The Fu Ssu-nien Lectures, 2025

The Fall of the Ming in the First Person: Jiangnan 1640-1650

Second Lecture: **Conquest, Resistance, Acceptance**

Prof. Pierre-Étienne Will

Collège de France

Institute of History & Philology, Academia Sinica

The Fall of the Ming in the First Person: Jiangnan 1640-1650

Pierre-Étienne Will

(Collège de France)

IHP, December 3rd, 2025

(Draft, not for citation)

In yesterday's lecture I have based myself on a selection of first-person testimonies and remembrances to illustrate the extreme social tensions that had been building up in the Jiangnan region (more precisely, in Suzhou and Songjiang prefectures) since the late 1630s; and I have showed how these tensions, how the volatility stressed by every author could only be exacerbated by the sequence of natural disasters—drought, locusts, epidemics—that ravaged the region during the same period, culminating in 1641 and 1642, and caused a murderous famine such as had never been experienced by the people of Jiangnan, for whom such things could only happen in the north.

I also mentioned the extreme nervousness, at times bordering on terror, fueled by a succession of alarming news of military defeats against the Manchus, and especially—because they operated so much closer—by the rebel armies that for years had roamed much of north and central China. It is a fact that Jiangnan did not experience the realities of war and invasion until the spring of 1645, when the Qing forces entered the region; but already in the early 1640s, if not before, we may assume that many people in Jiangnan, and definitely several of our authors, expected that their native province would sooner or later be engulfed in the wars fought by the Ming against deadly enemies. As Lu Shiyi, writing in Jiading in 1641, exclaims at one point: "I fear that in the future our home will fall victim to some unpredictable catastrophe!" (恐將來鄉國有不可測之變).

Such, then, was the psychological stress under which our region, weakened as it was by economic misery and social strains, was confronted with the political and military upheavals of 1644 and after. My aim in this lecture is, again, to look into first-person documents to get as precise as possible an idea of how the people of Jiangnan—and not just the political and academic elite—reacted and behaved once they were challenged with a cluster of shattering realities.

These realities were in fact of an extremely varied nature and kept changing at a rapid space. So, it seems to me that it may be helpful to begin by briefly recalling the sequence of *events*

that shaped them. The beginning of everything was of course the fall of Beijing at the hands of Li Zicheng 李自成 and the suicide of the Chongzhen emperor, on April 25, 1644; or rather (since we are in Jiangnan), it was the *news* of that unspeakable catastrophe: first, the unverifiable rumors that started seeping out and spreading here and there after a time-lag of perhaps a dozen days—rumors such as "reason refuses that it might be true" (以理所必無), as the *Qi Zhen jiwen lu* author says; then, a few days later, the confirmation of the news by reliable informers arriving from the north; and then again, several weeks later, the formalization of the new situation on June 8 by means of the "edict of lamentation" (*aizhao* 哀詔) promulgated by the Ming prince who had just been appointed regent in Nanjing, and who would be enthroned as the Hongguang emperor eleven days later.

The next shattering event, after the Ming dynasty had survived for one year in South China, was the comparatively easy capture of Nanjing by the Manchus, on June 7, 1645, three weeks after they had taken Yangzhou and broken the Ming line of defense north of the Yangzi; and, as a result, the collapse of the Ming regime. What followed was a rather confusing period, with a constantly evolving mixture of submission and resistance on the part of the inhabitants of Jiangnan. During their progress through the region, the Qing forces (which were largely composed of Chinese troops commanded by Chinese generals) resorted with indisputable success to the threat of submitting the cities that would refuse to surrender at once to the same fate as Yangzhou: Yangzhou's savage slaughtering was of course on the minds of everybody. On the other hand, the Qing's fateful decision to order all Chinese men to shave their heads and wear their hair in pigtail could only encourage resistance; and it is again this background that several cities which appeared to have accepted the new rulers rebelled again, at the cost of massacres that have entered history—Jiading, Jiangyin, Kunshan, Songjiang, and others. As far as final surrender goes, the situation had become more or less stabilized, in the cities and towns if not in the countryside, by the end of 1645; and although there were further attempts at uprising during the next few years, they never coalesced and they failed rapidly.

Such, then, is the general outline of events. What interests me is to find direct testimonies of how they affected both society and individuals. Thus (to take one first example), how was Jiangnan impacted by the news of the fall of Beijing in the spring of 1644? Here we can start from an ingenious study by Kishimoto Mio, first published in 1993, who based herself on a multiplicity of sources—including some of those I'm using in this presentation—to trace the propagation of the information in Jiangnan: when exactly was it received in each place? And to what extent can we figure out how it circulated? There are some uncertainties due to the sources, but the general picture is that the rumor spread across Jiangnan during a period of about one month, from the first week of May to the first week of June, until it became official news with the edict of lamentation, which itself took a certain number of days to be proclaimed everywhere.

For my part, I located a few more sources that complete Kishimoto's detailed account, and I also tried to look closer at the *reactions* triggered by the stunning news of the disaster in Beijing—both individual reactions and reactions among local communities. These reactions are in fact very contrasted—such as it would be difficult to describe all of them in detail here.

