

王慶成：論洪秀全的早期思想及其發展

Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's Early Thought and the Taiping Revolution

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HUNG HSIU-CH'ÜAN'S THOUGHT, particularly in the early period of his life, has a close bearing on the rise of the Taiping Revolution and its subsequent character. During the last thirty years Fan Wen-lan 范文瀾, in such important works as *The T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo Revolutionary Movement* and his *Modern History of China*, as well as other researchers, have analysed the early thought of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan and its influence on the development of the Taiping Revolution, and have reached similar, generally accepted conclusions. The work of these historians is the basis and starting point for the continuing examination of these questions by others, as well as for the present article which, in concentrating on Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's thought and its development before the Chin-t'ien 金田 rising, attempts to answer the following questions: When and how did he decide to launch a revolutionary struggle against the Ch'ing? What influence did Christianity have upon his early thought? Did he merely 'borrow the Western God' to serve the cause of revolution? Did his early writing preach political and economic egalitarianism?

A correct understanding of history is not easily achieved: objectively it is limited by the historical material; subjectively, apart from the level of understanding of the researcher, his field of vision is open to all kinds of social influences. The understanding of history therefore, is a process. In examining certain questions connected with Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's early thought, this article, while laying no claim to originality, merely seeks to further the process of historical understanding.

I. Hung Hsiu-ch'üan and His Thought before 1843.

HUNG HSIU-CH'ÜAN WAS BORN in a peasant family in Hua-hsien (Kwangtung) on 1 January 1814 (Chia Ch'ing 18/12/10). From the earliest age he was subject to the

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traditional cultural influences of Chinese feudal society. According to his cousin and intimate, Hung Jen-kan,

The young Siu-tsuen soon developed an extraordinary capacity for study, and was sent to school when seven years of age. In the course of five or six years, he had already committed to memory and studied the *Four Books*, the *Five Classics*, the *Koo-wun* [Ku Wen], and the *Hau-king* [Hsiao Ching]; afterwards he read for himself the History of China, and the more extraordinary books of Chinese literature, all of which he very easily understood at the first perusal.¹

Because of his diligence his family placed great hopes in him:

He soon gained the favour of his teachers as well as of his own family relations; who felt proud of his talents, and surely hoped that he would in the course of time attain the degree of a Tsin-tzu [*chin-shih*], or even become a member of the Han-lin college, from which the highest officers are selected by the Emperor, and this by his high station reflect a lustre upon his whole family.²

From the age of about 16 to 31, that is to say, during the 15 years between 1828 and 1843, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan shared the common experience of most scholars in Chinese feudal society: sitting examinations and teaching in village schools. The historical record tells us little about how he got on at the examinations; but according to what Hung Jen-kan told Theodore Hamberg,

At an early period, when he was only sixteen years of age, Hung commenced to visit the public examinations at Canton, with the hope to realize the high expectations entertained by his family respecting his literary abilities. . . .

Siu-tshuen's name was always among the first upon the board at the District Examination, yet he never succeeded in attaining the degree of Siu-tshai [*hsiu-ts'ai*].³

In the Ch'ing examination system, eligible candidates (*t'ung-sheng*) had to pass the district, prefectural and provincial examinations before they could win the *hsiu-ts'ai* degree. The district examinations consisted of five sessions, and those who passed the first were qualified to sit the prefectural examinations; but only the candidate who came first in the last session received the title *an-shou* 案首 ('first on the list'), and normally at the prefectural examinations candidates were selected to enter the academies.⁴ Although Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's name was 'among the first upon the board at the District Examinations' when he was sixteen, it seems he was not

¹Theodore Hamberg: *The Visions of Hung-Siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*, Hong Kong: China Mail Office, 1854 (hereafter abbreviated as 'Hamberg'), 2.

²*Ibid.*

³*Loc. cit.*, 2.

⁴Shang Yen-liu: *Ch'ing-tai k'e-chü k'ao-shih shu-lu*, 1958, p. 5.

Taiping Ideology

The ideology of the T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo has been the subject of much discussion in China in the last few years. Apart from the intrinsic importance of the topic, one of the reasons for the attention devoted to it was the marked tendency in the past to exaggerate Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's role and to exaggerate the revolutionary elements in his thought. It was often claimed, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, that Hung had become revolutionary in his thinking as early as 1837. This involved distorted interpretations of his works. Wang Ch'ing-ch'eng, a leading Taiping specialist, is one of the first to look again at Hung's early writings and activities, not pre-judging them, but using them to trace the development of his thought. Hung's repeated attempts to pass the examinations show him to have had the typical ambitions of a young scholar. Personal disappointment led him to question the society in which he lived, and made him susceptible to the appeal of Christianity. He began to worship God and to condemn the evils he saw around him, including idolatry, in Christian terms. His intentions did not become revolutionary until after his second visit to Kwangsi in 1847, when he was influenced by the wide-spread rebellious activity there and realized the possibility of using the organization, which Feng Yun-shan had set up, to challenge the dynasty.

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an-shou; so his attempt at the prefectural examination failed that year.

After this failure he remained at home, helping with the manual work; but before long he was engaged as a village teacher. 'In 1836, when he was twenty-three years of age he again visited Canton to be presented at the public examination.'⁵ Hamberg's account continues:

The following year, 1837, he again attended the public examination at the provincial city of Kwang-tung. In the commencement his name was placed high upon the board, but afterwards it was again put lower.⁶

When failed *t'ung-sheng* sat the examinations again, they had to start again with the district examination.⁷ So on two occasions, before sitting the examinations in Canton, Hung must have sat the district and prefectural examinations again. At the latter, those who passed the first session could proceed to the provincial examination. This consisted of two main parts (*cheng* and *fu*). That Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's name 'in the commencement . . . was placed high upon the board, but afterwards it was again put lower', implies that he failed the provincial examination.

After his failure in 1837 Hung Hsiu-ch'üan was ill for 40 days. After recovering, 'he again attended the public examination at Canton, and was also, as before, several times engaged as teacher of a school about eight miles from his native place.'⁸ Later Hung Jen-kan, in his deposition after capture, spoke of his cousin's attempts to pass the examinations:

At the age of twelve or thirteen he had acquired a fair knowledge of the classics, history, poetry, and literature, and from this time up to his thirty-first year he was high on the list of successful candidates in the [preliminary] examinations, but he never succeeded in the examinations supervised by the provincial director of studies, which made him very resentful.⁹

In 1843, when he was 31, Hung sat the examinations for the last time.¹⁰ Hung Jen-kan makes it clear that his cousin went to Canton for the examinations four times, and that each time, before going to Canton, he had to sit the examinations

⁵Hamberg, 3. [Hamberg's original note here reads, 'It may also have been some time before that period.' -Tr.]

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Only a candidate at the provincial examination who failed to get the degree owing to insufficient vacancies (*i-sheng*, or 'candidate on the waiting-list') was exempt from the district and prefectural examinations the next time. See Chang Tsung-ju: *Ch'ing-tai k'ao-shih chih-tu*, 1931.

⁸Hamberg, 4.

⁹Hsiang Ta et al. (ed.): *T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo* (In

Chung-kuo chin-tai-shih tzu-liao ts'ung-k'an, Second Series, under the general editorship of the China Historical Association), 8 vols, Shanghai 1952 (hereafter abbreviated as 'TPTK') II. p. 847. The English translation is taken from Franz Michael and Chung-li Chang, eds., *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*, Seattle and London, 1971, 3 volumes (hereafter abbreviated as 'Documents') II. 1514.

¹⁰According to G.H. McNeur: *China's First Preacher Liang A-fa*, 1931, in 1847 Hung 'again failed the examination.' The original source of this information is not given and its accuracy remained to be proved.

at Hua-hsien.¹¹

The examination system was used by the feudal ruling class for selecting men of ability in order to consolidate its rule. It provided the means whereby a small number of intellectuals from the middle and lower strata could rise into the ranks of the ruling class, so the majority of intellectuals were deeply caught up in its toils. That Hung Hsiu-ch'üan sat the examinations several times shows that at this time he cannot have had any thought of opposing the Ch'ing dynasty and raising revolution. However, a poem which he composed on the way home from Canton after the examinations of 1837 has survived.

*The dragon hides in a corner of the sea,
For fear he might alarm Heaven;
In a brief period of leisure, he jumps
into the deep gulf.
Wait until the wind and the cloud gather together;
Then he will soar up into the world and
pacify heaven and earth.*¹²

According to the same source, during his illness after returning home, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan wrote:

*My hand now holds both in heaven and earth the power to punish and
kill,
To slay the depraved, and spare the upright; to relieve the people's
distress.
My eyes survey from the North to the South beyond the rivers and
mountains;
My voice is heard from the East to the West to the tracts of the sun
and moon.
The Dragon expands his claws, as if the road in the clouds were too
narrow;
And when he ascends, why should he fear the bent of the milky way?
The tempest and thunder as music attend, and the foaming waves are
excited,
The flying Dragon the Yik-king [I-ching] describes, dwells surely in
Heaven above.*¹³

¹¹There are statements in Hung Jen-kan's deposition which require further study. For instance, in the Ch'ing examination system, prefectural examinations (*t'ung-k'ao*) were to take place in the second (*ch'ou*), fifth (*ch'en*), eighth (*wei*) and eleventh (*hsü*) years of the twelve-year cycle. Preliminary examinations were fixed for the third (*yin*), sixth (*ssu*), ninth (*shen*) and twelfth (*hai*) years. 1836 (*ping-shen*) was a year for the preliminary examination, and 1837 (*ting-yu*) was not a year for the prefectural examinations. Some writers therefore consider that Hung cannot have sat the examination in that year. There were exceptions however: for instance, if there was a 'special examination' (*en-k'e*), the prefectural examination counted as a preliminary one, and a further

examination took place after the village examinations (*hsing-k'ao*). So it is by no means impossible that there was a prefectural examination in the *ting-yu* year (1837). Some say that Hung cannot have gone to sit the examinations two years running, in 1836 and 1837, because of the 'three years, one examination' ruling. But this is incorrect, since this ruling refers to the village examinations: the *hsiu-ts'ai* examinations were twice in three years.

¹²TPTK II. p. 848; *Documents*, III. p. 1515.

¹³Hamberg, 3; *Documents* III. p. 1517 (This is a revised and modernized version of Hamberg's translation.)

