

# The Daoist Utopia of Great Peace\*

Barbara Hendrischke

Sydney/Australia

The title of this paper needs some explanation. "Great Peace" is a crude English equivalent for the Chinese term *taiping*, which figured prominently in Chinese thought during the Han Dynasty and recurred occasionally in later historical periods, for instance in the mid-nineteenth century, when Hong Xiuquan called his newly founded state the Kingdom of Great Peace. I will deal here with a Daoist interpretation of the term, or to be more precise, with an interpretation which probably stems from the beginnings of Daoist religious thinking. Thus I will have to go back to the last decades of the Late Han Empire.

The early Daoists viewed the state of *taiping* as what we might call a utopia. Utopia is such an ambiguous term that one might argue against its use.<sup>1</sup> However, as a convenient shorthand equivalent it has some use and, indeed, the western use of the term reflects some of the ambiguities of the Chinese term *taiping*. There is a nostalgic element in both usages: some thinkers observed a state of *taiping* in China's golden past,<sup>2</sup> similar for instance to Ovid's appraisal of a long lost Golden Age.<sup>3</sup> There is also the anticipatory element in that the state of *taiping* is seen as a promise of a better future: *taiping* will arrive and mankind's worries will be over. In the West, we know of millenarian utopias which were sought by means of religious orgies and of social and humanitarian utopias, that were to be achieved by political reforms. In China, the term *taiping* has served both purposes and has been the goal for millenarian movements as well as established politics, as I hope to demonstrate in this paper. However, the ambiguity of the Western term is in some respects broader than the meaning of "Great Peace". In the west, we can use "utopia" in a negative way with the implication of radical, non-realistic political and social phantasies, and in our century the hope for a utopia has been

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sandkühler 1990, Vol. 4:678ff.

<sup>2</sup> See Jia Yi, *Xin shu*, ed. Congshu jicheng, ch. 9 Xiu zheng yu:96: The Yellow Emperor achieved *taiping*; Yao and Shun were also said to have achieved Great Peace, cf. Wang Chong, *Lun heng*, ch. Jiang rui:168, or all the Five Emperors and Three Kings, ch. Xuan Han:189.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ch. 1:9, cited Cohn 1970:187 and Kumar 1987:3.

overshadowed by the fear of an anti-utopia as depicted in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* or of George Orwell's apocalyptic vision. These connotations are not contained in the term *taiping*. The notion of Great Peace is only used to define a desirable, positive state of affairs, and it can even, on rare occasions be used to give praise to the historical present or the very recent past.<sup>4</sup>

### The *Taiping jing*

Before returning to the term *taiping* and all it entails, I would like to pay some attention to the source material dealt with here. Most references will be to one single text of early Daoism, entitled *Taiping jing*. This scripture was edited in the last years of the 6th century by disciples of Tao Hongjing, who belonged to the Maoshan branch of Daoism. About one third of the scripture has been preserved in the original 6th century version.<sup>5</sup> Much of the rest has come down to us in an abbreviated version produced during the Tang Dynasty. Taken together there is considerable textual material available. A fundamental problem is that we have little information about its origins – we do not know when and where the texts were written, which are contained in the present-day *Taiping jing*, or *Taiping corpus* as I would like to call it, since it consists of texts from different sources. There are at least three distinct layers of text.<sup>6</sup> The Celestial Master layer contains dialogues, often in a lively style, between a teacher called Celestial Master (*tianshi*) and his disciples. The style of these A-type dialogues is unique. Dialogues as such are commonplace in early Daoist writings,<sup>7</sup> consisting of lectures or sermons which a teacher delivers in standard language and with few interruptions from the audience. The Celestial Master dialogues are different. They contain colloquial elements and the student can assume the role of a discussant by raising questions or presenting arguments. When this contribution does not please the Master he enters into a verbose lamentation about his disciple's monstrous stupidity. The dialogues of the B-layer are more like the standard type, with a so-called Celestial Gentleman of very high divine rank, a disciple and a "Great Divine" who mediates between the two. The third part of the text consists of assorted non-uniform writings which have nothing in common except for the fact that they contain no dialogues. The three parts are quite distinct.<sup>8</sup> The use of the term *taiping* for instance is limited

<sup>4</sup> Wang Chong, *Lun heng*, ch. Xuan Han:189 says that Emperor Xuan achieved a state of Great Peace comparable to that of Yao and Shun.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 1970:11 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Xiong Deji 1962:9ff.; Takahashi Tadahiko 1983:296.

<sup>7</sup> "Early Taoist Writings" are texts considered to have been produced before the early sixth century, cf. Zürcher 1980:84.

<sup>8</sup> 42 of the transmitted chapters are of layer A, four are of layer B, nine stem from differ-

to the Celestial Master parts of the corpus. In layer B the term occurs only in connection with texts – the so-called “texts on Great Peace” (*taiping zhi shu*)<sup>9</sup> – and these could well refer to the Celestial Master texts of layer A. However, no consensus has yet been reached on the date of these different layers. While I am convinced that layer A is the oldest and reaches back into the outgoing Han Dynasty, others see B as the oldest layer.<sup>10</sup>

To date, the academic history of the Taiping corpus has been far from splendid. Max Kaltenmark’s short essay from the early seventies is still the only reliable description of the text. For many years in China there was no chance to critically approach the *Taiping jing* because it was considered to be almost sacred. Chinese scholars were obliged to link the *Taiping jing* to the so-called Taiping-movement of the second century which led to the great Yellow-Turban peasant rebellion.<sup>11</sup> For them the *Taiping jing* had to be a Han-Dynasty text, in spite of the lack of reliable bibliographical evidence. On the positive side, Wang Ming from the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences has produced a very useful modern edition on the basis of the Ming dynasty texts contained in the Daoist canon. The Japanese have solved the later history of the corpus by analysing its 6th century edition and later versions,<sup>12</sup> however I believe that they have not yet succeeded in a plausible analysis of the texts as such.

Max Kaltenmark has based his work on the *Taiping jing* on the hypothesis that much of the Celestial Master material is of Han Dynasty origin and he has never had cause to revise this view.<sup>13</sup> However, to prove this hypothesis seems equally impossible. All arguments for an early date of the central texts of the corpus stem from their contents, and such arguments alone cannot be considered sufficient.

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ent sources and three are of mixed origin. Only a few chapters leave some room for doubt concerning their stylistic affiliation: chapter 38 consists of a brief and cryptic list of commandments, interpreted in A-style chapter 39. Chapter 38 can consequently be considered as a Celestial Master chapter. Chapter 71, despite the occurrence of a Divine Man (*shenren*) is also listed as an A-style chapter. So is the poorly transmitted chapter 116. Chapters 50, 55 and 108 contain texts of different layers. For a recent analysis of the different textual layers and their origin cf. Petersen 1990a:198 and 212.

<sup>9</sup> See TPJHJ 114:624 (B).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Takahashi 1983:323ff., and Takahashi 1988:280; Petersen 1990a:212.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Harrison 1969:147, Xiong Deji 1962:8; Yang Kuan 1959:32f.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. in particular Yoshioka 1970; cf. Mansvelt Beck 1980 for an account of Japanese research on the text.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Kaltenmark 1979:20f.

They cannot be backed up by early citations, reliable accounts of textual history, parallel texts or other external evidence.

Be that as it may, the topic of *taiping* will itself lead us back to Han Dynasty concepts and traditions. I shall return to the problem of date and place after I have discussed the notion of *taiping* and what it stands for in the corpus.

