Clashing Dilemmas: Hong Rengan, Issachar Roberts, and a Taiping “Murder” Mystery

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A SMALL BUT IMPORTANT INCIDENT during the later years of China’s Taiping rebellion has the potential to shed light on larger questions associated with this critical period. An understanding of the character and motives of two of the key figures involved, Hong Rengan and the Reverend Issachar Roberts, is key to unravelling this complex story. The Taiping rebellion was a movement led by Hong Xiuquan (hereafter Xiuquan) who declared himself the younger brother of Jesus Christ and, in 1850, the “Heavenly King” of the “Great Peace Heavenly Kingdom.” The main goals of his movement were to expel the foreign Manchu (Qing) dynasty and to destroy the “idol worship” of Confucianism. Xiuquan’s younger cousin, Hong Rengan, or Hung Jen-kan, (hereafter referred to as Rengan), was one of the original converts to the new religion, but became separated from the Taiping movement. Once that movement became more no-

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torious and widespread, Rengan’s life was in danger if he stayed in their home province, and thus, after some effort, he finally managed to escape to British-controlled Hong Kong, where he worked with Western missionaries during the early and middle years of the rebellion. After these many years in Hong Kong, he finally managed to break through the imperial lines blockading the Taiping capital, and joined the rebels in Nanjing in 1859. Within one month, Xiuquan elevated him to the title of Kanwang, or “Shield King,” as well as to the post of prime minister of the Taiping kingdom. Surprised as he was at his sudden elevation, Rengan took advantage of his position and his influence with his cousin to attempt a series of political, economic, and theological reforms to the Taiping movement, as well as to develop a new military strategy that helped the movement survive for several more years. His influence waned, however, after he was ousted as prime minister in 1861, though he continued as foreign minister for several more months. The other key figure in this story was Reverend Issachar Roberts, an American Southern Baptist missionary who had been the original teacher of Christianity to both Xiuquan and Rengan in Guangzhou (then called Canton by the foreigners) in the 1840s. In 1860, after two trips home to the United States, and when his mission in Canton was in severe danger of failing, Roberts finally accepted Xiuquan’s longstanding invitation to take up residence in the Taiping capital of Nanjing, where he tried to open several chapels and made efforts to “correct” Xiuquan’s theology.

An account by Roberts is unfortunately the only source that survives for the incident in question. Rengan himself said very little about what transpired, and thus even present-day Chinese scholars are forced to rely on Western missionary accounts. In any case, we know that on 13 January 1862 Rengan entered the part of his residence that contained the quarters of Reverend Roberts, who was then serving as his foreign affairs advisor. According to Roberts’s own initial account, Rengan made insulting remarks and gestures towards him, and then turned in fury against a “boy” Roberts had appropriated as his servant, a person whom one Western observer claims
Roberts was trying to protect from execution for some earlier of-
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Despite the harsh and specific condemnation in his original
account, Roberts was later forced to give grudging retractions of
some of his claims. In a letter to the English language newspaper
based in Shanghai, the North China Herald, published on 8 February
1862, Roberts admitted that his baggage, assistant preacher, and two
servants had in fact later been returned. In his second retraction of
10 April, Roberts said that the servant had not been killed, but only
injured, and that it was Rengan’s brother who “prompted him to the
wicked deed” of striking the servant. Roberts nevertheless claimed
not to know what happened to the servant afterwards and whether or
not he survived; evidently the returned servants did not include the
“boy” in question. Augustus Lindley, a British adventurer who
fought on the side of the Taipings, claimed that the boy was seen
alive and well afterwards and had probably been struck with a stick
rather than a sword. Roberts may have made a third retraction: the
unnamed author of a pamphlet entitled “A Letter to the Bishop of
Victoria Hong Kong Regarding the Religion of the Taiping Rebels in
China” alleged that Roberts admitted that, in fact, it was Rengan’s
brother, and not Rengan himself, who struck the servant:

Of course you now know that the story of that person’s boy
being murdered by the Kan-wang is a fabrication. “The Kan-
wang called on me,” said Mr. Roberts, when I asked him about the matter, “and desired me to punish the boy…. I told him I would first remonstrate with him; and then he, the Kan-wang’s brother, dissatisfied with my answer, beat him as I thought, to death.”

Despite the profound changes in Roberts’s story, his initial account was trumpeted in diplomatic messages and in the foreign press, causing great and lasting damage to Rengan’s reputation. To this day, most scholarly accounts of the incident fail to note the anonymous author’s claim that it was Rengan’s brother who struck the servant. More important, the incident as promoted in the English language press helped to permanently damage the Taipings’ image in the eyes of foreigners.

This incident remains a mystery in no small part because Rengan’s alleged actions, even if not murder, and even if amounting only to acquiescence in the actions of his brother, nevertheless seem to contradict Rengan’s known character. Rengan had worked closely with the missionaries of the London Missionary Society in Hong Kong from 1855 to 1858, and they thought very highly of him. This favourable opinion was shared by the groundbreaking Sinologist and missionary Reverend James Legge, who found Rengan to be “one of the most intelligent and impressive Chinese he had ever met.” Legge described Rengan as “the only Chinaman with whom I ever walked with my arm round his neck and his arm round mine.”

Legge also said of Rengan that:

[H]is literary attainments were respectable; his temper amiable and genial; his mind was characterized by a versatility unusual in a Chinaman. His knowledge of Christian doctrine was largely increased, and of the sincerity of his attachment to it there could be no doubt…. Over young men his influence was peculiarly beneficial.

Legge and the other missionaries in Hong Kong had to constantly deal with “rice Christians”—potential converts motivated by economic benefits rather than true conviction—and thus were on the
lookout for insincerity. They became impressed with Rengan only after working with him over a long period of time. Another member of the London Missionary Society in Hong Kong observed that, “Whenever you see anyone having long and frequent intercourse with Hung-jin [Rengan], you may be sure there is something good going on in him.”

Even as late as the early 1860s, missionaries who visited Rengan in the rebel-held areas were still favourably impressed by his personality and sincerity, even as their doubts about the Taiping movement as a whole were growing.

Many scholars of the Taiping movement have also found Rengan to be a very sympathetic figure, one whose attempts to reform the Taiping foreign and military policy and open up its political structure helped the movement last several more years, even though his reforms came too late and were doomed to failure. In the work he presented to Xiuquan shortly after his arrival, the “New Treatise on Aids to Administration” (Zicheng xinpian), Rengan called not only for policies to spread modern scientific education, develop public health care, build railways, and open up the Taiping-controlled regions to foreign investment, but also for a free press, and for checks on the government by the people through ballot boxes placed on the streets.

