

The Intolerant Ideology of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: An Example of Chinese Acceptance of Modern European Civilization

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Preface

This paper will discuss the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (太平天國) movement during the middle of the nineteenth century (1850–1864). This movement at one time was seen as a precursor to the Chinese Revolution, and has been a focal point for research in China's modern history. However, following the collapse of the model that proposed the movement as an exemplar of Chinese revolutionary history, research into the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom has become somewhat neglected. In recent years, many city-based intellectuals who have profited from government policies of reform and opening to the outside world have begun to criticize the destructive character of the Taiping that was a Hakka-centred frontier immigrant-led movement. There have even been those who have compared it with the Falun Gong (法輪功), and who see the God Worshippers Society (上帝會) led by Hong Xiuquan (洪秀全) as a cult. Indeed, many puzzles regarding this movement remain unsolved to this day.

Take, for example, the contention that the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom evolved under Protestant influence. Everyone knows of Hong Xiuquan's "vision" (in which he ascended to Heaven to be entrusted with the salvation of the world) that came after he failed the imperial examination (*keju* 科舉). However, the God Worshippers Society that formed the basis of the movement had a strong Confucian character, and was also influenced by folk religion and the role played by beliefs in a descent of the Heavenly Father and Heavenly Brother into the world of mortals. In the past, I have also commented on the influence of many Hakka customs on the doctrines of the God Worshippers Society.¹⁾

This being the case, what exactly did Hong Xiuquan learn from Protestantism? What kind of characteristics did Christianity actually bestow upon the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom? These questions require deeper

study and investigation. The author hopes to begin to answer these questions by examining the early activities of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, and analyse the influence of the concept of “intolerance” found in Judaean-Christian thought, and from this draw some conclusions regarding the significance of the Taiping movement in modern Chinese history.

One: Hong Xiuquan’s Acceptance of Protestantism—The Background to the Destruction of Idols Movement

Hong Xiuquan’s conversion to Christianity began when he read the missionary text “Good Words to Admonish the Age (勸世良言).” The author of this pamphlet, Liang Fa (梁發 a native of Gaoming prefecture, Guangdong) had previously worked as a printer for the London Missionary Society missionary Robert Morrison, and had been baptized in 1816. After baptism, he decided to devote himself to “persuading others to abandon their idols, repent their sins, and turn to worship of the one true God,” and produced many brochures similar to “Good Words to Admonish the Age.” Liang Fa saw the actions of Chinese in “manufacturing countless idols to worship” as “a frankly ridiculous search for protection from dead objects, that truly is deserving of pity,”²⁾ and launched an accordingly severe critique of idol worship.

The importance attached to the critique of idol worship was a characteristic common to most Protestant missionary activity in China at the time. The Protestant decision to begin proselytizing in China derived from European and American evangelical religious revival movements that took place in the late eighteenth century. This movement prioritized the importance of individual religious experience and a devout religious life. Religious societies actively targeted Asia and Africa for evangelization, with special attention to overcome idol worship. The London Missionary Society was a part of this, and the first missionary sent to China, Robert Morrison, was particularly concerned to win the conversion of his Chinese assistants.

Although the missionaries were full of zeal, initially the Protestant mission to China did not achieve much success. After 30 years, they had gained only a dozen or so converts.³⁾ The primary reason for this was a ban imposed by the Qing dynasty on Catholicism (at the time China did not distinguish between Catholicism and Protestantism), and it was only after the negotiations following the Opium Wars (1840s) that Qing officials allowed missionary activity to be conducted within the treaty ports.

Evangelization in the interior was only permitted after the signing of the 1860 Treaty of Beijing. Furthermore, it must be conceded that the severity that marked the evangelical movement was a barrier to Chinese entry into the religion. The creed, for example, that “All humans are sinners, and it is only through the death and resurrection of Jesus that forgiveness is granted,” proved problematic for Chinese people to grasp owing to a vastly different cultural background.

On their part, foreign missionaries found Chinese society to be “full of idols, a place besieged by idolaters.” They placed emphasis on Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist religions as representative of Chinese belief, regarded them as idol worship and advanced critiques on that basis. Naturally, this exclusive attitude provoked negative reactions towards Christianity, decreeing it to be motivated by religious hate. Liang Fa himself once remarked with antipathy: “Where does such reasoning come from, telling people that they can’t worship resemblances of Gods, Buddhas, and Boddhisattvas, what kind of principle is this? It’s bound to be the heresy of some cults, and who’s willing to believe that!”⁴⁾

However, it was precisely because of its intense, direct stance in opposition to idolatry and its fight to eliminate it that gave the Protestants enormous influence. What a failed examination candidate Hong Xiuquan read in the “Good Words to Admonish the Age” struck home: “Readers of Confucianism must also set up two idols (namely Wenchang and Kuixing, gods of scholars) to worship. Individuals also all seek blessings to pass the provincial examinations... For what reason do individuals all worship these idols, when there are some who study for exams till the age of 70 or 80 years old and yet cannot enter the school gates as Xiucai (秀才 students who have passed the primary Imperial Examination)... This is the fault of Confucianism that leads people into the blind pursuit of success, thus that they are confused and fall to worship of these two idols.”⁵⁾ Hong was naturally shaken as he read such words, as though “awakening from a long dream.”⁶⁾

After reading “Good Words to Admonish the Age,” Hong voluntarily sought baptism. In 1847, not long after founding the religion of God Worshippers (上帝教), Hong Xiuquan visited the Baptist missionary then in residence at Guangzhou, Issachar Roberts. Roberts had been inspired by the evangelizing zeal of Charles Gutzlaff whilst overseas, and had been forced to overcome the suspicions of the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society who doubted whether he was truly qualified to be a chaplain and raised objections to sending him to China. Owing to his strong

attachment to the teachings and faith of his denomination and his direct nature, he frequently attracted resentment and complaints from his fellow missionaries.

