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A War of Words:
The Circulation and Interpretation of Taiping Depositions

By
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A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for Honors in History
In the College of Arts and Sciences
Washington University

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Abstract:

On November 18, 1864, the death knell of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was rung. Hong Tianguai Fu had been killed. Hong, divine leader of the once nascent kingdom and son of the Heavenly Kingdom's founder, was asked to confess before his execution, making him one of the last figures to speak directly on behalf of the Qing's most formidable opposition. The movement Hong had inherited was couched in anti-Manchu sentiment, pseudo-Marxist thought, and a distinct, unorthodox, Christian vision. The Taiping Civil War resulted in the death of as many as thirty million people, altering East Asian power dynamics for years to come. Interested in this new reality, the Western world listened intently to the Young Monarch's last words.

Depositions have a long history in imperial tradition. They were collected by courts to confirm the identity of those who broke the law and to indict them for their crimes against the dynasty. These documents were also used to collect information on opposition movements, giving Qing rulers a more comprehensive vision of those attempting to bring them down. Thus, the deposition resulting from Hong's confession fit within an established legal genre. Unlike those composed by members of previous uprisings, Hong's confession circulated well beyond court archives and into the hands of foreign publications. Commentators eagerly translated and edited the document for their extensive audience, placing their interpretations at the core of foreign debate about the conflict's legitimacy. The Western public was intrigued by the prospect of a new Chinese kingdom founded on Christian beliefs, and no one could tell this kingdom's story better than those who had lived in it.

This thesis changes our understanding of the process through which Taiping depositions were created and utilized. Challenging previous scholarly assumptions that approached these documents as mere tools for factual reconstruction, this work argues that court depositions

played a vital political role in shaping contemporary perceptions of Qing rule and of its opposition movements. More specifically, previous scholarly discussions on Taiping depositions are frozen in colonial and Cold War narratives, as those debating their value fail to understand that depositions were products of personal and communal ambitions. These authors perceive these documents as static indicators of a movement's character, to be used to legitimize or damage the narrative deployed by their respective political alignment. By analyzing the depositions written by Taiping leaders Hong Daquan, Li Xiucheng, and Hong Rengan, in addition to any subsequent edits, Western reactions, and larger political concerns surrounding them, this thesis examines the role depositions played in determining external perceptions of the Taiping. In following the lifespan of these documents, as opposed to judging their character, a greater understanding of their impact is revealed.

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Author's Note:

All names and Chinese transliterations are provided in Pinyin, with exceptions given to those who have published English works in their own name using Wade-Giles.

Weights and Measures:

1 *li* (里) = .31 miles

Introduction:

The Context

On November 18, 1864, the death knell of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was rung. Hong Tianguifu had been killed.¹ Hong, divine leader of the once nascent kingdom and son of the Heavenly dynasty's founder, could no longer outrun the forces of the Qing empire. The Junior King of Heaven, whose practical reign had not even surpassed five weeks, was given time to confess before his execution by slow slicing commenced. His age, amounting to only fourteen, combined with the isolated lifestyle he was forced to live resulted in a deposition containing little insight into the workings of the kingdom. The document veers in too many directions, from Hong's desire as a child to see his mother and sisters, to his plan to accompany the man who sheltered him during his escape, Assistant District Director of Studies Tang Jiadong, to Hunan in hopes of sitting for the imperial examinations.² The majority of the deposition the court put together from Hong's confession describes the end of his journey. Readers follow Hong from his premonition predicting the entrance of Qing soldiers into Nanjing to his flight from the city with the rest of the Taiping leadership, an escape that required him to abandon much of his family. Whether Hong had been feigning confusion in hopes of gaining a pardon, legitimately thinking he would be allowed to live under Qing rule, or simply did not comprehend what had occurred to him and his people over the previous few days is entirely uncertain. A translation of the completed deposition, despite its lack of new material, was published in full in the *North China Herald* on July 22, 1865. What purpose did the release of

¹ Hong was also called Hong Fu Tian in Western and Qing records.

² Franz H. Michael and Chung-li Chang, *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*. Vol. 3. 3 vols. (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1971), p. 1532.

Hong's deposition serve, and what message did it send to the paper's English-speaking audience? The piece existed in a public space because it helped to secure the vision the Qing dynasty hoped to present to its Western counterparts. Just as they had done during the war, Qing rulers hoped to use the very words of their enemies to procure foreign support, hoping to calm concerns and possibly relieve Western nations' involvement in the region.

The Taiping Civil War, a conflict rooted in religious ideals and ethnic strife, began in 1850.³ The Taiping were not the only group to resist Qing rule in their time, but they did put a greater strain on the empire than any attempts had before them. Although large-scale violence between the Taiping and Qing would not commence until the Society of God-Worshippers officially declared itself to be loyal to a new kingdom in January of 1851, the movement's roots can be traced back as early as 1837. In this year, after failing to earn a *shengyuan* degree for the third time, Hong Xiuquan returned to his home in Guangdong, where he would suffer from a series of fever dreams. Unable to interpret these, life continued as it had before, until a happenstance encounter in 1843 brought Hong face to face with *Good Words to Admonish the Age*. The document was a Protestant tract written by Liang Fa, another Guangdong native who had converted to Christianity around a half-century prior. Liang spent his adult life successfully disseminating Christian texts to new believers throughout Asia. Soon after, accompanied by his new understanding of his self-proposed religious role and a small group of believers, Hong

³ As argued by Tobie Meyer-Fong in the first chapter of her 2013 book, *What Remains*, this thesis will refer to the central conflict as the Taiping Civil War, not the more commonly used Taiping Rebellion. This serves to “[eliminate] implicit value judgments and [transcend] the totalizing political and moral narratives that emphasize national priorities over individual and collective suffering” as stated on p. 11. In doing so Meyer-Fong affirms the decision Stephen Platt's made in his book, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*, published the year before.

travelled throughout his home province and the nearby Guangxi in hopes of finding converts, finally settling in the Thistle Mountains.

Around the time the Taiping left their natural stronghold and began to make the trek alongside the Yangzi River, a journey which would eventually bring them to Nanjing, some estimates claim that the group had garnered up to a half a million followers.⁴ The movement was made up primarily of those of Hakka descent. The Hakka, meaning “guest people,” are a sub-ethnic minority who historically had a tense relationship with both the Manchu-led Qing and the more populous Han Chinese. The movement was bolstered by members of Tiandihui (天地會) and other discontented subjects hoping to hurry the demise of the Qing.⁵ Many of these new recruits were attracted by the Taiping message, now expanded to be explicitly anti-Qing and Manchu, just as much as they were interested in seeing this new Taiping religion at work, an increasingly divergent Christian faith. Among some of the elements that would attract China’s less privileged classes to Taiping territory were rumors of land redistribution, some form of gender equality, and a ban on opium, the drug that had set the stage for many events of the nineteenth century. It was the existence of these policies that also contributed to the fear many foreigners and Qing loyalists would develop toward the Heavenly dynasty in the coming years. The violence resulting from the kingdom’s efforts, which would affect the entire Qing empire in some capacity, ended in 1864 with the fall of Taiping-occupied Nanjing. Between twenty and thirty million people lost their lives through direct violence or resulting famine and destruction,

⁴ Stephen R. Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, the West, and the Epic Story of the Taiping Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), p. 16.

⁵ *Tiandihui*, translated as Heaven and Earth Society, sometimes known in the West as Triads, were localized secret societies who originally existed as an attempt to restore the Ming dynasty, but often found themselves engaged in illegal activity or serving as paid protection for their respective communities.

with many regions suffering up to a fifty percent decrease in their population size.⁶ While the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was ultimately unsuccessful in establishing a new Christian rule in Asia and expelling the Manchu-led Qing dynasty from its land, the kingdom's efforts helped define a new power structure within Qing China. The Taiping had successfully challenged Western expectations, redefining how these nations interacted with the Qing, as well as how foreign eyes perceived the relationships existing within the empire's borders.

The Sources

Depositions collected by the Qing Court are some of the few sources available for understanding the Taiping movement through the words of its own members. These documents had lives of their own, from their inception, to potential stages of editing, and finally interpretation. This thesis will follow some of these documents throughout these various stages, confronting how their use evolved as their "life" pressed on. The terms "deposition," defined as the process of giving sworn evidence before the law, and "confession," that of a formal admission of wrongdoing, typically in the context of religious belief, will be used interchangeably in this thesis. They can be translated to Mandarin as *gong* (供) and *zize* (自责) or *zिसong* (自訟) respectively.⁷ The original Chinese used to describe these documents is almost always deposition as opposed to confession, although both terms have long histories in Chinese tradition.

⁶ Tobie S. Meyer-Fong, *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in 19th Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), p. 1.

⁷ Translations are taken from Philip A. Kuhn's *Reading Documents: The Rebellion of Chung Jen-chieh*, p. 37 and Wu Pei-Yi's "Self-Examination and Confession of Sins in Traditional China," p. 5.

The terms confession and deposition only became conflated in the mind of readers upon translation. Both have been used by scholars and contemporary viewers to describe the documents written by members of the Taiping movement. Many translators opted for the term deposition when titling or describing their renditions. This was most common in newspapers of the time, such as the *North China Herald*, whose translations would become the standard for many editions of these documents. However, not all newspapers used the term “deposition,” with publications like *The China Mail* preferring to use “confession.” Overall, “confession” was a much more popular term, chosen by individual observers like Lindesay Brine, regardless of the fact that depositions and confessions were not equivalent.⁸ This mistranslation has caused a great deal of improper reading and wayward analysis of depositions, as it added a religious layer to a primarily legal document. In conjunction with the religious claims of the Taipings, Western eyes could not help but associate Judeo-Christian overtones with the depositions Taiping leaders would produce. This would drastically alter the way these would be viewed, removing them from their original legal intentions. Some commentators, like Augustus Lindley, chose to use both, shifting translations as they discussed different documents.⁹ Commentators who did this typically used varying terms to invoke differing opinions on the character of the deposition at hand. Their choices, however, could be derived from the fact that those who gave testimony used the term “confession” to explain what they were doing. This is because the act they engaged in was not deposition but confession. Their words would not become depositions until

⁸ Lindesay Brine. *The Taeping Rebellion in China; A Narrative of its Rise and Progress, Based Upon Original Documents and Information Obtained in China* (London: J. Murray, 1862), p. 131.

⁹ Augustus F. Lindley, *Ti-Ping Tien-kwoh; the History of the Ti-ping Revolution, Including a Narrative of the Author's Personal Adventures* (London: Day & Son, 1866), p. 771.

the people interrogating the author, usually in multiple sessions, consolidated these thoughts into a single, coherent document.¹⁰

Chinese religious confessions can be dated back to the middle of the second century C.E. Early Daoist rituals, specifically the public acts of healing promoted by various secret societies, often required a confession of sin from the patient before the process of healing could begin.¹¹ A written tradition of religious self-disclosure can be traced back to Buddhist documents from the sixth century, although the practice did not become widespread until the seventeenth. The influx of Christian belief during the late Qing only further entrenched the notion of “confession” amongst new groups of converts. Their numbers may have been small, many missionaries counting less than fifty longstanding Christian converts in their lifetime, but their presence was influential.¹² The emergence of the Christian concept of confession may or may not have impacted the manner in which Taiping leaders wrote their depositions, and it certainly did not affect the way the Qing court collected depositions, but the concept actively impacted the way in which these documents were viewed by Western eyes. A confession is an admission of sin, of wrongdoing. In this light it would be difficult for those coming from a Christian background to have a positive reading of the documents that came into their possession. These would be

¹⁰ See Appendix 1 of Susan Naquin’s *Millenarian Rebellion in China* and the entirety of Robert Hegel’s *True Crimes in Eighteenth-Century China* for examples of testimony prior to their consolidation into a deposition.

¹¹ Wu Pei-Yu, *The Confucian’s Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1990), p. 209.

¹² As discussed on p. 16 of Platt’s *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*, many missionaries, like Theodore Hamburg, preferred individual attention over mass conversion. Platt notes that Hong Rengan converted between fifty and sixty converts in 1844, more than Hamburg ever did.

documents based in a failure to comply with religiously-imposed values and an expression of blasphemous crimes as opposed to an effort at redemption.

Depositions were vital to the imperial understanding of Qing subjects and were in no way unique to the dynasty's engagement with the Taiping. Documents from between 1702 and 1809, later compiled and translated by Robert Hegel, shows that depositions collected from all kinds of criminal proceedings provided the court with similar data.¹³ For example, the Qing dynasty had collected confessions fifty-one years prior to the Taiping Civil War, during the Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813. The dynasty did the same as it fought Nian forces to the north of Taiping territory throughout the 1850s and 60s. These documents served multiple purposes in the eyes of the imperial court. Depositions provided information necessary to proving that those who had been caught were who they said they were. By corroborating information extracted from other confessions and from field reports, the Qing court ensured that those responsible for the conflict were properly charged and punished. This did not always go as intended. A group of Nian insurrectionists managed to fabricate and hold to a distinct, concrete story when captured and interrogated, turning this central tool of the court against it. When Zhang Lexing's adopted son was questioned in 1859 on the fate of his father, a founder and prominent leader of Nian forces, "he testified that his father had fallen into an outer moat and drowned during a government offensive."¹⁴ The same story was repeated by Nian troops captured in several other counties. With no evidence explaining otherwise, the Qing had no reason to think the story was anything

¹³ Robert E. Hegel, *True Crimes in Eighteenth-Century China: Twenty Case Histories*, Asian Law Series (Seattle: University of Washington Press. 2009).

¹⁴ Elizabeth J. Perry, "When Peasants Speak: Sources for the Study of Chinese Rebellions." *Modern China* 6, no. 1 (1980): p. 82.

but true, when in reality Zhang Lexing was very much alive and leading Nian soldiery in continued resistance, which he would do until his passing four years later.

What this anecdote on Nian resistance illustrates is the value that the imperial government placed in this form of testimony. Managing an empire as vast as Qing China meant that the imperial court had no realistic mechanism for monitoring the population at large. Served by a faltering Eight Banners and an increasing number of local militias whose allegiance was questionable, the only way to accrue an accurate account of the struggle between government and resistance was through the dissenters' own words.¹⁵ The combination of these reports and the information gathered from their own forces allowed the Qing court to receive a comprehensive picture of what had occurred throughout a conflict, from the true extent of a movement's sway amongst the population to the amount of damage done and the thought process behind the uprising. By understanding the individual experiences that made up the conflict at large, the imperial court could do more than incriminate the individual actors propagating unrest. This new comprehension allowed the court to better address, fight back against, and properly respond to its subjects' grievances.

This form of evidence was collected through various methods of interrogation, often over the course of multiple sessions. As mentioned earlier, there arose the problem of turning these potentially wide-ranging confessions into a single, coherent deposition. This problem was not limited to the evidence within a deposition, but to the information collected throughout all the depositions representing a single event or subject. Small details might vary, but a cohesive narrative had to prevail at the end of the day. These methods of interrogation, to use a modern

¹⁵ The Eight Banners refers to the Qing dynasty's standing army, an entity which had originally enabled the Qing's victory over the Ming, but who had weakened significantly as the Taiping Civil War approached. The name was derived from the group's organizational structure.

euphemism, were often “enhanced” and were not always helpful in discerning truth from a desire to escape pain. For example, a member of the Eight Trigrams had been forced to confess after an official ordered “smoke from burning coal and paper to be blown into [his] nose.”¹⁶ This order ultimately resulted in the man’s death. Another official of the time was known to break the shinbones of his prisoners prior to interrogation.¹⁷ This reality must be taken into account when considering the validity of, and reasoning behind, any testimony given.

Susan Naquin’s research on the depositions of the Eight Trigrams not only reveals the methods interrogators used but explains the reasoning behind their questions. Her research assumes that most people would lie to minimize their own involvement or remove blame from their actions in an attempt to escape harsh punishment.¹⁸ As such, interrogations focused on the activities of others, creating a dynamic in which confessors emphasized the deeds of others and downplayed their own. Other factors that may have affected the collection of depositions is the variety of dialects that officials would have encountered. Especially concerning adherents of the Taiping movement, many of whom had travelled over three thousand *li* over the course of the war, deciphering their dialect and vocal quirks would not have been an easy task for officials who themselves might have come from a different region entirely. In addition, according to historian Thomas Buoye, officials often underreported testimony which arose from violent conflict, out of fear that such reports would reflect badly on their capabilities.¹⁹ Whether or not

¹⁶ Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (New Haven: Yale University Press. 1976), p. 296.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 144.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 286.

this was possible during a conflict as widespread as the Taiping Civil War is difficult to say, but these patterns heavily informed the narratives that depositions revealed.

