Elite and Peasant During the Taiping Occupation of the Jiangnan, 1860-1864

KATHRYN BERNHARDT
Southern Methodist University

Bitterly, bitterly,
The years creep slowly past.
But when the Taipings come,
Life will be good at last.
The land will be divided,
And contracts strewn on the roads.
All people will be equal.
There will be no rich households.

This poem, related to Chinese scholars by peasants sometime in the 1950s, captures the sense of expectation with which their forebears throughout south and central China had awaited the arrival of the Taiping rebels a century earlier. As promised in their document *The Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty,* the Taipings would eliminate the rich and elevate the poor until all were equal in status and wealth. Other folk songs and tales suggest that the peasantry's hopes were not misplaced; they speak repeatedly of rebel prohibitions against rent collection, the expropriation of landlord property and its redistribution to the landless, and the divestment of the elite of its power.[1]

Western scholarship conveys an entirely different impression of life under Taiping rule, maintaining that only in their capital at Nanjing did the rebels attempt in any serious fashion to implement some of the ideals of their movement. Elsewhere, the Taipings, however revolutionary in intent, tended to be very conservative in action. According to Philip Kuhn and Frederic Wakeman, the

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insurgents' desperate need for money, grain, and other supplies for the war against the Qing made them reluctant to risk the economic disruption that a wholesale reorganization of local society would necessarily entail. As a result, the Taiping commanders in areas outside of Nanjing left existing power structures intact. The major beneficiaries of rebel rule, in this view, were not peasants, but members of the elite, who were granted complete control over local society in exchange for a steady supply of revenue (Kuhn, 1980: 189-196; Wakeman, 1977: 220).

Life under the Taipings, however, was neither the revolutionary peasant utopia of folk legends nor the conservative elite haven of Western scholarship. Rebel rule did not result in the total restructuring of rural society as prescribed in *The Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty,* yet neither did it rest lightly on the countryside, leaving the existing configurations of power and control, wealth and influence, essentially undisturbed. Local society under the Taipings was of a different nature than local society under the Qing. And, on balance, the changes that rebel rule effected in the rural order, while far from revolutionary, tended to serve the interests of the peasantry more than those of the elite. The specific focus of inquiry here will be the lower Yangzi valley or the Jiangnan,[2] the region on which Western scholarship has relied heavily for its conclusions about the rebel occupation of the countryside. An examination of local government and the landlord-tenant relationship during the Taiping years reveals that, while the world was not turned upside down in the Jiangnan, it was certainly knocked askew.

THE TAIPING SYSTEM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Throughout the four years (1860-1864) of the Taiping occupation of the Jiangnan, the structure of rebel rule reflected the military strategy that had secured the region in the first place. Not surprisingly, the Taipings made prefectural and county cities and large market towns their targets of attack, and these same cities

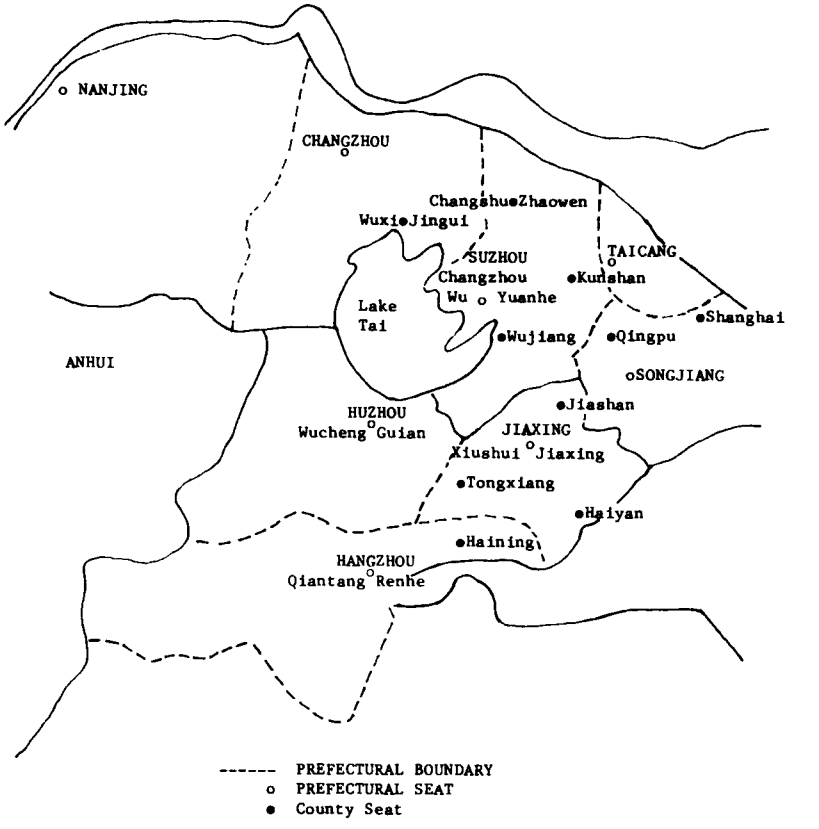

Figure 1: The Jiangnan

and towns then became the loci of their power. Except for some tinkering with the border between Suzhou and Jiaxing prefectures, the rebel rulers kept intact the administrative boundaries of the Qing prefectures and counties. The depth of their rule also paralleled that of the Qing; rarely were Taiping commanders and their contingents stationed in population centers smaller than the largest market towns.

To govern the vast countryside that lay beyond their direct control, the Taipings, again much like the Qing, depended on the assistance of Jiangnan residents. In a few places, rebel com-

manders accorded militia leaders almost absolute authority over their spheres of influence in return for ceasing hostilities and delivering a certain quota of taxes and supplies. Such was the bargain that the Taipings struck with the local strongmen and militia leaders Xu Peiyuan of Changzhou county, Suzhou, and Fei Yucheng of Yuanhe county, also in Suzhou. Only these men and members of their bureaus had the right to collect land and commercial taxes and to select local officials in their areas of influence. No Taiping soldier was permitted to enter these locales or to interfere with their governance (Zhongguo kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo, 1959: 123-124; Tao Xu, 1882: 1/6a-b).

Arrangements of this type were not the norm, however, and in most places in the Jiangnan, the Taipings retained the authority to appoint natives to be officials, called in rebel parlance *xiangguan* (rural officials), and through them to supervise closely the management of local affairs. In its ideal form, the xiangguan structure of administration was part of a political, military, and religious hierarchy modelled after the classical system of local control described in the *Zhouli*. As outlined in *The Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty,* residents of an area were to be divided into groups of five families headed by a *wuzhang* (corporal). Five wuzhang units formed a group of 25 families under the command of a *liangsima* (sergeant); four liangsima units combined into a group of 100 families under a *zuzhang* (lieutenant); five zuzhang units, a total of 500 families, were led by a *lüshuai* (captain); five lushuai units, equalling 2,500 families, were under the direction of a *shishuai* (colonel); and five shishuai units, or 12,500 families, were under the leadership of a *junshuai* (general). The responsibilities of the unit heads went beyond the military function their names suggest; at the same time they were to be the administrative and religious leaders of their respective groupings (Li, 1963: 286-288).