After hearing Hong Xiuquan described his “visionary” experience, Roberts evaluated it as “the same as the visions of Cornelius (Acts of the Apostles X describes the tale of how Cornelius in his dreams was warned by angels, and obeyed them in baptizing the gentiles),” thus expressing his approval. Roberts’ account of events reads as follows: “One thing he learned was that idolatry was wrong, so he soon abandoned his idols and taught others to do so also.”⁷⁾ This is the result of the influence of “Good Words to Admonish the Age” on Hong, and the rejection of idol worship was at the very nucleus of his understanding of Christianity. Nevertheless, according to surrounding testimony, Hong Xiuquan’s understanding of absolution was inadequate. However, this was a problem encountered by many new converts to Christianity. Hong Xiuquan described ascending to heaven to see an “old man” in his dream, and this was accepted by Roberts as a clear conversion experience with prospects.

Furthermore, the conventional translation of the Christian God—Jehovah—as “*Shangdi* (上帝)” allowed Hong Xiuquan to conflate the “old man” of his vision with the Christian God, and come to the conclusion that Christianity was a religion practised in China since time immemorial. A trend towards accepting foreign culture by seeking its origins within Chinese tradition is an often-seen pattern of acceptance of European culture within China. However, the famous Sinologist and missionary, Joseph Edkins, also noted that ancient China and Western ritual shared much common ground.⁸⁾ In other words, missionaries also supported the view that in ancient times there was no distinction between Eastern and Western stances on the worship of “Shangdi.” It was under the influence of such thinking that Hong Xiuquan converted to Christianity.

Returning to our theme, Hong Xiuquan spent approximately three months under the tutelage of Roberts, and in that time read the full text of the Bible. However, study of the works he later wrote reveals that he only paid attention to the first five books of the Old Testament (from the Book of Genesis to the Book of Deuteronomy). The greatest reason for this is that this section includes the Ten Commandments of Moses (Book of Exodus, Verse 20), and other content on the rejection of idol worship. Motomura Ryoji, working on foundations laid by Kishida Shigeru’s research, also noted that a monotheistic religion like Christianity was often adopted by oppressed groups, or groups who face discrimination.⁹⁾ Ac-

cordingly, the Hakka, who had arrived in Guangdong relatively late and had encountered general discrimination, were able to transform feelings of self-abasement into a kind of self-strengthening based on the idea of “authentic origins and orthodoxy.” Hong Xiuquan, as a Hakka himself, may well have developed sympathies with the first half of the Old Testament, beginning with the creation story.

However, Hong Xiuquan’s inclination towards the Old Testament, and his relative coldness to New Testament’s themes of “Christian absolutism” meant that the religion of God Worshippers was strongly influenced by the concept of “intolerance” found in aspects of Judaeo-Christian thought.¹⁰⁾ The original Old Testament was the only record of a contract between Jehovah and mankind. According to the Authorized Old Testament published by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, Jehovah (the God Emperor, *Huangshangdi*) is a “harsh God,” and further says: “If a father hates his Lord (God), then punishment will be visited to the third and fourth generations of his descent.”¹¹⁾ Furthermore, the 26th chapter of Leviticus when describing the basis for prohibition of idol worship reads as follows:

If all after of this you will still continue to defy me and refuse to obey me, then in my anger I will turn on you and again make punishment seven times worse than before. Your hunger will be so great that you will eat your own children. I will destroy your places of worship on the hills, tear down your incense altars, and throw your dead bodies on your fallen idols. In utter disgust I will turn your cities into ruins, destroy your places of worship, and refuse to accept your sacrifices.¹²⁾

This demonstrates a God Emperor who is extreme in his demonstrations of both love and hate. The revelations of “the fierce Lord in Heaven”¹³⁾ spread widely among believers and converts. In his autobiography, Li Xiucheng (李秀成 a native of Teng prefecture, later known as *Zhongwang*) also mentions that when he first became a believer, he was instructed that “People willing to worship the God (*Huangshangdi*) will face no calamity and no hardships, but those who do not worship the God will be injured by snakes and tigers. Those who sincerely worship the Lord must not venerate other gods, those who worship other gods are guilty of sin. Thus, after people have paid their respects to the God, all henceforth do not dare to worship other gods.” Due to his fear, Li did not then wor-

ship other gods.¹⁴⁾ This can be seen as a characteristic outcome of this kind of missionary teaching common in the early days of the Protestant mission in China. In order to avoid punishment, they make themselves the spokespeople of God's will, and direct action against idol worship becomes an imperative.

Hong Xiuquan was also strongly influenced by Confucianism through the preparing for *Keju* examination. He once described the temple of Liuwu (六鳥廟 Six Crows) devoted to worship of the God of Love by Zhuang (壯) minorities in Gui prefecture (貴縣), Guangxi Province, as "brimming with excess lust and illicit intercourse, for which it will be necessarily punished by Heaven,"¹⁵⁾ and wrote a poem condemning it. In fact, Confucian thought also rejects the worship of idols, and also often takes a highly orthodox stance versus different cultures, and also sought a strict "separation of the sexes." Add to this the fact that Hong Xiuquan had a tendency towards the paranoia, and the influence of Roberts who was himself described as "intolerant and bigoted to the Baptist dogmas,"¹⁶⁾ we can well understand the exclusive, combative creed of the religion of God Worshippers that demanded "executing the vicious and preserving the righteous (斬邪留正)"

Finally, Roberts mistook Hong Xiuquan for a "rice Christian" (one who joins the church to eat the food they provide), and refused to baptise him. The disappointed Hong headed for Guangxi, and on Zijing (紫荊) Mountain, Guiping (桂平) prefecture, he met Feng Yunshan (馮雲山 later the South King) who was the founder of God Worshippers Society once again, and was inspired by his bravery to launch an iconoclastic movement aimed at destroying temples and gods in the nearby area. This movement radically shook the social order, founded by the group of powerful immigrants, and became the beginning of the transformation of the God Worshippers Society into an armed uprising. This can also be said to be a product born from the combination of two demanding orthodoxies, Judeo-Christianity and Confucianism.

