

#Reach for the Stars

YTUMUN 2025

HCC STUDY GUIDE

Agenda Item:
Taiping Rebellion

Board Members

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YTUMUN



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1. Letter from the Secretary-General



2. Letter from the Co-Heads of Crisis

Distinguished Delegates,

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to the 2025 edition of the Yildiz Technical University Model United Nations Conference (YTUMUN2025), where we will be hosting you in the two crisis committees of HCC: The Taiping Rebellion and JCC: Gorbachev's Perestroika. We are your Co-Heads of Crisis, Eylül Ece Pazarözyurt and Ege Kaval, the individuals who will primarily be focusing on making both committees proceed in a fashion that both entertains and educates you.

Over the course of three days, we look forward to witnessing your intense debates, spanning from freeing the Chinese from the tyranny of the Qing Dynasty while following your holy leader, Hong Xiuquan, all the way to one cabinet attempting to bring the Soviet Union to the New Age, while the other side believes the motherland doesn't need to change to succeed. Our primary objective is to make these simulations feel as immersive and enjoyable as possible, while also giving you insight into both of these historical moments.

Attached to this letter is a study guide prepared to support your initial research and preparation for your respective committee. We would like to suggest that you go beyond the guide to both ensure your readiness for the proceedings and to broaden your horizons.

Before concluding our letter, we would like to extend our sincere thanks to every member of our Executive and Organizational Team for their tireless efforts in preparing the framework for these committees to become a reality.

If you have any questions or need assistance in regards to the committees, please don't hesitate to contact us. We are excited to see your diplomatic skills in action during the conference.

Best Regards,

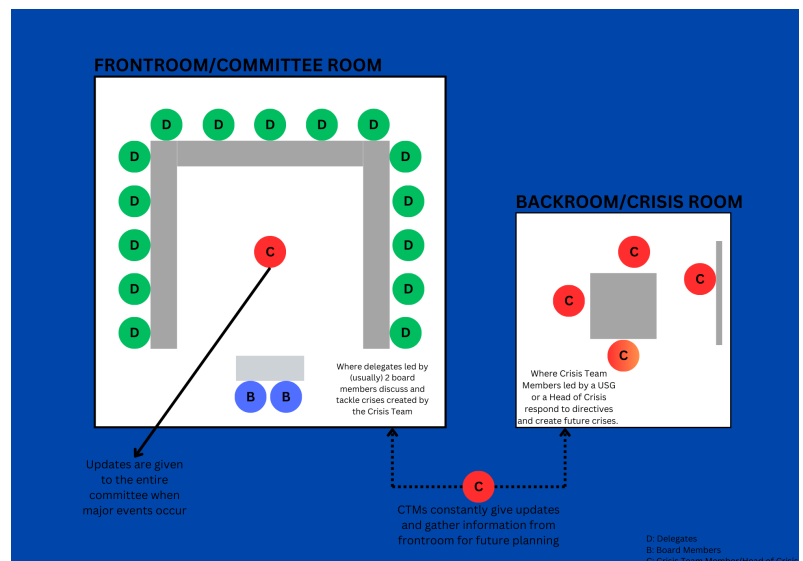
Co-Heads of Crisis YTUMUN25



3. Introduction to the Committee

Those of you who were at last year's edition of YTUMUN24 might remember that the topic of the Historical Crisis Committee (HCC) was early Edo-period Japan. The main theme of the committee was a simulation of the Tokugawa Shogunate and how, in the early 1600s, Japan's fear of Christianity spreading and corrupting ideologies on the mainland could be addressed. Within the proceedings, the Empress at the time was killed by one of her Christian servants, the Shinabara Rebellion, led by Masuda Shiro Tokisada (Geronimo), took place and was suppressed by the leadership of Sho Ho, the King of Ryukyu¹, the committee decided, with all of these developments in mind, to shut the borders of Japan and adopt the Sakoku (chained country) policy. This little bit of background is shared with you because within the final update being given, the decision that was made led to Japan thriving with the threat of Christianity spreading being repelled by the adopted policy. Now with that context in mind, this year we will be simulating what actually happens when Christianity spreads among the populace of an Asian country: the Taiping Rebellion.

Within this study guide, there will be historical insight on what led to the Rebellion that was led by a man named Hong Xiuqiong, a self-proclaimed son of god and brother of Jesus Christ, what the conditions of the Qing Dynasty was at the time, how this seemingly religious Rebellion was actually believed to be a revolutionary movement among the peasant class, and foreign influences that shaped the proceedings of this movement. This document will include all of the aforementioned information and much more, all aiming to get you ready for the proceedings ahead. Before delving into the historical aspects that will shape this committee, this introduction will provide some key pointers and helpful tips on the



¹ The delegate of Sho Ho will return in YTUMUN25 as one of the Co-Head of Crisis



nature of this cabinet, including an overview of crisis committees.

A crisis committee is a dynamic, simulation-based, usually historical event recreation, where delegates are expected to tackle issues in a rapid and direct fashion. This particular committee will be an HCC, meaning there will be a singular cabinet, which will be the main active members of the Taiping Revolution, and the Crisis Team, who will be performing as your historical recreation experts. Once the committee is underway, delegates are expected to take action on the crises, which are realistic scenarios given by the crisis team, with directives. Directives are written documents sent by members of the committee to the Crisis Team for evaluation and response. The delegates' written documents will be evaluated by this team, and the results and consequences of the actions taken will be relayed to the committee in the form of updates. These updates are what will shape the proceedings, as they will inform you on how you will be rewriting Chinese history, for better or for worse. A more effective workshop on directives and crisis committees will be given to you within the first session in the form of a workshop, but we hope that this short summary will help you understand what it is you will be doing within the cabinet.