Foreign governments, especially the British, seized on Roberts’s initial account of Rengan’s attack upon his servant in order to discredit the Taipings, which was in line with a shift in their foreign policy from official neutrality toward active intervention on the side of the ruling Qing dynasty. As many scholars have argued, foreign governments preferred the Qing government to the Taipings once the settlement of the Second Opium War in the north gave them free access to the Chinese interior. They preferred a weak, corrupt Qing administration that they could manipulate to a potentially strong Taiping regime, even one that was open to foreigners. Thus, if even the most sympathetic official among the Taipings could be shown to be corrupt and despotic, then Western governments would face less domestic resistance to ending their stated position of neutrality. Likewise, recent Chinese and other observers may wish to discredit
the idea that there were Chinese advocates of modernization and more democratic practices well before the twentieth century; a violent and insincere Hong Rengan may fit this agenda.

While one could argue that Rengan’s participation in a dictatorial, militaristic regime caused him to become more violent, especially after he was demoted and had to try desperately to regain his reputation, such an argument is contradicted by Rengan’s own admission that he hated war; his stated goal was to make his infrequent military excursions “as little terrible as possible.”19 The widely shared view of Hong Rengan as a pacific, sincere Christian would seem to be greatly at odds with his alleged actions against Roberts’s servant. Even for those unconcerned about whether or not Rengan was a true Christian, refuting the charges that he was a murderer and thief would help preserve his credibility as a sincere reformer. Rengan seems to have shared a distrust of violence with his mentor, Reverend James Legge, even if they did not ultimately agree about whether the Taiping movement could be turned in a positive direction. There is a kind of poignancy to the gulf in the two men’s understanding of the best way to open up China to modernization. Legge agreed that the Qing government was a repressive force, and thus strongly opposed the change in British policy toward support for the Manchu dynasty; nevertheless, he also opposed Rengan’s secular political efforts as doomed to failure and likely to detract from his goals as a Christian. Legge’s colleagues in the London Missionary Society in Hong Kong disagreed with him, believing instead that any attempt by Rengan to reform the rebels would be highly valuable. Thus, when Legge was away on a visit home to Britain, they secretly sponsored Rengan’s move to Nanjing.20

Hong Rengan’s Dilemma

Beyond the seeming contradiction to Rengan’s known personality and ideas, the 1862 incident also throws into focus the terrible dilemma in which Rengan found himself in late 1861 and early 1862. On the one hand, Rengan needed to retain influence among his fellow
Taipings and convince them of the necessity for reform when foreign missionaries were attacking Taiping doctrine on the streets of the rebel capital and foreign governments were starting to side openly with the Qing imperial government. On the other hand, he also faced the challenge of convincing foreigners of the positive nature of the Taipings at a time when anti-foreign sentiments on the ground prevented him from allowing them to see the rebel areas for themselves. Due to his failure to solve this problem, Rengan, who had already been downgraded from his post as prime minister before the incident, was around this time also removed from responsibility for foreign policy. In his later “confession,” written after he was taken into custody by the anti-Taiping armies led by Zeng Guofan, Rengan explained:

During 1861 and a part of 1862 I held the seals of the foreign department, until something occurred which roused the displeasure of the T’ien Wang, and I was ordered to hand them over to the Chang Wang.21

In the next sentence he referred to the incident with Roberts:

During my period in office I was assisted by a foreigner, who acted as my interpreter when occasion led me to call for his services. The person in question lived with me and received my hospitality for a long time, but from some slight misunderstanding one day, he made a precipitate flight from the city and every effort failed to win him back.22

The juxtaposition of the two sentences has led many observers to speculate that the incident with Roberts may have led Xiuquan to demote his cousin,23 but another source suggests otherwise. A letter written by the Reverend Josiah Cox on 11 January 1862 recounts his own visit to Nanjing and interview with the Shield King on 27 December 1861, and reveals that, even before the incident of 13 January, Rengan had been removed from his position because of the earlier actions of another, unnamed missionary. Rengan related this earlier incident to Cox:
Mr. _____ preached in the streets—“T’ien-wang is not a Heavenly King, This T’ien-Kuooh is not a Heavenly kingdom;” and our followers, disliking the statements, reported them to the Heavenly King…. Mr. ____ remained here some weeks, when one night he compelled the gatekeeper to open the city gates at night, contrary to regulations, for which two of the guard were beaten with one thousand blows, and very narrowly escaped decapitation, whilst I, to whom he professed to bring important information, was degraded two steps, and had the administration of foreign affairs taken out of my hands. I have nothing to do with foreign affairs now.24

This statement seems to contradict Rengan’s claim in his confession that he was responsible for foreign affairs for part of 1862, but perhaps he lost his portfolio before he had to give up the seals in early January.

The unnamed missionary that Rengan mentioned to Cox would sound very much like Roberts since Cox reported that Roberts “goes out daily to preach in the streets.” In fact, based on his conversations with Roberts, Cox wrote that

some of the Kings have endeavored to send away Mr. Roberts; but the Heavenly King refused. He says the Heavenly Father has told him that Mr. Roberts is a good man, and he is under a superstition that calamities would follow Mr. Robert’s removal.25

The unnamed missionary, however, could not have been Roberts since Cox’s statement, that the man “remained here for some weeks,” would not apply to Roberts, who was still in Nanjing when Cox visited. Cox reported that when he bade farewell to Rengan’s brother, the brother “entreated me not to preach in the streets, because hearers would say, ‘Another friend of the Shield King is attacking our doctrine.’”26 Rengan’s brother also told Cox that Rengan was getting into serious difficulty because of Western missionary activities in Nanjing.27 It is clear that Roberts was Rengan’s leading source of trouble. Another missionary reported in March 1861 that “even Mr. Roberts… is barely tolerated at Nanking, simply on account of [Hong
Xiuquan’s] personal regard toward him. They would like to get rid of his presence—the sooner the better.”

