

The Heaven and Earth Society and the Red Turban Rebellion in Late Qing China

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Abstract

This paper focuses primarily on what is called the Red Turban Rebellion (1854-1856), actually a series of rebellions by the Heaven and Earth Society in South China. The Red Turban Rebellion did not have nationwide repercussions, and may appear to be dwarfed in significance by the cataclysmic upheavals that China was undergoing in the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, this rebellion is of considerable interest and importance since it provides case studies for the interaction between local societies, for an uprising motivated by problems internal to that society, and for influences of local secret societies.

1) Introduction

The mid-nineteenth century was a period of widespread insurrections, and with the easy success of the Taipings, other oppressed people were inspired to increasing rebelliousness. One of the most chronically disturbed regions in the Qing dynasty during the nineteenth century was Guangdong province in southern China. After about 1820, the swelling opium trade helped finance a corresponding increase in the level of illegal activities and the number of illegal groups engaged in them. Guangzhou and the lower Pearl River Delta regions were the hub of these kinds of illegal associations especially the Heaven and Earth Society (Tiandihui 天地會).¹ At the same time, pressures of overpopulation and increasing rural poverty built up in the countryside. It is then Tiandihui groups who gave birth to the Red Turban rebellion and established huge rebel kingdoms in mid-nineteenth century.

The Red Turban rebellion was a complicated insurrection, or, more accurately, a series of insurrections. It involved dozens of rebel groups and scores of major rebel leaders, and the officials and gentry of Guangdong had to conduct a desperate struggle against the forces of local disorder while the major forces of the dynasty concentrated on crushing the Taipings and the Nian further north. This paper focuses on the Tiandihui rebellion in the Pearl River Delta areas (the Red Turban rebellion) examining the transmission of the Tiandihui into Guangdong as well as the Red Turban rebellion and its demise.

Methodology and Sources

Even though there is little in the way of scholarly study of the Red Turban Rebellions in English, there does exist a considerable literature on peasant rebellions in the nineteenth century.² I have used

¹ Organized dissidence as well as organized crime needs an economic base. For example, salt production in western Guangdong likewise helped make this area a center of Triad activity even before the opium trade stimulated what Frederic Wakeman has called an 'alarming crescendo of both criminal and secret society activity' after 1820. Hsieh's work showed that this relationship held true in a later period as well. See Frederic Wakeman Jr., 'The Secret Societies of Kwangtung, 1800-1856' In Chesneaux, Jean. ed. *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China: 1840-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 30; Winston Hsieh, 'Triads, Salt Smugglers; and Local Uprisings: Observations on the Social and Economic Background of the Waichow Revolution of 1911,' in Chesneaux, *Popular Movements*, 158-60.

² Studies on the subject of rebel groups and secret societies in nineteenth century China, such as Hsiao Kung-ch'uan, Frederic Wakeman, Philip Kuhn, and Albert Feuerwerker, have similarly viewed it as a form of popular dissidence, a level of local militarization, or a stage of rebellion. Wakeman's study (1966) is the first work to present the broad themes surrounding the Red Turban rebellion. However, his work suffers from the narrowness of temporal perspective. According to Wakeman, the Opium War and subsequent British pressure stimulate a social disorder, anti-foreignism, the rise of gentry power, and the polarization of society. But, we cannot see these developments in conceptual perspective without a consideration of the local society before the Opium War. His work suffers from a failure to discuss the pre-1839 period and the long-run effect of regional or ethnic consciousness upon the integrity of the local society. See Hsiao Kung-

extensively various kinds of secondary sources in English, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. This background work provides a context for analysis of the series of conflicts that I have chosen to study, for comparison with other conflicts will help to identify the distinctive elements that shaped the Red Turban Rebellion.

Primary historical material on my study can be divided into three different categories: official reports and observations and local histories, biographies of local leaders, and foreign accounts of life in Guangdong. Detailed reports by local officials from nineteenth-century China are rare, in part because of the administrative practice of discarding lower-level reports and in part because of the series of rebellions, wars, and revolutions that destroyed so many primary documents from pre-twentieth century China. By a curious irony of history, however, it was the British who preserved the collection of Chinese official documents that provides the richest source of information about the Red Turban Rebellions. When the British occupied the office of the provincial government in Guangzhou in 1858, they took possession of all papers they found there, including both administrative documents and private correspondence between the viceroy of Liang'guang 兩廣 (Guangdong and Guangxi) and the Qing court; even after the conclusion of peace with China, this collection was retained and deposited in the British Legation in Beijing, where it served as a file of intelligence materials. Eventually it was sent to London and finally came to rest in the Public Record Office, where it is known as the Foreign Office Archives or the Canton Archives.³ Preserved as it was originally found, it is a uniquely comprehensive record of provincial administration in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴ Since the Red Turbans were a direct threat to Guangdong province, the official reports in the Canton Archives include abundant manuscripts on their rebellions.

Some information on the Red Turban Rebellions is also contained in the form of memorials sent by provincial officials to the emperor, now in the Grand Council Reference Files (*Junjichu zouzhe lufu* 軍機處奏摺錄副) in the First Historical Archives at Beijing.⁵ The Emperor's response to these memorials can be found in the *Daqing lichao shilu* 大清歷朝實錄. The richest sources, however, are provincial, prefectural, and county histories or gazetteers. The gazetteer is a special genre of literature in Chinese historical writing, and

chuan, *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967); Wakeman, *Strangers*; Philip Kuhn, *Rebellion and its Enemies in Late Imperial China*; Albert Feuerwerker, *Rebellion in Nineteenth-Century China* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1975).

³ David Pong, *A Critical Guide to the Kwangtung Provincial Archives: Deposited at the Public Record of Office of London* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1975).

⁴ Even though Chang Hsin-pao (1964) and Sasaki Masaya (1967) identified and introduced these documents, surprisingly, very few historians have used them to study the rebellions of the Pearl River Delta during the mid-nineteenth century. This source has been tapped to some extent in a study by Wakeman (1966); however, his work only relied on materials written in English among Foreign Office records, materials that give an incomplete picture of developments in the Pearl River Delta. See Chang Hsin-pao, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); Sasaki Masaya 佐々木正哉, *Shinmatsu no himitsu kessha* 清末の秘密結社 (Tokyo: Kindai Chūgoku Kenkyū Inkai, 1967); Lu Baoqian 陸寶千, *Lun wan-qing Liangguang de Tiandihui zhengquan* 論晚清兩廣的天地會政權 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1975); Frederic Wakeman Jr., "The Secret Societies of Kwangtung, 1800-1856," in *Popular Movements*, ed. Jean Chesneau; Idem, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-18* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

⁵ Although there are many publications of archival documents from the Qing by Chinese archivists [for example, the edited collection of documents from the Number One Historical Archive in Beijing on the pre-Opium War Tiandihui: Qin Baoqi 秦寶琦 and Liu Meizhen 劉美珍 eds., *Tiandihui* 天地會. 7 volumes (Beijing: The Number One Historical Archive, 1981-89)], thousands of documents on various subjects have not yet been published. Thus, many historians still need to visit the Number One Historical Archive to pore through the enormous mass of poorly arranged documents for their research. For excellent guides to the use of these archival materials, see Beatrice S Bartlett, *Ch'ing documents in the National Palace Museum Archives*, (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1975); idem, *Archival Materials in China on United States History*, (White Plains, N.Y.: Kraus International Publications, 1985); idem, *Selected articles from Taipei National Palace Museum bulletin, 1972-1979*, (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1972-79); Joseph Esherick, *Chinese Archives: An Introductory Guide*, (Berkeley : Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, Center for Chinese Studies, 1996).

the Qing dynasty marked the genre's most fruitful period. County gazetteers (*xianzhi* 縣志) from Guangdong are particularly useful for my study, as they provide the most detailed local information. Thanks to the efforts of the history department of Zhongshan University, most of memorials as well as local gazetteers, on the subject of the Red Turban Rebellions are now collected and published under the title of *Guangdong hongbing qiyi shiliao* 廣東洪兵起義史料 (1992).⁶ Besides these sources, I also consulted several biographies and scholarly works of the time not in the *Guangdong hongbing qiyi shiliao*, such as and the *Sohak dongjumki* 西學東漸記, the biography of a gentry member who was traveling in the Guangzhou area during the chaotic mid-nineteenth century.⁷ The last primary sources I have used are the writings of nineteenth-century foreigners in the central Guangdong area, including tourists' accounts, Consular Reports, and, in particular, reports from missionaries.⁸

Finally, a note about conventions. First, I use Pinyin Romanization throughout. Second, with regard to place names, I have tried to use their late imperial forms, with a preference whenever possible for the ca. 1850 forms. Also, although there were various names (*xiang*, *ting*, etc.) for the lowest-level political unit in the late imperial state, I translate all as "county."

2) Tiandihui

The origin of the Tiandihui has been a subject of continuing concern for Chinese historians of the twentieth century. According to Dian Murray's research, "it was generally agreed that the organizations called the Tiandihui, the Three Dots Society (Sandianhui 三點會), the Three United Society (Sanhehui 三合會), the Hong League (Hongmen 洪門), and the Triads were one and the same, it was impossible to verify the point."⁹

Even though the actual origins of the Tiandihui are still clouded in obscurity and much heated scholarly debate, it is clear that the spread of the Tiandihui was accelerated by Monk Ti Xi 提喜 at Zhangpu 漳浦 county, Zhangzhou 漳州 prefecture of Fujian 福建 province in the eighteenth century, and that as a product of popular culture with deep social roots, it grew out of the natural configurations of Chinese society in places where the ecological and economic crises were most acute.¹⁰ Monk Ti Xi recruited three fellow residents of Zhangpu county: Lu Mao 盧茂, Li Amin 李阿閔 (alias Li Shaomin 李少敏), and Fang Quan 方權. In acknowledging Ti Xi as their leader, these men became the first generation of Tiandihui "brothers" who, during the Qianlong 乾隆 period (1711-1799), spread the society throughout the remainder of Zhangpu and Pinghe 平和 counties, Fujian, and, through their disciples, across the strait to Taiwan. The followers of these

⁶ *Guangdong hongbing qiyi shiliao* 廣東洪兵起義史料, Guangdong sheng wenshi yanjiuguan, Zhongshan daxue lishi xibian (Guangzhou : Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1992).

⁷ Yong Kweng 容閔, *Sohak dongjumki* 西學東漸記, trans. Kwon Heechul (Seoul: Ulyumoonhwasa, 1974).

⁸ Most of these sources were scattered in church publications such as *The Chinese Review* and *The Chinese Recorder* and in the twenty volumes of the *Chinese Repository* and in the British Foreign Office file in the Public Record Office, London.

⁹ This perception of the Tiandihui as a nationalist political organization is still deeply cherished by scholars on both Taiwan and the Chinese mainland. See Dian H. Murray, in collaboration with Qin Baoqi. *The Origins of the Tiandihui the Chinese Triads in Legend and History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), Introduction and chapter 4.

¹⁰ Western archival scholars such as Dian Murray and David Ownby do the recent important studies on the origins of the Tiandihui. Murray, especially in her work, *The Origins of the Tiandihui*, argued that Monk Ti Xi created the Tiandihui in 1761 or 1762. But this is still a problematic argument since another group of the Tiandihui members, such as Ma Jiulong 馬九龍, were active in Guangdong before Ti Xi's Tiandihui in Fujian. The fact that Lu Mao, a disciple of Ti Xi, met Li Hao 李浩, a Tiandihui member from another branch of the Tiandihui, on his way to north of Fujian province after his failure of uprising in 1768, also indicates the existence of the Tiandihui before Ti Xi. As Zhuang Jifa has pointed out that the Tiandihui did not created by any particular person but it had slowly evolved from the tradition of multi-surname brotherhoods that were organized for mutual-assistance. See Wu Zhaoqing 吳兆清 and Hao Zhiqing 赫治清, *Zhongguo banghuiishi* 中國幫會史 (Taipei: Wenzhi chubanshe, 1996), 62-64; Zhuang Jifa 莊吉發, *Qingdai Tiandihui yuanliukao* 清代天地會原流考 (Taipei: Shilin, 1982), 4-18; David Ownby, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in Early Ming-Qing China; The Formation of A Tradition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

early Tiandihui leaders fervently recruited new members in Taiwan, including, most importantly, Lin Shuangwen 林爽文 who was to raise a rebellion in later years.¹¹

David Ownby justifies that “Lin Shuangwen’s uprising was one of the largest and most successful in eighteenth-century China, and it was also the first rebellion in Chinese history led by the Heaven and Earth Society, the Tiandihui, whose pro-Ming, anti-Qing message recurs repeatedly in nineteenth-century Chinese sources.”¹² In spite of the fact that the Tiandihui as a whole suffered an unenviable fate during the violent decade between the suppression of the Lin Shuangwen rebellion and the end of the eighteenth century,¹³ the Tiandihui, ironically, reached the western Fujian-eastern Jiangxi region because of the suppression of Lin Shuangwen. The Tiandihui abandoned its original core area due to the Qing persecution. During the Jiaqing 嘉慶 era (1760-1820), the Tiandihui spread rapidly throughout the remainder of South China. The Heaven and Earth Society rebelled in 1802. In 1817, more than 2,000 of its members were arrested in Guangzhou, and another great lock-up of its members took place in Guizhou 貴州 in 1831. Arrests and executions accelerated, rather than stopped, the society’s subversive activities. In 1836 the Tiandihui group in Hunan 湖南 attacked a large city. The emperor degraded and punished the governor-general for his failure to arrest the leader. Thereafter, member of the Tiandihui spread widely in Guangdong 廣東, Hunan, Hubei 湖北, and Guizhou 貴州.¹⁴

Murray’s research on the Tiandihui emphasizes that Guangdong was a pivotal province for the development of the Tiandihui.¹⁵ While suffering a severe setback in Taiwan and Fujian 福建, by the first decade of the nineteenth century the Tiandihui still flourished in Guangdong, and had spread into Guangxi 廣西 and Jiangxi 江西. Thereafter, during the Jiaqing and Daoguang 道光 reigns, its strength and influence continually expanded throughout South China under a large variety of names.¹⁶

According to Dian Murray’s research on Boluo 博羅 county, Guishan 桂山 and Yong’an 永安 counties,¹⁷ local feudings were major reasons of the foundlings of the Tiandihui in Guangdong. These areas eventually became the site of the first Tiandihui uprising in Guangdong. Again, Murray explains, “Boluo had many immigrants from Zhangzhou, Fujian who fought with the natives over water rights. Individuals on both sides formed societies for self-protection, and casualties resulted from their leaders’ desire for revenge.”¹⁸ Although they were also collapsed when Governor-General Ji Qing 吉慶 dispatched provincial troops, these events quickly precipitated uprisings in neighboring Boluo, Yong’an, Zengcheng 增城, and Dong’guan 東莞 counties. The uprisings were most devastating in Boluo and Yong’an where over 240 villages and markets had been burned and looted by the rebels. According to the government memorial, *Gongzhongdang*

¹¹ Qin Baoqi 秦寶琦 and Liu Meizhen 劉美珍, *Tiandihui* 天地會 vol. 1, (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue, 1982), 68-72 and vol. 7, 524.

¹² Even if the Tiandihui was involved with earlier uprisings such as Lu Mao uprising of 1768 and the Li Amin uprising of 1770, the Tiandihui did not come under the close scrutiny of the Qing court until the Lin Shuangwen uprising on Taiwan in 1787-1788. See Ibid., Ownby *Brotherhoods*, 56 and Zhuang Jifa, *Qingdai mimi huidangshi yanjiu* 清代秘密會黨史研究 (Taipei: Wenshi zhexue chubanshe, 1994).

¹³ *Tiandihui* vol. I, 99.

¹⁴ W. P. Morgan, *Triad Societies in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Government Press, 1960), 3-58; Hirayama Shu 平山周, *Zhongguo mimi shehuiishi* 中國秘密社會史 (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1912), 1-33; Luo Ergang 羅爾綱, *Tiandihui Wenxianlu* 天地會文獻錄 (Shanghai: Zhengzhong shuju, 1943), 61-8.

