

Envision of the Land-after-death and Expectations for “This Life”: Translation and Reconfiguration of “Kingdom of Heaven” in Taiping Rebellion Movement

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Introduction

Taking a concept history approach, this article explores how the “Kingdom of Heaven”, one of the core concepts in the Bible to advocate good conduct, was turned into a political slogan that promoted the bloodiest rebellion in Chinese history when it was translated and remolded during the Taiping Rebellion Movement. This paper first investigates the original connotations of two concepts, “Kingdom of Heaven” and “Tian Guo” in their specific cultural contexts, before introducing how they came into dialogue to form a new concept of “Tian Guo”. During this process, the attitude of Taiping leadership towards the

concept experienced what I categorize as a three-phase change: they utilized it as a political slogan, hesitated about its long-term function, and weakened its influence in political plans. By analyzing how the two concepts interacted, this article presents the differences between Confucian and Christian culture: one emphasizes the achievements of “this life” while the other anticipate the land-after-death to a higher degree.

The late Qing Dynasty (1840-1911)¹ was a period of external and internal turbulence, and a space of frequent exchange of ideas. When Protestant missionaries came into China, they brought the Bible’s concepts and ideologies, some of which were never accepted by local people, while others blended into the Chinese language system. “Kingdom of Heaven” was among the concepts that triggered great social and political change in China. One event closely connected with this concept is the significant Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement from 1851 to 1864.

The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement was also called the Taiping Rebellion. The major founder of this rebellion was Hong Xiuquan (洪秀全, 1814-1864). When he was young, he laid hopes on the imperial examination to get an official position, which was a common practice among young literati at that time. However, he failed the examination consistently and after the fourth failure, Hong became seriously hurt, both mentally and physically. While he was ill, he dreamed of an old man who told him that he was selected and ordered by the deity to kill the demons and evils in man’s world. When he was recovered, he read a compiled brochure (i.e. *Good Words exhorting the Age*, 劝世良言) by Liang Fa about the Bible’s ideas. He connected the content in the brochure with his dream, and firmly believed that he was the son of God and was sent by God to save the poor people of China. Subsequently, Hong began to preach his understanding and interpretations of the Bible in the Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, and even established the Bai Shang Di Hui (the Congregation of God Worshippers) to take in followers.

¹ It is generally held by historians who study Qing Dynasty that the beginning of late Qing Dynasty was the year 1840 when the First Opium War broke out, and that this period ended when the Qing Dynasty was overthrown in 1911.

In 1850, Hong and other core members decided to fight against Qing Dynasty and in 1851 they launched the uprising in Guangxi. They declared themselves to have founded a state and named it Tai Ping Tian Guo (Taiping Heavenly Kingdom). This rebellion was a war of the largest scale in Chinese history. Although there are different estimations as to the accurate number of deaths, it was generally agreed that as a result of this rebellion, about seventy million people (nearly 40% of the total population of the time) were dead, migrated, missing or hurt. This rebellion was damaging to the military power of Ba-qi Force (the Eight Banner system,² which the Qing's Manchuria noble class depended upon) and ended an economically, militarily and politically flourishing age that had been maintained for more than one century since the emperor Kangxi (1654-1722). Notably, researchers such as June et al. and Platt have suggested that this rebellion movement signified the beginning of a political modernization process against feudalism and feudal oppression in China.

From the story of Hong, it is clear that there was a close relationship between Christian ideas and the founding of his state. Such a relation is also evident linguistically. The beginning of the rebellion state's name, Taiping (太平), means the greatest and most widespread equality and fairness in the world, followed by "Tian Guo" (Heavenly Kingdom in English and 天国 in Chinese, Tian for 天和 Guo for 国), which clearly demonstrates the religious character of this political force and Biblical influence. In fact, the title "Tian Guo/Heavenly Kingdom" was exactly borrowed from the first sentence of Chapter five, the *Sermon on the Mount* of Gospel of Matthew: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

In 1823, when the Missionary Robert Morrison finished translating and publishing the Bible into Chinese for the first time in Chinese history, the concept "Kingdom of Heaven" was first connected with the religious concept "Tian Guo". In traditional Chinese philosophy, such as Confucianist and Taoist thoughts, Tian Guo was an unreal, illusory and

²The Eight Banner system consisted of eight banners, each with about 300 people. These people were the elites of the Qing Dynasty, and they enjoyed priorities in many fields, such as imperial examinations, economic operation, and promotions in official positions.

fabricated Holy Land. The same can be said for the phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” in the Bible, with researchers widely accepting that the concept “Kingdom of Heaven” points to an abstract country of God. This article explores the remarkable story of what happened when the two religious concepts were connected by the missionary’s translation and became a tangible entity. It examines its political and material appeal for the people who revolted against the Qing Dynasty for more than ten years, in the hope of reaching this land.

