

Killing for the Great Peace: An Internal Perspective on the Anti-Manchu Theme in the Taiping Movement

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Abstract : The majority of existing studies on the Taiping Movement (1851-1864) viewed their anti-Manchu attitudes as nationalist agendas: Taiping was aimed at revolting against the Manchu government and establishing a new political regime. To explain these aggressive and violent attitudes towards Manchu, these studies mainly found socio-economic factors and stressed the status of "being deprived". Even the 'demon-slaying' narrative of the Taiping to dehumanize the Manchu tends to be viewed as a "religious tool" to achieve their political, nationalist aim. This paper argues that these studies on Taiping's anti-Manchu attitudes and behaviors are analyzed from an external angle and have two major problems. Firstly, they distinguished "religion" from "nationalist" or "political", focusing on the "political" nature of the movement. "Religion" and the religious experience within Taiping were largely ignored. This paper argues that there was no separable and independent "religion" in the Taiping Movement, as opposed to secular, nationalist politics. Secondly, these analyses held an external perspective on Taiping's anti-Manchu agenda. Demonizing and killing Manchu were viewed as purely political actions. On the contrary, this paper focuses on the internal perspective of anti-Manchu narratives in the Taiping Movement. The method of this paper is mainly textual analysis, focusing on the official documents, edicts, and proclamations of the Taiping movement. It views the writing of the Taiping as a coherent narrative and rhetoric, which was attractive and convincing for its followers. In terms of the main findings, firstly, internal and external perspectives on anti-Manchu violence are different. Externally, violence was viewed as a tool and necessary process to achieve the political goal. However, internally speaking, in Taiping's writing, violence was a result of Godlessness, which would be solved as far as the faith in God is restored in China. Having a framework of universal love among human beings as sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father and killing was forbidden, the Taiping excluded Manchus from the family of human beings and demonized them. "Demon-slaying" was not violence. It was constructed as a necessary process to achieve the Great Peace. Moreover, Taiping's anti-Manchu violence was not merely "political." Rather, the category "religion" and its binary opposition, "secular," is not suitable for Taiping. A key point related to this argument is the revolutionary violence against the Manchu government, which inherited the traditional "Heavenly Mandate" model. From an internal, theological perspective, anti-Manchu was ordained and commanded by the Heavenly Father. Manchu, as a regime, was standing as a hindrance in the path toward God. Besides, Manchu was not only viewed as a regime, but they were also "demons." Therefore, the paper examines how Manchus were dehumanized in Taiping's writings and were situated outside of the consideration of nonviolent and love. Manchu as a regime and Manchu as demons are in a dynamic relationship. As a regime, the Manchu government was preventing Chinese people from worshipping the Heavenly Father, so they were demonized. As they were demons, killing Manchus during the revolt was justified and not viewed as being contradicted the universal love among human beings.

Keywords : anti-manchu, demon-slaying, heavenly mandate, religion and violence, the taiping movement.

Conference Title : ICRV 2023 : International Conference on Religious Violence

Conference Location : Tokyo, Japan

Conference Dates : May 22-23, 2023