As for the historical context of the committee, as mentioned multiple times before, we will be simulating the members of the Taiping Rebellion. The event that transpired just around the middle of the 19th century in China is thought to be the start of modern Chinese history. Although the history books have written it as a rebellion, it is nowadays conceived to be the revolution that China needed at the time to stray away from its imperial roots. The end of the



imperial reign that lasted more than 2 centuries under the Qing Empire, historically came to an end in the hands of the Revolution of 1911; however, in the period of crises that transpired over the years, the Taiping Rebellion contained the roots of the revolution in the form of beliefs it propagated and the organization it established. Elements so different and unknown to China's tradition



that they indicate to us in retrospect the first internal manifestation of the effect of an outer and inner crisis in Chinese traditional history² (Michael, 2020). The actual name given to the rebellious movement by its main leaders was T'aip'ing T'ien-kuo, which translates "The Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace," and had a different meaning of peace: the everlasting fulfillment of God's will on earth, and of justice and equality for all³. What started off seemingly as a Christian movement gathered many members under it as it was a means to escape the tyranny of the Qing Dynasty, and that is what this revolution aimed to do: to free the people of their imperial chains.

4. Historical Background

4.1. The Qing Dynasty

4.1.1. The Ming-Qing Transition

In the early 1600s, China was ruled by the Ming Dynasty, an imperial dynasty ruled by the Han people, the ethnic majority in China at the time. Their rise to power had occurred all the way back in 1368, when they themselves overthrew the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty, which had been discriminating against the Han people. Uprisings led by a group known as the Red Turbans in 1351 started the first cracks in the Yuan Dynasty, which eventually led to the Ming Dynasty taking over. The Qing victory over the Ming, however, wasn't just opportunistic like its predecessors, but also strategic. Adopting Ming administrative frameworks while exploiting the Dynasty's collapse was precisely how the Qing Dynasty managed to topple the Ming after their reign of more than 250 years. The long and harsh reign of the Ming Dynasty had brought contradictions that had accumulated over their period in charge: a high concentration of ownership of the land, the corruption that had been spreading in governing institutions, deepening social troubles, and the painful way of life for citizens in the early 17th century had brought the Ming to the brink of destruction⁴(Dai, 2011). Feudal landlords had control of almost the entirety of the farmland of the country, and this led to the peasant class being forced into paying an excessively large variety of taxes, which were increased within the year if the peasants

² Franz Michael, *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents, Volume 1: History*, in collaboration with Chung-li Chang (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1963), p. 3

³ Lo, *Shih-kang*, p. 52-53

⁴ Dai Yi, *A Concise History of the Qing Dynasty, Volume 1*, trans. Lan Fangfang, Liu Bingxin, and Liu Hui (Hong Kong: Enrich Professional Publishing, 2011), p. 8



actually managed to pay them off. These burdens laid upon the people, coupled with famine and natural disasters, weakened the dynasty's legitimacy.

Natural disasters like floods, drought, locusts, and hail occurred all over the country, with the Shaanxi and Henan provinces specifically falling victim to the Chongzhen drought of 1628 and people within the region had to climb up mountains to gather wild grass for food. Once that ran out they had to resort to eating tree bark, and after that, they had to fall as low as to eat small

stones to stay alive. It was even found out that people living outside of the major cities had resorted to kidnapping adults and children, and to cannibalism. All of this caused farmers from numerous provinces to start rebelling against the exploitative regime, with leaders like Gao Yingxiang, Zhang Xianzhong, and Li Zecheng emerging to lead the charge (Dai,2011).⁵ These small groups of fragmented rebel forces banded together into formidable armies and, with the promises of tax relief and land redistribution, managed to advance all the way to Beijing in 1642.

These small rebellions were dismissed as actual threats by the Ming since they thought their armies could repel such forces, and they did to an extent, but the fall of Beijing forced the dynasty's

forces to retreat northeast. Ming general Wu Sangui had fled to this side of the country and was attempting to recruit individuals to his counterrevolutionary cause when he was approached by the Manchus, forces that had already been rising against the dynasty for decades, and knew it



⁵ Pp. 12-13



was their time to strike. Rooted in Jurchen* traditions and empowered by their effective leadership, they seized the opportunity on the already busy Ming decline to consolidate themselves as the successors to a collapsing empire.⁶ General Wu, disgruntled and with no other options remaining, was forced to side with the Manchus and together led the offensive to retake Beijing from Li Zicheng. The primary reason for this alliance was that after the peasant army took Beijing, the Chongzhen Emperor had committed suicide, leaving the Ming dynasty without a legitimate figure of power. Although the peasant army was beside itself after the takeover of Beijing, Li and his commanders lacked the necessary administrative structure and strategies to secure the entirety of China. Using this to their advantage, the Manchus took over Beijing and then the majority of China to establish themselves as the Qing Dynasty.

This historical transition was not just a simple dynastic replacement, but a dramatic transformation of Chinese society and governance. It was proof that the peasants, if provoked enough, would turn on their feudal lords and demonstrate the power of the people when united. The new ruling class of Qing managed to balance the feudal system and control the country for two and a half centuries; however, maintaining this balance would prove to be difficult for such a long period of time with the added threat of rising international contradictions and, of course, external pressures from the West.

