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The *Shang-ti Hui* and the Transformation of Chinese Popular Society:
The Impact of Taiping Christian Sectarianism

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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Approved by R. Kent Guy
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Doctoral Dissertation

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Abstract

The Shang-ti Hui and the Transformation of Chinese Popular Society:

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by Thomas H. Reilly

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Nineteenth-century China was an ideological volcano, with rebellions erupting throughout the century. But only one, the Taiping Rebellion, transformed the social landscape.

There is, nevertheless, something puzzling about the Taiping impact. As broad and as devastating as the impact was, the Taiping movement, apart from the Ch'ing efforts to suppress it, seems to have resulted in no long-term transformation of Chinese society. Most scholars have sought to explain this conundrum by arguing that it was the alien quality of the Taiping faith which explains why the Taiping were prevented from sparking any long-term transformation of Chinese society. This has solved one riddle, but created another: How then, if their ideology was so alien, were the Taiping able to recruit the legions of people to their cause and to mount their large-scale rebellion in the first place?

I argue in my dissertation that the Taiping's Christian sectarianism, while unique in Chinese history, was more connected to culture and society than scholars have recognized. Indeed, the reason for the singularly unique impact of the Taiping movement relates both to the original character of Taiping ideology and to its creative connectedness to Chinese society. My argument is composed of three parts: in the first part of my study, I examine the translation of Catholic Christianity into the Heavenly Lord sect; in the second part, I look at the content and practice of

Taiping Christian sectarianism; and in the third part, I survey the contact which the Taiping initiated with the sects and secret societies.

How the Taiping rebels interpreted the divine pretensions of the emperor and what they understood as the blasphemous character of the imperial office were both directly tied to their faith in Shang-ti. This faith ultimately led them on their iconoclastic campaigns whose impact on Chinese society contributed to the transformation of popular society, winning for the rebels a legacy in Chinese history.

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May I always aspire to teach as these teachers have taught me.

INTRODUCTION

The subject of this study is the Taiping Rebellion, a nineteenth-century rebellion which arose in 1851 and was only quelled some thirteen years and twenty million lives later. During its period of ascendancy, the Taiping movement ruled over much of the Yangtze River valley, and each province in the empire served, at one time or another, as a battlefield in the contest between Ch'ing imperial and Taiping rebel armies. Ch'ing forces finally managed to suppress the rebellion, but in their effort to defeat the Taiping forces, Ch'ing rulers were compelled to adopt changes in the structure of society which eventually led to their own fall fifty years later.

Like many rebel movements before them, the Taiping rebels espoused a sectarian faith. Unlike these earlier rebellions, only the Taiping Rebellion had an impact of this scale. There is, nevertheless, something puzzling about this impact. As broad and far-reaching as the impact was, as devastating as the impact was, the Taiping movement and its religious faith, seems to have resulted in no lasting

transformation of Chinese society. Indeed scholars have marveled over “the complete disappearance of Taiping beliefs after the fall of Nanking.”¹

Most scholars have sought to explain this conundrum by arguing that it was the alien quality of Taiping belief, having no connection to Chinese culture and society, which in large part doomed the rebellion to failure and explains why the Taiping were prevented from sparking any long-term transformation of Chinese society. The Taiping faith that *Shang-ti*, the high god of classical China, had chosen their leader, Hung Hsiu-ch’uan, to establish his Heavenly Kingdom in China, was certainly a new thing in Chinese history. That this same rebel ideology based its claim to legitimacy on a form of Christian sectarianism is what has led scholars to deny Taiping connectedness to Chinese culture and society. This solution has solved one riddle, but created another: How then, if their ideology was so alien, were the Taiping able to mount their large-scale rebellion in the first place?

Which side of the horns of this dilemma do we grasp? Either we can argue the alien quality of the Taiping faith, and then try to explain their initial success-- keeping in mind that even the earlier White Lotus and Eight Trigrams rebellions

¹ Franz Michael, *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*, Volume 1 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), p. 68. P. Richard Bohr, in his dissertation, “The Politics of Eschatology: Hung Hsiu-ch’uan and the Rise of the Taipings, 1837-1853,” states that “little if anything remained of Taiping faith and institutions after 1864;” pp. 277-278. Others are more cautious in their judgments; Philip Kuhn states that “The Heavenly Kingdom...vanished *almost* without trace.” (Italics are mine) See his *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 7.

never approached the Taiping in terms of the numbers of followers which each managed to draw to itself; or we can argue the indigenous appearance of the faith--explaining its initial success--, and then try to account for its ultimate failure.

I have chosen to take a hold of the horns of the latter position. I shall argue that the Taiping's Christian sectarianism, while unique in Chinese history, was more connected to culture and society than scholars have been willing to admit. Indeed the reason for the singularly unique impact of the Taiping movement relates both to the original character of the Taiping faith and to its creative connectedness to Chinese society. Taiping Christian sectarianism resembled indigenous Chinese faiths, and so was able to connect with popular society, winning for them a large popular following. But Taiping success must also be attributed to religious differences with the traditional sects as well, differences related to the rebel faith's Christian sectarian parentage. Because of their connectedness, the Taiping rebels were able to mount and sustain their rebellion. Because of their differences, the Taiping contributed to the transformation of traditional popular society.

While I was originally drawn to writing about Taiping religion early in my research on the movement, I realized that I would have to overcome some resistance and a little apathy towards the topic. There is an impression among students of Chinese history that all that scholars who write about the history of the Taiping do is write about the ideology of the rebellion. Actually, works devoted to

an analysis of the intellectual history of the rebellion are not as numerous as some suppose. While there is a chapter in every good survey of the rebellion, surveys such as those written by T.T. Meadows, Jen Yu-wen, Franz Michael and most recently, Jonathan Spence, monograph studies which specifically focus on the ideological or religious aspects of the rebellion are relatively few. There are only four scholars who have done so: Vincent Shih, Eugene Boardman, Rudolf Wagner and P. Richard Bohr.

Shih in his The Taiping Ideology: Its Sources, Interpretations, and Influences and Boardman in his Christian Influence upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion approach their analysis of the Christian elements of the rebellion from a similar direction, discussing the Christian doctrines in the abstract, and spending very few pages on how these doctrines were connected to and became manifest in the social and cultural context of late imperial China. Their analysis constitutes more a comparison between traditional Christian doctrines and those held by the Taiping. While Boardman is a vast improvement over Shih in how he considers "the Christian component," but for all his exposition of the theological background of the Hebrew idea of God borrowed by the Taipings, Boardman never once mentions how the title of *Huang-ti* as used by the emperor was a blasphemous usurpation of the status and title of *Shang-ti*. Our historical interest in the Taiping

religion was how the Taiping adapted and changed Christianity, but both of these scholars tend to focus on those aspects of the faith which were taken up unchanged.

Moreover this idea of a Taiping ideology, emblazoned in both these titles, discloses a fundamental weakness in how these scholars have conceptualized the issue and further distances the Taiping faith from its cultural and social context. For beyond its anachronistic character, the idea that the Taiping had an ideology suggests an intentionality towards political action which is not in accord with the early stages of the Taiping movement. We need to think of Taiping beliefs in the terms in which they themselves understood them. The source of their vision was a religious tract, the language of their proclamations was in the idiom of the popular religious world, the authority for their moral claims was religious tradition and religious revelation. Theirs was a religion not an ideology.

Wagner in his Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: the Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion and Bohr in his dissertation, "The Politics of Eschatology: Hung Hsiu-ch'uan and the Rise of the Taipings," present a much more culturally-contextualized approach, and the religion of the Taiping as religion is the central focus of their efforts. Both scholars, however, tend to focus on the millennial aspects of the faith, which is hardly a fringe issue in the religion, but do so to the neglect of other central doctrines, specifically those of *Shang-ti* (God) and Christ, ostensibly because these latter doctrines have little resonance in popular society.

Bohr discusses the ideas of God, Christ and human nature all in seven pages. Yet it was the Taiping understanding of God which was the ideological basis for their rebellion, and it was their failure to understand the role of Christ which contributed to Hung's confusion in working out his own identity, especially in relationship to the other Taiping kings. So while these two authors do examine how the Taiping adapted Christian ideas to the Chinese cultural and social context, the Christian ideas they examine are limited in scope, and do not showcase the full range of the revolutionary impact that these adapted ideas had on Chinese society. Where one does not look for changes in society, one does not find changes; this may explain Bohr's frustrating and futile search for vestiges of Taiping faith and institutions.

But there may be more to this resistance to the topic of Taiping religion than a surfeit of scholarship. Resistance may also arise from other sources---it may arise from a sense that this focus on religion is perhaps unjustified, not warranted by the history of the movement. It may also be due to an interpretation of religion which conceives of the idea of religion too narrowly. I would like to spend the rest of my introductory comments addressing these objections in the context of a general discussion of my understanding of the relationship of religion, culture and society, and of the Taiping religion and its rebellion in particular.

Religion was at the heart of the Taiping movement, and Taiping culture (here understood in its widest sense of the totality of human symbol-making activity) was

the body of the movement, the physical expression of these religious beliefs.

Political rebellion, in sum, was only one of several facets of this cultural transformation. Indeed, the Taiping would have regarded their mission as a failure if all they achieved were political goals. Hung Hsiu-ch'uan's ambition was far greater: his mission was to remake all of Chinese culture, its society as well as its politics, its education as well as its art. It would not be inappropriate to refer to the ambition of the Taiping as a cultural revolution, an attempt to remake all of Chinese culture according to Hung Hsiu-ch'uan's religious vision.

The Taiping purpose was to lead a revolution, but in the older sense of the word-- signifying a return to an earlier time. Hung wanted to return to the culture of the classical past, before the empire. For it was with the advent of the Ch'in empire that Hung believed Chinese culture had taken the wrong road. So there was a political objective in this revolutionary movement; the religious vision was, nevertheless, prior to the political rebellion. It was the worship of a new god which demanded the establishment of a new king, and not vice-versa.

One reason for this reluctance to give precedence to the Taiping religious vision and its attending cultural transformation is a result, in part, of applying a modern Western model of the relationship of religion, culture and society to a traditional Chinese situation. For beginners, this distinction with which I have been operating, that between a religious movement and a political rebellion, is wholly

alien to the Chinese situation. Such a distinction is a Western construct, the product of a “modern” way of looking at the world which divides the religious from the political, and separates the institutions of church and state. This way of conceptualizing religion and its cultural expression has had the effect of reducing religion to a single category alongside other categories of cultural expression, instead of being the central category which informs all other cultural categories.

Not only does the traditional Chinese conception of the relationship of religion to culture and society differ from the modern Western, but especially in the understanding of religion and political power, it differs from the traditional Western idea of spheres of authority, as well. In the history of medieval and early modern Europe, the pages are replete with struggles over the institutional boundaries between church and state, and which rights and duties pertained to each. Such protracted conflicts as the investiture controversy between pope and emperor are absent in Chinese history; in the Chinese setting, the right to appoint those who would govern religious organizations was always assumed by the emperor. In China, the idea that the emperor attended to the civil sphere (which still was bound by religious obligations) while the bishop attended to the sacred sphere was not a viable concept. In China, the emperor was expected, alongside his civil functions, to fill a priestly role and carry out priestly functions in the imperial cult. This understanding of the imperial role stands in sharp contrast to the European model

where the emperor was prohibited from engaging in priestly roles and activities. In Europe, there were spheres and they were distinct, separate and fixed.

There were no spheres of sovereignty in the Chinese state. Chinese thought in terms of levels of a hierarchy, where each level featured different religious and civil responsibilities. So, for example, as documented in the Shih Chi (Records of the Historian), the emperor was privileged to worship the national gods, while the feudal lords could only worship their regional gods. Thus to even ask the question: When did the Taiping religious movement turn into a political rebellion? is to construct the issue using a modern Western way of thinking about the relationship of religion and culture. In China, as in most traditional societies, there can be no “purely” religious movement which does not have political aspirations or artistic reverberations.

Therefore, rather than looking at how the religious movement was transformed into a political rebellion, we instead will be examining how the nascent religion of the Taiping was transformed through Hung’s effort to reconcile his original religious vision with his inherited Chinese traditions using the language, themes and concepts of the Bible. This religious transformation affected every aspect of Taiping cultural life, its political aspirations, its historical identity, its racial consciousness, its economic program, even its hairstyle. The religious movement was not transformed, then, into a political rebellion. The Taiping movement was

from start to finish a religious movement.² In even its most secular documents, such as the anti-Manchu “Proclamation by Imperial Sanction” (Pan-hsing Chao-shu) or the communalistic “Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty” (T’ien-ch’ao T’ien-mou Chih-tu), religious ideas infuse the passages. I am not denying the intention of the Taiping to stage a political rebellion, rather I am assigning such an intention to its proper, subordinate, place.

A second reason for the failure of Western scholars to give precedence to the essentially religious character of the Taiping movement lies in the Western understanding of the religious dimensions of traditional Chinese culture.

² Christopher Hill’s study of the English Revolution, The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1993), provides a fascinating parallel to the Taiping’s own revolution. While the parallel cannot be applied too strictly, there are strikingly similar characteristics which one would not expect from two movements which sprung from such vastly dissimilar backgrounds. There is a reason for this. For while England had been Christian for centuries, it had only been Protestant for decades, and it had only had access to the vernacular Bible for a shorter time (the Geneva Bible was published, complete with notes, in 1560. The King James Version, which came out in 1611, did away with these sometimes revolutionary annotations). By far the most important section of Hill’s book for my study is that entitled, “The Revolutionary Bible,” and in these pages, Hill documents the revolutionary impact which Biblical concepts, themes and passages had on the course of the revolution. This was an impact which was only possible because of what he refers to as the “political and cultural empire of the Bible in seventeenth-century England” (p. 7). Hill indicates the extent of the use of the Biblical idiom in seventeenth-century thought and culture when he indicates that even in such a “non-religious” work as Hobbes’ Leviathan, the author includes 657 citations from the Bible. (p. 20) I have in mind a similar kind of culture for the Taiping.

Hill sometimes, in an artificial kind of way, seeks to assign a priority to the role of social factors in these uprisings. In doing so, he highlights by contrast what has been my point with reference to the Taiping--without the Bible providing the language and concepts with which to express their reaction to social oppression, could the people have given voice to these social tensions? Would it even have been possible to have a revolution in China, or for that matter, England? For this Bible was lending divine authority to the cries for change. Hill further diminishes the role of the Bible by arguing that the revolutionaries used it in a fashion which was almost indifferent to the meaning of the text. I disagree; I believe that the Bible proved to be so disruptive to the status quo in large part because it was being interpreted according to traditional themes found in the Old and New Testaments themselves.

Traditional Chinese culture was an imperial culture. Many scholars have attempted to explain the apparent unity, a persistent unity, of Chinese culture in the face of a diversity of religious beliefs.³ There were hundreds of gods worshipped, there were dozens of sects, there were three religions. But what unified this diversity? Some have explained this cultural unity as being more of a unity of ethic, rather than a unity of belief. Others have looked for the unity in the religious dimensions of

³ The editors of the volume, Popular Culture in Late Imperial China (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), made this comment in facing these issues, "clearly identifying the common elements in the cultural diversity of late imperial China is a major conceptual problem." (xiv). Indeed, they would not be overstating the case if they had said that it is *the* major conceptual problem in the study of Chinese popular culture.

Catherine Bell in an article entitled "Religion and Chinese Culture: Toward an Assessment of 'Popular Religion,'" featured in History of Religions 29.1 (1989): 35-57, provided a short and insightful survey of the attempts especially to bridge the gap between speaking of a folk and an elite religion, which has in the history of the study of Chinese religion been the division most resistant to unifying efforts. She described three stages in the study of the relation of Chinese religion to Chinese culture. The first stage involved discussions of a great and a little tradition, or of an elite and a folk religion. A second stage in these efforts involved the positing of the notion of popular religion, which was intended to point to the underlying unity of Chinese religion, specifically those ideas and practices common to gentry and peasant alike. A third stage in this effort approaches this issue of unity and diversity in religion differently. Instead of looking at religion abstracted from culture, this approach takes religious symbols and rituals as part of a cultural whole, as "a fully embedded cultural system," and unities and diversities in these symbols and rituals as expressions of the dynamic present in all cultures. Though I am adding my own interpretation here, this approach can be termed a kind of "contested public sphere," where different groups attempt to define religious symbols in ways which allow each group to gain power over the other. I do not know if this third stage brings us any closer to an understanding of the place of religion in Chinese society. It is fascinating to read how different groups represent their concerns and values, concerns and values which are ever changing and yet ever confirmed in each social encounter, but such a view still seems to presuppose a fundamental unity which goes unexplained.

Bell was running at least one full lap ahead of the pack when she wrote her article in 1989. For in 1995, the Journal of Asian Studies (Volumes 54 and 55) featured a discussion entitled, "Chinese Religions--The State of the Field." The discussion of the field termed "Popular Religion," approached this controversial category once again by noting the problematic nature of the term "popular religion." The discussion found in these pages demonstrates that little progress has been made, and the comments that were made were even less conceptually sophisticated than those offered by Bell some six years earlier.

Confucianism. Both these explanations are true as far as they go, but they do not go far enough.

Hung Hsiu-ch'uan discovered the unity of imperial Chinese culture to reside with the emperor himself. The emperor was the focus of unity, a unity of religious character, for imperial Chinese culture. The emperor himself boasted of divine pretensions and he reserved for himself the prerogative of worshipping at the imperial cult. In the person and office of the emperor, then, the unity of Chinese religion, culture and politics consisted. All the adherents of these various Chinese religions and beliefs accepted the unique position and unifying role of the emperor, and so regardless of how diverse these religions might be, they still existed within this one imperial cultural system.

Hung's religion was different; it did not accept the position and role of the emperor. Taiping Christian sectarianism directly challenged and opposed the emperor and the imperial office, and with it, the imperial cultural system as well. Because the Taiping attacked the emperor and mounted a rebellion, scholars have thereby wrongly conceived of the movement as just another political rebellion; but Hung's rationale for targeting the imperial office focused on the religious and cultural aspects of the institution, not primarily its political aspect. Hung's crusade

Bell had concluded her article speaking of the paradox concerning the relationship of religion and culture, a paradox which as long as it remains unresolved reminds us how inadequate remain our categories for understanding both Chinese religion and Chinese culture.

began by targeting the temples of the city gods along with an attack on the magistrate's yamen. Indeed, as we shall see later in this paper, Hung first proclaims himself Heavenly King in a temple, in a poem he inscribed on the temple wall.⁴ In this way, while similar in certain respects to earlier sectarian revolts, it was radically different in the main. The Taiping sought to destroy the imperial culture, including the political office of emperor, the Confucian cultural apparatus, and the hierarchical society which supported it.

This study of Taiping Christian sectarianism and its social impact is composed of three parts. In the first part of my study, I examine the translation of Catholic Christianity into the Heavenly Lord sect, a Chinese sect, a development aided by the missionary use of Buddhist terminology and by the pressure of imperial proscription. I enlist the support of palace memorials from the Ch'ing archives, of the Ch'ing Law Code, and of early Catholic ritual guides to examine this development. I intend to show that by the eve of the rebellion that the Heavenly Lord sect had already become identified with Chinese sectarianism, but that it passed on a large portion of its rich legacy to the Taiping through the medium of

⁴ This occurs in the Chiu-yao Temple and is cited in the "T'ai-p'ing T'ien-jih;" Franz Michael, The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents, Three Volumes (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971), Volume 2: page 72. Shang-ti had conferred the title on Hung during his vision, but Hung only publicly announced his claim after visiting Rev. Roberts' chapel in Canton. Whether he made his claim known at some earlier time or place is not known. What is significant is that the Taiping chose to represent the incident according to this sequence of events and in this manner.

Protestant missionary literature. Yet Chinese officials and gentry held the Heavenly Lord sect responsible for the ensuing rebellion.

In the second part of my argument, I look at the content and practice of Taiping Christian sectarianism, analyzing the process whereby Hung Hsiu-ch'uan resolved the contradictions between his religious vision and his Confucian background through the use of themes and concepts derived from the Chinese Bible. In coming to this resolution, he completed the process of the indigenization of Christianity begun by the Catholics. For this analysis, I rely upon a wide range of Taiping documents together with missionary literature, including some of the earliest Christian Bibles, creeds and catechisms.

Complementing this work on the content of Taiping Christian sectarianism is my examination of the practice of Taiping Christian sectarianism, focusing especially on the practice of iconoclasm and desacralization in Taiping-occupied China. I spend much of my time in these pages describing the depth and breadth of the impact of Taiping religious practice.

The third and final segment of my argument focuses on the contact which the Taiping initiated with various sects and secret societies during the rebellion, and attempts to demonstrate through palace memorials and Taiping documents the extent of the contact between the Taiping and these popular associations, and the character of the resulting transformation of popular society.

I hope to demonstrate in this study that the Taiping's Christian sectarianism, though unique in Chinese history, was connected by a hundred native threads to Chinese popular culture and society. This connectedness explains how the Taiping were able to mount and sustain their rebellion. At the same time, Taiping faithfulness to the original character of their doctrines, to their differences with popular culture, explains how the Taiping were able to transform popular society. These two aspects of the Taiping religion together explain the unique impact of Taiping Christian sectarianism, an impact with echoes reverberating deep into Chinese society and whose repercussions extended far beyond the smoldering walls of the Heavenly capital.

CHAPTER ONE

CHRISTIAN SECTARIANISM AND ITS JESUIT ORIGINS

The history of Taiping Christian sectarianism must begin at the source, with the work of Matteo Ricci and the early Jesuit missionaries to China, as theirs was a contribution which is rightly called seminal. They created the Chinese Christianity which later developed into Chinese Christian sectarianism.

Nevertheless, contrary to how most studies of Christianity in China have portrayed the events, the history of Christian sectarianism does not end with the Ricci era. The era of the imperial proscription of the Heavenly Lord teaching, which immediately followed the age of the Jesuits, was as important to the development of Chinese Christian sectarianism as was the era of Matteo Ricci, for it was during these intervening years of persecution that Chinese Catholicism developed into what, to all appearances, can be called an indigenous Chinese sect.

Employing the word indigenous to describe a religion whose origins lay outside China may seem somewhat anomalous, but it helps to highlight the developments which I will argue took place during the era of Ricci and the era of proscription: by

the time of the Opium War and the unequal treaties, the Heavenly Lord sect had become indistinguishable, if not in belief and doctrine, in form and practice, from the everyday, ordinary Chinese sect. The history of these developments is critical for understanding the subsequent impact of Taiping Christian sectarianism upon Chinese society; the Taiping faith may have been detested by the gentry, but it was not unknown, or even alien, to them or to the lower orders of Chinese society. Indeed, I shall contend that the Taiping were only as successful as they were, especially in the early stages of the rebellion, because they and their ideology bore a familiar resemblance to the Heavenly Lord and to other sectarian movements, a resemblance which, given the apocalyptic character of the times, attracted armies of followers from among the common people.

The Mission of Matteo Ricci

Matteo Ricci and the early Jesuits sowed the seed for these developments in their efforts to create a Chinese Christianity. Their efforts largely focused on the translation of Christian concepts, doctrine and liturgy into Chinese, and this was also the area of their most notable contributions to the development of Chinese Christian sectarianism. The Jesuits were able to translate the most fundamental Christian concepts into authentic Chinese, save two of the most important, the terms for God and for Christ.

The controversy over the translation of the term for God is part of the Rites Controversy, and the pope ruled out the use of the term *Shang-ti* in the same decree in which he ruled against Christian participation in the Confucian rites. Matteo Ricci had used the term with much success in his teachings, but it was decided as early as 1628 that the term should not be used by the missionaries.¹ There was no controversy over the translation of the title of Christ, and yet this translation was no translation at all, but merely a transliteration of the Latin term for Christ, *Chi-le-si-tu*, often shortened to *Chi-tu*. Every other concept, including words such as the Holy Spirit, the devil, angels, holy, sin, heaven and hell were all successfully translated into authentically Chinese terms.

Matteo Ricci presented Christianity as a completion of Confucianism, as a more faithful completion than that offered by Buddhism and effected by the Neo-Confucianism of Chu Hsi.² For example, David Mungello in describing the work of the Jesuits states that,

...several Jesuit missionaries, including Frs. Ruggieri, Ricci, and Valignano, made the decision to blend Christianity with Confucianism rather than Buddhism. This decision followed an unsuccessful experiment in adopting the clothing and spiritual role of the Buddhist monks, and thereafter the Jesuits did not turn back from their decision to identify in dress, thinking, and social status with the Confucian literati...In 1612 the eminent scholar-official...Xu Guangqi

¹ Jacques Gernet, China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures, translated by Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 32.

² The studies that deal with this topic are numerous. Among the most recent and most well-known are: Jacques Gernet, China and the Christian Impact (1985); J.D. Young, Confucianism and Christianity: the First Encounter (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1983); and David Mungello, The Forgotten Christians of Hangzhou (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

expressed this plan in the form of a short, memorable phrase of the type of which the literati were so fond. In the preface to a work on Western hydraulics, Xu wrote that Christianity should 'supplement Confucianism and displace Buddhism' (*bu Ru yi Fo*).³

This is the achievement of the Jesuits, and it has been singularly, more often solely, celebrated.⁴

Most scholars who have studied this achievement have examined the supplementing of Confucianism. Few scholars have examined what was entailed in displacing Buddhism. How did the Jesuit missionaries conceive of this aspect of their evangelical task?

From their work in translation, this displacing of Buddhism evidently meant that Christianity would appropriate the linguistic treasures of Buddhism for its own enterprise. For what is striking about the translation effort is how much the language employed by the fathers was taken over from Buddhism, and as a result how much the translation of Christianity was infused with the spirit of Buddhism. The only terms which manifested any kind of Confucian ethos at all were the words for God, *Shang-ti* and *T'ien*, which were the very ones which were later to be forbidden by the pope. And it should not be surprising that the term which was finally selected as the most appropriate term for translating the name of the deity

³ Mungello, p. 122. Also Gernet, p. 66.

⁴ All of the major studies, except Gernet's, focus very narrowly on the work of the Jesuits, and then mostly on their work at the court, rather than in the provinces. Mungello, while still focusing on the Jesuits, does examine what was happening in the provinces.

was again a term which featured a Buddhist provenance, *T'ien-chu* (the Lord of Heaven).

Western scholarship has so often been absorbed with and captivated by the story of Ricci setting aside the Buddhist vestments he first donned in coming to China, and clothing himself with Confucian robes, taking this episode as the interpretive key for understanding what the Jesuits meant in their stated purpose of complementing Confucianism and displacing Buddhism. This image suggests that the Jesuits' intention in speaking of displacing Buddhism was to cast aside their Buddhist vestments, contemptuously throwing them into the trash as useless rags, showing no inclination of wearing them ever again. Such a view is supported especially by the types of sources most Western scholars have used in their analysis of the impact of the Jesuit mission. These are the different Jesuit apologetic works, highly philosophical and targeting a Confucian audience, the most well-known being Matteo Ricci's own, The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shih-i).

A perusal of Father Ricci's apologia indeed shows a hostile attitude to Buddhist and Taoist conceptions. Ricci structures his discussion of the Catholic religion in three basic parts, and it is in the first part where he addresses questions concerning the nature and identity of God. Ricci describes his God as the Creator and Ruler of the Universe, and identifies Him with the deity of the Chinese Classics, *Shang-ti*.

Ricci uses the terms *Shang-ti* (Sovereign on High) and *T'ien-chu* (the Lord of Heaven) most frequently in his referring to God, and he uses these interchangeably, but he also uses other terms such as *T'ien-ti* (Sovereign of Heaven) and *Shang-tsun-che* (Supremely Honored One).⁵ In the early years of the mission, one hundred years prior to Pope Clement's final ruling, it is evident that there is slight preference for *T'ien-chu*, but not an exclusive one. Ricci certainly attempts to link the name of *T'ien-chu* and *Shang-ti*, evidently believing that this association would overcome the inadequacies of either term used separately.

While Ricci may have left his preference for the terms for God intentionally vague, his antagonism towards any kind of Buddhist or Taoist understanding of God is not at all obscured. Following his discussion of God as Creator and Ruler of the universe, Ricci mounts an attack on what he regards as mistaken notions concerning God and his relation to the Creation, the *wu* (non-being) of Taoist thought and the *k'ung* (emptiness) of Buddhist thought, concepts which Ricci declares are "totally at variance with the doctrine concerning the Lord of Heaven."⁶ But he also seeks to correct the Neo-Confucian idea of the Supreme Ultimate as the "reality which produced heaven and earth."⁷ He corrects this notion by

⁵ Matteo Ricci, *T'ien-chu Shih-i* [The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven]; translated with an introduction by Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen, S.J., edited by Edward J. Malatesta, S.J. (Taipei: Ricci Institute, 1985). In his introduction, Ricci uses all four of these terms. See pps. 57-61. I have employed the English translation provided by the editors of this text.

⁶ Ricci, p. 99.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 107.

appealing to the classics, “Although I arrived in China late in life and discovered that the superior men of ancient times worshipped and revered the Sovereign on High (Shang-ti), of Heaven and Earth, but I have never heard of them paying respect to the Supreme Ultimate. If the Supreme Ultimate is the Sovereign on High and ancestor of all things, why did not the sages of ancient times say so?”⁸

Ricci is particularly relentless in his attacks on Buddhism in his discussion of the nature of spiritual beings and the human soul, especially in a section where he refutes the idea that God, Creation and man are an indistinguishable unity. “The Buddha failed to understand himself, so how could he understand the Lord of Heaven; but, happening to be possessed of some talent, and having been given a task to perform, he became boastful and arrogant, and recklessly and with no inhibitions whatsoever, considered himself to be as worthy of honor as the Lord of Heaven...Arrogance is the enemy of virtue. The moment an arrogant thought is conjured up in our minds, all our conduct is corrupted.”⁹ In his refutation of the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation, Ricci is even more hostile. Ricci first asserts that this doctrine was really obtained from Pythagoras, and spread to India where at just this time,

Sakyamuni happened to be planning to establish a new religion in India. He accepted the theory of reincarnation and added to it the teaching concerning the Six Directions, together with a hundred other lies, editing it all to form books which he called canonical writings. Many years later some Chinese went to

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 107.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 209.

India and transmitted the Buddhist religion to China. There is no genuine record of the history of this religion in which one can put one's faith, or any real principle upon which one can rely. India is a small place, and is not considered to be a nation of the highest standing. It lacks the arts of civilization and has no standards of moral conduct to bequeath to posterity. The histories of many countries are totally ignorant of its existence. Could such a country adequately serve as a model for the whole world?¹⁰

This antagonism can be misleading. For as I have noted above, while Ricci was conducting his campaigns against Buddhist doctrine, he and his colleagues were at the same time plundering the Buddhist linguistic storehouse and stealing away with some of Buddhism's most valuable treasures. Or to return to the clothing image, the displacing of Buddhism did not involve the casting aside of the Buddhist raiment, but only setting it aside for a different social occasion. Certain social situations dictated a more austere Confucian garment while other situations allowed for a more festive Buddhist outfit.

Both images suggest that the possible risks of spiritual pollution posed by the Rites Controversy seem mild when compared with the dangers posed by this cultural borrowing. Even when the Jesuit fathers did not borrow a word directly from the Buddhist lexicon, they did indirectly, combing the popular religious vocabularies for their translations. But could they have done otherwise? Buddhism itself was translated doctrine, and in its own time had mined the Chinese common religious lexicon for its own translations, so that by the time of the Jesuits, any

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 241.

word with any kind of religious connotations at all would, by the nature of the case, be understood primarily in a Buddhist sense.

Buddhism's long-time residence in China notwithstanding, the Catholic missionaries seem to have been more comfortable than the early Buddhist missionaries in making an even more extensive use of the common religious lexicon in translating their own doctrine.¹¹ While there are transliterations of geographic terms and biblical personages in Catholic translations, few of the most fundamental Christian doctrines incorporate transliterated concepts. Buddhism, on the other hand, features several such transliterated terms, even for its cardinal doctrines. Eric Zürcher describes the early process of translating the Sanskrit scriptures into Chinese. He notes, for example, how in the early centuries of the Buddhist mission to China, even the transliteration for the master's name itself was not standardized. Rather, there were four different transcriptions commonly found in the early translations, three of which used the same character to represent the initial sound of "fu," with a different character to represent the final sound of the master's name (浮屠 ; 浮圖 ; 浮頭), and only one using the character with the initial sound of "fo," (佛) which is the character which came to represent

¹¹ Eric Zürcher argues that terms of specifically Taoist provenance constitute a very small percentage of the Chinese Buddhist vocabulary. See his The Buddhist Conquest of China (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 33-34.

the Buddha's name.¹² Titles for the different manifestations of the Buddha, such as *Shih-chia-mo-ni*, *A-mi-ta*, and *Mi-le-fo*, all favorites of Chinese sectarians are likewise all transliterated.

Soothill's dictionary provides a number of examples of this Buddhist reluctance to translate some of the names of the religion's more major figures and the terms of its principal concepts. There are not a few transliterations using the Chinese character "sha" such as in transliterating the Sanskrit term, *sramenera*, religious novice. Transcriptions using the character "pi" are numerous, as well. Terms using the character "a" are even more plentiful: *A-shih-ye*, meaning disposition and mind, along with the title, *A-mi-ta*, which is defined as boundless and infinite, and is frequently used to characterize the Buddha as the one who possesses infinite qualities are two examples of this usage.¹³ Indeed the Buddhist translators felt compelled to invent a character to accommodate their transliterating, the character which they used for the sound, "sa,"¹⁴ While it is true that some of these terms, with the exception of titles for the Buddha, were not regularly included in the popular sectarian scriptures, the fact that such terms were included in the more

¹² Zürcher, p. 40. I have only been able to find scattered references to the enterprise of Buddhist translation. Kenneth Chen, *Buddhism in China* (1964), discusses the topic briefly, pp. 365-372. Peter Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism* (1991), examines how different classification schemes allowed Buddhist leaders to highlight scriptures which would appeal to their Chinese audience. He does not deal at any length, however, with the role of the translation effort itself in the process of sinification.

¹³ William E. Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*. (Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass; reprint edition, 1977), p. 287.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p. 467.

esoteric forms of Buddhist literature still indicates a certain ambivalence about the nature of the translation enterprise.

Catholic missionaries, by contrast, show no such caution, borrowing shamelessly from the popular religious lexicon and the Buddhist lexicon. The Jesuits brazenly commandeered some concepts directly from Buddhism. The words for heaven (t'ien-t'ang) and hell (ti-yu), the latter with its multiple levels and different classes, is the most prominent example of this borrowing.¹⁵ Ricci in his catechism comments on this association. He has the Chinese scholar remark, "If you say there is a Heaven and a Hell to come, then that is Buddhism. We Confucians do not believe this teaching."¹⁶ The word for the devil (mo-kuei) is a construct based on the name for the destroyer or the evil god in Buddhist thought along with the common term for ghost, or malevolent spirit. And, as we noted above, even the term which was finally determined to be most fitting for God, *T'ien-chu*, has a Buddhist provenance, though it is an obscure one. *T'ien-chu* in the Buddhist understanding can either refer to the "Lord of Devas, a title of Indra" as Soothill defines him, or the Lord of the Sixth Heaven of Desire¹⁷. Nevertheless, perhaps because of its greater obscurity and ease of pliancy, this term was favored over

¹⁵ The *Chung-wen Ta Tzu-tien* [The Great Dictionary of the Chinese Language] (Taipei, 1973), offers several classical proof texts for the term *ti-yu* (hell), but as used with the corollary of heaven (T'ien-t'ang), it only offers Buddhist references. Vol. 8, p. 317.

¹⁶ Ricci, p. 143.

¹⁷ Soothill, p. 143 and 145.

Shang-ti, which was more popularly identified with the classical pagan past and with Taoist beliefs.

Other terms while possessing strong religious connotations, and used by the Buddhists, were drawn from the secular cultural world. Using a word like secular to describe this kind of language does run the risk of misunderstanding. The word may be too tied into our modern Western mode of thought, which would distinguish between a secular and a sacred realm, and would restrict all religious language and liturgy to the sacred realm, usually identified with the institution of the church.

The Jesuits, as representatives of a more traditional mode of Western thought, would still have distinguished between a secular and ecclesiastical realm, but in a sense where the term secular would have denoted a civil realm which still would have been suffused with religious meanings and entrusted with religious obligations. This is, of course, closer to the Chinese situation, where all secular activity had its religious dimension. But where even this traditional European thinking does not fit the Chinese situation is the distinction between a civil and ecclesiastical realm.

In Chinese culture and society, there were no realms; there were levels in a hierarchy, and all those levels were religious. There was no separate ecclesiastical realm, embodied in a separate institution. At each level of authority, there was a

religious responsibility inherent in an office. The imperial office, for example, was at once a secular and a religious office. The emperor was both king and priest: he worshipped at the Temple of Heaven, he prostrated himself at the Temple of Earth, he venerated the imperial ancestors, and he prayed to the spirits of the imperial mountains and rivers.

Prominent in these religious terms derived from the secular world was the word for holy (*sheng*) whose secular and religious meaning highlights the sense of wisdom more than the Western sense of moral purity, though the Chinese term includes the latter sense. Moreover, while such moral qualities as compassion are always in the forefront in the Buddhist use of the term, enlightenment as the counterpart of Confucian wisdom gets the emphasis. Thus, when the word *sheng* is used to describe a person in a classical Chinese text, the term usually provided by Western translators is the word, sage, rather than the word, saint. *Sheng* is also used to describe things imperial.

Another term which the Catholics took from the secular world, again following the Buddhist example, is the term for committing a sin (*fan-tsui*). The Chinese term is taken from legal discourse where it means to commit a crime, and there is no way, save the context it is used in, to distinguish the two senses. Indeed, the

primary sense of the term remains the legal sense.¹⁸ This distinction between committing a sin and committing a crime may be another illustration of Western habits of drawing sharper divisions between the secular and sacred world than the Chinese were comfortable doing. In as much as the Catholic missionaries used this secular language to communicate their message, they would have been somewhat more successful in distancing their message from the Buddhist message, but only in a relative sense since the Buddhists also employed this same language in their own discourse.

This brief survey does point up the Catholic dilemma. Using these terms borrowed directly from the Buddhist scriptures, or indirectly from the Chinese secular world, following Buddhist practice, meant that however different the content of the Catholic message was going to be, it still, through its linguistic terminology, would be strongly associated with Buddhist beliefs.

The Translation Enterprise

The kind of confusion which was engendered by the Catholic translation effort is evident in the doctrinal literature of the church. The spiritual world which the missionaries conjured up is on prominent display, for example, in a catechism which was produced in the 1600s, the Catechism of the (or more literally, 100

¹⁸ The Chung-wen Ta Tzu-tien gives over 40 possible definitions for *tsui* and its cognates, all but one having this strictly legal sense. The one exception involves the Buddhist idea of moral

Questions and Answers about the) Holy Teaching of the Lord of Heaven, (T'ien-chu Sheng-chiao Pai Wen-ta).¹⁹

The text overall reads like a Western catechism. There is some confusion, both conscious and unconscious, concerning the doctrine of worshipping one God, but the catechism does not seem to indicate that this was insurmountable. For example, when discussing the Trinity, the question put by the catechist reads, "Can these three persons be called three Lords of Heaven?" The answer follows, predictably, "Persons, though, three. Together, they are one nature; one substance; one Lord of Heaven."²⁰

The real confusion concerns those issues which the catechism does not address, and such issues first surface in a discussion of angels, which are called heavenly spirits/gods (t'ien-shen), and of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the trinity, who is called the holy spirit/god (sheng-shen). This translation does not even capture the half of it. Since the Chinese language does not have a singular/plural form, singularity and plurality being dependent on context, these translations could just as easily read heavenly god/spirit when referring to angels, and multiple holy gods/spirits when referring to the one Holy Spirit. Furthermore, given the cultural

retribution. Volume 26, p. 223.

¹⁹ there is no date given on the title page, but within the text, there is a reference to the events of Jesus' life having taken place over 1600 years ago. (p. 12a)

²⁰ Pai Ying-li, T'ien-chu Sheng-chiao Pai Wen-ta [A Catechism of the Holy Religion of the Heavenly Lord], p. 2a. The title page identifies the author as a Western Jesuit missionary, or more

context, this multiple connotation would be more naturally present to the Chinese imagination. Moreover, the catechism does not always show that this connotation is not intended when it refers to the one Holy Spirit. Furthermore, there are other *shen* as well: even a guardian heavenly spirit/god. All of a sudden, there is not one god, or three gods, but a whole choir full of gods, not dissimilar from the Chinese popular religious vision of the spiritual world.

Another kind of problem arises in relation to the role of Jesus. In this catechism, there is no mention of Jesus' title, Christ. This is similar to Ricci's catechism. Rather in response to the question, "The Lord of Heaven when he descended to be born was referred to by what title?" The answer, "Jesus. That is to say, the Saviour of the World." Not much is said about him, though this catechism does discuss his death on the cross and his ascension, all of which Ricci passed over in his apologetic work. To the question concerning when this saviour will descend again into the world comes this response, "When the world is utterly exhausted, the myriad things will all be consumed by fire. On that day My Lord Jesus from Heaven will suddenly appear and judge the sin (tsui) of all people."²¹ In this catechism, then, the work of Jesus cannot be distinguished materially from the work of the Buddha who comes to save the world, and whose role is to oversee the end of one eon and usher in the beginning of the next. Indeed even talk about a godhead

precisely, a Western scholar who belongs to the *Ye-su* Society. It has received an imprimatur from the director of the society, one Ho Ta-hua.

of three persons, without providing a more detailed explanation of what this concept entails, would have made it difficult for the common Chinese neophyte to distinguish between the three Buddhas who ruled over the three ages and the three persons of the one Christian godhead.

Where the association between popular Buddhism and Christianity is more pronounced yet is in the ritual language and practices of the early Chinese church. In all the studies of the early efforts of the Jesuits, is there a one which deals with this aspect of the sinification of Christianity? If there is, this writer has not encountered it. In 1615, Pope Paul V granted the Jesuit missionaries the right to translate the liturgy into Chinese. The work of translation was assigned to a missionary by the name of Father Louis Buglio, and he completed, amidst heated debate among the missionaries as to the wisdom of such a policy, the translation of the liturgy, along with the Missal and the Breviary, well before the rulings of Clement which decided the issue of the terms to be employed.²² The policy of using the Chinese vernacular did not hold sway, but there seems to have been no official stand taken against the practice either, at least until the modern era.

Buglio's work on the liturgy reveals a much greater adaptation to Chinese popular religious conceptions than the apologetic treatises and the doctrinal literature do. The title page of his manual, intended to provide guidance to

²¹ *ibid*, p. 7a.

missionaries and native priests in conducting various rites, bears the title of the work in Chinese, Sheng-Shih Li-Tien (A Manual of Ritual Holy Matters), and in Latin, along with Buglio's name; it also lists the date and place of publication as Pekin, 1675. The table of contents shows that the manual covers such Catholic ritual and sacramental events as baptism (hsi-ti; wash of purification), penance (t'ung-chieh; painful begging of pardon), confirmation (chien-chen, establish and rouse to action), eucharist (sheng-t'i, the holy body), matrimony (hun-p'ei, to contract or arrange a marriage), extreme unction (tsung-ch'uan, final transmission), burial, and exorcism (ch'u-kuei, casting out ghosts). The manual also includes the rites for various feast days such as Pentecost, which is translated as *sheng-shen Chiang-ling* (the descent of a holy god). These terms suggest, as is evident from some of these translations, that it was in the liturgical life of the church even more than in the apologetic and doctrinal literature that the Jesuits made the closest contact with Chinese popular culture.

Beginning with baptism, the manual explains that the effect of the sacrament of baptism is to pardon our original and our fundamental (pen-tsui) transgression, and the punishment that the transgression deserves.²³ All of this explanation involves the use of strictly legal terminology. Any water that has been blessed and made

²² Columba Cary-Elwes, China and the Cross: A Survey of Missionary History (New York, 1957), pp. 134-135.

²³ Sheng-shih Li-tien [A Manual of Ritual Holy Matters], transl. by Fr. Buglio (Pekin, 1675), p. 1b of section on baptism.

holy can be used. A similar freedom is evident in a regulation concerning the kind of holy oil which was to be used in anointing the baptized: both olive and sesame oil were acceptable. The code makes clear the importance of baptism; without it, one could not enter the Kingdom of Heaven (T'ien-kuo).²⁴ At the baptism, these words of institution were to be spoken, "Today, the evil god/spirit (*shen*) leaves you, the good god/spirit [comes upon] you."²⁵

This last translation may have been a bit jarring to European sensibilities. Some terms, while used by Buddhist believers, were part of the religious heritage of Chinese popular religion. Prominent among these is the word *shen*, which can either be translated god or spirit. As we noted earlier, this is one of the most fluid terms in the Chinese religious vocabulary. Chinese speak of the different *shen* of people, of people becoming *shen*, and so being worshipped, and of the *shen* of various inanimate objects, like mountains and trees. The Jesuits chose to use the term *shen* for their translation of the Western concept spirit, as in Holy Spirit, but also for the spirit of men and women. They also used the term to translate the words for angel (t'ien-shen, heavenly spirit/god) and evil spirits. In doing so, it is hard to know if the effect was to confirm or supplant the Chinese world view.

In the final action of the ritual, the manual instructs the officiating priest to make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the baptized, while leading him to declare

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 6b. This term will be important for the Taiping.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 8b.

that that he is drawing the holy sign of our Lord and Saviour Jesus (Yeh-su) Christ (Chi-li-szu-tu). The priest then leads in a prayer which closes in the name of Jesus, and which focuses on his apocalyptic role, “Our Lord, Jesus Christ (Chi-li-szu-tu), who after that day will descend to judge the living and the dead, and, with fire, destroy the world.”²⁶

After the prayer, the participants were all expected to confess together the Apostles’ Creed. This document reveals an exception to the rule concerning Catholic confidence in their efforts to create a fully sinified Christianity, and instead shows some of the same reluctance exhibited by the Buddhists in translating their own “sacred language.” The text of the creed is translated into authentically vernacular Chinese with a few significant exceptions: the titles of the three persons of the Godhead and the term for the church are transliterated from the Latin. Thus the opening line of the text reads, “I believe in one almighty Heavenly Lord” (wei-yi ch’uan-neng-che T’ien-chu) but then follows this with the Chinese transliteration of the Latin term for Father, *Pa-te-le* (Latin; pater). So it is with the part of the creed where the believer confesses his faith in the Son and the Holy Spirit. For the section of the creed which concerns Jesus, the Chinese Christian confessed, “I believe in the only *Fei-lueh* (the transliterated form of the Latin, filius), *Yeh-su* (the transliterated form of Jesus) *Chi-li-ssu-tu* (the transliterated form of Christ), our

²⁶ *ibid*, pp. 8b-9a.

Lord.” The confession of faith in the spirit was even more cryptic for the Chinese Catholic, as it reads, “I believe in *Ssu-pi-li-do San-do*” (the transliterated form of the Latin, Spiritus Sanctus). The final belief that is confessed is in the “holy and public *e-ke-le-hsi-ya*” (the transliterated form of the Latin, ecclesia)²⁷ These transliterated terms do not often appear in prayers and catechisms, but the location in which they are most often found is liturgical settings, which makes their appearance even more significant.

More than baptism, the rites involving sickness and burial would have been associated with religious matters in a Buddhist sense. In these rites, there is less dependence on transliterated Latin, and more leaning on more traditional Chinese religious language. At the last rites, the priest was to instruct the stricken believer to repeat a prayer which ends this way, “we all anticipate entering your dwelling place, and we look towards the eternal blessings of the Lord, where all who love virtue and enjoy good fortune will enter. We demand that any evil spirits/gods (hsieh-shen) immediately depart and we beseech the heavenly gods/spirits (t’ien-shen) approach.”²⁸ If such prayers proved less than effective, the priest would be summoned to officiate at the burial rites where, as the casket was lifted, he would pronounce this benediction, “May the Lord of Heaven and all the saints (sheng-jen) relieve and protect. May the Lord of Heaven and all his heavenly spirits/gods

²⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 12a-b.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 56a.

(t'ien-shen) welcome [our beloved one], and receive his soul (ling-hun), and bring it before the throne of the Lord of Heaven."²⁹

More illustrative of the proximity of Chinese Christianity to Chinese Buddhism, especially in its popular forms, is the rite of exorcism. The cosmology of early modern Catholicism and traditional Buddhism included a world inhabited by spirits, malevolent and benevolent. While the Jesuit interpreter of the manual distinguished between such spirits/gods using adjectives such as heavenly, evil, good and unclean, the target of the rite of exorcism is a *kuei* (ghost/demon), which since this term usually refers in Chinese thinking to a malevolent presence (especially when they are hungry) is probably best translated as demon rather than spirit. What the difference is between an evil spirit/god (hsieh-shen) and a demon (*kuei*) lies beyond the scope of this study.³⁰

In the instructions given the officiating priest, the manual cautions the exorcist to first prepare all the spirit utensils (shen-p'in) for casting out demons (*kuei*). Then he is advised to press his hands against the demon-possessed person; at the same time, the manual warns the one who is helping with the spirit utensils against even touching the afflicted person. The priest begins by reading the exorcism classic (ch'u-kuei ching), and the text leads him through the steps involved:

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 69a.

³⁰ But such differences do constitute the subject of David Jordan's book, Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors (Berkeley, 1972).

The demon-possessed person whether he laughs or is silent, speaks of private, secret matters or takes on some strange form (ch'i-yi-che), do not let the priest believe his empty words. Rather, the teacher, my Lord the Exorcist, should command the demon not to speak and instead to speedily come out. Concentrate on being humble. It is absolutely necessary to the success of the exorcism to remember that demons are only beings created by the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu). Also [keep in mind that] there is no benefit in conversing with a demon, there is only harm. By all means do not do so. If after three times, the demon has not come out, it is not fitting to lose hope and give up. Rather, you should totally trust in the Lord of Heaven, and expend yourself in the effort for many days.

At the end of the session, the priest invites all those attending to join him in prayer,

“Almighty Lord, ...Jesus Chi-li-szu-tu. Formerly You bestowed authority on your followers: our feet could trample on poisonous dragons and pythons, on all the power of the evil demons. This is because your virtue has conquered death. If lightning from the heavens should strike, since I revere your name, I humbly beg you to grant that I, your insignificant servant, whose transgressions are forgiven, might, relying on your grace and ability, be brave and attack this fiercely poisonous dragon. May you together with the Lord of Heaven, the Pa-te-le (ie., the Father), live and rule forever and ever, amen.”³¹

It was not, then, just a matter of the language that was used. As the missionaries began to reveal the doctrinal substance of Christianity and as the church began practicing its rituals, the religion of the Heavenly Lord appeared to more closely mimic popular religious doctrines and practices than it seemed to reflect Confucian

³¹ Sheng-shih Li-tien, pp. 95a-b.

teachings and rites. This resemblance to Chinese popular religion was not so apparent in the beginning. Intentionally so; Ricci's apologia, for example, only deals with Jesus Christ and the Church and its practices for three to four pages of his work. He does not even mention the crucifixion, and this was a common practice of the Jesuit fathers, since they believed depicting the Lord of Heaven suffering the death of a criminal would scandalize Confucian scholars, and they were proved correct in this belief. But this was not the method of the missionaries in the provinces, where Dominicans and Franciscans unpacked the relics and rosaries, and openly displayed the more supernatural elements of the religion.

Jesuit Failure, Jesuit Success

It is not clear whether it was the more stifling and rigid intellectual world of Ch'ing China, or the literati's growing understanding of the true nature of Christianity and what they regarded as its resemblance to Buddhism, or just the more mundane result of a conflict between the pope and the emperor as manifest in the papal ruling, "Ex Illa Die," in 1715 and the emperor's own ruling in 1724, which finally earned the Heavenly Lord teaching its designation of *hsieh- chiao* (heterodox teaching). That the literati had increasingly lost interest in the *T'ien-chu* religion is noted and lamented by every scholar sympathizing with the Jesuit mission. David Mungello describes the state of the mission immediately prior to

the emperor's decree with a palpable sense of loss, yet one wonders what is the occasion for this melancholy portrayal,

In terms of numbers, the Hangzhou church in Hinderer's time had not yet declined. In the years from 1718 to 1720 there were more than one thousand Christians in Hangzhou, which is twice as many as the five hundred recorded in the annual letter of 1678-1679. Although Fr. Hinderer was the sole missionary in Hangzhou at this time, he was assisted by thirty catechists who had been trained in the Jesuit college. In his letter of 27 September 1719, Fr. Hinderer gave an accounting of the previous year's progress. Between 1 September 1718 and 1719, Hinderer baptized 228 people...In addition, Hinderer had heard 1,615 confessions and distributed the host to 1,230 communicants.³²

Such statistics in a later era would be cited as evidence of the progress of a mission. But this is not how so many of the Jesuit sympathizers read these numbers. For behind these numbers, these observers detect changes. "And yet the nature of the converts was changing. Whereas the twenty baptisms of 1678 and 1679 had involved literati like Zhang [a literati whose apologetic work Mungello's study is chiefly examining], Hinderer was baptizing people of less distinguished status."³³ In a word, this represents a failure of the Jesuit mission, not just in their goal of trying to reach the elite classes, but more profoundly in their purpose of creating an original Confucianism.

This was their stated purpose, to recover the common, Chinese religion of Heaven as represented in the Chinese Classics, especially the Book of History and

³² Mungello, p. 171.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 172.

the Book of Poetry. But their efforts in creating a Christianized Chinese common religion, or as they would have characterized it, in encouraging a return to “original Confucianism,”³⁴ were frustrated by the reality that while there may have been such a common religion, Buddhism had in the pursuit of its own evangelistic mission appropriated for itself the linguistic copyright of that religion, and brought about a division in the Chinese religious territory.

This failure suggests that the debate in Western historiography over such terms as popular and elite religion is not just the product of a Western construct being unnaturally imposed on traditional Chinese society. This is not to deny that there was a unity in how both the people and the elite related to the spiritual world. Rather, the divisions in Chinese society as reflected in the failure of this strategy of the Jesuits indicates that the divisions in Chinese religion proved to be a greater reality for the missionaries than any unity that might have existed.

At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that this was only a failure of Jesuit strategy. The overall Catholic mission was remarkably successful. For as the translation enterprise partook of more and more Buddhist-infused language, and the missionaries conducted more of their Buddhist-suggestive liturgies, the mission while increasingly alienated from the Confucian elite, drew near and increasingly identified with the common people.

³⁴ This term and its use is especially the subject of J.D. Young’s study.

Gernet in his study, China and the Christian Impact, also takes note of these changes in the profile of the Christian convert. His interest in these changes derives from his argument that the literati, once they realized the resemblance of Christianity to Buddhism and other heterodox teachings, wanted nothing more to do with the religion. Gernet attempts to show how the Western Christian and the Chinese Confucian discourses were too alien to each other for there to be any real understanding between the two. In this argument, Gernet marshals an army of evidence which supports his perspective. Yet, in the accumulating of this evidence, while proving his point about the Christian-Confucian estrangement, he demonstrates another: a picture of the popular embrace of Christianity and a sense of the affinity between the popular religion and Christianity.

As the missionaries revealed more of the essential teachings and the liturgical practices of the Christian religion to the Chinese, the literati response did become more tepid, even as the popular response grew more enthusiastic. Gernet does show that the basis for popular enthusiasm was the people's perception of the close links between their popular religion and Christianity. Gernet relates the experiences of the missionary Niccolo Longobardo and the harvest he reaped in Kwangtung Province, a movement which the missionary himself attributes at least in part to the "nation's remarkable facility for worshipping any god that there may

happen to be.”³⁵ Gernet relates this story to demonstrate his thesis that the Chinese populace had received the Catholic religion in a way that was altogether too familiar: the Heavenly Lord was just another god to add to the temple pantheon.

One reason for the eager popular embrace of Christianity was that it was being associated in the people’s minds with their Buddhist-inspired religious doctrines. The neophytes often drew inspiration from Buddhist and Taoist literature for envisioning their new life in the Christian faith, as Gernet shows us:

In a text that originated in a Christian community in Quanzhou, in Fujian Province, there is an account of a Chinese Christian called before the ‘Heavenly Court.’ After remaining dead for a short while, he is returned to life by virtue of his merits. It is an amusing transposition of the edifying tales of Buddhist and Taoist inspiration about descents into hell. The angels of paradise appear in the role of infernal judges, assessors, ushers and their subordinates, and the bureaucratic atmosphere conveyed is similar to that found in traditional tales. The analogy holds good for many details: the messenger who accompanies the dead man in his visit to the infernal regions and, in this case, to the court of Heaven and the Christian hell, the description of the court of justice, the existence of a register of merits and faults which determines the span of life granted to each man, the importance of pious actions such as adorning places of worship and reciting or copying sacred texts—all meritorious actions highly recommended in Buddhism...³⁶

Gernet suggests a second reason for the people’s interest in the new religion as growing out of their fascination with magic and the miraculous, features prominent in their own popular religion. Gernet includes account after account of miraculous events reported in missionary writings, especially highlighting the role sacred images, holy water, relics, and Latin-language prayers played in these events. As

³⁵ Gernet, p. 86.

Gernet describes his findings, "The missionaries' accounts are full of cases in which the sick, the possessed and the mad are cured or women in childbirth are delivered thanks to sprinklings of holy water, the application of holy relics, making the sign of the cross, or pronouncing the words, 'Ye-su' and 'Ma-li-ya.' The scenario usually follows the same pattern: only after having vainly tried medicine and Buddhist and Taoist ceremonies of exorcism do the sick turn to the missionaries."³⁷ It is significant that these resemblances are most apparent in the teachings about heaven and hell and in the rites involved with sickness and death, all moments of crisis and about which Confucian doctrine was silent.

These resemblances lead Gernet to argue that these converts were really only apparent conversions, since in most cases the conversion did not amount to a change in mentality. Rather, these newly-baptized Christians continued to express their faith in the categories of popular religion. Gernet here stumbles over a contradiction in his analysis. On the one hand, he describes how the Catholic religion was understood in the categories of Chinese popular religion, yet he also is trying to make the point that there could not have been any real conversion since the peasants could hardly have understood "a religion so profoundly alien to the Chinese traditions."³⁸ He makes this comment after he has demonstrated in

³⁶ Gernet, p. 93.

³⁷ Gernet, p. 90.

³⁸ Gernet, p.96.

fourteen previous pages of anecdotes how familiar the common people found the Catholic religion. He would maintain, though, that this was only a surface resemblance, and that there were deep differences between the mentalities of the two religions. But, is not this begging the question: If indeed those differences made the religion so alien, why did the common people respond to it so familiarly?

What seems to be an explanation more faithful to these events is that Christianity had become--at least on the popular level--a Chinese sect. Whether in the process of becoming so identified the missionaries had compromised the Christian message, or whether the peasants were just too slow in discerning its alien quality, are questions that can be raised, but never really answered, since we do not possess documents produced by these early peasant converts. But such questions may just be irrelevant for the purposes of this study. For what can be answered is that on a popular level, even so close to its foreign origins, Christianity was not regarded as an alien doctrine in the sense that the peasants kept it at a distance. Rather in its language and practice, the religion of the Heavenly Lord bore a resemblance to that other alien doctrine, Buddhism, which had centuries earlier attempted to fill the same religious void the Heavenly Lord was now trying to fill, a void which Confucianism by itself had never succeeded at satisfying.

CHAPTER TWO
CHRISTIAN SECTARIANISM
DURING THE PERIOD OF PROSCRIPTION

This resemblance between the teaching of the Heavenly Lord religion and Chinese sectarian religion did not escape the notice of the authorities. In this chapter, we will be examining the period of proscription; and I intend to paint a different picture of the situation of the Heavenly Lord teaching during these years between Yung-cheng's decree in 1724, which declared the teaching of the Heavenly Lord to be a heterodox teaching, and the 1858 Treaty of Tientsin which proclaimed the religion to be beneficial to society. These years constituted a trial for the church, to be sure, but the sect emerged from the ordeal of persecution with an imprimatur which it did not have before proscription: a Chinese identity.

While much attention has been expended on explaining the proscription of the Catholic religion as due to fallout from the Rites Controversy, little has been said about how much this resemblance to Chinese sectarianism may also have been a factor in the proscription of the Heavenly Lord teaching by the Yung-cheng

emperor. Indeed, the Yung-cheng emperor's decision in 1724 should be seen in the context of his general actions taken both to extirpate heterodoxy and cultivate orthodoxy, and these in turn in the context of the general nature of his centralist and autocratic rule.¹ J.J.M. DeGroot argued along such a line, pointing out that the decree against the Catholic religion was not aimed at the Catholics specifically, as he notes how in the same year that Yung-cheng proscribed the Christian religion, the emperor published a decree against native heresy as well.² Such a view is supported by Yung-cheng's elaboration of his father's hortatory treatise, The Sacred Edict, which was also published in the same fateful year of 1724.

The Sacred Edict

The Yung-cheng emperor in his Sheng-Yu Kuang-Hsun Chih-Chieh (The Sacred Edict Colloquially Explained) attempts to expound upon his father's sixteen maxims in such a way that the maxims might better fit his authoritarian agenda. The fact that he had a ready-made apparatus to propagate his views--the village heads and local gentry were expected to read from and lecture on this teaching throughout rural China--meant that he just might be able to realize that agenda.

¹ see Beatrice Bartlett's discussion of the autocratic policies of the Yung-cheng emperor in his institution of the Grand Council, Monarchs and Ministers (Berkeley, 1991) and, too, Madeline Zelin's account of Yung-cheng's fiscal policies in The Magistrate's Tael (Berkeley, 1985). Professor R. Kent Guy's work on intellectual developments and political policy in the late Ch'ien-lung era, The Emperor's Four Treasuries (Cambridge, Mass.; 1987), also deals with the issue of autocracy, and its relationship to ideological control and intellectual life.

Most of his exhortations are aimed at cultivating obedient and prosperous subjects, thereby ensuring a peaceful and flourishing state. The maxim in which our interest lies is the seventh one, that dealing with heretical sects. The K'ang-hsi emperor's maxim was brief, even terse, "Extirpate heresy (yi-tuan; literally, different principles) in order to exalt orthodoxy (cheng-hsueh; literally, correct teachings). The Yung-cheng emperor's definition of orthodoxy was at once more narrow and more detailed than his father's definition. It reads, "From time immemorial to the present what has been orthodoxy? Nothing more than [the observance of] these Five Relationships--emperor and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, friend and companion."³ His explication of orthodoxy takes up only a few lines of this chapter, a little more than a page of the text. His exposition of heterodoxy, on the other hand, takes up almost fifteen pages.

He begins his exposition on heterodoxy with a general warning about the dangers which accompany defections from orthodoxy; these include the death of good conscience with its inevitable consequences, the indulging in all kinds of depravities and the committing of all kinds of perverse crimes. This general

² J.J.M. DeGroot, Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China (Amsterdam: Johannes Muller, 1904), p. 274.

³ F.W. Baller, The Sacred Edict (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1892), p.72. I have used Baller's translation except in those cases where I felt a different one might better illumine the text on a certain point. In such cases, I have specifically noted that the translation differs from Baller's.

warning leads to a rhetorical question which introduces the body of the text: What is heterodoxy? Yung-cheng's response to this question reads as follows, "What is heterodoxy (Yi-tuan)? From remote times there have been just the three teachings (chiao). Over and above the Confucian Licentiates, there are Buddhist priests and Taoist monks; the latter are both (involved with) perverse teachings (hsieh-chiao)."⁴

There are a number of revealing features in the emperor's introduction to his definition of heterodoxy. He begins with asking, "What is heterodoxy," using the term, yi-tuan (different principles, or doctrines), which while having its negative connotations is not nearly as negative as the term hsieh-chiao (perverse, or corrupt, teachings). Secondly, he employs the term, "the three teachings," which is a bit self-defeating as a construct since it bestows a certain legitimacy on all three teachings; that, in effect, all three are on the same plane. But the emperor here is merely relying on a tried and true tactic in his strategy--attack the teachers; don't attack the teachings. This he does in the next line, where he declares that these teachers are (involved with) heterodoxy. Buddhists priests, not the Buddhist doctrine; Taoist monks, not the Taoist teaching, are his target.

Following this, the Son of Heaven begins discussing the three doctrines, leading off with Buddhism. He has only just introduced his topic when he abruptly dismisses the entire doctrinal corpus of Buddhism by stating that, "What then is the

⁴ Baller, p. 74. I have used Baller's Chinese text, but changed his English translation at a few points.

Buddha? The Buddha is the heart. What is it to repeat the name of Buddha? It is for the thoughts constantly to be occupied about the heart: if your heart is good this is Buddha. Look at their classical writings. The first volume is called the Heart Classic.” He then completes this part of his discourse with this sentence, quoting Chu Hsi, “Buddhism does not concern itself with anything in the four corners of the universe, but simply with the heart.’ This goes clean to the bottom of the Buddhist tenets and sums them up in a single sentence.”⁵

Yung-cheng then turns his attention to Taoism and to the Taoist search for immortality. After his denunciation of this latter pursuit, he moves back and forth between his attacks on Buddhist and Taoist practices for the rest of the chapter. The end result of heterodox teaching and practices, the emperor argues, is the destruction of the Five Relationships, since these sectarians abandon the life of the world to devote themselves to contemplation of the life outside the world in their quest to become Buddhas or immortals. The author sneers at these practices, asking, “Now, it is needless to say they cannot become Buddhas or Immortals: suppose it were a fact—who has seen them go up to the Western Paradise? or fly up in broad daylight? manifestly it is all humbug!”⁶

He then condemns the entire range of heterodox practices, Buddhist and Taoist, from burning paper money, offering presents, chanting prayers, pronouncing curses

⁵ Baller, p. 75.

⁶ Baller, p. 76.

and incantations--all of which the emperor declares are in the barbarous language of the Buddha's country (Fo-kuo; ie., India)--, to gathering in promiscuous meetings. In sum, the clergy have one purpose only: to defraud the common people of their money. The emperor has not, to this point, singled out any of the heterodox sects by name. There is no mention, for example, of the White Lotus or the Eight Trigram sect. He is attacking the full gamut of popular religion. From his description, he is determined to root out any and all teachings outside of Confucianism.

There is one sect, however, he does eventually single out by name. In the last few paragraphs, he mentions the Heavenly Lord teaching, almost as an afterthought. His thoughts on it form an appendix attached to his diatribe against Buddhism and Taoism. His comments are here reproduced in full, "Neither does the Heavenly Lord teaching, which speaks of Heaven and discusses the earth, of that which is without appearance and form, constitute orthodoxy (cheng-ching). It is only because they [the Catholic missionaries] understand astronomy, and are able to calculate the rules for astronomical tables, that the court employs them to compile the calendar. This is by no means to say their sect is good: you must on no account believe them."⁷ That is all the emperor has to say regarding the Catholic teaching. There is no condemnation of their doctrine; there is no denunciation of their

⁷ Baller, pp. 84-85. Again, I have adapted Baller's translation.

practices. Nor does he designate it an evil teaching. His judgment is less harsh: it just does not constitute orthodoxy.

Emperors who follow him will take a harder line. Nevertheless, by including the Heavenly Lord teaching in this section dealing with heterodoxy, the emperor makes it clear how the common people were to regard the religion. The chapter then ends with an exhortation to abandon the foolishness and depravity present in these teachings, and to cling to what is wise and essential. The whole duty of man and the way to obtain blessing from Heaven is simply this: to be perfectly loyal to the Ruler, and to fulfill one's filial duties to the utmost.

The Law Code

The judgment of the Yung-cheng emperor upon the heterodoxy of the Heavenly Lord teaching is reflected in the law code of the Ch'ing, especially as expressed in the editions of the Ta Ch'ing Lü-li Hui-t'ung Hsin-tsuán (A Comprehensive New Edition of the Statutes and Sub-Statutes of the Great Ch'ing). The article of the code dealing with heterodoxy appears under the division of laws dealing with matters coming under the jurisdiction of the Board of Rites. The title of the article reads simply, "Prohibitions Against Instructors in Magic and Sorcery." Since the statutes were taken over from the Ming, there is no mention of the Heavenly Lord teaching in the statutes proper, only of the White Lotus and White Cloud sects.