These verses are full of anti-Ch'ing sentiment and reveal Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's ambition to make himself emperor. They are often considered to mark the inception of his revolutionary feelings. However, in view of what we know about his repeated attempts to pass the examinations, we cannot avoid questioning conclusions based on this kind of historical record and evidence. In examining these verses it is first necessary to take note of their source, and of the time and situation in which they were made public. At home after his failure at the examinations in 1837 Hung Hsiu-ch'üan experienced various dreams and fantasies, and there is no reason to suspect that they were simulated.¹⁴ On the other hand, we can be sure that after he had decided to launch the revolution, and after the establishment of the T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo, many additions were made to the account of Hung's illness and the visions which accompanied it, exaggerating the facts and their significance. It is highly likely that the extant versions of these two poems, from before and during his illness of 1837, were influenced by the markedly mythological interpretation later made of his visions for political purposes. Indeed, there are several examples of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's statements, thought to date from his early life, which, for political reasons, were distorted by changes and additions, so that they contain contradictions and no longer ring true. For example, according to Hung Jen-kan's 1852 account, his cousin had a dream in which a red sun was put into his hand, after which he awoke and wrote the eight-line poem beginning

*Now that the five hundred years have passed
The true sun moves in sight;
How should these poor glow-worms dare
To rival it in light.*¹⁵

The political function of the dream, and of the poem, are quite clear. As we shall see from the analysis of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's fundamental beliefs in the period 1845-6 (see below), he could not have written such a poem at that time, so Hung Jen-kan's account is unreliable on this point. Moreover, in 'A Hero Returns to the Truth' (1861), Hung Jen-kan antedates the composition of this poem to 1843, *before* Hung Hsiu-ch'üan began to worship God, and even changed the first line from 'Now that the five hundred years have passed, the true sun moves in sight;' to read 'Now that the world shall enjoy great peace [*t'ai-p'ing*], the true sun comes in sight.'¹⁶ This is, of course, even less credible. Again, both Hamberg's 'The Visions of Hung Siu-tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection' and the 'Taiping Heavenly Chronicle' (T'ai-p'ing T'ien-jih) record that in 1837 Hung Hsiu-ch'üan was ill for more than 40 days. 'The Sovereign had ascended to Heaven on the first day of the third moon, and it was about forty or more days until he was again sent down into the world.'¹⁷ But 'A Hero Returns to the Truth' records that 'on the

¹⁴If we suppose that in 1837 Hung already intended to fake an illness in order to give force to his claim to having received a supernatural command, then it is difficult to explain why he should subsequently have sat the examinations.

¹⁵Hamberg, 7.

¹⁶TPTK II p. 573; Documents III p. 810. The original version suggests a line of legitimacy dating back to Chu Yuan-chang, which is completely eliminated in the subsequent version.

¹⁷Documents II p. 62.

fourth day of the third month, amid the clamorous singing of the birds, he composed the poem . . .

*The birds turn towards the dawn, in this resembling me;
As the Son of Heaven of the Taipings, everything I'll do at will.*¹⁸

Then suddenly his illness 'melted away'. But another official Taiping publication, the 'Gospel Jointly Witnessed and Heard by the Imperial Eldest and Second Eldest Brothers', has another version: that on the first day of the third month at midnight Hung Hsiu-ch'üan ascended to heaven and returned to earth two days later, then ascended to heaven on the third and fourth days, 'and engaged in great battles with the devils.'¹⁹ Leaving aside the legends of these 'visits to heaven', the statement that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan wrote the line 'As the Son of Heaven of the Taipings, everything I'll do at will' on 'the fourth day of the third month' in 1837, is clearly a fabrication. The same source also records that Hung, during this illness, sang 'verses from the Tenfold-Perfect Auspicious Poems' (*Shih-ch'üan ta-chi shih* 十全大吉詩). There are several secret allusions in these poems which we still cannot entirely comprehend; but in them the appeal to the people to revere and believe in God, and the idea that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan was the rightful Son of Heaven, are quite clear. Quite apart from the question as to whether a person in the middle of a fit of madness is likely to have composed ten poems comprehensible to others, (and that others could have heard them, or recorded them distinctly), the content alone of these poems provoke the question: How could Hung Hsiu-ch'üan at this time, *before* he had come in contact with Christianity or 'perused Heavenly books', have urged people to believe in God. The story of the composition of these poems in 1837 was clearly a later fabrication.

These examples show that historians should proceed with great caution when using material relating to Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's early thought. Such should be our attitude to the claim that the two poems, 'The Dragon hides in a corner of the sea' and 'To slay the depraved and spare the upright' were written in 1837. To be sure, to a scholar familiar with the classics and anxious to make a name for himself, repeated failure at the examinations was a tremendous blow, and that Hung should have felt resentment against injustice is perfectly plausible.²⁰ If at the time he did indeed write poems, their content would surely have been different from those which we now know. From his preoccupation with examinations and from his words and actions during his illness, it follows that in 1837 Hung could not have had revolutionary ideas about overthrowing the dynasty. On returning home after writing, according to Hung Jen-kan, the poem 'The Dragon hides in a corner of the sea', Hung Hsiu-ch'üan became ill, and thinking his last day had come, said to his

¹⁸*Documents* III p. 810.

¹⁹*Ibid.* II p. 9.

²⁰That the Taipings, immediately after the rising and the establishment of the T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo should hold examinations in the small town of Yung-

an; that they should have been regarded as so important after the establishment of the capital at Nanking, and that there was 'an examination of the third degree' after Hung Jen-kan's arrival there, can be seen as reflecting Hung Hsiu-ch'üan and Hung Jen-kan's desire to compensate for this blow to their morale.

parents and relatives, 'My days are counted, and my life will soon be closed. O my parents! How badly have I returned the favour of your love to me! I shall never attain a name that may reflect its lustre upon you.'²¹ These remarks reveal nothing which might suggest a state of mind which could create such a poem.

II. The Beginning of 'God Worship' was not the Beginning of Revolutionary Activity.

IN 1843, AFTER HIS FINAL failure at the examinations Hung Hsiu-ch'üan read Liang Fa's 'Good Words for Exhorting the Age.' This was his first contact with Christianity. Some historians have claimed that Gützlaff played a role in Hung's conversion to Christianity. Karl Gützlaff was a Prussian missionary who came to China in 1831, and subsequently took part in British aggressive activities. In 1844, after the Treaty of Nanking, he established a Chinese religious organization called the 'Chinese Union' and made use of its members to proselytize in the interior of the country, distributing Bibles and religious tracts.²² By 1850, Bibles distributed in this way had reached all the provinces of China except Kansu.²³ Because of the extensive nature of Gützlaff's activities, there were already rumours in the early days of the Taiping movement of a connection with Hung Hsiu-ch'üan and Feng Yun-shan 馮雲山. In 1852 for instance, I.J. Roberts wrote a report in which he expressed doubt that a disciple of Gützlaff's, said to have joined the Taipings, could have been Hung, even less that he was the leader of the movement.²⁴ In Bonham's report after his visit to Nanking in the Spring of 1853, he stated that the Taipings were familiar with the small volumes distributed by 'Dr. Gützlaff's organization.'²⁵ Recent works have even suggested that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan was a pupil of Gützlaff,²⁶ and that Feng Yun-shan was baptized by him.²⁷ It must be said however, that there is no reliable evidence on their relationship with the Prussian missionary. Whether some members of Gützlaff's 'Chinese Union', or those connected with them, joined the 'God Worshippers' Association'; whether Gützlaff's translation of the Bible, or tracts written by him, were later circulated among the Taipings—these are questions which require further study. It is certain however, that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's first contact with Christianity and the greatest influence on his early thought, was not Gützlaff or his writings, but Liang Fa's 'Good Words for Exhorting the Age'.

Liang Fa was a Cantonese from Kao-ming *hsien*, born in 1789, who in childhood attended school and later became a wood-engraver, employed in the printing of the British missionary Robert Morrison's translation of the Bible. Subsequently

²¹Hamberg, 3.

²⁵TPTK VI p. 896.

²²E. P. Boardman: *Christian Influence upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion*. Madison 1952, p. 43.

²⁶Wang Chih-hsin: *Chung-kuo chi-tu-chiao shih-kang*, 1948, p. 165.

²³K. S. Latourette: *A History of Christian Missions in China*, New York 1929 p. 253.

²⁷Prescott Clarke: 'The Coming of God to Kwang-si,' in *Papers on Far Eastern History* (Department of Far Eastern History, Australian National University) 7 (March 1973).

²⁴TPTK VI p. 824.

he was baptized and himself became a missionary. When, in the first half of the nineteenth century, new and established sects of Christianity sought to gain a foothold in China, the motives of the various missionaries were probably different, but objectively speaking they played a supporting role in the imperialist penetration of the country. Liang Fa however, in the period when the British imperialists were flooding China with opium, wrote a tract entitled 'For a Speedy Reform of the Opium Habit', written in urgent tones.²⁸ Although led astray by his blind faith in the illusions of Christian doctrine, there remained traditional elements from Buddhism, and even Taoism, in his religious make-up.²⁹

Liang Fa's Christian evangelical tract 'Good Words for Exhorting the Age' was first published in 1832. It consists of nine small volumes (some versions are divided into three or four volumes). The work does not give a systematic exposition of the teachings of the Old and New Testaments, but in 60 disconnected passages, makes extracts from various sections of the Bible, to which Chinese-style glosses were added, repeatedly reiterating certain Christian dogmas about the worship of God, reverence for Jesus, attacking idolatry, describing the eternal bliss of heaven and the suffering of hell. It is a shallow proselytizing work of no literary merit.

Yet this book had an enormous influence on Hung Hsiu-ch'üan. He obtained a copy of it in 1836, when he went to Canton for the examination, but at the time merely glanced at it without paying very much attention. In the Summer of 1843 his cousin Li Ching-fang borrowed and read it, and concluded that its contents were very strange and a great contrast to the Chinese classics. Hung Hsiu-ch'üan then read it carefully, and on him it provoked an even more striking reaction. He immediately abandoned idolatry and began to worship God and revere Jesus. Thus began a new period in his life.

It is customary to consider that when he began to worship God in 1843, this was the beginning of his preparatory work for the Taiping Revolution. Another view is that although Hung read 'Good Words', he did not accept Liang Fa's teaching, but merely 'borrowed' the authority of God to propagate revolution and mobilize the masses. To find out whether these views are correct we need to examine them in the light of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's words and actions after reading 'Good Words'.

How did Hung Hsiu-ch'üan and Li Ching-fang react after reading the tracts? Hung Jen-kan told Hamberg that his cousin 'rejoiced to have found in reality a

²⁸G. H. McNeur, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

²⁹Some of his remarks throw light on his psychological make-up. 'The Heavenly Father has boundless love and compassion for man, and all who know this great truth should strictly follow it. Those who accumulate evilness and are unwilling to suddenly awaken . . . will be dragged into Hell to suffer for ever. If one encounters this suffering it is difficult to bear, for grief and pain are extreme; the most cruel punishments of this world are ten thousand times less severe, because suffering is never-ending. So that those who during their lives cannot repent and reform, it would be better if they had not been born; for it would be better to be slowly ground to death between

millstones rather than suffer the tortures of Hell, which are many times worse. . . . Now, seeing the mysterious meaning of the Holy Book, which only outlines the everlasting punishment of Hell, my heart is very fearful. I tremble as I write and my whole frame shudders, and I am suddenly stricken by a limitless anxiety, lest I be destroyed by my own evil desires, and in a moment of confusion again fall into sin. Would I not then suffer this everlasting punishment? Who then would save me?' See *Ch'üan-shih liang-yen* ('Good Words for Exhorting the Age'), photolithographic copy of 1853 edition, Ch. 2 [This work has been reprinted in *Chün-tai-shih tzu-liao*, 1979, 2—Tr.]

way to Heaven and sure hope of everlasting life and happiness;’ they then ‘administered baptism to themselves,’ ‘according to the manner described in the books;’ they ‘prayed to God, and promised not to worship evil spirits, not to practice evil things, but to keep the heavenly commandments;’ they ‘poured water on their heads saying, ‘Purification from all forms of sin, putting off the old and regeneration.’ Hung Hsiu-ch’üan then composed a poem:

*When our transgressions high as heaven rise,
How well to trust in Jesus’ full atonement;
We follow not the Demons, we obey
The holy precepts, worshipping alone
One God, and thus we cultivate our hearts,
The heavenly glories open to our view,
And every being ought to seek thereafter.
I much deplore the miseries of Hell.
O turn ye to the fruits of true repentance!
Let not your hearts be led by worldly customs.³⁰*

This is no more than a poem of repentance: there is nothing revolutionary about it. As ordinary rural intellectuals, what kind of ‘transgressions as high as heaven’ can Hung Hsiu-ch’üan and Li Ching-fang have been ‘putting off’? The poem merely reflects the teaching of ‘Good Words’ that the first ancestor of mankind, tempted by the serpent, had disobeyed God’s commandments; that his descendants were born sinful and had departed from their true nature, and instead of revering God, had taken to idolatry and committed great sins; that God had sent his beloved son into the world to atone for the sins of man. This poem is the proof of Hung Hsiu-ch’üan’s acceptance of Liang Fa’s teaching.³¹

After his conversion, Hung told his friends and relatives ‘about the folly and sinfulness of idolatry, and about the duty of worshipping the true God.’³² He converted members of his family, a friend called P’eng, and especially his close

³⁰Hamburg, 4.

