

Images from Jiangnan to Evoke Tears from a Man of Iron

江南鐵淚圖

By Yu Zhi

Translated by Christopher C. Heselton

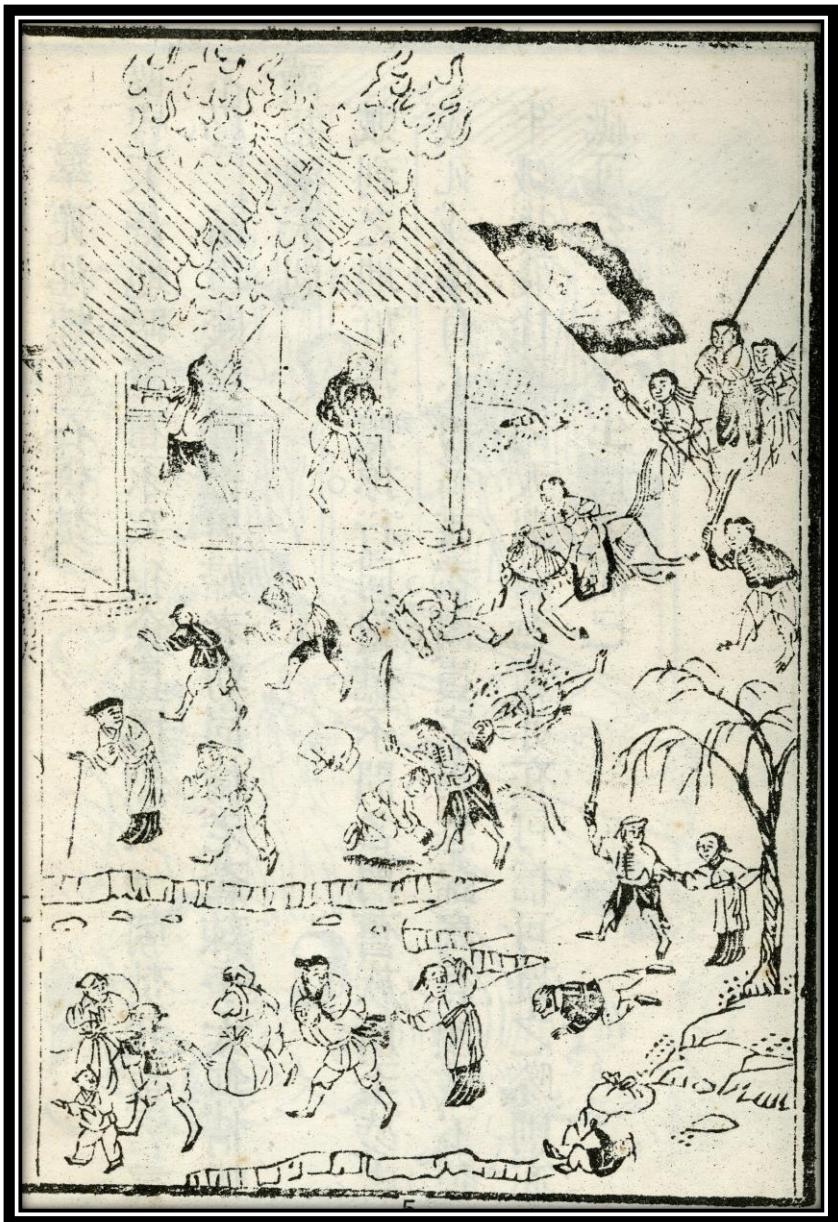
The following is an excerpt from Yu Zhi's *Images from Jiangnan to Evoke Tears from a Man of Iron* (*Tears from Iron* for short), which was published immediately after the Taiping Civil War (1851-1864). The author of *Tears from Iron*, Yu Zhi (1809-1874), was a minor scholar, playwright, and philanthropist from the wealthy city of Wuxi, Jiangsu (20 miles northwest of Suzhou along the Grand Canal). Like many men of his status, he aspired to become an official through the civil service examination, but never passed. Nonetheless, he was well-known in his community as a man of learning, writing, and virtue, which allowed him to rub elbows with some of the wealthiest and most powerful in the Jiangnan region. He used his connections, beginning in the 1840s, to start numerous charities, particularly orphanages for little girls abandoned at birth. Thus it is not surprising that when Civil War broke out in the early 1850s, Yu Zhi made himself into the unofficial propagandist for the Qing cause and took an active role in fundraising for both local militias and charities caring for refugees. When his hometown fell to the Taiping in 1860, he fled to Shanghai, which stayed out of the hands of the Taiping due to the presence of the British and French concessions there. In Shanghai, he redoubled his efforts fundraising for refugees. Since most of the Jiangnan region had fallen into rebel hands, he used his connections among the gentry in the Jiangbei region (northern Jiangsu), which had entirely avoided occupation by the Taiping, to raise funds for refugee relief and he continued to do so well after the war for reconstruction projects and charities that helped resettle refugees.