There are three main statutes, the leading one filling out the meaning of the what the law was concerned with:

All Masters and Sorcerers who falsely call down evil gods (hsieh-shen), or who write charms, or put a hex on water, or carry around palanquins [with idols], or pray to saints, or call themselves Doctrinal Patriarch, Chief Guardian, or Instructress; or those who wildly call themselves White Lotus Communities of the Buddha Maitreya, or the Luminous Honored One Sect, or the White Cloud School and other such societies together with all that answers to practices which are related to heresy (tso-tau) or heterodoxy (yi-tuan); or those who in secret draw up images or burn incense or hold meetings which meet at night and disperse at daybreak, where the people are stirred up and misled under the pretext of cultivating virtue. All such people shall be sentenced, the principal perpetrators to strangulation, and their accomplices each to a hundred blows with the heavy bamboo, followed by banishment to the distance of 3000 miles.⁸

The pages of this edition of the law code are divided horizontally into two main sections, with two sub-sections located above the main sections. The lower main section is occupied by the statutes and sub-statutes themselves. The upper main section contains the Conspectus of Penal Cases (Hsing-an Hui-lan), which is a compilation of cases related to the statutes and sub-statutes. Located above these two main sections, in the upper margins of the page, is the Upper Commentary

⁸ Ta Ch'ing Lü-li Hui-t'ung Hsin-tsuán (A Comprehensive New Edition of the Statutes and Sub-Statutes of the Great Ch'ing), ed. by Yao Yu-hsiang (Peking, 1873; reprint, Taipei, 1964), p. 1407. I have used the pagination of the reprint edition.

J.J.M. DeGroot translates much of this material. Where DeGroot provides an English translation, I follow that translation closely; if I depart from it, I note it accordingly. See his Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China. Chapter Four of his study contains the Chinese statutes and most of the sub-statutes along with English translations. DeGroot does not include material from the conspectus or the commentary. For cases from this supporting material, the translations are wholly my own.

For DeGroot's translation of this first statute, see p. 137.

(Shang Shu). This commentary also includes a number of cases which were considered relevant to the specific statutes and sub-statutes. These commentaries, however, were the work of the different publishers of the codes, and were not regarded as a formal part of the code itself. Nevertheless, since the cases which constitute these commentaries were selected from official archives and since some commentaries were read by a wider audience of officials, these commentaries achieved a quasi-official status.⁹

What is striking about this supporting material, both the official conspectus and the commentary, is the number of cases that deal with what is now referred to as the Heavenly Lord Sect. Most of these rulings concerning the Heavenly Lord sect come in the Chia-ch'ing reign, specifically in the period immediately following the Eight Trigram Uprising of 1813. It is clear that though the Heavenly Lord sect is included under the article of the code governing heterodoxy that it still was regarded as something less heinous than other sects. Included in the commentary of the code is this ruling promulgated by the Board of Punishments in the 24th year of the Chia-ch'ing reign (that is, 1819),

⁹ For crisp and concise translations of the statutes, see *The Great Qing Code*, translated by William C. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). He lists all the lü (statutes), but not the li (sub-statutes) nor the supporting material. The laws related to sectarians fall under Part IV: [Laws Relating to] The Board of Rites, Article #162, which is entitled, "Prohibitions Concerning Sorcerers and Sorceresses." For a discussion of the component parts of the law code, see Derk Bodde and Clarence Morris, *Law in Imperial China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1973), pp. 69-73 and pp. 144-159. I have employed Bodde and Morris' terminology for all these legal terms.

A reply of the Board of Punishments to an inquiry of Governor Wu of Henan Province concerning the apprehension of two bandits, Kuo T'ien-you and Han Piao, as to whether this case should be judged according to the precedents for judging the followers of the Heavenly Lord Sect. In our searching for prior cases, the Board notes that in the 18th Year of the Chia-ch'ing Reign, the decision which was reached by both the Grand Council and the Board concerning the Lin Ch'ing¹⁰ case in which White Sun sectarian criminals who repented and who left the sect, but who did not confess their crimes to an official, would be banished to Urumch'i where they would be sold as slaves. The governor, though, is seeking for permission to apply a precedent set by the Governor-General of Liang-chiang where a religious bandit by the name of Chieh Erh-ma, along with some others, repented and was judged according to a principle reserved for criminals who follow the Heavenly Lord sect. But the doctrines and the structure of the Heavenly Lord sect and the White Sun sect are not in agreement. This judgment involving Kuo T'ien-you and the other sectarians should be changed to conform to the Lin Ch'ing precedent, and these men should be banished to Urumch'i where they will serve as slaves. Afterwards, it should be clear that those who study and practice the White Sun religion, if they repent, but do not make a confession, are to be judged according to the Chia-ch'ing Year 18 decision.
Dated: Chia-ch'ing Year 24, Month 5.¹¹

This decision implies that the precedent dictating the punishment to be meted out to followers of the Heavenly Lord sect was lighter than that given out to members of the White Sun sect, evidently because of the latter's involvement in rebellion, and suggests that the Board of Punishments expected local officials to be discriminating between the different forms of sectarianism.

¹⁰ This case concerns the leader of the Eight Trigram Sectarian Uprising whose followers succeeded at entering the imperial palace, totally unnerving the emperor. This uprising led to harsh reprisals against all sectarians, including the Catholics. See Susan Naquin's Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) for an account of this episode.

¹¹ Ta Ch'ing Lü-li Hui-t'ung Hsin-tsuán, pp. 1413-1415. From the commentary.

This is not to say that the Heavenly Lord sect was subject to an enlightened method of justice. For the law code reveals that the followers of the Heavenly Lord sect were subject to a more vigorous persecution in the Chia-ch'ing reign than under any other reign. The Chia-ch'ing emperor may have been too zealous, in fact, as a ruling from his successor, the Tao-kuang emperor, made upon ascending the throne, suggests: "If after examination it is found that a person has stopped at abstaining from certain foods, burning incense, and chanting Buddhist scriptures all with the sole purpose of seeking happiness, and did not subject himself to any religious master nor make disciples nor did he seem to be acquainted with the name of any heretical sect, then such a person should be released."¹² The Tao-kuang emperor probably was less fervent in his own prosecution of sectarianism, but there is no return to the more relaxed approach of the Ch'ien-lung emperor.

An example of the application of this more lenient standard to Catholics should illumine the basis for this tolerant approach. This case, also appearing in the commentary section, was tried in the same year as the Eight Trigram Uprising, though the decision was handed down several months prior to the rebel storming of the imperial palace.

Ma Hui-yu [the Governor-General of Hu-kuang] and others have submitted a memorial inquiring about whether persons who have practiced the Heavenly Lord sect from birth, and, though appearing after the term of immunity has expired, who renounce the religion and come in person to [an official] confess,

¹² Ta Ch'ing Lü-li Hui-t'ung Hsin-tuan, p. 1417. From the sub-statutes.

can such persons still be pardoned of their crimes? This question refers to a case in Hupei Province, Ching-shan County, where a man named Liu Yi and eight others recently reported to an official. They stated that their grandfathers and fathers had practiced the Heavenly Lord religion. But now since there has been a series of investigations in their pao-chia districts, along with the publishing of the imperial decree on this matter, they have now come forward, pledging repentance. However this took place after the year of immunity had expired. These criminals though are farmers from a distant village, and so they could not have known of this law any earlier, and so the period of immunity had already passed once the decree became known. Moreover, they came to confess of their own accord, they truly fear the law, and their repentance seems more sincere than those who repented after being discovered by the magistrate. Might we then exempt them from punishment?¹³

From this precedent, we can understand the basis for a policy of leniency toward the Heavenly Lord sect. This leniency was only extended because these sectarians apostasized ("repented" in the language of the documents). May we assume that, had these poor peasants not come forward, their fate would have been similar to those devotees of the other sects which are mentioned in this section: the Red Sun, the White Cloud, the Luminous Honored, and the venerable White Lotus?

I think we can, though such an assumption is only valid for a certain time frame. While the Yung-cheng emperor did proscribe the practice of the Heavenly Lord religion and he did seize church buildings and property, the practice of the religion was not criminalized until the Chia-ch'ing reign, in the year prior to the outbreak of the Eight Trigram Uprising. This criminal status was the status of the sect then until the Opium War. The law codes published before the Eight Trigrams

¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 1418-1419. From the conspectus.

Rebellion and after the T'ung-chih reign did not include this ruling. Other sources do indicate that the law codes published during these intervening years included a sub-statute concerning the criminalization of the practice of the Heavenly Lord sect.¹⁴

We do have the decree which formed the basis of this legislation, and it was featured in the conspectus. Yet the language of the decree is directed at Western missionaries, and not the Chinese adherents. Confusion over how to deal with the Chinese adherents may be the reason why so much of the commentary was devoted to rulings involving the Heavenly Lord sect.

This development in the prosecution of the Heavenly Lord sect is not an instance where the sect was singled out as specific target of the regime. Rather, it reflects the more severe posture adopted by the Ch'ing after the outbreak of first the White Lotus rebellion in 1796, and then during the Eight Trigram rebellion in 1813, a posture which was moderated only slightly by the Tao-kuang emperor. Thus, for the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the decades immediately preceding

¹⁴ This sub-statute which criminalized the practice of the Heavenly Lord religion is reflected in all these cases taken from the conspectus (pp. 1414-1418) and the commentary, and is incorporated in the P'o Hsieh Hsiang Pien [A Detailed Refutation of Heterodoxy] which we will take up towards the end of this chapter. Many of the memorials from the Ch'ou-Pan I-Wu Shih-Mo [A Complete Account of Our Management of Barbarian Affairs]—hereafter [WSM]—address the sub-statute, and one memorial from the [WSM] summarizes the various legal stages in the history of the Heavenly Lord sect; see Tao-kuang, Chapter 75, pp. 4a-4b. The editions of the law code from the T'ung-chih reign and afterwards rescinded this sub-statute, but still included the separate case dealing with Western missionaries in the conspectus. An early Kuang-hsu edition, however, effaced all legislation dealing with the sect. See, Ta Ch'ing Lü-Li Hui-chi Pei-lan [The Great Ch'ing Statutes and Sub-Statutes, Collected and Classified], 1877.

the Taiping Rebellion, there was an empire-wide upsurge in the prosecution of sectarianism, a wave which enveloped the Heavenly Lord sect and other peaceful sects along with devotees of the White Lotus and Red Sun teachings. This intensified persecution is reflected in another development of the 1800s which we will discuss in a later chapter, and that is the forming of a new level of organization in secret society networks, the Triads.

The Application of the Law in the Memorials

Applying the Ch'ing Code in this inquisitional context must have been a delicate exercise for local officials. While the code counsels that there was to be some kind of distinction made between the followers of the Heavenly Lord and other sects, the picture which is formed out of the various memorials submitted by provincial governors demonstrates that nuances of doctrine and variations in ritual were, for the most part, lost on those who were charged with enforcing the code in the provinces. Catholics usually were not treated any differently from other sects.

Where the emperor and officials at court seemed as concerned about heterodox belief and how it might diminish imperial prestige as they were about heterodox practice giving birth to rebellion, provincial officials seem almost exclusively

concerned with the latter.¹⁵ To local officials, it seems, a heterodox sect was nothing more than the embryo of a heterodox rebellion. Followers of heterodox sects were sometimes distinguished from *chiao-fei* (religious bandits), and sometimes not. According to the law code, they are one and the same. Overall the record in these memorials is one of officials making careful distinctions, but only concerning behavior and practice; very rarely does the official judgment concern distinctions based on doctrinal differences. Officials took note of activities as harmless as propagating the faith and as harmful as spreading apocalyptic rumors. The criteria for determining when to prosecute these cases was usually the point at which these sectarian groups attempted to propagate their religion to others.

In the memorials, a common pattern emerges in which a particular governor lists the various heterodox sects (*hsieh-chiao*) or religious bandits (*chiao-fei*) operating in his jurisdiction. When Catholics are mentioned, they are included on such lists. A memorial from the eleventh year of the Ch'ien-lung reign, for example, was submitted by the former Governor of Fukien Province, now Governor-General of Kiang-nan and Superintendent of River Works. He reports on an abundant harvest in Fukien, even while commenting on the profusive spread of heterodoxy in the area. This spread of heterodoxy is puzzling to the Governor-

¹⁵ This fits with what Philip Kuhn found in the prosecution of political crime in general; it was not a bureaucrat's issue. See his *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

General, as he believes the people should be thankful to the emperor for the bounteous harvest which the emperor has provided, and the governor further believes that the people should be expressing their gratitude by forsaking such evil practices. He blames the spread of perverted teachings on the Heavenly Lord Sect which was discovered flourishing in Fu-an, but has now been suppressed.¹⁶

The governor mentions how he has apprehended leaders of the Luo Sect and three men connected to the White Lotus Sect in various towns around Fukien. There were some other families that were suspected of sectarian connections, the Governor-General reports, but even though they claimed they were White Lotus followers, being foolish peasants, they did not know that they were nothing more than followers of the Luo Sect. Since their faith only involved the hosting of an annual vegetarian feast for the Buddhist image of Kuan-yin, the governor did not prosecute them. He found no other trace of the White Lotus.¹⁷ Such leniency is in accord with the general tone of the Ch'ien-lung reign in its more tolerant approach to sectarianism.

An example from the more repressive Chia-ch'ing reign shows how short-lived this tolerance was. This case comes from Hupei in the twenty-second year of the Chia-ch'ing reign (1818) where a report was submitted concerning some followers

¹⁶ The Yung-cheng emperor had first moved against the Catholic religion in Fu-an in his first action towards proscription of the religion.

¹⁷ Kung-chung Tang [Palace Memorial Archive], Peasant Uprising Category (Beijing: Ming-Ch'ing Archives), 782-1, Ch'ien Lung 11/10/9. Hereafter, KCT.

of the Great Vehicle sect, whom the memorial describes as only practicing a vegetarian diet, without chanting scriptures or making disciples. A set of scriptures had been handed down to them, yet when they heard that possessing such scriptures was forbidden, they destroyed their scriptures and confessed their crimes before the official.

A second incident reported in the same memorial involved nine people who practiced the Heavenly Lord sect, a religion which had been handed down to them by their grandfather. These believers also limited themselves to practicing a vegetarian diet; moreover, they did not chant scriptures or make disciples. Their ancestors also had handed down to them a set of scriptures along with various religious articles, one of those articles being a cross. These Heavenly Lord sectarians, when they heard of the imperial declaration forbidding these things, after the example of the Great Vehicle sectarians, repented and sought pardon for their crime.

Still another incident from this same memorial involved a man from Shang-yuan County, Kiangsu [ie., one of the two counties encompassed by Nanking], who was also a follower of the Heavenly Lord sect. His faith was also handed down to him from his ancestors, and he likewise limited his activities to practicing vegetarianism and chanting scriptures. He also did not propagate his faith. As if anticipating a question such as, What then is a Kiangsu man doing in Hupei Province, the

memorialist notes that the man's occupation involves the repair of clocks and watches.¹⁸ The memorialist's willingness to accept this explanation reveals his reluctance over prosecuting sectarians for these kinds of activities.

The principle in deciding whether to prosecute these cases was determined by whether the sectarians had gone beyond the simple practice of vegetarianism; if a sectarian group had refrained from illegal acts such as the propagating of their faith and the possessing of copies of scriptures, they were left alone. It is difficult to know whether the followers of the Heavenly Lord were actually practicing vegetarians, or whether such a characterization arises out of the application of the legal precedent to the case.¹⁹ Since this was one of the considerations featured in the appeal to this precedent, it is reasonable to assume that the Catholics were not practicing vegetarians. This is not an issue, though it would be interesting to know if Catholic sectarians were being influenced by the Buddhist sectarians in this way. Nevertheless, what is of fundamental importance is the perspective of the official, and the parallel judgment he pronounces on the two groups.

The Heavenly Lord sect was here handled with leniency. But if officials suspected any links to either *chiao-fei* (religious bandits) or *hui-fei* (society bandits), their judgments could be harsh and their punishments severe. More here should be said about this notion of *fei* (bandit). Implicit in this concept is the sense

¹⁸ KCT 781-1, Chia-ch'ing 22/12/25.

that not only was a person engaging in an activity which was outside the law, it was also an activity which was subversive of the natural, social and moral order.

Rebels were almost always described as bandits, for while they may not have been robbing and stealing (they did indulge in a little pillage and plunder, however), they were trying to overturn the established order. Though there was a distinction made between *chiao-fei* and *hui-fei*, it was not always easily maintained, and some officials could be extremely careless in their designations.

This was not always the fault of officials. Often times, the line between the *chiao-fei* and the *hui-fei* was not so clearly drawn by the principals themselves. Catholics probably did not help their own cause either in that they referred to their doctrine as *chiao* and their meeting place as a *chiao-hui* (a doctrine, or religious, society).

Until the Taiping Rebellion, the Heavenly Lord sect was not usually implicated in cases of rebellion, or inciting the masses. And this holds true even during periods when the mood of the court swung into hysteria and paranoia, when pressure to search out and prosecute sectarian crime was intense. There is one report that is a follow-up to the one included in the Ch'ing Law Code involving the follower of the Heavenly Lord sect from Hupei, but now some 17-18 years later, in the eleventh year of Tao-kuang (1831). This report was compiled in response to an empire-wide

¹⁹ This legal precedent did not become a formal part of the code until the first year of Tao-kuang's reign. But it was already being applied in this case in the latter part of Chia-ch'ing.

investigation into the newly-formed triad organization, which had been organized over five provinces, with Hu-kuang (Hupei and Hunan) being one of those provincial areas. (Each province was represented by its own house. Fukien Province being the chief house; Hu-kuang was the fourth house. Each house had its own colors and flag.)

In spite of the fact that this governor filed his report in the wake of the Eight Trigram Rebellion, and amidst calls to conduct an investigation into the activities of this menacing inter-provincial secret society network, in this context fraught with tension, this Hupei official still attempted to make distinctions, based on behavior and practice, between peaceful and rebellious sectarians. Governor-General Lu Kun reports that he found no trace of the triad organization in his area, though he ordered the officials under him to be on the lookout for signs of such activity. He agrees with the censor whose investigation first prompted the report that these society bandits, who formed such associations and organized the masses, needed to be severely punished to the full extent of the law.

The governor-general reports that he has looked back over all the cases dealing with those criminals who practice religion and have been charged with banditry, and he very clearly states that while there has been many cases of sectarian activity, society activity of the kind which the emperor describes has been non-existent.

“From the time of Chia-ch’ing 18 to Tao-kuang 9 those bandits who have practiced

religion, but have repented and confessed [to officials], including Liu Yi and others all together amount to nineteen cases. They involve those who traditionally have practiced the Heavenly Lord Sect, the Great Vehicle Sect, the Dragon Flower Sect, the Three Sun Sect, the Niu-Pa Sect, the White Lotus Sect, the Green Tea Sect, and the Purity Sect. All these sects (chiao) are vegetarian, chant scriptures, seek blessing and help relieve disaster. There is not one article of their situation which is illegal.”²⁰ It is interesting that the governor sums up his appraisal of these groups with a focus on their practices, declaring that no article of their situation, referring to their practices, is illegal. This is a common pattern of these reports from the provinces: almost no attention is paid to doctrinal matters.

While this memorial shows that a sincere effort was made on the part of some officials to distinguish between peaceful and troublesome believers, at the same time, the lines demarcating what was peaceful religious practice from what was not was being drawn more and more narrowly. Sectarian behaviors such as gathering together as a group, chanting scriptures and propagating religion were now all defined as beyond the pale of legality.

These governors were not all to blame for these punitive policies. The officials could be heavy-handed, but it was not always without cause. Sometimes the sects were involved in what could truly be characterized as criminal behavior. For

²⁰ KCT 662-5, Tao-kuang 11/7/6.

example, the dangers of propagating religion are illustrated in this case taken from a memorial from Shantung submitted in the seventeenth year of the Tao-kuang emperor. Here again, there is a conscientious spirit infusing these memorials. An effort is made to deliver a balanced and fair decision, which is all the more admirable given the malicious intent displayed by this particular sectarian criminal.

Governor Ching E-pu introduces the case with a reference which appears in many of the memorials, “the propagating of perverted doctrines and the irresponsible spreading of evil rumors over and over again incite and stir up the people, and constitute the most injurious harm to the heart of the people.”²¹ The governor then reports on how he conducted a sweep of his province a year earlier, and caught up in his net a number of different sectarians, ensnaring devotees of the One Stick of Incense Sect, the White Lotus Sect and the Heavenly Lord Sect. The governor believes that the key to success in keeping his pond free of sectarian weeds is through strengthening the use of the *pao-chia* system (a mutual accountability system), which he takes as his “number one duty.” He also suggests donning plain-clothes (or literally, easy clothes) and making surprise visits to the countryside to ensure that the *pao-chia* system is operating at the highest standards of vigilance.

²¹ KCT 779-13, Tao-kuang 17/12/12.

The most pernicious of these sects, in the official's eyes, was the White Lotus sect. The governor's deputies had heard that one Chang Yao from Liao-ch'eng County was propagating the Hung-meng sect (here, this is a reference to the White Lotus sect) and that this man was wildly and irresponsibly circulating an evil report, and had even printed and pasted up posters with the result that foolish peasants were stirred up and a sense of terror had gripped them. The governor's deputies swept down on Chang, capturing him and seizing his printing blocks as well as some of his remaining posters. They apprehended several of his accomplices as well.

The governor was charging Chang Yao with the crime of fabricating an evil and perverse apocalyptic tract. The contents of this tract concerned a star which Chang divined was an omen from Heaven predicting a famine that was to hit Shantung. This celestial sign inspired him to write the tract and to concoct a scheme whereby those who paid money could enter Chang's White Lotus sect and escape the tremendous misery that was about to be unleashed on the people of the province. The punishment meted out for this kind of sectarian activity--fabricating this perverted teaching, then printing the tract and posting it up, with the intention of making money from terrified peasants--was severe. According to precedent, the leaders were immediately put to death, and the followers were imprisoned, to be executed after a waiting period. As for all those "followers who propagate the

perversed doctrines of the White Lotus sect and the Eight Trigrams sect, who recite wild and ridiculous, irreverent, chantings, if they are not yet 6 years of age or if they exceed 60 years of age, but made disciples, then they will be banished to the cities of the Muslims.”

The governor had also gathered up in his sweep followers of the Heavenly Lord sect? What happened to them? Again it is illuminating for our understanding of sectarian society how the Catholics were treated. Even in spite of the gross and heinous crimes committed by the White Lotus sectarians, the Catholics and the other peaceful sect were not implicated in the same crimes. They were still criminals, of course, but guilty of lesser charges. The main culprits in this case were Tsung Yueh-p’u and his partner in crime, Li Pan-lin. Tsung’s father, Tsung Ch’eng-chung, now deceased, urged Tsung Yueh-p’u and some of the others who are also now held captive, Tsung Yueh-p’ing, Tsung Yueh-kuang, Tsung Yueh-zhao, Tsung Yi-hsueh, Tsung Yi-jung to enter the sect, and thus Tsung Yueh-p’u and the others became followers of the religion. The memorial then describes the heterodox practices in which they engaged, and the judgment rendered.

The elder Tsung taught them to revere the Lord of Heaven, not setting up tablets of the Stove god (tsao-ch’un shen) in the kitchen. Instead every day, morning and evening, facing the cross, they kowtowed, petitioning for grace and giving back thanksgiving. Furthermore, he passed down to them the Ten Commands and the Seven Requests songs. He also taught them the distinguishing sign of the Heavenly Lord which involves using the index finger of the right hand to draw a cross on one’s forehead, nose, mouth and chest. It is not permitted to step over the cross. Tsung Yueh-p’u and the others after

they entered the sect did not pass it on to others, nor did they try to use magic to stir up people. So we right there in the hall had them step over the cross, repent and come out of the religion.

There is no record of any punishment. The critical point was that those following the Heavenly Lord sect were not circulating these malicious rumors nor were they trying to use magic to stir up the people and trick them out of their money. Later on, in this same memorial the governor sets these practices up as his criteria for determining the severity of sectarian crimes.

The followers of the Heavenly Lord who did “repent” were not charged with a crime, and were probably only subjected to a severe scolding, especially after the followers had informed them that they followed their fathers and grandfathers into the sect: there’s a filial twist to this sectarian activity. As is evident from the list of names cited in the memorial, most of the Catholic followers were from the same family, the first three on the list undoubtedly were all sons of Tsung Ch’eng-chung.

There is one element in this memorial which has not yet been addressed. What was the punishment for not “repenting” of one’s allegiance to the Heavenly Lord sect, for not stepping over the cross? Was that an option? Or were the followers compelled to repent? Unfortunately, this is a question that cannot be answered here. Neither the Hsing-an Hui-lan nor these memorials offer any cases of a sectarian criminal exercising such an option.

Missionary accounts, however, do provide a few details of the consequences for refusing to repent of sectarian activity,²² but it is difficult to know whether the penalty for refusing to repent was always as heavy as these accounts portray it. Moreover, there is the added difficulty in these missionary accounts of trying to ascertain the reason for persecution. For example, in one prominent account from the late 1700s in the Lettres Edifante, that of a missionary to Szechuan by the name of Gleyo, it is very clear that the Catholics were being persecuted because of the resemblance of their sect to that of the White Lotus. As he is being interrogated by a representative from the local gentry, the missionary defends himself in these words, "There are Christians in all the provinces of the Empire, and among those who are familiar with the doctrine, they have never confused it like you have, sir, with the notorious White Lotus."²³ The Catholics in Szechuan continued to suffer from this same kind of identification right up until the time of the signing of the Treaties of Nanking.

Such accounts then confirm what was seen in the memorials. Distinctions generally were made, but with reference to behavior and rituals, for the purpose of

²² Cary-Elwes in China and the Cross describes the years from 1784-1840 as "Dark Years." For the years 1724-1784, there was persecution, though it can only be characterized as sporadic. Unfortunately, for the "Dark Years," there is a gap in the reporting of incidents of persecution between 1784 and 1840 since the Lettres Edifiantes covers only those incidents up to the 1780s, and the Annals only begins publishing in 1838. (The French seemed to have been distracted, too, by their own rebellions during this period.) Moreover, the accounts that do exist tend to focus on the persecutions suffered by the missionary, rather than those suffered by the converts.

²³ Lettres Edifiantes et Curieuses, nouvelle edition, 1811, Tome 26, p. 291.

determining rebellious inclinations, and rarely with reference to doctrine and beliefs. An account from the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith implies that even when Catholics did not apostatize, they were not always treated harshly.²⁴ This is a general rule, and there were exceptional times and cases. Catholic believers as well as other sectarian believers could be treated as harshly as the law allowed; this was especially the case when the emperor called for more harsh penalties so to display his power and glory. The memorials and these missionary accounts then do confirm a tendency which was implied in the Sacred Edict and the law code regarding the official attitude toward the religion of the Heavenly Lord. The officials tended to view the sect as a common Chinese sect, heterodox but apparently not as subversive of social life as other sects.

What we do not know is how other sectarians viewed the Heavenly Lord sect. This is unfortunate since this question is a critical one because of its relevance to the popular impact of the Taiping Rebellion. Sectarians, though, left behind few traces of their perspective. We can surmise that since Catholic doctrine was expressed in the language of popular religion, since many of the practices of Catholicism, such as baptism, chanting scriptures, offering prayers with incense burning, exorcism and meeting together in secret were similar to practices used by the sects, and since the government persecuted and prosecuted Catholic followers

²⁴ Annals of the Propagation of the Faith, London, 1841, pp. 171-172.

who participated in such practices with the same zeal as that spent on the sects, that members of such sectarian groups as the Heavenly Lord and the White Lotus would feel a certain kind of camaraderie towards each other. Such a conclusion is conjecture, but not without basis. While there is no direct evidence for this camaraderie, there is one source which indirectly testifies to such a feeling of fellowship.

The Devotional Tract

A Catholic devotional tract bearing the title, the Sheng-Shih Ch'u Jao (A Grass Cutter in a Prosperous Age), a title which undoubtedly reflects the author's humility and not his occupation, presents the Catholic angle on this identification of the Heavenly Lord religion with Chinese sectarianism, and helps fill in the blanks left by government documents. It is a valuable source for studying this period for two reasons, and both have to do with the tract's inclusion of a chapter on heterodoxy. One reason is that this chapter is one of those small pieces of indirect evidence which supports the idea of a camaraderie shared by sectarians. A second reason is that this same chapter reveals a perspective which distinguished the Heavenly Lord sect from other sects.

The devotional work was published in the first year of the reign of Chia-ch'ing and contains meditations on a number of doctrinal subjects. After an introduction

there is the table of contents which lists the following chapter headings: Tracing the Origins; Redemption; The Soul; Rewards and Punishments; and Heterodoxy. In the introduction to his exhortatory tract, the author recommends a method by which his work will garner its greatest influence. "There is no difference between reading this for oneself or hearing someone expound upon it. If there are some of you who are not literate, whether married women or young girls, whether weak or infirm, yet who desire to hear the holy doctrine, but there is no one who can expound upon it, then all you need to do is have a close friend who is literate read it and recite what is on the page. This is no different from hearing someone expound the holy doctrine."²⁵ Evidently, these were times when it was not always expedient to gather together to hear a sermon preached in a church. There is this kind of pastoral emphasis throughout the work.

The chapter on heterodoxy begins with the author posing a hypothetical question:

If a friend were to come to your house and say, The Greatness of Heaven and Earth, there is nothing that can not be contained in them. The orthodox religion (cheng-chiao) of the Heavenly Lord surely should be able to accommodate all kinds of gods and Buddhas...moreover, all these gods and their doctrines have all been imperially approved; they are not privately established. It is like under the imperial court; there have to be also prefects...Look at the Buddhist establishment. They have never before turned away any other religion. If a person worships the Buddhist P'u-sa and then

²⁵ Feng Ping-cheng, *Sheng Shih Ch'u Jao* [A Grass Cutter in a Prosperous Age], (Chia-ch'ing 1); Introduction, p. 2a. This work also bears the imprimatur of a Bishop whose transliterated name is Ya-li-shan-t'ang (Alexander?). The title page includes the Western date as well: "In the 1796th year of the descent of the Heavenly Lord."

worships the Taoist Lao-tse, it is not something which is frowned upon. The most important thing is to judge a person by his conduct, whether it is orthodox. This way of thinking conforms to the dictum espoused by Mencius when he said, 'Whoever comes, do not turn away; whoever leaves, do not pursue...' ..As long as such matters do not transgress the laws of the land or harm one's moral ethics, why is there any need to so severely forbid these [other religious] activities.²⁶

Once again there appears a focus on practice, rather than doctrine, only now in the context of religious adherents talking to religious inquirers. The teacher's reply to this visitor's query speaks to why this was not a suitable position for the Heavenly Lord sect and it involves the Catholic claim that the Heavenly Lord religion is the orthodox religion. The teacher answers that Buddhism, being heterodox, can live with other heterodox beliefs and practices, because its beliefs and practices are of the same nature. The same is not true for the teaching of the Heavenly Lord, which because it is orthodox, is not of the same nature. One can not mix heterodoxy and orthodoxy, the teacher reminds his visitor. He then warns the visitor of the consequences which would result from the failure to distinguish such matters as right and wrong, good and evil. In such matters, he says, sounding as much like a Confucian as a Christian, even getting one little word incorrect can change the whole meaning and truth value of a statement. How satisfactory the inquirer found this response and whether he again bothered making his hypothetical visit, we do not know.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 1a-b of the chapter on heterodoxy.

The real challenge of heterodoxy, according to this tract, lay with the worshipping of other gods. In a section entitled, "Ghosts and Gods of the World," the author is confounded by their number and bewildered by their diversity, "The ghosts and gods which the world reveres are a thousand strange and a hundred bizarre. Their names are numerous. Every place and every teaching; how can you describe them all? Nevertheless, ultimately, we can say they are of only two kinds: one kind refers to all those things which are alive and growing and which are considered gods. The other kind refers to those people who have died and become gods."²⁷ Elaborating, he points to how all the different planets and stars of the milky way all possess their own god. All kinds of light do as well. Moonlight and lamplight all have their *P'u-sa* (Bodhisattva). Fire, lightning, wind, thunder, mountains, rivers, clouds and rain all have a god. Then the tractarian refers to the second kind of gods, to those people who have died and become gods. There are shrines to so many different types of people, he says. Even such low class people as prostitutes, actors, slaves and soldiers have become gods and now have their own shrines.

What people should know, argues the tract, is that before the moon and stars were created in the heavens and before the earth's rivers, seas and mountains were formed, the Lord of Heaven had already established that there would be spirits/gods

²⁷ *ibid*, pp. 5a-b of the chapter on heterodoxy.

(shen) who would guard and watch over these. Then the author asks, if the Heavenly Lord were to use men who die after the world was created to manage and rule these, then who would have managed these affairs before they died? This is the first matter to be explained. Every prefect, department and county, each piece of earth every single place has a god who is just a man who has died. Likewise, the evangelist wants to know, who ruled these places before these men died?²⁸ This is the Catholic strategy: the tract writer does not deny the existence of gods other than the Heavenly Lord, rather, in keeping with the Catholic view, these gods (shen) all are subject to the highest god, the Heavenly Lord. In effect, the Catholic spiritual world of angels (t'ien-shen; heavenly gods) and evil spirits (hsieh-shen) gets superimposed on the Chinese spiritual world of good gods and evil ghosts.

The Catholics, meanwhile, remain unmoved in their purpose to claim the orthodox position, and the Catholic clergy, at least, would then have found little to quibble over in the Confucian notion that there was such a thing as orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Indeed they would have wanted to be more consistent than the Confucians were in this regard. Beliefs and practices both were scrutinized.

Finally, the concern in this devotional work is more with the dangers of identification with sectarian beliefs and practices than the persecution of the authorities (But then this catechism was composed before the White Lotus rebellion

²⁸ *ibid*, p. 6a of the chapter on heterodoxy.

exploded onto the scene). The author has devoted one entire chapter to these matters. The emphasis in this catechism, then, shows that for the clergy, the greatest peril to the faith resided not in government persecution, but in the identification with other sects, and the solace that their followers might find in association with other sectarians.

As for the followers, such conclusions involving doctrinal hair-splitting no doubt eluded them. The tract may have been condemning the fact that the people believed in multiple gods and spirits, but the Catholics themselves had a fairly large pantheon, as well, at least to Chinese eyes. In the chapter devoted to discussing salvation, for example, the leading sentence is a question concerning images, “Since the Lord of Heaven is a divine (shen) substance without form or image, why then does the Heavenly Lord Hall (t’ang) and the homes of the followers of the Heavenly Lord all contain if not an image of a man holding a orb, then an image of a woman who is embracing a child. There is also in front of these images a cross. How do you explain all this?”²⁹ Other denizens of the Christian religious world included: the Heavenly Lord; the holy god (sheng-shen; ie., the Holy Spirit or the Holy Spirits—which if not specifically noted in the context could be read singular or plural) who is somehow different from the Heavenly Lord; the heavenly gods (t’ien-shen; ie., the angels); and guardian gods (what we would call guardian

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 1a of the chapter on salvation.

angels) beings who were often depicted as infant cherubs which to the Chinese religious mind would appear quite a bit different from-- and a lot less intimidating than-- the red and black-faced guardian gods who stood at the entrance to traditional Chinese temples; and then, as we have seen in other contexts, other beings such as the most evil ghost (the devil), evil and filthy gods, and demons. Those who lived in such a densely-populated spiritual world, it would seem, would have little ground to stand on in their attacks on the polytheism of the traditional Chinese world. Ultimately, the amount of text which the author dedicates to trying to distinguish the religion of the Heavenly Lord sect from other sectarians highlights just how close (and how threatening) the relationship must have been.

The Sectarian Scriptures

It is a question which cannot be answered, but one of those which also cannot be asked: Would the emphasis in this tract have been different if it had been composed after the outbreak of the White Lotus Rebellion, and after the suppression which followed? Would then a chapter on heterodoxy have been included?

It is easy to imagine that the emphasis would have been different, and that some collegiality might have come from the shared suffering. In this section, I want to reconstruct the view of the period of persecution which followed the White Lotus

Rebellion from the perspective of the (Buddhist) sectarians. In this way, we can better appreciate the period of persecution which all sectarians, Buddhist and Catholic, had to endure. One document which helps to reveal this valuable perspective during this time is a volume of sectarian writings assembled and edited by an official. The voice of the sectarians though filtered is not muffled.

The Chia-ch'ing reign, the reign during which both the White Lotus and the Eight Trigram revolts arose, appears to have been a time when a general sectarian hysteria had gripped the court, and in turn the provinces. By contrast, the succeeding reign, the Tao-kuang, was more unpredictable: in certain places and at certain times, such a hysteria would prevail; at other times and other places, a more measured temper would be seen. It was during the Tao-kuang reign that this collection of sectarian materials was first published. Evidence of this kind of hysteria, and especially the severe cruelty which the regime was prepared to employ in the suppression of these popular religious sects, is evident in this collection which was assigned the title, P'o Hsieh Hsiang-Pien (A Detailed Refutation of Heterodoxy).³⁰

Intended to help local officials better identify and deal with sectarian activity, this work is at once both a unique collection of then-current sectarian doctrines and

³⁰ Huang Yu-p'ien, P'o Hsieh Hsiang Pien [A Detailed Refutation of Heterodoxy] (1883). This text, though, is a reprint of an edition put out by his relative, Huang Jen-ku, in 1834. Huang Yu-p'ien only added a preface to the reprint. This material is taken from the introduction (lit., head chapter), 3b-4a.

a window into how the official mind during this critical period regarded the government campaign against sectarianism. The Heavenly Lord sect is mentioned, but this source is mainly relevant for providing a sense of the general context of sectarian inquisition in which the Heavenly Lord sect was operating, and also for giving us an idea of what might have happened to those peaceful sectarians, Buddhist and Heavenly Lord, who did not choose to “repent” of their beliefs.

This treatise was originally published in Tao-kuang 14 (1834) by an official in Kansu, Huang Jen-ku, and then was republished with a newly-written preface in 1883 by a relative of Huang, for help in dealing with a new outbreak of sectarian activity in Hupei Province in the late 1800s. In the original preface, written in 1834, Huang leads off with the official refrain that “heterodoxy is the greatest harm to the people.”

After the preface and other introductory matters, Huang turns to discuss the collection of scriptures he has compiled. His collection features scriptures which he had confiscated from various sectarians over the years, and he has organized them into a format where he names the scripture, then quotes from it, particularly the “most ridiculous portions” of the same, and then follows this with a rebuttal of the notions presented in these same scriptures.

It is instructive how much of his attack is aimed at Buddhism. For Huang, there are only Buddhist-inspired scriptures, and these more often than not bear a direct

reference to the Buddha in the title of the scripture. Of course, he never admits that his quarrel is with Buddhism per se. Not at all; rather he is concerned how all these doctrinal innovations spread by sectarians might offend the Buddha. Representative of Huang's method is his attack on one scripture which describes the Buddhist conception of the three ages. Huang quotes from a scripture entitled, the "Three Buddhas Passing on the Lamp."

After the Jan-teng (Lamp-lighting) Buddha appears, there is the Shih-chia Buddha (a transliterated reference to the Sakyamuni Buddha), who receives the transmission of the lamp. After the Shih-chia Buddha, there is the Mi-le Buddha (a transliterated reference to the Maitreya Buddha), who receives the transmission of the lamp. Then there appears the Patriarch T'ien Chen, who receives the transmission of the lamp. T'ien Chen then asks what person will receive the transmission? There are three major trees [of the sect], five trunks, nine major branches, 118 minor branches. The leaders and chiefs all speak up, your followers will all receive the transmission of the lamp. Yi-ah!! T'ien Chen is just Kung Ch'ang, who was just a man. How vulgar and detestable! And who then receives the transmission of the lamp [after T'ien Chen]? None other than Kung Chang's disciples, all of whom are foolish and stupid peasants!

Huang often portrays his attacks as directed against these kind of peasant addendums, rather than the more orthodox doctrines of Buddhism. He blames the increase of these heterodox notions on the moral laxity of the later years of the Ming Dynasty, when all kinds of heterodox ideas gained currency, ideas which were often advocated by the eunuchs, who were also responsible for the printing of

all kinds of these heterodox scriptures.³¹ Of course, this was also the period when the Heavenly Lord sect entered China.

Like every other good Chinese bureaucrat, Huang's objections to Buddhism lay only tangentially in its doctrine. Buddhist sectarianism was a threat to the state. And it was a threat in two ways, each of which was also represented in Catholic sectarianism. First, Buddhist sectarianism was a voluntary association gathering together at regular intervals. The Ch'ing court was suspicious of such gatherings, but did not always own up to the reason for its suspicions, mostly denouncing such meetings because of sexual promiscuity.

This suspicion was also present in the provincial official's mind. The problem, Huang admits, is not so much in the heterodox scriptures themselves, though these do poison the hearts of the people, but rather in the fact that the reading of these scriptures becomes the occasion for gathering together in small groups: "heterodox scriptures do not speak of plotting rebellion. What is the cause of rebellious plots engaged in by those who practice religion? The source of rebellious plotting arises in meeting together as an assembly; and the source of meeting together in an assembly arises from the heterodox scriptures. So while it is true that the heterodox scriptures do not speak of plotting rebellion, they necessarily are the origin of such plotting."³² Some scholars regard the Ch'ing state as the culprit in the increase

³¹ *ibid*, chapter one, p. 14b.

³² *ibid*, chapter three, p. 9b.

incidence of sectarian rebellion, arguing that Ch'ing state aggression drove otherwise peaceful sectarians into rebellion. Other scholars defend the imperial state by pointing to the apocalyptic character of sectarian doctrine as constituting the culprit.³³ But the issue behind government antagonism to sectarianism runs deeper than this question of the potential rebellious character of sectarian activity.

A second and more fundamental reason for official antagonism to all forms of sectarianism resides in the loyalty which sectarians pledged to another sovereign. In most studies of Chinese religion, it is noted how the spiritual world was regularly conceived as a mirror image of the physical world. The spiritual world had its own official hierarchy, with the different gods serving in their various official capacities. There was the Jade Emperor who ruled over the vast religious domain, and the different gods of provinces and cities who ruled under him. Like most aspects of Chinese religion, this cosmology overlapped with another in which the Ch'ing emperor worshipped Heaven and Earth, the princes the gods of the domain, and the common people worshipped lesser deities, like the kitchen god, and then each family its own ancestors.³⁴ The cosmology preferred by the state was the latter. Both these cosmologies were somewhat static.

A third cosmology was that promoted by the sects. Sectarian cosmology with its different Buddhas ruling from different thrones in different ages in turn overlapped

³³ DeGroot and Overmeyer are proponents of the former perspective, Naquin of the latter.

³⁴ *ibid*, chapter three, pp. 7a-7b, for example, Huang refers to this hierarchy of proper worship.

with each of these, and yet was much more dynamic. Sectarian cosmology would often conflict with the official cosmology, as in one example where in the worship of the *Wu-sheng Lao Mu* (the Eternal Mother, a favorite deity of sectarians), one scripture accorded her a position higher than that of *Yu-ti* (the Jade emperor) who was the counterpart of the Chinese emperor in the spiritual realm.³⁵

Sectarianism was a blasphemy of the official religious hierarchy and a usurpation of the emperor's prerogatives. This ramification of sectarian activity is not often addressed in the literature examining sectarianism and the state. Even the most peaceful sectarians, devoted to vegetarianism and chanting scriptures, were in the government's eyes rebellious, were a threat to the state. For heterodoxy constituted an allegiance to a different world view, a different authority. That is to say, believing heterodoxy was itself a rebellious act.

Usually this aspect of sectarian activity was more a matter of the court's concern, and not of the provincial official's. But this particular provincial official is an exception. Evidence of this perspective of heterodoxy as an allegiance to a different sovereign is especially displayed in Huang's treatment of the doctrines of the afterlife. The official view was that Buddhist (and Heavenly Lord, as well) conceptions of heaven and hell engendered a commitment to another sphere of

³⁵ *ibid*, chapter one, p. 24b.

authority which tended to disturb the security of society and subvert the authority of the state.

Again officials did not always own up to their real concerns. Rather, they might point to how visions of a future heavenly state distracted the followers from being grateful for the happiness which they have on earth, which for the Confucians meant the happiness to be found in the family. This is Huang's approach. Huang encourages the sectarians to consider the happiness of those who abstain from joining the sects, "Men plowing their fields, women weaving cloth, warmly-clothed and satisfyingly-fed. What about this happiness? A father's kindness, a child's reverence, an elder brother's concerned regard, a younger brother's respect. What about this happiness?...Happiness here on earth truly has some proof, but the happiness of heaven is empty and without basis. The heterodox sects hope and plan for the happiness of heaven, and in so doing lose the happiness of earth."³⁶ In the China of the nineteenth century, participating in this "Chinese dream" was becoming less and less of a possibility for many, and so the official attention to this may have just more strongly motivated peasants to seek their happiness elsewhere.

Huang may have had a little success in his appeal; however, seeking happiness was not the biggest drawing card of the sects; avoiding disaster (both apocalypse and hell) was a much more compelling motive for joining up. It is in this arena

³⁶ *ibid*, chapter one, p. 22a.

where the government was struggling most vigorously with sectarianism. And the government was losing. The earthly power to punish and the fear it inspired was being eclipsed by a spiritual one. Usually these two powers worked in tandem, but they had somehow become separated in the course of the wave of sectarian rebellions in the early nineteenth century. As the editor of these volumes points out, “In these days, heterodox scriptures do not use the obtaining of blessing to exhort people [to join sects]; instead, they employ the imminence of disaster to exhort people. Thus it is appropriate that those who propagate religion should themselves encounter punishment and execution.”³⁷ For how, asks this bearer of the imperial power, are those who consult these scriptures seeking release from the bonds of this life going to be released from the bonds of punishment:

... you can not be released from the iron chains, you can not be released from the handcuffs, and you can not be released from leg fetters. And when the time comes for interrogation, you can not be released from being beaten on the mouth, you can not be released from kneeling on chains, you can not be released from the ankle-press, and you can not be released from the finger squeeze. Then, when the time comes for pronouncing the sentence, you can not be released from the cangue, from being beaten with a rod, from being banished, from being strangled, from being decapitated, from being slowly sliced to death. If you are released from the eight bonds, [and you have to suffer these punishments] what does it matter in the end?³⁸

Huang sought to impress upon the subjects of the Son of Heaven that the kinds of punishments which were meted out by the state could be more terrifying than those meted out by the god of the underworld.

³⁷ *ibid*, chapter one, pp. 21a-22a.

Huang includes a large body of sectarian material touching on the doctrines of heaven and hell, and it is far and away his most frequent doctrinal target. And always, he asks his sectarian opponents whether the torments threatened in the next life can compare to those inflicted by the civil authority here on earth. He summarizes the teachings found in these heterodox scriptures,

The heterodox scriptures do not speak of punishment and execution; they stop at speaking of hell and apocalypse (chieh-shu). Why is this? It is because during the final years of the Ming Dynasty the legal nets were not tightly set. The result is that heterodox religion perversely spread over the land, with the result that the people do not know of the articles dealing with punishments and executions. Because people regarded talk of hell and apocalypse as descriptions of reality people became terrified. But then our present dynasty made clear its governing policies, that is to expel heterodoxy (hsieh) and honor the orthodox (cheng). Whoever is involved in heterodoxy will certainly face punishment and execution. But the foolish and stupid peasants still are more stirred up by heterodoxy, and do not regard civil punishment and execution as any kind of deterrent. Rather, what awakens in them a sense of dread is the specter of hell and apocalypse. They have treated lightly what should be considered more seriously, and treated seriously what should be considered more lightly. These doctrines should not be believed.³⁹

Regardless of how vividly he described these threats, peasants continued to regard those threats issuing from the state as pale compared to those threats coming from the circles of hell. The sectarians feared the terror of the spiritual world more than the terror of the physical world, induced by the specter of official torture and punishment. But how did it happen that these two realms had separated?

³⁸ *ibid*, chapter one, p. 23a.

³⁹ *ibid*, chapter one, p. 19a-19b.

This official is touching on a subject which is an intriguing one: What were the religious dimensions of punishment? The rituals of the court are often analyzed for their religious content. But as the Chinese conceived of all of life in terms of ritual, would their understanding of punishment be an exception to this? From this Tao-kuang official's record, it would seem that it was not an exception. Indeed, from his account, we can see that the execution of punishment was a ritual itself, and like all rituals, its performance, while involving the participants, was directed mainly at the spectators.⁴⁰

For Chinese imperial governments, punishment was not only a matter of restoring harmony to the cosmos, but was also an occasion for showing and displaying their power, their arbitrary and limitless power. Such a display was especially critical for the punishment of what Philip Kuhn calls "political crime," religious heterodoxy being one of such transgressions.⁴¹ Political crimes were more a monarch's issue, not a bureaucrat's issue. This is not unique to the Chinese monarchy; Michel Foucault describes European sovereigns as employing the same kind of strategy in their own punishments, which could be as horrific and as terrifying as anything the Chinese had devised. Even more so. Foucault introduces his subject with an account of the execution of the French regicide Damians whose

⁴⁰ I have been greatly inspired in this discussion of ritual by Catherine Bell's study, Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice (New York, 1992).

⁴¹ Philip Kuhn, Soulstealers, pp. 187-222.

torturous end included having his flesh torn with red-hot pincers, having molten lead and boiling oil poured into his wounds, and finally being quartered.⁴²

Foucault does not deal so much with the religious aspects of punishment in his analysis of these kinds of punishment. The compiler of the P'o Hsieh Hsiang Pien does, and he acknowledges that the crucial connection between what the government inflicted on the body in this world and what the spiritual rulers would inflict on the body in the next, the belief that the punishments which the magistrate was meting out were just the prelude to the ordeal which would be experienced in the next, this connection had been broken in the writings and experiences of the sectarians. Was the official beginning to wonder whether there was a danger that the state's ceremony of torture may not be producing the same effect on its audience as it had before? He is aware that the ritual is losing its earlier power, and not only losing its power, through sectarian re-interpretation, the drama of punishment was taking on a whole new, subversive meaning.

For what stymied the officials was that these doctrines, in spite of the cruel punishments inflicted on sectarians, were believed. Indeed, the evil of heterodoxy

⁴² Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison (New York, 1979), p. 3. Foucault is mainly interested in the reasons behind the development of these spectacular kinds of executions to the birth of the prison. Was it just a matter of a trend to a greater humanitarianism? Still, the first part of the book deals mostly with this idea of the "spectacle of punishment," which is what interests me here.

The motivation behind Damiens' assassination attempt was religious; at least this was one interpretation of it at the time. Foucault does not deal with such aspects.

was increasing even as the punishments grew more severe. Huang cites a precept which was then being circulated among sectarians.

Heterodox religion says that the body which has suffered decapitation immediately ascends to heaven, and the body which suffers slow slicing immediately is covered in a red robe and ascends to heaven. Ai-ai! This kind of malicious talk, you can not even see in the heterodox scriptures. It is well-recognized that a person who suffers decapitation or slow slicing cannot ascend to heaven [such a person having been judged by the government to be an evil person would necessarily be condemned to hell in the next world]. Even the heterodox scriptures do not have this kind of talk; that the sects dare speak this kind of language shows that the present age's heterodox sects are even more heterodox than the heterodox scriptures.⁴³

This kind of thinking reveals the extent of what the officials regarded as sectarian perversity: not only has the connection been broken between the punishments suffered in this life and the next, the connection has been reversed. Sectarians were reinterpreting the judgment of Ch'ing officialdom on sectarian activity. What the Ch'ing punished as the most depraved of activities, Heaven was rewarding as the most honored of service. This precept also reveals the extent to which the government had lost its struggle with sectarianism. Punishment was always the method of last resort in efforts at inculcating orthodoxy, and yet in the early decades of the 1800s, even this kind of draconian clampdown on religious activity was failing.

What concerned the official the most is how this contrary attitude towards physical punishment was growing stronger. So much so that in the concluding

pages, Huang advocated that officials and gentry stop using Confucian lectures to exhort the people to goodness (ie., obedience); instead, he recommended that they begin expounding upon the terrors of hell, and so co-opt the sectarian program. Terrors which were a pale reflection of the punishments being inflicted by Ch'ing officialdom. Huang followed his own advice, and published just such a work, and he was even looking for a lively little ditty which could accompany the text.⁴⁴

Such a development gives rise to a question concerning how closely this loss of loyalty among sectarians reflected a similar falling away among the general populace. If we view sectarians as people somehow set apart from popular society, such a question is not worth pursuing. But if we see sectarians as just a more devoted expression of popular Chinese religious commitment--a commitment which was not static, but highly sensitive to impending disasters and looming catastrophes--then this loss of loyalty among sectarians is an ominous change. It indicates that in the event of an apocalyptic movement like the Taiping Rebellion exploding over the Chinese countryside, the Taiping army would find eager recruits among persecuted and harassed sectarians.

While the emperor and a few exceptional officials may have been concerned with heterodoxy as much as heteropraxy, at the local level, it was almost exclusively about heteropraxy, and this is evident in the experience of the

⁴³ P'o Hsieh Hsiang Pien, chapter three, p. 9a.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, chapter four, pp. 35a-b.

Catholics. Do the sectarians chant scriptures? Do they propagate their religion? Do they use magic to stir up the people? If not, then, they are ordered to repent, their scriptures are confiscated, and they are allowed to return home.

Yet, even where the emperor was concerned about heterodoxy, it was not a concern with doctrinal matters. Catholic or Buddhist heterodoxy was irrelevant in this respect. Neither the law code or the memorials mention one point of doctrine. Nor do they mention, except in the rare event when a Western missionary is directly involved, its origins in the west. What concerned the court was what this heterodox belief revealed about the people's loyalty to their sovereign. The emperor was not just satisfied that the people did not express any rebellious behavior. He wanted more; he wanted their hearts and minds.

This survey of texts produced during the era of proscription provides the basis for the thesis that for the decades immediately prior to the Taiping Rebellion, the Heavenly Lord sect had evolved into an "indigenous" sect. This survey has also enabled us to reconstruct the world of the Chinese sect during this same critical period in Chinese history. It is a period when the government was losing its moral legitimacy among sectarians along with the religious sanction which safeguarded this legitimacy. It is also a period in which an intensified increase in sectarian activity was met by an even more resolute determination to suppress any such activity. A determination which apparently was not resolute enough, for we also

sense in these texts that it was a struggle which the sectarians were winning, bloody battle by bloody battle.

CHAPTER THREE

CHRISTIAN SECTARIANISM IN THE OPIUM WAR ERA

The persecution like some capricious summer storm came to an end, almost as suddenly as it began. When the first volume of the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith was published in 1838, taking up where the Lettres Edifiantes et Curieuses¹ had left off, there was a markedly different spirit in the reports from the field. While the initial reports of the state of the church were somewhat gloomy, these were submitted with a sense that the tide was turning. Estimates of the total number of Catholics on the eve of the Opium War ranged anywhere from 200-300,000, with Latourette settling on a range of 200-250,000.² Spread throughout the empire, the sectarians were concentrated around Beijing and in the Yangtze River valley, especially in its upper and lower reaches.

These numbers began to pick up quickly, even before the practice of the Heavenly Lord sect was made legal in 1844, and exuberant reports of conversions

¹ The new edition of the Lettres Edifiantes, although published in Toulouse from 1810 to 1811, still only included material through the early 1780s. The French were experiencing some turmoil of their own during these years that distracted them from the missionary task.

² Latourette, p. 183. Cary-Elwes gives an estimate of 300,000 for the year 1840; p. 188.

began to be regularly featured in publications such as the Annals. Indeed, as can be seen the first issue of this serial, reports dated three and four years before the signing of the treaty already testify to the change of mood, even in spite of sporadic incidents of persecution. That mood was brightest in areas where, a decade or so later, the Taiping would do some of their heaviest recruiting: Hunan, Hupei, Kiangsi and Kiangsu.

Persecutions still flared up, nonetheless. In 1840, a missionary by the name of Father Perboyre was captured in Hupei, beaten, tortured and thrown into prison. Later, the Vicar-Apostolic of Hu-kuang, passed on an account of his execution, "Father Perboyre was led to death, accompanied by five malefactors, who were beheaded before his eyes...before consummating his sacrifice, he [Father Perboyre] knelt down, and remained some time in prayer; his hands being then tied behind his back, he was raised on a cross, after which his throat was cut by the executioner. His agony lasted a long time. After his death, the soldiers divided his clothes among themselves, and his body remained on the gibbet during the remainder of the day and all the following night. It was at midday, on a Friday, that our glorious colleague expired."³ The outlines of his martyrdom are maybe a little too reminiscent of one that took place some 1800 years previous, but that does not diminish the price he paid. This punishment was an exception to the rule. Most

missionaries were escorted out of the country. That the good father's martyrdom occurred at the time of the struggles with England over the opium trade suggests that the missionary was as much a victim of the consequences of Western imperialism as Chinese tyranny.

Chinese Christians, as we saw in our examination of the law code, usually did not suffer these severe punishments, either. The memorials which make up the law code's commentary do not mention a case where Catholics did not apostatize, and when they did so, as we saw, their crime of participating in heterodox activity would be pardoned. In some places, it was reported that if the Heavenly Lord sectarians did not trample on the cross as a sign of their renouncing the faith, officials would help them, dragging them by force over the cross; or, the soldiers sometimes would falsify their abjuration, and the judges would go along with the same,⁴ so as not to punish those whose only crime was meeting together to chant scriptures.

In general, if Christians were punished, it was with banishment to the border regions, or if they did suffer death, it was often as a result of torture, beatings and

³ Society for the Propagation of the Faith, *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*. London, (1841), p. 308. Hereafter, cited as *Annals*. For 1838-1839, the editions I used were published in Paris. After that, I used those published in London and Baltimore.

⁴ *Annals* (1841), pp.171-172. This was gleaned from a letter submitted by the Vicar-General of Hu-Kuang Province; this title likely corresponds to the office of Chinese Governor-General of the two-province region.

imprisonment,⁵ rather than execution. One letter relates the story told by a young Chinese girl whose brother suffered this kind of martyrdom in Kiangsi, “The mandarin made my brother often appear before his tribunal. They placed him kneeling upon iron chains, in order to oblige him to trample on the cross, in token of his apostasy; but my brother was always firm and immovable.. [when he] arrived in the metropolis, my brother appeared several times before the tribunal of the mandarin, and received as much ill-treatment there...after such a variety of sufferings; he was so weak, that he was obliged to creep along on his hands and feet, in order to reach the tribunal. At last, worn out with pain and hunger, he died in prison.”⁶

The Opium War and the signing of the Treaty of Nanking brought an end to most of these persecutions. Church life returned to some sense of normalcy; with the empire being divided into three bishoprics--Macao, Nanking and Peking--and seven vicariates.⁷ Those who may have been holding back because of persecution were now emboldened to practice their faith. In December, 1842, Christmas was openly celebrated in Nanking, with a Chinese priest preaching the sermon, and with a “multitude of neophytes” in attendance (a later report estimates that the body of

⁵ Nonetheless, as Philip Kuhn in *Soulstealers* describes the forms of torture employed to extract confessions, death may have been preferable.

⁶ *Annals* (1841), pp. 173-174.

⁷ The organization of part of the Chinese mission into bishoprics and part into vicar-apostolicals was a measure adopted by the papacy to get around having granted the right of appointment to the king of Portugal. In this scheme, the king could only appoint to the bishoprics. See Cary-Elwes, p. 129.

Christians at the Christmas celebration was 2,000). Another missionary singles out Soochow and Nanking as boasting considerable congregations.⁸ The Vicar-Apostolic of Hou-kuang writes in 1842, "Although my vicariate is not so large as many others, it reckons more than eighteen thousand neophytes, scattered in a hundred different congregations, over a surface more extensive than all of Italy."⁹ He was probably comparing the size of his flock to that of the Kiang-nan church where the estimate of the Christian population was nearly 70,000.¹⁰ Writing in 1846, a Jesuit missionary writes from Kiang-nan that though conversions were not numerous, he himself had baptized about 130 adults in the first half of the year.¹¹ The Lazarists who were in charge of a wide range of provinces report 20 churches and 12,000 neophytes for Kiangsi and for the Vicar-Apostolic of Chekiang 20 chapels and 4500 Christians.¹² The missionary-explorer L'Abbe Huc reported visiting a village along the Yangtze where one-third of the inhabitants were Christians, and they celebrated Easter by lighting fireworks and throwing firecrackers.¹³

Britain's initial treaty did not provide for the erecting of churches, but the American treaty with China, signed in 1844, did (article 17). Establishing churches

⁸ *Annals* (1844), p. 229; p.325.

⁹ *Annals* (1844), p. 261.

¹⁰ *Annals* (1846), p. 193.

¹¹ *Annals* (1848), p. 26.

¹² *Annals* (1850), p. 14.

¹³ *Annals* (1843), pp. 172-174.

(li-pai t'ang), hospitals and cemeteries was allowed, and the French treaty called for the same (article 22), but these establishments were restricted to the five open treaty ports.¹⁴ The lifting of the ban on Christianity was worked out separately from the treaties, and was effected by an imperial rescript on December 28, 1844. Two years later, on February 20, 1846, the Tao-kuang emperor issued a decree which provided for the restoration of all church properties confiscated during the years of repression.¹⁵ The impact of the Opium War and the new order was then seen in the inland provinces first in the form of these religious changes, and only later in the form of economic and commercial changes. These decrees would later be enshrined in the Peking Convention of 1860. The Catholic missionaries did not wait for this confirmation. They began pressing their claims right away.

Ch'i-ying, the Manchu official who was commissioned to broker the Nanking treaty, handled these religious matters as well. The record of his representing French requests to the imperial throne is contained in the Ch'ou-pan I-wu Shih-mo (A Complete Account of the Management of Barbarian Affairs)¹⁶. Following the

¹⁴ Treaties, Conventions, Etc., Between China and Foreign States (Shanghai: Inspectorate General of Customs, 1917). The relevant article for the American treaty appears on page 683, in English and Chinese; the article for the treaty between France and China appears on p. 782, in French and Chinese.

¹⁵ Hosea B. Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1910), p. 332.

¹⁶ This collection of documents, mostly composed of memorials and edicts related to foreign relations with the West, was the work of high Ch'ing officials, produced under imperial command. The volumes include material from the Tao-kuang through the T'ung-chih reigns. However, the Tao-kuang material begins only in 1836, some 15 years into his reign, and focuses mainly on matters related to the struggle over the opium trade.

Yung-cheng's banning of the Heavenly Lord sect and throughout the years up to the Opium War, matters involving the Heavenly Lord sect had been handled in the same way matters involving other Chinese sects were handled: by local Chinese officials using the Ch'ing Law Code. While Catholic missionaries continued to serve in the court's Astronomy Bureau, and would occasionally intervene on behalf of some hapless missionary in the provinces, they could not have intervened in matters involving Chinese followers of the Heavenly Lord.

This method of handling the Heavenly Lord sect begins to change with the Opium War, and becomes formalized with the Tientsin Treaty of 1858, and the subsequent Peking Convention of 1860. The years between 1840 and 1860 were a period of transition from the era of proscription when the Heavenly Lord sect was treated as a common, heterodox Chinese sect to a period when it begins to be treated as a foreign religion, protected by unequal treaties. In fact, in documents related to the Heavenly Lord sect, the epithet of *hsi-yang* (western) which was only infrequently attached to the name of the religion during the time of proscription is now, more often than not, used to designate the faith.

The memorial which served as the basis for the edict which granted religious freedom to the Heavenly Lord sect was drafted by Ch'i-ying, and submitted to the court in the tenth month of the twenty-fourth year of the Tao-kuang reign (it was formally received by the court on November 11, 1844--shortly after the French

treaty was signed, which was on October 24). This memorial was prompted by a request of the French emissary Theodose de Lagrene to rescind the proscription of the sect. According to the memorial, the French emissary had many demands, and had made them repeatedly, marked by an attitude which was characterized by the Chinese as blasphemous (tu-ch'ing). These demands were so numerous, Ch'i-ying declares in his report to the court, that they could hardly be satisfied.

Nevertheless, Ch'i-ying wrote, the French legate's demands related to the matter of the Heavenly Lord sect were not without basis. For the French emissary had produced a copy of a ruling by the Bureau of Rites from the K'ang-hsi Year 31 (actually a rubbing; the ruling must have been engraved in stone).¹⁷ When Ch'i-ying and his ministers inquired as to who had given him this rubbing, and where it was found, Lagrene told them that it had originally come from China, and that it had been kept as a treasure by some of his countrymen for a long time. Ch'i-ying investigated the rubbing by looking at the color of the paper and the style of the characters, and he determined that it was not fabricated, especially since he observed that no one in this man's country at that time knew how to write Chinese characters, nor had they developed the technique of engraving on stone.

The Chinese commissioner tried to reason with the French barbarian, pointing out that this regulation was made many years ago, and that those enforcing the law

had to take current regulations as binding. Ch'i-ying still harbored some suspicions about the nature of the Heavenly Lord sect. If indeed, as the French emissary claimed, the Heavenly Lord sect exhorts people to do good, then why, he asks, does the law code include an article which accuses the sect of seducing women and using trickery to steal the pupils from the eyes of sick people? The French emissary, probably regarding such objections as a diversion, remained adamant in his demands for legalization.

Ch'i-ying consequently conducted an investigation into the history of the Heavenly Lord sect which he summarized for the Grand Council in this memorial. He found that the sect indeed had entered China during the Ming dynasty in the person of the Westerner, Li Ma-tou (Matteo Ricci), and that in every province foolish peasants had been tricked into joining it. In this sense, the Manchu official opined, the religion was difficult to tolerate. Nevertheless, in the more than two hundred years that it had been practiced in China, there had not been one incident where it was found responsible for inciting any kind of disturbance. In this way, Ch'i-ying argued, it was different from such heterodox sects as the White Lotus, the Eight Trigrams, and the White Sun.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ch'ou-pan I-wu Shih-mo (hereafter, IWSM), Tao-kuang, Chuan 73. This memorial is to be found on pps. 1a-3a, and in the next few pages, I reproduce the substance and, in many cases the form, of Ch'i-ying's report.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 2b.

Counting against it, however, were a few cases where Heavenly Lord sectarians had seduced and defiled women and also had cheated some sick persons by stealing the pupils from their eyes. These matters the Manchu official asserts the law code rightly strictly forbade. Yet in those cases where the sectarians had only been guilty of practicing their religion, the court had only required that they trample on the cross, indicating that they repented of this practice, and local officials had pardoned them of their crime. That is to say, the court's policy concerning the sect had been one of the law being severe, the official attitude being tolerant. Moreover, Ch'i-ying declared, officials had not been so thorough in searching out and prosecuting these cases lately, anyway. There was then no practical difference in the court's present policy between proscribing and not proscribing the sect.

This conclusion led Ch'i-ying to recommend that all those who practice the Heavenly Lord sect and who do not create disturbances or do what ought not be done (ie., purloining pupils) should be pardoned of any crime. If there were any who did seduce and defile women or who cheated sick people out of their pupils, or who committed any other kind of crime, then these persons and their crimes should be judged according to the law code. At the same time, Ch'i-ying reiterated the provisions of the treaty which forbade missionaries from traveling into the interior provinces.

The critical term in this decision is that Ch'i-ying was not asking that these sectarian practices be declared legal. Rather, he is seeking only that the crime of heterodoxy be pardoned in the case of the Heavenly Lord sect. The emperor is asked to show his magnanimity--or in the words of the memorial, the emperor is displaying the grace of heaven-- in this matter. There is no declaration that the sect is legal, let alone orthodox. That would only come later.¹⁹

The French were not satisfied with this effort. As a result, a few months later, Ch'i-ying was reporting to the throne further demands being made by the French representative. According to news which had reached Lagrene from the inland, Heavenly Lord sectarians were still being apprehended by local magistrates. All of a sudden, this had given birth to some major complications.²⁰ Lagrene's representative, J.M. Callery, blustered into the provincial office and submitted for Ch'i-ying's perusal a document which contained four articles. These articles included a demand to clearly indicate among those who practice the Heavenly Lord sect which of the accused were those who did what is good and which were those who did what is evil; a demand to send a copy of the original memorial [concerning the pseudo-legality of the sect] to every province; a demand to release all those who were then in captivity for practicing the religion of the Heavenly Lord; and a

¹⁹ The Ch'ing Law Code removes all sense of illegality in the twelfth year of the T'ung-chih reign. *Ta Ch'ing Lu-li Hui-t'ung Hsin-tsu'an*, p. 1415.

