ABSTRACT

FROM REVERED REVOLUTIONARIES TO MUCH MALIGNED MARAUDERS: THE EVOLUTION OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN IMAGES IN CHINA OF THE TAIPING REBELS

by Kapree Harrell-Washington

The aim of this paper it to present the images of the Taipings, their leaders, and their ideologies as constructed by two of these powerful expatriate communities, Great Britain and the United States. It also explores the political, social, cultural and economic factors that contributed to the formation of these images. In order to properly construct and analyze these images, this paper appeals to a variety of primary and secondary sources including contemporary newspapers, magazines, books, memoirs, and foreign relations documents.
FROM REVERED REVOLUTIONARIES TO MUCH MALIGNED MARAUDERS:
THE EVOLUTION OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN IMAGES IN CHINA OF THE
TAIPING REBELS

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by Kapree Harrell-Washington
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Advisor David Fahey
Reader Wenxi Liu
Reader Amanda McVety
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Note on Names

Scholarship on China generally utilizes either the Wade-Giles system or pinyin to transliterate Chinese personal and geographical names. The pinyin form has become popular in recent works and I have chosen to use it in the spelling of most of the Chinese names. However, in direct quotes from nineteenth century sources, I use their exact spellings. Their romanization of Chinese names conforms mostly to the Wade Giles form, but there are inconsistencies. For the reader, I have provided a select list of spellings from the nineteenth century text and their pinyin equivalent.

Nineteenth Century Names

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Yung-an

Personal Names (When citing Chinese names, the family name is written first, followed by the given name)

Feng Yün-shan  
Hsiao Ch’ao-kuei  
Hsien-feng Emperor  
Hung Jen-Kan (Kang Wang)  
Hung-siu chuen, Hung Hsiu-chüan  
Liang A-fa  
Li Ching-fang  
Li Hsiu-ch’eng (Loyal King)  
Li Hung-chang  
Lin Tse-hsu  
Prince Kung  
Shih Ta-k’ai  
T’ien-kuei-fu  
Tseng Kuo-ch’uan  
Tseng Kuo-fan  
Tung-Chih  
Tze His, Tz’u-his  
Wei Ch’ang-hui  
Yang Hsueh-ch’ing  
Yeh Ming-chen

Technical Terms

Ch’ing dynasty  
Sung dynasty  
Tai-ping T’ien-kuo  
Tsungli Yamen  
Tung-Chih

Qing dynasty  
Song dynasty  
Taiping Tianguo  
Zongli Yamen  
Tongzhi
1. Introduction

Upon hearing of the “socialistic” revolution in China from a Prussian missionary, Karl Marx commented,

Whether the “contact of extremes” be such a universal principle or not, a striking illustration of it may be seen in the effect the Chinese revolution seems likely to exercise upon the civilized world. It may seem a very strange, and a very paradoxical assertion that the next uprising of the people of Europe, and their next movement for republican freedom and economy of Government, may depend more probably on what is now passing in the Celestial Empire.¹

Marx concluded that the “revolution” would cause irreparable harm to European interests thus leading to revolution in Europe, specifically in Great Britain that had the largest economic stake in the China trade. This “socialist” revolution Marx that held in such high esteem was the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), the bloodiest war of the nineteenth century in which an estimated twenty to forty million lives were lost. Fought between the Taiping Kingdom of Heavenly Peace, led by Hong Xiuquan, and the ruling Qing dynasty, it lasted for over fourteen years and consumed much of southern China. The Rebellion would not become the catalyst for a worldwide economic revolution that Marx had hoped; it nevertheless changed the course of Chinese history. Scholars generally agree that the Taiping Rebellion, and to a lesser extent, the Opium War (1839-1842) and the Arrow War (1856-1860) are the three major events which mark the beginning of China’s modern era. The need to suppress not only the Taiping Rebellion but also the lesser rebellions ravaging the state and to pacify the foreign elements forced the ruling Qing dynasty to break with the past political, social, and intellectual traditions and modernize the state. The process of transforming China from a traditional closed society to a modern state proved to be a tedious endeavor. Ultimately, the turmoil of the mid-nineteenth century was too much for the Qing dynasty to overcome and two thousand years of imperial rule would eventually end in 1912.

The Taiping Rebellion differed from earlier dynastic upheavals in that it attacked not only the ruling dynasty but also the Confucian social order. The Rebellion itself was partly influenced by Western ideas. Some of its ideological content was derived from what the leaders understood of the Christian Bible. The Taipings’ pseudo-Christian ethos and its anti-Qing rhetoric captured the attention of the Western community present in China’s coastal cities. This community of foreign outsiders almost immediately recognized the unique character of the Taiping Rebellion.

The aim of this study is to present the images of the Taipings, their leaders, and ideologies as constructed by British and American expatriate community in China. These two countries represent the largest and second largest economic powers in China during the Taiping Rebellion. In the early to mid-nineteenth century, missionaries, statesmen and diplomats, merchants, soldiers of fortune, English-language periodicals, and adventurers contributed to the formation of Western images of China. Of this group, merchants, missionaries, English-language periodicals and statesmen were the major formulators of British and American images of the Taipings. These image-producers form the basis of this study.

Images rarely represent reality. At one time there can be an infinity number of realities. In constructing images, observers are influenced by their backgrounds, occupational interests, cultural biases, the political climate, history, and personal experiences. This diversity of experiences is evident in the eclectic array of images of the Taipings formed by various British and American interest groups. Occasionally, their images overlapped, at other times they held divergent views. Images are rarely static; they are constantly fluctuating to reflect the changing political climate and evolving concerns. Since there is always a multiplicity of images, I will focus on the dominant images held by each group. Occasionally, I will include the minority opinion where I feel it is needed.

Why this study? The 1950s, 60s, and early 70s marked the height of scholarship on the Taiping Rebellion by Western scholars. These scholars were looking to break the

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3 Initially, one might think that France was one of the top economic powers. In the mid-1800s, France was eclipsed by the United States in terms of economic power. However, in political power, it remained second to Great Britain.
enigma of the new Chinese communist state. Chinese Communists throughout the period of Maoist dominance identified with and saw themselves as carrying on the Taiping revolutionary traditions. In speeches and press releases, Mao Zedong proclaimed himself to be a modern-day Hong Xiuquan, leading the peasant revolution against the political and economic exploitation of the landlord class. There is little doubt that this proclaimed link to the Taipings by the Chinese Communists stimulated scholarly interest on the subject. Among the most influential books by Western scholars were Eugene Boardman Powers *Christian Influence of the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion* (1952), Franz Michael’s *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents, Vol. 1, History* (1966), and J.S. Gregory’s *Great Britain and the Taiping Rebellion* (1969). To this day, all of these books remain influential works for those interested in studying the Taiping Rebellion.

From the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 to the present, interest in the Taiping Rebellion in the West has waned although works continue to be published albeit to a lesser degree. Current scholarship on the Taiping Rebellion such as James Cole’s *The People versus the Taipings: Bao Lisheng’s Righteous Army of Dongan* (1981), Rudolf Wagner’s *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion* (1982), Jonathan Spence’s *God’s Chinese Son* (1996), concentrate on the cult of personalities or the religious ideologies of the Taipings. As of yet, no study has looked specifically at Western constructions of images of the Taipings and this thesis will fill that void. In order to properly construct and analyze these images, I appealed to a variety of primary and secondary sources including contemporary newspapers, magazines, books, memoirs, and foreign relations documents.

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4 This is not meant to imply that there were no studies on the subject prior to the 1950s and 60s.
6 In China however, books on the Taiping Rebellion continue to be produced at a steady rate. There appears not to be the same decline in scholarship that has occurred in Western nations.
2. Great Britain and America in China before the Taiping Rebellion

Section One: Great Britain

Marco Polo’s memoir *The Description of the World or the Travels of Marco Polo*, written around 1298 marked the beginning of Europe’s fascination with China. Although Europeans had some knowledge of the Middle Kingdom prior to this, Polo’s, the exotic and romanticized descriptions increased the interest in this mysterious kingdom. The first great era of interactions between Europe and China occurred under Mongol Rule (1271-1368). After the fall of the last Mongol emperor, the level of Sino-European contact decreased somewhat under the more isolationist Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The Qing dynasty, except for a brief period in the seventeenth century, maintained the isolationist policies of the preceding Ming dynasty. By the eighteenth century, China had become inaccessible to the outside world except for a few ports of trade. However, by this time Europeans had developed a taste for the luxury items from the Orient.

Among the nation most enamored with Chinese goods was Great Britain. Despite some resistance from the Chinese imperial government, by 1637 British merchants had established several trading posts in China. As Great Britain developed into an industrial power, her interest in China increased. British merchants were eager to tap into the market of the world’s most populous country. In 1773, the British government granted a monopoly to the British East India Company over the lucrative China trade. By the late eighteenth century, mercantilism had fallen out of favor with most sectors of the British government and was gradually replaced by a free trade market economy. From the prospective of the British government, there were several benefits to free trade. First, it would stimulate the growth of British manufacturing. It would help other countries to earn sterling through increased exports of food and raw materials to Britain and would enable them to buy more British goods. Secondly, it would help in civilizing non-Western nations. For a country like China, whose economy was seen as ‘backward’ and moral values as “degenerate,” free trade would help civilize the country through the
spread of enterprise and the British work ethic. The zeal for free trade principles led to the dissolution of the British East India Company’s Chinese monopoly in 1833.

Freed from government-sanctioned monopolies, British merchants and trading firms plunged into this new market with high hopes of earning large profits. Among the notable trading firms present in China were Jardine Matheson, the largest foreign trading firm in China during the nineteenth century, and Dent and Company. In order to protect Britain’s commerce enterprise, the British government appointed William John, the eighth Baron Napier, to the post of Chief Superintendent. He was the first British representative to the Chinese Empire. The appointment of Lord Napier signaled a new period in British relations in China in which the interests of the British government and her merchants became interlinked. The basic objective of both parties was to expand trade and commerce.

The Chinese, in general, looked upon merchants with suspicion and foreigners with even greater suspicion. In the Confucian social order, merchants ranked the lowest among the four occupational categories. Since the majority of Englishmen in China were involved in this dubious enterprise, they were naturally looked down upon by the Chinese elites. Also, the Chinese considered themselves the only truly civilized country because they alone had managed to embody the universal relationships between heaven, man, and earth in concrete, rational institutions. The mannerism, the behavior, and most importantly, the smell of the barbarians only reinforced the superiority of Chinese culture. Trade gradually became associated with the lowest social class and the inferior barbarians. The vastly different ideologies of the British and the Chinese on trade put them on an inevitably collision course toward war.

Up until the nineteenth century, China enjoyed economic prosperity partially brought about by profits from international trade. Europeans imported luxury items such as tea, silk, spices, textiles and porcelains from China and exported British manufactured goods and India cotton. However, the market in China for these foreign products was

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8 Four Confucian Occupations in descending order: Gentry scholars, peasant farmers, artisans and craftsmen, and merchants and traders.
9 Pruden, 70.
negligible. As a consequence of poor market research, or lack there of, and Chinese restrictions on trade, profits were not as high as originally estimated and the result was a huge trade imbalance that necessitated large payments of silver to China. In addition to an unresponsive market, by law all foreign traders were restricted to restricted to Guangzhou (Canton) and had to conduct their trade exclusively through specially licensed merchants known as the hong merchants. In 1793, Great Britain sent an envoy led by Lord Macartney to Beijing in an effort to expand Sino-British trading opportunities, however, the mission failed to gain any concessions. The Napoleonic Wars temporarily distracted Britain’s quest to “open” China but after its conclusion in 1815, Britain turned her attention back to the China question. In 1816, a second British mission was sent to Beijing but it was just as unsuccessful as its predecessor. Despite the Emperor’s refusal to expand trade, resourceful British merchants found the answer to the trade imbalance in the form of Indian opium. Thanks to the opium trade, by 1828 the balance had shifted. More silver left China than came in. Other European nations and eventually the United States quickly joined the lucrative opium trade.

The sale and consumption of opium had been banned in the Qing China since 1799. However, the ban did not slow the demand for the drug, nor did it stop Europeans from sending it to China. As a result, the outflow of Chinese silver seriously upset the internal Chinese fiscal system.

The Chinese internal currency system was based on silver and copper, silver to be used for tax payment, payment of salaries by the government and all calculations of the official treasury; copper to be used for local buying and selling, especially in the local agricultural markets. As a result of the outflow of silver, the internal value of silver to copper was changed from 1:2 to 1:3. This greatly aggravated the financial problems of the Chinese farming population, whose tax and rent payments were calculated in silver but whose income was based on devaluated copper.

With their economy in decline, China grew increasingly frustrated with the Europeans’, especially Great Britain’s, blatant disregard for China’s laws.

In 1839, the Daoguang Emperor (r.1820-1850) appointed the former Governor-General of Hunan and Hubei, Lin Zexu (1785-1850), as the Imperial High Commissioner at Canton and instructed him to solve the opium problem. The new commissioner was

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that most admirable type of official: one who combined deep ethical convictions with
great energy and a sense of public duty.\textsuperscript{12} Commissioner Lin notified the foreign
governments that Chinese officials would no longer tolerate their obstinacy. To illustrate
the seriousness of the situation, Lin drafted a letter to the Queen Victoria asking her to
stop the opium trade; however, the Queen’s ministers refused to forward a letter couched
in ‘contemptuous’ language to the Queen of England. After the Europeans ignored Lin’s
warning, he cut off the food and water supplies to the foreign factories and destroyed
twenty thousand chests of opium worth nearly three million pounds.\textsuperscript{13} As the chief
importers of opium, British merchants suffered the most from Lin’s actions. In the eyes
of many, the Chinese government had overstepped its bounds by destroying private
property and by infringing on her free trade rights. The outraged community demanded
the British government send warships to protect the interests of her subjects. The
government willingly obliged. On September 29, 1839, Chinese war junks attacked two
of these warships, the HMS \textit{Volage} and the HMS \textit{Hyacinth}. In retaliation, on November
3, 1839, the English declared war on China. The Imperial troops, despite numerical
superiority, were no match for the powerful weapons and steamships of the British
military and the once mighty Qing military were thoroughly routed by ‘foreign
barbarians’. On August 29, 1842 the war ended with the signing of the Treaty of
Nanjing, the first treaty China had concluded with any foreign state since the 1689 Treaty
of Nerchinsk with the Russians.\textsuperscript{14}

As victors, Great Britain now had a forum to address long-standing grievances it
held against the Chinese government. It came to no surprise that most of the grievances
related to trade. Among the deeper issues was the desire for greater intercourse with the
expanding British Empire. British government officials wanted direct access to the
Emperor and his government, preferably through the establishment of a legation in
Beijing, and the destruction of the Co-hong in Guangzhou.\textsuperscript{15} The treaty abolished the

\textsuperscript{12} Harry Gelber, \textit{Opium, Soldiers, and Evangelicals: Britain’s 1840-1842 War with China, and its
\textsuperscript{13} Catherine Pagani, “Objects and the Press: Images of China in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” in \textit{Imperial
Co-Histories: National Identities and the British and Colonial Press} edited by Julie Codell (Madison, NJ:
Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 149.
\textsuperscript{14} Gelber, 147.
\textsuperscript{15} James Hevia, \textit{English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China} (Durham,
Co-hong. The Chinese ceded the island of Hong Kong to Great Britain in perpetuity and increased the number of ports that foreigners could reside and trade to five. Now Guangzhou, Shanghai, Xiamen, Ningbo, and Fujian were opened for Western trade. Britain also gained the right to send consuls to the treaty ports, which, in theory, gave them direct access to local Chinese officials. In addition, an indemnity of twenty-one million pounds was to be paid to Great Britain by the Chinese government for reparations. In subsequent treaties, Chinese anti-Christian laws were repealed and an extraterritoriality agreement was reached. All treaties were up for review in twelve years. The Opium War had a lasting effect on the way the British and other foreign powers viewed the Chinese government. It confirmed foreign suspicions of Chinese military and naval inferiority and subsequent clashes of arms did nothing to rehabilitate China’s reputation.16

**British Missionaries**

As Great Britain’s commercial and political empire expanded into Africa and Asia during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a growing number of British people at home and abroad began to express concern for the salvation of the populations of ‘heathen’ nations. Several factors contributed to the newfound concern for the saving of souls: the Great (Protestant) Revival and Britain’s world bettering or civilizing discourse. In the world-bettering discourse, Britain saw itself as the moral, social, and political leader of the world, and as such had a responsibility to exert its superior values and morals onto supposedly inferior nations. Chief among the values and morals needed in becoming civilized was free trade, as previously mentioned, and Protestant Christianity. Great Britain would use free trade and Christianity to groom and coach these backward children on how to become a civilized society in the mold of Englishmen and women.

