

Christian Millenarianism and the Early Taiping Movement: Reopening a Debate

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The search for the intellectual roots of the Taiping Revolution which shook China in the middle decade of the 19th century has provoked a debate among some historians on the role of Christian influences, including the idea of the millennium. Most descriptions in English of the Taiping ideology discount the part played by Christian concepts, in particular the millennium. In doing that, V. Y. Shih, Charles C. Stelle, and Eugene Boardman miss a unique and important aspect of the movement.

The Taiping revolutionary movement began with the founding and expansion of the God Worshippers' Society in Kwangsi and Kwangtung provinces from 1844 to 1850. The declaration of the *T'ai-p'ing t'ien-kuo* ("Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace") in January 1851 marked the beginning of mobile warfare waged through four provinces, to the capture of Nanking, China's ancient southern capital in 1853. The period from 1853 to 1856 marks the establishment of a territorial regime in and around Nanking, the failure of the northern expedition to take Peking, and the warfare amongst the leaders. The period of defensive warfare at the perimeter and drift at the centre ended in 1859 with the assumption of the premiership by Hung Jen-kan. However his attempts at modernization could not reverse the trend of military defeats which ended with the fall of Nanking in 1864. The paper is principally concerned with the Taiping movement from its beginnings to about 1856.¹

I

The Latin *millennium* refers to a period of a thousand years; the Greek equivalent is *chilios*. In early Christian theology the term described a belief that Christ, after His Second Coming, would establish a kingdom of the saints on earth and reign over it for a thousand years before the Last Judgement. Some historians, anthropologists and sociologists now use "millennium" (and the adjective, "millenarian") rather loosely to encompass a variety of social movements in diverse societies — some with no Christian contact, much less tradition, at all — sharing certain behav-

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¹ On the history of the Revolution see T. T. MEADOWS, *The Chinese and Their Rebellions* (Stanford; Academic Reprints, (1856); FRANZ MICHAEL and Chung-li CHANG, *The Taiping Rebellion — History and Documents*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966, three volumes); Ssu-yü TENG, *The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers, A Comprehensive Survey*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); or Jen YU-WEN, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

hours of a salvationist type.² In addition, some historians have followed the development of the original Christian doctrine, first into schools of pre- and post-millennialism, and second into secularized versions of it.³ The concern of this paper is millenarian movements in which the hope of the millennium provided the reason for an armed revolt.

Those who have examined the Taiping ideology, in particular the millenarian aspect of the Christian influence on it, have tended to discount the vision of an imminent millennium as against other, indigenous factors. Vincent Shih considers the Christian element of the Taiping religion to be superficial. Charles Stelle separates the religious from the political aspect of the revolt, stressing that the latter was exclusively Chinese. Eugene Boardman sees Christianity playing a larger role in the formation of the ideology, but emphasizes the selectivity of the leaders in choosing what Christian doctrines to adopt. In a subsequent article he discounted the idea of the Taipings as revolutionary millenarians. These examinations fall short in accounting for the peculiar character of the Taiping ideology and the movement it fueled.⁴

² Norman COHN, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1970) pp. 13-29; Yonina TALMAN, "Millenarian Movements," *Archives Européenne de Sociologie*, VII, no. 2 (1966): 159-165; Sylvia L. THRUPP (ed.), *Millennial Dreams in Action, Studies in Revolutionary Religious Movements*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), S. L. THRUPP, "Millennial Dreams in Action: A Report on the Conference Discussion", pp. 11-12; Hans JONAS, *Gnostic Religion*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963); Eric VOEGELIN, *Order and History, Israel and Revelation*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956, chapter 13; Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, *Man in History: A Theological Study*, (London: Sheed and Ward), 1968.

³ THRUPP, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Peter WORSLEY, *The Trumphet Shall Sound: A Study of 'Cargo' Cults in Melanesia* (second edition, (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1968), especially pp. xxxix-xlvii; Kenelm BURRIDGE, *New Heaven, New Earth, A Study of Millenarian Activities*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969) 140ff; Kitsiri MALALGODA, "Millennialism in Relation to Buddhism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XII (1970): 424-441; David E. SMITH, "Millenarian Scholarship in America," *American Quarterly* (1965): especially pp. 538-539 on the distinction between pre- and post-millennialists; Ernest R. SANDEEN, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Ernest L. TUVESON, *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of Progress*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), on the secularization of millenarianism into the doctrine of progress.

⁴ Vincent Y. C. SHIH, *The Taiping Ideology, Its Sources, Interpretations and Influences*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 1967, p. xiii; Charles C. STELLE, "Ideologies of the T'ai P'ing Insurrection," *Chinese Social and Political Science Review*, XX, no. 1 (April 1936): 140-149; Eugene P. BOARDMAN, *Christian Influence Upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion, 1851-1864*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952); and his article in THRUPP, *op. cit.*, "Millenary Aspects of the Taiping Rebellion," pp. 70-79. I have not dealt with Jen Yu-wen who makes only peripheral references to "Christian idealism" in Taiping ideology. Jen YU-WEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 26, 143. Neither do I deal with Marxists who generally deny any motivating role to chiliastic religion. Rather they see it as a means or language of articulating material discontents. James HARRISON, *The Communists and Chinese Peasant Rebellions*, (New York: Atheneum Press, 1969), pp. 161-162; Jung SHENG, Lung SHENG-YÜN and Ho LING-HSIU, "Tentative Views on the Relation Between Peasant Wars and Rebellion in China," *Survey of China Mainland Press*, no. 2370, citing *Jen-min Jih-pao*, 17 October, 1960, pp. 11-15. For a more appreciative look at revolutionary millenarianism by a Marxist, see E. J. HOBBSAWM, *Primitive Rebels*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), pp. 10-12, 57-65, 105-107.

In spite of Shih's early statement that "this Christian element not only served as the unifying force of the Taiping movement but also distinguished it from all previous rebellions," he does not regard the Taiping ideology as a fundamental break from the Confucian tradition. "...At the rock bottom of the Taiping mental structure we find the traditional Confucianism. The Taiping adoption of Christianity, whether sincere or not, could not be entirely effective in eliminating the traditional influences."⁵ He bases his case on the Taipings' use of the Confucian classics (in an amended form, and several years after their establishment at Nanking) and Confucian references. "Taiping writings are full of phrases which betray the traditional bent of Taiping thought."⁶ However, it is questionable whether the use of classical phrases and titles indicates an adherence to the classical values. Shih himself admits that the motivation for the use of the ancient literary titles on their own works was to gain popular esteem by association with known works. He repeats Boardman's judgement that the Taipings used citations from the ancient writings to anchor their new ideas in the past.⁷ In attempting to compare the Taiping and Confucian moral values, Shih notes that "verbal similarity does not necessarily prove conceptual connection."⁸ The mere occurrence, then, of Confucian phrases is no demonstration that at "rock bottom" the Taiping mental structure was Confucian. If the Taipings were fundamentally Confucian, why did they not act like Confucians? It is the differences from Confucianism not similarities to it which gave the Taiping Revolution its extraordinary character.

