

Routledge Studies in Religion and Politics

RELIGION IN REBELLIONS, REVOLUTIONS, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Edited by

Warren S. Goldstein and Jean-Pierre Reed



Religion in Rebellions, Revolutions, and Social Movements

Religion in Rebellions, Revolutions, and Social Movements demonstrates that, while religion is often a social force that maintains, if not legitimates, the sociopolitical order, it is also a decisive factor in economic, social, and political conflict.

The book explores how and under what conditions religion functions as a progressive and/or reactionary force that compels people to challenge or protect social orders. The authors focus on the role that religion has played in peasant, slave, and plebeian rebellions; revolutions, including the Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Iranian; and modern social movements. In addition to these case studies, the book also contains theoretical chapters that explore the relationship religious thought has with the politics of liberation and oppression. It examines the institutional, organizational, ritualistic, discursive, ideological, and/or framing mechanisms that give religion its oppressive and liberating structures. Many scholars of religion continue very conventional modes of thinking, ignoring how religion has been—and continues to be—both a hegemonic and counterhegemonic force in conflict. This book looks at both sides of the equation.

This international and interdisciplinary volume will be of interest to students and scholars in the fields of politics of religion, sociology of religion, religious studies, gender studies, and history.

Warren S. Goldstein, Executive Director of the Center for Critical Research on Religion, USA (www.criticaltheoryofreligion.org) has a Ph.D. in Sociology from the New School for Social Research. He is the editor of *Critical Research on Religion* (SAGE Publications) and Series Editor of “Studies in Critical Research on Religion” (Brill Academic Publishers and Haymarket Books).

Jean-Pierre Reed is Associate Professor of Sociology, Africana Studies, and Philosophy at Southern Illinois University, USA. His primary research interests include the sociology of revolutions/social movements, theory, culture, and liberation theology.

Routledge Studies in Religion and Politics

Edited by Jeffrey Haynes

London Metropolitan University, UK

This series aims to publish high quality works on the topic of the resurgence of political forms of religion in both national and international contexts. This trend has been especially noticeable in the post-cold war era (that is, since the late 1980s). It has affected all the ‘world religions’ (including, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism) in various parts of the world (such as, the Americas, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa).

The series welcomes books that use a variety of approaches to the subject, drawing on scholarship from political science, international relations, security studies, and contemporary history.

Books in the series explore these religions, regions and topics both within and beyond the conventional domain of ‘church-state’ relations to include the impact of religion on politics, conflict and development, including the late Samuel Huntington’s controversial—yet influential—thesis about ‘clashing civilisations’.

In sum, the overall purpose of the book series is to provide a comprehensive survey of what is currently happening in relation to the interaction of religion and politics, both domestically and internationally, in relation to a variety of issues.

A Quarter Century of the “Clash of Civilizations”

Edited by Jeffrey Haynes

Religion and Democracy

A Worldwide Comparison

Carsten Anckar

2nd edition

Religion after Deliberative Democracy

Timothy Stanley

Religion in Rebellions, Revolutions, and Social Movements

Edited by Warren S. Goldstein and Jean-Pierre Reed

For more information about this series, please visit: www.routledge.com/Routledge-Studies-in-Religion-and-Politics/book-series/RSRP

Religion in Rebellions, Revolutions, and Social Movements

**Edited by Warren S. Goldstein and
Jean-Pierre Reed**

First published 2022
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa
business*

© 2022 selection and editorial matter, Warren S. Goldstein and Jean-Pierre
Reed; individual chapters, the contributors

The right of Warren S. Goldstein and Jean-Pierre Reed to be identified as
the authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual
chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or
utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now
known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in
any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing
from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or
registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation
without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-032-01152-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-01241-4 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-17782-1 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003177821

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	viii
1 An Introduction to the Critical Study of Religion in Rebellions, Revolutions, and Social Movements	1
JEAN-PIERRE REED AND WARREN S. GOLDSTEIN	
PART I	
Rebellions	29
2 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Religion and Revolution	31
MICHAEL LÖWY	
3 Mandate for Revolution? Reconsidering Chinese Peasant Rebellions in Terms of Changing One's Destiny	40
ROLAND BOER	
4 Peasant Revolt Against the Roman Imperial Order in Ancient Palestine	53
RICHARD HORSLEY	
5 John Ball and the 1381 English Uprising: From Rebellion to Revolutions	71
JAMES CROSSLEY	
PART II	
Revolutions	89
6 A Second Path: Nuns in the Early French Revolution, 1789–1791	91
CORINNE GRESSANG	

