

Life is dear, the tael is dearer: A Study on Displacing the Murderer in Homicide Cases in the Qing Dynasty

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Abstract

Displacing the Murderer in homicide cases was a difficult point in trials during the Qing Dynasty. Displacing the Murderer (Dingxong) refers to a system by which the person who commits the crime does not receive punishment; someone else serves as a substitute and receives the punishment. These types of cases increased gradually from the Qianlong period. Instances of Dingxong were particularly common in armed brawls between two large groups of people, often families and lineage groups in Fujian and Guangdong provinces. The stipulations in the Qing Code were set separately for the different details in these cases. The regulations were also revised constantly based on feedback from legal practice. In general, the result of these modifications for the offence tended to increase leniency. This paper analyzes the social and judicial aspects of Displacing the Murderer cases to reveal the operations for the Qing judicial system at the local level.

Keywords: Displacing the Murderer (Dingxong), Brawl, White duck slaughter, Governance of Officials in the Qing Dynasty

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