By contrast, when Shih finds the new Christian terminology in Taiping documents, he discounts its significance by arguing that the borrowing of particular terms does not mean an understanding or acceptance of the doctrines which the terms imply.⁹ Yet, there is reason to believe that the Taipings took over the concepts and meanings entailed in the phrases. Joseph E. Levenson, in studying the Confucian and Taiping concepts of "heaven", concludes that the rebels had radically different ideas.

Over and over again the changes are rung on the concept of Shang-ti as God of power, unlimited, inexhaustible power, and the sovereigns are *neng-tzu*, those of his children whom he clothes with power. (Where is *neng-tzu* in the Confucian vocabulary, in which *te*, virtue, the very antithesis of outer physical force, was the ideal "power" of monarchs?) Not virtue but power is what the *Tien-wang* [Heavenly King] gets from Heaven.¹⁰

The Taipings did indeed take over fundamental new ideas from Christianity — how else could they have broken the 'cake of custom' as Shih admits that they did?¹¹

⁵ SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 473.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166. See also p. 205.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 165 and pp. xv and 431, citing BOARDMAN, *Christian Influences, op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁸ SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁰ Joseph R. LEVENSON, "Confucian and Taiping 'Heaven': The Political Implications of Clashing Religious Concepts," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, IV (1961-1962), pp. 444, 447.

¹¹ SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 472.

As further evidence against the revolutionary nature of the Taipings, Shih describes their criticism of Confucianism as "arbitrary," general, and negative.¹² The inference seems to be that the Taipings could have no fundamental differences since their criticisms were not specific and constructive. If, however, one is correct in thinking the Taipings to be revolutionary millenarians, then one would not expect reformism, but only the most uncompromising opposition to a competing ideology.

Charles Stelle views the Taipings as undergoing a transition from the early years, when the religious and political elements of the ideology were separate; to the establishment of the capital at Nanking, after which the religious overshadowed the political. He thought the faith of the rebels a mixture of Christianity, Confucianism and pre-Confucian legend. Stelle did not identify the millennium as included in the Christian element. The pre-1853 political ideology consisted of part Ming restoration, and part traditional "mandate of heaven" rationale for the right of revolution — both Chinese. Indeed he seems to suggest that the Taipings, like the Triad Society (perhaps even as a part of the Triads), sought a change of dynasty, for which they merely used the new foreign religion as a rationalization.¹³

It is quite likely that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, the Taiping leader (or *T'ien-wang*), thought in terms of changing the dynasty by appeal to the "mandate of heaven," while in the early stages of taking up arms. Rev. Theodore Hamberg quotes one of his odes of that time, "We know that heaven means to raise a valiant hand / (To rescue the oppressed and save our native land.)"¹⁴ But Hung intended much more than a dynastic change, or restoration of the Ming. Indeed, he noted of the Triad Society, "after the lapse of two hundred years, we may still speak of subverting the Tsing [Manchu] but we cannot properly speak of restoring the Ming."¹⁵ His intention to end Confucian teaching and enact a wholesale land redistribution constituted a fundamental revolution in Chinese social thought and practice. That intention sprang directly from the "religious" aspect — Hung's visions. Moreover the union of the religious precept with political action existed from the beginning. An example would be Hung's refusal to bow to the Confucian scripture in the school where he taught.¹⁶ Stelle's distinction between the early years and the later religious period, then, seems arbitrary and mistaken.

Eugene Boardman is emphatic as to the importance of Christianity in the Taiping revolutionary movement. "The conclusion is inescapable that the Biblical component was an effective instrument of mass control

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹³ STELLE, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-149. On the "mandate of heaven," as a right of rebellion, see MEADOWS, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-24.

¹⁴ Theodore HAMBERG, *The Chinese Rebel Chief, Hung-Siu-Tsuen and the Origin of the Insurrection in China*, (London: Walton Press, 1855), p. 76. For the only account which completely rejects Hamberg (as "a wild story", a "mixture of gossip and fancy") see J. J. M. DE GROOT, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China*, (Amsterdam: Johannes Muller, 1903), pp. 553-554.

¹⁵ HAMBERG, *ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

and an important factor in Taiping military success."¹⁷ Nonetheless, Boardman stresses how little of Christian doctrine found its way into the Taiping ideology. In his survey of the literature produced by the rebels he found that all of the Christian Biblical canon did not receive equal emphasis. The first five books of the Old Testament held prominence, with little attention given to the life and teachings of Christ. From that, and the omission of any form of communion or mass, he infers that the leaders consciously selected the doctrines and portions of the Bible which suited their political situation.¹⁸

That conclusion appears to be a poor inference. If selectivity with Scripture, or emphasis on a particular part of the Bible rather than others, are the criteria of whether or not one is Christian, then few would qualify. Boardman presents no direct evidence that the selection was conscious. Indeed he points out the limited contacts of the Taiping leaders with orthodox Christianity and the Scriptures — especially in the early formative years of the movement. It may well be that the leaders took as much as they could understand in the new, strange doctrines of the missionaries. All that can be said with certainty from Boardman's survey is that the Taiping leaders were probably acquainted with most doctrines of evangelical Protestantism, and that of those only some were incorporated into the revolutionary ideology.¹⁹

In his article, 'Millenary Aspects of the Taiping Rebellion', Boardman attempted to apply to the Taipings Norman Cohn's definition of revolutionary millenarianism. Cohn describes as millenarian these movements which picture salvation as:

- (a) collective, in the sense that it is to be enjoyed by the faithful as a collectivity;
- (b) terrestrial, in the sense that it is to be realized on this earth, and not in some other-worldly heaven;
- (c) imminent, in the sense that it is to come both soon and suddenly;
- (d) total, in the sense that it is utterly to transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will be no mere improvement on the present but perfection itself;
- (e) miraculous, in the sense that it is to be accomplished by, or with the help of, supernatural agencies.²⁰

Boardman views the Taiping concept of salvation as collective and terrestrial in Cohn's sense. However he states that,

A sense of imminence seems to have been completely lacking and out of context. The so-called God Worshippers [...] were not told by their preachers that their salvation might come at any moment by Divine interposition.