### The millenarian promise of *taiping*

The term *taiping* was rarely used in the Pre-Han period; the *Lüshi chungiu* mentions that it refers to a community organized by certain music reflecting cosmic structures.<sup>14</sup> In the *Zhuangzi* the term *daping* is used to refer to a harmonious community.<sup>15</sup> *Da* as well as *tai* served to nominalize *ping* and give it the honour and weight of a concept; *ping* alone was mainly used as an adjective. In the case of the word *ping* the prefix *tai* proved more successful than *Zhuangzi's da*; in the case of *tong* for instance, *da* became established.<sup>16</sup> In Han Dynasty texts like the *Huainanzi* we frequently meet other concepts of a similar structure, for instance *taiqing* "Great Purity", first used in the *Zhuangzi*; or *taisu* "Great Simplicity" and *taihe* "Great Harmony".<sup>17</sup> The term *taiping* reaches beyond school differentiations. According to the *Shiji*, Qin Shihuangdi saw himself as a ruler about to achieve *taiping*<sup>18</sup> through the help of his "magicians" (*fangshi*), while the *Liji* mentions that a true gentleman will achieve Great Peace through rites and music.<sup>19</sup> Han texts of all creeds used the term widely to signify peaceful and harmonious social interaction, based for instance on rites,<sup>20</sup> on harmony with the course of nature, as expressed by Dong Zhongshu<sup>21</sup> or on appropriate, moral government as stated by Wang Chong.<sup>22</sup>

Not all utopias were given the epithet *taiping*. If we search for utopias beyond the usage of this term, Han Dynasty texts contain several short and concise descriptions of ideal communities, situated either in the Far West or in the long distant

<sup>14</sup> See *Lüshi chungiu jiaoshi*, ch. Dayue:255.

<sup>15</sup> See *Zhuangzi jishi*, ch. 13 Tiandao:471.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Pokora 1961.

<sup>17</sup> See *Huainanzi tongjian*:42f.

<sup>18</sup> See Sima Qian, *Shiji*, ch. 6:258.

<sup>19</sup> See *Liji zhengyi* (Orthodox interpretation of the *Liji*), ed. Shisanjing zhushu, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1980, ch. Zhongni yanju:1615,1.

<sup>20</sup> See the biography of Dou Ying in Ban Gu's *Hanshu*, ch. 52:2379. Dou Ying employed Duke Shen from Lu to construct a "Hall of Light" *mingtang* with the aim of establishing *taiping*.

<sup>21</sup> See citation in Zhao Lingzhi's *Houqing lu*, ed. Congshu jicheng, ch. 1:8, cf. Eichhorn 1951:120.

<sup>22</sup> See Wang Chong, *Lun heng*, ch. Xuan Han:189.

past, as for instance He Xiu's hard-working well-field community.<sup>23</sup> Whether under the sign of *taiping* or not, these admirable communities were all ideal replicas of the real empire, transposed into a sphere of order and regularity, rather than blue prints for something new and different.<sup>24</sup>

All this is well known and is mentioned here only as a reminder.<sup>25</sup> In some aspects the *Taiping jing* uses the term in a similar way. Firstly, *taiping* always refers to the world (*tianxia*) and does not signify an individual condition. *Daluán*, "the great disorder", can be considered as its opposite. Secondly, there is in the *Taiping jing* the concept of a Golden Age of *taiping* in the past,<sup>26</sup> just as there is in many Han dynasty and later texts, which mention various ancient rulers as creators of *taiping*. The *Taiping jing* however is imprecise on this point. It does not mention personages or periods, but says that in antiquity, whenever that was, *taiping* was achieved. Thirdly, in the Taiping corpus the condition of *taiping* is the most desirable condition encompassing all other human aims; in this respect the corpus agrees with the majority of Han-writings;<sup>27</sup> nowever, some ancient texts list *taiping* in the context of other desired ends, for instance together with a peaceful population and a natural, not premature death.<sup>28</sup>

What then, are the differences between the concept of *taiping* in the Taiping corpus and in other ancient material? What is the specific meaning of *taiping* in the Taiping corpus? We must at this point remind ourselves of the fact that the *Taiping jing*, whatever its origin might be, undoubtedly has its home in the formative period of the Daoist religion. Consequently we would expect the term *taiping* to have some attributes not contained in the philosophical writings of Han intellectuals.

The first characteristic aspect, limited to the *Taiping jing* is the prophecy of *taiping's* imminent arrival, or to be more precise, the prophecy of the possibility of its imminent arrival. It is likely that the *Taiping jing* is the manifestation of millenarian speculation in ancient China. We know that many popular move-

<sup>23</sup> See *Chunqiu Gongyang jiegou*, ed. Shisanjing zhushu, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1980: ch. 12:2415 (Duke Xuan, year 15); cf. Cheng 1985:217ff.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Bauer 1971:108ff.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Eichhorn 1957, Pokora 1961 and Stein 1963.

<sup>26</sup> See TPJHJ 45:125 and 92:377. However, only in these two rare instances *taiping* is mentioned in respect to antiquity (*gu*); overwhelmingly *taiping* is seen as a state to be achieved in the near future.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance Wang Chong as above note 22 or *Baihu tong*, ch. Fengshan:1a, where it is stated that the Fengshan ritual may only take place after *taiping* has been achieved.

<sup>28</sup> See the apocryphal *Hetu shengqia fu*, edited by Yasui Kōzan and Nakamura Shōhachi 1985:124.

ments centered on such speculation. However, the written sources attributed to them which have remained, are spurious. The *Taiping jing* is singular in producing the full millenarian argument, repeated again and again throughout much of the A-type text: by the time the Celestial Master instructs his disciples mankind's collected guilt has reached its peak, as depicted in the scripture. Mankind was doomed for destruction if Heaven had not sent the Celestial Master and his disciples to prepare men for the arrival of *taiping* which must be imminent because the cycle of evil has reached its maximum:

"Recently, the Celestial Master has extended his mercy and love and has shown sympathy for emperors and kings on their throne. We worry with all our heart that we have not attained Heaven's intention. Only on the basis of a full explanation is it possible to reach the path to Great Peace of the highest rank."<sup>29</sup>

The threat of imminent and total destruction is common to millenarian texts of all ages and cultures.<sup>30</sup> However, judging by the transmitted texts it did not enter Chinese written culture before the Han dynasty. Although the chaos of the outgoing Warring States period could well have resulted in an apocalyptic vision, we do not have any early traces of such a scenario, while several centuries later, when the *Taiping* corpus was written this thought must have been widespread. A passage in the corpus ridicules would-be prophets who rely on the apocalyptic threat. A Nostradamus-type charlatan is depicted as setting up a stage in the centre of town next to the market, where he bewails the fate of mankind, shedding enough tears to drown in them. The text says that crooks like him cause a lot of damage by misleading their credulous listeners.<sup>31</sup> The prophesy issued by the Celestial Master is of a different quality. He argues on the basis of men's moral behaviour that mankind's end is in sight, and is concerned with morals rather than with a detailed list of unavoidable nasty consequences if men do not mend their ways. The following passage deals with the consequences resulting from lavish funeral ceremonies:

"When Yin is strong and Yang is weak, (the dead) will repress the living, subordinates will oppress their superiors and sons their fathers. The king's government will therefore not be in balance (*ping*)."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See TPJHJ 35:33. The arguments concerning the amassed evil and the consequent annihilation or salvation of mankind have been collected by Petersen 1990b:2ff., referring mainly to chapter 92:370ff. The imminent arrival of *taiping* and the Heavenly mission of the Master and his disciples are commonplace throughout the scripture's A-style chapters; for instance TPJHJ 35:33, 34 and 35; TPJHJ 36:52; TPJHJ 37:56, 57 and 61.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Cohn 1970:24ff.

<sup>31</sup> See TPJHJ 37:58.

<sup>32</sup> See TPJHJ 36:52.