³¹In a passage in ‘Good Words’ Liang Fa described his own conversion. He wrote that the American pastor Milne told him that mankind was confused by worshipping idols: they do not worship God and thus transgress the commands of Heaven, whereas those who worship God, trust in the atonement of Jesus Christ and accept baptism, can obtain the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of their souls. ‘I then asked Mr. Milne the meaning of Baptism. Mr. Milne said,—“The rite of Baptism consists in sprinkling a little pure water upon the head or the body of a person. The inner or spiritual meaning of it is to wash a person clean from the pollution of his sins, that by the Holy Spirit his heart may be changed and cause him from the time of his having been baptized to love the good and hate the evil, to change his former life, and become a new man.” After hearing Mr. Milne expound in this way I again asked, “Now that I know myself

to be a sinner, how can I obtain forgiveness?” Mr. Milne said, “If you sincerely believe in Jesus and are baptized, then Jesus in suffering and dying, took your punishment upon himself. The Heavenly Father, seeing the merit of Jesus in atoning for sins, is also willing to forgive you and regard you as a good subject of God.” So I left Mr. Milne and returned to meditate in my small room, and thought to myself, “I am a sinner; if I do not rely on the atoning merit of Jesus, how can I pray to God freely to forgive my sins? Moreover, to believe in Jesus Christ, it is needless to say, is being a loyal subject of God; this will give the joy of Heaven after death, that is to say I will not sink into Hell after death and suffer everlasting torment. This is the height of good fortune.”’ See *Ch’üan-shih liang-yen*, Ch. 6. Hung Hsiu-ch’üan’s hymn of repentance and Liang’s personal statement are broadly similar.

³²Hamburg, 5.

friends Feng Yun-shan and Hung Jen-kan, and baptized them. On this occasion he wrote another poem,

*Besides the God of Heaven there is no other God;
Why do the foolish men take falsehood to be the truth?
Since their primeval heart is altogether lost,
How can they now escape defilement from the dust?*³³

Hung Jen-kan, 'wrote a reply according to the Chinese manner, finishing with the same words,

*'The mighty heavenly Father, He is the one true God.
Idols are made of wood, or moulded from the clod.
We trust that Jesus came, to save us who were lost,
That we may soon escape defilement from the dust.'*³⁴

Neither what Hung Hsiu-ch'üan told his relatives, nor the poems they wrote, went beyond what can be found in 'Good Words'. Both Feng Yun-shan and Hung Jen-kan later became important leaders of the Taiping Revolution, and their conversion is often considered to be the beginning of the 'revolutionary group' called the 'God Worshippers' Association.' In fact however, the creation of an organization for the worship of God came later, and was created by the proselytizing and organizational work of Feng Yun-shan in the Tzu-ching-shan area of Kwangsi. When Hung Hsiu-ch'üan began proselytizing he did not form an organization, still less did he mobilize 'revolutionary comrades'. This is quite clear from his activities and from his poems. Moreover Hung Jen-kan, Hsiu-ch'üan's most intimate friend at this time, still wanted to become a *hsiu-ts'ai* and continued to sit the examinations right up to 1849 or 1850.³⁵ Of course, the evolution of Hung Jen-kan's thought was different from that of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, but when in 1843, the latter taught about worshipping God, his audience included men who were still seeking to make names for themselves in the Ch'ing examinations; this shows that he was looking for converts, not for revolutionaries. He was not at this time making use of the dogmas of Liang's 'Good Words' for ulterior purposes: his attitude was one of sincere belief. This is clear from some of the events related by Hung Jen-kan.

Hung Hsiu-ch'üan had a great respect for the book 'Good Words for Exhorting the Age'. 'He revered the books highly, and if anyone wished to read them, he urgently told them not to alter or mark them in any manner, "Because," he said, "it is written therein . . . Jehovah's word is correct."'³⁶ He warmly defended the dogma presented in 'Good Words': in talking with a *hsiu-ts'ai* called Wen, who would not believe the true doctrines it contained, and even wished to correct their errors,

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵Hung Jen-kan wrote in his Deposition: 'I am forty years old this year and am a native of Hua-hsien in Kwangtung. At an early stage I devoted my mind

to study, and by the time I was between the ages of 28 or 29 I had participated and failed in five [state] examinations.' He was 28 in 1849-50. See *Documents: III* p. 1511.

³⁶Hamberg, 5.

Hung Hsiu-ch'üan became very angry 'and though the *hsiu-ts'ai* had killed a fowl for his entertainment, he left the house without partaking of it.'³⁷ He deeply believed in the superstitious stories in Liang's book:

Reading the description of the flood, the destruction of Sodom, and the judgement, they were filled with awe, not knowing if perhaps these dreadful calamities were still to be expected.³⁸

These accounts are at variance, if not absolutely in contradiction, with the argument that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan was not convinced by 'Good Words', and merely made use of the authority of the God which it portrayed.

It is necessary to mention anti-Confucianism here. The T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo did have an anti-Confucian character, and historians of modern China should give credit for this. But the significance of Taiping anti-Confucianism has often been exaggerated, especially a few years ago, without regard to the fact that there were changes in content and emphasis. In 1843, after his conversion, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan 'removed the idols from the school-rooms of his two converts [Hung Jen-kan and Feng Yun-shan].'³⁹ 'Removed' does not mean destroyed, moreover, other idols were removed at the same time: 'I later removed from my study the figures of Confucius and the God of Literature, and from my home the tablet of the kitchen god and all the other ox, pig, door and dragon demons.'⁴⁰ This shows that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan followed the strictures of 'Good Words' against the worship of *all* idols. Liang Fa had attacked Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, but the condemnation of Confucius was not total, and Confucianism continued to influence the minds of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan and Hung Jen-kan. When the former removed the Confucian tablets in 1843, his action was motivated by religious conviction, and this action subsequently influenced his own and the Taipings' opposition to Confucianism. This was the beginning of Hung's 'heterodox thought'; but it was not a symbol of anti-Ch'ing revolution.

Hung Hsiu-ch'üan did not accept the message of 'Good Words' in the same way as an ordinary convert might have done. He considered that he had received God's revelation through this strange book, and God's command to urge men to worship God and oppose idolatry in order to save the world. The origin of this extraordinary self-perception was closely connected with his visions of 1837. When he read 'Good Words' in 1836, he merely glanced at it. But the persons and events which he saw in his dreams may perhaps have represented shadowy recollections of God, Jesus, heaven and hell, which could have entered his consciousness from this cursory reading. He identified his visions with this source, and reached the conclusion that his soul had ascended to heaven, where he had seen God.

While at home, Siu-tshuen and his two friends attentively studied the books, which Siu-tshuen found to correspond in a striking

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *TPTK II p. 690; Documents II p. 6.*

manner with his former visions; and this remarkable coincidence convinced him fully as to their truth, and that he was appointed by God to restore the world, that is, China, to the worship of the true God.⁴¹

The dreams and visions were an illusory experience, but in a backward and ignorant society, with his ambitions balked, they had a practical function; they convinced him that he had a mission to spread the word of God.

We must now examine from a broader perspective, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's acceptance of 'Good Words' and his self-perception as a saviour. In view of his repeated disappointments at the examinations, and the resentment he must have felt, the opening words of Liang's book undoubtedly had a great appeal to him:

In recent ages scholars, farmers, artisans and merchants, great and small, have followed their own inclinations and created innumerable images of gods and Buddhas which they worship and appeal to . . . this is truly ridiculous and pitiful. Take, for instance, the three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism: everywhere there are those who revere them. Among Confucianists, for example, there are those who tend towards fallaciousness; so they deify Wen Ch'ang [the god of literature] and the Four Stars of the Dipper [k'uei-hsing] and worship them, hoping for their protection and the development of their talent and a series of successes at the examinations. Now many Chinese are Confucians and scholars, and they always worship these images, and all beg their protection so that they may graduate as *chü-jen* or *chin-shih*, or be appointed as *han-lin*, so as to embark on an official career and govern the people. Why then is it that although all worship these two images, some men begin studying and attending examinations and continue until the age of 70 or 80, without even being able to graduate as *hsiu-ts'ai*? Yet did they not every year worship these two images? Why did no blessing give them high distinction?⁴²

Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's parents were simple and ignorant worshippers of images, and it is more than likely that, hoping their son would make a name for himself, they too had worshipped the God of Literature and the Stars of the Dipper, but in vain. So the remarks of Liang Fa must have touched him on a sensitive spot. That a diligent student of the classics could successively fail the examinations, was no doubt due to the venality of the Ch'ing examination system, reflecting more general social ills. Liang Fa gave an erroneous, religious explanation of the root causes of such social evils, but the result was to increase Hung's doubts about a corrupt and declining society.

By the Chia-ch'ing—Tao-kuang period [1796-1850] Chinese feudal society was approaching its demise. The conflict between the landlord class and the peasantry, the corruption of the court, waste throughout the country and other fundamental political and economic contradictions, caused gloom among discrimina-

⁴¹Hamberg, 5.

⁴²*Ch'üan-shih liang-yen* ch. 1.

ting scholars. Injustice, dishonesty and other kinds of depravity—profiting from others' misfortunes, violence against the weak, cruelty and deceitfulness, pride, luxury and profligacy and idleness—tainted all aspects of society. A few pedants sighed over the degeneracy of society and the decline of public morals and the norms of human relationships, when pettifoggers were unrestrained and men bribed their way through the examinations to gain office and promotion, and gambling and opium dens multiplied.⁴³

The prominent thinker Kung Tzu-chen perceptively remarked that because of the inequality between rich and poor, and other social contradictions, society had become a great market, where the great tricked the small and the powerful oppressed the weak; where bizarre and exotic clothes, curious playthings and poisonous opium were sold; where men bought their way to offices and noble rank; where women sold their bodies and where some men, pretending to be men of virtue, peddled benevolence. All these 'merchants' tried to swallow up those smaller and weaker.⁴⁴ 'Kwangtung is a province full of treasures, but its administration is the most neglected; though a centre of maritime commerce, the minds of the people are the most shallow.'⁴⁵ As always, these problems elicited differing responses. Some statesmen placed their hopes in the virtue and ability of the ruler and sought to reform court politics. Thinkers like Kung Tzu-chen and, slightly earlier Yen Yuan, Li Kung and others, touched on the roots of the evils and proposed plans for the reform of the land system. Moralists and religious men, with a different view of the question, sought other means to cure corruption and decadence and save the country.