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
7	“Elective Affinities” Between Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the 1917 Russian Revolution	110
	TAMARA PROSIC	
8	“The Spirit of the Spiritless World”: The Shi’a Rituals of Muharram and the 1979 Iranian Revolution	132
	BABAK RAHIMI	
9	The Ambivalence of African Independent/Initiated Churches in Colonial and Postcolonial Politics	158
	JORAM TARUSARIRA AND BERNARD PINDUKAI HUMBE	
	PART III	
	Social Movements	173
10	Theorizing Religion, Social Movements, and Social Change	175
	ANNA PETERSON	
11	Mobilizing Religion in Twenty-First-Century Nativism in the United States	199
	RHYS H. WILLIAMS	
12	Elective Affinities Between Liberation Theology and Ecology in Latin America	219
	LUIS MARTÍNEZ ANDRADE	
13	Indigenous Spirituality and the Decolonization of Religious Beliefs: Embodied Theology, Collectivity, and Justice	231
	SYLVIA MARCOS	
14	Epilogue: On the Significance of Religion for Rebellions, Revolutions, and Social Movements	246
	JEAN-PIERRE REED AND WARREN S. GOLDSTEIN	
	<i>Index</i>	264

3 Mandate for Revolution? Reconsidering Chinese Peasant Rebellions in Terms of Changing One's Destiny

Roland Boer

The Chinese term *mandate of heaven* (*tianming*) is usually assumed to have the following meaning: a ruler's mandate is bestowed by "heaven," but if the ruler does not follow the precepts of virtue and wisdom in ruling, the mandate can be removed. From here two possible scenarios may unfold. The first is the palace coup: once "heaven" has removed its approval, someone—usually with a significant force behind him—can depose the ruler in question and assume the mantle of power. So it was that dynastic changes took place in China's long history of emperors and dynasties. The second is the peasant revolution: given that a ruler's ultimate responsibility was to ensure the well-being of the common people, if a ruler turned out to be rapacious and cruel, the people would be justified in disobeying and indeed replacing the ruler. At times, the two scenarios would merge, not so much with the frequent peasant rebellions throughout China's long imperial history, but more with the peasant revolution that succeeded in placing its ruler on the imperial throne. Examples include Liu Bang (256–195 bce) and the establishment of the Han dynasty in 202 bce and Li Zicheng (1606–45 ce), who led a peasant revolt against the fading Ming dynasty and established the fleeting Shun dynasty that lasted barely a few months in 1644 before the Qing dynasty took over.

While there is some truth to this common understanding, it has its limits. In what follows, I examine three terms that reveal an inherently this-worldly (secular) focus of Chinese cultural assumptions. First, *mandate of heaven* (*tianming*) means not so much a "divine right of kings" with heavy religious overtones but was understood—already in the first millennium bce—as a deeply secular "destiny" or "allotted life span." The sense here is that the wider scope of human affairs—contained within the realm of the heavens or the sky (the basic meaning of *tian*) and earth—has determined a person's and indeed a society's life. The second term is *destiny-and-fortune* (*mingyun*), a term that requires such a translation in order to capture a distinct dialectic—in the sense that there is a conjunction of forces that pull away from each other and yet can be found amid each other (think of *yin-yang*). It includes *ming* (命), which is one of the characters from *tianming* and has the meaning of destiny or fate. But the *yun* (运) indicates that one can, through persistent and conscientious effort, change one's destiny. Literally, it means to "move one's fate." The cycle of peasant

revolutions in China, right up the beginning of the modern era with the Taiping Revolution (1851–1864), may be characterized in these terms. They were, through sustained and dangerous action, seeking to move or change their fate. The third term is the *people's needs*, which came to be the ultimate determining factor in a ruler's "allotted life span." From at least the Warring States period, we find this emphasis throughout the Chinese tradition. If the ruler ensured adequate food and shelter, as well as social stability and harmony, then the ruler's "allotted life span" would be long. If not, the people would rebel. In order to consider this emphasis in a little more detail, I examine two case studies, one concerning Liu Bang and the peasant revolt of the third century bce that led to the Han dynasty in the early days of the imperial system and the other concerning the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom toward the end of the imperial system in the nineteenth century ce. The latter enables me to return to the question of religion and why the biblically inspired Taiping were ultimately rejected by Chinese culture.

Mandate of Heaven as a Secular Term

Let us begin with the "mandate of heaven," which was initially developed by the long-lived Zhou dynasty (1046–256 bce) to justify their overthrow of the earlier Shang dynasty. The Zhou lasted for eight centuries, and even though the last few centuries entailed nominal and ritual power over neighboring states that were constantly at war with one another, the earlier Zhou period was often held up as an ideal for how rulers should govern in terms of economic, technological, and cultural prowess. However, there was an initial problem: the Zhou had technically usurped the Shang in the eleventh century bce. How to justify such a move? The "mandate of heaven" was born, predicated on appropriate policies to ensure social harmony, economic well-being, and social codes. It was propagated in particular by the Duke of Zhou, ¹ who argued that the Shang had forfeited this "mandate" through corrupt and rapacious practices and that it was up to the Zhou to restore the social order.