Two: The Religious Character of the Taiping Army on the Quanzhou and Nanjing Massacres

In the year 1850, the God Worshippers Society initiated a return to the ancient Chinese custom of "worship of the Emperor God *Huangshang-di*," and tore down the banners of the Qing to rise in revolt. The Taiping forces routed the Qing army at each encounter, and started northwards

towards Nanjing. During this process there occurred an event, namely the 3 June 1852 massacre in the city of Quanzhou (全州), Guangxi.

Jian Youwen (簡又文) described the incident in this manner: “The Taiping armies did not have the capabilities to besiege the provincial capital of Guangxi, Guilin, and so decided to proceed to Hunan. Initially, they had no plans to attack Quanzhou. However, a cannon shell launched from within Quanzhou city struck South King Feng Yunshan, leaving him with near fatal wounds. This ignited the fury of vengeance in the Taipings, and thus they stormed Quanzhou. After taking the city, they proceeded to massacre the inhabitants.”¹⁷⁾ However, Cui Zhiqing (崔之清) has raised doubts about this version of events. He analyzed that Feng Yunshan died at the Battle of Suoyi Ford (蓑衣渡) after the occupation of Quanzhou, and argues that the legend of the “massacred city” was a rumour manufactured by literati hostile to the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.¹⁸⁾

So what are the facts of the matter? In the National Palace Museum in Taipei is preserved a confession left by a soldier of the Taiping army, Zhou Yongxing (周永興 a native of Anhua prefecture, Hunan). Within it is his account of the Battle of Suoyi Ford, which he relates: “The bandits saw that the situation was not good. The leaders the West King, South King, North King, and Lord Luo all disembarked from the boats to direct the troops and the battle from the banks.” He describes the following day thus: “The West King (here he has mistaken the South King for the West King) was gravely injured by a bullet, and about two hours later, I heard that the West King had died, and was buried on the river banks wrapped in red silk.”¹⁹⁾ From this, we know that the location of the injury and death of Feng Yunshan was in fact at the Battle of Suoyi Ford. On basis of the report of Imperial Commissioner Saisangga (賽尙阿 Chinese Sai Shang’a, Manchu Saisangga), it is known that the Quanzhou dead numbered over 1,300. Most were Qing functionaries and members of their households, and soldiers who had been mobilized into local militias. As for the residents, he observes that before the city was critically besieged, practically all the residents had fled outside the city to escape the fighting.²⁰⁾

So why did the rumour of “inhabitants massacred for revenge” appear? The Taiping siege of Quanzhou lasted 11 days from 24 May, and throughout, they waged war by digging tunnels underneath to break through the city walls. As the Taiping forces were believers in Hong Xiuquan’s God Worshippers Society, they considered the Qing officials, soldiers, and their assistants to be “demons” and idolatrous enemies. In the Edict on the Yongan Siege, Hong Xiuquan wrote that “High Heaven has

commissioned us to execute demons, the Heavenly Father and Heavenly Brother watch over us. Men and women all take up your blades... Be bold and let our hearts be united, and together let us kill the devils,"²¹⁾ and ordered that all should be killed without mercy.

This manner of fervent religious enthusiasm is also demonstrated by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's actions in attacking temples and destroying the idols within. The leader of the later Hunan army, Zeng Guofan (曾國藩), sighed: "Since the upheaval in tradition occasioned by this strange religious rebellion, our Confucius and Mencius have been weeping beside the nine springs of the underworld."²²⁾ His grief was occasioned by the advance of the destruction of idols movement, thanks to the influence of missionary tactics and Hong Xiuquan's understanding of Christianity. This movement, along with what became "speaking reason (講道理 *Jiang daoli*)" religious propaganda sessions, continued to the later days of the Taiping movement itself, although they did begin to gradually weaken. Moreover, when the Taiping attacked Guilin, fellow monotheistic Muslim believers helped them to manufacture weapons for the siege. The defending militias of Quanzhou faced the power and passion of intensely focused religious hostility. With no escape, they were forced to execute a desperate, obstinate defence, and were met at last with unconditional slaughter.

From the perspective of Chinese society at that time, the tenacious Taiping battle spirit was considered irrational. On the contrary, the hypocritical, self-protecting attitude displayed by the Qing troops dispatched to relieve the area was considered "normal." Prefect of Quanzhou, Cao Xiepei (曹燮培), denounced the weakness of the Qing commanders: "Each of our leaders commands ten thousand men, yet they still cannot shake the nerves of the traitors. There are only just over a thousand men within the city. Few cannot overcome many, the outcome is certain." and "If you continue to hesitate and take no action, and if there is no plan to defeat the rebels, then the day is open to defeat."²³⁾ As for the Taiping refusal to compromise—the abnormal phenomenon—people could only give an explanation that they themselves could understand, and thus fabricated tales of "massacres committed in revenge for the death of a king." Stories that arose after the Taiping Northern Expeditionary Force passed through Pingyang (平陽), Shanxi province in 1853 show a similar pattern.

As regard massacres actually committed by the Taipings, the massacre of the Manchus in Nanjing is perhaps the largest in scale. Towards the end of the year 1852, the Taiping army set out along the course of

the Yangtze River, and in February of 1853, began their assault on the heavily garrisoned city of Nanjing. The Qing garrison was isolated and without support, and on the morning of the 19 March, after the Taiping forces broke through the city walls using dynamite, the defence structure was found to be already in utter chaos. The Han Chinese residents in the outer city very quickly fell under occupation. Jiangning General Xiang Hou (祥厚)'s 4,000 Baqi (八旗 Eight Banners) troops and their dependents were left besieged alongside the Manchu residents in the inner city. From the 20th onwards, they fought a fierce battle—desperate in the extreme—versus the Taiping forces, and layer upon layer of Taiping dead piled up outside the city walls.