4.1.2. Inner Struggles of a New Dynasty-Troubles of Unification

China, being the vast multi-ethnic country that it is, comprised of many different people and of many different origins. The dynasties that ruled over the country varied in nature as the ruling ethnicity changed every time: from the Mongol-led Yuan Dynasty to the Han-led Ming Dynasty, and from them to the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty. The Manchu originated from Jian Zhou Jurchen (an ancient nationality in China) and were always the ethnic majority of Northern China. During the Ming Dynasty, the Jurchen were separated into three major groups: the Jian Zhou Jurchens, the Hai Xi Jurchens, and the “savage or wild Jurchens”, based on their geographic distribution and economic development(Dai,2011)⁷ This separation was further

⁶ Pp. 14-15

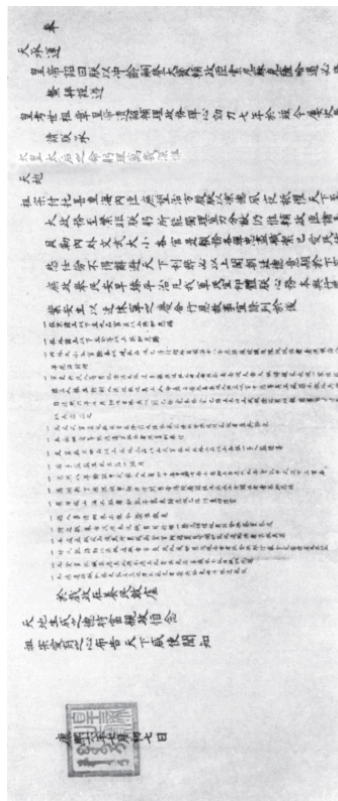
⁷ P.p. 29-30

*Jurchen: East-Asian Tungusic speaking culturally diverse people later named Manchus in 1635. Originally a semi-nomadic, agriculture focused and leadership lacking tribal people that during the Ming-Qing transition were somewhat united to tackle the Ming.



fueled by the savage Jurchen, who were constantly attacking the other two tribes in an attempt to impose superiority over them. The Ming were eager to let the troubles brewing between these tribes resolve themselves; if the tribes were to kill each other within their own endeavors, they wouldn't impose a threat to the Ming Dynasty. The tribes were forced to be further separated from each other in the early years of the Ming; however, this didn't fully turn out the way the Ming wanted.

The tribes were at war with each other, true; however, rather than collapsing into complete fragmentation, this conflict created the grounds for understanding that if the Jurchen were to consolidate their power, they had to be united under a single, dominant leadership. The Jian Zhou Jurchens began a process of political stabilization, reorganizing militarily to demonstrate their power and to overcome rival Jurchen tribes. Manchuria was stabilized with this, and the other tribes of the region became aware that proper, sustained expansion was only possible if they followed the Jian Zhou (Dai,2011)⁸.



⁸ Dai Yi, *A Concise History of the Qing Dynasty, Volume 2*, trans. Lan Fangfang, Liu Bingxin, and Liu Hui (Hong Kong: Enrich Professional Publishing), 2011, pg. 2-8



As the Manchu leadership slowly but surely unified the Jurchen groups, they found the improvements their newfound order brought and adopted institutions and practices that surpassed their usual tribal governance. Among these evolving policies were an administrative hierarchy and loyalty systems, which enabled an effective way for resource and manpower mobilization. These practices helped them expand their authority with great efficiency, undermining what little authority the Ming had left⁹. So with no realistic way of resisting this expansion, the Ming couldn't stop the expansion of the Manchu, and China started entering a new era in its entirety.

Even though the Qing wanted to abolish every last remnant of the Ming Dynasty, some of the governing aspects they inherited proved to be rather useful. The Confucian state¹⁰ ideology and taxation practices were the most vital, with the decision to keep these policies allowing the new dynasty to maintain continuity while reducing resistance from other factions throughout the country. There were concerns among the Manchu on these aspects, as some higher-ups feared they could eventually erode their distinct identity¹¹. This early Qing state had to balance its adaptation to becoming the ruling class and preserving its culture; integrating itself into Chinese political, and safeguarding the Manchu, something that was done by the usage of the banner system and ethnic distinctions within both the military and court.

After years of corrupt leadership, large areas of the land were economically distraught, with massive groups of the population being displaced due to natural disasters, and local resistance remaining after years of war. Achieving unity was to be done not only through military suppression of what little opposition remained, but also through the restoration of proper agricultural production and bringing stability to taxation. This process took the Manchu over 100 years, but by the late seventeenth century, the Qing had largely succeeded in establishing dominance over China, presenting themselves as the legitimate rulers of the empire. Unity was seemingly achieved, but was quite fragile due to the Manchus' own style of centralized, feudal system, leaving the people not saved from the Ming's tyranny, rather under new management. These unresolved tensions would eventually come to haunt them in the middle of the nineteenth century.

⁹ pp. 8-16

¹⁰ State ideology which is shaped by Confucian moral philosophy, prioritizing moral rule, social hierarchy, and governance through educated, merited officials.