¹⁵ Murray, *The Origins of the Tiandihui*.

¹⁶ Zhuang Jifa has linked Tiandihui expansion and growth to the migration patterns of individuals from Fujian and Guangdong provinces. The documents from the decade 1790-1800 are full of people from Zhangzhou, Quanzhou, Taiwan, and Chaozhou, moving through new areas and proselytizing. Archival evidence suggests that a large percentage of the pre-Taiping Tiandihui groups was formed by individuals who were originally from places other than those in which their societies were founded. According to data prepared by Zhuang Jifa, each of the 28 Tiandihui founded by individuals from Guangdong between 1783 and 1816 was founded in a province other than Guangdong. See Zhuang Jifa, “Qingdai Min-yue diqu de renkou liudong yu mimi huidang de fazhan 清代閩越地區的人口流動與秘密會黨的發展” in *Jindai Zhongguo chuqi lishi yantao huilun wenji* 近代中國初期歷史研討會論文集, (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1990), tables on 757-58.

¹⁷ Murray, *The Origins*, 61-69.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Jiaqingchao Zouzhe 宮中檔嘉慶朝奏摺, insurrection was instigated by Chen Lanjsi 陳爛屐四, the head of the Increase Brothers Society (Tiandihui 添弟會) in Boluo county.¹⁹ Taking advantage of a temporary low in the county's troop contingents, Chen launched a rebellion in 1802 and attacked several villages including Xiang'gang. He used ten cloth flags with the slogan “*shuntian xingdao* 順天行道 (obey Heaven and follow the way)”.²⁰

Imperial edicts during the Jiaqing emperor such as *Zhupi zouzhe* 硃批奏摺 are also showing that the Increase Brothers Society was active in Xiangshan, Xinhui, Heshan and Zengcheng in the Pearl River Delta and Hepu 合浦 and Qinzhou 欽州 in western Guangdong between 1803 and 1805.²¹ In 1816 it was found mainly in Renhua 仁化 county bordering on Hunan and Jiangxi and in Pingyuan 平原 county bordering on Jiangxi and Fujian.²²

These Tiandihui societies in Guangdong showed the fact that the growth of the Tiandihui in early nineteenth century Guangdong was heavily indebted to the outgrowth of migrant society. As new arrivals came into contact with the marginalized residents of their host communities—individuals who themselves may have been either native residents or former immigrants now assimilated—the Tiandihui gradually made its way into more settled communities, where, as seen above, it quickly became a vehicle for such activities as robbery, feuding, and rebellion.²³

By the time of the ascendancy of the opium trade during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the Tiandihui had already become a dominant underground organization in the Pearl River Delta and its nearby regions. The opium merchants often made use of the Tiandihui for their opium traffic. A memorial presented by Li Panliu 黎攀鏐 in 1836 further substantiates the relation between the opium smugglers and the Tiandihui society by stating in effect that the Tiandihui committed, among other notorious crimes, the illegal practice of protecting the opium traffic.²⁴

The Tiandihui also became potential recruits to piracy as seen from the report of the Liang'guang 兩廣 Governor-General in 1804: “We have secretly investigated the Tiandihui and indeed there are instances of conspiracies with the pirates.”²⁵ Many of the notorious Tiandihui leaders in the delta area were famous for their piratical activities. For instance, Luo Dagang 羅大綱, who is famous for enlisting his fellow Tiandihui members into the Taipings, was a pirate chieftain at Jiaotang 菱塘 of the district of Fanyu 番禺. He Liu 何六, the chief leader of the Red Turbans (1854-56), and all his subordinates had long practiced piracy in the delta.²⁶

¹⁹ *Gongzhongdang Jiaqingchao Zouzhe* 宮中檔嘉慶朝奏摺 (Taipei: Guoli Gugong Bowuyuan, 1982 reprint), #9101, Jiaqing 7.10.27.

²⁰ *Junjichu zouzhe lufu* 軍機處奏摺錄副, Nongminyundonglei 農民運動類 (Beijing: Fist Historical Archives), # 2684, Jiaqing 8.1.3; *Tiandihui* vol. 5, 450-82; Qin Baoqi, *Qing qianqi Tiandihui yanjiu* 清前期天地會研究 (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 1988), 302-6; *Dong'guan Xianzhi* 東莞縣志, 33.20b; *Huizhou Fuzhi* 徽州府志, compiled by Liu Guinian 李桂年, 46 juan (1881), 18.16b, Murray, *The Origins of the Tiandihui*, 64.

²¹ *Zhupi zouzhe* 硃批奏摺, Nongminyundonglei 農民運動類 (Beijing: Fist Historical Archives), #633 Jiaqing 9.11.22.

²² *Junjichudang lufuzouzhe* 軍機處檔錄副奏摺 (Taipei: National Palace Museum), #2666 Jiaqing 23.7.10.

²³ As time went on, however, the Tiandihui ceased to be a wholly “foreign” import and developed local roots. During the entire Jiaqing-Daoguang period, 63 percent of *hui* in Fujian and almost 61 percent in Guangdong were started by leaders in their home counties. Of course, even if 60 percent were started by locals, this still means that 40 percent were set up by outsiders. See Cai Shaoqing 蔡少卿, *Jindai Zhongguo huidangshiyuanjiu* 近代中国会党史研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 142-47; Yoo Jangkun 유장근, *Kundae Joong'kukyi bimil kyulsa* 근대중국의 비밀결사 (Seoul: Koryowon, 1996), 272-273.

²⁴ See *Dong'guan Xianzhi*, 70.9a.

²⁵ *Da Qing Renzong Rui (Jiaqing) huangdi shilu* 大清仁宗睿(嘉慶)皇帝實錄, Taibie, 1968, 97:19, Jiaqing 9/4/18.

²⁶ *Dong'guan Xianzhi* 東莞縣志, 35.4-9, 70.9a.

In 1843, bandits of the Tiandihui enrolled membership even in open daylight, plundered the district of Xiangshan 香山, and threatened to attack the chief town of the district. The magistrate of the district of Xiangshan was so afraid of the retaliation of other Tiandihui members that he imposed a light sentence upon the captured Triads, and he would not have reported the disturbances to the Guangzhou 廣州 authorities if the latter had not warned him to do so.²⁷ Keeping the local authorities in a state of fear, the Tiandihui in turn could precipitate private feuds with other illegal societies like themselves to extend their area of domination without any respect whatsoever to the authority of the local government.²⁸

Whole delta areas were now overrun with the Tiandihui. The reason for their spread was not merely due to the increased numbers of the immigrants but also to such factors as the readjustment of the internal trade, the Sino-British diplomatic tension (1844-49), the unemployment of the disbanded irregulars, and finally the drought and climatic calamities from 1847 to 1850. Until the Taiping Rebellion, however, this disorder brought by the Tiandihui remained sporadic and undirected, and its main effect was a devastating and unsettling influence on the countryside. But the rapid success of the Taiping exposed the degree of discontent that had developed by the middle of the nineteenth century.

3) The Course of the Red Turban Rebellion

A Series of Incidents Lead to the Red Turban Rebellion

In Guangdong the years following 1850 were a period of growing disorder. The trouble had begun with the Taiping incursions across the border from Guangxi. Of these, that headed by Ling Shiba 凌十八 had been the most difficult to subdue. According to imperial memorial, *Daqing Lichao shilu, Xianfeng period* 大清歷朝實錄 咸豐朝, Ling Shiba was a native of the prefecture of Gaozhou. He went to Guangxi in 1847 and joined the Taipings. He, then in May 1851, returned to his native land and set up Taiping headquarters at a place called Luoqing 羅鏡. Severe fighting between the rebels and the Qing force continued throughout the year of 1852.²⁹ Xu Guangjin 徐廣縉's war effort against Ling Shiba in Gaozhou made little headway. In the same year, the border city of Wuzhou 梧州 was under siege by the rebel Tian Fang 田芳. Other Triads closer to the Delta were inspired to attack Conghua 從化, only tens of miles from Guangzhou.³⁰

Rebel incursions and the failure of the provincial authorities to deal with them effectively were not the only cause of discontent. The gentry had become increasingly alienated by the extent to which they were called upon to finance operation against rebels, not only in Guangdong and Guangxi, but also in other provinces. This burden fell particularly heavily on the gentry of the Pearl River Delta. The situation had further deteriorated in 1852 after heavy flooding in the Delta had destroyed much of the harvest. The provincial authorities, however, were in such desperate need of funds that they had to continue making demands on the gentry. In 1853 they were asked to supply one month's rent on all their property to the provincial treasury. Eventually, these burdens were passed on to the tenant farmers who had already been suffering so much for past years.³¹

²⁷ *Guangzhou Fuzhi* 廣州府志, 81.41-42.

²⁸ Between 1843 and 1844, two private wars between the Tiandihui and the Sleeping Dragon Society (Wolonghui 臥龍會) had been fought that eventually resulted several hundred casualties in the district of Shunde. See G. W. Cooke, *China: being "The Times" special correspondent from China in the Years 1857-1858* (London, 1858), 435-36.

²⁹ *Daqing Lichao shilu, Xianfeng period* 大清歷朝實錄, 咸豐朝 (Taipei, 1964 reprint), 32.11.

³⁰ To save the city from imminent attack, a thick barrier of garrison troops and hired mercenaries was set up between the delta and the borderland. Xu Guangjin and Ye Mingchen 葉名琛, successive viceroys of Liang'guang, personally led armies into the mountains. By August 1852 they had blocked the rebel descent, decisively crushing Ling Shiba at Luoting 羅定. See F.O. 682, 68.4.14 (1850); idem, 327.2.35 (April 10, 1850); Frederic Wakeman Jr., *Strangers at the Gate*, (Berkeley and LA: Univ. of California Press, 1966), 132-133.

³¹ Nishikawa Kikuko 西天喜久子, "Juntoku danren sokyokuno seitatsu 順德團練總局的成立," in *Toyobunka kenkyusho kiyo* 東洋文化研究所紀要 105 (Tokyo University, 1988), 14-16; Liu Weizhang 廖偉章, "Taiping tianguo gemingshi Qingchao Guangdong caizheng 太平天国革命时清朝广东财政," in *Taiping tianguo yu jindai zhong'guo* 太平天国与近代中国, (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1993), 366; Wakeman, *Strangers*, pp.132-136; idem, "Secret Societies of Kwangtung," pp.38-39.

However, by far the most significant event took place in 1853 when the Taipings captured Nanjing and establish this city as their Heavenly Kingdom. The local disaffected elements, especially the secret societies, were very much excited by these disturbances that kept the local officials and officers very busy indeed. One of the secret society proclamations, which appears among British Foreign Office papers, reads, "The ancient books tell us that once in five centuries some man of talent beyond his fellows will appear, on whom the hope of the nation will depend. That period has elapsed since the rise of the Ming dynasty, and it is full time that a hero should come forward and save the nation."³²

From April, Tiandihui activity became increasingly menacing around Guangzhou. Reports were also received of disorder in Huizhou 惠州 to the west of the provincial city. In Guangdong the gentry belatedly began to take a more active part in organizing militia units. But in October the situation further deteriorated when a band allied with the Small Sword rebels of Amoy were driven out of their center at the Bogue, to the south of Guangzhou, and established themselves in Huizhou. In the following months severe disorders were reported from Huizhou and Dong'guan.³³ The disturbed state of the province provided an ideal setting for the further widespread disturbances known as the Red Turban rebellion.

The Beginning and High Tide of the Red Turban Rebellion

Qing government official records from various sources confirm that the beginning of the Red Turban rebellions are dated on June 17, 1854 in the village of Shi'long 石龍 where a smuggler and a local Tiandihui leader named He Liu led an attack on the district city, Dong'guan 東莞 (about 20 miles east of Guangzhou) and sacked it.³⁴ The revolt was not sudden one.³⁵ By the beginning of 1854, Ye Mingchen was already receiving urgent dispatches from his agents informing him that every day in the suburbs of Guangzhou, hundreds upon hundreds of people were secretly assembling and then as secretly dispersing. These assemblies were in fact secret society gatherings in which were held the ceremonies of admitting new members.³⁶ Trouble had been brewing for some time, but it was not reported to the capital until it became too extensive to conceal.

All the insurrectionists and their collaborators wore red turbans for a sign, which earned them the name of "Hongjinze 紅巾賊 (Red Turban Bandit)" or "Hongdouze 紅頭賊 (Red Head Bandit)". They were also called as "Hongbing 洪兵 (Vast Soldiers or Triad Soldiers)" since the Red Turbans used the insignia and watchwords of the Tiandihui.³⁷ Official records of the Qing government in the Canton Archives provide us the picture of cooperation between various Tiandihui lodges.³⁸ The principal prize was, of course, Guangzhou itself, and in the summer of 1854, the Red Turbans came close to taking the city.³⁹

Before 1854, the primary organizations of the Red Turban groups were those of numerous bands, with which the leaders sought to satisfy their followers' desires for material gain or mutual aid. The first characteristic of original Tiandihui units was their geographical decentralization. Before 1854, one could hardly point out a site that might be considered as their political or military headquarters. Secondly, the numerous bands were independent of one another. This characteristic is revealed by the fact that each band

³² F.O. 17.126, Bowring-Clarendon, Desp. 18 (Jan. 9, 1855).

³³ Wakeman, *Strangers*, 138.

³⁴ This was about one year after the Taipings established their capital at Nanjing, and indeed, the conflict was to some extent inspired by the Taipings. The Taipings even sent their secret agents back to Guangdong to contact the secret societies there in hope of stirring up a general uprising. See *Daqing Lichao shilu, Xianfeng period* 大清歷朝實錄, 咸豐朝 (Taipei, reprint 1964), and 142.11. Imperial edict, 8 (Oct. 1854); F.O. 682.340.13.12 (Sep. 1854); idem, 68.4.46 (1855).

³⁵ *Shunde Xianzhi* 順德縣志, 23:5.b.

³⁶ F.O. 931.1512-1514.

³⁷ Soda Yo 相田洋, "Kokinko 紅巾考," *Toyoshi Kenkyu* 東洋史研究, 38.4 (March 1980), 38-4, 57; Wakeman, *Strangers*, Chapter 14.

³⁸ The rebel bands generally cooperated with one another while maintaining their individual activities. Only occasionally did they fight among themselves. The sources regularly mention almost 34 major rebel leaders and many minor ones. The number of separate bands was considerably less, for quite a few leaders shared command of single groups or took over command after someone else was killed or captured. See F.O. 931.1497.

³⁹ Lu Baoqian 陸寶千. *Lun wan-qing Lianguang de Tiandihui zhengquan* 論晚清兩廣的天地會政權 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1975), 133-142.

leader called himself “*tangzhu* 堂主 (lodge master)”.⁴⁰ In other words, the Tiandihui groups, as represented by such scattered, incoherent, and irregular hordes, were local in nature. However, in the early fifties, the Tiandihui groups were supposed have embarked on a greater enterprise under the leadership of Chen Song 陳松. They found themselves in need of two weapons: general leadership and a tighter organization. These needs were filled by the efforts of Chen Song and his colleagues who provided a useful organizational framework that allowed much swifter mobilization of followers than would otherwise have been possible.⁴¹

Nothing concrete is known of Chen Song’s personal background other than his Tiandihui activities in Guangdong. According to the Guangdong provincial government records in the Canton Archives, on March 1854, Chen Song sent Tiandihui agitator Zhongde 鐘德, into Xinqiao 新橋 and Dong’guan to contact the leader of local Tiandihui lodges such as Chen Xianliang 陳顯良, He Liu, and Yuan Yushan 袁玉山 in the hope of stirring up a general uprising.⁴² After Zhongde’s arrestment by Qing authority, Chen Song appointed Li Wenmao 李文茂 as a leader of the Tiandihui lodges around Guangzhou (Pingjingwang 平靖王) and planned to rise up in early July.⁴³ But the first major outbreak came in a month earlier than their original planning date, with the revolt of He Liu, a local Tiandihui leader, in Shi’long. He Liu is from a merchant family in Shunde county and said to have been moved into Shi’long village of the Dong’guan county where he come under the influence of the Tiandihui leader.⁴⁴

After the Taiping rose in 1851, the authorities in Huizhou made strenuous effort to raise money for defense. Their fund raisings generally took the form of surtaxes or of “contributions” that were anything but voluntary. These exactions roused oppositions in Shi’long, and many of local Tiandihui members were actively participated in the tax-resistance movement.⁴⁵ But in October the situation further deteriorated when a band allied with the Small Sword rebels of Amoy were driven out of their center at the Bogue, to the south of Guangzhou, and established themselves in Huizhou. In the following months, severe disorders were reported from Huizhou and Dong’guan.⁴⁶ The provincial commander-in-chief was sent to the area, and reported a victory that was followed up with great severity.⁴⁷ Unleashed banner troops not only executed alleged local Tiandihui members but also wiped out entire villages.

