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The Precious Scroll of the Rat Epidemic

by Li Shanbao

translated and introduced by
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THE PRECIOUS SCROLL OF THE RAT EPIDEMIC

The Precious Scroll of the Rat Epidemic

by Li Shanbao

Translated and introduced by

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a complete translation of the *Precious Scroll of the Rat Epidemic* (*Shuwen baojuan*) of late 1910 as reprinted in early 1911 in Shanghai. This text reflects the anxiety caused by the recurrent outbreaks of the plague during the final years of the Qing dynasty. At the same time, it presents a detailed account of the attempt of pious Buddhist layman to integrate the traditional interpretation of epidemics as divine punishments for the sins of humans, and a more modern understanding of the plague as a disease spread by rats and their fleas. This latter comprehension may be traced to the influence of an exhibition of public health posters in Tianjin. The bodhisattva Guanyin comes to the rescue of humankind by teaching the dangers of touching rats and giving the design of “divine tongs” for handling them, whether dead or alive; she also expounds at length on the advantages of keeping a cat.

Keywords: Epidemics, the plague, rats (and their fleas), cats, divine tongs, Guanyin.

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INTRODUCTION*

During the final decades of the Qing dynasty, its subjects increasingly suffered from the plague. These outbreaks, which would continue into the twentieth century, are part of what often is called the third pandemic of the plague. While the place of origin of this third pandemic is still a matter of controversy, it is clear that several parts of Yunnan had already been visited by the bubonic plague in the second part of the eighteenth century. Over the course of the nineteenth century, this epidemic slowly made its way eastward, reaching the Pearl River Delta by 1894. From Guangzhou and Hong Kong the illness would work its way slowly up the Chinese coast, and also spread to other parts of the world. In the winter of 1910 and the spring of 1911 the three northeastern provinces in Manchuria were visited by a sudden and violent outburst of pulmonary plague. These epidemics have been studied in great detail, focusing on the clash between traditional Chinese medicine in fighting the disease and the developing Western approaches, and on the geopolitical situation of the times.¹

One of the most wide-spread traditional approaches to epidemics east and west saw them as divine punishment for the sins of humankind. In the Chinese case, the celestial administration of the Jade Emperor included a Department of Epidemics, which would send its representatives down to the world below to spread a disease whenever the number of sins had accumulated to such a degree that it incited the wrath of the Jade Emperor.² The communities that were struck by the disease were well advised to implore the mercy of the Jade Emperor and his representatives by communal and individual acts of contrition and spectacular acts of veneration. These appeals to Heaven would gain strength if

* I would like to express my thanks to Lloyd Haft, Katie Su, and Kim Bunkyō for their help in accessing copies of the *Shuwen baojuan*, and to Bridie Andrews, Liping Bu, and Angela Leung for promptly responding to my enquiries.

¹ For a general survey of the plague in the latter part of the Qing dynasty, see Fisher 1995–1996. For the spread of the plague from Yunnan to Hong Kong and the Hong Kong plague, see Benedict 1996 and Pryor 1975. For literature on the Great Manchurian Plague see for instance Budberg 1923; Gamsa 2006; Knab 2011; Summers 2012; and Wu 1959. Records of epidemics in Chinese historical sources often are too general and laconic to allow us to draw conclusions about the nature of the disease concerned (Brook 2020). “There is very little representation of epidemic disease in traditional fiction, even in popular works” (Schonebaum 2016, 30).

² Katz 1995, Ch. 2.

powerful deities such as Guan Yu 關羽 and Guanyin 觀音 (also Guanshiyin 觀世音) would intercede on behalf of mankind.³ When they did so, these deities would not be shy about publicizing their actions. In 1894 in Guanzhou it was Guan Yu who descended into the planchette to dictate documents in which he informed his faithful that his intervention with the Jade Emperor had resulted in a promise from that authority that the number of the victims would be halved if people would only abandon their sinful ways and practice a good godly life.⁴ In 1909 near Tianjin it was the bodhisattva Guanyin who summoned one of her believers, a Mr. Huang Zhiren 黃志仁, in his dream, to her celestial Potalaka Palace to inform him of a plague that would hit China from the northeast, tell him of her intercession with the Jade Emperor, and teach him how people could fight the disease not only by moral regeneration, but also by a number of practical measures. While Guan Yu's message still very much reflected traditional Chinese conceptions about the origin of epidemics and how to fight them, Guanyin's revelation as narrated by Li Shanbao 李善保 in the *Precious Scroll of the Rat Epidemic* (*Shuwen baojuan* 鼠瘟寶卷) reflects in several ways the new ideas about the origin and spread of the plague as they had developed by that time.⁵ It presents an intriguing attempt to integrate this knowledge into a more traditional understanding of epidemics: while Guanyin focuses on rats (and their fleas) as the carriers of the disease, she still identifies these rats as instruments of the Department

3 On Guan Yu, see Haar 2017. On Guanyin, see Yü 2001.

4 Anonymous 1895. This translation of Guan Yu's messages by J. Dyer Ball was appended to the official report on the Hong Kong plague of 1894 and has often been quoted in recent scholarship. In this translation the Jade Emperor is called the "Gemmeous Ruler." The planchette was and is widely used in Chinese spirit-writing cults. The simplest form of the planchette is a three-pronged stick. It is held by two men, and when the spirit descends in the instruments the third end leaves traces in a specially prepared plate of ash or fine sand, which are read by a specialized participant in the ritual as Chinese characters embodying the message of the divinity (Jordan and Overmyer 1986, 36-56; Kleeman 1994, 8-13).

5 Li Shanbao 1911. Che Xilun 2000, 246 lists three institutes that hold a copy of this text and claims these editions were all from Tianjin, but that cannot be true as he also mentions the second postface by He Jiong 何炯 who financed a new edition of the text in Shanghai in the spring of 1911. The text is briefly summarized by Sawada Mizuho 1975, 230-231 on the basis of the copy kept at Kyoto University. To the best of my knowledge, the text has not be reprinted in any of the recent collections of precious scrolls. The copy kept at the Museum of World Religions at Taipei was available for a while on the website of the museum, but that website has been closed. The only work of modern Chinese scholarship to pay attention to the *Precious Scroll of the Rat Epidemic* is Fan Xingzhun 1986, 243.

of Epidemics, and while she stresses keeping cats as an effective precaution against the plague, she identifies these cats as denizens of heaven that are sent down to earth. As a rare document on the understanding of the plague from a period of rapid change, the *Precious Scroll of the Rat Epidemic* well deserves to be more widely known.

* * *

Traditional Chinese doctors were unacquainted with the symptoms and the origin of the plague as it affected China in the late Qing⁶ and explained its spread by reference to a contagious miasma (*qi* 氣). From the moment the plague manifested itself in Yunnan, local observers were aware of the fact that the sudden death of great numbers of humans was preceded by abnormal behavior and mass mortality of rats. This is clear from the "Ballad of Dying Rats" (*Shusi xing* 鼠死行) by a certain Shi Daonan 師道南 (1772–1800), who himself would succumb to the plague shortly after writing this poem:

Rats die to the left,
Rats die to the right!
When people see dying rats it is as if they see tigers:
A few days after the rats have died,
People die like a collapsing wall.
 Don't ask the number
Of those who die during the day!
The sunlight is gloomy and bleak, covered by sorrowing clouds.
Before three people have walked some ten paces or more,
Two have suddenly died and, stretched out, block the road.
 When people die at night,
One doesn't dare weep:
When plague ghosts exhale, the lamp's green flame flickers.
In a moment a storm arises and the lamp is suddenly gone:
Man and ghost, corpse and coffin share one room in darkness.

⁶ Benedict 1996, 105.

Raven caw without end,
 Dogs are heard howling.
 People look like ghosts:
 Ghost steal their souls.
 Most of the people you meet during the bright day are ghosts
 And the ghosts you encounter after dark you take for people.

Dead people cover the ground, few houses are inhabited;
 Exposed to the winds, the bones slowly, slowly decay.
 There is no one to harvest the grain on the fields;
 From whom can the state requisition the taxes?

Astride a heavenly dragon I want to ascend to heaven,
 To call on the lord of heaven and beg heaven's mother
 To sprinkle heaven's brew and dispense heaven's milk
 And let it soak the soil of this world a thousand rods deep,
 So all people below the earth will come back to life again
 And the Yellow Sources will turn into a rain of spring.⁷

In the twentieth century this poem has often been hailed as evidence of an early Chinese awareness of the relation between rats and the plague, but while the poet describes the sudden massive demise of rats as a precursor of the sudden massive demise of humans, he does not identify the first as the cause of the second. The cause of death in Shi Daonan's poem is the breath/miasma exhaled by the plague ghosts. It is his contemporary Hong Liangji 洪亮吉 (1746–1809) who suggests that the rats carry the "miasma." When discussing this poem, he notes, "At that time in Zhaozhou there were weird rats that in broad daylight would enter people's home, stretch out on the floor, vomit blood and die. If people

⁷ Zhou Jinguo 2013.

were infected by their miasma, they also would immediately pass away.”⁸ But as this remark is included in a collection of critical notes on poetry, one can only wonder to what extent and how quickly it had an impact on the Chinese medical profession and on society at large during the nineteenth century.⁹ The first specialized Chinese treatise on the plague to treat it as an epidemic was Wu Zongyuan’s 吳宗宣 *Methods for Curing the Plague* (*Chi shuyi fa* 治鼠疫法) of 1891, which was printed by Luo Rulan 羅汝蘭 in his *Comprehensive Studies on the Rat Plague* (*Shuyi huibian* 鼠疫彙編) in Guangzhou in 1895.¹⁰ This explained the disease as caused by an “earth miasma” (*diqu* 地氣) that, rising from below, first affects rats and then humans.¹¹

In Guan Yu’s 1894 letter to the inhabitants of plague-stricken Guangzhou, the plague too is caused by a miasma emanating from the earth (and a nearby coal mine) and due to the sins of humankind. So the most effective way to fight the disease is through a moral regeneration. The god also revealed a most potent talisman against the plague demons: if a moral person makes a drawing of his famous halberd and writes the god’s full title on a piece of paper and pastes it on his front door, he will escape the disease. On a perhaps more practical note, the letter also includes a prescription for an anti-plague medicine.¹² It mentions rats only when it instructs its readers to purify private wells “because the water is becoming cooler and poisonous in the plague season, to which has been added the filthy fluid of the bodies of dead rats which has percolated into them from the drains” by garlic and other means.¹³

8 Hong Liangji 2001, vol. 5, 2285.

9 As late as 1909 a traditional Chinese physician belonging to the “Cold Damage School” published a tract titled *Rat Plague Is Not an Epidemic* (*Shuyi fei yi* 鼠疫非疫), stressing that each patient had different symptoms and needed individualized treatment (Benedict 1996, 105–106).

10 Benedict 1996, 106–107.

11 Benedict 1996, 107–109. Many of the sanitary measures proposed by Wu and Luo to prevent an outbreak of the plague are very similar to Western approaches to the disease for most of the nineteenth century.

12 Guan Yu was not the only deity to reveal prescriptions against the disease. Another planchette group received prescriptions from the ancient immortal Guangchengzi 廣成子. It continued its activities as a charity, and as such is still active in Hong Kong (Liang Qizi 2011).

13 Anonymous 1895. According to the *Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報, reporting on the epidemic from Shanghai, a certain Luo Fang 羅方 offered to buy any dead rats because he believed the plague was caused by the foul miasma of the rotting

But dead animals have been a favorite means to poison drinking water since ancient times. In Guan Yu's message to mortals it is still the plague ghosts who spread the disease.

Western medical professionals for long shared the ignorance of their Chinese colleagues about the cause of the plague and mostly relied on improved public hygiene and quarantine to contain its outbreaks. That changed in the late nineteenth century thanks to the international advances in bacteriology. During the Hong Kong plague epidemic of 1894 the French physician Alexandre Yersin (1863–1943), dispatched to Hong Kong from Hanoi, succeeded in identifying the rat-born bacteria that caused the disease, and a few years later he the role of certain kinds of fleas in the transmission of the disease from rodents to humans was also discovered. It took of course a while before the findings of these new-fangled methodologies were accepted by the Western-trained medical profession at large, let alone by the general public east and west.¹⁴ But while bacteria might be too small to become an object of annihilation, fleas and rats were large (and otherwise obnoxious) enough do so. While the author of the *Precious Scroll of the Rat Epidemic* does not mention bacteria and still freely uses the term “miasma,” he clearly identifies rats and their fleas as the carriers of the disease that transmit it to humans. While the ultimate cause of the plague is still sought in the sins of humans, the text strongly focuses on practical ways to deal with rats, dead or alive. The text starts out with a description of “divine tongs” (*shenqian* 神鉗) with very long pincers, that allow one to catch or gather rats without touching them (a picture is provided in the text on p. 6b). One is urged to destroy the dead rats by burning them. As the greatest enemy of rats is the cat, the text goes into great length in singing the virtues of keeping a cat. When the Bodhisattva Guanyin has finished her exposition on these topics, her interlocutor Mr. Huang Zhiren is taken to see a gallery of paintings (each consisting of a number of individual scenes) on the vices of rats, the virtues of the cat, and the horrors of the plague outbreaks. When Mr. Huang cannot stand looking at any more of these terrifying paintings, he returns to Guanyin who tells him that conventional religious rites are of no use in warding off epidemics and urges him to spread her message. As have other prophets when ordered to convert their fellow human beings, Mr. Huang points out that many people will be reluctant to believe him and follow his words.

corpses that were indiscriminately cast into ditches and toilets (Benedict 1996, 135–136).

