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REVIEW

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Chang'an–Lin'an: The Narrative Shift of the "Capital Story" from the Tang to the Song Dynasties—From the Perspective of Comparative Readings of Classic Works

Abstract A distinct narrative shift in the "capital story" can be observed from the Tang to Song dynasties. From the perspective of comparative reading of classic works, one can trace the developmental trajectory from the story of Chang'an to that of Bianjing and then to that of Lin'an. The transformation in textual forms—such as authorial perspective, narrative tone, and descriptive detail—is evident in the movement from *Surviving Anecdotes from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Eras* 开元天宝遗事 to *Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song* 大宋宣和遗事. The progression from the "Qujiang Lake narrative of Chang'an" to the "West Lake narrative of Lin'an" signals a spatial shift in the narrative scene from the inner court to the civil realm, accompanied by a major transformation in both narrative subjects and spatial attributes. "Liu the Administrative Aide in Huazhou" 华州参军 and "Madam White Is Kept Forever under the Thunder Peak Tower" 白娘子永镇雷峰塔, as canonical texts of the "Qujiang Lake narrative" and "West Lake narrative," respectively, illuminate how this narrative shift in the depiction of urban romance unfolds in detail: The former presents a variation of Tang-style storytelling, while the latter reflects the maturation of the Song aesthetic. In terms of cultural psychology, if the narrative of Chang'an in the Tang Dynasty embodies a cognitive model of "capital" and "state" as psychologically identical, then the narrative of Lin'an in the Southern Song adopts a vernacular and localized perspective. The local affections it constructs would later become one of the key sources for the formation of "place identity" in subsequent eras.

Keywords Chang'an; Lin'an; capital story; narrative shift; cultural psychology

Capital narrative constitutes an essential component of capital-centered literary writing. With social transformations and the evolving development of urban space, a distinct narrative shift

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in the "capital story" occurred from the Tang to the Song dynasties. This is most prominently reflected in the tales of Chang'an, Bianjing, and Lin'an as found in Tang and Song notes (*biji* 笔记) and fiction. In the Tang Dynasty, Chang'an served as the political, economic, and cultural center of the empire. It was not only the living space for all—from emperors and officials to commoners, monks, and Daoists—but also the grand stage upon which the institutions and regulations of the Tang polity operated. Tang writers employed both note-style and legendary story modes of writing to engage in urban narration. The former aimed to record historical facts and anecdotes. Representative examples include *Fine Stories from the Sui and Tang Dynasties* 隋唐嘉话, *Miscellaneous Records of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang* 明皇杂录, and *New Stories from the Great Tang* 大唐新语, all of which describe the lives and curiosities of emperors, statesmen, and celebrated literati in Chang'an. The latter refers to a more literary legendary story, which focuses on detailed depictions and vivid settings of urban life. Masterpieces such as *The Tale of Li Wa* 李娃传, *The Tale of Huo Xiaoyu* 霍小玉传, *The Story of the Song of Eternal Regret* 长恨歌传, and *The Story of the Old Man from the East of the City* 东城老父传 include numerous descriptions of palaces, markets, and other architectural features of Chang'an. Through these accounts, Chang'an is constructed as a vivid literary stage and spatial backdrop for character movement and narrative performance.

A major transformation occurred in the capital narrative after the Tang Dynasty, beginning with the dramatic reshaping of urban form. The urban transformation of the Song Dynasty has been referred to by Western scholars as a "Medieval Urban Revolution."[1] With the collapse of the residential ward-market system, the reconfiguration of urban space in the Song Dynasty gave rise to diversified and multi-dimensional interactive spaces. Street and alley spaces emerged prominently, brought to the forefront of history, and became dynamic stages for the activities of the urban citizenry. Worldly tales of joy and sorrow, separation and reunion unfolded within these layered, interwoven spaces, giving rise to a spatialized mode of capital storytelling. It can be said that it was precisely during the Song Dynasty that cities—especially the capitals Bianjing and Lin'an—truly took shape as spatial images. They gradually became more three-dimensional and substantial, and the urban space began to interact with its inhabitants on a psychological level. Residents, in turn, came to embody distinct urban characteristics, gradually acquiring identifiable traits not only in terms of external identity but also in personal temperament.