A second characteristic aspect of the religious use of the term in the Taiping corpus is the totality of *taiping*. Not a single item is left out. A single individual, dissatisfied and resenting his fate, can, we are told, put the arrival of Great Peace at risk.<sup>33</sup> This idea has significant repercussions throughout the Taiping corpus. It leads for instance to the demand for a public relations campaign to clear the ruling strata of all responsibility for general decay. The people should not blame their rulers because this resentment would confuse the cosmic balance.<sup>34</sup> Or, to give another example, punishments must be reduced to a minimum because they cause resentment:

"All human behaviour is governed by the ruling kings. Among those things men most wish for nothing is as constantly desired as life. . . . Mankind is part of the spiritual sequence of Heaven and Earth. To destroy someone is referred to as severing the spiritual sequences of Heaven and Earth and it can afflict damage on the body of Heaven and Earth. If the harm done is severe Heaven will later annihilate mankind. This was no light matter for the male and female ancestors who lived previously; for future generations they had to plan how it was possible to avoid inflicting the peril of inherited evil (*chengfu*) on their sons and grandsons. Thus under the rule of sages Great Peace was always kept in mind and the penal code was not applied."<sup>35</sup>

The same is true for female infanticide: women resent it and consequently it should be abolished.<sup>36</sup> The doctrine of the *Taiping jing* is an extreme example of so-called Chinese universalism, that is of the belief in the magical interconnection of all separate beings and of all strata of men and nature.

However, the concept of universality is put to unorthodox use. The modernity of the text's argument is striking, in that an individual situation is depicted as influential for the development of society in general. This in turn causes the appearance of the concept of individual responsibility, perhaps even individual rights, which transcend family and other narrow communal obligations. The text posits universal togetherness as an argument for strengthening the role of the individual rather than that of the oppressive forces of society at large. This trend of thought

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<sup>33</sup> See TPJHJ 42:89: all vapours must be harmonious; 36:52: if one *qi* vapour is not in line, the vapour of goodness and peace will not come; 35:34: in spite of the proximity of Great Peace each single instance of trespassing is of relevance.

<sup>34</sup> See TPJHJ 37:60: even the most virtuous ruler cannot abolish the evil piled up since the beginnings of history; to accuse him will only increase the general resentment; 108:515; 96:418; 37:58.

<sup>35</sup> See TPJHJ 40:80; compare also 54:204.

<sup>36</sup> See TPJHJ 35:36.

is one of the many novelties found in the *Taiping jing*, which the mainstream tradition of political, as well as of religious thought did not deem fit to adopt and develop.

A third characteristic aspect results from the second and is indeed of utmost importance. To prepare for the arrival of *taiping* is on the one hand the task of a ruler ("emperors and kings of utmost virtue" as they are called in the scripture) and on the other hand a general responsibility. Failure to achieve *taiping* cannot be blamed on the ruler – just as the growth of evil may not be seen as his responsibility:

"Now if a government fails to achieve harmony this is not only the fault of Heaven, Earth and ruler; the responsibility can be attributed to the misdeeds which are committed by each member of the population (*baizing*). They receive and transmit faults from one to the other, thereby making them even greater."<sup>37</sup>

So the *Taiping* corpus contains a theory of mass participation in mankind's fate. As far as I know this has not come to the attention of Chinese Marxist interpreters, who concentrated on more marginal and superficial issues. The argument that the rich are like rats in a granary may appeal to these interpreters;<sup>38</sup> however, starting with the Book of Songs<sup>39</sup> many social critics have voiced similar accusations.<sup>40</sup> The truly revolutionary approach of the *Taiping jing*, as I see it, lies in the idea of joint responsibility or, in other words, in a reduction of the pivotal role of political rulers. These three points – millenarianism, all-embracing totality and the involvement of mass-participation – may suffice to document how the *Taiping jing's* use of the term *taiping* differs from the way the concept was used by established political or philosophical thinkers.

Even in other early Daoist material a search for some parallel use of the term would be in vain. Where the term occurs, as in the *Laozi Xianger* commentary<sup>41</sup> or in the Inner and Outer Chapters of the *Baopuzi*,<sup>42</sup> it is always used in Wang Chong's or Dong Zhongshu's sense of the word as if it were of concern only for a ruler and his ministers: there is no hint of "the vapour (*qi*) of *taiping* being imminent" or of a Daoist missionary preparing mankind for the arrival of *taiping*.

<sup>37</sup> See TPJHJ 36:53.

<sup>38</sup> See TPJHJ 67:247.

<sup>39</sup> See *Shijing*, Wei feng, Legge 1970:171.

<sup>40</sup> See for instance Wang Fu's *Qian fu lun*, ed. Zhuzi jicheng: ch. 12 Fu chi "Luxury" or Zhongchang Tong's (lost) *Chang yan*, see the citation in Fan Ye's *Hou Hanshu*, ch. 49:1648 (cf. Balazs 1964:219).

<sup>41</sup> See Xianger commenting on *Laozi* 11 and *Laozi* 30 (*Laozi Xianger zhu suoyin*:11).

<sup>42</sup> See Ge Hong's *Baopuzi neipian* 8:33 and 10:43; *waipian* 15:129 and 34:197.

Leaving the sphere of philological evidence I will now briefly turn to the wider ranges of religious history. While the Taiping corpus uses the term *taiping* in a context which must be called millenarian, this differs from other documentations of Daoist millenarianism. Millenarianism as a religious creed was quite popular from the Han Dynasty onwards, and has fortunately – thanks to the efforts of Rolf Stein, Anna Seidel and others – been well represented in the Western language literature.<sup>43</sup> The Taiping Movement of the second century leading to the Yellow Turban Rebellion and to the overthrow of the dynasty was a major millenarian movement and, judging by its name, a token of the popular appeal of the *taiping* concept. However, specific correspondences between the Taiping corpus and the creeds and practices of the Taiping movement are rare, as far as we can gather from the limited material which has been transmitted on the Taiping movement. With regards to the wider range of post-Han millenarian movements and millenarian thought, for which more textual evidence is available, the slogans bear even less resemblance to the *Taiping jing's* utopia. Several texts have been transmitted, dealing with the complicated timing of the apocalypse, its gruesome details, the arrival of a Messiah and the salvation of the elect.<sup>44</sup> The corpus does not deal with any of these points – thus distinguishing it clearly from the apocalyptic texts. While the Taiping texts mention the extinction of mankind,<sup>45</sup> they do not go into the picturesque details; they do not contain the term “seed people”, used in other texts for the elected few<sup>46</sup> who will survive; the Taiping texts do not know of a Messiah, nor do they need one: it suffices that the Celestial Master and his disciples persuade a ruler to abide by the Celestial Master's scripture.<sup>47</sup> Any responsible ruler could suit this purpose. The Danish scholar Jens Petersen has recently published an article entitled “The Anti-messianism of the *Taiping jing*”, which in some respects is quite convincing. Looking at the problem from another angle: it seems striking that outright millenarian, Messiah-oriented texts like the *Yundu jing*<sup>48</sup> or the *Shenzhou jing*<sup>49</sup> have no need for the term *taiping*, or for the

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Stein 1963, Seidel 1970 and 1983a, Zürcher 1980.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Zürcher 1982:2ff.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. TPJHJ 36:44; the extinction of mankind is seen as the outcome of a lack of procreation, due to chastity or other deficiencies in the harmony between Yin and Yang. There is no violent action involved.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 1965; the term occurs in the introduction to the Taiping texts (see TPJHJ p. 1, 3 and 4), which contains many terms common in Maoshan texts.

<sup>47</sup> See TPJHJ 35:40; 42:93; 47:142; 70:279 and *passim*.

<sup>48</sup> In the *Yundu jing* (that is the *Taishang lingbao tiandi yundu ziran miaojing*, Daozang No. 322) a great flood is prognosticated in the course of which the saviour Li Hong will appear. According to Ofuchi Ninji 1974:55 the text was written around 570.

<sup>49</sup> The *Shenzhou jing* (or *Taishang tongyuan shenzhou jing*, Daozang No. 335) mentions that

concept of "inherited evil" *chengfu*, another characteristic term, which the A-layer texts in the corpus link to the end of mankind.<sup>50</sup>

So with respect to the use of the term *taiping* and its connotations, we must conclude that the Taiping corpus is not an integral part of any well-defined tradition. While it makes use of general as well as specifically Daoist speculations it remains somewhat distant from both. I will now turn to the doctrine of the corpus and hope to be able to point out how it combines the two traditions, that is how it synthesizes cosmological and social speculations with millenarian ideas.