¹⁴ Sutphen 1997. See also Andrews 1997 for the slow assimilation of germ theory in China in the case of tuberculosis.

The detailed description of the gallery of paintings makes one wonder whether Mr. Huang, who is described by the author Li Shanbao as his neighbor, and who does not seem to be a fictional character, may have visited an exhibition of public health posters on the cause, the manifestations, and the prevention of the plague. Tianjin was an atypical city in the final years of the Qing in having an active city sanitation department (*Weishengju* 卫生局), as of 1902.¹⁵ The sanitation department was actively engaged in an anti-plague campaign by spring of 1910 and most likely earlier. The picture magazine supplement of the *Shenzhou ribao* 神州日報 on March 25, 1910, featured a lithograph titled “Catching Rats to Prevent the Plague” (*Fangyi bushu* 防疫捕鼠), showing workers of the sanitation department handing out mouse traps for free to every family in the city. The accompanying text informs us that the plague is the most persistent epidemic, that rats carry the disease (which is transmitted to humans by their fleas), and that captured rats, whether dead or alive, have to be handed to the sanitation department for dissection.¹⁶ This program would seem to be modeled on the measures then in force in Hong Kong. One can imagine that the handing out of free mouse traps must have been accompanied by other activities of the sanitation department to enlighten the public. If our hypothetical exhibition of public health posters took place in the spring of 1910, it cannot have been inspired by the news of the Great Manchurian Plague of 1910/1911, but Huang Zhiren’s dream most certainly was. The *Precious Scroll of the Rat Epidemic* dates Mr. Huang’s dream to the “the first day of the Tenth Month of the second year of Xuanton” (November 2, 1910).¹⁷ The text shows no awareness of the difference in transmission and manifestations between the bubonic plague and the pulmonary plague, but the author of the *Precious Scroll of the Rat Epidemic* in his postface dated to the beginning of the Eleventh Month of the same year (early December 1910) claimed to have visited Manchuria on purpose to ascertain that the actual situation corresponded to the picture of horror described by Mr. Huang.

The description of the paintings seen by Mr. Huang is intriguing. Each painting has a general heading “in the Sanskrit script, as found in Buddhist sutras,” with a few lines in Chinese characters

¹⁵ Benedict 1996, 153–155; Rogaski 1999. Also see Bu 2017.

¹⁶ Xiao Yifei 2020. The rats will have been dissected to check for symptoms of the plague and inspected for the presence of plague germs.

¹⁷ The Tianjin sanitation department went into overdrive when the Great Manchurian Plague threatened the city.

accompanying each individual picture. Could it be that the real-life posters he had seen had originally been produced in British India (which had its own plague epidemics during the nineteenth century) and had been edited in Hong Kong for local use and elsewhere on the China coast? Unfortunately, I have to confess that so far I have failed to locate any copies of such posters if they ever existed. But if Mr. Huang saw such posters, it is tempting to explain his dream as a result of his conscious and subconscious attempts to integrate the new information he had received with his traditional understanding of epidemics. In achieving this new synthesis, he clearly drew on the well-known legend of the Five Rats Creating Havoc in the Eastern Capital. This tale circulated as early as the sixteenth century in various versions. In this tale, which is set in the eleventh century during the reign of Emperor Renzong 仁宗, five demonic rats create havoc in society and at court by their uncanny ability of taking on not only human shape, but the exact likeness of specific individuals, even of the emperor and the empress-dowager. Judge Bao 包公 first has to establish their original nature as rats, and then visits heaven to borrow the Buddha's pet cat. When he has eventually been able to do so and takes that cat to the world below, it exterminates the rats (with one exception, which explains the continuing enmity between cats and rats).¹⁸

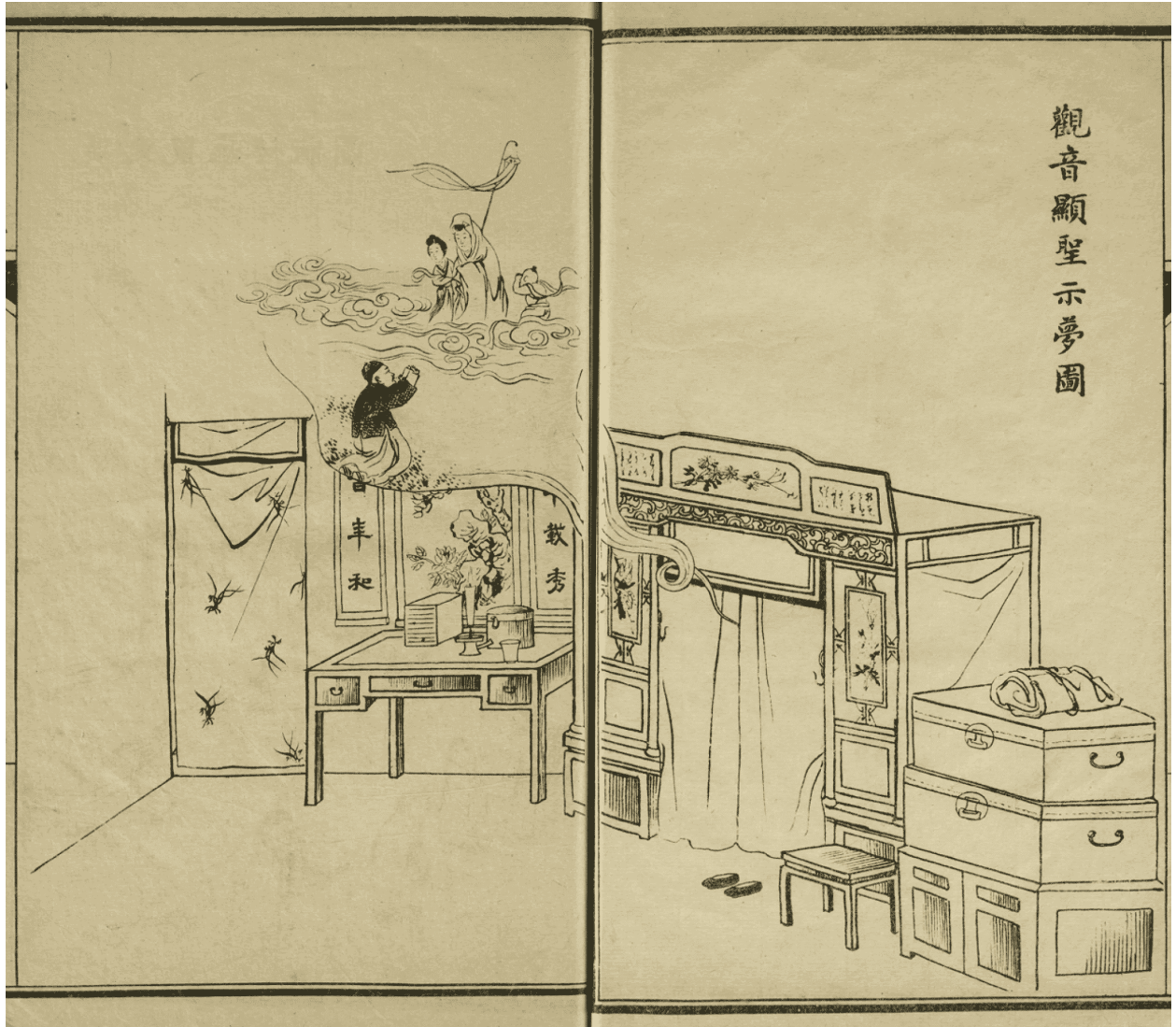
The *Precious Scroll of the Rat Epidemic* is concluded by a postface in which the author of the text, Li Shanbao, explains his relationship to Mr. Huang Zhiren and his decision to use a popularizing format. From the postface to the Shanghai reprint of 1911, it would appear that Mr. Huang financed the publication of the text (no copy of that edition seems to have been preserved). He Jiong, the editor of the Shanghai reprint, complains about the rudeness of that edition. His own edition is a fine lithographic printing, which is preceded by a picture of Guanyin and her acolytes, a picture of Mr. Huang's dream meeting with the Bodhisattva, and pictures of the horrors of the plague in Guangzhou and in Manchuria. No later editions of the text are known.

The *Precious Scroll of the Rat Epidemic* is written in an alternation of prose and verse. For the sections in verse, the author employs the ten-syllable line, which is subdivided into three segments of respectively three, three, and four syllables. I have tried to reproduce these metrical divisions by

¹⁸ Idema 2019, 65–81. The author of the *Precious Scroll of the Rat Epidemic* seems not to be aware that cats too can suffer the plague.

typographical means. The text claims to be a precious scroll. Texts in this genre were (and are) performed in an elaborate ritual setting, and many editions of precious scrolls include the texts to be recited at the opening and conclusion of the recital. The lithographic editions of precious scrolls produced in Shanghai in the late Qing still include at least an opening poem in which buddhas and bodhisattvas are invited to descend to earth and attend the event, and a poem in which these divinities are sent off again. While the *Precious Scroll of the Rat Epidemic* indeed begins with such a typical opening poem, it ends abruptly when Mr. Huang wakes up from his dream, and it does not include the expected closing poem that would send the invited buddhas and bodhisattvas off again. This suggests that the text was not necessarily written with a performance in mind, but was primarily composed for common readers.¹⁹

¹⁹ For more information on precious scrolls in the late Qing, see Berezkin 2014; Berezkin 2017.



Guanyin manifests her divinity and appears in a dream.



The horrors of the plague in Guangdong.



The horrors of the plague in the three northeastern provinces.

IDEMA, "THE PRECIOUS SCROLL OF THE RAT EPIDEMIC"

THE PRECIOUS SCROLL OF THE RAT EPIDEMIC

THE PRECIOUS SCROLL OF THE RAT EPIDEMIC

Now the *Precious Scroll on Rat Epidemics* is opened,
May all buddhas and bodhisattvas descend to earth.
If people will devotedly honor and practice this scroll,
It eliminates epidemics — forever free from disasters!

In the area of Han Village in Yanshan District of Tianjin lives an elderly man named Huang Zhiren who at present is seventy-eight years of age. With his white hair and ruddy complexion, his energy is strong and flourishing. Of his three sons, two engage in agriculture and one is active in trade. These men are between forty and fifty. There are nine grandsons, of which the eldest and the second are already married and have children. Even though it cannot be said that "five generations share one hall" there are already two great-grandsons. Mr. Huang is married in a second marriage to Ms. Hua, who this year turned exactly sixty. Husband and wife see eye to eye, and grandchildren are playing at their feet. The family is of middling wealth, but he most loves to exert himself in practicing good deeds. That's why the neighbors who know him all call him Good Man Huang. Now let me first introduce his family circumstances and his actions.

Good Man Huang

Is named Zhiren

And seventy-eight years old,

He is living in

Yanshan District

In the area of Han Village.

He has three sons

And nine grandsons

And also two great-grandsons;

He has a second wife
 Who is surnamed Hua
 And is already sixty years of age.
 His family owns
 Fields and gardens,
 And his living conditions are fine:
 He owns real estate and goods,
 And he himself is living
 In a tiled house of several bays.
 In his family
 The inherited
 Wealth was quite substantial,
 But in the *gengzi* year,
 During the great disturbance,
 Their losses were not minor.²⁰
 When order had been restored,
 The old man and his wife,
 Exerted themselves in good deeds
 And spent the family's money
 In taking good initiatives
 Without feeling any lingering regret.
 They repaired bridges,
 They restored roads,
 Doing all kinds of good works;

20 This refers to the Boxers Rebellion and the subsequent invasion of China by the allied troops (1900). These landed at Tianjin before marching on Beijing to relieve the besieged Legation Quarter there.

In winter they dispensed clothes,
 In summer they dispensed tea,
 And they also lit heavenly lamps.²¹

When they met people
 Who were in need
 They gave them cash or food,

And when they met
 With people who begged,
 They also gave them ready money.

They had earlier
 During the disturbances
 Seen with their own eyes

That quite some
 Rich and noble people
 Had been visited by misery,

And that's why
 They had been
 Moved to goodness in their heart,

And exclusively did
 These useful works,
 Honoring the elderly, pitying the poor.

His fame and reputation
 Was spread widely
 And far and near knew about them,

²¹ Oil lamps in temples before the images of the gods that are kept burning continually.

So everyone said

That Huang Zhiren

Was a good man indeed.

That old man

Practiced such good deeds,

That even Buddha and devas were moved,

And then one day

He had a significant dream

That may really be counted a miracle.