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[1] The founder of the "Medieval Urban Revolution" theory is the British scholar Mark Elvin, who, building upon the research of Yoshinobu Shiba and others, proposed that Chinese cities "underwent revolutionary changes in market structures and urbanization during the medieval period." Subsequently, American scholar William Skinner, based on this foundation, synthesized the research findings of Kato Shigeru, Denis Twitchett, Yoshinobu Shiba, and others, and identified five characteristics of the "Medieval Urban Revolution": First, the relaxation of the restriction that only one market could be established per county, and that such markets had to be located in the county seat; second, the gradual decline and eventual dissolution of official market management organizations; third, the abolition of the residential ward-market separation system, replaced by "more flexible street layouts allowing trade and commerce to take place throughout the city and its suburbs"; fourth, rapid expansion of some cities and the flourishing of commercial suburbs outside city walls; and fifth, the emergence of numerous "small to medium-sized towns" with significant economic functions. See Cheng Yinong 成一农 (2007).

Following the dramatic transformation of spatial form, changes in narrative form unfolded from the outside in, leading to a historical shift in capital narrative. A key indicator of this transformation was the gradual emergence of vernacular fiction as the most expressive and influential literary form within capital storytelling. Centering on the narrative shift of Tang-Song "capital stories," this article examines the topic from three main angles: the textual form, narrative content, and cultural psychology of capital narrative. Given the broad scope of the subject, the article adopts a fragmented perspective, focusing on comparative readings of selected classic works.

1 Transformation of Textual Form: From *Surviving Anecdotes from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Eras* to *Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song*

Before the Song Dynasty, capital narrative was typically represented by classical-language fiction and notes, whereas the Song era was characterized by the emergence of scripts for storytelling (*huaben* 话本). A comparison between *Surviving Anecdotes from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Eras* 开元天宝遗事[2], which depicts Chang'an, and *Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song* 大宋宣和遗事[3], which focuses on Bianjing, reveals that although both are forms of "capital anecdotes," there is a clear and marked shift in textual form, authorial stance, narrative tone, descriptive detail, and others.

From the Han and the Wei through the Tang Dynasty, the dominant theme of capital narrative was palace-centered storytelling, revolving around tales of emperors and their officials. This is particularly evident in *Surviving Anecdotes from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Eras*, which consists of two volumes and 146 entries. The text was authored by Wang Renyu 王仁裕 of the Five Dynasties period, who served as a Hanlin Academician in Shu and was known for his literary talent. Most of the events recorded in this work take place within the palace of Chang'an. According to statistics, among the 146 entries, 74 directly recount anecdotes involving Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 of Tang and other princes within the imperial court. These entries strongly reflect the atmosphere of the inner palace and are generally brief in length, written in a style reminiscent of *A New Account of Tales of the World* 世说新语.

Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song belongs to the genre of historical scripts for storytelling. It was written by an anonymous author during the Song Dynasty, with later additions possibly made by Yuan authors. The work, compiled in the

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[2] The excerpts from *Surviving Anecdotes from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Eras* cited in this section are all taken from *A Grand View of Notes and Novels of the Tang and Five Dynasties* 唐五代笔记小说大观 (Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 2000) and will not be individually annotated hereafter.

[3] The excerpts from *Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song* cited in this section are all taken from *Capital Editions of Popular Stories, Qingping Shantang Scripts for Storytelling, and Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song* 京本通俗小说・清平山堂话本・大宋宣和遗事, compiled by Hong Pian 洪楩 and others of the Ming Dynasty (see Hong et al. 1993) and will not be individually annotated hereafter.

Yuan Dynasty, is a collection of note-style novels that integrates multiple types of note-style novels into a coherent narrative resembling a storyteller's performance. Lu Xun 鲁迅, in his *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* 中国小说史略, commented on its compositional method: It closely resembles historical storytelling but is not oral performance; it appears like fiction but lacks fabrication. He noted that the work contains both poetry and traces of oral storytelling, indicating that it is neither a purely literati production nor a direct transcription of storytellers' oral scripts. Rather, the compiler pieced together relevant fragments and poems from classical sources, supplementing them with unofficial histories and popular rumors to create a connected narrative. As a textual form, *Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song* holds particular significance for the evolution of capital narratives, as it exemplifies a shift from literati-driven palace storytelling toward a more secular, marketplace-oriented narrative.