Religion, as Engels pointed out, cannot be dismissed as a complete fabrication by charlatans. Christianity started as a movement of oppressed people, of resistance by the weak against the strong; it was, in its historical context, a programme for the salvation of the powerless. Although it originally implied the demand for a kind of primitive communism, in general it is passive and negative, and merely promises happiness in another world; it is 'the sigh of the oppressed creature . . . the *opium* of the people.'

From the time when Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire in the 4th century, it had already become a tool in the hands of the ruling class, so in Liang Fa's 'Good Words' it is hard to find any trace of the struggle of the weak against the strong. But in order to find a foothold for his religious doctrine within Chinese traditional social ideology, he simply and forcefully exposed some of the evils of Chinese society:

The men of today have begotten all manner of evil doctrines, so the world has greatly changed; heaven and earth are turned upside down, morality is in disorder, evil is taken as good, and even men of virtue are considered as evil. This is because in the minds of men, when at

⁴³ See, for instance, Li Chao-t'ang: 'Luan-hou-chi so-chi' in *Chin-tai-shih tzu-liao*, No. 34, p. 177.

⁴⁵ Pao Shih-ch'en: 'Chih Kuang-tung an-ch'a Yao Chung-ch'eng shu,' in *An-wu ssu-chung*, ch. 35.

⁴⁴ *Kung Tzu-chen ch'üan-chi*, p. 79.

rest both day and night, all their thoughts and calculations, words and actions, are lascivious and evil, treacherous and deceitful, violent and oppressive; their hearts are full of these things, and so do they act in the world.⁴⁶

These problems, in Liang's view, could not be solved by traditional Chinese religious beliefs; indeed they were caused by such beliefs. The message he preached was unfamiliar to Chinese: he promised them that if only they would worship God they would be able to purify their souls, obliterate evil and the world would be at peace.

Because his hopes for a career had been blighted, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan became disillusioned with the old order and old religions. When he encountered a new kind of doctrine he accepted it and believed it was the truth. For its sake he made a great personal sacrifice and raised his values to a totally new plane; he abandoned the road to fame, and in order to oppose the depravity of the world and save degenerate humanity, he became a wholehearted and sincere evangelist of the gospel of God—but it was not, as history proves, the road to the truth.⁴⁷

III. On the Ideological Content of the 'Ode on the Hundred Correct Things,' the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World' and the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age.'

IN THE SPRING OF 1844 Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, Feng Yun-shan and others, full of zeal, left their homes and went to other districts and to Kwangsi, 'everywhere preaching the new doctrine, teaching men to worship the one God Jehovah, who sent his son

⁴⁶*Ch'üan-shih liang-yen*, ch. 2.

⁴⁷After Hung Hsiu-ch'üan began to worship God, he and Li Ching-fang had two 'demon-exterminating swords' made, and they sang together the poem, 'With the three-foot sword in our hand, Do we quiet the sea and the land . . .' (Hamberg, 5). Whether the first two lines of this poem imply the intention to raise armed rebellion against the Ch'ing must be discussed in the context of Hung's conception of himself as a saviour. He had made a connection between the teaching of 'Good Words' and what he had seen in his dreams, and concluded that he was sent by God to spread the gospel, eliminate demons and save China, bringing everyone to peace and prosperity. The poem can be interpreted as an expression of this kind of religious slavatationist belief. The words 'The three-foot sword in our hands' do not contradict such an interpretation. Liang Fa's 'Good Words' ch. 9 quotes from Ephesians 6, ' . . . be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. . . . Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.' That is to say, they were to take up the sword of the

Holy Spirit and slay demons. Such an idea was familiar in traditional China. Moreover, Li Ching-fang, who also bore a sword and sang the poem, is not recorded anywhere as having joined the Taiping Revolution. According to a tradition recorded by Chien Yu-wen, Li's grandson went to Nanking after the establishment of the Taiping capital there. Some say that before doing so he suspected that Hung had seen, when he ascended to heaven, not the 'true God' but a demon; he consequently turned back and went to Hong Kong, later becoming a missionary of the Basel Evangelical Society. Another account has it that he left Nanking after being ostracized. See Chien Yu-wen: *T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo tien-chih t'ung-k'ao*, III p. 1659. These accounts, whether reliable or not, are the only records of Li Chin-fang or his family having anything to do with the Taipings. We have seen no evidence that Li was anti-Manchu either in thought or deed, whether in 1843 or after. That such a man, having read 'Good Words' could sing 'a song of resistance' and subsequently show no sign of anti-Ch'ing feeling, is unthinkable. From this case we can see that to begin to worship God was not equivalent to raising revolution. The poem was not a 'song of resistance' against the Ch'ing.



THE FRONT-PAGE OF T'AI-P'ING CHAO-SHU (*Taiping Imperial Declaration*). It contains "Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World" 原道救世訓 and "An Exhortation in the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age" 原道醒世訓.

to atone for the sins of the world.⁴⁸ Eight months after they set out, Feng Yun-shan went alone to the mountainous region of Tzu-ching-shan in Kuei-p'ing district, while Hung Hsiu-ch'üan returned home from Kuei-hsien, and in 1845 and 1846 remained at Hua-hsien preaching and working as a teacher.

It would be unwise to assume that on this visit to Kwangsi, or at home after his return, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan was actually preaching and organizing revolution under the guise of religious teaching. We should, on the contrary, start from the facts and their analysis.

Everyone admits that Liang Fa's 'Good Words' is not a revolutionary work: quite the opposite, it teaches men not to rebel. On this visit to Kwangsi, if Hung Hsiu-ch'üan did not go beyond the teaching of 'Good Words', how could he have preached revolution or have produced revolutionary results? If we say that he was

⁴⁸Hamberg, 6.

preaching revolution, then we must find evidence that he was preaching something that is not found in 'Good Words'. Clearly, such evidence does not exist.

After returning home from Kwangsi, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan wrote works, including poems, amounting to 'altogether more than fifty volumes.'⁴⁹ Most of these have not survived, though some fortunately have, the most important being the 'Ode on the Hundred Correct Things', the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World' and 'An Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age.' The first we know to have been composed in Kwangsi in 1844, the latter two were written in 1845 at home in Hua-hsien.⁵⁰ These works provide direct evidence of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's thought during the three years in which he was in Kwangsi and at home afterwards.

The 'Ode on the Hundred Correct Things' is a poem of 500 characters and, apart from a few such lines as 'If correct you can enjoy the blessings of heaven, if incorrect you will finally end in the depths of hell,'⁵¹ which reflect Hung's use of ideas from 'Good Words', it is strongly Confucian in character. This is not surprising, since it was only a year since Hung Hsiu-ch'üan had known of this unfamiliar God, whereas his mind had been full of Confucian ideas for more than twenty years. The poem is replete with Chinese literary allusions; it preaches the moral principle of 'correctness' (*cheng* 正); it demands of sovereign and minister, fathers and sons, husbands and wives, men and women, nobles and rich, that they should act 'correctly'. But Hung Hsiu-ch'üan did not directly explain what he meant by 'correct'; he merely praised the ancient sages such as Yao and Shun, Yu and Ch'i, the Duke of Chou, Confucius and so on, as models of 'correctness' in rulers, ministers, sons and so on; whereas Chieh of Chou, Hsiang of Ch'i, P'ing of Ch'u and others, because of their various offences against 'correctness' in relations between the sexes, all got the punishment they deserved. Hung Hsiu-ch'üan considered that 'correctness' and 'incorrectness' lay at the root of the rise and fall of empires, and of personal fortune and misfortune. To the ruler he said, 'When the prince is incorrect the people do as they like. When the prince is correct, the people comply with his commands.' To the common people he said, 'when the prince is incorrect, calamities, because of his vices, multiply; when the prince is correct, blessings, because of his goodness, are enjoyed.'⁵² 'The truly correct make the people peaceful and the country stable. The truly correct make the evil plotter flee to distant places.'⁵³ This is a simple statement of Hung's moral code regarding personal, family and state ethics. Although it reflects his criticism of certain social ills, and is positive in so far as it does so, there is not a trace of revolutionary, anti-Ch'ing or anti-feudal feeling in it. This is what Hung Hsiu-ch'üan was preaching in Kwangsi and elsewhere in 1844.

The 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World' is one of the materials for the study of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's early thought which has attracted most attention: it is also one of the most misunderstood. It preaches that God

⁴⁹TPTK II p. 689; *Documents* II. p. 4.

⁵¹*Documents* II p. 33.

⁵⁰TPTK II p. 689, p. 646; *Documents* II. p. 4, p. 70.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³*Ibid.*

the Father is the only true God of the whole world and of all time, that everyone should worship this God and not idols. Most of the text is devoted to a treatment more specific than that of the 'Ode on the Hundred Correct Things', of examples of 'correctness' and condemnation of the 'six wrong things'—'licentiousness', 'disobedience to parents', 'killing', 'robbery', 'witchcraft', and 'gambling, opium smoking, drinking, geomancy, and fortune-telling'. Hung uses the example of such historical figures as Yü of Hsia, Po I, Shu Ch'i, Wen of Chou, Confucius, Yen Hui, Yang Chen and others to preach filiality, faith and charity, a sense of shame, 'the four cautions against improprieties' and the fatality of poverty and riches. The work mixes together Christian and Confucian thought and expressions in repeatedly exhorting people to worship God, to imitate the virtuous and to cast aside improper thoughts. As the title implies, this was Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's programme for the salvation of an evil society: it contains no suggestion of opposition to the ruling order of the time.

The 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World' contains these words:

*God, the Heavenly Father, is shared by everyone.
That the world is one family has been passed down from of old . . .*

*Heaven and man were of one mind, there were no two principles;
How could monarchs and sovereigns let their private views prevail?
Let God be worshipped;
Let all in this unite . . .*⁵⁴

*Under heaven all are brothers . . .
God looks upon all men as his children.*⁵⁵

These words have usually been interpreted as indicating Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's opposition to the feudal status system, as representing revolutionary and democratic ideas of political egalitarianism. In fact they are no such thing.

The fundamental message of 'Good Words' is that everyone should worship God, that God is the creator of all things, the father of mankind. Hung Hsiu-ch'üan used the Chinese classics to explain and enlarge upon this, and claimed that in ancient China, as elsewhere, people had once worshipped God, but that after the Ch'in men had strayed from the correct path. The idea that 'God, the Heavenly Father, is shared by everyone. That the world is one family has been passed down from of old,' was not new: it reflected the main drift of Liang Fa's 'Good Words'. As to 'Heaven and man were of one mind, there were no two principles; How could monarchs and sovereigns let their private views prevail?', if we look at the poem as a whole, it is very difficult to draw the conclusion that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan was preaching anti-feudal political egalitarianism. When we examine the poem's relationship with 'Good Words', the real meaning of these words becomes clearer. In the third volume of 'Good Words' Liang Fa wrote,

⁵⁴Documents II p. 25.

⁵⁵Documents II p. 28.