On the first day of the Tenth Month of the second year of the reign period Xuantong (1910), when Huang Zhiren had slept till midnight, he suddenly had a dream. He saw a young boy clad in white who came and summoned him, saying, "Because you exert yourself in practicing good deeds and because the ground of your heart is pure and good, the Mahasattva Guanyin hereby summons you to go to her to entrust you with a true message to save the world." When Good Man Huang heard this in his dream, he was both startled and happy, and asked that boy, "I am only an ordinary mortal. To be summoned by the Mahasattva is the greatest blessing of three lives.²² But I don't know the present location of the Mahasattva, so please be so kind as to show me the way." The boy replied, "She is as distant as the empty void and as close as a single foot. Just follow me." Good Man Huang made a bow and followed him.

When they left the gate

He suddenly noticed

That the road was quite different,

Quite unlike

The usual

Confusing maze of streets and lanes.

²² "Three lives" refers to one's past life, one's present life, and one's future life.

Through a limitless expanse

Led one fine

Wide and level road

With on both sides

Pines and cypresses

And all kinds of flowers.

There was no moon,

There were no stars,

But it was as bright as midday,

And a scent

Of sandalwood

Filled his nose with its fragrance.

He heard the mountain birds

Warble their clear notes,

As if listening to Buddhist songs,

And then there were

All kinds of wild beasts

That came and went peacefully.

Bye and bye

They arrived

On the top of a high hill,

So he could even better see

The pure scenery

That stretched before his eyes.

There were purple bamboos

That formed a grove —

Thousands and myriads of stalks!

And above them

White parrots

Were flying and singing in swarms.

By the side of the hill,

As he had a look,

Whitecaps surged on the sea's surface,

And again and again

His ears were struck

By the pure sound of the rising flood.

When he entered

The purple bamboo grove

Fragrant flowers bloomed all around,

And the ground was fully

Covered by pure sand

That completely resembled pure gold.

From a great distance

He saw

Deep inside the bamboo grove

The appearance

Of the magnificent image

Of her glorious Dharma body.

Her hair was done up

In a multilayered

Cockle bun of deepest black,

And her face was suffused

By her great compassion,

Her welcoming gentle expression.

Over her shoulder she wore
 A habit made of brocade,
 Its golden rays dazzling the eyes,
And strings of pearls
 Hung before her breast,
 Their precious air flashing and rising.
Baring her
 Pure and unsoiled
 Pair of white feet,²³
She was seated
 On her lotus throne
 In silent meditation.
The Dragon Maiden
 Held in her hands
 The pure vase and willow wand,
While the Red Boy,
 His hands pressed together,
 Stood at her side and bowed.²⁴
That young boy
 Then stepped forward
 To report on his holy mission

23 While Guanyin in her female manifestation is often described as the acme of female beauty, she never is shown with bound feet.

24 In common iconography Guanyin is often depicted with her two acolytes, the Dragon Maiden (Longnü 龍女) and Good-in-Talents (Shancai 善才/善財). How these two became disciples of Guanyin is told in an anonymous precious scroll of the nineteenth century, titled *Longnü Shancai baojuan* (translated in Idema 2008, 161–189). Our text replaces Shancai by the Red Boy (紅孩兒) who is subdued by Monkey in Chs. 40–42 of the sixteenth-century novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyouji* 西遊記).

And briefly reported,

“Huang Zhiren

Was summoned and has arrived.”

He saw the Mahasattva

With a compassionate face

Ever so slightly nod her head,

Whereupon the boy,

Shaking his body,

Manifested his true shape:

Originally he was

A white parrot,

And once transformed,

He flew off into

The purple bamboo grove

Where he preened his wings.²⁵

That very moment

Huang Zhiren

Knelt down on the floor,

And deeply bowing

Proclaimed her name,

Honoring her most devoutly.

When Huang Zhiren had made his bows, stretched out on the floor, he heard the Mahasattva Guanyin from her lotus throne send forth her marvelous tones, saying, “Good Man Huang, you may rise. Stand to one side and listen as I will expound the marvelous truth.” Huang Zhiren thereupon kowtowed again to express his gratitude, and then rose and stood to one side. The Mahasattva addressed him,

²⁵ The white parrot is often depicted flying above Guanyin. Legends telling how the white parrot became a disciple of Guanyin were current from the fifteenth century onward. See Idema 2002; Zheng Acai 2007.

saying, "I have learned that your good deeds are commendable, so I have sent my white-clad boy to summon you here. Do you know why?" Huang Zhiren pressed the palms of his hands together, made a bow and said, "Your disciple is simple and deluded and does not yet understand your intention. I beg you, Bodhisattva, to explain it clearly."

The Mahasattva thereupon said, "Very well! Let me tell you now that the people of this world will encounter a great *kalpa*.²⁶ People will die without end and nine out of ten families will be annihilated. Even though it may not go so far that people cannibalize their own kind, they will be unable to escape this predetermined fate." On hearing this, Huang Zhiren was very frightened and again threw himself down to kowtow, then said, "Allow your disciple to ask: How will the people of this world encounter this *kalpa*? By floods or fires? By violence or warfare? Please have the mercy to enlighten me." The Mahasattva promptly answered, "Rise to your feet and let me inform you."

Huang Zhiren

Obeyed her command

And stood respectfully to the side

And listened to the Mahasattva's

Each and every word

As she explained the situation,

"This is all because

The people of this world

Commit myriad kinds of evil,

And therefore

The inspecting gods

Reported this to the celestial court.

²⁶ A *kalpa* originally designates in Buddhist cosmology the great fire in which a world system, after an incalculable length of time, comes to an end. In later usage it came to designate large-scale disasters.

In the Lingxiao Hall

 This greatly angered

 His Majesty the Jade Emperor

Who that very moment

 Issued a jade edict

 Summoning the god of plagues.

The many divinities

 Of the Department of Plagues

 Kowtowed to receive his orders,

And it was determined

 That a rat epidemic

 Was most frightening to man.

As term was set,

 The hour and the day

 (The first day of the Ninth Month),

For two hundred thousand

 Of pestilential old rats

 To descend to the worldly dust.

If those plague rats

 Arrive at a place,

 That place is bound to suffer;

If they arrive at a house

 All members of that household

 Will each and all suffer the plague,

Without any distinction

 Between old or young,

 They will all lose their lives at once,

And it doesn't matter

Whether poor or rich —

You will likewise collapse and die.

In the beginning

Some people will

Start to shiver or develop a fever,

While others will

Become stiff all over,

Their body aching, their head bursting.

Within a few days

Following the outbreak,

It will be impossible to survive,

And following their death

Their whole body

Will all be black and blue welts.

If you visit me

Or I visit you,

You are immediately infected,

And if you will then

Seek a cure for your sickness,

No doctor or herb proves effective.

Even if you use

A foreign prescription,

A miracle pill or miraculous herb,

You can only cure

Just a few persons

Out of every one hundred patients.

A wife loses her husband,
 A son loses his father,
 People die, families are destroyed;
The elderly lack support,
 The infants lack care —
 No one can bear to hear the horror.

First of all
 Married women
 Are most easily infected;

Then there are
 The little children
 Who find it impossible to survive.

Then you have pregnant women
 And their unborn infants
 Who will pass away at the same time,

And in ivory bedsteads
 Old as well as young
 Meet with King Yama all together.²⁷

Happy couples
 Who ordinarily
 Are as close as lacquer and glue,

At such a moment
 When they meet with the plague
 Immediately abandon each other,

Just as if
 A merciless cudgel
 Beats mandarin ducks apart,

²⁷ King Yama is the highest judge in the underworld.

And just as if

The wind-blown waves

Shake apart the floating cress.

Who cares about

The love and affection

Of a young married couple?

They can't anymore

Press their bodies together

And indulge in carnal pleasures.

Who fears that you

Will weep until

Your liver and guts are cut to pieces?

He has already

Met with his *kalpa*

To be reborn somewhere else.

When poverty-stricken people

Have suffered to the full

Their thousands and myriads of pains,

They will in the end

Meet with the plague

And breathe their last in dust and mud.

As they lack the strength

And also lack the money,

They can nowhere find a proper coffin,

So their corpses

Are piled together

And burned to ashes in one big fire.

Rich and noble people
 Who ordinarily
 Are dressed in gold and wrapped in jade,
 Find out in the end
 When they meet the plague
 That they can nowhere buy their life.
 In vain they amassed
 Those many millions
 Of fields and gardens, houses and wealth —
 They may have satins and silks
 As well as pearls and jades,
 Rare treasures and exceptional goods.
 To amass gold and silver
 They in vain have spent
 Their heart-blood for half a life,
 But when the whole family
 Has lost their lives,
 It will all be given to strangers.
 This one
 Great *kalpic* disaster
 Will be without any precedent,
 And if you think
 To flee and escape,
 Dredge that needle from the ocean!"

When the Mahasattva had finished speaking, Huang Zhiren was so frightened that his tears coursed down. He promptly kowtowed again and said, "One does not have to see such a great *kalpa* with one's own eyes; even hearing about it with one's ears gives one goosebumps and the shivers. Bodhisattva, may you in your mercy save the world! Could you perhaps save a few people?" The Mahasattva, filled

with compassion, replied, "Out of the goodness of your heart you still know to beg for rescue. How could I bear to sit and watch and do nothing to save you? But at that time the Jade Emperor had already given his order to the Department of Plagues. Its divinities had received his jade edict and had to execute his order according to schedule. At that time I was overcome by compassion for the people of this world who would have to suffer this huge *kalpa*, and I wanted to greatly display my Dharma power to reverse their fate. But the heavenly agencies had made the decision and the Jade Emperor had personally given his judgment so how could I dare act against Heaven? I could only personally approach the throne of the Jade Emperor and implore him to pardon these people, but alas, the Jade Emperor did not agree to my request.

He opened his golden mouth,

 Issued his jade words,

 And answered me as follows,

'Guanshiyin,

 There is no need

 To bitterly beg for compassion.

This happens because

 The people of this world

 Have committed grave sins:

They have created

 Innumerable evils

 And cannot be allowed to be reborn.

Even if there are

 A number of people

 Without merit and without fault,

They also can only

 Be included in this *kalpa*:

 Jade and rock are burned together.

Even though you
 In your great compassion
 May want to seek pardon for them,
You have to know
 That my heavenly officers
 Cannot neglect the punishment of evil.
We urge you
 On no account
 To feel such compassion.
It has always been said:
 People are hard to convert,
 It's easier to convert the animals!
When I at that time
 Heard his jade order,
 I could not accept it in my heart,
And bitterly
 Begged him for mercy,
 Day and night without any pause.
I begged him for
 Seven times seven,
 That is a full forty-nine days,
And only then I could
 Move the Jade Emperor
 To change his celestial mind.

Even though the Jade Emperor then agreed to my request, the gods of the Department of Plagues had already sent those twenty million pestilential rats down to the mortal dust because the set date had passed, and there was no way to retrieve them quickly. He thereupon ordered me, 'Guanshiyin, as you so bitterly begged for a pardon on behalf of the people of the world, you must know that the

pestilential rats have already descended to the mortal world. The only possibility is to teach the people of the world to catch them themselves to send them back to heaven, so this huge *kalpa* may be somewhat mitigated. But even if the people of China's twenty-two provinces commit many kinds of sin, there still are differences in less serious and more serious. For the three provinces of Fengtian,²⁸ Jilin, and Heilongjiang the lists²⁹ have already been compiled, and no one can be saved or spared. As for Tianjin, Shandong, Zhejiang, and other provinces, these originally also fell under the statute for unpardonable crimes, but because you have begged me so devoutly, I will show you the conditions of pardon. Only if you teach it to the people of the world can they be spared.' I was filled with joy at that moment. After I had kowtowed without end to express my gratitude, I wondered: It is not easy to find a strategy to catch these pestilential rats and to teach it to the people of the world.

Employing my wisdom eye

I observed the full extent

Of the world of Jambudvipa³⁰

To see that the many

People of the world

Are bereft of a believing mind.

There are these many

Muddleheaded people

Who basically lack understanding,

And then the many

Vicious and evil people

Who act wildly without restraint.

²⁸ Fengtian is nowadays called Liaoning.

²⁹ Of the people condemned to die.

³⁰ Jambudvipa is the name of the continent on which the Buddha was born to preach the Law.

Who of them is willing

To listen to good words

And then practice good deeds?

There was only you

Who preserved a good heart

And was a a truly good man.

For that reason

I summoned you

To explain the situation:

You have to know

That in saving these people

The created blessing will not be minor.”

Huang Zhiren again prostrated himself and asked, “I don’t know what method the Bodhisattva has in mind when she speaks about a scheme for catching these pestilential rats? What are the norms of pardon the Jade Emperor has determined so people may be spared? I implore you, Bodhisattva, to expound it to me in all detail.” The Mahasattva replied, “This is of utmost importance, so listen quietly with all your heart.

These old rats

Actually are

Part of the Department of Plagues

And quite different

From ordinary rats

In the world of mortals.

Their heads and tails

Are by the looks of them

The same as those of common rats,

But you don't know

That their whole body

Is thickly covered in plague miasma.

Coming to a house,

They will spread it

Everywhere they pass through;

Their whole body

Carries jumping fleas:

These are the insects of plague.

People of this world,

No matter how

Strong and powerful they are,

Will on meeting them

Just a single time

Promptly pass from this world.

All foodstuffs

These plague rats

Have only sniffed at but once

Will when eaten

Cause the plague

From which one cannot be saved;

All items of clothing

These plague rats

Have only chewed on once

Will when worn

Cause the plague

Because the miasma attacks;

All articles of use

The plague rats

Have only run over once

Will when employed

Cause the plague,

More strongly than poison.

