

Taiping: a general intro to the story I have written

“Taiping” is a screenplay that tells the nearly 200-year-old story of an American-Chinese encounter. Combustible from the start, this strange crossing of paths would explode into a dynastic rebellion that shook an empire and, some would say, provided the first tremors to open China to the outside world.

In the year, 1847, two unusual men met in Guangzhou. Hong Xiuquan was Chinese; he had had an amazing dream about a journey to heaven in which God assigned him a task and a destiny: to overthrow the Qing Dynasty and bring heaven to earth. Issachar Roberts was his teacher, an American missionary who left his young country’s wild frontier to travel to a wilder place: southern China, at a time when China was beginning to be shaken by forces within and without.

The subject matter, if you’re a “googler,” would be “Taiping Rebellion” -- an ironic name for a decade-plus conflict that some will estimate as having caused 20 million deaths: the result of warfare, dislocation and famine – ironic, because *Tai-Ping* means Great Peace. My story is not really absorbed in the military history but rather focuses on the cross-cultural relationship between Issachar (called “Elijah” in my story) and Hong, and later between these two and Kan, who was Hong’s cousin (“younger brother”).

It’s a bizarre tale by itself. But my attempt to tell it is not stitched together as a documentary project. Rather, it is a story based on true events.¹ And concerning whatever might be deemed “untrue” in the story, I hope it all works together to tell a greater truth, a “truer truth.”

¹ For those with an appetite for history, I recommend *God’s Chinese Son*, by Jonathan Spence... also, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*, by Stephen Platt.