Perhaps some may say: since God is the Lord of Heaven and Earth and of all things, most to be honoured and revered, how can the common people, who are inferior and impure, dare to worship Him? But how can one say that only the sovereign and high officials ought to revere and worship Him, not the common people? The Lord of Heaven and Earth and of all things is the father and mother of all countries and all races. From the sovereign to the common people, all should worship him with no distinction of noble or base, only the distinction of good and evil, of sincerity or insincerity.

In the seventh volume Liang Fa wrote about the 'stupid' reasons for not daring to worship God:

Everyone knows who dares to worship heaven: only the Emperor dares sacrifice to heaven. Only the princes dare sacrifice to the patrons of the dynasty. How can a common man of the people worship God morning and evening every day? To do so goes against all principles, against his proper station in life.

Liang Fa constantly reiterates his call for everyone to worship God and criticizes the view that only the rulers and not the common people should do so; so it is clear that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's question 'How could monarchs and sovereigns let their private views prevail?' is no more than a reflection of Liang's teaching, and has nothing to do with political opposition to the feudal rulers. As to the phrases 'under heaven all are brothers' and 'God looks upon all men as his children,' they also must be examined in their proper context. The passages in the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World' read:

*The third kind of wrong is to kill;
To slay our fellow men is the worst of crimes.
Under heaven all are brothers;
The souls of all come alike from heaven.
God looks upon all men as his children;
For men to destroy one another is extremely lamentable.⁵⁶*

*All who want only to kill people are abandoned robbers;
In the end how can they escape calamity?
Pai Ch'i and Hsiang Yü ended by committing suicide;
Huang Ch'ao and Li Ch'uang, where are they now?⁵⁷*

These passages not only show no spirit of resistance, they are strongly opposed to rebellion. They clearly could not have been the theoretical basis of the Taiping Revolution. Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's opposition to killing stems from his belief that mankind is created by God, that men's souls are all God's gifts, that men are all alike—all children of God. The source of these ideas is Liang Fa's teaching. Liang wrote:

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

Mankind of all countries, though divided into different ranks and statuses, though noble or common, are in the eyes of God all like his children.

Though heaven and earth are great and all kinds of men and things are legion, they are, in the eyes of God, no more than one family.

Before God there is no distinction between Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, Barbarian or Scythian, bondmen or free; so in the world, all men are brothers. There is no difference between the men of different nations, because there is only the grace of Jesus Christ. The people of the whole world are one family.⁵⁸

This teaching recognizes the right and duty of all to worship God, but it does not condemn worldly inequality. This is true both of Liang Fa and of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, who in the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World' wrote,

*The true creating spirit is God alone.
Without distinction between noble or lowly, all must reverently worship Him.*⁵⁹

Later, he explained,

Monarchs are his able children, the good his filial children, the commoners his ignorant children, and the violent his recalcitrant children. If you say that monarchs alone can worship the Great God, we beg to ask you, as for the parents of a family, is it only the eldest son who can be filial and obedient to his parents?⁶⁰

This is clearly no different from Liang Fa's beliefs; there is nothing here resembling political egalitarianism, or opposition to the feudal status system.

Engels in *Anti-Dühring* made a brilliant analysis of egalitarianism:

The idea that all men, as men, have something in common, and that to that extent they are equal, is of course primeval. But the modern demand for equality is something entirely different from that; this consists rather in deducing from that common quality of being human, from that equality of men as men, a claim to equal political and social status for all human beings, or at least for all citizens of a state or all members of a society.⁶¹

He also analysed the idea of equality in Christianity:

Christianity knew only *one* point in which all men were equal: that all

⁵⁸ *Ch'üan-shih liang-yen*, ch. 3, ch. 9.

⁶⁰ *Documents II* p. 113.

⁵⁹ *Documents II* p. 25.

⁶¹ F. Engels: *Anti-Dühring*, Moscow 1954, pp. 143-4.

were equally born in original sin. . . . Apart from this it recognized, at most, the equality of the elect, which however was only stressed at the very beginning.⁶²

Hung Hsiu-ch'üan admitted the equality of man in original sin, and so admitted the equality of all in worshipping God; but he never admitted that in society all should have equal political and social status. Engels pointed out that in modern times the demand for equality was made in conjunction with the demand for human rights. Neither in the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World', nor in any of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's works, can one find so much as a trace of this kind of egalitarianism. If we believe that he put forward such ideas on equality and that they formed the basis of Taiping social theory, then it will be difficult to understand both Hung and the Taiping Revolution, and difficult moreover, to explain the history of the hundred years following the end of the Taipings.

Another important early work of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan is the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age.' In this he states that 'The ways of the world are perverse and wicked, while the minds of men are intolerant and shallow.' He criticizes the mutual oppression, seizing, fighting and killing between countries, provinces, prefectures and districts, villages and clans. He stressed that all men are brothers, all women sisters, and that there should be no distinction 'between this country and that country'. 'Why then entertain thoughts of your swallowing up me or my overwhelming you?' He thought that the great way of 'T'ang and Yü and of the three dynasties' should be realized, in which

those who had and those who had not were mutually compassionate, and in calamity they aided one another; doors were not barred, on the road no one picked up lost articles, men and women walked in different paths, and those selected [for office] were of supreme virtue . . . a public and common spirit ruled under the sky [*t'ien-hsia wei-kung*].⁶³

These statements represent Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's perception and judgement on society and his ideas on how to reform it. In the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the Age' he makes ethical and religious demands on the individual; in the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age' he makes demands upon society, proposing the transformation of an oppressive society, full of hatred and killing, into a society of justice, honesty and uprightness. We should recognize the value of this work, and the genuine development of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's thought which it represents; but we should also analyse its true significance and ideological level.

The 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age' deals more with society than directly with religion; but to a considerable extent its theoretical basis is still to be found in Liang Fa's Christian teaching. It puts forward the view that God is 'the universal faith of the whole world,' governing nations, regions, clans and all humanity; but mankind has lost its direction, forgotten its

⁶²*Ibid.* p. 144.

⁶³*Documents II* p. 35.

origins, with all kinds of evil resulting. Mankind should search for and recognize its origin, recognize that all men are brothers and all women sisters, that all humanity is one family and all enjoy peace and prosperity together. As we have seen, these ideas about the brotherhood of the children of God come from Liang Fa's 'Good Words'.

Apart from the direct influence of Liang Fa, this work could not avoid being influenced indirectly by 'Good Words'. Primitive Christianity initially reflected the demand of the oppressed for common ownership of property, although few traces of this demand have survived in the Bible. 'Good Words' is a work designed to persuade people to worship God, and is different in character from the spirit of early Christianity; but some parts of the Bible which Liang quotes, nevertheless, retain some idea of penalizing the rich to relieve the poor, succouring those in peril, helping the distressed and so on. For instance, Liang Fa cites the passage from Isaiah, 'cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.'⁶⁴ He also quotes Jesus' words to the rich man, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor.'⁶⁵ He speaks of God's command to divide food and clothing among the poor and hungry, God's condemnation of the rich man who would not pay his reaper, and of those who beat and oppress the poor.⁶⁶ He wrote that if everyone would believe in the truth 'rulers will govern properly and ministers will be loyal, fathers compassionate and children filial, officials will be honest and the people happy and enjoy peace, and a world in which doors will not be barred at night and articles not picked up on the roads. This was religious teaching concerned with worldly customs, things which were present in Chinese society and which Hung Hsiu-ch'üan himself had observed. These words stimulated Hung and led him to believe in the possibility of a world in which people were mutually compassionate, aided one another when in trouble and so on—that is to say a world of *ta-t'ung* 大同 ('great togetherness'). But there was a considerable difference between Liang Fa and Hung Hsiu-ch'üan in this respect. While Liang urged the poor to accept their fate and the rich to be compassionate in order to achieve spiritual satisfaction, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, on the other hand, actively demanded a just and righteous society. This was a step forward from the message of Liang Fa's 'Good Words', and from the fatalism of his own 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World.' However, in later works and in other Taiping documents, the idea that each person should be satisfied with his lot remained very influential.

Where he went beyond the scope of 'Good Words' Hung Hsiu-ch'üan did so by entering into the maze of ancient Chinese idealism. The 'Great Way' of *t'ien-hsia wei-kung* 天下爲公—a public and common spirit ruling under all the sky—represented, at a time when all the evils of private property and the class system were rife, a nostalgic idealization of the traditional society of ancient legend. It was a noble ideal in China's intellectual tradition, which at various times has inspired those who wished to save the world. But the thinkers who borrowed this concept,

⁶⁴ *Ch'üan-shih liang-yen*, ch. 1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* chs. 5, 6 & 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* ch. 2.

belong to different times, their class viewpoint differed, and we must analyse their thought in terms of their activities and social relations. Sun Yat-sen, for instance, is considered a great democrat of modern times; but not on the grounds that he was inspired by and wanted to realize this ancient utopia. The *'ta-tung'* ancient ideal could not, by itself, embrace modern political and social ideas. Hung Hsiu-ch'üan broke away from the shallow teaching of 'Good Words', but he did not, and could not, turn his eyes to the future, because the future at that time was very obscure to people: he could only look to the past and pour his salvationist energies into a familiar, idealized mould. In the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age' he made use of this ancient concept without putting forward any new ideas. So there are no grounds for saying that he was preaching economic equality. As Engels pointed out, the origin of the modern demand for economic equality was connected with the new structure of class relations in modern times: it was something which only the modern proletariat could put forward. 'The traces of common ownership which are also to be found in the early stages [of Christianity] can be ascribed to solidarity among the proscribed rather than to real equalitarian ideas.'⁶⁷ By the scientific standards of historical materialism which Engels used to analyse ideological concepts, to say that the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age' preached economic equality is, to say the least, unconvincing.

We should recognize that the message of this work is a step forward from that of the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World,' but not overlook the common feature of the two works: that neither contains any trace of revolutionary ideas about overthrowing the feudal rule of the Ch'ing. The 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age' attributes the ills of society, killing, oppression and so on, to the 'ways of the world' being 'perverse and wicked, while the minds of men are intolerant and shallow, their loves and their hates are all derived from selfishness.'⁶⁸ He considered that

when liberal-mindedness is great, happiness is great, and men likewise become great; when liberal-mindedness is limited, happiness is limited, and men likewise become limited.⁶⁹

At that time there were too many men of limited liberal-mindedness and 'the ways of the world' and the minds of men had sunk low. He called upon

all our brothers and sisters upon earth [to] rush from the demon's treacherous gate, and follow God's true way, constantly in awe of Heaven's majesty, and earnestly complying with Heaven's injunctions; and that they would one and all improve themselves and improve the world, that they might one and all correct themselves and correct others, that they might one and all make themselves as pillars in the midst of the stream, and that they might one and all restore control

⁶⁷F. Engels: *op. cit.* p. 145.

⁶⁹*Ibid.* pp. 36-7.

⁶⁸*Documents* II p. 34.

over the wild waves. Presently we shall see the world united as one family, enjoying universal tranquility.⁷⁰

He considered that the road to 'the great way' was in self-cultivation of the mind. Eight lines of verse terminate the work:

*God has from the beginning of time been our Father,
He is the source of the fountain and the root of the plant; earnestly
seek the truth.
When liberal-mindedness is extensive foreign countries become as one's
native country;
When the heart is kindly, the man of heaven is no more than the man
of earth.
When brutes injure each other, it is still improper,
When neighbours slay one another, it is far more inhumane.
Heaven produces and Heaven nourishes; harmony is to be honoured;
Let each of us, one and all, be at peace; let us enjoy tranquility.⁷¹*

There is no evidence here of any thought of revolution or resistance; on the contrary we can see that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, who had broken free of the toils of 'Good Words', had now returned to the same bonds, to a shallow ethical and religious teaching, and a more abstract doctrine of salvation.

