

# A Comparative Study on the Similarities and Differences between Western Christianity and Chinese Culture in Taiping Religion

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## ❖ ABSTRACT

This paper explores the extent of the Christian influence of Liang Fa's *Quanshiliangyan* and Isaachar J. Roberts on Hong Xiuquan and the Taiping Movement. Hong's religious background was in Confucianism, but when he encountered Liang Fa's *Quanshiliangyan*, he identified with Christianity. Subsequently, he studied with Roberts for two or three months. The religious experiences of Hong served as motives for the establishment of the Society of God Worshippers and the Taiping Movement. Therefore, this paper develops Liang's key ideas and Roberts' main teachings, describes Hong's beliefs and the actual practices of the Taiping Movement, as found in official documents of the Taipings, and compares their similarities and differences. Hong and his leaders received the new ideas of Christianity at the expense of their traditional culture. Furthermore, they attempted to combine Chinese culture with Christianity, as well as believe in Christianity to the limits of their understanding. Finally, this study finds that even though the *Quanshiliangyan* and Isaachar J. Roberts may have given the Taiping Movement its religious form and driving force, the theological vision of both Liang and Hong that also emerged from their Chinese culture energized the Taipings. The Taiping Movement resulted from a deliberate synthesis of Christian

ideas and native Chinese practices in China.

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### Key Words

Comparative study, Hong Xiuquan, Liang Fa, Isaachar J. Roberts, the Taiping Movement, Taiping religion

## I. Introduction

Hong Xiuquan<sup>1)</sup> (洪秀全, 1814-1864), the future leader of the Taiping Movement (太平天國, 1851-1864), was studying to be an officer of the Qing government. In August 1836, he traveled to Canton to take the required examination for the second time. During his stay in Canton, Hong acquired Liang Fa<sup>2)</sup> (梁發, 1789-1855)'s *Quanshiliangyan* (勸世良言), titled in English, *Good Words to Admonish the Age, being Nine Miscellaneous Christian Tracts*<sup>3)</sup> and took them home on his return from

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- 1) The Pinyin system of transliteration has been used in this paper with the exception of some names, such as Macao or Canton, which are most familiar in English.
  - 2) Liang was known generally as Liang Afa (梁阿發). Cf. "He [Liang Fa's father] called him 'Fa' ('Faat' in Cantonese) one of the common meanings of which is 'sent'" [George H. McNeur, *China's First Preacher Liang A-fa, 1789-1855* (Shanghai: Kwang Hsueh Publishing House, 1934), p.10]. The affixed 'A' commonly preceding the name 'Fa' is added in the Cantonese style "for the sake of euphony to names which consist of only one word or of which only one word is familiarly used" [Ibid.; Emily Hahn, *China Only Yesterday, 1850-1950: A Century of Change* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), p.51]. Cf. "Liang's full name is Liang Fa; the name Liang A-fa was a colloquial one used particularly by the missionaries" [Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement* (Taipei: Rainbow-Bridge Book Co., 1973), 15n].
  - 3) The date of Hong Xiuquan's acquiring the *Quanshiliangyan* is disputed. Theodore Hamberg says "1836," adding a footnote, "It may also have been some time before that period" [Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection* (Hong Kong: China Mail Office, 1854),

the unsuccessful examination. After a superficial glance at their contents, he placed them in his bookcase. Hong did not consider them to be of any particular importance. After failing his third examination in 1837, he became ill. While he moved in and out of consciousness Hong had a strange dream which he could not understand.<sup>4)</sup> In 1843, just after failing his fourth examination, a cousin, Li Jingfang (李敬芳), told Hong that Liang Fa's tracts were extraordinary and differed greatly from other religious books.<sup>5)</sup> Hong began to read them closely and carefully. As a result, he believed the dream he had in 1837 promised him leadership in the Kingdom of God, and he began to worship the Christian God.<sup>6)</sup> Hong Xiuquan took Liang Fa's teachings to heart and added them to the religious and moral ideas of what became the Taiping Movement.

Scholars of the Taiping Movement have assumed that the work of Liang Fa greatly influenced Hong Xiuquan, but very little has been written on the role of the *Quanshiliangyan* specifically. Scholars have not studied the nine tracts for two reasons. Even though hundreds of copies were distributed in the early nineteenth century, only four survived the destruction which followed the failure of the Taiping Movement.<sup>7)</sup> Usually, brief references to the works are based on Walter

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p.8]. George H. McNeur states "before August 1834," adding a sentence, "Before the distribution of books in front of the examination hall at Canton was hindered by the police in August 1834 a set of tracts written by A-fa himself had been given to a young candidate named Hung Siu-tsuen" (*China's First Preacher Liang A-fa, 1789-1855*, p.75). The date will be discussed in detail later on. Cf. John Foster, "The Christian Origins of the Taiping Rebellion," *International Review of Mission* 40 (April 1951), p.158.

4) Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*, pp.9-12.

5) *Ibid.*, p.14.

6) *Ibid.*, p.19.