²⁰ *IWSM*, Tao-kuang, Chuan 74, pp. 22a-25b.

demand to allow Chinese who practice the religion to build Heavenly Lord Halls (ie., churches).

Ch'i-ying thereupon once more met face to face with Lagrene, who remained as belligerent as ever. The Chinese felt that the barbarian emissary's character was so tyrannical and proud that they surmised that he must be the chief leader of the sea-going countries. Ch'i-ying employed all kinds of methods to mollify and control him, first using a flexible, then a firm approach, trying to show Lagrene how different the barbarian and Chinese circumstances were, emphasizing all along just how difficult it was to change the Chinese system of law.

At this point, Ch'i-ying believed he had prevailed in the encounter by using his logical approach. The barbarian, he observed, appeared defeated and he had no new words to declare; he could only continue repeating that the Heavenly Lord religion exhorts people to do good, and so the local officials should not arbitrarily and without basis investigate and apprehend such people. Lagrene was not yet what one would call docile. He continued to complain that although Ch'i-ying had already solicited the Great Emperor's favor allowing local officials to pardon such crimes, this in practice was proving no different from not rescinding the proscription, since Heavenly Lord devotees were still being apprehended.

Lagrene then let it be known that he would certainly lose face over this matter when he returned for an audience with his country's king, and that this matter could

even lead to the severing of relations. When he said this, Ch'i-ying examined the man's disposition, and he saw that Lagrene was indeed agitated. Surely it was because Lagrene had not fully obtained what he was seeking, and so he would be ridiculed by men from the other western countries. Because of this possibility, Ch'i-ying suggested to the emperor that if the French ambassador was humiliated to too great an extent, he may in time become enraged, and then he and the rest of the barbarians would be even more difficult to pacify.²¹

The Chinese commissioner consequently considered further the different articles submitted by the emissary. He maintained that he severely refused the Frenchman's most blasphemous demands, not giving any ground whatsoever. The only matter Ch'i-ying decided to allow had to do with the ordinances of the Heavenly Lord religion, that is that the sectarians be allowed to once a week meet together for worship, at which time they be allowed to call upon the likeness of the wooden cross, chant scriptures, and exhort one another to good works. All this seemed to be a necessary obligation and legitimate expression of the religion.

The only problem the Manchu official could foresee in allowing these practices was that those adhering to the religion were scattered in every province. This gave

²¹ As is evident from some of these documents, the Chinese were attempting to seek French help in fending off the British. Ch'i-ying noted in one memorial how the French and the Americans had both been at war with the British for a long time, and since there was no love lost between them, that the Chinese could make a few strategic friendships. See *IWSM*, Tao-kuang, Chuan 74, p. 44b. The French played along with this attempt, and even encouraged it. Ch'i-ying suggests to the court that the Chinese bestowal of Catholic toleration could hurry this process along.

the official cause for concern, for if the court were to allow the Heavenly Lord sectarians to gather together in a meeting, then the spreading of corrupt practices and disturbances would increase. Moreover, he noted, in the last few years, the White Lotus, the Eight Trigram and other such sects had repeatedly been sought out and punished. Indeed, the Blue Lotus (Ch'ing-lien) sect was at that moment being investigated and its followers were being apprehended. If they were to hear that the Heavenly Lord sect was to be tried under a new precedent which grants a pardon for their crime, this would result in some of these other sectarians craftily attaching themselves to the Heavenly Lord sect. The court especially could not allow itself to be unprepared for this kind of outcome.

In spite of this concern, Ch'i-ying felt that there was no further need to search out and prosecute such cases. And as for establishing a place where the name of the Heavenly Lord could be called upon, he felt that this, too, was a matter of the followers' own preference. However, he drew the line at calling together persons from distant villages, linking up with such, stirring up and inciting illegal disciples; under the guise of practicing religion, forming bands to do wrong and with other sectarians walking in filthy paths of hypocrisy. Such activities were against the law and would be prosecuted according to the old precedents. Condescending to the barbarian's inclination towards suspicion of others, the Manchu official drafted a

copy of these conclusions and showed the French emissary, who, when the time came for exchanging the treaties, seemed pleased and relieved with the fact that what was written therein accorded with all that had been discussed.

His pleasant mood did not last. A short while following this meeting, Ch'i-ying again met with Lagrene's interpreter, Callery. Callery informed the Chinese that his superior's mood was not upbeat; on the contrary, he was furious.²² For Lagrene had just completed a tour of the five open treaty ports, and Callery reported that during this tour, Lagrene had not seen one announcement posted up regarding the lifting of the ban against the Heavenly Lord sect. Furthermore when he brought up the issue with the local officials, they just responded in a perfunctory manner, putting up a poster or two here and there, so that they could claim to be obeying the decree. It was all a matter of form and no substance, Callery declared.

At the same time, the French plenipotentiary was continuing to receive reports of the apprehending of Heavenly Lord sectarians. Lagrene wanted to know what was happening with the imperial decree: Had local officials been notified, or not? If not, he requested that notices be posted in every province clearly stating that the Heavenly Lord sectarians were now free to practice their religion, and that an edict be promulgated and passed down to all officials. As their meeting came to an end, Lagrene made one further demand: he asked that the properties which had been

²² IWSM, Tao-kuang, Chuan 74, pp. 37b-42b.

confiscated from the sectarians during the Yung-cheng reign be returned to the sectarians.

Ch'i -ying was perplexed by these reports. How was it that the imperial decree was not being enforced in the provinces, and that sectarians were still being apprehended? He urged the court to punish those magistrates who were not enforcing this ruling. As for returning the properties of the sectarians, Ch'i-ying tried to defer this request. Yet again, Lagrene would not allow for this. Consequently, Ch'i-ying in consulting with his advisers proposed that all those buildings which had not been converted into temples or into people's homes, be returned to the sectarians. Only this proposal would avoid the kind of disturbances which would result from the indiscriminate seizing of property which for years had been claimed by others. The court acceded to this request, but did not immediately move on it.

The court, it turns out, did not enforce many of these rulings until they were compelled to do so under the pressure of the Taiping Rebellion and the Second Opium War. A significant factor in this delay was the swinging of the pendulum of foreign policy away from the appeasement tactics of Ch'i-ying and his party. Still, the court did begin to honor its promise to pardon the religious crimes committed by Heavenly Lord sectarians, and to allow the re-opening of old churches and the establishing of new ones. It is difficult to know just what was happening in the

countryside, and what might account for the rapid increase in the number of Heavenly Lord sectarians in the decade following the Nanking Treaty: Was it that people who were already believers were now coming out in the open; was it that White Lotus and other sectarians were now seeking a protective umbrella for the practice of their beliefs; or was it a result of new conversions?

Whatever the source of these new professions of faith, it is evident that the legalizing of the Heavenly Lord sect and the opening of churches, especially in the Yangtze River valley, inevitably had an impact on rural China which was an important preparation for the arrival of the Taiping. By the time of the Taiping, the Heavenly Lord sect had revived. In every year following these negotiations, more and more followers joined the sect, and this revival breathed new life into other branches of sectarianism as well. A new religious order was emerging, and the Taiping would reap the benefits of these changes.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE PROTESTANT CONTRIBUTION
TO THE RELIGION OF THE TAIPING

One area where the Heavenly Lord sect was not strong was in the southern provinces of Kwangtung and Kwangsi. Missionaries had labored in Kwangsi prior to the imperial proscription, even erecting a church building in the provincial capital of Kweilin. But owing to the fact that the provinces were attached to the bishopric of Macao, missionaries were not encouraged by the Portuguese ecclesiastical establishment to continue their evangelical work.¹ It is only after the Taiping rebels had moved into the Yangtze River valley that the inhabitants of this province see Catholic missionaries again, but again this was the result of a political shift: France had become interested in China's southern provinces as it laid claim to various parts of southeast Asia.

It was, nevertheless, not to be Catholic Christianity which would set the spark to the Taiping Rebellion. Even though Chinese gentry and officials would later trace

¹ Adrien Launay, Histoire des Missions de la Chine, Mission du Kouang-si (Paris, 1903), pp. 21-23.

the fuse of the rebellion back to the Heavenly Lord sect, it was the Protestants who lit that fuse. The Protestant contribution to the rebellion was critical. Borrowing heavily from the linguistic tradition of Heavenly Lord sectarianism, the Protestant missionaries added to it a term crucial to the development of Taiping thought. They then incorporated all these linguistic terms and theological concepts into the document which would have such a determinative impact on the Taiping: the Chinese translation of the Bible. The Protestant contribution ultimately enabled the Taiping to complete the process of the transformation of Christianity into Taiping Christian sectarianism.

While Catholic missionaries had been in China for centuries, the Protestants had somewhat tardily arrived in China. Protestants moreover were late arrivals not just to the Chinese mission scene, they were late arrivals to the entire world of missions. There was no significant Protestant mission effort until the end of the eighteenth century when William Carey published his An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen, in the turbulent tides of the Evangelical Awakening. The first modern mission society,² the Baptist Missionary Society, was formed in 1792 soon after Carey published his

² There had been some Protestant attempts before this, notably those mounted by the Moravians, who coincidentally profoundly influenced the Rev. Karl Gutzlaff. But these attempts were mainly scattered and short-lived. Moreover, there was no sense in the churches that they had a responsibility to undertake the task of missions. As suggested in Carey's title, the Calvinistic churches of England and America believed that if God wanted such people saved, He would do it himself. Wesley's revivalistic approach would change this attitude.

appeal; the first mission to send preachers to the Chinese, the London Missionary Society, was formed in 1795.³

While Carey's appeal does mark the beginning of this Protestant missionary impulse, it was not the origins of it. Nor do the origins of this impulse lay in the imperialistic designs of Britain. The British crown had granted the East India Company a monopolistic right to trade in Asia, and it was company policy to prohibit missionary work among the native peoples. Indeed, because of this very policy, William Carey, the first modern Protestant missionary, was forced to launch his evangelical career in a part of India which was governed by Denmark.

The origins of the Protestant missionary impulse, rather, are to be found in the response of evangelicals in Britain to the course of events in France and the continent. A prominent feature of early British Protestantism had been its millennial visions, especially manifest in the Puritan Revolution, and the dates for the founding of all the modern missionary societies point to a renewed sense of the imminence of the millennium and the apocalypse which must proceed it. The founding of these missionary societies occurred at a time when the Catholic Church in France and on the continent was being threatened with destruction, and the old order with it; such an event fit neatly into the English Protestant scheme of the end

³ Owen Chadwick, gen. ed., *The Pelican History of the Church* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964), Volume 6: *A History of Christian Missions*, by Stephen Neill, p. 261.

times. Devout Protestants understood that there was one precondition to the advent of the millennium, and that was that, “the gospel of the kingdom must be preached throughout the whole world...and then the end will come.”⁴ Thus, it is this apocalyptic motive which better accounts for the rise of the missionary movement, and this understanding of the origins of the movement will enable us to more faithfully reconstruct its impact on China and on the Taiping.

China's First Protestant Missionary and Its First Protestant Evangelist

What Protestants lacked in experience, they made up for in energy. Robert Morrison is credited with being the first Protestant missionary to arrive in China. He landed at Canton in 1807, and soon after attached himself, because of Chinese sensibilities and the East Indian Company policy, to the company as translator.⁵ He immediately immersed himself in the task set for him by his sending agency, a task which was to have such a significant consequence for the rise of the Taiping

⁴ Brian Stanley develops this perspective on the origins of the missionary movement in his *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1990); see esp. pp. 60-61. This quotation, a missionary favorite, comes from Jesus' teaching on the signs of the end of the age; see Matthew 24:14.

⁵ The policy, which was referred to earlier, was not changed until 1813 when that part of the charter was struck. Of course, for China, the policy would have been rendered irrelevant anyway since the company's monopoly over the China trade was broken in the same year. See Trevor Lloyd, *The British Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 136.

Rebellion: the translation of the Bible. In 1823, sixteen years after arriving in China, Morrison published the first Chinese Bible.⁶

Morrison, nevertheless, had not broken ground for this project unprepared nor had he laid the foundations for it unaided. Before he left England, he had acquired a copy of a Catholic translation of the New Testament which he had discovered at the British Museum. As we have seen, the Catholic missionaries had translated most of the Christian terminology, more often than not borrowing from the Buddhists, who in their own time had borrowed from Chinese popular religion. In spite of all the literature which was produced—catechisms, liturgies and sacramental manuals—no complete translation of the Bible had been attempted. Bible portions were, of course, produced, and they were featured in the various catechisms and liturgies. These portions, however, would never have been presented in the original context of Israelite history. Rather, Christian teaching was mostly abstracted from its historical context. This approach does have its benefits; but it also has its disadvantages, especially in relation to the indigenization of Christianity.

⁶ Morrison had finished his translation of the New Testament as early as 1813. The Morrison New Testament which I examined in Hong Kong was published in 1813; Harvard-Yenching Library's Morrison manuscript was also published in 1813. In 1823, the same year which Morrison published the entire Bible, Old and New Testament, a missionary colleague by the name of Joshua Marshman who was working in India came out with his own translation. Morrison's was regarded as the superior translation. See Donald MacGillivray, ed., A Century of Chinese Missions in China, 1807-1907 (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1907), p. 13. Also see John R. Hykes, List of Translations of the Scriptures into the Chinese Language (Yokohama: Fukyin Printing Company, 1915), pp. 2-3.

Jean Basset, a Catholic missionary who served in China in the late 1600s, was the translator of this Catholic version of the New Testament.⁷ The work is not even a complete translation of the New Testament; it includes only a harmony of the gospels (meaning that the four different gospels are harmonized into one account), the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's letters, and the first chapter of Hebrews. Basset died before completing the rest of the work, with the result that the apocalyptic book of the Revelation of John was left untranslated into Chinese. A copy of this translation was then made at Canton in 1737 and given to Sir Hans Sloan Bart, who in turn donated it to the British Museum. Morrison, engaging a Chinese resident in London, copied this Sloan copy, and then brought his own copy—which was then a copy of a copy—to Canton in 1807.⁸

Morrison inscribed various notes in his copy of Basset's translation; almost all of which are either English equivalents of various Chinese words, or romanized transcriptions of the Chinese characters. One exception to this rule is the note he wrote at the end of the harmony of the gospels, where he writes in a partisan aside, "It [the gospel harmony] closes with 'the whole world could not contain the books that could be written [a reference to The Gospel of John, 20:30].' I am grieved to find 'these are written that ye might believe, and that believing ye might have life

⁷ Rev. Thor Strandenaes, "The Sloane MS #3599: An Early Manuscript of an Incomplete Chinese Version of the New Testament," *Theology and Life* No. 6 (December, 1983), pp. 61-62.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 61.

through his name [a reference to the following verse, John 20:31]’ is omitted.”⁹ Morrison evidently felt that the Catholics had continued to pass over, even in China, what was essential to the gospel while preserving that which was inconsequential.

Morrison’s comments are not what is so fascinating about this document; what is fascinating and entirely unexpected are the parts of the original translation rendered by Basset. The most intriguing aspect of Basset’s work is his translation of the term for God. Basset did not use the term Heavenly Lord (T’ien-chu), the term mandated by the papal decree, in translating the term for God, nor did he use *Shang-ti*. Rather, he used *Shen*. And he uses it consistently throughout the harmonized gospel and the epistles. In the first chapter of the harmony, for example, taken mostly from the Gospel of John, we are told that in the beginning was the word (yen), and the word was a god (Shen), and that this word-god was in the embrace (huai) of a [nother] god (shen).¹⁰ What is most peculiar about this translation is that it seems in talking about the relation of this word-which-was-a-god to the other god, that Basset would have found it convenient to make use of another term for one of these gods so to distinguish more clearly the relationship that he is seeking to describe. But Basset never has recourse throughout his

⁹ Volume 1 (Shang Ts’e), Chapter 28 of the Gospels. The Morrison Transcript of the Basset Version of The New Testament. 1806. University of Hong Kong Library.

¹⁰ *ibid*, Volume 1: Gospel harmony, chapter one. Morrison’s transcript does not have pagination or verse numbering. Is verse numbering a Protestant innovation?

translation for the term Heavenly Lord. Even accounting for the fact that Basset died before the papal decree, it is still strange and explanations are elusive for why he does not employ the term in his translation.¹¹

In addition to the term for God, Basset's translation offers two more surprises, and these are his terms for the Holy Spirit and for angels. In all the other religious literature produced by the Catholics, the term for the Holy Spirit was consistently translated as *sheng-shen* (holy god). But Basset again parts company. He refers to the Holy Spirit as *sheng-feng* (holy wind). So in chapter one of the gospel harmony, we read this response to Mary's query regarding how she can bear an heir to the throne of David since she is a virgin; the angel responds, telling her that "the Holy Wind (*sheng-feng*) will come upon you." The angel later confirms the same to a skeptical Joseph, that it was "the Holy Wind which accomplished this."¹²

Basset's other surprise is his translation of the term for angel. In all other Catholic literature the term used to refer to angel is *t'ien-shen* (heavenly god). Basset used two different terms in translating the word angel, *t'ien-shih* (heavenly or imperial messenger) and *shen-shih* (a divine or godly messenger). So in Basset, the angel who appeared to John the Baptist's father Zechariah is called the Lord's *t'ien-shih* (heavenly messenger) while the angel Gabriel who appeared to Mary

¹¹ Basset died in 1707, the papal bull was issued in 1715. This translation of the Bible is a testimony to the fluidity of the rules guiding the Catholic translation effort prior to the papal decree.

¹² The Morrison Transcript of the Basset Version of the New Testament, chapter one.

bringing her glad tidings is a *shen-shih*. And on that star-lit Christmas night, when the birth of Jesus is announced to the shepherds, it is a crowd of heavenly messengers (t'ien-shih) who declare to them that peace has come to men of good will.¹³ There are no heavenly gods in the constellation of beings.

Such innovations in the translation of these key terms gives rise to suspicions as to whether Basset's translation was changed at one of the different points in the copy process. The translation seems so idiosyncratic; it is unlike any other Catholic document. At the same time it is very much like Morrison's own translation. Did Morrison edit out the Catholic terms in the Basset manuscript? That seems unlikely, and the testimony of various principals in the discussion of "the term question" which will be introduced next chapter argues against it.

It seems that what we have is a unique Catholic translation which Morrison followed slavishly.¹⁴ Where Basset translated a scripture, Morrison followed that

¹³ *ibid*, chapter two.

¹⁴ If we assume that these are Basset's own choice of terms, then this raises all kinds of questions as to why he decided to use this idiosyncratic terminology. Moreover, if this is Basset's rendering, then Morrison's use of *shen* for translating the term God would serve as a less compelling precedent in all the later debate over the "term question." (This debate we are taking up next chapter.) Indeed, such a precedent because of its Catholic provenance would have considerably weakened the argument for *shen* in the minds of most Protestant missionaries.

I do believe, however, that these are Basset's own rendering of the terms for God, Holy Spirit and angels, and not a product of Morrison's over-eager editorial impulse. There are several reasons why I believe this. For one, Morrison does sometimes use the term Messiah rather than Christ for the title of Christ. The Basset manuscript consistently employs *Chi-tu* (Christ). If Morrison was going to change all these terms for deity as he copied the transcript, he would have changed the *Chi-tu* to Messiah at the time of his copying as well. But he doesn't.

A second reason for my believing that this is Basset's unrevised rendering of these terms is that many of the missionaries in the debates over the term of God refer to the Basset manuscript, and in

translation almost word for word. This is evident in all of the Apostle Paul's epistles. For example, in his translation of I Corinthians 15, Morrison makes only minor changes to the Basset manuscript, none of which alter the meaning of the text at all.¹⁵

Morrison had to translate most of the gospels and the non-Pauline corpus from scratch, and so it is in these where we would expect to see him exhibit more creativity. But even in these passages, he follows Basset--though not as closely as he did in Paul's letters-- in using *shen* for God, *sheng-feng* for the Holy Spirit, and usually *shen shih-che* (messenger of a god) for angel. For example, in the passage describing the Annunciation, when Mary asks the Angel Gabriel how all this shall come to pass, Morrison translates the angel's (or, messenger's; the term used in this passage is simply, *shih-che*) response, "The Holy Wind (Sheng-feng) will fall

one example, quote from it when comparing terms for rendering the term for God (see The Chinese Repository, 1845, Volume 14, p. 54).

Thirdly, the Rev. Thor Strandenaes has seen the British Museum manuscript from which Morrison made his copy (he states that he even has microfilmed part of it), and refers to four other transcripts which are copies of it, including Morrison's own, and he makes no mention of there being a difference in the terms used for God, the Holy Spirit and angels in the various transcripts. Of course, he also fails to mention what an anomaly it is that Basset is using such language.

Though I am persuaded by these witnesses to believe that Morrison's copy of the Basset manuscript was unedited, I still am at a loss to account for the very unique terms he uses in his translation. I also cannot explain why the Protestant missionaries advocating the use of *Shang-ti* did not present the fact of Morrison's following the lead of the Catholic Basset, since such a presentation would have weakened the case for the term *shen*.

¹⁵ Morrison, for example, uses the more colloquial *ni* instead of the classically-influenced *erh* for translating "you;" he also substitutes a transliteration *Hsi-fa* for Basset's *Se-fa* in rendering the name, Stephen.

upon you,” and the child to be born to her will be called, “the son of God (shen).”¹⁶ On Christmas night the angels (shen shih-che; divine messengers; or, gods and messengers) appear as a heavenly army (t’ien-chun) rather than just a crowd, as we saw in earlier passages, but the army of angels like the crowd of angels still render glory to God (shen) in the highest. There is more to say about Morrison’s translation, but what we have to say will have to wait for a later chapter when this translation is compared to the Taiping translation.

As Basset passed the gospel message to Morrison, Morrison passed the message to Liang A-fa. Morrison did not directly influence the Taiping; his influence was mediated by Liang A-fa, the first ordained Protestant Chinese evangelist. The London Missionary Society, Morrison’s sending agency, had assigned Morrison two tasks: one was the translation of the Bible, another was evangelism. His partner in translating the Bible, Rev. William Milne, apparently was more suited to this latter task. For it was only after Morrison introduced his Bible printer, Liang A-fa, to Milne that Liang converted to Christianity, becoming China’s second Protestant and its first ordained evangelist.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ye-su Chi-li-shih-tu Wo Chu Chiu-che Hsin-yi Chao-shu (Jesus Christ, My Lord and Savior, Newly Transmitted Imperial Declaration). Luke 1:35. Translated by Robert Morrison. 1813. Verses are numbered in all Protestant Bibles produced in Chinese. While Morrison intended to convey the idea of a testament in his use of the term *chao-shu*, its primary meaning is a royal or imperial proclamation or declaration. This same term was used in the title of the Taiping’s New Testament

¹⁷ George H. McNeur, China’s First Preacher, Liang A-fa (Shanghai: Kwang Hsueh Publishing House, 1934), pp. 40-41.

His seemed to be a sincere conversion, although it was after the form of nineteenth-century Anglo-American evangelicalism which stressed individual salvation from sin over national deliverance from oppression along with consolation of the soul over concern for the body. Such emphases pervade the work through which Hung Hsiu-ch'uan first was introduced to Christianity, Liang's Good Words to Admonish the Age (Ch'uan Shih Liang Yen).

Most students of the Taiping Rebellion have emphasized the kind of Christianity which Hung Hsiu-ch'uan first came into contact with in the pages of Liang's nine-volume booklet. Boardman reminds us that "Protestant missionaries in China were much more what may be termed fundamentalist in their beliefs than are many missionaries in the twentieth century."¹⁸ It is probably more accurate to characterize these missionaries as evangelical, in the sense given this term at the time. The Wesleyan evangelical revival had affected all Protestant denominations in England and America, most of which were Calvinistic in their theological orientation. Under the influence of this "awakening," these Calvinistic churches--Congregational, Baptist, Presbyterian, and to an extent Anglican (Episcopal)--were transformed into a less doctrinaire and more energetic Protestantism.

¹⁸ Eugene Boardman, Christian Influence upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952), p. 52. A bit of an anachronistic characterization since fundamentalism only arose in the 1920s.

The early missions to China were almost all of this type, evangelical and Calvinist; the society which was most influential in these early years, the London Missionary Society, was the primary example of this evangelical temperament.¹⁹ In this context, Wagner's description of the kind of missionary who served in China during the early years also needs a little adjusting, "The young men who came to China and who had sometimes 'given themselves' at revivalist meetings to be missionaries...were typically not sedate and learned gentlemen, like the later arrival, James Legge, but rather a 'revivalist left' of often bizarre evangelical enthusiasts like the German Gutzlaff and the American saddler Issachar Roberts, 'the only missionary from the Mississippi Valley.'²⁰ Actually, Gutzlaff and Roberts were the exception to the rule; most of the early missionaries were sedate and fairly learned men--gentlemen do not come more sedate than Congregationalists or Presbyterians. It was, however, these exceptions who made a bigger impact on the Taiping. This is to be expected somewhat, for the ecclesiastical frontier was not for the faint of heart.

¹⁹ In the January, 1847, issue of the Chinese Repository, a list of the Protestant missionaries to the Chinese until that point numbered 86 men. Of this number fully 60 were from the Calvinistic-influenced boards of The London Missionary Society, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and the American Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. Methodist missionaries, for example, do not appear on these lists until a few years later.

²⁰ Rudolf Wagner, Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 13.

Indeed the Rev. Karl (Charles) Gutzlaff was among the hardest, the more eccentric and unbalanced, as well as, unfortunately, the most prolific of the missionary pioneers: he took the lead in handing out Bibles from opium ships, he conceived of the term 'blitz baptism,' he founded the Christian Union (the Han--signifying the Chinese race-- Hui), members of which first contacted Hung, and he served as the mentor for Rev. I. J. Roberts.²¹ His impact alone on the Taiping far exceeded the impact of all other mission efforts combined, including that of Robert Morrison.

A glance at some of the titles published by these early missionary pioneers, listed in Wylie's Memorials of Protestant Missionaries reveals the focus of their missionary calling. Other than his translation of the Bible, Morrison published eleven works in Chinese, including the following: A True and Summary Statement of the Divine Doctrine, An Outline of Old Testament History, Daily and Evening Prayers, and a geography primer, Tour of the World.²² In addition to his multiple translations of the Bible, Gutzlaff composed some 59 works in Chinese, including such titles as these: History of England, Doctrine of Redemption, Precious Words

²¹ For 'blitz baptism,' see Wagner, p. 13. Gutzlaff's distribution of Bibles from opium ships is decried by W.H. Medhurst in his book, China: Its State and Prospects (London: John Snow, 1840), pp. 361-380.

²² A. Wylie, Memorials of Protestant Missionaries to the Chinese (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Press, 1867; reprint edition, Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 4-7.

of Jesus, God (that is, Shang-ti) the Lord of All, Outlines of Political Economy, and Abandoning Depravity and Returning to Righteousness.²³

The dominant emphasis in these lists is on Christian doctrine, interpreted rather narrowly. Where there is the occasional glance cast in the direction of a more secular subject, the titles suggest that a division is drawn between the sacred and the secular: the title, Outlines of Political Economy, for example, does not suggest that this was a peculiarly Christian view of political economy. Indeed, a pattern emerges in this listing which formalizes a division between the secular and the sacred spheres of life, a pattern which was the legacy of the separate spheres claimed by the Enlightenment and Evangelicalism, respectively. This division influences the entire approach of these missionaries in their presentation of Christianity to the Chinese; this understanding of the relationship of the physical and spiritual worlds is intrinsic to Protestantism, and its roots have been a part of Protestantism since Calvin's reformation.²⁴ It is a division which was, of course, unnatural to the Chinese understanding of reality, and which Hung Hsiu-ch'uan in large part overcame in his efforts to complete the process of the indigenization of Christianity.

²³ *ibid*, pp. 56-63.

²⁴ Probably Zwingli is a more representative proponent of this understanding, expressed most vividly in his understanding of the eucharist as memorial, not sacrament. Carlos Eire in his work on the Reformation and iconoclasm, which we will be looking at in more detail two chapters from this one, argues that this distinction between the spiritual and the material, driven by an emphasis on the transcendence of God, was a necessary precondition for the unleashing of Reformation iconoclasm.

This very division is reflected in Liang A-fa's Good Words to Admonish the Age. Liang goes out of his way to exclude any discussion of an economic, political or social consequence of the religious ideas he explains, in effect polarizing the world of religion and the world of government and society. He accomplished this, for the most part, through his selection of the portions of the Bible which appeared in his work, and he chose passages which emphasized these Protestant themes of individual, as opposed to national or social, salvation.

This Protestant impact, though, should not be overstated. For there is a sense in which we can say that what Hung read was actually a Catholic tract, given that the nine booklets which constitute the Good Words were mostly a collection of Morrison's translated scripture, many times appearing without any commentary whatsoever,²⁵ and Morrison's scripture was, in turn, largely the work of Basset.

²⁵ It would not be exaggerating to say that Liang's book of pamphlets is nothing more than a compilation of passages from Morrison's Bible, so massive is the borrowing. Further, that which he borrowed from Morrison, he altered little. For example, in the account of creation, as recorded in Genesis, Liang's translation is exactly the same as Morrison's save Liang's tendency to remove some of the literary language's filler characters such as *ye* and *che* (comparing Morrison's Genesis 1-3 with Liang, pp. 174-178). He does add a character here and there to make Morrison's meaning clearer. Liang indulges in this latter habit more in the New Testament passages than the Old. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, while Morrison writes that Jesus saw the crowds, Liang has it that the *Lord of Salvation* saw the crowds (Matthew 5-7 with Liang, p. 51). In the Lord's Prayer, Liang adds that it is "our Heavenly Father who is in Heaven," clearing up Morrison's rendering, "our Father who is in Heaven" (p.59). At Revelation 22, Liang makes a few more substantial changes, including describing the river of the water of life as flowing "from the throne of God and of the Lord of Salvation," instead of as Morrison has it, "from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (p. 321), apparently fearing his Chinese audience will read this too literally, and think Christians worship sheep. Liang also is not too enamored with the image of the church as the bride of Christ, as found in verse 17, so he changes the word bride to read God's son (p. 323), the first of his changes which actually distorts the meaning of a passage. He apparently is not even satisfied with the transliteration of Christ, changing Morrison's rendering from 基利士督 to 基理師督 (p. 324).

Indeed, when it comes to those passages Liang quotes from the apostle Paul's epistles, we can say with little need for qualification that Hung was reading Basset's tract.

The first booklet of the Good Words begins with a translation of Genesis 3 and a brief description of the Fall of Mankind, beginning in other words not with Creation and the physical world which God created and which He blessed as good, but instead beginning with law, transgression and judgment--all very prominent themes in the succeeding pages. The most fearsome condemnation was reserved for idolaters, and no idol of any group is spared: the gods of merchants, peasants, and even seamstresses would all fail.²⁶ There is then a sudden shift to the Sermon on the Mount, with no transition offered. The first booklet ends with no account of who Jesus is, where he comes from, and how he died.

The second booklet contains some of the more familiar evangelical passages from the Bible, including John 3:1-21, and an introduction to Jesus as the 'Saviour of the World.'²⁷ The third and fourth volumes contain a series of translated

Liang A-fa, Ch'uan-Shih Liang-Yen [Good Words to Admonish the Age] (Canton: Religious Tract Society, 1832; reprint edition, Taipei: Taiwan Hsueh-sheng Shu-chū, 1965). I use the pagination provided by the reprint. Hereafter cited as CSLY.

The version of the Morrison Old Testament which I used as the basis for my comparison is his Shen-T'ien Sheng-Shu (Malacca, 1823); and for the New Testament passages, I have relied on his Yeh-su Chi-li-shih-tu Wo Chiu-chu Chao-shu (Canton, 1813-1814). These copies are housed at the Harvard-Yenching Library. The University of Hong Kong also has an early version of Morrison's New Testament.

²⁶ CSLY, pp. 31-32.

²⁷ CSLY, p. 69.

passages on which there is a commentary, one of these passages being Genesis 1. Volume Five contains another series of evangelical passages such as this verse from Matthew 16:26, “What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?” Volume Six features another string of translated Bible chapters along with Liang’s biography in which he highlights the suffering he endured during his incarceration in 1834 for his tract-distributing activity.”²⁸ Following this, there is the first real appearance of apocalyptic literature, a translation from the book of Revelation, chapter 22, where the throne of God is set up beside the river of life.²⁹ Volumes seven and eight take us back to the content of previous volumes, as does the ninth and final volume, which ends with a discussion of the Last Judgment.

Significantly, in Liang’s profuse quoting of scripture, there is little quotation from the Old Testament and none from the historical books; there is little reference to the experience of Israel delivered from Egypt; there is no listing of the Ten Commandments, though he does make reference to Moses and there are scattered references to many of the individual commandments; there are references to the Jews, but no discussion of their special role as ‘God’s chosen people;’ and only a few verses are dedicated to the history of the kingdom of Israel. In short, there are

²⁸ CSLY, p. 223; pp. 304–309.

²⁹ CSLY, p. 321.

abundant allusions to an other-worldly, individual salvation, but only meager mention of a this-worldly, historical, national salvation.

Liang A-fa wrote this book of tracts after he was ordained as an evangelist. He was evidently a zealous preacher, as he conducted repeated forays into the southern Chinese countryside from his base in Canton even before those celebrated tours made by Gutzlaff's Christian Union, which only began sending out evangelists in 1844. MacGillivray writes of these missions, "Kew A-gong, a convert of Liang A-fa, in 1830, in company with Liang A-fa, itinerated 250 miles into the interior of China, following in the train of one of the public examiners. They thus had free access to the young literati at every examination center, and distributed upwards of 7,000 tracts on the most important subjects."³⁰ Hung Hsiu-ch'uan's birthplace, Hua-hsien, was located within a 30 mile radius of Canton.

In 1836, Hung was attending the civil service exam in Canton.³¹ While there, he listened to some preaching and received a copy of the Good Words.³² He failed

³⁰ MacGillivray, p. 13. Jonathan Spence in his God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996) talks about how the Christian Union followed this same practice. He fails to mention, however, that this practice was initiated by Liang A-fa.

³¹ This date is the subject of some debate. Since it's not really relevant to my argument, I do not address it in the body of my paper; but I will address it here.

There is disagreement over whether Hung received the tracts in 1836 or 1837 (one author, Meadows, even suggests a date of 1833, because he assumed that it had to be Liang A-fa who handed the tracts to Hung, and Hung had left for Singapore in 1834 after being released from his imprisonment. See McNeur, p. 75. But this assumption is not necessary since any one of a number of evangelists could have given it to Hung).

There is really only one piece of evidence which makes reference to an 1837 date, and that is Hung Jen-kan in his confession. Yet there are a number of references to an 1836 date, most prominent among them being one in Hung Jen-kan's own account given to Hamberg (p. 8); 1836 is also the

the exam. In 1837, after failing the exam another time, he collapsed into a delirious state in which he envisioned himself appointed by the Heavenly Father, who was clothed in a black-dragon robe and sported a long golden beard, to slay the demons and to assume the imperial throne.

After recovering from his illness, Hung went back to his former way of life, but with a noticeable change in his demeanor. After taking and failing the exam in 1843 for what would be his fourth and final time, he returned to his position of school teacher in a village near his home. It was at this time that his cousin pointed out to Hung the correspondence between his visions and the contents of Good Words. Believing that this teaching was sent from heaven, they repented of their idolatrous ways, and then baptized themselves. Another cousin, Hung Jen-kan, and a fellow teacher, Feng Yun-shan, followed them into the waters of baptism. They immediately set out together preaching the new message in their province and in the neighboring province of Kwangsi.

In the fall of 1844, Hung returned to Hua-hsien, his home village, while his disciples continued to propagate the new faith among scattered communities of Hakkas, the ethnic group to which Hung and his disciples belonged, in the neighboring province of Kwangsi. For the next two years, 1845 and 1846, Hung

date given in the account from which Hamberg's account derives, namely, "Hung Hsiu-ch'uan's Background," (Michael, Vol. 2, p. 3).

³² Spence following Bohr who follows Jen Yu-wen theorize that this missionary was a Rev. Edwin Stevens. Dr. Spence, though, does not propose this theory too dogmatically; see Spence, pp. 30-31.

took up his teaching duties once again, composing poetry and writing religious discourses in his leisure time. In 1847, he was contacted by some evangelists in the employ of Rev. I. J. Roberts and was invited to study under the missionary in Canton.³³ After spending two months under Roberts' tutelage, Hung took a short visit back to Thistle Mountain in Kwangsi, where he discovered that Feng Yunshan, in his absence, had gathered several thousands of Hakkas into societies of "God-worshippers," (Pai Shang-ti Hui) a combination of religious sect and secret society.

Though he was welcomed as their heavenly ordained leader, Hung did not remain at Thistle Mountain for long. It was only after burying his father in the winter of 1849 that he returned to stay, on a permanent basis, with his newly gathered flock of God-worshippers. While he was absent from Thistle Mountain, other leaders rose to fill prominent roles in the movement. The most prominent was Yang Hsiu-ch'ing, former coal miner, whose position of leadership in the movement was legitimized by a series of prophetic utterances. In the early stages of the movement, all these leaders submitted to Hung's greater authority, a fact that would soon change. In the autumn of 1850, the Society of Shang-ti Worshippers collided with the local militia and in January, 1851, the Shang-ti Worshippers

³³ Theodore Hamberg, The Visions of Hung-Siu-Tshuen, and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection (Hong Kong: China Mail Office, 1854; reprint edition, Peking: Yenching University Library, 1935), page 31. Also Franz Michael and Chung-li Chang, The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents, Volume 2 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971), p. 70.

proclaimed the establishment of their Taiping Heavenly Kingdom at Chin-t'ien in Kwangsi Province.

The Bible and the Taiping

The critical years for the movement were those from 1847 to 1850, when the movement's growth accelerated as the Society of God-Worshippers was transformed from a religious movement into a political rebellion. Adumbrations of this direction had been part of Hung's visions from the start, and so to speak of his religious movement as having no political overtones would be misleading. After awakening from his original vision in 1837, for example, Hung announced to his father that "the venerable old man has commanded that all men should turn to me, and all treasure flow to me."³⁴ His imperial ambitions were more evident in a conversation he had with his sister, which was recorded in the "Taiping Heavenly Chronicle," "His elder sister, Hung Hsin-ying came to see him. The sovereign said, 'Sister, I am the Taiping Son of Heaven. With his own hand he wrote the four words *T'ai-P'ing T'ien-tzu* for his sister to see."³⁵

Still, the only violent actions taken at this early stage were striking against demons and their representations in various idols. There was nothing inherent in

³⁴ Hamberg, p. 11.

³⁵ Michael, Vol. 2, p. 63.

the nature of the vision itself which demanded anything more than this religious iconoclasm. Something happened during these early years to redirect the objectives of the movement. I will argue in what follows that the decisive event in these critical years was Hung's reception and reading of the Bible.

Hung was introduced to various passages of the Bible in Liang A-fa's tract, but as pointed out above, these passages had been abstracted from their context and had neglected to include passages which touched on certain themes. Hung may have been introduced to the Bible in its complete form through the evangelistic work of Gutzlaff's Christian Union (Han Hui) which had been formed in 1844, and which had adopted Liang A-fa's evangelistic strategy. The membership of the Union grew dramatically during these years, increasing from 37 evangelists in 1844 to 1,800 members by 1849, two years before it was disbanded in the midst of allegations of misconduct and duplicity.³⁶ The Union had been especially active in Kwangsi, having established six different stations in the province by 1846. While Gutzlaff's efforts were widely ridiculed and he was exposed to some degree of censure, most missionaries accused Gutzlaff more of irresponsibility than of outright deceit. Moreover, even Rev. Theodore Hamberg, who initiated the case

³⁶ P. Clarke, "The Coming of God to Kwangsi," Papers on Far Eastern History 7 (March, 1973): 154. The numbers of members given here are the accounting of Gutzlaff, and so may have been exaggerated to a certain extent; but they can be relied upon as ballpark figures.

against the Union, acknowledged that there were still some of the members who were upright, and that the Union had been able to achieve some of its goals.

It had been Gutzlaff's express purpose to carry the Bible itself, not just tracts, into the Chinese interior. This strategy was set down even before the opening of the treaty ports, as he reveals in his Journal of Three Voyages Along the Coast of China in 1831, 1832 and 1833 what he envisions as the best method for evangelizing the Chinese populace, "The translation and circulation of the Holy Scriptures, the composition and distribution of tracts, with occasional oral addresses to the people, are the means he [the Christian missionary] would employ to propagate the Gospel of Christ."³⁷ William Canton notes that the British and Foreign Bible Society had, as late as 1847, awarded the Union the sum of 100 pounds which funded the band of evangelists with 4000 New Testaments, 100 Old Testaments, and 600 copies of the Book of Psalms towards helping fulfill Gutzlaff's purpose.³⁸

This may have been Gutzlaff's general purpose and practice. But whether he was able to fulfill it in the particular case of Hung Hsiu-ch'uan and his band of followers is still problematic. Yet we can make a tentative case for believing that

³⁷ Charles Gutzlaff, Journal of Three Voyages Along the Coast of China (London: Frederick Westley and A.H. Davis, 1834; reprint edition, Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Company, 1968), p. 19.

³⁸ William Canton, History of the British and Foreign Bible Society, Volume 2 (London: John Murray, 1904), p. 402.

Gutzlaff was able to do so. The proximity of Hung's village to Canton suggests opportunity. Also, there are a few references which point to a level of awareness among the God-Worshippers of the Union's activities. In Hung Jen-kan's essay describing the Taiping King's background, Hung Jen-kan relates how, "in the chia-ch'en year [1844]; he [Hsiu-ch'uan] heard that some foreign brothers were propagating the Gospel and establishing churches..."³⁹ Now how did Hung hear about these activities if not through such contacts as the Union? More solidly testifying to the existence of some level of contact between the two groups is the fact that it is evangelists connected to Gutzlaff's colleague, Rev. I.J. Roberts, who seek out Hung and invite him to Canton. There would have to have been some kind of relationship already established for this invitation to have been accepted.

Prescott Clarke makes the case for there being a connection between members of the Christian Union and the early core of the God Worshippers' Society. In his research, Clarke not only lists the large number of reports of Taiping soldiers who claimed to have had a Chinese Union background, reports which were submitted by a wide range of Western contacts including the captain of the *Hermes*, E.G. Fishbourne, the British consul Lord Elgin, and several missionaries, but as persuasively he shows how the two missionaries who had the earliest exposure to the Taiping were missionaries who were associated with the Christian Union,

³⁹ Michael, Vol. 2, p. 6.

namely Rev. I. J. Roberts and Rev. Theodore Hamberg. As Clarke puts it, "In the same vein it might be asked why Hung Jen-kan came to Hamberg in 1852 rather than to another missionary."⁴⁰ Even more intriguing is Clarke's suggestion that it may have been bands of Chinese Union members who were responsible for the ingathering of so many converts in Kwangsi; the same converts who embraced Hung as their Heavenly King when he arrived at Thistle Mountain.⁴¹

While Clarke presents solid evidence for his contention that there were these kinds of connections between the Chinese Union and the Society of God Worshippers, and because of these connections, we may assume that the Society did have some encounter with the Bible, solid evidence for this assumption is lacking. Evidence is not lacking when we turn to consider whether Hung received a Bible from Roberts when he visited Roberts in Canton in 1847. At the least, and this may be all that is necessary, it is an established fact that Hung studied the Bible under Roberts. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine any Protestant missionary of the time, especially one whose mentor was Gutzlaff, not giving the Bible the dominant place in the curriculum.

⁴⁰ Prescott Clarke, "The Coming of God to Kwangsi," p. 172.

⁴¹ Clarke goes so far to suggest that it was not Liang A-fa's booklets that introduced Hung to Christianity, but that this introduction was the work of the Chinese Union. That suggestion, though, is not supported either by the explicit reference to the Good Words in "Hung Hsiu-chuan's Background" (Michael, Vol. 2, pp. 3-4) and in the *T'ai-p'ing T'ien-jih* (Michael, Vol.2, p. 63) which attributes Hung's introduction to Christianity to Liang's booklets.

We are not left to imagination. “The Taiping Heavenly Chronicle” states that while Hung was at Roberts’ chapel, “The Sovereign read the Old Testament and the New Testament long and carefully.”⁴² Moreover, Roberts corroborates this statement in an article which appeared in Putnam’s Magazine where he tells the readers that, “Hung, sow-tsuen, and his convert and cousin, Hung-Jin, having heard that the foreign missionary...was preaching the true doctrine in Canton, they determined, early in 1847, to come to our chapel and study the scriptures.”⁴³ Upon reaching the chapel, Hung joined the Bible class where he was “committing [to memory] and reciting the scriptures, and receiving instructions for two hours daily with the class.”⁴⁴

Hung did more than just study the Bible in Canton. He was also given a Bible which he took back to Thistle Mountain. From what we know of missionary practice and from what we may be able to infer from Hung’s writings, Roberts confirms. After two months of instruction, following a misunderstanding, Hung left Canton and returned to his home village where Roberts reports “Sow-Tsuen would read some portion of the Old and New Testaments, which he had received during his stay in Canton and then conversed about their congregation in Kwang-si....”⁴⁵ Now Roberts had not been an eye-witness of this practice. He undoubtedly

⁴² Michael, Vol. 2, p. 70.

⁴³ Issachar J. Roberts, “Tae Ping Wang,” Putnam’s Magazine October 1856, p. 382.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, p. 382.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. 383.

picked up his knowledge of it from Hung Jen-kan's account which was delivered to Rev. Hamberg in which the Sovereign's cousin reminisced about the early days of the movement in Kwangtung, "he [Hung Hsiu-ch'uan] met with Feng Yun San and others of his intimate friends, when they made an appointment, upon what hill they would assemble the following day. Siu-tshuen here used to converse with his followers, and friends about the congregation in Kwang-si. He also occasionally read some portion of the Old or New Testament, which he had received during his stay in Canton."⁴⁶ Roberts, in alluding to this reference, could have denied the veracity of this claim to have given Hung a copy of the scriptures, but he did not. In relating this passage intact, he confirms the truth of it: Hung did, as we would expect, receive and carry this Bible back to his followers.

Removed in time, though not removed in sympathy, from the event, Lindley, too, refers to the days after Hung's return from Canton to Thistle Mountain, when Hung "replaced their former books with copies of the Bible he had brought from Canton; reserving only such parts [of their former books] as were part of the New Testament."⁴⁷ The testimony of these participants, when combined with the appearance of various new concepts and assorted themes not previously prominent in Taiping literature leads to the conclusion that it is not only certain that Hung

⁴⁶ Hamberg, p. 45.

⁴⁷ Augustus F. Lindley [Lin-le], Ti-Ping Tien Kwoh. The History of the Ti-Ping Revolution, Volume 1 (London: Day and Son, 1866), p. 46.

read the Bible, in its full Old and New Testament context, but it is also as certain that he brought back a copy to share with his followers at Thistle Mount.

The Authorized Taiping Version of the Bible

Critical for our understanding the impact that this reception of the Bible had on Hung and his followers, especially for comprehending how the Bible sparked a transformation in what had been the dominant religious ethos of the movement, we need to determine what translation of the Bible Hung saw at Canton and what, if any, were the distinctive aspects of this translation. We will also need to consider the manner in which the Taiping regarded this received translation.

There is unanimous agreement among all the witnesses that the Bible which the Taipings adopted as the royally-sanctioned version was one of the earlier translations executed by Gutzlaff. Captain Fishbourne of the British ship, the *Hermes*, the first foreign ship to visit Nanking, reported, "The French war-steamer *Cassini* visited some months after us, and she brought down a reprint of Genesis, of Exodus, and a portion of the New Testament, consisting of St. Matthew's Gospel, printed almost verbatim from the version of Gutzlaff."⁴⁸ The American missionary, E.C. Bridgman, when he visited Nanking aboard the American vessel,

⁴⁸ E.G. Fishbourne, *Impressions of China and the Present Revolution* (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1855), p. 224.

the Susquehannah, the following year, supported this view, “They have in their possession probably the entire Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, and are publishing what is known as ‘Gutzlaff’s version’ of the same.”⁴⁹ There is no dissenting voice raised against this testimony.⁵⁰

If the Taiping adopted the Gutzlaff version of the Bible, what then happened to the Morrison version? We need to return to the history of Bible translation to answer this. Robert Morrison had completed his translation of the entire Bible in 1823. Since Liang A-fa’s Good Words was based on this Morrison version, Hung Hsiu-ch’uan’s first contact with the Bible was with passages translated from the Morrison version. Some missionaries felt that this translation was too wooden. One of those who did, Dr. Walter H. Medhurst, voiced his complaints about this translation, “The style adopted in the present version of the scriptures is far from being idiomatic, the translators having sometimes used too many characters, and employed inverted and unusual phrases, by which the sense is obscured.”⁵¹

Medhurst thereupon spearheaded efforts to produce a new translation.

The London Missionary Society veteran invited Gutzlaff to cooperate with him in producing a revised version of the Morrison translation. An odd coupling, the

⁴⁹ Prescott Clarke and J.S. Gregory, Western Reports on the Taiping (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1982), p. 149.

⁵⁰ Hykes, p. 5. Robert James Forrest, “The Christianity of Hung Tsiu Tsuen, A Review of Taeping Books,” Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society IV (December, 1867): 190. Canton, p. 405. Boardman, pp. 47-48.

⁵¹ Medhurst, p. 558.

sober Medhurst asking the spontaneous Gutzlaff to help him with this project. But it worked. Medhurst completed his revision of the New Testament in 1837 and Gutzlaff his revision of the Old Testament in 1838. This was the translation that was distributed by the Christian Union.⁵² Neither Medhurst or Gutzlaff was satisfied with the end product. Gutzlaff revised Medhurst's New Testament revision in 1847 and his own Old Testament revision in 1855.⁵³

There was no authorized version at this time; different missionaries and different societies used whichever version appealed to them and whichever supported their particular theological distinctives. The Delegates Version, the New Testament of which was published in 1854, was intended to remedy this situation, attempting a coordinated effort, but this attempt, too, broke down. The Bible which the Taipings adopted was the version for which Gutzlaff was solely responsible for the Old Testament and Medhurst principally responsible for the New Testament--similar, then, to the one distributed by the Christian Union.⁵⁴

While the missionaries failed to reach a consensus on translation, they were successful in passing on to the Taiping their reverence for the sacred scriptures. This is the testimony of observers as varied as Captain Fishbourne, Rev. Charles Taylor, an early Methodist missionary, and even the British consul Thomas T.

⁵² Hykes, p. 5.

⁵³ *ibid.*, pp. 4-5. Wylie, pp. 62-63. Gutzlaff produced several different revisions of the New Testament.

⁵⁴ Hykes, p. 5.

Meadows who, though skeptical of the Christian character of many aspects of the movement, could still say, "He [Hung] appears to have, once for all, taken the Bible as the highest standard of truth, and to have accepted everything new that he therein finds."⁵⁵ These observations can be augmented by reports of the energy expended on publishing the Bible. Fully 400 men at Nanking were said to be employed at this task.⁵⁶ The Bibles which were published were then distributed to the various chapels where on the sabbath the people would go to hear the expounding on the "holy book;"⁵⁷ in so doing the Taiping sought to cultivate the same respect for the Bible which the early followers showed. All this delighted the missionary observers.

But this Taiping respect for the Bible did not always take the form the missionaries would have liked to see. For the Taiping reverence for the Bible also resulted, paradoxically, in an effort aimed at revising the text. They were willing to alter the text at places, but rather than showing a cavalier attitude towards the text, the places where they did alter the text and where they did not further demonstrate the Taiping belief in the sacredness of the text. There were many alterations that could have been made to bolster the sagging image of Hung and reverse the declining fortunes of the movement in the last years of the rebellion, but such

⁵⁵ Thomas T. Meadows, *The Chinese and Their Rebellions* (London: Smith Elder, 1856; reprint edition, Stanford: Stanford University Reprints, 1953), p. 420.

⁵⁶ Fishbourne, p. 391.

⁵⁷ Fishbourne, p. vii.

changes were not made. Probably the most significant modification was the addition of Hung's commentary, published sometime between 1860 and 1861, but this, again, did not affect the body of the text.⁵⁸

The changes which did affect the body of the text were not insignificant. There are four different types of changes which Hung made to the text of the Bible. The first type of alteration involved the correcting of genuine mistakes, such as editing an inaccurately-written character (at Genesis 19:23, the character chao meaning "to shine" was printed with the wrong radical, making the meaning "to show"), and the adopting of clearer and smoother translations. A second type of alteration involved the avoidance of taboo characters, especially as these appeared in transliterations of names and places. For example, the first of the two characters used by Gutzlaff to transliterate the name, Jesse, in Matthew 1:5 was the same character employed to transliterate Jesus' name. So Hung merely substituted a different character with the same sound "yeh."

⁵⁸ There was no mention of the annotations in any of the primary sources I read, except for Forrest, p. 200.

Michael (p. 223) persuasively argues for a date between September, 1860, when the listing of the Bible accompanying the release of the Taiping's "Gospel Jointly Witnessed" still carried its 1853 title, Chiu-i-chao Sheng-shu and Hsin-i-chao Sheng-shu, and August, 1861, when Forrest received his copy of the annotated Bible, with the title Ch'in-ting Chiu-i-chao and Ch'in-ting Ch'ien-i-chao Sheng-shu from the Shield King.

The change in the title of the New Testament from "Hsin-i-chao" to "Ch'ien-i-chao" probably reflects the intention of the Taiping to elevate the status of the "T'ien-ming Chao-chih Shu" as the most recent of the authoritative scriptures. This is the text which the Taiping referred to as the "True Testament."

A third type of correction involved Taiping theology and moral tenets, with the result that certain people never die, they instead ascend to heaven (Abraham's son, Ishmael, for example, in Genesis 25:17). Nor do they drink wine any longer as did Isaac at Genesis 27:25. Nor do they have sexual relations with their daughters-in-law as Judah did when he failed to provide an heir for her in accordance with the Jewish law--Hung completely alters this story (Genesis 38:16-26).⁵⁹ The last story in its original form probably violated every vestige of Confucian ethic remaining in Hung's being, let alone his newly-acquired Christian morality. In deleting the more offensive elements, Hung obviously felt that he was purging the holy writings of some unholy accretions.

A final type of correction involved the rectification of titles and addresses. For example, the substitution of the personal "I" (wu) with the imperial "I" (chen) and of the common "say" (yu) with the imperial "decree" (yu) when referring to Jesus and Shang-ti.⁶⁰ Also for some reason, Hung demotes King David to the rank of

⁵⁹ Wu Liang-tso and Luo Wen-ch'i, "T'ai-ping T'ien-kuo Yin-shu Chiao-k'an Chi" (A List of Alterations in Taiping Printed Literature) in *Taiping T'ien-kuo Hsueh-k'an* 3 (1987), pp. 266-282. These two scholars have examined all the passages in the two Taiping Bibles, comparing the early version with Hung's annotated and edited version.

⁶⁰ In this last type of change, fewer alterations seem to have been made in the Old Testament than in the New. Below are examples of the rectification of names and addresses, taken from Matthew 5:16-28:

朕	replaces	吾	(Mt. 5:20)
諭	replaces	告	(Mt. 5:16, 20, 26)
諭	added to	語	(Mt. 5:22)
典執法	replaces	按察法	(Mt. 5:25)
朕諭	replaces	我語	(Mt. 5:25)

marquis (Matthew 1:6). Again, there are these changes, but in only a very few instances, such as the account of Judah and his daughter-in-law, do these materially affect the meaning of the text. In every instance, the alterations show that the Taiping sought to protect the sanctity and the moral authority of their scriptures.

Some have maintained that the attitude of the Taiping towards the Bible was not any different from their attitude to their other “scriptures.” Such an opinion is certainly justified when the document which narrates and describes Hung’s vision of the Heavenly Father, the “True Testament,” is considered. But to go as far as Rudolf Wagner does, who at some points seems to argue for the sacredness of every Taiping document including such works as The Pilgrim’s Progress, is unwarranted.⁶¹ Such a line of argument, in effect, profanes every document, and is grossly inaccurate. It is telling that none of these pietistic tomes, including The Pilgrim’s Progress, but much more significantly, the Good Words, never even made it onto the list of the Taiping imperially-sanctioned works, much less are these works accorded the respect that the Taiping reserve for the Bible and the “True Testament.”

Chiu-I-Chao and Hsin-I-Chao; Ch’in-Ting Chiu-I-Chao Sheng-Shu and Ch’in-Ting Ch’ien-I-Chao Sheng-Shu (T’ien-ching [Nanking], 1860?), British Museum Microfilm.

The “Ch’in-Ting” Old Testament contains the books of Genesis through Joshua; the New Testament includes all the New Testament books except the Gospel of John.

⁶¹ Wagner, pp. 59-60.

An explanation for the Taiping high regard for the Bible can be found in the prominent place Liang A-fa carved out for the Bible in his writings and in the position accorded it in Hung's vision. As we have seen, Liang's Good Words, is mainly composed of Bible selections, and the Bible was the authority given for Liang's every pronouncement. This authoritative place was confirmed in Hung's vision. That vision as recorded in "The Taiping Heavenly Chronicle," the so-called Taiping "New Testament," reads:

The Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God, ordered that three classes of books be put out and indicated this to the Sovereign, saying, 'This class of books consists of the records which have been transmitted from that former time when I descended into the world, performing miracles and instituting the commandments. These books are pure and without error. And the books of the second class [that is, the New Testament; in Gutzlaff's translation as with most other translations, the Old and the New Testaments were published as two separate books] are the accounts which have been transmitted from the time when your Elder Brother, Christ, descended into the world, performing miracles, sacrificing his life for the remission of sins, and doing other deeds, But the books of the other class are those transmitted from Confucius...these books contain extremely numerous errors and faults, so that you were harmed by studying them.⁶²

Later, when Hung visited Roberts in Canton, he discovered that the first two classes of books were the Old and New Testaments. Thus the scene was set for the Bible to wield a strong influence on the development of the Taiping movement. The potential was there: they had received the Bible before the politicization of the

⁶² Michael, Vol. 2, pp. 56-57. Hung identifies more specifically the three classes of books later in the same document, see Michael, Vol. 2, p. 70

movement. In the next chapter, we will examine what it was about the Bible, which more than the Good Words ever did, enabled Hung Hsiu-ch'uan to complete the transformation of his Society of God-Worshippers into a fully authentic, indigenous Chinese sect and in turn further moved this Chinese sect from a religious movement to a political rebellion.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONTENT OF THE RELIGION OF THE TAIPING

In this chapter, we will examine how the Protestant contribution of a Chinese translation of the Bible enabled the Taiping rebels to complete the process, which was begun by Catholic missionaries, of the indigenization of Christianity. The end product of this process was the religion of the Taiping, a religion which while inspired by Christianity was so shaped by Chinese traditions that it came to be regarded as a Chinese sect, which it had indeed become. I am calling this religion, Taiping Christian sectarianism.

In the introduction to this paper, I discussed two reasons why I believe there is a tendency among Western scholars to slight the religion of the Taiping. One reason I gave for this was the result of applying a modern, Western model of the relationship of religion, culture and society to a traditional, Chinese situation. A second reason I gave for this failure to give precedence to the religious character of the Taiping movement lies in the Western understanding of the religious

dimensions of traditional Chinese culture, especially of the religious dimensions of the imperial office.

For the most part, I was speaking of the work of modern, Western scholars of China. But it is not just Western scholars of the present whose perspective has been distorted by imposing this modern conception of the relation of religion and culture on the Chinese situation and by a failure to recognize the unifying role of the emperor and the interconnectedness of imperial Chinese culture. Early Protestant missionaries, also, reflecting a “modern” world view, had during their own time already rent the fabric of religion and culture asunder. This Western, and especially Protestant, way of dividing up the world, of abstracting the religious component of life from its social and cultural context and then inserting the compound into a wholly different social and cultural body, might have worked in a Victorian laboratory. But the religious changes which were introduced into the Chinese social and cultural body were an experiment which affected all of Chinese imperial culture.

Such dualistic conceptions were passed along to the Chinese through the medium of missionary-produced literature. Liang A-fa’s tract, Good Words to Encourage the World, is an example of this tendency: Liang’s work, either through its use of certain terms or its neglect of others, first transmitted this truncated gospel to Hung Hsiu-ch’uan and his followers. The Bible, on the other hand,

especially in the translation prepared by Rev. Charles Gutzlaff, was an exception to this rule. It united these aspects so that the resulting transformed faith could now function as an integrated whole: it was a religious, cultural, social and political whole.

The contribution of Liang's tract to Hung's crusade usually receives more emphasis than is due it. Liang's tract did work to germinate the religious seeds sown in Hung's vision; but it is my contention that it was Hung's reading of the Bible and his introduction to certain concepts therein which shaped the form and direction which the maturing movement took. His reading of the Bible provided him with the concepts which he needed to express his vision of a new culture. This connection between religion and its cultural expression was re-established by the Bible itself, more than any particular translation of it, because the Bible supplied the contexts in which Hung could interpret his received doctrine. The Bible restored the connection between cult and culture. The Bible put salvation in a cultural and historical context, which while different from the Chinese context, did allow the Taiping to understand the faith in its fullest dimensions.

In receiving the Bible, the Taiping were able to complete what the Catholic missionaries began, but did not finish. For the Catholics had always mediated the revelation--serving the Chinese abstracts of it--but it was the method of the Protestants to broadcast the scriptures, often without even including any form of

commentary. Seeing salvation in its historical context had as much to do with the transformation of Hung's religion as any of the specific doctrines or concepts. This is not to diminish the contribution of these concepts; on the contrary, four of these concepts, and especially one which was unique to the Gutzlaff translation, contributed immensely to the transformation.

In the pages which follow, we shall be examining these four concepts, which are the cardinal articles of the Taiping faith. We shall analyze the process of cultural transformation, looking at the translation of Christian ideas into the Chinese language by the missionaries—translations whose implications the missionaries were not oblivious to— and then consider how Hung and the Taiping received these ideas and shaped them according to the Taiping's own religious vision and to Chinese cultural traditions, thereby completing the process of the indigenization of Christianity into Taiping Christian sectarianism. The revolutionary nature of some of the terms employed by Gutzlaff and other translators would not be apparent to casual Western readers of the Bible, but in an imperial Chinese cultural context, a context where the emperor accorded to himself and to his appurtenances a "holy" status, and where he served as a religious, political and cultural symbol, the terms exploded with a revolutionary impact. We will be primarily focusing on the four most explosive concepts, those which most distinctively define Taiping religious identity and which most perspicaciously open a window into the Taiping soul: the

name of God, the title of Christ, the theological construct of the kingdom of Heaven, and the doctrine of the chosen nation.

Shang-ti: The High God of Classical China

By far the most incendiary term in this translation process was a term unique to the Medhurst-Gutzlaff version, that used for God, *Shang-ti*. In the first chapter, I discussed how this term was initially used by Matteo Ricci and the other early Jesuit missionaries, but whose use was forbidden by Pope Clement XI in the papal bull, *Ex Illa Die*.¹ The bull enforced a statement issued by the Inquisition which forbade the use of *Shang-ti* and *T'ien* (Heaven) in referring to God, while approving the more innocuous and historically neutral term *T'ien-chu* (Heavenly Lord) as an appropriate substitute.

The first Protestant translators, Robert Morrison and Joshua Marshman, learned from the experiences of their Catholic forerunners and initially refrained from employing the term *Shang-ti*. In the profusion of passages that Liang A-fa quotes directly from Morrison's Bible,² Liang uses mostly the terms *Shen-t'ien* (God, or gods, of Heaven) or simply *Shen*, and less frequently *Shen-t'ien Shang-ti* (Shang-ti, the God of Heaven), and *T'ien Shang-ti* (Shang-ti of Heaven, or the Highest God of

¹ Arnold Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin: The Jesuits at the Court of China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1942), pp. 165-166.

² And Liang's opus, as I showed in chapter four, is largely just that: a compilation of passages from the Morrison Bible.

Heaven) to translate the word, God. In the Good Words, Liang has recourse to invoking the name *Shang-ti* used alone in only a single passage.³

While Morrison favored the use of *Shen*, Gutzlaff preferred using the term *Shang-ti* for rendering the name of God, and less frequently *Huang-Shang-ti* and *Shang-chu*. So Genesis 1:1 reads, “元始上帝” “In the beginning, Shang-ti,” and Genesis 1:3 reads, “上帝曰光” “Shang-ti said light,” where Genesis 2:4 and 4:1, 4 refers to 上主皇上帝 (The Highest Lord, the Supreme Shang-ti) and 皇上帝 (the Supreme Shang-ti), respectively. All of these terms, but especially the last two, were associated with the imperial title.⁴

With this flotsam of translations floating on a tempest-prone Chinese religious sea, Western missionaries gathered in Hong Kong in 1843, following the opening of the treaty ports (and which, coincidentally, was the very year that Hung first perused Liang’s tract), and began to set down a plan for a unified translation of the Bible. The plan called for the apportioning of the Bible among the five different treaty ports. Once a draft of the apportioned section of the Bible was completed at one port, it would be sent to the other ports for evaluation. When the evaluation

³ For example: *Shen-T’ien Shang-ti* (神天上帝); CSLY, p. 44. *T’ien Shang-ti* (天上帝); CSLY, p. 38. *Shen* (神); CSLY, p. 237. *Shang-ti* --used alone--(上帝); CSLY, p. 435. Morrison’s and then Liang A-fa’s preference for the word *shen* is a reflection, as I discussed last chapter, of the influence of Basset.

⁴ Chiu-I-Chao Sheng-Shu, Hsin-I-Chao Sheng-Shu [The Old and New Testaments], 1853. Ch’in-Ting Chiu-I-Chao, Ch’in-Ting Ch’ien-I-Chao [The Imperially-Authorized Old and New Testaments], 1860? British Museum Microfilm. Both of these versions of the Bible were published by the Taiping, but only the latter features Hung’s annotations.

process was finished, each port was to appoint delegates who were to assemble at Shanghai in 1847, at which time these delegates would undertake the final revision. When the delegates finally did assemble in 1847, it was immediately apparent that the committee had become polarized over what came to be known as the “term question.”⁵

The debate over the proper rendering of the term for God took place in an open forum: in the pages of The Chinese Repository, which from the year 1843 to the year 1851, was inundated with wave after wave of articles arguing for one term or the other.⁶ On the surface, most of these articles seemed to be addressing the narrowly religious issues involved in using one term over the other. But, as I have maintained, there is no such issue in China, or anywhere, as one that is only narrowly religious. Regardless of how firmly the writers attempted to fix the channels of the issue, the discussion had a tendency to flow into other areas, and to spill over the most strongly-constructed categories.

The debate began in the religious sphere, and it was a virtual continuation of the Catholic debate some two centuries earlier. It was acrimonious at times, especially

⁵ A history of the committee is featured in The Chinese Repository (Canton), Volume 19, pps. 544-549. See also Douglas G. Spelman, “Christianity in Chinese: The Protestant Term Question,” (Harvard) Papers on China 22A (1969):27. Spelman deals exclusively with the religious issues of the debate, and only those dealing with the term, Shang-ti. He also touches on the political implications of the term, though this is not the focus of his study.

⁶ In the most intense year of the debate, 1848, over 350 pages of The Repository’s total 650 pages were devoted to the controversy; at the climax of the debate in 1850, there were no less than 19 different articles on the controversy in the one year. See The Chinese Repository, 1848, 1850.

as it intensified between the chief protagonists, Rev. William Boone, a missionary Bishop of the American Episcopal Church, who endorsed the use of the term *shen*, and Dr. Walter Medhurst, London Missionary Society veteran and erstwhile colleague of the Rev. Gutzlaff in the translation of what became the Taiping Bible, who advocated using the term *Shang-ti*. While sometimes acrimonious, the debate was always impressive, an imposing monument to the breadth of learning which these men commanded, with the argument shifting from Roman history to Hebrew grammar and then back to the Chinese classics, often in the space of a single journal article.