When the inner city of Nanjing fell on the 21st, only some 400 members of the Baqi forces were able to escape. In addition, due to their assistance in guarding the walls and support behind the lines, Manchurian women were massacred by the Taipings. This occurred on the 23rd, as described in the Jinling Records of Hardship (金陵省難紀略): “later around 1,000 Manchu women were driven by the bandits to outside the Chaoyang Gate, encircled and then burnt to death.”²⁴⁾ Afterwards, the Taiping army also conducted a “search for demons,” to find any Manchus, government officials, and soldiers concealed in the houses of ordinary residents. If found, they were killed on the spot. The notes written by Shen Zi (沈粹) describes “the wretched cries that moved heaven and earth” of the women killed on the banks of the Yangtze.²⁵⁾

It is said that the number of Manchus killed in Nanjing amounted to between 20,000 to 30,000. Accurate figures, however, are impossible to obtain. Jian Youwen regarded this incident as “an inhumane, ruthless atrocity, a characteristic of battles in ancient and medieval period that cannot be commended in the civilized modern age.” However, he simultaneously points out that the nationalistic spirit that supported “overthrowing the Manchu and restoring the Han” was engendered in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom by the stubborn opposition they had encountered and the sacrifice of countless men. Thus the bloodbath which followed the fall of the city was also “a natural human feeling.”²⁶⁾ Some suggested at the time that the cause of this kind of massacre lay in the anti-Manchu ideology and rhetoric of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. On 23 April 1853, the *North China Herald*, when reporting on murderous behaviour by the Taiping armies noted that “However revolting this may appear to Europeans, it is not believed to be too vindictive for Chinese, when their passions are aroused; their modes of punishment being known to be brutal in the

extreme.”²⁷⁾ The origins of the Han hatred for Manchu seen within the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom movement can be revealed by analysis of the cruelty of the Qing regime.²⁸⁾

In the course of the advance of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom forces from Hunan to the Yangtze river basin, they issued many calls to arms, analogous to calls to arms in the name of “upholding Heaven and destroying outsiders.” The Edict on the Issue for Enforcement praises what it terms “those under heaven, China under heaven, and the lands under heaven not captured by barbarians,”²⁹⁾ a proclamation of intense Han-centrism. Behind this is the Hakka orthodoxy as developed under harsh Qing restrictions on public opinion, the dynasty themselves also being another ethnicity. Similar trends can be seen in contemporary Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. The Qing were viewed as not representing “Hua, or civilization.” Such states made themselves the centre of the Hua-Yi (civilized/barbarian) distinction, created what have been termed “Little China” nationalisms.³⁰⁾ In addition, the anti-Manchu doctrines of the Taipings considerably influenced Chinese society that naturally included Qing dynasty supporters. Officials also analysed the cause of the surrender of Nanjing as follows: “The bravery of the Manchu and Han soldiers could not be united, and the bandits used this opportunity to enter [the city],”³¹⁾ suggesting that within the defending Qing forces there also existed ethnic conflict.

However, returning once more to the logic and thinking of the Taipings themselves, they rejected the Qing dynasty because they felt that the Qing dynasty and historic dynasties before them had caused China to lose the immemorial traditions of belief in “Shangdi,” had usurped his title for the emperor, and blasphemed against Jehovah. The Taiping contempt for Manchus is explained in this extract: “Why are the northern barbarians regarded as monsters? Snakes, devils, Yama, evil monsters, and ghosts, the Tatars only worship such things, and thus today, the northern tribes are seen as monsters themselves.”³²⁾ They were idol worshippers who had violated the Ten Commandments.

In the Hebrew tradition, Jehovah is a God who both eradicates and judges those who do not respect the commandments. As far as the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was concerned, Nanjing was a “little Heaven (小天堂)”—that is, a promised land. Thus, on arrival it was imperative to stamp out idol worshippers. It was precisely the character of this kind of religiously inspired intolerance that led to this “unprecedented unequalled massacre” occurring at what Zhong Wendian (鍾文典) has said

should be seen as “the greatest victory since Jintian Uprising”—the siege of Nanjing.³³⁾

Another interesting case allows us to see the attitude of the Taipings towards Catholicism previously operating in Nanjing. According to a report written by Mgr F X Maresca who was the bishop of the Nanjing area at the time, on 21 March, the Taiping forces attacking Nanjing appeared inside his church. Just at that time, the church was conducting a service for Holy week. However, the soldiers did not permit the congregation to kneel to pray, and ordered them to offer devotions to “the Heavenly Father.” Not only this, but they also left with the words “If you do not comply within three days, everyone will be beheaded.”

On 25 March, when believers started the worship of the cross, a large contingent of Taiping forces suddenly charged into the church, at once shouting threats and destroying the image of Christ and overturning the altar. Afterwards, they compelled the believers to read their prayer books out loud. Among them, one missionary gave a tract on the Ten Commandments to an officer. The officer read it carefully, and then said: “Your religion is good, ours cannot be compared to it, but the new Emperor has given his orders, it is necessary to obey or die.” After this, the Taiping soldiers took 140 believers away, and passed the death penalty on them. In fact the death penalty was suspended owing to the resistance of the believers, but the believers were still persecuted, often violently. Similar actions were undertaken in the localities of Yangzhou and Zhenjiang after the Taiping set out for the lower reaches of the Yangtze.³⁴⁾

The aforementioned refusal to countenance all idols, including “images of Jesus,” could only be produced by a church under the influence of Protestantism. Facing to these claim and actions of Taiping, a missionary in Canton, probably James Legge, criticized their actions severely. He said that demolishing idols by violence was closer to the religion of Berial than to Christ. The Bible does not command the destruction of images and heathen temples by force, much less the murder of the Manchus. And he suggested to missionaries in Shanghai to go to Nanjing and teach the people of the Taiping that the doctrines of Jesus do not authorize his followers to resist persecution by a resort to arms.³⁵⁾ Charles MacFarlane, after making a brief comment that this was an extreme argument, pointed out that most of Taiping were the social outcasts who suffered from suppression of the Qing government. His own opinion concerning their resort to violence was as follows:

As to the deduction of the “conservative,” that these people cannot be Christians of any kind, because they wage war and shed blood, it is to be observed that Christianity never yet, immediately and on its first introduction, changed the whole character of a people. The English, the French, the Germans, the Spanish, the Italians, all engaged in wars after their conversion, and continued to carry on wars with ferocity and cruelty many ages after Christianity had been preached to them, and their countries covered with Christian churches. One of the very first results of the Reformation was a long and bloody war, in which it can scarcely be said that the Protestants were much more gentle or merciful than the Romanist. The true Christian spirits was developed in Europe by very slow degrees...