Rengan’s dilemma was especially acute because Roberts was alienating Taiping followers by preaching against Taiping doctrines in the streets of Nanjing, probably with assistance from others—a point to be discussed in greater detail below—and because Xiuquan had ordered Rengan to protect Roberts. Cox reported that Rengan had already privately told one of Roberts’s Chinese assistants from Guangzhou that if he preached against the Taipings in the streets, he would not be able to protect him from being beheaded by Hong Xiuquan. Rengan also told Cox that the preaching of foreign missionaries in the rebel areas would undermine his foreign policy. He said that the Taipings would allow missionary visits to the rebel-held areas, but could not promise them protection, since if the foreign missionaries “preach against the heavenly title of the King, our followers may rise up and kill them at any time; and their death, if we had promised protection, would involve us in trouble with foreign nations.”

One can only imagine the special difficulty Rengan faced in protecting Roberts. If other Taipings harmed Roberts, Rengan would undoubtedly suffer the anger of his cousin, yet if Roberts continued to preach against Taiping doctrine, Rengan would lose support for his foreign and domestic policy reforms among the rest of the Taipings. This support was weak to begin with, since Rengan was a late arrival to the Heavenly capital and faced much jealousy from both leading Taiping generals and Xiuquan’s brothers after his quick ascendance to the top of the Taiping hierarchy. To use the terms Lowell Dittmer developed to analyze politics during the Cultural Revolution in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Rengan’s base of support within the top Taiping leadership was narrow and shallow, and, in parallel to the interim PRC leader Hua Guofeng’s relationship to Mao, depended mostly on his relationship to his cousin. Though Rengan’s authority also depended on his reputation for influence with foreigners, this, in turn, was true mostly because it was Xiuquan himself who seemed at least initially to accept Rengan’s claims of foreign
support. Indeed, Rengan pointedly cited his friendships with, and knowledge of, foreigners as a source of legitimacy when he was first promoted to the post of prime minister.32

In any case, the evidence from foreign missionaries leads this author to view the incident as an attempt by Rengan to solve his dilemma by inducing Roberts to leave of his own accord, rather than as an attempt to provoke Roberts into some action that would justify killing him, as Roberts suspected.33 Even the former strategy, however, would have been an act of desperation by Rengan, since if he succeeded in driving Roberts away from Nanjing in a bid to retain support within the Taiping camp, this would—and did—still leave Rengan in serious trouble with his elder cousin, given Xiuquan’s strict orders to protect Roberts. Rengan must have reasoned that being blamed for Roberts’s departure was less serious than being blamed for his death at the hands of an angry Taiping mob.

Once Roberts, virtually the rebels’ last Western supporter among the missionaries, left Nanjing and started his vehement public denunciations of the Taipings, Rengan lost nearly all hope of gaining Western support or even neutrality in the Taipings’ fight against the ruling Qing dynasty. Of course, as noted above, such hopes had really been lost by the time of the Second Opium War, when the Western powers gained the interior trade and missionary work concessions from the Qing that had previously been denied them.34 Hope for Western support was completely extinguished, however, when foreigners began to perceive Taiping attacks on the treaty ports and the impending renewed assault on the outskirts of Shanghai as a direct threat to their interests.35 The fact that Rengan had to drive Roberts away in order to have any hope of influencing Taiping foreign policy, yet thus exposed himself to the risk that the old missionary would then undermine his attempts to win foreign sympathy for the Taiping cause, only further demonstrates the terrible dilemma in which Rengan found himself.

It is also essential to understand what this incident shows about Rengan’s personal character. Was he becoming corrupted by his proximity to power, as some missionaries thought, or were his ac-
tions in the incident, though still inexcusably for one who claimed to be a Christian and who tried to infuse the Taiping movement with more orthodox Christianity, more understandable in light of his frustrations with foreigners? Foreigners who came to see Rengan in Nanjing commented on some changes in him: he was fatter than he had been during his lean and hungry years as a missionary assistant in Hong Kong, though that charge was later strongly disputed by another visitor to the Taipings, R.J. Forrest. Nevertheless, other missionaries remained impressed with Rengan’s sincerity and ideals, even as their doubts about the Taiping movement as a whole were growing. After all, one could argue that Rengan was assiduously trying to implement advice from missionaries and other foreigners to modernize the Taiping movement and open it up to Western contact and trade, but, unfortunately for him, foreigners had already begun to turn against the Taipings after 1860 when they found the ruling Qing dynasty more accommodating. An obvious comparison might be made to events in China in 1989, when leading Western officials and intellectuals at first encouraged the Tiananmen student movement but then, out of self-interest, failed to support the students and criticized them for not being democratic enough.

It was also unfortunate for Rengan that he started the new Taiping foreign policy just as missionaries began to report on the “blasphemies” of Taiping Christianity, and as the French and, increasingly, the British started to intervene militarily on the side of the Qing. It must have seemed to Rengan that the foreigners were undermining him at every turn. This is not to mention his frustrations at serious Taiping losses, especially the fall of Anqing to Zeng Guofan’s forces, which occurred in September of 1861, just as Roberts was causing trouble in Nanjing.

**Issachar Roberts’s Dilemma**

The incident involving Hong Rengan, Issachar Roberts, and the servant can also be better explained if we understand that Roberts was
faced with a serious dilemma of his own in late 1861. Put simply, he had to find a way to keep his mission in China alive by going to the rebel camp, while convincing his missionary colleagues that Taiping religious doctrine was still open to foreign missionary influence.

Robert had very nearly been dismissed from his post by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in 1850 due to complaints of serious improprieties lodged against him by several people, and he was only allowed to return to China after much repentance and after making promises of substantial reform. As George Pruden and Margaret Coughlin note, Roberts had been reprimanded and almost removed by the Baptist board for, among other things, exaggerating the number of converts in his Canton mission, padding the donation list with the contributions of his own and other missionaries under their Chinese names, and other dishonest actions, and rude behaviour toward others. Yet, upon his return to China, he almost immediately became embroiled in controversies, including trying to transfer the blame to others for actions he knew were his own fault and for which he had already apologized. For these actions, he was ultimately dismissed by the Board in 1855. Even before Robert’s dismissal, as Pruden notes, “his reputation among other missionaries at Canton had been diminished. He needed a good cause to reassert his usefulness to God and his design for China.”

In 1853, not long after he learned of the board’s first vote to dismiss him, with “his usefulness to the Christian cause... seriously questioned,” Roberts also learned that his former pupil Hong Xiuquan was now the Heavenly King (Tian Wang) of the Taipings. Immediately, “he seized upon his connection to [Hong] to redeem himself” and moved to Shanghai as a first step toward reaching the rebel capital.