As a special product of Christian ideas, the Taiping Rebellion has been studied by many western scholars. Thomas H. Reilly’s work *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire* has been particularly influential in recent years. Reilly offers many useful insights, such as the source of the title Tian Guo, how Hong utilized it to found a kingdom, and how the main guidelines of the Taiping state originated from local beliefs of Hong’s birthplace and Confucian world views (especially Tian Xia Da Tong, achieving universal peace). However, Reilly does not analyze Tian Guo linguistically, nor from the perspective of concept history. The same is true for other research on Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, including works by Carl S. Kilcourse and Stephen R. Platt. Despite the introduction of Hong’s manipulation of God’s heavenly kingdom in these works, further research is needed into the Chinese concept Tian Guo and how its connotations were changed after the introduction of the Bible.

This paper proposes that through analyzing the history of two concepts and how they react with each other, we can ascertain the nature of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. This contributes a new path in reviewing Taiping history. To use the analogy of a chemical equation, this paper regards the Kingdom of Heaven as one reactant, and Tian Guo in ancient Chinese literature as another, each with different significances and connotations, much like the chemical elements of each reactant. The concept Tian Guo in present age is the product of the reaction between Kingdom of Heaven in the Bible and Tian Guo in ancient Chinese texts. Previous research on the Taiping Rebellion presents this formula without an in-depth linguistic analysis of the elements of each reactant. Reilly, for instance, only analyzes one semantic element: the character of equality in Tian Guo, which echoes

with Confucius's utopian idea of "Tian Xia Da Tong (to achieve universal peace and harmony)". But there were other connotations for the traditional concepts of Tian Guo and the Kingdom of Heaven that require further research. These are the elements to be analyzed in this article.

The mutual and dynamic relations between history and concepts provides the theoretical basis for this paper's methodology. For researchers of concept history, concepts are regarded as human-like, since they also contain their own evolving history and experience. When researchers use the term "concept", they already agree to the fact that the connotations of a concept are often obscure (without clear boundaries), and that different connotations may exist at the same time and compete with each other. Although there are many different methods within concept history (for example, see Collingwood, Foucault, Koselleck, Lovejoy and Williams), researchers generally agree that by studying the changes of a concept during its "travel" in a foreign land, researchers can construct a dynamic relationship between this concept³ and the transition of social structures, thus helping people to better understand how history was propelled to a different era. Such a dynamic relationship means that this specific concept and social history can form a circle: on one hand, the "travel" progress (such as the change of meaning, indigenization and spreading) of the concept is inevitably influenced by local historical and political context; on the other hand, when a concept gradually takes root in people's minds, it will become a new social or political resource that may change the original society. As such, concept historians advocate that while history tells the story of concepts, concepts also tell the story of history. Ascribing to this theoretical viewpoint, this article advocates that by studying the evolving process of "Tian Guo", researchers can reveal more about the nature of the Taiping Rebellion Movement.

As discussed above, there are two significant reasons to study the Tian Guo concept. Firstly, Tian Guo was a political symbol that attracted

³ Different researchers use different terminologies for the word "concept", Lovejoy called it "idea", Foucault called it "discourse", Williams would like to call it "the keyword". No matter what term they use, they all support the method of investigating the concept to comprehend changes in history.

millions of people to fight in a terrible and bloody war. It is important to examine how an originally religious word should have exerted such great political and military influence. Secondly, the concept history of Tian Guo and the Kingdom of Heaven is a fascinating case for the interactions between concepts and history that will hopefully inspire further research.

Based on the cross-cultural dimension of concept history research, this article will discuss the following questions: how was the concept of the “Kingdom of Heaven” in the Bible re-constructed or localized in the early phase of the Taiping Heavenly Movement? How did the reshaped concept differentiate from its initial meanings in “Kingdom of Heaven” as well as in “Tian Guo”? Why did this new “slogan” initially promote the development of Taiping Rebellion, but was later abandoned by the political leaders of Taiping Heavenly Kingdom? Does this story illuminate any limits of the spreading of Christian ideas in China? By investigating these questions, this article contributes a deeper understanding of the dynamic interactions between language, history and politics, and of Chinese and Western differences in religion.