Throughout the rebellion, the Taiping leadership was more successful in implementing this system of control in its armies than among the inhabitants of conquered territory. By the time the rebels took the lower Yangzi valley, the military and religious duties of the xiangguan had fallen by the wayside, and their sole

remaining responsibility was administration. And even in this respect, the system as instituted in the Jiangnan fell short of the ideal in several ways. For one, imposing organization based solely on population and in defiance of natural boundaries and settlement patterns had never been an easy task in China, as the history of *baojia* and *lijia* attests. The xiangguan apparatus tended to be based on geographical areas, whether the prefecture-county-xiang-du-tu units of the Qing administrative hierarchy or the city-market town-village units of the economic hierarchy, rather than on groups of people. Moreover, the structure as implemented lacked the depth of the original design, since, in most counties, little effort was made to fill the three lowest tiers of the pyramid (zuzhang, liangsima, and wuzhang). Finally, in the Jiangnan, the Taipings appointed local men to be the *zongzhi* of prefectures and the *jianjun* of counties, positions that were not part of the *Zhouli* ideal. Equivalent to Qing prefects and county magistrates, the zongzhi and jianjun were held accountable to their respective prefectural or county rebel commanders.

The xiangguan undertook numerous tasks for their Taiping overlords, foremost among which was the gathering of the revenue and supplies needed for the war effort. They compiled population and land registers; collected household levies and property and commercial taxes; sold the mandatory boat permits, shop licenses, and road passes; and fulfilled rebel requisitions for wood, bricks, boats, and sometimes manpower. In addition, they helped to administer the Taiping civil service examinations, managed water conservancy, handled civil litigation, maintained local law and order, and implemented relief measures, such as the distribution of gruel to the poor and the resettlement of refugees (Li, 1963: 328-337).

The rebels recruited natives not only to fill the xiangguan posts, but also to perform the myriad chores that the administration of a large region entailed. The Taiping kings in their palaces, lesser rebel commanders in their halls, and xiangguan in their bureaus all needed clerks, messengers, doctors, porters, accountants, guards, and the like. In their recruitment of xiangguan and this other personnel, the rebel leadership in the Jiangnan searched for

a wide variety of people with an equally broad range of skills. An announcement issued by the commander of Jiaxing prefecture in 1861 urged the following types of people to come forward and offer their services: people well versed in astronomy, astrology, and mathematics; people with a knowledge of geography, topography, and the strategic possibilities of the area; individuals well read in the work of Sunzi and with a knowledge of military strategy and the deployment of troops; people familiar with local conditions and customs; men learned in history and political affairs; people with clerical skills; people with exceptional ability in the martial arts, horsemanship, and marksmanship; "heroes of the greenwood" (brigands) who are willing to forsake their evil ways; itinerant entertainers and opera performers who are fleet of foot; and physicians and surgeons (Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: IV, 73).

The men appointed xiangguan in the Jiangnan were of backgrounds and stations in life as diverse as the categories in this recruitment notice: upper gentry, lower gentry, and indigent scholars; former Qing magistrates, yamen clerks, and runners; large landlords, small landlords, and peasants; rich households, well-to-do households, and beggars; *dibao*, polder heads (*yujia*), and village elders; merchants, peddlers, and shopkeepers; militia leaders, gunboat commanders, and local strongmen; Daoist priests, Buddhist monks, and martial arts masters; carpenters, butchers, and doctors; and "local sticks" (*digun*), local bandits (*tufei*), and vagrants (*wulai*) (see Table 1).

The heterogeneous composition of the xiangguan reflects the haphazard recruitment and appointment procedures employed by the Taiping leadership. In theory, local residents were to select the full complement of xiangguan through public elections (*gongju*). In fact, the higher level xiangguan were appointed by the rebel commanders and the lower level ones by either the commanders or their xiangguan superiors (Li, 1963: 309-315). The main criterion governing the selection of xiangguan appears to have been expediency. As newcomers to the region, the rebels had at best only a sketchy knowledge of the society now under their control. Yet they had to set up a local bureaucracy as quickly

TABLE 1

Xiangguan in the Jiangnan

PLACE	*XIANGGUAN* POST(S)	INCUMBENT(S)
CHANGZHOU PREFECTURE		
Wuxi & Jingui counties	I) Individual *xiangguan*	
	Wuxi *jianjun*	rice merchant
	Wuxi *jianjun*	*tudong* (*tu* manager)*
	Jingui *jianjun*	pig merchant
	junshuai	gunboat commander**
	junshuai	servant
	shishuai	Daoist priest
	lüshuai	member of rich family
	lüshuai	member of rich family
	lüshuai	servant
	II) General description	
	unspecified	*tudong* (*tu* manager)*
	unspecified	vagrants (*wulai*) & village heads
SUZHOU PREFECTURE		
Suzhou city & its suburban counties (Yuanhe, Changzhou & Wu)	I) Individual *xiangguan*	
	jianjun	domestic servant
	junshuai	peasant
	junshuai	rent dunner
	junshuai	landlord (300 *mu*) & shopkeeper
	shishuai	landlord (300-400 *mu*) & shopkeeper
	shishuai	doctor
	shishuai	doctor
	shishuai	silk weaver
	shishuai	attendant in a gambling den
	zuzhang	guard of a city gate
	zuzhang	clerk in a meat store
	unspecified	owner of a clothing store
	II) General description	
	unspecified	village elders
	unspecified	beggars
	unspecified	vagrants
Kunshan county	I) Individual *xiangguan*	
	shishuai	mercenary
	unspecified	member of rich family
	unspecified	son of a gentryman
Wujiang county	I) Individual *xiangguan*	
	jianjun	poor scholar
	junshuai	*yujia* (polder head)
	junshuai	doctor
	junshuai	member of rich family
	junshuai	lower gentryman
	shishuai	tribute boat crewman

(continued)