We confess that we cling to the belief or hope that, however imperfectly, some seeds of the pure faith have been sown in China, and that great and happy results may be anticipated therefrom. At least this is clear,—the Chinese have had awakening.³⁶⁾

MacFarlane admitted the fact that the history of Europe had experienced many wars and violence in the name of religious justice, and Europeans should not regard Taiping as a heretical because of their intolerant thought and its result. In fact, the same argument could be seen in 1860s, when the most of Europeans criticized the Taiping for using the name of Christianity to build a “heresy” to deceive people. For example, the editor of the *North China Herald* pointed out that European history of Christianity is similarly soaked in blood. Disciples of orthodox Protestant churches had also formerly carried out violent destruction of idols, like the Taiping, and so to reprove the Taipings on these grounds was illogical.³⁷⁾ From these facts, we can see that the massacres and single-minded actions committed by the Taiping were fanned by aggressive ideologies of intolerance, however, some Europeans opposed to criticize Taiping as a heresy and tried to evaluate it as positive as possible after their immanent reflection on the history of Christianity in Europe.

Three: The Purge and Suppression of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom ——The Zhou Xineng Incident and Plunder of City Inhabitants

By September 1851, the Taiping had established an embryonic dynastic system in the occupied Guangxi city of Yonganzhou (永安州). At the same time, the Yonganzhou period saw a series of events in which East

King Yang Xiuqing (楊秀清) purged those who opposed his power and strengthened his own. A representative example is the incident in which military commander Zhou Xineng (周錫能) secretly contacted the Qing forces. Events happened roughly as follows: in June 1851 Zhou Xineng was ordered to return to Bobai (博白) prefecture to mobilize the believers who had fallen behind the Jintian Battalion. After returning to his hometown, he recruited 190 followers, but due to the curfews and martial law imposed by the Qing army, they returned in the outskirts of Yonganzhou by disguising themselves as an Zhuangyong (壯勇 volunteer militia of Qing army). Zhou Xineng first returned to the city with two subordinates and established connections with the Taiping army.

However, on 21 November, the Heavenly Father descended to the body of Yang Xiuqing and exposed Zhou Xineng as “acting as a spy for demons.” Zhou Xineng denied this at first, but was unable to resist the strict interrogation of the Heavenly Father. The account of the event reads: “I wrongly followed demons whilst away, and was enticed by them, and returned following a demon plan, to act as a double-agent for the devils.”³⁸⁾ On this basis, Zhou Xineng and his family were beheaded in public.

There is a section of Tianfu Xiafan Zhaoshu (天父下凡詔書 Proclamation of the Heavenly Father’s Descent to Earth) that describes how, before his execution, Zhou Xineng and his wife praised the authority of the Heavenly Father, and left messages for others warning them not to make the same mistakes as they. The essay is rather artificial in tone, and is unconvincing. Zhou Xineng also described his own meeting with “the uncle of the Xianfeng Devil (咸豐妖 the Xianfeng Emperor)” Saisangga in the Qing encampments.³⁹⁾ Although the memorial presented to the throne by Saissangga in September indeed does report that “puppet commander Zhou Xineng” had been killed,⁴⁰⁾ beyond this there are no traces found within Qing historical materials to indicate that Zhou was a secret agent.

Moreover, after the Jintian Uprising, fierce fighting continued, and within the God Worshippers Society there were many who “hate the leaders in their hearts” and “want to assist the Qing militias and their volunteer soldiers in killing the leaders.”⁴¹⁾ This dissatisfaction was especially strong among the members of the Bobai and Luchuan (陸川) prefectures, where Yang Xiuqing and Xiao Chaogui (蕭朝貴 later West King) had not visited these areas previously conducted activities relating to the descent of the Heavenly Father and Brother, imagining that they could assume a leadership role in the area. Naturally, this led to much unhappiness among the local membership. Not long after Zhou Xineng was executed

in Yonganzhou, former Luchuan prefecture God Worshipper leader Lai Shiju (賴世舉 also known as Ninth Lai 賴九) disappeared from the histories of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. In a similar fashion, the Zeng (曾) family from Dachong (大冲) Village that had given financial assistance to Feng Yunshan's missionary activities at Zijing Mountain, were repulsed by the rise to power of a former impoverished immigrant Yang Xiuqing. Their attitude led them into conflict, and after Zeng Yujing (曾玉璟) left Yonganzhou to return to his native place, he was killed and all traces of his family disappeared from the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.⁴²⁾ These events led people to believe fervently that "the Heavenly Father is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent"⁴³⁾ and determined the character of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom as an intolerant, religious, autocratic dynasty.

The above-mentioned purges and cruel punishments were all phenomena found during the armed phase of the Taiping movement. *Xunzhou Fuzhi* (潯州府志) recounted that they obey the religious precepts recorded in their devil books faithfully, and they execute anyone who violated these precepts without exception.⁴⁴⁾ The strictest pronouncements were on the smoking of opium and "the Seventh Commandment," namely the injunctions concerning gender segregation. Offenders would be sentenced to death by what was known as "snow amid the clouds" (雲中雪 the punishment of the long knives). Aside from this, according to the records in the *Tianxiong Shengzhi* (天兄聖旨 Edicts of the Imperial Brothers), when Jesus Christ descended into the body of Xiao Chaogui, he examined in detail the "confused speech" and improper attitudes of church members, and sentenced them to be whipped. Additionally, after the initial successes against the Qing armies, commands were issued forbidding retreat ahead of the call: "If anyone tried to retreat to the camp, and was so accused by a leader, he was beheaded immediately. Each time returning from battle, there were a total of some twenty or thirty men killed for this reason, and so when fighting all fight desperately."⁴⁵⁾ The above notes that many were executed on these grounds, and thus the majority obeyed commands.