IV. Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's New Travels in Kwangsi and the Road to Anti-Ch'ing Revolt.

IN THE SPRING OF 1847, after he had taught in the school in Hua-hsien for a little more than two years, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan went to Canton and stayed for a total of about two months with the pastor I.J. Roberts.

Roberts was an American Southern Baptist missionary, who had previously been an assistant of Gützlaff in Hong Kong. He had come to Canton some time after 1844, and had set up a mission there. According to Roberts, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan and Hung Jen-kan came 'with the intention of studying Christianity.' Hung Hsiu-ch'üan studied the Bible and attended classes; he related to Roberts how he had obtained 'Good Words', and spoke of his dreams and his writings. He asked to be baptized, but the intrigues of two of Roberts' assistants prevented this.

In 1843, after reading 'Good Words' and being converted Hung Hsiu-ch'üan had begun to preach the salvation of the world through the worship of God. His knowledge of the Christian God came, in the first instance, from abroad; having learned that a foreign missionary was preaching 'the true doctrine' in Canton, and learning that this was the same doctrine as that of 'Good Words', Hung naturally went to Roberts with a sincere desire to learn more, and to put his present knowledge to the test. It was in here that he first read the Old and New Testaments. Roberts himself had composed several tracts in Chinese, which Hung may have

⁷⁰*Ibid.* p. 36.

⁷¹*Ibid.* p. 37.

read.⁷² He was presumably pleased with what he learned, since he asked for baptism. When it was refused he decided to go again to Kwangsi, and rejoined Feng Yun-shan in the Tzu-ching-shan region in the Spring or early Summer of 1847. This was a turning point in his life—the beginning of his transformation into the leader of an anti-Ch'ing peasant revolution.

Feng Yun-shan had come to Kwangsi with Hung in 1844, and had made Tzu-ching-shan his base; having got to know the local people well while working as a labourer and as a teacher, he had been able to preach widely about worshipping God. His thoughts and intentions at this time are very difficult to be precise about, in the absence of any of his writing or other specific documentation; but the historical record shows clearly that the simple message he preached was about worshipping God, avoiding idolatry and so on. But it seems that from the beginning he took a more uncompromising attitude to the traditional order, for 'not only did he not acknowledge idols and statues, but he frequently mocked and defaced them.'⁷³ As a result of two or three years of missionary activity, a substantial organization, the 'God Worshippers' Association' was built up, with more than 2,000 members, in several *hsien* of Kwangsi. But we have no means of knowing at what point Feng began deliberately to use the organization for anti-Ch'ing struggle.

Feng Yun-shan 'came from a wealthy family', he 'left his countryside and his family, abandoning his wife and sons' and for several years in Tzu-ching-shan was 'exposed to the wind and the dust, repeatedly suffering adversity and fatigue . . . he experienced extreme hardships and persevered to the very end.'⁷⁴ He was evidently a man of great aspirations and determination. Li Hsiu-ch'eng 李秀成 wrote in his Deposition, that amongst the Taiping leaders 'it was the Nan Wang 南王 [Feng Yun-shan] who planned the setting up of the kingdom; at first it was he who did everything.'⁷⁵ So we can assume that before Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's second visit to Kwangsi, Feng had already considered the idea of using the 'God Worshippers' Association' to promote anti-Ch'ing revolution. The fact that he had already recruited to the Association of the 'greenwood heroes' Yang Hsiu-ch'ing 楊秀清, Hsiao Ch'ao-kuei 蕭朝貴 and perhaps Wei Ch'ang-hui 韋昌輝 and Shih Ta-k'ai 石達開, who had a considerable following, seems to indicate this.

Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, with his ideas of awakening and saving the world, must have been very moved at meeting Feng Yun-shan again, learning of what he had created and hearing of his aspirations. Hung himself had spent the years at home preaching and admonishing, with little effect on the morals of the world; his friend however, had achieved great results, had created a strong organization of several thousand members for the worship of God, members who respectfully called Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, whom they had never seen, 'Hung *hsien-sheng*.' These developments undoubtedly made him very happy. He had long been disillusioned and discontented with the corrupt society in which he lived; now Feng Yun-shan's suggestion that the growing organization might eventually be used to overthrow the rulers of that

⁷² Boardman: *op. cit.* pp. 144-5.

⁷³ *Documents II* pp. 69-70.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 378-9.

⁷⁵ C. A. Curwen (ed.): *Taiping Rebel: The Deposition of Li Hsiu-ch'eng*. Cambridge 1977, p. 81.

corrupt society, the Manchu court, transformed his sense of mission as 'saviour of the world' into an ambition to establish a kingdom. A month or so after Hung Hsiu-ch'üan reached Tzu-ching-shan, Feng Yun-shan and others 'wrote a memorial asking the Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God, to select for them a firm stronghold where they could settle themselves.'⁷⁶ This shows that they needed a place where they could secretly make plans, and that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan had decided, or was deciding, to take the road of anti-Ch'ing revolution. But apart from whatever Feng Yun-shan may have urged upon him, there were of course, subjective and objective conditions which allowed the transformation of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan from an evangelist into the leader of an embryonic revolutionary struggle.

We have already argued that in 1843 Hung Hsiu-ch'üan had not yet determined on a course of revolution. There were however, new elements in his thought at this time. Although his acceptance of God led him to 'bemoan the state of the universe and pity the state of mankind,' this God was nevertheless 'heterodox' to the Chinese tradition, and Hung's rejection of Confucian and other idols, based on this belief, was inevitably in conflict with the order of the times. Heterodox thought was always considered dangerous by the rulers: although not always revolutionary, it implied an attack on, a rejection of traditional ideology, so that under certain circumstances the advocates of heterodox ideas could rise up in resistance against the established order. Hung Hsiu-ch'üan did not simply preach the worship of God and attack idolatry: he criticized the corruption of society, and looked forward to an utopian society, where 'a common and public spirit ruled under the sky', and his critique and visions added up to a negation of contemporary society. Although his political attitude at this time was not one of anti-Ch'ing revolution, the heterodox and positive elements in his thought had the potential of developing into revolutionary ideology. Consequently there was no impassable gap between his *critique* of the evils of society and *resistance* to it. After Hung reached Kwangsi, Feng Yun-shan's achievements and secret plans, especially his practical contact with various forms of class struggle in the province, provided the conditions for such a transformation. In this far-away southern province the rule of the Ch'ing was particularly corrupt and inefficient, and constant popular resistance had earned Kwangsi a reputation as 'bandit country.' After the Opium War,

among the disbanded land and water irregulars of Kwangtung some appeared as bandits on the rivers of Wu-[chou] and Hsün-[chou], or else carried on depredations in the frontier regions of Nan-[ning] and T'ai-[ping Prefectures] where they colluded with local bandits and mobile bandits from other provinces, committing their outrages on land and water in an increasingly violent situation. In the 27th and 28th years of Tao-kuang [1847-8], the Hunan bandits Lei Tsai-hao and Li Yuan-fa twice burst into Yüeh, while the local bandit Ch'en Ya-k'uei and others repeatedly disturbed the peace; the smaller [bandit groups] rioted or extorted by blackmail, the larger [gangs] attacked towns and raided the prisons, so trouble spread like a prairie fire.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Documents II p. 73.

shih shih-mo,' in *T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo shih-liao ts'ung-pien chien-chi*, Peking 1961, II p. 3.

⁷⁷Yen Cheng-chi: 'Lun Yüeh-hsi tsei-ch'ing ping-

From about 1847 onwards, armed Triad groups rose in swarms in Hunan, Kwangtung and Kwangsi. In Kwangsi, class struggle taking the form of bandit outbreaks, virtually covered the whole province. In Hsün-chou Prefecture (in which Tzu-ching-shan is located),

the stupid and ignorant in their desperation take to dangerous pursuits. At first three or five join together as highwaymen . . . later they call mobs together to burn and kill. . . . In Tao-kuang 28 [1848] the bandits of Kuei-hsien gathered together hundreds of their accomplices and kidnapped the sons of the rich in order to extort money. . . . In the villages and markets of Hsün-chou, Wu-chou and Nan-ning, disturbances occurred daily and the troops sent to attack them were often not victorious.⁷⁸

The response of the feudal ruling class to this disorder was to raise large and small-scale militia forces. Class antagonism, with the lower strata of the people, participating in various forms of revolt, on the one side, and the feudal officials and landlord militia on the other, became increasingly acute. This situation was bound to push the God Worshipers towards revolution. Li Hsiu-ch'eng, then an ordinary member of the Association, described how it grew in this environment of violent class struggle:

For many years after the people were taught to worship God, nothing happened; but around the 27th or 28th year of Tao Kuang [1847, 1848] there were rebel and bandit risings all over Kwangsi, which disturbed the towns. Most communities had militia bands. There was a distinction between the militia and the God-worshippers; the God-worshippers stuck together as one group, and the militia as another group. They vied with each other and threatened each other, and thus forced a rising.⁷⁹

This genuine class struggle pushed Hung Hsiu-ch'üan into the front rank, and enabled him to draw on the strength of the masses, to lead and mobilize an armed revolutionary struggle. The precise way in which Hung Hsiu-ch'üan made this transition, however, needs to be further studied.

Of the documents relative to his thought, the ones which most reflect this transformation are 'An Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age' and especially the 'Taiping Heavenly Chronicle'. The former is an important work; but the date of its composition has never been determined precisely. It is generally, and mistakenly, considered to date from 1845-6: in fact it is from 1847-8. The Chinese translation of Hamberg's 'The Visions of Hung-Siu-Tshuen and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection' relates that in

⁷⁸T'an Hsi-ling: 'Kuei-p'ing li-nien tao-shih chi,' in *Hsün-chou-fu-chih*, ch. 27.

⁷⁹Curwen: *Op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

1845 and 1846 Siu-tshuen remained at home. During this time he wrote several essays . . . 'An Ode on the Hundred Correct Things,' the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the Age,' 'An Essay on the Origin of Virtue for Awakening the Age,' the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age' and 'Alter the Corrupt and Turn to the Correct.'

This is the evidence cited that 'An Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age' and the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the Age' were written at the same time. In fact, however, there is an error in the translation. In the original English edition of Hamberg's work, only two titles are listed which begin with 'On the Origin of Virtue . . .' not three.⁸⁰

In the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age' there appear such titles as '*chiu-i chao-shu*' 舊遺詔書, the Chinese translation of the Old Testament, which is not mentioned in 'Good Words' and which Hung Hsiu-ch'üan did not see until the Spring or Summer of 1847, when he was with Roberts. So the work must have been written *after* that time.⁸¹ In addition, the

⁸⁰The titles listed in the 1854 edition are: 'An Ode on the Hundred Correct Things,' 'An Essay on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age,' 'Alter the Corrupt and Turn to the Correct.' The 'Taiping Heavenly Chronicle' (facsimile of the 1854 edition) records that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan wrote in 1845 'The Proclamation on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World'; but the character (*chiu*, saving) is a type engraver's error for *hsing* (awakening). This is shown by the fact that in the list of Hung's works in the 'Taiping Imperial Declaration' (*T'ai-p'ing chao-shu*), after the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue for the Saving of the World' comes the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age': there is no 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World.' According to this, apart from the 'Ode on the Hundred Correct Things' and 'Alter the Corrupt and Turn to the Correct', the others which Hamberg listed are presumably the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World' and the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age.' He lists only two 'Origin of Virtue' titles, while the Chinese translation lists three.