TABLE 1 continued
Xiangguan in the Jiangnan

PLACE	*XIANGGUAN* POST(S)	INCUMBENT(S)
	shishuai	member of lower gentry household
	shishuai	*yujia* (polder head)
Changshu & Zhaowen counties	I) Individual *xiangguan*	
	Changshu *jianjun*	mat peddler
	junshuai	landlord
	junshuai	lower gentryman
	junshuai	prosperous landlord
	junshuai	butcher
	junshuai	teahouse waiter
	junshuai	"local stick" (*tugun*) & *dibao*
	junshuai	tenant
	junshuai	rice merchant
	junshuai	small landowner & shopowner
	junshuai	geomancer
	shishuai	street vendor
	shishuai	paper cutter
	shishuai	poor peasant
	shishuai	peasant
	shishuai	merchant
	shishuai	wine merchant
	shishuai	market broker
	shishuai	Daoist priest
	shishuai	poor scholar & *xiangdong* (*xiang* manager)*
	shishuai	small landlord
	shishuai	rich gentryman
	shishuai	rich gentryman
	shishuai	carpenter
	shishuai	sailor
	shishuai	martial arts teacher
	shishuai	*dibao*
	lüshuai	store clerk
	lüshuai	*dibao*
	lüshuai	monk
	unspecified	peasant
	unspecified	peasant
	unspecified	small merchant
	unspecified	small merchant
	unspecified	small merchant
	unspecified	meat store owner
	II) General description	
	junshuai	men of influence
	shishuai	yamen clerks & local bullies (*tuhao*)
	lüshuai, zuzhang	*dibao*, shop clerks
	liangsima, wuzhang	local men of influenc
	lüshuai, zuzhang,	

TABLE 1 continued
Xiangguan in the Jiangnan

PLACE	*XIANGGUAN* POST(S)	INCUMBENT(S)
	liangsima, wuzhang	men who own much land
	zuzhang, liangsima	*jingzao* (subcounty tax functionary) & *dibao*
TAICANG DEPARTMENT	I) Individual *xiangguan*	
	unspecified	beancurd seller
SONGJIANG PREFECTURE		
Qingpu county	I) Individual *xiangguan*	
	jianjun	lower gentryman
HUZHOU PREFECTURE	I) Individual *xiangguan*	
Wucheng county	*junshuai*	wealthy man
	junshuai	gambler
	unspecified	gentry manager
Guian county	*jianjun*	lower gentryman
	junshuai	merchant
JIAXING PREFECTURE	I) Individual *xiangguan*	
	zongzhi	yamen runner
Xiushui county	*junshuai*	son of yamen runner
	junshuai	son of pawnshop owner
	shishuai	son of rich family
	shishuai	yamen runner
	unspecified	*juren*
Jiashan county	*jianjun*	*juren*
Haiyan county	*junshuai*	yamen clerk
	unspecified	"local stick" (*tugun*)
	unspecified	bandit
	unspecified	bandit
	unspecified	bandit
	II) General description	
Xiushui county	*lüshuai*	men from prosperous rural families
Jiashan county	unspecified	local bandits
	unspecified	local bullies
Tongxiang county	*junshuai, shishuai*	vagrants
	zuzhang, liangsima	landowners
HANGZHOU PREFECTURE	I) Individual *xiangguan*	
Renhe county	*jianjun*	Qing magistrate
Qiantang county	*jianjun*	Qing magistrate

TABLE 1 continued
Xiangguan in the Jiangnan

PLACE	*XIANGGUAN* POST(S)	INCUMBENT(S)
Haining county	*jianjun*	militia leader
	shishuai	rich men
	shishuai unspecified	bandit lower gentryman

SOURCES: Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan (1961-1963: I, 265-275, 324-325; II, 145, 175, 190-200; IV, 58, 75, 77, 129, 138, 190, 192-193, 195, 288, 366, 396, 401, 407, 462-463); Zhongguo kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo (1959: 111, 122, 132-135); Xiang Da (152: V, 253, 275, 370; VI, 468, 674-675, 679, 705, 709); Suzhou bowuguan et al. (1979: 72, 389, 414); Tang Shi (1963: 87-90, 106, 110, 112, 125-126); Ke Wuchi (1959: 50); Dong Caishi (1981a: 717, 720-721; 1981b: 80-81); Shen Yuwu (1981: 87, 89); Harigaya (1980: 128-129); Wang Tianjiang (1981: 700); *Tongxiangxian zhi* (1887: 20/8b); Yuan Zhen et al. (1981: 17, 23); "Lihu yuefu" (1964: 168).

*Tu and xiang managers were residents appointed by county magistrates to assist in the administration of local affairs. In the postbellum period, when the institution of rural directorships became much more widespread, incumbents of such posts in the Jiangnan generally were degree-holders (Ocko, 1983: 136-140; Bernhardt, 1984: 171-173).

**The phrase *gunboat commander* refers to the leader of a group of riverine pirates. Gunboat (qiangchuan) gangs, so named because of the fowling pieces with which they equipped their fast, three-to-five-man crafts, appeared in the Lake Tai region of Zhejiang and Jiangsu in the mid-nineteenth century. For information on this underworld element, see Harigaya (1983).

as possible to begin the gathering of the riches of the Jiangnan for the Taiping coffers. The urgency of this need deprived the commanders of the time required to make a more judicious selection of officials (if that, indeed, had been their original intention). Men who in some manner or another—whether as organizers of tribute missions, former militia leaders, or volunteers for service—had become visible to the commanders were immediately designated xiangguan. People thus singled out responded with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Some, much to the horror of their contemporaries, took to their posts with alacrity, others only with great reluctance. Yet others who were called upon to serve refused outright, often bringing as a consequence economic reprisals against their families (Tang, 1963: 109-110).

Of the people who became xiangguan, there was undoubtedly a substantial number, particularly those from the lower classes, who did so because of sympathy with the rebel cause. Examples of this are hard to come by, however, since contemporary writers rarely acknowledged conviction as a possible motivation for serving the Taipings. In their view, people who volunteered for or

who willingly took up posts did so out of the greedy desire to accumulate wealth, while those who accepted positions reluctantly did so out of the more noble desire to protect their families and neighbors from the abuses of the Taipings and the other xiangguan (Suzhou bowuguan et al., 1979: 60-61). Once in the xiangguan camp, however, this distinction sometimes became blurred as the outsiders became insiders and built up a stake in the Taiping status quo. "In the beginning," one gentryman wrote, "they felt it was difficult to serve as xiangguan and [only did so] because they feared humiliation at the hands of the long-hairs." Yet, as time passed, "they gradually came to see eye to eye with the bandits. They acquired the manner of the bandits and lost their own original nature" (Tang, 1963: 110).

Aiding this transition from reluctant to willing collaborator was the seemingly limitless opportunities for unscrupulous xiangguan to get rich quick. Few received emoluments from the Taipings. Instead, the xiangguan deducted their "salaries" and bureau expenses from the taxes and levies they gathered for the rebels. As the conduits for the flow of the wealth of the Jiangnan from the people to the rebel government, xiangguan found it a relatively easy matter to collect more from the people, deliver less to the Taipings, and keep the balance for themselves. All other administrative duties, from refugee relief to civil litigation to water control, presented further occasions for graft, squeeze, and influence peddling. Periodic Taiping crackdowns on xiangguan corruption proved no more effective than Qing prohibitions had against malfeasance within its officialdom.