As a narrative work centered on the capital city, *Surviving Anecdotes from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Eras* places considerable emphasis on courtly and palace stories. Some tales recount amorous episodes within the imperial palace, such as "Choosing Consorts by the Butterfly's Landing" 随蝶所幸: "In the late years of the Kaiyuan reign under Emperor Xuanzong of Tang, he would hold banquets in the palace every spring morning or evening. The imperial consorts adorned themselves with vibrant flowers, and Emperor Xuanzong would catch a pink butterfly and release it. He would then spend the night with whichever consort the butterfly landed on. This game ceased once Yang Yuhuan became his exclusive favorite" 开元末，明皇每至春时，旦暮宴于宫中，使妃嫔辈争插艳花，帝亲捉粉蝶放之，随蝶所止幸之。后因杨妃专宠，遂不复此戏也. Other stories describe anecdotes about loyal officials, such as "Summoning the Academician by Palanquin" 步辇召学士: "On the 15th day of the seventh lunar month, Emperor Xuanzong was in the rest palace and wished to discuss current affairs with Yao Yuanchong 姚元崇. It was raining continuously that day, and the roads outside the palace were muddy and impassable. The emperor ordered his attendants to carry his palanquin to fetch Yao. At the time, Yao was serving as a Hanlin Academician and was renowned both at home and abroad. Since ancient times, there has been talk of cherishing the talented, but an emperor who valued talent as deeply as Emperor Xuanzong had never been seen before" 明皇在便殿，甚思姚元崇论时务。七月十五日，苦雨不止，泥泞盈尺。上令侍御者抬步辇召学士来。时元崇为翰林学士，中外荣之。自古急贤待士，帝王如此者，未之有也. Another example is "Awarding Gold Chopsticks to Commend Integrity" 赐箸表直: "Song Jing 宋璟 was a grand councilor, and he was widely praised for his upright character. During a spring banquet, Emperor Xuanzong gave his own golden chopsticks to Song through a palace attendant. Although Song accepted the gift, he hesitated to offer thanks, as he did not understand the intention. Emperor Xuanzong explained, 'I'm not rewarding you with gold, but with these chopsticks, to honor your integrity.' Song then stepped down and bowed in gratitude" 宋璟为宰相，朝野人心归美焉。时春御宴，帝以所用金箸令内臣赐璟。虽受所赐，莫知其由，未敢陈谢。帝曰："所赐之物，非赐汝金。盖赐卿之箸，表卿之直也。"璟遂下殿拜谢. Naturally, depictions of Chang'an's flourishing urban scenes—resplendent

flowers, fine horses, and luxurious attire—are indispensable in these narratives. For instance, it is stated in "Flower-Viewing on Horseback" 看花马: "Each spring, the gallant youths of Chang'an would ride in groups, each preparing a short horse with brocade saddle cloth and gold-trimmed bridles. They rode side by side beneath flowering trees, trailed by servants carrying wine. Upon reaching a scenic garden, they would dismount and drink at leisure" 长安侠少,每至春时结朋联党,各置矮马,饰以锦鞯金革各,并辔于花树下往来,使仆从执酒皿而随之,遇好囿时驻马而饮。Similarly, it is said in "Skirts as Tents" 裙幄: "In spring, the aristocratic women of Chang'an would go on countryside outings. Upon finding beautiful flowers, they spread out mats on the grass and used red skirts to form makeshift tents for feasting. Their indulgent lifestyle reached such extremes" 长安士女游春野步,遇名花则设席藉草,以红裙递相插挂,以为宴幄,其奢逸如此也. Another example is "Gathering Place of Romantic Figures" 风流薮泽: "In the Pingkang Ward in Chang'an, where the city's courtesans resided, gallant youths of the capital gathered. Every year, newly successful *jinshi* would bring red invitations and visit the ward. The place became widely known as a haunt of the fashionable and amorous" 长安有平康坊,妓女所居之地,京都侠少萃集于此,兼每年新进士,以红笺名纸游谒其中。时人谓此坊为风流薮泽. Although only a handful of tales directly portray the capital, the distinctive features of its streets and suburban scenery are vividly presented, collectively forming a lively tableau of Chang'an's festive life during a period of imperial prosperity.

By contrast, *Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song* offers a more complete and detailed depiction of urban space, especially in the two major narrative segments, "Secret Rendezvous with Li Shishi" 私会李师师 and "Enjoying the Lantern Festival with the People" 元宵与民同乐, where the plots are full of twists and turns and the settings are portrayed with vivid detail, making the stories both engaging and immersive.