Depositions collected during the Taiping Civil War were not entirely exceptional; in fact, stylistically they shared many elements with those that came before them. Many Taiping depositions begin with a statement of identity. This section establishes who the confessor is in relation to this person's family, regional origins, and early life. Depositions then relate the author's time with the Kingdom, which would be used to properly evaluate the accused's crimes against the court. Finally, depositions end by either addressing the court or asserting that the previous statements made within them must be considered the truth. This pattern can be seen in the first confession of Eight Trigrams member Chu Si, in which Chu begins by stating his home district, age, and immediate relations. The next three paragraphs, as organized by Naquin, cover Chu's first encounter with the Eight Trigrams, his attack planning with the organization, and his eventual journey to the capital, where he and his men were captured. His confession ends with the statement "[t]his is the truth."²⁰ The next two confessions collected from him are similar in their content, which, alongside those collected from his compatriots, indicated "the reliability of such testimony."²¹

What was unique about the Taiping documents, however, was the audience to which they were advertised, or even the fact that they were advertised at all. The length of each document also stands out. A look into the previously mentioned depositions collected during the Eight

¹⁹ Thomas Buoye, *Manslaughter, Markets, and Moral Economy: Violent Disputes over Property Rights in Eighteenth-century China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 242.

²⁰ Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China*, p. 272.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 271.

Trigram conflict shows that translated confessions rarely extended beyond two paragraphs, in contrast to the multi-page spanning Taiping confessions. Archival analysis of Nian depositions shows that their circulation remained primarily within government circles.²² The audience of Taiping depositions was significantly wider than those of the Eight Trigrams conflict. The fact that these documents were published in full English translations at all is notable. It indicates that there were those who felt that there was some benefit to showing a foreign audience the inner thoughts of those heading the efforts of the Taiping movement. This may be due to the movement's Christian roots or the widespread damage it wrought. Their length may be due to the extended reach, clearer goal, and stricter hierarchy possessed by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom than the other opposition forces of the era. It also indicates that there was more story to be told. These narratives contained more influence over their respective conflict's outcome than preceding depositions ever had.

The practice of extracting confessions for government use is one that still exists today. An article from *The New York Times*, published in 2018, highlighted the way in which the Chinese Communist Party has used the confession to de-legitimize political enemies and advance state-approved narratives. Televised confessions “are meant as warnings to others who would challenge the state, and to discredit accusations of abuses of power by the Communist Party or the state security organs.”²³ This thesis will in no way attempt to equate the two practices or claim that the modern-day version is derived from the imperial version. These practices may

²² Research done for this thesis did not find any evidence of the public circulation of Nian or Eight Trigrams depositions, nor was any evidence encountered via secondary sources. This does not mean that these documents were not circulated, although it will be assumed until proven otherwise.

²³ Steven Lee Myers, “How Chinese Authorities Uses Forced Confession as a Propaganda Tool.” *The New York Times* (New York), April 12, 2018. p. A10.

overlap at times, but they differ in many ways as well, as the environment and history from which they emerged is vastly different. Articles like Myers' simply provide readers with context, backing up the argument that confessions could be used in such a way.

The purpose of this thesis is to re-contextualize the environment in which Taiping depositions came to be. As opposed to viewing them as passive documents, exclusively used to reconcile data on behalf of the government, it will aim to establish depositions as a distinct political tool. Previous scholarly debate on Taiping depositions has focused primarily on the information they contained. This approach is useful, but only confronts half of the question at hand. Recognizing that the content of depositions is not random allows a reader to use said document to round out their understanding of the perceptions both within and around the movement. In order to properly understand the depth of these documents, one must take into consideration why this content was written down, and the process by which it was released into the hands of the public. Perceiving these documents solely for their fact-checking abilities is a consequence of the political commitments of those who have studied them so far. Although not directly related, an article from 1951 by Vincent Shih comparing interpretations of Taiping ideology by both communist and nationalist scholars of the time makes a noteworthy point. While Shih himself is most likely biased in his analysis as well, he acknowledges that each opinion was based in a desire to show that "the Taipings were no more than a band of rebels and that their society differed very little, if any at all, from traditional rebellions" or that "they were patriots and reformers and their movement was the forerunner of modern socialist and communist revolutions."²⁴ The political identity of the two parties vying for power was heavily

²⁴ Vincent Y. C. Shih, "Interpretations of the Taiping Tien-Kuo by Noncommunist Chinese Writers." *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1951): p. 256.

reliant on the connection these entities established with the movements of China's past. In the same manner that the Qing, and the dynasties before it, wrote histories of the preceding power, the Communist Party, the Kuomintang, and the Western world watching them all had motive in asserting one narrative as legitimate over another.

Just like the secondary works discussing them, depositions were products of personal and communal ambitions. They were affected by larger political concerns that confronted both the Qing and the Taiping and are thus a result of two camps battling over external perceptions of their conflict. Taiping depositions are documents riddled with bias and driven by goals that were not always direct or clear. This is due to the fact that each actor involved in writing, editing, and collecting them had an individual purpose to fulfill. This combination of voices resulted in documents that provide glimpses at truth, but more interestingly they provide insight into the relationships between those involved. By looking further into these relationships, scholars gain a more comprehensive understanding of the personal perspectives that made up each camp, rather than exclusively viewing the two groups from an outside, institutional perspective. In addition, depositions allow scholars to consider and observe concerns held by both parties not directly relating to physical damage of the conflict at hand. To analyze Taiping depositions without considering the elements of propaganda they contain, as most previous discussions have, is to misconstrue their role entirely. The depositions collected by the imperial court during the Taiping Civil War were not used exclusively as evidence in court; rather, they existed as tools of narrative. Their existence and prominent publishing in English differentiates them from depositions from previous conflicts, positioning them to influence the perception of the Taiping and Qing in Western eyes, and changing the course of their respective foreign relations.

Chapter 1: A False Confession and a Faked Execution

The Qing Dynasty Makes Its Move

The spring of 1852 was in many ways a turning point in Qing history. The Taiping Civil War had begun to ravage much of the Chinese countryside over the previous two years. As Taiping troops made their first territorial gains and entrenched themselves in their new mission, the leadership of the fledgling regime began to expand its vision of a Christian China. Garrisoned in the city of Yongan for the past six months, Hong Xiuquan's forces were energized and ready to move. It was during the small respite from marching that Yongan provided that Hong Xiuquan and his compatriots began to further expand their vision of a new dominion. As the conflict between Taiping and Qing forces increased daily, Hong had no choice but to claim for himself the Mandate of Heaven, an action exemplifying the pinnacle of imperial ambitions. In response, the Qing dynasty was now forced to acknowledge the newly-christened "Taiping Heavenly Kingdom" as more than the ramblings of discontented outsiders. Doing so, however, was a risk. As the Qing continued to suffer under increasingly one-sided treaties forced upon it by European nations, the dynasty found a way to redefine the advent of the Taiping as not a symptom of its growing weakness, but as an example of its returning strength. The long-promised beginning of this new Taiping-ruled kingdom began a search for an Earthly Paradise. As of April 5, Hong Xiuquan had left Yongan on a journey that would take him to his new capital at Nanjing, a place he would enter dressed in yellow robes. Two days later, members of the Qing court declared that their attack on the Taiping rear had gone well.²⁵ They had captured Hong Daquan, Tian De, or Heavenly Emperor of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.

²⁵ The Taiping renamed the city Tianjing, which translates to Heavenly Capital. The city has historical importance as it served as the capital of multiple dynasties, including but not

According to Franz Michael, who compiled a significant number of translated Taiping documents, Tian De's deposition first appeared in the public eye in English translation as a part of the *Overland China Mail* published on August 23, 1852. It appeared in *The China Mail* three days later.²⁶ These publications most likely came into possession of their variant the same way French expatriates Joseph-Marie Callery and Melchior Yvan, a missionary and politician respectively, did when putting together their contemporary history of the conflict.²⁷ Originally published in 1853, Callery and Yvan wrote their translation when "the Official Gazette of [Beijing] published a decree by which [Tian De] was sentenced to undergo the extreme penalty of the law."²⁸ An article released by *The China Mail* on September 30, addressing the deposition published on August 26 confirmed this, stating that "[t]he confession was kept back by the translator for six weeks, and was not published until the order for [Tian De's] execution appeared in the [*Beijing*] Gazette."²⁹ The more interesting discussion of *The China Mail's* article is not to be found in the publication's delay, but in the reasoning behind its author's further exposition. The vision of Taiping structure and movement the paper had once provided their audience was no longer accurate.

limited to the Eastern Wu, Eastern Jin, and Southern Tang. Most relevant is the Southern Ming dynasty, who established its capital there as it fled the advance of the emerging Qing dynasty.

²⁶ Michael and Chang. *The Taiping Rebellion*. Vol. 2. p. 188.

²⁷ This thesis quotes from the translation used by *The China Mail*. It is interesting to note the differences between translations. While the general form and information remains the same, authors often choose to word the deposition differently depending on their personal political preferences. Less notable, but still curious is the fact that certain facts vary between translations, such as the date on which the Taiping captured the city of Yong'an.

²⁸ Joseph-Marie Callery and Dr. Yvan, *History of the Insurrection in China*. trans. by John Oxenford (New York City: Paragon Books Reprint, 1969), p. 133.

²⁹ "The China Mail." *The China Mail* (Hong Kong), September 30, 1852. p. 158.

The second related issue of *The China Mail*, circulated on September 30, retracted all previous statements that may have implied the authenticity of said document. Basing its decision on arguments forwarded by British missionary, Sir John William Bowring, and American physician, Peter Parker, the paper questioned “whether this [Hong]...was ever the [Tian De] of [Guangxi]? [A]nd [if] not, whether the insurgents now have such a leader?”³⁰ Having decided that the deposition was most likely forged to some extent, *The China Mail* struggled to understand why the Qing might have done such a thing. An uncited source told the paper that it would have been quite unlikely that the Qing personnel responsible for Tian De’s supposed capture and transport to Beijing would have “taken the trouble to foist a scapegoat on the Prime Minister.”³¹ Neither could *The China Mail* understand what motive could have driven these imperial actors to frame the wrong man as a Taiping leader, seeing such a move as full of risk and causing short-lived relief at best, before they are found out. In some capacity, by asking these questions, *The China Mail* proves that the Qing did have reason to fabricate such a document. Suspicions of Qing forgery were not unfounded. From the time *The China Mail* originally published its translation, up until the publication’s subsequent retracting of its endorsement of the documents’ authenticity, the Qing could gain critical time in planning its next move. The imperial court could only benefit from incurring conversation around the motives and actions of the Taiping themselves as this would delay Western involvement on either side.

One reason why the authenticity of Tian De’s deposition mattered was that it made claims central to the legitimacy of the Christian adherence of the movement. A key segment of the deposition stated that Hong Xiuquan “had relied upon his magical arts for assistance” and

³⁰ “The China Mail.” *The China Mail* (Hong Kong), September 30, 1852. p. 158.

³¹ *Ibid.*

that “he was both a wine-bobber and a licentious man, having thirty-six women with him.”³² Such an attack by a supposedly-high ranking Taiping official might not have inferred anything about the movement’s progress or successes, but it did speak to the unorthodoxy of its people’s Christian belief. Talk of Hong’s surmised harem would be a contentious topic of discussion for years to come. Marriage practices played a vital role in *The Taeping as They Were*, a document written by “One of Them” and published in 1864. The pamphlet, which took an overwhelmingly positive point of view on the movement, found in their marriage practices evidence of their religious piety and overall compliance with Western moral standards.³³ This questioning of the basic moral stance of Taiping leadership, in addition to an earlier mention of Hong’s consorting with demons, seriously put into question any arguments made by Protestant missionaries on behalf of their new Christian kin.

The deposition of Tian De takes advantage of the ambiguity that accompanied the translation of both language and cultural concepts. The deposition’s use of “devils” may just as well have been referring to the Taiping leadership’s willingness to collaborate with foreigners as much as it could have implied the summoning of ghosts, demons, and other figures deemed heretical to a Western, Judeo-Christian audience. The difficulty of translating cultural concepts worked heavily in the imperial court’s advantage, allowing the document to mean two different things to two groups of people, and do damage to the Taiping reputation regardless. Similarly confusing to Western audiences was Chinese naming convention. The fact that Hong Xiuquan and Hong Daquan share a family name was a source of confusion for many Western viewers,

³² “The China Mail.” *The China Mail* (Hong Kong), August 26, 1852. p. 138.

³³ “One of Them.”, *The Taepings as They Were*. (London: Arthur Hall, Smart & Allen, 1864), pp. 26 – 28.

especially for those whose exposure to the language was limited and filtered through transliteration. That both of their political titles contained the character for heaven did not make distinguishing between the two any easier. Of course, Chinese commentators may just have easily confused the two names and titles, and any confusion on their behalf would have only made the task of translating and then understanding much more difficult.

The China Mail was seemingly uninterested in addressing a question central to understanding the purpose of Taiping depositions. Who were the intended readers of these documents? While the following chapter in this thesis will consider the depositions of dissidents to be primarily aimed toward an active, foreign audience, there were more factors at play this early in the Taiping conflict. Just as the Qing had hoped to assuage foreign fears and persuade Western powers to at least stay neutral, if not become pro-Qing, the same work had to have been done for the Chinese elite, a group of people whose role in imperial society was rapidly transforming. According to Jonathan Spence, the Qing controlled over five million square miles of territory at the beginning of the nineteenth century.³⁴ The empire's borders might have adjusted slightly by the start of the Taiping Civil War, but the point persists: the Qing empire was vast, and information travelled slowly. The first few years of conflict found its direct consequences fairly contained. Violence was limited to southern provinces like Guangxi and Hunan, and even then, was focused more narrowly on regions around both the Xiang River and West River basin. Just as the West was limited in its understanding of the Taiping due to geographic constraints, so were the majority of Qing commoners and gentry. At this point, Taiping doctrine was still forming and a mystery to most outsiders. Unless Qing officials could

³⁴ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York City: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2012), p. 32.

successfully assert a narrative of Taiping ideology in line with their own understanding of the movement, the dynasty feared losing the support of those who provided them with both their financial base and political strength on a local level.

The deposition of Tian De neutralized these potential political threats in a few ways. The deposition praised the military prowess of individual generals; perhaps as a rhetorical strategy inflating the impressiveness by which the Qing had caught Tian De and routed the rest of his army. At the same time, it painted the overall hierarchical structure of the Taiping in a much more negative light. Tian De stated that “[i]n action, whoever backed out was executed, and their officers severely punished[.]”³⁵ The deposition’s introduction similarly set a disapproving tone. In it, Tian De indirectly declared himself to be a *guanggun* (光棍), a term often used in Chinese history to describe wandering, unattached men. The increase in unattached men, or “rootless rascals,” was not a welcomed reality in the nineteenth century. Edicts imposed by both the Qianlong and Jiaqing emperors, fifth and sixth emperors of the Qing dynasty, specifically targeted *guanggun*, blaming them for what these rulers saw as a destruction of Confucius values.³⁶ Elites of the period believed that these *guanggun* “ruptured the boundaries of the household and threatened to violate the women (and young boys) within.”³⁷ With this in mind, the picture the deposition of Tian De sketched was not one of a rising freedom force, here to expel China’s oppressors, but a group of unsuccessful and now angry men. This was a group to be feared, a group that would not give the current class of literati or the newly established

³⁵ “The China Mail.” *The China Mail* (Hong Kong), August 26, 1852. p. 138.

³⁶ Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. 2000), p. 353.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 97.

merchant elite greater political and financial power, but one that would turn on them as quickly as they might have welcomed them in. Another facet of the confession is the state in which it left the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. By the very fact of Tian De's capture, in conjunction with his recollection of how he had last seen the Taiping forces, readers saw a group of scattered rebels forced to run away. It is as if the Qing had managed to pose its inconclusive victory, evident by Tian De's mention of the survival of Hong Xiuquan and other vital Taiping leaders, as a penultimate blow landed on a soon to be irrelevant enemy.

The Façade Manifests

The performance of power is an activity the Qing dynasty had been well versed in at this stage of its ruling career. One way in which the imperial court showcased this expertise during the events surrounding Tian De's deposition was through his execution. Jian Youwen, a prominent scholar from the Republic of China and at one point, a pastor, notes the "considerable fanfare" that accompanied Hong's capture and travel to Beijing.³⁸ Whether intentional or not, Tian De's capture had become a performance on the imperial stage. Lindsay Brine, an author and member of the British Royal Navy, provides his readers with a closer look into the execution, quoting from the Board of Punishments at Beijing. "The [Guangxi] rebel chief ... was put to death by being slowly cut into small pieces...and his head was exposed as a warning to all."³⁹ Why celebrate in such a tremendous fashion if the war had not yet been won? The dynasty may have used this as an opportunity to discourage further resistance, like they had done during the Eight Trigrams Uprising, or to exude an air of confidence.⁴⁰ Later doubts on the

³⁸ Jian Youwen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 84.

³⁹ Brine, *The Taiping Rebellion in China*, p. 130.

identity of Tian De strengthen claims of performance on behalf of the Qing dynasty, who easily could have used a random figure to reach its end goal. Take the southern inspection tours of the Kangxi and Qianlong emperors as examples of the dynasty's performative history. While these journeys, six for each emperor, did allow the emperor to personally survey his empire, in effect they were much more about strategic presentation and consolidation of outside belief than they were anything else.