Though perhaps not as common, but just as worthy of note, were those xiangguan who earned the commendation of their contemporaries for their honesty in office, their solicitous care of destitute refugees and needy scholars, and their attempts to curb the excesses of their bureaucratic peers (Tang, 1963: 110; Suzhou bowuguan et al., 1979: 41).

Whether in terms of their conduct in office, their reasons for accepting appointment, or their backgrounds, the xiangguan thus did not constitute a homogeneous group. This mixed composition of the xiangguan has long fueled a lively debate among Chinese historians on the question of the class character of Taiping rule.

Some scholars contend that the Taiping movement remained true to its peasant origins throughout the rebellion: Peasants dominated the ranks of the xiangguan, and rebel rule worked for their interests. Other scholars, while allowing that the rebellion was at its inception a peasant movement, maintain that the exigencies of war and subversion from within ultimately transformed the Taiping government into a "feudal, monarchical rule" in which political power remained in the hands of the landlord class. Among those who put forth the latter view, there is some disagreement over the timing of this transformation. Some historians date it from the establishment of the Heavenly Capital at Nanjing in 1853, while others assert that only after the internecine conflict among the leadership in 1856 did the "feudal" aspects of the rebellion gain the upper hand. Until then, political power was vested in the peasantry.[3]

Because of the varied class membership of the men who became xiangguan, both schools of thought are able to point to evidence that supports their respective views. Every example that the proponents of the feudal power theory raise of a landlord serving as a xiangguan is matched by the advocates of the peasant power theory with an instance of a person of nonelite status occupying a post in rebel officialdom. Both sides, in their mutual determination to divide all xiangguan and all local society into the two opposing camps of landlords and peasants, do considerable injustice to a complex historical record. The scholars of the peasant power theory, in particular, err in their facile identification of all nonlandlord, nonmerchant, and nongentry xiangguan as members of the peasantry when, in fact, only a very small number of xiangguan are explicitly referred to as peasants in the sources. In this respect, the feudal power theory, with its more numerous cases of landlord xiangguan, holds an evidential edge over the peasant power theory.

The difference of opinion between the two schools reflects not only the ambiguity of the source material, but, more importantly, two divergent approaches to the question of the nature of Taiping rule. The feudal power theorists take as their analytical starting point the ideals of the Taiping movement and view the realities of

rebel rule in light of those ideals. Insofar as the goals of the rebellion included divesting the local elite of its property and power and complete reorganization of society along *Zhouli* lines, the Taiping record was abysmal. The feudal power theory thus concentrates on the failures of the rebels and, in doing so, emphasizes the continuities between local society under the Qing and local society under the Taipings. The peasant power theorists, on the other hand, tend to take as their point of departure not the ideals of the rebellion, but local society as it existed before the arrival of the Taiping army. They therefore dwell on the points of discontinuity between Qing and Taiping society, giving a more reformist slant to the rebel occupation of the Jiangnan.

In general, Western scholarship on the Taiping Rebellion is in tune with the perspective and substance of the feudal power theory, although its category of analysis is the gentry rather than the landlord class. Historians such as Kuhn and Wakeman contend that the Taipings coopted the existing local leadership to serve as xiangguan, thus perpetuating the antebellum power structure in the occupied territories. Unlike the feudal power theorists, however, who do not go so far as to argue that the landlord class reaped financial and political benefits from Taiping rule, Kuhn and Wakeman further maintain that the gentry, freed from the constraints placed upon them by the Qing government, enjoyed under the rebels a virtually uncontested dominion over local society.

If mere numbers are used to evaluate the composition of the xiangguan, the argument for a continuity in power relations between Qing and Taiping society has much validity. People who had had some power, wealth, or status in local society prior to the arrival of the Taipings—be they landlords, gentry, market brokers, yamen clerks, or village elders—did hold a numerical superiority in the xiangguan ranks. The impression of continuity is reinforced by the examples of Xu Peiyuan and Fei Yucheng who, while not occupying xiangguan positions, were granted almost total control of their antebellum spheres of influence, and by the many instances of gentry and yamen clerks and runners who staffed the xiangguan bureaus and occupied themselves with

the daily administration of local affairs.

Yet this continuity in personnel was accompanied by a large measure of discontinuity in the configuration of power, a point frequently overlooked in assessments of the xiangguan. As Table 1 reveals, no strict correlation existed between the pre-Taiping status of the men who served the rebels and the posts they held in the xiangguan hierarchy. Those appointed to the high positions of zongzhi, jianjun, and junshuai included former yamen clerks, servants, peasants, a dibao, a teahouse waiter, a carpenter, a sailor, a butcher, and a doctor, as well as former county magistrates, gentrymen, wealthy merchants, and landlords. This mixture of people was replicated among the shishuai and lüshuai at the middle of the hierarchy. Of those who served at the bottom rungs as zuzhang, liangsima, and wuzhang, such detailed information is lacking, primarily because these positions were left unoccupied in most places. But what data exist suggest that these posts, when filled, were occupied by people of similarly mixed stock—merchants, people of landed wealth, dibao, and vagrants.

Men of prominent status, then, did not monopolize the higher xiangguan offices, nor were people of more humble backgrounds consigned to the lower ranks. As a result, many people rose during the Taiping period to positions of influence that had been beyond their reach under the Qing and acquired an authority that they were not reluctant to use against their erstwhile social betters. Conversely, men whose wealth or influence had commanded them a fairly high position in the elite under the Qing found themselves, during the rebel occupation, as xiangguan of the lower ranks, serving more as hostages to tax collection than as officials with any real authority. This scrambling in the pattern of power, plus the appointment of many men of nonelite status to posts in the rebel bureaucracy, thus made for a local society different from that of the Qing, in spite of the fact that people who had possessed some power and status under the Qing dominated the xiangguan ranks numerically.

The question of the class character of the xiangguan is bound up with the issue of the land policies instituted by the Taipings. The advocates of both the feudal power and the peasant power

theories recognize that the rebels nowhere implemented their revolutionary land redistribution program, and they attribute this failure, though with different emphasis, to the exigencies of war and the opposition of the landlord class. Where the two interpretations differ is on the question of what shape property relations *did* assume during the Taiping occupation. The feudal power theory, in keeping with its argument that political power remained with the landlord class, dwells on the Taiping affirmation of landlord ownership of land and the right to collect rents. The peasant power theory, on the other hand, highlights the reforms that the rebel leadership and its supposedly peasant-dominated xiangguan did effect in the land tenure system and the landlord-tenant relationship.