Speaking of individuals, in his immense diary the political star Qi Biaojia 祁彪佳, who was then travelling between Shaoxing and Nanjing to take up his post of regional inspector for Nan Zhili, mentions all the pieces of information about the situation at the capital—many of them fanciful or obsolete—that he received along the way, from all sorts of sources. But the confirmed news of the death of Chongzhen reached him only on the 1st of June, while he was one stage off Nanjing; and then he says, in his typically understated way: "Because of this, I walked to and fro during the whole night" (為之徬徨徹夜). And to return to people I mentioned yesterday, in his autobiography Ye Shaoyuan, who had heard rumors in his place in rural Wujiang, got confirmation of this event that "he does not even bears to mention" (不忍言之事) on June 5; and he reacted in more literary terms: "I was plunged in sorrow, and day after day my heart shook like a pennant tossed by the wind" (心搖搖如懸旌) (a phrase borrowed from the *Zhanguo ce*). For his part, Zeng Yuwang, the government student from a coastal town south of Songjiang whom I mentioned yesterday, who at the time stayed in a town near Shanghai named Zhoupu 周浦, says in his *biji* that on the 2nd of June his father received a letter from a colleague who had just been appointed minister in Beijing and asked him to join him; but that the next day the terrible news arrived in Zhoupu, causing his father to keep sobbing for three days, holding the letter in his hand.

Now contrast this with what Yao Tingling, the teenager from Shanghai, tells us. In Shanghai , Yao and his relatives had certainly heard the rumors, but in his autobiography he only mentions the official news of Chongzhen's death: on June 9, the *duanwu* festival, they were all in the middle of a banquet—his great-uncle the wealthy retired official and his sons, himself Yao Ton,gin, his teacher, and his friends in the family school (where he was a notoriously bad student)—when someone suddenly rushed in holding a "small gazette" (小報) which announced the death of the emperor and the fall of the capital. They were all stunned; and the immediate reaction was not crying with sorrow, but discussing where to take cover (斟酌避難)—as I mentioned yesterday, Yao's great-uncle had been thinking about it for some time.

In short, serious trouble was anticipated by the Yaos, as it no doubt was by Qi Biaojia during his sleepless night, or by Ye Shaoyuan during his several days of palpitations, or indeed by everybody, and for good reason: the region was reeling from the disasters I have described yesterday, social tensions were extreme, the fear of military aggression was building up; and in addition to this, many authors insist on the effects of the merciless fiscal pressure exerted by a government desperate to fund defense, in particular the ruthless implementation of tribute grain quotas, which struck the Jiangnan prefectures first and foremost: as the author of the Suzhou

chronicle *Qi Zhen jiwen lu* says, because of this pressure "a majority of people harbored thoughts of rebellion in their hearts" (人心大都思亂). In such circumstances, the collapse of what was the keystone of the entire political and symbolic order—the emperor in his capital—threatened to trigger a social explosion. And this is indeed what happened.

Our first-person testimonies are remarkably efficient in helping to fully grasp the uncertainty, the fear, and the underlying violence that pervaded the various places they are discussing. Better than that, they clearly show how the sequence of political events determined what was happening on the ground. At first, say some authors, the news of the demise of the Chongzhen emperor made the people feel like orphans. For example, Zeng Yuwang describes how, after the tragic event was known in the town of Zhoupu, the small folk were despairing and sobbing as if they had been "deprived of their anchorage" (靡所依泊). Other scenes of popular despair—as distinct from the *kumiao* 哭廟 ritualized lamentation of the officials and literati—could be cited. Almost immediately, however, the political vacuum created by the fall of Beijing translated into a state of near-anarchy; and although Hongguang's enthronement in Nanjing restored a degree of Ming legitimacy, it obviously did not put an end to this situation. All sorts of malcontent people and troublemakers (the sort of people that the sources call *wulai* 無賴 or *bucheng* 不逞, or other such terms) seemed just eager to take advantage of the shock created by the fall of Beijing, the wildest rumors continued to circulate, in addition to all of this there was again a protracted drought from the 6th lunar month through winter, and in a general way people were on edge.

Yao Tinglin is particularly good at describing this ambience in his native Shanghai. Right after mentioning the officials' and literati's ritual lamentation, he adds: "At the time in our prefecture, peace had reigned for a long time, the citizens knew nothing about war, there had been famine year after year, people only thought of running away, old and young lived in anxiety, and spurious news were heard every day." Sometime later, detailed news arrived in Shanghai of the Manchu takeover of Beijing and of the combats in the North; and then a terrifying rumor spread, to the effect that the four generals supposed to protect the Ming north of the Yangzi (the so-called *sizhen* 四鎮) had been defeated, and that they were now coming to Jiangnan *by sea* with the intention of plundering the region! There were constantly false alarms in the middle of the night that made people flee in panic. And because nobody felt safe, the rich started organizing their own security: "All the families of the elite (*shidafu* 士大夫) trained their bondservants (*jiaren* 家人), teaching them how to handle the spear and the bludgeon, mobilizing troops and accumulating weapons, banging gongs and clattering rattles, displaying their might and showing off their arms, each one to protect itself." So, in a few lines that concern the limited environment of Shanghai, we experience firsthand the mutually reinforcing effects of the political uncertainty, fanciful rumors, fear of civil or military violence, universal excitability, and somewhat pathetic attempts at self-defense.

Now if we look at the larger environment of Jiangnan, one of the best sources to realize how the whole region was on edge during the first few months after the fall of the North is a quite different sort of first-person document: it is the diary of Qi Biaojia. Qi Biaojia, who was then in Nanjing, had been appointed pacification commissioner for the four Jiangnan prefectures on the 12th of June and he had immediately set out for Suzhou; and his diary from this point onward reads like a day-by-day enumeration of riots breaking out here and there, of the destruction and looting of residences belonging to officials who had surrendered to Li Zicheng in Beijing, of mob attacks against local officials, of outbursts of plundering, and so forth—as many incidents that were reported to him during his progress to Suzhou.