The Great Revival, which ferociously swept through Europe and the United States in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, only enhanced the perceived need for the saving of ‘heathen’ souls. Central to the Great Revival was millennialism, a belief concerning the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. According to

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millenialists thinking, God and Satan will engage in a final battle for control of the world, in which God will prevail. However, before the millennium can begin the majority of the world must believe in Christ, the Savior. All Christians must ‘therefore go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28: 19-20).’ For Britons, who viewed themselves as the champions of Protestant Christianity, the words of Bible held special meaning. As Britain was the nation seen especially favored by Providence, the British felt it was their responsibility to spread the word of God to those who did not have it.  

Amid the electric atmosphere of evangelical zealousness, a number of missionary associations arose in Great Britain for the express propose of soul saving overseas. Among the earliest missionary associations to emerge in England were the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), the London Missionary Society (1795), the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), and the Church Missionary Society (1812). Initially, these missionary societies devoted much of their attention and resources to England’s crown jewel, India, and the British West Indies, because the British were more firmly rooted in these regions than in other non-Christian areas. China entered into the consciousness of British missionaries as a potential destination when Great Britain expanded its commerce into East Asia. Like the merchants who aspired to transform China into the largest market for British goods, missionaries were equally enthusiastic at the prospect of converting the largest population of unredeemed souls to Christianity. China in the early nineteenth century presented great challenges to the missionary enterprise. Under Chinese law, apostatizing of all kinds was banned, those who converted to Christianity or any other proscribed religion were in danger of execution, and, as previously mentioned, all foreigners were restricted to Guangzhou. In addition to the laws, the sheer physical size of China made travel extremely difficult. Despite the seemingly impenetrability of China, the London Missionary Society (LMS) sent Robert Morrison to Guangzhou in 1807, thus he become the first official Protestant missionary in China. The LMS was by far the most active British missionary society in China until the Opium War. The other major missionary organizations were either preoccupied with India, Africa, and the Americas or they believed China presented too many difficulties to the missionary

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enterprise. Following the loosening of restrictions on foreigners brought about by the Treaty of Nanjing, missionary societies established missions in China, such as the British and Foreign Bible Society (1843) and the Church Missionary Society (1847).

Missionaries continued to come to China despite the country’s restrictions on missionary activities and the dangers of overseas missions. Illness or death by disease or at the hands of the natives were common threats to all missionaries regardless of location. British missionaries often disguised their activities by engaging in other pursuits. Robert Morrison, for example, worked as a translator for both the merchant community and the British government. Some Protestant missionaries worked as medical doctors, which they hoped would create goodwill on which they hoped to be able to draw from in the future.\(^{18}\) The LMS sent Dr. William Lockhart, as the first British medical missionary. Missionaries also organized various charitable organizations such as schools, orphanages, and hospitals, where they were able to proselytize without outside scrutiny. Despite their efforts, Protestant Christian missionaries made very few converts. Many Chinese were suspicious of a religion that purported to be superior to all Chinese religions. The Chinese elite feared Christianity would undermine their prestige by undermining the Confucian values which in theory they were in charge of upholding. Protestant missions also received stiff competition from Catholics, mostly from France, who were equally fervent in their attempts to save souls of the godless Chinese. Catholics had a distinct advantage over their Protestant counterparts. Various Catholic orders -- Dominicans, Augustinians, Franciscans, and most importantly the Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits—had been active in China since the late sixteenth century. Before being first disbanded by Pope Clement XIII in 1773, the Jesuits successfully penetrated the Middle Kingdom and won over a number converts including the great mandarin and future prime minister Xu Guangqi (1562-1633).\(^ {19}\) Protestant missionaries, unlike the Jesuits who preceded them, refused to adopt the customs of the “heathen” Chinese and thus alienated themselves from the population. This attitude of superiority and the disregard of Chinese sensitivities combined with Chinese distrust resulted in a meager one hundred total

\(^{18}\)Waley-Cohen, 136.
converts from 1809 to 1840. Missionaries recognized this number was minuscule compared to the estimated four hundred million souls who inhabited China. This did not discourage the missionary enterprise; in fact it had the opposite effect. The challenge that China presented attracted adventurous missionaries, and their numbers increased steadily after the conclusion of the Opium War.

Section Two: The American Experience

British colonists in North America, like their contemporaries in Europe, also developed a taste for Chinese goods. As the British colonies moved toward independence in the latter half of eighteenth century, all trade into America suffered from the effects of war and other disruptions. After the United States gained formal independence from Great Britain, the Empress of China, a merchant ship based in New York, embarked on a historic voyage to Guangzhou in 1783 as the young nation’s first trading vessel to enter Chinese waters. The voyage of the American merchant ship proved to be quite profitable for her investors. The success of the Empress of China did not go unnoticed in the American business community. No longer constrained to obtain Chinese goods through London at prices set by the monopolistic British East India Company, merchants from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore eagerly established direct contact with Guangzhou for the purposes of extending trade into China. By 1803, a Boston company founded the first American trading firm in Guangzhou and slowly other American firms followed suit. Although much smaller than their British counterparts, American trading companies such as Augustine Heard and Russell and Company eventually achieved an important position in China’s commercial battleground.

Initially, American merchants traded goods such as alcohol, furs, tobacco, and Indian knickknacks for the silks, teas, and spices of China. American merchants did not flood the Chinese market with American goods. Thus they did not suffer the same severe trade imbalance that plagued British traders. As the trafficking of opium became big business in the early nineteenth century, American merchants switched their focus from

\[20\] Colin Mackerras, Western Images of China (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 42.

\[21\] Hunt, 6.
importing American goods to importing the addictive narcotic. The British East India Company and later individual British traders monopolized the Indian opium trade, and outside traders were forced to pay an additional fee for the prized opium. Americans unwilling to pay the hefty price of Indian opium sought alternative sources for its opium supply. In 1804, enterprising Boston merchants organized the Smyrna opium trade. Turkish opium now constituted most of the opium imported into China by American traders. By the 1820s Americans may have been carrying in annually as much as an estimated one hundred tons of Turkish opium, more than any American merchant had earlier thought China capable of absorbing, however, this number represented only one fifth of what the British were bringing in from India.  

As a result of the Smyrna trade, the United States received the dubious distinction as the second largest opium traffickers in China.

As a relatively new nation, still in the process of developing a stable infrastructure, overseas commerce, especially in China, lagged behind other European countries. American merchants patiently waited for the opportunity to increase their stake in the China trade. The opportunity came in the form of the Napoleonic Wars that engulfed much of Europe in the early nineteenth century. American merchants took advantage of Europe’s preoccupation to establish themselves as major traders in the global trade. Europeans renewed their interest in China after the end of formal hostilities in 1815; however, this did not displace American merchants from the position as important traders in the Middle Kingdom.

Early interaction between the government of United States and the Qing Emperors contrasted with the Anglo-Chinese relationship. The U.S. government was apathetic toward developments in China, and the American expatriate community was left to its own devices. Like all foreigners, American traders were subjected to restrictive laws and forced to adhere to the cohong system. They seemed more content with the cohong than their British counterparts. Unlike the British, American merchants did not have the luxury of professional civil servants. Nor did the U.S. government show great interest in the affairs of China. The government’s role in China was minimal, and this was consistent with the fundamental American policy of seeking to extend trade with as

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22 Hunt, 8.
few political complications as possible.\textsuperscript{23} Merchants appointed consuls from among their ranks. This job was unglamorous as consuls received no pay and really had no power; it was a figurehead position. As unofficial representatives they had no authority to negotiate with the Chinese government or the other European powers. Without any political or military backing from their home government, merchants had to rely on the cohong system in order to conduct business in China. As long as trading remained profitable, American merchants set aside any grievances they had against the cohong.

The Opium War was met with mixed reactions within the American expatriate community. Many Americans perceived Britain as the instigators of the War and were wary of Britain’s seemingly imperialistic intentions in China. In reality, Great Britain had little interest in expanding its formal empire into the country; her primary goal was the expansion of trade. American merchants also held lingering resentment toward the British because of their actions against American trading vessels during the War of 1812.\textsuperscript{24} They feared a British-controlled China might undermine the American position by cutting off the supplies of tea or by hindering “the avenues of trade.”\textsuperscript{25} At the same time, they understood British efforts to “open” China might improve trading conditions by coercing the Qing government into commercial concessions. Uncertain of the outcome and not wishing to antagonize either side, American merchants maintained a caution approach to the conflict. They continued to adhere to the cohong system, but never provided any form of assistance to the Chinese or the British.

Until the Opium War, China was on the periphery of the U.S. government’s foreign policy agenda; however, the conflict caught the attention of Washington thanks in large part to merchants who wanted to ensure their interest would not be left out of any treaty settlement that Britain might conclude with Chinese representative. In response to the concerns of its citizens in China, President John Tyler requested that Caleb Cushing lead a mission to China for the purposes of establish diplomatic ties and negotiating a treaty with the Imperial government. Despite Washington’s official neutrality throughout the war, Cushing was able to secure a treaty with similar provisions as the Treaty of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[24] During the War of 1812, British warships captured many American merchant vessels.
\item[25] Pruden, 77.
\end{footnotes}
Nanjing, and he obtained for the U.S. a most favored nation clause. On July 3, 1844, officials from China and the United States signed the Treaty of Wangxi, the first treaty between the two nations. Without firing a shot, Americans were able to increase their commercial interest in the China trade. This will be a familiar theme of U.S. relations for the next two decades as Washington’s foreign policy in China usually developed within the context of Anglo-Sino relations. The American government was more than willingly to sit idle by and reap the benefits of Great Britain’s aggressions.

The establishing of formal relations following the Treaty of Wangxi did not lead the United States to be more attentive to China. There was an overall lack of interest from the very top of the U.S. diplomatic corps as the presidents and Secretaries of State were preoccupied with European and South American diplomacy. During the period of 1843 to 1861 none of the Presidents with the exception of James Buchanan was well informed or interested in China. As a result of the apathy of top U.S. officials, individual commissioners were invested with discretionary power. The State Department gave no specific instructions or guidelines to their ministers. Commissioners were allowed to make their own decisions as they saw fit. Those appointed to China were often ill-paid, had little knowledge of the country and its customs, and were unprepared to deal with the challenges of Chinese diplomacy, and as a result often lasted only a year. Of the first nine commissioners between 1844 and 1860, they served on the average but a year each, leaving chargé d’affaires to fill the gap on no less than nine different occasions totaling some seven years. The chargé d’affaires were often from special interest groups, specifically from the missionary sector. Peter Parker, a medical missionary from Massachusetts and a graduate from Yale Theology School, served two different stints as chargé d’affaires between 1846 and 1852 before being appointed commissioner in 1855. The amateurism that permeated the commissioner’s offices lasted until the appointment of Anson Burlingame in 1861.

American Missionaries

26 Hunt, 14.
28 Hunt, 17.
The evangelical spirit created in the wake of the Great Revival swept through America with a vigor equal to that which occurred in Great Britain. From Massachusetts to Kentucky to Indiana, individuals flocked to churches and, where there were no churches, to makeshift tents to hear firebrand sermons on sinners and eternal salvation. The Great Revival with its message of millennialism, salvation, and active benevolence touched virtually all Protestant denominations. Amid this deep religious fervor arose the concern for evangelizing the unsaved. The emphasis on evangelism among the unsaved resulted in the establishment of five mission boards—the Philadelphia Bible Society (1808), the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810), the American Baptist Board of Foreign Missions (1814), and Episcopal and Methodists Missions (both 1820).

Their purpose, like their British counterparts, was to spread the Scripture to lands inhabited by godless “heathens.” This objective is reflected in the words of the constitution of the American Board, which clearly states their mission as “Propagating the gospel in heathen lands, by supporting missionaries and diffusing a knowledge of the holy Scriptures.”

Americans held the belief that the nation was especially favored by Providence. In the American narrative, God specifically designated America as a refuge for religious toleration and political freedom. As a reward for their spiritual faith, God blessed them with secular success. Americans saw themselves as in some sense, first religiously and then politically chosen people.

As Alexis de Tocqueville pointedly observed on his visit to America: “The Americans combine the notions of Christianity and liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other.” Being God’s elected people, it was important for Americans not only to lead the world into the millennium but also to spread America’s political principles. This sense of duty as God’s chosen people was a major catalyst for American missionary enterprise.

With a mandate from God to preach the joy of salvation, the various missionary societies initially focused their attention on the frontier regions of North America and

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29 Hunt, 25.
32 Schlesinger, 346-347. Tocqueville Dem in America, I 317
towards converting American Indians. Missionary societies allocated only a small portion of their resources to overseas endeavors. In 1812, the American Board sent the first overseas missionaries to India. However, this act did not lead to a massive increase in overseas missions. Foreign missions remained on the peripheral of missionary activity. It would not be until the 1820s that foreign countries became popular destination for missionaries. A major contributing factor to the surge in foreign missions were America’s naval expeditions and the country’s increased participation in world commerce which lead to a growing public awareness of the world.\(^{33}\) Missionaries previously preoccupied with North America now sought the adventure and excitement of an unfamiliar world. The American Board, by mid-century the largest of the American mission societies, took the lead in organizing foreign missions and recruiting individuals willing to give their hearts and maybe their lives to spreading God’s word and American principles. Eventually, all Protestant mission boards partook in overseas missions.

The most popular target of the American Board and of most mission boards during the mid-nineteenth century was the Middle East. The appeal of the Middle East to American missionaries was undeniable. It offered the opportunity to convert the misguided “Mohammedans” in the birthplace of Jesus Christ. As for China, it welcomed its first American missionary, Elijah Cole Bridgman in 1829. The Great Revival deeply impacted E.C. Bridgman decision to become a missionary and, when the American Board selected him to lead their first foreign mission to China, he enthusiastically accepted the offer despite having little knowledge about China. The thought of converting a “vast harvest of heathen souls” greatly appealed to him.\(^ {34}\) The next year the American Board established the South China Mission and deployed five additional missionaries to the country; notable among these were Dr. Peter Parker, David Abeel and Samuel Wells Williams.

The British and American missionaries enjoyed a mostly harmonious working relationship in China. This long and productive relationship developed during the first


decades of the nineteenth century as the mission boards from both countries worked to convert the non-Christian peoples of North America. As a result of these contacts, personal friendships and exchanges of information and literature, a partnership arose based on a sense of shared Protestant principles and a common background. This sense of cooperation extended to China as evangelicals from both countries recognized the need to present a united front in the face of hostile conditions and stiff competition from Roman Catholic missionaries.

British missionaries were also instrumental in creating an interest in missions to Middle Kingdom among Americans. British missionaries often wrote lively stories of their adventures and offered detailed descriptions of “Chinamen” that appeared in American periodicals. Robert Morrison, the first British Protestant missionary in China, went on a speaking tour of American churches in which he preached the need for Protestant missionaries from all countries to undertake the difficult but rewarding task of proselytizing in China. The success of Morrison’s speaking tour and the colorful commentary provided by British missionaries undoubtedly stimulated curiosity for the seemingly exotic and unknown land that was China among American evangelicals.

