

# Primary Source: *Pictures of Tilling and Weaving*

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## Introduction

*Pictures of Tilling and Weaving* is a series of scroll paintings first produced during the Song Dynasty by a government official named Lou Shou (1090-1162). The imperial government sponsored their production to educate people about agricultural techniques and practices, informed by Confucian beliefs and values. It was based on the view that the government should encourage basic, productive work like farming, as opposed to less essential enterprises, like trade.

### 題農務女紅之圖

宋樓璣舊製耕織圖大抵與吳俗少異其  
為詩又非愚夫愚婦之所易曉因更易數事  
系以吳歌其事既易知其言亦易入用勸於  
民則從厥攸好容有所感發而興起焉者  
人謂民性如水順而導之則可有功為吾民  
者顧知上意嚮而克於自效也歟



The sixteen images included below come from an encyclopedic book from 1696, *Yu Zhi Geng Zhi Tu*, though they are all based on the original mid-12<sup>th</sup> version. The preface and poems are from *Bianmin tuzuan* (*Illustrated Collection for the Convenience of Ordinary People*) from 1593. While not a direct translation from the poems on top of each image, they describe the events in each image.

The scholar-official Kuang Fan wrote the preface and revised the original text for this version in the style of folk songs. The *Bianmin tuzuan* consists of sixteen volumes. The poems and illustrations in the first two volumes depict the detailed process of farming and silk production. The images and accompanying texts, 15 for agriculture in general and 16 for silk production specifically, show hard-working peasants in idyllic surroundings.

### Discussion Questions:

- Besides just instructing how to make silk, what else did the *Pictures of Tilling and Weaving* teach?
- What is the role of people of different genders and with different roles in the family, as depicted in these images and poems?
- How would you describe the relationship between silk production and the natural and supernatural worlds?
- What is the relationship between the individual, the family, and the larger society and economy, as presented in these images and poems?



## Preface

In the Song dynasty, Lou Shou used to make the *Pictures of Tilling and Weaving*, the customs depicted were slightly different from the ones practiced in Suzhou [a major silk center in eastern China], and the elegant poems are difficult for the illiterate man and women to understand. Therefore, I [the author Kuang Fan] made several changes and rewrote folk songs in the style of the Wu region [around Suzhou]. Thus, the tasks depicted in the images are easier to understand, and the languages are easier to be heard. Using this to persuade commoners would be more efficient, allowing people to echo with the content and learn from it. People say that the nature of the commoners just like water, one could effectively guide them as long as following their nature. These images could help our people to know the governors' intentions and follow the practice.



## 下蠶 Hatching Silkworm Eggs

On the Qingming Festival<sup>1</sup>, bathing silkworm eggs in the peach-and-willow water,  
The black eggs were laid on papers, tiny and numerous.

The elder lady<sup>2</sup> uses the scale to weigh the eggs,  
Counting how many screens of silkworms could be cultivated this year.

<sup>1</sup> A confucian festival held in early April to recognize and revere one's ancestors.

<sup>2</sup> Referring to the married woman whose daughter-in-law is also depicted.





## 餵蠶 Feeding Silkworms

The heads of silkworms turn to white while the  
leaves change to green,  
Feeding needs to follow the pace and one  
needs to pick up leaves diligently.  
Until the silkworms become cocoons on the  
trellises,  
How many rounds of hard works need to be  
done.



## 蠶眠 Silkworms Molting

After first molting, there comes the second one,  
Only after the third molting could silkworms finally mature.

When they are in good appetite, they keep eating leaves frequently,  
Which need to be changed every other night to remain fresh.







### 採桑 Picking up Mulberry Leaves

Men go to the field to pick up mulberry leaves,  
This was only because that women are busy with  
feeding the silkworms.

Feeding silkworms and picking up leaves happen  
at the same time,  
Things need to be done simultaneously to make  
proper progress.





## 大起 **Awakening**

After the third molting, there comes the major awakening,  
For another seven days, people need to invest more energy.  
Mature silkworms need to be fed consequently,  
Cannot bear with hunger for even one moment.





## 上簇 **Setting up the Trellises**

When silkworms climb on the trellises, they turn transparent,  
Spinning the cocoon, they are working on their own.

People cheer up when more cocoons are spun,  
The hardworking of one spring finally paid off on this day.





## 炙箔Warming the Screens

The nature of silkworms is to be afraid of the cold,

Every screen [of silkworms] is next to the brazier.<sup>3</sup>

All [people] want is to keep silkworms warm,  
How could they ever care about spending money on the charcoal?

<sup>3</sup> A brazier is a pan or tray used to heat or cook with coals.





## 窖繭 Storing Cocoons

The harvest of cocoons is good this year,  
The elder lady laughs joyfully.

Putting all the cocoons into the pot and seal in the  
mud,

[This is because people are] afraid that when the  
wind blows, moth would come out of the cocoon  
[so the raw silk would be destroyed].





## 繅絲 Reeling off Silk from the Cocoons

Boiling cocoons and reeling off silk, hands never stop,

Differentiating the thick and thin threads requires carefulness.

Refined raw silk would be sold at a better price,  
While the thick and coarse ones are cheaper.





## 蠶蛾 Silkworm Moths

A female moth and a male moth,  
Following the nature of *yin* and *yang*.<sup>4</sup>  
They produce eggs as the silk seeds,  
From where come the production of the next  
year.

<sup>4</sup> In Confucian philosophy, these are opposite and complimentary principles that work together to keep the universe in harmony.





## 祀謝 Offering Thanks

Finishing reeling off the new raw silk, people  
need to thank the silkworm deity,  
Auspicious items pile up on the plate and the  
wine fills the cup.  
The entire family, old and young, all bow down,  
Burning the paper money in fire [as an offering].



壬辰年  
歲早開  
情寒氣  
催人蟻  
蟀并茅  
屋踈籬  
秋夜永  
短檠相  
對終絲  
成

## 絡絲 Spooling

Spooling all depends on the careful handling,  
This just costs time, but not the money.  
Thick or thin, upper or lower, they are all useful.  
The break points need to be connected.





## 經緯 Warp and Weft Threads

The heads of warp threads are bundled, and the weft threads come in piles,  
Weavers handle these threads without stopping.  
Since this is a peaceful time and a good society,  
No need to sell the new silk in the second month [to pay debts].





## 織機 Weaving Silk

Once finished arranging threads, one gets on  
the weaving machine,  
Handling the shuttle as quickly as flying.  
Keep working from the dawn to the dusk,  
Only the weaver herself knows how hard this is.





## 攀花Weaving Patterned Silk

Weaving patterns on the machine is the most difficult,  
All depends on the skillful hands.  
Recently creating new patterns,  
[Customers] fall in love with one pattern as long  
as they see it.



手把高  
執冰雪  
清秋衣  
欲製重  
金情遠  
巡莫漫  
施刀尺  
芳縷子  
絲綫  
成

### 剪製 Cutting Silk

All sorts of silk textiles pile up in the box,  
For making clothes in the future.  
Once having enough clothes for the parents-in-law,  
The remaining could be made for the husband.