⁸¹An article 'Hung Hsiu-ch'üan and the Taiping Revolution' in *Li-shih yen-chiu*, 1963 No. 1 made the suggestion that the 'Exhortation of the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age' may have been written in 1848. This is a reasonable suggestion. However, the author of the article considered that the version of the Bible which Hung Hsiu-ch'üan read in Canton was Gützlaff's translation, and that this was also the version which the Taipings later published; consequently, the passages in 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue and the Enlightening of the Age' concerning the 'ten commandments of Moses', the Chinese name for Noah and so on, were the same as

in the Taiping Bible. From this he concluded that the 'Exhortation' must have been written by Hung after reading the Gützlaff translation of the Bible. This argument is circuitous and imprecise, because it remains to be proved that what Hung read in Canton and what the Taipings later published was in fact the Gützlaff translation. Foreign scholars, first E.P. Boardman and later Prescott Clarke, after comparing the translation of certain terms, have asserted this; but Clarke himself quotes Roberts to the effect that he had never used the Gützlaff translation; so we cannot assume that this is what Hung read with Roberts in Canton. Moreover, Boardman and Clarke, after making certain checks, stated that the Taiping Bible was based on the Gützlaff translation; but Hsia Nai, who examined the copy in the British Museum, concluded that the New Testament was based on the Morrison translation of 1839, while the Old Testament followed a 1846, Ningpo edition of the Morrison translation published by the Hua-hua Bible Publishing House. Material does not exist in China for direct study and comparison, so we cannot with assurance make the connection between the Gützlaff Bible, the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age' and the Taiping Bible, and arrive at the date of the 'Exhortation'. For the time being, the most direct evidence of the date of the 'Exhortation' is that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan himself said that he had read the Bible while with Roberts. Whether this referred to the Gützlaff or the Morrison translation, the names of the Old and New Testaments do not appear in Liang Fa's 'Good Words' and must have been unknown to Hung Hsiu-ch'üan. Since the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age' mentions them, it must have been written after his stay in Canton with Roberts.

'devil of Hades' (*yen-lo-yao* 閻羅妖), the 'square-headed, red-eyed followers of . . . the devil,' the 'dragon of the Eastern Sea,' first mentioned in the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age,' do not appear in the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World,' nor in the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age,' written in 1845. But these terms do appear in the 'Taiping Heavenly Chronicle,' which was 'revealed in the Winter of 1848. This shows that they were composed at about the same time.

The 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age' is not a social and political work; it is still a religious one. It preaches that God is the creator, the ruler of the world, that 'life and death, happiness and misery, are all determined by God.' 'The articles of apparel and sustenance are all of his making.' That 'the sun and moon, stars and planets, the thunder and rain, the wind and clouds . . . the hills and plains, rivers and marshes' are all manifestations of God's efficacy. Because of the power, the virtue and benevolence of God, the work concluded that all should worship him, and that not to do so is a crime against heaven. All this shows the direct influence of 'Good Words'.⁸²

The work also presents the antithesis of God—the 'devil of Hades,' the concentrated expression of all devils—and sharply condemns the 'wild statements [that] the devil of Hades determines the period of life and death.' Hung Hsiu-ch'üan wrote,

this devil of Hades is none other than the old serpent devil, who is most mischievous and often transforms himself in order to deceive and entrap the souls of mortal men. It is he whom all brothers and sisters throughout the world should exert themselves to destroy as soon as possible.⁸³

In this Hung Hsiu-ch'üan went beyond the religious source material and ideological views of Liang Fa's 'Good Words', and not only created this representative of all

⁸²Liang Fa in 'Good Words' wrote, 'Some may say, God in Heaven cannot control the great things of the world and needs the help of all Buddhas and Bodhisatvas, just as a sovereign relies on all his ministers to rule a country. . . . If, out of chaos, before heaven and earth are fixed, God in Heaven can, from nothing, create heaven and earth and all things, how can he be incapable of governing the whole world? . . . Moreover God in Heaven is pure spirit, there is nothing he does not know, he is omnipresent and omnipotent—no ruler can compare with Him. However honoured and noble a prince might be, he cannot know all, be everywhere, but still needs the help of his ministers. But God in Heaven knows all, is omnipresent and omnipotent, the everlasting True God, who needs no helpers.' The 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age' cites 'those who are obstinate' and say 'there surely must be assistants who aid the Great God in protecting mankind, just as a sovereign in ruling a country has officials to aid him in the government' and proceeds to challenge this

view. Liang Fa's 'Good Words', in speaking of the great benevolence of God and the need to worship Him says, 'But man, from his birth, is daily nurtured, protected and provided with daily necessities by God in Heaven, in every breath, every instant, from beginning to end, he is succoured by God; only thus can he live upon earth. With such a great blessing, daily and unceasingly bestowed, how can men yet be unwilling to worship God, the creator of Heaven and Earth, and say that all daily necessities are bought with money earned by their own skills, or that they have been bestowed by the grace of this or that Buddha or Bodhisatva, so that they give thanks for Buddha's grave, and thus offend against virtue and commit a heinous crime? . . . a crime against God in Heaven.' The 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age' discusses the power and benevolence of God and the crime of not worshipping God, in broadly the same terms.

⁸³*Documents* II p. 38.

devils, the *yen-lo-yao*, but throughout the work made very clear the antagonism between the 'true God' and 'false gods' (*hsieh-shen* 邪神), which he strongly condemned. This is something which is absent from the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World' and from the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age'. In addition, from the point of view of reverence for God, and opposition to false gods, the work attacks former emperors of China who believed in idols. He showed his disrespect for earthly rulers by saying that only God should be addressed as 'ti' (帝), and that the rulers of men should not presume to use this title. In these respects this religious work can be taken as an indirect reflection of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's political attitude of increasing opposition to the Ch'ing dynasty.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, it is still necessary to point out that it does not represent anything new in socio-political thought. It contains the sentence: 'In this world man is the most noble; of the ten thousand things men are the most intelligent,'⁸⁵ but to call this 'anti-feudal humanism' is a very forced interpretation, because the next passage reads,

Why is man the most noble? Why is man the most intelligent? Because man is the child of the Great God. Is he not noble? Is he not intelligent? All the images of wood or stone, molded clay, and painted paper are mere things. Man is more noble than things, more intelligent than things. Why do men not regard themselves as noble, instead of regarding mere things as noble? Why do men not regard themselves as intelligent, instead of regarding mere things as intelligent.⁸⁶

That is to say, since the sons and daughters of God are noble and intelligent they should not worship idols and false gods. These ideas, these words, were not Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's own, but were directly derived from 'Good Words.'⁸⁷ The theoretical source was religious dogma, and had nothing to do with anti-feudal thought or humanism.

A work which reflects Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's anti-Ch'ing revolutionary attitude is the 'Taiping Heavenly Chronicle' (*T'ai-p'ing T'ien-jih* 太平天日). This mainly recounts his 'ascent to heaven' and 'acceptance of the Heavenly Father's com-

⁸⁴The Taipings later directly identified *yen-lo-yao* with the Ch'ing rulers. 'Why are the barbarians considered demons? Because the devilish serpent, the demon of Hades (*yen-lo-yao hsieh-kuei*) is a perverse demon; the Tartar demons worship only him, therefore we should now consider the barbarians as demons.' (*Documents* II 145). But there is no evidence for stating that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan when he wrote the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age', used *yen-lo-yao* as an allusion, a euphemism, for the Ch'ing emperor. The proselytizing works which Hung wrote at this time, were directed at people without much education, and he cannot have been unaware that indirect allusions of this kind would be unlikely to have any effect. We should

therefore examine the sense of the original work, and not assume that Hung was attacking the Ch'ing emperor by allusion.

⁸⁵*Documents* II p. 44.

⁸⁶*Ibid.* p. 45.

⁸⁷In many passages Liang Fa speaks of man as endowed by God with 'uprightness', as the 'most noble' and the 'most intelligent,' 'more intelligent than the ten thousand things,' and that if man does not worship God, how can he be called 'of the ten thousand things the most intelligent'? See *Ch'üan-shih liang-yen*, chs. 1, 3 & 4.

mand'—that is to say, of his dreams and visions, his reading of 'Good Words' and conversion, together with his two visits to Kwangsi in 1844 and 1847. It was not formally published until 1862, twelve years after the foundation of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom; but a note on the title page states, 'this work was revealed in the Winter of the Wu Sheng Year [1848],' meaning that its contents were announced by Hung Hsiu-ch'üan at that time. But there may be some discrepancies between what was 'revealed' in 1848 and what was published in 1862. For instance, the role of Hung Jen-kan may have been exaggerated. But the basic content is probably the same, so we may use the main content of the 1862 publication to examine Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's thought in the Winter of 1848.

The background to the 'revelation' of the 'Taiping Heavenly Chronicle' in 1848 was the increasing hostility between the God-worshippers and the local gentry. In the Winter of the previous year, the Kuei-p'ing *hsiu-ts'ai* Wang Tso-hsin, raised a militia force and arrested Feng Yun-shan. The God-worshippers Lu Liu and others lost their lives, and the struggle intensified between the God-worshippers and the local gentry and officials. On Feng Yun-shan's release in the Winter of 1848, he and Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, after missing each other several times, finally met again in Hua-hsien, where they discussed the activities of the God Worshippers' Association many times:

The native village of Fung Yun-shan is only a mile and a-half northward from that of Hung Siu-tshuen. As the country there is hilly, and affords pasture to the cattle, the villagers of many surrounding hamlets used to lead their cattle thither. Siu-tshuen, while at home, often assisted his elder brothers by leading their buffaloes to the mountains. Here he met with Fung Yun-shan and others of his intimate friends, when they made an appointment upon what hill they would assemble the following day. Siu-tshuen here used to converse with his followers and friends about the congregation at Kwang-si.⁸⁸

Since the 'Taiping Heavenly Chronicle' was 'revealed in the Winter of 1848', we can assume that its content was decided on at the secret meetings between Feng and Hung in Hua-hsien. At this time they basically completed their account of Hung's dreams and visions, turning them into a coherent religious and political legend, and there are several points in this account which merit attention.

We have already noted, that the dreams and visions were not originally invented or simulated by Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, but were hallucinations he experienced when ill. As to the exact nature of these fantasies, and the degree to which they were deliberately interpreted and improved upon, this is very difficult to study, mainly because the earliest accounts were all written after the Taiping rising, and all, to different degrees, contain later additions. In the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World', which Hung wrote in 1845, are the lines,

*My soul has previously been allowed to ascend to heaven.
My words are true and real, without the slightest exaggeration.*⁸⁹

⁸⁸Hamberg, 8.

⁸⁹*Documents* II p. 31.