7) The London Missionary Society has two copies. Harvard University has a copy. All of these copies were printed in Canton, in early 1832. But the New York

H. Medhurst's summaries in "Connection Between Foreign Missionaries and the Kwang-se Insurrection,"<sup>8)</sup> in the *North China Herald*, No. 160 (20 August 1853) and No. 161 (27 August 1853). A translation of the titles of the nine tracts and of their section headings was printed there and was cited and used by Theodore Hamberg in his work, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*. Hamberg's "quotes"<sup>9)</sup> were used by later writers. The second reason is due to the official People's Republic of China's view of the Taiping Rebellion. Communist scholars maintain that the Taiping Movement was primarily a peasants' rebellion or a class war that "took religious forms" only secondarily and they have not studied the influence of the tracts on Hong Xiuquan.<sup>10)</sup>

The primary objective of this study is to explore the following question: What is the extent of the Christian influence of Liang Fa's *Quanshiliangyan* on the ideology of Hong Xiuquan and the Taiping Movement? Church and secular historians who could not gain access to the *Quanshiliangyan* have assumed that almost all of the religious and moral ideas of the Taiping Movement were derived from the work of Liang Fa. Of course, the *Quanshiliangyan* had an enormous influence on the religious and moral system of the Taiping Movement. However,

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Public Library has another copy printed in Malacca, in late 1832, which contains an additional five-leaf or ten-page table of contents. This later edition printed in Malacca has twenty Chinese characters in each line, while the earlier edition issued in Canton has twenty-four Chinese characters in each line. But both were printed with wooden blocks using the same characters.

- 8) At the beginning, the Taiping Movement was known unofficially as "Kwang-se [Quangxi] Insurrection" or "Kwang-si [Quangxi] Insurrection," for they rebelled against the Qing government in Guangxi Province (廣西省).
- 9) Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*, pp.17-19.
- 10) James P. Harrison, *The Communists and Chinese Peasant Rebellions: A Study in the Rewriting of Chinese History* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), p.165.

Liang Fa and Hong Xiuquan were part of their own Chinese culture. In this paper, I propose that even though the *Quanshiliangyan* may have given the Taiping Movement its religious form and driving force, the theological vision of both Liang Fa and Hong Xiuquan also emerged from their Chinese culture, that the Taiping religion or *Bai Shangdi Hui* 拜上帝會 (Society of God Worshipers) which energized the Taiping Movement resulted from a deliberate synthesis of Christian ideas and native Chinese practices.

## II . Hong Xiuquan and His Connections with Christianity

Hong Xiuquan, also known as the self-proclaimed Heavenly King, Younger Brother of Jesus Christ, and God's Chinese Son, is an enigmatic character not only in Chinese history but also in Asian church history. He was from a Hakka (客家)<sup>11)</sup> peasant family in Guangdong Province (廣東省). The early history of the Hong family dates to the period when the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) controlled central China. During the seventeenth century, in order to avoid civil war, the family moved to Huaxian (花縣) or Hua County of Guangdong<sup>12)</sup> and so Hong was

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11) This Chinese phrase translates into English as "guest settlers." Other Chinese, in southern China, whose ancestors had come from northern China much earlier, referred to the Hakkas as guest people, because during the seventeenth century Guangdong Hakkas arrived there between the late Ming Dynasty and the early Qing Dynasty (Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, pp.10-11). Cf. "After the Manchus conquered China, most of the guest settlers remained unsundered for more than twenty years. They had a strong feeling against the Manchus and an equally strong feeling for restoring China to the Chinese. They were full of nationalistic sentiment and revolutionary spirit" [Ssu-yu Teng, *New Light on the History of the Taiping Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), p.50].

12) Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York: Norton & Company, 1996), pp.26, 28.

a Hakka or guest settler.

Four times in his life, in 1828, 1836, 1837, and 1843, Hong sat the civil service examinations at Canton, but each time he failed to become a scholar-official.<sup>13)</sup> Though educated in the Confucian Classics, in 1843, he renounced traditional Chinese institutions in favor of reforms that reflected Protestant Christianity, which he understood imperfectly.<sup>14)</sup>

### 1. Hong Xiuquan's Contact with the *Quanshiliangyan*

The case for the date of Hong Xiuquan's receiving the *Quanshiliangyan* is disputed. One possible date is 1833. In October 1833 Liang Fa and two of his companions went to Canton to distribute the tracts to literary examination candidates.<sup>15)</sup> Another possible date is 1834. On 20 and 21 August 1834 Liang and three colleagues, Woo Achang, Chow Asan, and Leang Asan, distributed tracts to the candidates in Canton. On the third day, however, the metropolitan authority interfered in the distribution and arrested Woo Achang, but the magistrate dismissed the case. Then, Chow Asan and his partner Akae were arrested again on 25 August, and the following day officials

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13) Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, pp.13, 15, 19; Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*, pp.30, 46, 59-60.

14) Robert H. T. Lin, *The Taiping Revolution: A Failure of Two Missions* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1979), pp.6-9.

15) London Missionary Society, *The Report of the Directors to the Fortieth General Meeting of the Missionary Society* (London: Westley and Davis, 1834), pp.21-22. Cf. Thomas T. Meadows, *Desultory Notes on the Government and People of China, and on the Chinese Language: Illustrated with a Sketch of the Province of Kwang-Tung* (London: Wm. H. Allen, 1847), p.75; J. Milton Mackie, *Life of Tai-ping-wang, Chief of the Chinese Insurrection* (New York: Dix, Edwards, & Co., 1857), p.61; and Eugene P. Boardman, *Christian Influence upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion, 1851-1864* (Madison, WS: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952), p.12.

arrested three printers. At the printer's shop four hundred copies of Christian tracts were confiscated, with the wooden blocks from which they were printed were destroyed. Liang managed to escape.<sup>16)</sup> With a good knowledge of these facts George H. McNeur argued that Hong received his copy of the *Quanshiliangyan* "[b]efore August 1834," that is, 1833 or early 1834, affirming, "[b]efore the distribution of books in front of the examination hall at Canton was hindered by the police in August 1834 a set of tracts written by A-fa himself had been given to a young candidate named Hung Siu-tsuen."<sup>17)</sup>

