

The Statute of Irritated Residents and its Practice in Ming Qing Dynasty

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Abstract

The statute of irritated residents enacted in the early Ming dynasty attributed mass uprising to government officials' corruption or incompetence, and it inflicted severe punishment to officials concerned. The spirit of the legislation—regarding people as foundation of the regime—forms a moral image clearly portrayed in the traditional imperial law. Since the middle and late Ming to the Qing Dynasty, however, the frequency and strength of mass uprising had been increasing with the intensification of social contradictions, and the statute of “irritated residents” was turned into “anti-law mob,” of which the target was turned from officials into the public. The transformation of the purport and practice of legislation reflected deviation between the moral image of the traditional Confucian empire and its realistic image.

Keywords: Irritated Residents, Moral Image, Realistic Image