The *Book of Songs (Shiji)* bestows such a "mandate" to the one attributed with establishing the Zhou dynasty, Wen Wang. ² The song in question (235) comes from a section called "*daya*," literally "refinement" but glossed by the fabled translator James Legge as "Greater Odes of the Kingdom." This material in the *Book of Songs* is among the earliest, which comes from the tenth to ninth centuries bce, and thus soon after the Zhou dynasty was established. Throughout the subsection concerning Wen Wang, we find references to the "mandate of heaven." To begin with, the house of Zhou may have been an old house, but the "mandate" (*ming*) had fallen upon it only recently with an expectation of renewal and reform. Why? The qualities of the first king:

Profound was king Wen;
 Oh! continuous and bright was his feeling of reverence.
 Great is the mandate of heaven [*tianming*]! (Legge 1871, 427)

The stanza continues with a reference to the Shang (also known as Yin), whom the Zhou had usurped. The Shang may have had many descendants of the royal house, but when “God on high [*shangdi*] gave the mandate [*ming*]” to the Zhou, the Shang became their subjects. At the same time, the text has a warning: be sure to show respect for ancestors, “cultivate virtue [*xiude*],” and strive to align with “destiny [*ming*].” If so, the outcome will be much good fortune and happiness. But these are not always assured:

The mandate [*ming*] is not easily [preserved],
 Do not cause your own extinction.
 Display and make bright your righteousness and name,
 And look at [the fate of] Yin in the light of heaven.
 The doings of high heaven,
 Have neither sound nor smell.
 Take your pattern from king Wen,
 And the myriad regions will repose confidence in you. (Legge 1871,
 427–28)³

In light of this early material, one may understand why the connection has been made with the Western notion of the “divine right of kings.” This connection was initially made during the last phase of European absolute monarchs, precisely when the Chinese texts initially became available in translation. The idea of the “divine right of kings” is, of course, quite old and can be found in religious texts such as the Hebrew Bible, as well as other material from ancient Southwest Asia. But let us stay with the European context, where theological justifications for monarchies took a number of forms. In a Roman Catholic framework, it was argued that all states must be subject to the church’s mandate, in which the pope functioned as God’s representative on earth. Even in the twentieth century, there were efforts to reclaim this idea (Maritain 1951; Jouvenal 1957). From Lutheran and Reformed perspectives, the sovereign was always subject to divine approval or its abrogation. This is particularly so with Calvin’s argument that even though an unpopular monarch rules with divine sanction, this was always subject to the ruler in question following God’s laws. If not, then God would appoint an agent to remove the ruler and even allow the people to disobey (Calvin [1559] 2006; Boer 2019, 75–90). We find the same emphasis in a somewhat more muted manner in Luther’s “two kingdoms” hypothesis, with its transfer of secular power from Rome to the prince (Luther [1523] 1962). Even so, Luther never urged a complete separation between the two kingdoms: the monarch was to ensure not merely proper conduct of religious observance but of all relevant divine laws as well. If not, the sanction would be removed. This emphasis even applies to absolute monarchies: the monarch may be the determinant of and thereby above state law—“There is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1–7)⁴—but such a monarch relies on divine sanction (Bodin [1576] 1993; Hobbes [1651] 1996). It follows that such sanction can also be removed from a wayward monarch.

The connection with the ancient *Book of Songs* from China would seem to be obvious, especially with its reference to *Shangdi* (上帝)—literally “the deity above” but often translated as “God on High”—as the one who confers the mandate. The problem here is what is known as “using western categories to understand China [*yixi jiezhong*]” (Wang 2018, 26). More specifically, there may have been references in the earliest layers of the *Book of Songs* to an abstract “God on High”—taken over from the earlier Shang dynasty—but these began to fade already with the Duke of Zhou, who emphasized a shift from the ignorance and superstition of the earlier ideas inherited from the Shang to a focus on “valuing and emphasizing human affairs [*zhong renshi*]” (Gu and Yu 2014). By the time of Confucius in the sixth and fifth centuries, the definition of wisdom became: “To devote oneself to the people’s just cause, and, while respecting spiritual beings [*guishen*], to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom” (Confucius 1993, 6:22). The spirits and gods should be kept “at a distance [*yuan*],” which entails a distinct focus on this world and specifically the right conduct in relation to human ties and relationships (the sense of *yi*—义). Such a this-worldly focus would become a distinctive feature of Chinese culture, so much so that Mozi’s effort in the fifth and fourth centuries to develop a more fully fledged religious system foundered and instead elements of Mohism were absorbed into a Confucian framework (Johnston 2010). Indeed, when there has been a risk of a more esoteric turn, these Confucian concerns would be reinvigorated—as, for example, with the neo-Confucianism of the eighth and eleventh centuries ce, which arose in response to the more esoteric and spiritual dimensions of both Buddhism and Daoism.