¹⁷ BOARDMAN, *Christian Influence, op. cit.*, p. 121. TENG, *op. cit.*, in his survey generally follows Boardman, pp. 32-33, 116-122.

¹⁸ BOARDMAN, *Christian Influence, op. cit.*, pp. 54, 73.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47. Curiously Boardman saw no Biblical support for the crucial Sacred Treasury (to which all contributed their goods and from which all drew supplies). Yet Acts 2:45 and Acts 6:1-4 have been drawn on for centuries by radical Christian sects (including millenarians) as evidence of divine sanction for primitive communism. BOARDMAN, *Christian Influence, op. cit.*, p. 108.

²⁰ Cohn *op. cit.* p. 13.

Instead they were readied for revolt, to be able by their own efforts to act when the opportunity presented itself.²¹

This is misleading in two ways. Before January 1851 the Taipings (then called the "God Worshippers' Society") believed that the kingdom of heaven was imminent — for they had the promise and person of one whom they believed to be Christ's younger brother, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan. After the declaration founding the *T'ai-p'ing t'ien-kuo* ("Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace") in that month, the followers believed that salvation had come, as Boardman has noted elsewhere.²² Certainly, too, the Taipings believed that this salvation occurred with divine assistance, as evidenced in the divine visitations alleged to have come to Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, as well as secondary leaders such as Yang Hsiu-ch'ing and Hsiao Ch'ao-kuai. Such intervention, they believed, would not be limited to Hung's initial revelation which led to the founding of the movement, but continued as God aided his "younger son" to battle the "devils."²³ There is evidence that the Taipings' concept of salvation was both imminent and divinely assisted.

Boardman is most confusing when he turns to Cohn's fourth point, the total nature of the salvation expected. He considers this the cleanest break of the Taipings from the revolutionary millenarian model. "The end sought was practical and possible, but was not envisaged with a hyperbolic yearning toward perfection. ...The regime strove to establish an ideal commonwealth on earth and thus had a very practical end in mind."²⁴ Later on he asserts, "So Taiping religion existed for two purposes, to provide other-worldly solace and to inspire the realization of a Taiping heaven on earth. [...] Their aim was an unusual one entirely out of the Chinese tradition. Members of rebellious secret societies could not join their movement unless they met its rigorous tests and subscribed to its goal of a new heavenly kingdom in China."²⁵ The juxtaposition of the phrases "ideal commonwealth," "heaven on earth," and "a new heavenly kingdom" with "practical and possible" and "a very practical end" is most unsettling. Bypassing the assumption that Boardman personally believes that the establishment of a heaven on earth is a practical objective, we are left with the alternative that the Taipings' concept of salvation did indeed fit Cohn's description as "no mere improvement on the present but perfection itself." That approach — rather than those of Shih, Stelle or Boardman — by viewing the Taiping ideology as chiliastic, enables us to understand its structure and appeal, which up to that period were unique in Chinese history.²⁶

²¹ BOARDMAN, "Millenary Aspects," *op. cit.*, p. 71.

²² BOARDMAN, *Christian Influence*, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 22. MICHAEL and CHANG, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 86-97.

²⁴ BOARDMAN, "Millenary Aspects," *op. cit.*, pp. 71, 74.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 77, 79.

²⁶ The idea of a special spiritual leader who would take political power and usher in a new age existed prior to the nineteenth century as a derivation of Buddhism. Such a concept would serve to prepare people for a chiliastic movement. But that idea cannot properly be called "millenarian" (though it often is) since the Buddhist conception of salvation was cyclical, foreseeing a succession of saviours. Thus it was not "total" (Cohn) or "ul-

III

In reviewing Conn's work, Yonina Talman developed several useful ideas which extended the definition of revolutionary millenarian. To the aspect of 'total', she adds 'ultimate', meaning the end of history. The movements are characterized by a radical dualism — the forces of good vs. the forces of evil — a further expansion of the totality of the struggle. The followers tend to be ecstatic in religious observance, and to display various antinomian tendencies. The leadership contains a prophet-organizer as a mediator between the Divine Being and the movement, as well as messianic appeal (through a personal human Messiah, or a mechanical stand-in).²⁷ With this in mind we shall examine the Taiping concept of salvation, and the characteristics as well as the background of the Taiping leadership.

The Taipings conceived of salvation as collective. "Those who worshipped God with awe, reverence, and sincerity would go to heaven, which meant either the heavenly capital in this life or heaven in the next [...]."²⁸ Implicitly, then, salvation could be enjoyed on earth, rather than waiting for death to take one to heaven. In his commentary on the *Revelation* of St. John (21:1-2, 9), concerning the new heaven and new earth, and the promise of a new Jerusalem, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan wrote,

It is the same on Earth as in Heaven. What John saw was the Great Paradise in Heaven. Whether Heaven or Earth it comes to the same: the New Jerusalem is the present Heavenly Capital [Nanking], where God and Christ descend upon earth to guide Me and the Junior Lord in establishing the Paradise of the Heavenly Dynasty.²⁹

The preceding shows that the Taipings considered the Kingdom of Heaven not just imminent by the time they were established in Nanking, but actually present in the "Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace." The reference to the descents of God and Christ further indicate the role of the miraculous in the movement.

Supernatural agencies played a large part in the Taiping Revolution. Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's authority and appeal were based upon his claim to have ascended to Heaven and to be the younger brother of Christ, the Son of God. As well, Yang Hsiu-ch'ing and Hsiao Ch'ao-kuei claimed

time" (Talman) because another saviour would be needed in 129,600 years. Susan Naquin writes that the 1813 White Lotus rebels saw their action initiating the final cycle, yet she also notes her sources as limiting that cycle to 97,200 years. Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China, The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 11-13. See also C. K. YANG, *Religion in Chinese Society*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), pp. 218-243, especially pp. 230, 234-235; Yuji MURAMATSU "Some Themes in Chinese Rebel Ideologies," in *The Confucian Persuasion*, edited by A. F. WRIGHT, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), pp. 241-267, especially pp. 245-247; and MALAL-GODA, *op. cit.*, pp. 424-441.

²⁷ TALMAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-70. See also her article, "Pursuit of the Millennium: the Relation Between Religion and Social Change," *Archives européennes de sociologie* III, no. 1 (1962): 125-48.