Kingdom of Heaven/God in the Bible

In the Bible, there are three inter-connected major themes: The Kingdom of God/Heaven, God and God’s Will. The concept of the Kingdom of Heaven runs throughout the entire New Testament and it first appears in the Gospel of Matthew in the sentence: “And saying, Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). In Matthew, “Kingdom of Heaven” appears thirty-two times, while “Kingdom of God” occurs five times. However, none of the other three Gospels use “Kingdom of Heaven”, and “Kingdom of God” is used in all corresponding places, such as Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10. At present, most churches consider “Kingdom of Heaven” and “Kingdom of God” to be the same concept and therefore that they can replace each other.

According to 基督宗教知识辞典 (*The Dictionary of Christian Knowledge*) by Leopold Leeb, the “Kingdom of Heaven” in the Bible is not related to a material living place of God, nor the western paradise, nor some place in the sky or a concrete country (84). This concept is more

likely a verb than a noun: God rules with his principles and orders in the Kingdom of Heaven. As such, “Heaven” is just an honorable title for God; Kingdom of Heaven does not point to a specific church and therefore it is not a real institute in earthly world (Leeb 99). This “kingdom” in the Bible is an abstract field of God’s reign, which is invisible, just as Jesus’s words: “Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21).

Within God’s reign in the Kingdom of Heaven, all relationships should follow the principle of equality, as mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (7:12). Under this regulation, all the souls in this kingdom are equal. But it should be noticed that such equality is also at an abstract level - there are no specific explanations for how to implement such equality or to what degree the equality should be guaranteed. Besides, in the text of the Bible, the words “Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” occur many times. These are not forecasting an upcoming formal country or physical organization but reminding people to introspect and repent their sins and follow the reign of God.

In fact, throughout the Bible, there are no detailed descriptions for the sceneries or situations in the kingdom, nor specific illustrations about how Christian followers get along with each other or how God rules. Instead, the Bible makes use of different parables to explain elements related with this Kingdom, such as the parable of sowing seed: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared” (Matthew 13:24-13:26); the parable of the Mustard Seed: “...kingdom of God like...like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches” (Luke 13:18-13:19). Although many different parables are used to explain such a kingdom, its expression is still very abstract and obscure overall.

Although researchers at present mainly interpret Kingdom of Heaven from the dimension of religion, it is believed that in real history, this kingdom described by Jesus should maintain certain political

implications (Wong 202). For example, when Jesus entered into the city of Jerusalem with a conspicuously high-profile manner that seemed like a king in spiritual world, and put forward the slogan “Kingdom of Heaven”, it would be very possible that the local governor and politicians such as Pontius Pilate (the fifth governor of the Roman province), as well as Jewish leaders were alert to such statement. There should be a possibility that, especially from the stance of Jewish leaders and the Roman royal class, this so-called “Kingdom-at-hand” may threaten their existing political power. The words of Friedrich Engels also present the threat of religious slogan as, when describing religious activities in the Medieval Ages, he claims: “these risings, like all mass movements of the Middle Ages, were bound to wear the mask of religion and appeared as the restoration of early Christianity from spreading degeneration...but behind the religious exaltation there was every time a very tangible worldly interest” (446). There is a possibility that the concept Kingdom of Heaven can inspire people and unite them together with a common expectation for such a kingdom, which further facilitate a political power that may threaten the present one.

Notably, Jesus’s “Kingdom of Heaven” experienced changes when his apostle Paul propagated this concept. When Paul preached the religion in the two cities of Thessaloniki and Corinth, he tried to weaken the political implication in this concept. It can be rationally inferred that Paul may have drawn lessons from Jesus’s experience; he tried to attenuate the political significance so that the local officers would show less concern, providing more freedom for his missionary work in those areas (Wong 210). This inference is supported by real historical texts. For example, in the thirteen Pauline Epistles, the word “kingdom” for “Kingdom of God” or “Kingdom of Heaven” only appears thirteen times, far less than its frequency in the three Synoptic Gospels⁴, which is ninety-three times in total (forty-one times for Matthew, fifteen for Mark and thirty-seven for Luke). Apart from the reduction of frequency, the Kingdom of God/Heaven was also sanctified by Paul and only appears in the context of Christian eschatology. In Pauline Epistles, the Kingdom of

⁴ The Gospel of Matthew, Mark and Luke share many similarities in text structure, diction and viewpoints, and are thus called Synoptic Gospels by the researchers of the Bible.