The contours of the debate were determined by how much weight the participants gave to one of two concerns. The *shen* advocates emphasized the need to follow the apostolic precedent in searching for the proper term for signifying the deity. What Boone and his allies liked about the term *shen* is that it seemed to better fit with the apostolic example of translating the name of God into the Greek language. The apostolic writers of the New Testament had employed the Greek term *theos* for translating the idea of the deity. The apostles, though, were not the pioneers in using this Greek term for translating the Hebrew name of God. They were merely following the lead of the translators of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek in the pre-Christian translation known as the Septuagint. (The name for this translation is derived from a story about the number of elders (ie., 70) originally

assembled to translate the Hebrew Pentateuch, that is the first five books of the Old Testament into Greek.) In that translation, Jewish translators favored the term *theos* in their translation of the Hebrew term for God, *elohim*.

This apostolic model became for Boone and his colleagues the sole criteria for judging the suitability of the term. What did the apostles do in their translation of the Hebrew idea of God? The Apostles did not use the name Zeus for referring to the God of the Hebrews, they used the Greek term which designated the common generic god, *theos*.⁷ As Boone explains,

The following considerations have convinced us, that, in such a case, the generic name for God should be used; and that the use of the name of the chief Deity of any polytheistic nation to render *Elohim* [one of the Hebrew terms for God in the Old Testament] would be totally inadmissible.

1. *Elohim*, in the Old Testament, is not a proper term of the true God, but is a generic term, applied to heathen Deities as well as to Jehovah. It must therefore, be rendered by a generic term and not a proper name.

2. In using the generic name for God, under the circumstances we are considering, a translator follows the example of the inspired men, who wrote in the Greek and Latin languages. The Greeks and the Romans were polytheists: the inspired writers of the New Testament, and the Apostles who preached the gospel to the Greeks and Romans, were precisely in the same circumstances which we are now seeking for a general rule to guide us in our inquiries. The question, then, how did they act under these circumstances, is one of great interest to us. It is well known that the Septuagint translators used *θεος* and not Zeus to render *Elohim* into Greek; and that the Apostles used the same term in the New Testament. The same course was pursued at Rome; the generic name was preferred to the name of the chief Deity; Deus was used, not Jupiter. If then a translator, engaged in rendering the Sacred Scriptures into

⁷ This again was actually the decision of the Jewish translators who first translated the Hebrew scriptures into Greek during the third to the first centuries, B.C. See the article on this translation in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pps. 1093-1103.

I have looked at a copy of the Septuagint. In the Book of Genesis, the words for God are mostly *kuriōs ò theos* (the Lord God) and, simply, *ò theos* (God).

the language of a polytheistic people, desires to follow the example of inspired men, he must employ the generic name for God used by them, and not the name of the chief Deity.⁸

Conversely, what Boone objected to in using the term *Shang-ti* is that missionaries would unwittingly be promoting the worship of a pagan god.

Medhurst responded to this approach with an argument taken from the context of Chinese culture. The apostles, he argued, did not adopt the term *theos* unconstructed. They added the singular nominative article to it, so that in the New Testament the name of God is always, (the) God. Yet there was no such grammatical tool available in the Chinese context. Instead, translators were always having to fall back to putting together strings of attributions to convey their meaning of the one God, most simply designated by the form, the “One True God.”

Medhurst contended that the Chinese word for God had to convey to the Chinese the sense of unrivaled majesty which the Christian God possesses. This sense, he felt, was not captured by the term *shen*. Medhurst reasoned that in the Chinese

⁸ *The Repository*, January 1848, pp. 19-20. Note in Boone’s comments how he relies on a cue to signify that the name of God is not a reference to the generic variety: he capitalizes the name. In the Greek, the apostles relied on a similar cue, referring to God in the singular nominative case. One device that was used by the advocates of a generic name for the deity in Chinese was to precede a reference to the name with a space, denoting a special reverence for the term. Of course, in Chinese documents, the emperor was accorded even greater respect—every reference to the emperor’s name would require the forming of a new line, along with the elevation of the name above the body of the text.

classical texts the term *shen* denoted the generic name for a god and did not evoke the respect and awe due to the highest God. In his words, “Its simple and original meaning is that of spiritual and invisible beings in general, but always of an inferior order.”⁹ So Medhurst objected to the use of the term *shen* as it could and did signify everything from the spirit of a waterfall to the deification of a dog. Moreover, he pointed out that the term *shen* is often paired with the word *kuei* (ghost, and usually a malevolent ghost at that) which demonstrates that both terms refer to lower-level spiritual beings, and not at all to higher-level beings.

The London Missionary Society veteran then returned to the Chinese cultural context and proposed using the name *Shang-ti* for translating the term of God, both because it had a classical pedigree and because the term *Shang-ti* referred to one who properly occupied the highest position of all the gods in the Chinese world. In fact, Medhurst argued that there is a sense in which the Chinese were not polytheists at all, since while they recognized the existence of a plurality of spiritual beings, they nonetheless only accorded *Shang-ti* the highest honor. In this line of thinking, he quotes from the work of a seventeenth-century Greek scholar by the name of Cudworth,

⁹ *The Repository*, January 1847, p. 35. Part of the debate focused on finding a term which like the Greek term *theos* could signify both a generic sense of god and the majestic sense of the high God. Medhurst stumbled at one point and tried to argue that only the term *Ti* satisfies both these requirements. He only really won the debate—at least in my view—when he argued that the Chinese language did not have one single term which supplied both these meanings.

Cudworth thinks that the Greeks were both monotheists and polytheists at the same time; that is, understanding the word *theos*, combined in the two terms, in different senses. In the first as conveying what he calls the natural idea of God, viz, an All-perfect Being, the Ruler of the Universe, and the other [sense of the term *theos*] as alluding to certain supposed invisible intelligences, who were the objects of religious worship, but subordinate to the one Supreme. What Cudworth pleads for in behalf of the Greeks may be allowed to the Chinese: and they may be considered as monotheists, because they believe in one Supreme God, the Author and Ruler of all. Much will depend, however, on the sense in which we understand the word.¹⁰

This is similar to the approach which the Catholic missionaries had adopted. The Lord of Heaven ruled over a vast host of lesser spiritual beings, whose titles were rendered into the Chinese by combining different attributes with the generic name for deity: *t'ien-shen* (heavenly god; ie., angel), *sheng-shen* (holy god; ie., Holy Spirit) and then *hsieh-shen* (evil gods; ie., evil spirits). Medhurst was not always so imaginative in his presentations as he shows himself to be here. His comments, however, do reveal what he took to be the critical issue. While the Greek word *theos* could both refer to the highest deity and to the plurality of deities, the Chinese word *shen* only referred to the latter. Therefore, the apostolic example could not be followed in this situation since the Greek case was not truly parallel to the Chinese.

¹⁰ The Repository, October 1848, p. 490. Ralph Cudworth, though cited by Medhurst here for his work in the Greek language, apparently was even more skilled in the Hebrew language, as he served as Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge from 1645 until his death in 1688. For more information on his life and scholarship, see Dictionary of National Biography, ed. by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, Vol. 5 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908), pp. 271-272.

Most of the debate involved the quoting of other authorities. Both sides enlisted the support of both Chinese classical texts and missionary precedent, resulting in a virtual symposium, often very learned, on the classical Chinese understanding and use of the terms for representing deity.¹¹ First there were the Chinese authorities, and this meant first of all the Chinese classics. This part of the debate was waged most vigorously by Medhurst since his whole argument for the use of *Shang-ti* was predicated on what this term meant in the Chinese context. The discussions were extensive. For example, in one discussion, Medhurst quotes from the Book of History, the Book of Songs, the Great Learning, the Doctrine of the Mean and the Mencius in order to bolster his argument concerning the use of the term *Shang-ti*. There were various parts to his argument. He tried to show how the Chinese in their classical writings attributed to *Shang-ti* all those characteristics that Christians attribute to their high God. Among the attributes which Medhurst saw the Chinese assigning to *Shang-ti* were: the deity was responsible for the production and formation of all things; he was called the lord and governor of Heaven; and he enjoyed the sacrifice and worship accorded the highest deity.

¹¹ It was noted that Morrison, Milne and Marshman had primarily used *shen* in their translations, but others pointed out that Morrison and Milne had both changed their views on this toward the end of their careers. See The Repository, February 1847, p. 102; March 1847, p. 123.

Another of these attributes assigned to *Shang-ti* was that divine decrees were issued by him. This discussion related to the classical idea of the mandate of Heaven whereby the affairs of nations and the rule of kings was regulated. Here follows Medhurst's exposition of various passages from the Book of History: "In the Shoo-king 6th book, 4th section, it is said that 'Wan and Woo were able to receive the correct decree from Shang-te while high Heaven accorded with their principles, and conferred upon them universal rule' ...In the Shoo-king, 4th book, section 9, 'The eleven men who aided Woo-wang [King Wu] were able to trace out and understand the decree of Shang-te,' which decree is called by the Commentator, 'the decree of Heaven.'¹² It was not just Medhurst who saw *Shang-ti* as the highest god of the Chinese pantheon. The English missionary often referred to various Chinese commentators' interpretations of the specific texts he quoted and to their explanations of the identity of *Shang-ti*, as when he writes, "In the Shoo-king, 5th book, 5th section, the Commentator says, 'when reference is made to the protecting influence which overshadows mankind, the word Heaven is used, and when the reference is to the Lord of all, the word Te [that is, Ti] is employed.'¹³ In a conclusion to this discussion of the classical meaning of the name *Shang-ti* and of the term *shen*, Medhurst emerged victorious, demonstrating

¹² The Repository, April 1848, pp. 162-163.

¹³ The Repository, March 1848, p. 130.

that while the Greek *theos* ruled the world and the lesser spiritual beings, the Chinese *shen* did not; that role in the Chinese context was reserved for *Shang-ti*.

There were other fronts in the battle. The debate also appealed to the authority of various missionary authorities. Here, Medhurst and Boone reached as far back as could be reached, even referring to the Nestorian missionaries, citing the terms inscribed on the Nestorian monument, erected during the Tang dynasty, in their argument. The inscriptions were more of a boon to Medhurst and not a boon to Boone, since the term for God employed therein is the true Lord (chen-chu), splitting the difference in effect, while the term for angel was heavenly god (shen-t'ien),¹⁴ a definite win for Medhurst, since it showed that the Nestorians interpreted the Chinese *shen* to refer to beings of a different, and lower, order than the supreme God.

After all the pages of proof texting, though, the debate was at an impasse. If the Chinese cultural context was taken more seriously, then Medhurst did seem to win. But if the apostolic example was taken more seriously, then Boone seemed to win. The debate became so protracted and deadlocked at one point that Medhurst, in

¹⁴ *The Repository*, May 1845, pp. 201-229 contains the full Chinese text of the monument. The Nestorian Church was an independent branch of early Christianity, characterized by their belief that the divine and human aspects of Jesus existed as two separate persons. The church was further characterized by the fact that the center of their faith was the city of Baghdad. Their missionaries operated in China during the Tang Dynasty.

frustration, suggested a compromise be adopted: transliterate the English name for God into Chinese.¹⁵ Fortunately, his suggestion was not taken seriously.

This debate was not just limited to the religious sphere; it also involved deeper issues, and these issues began to surface as the debate intensified. The first of these deeper issues to appear was the political one. In 1848, coincident with the rising politicization of the Taiping, of whom the missionary community was at this point unaware, there were scattered references in The Chinese Repository which addressed the political dimensions of using the term *Shang-ti*. Indeed, such associations were the basis for Boone's more heated objections to using the term *Shang-ti*. He referred to the definitions provided by various Chinese dictionaries, including the K'ang-hsi dictionary and assorted French Catholic dictionaries, finding that, "...all the dictionaries, both native and foreign, give Judge, or Ruler, as the meaning of Ti whilst they give no intimation of its being the appellative name of God."¹⁶ More disturbing, the writer felt, was its rendering in certain specific contexts, "We give a few additional texts of Scripture to show how subversive of civil government, the use of this word [Ti] to render Elohim [the Hebrew term for

¹⁵ The Repository, December 1846, pp. 578-601. But this is not as far-fetched a suggestion as Medhurst implies. After all, this is what the Buddhists did and, in one unique case, that of the title of Christ, what the Catholics and Protestants did as well. In the Chinese context, this involves finding characters, not letters, to represent the sounds of the foreign word. Oftentimes, the fact that it is a transliteration is indicated by adding a k'ou (mouth) symbol to the left of each of the characters used in representing the sound.

¹⁶ The Repository, February 1848, p. 87.

God in the Old Testament] would prove. 'I am the Lord and there is none else; there is no God beside me.' (Is. 45:5) What would be thought of the English translator who would use the term king as that whereby to render Elohim, into English, in the passages quoted above."¹⁷ Three months later, another writer warned the readers of The Repository of the same danger, "Another objection to Te [sic], is, that it has been used from the highest antiquity, and still is, the title given to the ruler of China..."¹⁸ It will be seen that the use of the term *Shang-ti* in just these same contexts did result in the very consequences against which these writers had sounded an alarm.

Medhurst responded to this charge in a particularly astute article in which he pointed out the difficulty in the Chinese context of separating the religious from the political. He begins his defense, "Another objection to Te, is, that it has been used from the highest antiquity, and still is, the title given to the ruler of China."¹⁹ Medhurst then launches into a survey and an analysis of the divine pretensions of the Chinese emperor. He notes that while there were five individuals in classical times who received the title of *Ti*, the so-called Five Emperors (*Ti*), it was the

¹⁷ The Repository, February 1848, p. 87. The word *elohim* is an interesting word itself. *Elohim* is one of the Hebrew names for the one God. The --im suffix, however, denotes plurality. This anomaly is explained by describing the --im suffix as serving to evoke the fullness of deity, the plurality of majesty. This explanation aside, the term does reflect something of a polytheistic background.

¹⁸ The Repository, May 1848, p. 221.

¹⁹ The Repository, May 1848, p. 221.

Ch'in emperor who "arrogated to himself" the title of *Huang-ti*. (This title is traditionally translated into English as emperor, but is literally translated as Glorious or Illustrious Emperor, or God.)

Medhurst comments on the import of this last title by reminding the reader that except for the ancient emperors, China's rulers had only been called *wang* (usually translated kings, but can be translated as princes) until the time of the first emperor of the Ch'in Dynasty. The missionary explains, moreover, that the addition of the attributive *huang* does not necessarily imply a title higher than that of *Shang-ti*, and he also points out that in succeeding reigns, it was the practice to confer the title of *Ti* used alone only upon deceased emperors.²⁰ While an emperor was alive titles such as *Huang-shang* (Illustrious Superior) and *Sheng-chu* (Sagely, or Holy, Lord), along with *Huang-ti* were regularly employed to refer to the sovereign.

Furthermore, Medhurst elaborates, the imperial person and appurtenances were often described with the term Heavenly, such as *T'ien-wei* (Heavenly seat or throne), *T'ien-en* (Heavenly grace), *T'ien-ping* (Heavenly soldiers) and *T'ien-ch'ao* (Heavenly court),²¹ and then last, but hardly least, *T'ien-tzu* (Son of Heaven), another title attributed to the ruler of China which certainly demonstrates that the Chinese were not reluctant to confer upon the emperor religious status.

²⁰ When visiting the Temple of Heaven today, the ancestor tablet on display in the main hall of the temple is inscribed with the words, *Huang T'ien Shang-ti*. Henri Maspero states, though, in his classic, *China in Antiquity*, that the worship of Heaven did not have reference to any such tablet.

²¹ *The Repository*, May 1848, pp. 222-223.

Medhurst, nevertheless, acknowledged the divine pretensions of the emperor in assuming the title *Huang-ti*, comparing the Chinese practice to the ancient Roman practice, where Roman emperors were called *theoi* (gods) and sacrifices were regularly offered to them. At death these same Roman emperors were often honored with an apotheosis (a ceremony whereby the emperor was raised to a divine status). After the apotheosis, these deceased emperors were then served by priests who rendered them worship. These divine associations were likewise similarly cultivated in the Chinese situation. Medhurst referred to the ceremonies surrounding the imperial court such as the kowtow and the burning of incense. These correspondences led Medhurst to this conclusion, “The resemblance between the deification of emperors practiced by the Romans, and that current among the Chinese, holds good in another respect, that it prevailed in both nations, until the Gospel came among them; and as the practice, and all the superstitions connected with it gave way before the influence of Christianity in the days of Constantine, may we not hope that the same result will follow the propagation of the Gospel in China in these latter days.”²² The Taiping would share this same hope.

But there is some inconsistency here. For while Boone accused Medhurst of seeking to impose a term which is too politically-colored for God, the fact of the

²² The Repository, May 1848, p. 230.

matter is that both Medhurst and Boone attempted to identify the deity which was worshipped in the imperial religion with the Christian God. One of Boone's proofs that the term *shen* could designate a being worthy of the highest worship involved a reference to the *shen* which was worshipped by the emperor at the winter solstice, the *T'ien chih Shen* (the God, or gods, of Heaven). Medhurst himself refers to the practice of imperial worship in another article in his effort to show the greater worthiness of *Shang-ti*:

At the great sacrifices offered by the rulers of the present dynasty, at the period of the winter solstice, an altar is erected at the southern side of the capital, of a round form, three stories high, the top of which, or the principal place of honor, is intended for the shrine of Shang-te, or Te; having the shrines of the Imperial ancestors arranged on the right and left hand, while those of the attendant Shins... are placed on the second story, and are honored with medium sacrifices.²³

He also notes in another volume that in the Chou-li (the Rites of Chou), the ruler was to put on more "felicitous robes" when sacrificing to *Shang-ti*, and he was to remove these same robes when he worshipped the *shen* (gods) of hills and rivers. He quotes a Chinese commentator's remarks on the reasons for the different dress code, "he [the ruler] did not dare to gratify those who were inferior, by putting on the most honourable dress."²⁴

²³ The Repository, April 1848, p. 174.

²⁴ The Repository, July 1848, p. 329.

Here we see in this discussion of imperial religion, how smoothly the conversation moves into a discussion of the cultural issue. And the most critical aspect of the cultural issue for the missionaries and then for the Taiping involved an assumption made by those who embraced the term *Shang-ti*, and it goes like this: Did the Chinese ever worship the one true God, and then later fall away from Him? Those who advocated using the term *Shang-ti* would have answered this question in the affirmative. They would have said that the Chinese did at one point worship the true God (ie., the God of the Old and New Testament). This is why the missionary scholar James Legge in his authoritative translations of the Chinese Classics could so unapologetically insert the term God in his every translation of *Shang-ti*. This understanding, as we shall see shortly, is also the basis for Hung's own reevaluation of his cultural heritage.

Medhurst repeats one refrain throughout his argument; he makes a series of references to God "as the Chinese knew him." He very intentionally does this, since Medhurst maintained that amidst all of what would be considered by the Christian church as false worship, the Christian God had not left himself without a witness. As he states in one of many conclusions on the subject, "We therefore conclude that by *Te* the Chinese mean the Supreme God, so far as they are acquainted with him." The seasoned missionary backed up this conclusion in a footnote with a reference to the apostle Paul's discussion of man's knowledge of

God in the Book of Romans, a reference which led Medhurst to remark, "That something of God is ascertainable by pagans, may be argued from the statement of the Apostle Paul in Rom. 1:20:--"The invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead."²⁵

For Medhurst, then, Heaven was not just China's Heaven, but Europe's as well. Advocating such a position involved the missionary in affirming the essential worthiness of every culture, along with that culture's history, and that such a culture could always be redemptively reclaimed.²⁶ Such a position is a fascinating one for an English missionary to be taking, since a more severe stance on the corruption of Chinese culture would have made Britain's imperialistic objectives in China easier to justify, and hence reminds us once again that the missionary and the mercantile enterprises were not always, if they were at all, of one piece.

Reverend William Boone and his supporters would have none of this. In stark contrast to Medhurst, Boone maintained that the *Shang-ti* of the classics was a pagan god, and Chinese culture had been deprived of the light of all revelation from the dawn of its history. It and its history were incapable of redemption; the

²⁵ *The Repository*, March 1848, p. 109.

²⁶ As we shall see, it is the American Episcopalian who will adopt the more severe stance. It would probably be fruitless to try to disentangle how much of the animus expressed in this debate was tied to national, denominational (Medhurst as a representative of British dissent; Boone representing the American branch of the Anglican establishment), or just personal differences. The hostility is, nonetheless, palpable.

missionaries were beginning with a tabula rasa. As one letter to the editor distilled the issue, "I would further suggest that if you answer that Shang-ti is identical with Jehovah, you must maintain that the Chinese know and have known, independently of revelation, the true God for thousands of years, for they have unquestionably known Shang-ti for that length of time."²⁷ Boone sets up his position on this issue in direct contrast to Medhurst: "But we are not contending that Shin means a true God, or was ever used by the Chinese to designate such a Being as the one described above. On the contrary, we are full persuaded they have no knowledge of a self-existent, eternal, almighty Being, who created heaven and earth."²⁸

This cultural aspect of the controversy was summed up in an article in July of 1848 where the editor weighed in on the side of Boone in evaluating the import of Medhurst's assertion: "Now, without doing violence to language, we must admit that Dr. Medhurst believes that the Chinese, ancient and modern, do know and worship the one only living and true God--not some imaginary Divinity--but the same Being whom he and all Christendom worship...when he speaks of the Supreme Being as far as the Chinese knew him, it seems to be evident that he means to affirm that the Chinese do know the true God."²⁹ Medhurst responded in

²⁷ The Repository, July 1848, p. 359.

²⁸ The Repository, January 1848, p. 50.

²⁹ The Repository, September 1848, pp. 460-461.

the affirmative that the Chinese had known and had worshipped the true God, *Shang-ti*, though they had done so imperfectly.

In the end there was a stalemate. Those on the side of Medhurst maintained that only the term *Shang-ti* conveyed the sense of the supreme position and governorship which the biblical idea of God purposed to express. Those on the side of Boone continued to favor *shen* because of the apostolic example where the generic terms for god, the Hebrew *elohim* and Greek *theos*, were employed to translate the term for God in the Old and New Testament. The debate ended in The Repository and in the Shanghai “Delegates” translation committee without having broken through this impasse. Each mission and Bible society decided for itself which term seemed most appropriate, and so two different translations, one featuring *Shang-ti* and the other *shen*, were published, a practice that continues down to the present day.³⁰ At the same time, this was a decision which in large part also closed down the discussions concerning the relationship of Christianity to Chinese imperial culture—at least among the missionaries.

It was Medhurst’s understanding of God which won over Hung. Though he was not in the audience of the delegates, he was a beneficiary of Gutzlaff and Medhurst’s decision to translate the term for God with the name *Shang-ti*. The

³⁰ Chinese Bibles are still published in *Shen* and *Shang-ti* versions. I have a copy of each.

repercussions of this term soon became evident in the integrated Chinese worlds of religion, politics and culture.

At the most fundamental level, Hung's view of the exclusive worship of *Shang-ti* meant that no other god could be worshipped. So his movement which began in iconoclasm continued in such activity until the very end. Hung's early missionary treks included the defacing and destruction of temples. On one of his forays into the Kwangsi countryside, Hung attacked an idol in a temple in Hsiang-chou, beating the idol, which he referred to as a demon, and ordered his followers to "dig out the eyes of the demon, cut off his beard, trample its hat, tear its embroidered dragon robe to shreds, turn its body upside down, and break off its arms."³¹ And it was in a temple, the Temple of the Nine Dragons, where Hung first proclaimed publicly that he was the Heavenly King. He had previously declared that he was the Son of Heaven, and the title of Heavenly King had earlier been given him, but it was only in the Nine Dragons Temple, after visiting Robert's chapel and studying the Bible, that Hung publicly proclaims his intention to serve as the Heavenly King, some three years prior to the rising at Chin-t'ien.

³¹ Michael, 2:74; I have used Michael's translations for all the Taiping documents whenever these are available, indicating any differences I have with his translations in the footnote. He includes most of the documents, with the understandable exception of the Taiping Bibles. Hsiang Ta, et. al., ed., *T'ai-P'ing T'ien-Kuo*, Volumes 1 and 2, in the series, *Chung-Kuo Chin-Tai-Shih Tzu-Liao Ts'ung-K'an* (Shanghai: Shen-chou Kuo-kuang She, 1952), Volume 2, p. 649. Hsiang has provided the Chinese versions of these same documents. Hereafter, I shall cite this source as TPTK.

Hung's iconoclasm continued to be an identifying mark of the Taiping Movement even to the end of their crusade, to which this first-hand report on the ruins of Ningpo submitted by Rev. Josiah Cox testifies, "In the temples we entered, the destruction of idols has been unsparing. The god of war and his satellites [sic] lay in scattered fragments about their former shrines; here lay a dishonored image prostrate on its nose. Another lost its head. Others stood with bruised eyes and mouths, and ears and noses missing. Some lay about in dismembered heaps."³² Hung, too, had believed that Jesus' declaration in the gospels that he would destroy the temple at Jerusalem contained a prophesy about Hung's own mission—that when he as the Heavenly King ascended the throne of all China, God would help him rebuild the very same temple (presumably in China).³³

This was an iconoclasm motivated by how Hung read the Ten Commandments, as he states very clearly in the "Taiping Chao-Shu" (The Taiping Imperial Declaration):

By referring to the Old Testament (Chiu-I Chao-Shu) we learn that in early ages the Great God (Huang Shang-ti) descended on Mount Sinai and in his own hand he wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone, which he gave to Moses, saying, 'I am the Supreme Lord (Shang-chu), the Great God; you men of the world must on no account set up images resembling anything in heaven above or on earth below, and bow down and worship them.' Now you people of the world who set up images and bow down and worship them are in

³² Prescott Clarke and J.S. Gregory, Western Reports on the Taiping (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1982), p. 388.

³³ Rudolf Wagner discusses this passage in Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion (Berkeley, 1987), page 38.

absolute defiance of the Great God's expressed will...How extremely foolish you are to let your minds be so deceived by the demon!³⁴

Hung, later in the same document, applauds the iconoclastic efforts of previous emperors, including one Emperor Ti of the time of the Six Dynasties who "demolished licentious temples," and commends the iconoclastic work of virtuous officials such as the Ming official Hai Jui for condemning idolatrous rites. Hung then summarizes his short survey of native iconoclasm with these words, "They did not know that which they destroyed, that which they burned, and that which they reprovved certainly ought to have been destroyed, burned or reprovved; and that which they did not destroy, did not burn, or did not reprove also ought to have been destroyed, burned or reprovved."³⁵ Of special significance is how Hung, who has weaved through this treatise his condemnation of the idolatry of the imperial title, now launches into his final condemnation of the office, which is how he concludes this very important treatise.

This religious belief in the exclusive worship of *Shang-ti* fostered a conviction about the illegitimacy of the Chinese imperial system. According to Taiping teaching, by adopting the term *Huang-ti*, the emperors had committed blasphemy. This view, then, echoed Medhurst's comments on the imperial system as a blasphemous usurping of *Shang-ti*'s prerogative, and this teaching became the

³⁴ Michael, 2:41; TPTK, 1:95.

³⁵ Michael, 2:45; TPTK, 1:97.

ideological motivation for overthrowing not just the Manchus, but also for overturning the entire imperial system as it was established by the first Chinese emperor, Ch'in Shih-huang. The imperial figure became just one more idol to smash.

This charge has not been taken seriously by those who have studied the Taiping. While many traditions of ruling authority have claimed for themselves divine origins and boasted of divine pretensions, the Chinese imperial system may have been doing these all one better. What was the meaning of the emperor's claim to the title of *Huang-ti*? What was the meaning of his claim to be, not just represent, the Son of Heaven?³⁶ There does seem to be an identification with deity here which does give substance to the Taiping charge of blasphemy.

³⁶ I have to say that I find the silence on this topic somewhat perplexing. Rodney Taylor in his *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990) does not even broach the subject. There are studies on the Imperial cults, that is those cults in which the emperor participated. We know what animals were sacrificed on what sacred day--we even know what color they were supposed to be: the three Great Offerings included a red bull, a black ram and a white pig. But I have yet to find a study which examines the religious aspects of the imperial person and office. If anyone could succeed at such a project, it would be Michael Loewe. Loewe goes into detail discussing the imperial cults in his entry in the *Cambridge History of China*, but he, too, says nothing about the cult of the emperor itself. Surprisingly, he leaves such a discussion to another contributor who refers to Ch'in Shih Huang-ti's assuming of the title of *Huang-ti* in a short page or two. Neither does Loewe address the issue, but more understandably since he is dealing with the Han Dynasty, in his comments on religion in his *Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 104 BC to AD 9* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974). Nevertheless, he addresses other aspects of the Ch'in imperial legacy; why not this one? All I can say is that this is a profound and perplexing gap in our knowledge of imperial Chinese culture.

As we have seen, Gutzlaff used the term *Shang-ti* throughout his translation, and not infrequently referred to God as *Huang Shang-ti*. Hung condemns the entire imperial identification with the God of Heaven in these words:

The Great God is the only emperor [ti]. The monarchs of this world may be called kings [wang] and that is all; but how can they be permitted to encroach a hair's breadth upon this? Even Jesus the Saviour, God's Crown Prince [Huang Shang-ti T'ai-tzu], is only called our Lord. In heaven above and earth below, among men, who is greater than Jesus? Even Jesus was not called emperor [ti]; who then dares assume the designation of emperor [ti]? One who does so only demonstrates his blasphemous presumptions, bringing down upon himself the eternal punishment of hell.³⁷

The one who dared assume this designation was the then present ruler, the Emperor Hsien-feng.

While Hung Hsiu-ch'uan certainly attempted to wield the authority of an emperor and he boasted his own connections to divinity, he always made it clear that only the Father could be called *Ti*, and that he was only to be called a king: a heavenly king, yes, but only a king. As he instructs his heavenly soldiers: "Henceforth, all soldiers and officers may address me as Sovereign (or, lord; the term is *chu*), and that is all; it is not appropriate to call me Supreme, lest you should offend the Heavenly Father."³⁸ Hung's objective was not just to rebel against this one emperor, but rather was to topple the entire imperial institution.

³⁷ Michael, 2:46. Michael's translation has God's son where I have God's Crown Prince; TPTK, 1:97. Quoting this line in the original Chinese accents the boldness of his challenge, "上帝乃是上帝也... 耶穌尚不得稱帝，他是何人敢面見稱帝者呼。"

³⁸ Michael, 2:107-108; TPTK, 1:67.

As he puts it in the “The Trimetrical Classic,” the rulers of the classical period all honored *Shang-ti* and revered heaven. It was only with the appearance of the Ch’in Dynasty that the ruler arrogated to himself the name of *Huang-ti*, and so “All were deluded by the devil, Those two thousand years.”³⁹ In this sense, the iconoclastic crusade which began in the temples of Kwangsi was intended to close in Peking’s imperial palace.

The Taiping enterprise was not only concerned with tearing down, it was also involved with building up. The kingdom which Hung envisioned establishing was intended to return to the point where the emperors had led China astray, only this time China was to take the right path. As the “Taiping Imperial Declaration” emphasizes, it was from the time of Ch’in and Han that China began straying from the path of righteousness. Hung held the emperors responsible for the resulting spread of idolatry and the general corruption of culture. In a very real sense, then, the faith in *Shang-ti* was vitally connected to the culture of the classical period, and Hung wanted to re-attach that connection. His purpose, however, was not conservative or reactionary—he was not some slavish proponent of a return to Confucianism, to be sure. Instead, his intention was to establish his Heavenly Kingdom on the foundations of classical China, and thereby continue its traditions into the present.

³⁹ Michael, 2:157; TPTK, 1:226

Jesus, the Anointed Prince

With all the debate surrounding the question of an appropriate rendering for the term for God, the student of church history, cognizant of the controversies which engulfed the early church, might expect that the debate over the title of Christ would exceed in intensity that of the debate over the name of God. That, though, was not the case. In fact, what is conspicuous by its absence is that very debate. As opposed to the volumes of articles concerning the name of God, The Chinese Repository only considered the title of Christ in a single footnote. There were six major councils in the history of the early church which addressed the nature and, consequently, the title of Jesus—was he Lord and God, or was he just Lord; there is not one minor church committee which addressed the nature and title of Jesus in these nineteenth-century missions.

This oversight did not begin with nineteenth-century missions. It was the Catholic missionaries in the early seventeenth century who first transliterated the title of Christ, in its Latin form at that, into Chinese, *Chi-li-szu-tu*.⁴⁰ But no uneasiness was expressed at that time, nor down to the time of Morrison who, following Bassett, seemingly naively just copied the term into his own translation

⁴⁰ The Catholic transliteration of Christ differed from the Protestant only in a minor fashion. The Catholic transliteration is 基利斯督. The Protestant is 基利士督. Both these transliterations usually appear in a shortened form as 基督.

of the Bible. This is not to say Morrison was unthinking in adopting the designation. He did experiment with using Jesus the Messiah in some passages, but still he failed to translate the term, falling back on transliterating the title, *Mi-sai-ya*.

But then this seems doubly culpable since the Greek term Christ was how the apostolic writers had rendered the Hebrew term Messiah in the first place: both terms signifying “anointed one” in their respective languages. One would think that among all the Protestant missionaries who followed Morrison, especially among those who were submitting articles to The Repository, that there would be some awareness of the inconsistency involved in their not following the apostles’ lead by translating the Hebrew title of Messiah into its Chinese equivalent just as the apostles in their own day had translated the Hebrew title of Messiah into its Greek equivalent (into, that is, Christ). But there was no awareness of this inconsistency, or the unnaturalness of calling Jesus, *Chi-li-shih-tu* (usually given in its shortened form, *Chi-tu*), as if that were his foreign family name. Why is this? Is it because the only truly appropriate rendering in Chinese for the title of Christ, a Greek term meaning “anointed one” which referred back to the Old Testament

tradition where kings were anointed by prophets and priests, was *T'ai-tsz* (the Crown Prince) and that title was already claimed by another?⁴¹

Liang A-fa had refrained from using the title *Chi-tu* (Christ) except when quoting directly from Morrison's New Testament. He most frequently used the title *chiu-chu* (salvation lord), and *chiu-shih-chu* (the lord of the world's salvation).⁴² Never, though, was this title imbued with the sense that the title savior could refer to a leader or ruler who would save his people from oppression. The Old and New Testaments' more holistic image of a savior who both rescues from sin and delivers from oppression was narrowed to the former. At times, Liang has no recourse but to use political language to describe the mission of Jesus. He is referred to as a king, or at least that is what he is accused of by the leaders of the Jews, and for that charge he is crucified. But, still, he is only the King of Judea.⁴³ Liang might write that God (here, *Shang-ti*, the God of Heaven) is the King of Kings, and even more atypically that He is the Emperor of Emperors.⁴⁴ But, Jesus remains only the King of Judea. Gutzlaff's Bible is also more conservative with respect to the title of Christ. Jesus is called *Chi-tu* and the wise men still ask at

⁴¹ I have found only one line in *The Repository* where the title of Christ was discussed. In that line, embedded in a footnote, Medhurst states that Morrison in one of his tracts had employed "Son of Heaven" (T'ien-tzu) for the title, a term which, Medhurst remarks, is "solely appropriated to the Emperor of China." See *The Repository*, July 1848, p. 342.

⁴² for example: for *chiu-chu*, see CSLY, p. 51.

for *chiu-shih-chu*, see CSLY, p. 75.

⁴³ CSLY, p. 142.

⁴⁴ CSLY; p. 364, p. 263.

Matthew 2:2 where is he who was born *Yu-t'ai kuo-jen-te wang* (king of the Jewish people's country)?

This failure to translate the meaning of the title of Christ prompted Hung Hsiu-ch'uan to come up with his own term for Christ's title which was in keeping both with his own vision and with the role he saw Jesus playing in the New Testament. Of course, it was the relation of God to Jesus and then of God to Hung which most bedeviled Hung. The confusion is understandable. For Hung believed that his own mission was to rule China, as appointed by *Shang-ti*. As ruler of the Chinese, he would assume the title of Son of Heaven. But if he was to serve as the Son of Heaven, where did that leave Jesus? Confounding the issue of the role of Jesus was the difficulty that the Taiping experienced with the nature of Jesus. Hung and his followers were devout monotheists. They worshipped God, the Father, and Him only. For that is what the first commandment called them to do. Jesus was not God (ie., *Shang-ti*), but rather, God's son.⁴⁵

Where Jesus was given a title, there were three favored by the Taiping. One of these was *T'ien-hsiung* (天兄), which is translated by Michael as Heavenly Elder Brother. An allusion is probably being made here to the ruler as the Son of Heaven. A second title had a more direct historical referent, *T'ai-tzu* (太子). It was the title given to the heir apparent, the prince who was appointed as the next-

⁴⁵ This is similar to that most resilient of the early church heresies: Arianism.

in-line to the throne, the Crown Prince, which is the virtual Chinese equivalent to the meaning of Messiah in Hebrew and Christ in Greek.⁴⁶ A third title conferred upon Jesus, *T'ai-hsiung* (太兄), is a bit more problematic, but which, given its connections to *T'ai-tzu*, seems best rendered as Eldest Prince.

The degree of Hung's confusion on these issues is copiously documented for us in the annotations he wrote into his revised edition of the Taiping New Testament. Most of these comments involve the working out of his own identity as a Son of Heaven in relation to Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Many of the annotations involve the defining of Jesus' title according to Jesus' own relation to *Shang-ti*. The annotation above Matthew 10, for example, proclaims that, "The Eldest Prince (*T'ai-hsiung*) himself gives proof that he is God's (*Shang-ti*'s) son."⁴⁷ This passage is quickly followed by Matthew 16 where Hung states that *Chi-tu* (Christ)

⁴⁶ This title given to Jesus is not used as frequently as the title of *T'ai-hsiung*. However, it appears in some highly significant contexts. For example, it is used, as we saw above, in the annotations at Matthew 17 and I John 5, both passages critical to the identity of Jesus, Hung states very directly that *Chi-tu* is *Shang-ti*'s Crown Prince (*T'ai-tzu*); it is the title used in the "San-tzu Ching"; see TPTK, 1: 226. Also it appears in this line from the "*T'ai-p'ing Chao-shu*," "救世教主耶穌皇帝太子也." see TPTK, 1: 97.

T'ien-hsiung (Heavenly Elder Brother) is the most frequently used title in the Taiping version of the Ten Commandments, the "*T'ien-t'iao Shu*"; see TPTK, 1: 75-77.

The "*T'ai-p'ing T'ien-jih*" contains one of the more complete and definitive summaries of the titles for Jesus in this line, "救世主天兄基督是皇帝太子." see TPTK, 2: 631.

⁴⁷ *Ch'in-Ting Chien-I-Chao*, Matthew 10.

I have used the translations in Michael for this annotation, see p. 228, and for the others, also. The only change I have made is his translation of *T'ai-hsiung* as Elder brother. This is the most frequently used title Hung attributes to Jesus. Though this term does not have an entry in a dictionary such as the *Chung-wen Ta Tz'u-tien*, it seems that this Chinese title would be better rendered "Eldest Prince" or "Crown Prince," since Hung uses this title interchangeably with *T'ai-tzu* (Crown Prince or Heir Apparent) as I attempt to demonstrate in this passage. See also the discussion at note 46 above.

is God's (*Shang-ti's*) son. At Matthew 17, Hung remarks that *Chi-tu* (Christ) is God's *T'ai-tzu* (Crown Prince). So we have *T'ien-hsiung* (the Heavenly elder brother) is God's son at Matthew 10, *Chi-tu* is God's son at Matthew 16, and *Chi-tu* is God's *T'ai-tzu* at Matthew 17. Combining these attributions, we have *T'ai-hsiung* is Christ (*Chi-tu*) and *T'ai-tzu* is Christ; it would seem to follow, then, that for Hung the titles *T'ai-hsiung* and *T'ai-tzu*, when applied to Jesus, can both be translated Crown Prince. Whether we can subject these annotations to this kind of analysis is something of a moot point, but there is some identification of the titles, and we have seen this same identification of titles in other contexts. We conclude, then, that for Hung, Jesus' proper title was Crown Prince.

While there is some confusion at this level, Hung is very clear that Christ, the Crown Prince, is not to be identified with *Shang-ti*. They are distinct beings: they are father and son. At Mark 12:28-34, Hung chastises those Christians who have confused the persons of the Father and the Son. "The Eldest Prince (*T'ai-hsiung*) clearly proclaims that there is only one Supreme Lord. Why did later disciples through some error feel that Christ was God (*Shang-ti*)? If that were really true, this would be so: there would be two Gods (*Shang-ti*). Respect this."⁴⁸ Hung's comments above the fifth chapter of I John, where one of the most strongly Trinitarian statements in the Bible is recorded (a passage which is omitted in

⁴⁸ Ch'in-ting Chien-i-chao; Michael, 2:229.

modern versions), clears up some of the confusion, “Now the Eldest Prince (T’ai-hsiung) has descended into the world and issued a sacred directive instructing me, saying ‘Hsiu-ch’uan, my own brother, later on you must not proclaim yourself ‘Ti.’ Our father is ‘Ti.’”⁴⁹ The understanding that Hung Hsiu-ch’uan arrived at was that he in this time and place was appointed by *Shang-ti*, the Father, to serve as the ruler over the world from the T’ai-p’ing kingdom, just as Jesus had been appointed to rule over the world from Judea.

Hung, as the second son of *Shang-ti*, was the next in line after Jesus to rule the universal kingdom. Jesus had ruled in Judea, but then was killed. The role of ruling the kingdom now was left to Jesus’ younger brother.

The Kingdom of Heaven and the Heavenly Kingdom

As the Son of Heaven, Hung was to rule over the kingdom of Heaven that was on earth. This third construct, the kingdom of Heaven, is also not exclusive to the Medhurst-Gutzlaff version of the Bible, though, it is exclusive to the Gospel of Matthew; in the other three gospels, the designation is “kingdom of God.” Nevertheless, in either rendering, its potential political associations are self-evident, while its cultural connections are not as clearly manifest.

⁴⁹ Ch’in-ting Chien-i-chao; *Michael*, 2:234-235.

Medhurst had discussed the intricate dilemmas posed by imperial associations with divinity. This was true in his choice of the term *Shang-ti*; it was also true in his translation of the phrase, kingdom of Heaven. But how could this phrase be translated without employing both of these politically-charged terms, kingdom and Heaven? As we have seen, even the latter idea in a Chinese context bore strong political implications. Indeed where in the West an expression such as kingdom of Heaven might be interpreted as less politically threatening than the word kingdom used alone, in the Chinese context, the compound term could very easily be interpreted as more threatening. This is because of the place the doctrine of Heaven occupies in traditional Chinese political thought.

Liang A-fa, who as we have seen tried to be more circumspect about the implications of these associations, had his share of problems staying true to this tendency. For example, he included in his tracts the Isaiah 45 passage which refers to the heavenly host, 萬軍, and he frequently refers to God's decree as a holy edict.⁵⁰ Gutzlaff who was not so reticent about these implications followed Morrison in speaking of this host as heavenly soldiers and God's decrees as holy edicts.

Both Liang and Hung confronted the issue of these associations of Heaven with the imperial cult at different points in their writing. It was a serious issue: in

⁵⁰ CSLY, p. 170, 263.

encouraging the common people to worship Heaven, these commoners would be encroaching on an exclusive imperial right to this worship.⁵¹ Since the worship of Heaven was an imperial prerogative, a commoner who worshipped Heaven would thereby be committing a seditious act. Liang A-fa had tried to counter such a charge by arguing that the Father of all should be worshipped by all, regardless of whether the position one occupies was noble or mean, thereby making such worship an expression of filial piety.⁵² Hung, too, spoke to this tradition when he remarked in his introduction to the Ten Commandments: “Now those whose minds have been deluded by the demons say that only the monarch can worship the Great God. However the Great God (Huang Shang-ti) is the universal Father of all the mortal world...If you say that monarchs (chun-chang) alone can worship the Great God, we beg to ask you, as for the parents of a family, is it only the eldest son who can be filial and obedient to his parents?”⁵³ Both of these men treat the matter of worshipping Heaven as a matter of filial piety, which not even the least Confucian of emperors could argue with.

As for the political associations of the term for kingdom, these associations were apparently too evident to both Morrison and Liang A-fa. In this construct, we have

⁵¹ According to Michael Loewe, the worship of Heaven was established as the emperor's first duty only in A.D. 5 during the rule of Wang Mang. See Chapter 12, “The Religious and Intellectual Background,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, Volume 1 (1986), p. 664.

⁵² CSLY, p. 150.

⁵³ Michael, 2:113; TPTK, 1:73.

a case where it is not that Gutzlaff politicized a religious term, but where Morrison attempted to spiritualize a political term. Liang, in accordance with the Morrison translation, favored the idea of a kingdom reign over the more terrestrial feel of a kingdom realm. For example, when Jesus speaks of the kingdom of Heaven at Matthew 5:19, he warns those who teach the little ones to break the commandments of God. Such people, Liang has Jesus saying, will be the smallest under Heaven's reign--rather than in the Kingdom of Heaven-- as Liang resorts to the construct *t'ien-wang*, rather than the more natural translation which Gutzlaff and others adopted, *t'ien-kuo* (kingdom of Heaven).⁵⁴ Likewise, in a passage more familiar to Western readers, the Lord's Prayer, the petitioner prays that God's reign will come to earth, while Medhurst-Gutzlaff and others following them, have the wording more familiar to Western ears, "thy kingdom come."⁵⁵

But there were some places where using the more territorial work *t'ien-kuo* (kingdom of Heaven) could not be avoided without seriously violating the meaning of a passage. In the Good Words the heavenly kingdom is first introduced in Liang A-fa's reference to the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus makes repeated mention of this ethereal address, as in, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven."⁵⁶ Liang does not really discuss the location of this

⁵⁴ CSLY, p. 53. Morrison is the exception in this translation. He even parted company with his predecessor, Bassett.

⁵⁵ CSLY, p. 59. For Gutzlaff's rendering, see Hsin-I-Chao, Mt. 6:10.

⁵⁶ CSLY, p. 52.

kingdom until thirty pages later where he states that there are two referents for the term, one indicating the everlasting blessing of *T'ien-t'ang*, the Heavenly Hall, a place where the soul goes after a person dies; the other referent is the common gathering (*kung-hui*) of those who worship the God of Heaven, *Shang-ti* (*Shen-t'ien Shang-ti*) here on earth.⁵⁷

This passage is a significant one. For it provided a connection for the Taiping between their forming of a gathering, that is a *hui* (meeting; or probably in this region overrun by secret societies, it is more naturally translated society), and their establishing the kingdom of Heaven on earth. Indeed, the Taiping replicated the theological connections between the church, heaven and the kingdom of Heaven on earth in their own historical development: the Taiping movement was conceived as the Society of God-Worshippers, and matured into the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.

Liang includes two allusions to the Heavenly Kingdom in this passage, but there is still a third referent to the Heavenly Kingdom to which Liang did not, in this passage, allude. Yet it is the third referent which is the vital link between the society of believers and the Heavenly Hall which is the final resting place of the soul. This is the millennial kingdom of the Book of Revelation. Millennialism has been linked to rebellion throughout early modern Chinese history. It has also been linked to revolution, in China and in Europe. E.J. Hobsbawm in his classic work,

⁵⁷ CSLY, p. 87.

Social Bandits and Primitive Rebels, declared that millenarian movements were the only primitive form of social protest which could legitimately be called revolutionary, and he emphasized the characteristic shared by millennial and revolutionary movements of the hope of a complete and radical change in the world.⁵⁸ The Taiping movement had such a hope of complete and radical change.

Liang did also, but to a point. There is only one place in his tract where Liang cites from the Book of Revelation, the Revelation 22 passage in which the river of life is depicted as flowing out from under the throne of God. Liang ignores the passage immediately before this, Revelation 21 which portrays the descent of the Heavenly City to earth, and many other passages from the Book of Revelation as well.⁵⁹ Liang, reflecting the prevailing view of such matters among nineteenth-century missionaries, fervently discourses on the subject of the coming end of the age, while coolly avoiding all discussion of a territorial fulfillment of these promises in the present age. He ardently discourses on the subject of judgment, while only lukewarmly and infrequently mentioning the apocalyptic battles which are to precede the advent of the millennium.

Instead, Liang reserved his apocalyptic language for describing the horrors of hell, and this was a topic and theme which he returned to again and again in the

⁵⁸ E.J. Hobsbawm, Social Bandits and Primitive Rebels (The Free Press, 1959), p. 57.

⁵⁹ CSLY, p. 321. I did not find any reference in Liang to the Heavenly City which is described in Revelation Twenty-one and after which Hung named his capital.

pages of the Good Words. Actually, he never leaves this theme. His book of pamphlets begins with the judgment of Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden and it ends 500 pages later with a description of the Last Judgment, when the Salvation Lord with the help of one billion angels will gather all the world's people before his throne. At that time, as Liang describes it, the angels will open the Book of Good and Evil (*shan-e shu-chuan*), and then the heavenly messengers will separate the good people from the evil, separating the sheep (*mien-yang*) from the goats (*shan-yang*). The Salvation Lord will commend the sheep who are on his right hand, for when He was hungry they gave Him something to eat, when He was naked, they clothed Him, and so as a result they are to be rewarded with the kingdom. Liang does not say too much about this kingdom. But to those who did not do such, the goats on his left, they are to be cursed and are ordered to enter the eternal fire (*ch'ang-huo*) where they will suffer the flames of a scorching fire (*lie-huo*). After the judgment, the end will come when the Salvation Lord will command the Divine Messengers to use the fire of the Heavenly Father's raging wrath to burn the entire earth.⁶⁰ Liang counsels his readers in words which when inverted echo those which a Ch'ing official had used to mock sectarian Buddhist scriptures, "If you cannot suffer the bitter pain of a fire's burning in this

⁶⁰ CSLY, pps. 495-502.

earth, how will you suffer the bitter pain of the eternal fire in the life to come?"⁶¹

Liang reminds us in these pages that New Testament religion could be every bit as terrifying as Old Testament religion, and this was a fact often overlooked by Western observers who characterized Taiping religion as excessively colored by the Old Testament God of wrath. Wrath, judgment and the apocalypse are present in the New Testament as well, though it should not be overlooked that in Liang these events are described as taking place outside the scope of history; the kingdom which the faithful would inherit comes at the end of history.

Hung's conception of heaven's reign was at once more earthly, more present, and more dynamic than that presented in Liang's tracts. He believed in a kingdom that was coming, even now, through the instrumentality of the Taiping host. Whether this belief was inspired more by sectarian Buddhist ideas of the coming of the final age, or by just a naive reading of the Christian scriptures is hard to ascertain. There certainly is no contradiction between the two visions. The dynamic element is certainly present in the Bible: such is the import of the Lord's Prayer after all-- "may your kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven." And, as Hung notes, Jesus introduces his Judean ministry with the proclamation that the

⁶¹ CSLY, p. 100. I am alluding to the comments made by the official who compiled the P'o-hsieh Hsiang-pien (A Detailed Refutation of Heterodoxy). He had mocked the Buddhists by asking whether the tortures that he inflicted on them here on earth could ever be surpassed by the tortures they feared they would have to endure in hell. See chapter 1.2.

kingdom is drawing nigh, with the Chinese rendering more closely conveying the idea of movement: “T’ien-kuo chin-yi.”⁶²

Where Liang would only take a cursory glance at millennial and apocalyptic passages, Hung would set his gaze on them, enthralled with such images as that in Revelation 21 where the New Jerusalem, the Holy City, descends to earth. He comments, “The New Jerusalem, the Heavenly capital [T’ien-ching], is where God and Christ descended into the world, bringing both myself and the Young Monarch to be the sovereigns, establishing the heaven of the Heavenly Court. God’s Heaven [Shang-ti T’ien-t’ang] now exists among men. It is fulfilled. Respect this.”⁶³ In Hung’s view of salvation in history, there would be no waiting for heaven in the ‘sweet bye and bye’; God’s reign on earth commenced with the establishing of the Heavenly Capital.

Apart from the references in Hung’s annotations which are related to the identity of Christ, the most frequently appearing references are those which relate to this dynamic kingdom. Eugene Boardman, reflecting an older Protestantism’s understanding of this doctrine, finds Hung’s dynamic view deficient: “The phrase ‘the kingdom of Heaven’ or its alternate ‘the kingdom of God’ was considered by Hung to refer to his own regime, whereas the sayings of Jesus in the New

⁶² “天國近矣。” Hsin-I-Chao, Ch’in-Ting Chien-I-Chao; Mt. 4:17.

⁶³ Ch’in-Ting Ch’ien-I-Chao, Revelation 21; Michael, 2: 237.

Testament describe Christ's kingdom as an intangible essence not of this world...the 'kingdom' was not a terrestrial conception."⁶⁴ Such a view expresses the understanding of the early nineteenth-century missionary more than it does that of Jesus, or the consensus of theologians today. Hung's view, in fact, approximates today's understanding more closely.⁶⁵ As Hung comments on Matthew 5, "It is the kingdom of Heaven which the Heavenly Father and Heavenly Elder Brother now have descended to establish." And with even more clarity, he adds,

This one great kingdom of which we speak includes Heaven above and earth below. In Heaven above and on the earth beneath there is the Heavenly Kingdom. Heaven above, earth below is one unity.

Don't mistakenly consider that God the Father's Heavenly kingdom only indicates that Heaven above is the Heavenly Kingdom. For the Elder Brother prophesied saying that the Heavenly Kingdom is close at hand. [Mt. 4:17] Now the Heavenly Kingdom comes into the world. Presently, the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly Brother have come down into the world to create this Heavenly kingdom.⁶⁶

This dynamic understanding of the kingdom, as represented in the Bible and in Hung's thought, is associated with an apocalyptic view of history, with God intervening in history to judge and to save. Such a view of history was hardly

⁶⁴ Eugene Boardman, Christian Influence Upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion, 1851-1864 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952), p. 108.

⁶⁵ The relationship between the present realization of the kingdom of God and the future fulfillment is now often expressed in the phrase, "the kingdom is already present, but not yet in its fullness," emphasizing the idea that there is some fulfillment in the present age. Liberation theology has taken this understanding one step further by proclaiming that the kingdom in its fullness is already present. Two Liberation theologies which have helped my own understanding of the import of these millennial teachings are: Jose Miranda's Communism in the Bible (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982) and Leonardo and Clodovis Boff's Salvation and Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).

⁶⁶ Ch'in-Ting Ch'ien-I-Chao, Matthew 5; see also Michael, 2: 227.

absent from Chinese traditions. One of those traditions was the classical idea of the mandate of Heaven, which envisioned a moral Heaven ruling over the affairs of men. Heaven appointed kings and sovereigns to implement Heaven's order among men, and kingly laws could not with impunity violate this moral order. If the ruler proved morally unsuited to the carrying out of his task, Heaven would remove the mandate and the ruler.

It is significant that the document which draws most heavily on this idea of the Mandate of Heaven is that entitled, the "Taiping T'ien-jih." This title is translated by Michael as "The Heavenly Chronicle," but the phrase *t'ien-jih* seems to function more as an apocalyptic allusion to the "Day of the Lord" (*Chu-chih-jih*), the day of the Lord's visitation, as described in Matthew 24 and I Thessalonians 5. Both passages were scrutinized and commented on by Hung, and such an interpretation better fits with the content of the "Taiping T'ien-jih" as well. In this Taiping document, the authors are arguing, using classical precedent, that the Manchus have lost Heaven's mandate through their morally unconscionable rule. Thus there is an identification of the loss of the mandate of Heaven with the biblical idea of the Day of the Lord, the Day of Judgment.

There was another Chinese tradition which the Taiping could draw on in their teachings about this dynamic kingdom: the tradition of sectarian Buddhist

millennialism.⁶⁷ The belief in a Buddhist millennium was shared by all the different Buddhist sects, not just those associated with the sects which took the name of the White Lotus. What, though, was it about this particular Taiping millennialism which made it so successful as compared to earlier attempts such as the White Lotus? Part of it was that Taiping millennialism bought more into the Confucian idea of Heaven's mandate than did the sects--and so it truly was more Chinese than the other sects, in being more concerned with historical and national salvation. The Taiping version also emphasized the value of this world over the next. This was millennialism, but millennialism with a difference: *Shang-ti* entered history, not to end it, but to bring his kingdom into it. This unquestionably clicked more with the secular Chinese mind than had Buddhist ideas of salvation outside of history.

Hung's vision nevertheless coincides closely with White Lotus visions of the millennium in one respect: Hung's kingdom, as with the White Lotus, was to be ushered in with a great apocalyptic battle. As Hung announces in his annotations at Matthew 24 and 25, passages that are deeply colored with apocalyptic language and heavily laden with apocalyptic content, "Now the Elder Brother [or, Crown

⁶⁷ In the same chapter where he discussed the connections between millenarianism and revolution, Hobsbawm ruled out the possibility of religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism as capable of inspiring such movements; pp. 57-58. He spoke this way because he could not conceive of a religious tradition which saw the world as a constant flux as having the wherewithal to inspire a movement which would radically change the nature of that world.

Prince] has come down and is seated on his glorious throne, and all the nations are gathered before his temple. It is fulfilled. Respect this.”⁶⁸ What had been promised in the Old Testament had been fulfilled in Jesus’ kingship; what was prophesied in the New Testament was being fulfilled in Hung’s own kingship.

This apocalyptic battle is vividly portrayed in the book of Revelation, where Satan, depicted as a red dragon, attacks the saints. Though this is one of several images used to depict Satan, the fact that Chinese imperial power was represented in the symbol of the dragon makes this image the most volatile of those employed. Rudolf Wagner also notes the religious connections Gutzlaff had made in his book, The Life of Taou-Kuang, concerning the emperor and this symbol, and how Gutzlaff provided an “elaborate description of the religious practices of the Daoguang emperor” focusing particularly on the Llamist worship of the Black Dragon, which the emperor had adopted.⁶⁹ Several pages earlier Wagner relates how Gutzlaff had linked this image of the black dragon with the figure of Satan. It would not stretch the imagination to posit that Gutzlaff might have passed on to his apprentice in the evangelism craft, Rev. I.J. Roberts, a sense of the loathsomeness of this religion in the eyes of *Shang-ti*.

⁶⁸ Ch'in-Ting Ch'ien-I-Chao, Matthew 24 and 25; Michael, 2: 229.

⁶⁹ Rudolf Wagner, Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion, Chinese Research Monograph, no. 25 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 64.

In the apocalyptic scene of Revelation 12, we read of a war in heaven where, as the Gutzlaff version has it, “**天上有戰。 。 。 天使戰龍**” (In Heaven, there is a war...the angels make war on the dragon).⁷⁰ This passage must have proved somewhat disconcerting to the Chinese since they were used to regarding the dragon as a symbol of good power, specifically imperial power, and not evil. Hung’s own fascination with this passage prompted him to compose one of his longest annotations, which in part reads, “God has especially dispatched me to be born into the world and eradicate this serpent...This great red dragon is Abaddon, that is, the demon Yen-lo. Respect this.”⁷¹

Wagner tells us that the Taipings redeemed the symbol of the dragon by distinguishing between dragons of different colors: the golden dragon remained the symbol of good power, while dragons of a different hue—specifically red and black—designated symbols of other more malevolent beings.⁷² But as Spence reminds us, even this solution was not free of difficulties, for Hung’s original vision had portrayed the Heavenly Father as seated on a throne dressed in a black dragon robe, and this developed into a point of contention between Hung and the Eastern King.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ch’in-Ting Chien-I-Chao, Hsin-I-Chao; Revelation 12:7. This translation is not the product of missionary manipulation, but is a direct translation of the original Greek.

⁷¹ Ch’in-Ting Ch’ien-I-Chao, Revelation 12; Michael, 2: 236-237.

⁷² Wagner, p. 41, referring to a passage in “T’ien-fu Hsia-fan Chao-shu.” See Michael, 2: 217.

⁷³ Jonathan Spence, God’s Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), p. 220-221.

The book of Matthew, chapters 24 and 25, further discourses on apocalyptic themes. In these passages, Jesus alludes to a final cosmic battle after which Jesus himself would appear as “the lightning that comes out of the east.” Whereupon, he would set up his throne and the nations of the earth would gather before him for the final judgment. Jesus’ prophecies elicit a two word comment from Hung: *ying-yen-le* (it is fulfilled).⁷⁴

Hung at times saw Jesus as this coming king and at times saw himself as the prophesied coming king. The emotional urgency which evangelical religion associated with the second, more triumphal, coming, of Christ was now transferred to Hung’s own crusade. At Revelation 12, the outcome of the cosmic struggle between the dragon and the angels is a rout in which the devil and his minions are cast down to earth where they proceed to persecute the holy ones. And again, Hung writes, “it is fulfilled.” At Revelation 19, the battle scene in the final conflict is graphically depicted,

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war, and on his head are many crowns... He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven are following him, riding on white horses... Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the wrath of God almighty.

⁷⁴ Ch’in-Ting Ch’ien-I-Chao, Matthew 24, 25; Michael, 2: 229.

Hung's only comment appears at the end of the passage which speaks of the serpents and beast being thrown into the lake of fire. Hung comments on this, and he again declares, "It is fulfilled. Respect this."⁷⁵

For the establishing of the Taiping kingdom, the heavenly army had to fight many such battles, yet in these battles, they had the assurance that Shang-ti would be leading his holy soldiers to victory. As it is recorded in the "True Testament," shortly after the announcement of the forming of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, Hung exhorts his soldiers to continue their struggle:

All soldiers and officers throughout the army, both great and small, I earnestly beseech you to obey the Heavenly Commands; and with joy and exultation, with majesty and courage... to march forward in a body and together uphold the principles of the Heavenly Father and Heavenly Elder Brother.⁷⁶

And so the apocalypse began.

The Chosen People

There was a fourth and, for our purposes, final construct which the Taiping took from the Bible and made their own, that of themselves as God's chosen people. With this construct, we see the process of indigenization of Taiping Christian sectarianism as complete. What may be so obvious in the Taiping identity that its

⁷⁵ *Ch'in-Ting Ch'ien-I-Chao*, Revelation 19, 20; Michael, 2: 237.

⁷⁶ "T'ien-ming Chao-chih Shu," Michael, 2:106; TPTK, 1:65.

significance has been overlooked by most scholars is this matter of the Taiping's understanding of their mission as the chosen people of God. But it is a problematic concept. For while this sense of chosenness encouraged Chinese nationalism, it at the same time undermined it. Chinese history was no longer seen as something unique. Rather Chinese history was now being interpreted in the context of a universal Christian history. So Chinese nationalism gains and it loses in this attempt: it gains a sense of chosenness and it loses a sense of its uniqueness.

It is problematic on a second, more practical, level as well. For in the process of interpreting Chinese history within the context of a universal Christian history, the foreignness of Christianity became awkwardly apparent. Nothing could have been more jarringly discordant for the Taiping soldier and the Chinese subject than to hear the events of the history of Israel—descriptions of heroes such as Moses, of villains such as Pharaoh, and places such as Mount Sinai—all transliterated into Chinese: foreign tales in a strange tongue. Such accounts must have bewildered even the most worldly Chinese, and painted Taiping Christian sectarianism with a distinctively foreign brush. This very dissonance though at the same time testifies to Taiping earnestness and zealous idealism in remaining true to their beliefs, and also highlights the tremendous distance that had to be traveled in order to make their faith into a truly Chinese faith, a faith that could be embraced by soldier and

peasant alike. We will examine this sense of chosenness first by looking at how the Taiping identified with various moments in Israel's history.

As we have already seen, Liang A-fa was very selective in his use of the (Morrison) Bible. He included no passage from Exodus through Deuteronomy, or from any of the historical books, all of which portray the national salvation of Israel, and we have suggested that this conforms to Liang's overall tendency to emphasize an individual, spiritual salvation to the neglect of a more national and this-worldly salvation. Liang did not neglect such ideas entirely, and he did refer to Moses in a few scattered sentences, but in terms of emphasis, his treatment amounted to a neglect of such material. Here again, then, we see evidence for the limited impact of Liang A-fa on the Taiping. For Liang A-fa was very much a New Testament work (only twelve of the 57 biblical passages directly quoted in Good Words are from the Old Testament, and many of these passages are limited to a couple of verses). The comment of so many observers of the Taiping religion was that it seemed to be more of an Old Testament religion than a New Testament one, and the Taiping God seemed to act more like the Old Testament God than the New Testament one. The point that I have been making in this chapter is that with a few qualifications, such an observation is true, and while Hung picked up some of these ideas and themes from Liang A-fa, he must have obtained most of his Old Testament ideas from the Old Testament itself.

It was Hung's catechetical sojourn at Roberts' chapel where he first encountered the salvation of the people of Israel, the people chosen by *Shang-ti*, in its full historical context. Whether Hung identified himself as a kind of Moses, the chosen leader of an oppressed people is not certain, but that he did see in the experiences of Israel's oppression in Egypt a type of the oppression suffered first by his own ethnic group, the Hakkas, and then his own people, the Chinese, at the hands of the Manchus, is attested to by foreign observers and by the Taipings themselves. After recording Hung Jen-kan's account of the rise of the Taiping, Rev. Theodore Hamberg was the first foreigner to comment on this identification, "They no doubt supposed that the promised possession of the heavenly kingdom (天國) referred to China, and that the inheritance of God's chosen race, applied to Hung Siu-tshuen."⁷⁷ Captain Fishbourne of the British steamer, the *Hermes*, sailed the first Western ship to visit the Heavenly Capital. He himself was a member of the nineteenth-century's principal claimant to the title of chosen race, the Anglo-saxon, and he had this to say, "It is evident the insurgents are seeking to establish a species of theocracy, something like what they conceive that of Israel to have been; Israel, whose history they have always considered a type of their own, modified by

⁷⁷ Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-Siu-Tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-Si Insurrection* (Hong Kong: China Mail Office, 1854; reprint ed., San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1975), p. 24.

their ideas of the New Testament.”⁷⁸ Other less sympathetic observers disputed the assertion that their ideas had been modified in any way by ideas from the New Testament.

The Taiping had begun the process of identification with this example of a national salvation early on. By the time of the publication of the “T’ai-p’ing T’ien-jih” in 1848, at about the time when the Society of God-Worshippers was taking steps in the direction of the Heavenly Kingdom, the Taiping were writing of that deliverance which has proved so compelling to generations of oppressed people throughout history. After a short prologue, which sets forth the Genesis creation story, the Israelites and their antagonist are introduced, “...the marquis persecuted them harshly. The Great God was greatly angered and descended to rescue the Israelites, leading them out of Egypt and across the Red Sea, displaying great divine powers and destroying the demon marquis (yao-hou). Coming to Sinai, the Great God himself delivered the Ten Heavenly Commandments. But later ages frequently fell victim to the schemes of evil demons and repeatedly violated the Heavenly Commandments.”⁷⁹ There are several elements in this retelling which demand a closer examination. Foremost among these is the identification of a worldly ruler opposing God’s chosen people with the image of a

⁷⁸ E.G. Fishbourne, Impressions of China and the Present Revolution (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1855), pp. viii-ix.

⁷⁹ Michael, 2:52-53; TPTK, 2:631.

demon. It was a small step for Hung to apply this demonization of a ruler to China's own situation, and the account of Pharaoh's oppressive rule made it easy for the Taiping battalions also to accept an application of this story to the ruling Manchus.

It was with a second episode of Israel's early history, the covenant-making at the foot of Mt. Sinai, where the Taipings come even closer to an identification with the Old Testament idea of a chosen people. Nothing else displayed this self understanding as the chosen people more than the Taiping reverence for the Ten Commandments. So prominent was the place of the commandments in the religion of the Taiping that the Chinese common people often referred to their faith as the "Ten Commandments religion."⁸⁰ In the next chapter of this paper, we will have an opportunity to appreciate just how seriously the Taiping leaders took this characterization of their movement. But here it is enough just to note that their reverence for and submission to the decalogue was seen in their fervent iconoclasm and in their reluctance to forge too close a tie with the secret societies, policies which if moderated could have won even more people over to their cause. Such moderation, nevertheless, came at too high a price for the Taiping.

This reverence for the decalogue was not passed onto the Taiping by Liang A-fa. Though he did briefly refer to Moses and the handing down of the Ten

⁸⁰ Fishbourne, p. 180.