²⁸ SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

²⁹ J. C. CHENG, *Chinese Sources for the Taiping Rebellion, 1850-1864*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1963), p. 91.

authority through divine visitation. In particular Yang's assertion that God, the Heavenly Father, descended on him, gave that individual a commanding position within the movement, at times as great as that of Hung himself. These divine interventions were used at decisive junctures to raise morale and protect the movement. Yang, speaking as the Heavenly Father, on one occasion exposed an assassination plot by Chou Hsi-neng. (The plot was most likely uncovered by Yang's secret police.)³⁰ The Taipings relied on these miraculous interventions to enforce discipline and sustain morale.

During the early period in Kwangsi province (1844-1850), the God Worshippers' Society had in Hung Hsiu-ch'üan and his revelation the promise of a new order about to be born. In the year before Hung proclaimed himself as Heavenly King, he made prophecies that God had decided to send pestilence upon the unbelievers as a sign for the God Worshippers to leave their homes and come together. This 'calling out the righteous from the sinful world' in preparation for the divine intervention has been common in many millenarian movements.³¹ That sense of imminence, which Boardman missed, was replaced in January 1851 by the declaration that the "Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace" had come. Like the 16th century Anabaptists in their last days at Münster, the Taipings believed themselves to be fighting for a New Jerusalem that had arrived, rather than one soon expected.

The Taipings came not merely to establish a new dynasty, but to re-order society. The existing regime was identified with "Yen-lo," the devil serpent. Upon his overthrow, a new society would be organized. The Confucian classics — the staple of Chinese culture for centuries — were to be superseded by the Bible and Hung's Imperial Declarations. The land system was to be radically altered, giving each person, male or female, an equal allotment of land to till. (That, of course, would mean the end of the rural class system.) Women were to be free to marry by their own consent, to try for the scholarly examinations, and own property and their own persons. "There being fields, let all cultivate them; there being food, let all eat; there being clothes, let all be dressed; there being money, let all use it, so that nowhere does inequality exist, and no man is not well fed and clothed."³² The Taipings thus aimed at a totally new society, a revolution in social, economic and religious beliefs and practice.

An understanding of the totality of the Taiping goals resolves the dispute over the authorship of a document entitled, "Manifesto on the Right to the Throne." If the Taipings hoped solely for a dynastic change, as Stelle argued, then it might have been a Taiping publication. But a comparison of its language with that of Hung himself shows a complete divergence.

³⁰ MICHAEL, and CHANG, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 86-97; SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

³¹ HAMBERG, *op. cit.*, p. 73; COHN, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 209ff, 226ff. THRUPP, *op. cit.*, Rene RIBEIRO, "Brazilian Messianic Movements," pp. 55-69; and Howard KAMINSKY, "The Free Spirit in the Hussite Revolution," pp. 166-186.

³² Michael and Chang, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 312-320, 314.

There is, therefore, no difference between ourselves, who lay contributions on the villages we take, and the agents sent from Peking to collect taxes. Why then, without any motive, are troops dispatched against us? Such a proceeding strikes us a very unjust one. What! Is it possible that the Manchooos [*sic*], who are foreigners, have a right to receive the taxes of the captured provinces, and to name officers who oppress the people, while we Chinese are prohibited from taking a trifling amount at the public cost? [...] The right to govern consists in possession.³³

This is the kind of appeal one would get from those such as the Triad Society which intended only a restoration of the Ming Dynasty. It calls on Chinese sentiment against the foreign Manchus, promises lower taxes, and appeals to its local military success in occupying territory as proof that it has received the "mandate of heaven." The Taipings' source of authority is quite different.

God has sent me to descend into the world;
What has become of the trickery of the evil demons?
Relentless am I, in command of the heavenly hosts;
All of you evil demons must quickly flee.³⁴

Here we clearly see that Hung's appeal is to God's commission to him personally to establish the heavenly kingdom and exterminate all demons.

Of the further characteristics noted by Talman, several appear in the Taiping movement. The radical dualism of good vs evil is common. According to "The Taiping Heavenly Chronicle," for example, Hung had received this command from God, his Father,

The people of the world have fallen victim to the schemes of the serpent and demons, and as a result they have been caught and they fall into the depths of hell and sink. The people of the world must definitely not kneel to them or show reverence to them. They must return their hearts to reverence for God before they can escape the hands of the demons, and be able to ascend to heaven.³⁵

The Taipings could make common cause with no one — neither rebel bands such as the Triad Society nor the Western powers. To support the movement one had to put oneself under its discipline and adhere to its religion, an idea which struck the Triads as arrogant and the Western powers as shocking and blasphemous.³⁶ Certain antinomian tendencies evidenced themselves: idol smashing, destruction of Confucian classics and Buddhist temples, and a radically unorthodox sexual code — beginning by the prohibition of all sexual contact, and ending with compulsory mar-

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 40-41, 49. BOARDMAN, *Christian Influence*, *op. cit.*, p. 4. When Hung's teacher from his days in Canton showed up in Nanking, while he was given respect, he was expected to worship Hung and become a proselyte to the Taiping Christianity. Yuan Chung TENG, "Reverend Issachar Jacox Roberts and the Taiping Rebellion," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, XXIII, no. 1 (November 1963), p. 64. On the clash with the Western powers over religion, see also J. S. GREGORY, *Great Britain and the Taipings*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), pp. 47-53, 133-139; and TENG, *op. cit.*, chaps. IX & X. MEADOWS, *op. cit.*, gives the text of the Taiping communication welcoming the English who "have now come to give their allegiance to our Sovereign [...]", pp. 269-271.

riage. The ecstatic forms of worship, mentioned by Talman, can be found particularly in the early period of the Taiping movement.³⁷ Finally, as we shall see in the next section, the Taipings' leadership structure took the form of a prophet or organizer and a messiah.

III.

The leadership of the Taipings — in particular Hung Hsiu-ch'üan himself — both in background and behaviour fit the revolutionary millenarian model of Cohn and Talman. Hung was born the youngest son of a poor peasant family in Kwangtung, a province of southern China. Apparently Hung was authoritative and quick tempered by nature. He took the lead in organizing games among the other children and beat those who disobeyed his orders. A gifted child, he was the centre of his parents' hopes. By much sacrifice he was sent to school, but the family could not finance him past his fourteenth year. He continued his studies on his own, working as a village school teacher, aspiring to write the state examinations which would be the key to employment, social status and wealth. From 1827 to 1843 he tried the Imperial examinations repeatedly, but without ultimate success. While in Canton for the examinations during 1834, he is first known to have had contact with missionaries.³⁸ He received a series of tracts in Chinese entitled, "Good Words to Admonish the Age." A year or so later, after yet another failure at the Imperial examinations, Hung became critically ill and experienced a series of visions. That tract and those visions formed the basis for the Taiping movement.