On 17 June, 1854, He Liu, a leader of the Tiandihui local lodge (Hongyitang 洪義堂), animated by Chen Song’s direction, seized the opportunity to rebel by proclaiming a revenge for his blood-oath brothers who had been killed during the suppression of the Qing’s purge at Shi’long. A local gazetteer (*Dong’guan Xianzhi*) along with the Grand Council records (*Junjichutang zouzhe lufu*) details the number of factors that had come together to precipitate the revolt including maladministration by local magistrate, Jiang

⁴⁰ With the source of the term *tangzhu* clarified, it becomes easy to recognize the effect of this decentralizing system on the organization of the Tiandihui. The characteristic of the units led by the *tangzhu* was that, in spite of their similarities in organization, each one had an independent *zhu* or “host,” above whom there was no central body for general leadership. Thus the system was a reflection of the independence of leaders and the decentralization of the entire Tiandihui that existed before Chen Song’s arrestment in late 1854. See Hu Zhusheng 胡珠生, *Qingdai Hongmenshi* 請代洪門史 (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1996), 309; F.O. 931.1439.

⁴¹ Wakeman argues that there is no evidence to show that the rebellion was planned in advance. “Rather rebellion engendered rebellion, in a distinct crescendo of disorder after He Liu’s revolt.” But Wakeman failed to provide the explanation on how such a large number of people could have gathered so suddenly and have organized attacks on administrative seat. In contrast to Wakeman’s contention, many resources show us that there was plotted conspiracy under a Tiandihui leader, Chen Song. See “Huifei zongtoumu Chen Song shiyou 會匪總頭目陳松事由,” in Sasaki Masaya 佐佐木正哉, edit. *Shinmatsu no himitsu kessha .Shiryō hen* 清末的秘密結社-資料篇, (Tōkyō: Kindai Chūgoku Kenkyū Inkai, 1967), p. 21; F.O. 931.1090 Information regarding bandit in Guangzhou (1850s); 1439 Reports on Chen Song (1854), 1484 List of 36 Red Turban rebels in the Nanhai area (1854). For Wakeman’s argument, see Wakeman, *Strangers*, p. 139.

⁴² F.O. 931.1090.

⁴³ “Huifei zongtoumu,” 21.

⁴⁴ F.O. 931.1439.

⁴⁵ Nishikawa Kikuko, 13-16.

⁴⁶ *China Mail* 27 (October 1853); *Guangzhou Fuzhi* 廣州府志, 82.2b.

⁴⁷ Wakeman, *Strangers*, 138.

Zhaoen 江肇恩.⁴⁸ But a subsistence crisis brought on by product of Tiandihui conspiracy that seized upon the opportunity brought from unreasonable tax demands. He Liu and his followers attacked the district city, Dong'guan and sacked it.⁴⁹ This was soon followed by outbreaks of rebellion in all the districts surrounding Guangzhou. It quickly got out of hand, and rebellion engulfed the Pearl River Delta areas. Town after town fell to insurgents, who held several administrative seats continuously for several years. The government was unable to suppress them until about early 1855, when massive reinforcements were transferred from neighboring provinces.⁵⁰

At Dong'guan, the Red Turbans halted and took time out to organize their rebel groups more fully. The rebels needed time to recoup and reorganize their forces, incorporating the many new recruits they had gained. More important still may have been the need for clarifying the chain of command among the Tiandihui leaders. It had obviously become necessary for Tiandihui leaders to give more ranks and official titles to their followers in the rebellions. The critical military situation at Guangzhou made it all the more necessary to strengthen the fighting spirit by a promise of great rewards. After the sudden arrest of Chen Song by Qing authorities on October, 1854, all Tiandihui lodges concentrated their bands in the Dong'guan area where they formed an alliance and elected Li Wenmao and Chen Kai 陳開 as co-leaders of the strongest group (Hongxuntang 洪順堂), that is, as “*mengzhu* 盟主 (Lord of the Alliance)”.⁵¹

In late 1854, the Tiandihui leaders assembled in a temple at Foshan and started the rebellion with “a sacrifice to a flag”.⁵² This matter of formality symbolized something concrete in the Tiandihui organization. The concentration of bands in Li Wenmao and Chen Kai indicates that the Tiandihui groups were trying to build a unified force out of scattered and incoherent branches. The sacrifice to a flag implies not only that the disunited and disorganized Tiandihui groups had rallied under one standard, but that they were pledged to a greater enterprise—rebellion. The unification of the numerous branches formerly led by local *tangzhus* marked an improvement over the previously scattered forces.⁵³ Yet this coalition, though representing a higher degree of unity, did not last, because it was not yet founded on an institutional reality. Immediately after its formation, the combined force met a test that resulted in disaster.

According to the official deposition regarding rebel activities in the counties near Guangzhou areas, Li Wenmao divided his lodge into four groups for the campaign: Chen Xianliang 陳顯良, with his army of about 30,000 from the east, Ganxian 甘先 from the north, Li himself from the west, and Lin Guanglong 林光隆 from the south should attack the city. Chen Kai 陳開 was also agreed to lead his army, upwards of 100,000, to join in the attack on Guangzhou. Li also asked He Liu of Hongyitang 洪義堂 to bring his troops, 10,000 strong, to reinforce Chen Xianliang in attacking Guangzhou from the east.⁵⁴ They started with conspicuous success, capturing the important city of Foshan only 15 miles from Guangzhou on the 14th

⁴⁸ A number of factors had to come together to precipitate the revolt including maladministration by local magistrate, Jiang Zhaoen 江肇恩. But a subsistence crisis brought on by product of Tiandihui conspiracy that seized upon the opportunity brought from unreasonable tax demands. See *Junjichutang zouzhe lufu* 軍機處檔錄副奏摺, (Taipei: Guoli Gugong Bowuyuan, 1982 reprint), Xianfeng 4.7.25; *Dong'guan Xianzhi*, 35.7.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Jian Youwen 簡又文, *Taiping Tianguo quanshi* 太平天国全史 (Hong Kong: Jianshi mengjin shudian, 1962), 888-93.

⁵¹ Tiandihui symbolism marked many aspects of the rebellion. Li and Chen's chosen title—“alliance leader” (*mengzhu*)—resonates with the terminology of brotherhoods and associations. Rebels added the *hong* character to the ranks of some of the generals. Perhaps more importantly, rebels retained the language and some of egalitarian practices associated with brotherhoods. See F.O. 325.3.22; “Dong'guanxian shilong difang qishi yuanyou 東莞縣石龍地方起事緣由,” in *Tiandihui*, 21.

⁵² F.O. 931.1440, 1558.

⁵³ Though supreme leader of the complex Tiandihui groups always made the major decisions concerning external affairs, the sub-leaders provided a secondary level of command. In the event of the leader's death or absence, they could take over to prevent the alliance's disintegration, taking primary responsibility for their own followers while seeking to restructure the rebel groups according to the previously established hierarchy. Li Wenmao and other top leaders could thus keep the Red Turban force without jeopardizing their control after Chen Song's death. See Ibid.

⁵⁴ F.O. 931.1558 Deposition regarding rebel activities in Zengcheng, Dong'guan and Foshan areas in 1854 (April, 1855).

July. The Red Turban leader there, Chen Kai, proclaimed his intention to restore the Ming dynasty, and made some attempt to institute a popular program.⁵⁵

In the time-honored tradition of Chinese rebels, Chen Kai used imperial trappings to bolster his legitimacy. Chen declared that a new reign period was in effect: it was now the first year of the “Da’ning 大寧 (Great Peace)” reign.⁵⁶ Chen was particularly emphatic in his claim to be restoring the Ming dynasty, a claim that explains—and adds credence to—the tales linking his revolt to the machinations of the Tiandihui. Edicts and proclamations were invariably issued in the name of the Ming, while the banners of Chen’s followers were inscribed with the slogan “Overthrow the Qing and Restore the Ming” (Fan Qing Fu Ming 反清復明).⁵⁷

In other parts of Guangdong Red Turban bands first attacked the chief towns of the districts in which they had originated. Uprisings are recorded as having taken place in the sixth month of the fourth year of Xianfeng emperor (25 June - 24 July 1854), in Xin’ning 新寧 by on the 21st July, in Kaiping 開平 on the 12th August, and in Gaoming 高明 and Heshan 鶴山 at about the same time. The district cities of Heshan and Kaiping were captured by the Red Turbans (Hongdetang 洪德堂) led by Liang Peiyu 梁培友, and the district city of Enping 恩平 was also besieged.⁵⁸ The Red Turbans were particularly active in the prefectures of Guangzhou and Chaozhou 潮州 and more district cities fell to the insurrectionists such as: Huaxian 花縣, Qingyuan 清遠, Zengcheng 增城, Conghua, Longmen 龍門, Kaijian 開建, Yingde 英德, and Changluo 長羅. The Red Turbans also attacked the prefecture of Jiayingzhou 嘉應州.⁵⁹ It is estimated that the total number of rebels around Guangzhou was estimated more than 200,000.⁶⁰

Government forces were in disarray. In 1854, Guangzhou had an authorized 5,000 Banner troops and 4,000 Green Standard troops. In reality, it had many fewer men. The few available troops were often ill trained and poorly led. In the first several months of the rebellion, the Army of the Green Standard virtually ceased to exist, as a result of such factors as deaths, desertions, and transfers of troops to the militia. There was no restoring it, and the fighting was taken over by locally recruited braves and militia and by troops from other provinces.⁶¹

The Demise of the Red Turbans

In the districts around Guangzhou, the Red Turban successes continued unchecked until the end of August. After nearly seeing the city fall into rebel hands, the provincial authorities were saved less by their own efforts than by three factors that eventually brought about the defeat of the rebellion. The first was the failure of the rebels to coordinate their activities. This led to a delay in mounting an attack on Guangzhou, in which time the rebels began to grow short of supplies, and the original impetus of the movement was lost. The second factor was the role played by the militia forces organized by the gentry. The threat offered by the revolt had at last convinced the gentry of the necessity of defending their own interests. The first instance of this took place at the end of July, near Sanyuanli 三元里, scene of the famous resistance movement against the British in 1841. There a small force of militia supported Banner troops in an attack against a Red Turban band. Thereafter the gentry-led militia in the area was expanded and prevented the Red Turbans at Foshan from making a vital link-up with other rebels to the north of Guangzhou.⁶² Their success led to the formation

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Imperial imagery was mixed. Chen himself assumed the title of Zhen’nanwang 鎮南王. See *Xunzhou Fuzhi* 潯州府志, 27.5; F.O. 931.1532, 1569 Deposition of the rebel (July 1855).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *Enping Xianzhi* 恩平縣志, 14:7b; *Guangzhou Fuzhi*, 82:10b; *Kaiping Xianzhi* 開平縣志, 21:3a; “Ping’gui jilue 平桂紀略,” Su Fengwen 苏风文 ed., in *Guangdong hongbing qiyi shiliao* 廣東洪兵起義史料 (Guangdong sheng wenshi yanjiuguan, Zhongshan daxue lishi xibian. Guangzhou : Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1992), 772-813; “Gufei zhonglu 股匪總錄,” Su Fengwen ed., in *Hongbing Qiyi shiliao*, 814-840.

⁵⁹ “Ping’gui,” in *Hongbing*, 800-812; Wakeman, *Strangers*, Chapter 14; Jian Youwen 簡又文, *Taiping tianguo quanshi* 太平天國全史, Vol. II, Chaps. 1 and 2.

⁶⁰ See *Dong’guan Xianzhi*, 72.4a; John Scarth, *Twelve Years Years in China: The People, the Rebels, and the Mandarins* (Edinburgh: T. Constable and co., 1860), 229.

⁶¹ F.O. 279A.6.3. Report on annual payments to Banners. (n.d.)

⁶² *Shunde Xianzhi* 順德縣志, 3.2-5.

of other militia forces around Guangzhou. These units, which were to be the principal force for the settlement of the revolt in rural areas, were organized over whole districts, eclipsing the authority of the magistrate in power and prestige.

Although the rebels were numerous in the Pearl River Delta, the gentry were powerful enough to challenge them. As the authorities were helpless, they had no alternative but to allow gentry to proceed independently. Committees were organized and in many cases run by men who had taken the lead in the anti-British movement of the 1840s. Militia forces were raised, and a technique was devised for the systematic clearance of areas of rebel bands. This was followed up by measures to ensure the future order of the area, with control in the hands of the gentry.⁶³

The last factor was the part played by foreigners on the suppression of the rebels. In the meantime, the various rebel leaders were again planning another joint attack on Guangzhou in early January 1855 under the leadership of Chen Xianliang who set up the rebel headquarters at Xinzao 新造 (Blenheim Reach). From the east Lin Guanglong was to sail up the Pearl River with 145 junks; He Liu and his fleet were to attack from the south. The combined forces of Kan Xian and Zhou Chun 周春 including about 20 junks, were to attack from the west. Finally Li Wenmao was to attack from the north.⁶⁴ The strength of these rebel groups combined was certainly very impressive, so much so that the Governor-General, Ye Mingchen had to ask British help desperately.⁶⁵ Ye had been asking the British help since the beginning of December, 1854. He made the request that the British ships of war which were 'also in the river for purposes of protection' should join in the suppression of 'the thieves in this river.'⁶⁶ Even though Britain's initial answer to this request was to insist that Britain continues to observe strict neutrality, they eventually sent naval forces when the situation got worse. The mere presence of foreign vessels was alone sufficient to limit the rebels' freedom of maneuver on the river. Now, the Qing army was able to defend Guangzhou successfully with the supplements of ammunition and food from the foreign merchants.⁶⁷ The Red Turbans could not consolidate its position against the increasing help given by the foreign merchants to the Imperial army, and was eventually forced to disperse.

After some disorganized fumbling, the authorities mustered several thousand troops to deal with the rebels. Included among them were reinforcements from a formidable Qing general Shen Dihui 沈楦輝, hundreds of specifically recruited Chaozhou 潮州 mercenary, militia from the Ninety-six Villages and an augmented personal militia of a military *Juren* 舉人, Zhu Guoxing 周國興. In March 1855, the siege of Xinzao 新造 had been lifted and the city of Foshan had been recaptured.⁶⁸ Guangzhou was at last saved. Chen Kai and Li Wenmao chose to avoid direct confrontations with government troops as much as he could. They moved toward Guangxi with their men as reinforcements poured in and established the "Dacheng Kingdom (Dachengguo 大成國)" in Xunzhou 潯州.⁶⁹

The other Red Turban armies such as the band of He Liu, Chen Jingang 陳金剛,⁷⁰ and Zhou Chun 周春 (alias Dou Pichun 豆皮春)⁷¹ were also repulsed and their flight now described a rough arc: first they moved north through Yizhang 宜章, Chenzhou 郴州 and Guiyangzhou 桂陽州 of Hunan province for a final stand. Government troops, mostly those under the command of Wang Xin 王鑫, were in constant

⁶³ Wakeman, *Strangers*, p. 144.

⁶⁴ Jian, *Quanshi*, pp. 859-60.