How should people

Under these circumstances

Try to catch and seize them?

The only way is

To use divine tongs —

Only that ensures success!"

At that moment she took out a picture that she showed to Huang Zhiren, saying, "These are the divine tongs. Take it with you and don't treat it lightly.

黃志仁復又上問道菩薩賜示神箱圖樣真屬大慈大悲但鼠性最是靈	勸世人 一家家 都備幾把 那怕他 老鼠瘟 立斂兇鋒	隨便的 鐵匠店 都能打造 照尺寸 不可改 大式相同	你回去 勸世人 照樣製造 用渾鐵 入火爐 煅煉通紅	瘟老鼠 但用他 輕輕箝住 那怕他 最利害 疫氣全空	這神箱 看了去 小小一物 却不知 他作用 竟有神功	他	當時就取出一圖交與黃志仁閱看道此乃神箱汝今祇受不可輕覷與	似這般 叫世上 如何擒捉 除非是 用神箱 纔得成功	凡器具 經瘟鼠 走了一走 人用時 便發瘟 比毒遂山	凡衣服 經瘟鼠 啃過一啃 人穿了 便發瘟 疫氣進攻	凡食物 經瘟鼠 嗅過一嗅 人吃了 便發瘟 雖救無從
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The "divine tongs", as shown on p. 6b of the Chinese text.

These divine tongs

At first sight

Are only a very small object

As you don't know

That when used

They possess a divine efficacy.

If you use them

To lightly pin down

These old pestilential rats,

These rats may be

Extremely terrible,

But their miasma is ineffective.

On your return

Urge the people

To make them according to this model.

Use common iron,

Heat it in fire,

And forge it when it is fully red.

Each and every

Common blacksmith

Should be capable of making them:

Stick to the measures,

Those cannot be changed:

Size and model should be the same.

Urge the people

To stock a few

In each and every household,

Because for sure

The rat epidemic

Will immediately lose its strength!"

Huang Zhiren again stepped forward and asked, "Bodhisattva, by giving me this illustrated model of these divine tongs you truly show me your great compassion and great mercy. But rats are by nature nimble and alert. As soon as they hear a person, they immediately flee and hide themselves. How could they not flee when they hear the sound of these tongs? It must be quite difficult to catch them in this way. And I also don't know how to dispose of these pestilential rats once I have caught them. The Jade Emperor may order people to catch them and send them back to Heaven, but what does he mean by that order? Moreover, plague rats and common rats look the same. If you catch a common rat by mistake, wouldn't that cause a grudge?"³¹ The Mahasattva kindly replied, "That is a very good question! Listen to my exposition.

These pestilential rats

Were originally

Raised by the Department of Plagues.

Obedying the jade edict

They came to the world of man,

Enjoying misfortune, raising disaster.

In order that

The majority

Of people would die of the plague

Every body hair

Brings along

That pestilential miasma.

³¹ For a pious Buddhist taking any life counts as a major sin. The victim upon death will appeal to King Yama for justice.

If people

 Would only once

 Touch them with their hands,

They immediately

 Would suffer the plague,

 Unable to last for a moment.

This was meant

 To teach people

 That they could not catch them

But should allow them

 To spread their disaster

 Throughout the world below.

Fortunately I

 Asked the Jade Emperor

 To reverse his holy decision,

Authorizing people

 To use these divine tongs

 To capture and seize them.

In case of

 Poor families

 Who lack the money to make them,

They can also use

 That common utensil,

 The tongs to stir up the oven fire,

Because if they

 Would still use their hands,

 They would be infected as before.

I urge all people

To remember this well:

Be careful, don't act lightly!

When people

By whichever method

Have prepared contraptions,

They should wait

Till they have caught them

And then use these divine tongs.

It is not so

That I teach people

To catch each of them alive,

But could I

Have them flee

On hearing the sound of these tongs?

When it comes to

Sending them back to heaven,

That is of utmost importance:

You definitely cannot

Anywhere you please

Throw them away in the dust.

Even if you

Would beat them to death,

That would be of no use at all:

They are capable

Of playing dead —

Their tricks are unfathomable!

In case you would

Drown them in

The water of a river or of a well,

Those who would drink

A mouthful of that water

Would be unable to survive.

You can only

Fight them with fire:

That is the best strategy!

Otherwise

It is truly hard

If you wish to subdue them.

This is all because these pestilential rats are extraordinarily cunning. They have been sent down by the Department of Plagues following a jade edict. And when they arrived in this world below they have in an instant passed the pestilential miasma completely to all common rats so there is not a single one that has not been turned into a pestilential rat. If people catch them, they don't have to discriminate, and how can there be any grudge! But when you want to promptly send them back to heaven, that is really not easy. Upon catching them you have immediately to burn them to ashes in a flaming fire. Then they will be collected by the proper gods of the Department of Fire, and each and all of them will be escorted to the Department of Plagues. Only then not a single one of these pestilential rats will go missing and none of them will be able to escape. If you only beat them to death or throw them into a river or well, and people drink from this water, each and every one of them will die. They will cause even more havoc, and the damage they create will not be minor. You have to remember this clearly when informing people."

Huang Zhiren thereupon said, "Bodhisattva, please allow me to ask. Nowadays there is a contraption called the 'spring cage.' These are ordinarily used by families. They are designed to catch rats and their construction can be quite varied. Can you also use these spring cages to catch pestilential rats?" The Mahasattva replied, "Even though spring cages are used to catch common rats, you can even

better use them to catch pestilential rats. Moreover, everyone knows them. When you arrive in the world below, urge people to use many of them — the more the better. Only upon catching a rat, you have to fumigate these traps over a fire or wash them with carbon water before you can use them again. On no account can you pick up the rats you have caught with a spring cage with your hands. You still have to use iron tongs to take them outside and cremate them, so as to send them off to heaven. Only then will you have no further worries. As to your question about the norms decreed by the Jade Emperor for sparing people, listen again as I will explain those in detail.

These pestilential rats

Have by nature

Extensive supernatural powers;

Arriving on earth

They spread the plague,

A fierce evil that is exceptional.

A single rat

Can transmit it to

A hundred people who'll die,

So a hundred rats

Can easily cause

A myriad of people to meet with disaster.

To catch those rats

Is for people of this world

Really not an easy task at all,

Because these rats

Have a small shape,

So it is hard to take preventions.

Inside double walls,

Below floor planks:

They can escape everywhere;

In old clothes boxes,

In waste paper chests:

In all these places they hide!

Now in case

You catch one,

Your merit is not minor at all:

It outdoes the merit

Of practicing self-cultivation

By following a vegetarian diet and burning incense.

Each single person

Who is capable

Of catching fifty rats,

Will be reckoned

To have completed his merits

So he will be spared from death,

And if a single person

Can even catch

More than five hundred rats,

His whole family

Will be spared

And forever enjoy peace and prosperity.

Further, if you can

Catch rats to the number

Of even more than one thousand

Your family

Definitely can

Continuously enjoy blessing and longevity.

When ordinary people

Will go in person

And pursue these pestilential rats,

They will of course

Immediately

Be spared from disaster and misfortune,

But if rich and noble people

Cannot go out in person

To catch and seize rats themselves

But hire others to do so,

They will likewise

Create blessings without limit.

In final accounting

It makes no difference

Whether one is rich or poor:

As long as you can

Catch pestilential rats,

You will meet with Blue Heaven.

Among people

There are some

Who lack a clear understanding:

They do not believe

There are pestilential rats

And wildly talk all kinds of nonsense.

Then there are those

Who feign compassion

And refuse to catch any pestilential rat —

Catching a rat,
 They will argue,
 Is a sin that they cannot sustain.

Then there is a kind
 Of slackers and lazybones
 Who in all tasks fear to act,

And if you tell them
 To catch plague rats
 They'll say that these cause no harm.

Then there are those
 Miserly skinflints
 Who only care about themselves,

And when they hear others
 Are catching those rats
 They'll scoff them as panic-stricken.

They will say
 That as long as one can
 Preserve one's personal hygiene,

Then even some more
 Pestilential rats
 Cannot do one any harm at all.

These various kinds
 Of ignorant people
 Truly are pitiable:

When they run into
 A pestilential rat,
 They're bound to meet with Death.

You have to

Commit my words

Firmly, oh so firmly to your memory

And use my words

To most urgently

Admonish the people down below!"

Huang Zhiren again kowtowed and asked, "Your disciple will of course strictly obey your instructions. But I was told that I could not arbitrarily dump those pestilential rats or throw them into rivers or wells. But in his ignorance your disciple wonders how they could still create havoc once they have been beaten to death?" The Mahasattva said with a sigh, "You do not know how it works. Let me expound it once again in all detail so you will understand.

Among all animals

These old rats

Are from birth most corrupt,

They are cunning

And secretive,

Causing harm without end.

In case they are

Firmly captured,

They will feign to be dead,

And when people

Throw them away,

They will promptly disappear.

Even if you

Beat them to death,

They still manage to survive.

Then there are

Water rats,

That are a different kind:

They are capable

In the water

To dive this way and that.

Immersion doesn't kill them,

Drowning doesn't kill them,

They really are truly evil!

Now if even

Ordinary rats

Still have these capacities,

How much greater

Supernatural powers

These pestilential rats will possess!

Ordinarily,

While in heaven,

They cannot descend to earth:

All day long

They are locked up

In securely sealed iron cages.

In charge of them

There are also

Yellow-turbaned strong guards

Who without pause

Are patrolling all sides

Both by day and by night.

Even though these rats

Each and every moment

Want to leave the upper world,

They have no chance:

Guarded so tightly

They cannot escape from their cages.

Now this time around

They have actually,

Obeying the Jade Emperor's edict,

Been released on purpose

To descend on the world —

Their chance of a thousand years!

They only hope

In the world below

To hide themselves without a trace,

So as to let them

Harm the people

And send them off to their death!

People may think

By beating them to death

They will have removed all harm,

But don't realize

They only play dead —

These rats are so cunning and clever!

When people

Dump them

Out on the streets or in the lanes,

They will in a wink

 Come back to life

 And return once again to their house.

Then there are those

 Who will dump them on

 Any pile of rubbish and garbage,

But in that way

 These rats can even better

 Display their supernatural powers.

To spread the plague

 They don't even have

 To run around in all directions:

They raise their hair

 And extend their legs

 To attract and seduce flying insects.

Whether

 The pricking blue fly

 Or the sharp-mouthed mosquito,

Once they've struck a rat,

 They each and every one

 All become pestilential insects.

When they fly

 Before one's face

 And once bump into his face,

That pestilential miasma

 Ascends that person's body

 And wildly attacks him everywhere.

If people

Dump these rats

Into a flowing river or a well,

These rats will

Inside the water

Even be more successful still.

Letting their body

Bob and float

On the surface of the water,

They are spreading

That pestilential miasma

Following the stream anywhere.

Whenever people

Cross such water,

Use it or, worse, drink from it,

Only a single drop

Causes the plague,

And all efforts will be in vain.

Then there are

In those streams

Fishes, turtles, frogs and shrimps

That each and all

That very moment

Also become pestilential critters.

When people unknowingly

Hunt them and catch them

To have them serve as foods,

Their plague miasma

Will enter your stomach,

And that will lead to your death.

So you can only

Fight them with fire —

That is the cleanest solution

As the god of fire

Does not fear their

Innumerable transformations.”

When Huang Zhiren had heard this, he again kowtowed and asked, “Rats are by nature very cunning. This is indeed just as you, Mahasattva, clearly explained. But as these pestilential rats have come down from heaven, their shrewd intelligence must be quite superior to common rats. Moreover, there are as many as twenty millions of them! So I am afraid that it is not an easy task to catch them if we only rely on the people of this world. So I implore you, Bodhisattva, in your great compassion and great mercy, to widely exert your Dharma power and to conceive yet another excellent method to annihilate this pestilential miasma as soon as possible in order to save and preserve the innumerable lives of the people of this world. You, Bodhisattva who Saves us from Suffering and Saves us from Dangers, are most responsive. Your disciple here already prays to you on behalf of the people of the world!” When he had finished speaking, he kowtowed without end.

The Mahasattva replied, “Excellent! As you have such a good heart you don’t have to feel ashamed when others call you ‘good man.’ I have considered this issue already for quite some time. When I earlier implored His Majesty the Jade Emperor to subdue these pestilential rats and the Jade Emperor agreed and allowed the use of the divine tongs, I already considered this issue. So at that time I further begged the Jade Emperor to grace me with yet another edict to assist the merit of the divine tongs, and the Jade Emperor graciously agreed. He promptly summoned the proper god in charge of all animals and issued a jade edict ordering him to select twenty thousand divine cats of every color and send them down to those regions where the pestilential rats had descended to assist the people of the world in catching them and reversing their fate. When this edict had been issued at my request, I was

overcome by gratitude. This showed that Heaven's heart is humanity and love. Even though the people of this world commit sins without end so they should suffer this huge *kalpa*, he agreed to dissolve and remove this *kalpa* as soon as he was implored to do so. What is needed is only that people of this world have a believing heart and uphold and practice [his commands]. How should they worry that these Heaven-sent disasters cannot be overcome? Now you mention this, I also just wanted to inform you that you have to urge each house and each family to keep a cat. That is even more convenient than catching rats yourself. Listen to me as I will tell you this in all detail.