Commandments, he nowhere provides a full listing, and only indirectly mentions five of them.⁸¹ More significantly, he did not put them in their historical context where Israel was entering into a covenant with Jehovah, promising to obey him as their God and ruler, a historical context which any version of the Bible would have provided. This is not to say that Liang did not pass onto the Taiping the sense that obedience to *Shang-ti's* commands was an essential part of the religion of *Shang-ti*. He did. This is reflected in Hung's earliest poems where Hung writes, "Obey the sacred commandments, worship the true God; at death it will be easy to ascend to heaven."⁸² Indeed in all the early accounts, there is a standard three-part formula for becoming a follower of *Shang-ti*: cast off demons, worship the true God, and obey the heavenly commandments.

Yet while Liang may have passed on the sense that obedience to *Shang-ti's* general commands was a good thing, obedience to God's specific Ten Commandments was not enjoined upon Hung until he visited the Baptist chapel at Canton. Not only did he first study the decalogue in its covenant-making context there, but he also obtained from Roberts the 1840 Baptist publication of the

⁸¹ Liang's indirect mention comes when he quotes from Jesus' own summary of the decalogue in his conversation with the rich young ruler from Matthew 19:18-19. Jesus replied to the man's query about what he must do to gain eternal life by saying, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself." The last commandment is a summary of the decalogue, rather than a part of the ten. See CSLY, p. 88.

⁸² Michael, 2: 5.

decatalogue which was to serve as the basis for the Taiping version and which became an integral part of their corporate worship.⁸³ Such prohibitions as “Do not lie” or “Do not kill” would hardly have seemed out of place in a Chinese religious setting, especially since the Buddhists had a list of prohibitions themselves (ten in number in fact, with the first five applying to lay and clergy alike). But what was foreign about the ten Christian commandments had to do with the first four: those having to do with idolatry, with honoring the name of *Shang-ti*, and with hallowing the Sabbath. These four, then, would have distinguished the Taiping list from others.

The obedience which was enjoined to these commandments was not understood as some formal adherence to a written code, but rather, especially since the first four concerned the honoring of *Shang-ti*, it was an obedience which was a personal and corporate pledge of loyalty to *Shang-ti*. By this oath, *Shang-ti* became the Taiping god and they became His people. For *Shang-ti* was the true “Ti;” earthly rulers were only kings. The Ten Commandments were *Shang-ti*'s edicts. Exodus 20:1 in the Gutzlaff version has this introduction to the decatalogue, “**皇上帝諭此諸言。**” The first commandment as it reads in today's average American pew Bible reads, “I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt have have no other

⁸³ Jen Yu-wen, The Taiping Revolutionary Movement (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 161.

gods before me.” Gutzlaff’s Old Testament rendering of this commandment reads, “毋在本面崇異神,” while the “T’ai-p’ing T’ien-t’iao” reads simply and positively, “崇拜皇上帝” (Worship the Glorious *Shang-ti*). But it is the third commandment which implicated the imperial system in the sin of blasphemy. Gutzlaff translated the commandment thus, “毋瀆稱汝上主皇上帝之名夫皇上帝無不罪妄稱其名者,” (Do not blaspheme the name of your High Lord the Glorious *Shang-ti*; the Glorious *Shang-ti* will certainly condemn as guilty he who recklessly calls upon his name)⁸⁴ while the “T’ien-t’iao” followed this translation, and then added, “不好妄題皇上帝之名”(It is not good to recklessly speak out the name of the Glorious *Shang-ti*). The poem that accompanies the “T’ien-t’iao” is particularly revealing: “our exalted Father is infinitely honorable; those who violate the proper boundary and profane his name seldom come to a good end.”⁸⁵ This translation of the third commandment is that over which The Repository had expressed its misgivings, fearing its political repercussions.

The Taiping identification with the history of Israel shaped their emerging nationalism. Israel was the people chosen by God in the past to embody his salvation and represent his claims to the world. According to the Taiping, China was to serve in that role in the present. It is here that we can best witness this

⁸⁴ Chiu-I-Chao, Ch’in-Ting Chiu-I-Chao; Exodus 20: 1-7.

⁸⁵ Michael, 2:119-120; TPTK, 1:78.

process whereby the Taiping lost the traditional sense of China's uniqueness as being the ruler of all under Heaven, while gaining a new sense of the unique role which *Shang-ti* had prepared for them to play on the world's stage. In many ways the old vision of China's place in the world was not lost at all; it just became conflated into the new vision. This new vision gave birth to and shaped the Taiping's nascent nationalism. In the process, this new vision gave birth to a paradox: through adopting a foreign doctrine, the Taiping created a sense of the unique role of the Chinese nation.

China had always seen itself as the center of the world, as the center of all that was under heaven. With the arrival of the West, this vision of the world was being challenged. Hung placed China at the center once again in a new, Christian vision of the world order. So it is in the Taiping version of the "Three Character Classic" (*San-tzu Ching*) that Hung begins with God's creation of the world and then moves to the special place of Israel in this world. After this, Hung introduces China's place, "Throughout the whole world, there is only one God; The Great Lord and Ruler, without a second. The Chinese in early ages were looked after by God; Together with foreign states they walked in one way. From the time of P'an Ku down to the Three Dynasties; They honored God, as history records."⁸⁶ He then chronicles how the first ruler who took the title *Huang-ti* (emperor), the Emperor

⁸⁶ Michael, 2:156.

Ch'in Shih-huang, led the whole people astray, and those rulers who came after him followed him in his error. But God in his pity sent his son, Hung, down to China to help bring his people back to the right path. The remaining stanzas of the primer list all the teachings and admonitions which Hung believes the Chinese people needed to attend to so as to travel safely along this new course.

A comparison of the Taiping "Three-Character Classic" with both the traditional version of the classic and then with one of the more popular missionary versions highlights the distinctives of Taiping identity, especially the Taiping determination to reinterpret Chinese history in light of this new understanding of China's place in the world.⁸⁷ The traditional Confucian version, the text of which was fixed during the thirteenth century, served as a primer, an introduction to the literary language (it contains about five hundred different characters) and to all learning. It also serves as an introductory survey of Confucian culture. The primer's first line begins with a statement of faith about man, declaring that man's nature is originally good. And then this is followed up by another faith statement: Only the

⁸⁷ The Taiping version is available in the Chinese in TPTK, 1:225-227; and in English in Michael, 2:152-161. For the traditional Chinese version, I used a version which was originally edited in the Sung dynasty by Wang Yin-lin, bearing the simple title, San-tzu Ching (The Three Character Classic) and which has been recently collated by Ch'en Hsu-kuo (Changsha, 1986). The missionary version I used is one which was first composed and published by Walter Medhurst in 1823, the edition I had access to was published in Hong Kong in 1843, and it, too, bore the simple title, San-tzu Ching. Medhurst's version seems to have been a popular one, at least in missionary circles. I ran across several editions and revisions of it. One of these published in 1904 by the Commercial Press in Shanghai follows the very same headings and includes the very same topics, although the wording is smoother.

application of learning helps keep men to that original goodness. "If there is no teaching, the nature will change," the classic warns. The content of its curriculum consists primarily of moralistic axioms promoting Confucian morality, with the three bonds of ruler and minister, father and son, and husband and wife, being the capstone of that imposing moral edifice. In short, it is doing what catechisms are intended to do: catechize. The text also surveys the titles associated with the Confucian canon, and finally turns its attention to history, beginning with the earliest dynasties, and continuing down to the Sung Dynasty, which is where history ends for the Three Character Classic.

There are several points of contrast with the Taiping version which are worthy of discussion. The Taiping classic begins in a very different place than the traditional version, with the Great God and His creation. The Taiping primer then introduces the nation of Israel and continues with this history for about one-third of the entire document, almost exclusively focused on the story of Egypt's judgment and Israel's deliverance. This history is then followed by a recounting of China's early history, being careful to emphasize that in China's early history, the people walked in God's ways, and that it was only with the Ch'in emperor that the people were led astray. The Taiping document spells out how each dynasty after the Ch'in led China farther away from the Great God's ways. It, too, breaks off this historical narrative with the Sung Dynasty. For the Taiping, however, history resumes again

in 1837, when Hung ascended into heaven. The last part of the classic concerns Hung's vision and Taiping doctrines derived from the vision. The Taiping document ends with a litany of exhortations emphasizing the importance of fearing *Shang-ti* and keeping his commandments. In sum, the traditional version and the Taiping version alike are concerned with defining right doctrine and with interpreting Chinese history, although their definitions and interpretations diverge from each other.

The Taiping version contrasts even more sharply with the missionary version. Both of these versions begin with God and His creation. But after their opening lines, they are completely different documents. The missionary document begins with God (Medhurst uncharacteristically refers to God as the "true divine Lord" and not *Shang-ti*), but tells us more about his nature: he is all-knowing, he is all-powerful, and then mentions the creation of man (Medhurst is careful to point out that man's nature originally was indeed good). The rest of the document reads like a typical gospel tract which, except for the fact that it is written in Chinese and that it is in the format of the "Three Character Classic," could have been published in any other century and at any other place. The topics covered are familiar: God and his nature; creation; the fall of man; Jesus' birth, death and resurrection; and an explanation of the means to salvation, concluding with an exhortation to make use of these means. There is not a mention of, not one character about, Chinese

history or Chinese culture in this missionary version of the primer. What would Chinese students learn from this primer? It appears that they would learn that this Salvation Lord was concerned only with dis-embodied, history-less, culture-free souls. The missionary version had nothing to say about the Chinese past, its history or its culture.

The Taiping “Three Character Classic,” on the other hand, had something to say about these matters, and attempted to reclaim the Chinese past, placing that past in the more universal context of the Great God’s dealings with all humankind. Out of all the earth’s peoples, the Great God had singled out the Chinese for special favor, for God had appointed one of their number to serve as the Heavenly King. This more universal outlook, then, manifested a nationalistic edge. The British reacted to this aspect of Taiping nationalism in their first visit to Nanking. As God was Lord in Heaven over all peoples, so He had chosen Hung to be Lord on earth over all peoples. Since the British claimed to worship *Shang-ti*, they would then, in this scheme of things, desire to submit to *Shang-ti*’s appointed representative on earth. That scheme did not resonate with the British plenipotentiary. T.T. Meadows reports how the British first encountered this Taiping view:

In reply to my inquiries respecting the Tae-ping Wang, the Prince of Peace, the Northern Prince explained in writing that he was the ‘True Lord’ or Sovereign; that ‘the Lord of China is the Lord of the whole world; he is the second Son of God, and all people in the whole world must obey and follow him.’ As I read this without remark, he said, looking at me interrogatively,

‘The True Lord is not merely the Lord of China; he is not only our Lord, he is your Lord also.’⁸⁸

In a later exchange, Meadows remarks that the British sent an unequivocal message “fitted to disabuse the senders of their notions of universal supremacy.” The British were not about to kowtow to yet another Chinese sovereign.

One edge, then, of this belief in the universal rule of *Shang-ti* cut against those who claimed to be fellow worshippers of *Shang-ti*. The opposing edge of this claim cut against those who did not submit to the rule of *Shang-ti*, and for Hung this referred specifically to the Manchus. The Han race was the chosen people of God. The Manchu race was the rejected people; they were the people of the demons. Any nationalism which is born of a religious vision of chosenness conversely seems destined to conceive of a people who are not chosen. In this sense, the Taipings can be said to be the progenitors of Chinese nationalism. And that this nationalism was conceived in a religious context has certain implications for later Chinese history. For this kind of nationalism was different from that espoused by the secret societies which was primarily politically derived, and yet it is the form of nationalism espoused by secret societies--that which emphasized political aspects and not religious and cultural aspects-- which exclusively shapes our present understanding of the origins of Chinese nationalism.

⁸⁸ Clarke and Gregory, “A Report by T.T. Meadows,” p. 50.

Conclusion

The genealogy of Taiping Christian sectarianism forms an intricate tree. It was born of a mixed parentage, but too much can be made of its foreign ancestry. Hung Hsiu-ch'uan's vision fit with Christianity, as Rudolf Wagner has written, like two halves of a tally. But his vision could only fit so neatly because in large part it was joined to a Christianity which had already been changed by its translation into Chinese. Taiping Christian sectarianism was born out of Hung's effort to reconcile his religious vision with his own Chinese traditions by using the language and concepts of a translated Christianity.

This faith challenged the legitimacy of the imperial institution and threatened to supplant imperial Chinese culture. Tseng Kuo-fan was right about this much: the success of the Taiping would have meant the end of traditional Chinese culture--but only *imperial* Chinese culture. Their success would, on the other hand, have heralded the beginning of a new Chinese culture, a culture whose reinterpretation of the past was already resulting in the transformation of its traditions: a revival of the ancient religion, a reappraisal of the sacred nature of the imperial office, and a renewed understanding of the Chinese nation's place in the world. How successful the Taiping were in this transformation, especially in the capacity of their faith to appeal to the people and also in creating this new beginning we will

now consider, as we turn from this study of the content of Taiping religion to a study of its practice.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PRACTICE OF THE RELIGION OF THE TAIPING

There is a singular inadequacy of the many interpretations of Taiping religion, and that is that they focus almost exclusively on the content of the religion, and pay little attention to the practice of the Taiping faith. Yet it is only a knowledge of the practice of the faith which can provide us with a proper gauge for measuring the impact of the Taiping faith on popular society. In this chapter, I seek to correct this imbalance in our interpretations of Taiping religion. In the first section of the chapter, I shall examine those who practiced the Taiping faith, the followers of Taiping religion, and attempt to sketch a portrait of these followers. Then in a second and a third section, I shall consider the faith as it was practiced, in an effort to depict the worship and the mission of the Taiping movement.

For all three sections of this chapter, I have primarily consulted how outsiders viewed the Taiping practice. These outsiders fall into two groups: Ch'ing loyalist observers and Western (mostly, missionary) contacts. Neither of these groups was indifferent to the outcome of the rebellion.

The Ch'ing loyalists, mostly those who lived in Taiping-administered cities, had a wider exposure to the Taiping faith, but were more hostile to that faith, and hence much more prone to focus on the negative aspects of Taiping practice. (At least they tended to do so in their published accounts, most of which appeared after the rebellion had been suppressed.) These Ch'ing loyalist accounts, with one major exception, are in the form of diaries, letters and essays composed by lower-level gentry. The one major exception is the account authored by Chang Te-chien. Chang's account is essentially a reconnaissance report, compiled for the Ch'ing general, Tseng Kuo-fan. Chang compiled this report from his own experiences, but he also relied on captured documents along with oral accounts from those Ch'ing loyalists who had escaped Taiping rule, and from the testimony of hapless Taiping soldiers who had fallen into the hands of their Manchu enemies.¹

The Western contacts were more sympathetic, at least in the early stages of the rebellion, and there is also a greater range of opinion, allowing the reader to form a more objective view of the events. Yet, these Western contacts' exposure to the everyday customs, rituals and activities of the Heavenly Kingdom was more

¹ Chang's account is also the most authoritative in terms of its inclusion of primary documents and is the most complete in terms of detail. It was issued in 1855, and so deals entirely with the early stages of the movement. Chang Te-chien seems to have been well-suited for his espionage career: there is no record of his background in any of the main biographical references. He kept his identity hidden. He is not listed in the Ch'ing-tai Chih-kuan Nien-piao nor is he listed in any of the major biographical dictionaries.

All the Ch'ing loyalist accounts, along with Chang Te-chien's report, were collected in the series edited by Hsiang Ta. Hsiang Ta, et al, ed., Tai-p'ing T'ien-kuo, 8 Volumes (Shanghai: Shen-chou

limited. Taken together, these observer accounts complement each other, and do present a reasonably-balanced picture of the practice of the Taiping faith.

What is striking in both the Chinese and Western accounts, the hostile and the sympathetic, is how both focus on the Christian aspect of the Taiping ideology as being the most distinctive aspect, as being the defining element, of the Taiping movement. One would expect this to be the case with the Western accounts, given the Westerners' own Christian background, but so it is also true with the Chinese observers. While both sets of observers do acknowledge the presence of borrowings from popular religious sources, with the Ch'ing observers decrying the embrace of the religion by those whom they refer to as the "foolish peasants" (yu-min), Ch'ing and Western observer alike characterize the movement mostly as Christian (the Chinese observers, actually, characterized the movement more as an offshoot of the Heavenly Lord sect²). What observers saw in the religion of the Taiping, then, was a form of Christian and Chinese sectarianism.

A Portrait of Those Who Practiced the Faith: the Taiping Followers.

This portrait of the Taiping followers will be characterized more by impressionistic brushstrokes than by photographic snapshots. For while we know

Kuo-kuang She, 1952) as part of the series, "Chung-kuo Chin-tai-shih Tse-liao Tsung-k'an." Hereafter, all citations from these accounts will refer to TPTK, and to the title of the account.

² I will discuss the identification of the Taiping with the Heavenly Lord sect at greater length in Part Three, Chapter 3.

who the different leaders were and are familiar with their background, our knowledge of the ordinary followers and of their devotion to the faith is quite another matter. In other words, most students of Chinese history would have a hard time answering this question: Who was practicing what where, and for how long? Actually this question can be broken down even further since we already know the “what,” and when we discuss the “where,” we hand-in-hand will be discussing the “how long.” So, actually, we have only two parts of the question to answer: “who” and “where.”

Answering the “who” aspect of this question is the most difficult. First of all, there is the distinction between what the army practiced and what the people practiced. Can such a distinction even be made? In the vast majority of these observer accounts, there is only a small effort made to distinguish between the practices of the people who are part of the Taiping army and the practices of those who are not. Were not all the subjects of Taiping rule, ipso facto, also soldiers in the Taiping army? If all able-bodied men of fighting age were recruited to serve, then such a distinction between soldiers and subjects becomes less and less meaningful.

From many of these observer accounts, it does seem that the distinction between soldier and subject was drawn and that the relation between the two was shaped primarily by the residence of the subject, whether the subjects were residing in the

city or in the countryside. If a subject was residing in the city, he would be expected to comply with the Taiping social organization and with the religious practices. In the cities, the Taiping did attempt to realize their order for both soldiers and subjects.³ Nanking, for example, was organized according to the Taiping ideal of the twenty-five member governing unit. Each member would eat in a communal hall from the rations apportioned out of the sacred granary, and at these meals, all the people were expected to offer up the morning and evening prayers.⁴ Nevertheless, it also seems clear that not all those men and women

³ Making this distinction between those residing in the cities and those residing in the countryside is somewhat problematic. For the Taiping often restricted large parts of their cities to exclusive habitation by their soldiers. And at certain times, they excluded subjects who were not soldiers from dwelling within the walls altogether. Such a policy seems to have been dictated by whether the city was secure or was threatened by Ch'ing attack. For example, the London Mission Society missionary Rev. Griffith John visited Nanking in November of 1860, and he found the city to be functioning much like a normal city. When he returned in April, 1861, he found that everyone but the soldiers had been excluded from living within the city walls. See Prescott Clarke and J.S. Gregory, Western Reports on the Taiping (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1982), p. 296. The date is not given in the selection. But it was noted in the original report to the LMS; see the *Archives of the Council for World Mission*, "London Missionary Society: Central China," Set #2140, Box #1, Fiche #50.

Rev. E.C. Bridgman in a letter to the North China Herald describing his travels through Taiping China, notes that at Wuhu (safely below Anking and not targeted by the Ch'ing) there were few troops, while at Nanking the troops had commandeered full sections of the city and Chinkiang "for the time being, ... is made one vast camp." Clarke and Gregory, p. 148. The effectual phrase is the leading one, "for the time being."

⁴ John L. Withers, "The Heavenly Capital: Nanjing Under the Taiping, 1853-1864." Ph.D. Dissertation; Yale University, 1983. See his chapter three for a complete description of life in the Heavenly Capital. In this chapter, he describes how all the residents of Nanking were divided up and assigned to different institute (kuan), separated by sex and by occupation (the separation of the sexes ended in 1855). This was a hybrid system, being an amalgam of the Taiping military organization which was based on twenty-five member units and the Taiping Heavenly Land System which laid down a twenty-five member family unit for the civilian administration.

It is Withers argument that the Taiping were too successful at implementing their ideal order, and this is what led to disaffection among the subjects. The problem with his argument is that he is relying almost totally on the views of the gentry. As he admits in the final pages, "we cannot

living under Taiping rule were subject to the full rigors of the code which governed the military. Most were engaged in occupations such as printing and publishing, medical work, and the kind of common occupations which are needed to keep a city running: bricklayers, bakers and tailors.

The distinction between soldiers and subjects was also maintained in the countryside, but there does not seem to have been much energy directed at organizing the countryside according to the idealized administration that had been established in the cities. The Taiping soldiers, nevertheless, still expected the peasants to participate to some degree in the religious life of the kingdom. Invariably, though, the peasants' participation was limited to their listening attentively to the Taiping preaching sermons, and just as often to the peasants offering up their grain for the sustenance of the heavenly soldiers.

The Taiping took their message to the people. In addition to the posters and declarations which were ubiquitous in Taiping areas, the rebels would also preach to the people in the countryside. A resident of the Heavenly Capital remarked upon some of the Taiping's preaching activities which occurred outside of the city walls; in these sermons they instructed the people about the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly Elder Brother and how the Father had beget the kings, and described for the people a rosy future where they would all be able to enjoy blessings without

therefore be sure how the bulk of the populace reacted to many of the major aspects of the Taiping program." (218)

limit.⁵ Another observer speaks of the Taiping army “propagating religion” throughout the countryside.⁶

The peasants were expected to respond to the messages which expounded the righteousness of the Taiping cause by contributing to the needs of the various campaigns. These were no doubt not always voluntary contributions. In one of his more partisan comments, Chang talks about how the Taiping in preparation for ‘robbing’ the common people of their grain would first assemble the people of the villages and explain to them how these provisions were to be used to support the mission of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. The Taiping would say, “The Heavenly Father created the mountains and the seas...your family’s lands and fields all are what the Heavenly Father bestowed upon you, so that it is reasonable for you to respond by contributing your silver and your grain [to the Kingdom]...”⁷ Significantly, Chang does not mention any coercion in his description.

Western observers, especially during the early stages of the movement, frequently commented on the popular support enjoyed by the Taiping. A Catholic missionary whose order was concentrated in the provinces of Hunan and Hupei, logs this report from the early stages of the rebellion, “They everywhere announce themselves as deliverers of their country from the yoke of the Tartars...Those who are desirous of seeing established the Chinese dynasty, applaud these pamphlets

⁵ TPTK, Vol. 4; “Chin-ling Kuei-chia Chi-shih-lu,” p. 652.

⁶ TPTK, Vol. 4; “Tun-pi Sui-wen-lu,” p. 355.

vilifying the foreigners [ie., the Manchus]. This enables the rebels to obtain voluntary subsidies in enormous sums, and affords them the means of increasing their army daily.”⁸ This same observation concerning popular support is echoed by the Reverend Charles Taylor in his visit to Chin-kiang, except he notes that the peasants did benefit from the exchange.⁹ Descriptions of popular support were also submitted by Ch’ing observers. From Chekiang, for example, during the waning years of the Taiping movement, an account mentions how the peasants were offering the Taiping foodstuffs, and again there is no mention of the Taiping coercing them to do so.¹⁰

While it is important to qualify these accounts by acknowledging those reports which describe the depredation suffered by the peasants under wave after wave of Taiping and Ch’ing banditry, it is significant that no Western reporter and none of these Ch’ing observers ever comments on the peasants offering foodstuffs to the Ch’ing armies. Ch’ing officials had an explanation for all such incidents involving the popular appeal of the Taiping; that appeal was dismissed by references to Taiping cunning, usually in combination with other references to what they described as the natural foolishness of the peasants. Such comments, though, give pause to the reader. What was the appeal of the Taiping?

⁷ TPTK, Vol. 3; “Tse-ch’ing Hui-tuan,” p. 267.

⁸ Clarke and Gregory, p. 30.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁰ TPTK, Vol. 6; “Chien-te-chai Sui-pi,” p. 757.

One refrain which frequently appears in these loyalist accounts is how the Taiping used sectarian religion to trick those they described as the “foolish people.”¹¹ This comment was made in Wuchang, in Anking, in Nanking. But it should be remembered that this same comment was made of those who joined the White Lotus rebellion at the turn of the century, as well. Moreover, this is one of those descriptions which begs a question or two: Why could not the government keep the people from being tricked? According to the Ch’ing view, was any peasant who followed the Taiping, by nature of the case, placing himself in what they referred to as the foolish peasant category? When, too, did a foolish peasant pass over into the category of a rebel? Finally, relevant to the thesis of this paper: If the Taiping faith was such an alien faith, how could the Taiping have been so successful in using their religion to trick the people?

One last impression that the reader picks up from these accounts is that in the early stages of the movement, when the Taiping were winning all their battles, the people were more than willing to fight for what looked like would be the winning side, and so were eager to participate in the full range of Taiping religious activity. The large number of men and women recruited in the provinces of Hupei and Hunan testify to the motivating force of such a chain of victories. During the later stages of the movement, when victories were not as frequent, and future triumph

¹¹ TPTK, Vol. 3, “Tse-ch’ing Hui-tsu’an,” p. 249; Vol. 4, “Chin-ling Tsa-chi,” p. 612; Vol. 5, “Meng-nan Shu-ch’ao,” p. 43; Vol. 4, “Tun-pi Sui-wen-lu,” p. 354.

not so certain, even the Kwangsi “old brothers” were probably not as zealous in their devotion.

An equally important issue concerning the “who” question, especially because of what it tells us about the impact of Taiping religion, involves the matter of the geographic representation of Taiping recruits. We know the Kwangsi men and women occupied prominent roles in the movement, but what about those men and women from other provinces? What were their roles? What proportion of the movement did they constitute?

The march from Yung-an through Hunan and Hupei and into Nanking swelled the ranks of the Taiping Army from the tens of thousands to over a million. It is usually the case that long marches result in the decimation, not the augmenting, of recruits. Moreover, while triumphant, it was not the case that the heavenly soldiers racked up an unbroken string of victories in Hunan and Hupei. They never did conquer Chang-sha. After the Taiping broke through the wall at Wu-chang, one observer in that city estimated the total numbers of the attacking force by province: from Kwangtung and Kwangsi, there were more than 20,000 men; and from Hunan and Hupei, there were more than 40,000.

The number of recruits from these latter two provinces quickly dominated the army of the Taiping, so much so that some of its units were completely made up of “Ch’u” men, that is Hupei (and sometimes used of both Hupei and Hunan) recruits.

One observer who had lived under Taiping rule in Nanking speaks of how some of the most cruel tasks of the regime were performed by the bandits from Kwangsi and those from Hunan and Hupei (the two Hu).¹² In just a short time, the holy soldiers from the two provinces of Hupei and Hunan were being referred to as “old brothers” as opposed to the “new brothers” recruited from Nanking and Kiangnan.¹³ The Reverend Joseph Edkins, after a visit he made to Nanking in the early 1860s, gave an eye-witness account of the character of the army guarding Nanking, and he found that even at this late date the soldiers stationed at Nanking continued to be dominated by those coming from Hukuang, “The most [sic] of the insurgents met here were from the provinces of Hupeh and Hunan, in the interior of the country...Many of these, by length of service, have been promoted to important posts, and are only second in influence to the original rebels.”¹⁴

Most of the upper levels of the Taiping ranks were dominated by Kwangsi men. All of the early kings and nobles were from Kwangsi. One Nanking account includes a list of the top-ranking officials, along with a short biographical sketch.¹⁵ It shows that some of the more important posts were given to men from other

¹² TPTK, Vol. 4; *Chin-ling Tsa-chi*,” p. 621.

¹³ TPTK, Vol. 4; “*Chin-ling Pei-nan-chi*,” p. 749.

¹⁴ Clarke and Gregory, p. 285.

¹⁵ TPTK, Vol. 4; “*Chin-ling Kuei-chia Chi-shih-lueh*,” pp. 666-680. This list forms an appendix to the account, and it supplies a rather extensive biography for each of the leaders. In addition to the information on the kings, this list provides a biographical listing of some 100 Taiping leaders. This account is an early one, 1853-1854. The provincial composition of the upper offices did change as the movement developed, but the very top positions still went to Kwangsi men.

provinces, especially men from Hupei and Hunan. So while the top 50 posts were filled almost exclusively by Kwangsi men, the middle posts showed a much broader representation. Hupei men, like the 'false' North Palace Secretary, Chang You-hsun, were strongly represented at these middle levels.

Another Ch'ing loyalist and Nanking resident who acknowledges that numbers are hard to come by nevertheless still comes by some fairly significant figures. After the Taiping established a household registration system in the Heavenly Capital, this member of the Nanking gentry compiled a list of the provincial origins of the city's residents: men with Kwangsi origins numbered 1500, men hailing from Kwangtung 2,900 (the women from Kwangtung and Kwangsi totaled 2500); from Hunan, there were 10,000 men (and 400 women); from Hupei, 30,000 men (25,000 women—why there are this many Hupei women is not explained); Anhwei Province is represented by 3000 men (and 3000 women); representatives from other provinces totalled 2000 men; and those from Nanking and other Kiangsu cities numbered 55,000 men (110,000 women).¹⁶ It seems safe to assume from such a list that all those present in the city from outside Kiangsu Province were part of the Taiping movement, which would constitute about 50,000 men, a total which approximates those from Nanking and its environs.

¹⁶ TPTK, Vol. 4; "Chin-ling Kuei-chia Chi-shih-lueh," p. 655.

Far more suggestive of the character of the movement is the small percentage of followers who called Kwangsi their home--only 1500 men, or 1.5% of the total population. Another observer provides an estimate which focuses on just the composition of the army in one sector of the Heavenly Capital; his estimate yields these numbers: 900 soldiers whose native province is either Kwangtung or Kwangsi; 10,000 whose native province is either Hunan or Hupei; and 30,000 whose native province is within Kiangnan.¹⁷ These statistics are similar to those reported above, and the percentage of Kwangsi men is about the same.

Chang Te-chien includes one "false" military roster which includes the names and provincial origins of a sampling of recruits from one Taiping battalion. Assisting a sergeant (ssu-ma) by the name of Chi T'ien-shun, who was a native of Kwangsi Province and who joined the ranks of the Heavenly Army at Chin-t'ien, there was an assistant sergeant who was a native of Hupei. Under these two men were five corporals (wu-chang) who were themselves in charge of four soldiers. One of these corporals by the name of T'an Ta-fu, who was only 19 years old, hailed from Hupei. Under his command were four soldiers, one from Hunan, one from Kwangtung, and two from Anhui. Another corporal was also from Hupei. Under his command was a man from Hupei, one from Kiangsi, two from Kiangnan. A third corporal was born in Kiangnan (Soochow) and those under his charge

¹⁷ TPTK, Vol.4; "Chang Chi-keng I-kao," p. 764.

include one man from Kiangnan, and three from Hupei.¹⁸ Almost all of these men from this roster were enlisted into the service of the Heavenly Kingdom in the third year of the Kingdom (1853).

It would be helpful if there were more such lists, so that we could better evaluate the representativeness of this one. I think, though, it can be assumed that this roster submitted by Chang is representative, since Chang seems to assume that it is, which is why he includes it; and, his report was, after all, compiled for the purview of Tseng Kuo-fan. What is fascinating about this list and those above, all of which come from the early years of the Taiping Kingdom, is that the even in the early years of the movement there is a tremendous geographic diversity in the movement.

While this seems to be a fair reflection of the provincial composition of the army in the early stages of the movement, the provincial composition of the recruits, as would be expected, changes even more during the final stages. Of the two military rosters extant, one does date from the later stage of the movement. This is a list which features those retainers who accompanied the Hu Wang (The Protector King), Ch'en K'un-shu. Ch'en, a Kwangsi man, had been a subordinate of Li Hsiu-ch'eng, the Loyal King, but broke off from him in 1862, and shortly afterwards captured the city of Ch'ang-chou in Kiangsu Province.

¹⁸ TPTK, Vol. 3; "Tse-ch'ing Hui-tsuán," pp. 124-125. A copy of this list in its English translation can also be found in Michael 2:566-569.

Of the more than 1000 persons on this list, less than 500 are described in terms of their provincial origins. (Franz Michael states that this list was compiled in September and October in 1863.) Among those whose origins are mentioned, the largest contingents are from Anhwei (with 201 men) and Kiangsu (with 215 men). The positions these men occupy range from the Right Second Propaganda Agent, Li Ch'eng-huai, twenty years old, native of Kiangnan, to a firewood boy, Chang Tesheng, twenty-two years old, native of Anhwei, who had joined the Taiping in 1858. None of these, except the Protector King himself, is a native of Kwangsi.¹⁹

This discussion of the geographic diversity in the Taiping army leads naturally into the second aspect of the question concerning the compass of Taiping religious influence, the "where" aspect. How far did the Taiping impact reach?

Their impact was strongest to be sure in those cities along the Yangtze River which the Taiping occupied for a duration of two years or more, cities such as Wuchang (capital of Taiping Hupei Province; governed from June, 1854 to December, 1856), Anking (capital of Taiping Anhui Province; governed from June, 1853 to September, 1861), Chiu-kiang (capital of Taiping Kiangsi Province; governed from September, 1853 to May, 1858) and later Hangchow (capital of Taiping Chekiang Province; governed from December, 1861 to March, 1864) and

¹⁹ Michael, 3: 1271-1355. Wang Ch'ing-ch'eng, *T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo-te Wen-hsien ho Li-shih* [Documents and History of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom] (Beijing: Social Science Publications, 1993), pp. 593-604, contains photographic reproductions of a portion of these lists.

Soochow (capital of Taiping Su-fu Province; governed from June, 1860 to December, 1863).²⁰ In these cities the more sympathetic residents would have been totally indoctrinated, through all the sermons and prayers and hymns, along with literature such as the Three Character Classic, with their children learning many of the doctrinal corpus at schools the Taiping set up²¹; the more antagonistic residents--at least, those who were unable to flee-- would have resisted indoctrination, but would nonetheless have been thoroughly familiar with all aspects of the Taiping faith, as is evident from each of these observers' accounts.

This list of cities does not include those cities of lesser importance in Taiping-controlled areas, nor does it include a number of cities which the Taiping held for a brief time, only to be driven out, or from which they just chose to pull back. Some of these may have only been under Taiping control for several months, which still would have given the residents enough time to become familiar with the Taiping creed. The number of these cities is not small, nor is their range narrow. Yung-an in Kwangsi was occupied for 7 months; Yangchow traded hands a number of times; Chia-ying in Kwangtung Province was captured twice by the Taiping (in 1859 and 1865), Lin-ch'ing in Shantung Province fell to the Taiping in 1854. We have not

²⁰ Kuo Yi-sheng, editor, *Taiping Tien-kuo Li-shih Ti-t'u Chi* [A Historical Atlas of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom]. Peking: China Maps Publishing, 1989. pp. 9-10.

²¹ TPTK, Vol. 4; "Chin-ling Tsa-chi," p. 621. Griffith John also reported that he visited a Taiping school for younger boys, see Clarke and Gregory, p. 297. We know the Taiping set up schools in the Heavenly Capital, but there is no other comment on this from the descriptions of other cities. It

even considered the different campaigns, such as the Northern Campaign, or Shih Ta-k'ai's forays into Fukien²² and then into Szechuan, nor have we included the cities occupied and governed by groups allied with the Taiping, such as the Small Sword Society's rule of the Chinese city of Shanghai and the Nien's control of the cities and towns of the Huai River Valley.

This is a portrait of the kinds of men and women who practiced the Taiping faith, from the hardened Hupei war veterans to the Ahwei fire boys. This survey of the who and where of the Taiping followers demonstrates the movement's heterogenous character and its geographic extent. What, though, was it that these Taiping sectarians practiced; what were the rituals and customs of their faith? To answer this question, we need to turn to consider the faith as it was practiced.

A Portrait of the Faith Practiced: Taiping Worship

After the Taiping established their Heavenly Capital, on the sixth day of the week, so reports one resident of the city, a flag would appear on the street which announced that the next day was the sabbath, and that appropriate preparations, on

would seem that since the Taiping had begun to conduct their own version of the bureaucratic exam that this was probably the practice in other Taiping-occupied cities as well.

²² TPTK, Vol. 6; "K'ou-ting Chi-lueh," describes the practices of the Taiping in Fukien, including maintaining the sacred treasury, chanting the doxology, and smashing idols. pp. 809-812.

the part of the people and the soldiers, for worship were to be made.²³ It was one of the regulations of the Taiping that for worship on the sabbath, the people needed to wash their faces in order to devoutly worship the virtue of the Heavenly Father.²⁴ There was also to be no distracting clamor or chattering during worship services, as one Taiping regulation stipulates, "At morning worship, when we are worshipping the Heavenly Father, if any official or soldier makes any kind of distracting noise or commotion that person shall be decapitated."²⁵ This is a method which surely created a more reverential tone in the worship service. The same tone was set for each of the three daily worship services, where before each meal, there was the chanting of a hymn and the reciting of a prayer.

Chang Te-chien describes their sabbath worship service. Unlike the practice at Chinese temples, he tells us, the Taiping did not use incense in their worship. On a table, they set two oil lamps and usually a vase of flowers, accompanied by three cups of tea, three dishes of various (sacrificial) meats and three bowls of rice. In the front of the table, they set up a bamboo plank about three feet in length on which they wrote, "Receiving the Commands of Heaven" (Feng T'ien-Ling). Behind the table, they set three chairs for those officiating at the service.

²³ TPTK, Vol. 4; "Chin-ling Kuei-Chia Chi-Shih Lueh," p.652. Another observer records that on the flag were written the words, "Ming-jih T'ien-fu Chiang-fan, ke yi kung-ching" ("Tomorrow, the Heavenly Father will descend into the world, everyone should reverently worship"), indicating the Taiping understanding of the dynamic presence of the Heavenly Father. This then would suggest that the purpose of worship was to gather to worship the Heavenly Father in person, as it were. The Taiping sabbath was Saturday. TPTK, Vol. 4; "Tun-pi Sui-wen Lu," p. 392.

Also unlike the practice at Chinese temples, theirs was a corporate worship. At the beating of a gong, the people would gather for worship. Then they would sing (chant) the doxologies, and listen to sermons and teachings. One of the officials would record all the proceedings of the service on a piece of yellow paper (signifying imperial business). For the closing act of the service, the recorder would read what had transpired during the service, and all those in attendance would sign their names. The yellow paper would then be burned, as a memorial (the term is *tsou*) presented to Heaven.²⁶ Sabbath worship was required of all, but only soldiers and officials would be punished--by wearing the cangue and caning (1000 strokes) for the initial offense--if they did not attend.²⁷ This form of worship was universally implemented throughout Taiping China and was followed by all the kings until the fall of Nanking.²⁸

Worship consisted of prayer, singing and preaching from what the loyalists referred to as the "bandit books."²⁹ As the only partially-realized "Land System of

²⁴ TPTK, Vol. 3; "Tse-ch'ing Hui-tsuan," p. 227.

²⁵ TPTK, *ibid.*, p. 230.

²⁶ TPTK, *ibid.*, pp. 261-262. Chang does not include the fact that the Taipings delivered a sermon or teaching (*chiang tao-li*) in his description here. But he includes it elsewhere, and this part of the service is included in the accounts of other observers.

²⁷ TPTK, Vol. 3; "Tse-ch'ing Hui-tsuan," p. 231.

²⁸ Two eye-witness accounts in Soochow and one account from Chekiang offer descriptions similar to Chang's. All three are from the 1860s. See TPTK, Vol.5: "Su-t'ai Mi-lu-chi," p. 290, and "Chieh-yu Tsa-chi," p. 313 on Soochow; Vol. 6, "Hu-hsueh Sheng-huan-chi," pp. 737-738 on Chekiang.

²⁹ But there was no celebrating of the sacrament of communion. Baptism was administered, but usually not within the boundaries of a worship service. See the interview with the Shield King, as reported in the North China Herald (Shanghai), August 11, 1860.

the Heavenly Dynasty" (T'ien-ch'ao T'ien-mou Chih-tu) enjoined, "In every circle of twenty-five families...Every Sabbath the corporals must lead the men and women to the church, where the males and females are to sit in separate rows. There they will listen to sermons, sing praises, and offer sacrifices to our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God."³⁰

The Taipings prayed in worship, at sabbath worship, but also at their daily morning and evening meals.³¹ The Taiping taught their children to pray, kneeling down, saying, "We are grateful to the Heavenly Father, the Highest Lord, the Glorious Shang-ti who is in Heaven; let your decree be executed on Earth as in Heaven."³² American missionary visitors to Soochow wrote down some of the prayers they heard there. The prayer which was recited at the Taiping daily meals reads like this, "Heavenly Father, the Great Shangti, bless us little ones. Provide us day by day clothes to wear and food to eat. Keep us from calamity and difficulty. Grant that our souls may ascend to Heaven."³³ They prayed to Heaven, as one

³⁰ Michael, 2: 315. Hsiang, 1: 322. The Taipings did not have a separate institution which they designated church, and this is not what they have in mind here; rather, they had a meeting place for worship—as it is called in this passage, the *li-pai t'ang* (the worship hall).

³¹ One observer states that Taiping soldiers were whipped if they did not offer prayer at mealtime. This is suspicious, though, since he is the only one to mention such a punishment. TPTK, Vol. 4; "Chin-ling Tsa-chi," p. 612. But as cynical a remark is made by Chang Te-chien who implies that the faith of the Taiping rank and file was only as fervent as the regularity of the meals which they were praying over. See "Tse-ch'ing," p. 263.

³² TPTK, Vol. 4; "Chin-ling Kuei-Chia Chi-Shih Lueh," p.652.

³³ North China Herald, June 30, 1860. The report includes a Chinese and English version of the prayer.

Ch'ing observer notes so as to demonstrate how ridiculous the Taiping habits were, in any and every circumstance, even when facing execution or a serious illness.³⁴

But what provoked even more derision among the loyalist observers was the fact that the Taiping instructed their soldiers, as they were going into battle, to kneel down and pray, "T'ien-fu K'an-ku" (Heavenly Father, watch over us) before they engaged the enemy.³⁵ As one Taiping regulation governing military discipline read, "All soldiers and officials, when they are going to battle to kill demons, together need to sincerely kneel and seek the Heavenly Father's care and His help in battling and killing demons."³⁶ The Reverend Griffith John describes the content of their prayers this way, "The subjects of their prayers are, in the case of those who possess a coarser mould of mind, victory in battle, and a speedy subjugation of 'the hills and rivers.' The more thoughtful pray for forgiveness of sin and the salvation of the soul."³⁷ One would suppose that the content of the prayer would be determined in large part by whether the enemy the soldier was then facing was the Ch'ing army or the devil's host; of course, for the Taiping, these enemies were one and the same.

A second component of worship was the singing of songs. In particular, a rendition of the doxology seems to be another element of the common religious

³⁴ TPTK, Vol. 4; "Wu-chang Chi-shih," p. 601.

³⁵ TPTK, Vol.4: "Chin-ling Kuei-chia Chih-shih Lueh," p. 658.

³⁶ TPTK, Vol. 3; "Tse-ch'ing Hui-tsu'an," p. 228.

³⁷ Clarke and Gregory, p. 236.

tradition which was required learning for all Taiping soldiers. This was probably chanted rather than sung since the term most often used is *sung-ching*; though the terms for recite (*nien*) and sing (*ch'ang*) are also used. The song of praise offered to *Shang-ti* is more than vaguely reminiscent of the Protestant version, "Praise *Shang-ti*, the Heavenly Holy Father, Praise *Ye-su* (Jesus), the Holy Lord of the World's Salvation, Praise the Holy Divine Wind (*Sheng Shen-feng*), the Holy Spirit, Praise Three Persons Forming One United True God."³⁸ This was the song which the Methodist missionary, Dr. Taylor, remarked had greeted his ears morning and evening during his visit to Taiping territory, and which was the one most often recorded by Western and Ch'ing observer alike.³⁹

In most accounts several other stanzas are added to this standard one; in a shorter rendition the worshippers added, "Praise the Great Way which is able to save one's life, enjoying blessings without limit; the road to the Heavenly Hall is open; today acknowledge and repent, and your soul will ascend to Heaven." Another version of the doxology added a reference to Jesus as the Crown Prince (*T'ai-tzu*) who descended into the service and then ended with a call to the Son of Heaven (*T'ien-tzu*) to reign for ten thousand years.⁴⁰ A report from Soochow states that the singing of their doxology included some 28 verses of four to five characters

³⁸ TPTK, Vol. 4; "Chin-ling Kuei-Chia Chi-Shih Lueh," p. 652.

³⁹ Clarke and Gregory, pp. 66-67.

each.⁴¹ Such a lengthy tune suggests either that in the declining years of the Heavenly Kingdom the leaders may have been using every available method to inculcate their ideology, or that the Taiping happened to have a lot more in Soochow to sing about.

The sermon was the third part of the service, usually consisting of reading from the Bible, or from one of the Taiping doctrinal texts. This was to be the main focus of the worship service as it was laid out in the "Heavenly Land System." Observers, however, comment most on those sermons which were delivered outside the walls of the worship halls. Ten days after capturing the city of Wuchang in 1853, the Taiping had all the people of the city gather to listen to their first Taiping sermon, speaking many words, which according to one loyalist, "stirred up the foolish people."⁴² In Yangchow, they subjected the city's residents to the same, but it was delivered on the sabbath.⁴³ Chang Te-chien writes of the Taiping in the various cities they conquered as passing out badges which the people would fasten to their waists if they were willing to serve as obedient subjects of the Taiping. Then these people would be ushered to places where they could listen to Taiping leaders preach sermons, "Wherever the Taiping dwelt, they would sound a gong

⁴⁰ TPTK, Vol. 4; "Tun-pi Sui-wen Lu," p. 392. Vol. 4; "Chiang-nan Ch'un-meng-an Pi-chi," features a doxology with a few more stanzas added, including the reference to Jesus as the Crown Prince. Pp. 437-438.

⁴¹ TPTK, Vol. 5; "Su-t'ai Mi-lu Chi," p. 290.

⁴² TPTK, Vol. 4; "Wu-ch'ang Chi-shih," p. 595.

⁴³ TPTK, Vol. 5; "Yang-chou yu-k'ou Lu," p. 104.

and gather the local people (pai-hsing) along with their soldiers, on any day at any time and at any place” to listen to the preaching of sermons.⁴⁴

There is one issue which needs to be addressed before we leave this discussion of Taiping worship. There is an opinion which is often expressed about the practice of Taiping religion, which, while in part having some basis, assumes too much for the evidence which makes up that basis. This issue concerns the constancy of devotion and the consistency of practice among the Taiping rank and file. The issue usually is expressed in this form: in the early stages of the movement, the Taiping were all zealous for the faith, and conscientious in their practice; in later stages, with the newer recruits, that practice falls off to the point of being abandoned. In the Reverend Joseph Edkins’ interview with the Shield King, Hung Jen-kan, the Taiping chief seems to support this view declaring that the religion had “deteriorated considerably.”⁴⁵ But the Shield King is comparing the devotion of the demoralized, final stages of the movement with the fervent early years of the Society of God-Worshippers. I am not arguing that religious devotion did not fall off, it is just the pitch of that fall which I want to characterize differently.

It was not a precipitous fall; it was more a gradual slip. One of the accounts provides us with an example which will enable us to better gauge the degree of the fall. This case is taken from Chekiang, from the years 1860-1862, the years of

⁴⁴ TPTK, Vol. 3; “Tse-ch’ing Hui-tsuan,” p. 266.

⁴⁵ North China Herald, August 11, 1860.

decline and supposed waning of Taiping zeal. In this account, Taiping soldiers were keeping captive a Ch'ing sympathizer who recorded their beliefs and rituals. He reports that they are only worshipping two times a month, signifying a reversion to the popular Chinese tradition in the thinking about the proper time of worship. Nonetheless, they were still engaging in Taiping rituals, including singing (chanting) the doxology, writing down the proceedings of their worship and, by burning the paper, submitting this worship as a memorial to the Heavenly Father.

The doxology they sing follows the traditional Taiping doxology and adds a few other lines of their own (this was a common occurrence). The lines in question do appear in other records of Taiping worship, but they are not universal. Following the doctrinal core which praises the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Three-in-One, this group adds:

How can the true way have anything in common with the way of the world; it only can save the people, it will grant them the pleasure of blessing without limit.

Those who are wise will leap and jump [for joy] since they will know what constitutes blessing. Those who are foolish will awaken and apprehend, since the road to the Heavenly Paradise will be open.

Oh! The vast and profound mercy of the Heavenly Father! Its breadth is great and without boundary. He did not even spare the Crown Prince (T'ai-tzu). But rather sent him down to us, contributing his life to redeem us from the consequences of our crimes (sins).

When people understand this, let them repent. May the Son of Heaven live forever.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ TPTK, Vol. 6; "Hu-hsueh Sheng-huan Chi," pp. 737-738.

Such a report suggests that later followers of the Taiping, the so-called younger brothers, though maybe not as zealous as the older Kwangsi brethren still, whether they were devoted to it or not, knew their religion. They knew their Ten Commandments and they knew the rudimentary outline of Christian doctrine: beliefs about the Heavenly Father, Son and Holy Spirit, about their trinitarian relationship, and about the mission of Jesus.

What they understood of this doctrine, or how they understood it, while perhaps interesting to discover, is not pertinent to what we want to show here. Rather, what we want to show is this: that the Taiping continued to practice their religion, at least the core of it, and to practice it faithfully in all the provinces and cities which they occupied even through the final stages of the movement.

And this is not an isolated case. Even in Soochow, the city governed by Li Hsiu-ch'eng, the king whose commitment to the religion was characterized as a few degrees short of lukewarm, the soldiers still memorized the Commandments, chanted the doxology, and worshipped on the sabbath day.⁴⁷ Rev. Griffith John penned these remarks after his visit to Soochow, "Comparing the present religious state of the revolutionists with what they were at Nanking and Chen-kiang eight

⁴⁷ Clarke and Gregory, p. 249. TPTK, Vol. 5; Su-t'ai Mi-lu-chi, p. 280, provides a description of an incident where those who violated one of the Ten Commandments were paraded through the streets, a poster carried before them detailing their sins/crimes. TPTK, Vol.5; "Chieh-yu Tsa-shih," p. 313 describes a worship setting in Su-fu Province.

years ago, there seems to be little difference."⁴⁸ His comparison is meant to be understood positively. Such a statement is probably to be expected from someone like John who sympathized with the movement. But his colleague, Reverend Joseph Edkins, who was convinced that the Taiping barely rose above the crudest idolators and syncretists, could even report that when he visited a town twelve miles from Nanking, he found that the chief of that city was devout, praying the daily prayers and supervising his son in the learning the of the Three Character Classic and the Ten Commandments.⁴⁹

These Taiping followers in Soochow were joined by the men and women, whom we met above, the hardened Hupei war veterans and the young Anhwei fire boys, in the practice of their faith. These men and women were all expected and required to learn the Ten Commandments within three weeks (and to comply with its prohibitions), as well as to sing the doxology at the morning and evening meal, and attend the worship service on the sabbath.

A Portrait of the Faith Practiced: Taiping Mission

Taiping religious practice was not just confined to the worship service; these were not sabbath sectarians. The Taiping practice of their faith also extended to their mission. That mission encompassed three different dimensions, each

⁴⁸ Clarke and Gregory, p. 236.

⁴⁹ *ibid*, p. 289.

dimension targetting a different constituency. The Taiping mission included: attacking the old imperial order and those who defended that order; modeling the new Taiping order among themselves and their subjects; and propagating their views of the old and new order among those who were neither defenders of the old order or subjects of the new.

The Ten Commandments was the theological and ideological basis of the Taiping mission. In the discussion last chapter of the content of Taiping religion, it was noted how the Taiping had set aside the most prominent place in their faith for the Ten Commandments. Western observers frequently commented on the decalogue's paramount position. In the very first foreign contact with the Taiping following the establishing of the Heavenly capital, E.G. Fishbourne, the captain of the *Hermes*, and the English Consul, Thomas T. Meadows, both recounted this conversation the English visitors had with the Northern Prince:

To all this the Northern Prince listened, but made little or no rejoinder; the conversation, in so far as directed by him, consisting mainly of inquiries as to our religious belief, and expositions of their own. He states, that, as children and worshippers of one God, we were all brethren; and after receiving my assurance that such had long been our view also, inquired if I knew the Heavenly Rules (Tien teaou). I replied, that I was most likely acquainted with them, though unable to recognize them under that name; and after a moment's thought, asked if they were ten in number? He answered eagerly in the affirmative. I then began repeating the Ten Commandments, but had not proceeded far before he had laid his hand on my shoulder in a friendly way, and exclaimed, 'The same as ourselves! The same as ourselves!'⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Fishbourne, p. 138; Meadows, p. 259.

Their devotion to the Mosaic code was an expression of their commitment to a form of religion which concerned all of life, springing forth, as the commandments do, from the narrowly religious and flowing out to the totality of life in every dimension: social, economic and political.

Conforming to the rule of the Ten Commandments served as the essential core of Taiping religious practice. And that rule was strictly enforced. Ch'ing and Western observers all in unison note the dominant position of the rule and its strict enforcement especially on army recruits. Chang discusses the severity of Taiping discipline, especially in relation to the Ten Commandments. That severity is most clearly displayed in the Taiping regulation which stated that all army recruits were to memorize the decalogue, requiring that it be recited by heart within three weeks. The penalty for failing to do so was decapitation.⁵¹ Those who were literate were to help those who were not, by reading the commands aloud for the recruits until they learned them by heart. The penalty for transgressing the commands was the same as not knowing them.

The first three commandments propelled their iconoclastic crusade. The Taiping's iconoclasm was as much an expression of their loyalty to Shang-ti as was their worship, and it sprung from how they read the Commandments. In the 'Taiping Imperial Declaration,' it is stated that, "The Great God commanded

⁵¹ TPTK. Vol. 3; "Tse-ch'ing Hui-tuan," p. 229.

Moses, saying, 'I am the Supreme Lord, the Great God; you men of the world must on no account set up images resembling anything in heaven above or on earth below, and bow down and worship them.' Now you people of the world who set up images are in absolute defiance of the Great God's expressed will."⁵²

This iconoclasm was a distinguishing feature of the kind of Protestantism which Hung had come into contact with in his reading of The Good Words and in his journey to the Baptist chapel at Canton. The Calvinist wing of the Reformation was characterized from its beginnings by such iconoclastic activity.⁵³ As Carlos Eire, in his study of the role of iconoclasm in the Reformation, has shown, Zwingli and other Swiss reformers read the Ten Commandments in a fashion which compelled the followers of Reformed Protestantism to take action against physical representations of the sacred.⁵⁴ The herald announcing the arrival of the

⁵² Michael, 2: 41. Hsiang Ta, 1:95.

⁵³ Indeed the Calvinists parted company with the Catholics and Lutherans in the very numbering of the Ten Commandments. The Calvinists divided the Mosaic table differently. Their first three commandments concern idolatry; where the Catholics and Lutherans divided up the commandments so that only the first two concern idolatry. The Calvinists then compensate at the end by combining the commands involving coveting. If we are keeping score, this means that the Calvinists have three commandments at the beginning of the decalogue concerning idolatry (the first through third commandments) and one at the end concerning coveting (the tenth), while the Catholics and Lutherans have two commands concerning idolatry and two concerning coveting. The whole numbering in between is likewise affected. The net result for the Calvinist version is a greater emphasis on the sin of idolatry. The Taiping listing of the Ten Commandments follows the Calvinist model.

⁵⁴ While the evangelical tide had washed over Anglo-American Protestantism in the late 1700s and early 1800s, it did not result in the wholesale abandoning of Calvinist traditions and doctrines among the dissenting churches. The main missionary organs in China up until the 1850s were all affiliated with Calvinistic churches. Even the Baptists during this era would have been considered Calvinistic Baptists. The founder of modern Protestant missions, William Carey, was an English Baptist, and the very title he selected for his call to action on the missionary front demonstrates this orientation of

Reformation in city after city during the early decades of the sixteenth century would have more often than not been the sound of shattered stained glass.

Eire documents how iconoclasm was a prelude to revolution in Switzerland and to the Wars of Religion in France. He describes iconoclasm as a “revolutionary act,” a directed act of violence shattering the accepted social myth.⁵⁵ In Basel, Eire recounts how the power of Rome and of the established oligarchy were “swept away with the images.” In Bern, he relates how “the people marched on the Cathedral to wage war on the idols. From the Cathedral alone, forty-six wagons of rubble were carted away to be burnt.”⁵⁶ Bernese soldiers were then dispatched to other Swiss cities. When they entered Geneva, they beat the priests and stripped them of their habit, and then fed a sacred host to a goat. Another soldier plucked the eyes out of a statue of St. Anthony with his sword, in the full view of the friars.⁵⁷ What is especially significant given the parallels with Taiping iconoclasm is the development in the thinking of this movement toward a theory of resistance which views tyrannicide as a form of iconoclasm. As Eire notes, “Although none of the major continental Reformers ever advocated tyrannicide or revolution as a

the dissenting churches. The title of his work is An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen (1792) and his argument is directed against the view that since God has predestined men to be saved, He Himself will convert the non-Christian world, if it so pleases Him. He does not need the service of mere mortals.

⁵⁵ Carlos Eire, War Against the Idols: the Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 151.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 112-113; 118.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 128, 136.

way of effecting religious change, their followers would not always be restrained from applying the same rule to governments that they applied to the “idols.” As a form of aggressive disobedience to established authority, iconoclasm is closely related to the more radical forms of political revolution.”⁵⁸ It is this same connection between smashing idols and rebelling against idolatrous governments that the Taiping made in their own crusade for religious change.

This same iconoclastic fervor marked the Taiping movement from the beginning. The destructive aspects of the mission began with smashing idols, and continued in the toppling of Confucius and the slaying of the Manchus. For each of these cultural artifacts defined and supported the blasphemous claims of the imperial office. In the early years of the movement, to show their loyalty to the Heavenly Father, both Hungs smashed their school’s Confucian tablets, and a turning point for the movement as a whole came when Hung Hsiu-ch’uan dismembered the idol in Kwangsi. The Taiping rebels left a trail of shattered idols wherever they ventured. This was a characteristic of the movement which was frequently commented upon by Western and Ch’ing observer alike.

Western observers often described these iconoclastic spectacles as one of their first impressions when visiting Taiping-occupied lands. Captain E.G. Fishbourne, Commander of the British Steamer the *Hermes*, was one of the first witnesses to

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 157.

describe this aspect of the rebellion. While he found that the rebels had spared the Buddhist priests (though they did require them to grow their hair), no mercy was shown to their religious representations. "The idols, it is true, were all destroyed; some of these must have been magnificent, made of clay, and forty or even sixty feet high. Those of wood or stone were defaced, and many thrown into the water."⁵⁹ The Reverend Walter Medhurst in an interview with a man who had served as a Taiping soldier was told that "everything belonging to Buddha and Taou [sic],... were indiscriminately destroyed... As for the priests, opium-smokers, and whoremongers, they dared not show their faces."⁶⁰ From Foochow, too, comes a report which describes the demolishing of temples, and an equally sanguine fate for the priests.⁶¹ Alexander Wylie who surveyed Taiping China from Nanking to Anking filed a report in 1859 in which he comments on this signature mark of the Taiping,

The temples have been especially marked out for destruction, and I find that it is an invariable practice with them, for there is not a single temple for idol woship to be seen anywhere within their reach. In the temple of the god of war, nothing remains but a semi-calcined marble tablet, and a pivot of clay seated on a pedestal, which formed the nucleus of the grim idol--apparently reproaching his besotted worshippers for their folly.⁶²

⁵⁹ Clarke and Gregory, p. 57.

⁶⁰ Clarke and Gregory, p. 89.

⁶¹ *ibid*, p. 203.

⁶² *ibid*, pp. 219-220.

A more vivid description yet comes from Griffith John's journey to Soochow where even in 1860 he is able to record that, "The iconoclastic tendencies of the Taipings are still in full vigor. Nowhere, apparently, do they leave the idols untouched...It is common to see the nose, chin, and hands cut off. The floors of these buildings are bestrewn with relics of helpless gods...Some are cast into the canals, and are found floating down the stream mingled with the debris of rifled houses and the remains of the dead."⁶³ In the early stages of the rebellion, missionaries greeted this iconoclasm as a positive omen, but in the later stages, in many of these accounts, these same missionaries encounter such scenes with an increasing sense of foreboding.

Chinese observers also noted this signature mark of the movement, but in less approving terms. In Nanking, near Mo-ch'iu Lake, stood the statue of one King Chung-shan. The Taipings did not know which god it was dedicated to, and the issue was irrelevant to them anyway; they cut off its head and then destroyed the statue, after which they set fire to the building in which it was housed.⁶⁴ As one loyalist observer explains this penchant for pulverizing, "the bandit's religion involves looking up toward the empty skies to worship, they are upset by idols (shen-hsiang: statues of gods). Seeing one, they immediately smash and destroy it;

⁶³ *ibid*, p. 234.

⁶⁴ TPTK, Vol. 4; "Tun-pi Sui-wen Lu," p. 398.

they show no tolerance for any kind of idolatry.”⁶⁵ The effect on Chinese worshippers at some of these temples must have been traumatic, witnessing this attack on their sacred objects. But what must have been especially disconcerting to the believer was that the idols proved to be no match for the Taiping forces.

Another object of Taiping wrath was Confucius and the classics. Hung Hsiu-ch’uan had shown this iconoclastic posture towards Confucianism early, where in his vision of his ascent to Heaven he beats Confucius with a whip, despite the sage’s cries for mercy. The Taiping also defaced the statues of Confucius and leveled his temples. More sacrilegious in the eyes of Ch’ing officials was the effort to displace the Confucian canon with the Taiping Christian Canon in the official exams. Though the Eastern King sought to moderate the Taiping stance toward Confucius, Hung would not relent.

The punishment for reading the classics, the “demon books” as they were referred to in the Taiping regulations, and teaching them was decapitation.⁶⁶ One poet lamented that the Taiping did not read books, that books had no pleasure for them, that they did not know Confucius or recognize Mencius, that they thought it was good to burn these books and better to throw them in the water. All those who read books or collected them, along with those who bought and sold them, were

⁶⁵ TPTK, Vol. 4; “Wu-ch’ang Chi-shih,” p. 601.

⁶⁶ TPTK, Vol. 3; “Tse-ch’ing Hui-tsu’an,” p. 232.

executed.⁶⁷ These complaints may be hyperbolic for literary, or more probably propagandistic, effect (they actually treated scholars fairly well; one self-styled businessman is addressed as “sir” just because he could read and write); nevertheless, the Taiping disposition towards the classics of Chinese culture was well known, and even if this was an exaggeration, it was an exaggeration based in some fact.

What aroused the fury of the Taiping even more than Confucius were the Manchus. They were the demons who had plundered and pillaged Chinese civilization,⁶⁸ and the sign which demonstrated one’s loyalty to the Taiping was to let the hair of the front of the head, the part of the head which had been shaved to show submission to the Manchus, grow long.⁶⁹ Everything which was associated with the Manchus and the Ch’ing court was identified by the adjective demon, as is vividly described for us by one loyalist, “The bandits regard officials as demons, when they see dynastic clothes and headgear, ... these are also regarded as demonic paraphernalia. They call scholars, demon scholars, soldiers, demon soldiers, messengers, demon messengers. There is nothing they do not demonize; they even call the people’s militia, demon maggots.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ TPTK, Vol. 4; “Chin-ling Kuei-chia Hsin-yueh-fu Wu-shih Shou,” p. 735.

⁶⁸ A contradiction only for those outside the Taiping movement; in their iconoclastic activity, the Taiping believed they were saving Chinese civilization.

⁶⁹ The Taiping favored style was long, flowing tresses; they are regularly referred to in accounts as “long-hairs.”

⁷⁰ TPTK, Vol. 5; “Su-t’ ai Mi-lu Chi,” p. 279.

The Manchus were the enemies of *Shang-ti* since the Ch'ing emperor had profaned *Shang-ti* by taking his name in vain. This connection is explicitly made in one missionary's account of the occupation of the treaty port of Ningpo, in which the missionary reports that the Taiping war cry heard throughout the city was, "Down with the Tartars...Down with the Idols."⁷¹ Hung's original commission from the Heavenly Father was to exterminate these demons. And the Taiping carried out that commission faithfully.

After breaching the wall of the cities they conquered, the Taiping's first objective was to make for the Manchu section of the city. In Hunan, a loyalist observer writes of the "pitiful Manchus," who, men and women, young and old, were devoured by the hungry swords of the Taiping. When they reached Nanking, the Taiping warned the common people to stay in their homes as they headed for the Manchu quarter. The holy soldiers killed all the Manchu men, and then drove several thousand Manchu women to the outside of the Ch'ao Yang Gate, surrounded them and burnt them to death.⁷² When Ho-fei in Anhui province fell, one observer heard shouts of "kill the demons" filling the streets and alleys of the Manchu city.⁷³ We know that these reports were not exaggerated, and if the clipping of a queue could cause the Manchus to tremble, it is not difficult to imagine what kind of response these reports elicited at the Ch'ing court.

⁷¹ Clarke and Gregory, p. 381.

⁷² TPTK, Vol. 3; "Ching Shan Ye-shih," p. 6; "Tse-ch'ing Hui-tsuai," p. 694.

The Taiping mission was characterized not only with destroying the imperial culture, but also with building their Taiping Christian culture. The commandments also played a role in this enterprise as well. The Taiping understanding of the seventh commandment, for example, and its prohibition against adultery, which in the Taiping version also denounced licentiousness, led them to impose restrictions which forbade any kind of social contact between men and women, especially sexual relations, and this rule extended even to married couples. According to one observer, the separation of the sexes was carried to such an extreme that fathers could not even communicate with their daughters nor mothers with their sons.⁷⁴ This custom of separating the sexes is reported by a number of observers, although it is known that the Taiping only strictly enforced this regulation in the early years.

But to institute it at all led to unceasing denunciations from Confucian-oriented observers for whom the structure of the family was sacrosanct. The observers often attacked this Taiping custom, particularly targeting the egalitarian habit of addressing each other as brother and sister, which in particular offended the hierarchical sensibilities of Confucian observers. As Chang Te-chien comments,

As for the great ethical code of father and son, husband and wife, the bandits rebel against Heaven, and they turn their backs on reason; they do not acknowledge the order of older and younger, of noble and mean; they only know brother. And these so-called brothers, not only are you yourself a (an elder) brother, but all of them are (elder) brothers; not only are you yourself a (younger) brother, but all of them are (younger) brothers, and everyone desiring

⁷³ TPTK, Vol. 5; "Meng-nan Shu-ch'ao," p. 61.

⁷⁴ TPTK, Vol. 4; "Chin-ling-sheng Nan-chi Lueh," p. 715.

it all, just makes it all a matter of being one's brothers [ie., what is yours is mine]. So then there are old 'brothers' and new 'brothers' as terms of address. Compelling wives to be addressed as 'sister' so that you have old 'sisters' and new 'sisters' as terms of address.⁷⁵

It seems that in this passage what elicits more condemnation than the unnaturalness of separating husband and wife is the unnatural, to the Confucian mind, egalitarian character of all Taiping relationships.

The commandments which forbid stealing and coveting, the eighth and tenth, were enforced with as much severity. The Taiping response to these commands was all the more conscientious since these commands fit with the Taiping understanding of Shang-ti as the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth. Since He created the earth, the land belonged to Him, and He willed that it be apportioned fairly among all his children. As distinctive as was the Taiping commitment to Christianity-- for both Chinese and Western observers alike-- was the Taiping commitment to economic equality and social justice. These values are enshrined in the widely-circulated document, "The Heavenly Dynasty Land System" (T'ien-ch'ao T'ien-mou Chih-tu), which proclaims, "...for the whole empire is the universal family of our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God. When all the people in the empire will not take anything as their own but submit all things to the Supreme Lord, then the Lord will make use of them, and in the universal

⁷⁵ TPTK, Vol. 3; "Tse-ch'ing Hui-tsuán," p. 180.

family of the empire, every place will be equal and every individual well-fed and clothed. This is the intent of our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God, in specially commanding the true Sovereign of T'ai-p'ing to save the world."⁷⁶ While there have been many observers and scholars alike who have questioned the sincerity of the Taiping in publicizing this document, and who doubted whether the Taiping had any intentions of instituting this system, the case that their intentions were more naive than insincere has been made much easier to prove in recent years.