⁶⁵ "Heshan Maishi zupu ji yutu jishi lunlue 鹤山麦氏族谱及輿图记事论略," Mai Bingjun 麦秉钧 ed., in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 1016-1017.

⁶⁶ F.O. 17.218, Desp. 230, Bowring-Claredon, 11 (Dec. 1854).

⁶⁷ Various aspects of British assistance to Qing officials during the Tiandihui siege of Guangzhou are documented in both British and Qing sources. See F.O. 17.218, Des. 230, Incl., Bowring-Ye, (11 Dec. 1854); Scarth, *Twelve*, p. 278; "Heshan Maishi," in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 1016-1017; Luo Ergang, *Taiping tianguo shiliao kaoshiji* 太平天國史料考釋集, (Beijing: Shanlian, 1956), p. 143; *North China Herald*, No. 301 (May 3, 1856), and No. 359 (June 13, 1857); Thomas T. Meadows, *The Chinese and Their Rebellions*, (London: Smith, Elder, 1856), 453; Jian, *Quanshi*, 2, appendix to ch. 11, illustration 7.

⁶⁸ Jian, *Quanshi*, pp. 859-60.

⁶⁹ F.O. 68.4.12, 253A.6.37, 279A.6.37, 327.2.32, 391.3.54 (1855).

⁷⁰ "Gufei zonglu," in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 836; "Sihui Xianzhi 四会县志," in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 1593-1594.

⁷¹ "Zhen'geshi biji 枕戈氏笔记," in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 853.

pursuit of the rebels.⁷² The Red Turbans periodically paused to attack towns, but without success. For the most part, they just tried to stay ahead of their pursuers. He Liu was killed in action on January 3, 1856 near Chenzhou and the rebel ranks thinned steadily in combat. Kan Xian led remnants of the band back to Guangdong by a roundabout route and was himself killed near Huaxian on September.⁷³

In early 1856, Qing forces had an easy time of it, and took their revenge on the helpless civilian population in the villages surrounding Guangzhou. Some claimed that a million people were killed in the "White Terror" on suspicion of having been connected to the rising. Ye Mingchen, the Governor-General, himself set the example for merciless repression by boasting that he had been responsible for the deaths of 100,000 rebels.⁷⁴

4) The Nature of the Rebellion

The Composition of the Red Turban Rebels

What social groups or classes then dominated the Red Turban forces? It is difficult to be precise about the social composition of Red Turban followers. Sasaki Masaya dismisses them as a group of vagrants, monks, sorcerers, and artisans.⁷⁵ On the other hand, Maeda Katsutaro states that rebel groups assembled several tens of thousands of poor people, presumably peasants to oppose the tax abuse.⁷⁶ The leadership of the Red Turban rebel groups is certainly of critical importance in any assessment of its character. Among the rebel leaderships, there were fortune-tellers, bean-cake sellers, carpenters, sailors, actors, barbers, blacksmiths, rice pounders, miners, medicine men, merchants who dealt in illegal trade such as smuggled salt and opium, hired laborers, robbers, pirates, pawnshop owners, and members of the lower intellectual class such as clerks and graduates of public examinations; to these many more might be added, such as petty officers of the courts, military deserters, runners, peddlers, and smugglers. All these groups were not distinctly separated, but overlapped each other.⁷⁷

There is little doubt that the majority of Red Turban outfits were led by members of the local secret societies. Equally indisputable is the fact that poor and lower constituted the majority of rank and file Red Turban members.⁷⁸ They came to be known as 'the drifting population (*yumin* 游民)'. In brief, members of

⁷² "Qing Wenzong Xianfeng Shilu 清文宗咸丰实录," in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 1152-53.

⁷³ "Yahu Caoshi zupu 雅湖曹氏族谱," Cao Fengzhen 曹凤贞 ed., in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 851.

⁷⁴ According to Yong Kweng's account, *Sohak Dongjumki*, 75,000 people were executed by Ye's order in Guangzhou only and more than half of these people were not directly related to the Red Turban rebellions. See, Yong Kweng 容闳, *Sohak dongjumki* 西學東漸記, Kwon, Heechul. tran. (Seoul: Ulyumoonhwasa, 1974), pp. 63-65. See also G. W. Cooke, *China: being 'The Times' special correspondence from China in the years 1857-8, with corrections and additions*, (London, 1858), 407; Wakeman, "Secret Societies," 246.

⁷⁵ Sasaki Masaya, "Kampo yonen Kanton Tenchikai no haran 咸豐四年廣東天地會の反亂," in *Kindai Chugoku Kenkyu Senta iho* 近代中國研究センタ彙報, 2.3 (1963).

⁷⁶ Maeda Katsutaro 前田勝泰郎, "Shindai no Kanton ni okeru nomin toso no kiban 清代廣東における農民斗争の基盤," in *Toyo gekuho* 東洋學報, 51 (March 1969), 1-38.

⁷⁷ Chesneau justified these people semi-proletarian intellectuals or impoverished semi-proletarian vagrants who had fled from their home villages. For instance, a principal Red Turban leader, Li Wenmao, was a wandering actor, and many other Red Turban leaders were semi-proletarian vagrants. Some of these vagrants were drawn to the search for a new political authority because of many setbacks that they had encountered after leaving their native places; others embraced a political vision because their social or occupational positions allowed them to see the degenerate reality of the ruling state. These people inhabited a world very different from that of the peasants involved in local rent and tax resistance, for even the poorest tenant was tied to his land and even the propertyless cultivator clung to the plot he rented in order to go on living. The objective conditions that brought them to the leadership of political rebellions were supplied by the great mass of desperate marginalized vagrants who were appearing in greater numbers in nineteenth century. See *Ibid*; Lu, *Liang'guang de Tiandihui*, 133-142; Jean Chesneau, *Secret Societies in China in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971); See also Table 1, Occupation of the major Red Turban leaders in Guangdong, 1854-1855.

⁷⁸ Wang Tianjiang's study reveals that the bulk of secret societies in the nineteenth century was composed of six main types of social person; dispossessed peasants, artisans, small traders, small owner-mangers of various land and water transport vehicles, laborers or porters, and disbanded soldiers of the Taiping and

secret societies tended to come directly from those classes of society conspicuous for their poverty, their despised occupation and their inferior inscriptive status, which also implied an absence of effective kinship ties. For this drifting population most of whom were likely to be men of an economically lower status, secret societies were sometimes explicitly political tools, to be wielded against the local authorities or even the dynasty, either for reform or –more likely—rebellion. Table 1 presents information on the occupational background of thirty-four major rebel leaders. Over eighty percent of these leaders were from the rootless sector—disbanded soldiers, strolling player, local toughs, vagrants, etc.⁷⁹

Table 1: Occupation of the major Red Turban leaders in Guangdong, 1854-1855⁸⁰

Occupation	Names	Number
Artisan	Zhu Hongying 朱洪英 Chen Jingang 陳金剛	2
Bandits	Chen Songnian 陳松年 Gao Mingyuan 高明遠 Chen Liangkang 陳娘康 Fan Yayin 范亞音 Chen Zhiguang 陳志廣 Liang Peiyu 梁培友	6
Boxers	Chen Kai 陳開 Di Huagu 翟火姑 Huang Zhenshan 黃鎮山 Zhang Jiexiang 張嘉祥 Yao Xinchang 姚新昌	5
Fortune Teller	Gu Shengyang 古聲揚	1
Low Degree Holders	Wu Lingyun 吳凌雲 Zhou Yingnian 周永年	2
Monks	Heshang Neng 和尚能 Seng Liang 僧亮	2
Not Known	Yin Changying 尹昌英 Zou Xinmao 鄒新茂 Deng Xingque 鄧興雀 Liang Xianfu 梁獻甫	4
Servant	Su He 蘇賀 Lu Cuijin 呂翠晉	2
Soldiers	Guan Ju 關鉅 He Mingke 何名科 Huang Jinliang 黃金亮 He Wan 何晚 Zhang Gaoyou 張高友 Huang Dingfeng 黃鼎鳳 Feng Liu 馮六	7
Strolling Player	Li Wenmao 李文茂	1
Toughs	Tanya Erman 覃亞兒滿 Li Shibao 李石保	2

Many rebel followers were famine refugees, another fruitful source of recruits when they failed to find work at the end of their wanderings. What most characterized these rebels was their landlessness. The

imperial forces. See Wang Tianjiang 王天獎, “19shiji xiaban de zhongguo di mimi shehui 19 世纪下半的中国地秘密社会,” *Lishi Yanjiu* 历史研究 (Beijing, 1963) no. 2, p. 83.

⁷⁹ See Table 1. See also Feiling Davis, *Primitive Revolutionaries of China: A Study of Secret Societies in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1971), 93. Feiling includes the following list of 39 Guangzhou Tiandihui leaders which was confiscated by officials in 1855: Number of Salaried Workers – 10, of Small Traders [Peddlers?] – 8, of Farmers – 6, of Fishermen – 5, of Artisans – 5, of Mendicants – 2, of Smugglers – 1, of Minor government employees – 1, of Gentry – 1, and of Total – 39.

⁸⁰ Source: Lu, *Liang'guang de Tiandihui*, 134-142.

landless were accordingly the “out” class in much of rural China, forced to live on the outskirts of the village, and subject to various kinds of discrimination.⁸¹ Unable to accumulate wealth or to access the accepted avenues of social advancement, people like these had nothing to lose and everything to gain from a confrontation. The decision to become a secret society member, soldier, bandit, or a rebel was less agonizing than usual since there was little alternative.

Besides their generally impoverished conditions, the other features about the social composition of the rebels were their chronic underemployment and high geographic mobility. The Sino-British tensions as well as the shifting of the trade route brought about the decline of exports in Guangzhou, which had a very significant effect upon the economic situation along the Pearl River Delta regions. This meant the unemployment of thousands of people involved in foreign trade, especially of sailors and porters.⁸² The question of hunger probes the important issues of poverty, misery, and marginalization. Following passage from the *Xianfengchao chou ban yi wu shi mo* 咸豐朝籌辦夷務始末 reveals the desperation that drove these people:

At present the bandits along the West and North Rivers have not been pacified. Yet trade between us and the barbarians has long been stagnant. The sailors and the porters, being poverty-stricken people, when they are once unemployed do not have other means of making a living, and are forced to join the bandits.⁸³

The lack of adequate employment opportunities accounts in a large measure for the high geographic mobility of these men. Table 2 from my research on the Foreign Office Archives shows us that in a group of thirty-nine convicted rebels, twenty-nine men had joined a rebel group outside their native counties, and the rest had joined within their native county. These were exactly the sorts of people—hired workers, porters, peddlers, boatmen, itinerant actors, fortune tellers, etc.—who were constantly traveling up and down the rivers and roads, and who were the most apt to seek the help and protection of brotherhoods while away from their homes.⁸⁴

Table 3 also allows us to paint a socio-demographic portrait of the Red Turban members. The Red Turbans had no apparent restrictions on recruiting their forces. The rebel participants ranged widely in age and even several women were allowed to join the rebel forces.⁸⁵ As presented in Table 3, the youngest in their early twenties and the oldest in their late forties. However, most members were predominantly adult males aged between twenty and thirty-two years old. According to the records of twenty rebel leaders captured by the government in *Hongbing Qiyi Shiliao*, most of rebel followers were from the poor and marginalized immigrants who did not have local kinship ties; nine had no living parents and siblings, twelve were never married, and only three had living parents and siblings.⁸⁶ Lacking family or village ties, linked to the regional market or even to the road itself, their rootlessness made rebellion a relatively easy decision when an economic downturn destroyed the system's cohesion.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Martin C. Yang, *A Chinese Village, Taitou, Shantung Province* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945).

⁸² Zhuang Jifa also found that most of the men who joined the secret societies in the nineteenth century were poor people who had difficulties in earning an adequate living. Most secret society members were men who did not hold steady employment, whose work was very precarious and unpredictable, and whose families were landless. See, Zhuang Jifa, *Qingdai mimi huidang*, pp. 1793-175.

⁸³ *Xianfengchao chou ban yi wu shi mo* 咸豐朝籌辦夷務始末 40 juan (Beijing, 1928 reprint), 19:8b.

⁸⁴ See Table 2.

⁸⁵ One of powerful rebel leader, Di Huagu 翟火姑 is a good example of female rebel participant. See Wu Bingheng 吳秉衡, “Xinfeng shouchengji shilue 信豐守城記事略,” in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 1126-27.

⁸⁶ *Hongbing Qiyi*, 95-129.

⁸⁷ They were men whose interests and activities usually transcended the local marketing districts and whose organizational visions were therefore sometimes as wide as those of the local population. Without the burdens of the family and with their ambition, strength, and unhampered openness to new ideas and challenges, they were a ready store of potential followers for any martial adventure.

Table 2: Place of Origin of the Rebels Captured in Qujiang County.⁸⁸

Place of Origin	Number
Qujiangxian 曲江縣	10
Huaxian 花縣	8
Nanhaixian 南海縣	6
Yingdexian 英德縣	1
Qingyuanxian 清源縣	2
Dabuxian 大埔縣	1
Renhuaxian 仁花縣	1
Nanxiongzhou 南雄州	1
Jiayingzhou 嘉應州	1
Shixingxian 始興縣	2
Hepingxian 和平縣	1
Nankangxian 南康縣 (Jiangxi 江西)	1
Changningxian 長寧縣 (Jiangxi 江西)	1
Ganxian 贛縣 (Jiangxi 江西)	1
Guiyangxian 桂陽縣 (Hunan 湖南)	1
Yizhangxian 宜章縣 (Hunan 湖南)	1

Table 3: Age Distribution of Red Turban Rebels Captured in Yingde County.⁸⁹

Age	No.	Age	No.
23	2	24	3
25	1	27	5
28	3	32	11
33	1	34	1
35	2	36	1
37	2	38	1
40	1	42	1
43	1	45	1
47	1	Total Number	39

The Red Turban method of recruiting seemed to follow the tradition of the Tiandihui, attracting volunteers and compelling others to join.⁹⁰ Numerous accounts in government sources tell us that the Red Turbans used generous distributions of money and food to the plebeians in order to enlist new members. After sacking government treasuries and private pawnshops, the Red Turbans distributed part of the booty to the people to win the hearts of the people.⁹¹ For example, the Red Turban leader, Chen Kai wasted very little time once he had taken Foshan. In his proclamation, he promised good treatment to the local population, officials, and officers if they offer no resistance.⁹² Despite his connection with the Tiandihui, Chen relied largely upon secular slogans to rally his followers. His call for an end to extraordinary tax levies was a far more potent source of support than his Ming restorationism.⁹³ Many families were in arrears, and

⁸⁸ Source: F.O. 931.1753 List of 39 Rebels (n.d.).

⁸⁹ Source: F.O. 931.1729 List of 35 Rebels (n.d.).

⁹⁰ Members were recruited to the Triads in a number of ways: by voluntary enlistment or persuasion, or, failing this, sometimes by blackmail, physical threat or kidnapping. See Gustave Schlegel, *Thian Ti Hwui: The Hung League or Heaven-Earth League* (Batavia: Lange and Co., 1866), pp. 57-8.

⁹¹ *Xiangshan Xianzhi* 香山顯志, 22.58; *Shunde Xianzhi*, 23.6.

⁹² F.O. 931.1476 A Proclamation by Chen Kai (Nov. 29 1854).