### Social reforms leading to Great Peace

Before turning to some details of the Daoist utopia two preliminary questions must be briefly dealt with. The first question is why mankind is expected to arrive at Great Peace and the second question is how Great Peace is achieved and what sort of society it entails.

Concerning the first question a combination of factors is seen behind the arrival of *taiping*, factors which have usefully been assembled by Jens Petersen to prove the scripture's "anti-messianism".<sup>51</sup> Although slightly in conflict with each other these factors constitute a fairly coherent line of thought, which is roughly the following: mankind is in great danger, due to the vast mass of evil which has been accumulated ever since the creation of heaven and earth. While there is no conjecture in the corpus concerning the length of cycles it uses some of the relevant Han-Dynasty cosmological terms.<sup>52</sup> However, despite the missing details it seems clear that a cyclical view of history agrees with most parts of the A-layer text. The extremity of the present situation contains, we are told, the chance of a new beginning which is heralded by the imminent arrival of the *qi* "vapour" of *taiping* – a unique cosmic situation which contains the chance to establish peace among men. Heaven has sent the Celestial Master, his disciples and various texts to support men who wish to transform this chance into reality. Consequently the Master expresses a sense of mission and urgency when he appeals to the insight of his disciples. The cosmic conjunction makes time very precious to him and his followers. For the corpus's line of argument it is important to remember that the

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destruction will begin in a *renwu* year and that the saviour Li Hong will appear ten years later in a *renchen* year, cf. Zürcher 1982:3; cf. Mollier 1991.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Hendrichske 1991; see for instance TPJHJ 92:372f.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Petersen 1990b.

<sup>52</sup> The terms used are for instance "conjunction" *jihui* (TPJHJ 92:371) or "revolution of heaven" *tian shiyun* (TPJHJ 69:270) for the regular term *tianyun* (see Sima Qian's *Shiji* ch. 27 *Tianguan shu*:1344).

cosmic situation is only partially man-made. Its constituents are mankind's past performance and "Heaven's will".

This line of thought is essentially millenarian despite the missing Messiah and the limited religious appeal. However, when we approach the second point, that is, how Great Peace was to be implemented, we will move away from religious reasoning and back to the sphere of socio-political concepts.

In this respect the text does not follow a single argumentative line. Instead, in a cumulative fashion it builds up two complexes of social reality, which can broadly be defined as the realms of what is and what should be. The realm of what is encompasses human failures and follies which add up to disastrous consequences. Within the lists of different facets it seems impossible to distinguish the layers of cause and effect or to arrive at one single chain of causation. According to the corpus, each new layer of damage effected by other causes turns into the cause for new damage while at the same time reaching backward to renew and intensify the original cause: female infanticide for instance will endanger human procreation; this will offend the earth which will reduce its fertility and cause starvation and poverty; this in turn will increase the occurrence of female infanticide. Some links run crosswise to this basic chain: infanticide will anger women and thereby increase resentment, which will as a result cause a disturbance of the Yin/Yang balance which will then endanger procreation. Another line of argument starts with the unbalanced numbers of men and women caused by female infanticide: this imbalance will lead to less children.<sup>53</sup> For orientation, if the reader wishes to untangle a cluster he can only haphazardly order the different items in form of a list.

The same is true for the realm of what should be, which in many ways is defined by being the opposite of what is: men will not dig deep wells,<sup>54</sup> will not clear mountain forests by burning them down,<sup>55</sup> will not be deprived of their essential needs,<sup>56</sup> that is food, procreation and clothes. They will not attempt to be chaste,<sup>57</sup> will work for their living,<sup>58</sup> and will hold jobs which they are capable of.<sup>59</sup> They will rarely suffer punishment and will consequently bear no grudge,<sup>60</sup> which will have a beneficial influence on the regularity of the four seasons and

<sup>53</sup> See TPJHJ 35:36.

<sup>54</sup> See TPJHJ 45:120ff.

<sup>55</sup> See TPJHJ 118:668f.

<sup>56</sup> See TPJHJ 36:42ff.

<sup>57</sup> See TPJHJ 35:37ff.

<sup>58</sup> See TPJHJ 67:251.

<sup>59</sup> See TPJHJ 48:152, 54:202 and 47:144.

<sup>60</sup> See TPJHJ 54:204; 40:80.

the size of the harvest,<sup>61</sup> which will then further increase general cooperation and well-being.

The bulk of the Taiping corpus describes the world as it should be, listing and explaining all aspects of *taiping*-linked reform. Most of these reforms are of a socio-political or of a moral and altogether secular nature, to the extent to which the term "secular" can be applied to the Han Dynasty cultural scene. The state of *taiping* relies heavily on cosmological speculation and natural or heavenly laws while ignoring religious rituals for the communication with the deities and the magical devices, which were practiced within ancient millenarian movements. For the Taiping corpus, morality was all – in this respect the text is traditional. However, the contents of this morality have little in common with the specifics of Chinese traditional morality.

### Communication in the state of Great Peace

From the *Taiping jing's* ambitious reform program, which attempts to deal with life's totality – it must be remembered that not a single mistake is allowed if *taiping* is to prevail – from this all-embracing program I will introduce the section on communication to show what a society on its way to Great Peace is like. For the Taiping authors, communication is the hub of social coherence. While other factors are mentioned, for instance the proper placement of officials or the reduction of legal punishments, communication takes up more space in the corpus than the other intra-social links. Communication can, it is claimed, break the boundaries of hierarchy and departmental loyalty to achieve a more egalitarian and open society. These blunt modernist terms are, I feel, justified by the corpus's pronounced concern for welfare, justice and freedom of information – all in the context of early medieval China.

Concerning the flow of information from grassroot levels up to the top and down again to the people, the corpus has laid out an apparatus of some complexity. In this process, the upward flow is given more attention than the direction downwards. How the political leaders are linked with the people amounts to a central administrative question, as has correctly been pointed out by Hachiya Kunio who has written a voluminous article on the subject.<sup>62</sup>

There is first of all the oral interview, which is set up when a locality is in trouble. The text gives pedantic instructions on how all villagers are to be tricked into becoming police informants. If the situation is handled properly, it will, the Celestial Master claims, lead to cooperation between the local population and the

<sup>61</sup> See TPJHJ 35:36; 67:244.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Hachiya Kunio 1983; cf. also the account Kaltenmark 1979:24ff.

authorities so that the administration will achieve its aims. When the people side with the authorities rather than with robbers and other outlaws the latter will quickly be caught:

"The county head proceeds to the place where robbers have appeared and issues an invitation to the local population. He seats the retired officials of high and low rank facing east, the scholars and men of virtue facing north, the pious sons and devoted younger brothers facing west; he places the diligent farmers in the south-east facing north-west, and wicked young people in the south-west facing north-east. The official in charge seats himself facing south. Why does one have to sit in exactly this way? If everyone stays in his group the way of Heaven is complied with and the position of men is as it should be. Consequently it should be easy to lay hold of the robbers. Why? Retired officials of high and low rank are suited to the position of righteousness. After having left office they like to help out on the basis of their righteousness. The scholars and men of virtue are suited to the position of clear-sightedness in that they wish to let their Dao of classical education shine for the detection of the wicked. Pious sons and filial younger brothers are suited to (the sun's) home county, in that the very pious through his feelings can cause (robbers) to return to their home county... Men facing east, west and north sit down first, while the lazy and the wicked sit down afterwards. If there is wine each should be given one cup. If there is no wine, good words should be delivered to help the men to bring complete clarity into everything. The official in charge sits in between, but he locks himself in behind doors. One after the other the men are called up. Through being either honoured or humiliated they all volunteer information. Each man in his statement reports the name of the gang leader. The consistent and the inconsistent in what has been said will then be deliberated. The person who has said something inconsistent will be known as a great liar and will henceforth be classified as such. The person whose words were consistent will in the end be presented with gifts. Why not immediately? This would cause resentment. A ruler or a father who cause resentment in their subjects or their children are not a merciful father or a worthy ruler..."<sup>63</sup>