The date of 1836 accepted here can be seen in Theodore Hamberg's, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*. In most ways Hamberg's book is the best source because it is based on the testimony, both oral and written, of Hong Rengan (洪仁玕), kinsman and early convert of the Heavenly King, with every sign of care and critical judgment on Hamberg's part as the interviewer. He states "1836," adding a footnote, "It may also have been some time before that period."<sup>18)</sup> Two sets of Hong Rengan's brief written notes have survived and in recent years been published in Chinese and then translated into English. Of these, "Hung Hsui-chuan's Background,"<sup>19)</sup> as Hamberg's source, probably written in 1852 or 1853, seems to say "1836."<sup>20)</sup> While the other "The Confession of Hung Jen-kan,"<sup>21)</sup> in 1864, says "1837."<sup>22)</sup>

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16) London Missionary Society, *The Report of the Directors to the Fortieth General Meeting of the Missionary Society*, p.26.

17) George H. McNeur, *China's First Preacher Liang A-fa, 1789-1855*, p.75.

18) Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*, p.8.

19) Cf. Hong Rengan, "Hung Hsui-chuan's Background," in *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*, vol. 2, *Documents and Comments*, ed. Franz Michael and Chung-li Chang, pp.3-7.

20) *Ibid.*, p.6.

21) Cf. Hong Rengan, "The Confession of Hung Jen-kan," in *The Taiping Rebellion:*

The date 1836 has now become even more accepted with the discovery of the document itself, that is, “Hung Hsui-chuan’s Background.”<sup>23)</sup>

If we establish the date beyond doubt as 1836, who was the Western missionary or foreign man? Jen Yu-wen confirmed who he was by compiling a list of all European and American missionaries known to have been working in Canton at the time and then eliminating those who could not have been the missionary Hong Xiuquan heard. “Edwin Stephens<sup>24)</sup> remained the only possibility.”<sup>25)</sup> Jonathan Spence also insists that the missionary was Edwin Stevens who lived on the edge of Canton, and who died in 1837.<sup>26)</sup>

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*History and Documents*, vol. 3, *Documents and Comments*, ed. Franz Michael and Chung-li Chang (Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 1971), pp.1507-1530.

22) *Ibid.*, pp.1514-1515.

23) The date 1837 as mentioned in the confession might have been an unintentional mistake on Hong Rengan’s side, or it might have been made intentionally in order to show that Hong Xiuquan’s ascent to heaven during his illness in 1837 had nothing to do with the tracts, since there would then be no time in between for Hong Xiuquan to study them. Most scholars do not support this position. Cf. John Foster, “The Christian Origins of the Taiping Rebellion,” *International Review of Mission* 40 (April 1951), p.158; and Franz Michael and Chung-li Chang, *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*, vol. 1, *History*, p.24.

24) His correct name is Edwin Stevens (1802-1837), and he was a pioneer missionary among the international seafaring communities of Canton and Whampoa. He was appointed by the American Seaman’s Friend Society, in 1832, as their chaplain at the port of Canton, and affiliated with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1836. Cf. Alexander Wylie, *Memorials of Protestant Missionaries to the Chinese: Giving a List of Their Publications and Obituary Notices of the Deceased with Copious Indexes*, pp.84-85.

25) Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, p.14. Cf. “The missionary was probably Edwin Stevens” [Yuan Chung Teng, “Reverend Issachar Jacox Roberts and the Taiping Rebellion,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol. 13, no. 1 (November 1963), 56n].

26) Jonathan D. Spence, *God’s Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*, p.31.

Some Western scholars assert that the Chinese interpreter was Liang Fa himself,<sup>27)</sup> but this entails fixing an earlier date for the distribution of the tracts, usually given as 1833 or 1834, since Liang was not in Canton between 1835 and 1839. Nor is it Liang's friend and assistant, Kew Agang, who distributed the tracts with Liang to the literary examination candidates in 1833 and 1834. Kew left Canton, in 1834, forced to flee after his local enemies denounced him to the metropolitan authority for dealing too closely with the foreigners.<sup>28)</sup> Nor is it either of those two men's sons, for Liang's son fled to Malacca,<sup>29)</sup> and Kew's son was held in jail instead of his fugitive father.<sup>30)</sup> If we agree the date is 1836, the interpreter's identity definitely excludes Liang and his son, and Kew and his son, with the name of the Chinese interpreter still unknown.<sup>31)</sup>

## 2. Hong Xiuquan and Issachar J. Roberts

Issachar J. Roberts (1802-1871) was, as far as is known, the only Western missionary to instruct Hong Xiuquan.<sup>32)</sup> In late 1846 a Christian convert from Canton visited Hua County and urged both Hong Xiuquan

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27) Eugene P. Boardman, *Christian Influence upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion, 1851-1864*, 99n.

28) Alexander Wylie, *Memorials of Protestant Missionaries to the Chinese: Giving a List of Their Publications and Obituary Notices of the Deceased with Copious Indexes*, pp.11-12.

29) *Ibid.*, p.22.

30) *Ibid.*, p.12.

31) Cf. Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, p.14; and Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*, pp.31-32.