Heaven is merely a spiritual country that only accepts people who repent their sins, follow the steps of Jesus and thus achieve a spiritual rebirth: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). By analyzing the texts of Synoptic Gospels and Pauline Epistles, we can see the Christians’ efforts to modify their core themes out of a caution to relax the vigilance of the ruling class. Under this, the political connotations of Kingdom of Heaven gradually faded away. However, it was a completely different story when it was brought to Qing Dynasty in the 19th century through the translation of the Bible.

Tian Guo(天国) in Chinese Classics

In Chinese traditional classics, the concept Tian Guo (天国) is of the same meaning as other terms such as Tian Ting (heaven, 天庭), Xian Jing (Fairyland, 仙境) or Jing Tu (Pure Land or Paradise, 净土). According to the authoritative Chinese dictionary *Ciyuan* (辞源), Tian Guo is the Pure Land or Paradise of religious disciples, and the place where deities live. Tian Guo also shares the same meaning with Tian Tang, which is explained in *Ciyuan* as “the paradise where the celestial immortals and post-mortal souls live” (refer to *Ciyuan* for the phrase “天国”).

Tian Ting in classic Confucian school was a system with rank order, and it was just like the imperial court of ancient Chinese dynasties. Di (帝), the emperor of Tian Ting, ranks the highest position and the other deities each has his/her own rank position in the Tian Ting. What the Confucian school tried to emphasize was the ranking system, and they held that this system corresponded with the official ranking system on the earth. Li Daoyuan, a Confucian geographer in Chinese Northern Wei Dynasty (368-534), once depicted the location of Tian Guo in the famous Chinese geographical masterpiece *Commentary To The River Classic* (水经注). It says: “there are three levels in the Kunlun Mountains, the lowest level is called Fan Tong (樊桐) or Ban Tong (板桐); the middle level is called Xuan Pu (玄圃) or Lang Feng (闾风); the highest one is named Ceng Cheng (层城) or Tian Ting (天庭) (by Li, written around AD 515-527).

According to Li, Tian Ting or Ceng Cheng is the place where the emperor of heaven lives.

In Taoism, Tian Guo is the fairyland that mortals can only access after they finish their arduous “cultivation” and become immortal. When it is time, these newly cultivated immortals can fly up to the Tian Guo and live together with the emperor of Tian Guo, as well as other immortals. The cultivation process is extremely tough and arduous, including both mental and physical testing. Mental cultivations are often related with moral amendments: by continuously checking and changing his/her improper and wrong behaviors, the cultivator can improve his/her ethic level. And physical cultivation is often related with a healthy body and vital energy - some branches of Taoism advocated the use of alchemy to concoct pills for immortality. In one Taoism classic *Guang Huang Di Ben Xing Ji* (广黄帝本行记, written in AD 881), which offers a systematic summary about how Yellow Emperor cultivated himself and became an immortal, there is a record about the city of Tian Guo: Qing Cheng (青城) is the capital of Tian Guo. Mount Qing Cheng is located in the present Sichuan province and is the cradle of Taoism.

Tian Guo for Chinese Buddhists is different from that of Taoism or Confucianism. Jing Tu (Pure Land) is the corresponding concept in Buddhism and it points to a pure land or paradise in the west. Buddhism considers all human beings to be trapped within the cycle of the Six Realms of Existence (Liu Dao, 六道). Sentient beings reincarnate into next realm according to their conduct in this life. A human can be reborn in one of the three good realms (realms of deva, human and asura) due to good conduct, or reborn in one of the three bad realms (realms of animal, hungry ghost, and denizen of hell) because of their bad deeds (Jones 4). However, even if they enter the good realms, they still have to experience the next judgement of rebirth and continue the cycle. The only way of shake off this shackle is nirvana. If the sentient being hopes to enter a good realm in the next reincarnation, they should cultivate themselves. But the real world is constructed on various norms, ethics, temptations, and desires, therefore, it is difficult for people to practice good conduct without disturbance from external temptations or constrains. Then Jing Tu, as a pure land, offers a place where people can cultivate wholeheartedly (whereby individuals can concentrate on their

cultivation without the influence of the outside secular world), so that it is easier for them to reach nirvana or go to good realms in the next life (Galen 2). Meditation and the reciting of Amitābha's name are the two main methods to achieve enlightenment and purify one's mind.

Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism were the three major philosophy schools in ancient China. They remained largely independent, despite influencing each other to a certain degree. After the Han Dynasty (BC200—AD220), Confucianism gradually became the most favoured religion and highly revered by the emperors. Tian Ting in Confucianism, the fairyland in Taoism and Jing Tu in Buddhism gradually blended, and a special system of Tian Guo took shape in people's minds. The significance and concerns in Tian Ting of Confucianism were mostly reserved while the meanings in Jing Tu of Buddhism were largely discarded. Tian Guo then became a place for deities of different ranks and Yu Huang Da Di (玉皇大帝, which was originated from Dao school) ranked as the top position. Such a ranking system was similar to the imperial court on the earth, both following strict rules and regulations. The deities in such a Tian Guo could descend to men's world for a judgement tour. They gave awards to people with good conduct and punished bad conduct. People with very significant contributions, impressive morality or high prestige could be elevated to Tian Guo and be awarded as a new deity with a particular position. This idea echoes the Confucian value which encouraged people to work hard, achieve personal value and become prestigious figures in this life.

In short, Tian Guo in Chinese traditional classics is a sacred place that only people with good deeds or great achievements can access after they finish their journey in the human world. It was a concept influenced by the three main schools of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, and Confucianism exerted the greatest influence on its final meanings. From the above discussions, we can conclude that Kingdom of Heaven in the Bible and Tian Guo in Chinese traditional literatures share certain similarities, i.e. they all provide a message that, if people cultivate their behaviors before death, the emperor or king of that "Kingdom" or "Guo" (国) will guide them to a salvation and supreme glory after the physical body dies. It is a reasonable inference that when the missionary Robert Morrison tried to find a word from Chinese classics for the Christian

concept “Kingdom of Heaven”, he got inspiration from the meanings of “Tian Guo” and finally decided to combine them together.

Difference between Tian Guo and Kingdom of Heaven

Although the discussed similarities connect the two concepts together, they are of course distinct due to different cultural ideologies and traditions. Firstly, Tian Guo in Chinese traditional classics is not an abstract term. In fact, the Chinese classics have made very detailed and vivid descriptions about its landscape as well as construction layout. For example, in *Classic of Regions Beyond the Seas: West* (海内西经), the eleventh chapter of the famous mythological geography *Shan Hai Jing* (also called *Classic of Mountains and Seas*), it says:

Mount *Kunlun* lies northwest of the capital of the mortal world under the rule of the God of Heaven. It covers an area of 800 square *li* and rises to a height of 80,000 feet. On its top there are rice shoots which are forty feet high and five spans wide. On each side of the mountain there are nine wells and their railings are made of jade. Each side of the mountain has nine gates and at each of these gates there is an animal named *Kaiming* acting as the guard. This is the place where a hundred gods live. They stay on the cliffs of the eight mountains adjacent to the *Chishui* River. No one can climb up these steep cliffs except Ren Yi [仁羿, who was a great human hero in Chinese myth and famous for the shooting of eight suns with his infinite strength] can climb over those high cliffs. (*The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, page 251)

Such vivid depictions reflect ancient Chinese people’s imaginations about the inaccessible world of Tian Guo. In another classic, *Shiji* (史记) or *Records of the Grand Historian*, there are also detailed descriptions about Tian Guo. In the twenty-seventh Chapter Tian Guan Shu (天官书, Book about the Heaven Palace), different palaces are properly arranged according to the rank order of deities living inside. There are palaces for a harem or seraglio, and also latrines, horse parking places and sacred temples. Mythical creatures guard the four corners of the whole area. Therefore, Tian Guo in ancient Chinese culture is a place with very specific, lively scenes. The constructions are in delicate designs and are arranged according to the strict ranking order.

It can be concluded that there are at least three differences between the concept of Tian Guo and Kingdom of Heaven. Firstly, the kingdom in the Bible is never connected with a concrete territory or country; the abstract term has no visual or material forms and never stimulates imaginations of the architectural landscape or rare creatures. Secondly, there are hundreds of immortals living together in Tian Guo and they all obey a strict ranking order. In Taoism classics, Yu Huang Da Di ranks the highest, and below him are deities for water, thunder, flowers and so on, which resembles the God and Goddess system in Greek mythology. However, the Bible follows a strict monotheism - God is the only ruler, the rest are his followers. Everyone is equal and there is no such ranking order as a guideline for interpersonal relationships. Finally, the Bible always emphasizes that God only reigns in an abstract moral world. Conditions such as the rising or demoting of a deity's position does not exist in the Kingdom of Heaven; however, in Tian Guo, an immortal can be awarded a higher position if he/she makes some contribution, and may be punished to go back to the humans' world if he/she makes errors.