The passage is strikingly concrete, outlining the psychological element inherent in successful administrative measures. The interest of the author is that of the administrator. Takahashi Tadahiko has quite convincingly argued that the Taiping corpus is concerned with the small worries of regional officials. This excludes two other possible perspectives. The corpus is on the one hand not written from a radical anti-establishment point of view and there is not the slightest hint at its

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<sup>63</sup> See TPJHJ 35:40.

authors changing sides in a revolutionary fashion.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, the texts are not concerned with the larger decisions made at the imperial court.<sup>65</sup> The regional nature of the text is underlined by the fact that one of its major reform items, that is the interdiction of female infanticide was enacted on a local scale during the outgoing Han Dynasty.<sup>66</sup> The same is true for other measures of social welfare. Feeding and clothing the people<sup>67</sup> as well as bridging the most blatant social ruptures<sup>68</sup> were mainly the task of regional government. The regionalism of the corpus is further documented by the fact that the different strata of the population involved in the fact finding mission described above replicate real Han Dynasty strata: The "retired officials" of central government played an important role in county affairs;<sup>69</sup> the "pious sons" and "filial brothers" were at various occasions presented with pieces of silk and exempted from taxes and labour service. Local government representatives would turn to these two groups to recommend candidates for offices in the central government. The "outstanding farmers" enjoyed a similar rank.<sup>70</sup>

### The prognostic tradition

The authorities of the *taiping* state staged interviews when they had an occasion to pay special attention to a particular region. When there was no such occasion they had to rely on the people's written communication to keep in touch. The term used is "memorial" *shu*, although this must not mean that only properly written memorials were welcome. The information desired was of a particular kind:

"Reports on abnormal phenomena, disasters and diseases, whether large or small in size and in scope, irregularities of wind and rain, all the big and small sufferings of the people and the ten thousand

<sup>64</sup> The *Taiping jing* is not a revolutionary text; it says that "robbers" are too lazy to work (67:243) and that they are evil ("without Dao") (67:250).

<sup>65</sup> Takahashi 1986:254ff. and 259 ff.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Jia Pian's attempt in Xinxi county in the south east of present Henan to make female infanticide illegal. As far as I know this is the only such attempt which has been reported by the historiographers (see Fan Ye's *Hou Hanshu* ch. 67:2216). Jia Pian was an anti-eunuch partisan who died probably in 168 A.D. because he refused to go into hiding. The children who were saved by his policy were given his family name.

<sup>67</sup> See TPJHJ 36:43ff. Men have three essential needs: food, procreation and clothes.

<sup>68</sup> See TPJHJ 35:32, where it is stated that a ruler can be called wealthy only when there is no extreme poverty among those over whom he rules.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Ebrey 1980:351f.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Hsu Cho-yun 1980:24f. and 170f. The *san lao* "local elders" do not occur in the *Taiping jing*'s text.

creatures should be discussed and further reported. Through reports the small officials will all know of their strengths and weaknesses and the people will know of their strengths and weaknesses. Who lives next to mountains and hills will know of the changes taking place there. Whoever lives next to towns and villages will know of the changes taking place there. . . (The same holds true for the plains and paddies)<sup>71</sup> The high and the low, the outside and the inside can all be known without exception. This is the art of establishing Great Peace."<sup>72</sup>

All natural disasters had to be reported speedily. If not, the authorities would lose contact with Heaven, or rather they would be forced to govern without Heavenly feedback, which could only lead to dire results. The *Taiping jing* says:

"To report all abnormal phenomena and natural disasters, no matter whether large or small, good or bad, outside or inside, distant or near is to enable the virtuous ruler and his worthies to spot the origin (of these phenomena). Now all abnormal phenomena and disasters are an image of events and are modeled after human behaviour. They are borne out of an affinity in kind (*yuan lei*).<sup>73</sup> The worthies will jointly deliberate and let their thoughts reach out to the (phenomena's) meaning. On the basis of this they will examine the events and arrive at an understanding. Then Heaven and Earth will day by day be pleased, and emperors and kings will day by day be content."<sup>74</sup>

So government efficiency, the Taiping authors claim, is in fact based on the reporting of natural phenomena. Without such reports the political leaders cannot analyze the situation and draw up effective measures. The A-texts of the Taiping corpus are completely embedded in the ideology of prognosticism which was highly fashionable throughout the latter half of the Han Dynasties:

"Heaven and Earth are so worried that they fall sick. Therefore they cause abnormal phenomena in order to inform their children that they would like to see order. However the people, stupid as they are, jointly intercept Heaven's sayings. Heaven and Earth are very angry about this."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> The term used is *shuizia tian*.

<sup>72</sup> See TPJHJ 86:324.

<sup>73</sup> Morohashi 1955: No. 27656,68 explains the term *yuan lei* which seems to be rare, on the basis of its occurrence in Xu Gan's *Zhonglun*, ed. Congshu jicheng, chapter Guiyan:8. Xu Gan uses it to explain how reactions stem from an action; slanderous words for instance will be used when they are appropriate, that is when they do justice to the person thus slandered. The term *lei* (as in *leishu* "encyclopedia") alone is used throughout the corpus when the organization of written material is dealt with.

<sup>74</sup> See TPJHJ 86:326.

<sup>75</sup> See TPJHJ 86:321.

The formation of the Daoist religion was closely related to the prevalence of prognostic speculation in the intellectual life of the outgoing Han Dynasty. This has frequently been confirmed. Anna Seidel for instance has pointed out how Daoist contracts between Heaven and man resemble the contract confirmed by apocryphal scriptures like the River Chart.<sup>76</sup> The Taiping corpus is like a major crossroad between the Daoist and the prognostic tradition, shaped by both and allowing ideas to travel from one into the other. In his lectures the Celestial Master frequently referred to the two essentials of the new creed, the first being that natural phenomena are sent by Heaven and must be subjected to prognostic scrutiny. The second concerns the role of texts. They are accorded an essential redemptive function. In the process of social reform the correct text is essential, while disciples who will explain it, and rulers who will implement it, play only secondary roles. Texts can even put the Celestial Master into second place, in that he may depart from the world without endangering the process of salvation as long as his text remains available.<sup>77</sup> However, the corpus is like a crossroad and cannot be identified with either tradition. While the prototypical apocryphal texts River Chart and Luo Writing are mentioned,<sup>78</sup> they are not adored as perfect scriptures. The proper redemptive texts are in principal man-made. Their creation may be instigated by Heaven, but their words stem from men. In the worldly-transworldly jungle of prognostic signs, texts dealing with these signs and Heaven-sent apocryphal texts which help to explain these signs, the Taiping texts (in spite of their Heavenly significance) travel on a rather worldly road.

Twofold argumentation is characteristic of the Taiping corpus which, I feel, addresses a clientele of believers or scholars in a time of rapid cultural change. Elements of popular religion were intermingled with philosophical theories, and rituals and ceremonies were handed from one social stratum to the other and from one region or ethnic community to the next. The corpus in its framework of references attributes a twofold role to the phenomenon of written material. While it has a function in the strictly utilitarian world of prognostics it also figures in the network of cosmological principles. As Hachiya Kunio has put it, "to get through" is in itself an essential process whereby the cosmological order is kept intact. All information, just like all fluids and vapours must travel from one level to the next, must be spread to all parties concerned. This becomes obvious from a passage, in which the Celestial Master confronts his disciples with the following question:

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. Seidel 1983b:308ff.

<sup>77</sup> See TPJHJ 46:126.

<sup>78</sup> See TPJHJ 91:348; 46:126; 47:140; 102:461; 112:566.