As in the case of the xiangguan, the fiscal arrangements of the Taiping years were of such variety and complexity that proponents of both theories can find extensive corroboration for their different perspectives. Either school, however, would be hard put to document for any county a direct connection between the composition of the xiangguan and the land, rent, and tax policies instituted there. Counties where men of nonelite status were prominent in the xiangguan bureaucracy did not necessarily have the more reformist land policies, and, conversely, counties where men of the elite clearly dominated did not necessarily have the more conservative ones. Instead, the conservative and reformist elements coexisted as integral components of a fiscal plan that owed its origins more to expediency than to ideology.

LANDLORD-TENANT RELATIONS DURING THE TAIPING OCCUPATION

First issued in early 1854, the document *The Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty* contained a blueprint for the total reorganization of the agricultural and fiscal systems of Chinese society. Private ownership of land was to be abolished and the land thus freed distributed by the Taiping state to all individuals, male and female. Each person 16 years or older was to receive one

mu of top-grade land or its productive equivalent in inferior land, while people under the age of 16 were allotted one-half mu of top-grade land or its lower-grade equivalent. At harvest, a household was to keep a sufficient amount of grain as food for its members and as seed for the next year's crop. Surplus grain would be deposited in the public granaries that were to be set up for each 25-family (or liangsima) unit. When families were in need of extra grain or cash for wedding, birth, or funeral expenses, they would receive an appropriate amount of funds from the common treasury. Any grain in excess of the needs of a particular liangsima group would be channeled to grain-deficient units (Michael, 1966: II, 309-320).

As is well known, this strictly egalitarian program was destined to remain merely an ideal. Soon after its formulation, a severe food shortage in Nanjing forced the Taiping leaders to abandon any plans they may have had for its implementation. In the summer of 1854, Yang Xiuqing, Wei Changhui, and Shi Dakai memorialized Hong Xiuquan for permission to order residents in rebel territory in Anhui and Jiangxi to "deliver land taxes as usual." The Heavenly King gave his consent and thus set the government on the course it was to maintain until its defeat in 1864. To ensure a steady flow of income, traditional property relations were to be left intact and exploited in the fashion of the Qing state. Tenants were to deliver rents to their landlords, and landowners were to render taxes to the Taipings (Luo, 1984: 104-107). The reprint of the land document sometime after 1860 (the exact date is not clear) indicates that the rebels continued to accord land redistribution a place in their ideology, but the pressures of war and the demand for revenue deprived them of the time and security needed to carry out such a vast undertaking.

A restructuring of property relations was thus not on the insurgents' agenda for the Jiangnan. Nothing speaks so forcibly of their failure even to attempt to implement their program there as the utter silence in the sources not only about land redistribution as a Taiping practice, but also about land redistribution as a Taiping ideal. None of the available contemporary materials mentions the land law, even while recording, often in minute

detail, nearly all other aspects of life under rebel rule. Since many of these records were written by landlords who otherwise discussed matters pertaining to their property, it is safe to assume that the Taiping land program was not widely known.

This unfamiliarity with the land program suggests that, at least by 1860, the Taipings were no longer even exploiting its appeal to garner peasant support. The rebels came to the Jiangnan not so much as a liberating force, but as an occupying army whose primary aim was to extract as much revenue as possible to fuel the fight against the Qing. This concern dominated all others, producing a welter of ever-changing and seemingly contradictory policies. On the one hand, the Taipings affirmed, both in word and deed, the traditional land system. They honored existing claims of ownership in land registration drives, issued announcements calling upon the populace to pay rents and taxes as usual, and declared rent and tax default to be a crime, punishable in some locales by decapitation (Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: IV, 73, 390, 415; Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1979: 145-146, 209-210).

Yet the maintenance of the traditional system was not a goal in itself, but merely a means to another end. And Taiping support of existing property relations was contingent upon their being productive of revenue. When the required funds were not forthcoming, the rebel commanders were quick to adopt measures that, while not working sweeping changes in the pattern of land ownership, did seriously undermine landlord control over the land and its cultivators.

The Taiping need for revenue was but one ingredient that went into the making of their land policies. With the conquest of the Jiangnan, the rebels inherited not a *tabula rasa* upon which they could inscribe their designs at will, but a region with a recent history of widespread and violent conflict over rents and taxes (Bernhardt, 1984: 73-111, 226-234). Landowners and tenants, after several decades of fierce resistance to what they perceived as unreasonable claims on their surplus, proved less than amenable to Taiping demands and, through their opposition, helped to determine the direction of rebel policy.

The land system that took shape in the Jiangnan during the occupation was thus not the result of a systematic and consistent application of some comprehensive Taiping program. Rather it was formed in each area by different combinations of expediency, landlord acquiescence or opposition, and peasant resistance. Land, rent, and tax arrangements varied considerably over space and time.

DEPARTURE FROM CONVENTION: THE POLICIES OF 1860

The Taipings arrived in the Jiangnan in 1860 with the intention of tapping into the existing mechanisms of surplus extraction and, to that end, ordered landowners to render taxes and tenants to deliver rents. But what was desirable in principle, the rebels quickly discovered, was often not workable in practice. In the majority of counties, Qing land and tax records had perished in the burning and looting of yamens. Many landowners had fled their homes, and those remaining were reluctant to report their holdings to the xiangguan. Moreover, landlord attempts to collect rents met with fierce tenant resistance (Tang, 1963: 97-98; Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: II, 176).

The absence of many landlords, the lack of adequate registers, and tenant opposition to rents all combined in the fall of 1860 to make the collection of taxes on the basis of land ownership difficult. The Taiping commanders in a number of counties therefore elected to dispense with the customary procedure and levy taxes on the basis of cultivation instead. When ownership and cultivation coincided, as in the case of cultivator-owners, the new method of collection did not differ from the old. For landlord land, the Taiping government bypassed the proprietors altogether and began gathering taxes directly from tenants.

The practice of tenant payment of taxes (*zhuodian qizheng*) became fairly widespread in the autumn of 1860; evidence points to its adoption in Taicang department and Suzhou, Changzhou, and Jiaxing prefectures. The scope of its implementation varied somewhat from place to place. In the suburban counties of Suzhou city (Wu, Yuanhe, and Changzhou), for example, the

rebel commanders instructed only those tenants whose landlords had fled to pay taxes. Should their landlords return, the tenants were to deliver to them the back rents minus the amount they had paid in tax. Landlords still in residence were to continue to collect rents and pay taxes (Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1979: 145-146). In other areas, such as Wuxi, Jingui, Changshu, and Zhaowen counties, as well as Taicang department, the Taipings applied the new procedure to the land of both refugee and resident landlords. After the tenants had paid taxes, landlords were permitted to collect what rents they could. No provision, however, was made for the collection of back rents upon the return of a refugee landlord (Cai, 1979: 176; Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: I, 267, 278; Suzhou bowuguan et al., 1979: 67; Xiang Da, 1952: V, 370-371, 436).