⁹³ Given the historical connection to the pro-Ming stance, one can assume that the Red Turban Rebellion expressed a simple desire to oust the Qing and return to Ming rule. However, when we examine more closely the rebel force, it is more difficult to determine the nature of the ideology of the rebels. With the exception of the banners, there is no explicit expression of pro-Ming sentiment in rebel confessions or other accounts of the mass action. For egalitarian slogan and policy of the rebels, see F.O. 931.1440 A Red Turban Proclamation; F.O. 931.1466 Proclamation of Chen Kai (Aug. 27, 1854); F.O. 931.1477; "Tao Daqing xiwen 討大清檄文," in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 38-39; "Oath Taken by Members of the Triad Society, and Notices of Its Origin," *The Chinese Repository*, Vol. XVIII, no. 6 (June, 1849), Article 7. For the terms

dissatisfaction was widespread. In his proclamations, Chen railed against the harsh tax burden and other abuses perpetrated by the government. He abolished surcharges and remitted the land tax for three years, after which it was to be collected at the basic rate. One source states that he acquired several thousand followers in this way.⁹⁴ More often, however, the Red Turban rebels forced young men to fight for them. According to a local gazetteer, *Foshan Zhongyi xiangzhi*, “Wherever the Red Turban bandits went, they set houses on fire and forced men into their service.”⁹⁵

During periods of widespread uprisings and social unrest, as was the case in 1854, whole communities joined in the disturbances. At such times rebel forces were flooded with new recruits made up of the normally settled peasant farmers, and not just the rootless poor. Much of the initial Red Turban success was due to sudden switches of allegiance by the local people. Whole villages and blocs of villages might hoist the red flag and temporarily join the insurrectionist camp.⁹⁶ Some did this probably out of patriotic Chinese anti-Manchu sentiments, but the majorities were primarily concerned with their own security or motivated by the thought of gain. Depending on the specific context, joining the insurrectionists might afford advantages in the conduct of inter-clan or inter-village relations.⁹⁷ Similarly, the non-joiners were not all motivated by reasons of loyalty to the Manchus or to the established order; they might simply be acting in accordance with their own interests.⁹⁸

While forces of the Red Turbans seem certainly to have come largely from the humbler segments of society, rebels also managed to recruit several members of the local elite. Certainly, the principal Red Turban leaders, for instance, He Liu and Li Wenmao, were illiterates, and many other Red Turban leaders were also uneducated.⁹⁹ However, although bravery was essential for fighting, brains were needed for planning. This need was filled by a number of scholars, some of whom had received the first degree through civil service examination.¹⁰⁰ They commanded great prestige and honor from the commoners. Unemployment, government pressure, heavy taxation, or illicit fees drove such scholars to serve the rebels.

These political advisers changed the nature of some Tiandihui leaders to rebel kings. A notable example of the work of these scholars was evidenced in “Lü Zigui gongci 呂子桂供詞,” a Qing official records in Guangzhou. Chen Kai proclaimed himself as “Zhen’nanwang 鎮男王 (Guardian King of South)” which was planned by a bachelor (*xiucai* 秀才), Lü Zigui 呂子桂.¹⁰¹ He helped Chen perform the ceremony by sacrificing to heaven and earth; they drew up regulations and formed the military systems. Chen Kai also rewarded his chief lieutenants with titles and offices, issued proclamations, stepped up his recruitment efforts and finally created his own kingdom, Dacheng’guo in 1855.¹⁰² The military adviser for Chen Kai’s rebel kingdom was also a stipendiary *shengyuan* 生員, Chen Dingxun 陳鼎勳.¹⁰³

Certainly there were some local elite participated in rebellions but the image of rebels mainly composed by ‘drifting population (*yumin*)’ still emerges as the dominant one. However, merely depicting the social background of the rebel participants is not sufficient to show the real picture of its composition. A discussion of the groups according to their dialect would give us a much clearer understanding of the significance of the Red Turban Rebellion. The Qing archival records used in this study reveal very interesting facts that shed much light on the identities of rebel participants. Several evidences show that the

related to Ming restorationism, see F.O. 931.1531 Proclamation by “Commander in Chief for the Restoration of Ming,” (1855); “Daming Douyuanshuai xiwen 大明都元帥檄文,” in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 50-51; “Fuming zongbing dayuanshuai hong gaoshi, 復明總兵大元帥洪告示,” in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 61.

⁹⁴ *Xunzhou Fuzhi* 27.4-5.

⁹⁵ *Foshan Zhongyi xiangzhi* 佛山忠義鄉志, 11.14.

⁹⁶ *Xiangshan Xianzhi*, 15.30-40; *Huizhou Fuzhi*, 18.25; *Guangzhou Fuzhi*, 82.8.4.

⁹⁷ Wakeman, “Secret Societies,” 34-35.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*; “Shundexian huifeilan duanyuanyou 順德縣會匪亂端緣由.” in Sasaki, *Shinmatsu no himitsu kessha .Shiryō hen*, 51; *Xu’nanhai Xianzhi* 續南海縣志, 21.4.

⁹⁹ *Dong’guan Xianzhi*, 35.4; *Xunanhai Xianzhi*, 26.13, 18.14; *Fanyu Xianzhi*, 22.27.

¹⁰⁰ There are some instances of lower degree holders working with the rebels. See Jian, *Quanshi*, vol. 2, 824; *Nanhai Xianzhi*, 15.12a; F.O. 931.1500. A note on gentry rebel who had led rebels in an attack on Xinhui (1850s).

¹⁰¹ “Lü Zigui gongci 呂子桂供詞,” in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 108-110; Xu, *Ling’nan*, 236.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Yulin zhouzhi* 鬱林州志, 18.60.

social composition of the Red Turban rebels was no simple, static matter, but rather tempered by regional variation.¹⁰⁴ For instance, the local Tiandihui lodges often took advantage of other ongoing feuds to enhance their position. One of the most enduring such feuds was the ethnic struggle between the Punti and the Hakka in the *wuyi* regions.¹⁰⁵ Even though the Hakka had been falsely accused by the Punti of being Red Turban rebels,¹⁰⁶ archival records of the rebel participants in Central Guangdong such as the local gazetteers from Enping and Kaiping counties,¹⁰⁷ on the contrary, show that one group of people stands out because they are mostly absent: the Hakka.¹⁰⁸ There were certainly some Hakkas among the Red Turbans but most of the Hakka rebel participants were from Eastern Guangdong.¹⁰⁹ But in view of what happened later, there seems no doubt that, in the districts to the west of Guangzhou, the *wuyi* regions, most of the rebels were the Punti.¹¹⁰

The Tiandihui memberships were more numerous in the *wuyi* regions during the mid-nineteenth century, in part because the mass emigrations of the early nineteenth century, when millions fled from starvation. These new settlers provided eager recruits for the protection that Tiandihui membership offered, and might even utilize their Tiandihui affiliations to launch attacks against their more long-standing neighbors, the Hakkas. The Hakkas might well form militias aiding Qing forces in turn, to secure once again greater organizational and numerical strength against the newcomers.¹¹¹

Red Turban efforts to recruit *wuyi* people increased in 1855 and continued in the period immediately following the first Tiandihui attack on Guangzhou. However, interethnic hostility proved to be more powerful than either the Tiandihui "cause" or general popular animosity toward the Qing state. In late 1854, ethnic strife pushed the Punti tenants and vagabonds in *Heshan* county into an open rebellion under the guidance of Liang Peiyou. Although local details of rebel organization in the *Heshan* at the time are scarce, sources clearly indicated that Punti resentment of the Hakka have been a subsidiary cause of the Red Turban Rebellion.¹¹²

In this sense, ethnicity was central to the cause of the rebellion especially in the *wuyi* regions. At the same time, ethnic division also explains the failure of the rebellion. Before the arrival of Qing forces, the rebels' main opponents were ethnically organized bodies of Hakka militias. Local Tiandihui leader, for instance, Liang Peiyou in Xin'ning could not have raised forces district-wide without the mobilizing power of ethnic anger, and the Qing fight against the Red Turban rebels would have been even more protracted without the aid of the similarly motivated Hakka militia. Red Turban's efforts to forge a pan ethnic alliance

¹⁰⁴ The types of Red Turban groups also varied along with differences in cropping and landholding patterns. For instance, Northeastern Guangdong, with a less productive agriculture based upon wheat, maize, and beans, was the home of more egalitarian Red Turban units in which the leaders—often peasants themselves—were treated as brothers. Central region saw the development of Red Turban units comprised of demobilized soldiers, brigands, and local bullies. On the other hand, the *wuyi* regions of the Central Guangdong, known for productive wet-rice cultivation and high rates of tenancy, saw Punti tenant dominated Red Turban units known as a *tang*. See Yoo, *Kundae*, 258-275.

¹⁰⁵ The term "Hakka" (*kejia* 客家 in Mandarin, meaning literally "guest people") usually indicates an immigrant population in southern China, distinguished from the Punti (*bendiren* 本地人, natives) primarily by dialect. The line of demarcation between the Punti and the Hakkas that lived in some parts of Guangdong (Enping, Gaoming, Heshan, Kaiping, Xinhui, and Xinning) was particularly rigid. Those Hakkas who had migrated to these localities in recent times often faced discrimination by the natives, and readily engaged in constant disputes with the latter.

¹⁰⁶ This accusation was brought by the Punti tenants during their struggles with Hakka tenants in Xin'ning. See *Xin'ning Xianzhi* 14.34b.

¹⁰⁷ *Enping Xianzhi*, 14.7b; *Kaiping Xianzhi*, 21.3a.

¹⁰⁸ According to Luo Baoshan's research, there was only one Hakka rebel leader among twenty-eight major Red Turban rebel leaders. See Luo, *Lun wanqing*, 133-142.

¹⁰⁹ A band of Tiandihui rebels who attacked Kowloon on 19 August 1854 were reported to have been nearly all Hakka stonecutters from Xin'an county. See C.O. 129.47. Governor of Hong Kong to Sir George Grey (Aug. 21, 1854).

¹¹⁰ "Huitang Xiaoxi 會黨消息," Jin Yudi 金毓敏 ed., *Taiping Tianguo shiliao* 太平天國史料 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1953), 497-499.

¹¹¹ *Enping Xianzhi*, 14.7b; *Guangzhou Fuzhi*, 82.10b, *Kaiping Xianzhi*, 21.3a.

¹¹² See *China Mail* 22 May 1856; 10 May 1855; F.O. 228/173

failed, and much of the violence of the rebellion pitted the Punti rebel against the Hakka militias. In this sense, ethnicity was central to both the recruitment success and eventual failure of the rebellion.¹¹³

Qing Forces

As far as that the initial failure of the Qing forces against the Red Turban rebels was concerned, the important factor was the failure at this point of the methods of rural control which the Qing government had employed. The *baojia* 保甲 was intended to prevent the development of disorder in rural areas.¹¹⁴ But to deal with more serious threats to security, the Qing government had at its command a large standing army. This was organized into two great divisions, Banner troops and troops of the Green Standard. Western missionary reports from the China Repository show that in Guangdong the Banner troops, nominally numbering about 5,000, were under the command of the Manchurian General and all stationed at Guangzhou. The Green Standard troops, numbering approximately 70,000, were distributed throughout the province.¹¹⁵ The system of military control had remained largely unchanged since the Manchu conquest, and the disinclination of the Manchus to place complete trust in the Green Standard forces was displayed by the practice of dividing the army into separate commands. The greater part of the forces were under the provincial Commander-in-Chief (提督), and were stationed in Huizhou. Under him also were the naval forces. But both the Governor-General and the Governor had separate forces under their command, the former largely stationed at Zhaoqing 肇慶, and the latter at Guangzhou.¹¹⁶ The situation was further complicated by the fact that, although the military headquarters of the various commands were territorially separate, there was no territorial division of military responsibility, and the forces of each command were distributed throughout the province.

Military garrisons were distributed in most of rural areas of Guangdong; however, there was insufficient protection from the local officials against the threat. While the magistrate had overall responsibility for the security of his district, the forces at his disposal were extremely limited. Military garrisons were not under his command. In order to make arrests, he could use the yamen-runner, who in some ways served as a police force. But if there were any disorder in the district, the magistrate had either to find local aid to deal with it, or to call for assistance from outside, and lay himself open to a charge of incompetence. This problem is rooted in the absence of central government structure below the county level, coupled with laws prohibiting magistrates from serving in their home districts. During the Qing at the village level there were local constables, headmen, and gentry families, and even government units for purposes of taxation, but "no formal government of any sort existed below the *zhou* [department] and *xian* [county] levels."¹¹⁷

In this period, the average county population was 100,000-250,000, a number very difficult to keep under close surveillance.¹¹⁸ To be sure, the district magistrate had subordinates charged with collecting

¹¹³ The Hakkas formed a gentry-led militia similar to the militia around Guangzhou and defeated the rebel forces at the gate of Xin'ning district town that eventually stemmed the rebel tide in this area. See *Xin'ning Xianzhi*, 14.18b-21b.

¹¹⁴ To prevent the development of local disorder, the Qing had continued and improved the sub-administrative apparatus of control that had existed under the Ming. The most important of these was the *baojia*. For Qing government, the *baojia* had two purposes. Under the system all households and individuals were compelled to register and to be formed into groups of households, the *bao* and *jia*. In this respect it resembled a form of census, but at the same time singling out persons responsible for carrying out the system. Its other function, which was probably considered the more important, was the duty imposed on *baojia* heads to report the occurrence of crimes or the existence of criminals in their neighborhood. See Kung-chuan Hsiao, *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960), 43-83.

¹¹⁵ The commander-in-chief of the land forces was stationed at Huizhou. His troops consisted of four brigades (*zhen* 鎮), namely, Shaozhou 韶州, Chaozhou 潮州, Gaozhou and Qiongzhou 瓊州. Humen 虎門, on the other hand, was the headquarters of the marine forces, which consisted of four squadrons, two on each side of Humen along the coast. For details on the distribution of military forces in Guangdong, See *China Repository*, Vol. 4 (1835-6), 284, and Vol. 20 (1851), 54, 254.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Ch'u T'ung-tsu, *Local Government in China under the Ch'ing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 1.

¹¹⁸ Hsiao, *Rural China*, 5.

taxes and information, but they could be bribed or intimidated by powerful local interests, including the secret societies themselves. Other difficulties of county officials described by Chang Chung-li included insufficient staff, lack of funds, and short terms in office, all of which in some situations could lead to unfamiliarity with local conditions.¹¹⁹ With no more than a small constabulary at their immediate command, most magistrates were not equipped to deal with large, well-armed rebels. In any case, from the viewpoint of the average local official, for whom the slightest hint of trouble could mark the end of his career, any attempt to suppress local trouble was extremely perilous; unless sure of success, most magistrates sought to ignore the suppression directives that periodically descended upon them from their less vulnerable superiors.¹²⁰

The incompetence of local magistrates against the threats was only part of the Qing local security problem; the real trouble lay in the soldiers themselves. There had been several cases of Manchu brigadier generals who fled from their posts at the approach of the rebels, but reported that they had won great victories; the lies were later discovered after an investigation by Qing censors. Draft memorials of the Governor-General in the Canton Archives show many false reports of provincial officers.¹²¹ Often brigadier generals were too old to totter along, but they were still commanders at the front. For instance, two officers each commanded more than one thousand cavalry, all of whom had been in the war for more than ten years; they were tired, ill, and home sick, and they had no desire to fight.¹²² The Green Standards, too, had deteriorated. They were in arrears on pay for years on end. And without good officers, the soldiers became inefficient. The guard posts on land, nevertheless, disintegrated. By the mid-nineteenth century, a Western eyewitness, the Reverend Krone, wrote that on his visit to some of them, 'he found neither guns nor soldiers', and that 'the places themselves showed no signs of fortification save a dilapidated wall'.¹²³

The average county garrison numbered between 150 and 300 soldiers raised from among the young men of the county, whose main responsibility was to ensure security within the county boundaries.¹²⁴ When troubles were reported in outlying areas these troops were supposed to take independent action to suppress the rebels. However, the local garrison, apart from a few well-meaning youths who volunteered to protect their home county, generally attracted the same rough sorts who would join the rebel forces or the government army. Indeed, the same man could even be bandit one day and soldier the next. At worst, someone in the magistrate's office itself might even be in collusion with the rebels, selling them information about suppression plans.¹²⁵ What happened at Foshan may serve as a good example. On 25 May 1855, three suspects were arrested during a house-to-house check. The suspects confessed that they were soldiers from a company stationed in the neighborhood, but at the same time they were members of the

¹¹⁹ Chang Chung-li, *The Chinese Gentry* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955), pp.52-53

¹²⁰ One can find herein another reason—government negligence and connivance—for the rebels' continuation and development. In 1803 the Jiaqing emperor said that since avaricious officials took advantage of people's legal disputes and feuds for the purpose of blackmail, the people first resented, then hated, and finally fought against the officials. "Are the people to be blamed for their conduct?" the emperor queried. "They were actually incited by local officials." The emperor noticed that, because the disorders in a district would bring disgrace and penalty to the magistrate, many local officials in recent years had ignored important local disorder cases. This was especially true in later period in Humen where the oppressiveness of the garrison soldiers had led many local people to join secret societies, eventually resulting in armed attacks on the soldiers. See Wakeman, "Secret Societies," 36; F.O. 931.1163 A report on the longstanding hostility between the soldiers garrisoned at Humen and the local population. (1850s).

