

The External Factors of the Failure of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom

Han Congcong

Hubei Normal University, Huangshi, Hubei, 435002, China

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Abstract: From beginning to end, the Qing government adopted a comprehensive blockade policy towards the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, with the aim of suppressing it quickly. At the same time, the Qing government attempted to rely on a policy of trade mutual benefit to persuade Western countries to cooperate in jointly blocking and suppressing the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. At the same time, it relied on diplomatic pressure, military inspections, and other means to strictly prevent foreign merchants from engaging in trade with the Taiping Army, in order to block the external trade supply channels of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. But in the early stages, Western countries sympathized with the Chinese Civil War due to religious beliefs and trade issues, and then "strictly adhered to neutrality". With the prolonged civil war, the interests of Western powers in China were greatly affected. In order to maintain their own rights and interests, they gradually changed their positions, and the reactionary forces at home and abroad joined forces. Western countries took the opportunity to cut off trade channels with the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. As a result, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom regime, under the joint blockade and crackdown of the reactionary forces at home and abroad, went to the brink of collapse.

1. Introduction

The Taiping Rebellion lasted for 14 years and reached the peak of the old-fashioned peasant war. In the study of the history of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, the academic community has conducted in-depth discussions and research on many major theoretical issues, such as the nature of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's political power, character evaluation, revolutionary program, strategic gains and losses, and reasons for failure. The results have been fruitful, but there are also many deep-seated issues that need further exploration. Summarizing the research achievements of the history of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom truthfully will be beneficial for promoting its vertical development. For a long time, many scholars have analyzed and interpreted the reasons for the failure of this peasant movement from multiple perspectives. Based on the current achievements, they mainly focus on political mistakes, economic collapse, internal contradictions within the revolution, detachment from the masses in religious beliefs, military war mistakes, and failures in diplomatic relations. However, it rarely involves the external blockade faced by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Currently, there is no comprehensive analysis in the field of history, and representative achievements are only found in some books, archives from the Qing government period, and newspaper reports from Western countries on this movement. Based on this, this article

attempts to explore the reasons for the failure of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and the Qing government's successful suppression of rebellion from the perspective of external blockade by analyzing the attitudes of the Qing government, Western countries, and domestic and foreign merchants towards the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, as well as the reasons for their later transformation. This is a new perspective.

2. The Qing government implemented a comprehensive blockade policy against the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom

The Qing government's comprehensive blockade policy towards the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was from beginning to end. When the Taiping Army was still in Guiping, Guangxi, Li Xingyuan advised the court, "Between the importance and urgency, the officials and others made multiple plans. When the bandits in Jintian needed food, they would inevitably go out to plunder. After careful planning, they instructed the nearby prefectures and counties to lead more troops to train and block the pass, making them unable to eat. As the road approached Shanyao, they also advised the Xunzhou Prefecture and County to try to guide them in advance, not to be lured by thieves, and planned to hire Yao trainers to attack from later on. The handling was urgent." [1] On the one hand, the government ordered various prefectures and counties to take measures to blockade the Taiping Army. At the same time, the Qing government issued numerous notices warning the people not to provide aid or sell grain to the Taiping Army, and severely cracked down on civilian supply activities. The Qing government implemented the blockade policy from top to bottom internally.

At that time, those who were able to sell grain to the Taiping Army through the tight defense of the Qing army, except for a few civilian people, were mostly a group of civilian merchants who profited greatly from transporting grain and rice to the Taiping Army. According to Zhao Liewen's record, "Some righteous people said that there was little rice among the thieves. Residents outside the city went to the area of Dashengguan to sell rice to help the bandits, at a rate of 1300 wen per bushel. The thieves who transferred and sold the goods were at a rate of 1500 wen per bushel." [2] This civilian group is also subjected to strict blockade and crackdown.

When the Qing government strictly investigated the transportation of food and other materials by civilians and merchants to the Taiping Army, it also internally investigated the Qing army that violated the blockade policy and transported materials to supply the Taiping Army. Due to the temptation of heavy profits, there were also situations within the Qing court where supplies were transported to the Taiping army. When the Taiping army fought against the Qing army on the front line and encountered encirclement, there would be situations where they purchased or exchanged food and supplies with large amounts of money from the Qing army. "The bandits of Jinling have long claimed to have run out of food, why not see them starve to death? The officials and soldiers have also sold them." [3] This matter was also subjected to strict investigation and crackdown by the Qing court.

In summary, the Qing government, in order to crack down on the supply of food and other supplies to the Taiping Army, comprehensively blockaded the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom regime, and took measures to rigorously investigate and crack down on the behavior of aiding the Taiping Army by the civilians, merchants, and internal personnel of the Qing army in the ruling area.