On the eve of the Taiping Rebellion, several themes characterize the American missionary experience. The first was a sense of independence. As previously mentioned the U.S. government had a laissez faire approach to China. This hands-off attitude allowed American missionaries more latitude than their British colleagues. Whereas British missionaries were confined to the five treaty ports because of the strict oversight of their home consulate, American missionaries often ventured outside of the treaty ports knowing that there would be no punishment for their transgressions. Another theme was a sense of failure. As of 1860, only an estimated one hundred Chinese converted to Protestant Christianity. The diminished returns from the field frustrated the most dedicated missionaries and their financial backers. The financiers of the missions expected to see results and, if their expectations were not met, funds were withdrawn. It was not unusual for missionaries to change their source of financial support during the course of a mission. Issachar Jacox Roberts, one of the first Baptist missionaries in China, had to change his source of financial support twice due to his lack of success in

35 Porter, 117 and 128.
converting the native population.\footnote{Pruden, 30.} However, this failure produced a fiery attitude and passion that came to dominate the American missionary experience. Despite few tangible results, missionaries continued to preach their message of salvation with great zeal.

\footnote{Pruden, 30.}
3. Overview of the Taiping Rebellion

Throughout the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries China experienced a series of internal rebellions that threatened to revoke the Qing dynasty’s Mandate of Heaven, which it held since 1644.\(^{37}\) The Qing dynasty expended much energy attempting to suppress various rebel groups starting with the White Lotus Rebellion in 1796. In the 1830s, the aborigines of central and southwest China, known as the Miao, rebelled. Shanghai was captured by the Small Sword Society in 1853. In the north, a rebel group known as the Nian held the province of Anhui, and northwest and southwest China was threatened by major Muslim uprising known as the Dungan Revolt (1862-1877). The most devastating of these, the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), arose in the southern provinces of Guangxi and Guangdong.

It is difficult to pinpoint one exact cause for the Taiping Rebellion. Several factors played a part in precipitating its outbreak including the Opium War, the subsequent loss of face of the Qing Emperor, and the rapid population increase. The Opium War contributed to the rise of the Taiping Rebellion in several ways. After the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing, workers in Guangzhou, the principal city of the Guangdong province, suffered by the shift of foreign trade to Shanghai. Many transportation workers, porters, and other manual laborers lost their jobs.\(^{38}\) Moreover, to pay the war indemnity, Qing officials again raised taxes. Those who could not afford the tax increase, including many small farmers, were forced to leave their land. A large segment of this disaffected population turned to banditry in order to survive. Banditry increased in Guangdong and in the neighboring province of Guangxi. Both provinces became prime recruiting grounds for the Taipings, who offered villagers protection from the roving banditti.

Another consequence of the Opium War was the loss of face for the Qing dynasty. The dynasty was founded by Manchus, an ethnic minority from Manchuria. The majority of the population consisted of Han Chinese, and ethnic tension between the populace and their alien rulers remained a constant throughout the reign of the Qing

\(^{37}\) The Mandate of Heaven is concept that Heaven blesses the authority of a ruler as long as he continues to be just and wise. However, if Heaven becomes displeased, the mandate will be given to someone else.

Emperors. However, the Qing military led by an elite fighting force known as the Bannermen and the Qing adoption and preservation of the Confucian social system allowed the Manchus to maintain control of the Han Chinese population. Han hostility toward their Manchu rulers resurfaced following China’s defeat at the hands of the ‘inferior’ European ‘barbarians.’ The humiliating loss in the Opium War, coupled with economic dislocation and a general decline in prosperity, created a climate of contempt for the Manchu overlords. Speculation grew that the ruling house had lost its heavenly mandate, and the time was ripe for a dynastic change. Some demanded the restoration of the Ming, the last Han Chinese dynasty.

Perhaps the number one cause of the Taiping Rebellion was the rapid population growth. The population, which has been roughly estimated as one hundred million at the start of the Qing dynasty, had increased to about three hundred million by the beginning of the nineteenth century. The population thus increased while cultivated land and quantity of agricultural production grew little. During this population explosion, China also experienced a number of floods, famines, and plagues. The shortage of arable land and the natural disasters led to a surge in migration. Areas where population had been sparse experienced an influx of migrants leading to mounting pressure on resources and increased competition. Migrants from the plains of Central China known as Hakkas (literally, guest people) flooded the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi where they clashed over the region’s limited resources with the Punti, descendents of early Chinese settlers to the area who made up the majority of the population. As the competition between the two groups intensified, Punti hostility toward the newcomers increased eventually ended in outright violence against the Hakka minority. As with many other rebellions, social outcasts were the originators of the Taiping Rebellion. All of the original leaders of the Rebellion and its earliest adherents were from this vulnerable minority Hakka group.

The rise in population also adversely affected China’s examination system. The most prestigious occupation for educated men was within the government bureaucracy, but the size of the civil bureaucracy remained fixed at about twenty thousand appointees despite the population boom. The competition in the examination system became more

intense, and many qualified men were unable to obtain substantive appointments. One such frustrated examination candidate, Hong Xiuquan, eventually became the titular head of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. If Hong had succeeded in receiving one of the esteemed positions within the government, history might have been greatly altered as it is unlikely he would have called for the overthrow of the ‘corrupt’ Qing government.

The Rise and Fall of the Taiping Rebellion

The self-proclaimed Heavenly King and Brother of Jesus, Hong Xiuquan was born on January 11, 1814, in the village of Huaxian, Guangdong, to a family of peasant farmers. It is said that Hong was a very bright child who at a young age memorized the five Confucian Classics. With such intelligence and promise, his family committed their limited financial resources to the education of their son in the hopes that he would acquire the learning needed to enter into a career as a government official. If their son passed the examination for the shen-yuan degree, the family’s sacrifice would be rewarded with honor and long-term financial security. Hong passed the district preliminary exams, which qualified him to take the provincial examination at Guangzhou. In 1827, Hong, at the age of thirteen traveled with his father to Guangzhou to take the examination. As always, there were thousands of candidates assembling in the huge examination compound in the eastern part of the city, and rigorous quotas ensures that only a tiny percentage could pass. The numbers did not favor Hong, and he failed to advance to the next phase of the examinations. He and his father returned home somewhat dejected. However, Hong did not relinquish his dream of wearing the blue robe of a Confucian scholar. His family’s finances dictated that they could no longer support his studies, so he took a job as a schoolteacher. At the age of twenty-two, Hong again tested his fortune by taking the exam for a second time. Again he failed but in the process he received a book that would impact his life and Chinese history. On the steps of the examination hall, Chinese Protestant evangelicals distributed Christian tracts by Liang Afa, one of the earliest converts to the Protestant Christianity. In Liang’s tracts, collectively titled “Good Words for Exhorting the Age” (Quanshi liangyan), China’s

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40 Roberts, 265.
religious and secular culture was condemned and a blueprint was offered for the redemption of society and the individual through Christian monotheism. It also saw in the Old Testament a story of a chosen few who with God’s help had rebelled against oppression. Liang also stressed the righteous wrath of Jehovah, more than the loving-kindness of Jesus. Hong gave it a superficial glance but never an in-depth read. The book collected dust until Hong’s cousin Li Jingfang rediscovered it some years later.

In the spring of 1837, Hong went to Guangzhou for the third time for the provincial examination and again his name failed to appear on the list of successful candidates. Unable to cope with his repeated failure, he fell critically ill and had to be carried back to his native village where his condition worsened. In and out of consciousness, Hong’s mind began to fill with strange hallucinations. In one of his hallucinations, Hong:

felt like he was dying, and a group of heavenly attendants lifted him to heaven with great pomp. On arrival an old woman (His Heavenly Mother in a later version) washed off the filth he had picked up by associating with earthly people, and old man slit him open and replaced his internal organs with fresh ones. He met various relatives, including an elder brother and a father, very dignified in his black dragon robe and huge golden beard…Hong also fought extensive battles with imps and demons contesting the old man’s authority, finally discovered the demonic leanings of Confucius himself. Toward the end, the old man presented Hong with a sword and a seal of office, sending him reluctantly down to earth to cleanse the world of demons and idol worship.44

When Hong recovered from his illness, he returned to his job as a school teacher. In 1843, he tried one last time to pass to examinations, but he was no more successful than in his previous attempts. Hong’s frustration turned to anger directed at the Manchu rulers who he blamed for upholding an archaic examination system that was inherently unfair.

At the time of his illness, Hong did not understand the meaning of his vision. It was not until his cousin Li Jingfang visited him later in the year to urge him to read Liang Afa’s “Good Words for Exhorting the Age.” After reading Liang’s tracts, Hong had an epiphany. He now understood the meaning of his hallucination. Hong understood the old man with the huge golden beard to be God and the elder brother Jesus. The demons he was commanded to destroy were the Manchus. God sent him to earth to rid China of

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idol worshippers and to bring Christianity to China. Hong immediately set out to spread the word of God. He baptized two other failed scholars, his cousin Hong Rengan and a local named Feng Yunshan. Together these three along with other converts went on a rampage of destructions, smashing idols and desecrating temples. For this act, Hong Xiuquan was fired from his school teacher job. Their message of the salvation through Christianity found an audience among many of the disaffected Hakka community, and the number of converts expanded rapidly. In order to increase their knowledge of Christianity, Hong Xiuquan and Hong Rengan went to Guangzhou in March of 1847 to study Christianity under Issachar Jacox Roberts, a Southern Baptist missionary. Roberts later reported that Hong Xiuquan remained at his chapel for “about two months, joined our Bible class, committing and reciting the scriptures and receiving instructions for two hours daily with the class.”  

When Hong ran out of money, he could no longer afford to continue his studies. Roberts refused to subsidize his study for fear that Hong was a ‘rice Christian who feigned conversion to obtain material benefits.’ He made the trek back to Guangxi, preaching God’s word along the way. While Hong was away, Feng Yunshan had established a religious community known as the Society of God Worshippers in the region called Thistle Mountain in northwest Guangxi. The area around Thistle Mountain became the base of operation for Hong and his faithful disciples. By 1850 there were at least ten thousand God-worshippers in and around Guangxi, perhaps even as many as thirty thousand.

Guangxi was a province in turmoil. Bandits roamed the land while pirates infested the waterways. Crime spread incessantly throughout Southeast China. Hakka villages became targets not only of their Punti neighbors but also of local militia groups. In one incident a militia passing through a Hakka village molested the inhabitants, and this led to a conflict after which the one hundred thirty dispossessed villagers, left to join Feng Yunshan. As a result of such hostilities, Hakka and other minority groups, sold their property and sought safe haven with the God Worshippers, who promised protection.

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45 Pruden, 185.  
46 Rice Christian refers to those who outwardly convert to Christianity in order to receive food from missionaries. Inwardly, these people maintain their previous religious beliefs.  
48 Gray, 58.
from the increasing level of violence. The local authorities grew alarmed at the size of the God Worshippers and ordered them to disband. The government did not differentiate the God Worshippers from other menacing bandit groups. Hong and his followers refused to disband, leading to open clashes with the imperial forces.

Influenced by Protestant apocalyptic thinking, Hong’s movement had, by 1850, entered into a millenarian phase. He now saw his movement in terms of good and evil, the God Worshippers being good and those who adhered to the old order being the evil. In order for the world to enter into eternal peace the evil must be defeated. In early December 1850, Hong finally received the impetus he needed to start his war against the demons. A provincial army attempting to capture Hong was routed near Huazhou by the outnumbered God Worshippers. The seriousness of the incident marked Hong and his followers as rebels. On January 11, 1851, his birthday, Hong Xiuquan proclaimed a revolution and established a new kingdom based on his understanding of Christianity. He named his kingdom Taiping Tianguo, literally the Heavenly Kingdom of the Great Peace. The goal of the Taiping Tianguo was to “liberate China from the yoke of foreign power and convert it to the worship of the true God.” The momentum from the Taipings destruction of the Imperial troops at Huazhou continued as the Taiping army enjoyed victory after victory over the demoralized Manchu army. On September 25, 1851, the Taipings captured their first walled city, Yongan. At Yongan, Hong Xiuquan assumed the title of the Tian Wang or Heavenly King and appointed his closest associates as lesser kings. Yang Xiuqing, a former government clerk, was bestowed with the title of East King and became second in command to Hong; Xiao Chaogui, a poor peasant, was appointed the West King; Hong’s cousin Feng Yunshan was made the South King; Wei Changhui, a member of an influential clan and former member of the Cantonese militia, was the North King; and Shih Dakai, another failed examinee, was given the title of Wing King. Hong Xiuquan’s son, Tiangu Fu, was called “the Young Monarch.”

After breaking the imperial encirclement of Yongan, the Taipings, now numbering around one hundred thousand members, marched north through the provinces of Hunan, Hubei, Anhui capturing the cities of Changsha, Wuchang, and Anqing.

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49 Pruden, 176.
50 Hamberg, 53.
Striking into Jiangsu Province in March of 1853, the Taipings besieged Nanjing and its garrison of forty thousand Bannermen troops. On March 19, 1853, Nanjing fell and every Manchu that could not escape was either massacred by the Taipings or committed suicide. Nanjing held special significance to the Taipings as it was the capital of the revered former Ming dynasty. Hong declared Nanjing the capital of the Taiping Tianguo, and it remained as such for eleven years. The march north was not without its causalities. The South King and West King did not live to see the establishment of the New Jerusalem at Nanjing.

At Nanjing the Heavenly King, with the assistance of Yang Xiuqing, formalized the Taipings’ doctrines and government and social systems. The religious tenets included the belief in the Christian God, acclaimed Christ as the Savior and that Hong was the son of God and the younger brother of Jesus. As a son of God, Hong had direct access and often communicated with Him through the medium of trances. The Taipings also practiced baptism, observed the Sabbath (worshipped on Saturdays), obeyed the Ten Commandments and imposed on his followers a strict code of moral conduct drawn from Protestantism. Alcohol and opium usage, lying, gambling, idol worship, adultery, prostitution, foot-binding, and polygamy were prohibited and punishable by death. Sexual love was also prohibited until their final victory over the Manchus. Inspired by the “Rites of Zhou (Zhou Li),” their basic document of state, “The Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty,” laid out the Taipings system of government and an economic program. Every twenty-five families formed a basic social unit under the charge of the master sergeant who administered the civil, educational, religious, judicial matters of the families. The government owned all land, and a common treasury was established. In exchange for the relinquishing land rights, each family was to be given a unit of land which was to provide for its need. Equality of the sexes was also proclaimed.

Seemingly content with their existence at Nanjing, Hong and his cohorts in the spring of 1853 allocated only a small fraction of their troops to the advance on Beijing. Historians frequently cite the decision to make Nanjing their Heavenly Capital instead of advancing toward Beijing as a major strategic error on the part of the Taiping leadership.

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51 Gray, 61.
52 Roberts, 235.
Had the entire Taiping army marched on Beijing, it is likely that the lightly guarded city would have fallen, leading to the disintegration of the Qing dynasty. Instead, the Taiping army reached only as far as Tianjin, seventy miles outside of Beijing, before being driven back and crushed by Qing forces in 1855. They never threatened Beijing again.

After the failure of a Western expedition, the movement stalled. The Taipings did retain control of the commercial important lower Yangzi River. At Nanjing, the Heavenly King became more reclusive, leaving affairs of state in the hands of his shrewd Prime Minister, Yang Xiuqing. The East King, flushed with power, increasingly chastised the Heavenly King in private and in public. Yang received independent religious revelations from God. In one instance, Yang claimed God instructed him to punish Hong for his treatment of his female servants. Hong yielded to Yang’s request that he be punished. Miraculously, at the last minute before Hong was to be beaten for his transgression, God spoke to Yang and ordered Hong spared. Faced with Yang’s swollen ego, Hong in September of 1856 recalled Wei Changhui, the North King, to deal with the Yang problem. This began a period of internal fighting and turmoil. Wei murdered the East King and his family along with twenty thousand of his supporters. In the ensuing chaos, fearing for his life, Shih Dakai fled Nanjing. The Heavenly King, now in a panic, had his forces kill the North King and his entire family. Shih, the Wing King who was the last of the original Taiping wangs and perhaps the most competent of them all, returned to Nanjing briefly to fill the leadership void. Hong, however, no longer completely trusted his kings and so turned more and more to his inept brothers for counsel. Shih, fearing for his life, this time from Hong’s corrupt brothers, left Nanjing on an independent expedition to southwest China. Although, he continued to pledge his loyalty to Hong, he decided it was best to remove himself from the power struggle in the Heavenly capital.