These divine cats

Have originally

Been raised in heaven above

But compared to

The cats of this world

They are not all that different.

Each and every one

Has by nature

Silver teeth and steel claws,

They keep their furs,

Coming in five colors,

Specklessly clean, free of dust.

Their front legs are low,

Their hind legs are high,

Their shape resembles a tiger;

Their tails stand tall,

Their ears are alert —

A short neck and long body.

Catching old rats

Is originally

The very nature of these cats,

So when a rat

Sees a cat,

It loses all courage and spirit.

If each family

Would be able

To keep a cat,

The rat epidemic

Would in that region

Not be able to enter the gate.

This is because

The cat cannot only

Catch them, but also devour them.

If you keep a cat

Those old rats

Will have no means to survive!

Ordinarily

Keeping a cat

Is only counted a minor matter,

But during the plague

Keeping a cat

Becomes quite important indeed.

The everyday

Expenses you have

For fish and food are quite limited,

But the great

And exceptional merit

Benefits you and benefits others.

That each family

Keeps a cat

May be a common occurrence,

But in this world

There also are people

Who do not want to keep a cat:

Some because

When keeping a cat

They hate it for its thieving mouth —

They don't know

That fish and meat

Should always be properly stored;

Some because

When keeping a cat

They hate its foul pee and foul shit —

They don't know

That with diligent cleaning

That should not be a problem at all;

Some because

When keeping a cat

They hate the expenses and costs —

They don't know

That feeding a cat

Can cost you at most a few coppers;

Some because

When keeping a cat

They hate the animal's jumping fleas —

They don't know

That with diligent grooming

Their cat will remain clean and pure.

Now even if

They cannot conceive

These various counterarguments,

They still should think

Which one, cat or rat,

Is the most important of the two?

So I urge all people

On no account

To ignore the big because of the small:

Keeping a cat

Is more effective

In avoiding the plague than any pill.”

Huang Zhiren thereupon further asked her, “Bodhisattva, you have instructed me that divine cats have descended to earth. Your disciple will definitely inform the people of this world that each family must keep a cat as a prevention against the plague. But I don't know whether the divine cats can be kept in the same manner as common cats — is it the same way as with common cats? Please instruct me once more.” The Mahasattva replied, “Your question is excellent. Let me instruct you in the circumstances.

These divine cats

And pestilential rats

Have descended from high heaven,

But actually

In terms of procreation

The rat is much stronger than the cat.

For the pestilential rats

Coming down to earth

Was an extremely easy business:

From their conception

To their appearance

All happened with greatest speed.

Opening their eyes

And shedding their down

Proceeded even more quickly,

And within a few days

They already could

Spread this plague epidemic!

When these divine cats

Descended to earth,

Things didn't proceed that fast:

From their conception

To their appearance

Took the time of three months.

Let me also explain

That from birth

Till they could eat and could walk,

People would have,

Counting the quickest way,

To wait until they were in a panic.

Considering that

They would come too late

To annihilate the pestilential rats

(By the time the cats

 Could catch the rats,

 The epidemic would be raging),

Therefore

 The assembled deities

 Convened a communal conference

And ordered the divine cats

 Not to pass through wombs

 In descending to the world below,

But attach themselves,

 Each and every one,

 To the body of a common cat,

So they would not

 In birth and growth

 Waste any time and miss the moment.

The people on earth

 Would only see

 The shape of a common cat,

Not realizing

 That a divine cat

 Secretly provided protection.

Tell the people

 That in keeping a cat

 They have to be caring and loving;

On no account

 Can they denigrate the cat

 And treat it as a vulgar creature.

This is because

Each common cat

Has a divine cat attached to it

So as to be capable

Of controlling those rats

With its lofty Dharma power.

Even though people

With a mortal man's eye

Cannot discern this state of affairs,

Still if they would

Treat the cat lightly,

Their sin would be hard to repay.

There is something,

You have to tell people,

That requires even more their attention:

The cat's body

Should be combed and washed —

It never can be dirty or grimy.

When in winter

You will bath it,

Use warm water at all times,

But when in summer,

You bath it daily,

Cold water is not a problem.

This issue

Actually is

Of extraordinary importance,

So I urge all people

Who are keeping cats,

On no account to forget this.”

Huang Zhiren then again stepped forward and asked, “Bodhisattva, you instruct us that in keeping cats we should be diligent in combing and bathing. I do not understand what the importance is of this. Please instruct me clearly.” The Bodhisattva replied, “There is something you don’t know. These plague rats are extremely cunning. They see these divine cats coming to suppress them. Now it has always been the case that one creature subdues another creature, so they cannot do anything against these divine cats, but in one way or another they cannot accept to be subdued, and they are unwilling to stop their desire to spread the epidemic that very moment. They fail in their aim to spread the plague to all people of the world — only then their hearts would be satisfied! Wherever these divine cats appear, they do not dare approach them closely, but time and again employ magical techniques to transfer the pestilential miasma they carry with them to the fleas on the bodies of the divine cats. These fleas can then, just like the pestilential insects on the body of the pestilential rats, transfer the pestilential miasma to a human being as soon as they jump on someone’s body. Only if you continuously comb and bath your cat, will it be free of fleas, and the pestilential rats will have no possibility to play their tricks.

Now there is still something else that is extremely important in preventing the disease. The reason for High Heaven to send down this plague was that the people of this world commit sins without end. Now the neglect and destruction of natural goods is a major sin. That is why you have to pay great attention to foodstuffs.

I now once again

Urge all people

To absolutely remember

That tea and food,

Dishes and plates

Should always be guarded.

All your foodstuffs,

 No matter whether

 Broad daylight or dark night,

All have to be

 Properly stored —

 You are not allowed to forget!

Because these

 Pestilential rats

 Have no end of transformations:

When they see foods,

 They promptly will

 Engage in their magic tricks.

Even in the case

 Of freshly made

 New and fresh tea and rice,

They only have

 To sniff at it only once,

 And the miasma is quite strong.

It may be sea food

 Or fine venison,

 Or everyday household fare,

They only have

 To pass by only once,

 And promptly transmit the plague.

It does not change color,

 It does not change taste,

 And so this is impossible to detect,

But once you eat it,
 The epidemic disease
 Will from then visit your body.
This is in origin
 The retribution for
 The sins committed by people,
But if you can
 Properly store your food,
 The rats have no way to find it.”

Huang Zhiren again kowtowed, and thanking her said, “Bodhisattva, you have been so kind as to instruct the people of this world, leaving no detail untouched. Your disciple feels deeply grateful. Filled with veneration let me first kowtow and express my thanks on behalf of the people of the world. But your disciple is simple and unenlightened. As the pestilential rats have come down to earth by passing through a womb, they also must be, I would think, creatures of flesh and blood. In their body they carry all this pestilential miasma and plague insects. Can these rats themselves escape the disease when the epidemic manifests itself?” The Mahasattva replied, “Your question is excellent. Now listen to me.

These pestilential rats
 Originally have a body
 Made up of epidemic miasma.
Passing through a womb,
 They arrive in the world,
 And by and by see the light.
When they are born
 That pestilential poison
 Remains hidden and doesn't show,

Only as they slowly

Start to grow up,

Can it infect and wound people.

As they too have

Bodies of flesh and blood,

Of course they cannot be spared,

But the consequences

Of their one death

Are quite important indeed.

Ordinarily

It does not know

That its belly is full of poison,

And in its fur

Plague insects grow,

Slowly so slowly to maturity,

But when it comes

To that one day

That the miasma explodes,

Then that pestilential rat,

That creature too,

Will immediately lose its life.

But for that rat

It's not the case

That it lightly passes away:

It dies

For the purpose

Of greatly spreading the plague!

When this pestilential rat
 Has reached the moment
 That the plague will explode,
Then it will at that time
 Appear from its hole,
 Everywhere seeking for people.
Now in case
 It comes across
 A place that keeps a divine cat,
Then it does
 Not dare show its shape
 In the house of such a family,
But when it finds
 Another family
 That does not keep a cat,
It will go there,
 Having found them,
 And parade around at will.
When the plague explodes
 It will on purpose
 Seek out places with people,
And in front of them
 It will jump up and down
 To send off its miserable life.
Its one death
 May at first sight
 Not be counted for much,

Because it isn't known

That this one death

Plants the root of disaster!

If anyone

Is unlucky enough

To see such a dead rat,

That person

Will meet with misfortune,

Unable to escape with his life.

If any family

Sees such a dead rat,

Their fate is even more gruesome:

Old and young,

The whole family,

Will die to the very last person.

Even if you have

At that moment

A miracle pill or superior medicine,

I don't know

How many people

May be saved from every hundred!

This is actually

These pestilential rats'

Most effective magic method,

But I do not want

To see humankind

Reduced to such a situation!"

As Huang Zhiren was listening, he fully understood, and said, “So it is actually this way! Each and every one of these pestilential rats not only cannot avoid death, but their death is in fact their magic method to spread the epidemic. That is truly terrifying! But there is still one question I would like to ask. A rat as a single animal, in your disciple’s opinion, has a small body and is by nature an expert in boring. No matter whether walls or floors, it can work its way through them and enter. How can people ever catch it if it stays hidden in its hole and does not come out but waits until people have dropped all precautions, and it stealthily arrives? Is there perhaps yet another excellent method?” The Mahasattva said, “Excellent! I just wanted to tell you about this. That you ask about it shows the goodness of your heart. You think of every detail! Listen once more to my exposition.

In general rats

Will by nature

Try to hide themselves,

So inside houses

They concentrate on

Making holes in the walls.

Soft and pliable,

They bore their way

In a most secretive manner:

Above the ceiling,

Below the floor,

That is their original home.

This applies to

Ordinary dwellings,

Double level or single level,

But also in

Those new constructions

It is hard to exclude them.

Next to wall corners

And under pillar bases

They are most dangerous,

Because a rat's

Four front teeth

Surpass the purest steel.

If they only

Ever so lightly

Gnaw a few mouthfuls,

They immediately

Create a hole

To enter and leave at ease.

When we come to talk

About pestilential rats,

Their abilities are even greater:

When they employ

Their magic methods,

They are exceptionally terrible.

Even if those

Houses of people

Have walls of bronze and iron,

They still are capable

To bore their way inside

And secretly hide themselves.

But in case

Those families

Are willing to keep a cat,

These rats

In their holes

Won't dare launch an attack.

All day long

They will stay inside,

Suffering an unbearable hunger,

So they'll want

Stealthily

To move to some other place.

But if a family

Does not have

A divine cat to protect them,

They can at will

Wreak their destruction,

Wildly gnawing without pause.

Even if you

Used the finest

Hardwoods for your house,

Both ceiling planks

And floor boards

Will be damaged by gnawing.

So you must

Urge the people

To pay attention at all times:

As soon as they see

The hole of a rat,

They must take precautions.

They must

As soon as they see

These holes, large or small,

Immediately

Order a carpenter

To repair these, nice and clean.

And in case

These have been repaired,

Guard against further gnawing!

I have yet

Another method

You must commit to memory;

In all cases

Of rat holes

Can be applied with success:

Have a ready supply

Of 'rammed earth'³²

To fill up the holes inside.

Order the carpenter

To once again

Make repairs to the outside

So those rats

Don't dare anymore

Come and go by this way.

Then there are

The bottoms of chests,

The undersides of couches,

³² A cement-like substance.

As soon as only

Half a crack appears,

Rats can easily hide there.

You only need

A sliver of wood —

It won't cost you much,

But tell the carpenter

To repair the crack

As soon as it is possible.

The common people

Must firmly commit

My words to memory:

Of course they will

In case of an epidemic

Turn out to be of use.

If I today

Have summoned you

To entrust these messages,

It is because

These are not common:

I taught you good methods.

Because you

For tens of years

Have been devoted to goodness

And ordinarily

Go everywhere

To rescue those in dire need,

I chose you

To manifest my shape

In your dream for my sermon,

And you must now

Inform the others —

You're not allowed to forget!

Urge the people

First of all

To believe you as they listen,

On no account

Can they take this

As the nonsense from a dream.

If there are people

Who before the gods

Make a comprehensive vow

To catch pestilential rats

To prevent the rat epidemic

They definitely will be blessed.

I already earlier

Informed you of

The conditions for catching rats:

If one catches fifty,

That is counted as

One vow that will be rewarded.

If you collect one vow,

You will be protected

For one year from all sickness;

If you collect ten vows,

 You will be protected

 For all eternity from any disaster.

And in case one's

 Desire to collect vows

 Is even greater and even better,

That whole family

 Will from that moment

 Enjoy incalculable good fortune.

Now even if you

 Are still burdened

 By all kind of crimes and sins,

You also can

 Dissolve those forever

 To always enjoy peace and health.

While on earth

 You will reach old age

 And all your life be strong and hale,

And when eventually

 Your longevity will end,

 You'll proceed to Heaven's Palace.