It has never been challenged that the Taiping practiced a community of goods, best exemplified in the institution of the sacred treasury (sheng-k'u). This institutional expression of the Taiping belief in economic equality is abundantly attested to and can be copiously documented. In Wuchang, one of their first actions after they entered the city was to set up the treasury.⁷⁷ Nanking's sacred treasury was still operating and "carried out to its fullest extent" when Griffith John visited in the 1860s.⁷⁸ Even as far afield as Fukien, whatever food or clothing obtained was shared with all.⁷⁹ One of the regulations governing troop behavior is that all the loot left by "demons," including gold, jade and clothing was all to be

⁷⁶ Michael, 2: 314. The "Heavenly Land System" was usually included on all the lists of "false documents" drawn up by Ch'ing observers, which suggests a fairly wide distribution since if they could get their hands on copies of the document, many others could also. Chang Te-chien compiled one such list; see Vol. 3; "Tse-ch'ing Hui-tsuan," p. 260.

⁷⁷ TPTK, Vol. 4; "Wu-ch'ang Chi-shih," p. 593.

⁷⁸ Clarke and Gregory, p. 267.

contributed to the treasury.⁸⁰ There was also the practice of sharing all meals together. In all these ways the Taiping worked to make sure that all the wealth of *Shang-ti* would be distributed equally among all his sons and daughters.

Beyond these considerations, it has been the publication of Kathryn Bernhardt's study of Kiangnan area rent rebellions which has disclosed, through the patterns of these rebellions, the impact of Taiping socio-economic doctrine and policy. As Bernhardt reminds us, even though the Taiping were not able to implement their land system, they did implement other more equitable policies, some as rudimentary as compelling gentry households to pay their fair share of taxes, which did change the landscape of landlord-peasant relations in the area permanently. Rather than what has traditionally been argued about the impact of the Taiping Rebellion, it was the peasants, not the elite, which derived the most benefit from the upheaval.⁸¹

The Taiping mission did not end with their efforts to destroy the Ch'ing empire or their attempts to build their own Heavenly Kingdom. There was a third dimension to their mission, directed at those who had not yet thrown their lot with either side, and this involved the propagation of their complaints about the old

⁷⁹ TPTK, Vol. 6; "K'ou-ting Chi-lueh," p. 811.

⁸⁰ TPTK, Vol. 3; "Tse-ch'ing Hui-tuan," p. 229.

⁸¹ Kathryn Bernhardt, *Rents, Taxes and Peasant Resistance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). The introduction and chapter three, which is entitled "The Taiping Occupation of Jiangnan," are most directly relevant to this question.

order and their promises for the new. The Taiping spent a great deal of effort at winning the hearts and minds of the people, at getting their message out to the people, at proselytizing. Reaching far outside the boundaries where they exercised formal control, the Taiping were able to extend their influence through the distribution of literature even into areas they did not occupy. Ironically, the Ch'ing were compelled by these Taiping efforts to engage in the same kind of proselytizing, and often wound up spreading the Taiping message in their own attempts to counteract it. Understanding this dimension of the Taiping mission is critical for understanding both the long-term impact of the Taiping and for evaluating the charge that their message was too foreign for the people to accept.

Consider the declarations posted up on anonymous walls. These were especially conspicuous in those cities which were the object of a Taiping siege. We could expect this to be the case in Nanking. There a Ch'ing observer describes the scene for his readers, "The rebel bandits set up their Heavenly Father religion [the only time this phrase is used] coercing foolish people [to join]; the center of the city was plastered with false declarations. Regardless of what matter, these all begin with 'The Heavenly Father has greatly poured out his heavenly grace and mandated that our Heavenly King serve as the truly-mandated Lord, and to establish the Heavenly Capital...' and such, these several phrases."⁸²

⁸² TPTK, Vol. 4; "Chin-ling Tsa-chi," p. 612.

Chang Te-chien tells us that in the very beginning of the rebellion such literature was not so plentiful, nor did the wording so openly challenge the dynasty. But all that quickly changed. When the Taiping captured Yung-an, along with the city came all its resident literati, and so they had the capability for publishing many more of these. Chang's account features many of these so-called "false declarations," which he states are representative of the different types posted in areas of Taiping activity. The one which leads off this representative sampling is by far the most grave,

The Heavenly King [hereby] proclaims saying: All you Ch'ing fellow-Chinese, you whose position is so clear; order all your soldiers and officials to obey the mandate and adhere to the Commandments. In all the great universe, the Glorious God [Huang-ti; usually the title used for the emperor] is alone one. He is the Heavenly Father, the High Lord, the Glorious High God [Huang Shang-ti]. Apart from the Heavenly Father, the High Lord, the Glorious High God, if there is a man who calls himself the Glorious God [Huang-ti], with respect to the law of Heaven this transgression involves snow in the midst of the clouds. In the universe, the Great Elder Brother is alone one. He is the Heavenly Elder Brother, Ye-su [Jesus]. Apart from the Heavenly Elder Brother, if there is a man who calls himself the Great Elder Brother, with respect to the law of Heaven this transgression involves snow in the midst of the clouds [see note]. Continuing from this moment, I am clearly proclaiming this to the whole universe. After this, any one who transgresses [these commands] should not blame us [for what befalls him]. Respect this.⁸³

⁸³ TPTK, Vol. 3; "Tse-ch'ing Hui-tsuan," p. 191. According to the *Yu Hai* [An Encyclopedia of Chinese Folk Language], ed., Chung Ching-wen, the phrase "snow in the midst of the clouds," refers to executing a person with a flying knife (ie., a knife that is thrown). The dictionary states that the locus classicus for this word is these Taiping documents; p. 84. Franz Michael has a somewhat different explanation. This "snow in the midst of the clouds" was the name of a sword given Hung Hsiu-ch'uang by *Shang-ti*; the phrase later came to refer to execution by beheading. See Michael, 2:57-58.

This representative declaration contains a very serious challenge: the Taipings are proclaiming that the emperor in referring to himself as *Huang-ti* has transgressed the law of Heaven and so is judged to be worthy of execution. These are somber and sobering words.

All but a few of the different declarations Chang includes begin with the line, "The True [Bearer] of the Mandate of Heaven, the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace." Then since each of the kings would be operating in different fields of battle, the particular king in whose name the declaration was issued--the Eastern King or the Northern King-- would then be listed along with his various titles. Following these expressions comes the phrase, "the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly Elder Brother have greatly displayed their Heavenly mercy, specially sending my True Lord, the Heavenly King to descend into the world to sovereignly rule over all the world."⁸⁴ The heading of some of the declarations sometimes concluded with the phrase "to slaughter and exterminate the demons," replacing the phrase "to sovereignly rule over all the world."⁸⁵ After this heading would come the contents of the declaration itself.

Thus, from only the formulaic heading of each of these declarations, the populace reading this literature (or listening to it read, in the case of those who

⁸⁴ TPTK, Vol.3; "Tse-Ch'ing Hui-tsuan," pp. 193-199.

⁸⁵ TPTK, Vol.3; "Tse-ch'ing Hui-tsuan," p. 218. This is given as typical of declarations issued, not surprisingly, by Yang Hsiu-ch'ing

could not read) would know some basics about the religion of the Taiping Kingdom, even if they never had the opportunity (or, as these observers viewed it, misfortune) to live under their rule. They would know that this movement was challenging the claim of the regime to be the bearer of the Mandate of Heaven; they would know that the challengers were calling themselves kings and not emperors-- and why would that be, the curious peasant would wonder--, they would know that as part of the challenge that the Taiping were engaging in a particularly provocative form of iconoclasm and a demonizing of the ruling race, and finally they would know that the challengers were backing their enterprise with religious appeals to the mandate of Heaven.

These declarations, on yellow paper with dragon borders, appeared everywhere. They appear first in Yung-an. They are "posted on every street corner" in Ch'ang-sha, even though the Taiping fail in their attempt to take the city.⁸⁶ Many times these would be posted by secret society allies living within the cities. But at other times they would use more creative methods of delivering their messages: at Nanking the God-worshippers shot their literature into the city by bow and arrow, both declarations and documents.⁸⁷

In Soochow, the yellow paper declarations were displayed when different criminals were paraded through the city, and were festooned over the cangues

⁸⁶ TPTK, Vol. 3; "Tse-Ch'ing Hui-tsuán," p. 217.

⁸⁷ TPTK, Vol. 4; "Chin-ling-sheng Nan-chi Lueh," p. 690.

placed around the necks of transgressors. A typical Soochow banner read, "The Loyal King has a command; let all the brothers hearken: such and such a person did such and such a thing; he transgressed the Heavenly Commandments; presently we have punished his crime."⁸⁸ Also issued around Soochow is a denunciation of the demon court which was showing such contempt for the sacred things of the former Ming dynasty, an appeal with secret society overtones.⁸⁹

The efforts which the Taiping expended in order to widely distribute this literature and to secure an audience for their message testifies to the confidence which the Taiping evinced; they seem to have been convinced that the more the people knew about their doctrine and their purpose, the greater willingness the people would show in giving allegiance to their movement. Was this confidence that the Taiping had in the common people misplaced?

This literature was varied; there was a range of genre which the Taiping employed in their struggle. After the Taiping breached the walls of Nanking, one of their first actions was to plaster the walls with all kinds of declarations and announcements. Sometimes these concerned a decree of one of the kings, sometimes they concerned matters of belief or conduct. An example of the latter was seen during the occupation (or, liberation) of Nanking, "When people do not know how to revere Heaven, the Heavenly Father is greatly enraged; the first time,

⁸⁸ TPTK, Vol. 5; "Su-t'ai Mi-lu Chi," p. 280.

⁸⁹ TPTK, Vol. 5; "Wu-ch'ing Jih-chi," p. 340.

he sent down flood waters.”⁹⁰ And another, on red paper, “The Heavenly King has been invested with the mandate of the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly Elder Brother, in order to save the people of the world; everyone must know the Heavenly Father and submit to the Heavenly King.” On top of the doorposts leading into their living quarters is written this exhortation, “Let everyone worship *Shang-ti*, then each person will ascend to the Heavenly Paradise; come quickly, come quickly, worship *Shang-ti*.”⁹¹

Beyond these declarations and proclamations, which are largely political in nature, there is the specifically religious literature which poured out of the Taiping printing presses. One common feature of many of these observer accounts is the list of Taiping publications they include, demonstrating a degree of familiarity with these materials which in itself testifies to the wide and effective distribution of these materials. Chang Te-chien provides a list of all the titles which played an important role in the movement; a sampling of the nineteen different titles he records follows: the Old Testament, the New Testament, the *T'ien-T'iao Shu* (the Ten Commandments), the Three Character Classic and the Heavenly Land System.⁹²

⁹⁰ TPTK, Vol. 4; “Chin-ling-sheng Nan-chi-lueh.” For the warning about the Heavenly Father’s wrath, see p. 694.

⁹¹ TPTK, Vol. 4; “Chin-ling-sheng Nan-chi-lueh,” p. 695.

⁹² TPTK, Vol. 3; “Tse-ch’ing Hui-tsu’an,” pp. 252-253.

A loyalist named Wang K'un laments the fact that the Taiping have broadcast (ch'uan-po) their "demon books" to the four corners of the empire. He refers to the new and old "cursed" books, playing off the title of the *Hsin-yi-chao* (the New Testament) and *Chiu-yi-chao* (the Old Testament) [chao is written as chou, meaning cursed].⁹³ This broadcast distribution of their books was one of their first steps in establishing the new order in the cities they subjugated. One Ch'ing observer states that after the rebels and bandits entered Nanking, they "distributed and scattered their false books, and ordered that we chant and read them. There were titles such as the Old Testament, the false Taiping Military Organization, the false Taiping Camp Regulations, the Ode to Youth, ... and the Three Character Classic."⁹⁴ Two other Nanking observers give similar lists, both of which mention titles including the Old and New Testaments, the Three Character Classic and the Ten Commandments.⁹⁵ These books were also the same texts used in the schools to educate the children, at least this was the case in Nanking.

It is hard to know just how long this practice of literature distribution continued. Books were probably not as generously spread abroad in the later stage of the movement as they were in the early years. But Taiping broadsheets and declarations were posted everywhere the Taiping advanced and through the final

⁹³ TPTK, Vol. 4; "Tun-pi Sui-wen," pp. 391, 393.

⁹⁴ TPTK, Vol.4; "Chin-ling Tsa-chi," p. 611.

⁹⁵ TPTK, Vol. 4; "Chiang-nan Ch'un-meng-an Pi-chi," p. 436. "Chin-ling-sheng Nan-chi Lu" even enumerates the Commandments and quotes from the Three Character Classic; see p. 717.

years of the Kingdom. And it was not just the Taiping who were disseminating information about their doctrine to the Chinese public. The Ch'ing were doing the same. As all these observer accounts show; just in their efforts to win the propaganda war, the Ch'ing had to address Taiping doctrines and formulate responses. These observer accounts are records of just this very process.

These observer accounts served a more important role in the era following the rebellion. Many of these accounts, for example, were written in the 1850s, but were only published after the rebellion was suppressed. Thus, these accounts found new life in the period of reconstruction, when the gentry not only took the lead in rebuilding the dikes and restoring the administration of Taiping China back to the Ch'ing, but also in reconstructing the ideological world of the common people. What can only be commented upon here, but would no doubt yield a promising study in itself is the proliferation in post-Taiping Ch'ing China of the establishing of shrines to fallen martyrs. Whose version of the events would hold; whom would the people regard as the martyrs? In many respects, these observer accounts themselves fit into this program of ideological reconstruction and such efforts in themselves provide one last piece of evidence of the widespread impact of the Taiping and their religion.

The Chinese and Western fixation, then, on the Christian elements of the Taiping was not unjustified. The ideology was something more than popular

religion and it occupied a prominent place in both Taiping propaganda campaigns and in the administration of their territories. It was the something more which accounted for Taiping success on the battlefield and which seems also to have accounted for their appeal to the people.

A number of questions are raised by this survey which are highly critical for understanding what was happening in Chinese society for the period extending from immediately after the fall of Nanking to the advent of the 1911 Revolution. One of these questions concerns the impact of Taiping iconoclasm on society. Joseph Edkins made this assessment of the impact of Taiping iconoclasm on Chinese society while visiting Soochow, and I think it sums up the situation well, "The rebels have shown their scorn of the idols, by chopping off their noses, and placing them in ridiculous attitudes. A blow has been inflicted on Chinese idolatry, by the actors in this movement, such as it has never received."⁹⁶ What was the impact of all this iconoclasm--the smashing of the idols, the slaying and demonization of Manchus, the assault on the imperial office as a blasphemous transgression of Shang-ti's holy name--on popular society? The Taiping controlled vast stretches of both the middle and the lower Yangtze Valley for years, and tens of thousands were enlisted to fight for their cause. Millions more witnessed the levelled temples and crowded around the declarations denouncing the emperor.

⁹⁶ Clarke and Gregory, p. 282.

Did this yield no changes in the popular perception of imperial legitimacy? What ideological impact did the Taiping campaign produce?

And if there were changes, were they the kind of changes which, when the Taiping were defeated, made the people more fearful of the ruling authority, spiritual and temporal, or less; more malleable to the will of their rulers, or more resistant? Did the people regard the Taiping defeat as just deserts for their attack on the old order and the hardened-clay gods, or did they see the Taiping as martyrs who were sacrificed in a just cause? We know how the gentry interpreted the Taiping defeat; this has been meticulously chronicled for us. But where would we go to find out how the common people interpreted this event? These questions are suggestive of the important work that still needs to be done. I attempt to answer them in an oblique fashion in the next chapter; I expect that like too many questions for the late imperial period, oblique answers are the only kind we can hope for.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SOCIETY AND SECT ON THE EVE OF THE REBELLION

Much has been written about changes in the structure of central government, about the shifting composition and expanding power of the gentry, and about the immiseration of the peasant in the twilight of the Ch'ing dynasty. There are other aspects of late Ch'ing society, however, that we know very little about. One of the gaping holes in our knowledge of this important period concerns popular society, especially the world of the secret society and the sect. Susan Naquin's study of this world leads us into the nineteenth century, and Joseph Esherick's brings us out; Philip Kuhn and Elizabeth Perry offer glimpses at it from the perspective of their more particular interest in the subject, but few have attempted to study this subject as the sole and singular focus of their study.¹ I am not going to attempt to do so either, at least here, but what I endeavor to do is examine what I believe is the chief reason for scholarly timidity. I believe that it is the question of the Taiping

¹ With one significant exception: David Johnson, Andrew Nathan and Evelyn Rawski, eds., Popular Culture in Late Imperial China (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985). Popular culture is examined in its popular social context.

Rebellion and its relationship to Chinese popular society which has intimidated scholars in their efforts to study this aspect of nineteenth-century popular society, and I shall seek to make a small breach in the wall which has prevented Chinese scholars from exploring this very important part of the Ch'ing terrain.

In this, the third part of the dissertation, I will be examining the impact of the Taiping rebellion on Chinese popular society, and its resulting transformation. To understand the nature of this impact, we need to first consider the shape and contours of Chinese popular society on the eve of the rebellion.

Most studies of Chinese popular society begin their exploration by dividing their subject between religious sect and secret society, between *chiao* and *hui*. This distinction has the benefit of tradition supporting it, but it can be misleading. Another distinction often drawn is a geographic one, dividing China at the Yangtze River between a sectarian north and a secret society south. These distinctions have their usefulness, and as long as it is kept in mind that there is some artificiality to the distinctions, and a great deal of overlap, especially at the boundaries, then these distinctions can still be useful.² This study will employ these distinctions, but always in the company of many caveats and not a few provisions.

² David Ownby in an article entitled "The Heaven and Earth Society as Popular Religion," published in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (November, 1995), pp. 1023-1046, talks about the religious elements of secret society life, gently reminding us that there is overlap in these distinctions between sect and society. The point is well taken, but I do not believe today's China scholars are so prone to overlook this dimension.

One big caveat that I need to enter right at the outset of this exploration is regarding this assumption I have been making concerning the secret society and religious sect as somehow representing the whole of Chinese popular society. I do not think that I am assuming too much in such an identification, especially when authoritative others have already made the case for such an identification with respect to society and sect.

E.J. Hobsbawm argued for this identification in the case of the social bandit, maintaining that the social bandit could never have survived if he had not had the support and protection of the surrounding peasant society. The social bandit recognized his need of this support, and he carefully cultivated it, through creating a Robin Hood type image of himself, and staying faithful to the very same code. It was the state and the gentry, not the peasant, which considered the social bandit a criminal.³

Susan Naquin argued that this identification holds for the relationship of religious sect and popular society as well. She speaks of a continuum of devotion in the rural countryside, with those who join the sectarian congregations being just a more devoted expression of the beliefs held and the practices attended to by all members of the society.⁴ Thus, these authorities allow us, with some confidence,

³ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Social Bandits and Primitive Rebels* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1959), p. 19.

⁴ For example, Naquin has this to say in her article, "The Transmission of White Lotus Sectarianism," published in the volume, *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, "By the eighteenth

to posit that what affected the society and sect did indeed affect the larger popular society.

Secret Societies on the Eve of the Rebellion

Chinese society on the eve of the Taiping rebellion was in ferment. Secret society activity, especially in the early to middle nineteenth century, was particularly intense. But where is the scholarship which records this turmoil? There has been an abundance of scholarship on secret societies in general and on the venerable Heaven and Earth Society (T'ien-ti hui) in particular. Much of this scholarship, however, is fixed on the eighteenth century, on what its advocates believe is the chief issue in the history of the societies: the origins of the secret society.⁵

The debate surrounding this issue of origins concerns whether the secret society was formed during the Ch'ing conquest as a proto-nationalist movement, as a creation of Ming loyalists, or whether the secret society was formed during the

century, White Lotus sects were part of a continuum with the popular religion from which they emerged, and they differentiated themselves from it to varying degrees." p. 289.

⁵ Qin Baoqi and Chuang Chi-fa both have mainly focused on the problem of origins. Chuang, however, does deal with the Taiping and then jumps forward to the 1911 Revolution. Ts'ai Shao-ch'ing deals less with the problem of origins, and more with later developments. While Qin Baoqi collaborated with Dian Murray in the writing of the magisterial work, The Origins of the Tiandi Hui: The Chinese Triads in Legend and History (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), and while the title of the work focuses on the issue of origins, they do spend a fair share of the pages on later developments. Also worth looking at is the edited volume, "Secret Societies" Reconsidered (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993) compiled by David Ownby and Mary Somers Heidhues.

economic and social distress of the late eighteenth century as a self-help association, as a mutual-aid brotherhood. The myth and legends of societies like the Heaven and Earth Society, as well as Kuomintang nationalist agendas, supported the earlier date with its more exalted account of secret society origins, while recent scholarship relying on archival material has supported the later date with its more mundane account of those origins. As Dian Murray states in her introduction, "These materials [from the Ch'ing archives] suggest that the Tiandihui emerged as a mutual aid fraternity in response to the demographic and economic crises of the later eighteenth century, and that it was but one of several societies, or *hui*, to appear at this time."⁶ When it is recognized that the missionary Rev. William Milne made the same kind of conclusion from his own analysis of the origins of the Heaven and Earth Society 150 years ago,⁷ these issues and the debates over them lose much of their remaining sense of urgency and importance. At least, we can hope that the really important work--that concerning the developments which took place during and after the Taiping-- may now step onto center stage.

One development in the secret society world which occurred immediately prior to the rise of the Taiping, during the reign of the Tao-kuang emperor, involved the

⁶ Murray, p. 1.

⁷ See the article in The Chinese Repository, Volume 14, 1845, pp. 59-69, which published the results of his study.

setting up of a network of secret societies called triads (*san-ho hui*). This inter-provincial organization of secret societies was centered on Fukien Province and branched out from there into all the adjoining provinces, so that by the 1830s the network encompassed five or six provinces and was divided into five houses or branches. In the eleventh year of the Tao-kuang emperor (1831), the Governor-General of Fukien and Chekiang, responded to a general call by the emperor to look into a censor's report which described this new organization as it was forming in an area of Kwangtung Province. The censor had reported the following:

... formerly there were bandits (*fei-t'u*) who swore allegiance and formed a gang. Their founder was registered in this same province. Recently I heard another report of [secret] society bandit (*hui-fei*) activity, so I went to investigate. While there I confiscated a map. One piece of the map indicated that the bandits for several years now have assembled together to form an alliance connecting five or six provinces, and that the name of this network is the triune society (or triads; *san-ho hui*). This gang is divided into five branches (or houses; *fang*) with Fukien serving as the major branch, and Kwangtung as a second branch, Yunnan as a third branch, Hukwang as a fourth branch and Chekiang as a fifth branch. Every branch has its own leader, and uses a different color for its flag. Those who enter the society receive a slogan (*k'ou-hao*) and each one is given a map to fool the people. Many have become followers.⁸

One governor dismissed the censor's report and its notion of such a network. He did not find any sign of such an organization in his province; all he had found in the way of heterodox activity involved garden-variety sectarian groups.⁹

⁸ KCT, Nung-min Yun-tung Category, #662-3, Tao-kuang 11/16/19. All memorials cited are taken from this classification category unless noted otherwise.

⁹ KCT, #662-5, Tao-kuang 11/7/6.

That there would be some incredulity expressed over this report of an organized network reflects perhaps what this governor had long observed of the nature of society organizations: that secret societies such as the Heaven and Earth Society were essentially local associations. This sense of local-ness is most clearly displayed in the fictive ties of sworn brotherhood which constituted membership in the society, creating a lineage network for those who may not have had the advantage of being born into such. The ceremony surrounding the birth of a brother into the family of the society involved rites such as mixing and drinking a combination of blood (usually the blood of a chicken with drops of blood from the initiate) and wine, swearing fidelity to the group, adopting a common surname (usually the name Hung), all the while kneeling before a statue of a founder of the group or of some god. The whole process was termed *chieh-pai hsiung-ti*, the *chieh-pai* component signifying the quasi-religious element in the forming of the brotherhood.

The Heaven and Earth Society's rituals also included passing under crossed swords as they swore their oaths of brotherhood. Blood oaths as such, without the surrounding ceremonial, were common even in the early Ch'ing, but the forming of the more elaborate *T'ien-ti Hui* organization was a creation of the Ch'ien-lung era. While the organization may have been formed for the purpose of mutual aid, it was

a flexible apparatus, and was as often used for other purposes, including smuggling and, in rarer instances, rebellion.¹⁰

In a memorial submitted only a year before the Taiping would proclaim the inauguration of their reign, Governor-General Yu T'ai of Hu-kuang is seeking to reassure the throne, which had become alarmed over the reports of society activity in his province of Hunan. The governor-general declares that society bandits have been captured along with their flags, identification badges (yao-p'ai), a chart which displays the eight trigrams, and a military manual: that is, all the apparatus for fomenting rebellion.¹¹ The governor-general was apparently not too well-versed in the art of reassuring the court.

His deputy serving under him, on the other hand, was more practiced in this art. A couple months after Yu T'ai's report, Hunan's Governor Feng Te-sheng is describing more features of the same society. This society held their initiation ceremony at an abandoned temple. After each prospective member handed over two-three hundred strings of cash (wen) initiation fee, which was used to buy sticks of incense and the ceremonial chicken blood, they were inducted into the society by means of the standard ritual, which included, in addition to the drinking of the blood and wine mixture, signing their names on a list and setting up an altar for the gods (she-li shen-wei).

¹⁰ Murray, pp. 12-22.

¹¹ KCT, #789-2, Tao-kuang 29/10/6.

What must have been more unsettling for the court was one of the other of the society's rites. The leader of the society cut a piece of paper into five different flags and arranged them on a table, the initiates being told that the pieces of paper represented the five directions (or more likely, the five houses of the triad network). From now on, they were told, wherever they find themselves, they only needed to show this flag and they would be able to enlist help from other brothers. Afterwards the leader, Chen Chih-k'uei, handed them the chart of the eight trigrams and their identification badges. Then they sacrificed (tsai) a chicken and taking its blood mixed it with wine and passed it around for all to drink, and in this way they became sworn brothers.¹² But the court need not become unduly alarmed. For the governor had found neither a seal nor a banner emblazoned with a slogan, which are the sine qua non, the screwdriver and wrench in the toolkit of rebels.

While the revisionist treatment of the Heaven and Earth society has attempted to show that the purpose of secret society association was mutual aid and protection, and sometimes also for looting, robbing and smuggling (especially opium), but not for organized resistance to the ruling Ch'ing, it does seem clear that such a development as the latter was part of the society repertoire. Whatever its origins may have been, the society form of association did take up a Ming loyalist banner in the nineteenth century. Many missionaries commented on this as the most

¹² KCT #789-3, Tao-kuang 30/1/18.

distinctive aspect of society activity and as we shall see the Taipings, too, regarded Ming loyalism as an integral part of society identity. This is not to say that secret societies devoted all their waking hours to plotting the overthrow of the government, but only that if there were to be such a movement, it could count on the sympathy and the concrete support of groups such as the Heaven and Earth Society.

Religious Sects on the Eve of the Rebellion

They would not be the only kind of group ready to lend support to such a movement. As we saw in part one, sectarian activity was on the upswing as well. In part one, we perused some of the memorials which were issued during the period of proscription. We had also noted in the first part of this study how Heavenly Lord sectarian activity was not criminalized until the Chia-ch'ing reign in the early 1800s, and how especially after the Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813 that Ch'ing officials had begun to crack down brutally on all forms of sectarian activity. We have the records of the Ch'ing Law code and the increased incidence of sectarian rebellions, all of which testifies to a combination of both intensified sectarian activity and a tougher official stance toward suppressing this same activity.

Hunan in particular in the years leading up to the appearance of the Taiping was plagued by all kinds of sectarian activity. In the twentieth year of the reign of the

Tao-kuang emperor there were reports that a vegetarian sect was propagating and practicing some evil doctrine (hsieh-chiao) in Kwangsi and Hunan, and that they were circulating some kind of demon language and distributing some false (uncensored) books. Then Governor Yu T'ai calms official fears aroused by such reports as he informs the emperor that he has investigated the literature of these sectarians and he found no talk of rebellion. They are all peaceful vegetarians, he concludes, subscribing to such sects as the Red Sun, the Great Vehicle, and the Blue Lotus.¹³ Of course, what the governor fails to mention is that with names such as Red Sun and Blue Lotus these sectarians would have confessed their faith in the apocalyptic vision of the White Lotus tradition. This apocalyptic vision was potentially rebellious, were the social circumstances to coincide with the sectarian's picture of the end of the era. It was a wise governor who neglects to mention such things.

Just seven years later a new governor of Hunan does not present such a reassuring account of sectarian movements. Governor Wu Wen-yung memorializes the throne concerning an intensifying of heterodox activity, particularly as promoted by religious bandits, noting, too, that society bandits have not been quiescent. Governor Wu recounts how a certain Ch'u Ch'ao-szu and his older brother had traveled to Hunan to do some trading.

¹³ KCT, #789-11, Tao-kuang 20.

While in Hunan, they became acquainted with a man named Wang Ch'eng-chin who was privy to teachings of the Three Vehicle Sect. Ch'u became a follower of Wang's, revering him as his master (pai...wei shih), and he joined Wang in propagating these beliefs and tricking people out of their money (a common charge made by officials). Wang in turn passed on to Ch'u a sutra along with the fundamentals of the sect's creed, which included a belief in the Eternal Mother (wu-sheng lao-mu) along with the three refuges (that is, in Buddha, in the priesthood, and in the doctrine) and the five prohibitions (that is, do not kill, steal, commit adultery, slander, drink wine). When Ch'u explained the outline of his beliefs to one Hsieh Tz'u-feng back in Kiangsi and to some others, they swore brotherhood and they began planning to rob and steal. The governor recommended the standard punishment for all the bandits: strangling for the leaders and banishment to the Muslim cities for the followers.¹⁴

Neither Sect nor Society

This memorial is a fairly ordinary memorial reporting on sectarian activity. What, though, is not so ordinary, yet not highly unusual, is the fact that this sectarian is swearing brotherhood, adopting the egalitarian structure of the secret society; the official wording invokes the secret society ritual language. Is this just

¹⁴ KCT #599-1, Tao-kuang 27/11/16.

sloppy reporting by an official who may have either been uninterested in the finer differences in heterodoxy, or was this accurate reporting of heterodox activity in these border regions? Is this just one more example of eclecticism in Chinese religion, now washing away the boundaries between different faith structures? Or is it more an evidence of the practical nature of the Chinese in the adoption of the organizational structures of sect and society--these structures are not essentially bound to the content of the creed; but can be adapted to the circumstances of time and place?

It is clear that there is more going on here than just an official mindset which is careless in making the nuanced distinctions between heterodox associations. It is also a reflection of the reality that while there are those societies which are only religious tangentially and there are those sectarians which are organized hierarchically under a master, there is a great deal of overlap especially along the Yangtze River valley which has served as the boundary between the two groups--so that you have sectarians which might adopt many of the rituals and even organization of the secret societies and societies which subscribe to some form of White Lotus apocalypticism.

And if this phenomenon were not worrisome enough, a new kind of sectarian bandit (or is it a society bandit?) is extending its influence in Szechuan, having taken advantage of the chaos following the religious rebellion (of 1813). These

heterodox practitioners are not identified as either society or sectarian bandit, but are simply called *Kuo-fei* (a name whose character is not known, but it sounds like the word for country), and their influence will increase exponentially during the Taiping Rebellion, but under another name: the *Ke-lao Hui*. In the later years of the Tao-kuang reign, however, they are making do smuggling opium.¹⁵ What was more ominous yet in the final years of the Tao-kuang reign was that throughout Szechuan and its neighboring provinces, the White Lotus, the Heavenly Lord and every other kind of sect is increasing its strength as well.

¹⁵ CCCT #2721-1, Tao-kuang 22/12/11.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE TAIPING TRANSFORMATION OF THE SECRET SOCIETIES

Before there was the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, there was the God-Worshippers Society (Pai Shang-ti Hui). That a rebellion developed out of an association of heterodox religionists was not a new thing in Chinese history. But there was more to this movement than sharing a common creed. The Taiping were a religious sect, but referred to themselves as a society (hui) as well, calling each other brother and sister, and followed the lead of a man with the surname of Hung (secret society members often adopted this surname to express the idea that they were all one family). This combination of society nomenclature with a sectarian signature was a new thing in Chinese society, and indeed it may be that the characteristic mark of nineteenth-century popular society. The appearance of the Taiping is one more piece of evidence documenting the fact that the traditional distinction between sect and society was rapidly eroding in the face of increased social and demographic pressure on the one side and government persecution on the other. Indeed, after the rise of the Taiping movement, this distinction would disappear completely in many

parts of popular China.

The officials who first noted the appearance of this new God-Worshippers society in Kwangsi in the tenth month of the founding year of the Hsien-feng Emperor labeled them with the name Shang-ti Society, but they mistakenly believed that this name was represented by characters which translated meant, the Esteemed Younger Brother Society. The Grand Council draft copy shows that officials were wise to the tricks of these society bandits, as they comment that “formerly there was the Increasing Younger Brother [T’ien-ti] Society which has changed its name to the Esteemed Younger Brother [Shang-ti] Society.”¹ This was the modus operandi of all society and sectarian associations. When the authorities banned one group, and proscribed their activity, the associations would adopt the name of a society which had not been prohibited. The Heaven and Earth Society (T’ien-ti Hui) was notorious for its use of this tactic. So while the law code had set severe penalties for those found to be associated with the Heaven and Earth Society, it did not say a word about those who associated with the Increasing Younger Brother Society (also, the T’ien-ti Hui). This practice both frustrated and infuriated the officials. All the more so, since it seems to have worked in helping society bandits escape the more severe aspects of the justice system. Thus when officials first take note of the

¹ Chun-Chi-Ch’u Tang [Grand Council Archive] (Beijing: Ming-Ch’ing Archives), Peasant Uprising Category, #2706, Hsien-feng 1/10/7. Hereafter, CCCT. All archival materials belong to this “Peasant Uprising” category unless otherwise noted.

God-worshippers society, they assume that it is just the latest guise of the Heaven and Earth Society.

This does not mean that they regarded its appearance as anything inconsequential. For this group was reported to be plotting rebellion. While sectarian groups often fomented rebellion, society groups more often preferred the safer and more lucrative activities of pillage and plunder. This group was not one of those playing it safe. They were reported to have a slogan with seven characters, three of which referred to the Great Ming Kingdom, and it was rumored that their leader was a Ming Dynasty pretender who had taken the appellation, the King of Great Peace (T'ai-p'ing Wang). They had even adopted a reign title, and established a network in Hunan as well as in Kwangsi and Kwangtung. The authorities were a little slow off the mark, for by the time they noticed this new society, it was already too late to do too much about it. But they would still try.

The Taiping and the Secret Societies

There is a kind of conventional wisdom concerning the relationship of the Taiping rebels and the secret societies: during the early stages of the rebellion, the Taiping made common cause with these groups who shared their animus against the Manchus, but this shared hostility was not enough to overcome their differences in vision and in spirit. In a word, Taiping moral discipline proved to be too severe for

the secret societies, and as a consequence, this coalition fell apart. Like most examples of conventional wisdom, this description of the relationship between the secret societies and the Taiping is based in large part on an accounting of actual events, but this account should not be considered as the last word on the subject of the relationship between the two groups.

The account in question here is that given to the Rev. Theodore Hamberg by the future Shield King (Kan Wang), Hung Jen-kan. In this record, Hung Hsiu-ch'uan's cousin relates an early incident in the history of the God-worshippers where eight different heads of triad societies approached the Heavenly King, promising fealty to his rule. In accord with this request, the God-worshippers sent them teachers to instruct the members of the societies in the truth of the Taiping creed. The triad leaders rewarded these teachers with a generous gift of money which all, except one of the group, donated to the Taiping common treasury. This same teacher had transgressed the moral code once before—he had used opium and alcohol, yet because of his eloquence as a preacher of the doctrine, he had been spared punishment. This time he was not so fortunate: he was decapitated on the spot. This severity in the enforcement of the Taiping moral code led most of the triad chiefs to withdraw from the movement.² One who did not withdraw, Lo Ta-kang,

² Theodore Hamberg, The Visions of Hung-Siu-Tshuen, and the Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection (Hong Kong, 1854; reprint edition, San Francisco, 1975), pp. 54-55. Jen Yu-wen is one of many who refer to this passage in Hamberg in order to define the relationship between the

submitted to the Taiping discipline, and with several thousands of his followers joined the movement. He was appointed a general and served the Taiping with valor and success.

Given this account, there is still much which can be said that is often overlooked and frequently ignored. First of all, after this incident, there were still many more incidences of cooperation between the Taiping and the secret societies. Indeed all of the cases of cooperation occurred after this incident. Moreover, most secret society members joined the Taiping as individual members anyway, not as part of a network of societies affiliating with the Taiping movement, although there was this kind of involvement, too.³ While the Taiping were winning battles, theirs was an enthusiastic commitment. As Chuang Chi-fa has written, secret society involvement was a key factor in the early string of victories, for they served as a fifth column

Taipings and the secret societies. See his The Taiping Revolutionary Movement (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 69-70.

³ C.A. Curwen states, for example, that forty to fifty thousand Triad members joined the Taiping movement in its sweep through Hunan. He cites Li Hsiu-ch'eng's confession as the source of this statistic. But it is not clear from the confession itself that these were secret society members (see Hsiang Ta, ed., TPTK 2:790; Li states that they "recruited a mass of twenty or thirty thousand"—chao erh, san wan chung). Since Curwen's translation of the confession is one of the standard translations, he may have some good cause for making this inference. Nevertheless, it would have been helpful if he had provided the evidence on which he based this inference (he does not provide it in the notes of his translation, either). He makes a similar statement concerning Shih Ta-k'ai, stating that Shih enlisted between twenty and thirty thousand society members, and while in this instance Curwen does allude to some government reports for this statistic, he unfortunately does not cite these sources. C. A. Curwen, "Taiping Relations with Secret Societies and with Other Rebels," in Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China, 1840-1950, edited by Jean Chesneaux (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp. 75, 77.

Still this is a truly seminal article. Would that I had read this short, highly enlightening, piece early on in my research, as it provides a brief overview of the range of Taiping relations with the secret societies.

within the cities the Taiping were besieging. While the Taiping were attacking the walls of a city from without, the secret societies were undermining the city from within. It would be secret society allies, for example, who would post many of the Taiping declarations.⁴ The degree of this enthusiasm waned when the tide of Taiping victories crested, but this change in the emotional support for the movement did not necessarily translate into a change in commitment to the movement.

What is clear in the episode related to the Reverend Hamberg is that the disaffection which was often expressed in the relationship between the Taiping and the societies grew out of differences in the moral code, not in the doctrinal creed. Nowhere do we read that the secret societies were alienated because of the Taiping creed. While it is not always easy to separate the Taiping moral code from the Taiping doctrinal creed, from the accounts that are available which attempt to explain the reasons for the cooling ardor of secret society recruits, most point to the prohibitions concerning the moral code—opium use and the like. Where they do mention a doctrinal matter, it is more related to the Taiping vision of the new society than it is to a tenet like monotheism.

Though not as zealous as the true believers, secret society groups nevertheless cooperated with the Taiping, and this cooperation is copiously chronicled in the

⁴ Chuang Chi-fa, *Ch'ing-tai Mi-mi Hui-tang Shih Yen-chiu* [Research on the History of Ch'ing Era Secret Societies] (Taipei: Wen-shih-che Publishing House, 1994), pp. 211-214.

archival records, showing that each side could recognize that a practical alliance sometimes served each of their interests. From Hunan, a memorial reached the Grand Council which described how society bandits in the province were everywhere linking up with the *Yueh* bandits.⁵ Another memorial from Hunan reported that society bandits were raising banners with the title “T’ai-p’ing Yuan-shuai” (Taiping Commander) heralding the newly established cooperation.⁶ The *Pien-ch’ien Hui* (Border Money Society), a society whose sphere of operations was centered on Kiangsi, had linked up with the Taiping and was capturing cities as part of its advance in the province.⁷

One case of secret society and Taiping cooperation from Kiangsi provides a detailed depiction of the character of this practical relationship. This case is reported by the illustrious Ch’ing general Tseng Kuo-fan, and it concerns his campaign against a combined army of local bandits (t’u-fei), society bandits (hui-fei) and long-haired thieves (ch’ang-fa tsei; ie., Taiping rebels) in an area of Kiangsi Province.⁸ In early September, 1856, Tseng submitted his report of the back-and-forth struggle between his coalition of Ch’ing armies and the Taiping

⁵ *Kung-Chung Tang* [Palace Memorial Archive] (Beijing: Ming-Ch’ing Archives), Peasant Uprising Category, #657-4, Hsien-feng 5/1/7. Hereafter, KCT.

⁶ CCCT #3018, Hsien-feng 1/7/12 to 10/11/9.

⁷ KCT #709-2, Hsien-feng 6/11/8 and KCT #709-3, Hsien-feng 6/8/30 (most memorials are organized in chronological order in the archive; this one appears to have gotten mixed up)

⁸ KCT #656-3, Hsien-feng 6/8/7. The account of the course of the battles that follows is based directly on this memorial.

coalition in Kan-chou Prefecture in southern Kiangsi Province. In the opening lines of his report, the general briefs the emperor on the strategic importance of the prefectural seat of Kan-chou, a town which lay astride the Kan River, noting that “from ancient times it was a piece of territory which those who use soldiers must hold on to in order to protect the upper reaches of the river.” A map of Kiangsi Province reveals the reason for its strategic importance, for not only did Kan-chou sit at the confluence of several rivers traversing the province, more importantly, it connected to the Yangtze River which flowed along the northern border of the province.

Because of its strategic position, the general was determined to hold onto Kan-chou Prefecture. It was not a sure thing that he would be able to do so. The Taiping ruled in Kiangsi from late 1853 to the middle of 1858, and the Taiping battalions enforcing that rule in Kiangsi were under the command of Shih Ta-k'ai, the Assisting King. Though they never did control Kan-chou Prefecture, the Taiping did control all the prefectures surrounding Kan-chou, indeed most of Kiangsi, including the neighboring prefectures of Ning-tu and Chi-an. At the time that Tseng filed this report, the general seemed to have felt that the worst was over, at least in southern Kiangsi; Kan-chou Prefecture had been threatened--at one point the entire stretch of the river from Kan-chou north to T'ai-ho, a distance of approximately 100-150 kilometers was under the control of the Taiping coalition--

but he had recently been able to relax the martial order which had been imposed on the city. He was not premature in his actions, for the year 1856 was not a propitious one for the Taiping cause, as a dark cloud of fratricide had settled over the Heavenly Capital.

The struggle to preserve the city had been intensely fought; battles had been lost; soldiers had fallen on the field of conflict. What made the combat especially treacherous for the Ch'ing was the complex character of their enemy. Tseng and his commanders were up against a diverse array of military situations, from the more organized strategies of the Taiping armies to the guerrilla tactics of local and society bandits. The Ch'ing general recounted the stories of several different battles for the emperor.

In one of the early engagements, the Commander who was protecting the southern flank, Wang Pao-jun, led militia troops numbering some 3000 men from Hsin-ch'eng and Nan-k'ang prefects together with soldiers from two Ch'ing encampments on an expedition to exterminate the enemy. In successive encounters, however, he "lost the advantage." On the twelfth day of the third month of 1856, Han Chin-chun, holder of a military degree, arrived at Liang-k'ou. On the fifteenth of the month, Han engaged the T'ai-ho area "bandits" (ie., armies of the Taiping coalition) in battle around Wan-an and won a great victory. He slaughtered many bandits and sunk three of their ships. On the seventeenth day of the month, these

same bandits regrouped and renewed the fight, attacking from all four directions resulting in significant losses for the Ch'ing troops. The naval backup was however unable to support Han Chin-chun, which forced Han to retreat. He then together with Lieutenant-Colonel Che-k'e-tun-pu gathered together all their soldiers and militia braves at Kan-chou, and waited for the next offensive.

On the twenty-second day of the third month, at T'an-k'ou, in the area of Nan-k'ang (just southwest of Kan-chou), society bandits (hui-fei) instigated a disturbance by killing a special commissioner by the name of Chou Ch'ing-yun. Within several days of this incident the local bandits arose from all sides, while downstream the long-haired bandits [ie., the Taiping] on the twenty-fifth of the month laid siege to the town of Lung-ch'uan. Several towns in the area were now in peril of falling into the hands of the different groups of bandits.

Fresh troops then arrived from Hunan, strengthening the Imperial army with reinforcements. But it seemed to them that the more bandits they killed the more bandits there were to replace those who had fallen, and the broader their influence grew. At that point,

They [the bandits] once again returned to do battle, and having called out all the long-haired bandits [that is, the Taiping] in the area stretching from T'ai-ho to Wan-an to join them, they advanced to Kan-chou. On the ninth day of the fourth month Han Chin-chun at Ta-hu River met the bandits in battle. The bandits, having suffered defeat, then took off along different roads, to the east and to the west. On the twenty-ninth day of the month they laid siege to Kan-chou. Both sides of the river had about forty or fifty different camps of bandits, and their gunboats also numbered around forty or fifty and were

docked at the northern part of the city at a place called, Turtle Feet and Tail. Returning again upstream, the bandits commandeered a number of other ships with which they constructed a floating bridge. Then on the third day of the fifth month the thieves split up and from the east and west, two different routes, crossed the river. They headed directly for the lower part of the city. As they were passing by, a group of soldiers and militia men came out of the city to do battle, capturing and beheading more than three hundred of the enemy and sinking seven of their boats, drowning another one hundred men. The rest of the bandits were thrown into confusion and our men followed them in hot pursuit.

There were a few more battles, but the Ch'ing were able to hang on to Kan-chou. It was one of the few cities in Kiangsi Province which they were able to hold during these early years of the rebellion. The Imperial commanders explained their lack of success in Kiangsi and elsewhere to their sovereign by portraying how formidable was the foe they faced. For while the bandits were able to recruit from the entire surrounding countryside, the Ch'ing had to send for reinforcements from outside the province. Their opponents had men right at hand in the Kiangsi countryside ready and eager to join up, and the Imperial soldiers could not, as they put it in the memorial, kill them fast enough. The society bandits may not have been as zealous as the true believers, but that is not to say they had no enthusiasm for the cause.

Still, most of the examples of cooperation are hardly testaments to a sacrifice for the revolution, or to conviction. Indeed, many examples smack of opportunism. One of the more well-known examples of this kind of Taiping and secret society relationship involved the Small Sword Society (Hsiao-tao Hui). The Small Sword Society attacked and captured many towns and cities in Chekiang and Fukien

during the time of the rebellion (and posted placards wherever they went),⁹ but it was their capture of the Chinese city of Shanghai in September of 1853, which grabbed the most attention, of Chinese and foreigner alike. In a letter which the chief of the society, Liu Li-ch'uan, addressed to the foreign community of Shanghai, he claims a connection to the Heavenly King,

At present Heen-fung, of the Tartar Dynasty, is nearly destroyed, having lost nine-tenths of his territory. T'hae-ping-wang is now in possession of Nanking...in overthrowing the cities of the Tartar dynasty his progress has been like that of a splitting bamboo. He has now sent a body of troops to attack Peking, which in a few days will be captured, as is well known to every body. I have entered into an arrangement with T'hae-ping-wang, between whom and myself there are constant communications, to and fro. My troops, and the soldiers under the government of T'hae-ping-wang, constitute but one army. China is now viewed in the same light with foreign nations.¹⁰

While Liu claimed some connection to the Taiping, it is not entirely clear whether the Taiping wanted to claim such a connection to him. They never did, for example, offer him any assistance. Some have pointed to this episode as demonstrating one more time how Taiping ideology prevented the rebels from taking advantage of opportunities presented them. Curwen argues otherwise, maintaining that the Taiping were probably too preoccupied with their own

⁹ KCT #684-1, Hsien-feng 7/5/11, reports on the towns and cities the Small Sword Society attacked in Chekiang Province; KCT #684-2, Hsien-feng 7/4/20, and KCT #684-3, Hsien-feng 7/5/21, report on those in Fukien Province.

¹⁰ North China Herald, October 22, 1853. The Ch'ing archives have much to say about the various military campaigns which were mounted to suppress the Small Sword Society, but very little to say about the society's ideological claims. Thus, I have used these documents from the Herald. Unfortunately, no version of the Chinese text appeared with the English translations.

numerous and ambitious campaigns, including the failed Northern Campaign, to give the Small Sword the attention due them. That Curwen can call on the support of Jen Yu-wen and Luo Erh-kang for his views certainly strengthens his position.¹¹ Such a position appears all the more convincing when we consider that the failure of the Northern Campaign was a result in part of the inadequate number of men which the Taiping were able to muster for the march north.

Whether the Taiping were just too busy to come to the aid of the Small Sword, or whether they were reluctant to become too openly identified with secret societies at this point in the rebellion, is a question we cannot answer definitively. While we cannot definitively answer the question of cooperation, we can answer the question of Taiping influence on the secret societies. It is evident in their publications that the Small Sword Society was eager to be linked to the Taiping, and that their efforts to encourage this connection extended to the ideological front of the battle, as well. In May of 1854, the North China Herald carried a translation of two different Small Sword proclamations posted up at various places in the Chinese city. The editor introduced the selections by noting that the rebels had been more consistent in their practice of late, having removed idols from temples under their control.

¹¹ Curwen, pp. 78-79. Jen Yu-wen considers the Taiping failure to come to the aid of the Small Sword to be one of three strategic errors committed by the Taiping in their early years. See Jen, The Taiping Revolutionary Movement, p. 166.

In this proclamation, the self-styled generalissimo of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom appears to have gotten religion. The first proclamation opens, "Liu, Generalissimo of the forces of the Great Peaceful Heavenly Kingdom, issues this proclamation with regard to the origin of mankind--that God the Heavenly Father 'created the heavens and the earth,' the sun and moon and stars, the flowers and fruits, grass and trees, birds and beasts... "God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." A few paragraphs later, he castigates the people for their lack of filial piety towards God, in these words, "Now as each of you has a disposition to respect your two parents, and venerate your ancestors, how is it that you reject the one God, the heavenly Father, who spread forth the heavens and the earth, who created all things, and who originally formed man, and instead of worshipping Him, believe in wicked spirits and adore idols made of earth and wood?" He then instructs the people concerning how the people in ancient times all worshipped God, but points out how Buddhist priests had led the people away from this belief. He praises the founder of the Ming Dynasty for acting to suppress some of the more wicked aspects of this Buddhist influence, but "still the Buddhist temples were not destroyed, so that the root of the evil was not thoroughly eradicated."

The second proclamation is even more hostile to Buddhism; indeed, it is in its entirety a denunciation of Buddhism. It begins,

Lew, Great Generalissimo of the Tae-ping Celestial Empire,

Issues this general announcement, for the purpose of rectifying the popular customs, eradicating corrupt sects, and inculcating the knowledge of duties toward princes and parents:

Whereas from the time of Yaou, Shun, and the Three Dynasties, while as yet the Buddhist religion was unknown in the Middle Kingdom, princes were intelligent and ministers were faithful; dynasties were prolonged, and the years of sovereigns were extended; there was happiness among the people, and the various kinds of grain were produced in abundance. With respect to the Buddhist religion, this doctrine began to enter China from the time of Ming Te of the Han Dynasty....Han Yu a scholar of the Tang Dynasty says, "During the time of the Three Dynasties, the people enjoyed peace, happiness and old age, while Buddhism was still unknown in China. From the time of the introduction of Buddhist doctrines in the Han Dynasty, the Keang and the Jung Tartars spread turbulence in the Flowery Land; princes became ordinary men, ministers became eye-servants, the administration became tyrannical, dynasties were shortened, and turbulence and extinction succeeded each other..." I now exhort all of you who are possessed of intelligence, from this time to begin anew, and no longer honour falsehood, nor place faith in Buddha... From the time that this is issued, I exhort all you ignorant people who are deluded by corrupt religion, without delay to arouse yourselves to a state of consciousness; abandon these corrupt religions; rectify your manners and customs; do not worship useless clay and wooden images; do not go to the temples to light incense sticks and burn paper money...I have no other object in this than to act according to the ancient national laws and regulations of the Ming dynasty, in promoting the practice of loyalty and filial piety, and retrenching useless expenses. I entreat you respectfully to comply without opposition to this special proclamation.¹²

What are we to make of these documents? Clearly, the Great Generalissimo is trying to toady up to the Taiping, and probably to the foreigner as well. He does this by tapping into the anti-Buddhist tradition, in a fashion which parallels Hung Hsiu-ch'uan in his own denunciation of Buddhism. It differs from the Taiping

¹² North China Herald, May 20, 1854. Both proclamations are featured in the same issue.

denunciation in that it does not call for the people to embark on a crusade of iconoclasm; rather, the Small Sword leader counsels the people merely to refrain from participating in some of the popular rituals of the religion. He also has mixed the Taiping message with the secret society's call for a restoration of the Ming. While we may properly question the sincerity of the generalissimo in drawing up these proclamations, can we overlook the impact of his posting of the same, especially since as the Herald's editor noted, the Small Sword members were removing idols from the temples?

The Taiping in these early stages may have tried to play down these connections to the secret societies---while availing themselves of a convenient ally at times of need-- but their influence is undeniable. The Small Sword society leader, for example, may have been totally insincere in his pronouncement, but the pronouncements were still issued. Society members still obeyed them. People still read them. But could this kind, did this kind, of influence last?

It was usually not the secret society partner in this relationship, then, whose affections would be withheld; it was usually the Taiping partner who would have the second thoughts. This is evident in the confessions of both Li Hsiu-ch'eng and Hung Jen-kan, where both men attribute cooperation with secret societies as a cause of the deterioration in the spirit and discipline of the Taiping movement. As Li put it in his confession, men like this "caused a change of heart in our Heavenly

Dynasty.”¹³ Furthermore, the secret societies were not always faithful partners; several of their leaders switched sides during the course of the rebellion. This unreliability was probably as important a reason for Taiping reticence in forming alliances as was secret society heterodoxy. Neither of these characteristics, however, prevented the Taiping from cooperating with the secret societies. Thus, while theirs was a sometimes stormy marriage, it did not ultimately founder on the rocks of secret society revulsion toward Taiping doctrine, or any loss of love on the part of the secret societies at all, but the tension was always a product of the Taiping ambivalence about the benefits of this relationship.

The Taiping Impact on the Societies

In acknowledging that there was theirs was an uneasy relationship, it is important not to lose sight of what is at issue here. That issue is: Did, in spite of this rocky courtship, the Taiping Rebellion have an impact on the secret societies? That issue is the critical one, and it is even more so because we can answer the question with a resounding yes.

At the most fundamental level, the Taiping rebellion revived the ambitions of the secret societies. While secret society activity had been increasing prior to the ascendancy of the Taiping, government efforts at suppression had been expanding

¹³ Li gives this assessment in Franz Michael, The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents, Volume 3 (Seattle, 1971), p. 1421.

as well. As a result, the societies tended to dissolve in certain areas and at certain times, only to be gathered up again when circumstances changed. Societies would enter a dormant stage; when the circumstances changed, as they did with the advent of the rebellion, the call would go out and the membership would emerge from their hibernation. This characteristic of periods of activity followed by periods of dormancy has not been examined enough in studies of secret societies. Yet it is critical to understanding the nature of popular society. It is not just sectarians who would rise up when a sense of apocalyptic change seized the countryside, it was also these societies. This characteristic also helps to explain the sudden disappearance of the Taiping following the fall of Nanking. Did all the Taiping soldiers fall under the Ch'ing sword, or did some escape underground?

A number of memorials report how captured society bandits would confess that their society had been only recently restored. One memorial in the fourth year of the Hsien-feng reign recounts this type of development, "formerly within the Increasing Brothers Society [one of many monikers of the Heaven and Earth Society], Ch'u [Hupei and usually Hunan intended] and Yueh [Kwangtung and Kwangsi] and every province would recruit men; now they have planned to restore the old societies in order to assemble large masses of men for purposes of rebellion."¹⁴ The memorial continues by describing how a core group of men

¹⁴ KCT #651-4, Hsien-feng 4/11/18. In a similar fashion, when the government conducted an empire-wide bandit-suppression campaign after the fall of Nanking, the *T'ien-ti Hui* seems to once

gathered at a store owned by one Ch'en Jung and how "according to the model of the old society, they swore brotherhood, thereby instituting the society." In other parts of this same memorial, it describes how men were deputed to other parts of Hunan to set up similar groups, reviving older Increasing Brother Societies and Heaven and Earth Societies, all this as a consequence of the impact of the Taiping, or as the memorial prefers to phrase it, as a consequence of "the Yueh bandits not having yet been pacified."

As this report makes clear, though, these groups were being revived with a particular purpose in mind: rebellion. While the origins of the Heaven and Earth Society may be traced to the mundane desire for mutual aid, it is clear that the organization went through a number of developments in its history. Again, the critical role circumstance plays in these developments. Under demographic pressure, the outlaw aspects of some associations becomes more prominent, as more Heaven and Earth Societies engage in pillage and plunder. In the circumstances surrounding the Taiping Rebellion, rebellious features of secret society life assume greater prominence.¹⁵

again have entered a dormant stage. Then, as one memorial in the thirteenth year of the Kuang-hsu reign reports, when the pressure eased, different groups began reviving the *T'ien-ti Hui* associations once more; see KCT #780-9, Kuang-hsu 13/7/25.

¹⁵ Ts'ai Shao-ch'ing states that during the period from 1840-1874, there were more than a thousand different secret society inspired uprisings. In early Chia-ch'ing, there were about 10 such uprisings a year; in late Tao-kuang, the number escalated to about 100 a year. See his *Chung-kuo Mi-mi She-hui* [Chinese Secret Societies] (Che-kiang People's Press), pp. 221-222.

As we noted earlier, such matters were usually the domain of the sects. Secret societies generally did not rebel. This is not to say that the Heaven and Earth Society had any kind of constitutional aversion to the idea. Hardly; their ideology contained an element of rebellion. And it was rebellion with a nationalist edge: the Heaven and Earth Society sought to dethrone the Manchus and restore the throne to its rightful Han occupants. They wanted to restore the Ming Dynasty.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the first mention in government reports of such restorationist language does not appear until 1801.¹⁷

This ambition of the secret societies for leading an anti-Manchu uprising moved to center stage during the early years of the Taiping Rebellion. The Taiping movement was fanatically anti-Manchu, and this passion swept the secret societies into the arms of the movement. The banner which often led the *T'ien-ti Hui* into battle was emblazoned with large characters referring to their nationalist creed, "*Han Ta Ming*," the Great Ming [Dynasty] of the Han peoples.¹⁸ In his recollections of the Liang-kuang countryside of his youth, Liu Yung-fu, the leader of what would become the Black Flag Army, described the state of society at the time, "The long-haired ones were everywhere, calling for the restoration of the Han;

¹⁶ Dian Murray states that even though the Heaven and Earth Society did sponsor rebellions in its early years that these first rebellions were free of Ming restorationist rhetoric. See The Origins of the Tiendihui (Stanford, 1994), p. 36.

¹⁷ Murray, p. 62.

¹⁸ For one example of such a *T'ien-ti Hui* banner, see CCCT #2814, Hsien-feng 3/7/16.

there was no place that did not have them.”¹⁹ It was the Eastern King who exploited this common hostility, as displayed in the publication entitled, “Proclamations by Imperial Sanction” (Pan-hsing Chao-shu),

Awake! Awake! Those who follow Heaven shall be preserved; those who rebel against Heaven shall perish. Now, the Manchu demon, Hsien-feng, being in origin a barbarian, is the mortal enemy of us Chinese; moreover, he has induced mankind to assume demon shape, to worship evil spirits, to disobey the true spirit, and to greatly rebel against the Great God; Heaven cannot tolerate him and therefore he must be destroyed...Moreover, many of you able-bodied men are members of the Triad Society; do you not recall that the Hung [Triad] brotherhood entered into a blood pact to exterminate the Ch’ing, indeed with united hearts and united efforts? Whoever heard of men pledging themselves in sworn brotherhood, and then turning around and facing north, serving their enemies?²⁰

While these direct appeals to the triads were dropped in later versions of this document, the nationalist rhetoric which burns throughout was not cooled, and so an indirect appeal to the nationalist sentiments of the triads and all Chinese continued to be broadcast throughout the Taiping sway. These parts of the “Proclamation” were retained:

O you masses, listen to our words. It is our belief that the empire is China’s empire, not the Manchu barbarians’ empire; food and clothing are China’s food and clothing, not the Manchu barbarians’ food and clothing; sons, daughters, and citizens are China’s sons, daughters, and citizens, not the Manchu barbarians’ sons, daughters, and citizens. Alas! since the Ming’s misrule, the

¹⁹ Ella S. Laffey, “The Making of a Rebel: Liu Yung-fu and the Formation of the Black Flag Army,” in *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China*, p. 90. Laffey points out that the reference to longhairs may not be to the Taiping, but to any restorationist group. But during the rebellion, this term is almost exclusively used of the Taiping. The fact that Liu recalls the slogan as calling for a restoration of the Han (race) and not the Ming Dynasty would also indicate a Taiping connection.

²⁰ Michael, Volume 2, pp. 143-144.

Manchus availed themselves of the opportunity to throw China into confusion; they stole China's empire, appropriated China's food and clothing, and ravished China's sons, daughters, and citizens...Alas! there are no men in China. China is the head and Tartary the feet; China is the land of spirits and Tartary the land of demons. Why is China called the land of spirits? Because the Heavenly Father, the Great God, is the true Spirit; heaven and earth, mountains and seas are his creations, therefore from of old China has been named the land of Spirits...But alas! the feet have assumed the place of the head; the demons have usurped the land of spirits and have forced us Chinese to become demons.²¹

This proclamation continues with a description of the differences in the races which moves from language of demons and gods to language of beasts and men. The proclamation describes the differences between the two races in terms of their hair style, the long pig-tail representing Chinese submission being likened to the tail of brute animals, and of the clothes they wear, the official cap being likened to a "monkey cap." Thus the long-flowing hair and the yellow and red silk uniforms of the Taipings were a depiction of what was both Chinese and human. A few paragraphs after this the Manchus are likened to odorous foxes, barbarian dogs, and again, foolish monkeys.

While the Taipings shared the secret society objective of driving out the Manchu barbarian, they did not share the society objective of restoring the Ming Dynasty. While Hung Hsiu-ch'uan did believe that the Taiping could make common cause in their shared goal of toppling the Ch'ing, he did not hide the fact that Taiping and secret society cooperation ended with the realization of that goal. In the same

²¹ Michael, Volume 2, p. 145.

record to Rev. Hamberg, Hung Jen-kan quotes Hung Hsiu-ch'uan's pointed emphasis as to this difference:

Though I never entered the Triad Society, I have often heard it said that their object is to subvert the Tsing and restore the Ming dynasty. Such an expression was very proper in the time of Khang-hi, when this society was at first formed, but now after the lapse of two hundred years, we may still speak of subverting the Tsing, but we cannot properly speak of restoring the Ming. At all events, when our native mountains and rivers are recovered, a new dynasty must be established. How could we at present arouse the energies of men by restoring the Ming dynasty?²²

The Taiping chief then lists "several evil practices" of the Triads which he cannot abide. There is little reason to doubt the authenticity of this record especially since it fully conforms with the Taiping idea that it is the imperial system which needed replacing, not just the present reigning dynasty.

Yet what impresses the reader of this statement is the sense of (while hesitant to use the word, I find no other satisfactory) "progress" which imbues the language. A modern-day sound bite equivalent of this response would go something like, "we've tried that Ming stuff before, it's time to move on to something else." This language is almost preperceptive; it conceptualizes and so calls forth a reality which would not be realized until six decades later. Hung Hsiu-ch'uan created the concept, the idea, that there could be a China that was not an imperial China, and that creation alone precipitated a process which was completed in 1911. More will be said about this in the conclusion.

Beyond rebellious ambitions and an anti-Manchu nationalism, there was a third area where the Taiping were to influence and leave a permanent mark on the secret societies. The leaders of the secret societies rarely assumed the title of king when they took up arms against the government (sects, though, often would). The usual title for a leader was teacher or elder brother or father (ta-ye), though Murray does include one example of a society uprising where in Kwangtung in 1802, the leaders were invested as kings.²³ This tendency changed with the Taiping Rebellion. The secret society scholar, Ts'ai Shao-ch'ing, maintains that this is one of the main differences between secret society rebellions prior to the Taiping and those occurring after. While there may have been the isolated rebellion prior to the Taiping where the leaders took the title king, during the rebellion, it was the rule. As Ts'ai states,

Under the influence of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, the united struggle of the Heaven and Earth society and all the different sects developed in several new directions. First, the scope and the time over which the uprisings took place greatly increased over all previous uprisings...Second, the level and sophistication of the struggle was prominently elevated. The most important expression of this is seen in the following aspects. 1) a universalizing establishing of the system of kingship...Prior to the establishing of the Heavenly Capital, in all the uprisings of the Heaven and Earth society, very few would establish their own government authority, and even fewer would have a situation where the society invested their leader as a king. Though some uprisings might occupy large areas of territory, their leaders for the most part would only take for themselves titles such as commander-in-chief (yuan-shuai), or tou-tu (military governor). However, after the Taiping Heavenly

²² Hamberg, pp. 55-56.

²³ Murray; on pp. 61, 69, 76 she discusses the titles taken by leaders of the *T'ien-ti Hui* in different regions; on pp. 64-66 she discusses the uprising where the leader takes the title king.

Kingdom established its capital, many of the Heaven and Earth society-sponsored uprisings leaders (chun-kung) began to take call themselves kings and set up governments.²⁴

Professor Tsai lists many examples of this new development.

I found a few of my own. One example I found which was not in the south comes from the Kiangnan area, near Soochow from the fourth year of Hsien-feng where a Three Unities Society (triads, San-ho hui) is posting up all kinds of false declarations in the area and has invested their leader with the title of Vanguard (Hsien-feng) King. The Governor General of Liang-kiang orders that all the leaders and followers be put to death by way of slow-slicing.²⁵ The severity of the sentence--the practice of separating the leaders involved in these matters from the followers, with the latter receiving a lighter sentence, appears to have been abandoned during the rebellion; all were now subjected to the most sanguine of punishment-- demonstrates the length to which the authorities would go to prevent any further increase in this type of Taiping influence over secret societies.

That influence seems to have waned to some extent, but still had an impact on secret societies such as the Heaven and Earth Society and the Triads (San-ho Hui) in southeastern China. On the Kwangtung-Kwangsi border, in one case some nineteen years after the defeat of the Taiping, the Heaven and Earth Society was investing their leaders with titles such as "Pacifying the East King," "Pacifying the

²⁴ Ts'ai Shao-ch'ing, pp. 227-228.

²⁵ KCT #662-15, Hsien-feng 4/4/26.

West King,” “Establishing the North King,” and “Subduing the South King.”²⁶ In another report to the throne, a governor of Kwangtung described secret society activity in the province, saying that societies like the *San-ho Hui* (the Triads) were everywhere posting up false declarations. Ch’ing soldiers executed one hundred and forty-three of the society leaders including one who claimed the title of Second King and another the title of Third King.²⁷

The question is: Were the authorities successful in their draconian efforts to stem the tide of this influence on the secret societies? Professor Ts’ai suggests that certain patterns of secret society behavior which emerged during the Taiping Rebellion continued after the rebellion was suppressed. The best evidence from the archives confirms this, but in order to present it, we need to first introduce a branch of the secret society family tree which sprung up quickly and expanded vigorously during and especially after the rebellion. The appearance of this society is the most dramatic consequence of the Taiping Rebellion for popular society. This society is the Elder Brother Society (Ko-lao Hui).

The Elder Brother Society and the Transformation of Chinese Popular Society

Much of the current scholarship on the Elder Brother Society (Ko-lao Hui) concerns the origins of the society. That is, can its origins be traced as far back as

²⁶ CCCT #2698, Kuang-hsu 9.