The most famous injunction of Taiping army commanded by Yang Xiuqing is: "All safe households and all safe places, what officials and what soldiers are there? All those who enter into a private house without orders will be executed with no leniency. If the left foot crosses the threshold of a house, then amputate the left foot."⁴⁶⁾ This ideology of strict punishment created a regime with extremely strict, impartial disci-

pline wherein the power of the high command was unmatched. Without exaggeration, the Qing official memorial to the emperor submitted in 1852 when the Taiping attacked Hubei read as follows: “These bandits are expert in use of enticements and threats. Each time they take a city or pass through a village, they first send out a fake proclamation of safety. If they buy items, they will pay more. They also take register of the names of residents. They give out silver in assistance, and do not haggle, if there is supply then they do not disturb it.” The above is vastly different from the plundering, arson, and merciless killing committed by the Qing armies and local militias, notably the Chaozhou Braves (潮州勇). The memorandum also noted that “Following the behaviour of the guests, the people treat the soldiers as enemies and the rebels with favour.”⁴⁷⁾

However, after the first time the Taipings attacked a large city—namely Wuchang in January 1853—they began to adopt different policies toward local residents. After the first peace announcement was posted and killing stopped on 15 January, Yang Xiuqing ordered that all men and women of the city should go to “worship Shangdi,” took a register, and began to organise male and female dormitories. This was the first time since the Jintian Uprising that the male and female dormitory system had been implemented among the residents of an entire city. The residents were incorporated into a military organization system that assigned 25 people to a dormitory—male and female segregated—under the management of an older veteran soldier.

At the same time, they also implemented another Taiping social institution—the sacred warehouses. At the outset, the Taiping army built tribute halls and requested people to donate goods and money. People mistakenly believed that if they donated property, they would not be called up, and so took their household items to the warehouses. However, on 20 January, an order was issued calling all city residents to leave the city and enter the regiments. *Wuchang jishi* (武昌紀事 The Annals of Wuchang) recorded that “No more than two or three in ten were allowed to remain within the city.”⁴⁸⁾ It was only at the later ritual celebrations that people began to realise that “offering tribute” was a pretext for confiscation.

However, the methods used for incorporating city residents into the troops and confiscating property were highly ingenious. Able-bodied men were divided into the Zhengpai (正牌 main troops), the elderly and children were sorted into the Paiwei (牌尾 rearguard). The ill and disabled were allocated to appropriate dormitories for their needs, under a minutely organised distribution system. It is notable that such policies

were exclusively implemented on city folk, as suggested by the following instructions: “only capture city residents, don’t take peasants.”

In the early stages of the uprising, the Taiping army had an intense religious character, and refused to conscript non-church members into their ranks. This policy did not change until the Hunan campaigns, helping to explain why people would “treat the rebels with favour.” However, after plans to attack Wuchang, Nanjing, and other major cities were laid, the Taiping adopted a strategy based on distributing the accumulated wealth of the city to the countryside, and implemented measures designed to lighten the burden on the countryside, thereby isolating the cities and rendering them vulnerable. This strategy was encapsulated in these words: “In all places that they pass through, they shall distribute clothing gained to the poor, and spread rumours saying that in future the land tax will be suspended for three years, so that the rich will sit alone and besieged in the cities, and not even a single coin will be donated to help them.” Thus it was that “The ignorant people help the thieves, and even compete to make them welcome,”⁴⁹⁾ and as this volume suggests, the Taiping success in gaining rural support made their campaigns smoother, but also meant that huge sacrifices were paid by the people of the cities forcibly occupied.

The discord between the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and city residents was first demonstrated by the pitiless treatment they received after incorporation into their ranks. The majority of city residents were “cowardly and unskilled in the fighting arts, and incapable of even hitting a target,” and were unable to instantly transform themselves into effective soldiers. Additionally, the Taiping army forced them to undertake hard labour, for example transporting foodstuffs from the warehouses to boats. The treatment was harsh: “those who are weak in strength and cannot complete their tasks, when they rest at the side of the road for a moment are flogged and reprimanded. Some are unable to take the humiliation and throw themselves into the water to drown.” Several instances in which people committed suicide as protest against such excessive labour demands and unequal treatment have been recorded.

Of the women taken into the female dormitories, the majority had bound feet. Their feet made movement difficult, “there are none who do not bow beneath their burdens, carrying their sons and daughters as they wend their way through the streets and lanes.” However, the female cadres in charge of the dormitories made no efforts to conceal their impatience with these women. One account tells of “those women with beau-

tiful clothes and who own hairpins and bracelets, their possessions are plundered away immediately by the bandit women.”⁵⁰⁾ This was also the case in Nanjing. Wang Shidou (汪士鐸), who lost two daughters under the rule of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, recalled:

The rebels are mountain people, and their women are used to ploughing and weeding, weaving and dyeing. However, as they are not used to it and do not know how, the women of Nanjing cannot do such work. Thus, they are made to do what they can—carrying rice, pounding grain, felling bamboo, peeling bamboo, digging trenches, carrying bricks, harvesting wheat, harvesting paddy fields, carrying salt—, they are each responsible for all such tasks, and their own effectiveness. Due to the handicaps of bound feet, they must unbind them, but it was not known that having been made small, they would not recover their size, and thus there was an uproar over their brutality. However, this suffering is particular to the women of Jiangsu, if we consider the women of Anhui, then it was not considered strange. The men should do the tasks requiring physical strength. In Jiangsu, people are divided into many classes, but in Anhui people are not. Thus, many are willing to be rebels from all levels of society in Anhui, whilst even the poor in Jiangsu are unwilling, because the customs of the two places are different.