¹¹ Yi, Volume 2, pg,20-23



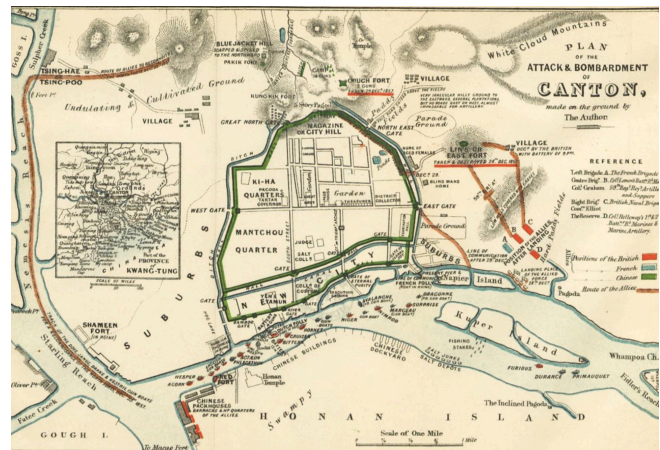
4.2. The Opium War

The first Opium War, fought from 1839 to 1842, stemmed from two primary causes, the first of which was the trade imbalance between Britain and China and China's ban on opium. China had been wary of outsiders, and under Emperor Qianlong, it dismissed British requests to open trade. The British, licking their wounds from economic losses in North America and India, wanted to utilize the Chinese market to make up for losses and cover debts incurred by the East India Company, which had fought costly wars in India.

Britain's East Asian trade was concentrated in India and would pass from there to China through what is now Indonesia. The East India Company sought out an opportunity to make up losses and gain a foothold in the Chinese market problem being the Canton system. What was the Canton system? “In 1757, the Emperor of the Qing dynasty issued a Decree that the city of Canton (Guangzhou) was to be the only city in China open to trade with foreigners” (Hayes, n.d.)¹²

This posed both a problem and an opportunity for the British; they didn't just want but felt they needed Chinese tea, and so greater access to China's markets had to be found. The limits imposed on imports by the Chinese had limited access to silk tea and other goods and this would anger merchants, leading to piracy, and the British would seek to negotiate an end to the Canton system, but even with the tribute given to the Emperor, the Canton system would hold.

The British had grown averse to trading bullion and other currencies for Chinese goods and so they pounced on the opportunity to “smuggle” opium into China via the Indian black market. “A solution to the problems caused by the expenditure of hard money was the *papaver somniferum*, or the opium poppy, which could be grown and processed in India and traded and sold in China, forcing the Chinese to pay for opium in silver and reversing the previous practice”(Larson 2023)¹³



¹² Larson, E (2023) First Opium war, EBSCO research starters [First Opium War | Research Starters | EBSCO Research](#)

¹³ Haynes, J. P. (2025) The Opium Wars in China. Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada [The Opium Wars in China | Asia Pacific Curriculum](#)



Initially, the East India Company had a monopoly on the drug; however, around 1834, the company would lose its stranglehold on the market. It should be noted that the Empire had tried to ban opium in the 1720s and later on, during the mass opium trade stated previously during the 1830s, another ban would be enforced.

In under 30 years, from 1810 to 1838, opium imports to China via proxies in India (where the poppy required for opium was grown) would surge from 4,500 chests to well over 40,000 (Haynes, n.d.)¹⁴. This would help solve Britain's currency problem

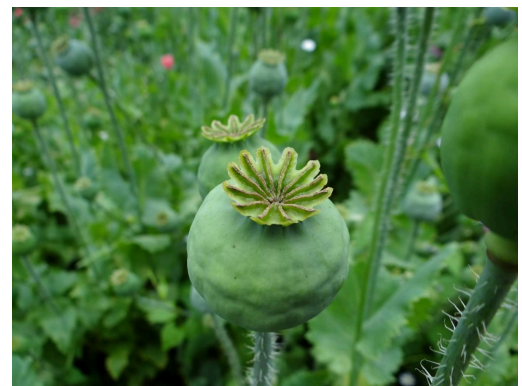


and its tea problem in one fell swoop. However, the Chinese grew upset at Britain's disregard for Chinese law, and the Emperor would attempt to bring an end to the illicit trade by enforcing the ban.

And so Emperor Daoguang would send an enforcer to bring an end to the trade in 1838, and by March of 1839, Lin Zexu would arrive to crush the problem. (Larson, 2023)

When he arrived in Canton, he moved quickly to shut down opium dens and arrest addicts in the process, seizing around 50,000 pounds of opium and arresting 1600 people. (Larson, 2023)¹⁵

Hayes(2025) explains that on top of this, he would go after merchants and smugglers offering them tea in exchange for their stores of opium to keep it off the market. The British merchants would refuse Lin's offer, resulting in their quarantine for 6 weeks. At that point, they would cave in to his demands, "handing over 2.6 million pounds of opium" and going after stores on British vessels, much to their protest, they would argue that they were indeed in international waters. Lin countered this argument by stating that they were anchoring on a Chinese



¹⁴ Haynes, J. P. (2025) The Opium Wars in China. Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada [The Opium Wars in China | Asia Pacific Curriculum](#)

¹⁵ Larson, E (2023) First Opium war, EBSCO research starters [First Opium War | Research Starters | EBSCO Research](#)



island.¹⁶ Here, it is important to note what opium is and why Chinese authorities felt the need to crack down on it.

Opium is an addictive drug taken from the bulb of a poppy flower, and the high it grants is similar to that of heroin. It dries up the mouth, nose and triggers constipation in your bowels, and like any other addictive substance, triggers dependency, forcing you to rely on it to function, so to speak. (DEA, 2024) ¹⁷

Returning to the crackdown enforced by Lin, Zexu's enforcement would greatly anger Western traders, sparking debates about free trade, and Captain Charles Elliot would offer these traders compensation in exchange for their cooperation (Extra History, 2016). The British government refused.

The decay of China-Britain relations at the time was worsened by a murder committed by British sailors on Chinese soil and though Captain Elliott would compensate the family of the victim and have the men involved sentenced to hard labor Lin was immensely angry about the whole ordeal, and to ensure the British could not violate China's law he prevented rations from making their way to British sailors and with the assistance of the Portuguese kicked them out of Canton, ultimately resulting in the British force moving civilians to Hong Kong.