Tears from Iron was a pamphlet produced as a part of Yu Zhi's fundraising efforts. It consist of 42 woodblock print images that depict the raw visceral emotions experienced by many during and after the war as well as Yu Zhi's own interpretation of the war. Each image is accompanied by a text, which include an eight character title, an eight stanza song, and prose that describe the story or idea behind each image. Part of the purpose of the illustrated pamphlet was to show members of the gentry in Jiangbei, who had been spared the worst of the war, just how much the people in neighboring Jiangnan had suffered in the war, and to encourage them to donate to the reconstruction of the region. In this sense, *Tears from Iron* falls between a reflection of the emotional horrors and experiences of the war as well as a piece of propaganda designed to encourage the wealthy to donate. *Tears from Iron* is also one of the few sources of the period that gives us a civilian perspective of how the war was lived, experienced, and remembered.

Yu Zhi's Foreword

Jiangnan was more devastated than other provinces in the war. Many unbearable horrors were seen and heard that are too difficult to paint with words. Things that would make even bring a supposed man of iron to tears were he to see them. Alas! That things have become so horrible is tragic. Any man with a heart cannot help but be moved to weeping. Fortunately, the people have been saved from fire and water, and the imperial court has been restored as if by a spring rain. Our emperor works to pacify the downtrodden and heal the sick. His majesty has put his might and the resources of the army to help those in need. He implores the wealthy and educated to take pity on the people and urges them to give. This is no easy task. Those that have seen and heard what has happened know how enormous our work must be, and the pain and tears stored are enough for several generations. I wish to tell all those saddened that not all is lost.

With the emperor's benevolent grace as my guide, I have put my brush to ink and made these images from Jiangnan to evoke tears from a man of iron.

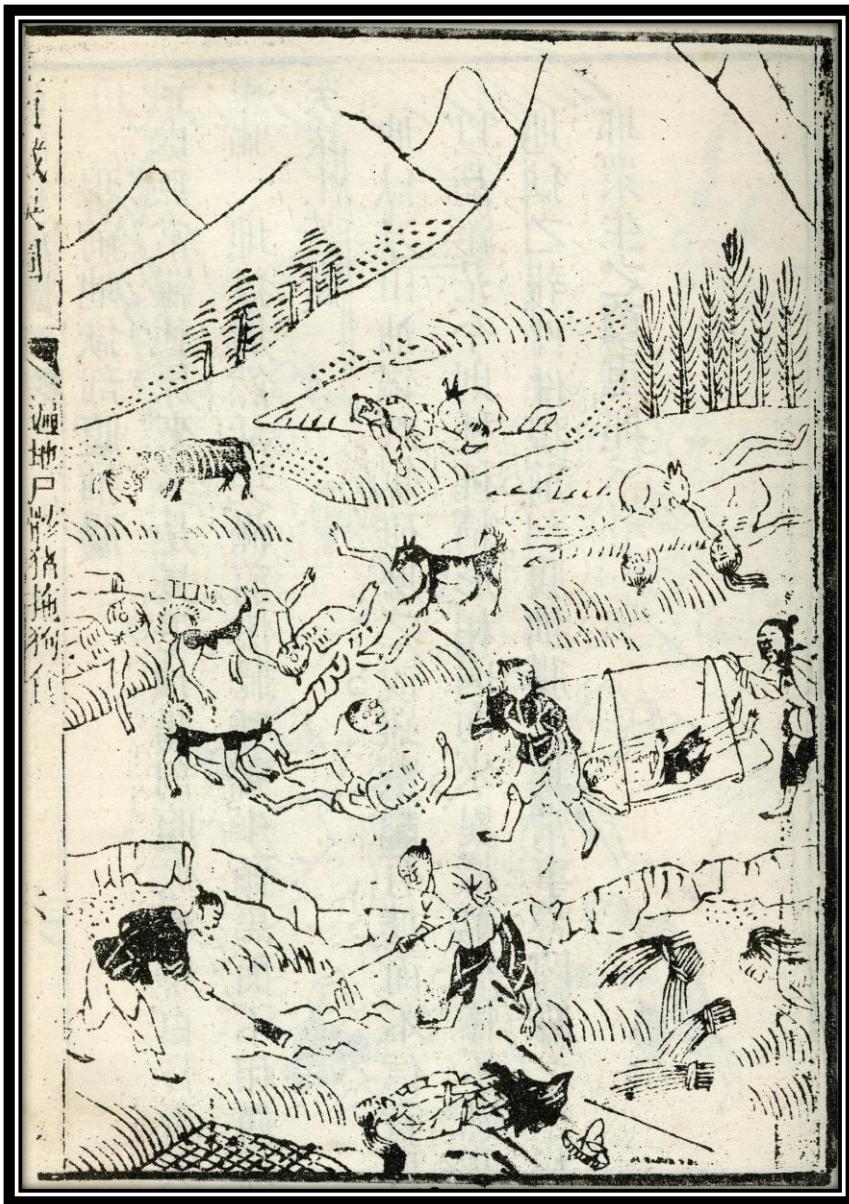


The Rebels Trample and the Bandits Spread Devastating the Common People

*These detestable packs of clowns [the Taiping];
Have beleaguered Jiangnan for many years.
The living have been poisoned by heartache.
They are pretty much half dead.*