After failing to get the permission of the United States consul to visit Nanjing, Roberts decided to return to America to find a safe haven for his wife and two children, as well as to drum up support for his mission to the Taipings among his supporters in the American west and south. After nearly a year away, Roberts finally returned to China in early 1856. For various reasons, including the Qing dy-
nasty’s retaking of the approaches to Nanjing and the looting of his chapel in Canton by an anti-foreign mob, which left him in serious financial straits, Roberts was not able to take up Xiuquan’s invitation and move to Nanjing until the fall of 1860.

Given his failing mission in Canton, Roberts needed to prove to his supporters in America, as well as to his fellow missionaries, that he still had a purpose in China, which he thought he could fulfill by going to the rebel camp to correct the Taipings’ imperfect understanding of Christian doctrine. At first, his mission to Nanjing seemed to vindicate his efforts, as he won an edict from the Heavenly King granting “free toleration to both Protestants and Roman Catholics,” and another decree granting him permission to open eighteen chapels in Nanjing and more in other Taiping cities. When Taiping fortunes started to fall again in 1861, however, and as foreign “neutrality” in the Chinese civil war seemed to give way to support for the ruling dynasty, the rebels increasingly began to resent the foreign missionaries, and, thus, Roberts was in great danger of losing his purpose and perhaps his last chance to hang on in China. Even as his situation in Nanjing worsened and his ability to preach in Nanjing was being restricted, he continued to invite other missionaries to join him in Nanjing.

Roberts’s continuing invitations to other missionaries reveal the terrible dilemma he faced: if he admitted conditions were not ripe for conversion of the Taipings to “true” Christianity, his mission would be judged a failure by his colleagues, but if he invited them to join him in the capital, and they saw the unfavourable reality on the ground, it would become plain that his claims of success were exaggerated, if not completely false. Indeed, when some colleagues came to Nanjing and saw his poor living conditions, and confronted the poor prospects for proselytizing among the rebels, Roberts, whether he knew it or not, lost whatever respect he had remaining among his ministerial colleagues and increasingly became the object of ridicule among the foreign community in Shanghai. The Reverend T. P. Crawford said of Roberts:
I only know that he is at Nankin, acting Roberts. His last effort to humbug the world is supremely ridiculous.... He lives in a miserable old dirty room, has no power or influence among the Rebels, except in his own vain imagination. When I saw him there in February last, he was dressed up apparently in the old cast-off robes of the chiefs, and without exaggeration he was the dirtiest, greasiest white man I ever saw. He knows well enough that no missionary family could live among the rebels, and he also knows that they do not want them among them—notwithstanding his loud call for missionaries, and other humbug remarks.48

The leading foreign newspaper in Shanghai proclaimed that, “The fanatic Roberts, whose ravings and whose personal eccentricities as described by himself have caused so much amusement, must be looked on as a most untrustworthy witness.”49 Even as his conditions at Nanjing worsened, Roberts had a desperate need to prove to his colleagues and other foreigners that he could still preach usefully in the rebel camp.

One important key to unlocking the mystery of the incident with Rengan is Roberts’s low level of education and poor facility with Chinese languages, a fact not usually acknowledged, or perhaps even realized, by most modern Taiping scholars.50 From the dissertation research of Margaret Coughlin, and from the accounts of other missionaries, we can start to comprehend how Roberts’s low level of general education, and his poor Chinese language ability in particular, hampered his efforts to preach in the rebel camp and heightened his personal dilemma. After reviewing this evidence, we would be less inclined than other scholars to discount, on the grounds that he was an open supporter of the Taipings, Lindley’s condemnation of Roberts as “least qualified” to be a missionary and “singularly illiterate,” a man whose work among the rebels “did far more harm than good.”51

Like many Baptists in what was then the western part of the American south, Roberts, who worked as a farmer and saddler to support himself, received most of his education in “occasional sessions in country schools,” and never went to college, although he
later studied for approximately six months at the Furman Academy in Edgefield, South Carolina. Unlike most other missionaries from Britain and America, who were mostly approved by church boards before being sent to China, Roberts first went to China on his own, settling in Macao before the First Opium War, although economic necessity did force him to seek the support of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Boston after a few years. In fact, his original application to the board before he left America was rejected, not least because of negative comments from three of the four ministers Roberts named as references. These comments dealt not only with Roberts’s low educational level, but also his lacklustre talents as a preacher and his difficult character. He financed his own mission to China through property he owned in Mississippi, though when the property turned out to be worth less than he had estimated, he was forced to work with other missionaries already in Macao and to again seek the approval of the Boston board in 1841, an application that was ultimately approved. In Macao, in Hong Kong after the conclusion of the First Opium War in 1842, and in Canton after his move there in 1844, there were constant complaints from other missionaries about Roberts’s “uncouth” and difficult nature.

One could perhaps argue that these attitudes toward Roberts reflected American regional differences between the eastern and western parts of the Baptist church, or denominational differences among China missionaries, some of whom might have looked upon Roberts as a representative of a “low church,” or perhaps been jealous of Roberts’s seeming success in gaining a missionary foothold on the Chinese mainland. Yet it should be noted that Roberts eventually alienated himself even from members of his own denomination and fellow westerners, not to mention his own wife and children.

Most crucial to unlocking the mystery of the 1862 incident is the fact that Roberts found it difficult to master Chinese languages, despite years of study, and had to rely on native Chinese assistants to do much of his missionary work. Roberts first studied variants of the Fujian dialect among dockworkers in Macao, and then Cantonese in Hong Kong and Canton, as well as written Chinese, but, by many ac-
counts, he mastered none of these languages. Roberts himself noted in 1842—more than five years after he came to China—that his progress in studying Chinese had been “feeble.” Given his poor preaching and Chinese language skills, it is very likely that Roberts continued in later years the early pattern of relying on assistants to convey his message. In 1845, Elijah Bridgman noted that Canton missionaries “have usually employed native teachers, their converts, to speak, and I suppose the larger half of the speaking is done by them.” William B. Johnson, a college-educated Baptist missionary, described by other missionaries as a true scholar and admirable linguist, but who was critical of his own abilities, said in 1847:

All the missionaries speak only the Macao dialect which is imperfectly understood by Cantonese. The Chinese say that they understand less than one half of what Bro. Roberts says and when he shops he has to point at things.

Thus, after more than ten years in China, Roberts still could not make himself intelligible to the people to whom he preached in Hong Kong and Guangzhou.

