

Original Paper

Analysis of the Impact of Insufficient Grain Supply on the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom

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Abstract

Throughout the Taiping Rebellion, the issue of food supply became its Achilles heel, causing extremely adverse effects on the revolutionary movement. In the early stages of the uprising, due to insufficient food supply, it had to break through from Yong'an, making military operations constrained by food supply; Nanjing was established as the capital for the convenience of food supply, which resulted in significant military strategic mistakes; At the same time, the insufficient supply of food intensified the internal contradictions of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. It adopted methods such as ordering tribute and attacking vanguard to obtain food, which not only disappointed the farmers who had high hopes for it, but also caused serious opposition among landlords and gentry. Even the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's army had several incidents of fire and union to compete for food. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom experienced a food crisis due to food supply issues, which led to serious political, military, and religious crises, ultimately leading to the failure of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom movement.

Keywords

grain supply, errors, the contradiction intensifies, political crisis, negative effect

1. Introduction

The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom movement has been plagued by the issue of food supply from its inception to failure. To some extent, insufficient food supply poses a serious threat to the development of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom revolutionary movement and the stability of the political power. In this regard, some experts and scholars also believe that what was lacking in the military struggle of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was not its human resources, but material support, with the most prominent being the support of food supplies (Tian & Ji, 1991). It was precisely because the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom failed to solve its food supply problem that it caused a food crisis, which led to a

series of problems. At present, the academic community's analysis and exploration of the history of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom mainly focuses on political dualism, economic collapse, cultural beliefs deviating from Chinese tradition, and military strategic failures. There is relatively little research on food supply and food crisis, which is mostly seen in the economic extension of some monographs or papers, but it is not systematic and comprehensive. This article attempts to analyze the negative impact of insufficient supply on the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom from the perspective of the food crisis, and make certain supplements to the research on the history of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in terms of food supply.

2. Insufficient Food Supply Forced Yong'an to Break Through

Regarding the sources of food in the early stages of the Taiping Rebellion, scholars such as Zhao Dexin believe that "at the beginning of the uprising, it was mainly the rebels who donated their property, followed by the masses offering tribute and support, to take the lead in attacking the enemy and seizing enemy property. During the march from Guangxi to occupying Nanjing, money and goods from the Qing government and army were seized, becoming a major source of income (Zhao, 2017)." Considering the strategic situation of the Taiping Army in mobile warfare at that time, coupled with the lack of stable base areas and the actual situation of being surrounded and intercepted by enemy forces, the initial food supply of the uprising was mainly focused on plundering and seizing along the way. But this method cannot be implemented for a long time. Once in a dangerous battle, the food supply channel of the Taiping Army will be cut off, making it difficult for the Taiping Army to persist in simple defensive operations. As a result, such a situation often arises. Once the Taiping Army loses its military and its food supply is cut off, and relying solely on defensive operations is difficult to sustain, "it will have to be forced to relocate and open up new bases to obtain new food sources. When new food supply bases are established, the Qing army will besiege again, forcing the Taiping Army to relocate again (Tian & Ji, 1991)." This form of mobile warfare, relying on looting, poses great risks to the food supply and other logistics supply of the Taiping Army. In wartime, it undoubtedly affects the military operations of the Taiping Army, and the most typical example is the Yong'an Campaign, where they chose to break through due to insufficient food supply.

The Taiping Army was besieged within the city of Yong'an, and in the first few months, due to the assistance provided by the aforementioned channels, they were able to sustain themselves. As they passed away, the Qing army became more and more besieged, and the battle became more and more intense. "The army was besieged in all directions, with no internal or external communication (Luo, 1995, p. 118)." As soon as the demand is met, it becomes increasingly scarce and scarce (Jian, 1962, p. 325). According to Yao Ying's report, he believes that "cutting off its food supply is an important method to strangle the Taiping Army (Tian & Ji, 1991)." In Jian, Y.W.'s view, "It can be confirmed that the withdrawal of the insurrectionary army from Yong'an was not due to defeat, but rather due to a lack of materials such as grain, salt, nitrate, medicine, and lead, and the siege of the official army,

which was tight for a day without any reason to supplement (Jian, 1962, p. 326).” The uprising army was trapped in Yong'an for 7 months, and the interruption of food supply was closely related to the encirclement of the Qing army. However, fundamentally speaking, it was a mistake in the food supply method that the Taiping Army relied on to maintain development in the early stage. This proved that insufficient food supply affected the military operations of the Taiping Army, and ultimately military operations had to be constrained by food supply.

3. Nanjing Was Established as the Capital to Solve the Problem of Food Supply

The leadership of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom settled in Nanjing and ultimately positioned it as the capital. One of the core elements was to solve the food supply problem faced by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.

Regarding the reason why the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom regime established its capital in Nanjing, Li, X.C wrote in his autobiography that there was a debate within the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom about whether to establish the capital in Henan or Nanjing. Later, an elderly sailor proposed to the Eastern Prince Yang, X.Q. to establish the capital in Jinling instead of Henan, and analyzed his reasons in detail (Luo, 1995, p.153).

If according to Li, X.C.'s statement, the Eastern Prince Yang Xiuqing's decision to establish the capital in Nanjing was based on the advice of an old sailor, it is somewhat dramatic, and the credibility of this statement is not high. However, it reflects a fact that when Prince Yang, X.Q. of the East considered establishing the capital of Nanjing, he emphasized the abundant resources, convenient food supply, and convenient transportation of food and materials in the surrounding areas of Nanjing.