The Qing are not unique in this, as performing power is prevalent in all government histories. Japan historian William Coaldrake points to the process of *shikinen sengu* (式年遷宮), a rebuilding process, as a display of government performance. This process involved the periodical renewing of important Shinto shrines from the ground up; it was an action that required a great number of resources and laborers. Through these construction projects the presiding Japanese emperor could emphasize his connection to the heavens and remind the people around the shrine of his power. They did this by both engaging a large section of the populace in a labor project as well as by creating an enduring monument to the emperor's authority.⁴¹

The performativity of Tian De's execution becomes exceptionally notable after looking at the two depositions featured in the next chapter of this thesis. Both depositions were published around the closing of the war, during, or immediately after the snuffing out of the largest Taiping threat to the imperial court. In addition, both depositions came from confirmed leaders of the Taiping, leaders who were in no way peripheral figures. These were, in the eyes of the forces

⁴⁰ Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China*, p. 188.

⁴¹ William H. Coaldrake, *Architecture and Authority in Japan* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 37 – 42.

who followed them, the armies that resisted them, and the Western eyes who watched them, the two central figures in the later stage blossoming of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, without whom the movement would not have survived as long as it did. There was no celebration accompanying the capture of these leaders. The first, Li Xiucheng, was executed, somewhat surreptitiously, before his captors even reached Beijing. The second, Hong Rengan, was left to seethe in the presence of the “Manchu devils” he so despised for an entire month, forced to read the depositions of those caught before him, before he was executed quietly less than a week after the death of his sovereign. The prominence the Qing attributed to the performative execution of Tian De does not inherently inform an audience on the dynasty's motives for doing so. While the contrast between the events surrounding the lives of these depositions is notable, it may very well be explained by the difference in circumstances and contemporary relations surrounding the events. At this stage, the Qing had to convince the entire world to fight alongside it, whereas later on the dynasty only had to prove that this decision to do so had been the right one. This aspect of Tian De’s deposition speaks to the fact that these documents were used as much more than just archival court evidence. They were not meant to be lost in a sea of records within a government gazette, but to be broadcast far and wide. Depositions were a singular, yet important, element of a larger effort at promoting Qing success. They were vital to encouraging the stability of current rule through the assertion of a dynasty-approved narrative.

An Imposter’s Disguise

The confession credited to Tian De followed the standard format attributed to imperially-collected depositions prior to the Taiping Civil War, as discussed in this thesis’ introduction. For sake of analysis, it can be divided into three distinct sections. The document begins with a declaration of identity, in which Tian De recounted his familial connections, geographic origins,

and early history. The purpose of this section in most depositions was to assist the members of the court in confirming that the identity of the prisoner in question was the same as the one they aimed to prosecute. The middle of the deposition consisted of a telling of Tian De's joining up with the Taiping forces, and his subsequent actions while amongst them. This included his rise to power. The point of this was to determine what crimes against the empire the deliverer perpetrated so that the court might properly condemn and sentence said prisoner. This information also gave the court a clearer picture of what was actually occurring throughout the realm by allowing it to compare and contrast what its members have been told with more formal reports. The final section of Tian De's deposition served as an indication of Taiping motives. It is here that Tian De formally separates himself from the rest of the movement. He revealed himself as an individual and independent actor, one whose goals did not align with the Taiping movement as a whole.

In a move that contradicts statements from his first paragraph, where he admits to studying military strategy after failing his examinations several times, Tian De states: "I wore a yellow robe, and I did not of my own will desire to sit on the king's throne."⁴² What to the uninitiated eye may come across as a vain recognition of fashion choice was in reality a denunciation of Taiping goals. Historically, yellow had been the exclusive domain of the imperial lineage. Hong Xiuquan may have called himself the Heavenly King, but by donning yellow clothing he clearly denoted himself as an emperor, poised to directly challenge the legitimacy of over two centuries of Qing rule. Context for this statement is provided in the previous few sentences, in which the persona of Tian De listed a large number of Taiping leaders who were similarly clad in yellow, establishing that the entire Taiping populace used the color.

⁴² "The China Mail." *The China Mail* (Hong Kong), August 26, 1852. p. 138.

The translated sentence, which is admittedly worded a bit confusingly, has more than one level of complexity to it. Translated differently by Franz Michael the sentence reads as follows: “[w]hile in the official residence, I also had a yellow robe and a yellow cap. Since I did not uphold myself as a *wang*, nor sit at court, I did not wear them.”⁴³ This variety of available translation can be seen in many other places, such as the contemporaneous Callery and Yvan history. These differences do not change the content of the deposition; rather, they shift the tone of the document, adjusting its words to better align with the translator’s political leanings.

If this deposition had in fact been put together by officials in Beijing in hopes of controlling outside perspectives on the conflict, what did they gain from separating Tian De from the rest of the movement? What was the reasoning behind portraying him as less committed to the end goal? This image presented foreign readers with a Taiping Kingdom that had not yet found its direction, a kingdom who had, to invoke the rhetoric of naming discussed by Stephen Platt and Tobie Meyer-Fong, been made up of bickering, imploding rebels rather than a strong-willed and focused young kingdom. The excerpt also relayed the fact that this new power may not be as receptive to a dominating West as some nations hoped the Taiping would be. With “secular” moderates like Tian De and the triad faction he supposedly represented out of the picture, no one was left to push back against Hong Xiuquan’s radical utopian path. This newly-concentrated Taiping would be much more difficult to deal with than the subdued Qing dynasty that had been working with the West at that moment. Of course, this would only be a reality provided the dynasty did not remove the Taiping threat soon, which with a bout of arguably unwarranted confidence, it promised to do.

⁴³ A *wang* (王), or king, served as the upper echelon of Taiping political, religious, and military command.

Tian De's unwillingness to wear the robes of an emperor is not the only way in which the man separated himself from the rest of his cohort. His lack of belief in the religious element of the Taiping mission is never directly stated, but it is heavily implied throughout the deposition's writing. It is particularly evident in the document's second paragraph, which finds Tian De berating the central Taiping leadership's claim to divine origin as such: "[w]ith these flaming words [Hong Xiuquan and Feng Yunshan] beguiled the members of the association, so that none of them left it."⁴⁴ This emphasis on Tian De's lack of religious fervor would become important to many critics of the Taiping later on, and at the time was vital in defining perceptions of the movement. Commentary from *The China Mail* from the same issue, focused on the fate of a town in Guangxi and another in Hunan, addresses this perception. "It would appear that bands of dispersed insurgents...have been committing great excesses wherever they have come, sparing neither the lives nor property of those who fall into power."⁴⁵ The paper was convinced that those at the ground level of the Taiping are only ever changed from "their former condition of marauding banditti" by the sheer will power of those leading them, who in turn only did so out of "a desire to win the people's confidence."⁴⁶ This concern about the behavior of Taiping troops is connected to Tian De's feelings toward Taiping Christianity. In conjuncture with the image of a soon to be unified radical leadership, *The China Mail's* message was that if Tian De and the other reports the paper had collected were to be believed, should the Taiping movement begin to gain any more momentum than it already had it would become a force to truly fear. The deposition's construction of Tian De exploited the distance between the various camps making

⁴⁴ "The China Mail." *The China Mail* (Hong Kong), August 26, 1852. p. 138.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

up the Taiping. The conflict between Tian De's moderates, who used the Christian faith as a mere unifier, and the religious extremists following Hong Xiuquan, undermined the legitimacy of the movement. The deposition had created the perfect enemy, a group made up of opportunists rather than freedom fighters, a group of Christian imposters rather than soldiers of Heaven. In this way the imperial court hoped to enlist the assistance of Western nations who might have otherwise come to the aid of these newly-Christened brethren.

Perceptions of the Truth

“This confession is true.”⁴⁷ Thus concludes each translation of Hong Daquan's deposition, just as many had ended before his and as Hong Tianguai Fu's deposition would end twelve years later. Of course, as this chapter has shown, not everyone believed this to be the case. The previously mentioned Callery and Yvan were not subdued in their passionate support of the Taiping by the document, rather they had grown more inflamed by this “perfidious intention to compromise the Christians.”⁴⁸ According to the authors, the deposition was the product of politicians in Beijing and a part of a larger attempt to discredit Christianity and convince the West of the consequences that would result from Taiping success. This notion that a victorious Taiping Kingdom would rid its ports of foreign influence and bar any access to the region was a common thread amongst Qing propaganda efforts, one that was based on an already rampant fear. Ironically enough, Stephen Platt points out that the eventual result of the Qing victory was essentially the same. The Qing may not have passed any laws banning foreign trade, but peace lacked the economic stimulus that the war had provided. The conflict had acted as a stimulus, favoring the safety foreign merchants could provide. The end of the war resulted in a

⁴⁷ “The China Mail.” *The China Mail* (Hong Kong), August 26, 1852. p. 138.

⁴⁸ Callery and Yvan, *History of the Insurrection in China*, p. 138.

mass exit of investments in foreign services and significant financial downturns.⁴⁹ Confessions like that of Tian De's could not predict which outcome would best suit foreign nations, but they did allow for foreign politicians to gather the evidence they needed to argue for one side or the other.

Thomas Meadows, an English author and interpreter for the British consulate in Guangzhou, ardently believed that Hong Xiuquan and his followers were the next in a series of revitalizing forces “that can clear the political atmosphere when it has become sultry and oppressive” just as the Manchus had once been to the Ming dynasty.⁵⁰ In his comprehensive study on the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, informed by his own experiences in China, Meadows did not seriously take into account the possibility of a Tian De. Relegating the conversation to a single footnote halfway through the book's over six hundred pages, Meadows asserted that any debate over Tian De was the result of a translation mishap. “[T]he sinologue will readily perceive how the mandarin-pronouncing Imperialist Officers would fall into the error of substituting [Tian De] for [Tian Gui], and consider it the title adopted by the rebel leader.”⁵¹ Meadows ended his footnote by reiterating to his readers that they must not take the proposition of a Tian De seriously. There never was a man named Hong Daquan. Even if there was, any connection to or a power equivalent to that of Hong Xiuquan he claimed to have was based in

⁴⁹ Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*, p. 360.

⁵⁰ Thomas Taylor Meadows. *The Chinese and their Rebellions: viewed in connection with their national philosophy, ethics, legislation, and administration. To which is added, an essay on civilization and its present state in the East and West* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1856), p. 464.

⁵¹ Meadows, *The Chinese and their Rebellions*, p. 240.

“the desire to die as a person of importance,” or a result of the torture to which he must have been subjected.⁵²

As a contemporary observer, his book published the same year that rumors of Tian De began to circulate, Meadows was in no place to speak on the impact of such a potentially false deposition. His commentary does, however, emphasize that people believed there to be an importance in understanding the role Tian De claimed to play, and what that resulted in for an understanding of Taiping hierarchy. Meadows might not have had more to say on the subject, but what he did have to say assumed that the confusion born out of the deposition of Tian De had a role in defining the kingdom’s narrative as seen by the Western world. This assumption proved true down the line, as authors like the previously mentioned Lindsay Brine continued to discuss the fate of Tian De. Brine, while opposed to Meadows’ belief that Tian De never existed, left his stance slightly more open to convincing. Brine weighed the arguments for both possibilities before securing his allegiance to a specific interpretation. He was impressed with the trove of knowledge Tian De seemed to possess about the affairs of other Taiping leaders and Taiping actions in general, his knowledge reconciling imperial, Taiping, and independent reports. That his existence falls in line with previous rumors Brine had heard, specifically those of a priest who claimed to descend from the Ming and had recently been strategically promoted to the rank of emperor within the Taiping camp, only furthered his convictions. This in turn helps explain why the Taiping counted years as Tian De one, or Tian De two before they entered Nanjing, as it was tradition in dynastic history to refer to the year by the reign date of the presiding emperor. Furthermore, Brine believes that the risk those faking a confession would have run would have been too high, and would have been rather impractical, just as *The China*

⁵² Meadows, *The Chinese and their Rebellions*, p. 241.

Mail originally believed. The immediacy of Tian De's transportation to Beijing only enhances this perspective. Brine gave credence, although not as much, to evidence pointing toward the possibility that Tian De was an imperial construct. As such he finds the lack of mention of Tian De in any Taiping documents concerning.⁵³ Brine, like Meadows, does not delve into the realm of consequences for Tian De's existence, but the fact that he dedicates such space to the discussion of the figure even after the conflict has developed much further indicates that foreign observers felt that the truth of the situation held some sort of importance. Observers paid attention to what was said in depositions, they placed weight in the messages these documents sent.

A Goal Achieved

Tian De's deposition was a tool for maintaining status quo. The document did more than just sow confusion about the goals and leadership of the Taiping movement, it declared the Christian conquest dead in its tracks. Commentary from *The China Mail's* discussion of the deposition noted that the document confirmed what other sources had already hinted at. All information pointed to the reality that imperial forces "had been singularly successful in dispersing the insurgents: in so much that among the Canton Chinese, who have taken any interest in the matter, as well as by the better informed foreigners, the rebellion is regarded as checked, if not finished."⁵⁴ As history has shown, this assertion was anything but true. It would be another twelve years before the Taiping officially fell to imperial forces in Nanjing. What did Qing officials gain from promoting such a false view of Taiping progress? They gained security. By spreading the false notion that the movement's momentum had begun to sputter out, the Qing

⁵³ Brine, *The Taiping Rebellion in China*, pp. 129 – 138.

⁵⁴ "The China Mail." *The China Mail* (Hong Kong), August 26, 1852. p. 138.

dynasty hoped to influence core perceptions amongst the Western powers keeping track of the growing conflict. The first perception was an assertion that everything within the dynasty's borders was under control. No foreign aid was needed in quelling unrest, seeing as the Qing was just as strong as it had ever been. Whether the court's subjects, or the court itself, actually believed that is doubtful, but the image of strength is often just as important as strength itself, especially when one's audience is an ocean away. Secondly, it calmed any growing fears that might be found in foreign nations who had invested or involved themselves in the affected regions. Unrest meant potential for loss, both political and financial. The deposition aimed to show Western nations that they need not fear for their own fates in Asia nor should they underestimate the capabilities of the dynasty. If the Qing could convince the Western world that it had everything under control, the dynasty could decrease the risk of greater involvement and presence from Western nations, something the dynasty's rulers already had more of than they would have liked. Capturing the opposition's leader was a drastic and effective way of doing this.

To believe that around 1852 a Qing army had taken a man named Hong Daquan into custody for connections to the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom is not a significant stretch. The more contentious aspect of the story surrounding this questionable deposition is what role this man actually played in the Kingdom, if he played a role at all. This topic has been the primary focus of most discussions past scholars have engaged in revolving around the deposition of Tian De. While the nature of Tian De's true identity is a vital aspect of scholarly debate, the domineering presence of this conversation tends to outweigh other critical elements of historical study. For example, almost no discussion of the Taiping reaction, or more accurately the lack thereof, to Tian De's capture and execution exists in the popular canon of Taiping studies. The purpose of

arguing over Tian De's existence is moot if there are no consequences to his actuality. It is important to understand that if the extent of his deposition's truthfulness is proven to be severely limited, then his deposition, and those that would come after, must be viewed under an entirely new lens.

Afterlife and Impact

Luo Ergang, a man who had served as Director of the Taiping Historical Museum, is one historian who argued in favor of the theory that a man by the name of Hong Daquan never existed. As will be further discussed about other Chinese historians in the next chapter, this opinion may have been based in political bias as marked by his loyalty to the Communist Party. Without viewing this fact as inherently negative or positive, as Luo's research was vital in establishing what modern scholars know about the Taiping today, it is important to note that his work was often praised by Mao Zedong, and was probably influenced by Luo's distinctly Leftist lens. Seeing as members of the Communist Party envisioned the Taiping movement as their predecessors in many ways, there was an advantage to spinning the Qing as a malicious entity, as well as in taking the movement's lack of mention of a Tian De at face value.

A chapter in James Hail's *Tseng Kwo-Fan and the Taiping Rebellion*, an early study entitled "The Suppressed Leader" and published in 1927, proposed a version of Hong Daquan unlike the typical narrative provided by those in favor of his existence. In it, Hail lists five insights that he believed provided proof not only for Hong's existence, but for his position as a player of significant power in the early Taiping administrative structure. These included the fact that the Qing took note of Hong in the first place, thinking it useful to capture him alive and transfer him to Beijing. This, however, may not have been as deliberate as Hail believed. There is just as much reason to believe that Hong claimed to be important once captured in hopes of

trading off this made up title for an improved chance at survival while in captivity. Other elements, such as his claim to being from Hunan, were tested. While that may have been true, a single aspect of one's identity is not proof of any other facets of a person's history. The third and fourth points revolve around Hong's title, something Hail claimed to clearly separate him from Hong Xiuquan, a fact which was apparently well known prior to the existence of the deposition. Both of these arguments had been previously discredited by Thomas Meadows.