*Everywhere there is torment.
It is hard to paint an image or convey the feeling.
One will have to rely on my crude efforts.
For the sound of grief could fill a river.*

Since the fall of Jinling [Nanjing] in the year *yichou* in the reign of the Xianfeng Emperor [1853], the Yue rebels [the Taiping]¹ have wantonly looted and pillaged. Fortunately, General Zhang [Guoliang]² repeatedly fended off the rebels for many years, fiercely resisting and providing a wall of protection for Jiangnan. In the spring of the year *gengshen* [1860], the general died in battle, and the defenses of Suzhou failed. There was not a single village that did not fall prey to destruction and horrifically slaughtered. It is difficult to put into writing. For those who witnessed it, it wore their grief to exhaustion.



Everywhere Lie Corpses and Bones; Hogs Scavenge and Dogs Devour

*The living have seen heaven flipped and the earth overturned!
Everywhere corpses lie.
Blood and flesh soak the fields.
None record their title and name.³*

*Dogs and pigs unwittingly chew on the bodies.
Suddenly, the rebels had come fighting ferociously.
They passed by six times like rabid men.
They are far from being as good as beast.*

After the rebels passed by, there are no residents in the alleys. There is no one left to gather the [corpses of] men and women killed, and are often left to the dogs and pigs to be eaten, tugging and pulling at the bodies tearing them into pieces. Although there are filial sons and adoring grandsons, they have no way of recognizing [their mutilated corpses]. They are truly no better than dogs and pigs! Those failing to attempt to search one by one the men and women killed in the conflict are not being filial⁴ to their parents and relatives. Five or six out of ten are devoid of all gratitude. Their actions are like those of dogs and pigs. The way of heaven is manifestly bright and is not without reason. It can be used to reflect upon oneself.



Cast Into the Wilds, They Fill Ditches

Once they get word that the rebels are coming;

Everyone flees in panic.

Without hesitation, they abandon their wealth and things.

They struggle as if in the mouth of a tiger in order to survive.

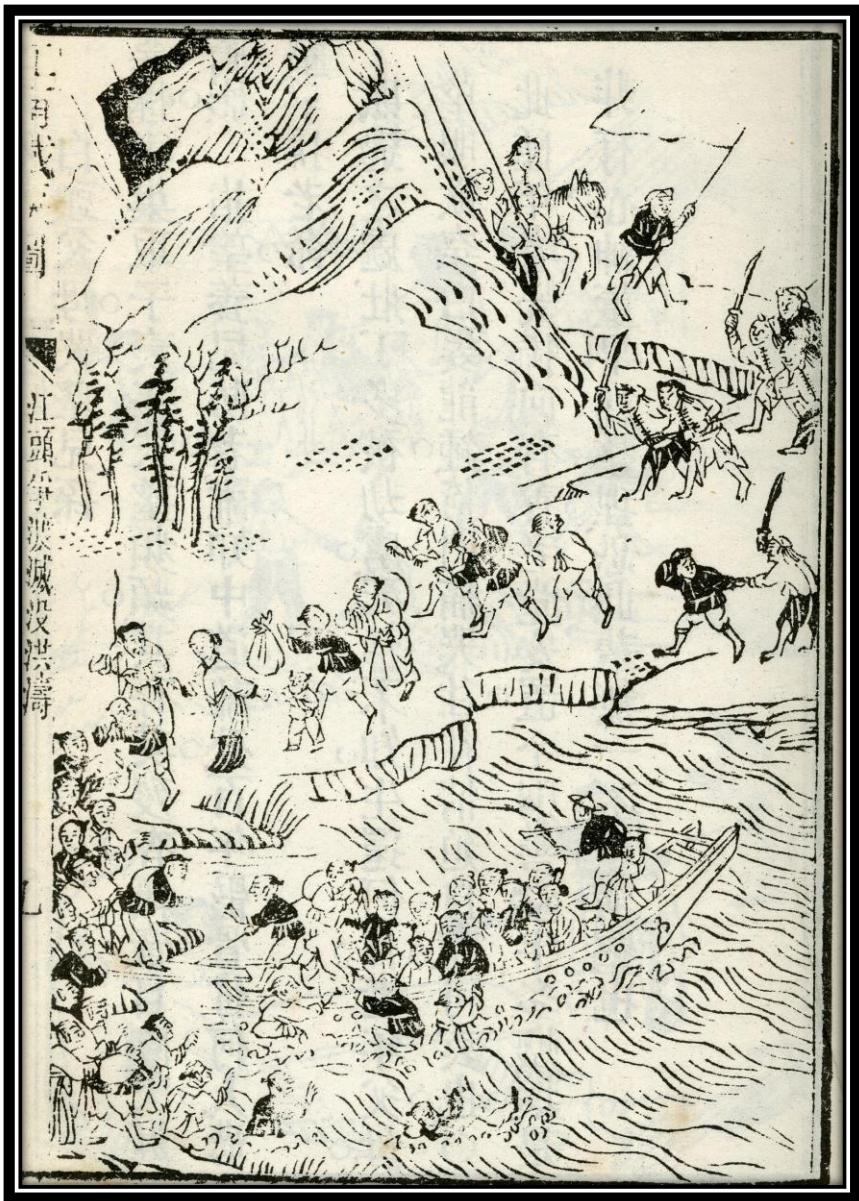
They eat anywhere they can and sleep out in the open.