3. Trade between the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and Foreign Merchants

3.1. The Foreign Policy of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom

The leaders of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, in addition to producing and collecting tribute materials from the people, gentry, and merchants within the occupied areas, held a positive attitude

towards the issue of trade with the West. For example, Yang Xiuqing, the King of the East, pointed out in his "Reply to the Thirty One Demands of the British and Inquire about the Fifty Demands of the British" that "not only does Britain engage in commerce, but all nations engage in commerce, and brothers are brothers within the world." [4] The "Letter from Luo Yuanhao to Pu Heng" also reflects the attitude of the high-ranking officials of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom towards trade with foreign countries: "Today, Allah of our country is punished by the Heavenly Expedition, and we will be gentle with distant people and reconcile with China and foreign countries. Trade cannot be avoided, and taxes on goods are not levied." [5] In addition, at that time, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was particularly friendly to Westerners due to its worship of God's teachings, and used its identity as a "foreign brother" to focus on maintaining good diplomatic relations with Western countries for trade and trade. The Beihua Jiebao once reported on the experiences of Westerners in the occupied areas of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: "Although the attitude of the Taiping Army towards foreigners is extremely friendly, they always refer to foreigners as 'our foreign brothers', saying, 'We both worship the Heavenly Father and believe in the same Heavenly Brother. Why do we have differences between us?' They seem to want to interact with foreigners and hope to promote trade relations." [6]

Throughout the history of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Due to the comprehensive crackdown and blockade by the Qing government, it has always maintained a positive attitude towards foreign trade. Including in the later period of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, after Western countries openly colluded with the Qing government. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom still did not cut off trade channels with the West, but instead made every effort to maintain them.

This is reflected in the "Letter from Loyal King Li Xiucheng to Consuls of England, America, and Portugal":

If a legal person can guard the county seat and several miles around the city in Shanghai, can they sell their goods in a small area and have the convenience of transportation and trading There must be a cause and effect in any romantic relationship. The current legal entity has broken its faith and is at odds with me. Yi and others have taken unreasonable actions first, and if they only trade in Shanghai in the future, they can make this plan as much as possible. If Yi and others enter the territory and trade of our dynasty again, my domain will be lenient and generous, and I may be able to allow their actions to go unpunished... My domain came to Shanghai only to make a treaty, hoping to establish a consistent relationship through trade and commerce, and not to engage in war with you. If he orders an attack on the city and kills the people, there will be no difference or similarity in the way he engages in warfare, which will make the demon soldiers sneer. [7]

This indicates that in order to ensure the external supply channels of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, efforts were made to maintain relations with Western countries without breaking down, and friendly diplomatic relations were emphasized to ensure the external supply channels of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.

3.2. Western countries and foreign businessmen hold a supportive and neutral attitude towards the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom

In the early stage of the Taiping Rebellion, Western powers held a sympathetic attitude towards it based on common religious beliefs, and subjectively supported the Taiping Army in overthrowing the Qing Dynasty. Apart from religious beliefs, Western countries and the merchant community were more concerned about the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's victory over the Qing government and further opening up the Chinese market to obtain maximum commercial benefits. Therefore, at this time, Western countries and foreign merchants hoped for the emerging Taiping Heavenly Kingdom regime.

After the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom established its capital in Nanjing, Western countries adopted a neutral policy to observe the direction of China's political situation. However, on the other hand, due to the blind and arrogant exclusionary policy of the Qing government, Western countries were full of favor towards this emerging revolutionary force. Before the Taiping Rebellion, "Europeans were very dissatisfied with their position in China. Manchus were increasingly afraid of interacting with foreigners and adopted arrogant and exclusive policies. It was at a time when this policy was almost unbearable that the Taiping Rebellion occurred"[8] Therefore, Europeans naturally had a favorable impression of this emerging force. Once the views and actions of the Heavenly King became known, they immediately became aware of it has won widespread support and praise.

From this, it can be seen that in the early stage of the Taiping Rebellion, foreign missionaries held a sympathetic and supportive attitude towards the Taiping Rebellion based on common religious beliefs. Foreign merchants had high hopes for the Taiping Rebellion because they preferred to see a more open China. In addition, after the Taiping Army occupied Nanjing, Western politicians held a neutral attitude towards the revolution that occurred in China based on national diplomatic relations and the maintenance of their own interests in China. At the same time, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom also hoped to maintain good diplomatic relations with Western countries, pay attention to extensive trade with foreign merchants, and ensure its own material supply from the outside.

4. The Qing government wanted to block the trade between the Taiping Army and foreign merchants

As the legitimate government of China at that time, the Qing government was able to provide more benefits to Western countries compared to the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Therefore, while blockading and attacking the Taiping Army, the Qing government tried to make extensive contact with Western countries through diplomatic and economic means, attempting to cut off the external supply channels of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in order to quickly strangle this magnificent peasant uprising.

