Rebellions in 19th Century China

- Was change due to internal or external causes?
- Why did anyone launch an uprising against the Qing?
- Hong Xiuquan and the origins of the Taiping rebellion
- Why there were other major rebellions at the same time as the Taiping?
- Did ordinary people support these rebellions?

Rebellions:

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Names and Terms

Tiandihui (Heaven and Earth Society 天地会 or Increasing Brothers Society 添弟会)

Shaolin Temple

Hong Xiuquan (Hong Hsiu-ch'uan)

Hakka

Jintian (Chin-t’ian)

Yang Xiuqing (Yang Hsiu-ch’ing)

Xiao Chaogui (Hsiao Ch’ao-kuei)

Wei Changhui (Wei Ch’ang-hwei)

Shi Dakai (Shih Ta-k’ai)

Taiping Tianguo (太平天国 Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace, T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo)

Zeng Guofan (Tseng Kuo-fan)

Texts

1. An 1821 report from the Governor General of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces on why people joined the Tiandihui in Guangxi:

"We have noted that the nature of the people in Guangxi is plain and simple. Because Guangxi borders on Guangdong, Hunan, and Yunnan, floating people from outside the province come in to till the land, and the bad grows together with the good. As a result, they induce the people to form Increase Brothers societies. Villagers are then persuaded to join as well because they are isolated. They join in hopes that they will receive assistance in times of trouble. Or, if they are from flourishing households, they join out of fear of being robbed, to protect their homes. At first these offenders only extorted money to use. They followed the old books handed down for more than a century to establish their own registers and waist certificates. They transmitted secret codes and referred to individuals as "elder brother" or "teacher". If they know that the crimes of the Tiandihui are severely punished, then they change the name to Old People's Society or something else. Whenever they have several score of followers, they from a new unit, but there are no cases of societies with
more than 100 people. One person may belong to two or three societies, so that their numbers increase rapidly. They get together to commit robbery and are also joined by many clerks and soldiers who hope that the societies' screen will help them from being arrested."


3. A proclamation issued by the Small Sword Society which organised an uprising in Shanghai in 1853 criticises Manchu rule:

"It can be found in historical records that enlightened emperors of old defeated the peoples of the north and west to protect the territories of the Xia, and drove out the barbarians to bring peace to China.... Since the Manchurian bandits captured the throne, rituals and propriety have ceased to exist, and all sense of shame has been lost. All over the county, there are officials with the hearts of wolves and the practice of dogs, who are oppressive, and whose demands are arbitrary. They sell official posts and titles, and the Imperial Court is thus staffed with people with rabbit heads and deer breasts. The government offices are like a market: those who have money may live, and those who do not die. Officialdom behaves like bandits, creaming the people's fat, stripping them of their oil. Nomination to official titles is unjust, employment is wasted. [Manchu] bannermen fill the Imperial Court, and brilliant people from all quarters fall to the wayside."

(Quoted in David Faure, "Secret Societies, Heretic Sects, and Peasant Rebellions in Nineteenth Century China" Journal of the Chinese University of Hong Kong 5.1 (1979), p. 192.)

4. A Taiping proclamation issued by Yang Xiuqing and Xiao Chaogui in 1852 attacks Manchu rule:

"The Chinese have Chinese characteristics; but now the Manchus have ordered us to shave the hair around the head, leaving a long tail behind, thus making the Chinese appear to be brute animals. The Chinese have Chinese dress; but now the Manchus have adopted buttons on the hat, introduced barbarian clothes and monkey caps, and discarded the robes and headdresses of former dynasties, in order to make the Chinese forget their origins. The Chinese have Chinese family relationships; but the former false demon, Kangxi, secretly ordered the Tartars each to control ten families and to defile the Chinese women, hoping thereby that the Chinese would all become barbarians. The Chinese have Chinese spouses; but now the Manchu demons have taken all of China's beautiful girls to be their slaves and concubines. Thus three thousand beautiful women have been ravished by the barbarian dogs, one million pretty girls have slept with the odorous foxes; to speak of it distresses the heart, to talk of it pollutes the tongue."