Everyone pities they who live under broken branches and flapping tents.

With faces worn by weather, they beg for food and learn to play the flute.⁵

To be a half-starving corpse in another village.⁶

Refugees flee the charging rebels. They flee for their lives - always fleeing [the approaching rebels] and always on the move. They have been scattered in every direction. Those that have no relatives to rely upon have no way to survive. Over time, their mussels are worn and their strength sapped, and their corpses often fill ditches. Within a short time, local men of note and old families just cover up the ditches to bury them. It is hard to understand this. It is like Zheng the Examiner's *A Painting of Vagrants*.⁷ How has it come to this extreme!?

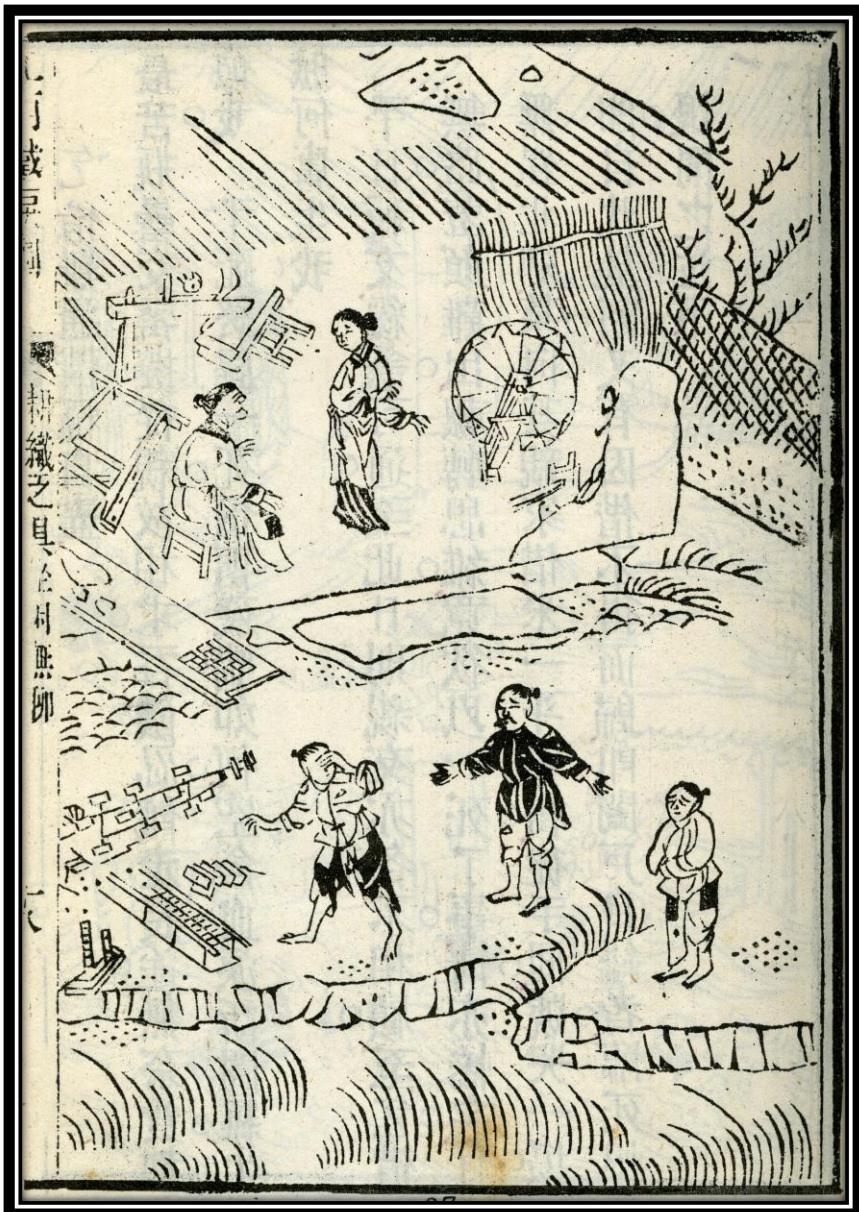


They Struggle to Cross the River; In the Frothing Waves They Sink

*Their eyes full of the images of tumultuous warfare;
They flee in any direction for their lives.
Fortunately, at the river's edge a ferryboat is moored.
They plead with the captain to save their pitiful lives.*

*These desperate people are numerous and crowd on the boat.