By 1839, both sides viewed the other as unreasonable. British officials believed that China was obstructing free and legitimate trade, and the Qing dynasty believed that Britain was

¹⁶ Image source [Free Images : field, lawn, meadow, flower, green, produce, vegetable, botany, garden, seed pod, flora, wildflower, capsule, toxic, thistle, drug, flowering plant, daisy family, heroin, opium poppy, poppy seed pod, papaver somniferum, morphine, alkaloid, land plant 4000x3009 - - 595275 - Free stock photos - PxHere](#)

¹⁷ DEA United States Drug Enforcement Administration [Opium](#)



clearly and deliberately violating Chinese law. Neither side was willing to cave in to compromise, and war loomed. The British fleet was best in class, and with the Industrial Revolution in full swing by this point, warships had begun to be equipped with steam engines and far more modern cannons than what the Qing fleet could muster; even the quality of sailors was at a mismatch.

The Qing empire's troops were poorly disciplined opium addicts, but were decently fortified with a small fleet present in the region. The British holed up in Hong Kong were at this point facing a food crisis, and so Captain Elliot sent a request for food, which was ignored and so he sent a convoy to the mainland to trade for it, resulting in the Qing fleet firing upon the vessels. (Extra History; 2016)¹⁸ This first exchange would bring tensions to a boiling point and lay the groundwork for the Chinese defeat at Canton.¹⁹ On March 18th, 1841, a British squadron would arrive and push into Canton's river defences, and with their commissioner not yet in the city, Qing forces were fragmented and ultimately broken. (Wikipedia contributors, 2025)²⁰ The British would ultimately raise their flag high over the city.

4.3. China After the War

The Treaty of Nanjing in 1842 ended the first opium war, and the Qing dynasty was forced to make vast concessions to the British Empire, the most important would be the cession of Hong Kong, which has had ongoing ramifications for China even post-reunion almost 200 years later, and the opening of several ports to British merchants.²¹

¹⁸ Extra History (2016) <https://youtu.be/jAjUqwauf-A?si=WHhldDzF5X-Z6tHo>

¹⁹ Image source [The Opium Wars that devastated China](#)

²⁰ Wikipedia contributors. (2025) . Battle of Canton (March 1841) [Battle of Canton \(March 1841\) - Wikipedia](#)

²¹ [MIT Visualizing Cultures](#)



Even tariff autonomy was lost, effectively killing domestic price control on foreign goods. Lasaffer, R. (2025)²² also states that the Qing owed upwards of \$15 million and had to take full legal responsibility for the war. Even worse for China as a whole, the 1843 Treaty of the Bogue sets the precedent for British immunity to Chinese law. (USC, US-China Institute, 1901)²³. These treaties led the Qing dynasty to be exploited by foreign powers, weakening the dynasty to the point where, later on in the century, Japan would aggressively expand to avoid similar kinds of exploitation by Western powers, to China's further dismay. In fact, China would be in a horrific position because of the Opium Wars and Western exploitation, which led to the Chinese Communist Party labeling the entire time period from 1839 to 1949 “the Chinese century of humiliation.” All of these factors led to this very bitter feeling towards foreigners and general instability within even provincial-level governance.

With the loss of the war and such unfavorable terms being leveled at China, poverty within the nation would rise, and it could be said that the Emperor's authority itself was in question.

The stage was set for rebellion.

²² Lasaffer, R (2025) Nanjing(1842): Unequal Treaties and the Right to War [Oxford Public International Law: Nanjing \(1842\): Unequal Treaties and the Right to War](#)

²³ USC. US China Institute.(1901) Treaty of Nanjing(Nanking)1842 <https://china.usc.edu/node/20462>



4.4. Foreign Interests

Great Britain, being the premier global power of the time and the cause of the opium wars, Britain's interests are relatively simple interests to lay out. The loss of the 13 colonies in the Americas and the costly Napoleonic Wars helped push Britain's empire ever eastward in search of new cash flow, and its ongoing great game with the Russian Empire in Central Asia meant that Britain had a vested strategic interest in China. Unlike some of her competitors, she had the Navy necessary to properly extend that Far East.

See, Chinese tea and silk were hot commodities back home, and as mentioned previously, they felt the need to stop the proverbial cash sink that was the Chinese economy. This led to the First Opium War, where the British had the drug to get gold and silver out of the Chinese economy and back into the British economy.

American Interests in China walked a very similar line to that of the British; Silk Tea furniture and the Americans would export furs and other goods. It should also be noted that during the American period of Manifest Destiny, thousands of Chinese immigrants came to the country to join in on the California Gold Rush and help establish the rail system that would connect the far West of the United States to its East.

It is also important to note that among the many different merchants smuggling opium into China both before and during the war, American sailors had a notable presence.

However, according to the United States Office of the Historian, after the defeat of China during the first opium war, the United States signed an agreement that replicated many of the points of the Nanjing Treaty.

The Treaty of Wangxia would differ from the British Treaty regarding Christian missionaries, where the British understood it was still a touchy subject with the Chinese Empire the Americans pushed for their presence in China and got the Qing dynasty to allow these missionaries to be tutored. It was still similar to the British agreement in the sense that Americans, like their British counterparts, were outside of the traditional norms of Chinese law,



except for opium related Charges. (United States Office of The Historian, N.D)²⁴, and the access for ports all across China instead of being limited to Canton like in years previous.