What are the implications for the “mandate of heaven”? The term for “heaven”—*tian* or 天—has little of the personalized divine nature of the Western “Heaven.” Instead, it means an impersonal and material “sky” or the heavens, often coming to be associated with “destiny” or “fate.” Indeed, the more basic sense of *tianming* is precisely this: the destiny determined by the greater domain of heaven and an earth populated by human beings, which are seen as one—*tianren heyi* (Xu 2016). What happened to the old *Shangdi*, the “God on High”? He went even further above or “on high [*shang*],” while the main concern was squarely with the world below the heavens—*tianxia* (天下). Thus, *tianming* became the “allotted life span” of a dynasty and indeed a society, as determined by the wider realm of the heavens and the earth. As mentioned in the *Zuozhuan*, or Zuo’s Commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*: “Humans are born between the heavens and the earth [*tiandi*] and this is what is called their destiny [*ming*]” (Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016, 802).⁵

Changing One’s Destiny (*mingyun*)

We are at the point where Chinese culture—understood in the broad sense that includes history, society, and political structures⁶—is by default concerned with this world and is thus “secular”—to invoke the basic sense of the Latin *saecularum*. This means that the peculiar history of the western peninsula of the

Eurasian landmass—as Diakonoff (2003, 157) liked to call western Europe—is by no means normative. Here I mean the relatively recent history of “secularization” from the religious assumptions and structures that dominated Europe for century upon century. In China, this narrative does not apply, or, if it does at some level, we would need to go back some 3,000 years to find not so much an analogous as a prototypical process.

Thus, the concept of *tianming* was more about the determination of life by the wider dynamics of the world, the unity of the heavens and the earth (*tiandi*). The shorthand for this determination is “destiny” (*ming*). In the case of *tianming*, this destiny pertained to the rulers of the various dynasties. Now we come upon two questions, which have implications for understanding the process of peasant revolutions in Chinese history. The first question is whether *tianming* is still seen as in some way superstitious. Perhaps I can answer as follows: after I arrived in Dalian to begin working at the School of Marxism at Dalian University of Technology, the dean referred to *yuanfen* (缘分). This related term refers to the apparent chance that brings people together, or—more preferably—the natural affinity between people that brings them to a “predestined relationship.” The dean was referring to the process by which we had met in Australia. I had come to Dalian for a lecture, and then his suggestion that I come to Dalian to work there caught me at a time when I was indeed looking for a change—even if I was not particularly conscious of the desire at the time. I asked the dean and others present—who are all members of the Communist Party of China (CPC)—whether *yuanfen* is a superstitious term. Not at all, they replied; it is a perfectly materialist notion about how the world works. The same observation applies to *tianming*.

The second question: Is this “destiny” or “fate” a given, concerning which one can do nothing and simply acquiesce? This may be the western cultural tradition’s understanding of “fate,” which then stands in tension with free will and human action. In contrast to such a Western either–or approach to contradictions, or “zero-sum” as it is also called, the Chinese approach is rather different: “things that oppose each also complement one another [*xiangfan xiangcheng*].”⁷ We may see such a dialectic in another crucial term, *mingyun* (命运). It combines a character we have already met, *ming* (命), which refers to the destiny of fate pertaining to one’s life, with *yun* (运), which includes the senses of fortune, movement, use, and application. The combination of the two characters as *mingyun* means that one can, through sheer hard work and innovation, change the course of one’s destiny. In other words, if we apply ourselves to the task at hand, we can move destiny in our favor—for which the translation “fate-and-fortune” may be the most apt. To be sure, Chinese culture has plenty of material concerning predetermined fate. For example, a student of Confucius named Zi Xia observed: “I have heard that life and death are determined by fate [*ming*], and that wealth and honors depend upon the will of the heavens [*tian*]” (Confucius 1993, 12.5). At the same time, there is an even greater sense that one can change the direction of one’s destiny toward good fortune. For example, already in the *Books of Songs* we find the idea that even an ancient country needs to innovate. Let us return to the section on the first king of Zhou, Wen Wang. In the first stanza of that section, we find:

“Although Zhou was an old state, the mandate was for reform [*qi ming weixin*]” (Legge 1871, 427). The word for “reform” may also mean that the mandate was a recent one, although both senses apply: the new mandate was also a mandate for reform and innovation. More substantially, the Chinese also believe that “human will triumphs over the heavens” and “human effort can achieve anything.” Or, as Mencius put it, “whether life is long or short does not change one’s attitude, but through self-cultivation one waits for whatever issue; this is the way to establish one’s destiny [*ming*]” (Mencius 1895, VII.1.1).⁸ In sum, there is a distinct dialectic in the idea of *mingyun*, with both destiny and concerted effort inseparably connected.⁹ One can understand, then, how Marx’s formulation strikes a distinct chord in China: “Human beings make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx [1852] 1979, 103, [1852] 1985, 96–97). Indeed, it is often said in China that Marxism has enabled the Chinese people to seize hold of their destiny and overcome the profound century-long humiliation at the hands of colonial powers—the abject poverty in which China found itself—and rejuvenate the country through revolution and reform (Boer and Zang 2019, 10).

The People’s Needs

Let us pause for a moment and take stock: the idea of “mandate of heaven” (*tianming*) turns out to be an already secularized concept bearing the sense of a destiny determined by the larger context of human existence between the heavens and the earth. Furthermore, it should be understood in light of “*mingyun*,” which bears the sense of changing one’s destiny through arduous human effort. The question remains as to how all of this is relevant for peasant revolutions, especially in light of my invocation of Marx at the close of the previous section. To be sure, there was plenty of plotting and skullduggery in the imperial courts, with not a few palace coups. But—as mentioned—there is also a long history of peasant rebellions, a few of which rose to the full level of a successful revolution, even if they ended up establishing another imperial dynasty.