Upon his recovery from the illness, Hung did not immediately connect the visions with the Christian tracts, which he had only briefly scanned. However, he became more self-confident and took an active interest in public affairs. "His manner became studied, his walk measured, and [...] [his] general outlook hardened to one of unswerving belief in his own special mission."³⁹ Ssu-yü Teng considers it possible that even in 1837 Hung may have had imperial ambitions. In a poem ascribed to Hung in that year appears the line, "he flies to all directions of the sky and sets the universe in order."⁴⁰ But it was only after his failure in the examinations of 1843, and at the urging of his cousin (who had read the tract series) that Hung seriously studied "Good Words to Admonish the Age." According to "The Taiping Heavenly Chronicle," the Heavenly Father had told Hung,

³⁷ HAMBERG, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-71. MEADOWS, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-105, 429-431.

³⁸ John FOSTER, "Christian Origins of the Taiping Rebellion," *International Review of Missions*, XL (April 1951), especially the extended footnote, p. 158n. MEADOWS, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-76. Jen YU-WEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-15.

³⁹ Jen YU-WEN, *op. cit.*, p. 19. MICHAEL and CHANG, *op. cit.*, I, p. 23. See also FOSTER, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-167, for an interpretation of the relation between the origins of Hung's visions and "Good Words to Admonish the Age." For another, see P. M. YAP, "The Mental Illness of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, Leader of the Taiping Rebellion," *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, XIII, no. 3 (May 1954): 287-304.

⁴⁰ Ssu-yü TENG, *New Light on the History of the Taiping Rebellion*, (New York: Russell and Russell), 1966, p. 52. See also Jung SHENG, Lung SHENG-YÜN and Ho LING-HSIU, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

When you descend into the world there will still be several years before you awaken. But you need have no fear about not awakening. Later a book will be given to you which will explain to you all of these things. Having had all of these things made clear to you, you will not err if you then shall go on to act in accordance with this book.⁴¹

From his understanding of the visions and the Christian tract series, Hung built the foundations of the Taiping ideology.

In the first years of the movement, the two other key leaders were Feng Yüan-shan and Yang Hsiu-ch'ing. A close friend of Hung's, Feng was an early convert. He travelled with Hung on his early preaching tours. It was he who actually organized the God Worshippers' Society. Yang, who joined the movement later, distinguished himself as the ablest military leader among the Taipings. As well when he entered the Society, he brought in his own group of followers, who were charcoal burners and miners. Feng, like Hung, was a village teacher who had failed the Imperial examinations. Yang was an ill-educated orphan who as a charcoal burner held one of the lowest occupations in that society. Among these people he became a leader, and perhaps had used his power to offer protection to Canton-Yangtze convoys.⁴²

Cohn describes the typical leader of a millenarian sect as a failed priest, or a candidate for the priesthood, who had turned into an evangelist of sorts. Hung and Feng approximate that status, as nearly as one could in the context of Chinese society. The education was necessary to give the individual an acquaintance with the millenarian option; and the social prestige of an educated person. To have failed in that education may also have been psychologically necessary for the aspirant to turn rebel. One had placed a high value on "the system" and on succeeding in it. Having failed, one finds that his loyalty to that "system" has been gravely shaken.

All three of the early Taiping leaders were born in low estate and had endeavoured with some success to rise. Hung and Feng aspired to become scholars but had failed to get beyond the station of village school master. Yang had sought security in an organization, but if it was indeed tied to the convoys bound for the Yangtze valley, then the loss of Canton's trade monopoly after the Opium Wars would have shaken even that small protection. These men in their social background bear considerable similarity to the "propheta" described by Cohn.

Unlike the leaders of the great popular risings [...] "propheta" were seldom manual workers or even former manual workers. Sometimes they were petty nobles; sometimes they were simply imposters; but more usually they were intellectuals or half-intellectuals — the former priest turned freelance preacher was the commonest type of all.⁴³

⁴¹ MICHAEL and CHANG, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 61-62.

⁴² *Ibid.*, I, pp. 34-36.

⁴³ COHN, *op. cit.*, p. 284. See also pp. 84-85. Another common feature of the millenial "prophetae" was that they came as strangers to the district where those who became their followers lived. COHN, *op. cit.*, pp. 42, 44, 90, 260, 264. Similarly Hung and Feng found their greatest success in Kwangsi not their native Kwangtung. To come as a stranger added mysteriousness to the millenarian leader's appeal.

The two individuals who founded the Taiping movement clearly fit into that description. In Europe up to the Reformation the priesthood held a social position approximately equivalent to that of the Imperial scholars in China. Yang's role was not that of organizer, thinker, or planner, but military chief. Shih comments, "Yang undoubtedly realized the political significance of the ideology and made use of it to the fullest extent. Though he contributed no original ideas, he injected life into the ideology by making it practical."⁴⁴ Aside from bringing in a sizeable group of followers, Yang appears to have played a lesser role until the military campaign began.

The Taiping chiefs shared not only a common background but also common characteristics of leadership with the European revolutionary millenarians: a demand for the total commitment of those involved; a monopoly on authoritative knowledge; and the leaders' unquestioned right to make doctrinal changes. The authority of the leaders was further buttressed by control over a central treasury to which all wealth was subject. These characteristics of the leadership derived from the ideology of the movement, and were not individual aberrations.

Cohn describes the total nature of the millenarian struggle, in the minds of the millenarians, not as a "struggle for specific, limited objectives, but as an event of unique importance, different in kind from all other struggles known to history [...]."⁴⁵ This experience of uniqueness served to justify the destruction of all their other social ties and obligations and their submission to the "movement." In the Anabaptist rebellion at Münster, led by Matthys and Bockelson, the élite corps was composed entirely of immigrants, "who either had no possessions or had left them to come to Münster, [they] were Bockelson's creatures and stood or fell with him." To these were accorded the highest social status and material comfort. Compare them to the Taipings' organization of their troops.