¹²¹ For instance, a Provincial judge, Xu Xiang'guang 徐祥光 was impeached by Governor-General, Ye Mingchen for bad military organization, false victory reports regarding the fall and recovery of Xingan, and corruption. See F.O. 931.1412 Draft Memorial of Ye Mingchen (Nov. 20, 1853). F.O. 931.1395 A confidential letter from the prefect of Huizhou regarding the falsifying reports of the magistrate for exaggerating a military emergency and shunning responsibilities.

¹²² F.O. 931.1662 An Edict regarding a case of alleged negligence by Qing forces. (Oct. 6, 1857); F.O. 931.1760 List of soldiers and an officer who interfered with official matters. (n.d.).

¹²³ Reverend Mr. Krone, "A notice of the Sanon District," *China Branch, Royal Asiatic Society, Transactions*, (1859), 71-105.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ For instance, a Brigade General, Wang Pengnian 王鵬年 was impeached by Xu Guangjin for his attempt to conceal the facts in connection with a case of piracy. Some minor Xiangshan officials also collaborated with the Red Turban rebels. See F.O. 931.1285 Memorial of Xu Guangjin (April 28, 1851); F.O. 931.1504 A letter reporting on the Red Turbans under Chen Kai (1854).

Tiandihui and had joined the forces of Chen Kai, who occupied the town the year before.¹²⁶ Statements made in the same case provided evidences of the soldiers' drug-addiction, gambling, prostitution, illicit dues, and affiliations with the Tiandihui.¹²⁷ Even greedy soldiers relished the opportunity to collect the loot of the rebels for themselves. For example, during the battle against Chen Ji 陳吉 of Shunde, they immediately fell on the booty left by the rebels who were routed, despite the order to pursue the rebels and wipe them out.¹²⁸

Banner troops stationed at the provincial city had similar problems. The standard of living of the average Banner soldier had declined considerably by the mid-nineteenth century. Groups of idle young Bannermen wander about the city of Guangzhou, provoking trouble wherever they could, became a serious problem. As a result, it was suggested to the Governor-General that he should take advantage of the urgent demand for soldiers during the siege of Guangzhou in 1854 to recruit the jobless Bannermen into a mercenary force attached to their own Banner to strengthen the defense of the city.¹²⁹

In late 1854, Red Turban rebels appeared everywhere in the Pearl River Delta, where 15,000 government troops had long been concentrated; the soldiers fought poorly, however, for they had not received any pay for a long time. The total number of soldiers then available in Guangdong province was less than 5,000, and, since the generals cared only for the protection of their own provinces, the isolated units were frequently surrounded and harassed by their foe.¹³⁰ For instance, Ye Mingchen in 1855 made a sharp complaint to the throne against the Qing forces from other provinces. He said that he could not command any troops in the neighboring provinces, and the soldiers were either still at their original stations or had purposely slowed down in their movements so that others might go first and bear the brunt of fighting. Thus no other governor paid much attention to the strong forces of the Red Turban in Guangdong.¹³¹ In other words, the incompetence and low morale of the Qing officers and men was one major reason for the prolonged war against the Rebel forces.

But most importantly, the poor relationship between soldiers and civilians was the principal cause for the long delay of military success. For many years the government could not count on civilian support for the imperial soldiers, who did innumerable horrible things to the people. In Guangdong, the situation was certainly bad. The conduct of officials serving in the province was regarded as the basic cause of disorder in the early years of the Red Turban Rebellion:

Where does the source of the present day turbulence lie? It lies in those magistrates that are greedy and cruel. Let us speak of western Guangdong. When disorder had not yet arisen in western Guangdong, officials who held posts in this region...perceiving that the custom there is primitive and the people are ignorant, treated the latter as if they were birds, beasts, or savages that deserve no affection or care.¹³²

The writer goes on to say that superior officials are themselves corrupt, and aid their subordinates, whom they treat as their agents. As a result:

¹²⁶ F.O. 931.1522. Report on three rebels. (1855); F.O. 931.1493 and F.O. 931.1133. Reports on three executed rebels at Foshan (June 1855).

¹²⁷ Ibid. Soldiers and militiamen of the Opium War were discharged when the foreign menace was apparently disposed of after 1849 and many of them became bandits or joined secret societies as soon as they were discharged. According to Wang Tianjiang, there were approximately sixty to seventy percent of the Green Standard and Hunan Armies in the secret societies during the 1860s. See Wang Tianjiang 王天奖, "19shiji xiaban de zhong'guo di mimi shehui 19 世纪下半的中国地秘密社会," *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究 No. 2 (Beijing, 1963), 85-6.

¹²⁸ F.O. 137.6.6. Note on rebellious societies along the coast of Guangdong (c. 1855)

¹²⁹ F.O. 253A.3.22. Five proposals for the defense of Guangzhou (1854).

¹³⁰ Guangzhou supposed to have 5,000 Banner troops, 4,000 Green Standard troops, 2,000 mercenaries from Chaozhou and 4,000 mercenaries from Dong'guan. However, more than two thirds of the troops were temporarily disabled because of on-going troubles in rural areas and in neighboring province. For instance, upwards of 3,000 soldiers were sent to fight the Taipings in Hunan and many were also transferred to north Guangdong to fight against the rebels. See F.O. 17.217. Desp. 59, Incl., Morrison's report (Nov. 9, 1854); F.O. 931. 1098 A list of officers and numbers of troops (1850s).

¹³¹ F.O. 931.1609 Ye to Commander-in-chief of Guangxi (1855); Jian, *Quanshi*, 852.

¹³² *Guangzhou Fuzhi*, 129.24b, quoted by Hsiao, *Rural China*, pp. 469-70.

The local people have hated them all in the depth of their hearts for a long time. As soon as the crisis comes and the alarm is sounded wicked elements take advantage of the situation [and start a revolt]. Vagabonds join them; and ignorant, destitute people, after having been subjected to some pressure [applied by the rebels] and having found it impossible to get food, follow them gladly. The conditions for a great upheaval are thus brought to completion.¹³³

Of course, famine and economic depression were also factors facilitating the Red Turban development. The worst floods along the Pearl River during the years of 1852 and 1853, for instance, compelled many helpless people to turn to Tiandihui groups.¹³⁴ The inflation of silver, the devaluation of coins, and the rapid increase of prices for daily commodities affected the Pearl River Delta areas. During the widespread famine of 1853 and 1854, rural insurgents led by local Tiandihui lodges simply overran the countryside.¹³⁵

Taiping Connection

Another opportunity for the development of the Red Turbans was the Taiping rebellion. There is no doubt that the advent of the Taiping had a considerable effect on most of China. It encouraged the spread of rebellion even among those who knew little or nothing about its ideology. It certainly did so in Guangdong as well. The Qing government was mortally afraid that the Taiping would link up with the Red Turban rebels and magically transform them into a military juggernaut. In the sources, an occasional statement can even be found to the effect that the Taiping leaders instructed the Red Turban leaders and others on tactics and molded them into effective troops. A memorial of Ye Mingchen said, 'The rebellious bandits of Jiangnan had secretly sent their cohorts back to Guangdong to get all evil elements in league with them and start riots at the same time. Gaoming, Shunde, Huilai and other districts and the city of Chaoqingfu had been lost to them.'¹³⁶ Inspired by the Taipings' triumph at Nanjing, and encouraged by Hong's envoys, the local Tiandihui lodges launched the Red Turban rebellion in 1854 at Dong'guan.¹³⁷ If the Taipings had not been well settled in Nanjing, the Red Turbans would not have been so daring and so successful in taking many cities.

Certainly there were a number of observable similarities between the Taipings and the Red Turbans and some leading leaders gave the Red Turbans a ready welcome as recruits. For instance, both shared a hatred for the Manchus, went unshaven, wore clothing after the style of the late Ming dynasty, and dressed their heads with red turbans. These various facts demonstrate substantial Taiping influence over the Red Turban rebellions.¹³⁸ Both groups were able fighters in the eyes of the imperial government, and

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ The summer of 1853, Guangdong had the worst floods ruining many crops that eventually led much of rural population into starvations. See *Daqing lichao shilu, Xianfengchao*, 67.19 Imperial Edict (Sept. 11, 1852); Idem., 104.25. Imperial Edict (Sep. 26, 1853).

¹³⁵ Records in local gazetteers during the 1850s give enough evidence to show that climatic calamities fell upon almost the entire area of the Pearl River Delta. See *Guangzhou Fuzhi*, 163.35b-36b; *Huizhou Fuzhi*, 18.21b; *Deqing Zhouzhi* 德清州志, 15.29a; *Xin'ning Xianzhi*, 14.18a.

¹³⁶ See Yong Kweng, *Sohak*, 63; "Taipingtianguo chun'guan zheng chengxiang zhuodeng zhi Folingshi tongbing dayuanshuai Lideng diewen 太平天国春官正丞相桌等致佛岭市统兵大元帅李等牒文," in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 62-63; F.O. 682.340B/12; F.O. 931.1599 Note concerning interrogation of Gan Xian 甘先.

¹³⁷ It was undeniable fact that the Red Turban rebels grasped opportunity to rise up created by the success of the Taipings. See Yong, *Sohak*, 63; F.O. 931.1394 A report from the acting prefect of Chaozhou to Governor of Guangdong. (June 9, 1853).

¹³⁸ Some Red Turban rebel groups tried to imitate the Taipings in their imperial ambitions. For instance, Chen Kai adopted presumptuous titles of kings and symbols of flags that have been approximately the same as the Taipings. The flags and uniforms of the Red Turbans were largely imitations in color and style of the Taipings' flags and uniforms. After occupying Huaxian, Chen Kai even put the characters on his flag, "Heavenly King of the Taiping Kingdom 太平天國正命天王." See Luo Baoshan 骆宝善, "Guangdong Hongbing qiyi luelun 广东洪兵起义略论," in *Lingnan Wenshi* 岭南文史 (Guangzhou: Guangdongsheng wenshi yanjiuguan, 1983), 87; Zhong Zhenwei 钟珍维, "Chen Kai, Li Wenmao lingdaode hongjinjun qiyi 陈开, 李文茂领导的红巾军起义, in *Zhongxue lishi jiaoxue* 中学历史教学 9 (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1958), 17; Cai Xiaoqing, "Lun Taipingtianguo yu Tiandihui guanxi

they were the products of the same general political and social conditions. They both caused the Manchu dynasty a great deal of trouble, and both dealt it near-fatal blows. Yet the differences between the Taipings and the Red Turban rebels were manifold.

The Red Turban's political and military organizations were less mature than those of the Taipings who had a clear political, economic, social, and religious ideology.¹³⁹ The Taipings exercised political and military control over a definite territory, but after 1856, the Red Turbans simply sought food and safety. Although later some Red Turban forces did become allies in the more desperate stages of the fighting against the imperialists, the alliance was born of military necessity and never constituted an organic union. As Hong Xiuquan himself recognized the irreconcilable differences with the Triads, an alliance or partnership between the two organizations was rendered impossible by fundamental differences in political objectives, religious beliefs, and moral ideals and practices:

Though I never entered the Triad Society, I have often heard it said that their object is to subvert the Tsing and restore the Ming dynasty. Such an expression was very proper in the time of Khang-hi (K'ang-his), when this society was at first formed, but now after the lapse of two hundred years, we may still speak of subverting the Tsing, but we cannot properly speak of restoring the Ming. At all events, when our native mountains and rivers [the Empire] are recovered, a new dynasty must be established. How could we at present arouse the energies of men by speaking of restoring the Ming dynasty? There are several evil practices connected with the Triad Society, which I detest: if any new members enter the society, he [sic] must worship the devil, and utter thirty-six oaths; as sword is placed upon his neck, and he is forced to contribute money for the use of the society. Their real object has now turned very mean and unworthy. If we preach the true doctrine [Christianity], and rely upon the powerful help of God, a few of us will equal a multitude of others. I do not even think that Sun-pin, Woo-khi, kung-ming [sic], and others famous in history for their military skills and tactics, are deserving much estimation, how much less these bands of the Triad Society.¹⁴⁰

There is no doubt that splinter groups of Taiping did come in contact with the Red Turban rebels.¹⁴¹ But the relationship was not always harmonious and was rarely close. The earliest contact between the Taipings and the Guangdong Tiandihui groups occurred in 1851, through Ling Shiba's revolt.¹⁴² After Ling's revolt, the Taipings apparently sent agencies to stir up rebellions in Guangdong; however, no formal alliance with the Tiandihui groups was concluded. This was a time when the Taipings were at the height of their strength; cooperation with a motley group of local secret societies in Guangdong probably seemed a liability to be avoided.¹⁴³ However, several years later the situation had changed dramatically. The Taipings suffered from serious internal dissension and severe military losses. Inasmuch as the Red Turbans had also undergone a series of defeats, it was to the advantage of both groups to effect an alliance.

After the failure of their insurrections in Guangzhou areas, some of the Red Turban groups of such leaders as Ge Yaoming 葛耀明 and Zhou Chun marched northward to Jiangxi and captured a few cities. But their real hope was to join Shi Dakai 石達開 for the protection offered by numbers and Shih was equally

論太平天國與天地會關係,” *Zhong'guo jindai huitangshi yanjiu* 中國近代會黨史研究, 158-171; Luo, “Taiping tianguo shiqi,” 54.

¹³⁹ For good summaries on this, see Vincent Y. C. Shih, *The Taiping ideology: its sources, interpretations, and influences*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967); Teng Ssu-yu, *New Light on the history of Taiping Rebellion*, (New York, Russell & Russell, 1966); Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973).

¹⁴⁰ Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen, and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection*, Hong Kong, *China Mail*, 1854, 55-56

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* Some members of the Tiandihui, including Ling Shiba, Luo Da'gang, and Zhang Zhao joined the Taipings at different times.

¹⁴² *Xinyi Xianzhi* 新宜縣志, 8.4; Guo Tingyi 郭廷以, *Taiping tianguo shishi rizhi* 太平天國史事日誌 (Taipei: Shangwu Printing Co., 1976), p. 73. .