But in case

 One refuses to believe

 And talks all kind of wild nonsense,

One will not only

 Suffer the plague

 And immediately meet King Yama,

But one also

Will suffer the various

Tortures of the earth-prisons:

Ascending the mountain of knives

And climbing the tree of swords,

One's guts are torn from one's belly!

That Oxface

And Horsehead

Are extremely vicious and mean:

They gouge out your eyes,

They cut off your tongue,

And tie you to a flaming couch.

At that time

Even I

Will be unable to save you,

And as I see you

Suffering these tortures,

I cannot but be wounded at heart."

When Huang Zhiren had heard this, he again bowed and replied, "Bodhisattva, you don't spare any effort to dispense your instructions again and again, so even one as simple and obtuse as your disciple can be moved to reverentially observe your kindness in sermonizing. But the people of the world are stupid and deluded and very hard to convert. Also false and fake rumors abound, so devout and sincere belief and veneration is not easy. Bodhisattva, let me give a you brief exposition.

Your disciple

Has received

Your tireless and earnest warning

And he definitely will
 Obey your holy command
 And transmit your message to all,
Hoping that others
 Will believe your good words
 And sincerely believe your words,
Because only then
 I cannot betray
 The bodhisattva's kind mercy.
But I only fear
 That people at present
 Are diverse in nature and feelings,
And that there
 Exists a considerable
 Difference between good and evil.
Those who are good
 Will on hearing these words
 Fully be filled with a strong belief
And strictly obeying
 The Bodhisattva's words
 Make every effort to practice them.
They of course
 Will so be able
 To avoid disaster and misfortune —
This kind of people
 Possess from birth
 Originally the root of goodness.

But alas

There are also

Simple and deluded people,

Who when others

Tell them good words

Stuff their ears, refusing to listen.

By nature these

Lack from birth

The distinction of good and evil,

So when you

Tell them good words,

They will say that that is not true.

There are those people

Who from their birth

Are filled with evil conceptions:

They don't fear Heaven,

They don't fear Earth,

They don't respect ghosts or gods.

They will say,

'Where are those

Gods, immortals, sages and saints?'

They will say,

'Who ever saw

The Buddha, the World-Honored One?

These all are only

Invented by those

Buddhist monks and Daoist priests

Who, seeking donations,
Created these false words
In order to hoodwink other people.
Then there are those
Stubbornly deluded people
Who refuse to believe anything at all
And they will say,
'What one hasn't seen
Can never be accepted for the truth.'
You can talk
To those people until
Your mouth is dry, your tongue scorched,
But to them it is all
Wind passing their ears
And they will retain nothing at all.
In their heart
They will never agree
To lend credence to words of others
And in all matters,
Whether large or small,
They will always harbor strong doubt.
Then there are many
Muddleheaded people
Who are even more to be pitied:
They at all times
As one set rule
Will always lack any understanding.

When you urge them

That by committing sins

They lose the Buddha's assistance,

They on hearing this

Will laugh in your face

And say you are telling them lies.

When you urge them

To practice good deeds

To dispel disaster and receive blessing,

They will tell you

That what you say

Lacks any foundation or evidence.

When you urge them

To produce merit

To avoid distress and gain luck,

They will ask you,

'Who ever saw the shape

Of your distress and good luck?'

These kinds of people

Are on all issues

Fully deluded and utterly stupid

As they don't know

What in this world

May be false and what will be true.

Only if they

See profit and harm

With their own eyes quite clearly,

Is it possible

To attract their attention

And scare them into awareness.

Nowadays

These kinds of people

Are really not limited in number:

Out of a hundred

I can only fear

They may reach fifty percent.

When your disciple

Will diligently follow

The Bodhisattva's teachings

And preach these to them,

They will not believe them —

So how could they practice them?

I beg you, Bodhisattva,

In your compassion,

To greatly display your Dharma power

So as to cause these people

To listen to your good words

Each and all with devout sincerity

Because only then

Your disciple can

Speak and encounter belief.

You then will not in vain

Have preached to me here

So earnestly and so tirelessly.”

When Huang Zhiren had set out in great detail that among the people of the world those who could believe were only a minority and those who could not believe a majority, the Bodhisattva promptly replied, "Excellent! I too have long been aware that the people on earth are burdened by heavy sins and have since long been trapped in the net of delusion. If one does not show them true evidence and solid proof, it is hard to make them follow and believe. If you had not mentioned this, I still had prepared for this already long ago. But this shows your solid desire to practice goodness and strongly search for concrete results. This very admirable!"

When she had finished speaking, she ordered a boy clad in white to quickly guide Huang Zhiren to the grotto in back to let him have a good look there. "Then bring him back here to await my holy edict." Holding a spirit flag in his hand, the boy led Huang Zhiren to the grotto in back.

Huang Zhiren

Followed this

Boy who was dressed in white

To the grotto in back

Where he saw

That the scenery was pure and fresh:

Exquisite shrubs

And rare flowers

Filled the grounds in profusion

And everywhere

A sandalwood scent

Filled your nose with its fragrance.

White jade stones

Were laid out

Below the gold covering the floor:

Clear like water,

Bright lie a mirror,

Neat and clean without any dust!

When they arrived

 Before the grotto's gate,

 Its rock walls rose as high as the sky:

Vines climbed upwards,

 Moss spread below

 In an arrangement of various greens.

When they entered

 The back grotto's gate,

 Yet another heaven and earth appeared

That filled your eyes

 Wherever you looked

 With the overwhelming light it emitted.

On this side were

 Purple bamboo fences

 And high hangings on golden hooks;

On that side stood

 On precious pedestals

 Pure vases made of white jade.

On this side were

 Brocade habits

 And white clothes hung side by side,

On that side stood

 Begging bowls

 That were made of purple gold.

Then there were

 An infinity of

 Rare jewels and exceptional treasure,

Which were beautiful

As well as spotlessly pure,

Producing a shining precious aura.

To the left

They entered

Yet another separate chamber:

On its four walls

Were hung up

Bright and clear picture paintings.

That boy in white

Addressed Zhiren,

Speaking to him the following words,

"Lay-person, please

Look at these pictures,

Make sure to memorize them well."

Huang Zhiren

Obedied his words

And stepped forward to look better.

But when he had observed

Each and every painting

He found it hard to grasp their sense.

He only saw all around this room had been hung picture paintings. Each painting was more than one rod in height and more than four feet in width. They had been mounted on ancient brocade, using ivory pins and jade rollers. There were more than twenty paintings and each painting was divided in ten or eight illustrations. The painting technique was skilled and precise, while the colors were fresh and bright. The people were as lively as if they were real. They had been painted in an extraordinary fashion, and atop each painting there was a horizontal row of several Sanskrit letters from the Western Heaven. When Huang Zhiren looked closer, he saw they were the same as the letters in Buddhist sutras.

He did not understand their meaning, but on the side there were numberless small characters that provided a detailed explanation. Atop the first painting were arrayed six Sanskrit letters as big as a cup. Below that was a painting of all kinds of rats, grey and black, dead and alive.

He only saw

That the first painting

Was fully devoted to rats.

The first picture

Showed a painting

Of one mass of black clouds

And in those clouds

One saw vaguely

Old rats without number,

Some jumping,

Some running

As they rushed downward.

On the side

Was explained

In some lines of small characters

That these were

Those pestilential rats

Having barely descended from heaven.

The second picture

Showed a painting

Of rats that had barely been born:

With their naked skin

Without any fur

They could not yet move around.

Each and every one,

 Their eyes still closed,

 Shook their heads and their brains.

There were also

 Some bigger rats

 That breastfed them with the greatest care.

To the side were noted

 Not all that many

 Lines written in small characters

That explained

 That these pestilential rats

 Had just descended to the mortal dust

And, still in

 The nests of rats,

 Had not yet been weaned:

They could not yet

 Spread the plague

 Everywhere to harm humans.

He next looked at

 The third picture:

 The rats had grown up

And ran to the east

 Or jumped to the west,

 Up and down, turning and rising.

They jumped on beams

 And bored through walls,

 Reversing and breaking pots and vats;

They gnawed on books,

They tore at clothes,

Climbed up and reversed jars of oil.

The explanation said

That pestilential rats

Cause disaster and wreak destruction

By damaging vessels

And stealing foodstuffs,

While spreading seasonal epidemics.

The fourth picture

Was a painting

Of one man who was lying asleep

While there was one rat

That was stealthily

Moving across that man's body

And it so lightly, lightly

Passed its breath

Into the nose and mouth of that man

Just as if

A demonic vixen

Was stealing his breath to strengthen her essence.

The explanation read

That a rat from birth

Is adept at vanquishing breath:

It will utilize breathing

To spit out its pestilential miasma —

The consequences are far from minor.

The fifth picture

 Showed several rats

 That shook the hairs of their furs,

So the fleas

 All over their bodies

 Fled and ran off in all directions.

The explanation said

 That these jumping fleas

 Were extraordinarily dangerous:

If they bit a man

 He would immediately

 Come down with the plague.

The sixth picture

 Showed a pile

 Of clothes of little children

And several rats

 Bored their way inside,

 Rolling about this way and that.

The explanation read

 That the pestilential miasma

 Was extremely cunning in its tricks,

Spreading

 The plague miasma

 So it secretly would infect people.

The seventh picture

 Showed scarves and pants,

 Articles of female clothing,

With several rats

That were sleeping there

As they were about to die.

The explanation said

That rats by nature

Love things that are dirty,

So when they find

Unclean things,

They surely will spread the plague.

The eighth picture

Showed a painting

Of a man sitting by himself,

With several rats

In front of him

Jumping around as they died.

When Huang Zhiren

Had seen all of them

He suddenly came to realize

That this was how

These pestilential rats

Spread the plague to harm people.

When Huang Zhiren had observed the first painting, he was completely clear in his heart: these were the ways in which pestilential rats harmed people. But to his regret he could not read the Sanskrit letters on top so he did not know what they meant. When he looked at the second painting it depicted the divine cats descending to earth and catching rats. Each and every shape and color was extraordinarily lively. Here too six Sanskrit letters were written at the top.

The first picture

Was a painting

Of divine cats descending to earth,

Each and every one

Surrounded by

Five-colored auspicious clouds.

With raised ears

And towering bodies

They were extremely impressive,

Resembling

Fierce tigers

Rushing down a mountain forest.

The explanation said

That the divine cats,

At the order of the Jade Emperor,

Arrived in the world of man

To catch those pestilential rats

And thereby save the people.

There was one picture

Showing divine cats

Of every type of colored fur:

Shaking their heads

And raising their tails

They were truly quite energetic.

The explanation said

That the divine cats

Had secretly descended to earth

And in one movement

Attached themselves

To the bodies of the common cats they met.

From that moment

These common cats

Were extraordinarily active,

Now showing

Even less mercy

On encountering pestilential rats.

On this side

There was a picture

That had been done even better:

It showed a cat

That had crouched down,

Listening stealthily with raised ears.

To the side it explained

That pestilential rats

Displayed activities over there

And the cat on this side

Had learned about it

And now was all focused attention:

As soon as

One moment

Its ears would have detected them,

It would run over

And grab them,

So those rats would lose their souls.

Yet another picture

 Showed several holes

 At the bottom of a wall,

And a single cat

 That closely watched

 The entrances of these holes.

The explanation said

 That in that wall

 There were quite some rats,

And that therefore

 The cat was waiting,

 Unwilling to move its body.

It waited for them

 To thoughtlessly

 Stick their heads outside the hole

And then run forward

 And snatch them in one bite,

 Leaving them nowhere to escape.

In yet another picture

 There were several cats

 Rolling around with each other.

There was one cat

 Carrying a rat in its mouth

 And trying to avoid them all.

The explanation said

 That one having caught a rat

 All others too wanted to bite it,

And that therefore

 All these cats

 Were fighting with each other.

Yet another picture

 Showed a single cat

 That had caught one rat:

It threw it away,

 Then caught it again,

 Playing with it for pleasure.

The explanation wrote

 That superior cats

 By their inborn nature

When catching a rat

 Don't devour it at all

 But keep on playing with it.

And when they then

 Have played it to death,

 They promptly abandon it,

Completely unlike

 Those common cats

 That bite, chew and devour.

In yet another picture

 A single cat again

 Was loudly snoring as it slept,

But there were

 Quite a number of rats

 Running away as far as they could.

The explanation said

That there is a kind of cat

That by its nature disperses rats:

It does not have

To go and catch rats —

The rats spontaneously flee.

As long as it

Soundly sleeps

In the house of anyone,

That whole family

And its four neighbors

Will be free of all rats!

Among cats

This is actually

The most superior breed:

If such a cat

Is kept in the house,

The rats are exterminated.³³

When Huang Zhiren had looked at this painting, he deeply understood its meaning and thought to himself, "This is the full story the Bodhisattva told me of the divine cats descending to earth. As for the depicted cats and rats, their depiction is extremely realistic and touching. But to my regret I cannot read those Sanskrit letters written at the top. I understand they indicate the meaning of these pictures, but I do not fully understand their meaning and that frustrates me." But suddenly he thought, "Why don't I ask this boy? He must be able to explain them."