The purpose of these words is to underline the need to worship God and follow 'the true way'; that he does not describe the actual dreams in this passage is not strange. In the Spring of 1847, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan related his visions to Roberts. According to the latter,

In giving the account of his visions, he related some things which I confess I was at a loss, and still am, to know where he got them, without a more extensive knowledge of the scriptures.⁹⁰

Roberts' attitude, it can be seen, is one of incredulity, not of denial or disapproval: which shows that Hung's account at that time, was not like that which he made public in 1848. In particular, what he told Roberts could not have included the suggestions that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan was the second son of God. But in the Winter of 1848, after revision at the hands of Hung and Feng, the visions became the story of Hung's ascent to heaven and acceptance of God's command. It now included the idea that God led Hung Hsiu-ch'üan 'to the high heaven, to point out to him how the evil demons deluded and harmed the people of the world,' how Hung 'did battle and drove out demons', how the Heavenly Father reproached Confucius and commanded Hung to 'descend into the world' to awaken and save mankind. This legend which Hung 'revealed' in 1848 has several religious, political and ideological characteristics; but here we will only analyse two points which reflect Hung's political attitude.

From a religious point of view the legend goes beyond ideas that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan could have obtained from Liang Fa's 'Good Words' or from the Bible; from a theoretical point of view, it differs from normal Christian doctrine in that God is completely anthropomorphized. In Hung's previous writings, including the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age,' the concept of God is not clearly anthropomorphized, but is confused with the Chinese concept of 'heaven' (*t'ien* 天), sometimes with the concept of 'ruler' (*chu-tsai* 主宰), and sometimes with 'nature' (*tzu-jan* 自然). Some historians have even mistaken Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's religious ideas for a kind of pantheism. The anthropomorphization of God is complete in the 'Taiping Heavenly Chronicle'; he is a God with a wife and children, with a will, and especially with unlimited power who, on sending Hung into the world, told him 'whenever you are beset by difficulties I [*chen* 朕: the imperial first person singular—Tr.] shall take charge.'⁹¹ Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's creation of this kind of God and his 'command', is not only evidence that he had decided on a course of revolution in order to establish an empire; it also shows the need to mobilize the superstitious masses to his cause. If Hung 'borrowed God' from Western Christianity as an instrument for raising the Taiping revolution, then this 'borrowing' only begins in 1848, and not with Hung's reading of Liang Fa's 'Good Words'. In reality, this 'borrowing' is the same as the traditional use of auspicious omens, 'lighting lanterns and crying like a fox,' and so on.⁹² Of course Hung Hsiu-ch'üan did not merely 'borrow' God: he also believed in God. This confusion was

⁹⁰Hamberg, 7; *TPTK* VI p. 824.

⁹¹*TPTK* II p. 642; *Documents* II p. 62.

⁹²This was one of the 'auspicious omens' used in the Ch'en She—Wu Kuang rising against the Ch'in—Tr.

particularly marked in his later thought—a subject which we will not discuss here.

In the 'Taiping Heavenly Chronicle' Hung Hsiu-ch'üan not only anthropomorphized God, he also endowed himself with supernatural attributes, something which was unacceptable to the doctrine of every missionary; it also went beyond anything in his earlier works. This self-deification, as second son of God, saviour and true sovereign of the world, had a great effect, in the conditions prevailing at the time, in mobilizing the God-worshippers for the conquest of the empire. Moreover, when we remember that in the Spring and Autumn of 1848, Yang Hsiu-ch'ing and Hsiao Ch'ao-kuei had already claimed to speak with the voices of God and Jesus respectively, the story that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan was the second son of God who had personally been to heaven to receive God's commands, was clearly necessary in order to deal with problems of 'internal relations.'

It has been suggested that Liang Fa's 'Good Words' usually refers to Jesus as 'the son of God' or the 'Holy Son', and only very rarely as 'the only-begotten Son', and that this is the reason why Hung Hsiu-ch'üan could claim to be God's second son.⁹³ In fact, the references to 'only-begotten Son' are not so rare.⁹⁴ Hung did not call himself the second son of God because of a misunderstanding of Christianity; in the Winter of 1848 he deliberately revised his visions in accordance with political needs. That is to say, he was no longer bound by Liang Fa's 'Good Words'.

In the Summer of 1849, after Hung and Feng returned to Kuei-p'ing in Kwang-si, the preparatory work for the revolutionary struggle was intensified and in the next year, Hung wrote a poem which expressed his intentions:

*In recent times the murky atmosphere has greatly changed;
We know that Heaven means to take heroic leadership.
The Sacred Land has been betrayed; it will not easily fall again;
God should be worshipped, and he shall be worshipped.
The founder of the Ming sang an ode on the chrysanthemum;
The emperor of the Han held out wine in esteem to the singing wind.
From times of old deed have been done by men;
The black mists are dispersed in the face of the sun.⁹⁵*

In this poem Hung Hsiu-ch'üan praised Chu Yuan-chang and Liu Pang, but according to the principle he expounded in the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Enlightening of the Age,' he ought to have called these worldly rulers 'wang' (王). In calling them 'chu' (主) and 'huang' (皇) he reveals his genuine admiration. He had travelled a tortuous road from the ambition to make a name for himself in the examinations, to the use of religion and morality for the salvation of the world. Finally, he took the road of Liu Pang and Chu Yuan-chang, the revolutionary road of resistance to the feudal order in the name of the peasants.

⁹³Chien Yu-wen: *op. cit.* III, p. 1701.

⁹⁵*Documents II*, p. 77.

⁹⁴*Ch'üan-shih liang-yen*, chs. 2, 5 & 7.

V. Conclusion.

MARX WROTE, 'For a long time men have used superstition to explain history; now we use history to explain superstition.'⁹⁶ The heroes of the Taiping Revolution did indeed use superstition to explain their own history; but students of the revolution must use history to explain their superstition.

That Hung Hsiu-ch'üan became the leader of the Taiping Revolution was not, of course, an expression of any supernatural will, but was the result of the development of his own consciousness. An understanding of the development of his thought, of the road he took, may help to explain the contradictions in his ideological make-up. For instance, Hamberg's account contains the following passage,

Siu-tshuen often used to praise the doctrine of Christianity, but, added he, 'Too much patience and humility do not suit our present times, for therewith it would be impossible to manage this perverted generation.'⁹⁷

This quotation has often been used as evidence of Hung's Christian beliefs after reading Liang Fa's 'Good Words', showing how he 'transformed' the God of the imperialists into a revolutionary God. This results from a confusion about the periods of his ideological development. Hung Jen-kan did not record *when* his cousin made these remarks; but it cannot have been in the early period after his conversion. Both in the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World' and in the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age,' which Hung Hsiu-ch'üan wrote after reading 'Good Words', he wrote about 'making faith and charity your masters,' and 'rest contented with the Heavenly mandate,'⁹⁸ and 'Heaven produces and Heaven nourishes; harmony must be honoured; Let each of us, one and all, be at peace; let us enjoy tranquility.'⁹⁹ The demand for 'patience and humility' does not differ much from that of Liang Fa's 'Good Words'. To judge from his ideological development, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's words about opposing too much 'patience and humility' in managing 'this perverted generation,' must date from after 1847-8.

So the beginning of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's anti-Ch'ing revolutionary attitude dates from after 1847. Connected with this, he revised some of the ideas which he had previously propagated. These changes in his thought, though mainly reflected in post-rising writings, must surely have evolved over a period of time. For instance, in the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World', and in the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age', Hung vied against killing: 'for men to slay one another is extremely lamentable.'¹⁰⁰ 'When brutes injure one another, it is still improper. When neighbours slay one another, it is far more inhumane.'¹⁰¹ But in the 'Taiping Heavenly Chronicle', and especially in works

⁹⁶ Marx: *On the Jewish Question*.

⁹⁹ TPTK I p. 92; *Documents*, loc. cit.

⁹⁷ Hamberg, 8.

¹⁰⁰ TPTK I p. 88; *Documents* II p. 28.

⁹⁸ TPTK I p. 89; *Documents* II p. 37.

¹⁰¹ TPTK I p. 92; *Documents* II p. 37.

written after the rising, Hung emphasized the necessity of 'exterminating evil demons' and so on.

Again, in the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World', the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age' and in other works, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan stressed that 'poverty and riches are arranged by Heaven.'¹⁰² that 'riches and honour are but fleeting clouds,'¹⁰³ and called upon men to 'urgently renew yourselves,' to 'perfect their conduct,' and taught that Heaven was only a place where the soul could enjoy happiness. But later he created a 'little paradise', with a promise of *worldly* happiness, where food and clothing would be abundant and where the meanest would be dressed in silks and so on.

Particularly worthy of attention is the fact that Hung Hsiu-ch'üan revised his blueprint for the salvation of the world. In the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World', and in the 'Exhortation on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age', as we have seen, he urged men 'to improve themselves and improve the world . . . , correct themselves and correct others,' to 'renounce vanity, escape the common lot of man and live in tranquility, enjoy peace and prosperity together.' But later, in the 'Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty' the message was

there being fields, let all cultivate them; there being food, let all eat;
there being clothes, let all be dressed.

and

when all the people of the empire will not take anything as their own but submit all things to the Supreme Lord, then the Lord will make use of them, and in the universal family of the Empire, every place will be equal and every individual well fed and clothed. This is the intent of our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God, in specially commanding the True Sovereign of the T'ai-p'ing to save the world.'¹⁰⁴

The concept of 'saving the world' had undergone a great change between the 'Ode on the Origin of Virtue for the Saving of the World' and the 'Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty.'

These changes in Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's thought do not represent the emergence of an egalitarian idea which was previously absent, but merely reflect the need to mobilize the peasants for revolutionary action. Lenin insisted that in the struggle against autocracy, especially against the landholding system of the large slave-owners, egalitarian ideas were the most revolutionary. In accordance with this, historians have correctly assessed the revolutionary significance of the 'Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty.' But the egalitarianism which Lenin spoke of, as is made clear by his subsequent remarks, refers to peasant ideas about equality

¹⁰²Documents II p. 30.

¹⁰⁴Documents II p. 102.

¹⁰³*Ibid.* p. 29.

in landholding. Stalin remarked that the roots of egalitarianism lie in the thought processes of individual peasants, in the demand for the equal division of all goods—the psychology of primitive peasant communism.¹⁰⁵ The demand for equality of status, as a manifestation of the equality of property, has a long history in China's peasant wars and, as Engels said, this is a very ancient concept. But it has never included the idea that all should have equal political and social status. What the 'Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty' envisaged was a society with equality of ownership, but with all political and economic power concentrated in the hands of the 'sovereign.' This is worlds apart from modern egalitarian ideas, and was a system basically suited to the ideas and interests of the poverty-stricken peasants in Chinese society.

The ideas which Hung Hsiu-ch'üan at first propagated, about not killing, about patience and resignation, not seeking for worldly pleasures and so on, could be of no assistance in fermenting a peasant war of resistance, and could not become a theoretical basis for their struggle; but 'killing demons' and 'saving the just,' providing some material advantages to the peasants, could mobilize them. That Hung Hsiu-ch'üan could become the leader of a peasant revolutionary struggle, was because he was able to abandon some of his original ideas and adopt others more suited to the interests and needs of the peasants. This shows that the root of the Taiping Revolution lay in class struggle in Chinese society, not in religious domains. Liang Fa's 'Good Words for Exhorting the Age' merely made Hung Hsiu-ch'üan into an evangelist; it was only class struggle which pushed him towards political revolution and the creation of a new state.

¹⁰⁵ See Stalin's conversation with Emil Ludwig.