"Can you also understand what 'blockage' is?"<sup>79</sup> The disciples show interest and ask for the meaning of the term. The Celestial Master explains:

"The nine orifices are similar to the division into the nine continents. Now if, as you have just said, vapour is swallowed without letting it penetrate the body's joints<sup>80</sup> then darkness will prevail and there will not be light. Thus the larger and smaller of the nine continents harass each other, and words on urgent business cannot reach from below to above. But the life of all ten thousand creatures of Heaven and Earth is dependent on the vapour's penetration. Heaven and Earth use vapour like wind to transform the life of all ten thousand creatures. Now if the vapour does not get through the joints the Dao of Heaven is thus blocked. Proof is that it cannot get through and reach its destination."<sup>81</sup>

The meaning of this passage is clarified by another short passage, in which the Celestial Master uses the same terms:

"Excellent. I have listened to what you have said. You have learned that Heaven, although for a long time angry and bitterly resentful because its words did not get through will cause thousands and thousands of strange occurrences in order to talk to emperors and kings. Now if below there is an instance of blockage these occurrences cannot reach up (to emperors and kings) and Heaven's anxiety is increased."<sup>82</sup>

In their answer the disciples please the Master by documenting their agreement or "understanding":

"When in swallowing vapour we only inhale without allowing it to penetrate, the vapour will turn around and will again go upwards (as was not intended). In this instant ears and eyes will be deaf and blind and we will not perceive anything (which again was not intended)."<sup>83</sup>

Communication will avoid such blockage and it is imagined to happen mainly through texts. The interview as depicted above is the exception. We must imagine the world of Great Peace as being inundated by a constant flux of texts.

While the Taiping corpus is aimed at the salvation of mankind, this salvation is depicted as nothing else but the result of the creation and distribution of

<sup>79</sup> See TPJHJ 86:317.

<sup>80</sup> The character *jie* is to be read without the mouth radical.

<sup>81</sup> See TPJHJ 86:317.

<sup>82</sup> See TPJHJ 86:316.

<sup>83</sup> See TPJHJ 86:316.

texts. However, the relevance of texts reaches even beyond their role in the religio-political reform program. A concept of textual coherence is the philosophical basis underlying the Taiping authors' worldview. All relevant social and natural processes as well as all understanding of the world can be defined as "text". If the authors had delineated their theory of knowledge, they could only have argued in philological terms: to gain knowledge is to interpret texts. The will of Heaven becomes visible in texts or "patterns" (the double meaning of *wen* is made use of), the lectures of the Celestial Master are very often depicted as interpretations of his previously distributed text. Furthermore, the understanding of the disciples is frequently phrased as not linked to the subject matter itself but rather to the textual presentation of this matter. Knowledge is not gathered or conveyed directly but only via texts: "Only after there was a sacred scripture did the intentions of Heaven and Earth become known."<sup>84</sup>

The corpus's doctrine can be put into simple terms: The penetration of matter as well as of mind is conducted via the flux of texts and this flux is the main device against a dangerous cosmic "blockage". It is tempting on the one hand to speculate on a certain parallelism between this doctrine and modern theories of communication and, on the other hand, the post-structuralist transformation of all objects into components of a "text".<sup>85</sup> However, the magico-religious worldview of the Taiping authors and the very real nature of the texts they collect, compose, edit, interpret and distribute, sets them worlds apart from the modern aim to come to grips with the "text" we live in.

An analysis of the corpus's account of "texts" leads very near to the nub of all the scripture's long-winded ramblings. This can for instance be seen by the way the notion of equality – one of the meanings of the character *ping* – is unfolded in the process of producing texts. This process which involves institutional mechanisms in which Chinese (the text says "men") and "barbarians",<sup>86</sup> or the people and the officials<sup>87</sup> are put on equal terms. The description of these procedures signifies an attempt to transgress bureaucratic and other hierarchical structures which is redolent of "the best of all worlds". Following Hachiya's useful study I will first outline the practicalities of text collection and list the different categories of texts and will then briefly tackle the origin of the proper text, or rather the sacred scripture which is meant to bring salvation. A brief consideration will be given to the relationship between such a sacred scripture and the texts in the Taiping corpus. Here we are confronted with the problem that the texts on the one hand

<sup>84</sup> See TPJHJ 91:351.

<sup>85</sup> See Michel Foucault's *Les mots et les choses*, and cf. Sandkühler 1990, Vol. 4:574.

<sup>86</sup> See TPJHJ 87:334; 88:333.

<sup>87</sup> See TPJHJ 86:322.

promise a scripture of salvation when in fact they pretend to be this scripture.

### The collection of texts

The prognostic as well as the cosmological arguments stress the need for an efficient handling of grassroots complaints. Two manoeuvres are proposed to allow memorials to reach the authorities: officials who intercept a memorial will be heavily punished,<sup>88</sup> while in the same chapter,<sup>89</sup> as if in distrust of this first manoeuvre, it is mentioned that it might be wiser to deposit a memorial in a neighbouring region, to avoid censure or retaliation.

Texts, however, serve different purposes and come in different groups. The bulk of memorials complaining about regional mismanagement is one. Another group consists of recipes for longevity and other "unusual" material.<sup>90</sup> The important works of general wisdom as well as moral guidelines must also be considered as "texts". All these writings are to be collected, viewed, excerpted and then redistributed among the people as a new set of rules for moral and political orientation. One strategy for collecting texts is a network of containers – in the shape of a three foot cube with a window – to receive written material. Located at large crossroads they are meant to be easily available.<sup>91</sup> Contributions, generally signed, are expected from the people, from petty officials and in particular from travellers whose independent opinions are, as the authors tell us, dreaded by the officials in charge.<sup>92</sup>

The containers, however, are only one way in which the text-greedy authorities lay hold of their prey. They can also send emissaries to actively collect all available texts,<sup>93</sup> read and excerpt them and publish a text of selected valuable quotations from the vast number of collected texts.<sup>94</sup>

To properly evaluate the information thus collected, a meticulous process of sifting and grading material is laid out. It is supposed to be first catalogued according to topics and then examined and discussed. In their final evaluation of different passages scholars must, the authors remind them, remember that minority views are false and majority views correct; subsequently passages are extracted and commented upon, reduplicated, memorized and eventually put to the test in

<sup>88</sup> See TPJHJ 86:320.

<sup>89</sup> See TPJHJ 86:317.

<sup>90</sup> See TPJHJ 88:334f. The term *fang* refers to recipes for longevity, see TPJHJ 90:340; "unusual utterances and special plans" *qici shuce* (TPJHJ 91:348) may well do the same.

<sup>91</sup> See TPJHJ 88:332.

<sup>92</sup> See TPJHJ 54:206 and 86:328.

<sup>93</sup> See TPJHJ 96:419.

<sup>94</sup> See TPJHJ 96:415.

practical politics. Lists of the material are to be prepared every third and every fifth year.<sup>95</sup> The Taiping corpus abounds of strategies designed to lay hold of virtually all texts available. In this respect the aims as well as the procedures of collecting texts give the impression once again – as confirmed by other parts of the scripture – that the authors were concerned with regional administration rather than with governing a larger territory.

From a propagandist point of view the procedure of text collection and distribution is skillful, in that it caused the regulations which were issued by government authorities to consist of material which was originally handed to the government by the people. This procedure was perhaps also geared to the real need for a large and unorthodox consensus while externally entailing a broad populist approach. It could be argued that it was particularly suited to times of crisis. This can refer either to the crisis imagined in the cosmological speculations of the corpus or to any of the real crises which abounded in many parts of China from the outgoing Han Dynasty onwards.

While it was not new that the authorities were expected to value the opinions held by the people – as they did for instance by collecting folksongs or popular sayings – the *Taiping jing's* intense concern with collecting written material is of a different order. For the Taiping authors to deal with texts was to deal with reality. We are confronted with a confusing variety of texts: first in importance is the text which the Celestial Master had handed to his disciples. This text is their main object – they must understand it, memorize it and practice its doctrine.<sup>96</sup> Eventually they will hand it to a virtuous ruler, who will abide by it and soon achieve Great Peace.<sup>97</sup> However, there is also the text produced from the lectures of the Celestial Master, which are carefully recorded by the students, so that not a single word is omitted.<sup>98</sup> If we followed this tale the transmitted text of the Taiping corpus would consist of lecture notes. This version of its origin is corroborated by the repetitious, verbose and rather clumsy style of many of the writings in the corpus. A third text – possibly identical with Celestial Master text No. 1 – is the so-called scripture of the Extreme Grotto (of the Majestic Heaven).<sup>99</sup> However, beyond these texts with some identity, there is a general collection of texts of all schools, all ages and on all subjects.<sup>100</sup> Terms used are those of Han Dynasty

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<sup>95</sup> See TPJHJ 88:334.