Thereupon he pressed the palms of his hands together, made a bow and said, "Brother, allow me to ask a question. What is the intent of what has been written at the top of the first and the second painting? With my mortal eyes I cannot grasp it, so please instruct me." The boy replied, "The big

³³ For the Chinese lore about cats who destroy rats by their very presence, see Idema 2019, 44.

characters inscribed on the first painting are the six characters for 'Picture of Pestilential Rats Causing Disaster.' The six characters inscribed on the second painting are 'Picture of Divine Cats Annihilating Rats.'" Huang Zhiren said, "Many thanks for your complete explanation." And he thought to himself, "This is not different from what I had surmised." Thereupon he inspected the other pictures. He saw that on each painting there was at the top a horizontal title in Sanskrit letters. In the separate pictures under it there were all kinds of men and women, old and young, rich and poor. When he first looked at the closest painting, it was divided in several pictures that offered a gruesome spectacle. In general they painted the situation of people suffering from the plague.

He saw that

In these pictures

There were mountains and streams;

There were families

And their dwellings,

All extraordinarily artful and precise.

On this side

Was painted

A thatched cottage of limited size

Within it were one man

As well as one woman,

Both in worn and tattered clothes.

The man was

Embracing his head,

His face fully displaying his illness —

On a spread-out

Torn quilt and bedding

He was lying face down on his bed.

That woman too

By the looks of her

Also seemed to suffer the illness

As she faced

That fellow,

Covering her face, hiding her grief.

The explanation

Informed him that

This couple, both husband and wife,

The man and the woman,

Were struck by the plague

And that there was no hope for a cure.

There was no rice in the pot,

There was no fire in the stove:

They suffered the greatest distress;

They had no in-laws,

They had no relatives,

So who would now come to their aid?

These people were

A simple family

(The common people's hundred surnames)

That worked one day

To have food for one day

And didn't have any stores of grain.

In normal times

They already

Suffered a myriad of bitter miseries,

And now one day

They had caught the rat-plague:

They were even more overwhelmed.

On that side

Was painted

A pure and cool tile-covered house

With one family

Of men and women

Of every age and every character.

Some were sitting

And some were sleeping,

But they all were sick and tired:

Some of them wept

And some of them cried,

Each and every one miserable.

At the corner of the house

There was to be seen

The corpse of a single dead rat,

And from that corpse

A pestilential miasma

Was covering that whole house.

The explanation said

That these people

Originally were strong and hale,

But, struck by the plague,

They had all turned

Into sallow-faced bags of bones.

In that house

 Stood arranged

 All kinds of boxes and chests,

And in terms of wealth

 Such a family

 Might be counted as very well off,

But only because

 They didn't keep a cat

 And didn't know how to catch rats,

This whole family

 Was infected

 By this contagious epidemic disease.

That this dead rat

 Spread the disaster

 They did not understand at all

And only thought

 That the seasonal disease

 Couldn't be avoided or prevented.

In the middle

 Was further painted

 A high hall in a big mansion

With several

 Men and women

 Dressed after the latest fashion.

On their bodies

 They all wore

 Damask, gauze, silk and satin,

But actually

Each and every one was

Upset, frustrated, beset by worries.

Some of them

Couldn't prop themselves up,

Allowing their bodies to collapse,

And others

Could not sit anymore

And lay down on their beds.

Even though

They all had

Servants who could wait on them,

It seemed very much

As if all of them

Suffered unbearable pains.

Behind their backs

Had been painted

Quite a number of rats,

Some of them dead,

Some others alive,

Truly the dirtiest mess!

The explanation said

That rich and noble families,

Dressed in brocade and fed on jade,

In ordinary days

May lead a life of luxury

Surpassing that of titled princes,

But because

They don't believe

In keeping cats to catch rats,

Will therefore

Be struck by the plague

And suffer misfortune likewise.

Over here

Had been painted

Very tall and strong fellows

That by their looks

Even surpassed

The four Diamond Kings,³⁴

But alas!

Each of them

Had fallen down to the ground,

On their necks

And in their groins

Suffering from bubonic sores.

The explanation said

That these fellows

Once were strong and sturdy,

But when struck by the plague

They then too quite quickly

Had been ruined by the disease.

Even though they

In ordinary times

Did not fear any sickness at all,

³⁴ Protective deities of Buddhism, usually depicted in their fearsome shapes at the entrance of Buddhist monasteries.

Once struck by
 The rat epidemic
 They nowhere could vaunt their strength.

Over there
 There were some
 Girls as beautiful as flowers,

Who had been painted
 As if they had been
 Sculpted from jade, fashioned from powder!

They had been made up
 In the latest fashion,
 With pearls and halcyon feathers,³⁵

But they too,
 Once struck by the plague,
 Had lost the luster of their face.

Their brows knitted in a frown,
 Their faces displaying pain,
 They were utterly miserable,

As they lay down
 On their Yang Guifei-couch —
 Brocade curtains, an ivory bed!³⁶

Most pitifully:
 By the looks of it
 They were about to breathe their last

³⁵ Halcyon feathers were widely used in hair ornaments.

³⁶ Yang Guifei was the favorite consort of Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756) of the Tang dynasty.

But did not yet know

At what moment

They would meet with King Yama.

The explanation said

That these women,

Exceptionally pampered and noble,

In ordinary times

By all would be called

Peerless and beyond compare —

By their looks

They surpassed

The rarest jewels and treasures!

But the rat epidemic

Did not know how

To cherish their jade and fragrance:

When out of the blue

They were struck by the plague,

They suffered misery like others —

Features like a flower

And a face like the moon

Could not protect them from losing their lives.

Then there were

Elderly people

Who had reached a high age,

With bent backs

And sighing waists,³⁷

And heads full of white hair.

³⁷ Tentative translation.

But because they
 Were struck by the plague,
 They could offer no resistance;
Decrepit and doddering
 In their old age dotage,
 They could not last any longer.
The explanation said
 That they in their youth
 Had repeatedly survived disaster,
And as a result
 Had now in old age
 Encountered this rare misfortune.
In ordinary times
 They might very well
 Live on without sickness or pain
And all would say
 That throughout life
 Blessing and longevity would last,
But they had no clue
 That they late in life
 Might be struck by the plague
That would kill them off —
 Candles in the wind,
 Frost on the grass!
Then there were
 Little children,
 From birth so adorable:

And chubby and white,

And so intelligent,

Extremely smart, without compare!

But because they were

Struck by the plague

There was no way to save them

And it was obvious

That within a short time

They were destined to die:

Their eyes closed,

Their bodies stretched out,

Half awake and half asleep.

Also were painted

A number of rats

That circled around them.

The explanation

Wrote as follows:

When these lovely children

One day suddenly

Are struck by the plague,

They truly break one's heart.

Even if you

In ordinary times

Pampered and spoiled them,

This 'flesh from the heart'

And 'pearl on the palm'

All are entrusted to dreams.

When he looked again

 To the top of the painting

 The general legend was clear:

When common families

 Develop the rat epidemic,

 They are most deplorable.

In the beginning,

 When one person died,

 He was dressed by relatives,

But when later

 Everyone collapsed,

 There was none to take care.

Once you were ill,

 No one came to ask

 Whether you wanted tea or water,

And when eventually

 All had died together,

 There was no one to buy coffins.

All what remained

 Was a pile of corpses

 That started to smell and to rot

And one never saw

 Any person arrive

 To provide them with a funeral.

When relatives visited

 And heard about this,

 They quickly made themselves scarce,

And when friends

Heard about this,

They too, no wonder, moved far away.

Therefore,

When a region

Remains free from the plague, all is fine,

But when the plague strikes,

The miasma of the corpses

Spreads the epidemic even farther.

One transmits it to ten,

Ten transmit it to one hundred

And millions without any number:

The millions of families

That make up a city

Will be wiped out clean.

If you don't believe this,

The province of Guangdong

Will provide an example.

For warning the world

I will tell that old tale

Once again in every detail!

When Huang Zhiren had looked at this painting, he asked the boy, "Brother, what is the explanation of this painting?" The boy clad in white replied, "This is the great *kalpa* of the rat epidemic, to which the other *kalpas* of water or fire, violence or warfare cannot be compared. For all people, no matter of what kind, it is equally hard to escape. If you base yourself on income, it doesn't matter whether you are a poor family, a well-to-do house, or a rich and noble mansion — once you are infected, you are all the same. If you base yourself on bodily constitution, it makes even less difference whether you are strong or weak, old or young. Whether you are a big fellow with strong tendons and great

strength like a Diamond King or a beautiful babe fashioned of gold and wrapped in jade like an immortal maiden, whether you are an old man who never in his life suffered any disease and whose beard and eyebrows are white or a child who cannot be bought for a million and surpasses the rarest treasure, once infected by the rat epidemic you all together will meet your end. And what is even more fearsome: you will breathe your last in a few days if death comes slowly and in half a day if it comes fast. This is all because you refuse to catch rats and to keep a cat. That is why the Bodhisattva painted these pictures to warn the people of this world.” Huang Zhiren recited the name of the Buddha, “Hail to the Buddha Amitabha! She truly may be called ‘Greatly Merciful and Greatly Compassionate’! But what is the explanation of the Sanskrit letters written at the top?” The boy replied, “That means, ‘Picture of Spreading the Rat Epidemic.’”

When he had heard this, Huang Zhiren observed the next painting. This was also divided into several pictures. What had been painted there were all people who were about to die or had died already. It was all extremely pathetic and terrifying.

The first picture

Again displayed

A rich and noble atmosphere

But several

Men and women

Lay stretched out in the hall:

Their faces were sallow,

Their features had changed,

Their bodies had turned black —

It was clear that they

Had suffered the plague

And all had lost their lives.

On this side

Were amassed

Gold, silver, goods and treasure,

And on the other side

Had been piled up

Clothes, garments, cash and grain.

The family possessions

Would seem to reach

The huge amount of millions,

But each and every one

Had closed his eyes —

Truly a most saddening sight.

To the picture's side

Had been written

Ever so clearly, ever so clearly

The information that

This family had been

Extraordinarily rich and noble.

In vain had been

This enormous wealth

As they could not enjoy it:

Everything

Was left behind —

In vain they had toiled for others.

The second picture

Showed the painting

Of a middle-aged merchant:

He too was struck

By the rat epidemic

And lay stretched out on the bier,

While next to him

 There stood several

 Middle-aged women, his wives,

Who covered their faces

 Or fell on their knees,

 As tears poured from their eyes.

It seemed as if they

 Truly found it impossible

 To be separated, be left behind.

To the side the explanation

 In a few lines of characters

 Was very saddening indeed.

It explained that this man

 Actually had

 Three wives and four concubines

But when one day

 He was struck by the plague

 His life had been taken by Death.

In vain he possessed

 Jade-like celestial immortals,

 Beauties and handsome women,

Whom he all

 Had left behind

 To guard their empty room alone.

But these

 Jade-like celestial immortals,

 Beauties and handsome women,

Would also within

Three or four days

Pass away and breathe their last.

No more talk

Of love and affection,

Of a white-haired couple in old age!

All that was left

Was one family

That had turned into a funeral home.

Another picture

That had been painted

Was exceptionally distressing

As it showed

A little baby;

It had died because of the plague.

There was a woman

Who was still

Tightly holding it in her arms,

And then there was

An elderly woman

With temples white like frost.

She to one side

Was covering her face

As she beat her breast and wept

In a heart-rending way,

So it seemed as if

Her gusts were cut to smithereens.

Next to the picture

There was a text

That explained the bitter story.

It was explained

That this family had been

Orphans and widows for three generation.

Their only hope was

That this little child

Would grow up into an adult

Who continued the sacrifices,

And would sire the offspring

To sacrifice at the graves.

But because they

Didn't believe

In keeping a cat to catch rats

It was struck by the plague,

To be justly compared

To tender grass after the frost.

From now on

She could not hope

To hold him closely in her arms;

From now on

She could not hope

He would call her "mommy,"

From now on

She could not hope

He would continue the family;

From now on

There was no future,
No one to wrap up the scene.

To the side

Had been painted
A young married couple,

That as a pair

Had died of the plague,
Stretched out on their ivory bed,

And beside them

Were kneeling
A young son and small daughter

Who wept and wept

And cried and cried,
Pulling at their father and mother.

There were two

Elderly women
Who came and pulled them away,

Ever so viciously

Treating them
To wild slaps and cuffs on the ears.

The small characters

Had been written
In a very clear manner indeed

And explained:

This was the family
Of a merchant of gentry status,

But because

They did not want

To keep a cat to catch rats,

They were therefore

Struck by the plague

And husband and wife had died.

They left behind

A son and a daughter

With no one to take care of them,

So they ended up

In the hands of others,

Who abused them in an unbearable way.

They wept for their father,

They wept for their mother,

Calling for them a thousand times,

These unfortunate children —

But which person

Would show any kind understanding?

Their father and mother

Were now two ghosts

In the underworld, filled with regret

Because they refused

To take precautions,

Carefully, against that rat epidemic.

But at this stage

They could only,

Even though dead, blame themselves:

Their pampered children

Entrusted to others

Suffered from blatant mistreatment.

Yet another picture

Painted the scene of

A traveling merchant far from home

Who brought his body

To breathe his last

In the middle of some roadside inn.

A coffin stood there

Of the cheapest make

Ready to receive his remains

And there were

People of that inn

Hastily dressing the corpse.

