

EXCERPTS FROM ODE FOR YOUTH

Introduction

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

In the document below, unknown authors outline, in verse form, the Taipings’ fundamental principles governing family relationships.

Document Excerpts with Questions

From *Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*, by Franz Michael and Chung-Li Chang (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971). © 1971 University of Washington Press. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

Excerpts from Ode for Youth

On Reverence For Parents

As grain is stored against a day of need,
So men bring up children to tend their old age.
A filial son begets filial children;
The reward here is truly wonderful.

On The Fathers’ Way

When the ridgepole is straight, nothing will be irregular below;
When the father is strict, the Way will be formed.
Let him not provoke his children to wrath,
And the whole dwelling will be filled with harmony.

Primary Source Document, with Questions (DBQ) on *EXCERPTS FROM ODE FOR YOUTH*

On The Mothers' Way

Mothers, beware of partiality;
Tenderly instruct your children in virtue.
When a mother's demeanor is worthy of her daughter-in-law's imitation,
The happy feeling will reach high heaven.

On The Sons' Way

Sons, be patterns to your wives;
Obedience to parents is your natural duty.
To the tattle of women never listen,
And you will not be estranged from your own flesh.

On The Daughters-In-Law's Way

You who are married into other families,
Be gentle and yielding, and your duty will be fulfilled.
Do not quarrel with your sisters-in-law
Or quarrel and vex the father-in-law and mother-in-law.

On The Elder Brothers' Way

Elder brothers, instruct your younger brothers;
Remember always your common parentage.
Should the younger brother commit some trifling fault,
Bear with it and be indulgent.

On The Younger Brothers' Way

That there should be old and young is ordered by Heaven;
The way to follow elder brothers lies in respect.
When younger brothers understand Heaven's manifest principles,
Happiness and honor will be their portion.

On The Elder Sisters' Way

Elder sisters, instruct your younger brothers and sisters;
Refine the good that you may turn to Heaven.
Should there be reason to return to your parents' home,
Gather the younger ones and tell them what is wrong and right.

On The Younger Sisters' Way

Girls, obey your elder brothers and sisters;
By obliging and avoid a high display.
With careful diligence cultivate the upright,
And mind and keep the Ten Heavenly Commandments.

Primary Source Document, with Questions (DBQ) on *EXCERPTS FROM ODE FOR YOUTH*

On The Husbands' Way

The husband's way is based on firmness;
Love for a wife should be qualified by prudence.
And should the lioness east of the river roar,¹
Let not the heart be filled with terror.

On The Wives' Way

The wife's way lies in the three obediences;²
Do not disobey your husband.
If hens crow in the morning,
There will be self-sought misery for the family.

Questions:

1. How do these beliefs reflect traditional Chinese ideas? Western ideas?
2. Why do you think they were so powerful? To whom do you think they would appeal most in Chinese society: rulers, the educated, peasants, or merchants?
3. Many revolutionary groups place a great deal of emphasis on the education of the youth. Why do you think this is so?

¹ "Lioness east of the river" is an idiom for "domineering wife."

² Obedience to father, husband, and sons.