It seems to have been the policy to bring together in each squad men from different places, another measure designed to prevent any autonomy of the unit or its commanders. [...] It was the policy of the Taiping leaders, in the creation of their army, to distribute their followers in such a way as to destroy the cohesion of the village groups.⁴⁶

The only tie allowed legitimate existence was to the Heavenly Kingdom. "By their attempt to incorporate the teachings of their beliefs and the management of all public affairs in the governmental structure, the Taipings sought to introduce a monist order in which the state would be all."⁴⁷ Not even the ties of family were allowed to intercede on the demands of the Heavenly Kingdom. While praising the sons' devotion to their fathers, ultimately the Taipings decreed, "We know only the state; it is impossible to be both loyal and filial."⁴⁸

⁴⁴ SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁴⁵ COHN, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 276. MICHAEL and CHANG, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 44-45.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

The regime was enforced and reinforced by a number of devices. The first of these was the establishment of a monopoly on authoritative knowledge. The attack on the Confucian classics was carried out physically in the destruction of family shrines and the burning of works by Confucian scholars. When not strictly proscribed, the classics were issued only in the approved revised form. While the Taipings often used classical references, and would even put the titles of classics on their own works, this was done to "anchor in Chinese tradition as many of the new theological and revolutionary ideas as possible."⁴⁹

In place of the ancient classics, the Taipings put their own version of the Bible (with Hung's annotations), and the imperial heavenly declarations. "All young boys must go to church every day, where the sergeant is to teach them to read the Old Testament and the New Testament, as well as the book of proclamations of the true ordained Sovereign."⁵⁰ No other interpretation of Christianity was allowed, much to the dismay of Protestant missionaries, who had hoped that the new movement would open China their efforts. "What astonished and then angered the foreign visitors most was the presumption with which their allegiance to the Taiping religion was demanded."⁵¹ The new ideology considered itself to be the final and total revelation of God's will. As such it would admit no challenge.

The same desire for a monopoly of all authoritative knowledge can be seen in the revolutionary millenarian movements examined by Cohn. In the medieval crusades of the "pastoureaux," the leader spoke as the prophet of God, whose words were not to be contradicted or questioned without danger.

When the "Pastoureaux" left Paris, they moved in a number of bands each under the leadership of a 'Master', who, as they passed through towns and villages, blessed the crowds. [...] Jacob [the "propheta"] preached in public, and a scholar from the cathedral school [of Orleans] who dared to oppose him was struck down with an axe. [...] [at Bourges] someone in the crowd dared to contradict him. Jacob rushed at the man with a sword and killed him. [...]⁵²

A movement which aims at perfecting the world can be expected to demand absolute commitment and to allow no contrary expressions of opinion.

However one must not understand the total nature of the claims made for the revolution and the leadership's monopoly of authoritative knowledge as producing a rigid, never-changing system. Another aspect of the leadership role in a revolutionary millenarian movement is the power to change doctrine at will. An example of this flexibility can be seen in the status accorded to women by the Taipings. In the early stages of the movement prostitution, footbinding, and parentally arranged marriages were forbidden. Women could write the official examinations for entry into the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43. BOARDMAN, *Christian Influence*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁵⁰ MICHAEL and CHANG, *op. cit.*, volume II, p. 315.

⁵¹ BOARDMAN, *Christian Influence*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁵² COHN, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97, 264.

public service, choose their own marriage partners, and own land. During the period of mobile warfare, and for some time after, the Taipings segregated men and women into different units and different camps. "Adultery" was defined as any sexual relationship, even between husband and wife, and was punishable by death.⁵³ This command was based on Hung's view that all men and women were sisters and brothers because of the fatherhood of God. Yet in 1855, when segregation formally ended, the regime decreed compulsory marriage.

The marriage order proved to be a mess. In many cases old men were wedded to young girls and old women coupled up with young men, causing a great deal of heartbreak. When the order was proclaimed, many of the women committed suicide by hanging themselves, jumping into wells, cutting their own throats, or taking poison.⁵⁴

Once again, the switch from respecting women highly to regarding them as virtual chattels can be paralleled in the European millennial experience.

The Anabaptists at Münster commenced their regime with a strict code governing sexual behaviour. The only permissible relationship was marriage between two Anabaptists. A tendency to asceticism was very common in medieval revolts since it was often the licentiousness of the local clergy which gave them popular support. However, the strict code of morality came to an abrupt end, when the messianic leader decided to introduce polygamy.

The path along which Bockelson now led the Anabaptists in Münster was in fact that which in earlier centuries had been trodden by the Brethren of the Free Spirit and by the Adamites. To the assembled preachers and Elders he explained how God had revealed to him that the Biblical precept to 'increase and multiply' must be taken as a divine commandment. [...] Bockelson argued for days on end and finally threatened dissenters with the wrath of God; after which the preachers went out obediently to expound the new doctrine in the cathedral-square.⁵⁵

As in Hung's Heavenly Kingdom the new policy met with resistance — an armed uprising and numerous suicides among women. As in Nanking, the new policy caused great hardship among the families in Münster. That such a radical change in doctrine, affecting people so deeply, could be made and enforced, demonstrates the tremendous power and authority of the leadership.

A further practice, the establishment of a central treasury, greatly strengthened the hold of the leadership over the people. The Taipings, from their first call to arms at Chin-t'ien, had organized a "Sacred Treasury" to which each individual contributed all possessions and wealth beyond immediate personal necessities. When the army was on the march the treasury functioned as a quartermaster's depot. However, when the period of mobile warfare ended, the Sacred Treasury became part of the Taiping government. Shih describes the basis for this:

⁵³ BOARDMAN, *Christian Influence*, *op. cit.*, p. 27. SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 66. During this period the Taipings did not consistently apply their own doctrine. SHIH, *op. cit.*, pp. 72, 195. Jen YU-WEN, *op. cit.* pp. 137-138.

⁵⁴ Huang CHÜAN-TSAI, cited in SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 68. Jen YU-WEN, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

⁵⁵ COHN, *op. cit.*, pp. 269, 275.

State control was apparently based on the idea that everything belonged to God. And the *T'ien-wang* being the chief representative of God and the concrete symbol of the state, was naturally the rightful disposer of all things.⁵⁶

According to the "Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty" each village was to have its own Sacred Treasury under the authority of the Taiping imperial commander.⁵⁷

The Sacred Treasury served several functions in unifying the Taipings around their leaders. First, the act of contributing all one's goods to the treasury further reduced any private interest one might have apart from the movement. We have already noted that members of the same village or family and even husbands and wives were separated. All these regulations left the Taiping member with only one strong tie — to the movement itself. (That these rules were taken seriously is shown by the fact that the Taipings would not accept groups that wished to retain their unity — the Triad Society and the pirate bands — even when the extra numbers were most needed.)⁵⁸ Once the individual entered the Taiping army, he or she had little choice but to remain obedient. Dependent on the treasury for day-to-day existence, the Taiping soldier had little opportunity for desertion or disobedience.