Now a final consideration comes into play: the people’s needs, which are clearly focused on collective concerns. On this matter, a distinct saying sums up an emphasis of thousands of years: “When the granaries are full, the people follow appropriate rules of conduct, and when there is enough to eat and wear, the people know honor and shame” (Sima 2014, 2595, 3952).¹⁰ The saying, as recorded by the historian Sima Qian, is attributed to Guan Zhong (720–645 bce), an influential reformer of the state of Qi during the Warring States period.¹¹ There are, of course, many other statements along a similar vein in the Chinese tradition,¹² which emphasize not merely that a ruler’s destiny or mandate is decided by the vaster realm of human existence designated by *tian* but especially whether or not the ruler ensured the collective well-being of the people. This well-being took the form of conditions that enabled adequate food and shelter, as well as social stability (*wending*) and harmony (*hexie*). Indeed, it was the ruler’s task to “bring peace

and stability to the country [*anbang dingguo*].¹³ Typically, we find that when these collective needs were not met, revolts by the common people—overwhelmingly peasants—would break out.

Liu Bang and the Han Dynasty

Let me give a couple of examples, one from the early days of the imperial system and one from its last days. Liu Bang (256–195 bce) rose from humble peasant origins to become the first emperor—known as Gaozu—of the Han dynasty (202 bce–220 ce). We are reliant on two main accounts, one by Sima Qian, in volume eight of his history (2014, 435–502), and the other by Gu Ban in the first volume of his *Hanshu* (1962, 2–24).¹⁴ These histories generally deal favorably with Liu Bang, since he—after some persuasion by a scholar known as Lu Jia¹⁵—adopted a Confucian framework for governing the empire. Indeed, it was the result of this emphasis that Confucianism has become the core framework for Chinese culture. The key here, however, is that Liu Bang was of a very humble peasant background, from the countryside of the state of Zhou. In light of the uncertainty surrounding the succession to the Qin dynasty (221–210 bce) and widespread peasant rebellions, Liu Bang was able to leverage himself to a commanding position in the rebel forces. After considerable struggle, he secured rule and established the Han dynasty.

Why was there so much unrest? The historians attribute this to the harsh rule of the first and only Qin emperor, who implemented measures based on what became known as the Legalist tradition.¹⁶ This tradition stressed that a ruler should govern “according to law as the basis [*yifaweiben*]” and that all should be subject to the law. All very well, but this was predicated on the assumption that “human nature is evil [*xing’elun*],” needing stern punishments and appropriate rewards for the sake of social order. *Legalism* has often become a byword for harshness of punishment. It was this system that was adopted by the state of Qin, which became by 221 bce the first real empire that unified China. However, the very harshness of the laws and the degradation of the peasantry soon led to revolt and the overthrow of the dynasty. It was precisely these conditions that enabled Liu Bang to rise as a peasant leader.¹⁷

After being persuaded of the benefits of Confucianism, which had been widely suppressed during the brief Qin era,¹⁸ Liu Bang instituted a rather different system. It was predicated on the “both hands” (*liangshou*) of legal sanction and virtue, although there was a distinct emphasis on the latter. The five key virtues that should ensure stability and harmony are benevolence, righteousness, ritual (propriety), wisdom, and faithfulness (captured in the five-character phrase *renyilizhixin*). These were—as Mencius would come to emphasize—to provide the foundations for a concern with the common people’s livelihood. In brief, the Confucian emphasis is both “rule of virtue” (*dezhi*) and “rule of propriety” (*lizhi*).¹⁹ What about the rule of law? Already with Lu Jia, but especially with his successor, Dong Zhongshu (179–104 bce), there was a dialectical emphasis on both law and virtue. Here the Daoist tradition’s *yin-yang* was very useful: the two lines are

inescapably connected in governance, in which the positive *yang* is virtue and the negative *yin* is punishment. The result: not only was Confucianism assiduously promoted, but Liu Bang immediately issued a decree to lower taxes on peasants to a manageable level and minimize the cycle of compulsory labor (*laoyi*) for the common people. Of course, these were not abolished, for that would be somewhat self-defeating for an imperial system, but the easing of burdens has also contributed to a generally favorable historical assessment of Liu Bang.