More locally again, let me just cite Zeng Yuwang in his *Yiyou biji*, who is always good at describing the mood prevailing in the rural and small-town surroundings of Songjiang and Shanghai. Zeng explicitly connects the fall of the Ming in 1644 with a turn to violence: now killing people was like cutting grass (殺人如草), he says, and he explains that he did not dare to walk the roads because they were full of armed men, and only after several months did the roads become safe again. But Zeng Yuwang also speaks extensively of another, much more systematic and collective sort of violence: I'm speaking of the bondservant revolts (奴變) that started shortly after the dynastic debacle in Beijing was known in the region—in July 1644, according to most sources.

The revolts of bondservants (also called slaves, or serfs, there are debates on the proper term) in the mid-1640s have already been well studied by historians, so I don't want to enter too much into details. All our first-person authors discuss them, sometimes at great length, and they add a lot of firsthand information to the other sources dealing with the subject (that is, first of all, the local gazetteers): for example, on the precise locations of the attacks, on the names of the leaders, on the families that fell victim to the uprisings, even on the number of victims, and more.

Let me recall at this point that the condition of the *nupu* 奴僕—also called *jiaren* 家人, and various other names—was often a *voluntary condition*, people signing contracts to place themselves under the fiscal protection of a "master" in exchange for their liberty and that of their descendants, and for various services; while for members of the elite, boasting a lot of bondservants was a marker of statute and influence. In any event, the phenomenon was pervasive in Jiangnan society, and apparently it was particularly widespread in the cotton-producing areas along the Yangzi—places like Shanghai, Jiading, Taicang, or Jiangyin. Economic exploitation (which was far from systematic) was less an issue than the resentment of bondservants at their inferior status and the demeaning, occasionally brutal, ways they were treated, *and* especially at the fact that this inferior status was hereditary. This is why much of the violence against bondservant-owners during these episodes was exerted by people who

absolutely insisted on "retrieving the contracts" (*suoqi* 索契)—that is, the contracts that had deprived them and their descendance of their status of *liangmin* 良民, or "freemen".

And this contributes to explain why the two waves of bondservant uprisings that struck Jiangnan coincided with the two changes of regime that happened: first, the advent of the short-lived Hongguang regime in Nanjing; and one year later, the imposition of Qing power on the region. Thus, Zeng Yuwang in his *Yiyou biji* claims that it all started with the Hongguang accession edict, in June 1644, which contained the phrase *yu min gengshi* 與民更始, "to offer the people a new departure". Now this notion, which is often found in proclamations of dynastic change, circulated among the bondservants with a completely different meaning: for them, it meant that they would no longer be subjected to their former masters, that their condition would change.

This first wave of bondservant uprisings was extremely violent, but it was comparatively short—a few weeks altogether. Obviously, despite the general turmoil the Ming authorities in Jiangnan were still able to coordinate their actions and mobilize the administrative and military means necessary to arrest and execute the leaders and restore order—meaning, as our authors insist, to preserve the status segregation between masters and bondservants (*zhupu zhi fen* 主僕之分). In contrast, the second wave of bondservant disturbances, which coincided with the collapse of the Nanjing regime in the spring of 1645 and the Qing's painstaking efforts to establish their own domination, took place in a context of *total* anarchy: for a variable amount of time, depending on the locality, no instance existed that would be able to impose its control over society. And to the cocktail of social antagonisms, economic difficulties, and anxieties about an impending military assault that had prevailed in 1644, a new element was now added, to wit, the uncertainties about how to deal with the invaders claiming imperial legitimacy who had got rid of the Ming in Nanjing and were now attempting to replace them across Jiangnan. In other words, it was the choice between resistance or not resistance. The resulting confusion and violence were worse than the year before; and they are conveyed with much realism by our first-person sources.

Part of this violence and confusion was again caused by the bands of bondservants that rose up in a number of places immediately after the population had heard of the demise of Hongguang. And in several instances we hear of the same calls as in the Songjiang area in 1644, for a change in the condition of bondservants on the pretext that the regime has changed. Let me briefly give two examples which I find particularly interesting.

The first concerns Taicang, and it is found in the somewhat disorderly but extremely rich first-person chronicle I mentioned yesterday, the *Yantang jianwen zaji*. The outbreaks of violence involving various gangs of outlaws or undisciplined bands of soldiers, the coming and going of officials and military commanders of unclear loyalties, the attacks on the rich, the

settlings of accounts, the racketeering in the name of defense, the episodes of panic among the populace, and so on and so forth—all of this is fascinating to read, but much too complicated to recount in detail. But in the middle of it there is a substantial entry on the bondservant uprising that was part of the turmoil immediately after the "change of regime" (鼎革), in other words, of the confirmation of the capture of Nanjing and arrest of the Hongguang emperor by the Manchus in June 1645. The *Yantang jianwen zaji*, in fact, is the only source on this event in Taicang (the entry in the Taicang local gazetteer also mentions it, but it is no more than a summary of the same text).

The author begins with a paragraph expounding the considerable importance and the great severity of the *zhupu* institution in Taicang society, an institution which, he insists, is supported by imperial law; and then he recounts how the change of regime incited some "cunning slaves" (*xianu* 黠奴) to violently demand the return of their bondage contracts, using as an argument that "because of the change of regime, why should the rules of bondage be as before?" (以鼎革故，奴例何得如初). And following this there is the usual description of bands of bondservants roaming the city, the towns and the villages to get their contracts back, the terrorized masters, the humiliations, violence, arson, and killings whenever the masters are too slow in responding, etc. But what is unique in this account, it seems to me, is that the man who seems to have been the leader of the movement, a certain Yu Boxiang 俞伯祥 (a former bondservant who lived in the city), attempted to *institutionalize the revolution*, so to speak: "He claimed that their achievements should endure a thousand years, and wanted to engrave them on stone: the subordination would be allowable for only one generation (*yidai* 一代), and could not be extended to the sons and grandsons." So, not the abolition of the condition of bondservant, but its limitation. And quite remarkably, he forwarded this request to the highest authorities (轉控上臺)—*Qing* authorities, that is, since the author makes clear that at the time "Jiangnan had just been pacified" (江南新定). The request was rejected, of course; but the one reason cited by the author is that the authorities hated this notion of "one generation" (*yidai*), which they regarded as inauspicious (惡一代之言不祥), presumably because it might suggest that the Qing would last for only one generation. Shortly afterwards the new official put in charge of Taicang captured Yu Boxiang and executed him. And only then, the author of the *Yantang jianwen zaji* claims emphatically, "was the world happy!" (天下始快).