¹⁴³ At this time, the Taipings rigidly rebuffed alliances with the ‘impure’ pro-Ming secret society lodges. A point well put in Philip Kuhn's volume, *Rebellion and its enemies in late imperial China, militarization and social structure, 1796-1864*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

anxious to assemble their great numbers under his banner for the increase of Taiping strength.¹⁴⁴ The Red Turbans were also encouraged to take large-scale, seditious actions by Luo Dagang 羅大綱 in Qianjiang 遷江 and Liu Lichuan 劉麗川 in Shanghai.¹⁴⁵ In response to the call of their former friend, Luo Dagang, Hu Youlu 胡有祿 and Zhu Hongying 朱洪英 fought their way from Guangxi to Hunan, with the aim of reaching Nanjing. They were followed by Chen Kai and Li Wenmao. These Red Turban forces, joined by He Liu's unit from Guangzhou, occupied Chenzhou 郴州 and Guiyang 貴陽 in southern Hunan in the summer of 1855. But they were defeated in September by the Hunan army, commanded by Liu Changyou 劉長佑 (1818-87), who later became governor-general of Zhili 直隸.¹⁴⁶ Hu Youlu and his followers were annihilated, but other columns of secret-society forces fought their way to Jiangxi.¹⁴⁷

In Jiangxi they were welcomed by Shih Dakai. The combined forces of the Taipings and the Red Turban rebels occupied Ruizhou 瑞州 for more than two years and caused people much trouble.¹⁴⁸ They conquered Jian 吉安 and other districts in Jiangxi. The other Tiandihui headquarters in Chenzhou was not recovered by the Hunan army until January 1856. Soon, Hong Dachuan's (洪大全 alias Jiao Liang 焦亮) wife, Xu Yuegui 許月桂, and younger brother, Jiao San 焦三, who had been powerful leaders in southern Hunan, were also routed and surrendered to the government force. The remaining members were driven back to Guangxi, where the kings of the Kingdom of Great Achievement, Chen Kai and Li Wenmao, reoccupied Wuxuan in April 1856. Li was killed after an abortive assault on Guilin, capital of Guangxi. Chen Kai held his territory three years longer until it was recovered by the new provincial governor, Liu Changyou, with a large, experienced Hunan army. He was finally arrested and executed in August 1861, and the remnants of his force joined Shi Dakai.¹⁴⁹

In sum, some of the Red Turbans allied themselves loosely with some of Taiping forces, but the alliance was most likely nothing more than a brief marriage of convenience. There is clearly little substance to the claim of a close operational connection between the Taiping and the Red Turban rebels. There were a few contacts, some of them prolonged, but nothing more. Some of the men who are said to have been Taiping leaders have dubious credentials for that role. At most, the few substantiated Taiping contacts may occasionally have been of some tactical significance.

Reasons of Red Turban Failure

The Red Turban rebellions failed because of (1) the lack of superior leadership, (2) the disunion among leaders, (3) the shortage of popular support and weapon, (4) the diplomatic failure with foreigners, and (5) the powerful resistances from various militia groups.

The ignorance of the rebel leaders is primarily responsible for the disastrous failure. Red Turban leaders like Li Wenmao and Chen Kai were limited in education and ability. Incompetent leadership created internal trouble. Most rebel leaders were stubborn and narrow-minded and could not take advice from others. For instance, the proposal of a military adviser, Su Qiumei 蘇秋涓, was rejected.¹⁵⁰ Li Wenmao was not even interested in having an official examination in his rebel government to hire other literate advisers.¹⁵¹ In addition, the rebel government alienated the literate by their unnecessary cruelty.¹⁵² Even though a few of the lower levels of the local elite participated in the Red Turban forces, on the whole, these forces lacked men of ability to serve as staff members or military officers, for most were illiterate. These Red Turbans

¹⁴⁴ Shi Dakai entered Jiangxi in late 1855 and proceeded to incorporate into the Taiping force several groups of the Red Turbans in the area. See Jian, *Quanshi*, vol. 2, 801-962.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 835-929.

¹⁴⁶ Luo, *Liang'guang de Tiandihui*, pp. 329-330.

¹⁴⁷ Some of these Red Turbans became a "Flower Flag Force (Huaqijun 花旗軍)" of the Taiping kingdom. See Wang Qingcheng 王庆成, "Taiping tianguo de 'qizhi' 太平天国的'旗制'," in, "in *Taiping tianguo de lishi he sixiang* 太平天国的历史和思想(Beijing: Zhonghus shuju, 1985), 260-264.

¹⁴⁸ *Ruizhou Fuzhi* 瑞州府志, 6.12.

¹⁴⁹ Jian, *Quanshi* vol. 2, 801-939; Guo, *Taipingtianguo*, 427-454 and 799-803.

¹⁵⁰ Su Qiumei, a military adviser for the Red Turban force at Foling 佛嶺, advised Chen Kai to hire gentries for the purpose of efficient rural control, but his proposal was never accepted. See "Foling Tiandihui junji wenfang sishi tiaochen 佛嶺天地會軍機文房司事條陳," in Sasaki, *Kampo yonen*, 218.

¹⁵¹ Jian, *Quanshi* vol. 2, 935.

¹⁵² *Fanyu Xianzhi*, 212.218; *Foshan zhongyi xiangzhi*, 11.14.

failed to keep a unified military force for a long time with interchangeable military commands or to achieve complete central control over appointments.

The alliances of the various Red Turban groups were a normal part of Tiandihui strategy; the unity achieved thereby was circumscribed by the need of individual leaders to retain their followers' loyalty. Although lesser leaders might recognize another's superior ability, their ultimate motivation was either survival or self-advancement. In addition, muddle-headed leadership generated the political corruption that prevailed among the rebels. The leaders of Red Turban forces were often short-sighted; they moved almost blindly here and there as being without definite aims except perhaps those of seeking for food to solve the immediate problem, especially after their failures on the attack of Guangzhou. They intended to go to Guangxi, but some lacked the persistence to reach that goal. Therefore, the major cause of the Red Turban's failure was its own inadequacy. While the Red Turban groups were gradually returning to the traditional state of disunion and non-co-operation, the government side made great progress. The Green Units were replaced by the newly trained Hunan Braves who were better paid, better disciplined, better equipped, and endowed with a stronger fighting power than the rebels.¹⁵³

The second reason for the failure of Red Turban rebellions was disagreement among rebel leaders. One of the greatest weaknesses of the rebel forces in the campaigns against the Qing force was lack of harmony and cooperation among the rebel groups.¹⁵⁴ A rebels' internal harmony varied according to its fluctuating fortunes. Although Chen Kai, the rebel supreme leader surrounded himself with other Tiandihui confederates right up to his death in 1861 at Xunzhou, the problem of maintaining authority over his sub-leaders had always been a thorny one for him. Chen Xianliang's experience provides useful examples. After failing to be a king of Dacheng kingdom, Chen bore a grudge against Chen Kai and returned back to Guangdong without following Chen Kai's force in Guangxi.¹⁵⁵ Li Wenmao was always on bad terms with Chen Kai. For instance, Li played safe to protect his own headquarters at Liuzhou 柳州 and refused to cooperate with Chen Kai to protect Xunzhou from the counter attack of Qing force in 1861.¹⁵⁶ These are only a few examples of the bad relations that prevailed among the rebel leaders fighting their common foe. The disagreements among rebel leaders naturally caused the lack of coordination in the fighting.¹⁵⁷ During the protracted attack against Guangzhou, there was frequent disagreement and disorganization among the rebel groups near the front, and that gave the Qing force the time to bring in more forces from other provinces.¹⁵⁸ In 1861, the Governor-General of Liang'guang in taking advantage of the internal trouble of the rebels, summoned troops from Hunan to destroy the rebel front.¹⁵⁹ On the basis of presently available material, one may conclude that although the Red Turbans did have a united force, it was not very solid or systematic.

Another reason for the Red Turban military failure was that they did not have enough soldiers and weapons to enlarge their rebellion. Nor was the Red Turban army a professional one, being composed mainly of marginalized wandering people.¹⁶⁰ Even though they claimed to have a huge following and the imperial government officials reported large rebel armies in order to gloss over their own defeats, the actual Red Turban combatants were not large in number. From beginning to end, most records about rebel numerical strength are exaggerated. The total number of the Red Turban rebels who participated in the first

¹⁵³ Zheng Piexin 郑佩鑫, "Dacheng'guo de fanqing qiyi 大成国的反清起义," in *Shixue yuekan* 史学月刊 (Henan renmin chubanshe, Dec. 1958), 19.

¹⁵⁴ F.O. 931.1468 Intelligence report on disagreement among rebel leaders (1854).

¹⁵⁵ Hu, *Qingdai Hongmenshi*, 320.

¹⁵⁶ Chen Kai, after establishing his rebel government, minted new money, "Hongfu tongbao 洪福通宝." The fact that Li Wenmao circulated his own money, "Pingjing shengbao 平靖胜宝" while he was still in collaboration with Chen to fight against Qing force indicated the uneasy relations between Chen and Li as well. See "Chen Song shiyou 陈松事由," in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 212-213; "Gufei zonglu 股匪总录," in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 824-830.

¹⁵⁷ The authorities were equally aware of this fact, and frequently exploited it in attempts to put down the rebels. See Wang Xin 王鑫, *Wang'zhuang wugong weiji* 王壮武功违集, 13.319 (1892).

¹⁵⁸ Foreigners observed that 'there seems no unity of purpose nor combined action among the different bands of rebels.' See F.O. 17.218, Bowring-Clarendon, Desp. 235, (Dec. 23, 1854).

¹⁵⁹ Hu, *Qingdai hongmenshi*, 318-320.

¹⁶⁰ Zhou Yumin 周育民, *Zhong'guo banghuishi* 中国帮会史, (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1993), 154.

attack on Guangzhou was reported as around 200,000.¹⁶¹ But one scholar estimated that the actual rebels numbered around 40,000 in 1856.¹⁶² This surprisingly small fighting force, even if we allow the number to be doubled or tripled, could show the weakness of the rebel army.

It is sure that the Red Turbans at first enjoyed popular support that was, however, stopped when they failed to enter Guangzhou. Peasants were compelled to become rebels often against their wishes. In addition, the failure to take the provincial capital must have had great psychological effect on the Red Turban leaders as well as on their potential followers; they had no more prestige and no bright future. They made several abortive attempts to attack Guangzhou. Instead of distributing food and valuables to attract followers, the Red Turban leaders had to force the peasants to join them by putting swords on their necks.¹⁶³ Understanding the fact that the Red Turban followers were mostly compelled by hunger or force, Qing forces blocked the entrance of the Red Turban local tax revenue to large cities and hence Red Turbans now gave up their lenient tax system on the local population.¹⁶⁴ Chinese peasants were practical. Whoever could offer them more food, less tax and better protection could win their hearts. Soon the rebels would have to risk alienating the local populace. Large-scale recruitment to join the Tiandihui seems to have stopped with the failure of the Red Turban attacks on Guangzhou in 1855.¹⁶⁵

Lack of naval forces was an additional disadvantage for the Red Turban forces when there was insufficient military power. The war against the Qing forces was largely a struggle for the domination of the Pearl River. Foreign naval power deprived the rebels of the river communications that had given them food and munitions supplies and, above all, mobility. Qing forces bought new weapons from foreigners to maintain soldiers and to organize a Pearl River navy to patrol the river.¹⁶⁶

Foreign Interventions

Officially the Western powers, such as Britain and France, proclaimed a policy of 'strict neutrality' from the beginning of the revolt.¹⁶⁷ However, this policy wavered when the British residents became anxious about the fate of foreign property in Guangzhou. By early 1855, having taken Dong'guan, the Red Turban forces had surrounded Guangzhou on four sides, and were ready for the assault. At this point, problems arose between the Red Turbans and the foreigners whose presence in Hong Kong was of major importance. The river communications were immediately interrupted by the insurgent fleets that extended ten miles along the Pearl River.¹⁶⁸ To prevent a severance of communication between Hong Kong and Guangzhou, the British and American authorities agreed to grant permission for the British and the United States flags to be flown aboard Chinese boats.¹⁶⁹ This measure had had two major effects: it secured the supply line of

¹⁶¹ Jian, *Quanshi*, 830-8.

¹⁶² Zheng, "Dacheng'guo," 19.

¹⁶³ *Guangzhou Fuzhi* 82.17 and 134.25.

¹⁶⁴ *Nanhai Xianzhi*, 13.40a, 17.13a-15b; F.O. 17/215, Incl. 1 in Desp. 112 (July 20, 1854); Wakeman, "Secret Societies," p. 42.

¹⁶⁵ Rebels' desperate resort to plunder antagonized the general populace particularly after their failures on attacking of Guangzhou in 1855. See *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ F.O. 931.978 Report on cargo of three foreign ships (n.d.); Huang Ting'gui 黄廷桂, "Shijiu shiqi zhongyede Guangdong Tiandihui 十九世纪中叶的广东天地会," in *Xueshu yanjiu* 学术研究 No. 1 (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1963), 29.

¹⁶⁷ The British policy of neutrality on China as formulated by Bonham was approved by Clarendon, followed by Bowring and others, and served as an official line in China for almost a decade. The British home government preferred neutrality; the aggressive Palmerstone had left the Foreign Office in December 1851, and his successor, Clarendon, stood for mediation. The rising power of the Second Empire under Napoleon III, and the deepening Crimean crisis, also necessitated a policy of non-commitment in the Far East. British diplomats in China liked such a policy because it gave them ample room for action. Bonham's strategy was to sit tight until higher Chinese officials asked for aid, so that greater demands could be made with greater assurance of acceptance. See F.O. 17/200, no. 17, Hong Kong, 10 Mar. 1853; F.O. 17/218, Desp. 226, Incls., Robertson-Bowring, (Dec. 2 and 5, 1854); Wakeman, *Strangers*, 146.

¹⁶⁸ F.O. 931.1086 A report giving a brief account of military action in north of Guangzhou (Jan. 1855); Jian, *Quanshi*, 844.

¹⁶⁹ W. C. Costin, *Great Britain and China, 1833-1860*, (Oxford, The Clarendon press, 1937), 178; Zheng, "Dacheng'guo," 19.

armament to the Qing forces from the Western merchants,¹⁷⁰ and it inaugurated the *Arrow* incident in 1856.¹⁷¹

The motive for abandoning the policy of neutrality was primarily the protection of British commercial interests including opium, the import of which was then increasing.¹⁷² The other motive was the West's desire to show a favorable response to the Qing court's conciliatory policy. After signing the peace treaty with the Qing government, there was a clear realization that more commercial advantages were available from the recognized government. The British were not willing to support the rebels.¹⁷³ The other motive was reaction against the rebels' attitude of superiority. The Red Turban's first contact with foreign diplomatic and commercial representatives came in the years 1854 as the British received Chen's invitation to his camp. However, after correctly having suspicions about the foreign ships supplying armaments and grains to the Qing forces, Chen Xianliang's cordial gesture towards foreigners was drastically changed. Chen treated the British officers as tribute bearers, and wanted them to recognize him as the lord of all kingdoms and demanded that they stop selling the armaments and grains to the Qing forces. Meanwhile, the rebels irritated the foreigners more and more by their continuous bombarding and looting of foreign merchant ships. Foreigners were furious and began to lose patience with the rebels and refused to recognize Chen's authority. This ineptness in foreign relations arose naturally from the very narrow experience of the leadership that proved a fatal weakness for the Red Turban rebels.¹⁷⁴

When the revolt spread along the whole Pearl River system and Guangzhou, the capital of the Guangdong province, was besieged for months, the Qing authorities in Guangzhou were in such a desperate situation that they were eager to seek the aid of the British for the suppression of the insurgents. Though not actively responding to the Chinese request, the British authorities did send their naval forces to Guangzhou under the pretext of protecting their national interests.¹⁷⁵ In Guangzhou, Sir John Bowring allied the British fleet with Governor-general Ye Mingchen's forces, and thus contributed to the 'extermination which desolated the province of Guangdong.'¹⁷⁶ Ye said that 'the person executed by his order were over 100,000.'¹⁷⁷ Ye dared to do this because he was being supported by the British forces. Bowring denied any responsibility, claiming that it was no part of his duty to interfere with the domestic affairs of China, but that

¹⁷⁰ The Peninsula and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P & O), among others, had done a roaring trade by using steamers to tow 'up the River to Canton, Chinese vessels and goods in the nature of supplies and munitions of war.' The rebels gave notice of a blockade of Guangzhou. See F.O. 17/226, Stirling to Bowring 12 Jan. 1855, enclosed in Bowring to Clarendon, Desp. 31, 15 Jan. 1855. Stirling was the British rear-admiral commanding the China station of the Royal Navy.

¹⁷¹ Thus the present study confirms the fact that an important origin of the Arrow War may be found in the Red Turban Rebellion and the Taiping Rebellion that simultaneously ravaged central and southern China. Qing government was exhausted by these upheavals, thus presenting a golden opportunity for the British again to wage a war on China, a war they could expect to win easily. Such a consideration makes strategic sense, and may have swayed Parkes and Bowring when they reported the unrest to London. See F.O. 228/213 Desp. 157, Parkes to Bowring, (Oct. 13 1856).