Taiping Heavenly Kingdom

The second example comes from the other end of China's long imperial history: the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of the nineteenth century (1850–1864). It began as a small movement with a few local villagers in the mountains of Guangxi Province. They were led by a charismatic and rather unstable visionary, Hong Xiuquan, and drew on disaffected peasants, miners, ethnic minorities, and organized “bandit” groups. Within a few short years, the pent-up frustrations of imperial exploitation and colonial humiliation attracted millions. The Taiping forces swept north, developing innovative and spectacularly coordinated military tactics against which the Qing forces were no match (Luo 1991). Along the way, the Taiping instituted strict discipline, reorganized the social and economic fabric of an emerging state, and captured the old imperial capital of Nanjing in 1853 (renamed Tianjing, the heavenly capital). In doing so, the Taiping managed to control for a time the “cradle” of Chinese civilization in the most populous and prosperous part of China. The new state was short-lived. British colonial forces were keen to preserve their lucrative drug trafficking of opium while a weakening Qing Empire colluded with the British colonialists for their own reasons to strangle the Taiping state. Nanjing fell in 1864, and the last remnants of the Taiping forces were obliterated in the 1870s and 1880s. Their eventual destruction left ten to twenty million dead and far more devastated. As for the Qing Empire, it would never recover, managing to struggle on for another fifty years before it fell in the republican revolution.

The Taiping movement was profoundly ambiguous. In many respects, it manifested features of the peasant rebellions of old, with an explosion of pent-up frustration in response to systemic exploitation and mistreatment, along with a leader of equally humble origins. It was also an anti-colonial revolution, focused on eradicating the bane of opium and colonial humiliation, and yet it deployed the “foreign teaching” of a version of Christianity for its main ideological and social agenda. Furthermore, the Taiping movement was thoroughly anti-imperial, targeting the whole imperial system as such, and yet it instituted what was in many respects a new imperial system with Hong Xiuquan as its ruler. It sought to overturn what it saw as the dead weight of the Confucian heritage and yet incorporated many features of Confucianism in its new ideology of state. In short, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom appeared at a crucial turning point in Chinese history: on one hand, it marks the final chapter of the old pattern of palace coups and peasant uprisings; on the other, it signaled the emergence of a newer struggle

for anti-colonial national liberation. We find this ambiguity in Mao Zedong's own assessments, but it is an ambiguity that enables a whole series of different assessments of the movement.²⁰

In the past, I have taken sides in such debates, emphasizing the revolutionary character of the movement, to the extent of arguing that it marks the arrival of the Christian communist tradition in China (Boer 2019, 183–99). Upon further reflection, it is clear to me that Taiping movement was far more ambiguous than I had at first thought. One reason for that earlier assessment was that it came at the closing stages of a long research project on Marxism and religion. When I initially wrote the piece for a lecture in 2015, I thought that it might be possible to use the method and framework I had developed to understand Chinese communism. But I was mistaken. Let me put it this way: when I presented my lecture concerning the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in China, my argument did not persuade the audience. Why? It is not merely that Hong Xiuquan is seen as little more than a bandit, but more the way in which a unique interpretation of the Bible came to form the core of the Taiping ideology and structure of governance. The path to such an emphasis among the Taiping is long and convoluted, but ultimately this approach was alien to Chinese cultural sensibilities. Here was a system of thought and culture that emphasized ontological or outer transcendence (*waizaichaoyue*), which is deeply foreign to Chinese cultural sensibilities in which inner transcendence (*neizaichaoyue*) and cultivating one's moral character (*xiuchen*) are key (Ren 2012; Shen 2015; Guo 2016; T. Xu 2016). The movement also sought to impose a religiously inspired framework on a culture that had been deeply secular for millennia. In brief, it was the invocation by the Taiping of what is known as “foreign teaching” (*yangjiao*) that led to their rejection.

We may interpret such a response in a number of ways. One way is to develop a historical dialectic of the religious and the secular in Chinese history, in which one returns when the other is dominant (Goldstein 2017). This is clearly a development on the tendency to pick one or the other side in, for example, assessments of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom:²¹ I have a somewhat different interpretation: there have and will continue to be moments of religious expression in times of turmoil and upheaval, but ultimately the core this-worldly focus of Chinese culture will reassert itself. Perhaps we can invoke Mao's reinterpretation ([1937] 1965, [1937] 2009) of dialectical materialism here: not only do contradictions move in a pattern of unity-in-struggle, but in any contradiction there is always a primary term. In a Chinese cultural context, the primary term is precisely the this-worldly focus, the inner transcendence of self-cultivation, in which the “unity of heavens and human beings” (*tianren heyi*) becomes the “unity of nature and human beings.” Thus, a revolutionary movement that is to have any traction in such a context will be one that is focused on people's needs, on the ability to change one's destiny through concerted human effort.

Conclusion

This reexamination of the “mandate of heaven” has taken us through three key ideas: *tianming* as an allotted life span that is determined by the context contained

within the heavens and the earth, or in the unity of nature and human beings; *mingyun* as an ability to move or transform one's destiny through human effort, in light of which we should understand the emergence of peasant revolutions in Chinese history; and the collective focus on the people's needs, or what is now called "people-centered" or "taking the people as center" (*yi renmin wei zhong*). Indeed, it is precisely with the combination of the latter two ideas that we find a deeper connection between earlier Chinese history and the communist revolution of the twentieth century. That whole process may have dispensed with the notion of *tianming*, the mandate of heaven, but it does continue the emphasis on transforming one's destiny by a focus on taking the people as the center. Indeed, this may well be seen as a Chinese Marxist definition of *revolution*.