If I read this episode correctly, it seems to me to imply that, at the time of the somewhat chaotic transfer of power in Jiangnan, not only some of the bondservants believed that the new masters of the empire might agree to improve their condition, *but also* that the new masters in question were not necessarily impervious to the idea; in the present example, it is the *wording* of the request which turns them off, rather than its content. This is my guess, of course; but let me cite another first-person chronicle—a rather astonishing text, I must say—which testifies to a sort of unholy alliance between the Manchu authorities in Nanjing and a party of insurgent bondservant in the nearby county of Liyang 溧陽. The little-known text is entitled *Laijiang jishi*

benmo 瀨江記事本末; it was originally a manuscript in the private collection of Xie Guozhen, but it has been published in 1980 in the *Qingshi ziliao* series. Its author, whose name was Zhou Tingying 周廷英, was a government student and a diehard Ming loyalist; and it is from this perspective that he recounts the transition in his native Liyang.

The *Laijiang jishi benmo* is one of the most arresting testimonies on the anarchy and confusion that prevailed more or less everywhere in Jiangnan immediately after the Manchu takeover of Nanjing; and also on the bondservant organized revolts that occurred *not* everywhere, to be sure, but in a number of counties. But what is special in the present case is that the leaders of the bondservant uprising—two brothers named Pan 潘, described as "powerful slaves" (*haonu* 豪奴) who had rebelled against their master as soon as the fall of Nanjing was announced—that these two leaders were recruited by the Ming magistrate of Liyang as militia chiefs in charge of defending the city against the invaders. And after the magistrate had abandoned his post (as did many others in the region during this first stage of the conquest), the Pan brothers and their bondservant followers were left in control of the city, where they consistently plundered the rich; and from there on, the city was besieged by the surrounding country, which was under the control of Ming loyalists led by the local gentry. Zhou Tingying recounts in detail the battles that opposed the two sides, with many highs and lows that it would be much too long to detail. But at one point the brothers decided that to survive they needed to strike an alliance with the Qing authorities in Nanjing, and they managed to hand over the county registers to them. And soon the Qing sent troops to lift the siege of Liyang. This led to a protracted period of combats between the highly efficient Qing forces (who were in fact Chinese) and the loyalist militias that continued resistance in the hills around.

The Nanjing authorities also arranged to install a new magistrate in the city. Though he was unable to control the Pan brothers, who had been given titles of officers by the Qing and continued to run the city, the new magistrate was able to make and enforce some decisions which in a short time would dramatically change the situation. The first was to order all the male inhabitants of Liyang to shave their heads. Those living in the city hesitated at first, because at the time the recapture of Liyang by the Ming loyalists outside was still a possibility; but they were soon forced to comply (the Pan brothers had been the first to shave their heads). On the other hand, the population of the surrounding country fiercely resisted. As a consequence, for a while Liyang displayed a pattern that we can find in several other places during the first few months of the Qing conquest of Jiangnan, like Jiangyin, Songjiang, Taicang, and others: in this patters, the walled city where everybody has rapidly cut their hair is surrounded, or even besieged, by a hinterland where people refuse to do it, until resistance is no longer possible. I will come back to this.

Another decision made by the new magistrate, in a way as crucial, was to set up a compulsory examination for the students of Liyang. This was about two months after the hair-shaving order,

and it was clearly a turning-point. According to Zhou Tingying, until then a vast majority of the county's student were still hiding away in the country in order not to have to shave their heads; but when the examination was set up, almost all of them came to attend, some five hundred in all! As Zhou scornfully comments, all those scholars who had arranged a solemn lamentation at the Confucius temple after the death of the Ming emperor, now they take the examination with shaved heads that make them look like dogs and pigs, and with shame on their faces. Earlier, he says, they were hiding to keep their hair; but now they are so eager to take the exam that they do not shy away from mutilating the body they have received from their parents! Only a hundred students, including Zhou himself, we assume, managed to stay away.

This episode in fact leads me to say a word of the position and behavior, during the Ming-Qing transition, of this very special category of literati that were the *zhusheng* 諸生 (or "blue collars" 青衿, or many other appellations—let me call them "government students", or just "students"), of whom there must have been tens of thousands in Jiangnan in the late Ming. Most of our first-person sources were written by students, so it is not surprising that they have much to say about how they lived through the period. As degree-holders they were certainly part of the gentry, if only the lower gentry; but they were quite a varied bunch of people, ranging all the way from members of rich and prestigious families to modest scholars who had to work as tutors to make a living—as was apparently the case of most of our authors. But even so, their academic rank radically distinguished them from commoners in terms of status, of social authority, and (if I may say) of symbolic capital.

In any case, whether rich or poor, to preserve the academic status which they so passionately cared about, with all the fiscal and sumptuary privileges attached, the students needed to pass periodic examinations, whatever the circumstances. As we saw yesterday, the turn of 1641 and 1642 was when the famine conditions were the most horrendous in Jiangnan, and yet Zeng Yuwang and his colleagues duly travelled the devastated countryside to reach Jiangyin, where the examination of students was taking place that year; so did Lu Shiyi and his friends of the Taicang *tongshanhui*, who obviously considered they had no choice but going to take the prefectural examination in Suzhou, which they attended amidst streets strewn with dead people.