The final point, and to Hail, "crowning proof of [the document's authenticity]...lies in the remarkable understanding [Hong] has of the Tian Wang, who, to the followers of lower rank, must have appeared, through the glamour of imperial seclusion, a very able leader."⁵⁵ To Hail's credit, after declaring Hong to be a legitimate player in the Taiping struggle and identifying him as a man named Zhu Jiudao, he outlines what this new reality might imply for understanding the Taiping, a point many scholars never reach in their analysis of the deposition of Tian De. Importantly, Hail also provides reasoning for the lack of mention of Hong Daquan in other Taiping documents and historical records, another aspect often neglected in research. He attributed this to mass suppression efforts resulting from the shame in losing a leader; efforts also evident in the "deliberate editing" of one of Taiping leader Yang Xiuqing's "speeches in order to omit reference to the presence of Triads among the following."⁵⁶ While this might be true, Hail never cited any proof of this, leaving it to mere speculation, should the reader accept his other premises on Hong Daquan as true. The only time in which Hail did cite in this situation was to quote his opponents, like Thomas Meadows, who claimed that Hong's existence was the result of

⁵⁵ James W. Hail, *Tseng Kuo-Fan and the Taiping Rebellion: With A Short Sketch of His Later Career* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), p. 61.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 72.

a clerical error, a stance taken after Meadows interviewed multiple members of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and searched for elements of editing and suppression in their documents.⁵⁷ While there exists precedent for a mass intentional coverup of information amongst dissenting forces, as shown by the Nian mentioned in this thesis's introduction, precedent alone cannot justify Hail's conjecture.

It is necessary to keep in mind that Hail's research, while at times in-depth and impressive, is not without bias or intention. His language reveals that he wanted Hong's confession to be real, positing that he might actually have descended from the line of Ming emperors. He wrote as if driven to see Hong Xiuquan knocked from his rung as at the top of the Taiping political ladder. Hail refers to Taiping religious belief as "iconoclastic, fanatical" and goes on to berate Hong Xiuquan as all too willing to "dwell in his well-filled harem and indulge his religious vagaries, while his generals won victories and ordered the government in his name."⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that this assertion of extreme military and political capability on behalf of Hong Daquan was part of what caused authors Callery and Yvan to doubt the document's validity in the first place.⁵⁹ Hail did not view this as an exaggeration aimed at taking down Hong Xiuquan. Having taken the statement at face value, he seriously doubted anyone who claims the Tian Wang could have possibly been behind what he sees as the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's unlikely success and momentum. In addition, he refers to the God-Worshipping community as "pawns," useful only in fulfilling the conquest dreams of both Hongs. Hail's commentary, while based in historical research, was likely influenced by his

⁵⁷ Meadows, *The Chinese and their Rebellions*, p. 241.

⁵⁸ Hail, *Tseng Kuo-Fan and the Taiping Rebellion*, pp. 61 – 63.

⁵⁹ Callery and Yvan, *History of the Insurrection in China*, p. 140.

environment. Raised by two Presbyterian missionaries, and having himself earned a bachelor's degree in Divinity at Yale, Hail's traditional Christian leanings most likely predisposed him to be opposed to any sort of Taiping interpretation of his chosen religious beliefs. In addition, his book was published in 1927, a year after his family's expulsion from China by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces. This new dynamic between Hail and the Chinese government, who through both Chiang and Sun Yat-sen viewed Hong Xiuquan and the Taiping as a first wave of a nationalist revolution, may have sparked a bitterness in his writing.⁶⁰ It would be hard to imagine that these circumstances did not play some role in forming his opinions on change in China as such.⁶¹

Whether or not a legitimate connection between Hail's environment and his research can be drawn is uncertain. This discussion does, however, remind the reader that every author possesses bias, and often has a purpose in setting out to write on a specific subject. Hail's analysis of Tian De often veers too much on the side of a larger ad hominem attack campaign aimed at Hong Xiuquan and forced together narratives too subjective to be considered useful in deciphering the identity of the man called Tian De. His overall message, however, is useful. Hong Daquan might not have been the military and political mastermind Hail believed him to be, but to write him off as a mistake in the annals of history is to ignore the fact that Tian De has had an impact. Tian De's existence might be questionable, but the discussion around him is just as vital in interpreting the narrative that defined the outcome of, and continues to influence the conversation around, the Taiping Civil War.

⁶⁰ Vincent Y. C. Shih, *The Taiping Ideology: Its Sources, Interpretations, and Influences* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), pp. 493 – 495.

⁶¹ *Wooster Daily Record* (Wooster), June 12, 1963. p. 2.

Teng Ssu-yü, a history professor at Indiana University who worked closely John K. Fairbank, one of the period's leading Sinologists, championed a third vision of Hong Daquan. Originally proposed by Jian Youwen in 1946, Teng conceded to people like Hail that the written confession of Tian De was not "entirely apocryphal, whereas the [Beijing] confession seems to have been scamped by some clerk during or after the examination."⁶² Both Teng and Jian believed that a person named Hong Daquan did in fact exist, and most likely had served with the Taiping for some time before his capture. They back this up by stating that unlike later Qing-associated generals, whose extra-military positions required them to maintain broader focuses, those who captured Hong had little reason to lie to the imperial court about their progress. Forcing identities on prisoners was an unnecessary deed when the actual work being done was already satisfactory. On the Beijing side of things, officials possessed the motivation that the army lacked. Military campaigns were progressing as well as could be realistically expected. Victory might not have been secured yet, but the conflict was still very much in its infancy, and people like Saishanga had only positive notes to pass along to their superiors. It was the emperor and his officials who had to worry about maintaining the loyalty of their literate subjects or keep the hungering nations of the West at bay.

Later analysis from Teng found him backpedaling. He was no longer willing to hear out the arguments of people like James Hail. In Teng's *The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers*, published in 1971, Hong Daquan is explicitly mentioned five times. In each of these discussions Hong was directly associated with the leaders of the Heaven and Earth Societies, or Triads, that the leaders of the Taiping knowingly worked in conjunction with during the early

⁶² Teng Ssu-yü, *New Light on the History of the Taiping Rebellion* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), p. 24.

stages of their recruiting efforts. Teng only connects Hong with the Taiping more closely when he discusses the inaccurate reports that plagued government-run and private publications throughout the conflict's course. He notes that "[r]iots by secret societies and despoliation by bandits had been confused with the activities of God-Worshippers in early accounts. [Hong Xiuquan] was confused with a certain [Hong Daquan] who adopted the title of [Tian De Wang] (King of Celestial Virtue)."⁶³ Teng went on to reject Hail's identification of Hong as Triad leader Zhu Jiudao, instead affirming Jian Youwen's belief that Hong was in reality a man known as Jiao Liang. Jian's vision of Jiao was much different from Hail's discussion of Zhu. Jiao was not a military mastermind, but a low-level official, one who had entered the Taiping ranks through the Triads. It was Jian's belief that Jiao had never received any official title from the Taiping. His friendly relationship with Taiping authorities, due to his Triad experience, had accorded him the respect of being called "Master Hong," but all this "ended abruptly in [Yongan zhou] and the so-called Hong Daquan was put in chains by the Taiping leaders."⁶⁴ Teng also looked to Guo Dingyi, another Chinese scholar of the first half of the twentieth century, when forwarding this identification. Guo also believed that the man responsible for Tian De's capture, the previously mentioned Saishanga, had "inserted some words into [Hong's] confession in order to exaggerate his merit."⁶⁵ Teng was unsure of this statement's validity. According to the *Qing shilu* (清實錄), or the "Veritable records of the Qing dynasty," the court had been rather satisfied with their force's progress up until that point, giving Saishanga no reason to lie about his

⁶³ Teng Ssu-yü, *The Taiping and the Western Powers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1971), pp. 183 – 184.

⁶⁴ Jian, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, p. 84.

⁶⁵ Teng, *New Light on the History of the Taiping Rebellion*, p. 103.

prisoner's identity. In a turn of events, Saishanga had actually lost rank after he presented the court his new prisoner.⁶⁶ All of this contributed to Teng's belief that the man known as Hong Daquan was in reality a rather minor player in Taiping bureaucracy, and that his deposition had been put together by officials in Beijing, not by those in the field. The belief that Hong Daquan was in reality Jiao Liang was also asserted by Chin Shunshin, an award-winning Taiwanese-Japanese author, who claimed Jiao had been attempting to cause dissension amongst the Taiping ranks, although he cites no sources and is primarily known for his fiction.⁶⁷ By asserting one name over another, Teng and Jian denied the legitimacy of all claims made by Hail on Hong Daquan's suspected political authority over Hong Xiuquan's religious claim to the Taiping throne.

Discussion of Tian De as a prevalent actor during the early events of the Taiping Civil War dissipates amongst scholars in the 1970s. Neither his name nor his confession is mentioned in any comprehensive detail, outside of the occasional inconsequential footnote or paragraph, in the more modern works of Jonathan Spence, Stephen Platt, and Tobie Meyer-Fong. This lack of discussion on behalf of the field's foremost scholars must be considered. Platt's mention barely touches upon the consequences of Tian De's presence at all. The single sentence devoted to the man is used exclusively to explain the lack of clear information available, and the lack of interest most foreigners had in the conflict during its first few years.⁶⁸ One reason for this dearth of modern analysis might be the fact that, as pointed out by Teng Ssu-yü, the original confession

⁶⁶ Teng, *New Light on the History of the Taiping Rebellion*, pp. 103 – 104.

⁶⁷ Chin Shunshin, *The Taiping Rebellion*, trans. Joshua A. Fogel (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2001), pp. 262 – 264.

⁶⁸ Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*, p. 9.

and its surrounding documents have yet to be uncovered, all prevalent information coming from published translations and the discussions surrounding these circulating versions.⁶⁹ Those academic conversations that did occur were not as all-encompassing as they could have been. Teng may have continued the conversation on Hong's existence, but he did not take Hail's bait as to discussing his impact, leaving the subject entirely untouched. As will be shown in the next chapter, analysis of Taiping depositions remains rooted in minutia, rather than engaged in larger cultural context and effect. Historical study on Tian De is stuck in decoding who exactly this person was. This is important for creating a framework for which to view the deposition because if, as this chapter argues, that Tian De was merely a blank canvas that officials in Beijing could project their own motives onto, a much different discussion is to be had than if Tian De was in fact a Taiping leader erased from history. The conversation never passes this stage though. The impact these publicly circulated documents may have had on defining the way onlookers viewed the struggle, formed their opinions on it, and decided how to act around it, is rarely considered in detail, if considered at all.

The deposition of Tian De set the stage for interpretations of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom for years to come. Hong Daquan's words would echo in the ears of merchants, missionaries, and politicians throughout the Western world. Through him the Qing dynasty was able to successfully put into question not only the chances of a Taiping victory, but also force Western powers to consider whether or not a Taiping-run China was something they actually desired. Hong's focus on his own pre-meditated entrance into the Taiping ranks and their divergent Christian practices caused apprehension amongst previously devoted Taiping supporters. The questionable nature of the document's origin, and arguments over its

⁶⁹ Teng, *New Light on the History of the Taiping Rebellion*, p. 104.

truthfulness, meant that the process by which Western audience's understood future depositions was similarly altered. Depositions would be placed under much stricter scrutiny than they had been before. In terms of impact on the Qing perspective, the amount of discussion the document brought into existence reinforced the belief that these documents did have power in the public realm. As few foreigners had access to the Taiping themselves, any glance at their inner thoughts was jumped at and read eagerly by foreign audiences. Tian De's deposition may have made commentators more cautious in their analysis of depositions' meanings, but it also proved that these same people had little ability to confirm what was fiction and what was truth. Their ability to differentiate relied heavily on the words of few experts and left vastly different interpretations open to widespread acceptance. The content of Tian De's deposition, and discussions surrounding it must be viewed as biased and goal-oriented if secondary analysis is to properly evaluate the documents purpose and role.

Chapter 2: The Recanting of the Faithful King and the Movement's Last Stand

A Surprise Visit

Augustus F. Lindley could not believe his eyes. The date was October 22, 1864, and for the first time since their parting interview in Wuxi, he was reading the words of an old friend. These, however, were not the words of the man he thought he knew. The man's name was Li Xiucheng, but he was more commonly referred to in China as the "Zhong Wang" of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, or the "Faithful King" for the English-speaking contemporaries paying attention to this fourteen-year conflict.⁷⁰ A talented military commander and vital leader in the later days of the Taiping conquest, Li was in many ways viewed as the Kingdom's last hope. His capture outside of the town of Fangshan a mere three days after the fall of Nanjing marked an end to any serious attempt at victory on behalf of the Taiping. He was one of the more well-known Taiping generals amongst Europeans and is consequentially one of the more controversial figures of the war. To those like Lindley he was "the most restless and determined of all the desperadoes Taeping-dom has sent forth."⁷¹ As described by *The Newcastle Courant*, Li was "the only man whom the Taeping movement has produced on the rebel side who gave any proof of military talent, or any sign of having learnt the prudence of moderation in war."⁷² To others, he was nothing more than a heathen working under the guise of Taiping sovereignty for his own gain. This is why, on October 22, when the *North China Herald*, the primary news source for

⁷⁰ "Loyal King" is the standard translation among today's historians. This thesis uses "Faithful King" to reflect the Christian lens through which Western audiences perceived depositions at the time of release.

⁷¹ "The Capture of Nankin." *The Times* (London), October 1, 1864. p. 12.

⁷² "The Capture of Nankin." *The Newcastle Courant* (Newcastle), September 30, 1864. p. 3.

English-speaking foreigners based in China, published a document known as “The Autographic Deposition of [Zhong] Wang, The Faithful King, at his Trial After the Capture of [Nanjing],” Lindley found himself angered and at a loss for words. What had happened to the man Lindley hoped to claim as a hero back home? This chapter will analyze the impact that Li’s confession had on the foreign community during its initial period of its circulation, as well as whether it had any continued influence as the memory of the Civil War waned. After the completion of an original run of edits made by Zeng Guofan, the document acted as a piece of pro-Qing propaganda, reminding Westerners why they had broken their pledges of neutrality in the first place.

Li Xiucheng, as evidenced by his own words and by secondary research, joined up with the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in 1851 during its march to Yongan.⁷³ Born to a poor peasant family, Li worked his way from the bottom of the Taiping organization to the very top. Successful military campaigns in the Jiangnan region, including the capture of Hangzhou and Suzhou in 1860, and the defeat of a significant portion of Qing forces, poised Li to become the kingdom’s most essential military leader, a position he would hold until the end of the war. Li’s outlook, compared to those of his fellow Taiping officials, was an interesting one. His attitude toward foreigners made him popular in Western press outlets, and his relatively late arrival to the Taiping camp as a young boy meant that his views on Taiping religion, strategy, and goals did not align perfectly with the movement’s founders and their intentions. This contrast would make Li an important figure in contemporaneous discussions attempting to uncover who the Taiping really were.

⁷³ Jonathan D. Spence, *God’s Chinese Son: The Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996), p. 278.

In his deposition, the English translation of which spans around seventy-eight pages, the Faithful King confessed many things.⁷⁴ The most startling was a sense of regret over the path his life had taken since first joining up with the Taiping back in Guangxi. It highlighted an overwhelming mentality of helplessness toward how this enterprise had turned out. In a sense, the now ironically titled “Faithful King” had recanted the ideology and state he had spent the past twelve years giving his life to and was about to lose it for. “Now I have been taken prisoner; but how could I have known that it would come to this? If I had foreseen the present disaster I could long ago have avoided it by remaining at home as an ordinary man.”⁷⁵ In his book, *Ti-ping Tien-kwoh*, published two years after the *Herald’s* version of Li’s deposition surfaced, Lindley remained unconvinced that this supposed autobiographic statement contained any significant portion of truth. The two-volume work was even dedicated to the Zhong Wong “if he be living; and if not, to his memory.”

Lindley was without a doubt on the fringe when it came to views on Li Xiucheng’s fate after the fall of Nanjing. *The Times* had published news of his capture as early as September 30; his eventual execution via “cutting into a thousand pieces” being reported by September 17 and published on November 10.⁷⁶ Even so, Lindley’s opinions had not arisen out of passion alone. There were others who seconded his doubts. On November 18, twenty-seven days after the *North China Herald* published the first section of Li’s confession, *The Age* declared that “the fate

⁷⁴ According to Franz Michael, Zeng Guofan’s edited and abridged version, used by the *North China Herald*, only contained 28,000 characters, containing 5,000 less characters than the version published by Luo Ergang in 1951, and 22,000 less characters than Zeng claimed the document contained in a set of instructions sent to his son (*The Taiping Rebellion*, p. 1381).

⁷⁵ Charles A. Curwen, *Taiping Rebel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 120.

⁷⁶ “Japan and China.” *The Times* (London), November 10, 1864. p. 4.

and whereabouts of the [Zhong Wang]...is possibly the most salient point at present in Chinese politics.”⁷⁷ *The Age* was no outsider periodical either; in fact it was the leading newspaper of the colony of Victoria at the time. The paper cited contradictory government bulletins and apparent sightings by legible sources in Huzhou. San Francisco-based paper *The Daily Alta California* would suffer from similar confusions. On October 15, the same publication wrote of the Zhong Wang’s beheading, dating it to early September. A paragraph later *The Daily Alta California* repeated that the Zhong Wang had been captured, but believed that he was still awaiting his sentence.⁷⁸ On November 14, the paper wrote that its original report had been wrong, correctly affirming that the Zhong Wang had not been beheaded on August 2.⁷⁹ However, the paper incorrectly believed that Li had been sent to Beijing, a place his trials never took him.⁸⁰ It would not be until mid-January that *The Age* would confirm the Zhong Wang’s death.⁸¹ At the same time, the paper would comment on the repulsive characteristics which had apparently always characterized the movement, losing the undeniable tone of respect it had afforded the Zhong Wang in November. What drove Lindley and the like-minded reporters at *The Age* to these doubts? What evidence was there that the Zhong Wang’s confession was a result of the Qing dynasty’s supposed “addiction to forging documents of this sort?”⁸² As discussed in the previous

⁷⁷ “China.” *The Age* (Melbourne), November 18, 1864. p. 7.