The internecine violence at Nanjing resulted in the breakdown of the central Taiping authority and military dysfunction. While the Taiping military was in disarray, Zeng Guofan, a famous scholar-official from Hunan, organized a private army known as the Hsiang Army (also called the Hunan Brave), Zeng fought not for the Qing dynasty but for the preservation of Confucian traditions, which the Taipings threaten to destroy. Zeng’s army was composed mostly of the literati and peasants angry at the destruction of
temples and the disruption to their lives caused by constant warfare. Between 1856 and 1859, the Hunan Braves reversed much of the Taiping’s progress in Hunan and in the adjacent province of Hubei.

In 1859, the rebellion received an injection of much-needed hope. Hong Rengan, the Heavenly King’s cousin and one of his earliest converts, arrived at Nanjing and assumed the position of Prime Minister. Rengan, given the honorary title of Shield King, had spent seven years in Hong Kong studying Christianity under Protestant missionaries from the London Missionary Society. Once given supreme authority, Rengan centralized the political and military authority and embarked on a Western-style reform program. Among his more novel ideas were the establishment of post offices and banks, the construction of new roads, and installing a system of life and property insurance. Central to his new program was the cultivation of relations with the European nations in China. If this maneuver proved successful, the foreign powers could provide the Taipings with money and modern arms. To achieve this goal, Rengan published New Work for Aid in Government (also called A New Treatise on Aids to Administration), a document outlining his Westernized reform program, and sent it to all the foreign consulates. This manuscript is filled with reverence for specific foreign countries. He refers to the United States as the “Flowery Flag Country” and praises it as the “most righteous and wealthy of all.” Of England, he describes her as the “most powerful of nations” because the nation has best “institutions.” To “correct” the deficiencies in the Taiping religion and as a propaganda tool, the Shield King, issued a decree granting religious toleration to Protestants and Roman Catholics and called for the opening of eighteen churches. He invited European missionaries to Nanjing and Suzhou to teach “orthodox” Christianity to the Taiping hordes.

In order to fully implement the reform program, Hong Rengan deemed it necessary to have more personal contact with the Western powers. From Nanjing, located one hundred thirty six miles away from the nearest port city, this appeared to be

53 Spence, 274.
55 One of the complaints against the Qing government prior to the Treaty of Tianjin was their refusal to add religious toleration to any of the treaties with the European powers. By officially granting religious toleration, Hong Rengan hoped to receive support not only from the missionaries but also from Western governments.
impossible since most Europeans resided in China’s coastal cities. As a solution, Rengan launched an attack on Shanghai, the adopted Chinese capital of most European expatriates. Rengan entrusted the mission to the ablest of the Taiping military leaders, Li Xiucheng (the Loyal King). Initially, Li’s offensive proved unstoppable. His forces captured the provincial capital of Zhejiang, Hangzhou in March 1860 and in June of the same year Suzhou fell. Imperial forces, with the aid of a foreign mercenary force known to the West as the Ever-victorious army led by an American soldier of fortune, Frederick Townsend Ward, briefly retook Hangzhou in the spring of 1861, Li recaptured the city in December of 1861. Li made his descent on Shanghai in early 1862. Defending Shanghai were nine hundred British and one thousand French troops, along with one thousand of Ward’s “Ever Victorious Army” and Zeng’s Hunan Braves. 56 Unable to overcome the superior fire power of the Europeans and the tactics of Zeng, Li withdrew to the suburbs of Shanghai. On June 19, 1862 the Taipings made one final thrust against Shanghai, with the similar results. This proved to be the last great offensive of the Taiping Rebellion. After their failure to seize Shanghai, the Heavenly King’s army would be on the defensive. The “Ever Victorious Army,” now under the command of the British officer “Chinese” Charles Gordon, combined with Zeng’s forces began the tedious task of capturing Taiping held-cities. By April of 1864, when the combined forces of Gordon and Zeng successfully returned all of the cities in the Zhejiang provinces to the Emperor, the surviving Taipings, including the Loyal King, retreated to Nanjing.

The Heavenly Capital was in disarray. The resilient city resisted the constant shelling by the Imperial Army but finally the siege took its toll. Famine engulfed the city. When the Loyal King informed the Sovereign of the food shortage, the Heavenly King, whose sanity was now question, issued an edict saying “everyone in the city should eat manna (sweet dew). This will keep them alive.” 57 Manna, of course, did little fulfill the hunger of the people and, as a result, many died of starvation. Hong Xiuquan also no longer trusted the Shield King after his disastrous Shanghai offensive. Rengan effectively lost all power and remained Prime Minister in name only. To all but the

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57 Curwen, C.A., ed, Taiping Rebel: The Deposition of Li Hsiu-Ch’eng (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 145. Li later attributed Hong’s death to his eating manna.
Heavenly King, the fall of Nanjing seemed imminent. Hong believed to his dying day that God would save His holy city from destruction at the hands of the demons. Surrendering would certainly end in unceremonious executions at the hands of the Manchus, so it was not an option and the choice was made to fight to the last man. Hong Xiuquan, the Heavenly King, died on June 1, 1864, either of suicide or illness, and the crown was passed to his fifteen-year-old son, Hong Tiangui Fu. With the empire already in shambles, the young monarch could do little to restore it, and, in July 1864, the capital of the Heavenly Kingdom fell to forces of Zeng Guofan’s brother, Zeng Guoquan and his protégé, Li Hongzhang. As promised, the Taipings fought to the death. Those who did not die by the sword committed suicide. However, the Young Monarch, Li Xiucheng, Hong Rengan, and an estimated one hundred followers escaped the carnage at Nanjing. As the party rode away, Li Xiucheng’s horse collapsed and he was captured shortly thereafter. The Shield king was apprehended on October 9 in Guangdong, where the movement started. Of the last three kings, Tiangui Fu eluded capture the longest. However, his luck finally ran out, and, he was arrested on October 25, 1864 by a Qing patrol. None of the lives of the leaders were spared. Pockets of resistance lasted until the 1870s, but for all practical purposes the movement ended with the fall of Nanjing.
4. Early Images of the Taipings

Section One: Nothing But a Band of Robbers: 1849-1851

By 1849, reports circulated around the foreign consulates of serious disturbances in the provinces of Guangzhou and Guanxi. Unbeknownst to them, Hong and his fellow God-worshippers were in open rebellion against the Qing state. In April of that year, the British consul at Guangzhou and future Governor of Hong Kong, Dr. John Bowring, received a copy of a memorial written by the Governor General of Guangdong-Guangxi to the Daoguang Emperor recounting details of a recent clash with a small band of insurgents in the Guangxi province. With this memorial in hand, Bowring, a merchant turned diplomat from Exeter, England, commented to Sir Samuel George Bonham, the Minister Plenipotentiary of China, that

As far as our imperfect sources of information throw light on the matter I am disposed to believe that the position of the insurgents is far more menacing to the public tranquility than would appear from these official statements.  

Bowring’s dispatch to Bonham thus becomes the first report from an British source regarding the Taipings.

From 1849 to their capture of Yungan in 1852, information regarding the Society of God-worshipers was infrequent and scattered. Confinement of foreigners to the five treaty ports as stipulated in the Treaty of Nanjing hindered information gathering. No eyewitness accounts could be produced from ‘reliable’ persons. All eyewitness accounts were from the Imperial government, which most Europeans did not fully trust. The remoteness of the Guangdong-Guangxi provinces added to the problem of information gathering. The two provinces are separated from other parts of China by natural borders of mountains and, as a result, it delayed communications from Guangxi to reach the port cities.

One of the earliest images constructed of the Taipings constructed by the British was that of a band of organized robbers and bandits. The British diplomatic corps and the treaty port based English-language newspapers formulated this image. These two image-formulators were heavily dependant on the members of the Qing Government and

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government sanctioned Chinese newspapers for any information concerning the Guangxi rebels. The Qing Government not wanting to appear weak and feeble to the power that humiliated them some ten years before, it carefully downplayed the uprising in Guangxi as a mere ‘disturbance’ and reassured all that the ‘rebels or robbers’ would soon be ‘exterminated.’59 The Beijing newspapers also helped in distributing the image of Taiping as robbers. One Beijing gazette reported that Taipings were a ‘band of robbers’ and ‘pirates who had escaped from the grapeshot of the English on the coast of Fokien, and taken refuge in the mountains.’60 By December of 1850, Hong and his followers of approximately ten thousand had routed a provincial army near Huazhou, so any characterization of his movement as a simple disturbance created by robbers was a deliberate understatement. Since the Chinese government and Beijing gazettes were their primary source of information, the British representatives reproduced their image of the Taipings as robbers.

Thomas Taylor Meadows, British interpreter at the Guangzhou consulate and latter a staunch defender of the Taipings, was among the first to perpetuate the image of the Taipings as robbers. Meadows’ primary duty at the consulate was to translate the documents and reports of the Chinese government. Frequently translators, like Meadows, supplied comments along with their translations. Meadows’ position as translator allowed him to transmit his image of the Taipings to higher ranking officials. For instance, in August 1850, Meadows sent the British Foreign Minister, Lord Palmerston, a translation of a Memorial about the disruptions in Guangxi. In addition to the translation, Meadows commented that ‘robbers have openly defied the authorities at Kwangse during the last twelve months, and have killed the Chief Magistrate.’61 Meadows was directly transmitting his image of the Taipings to Lord Palmerston, who in turn also characterized the rebels as a band of robbers.

To Meadows and other Europeans, it came as no surprise to hear of roving bands of robbers and bandits terrorizing and plundering the Chinese countryside. One result of

61 Clarke and Gregory, Western Reports, 5.
the nineteenth century decline of the Qing dynasty was a rise in banditry and piracy. Heavy taxes, high rent and lack of protection from corrupt officials caused many farmers to leave their land and join roaming groups of disposed people who became bandits.\textsuperscript{62} The British government was well aware of these bandits and pirates who made trade around the port cities hazardous. In the 1840s, the British navy with the tacit approval of the Chinese government launched a merciless attack on pirates and bandits off the South China coast. Knowing the history of banditry, especially in southeast China, Meadows had no reason to doubt that the Taipings were nothing other than a big-scale banditry movement.

George Bonham, at his residence in Hong Kong, concurred with Meadows assessment that the Taipings were merely robbers bent on ‘plundering.’ Reports of a capture of many ‘banditti’ near Guangzhou received a few months after Meadows first dispatch to Palmerston only reinforced Bonham’s image.\textsuperscript{63} He concluded that the disturbance in Guangxi was nothing more than a bunch of marauders and they presented no real threat to British interest or the Chinese government.

The \textit{Friend of China} an English-language newspaper based in Hong Kong was one of the first periodicals to mention the disturbance in Guangxi. Later, as the Taiping rebellion progressed, the \textit{Friend} became a consistent supporter of the Taiping cause. In an article written on May 23, 1851, it also represented the Taipings as ‘robbers, whose sole object is plunder.’\textsuperscript{64} The \textit{Friend of China} also questioned if there was more to these bandits than just organized mischief. It reported that rumors from Guangzhou suggest these robbers might have a possible Christian element to it, and the leader might be a ‘Roman Catholic.’ The author later dismissed this rumor of a Christian element as ‘unlikely to be true’ and that it was mostly likely started by the enemies of these robbers to ‘create disaffection’ against them. The author does not relate why a linkage to Christianity might ‘create disaffection’ against them, however, one possible was that Christianity, being seen in China as the religion of the foreign ‘barbarians,’ would dissuade individuals from joining this banditry movement. Any link with the religion of the European invaders was perceived to be a negative.

\textsuperscript{62} Michael, 10.  
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Friend of China}, 23 May 1851.
Even after more information was gathered in the coming years about the Taipings, this early image of them as robbers and bandits never completely vanished. In 1857, a book entitled *Life of the Taiping Wang* by an American named J. Milton Mackie described the Taipings as originally being ‘outlaws and robbers.’ Mackie is not the only person to later rehash the early image of Hong and his followers. Toward the latter years of the rebellion as public opinion turns decisively against the Taipings, the image of the Taipings as robbers and bandits resurfaced.

The earlier tendency to represent the Taipings as robbers reflects the overall Western image of the Chinese. In the eyes of many British and American travelers, China was viewed as a backward nation with an incompetent government unable to establish the proper rule law and order. A government incapable of performing this basic function of civilization should expect to experience high levels of crime and widespread banditry. As for the Chinese people, the West often portrayed them as ‘lazy, lawless race’ full of cunning cheats and thieves. Hearing of a band of robbers pillaging and plundering in one of the most lawless areas of China was no great revelation since thievery was assumed to be a natural part of the Chinese character.

Disorder characterized the American consulate in the first two years of the rebellion. In the early months of 1850, the American commissioner Thomas Nelson resigned. The Fillmore administration, unable to get anyone to accept to accept the low-paying China post, left matters in the hands of the missionary Peter Parker. The chargé d’affaires’ dispatches of 1850 and 1851 reveal Parker had heard of ‘serious disturbances in the Provinces of Canton and Kwangse’ and of efforts by the Imperial government to eradicate the subversive elements. Surprising, Parker never refers to the Taipings as robbers or bandits but either as rebels or insurgents. Parker, although fluent in mandarin Chinese and able to read the various Chinese gazettes and memorials of the Imperial Government, had nothing compared to the British consulate in terms of an ability to gather information. By 1850, the British diplomatic corps consisted of some thirty

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66 Mackerras, 41, and Pagani, 153.
67 Hunt, 19.
British personnel; the United States did not even have a commissioner.\(^{68}\) Parker’s lack of resources and staff may be one explanation as to why he never portrayed the Taipings as robbers. Or perhaps Parker was less inclined to take at face value the decrees of the Imperial government. As for the missionaries of both the United States and Britain, no interest was shown whatsoever in a bunch of rogue bandits from a distant province.

Section Two: A Period of Ambiguity: 1851 to 1853

On Sept. 24, 1851, the God-worshippers, now referring to themselves as the Taiping Tianguo or the Kingdom of Great Peace, besieged the walled city of Yongan located. The lightly defended garrison of around eight hundred Qing troops proved to be no match for Hong’s celestial army of thirty-thousand fanatical followers and the city fell the next day. No quarter was given, the Imperial soldiers were massacred and all ‘Tartar demons’ either committed suicide or were slaughtered in the ensuing mayhem. The Qing could no longer deny that this band of alleged robbers and thugs presented a serious political threat to the dynasty. At Yongan, Hong’s movement was reorganized. A collective leadership was established, with Hong as the Tian Wang or Heavenly King and each of the principal leaders receiving the rank of wang, or king. At Yongan, the rebels began to produce the remarkable set of publications which proclaimed and justified their cause.\(^{69}\) This proclamations and documents eventually found their way to the European settlements on the coast.

The capture of Yongan and the subsequent success of their campaign north, altered the image of the Taipings as bandits. This early image was replaced by a hodgepodge of images which reflected the ambivalence of the American and British toward the God-worshippers. Most images were vague and contradictory, often blurring the lines between the secret societies and the God-worshippers and attempting to ascertain if they were really Christians or not.\(^{70}\) Intelligence from the Imperial government and Chinese gazettes continued to serve as major sources of information on the rebellion but were supplemented by the writings of the Taipings.

\(^{69}\) Roberts, 270.
\(^{70}\) Spence, *God’s Chinese son*, 193
Early in 1851, reports circulated around the British and American consulates that ‘the whole plan’ of the Taipings was ‘conceived and elaborated by the secret societies.’ Secret societies were underground political and sometime religious organizations, very loosely organized around the principles of brotherhood, equality, and protection with a shared system of rites and ceremonies. Secret societies led many of the uprisings that occurred all through imperial history. The nineteenth century witnessed a burst of secret society activity, which, coincided with the deterioration of Qing dynasty. The objective of most was to overthrow the Manchu Emperors and replace them with an ethnically Han Chinese Emperor. Since the Ming dynasty was the last Han Chinese dynasty, many called for its restoration. In January of 1852, the *Friend of China* obtained a proclamation by the Eastern King, Yang Xiuqing, in which he declared the “fortune of the Han dynasty is about to flourish, and the foreign Dynasty of the Mantchoos will soon end.” With an obvious anti-Manchu agenda, it was difficult to differentiate the Taipings’ movement from similar uprising, against the Qing dynasty by various secret societies.