Notes

- 1 The Duke of Zhou (*Zhougong*) took over after the brief reign of Wu (ca. 1046–1043 bce) and governed as regent until the youthful Cheng, son of Wu, could take over responsibilities as emperor.
- 2 Wen was later acknowledged as the founder of the Zhou dynasty, although his son, Wu, was technically the first emperor from 1046 bce.
- 3 Translation modified. One may also find a bilingual text, with Legge's translation, at <https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/wen-wang>.
- 4 For example, in a Danish Lutheran context, biblical texts such as 1 Samuel 8–10, with its warnings over what a king would do, were reinterpreted to justify precisely such acts by an absolute monarch (Pettersen 2012).
- 5 Translation modified. One may also find the Chinese text at <https://ctext.org/chun-qiu-zuo-zhuan/cheng-gong-shi-san-nian>. The risk with using the terminology of "secular" is that it assumes a religious dimension that it challenges, seeks to negate, and then embodies once again in a qualitatively new form. In the text, I am trying to convey the point that this may have been the situation in the first millennium bce in China, but it has been not so prevalent since then.
- 6 The best overview of Chinese culture in English is by Gan Chunsong (2019).
- 7 The initial appearance of this phrase—in full as *xiangfan er jie xiangcheng ye*—comes from the first century ce, in Ban Gu's *Hanshu*, or *History of the Earlier Han Dynasty*, in the *yiwenzhi* part (B. Gu 1962, 374). The text may also be found at <https://ctext.org/han-shu/yi-wen-zhi>. It has become a common phrase and one finds it also in the works of Mao Zedong ([1937] 1965, 333, [1937] 2009, 343).
- 8 Translation modified. The bilingual text may also be found at <https://ctext.org/mengzi/jin-xin-i>.
- 9 It is not for nothing that the word is found in the increasingly popular phrase in developing countries around the world: "a community of common destiny/future [*mingyun*] for humankind."
- 10 The sentence appears on two occasions in Sima Qian's *Shiji*, once in the *Guanyan liezhuan* section, and once in the *Huozhi liezhuan* section. The later Confucian tradition would debate whether ethics arose naturally from such a material basis or whether they also required the "cultivation of moral character [*xiushen*]." The latter became the dominant position under the influence of Mencius, who observed that if the people "have not a certain livelihood, it follows that they will not have a fixed heart." But the steady "heart" in question required more: people must have more than food and shelter, for without the cultivation of virtue they would be little better than animals (Mencius 1895, I.7, III.3).
- 11 Some readers may be reminded of Engels's observation ([1883] 1985, 407) at Marx's funeral: "humankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it

- can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.” Note also Bertolt Brecht’s aphorism from *The Threepenny Opera*—“Food comes first, then morality” (Brecht and Weill 1968, 54).
- 12 For example, in the *Analects* we find that “if all is well-apportioned, there will be no poverty; if all are in harmony, there will be no lack of men; if stability reigns, there will be no danger of collapse” (Confucius 1993, 16.1). One may also find a bilingual version at <https://ctext.org/analects/ji-shi>.
 - 13 This saying is attested in the thirty-seventh chapter of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. A bilingual text may be found at <https://ctext.org/sanguo-yanyi/ch37>.
 - 14 The accounts may also be found at <https://ctext.org/shiji/gao-zu-ben-ji> and <https://ctext.org/han-shu/gao-di-ji>.
 - 15 Lu Jia is reputed to have written the twelve-volume *Xinyu* (literally “New Words”), available at <https://ctext.org/xinyu>.
 - 16 I am summarizing here a very complex history. For an excellent overview in English, see Zhang Jinfan (2013), while one may also consult in Chinese the works of He Qin-hua (2017, 2018).
 - 17 Nonetheless, scholars are keen to point out that whenever a government has needed to root out corruption and ensure stability for the sake of economic and social improvement, it has resorted to the Legalist tradition.
 - 18 It was during the Qin period that the infamous “burning of the books and burying alive of the Confucian scholars [*fenshukangru*]” was supposed to have taken place.
 - 19 As the *Analects* (1993, 2.3) put it: “If the people are guided by law, and kept in order by punishment, they may try to avoid crime, but have no sense of shame. If they are guided by virtue, and kept in order by the rules of propriety, they will have a sense of shame, and moreover will come to be good.”
 - 20 Within China, the ambiguity enabled—for example—Sun Zhongshan (Yat-sen) to see the Taiping as basically anti-imperial, while the earlier doyen of Taiping scholarship in China, Luo Ergang (1943, 1986), initially argued for their revolutionary and egalitarian credentials. Later, Chinese Marxist scholars tended to see the movement more in terms of utopian socialism and argued that there was little that could be regarded as revolutionary.
 - 21 Goldstein’s study also examines the *Yihetuan Yundong*, or Boxer Rebellion, the “House Church” movement, and the sectarian extremism of Falun Gong.