⁷⁸ “Later From China.” *The Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), October 15, 1864. p. 1.

⁷⁹ Li’s actual execution did not take place until August 7.

⁸⁰ “Later From China.” *The Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), November 16, 1864. p. 1.

⁸¹ “China.” *The Age* (Melbourne), January 16, 1865. p. 6.

⁸² Lindley, *Ti-Ping Tien-kwoh*, p. 771.

chapter, Li's deposition was not the first popular confession to be published during the Taiping Civil War. Time had not yet forgotten the Deposition of Tian De.

Dubious Claims

The Deposition of Tian De had shown the Qing to have a comprehensive understanding of the power of deposition as a political tool. While the Qing's attempt at delegitimizing and undermining the momentum of the Taiping was ultimately unsuccessful, this early attempt at redefining the Taiping narrative had a great impact on the nature of later depositions. The case of Tian De gave Lindley reason to color his perception of the text. He postulates that Li's deposition might have been "made up by some prisoner of note...and the cunning writers attached to the Governor-General of the two" Jiang, Zeng Guofan.⁸³ Lindley's convictions, or perhaps they would be better characterized as hopes, may not have panned out, but his initial instincts were not entirely misplaced. There was no reason to believe that Li Xiucheng's deposition had not been edited before being published, the real question is to what extent, and why?

Li Xiucheng's writing covered a lot of ground. A large portion of the text is dedicated to describing his pivotal role within the Taiping military and government. His confession also alludes to internal conflict within the movement, musings on why it failed, and a few ardent pleas for kind treatment of his troops and their families. The deposition was important not only for its content, but for the context it provided as well. Seeing as it was published only three months removed from the events at Nanjing, Li's words gave the European world its first major look at the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom since its initial collapse, from its earnest beginnings onward.

⁸³ Lindley, *Ti-Ping Tien-kwoh*, p. 771.

Lindley's book acted as a response to the acknowledgment that Li Xiucheng's deposition supposedly provided its readers with an uninterrupted and authentic view of Taiping history. Lindley was of the opinion that Li's statements had largely been misrepresented and incorrectly interpreted by those involved in policy and the press. His efforts to rework the mainstream understanding of the movement were supposedly commissioned by the Zhong Wang himself.⁸⁴ This added another layer to Lindley's already dubious claims of authority on the subject. Did this appeal for a new vision of the Taiping conflict have any notable impact on Western thought? As Hallett Abend notes in *The God From The West*, his 1947 book on Frederick Townsend Ward, "[Lindley's] work was published after the fall of Nanking, after the death of the Heavenly King, and after the utter collapse of the Taiping movement, it could not have had a wide public appeal or a sizable sale." It is important to remember that by the time *Ti-Ping Tien-Kwoh* was available for public consumption in 1866, both Europe and Asia had become preoccupied with new conflicts. One explanation Abend provided for Lindley's push to publish is "the suspicion that the publication was heavily subsidized by Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in Parliament."⁸⁵ While these suspicions were never confirmed, Lindley's book is nonetheless populated with a series of heated attacks on both American and British actors involved on the Qing side of things. These partisan leanings must be taken into consideration when evaluating the legitimacy of Lindley's claims.

A Critique's Origin

⁸⁴ Augustus G. Stapleton, "The Rebellion in China: Important Testimony of its Character." *New York Observer and Chronicle* (New York), October 11, 1866. p. 322.

⁸⁵ Hallett E. Abend, *The God From The West; a Biography of Frederick Townsend Ward* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1947), p. 129.

Another element of Lindley's criticism to consider is the nature of his publisher. The firm that championed his work was known as Day & Son. Day & Son, who had once been awarded a Royal Warrant, had run into both financial and legal trouble after attempting to assist exiled Hungarian patriot Lajos Kossuth print a new currency.⁸⁶ This was clearly intended to "promote revolution and discord" to many observers following Kossuth's case.⁸⁷ Vincent Brooks, another publisher who had purchased the Day & Son firm, had similarly courted controversy after he served as one of prominent utopian socialist philosopher Robert Owen's primary publishers.⁸⁸ If these publishers had any outright connections to the Taiping movement, they were not obvious. In addition, the ideals Kossuth and Owen held clearly differed from the utopian ideas formulating in China.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, the predisposition they demonstrated toward independence-minded movements indicates a willingness to support alternative world visions and opposition movements. It is without question that Lindley stood opposed to "the evil foreign policy which Great Britain, during the last few years, has pursued."⁹⁰ These ideological leanings only further encourage suspicions that Lindley's writing may have had more directly political undertones than meet the eye. Regardless of political allegiances and ideological goals, thanks to

⁸⁶ According to pp. 677 – 682 of J. W. de Longueville Giffard's *Reports of Cases Adjudged in the High Court of Chancery, by the Vice-Chancellor Sir John Stuart: 1857 – 1865*, Kossuth and Day & Son were found guilty, as Kossuth lacked the direct approval of the Diet of Hungary. His decision to print currency was viewed as a hostile action.

⁸⁷ Joshua Toulmin Smith. *Who is the "King of Hungary" that is now a suitor in the English Court of Chancery?: a letter to the Right Hon. Lord J. Russell* (London: W. Jeffs, 1861), pp. 7 – 8.

⁸⁸ Thomas Medwin, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. (London: Humphrey Milford, 1913), p. 99.

⁸⁹ Chuck Wooldridge, *City of Virtues: Nanjing in an Age of Utopian Visions* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), p. 9.

⁹⁰ Lindley, *Ti-Ping Tien-kwoh*, pp. vii – viii.

Charles Curwen's 1977 book, *Taiping Rebel*, Lindley's concerns have been somewhat confirmed. The book places both the original and edited versions side by side for easy comparison, allowing readers to gain an understanding of exactly where, and perhaps why, Zeng chose to alter Li Xiucheng's words as he did. Curwen's knowledge of Zeng's edits came from a few sources, one being the clear red marks found on the original manuscript, another being the diary entries of Zhao Liewen, a member of Zeng's *mufu* (幕府), or inner administration.⁹¹ Zhao's journal, which was rather unembellished according to a 1972 study of Zeng Guofan's administration by Jonathan Porter, explicitly mentioned an editing process. In it Zhao also records that he was asked to read through the document twice, indicating that he may have played the role of a mysterious second editor Curwen could not identify.⁹²

If one were to look purely at the number of articles Western periodicals ran on Li Xiucheng's confession, one might get the impression that this document, quite frankly, was not significant at all. As previously argued, Lindley's timing was off. Most newspapers had moved on rather quickly and were no longer invested in the now silent battlefield. Even the *North China Herald* neglected to mention it much after publishing the last section of its appendix to the document in March of 1865. So why was Lindley so obsessed with redirecting the narrative most observers derived from Li's words? Just as Lindley maintained hope that the Zhong Wang still lived, he had equal faith in the eventual success of the Taiping movement. Rumors of surviving Taiping forces still circulated. One purported that a Taiping army had recently begun to conquer territory in Fujian, an army Lindley incorrectly believed was led by the departed

⁹¹ Curwen, *Taiping Rebel*, p. 39.

⁹² Jonathan Porter, *Tseng Kuo-fan's Private Bureaucracy* (Berkeley: Regents of the University of California, 1972), p. 57.

Hong Rengan, cousin to the Heavenly throne and an active reformer in the movement's latter days.⁹³ If this was true then there was immediate cause for renegotiating the terms by which the Western world discussed and looked back upon the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's attempt at conquest as originally cemented by Li's confession. "[F]or the Heavenly Father is with us, and who can triumph against him?"⁹⁴ By using this quote from the general Taiping leadership Lindley asserted the Christian faith that had been stripped from them since Li's confession. He told the members of the European world that they may have been wrong in their initial judgement. Lindley was not the only person who felt that this confession held an important position. One man who felt similarly was the previously mentioned Zeng Guofan, Commander-in-Chief of the Hunan Army and the Qing official responsible for coordinating the successful Qing siege of Nanjing.

The Official Perspective

Zeng Guofan had not built his Hunan Army from the columns of Banner troops already in the service of the Qing dynasty, but from the myriad of local subjects under his jurisdiction directly affected by the Taiping encroachment toward Central China. The organization's unique beginning offers up some light on Zeng's position and goals within the empire. Regardless of personal belief, Zeng expressed no royal ambitions or dreams. He portrayed himself as a model statesman, one who loyally served his emperor and dynasty. That is not to say he did not see problems with the way the bureaucracy had been managed in recent years, as was evident by his initiative in starting the Hunan Army. This action clearly indicated a lack of confidence in imperial ability to resist the Taiping advance and protect Qing civilians and their property.

⁹³ Lindley, *Ti-Ping Tien-kwoh*, p. 820.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 821.

Zeng's uncertainty was directed right back at him from the imperial court. The officials in Beijing might have needed Zeng's organizational prowess, but they used him cautiously, suspicious of his motives. As Jonathan Porter points out, by the end of the war "[Zeng's] autonomy had already progressed so far that his organization could be regarded as a viable foundation for a new Chinese dynasty, controlling the richest area of the empire and wielding authority in all of the crucial areas of personnel, finance, and military power."⁹⁵ This mutual distrust, put aside in the name of the same goal, underlies the unique vision Zeng hoped to portray in releasing Li's confession. The resulting document showcases a much more complex effort than a simple attempt at painting the Taiping as an overwhelming evil.

Upon the Zhong Wang's capture, Zeng wrote in a memorial to the imperial palace that there existed "a great number of people who read rebel depositions."⁹⁶ This statement proved true, at least during the conflict's immediate aftermath. The *North China Herald* ran the Zhong Wang's deposition and related materials for over four months following the translated document's initial publishing. Li Xiucheng's words dominated the space within the weekly edition's few pages, and the paper's columns offered up relevant perspectives sanctioned by British Parliament on more than a few occasions. From their defeat in the first Opium War to the subsequent signing of a myriad of unequal treaties, the Taiping Civil War found the Qing government in the midst of its so-called "Century of Humiliation." Li's confession came at a time when Qing China's success as a unified entity relied heavily on its ability to disarm and fend off outside forces. Maintaining the state's image as crucial to stability as it had always been. Zeng might have had his problems with the Qing, but his fear of more Western intrusions

⁹⁵ Porter, *Tseng Kuo-fan's Private Bureaucracy*, p. 117.

⁹⁶ Curwen, *Taiping Rebel*, p. 120.

greatly outweighed any thoughts of disloyalty. Zeng felt that increased involvement from the West would only place the Qing in a double bind. Any victories achieved with foreign assistance would only wrestle control away from the state. Any losses would damage the state's reputation and risk bringing on more political and financial burdens.⁹⁷ In addition to condemning the Taiping movement's motivations and actions, Zeng's edits transformed Li's confession into an affirmation of Qing authority. It was no doubt that public opinion in the West on the Taiping had certainly soured during the last few years of the kingdom's rule. Public opinion on the Qing, however, had not necessarily improved in its place. As the conflict neared its end European nations began to feel the strain of the Taiping Civil War on their investments, and involvement, in the region. In many ways the confession served as a reminder that it made more sense for European powers to continue to support the Qing than it did for them to take any stronger action against the Qing than they already had.

“The thing to be feared now is that the foreign devils will certainly take action.”⁹⁸

Whether intentional or not, this was Li's last message to his captors. It was a warning to his fellow countrymen of the dangers that lay ahead. These cautionary words, alongside a list of “ten propositions anent securing allegiance of the rebels...as a ransom of his life, and his words announcing ten fatal causes which lead to the defeat and death of the rebel [Hong],” are removed from the confession as it appeared in the *North China Herald*.⁹⁹ The section is not even mentioned, whereas his ten errors and requests are explicitly stated as having been removed from

⁹⁷ Caleb Carr, *The Devil Soldier: The American Soldier of Fortune Who Became a God in China* (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 187.

⁹⁸ Curwen, *Taiping Rebel*, p. 161.

⁹⁹ “The Autographic Deposition of Chung Wang, The Faithful King, at his Trial After the Capture of Nanking” *North China Herald* (Shanghai), February 11, 1865. p. 22.

the transcript. Two questions arise from this juxtaposition. Why mention the propositions at all if they were not going to be published? More importantly, what purpose does the deliberate removal of anti-foreign sentiment have? To answer the first question, one can look back at the previous paragraph's analysis of state image. It is only in hindsight that one can view Li's capture as an official end for the Taiping. Hong Tianguai Fu, heir apparent to the heavenly throne of the Taiping, was still at large; as was Hong Rengan, the heir's uncle and perhaps the last true believer in the movement's cause. By stating that a set of terms existed, without disclosing their actual content, Zeng relayed a sense of control over the matter. Zeng did this in his reports to the imperial court as well. According to Stephen Platt, Zeng's embellished report after Nanjing's fall made it seem that "a hundred thousand rebel soldiers had been killed in the fighting, inflating the glory of his family and his army, masking their looting and atrocities against civilians."¹⁰⁰ The inclusion reminded the world that it was not the European led Ever-Victorious Army that had reclaimed Nanjing, but the Hunan Army. Zeng Guofan, and through him the entire Qing dynasty, had seen to the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's initial collapse and would be capable of finishing it without extraneous hands.

Zeng Guofan's purpose behind deliberately removing any warnings about foreign powers is less ascertainable. Doing so could have been for a few reasons, one of which being that Zeng did not wish to provoke the West in any way. Whereas including mentions of Li Xiucheng's terms of surrender built up the image of the Qing, theoretical guidance on how to deal with foreigners risked bringing it back down, should Westerners believe that Zeng aimed to follow it. On a more pragmatic level, the removal might indicate that Zeng did in fact desire to take note of Li's words, hoping to obtain the upper hand by hiding this information from sight. This

¹⁰⁰ Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*, p. 352.

discussion further signifies the fact that Zeng had not intended to paint the Taiping as an evil enemy overall. Zeng's edits portray Li and the Taiping as an enemy worth fighting, but not for uniform reasons. The demons he constructed were not entirely black and white.

The fact that his capture essentially ended the civil war could not have been known to Li upon his capture. As Li put his life to words he hoped to not only achieve some sort of amnesty for his own actions but also to spare the lives of his family and fellow Taiping followers. As will be seen later in this chapter, this difference in expectations produced a much more malleable document, one already pre-disposed in favor of imperial forces. Zeng's edits did not re-arrange the entire document. These changes primarily focused on fixing grammatical errors, removing unnecessary information, and statements so flattering toward Zeng and his troops that they might inflame the court's already heightened suspicions.¹⁰¹ Those few edits not related to document's overall appearance do however aim to reinforce any malleability Li left open.

Securing the Western Front

A weekly column from the *North China Herald*, titled "Impartial Not Neutral" espoused a view much more in line with Zeng's edits than Lindley's evaluations. Appearing in issue number 744, one week after the confession's first appearance, the column states as follows: "He, the Faithful King, one of the pillars of the faith so called, repudiates or ignores the existence of that great moral inspiration which had been represented by the friends of the insurgents as the moving spring of all the acts performed under the rebel administration." The column ended on a steadfast note, proclaiming that "we are justified in coming to the conclusion no high and noble aspirations filled the breasts of the men who initiated the rebellion – that, in a word, they were

¹⁰¹ "The Autographic Deposition of Chung Wang, The Faithful King, at his Trial After the Capture of Nanking. Appendix." *North China Herald* (Shanghai), March 25, 1865. p. 46.

ambitious schemers plotting to overthrow a government for the sake of their own personal aggrandisement, and utterly unfit to organise a system, or in any degree secure the happiness of the people.”¹⁰² Here, Lindley’s sentiment of shock and disbelief was replaced with a feeling of smug satisfaction, and an undoubting belief that what was written down was the truth. The editorial unabashedly declared that it was “unlikely that any exaggeration or misrepresentation had crept into [Li’s] report.”¹⁰³ This moment serves as the most direct affirmation of Zeng’s conviction. Arguably China’s most influential foreign paper, circulating almost eight thousand copies in its prime, had found in Li Xiucheng’s deposition a defining piece of evidence in confirming the righteousness of Great Britain’s political stance over the past fourteen years.

