

Senior Thesis History Department May 2020

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Abstract Title: **Changes in Sino-British Relations from the Opium Wars to the Taiping Rebellion**

Britain and China differed culturally and ideologically in the mid-19th century. The different perspectives on politics and trade caused tensions to rise between the two nations. China was previously an isolated nation that used Confucius beliefs to create their social and political structure. Britain wanted to interact with China to gain access to certain goods, like silk, tea, and porcelain. To do so they initiated trade with China at, Guangzhou, the Port of Canton. This was the only sanctioned trading port in China since the Chinese were wary of foreigners. The differences between the two nations reached its climax prior to the First Opium War, which began in 1839 and lasted until 1842. Following this, China would become a weaker nation due to the “unequal treaties” placed on them by Britain and America. One stipulation China had to follow in the “unequal treaties” was to cede Hong Kong to the British. This led to Hong Kong becoming an economic center vital to Eastern trade. Hong Kong also adopted certain principles from the British, like capitalism, which changed their identity. The “unequal treaties,” an agreement made between Western nations and China, would also play a role in starting the Second Opium War, also known as the Arrow War of 1856-1860.

The introduction of Western values like individualism, capitalism, and Christian religion influenced the development of Hong Kong while also introducing concepts that were applied to the Taiping Rebellion. The First Opium War left China in shambles due to the reparations

placed on the country from the treaties that opened up more ports for trade. This made China more susceptible to Western values. The interactions between Britain and China during the First Opium War became the catalyst for Xiuquan Hong to analyze his visions and status in Qing Society. To deal with his failure to join *Jingshi*, he used Protestant Christian beliefs and Liang's manuscript to create the Taiping Rebellion. The Taiping's tactics against the bureaucracy of the Qing Dynasty led to one of the bloodiest civil wars in history. Despite this, the Taiping rebels were crushed once the British intervened on behalf of the Qing. This foreshadows the influence of Western beliefs on Hong Kong when it was a British Crown Colony. The culmination of the differing values between Hong Kong and China led to the protests currently happening. The influence of public memory of the First Opium War and the Taiping Rebellion is relevant to understanding the current political climate in Hong Kong.