With the development of the situation, especially after the end of the Second Opium War, Western countries "fulfilled all their demands as they wished, and the sharpness of aggression immediately turned to the Taiping Rebellion." [9] At the same time, in order to completely eliminate the Taiping Army, the Qing government sent diplomatic messages to various countries from central to local officials, hoping to block foreign merchants from trading with the Taiping Army. For example, in September 1860, in order to block the external supply channels between Western countries and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, the Qing court sent a special message to British envoy Bruce (excerpt):

Due to local unrest and obstacles to your country's commercial affairs, I cannot ignore your request to legislate a ban on this matter.....I hope that your esteemed minister will inform all merchants in the Yangtze River to comply. If the merchant ship refuses to comply, the thieves and bandits will receive assistance, which will further spread and cause inconvenience to China's military affairs and salary needs. And the soldiers in the military camp cannot pacify the bandits, so it must be said that I did not handle it well. I have no other choice but to temporarily suspend trade according to the treaty, and prohibit commercial ships from entering the Zhenjiang area. Once the area is calm, I will proceed with the matter. Correspondingly, your esteemed minister is requested to review the reply. Those who require attention.[10]

We can see that in order to block the trade activities between foreign merchants in the Yangtze River Basin and the Taiping Army, the Qing government set up inspection and patrol personnel to

specifically inspect the trade activities between foreign merchants and the Taiping Army. Once discovered, "their goods were detained, but this situation must be reported to the consuls of various countries in advance to avoid further investigation." [11] At the same time, we will intensify the use of diplomatic means and economic interests to persuade Western countries to cut off the foreign trade channels relied upon by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom regime. In the areas occupied by the Qing army, we will use military inspection methods to strictly prohibit foreign merchants from engaging in trade with the Taiping Army.

5. The comprehensive blockade of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom by Western countries in the later period

In the later period of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, the attitude of Westerners changed due to trade issues. Ma Shi believes that trade is the main and almost exclusively beneficial interest of Western countries; For this reason, the restoration of peace and order is extremely important. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to restore normal social order to the land of China as soon as possible and end the prolonged and brutal war. Therefore, Western countries have found it inappropriate for them to only maintain a neutral state and must personally intervene in China's civil war. Therefore, various measures have been taken to help China end the war as soon as possible, restore normal internal operations, and maintain their commercial interests in China. [12]

Especially after the end of the Second Opium War, Western powers realized that the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom would not become a spokesperson for their interests in China, so they changed their "neutral" stance and instead colluded with the Qing government. The Qing court seized the opportunity to launch a suppression strategy of "borrowing troops to assist in suppression", which was in line with the intentions of aggressors such as Britain and France. Therefore, "After the signing of the Beijing Treaty, British Prime Minister Bamar Chun established a counter revolutionary policy of jointly suppressing the Taiping Rebellion with the Qing government." [13] After the signing of the Beijing Treaty between China and France, French envoy Gro took the initiative to appeal to Yi, expressing France's willingness to help China eliminate the rebellion of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. [14] Subsequently, Russian Minister Ignatiev reiterated his willingness to provide assistance in weapons and equipment to the Qing government, and expressed Russia's willingness to directly send troops by sea to cooperate with the Chinese army in suppressing the Taiping Rebellion. [15] At the same time, while Western countries intensified their aid to the Qing government, they cut off the supply channels for supplies to the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom from the national to foreign merchants, in cooperation with the Qing government's comprehensive blockade of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.

In summary, as the reactionary forces at home and abroad began to collude after the Second Opium War, the group of Chinese and foreign merchants also joined forces, cutting off the trade channels between the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and foreign merchants, exacerbating the material shortage of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, and intensifying the already fierce crises within the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's ruling area. In the end, this massive peasant uprising movement completely failed under the joint blockade and suppression of the Chinese and foreign opposition forces!

6. Conclusions

The ultimate failure of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was the result of joint blockade and strangulation by domestic and foreign reactionary forces, or it can be said that it ultimately collapsed under comprehensive blockade at home and abroad. This is a situation that has never been encountered in previous peasant uprisings and revolutionary movements.

Undoubtedly, there are many reasons that led to the failure of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom movement. However, objectively speaking, the external blockade faced by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom regime from beginning to end was an important factor that led to its ultimate failure, and it was also an insurmountable obstacle. From this perspective, its failure was inevitable. This article analyzes the external reasons that led to the ultimate downfall of this peasant regime from the perspective of external material supply, which is related to the success or failure of this regime. The research results are helpful for us to comprehensively and multi-dimensionally examine the economic policies, military strategies, and political system of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, and are a useful supplement to the study of the history of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.

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