5. The Taiping Rebellion

The failure of the Qing Dynasty in the Opium War showed the people of the empire that the renowned militarily invincible Qing forces were not so mighty after all. The forces faced were some of the finest in the world at the time, of course; however, the Qing Forces' self-proclaimed holy invincibility was evidently not true. The White Lotus Rebellion, which took place in 1794 and was suppressed in 10 years' time, also showed the true fragility of the forces as well. The Empire did not accept these losses gracefully; despite the challenges of unequal treaties, the peak of opium addiction, territorial losses, and other issues, the Qing continued to raise taxation rates, which pushed millions further into poverty (Hourly History, 2020).²⁵

At the same time, a young man named Hong Xiuquan, who had a dream of being part of the imperial system, was studying for the imperial exams. These exams were open to the entirety of the nation, and only the select few who scored the highest were allowed entry into the system.



Hong scored exceptionally high on all three of his imperial exams, but corruption ran deep in the system, and he simply couldn't break through to the 0.001 percentile. This time, his body responded to the repeated failure, leaving him bedridden for numerous days. He ended up waking up eventually but kept going on and on about visions that he had, which kept going for 6 more weeks. Five years later, in 1843, he took the imperial exam for the fourth

time, and Hong failed yet again. Shortly after, his cousin Hong Rengan visited him, bringing a Christian pamphlet with him. After reading the pamphlet and understanding its contents, the visions became clear in Hong's mind, and his purpose as well: *he was the son of God and the*

²⁴ United States Office of The Historian, N.D [Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations - Office of the Historian](#)

²⁵ Taiping Rebellion: A History from Beginning to End, 2020 p, 4-5



brother of Jesus, sent from the heavens to rid China of the demons of Confucianism (Hourly History, 2020).

As ridiculous as this may sound, Hong quickly gathered close friends and relatives and managed to convert them. His closest friends became missionaries for his cause, and with the discontent of the people, their numbers grew rapidly, ultimately becoming the group of individuals that would attempt to shape China for the better: the Taiping Rebellion.

*“Praise Heavenly Elder Brother, who sacrificed himself for humankind and
the world.*

Praise King East as Holy Spirit Wind, curing and saving the sick. Praise

King West as the Master of Rain, the most honourable.

Praise King South as the Master of Clouds, the most righteous.

Praise King North as the Master of Thunder, the most humane.

Praise King Wing as Master of Lightning, the most just.”

—Taiping Hymn

5.1. Hong Xiuquan

The Taiping Rebellion was founded by Hong Xiuquan (1814–1864), who also served as its supreme leader. His charismatic religious authority, shaped by personal failure, millenarian belief, and selective engagement with Christian doctrine, was the foundation of his leadership rather than conventional political legitimacy or military professionalism. Understanding Hong Xiuquan is crucial to comprehending the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's early prosperity as well as its eventual demise.

Hong's early years were typical for a Qing-era, aspirational Han Chinese man. Through the Confucian civil service examination system, which was the main path to social mobility and state legitimacy, he sought





success. However, Hong had a psychological and ideological breakdown after failing the provincial-level exams on several occasions. In 1837, he suffered a nervous breakdown. After it, he reported having a series of vivid visions. Later, after reading Christian missionary tracts, he reinterpreted these visions as divine revelations that identified him as *Jesus Christ's younger brother* and assigned him the mission of driving out demons from China.

This reinterpretation decisively broke Confucian orthodoxy. Hong portrayed Manchu rule as a demonic occupation approved by false teachings, rejecting the Qing dynasty not only as politically corrupt but also as cosmologically illegitimate. The Taiping movement gained an absolutist moral clarity that proved highly mobilising among marginalised populations as a result of this theological framing, which turned political rebellion into sacred warfare.

Hong Xiuquan used a combination of revolutionary symbolism and theocratic authority to exercise power as a leader. By referring to himself as the "Heavenly King" (Tian Wang), he elevated his orders above standard political discourse. Strong loyalty was produced by this structure, but it also led to systemic flaws. Instead of using institutional procedures, decision-making became centralized but unpredictable, mediated by visions and divine declarations. Furthermore, following the conquest of Nanjing in 1853, Hong gradually distanced himself from day-to-day governance, giving power to subordinate "kings" whose rivalries would later cause the regime to collapse.

Importantly, Hong had neither military training nor administrative experience. His leadership prioritized ideological conformity over practical governance, emphasizing moral purification over state capability. Dissension within the leadership was viewed as heresy rather than political disagreement, and policies were frequently issued without procedures for enforcement. This culminated in violent internal purges, most notably the Tianjing Incident (1856), which severely weakened the Taiping command structure and irreparably damaged internal cohesion.

For a better understanding of his psychology and mindset, here is a poem written by the Heavenly King himself.