But in the Qing the choice was different: it was between skirting the examinations and losing one's status out of loyalty to the Ming, or submitting and remaining a government student. All the sources confirm that a vast majority of those who had acquired their *shengyuan* degree under the Ming did submit, as we have seen in Liyang, and, I assume, without too many pangs of conscience. It must be admitted that the Qing authorities, who were well aware of the immense importance for scholars of preserving their status, exerted a lot of pressure; besides, they were obviously keen on imposing their control on the student population, which had always been

regarded by officials as a hotbed of agitators. The Qing therefore lost no time making known that the titles and degrees earned in the Ming would have to be confirmed by examinations.

Thus, Zeng Yuwang tells us that only days after everybody had been compelled to shave their heads in the town of Zhoupu, the new Songjiang prefect ordered that a *luke* 錄科 examination be held (that is, an examination of all the students to decide on who would be allowed to attend the provincial examination); and he specified: those who do not attend will have their property confiscated. Zeng Yuwang did make the trek to Songjiang with his colleagues, even though he was then mourning his mother—but he had not yet notified the Confucian school. Zeng himself *was* exempted from attending the examination because of the mourning; but, he says, not a single one of his colleagues (同袍) asked to be excused (*gao tui* 告退).

About a month before, on September 22, Songjiang had been taken by Li Chengdong 李成棟, a fearsome general who had defected from the Ming not long ago and who conquered most of Jiangnan for the sake of his new masters. For some weeks the city had been held by loyalist forces under a former Ming high official named Shen Youlong 沈猶龍. The destruction and killings at the hands of Li Chengdong's soldiers were horrifying: when he arrives in the city for the examination, Zeng Yuwang tells us of the houses in ruins, the rotting corpses and the piles of bones on the streets, the brutal soldiery occupying the houses still standing—the new prefect has settled in the residence of the famous statecraft scholar Chen Zilong 陳子龍, one of the icons of the loyalist resistance, who had fled to join the southern Ming… Elsewhere in the text Zeng claims that after its sacking Songjiang's old wealth and splendor was diminished by 70 percent. (Yao Tinglin has a lyrical passage on the past splendor and luxury of Songjiang, which he had visited as a little boy.) In any case, shortly after the examination, and while Zeng was still in Songjiang, Li Chengdong ordered the high gentry of Songjiang (the 鄉紳) to pay a visit to his office, or have their property confiscated and be denounced as rebels. They all went, day after day, a dozen former Ming officials (*xiangshen*), as many provincial graduates (孝廉), and the students, who had to wait on line and were roughed up by the guards. On the way out, even the *xiangshen*, who had been politely treated by the general, were pushed around by the guards.

These are just vignettes illustrating the various ways people who were used to be the leading lights of Jiangnan society were humiliated and put under strict control by their conquerors; and of course they would have much more to suffer in the years after, up to the fiscal onslaught inflicted upon them by the regents of the realm in the first years of Kangxi—I'm speaking of course of the well-known *zouxiao'an* 奏銷案, about which most of our authors have extended accounts of how it was experienced around them, or even by themselves. But the point here is that most of them accepted right away such humiliating treatments in order to maintain their status and privileges, rather than abandon them and go into hiding, or join the resistance further south.

Incidentally, join the resistance in the South is what Zeng Yuwang's father and brothers did in 1645: apparently Yuwang himself did not have the same moral fiber. For example, at one point he mentions the case of three *juren* brothers named Zhu from a town nearby, who at the time of the fall of Songjiang set up a secret society to resist the Qing *in which the bondservants remained segregated*, which the bondservants clearly resented; so much so that soon the Zhu brothers and their family were massacred in revenge by a "powerful slave". The three men were certainly admirable for their patriotism, but Zeng has only this comment [p. 6]: "In a general way, in times of trouble, the only thing to do is to run and take cover. If you commit yourself rashly and scheme some action, you can be sure to lose your life! Let people in the future take the fate of the Zhus as a warning!"

It is abundantly illustrated by our first-person authors, and indeed, it is more than understandable, that during the Qing conquest a majority among the people of Jiangnan did not need to be warned against reckless resistance. And to illustrate this further, and in a different environment, let me go back to Suzhou.

Yesterday I said a word of that unique first-person chronicle of Suzhou during the transition, the *Qi Zhen jiwen lu*; I even said that it is a text that reveals the psychology of that city. And indeed, this seems to me well in evidence in the pages that cover the imposition of Qing power upon Suzhou in 1645—a very long section indeed. Just compare with the Qing editions of the Suzhou prefectural gazetteer, which all contain the same short account, holding on a half-folio, duly enumerating the main incidents, but with a kind of objective detachment: the capitulation of Suzhou was a foregone outcome, there were some clashes to be sure, but the Qing army took care of the problems, and in the end the population gladly submitted to the representatives of the new dynasty. None of this is wrong, but the point of view is that of the conqueror.