<sup>96</sup> See TPJHJ 72:299.

<sup>97</sup> See TPJHJ 41:83; cf. Kaltenmark 1979:29f.

<sup>98</sup> See TPJHJ 41:83.

<sup>99</sup> See TPJHJ 91:348; see below note 116.

<sup>100</sup> See TPJHJ 41:83 ff.

philology.<sup>101</sup> I am tempted to view the world of Great Peace as a playground for philologists – as individuals or in groups, at all levels of the administration or in a private capacity they handle texts to their heart's content. The Celestial Master texts themselves were, according to one version, by no means exempted from this philological enterprise. They were collected from other writings, just like all reliable texts.<sup>102</sup> We must conclude that if men want to achieve Great Peace they have no choice but to collect and distribute writings.

### Textual hierarchies

Texts can supposedly be distinguished according to the relative truth of their doctrine, which I feel seems to be their main distinction. They must be considered true when they match the intention of Heaven and the only way to find out whether they match or not, is to put them into practice.<sup>103</sup> A text is true when to follow its doctrine allows a ruler to give peace to his country and righteousness to his people. Texts which are false however will cause various natural disasters "of heaven and of earth" and political insurgencies in the form of "robbers". These texts will, in other words, be the cause for continuous catastrophes.<sup>104</sup> This is an extremely blunt pragmatic approach which is modified only by considerations of a religious nature, in that the forceful presence of a missionary, this is of the Celestial Master or his disciples will turn rulers to trust in the proper scripture and save them from trying out all the wrong ones.

The doctrine established in the corpus is ambiguous concerning the availability of any absolute truth. A binary division into the one true text and all the other false ones is occasionally hinted at, however there is also a more mundane consideration. This concerns a hierarchical order of relative truth which assigns limited and specific significance to texts of different rank.<sup>105</sup> This order of texts seems to

<sup>101</sup> See below note 104ff.; for *jiao* "to collate" cf. Pokora 1975:261; however, the term *jujiao* which is used throughout the corpus (for instance TPJHJ 51:190) has not been entered into the dictionaries and does not seem to occur elsewhere.

<sup>102</sup> TPJHJ 91:348.

<sup>103</sup> See TPJHJ 91:358, cf. Hachiya Kunio 1983:44.

<sup>104</sup> See TPJHJ 96:415. The evaluation of texts follows the criterium of usefulness. This proposition can be upheld for the whole of the A-layer corpus. However, there is a distinct trinitarian mind at work in some chapters of the corpus, dividing phenomena into three irrespective of whether such a division is meaningful; concerning the validity of texts this leads to the following speculation: With texts of the Three Dao (*sandao* referring to Heaven, Earth and mankind) you will live longest and understand the will of Heaven, with texts of the Two Dao (*erdao*) you will live long and understand the will of the Earth, with texts of only One Dao you will in your government imitate men and your life will be short; see TPJHJ 53:198 and cf. Kaltenmark 1979:26.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Takahashi Tadahiko 1983:300 ff.; see TPJHJ 51:190.

have links with the real world of Han literature. The "original text" *benwen*<sup>106</sup> is attributed the first rank, and in the second rank the "expositions in chapters and sentences" (*zhang ju*), which was the designation of a "standard" – this is to say of Han Dynasty New Text School origin – commentary to the classics.<sup>107</sup> Third come the "explanations" (*jie nan*), with the term *jie* hinting at the more philological side of Han learning, as in the expression *jie gu*, frequently used in commentaries, or in the *jie zi* of the *Shuowen jie zi*.<sup>108</sup> Fourth comes "literature" (*wenci*) and fifth "fake" texts (*wei*). "Destructive" texts are listed at the bottom in the tenth rank.<sup>109</sup> In another list consisting of 6 ranks the correct text is followed by "esoteric words" *mici*. This term is similar to the *miji* "esoteric records", by which apocryphal scriptures were referred to.<sup>110</sup> The expositions in chapters and sentences (*zhang ju*) come next, then obvious deterioration sets in, with "licentious" (4th), "deviating" (5th) and "deceptive" (6th) texts.<sup>111</sup>

The corpus also contains the well-known conservative attempts to link deterioration with chronological duration, classifying texts as those of the Three Majesties at the top, followed by the Five Emperors' and the Three Kings' texts and at the very bottom the writings of the Five Hegemons.<sup>112</sup> However the corpus often expresses a less conformist view of historical development. Chapter 65 for instance mentions texts from various ages which all deal with the true Dao.<sup>113</sup> This is elaborated by the Celestial Master in the following lecture:

"Well, concerning the collating of sacred texts from highest, middle and lower antiquity, sometimes the sacred texts of highest antiquity might fail to touch on a subject which the sacred texts of middle antiquity deal with, while a subject not touched upon in the sacred texts of middle antiquity might be dealt with in the sacred texts of lower antiquity. This is so because on each subject the texts follow from and supplement each other; all together they result in the one superior (*shan* 'good') uttering (*ci* 'phrase') and should therefore be

<sup>106</sup> See TPJHJ 70:277f. and 40:76. *Benwen* is the text for which commentaries (*zhangju*) were written, cf. *Hou Hanshu* ch. 44:1500.

<sup>107</sup> See TPJHJ 70:277; cf. Dull 1966:389f.; the respective Old Text term was *jie gu* ("explanations").

<sup>108</sup> *Jie nan* is referred to as the title of a work by Yang Xiong in which he meant to explain "the great depth of the mysterious", see Ban Gu's *Hanshu*, ch. 87:3575.

<sup>109</sup> See TPJHJ 40:76.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. J. Dull 1966:258, see Fan Ye's *Hou Hanshu* 30A:1047.

<sup>111</sup> See TPJHJ 51:190.

<sup>112</sup> See TPJHJ 47:140.

<sup>113</sup> See TPJHJ 65:229.

collected, so that afterwards in a sacred book the will of Heaven and Earth can be consulted... What the wise men of highest antiquity have omitted, the wise men of middle antiquity may have included. What the wise men of middle antiquity have omitted, the wise men of lower antiquity may have included. What was omitted by the wise men of lower antiquity was included by the wise men of highest antiquity. In each subject matter the texts follow from each other and therefore supplement each other. All together they result in the one uttering of superior wisdom (*shan sheng*)... Occasionally the great wise men have been slightly neglectful and the wise men of middle standing have achieved something, or a point which has been omitted by the wise men of middle standing may have been included by wise men of lesser standing. They also follow each other in regard to subject matter and will therefore supplement each other. Together they create one uttering of superior wisdom."<sup>114</sup>

Similarly formalized accounts are given for the cooperation of the different political strata, that is of sovereign, officials and of the people, and of various social strata, for instance of the wise, the worthy, the people and of men of barbarian origin:

"Therefore above and below, outside and inside, honoured and humble, distant and near – we should collect all their texts and essential sayings, assemble the arguments for and against an issue, so that the texts follow each other according to their subject matter and therefore supplement each other – until we have something which is complete."<sup>115</sup>

The complete product, the text of texts, according to some passages in the corpus, is nothing else but the "book of the Celestial Master" (*tianshi zhi shu*),<sup>116</sup> "which is the scripture on the *dongji*...".

The term *dongji* "pervading the extremes" is in itself a facet of the Taiping authors' fascination with the all pervading flow of knowledge and understanding. The term *dong* is explained as "to reach" or "to penetrate". The mercy of a ruler may for instance reach into all six directions<sup>117</sup> and the same can be said for the Celestial Master's text: "My book will make the spiritual (*shenxin*) known and will reach into all the six extremes (*liuji*) and the eight directions".<sup>118</sup> The term *dongji* is used throughout the corpus in various contexts as an attribute for

<sup>114</sup> See TPJHJ 91:352.