This view of the Heavenly dynasty would hold sway over mainstream Western viewers for years to come. An article by G. T. Ferris, published by *The Cosmopolitan* in 1889, held to earlier convictions of the Zhong Wang’s bravery, but went no further in praising him. The article painted him in the same light that the paper had used when they spoke of the rest of the movement’s leaders. The Zhong Wang was no longer a man of mercy, but a violent rebel leader who “burned and slaughtered to the very suburbs of Shanghai” and allowed for “rape, robbery, murder, and every form of savage brutality” to dominate the territories he took.¹⁰⁴ It is here that the Zhong Wang’s attempt to find a middle ground, and placate his captors, might have done his cause more harm than good. By declaring himself a believer of the inevitable, he alienated many of the Western missionaries and commentators who might have maintained their loyalty to the

¹⁰² “Impartial Not Neutral” *North China Herald* (Shanghai), October 29, 1864. p. 174.

¹⁰³ “The Autographic Deposition of Chung Wang, The Faithful King, at his Trial After the Capture of Nanking. Appendix.” *North China Herald* (Shanghai), March 25, 1865. p. 46.

¹⁰⁴ G.T. Ferris, “An American Soldier in China.” *The Cosmopolitan* (New York), August 1889. pp. 392 – 393.

Taiping otherwise. People like Archdeacon Arthur Moule would comment that the Taiping movement might have begun under a Christian ideal, but this was only an ideal, and one that had been lost along the way. As early as 1861, Moule had lost hope in possibility of a Christian success through the Taiping.¹⁰⁵ In a lecture read before the Shanghai Literary and Debating Society, he noted that the job of the Christian missionary was much harder in 1883 than it was prior to the Civil War. The Christian proclamations of the Taiping only linked the belief system with violence and unrest; bringing about a much warier population and government than had existed before.¹⁰⁶ Moule and his contemporaries no longer saw supporting a group, whose commitment to God was now in question and circumstantial at best, as having been worth the image setback. *The Washington Post* made a similar comment in 1900. The paper referred to Taiping religious belief as “Christianity” and therefore attributed a lack of sincerity or legitimacy to it. The author continued on to associate this period of violence with contemporary opinions on Christianity’s influx in China, claiming that Chinese spectators see Christianity’s continued infiltration as “a carnival of blood.”¹⁰⁷

“After I worshipped God I never dared to transgress in the slightest, but was a sincere believer, always fearing harm from serpents and tigers.”¹⁰⁸ This sentence is conspicuously absent from the first section of Li’s deposition published in the *North China Herald*. Edited out by Zeng, this missing sentiment reframes the rest of Li’s confession. In place of any notion of

¹⁰⁵ F.O.17/380.

¹⁰⁶ Arthur E. Moule, *Personal Recollections of the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion* (Shanghai: Shanghai Mercury, 1898), pp. 24 – 28.

¹⁰⁷ "The Taiping Rebellion." *The Washington Post* (Washington, D. C.), July 21, 1900. p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Curwen, *Taiping Rebel*, p. 83.

sincere belief, readers of the *North China Herald* heard of a population coerced into believing in God. “The people of the world are all afraid of death; being told that serpents and tigers would devour them, who would not be afraid. Therefore they obeyed.”¹⁰⁹ These two statements are quite similar in content, but promote much different perspectives on the Taiping movement’s Christian motives. The first statement is a simple one. Li declared himself to be a true believer in the message of God. The fear of serpents and tigers may not be a conventional one for the average Western Christian, but the fear of punishment for one’s sins, such as the act of non-belief, is standard fare. This is a concept that can be easily translated into a European context, and can be justified as not a new interpretation, but an adaption of biblical penances for a Chinese stage. The second statement is much less easily rationalized as a profession of true belief in a Western context. This becomes even more evident when Li attributes that majority of Taiping conversions to a desire for a secure source of food. The concept of “Rice Christians” was nothing new, having been tossed around since the Jesuits’ early expeditions into Chinese territories. What separates these two is that most “Rice Christians” were organized into small, localized communities, not large political institutions that aimed to establish a new Heavenly regime. The Zhong Wang’s declaration of personal faith may not have been much, but it provided some basis for the movement’s Christian leanings. Instead the *North China Herald* finds “[n]o enthusiasm for the spread of truth and Christianity” in the contents of Li’s confession.

¹¹⁰ The removal of any mention of sincere belief only more heavily emphasizes the notion that the Taiping was in reality made of very few “true” Christians. It was an important step in

¹⁰⁹ Curwen, *Taiping Rebel*, p. 80.

¹¹⁰ “The Autographic Deposition of Chung Wang, The Faithful King, at his Trial After the Capture of Nanking. Appendix.” *North China Herald* (Shanghai), March 25, 1865. p. 46.

solidifying anti-Taiping attitudes amongst Europeans. It was much easier to justify siding with the Qing against a reportedly Christian movement when those people were Christian in name alone.

It is in this manner that Zeng Guofan managed to transform Li's confession into a pro-Qing piece of propaganda. Through small cuts and edits, Zeng made Li's position much more ambiguous. By doing this, Zeng does not necessarily aim to improve the reader's perception of the Qing as a moral entity; he merely makes that of the Taiping more questionable. Doing anything else would have been both incredibly difficult and out of character for someone in Zeng's position. Zeng had his own conflicts with the Qing, who in turn had problems with the West, and so on. From the Ever-Victorious Army's disagreements with Qing forces over execution procedures to Zeng's inability to control his army's desire to loot and raze captured Taiping territory, including the occasional slaughter of said territory's inhabitants, it was clear that the nations of the West alliance with China's elite would be an uneasy one.¹¹¹

Coming Around

Anti-Taiping sentiment had not always been the standard to which Western nations held. According to Holgor Cahill's 1930 biography of Frederick Townsend Ward, commander of the Ever-Victorious Army, this sentiment would not gain widespread traction until the signing of the Treaty of Beijing, a treaty foisted upon the Qing in 1860 which ceded land and power to the United Kingdom, France, and Russia. It was at this time that nations like Great Britain and France decided there was more political and economic gain to be had by siding with the Qing. Cahill continued to describe the myriad of claims made against the Taiping from this time forward, from tales of Hong Xiuquan's hundred wives, to the kingdom's supposed razing of

¹¹¹ Wooldridge, *City of Virtues*, p. 120.

Suzhou, in which it was claimed that thousands of innocents had been killed. He even mentions the Zhong Wang, seconding the previously mentioned claims made by *The Times* and *Newcastle Courant*, emphasizing that his merciful behavior towards his opponents was well-known around the world.¹¹² What does this lasting impression of Li say about Zeng's decision to go public with his deposition? This decision was ultimately a successful one. If Zeng's goal was to use Li as a tool, securing the prevailing narrative of the Taiping as a threat to the Western world, and tangentially demonizing him in the process, it undoubtedly worked. This vision may have existed amongst Western viewers prior to the confession's publishing, but its existence secured and hardened these beliefs. It gave the nations of West the authentic voice it needed to declare themselves to be participants in a just war, fighting to protect China from the exploits of a false prophet.

If it was well-known that a majority of the reading public in Europe had sided with the Qing, or at the very least come around against the Taiping, who was Zeng Guofan targeting when he decided to go public with this confession? One demographic he might have had in mind is the group of missionaries who still believed in the movement's Christian vision. One member of this faction was Reverend J. V. Worthington, who in April of 1864, published a series of commentaries by fellow Lutheran missionary Wilhelm Lobscheid. For Worthington, who also wrote the introduction to *The Taeping as They Were*, these commentaries illustrated "the noble and dignified costume" worn by the Taiping. "They look like the Lords of China." He went on to shame the British government for its conduct; unable to understand his nation's ignorance of what he viewed as an inherently progressive, Christian agenda. It is important to keep in mind

¹¹² Holger Cahill, *A Yankee Adventurer: The Story of Ward and the Taiping Rebellion* (New York: The Macaulay Company, 1930), pp. 275 – 277.

that the Taiping Civil War was, in the minds of many, Christianity's only real chance at securing a permanent foothold in China. Any particularities in theology or practice could be wrinkled out with a little bit of guidance from the Heavenly Kingdom's Protestant big brother. Lobscheid is of the opinion that the proselytizers who had turned their backs on the Taiping did so out of a lack of credit for what they saw as their own doing.

Isaac Roberts was one of these people. Roberts, being the only foreigner to have had extensive interactions with Hong Xiuquan, projected a certain aura of authority over the issue of the movement's Christianity, especially in their earliest days. Roberts may have had the experience to back his claims of authority, but this time with Hong and his early followers was exactly what led to more conventional contemporaries of Roberts to mock him relentlessly. An 1861 article in *The Daily Alta California* provided readers with some choice words from Roberts. The quote, given halfway through his stay in Nanjing, declared the Zhong Wang to be a good Christian, although the paper noted the group's lack of orthodoxy.¹¹³ Roberts would leave Nanjing soon after this, decrying the Taiping leaders as unfit to rule, just as the *North China Herald* would two years later.¹¹⁴ Wilhelm Lobscheid is frustrated by actions like these, actions he sees taken again and again by missionaries throughout China. To him these denouncements were derived from explicitly selfish and political motives. They were the voices of missionaries who turned around when the job became too difficult, or when they were not immediately heralded as the saviors they believed themselves to be. "[I]f they are missionaries, it is their duty

¹¹³ "The Asiatic News." *The Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), January 19, 1861. p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Spence, *God's Chinese Son*, p. 298.

to try and remedy the faults they do nothing but rail at,” instead of actively advocating against their success and development.

It is clear at this point that a resistance, however small, to the demonization of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom had found a voice and was in a position to use it. This opposition may have been made up of a few missionaries, soldiers of fortune, and adventurers here and there, but its members possessed a quality most of mainstream commentators lacked: they had lived with the Taiping. While plenty of Europeans had visited the Heavenly Kingdom, or been treated to brief stays, few people had spent large spans of time with them, especially after the turn of the decade. It is questionable whether Zeng had hoped to change the minds of these people, and these oppositional, although solid, never seemed to catch on. A more likely assumption is that by publishing Li Xiucheng’s deposition, Zeng hoped to pose these voices as even more partisan and biased than they had already appeared to be. What could be more authentic and accurate than the voice of the Taiping themselves? Zeng’s edits established these voices as mere visitors, who could not have had access to thoughts and motives that only Li could see within himself.

The Movement’s Last Stand

The deposition of Hong Rengan may have been the last Taiping confession of note to be published to a wide audience. Shorter than Li Xiucheng’s confession, and significantly more informative than Hong Tiangui Fu’s, the deposition serves as an interesting contrast to those that came before it. Excerpts of the translated document appeared in the *North China Herald* a total of four times before it was available to foreign eyes in its entirety. According to Franz Michael this is the only instance in which the entire document has been made available to the public. The official confession of Hong Rengan, Shield King of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, major

reformer and ambassador to the West, was only to be read in full in English.¹¹⁵ When facing their own people, members of the imperial court had no more story to tell. The Qing and those living within the empire had lived through the conflict once already, there was no reason to live through this period of radicalism once more, even if only through the words of a dead man.

Hong Rengan was forty-three at the time of his execution.¹¹⁶ Up until then he had devoted an entire third of his life to furthering the cause of the Taiping and supporting his old cousin, and sovereign, Hong Xiuquan. Like his cousin, Hong had failed to pass the state examinations. He had earned his living tutoring young students in his village, passing on Confucian traditions and knowledge, just as many other failed examinee candidates chose to do. Hong could have easily lived out the rest of his days quietly doing so, and he may have if Hong Xiuquan had not concluded in 1843 that his visions had been a religious call to action. Upon hearing this Hong, alongside the family's neighbor, Feng Yunshan, answered his cousin's call and became one of Hong Xiuquan's first converts.¹¹⁷ Despite his family's efforts at keeping him at home and in the classroom, they could not stop Hong Rengan from becoming one of the Heavenly Kingdom's most devoted followers.

It was by chance alone that Hong's path deviated from the rest of the Taiping camp from there on out. After visiting Swedish missionary and early Taiping advocate, Theodore Hamburg, in the middle of 1852, Hong would become separated from the movement for almost a decade, as his attempts to travel inward from the cities of Hong Kong and Shanghai were continually foiled

¹¹⁵ Michael and Chang, *The Taiping Rebellion*, Vol. 3. p. 1510.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 1511.

¹¹⁷ Feng Yunshan, known as the South King, was one of the first Taiping leaders to call for open resistance against the Qing government. In addition, he played a major role in early attempts at turning the Taiping religious movement into an official political organization.

by Qing troops and other mishaps. This separation became a vital tool and defining aspect of Hong's role within the movement. It was in Hong Kong that he met James Legge, a Scottish missionary who Hong would work closely with in the coming years, despite Legge's firm conviction that Taiping Christian doctrine was not yet legitimate. While studying and preaching under Legge's tutelage, Hong would become much more informed than his brethren in Nanjing on the affairs of the world outside of China. While there he would establish himself among foreign actors as "the proselytizer, fearlessly exposing [Taiping] errors, and extorting them to repent and believe the Gospel" as reported by in the *Overland Register* on August 25, 1860.¹¹⁸ In addition, as expressed in *Missionary Magazine*, the Western world would come to respect his literary attainments and attitude, impressed by his versatility and sincerity.¹¹⁹ This background became invaluable to Hong when he finally rejoined the rest of the movement in 1859 as an ambassador and reformer. Jian Youwen echoes the bold sentiment that Hong Xiuquan felt upon greeting his long-separated cousin, "there was no one better qualified to assume the multifaceted religious, political, cultural, and military responsibilities of chief administrator in the Heavenly dynasty."¹²⁰

Hong Rengan's deposition differs from the previous two showcased in this thesis in some striking ways. Edits to the document are essentially non-existent and show up exclusively in the Chinese version of the text published by the governor of Jiangsi, Shen Baozhen. The few edits that were made show up as the removal of some poetry here and there and the toning down of some negative comments directed towards Zeng Guofan and his brothers. Commentary by

¹¹⁸ Lindley, *Ti-Ping Tien-kwoh*, p. 242.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 225.

¹²⁰ Jian, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, p. 356.

contemporary viewers is oddly few and far between. Analysis by scholars in secondary sources is just as hard to come by. What is it about Hong's deposition that made it so much less prevalent to those with some stake left in this now defunct conflict? Hong's hardline attitude toward the Qing and the West and continued religious fervor left little room for interpretation. His analytical approach to the movement's fall could in no capacity further support the West's decision to help silence its Christian kin.

First, to analyze the deposition itself, Hong Rengan posed himself as a simple man, one who desired nothing more than to "rely on his gracious protection in order to enable me to live out my normal span of life," albeit one who was quite well educated and never lacked any opinions.¹²¹ Unlike the Zhong Wang, however, Hong does not attempt to justify his actions as a result of circumstance, instead proudly claiming ownership of his actions and declaring his intent to "resign all into the keeping of Heaven," even if that should bring about his death.¹²² He continued on to describe in detail the movement's religious beginnings, making his devotion to the Tian Wang's form of Christianity clear, and his attempt to gain military experience upon his entrance back into the Taiping fold. The end of this section, which also contains the last bit of available Chinese text available to the public, showcased a Shield King in conflict with the more experienced generals surrounding him. It is a manifestation of his earlier concerns on potential jealous; even the Zhong Wang, who had once been the only commander Hong could count on to agree with him, had chosen to ignore his "lofty views" and express his loss of hope at success, and the Shield King's refusal to see this only caused Li great pain.¹²³ It is from this section

¹²¹ Michael and Chang, *The Taiping Rebellion*, p. 1512.

¹²² *Ibid*, p. 1514

¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 1526.

forward that Hong shifts his focus from a history of the movement to his understanding of the Heavenly dynasty's demise.

“We come now to the cause of all our troubles – the assistance rendered by foreigners to the Imps.”¹²⁴ It is with these bold words that Hong Rengan declared his unflinching dedication to the Taiping ideology and goals. Where Li Xiucheng ended his unedited deposition with an anguished cry, despairing at the fate of the kingdom's people and falling back on his lack of ability and understanding, Hong maintained a sense of calm. Rather than break down or attempt to escape his sure to be fatal future, he persisted as if nothing has changed, addressing the end of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom factually and remotely. Quotes like the one above explain why the Qing may not have bothered at an attempt to adjust the narrative it lays out. Hong refused to adjust even his language in the presence of his captors, referring to his opponents as “Imps” until his execution. Unlike the character of Tian De or the concerned general, Li Xiucheng, Hong gave the Qing no room to adjust. His proclamation and retelling of his faith, alongside his understanding of his kingdom's drawbacks and how these led to its demise are not easily spinnable as anything but what they claim to be. This may explain why the only edit Shen Baozhen made was to remove some of the more damaging insults to his compatriots, the Zeng family. He could not hope to get any use out of the deposition, only aim to control any internal harm it might create.

Analysis of the deposition itself can only theorize why discussion of it never materialized. A search of prominent Western newspapers, including *The Times*, to *The Age*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and *The New York Times*, amongst others, showed that the Shield King received almost no mention in press based outside of China after news of his capture was

¹²⁴ Michael and Chang, *The Taiping Rebellion*, p. 1526.

received.¹²⁵ Similarly, the document receives little notice in secondary research on the topic. Franz Michael refers only to primary sources in his discussion of the confession. Even Stephen Platt's *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*, a book whose contents largely revolve around Hong's involvement in the Taiping movement, ends its narrative upon Hong's capture, using his deposition as a source without ever considering the context surrounding it. What could possibly explain the lack of interest in the autobiographical statement of perhaps the most well-liked bureaucrat and ambassador of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom? As mentioned earlier, the fact that "Hong did not expect to be pardoned" and his refusal to "indulge in personalities as [Li Xiucheng] did" added up to a document that simply was not as interpretable.¹²⁶ Hong maintained the demeanor he had originally gained respect for until the end, making his departing words incredibly difficult to exploit for any specific end goal. The deposition spoke for itself, and the world would let it do so.