Translation and initial re-construction of Tian Guo

In 1823, the missionary Robert Morrison, of the London Missionary Society, finished translating the Bible into Chinese and published it in the Guangzhou province. This was the first time that the Bible was published in the territory of China. Some other missionaries, such as Karl Gützlaff, provided a revised version on the basis of Morrison's translation, which later became the most popular one in Chinese Christian Churches. As discussed in the previous section, Morrison translated Kingdom of Heaven/God into Tian Guo, which was retained in the Gützlaff version. Other versions of the Bible also adopted "Tian Guo" to translate "Kingdom of Heaven", including the Gospel of Matthew published by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in 1853, the version translated by Michael Simpson Culbertson and Eliia Bridgman in 1863, as well as the version by Archimandrite Guri Karpov in 1864. According to Joachim, it was a general strategy for the missionaries (especially the Jesuits) to accommodate or localize European notions through the reinterpretation, or occupation, of distinguished Chinese terms (152).

With the spread of the translated version of the Bible in China, the original meanings of “Tian Guo” and “Kingdom of Heaven” began to compete in the Bible readers’ and Christianity followers’ consciousness. For example, the polytheism in Tian Guo competed with the monotheism in Kingdom of God. The latter succeeded and God became the only master of Tian Guo. The ruling relation between the “king” of this kingdom and his people also competed. Yu Huang Da Di naturally holds the empery of Tian Guo as well as the humans’ world, and he can decide everything, and all the people should follow his orders willingly or unwillingly; people respect and fear him for his power. However, the relationship between God and his followers is more of the preaching persuasion, and God’s ruling only exists in the Kingdom of Heaven. Since Yu Huang Da Di was gradually replaced by God, the absolute ruling style of the former was replaced by the style of preaching in Tian Guo. Moreover, the original ranking order contained in Tian Guo was erased by the equal interpersonal relations below God. The imagination of spatial architectures and mythical creatures also disappeared due to such interplay. A small group of people in China (especially those who, once reading the Bible, attended the sermons held by missionaries, or who got to know Christian thoughts through other channels) gradually accepted the idea that Tian Guo was a place ruled by God, and that his followers lived equally and peacefully in this kingdom. The original connotations of Tian Guo in Chinese classics faded away. This reflects the influence of Christian culture in the colonial era.

Although the translingual practice between Kingdom of Heaven and Tian Guo occurred, it did not initially generate much political function or social influence. This was because of the limited spreading scope of the Bible under the historical background of resisting foreign religion. People were indifferent to the outside world, and rejected Christian culture (Wang 32). Besides, the abstract moral persuasion could hardly impress Chinese people, since there was no such culture or religious tradition to support it. They were not concerned with the world after death. For them, God was just a fictitious deity.

However, the story changed when two crucial figures participated in this game. The first, Morrison’s Chinese assistant, Liang Fa, who was mainly responsible for the Bible’s printing work, rewrote the Bible into a

thin religious pamphlet *Quan Shi Liang Yan* (劝世良言, *Good Words Exhorting the Age*). He made use of simple and easy illustrations to explain the core concepts, including the Kingdom of Heaven. He specifically added some notes for this concept: “the phrase of Tian Guo, firstly refers to the enjoying of happiness in the heaven when people’s physical life ends and their souls go to the heaven, secondly points to a place where the followers of Jesus assemble to worship the God; the term Kingdom of God is of the same meaning” (Liang Fa 21). Liang’s first explanation basically conformed to the original meaning of Kingdom of Heaven; however, the second one was his own interpretation. He substantialized this abstract concept to be a concrete worshipping place. Such a subtle change then provided inspirations for another figure, Hong Xiuquan, the leader of the Taiping Rebellion and the emperor of Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, who found a political basis here for his own kingdom after reading the Bible. The author of this paper summarizes three phases for the fate of Tian Guo in terms of Taiping’s understanding and attitude for this concept in the thirteen-year life of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.