The designation of the title ‘Heavenly Kingdom’ for the Taipings new empire also contributed the assumption that they were connected to one of these underground organizations. One of the most notorious secret societies of the century was the Triad Society also known as the ‘Society of Heaven and Earth.’ Since its formation in the 1760s, the Triad’s engaged in sporadic resistance movements against the Qing dynasty mostly in the provinces of Fujian and Guangdong. The similarities in name between the ‘Society of Heaven and Earth’ and the ‘Heavenly Kingdom,’ plus the fact both had roots in Guangdong, confused a number of people including Walter H. Medhurst, the Chinese Secretary at Hong King and resident of China for more than thirteen years. Medhurst, who was well-versed in the history of the Triads, concluded that the ‘various chiefs’ of the Taipings are ‘of the same fraternity, called the ‘Brotherhood of Heaven and Earth.’

This image of the Taipings as cohorts of the Triad also appeared in the newspapers of the China coast. In a later narrative of the rebellion, Commander Lindesay Brines of Her

71 MacFarlane, 78.
72 Michael, 12.
73 *Friend of China*, 30 January 1852.
74 Clarke and Gregory, *Western Reports*, 33.
Majesty’s Navy recounted that in ‘several articles devoted to the subject of the rebellion, which appeared in the English papers published in China between 1849 and 1853, a great deal of space’ was devoted to showing ‘that the rebellion was an offshoot of the well-known Triad Society.’\footnote{Lindesay Brine, \textit{The Taiping Rebellion in China: A Narrative of its Rise and Progress} (London: John Murray, 1862), 113.} In addition, the Triad employed the slogan \textit{fan-Qing, fu-Ming} (Oppose the Qing, restore the Ming), which corresponded with the Taipings anti-Manchu, pro-Ming message.

Much energy was expended during this period in attempting to determine if the Taipings if were Christians. The diplomatic and missionary communities of United States and Great Britain both expressed deep interest in ascertaining if the rumors about the Guangxi rebels being indigenous Christian were true. As early as June of 1851, the \textit{Friend of China} described Hong as possible being an adherent to Christianity, but the newspaper later dismissed this claim. By September of that year, Thomas Meadow was in possession of an edict by the Xianfeng Emperor in which he stated ‘he had received memorials, to the effect that the disturbances in the Two Kwang were in a great degree owing to the spread of ‘Strange Doctrines.’” Meadows was convinced the ‘Christian religion’ was ‘included in the term ‘Strange Doctrine.’” However, Meadows’ superior John Bowring was doubtful that the movement had ‘anything whatever of a religious character.’ In May 1852 he told the Foreign Office,

\begin{quote}
that there had been for some time past reports of Christian inscriptions upon the banners of the insurgents, but quoted Protestant missionary opinion that rebel use of the term ‘\textit{Shang-ti},’ by which the Protestants translated the Western concept of God into Chinese, referred not to the Christian God but to a Chinese god of war.\footnote{Gregory, \textit{Great Britain and the Taiping}, 7.}
\end{quote}

The Protestant missionary opinion quoted by Bowring was not as clear cut as the Governor indicated in his letter. After ignoring the initial stages of the rebellion, the fall of Yongan and the subsequent publications of Taiping manifestos finally sparked the interest of the American and British missionary communities. However, opinion was equally divided as to the religious nature of the God-worshippers. As with Bowring, the Taipings self-reference as the \textit{Shang-ti} Society and their reverence of \textit{Shang-ti} created much confusion in the missionary community. \textit{Shang-ti} was used in the Chinese classics
as the creator of all things and because of this connection to the Chinese classics some viewed its usage as idolatrous. For some time, there had been a great controversy among the British and American missionaries as to the proper Chinese translation for the Christian God. The Americans preferred the term *shen*, while many in the British societies favored *Shang-ti*. So when the Taipings spoke of *Shang-ti*, it was difficult to determine whether they were referring to a Chinese god or the Christian God. Later, as more reports on religious nature of the Taipings reached the missionaries along the coast, many concluded that these rebels were in fact sincere Christians.

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5. Height of Popularity: Positive Images of the Taipings, 1853 to 1854

Section One: Construction of Positive Images

Less than two years after their historic capture of Yongan, the Heavenly Army reached the edges of Nanjing, the former capital of the formerly venerated Ming dynasty. On March 19, 1853, Hong came one step closing to realizing his dream of restoring an ethnically Chinese emperor to the throne as his followers breached the walls of Nanjing and flooded onto its streets. Nanjing was heavily garrisoned by forty thousand Bannermen troops. However, the Banner troops of Nanjing suffered the same outcome as their brethren at Yongan. The Imperial troops were routed within days by one hundred thousand devoted followers of Hong. On March 29, the Heavenly King made his triumphant entrance into Nanjing and immediately proclaimed the city to be the new Heavenly Capital of his empire.

From their victory at Nanjing to the spring of 1854, the Taipings enjoyed unprecedented popularity in the British and American communities. This period produced an abundance of positive images of the Taipings on a scale never seen before or after. Several factors contributed to the construction of these positive images including the deteriorating relationship between the Qing government and West, the victories of the Heavenly Army, the influx of Taiping-produced literature, favorable eyewitness reports, and three new books on the subject of the rebellion.

The news of the conquest of Nanjing was met with general praise and adulations from the British and American diplomatic communities. At this time, both countries held an overall negative image of the Qing monarchy. The Chinese government was criticized for being a cruel, corrupt, ‘patriarchal despotism.’ Humphrey Marshall, the new U.S. Commissioner, described the Qing government as “impotent, ignorant, and conceited; all its ministerial and subordinate officials are superlatively corrupt.”78 The accession of the Xianfeng Emperor (r.1850-1861) to the Imperial throne in 1850 further added to the negative image of the Qing monarchy. The new Emperor attributed the defeats and humiliations suffered during his father’s reign to weak and incompetent officials, and he

showed himself anxious to regain lost dignity by supporting whole-heartedly an anti-
foreign administration. He immediately reversed his father’s conciliatory policies
toward foreigners. The Xianfeng Emperor appointed the notoriously xenophobic
Governor of Guangzhou, Ye Mingchen, to the post of Viceroy and Imperial
Commissioner in charge of ‘barbarian affairs.’ The Emperor, Ye and other militants in
Imperial court fought off demands for treaty revision, refused to honor the provisions of
the treaties already in place, and reinforced the unwritten policy of not allowing
foreigners in Guangzhou proper.

The major objectives of the British and American consulates were to secure full
implementations of the terms of the Treaties of Nanjing and Wangxai, extend commercial
privileges, and establish a diplomatic resident in Beijing. The Emperor’s refusal to
renegotiate caused much distress and anguish. The governments of both countries were
uncertain as to how approach the China situation. In the early 1850s, Great Britain was
preoccupied with the growing crisis with Russia in Eastern Europe and placed affairs in
China on the peripheral of the British Foreign Ministry. For the United States, military
action was never an option to force concessions. Secretary of State, William Marcy,
instructed Humphrey Marshall to ‘carry out treaty revision’ but warned him that no
American warships would be available to assist him in this endeavor. The meteoric rise
of the Taipings coincided with the height of European dissatisfaction with the Qing
government.

The Imperial army seemed incapable of halting the Heavenly Army’s rapid
advance, and from all vantage points the Taipings look to be the future rulers of the
Middle Kingdom. It appeared the Qing’s Mandate of Heaven had expired, and a new
dynasty was about to take its place. From the perspective of the British and American
communities, Hong’s Heavenly Kingdom appeared to represent a viable alternative to the
present dynasty or at the very least, create enough pressure on the Imperial government
that it would have to succumb to the demands of the foreign governments. From the
information previously gathered about the insurgents, many concluded the Taipings
would be more favorable to trade than Xianfeng Emperor. Thomas Meadows remarked

80 Hunt, 42.
their (the Taipings) success’ will allow for ‘complete freedom of commercial action throughout the whole of the Chinese empire.’

Meadows statement was illustrative of the very high hopes some held for the movement. The possibility of obtaining concessions without the use of force appealed to both the merchant class and the diplomats and led to the desire to see the Taipings in power. The Heavenly Army’s military success coupled with less than conciliatory attitude of the Imperial government resulted in a favorable image of Taipings.

In late April 1853, the British Minister to China, Sir George Bonham, accompanied by his esteemed translator Thomas Meadows departed Hong Kong for Nanjing on the armed steamship Hermes, captained by E.G. Fishbourne. Although Bonham was not the first to attempt the journey to the Heavenly Capital, his expedition was the first to arrive safely in Naijing and the first to make actual contact with the Taiping leadership. The objective of Bonham’s mission was to ascertain the intentions of the Taipings toward foreigners, to assure them of British neutrality, and to remind them to respect the terms of the Treaty of 1842. Upon arrival in Nanjing, Bonham requested an interview with the Heavenly King but in order to meet Hong, Bonham he had to ‘yield obedience to the rules of ceremony,’ and ‘obey all commands,’ which, of course, was beneath such a high-ranking British official and he refused to submit to their demands.

The Minister remained on the Hermes for the entire duration of their stay at the Heavenly Capital, and only met with one ranking official, Hong’s brother-in-law, Lai. After his time at Nanjing, Bonham was less than enthusiastic about the rebellion, but he maintained a wait-and-see approach and did not exhibit a preference for either side.

Bonham’s companions on the steamship were much more impressed with the Taipings than the Minster. While Bonham lingered aboard the ship, Thomas Meadows and Captain Fishbourne ventured ashore and obtained interviews with the Wei Changhui, the North King, and Shi Dakai, the Wing King. Their images of the Taipings were overwhelming positive. To Captain Fishbourne, the Taipings he met seemed “clever, decided and determined” but also “civil and good-humored.” Meadows was equally

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81 Gregory, Great Britain and the Taiping, 19.
82 Clarke and Gregory, Western Reports, 42-47.
impressed. From his visit and interactions with various rebels, Meadows concluded the Taipings had a ‘greater readiness’ to ‘assimilate to Western ideas’ and they were likely to be less ‘prejudice’ toward foreigners than the Manchus. On his return to Shanghai, Meadows wrote the first substantial public Western report on the Taipings, which appeared in the North China Herald. Since the North China Herald had the largest readership of any English-language periodical, Meadows’ account of the expedition and his opinions reached a wide audience. As a long-time public servant, Meadows was seen as a reliable source, and the British and American communities had little reason do doubt his favorable portrayals of the Taipings. Meadows’ narrative along with Captain’s Fishbourne’s account contributed to the overall positive image of the Taipings.

The first books about the Taiping Rebellion appeared during this period. They were The Chinese Revolution (1853) by Charles MacFarlane, L’Insurrection en Chine or The History of the Insurrection in China (1853) by Joseph-Marie Callery and Dr. Melchoir Yvan, and The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen and the Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection (1854) by Reverend Theodore Hamberg. Of the three, The Chinese Revolution and The Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen produced the most favorable images of the rebellion. The French Catholics were notoriously opposed to the Taipings because of their perceived Protestant-leanings; therefore the tone of Callery and Yvan’s L’Insurrection was fairly negative. Callery, once a missionary, and afterwards an interpreter to the French embassy in China, and Yvan, physician to the French embassy in China, utilized first-hand knowledge, early Taiping literature and Imperial sources to recount the authors’ account of the causes of the rebellion, its current progress and to present the alleged religious beliefs of the rebels. L’Insurrection exemplified the limited knowledge by Westerners during the early years of the rebellion. Callery and Yvan confuse the identity of Hong Xiuquan with a leader of the Society of Heaven and Earth and assert that a Chinese disciple of a LMS missionary was a spiritual leader of the Taipings. Western writers on the Taiping Rebellion had limited knowledge. Callery and Yvan’s work was the first serious book on the Taiping in a Western language and because of this distinction, information from it was often cited in other books and

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84 Gregory, Great Britain and the Taipings, 19.
85 Clarke and Gregory, Western Reports, 40-41.
periodicals by Westerners. Its popularity resulted in it being translated into several languages including English in 1854.

Charles MacFarlane’s *The Chinese Revolution* presents a pro-Taiping account of the civil war. MacFarlane (1799-1858) was a British traveler and prolific writer who published numerous books including *Japan: an Account, Geographical and Historical* (1854), *A History of British India, from the Earliest English Intercourse to the Present Time* (1854) and *A Memoir of the Duke of Wellington* (1852). MacFarlane’s account of the Taipings Rebellion focused primarily on the origins and motives of the Taipings, and leaned heavily on published British Dispatches, Callery and Yvans’ *The Insurrection in China*, as well as on contemporary accounts, English-language newspapers, Beijing gazettes and interviews. The tone of MacFarlane’s book is decisively anti-Qing, which reflected the political climate. He expressed the same qualified hopes as Thomas Meadows that after the insurgents succeed in ‘putting down the Tartar authority… China will be fully opened to our commerce.’

MacFarlene was overall optimistic about the prospects of the Rebellion.

Perhaps the most influential of the three books was *Visions of Hung-siu-tshuen* authored by Theodore Hamberg, a Swedish missionary affiliated with the Evangelical Missionary Society. Hamberg based his books on interviews he conducted with the Heavenly King’s cousin and future Prime Minster of the Taiping Tianguo, Hong Rengan. Hong Rengan, the reader may remember, was among Hong Xiuquan’s earliest converts, and he accompanied the Heavenly King to Guangzhou to study under Issachar Roberts in 1848. In addition to the interviews, Rengan supplied Hamberg with an essay concerning the origins of the God-worshippers. Since Hamberg’s source was a believer in the Heavenly Kingdom, *Vision’s* was immensely sympathetic to the Taipings. In his introduction to the book, Hamberg, stated that his ‘object is merely to state such facts as have come to his knowledge from a trustworthy source’ and that he has not altered the information given to him and ‘has seldom introduced any criticism of his own.’ Since Hamberg refrained from adding his own commentary to the book, it can be said that *Visions* was the first true insider’s account of the Taiping Rebellion. Rengan’s narrative

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86 MacFarlane, 224-225.
87 Hamberg, 2.
depicts the Taipings as God-fearing Christians whose only goal is to ‘liberate China from the yoke of foreign power and convert it to the worship of the true God.’\textsuperscript{88} This book helped lay the foundation for the favorable interpretation of the movement.

Besides giving insight into the origin of the Rebellion, Hamberg’s work was also significant for its details on the life of enigmatic leader of the Taipings, Hong Xiuquan. Prior to the book’s publication in 1854, little was known of the life or personality of the Heavenly King. Once the Taipings captured Nanjing, Hong isolated himself from the outside world; only his wangs and his eighty-eight wives were allowed the privilege of being his companions. On his expedition to Nanjing, George Bonham requested a meeting with Hong but for reasons already stated, it never materialized. Since no one had every seen Hong, rumors arose in the foreign enclaves questioning if Hong was dead or if he actually existed. Rengan’s narrative dispelled rumors of Hong’s demise and it supplied information on the Heavenly King’s family, his education, and motives. Overall, Rengan presented Hong as a sympathetic character. He was a humble and earnest peasant from a respectable family who found God and devoted his life to spreading the Christian faith throughout China.

The Taipings were active agents in the cultivation of their image. They produced volumes of works on their origin, beliefs, laws, government structure, and religion. These documents offer insight into the character of the movement and of its participants that outside sources could not give. Once installed at the Heavenly Capital, the Taipings became fixated on transmitting their message through writing and publishing.\textsuperscript{89} Since most peasants were illiterate, the Taipings were obviously appealing to the Confucian literati and the foreigners. Whenever a foreigner visited Nanjing or any city in the Heavenly Kingdom, the Taipings furnished their visitors with stacks of their literature. For instance, before departing on the Hermes, their Taiping host presented Bonham and company with twelve of their pamphlets and books. The reports and tracts brought back to Shanghai fascinated the foreign community and caused new waves of excitement about the Taipings.\textsuperscript{90} Among the most intriguing publications were the Taipings Bible, \textit{The Book of Religious Precepts}, which W.H. Medhurst called the ‘decidedly best production

\textsuperscript{88} Hamberg, 57.
\textsuperscript{89} Pruden, 122.
\textsuperscript{90} Spence, 199.
issued by the insurgents, *The Book of Celestial Decree*, a collection of communications from God and Jesus to Hong, and the *Trimetrical Classic*, which detailed the creation of the world.\footnote{Irish University Press Area Studies Series, *British Parliamentary Papers, China*, Vol. 32, *Correspondence, Memorials, Orders in Council, and Other Papers respecting the Taiping Rebellion* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1971), 51.} All twelve tracts were published in the *North China Herald* for the general public to read. The Taipings’ works combined with the political situation in China, favorable eyewitness reports, and three new books on the subject of the rebellion were pivotal in the formulated of the positive images of the Taipings. Among the most common images constructed of the Taipings during this early period were of Chinese Protestants and revolutionaries.