Stories about Li Shishi 李师师 are mostly found in folk records. For instance, *Accounts of Lotus in Mud* 青泥莲花记 records, "In the city of Bianjing, there was a famous courtesan named Li Shishi who lived in Jinxian Alley. Her beauty and talents were unrivaled among all. From the Zhenghe era onward, Emperor Huizong of Song would often go out in secret, riding in a small sedan chair, accompanied front and rear by several inner-court attendants, as he made his way to Li Shishi's residence" 东京角妓李师师,住金线巷,色艺冠绝。徽宗自政和后,多微行,乘小轿子,数内臣导从往来师师家. In contrast, *Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song* presents a more vivid and detailed account of this episode. The text narrates that Emperor Huizong, "accompanied by Gao Qiu 高俅 and Yang Jian 杨戬, secretly left the palace through the Houzai Gate, leaving a travel pass with the gatekeeper General Guo Jian 郭建, and then entered the capital city of Bianjing. They passed through long streets and short alleys, where song stages, dance pavilions, wine markets, and brothel towers filled the scene with unparalleled splendor and prosperity" 引高俅、杨戬私离禁阙,出厚载门,留勘合与监门将军郭建等,向汴京城里,穿长街,蓦短槛,只是些歌台舞榭、酒市花楼,极是繁华花锦田地. "As evening fell, they arrived at a ward called Jinhuan Alley, where the atmosphere was particularly refined and charming: At every household's

entrance stood sculpted figures, and in the courtyards were arranged precious flowers; behind the curtains came waves of cheerful laughter, and from within the doors floated the melodious sound of flutes and pipes" 抵暮,至一坊,名做金环巷,那风范更别:但见门安塑像,户列名花;帘儿底笑语喧呼,门儿里箫韶盈耳. It was at this moment that Emperor Huizong encountered Li Shishi and was instantly captivated by her. What followed was a series of humorous and intriguing events in this very alleyway: Emperor Huizong boasted extravagantly before Li Shishi, but Li's madam (the brothel keeper) reported them to the authorities, prompting officers to be dispatched for their arrest; Gao Qiu hastily drove away the patrolling soldiers; Emperor Huizong even spent the night at the brothel and ended up in a jealous rivalry with patrol officer Jia Yi 贾奕 over Li Shishi.

The story of Li Shishi unfolds amid dramatic twists and turns, with dialogues rich in colloquial and street vernacular. Jia Yi, who had previously been close to Li Shishi, became greatly enraged when she neglected him and pressed her to reveal the identity of her new companion. The text records, "Li Shishi said, 'The person who just left is neither a military governor nor a commissioner for pacification, nor an imperial censor or a grand councillor at court. But that person's background is very significant!' Jia Yi replied, 'At most, he must be a prince, nobleman, or royal son-in-law.' Li Shishi said, 'No, he isn't.' Jia Yi persisted, 'If he has a higher status than princes or nobles, then he can only be the reigning emperor. But the emperor has three thousand beauties and eight hundred favored concubines—how could he take interest in someone as improper as you?' Li Shishi said, 'You'd better believe me!' ... Li Shishi then said, 'I will make you believe.' Soon after, she took a piece of fine gauze clothing and handed it to Jia Yi. Upon close inspection, Jia Yi recognized it as the emperor's garment. He sighed deeply and suddenly collapsed" 师师道:"恰去的那个人,也不是制置并安抚,也不是御史与平章。那人眉势教大!"贾奕道:"止不过王公驸马。"师师道:"也不是。"贾奕道:"更大如王公,只除是当朝帝主也。他有三千粉黛,八百烟娇,肯慕一匪人?"师师道:"怕你不信!" ……师师道:"我交你信。"不多时,取过那绞绡直系来,交贾奕看。贾奕觑了,认的是天子衣,一声长叹,忽然倒在地. This story brims with the kind of amusement favored by common folk. At the paragraph's end, seemingly to leave a trace of this urban legend, the text states, "Emperor Huizong, fully deceived by treacherous ministers, conferred the title of Consort Ming upon Li Shishi and even renamed Jinxian Alley as Xiaoyu Street" 徽宗悉听诸奸簸弄,册李师师做李明妃,改金线巷唤做小御街. Thus, this romantic episode left an enduring mark within the city's streets and alleys, available for historical inquiry.