Coughlin notes further the early missionaries’ reliance on their Chinese assistants, not just to teach them the language, interpret for them, and act as guides, but also to provide them with an evaluation of their proficiency in Chinese:

Lacking proper instructional materials, the missionary was completely dependent on his teacher-assistant. The latter, however, regarded the missionary as his teacher and superior and, according to Confucian tradition, felt duty-bound to continually compliment and encourage him. He probably made every effort to understand his “student’s” mispronunciations so he would not have to correct him or show either his own or his teacher’s ignorance.

Based on Roberts’s own letters, Coughlin concludes that he had no clear idea of the tonal nature of Chinese languages, which would make his speech very hard to understand by native speakers, and that
he took at face value the compliments of his Chinese teachers, who thus completed “a most successful snow job” on him.63

While it might be expected that Roberts must have improved his Chinese language facility after more years in China, one must remember that he returned to America at least twice in the next ten years, and also moved to the non-Cantonese speaking cities of Shanghai and Nanjing by 1860. In fact, in June 1860, just before he left Guangzhou for the rebel camp, in answer to a question from the Southern Baptist board about “the use of an interpreter,” Roberts wrote:

[I]t is with much success that one preach to the natives by interpreters. [sic] My use of them is this[::] they simplify my meaning to the natives and correctly convey my ideas[.] The language must well be understood to preach to natives[.] [T]he native Broge [sic] can hardly be cot [sic—caught?] by American [sic], hence by the use of an interpreter they convey correctly the word preached. And again they more or less become teachers or preachers. In short they are coworkers in my preaching to the natives here which will be more than usual….64

In this letter, Roberts refers to his use of Cantonese interpreters in a region of China where he had preached for over two decades. One is hard pressed to imagine how he could have preached by himself in Mandarin in Nanjing with only a few months of experience with that language.

Thus, from late 1860 to early 1862 when he was active in Nanjing, Roberts was only familiar, to a greater or lesser degree, with the languages of Fujian and Guangdong, and could not be understood by many people on the streets of the Taiping capital. Reverend Josiah Cox reported on his 1862 visit to Nanjing:

I endeavored to converse with sundry parties in the streets; but as they were natives of a different province, they could not understand my Canton dialect. There is quite a Babel jargon of dialects among the followers of the Tai-ping flag,
because they have been impressed from every district traversed by their victorious bands….

I strolled about the shopping which lines the banks where we landed, and on to some forts, but found neither shopkeepers nor soldiers, who can speak Cantonese.65

The Reverend Joseph Edkins reported on his own visit to Nanjing, noting that “Mr. Roberts addressed the Taipings who came from the south in the Canton dialect, and I followed him, speaking to the remainder in the Mandarin idiom.”66 Not knowing Cantonese himself, of course, Edkins would have no idea of how well Roberts was communicating with those Taiping followers, by this time relatively few, who spoke Cantonese. Reverend Muirhead of the London Mission also reported on his visit to Nanjing in January 1861 and observed that “Mr. Roberts has long [held services] in his own house, but from his not knowing the Mandarin dialect, he had been prevented from more public labours.”67

Thus, when Roberts was preaching against Taiping theology in the rebel capital in 1861 and early 1862, he could not have been understood by most natives of the area, and even his Cantonese may not have been very clear. He did claim in a letter to another missionary that he had begun preaching in “the Nanking dialect” in the streets of the rebel capital in 1861,68 but there is no evidence that Roberts ever learned to speak Mandarin, his claim is contradicted by the accounts of Edkins and Muirhead, and Roberts had a known propensity to exaggerate his activities in China. It is more likely that Roberts meant that he was preaching with or through his assistants in Nanjing, and his letter of 28 June 1860 suggests that he continued his common practice of using native interpreters. This might be one reason why Rengan warned the assistant who had accompanied Roberts from Canton that he would be subject to execution if he preached against Taiping doctrine.69

The move against Roberts’s assistant was part of a larger crackdown on Western missionary proselytizing in Nanjing that began in late 1860 or 1861 after Xiuquan had several debates with
Western missionaries that led both sides to realize how far apart their theologies were. Roberts was now forbidden to open new chapels in and around Nanjing as he had originally hoped, other foreign missionaries were refused permission to stay with Roberts in his residence in Nanjing, and Rengan warned other missionaries that he could no longer protect them if they continued their preaching in Nanjing. Virtually the only hope Roberts had left was to take advantage of his special protected status as the original teacher of the Heavenly Emperor to continue preaching by himself in Nanjing. Given his limited Chinese language abilities, however, this would not have been an attractive option for him.

**Possible Solution to the Mystery**

Rengan may have reasoned that by thus limiting Roberts’s ability to speak publicly against the Taipings in Nanjing, his own worries about any trouble Roberts might cause in the rebel capital would be diminished. Better still, perhaps Rengan concluded that Roberts would leave the rebel areas of his own accord if he could not communicate without assistance.

The “boy” at the centre of the incident may therefore have been more significant than scholars have appreciated. It is possible that Roberts, in response to Rengan’s restrictions on his assistants, was grooming the “boy” to translate for him, and perhaps he had already started using him in that manner. No one has before hypothesized that Roberts actually used or intended to use the servant in this way, although Shao Yong does note that Rengan “acted on his words” when he “severely punished” Roberts’s servant after he had earlier warned the previous Chinese assistant that he could not protect him from decapitation if he continued to preach against Hong Xiuquan’s doctrines. If Roberts was indeed attempting to groom his servant to replace his former assistants, this move would frustrate Rengan’s potential strategy of preventing Roberts from getting out his message. Those who claim that the servant was under sentence of death for some offence never specify what that offence was, though
they assert that the offence occurred before Roberts made him his servant and tried to protect him. This author has finally been able to determine, by consulting what may be the last remaining copy of the pamphlet, “A Letter to the Bishop of Victoria,” that the offence was “voiding his excrement in the Kan-Wang’s path.” Whether or not such a minor, if vulgar, offence was the “boy’s” real crime, we could speculate that his potential to help Roberts carry on his preaching against Taiping doctrines was the true underlying reason for the harsh punishment. Unfortunately, no evidence is available in either Chinese or Western sources about the age or status of the servant, and we are left only with Roberts’s reference to the servant as a “boy.” This could be a racialized reference to a servant of any age.