Afterlife and Impact

Zeng Guofan had no way of knowing that his edits to Li Xiucheng's confession would maintain their noteworthy status for the next century to come. Shen Baozhen could not have known that Hong Rengan's deposition would not. Many of the original leaders of China's communist movement saw themselves as successors to the advances the Taiping had made. For much of the Chinese Communist Party's origins Taiping actions were used to shape the party's own images and notions of Chinese nationalism and history. Zeng's removal of lines like "I did this because of my unquestioning loyalty, in order to save the Sovereign who was in danger"

¹²⁵ The last instance in which *The Times* referenced Hong Rengan, in the context of the Heavenly Kingdom's aftermath, occurred on January 12, 1865, a full five months before his deposition was published.

¹²⁶ Michael and Chang, *The Taiping Rebellion*, pp. 1509 – 1510.

allow for such discussion to happen in the first place.¹²⁷ They make Li's actions seem just as dubious to commentators of the twentieth century as they did to Augustus Lindley. It is due to this that much debate surrounded the status of Li as either a hero or a traitor. As discussed by Steven Uhalley Jr. in 1966, around the time of the conflict's centenary, much of the evidence used to prove Li's status came directly from his confession. Uhalley provides an example of these debates by comparing two varying opinions. One of these opinions was provided by Luo Ergang. Uhalley considered Luo to be "the leading authority on the Taipings in Mainland China today" as did many other Western scholars of the period, evident by frequent citing of his work.¹²⁸ The contrasting opinion was provided by a prominent Party endorsed historian by the name of Qi Benyu. Qi was both a powerful politician, close to Mao until the Cultural Revolution, and a dominant figure in Chinese scholarship at the time. He headed the history department of the *Red Flag*, a political journal started in 1958, and served as the primary outlet of CCP theory during the Cultural Revolution.¹²⁹

According to Luo Ergang, Li Xiucheng maintained his genuine status as "Loyal King" until his execution. "[W]hat many historians have accepted as treachery by Li had actually been an extremely clever strategem [sic]...intended to deceive Li's captor, [Zeng Guofan], with the aim of buying time for the Taipings."¹³⁰ Uhalley admits that Luo's description of a "self-sacrifice plan" is in reality unlikely. He calls back to an argument made by Jian Youwen, who similarly

¹²⁷ Curwen, *Taiiping Rebel*, p. 155.

¹²⁸ Stephen Uhalley, "The Controversy Over Li Hsiu-ch'eng: An Ill-Timed Centenary." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 25, no. 2 (1966): 307.

¹²⁹ "China to Furl Red Flag, Its Maoist Theoretical Journal," *The Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles), May 1, 1988, http://articles.latimes.com/1988-05-01/news/mn-3384_1_red-flag.

¹³⁰ Uhalley, "The Controversy Over Li Hsiu-ch'eng: An Ill-Timed Centenary." p. 308.

asserts that Luo's conclusion is unlikely.¹³¹ Qi Benyu's argument disregards this possibility entirely. Qi's main argument maintains that the job of the historian is to analyze actions not speculative motives. He states that purposefully or not, Li's confession sets him up as having betrayed the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. The fact that this argument involves distinguished political and academic actors is proof of the perceived importance of Li's actions to defining Chinese communist identity. If the Chinese Communist Party claimed Li as a hero when in reality he had been a traitor, or vice a versa, Chinese communist thought would lose a vital part of its cultural lineage. Hong Rengan's deposition emphasized quite the contrary. There was no need to argue over his dedication to the Taiping cause and therefore debate over his place as a legitimate ancestral hero.

Another example of the lasting impact of Li Xiucheng's confession is to be found in the way books published for public consumption refer to him. Take for instance *The Taiping Revolution*, first translated by the Foreign Language Press in 1976, a book written by members of the Fudan University and Shanghai Normal University faculty. The authors, known collectively as the Compilation Group for the "History of Modern China" Series, portray Li's later actions as demoralizing, abasing, recalcitrant. They continue to describe elements of his confession as exaggerated, inaccurate, and boastful. Furthermore, when mentioning his escape from Nanjing with Hong's recently crowned heir no mention is made of his attempt to save the young sovereign by giving away his horse. Instead the book informs the reader of Li's flight to Fangshan as being dominated by his attempt to secure the kingdom's "gold, silver, pearls and precious stones" and resulting in "meekly expressed repentance" so that his life might be

¹³¹ Jian Youwen played a unique role in Taiping historiography due to his position as a member of the Nationalist Party and as a devout Christian.

spared.¹³² It is interesting to see the book quote from Augustus Lindley as well. Quoting from his history four times over the course of the book's one hundred and seventy-four pages the authors find a powerful ally in Lindley's unswaying belief in the movement's positive nature. They even start the book off with a painting of Lindley's exploits and efforts to assist the Taiping in combat towards the conflict's end.

The Taiping Revolution may not have been written by any prominent political leaders, but the company responsible for its circulation has been closely associated with the Chinese government ever since the organization's founding in 1952. The Foreign Language Press primarily targets the international community, just as Zeng Guofan aimed to do when he published Li Xiucheng's deposition in the *North China Herald*. What this coverage, and the previous discussion analyzed by Stephen Uhally Jr., fail to do is consider the historicity of the issue. Uhally faults Qi Benyu and his associates for viewing Li's words through a strictly Marxist lens. There is some legitimacy to this. A considerable portion of the discussions around Li's confession tend to begin with judgement already in place. Rather than view Li's words and their effect in their own historical context many instances of scholarship jump straight to mapping modern conceptions of "hero" or "villain" onto Li based on their own biases. Uhally himself is no better than those he is accusing. By deferring to Jian Youwen's interpretation and belittling the work of Mainland Chinese scholars he shows himself to be another tool in the political game that is justifying Nationalist or Communist rule.

Despite its seemingly peripheral place in Taiping history at the time, a belief encouraged by the lack of major discussion on the topic in Western publications, the deposition of Li

¹³² Compilation Group for the "History of Modern China" Series. *The Taiping Revolution* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press. 1976), pp. 151, 157.

Xiucheng has persisted, maintaining its relevance for over a century. The document is important not only for the light it provides on Taiping inner-politics but for the clear manner in which Zeng Guofan's editing history can be seen through it. Thanks to Charles Curwen's translation and formatting efforts, modern scholars can see how the deposition of Li Xiucheng showcased the political struggles the Qing dynasty continued to face, even as the violence brought on by the war faded away. From the state of stability desired by Zeng and his fellow literati, to the attempts at staving off Western pressures and involvement sought by the imperial court, Li's subtly transformed words provided a clear platform from which all parties could promote their own narratives. On the other hand, Hong Rengan's deposition has remained in the shadows. Its pages have provided significant insight on the origins of the movement and Taiping religious practice as a whole, but its more direct stance and unwillingness to engage in the muck of politics made it significantly less spinnable, for both commentators of the past and present. Regardless, these documents represent unique voices in Taiping studies, that of the Taipings themselves. They are clearly the products of multiple objective and perspectives, synthesizing more than just a factual account of the storyteller's experience. By perceiving depositions like those discussed as products of conscious editing and circulation, they forward a much different narrative than what appears within the content itself. It is a narrative built on personal and political goals, a narrative hidden between the lines.

Conclusion:

Hong Tianguai Fu's knowledge of state building was miniscule by the time of his execution. He had even less experience as a ruler. The boy's deposition was not published as a result of his position, having inherited the rule of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom at the civil war's close he served as a figurehead for the imminent imperial victory. The deposition was a tool used by the Qing dynasty to secure the continued support of the Western world in their attempt at maintaining power. It did so by showcasing the Taiping leadership's incapacity to rule, as perceived by the Qing court, the deposition assured Western colonial powers that their investments in the region would not have been safe under Taiping rule. The inexperience of Taiping leaders would not have made them easy targets, rather it would have led to a collapse of Western involvement in the region. The circulation of a myriad of other Taiping depositions that found their way into Western hands worked in the same way, reinforcing the belief that it is the content and the message of depositions that mattered, not just their existence. The same issue of the *North China Herald* that featured Hong Tianguai Fu's deposition contained statements from Hong Renzheng, Hong Rengan's cousin, and the twenty-six-year-old Huang Wenying, brother to a member of the Taiping theocracy's third class of kings.¹³³ These people, while still leaders of the movement, were rather obscure and their exploits would have only been known to those most well-versed in Taiping bureaucracy.

These depositions focused the message the Qing court aimed to get across in editing and publishing their contents. Their overall tone, one of an unwillingness to rule and a carelessness toward their fate, reinforced the idea that the Taiping, and any future threats to Qing authority,

¹³³ A *wang*'s class did not inherently imply value or role within the organization, especially as Hong Xiuquan began to appoint an increased number of kings in the Kingdom's later days to replace his original five, almost all of whom had died prior to 1857.

lacked the proper elements required for ruling China and for dealing with foreign entities. This study pushes scholars to reconsider the very role that these documents played in shaping the way Western actors understood the justification laid out by the Qing court for continued rule. By ignoring the process of translation by which depositions came to be, much of the information that can be gleaned from these documents is lost. The change in the audience of Taiping depositions from that of previous conflicts is representative of much more than an increase in Western interest in East Asian affairs. Combined with the knowledge of prominent editing processes, the lives of these documents act as evidence of a clear strategy to influence Western views on the broader realm of Qing dynasty politics.

The fact that depositions from people like Hong Renzhang and Huang Wenying reached the same level of circulation as someone as important, if only ceremonially, as the Young Monarch, points toward the fact that the Qing valued the stories these depositions could tell. Hong Renzheng directed his captors to his cousin, claiming no knowledge of any internal Taiping affairs. Huang Wenying, who was unwillingly promoted to a slightly more prestigious military role a year prior to his capture, expressed bitterness and depression in his court confession. Topics of conversation spanned from the dispirited nature of current Taiping forces to the kingdom's increasing inefficiency. Huang directly attacked Li Xiucheng, stating that "the Zhong Wang was a very selfish man, acting in most causes for his own benefit instead of being zealous to promote the public good." He harangued Hong Rengan as well, upset that the Shield King did nothing to assist him after he was stabbed for remonstrating Li.¹³⁴ At this point Huang believed that not a single capable person was loyal to the kingdom. Toward the end of his

¹³⁴ "Statement of Huang Wen-Ying." *North China Herald* (Shanghai), July 22, 1865, p. 144.

deposition, Huang declared that he was apathetic towards the course of his fate. He had no home to return to and no desire to rejoin his kingdom, hoping only for the release of death. Huang ended his deposition the same way Li had started his, with a cry of regret. Huang had left his dead brother in a ditch without a proper burial. In addition, he had been unable to locate his six-year-old son, having heard nothing of him since his capture.

While there is no evidence suggesting that these documents were forgeries, their publication served an important purpose for the Qing court. These depositions reinforced the idea that Taiping leaders were incapable rulers, further favoring the narrative that they did not constitute a real threat to the dynasty. It would be difficult to find a deposition bleaker than Huang Wenying's. The document built upon ideas originally laid out by Tian De's supposed confession and furthered through Li Xiucheng's personal retractions. Hong Renzheng's deposition, while succinct, similarly enforced an idea that the ranks of Taiping leaders were filled with halfhearted actors, ignorant of the movement's larger message. These documents did nothing to salvage the kingdom's reputation or assist people like Augustus Lindley and J. S. Worthington in their attempts to promote the cause of the Heavenly Kingdom to their governments back home. Depositions from Tian De and Li Xiucheng performed similar kinds of work. Through edits by both Qing provincial officials, such as Zeng Guofan, and Qing capital officials, the words of Taiping leaders became tools supporting a pro-Qing dynasty narrative. In the way these edits altered a deposition's tone, and emphasized sections discussing schisms within Taiping leadership, differing stances on the purpose of religion, and uncertainty towards the movement's end goal, officials were able to create documents that assured the nations of the West that they had made the right decision in giving the Qing dynasty their support over the heterodox practices that guided the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. By publishing the depositions

of more than just the most prominent members of the Taiping bureaucracy, Qing authorities augmented a clear and cohesive narrative that was easily deciphered by Western audiences. These published depositions reminded the West that the Taipings were not the new hope of a Christian China that some had thought they would be. Depositions justified the vision that the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom had been a selfish, and egotistic rebellion, not an attempt by a legitimate power at fighting a civil war.

The fall of the Taiping would mark the last mass struggle against Qing rule until the birth of the Nationalist and Communist parties in the early twentieth century. The movement's impact would carry on, as their anti-Manchu agenda, radical social policies, and self-defining attitude continued to reverberate inside the minds of Chinese activists and intellectuals for years to come. Both ruling parties would return to the words of Hong Xiuquan, Li Xuicheng, and Hong Rengan in their attempts at legitimizing their own political advances. It is perhaps for this reason that many early scholars ignored the intricacies of how a deposition was made, choosing instead to focus solely on the deposition's words and what these say about the author's character. In the midst of hot debate over which political lineage was cause for a genuine authority of rule, all that mattered was how a deposition defined a figure's role. Whether Li Xuicheng's deposition showed him to be a vital member of the Taiping community, or a traitor to the movement's cause, entire claims of ideological descent would have to be revised and adjusted to fit this new understanding. In this way early scholars of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom viewed the depositions its leaders produced under the same light that contemporary commentators did. Early scholars took these depositions at face value instead of questioning the processes that led to their production; they ignored the power dynamics present between those who gave testimony and the officials that put them to writing. Scholars have also ignored the reasons behind the

publication of these documents and the meaning they acquired through translation into English for circulation among Western newspapers. These scholars worked with depositions as the static tools the Qing dynasty presented them as, rather than confront the impact that this propagandized nature might have had.

Modern scholarship has similarly missed the broader picture when it comes to Taiping depositions. By focusing on the written words of a few well-known figures, scholars continue to portray the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom as the effort of a few extraordinary people as opposed to the culmination of mass uncertainty and unrest, made up of people from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, all who harbored different goals. By the time Taiping depositions had reached their Western recipients, the documents had already gone through multiple stages of editing, even if this editing was done through translation alone. As such, the depositions that became available to Western readers were not direct testimonials, but the result of multiple camps adjusting a narrative in hopes of actively influencing external perceptions of their respective goals. To view these depositions without confronting this reality is to ignore their intended purpose. Evaluating their content as purely factual, without trying to understand the factors that brought the document into existence and what each actor hoped to get across through it, creates a more one-dimensional view of those involved. Depositions were more than the result of a single strain of thought. They were the product of multiple perspectives, fighting to stand out, coalescing into one final narrative.

This thesis has suggested a new angle for approaching the study of Taiping depositions. By emphasizing the central role played by court testimony in crafting contemporary narratives about the Qing court's ability to fight internal, political opposition, as well as govern its massive empire, the focus shifts from the words that make up a deposition to the message it aimed to get

across, and the process by which this message came to be. Through editing and the promotion of a specific narrative, the imperial court was able to use the very words of Taiping adherents to encourage the Western world to fit a specific role. The depositions informed the West that the Qing dynasty was fully in control, and that this mysterious opposition was in no way the Christian hope that some people thought it might have been. In order to understand what the members of the Taiping actually fought for, and how the Qing dynasty aimed to deal with them, the lifespan of a deposition must be taken into consideration. Taiping depositions must not be evaluated qualitatively. An accurate understanding of their role will not come by attempting to fit them into modern political agendas, but only through a historical look at their creation, edits, audience, and impact. Depositions were living documents resulting from a myriad of combating ideals. This thesis demonstrates that to understand the significance of these documents one must trace each phase of their existence, attending to the ways in which contemporary figures engaged with them. In doing so, this thesis reveals a clearer picture of the purpose and function of these Taiping depositions in their historical context.