**Section Two: The Chinese Protestants**

The latest news out of Nanjing seemed to verify the previous rumor of a strong Christian presence among the Taipings. To add to the delight of many, accounts from the crew of *Hermes* and the Taipings’ literature suggested that the religion of these Chinese rebels contained elements of Protestantism. Upon hearing of these reports, an image quickly emerged of the Taipings as Chinese Protestants and many hailed it as foreshadowing the conversion of China to Christianity. The British translator Thomas Meadows remarked that the Taipings were ‘Christians of the Protestant form of worship and anti-idolaters of the strictest order’ and he often referred to them as his ‘Christian brothers’.\footnote{“The Rebellion in China,” *The Christian Advocate and Journal* 28 (1853): 37.} An American merchant echoed Meadows sentiment that “the religion and professions of the insurgents are nearest those of Christians of the Protestant form of worship.”\footnote{American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The Marshall Mission, 157.} This image was prevalent in both the British and American expatriate community, and was strongest during the Taipings’ first year of occupation at the Heavenly Capital. The missionary community was the most fervent supporters of this Chinese Protestant image.

For decades, the missionary enterprise in China struggled mightily to gain converts amid a populace deeply entrenched in institutions developed long before Christianity. The opening of five additional treaty ports following the Opium War elicited great hope and excitement among the missionaries, who believed they now had
the proper conditions to reach more souls than ever. However, the anticipated conversion of mass numbers of Chinese to the ‘light of God’ never came to fruition. Instead, the ‘heathen idolaters’ continued to cling tightly to the ‘empty humanism of Confucianism’ and the ‘feebleness of Buddhism.’ The desperation and frustration felt throughout the missionary community opened the door for Hong’s followers to be quickly embraced by this community in need of some type of tangible success. By portraying the Taipings as Chinese Protestants they claimed a much-needed victory not only over paganism and idolatry but over their Catholic rivals as well.

Of the American and British missionaries, Issachar Jacox Roberts was one of the first to embrace and perpetuate this image of the Taipings as Chinese Protestants. Roberts, a Baptist missionary from Tennesee, went to China in 1837 and spent most of the next thirty years there. Three years before the outbreak of the rebellion, the Heavenly King and his cousin Hong Rengan ventured to Guangzhou to study Christianity at Roberts’ Uet-tung church. Hong’s two months at the Uet-tung church was the only formal instruction he received on Christianity. Roberts’ connection to Hong as his spiritual teacher became the driven force behind his almost unyielding support of the Taipings. Even before the fall of Nanjing, Roberts was among the first to portray the Taipings as Chinese Protestants. In a letter to the *Chinese and General Missionary Gleaner* written a month before Hong’s capture of Nanjing, Roberts described his encounter with Hong at Guangzhou. Of Hong, Roberts reports that he ‘studied the scriptures and received instruction, and maintained a blameless deportment’ was extremely desirous of being ‘taught the Christian religion.’ By stressing the Heavenly King’s ‘blameless deportment’ and his devotion to learning the Scriptures, Robert’s provided evidence that Hong, the leader of the movement, was a respectable Christian gentlemen with a strong knowledge of Protestant Christianity learned firsthand from

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95 As mentioned in Chapter One, China had a strong Roman Catholic presence dating from the eighteenth century. The Protestant missions were in constant competition with Catholics for converts. Also, Catholics generally accepted this image of the Taipings as Protestants. The Catholic community developed a very hostile attitude toward these ‘Chinese Protestants.’
96 Pruden, 2.
Roberts, a knowledge that had surely extended to his followers. At the end of his exposition, Roberts pronounced Hong was ‘under the wisdom and guidance of Almighty God’ and the Taiping Rebellion was ‘designed by Him to bring about’ the ‘renovation and salvation of this numerous people.’ Roberts’ also anticipated these Chinese Protestants would be the vehicle by which the ‘salvation’ of Christianity was spread to the ‘pagan’ and ‘idolatries’ population.

Roberts’ initially zeal for and quick recognition of the Taipings as Protestants was due in large part to his need for a personal victory. As with all Protestant missionaries, Roberts’ accomplished little in terms of converting the Chinese masses to Christianity. In addition to his conversion failures, the Tennessean had a tumultuous relationship with his sponsoring missionary board owing to Roberts’ stubbornness and his inability to work productively with others. The Southern Baptist Missionary Board decided to dismiss the embattled Roberts as one of their missionaries. Without the financial support of a sponsoring mission board, it was virtually impossible for missionary to subsist in China. The news that Hong was the leader came at an opportune time after the board reaffirmed their position to dismiss him. To have one of his former pupils in such an important position as leader of a Protestant movement, Roberts’ hoped, would validate his work in China and lead to possible reinstatement. Roberts’ almost obsessive need to project the image of Hong and his followers as Protestants was essential to his survival and, perhaps more importantly, to the restoration of his tarnished legacy.

Besides Hong’s association with I.J. Roberts, the circulation of a Protestant translation of the Bible among the Taipings contributed to the construction of the Chinese Protestant image. Upon departing from Nanjing, Sir George Bonham collected various publications by the rebels to take back with him to Shanghai. Included among these books were the first twenty-eight chapters of the book of Genesis as translated by Dr. Charles Gutzlaff and other missionary tracts likely ‘procured from the late Doctor Gutzlaff’s Union.’ Gutzlaff, a prominent Prussian Protestant missionary associated with the London Missionary Society in China, produced a popular translation of the Bible.

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98 Pruden, 200.
99 *British Parliamentary Papers*, 32.
which subsequently fell into the hands of Hong, mostly likely from his time in Guangzhou. Hong used the Gutzlaff Bible as a source for many of his religious tracts.

News of the Gutzlaff Bible also substantiated a rumor that either Gutzlaff or one of his disciples heavily influenced the religion of the rebels. In Roberts’ letter to the *Chinese and General Missionary Gleaner*, he mentioned that one of “Mr. Gutzlaff’s disciples had joined the rebels.” Later, *The Chinese Revolution* and *History of Insurrection in China* both asserted that a ‘native Protestant disciple of Gutzlaff’ was an active participant in the rebellion and held a ‘high rank, and exercises great authority.’

MacFarlene added he had ‘no doubt’ that ‘Gutzlaff contributed to the movement and to the infusion of the religious element.’ Although Hong studied the Scriptures under Roberts, he was only in Guangzhou for two months, enough time only to receive an elementary understanding of the Christianity. The perceived high level of Protestant knowledge supported the contention that a Chinese Gutzlaff disciple was among the Taipings.

The Taipings’ vigorous opposition to idolatry and their strict code of morals also precipitated the Chinese Protestant image. The earliest Protestant missions identified idol worship as the major antagonist. They spoke disparagingly of the pagan idols and the silly ceremonies which made up a large part of Chinese daily life. The Heavenly Army’s rampant destruction of all temples, its desecration of idols, its rejection of ancestor reverence and filial piety, and its denunciation of idol worship as ‘evil,’ was met with applause by like-minded missionaries. Even before the Taipings were identified as Chinese Protestants, various sources praised their anti-idolatry position. In 1851, the Guangzhou-based American missionary publication, the *Chinese Repository*, reported Hong and his ‘party worship none of the gods of the country, nor pay the least reverence to their images, but clear their temple of all idols.’ The writer of this piece and many others at this time did not place these actions in any type of Christian context. However, this changed once the missionaries received some of the Taipings’ publications. From their literature, it became evident that the Taipings adopted the Ten Commandments as

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100 MacFarlene, 80.
101 MacFarlene, 82.
102 Covell, 46.
their code of behavior. In addition to the original Ten Commandments, Hong added opium/tobacco use, prostitution, gambling, polygamy, lying, selling slaves, and foot-binding to the list of prohibitions. This austere code of conduct impressed the missionaries. The Taipings’ apparent hatred of idolatry and their moral code added to and reinforced the perception held by Protestants of a shared-value system with the Heavenly Kingdom. Reverend George Smith, Bishop of Victoria, at Tianjin, Anglican Primate on the China Coast expressed his belief that ‘the rebel chiefs believe in Protestant Christianity.’ He based his opinion on the Taipings’ declaration ‘that they are commissioned by the Almighty to spread the knowledge of the one true God’ and ‘have every shown a determination to destroy idolatry of every kind.’ The shared values with the Heavenly Kingdom also impressed Reverend W. Gillespie of the LMS who commented the Taipings ‘are men thoroughly earnest. Gamblers, opium smokers and whore-mongers are exterminated. A host united and governed by such rigid rules is a mighty miracle.’ He added the ‘Taipings were Protestant Christians observing the Ten Commandments.’ For Gillespie and Dr. Hopson, the Taipings’ moralistic outlook embodied the values of a proper Protestant.

Not all were ready to anoint them as Chinese Protestants. The opposition to this image came mainly from various British and American diplomats, who were less likely to mingle religion and politics. George Bonham rejected the Protestant nature of the Taipings, and in a dispatch to Lord Aberdeen, the Minister stated the following,

They (the Taipings) have established a new religion, which may be called a spurious relation. The base of this structure is supposed to be founded upon the Old Testament and religious tracts; but they have superadded thereto a tissue of superstition and nonsense.

He not only dismissed them as Protestants but denied all insinuations that the Taipings were Christians. Bonham was less impressed with the religious elements he witnessed at Nanjing than his companions abroad the Hermes. Hong’s account of being ‘taken up to heaven by God’ and his declaration that God chose him as the sovereign of the world especially concerned Bonham and contributed to his denial. However, Bonham’s

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104 MacFarlene, 118.
105 Ssu-yü Teng, The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers: A Comprehensive Survey (Taipei: China Academy, 1982), 175.
106 British Parliamentary Papers, 32.
rejection of the Protestant image should not be misconstrued as him having an overall negative image of the Heavenly Kingdom. The Minister recognized that the Taipings had respectable qualities. However, he could not accept Hong’s seemingly outrageous claim of being God’s chosen one.

On the American side, Humphrey Marshall was equally dismissive of the Chinese Protestants image. The Commissioner, influenced mostly from conversation with George Bonham and translations of Taiping text, drew the conclusion that Hong ’derives his system from the ancient Chinese classics’ and studies and follows ‘Confucius and Mencius.’ He also chided ‘the pseudo sympathy which gathers around the banners of the rebellion because they (Taipings) bear forward the cause of Christ’. Marshall, an agnostic, did not have the same religious background as his colleagues at the American consulate and as result he had less sympathy than other Americans for the Taipings cause. Marshall maintained a negative and hostile attitude toward the Taipings for the duration of his term as commissioner. Marshall and Bonham represented the minority view. The majority of Americans and the British readily embraced the Chinese Protestant image.

Section Three: The Revolutionaries

Whereas the Chinese Protestant image appealed to a wide American and British audience, this period of unprecedented popularity for the Taipings also saw the Americans and British formulated distinctly separate images of the rebels. For example, the Americans constructed an image of the rebels as revolutionaries. In the American narrative, united by a common cause, this motley crew of long-haired rebels, succeeded against all odds against a force more experienced and better equipped. As one missionary observed ‘these revolutionaries’ were ‘fighting to free their country from a foreign yoke.’ These one-time robbers and bandits became revolutionary heroes and patriots fighting against the injustice and cruelty of their foreign overlords.

110 Christian Advocate and Journal 28 (1853): 37.
It is not surprising that the Americans developed such an image of the Taipings, after all, they were presently in a struggle which seemed to parallel the American experience. For many, the Taipings exhibited characteristics similar to those of Americans. Foremost, the Taipings, like the Americans, identified themselves first in religious terms. The Taipings were soldiers for God, fighting in His name, and succeeding because of Him. The Taipings believed God divinely ‘blessed’ their ‘Heavenly Kingdom,’ just as Americans held the belief that their nation was especially favored by Providence.’

Secondly, there was a perception that Hong and his followers were liberal-minded Christians struggling, for individual liberty and free trade against the ‘illiberal, effete, pagan’ Manchus. Matthew Perry, Commodore of the U.S. Navy, saw the civil war as a conflict “between a despotic government and organized revolutionary army gallantly fighting for a more liberal enlightened religious and political position.” Perry’s statement conjured up memories of America’s own struggle for liberalism against the tyrannical British monarchy. Rev. Issachar Roberts also identified the rebellion as a ‘struggle for liberty.’ Those who accepted this notion of the Taipings as liberals based their opinions more on the perceived enlightened ideas of the rebellion such as the equality of women and the meritocracy in the army and the civil service jobs. The overwhelming positive response to the Taipings clouded many of the less favorable aspects of the Taipings. Far from being liberal, Hong allowed no religious freedom, all conquered peoples had to submit to the religion of the Taipings or face death, the form of government was a theocracy as opposed to a democracy, and the Heavenly King and his fellow wangs dispensed justice without a trial. Regardless of the actual realities of the Taiping Rebellion, Americans nevertheless embraced the image of the Taipings as fellow revolutionaries.

Revolutionary imagery flooded the writings of the American expatriates in the months following the capture of Nanjing and it became fixed in the popular consciousness. The terms revolution and revolutionary movement came into vogue when

112 Covell, 84-85.
113 Hunt 36.
describing the Rebellion. When referring to the Taipings, the words revolutionists and revolutionaries were used instead of rebels or insurgents. For instances, in a letter to the Christian Advocate and Journal, a Methodist missionary in Fuzhou referred to the Taiping Rebellion as ‘a great revolutionary movement’ and the Taipings as ‘special revolutionists.’\textsuperscript{115} In a letter to the Secretary of the Navy, J.C. Dobbin, Commodore Perry reported to his superior that the term ‘insurgents’ has fallen out of favor in many circles and ‘they may now be more correctly styled, revolutionists.’\textsuperscript{116} The habit of referring to the Taipings as revolutionaries became so entrenched in the American psyche that even after the rebels fell out of favor, Americans continued to apply the term revolution to their movement.

Initially, the American diplomatic and merchant communities proved to be the strongest proponents of the revolutionary image. During the early 1850s, with only about twenty-five of the approximately two hundred Western business firms, Americans carried about one-third of China’s trade with the West.\textsuperscript{117} With their burgeoning trade, American merchants expected additional concessions from the Chinese Government to ensure their continued success and it was the duty of the American consulate to protect and expand commerce. Both parties had an unrestrained devotion to the expansion of trade and sought to align themselves with whatever party seemed favorable to trade. Clearly, the Qing government as presently constituted offered no real hope for reforming trade, so the Taipings presented an attractive alternative. For diplomats and merchants, the Taiping revolutionaries represented change; a change from the policies of the much maligned Xianfeng Emperor and his court of xenophobic officials. The Taiping revolutionists would lead China into a new era of cooperation with the West where the interests of foreign traders and diplomats would be properly cultivated. The three largest American firms in China, Nye, Perkins & Company, Augustine Heard, and Russell & Company expressed their optimism that the ‘revolutionists are favorably disposed to foreign intercourse’ and under Taiping rule the ‘future of trade’ held ‘great promise.’\textsuperscript{118} The merchant and diplomat image of the Taipings was rooted in self-interest. As long they

\textsuperscript{115} Christian Advocate and Journal, October 20, 1853; 28, 42  
\textsuperscript{116} American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The Marshall Mission, 193  
\textsuperscript{117} Cohen, 12-13.  
deemed the rebellion to be beneficial to trade and the Qing government as a detriment to it, the positive revolutionary image remained strong within these two interest groups.