In the *Qi Zhen jiwen lu* it is very different. The narrative extends over 18 Chinese double pages, month after month and often day after day; and the perspective is that of the vanquished, of the Suzhou inhabitants (including the author himself) who *underwent* the violence. When the news that the Manchus had entered Nanjing was confirmed in Suzhou a few days later, the city was instantly overwhelmed with panic. And it reacted in a way of which we find a number of examples during the conquest, in Suzhou and elsewhere: everybody only wished to flee with their families, and the city gates were left open day and night to allow free passage—attempting to close them, the author says, might well have caused a riot. Who exactly was part of this mad rush? When he wants to evoke a mass movement—a riot, or an exodus like here—the author often uses the conventional term *shimin* 士民 (gentry and people); but we may suppose that not everybody was able to move to the country (下鄉) at short notice. Indeed, the text tells us that on the present occasion the price of carts, sedan chairs, and boats soared brutally (it gives precise figures); and it says in as many words that the local officials were at a loss, that the elite

residents (the *xiangshen*) only thought of absconding, and that nobody considered defending the city; so that the small folks who were unable to flee were left to themselves and only wanted to submit in order to save their lives. Obviously the Yangzhou dilemma was on everyone's mind: submit, or be slaughtered. So that the leitmotif during the entire period is: don't provoke the Manchus, don't displease them, just do what they want.

In fact the dreaded Qing forces did not materialize: only a trio of officials and military commanders appeared, on June 18, who settled on Tiger Hill outside Suzhou and requested the registers of the prefecture. Whereupon the prefect ran away, and it was the clerks and soldiers of the various *yamen* who came with incense and gifts to welcome the Qing envoys and escort them to the prefectural seat. Two proclamations were posted, one signed by Dodo 多鐸, the Manchu prince who commanded the Qing invasion, who reminded the population that there would be no harm done if they submitted, but that otherwise they would be dealt with like in Yangzhou (維揚為例); and another one signed by the Suzhou luminary and chief collaborationist Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, who dispensed comforting words. The registers of Suzhou were duly remitted to the Qing officials, and everybody thought that "the big affair had been settled" (人以為大事已定).

But it had not. Only a few days later, a pair of Ming loyalists who were in control of some troops in the area captured two of the three Qing representatives by trickery and executed them, while the third managed to escape and rushed to Nanjing to give the alert, insisting however (according to our author) that the people of Suzhou had already submitted and were not involved. Whatever the case, for the second time a wave of panic swept through the city: this time the actual Manchu army is sure to come, and they will show no mercy! Those with means again left the city to take shelter in the country; and when the Qing forces were announced to have reached Wuxi, the loyalist official who claimed he would organize the defense of Suzhou with the help of the gentry got hold of all the silver he could find in the prefectural treasury and ran away with his soldiers.

Then the Manchus arrive (on June 27; all of this, remember, happens within a few days)—apparently real Manchus (not Chinese troops), those that the text calls Beibing 北兵. The city is open and undefended. The Manchu soldiers—each man with two horses—walk from gate to gate in single file and establish their camp at the Earth Altar (社壇). The commander, who is staying at the Baiyun monastery (白雲庵) outside the city wall, has reassuring public notices posted everywhere, and he makes it known that he wants the notables (*xiangshen*) to come and discuss local affairs with him. Two days later a new prefect arrives, a Chinese from Henan with shaved head and wearing informal clothes.

And at this point, we are treated with a vignette of city life which I find rather remarkable. The small folks (the *xiaomin*), who are terribly afraid that some catastrophe will befall the city, collectively go to the residences of the retired officials (縉紳) and implore them to answer the

invitation of the Manchu commander; but most of the retired officials are reluctant to show up. The crowd then goes mad, and several residences are wrecked as a result. Then the small folks decide to take the formal submission in their own hands. Each neighborhood (圖) in the city and suburbs walks in procession to the Manchu camp, bearing incense and preceded by a banner bearing the words, "The people of such-and-such neighborhood submit to the Great Qing state" (某圖民投順大清國). They are soon followed by the students of the Confucian school and by at least some of the *xiangshen*—but not all of them, and the commander (a former Ming military officer named Tu Guobao 土國寶 who will soon be appointed vice-president of the Censorate and grand coordinator 巡撫) orders the various neighborhood chiefs to find out about those notables who have chosen to stay at home. Then the new authorities settle down in the city, new officials are appointed from among friendly local degree-holders, all sorts of reassuring declarations are issued, and the cooperation of the gentry and commoners is insistently encouraged; and the main Manchu force soon leaves for Hangzhou.

As it is described in the *Qi Zhen jiwen lu*, the period that follows (about one month) might be characterized as "normalization under occupation"—however harsh the occupation. But the process of normalization was upended at the beginning of August when the Qing authorities suddenly ordered all the men to shave their heads. They had arranged to catch the Suzhou population off guard, in fact: on the one hand they multiplied reassuring declarations, to the effect that the order promulgated in Nanjing on July 20 would not apply in Suzhou; while on the other hand they gradually closed all the gates of the city and moved part of their troops inside; until on the dawn of August 2nd the order that men of every condition shave their heads under penalty of death was posted everywhere. And, says the text, "in less than a half-day the city had changed appearance" (不半日間，城中倏然改觀矣).

So, inside the city the compliance was immediate—the few people who protested were executed on the spot, and the author has this remark: "People who cherish their hair but forfeit their heads, this is called not to understand reason!" (人以惜毛髮而反喪首領，此之謂不知類也). But outside it was quite different. In the early hours of the 4th of August the gates of Suzhou were forced one after the other by bands of armed men wearing white turbans, calling themselves "people's militia" (民兵), and flourishing banners with the characters *Da Ming* 大明. The author claims that he could see by himself that they were very numerous, but it was nothing but a bunch of incompetent street idlers and villagers, without any organization or leadership, totally unable to hold a city. Indeed, by the evening they were all gone. Still, the text delivers an extremely lively description of the disorder, uncertainty, and panic in Suzhou during that day, a thousand boats and most of the government buildings set on fire, the locals forced to provide the insurgents with food and drink and building barricades across the streets to hold up the dreaded Qing cavalry. But the Qing troops shut themselves in the prefectural school and did not bother to intervene. After everything was over, the inhabitants of Suzhou anticipated with terror the retaliation from the Qing army that was sure to come, and once again

a lot of people abandoned the city to take shelter in the country. As for those left behind, as soon as the next day they were advised to go and beseech the authorities to believe that they were innocent, that it was all people from outside.