Appendix A: Maps

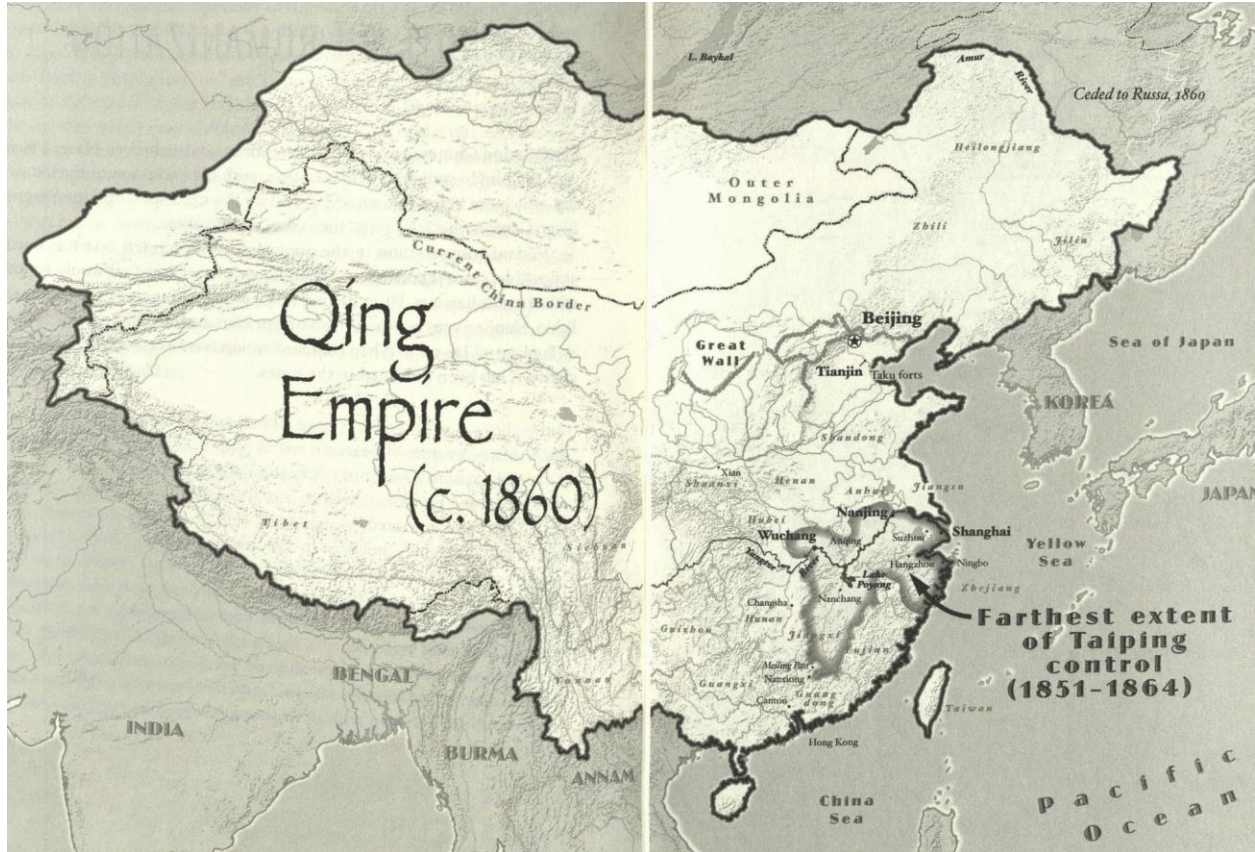


Figure 1: The Territorial Reach of Qing empire as of 1860, provided by Stephen Platt in *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*, pp. xxx – xxxi.

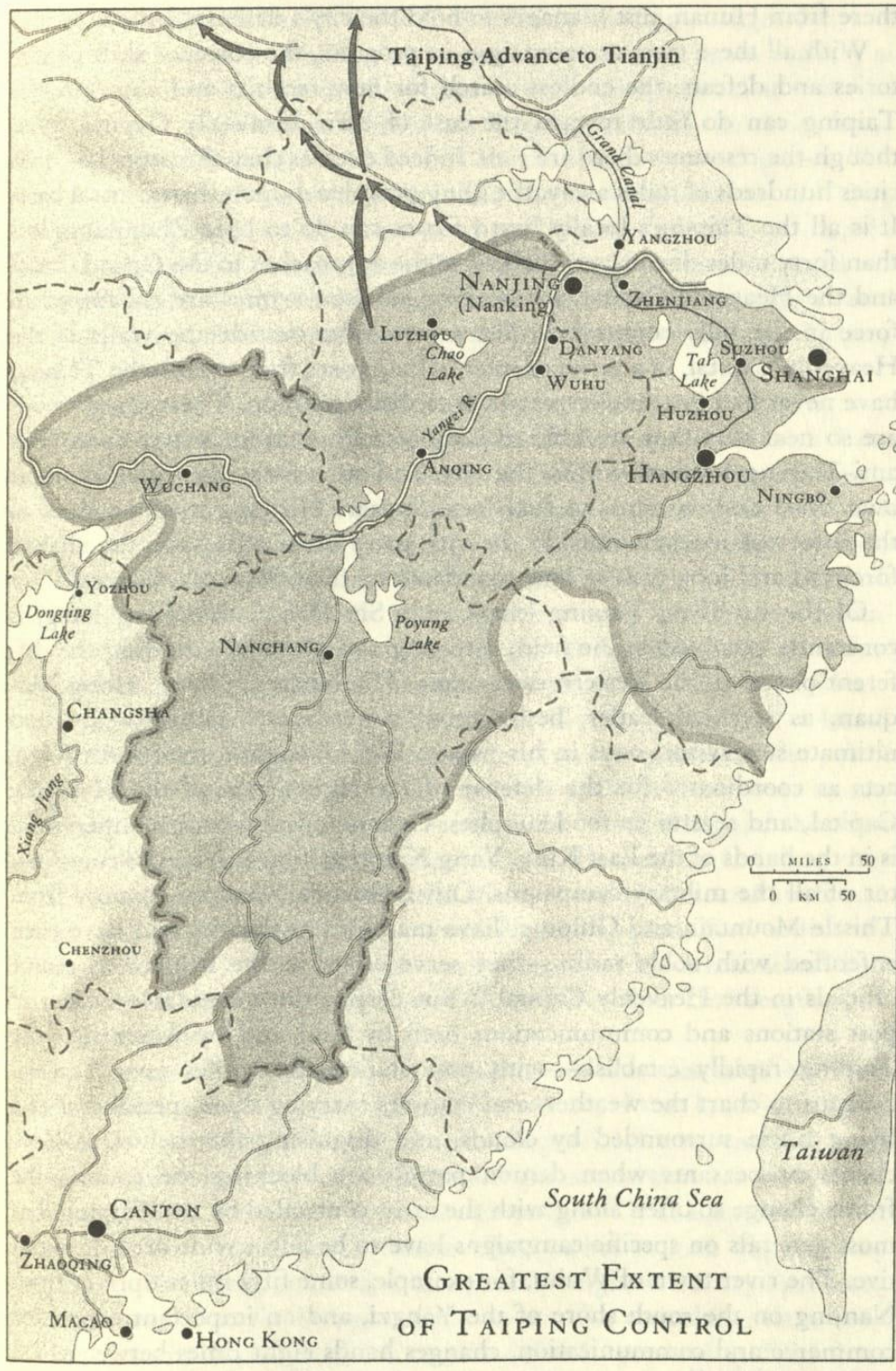


Figure 2: The Greatest Extent of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, provided by Jonathan Spence in *God's Chinese Son*, p. 217.

Appendix B: Translated Depositions

STATEMENT OF HUNG-FU-T'EN, SON OF THE TIENWANG.

I am a native of Canton and my name was originally Hung-t'ien-kuei until a few years back when the old Tienwang directed me to add a "fu," and I was then called Hung-t'ien-kuei-fu. On my accession to the throne the two words "Young Lord" were engraved on my royal seal. I am 16 years old and am the son of the second wife (named Lai) of the Tienwang's 88 wives. At the age of nine I had four wives given to me and I was forbidden access to my mother or sisters. The old Tienwang composed several verses on the forbidden intercourse of men with women, some of which I still remember. I had a yearning after my mother and sisters when I reached my ninth year, and used to take advantage of the time when the old Tienwang had business in the Court to steal a look at them. The old Tienwang told me to study religious books, and would not allow me to study ancient books, which he said were all

wicked. I managed, however, to read thirty or more volumes and still retain some recollection of their subjects and contents. I have never been outside the city gates. On the 24th May 1864 the Tienwang succumbed to sickness and the ministers then supported me to the throne, and having worshipped Shantung they then did homage to me.

Court matters were under the control of the K'angwang, and military affairs in the hands of the Chungwang. All decrees which were issued were drawn up by the two people above mentioned and I was directed to subscribe my name to them. I was now styled the young Tienwang and my four wives were called young Queens. During the night of the 8th July I dreamt that the Imperialists blew down part of the wall and forced their way into the city. On the following day about noon I was standing with my four wives in one of the upstairs rooms. I observed the Imperialists entering the city. I immediately assayed to run downstairs but was held fast by the four Queens. I told them that I was merely going to have a look and that I would be back again. I then ran direct to the Chungwang's palace and the Chungwang and myself made several attempts to get out of the gates but were unable to do so. Towards the first watch, however, disguised as Imperialist soldiers, we made our way with a thousand or more men through one of the breaches in the walls. When the Imperialists became aware of this, they pursued us and cut off some of our men so that our numbers were considerably reduced by the time we reached Kuang-tê-chow. We now agreed with the Tuwang to take different routes to Kiangsi and endeavour to join the K'angwang and the Shihwang. Our whole journey was a succession of fights, and when we reached Yang-chin-p'ai I told the rest that the Imperialists would attack us in the night; but the K'angwang and the others said that we should not be pursued so far. About 12 o'clock at night we were surrounded and afterwards dispersed. The troops pressed us hard and after crossing the bridge I dismounted and was assisted over the hill by my followers. The pursuit still continued and we then concealed ourselves in a pit (or cave). Here my companions were all secured but somehow or other the soldiers did not discover me. I waited until they had all got on well ahead and then I looked for a hiding-place amongst the hills. I remained in this state four days, suffering so much from hunger that I actually desired death. Suddenly, however, a very tall man of snowy

whiteness all over gave me a biscuit. I was thinking of following him, but all at once he disappeared. The biscuit relieved my hunger and I spent two more days amongst the hills. I then went to the house of a man named T'ang, stated my name was Chang and that I was a native of Hoopeh. I lived there four days during which time I had my head shaved and obtained my food by assisting T'ang to cut his grain. T'ang advised me to go home and I then journeyed on till I reached the clear water well at Kuang-ch'ang. I here made enquiries as to the way, and learning that I was then on the road to Chien-ch'ang I turned back lest I should meet my Imperialists. A brave whom I met, accused me of being a ch'angmao and tore my clothes off, and when I was close upon the confines of Jui-chin another brave accosted me and asked me to carry a bamboo for him. To him I replied that I was unable to carry any load as I did not know how to do so.

I then made my way to Shih-ch'ing where I was arrested and brought into the camp. Mr. T'ang has treated me well, and to him I have related the fact that the conquest of the empire was the ambition of the old Tienwang and that I had no part in it. Even after I had succeeded to the throne, everything was carried out by the K'angwang and the Chungwang.

Canton is a bad place and I have no desire to return to it. My ambition is to accompany Mr. T'ang to Hoonan and read for a literary degree.

Figure 3: Deposition of Hong Tiangu Fu, as translated and published by the *North China Herald*

on July 22, 1865, p. 114.

Here Tai-tsiens, confesses as follows:—I am a man of the district of Hang-shán, in the prefecture of Hang-chau; I am thirty years of age; my parents are both dead, and I have neither brothers, wife, nor children. I have been from youth devoted to letters, and have several times entered the Examinations; but as the officers did not acknowledge my talent for writing, and repressed my abilities, I became a priest. I had not long left the priesthood, when I again entered the Examination, and as before I was unsuccessful. This greatly irritated me, and I began to study books on the military art very carefully, in order to scheme against the Empire; I also made myself perfectly familiar with the topography of every part of the land. While I was a priest, I kept myself quiet and retired, diligently examining all works on strategy, so that all the rules of discipline and war since the days of antiquity were familiar to me; and I was emulous to equal to Kung Ming [in the days of the Three States]. Thus I came to think that I could carry out my plans speedily, and if I followed the plans of Kung Ming, flattered myself that I could take the empire as easily as turn my hand over.

Several years ago, when I was a priest, I was travelling over Kwáng-tung, and when in the district of Hwa, became acquainted with Hung Siú-tsiuen, (who is not my relative) and Fung Yun-shán, both of whom are literary persons of great talents, and the former like me had been unsuccessful in the Examinations. He had formerly been through both the Kwáng provinces, and formed an association of reckless persons of the Triad Society. Every one of those who joined it in Kwáng-tung adhered to Fung; and this was done several years, he deluding every one who joined the association to take their oaths that they would live and die with him, and exert all their efforts to assist him. They gradually increased in numbers, and it was feared that there might be a want of hearty union in some of the members; so Hung Siú-tsiuen learned magical arts and to talk with demons, and with Fung Yun-shán made up a story about "a heavenly father, heavenly brother, and Jesus, narrating how the heavenly brother came down from heaven, and that all who would serve the heavenly father would then know where their best interests and profit lay; that when he sat it, was in a small hall of heaven; and when he had been put to death by men, he sat in a great hall of heaven." With these inflaming words they beguiled the members of the association, so that none of them left it; and this procedure, I was well aware, had been going on for many years.

In December, 1850, when their numbers and strength had become large, I went to Kwáng-si, where I saw Hung Siú-tsiuen; he then had engaged the graduate Wei Ching, alias Wei Cháng-hwui, of Ping-nán, and Siú, Yáng, and others of Kwáng-tung, to go out and begin to plunder and fight the government. The members of the brotherhood willingly followed these men, giving themselves, their families, property, and all to them, so that they had funds for their purposes, and bought horses and engaged troops. Their hopes were now high, and they took at this time the name of the Sháng-tí Association.

When I reached Kwáng-si, Hung Siú-tsiuen called me his worthy brother, and honoured me with the title of king Tien-teh (Celestial Virtue) and took all his lessons in the art of war from me. He called himself king Táping (Great Peace); Yáng was generalissimo of the troops with civil powers, and had the title of Eastern king; Siú was deputy generalissimo of the right, with the

title of Western king; Fung Yun-shán was general of the advance with the title of Southern king; and Wei Ching was general of the reserve, with the title of Northern king. Ministers were also made; thus Shih was appointed minister over the Board of Civil Office, and king of the right wing; Tsin was over the Board of Revenue and king of the left wing; Wú Lái and Taang were generals of the Guard, Chá was judge advocate, and Taang Yuh-siú Lo lieutenant-generals. There were many military officers, whose names I do not remember, some of them over 300 men, and others over 100 men. In action, whoever backed out was executed, and their officers severely punished; while rewards and promotion were given to those who were victorious. The government troops killed many of our men. I called Hung Siú-tsiuen my elder brother, and those under our lead addressed us both as Your Majesty; we addressed them by their names.

On the 27th August, 1851, we took Yung-ngán, Wei Ching having before given battle to and defeated the Imperial troops. I and Hung entered this city in our sedans on the 2d of September, and occupied the official residence, which we called our Court, and where we permitted none to dwell. This Hung Siú-tsiuen received most of his knowledge of tactics from me, but my opinion did not accord with his, and I often spoke of this being a small spot, and asked where was the propriety of having so many persons styled kings! Moreover he had relied upon his magical arts for assistance, but no one, even in ancient times, ever reached the throne by them; added to this, he was both a wine-bibber and a licentious man, having thirty-six women with him. I wished to hear of his destruction and defeat, for then I could myself succeed in obtaining dominion.

At this time, the Eastern king Yáng managed the forces, sending them out and appointing their duties, and the officers who should be over them. Wei Ching had the superintendence of actual engagement with the troops, in which he was both skilful and unwearied: he was a most courageous man; even ten thousand of the Imperialists were not a match for him with a thousand men under him. During the several months we occupied Yung-ngán-chan, which we called our court, all our officers memorialized us respecting the affairs of state; a calendar was issued under the direction of Yáng, in which no intercalary month was inserted; but in this matter I was not a party.

Now, when it happened that the ingress into the city was stopped, and rice, gunpowder, and other ammunition was beginning to fail, we reflected that the members of our association in Kwáng-tung and in the department of Wú-chau were formerly very numerous, and plucked up heart to make the attempt to get out of our hole. On the 7th of April, we rallied our spirits and attempted the sortie, dividing the forces into three bands. About 8 a.m. Wei Ching sallied out with 6000 men under him, followed by Yáng and Fung Yun-shán with 5000 or 6000 men about 10 p.m., to cut their way through; these took Hung Siú-tsiuen and his women with them, thirty or more persons, with horses, sedans, and all. About 2 a.m., having more than a thousand men with us, I and Siú went out, being distant from Hung Siú-tsiuen about a league, and were attacked by the government troops, and pursued. Siú would not attend to my orders or signals, and our force was routed, more than 1000 men losing their lives, and I was taken prisoner. It was our intention to have gone by way of a place called Kú-chuh to Cháu-ping-hien (in the department of Ping-lo), and then to Wú-chau-fó, and thus get into Kwáng-tung. The firing of the East fort when we sallied from the city was my act, and I also directed putting fire in the city, so as to facilitate our sortie.

My original surname is not Hung, but it is only since I contracted a brotherhood-relation with Hung Siú-tsiuen, that I changed it to Hung Tai-tsiuen. I wore embroidered clothes and a yellow high cap; the four kings had red-bordered caps like it; the rest of the high officers wore yellow embroidered aprons when they went into action, and carried yellow flags. In the Yamen, I wore a yellow robe; and I did not of my own will desire to sit on the king's throne.

This confession is true.

Figure 4: Deposition of Tian De, as translated and published by The China Mail on August 26,

1852, p. 138.

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