¹⁷² F.O. 17/358, Lt.-Col. Neale's report, Peking, (Dec. 20 1861)

¹⁷³ Stanley Wright, *The origin and development of the Chinese Customs Service, 1843-1911 An historical outline*. (Shanghai, 1939), 147.

¹⁷⁴ Most of rebel leaders had never seen or made the acquaintance of a foreigner. Only Chen Xianliang had business dealing with foreigners in Guangzhou and he presumably spoke some pidgin English. Ineptness in foreign relations was one of major factor of rebel demise. See Wakeman, *Strangers*, 146-147; F.O. 17.228, Desp. 108, Incl., Robertson-Ye, (Feb. 23, 1855); F.O. 17.228. Bowring-Clarendon, Desp. 108 (Feb. 28, 1854).

¹⁷⁵ Parliamentary Papers, 1857, vol. XII, [2173] Correspondence relative to entrance into Canton, 1850-55, pp. 27-28. Commissioner Ye to Sir J. Bowring, Dec 7, 1854; Sir J. Bowring to Commissioner Ye, Hong Kong, Dec. 11, 1854.

¹⁷⁶ G. W. Cooke, *China and Lower Bengal: Being the Times Special Correspondence from China*, (London: Warne & Routledge, 1858), 406; Luo Baoshan 骆宝善, "Guangdong Tiandihui qi yi qijian zhongwai fandongpai de goujie 广东天地会起义期间中外反动派的勾结," in *Taipingtianguo xuekan* 太平天国学刊 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 416-429.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

he had gone to Guangzhou with a large naval force to protect the factories.¹⁷⁸ The presence of the British naval force along the Pearl River impeded seriously the river fleet operations of the insurgents in the regions. This was one of the reasons, as claimed by some authorities, for the sudden collapse of the Red Turbans.¹⁷⁹ In February of 1855 the Guangzhou authorities were able to recover almost all the Pearl River Delta.

Militia

Lastly, resistances from the gentry's organized militias sent the Red Turban army to death. In face of the failure of the regular troops in time of crisis, the first response of the Qing military leadership was to hire paid fighters, or *yong* 勇, to supplement the regular forces.¹⁸⁰ There were numerous mercenaries employed by Qing forces at Guangzhou at the beginning of the Red Turban Rebellion, but as the war wore on, there was an acute shortage of government funds,¹⁸¹ and the gentry were induced by the Governor-General with the promise of honors, titles or even officers to use their own resources to hire their clansmen as mercenaries and to organize their clans into self-financing militia units.¹⁸²

The Red Turban drive through the Pearl River Delta areas in the 1850s galvanized residents to re-mobilize for self-defense. Now, in the cities and the larger market town, the officials and elites resurrected the procedures used in *sanyuanli* 三元里 in 1841 during the Opium War—the formation of militia or self-defense bureaus, the recruitment of mercenaries, and the organization of *baojia* as a patrol system and conscription pool. These rural defense groups, most commonly called “white soldiers” (*baibing* 白兵) for the white cloth they wrapped around their heads to distinguish themselves from the ‘red-turbaned’ rebels, were usually identified by the name of the small market town or village that served as their headquarters, suggesting that natural, as opposed to administrative, units formed the basis of organization.¹⁸³

The most formidable militia complex around the Pearl River Delta was organized in Shunde county. According to the Shunde County gazetteer, Shunde county was badly hit by the Red Turbans. In addition to the usual village-by-village devastation, there were also ruinous raids executed by Red Turbans from other counties. Finally, when the Red Turbans captured the county capital in 1854, the county magistrate of Shunde fled, and the local government dissolved.¹⁸⁴ After the downfall of the local government, the gentry class in Shunde county quickly reasserted itself. It reorganized militia in villages and in a few months, drove the Red Turbans out of Shunde county. It was reported that 13,000 rebels had been executed in the course of suppressing the rebels. Subsequently, when the order from the provincial governor to form the militia arrived, the gentry greatly expanded the scope of the local militia to form the Shunde county Central Militia Bureau on May 7, 1855.¹⁸⁵

Another powerful militia unit, once called the Ninety-Six Villages in Nanhai county and situated somewhere between Guangzhou and Foshan, was formed. They were so well organized and efficient that they not only successfully defended their villages, but also brought a halt of Chen Kai's troops who were

¹⁷⁸ Stanley Lane-Poole, *The life of Sir Harry Parkes, K.C.B., G.C.M.G., sometime Her Majesty's minister to China and Japan.*, Vol. i. (London, New York: Macmillan and co., 1894), 221.

¹⁷⁹ Chikashi Hirayama 平山周, *Zhong'guo mimi shehuishi* 中國秘密社會史, (Shanghai, 1912), 1935 edition, p.p. 26-27.

¹⁸⁰ Broadly speaking, the term *yong* was used to denote any irregular forces of a loyalist character. Thus the militia of a *tuanlian* 團練 association were sometimes described as *tuanrong* 團勇. But generally *yong* 勇 referred to forces on a higher level of militarization: men who were entirely detached from their communities and who depended for their sustenance upon pay or loot. Some such units were recruited directly by government officials, such as notorious *yong* from Chaozhou. See Jian, *Quanshi*, Vol. 1, 370.

¹⁸¹ Shortage of military funds was another reason for the prolonged war. The financial structure of the Qing dynasty was rigid and incompatible with the needs of special circumstances. The Ministry of Finance could barely make ends meet even in time of peace, and in wartime the central government could only issue mobilization orders and dispatch troops to the front, without being able to give them adequate weapons and provisions. These had to be furnished by the locality where the war occurred. See F.O. 931.1092. A report regarding military preparation for attacking rebels (1850s).

¹⁸² F.O. 253A. 3. 56. Regulations against banditry, etc. (1855)

¹⁸³ Xuxu 徐续, *Ling'nan gujinlu* 岭南古今录 (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1992), 236-237.

¹⁸⁴ *Shunde Xianzhi*, 1929, 23.5-7.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.1, 16.3, 23.7.

advancing on Guangzhou.¹⁸⁶ In sum, the contributions by these militias towards the suppression of rebellion and policing of the local areas were considerable.

While the need to use local forces at a time of emergency was recognized, officials regarded the raising of militia as potentially dangerous. As a consequence there was a difference between the concept of the nature of the *tuanlian* held by officials, and that held by the gentry. For officials the *tuanlian* was an immobile and non-professional force, the direction of which should come under the district magistrate, who should also approve the immediate leaders. For the gentry, the *tuanlian*, unlike the *baojia*, system offered direct influence in local affairs.¹⁸⁷ At the time of the Red Turban Rebellion, the weakness of the government, revealed on that occasion, allowed the gentry to exploit their potential strength as leaders of the rural community. For instance, having such a strong county militia bureau, the gentry class in Shunde was able to assert in the aftermath of the Red Turban Rebellion. Since the nearby Xiangshan county was still under the threat from the Red Turbans, the gentry of Shunde county had the excuse to take over control of the police forces of the polder farm in Xiangshan county, which was known collectively as 'Donghai Shiliusha 東海十六沙 (Sixteen delta lands of the Eastern Sea).' The Shunde gentry then asked the polder farm owners to donate 0.6 tales per mow annually as a protection fee. Since there were 460,000 mows of polder farms in Xiangshan county, this meant an annual revenue of 276,000 tales to the gentry in Shunde county. With such a strong financial base, the gentry in Shunde county was able to donate huge sums of money to finance the provincial military.¹⁸⁸

In sum, the Red Turban Rebellion had again realigned the power structure of the local Chinese communities, with the gentry emerging from the rural upheavals considerably strengthened. In the 1850s, the gentry obtained the legitimacy to reorganize regional militia, to have its own tax base to finance the militia, and to use the militia for regional hegemony.¹⁸⁹

5) Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to focus the history of the Tiandihui in Guangdong in the mid-nineteenth century, the set of events that led up to the Red Turban Rebellion, and to describe the rebellion itself. Significantly, this local insurgency is easily overshadowed by the Taiping and Nian—two of the largest rebellions in Chinese history—with which it overlapped in time. Nevertheless, for a number of reasons the factors giving rise to it and the details of its development are of interest.

First, the local conditions mid-nineteenth century suggest that the level of conflict in the Pearl River Delta was high, that outbursts of collective violence were common, and that rationales for rebellion were readily available within Chinese popular culture. The evidence suggests that the origin of the Red Turban Rebellion owed much the special historical circumstances of the mid-nineteenth-century Pearl River Delta—crippling natural disasters exacerbated by inefficient government and increased taxes and the success of the Taiping rebels. Most of the rebel groups were spurred to rebellion by a combination of economic conditions and government demands. Not only natural disasters, but also government abuses and excessive

¹⁸⁶ This was a vital for the survival of Guangzhou because it prevented Chen Kai joining forces with the rebels besieging the city. See F.O. 931.1455. Report from three leaders of the gentry on campaign against rebels near Foshan (Aug. 1854).

¹⁸⁷ Philip Kuhn, "The T'uan-lien Local Defense System at the time of the Taiping Rebellion," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 27 (1967).

¹⁸⁸ Another source of revenue for the gentry class was *lijin* 厘金—namely, transit tolls levied on articles of commerce. Each subdivision (called *gongyue* 公約) of the Shunde Central Militia Bureau was functionally charged with the management of funds in conjunction with the hiring of militia, the distribution of relief, and the reconstruction of local schools. The subdivision obtained those funds by erecting customer barriers around major market towns. For instance, the Longjiang *gongyue* 龍江公約, which had 100 braves and an annual expenditure of 10,000 derived its revenue by collecting donations from the cocoon, butcher, and mulberry activities. See *Shunde Xianzhi* 3.2-11, *Xiangshan Xianzhi*, 1920 16.5-7.

¹⁸⁹ It may be noted that the old ruling class was not necessarily weakened during the process of the rebellions. It might strengthen itself and even engage in regional hegemony. Facing the crippled state of the peasantry and the state, the gentry was able to accumulate massive property right after the rebellion. For example, in just a few years after the rebellion, 8,641 mows of communal land were acquired to build a new educational institution called Qingyun Wenshi 青雲文社 (Blue Cloud Academy). See *Shunde Xianzhi* 4.34-36.

tax demands could easily push people below the margin of subsistence. Therefore, government commutation of taxes was often a major demand of the Red Turban rebels. Violence was already endemic to the Pearl River Delta.

Second, local violence was further aggravated by heavy-handed practices of the Qing state on local Tiandihui lodges who eventually became organizers and perpetrators of the Red Turban Rebellion under the initial leadership of Chen Song. While many of the individual outbreaks that collectively made up the Red Turban Rebellion were directly linked to events that threatened the livelihood of the people, subsistence crises alone do not provide an adequate explanation for these rebellions. In the Pearl River Delta, the decision to rebel seems to have been made deliberately in almost every case.

Most of the rebels did not rise up against the government on the spur of the moment, as someone acting out of blind fury would do. Both Chen Kai and Li Wenmao spent several months preparing for revolt under the leadership of Chen Song, and their uprisings were both related to subsistence-threatening tax demands and to the Tiandihui direction.¹⁹⁰ He Liu's Tiandihui lodge spent more than a year organizing to resist excessive tax demands related to commutation.¹⁹¹ In other words, the ambitions of certain Tiandihui leaders intensified and transformed local discontents into massive rebellion against the state.

Third, although people of different ethnic groups and different social strata banded together against the Qing government, the revolt, particularly in the *wuyi* regions, was caused largely by a pervasive subethnic hostility. At the low level of society, the Punti rebels in the *wuyi* regions tended to direct their hostility primarily at the Hakka people. The solidarity demonstrated by rebels of the Punti and by militias of the Hakka is one interesting finding of this study. After the suppression of the Red Turban rebels, the Hakka-Punti armed conflicts continued for more than ten years (1865-1867) and covered most of the *wuyi* regions along the Pearl River valley.

Fourth, the Red Turban Rebellion had again realigned the power structure of the local Chinese communities, with the gentry emerging from the local disorder considerably strengthened. What G. William Skinner has termed "community closure" began to take effect.¹⁹² Lineages, sublineages, and villages turned inward for protection while competition and feuding among the communities intensified. Economy activity at the regional level and economic mobility became constricted; protective confederations and boundaries hardened. As magistrates hesitated to interfere, as lineage leaders were able to defy civil servants, and as disaffection with the government spread, Qing governance became ever more superficial. Villagers took the law into their own hands. In the 1850s during the Red Turban Rebellion, the gentry obtained the legitimacy to reorganize regional militia, to have its own tax base to finance the militia, and to use the militia for regional hegemony.

Last, the suppression of the Red Turban Rebellion with the aid of foreign troops was not only a brutal and devastating, but also a shortsighted political action. The human and material destruction was immense and incalculable, sowing profound seed of bitterness and xenophobia in the minds of survivors. Thousands had been driven from their homes and deprived of their livelihood, while others emigrated abroad, some as indentured laborers in the Americas. In addition to hundreds of villages, some thirty-two different administrative seats in Guangdong ranging from the district to the prefectural level were lost to the insurgents during the period of 1854 to 1855. Most were quickly recaptured, but several were held by the rebels continuously for more than several years. For example, Deqingzhou in Zhaoqing county was held by the rebels until April 1858.¹⁹³ The provincial capital never fell, but it came perilously close on two occasions. Towns were reduced to rubble, fields were overgrown with weeds, and large tracts of the province were depopulated.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ *Foshan Zhongyi xiangzhi*, 11.14-15; "Chen Song Shiyou," in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 212-213.

¹⁹¹ He Liu organized the Tiandihui in his area for at least a year before he was pushed into large-scale, active rebellion. See "He Liu deng shilong qishi yuanyou 何六等石龙起事缘由," in *Hongbing Qiyi*, 214.

¹⁹² G. W. Skinner, "Chinese Peasants and the Closed Community: An Open and Shut Case," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 13 (1971): 270-281.

¹⁹³ Jangkun Yoo 유장근, *Kundae Zoongkuk'yi Bimil kyulsa* 근대중국의 비밀결사, (Seoul: Koryowon, 1996), 279.

¹⁹⁴ The devastation in the Pearl River Delta, including the burning of numerous houses, was not caused by the rebels alone, but by the imperial troops and local militias as well. The living of many of the displaced refugees were lost not only through the fighting, but through hunger, pestilence, and other tragedies as well. The Red Turban advance meant war, and war meant the destruction of crops, the disruption of trade routes,

The cost of the rebellion was appalling in terms of lives, property damage, and funds required for suppression. Reliable figures are difficult to find. But, more than 26,000 people in Fanyu and Shunde counties and 10,000 people in Zhaoqing county were executed by the Qing government.¹⁹⁵ According to one scholar's estimate, there were about 400,000 people who died out in Guangdong province because of this White terror by the Qing court.¹⁹⁶

In sum, the Red Turban Rebellion was composed of many ingredients, including adverse ecological conditions, which led to increased competition for resources; government abuses and mal-administration; communal frictions; and the activities of the Tiandihui. The Taiping rebellion also played an important role in the timing of the Red Turban Rebellion. Without it, unrest in the Pearl River Delta would probably not have exploded with such intensity. It was the coming together of a number of different socioeconomic and historical rhythms at a particular time that brought about a rebellion, or series of rebellions, of such massive dimensions. The revolt was the result of interactions between the basic structures of local society in the Pearl River Delta.

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pillage, rape, and death. As reiterated in account after account, Qing troops were responsible for much of the wrack and ruin in Guangdong, to the point that, as one gentryman lamented "the people fear the Qing soldiers, but not the Red Turban rebels." See F.O. 931.1461 A letter advising against the demolition of civilian house as a method of defense. (July 9, 1854).

¹⁹⁵ Luo Baoshan 駱寶善, 'Taiping tianguo shiji Guangdong Tiandihui qiyi shulue 太平天國時期廣東天地會起義述略,' *Zhongshan Daxue xuebao* 中山大學學報, 4-1 (1981), 58-59.

¹⁹⁶ Xu Xu, *Ling'nan*, 244.

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