32) Alexander Wylie, *Memorials of Protestant Missionaries to the Chinese: Giving a List of Their Publications and Obituary Notices of the Deceased with Copious Indexes*, p.95; and Yuan Chung Teng, "Reverend Issachar Jacox Roberts and the Taiping Rebellion," p.56.

and his cousin Hong Rengan to visit Roberts at his chapel and hear his preaching. But both of them were too busy with their own teaching to accept.<sup>33)</sup> The same man, Moo-li-pan, who told the Hong cousins about Roberts also told one of Roberts' assistants, Choo-thau-hing, about Hong Xiuquan and his new religion that seemed similar to Christianity. Early in 1847 the assistant wrote to the Hongs and invited them to visit Roberts in Canton: "Having heard from Moo-li-pan that you, honoured brother, about ten years ago received a book, the contents of which agree with the doctrine preached in our chapel here, we the Missionary and the brethren will rejoice if you would come hither and assist us by preaching in the chapel.<sup>34)</sup> This is our sincere wish."<sup>35)</sup> In March 1847, Hong Xiuquan and Hong Rengan accepted the invitation.<sup>36)</sup> Because of Hong's literary training and natural bearing, Roberts had, within a week of Hong's arrival in Canton, predicted:

They are here now learning daily, and I feel almost persuaded that the Lord has sent them here, and if so it will not be long until they are added to the church. Then the gospel will be preached in their native village where they say a considerable number have already abandoned their idols. Those are young men of considerable number

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33) Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*, pp.30-31 and Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*, p.93.

34) The invitation to preach must be considered as a Chinese expression of politeness.

35) Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*, p.31.

36) Alexander Wylie, *Memorials of Protestant Missionaries to the Chinese: Giving a List of Their Publications and Obituary Notices of the Deceased with Copious Indexes*, p.95; Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, p.28; Yuan Chung Teng, "Reverend Issachar Jacox Roberts and the Taiping Rebellion," p.56; Franz Michael and Chung-li Chang, *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*, vol. 1, *History*, p.29; Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*, p.92.

talents, the elder about 34 or 35 years of age. Each of them has taught school several years and seems to write well.<sup>37)</sup>

Hong Rengan left Canton shortly after his arrival,<sup>38)</sup> but Hong Xiuquan, Roberts reported in 1856, remained at Roberts' chapel for "about two months, joined our Bible class, committing and reciting the scriptures, and receiving instructions for two hours daily with the class." Hong asked to be baptized and join the church. Roberts appointed a committee of Chinese members of his chapel "to examine his [Hong's] case, and report to the church." The committee went to Hua County to talk with Hong's family and friends and reported that his account of visions and activities against idols appeared genuine. Hong underwent a public examination of his personal faith, and his testimony was apparently well received. "We were on the point of receiving him," Roberts reported, when the church moderator reminded Hong, "There is no certain employment, nor pecuniary emolument connected with becoming a member of the Church, we ought not to do so from sinister motives." Hong had obviously counted on being hired as an assistant after his baptism. Roberts would not guarantee him a position, because he immediately suspected that Hong might be insincere. So Roberts postponed Hong's baptism "indefinitely."<sup>39)</sup> Hamberg, however, gives

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37) Issachar Roberts, "Letter from Canton, 27 March 1847," *Baptist Banner and Western Pioneer* 14, no. 30 (29 July 1847), p.118.

38) Cf. "Having continued their studies about a month, Mr. Roberts sent two of his Chinese assistants, Choo and Tsen, with the Hungs to their native place. Here they preached a few days and then returned to Canton, but Hung-Jin [Hong Rengan], who was well aware that two other assistants of the name Wang, also engaged by Mr. Roberts, were making intrigues to prevent new brethren from being employed, for fear of losing their own situations, did not again go to Canton, but remained at home and studied medicine" (Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*, p.31).

Hong Rengan's account of how Roberts' assistants deceived Hong Xiuquan into asking for employment.<sup>40)</sup> Hong Rengan told Hamberg that Wang-ai and Wang-khien were jealous of Hong Xiuquan who was better educated and who, if baptized, might replace them. They persuaded Hong Xiuquan to insist on a small stipend and Hong, running low on funds, fell into the snare. He was unaware how much Roberts disliked "rice Christians,"<sup>41)</sup> but the assistants knew about this side of their employer's nature.

About the time that Hong was forced to leave Roberts because he could not afford to stay longer, a Cantonese mob broke into Roberts' chapel on 23 May 1847. Roberts' claim for damage and his insistence on his right to an indemnity under the Treaty of Wangxia was his primary concern for several months.<sup>42)</sup> Hong had other concerns, too. With a small loan from a friend in Roberts' chapel, he left Canton for Guangxi to find his cousin, Feng Yunshan, whom he had left in that province in late 1844. Hong rejoined his kinsman in the summer of 1847 and learned of Feng's success in converting over three thousand people and in organizing the Society of God Worshipers.<sup>43)</sup> These converts had been taught a new

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39) Issachar J. Roberts, "Tae ping Wang," *Putnam's Magazine* 8 (October 1856), pp.382-383.

40) Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*, pp.31-32. Cf. Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, p.28; Ssu-yu Teng, *The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers: A Comprehensive Survey*, p.46.

41) A rice Christian is someone who has formally declared himself or herself a Christian for material benefits. It is usually not for religious reasons. The term is often used perjoratively. See George H. McNeur, *The Missionary in Changing China*, pp.102-103, for an explanation of early Chinese rice Christians.

