

**EXCERPTS FROM THE LAND SYSTEM OF THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM
(TIANCHAO TIANMU ZHIDU): "THE TAIPING ECONOMIC
PROGRAM"**

Introduction

In the 1840s a young man from Guangdong named Hong Xiuquan (1813-1864) created his own version of Christianity and made converts in Guangdong and Guangxi provinces. Hong believed that he was the Younger Brother of Jesus and that his mission, and that of his followers, was to cleanse China of the Manchus and others who stood in their way and "return" the Chinese people to the worship of the Biblical God. Led by Hong, the "God-worshippers" in rural Guangxi rose in rebellion in 1856 in hopes of creating a new "Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace" (*Taiping Tianguo*). Their movement is known in English as the Taiping movement ("taiping" meaning "great peace" in Chinese). The rebels swept through southern China and up to the Yangzi River, and then down the Yangzi to Nanjing, where they made their capital. Attempts to take northern China were unsuccessful, and the Taiping were eventually crushed in 1864. By that time, the Taiping Rebellion had caused devastation ranging over sixteen provinces with tremendous loss of life and the destruction of more than 600 cities.

In the document below, unknown authors lay forth parts of the Taiping economic program. This program was not carried out in practice (the Taipings were not known for their administrative capabilities), but it does represent the publicly stated ideals and goals of the movement.

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

From *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, compiled by Wm. Theodore de Bary and Richard Lufano, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 224-226. © 2000 Columbia University Press. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

*Excerpts from The Land System of the Heavenly Kingdom (Tianchao tianmu zhidu):
"The Taiping Economic Program"*

The distribution of all land is to be based on the number of persons in each family, regardless of sex. A large family is entitled to more land, a small one to less. The land distributed should not be all of one grade but mixed. ...

All the land in the country is to be cultivated by the whole population together. ...

...

During harvest season, the Group Officer¹ should direct [the grain collection by] the sergeants. Deducting the amount needed to feed the twenty-five families until the next harvest season, he should collect the rest of the produce for storage in the state granaries. ... all people

¹ The *liang sima*, official in charge of each twenty-five-family group.

**Primary Source Document, with Questions (DBQ) on
EXCERPTS FROM THE LAND SYSTEM OF THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM (TIANCHAO TIANMU ZHIDU):
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under Heaven are of one family belonging to the Heavenly Father, the Supreme Ruler, the Lord God-on-High. Nobody should keep private property. All things should be presented to the Supreme Ruler, so that He will be enabled to make use of them and distribute them equally to all members of his great world-family. Thus all will be sufficiently fed and clothed.

Questions:

1. Why would Confucian scholars be opposed to the system suggested in these passages?
2. What strengths and weaknesses do you see in the Taiping economic program as revealed in these passages?
3. In what ways does the system envisioned here differ from what was already in place during the mid-nineteenth-century Qing?

Longer Selection

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*Excerpts from The Land System of the Heavenly Kingdom (Tianchao tianmu zhidu):
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The distribution of all land is to be based on the number of persons in each family, regardless of sex. A large family is entitled to more land, a small one to less. The land distributed should not be all of one grade but mixed. Thus for a family of six, for instance, three are to have fertile land and three barren land — half and half of each.

All the land in the country is to be cultivated by the whole population together. If there is an insufficiency [of land] in this place, move some of the people to another place. If there is an insufficiency in another place, move them to this one. All lands in the country are also to be mutually supporting with respect to abundance and scarcity. If this place has a drought, then draw upon the abundant harvest elsewhere in order to relieve the distress here. If there is a drought there, draw upon the abundant harvest here in order to relieve the distress there. Thus all the people of the country may enjoy the great blessings of the Heavenly Father, Supreme Ruler and Lord God-on-High. The land is for all to till, the food for all to eat, the clothes for all to wear, and money for all to spend. Inequality shall exist nowhere; none shall suffer from hunger or cold. ...

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Mulberry trees are to be planted along the walls [of villages] throughout the country. All women are required to grow silkworms, to do weaving, and to make clothes. Every family of the country is required to raise five hens and two hogs, in keeping with the proper breeding seasons.²

During the harvest season, the Group Officer³ should direct [the grain collection by] the sergeants. Deducting the amount needed to feed the twenty-five families until next harvest season, he should collect the rest of the produce for storage in state granaries. The same method of collection is applicable to other kinds of products, such as barley, beans, ramie fiber, cotton clothes, silk, domestic animals, silver and copper cash, and so on, for all people under Heaven are of one family belonging to the Heavenly Father, the Supreme Ruler, the Lord God-on-High. Nobody should keep private property. All things should be presented to the Supreme Ruler, so that He will be enabled to make use of them and distribute them equally to all members of his great world-family. Thus all will be sufficiently fed and clothed. ...

The Group Officer must keep a record of the amount of grain and cash he has collected and report them to the Treasurers and Receiving and Disbursing Tellers. A state treasury and a church are to be established among every twenty-five families, under the direct administration of the Group Officer. All expenditures of the twenty-five families for weddings, births, or other festival occasions are to be paid for out of the state treasury. But there is to be a fixed limit; not a penny is to be spent beyond that. ... Thus, throughout the land in the contracting of marriages, wealth need be no consideration.

In the twenty-five family units pottery-making, metalworking, carpentry, masonry, and other such skilled work should be performed by the sergeants and militiamen in the off-seasons from farming and military service.

In conducting the different kinds of festival ceremonies for the twenty-five families under his administration, the Group Officer should hold religious services to pray to the Heavenly Father, the Supreme Ruler and Lord God-on-High. All the bad customs of the past must be completely abolished.

² A paraphrase of *Mencius* 1A:7.

³ See footnote 1, above.