<sup>115</sup> See TPJHJ 91:352.

<sup>116</sup> See TPJHJ 91:348.

<sup>117</sup> See TPJHJ 71:281.

<sup>118</sup> See TPJHJ 68:258.

efficient government: the model of *dongji* should be imitated by a person who aims at strengthening the good and reducing evil,<sup>119</sup> the so-called “Dao of *dongji*” will transform (*hua*) men,<sup>120</sup> and a government of *dongji* will be pervasive.<sup>121</sup> There can be little doubt that the term is specific for the corpus. It is linked to *ping*, for instance in the expression “the vapour of highest all pervading peace” (*dongji shangping qi*)<sup>122</sup> and in the honorific title of the Celestial Master “Master of the majestic peace of Heaven, pervading all” (*Tianshang huangping dongji zhi shi*).<sup>123</sup>

When “all pervading” is used in the title of the Celestial text it is explained that the scripture concerns the government of the “all-pervasiveness of Heaven” *tian dongji*. When the disciples question this explanation the Celestial Master lectures them on the historic need for the scripture and its millenarian function,<sup>124</sup> while the name itself remains unresolved. However, we may gather that the term is meant as an aim (“The scripture which should be all-pervasive”) and signals the need for the scripture’s wide distribution.

The corpus contains several very detailed and painfully repetitious accounts of the creation of this scripture, which amount roughly to the following outline: The large amount of human and cosmic misery (*chengfu*) prompts Heaven to send a person to collate texts. Truth can only be achieved through such a collation and not through any single newly arrived wise man, since there were always, even in the distant past, different opinions. What is needed is to supplement all isolated and fragmentary knowledge by other knowledge, in order to achieve a total demonstration of the will of Heaven.<sup>125</sup>

The full programme of text-instigated reform is outlined in a few paragraphs of chapter 51 of the corpus, written in the A-style and dealing mainly with the problem of understanding and evaluating texts. “Textomania” is an obsession of the A-layer of the Taiping jing, spreading into some C-passages. The B-layer texts, which deal with individual salvation rarely mention writings. In chapter 51 correct texts, properly understood, are seen as the root of social order; when texts are false, and approached with ill intentions, evil will come about.<sup>126</sup> Texts are correct when they are cosmological that is when they are “in concordance with the will

<sup>119</sup> See TPJHJ 41:152.

<sup>120</sup> See TPJHJ 67:253.

<sup>121</sup> See TPJHJ 92:397.

<sup>122</sup> See TPJHJ 92:378.

<sup>123</sup> See TPJHJ 116:629 and also 118:668.

<sup>124</sup> See TPJHJ 91:350.

<sup>125</sup> See TPJHJ 91:350; 37:54f.

<sup>126</sup> See TPJHJ 51:198.

of Heaven".<sup>127</sup> What is to be done to obtain correct texts? One should collate the texts of high, middle and also low antiquity, which stretches to the time of the Celestial Master. One must then group them, and get them into a sequence, which should resemble the combined wisdom of all different schools. From this collection one should produce an annotated digest. In the end this digest will lead to perfect bliss: Heaven's worries will be over, the earth will suffer from no more offenses, emperors and kings will happily conform to the intentions of Heaven, all beings will be in their place. The collection of sayings will "allow the world to speak jointly to make the intentions of heaven and earth known":<sup>128</sup> the message conveyed in properly collected texts is in fact a message from Heaven; texts have the function to link men and – as we might say – nature. Regardless of their contents they are in themselves an auspicious token of Heaven's concern.

### The world of complete communication

The *Taiping jing's* message is that the world of Great Peace will be a better world. It will contain elements of social justice, general fairness and of public welfare; it will put the bureaucracy under continuous and instant supervision through activating the population, and it will also change general behavioral patterns; mating, for instance, each man with two wives will be an innovation implemented in order to ensure the future growth of mankind.<sup>129</sup> Like a photographer's negative this image of a new world reflects the distress of the population in a period of severe administrative shortcomings and general turmoil. In this paper it has been argued that the Taiping-authors claimed that the better world would only be achieved and upheld through the handling of texts.

Intense communication is an essential element of the world of *taiping*. If reduced to its political kernel this is a Daoist alternative to other means of control, for instance to the Legalists' "law" and the Confucianists' "ritual" or "piety" and other standards of behaviour, which were all meant to help the ruling strata control themselves. By the opening up of channels of communication, public opinion and in particular public dissent are introduced into the political scene. According to Legalist acumen the almighty public servant should be curtailed by laws. According to the Taiping program he is to be subdued by concern for his public image. If he does not live up to the expectations of the local population, malevolent reports will be written. The prospective communicative channels will then ensure that these reports reach the higher levels of administration.

<sup>127</sup> See TPJHJ 51:188.

<sup>128</sup> See TPJHJ 91:349.

<sup>129</sup> See TPJHJ 35:37 ff.

If we take the Taiping authors' concern for written texts at its full value, it opens up intriguing pathways for evolutionary change. Through collecting, evaluating and finally re-distributing texts, society will change. At this point it should be asked who was in charge of handling the texts once they had been collected. The answer is that "the worthy and the enlightened"<sup>130</sup> were in charge of handling the texts. It is however impossible to speculate on how and if they were imagined to be different from the established scholars and civil servants, except for the very general observation that they must have been literate, and may not have pursued a regular official career.

The utopia of Great Peace was expected to be realized for millenarian reasons. This is no contradiction, if we trust the Western utopian tradition. In China, we cannot turn to parallel items of intellectual history. In spite of Wolfgang Bauer's *China's search for happiness* I cannot see much of a utopian tradition in China. The reasons for the Chinese disgust with utopias are beyond the framework of this paper. However, we must keep this disgust in mind when we take a last look at the history of the *Taiping jing*. The corpus played the role of a mediator between the old elitist system of values, as expressed in Han and Pre-Han philosophy, and populist demands and hopes for a society in decay and dissolution. This is apparent from the multifaceted connotations of the esteem for textual communication discussed in this paper. The Confucian roots are almost too obvious to mention; the prognostic transformation of this esteem is another point of departure; so is the utopia of a well-ordered, happy society as well as the belief in an all-encompassing universe. Post-axial age egalitarianism is not only a Western preoccupation. It entered the Taiping worldview, linking each individual to Heaven via communication and via moral performance.

However, in the Chinese tradition the mediating role of the *Taiping jing* has not been acknowledged and the corpus has never become an item of China's history of thought. It never became a major element of the Daoist tradition, which soon moved into the politically safe regions of personal salvation, nor did it ever come in contact with the high tradition of general learning. The fact that the *Taiping jing* had practically no impact may be interpreted as a token of strong anti-utopianist bias in Chinese intellectual history.

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<sup>130</sup> See TPJHJ 96:415.

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TPJHJ see *Taiping jing hejiao*.

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## Glossary

benwen	本文
chengfu	承負
daluan	大亂
daping	大平
datong	大同
dongji	洞極
dongji zhi jing	洞極之經
dongji shangping qi	洞極上平氣
erdao	二道
fang	方
fangshi	方士
hua	化
jiao	校
jie ci	解辭
jie gu	解詁
jie nan	解難
jihui	際會
jujiao	拘校
liuji	六極
mici	秘辭
miji	秘記
mingtang	明堂
qi	氣
qici shuce	奇辭殊策
sandao	三道
san lao	三老
shan sheng	善聖
Shenzhou jing	神呪經
shenren	神人
shenxin	神心
shu	書
shuixia tian	水下田

taihe	太和
taiping	太平
Taiping jing	太平經
taiping zhi shu	太平之書
taiqing	太清
taisu	太素
tianshang huang ping dongji zhi shi	天上皇平洞極之師
tianshi	天師
tianshi zhi shu	天師之書
tian shiyun	天時運
tianxia	天下
tian yun	天運
wei	偽
wen	文
wenci	文辭
yuan lei	緣類
Yundu jing	運度經
zhang ju	章句