42) Roberts wrote that he did not know what he became of Hong "until informed in 1852, through the report of Hung-jin [Hong Rengan], that he was the leader of the great revolutionary movement which commenced in Kwang-si" (Issachar J. Roberts, "Tae ping Wang," p.383). It was Hamberg that brought the account of Hong Rengan to Roberts' attention.

set of moral principles based on a sincere devotion to God and Christ. Moreover, the focal point of all Feng's teaching had been the ascension of Hong Xiuquan into Heaven where he had received the command of God to "destroy the demons." Hong was consequently received with awe and was called Hong Xiansheng 洪先生 (Teacher Hong). With his presence, the Society of God Worshipers grew rapidly.<sup>44)</sup>

### III. The Similarities and Differences between Western Christianity and Chinese Culture in Taiping Christianity

Church and secular historians who could not gain access to Liang Fa's *Quanshiliangyan* have assumed that most of the religious and moral ideas of Hong Xiuquan were derived from Liang's Christian tracts. Of course, Liang's work was the fundamental religious and moral source of Christian teaching for Hong and had an enormous influence on the religious and moral system of the Taiping Movement. However, Liang Fa and Hong Xiuquan were part of their own Chinese culture. In this part, I propose that even though the *Quanshiliangyan* may have given the Taiping Movement its religious form and driving force, the theological vision of both Liang Fa and Hong Xiuquan also emerged from their Chinese culture, that the Taiping religion which energized the Taiping Movement resulted from a deliberate synthesis of Christian ideas and native Chinese practices.<sup>45)</sup>

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43) Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*, pp.32-35; and Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*, pp.93-94.

44) Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, pp.29-33; and Ssu-yu Teng, *The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers: A Comprehensive Survey*, p.49.

45) Eugene P. Boardman, *Christian Influence upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion, 1851-1864*, p.122; Vincent Y. C. Shih, *The Taiping Ideology: Its*

## 1. Hong Xiuquan's Visions and Chinese Culture

In 1837, Hong Xiuquan's third failure at the civil service examination resulted in a nervous breakdown. He returned home seriously ill. During this sickness he saw visions which made a deep impression upon him. He felt himself caught up to heaven and commissioned by the old man, or the Heavenly Father, to destroy idolatry. Henceforward Hong is said to have been more correct in conduct and dignified in manner.<sup>46)</sup>

As Kenneth S. Latourette suggested, however, the origin of the visions was Chinese and non-Christian: "It seems more probable that the visions sprang primarily from the religious beliefs by which Hung had been surrounded from his youth."<sup>47)</sup> Even at that time Hong believed in a God as the creator of all things, a God whom man must worship and serve. However, it was a personal God, with whom Hong had a personal relationship. This God was an imposing figure with a golden beard who sat in heaven like an emperor in a dignified posture, in a black dragon robe, with a high brimmed hat, hands on knees, and who was surrounded by his heavenly family and court.<sup>48)</sup> It is only natural that Hong's views of God and heaven were informed by his Chinese ideas on the family. God had a heavenly wife,<sup>49)</sup> and Jesus Christ, who as God's son played

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*Sources, Interpretations, and Influences* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 1967), pp.165, 273, 285; Thomas H. Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 2004), p.4.

46) Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*, p.14.

47) Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1929), p.284.

48) Hong Rengan, "The Taiping Heavenly Chronicle," in *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*, vol. 2, *Documents and Comments*, ed. Franz Michael and Chung-li Chang (Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 1971), p.54.

49) There was no "Heavenly Mother" in Liang's tracts.

his part in the family, also had his own heavenly wife. Heaven was a beautiful place with beautiful maidens and angels, with heavenly music.<sup>50)</sup>

## 2. The Doctrine of the Trinity

More puzzling to Hong was the Trinity, mentioned but never explained by Liang.<sup>51)</sup> This mystery, difficult even for Western theologians, impressed Hong as a contradiction, for how could the seemingly polytheistic concept of “three persons in one” be reconciled with Christian monotheism?<sup>52)</sup> Having found faith in the one true God, Hong turned a deaf ear to the idea of “three gods,” as the missionaries who tried to correct his interpretation came to realize.<sup>53)</sup> Moreover, the fundamental Chinese ethical principle of the relative status of the superior and the inferior—that a father must be more honorable than a son—would never allow an equal footing of the two persons, to say nothing of the merger of the two persons into one identity. There was an extremely strict rule for all Taiping writings, like strict regulation for writing or engraving the characters *Shangdi* 上帝 (Emperor) or *Wang* 王 (King) in the Chinese traditional documents, that the holy name of God in any form must always be inscribed on a new line and raised four spaces above the first word of an ordinary line and that the name of Jesus Christ must be raised three spaces, the Heavenly King and the new

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50) Ibid., p.53.

51) Liang Fa, *Quanshiliangyan*, vol. 1, *Zhenzhuan Jishi Wen* 真傳救世文 (Canton: Religious Tracts Society, 1832), pp.5-6.

52) Cf. Hong's annotations on the Gospel according to St. Mark and on the First Epistle General of John in J. C. Cheng, ed., *Chinese Sources for the Taiping Rebellion, 1850-1864* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1963), pp.85, 88-89.

53) Cf. Griffith John, “A Letter from Rev. Griffith John,” *Missionary Magazine and Chronicle* 24 (October 1860), pp.270-275 and Issachar J. Roberts, “A Letter from Rev. I. J. Roberts,” *North China Herald* (4 February 1862).

Kingdom two spaces, and the other kings one space.<sup>54)</sup> This was entirely in accord with Chinese traditional ethics and etiquette, which would have made equal deference to God the Father and Christ the Son unthinkable.

