

City as Cenotaph: Building Commemorative Landscapes in Post-Taiping Jiangnan

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The Taiping Rebellion quite literally left its mark on the cities of Jiangnan: shattered and burned-out houses emptied of inhabitants, administrative buildings rendered unusable even decades after the conflagration, and temples and scenic sites ruined, beyond recognition. The flurry of gazetteers published in the 1870s and 1880s documents not only the damage, but also narrates efforts at restoration, reconstruction, and reorganization. These efforts sought to impose some semblance of physical and political order on ruined lives and landscapes. This paper will explore the post-war construction of “commemorative landscapes,” sites sponsored by officials and local elites that paid tribute to loyalty martyrs, reconstituted communities, and reinstated or invented symbols of local cultural achievement. Such sites included shrines honoring the recent war dead, restored Buddhist and Daoist temples, cemeteries, and stele inscriptions.