Indeed, it was soon learned that the attack had started from a fight with government soldiers in the lake area nearby, and that a party which planned to enter the city and set free some prisoners had been joined by a mass of people—but there was no plan to take Suzhou, which explains why the attackers left the city so quickly. Whatever the case, during the weeks that follow the author describes day by day and with much detail the sort of situation I have already described: a walled city under siege by a hostile countryside, which is under the control of a variable combination of local militias, bandits, and forces led by loyalist literati and military men; the people *inside* with shaved heads, and the people *outside* rebelling against such a humiliation: in the words of the *Yantang jianwen zaji* author, speaking of the town of Shaxi in Taicang, "those who have kept their hair cannot go in the city, those who have shaved their heads cannot go into the country" (有髮者不得城行，削髮者不得下鄉). Or the opposite, when it was the city that rebelled, like in Jiangyin, Wujiang, or Songjiang. Let me add that this pattern was clearly favored by the very nature of traditional Chinese administrative cities (and many non-administrative towns as well), which were solidly walled, therefore easy to defend, easy to besiege, and difficult to take.

The author of the *Qi Zhen jiwen lu* manages to convey something of the tribulations and emotions of the people *inside* Suzhou—those who were besieged, like himself—during the more than a month, more or less August 1645 and the beginning of September, during which this situation endured: how they were enlisted by the administration to participate in the defense and submitted to various requisitions, the fear of spies and thieves, the brutal discipline imposed by the military, the deserted streets, the danger and violence everywhere, etc. In any case, it would be much too long to enumerate all of the incidents he reports, page after page and day after day, the attacks and counter-attacks, the sorties to get supplies, the fighting and plundering in the suburbs, the refugees who were allowed in, the terrible things that happened to women at the hands of the soldiery, and so on and so forth. In mid-September, when the battles are more or less over, the author is able to go through the Changmen 閶門 gate for the first time in forty days; and he is appalled by what he is seeing: this neighborhood which used to be bursting with noise and women (粉花喧鬧) is now a field of ruins and burnt-down shops; and it is the same when he explores other suburbs the next few days. In any event, it will still take several weeks—to about mid-October—for a semblance of normalcy to be restored and for the life of the Suzhou citizens to return little by little to something like the joyous bustle of the good old days. But of course this was only the beginning of a process of normalization which would take months and years, and which in our text again takes many pages; and these page are still full of incidents and violence, of misery caused by the military, of economic distress, and other such things.

I won't develop on this, however. In the time that is left I'd like to stay with the terrible year 1645, but in an environment different from the Suzhou metropolis, and an environment to which I have already devoted some time—I mean, the rural and small-town area around Songjiang and especially Shanghai. This area was much in dispute in 1645, with a lot of uprisings and resistance, and many battles. The history of its conquest by the Qing has already been told in detail—I'm thinking of Fred Wakeman's brilliant work in particular. So, the overall context of what happened on the ground—the strategy of the Qing, the plans and alliances of the resistance, the battles, and so on—is relatively well known. The authors of our first-person texts do allude to this context, but they don't say much of it, because it is not their subject, they are not historians. What they report on is history as it was experienced by individuals—that is, by themselves.

Take for example the innumerable occurrences where crowds of people abandoned their places and ran around desperately in whatever direction to escape from the announced, or ongoing, massacre, rape, and plunder. Several of our authors were caught in these panicky attempts at fleeing and give us first-hand descriptions of them. Such episodes, actually, were especially common during the summer of 1645, when bodies of troops claiming to represent the fallen Nanjing government and combat the invaders were roaming the region and doing no little harm to the local population—even if the level of destruction and killing did not compare with what the much more efficient Qing forces achieved in this respect. The author of the *Yantang jianwen zaji*, for example, has a long section on the extraordinary confusion around Taicang, starting in early August after the promulgation of the head-shaving order, which was obeyed in the city and in his own town of Shaxi, but resisted outside. For a while he was able to hide with his wife and children outside the town near his ancestors' tombs; but after the fearsome troops of general Li Chengdong arrived in the region in September, where they made a great carnage, he was engulfed in the general chaos, with streams of refugees on the run, and erred from place to place, sometimes hiding in the grass and reeds, until he was able to return to Shaxi.

We find similar fine-grained descriptions in the first-person sources concerning the Songjiang area. Zeng Yuwang in his *Yiyou biji* has a substantial passage on the disorderly resistance attempts around Shanghai (as I mentioned, he was residing in the town of Zhoupu at the time) after the news of the fall of Nanjing, and then Suzhou, started circulating in the region. Most of these attempts were by local military men whose main purpose seems to have been to amass military hardware and to levy supplies (*daliang* 打糧) from the locals, especially the rich, in their respective bases. All this activity took place in a context, again, of complete anarchy during two months and more, with a lot of plundering and killing by uncontrolled local militias (the so-called *xiangbing* 鄉兵), of settling of old accounts, and so forth. Zeng himself took his family to various places to take shelter; and it was the same after Li Chengdong captured Songjiang and it was announced that the "great army" (大兵) was only 10 kilometers from

Zhoupu; and still soon again, when the same army went to bloodily quell a large loyalist force which had itself caused much havoc in the area.