It was explained

That this kind of people

Did not know rat epidemics:

They feared to keep cats,

They feared to catch rats,

And said it was utter nonsense.

Struck by the plague

He now ended up

Abandoning wife and children:

In a strange place

He lost his life

Far from home as a wanderer.

When the coffin was closed,
 There was not a single
 Close relative or family member
And it was left
 To unrelated people
 To conduct the final ceremonies.
Then that coffin
 Would be carried
 To the open field outside town —
If you wanted
 To transport him home
 Streams and hills were too far.
Most lamentable was
 That back at home
 His wife and kids, old and young,
In their dreams
 Night after night
 Would still be longing for his return.
He had left behind
 Clothes and possessions,
 Gold, silver, money and treasure
That all of it would
 Only benefit others —
 Truly, a most disheartening scene.
There also was
 A picture painted
 In a most thorough and vivid way:

It depicted several

Poverty-stricken people

Who had died by the side of the road.

Some of them

Were dressed in rags

And looked like they had been beggars,

But some of them

Had sturdy arms and legs

And seemed rather to have been bandits.

Some stretched out their legs,

Others were all rolled up:

Each man displayed his own posture,

But they likewise were

Struck by the plague

To die here a miserable cruel death.

Next to the picture

In small characters

There were a few lines of explanation

That informed you that

These poverty-stricken people

Had passed away because of the plague.

Some of them

Were people who

Had led a life of utter misery;

Some of them

Were unattached males

Who had wandered across the land.

In ordinary times

 Their existence

 Was already extremely filthy,

In times of the plague

 Of course they could not

 Take the proper precautions.

If you would teach them

 To avoid the epidemic

 By keeping a cat to catch rats,

They alas

 Could not keep one —

 Isn't that something distressing?

Someone might say,

 “They cannot even manage

 Three meals a day for themselves,

So in case these men

 Would also have to keep a cat,

 Where would they find the food?

They had to use

 Their flesh-and-blood body

 To block and defeat this rat plague,

But even men

 Made of iron and rock

 Would also have lost their lives.”

When Huang Zhiren had seen this, he again asked the boy, “Brother, could I bother you once again to point out the main points of the intention of this painting?” The boy replied, “This shows that all people who suffer from the plague will equally die. They may be rich and noble, poor and base, widower and widow or single orphan, they may have a myriad of sorrows or a thousand of concerns,

they all end up as the same spring dream." On hearing this, Huang Zhiren could not help heaving a sigh. When he looked at the next painting, it was even more horrible.

The first picture

Was a painting

Of innumerable corpses

That had been left

In the open field

In a disorderly mess.

It seemed as if

During a war

After a fierce battle

The corpses were left

Out in the open field

To feed the dogs and wolves.

Next to the picture

Were some characters

That very clearly explained

That all these

Many corpses

Were victims of the plague.

So many had died

That within one day

They numbered in the thousands,

So the coffin-makers

Lacked the time

To make the right number of coffins.

Because of this

 These corpses were piled up

 In the open field outside the town,

To be lashed by the wind,

 To be beaten by the rain

 And miserably scorched by the sun.

The second picture

 Showed a scene

 That was even more fearsome:

One saw many

 Corpses of the deceased,

 Pressed together like dogs or sheep:

On all four sides

 Had been amassed

 Dry firewood and bundles of straw,

And some people

 Were lighting the fire

 To pitifully burn them to ashes.

The black smoke rose,

 The red flames emerged

 As the fire raged unconstrained —

Only because

 They suffered the plague,

 The corpses had nowhere to hide!

So they could only

 Bring out one brand

 Of merciless, unquenchable fire,

So skin and flesh,
 Bones and blood
 Would be cleaned away by the flames.

There was also a picture
 That showed a scene
 Of quite a number of corpses,
All located
 On the beach,
 Facing the wide-open ocean.

There were numerous
 People of low degree
 Who all were working together:

Some hauled the corpses,
 Some carried the corpses,
 Throwing them hastily into the sea.

Out in the sea
 Were depicted
 The churning whitecaps and waves —

Some corpses were sinking,
 Some corpses were floating,
 Offering a most distressing sight.

It was explained
 To the side
 That because of the epidemic

So many had died
 That for a cremation
 There were no people to help,

And if you wanted
 To bury them all
 There was not enough of empty land,
But if you kept them
 You could expect
 That the plague would spread further,
So you could only
 Throw them into
 The wide ocean's watery expanse
And allow there
 The krakens and dragons
 To devour them to fill their bellies.
There also was a picture
 That showed a scene
 That was extraordinarily strange:
It painted
 A village
 That was completely deserted.
Now that picture
 Had been painted
 As a snowy scene all around,
And in the snow piles
 Had been buried
 The corpses of the deceased.
Some showed a head,
 Others displayed a leg:
 Truly too gruesome to behold.

At the side

Had been written

A few lines in small characters

That explained

That these corpses

All were victims of the plague:

Poverty-stricken people

Who out on the road

Had died during this epidemic.

Right at that time

A terrible snowstorm

Had blanketed the wide world:

One half died of the plague,

One half died of the cold,

And no one to bury them properly.

When Huang Zhiren

Had looked at this,

He felled it was way too terrible:

He could not bring

Himself to look,

And rested a while to recover.

Before Huang Zhiren had looked at all the pictures on this painting, he involuntarily burst out in tears and could not look anymore. He asked the boy again, "Brother, allow me to ask, what may be the purpose of all these corpses that are depicted?" The boy replied, "What is painted in these pictures are all people who were infected by the epidemic and died because they while alive did not believe in catching rats and did not know to keep cats. When one day they contracted the plague, they not only suffered greatly while still alive, but after their death their bones still met with such a gruesome *kalpa*." Huang Zhiren thereupon repeatedly recited the name of the Buddha, "Hail to the Buddha Amitabha!"

This is truly upsetting. There are all these paintings, and the more I see, the more gruesome they become. In fact, I cannot bear to see any more. Brother, please let us go back together and report to the Bodhisattva.” The boy agreed and led Huang Zhiren out of the grotto in back.

When they came to the earlier place, he saw that the Mahasattva still was seated on her lotus throne in the Purple Bamboo Grove. The boy stepped forward and reported on their visit. Huang Zhiren also stepped forward, kowtowed and said, “Your disciple has carefully looked at the paintings in the grotto in back. They are so gruesome and heart-rending, that I could not restrain myself. I have looked only at some paintings in the beginning. There were still many other paintings but I could not bring myself to inspect them carefully. As your disciple is simple and deluded, there is still something I do not understand. Earlier you said that dead rats could not be thrown into the water, but in the pictures there were scenes of human corpses being thrown into the sea. How could that not again spread the contagion?” The Mahasattva replied, “Excellent! You truly live up to the two characters ‘humane’ and ‘compassionate’. You must understand that the paintings over there distinguish between serious and less serious in painting the situation of the plague for each of the provinces you have already seen. The remaining paintings also only distinguish between serious and less serious. But I cannot blame you for wondering about throwing corpses into the sea. You must realize that the open sea and the inland rivers are different. One cannot drink the water of the sea. Also, the ocean is limitless and in a moment everything disappears. Even though it doesn’t matter if you throw these corpses into the ocean, it is still too bad for words that the world has come to this deplorable state.”

Huang Zhiren kowtowed again and asked, “Your disciple is simple and deluded. Bodhisattva, please be so kind as to inform me in which province the plague this time will be most serious and in which province less serious?” The Mahasattva replied, “When this epidemic first arrived in China, it came by way of Hong Kong and Guangdong, which were the first infected. Later the whole province of Yunnan was also infected. Nowadays the rat epidemic is still not eliminated there. That is because the people of that region commit many great sins. That’s why those who die of the plague number in the millions. When it comes to the next category, one first has to mention Fengtian, Jilin, and Heilongjiang. That’s the place most of the plague rats have been sent down to. Those are the pictures you could not bear to look at. Hereafter these three provinces will suffer a rampant plague. Each detail will conform

to the pictures, as you will witness very shortly. The next category is places like Zhili³⁸ and Shandong. Because the people of those provinces have committed serious crimes, the number of the plague rats that will be sent down there will be very large. And in the two provinces Jiangsu and Zhejiang the plague rats that will be sent down also will count more than a million. It was determined that they would manifest themselves in the autumn and winter of next year. Fortunately the divine cats that descend to earth also correspond to the number of plague rats in these regions. That's why the divine cats also will be numerous in Jiangsu and Zhejiang. All those who can keep and cherish a divine cat will be without problem."

When Huang Zhiren

Had heard these words,

He once again knelt down and bowed,

Thanking the Bodhisattva

For instructing a simple mortal —

His great gratitude was inexpressible.

"Your disciple

Still has one

Question he wants to pose to you.

My question is:

In the world below

There is a certain category of people

Who in ordinary times

Exclusively sticks to

A vegetarian diet and don't eat meat.

On meeting problems

They want to organize

Daoist sacrifices and sutra-readings;

³⁸ Hebei Province.

On meeting illness

As well as death,

They devoutly offer their prayers,

And I wonder

Whether such activities

Really have a divine efficacy?

In case that

These rat epidemics

Also can be disbanded in this way,

Your disciple

Definitely will

Teach these methods to the world

So people may

Invite in great numbers

Buddhist monks and Daoist priests

To recite the sutras

And perform penitences

So as to avoid the stars of disaster.”

When the Bodhisattva

Had heard these words,

She showed a smile on her face,

And only said,

“Huang Zhiren,

How intelligent you are indeed!

Ordinarily

You too are counted

As one of those who reads books,

So how can you

Have forgotten

The teaching left by the Sage?

A long time ago

Master Kong³⁹

Already has taught humankind

That if mortal man

Offends Heaven,

His prayers will be of no use.

These rat epidemics

Are in their origin

Punishments decreed by Heaven

So how can

Such sacrifices

Diminish them in the slightest?"

When the Mahasattva had finished speaking, she further said to Huang Zhiren, "That I summoned you here was only in order that you in turn would preach the terrible danger of rat epidemics and the methods for catching rats and keeping cats to the people of the world so they would be informed. In summary: keeping a cat is not as good as catching rats. If one only relies on one's divine cat and does not know to make every effort to catch rats by one method or another in order to annihilate the root trunk, this *kalpa* cannot be extinguished.

"Excellent! If you can with a believing heart uphold and practice my words, you will not betray my intention this time. Firmly commit all you have seen and heard to your memory and broadly preach it to the people of the world so they will understand. The merit you acquire thereby will truly not be minor. You have been here already for quite some time, so you should quickly go home."

When Huang Zhiren heard these words, he repeatedly kowtowed as tears coursed down his

³⁹ Confucius.

cheeks. The very moment he wanted to implore the Bodhisattva to save him from suffering, the Mahasattva took the willow wand from her pure vase and sprinkled his head with its pure water. That very moment Huang Zhiren felt soaked by this sweet dew. As his whole body was pure and cool, he woke up with a start.

[POSTFACE BY THE AUTHOR]

Mr. Huang Zhiren and I are neighbors, and we are also connected by marriage. In ordinary times his humanity and mercy and his love of good deeds were already renowned throughout the township. When this time he received this warning dream his experiences were still clearly before his eyes when he awoke, and he still could firmly remember each and every word, each and every sentence of the words the Mahasattva had entrusted to him. At that time also he told them to me in great detail.

Who could have known that on entering the winter season, the three provinces of Manchuria indeed would be struck by a severe epidemic. Because I remembered the words of Mr. Huang, I went in person to those provinces to inspect the situation and see for myself. The situation that I encountered was not different in any detail from the paintings Mr. Huang had seen in his dream and narrated to me. It perfectly conformed to the Mahasattva's silent message, "You will witness this very soon."

Overcome by trepidation I reverentially arranged what Mr. Huang had narrated to me into order. Using a simple and clear language, I did not detest the rustic and vulgar. That very day I entrusted it to artisans for printing as a book to be distributed everywhere, so the people of the world would promptly prepare their methods for catching rats and would in time of need not have to feel regret after the fact.

Respectfully written on a lucky day of the first ten-day week
in the Eleventh Month of the second year
of the reign period Xuantong of the Great Qing,
by his younger relative by marriage Li Shanbao of Shanzuo (Shandong)

[POSTFACE OF THE SHANGHAI EDITION]

This book originates in Tianjin where it had been printed by Mr. Huang. Even though its words are easy to grasp, its aim is to wake up the simple and obstinate and to eliminate their *kalpic* fate. Alas, the number of printed copies was limited so it could not yet be widely distributed, and its printing also lacked in quality. A friend who came from the North gave me this book.

Because of my friend's urgent pleading, I understood the humanity and love of Heaven's Heart: even in the midst of a great *kalpa*, I still harbor the intention of reversing it. I therefore had this book printed once again to broaden its distribution. This is how I extend and broaden Mr. Huang's intention of sharing goodness with others. If there are gentlemen who delight in good works and are able to gather the funds for a reprint, the distribution will even be wider. If this will ever more increase the goodness [of Mr. Huang], the created blessing will be without limit.

Respectfully written on the day of the full moon
of the Third Month of the third year
of the reign period Xuantang
by the Quantang Believer He Jiong

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