

## Taiping Rebellion

(1850-64), radical political and religious upheaval that was probably the most important event in China in the 19th century. It ravaged 17 provinces, took an estimated 20,000,000 lives, and irrevocably altered the Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1911/12).

The rebellion began under the leadership of Hung Hsiu-ch'üan (1814-64), a disappointed civil service examination candidate who, influenced by Christian teachings, had a series of visions and believed himself to be the son of God, the younger brother of Jesus Christ, sent to reform China. A friend of Hung's, Feng Yün-shan, utilized Hung's ideas to organize a new religious group, the God Worshippers' Society (Pai Shang-ti Hui), which he formed among the impoverished peasants of Kwangsi. In 1847 Hung joined Feng and the God Worshippers, and three years later he led them in rebellion. On Jan. 1, 1851, he proclaimed his new dynasty, the T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo (Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace), and assumed the title of T'ien-wang, or Heavenly King.

Their slogan--to share property in common--attracted many famine-stricken peasants, workers, and miners, as did their propaganda against the foreign Manchu rulers of China. Taiping ranks swelled, and they increased from a ragged band of several thousand to more than 1,000,000 totally disciplined and fanatically zealous soldiers, organized into separate men's and women's divisions. Sweeping north through the fertile Yangtze River Valley, they reached the great central China city of Nanking. After capturing the city on March 10, 1853, the Taipings halted. They renamed the city T'ien-ching (Heavenly Capital) and dispatched a northern expedition to capture the Manchu capital at Peking. This failed, but another expedition into the Upper Yangtze Valley scored many victories.

Meanwhile, Yang Hsiu-ch'ing, the Taiping minister of state, attempted to usurp much of the T'ien-wang's power, and as a result Yang and thousands of his followers were slain. Wei Ch'ang-hui, the general who had slain Yang, then began to grow haughty, and Hung had him murdered as well. Another Taiping general, Shih Ta-k'ai, began to fear for his life, and he abandoned Hung, taking with him many of the Taiping followers.

In 1860 an attempt by the Taipings to regain their strength by taking Shanghai was stopped by the Western-trained "Ever-Victorious Army" commanded by the American adventurer Frederick Townsend Ward and later by the British officer "Chinese" Gordon. The gentry, who usually rallied to

support a successful rebellion, had been alienated by the radical anti-Confucianism of the Taipings, and they organized under the leadership of Tseng Kuo-fan, a Chinese official of the Manchu government. By 1862 Tseng had managed to surround Nanking, and the city fell in July 1864. Hung, who had refused all requests to flee the city, committed suicide. Sporadic Taiping resistance continued in other parts of the country until 1868.

Taiping Christianity placed little emphasis on New Testament ideas of kindness, forgiveness, and redemption. Rather it emphasized the wrathful Old Testament God who demanded worship and obedience. Prostitution, foot-binding, and slavery were prohibited, as well as opium smoking, adultery, gambling, and use of tobacco and wine. Organization of the army was elaborate, with strict rules governing soldiers in camp and on the march. For those who followed these rules, an ultimate reward was promised. Tseng Kuo-fan was astonished when, after the capture of Nanking, almost 100,000 of the Taiping followers preferred death to capture.

Under the Taipings, the Chinese language was simplified, and equality between men and women was decreed. All property was to be held in common, and equal distribution of the land according to a primitive form of communism was planned. Some Western-educated Taiping leaders even proposed the development of industry and the building of a Taiping democracy. The Ch'ing dynasty was so weakened by the rebellion that it never again was able to establish an effective hold over the country. Both the Chinese Communists and the Chinese Nationalists trace their origin to the Taipings.

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## **TAIPING REBELLION – DBQ**

- 1. TAIPING CHRISTIANITY STRESSED THE OLD TESTAMENT OR NEW TESTAMENT?** \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. LIST 4 CONCEPTS THAT THE FOLLOWERS OF THE TAIPINGS WERE AGAINST.** (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_  
(3) \_\_\_\_\_ (4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. HOW DID THE FOLLOWERS OF THE TAIPING REBELLION TREAT WOMEN?** \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. WHAT WAS THE TAIPING PHILOSOPHY REGARDING LAND OWNERSHIP?** \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. HOW MANY (ESTIMATE) DIED IN THIS REVOLUTION?** \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. WHAT GROUPS WERE ATTRACTED TO THE TAIPING MOVEMENT?**  
(1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_