

No. 155 A Tea Party at the Peach Spring Fountain
given for my staff, as a token of my thanks for their arduous work
in helping me collect the arrears in sales and taxes

The *yamen* of the Salt Administration is in the inner city of Yangzhou. The main hall is called the Office of the Administration of the Laws,¹ and there hangs a specimen of the Imperial calligraphy of the Emperor Kangxi—the two horizontal characters *ziyuan*—Purple Wall (or Constellation). To the west are two buildings—the Hall of the Four Rarities,² and the Peach Spring Study, below the steps leading up to which is a stone well, named the Peach Blossom Spring.

In the second month of the cyclic year *gengzi* (1840), when I was attending the office, I received an official message from the Ministry, saying: “We have respectfully received the cinnabar command.³ ‘In the triennial review of all officers, the important matter is to encourage them to do their work better than ever. Of all the officials, Manchu or Chinese, those who have worked loyally and industriously, and those who have worked wholeheartedly and painstakingly, should of course be singled out and commended. The Director-General of River Conservancy South of the Yangtze, Linqing, has been conscientious and meticulous in his work, and has maintained the River in a state of peace and tranquillity. Let him be additionally favoured by sending his name to the Ministry for deliberation and commendation. Let this be reverently obeyed.’ ”⁴

Just prior to this, in the first month, the Imperial legate, the Ministry Vice-President Engui⁵ and the Assistant Justice of the Supreme Court He Rulin⁶ were sent down from Peking to visit and investigate the

¹The Chinese word *tai* 臺 here means office, as in *Yushi tai* 御史臺 (the Censorate). The *taicheng* 臺城 in Nanking (first so called in the Southern dynasties, and still so called to the present day) means simply the city of the Central Government Offices—there has never been any terrace there.

²The source for this is Xie Lingyun 謝靈運.

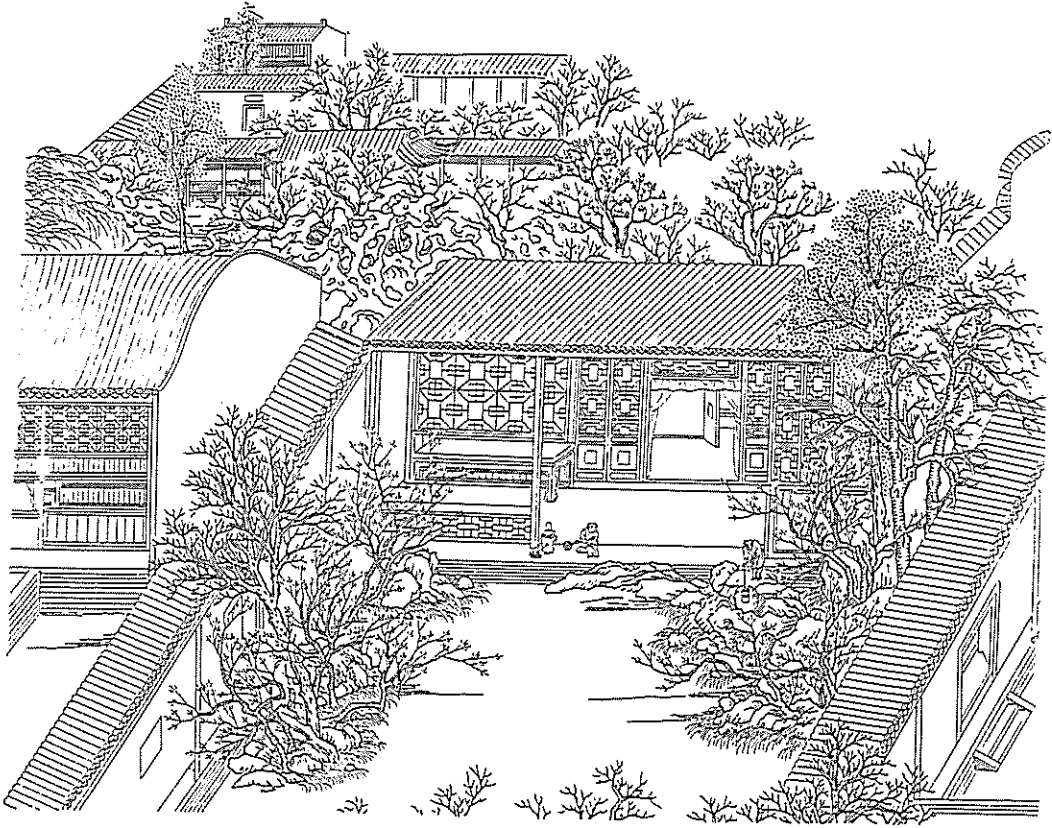
³Command from the emperor.