Besides this, Wang Shiduo also noted that “the people of the river lands and those of the mountains are different as though they were from worlds apart.” The mighty kings of ancient times were all born in the plains and thus were “in nature temperate,” and he concludes that no such ruler can be born from either the river lands or the mountains.⁵¹⁾ The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom confronted head-on the deep gulf that continues to exist today between town and countryside in China. The lower class frontier immigrants who were the soldiers of the Taiping armies had no way of understanding the customs and thinking of the city residents. Clinging to their own traditions, and self-assertion for the Hakka, they lacked the capacity to tolerate the culture of other Han groups. Thus, however they may have hoped to recover the correct rule of a true “Chinese” dynasty, their political claim could not be accepted by the people of Jiangnan.

Elements of intolerance found in Judaeo-Christian thought on the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom further justified and intensified this form of narrow-minded and exclusive Hakka rhetoric. The influence of the rheto-

ric of salvation on an oppressed group was precisely what engendered sentiments of dissatisfaction and envy within the oppressed mountain peoples towards the city residents. The intolerance displayed in looting cities reached a climax with the 2 February 1853 “choosing concubines” affair. This was the day on which Hong Xiuquan and companions summoned over 60 beauties to enter the imperial harem, and female cadres also offered women from within their own dormitories. On the next day, 3 February, a grand Taiping New Year ceremony was held, as described by one record: “For bogus officials to celebrate barbarian chiefs, for rebel women to congratulate false concubines, all dressed in stage armour. The city clamoured with the “tangta” of cymbals and drums, the entire region was just like a stage. Within the city, firecrackers were set off with a sound like thunder, and the streets were left covered in firecracker papers to the depth of about an inch.”⁵²⁾ Previously, it was possible to say that these frontier peoples had been isolated from wealth and prosperity. Under the leadership of an omniscient and omnipotent God, they were able to dominate the city and its ceremonies. Such actions were one means to remedy a perceived deficiency in what they believed to be a lost history.

Conclusion

This paper has followed the thread of intolerance originating from Judaeo-Christian thought to analyse the influence of Christianity on the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. There is little doubt that the monotheism found in the Hebrew tradition itself was the religion of salvation of an oppressed people similar to the Hakka, later impoverished immigrants, and similarly it served as the basics on which to realize equality before the one true God. On the other hand, the concept of abolishing idolatry transmitted through missionary activity became a key characteristic of the God Worshippers Society and narrow-minded aggressiveness toward idolatry transformed the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom into an exclusive, combative entity.

Interestingly, the intolerant nature of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom has much in common dogmatic Marxism, once called a sort of secular Christianity. For example, the ruthless massacres of Qing officials and Manchus committed by the Taiping resemble the violence visited on those labelled “counter-revolutionaries (反革命)” by the Communist Party (共產黨) and the Nationalist Party (國民黨). In addition, the purges carried out targeting veterans in Yonganzhou also call to mind the rectifica-

tion campaigns and political purges implemented by Mao Zedong (毛澤東) whilst establishing his political authority during the Yan'an Period. Furthermore, the power struggle between Hong Xiuquan and Yang Xiuqing which ultimately brought about the 1856 Tianjing Incident (天京事變) bears an unusually close structural resemblance to the events and course of the Cultural Revolution.

So where precisely did the religious fervour that accompanied violence come from? Could one source be hidden in forces internal to Chinese society? That may well be, but intolerance also well described Europe in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Under the influence of evangelical movements, nineteenth century Protestant missionaries saw the transmission of the gospel and European civilization to heathen lands as their life's mission. Thus, Christian evangelism sought to lead heretics from "the darkness of ignorance" towards the virtues of civilization. Naturally, there were missionaries who believed that there were pure individuals among the heathen. However, there were more who had absolutely no doubts about the unconditional superiority of modern European civilization. Thus, after the Taiping armies attacked Shanghai in 1860, there were missionaries who were harshly critical of non-Christian elements of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom ideology, and supported its suppression by the Great Powers.

Thinking along these lines, it is not difficult to realise that the exclusive religious fervour of both the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and later-day Marxism represent negative aspects of the arrival of European civilization. Surveying world history, this sort of phenomenon is not limited to the nineteenth century and the Cold War. After 11 September 2001 President Bush compared "the war against terrorism" to the crusades. The "ideology" underlying his words displays the power of a long and continuing legacy of religious intolerance.

Moreover, books on contemporary Chinese history and society, no matter if written in Chinese, Japanese, or English, pay little attention to anything that smacks of a cult. Actions incompatible with attempts to improve society are also systematically eliminated from history. It seems unavoidable that scholarship lacks any deep reflection on the religious character of modern history. The research in this paper demonstrates that the one-sided emphasis on the destructive nature of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom as seen in China academic circles today may well derive from a lack of understanding of religion and contempt held by city intellectuals for rural areas. Nonetheless, how to advance an understanding of hetero-

geneous others from a tolerant standpoint is a question whose scope is not limited to the study of modern China.