The separate yet clashing dilemmas of Hong Rengan and Issachar Roberts did lead in the end to one commonality—the failure of each man’s personal life work. It is certainly true that both men were very unusual in their respective ways, yet each was uniquely positioned to influence the Taiping movement, even if neither was able to capitalize on that influence. Thus, in the personal failures of each man we can see written the larger failures of the sides they represented. The Western missionaries failed to understand and cooperate with the Taipings, while the leaders of the Taiping movement failed in their bid to enlist foreign help or even neutrality in their attempt to overthrow the ruling Qing dynasty.

**Epilogue: The Deaths of Hong Rengan and Issachar Roberts**

An examination of how each man’s life ended reveals much about their characters, and it may especially support the contention that Rengan’s actions were not entirely selfish or, as he and Roberts might have put it, not “fully sinful.” In Roberts’s case, despite his strong religious beliefs, flaws in his personal character contributed to the failure of his mission in China and, as we will see below, to the very difficult circumstances at the end of his life, though the cause of his death does reveal a kind of integrity nonetheless.
Hong Rengan’s most appealing personal quality for many Taiping scholars was revealed by the manner in which he faced his own death. Unlike other captured rebels, who pleaded for their lives by promising to convince other Taipings to surrender, Hong Rengan went to his gruesome execution unrepentant, even reciting a poem that expressed hopes that the Taiping movement would one day be renewed.\(^75\) C. A. Curwen was less inclined to praise Rengan. While acknowledging that Rengan “expressed no regret and no sense of guilt” for serving the Taiping cause, he wondered why any captured Taiping rebel would not take the “heroic alternative” of resisting cooperation with Qing authorities and refusing to provide any written account. He also noted that Rengan’s confession stressed personal loyalty to his relative and his duty as a minister more than it did revolutionary loyalty.\(^76\) Eugene P. Boardman and So Kwan-wai identified other weaknesses in Rengan’s character, including too much willingness to follow the commands his older brothers gave him not to join his cousin’s religious movement in its early years before it became a rebellion. They also accused him of “compromising his integrity” in the later years of the movement by allowing others to write passages in official Taiping documents that suggested Rengan himself had had divine revelations.\(^77\)

Yet neither of these works takes into account the practical realities Rengan faced, and the limited openings that were available for him to exploit. When Rengan was caught by Zeng Guofan’s forces, he may have shared the hope of any captured rebel that his account would one day come to light. This would be especially likely if he thought the Qing regime would not last, as indeed proved to be the case, since the empire was overthrown less than fifty years later and its archives opened up during the ensuing Republican period. Boardman and So also underestimated the dangers Rengan faced in openly challenging Taiping doctrine. Rengan knew how many people were being executed daily, even for small offences, in the late days of the Taiping camp, and he especially knew how many Taiping leaders had perished due to internecine warfare just before he arrived in Nanjing. Given Hong Xiuquan’s state of mind in his later years—some people
have described him as paranoid and delusional—and the despera-
tion with which the Taiping regime tried to prevent defections as the
armies of Zeng Guofan and his protégés closed in on the Taiping
capital, it would be easy to see why no one dared to openly challenge
Xiuquan. Indeed, it would also be clear why Rengan may have felt it
prudent to permit others to spread the idea that he was a source of di-
vine revelations or was a special link to the top leader; such beliefs
would certainly enhance his ability to retain influence, or even just to
survive the corrupt and violent environment. A parallel may be drawn
to the failure of other top leaders surrounding Mao to challenge his
disastrous polices of the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolu-
tion. One could ask whether it was more courageous to make an
open challenge that would lead to certain death, or to search, however
desperately, for some way to salvage hope for the future.

Roberts, unlike Rengan, faced no such deadly choice, though
perhaps one could give him credit in the end for leaving the Taipings
and accepting failure rather than acceding to their requests to spread a
Taiping doctrine that he considered blasphemous. Even so, Roberts
did try to make contact with the rebels one last time, in a trip from
Guangzhou to rebel-held territory in Suzhou in 1863. This trip has
been regarded as a mystery to Taiping scholars, but seems in fact to
show the desperate choice Roberts faced after he left Nanjing, and his
vain hope to maintain a purpose for his mission to China. Neverthe-
less, Roberts faced merely the dilemma of participating in blasphemy
or conceding the failure of his mission; Rengan’s dilemma was either
decapitation by angry Taipings or slow execution by slicing at the
hands of Qing authorities.

After leaving the Taiping camp, Issachar Roberts returned to
Canton. Failing to keep his mission alive, he was forced to return to
America in 1866. By the time he died in 1871, his stubborn and diffi-
cult personality had caused him to be estranged even from his wife
and children, who waived any claim to his estate. Roberts’s life did
show a degree of integrity, since he sacrificed much to go to China,
accepted the failure of his mission rather than remaining with the re-
bels, and ultimately died of the leprosy he contracted during his early
work among lepers in Macao in the 1830s. Nevertheless, it is very clear that Roberts’s stubborn personality and infuriating behaviour were enough to drive Hong Rengan to the breaking point, and the evidence shows that Rengan’s frustration with Roberts was far from unique. Issachar Roberts’s actions in Nanjing helped to frustrate both Rengan’s and his own plans for change and reform. Roberts’s initial claims that Rengan murdered his servant, despite his later retractions, have put a black mark on Hong Rengan’s reputation to this day. Perhaps this essay will play some small part in helping to redeem it.
Notes

1 For example, see Hua Shi, “Luo Xiaquan fanwen taiping tianguo” [Issachar Roberts Visits the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom], *Lishi jiaoxue* [History Teaching] 5 (1986): 41-42. Hua Shi, in common with most recent Chinese commentators on Rengan’s relationship with Roberts and other missionaries in the 1860s, uses the Chinese translation of letters in the nineteenth-century English language newspaper, the *North China Herald*. See Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, Lishi yanjiu suǒ [Shanghai Institute of Social Sciences, History Section], *Taiping jun zai Shanghai: “Bei Hua jie bao” xuan yi* [The Taiping Army in Shanghai: Selections from the *North China Herald*] (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe [Shanghai People’s Publishing House], 1983). Another Chinese language source for foreign materials on the Taiping is Luo Ergang and Wang Qingchengu, comp., *Taiping Tianguo* [The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom], volumes 9-10, *Wairen jizai* [Foreigners’ Accounts], (Guilin: Guangxi shifandaxue chubanshe [Guangxi Normal University Press], 2004).