Some Chinese scholars have interpreted tenant payment of taxes as a kind of "land to the tiller" program (*gengzhe you qitian*). In their view, the Taiping rebels, unable amid the turmoils of war to carry out a full-fledged redistribution of land, instead passed ownership from landlords to tenants through the zhuodian qizheng arrangement (Luo, 1979: 207-210; Rong, 1981: 538). The evidence these scholars cite to support their contention is not conclusive. While some sources suggest that the tax obligation cancelled the cultivator's rent obligation, especially when the landlord was no longer in residence, there is no indication that the tenant, through the payment of taxes, received the right to alienate the land, the true test of ownership. Zhuodian qizheng was perceived, at least by the Taiping government, as merely a temporary method of tax collection.

How tenants viewed their payment of taxes was a different matter. They believed or, perhaps more accurately, chose to believe that the shift in tax liability entailed a transfer of ownership as well or, at the very least, released them from their rent obligations.[4] Cultivators in Wuxi and Jingui "now regard leased land as their own property and therefore do not deliver any rent" (Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: I, 279). In Changshu and Zhaowen, peasants also welcomed the new arrangement, since the amount they had to pay the Taipings in

tax was less than what they had been required to deliver to their landlords in rent. "Since they avoid paying rents," one observer noted, "they are delivering taxes eagerly" (Tang, 1963: 110). When landlords tried to assert their claim on the harvest, tenants adopted the position, and defended it with force if necessary, that they did not have to deliver rents because they had already paid taxes, a stance that had little backing in the Taiping land regulations (Xiang Da, 1952: V, 371).

Peasant repudiation of rent on these grounds may have reflected a genuine confusion about their duties under the new policy, but in light of the history of tenant protest in the Jiangnan, their misapprehension was no doubt more willful than innocent. Qing officials, in their appeals to tenants, typically had explained the need for rent collection not so much in terms of the economic survival of landlords or of rent as payment for the use of land as in terms of landowners' tax liability—tenants had to deliver rents so that their landlords would have the wherewithal to pay taxes (Zhongguo renmin daxue, 1979: I, 41-42; Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1983: 114-115). The broad effect of these appeals ran counter to their intention, inspiring resistance rather than compliance. Tenants subverted the official logic to serve their own ends and refused to pay rents in full when their landlords received remissions in taxes—since landlords do not have to pay the entire amount of tax, they do not need to receive the entire amount of rent (Zhongguo renmin daxue, 1979: I, 33, 42-43; Gongzhongdang #007079, 1842). Under the zhuodian qizheng practice, peasants pushed this reasoning to its inevitable conclusion—since landlords no longer had to pay any tax, there was no reason for them to receive any rent.

By all accounts, the rent resistance of the fall and winter of 1860-1861 weakened landlords' already tenuous hold over their tenants. Changshu and Zhaowen landowners complained of receiving virtually no rents for the autumn harvest (Xiang Da, 1952: V, 370-371). In Wuxi and Jingui, absentee landlords living in the county seat suffered the same fate, although proprietors residing in the countryside were able to coax a few *dou* out of the otherwise reluctant tenants (Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan,

1961-1963: I, 279). Elsewhere in the Jiangnan, especially in those locales where customary taxation procedures remained in force, landlords fared somewhat better, but even they were able to collect only a fraction of the regular amounts of rent (Xiang Da, 1952: VI, 671).

Like landlords, the Taipings also were dissatisfied with the financial arrangements of 1860. Throughout the summer and fall of that year, the rebel commanders conducted a vigorous campaign to register land and compile fiscal records to replace those lost during the fighting. They repeatedly issued orders to landowners and tenants to report holdings and dispatched lower-level xiangguan, former yamen clerks and runners, and subcounty functionaries to carry out field surveys (Tang, 1963: 110; Ke, 1959: 50). These efforts were not entirely successful. Concealment of land was rife, and the surveys were too time-consuming to yield quick results. By the end of 1860, therefore, much land had not yet entered the rebel tax rolls, representing a substantial loss of income (Suzhou bowuguan et al., 1979: 73; Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: IV, 193, 496).

FURTHER REVISIONS: THE POLICIES OF 1861-1862

The Taiping need for more effective land registration techniques, landlord desire for rents, and tenant inclination to resist same prompted the commanders of a number of counties to institute further changes in the fiscal procedures. Local exceptions aside, the general trend in 1861 consisted of a partial discontinuation of tenant payment of taxes, the implementation of rent reduction, the direct involvement of xiangguan bureaus in the collection of rents, and a stipulation that made landlord registration of land a precondition for receiving rents. With this cluster of policies, the Taipings intended to placate both landlords and tenants, yet at the same time ensure the registration of land and hence their extraction of revenue. As with any plan that attempts to honor competing claims on fixed resources, no one was completely satisfied with the new arrangements, least of all landlords.

Of the measures adopted in 1861, the one most calculated to appeal to landlords was the partial abandonment of tenant payment of taxes. In those areas where the practice had been applied to all landlord land—Taicang, Changshu, Zhaowen, Wuxi, and Jingui—the Taiping commanders stipulated that landlords in residence should resume the collection of rents and delivery of taxes. Tenants would retain the tax liability only for the property of refugee proprietors. This partial restoration of the customary method of tax payment deprived tenants in these locations of their much-used excuse for nonpayment of rents, thus enabling those landlords who had suffered under the zhuodian qizheng policy to regain some control over their land and its cultivators (Jingzhai riji, n.d.: 39a; Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: I, 276, 278, IV, 415; Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1979: 134-135; Ke, 1959: 53).

Yet any economic benefit landlords might have derived from this change in policy was all but negated in some counties by a simultaneous enforcement of reductions in rent. Varying from place to place, the rents stipulated by the Taipings ranged from .4 to .8 shi of rice per mu, or roughly 30% to 80% of the average amounts in the pre-Taiping period (Bernhardt, 1984: 17-18). The cost of these reductions was born entirely by landlords, who, in spite of their decreased rental income, were still expected to shoulder the full burden of land taxes and miscellaneous expenses and levies, a burden that in some counties was as heavy under the Taipings as it had been under the Qing.[5] As a result, they generally earned in the end no more than .1 to .3 shi per mu, and that paltry sum only if their tenants had paid the reduced amounts of rent in full (Tang, 1963: 124; Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: IV, 416, 420, 468; Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1979: 146; Suzhou bowuguan et al., 1979: 152, 156, 163; Zhongguo kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo, 1959: 101, 106).