From the perspective of the Heavenly King Hong,X.Q. ,the reason for establishing the capital of Tianjing was also based on the following considerations: the convenience of obtaining stable food supplies in the Nanjing area to ensure the food security of the capital of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, alleviate the food supply crisis, and provide stable logistical support such as food for the Taiping army fighting abroad, based on the prosperous Jiangnan region. After the Taiping Army occupied Nanjing, at the banquet of Hong,X.Q.'s 40th birthday, the courtiers presented congratulatory speeches and compiled a collection titled “On the Establishment of Tianjing in Jinling”. It is mentioned in many places that Nanjing not only has the aura of an emperor and a dragon, but also features a tiger perched on a winding dragon and a treacherous terrain; More importantly, it is located in the southeastern region of wealth, with abundant grain production and a strong strategic reserve foundation (Chen & Mao, 1996). These factors prompted Hong,X.Q. to consider establishing the capital in Nanjing from the perspectives of strategic position and convenient food supply.

However, many people in later generations have had a great controversy over whether the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's capital, Tianjing, was correct. For example, Jian,Y.W. believes that the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's move was a major failure and one of the important reasons for the ultimate failure of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom movement (Jian, 1962, p. 513). Similarly, the British F A.

Lindley believed that the establishment of Nanjing as the capital of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was extremely detrimental to the future Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, as the occupation of Nanjing led to the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's revolution abandoning its offensive (Lindley, 1997). But the author believes that the leadership of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom chose to establish its capital in Tianjing out of the consideration of first solving the problem of food supply, which has its practical significance in the specific historical context and can be considered a wise choice.

4. The Problem of Food Supply Exacerbates Internal Conflicts in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom

4.1 The Contradiction between the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and the People

Grain was a major military supply during the Taiping Army's march. In the early stages of the revolution, Taiping Army generals believed that relying on the tribute of the people could complete the army's food supply, and thus invented the "tribute list". Before arriving at each location, the Taiping Army sent people to post tribute notices, encouraging wealthy households to contribute while the poor to contribute. After the army arrived, the military commander sent people to collect grain and other tribute items from the people at the beginning of the local period, and then sent them to the holy treasury, and then distributed corresponding tribute receipts to the people. This method of collecting tribute taxes had a certain degree of compulsion. But with the increasing number of times the Taiping Army received tribute from local people, they found that the tribute receipts they received could not protect their own property safety, nor could they receive corresponding rewards. They woke up and no longer willingly paid them for free. After the progress of collecting tribute from the people was not smooth, the Taiping Army began to adopt a policy of plundering and attacking the vanguard. The Taiping Army's use of plundering in order to obtain food supplies will undoubtedly provoke strong resistance from the people.

After the policy of "paying tribute and paying taxes as usual" was introduced, due to the frequent collection of tribute taxes by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom authorities or the frequent vanguard actions, the people suffered greatly and fled one after another. In some areas, there has even been resistance from the people, leading to collective resistance against grain and rent, and even the killing of township officials and attacks on grassroots grain collection institutions in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Furthermore, multiple uprisings by the lower class against the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom regime have erupted within the area under its rule. Faced with frequent anti grain actions by the lower class farmers, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom maintained its ruling order and ensured its food supply. Only violent conscription can be used, or only military suppression can be used, but this method of conscription backed by force is undoubtedly the opposite of pushing farmers towards the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.

4.2 The Contradiction between the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and Landlords and Gentry

At the beginning of the Taiping Rebellion, in order to quickly replenish food and cooperate with the rapid progress of military operations, the Taiping Army ordered local landlords to "pay tribute" and

“attack the vanguard”. Including township officials who often adopt a “scientific school” approach when collecting grain, “bandits ravage the riverbank and travel between Luoyi, and it is not surprising to see them (Xiang et al., 1952).” The plundering and encroachment of farmers and local gentry in various regions inevitably led to opposition from the landlords and gentry in the areas occupied by the Taiping Army, resulting in opposition between the landlords and gentry.

The plundering measures taken by the Taiping Army against landlords and gentry, as the war lasted for a long time, made the gentry groups in various regions uneasy, fearing that all their property would be plundered in this peasant revolution. If they wanted to protect themselves, they could only rise up in groups and thoroughly strangle this peasant uprising army. However, due to the traditions of Chinese society, traditional gentry still played an important role in the vast grassroots society within the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom’s ruling area (Fei, 1993). As a result, the connection between the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and the vast rural areas under its jurisdiction was almost severed, and the supply of troops and food that the Taiping Army relied on for survival and development was greatly restricted. They had to continue to rely on temporary but not long-term “coercion” and “plunder” to obtain food supplies in order to maintain their own survival. On the other hand, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom regime adopted this method of grain collection to maintain its revolutionary development, while invisibly placing itself in opposition to traditional rural society.

5. Conclusions

It can be said that the food crisis caused by insufficient food supply gave rise to a series of crises, which had a significant negative impact on the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and became the last straw that crushed the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom’s regime. For the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom regime at that time, implementing a grain collection policy that effectively safeguarded the interests of farmers and protecting their production enthusiasm was the fundamental solution to the food problem. Developing agricultural production was the source of ensuring food supply. However, due to the lack of advanced theoretical guidance from the peasant class, they are unable to solve the ever-changing and complex problems that arise during the revolution, including the issue of food supply. In today’s peaceful and prosperous country, we must still be prepared for danger and learn from history.

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