He tells them to hurry and board.
Bravely, they risk the waves charging forward;
Headless of the waves frothing and rolling.*

Being pursued by the rebels, refugees flee to the river's shore. The refugees are many, but the boats few. Many arrive too late to find salvation. Some, desperate, charge into the waters [to swim across], where they meet their common end like floating fish belly-up. So numerous are they that they cannot be counted; any guess would probably underestimate the true numbers of those that drowned under capping waves in the middle of the river. There are also those that, due to the strict imperial order blockading the river,⁸ could not find salvation and tragically committed suicide by drowning themselves in the river. One could not count on one's fingers how many times these kinds of things have happened. The horrors are difficult to speak of. At the time, had we hired boats to help people crossing the river, we could have saved thousands. This would have been a real ship of benevolence.⁹



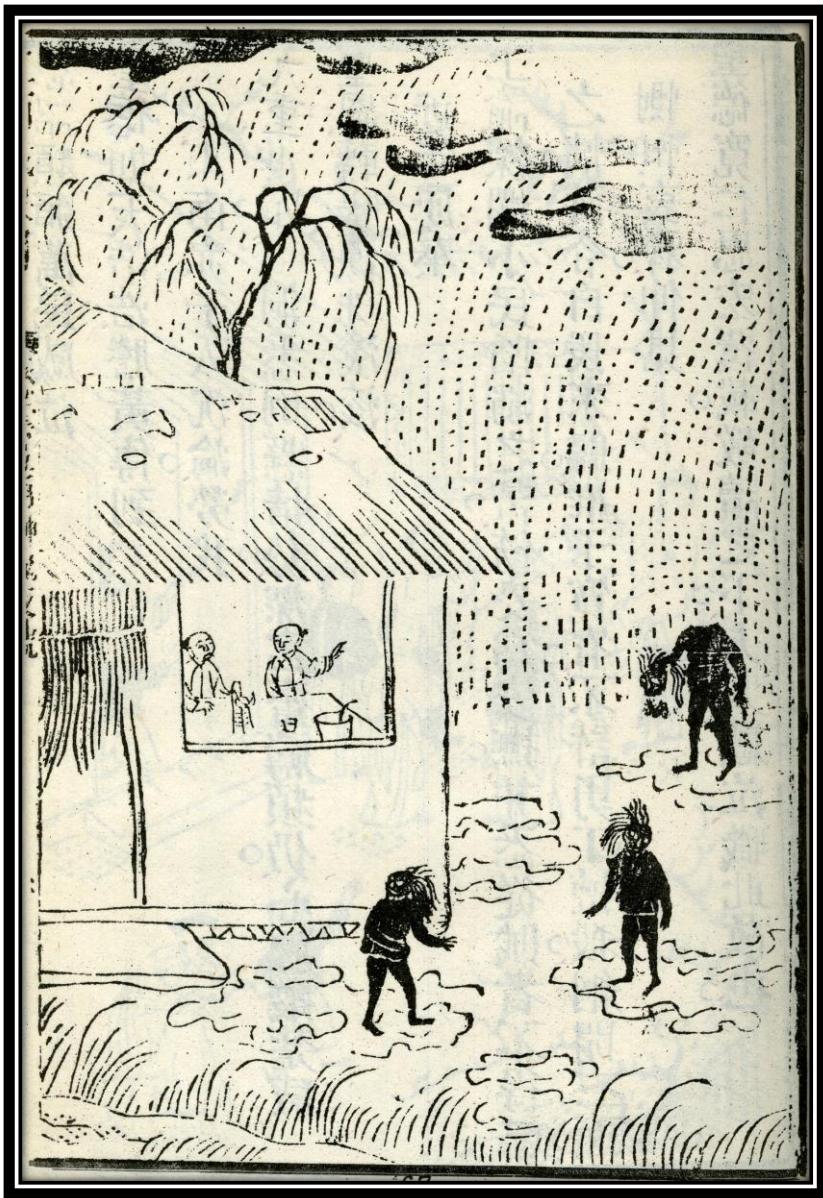
Farmers and Weavers Lack Tools; They Sit Idle in Their Plight