References

- Bodin, Jean. (1576) 1993. *Les six livres de la république*. Paris: Librairie générale française.
- Boer, Roland. 2019. *Red Theology: On the Christian Communist Tradition*. Studies in Critical Research on Religion. Leiden: Brill.
- Boer, Roland, and Zang Fengyu. 2019. “Renlei mingyun gongtongti de lilun neihan yu xianshi jiazhi.” *Zhongyang shehuizhuyi xueyuan xuebao* 2019 (4): 9–17.
- Brecht, Bertolt, and Kurt Weill. 1968. *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Calvin, John. (1559) 2006. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.
- Confucius. 1993. *Lunyu jinyi—The Analects of Confucius (Chinese-English Bilingual Edition)*. Translated by Yang Bojun, Wu Shuping, Pan Fu’en, and Wen Shaoxia. Jinan: Qilu shushe chuban gongsi.
- Diakonoff, Igor. 2003. *The Paths of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Durrant, Stephen, Wai-ye Li, and David Schaberg, trans. 2016. *Zuo Tradition—Zuozhuan: Commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals.”* Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Engels, Friedrich. (1883) 1985. “Das Begräbnis von Karl Marx.” In *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. I.25, 407–13. Berlin: Dietz.
- Gan, Chunsong. 2019. *A Concise Reader of Chinese Culture*. Translated by Yu Shiyi. China Insights. Singapore: Springer.
- Goldstein, Warren. 2017. “The Mandate of Heaven on Earth: Religious and Secular Conflict in China.” *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 3 (1–2): 25–45.
- Gu, Ban. 1962. *Hanshu*. Edited by Xu Dongfang. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju.
- Gu, Kansheng, and Yu Degang. 2014. “Lun Zhougong de ‘tianming’ sixiang zhexue jiqi dui houshi de yingxiang.” *Sichuan daxue xuebao (zhexue shuhui kexue ban)* 2014 (1): 43–50.
- Guo, Xiaojun. 2016. “Lun rujia zhexue de lunli jingshen—yi ‘neizaichaoyue’ wei shijie.” *Jiangsu shehui kexue* 2016 (6): 31–36.
- He, Qinhu. 2017. “Yi gudai Zhongguo yu riben wei zhongxin de zhonghua faxi zhi lüjia kao.” *Zhongguo faxue* 2017 (5): 196–215.
- . 2018. “Zhongguo faxi zhi falü xueshu kao: yi gudai Zhongguo lüxue yu riben de mingfa dao wei zhongxin.” *Zhongwai faxue* 30 (1): 7–36.
- Hobbes, Thomas. (1651) 1996. *Leviathan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnston, Ian. 2010. *The Mozi: A Complete Translation*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jouvenal, Bertrand de. 1957. *Sovereignty: An Inquiry into the Political Good*. Translated by J. F. Huntingdon. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Legge, James. 1871. *The Chinese Classics: Vol. 4, Part 2: The She King, or The Book of Poetry*. Hong Kong: London Missionary Society.
- Luo, Ergang. 1943. *Taiping tianguo shigao*. Beijing: Kaiming shuju.
- . 1986. *Taiping tianguo shi*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.
- . 1991. “Taiping tianguo de bingfa.” *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 1991 (1): 170–81.
- Luther, Martin. (1523) 1962. “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed.” In *Luther’s Works*, edited by Walther Brandt, Vol. 45, 81–129. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Mao, Zedong. (1937) 2009. “Maodun lun (1937.08).” In *Mao Zedong xuanji*, Vol. 1, 299–340. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe.
- . (1937) 1965. “On Contradiction (August, 1937).” In *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol. 1, 311–47. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press.
- Maritain, Jacques. 1951. *Man and the State*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marx, Karl. (1852) 1985. “Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte.” In *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. I.11, 96–189. Berlin: Dietz.
- . (1852) 1979. “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.” In *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 11, 99–197. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Mencius. 1895. *The Works of Mencius*. Translated by James Legge. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Petterson, Christina. 2012. “En konge i sin faders sted. Bibel og konge i den danske enevælde.” In *Bibelske Genskrivninger*, edited by Mogens Müllerand Jesper Høgenhaven, 413–34. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag.
- Ren, Jiantao. 2012. “Neizaichaoyue yu waizaichaoyue: zongjiao xinyang, duode xinnian yu zhixu wenti.” *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 2012 (7): 26–46.
- Shen, Shunfu. 2015. “Shengcun yu chaoyue: lun Zhongguo zhexue de jiben tedian.” *Xueshujie* 2015 (1): 151–60.

Sima, Qian. 2014. *Shiji*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.

Wang, Haifeng. 2018. “Dangdai Zhongguo makesizhuyi zhexue de xianshixing pingge—gaige kaifang 40 nianlai makesizhuyi zhexue yanjiu de fansi.” *Zhexue dongtai* 2018 (10): 22–30.

Xu, Tao. 2016. “Zhongxi zhexue huitong shiyu zhong de ‘neizaichaoyue’ yu ‘tianren heyi’.” *Xueshu yuekan* 2016 (6): 166–76.

Zhang, Jinfan. 2013. “Ancient China’s Legal Tradition and Legal Thought.” *Social Sciences in China* 34 (2): 134–51.