Poem on Executing the Evil and Preserving the Righteous



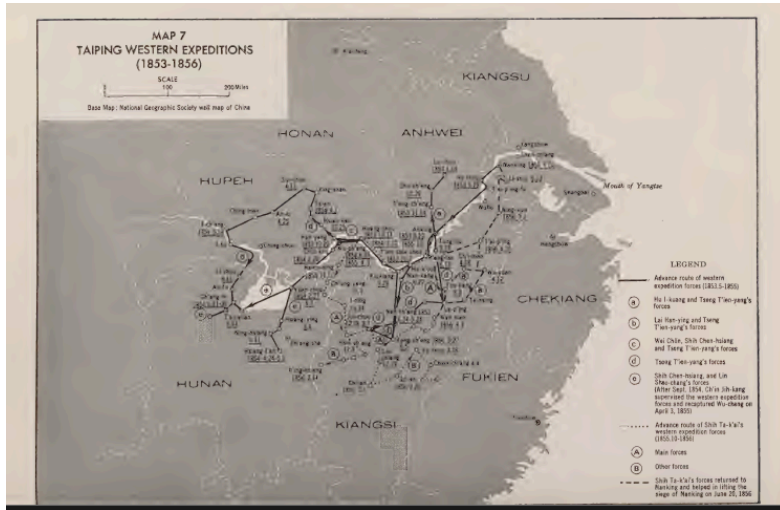
*In my hand I wield the Universe and the power to attack and kill,
I slay the evil, preserve the righteous, and relieve the people's suffering.
My eyes see through beyond the west, the north, the rivers, and the mountains,
My voice shakes the east, the south, the Sun, and the Moon.
The glorious sword of authority was given by the Lord,
Poems and books are evidences that praise Yahweh in front of Him.
Taiping [Perfect Peace] unifies the World of Light,
The domineering air will be joyous for myriads of millennia.*

Hong Xiuquan, The Heavenly King

5.2. Taiping Heavenly Kingdom

In addition to being a rebellion, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (1851–1864) was a rival sovereign endeavor. It was a theocratic monarchy that asserted its authority to overthrow the Qing and restructure society in accordance with "Heavenly" law. Its political significance stems from the fact that, despite establishing a capital, issuing state documents, holding territory for more than ten years, and attempting extensive reforms, it continuously failed to transform revolutionary legitimacy into long-lasting state capacity. The kingdom will be examined in the three plots that follow.





5.2.1. Capital and Territorial Governance

After capturing Nanjing in 1853, the Taipings renamed the city Tianjing “Heavenly Capital” and made it the heart of their administration across southern and central China. On the surface, they established all the trappings of a stable regime, which was an impressive capital, a formal court

hierarchy, and official proclamations. Yet beneath this façade, real power often shifted according to military priorities and the influence of competing factions, giving daily governance a sense of uncertainty and tension.

5.2.2. Political structure

At its core, the Heavenly Kingdom was established as a *monarchy* founded on religious legitimacy. The leader’s authority was seen as divine rather than limited by a constitution. Beneath the “Heavenly King” (Hong Xiuquan), top commanders, each given the title of “king”, held significant power. This setup allowed for rapid mobilization, but it also encouraged the rise of rival power centers, personal armies, and strict ideological enforcement, often at the expense of civilian governance. In many ways, these actions capture the classic crisis committee problem that we all love and embrace, a state capable of conquering territory but unable to consistently coordinate power and policy.

5.2.3. Reform Goals

The Taiping regime promoted a radical program that, in modern terms, resembles a mix of egalitarian land ideology, moral regulation, and social engineering.

Key policies can be mentioned as “**Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty**“ (pledged equal land distribution and communal sharing of surplus under a centrally directed scheme), **Gender equality (officially)** (the Taiping state publicly endorsed equal distribution principles “regardless of gender,” and framed reform as moral and social renewal, though implementation



varied widely and was disrupted by constant war) “*Modernization*” *impulse (selective)* (a later reform-minded document, A New Treatise on Aids to Administration (*Zizheng xinpian*), expressed interest in state strengthening and economic development influenced by Western methods again, largely constrained by battlefield realities and internal politics)

5.3. Influence of Christianity

Christianity significantly influenced the ideological roots of the Taiping movement, though in a rather unorthodox way. Instead of fully embracing Christianity as a traditional religious system, the Taipings adapted Christian beliefs to fit within a pre-existing Chinese millenarian framework. Hong Xiuquan’s encounter with Protestant missionary writings, particularly Liang Fa’s *Good Words to Admonish the Age*, gave him the religious language needed to reinterpret his spiritual visions. As a result, Hong believed he was Jesus Christ’s younger brother, chosen by God (Shangdi) to purge the world of evil and create a Heavenly Kingdom on earth. This belief elevated the rebellion from a political uprising to a sacred duty, giving the movement a divine moral rationale for using violence against the Qing dynasty.

Christianity’s adoption also reshaped political legitimacy within the Taiping state. Traditional Confucian loyalty to the emperor was cast aside and replaced by absolute devotion to God and the Heavenly King. Political dissent was thus recast as religious defiance, removing room for dialogue or differing viewpoints. This uncompromising stance helped maintain order early on but also fostered rigidity and intolerance among leaders. More and more decisions were justified through divine inspiration rather than pragmatic reasoning, reducing the movement’s flexibility in responding to evolving military and political challenges.



Taiping Christianity also directly challenged Confucian culture, which had long underpinned the Qing government’s moral and bureaucratic systems. The Taipings rejected Confucian texts, ancestor worship, and traditional ceremonies, labeling them as idol worship. In the areas they controlled, they often destroyed temples, shrines, and ancestral halls. While such iconoclasm appealed to the



disenfranchised and those disconnected from elite traditions, it alienated the scholar-gentry class, whose administrative skills were crucial for effective governance. Thus, while Christianity served as a radical force of cultural and social disruption, it failed to offer a viable replacement for Confucian governance practices. The Taiping movement's Christian identity also affected its foreign relations. Initially, some Western missionaries and diplomats viewed the movement with tentative hope, thinking a Christian-influenced government might support Western trade and religious missions. However, these hopes faded as it became clear that Taiping theology strayed significantly from mainstream Christianity. Hong's assertion that he was Jesus's brother and the group's embrace of new scriptures were seen as heretical by missionaries. Coupled with the widespread instability and economic turmoil caused by the war, these differences led Western powers to withdraw any potential backing for the Taipings and instead support the Qing dynasty, which was seen as a more reliable partner for trade and diplomacy.