Without being privy to the discussion among the Taipings that resulted in the decision to reduce rents, it is difficult to determine their exact motivation for doing so. Unlike their relationship with Jiangnan landlords, where sheer necessity forced the rebels to act in ways contrary to the goals of their movement, in this instance

ideology and expediency dovetailed so neatly that they cannot be easily disentangled. The reductions in rent may well have been, as the advocates of the peasant power theory contend, simply an embodiment of the Taiping commitment to alleviating the suffering of the peasantry. If that had been the case, however, one would have expected the rebels to have implemented the reductions in the fall of 1860, immediately after their conquest of the Jiangnan. Yet, aside from several Wujiang market towns, where rents were indeed lowered in the autumn of 1860, most instances of reduction occurred in 1861 only *after* tenants had demonstrated quite forcefully that they would not tolerate the high amounts. The Taiping administration, bowing to their wishes, lightened their burden primarily in the hope that they would then feel obliged to deliver at least the decreased rents, which, in any case, were more than many peasants had been willing to pay when left to their own devices.

If this had been their intention, the Taipings must have been sorely disappointed, for resistance to rents did not abate after the reductions. It was especially prevalent in those counties where tenants in 1860 had interpreted their payment of taxes under the zhuodian qizheng policy to mean either that the land had passed into their ownership or that they were no longer required to render rents. When the cancellation of the policy proved them wrong on these accounts, they were not disposed toward resuming delivery of rents, even at the lowered rates (Tang, 1963: 125; Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: I, 278-279, 281, IV, 515).

The rebel administration in 1861 dictated not only the amount of rent, but the manner of its collection as well. In a number of locales, xiangguan tax bureaus or newly established rent bureaus assumed the task of gathering rents directly from tenants. The earliest examples of such agencies were those already in operation in several market towns in Wujiang county in the autumn of 1860 (Suzhou bowuguan et al., 1979: 152, 163; Lili xuzhi, 1889: 12/18a-b). The bureau personnel collected the rents from tenants, deducted land taxes, miscellaneous levies, and their own expenses, and then handed the remaining cash or grain to the landlords. In

1861, similar bureaus were set up in other parts of the Jiangnan—Yuanhe, Wu, Changzhou, and southern Changshu counties in Suzhou prefecture, Wuxi and Jingui counties in Changzhou prefecture, and several places in Jiaxing prefecture (Gu, 1964: 166; Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: I, 278-279, II, 198, IV, 202, 396-397, 406-407, 416-417; Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1979: 145-146).

The proponents of the feudal power theory view this network of rent bureaus as an unequivocal example of Taiping support for the landlord class in the Jiangnan. Not only did the rebel government allow the continuation of the landlord-tenant relationship, they argue, it also created an infrastructure to facilitate the collection of rents. Certainly, assisting and thereby placating landlords was of concern, but the bureaus were slated to serve the government first and landlords only incidentally, an ordering of priorities most evident in the fact that entrusting one's rent collection to the xiangguan agencies was usually compulsory. Prohibited from gathering rents privately, landlords had to register their property with the bureaus if they hoped to receive any income from their land. Channeling rent payments through its own bureaucracy was thus a way for the rebel administration to extend its control over the revenue generated in the countryside. Simply by virtue of having tenant rents pass through its hands first, the government increased the likelihood that landlords would register their property and that land taxes, miscellaneous levies, and expenses would be paid.

The arrangement further guaranteed that the Taipings and their xiangguan would not be the ones forced to bear the greater financial loss in the event of an insufficiency in rental income. The bureaus, rather than promising landlords a certain percentage of whatever was taken from tenants, assigned them a fixed share of the stipulated rent—for instance, as in the southern part of Changshu county, .24 shi out of a reduced rent of .7 shi per mu (Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: IV, 468). The remainder was divided among land taxes, levies, and bureau expenses, all of which had precedence over the landlord's claim. Given tenant propensity for default and xiangguan talent for

embezzlement, it is hardly surprising that landlords frequently did not receive even their small portion of the rents. Bureau rent collection, far from being a boon to hard-pressed landlords, effectively placed them on a very capricious Taiping dole (Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: IV, 396, 462-463; "Lihu yuefu," 1964: 172; Natsui, 1981: 18-19; Suzhou bowuguan et al., 1979: 222-223).

The uncertainty of receiving one's portion of the rent, along with a fear of the undesirable consequences that might result from making one's presence and wealth known to the rebels, explains the adamant opposition that landlords in some places displayed toward bureau rent collection. In the summer of 1861, for example, the Changshu commander Qian Guiren ordered landholders in the northern part of that county to report their property to the tax bureaus. Those who registered more than two hundred mu of land were to be classified as *dahu* (large households), to what end Qian did not specify. After the autumn harvest, the bureau staff was to undertake the collection of .8 shi of rice from each mu of rental land, .2 to .3 shi of which would then be handed over to the landowner. Any attempt at the concealment of holdings, Qian further decreed, would result in the confiscation of the property in question. Despite this threat, few northern Changshu landlords followed commander Qian's orders. They feared, it was reported, that if they registered with the bureaus, they would be subject to extra xiangguan and Taiping exactions. The plans for bureau rent collection thus fell through (Tang, 1963: 124).

Continuing his efforts to induce the landlords of northern Changshu to report their holdings, Qian then ordered them to purchase *tianping* (land certificates) as a prerequisite for collecting rents privately. Once again, he threatened the noncompliant with confiscation, and, once again, few landlords complied. "They are clearly aware," one gentryman explained, "that [because of tenant resistance] they would not necessarily receive any rents [even with the certificates] and, moreover, are deeply concerned that they would suffer endlessly should the bandits find out who they are" (Suzhou bowuguan et al., 1979: 73). This

time, Qian made good his threat and expropriated the defiant landlords, who consequently received no rental income for the remainder of the occupation (Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: IV, 460; Zhou, 1955: 83-84).

Commander Qian's policy of making the receipt of rents contingent upon the registration of land was part of a general trend evident in 1861 and 1862 in some of the other areas where the collection of tenant dues was not routed through xiangguan bureaus. Without official documents certifying that they had duly reported their holdings, landlords were not entitled to collect rents privately. Occasionally, as in several market towns in Wujiang county, landlords received a special rent permit for each mu of reported property (Suzhou bowuguan et al., 1979: 156). More commonly, as in northern Changshu, Taiping land certificates, which the government began to require of all proprietors in 1861-1862, served as the necessary proof of registration (Ke, 1959: 53; Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: IV, 514).

The Taipings and their xiangguan generally issued land certificates to landowners who otherwise had clear title to the property. But in Tonglizhen, Wujiang county, tenants were permitted in 1862 to buy the certificates for the land they cultivated at the price of 360 copper cash per mu (about one-tenth of the current price of land). "[Since] the rented land becomes their own property," a contemporary commentator wrote, "the peasants are delighted and are coming forward one after the other to purchase the land certificates" (Zhongguo kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo, 1959: 104). Presumably, the certificate acted as the title deed to the property, and the tenant did indeed become the legal owner in the eyes of Taiping law. The purchase of land certificates by Tongli tenants is the most unambiguous instance of any rebel "land to the tiller" measure. It remains, however, an isolated case.