Again, Humphrey Marshall presented the opposing opinion. Only once in his more than fifty dispatches does he refer to the Taipings as revolutionists and when he used the word it was in a decidedly condescending tone. To Marshall, it was almost blasphemous to compare a movement which he viewed polarizing and tyrannical with the American Revolution. The Taiping rebels, according to the Commissioner, were just as “impotent, ignorant, conceited and superlatively corrupt.” as their Imperial opponents.\(^{119}\) Marshall’s distaste for the Taipings had more to do with the political situation in China, specifically his mistrust of the British government than the actual rebellion. The American Commissioner harbored an intense Anglophobia and gradually came to believe the British were working for the collapse of the Chinese government to further their imperial design.\(^{120}\) Based on what he perceived to be the unconditional support by the British for the Taipings, Marshall reasoned the British were attempting to establish a protectorate in China by extending assistance to the rebels. If the rebels overthrew the ruling party, their British allies stood to reap untold concessions, while the interest of the United States interest would be excluded from this new China. Marshall based his suspicions on a letter supposedly written by the Heavenly King to George Bonham in which Hong allegedly assured the Minister, that if victorious, he would grant commercial concessions to the West. Since Bonham never mentioned this alleged letter to him, Marshall suspected Bonham was withholding information from him for some devious purpose. Marshall concluded “the highest interests of the US are involved in sustaining China” and not with supporting the revolutionaries. He remained one of the few Americans who did not embrace the revolutionary image.

**Section Four: The “Civilized” Chinese**

The British and Americans usually reserved the terms Protestant and revolutionary for those of European ancestry; rarely were these words used to describe the peoples of the ‘orient.’ In the nineteenth century lexicon, these terms implied

\(^{119}\) Hunt, 20.  
\(^{120}\) Cohen, 16.
progress and civilization, both traits of the West. When Europeans compared themselves to ‘Others,’ they emphasized their progressiveness and superior civilization. As the Chinese eschewed change and remained committed to their ‘archaic’ ways, they became the antithesis of Europeans. The Taipings presented a unique challenge to image-formulators of China. Ethnically, they were Chinese, however, their Protestant background and revolutionary ideas were perceived as more European. In representing the Taipings as Protestants and revolutionaries, the American and British formulators of these images had to modify the characteristics of these Chinese rebels in order to make them appear more less ‘Asiatic.’

The British and American expatriates were generally caustic in their opinions about the Chinese people and the Manchu. Of the government, these observers considered the Qing rulers to be backwards, cruel, tyrannical, conceited, incompetent and weak. The military force, as evidenced by their crushing defeats at the hands of the British and the Heavenly Army, was hapless and the leadership incompetent. In his famous general work on China, *The Middle Kingdom*, the American missionary S. Wells Williams, described the Qing government as ‘despotic and defective and founded on wrong principles.’\(^{121}\) Wells continued his critique by deriding the government for its continued adherence to ‘the patriarchal theory that does not make men honorable, truthful, or kind’ and ‘does not place women in their right position nor teaches all classes their obligations to their Maker.’\(^{122}\) Williams’ critique is a damning indictment of the Qing dynasty and was indicative of the general disdain many Europeans felt toward the Imperial government.

The Chinese people received equally harsh assessments. With a sense of cultural and political superiority, the European community represented the inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom as cheats and thieves, rampant adulterers, who were overly lustful and prideful, and lacked all sympathy. In addition, they portrayed as spiritually and physically unclean, cruel, and deceitfully cunning. As one British traveler noted, the Chinese are a ‘lazy,’ ‘stupid,’ lawless race that is ‘filled with the most conceited notions

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122 Wells, 298.
of their own importance and power.\textsuperscript{123} In his study of the American missionary enterprise in China, Murray Rubenstein wrote the following of the nineteenth-century Western image of the Chinese:

\begin{quote}
The Chinese were notorious gamblers, destroying their families with their love of games of chance. They were a lascivious, depraved people who treated their women with contempt. These flaws in the Chinese character, stemmed from the hollow nature of Chinese religion. There was no belief in God, and by Western standards, no morality.\textsuperscript{124}
\end{quote}

The list of virtues of the Chinese was short, the vices long. On the whole, the images of the Chinese were decidedly negative and in stark contrast to the overwhelming positive images of the Taipings.

As Protestant Christians and revolutionaries, the Taipings took on the characteristics of the ‘civilized’ and ‘progressive’ Europeans and less of the ‘barbaric’ and ‘depraved’ Chinese. Everything from the Taipings manners, to their form of government, to their military structure, was perceived to be less ‘Chinese’ in nature. For instance, whereas the Chinese were seen ‘cowardly,’ ‘immoral,’ and ‘thieves’ the Taipings were considered to be’ courageous,’ ‘honest’ and of ‘high morals.’ The Heavenly Army was depicted as ‘disciplined,’ ‘well- organized,’ and ‘fearless’ while the Imperial troops were described as apathetic, lazy and incompetent.

One of the major criticisms levied by West of Chinese society was their ‘barbaric’ and inhumane treatment of women. As one English traveler noted, ‘the females here, like those of most half-civilized or barbarous nations,’ which presumably included China, ‘are kept in the background and are not considered on an equality with their husbands.’\textsuperscript{125}

However, in the Taiping Tianguo, the conditions for women were considered markedly better. While Chinese society denied women all access to an education, the ‘insurgents’ made the ‘education of women’ one of the objectives.\textsuperscript{126} The Taipings’ laws and regulations also prohibited the cruel custom of foot-binding and outlawed female infanticide. The Heavenly Kingdom’s ‘enlightened’ treatment of women seemed to

\textsuperscript{123} Codell, 153. \\
\textsuperscript{124} Rubenstein, 77. \\
\textsuperscript{125} Robert Fortune, Three Years Wanderings, 7-8 in Mackerras, 52. \\
\textsuperscript{126} The Albion, June 18, 1853: 15, 32
mirror that of the more ‘civilized’ West, where women were theoretically treated with ‘dignity’ and ‘respect.’

Perhaps no work illustrated this trend of contrasting the characteristics of the Taipings and Chinese better than E.G. Fishbourne’s book *Impressions of China and the Present Revolution*. From his experiences at Nanjing, Captain Fishbourne concluded that the Taipings were superior to the Chinese in every way. According to Fishbourne, the Taipings were ‘men of their word’ and he identified this characteristic as ‘different from other Chinamen.’ He continued, ‘if they say they will give you twenty blows of a bamboo, they will not stop short at nineteen.’ Of their manners, the Captain wrote the Taipings ‘are most frank in their manner, quite unlike what we are accustomed to in Chinese.’ He was also impressed with “the quiet self-possession and confidence of the leaders’ whom he characterized as ‘quite un-Chinese.’ Fishbourne made comparisons with the Chinese to show that the Taipings were better. By representing the Taipings as innately different from and superior to the Chinese, Fishbourne and other Europeans could more easily justify applying the terms Protestant and revolutionaries to the rebels.

127 Fishbourne, 184
6. Fall from Grace: Negative Images of the Taiping, 1854-1864

The Taipings’ fall from grace was swift and merciless. The popularity and high reputation they once enjoyed in the British and American communities quickly dissipated and were replaced by scornful disdain and blatant disapproval. Except for a brief period between 1860 and 1861, the images produced of the Taipings after 1854 were overwhelming negative. Once in this abyss of public opinion, the Taipings had a difficult time climbing out of it. Their images transformed from sincere Protestant Christians and noble revolutionaries to lawless marauders and blasphemous Mohammedans. The early, nearly unanimous admiration had all but disappeared by late 1854.

The Taipings’ inability to capture Beijing factored into the decline of their popularity. Two months after the Heavenly Army’s victory at Nanjing, Hong deployed one hundred thousand of his troops on a northern expedition to Beijing. If Hong wished to overthrow the Qing dynasty, it was imperative that his forces seize control of the capital. American and British prognosticators expected the Taipings advance to Beijing to follow the general trend of past military engagements in which the Taipings overran the hapless Imperial troops for quick and decisive victory. The sooner the much despised Xienfeng Emperor was deposed and the more conciliatory Hong in power, the better for American and British interests. However, to the surprise of most, the half million Imperial troops defending Beijing repelled the Taiping troops. The Heavenly Army reached as far as Tianjin, seventy miles from Beijing but then was checked by the Qing forces and slowly driven back. The Taiping army never serious threatened the capital again.

The failure of the Taipings’ northern expedition to capture Beijing lowered expectations that the rebels would ultimately prevail.128 Those in the foreign communities who initially praised the movement did so because they believed the Taipings to be the next rulers of China. However, their failure to advance north dampened hopes for a dynastic change.

Additional contacts made in 1854 and 1858 contributed to the disintegration of the positive images of the Taipings. In that year, two diplomatic missions, one American, and the other British, reached the headquarters of the Taipings in Nanjing. The American

128 Pruden, 28.
group, led by the new American Commissioner Robert McLane, and accompanied by Captain Franklin Buchanan, consular official Lewis Carr, Reverend William Culbertson, and Reverend E.C. Bridgeman, arrived in the Heavenly Capital on May 22, 1854, aboard the Susquehanna. The voyage got off to a inauspicious start. As the Susquehanna approached Zhenjiang, a Taiping garrison commander, unfamiliar with the American flag on the vessel, fired at the ship. This action enraged Captain Buchanan, who called the incident ‘heedless and insulting’ and demanded an apology from the commander at the garrison. Tempers were not improved once the vessel landed at Nanjing. The Taiping military leadership refused a request by McLane to meet with Yang, the Eastern King, on the grounds that in the Commissioner’s letter he ‘employed terms used in correspondence between equals,’ and if McLane ever ‘desired to see the eastern king’s golden face…(he) ought to come kneeling.’ McLane had no intentions of kneeling to Yang or submit to ‘proper rule of ceremony,’ so his request to meet Yang remained denied. The trip continued its downward spiral after eight Americans were arrested in Nanjing for entering the city without proper clearance. The arrested members of the party endured a tense interrogation by Taiping authorities before finally being released. The next day the Susquehanna departed the Heavenly Capital.

The images produced by Americans aboard the Susquehanna were not favorable to the Taipings. Charles F. Fahs, associated surgeon in the U.S. Navy and a member of Fishbourne’s crew, remarked that the “people appear to be the dregs of the country, and are devoid of all principle. The majority of them, even the mandarins, are illiterate, and have but little morality or integrity to control them.” The harshest criticism came from Robert McLane, who, before his journey was optimistic about the rebellion. Like Fahs, McLane described the people as being “composed almost exclusively of the ignorant and unenlightened population of the interior.” The Commissioner reserved his sharpest comments for ‘the chief’ and his ‘principal minister of State’, whom he referred to as

130 American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The McLane Mission, 222.
131 American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The McLane Mission, 49.
‘charlatans,’ for having ‘constructed a rude despotism.’ McLane concluded that the Taipings were ‘unworthy of the respect of the civilized world, and perhaps incapable of consolidating civil government beyond the walled cities they captured.’ McLane’s characterization of the Taipings as incapable of good government became a dominant theme in the American and British discourse on the Taipings after 1854. During the height of their popularity in 1853, the Taipings were praised for their organization and the resourcefulness of their government. Now McLane and others portrayed Taipings’ administration as dysfunctional. As an American, McLane was disappointed that the Taiping government, once described by many of his countrymen as a liberal democracy, was in fact a ‘despotic’ theocracy. He decided that nothing beneficial could be gained from a movement more arrogant and less organized than the present dynasty.

Soon after McLane returned to Shanghai, John Bowring, now governor of Hong Kong and Superintendent of British trade, sent out a second British mission to Nanjing led by this time by his son Lewin Bowring, W.H. Medhurst, and Captain Arthur Mellersh. They journeyed in two small vessels, the Rattler and the Styx, and stayed off the coast of Nanjing for ten days, longer than any previous Western visitors. During their visit to the Heavenly Capital, they never met with any Taiping officials and only communicated with the senior leadership through dispatches. Both returned with the same low opinion of the Taipings as McLane. Among their biggest grievances with the Taipings was the Eastern King reference to them in several dispatches as ‘barbarians, the same terminology used by the Qing to describe foreigners. Even after Captain Mellersh reprimanded Yang for ‘his improper language towards us,’ Yang persisted in calling them barbarians. The arrogance of the Eastern King was no better than that of the Xianfeng Emperor. In their final report to Superintendent Bowring, Lewin and Medhurst expressed opinions similar to that of the Americans as to the low quality of the Taipings. They “noticed a total absence of men of age, of education, or of respectability, and even the Eastern King, judging from the style of his ‘Mandate to Captain Mellersh’, must be a

132 American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The McLane Mission, 58 and Clarke and Gregory, Western Reports on the Taiping, 133.
133 Clarke and Gregory, Western Reports on the Taiping, 130.
134 American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The McLane Mission, 240-255.
man of ordinary literary attainments.” As for the religious elements, the two diplomats were extremely disturbed by Yang’s title as Holy Ghost. They considered it ‘revolting and blasphemous.’ This ‘assumption of Divinity by the Eastern King’ caused them to shake ‘any belief we may have had as to the sincerity of the profession of Christianity made by the insurgents.’ Also they found no evidence ‘that any properly organized form of government exists among them.’ Their visit strengthened the swing of foreign opinion against the movement.

From 1854 to 1858 the British and American governments had no contact with the Taipings. It was not until 1858, when James Bruce, Lord Elgin, British Minister Extraordinary, convinced the Imperial government to allow him to embark on an expedition up the Yangzi River, was contact renewed. The official purpose of Elgin’s expedition was to investigate the possibilities of the navigation of the Yangzi River and the commercial prospects of the region; his unofficial mission was to observe the Taipings. On November 8, 1858, Elgin with a convoy of five ships departed Shanghai for Hankou, some six hundred miles inland. Since the Taipings’ controlled a large section of the lower Yangzi Valley, Elgin and his crew had the opportunity to examine the Taipings up close. Lord Elgin’s mission up the Yangzi River produced some of the most damning images of the Taipings.

Elgin’s reports mirrored those of 1854. The two main points that emerged from the Ministers’ report were his “conclusion that the Taiping movement now lacked popular support, and the total absence of commercial activity observed in Taiping territory as compared with Imperial.” Elgin’s fellow passengers on his journey up the Yangzi were far more critical of the Taipings than the Minister Extraordinary. T.F. Wade, Chinese Secretary at Hong Kong and the chief interpreter of the mission, offered his assessment of what he witnessed during the expedition’s visit to Taiping held areas. In his account, Wade described the movement as having degenerated into ‘pure and simple brigandism’ and that the leaders ‘have so far established their incompetence to

135 American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The McLane Mission, 258-259.
136 American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The McLane Mission, 269.
137 American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The McLane Mission, 258.
138 Michael, 132.
139 Gregory, Great Britain and the Taipings, 80.
Wade’s disapproval of the rebel government echoed the earlier opinion of American Commissioner, Robert McLane, who also believed the Taipings lacked sufficient skill in governing. The Secretary believed the country would fall into a state of anarchy if the Taipings succeeded in overthrow the Qing. For Wade, the Taipings offered a worse alternative to the present Chinese government and were not worthy of British support.

The most severe criticism of Hong and his Heavenly Kingdom came from Reverend Alexander Wylie of the LMS. As early as 1854, influenced by reports from McLane and Lewin Bowring, Wylie spoke disparagingly of the Heavenly King and the Eastern King, referring to both as arrogant. Reverend Wylie departed Shanghai with a deep seated prejudice against the Taipings that only intensified after his visit to Nanjing and other rebel strongholds. Wylie was very scathing about the conditions in the Taiping territories. He wrote that ‘from the large and formerly important city of Chin-keang-foo (Zhenjiang) as far as Kewheen (presumably Juijiang) the banks of the river (Yangzi) present a most complete scene of desolation, flourishing cities turned into literal masses of ruins.’ Wylie was despondent over the chaotic situation in the Yangzi Valley and blamed the rebellion for the current turmoil in what he termed as ‘one of the fairest portions of the country.’ Wylie also portrayed the Taipings as plunderers who ‘victimize every man of opulence who comes within their reach.’ Because of their marauding ways ‘there is little of security among the people in the territories under their control.’ Wylie’s overall evaluation of the Rebellion was extremely bleak. From what he observed on the expedition, he concluded that the Taipings were nothing more than ‘lawless’ marauders.