On the positive side the treasury gave the individual a sense of material security. Most of those recruited into the movement had lived a very insecure life as river pirates, Canton porters, charcoal burners, miners, or poor peasants. Shih comments, "All the people asked for at that time was some measure of economic security; and the sacred treasury was devised to give them that security."⁵⁹

The phenomena of a common treasury under the control of an all-powerful leadership was also found in European millenarian sects. With them it served much the same purposes. Tanchelm of Antwerp had all his followers put their wealth under his control, when he was supposedly marrying the Virgin Mary. The Drummer of Niklashausen, although he did not establish a regime of any length, called on the same ideas of common property and "gifts" to God's prophet.⁶⁰ However, the common treasury was most fully developed during the Anabaptist reign at Münster. During the siege of that city, the leadership had time to work out its revolutionary ideas. After declaring Münster to be the "New Jerusalem" (as Hung did with Nanking), the leaders confiscated all property of those who had fled. As well,

All clothing, bedding, furniture, hardware, weapons, and stocks of food were removed [from private homes] and placed in central depots. After praying for three days Matthys announced the names of seven 'deacons' who had

⁵⁶ SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁵⁷ MICHAEL and CHANG, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 314-315. The reference is to "the public granary."

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41, 49. Jean YU-WEN, *op. cit.*, p. 125. When the Triads seized Shanghai in 1853, the Taipings withheld their aid, in part because the Triads attempted no "moral reform" (i.e. ending opium smoking and idol worship).

⁵⁹ SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 485.

⁶⁰ COHN, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 228-229, 234.

been chosen by God to administer these stores. The poor were encouraged to apply to them and received commodities according to their needs.⁶¹

Control over the central stores kept the troops loyal, for they knew "if hunger came, they would be the last to suffer from it."⁶² By seizing all the horses and weapons, Matthys and Bockelson ensured themselves against serious revolts from within the town. Moreover, by controlling the food supply, they could guard against desertion. Both at Münster and at Nanking the central treasury served to sustain the absolute power of the leaders. In company with the monopoly on authoritative knowledge and the leaders' right to make doctrinal changes, the institution of the treasury enforced a total commitment to the movement and its "prophe-ta."

IV

An analysis of the ideology of the Taipings leads one to ask what would induce masses of people to join such a venture. Professor George E. Taylor has developed an extensive explanation of the Taiping revolutionary movement from its economic and social context. In the century prior to the Taiping Revolution, the estimated ratio of increase in cultivated land to the growth in population was 1:2.2. Compounding the population pressure on land was a drastic increase in taxation brought about by the shortage of silver and the debasement of the common copper coins. After 1831 foreign commerce (largely opium) reversed the balance of trade, draining China of its silver. To counter the decline in revenues, the Imperial government debased the copper currency. However, since the peasant had to pay his tax in a fixed number of silver coins, his burden was doubly increased — as those coins had become scarcer and his ability to purchase them had decreased. In addition the rate of tax varied across the country, being heaviest in Hunan, Hupei, Kweichow, Kwangtung and Kwangsi. The growth of population beyond what the cultivated land could sustain and the crushing burden of an inequitable taxation system combined with the usual disasters of famine and flood, until "the position of the peasant had become depressed, insecure and degraded to what almost amounted to serfdom." After 1800 China had a large permanent population of paupers which served as "the raw material of revolution and rebellion."⁶³

In the provinces of Kwangtung and Kwangsi these conditions were exacerbated by the Opium Wars and their aftermath. Canton, the region's central city, had been the major battleground. The Manchu Dynasty's military reputation had been corroded by its failure against the foreign powers. Through the Treaty of Nanking, Canton lost its monopoly on Western trade. The decline of that trade left thousands of porters and

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁶³ George E. TAYLOR, "The Taiping Rebellion: Its Economic Background and Social Theory," *Chinese Social and Political Science Review*, XVI, no. 4 (January 1933): 549-568. For a similar view by Marxists, see Jung SHENG, LUNG SHENG-YUN and HO LING-HSIU, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

boatmen unemployed. With their defeat by the Western powers in the Canton delta, the river pirates were driven inland, forming another dislocated group. The defeat of the Imperial forces and the large floating population of unemployed made Kwangtung and Kwangsi a region dominated by insecurity.⁶⁴

The situation in the two provinces was worsened by local feuding, in particular between two rival groups — the Hakkas and the Punti. The latter, greater in numbers, were the original people of the region. The Hakkas had emigrated into the region from the north, settled in separate communities and retained their own dialect and customs. Hung, Feng, Yang and most of the God Worshippers' Society's early members were Hakkas, and certainly part of the early appeal of Hung's movement consisted in its ability to protect its members. To the minority Hakkas, continually harassed by neighbouring Punti villages, that would have been a powerful attraction.⁶⁵

Not only had the Imperial authority been undermined in the war with the foreign powers, but the local authorities had little control over village feuds and minor uprisings. Since the provincial officials had rotating, rather than permanent, appointments they sought to stay out of any local quarrels. They did not report such quarrels either, for fear it would reflect on their own record. Consequently, local feuds between village militias came to be more or less accepted. In this setting the God Worshippers' Society had to develop its own local corps to protect its members, and the Imperial officials remained neutral whenever possible, considering the development of the corps a natural part of the local political pattern.⁶⁶

Without passing judgement on whether the social and economic background sketched above itself provided the sufficient cause of the Taiping Revolution, one can compare it with the backgrounds of the European revolutionary millenarian revolts. Of the movements he studied, Cohn states, "the social situations in which outbreaks of revolutionary millenarianism occurred are in fact remarkably uniform."⁶⁷ The central authorities were weak or discredited; the local authorities were unable to cope with the disturbances.

The France which emerged [from the Hundred Years War] [...] was a monarchy centralized to the point of despotism, controlled by a royal army and civil service; a land moreover where towns had lost every scrap of autonomy. In such a state there was little opening for popular movements of any kind.⁶⁸

Prior to this, in the highly decentralized feudal system of France, there had been a succession of chiliastic revolts, as well as a goodly number of ordinary peasant and town rebellions for lower taxes or more autonomy. Contrary to this, in what is now Germany, the situation was reversed.

⁶⁴ MICHAEL and CHANG, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 18-19.