By the end of 1862, then, a variety of rent and tax arrangements had emerged in the Jiangnan: landlords collecting rents and paying taxes as of old, landlords receiving rents through bureaus, landlords collecting no rents, tenants paying rents to bureaus, tenants paying taxes in their landlords' stead, and, in Tonglizhen, tenants paying taxes as cultivator-owners after having purchased

land certificates. Along the rather tortuous path that culminated in this admixture of procedures, the Taipings were guided more by expediency than by ideology. Initially, their need for revenue produced an intention to conserve and exploit the existing mechanisms of surplus extraction. Then, when it became apparent that relying on conventional methods of rent and tax payment was not the most effective way to reap the riches of the region, they introduced a series of modifications in the fiscal system. On the whole, these alterations were far from congenial to landlord interests. In some areas, landlords were denied the right to any rent because of their failure to register their land. In others, they were forced to entrust the collection of rent to bureaus, which frequently appropriated their share. And where landlords were permitted to collect rent privately, they were often compelled to do so at reduced amounts set by the rebel government.

Underlying the twists and turns in the Taiping land policy was tenant resistance to rents. Indeed, few of the departures from customary rent and tax procedures would have been necessary had Jiangnan tenants demonstrated a willingness from the outset to deliver their dues in full. The switch from landowner to cultivator payment of taxes in 1860 was undertaken, among other reasons, because landlords still in residence could not be assured of gathering from their tenants enough grain or cash to cover their taxes. The subsequent reversion to landowner delivery of taxes in some areas was prompted by peasant exploitation of their payment of taxes to repudiate their rental obligations. The Taiping rent reduction, though fully consonant with the rebel ideology, assumed in the context of widespread default the nature of a calculated attempt to induce tenants to increase the amount they were willing to pay. And bureau rent collection was implemented in part because of the inability of landlords to collect rents on their own. A number of the specific measures adopted by the Taipings also had as their aim the registration of landlord land. Yet it can be argued that landlords would have been more inclined to report their property had they been assured of receiving enough in rent to make it worth their economic while.

Tenant resistance not only drew the Taiping government in the

Jiangnan away from its original commitment to orthodox rent and tax procedures, but also made itself strongly felt within the complex of new practices. Despite the generous reductions accorded to cultivators in some counties, default continued to be a major source of financial instability for both the landlord class and the Taiping administration. And, during the occupation period, as in the past, peasant opposition to rents often took on a more violent cast. Because of the particular collection arrangements that came into being under rebel rule, xiangguan and their bureaus became objects of tenant attack as frequently as individual landlords. In some locales, peasant protest against bureau rent collection was so fierce that the managers elected to shut down the operations rather than risk repeated assault. It was in their response to resistance to rents that the Taipings most fully demonstrated the ambivalence of their position vis-à-vis the peasantry in the Jiangnan. Unable to reconcile their conflicting roles as a force of liberation and an army of occupation, the rebels were at times conciliatory and at other times brutal in their treatment of tenant protesters (Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan, 1961-1963: I, 278-279, 281, IV, 396-397; Suzhou bowuguan et al., 1979: 73; Zhongguo kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo, 1959: 106).

CONCLUSION

The Taiping occupation of the Jiangnan, though short-lived, left its mark on the imaginations of the rebellion's survivors and their descendants. The memory of the rebels was kept alive through stories and songs, annual commemoration ceremonies, and occasional sightings of "ghost soldiers" engaged in an ongoing, ethereal battle (Yuan Zhen et al., 1981: 26-27; Meili zhi, 1877: 7/34a; Shenbao, 2/6/1873). For the Jiangnan literati, the period of the Taiping occupation became a universal point of reference, a great watershed between life when it was sweet and life now turned sour. The prerebellion era was perceived in retrospect as a golden age. Then, peasants were diligent, officials honest, and the gentry public-minded. Now, all bore the tarnish of the great Taiping calamity.

While these literati pronouncements about the effects of the Taiping occupation are not wholly credible, they do give some indication of the depths to which the Jiangnan elite was shaken by the rebellion. The degree of physical destruction alone was appalling. By rebellion's end, cities and towns, once the nodes of a thriving commercial network, lay gutted by fire, with only scorched walls standing as testimony to their former importance. In much of the countryside, piles of rubble marked the sites of former villages, and vast tracts of land were no longer under cultivation. Millions of people had died or had fled their homes to find safety elsewhere.

The impact of the rebellion on the Jiangnan was not limited to this extensive physical devastation, for the Taiping occupation also took a heavy toll on elite control of rural society. To be sure, the rebels' overriding concern, the need for revenue for their war effort, led to practices supportive of the antebellum status quo—the appointment of members of the gentry to serve as xiangguan and the affirmation of landlord ownership of land and the right to collect rent. Yet this same concern also resulted in policies disruptive of existing power and property relationships—the selection of many men of nonelite status to be xiangguan and alterations in the customary tax and rent procedures that worked to the advantage of tenants and against the interests of landlords. To a certain extent, the easing of the financial burden on the tenantry during the occupation years reflected the original (yet, by 1860, much diluted) commitment among the Taipings to improving the lives of the poor and the powerless. To an even greater extent, however, it stemmed from the limitations that the peasants themselves imposed on the rebel government through rent resistance.

NOTES

1. The poem translated in part here can be found in Zhongguo kexueyuan Jiangsu fenyuan wenxue yanjiusuo, 1960: 78-79. For other stories and songs concerning the revolutionary policies of the Taiping rebels, see this work as well as Taiping Tianguo lishi bowuguan (1962).

2. During the Qing, the term *Jiangnan* (south of the river) most typically referred to the three prefectures of Changzhou, Suzhou, and Songjiang, and the department of Taicang in southern Jiangsu, and the three prefectures of Jiaxing, Huzhou, and Hangzhou in northern Zhejiang province.

3. For the peasant power theory, see, for example, Shen (1981) and Dong (1981a); for the feudal power theory, see Wang (1981), Sun (1981), and Lin (1981).

4. The zhuodian qizheng policy may well have been the historical source for those folk songs and stories that mention Taiping prohibitions against rent collection and the redistribution of land.

5. Land taxes under Taiping rule varied considerably from county to county as well as from year to year. In some places, they reached by rebellion's end amounts as high as those levied by the Qing, while in others they were considerably lower throughout the occupation period. For one group of taxpayers, however, the tax burden tended to be uniformly heavier under the Taiping than under the Qing. Unlike the Qing, the rebel government made no distinction between gentry and commoner households in its tax assessments. As a result, landowners who had been able under the Qing to evade a large portion of the tax through a combination of legal exemptions and well-placed bribes to yamen personnel were now required to pay all imposts on their property in full (Bernhardt, 1984: 149-156).

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Kathryn Bernhardt is an Assistant Professor of history at Southern Methodist University. She is currently working on a book about landlord-tenant relations in the Jiangnan during the late Qing and Republican periods.