Reverend Wylie’s narrative of his journey along the Yangzi was also significant for his accounts of the religious nature of the Rebellion. Again, Wylie wrote negatively of the religious elements he witnessed in the Taipings’ territory. He condemned the “monstrous doctrine they have adopted of Hung-seu-tseuen being the second son of God, and on par with Jesus.” Of their once revered moral conduct, Wylie pointed out that

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141 S.Y. Teng, 177.
142 Clarke and Gregory, Western Reports, 218-219.
‘opium-smoking, the bane of China, is not entirely suppressed, as some of the officers acknowledged to me that they smoked it’ and ‘tobacco smoking, is yet a very common practice among them.’ The Taiping chiefs also engaged in the ‘despicable’ practice of polygamy. He was aghast to find ancestral halls still intact, implying to him ‘at least toleration, if not the practice, of this deep-rooted from of Chinese worship.’ Missionaries initially praised the Taipings for not engaging in ancestor worship and their high moral values. However, Wylie’s observation contradicted the previous suppositions of the Taipings’ moral conduct and religious values. In addition to the ancestor halls, Wylie also discovered “Mohammedan mosques still standing among the ruins at Chin-keang and Nanking.” As early as 1854, comparisons between the Taipings and Muslims began to appear in various Western sources. In May of 1854, a correspondent for the English-language newspaper The China Mail reported he believed “him (Hong) to be a second Mahomet, using the Scriptures with which he became acquainted in the family of a Missionary, only to impose his own claims upon his followers.”\textsuperscript{143} Later murmurs suggested that Islam some how influenced the Taipings’ movement. The Reverend’s findings of Islamic mosques at two major cities seemed to support the allegation of an Islamic influence on the rebellion. Since the mosques were among the few buildings still intact in both cities, they must be of importance to the inhabitants of those cities. Reverend Wylie’s ended his exposition by declaring that ‘no Christian man will feel justified in sympathising with their cause.’\textsuperscript{144}

Wylie’s narrative substantiated early claims from the expeditions of McLane and Bowring that the Taipings were not genuine Christians. From the pessimistic accounts of these and other travelers, the Taipings rapidly began to loss their strongest base of support, Protestant missionaries. Four months after Lord Elgin’s convoy arrived back in Shanghai, S.W. Williams, a former pro-Taiping missionary, wrote to the New York Observer and Chronicle the following,

Their pretensions to Christianity are of the shallowest description, and they do not possess even a superficial knowledge of its tenets, much less of its practice. They are polygamists, opium-smokers, and the only Bible example they seem to follow is that of the Israelites in the conquest of Canaan.\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{143} The Circular (1854); 66, 262.
\textsuperscript{144} Clarke and Gregory, Western Reports, 222.
\textsuperscript{145} New York Observer and Chronicle; April 14, 1859; 37, 15.
Williams’ spoke of the rebels now with contempt. They began to look less like Christian revolutionaries he once had envisioned and more like traditional Chinese rebels.\textsuperscript{146}

A short revival of Taiping fortunes after the ascension of Hong Rengan to the position of Prime Minister in 1859 briefly renewed missionary enthusiasm for the Heavenly Kingdom. Rengan invited missionaries from all Protestant denominations to the Heavenly Capital to meet with him and he offered them freedom to preach in Taiping territory. In addition, Rengan issued a decree granting, “free toleration to both Protestants and Roman Catholics and called for the opening of eighteen chapels.”\textsuperscript{147} The Reverend Griffith John of the LMS was one of the missionaries to accept Rengan’s offer and he made the trip to Nanjing in 1860. John was very impressed with the Prime Minister and his devotion to correcting Taiping theology. From his time at Nanjing, the Reverend concluded, “Notwithstanding all their errors, which are neither few nor insignificant, I firmly believe that they are the chosen instruments to relieve China from the darkness and thralldom of idolatry.”\textsuperscript{148} However, the renewed goodwill between the missionary community and the Taipings was temporary.

Regardless of the negative images that poured into his residence at Guangzhou, I.J. Roberts, Hong’s former teacher, remained a vocal minority speaking out for the Taiping cause. Roberts insisted the Taipings were sincere, if ill informed, Christians. In 1860, Roberts accepted an invitation by the Prime Minister of the Taiping Tianguo to come to Nanjing and preached the Gospel to the masses. Roberts stayed in the Heavenly Capital for fifteen months before departing on unpleasant terms. Upon returning to Guangzhou, Roberts produced a biting account for the China Mail of the Heavenly King and the rebellion, of which he was now ‘much opposed to.’\textsuperscript{149} Roberts described Hong as ‘violent, bloodthirsty, crazy man,’ who ordered ‘individuals to be put to death for a word without trial.’ Of the government, he believed Hong ‘with his Coolie Kings,’ incapable ‘of organizing a Government as beneficial to the people as the Imperialists.’ Roberts reiterated the opinion of McLane and Elgin that the Taipings were incapable of governing

\textsuperscript{146} Cohen, 39.
\textsuperscript{147} Roberts, 289.
\textsuperscript{149} Extract from the “China mail” of April 10, 1862 in British Parliamentary Papers, 368-369.
the Chinese Empire. As to the religious practices in the Heavenly Kingdom, Roberts deemed it ‘very similar to Mahommedan and very little or none better as to saving souls.’ Roberts’ saw many similarities between the religion of the Taipings and Islam. First, both tolerated polygamy. Second, Hong, like Mohammad, received ‘Divine revelation’. Last, according to Roberts, both Hong and Mohammad used the Scriptures as a means to gain power. Roberts was universally seen as a Taiping apologist and, as Sir Frederick Bruce stated, ‘had every motive for taking the most favourable view possible of the cause.’

His condemnation of the insurgents effectively destroyed the last vestiges of positive images of the Taipings among the missionary community.

The Taiping Rebellion also disrupted commerce, which was of greater concern to most American and British expatriates than their ‘blasphemous’ religion. Since 1854, the primary battleground of the civil war had been the lower Yangzi Valley region. The contending Taiping and Imperialist armies depopulated great areas of this once populous region. As Thomas Blakiston, Captain of Lord Elgin’s vessels noted that along the Yangzi “there is much desolation, ruin, and filth.” More important to the British and the Americans, the trade that once prospered along the Great River all but came to a halt. The lower Yangzi basin was one of China’s main silk and tea producing regions, and the civil war devastated the production of these two commodities. The rebellion also disturbed the complex network of Chinese commercial relations that handled trade with the treaty-port merchants and, at the same time, reduced the Chinese demand for luxury imports. In the export markets, tea and silk prices and supplies were uncertain and irregular.

In addition, the Qing government levied a six percent “war tax” on tea in 1854, which increased to twelve percent in 1855. Initially, the British and Americans wrote off this disruption to trade as a brief inconvenience; the benefits to be gained by the new Taiping Empire would more than compensate for the interruption of trade. However, as the prospects of a Taiping success dimmed, it became clear that the rebellion was actually harming trade. A prolonged war could cause irreparable damage to trade. The failure of

150 British Parliamentary Papers, 368.
151 Thomas Blakiston, Five months on the Yang-tsze with a Narrative of the Exploration of its Upperwaters, and Notices of the Present Rebellion in China (London: John Murray, 1862), 20.
152 Lockwood, 68.
the northern expedition coupled with the disruption to trade resulted in a negative opinion of the Taipings.

The reports from the Susquehanna, the Styx and Rattler, and Lord Elgin’s mission worried the merchants and the diplomats about their trading prospects under the Taipings. From all indications, the Taipings did not place a high of value on trade or commerce. Reverend Culbertson commented that he “saw no shops, and nothing exposed to sale” at Nanjing.\textsuperscript{154} Lewin and Medhurst reported they also “saw no commerce or traffic of any kind.”\textsuperscript{155} Later dispatches from Elgin’s mission did not relieve merchant fears. During his short stay at Nanjing, Elgin witnessed ‘a total absence of commercial life of any kind.’\textsuperscript{156} The perceived lack of commerce at the Heavenly Capital was seen by many as proof that the Taipings were hostile towards trade and by extension hostile towards British and American interests.

Perhaps the number one factor in the decline in the Taipings’ positive image was the changing political climate in China. As previously mentioned, the British and American governments had a long list of grievances against the Qing government. The Treaty of Nanjing was due for revisions in 1854, but the Xianfeng Emperor avoided all efforts at renegotiations. Finally free from the war in the Crimea, the British government now turned their attention back to the problems in the Far East. It became obvious to many in the Foreign Office and at the British consulate that force would be needed to gain concessions from the Qing government. The Arrow incident provided their pretext for war. On October 8, 1856, the Chinese police boarded the Hong Kong-registered shipping vessel Arrow and arrested her Chinese crew (the Captain was British and was not arrested), accusing them of piracy, and then lowered the British flag. After a short stalemate, a combined Anglo-French force seized Guangzhou and Tianjin and forced the Emperor to negotiate a new treaty.\textsuperscript{157} It contained the following provisions:

- the opening of ten new treaty ports, including four inland along the Yangzi River as far as Hankou (subject to the defeat of the Taipings); the establishment of permanent Western diplomatic establishments in Beijing; permission for

\textsuperscript{154} American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The McLane Mission, 240-255, 51.
\textsuperscript{155} American Diplomatic and Public Papers: The McLane Mission, 240-255, 258.
\textsuperscript{156} British Documents on Foreign Affairs, Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print Part I, From the mid-nineteenth century to the First World War. Series E, Asia, 1860-1914, Vol. 18, Lord Elgin’s Missions (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1989), 50.
\textsuperscript{157} The French claimed the execution of a missionary in the interior as their pretext for going to war.
foreigners, including missionaries, to travel throughout China and guaranteed Christians, foreign and native, religious freedom.\textsuperscript{158}

Shortly after the Treaty of Tianjin was signed, a skirmish between the Qing troops and the Anglo-French arose due to the Qing’s lack of compliance over several of the treaty provisions. Another battle resulted in an Anglo-French victory and the destruction of the Emperor’s Summer Palace. In 1860, the warring parties signed the Convention of Beijing, which granted additional concessions to the British and French victors. As a result of a most favored nation clause, the Americans were extended the same concessions as the British and French.

The signing of the Treaty of Tianjin and the Convention of Beijing signaled a new era in the relationship between the Qing and British and American governments. With these concessions in hand, the Taipings had outlived their usefulness to both communities. The primary concern of British and American policy in China after the war became the full implementation and enjoyment of those new gains.\textsuperscript{159} One of the provisions of the treaty was the opening of four treaty ports along the Yangzi River and the right of all merchants to trade upon the ‘Great River.’ Since the central provinces through which the Yangzi flows were under Taiping domain, full access to the river was conditional upon the restoration of peace.\textsuperscript{160} Because the Taiping Rebellion hindered their access to the Yangzi, the British and American diplomats withdrew any support they may have had for the Taipings. The sooner the rebellion ended the better for their trading prospects in the rich Yangzi Valley.

For the British and the Americans, the stability of China became a priority. The British had two reasons for wanting stability. First, the Indian Mutiny of 1857 confirmed that it was in the best interest of Great Britain not to engage in another full-scale colonial enterprise. If the Rebellion continued its course, many in the British Foreign Office believed, China would fall into a state of anarchy. If that occurred, Great Britain might be forced to govern the country herself in order to protect trade. Second, Great Britain and Russia were currently engaged in what historians now refer to as the Great Game. If

\textsuperscript{158} Waley-Cohen, 164.
\textsuperscript{159} Gregory, 67.
the Qing government collapsed and the country partitioned, British strategists feared, only Russia would be in a position to benefit from it because of its proximity to China.\textsuperscript{161} China had already proven to be easy prey for Russian expansions. While the Qing were preoccupied with the \textit{Arrow War}, the Russians grabbed Amur-Ussuri territory on China’s northern border. The Americans also desired a stable China for it was feared if China collapsed and Great Britain and Russia partitioned China, American interests would be excluded.

From the eyewitness accounts, it appeared that the Taipings had no concept of organized government. Consul Medhurst summed up the general British attitude toward the rebels’ government:

The Taipings afford us perhaps even less encouragement to look for peace and security…All our experience of their domination hitherto proves their utter want of that administrative ability, and that popular confidence, which can alone make China peaceful, and render trading relations with its people possible.\textsuperscript{162}

The British and American consulates desired stability and it became abundantly clear that the present Qing government offered best hope for this stability. In the years after the signing of the Convention of Beijing, the Qing government underwent a radical transformation. The notorious xenophobic Xianfeng Emperor died in 1861 and his five-year-old son, the Tongzhi Emperor replaced him. Being too young to administer the country, the regency of the Tongzhi Emperor assumed controlled over affairs of the state. The Emperor’s regency, his mother, Cixi, the Empress Dowager Ci’an and his uncle, Prince Gong embarked on new policies of conciliation and treaty adherence. Among the new institutions created by the regency was the Zongli Yamen, China’s first western style foreign office. Foreigners now had place to formally address their grievances. With a more Western-friendly government in place at Beijing, the British and Americans concluded the Taipings had to be defeated in order to reestablish the Qing’s authority. Both governments lent resources and logistical support to the Qing troops and the British commissioned Charles ‘Chinese’ Gordon to lead the ‘Ever Victorious Army’ against Taiping forces. For all effective purpose, the Taipings lost all support among the British and American diplomats.

\textsuperscript{161} Hevia, 24.
\textsuperscript{162} \textit{British Parliamentary Papers}, 248.
7. Conclusion

The flattering images of the Taipings predominant in the years 1853 to 1854 had all but disappeared by the closing stages of the Taiping Rebellion. The decline in the popular images of the Taipings in the years after 1854 was not solely confined to the British and American communities. Karl Marx, once a Taiping enthusiast, became disillusioned with the rebellion after it failed to bring his predicted global uprising. In his later opinions, Marx no longer referred to the Taiping Rebellion as a great socialist revolution but as a tyrannical force weakening China to a point where it was forced to rely on capitalist nations such as Great Britain for its survival. Marx’s reversal of opinion on the Taipings illustrated that the various image-formulators of Great Britain and the United States were not the sole holders of negative images of the Taipings. By the end of the rebellion, for a variety of reasons, depending on a wide range of factors including politics, religion, personal experience, national interests, etc., the majority of the Western world held similar images of the Chinese rebels.

The various interests groups in the British and American communities did not revise their negative opinions of the Taipings after the conclusion of the rebellion. On the contrary, the negative images continued to prevail well into the twentieth century. Twenty years after the fall of Nanjing, Samuel Mossman editor of the *North China Herald*, presented his recollection of the rebellion. He wrote,

> At first the intentions of the rebels (after taking Ningpo) were apparently of a peaceful character, and their headmen issued notices in Chinese, making Ningpo a free port for three months; and inviting the native traders to resume their occupations. But this was all a sham to cover their warlike operations. Instead of legitimate trade being restored, a contraband traffic in munitions of war grew up, demoralizing to foreign commerce, and prolonging the desolating insurrection. Instead of peaceful industry being revived in the city, all artisans had been driven from it excepting workers in arms and ammunition, while the only semblance of a government was that of a rude military despotism.163

Again the themes so prominent in the later half of the rebellion continued to exist after the war’s conclusion. As we have seen in the *Fall from Grace* chapter, the Taipings were heavily criticized for their destructive nature, being detrimental to trade, and their lack of efficient government. Mossman’s quote is reminiscent of the criticism levied at

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the Taipings decades earlier. He condemned the Taipings for damaging the China trade and their ‘warlike’ character. Of their government, Mossman viewed it as a ‘military despotism’ incapable of properly cultivated what he termed ‘peaceful industry.’ The bleak picture painted by Mossman was consistent with the type of demonization of the Taipings that occurred in the aftermath of the rebellion. Although this demonization would subside in the first half of the twentieth century, the negative portrayal of Taipings will again resurface in the West, albeit to a lesser degree, during the Cold War as Chairman Mao, proclaimed himself the modern-day Hong Xiuquan and the Communist Party as his Heavenly Army.
8. Pictures and Maps

The Heavenly King, Hong Xiuquan

The Taiping Royal Seal
Zeng Guofan, the leader of the Hunan Braves, the army largely credited with defeating the Taipings.

“Chinese” Charles Gordon
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