*Their hands are tied when it comes to useful work in the morning hours;
Their livelihoods farming and weaving have been cast aside.
It is not the case that they are lazy or deign hard work,
But their tools of the trade have been swept up.¹⁰*

*They cannot buy what they need for they lack the capital.
They fritter away idle all day long.*

*They reminisce about when they would go and sell a bundle of cloth.
Now, they are distraught in disheveled clothes like a torn thread.*

Most of the people of Jiangnan relied upon farming and weaving to live. Ever since they suffered the destruction of the rebels, everything has been laid waste. Every loom and spindle, plow and sickle in every home has been destroyed. Although they have the talent for their work, they have no way to put their hands to work. They spend their days and evenings idle, looking at their homes with no hope. They have no livelihood to survive. Over time survival becomes harder. If at the time they had some way to borrow money, those that relied on such tools, even though they would need to pay back the interest, they would still do so willingly, because with something profitable people could pay back interest. This is the smartest and least wasteful way, as well as the most convenient. Such benevolent loans and virtuous debts would find many an appreciative people. Even if they could not be paid back, those that had a heart would still be elevated above their peers by the people. I encourage everyone to save the lives of the many, to care for the dead, and shelter the old. Over a hundred generations it will come back a thousand time, giving rise to happiness and prosperity. Those that know about karma cannot miss this opportunity!

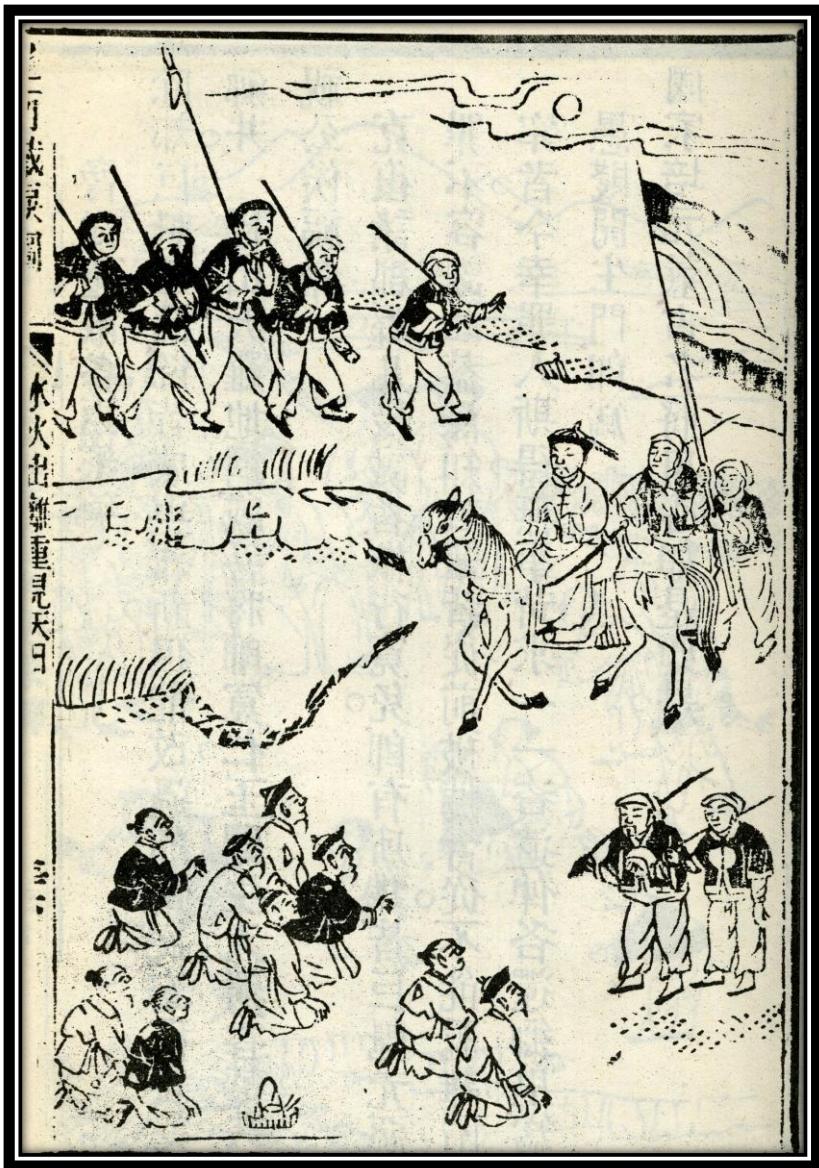


Under Foreboding Clouds and Sobbing Rains, Ghost Howl in the Night

*How deeply tragic it is!
In the middle of the night, suddenly there is a sorrowful wail.
Through the driving winds and torrential rains, one cannot bear to listen.
They moan as if it is Ruobao's¹¹ torment.*