Three phases of Tian Guo’s fate in Taiping Heavenly Kingdom

Phase one: be kidnapped and utilized as a political slogan

In the Bible published by Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (named 钦定前遗诏圣书, *1860 Taiping Version of the New Testament*) in 1860, Hong divided Tian Guo into two parts: one is the Kingdom in the heaven and the other is a kingdom on the earth. In this book, he added notes for the concept: “there is one Tian Guo in the heaven and also another Tian Guo on the earth; they both are the kingdoms of God; the Tian Guo in the heaven is the large one while the one on the earth is the small one- the latter is just our Taiping Heavenly Kingdom” (Hong 117). Hong claimed that he was the brother of Jesus and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom founded by him was the small kingdom of God. By Hong’s manipulation, an abstract religious concept became a real nation with formal political departments as well as military aims.

The influential “travelling theory” of Edward Said can be applied to explain the cross-culture travel of the concept. According to Said, in the

whole travelling of a certain theory, there is first a starting point from which the concept can be brought into a different context, then this concept should go through a special distance and be sown in the new land. Following this, there should be some special conditions for the acceptance or reconstruction of the concept, and finally, the remolded concept possesses a new function or position in local context (226-227). Robert Morrison's translation is the starting point of this travel, while the illustration of Liang and "utilization" by Hong created conditions for the concept's spreading and acceptance. Now the abstract religious concept became a political slogan, connecting with concrete organizations, official ranks and material rewards. The rebellion group was made up of poor lower-class peasants, and they were quickly attracted by the allure of this new remodeled "dream". Those farmers had been exploited for a long time and they craved a brand-new value system that could overturn the old order and belief (Kojima 117). Both the concept Kingdom of Heaven and the term Tian Guo now lost part of their original meanings and were replaced by new political functions, as predicted by Said, in the new military power: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Besides competition, the two concepts also cooperated with each other: under the religious coat of "Kingdom of Heaven", the ranking order and relationship principles in Tian Guo became valid on the earth from imaginary descriptions in ancient Chinese classics.

The exploited peasants were indeed greatly encouraged by the future of Tian Guo. If they rose up and fought, they could get material and political awards, which were practical and realistic. Even though they could not win an official position, they could at least live in a kingdom where everyone was equal. In fact, they were more inspired by the improvement of living conditions than by the words and promises of God. At the end of 1850, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was officially founded. Since then, the call to build "Tian Guo" kept growing from the south to the northern parts of China. The rebellion army rapidly occupied the rich and prosperous cities of the middle and southern China, ruling about 30 million people and 600 cities in its peak time.

Phase two: a dilemma of further utilization

The first phase witnessed a fierce spark between Tian Guo and Kingdom of Heaven. But when the Taiping kingdom entered a relatively stable “plateau” period, many contradictions appeared. On one hand, the kingdom still needed this slogan to encourage more people to join in. On the other hand, the leaders found that it became more and more difficult to advocate and use it. First, an equal Tian Guo was impossible. After the kingdom was set up, Hong Xiuquan enacted an agricultural policy to fulfill his promises about equality. According to this policy, everyone in the kingdom could be allocated a piece of land according to his or her age. People under 15 got half the acreage of people over 16. But this one-size-fits-all approach was too simplistic for a big kingdom with a large population. It was very hard to guarantee fairness. Further, this land allocation policy was just a general guideline and could not be consistently implemented since there were no relevant laws, legal system, culture or even manpower to support it in a feudal social background in 19th century China. The leaders tried to fulfill their promise of equality, but they neither possessed the abilities nor conditions to achieve this.

Secondly, the religious lies weaved by Hong became the sword that finally stabbed him. Hong claimed that the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was the small kingdom of God and he was the son of God and the brother of Jesus. However, another lord Yang Xiuqing (杨秀清) claimed that he was the heavenly father and fell down to earth. Thus, Hong became the son of Yang Xiuqing, which was indeed ridiculous. Hong increasingly felt his authority challenged and became so frustrated with Yang that he killed him. After Yang died, common people realized that they were cheated; the almighty heavenly father was also a mortal and could be killed. They no longer believed in the so-called heavenly kingdom.

Thirdly, the initially inciting power of Tian Guo gradually receded. As the foundation of the kingdom was abstract religious ideologies, the lords and military generals had to come up with other efficient and practical measures to control the military army. However, abstract Christian thoughts could not help them neither could they walk the path of Confucianism that they had fiercely condemned before. The Taiping regime was trapped in this dilemma. They hesitated to continue using

Tian Guo as a slogan and impetus of the state. They could not fully abandon it, but this religious concept could no longer provide sustainable and practical resources. None of the promises attached to Tian Guo (such as equality) could be realized since there were no long-term plans nor suitable cultural, political, legal system for them.