Notes

- 1) Kikuchi 1999.
- 2) Liang 1979, vol. 3, pp. 3.
- 3) Kurata, 2009.
- 4) Liang 1979, vol. 6, pp. 79.
- 5) Liang 1979, vol. 1, pp. 4.
- 6) Hamberg 1854, pp. 19.
- 7) “Roberts’ Letter concerning Hung Hsiu-chüan’s Visit to His Canton Chapel,” 1847, 3, 27, Coughlin 1972, pp. 316
- 8) Joseph Edkins, “China and the West: Ritual Similarities and Differences,” *Zhongxi Wenjianlu* (中西聞見錄) vol. 16 Nov. 1873, Namiki 2010, pp. 129.
- 9) Motomura 2005, pp. 72.
- 10) Of Course, it is needless to say that Christianity cannot be defined simply as an intolerant religion; at certain times and at certain places intolerance was pronounced, but Christianity has as well a more dominant tolerant and merciful nature in its thought and action. There is some misunderstanding in Japan regarding monotheism, thinking it to be an especially aggressive and violent. See Yamaga 2013, pp. 365.
- 11) “Qingding Jiuyizhaoshengshu (欽定舊遺詔聖書),” vol. 2, *Chumaixiguozhuan* (出麥西郭傳), chap. 20, Luo and Wang 2004, vol. 2, pp. 128.
- 12) “Qingding Jiuyizhaoshengshu (欽定舊遺詔聖書),” vol. 3, *Liweishu* (利未書), chap. 26, Luo and Wang 2004, vol. 2, pp. 77.
- 13) “Tianxiong shengzhi (天兄聖旨, The Imperial Edict of the Heavenly Brother),” vol. 1, Middle Third of November, 1948, Luo and Wang 2004, vol. 2, pp. 248.
- 14) “The Confession of Li Xiucheng (李秀成の供述書),” Namiki 2010, pp. 217.
- 15) “Taiping Tianri (太平天日),” Kojima 1976, pp. 186.
- 16) Lindley 1866, pp. 566.
- 17) Jian 1944, pp. 295.
- 18) Cui 2002, pp. 461.
- 19) “The Confession of Zhou Yongxing,” *Junjichu dangan* (軍機處檔案 Materials in the Office of Military and Political Affairs in Qing Dynasty) Record No. 084613, National Palace Museum, Taipei.
- 20) Report of Saisangga, 1851, 6, 10, *Zhongguo Diyi Lishi Danganguan* 1992, vol. 3, pp. 219.
- 21) “Edict of Breaking the Siege in Yong’an (永安突圍詔),” *Taiping Tianguo Lishi Bowuguan* 1979, pp. 37.
- 22) “Dispatches on Fighting the Guangxi Bandits (討粵匪檄),” Namiki 2010, pp. 286.
- 23) Jian 1944, pp. 297.
- 24) Zhangrunan, “Jinlin shengnan jilüe (金陵省難紀略),” *Zhongguo Shixiehui*

- 1957, vol. 4, pp. 458.
- 25) Shen zi, “Yangzhuohanbiji (養拙軒筆記),” Taiping Tianguo Lishi Bowuguan 1961, vol. 2, pp. 266.
 - 26) Jian 1962, pp. 491.
 - 27) Clarke and Gregory 1982, pp. 36.
 - 28) The news of Taiping’s massacre to Manchuria was too shocking, some Europeans who sympathized with Taiping’s Christianity could not believe it (Fishbourne 1855, pp. 177). Others think that Taiping would be better than Qing dynasty in their cruelty. For example, Lieutenant Sprat, who visited Nanjing and saw North King Wei Changhui (韋昌輝) in 1853 wrote as follows; “It is horrible to think that they cut off 20,000 Mantchoos, even to the infant at breast, but they seem hostile only to them; but it is still more horrible to think that the Mantchoos, in two of the many provinces, cut off as many in the name of justice within the year (we know of 2,000 in six weeks); and this in the name of justice! The former is the exception, the latter is the rule.”(Anonymous 1853, pp. 128).
 - 29) “Banxingzhaoshu (頒行詔書),” Namiki 2010, pp. 178.
 - 30) Arano 1994.
 - 31) Report of Xunaizhao (許乃釗), 1853, 3, 31, Zhongguo Diyi Lishi Danganguan 1992, vol. 5, pp. 313.
 - 32) “Banxingzhaoshu (頒行詔書),” Namiki 2010, pp. 179.
 - 33) Zhong 1992, pp. 369.
 - 34) A Letter by Mgr F X Maresca, Clarke and Gregory 1982, pp. 37.
 - 35) Anonymous, “The Religious Character of Insurgents,” MacFarlane 1853, pp. 132–133.
 - 36) MacFarlane 1853, pp. 137.
 - 37) *North China Herald*, No 522, 28 July, 1860.
 - 38) “Tianfu xiafan zhaoshu (天父下凡詔書 Proclamation of the Heavenly Father’s Descent to Earth),” Zhongguo Shixehui 1957, vol. 1, pp. 7.
 - 39) “Tianqing daolishu (天情道理書),” Zhongguo Shixehui 1957, vol. 1, pp. 376.
 - 40) Report of Saisangga, 1851, 9, 27, Zhongguo Diyi Lishi Danganguan 1992, vol. 2, pp. 273.
 - 41) “The Confession of Li Jinfu (李進富),” 1851, Record No. FO931 1041, National Archives (Kew), London.
 - 42) Kikuchi 2013, pp. 145.
 - 43) “Tianfu xiafan zhaoshu (天父下凡詔書),” Zhongguo Shixehui 1957, vol. 1, pp. 18.
 - 44) Tangxiling (譚熙齡), “Zijingshilüe (紫荊事略),” Wei 1874, vol. 27.
 - 45) “The Confession of Li Jinfu,” 1851, Record No. FO931 1041, National Archives (Kew), London.
 - 46) “The Confession of Li Xiucheng,” Namiki 2010, pp. 222.
 - 47) Memorandum of Lei Yicheng, 1853, 1, 7, Junjichu dangan Record No. 087822, National Palace Museum, Taipei.
 - 48) Chenhuiyan (陳徽言), “Wuchang jishi (武昌紀事),” Zhongguo Shixehui 1957, vol. 4, pp. 593–596.

- 49) Zhangdejian (張德堅), “Zeiqing huisan (賊情彙纂),” vol. 10, *Zhongguo Shixehui* 1957, vol. 3, pp. 270–271.
- 50) Chenhuiyan (陳徽言), “Wuchang jishi (武昌紀事),” *Zhongguo Shixehui* 1957, vol. 4, pp. 596.
- 51) Wang 1967, vol. 3.
- 52) Chenhuiyan (陳徽言), “Wuchang jishi (武昌紀事),” *Zhongguo Shixehui* 1957, vol. 4, pp. 597.

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