*Despondently, one keeps looking for the sun to rise,
Desiring to express one's complaints.
I send my wife and child away, and ask my good friends.
He points out that several people lost their life there.*

Those that have read the tale of *Ruminating on an Ancient Battlefield*¹² have often heard of ghost crying out on dark days. Every time they close the book they cannot help but be saddened. Today is much like in antiquity, for we have all seen it before our eyes, and sense that the ancients really were not fooling us – The dead are amongst us! Which of them did not have a father and mother? Which of them did not have wives and sons? Ghost know! And what is to be done about those [ghost] that looked toward the care of friends and relatives?¹³ And what is to be done about their friends and relatives now?



Saved from Fire and Water, the People See the Light

*The mist have dispersed and clouds settled;
Only to discover again that the sky is bright.
For over ten years they have endured brutality with words of misery.
Only now do they have their lives back.*

*Take pity on our thousand plights and hundreds of sorrows.
Snicker at their humiliating defeat and ignominious retreat.
From hence forth, of peace shall songs be sung and music played.
For our majestic land¹⁴ is whole once more.*

The commoners of Jiangnan have no more strength to move.
Most have suffered unheard of denigrations. Their mouths emerging from
the darkness of hell¹⁵ speak of tormenting things too horrific to describe.
Fortunately, our great soldiers have bravely triumphed and the rebels
scattered in defeat. [The people] as if plucked up from the mist see the
blue sky. Everyone raises their hands in the air in delight!



Fearing to Reform One's Nature Will Only Lead to the Seas of Calamity Rising Once More

*The winds of the apocalypse¹⁶ are fierce and waves brimming;
Some have already crossed together to the other side.¹⁷
Heaven's¹⁸ mind sees into men's hearts.
So men are not in a position to sing praise of their deeds.*

*Imperiled like a fish in a barrel and a sparrow in a net,
Fearful like stepping on a tiger's tail and walking on ice in the spring.
They burn incense and spend the night reflecting upon themselves.
Have they ever awakened from this delightful dream?¹⁹*

This spell of calamity has rarely been seen since ancient times. From whence did it come? All things derive from man, and if man does not reform, then Heaven's rage is sure to follow. The apocalypse wrought by the rebels was borne of man, and not man's response to the apocalypse. Heaven's rage cannot be avoided, so how can the apocalypse be evaded? Those wishing to avoid Heaven's wrath must cast aside their fear of reforming their nature. For it is illogical not to! Heed this and one can avoid the blade of soldiers and the pestilence of war. None of this will be as an apocalypse. As soon as the rebels are defeated, one can revel in delight.

Yu Zhi's Conclusion

The following 42 images were made by the Mountain Man Sent to the Clouds²⁰ to solicit donations for the refugees of Jiangnan. Ever since Jiangnan suffered at the hands of the rebels, refugees have been unable to survive. Their tragic stories are full of anguish too hard to reliably convey in words. His majesty brings back joy by ordering the loyal to be recognized, sweeping clean the halls, saving the people from fire and water, and providing for military expenses. He has ordered relief dispersed to many for the salvation and resuscitation of the masses of sages that are sick with dread. This mountain man witnessed these horrors leaving him heartbroken, and thus made these images to solicit donations everywhere among people such as myself that have been moved to tears and hope to help by donating or cherishing these written words.

His highness is deeply sorrowed by this darkness. He has ordered that the hungry and weak all be cared for, and this Mountain Man shares in these bitter sentiments. I implore those that feel the same to contribute resources or make copies of this pamphlet to spread its message of hope far and wide.

Gentlemen of compassion in the four corners of the earth care for one another, mutually helping each other in soliciting assistance. When they see such things as in this pamphlet, they cannot help but be shocked and moved and compelled to action. There should be no lack of people moved to loosening their purse strings out of a sense of righteousness. If this is such and there is no lack of even outsiders willing to give alms, then there is nothing we cannot do.

Alas! These images are difficult to look at and unbearable to listen to. Those that looked at them and are not moved have no human compassion. Those that are moved but do not make an effort to save people have no human compassion. In this extraordinarily apocalyptic calamity, it is impossible to know how many tens of millions of commoners died. Many of them were noble gentlemen of greater deeds and reputation than myself. Many were men of intellect and talent that far surpass my own. They are countless. What virtue or ability did I possess that allowed me to avoid this calamity? I still do not know. I am thankful to Heaven's grace, which allowed me to reform myself to good in instinctual hopes of repaying Heaven's kindness.