²⁷ KCT #661-16, Kuang-hsu 23/5/12.

the Ch'ien-lung reign, to the society first noted in government reports as the *Kuo-lu Hui*? At present, scholars have not been able to answer this question conclusively.²⁸ Whatever its origins, it is fully recognized that it is the Taiping Rebellion which brings this group out of its obscurity and insignificance and presents it with one of the weightiest and most consequential roles to play in late nineteenth-century Chinese society. Before the rebellion, reports of the activity of the *Ko-lao Hui* are non-existent;²⁹ after the rebellion, this society emerges as the most important society all along the Yangtze River, that border between the southern society and the northern sect, and displaced the Heaven and Earth Society and the various White Lotus religious sects in the riverine provinces. By the middle of the Kuang-hsu reign, they have become in the words of a refrain repeatedly expressed in the memorials of the time, "the society bandits which are the most

²⁸ See discussion in Cheng-yun Liu, "The Ko-Lao Hui in Late Imperial China," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1983, pp. 8-49 on the *Kuo-lu* Society. Liu finds the evidence inconclusive as to the issue of whether the *Ko-lao Hui* originated from the *Kuo-lu Hui*. He stresses that both societies existed independent of each other from the time of the Taiping Rebellion, and that the *Ko-lao Hui*'s complex organization and rebellious tendencies tended to distance the two even further. The *Kuo-lu* Society continued to operate after the Taiping according to patterns which were established before the rebellion. They remained a local phenomena— seldom are they found outside of Szechuan— and continued to engage in petty banditry, rarely if at all sponsoring rebellion. The spread and character of the *Ko-lao Hui* then differed markedly from the *Kuo-lu* after the rebellion, so much so that however similar their origins, these two societies developed into two radically dissimilar organizations in the aftermath of the rebellion.

See also Chuang Chi-fa's discussion on the relation of the *Kuo-lu Hui* to the *Ko-lao Hui*, esp. pp. 286-290.

²⁹ Liu Cheng-yun states that the first report of Elder Brother activity reached the throne in the second year of the T'ung-chih reign; he cites a document from the Yueh-che Tang [the Monthly Memorial Record Archive]. In the Beijing archives, except for one single, somewhat questionable, document from the Chia-ch'ing era, the earliest notice of Elder Brother activity comes from the fourth year of the T'ung-chih reign.

harmful to our land.”³⁰

Part of the mystery surrounding the origins of the society concerns its ideology. Very little is known of its beliefs. Only rarely is there a mention of any kind of ideology or doctrine. Indeed there are only a few memorials which mention such matters. One of those references is to a heterodox teaching infiltrating some mountain halls which involves cutting off people’s braids and attaching them to paper figures, followed by pronouncing different chants and spells over the assembled paper multitudes.³¹ The fact that the Elder Brother Society replaces both society and sect in the border regions between the society south and the sectarian north suggests two things: one, the distinction between society and sect, always difficult to maintain, was even more so in these border areas along the Yangtze, with the result that the kind of ideological fluidity which obtained prior to the rebellion in these regions become a characteristic feature of the *Ko-lao Hui* ideology; and two, that ideology was not the most distinctive feature of this society. Organization was. This latter observation is especially critical for our study.

The organization of the society is in many respects similar to the Heaven and Earth Society, particularly in its initiation rites: drinking a mixture of chicken blood

³⁰ See for example, the opening to a memorial from the Governor-General of Liang-Kiang, Liu K’un. KCT #688-8, Kuang-hsu 18/3/18.

³¹ CCCT #2726-6, Kuang-shu 2/18/14 through CCCT #2726-10, Kuang-hsu 2/9/29. These sectarians are linked with the Elder Brother Society in each of these documents.

and wine, swearing by oath to uphold the principles of brotherhood between members. Each society was designated by one of four different names, a hall name (t'ang-ming), a mountain name, a water name, and an incense name. In the government documents, most societies are referred to by their hall or mountain names.³²

The Elder Brother Society differs from the Heaven and Earth Society, however, in having adopted a more complex structure for its organization, and this allowed the society to develop connections with other societies which was sometimes difficult for the Heaven and Earth Society to do. It though still remained for the most part a localized organization.

Also unlike the Heaven and Earth Society, and more like sectarian organization, the structure of the *Ko-lao Hui* while retaining some fraternal aspects was strongly hierarchical. The head of a particular society was called the Chief Dragon Head (cheng lung-t'ou), and below him a Deputy Dragon Head. Then came five officers who were in charge of the various hall responsibilities: the officers in charge of seating the hall (tso-t'ang), accompanying the hall (p'ei-t'ang), supervising punishments (hsing-t'ang), managing the hall (li-t'ang) and keeping the registers (chih-t'ang). Along with a few other offices, these officials were referred to as the

³² A description of *Ko-lao Hui* organization and nomenclature is available in Cheng-yun Liu, pp. 61-75, and Charlton M. Lewis, "Some Notes on the *Ko-lao Hui* in Late Ch'ing China," in Chesneau, Popular Movements and Secret Societies, pp. 101-107.

first level officials, or simply *Lao-ta* (the first elder brother). The offices below these high offices showed a wide variance in terminology among the different societies, while the terms for the higher offices remained fairly consistent. That is, if offices were mentioned at all in any memorial, the chances were good that these would be the ones that would be mentioned. While this is the general rule for the terminology, there were many exceptions, the most important of which is to be discussed later in this chapter.

One of the first notices concerning the Elder Brother Society in government documents was in a memorial submitted immediately after the fall of the Heavenly Capital, drawn up by the victorious Chinese general Tseng Kuo-fan. That Tseng Kuo-fan would be submitting this report is not coincidental. For apart from the fact that he was the head of the efforts to suppress the Taiping rebels, there is also the fact that while the Elder Brother Society may not have been conceived within the womb of his Hunan Army, the society certainly went through its gestation period there. Indeed, one of the more problematic issues (of many) in the history of the society is the extent to which Tseng not only permitted the spread of the society, but even encouraged it as a defense against Taiping ideological appeals. And so this appearance of the Elder Brother Society is somewhat paradoxical. For not only did Hunan supply a large contingent of the forces which made up Tseng's Hunan army and the mass of recruits for the Taiping's holy army, but the province also filled the

ranks of the Elder Brother Society as well. Tseng may have felt that this Elder Brother organization would ensure his troops' loyalty as they fought against their fellow Hunanese on the Yangtze Valley battlefields. He evidently failed to calculate the impact of this strategy on post-bellum Chinese society.

The Elder Brother Society only became a problem after the rebellion was put down. For then arose the matter of de-mobilization, always a matter which promotes instability. It seems that some recently-discharged Hunan soldiers, unhappy with how they had been compensated, were fomenting some disturbances.³³ These disturbances had begun in one camp and quickly spread to many others. Tseng looked into the affair and submitted this account of his investigation, introducing ever so gingerly the possible connections that these disturbances have to the emerging Elder Brother society. Tseng blames one official and one soldier in particular for this agitation:

According to T'ang I-hsun's [the officer in charge of the camp where the first disturbance occurred] stream of reports, in the fifth month of this year, this agitation over the soldier's remuneration can all be traced back to a captain from the Ch'iang-chung camp by the name of Yang Fu-sheng. He is responsible for leading the riot, for fanning the flames. When the southern Anhui circuit intendant Chang F'eng-chu arrived at the Hui-chou camp in order to pacify the situation, he was met with hostility and humiliation, and forced to order requisition slips drawn up for more pay for the soldiers. This state of affairs was all orchestrated by Yang Fu-sheng who was standing on the sidelines. A soldier by the name of Feng Ch'i-lung was his accomplice in the deed, as he started some rumors among the ranks which inflamed the whole

³³ KCT #688-1, T'ung-chih 4/11/27. The selections on these two pages were taken from this memorial.

group of soldiers, and they began to smear their mouths with blood and sacrifice to the flag [these are signs of oath-taking].

Tseng has now prepared the emperor for the possibility, given the oath-taking, that there were some secret society connections to this whole incident. A paragraph later, he makes those connections explicit and introduces the name of this secret society,

In this last year, in the provinces of Kiang-nan and Hunan and Hupei there has been those who are members of the Ko-lao Hui (the Elder Brother Society); the adherents of this society are very numerous. Those soldiers who were most strongly agitating for greater compensation at the Hui and Hsiu camps in large part were bandits who had entered this society.

Tseng does not say anything more about the society than that they are behind this disturbance and similar ones at several other camps. He does not attempt to recount for the emperor the origins of this group, nor does he offer any other information about the character or organization of the society. Surely the fact that a captain in the army was involved would have alarmed the emperor to a certain extent; at the least, it would have left him feeling apprehensive and unsettled about the appearance of this new association.

And well it should. In almost every report on the Elder Brother Society after this one, when a reference is made to the source of its rising, most references point to its origins in the armies recruited during the Taiping Rebellion,³⁴ and some specifically

³⁴ Accounts which deal with the later development of the Elder Brother Society, such as Joseph Esherick's account, tend to focus on the "lumpenproletariat" character of *Ko-lao Hui* membership,

mention the Hunan army of Tseng Kuo-fan. In a memorial which follows up Tseng's, the memorialist apprises the throne of the spread of the Elder Brother Society. "The Elder Brother Society is expanding steadily throughout Hunan, Hupei, Chekiang, Fukien, Yunan, Kweichow, Szechuan, Shensi, Anhwei, Kiangsi, and Kiangsu, where its membership is the highest. In every province the bandits are setting up their mountain names and their hall names, growing so brazen that they are establishing false offices, manufacturing false seals and stitching together banners."³⁵ The memorialist admits it is difficult knowing how to stem the tide of these activities, especially since "most of these Elder Brother bandits were previously officers and infantrymen in the army battalions." He suggests that the emperor allow some of the ex-soldiers who have joined with the bandits out of economic desperation to return to the ranks at half-salary. As for the leaders of the bandits, he recommends imposing immediate capital punishment. Using this carrot and stick approach to the problem, he believes, will enable the government to slow the flow of recruits into bandit bands.

The army connection continues to be a strong one throughout the latter

the ranks of the society being swelled with men employed at such occupations as boatmen, miners and yamen clerks. He refers to the "convention" of one description which speaks of the origins of the society in the demobilization following the Taiping Rebellion. In the early stages of the society's development, the de-mobilized soldier connection is no convention. Even during later stages, Esherick shows it is not totally a convention when he includes one survey of some fifty-seven 1911-era secret society members, and even at this late date, fully 22 of the number were employed as soldiers. See Joseph Esherick, Reform and Revolution in China: the 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 22-23.

³⁵ KCT #688-2; Kuang-hsu 1.

nineteenth century, with the *Ko-lao Hui* actively recruiting discharged soldiers into full-time banditry and rebellion, but at the same time it was also infiltrating the ranks of the armies. Not only did Tseng Kuo-fan have to disband his Hunan Army because it had become infested with society members, but discharged soldiers joining up with the *Ko-lao Hui* continued to be a characteristic feature of the composition of the society down to the revolution.

In Kiangsi Province in the fifteenth year of Kuang-hsu the problem is persisting. The problem as it is stated in one memorial, is that "in every place, when these army divisions were broken up, the discharged soldiers had no occupations to return to, so they looked toward joining up with the Elder Brother Society and then occupied themselves in setting up these associations with either hall or mountain names."³⁶ In Chekiang in the twentieth year of Kuang-hsu it is more of the same, the society recruiting discharged soldiers into its ranks.³⁷

A report from Henan described the life of one Elder Brother Society member. Though he was a native of Hunan, and had served in the Ch'ing army, in the third year of T'ung-chih, he was discharged, after which he joined the Elder Brother Society. He was arrested for fomenting rebellion in Shensi.³⁸ From Kwangtung Province, a report is submitted which describes how floating braves from outside

³⁶ KCT #685-2, Kuang-hsu 15.

³⁷ KCT #691-3, Kuang-hsu 20/1/22.

³⁸ KCT #701-4, Kuang-hsu 21/8/26.

the province are “creating peach garden societies and setting up loyalty righteousness halls [this is terminology from the classic, Outlaws of the Marsh (Shui-hu Chuan)] and in a temple on Mount Chung-yuan, they are swearing brotherhood, worshipping the banner and in general inciting and leading astray the country people by encouraging them to enter their societies.”³⁹ The governor refers to those responsible for this activity as members of the Elder Brother Society, and it should come as no surprise that in the confessions of those who were apprehended a man from Hunan was fingered as the leader of their society.⁴⁰

One governor of Hunan, Governor Wu Ta-ch’eng, identified his own province as the source of the society bandit problem. He declared that if one wanted to clean out the roots of this weed, one needed to begin digging in Hunan. “Hunan’s brave men [or militia men; the term is yung] when they become bandits are large and worrisome; when they do not become bandits, then you can use them to pacify the men who did become bandits.”⁴¹ Chang Chih-tung, who was serving as Governor-General of Hupei and Hunan at the time, would tend to agree with this assessment of the unique place of Hunan in the spread of these societies.

³⁹ KCT #697-1, Kuang-hsu 17/9/11.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* The purported leader’s name was Ts’ai Chiu-cheng. Those who were followers of this man had believed he was from Hunan. In their interrogation of Ts’ai, Ch’ing officials found that he was actually a native of Szechuan, from a county bordering Hunan. Coming from a border area, Ts’ai sported a Hunan accent. Did Ts’ai think that if people believed he was Hunanese, he would be more easily accepted as a society leader?

⁴¹ KCT #693-6, Kuang-hsu 20/4/28.

In a memorial composed shortly after the time of the missionary troubles (which occurred in the years from 1890-1891), the governor-general identified the source of the problem once again with the soldiers discharged after the Taiping Rebellion, and specifically those associated with the Hunan Army. As Chang explained it in the memorial, the martial spirit of Hunan people was especially aroused from the earliest years of Hsien-feng. The Hunan Army in particular had for many years been fighting throughout the provinces of the empire. Because of this, Chang elaborated, these Hunan army men were used to the more carefree life of a soldier, and it was difficult for them to return to the more mundane life of a peasant, "they are unwilling to return to the settled life of plowing and digging wells; rather when they are released from the camps they one after the other get involved with swearing brotherhood and establishing mountain halls, cutting and distributing banners and creating rebellious songs with the intent of inciting and leading astray the foolish and ignorant."⁴²

The problem is that in many of these cases the Elder Brother Society was not just engaging in common banditry, but they were also plotting rebellion. Studies of the Elder Brother Society have in many cases focused on the society in the later stages of its development, especially after 1911, when the Elder Brother Society could not be distinguished from groups like the Green Gang, insofar as the types of activities

⁴² KCT #695-7, Kuang-hsu 18/6/26.

both were engaging in are concerned (gambling, prostitution, opium smuggling). During the late nineteenth-century, however, these Elder Brother Societies while engaged in smuggling and banditry were also actively involved in rebellion.

The growth of the Elder Brother Society took place in the later years of the T'ung-chih reign, and the early years of the Kuang-hsu reign. At first, the society kept a low profile, engaging in petty banditry until the late 1880s, a time when the societies launched a new career of rebellion. The Elder Brother Society was primarily responsible for the wave of attacks on mission compounds in 1890-1891, and they would eagerly participate in the 1911 Revolution as well. It does seem from the archival evidence that the year of missionary troubles was the year which marked their premiere on the theater of national rebellion. After 1911 they would branch out into the kind of activities which Chinese secret societies became more known for: gambling, prostitution and opium smuggling.

Rebellion, for example, was what the societies were plotting in Anhui Province in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Here an Elder Brother Society was planning an uprising, and had even prepared the red robes they were going to wear, along with the requisite seals and weapons. The authorities had acted on the confession of a suspect who belonged to the society and who said that he had met the man who was leading them, one Chou Tzu-i, in the army.⁴³ They were operating in an area which

⁴³ KCT #687-1, Kuang-hsu 14; KCT #687-2, Kuang-hsu 16/9/7.

was just north of what was once Taiping-occupied territory, T'ai-ho County.

The Elder Brother Society is doing the same thing in Kiangsi Province, in an area which we have already visited: Kan-chou Prefecture. This prefecture, as we saw above, was the scene of several different battles between Ch'ing armies and a coalition of Taiping and secret society soldiers. Fast forward some twenty four years after the fall of Nanking, and the Elder Brother Society can now be found plotting rebellion in an area which was once the territory of the Heaven and Earth Society. Indeed, it is conceivable that some of these Elder Brother Society members had seen action on both sides of the conflict, many fighting for the Ch'ing, some fighting for the Taiping and their secret society comrades. They are now manufacturing weapons and making seals, flying banners, and instituting their own officials. They are also posting up declarations throughout the province.⁴⁴ It is a true reversal of fortune for the Ch'ing regime.

There are two distinctive features of Elder Brother Society rebellion which seem to have originated with the Taiping Rebellion. One of these is that there is little talk of a restoration of the Ming. The secret society slogan which was raised prior to the rebellion, "Overturn the Ch'ing, Restore the Ming" is only infrequently seen in accounts of secret society activity following the Taiping.⁴⁵ This is a radical

⁴⁴ KCT #685-1, Kuang-hsu 14/10/16 for the making of weapons and implements of rebellion; KCT #685-2, Kuang-hsu 15; KCT #685-3, Kuang-hsu 18 for the posting of declarations.

⁴⁵ I say infrequently only because I did not happen to find any reference in any of the documents I read. I checked this out in a conversation with Professor Ts'ai Shao-ch'ing and he confirmed that

break with the past, and prepared the societies for their alliances with the republicans in the 1890s and early 1900s, prepared the societies by making them more open to the idea of a republican form of government than they were for a parliamentary monarchy.⁴⁶ There may be other explanations for this, but certainly one of the more viable ones is that the Taiping Rebellion had in some way--through their desacralization campaigns waged on the emperor or their attacks on the imperial office-- changed Chinese society in such a way that the possibility of a form of rule which was not imperial could be imagined and even fought for.

One of the more fascinating cases of Elder Society rebellion involves the case of a man named Li Hung. What makes it fascinating is its connection to the Taiping Rebellion and also because this "rebellion" bears all the marks of the revolutionary uprisings--the planning, the networking and the securing of foreign weapons-- that would soon after this be instigated by groups such as the *Hsing-chung Hui* [The Revive China Society; a republican revolutionary organization]. Li was the leader of a powerful, extensive network of Elder Brother Societies in Hupei during the years of the missionary troubles.⁴⁷ He had consulted with some of the other important secret society leaders in the Yangtze Valley, and had organized them into

this too is a feature of post-Taiping society activity.

⁴⁶ It is true that during the time of cooperation between reformers and revolutionaries, all came together to call for a parliamentary monarchy under the Kuang-hsu emperor, but when the cooperation broke down the secret societies lined up for the most part behind republicans. Hunan's first military governor after the revolution, Chiao Ta-feng, had led an army of secret society

two branches, one ruling over the upper and the other ruling over the lower stream of the Yangtze. The lower branch was further divided under five different banners, one leader assembling his men under the North Banner, another the South flag, the East, the West, and then the Center, with Li himself leading all these divisions as the Great Commander (Ta Yuan-shuai). The Ch'ing authorities had captured the leader of the North Banner, Kao Te-hua, who was a native of Wu-ch'ang, and who had entered the Elder Brother Society at Yangchow. He himself had set up a society called the Mount Ch'u-chin Protect the Country Hall, and his society revered the memory of their founder, one Hung Shih-wu. This same Kao was now telling the officials all they wanted to know about Li and his plot.

Li Hung had a history. He was the adopted son of Li Shih-chung, a Nien and then Taiping general, who had allied with the forces of Li Hsiu-ch'eng, the Taiping Loyal King. Li Shih-chung served with the Taiping army and then defected to the Ch'ing side. He was later invested with a government office, but then was suspected of malfeasance and executed. Li Hung reportedly sought to avenge his father's death by leading a rebellion against the Ch'ing, which in part was to be armed with weapons provided by a foreigner.⁴⁸

elements. He was, however, quickly disposed of after he had outlived his usefulness. See Esherick, pp. 204-210.

⁴⁷ KCT #692-1, Kuang-hsu 17/27.

⁴⁸ Li Shih-chung was also known as Li Chao-shou. *Chung-kuo Jen-ming Ta Ts'e-tien* [The Chinese Biographical Dictionary] (Shanghai, 1984), p. 380; Charlton M. Lewis, pp. 109-110. See also Li Hsiu-cheng's letter condemning Li Chao-shu in *Michael* 2:707-710. In his confession, Li Hsiu-

This intention can be accepted at face value. But still, there are many ways to avenge a father's death--assassination of individual government officials seems a lot less risky--so why did Li Hung choose this method? Although his rebellion was planned during the general wave of attacks aimed at foreigners during the 1890s, Li was not aiming to strike at the foreigners, but rather he was looking to take advantage of the confusion of these years to strike at the government. He intended to overthrow the Ch'ing. Another aspect of his uprising that makes it unique is that there is no mention in this case of his intention to restore the Ming Dynasty, or of any Ming loyalist calls at all, which were a prominent aspect of rebellion prior to the Taiping. Unfortunately for Li, his plans for the rebellion ended as many smaller Elder Brother society- inspired uprisings had ended--in failure. The plot unraveled when the government seized the Western ship which was transporting the arms they needed to undertake their uprising. The Ch'ing then moved to apprehend all those involved.

At least one other of Li Hung's accomplices in this plot was also a man with an extensive history. It is a history which reveals much about the world of the secret societies in the late nineteenth century. His accomplice's name was P'u Yun-t'ing, the head of the East Banner of would-be rebels. In his confession to the

ch'eng lists Li Chao-shou as the one person who most hurt the cause of the Heavenly Kingdom; see Michael, 3:1421. But even after Li Chao-shou went over to the other side, he still remained on friendly terms with the Li Hsiu-ch'eng.

authorities, he divulged that when he was a youth he had been captured by the Taiping.⁴⁹ Then afterwards, he served in Li Hung-chang's Huai Army. Following his service in the army, he joined the *Ko-lao Hui*, which he had been a part of for more than twenty years.

This is the ripple effect of the Taiping Rebellion on Chinese society. Men whose fathers served with the Taiping, men who served with the Taiping as youths. Men who later served in the Ch'ing armies, and then later joined in the Elder Brother Society. These were fluid times in terms of loyalty. Li Hung's father, Li Shih-chung, served with the Taiping, and then betrayed them. The Ch'ing enlisted Li Shih-chung and then executed him. On the level of the common recruit, there were all kinds of shifting allegiances as well: Taiping soldiers going over to the Ch'ing side, Ch'ing militia signing up with the Taiping. It was not just the Heaven and Earth Society members or the Nien Army members whose loyalty was unpredictable, but soldiers fighting on each side were being captured and thrown into the ranks to fight those who only weeks before had been their comrades in arms.

It is this kind of context which makes it so difficult to argue that the Taiping and

⁴⁹ This is something of a problematic statement. Would he even admit to having willingly served with the Taiping? Being part of the Elder Brother Society was one thing, but to admit to a Taiping connection is another. This much is certain: he had experienced three very different sides of Chinese popular society in his lifetime--the heterodox and revolutionary Taiping movement; the orthodox and conservative Huai Army; and lastly, the heterodox and keeping-your-options-open form of political loyalty of the Elder Brother Society.

their ideology disappeared without a trace. Evidence such as this document suggests that many men who had fought under the Taiping banner and were influenced by their anti-imperialist ideology simply blended back into the sectarian countryside after the fall of the Heavenly capital only to reappear decades later. In the ideological battle between the Taiping and the Ch'ing, and in the shifting of currents following, is it not self-evident that the loyalty of many of these men to the Manchu dynasty and to the imperial office may have been shaken, or that when the opportunity for a republican revolution presented itself that it would not be simply dismissed out of hand, but that, having been prepared for this development by their participation in ideological campaigns, these men would sympathetically attend to such a message?

In addition to an absence of Ming-restorationist slogans (at least a dramatic reduction in their frequency), a second feature of changes in the pattern of rebellion introduced by the Taiping can be seen in some of the titles these Elder Brother Society leaders took, in one title in particular: the title of king. Not only, then, was there the negative aspect of Taiping influence in no longer expressing a demand for a restoration for the Ming Dynasty, but there was also this positive vision of what exactly should take the place of the imperial system. This title of kingship, as mentioned earlier, was regularly conferred upon Heaven and Earth Society leaders during the Taiping rebellion, whether they were in direct alliance with the Taiping

rebels, or not. We discussed how this was one major impact of the rebellion on the secret societies during the time of the rebellion. This practice lasted beyond the rebellion, and appears in a few cases involving the Elder Brother Society.

The leader of the Elder Brother Society was normally referred to as the Dragon Head (L'ung-t'ou), but there were a few societies which also conferred upon their leader the title of king. The circumstances which would lead an Elder Brother society to grant the title of king to its leader instead of, or along with, the title of Dragon Head were primarily society involvement in rebellion, rather than petty banditry and the kind of illegal activity the society would be known for after the 1911 Revolution. There are various references to Elder Society kings in the archives, and they all concern societies involved in rebellion.⁵⁰ In northern Anhui a report is submitted which sums up the activities of society bandits in these terms: "there is no evil that they do not do;" one of the evils being that their leaders "dare to call themselves kings."⁵¹ From Hunan, from the home county of Tseng Kuo-fan no less, a memorialist writes of one Elder Brother Society group whose leader calls himself the "Great King" and has anointed his son the heir apparent, the "Second King."⁵² Somewhat more worrisome is another case from Hunan where Chang

⁵⁰ KCT#685-1, Kuang-hsu 14/10/16; KCT #687-6, Kuang-hsu 26/8/28; #702-2, Kuang-hsu 18/6/22; #705-3, Kuang-hsu 31/8/27, and #705-5, Kuang-hsu 34, where the leader is taking the titles of both Dragon Head and king; and finally, one of a more comical nature, King Longfoot, KCT #695-7, Kuang-hsu 18/6/26.

⁵¹ KCT #688-3, Kuang-hsu 17/3/13.

⁵² KCT #693-4, Kuang-hsu 20/3/20.

Chih-tung informs the court of an Elder Brother Society which alongside the ordinary nomenclature is referring to its leader as the *Shun T'ien Wang* (Obedient to Heaven King), and its soldiers as Heavenly Soldiers.⁵³ They possess all kinds of military weapons and are posting up declarations concerning their uprising.

That this last case mentions a Obedient to Heaven King and heavenly soldiers leads me to posit one more circumstance which might lead a society to confer the title of king, and that was some society connection to the Taiping rebels. I use the word "might" because there are not that many cases which explicitly name the titles of the leaders, dragon head or Great Commander, and there are even fewer cases where the title that is mentioned is that of king. Most Elder Brother Society rebels, of course, had an indirect connection to the Taiping rebels: that is, they were soldiers recruited by Tseng Kuo-fan to do battle with the rebels. There were other Elder Brother Society rebels, however, who had even stronger and more positive connections.

There is only one instance I found of an immediate and direct influence of the Taiping upon an Elder Brother Society practice of conferring kingship. In the fifth year of the T'ung-chih reign, about two years after the fall of Nanking, the Governor-General of Fukien and Chekiang Provinces and erstwhile Taiping

⁵³ KCT #695-8, Kuang-hsu 18/8/3; KCT #695-9, Kuang-hsu 18/9/14. The *Sh'un T'ien King* was one of the preferred titles of sectarian leaders; this custom has a long tradition and will be discussed in more detail next chapter. The latter memorial also contains the full list of traditional Elder Brother Society offices.

opponent, Tso Tsung-t'ang, informs the court of some problems with a society called the Kiang-hu (Kiangsu-Hukwang, or maybe just, River-lake) Society, otherwise known as the Elder Brother Society. It seems these "bandits" are publishing demonic (yao) books and ghostly diagrams (yao-t'u) and propagating heterodox teachings. But even more ominously, on the banners they carry into battle they have stitched the words, "The Great Commander and King of the T'ai-p'ing Heavenly Kingdom."⁵⁴ Ch'ing officials could lay their apprehensions to rest, for this was the only case of immediate and direct influence on the Elder Brother Society.

There is only one other significant case in the archives, beyond the *Sh'un T'ien* King discussed above, which documents a later and more indirect connection to the Taiping and which documents the practice of kingship. This case involves a man by the name of Teng Shih-en. This case originated in Kiangsi, and the first report comes in April, 1894, from the office of the governor, Te Sheng. This governor had personally investigated the facts of this case and was now making his report.

Your servant has personally investigated this case. The bandit leader, Teng Shih-en, himself claimed to be a remnant of the Yueh bandit, [this is the other moniker besides "long-haired bandits" the Ch'ing assigned to the Taiping] Hung Hsiu-chuan's gang. He established a Heaven and Earth Society which has been operating many years now and which has recruited a large group of members. Moreover, he falsely calls himself, the Heavenly King of the Two Prefectures [that is the two prefectures of Chi-an and Nan-an in southwestern Kiangsi]. Because his son, Teng Kwei-lan, had been apprehended by Ling

⁵⁴ KCT #782-8, T'ung-chih 5/4/19.

County [authorities] in Hunan, Teng Shih-en had called together a group of his men to help break his son out of the jail. To kill in cold blood these soldiers at Yung-ning city and to surround and attack the city itself truly is an action which belongs to the category of planning rebellion and fomenting revolt. It is a great crime and an extreme evil. So even though Teng had already died of his injuries, I had the corpse dug up, cut into pieces and exposed in view of the people in order to make manifest the laws of the empire and so to make the people's hearts more responsive.⁵⁵

Teng Shih-en had been operating in the prefectures of Chi-an (Yung-ning County is in Chi-an) and Nan-an. These prefectures are former Taiping-controlled territories and share a border with Kan-chou Prefecture on the east, which was the site of some of the battles between the Ch'ing and a Taiping-secret society coalition that were examined in the previous section. On the western border of Chi-an Prefecture, in Ling County in Hunan, the plan for the jailbreak materialized.

The governor's memorial details a rich legacy which the Taiping bequeathed to these prefectures in Kiangsi and Hunan. Teng Shih-en claims that he had been a part of the Taiping movement, explicitly declaring that he had been a follower of Hung Hsiu-ch'uan. He further evokes this legacy by referring to himself as the Heavenly King of these prefectures. There is one issue, though, that is a little ambiguous. Governor Te Sheng writes that Teng confessed that he had set up a Heaven and Earth Society association. This may have been the type of organization Teng Shih-en set up. But some of the leaders he was cooperating with were setting up what are described as mountain halls which is terminology more characteristic

⁵⁵ KCT #686-1, Kuang-hsu 20/3/16.

of the Elder Brother Society. Such designations may have just been formulaic for this governor; he may have designated all secret society activity as being associated with the Heaven and Earth Society since it was still active especially in the southern hinterlands of his province. Moreover, while the hierarchical organization did set the Elder Brother Society apart, most of its rituals were similar to the *T'ien-ti Hui*—burning incense and swearing oaths, so in many respects these were only semantic differences.

In a succeeding document, the Kiangsi governor had more to report on this case. The Ch'ing authorities had apprehended another bandit leader involved in this case by the name of Chao Fei-lung. Upon questioning he, too, confessed that “when he was a youth he practiced the Hung religion of the *Yueh* bandits, and that afterwards he set up a mountain hall [this is Elder Brother Society terminology] and recruited a number of followers to enter his society. He and his followers looted and plundered throughout the area of An-jen County in Hunan Province and further dared to follow Teng Shih-en, cooperating with him in his attack on Yung-ning County.”⁵⁶ This case is getting more interesting. An-jen County is not on the border with Kiangsi, it is about 75 kilometers inside of Hunan, which means that the different societies were cooperating over a wide stretch of territory.

The governor also refers to this bandit leader as “having practiced the Hung

⁵⁶ KCT #686-6, Kuang-hsu 20.

religion.” This is one of those rare, very rare, occurrences when a report of *Ko-lao Hui* activity actually refers to some teachings, to an ideology of any kind. Given that the *Ko-lao Hui* has left behind so little evidence of their teachings, this account has to be given more weight than the average account which does not contain any such evidence. But what exactly is this religion? Is this just the governor’s off-hand reference to some vestigial beliefs of the Taiping which still exist in this area? He makes the same kind of remarks when he describes a new incident which happened in Nan-an Prefect. The leader there also practiced, as the official described it, the religion of Hung. While we always have to be aware that this may possibly be the result of Governor Te Sheng’s unique way of conceptualizing secret society activity, we have to keep in mind, too, that this would have been a very foolhardy habit to fall into, as any mention of Taiping remnants would have greatly alarmed the court. This then cannot just be some serendipitous exercise. This kind of reporting could jeopardize a career. With such matters in mind, it seems unlikely that the governor would describe the religion of this group in these terms except in the case that these terms were the appropriate words for describing the religion.

We can only speculate about what it was that led the governor to so characterize this bandit activity. Obviously, the society leaders themselves claimed this connection. But the governor must have seen something in their activity to substantiate the claim, something beyond Teng’s self-styled title of Heavenly King.

Unfortunately, none of the memorials reveal what led the governor to make this connection. Nor does any other governor report such a connection. Is it that there was no such activity in other provinces, or if there was, that the governors did not dare to report it?

Another governor who submitted a memorial concerning the same case did not so characterize the rebels. Hunan Governor Wu Ta-ch'eng reported on a group with connections to Teng Shih-en operating in the borderlands of Hsiang County and Shao-yang City. This, too, was no small piece of Hunan Province. There was over a hundred kilometers of territory between these two locations, and it fell in the very middle of the province. Nor was it an insignificant part of Hunan Province: Hsiang County was the birthplace of Tseng Kuo-fan. Governor Wu reports that he executed more than seventy of the main suspects, and that several thousand followers were dispersed. There is no discussion of any religion they practiced or even any description of their rituals or organization. He did point out, in a passage which we cited earlier, that these society bandits all did have roots in the armies recruited during the Taiping wars. Thus, though there is no specific reference to Elder Brother Society bandits, only a general reference to society bandits, it can be assumed that because of their origins and their territorial range that they were indeed Elder Brother Society rebels.

The only clue which links them ideologically with Teng Shih-en is that the one

leader is referring to himself as a king. One leader calls himself the Great King and his son, the Second King.⁵⁷ Is this the sine qua non of the vestigial ideology of the Taiping: the practice of kingship in the societies? It seems that it is. Whatever else that the governor of Kiangsi meant when he referred to these society rebels practicing the religion of the *Yueh* bandit, this practice is something concrete that he does give us and that appears in other reports. Finally, we should note that the Taiping's revival of the tradition of kingship was religiously motivated; we are left to wonder, however, whether that motivation continued on in society practices of this same form of rule.

The Elder Brother Society and the 1911 Revolution

This study of the Elder Brother Society would be deficient in its scope if it failed to comment on the connections of the society to the 1911 Revolution. In these connections, I hope to evoke something of a legacy of the Taiping for the revolution. This segment of my chapter is perhaps more suggestive than evidence allows, but since such evidence is lacking, I do believe that suggestiveness has a place, especially since these ideas follow a trajectory established by the evidence that has been presented up to this point.

⁵⁷ KCT #693-4, Kuang-hsu 20/3/16. This is Governor Wu's fourth memorial concerning this case. The initial incident did happen in his territory, though, and it was only when Teng Shih-en was captured that the Kiangsi governor submitted his own report. KCT#693-1 and #693-7 mention Teng Shih-en, and #693-7 also mentions connections between these society members and Chao Fei-lung.

The fact is that some explanation is needed to account for popular support for the revolution. I am persuaded that there was some ideological basis for secret society involvement in the revolution and support for its goals, and that this ideological basis is in part a legacy of the Taiping. The more general subject of society participation and support for the revolution, on the other hand, has been widely explored and thoroughly documented, by John Lust and Joseph Esherick as well as Chuang Chi-fa. I will rely on them to tell this part of the story.

Most significant for demonstrating ideological common ground between the societies and the revolutionaries, and for suggesting a Taiping legacy, is the fact that the revolutionaries were regarded and hunted down much as society bandits had been hunted down by the Ch'ing. Such an identification is self-evident in the case of Sun Yat-sen who named his different organizations "societies": he formed the *Hsing-chung Hui* (the Revive China Society) in 1895 and the *Hsing-han Hui* (the Revive the Han Society) in 1899, the *Hsing-han Hui* initiating a collaboration between literati revolutionaries and the secret societies.⁵⁸ Even the reformer and monarchist K'ang Yu-wei is referred to as a rebel (*ni-fan*) in these government documents, and like all rebels before him, he is accused, perhaps justifiably, of "desiring to link up with society bandits, and seizing the opportunity [of rural unrest] to stage an uprising."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Charlton Lewis in Chesneaux, *Popular Movements*, p. 110.

⁵⁹ KCT #695-17, Kuang-hsu 27/5/18.

This identification of revolutionaries with secret societies on the part of Ch'ing officials was not without basis. The revolutionaries did seek out contacts with the societies, especially the Elder Brother Society. They proved to be more enthusiastic partners than the literati, who were always a little skittish about cooperating with the revolutionists. Furthermore, neither the literati or the revolutionaries had any support among the common people. As John Lust describes the situation, the secret societies in general and the *Ko-lao Hui* in particular not only provided connections to the lower ranks of the New Army, but opened up a door of influence to provincial armies and even something approaching a mass following.

Lust details the cooperation between revolutionists and secret societies in the development of the *Kuang-fu Hui* (Restoration Society) centered in the lower Yangtze and the *Hua-hsing Hui* (the Revive China Society) centered in Hunan. The *Kuang-fu Hui* set up a military training school where revolutionaries and secret society members worked side by side. In Hunan, a half-way society was formed which encouraged cooperation between revolutionaries and society members, especially those under the leadership of one Ma Fu-i; it was called the *T'ung-ch'ou Hui* (the Society Against the Common Enemy).⁶⁰ These two areas, the upper Yangtze Valley and the lower Yangtze were the strongest centers of radicalism prior to 1908. It is no coincidence that these areas were also the same regions

⁶⁰ John Lust, "Secret Societies, Popular Movements and the 1911 Revolution," in Chesneaux, *Popular Movements*, pp. 178-179.

where the Elder Brother Society was the strongest,⁶¹ nor is it a coincidence that these regions were also the sites of the bloodiest battlefields in the Taiping civil war.

And further, it should come as no surprise that when the revolution did break out, it did so in Hunan. For the events which transpired in Hunan and in neighboring Hupei, Joseph Esherick narrates a play by play account of the developments. A major participant in these events was the Elder Brother Society, the secret society which Esherick refers to in understated fashion as the most important society in the Yangtze valley of Central China. Esherick notes how Sun Yat-sen deputed Pi Yung-nien to Central China to rally the secret societies for his *Hsing-chung Hui*. In 1899, Pi led seven "Dragon Heads" (leaders of Ko-lao Hui units) to Hong Kong to meet with leaders of the Cantonese triads. This was a two-month conference. The product of this conference was the formation of an umbrella organization named the *Hsing Han Hui* (Revive the Han Society) which was to cooperate with Sun's *Hsing-chung Hui*.⁶²

Another revolutionary, Huang Hsing, met with the secret society leader Ma Fu-i and sealed their alliance with the archetypal secret society ritual, drinking a mixture of wine and chicken blood.⁶³ Still the track record of this revolutionary and secret

⁶¹ Lust cites only one other example of a similarly strong center of radicalism and that is Kweichow. But here, too, *Ko-lao Hui* support made the radicalism politically viable. See p. 180.

⁶² Esherick, pp. 24-25.

⁶³ Esherick, p. 51.

society cooperation was not exactly winning. Esherick describes the three different attempts at revolution in Hupei and Hunan prior to 1911--T'ang Ts'ai-ch'ang's Independence Army Uprising of 1900, Huang Hsing's Changsha plot in 1904, and the P'ing-Liu-Li uprising in 1906--as all failures. Frustrated, some revolutionaries decided to work with the New Army instead.

The Elder Brother Society still remained one of the leading players, especially in Hunan. The Revolution of 1911 began in Hunan, and it was in Hunan where a revolutionary who was supported by secret societies seized power. This was the reign of Chiao Ta-feng, the first governor of Revolutionary China. His was a short reign, some ten days, but it vividly illustrates the role which the secret societies played. It also is an episode which dramatically documents what happened to the revolution in general; Chiao's term expired prematurely--within days of his winning office-- when he was assassinated by more conservative forces associated with the literati and the New Army. Even in Hupei where the conservative forces managed to commandeer the revolution before it broke out, the secret societies still played a major role. As Esherick describes it, there was no uniform pattern in the province as a whole.⁶⁴ In some areas of Hupei, especially commercial centers, the secret societies were the leading force; in other areas, the constitutionalists and the New Army were the leading force.

⁶⁴ Esherick, p. 192.

John Lust postulated that there were ideological as well as strategic reasons for the cooperation between the republican revolutionaries and the secret societies. He does not emphasize the ideological grounds in his analysis, touching on them only briefly in a section entitled, "Iconoclasm and Nationalist Myth."⁶⁵ He speaks of the knight-errantry (jen-hsia), Robin Hood-type of tradition in popular culture which could have served as a common basis uniting the two groups. And there was also their common hostility to the Manchus, voiced most faithfully by the societies in their slogan, "Overturn the Ch'ing, Restore the Ming" (he does not recognize the declining use of this slogan). Lust includes the possibility that Taiping anti-Manchu documents were even republished during the years prior to the revolution.

Though Lust does not do more than raise the possibility of the Taiping legacy serving as a common ideological basis for cooperation between the revolutionaries and the secret societies, there are others who have tried to document such a basis. In a collection of source materials on the *Hsin-hai* Revolution, published under the editorial sponsorship of the Chinese Historical Studies Society, there appears some documents assembled under the title, "Hung Ch'uan-fu's Uprising."⁶⁶ These materials concern an uprising participated in by a younger brother of Hung Hsiu-

⁶⁵ For this section, see Lust, pps. 170-174.

⁶⁶ *Hsin-Hai Ke Ming* [The Hsin-hai Revolution] ed., Ch'ai Te-keng, et. al., in the series *Chung-kuo Chin-tai-shih Tzu-liao Ts'ung-k'an* (Shanghai, 1981), pp. 315-327.

ch'uan⁶⁷ who had fought with the Taiping armies, earning the rank of general, and in the waning years of the kingdom had been invested with the title of Lustrous King (Ying Wang). After the fall of Nanking, he escaped to Hong Kong, where decades later he plotted his uprising.

This was an uprising, albeit a failed one. Indeed it did not even get off the ground. And that it is styled Hung Ch'uan-fu's uprising is something of a misnomer. While he was one of the main leaders, Hung seemed to serve more in the role of figurehead. After the 1895 Canton Uprising failed, Hung was contacted by a leader in the debacle by the name of Hsieh Tsuan-t'ai. Hsieh had heard that Hung Ch'uan-fu "was seeking to find some of the legacy of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom." (From the context of this remark, it is clear that Hung was searching for remnants of the revolutionary vision or spirit of the Taiping.) Hsieh had also heard of Hung's influential reputation among the secret societies of the area. In view of these connections, Hsieh invited Hung to participate in the planning and staging of another uprising in the year, 1903. It failed, too, betrayed by first one traitor, and then another.

Having really never had the chance to get off the ground, the literature of this rising cannot be considered voluminous: it barely fills six pages of this collection.

⁶⁷ The introduction to these materials notes that some believe he was actually Hung Hsiu-ch'uan's nephew, but the editor believes the evidence supports the idea that he was Hung's younger brother. Ibid, p. 315.

Apparently, though, Hung Ch'uan-fu and his revolutionary colleagues were as ambitious as Hung's older brother had been. Their declarations proclaim the establishing of the "Great Ming Obedient to Heaven Kingdom" (Ta Ming Shun-T'ien Kuo). At the same time, the declarations condemn the Manchus and their Ch'ing dynasty for their grievous crimes, a list of which reaches far back to the founding of the dynasty, to the massacre at Yangchow which lasted ten full days, and extends to the then present day, when the Ch'ing allowed the Boxer Rebellion to break out in order to do the greatest possible harm to the land of the Han.

Even though Hung Ch'uan-fu participated in this enterprise, there is no mention of his elder brother's own enterprise. The only connections between those declarations the Taiping produced and those published by these rebels are their anti-Manchu line and a quite traditional appeal to the blessing of Heaven. For example, there is this line in a Hung Ch'uan-fu proclamation, "When righteous Heaven destroys the Manchu Ch'ing, this will be the time when Heaven revives [hsing] our Han people. We this general and his army respond to Heaven and listen to the people."⁶⁸ There is also a reference in a short maxim which speaks of establishing T'ai-P'ing (the Great Peace) where there is no private and all belongs to the whole of the Han people.

In these few pages of public declarations, it is revealing what is said and what is

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 323.

not. What is said represents fairly standard secret society fare. There is the anti-Manchu talk, and calls to revive the Han. But there is also more and less than standard secret society talk. There is more: a stronger emphasis on Heaven than usually appears in such documents. There is also less: a lot less; there is no mention of reviving the Ming Dynasty—even though this is part of the title of the kingdom in whose name they carry out this rising-- or any imperial dynasty at all. Instead the documents proclaim the rebels intention to set up a republic and to elect a president.

There is definitely some ideological confusion here; nonetheless, I would suggest that what is more and what is less than standard secret society slogans here represents in part the legacy of the Taiping Rebellion bequeathed to the secret societies, a legacy which organizations such as Sun Yat-sen's *Hsing-chung Hui* legitimized and took over into their own appeals to the secret societies. The Taiping Rebellion had struck the imperial office and its culture with a devastating blow, smashing to pieces this icon which symbolized traditional China. If there had been no Taiping Rebellion, would there have been a 1911 Revolution? Without the resulting transformation of the secret societies, the evidence that survives suggests that it might still have occurred; but without the popular support it was able to harness from the legacy of the Taiping, the 1911 Revolution would have been even more a revolution of the elite than it already was.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to show the relationship of the Taiping with the secret societies and then attempted to analyze the impact of that relationship on developments within the secret societies. I believe I have demonstrated that in spite of the conclusions of conventional wisdom that the Taiping did maintain some relationship with the secret societies, and though it was strained at times, that that relationship was never ruptured by any secret society aversion to the Taiping creed. It was a relationship of convenience, and both sides understood this, but it worked. I believe that the evidence which I have presented concerning the nature of their relationship is solid and convincing.

For the purpose of the thesis of this dissertation, I feel that I only have to convince the jury of my readers that the Taiping did have this relationship. For showing the relationship that the Taiping maintained with the secret societies and identifying the cause of the strains in that relationship demonstrates that the Taiping did have popular support, that in the words of Tseng Kuo-fan the Ch'ing armies could not kill those supporters fast enough. The Taiping may not have always chosen to depend on that support, but it was available when they did so choose. Moreover, it seems that the Taiping creed, if not its practices, may have even strengthened popular support. It is significant that there is no evidence that the

Taiping lost support because of their creed; rather the Taiping boldly proclaimed that creed, to all appearances believing that their creed enhanced their support among the people.

The case for popular support, though, is definitely made stronger if the jury is persuaded by the second part of the argument, that not only was there a relationship, but there was impact and influence: the societies actually were changed by this association with the Taiping. My evidence for this part of the argument has been largely circumstantial. There is no one eye-witness or no one smoking gun. Rather, there were changes in Chinese popular society during and following the rebellion, and I have tried to assemble the facts so that the reader can draw the inference which is the only one I believe can reasonably be drawn: that these changes in Chinese society were the result of the impact of the Taiping and their religious doctrine and practice on Chinese society.

Some of these changes are difficult to understand apart from the impact of the Taiping movement: the practice in some societies--especially those which had some connection with the Taiping-- of conferring the title of kingship on their leaders, rather than the more traditional titles of Great Commander or Dragon Head; the silencing of the calls to restore the Ming Dynasty; the revived and transformed sense of Chinese nationalism; and finally the openness among the societies to cooperate with republican revolutionaries. Each of these changes can be traced to

Taiping doctrines and practice, especially to their understanding of the blasphemous character of the imperial office and to their iconoclastic and desacralization campaigns. Taken one by one, these pieces of evidence may not prove persuasive, but taken together, these changes testify convincingly that the Taiping and their doctrines not only did not turn people away from the movement, but rather that some of their principal doctrines were embraced and internalized by the people for a generation after the fall of the Heavenly Capital, playing an ideological role in the overthrowing of the Manchus.

This is the evidence from the societies for the popular appeal of the Taiping; in the next chapter, we will examine the evidence from the sects.

CHAPTER NINE

THE TAIPING TRANSFORMATION OF THE SECTS

As compared to the impact of the rebellion on the societies, the impact of the Taiping Rebellion on the sects was much more complicated, the transformation at once broader and deeper, more entangled and impenetrable. That the rebellion had this kind of impact on the sects was a consequence of, and a testimony to, the Taiping's own religious character. In this chapter, we will be examining the full range of the impact on sects in general, and then because of their exceptional quality, two in particular: the Nien and the Heavenly Lord sects.

The most dramatic consequence of the Taiping Rebellion is the virtual disappearance of specifically sectarian activity in the Yangtze River valley. When the government reports on sectarian activity at all following the rebellion, these reports emanate almost exclusively from the provinces of Chihli and Shantung. Only very rarely will a report be submitted from what had been Taiping China.

There are several possible explanations which can be offered for this eclipse of sectarian activity in central China, each of which takes the rebellion as the direct

cause of sectarian demise. One explanation is that sectarian movements could have been drawn into alliance and identification with the Taiping movement in such a way that they were wholly absorbed by the movement. They lost their separate identity. Now this would not have been the first time that such a development had taken place in Chinese society, since the boundaries between different sects were as fluid as the sect masters were creative in adapting to changing ideological conditions. We can assume that of all those flocking to the movement, sectarians would have been in the lead.

A second explanation looks at government policy towards sectarianism. The government even in peaceful times was negligent in attempting to distinguish between various sectarian teachings and organizations. During the Taiping Rebellion, the authorities were even less conscientious in making such distinctions. No longer did the authorities, for example, distinguish between the leader and the followers in imposing punishment for sectarian activity; the policy during the rebellion was to execute all those suspected of sectarian activity on the spot. Indeed this is what makes Heavenly Lord sectarian activity so important to understanding these times: since the government tended to group all sectarian activity together, how the government treated the Heavenly Lord sectarians is a good indicator of how the government treated all sectarians. It could very well be

that sectarians were slaughtered in mass during the rebellion, along with the Taiping sectarians.

A third explanation that should be considered is that sectarians may have been secularized during the rebellion, and so after the rebellion they became assimilated into groups like the Elder Brother Society which did not place a high priority on ideology. This explanation then would entertain the idea that one of many results of the rebellion was a secularization of popular society. The forms of association were no longer religious sects, but secret societies such as the Elder Brother Society.

A fourth explanation relates once again to government policy, but in this case policy which was followed after the rebellion. Government attempts to re-indoctrinate popular society and efforts to monitor and suppress any sign of ideological deviance may have been so effective that sectarian groups had to keep a very low profile, or had to disband all together.

In the discussion which follows, there is some evidence for each of these explanations, and that all of them may together account for the disappearance of sectarian activity from the Yangtze River valley. This disappearance, though, makes it all the more difficult to describe the impact and the transformation of the Taiping on sectarian movements. There are several cases which document the Taiping impact on sectarian groups, but only a few which provide a case record

which allows for us to follow a sectarian group from its appearance before the rebellion to after the rebellion is suppressed. The archives provide, then, only a few significant cases which survey the impact of the rebellion on specific sects over several decades of nineteenth-century Chinese society, and yet these few do provide a historical panorama of the changes produced by the Taiping.

One of these cases involves a group which was first introduced when we were discussing the state of Chinese society on the eve of the rebellion. Activities of this sect were first reported in the twenty-seventh year of the Tao-kuang emperor (1847). At that time, Kiangsi Governor Wu Wen-yung reported that he had apprehended some thirty persons who had been propagating religion. He identified them as associated with the Three Vehicle sect. (Whether this was the name the sectarians took for themselves, or whether this was a generic name given to all Buddhist-inspired sects is not clear from the governor's memorial.) The leader of these thirty sectarian criminals, Ch'u Ch'ao-szu, had listened to and believed in the doctrine preached by a man from Hunan, Wang Ch'eng-chin, a man whom Ch'u came to revere as his master. Master Wang had passed onto Ch'u a belief in the Eternal Mother (Wu-sheng Lao-mu), in the three returns and in the five prohibitions, while at the same time entrusting him with three small books of scriptures and a sutra. Along with the usual charges of which sectarian criminals were regularly accused, namely making converts, stirring up the people and

defrauding money, these sectarians were also accused of linking up with a bandit by the name of Hsieh Tz'u-feng.¹

While Governor Wu decries how in all the border regions of Kiangsi, Kwangtung, Hunan and Fukien, various kinds of rascals and bandits are propagating religion and swearing brotherhood, other than the charge of linking up with the bandit Hsieh, there is no charge in this case which alleges rebellion of any kind. The religion that was propagated in these regions was called first by the name *T'ien-kang* (The Celestial Dipper) sect, and then appears as the *Chin-tan* (Golden Elixir) sect and the *San-sheng* (Three Vehicle). While the *Chin-tan* sect may have differed in its origins from the other two—Overmeyer indicated it was a Taoist sect—the fact that the *San-sheng* sect which Master Wang was propagating featured a belief and interest in practices which could help prolong life (a Taoist distinctive if there ever was one) shows that it was not only government officials who were averse to making doctrinal distinctions.²

Even though there probably were distinctions among the sects, as we have seen,

¹ KCT #599-1, Peasant Uprising Category, Tao-kuang 27/11/16. Unless indicated otherwise, all archival references are from this category.

² Daniel Overmeyer, in his *Folk Buddhist Religion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 124, argues that the tradition which was behind the Golden Elixir sect was a Taoist tradition, and so ostensibly a different tradition from the White Lotus. It is highly likely that these were three different sects operating in the same area, but because of the obvious syncretistic impulses at work here (the practices intended to prolong life passed onto a Buddhist sect and, as we shall see shortly, the belief that this "Taoist" *Chin-tan* sect holds to—that its leader is a Buddha messiah) and also for the purposes of this analysis, I am treating these as the officials did, as just different expressions of the same heterodox impulse.

the government still treated them as one. These religious bandits were all punished according to the precedent in the law code which was meted out to the White Sun sect, that of the leaders being immediately strangled, and the followers either banished to the malaria-infested south or the Muslim-inhabited west. This is the last time in this case when authorities would distinguish between leaders and followers in deciding the punishment.

This action did not put an end to the movement. For these sectarians appear in Hunan again a few years later during the Taiping Rebellion, only this time the books which are confiscated contain rebellious language. This same *T'ien-kang* sect was once again the object of government interest, and this time it was also operating in the Hupei-Hunan border regions, specifically Ching-chou Prefecture in southern Hupei and Feng-chou Prefecture in northern Hunan. The memorial laments that "every place in the area has bandits (or rebels, *fei-t'u*) who are plotting (rebellion) and gathering large groups of followers."³

This time, though, the sect is passing out more than just scriptures. These bandits are distributing offices, meaning that they are actively plotting rebellion, and not only that, they have begun establishing their leaders as kings. The Ch'ing authorities had recently captured one of their leaders, a man by the name of Luo Hua-po, who was invested with the title of the Faith and Blessing King (*Hsin-fu*

³ KCT #599-5, *T'ung-chih* 1/2/3.

Wang). Upon further investigation, officials had discovered that each of the five leaders of this uprising had taken characters representing the five constant Confucian virtues, benevolence (jen), righteousness (yi), propriety (li), wisdom (chih), and faithfulness (hsin), as royal titles.⁴

The authorities had nonetheless still failed to dig up the roots of the movement. In the fifth year of the T'ung-chih reign (1866), two years after the fall of Nanking, the brother of Tseng Kuo-fan, Tseng Kuo-ch'uan, drafted a document on the conditions of places such as Hupei's Ching Prefecture.⁵ He comments that since the Yueh bandits (that is, the Taiping) passed through, the people's hearts had been highly unstable, and they were especially susceptible to rumors which were manufactured by some of the unemployed floating population. The floating people had been propagating heterodox religious teachings which were inciting the foolish peasants, leading many to form societies and to swear brotherhood.

Some sectarian bandits had already set a time when they are planning to rise up in rebellion. Tseng reports that his soldiers had seized these bandits together with their "false" seals, white cloth, and white battle tunics, along with some "false" lists of official positions. The name of the religion which they propagate is called the Chin-tan (Golden Elixir) sect. The followers of the sect believed that the man they

⁴ KCT #599-6, T'ung-chih 1/6/3. The Elder Brother Society also adopted these virtues for some of their leaders' titles.

⁵ KCT #599-7, T'ung-chih 5/8/16.

captured, Liu Han-chung (his name means, "Loyal to the Han"), is the third Buddha who has descended into the world.

This series of communications from Ching-chou Prefecture presents a picture of a countryside in tumult. There are a number of elements in these cases any two or three of which would prove to be a volatile mix. There is a tradition of sectarian heterodoxy; there are Buddhist apocalyptic visions; there are kings, seals and white battle tunics; there is the Taiping occupation; and there is even a hint of Han racial sentiment. And these elements are mixing. Though it may reflect some on the memorialist's unfamiliarity with the shape and contours of heterodox geography, it at the same time takes no strained stretch of the imagination to argue that the memorialist is describing a landscape which has been transformed by the rebellion. No longer are the traditional boundary lines between the society and sect so clearly drawn. Boundaries have not only shifted; they have been removed. Now sectarians are swearing brotherhood, and society members are rebelling. The question: Are these bandits religious bandits or society bandits? is now even more irrelevant than it ever was.

The General Sectarian Impact

The sectarian tradition proved responsive to the Taiping impact in several different areas. One element in sectarian tradition which was especially responsive

to the Taiping impact was the sectarian proclivity toward rebellion. The apocalyptic visions of White Lotus sectarianism were made manifest, the battle between good and evil made dramatic, in the struggle of the Taiping and the Ch'ing. In one case reported by the Governor-General T'ai Liang from the provinces of Liang-kiang in the fourth year of the Hsien-feng reign, the governor comments that he has apprehended a number of followers of religious practitioners who were spreading everywhere all kinds of perverse rumors, one of which was that in Kwangsi Province, the king of the demons had descended to the earth. These believers were part of a sect called the Golden Orchid sect (Chin-lan) who had gathered under banners which read "The Great Han Kingdom Heavenly Truth Year One."⁶ While it was part of the sectarian repertoire to rebel, especially during periods of calamity and distress which recalled their apocalyptic views of the future, it was not usually with an intention to establish a racially pure Han kingdom. Such nationalism, though, was a prominent feature of Taiping-era rebellions.

A second area where the sects were particularly responsive to the Taiping impact was in the area of iconoclasm. This may seem to be an anomaly of sorts; our assumption would be that Taiping iconoclasm would have produced other responses from the sectarians than emulation. But at least in one case involving thousands of sectarian followers, this was the response. In the first year of the

⁶ KCT #722-1, Hsien-feng 4/2/4.

T'ung-chih reign, a Manchu official reports that along the southern bank of the Yangtze River that a number of vegetarian bandits had been active.⁷ Their number was estimated at 20,000; but the official also calculates that there were probably some 100,000 people who were adherents of this sect. They were operating in some of the recently-contested areas of the region. The sectarians were referring to their doctrine as the Pu-tu (Universal Ferry; a Buddhist concept) teaching. But what were these sectarians doing which has alarmed the authorities so? They were destroying ancestral tablets. In this they were realizing their teaching of "newly renewing" doctrine. This is the only case which describes such activity, but, as the official himself admits, this teaching has been embraced by not a few followers.

A third element in the sectarian tradition which was responsive to the Taiping impact was the Taiping call for economic equality. In the summer months of the first year of the Hsien-feng reign, only seven and eight months after the Taiping officially proclaimed their Heavenly Kingdom, reports reached the Grand Council concerning bandit-inspired ferment throughout the southern prefectures of Hunan and northern Kwangsi. The memorialist, Huang Chao-lin, lists mainly sectarian bandits operating in Hunan, each of which bears a different name, but all of which are characterized as vegetarian bandits and society bandits in Kwangsi. (At this time, the Taiping were not yet being distinguished in government reports from other

⁷ KCT #734-1, T'ung-chih 1/8/5; KCT #734-3, T'ung-chih 1/8/19.

society and sectarian bandits. This changed when they captured Yung-an one month after this Kwangsi report was submitted.) This explosion of rebellion has alarmed officials, and one report describes how all kinds of society bandits in Kwangsi are raising banners proclaiming their intention to rob from the rich and give to the poor.⁸

The reports speculate that these Kwangsi bandits have borrowed this slogan from the popular novel, Shui-hu Chuan (All Men are Brothers). That a government report would allude to this novel raises an important issue in the discussion of the impact of the Taiping. The Shui-hu Chuan is a collection of stories about a group of Robin Hood-style bandits who while engaging in their petty banditry also protect innocent common people against corrupt officials and powerful landlords. They rob from the rich and give to the poor. They were not just robbing anyone, these bandits were specifically targeting the rich. There are echoes here of notions of popular justice about which scholars such as Hobsbawm and James C. Scott have written. It is clear that along with all the other traditions which the Taiping tapped into, this “social bandit” tradition was one, a tradition more the preserve of secret societies, but also one shared by sectarians who envisioned an utopian society where all people have access to all the earth’s resources.

⁸ CCCT #2793-1, Hsien-feng 1/7/21; CCCT #2793-2, Hsien-feng 1/8/12. These are taken from the Peasant Uprising Category unless otherwise noted.

One final aspect of the impact which the Taiping had on sectarians, and which we mentioned earlier, was in their ideas of political rule: the rule of kings. There is a tradition in the White Lotus sect of rebel leaders calling themselves kings. Susan Naquin refers to this tradition in her study of the Eight Trigrams Rebellion. The three main leaders of that rebellion took the titles of the King of Heaven, of Earth and of Men. Other men associated with the Eight Trigrams took a title that will be discussed more in connection with the Nien rebels: the *Shun-t'ien* King (the King Who is Obedient to Heaven).⁹ Thus we can say that whereas in the societies, contact with the Taiping resulted in the introducing of the title of kingship; for the sects, contact with the Taiping resulted in the return to and strengthening of a neglected tradition of kingship.

It was a tradition which was being revived at the very moment of the Taipings rise to power. In the fourth month of the first year of the Hsien-feng reign, a memorialist reports that there are different sects in different provinces which are calling their leaders kings: there is the Red Earth king and the Red Sky king. Much of this kind of activity can be directly related to the death of the Tao-kuang emperor and the paroxysms seizing through Chinese society throughout his reign, all providing material for apocalyptic action.

⁹ Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); pp. 116, 221-222. Other men took such royal titles as the "P'ing-hsi Wang" (the King who Pacifies the West) and "Ssu Ta-Wang" (the Fourth Great King).

The first instance of a memorial noting the impact of the Taiping on such developments within sectarianism comes from Hupei in the third year of the Hsien-feng reign. Here sectarians connected to a group called the "Golden Drum Lotus Society" are calling their leaders Eastern and Western Kings. The official reporting on this group points to the Taipings attack and capture of Wuchang as having provoked such changes in the sects.¹⁰ Another example of Taiping influence comes again from Hupei. In the first year of the T'ung-chih reign, a report came to the throne concerning some sectarian bandits who have set up a king.¹¹ Still more evidence comes from Hupei, where in the year following the fall of the Heavenly Capital, a White Lotus sect leader is referred to as the "White King." And this White King has chosen for his dynastic title, the name, the "T'ai P'ing Protected Kingdom."¹²

In concluding this discussion of the different aspects of the Taiping impact on sectarian movements, we shall consider the heterodox career of one man whose resume incorporates many of these changes in Chinese popular society. The name of this man is one Wang Yu-ts'ai. In the fifth year of the Hsien-feng reign (1855), a group of bandits had gathered around Kiangsu province, and after having pillaged and plundered the cities of Wu-hsi and Suzhou, had been captured by Ch'ing troops. These bandits appear to be society bandits, as they call their association the

¹⁰ CCCT #2953, Hsien-feng 3/2/9.

¹¹ CCCT #3019, T'ung-chih 1/2/14.

Sheng-te Hui (the Victory Society), they address their leaders as *Ta-ko* (older brother) and their initiation rite includes the drinking of blood.

In the year prior to their capture, two of the leaders of this group of bandits, both hailing from Kwang-tung Province, ordered one of their members, Wang Yu-tsai, to go to Nanking (the Taiping heavenly capital) in order to recruit some men (he recruited an estimated 2,400 men) and march to an area around Suzhou to “create an incident.” Under Wang’s direction, this group formed the *Sheng-te Hui*. Receiving word that one of the leaders of the group which sent him out had been executed, Wang dispersed his men, eluded the authorities, and thus escaped the same fate. The official submitting this report believes that the spectacle of execution had resulted in the scattering and breaking up of this society.¹³

This proved to be wishful thinking. For in the fifth year of the T’ung-chih reign (1866), Wang Yu-ts’ai turns up in a different case.¹⁴ This time he is operating along the border between Kiangsi and Fukien. His modus operandi has also changed; he is now linked up with some “vegetarian bandits” (that is, sectarian bandits; sectarians are vegetarians). Submitting this memorial is the Governor-General of Fukien and Che-kiang, the celebrated Ch’ing war hero, Tso Tsung-t’ang. Tso notes that in this border area there are a number of vegetarian bandits who are propagating their religion and attracting followers.

¹² CCCT #2277-2, T’ung-chih 5.

¹³ KCT #743-1, Hsien-feng 5/2/24.

On the fifteenth day of the second month, several hundreds of their followers had suddenly swooped down on a city along the border. Wearing various -colored turbans, white, red and green, they filled the streets and stood guard at all the corners. They unfurled flags upon which was stitched, in large characters, "The Heavenly Kingdom is Universally Present" (T'ien-kuo P'u-yu). In the confessions which were obtained from some of the participants, it was not known who the main leaders were; but one man mentioned Wang Yu-tsai as one of the lesser leaders (hsiao t'ou-mu).

Yu-ts'ai enjoyed a brilliant, albeit probably not long, career as one of the Ch'ing government's most wanted criminals. He is mentioned in a couple of other memorials. A month after making his report declaring his hope that the group had broken up, Tso Tsung-t'ang lists (no doubt somewhat sheepishly) his name among other "criminals who are practicing religion and making converts."¹⁵ Acting Governor-General Ying Kuei also mentions him, describing him as a "wanted criminal."¹⁶ Later memorials do not mention Wang, but other governors throughout the latter part of the T'ung-chih reign and well into the Kuang-hsu reign report the difficulty they are having with vegetarian sectarian bandits who are swearing brotherhood, ritualized in the drinking of blood and wine, and who are

¹⁴ KCT #774-2, T'ung-chih 5/3/10.

¹⁵ KCT #774-3, T'ung-chih 5/4/19.

¹⁶ KCT #774-4, T'ung-chih 6/2/22.

setting times for rising up against the government.¹⁷ Sectarians have blended with secret society members and both are stepping back into the cracks and crannies of Chinese society.

Wang's career provides one further bit of evidence--and bits of evidence are all that we have--that thought the Ch'ing government destroyed the Heavenly Capital, and apparently sectarian organization as well, the spirit of the Taiping Kingdom survived in sectarian beliefs and practices which were no longer concentrated in sectarian organizations and instead were dispersed throughout Chinese society. Heterodox beliefs and practices entered the mainstream of Chinese popular society in a more powerful way than before the rebellion, and with these flowed vestigial Taiping ideas and doctrines.

The Impact on the Nien Rebels

The Taiping, as we saw in the previous chapter, never formally cooperated on an organizational level with any secret society. The Taiping did, however, formally cooperate on a large scale with a sectarian movement. This was the Nien. The Nien were something of an enigma, in some ways similar to the later *Ko-lao Hui* in their seeming total disregard for ideology. Even officials were at a loss in trying to figure out how to classify these rebels. Most often they were classified as neither

¹⁷ KCT #774-7, Kuang-hsu 18/3/27. This report is submitted by the governor of Kwangsi, which is far removed from Fukien-Kiangsi border region where Wang Yu-ts'ai was operating.

sect nor society, and referred to simply as the Nien rebels. Even their name adds to the mystery surrounding this group. What is the meaning of this term, *nien*? While there has been some controversy over the meaning of this self-designated moniker, a consensus has been reached. Scholars have concluded that the term refers to the method of organization that was adopted by the rebels, one where different groups of rebels are bunched together in a larger group.

That consensus does not hold up on most other points. One of the continuing points of contention is the White Lotus connection which some scholars have found in Nien materials.¹⁸ One of those scholars, Chiang Ti, argues that the Nien had a very close relationship to the 1796-1804 White Lotus Rebellion, with both White Lotus rebels and discharged soldiers swelling the ranks of the Nien following the suppression of that rebellion. As Elizabeth Perry notes, the way to reach a consensus on this important issue has been impeded by the fact that unlike the Taiping, the Nien left behind very few documents for scholars to consult. Perry had some hope for what might be found in the Ch'ing Historical Archives collection. This archive is now accessible, yet while there is an abundance of documents

¹⁸ Ma Ch'ang-hua in Elizabeth Perry's edited volume, Chinese Perspectives on the Nien (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1981), attempts to refute this connection. I did not find his argument persuasive. Perry notes how one of the contributors to the same volume, Chiang Ti, argues for this connection, but she laments his lack of documentary evidence. She may be too quick to dismiss what he has found. It is true that his argument is not based on archival evidence, but he still does provide documentary support, mainly reports of minor officials. Another scholar who argues for a White Lotus connection, but offers even less evidence for it is Siang-tseh Chiang in his The Nien Rebellion (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1954), pp. 8-19.

available, these records contain few references to any kind of religious or ideological content.