⁴The conventional ending for an Imperial Edict.

⁵An Imperial Clansman, a *jinshi* now serving as Ministry President, and footsoldier General Commander. (LQ)

⁶Native of Jiangsu, a Selected Candidate, now promoted to Ministry Vice-President and Councillor of the War Council. (LQ)

茗煮泉桃



building materials and construction work on site. They found that the Conservancy construction materials stored at the Yangzhou grain stores were less than the reported quantity, and that the official work at the Su'nan Office was occasionally lax. They requested that the officers responsible be dismissed. The Censor explicitly impeached the Director-General for dereliction of duty. He later received an Imperial Edict. This stated that since the Director-General had not taken delivery of the said materials, the officers concerned should be leniently exculpated from any judicial investigation.

In my memorial of gratitude to the Central Government, I wrote the following words: "My humble and grateful thanks to my sagacious sovereign's Heaven-like Broadmindedness and Magnanimous Liberality, for forgiving my culpability and commending my insignificant merit. Your humble servant, stricken in his conscience, feels all the more shamed upon self-examination . . ." etc.

The salt from the area North of the Huai, regulated by the Ticket system, was reported as all sold, and the Throne was memorialized in the first month of the year. The Transport system for salt⁷ in the area South of the Huai should have its accounts completely settled by the second month of the year, according to regulations. When I assumed the post of salt administrator and received the seal in the previous year, my predecessor had already issued the Transport salt for ten months but had only collected 700,000 taels of silver. There were only two months left, and in those months there would be the 'closure of the seal'.⁸ I was terrified that the uncollected taxes would be classified as a debit amount. Moreover the system of amalgamated accounting practised over the past years had been disallowed by the Ministry in the previous year. Then I memorialized the Throne to borrow 360,000 taels from the Salt Administration of the North Huai area, offering to put down in writing that this amount would be fully returned within three months by the salt

⁷The Transport 網 system and Ticket 票 system were really the same. The first was the old-fashioned licence which had been in the merchant's possession for maybe generations; whereas the second was the reformed system whereby anyone could apply according to law.

⁸The New Year recess, extending to about three weeks.

merchants. This was approved by His Majesty. Reaching Yangzhou I considered and devised all kinds of methods to accelerate the collection work. I informed all the merchants in person. Any merchant who handed in the full amount due would be rewarded with a bonus. They were all enthusiastic and ready to pay the due amount. Thus the eighty-one percent of the Transport sales, the remaining unpaid amounts of the 'D' and 'E' categories of Transport sales, and also the appended 'B' tax were all duly paid, and altogether 2,290,000 taels were collected. This was certainly not what I had initially expected. The fortunate outcome was all due to the assistance of the many friends among my staff members. So, on the second day after the first *si* day, I held a tea party in the Peach Spring Study, and invited my staff members Xiao Meisheng,⁹ Shen Yonglou,¹⁰ and Shen Fengchao,¹¹ to enjoy some Biluochun tea¹² made with boiled water from the spring, and to appreciate some of my paintings and poems. We reclined, wandered about, sat or stood, adopting whatever posture we liked, speaking freely and without restraint. My only regret was that since none of us was any good at chess, we could not do justice to the chess handbook of Fan Xiping.¹³

⁹Named Lingyu 令裕, a Jiangsu man, a senior licentiate, in charge of salt matters and books. (LQ)

¹⁰Named Yuanjie 元杰, a Zhejiang man, clerk in charge of litigation and tax affairs. (LQ)

¹¹Named Tong 桐, a Zhejiang man, Exhibitioner student, in charge of Memorials to the Throne. (LQ)

¹²A kind of tea supposed to be the best of the green teas. This name was generally supposed to have been bestowed by the Emperor Kangxi. (YTH) This 'Green Snail Spring Tea' was for centuries known as 'Astounding Fragrance' 嚇殺人香. According to legend the Emperor Kangxi gave it its new name, after the tightly rolled spiral shape of its processed leaves. It grows on two mountains which poke out of Lake Taihu 太湖. One is an island in the lake, the other a peninsula. "The water evaporating from the lake keeps them overhung with clouds and mist, thus the leaves stay moist." See Chow and Kramer, *All the Tea in China* (San Francisco: China Books, 1990). (JM)

¹³Named Shixun 世勳, a Zhejiang man working on Salt Commissioner Gao's staff, who had recently composed and published a widely read *Peach Blossom Spring Chess Manual* 桃花泉弈譜. (LQ) The chess game referred to here is of course the old native Chinese chess, known in Japanese as Go. (YTH)