5 For his first partial retraction, see Roberts, “Further Disclosures on Taipings by Roberts the Missionary,” *North China Herald*, 606, 8 March 1862, 38-39. Shao Yong, in the first version of his article on Hong Rengan, seems to be the only Taiping scholar who correctly notes that Roberts, in his March letter, admitted that his assistant and servants, and not just his baggage, had been returned. Strangely, this accurate claim does not appear in the revised version of Shao’s article. See Shao Yong, “Hong Rengan yu xifang quanjiaoshi” [Hong Rengan and the Western Missionaries], *Shanghai shifandaxue xuebao* (shehui kexueban) [Journal of Shanghai Normal University (Social Sciences Edition)] 30: 3 (May 2001): 49 and Shao Yong, in Liu Rizhi et al., comp., *Taiping tianguo yu Zhongxi wenhua: jinian Taiping tianguo qiyi 150*
zhounian lunwenji [The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and Chinese and Western Culture: Selected Papers from the Conference Celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom]: 248.


7 Lindley’s account of the incident is in a long note in his memoirs. See Lin-le (Augustus F. Lindley), Ti-ping Tien-kwoh: The History of the Ti-ping Revolution Including a Narrative of the Author’s Personal Adventures, 566-568.

8 “A Letter to the Bishop of Victoria,” 16, emphasis in the original. The letter was published privately and is dated on the first page, “South China, 18th June, 1862.” Historic Collections, King’s College, University of Aberdeen Library. The author of the pamphlet, like Lindley, is scathing in his indictment of the Bishop of Victoria and other clerics for turning against the Taipings on what he regarded as scant evidence. It might be natural to speculate that the anonymous author was Lindley himself, except that the author seems to have been well aware of biblical issues and must have been in Shanghai or Guangzhou in order to have spoken with Roberts, neither of which applied to Lindley. For contemporaneous citations of the letter, see Lindley, 568, and also W.H. Sykes, The Taeping Rebellion in China (London: Warren Hall & Co, 1863), 25. The letter was apparently held by other libraries in the nineteenth century, including that of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. See Daniel S. and Isabel Durrie, comps., Catalogue of the Library of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (Madison: State of Wisconsin, 1873), 650. It seems that the Wisconsin copy is no longer extant, but this author has been able, with the generous assistance of Michelle Gait and her colleagues at the Historic Collections of King’s College of the University of Aberdeen Library in Scotland, to locate what may be the last copy of the pamphlet still in existence in the world. Aberdeen, of course, was the hometown of James Legge and other dissenting Protestant members of the London Missionary Society who were to some degree more sympathetic to the Taipings than most other missionaries.

9 A notable exception is Luo Ergang in Taiping Tianguo shi (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991): 4: 2335-2336. Perhaps other Taiping scholars have not cited the pamphlet because they were only aware of it through Lindley, who many consider a pro-Taiping partisan and thus a biased source, but a
comparison of the actual pamphlet (see note 8) confirms its accuracy and suggests that it should be given more credence.


13 Rev. J. Chalmers, quoting from an article by Legge in the *Overland Register*, Hong Kong, 25 August 1860, reprinted in Eugene P. Boardman and So Kwan-wai, “Hung Jen-kan,” 270; Lin-le (Augustus F. Lindley), *Ti-ping Tien-kwoh*, 242; and R. Wardlaw Thompson, *Griffith John*, 125. It should be noted that after Great Britain’s foreign policy changed from alleged neutrality to open hostility toward the Taipings, other, non-missionary sources expressed skepticism about Hong Rengan’s motives, even though they did not know Rengan personally. For example, Frederick Bruce, British Plenipotentiary in China, used the incident with Roberts and his servant to claim that the real purpose of all of Rengan’s reform ideas was to “throw dust in the eyes of foreigners” and fool them about the real character of the rebels. See Bruce, “Letter to Earl Russell,” 4 March 1862, in “Further Papers Relating to the Rebellion in China,” *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1863, 6-7. See also J.S. Gregory, *Great Britain and the Taipings* (London: Praeger, 1969), 158-59, 245, n. 11.


15 Among Western scholars, Franz Michael especially stands out in depicting Rengan as a hero of the Taiping movement. See Franz Michael and Chang Chung-li, *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*, 3 volumes (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), I: Part V: 134-168. Of the abundant Chinese scholarship in the reform era that recognizes Hong Rengan as an important pioneer of Chinese modernization, see, for example, two generally laudatory biographies of Rengan: Shen Weibin, *Hong Rengan*
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(Shanghai: Renmin Chubanshe, 1982), and Xia Chuntao, Cong shu shi, Jidu tu dao wang ye: Hong Rengan [From Confucian Tutor to Christian to King: Hong Rengan] (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe [Hubei Educational Press], 1998). For Chinese academic journal articles in the last decade that continue to see Rengan as an early modernizer, see Shao Ling, “Lue lun Hong Rengan de jindai fazhi sixiang” [On Hong Rengan’s Modern Legal Thought], Jinan jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao [Journal of the Jinan Institute of Education] (2002): 3; Qiu Yuanyou, “Hong Rengan – zhu zhang zhongguo falu jindaihuade di yi ren” [Hong Rengan: The First Person Advocating Legal Modernization in China], Huaibei meishiyuan xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban) [Journal of the Huaibei Coal Industry Teachers College, Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition] (2001): 5; and Hou Zhuqing, “Hong Rengan youli xianggang zhi jingyan yuqi chengshi xiandaihua sixiang” [Hong Rengan’s Experience of Visiting Hong Kong and his Ideas of Urban Modernization], Haerbin xueyuan xuebao [Journal of Harbin University] (2004): 12. All of these may be accessed through the China Academic Journals Full Text Database (Beijing: Qinghua University) at http://china.eastview.com. Finally, see Liu Jingdong, “Minzhu yu kexuede zhuiqiu: Hong Rengan de jindai linian jiqi beiju” [A Pursuit of Democracy and Science: Hong Rengan’s Modern Idea and His Tragedy], Zhexue yanjiu [Philosophical Research] 6 (2000): 34-39. Liu Jingdong observes that the noted Chinese philosopher Feng Yulan believed that the Taipings borrowed only backward ideas from the West and represented “feudal superstition,” but nevertheless recognized Hong Rengan as one who attempted to borrow the most modern ideas of the age.