As to the third person of the Trinity, already robbed of holy stature by translation of the names as *Shengshenfeng* 聖神風 (Wind of the Holy Spirit) or *Quanweishi* 勸慰師 (Comforter or Teacher of Encouragement), Hong saw no justification whatever for accepting this “wind” or “teacher” sent by God as God’s equal.<sup>55)</sup> Ironically, the Taipings faithfully chanted, not sang, in their daily worship of God, the words of the Trinity in the Doxology taken over intact from the Baptist church in Canton,<sup>56)</sup> but this represented a symbolic acceptance of a form rather than critical acceptance of the theological content. Hong explicitly rejected the doctrine of the Trinity in his annotations on biblical texts, totally convinced there could be no basis for believing in “three persons in one.” A pertinent line in his later meditations reads thus: “Of the three persons, Father and Son are one blood-vein in kinship.”<sup>57)</sup>

Hong Xiuquan could believe the union of the Holy Father and the Holy Son into one by blood relationship, a relationship exalted in the Chinese ethical system, but not by metaphysical consubstance, a concept

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54) Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement* (Taipei: Rainbow-Bridge Book Co., 1973), p.160.

55) Eugene P. Boardman, *Christian Influence upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion, 1851-1864*, p.72.

56) “They worship God daily under the name of Heavenly Father Shangti, and heavenly elder brother, Christ. But not according to New Testament usages. They have no regular immersion or Lord’s Supper; and the Doxology and Hymn which I taught Hung Siu-tsiuen when he was with me at Canton in 1847, I fear they are using (some of them at least) as the Jews did Moses’ serpent, worshipping them formally instead of the God whom they praise. They are at any rate now sung I presume by millions every day” [“A Letter from Rev. I. J. Roberts,” *North China Herald* (30 March 1861)].

57) J. C. Cheng, ed., *Chinese Sources for the Taiping Rebellion, 1850-1864*, p.88.

whose roots were buried deep in Greek philosophy. It was impossible to unite the Holy Spirit with God and Christ by even blood relationship. Hong repeatedly defended the doctrine of God's physical nature because he actually walked and talked with God in heaven. The concept of a divine family is a projection of a deeply rooted family centered culture in China.<sup>58)</sup>

The Father knows that there are some mistakes in the records of the New [Sic] Testament, and thus has sent down the Eastern King as a witness that the Holy Ghost is the Wind of God, the Eastern King. He also knows that the people on earth mistakenly think that Christ is God. Thus God has sent down the Eastern King to prove the existence of the Divine Father. Thus Christ has sent down the Western King to prove the existence of the First Son. Hence, the Father is the Father; the Son, the Son; the Elder Brother, the Elder Brother; the Younger Brother, the Younger Brother; one in two, and two in one. Immediately upon their descent the titles and ranks have been fixed. If you should suppose that Christ is God, there would be another God. How could the mind of the Great Elder Brother be at ease? Now the Great Elder Brother descended upon earth, and issued an edict instructing Me Myself: "My brother Hsiu ch'üan, you shall not call yourself Emperor [God]; only the Father is indeed the Emperor [God]." Then Great Elder Brother then spoke as the Son of the Father. Moreover, I Myself ascended to the High Heaven, saw the Heavenly Father, the Heavenly Mother, the Great Elder Brother and the Heavenly Sister-in-law many times. The proofs and evidence are just too many. In Heaven and on Earth it is the same. The things heard are not quite equal to those seen.<sup>59)</sup>

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58) Rudolf G. Wagner, *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), pp.44-46.

59) J. C. Cheng, ed., *Chinese Sources for the Taiping Rebellion, 1850-1864*, p.89.

### 3. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

In Volume Six of his tracts, Liang introduced his own baptism and reported the definition of baptism that William Milne had given to him.<sup>60)</sup> And in Volume Nine, he presented a simple discourse on Acts 19 when Paul baptized the disciples of Ephesus with water in the name of the Lord Jesus.<sup>61)</sup> The passages were very difficult for Hong Xiuquan to understand. When Hong started to preach the Gospel, the man he reached first was Li Jingfang, with whom he read the words of Liang's tracts and understood them. Now piecing the rite of baptism together from the scattered bits of information left by Liang, Hong and Li baptized each other in a private ritual, as Liang had baptized his wife. As Hong and Li sprinkled water on each other's heads they prayed to their new true God and promised to follow God's commandments.<sup>62)</sup> They thereupon kept away from their idols and removed the tablet of Confucius which is generally found in the schools and worshiped by the teacher as well as by the students.<sup>63)</sup>

The Taipings had a modified form of baptism, in which they washed the face and chest, or took a bath in a river. A Taiping explanation of baptism stated: "Let the suppliant kneel down in the sight of Heaven and pray to the Great God to forgive his sins. He may use a written form of prayer, and when the prayer is over, he may either take a basin of water and wash his whole body clean, or he may perform his ablutions

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60) Liang Fa, *Quanshiliangyan*, vol. 6, *Shuxue Zhenli Lun* 熟學真理論 (Canton: Religious Tracts Society, 1832), pp.16-18.

61) Liang Fa, *Quanshiliangyan*, vol. 9, *Gujing Jiyao* 古經輯要 (Canton: Religious Tracts Society, 1832), p.1.

62) Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*, p.66.

63) Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*, p.20.

in the river, which will be still better.”<sup>64)</sup> The two concepts of either immersing or washing that are shown here seem to be based on the different terms for baptism. It is possible that Hong’s idea of baptism is a mixture of the concept of sprinkling derived from Liang’s tracts and immersion derived from the teaching of the Southern Baptist missionary Issachar J. Roberts.<sup>65)</sup>

In the visions, Hong joined the heavenly host by leaving all that was important and dear to him. He left his wife, who was pregnant, and his father. Hong was afraid of this radical departure, as it literally meant the death of his old self. However, he got a new name, a new family, and a new role within the heavenly host. His old inner life was crudely cut out with a knife. At the same time Hong was provided with new religious, moral, and ideological convictions by means of the scrolls that passed before his eyes. The he was outwardly cleaned in a river and ordered to do battle with demons, and received a palace in which to enjoy his rule and life.<sup>66)</sup>

The Taipings had to follow this pattern. They were to break away from their families and property. Their old selves were to die. The renewal of inner life and the cleansing of the outer body were reenacted in the rite of the Taiping baptism. The inner renewal and outer cleansing was the precondition for entering into direct contact with God. Then the Taipings would become members of the heavenly host, and after victory against the Qing soldiers and demons would be rewarded appropriately.<sup>67)</sup>

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64) Hong Xiuquan, “The Book of Heavenly Commandments,” pp.114-115.

65) Jost O. Zetzsche, *The Bible in China: The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China* (Nettetal, Germany: Steyler Verlag, 1999), p.73.

66) Cf. Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*, pp.9-12.

67) Rudolf G. Wagner, *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Revolution*, p.82.

The sacrament of the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper is the most generally performed of all the sacraments. If the Taipings practiced baptism, why did they neglect the Lord's Supper, a symbolic ceremony of equal prominence? It is possible that Hong did not know about the Lord's Supper, for he neither mentioned it nor observed it. However, Issachar J. Roberts said on 27 June 1847: "The Chinese brethren and myself unite in the Lord's Supper. There are twelve native and six foreign communicants, making the whole fraternity, male and female, eighteen."<sup>68)</sup> Since Hong did not leave Roberts until 21 July 1847, he should have been included in the twelve native communicants for the Supper, and he should have had some impression of the ceremony. Hong's neglect of it could be because Roberts had not permitted Hong to take it without being baptized, or Hong may have been unimpressed with the ceremony.

Another instance of Hong's neglect is that the symbol of the cross, which was mentioned in Liang's *Quanshiliangyan*, was not adopted or carried by the Society of God Worshippers or the Taipings. The title pages of their religious books were decorated not with the cross but with the dragon.<sup>69)</sup>

#### 4. The Sabbath and Other Teachings

The Sabbath, which fell on the Western Saturday by a miscalculation in the Taiping calendar,<sup>70)</sup> was strictly observed. On that day work and

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68) H. A. Tupper, *The Foreign Missions of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1880), p.85.

69) Eugene P. Boardman, *Christian Influence upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion, 1851-1864*, p.78.

70) A Taiping year was divided into 366 days and 12 months. The six odd months had 31 days and the six even months 30 days. To allow for periodical correction, the Taipings were to have a special short year in every forty whose months

business were suspended. On Friday afternoon flags with inscriptions saying that the next day was worship day and should be observed by all people were hung above all cross-roads. There were three services, one was held at midnight and the other two were at noon and the late afternoon on Saturday. The services were generally held in a living-room containing a table on which there were two lamps or candles, three cups of tea, three bowls of rice, and sometimes various kinds of food as offerings to God or the Supreme Being.<sup>71)</sup> The worshippers sat on two sides before the table, men on one side, and women on the other. Each service opened with a doxology, followed by a hymn accompanied by Chinese musical instruments. There were Bible reading and repetition of a creed. A written prayer was offered by a leader or an officer,<sup>72)</sup> who

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would have only 28 days each. The indication of the year, month, and the day by cyclical signs was based on an old Chinese almanac, and that of the 24 solar terms, weekdays, and Sundays was derived from both Western and Chinese almanacs. The purpose of making a new calendar was to sharpen the fighting spirit of the Taipings. In the old Chinese almanac every day in the year was noted as lucky or unlucky, and hence suitable or unsuitable for doing something. The Taipings adopted a new calendar from which all these superstitions were excluded. Thus, the Taipings would not have cause to be reluctant to fight on any given day. The Taiping calendar, in many ways the most significant cultural achievement of the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace, nevertheless, suffered from an initial miscalculation: The Taipings “put the Taiping calendar one day ahead of the Chinese lunar and Western solar calendars, e.g. the Taiping Sunday was Saturday in the Western calendar. This error was never corrected” (Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, p.82). Cf. Ssu-yu Teng, *The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers: A Comprehensive Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp.123-124.

71) The food offerings to God were the same as those to the idols or ancestors in China at that time. Cf. Walter H. Slote and George A. De Vos, eds., *Confucianism and the Family* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), p.173; Laurence G. Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1989), pp.36-59.

72) The Taipings had no ordained minister.

burned the paper after reading it. An address or sermon was given. The service concluded with the repetition of the ten Heavenly Precepts, a hymn, the setting off of firecrackers, and the burning of incense. There was also daily morning and evening worship, and a grace was said before meals.<sup>73)</sup>

The Sabbath service was not the only occasion for preaching. A sermon might be delivered on any day from a platform before a crowd in a newly conquered city, or before newly recruited troops, or at the beginning of a new expedition or other difficult undertaking, in order to arouse the enthusiasm of the listeners for the Taiping cause. In complete accordance with the eschatology set forth in Liang's tracts, the Taipings believed in an eternal life, final judgment, and the existence of heaven<sup>74)</sup> and hell. There was not much difference between their conceptions in this respect and orthodox ones except for some additional emphases. The glorious, happy, and eternal life in heaven was promised as the crowning reward for those who fought bravely, served loyally, and died as faithful warriors for the revolutionary cause. Hell was to be for the eternal punishment of cowards, traitors, and all other undutiful and unfaithful revolutionaries. It is easy to surmise the origin of these punishments. It was from the Buddhist teaching on the origin of hell.<sup>75)</sup> The ideas of heaven and hell of the Taipings, then, were a fascinating example of religious syncretism.