⁶⁵ SHIH, *op. cit.*, pp. 304, 471.

⁶⁶ MICHAEL and CHANG, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 11-12. HAMBERG, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-80.

⁶⁷ COHN, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

There the royal power had been declining ever since the beginning of the thirteenth century and the nation had been disintegrating into a welter of petty principalities, at the same time as industry and commerce had been expanding and population increasing. And it was Germany which became the scene of a new series of messianic movements.⁶⁹

As the centralization of France put an end to opportunities for local revolts succeeding, the breakdown of authority in Germany opened new opportunities. The parallel to the Manchu Dynasty in the 1840s is evident; perhaps the most notable difference is that China's defeat in the Opium Wars marked a precipitate rather than a gradual decline in the military reputation of the Imperial forces.

There is considerable dispute over the role poverty plays in causing social unrest. Some assume that great poverty will lead people to question the social or economic system in which they live: Shih, for example, says, "The economic situation in which injustices prevailed must have shaken people out of their stupor and set them thinking."⁷⁰ Yet people may react quite differently. They may consider that their poverty is not caused by injustice; or that the injustice cannot be overcome. Indeed sudden extreme poverty may lead people to cling more closely to what solace the social system has to offer.

In his study of European millennial revolutions, Cohn observed,

So long as that [manorial] network remained intact peasants enjoyed not only a certain material security but also — which is even more revelant — a certain sense of security, a basic assurance which neither constant poverty nor occasional peril could destroy.⁷¹

The peasant integrated into his village and manor: or the journeyman, into his town and guild, might revolt; but such rebellions would be for limited goals within their community. These people did not provide the basic fuel for the millennial uprisings. Rather, the groups which heeded the "propheta's" call initially were those "living on the margin of society, in a state of chronic insecurity" — landless peasants produced by overpopulation and landlord expropriation, the urban workers outside the guild system.

In addition to poverty as great as that of any peasant, the journeyman [outside the guilds] and casual labourers suffered disorientation such as could scarcely occur under the manorial regime. There was no immemorial body of custom which they could invoke in their defence, there was no shortage of labour to lend weight to their claims.⁷²

It was not solely poverty, even sudden poverty, which caused people to favour chiliastic movements, but "living in a state of chronic frustration and anxiety" which produced "the most impulsive and unstable elements."⁷³

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 484. See also p. 474. HARRISON, *op. cit.*, p. 116. For a reassertion of this view, see WORSLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxix-xlvii.

⁷¹ COHN, *op. cit.*, p. 56. See also p. 281.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59. See also pp. 87-88.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

The marginal economic existence and the social disorientation were made relatively worse as these conditions existed along side great riches. Those riches were not the traditional holdings of an established landed aristocracy, but a newly created wealth lacking the protection of customary acceptance. In Europe Cohn notes that the towns which contained the disoriented poor also contained a small group of very rich merchants who "came to form a selfish oligarchy which was concerned solely with protecting its own interests."⁷⁴ Similarly, in the country, the large landowners sought to convert their feudal estates into profitable enterprises. The nobility commuted traditional services into cash rent and instituted the practice of eviction for failure to pay rents.

Materially the peasants often benefited greatly from the change; but their attitude was determined rather by the snapping of a bond which, burdensome and oppressive though they had often found it, had yet possessed a certain paternal quality. As serfdom disappeared, material interest tended to become the sole criterion regulating the landowner's dealing with his peasants.⁷⁵

Ssu-yü Teng has noted the same developments occurring in China during the first half of the nineteenth century: concentration of land holding, dispossession of peasants, new wealth in the towns aggregated by merchant-usurers. The latter in particular aroused the hostility of the peasants through the operation of pawnshops that drained the little which they had. "Where undreamed-of prosperity flourished side by side not only with great poverty but with great and unaccustomed insecurity" the disoriented poor — frustrated in their desire for the same success as that of the newly rich — sought other routes to exalted social prominence and security.⁷⁶

If the poor rebelled because of their poverty, then one would expect their goals to be economic. But, given that the poor involved in millenarian revolts were motivated by their own social insecurity, then their aims would encompass much more than economic changes. One way out of the frustration and anxiety of a marginal existence was the belief "of being divinely appointed to carry out a prodigious task," "a communal mission of vast dimensions and world-shaking importance." Such a commission

[...] gave them not simply a place in the world but a unique and resplendent place. A fraternity of this kind felt itself an elite, set infinitely apart from and above ordinary mortals, sharing in the extraordinary merits of its leader, sharing also in his miraculous powers.⁷⁷

The desire of the disoriented poor for an exalted social status made them open to a chiliastic stranger with an apocalyptic mission.

From this analysis it is not a complete explanation to examine economic conditions as "the root of the matter."⁷⁸ The economic and social

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁷⁶ TENG, *New Light*, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-48. Cohn, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁷⁷ COHN, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁷⁸ SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 433. Also TAYLOR, *op. cit.*, p. 549 and Jung SHENG, Lung SHENG-YÜN and Ho LING-HSIU, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

factors studied by Taylor and others are not in themselves causes of, but rather conditions for, a revolutionary millenarian movement. There were a number of separate revolts in southern China in the 1830s through to the 1860s. Shih states that, "if there had been no Taiping Rebellion there would have been rebellion of some type; and if there had been no Hung, there would have been some other leader to take advantage of the time."⁷⁹ But none of these rebellions had the singular character or success of the Taipings. What made the Taiping Revolution peculiar was its millenarian aspect. While opportunistic individuals undoubtedly joined it for their personal aggrandizement, the initial stimulus for the rising was an imminent messianic hope.

Both Vincent Shih and Charles Stelle deny a motivating role to Christianity in beginning the Revolution. Eugene Boardman demonstrates more appreciation of Christian influence, yet he misses the key element in that influence. The Taiping ideology can only be fully understood by taking into account its revolutionary millenarian aspect, derived from Hung Hsiuch'üan's interpretation of Christianity. That particular variety of salvationism gave its adherents the emotional and social security they desperately sought. It also gave the movement's leadership extraordinary authority over the rank and file, which welded those diverse elements into a powerful military force. The Taipings share with other revolutionary millenarians a similar ideology of world transformation, and the characteristics of an all-powerful leadership. These are consequences of the attempt to attain religious ends by secular means. The final result of attaching the all-encompassing ends of religion to the political process was to reduce the individual to the status of an expendable tool for the construction of a paradise on earth.

⁷⁹ SHIH, *op. cit.*, p. 408n.