This is not a cause for despair, though. For the few ideological references which are included do strengthen the argument for a connection to the White Lotus. In the earliest government documents the Nien were referred to as the Red Beard sect (*Hung-hu chiao*). Sometimes documents refer to them as *Hung-hu Nien-fei* (Red Beard Nien bandits). When the infrequent attempt is made to categorize them with a label other than just Nien bandits, they are described as *chiao-fei* (sectarian bandit) rather than *hui-fei* (society bandit).¹⁹ Such a designation does not necessarily, by itself, mean that they were sectarians. Government officials working north of the Yangtze habitually referred to those participating in heterodox voluntary associations as religious bandits, while south of the river the same participants would be labelled as society bandits.

So in themselves, such references in the documents would not mean much. But in combination with other bits of evidence, these categories do suggest that there were indeed religious connections. In the sixteenth year of the Chia-ch'ing reign, the governor of Honan province reports that the cries of "rob from the rich and give to the poor" are heard in all the marketplaces. He holds religious believers (*hsin-*

¹⁹ See for example, KCT, Nien Army Category, #3-10, Chia-ch'ing 21/4/12.

t'u) responsible for propagating these incendiary slogans.²⁰ As the case develops the governor identifies the bandits as Red Beard bandits (that is, the Nien). In the later part of the Tao-kuang reign the governor-general of Hu-kwang also reports that there are Nien propagating religion.²¹

Of more significance for establishing a White Lotus connection is a memorial coming out of Honan in the twentieth year of Chia-ch'ing from the Manchu dignitary, Ch'i Shan, who was serving as an official with the provincial court. He informs the throne that along the border with Shandong Province, there have been sightings of a group who are said to belong to a sect called the *Shun T'ien* (Obedient to Heaven) sect, and that they have been marching under a banner which reads, "*Shun T'ien Ta Wang*" (The Great King Who is Obedient to Heaven).²² This memorial is a follow-up to a memorial related to the same case, and all these memorials are concerned with the Red Beard Nien bandits. Such a banner links the Nien even closer to White Lotus traditions of kingship. Thus, prior to the outbreak of the Taiping Rebellion, the Nien, while probably not devoted White Lotus sectarians, did identify with some of their traditions, most significantly the tradition of White Lotus kingship.

²⁰ KCT, Nien Army Category, #1-1, Chia-ch'ing 16/4/28. This slogan recalls that which was heard in Kwangsi during the rise of the Taiping, which was discussed in the early part of this chapter. It seems to have been a slogan favored by the Nien; it appears again in Honan as late as 1895--see CCCT #2990, Kuang-hsu 21/4/1.

²¹ KCT, Nien Army Category, #5-21, Tao-kuang 28/12/10.

²² KCT, Nien Army Category, #2-13, Chia-ch'ing 20/12/27.

But this was not just a one-time incident. For during the time of the Taiping, the Nien return to evoking this White Lotus tradition. In the second month of 1853, after the Taiping took Anking, the Nien began organizing for rebellion. By the tenth month of 1853, after the Taiping launched their Northern Expedition and had devastated imperial opposition in Honan, Nien leaders incorporated fifty-eight bands into one, and four of their leaders were invested with the titles of the Four Great Heavenly Kings (Ssu Ta-T'ien-Wang) in order to better realize their ambitions.²³

In the fourth year of the Hsien-feng reign, a memorial from the Kiang-nan region, a bandit leader connected to the Nien and to the Taiping is calling himself the Taiping "Shun T'ien Wang" (now this can be read two ways; either, "The Taiping King who is Obedient to Heaven," which would be the translation which would be historically continuous with the Nien tradition, or the leader who is "Obedient to the Heavenly King," i.e., the Taiping Heavenly King)²⁴ and a similar report concerning a *T'ien Shun Wang* comes again out of Honan Province at the same time.²⁵ Moreover, as Chiang Ti points out, the renowned Nien rebel, Chang Lo-hsing, took the title of Luminous King (Ming Wang), another royal title with White Lotus connections reaching as far back as the founding of the Ming Dynasty.

²³ Siang-tseh Chiang, pps. 3-6, 22.

²⁴ KCT, Nien Army Category, #9-10, Hsien-feng 4/3/17.

²⁵ KCT, Nien Army Category, #10-6, Hsien-feng 4/6/19.

There is one more piece of archival evidence for a White Lotus connection, and this comes from a Nien declaration (kao-shih) stamped with the year 1861 in the files of the Grand Council. In this declaration a Nien leader whose name was Yang and who bore the title, Commander-in-Chief (Ta Yuan-shuai), a title which recalls the political traditions of the classical age and the Confucian virtues which held sway over China during that period. Commander-in-Chief Yang then takes the present regime to task for the violating of all virtue and for embittering the people. One of its more heinous crimes is that the Ch'ing rulers have attempted to destroy the Buddhist religion and have maligned the Buddhist doctrine by labeling it a heterodox religion, and then punishing its followers as if believing in the religion were a great crime. Yang reflects, "It is so cruel, one cannot speak of it."²⁶

The Taiping link to the Nien fulfilled the worst fears of Ch'ing officials. One official writes from Anhwei about how the Nien were taking advantage of the chaos left in the wake of the Taiping, and that their leader "falsely calls himself the T'ai-p'ing Obedient to Heaven King (T'ai-p'ing Shun-t'ien Wang)."²⁷ They have also emblazoned on their military banners the name of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Now all the local bandits and starving peasants were flocking to the side of the Taiping-Nien alliance. There were "false placards" everywhere.²⁸ Much has been

²⁶ CCCT, #2860-1.

²⁷ KCT, Nien Army Category, #9-15, Hsien-feng 4/5/21.

²⁸ KCT, Nien Army Category, #12-7, Hsien-feng 7/3/12.

made of the mercenary nature of the alliance, especially because of Li Hsiu-ch'eng's death-row confession. This was a more permanent and formal alliance than the Taiping had with any secret society, but like those society allegiances it had its rough days. But this alliance worked even better than those informal alliances with the secret societies, and one reason I believe it did work so well was that there was a religious connection, ethereal as it may have been, which served as an ideological basis for the alliance.

The Taipings' ambivalent attitudes toward even this kind of alliance was understandable given the actions of men such as Li Chao-shu, the Nien leader, who allied with the Taiping in early 1856, helping in the victory over the Ch'ing South Kiangnan Army. He later abandoned the Taiping during the summer of 1858, attaching himself and his troops to the Ch'ing. Li Hsiu-ch'eng, the Taiping Loyal King, addressed a letter to Li Chao-shu following this betrayal, in which he, with a mixture of threat, bewilderment and a poignant sense of betrayal, expressed his determination to punish this treachery:

Since your capitulation to Sheng-pao [a Ch'ing commander], your present strategem has been to capture our Ch'u-chou and Lai-an, and you have indeed repaid my kindness with enmity. But this determined heart of mine shall never be at ease. I hope that now that you have capitulated to the demons, you can still resist me with all your strength. Your officers and soldiers have all been trained by me, and their temperament as well as their capabilities are very well known to me.

Since you have revolted against the Heavenly Dynasty, I, the chief general, am resolved to raise my troops to punish your crime.²⁹

At his formal surrender to the Ch'ing, Li Chao-shu changed his name to Li Shih-chung. The Ch'ing awarded him with a high rank in the imperial army, and then turned him against his former allies. Li Hsiu-ch'eng in his confession assigns a great portion of the blame for his and the Taiping failure to the traitorous action of the Nien leader. As the Loyal King put it, "Among those who hurt the fate of the Heavenly Kingdom, Li Chao-shu comes first."³⁰ Li Chao-shu did finally step over the line with the Ch'ing as well, and he was executed for it. (But as we saw in the last chapter, his son, Li Hung, the Elder Brother Society leader, saved for himself the final word on his father's judgment.)

Li Hsiu-ch'eng lists another Nien leader, Chang Lo-hsing, in second place for those who hurt most the fate of the Heavenly Kingdom. Together with some of the secret society soldiers, Li states that they "caused a change of heart in our Heavenly Dynasty."³¹ Chang was the commander of a Nien force which was called the "Great Han Army," and their goal was the overthrow of the Ch'ing and the establishment of the Great Han Kingdom (note the nationalistic spin, and the fact that they did not advocate a restoration of the Ming). In his confession, he maintains that it was only

²⁹ Michael, Vol. 2, p. 709.

³⁰ Michael, Vol. 3, p. 1421.

³¹ Michael, Vol. 3, p. 1421.

when the Taiping attacked his home village in 1853, which as a consequence led to a general rising of bandits, that Chang took up arms against the Ch'ing and raised the banner of the Han kingdom. He called himself the "Everlasting King of the Han," and he was acknowledged as the head of all of the Nien groups.³²

Until this point, the Nien had generally been involved with petty plunder and pillage; now as a result of their contact with the Taiping, they were to embark on the Great Enterprise. Chang led his army to join the Taiping in 1858, and when he marched into battle, the banner proceeding him was changed from the Bright Commanding King of the Great Han to "Taiping T'ien-kuo Ting-t'ien-fu," (The title Ting-t'ien-fu, roughly translated as Illustrious Heavenly Blessing, was a noble title; of the six titles of Taiping nobility, this was the third highest rank) indicating his identification with the Taiping enterprise.³³ In spite of his contribution, the Taiping only granted him the title of the Fertile (Wu) king, bringing him into the ranks of the Taiping kingship, and that only in the last stages of the rebellion. He was executed by Manchu authorities in 1863.

³² Perry, Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China, 1845-1945 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), pp. 265-266. There is a conflict in terms here, but it is only an apparent one. Siang-tseh Chiang uses "Great Han Prince of Heavenly Mandate" (p.8, 24, 30), but the translation of Chang's title in Perry and in Lo Erh-kang's discussion is rendered, "Everlasting King of the Han." It is probable that both titles were used, since at one point the Nien took titles such as "Obedient to Heaven King" and "Great Heavenly King" as well.

As a side note, the Nien in Perry's typology represent the predator strategy followed by peasant groups in northern Chinese society.

³³ Perry, Chinese Perspectives on the Nien, pp. 84-86.

And these are the ups and downs in the careers of only two of the Nien kings who allied with the Taiping. There were at least seventeen Nien leaders who were invested with the title and responsibilities of Taiping kingship.³⁴ Among these royal titles are several which recall kingdoms of the classical past, such as the King of Wei, the King of Ching, the King of Yen and the King of Liang. The scope of Taiping-Nien cooperation has led the dean of Taiping scholarship, Lo Erh-kang, to advocate dropping the term "Nien Army" from this stage of Nien history, and replacing it with the name, the "New Army of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom," because of their widespread adoption of Taiping customs and nomenclature, including the Taiping calendar and Taiping uniforms.³⁵

Moreover, this listing fails to account for what happened after the fall of Nanking when remnants of the Taiping Army joined Nien forces, the most prominent of these being Lai Wen-kuang, the Taiping *Tsun* (Respected) King. After the fall of Nanking, the Nien were divided into two main forces, east and west, with Lai leading the eastern force on expeditions throughout the provinces of Shantung, Honan and Hupei. Li Hung-chang put an end to Lai's eastern force in 1868. In his confession, the Respected King refers to the troops following him north of the

³⁴ Kuo T'ing-yi, *T'ai-P'ing T'ien-Kuo Shih-Shih Jih-Chih* [Historical Facts and Calendrical Record of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom] (Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishers, 1986), pp. 30-33 of the appendix.

³⁵ Perry, *Chinese Perspectives*, p. 89.

Yangtze as numbering several tens of thousands. They were all natives of Anhwei.³⁶

In his confession, it is not clear whether they all died with him, or whether Lai sent some back to their homes in Anhwei. From our discussion of the Elder Brother Society last chapter, it is evident that some at least did make it back. Men like Li Hung, Li Chao-shu's son, did. Did the Nien tradition of kingly rule and Taiping Chinese nationalism follow these men into the societies? If a man like Li Hung is representative, it appears that these traditions were not left at the door of their mountain halls.

There is one last sect which was transformed by the Taiping impact. In the final part of this chapter, we shall consider the Taiping impact on the Heavenly Lord sect.

The Impact on the Heavenly Lord Sect

In the first chapter of section two, that concerning the Protestant missionary contribution to Taiping Christian sectarianism, we mentioned how in the Chinese official mind the Taiping were identified closely with the Heavenly Lord sect. The whole thrust of my argument, in contrast to what others have assumed, has been that this association did not make Taiping sectarianism seem like an alien creed, at

³⁶ Lai's confession is found in volume 3, pp. 1544-1546 of Michael.

least in the eyes of the people. One reason that this was so was because up until the last years of the rebellion, the Heavenly Lord doctrine was still identified with native Chinese heterodoxies, the White Lotus in particular. It was only with the signing and, more importantly the enforcing, of the Tientsin Treaty, which legalized the practice of the Heavenly Lord sect outside the treaty ports, that the Heavenly Lord sect moves from an official category of illegal and heterodox identified with native illegal heterodoxy to a category of legal and still heterodox, yet now identified with foreign heterodoxy. (In the first years after the signing of the Opium Treaty, as we saw in previous chapters, the emperor had declared that the Heavenly Lord sect was legal, but the circumstances of the Taiping Rebellion had called into question this newly-established status.)

The ordinary reference to the Taiping in government documents was either *Yueh-fei* (Yueh indicating their Kwangtung and Kwangsi origins) or *ch'ang-fa fei* (long-haired bandits). They were never called by that name which they had chosen for themselves, the *T'ai-p'ing*. And when the documents do specifically examine the teachings of the Taiping, officials and gentry observers alike characterized those teachings as those of the Heavenly Lord sect.

Reports from Wu-ch'ang, from Nanking, from Yangchow, and from Soochow all describe the Taiping religion in relation to the Heavenly Lord sect.³⁷ For example, from a narrative of the occupation of Soochow comes this description of the Taiping religion, "Amidst the rebels (tsei) is practiced the religion of the Heavenly Lord. It is the same as that practiced by the Western barbarians. Every seventh day they worship, at which time they chant a twenty-eight line hymn whose first line reads, 'Praise be to the High Heaven.' The third line reads, 'Praise be to the Heavenly Father.' The fifth line reads, 'Praise be to the Heavenly Elder Brother [T'ien-hsiung].' This *T'ien-hsiung* is the barbarians' so-called Jesus." From this description, too, we can witness another emerging development, the pointed description of the Heavenly Lord sect as originating with the Western barbarians, a development which is related to the new situation of Chinese Catholics brought about by the Opium War treaties.

This identification of the Taiping and the Heavenly Lord sect quite naturally led to a perception among officials and observers alike that the Taiping were a branch of the Heavenly Lord sect, and gave rise to allegations of conspiracies between the two. For example, even as late as the third year of the Hsien-feng reign, the acting Governor-General of Liang-Kuang, Ye Ming-ch'en, reported that he had seized a

³⁷ Wu-ch'ang: "Tun-pi Sui-wen Lu," TPTK, vol. 4, p. 392. Nanking: "Szu-t'ung Chi," TPTK, vol. 4, p. 479. Yangchow: "Yang-chou Yu-k'ou Lu" TPTK, Vol. 5, p. 104. Soochow: "Su-t'ai Mi-lu Chi," TPTK, Vol. 5, p. 290.

common bandit by the name of Ling Shih-pa. The governor-general reported that this bandit "had in the twenty-ninth year of Tao-kuang at Chin-t'ien in Kwangsi Province linked up with Hung Hsiu-ch'uan [the character is mistakenly taken to be that for a spring] and the rest. Because the name of the Heavenly Lord sect had already been around too long, they changed the name to the Shang-ti Hui, and together they swore allegiance [chieh-pai: this is secret society language] to that same criminal."³⁸ This was a commonly-held view of the origins of the God-worshippers Society: that it had evolved out of the Heavenly Lord sect. This view is repeated almost verbatim in several observer accounts.

In the chapter of his report devoted to the "bandit religion," Chang Te-chien recounts how in the history of past rebellions, rebels had used religion to stir up the common people. In the most recent history, he points to the risings of the White Lotus and the Eight Trigams as being examples of this kind of trickery. So it was in this case. Chang notes that Kwangtung and Kwangsi had many followers of the Heavenly Lord sect (this is his observation; actually these two provinces represented a very small contingent of the Heavenly Lord sect). He next describes how these followers of the Heavenly Lord, under persecution from the authorities concealed their name, changing the term *chiao* to *hui*, so that there were now such

³⁸ CCCT#2836-5, Hsien-feng 3/2/24.

names as the *Shang-ti Hui*, the *T'ien-ti Hui* (Increasing Brothers), and the *Hsiao-tao Hui* (Small Sword). Chang traces the genealogy of the Taiping for us:

Hung and the other rebels when they first swore brotherhood called themselves the *Shang-ti Hui*. Then they changed the name to the *T'ien-ti Hui* (Heavenly Emperor Society), and also went under the name of the *T'ien-ti Hui* (Increasing Brothers Society). This is why all those who enter these societies regardless of whether they are old or young, afterwards all consider each other brother. Even though there have been these multiple changes in the name, in substance it is all still the Heavenly Lord sect (*T'ien-chu Chiao*).³⁹

Now that is a fairly broad sweep of the brush. Not only is the Heavenly Lord sect the origin of the Taiping, but as Chang traces its genealogy, the Heavenly Lord is also the origin of all the secret societies.

A similar account of the origins of the Taiping is this one recorded in the early years of the rebellion, "A villainous man from Kwangtung by the name of *Chu Chiu-t'ao* set up the *Shang-ti Hui*. The rebel *Hung*, along with *Feng Yun-shan* began to take him as their teacher, and then afterwards, because they could not incite a big enough following, they established a *Heaven and Earth Society* which also goes by the name of the *Triad Society*. After this, because in recent years the *Heavenly Lord sect* has become quite flourishing, they wanted to ride it, and so they hopped on."⁴⁰

Many of the observer accounts comment on the similarity of the *Heavenly Lord teaching* to the *Taiping teaching*. For example, *Chang Te-chien* identifies the

³⁹ "Tsei-ch'ing Hui-tsuan," TPTK, Vol. 3, p. 249.

⁴⁰ "Tun-pi Sui-wen Lu," TPTK, Vol. 4, p. 392.

doctrine of the Taiping closely with the Heavenly Lord. Indeed in his chapter on the religion of the Taiping, he spends almost as much time talking about the Heavenly Lord sect as he does the Taiping, even providing a brief history of the coming of the Heavenly Lord sect into China, beginning with the Western missionary, Li Ma-tou (Matteo Ricci). An account of the fall of Wu-ch'ang describes how soon after the Taiping scaled the walls, they began propagating such teachings as the Heavenly Father having created the earth, the hills and rivers, in seven days and seven nights. The observer concludes that "it is all trusting in gods and ghosts, trying to stir up and frighten, together with White Lotus and Heavenly Lord sectarian bandits, only they are even more perverse."⁴¹ Other observers comment on the practices common to both the Heavenly Lord and the Taiping. For example, a few accounts point to the custom of dividing up time into seven-day weeks, with the seventh day set aside for a day of worship.⁴² A couple of accounts remark on the shared propensity of Taipings and Catholics to smash idols and raze temples.⁴³

This identification of the Taiping rebels with Heavenly Lord sectarians alarmed Catholic missionaries. In the earliest stages of the rebellion, Catholic missionaries reported that officials were making this link between the Taiping and the Heavenly Lord sect. One of the first of these reports concerned the state of the Catholic

⁴¹ "Wu-ch'ang Ping-hsien Chi-lueh," TPTK, Vol.4, p. 571.

⁴² "Yang-chou Yu-k'ou Lu," TPTK, Vol.5, p. 104; "Yueh-chou Chi-lueh," TPTK, Vol. 6, p. 768.

church in Hunan and Hupei at the time of the Taiping campaign there. An Italian Franciscan missionary submitted this report,

The extraordinary conduct on the part of the rebels renders it impossible to say to what religion they belong, or what form of worship they are thinking of establishing in China...Now, as the destruction of the temples and the idols is an act opposed to the principles of all the pagan sects, not excepting that of Confucius, the government of the celestial empire is beginning to believe that the leaders and instigators of the rebellion are Christians, and supports this suspicion on the fact that, of all the religions in China, the Gospel is the only one professing the hatred of idols and the worship of them. My couriers assure me, that lately, in consequence of this suspicion, the imperial government has made a prisoner of an old man of upwards of sixty years of age, who is well known to me, and whom all the Christians hold in great veneration, as being the principal catechist in the province of Hou-nan. On his premises were found a few treatises against idolatry, and this circumstance has aggravated his fault in the eyes of the authorities, who have declared the doctrine of these books conformable to that of the insurgents. ⁴⁴

The missionary reasons, though, that the rebels cannot be followers of the Heavenly Lord sect for on the banners leading them into battle, the words "Xam-ti houoei (religion of the supreme emperor)," are inscribed. "Who is not aware," writes the missionary, "that Benedict XIV, forbade the Missioners to make use of these two words to represent the name of God, because these words, expressing only the great and supreme emperor, were inadequate to express the name of the omnipotent God." He nevertheless laments the fact that the imperial authorities were not in the habit of making such fine distinctions among heterodox sects. The same missionary admits, in a later report, that their protestations of innocence were

⁴³ "Wu-ch'ang Chi-shih," TPTK, Vol. 4, p. 599; "Hu-k'ou Jih-chi," TPTK, Vol. 6, p. 790.

⁴⁴ Annals of the Propagation of the Faith (London) 1853, pp. 220-221.

certainly muted when it was discovered that the Taiping destroyed all the temples in the city, but spared the Catholic church.⁴⁵

There may have been more substance to these allegations of conspiracy than Catholic missionaries dared to admit. For there is one Western report which suggests that Heavenly Lord sectarians were indeed going over to the Taiping. Captain E.G. Fishbourne found in his contacts with Taiping followers that “one or two told us they were worshippers of Tien-chu, by which I understand them to say that they were different from others in the movement, and they appeared not to wish it to be generally known that they said so; it might be that they meant to say merely that they had been such, until they had joined the movement.”⁴⁶ This, though, is the only reference to such contacts, at least among Western reports.

More often missionary correspondence reveals that the Taiping often did not know what to do with Catholic believers. Were they followers of *Shang-ti*, or were they worshippers of images? Some Western reports describe how the Taiping persecuted Heavenly Lord sectarians and some describe how they protected them. For example, the Catholic bishop of Nanking recounts how when the Taipings captured his city that the Catholics were ordered to pray to *T'ien-fu* (the Heavenly Father). The bishop states that the Christians answered that they were Heavenly Lord sectarians and that they did not know any other religion. Once more, they

⁴⁵ Annals of the Propagation of the Faith (London), 1855, p. 84.

were commanded to recite a prayer to the Heavenly Father. The bishop describes how the Christians remained steadfast in their refusal on subsequent occasions, even though some of the men relented since as the bishop puts they considered that the prayer, "contained nothing contrary to our Holy Religion." These same men, however, later expressed contrition for their lack of faith.

This account is rather strange. For surely the Catholics would have had little problem praying to the Heavenly Father. Indeed, the Heavenly Lord sect had many prayers which were addressed to the Heavenly Father. While the bishop might have been understandably antagonistic towards the Taiping for shutting down his church and killing some of his followers (deaths which appear even from his account unrelated to the fact that the victims were singled out because of their faith), it does seem that he allowed his antagonism to overcome his ability to properly characterize the events which transpired.

For there are other reports which offer dramatically different characterizations of the treatment of Catholics at the hands of the Taiping. A Catholic missionary who visited Taiping territory aboard the "Cassini" found the Taiping much more accommodating to the needs of the Heavenly Lord sectarians. The missionary even received Taiping promises to treat them as brethren "because they worshipped the Heavenly Father." He concludes that "Our Christians have not been maltreated in

⁴⁶ Prescott Clarke and J.S. Gregory, Western Reports on the Taiping (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1982), pp. 58-59.

so far as they are Christians, and if a cross and images have been destroyed at the hands of some subordinates, the chiefs have received such things from ours--with much respect."⁴⁷ A missionary report submitted from Kiangsi Province confirms that when the Taiping learned that the Heavenly Lord sectarians, too, called on the name of Jesus and combated idolatry, the Taiping respected them and were even described as being "favourably disposed towards us."⁴⁸

These suspicions of an alliance between Heavenly Lord sectarians and the Taiping were addressed in a Catholic catechist's work, entitled Yuan-ni Pao-fa [A Treasured Raft which Rescues the Drowning],⁴⁹ which was published in Hupei in the tenth year of the Hsien-feng reign. It is no accident that this apology was published in Hupei. For the general impression among gentry and officials that there was an active alliance between the Heavenly Lord and the Taiping was nowhere stronger than in Hupei and neighboring Hunan. The place of these two provinces in the Taiping Rebellion, especially as the recruiting ground for both the Taiping and the Hunan army and then later the Elder Brother Society, has already been noted. There is even more to be said. For Hunan also served as the ideological nerve center of the cultural battle first against the Taipings and then

⁴⁷ Western Reports, pp. 110, 113.

⁴⁸ Western Reports, p. 201.

⁴⁹ Chu Hsi-man and Kuo Pao-lu, Yuan-ni Pao-fa [A Treasured Raft which Rescues the Drowning] (1860).

against the Heavenly Lord sect, and out of Tseng Kuo-fan's Hunan think tanks poured some of the most vituperative literature employed in this battle.

At the same time, the provinces of Hupei and Hunan had always been a stronghold of the Heavenly Lord sect. The two provinces as early as 1844 formed one of four Vicariate-Apostolics, and numbered some 18,000 believers in 100 congregations.⁵⁰ In spite of the depredation of the civil war, the numbers held constant, with the ranks of those who had fallen during the war being filled by new converts. In 1856, the provinces were split into two different vicarates. By 1866, Hupei, which had by far the greater number of believers, still had 16,000 followers, and in that year alone gained 321 more through adult baptisms (indicating they would have been converts to the faith).⁵¹

This Yuan-ni Pao-fa is intended to be both an encouragement to the faithful as well as an apologetic treatise aimed at rescuing "those who are drowning in Buddhism and Taoism" heterodoxies. The author relates how he began his vocation teaching at an academy in Hunan, and then describes how he also journeyed to the Far West where he had the opportunity to glance over the teachings of the "Holy Religion of the Heavenly Lord." He does not seem to have chosen the most auspicious time for publishing what can be regarded as an iconoclastic tract.

⁵⁰ The Annals (London), 1844, p. 261.

⁵¹ The Annals (Baltimore), 1867, pp. 58-61.

But it becomes clear why though this may not be an auspicious time for publishing this tract, it was necessary to do so. For while he does devote most of his time to denouncing heterodoxy and to exalting orthodoxy-- the latter of course referring to the Heavenly Lord sect-- it becomes quickly apparent why he has chosen this time to publish this tract. The Heavenly Lord sectarians have become the subject of all kinds of rumors and the object of contempt. They have been accused of heterodoxy and of the most egregious kind: that leading to rebellion. It is within this climate of rumor and this atmosphere of slander that the catechist launches his defense.

The need to distinguish between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, the author states, is especially important in the light of the arrival of the Kwangsi rebels. He attempts to explain to his devout readers why it is that if their religion is truly the good and orthodox way, why then was it being maligned so. It was a matter of jealousy, he explains, that incites people to create falsehoods and spread rumors. "So it is that when the Kwangsi rebels rose up that people speculated saying that they were part of the Heavenly Lord sect; when Hunan's Ke-ti Hui [Elder and Younger Brother Society] gathered together, people gave voice to their suspicions saying that they also were part of the Heavenly Lord Sect."⁵² This was the context in which he

⁵² Yuan-ni Pao-fa.

composed this tract on orthodoxy. It is his defense against the accusations and the allegations charged to the Heavenly Lord sectarians in the wake of the rebellion.

But this kind of tract did not stem the flow of accusations. One of the most notoriously antagonistic and salaciously vituperative tracts was also published by Hunan presses during the final years of the Taiping Rebellion. This is the tract, Pi-hsieh Chi-shih (A Record of Facts to Ward off Heterodoxy). This tract enjoyed a long career playing in several different anti-Catholic and later anti-missionary productions. Paul Cohen in his influential China and Christianity spotlighted the role the text played in “the anti-foreignism” of the 1860s, which he associated (a depiction which I will contend is incompletely drawn) with the growth of the missionary movement.

Before Cohen’s book, the tract was best known for the role it played in inciting the 1891-1892 Missionary Riots along the Yangtze. But its premier role actually predated even the events studied by Cohen, since the first part it played actually came in the final years of the Taiping Rebellion. In this the role it was created for, the tabloid tome attacked the Heavenly Lord sect, in part because of its alleged connection to the Taiping rebels. Indeed, it is not entirely clear whether the author of this tract is targeting Heavenly Lord sectarianism in its narrow expression, or as a wider phenomena, one which would have included the Taiping rebels.

The version which I consulted is the same which Cohen relied on for his own study. The date of its publication is the tenth year of the T'ung-chih reign (1871). The title page notes, though, that this is a reprint; there are two separate prefaces, one from 1861 and the second from 1862.⁵³ The earliest preface identifies the author of this work only as "The person whose heart is the most wounded under Heaven." Cohen examines the evidence for the authorship of the tract and he determines that the ultimate responsibility for the tract lay with Tseng Kuo-fan. Cohen notes how one Chinese Catholic scholar claimed that this work was composed by Tseng's headquarters for use in their ideological campaign against the Taiping. This claim is easy to substantiate, as will be apparent in the analysis of the content of the work which follows.

The most wounded-hearted one begins his propaganda piece with a quote, several pages in length, from the section of the Sacred Edict concerning heterodoxy. He then provides a table of contents which features the following chapter titles: A

⁵³ Paul Cohen in his China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Anti-Foreignism, 1860-1870 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963) provides a highly informative analysis of the provenance of A Record of Facts to Ward Off Heterodoxy (Pi-Hsieh Chi-Shih; hereafter, PHCS). See the appendix, pages 277-281. Also there is an English translation of a tract which is similar to the A Record of Facts. The English title is Death Blow to Corrupt Doctrines, published in Shanghai in 1870. There is an overlap in the contents; both contain Yang Kuang-hsien's tract Pi-hsieh Lun, for example, as well as a chapter entitled "Miscellaneous Quotations." They are different publications, though, as A Record of Facts includes chapters Death Blow does not, and even in the chapters they do share, such as the "Miscellaneous Quotations," A Record of Facts includes many more quotations than Death Blow. The latter work does include one chapter which the A Record of Facts does not offer, one carrying the provocative title, "Petition from Hunan for the Expulsion of the Non-Human Species."

Collection of Sayings Concerning the Heavenly Lord Sect; An Outline of the Heavenly Lord Sect's Entrance into China; A Discussion about Warding off Heterodoxy; Miscellaneous Quotes; Criticizing and Disputing Heterodox Teachings; Testimonials. In an appendix, there is a "Warding off Heterodoxy" song, as well as a manual on setting up local militias and a discussion of the Elder Brother Society. This anthology comes with everything: it is a safety guidebook intended to be used in case of local ideological emergencies.

In his introductory chapter, the author discusses the origins of the Heavenly Lord sect and its founder, Jesus. Some comments are called for here, especially in light of the relationship between the Taiping and the Heavenly Lord sect. For in the very first paragraph, the Hunanese literatus describes how those who practice this religion slanderously declare that "Jesus is Shang-ti incarnate" (Yeh-su pen Shang-ti hua-shen), and further identifies Jesus as *T'ien-hsiung* (Heavenly Elder Brother).⁵⁴ These "true facts" are a little distorted at this point, since Catholics never spoke of *Shang-ti* and never called Jesus the Heavenly Elder Brother. The Taiping, on the other hand, as we have had occasion to see, did employ these very terms.

The author never really discusses the Heavenly Lord sect's association with the Taiping. He merely asserts it. He does point out in a couple of places that this is

⁵⁴ PHCS, "T'ien-chu Hsieh-chiao Chi-shuc." p. 1a.

the religion which the Taiping gave allegiance to. For example, from chapter one again, the author after having examined the perverseness of the sect, both in its moral and political dimensions, has this to say about its association with the Taiping, "This being so, our country early on prohibited and severely restricted the sect. Those who propagated and practiced it then did not dare to gather together or reveal their vile form, down to the latter years of Tao-kuang. Thereupon, the bandits Yang Hsiu-ch'ing and Hung Hsiu-ch'uan and the others, in the name of this very religion gathered a following and began to stir up chaos."⁵⁵

The salacious character of the tract becomes quickly manifest and caused the missionaries to hesitate somewhat before they published their translation of the related tract, Death Blow to Corrupt Doctrines, since they were 'aware that serious objections may be urged against publishing in English a book so full of obscenity.' Not wanting to seem too squeamish in exposing human depravity, they nevertheless forged ahead concluding that the present crisis warranted its perusal by the missionary community.

The missionary translators were prudent in issuing this warning, for the accusations tend toward the lurid. There is the often-quoted accusation that Catholic missionaries scooped the eyeballs out of the dead in order to brew their magical potions and prepare their evil concoctions. There is an accusation that the

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p. 3a.

Heavenly Lord sectarians smeared menstrual discharge on their faces in preparation for worship. There is an accusation that one man had peeped through a neighbor's wall (unintentionally the account tells us) and witnessed a father and son who practiced the Heavenly Lord religion engaging in all kinds of illicit relations with each other.⁵⁶ Much of the first chapters of the tract is devoted to these kinds of slanders.

But not all of the work is of this temper. Yang Kuang-hsien's chapters and one written by "the most wounded heart" entitled "Criticisms and Disputations of Heterodox Doctrines" are actually reasoned examinations of the Heavenly Lord Doctrine. The "Criticisms" chapter is directed at the Heavenly Lord sect, but in fact must be based on a Protestant pamphlet, since the "most wounded heart" refers to *Shang-ti* throughout, and when discussing the sacraments only lists two, and that discussion further suggests a Protestant source. The format of this chapter recalls that employed in the P'o-Hsieh Hsiang-Pien which we analyzed back in part one (it too was reprinted during these years following the rebellion) where the author lists each of the heterodox doctrines point-by-point, representing these as they are truly believed, and then following the phrase "shih-wen," connoting legal terminology, or better an inquisitional type of examination, demands to know how the accused

⁵⁶ For the slanders concerning purloined pupils, see for example, "T'ien-chu Hsieh-chiao Chi-shuo," p. 4a; for the menstrual discharge used in worship, see "Tsa-yin," p. 3b; for charges of the father and son's relations, see "An-cheng," p. 11b. These accusations and variations on them are repeated throughout these pages.

can explain the apparent contradictions and obvious perversity in the particular doctrine.

The author treats the material in a serious manner, though employing sarcasm and mockery when he wants to deliver his point with particular force. He begins his discussion by focusing on the doctrines of heaven and hell, which was also a favorite target of the P'o-Hsieh Hsiang-Pien. He discusses God, or as the pamphlet refers to Him, *Shang-ti*, wondering how when God himself has commanded that men not add to the name of *Shang-ti*, why is he then called by so many names--*Ye-ho-hua*, Heavenly Father, *Shang-ti*, Heavenly Lord? He asks why if it is claimed that Jesus was sent to this earth, and that he committed no sin, keeping *Shang-ti's* commands completely, how does that claim square with the fact that he was punished by the Kingdom of Israel for transgressing its laws?

Then there is the matter of God's Kingdom (significantly called *Shang-ti's* Kingdom, not the Kingdom of Heaven--the name the Taiping's favored). If there are two kingdoms, as the Heavenly Lord doctrine states, the Kingdom of God and that of the Devil, and those who revere *Shang-ti* belong to the former and are therefore called the "people of God," the inquisitor wants to know if this means then that all the ancient and worthy sages of the Chinese empire, along with all the rulers and ministers of the Great Ch'ing--all these who did not know about or follow Jesus, if they all belong to the devil? Moreover, does this mean that the

Yueh bandits who adhere to this religion and are instigating such tumult are the people of God as well?⁵⁷ The prosecutor rests his case with this most ludicrous of teachings.

In order to avoid such heterodox teachings and to properly indoctrinate the illiterate in orthodox teachings, the “Most Wounded Heart under Heaven” has also composed a song, entitled, “The Warding Off Heterodoxy Song.” This is one very long song, seven characters to a line in 294 lines, and it encapsulates all the main points of the preceding chapters, including the most salacious of slanders. Too, while directed at the Heavenly Lord sect, it contains vocabulary more properly suited to the Taiping. There is a reference to God the Creator as “the Heavenly King” and to the Heavenly Lord as both *Sheng-tzu* (the Holy Son) and *T’ien-hsiung* (Heavenly Elder Brother; this title is used exclusively by the Taiping)⁵⁸ in addition to multiple references to *Shang-ti*.

As in the body of his tract, he makes the connection between the Heavenly Lord sect and the Taiping explicit, “In the final years of Tao-kuang the disaster gradually started to sprout, Hung Hsiu-ch’uan and Yang Hsiu-ch’ing holding high this heterodox religion in like manner chaos brought about, spreading out from the southeast it became the great calamity, these ten-odd years we have not been able to enjoy peace and security, the perverse barbarians [referring to Europeans]

⁵⁷ PHCS, “P’i-po Hsieh-shuo,” pp. 20b-21a.

ascertained China's situation, they knew about the heterodox religion and the sectarian bandits' devotion, in the ch'eng-wu year, they entered Kwang-tung and began a commotion."⁵⁹

One of the more intriguing parts of this song is where it describes the terms which the sectarian bandits--whether these are Taiping bandits or Heavenly Lord bandits he is alluding to is not clear-- use to refer to death. The composer mentions these terms to show just what extreme these bizarre doctrines extend. "Death has three levels of holy status." These levels of status are determined by the kind of death one suffers. From a description of the death, it is evident that these are punishments imposed by the state. The highest stage of holiness is reached when one suffers death by dismemberment.

After noting parenthetically circumstances of death not associated with capital punishment, the songwriter returns to the subject, summing up what he had learned of sectarian perverseness concerning this topic: "if one then transgresses the laws of the empire, and so has his life taken from him, this is called putting on a red robe, and ascending to Heaven."⁶⁰ This phraseology is a word-for-word parallel to that found in the P'o-Hsieh Hsiang-Pien, where the inquisitor reported how ridiculous the sectarians (in his case, mostly White Lotus; here the heterodox sectarians are

⁵⁸ PHCS, Appendix. The term *T'ien-hsiung* appears twice, once on p. 1b and once on p. 3a. The title for Jesus, *Chi-tu*, is never mentioned in this song, or, for that matter, in the entire book.

⁵⁹ PHCS; Appendix, p. 3b.

⁶⁰ PHCS, Appendix, p. 4b.

Heavenly Lord sectarians) were and as proof of the absurd notions they held, he too offered this same saying concerning the red robe. Thus in martyrdom the doctrinal differences of the various sects--Taiping, White Lotus and Heavenly Lord--disappear; all alike partake in the ritual donning of the blood-red robe.

The government was making threats, and they were not idle ones. If there were any doubts about the determination of the authorities to follow up on their threats, the document which follows this song would confirm that intention. The title given this document is "T'uan-Fang Fa" (Methods of Militia Defense). It is a brief ten-page instruction manual on the fundamentals of forming militias, covering twenty different principles of successful militia organization. This manual was not published for an everyday, generic-type of village defense; it specifically targets the defensive needs arising out of the Taiping Rebellion.

An emphasis is especially put on the need for constructing an ideological defense. Fully nine of the twenty principles explicitly deal with matters ideological, many of these specifically concern how to ferret out any hidden Heavenly Lord sectarians. There is a very rational motivation behind this ideological campaign, and that is the cryptic-Catholicism of the Taiping rebels. Eliminating Heavenly Lord sectarians and other heterodox sectarians was the first battle in the long war against the allied masses of heterodox forces.

Though most of these principles are negative in tone, the first dealing with religion is positive in intent. The fourth principle of successful militia formation states: "Regardless of whether one belongs to an official, gentry, scholar or common person's household, in the middle of the hall [in the household] one must set up a shrine. One must offer worship to a tablet on which is inscribed these five characters: Heaven, earth, ruler, family, teacher. One must also offer worship to one's ancestors and the ancestral tablet. In each season of the year, the head of every militia unit must call together a meeting of the militia group. At this time, he should inspect every household to see whether or not such a shrine has been set up."⁶¹ Only in this way, the manual instructs, can the temptation of heterodox religion which is so deep be resisted.

The positive work of indoctrination in good religious habits was not, though, considered sufficient. The remaining articles which concern ideological defense guide the effort needed to expunge bad religious habits. The article which leads off this endeavor is a peculiar one. So as to communicate the full impact of its character, I quote it in entirety:

At the threshold [this word is *yu*, and it is key to understanding this passage; it signifies the place where one steps on or over to get into a house, and by extension connotes here the gate of a city] to every city, there should be etched in stone the figure of Jesus nailed to the cross. It should be carved according to this form: he should have no beard, his body should be naked, his hair disheveled, his two hands stretched out, with the left foot placed on top of

⁶¹ PHCS, Appendix, p. 7b.

the right. His head should lean to the right. At every port and every important pass there likewise should be etched this figure. On the ground of every street, of every market, of every village, and even on the threshold of every home, there should be this likeness. If anyone is unwilling to have this likeness etched, then he shall be considered a follower of heterodox religion. The militia unit head should hire a stone carver and order every family to comply.⁶²

Some background is needed to understand the import of this regulation. During the period of proscription, it was the custom of officials to compel a follower of the Heavenly Lord sect to step on and trample on a crucifix in order to signify that one truly had repented of his participation (ie., recanted of one's belief) in the heterodox sect. Now a practice which was once applied to individuals is being applied here to households and even whole cities. Moreover, the fact that Jesus was to be represented with disheveled hair and without even the dignity of a loincloth--represented in a manner which therefore would magnify the shame of his death--would have further added to the indignity and abuse which was to be accorded the holy and the sacred.

I have not seen any missionary report which discusses this practice, but I wonder whether it was not employed in some areas which were suspected of a wavering loyalty in their commitment to the regime. The very strong evidence which points to True Facts being the product of Tseng Kuo-fan's wartime propaganda machine combined with our knowledge of Tseng Kuo-fan as a prominent booster of local militias would all taken together argue for an attempt to enact this policy.

⁶² PHCS, Appendix, p. 7b.

Obviously, it was impractical to adopt this suggestion on a wide scale, but it seems reasonable to believe that it may have been adopted in areas which had traded allegiances a number of times or which had come under the influence of the Taiping for an extended period.

And what happened to those individuals or families who were not smoked out of their heterodox lairs? It seems that the toleration that once may have been extended to such individuals was now taken away. There is no talk of repentance, or of distinguishing between followers or leaders. There is only talk of imposing the death penalty, and imposing it immediately. Here is what the eleventh regulation demands, "Every family lineage must establish a lineage militia. If there are any in the lineage who follow a heterodox religion, and that person is discovered, then he must be bound up and transported to the lineage shrine where he is to be put to death. This should be quick and easy [quick: not having to wait for the Autumn assizes; easy: not having to bring the accused to the magistrate's yamen]." Heterodox religion in this manual's parlance is the Heavenly Lord teaching--this is made clear in the ordinances. If it was not clear at first, the head of each militia would make it clear since one of the ordinances required that he read the law code concerning the Heavenly Law sect to the militia annually, and Heavenly Lord sectarians were to be punished according to the code.⁶³

⁶³ PCHS, Appendix, pp. 8b-9a.

It is not known how many Heavenly Lord sectarians lost their lives in the rebellion. Most missionaries only reported such losses in the most general of terms, and then the deaths were attributed mainly to being caught up in the cataclysm of the times. How many White Lotus and other sectarians perished, caught up in the net Ch'ing officials set for the heterodox? This number we also do not know, and more sadly, there was no one around to report these losses even in the most general of terms.

The Legacy of the Taiping in Western and Chinese Memory

After the signing of the Tientsin Treaty and the fall of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, the Heavenly Lord sect emerged from the shadows of illegality into the full light of legality, if not orthodoxy. The memory of the Heavenly Lord religion's connections to the Taiping rebels refracted that light to the different groups who had come into contact with the Taiping.

The legacy of the Taiping and its Heavenly Lord connections was largely forgotten in the Western missionary camp. Human as it may be, it appears from all the evidence that the Taiping and their efforts were-- in contrast to how the Taiping legacy was regarded by Chinese officials, gentry and the common people-- summarily dismissed and ignored by the Western community. The missionaries learned little from the Taiping Rebellion, and even less from the Taiping efforts of

the indigenization of Christianity. Indeed the entire history following the rebellion must be seen as a setback for Chinese Christianity as Christianity became identified with imperialism and the West in a way which had never been the case prior to the rebellion.

Catholic converts had been most affected by the rebellion, yet Catholic missionaries seem to have been most oblivious to the changes in Chinese society. They evidently thought they could afford to be. For example, in a version of the Ten Commandments published soon after the defeat of the Taiping, T'ien-Chu Shih-Chieh Ch'uan-Lun Sheng-Chi [A Discussion of The Holy Record of the Ten Prohibitions of the Heavenly Lord],⁶⁴ there is not one single reference to the Taiping Rebellion. Nor in the discussions of the commandments is there any evidence of a changed theological perspective arising out of the decade-long civil war.

In the discussion, for example, of the first two commandments which deal with idolatry and blasphemy, there is no mention of the Taiping and their iconoclasm, which seems almost conspicuous by its absence. Indeed, in the discussion of the first commandment, that which declares, "Worship One Heavenly Lord [T'ien-chu] Above All the Ten Thousand Things," there is not one allusion to Taiping iconoclasm, even though the discussion mostly concerns the meaning of idolatry.

⁶⁴ P'an Kuo-kuang, T'ien-Chu Shih-Chieh Ch'uan-Lun Sheng-Chi [A Discussion of the Holy Record of the Ten Prohibitions of the Heavenly Lord] (1869).

Instead, most of the pages are taken up with defending various Catholic practices such as encouraging the use of its own “statues” in worship, while condemning the use of “idols” in Buddhist worship. “Questions: Holy Statues are not the true Heavenly Lord, and not the true Heavenly Mother, and not the true Saint; yet those in your religion revere and worship these. Why is this?” The answer comes, in contrast to Buddhism, the Catholics are not worshipping the form of the statue, but are really in truth worshipping the Heavenly Lord. This is followed with questions about the images of little boys with wings [cherubic angels]. It may be that the missionaries had to spend a little bit more time on such issues as the place of statues in worship following the assault on these during the rebellion, but if that is so, this certainly is not explicitly addressed in the catechism. At least in the discussion of statues and idols, there would have been the opportunity, tailor-made, to speak to issues of idolatry and iconoclasm, since Catholic statues had been shattered along with Buddhist idols, but this opportunity was passed over.

Nor is there much concern at all in the second commandment over the issue of blasphemy, which was the main thrust of the Taiping assault on the imperial office. Indeed this discussion seems insulting in its superficiality, as it is entirely focused on what Europeans took to be the import of the commandment, which from the catechism seems to be merely limited to rashly using God’s name in making an oath. No consideration of the Taiping charge that the emperor had usurped the

place of *Shang-ti* is present in this doctrinal statement. Even stranger, there is no discussion of the different names of God. The names of *Shang-ti* or even Heavenly Father do not even appear on these pages.

The Protestant record is not much brighter. Protestant catechisms, like Catholic catechisms, continued to follow a traditional format, usually composed of presentations of the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed, along with a short discussion of the church and sacraments, all in a question and answer format. The translations of these key documents of the church are clamorous testimony to the Protestant inability to come to any consensus regarding the most critical terms for referring to the deity and a mute witness to the virtual denial of the Taiping impact.

The third commandment, that concerning the prohibition against using the Lord's name in vain, appears in various and diverse forms in the different catechisms. In a version attributed to Liang A-fa, which bears the characteristic influence of Morrison, the commandment reads, "People are not permitted to carelessly call on or blasphemously speak the name of the God of Heaven, Shang-ti."⁶⁵ William Milne, the colleague of Morrison, translated the third

⁶⁵ Liang A-fa, Chen-tao Wen-ta Ch'ien-chieh [The True Way Catechism Simply Explained] (Malacca, 1829), p. 3b.

commandment in this way, “You shall not in any instance vainly or recklessly call upon the Divine Lord [Shen-chu], your god’s name.”⁶⁶

No changes in these catechisms’ presentations appear in the wake of the rebellion. A catechism published by Milne’s son during the vigorous years of the Taiping movement featured this rendition of the commandment, “The name of your Shang-ti Ye-ho-hua [the transliteration of Jehovah], you shall not vainly call out; he who vainly calls out the name will commit a sin which cannot be forgiven.”⁶⁷

Here along with a bad translation, the Chinese convert also received a bad theology (ie., there is a sin which cannot be forgiven). A catechism published in Peking in 1873, reflecting the long and continuous Catholic tradition in and around the capital, but swimming against the tide of Protestant tradition elsewhere, prohibits vainly calling on “Your Heavenly Lord Ye-ho-hua’s name.”⁶⁸ In none of the translations of the term for God is there any concern taken from the example of the Taiping. Nor is there a concern taken for consistency: Just whose name does the third commandment prohibit the convert blaspheming: the Divine Lord’s; *Shang-ti Ye-ho-hua’s*; or the Heavenly Lord *Ye-ho-hua’s*?

It would have been a fitting memorial to the Taiping had the catechisms which were published after the rebellion reflected some evidence of a grappling with the

⁶⁶ William Milne, *Yu-hsueh Ch’ien-chieh Wen-ta* [An Elementary Scholar’s Catechism Simply Explained] (Malacca, 1817), p. 4b.

⁶⁷ W.C. Milne, *Chen-tao Ju-men* [The Entrance to the True Way] (Amoy, 1855), p. 4a.

⁶⁸ Henry Blodgett, *Chen-li Wen-ta* [The Catechism of the Truth] (Peking, 1873), p. 16b.

name of *Shang-ti*, or some discussion—even a denial of the Taiping claim—of the title of the emperor being a form of blasphemy. But there is not. Indeed often these catechisms were just reprints of catechisms published before the rebellion. Milne's Ch'u-Hsueh Wen-ta (Young Scholar's Catechism), for example, was first printed in 1817, in the Chia-ch'ing reign, but it was reprinted in much the same form in 1848, in 1850, and 1892.

Nor does there seem to be any evidence in these catechisms where they render the name of God that they were at all influenced by the rebellion. The choice of a name for the deity does not seem to have been influenced at all by the birth, life or death of the rebellion. *Shang-ti* is the name which is preferred by a slight margin of the authors of these catechisms, but there is no sign of anything approaching a consensus on the issue. Indeed like the Catholic missionaries, the Protestants seem to have just ignored the Taiping and their rebellion, almost acting as if it never happened.

But, of course, the rebellion did happen. While Catholic and Protestant foreign missionaries may have felt as if they could ignore the event, Chinese gentry and the common people did not forget the rebellion, nor did they fail to remember its connections to the Heavenly Lord or the *Yeh-su* (Jesus) Sects.⁶⁹ Though weak

⁶⁹ Protestants were initially referred to as the Jesus Sect; later they are referred to as the *Chi-tu* (ie., Christ) Sect.

among the missionaries, the memory of the Taiping continued strong among Chinese gentry and common people alike.

The memory of the Taiping religion's association with the Heavenly Lord religion continued strong in the decades following the fall of Nanking. The circumstances of the rebellion, especially as they were experienced in Hunan and Hupei, solidified the identification of the Heavenly Lord sect and the Taiping, and hardened official attitudes against the practice of the former. The accusation of a Taiping connection was difficult for the Heavenly Lord sectarians to shake. Even when French Catholic missionaries, grasping copies of the Treaty of Tientsin (signed four years before the fall of Nanking), sought to realize the newly granted legal status for followers of the Heavenly Lord religion, they encountered strong resistance from both officials and gentry.

It did not help the missionaries any that Hunan continued to publish various versions of the A Record of Facts to Ward Off Heterodoxy, even in spite of the protests of missionaries such as Griffith John who pointed to the role such literature played in anti-Christian incidents from the Tientsin Massacre through the Boxer Rebellion. This association of the Heavenly Lord sect with heterodoxy, especially of the Taiping variety, was also fostered by the publication of the different Ch'ing observer's accounts during these years. For example, one of the more prominent accounts which frequently identified the Taiping religion with the religion of the

Heavenly Lord sect, the W'u-ch'ang Chi- Shih was first published during the rebellion, and then reissued in a revised edition in 1865, a year after the rebels were defeated.

The construction of loyalist memory was aided further by the publication of various martyrologies. There were a number of these printed in the years following the rebellion.⁷⁰ One which I glanced at was entitled Liang-Kiang Chung-I Lu [A Record of Martyrs from Kiangsu and Kiangsi]; it went through at least two printings, in 1877 and 1893. This publication was a record of those who died in the rebellion, and it includes the names of several thousand individuals from various cities and towns in Kiangsi and Kiangsu. There are six volumes of 56 different registers (ts'e--the same word used for enrolling for a census). Each register contains the list of different incidents of "martyrdom" and of all those killed in those incidents, at least those who received recognition for their service from the emperor. For example, register number eighteen concerns all the incidents in Nanch'ang Prefecture, Kiangsi. Among the different incidents of martyrdom on behalf of the imperial cause was one which resulted in the death of 342 women. In register twenty-four, there was an incident in Anking where 256 people died.

⁷⁰ Franz Michael lists several, among those listed are this sample: Chekiang Chung-I Lu [A Record of Chekiang Martyrs], 1867; Kiangsi Chung-I Lu [A Record of Kiangsi Martyrs], 1880; Hunan Pao-Chung-Lu Ch'u-Kao [A Draft Record of Hunan's Praiseworthy Martyrs], 1873. Liang-Kiang Chung-I Lu [A Record of Martyrs from Kiangsu and Kiangsi], 1877 and 1893. Michael lists only the 1893 version; the copy I saw--the 1877 edition-- was a part of the Nanking University Library.

Memories of those who died, and the imperial cause they died for, were enshrined in these works.

The identification of the Heavenly Lord sect with heterodoxy, especially with Taiping heterodoxy, imprinted on the gentry and official memory, also lived on in popular memory. One consequence of the rebellion for the popular sectarian movements—which we mentioned earlier—is that sectarian influence was almost eliminated from the Yangtze River valley (though it does come back some toward the end of the century). White Lotus sectarians, however, continued strong in the north, especially in the provinces of Shantung and Chihli. It is not known whether the association in the popular mind of the Heavenly Lord sect with the Taiping encouraged the successive waves of sectarians who joined both Catholic and Protestant mission churches in these areas, but it surely could not have hurt.⁷¹ Indeed, one of the main sources of Christian converts after the rebellion were White Lotus sectarians. It may have been more the case that White Lotus sectarian memories were even more deeply rooted, extending back to the period prior to the lifting of the ban on the Heavenly Lord sect, to the time when Heavenly Lord sectarians were fellow travelers on the heterodox highway, when each would have

⁷¹ The legacy which the Taiping left seems to have been a positive one, probably because these two provinces were not part of the main theater of the fighting. One missionary traveling through the two provinces heard “universal testimony” that the rebel soldiers were more humane than the imperial soldiers, “With one voice, the people bore the same testimony, at every place visited.” The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal (Foochow), Vol. 1, #9 (January 1869), p. 177.

stopped for the other, in Good Samaritan fashion, and helped bind the wounds of those who might have haplessly fallen under the blows of a zealous magistrate.

White Lotus sectarians provided a vast pool of converts for both Catholics and Protestants. As early as 1878, the Reverend Joseph Edkins commented on sectarian openness to Protestant overtures in an article he wrote for the The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal entitled "A Christian Movement in the Province of Shantung," but he only referred to the sectarians as coming out of the "mi-mi chiao," (secret religion).⁷² His knowledge of the sects can only be described as rudimentary. And missionary understanding of these groups would remain shallow for the rest of the nineteenth century, even though there were a vocal few among the missionaries who attempted to call attention to the phenomenon. But such attempts appeared futile. For even as late as 1890, in the record of the second all-China Protestant Missionary conference, there is only a single article dealing with the sectarians, even though as the author admits, "The fact that large numbers of Christians in this province have been gathered from these sects, should lead us to give more attention to them." Indeed though they are despised by officials, this missionary found that "Some of the best and most consistent Christians I know

⁷² The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal (Shanghai), Volume 9, #4 (July/August, 1878), p. 283. Daniel Bays has written on this White Lotus movement, particularly focusing on the role played by missionary tracts in the process. See his, "Christianity and Chinese Sects: Religious Tracts in the Late Nineteenth Century," in Christianity in China: Early Protestant Missionary Writings, edited by Suzanne Barnett and J.K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

were once the devoted followers of these societies.”⁷³ Though he seeks to be a spokesman for the sectarians, this missionary still fails to understand their character; his knowledge is only slightly less facile than that of Edkins.

Statistics tell part of the story of this sectarian movement. Though Shantung Province had not been one of the early outposts of foreign missions, it soon came to be one of its most flourishing. Catholics reported approximately 62,000 adherents from Shantung, making it the biggest field outside of Chihli, Kiangnan and Szechuan, areas which had long been bastions of Heavenly Lord strength. The largest Protestant missionary force in the early decades, the Presbyterians, also had gathered a large flock in Shantung; in 1890, 7000 converts filled their churches, half of their total number.⁷⁴

This movement into the Christian churches provoked one last paroxysm of violence directed at the heterodox sectarians: the Boxer Uprising. Shantung Province, the center of this vigorous Christian sectarianism, was also the venue for the Boxer Uprising. While it once was thought that the Boxers were themselves White Lotus sectarians, recent scholarship has shown that this was not the case, and so this story of shared sufferings does not have to end more tragically than it

⁷³ Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1890), p. 198.

⁷⁴ D. MacGillivray, A Century of Protestant Missions in China (1807-1907) (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1907; reprint edition, San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1979); for Catholic statistics, see pp. 675-677, for Presbyterian statistics, see pp. 389-394.

already is, with one sect turning on the other. On the contrary, a Chinese scholar has found that the Boxers not only were not White Lotus sectarians, but that they actually attacked known White Lotus sectarians during the Uprising because of the White Lotus association with heterodoxy in general and with Christianity in particular. The Christian martyrologies of the time tended to focus on the missionary loss of life during this incident--Latourette gives 186 for the Protestant missionaries, including children, and the Catholics reporting some 47 missionaries (priests and nuns)--but we should not overlook that there were also 1,912 Chinese Protestant converts and estimates in excess of 30,000 Chinese Catholic converts killed as well.⁷⁵ Since all the martyrdoms occurred in northern China, the area of China which was home to the majority of sectarians, we can assume that a high percentage of the blood that was spilt came from the bodies of sectarians. Thus the story of the two Chinese heterodox sects ended as it began, each donning a red robe of martyrdom.

Conclusion

There are three conclusions that we can make regarding the legacy of the rebellion for the sects. Here again, as in my discussion of the Taiping legacy for the societies, I am only able to suggest what I believe happened following the rebellion.

⁷⁵ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1929), pp. 512-513, 516-517.

More research has to be done; more records found. These conclusions are not conclusive.

The situation is even more difficult to interpret for the sects than it was for the societies, since most sectarian organizations were shattered by the rebellion. Sects which survived would also have been subject to the suppression of the post-rebellion ideological campaign which the Pi-Hsieh Shih-Chi alludes to. Could sectarian beliefs survive without an organized community to safeguard these beliefs? Were sectarian beliefs just taken up into organizations like the Elder Brother Society and incorporated into their own belief system (or lack of system--repertoire of beliefs). In such a case sectarian beliefs would have become more diffused than ever. This would augur well for the legacy of the Taiping as it would mean that their own beliefs would have just become a part of the popular culture, just as the beliefs of other sectarians had.

The first conclusion which I want to make is by far the least risky to put on the table. In light of this firmly held connection between Catholicism and heterodoxy--especially allegations connecting the Heavenly Lord with the societies and the Taiping, I think it is fairly evident that the so-called anti-Christian tradition which Paul Cohen evokes in his classic study needs to be reassessed. The very period he covers, 1860-1870, should have tipped us off as to the importance of the rebellion in understanding this period. Instead, Cohen argued that the growth of Chinese

anti-foreignism in these years was primarily the consequence of the expanding missionary movement. Yet there was no big upsurge in missionary recruits fielded during these years.

More controversially, he pointed to the role which a Chinese anti-Christian tradition played in this anti-foreignism (that there was an anti-Christian tradition is as true as there was a Christian tradition). While these factors may have played a part in officials and gentry hostility to missionaries, it should be clear from this discussion that they were mostly hostile to Christianity because of its connections to societies and sects, and particularly because of its connections to that most revolutionary of sects, the Taiping.

The legacy of the Taiping Rebellion was more a legacy which was handed down to the common people. That legacy involves more than just a sectarian disposition towards linking up with Catholic and Protestant mission churches; the Taiping impact on Chinese sectarianism extended beyond the confines of mission compounds. A second aspect of the Taiping legacy involves the attack on and the de-legitimizing of the old imperial order. I think that the widespread identification of the Taiping, the White Lotus and the Heavenly Lord sects which continued to be a part of such publications as the Pi-Hsieh Chi-Shih and the P'o Hsieh Hsiang-Pien, of the various observer accounts, in combination with the tendency of White Lotus followers to convert to Christianity helps us to interpret what the Taiping legacy for

the sects was. It was a legacy of iconoclasm, directed at the ideological and political status quo, and it was a legacy of a de-sacralization of the imperial office.

If, to cite just one example of the loss of popular legitimacy, White Lotus sectarians and Heavenly Lord sectarians together could claim Heaven's approval and reward in their struggle to be true to their doctrines and practices, if they could claim the red robe of martyrdom, this claim implies something about the illegitimacy of imperial authority. What the Ch'ing authorities treated as a heinous evil, Heaven was awarding with its highest honors. This sectarian reinscription of Ch'ing justice was more than anything what earned the Taiping and their missionary successors official enmity and what provoked gentry wrath.

A final aspect of the Taiping legacy concerns this same doctrinal assault on both idolatry and the imperial office, but focuses on its continuing impact. The Taiping legacy did not end with the fall of Nanking; the Taiping message continued to be proclaimed in the markets and streets of former Taiping-administered towns and villages. Through the work of their missionary successors and their Chinese evangelists, the Taiping message continued to be preached throughout China. How would former Taiping recruits and subjects respond to the preaching of the Ten Commandments-- the code which was required of every recruit- to hearing again the Commandments' condemnation of idolatry and warnings against taking the name of *Shang-ti* in vain? How would they respond to the sounds of the doxology

wafting through the city-- would the stanzas which referred to the Heavenly King and to Jesus the Heir Apparent come to mind? It hardly seems that anyone who lived through the years of the Taiping rebellion could fail to remember these doctrines which the Taiping had propagated all throughout the countryside.

While the missionaries themselves could remain oblivious to the changes that the rebellion wrought in Chinese society, the people--official, gentry and peasant--could not be so insensible to the Taiping legacy. In the voices of the missionaries and their evangelists, the memory of Taiping iconoclasm, nationalism, and de-sacralization, along with the wounds suffered during the struggle to promote these teachings, would have remained forever fresh.

CONCLUSION

I would like to end this study of the Taiping with the same question with which I began: the riddle of the impact of the rebellion. I believe that what I have documented in the previous chapters lays to rest the idea that one of the main causes behind the failure of the rebellion was the alien quality of the Taiping faith, having no connection to Chinese culture and society. What I have presented shows, rather, that the Taiping faith was connected to Chinese culture and society. The Christianity of the Heavenly Lord sect with its Buddhist-tinged terminology and practice had already become familiar to popular China prior to the Taiping, and the faith became even more familiar with Hung Hsiu-ch'uan's contributions to the completion of the process of its indigenization, to the final form of the faith which we are calling Taiping Christian sectarianism. It was these connections and this familiarity which enabled the Taiping to successfully mount their campaign in the first place and then to establish a common ground with the societies and the sects in their concerted struggle against the Ch'ing. The result of their cooperation was a transformation of society and sect.

At least in the short-term. For while I have been able to describe the kinds of contacts the rebels made with society and sect during the rebellion, and how these contacts did result in changes to the thought and practice of society and sect, the testimony to the perseverance of these changes after the rebellion in the thought and practice of society and sect has been scattered, and many times even muted. This negative testimony to the impact of the Taiping has been used to support the theory of an alien faith which the people were quick to avoid. What, though, do we do with this testimony in light of my explanation of the popular familiarity of the Taiping doctrine?

We do have to wonder what happened to this Taiping faith and the changes it engendered. If there were these changes in the thought and practice of society and sect during the rebellion, why do we not hear so little of these changes after the rebellion? Could it be that the gentry control of the rural countryside was so complete after the rebellion that they effectively suppressed all these changes? Could it be that the Ch'ing victory was so complete, and the post-Taiping terror it induced was so intense, that it virtually intimidated all opposition and suppressed all changes?

We know that after the White Lotus Rebellion at the turn of the century that the Heavenly Lord sect was criminalized, and a more severe approach was taken to the practice of all sectarians in the early nineteenth century. This harsh policy did have

the effect of suppressing society and sectarian activity for a time, only to have it explode once again in the two decades prior to the Taiping.

That same pattern does not seem to obtain after the rebellion: There does not seem to have been any draconian increase in the prosecution of sectarian cases following the rebellion. But again could this be due to the societies and sects adopting a lower profile, entering a more dormant phase? There is so much that we do not know of popular society following the Taiping, yet at the same time there is so much that we need to know.

It is in an attempt to solve such puzzling questions that leads me to once again consider the issue of the relationship of the Taiping rebellion to the 1911 Republican Revolution. This kind of revolution was only possible because of changes that occurred in popular society. The gentry may have taken over the revolution once it began, but the revolution could only be staged to begin with because it had the support of one segment of popular China: the secret societies. If the Taiping did effect these changes in Chinese society, if they did transform Chinese popular society especially in the people's views of the legitimacy of the imperial office, yet these views were initially suppressed, then we would expect that eventually these changes would be expressed. The fact that there was a 1911 Revolution at all, in other words, was only possible because of the changes which the Taiping had introduced into popular society.

Too often the Revolution of 1911 event has been dismissed as just a “political revolution.” Normally such a comment is made in the context of a comparison to the 1949 Communist Revolution, which is considered more truly revolutionary because it struck at the structure of social power. 1911 was only a political revolution, while 1949 was a real revolution, a social revolution. But in view of what Hung Hsiu-ch’uan discovered about the imperial office being the seat of unity for all of Chinese culture, in view of how the Taiping believed and propagated their belief throughout the Chinese countryside that the imperial institution was a blasphemy in the eyes of *Shang-ti*, and in view of their iconoclastic campaigns which attacked and destroyed religious and political representations alike, can we dismiss the abolition of the imperial office as merely a “political” event. Was 1911 not a political, social and cultural revolution even more earth-shaking than any of those which came after it, was it not what made later revolutions even possible? If Hung Hsiu-ch’uan was right about the unity of Chinese culture residing in the emperor, and he was right about its religious foundation, then the revolution of 1911 was of a far greater consequence than that of 1949.

Here again, we have fallen casualty to our narrow understanding of the imperial office---it was not just an emperor who resigned: it was a politico-religious faith which was repudiated, it was an imperial culture which was toppled. And it can be argued as well in the same vein that the Taiping rebellion was more revolutionary

than them all, for the 1911 revolution lacked the positive program of cultural construction which the Taiping possessed. The republican revolutionaries may have mistakenly believed that all that they were participating in was a political revolution-- forcing a ruler to step down-- and so they did not have a positive cultural vision for replacing what they had destroyed.

The Taiping and the 1911 Revolutions are linked in one last puzzle. We end this chapter with a paradox, though, where we began with a riddle. And the paradox is this: When the time came for the final swing to be struck at the imperial icon, it was the same gentry who had protected the emperor and the whole of imperial culture during the time of the Taiping rebellion which delivered the final, fatal blow.

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