Our generation is full of men that have read the books of the sages, and moved to embrace their words. At this moment in time, for those that sit idly by when seeing such horrors and claim to embrace such words, how can they claim to measure up to such lofty ideals? I say that those of true virtue and repute are those that take part in charity at the necessary moment. How can those today of virtue and repute and those today that supposedly take part in charity stand by twiddling their thumbs?

Human existence is a flicker of life that last at most a century, but the opportunities to accumulate moral merit can last a millennia. These instances are hard to come by, and after they pass they will not come back. The more one donates the more benefit one will receive in return. Those that care for the future of their children and grandchildren and worry about their immortal soul should put their entire being into this. For how will there be a second opportunity like this to do good deeds? My plan is to gradually accumulate merit like dust building a mountain from nothing. My writing hand returns to the ancients and cherishes their words. Those that read this and carry these chapters should sigh, and think of them [the ancients], their own fortuity, and not miss this opportunity to accumulate karma. It is also for later generations that they might have profound sense of what we experienced.

¹ The Taiping were often called the Yue Rebels in Qing sources. The term Yue alludes to the fact that the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom began in Guangxi Province and many of the generals and officials of the Taiping regime were also from Guangxi.

² Zhang Guoliang (1810-1860) was the general responsible for keeping the Taiping contained in Nanjing and preventing the Taiping from marching eastward into Jiangnan. In the spring of 1860, the Taiping managed to breakthrough Zhang's defenses with a risky ploy at the Second Battle of the Jiangnan Encampment. Zhang fled

with the remainder of his troops to Danyang, where he was defeated again. In some accounts, he died while trying to flee across a canal when his boat capsized and he drowned. In other accounts, he committed suicide with his own sword. He was remembered by many people in Jiangnan at the time as the supreme defender of their home who tragically fell fighting to the death.

³ "None record their title and name" ie. they were not properly buried so that their name would be put on a headstone and thus forgotten.

⁴ "filial" or "filial piety" is an essential Confucian virtue concerning the kind of selfless devotion and gratitude one should have towards one's parents. In this case, Yu Zhi is demurring the fact that many sons and daughters have failed to properly bury their parents and venerate their spirits – a crucial element of ancestor worship – and thus deeming them moral failures.

⁵ I believe the author means that refugees learned to play music to beg for money as street performers.

⁶ Ie. far from home in a strange place.

⁷ This is a reference to a famous painting in the Song dynasty by Zheng Xia (1041-?) that depicts refugees fleeing famine in Henan Province in 1074, which Zheng used to convince the Shenzong Emperor to provide famine relief and criticize reforms he was opposed to.

⁸ This is a reference to an imperial order that banned all ships from sailing around the mouth of the Yangzi River for fear that they would be captured by the Taiping and incorporated into their navy.

⁹ "ship of benevolence" is a Buddhist term that meant to perform works of charity. In this case, Yu Zhi is making a play on words both literal and figurative.

¹⁰ "swept up" ie. "destroyed," "eliminated," or "lost."

¹¹ Ruobao's torment is a reference to a famous ghost story from the Warring States Period. Ruobao rebelled against his lord and lost. As punishment, his lord executed his children and grandchildren, leaving him with no descendants to care for his soul in the afterlife. Therefore, it is said that in the afterlife Ruobao is a starving ghost for eternity.

¹² A reference to a famous Tang dynasty poem in which the author meets the tormented ghost of soldiers on a battlefield that had died centuries earlier.

¹³ Yu Zhi is referring to the fact that these are wandering ghost that have no family to provide for their spirits in the afterlife and are thus suffering.

¹⁴ "our majestic land," or more literally "the exquisitely embroidered mountains and rivers," refers to China.

¹⁵ "Hell" here is the Buddhist and popular Chinese concept of hell. Not to be confused with the Christian hell, but they do share some similarities in that it was a terrible place for the spirits of the wicked to linger in torment after death.

¹⁶ "apocalypse" or "calamity" here is translated from the word *jie* (劫) or *jiehai* (劫海 – more literally "apocalyptic sea"), which was a Buddhist concept of the horrific end of a *kalpa* or epoch in which the wicked would be destroyed. While it should not be confused with the Christian idea of the apocalypse, it does share some similarities in terms of moral judgment, atonement, and the end of an era.

¹⁷ Ie. They have been swept up in the apocalypse and died.

¹⁸ "Heaven" here should not be confused with the Christian idea of the afterlife, but seen as a moral force or entity (not being or deity) that reacts to the morality of the mortal realm. When people are wicked, Heaven punishes with disaster.

¹⁹ I believe he means that while spending the night in deep meditation at the temple burning incense as described in the previous line; they come to the realization that they need to reform themselves. With this epiphany, people begin to see good restored to the world, so they might think that they must have fallen asleep while meditating and they are still dreaming, because it is difficult for them to accept that there is good in the world.

²⁰ "The Mountain Man Sent to the Clouds" was Yu Zhi's nom'd plume.