5.4. What Went Wrong?

A number of internal conflicts, poor quality institutions, and bad strategic choices contributed to the Taiping Rebellion's demise rather than a single significant setback. Despite early successes and the creation of a rival state, the movement was unable to transform its revolutionary fervor into long-term political dominance. The fundamental cause of its downfall was a severe mismatch between its ambitious ideological objectives and its inadequate administrative capacity, which became increasingly apparent as the war dragged on.



A major contributor to the Taiping collapse was infighting among its leaders. The Heavenly Kingdom's political system placed authority in the hands of a few top leaders, known as "kings," who held both military power and religious status. This structure encouraged competition rather than cooperation. The internal discord reached a breaking point during the Tianjing Incident in 1856, when violent purges wiped out several prominent leaders and thousands of their followers. These power struggles fractured the movement's leadership,



disrupted military command, and permanently weakened the Taipings' ability to wage coordinated campaigns (Spence, 1996).

Administrative errors also affected the Taiping regime poorly. Even though they offered bold reforms, such as land redistribution and moral governance, they lacked skilled and experienced bureaucracy to implement them effectively. Civil affairs often took a backseat to military concerns, and ruling was more about force than structured governance. By sidelining Confucian-trained scholars, the regime lost access to capable administrators. Instead, loyalty to ideology was prioritized over expertise. This led to the breakdown of the economy under the stress of war, inconsistent taxation and a gradual loss of public support.



Their demise was further sealed by strategic errors. The Taipings lost the chance to advance toward Beijing after taking Nanjing in 1853. Rather, they dispersed their troops among several fronts, giving the Qing government time to reorganize and implement fresh strategies. The Qing's counterattacks relied heavily on local elite-led regional militias rather than the conventional Qing banner forces. As Qing forces changed, the Taipings continued to use antiquated mass mobilization strategies that were less successful. The decline in public support was another important factor. Farm destruction, mass population displacement, and widespread famine were all consequences of the ongoing conflict. Civilians who had previously seen the Taipings as a promising alternative to Qing misrule were turned off by their harsh conscription policies, strict social controls, and cruel punishments for dissent. The very moral authority that had given the Heavenly Kingdom its legitimacy was gradually undermined as it was perceived as another repressive government rather than as a force of liberation.



6. Final Remarks and Expectations

“The affair of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was not a war between the Manchus and the Hans, but was actually a class war between the peasants and landlords.”

-Mao Zedong²⁶

The quote above from Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party from 1943 to 1976, summarizes the actual core principle of the Taiping Rebellion. Even though it started as a movement by an individual claiming to be a holy individual sent by God, it evolved beyond a religious movement. The people of the land were exhausted from years of difficulties spanning from land inequality to heavy taxation, from corruption and inefficiency within the Qing bureaucracy to the inability of the Empire to protect against foreign powers. The millennium-standing Confucian state ideology was exposed for being useless when it came to mass social suffering, and the people demanded change.

The Taiping weren't just a band of simple rebels; they had the goal and the vision necessary to attempt to govern the entirety of China, promising changes that would have relieved the people, like the abolition of private land ownership, the promise of rigid moral and social codes, as well as the promise of equality. These promises didn't make complete sense since they were still aiming for authoritarian control over China. The Taiping used every chance they got to showcase their unity for the cause, but failing to actually stay true to this nature is what brought about their eventual downfall. Internal factionalism and leadership purges shook the foundations of the rebellion, which ultimately alienated a large percentage of their followers. Their inability to build a proper civilian administration system was also a problem, making people question the promises made by the leaders of the rebellion.

Delegates must understand that this committee isn't simply about winning a civil war, but it is about deciding what kind of China the people want. The looming threat of foreign influence and the Qing being preoccupied with other matters are all factors that need to be addressed. This is an event in history because it failed, but it shaped modern Chinese history by weakening the

²⁶ Mao Zedong, *The Importance of Commemorating the Paris Commune*. 1926.



Qing state and paving all the way to the Chinese Revolution of 1949. Becoming one of the deadliest conflicts in human history, with a tally of 20-30 million estimated deaths²⁷, the Taiping Rebellion will be a difficult, yet multidimensional event that will be simulated for the three days of the conference. Delegates can expect a multitude of varieties of crises that will be presented, from war doctrines to secret directives, from people demanding more from the Rebellion leaders to what is happening in the unseen areas of the country. Karl Marx, in a letter he sent to Friedrich Engels said the following:

“The stationary nature of this part of Asia, despite all the aimless activity on the political surface, can be completely explained by two mutually supporting circumstances: 1. The public works system of the central government, and 2. Alongside this, the entire Empire, which, apart from a few large cities, is an agglomeration of villages, each with its own distinct organisation and each forming its own small world²⁸. ”

These small worlds, the villages formed, if united into a single body, could have created one of the most effective and efficient systems in the world at that time.

As closing remarks, perhaps a very unexpected suggestion that you would never have seen coming, I suggest watching and later researching the animated series “Avatar: The Last Airbender” as preparation for this committee. The specifics of why this suggestion is given can not be mentioned; however, during proceedings in the committee, you might draw parallels to the governing systems of the nations in the show itself. There will be so much to do in this committee, and we are looking forward to making it as entertaining and educational for you as possible.

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²⁷ These are the official numbers available but some sources estimate the number being even as high as 80-100 million lives.

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