Indeed, the fall of the cities of Songjiang, and then, on October 14, Shanghai, which had been largely deserted by its inhabitants, did not by any means put an end to the troubles and violence in the country around; and it took some time until Li Chengdong's forces succeeded in taking the towns one by one, with much bloodshed and looting, and in installing new officials. These developments are reported in vivid detail not only by Zeng Yuwang, but also (from a somewhat different perspective) by the young Yao Tinglin, who at the time happened to live with his mother's family in the same town of Zhoupu. There, as elsewhere, local strongmen had been building up militias and racketeering the rich and the merchants in the name of local defense. But it was after the fall of Shanghai that the worst was expected by the locals, as Li Chengdong was known to systematically devastate the cities and towns he captured. The inhabitants of Zhoupu were in a state of extreme edginess; they would rush out of the town at the slightest alert; and a delegation of merchants and influential families went to Shanghai with gifts to meet Li Chengdong and declare that the town was willingly submitting to the Qing. During that period of uncertainty people everywhere pasted slips of yellow paper on their doors with the characters 大清順民; but they would hastily remove them when a rebel force was said to be approaching, and paste them again when it was the arrival of the "great army" that was announced. And of course everybody had shaved their heads.

For their part, Yao and his mother's family had taken refuge in an isolated place near the family tombs, a few kilometers from the town. There they spent more than two gloomy months under persistent rain. Yao was sent to the town from time to time to get news and buy things, and he says that he was appalled by the sight of people with shaved heads, which he found horrible and pathetic. Only when they heard that their house in Zhoupu had been ransacked by bandits did Yao and his mother return to town; they refurbished the house, and, says Yao, "it was like establishing a new household" (如新做人家一般). And though he does not say it explicitly, he shaved his head.

It certainly was a sea change in the life of the 17-year-old who during the last Ming years had lived a comfortable life, if somewhat troubled, as part of a "famous family" of Shanghai, and who would now have to fend for himself in order to feed his mother and brothers, and later his wife and many children. But it had larger implications. Immediately after he speaks of "establishing a new household", Yao Tinglin has a sort of encomium, not to the new period in his life, but to the new era in the life of the Chinese people: "From then on a new dynasty would be in charge, from then on the fate of the nation would change hands, from then on men would wear a pigtail and short sleeves, from then on there would be people rich and lowly, there would be people lowly and noble, from then on one heard barbarian tunes on the frontiers and the

northern flute under the moon, people smoke tobacco everywhere, from then on people spoke a livelier language and saved on civilities, it was a new world and there was no return to the old manners. One said 'second year of Shunzhi'."

This sense of irreversible change is a constant theme with most of our authors, some of whom wrote into the 1690s, like Ye Mengzhu and Yao Tinglin. In Yao Tinglin's account of his own life, it is truly central, to the extent that he appended to his autobiography a substantial essay listing everything that was different in the Qing, during which he spent his adult life, from the Ming of his childhood and teenage years. What also singularizes Yao Tinglin is that his post-1645 perspective is that of an ordinary citizen, living in the country as an agriculturist and village schoolteacher (and working as a *yamen* clerk for a decade). The views he conveys are truly "from the ground", even if he had some cultural capital and displays an undisputable sense of the larger historical picture. In contrast, most of the other authors of the first-person documents I have cited were government students; and even if they are genuinely distressed by the sufferings of the masses during the most violent episodes of the transition (including the famine in the early 1640s), they remain representative of the views of their class, beginning with their obsession with preserving the social hierarchies and their abhorrence of any sort of troublemakers—be they tenants threatening landowners, bondservants rebelling against their masters, or the ne'er-do-wells (無賴) plaguing the streets of Suzhou.

The difference in preoccupations is well in evidence in the parts of the texts dealing with the years after 1645, in other words, when the transition was a *transition to normalization* (however difficult this was in Jiangnan). Yao Tinglin in his village is much preoccupied with the weather, with seasonal prices, with fiscal pressure (so often meaning fiscal violence)—this kind of things. The others like to speak of schools and examinations; they regret the decorous head-dresses and clothes that scholars are no longer allowed to wear; and they devote much space to the destinies and tribulations of a variety of officials, literati, and "big families" they have heard about—this was their world after all. Some, Zeng Yuwang in particular (but he is not the only one), also complain a lot about the lack of respect toward scholars on the part of the new authorities, and even worse, of the military. Zeng lived in a garrison town where under the old regime the relations between the civilian and military elites used to be generally harmonious; but this was over after the conquest, and Zeng deplores in several entries of his *biji* that the military commanders appointed by the Qing are with few exceptions corrupt and brutal in their dealings with the local scholars, not to mention their troops, which are a scourge. As a matter of fact (and this too can be seen very concretely in some of our texts), the domination of the military over the society and civilian administration of Jiangnan was to continue for more than three decades after the conquest.

What I would like to insist on to conclude is that the first-person testimonies and chronicles I have cited (of which there exist other examples) add, so to speak, a layer of reality and lived

experience to the history of the Ming-Qing transition as we usually know it—a layer of reality that I think is irreplaceable. To limit myself to what I have exposed today, they are fine-grained, indeed absolutely graphic, about the confusion, violence, and carnage that overwhelmed the region during the fateful months after the fall of Nanjing and, especially, the head-shaving order; and also, about the stark contrast between the deadly efficiency of the Qing armies (both the Manchus themselves and their Chinese allies), and the amateurish and disorderly ways of the forces that attempted to resist them in the region. And finally, as I hope should be clear from my account, they offer valuable materials to enrich and nuance the resistance vs. submission *problématique*—I mean, the ways the various combinations of dynastic loyalty, care for status preservation, outrage at cultural aggression, fear of violence, longing for order, and so forth, kept changing, indeed for many years, until Jiangnan could be regarded as having generally accepted the Qing dominion. But this is another story, about which we may have occasion to talk tomorrow.