Phase three: abandoned by Taiping leadership

As discussed in the last phase, the Christian religion could not provide more inciting energy for the expansion of the Taiping power. More than that, it began to hinder the development of this state. The Taiping kingdom only worshiped God and fought against all the other deities and immortals. They disseminated the idea that all men were made by God and owed him their life and happiness. However, they took extreme vandalistic measures: when they attacked and occupied a new place, they damaged all the sculptures or pictures of the deity honored by local people and burned the old Confucian, Buddhist or Taoist temples. Such mob-like behaviors heavily provoked the Qing government and social elites, for whom the Confucian philosophy and values were spiritually and culturally fundamental. Different power groups⁵ within the higher-class agreed that it was barbaric to ruin the precious architecture and traditional civilization, and they should work together to wipe out this barbaric force. Throughout China's history, there were many rebellions, but even the bloodiest army would respect the temple of Confucius and the statues of Buddha, as well as Yu Huang Da Di. The Taiping army was the first to challenge mainstream ideology and thus condemned by the upper classes, which restricted their long-term development. The leadership therefore had to weaken its negative influence through less and less reference to the religious connotations of the concept.

Since it was impossible to follow the traditional path, the leadership of Taiping Heavenly Kingdom had to design a new way. In 1859, the new lord Hong Renxuan (洪仁轩), who in Hong Kong had learned western political, legal and economic systems, submitted a document about

⁵ There were many different social and political power groups and they all belonged to the upper class. In the matter of Taiping rebellion, they all stood on the same side, which was to wipe out the Taiping army.

comprehensive reform (资政新篇) to Hong Xiuquan. This reform plan recommended political centralization of the Taiping leadership, advocated industrial engineering and transportation business to boost the economy, and promoted a reform of the legal system. This document showed signs of modernization in China and provided a new path for the Taiping regime. If we review the history of China in the past 200 years, it is evident that modern China is influenced by western political, economic and legal systems, indicating that the plan designed by Hong Renxuan was a viable path for Taiping's future. Hong Xiuquan permitted the publication and dissemination of this document within the kingdom, although it was never fully implemented. In the final years of Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, the leadership gradually abandoned abstract Christian concepts and sought new ways to develop the state. However, before they established a suitable system, the kingdom was conquered and perished.

Even though the Taiping army attracted many peasants with a seemingly righteous aim (to reach the greatest and most widespread equality and fairness in the world) in the beginning, they gradually lost the support of middle and upper classes who had powerful military force. Externally, the Taiping regime could not win the heart of social elites; internally, they could not establish a system sufficient for the future. Moreover, western missionaries also felt insulted because their sacred religion was "kidnapped" for a political purpose instead of being used to purify people's mind and persuade the following of God. Later on, the Qing Dynasty defeated Taiping army under the help of foreign countries. It can be seen that the intertwined concepts "Kingdom of Heaven" and "Tian Guo" became a double-edged sword: it helped to found the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, while it also hindered further development of this state.

Summary

This article traces the "travelling" process of the concept "Kingdom of Heaven" in the Chinese Qing Dynasty through the Bible translation by the missionary Robert Morrison. The concept Kingdom of Heaven and the concept Tian Guo were two independent terms in different cultures. Through Morrison's translation, the first concept entered into a new

historical context and after personal interpretation by Liang Fa and Hong Xiuquan, the foreign imagination of a land after death was connected with local traditional culture. Expectations of entering heaven in Christian culture were accompanied by an emphasis on tangible values and gains. The result was that an abstract religious theme turned into a political slogan, an imagined kingdom in heaven became a real political power on the earth. A foreign religious term was “recontextualized” to give political energy.

However, the reconstructed concept was the child of two different cultures. The two different value systems competed with each other and the result determined the destiny of the rebellion. It can be discerned that doctrines in the Bible are based on the present social order, but emphasize redemption and happiness of the soul after death, while for the Confucian, man’s ethical performance, social contributions and achievements in this life are the most important events to be concerned with. The present concept of Tian Guo is a linguistic heritage of that rebellion, and the present word is comparable to a fossil of that unique history. The travelling history of this concept is a good case for the study of interactions between language, culture and society. It proves the dynamic relationship between language and history: history shapes language, while language in turn helps to construct history. Subsequently, by analyzing the history of a particular concept, we can better understand important events. This article applies this thinking to further illuminate an aspect of the Taiping history.

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