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73) Augustus F. Lindley, *Ti-ping tien-kwoh: The History of the Ti-ping Revolution, Including a Narrative of the Author's Personal Adventures*, vol. 1 (London: Day and Son, 1866), pp.318-321.

74) Hong believed in thirty-three levels of heaven. It did not from Liang's tracts but from the Buddhist tradition of thirty-three levels of heaven and thirty-three levels of hell. Cf. Laurence G. Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*, pp.112-126.

75) Eugene P. Boardman, *Christian Influence upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion, 1851-1864*, pp.84-87.

From the beginning to the end, there was no church organization as such in Taiping Christianity. The closest approximation was the Society of God Worshippers, which dissolved into the Taiping army after the uprising. However, the Taipings had planned to have a chapel for every twenty-five families, but they did not have a chance to fulfill the plan.<sup>76)</sup>

Instead, a living-room or special hall was used for worship. In every government agency, every dignitary's or official's residence, and every army headquarters, the best room in the building or house was remodeled or set aside as a hall for worshipping God. But no churches were founded in the cities or places under Taiping control, though Christianity was the state religion of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.<sup>77)</sup> This seeming paradox grew out of the fact that the Taipings carried over to their worship of God some of the attitude surrounding ancestor worship in the home in Chinese tradition.

#### IV. Conclusion

Taiping Christianity was in reality a new religion manifesting orthodox and heterodox elements as well as indigenous influences.<sup>78)</sup> In common with Christians everywhere, the Taipings worshipped God, acclaimed Christ the Savior, read the Bible, followed the Ten Commandments,

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76) Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace, "The Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty," in Franz Michael and Chung-li Chang, eds., *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*, vol. 2, *Documents and Comments*, p.315.

77) Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, p.164.

78) Cf. "At its close, as its beginning, the Tai Ping movement was a Chinese sect, displaying some interesting results of contact with Christianity, but drawing most of its beliefs and characteristics from its Chinese environment and the erratic genius of its leaders" (Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, p.298).

performed baptism, and believed in heaven and hell. The Taipings also embraced some major doctrinal differences in their profession of Christianity. Some leaders practiced shamanism in the Society of God Worshipers. Hong advocated the revival of China's pre-Confucian egalitarian commonwealth of great peace and equality, and wanted to rule directly by the Heavenly Father, under his own vice-regency. Hong and the Taipings could not understand the doctrine of the Trinity. They borrowed concepts of the Buddhist King of Hades and thirty-three levels of heaven and hell. They had a modified form of baptism and neglected the Lord's Supper. The Taipings did not carry the cross or adopt it as a symbol.

Now how can I conclude that what is the Taiping religion or Taiping Christianity? Hong Xiuquan's interpretation of Christian doctrine was molded by his own social and cultural milieu, the special needs of the Taiping Movement, and a reverence for the ancient truths of Confucianism. Adaptation to social and cultural conditions was not a new approach to Christianity. However adaptation of Christianity to Eastern rather than Western culture was a different matter with problems whose resolutions are still being pursued by Chinese Christians and Western theologians. That Hong erred is hardly surprising. Nor is it surprising that the greatest distortion in Taiping Christianity arose in the ethical sphere where Hong, like Liang Fa, saw the similarities between the teachings of Confucius and Christ and missed the quintessence of Christ's message, the emphasis on God's love. The writings of Liang Fa, in the *Quanshiliangyan*, influenced Hong Xiuquan as he founded and directed the Society of God Worshipers. Hong, however, modified much of Liang's teaching and shaped a new religion based on Chinese tradition as much as on Christianity.

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❖ 국문초록

## 태평천국운동에 있어서 서양 기독교와 중국 문화의 상관관계에 대한 비교 연구

김 석 주

태평천국운동은 현대중국의 성립과 관련하여 차지하는 특별한 위상으로 인하여 세계 여러 곳에서 많은 연구가 진행되어 왔다. 그러나 이러한 상당한 연구 성과에도 불구하고 기독교적 측면의 연구는 그리 많지 않다. 따라서 이 글은 이 점을 중시하여 태평천국운동과 기독교와의 관계 중 19세기 중국 개신교가 홍수전과 태평천국운동에 끼친 영향을 먼저 파악한다. 홍수전은 양발과 이사카 로버츠로부터 유일하신 존재 하나님께만 예배드려야 함을, 예수님을 구세주로 고백해야 함을, 그리고 성경을 배우고 익혀야 함을 깨달았다. 심오한 여러 기독교 사상을 배웠고 영생을 소망하며 천국과 지옥이 존재함을 믿었다. 그러나 이런 믿음을 이 땅에서, 특히 19세기 중국에서의 삶 속에 적용함은 이와는 다른 별개의 이야기였다. 우리가 잘 아는 것처럼 홍수전은 19세기 중국이라는 시공간적인 토대 위에 생성된 중국문화의 영향 아래 살아가고 있었다. 따라서 그의 서양 기독교적 믿음은 중국화 되고 또 그들 중국인들이 이해할 수 있는 문화와 세계관으로 재해석되어 실행되었던 것이다.

주제어 : 비교 연구, 홍수전, 양발, 이사카 로버츠, 태평천국운동, 태평 기독교

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