17 Teng Ssu-yu, The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers, 200.


20 Carl Smith, citing letters in the London Missionary Society Archives, reports that the Rev. John Chalmers and other members of the London Missionary Society in Hong Kong sponsored Rengan’s efforts to reach the Taiping capital in hopes that he would have a positive influence on Taiping doctrine and policy, and that the Society continued to support relatives of Rengan who managed to escape to Hong Kong before and after the fall of the Taipings.
See Carl Smith, “Note on Friends and Relatives of Taiping Leaders,” *Journal of Christianity and Chinese Religion and Culture* XIX: 2 (1976), reprinted with additional comments by Jen Yu-wen in *Journal of the Hong King Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 16 (1976): 125-126. James Legge’s daughter, however, claimed that Legge strongly counseled Rengan against joining the rebels, even though he played a major role in supporting Rengan’s relatives in Hong Kong, including Rengan’s brother and son, during and after the rebellion. She also claimed that, before leaving for a trip home to Britain, Legge left strict instructions with Rengan not to leave Hong Kong for the rebel camp. See Helen Edith Legge, *James Legge Missionary and Scholar* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1905), 92.


Ibid. Rengan’s removal as foreign minister due to his cousin’s displeasure is also noted in Shen Weibin, *Hong Rengan*, 107.

For example, see Teng Yuan-cheng, “The Failure of Hung Jen-kan’s Foreign Policy,” 138.

Josiah Cox, “China: A Missionary Visit to Nanking and the ‘Shield-King,’” 62. This 11 January 1862 letter by Cox, to the best of this author’s knowledge, can only be found in the original source, the *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*. Cox also mentioned his December visit to Nanjing in his personal journal, where one can ascertain that the date of his interview with Rengan was 27 December 1861. See Cox, “Journal of Rev. Josiah Cox,” *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, 3rd series, IX (25 April 1862): 69-72. The journal is reprinted in Prescott Clarke and J.S. Gregory, *Western Reports on the Taiping*, 308-314.


Ibid.


Hong Rengan, as quoted in Josiah Cox, “China: A Missionary Visit to Nanking and the Shield King,” 64.

See, for example, S.Y. Teng, *The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers*, 160.


See note 15 above.


The story of the end of the foreigners’ supposed “neutrality” after the settlement of the Second Opium, or “Arrow,” War, and their turn against the Taiping cause, is well documented and described in all the classic studies of the Taipings. See, for example, Franz Michael and Chang Chung-li, *The Taiping Rebellion*, I: 151; and Jen Yu-wen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement*, 445-447.


George Blackburn Pruden, Jr., “Issachar Jacox Roberts and American Diplomacy in China during the Taiping Rebellion” (PhD diss., International Studies, The American University, 1977), 163-168; Margaret M. Coughlin,

44 Ibid., 193.
46 Ibid., 289.

There are three sources that are exceptional in that they acknowledge Roberts’s low level of education. These are S.Y. Teng, The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers, 201; Xia Chuntao, Cong shu shi, 193, whose interpretation is based largely on the work of Teng; and the work of the contemporary Chinese scholar Ma Dazheng, “Lun Hong Rengan sixiangde xingcheng jiqi lishi dili” [On the Formation and Historical Status of Hong Rengan’s Reform Ideas], in Taiping tianguo shi xueshu taolunhui lunwenji—jinian taiping tianguo qiyi 130 zhounian [Collection of Papers of the Academic Seminar on the History of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom—In Memory of the 130th Anniversary of the Taiping Rebellion] (Guangxi Renmin chubanshe, Guangdong Renmin chubanshe, 1983), 330, available online at http://www.renwu.net/web/Article.ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=32125, 2-3.

51 Lin-le (Augustus F. Lindley), Ti-ping Tien-kwoh, 506, note.
52 Margaret Coughlin, “Strangers in the House,” 38.
53 Ibid., 36.
54 Ibid., 39-41. Both Coughin and Pruden (33) have drawn upon material in the archives of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS).
56 Of the many complaints in other missionary accounts about Roberts’s “uncouth” nature and his ignorance of language and proper behavior, see especially George Pruden, “Issachar Jacox Roberts,” 65, n. 50.
57 On the Board’s final success in convincing Roberts’s Western supporters of the justice of his dismissal, see George Pruden, “Issachar Jacox Roberts,” 199-200. On Roberts’s alienation of his wife and children, see Margaret Coughlin, “Strangers in the House,” 140, and S.Y. Teng, The Taiping Rebellion, 55.
Margaret Coughlin, “Strangers in the House,” 150, n. 4; George Pruden, “Issachar Jacox Roberts,” 64, n. 48. They have both cited a letter from Roberts to Peck, Hong Kong, 23 April 1842, in ABFMS.

Margaret Coughlin, “Strangers in the House,” 217, citing Elijah Bridgman to Anderson, 26 May 1845, ABFMS.


Margaret Coughlin, “Strangers in the House,” 96b, citing a letter from Johnson to Dr. J.B. Taylor, Canton, 20 August 1847, SBHLA.

Margaret Coughlin, “Strangers in the House,” 151-152.

Ibid.

Issachar Roberts, letter to A. M. Poindexter, 28 June 1860, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives. The author would like to thank Bill Summers, the Director of the SBHLA for making this and other letters of Roberts available to me. To this author’s knowledge, Roberts’s letter of 28 June 1860 has not been previously cited.


Reverend Muirhead, as quoted in Lindsey Brine, *The Taeping Rebellion in China*, 288.

Margaret Coughlin, “Strangers in the House,” 275, citing Roberts to Rev. Rosewell H. Graves, 16 April 1861, SBHLA.


Shao Yong, “Hong Rengan yu xifang quanjiaoshi,” 49.

“A Letter to the Bishop of Victoria,” 18 June 1862, 16. Historic Collections, King’s College, University of Aberdeen Library. Perhaps understandably, given his Victorian audience, Lindley left out this part in his quotation of the Letter.

This author would like to thank his colleague Beatrice McKenzie of the History Department at Beloit College for pointing out the latter possibility.

Chung-li, though emending the more complete *North China Herald* version of Rengan’s confession with earlier poems of Xiuquan and Rengan, nevertheless leave Rengan’s final poem out of their collection of Taiping documents. *The Taiping Rebellion*, II: 1507-1532.


78 For example, see Yap, P.M., “The Mental Illness of Hung Hsiu-chuan, Leader of the Taiping Rebellion,” *Far Eastern Quarterly* 13: 3 (1954): 287-304, who views Hung as suffering from “megalomaniac convictions” and suspects that his illness had “a schizophrenic-paranoiac element.”