Another example is the segment titled "Enjoying the Lantern Festival with the People." In the sixth year of the Xuanhe reign, on the night of the Lantern Festival, the entire city was decorated with lanterns and banners, bustling with lively celebrations. The text records that in front of the main palace gates of the imperial court in Bianjing, five gates stood, and "starting from the winter solstice, construction began on the Aoshan Mountain Tall Lantern [lit. the stacking of lanterns simulates the legendary shape of the giant turtle to form a steep lantern mountain shape]. This lantern was 16 *zhang* 丈 tall and 265 *bu* 步 wide [*zhang* and *bu* are the

units of length in ancient China; one *zhang* is approximately 3.17 meters, and five *bu* is about one *zhang* during the Song and Yuan dynasties]. In the center stood two Ao pillars, each 24 *zhang* long, with golden loongs coiling up and down each pillar. Each loong's mouth held a lantern, called the 'Twin Loongs Holding the Light.' In the middle was a plaque measuring three *zhang* and six *chi* 尺 [a unit of length in ancient China; ten *chi* is about one *zhang*] by two *zhang* and four *chi*, inscribed in gold characters with eight large words, embleming: Xuanhe Colorful Mountain, Enjoying Joy with the People" 自冬至日,下手架造鳌山高灯,长一十六丈,阔二百六十五步。中间有两条鳌柱,长二十四丈,两下用金龙缠柱,每一个龙口里点一盏灯,谓之双龙衔照。中间有一个牌,长三丈六尺,阔二丈四尺,金书八个大字,写道:宣和彩山,与民同乐. At that time, high-ranking officials scattered gold coins among the crowd and later granted each person a cup of imperial wine. During this event, an especially amusing incident occurred. A woman, after drinking the imperial wine, secretly hid a gold cup, intending to take it away, but was caught on the spot. She was then brought before Emperor Huizong 徽宗. To defend herself, she composed a lyric titled "Partridge in the Sky" 鹧鸪天 on the spot. The director of the imperial music bureau, Cao Yuanchong 曹元宠, suspected that her work had been pre-prepared rather than improvised. Consequently, the woman immediately composed another lyric titled "Charm of a Maiden Singer" 念奴娇. Upon hearing it, Emperor Huizong was greatly pleased. Not only did he forgive her, but he also bestowed the gold cup upon her. This Lantern Festival story set in Bianjing not only showcases the era's peace and prosperity but also reveals how deeply the common populace influenced the culture of that time.

In addition to the difference in the breadth of urban spatial representation, the two works also exhibit significant variation in the romantic expression and aesthetic appeal of their urban narratives. *Surviving Anecdotes from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Eras*, for instance, contains several stories centered on palace romances. In the anecdote "Charming Eyes" 眼色媚人, it is written, "Niannu was a woman of exceptional beauty and graceful bearing, gifted in singing, and rarely left the emperor's side throughout the day. Whenever she held the clapper and cast flirtatious glances around during a banquet, the emperor would say to the consort, 'This woman's appearance is seductive, and her gaze is alluring.' Whenever she sang, her voice seemed to float down from the morning clouds. Even amidst the clamor of bells, drums, reed pipes, and flutes, her song remained clearly distinguishable. Among the palace courtesans, she was the emperor's favorite" 念奴者,有姿色,善歌唱,未常一日离帝左右。每执板当席顾眄,帝谓妃子曰:"此女妖丽,眼色媚人。"每啭声歌喉,则声出于朝霞之上,虽钟鼓笙竽嘈杂而莫能遏。宫妓中帝之钟爱也. Similarly, in the anecdote "The Flower Dispelling Sorrow" 销恨花, it is recounted, "In the imperial gardens of the Tang court, thousands of peach blossoms were once in full bloom. The emperor and Consort Yang would dine and frolic daily beneath the peach blossoms. The emperor remarked, 'It is not only the daylily that can make one forget sorrow—this flower can dispel sorrow too'" 明皇于禁苑中,初有千叶桃盛开。帝与贵妃日逐宴于树下。帝曰:"不独萱草忘忧,此花亦能销恨." In another example, "The Passion-Enhancing Flower" 助情花, it is stated, "At the time,

Emperor Xuanzong of Tang was lavishing his exclusive favor upon Consort Yang, showing little interest in state affairs. An Lushan 安禄山, who initially enjoyed the emperor's deep favor, offered one hundred grains of passion-enhancing flower incense. Each grain was red in color and about the size of polished round-grained rice. One grain was taken by the emperor each night before retiring with Consort Yang. The grain stimulated desire, invigorated the mind, and enabled one to remain energetic without fatigue. In private, the emperor said, 'This is as miraculous as the *shenxujiao* of the Han Dynasty!'" 明皇正宠妃子,不视朝政。安禄山初承圣眷,因进助情花香百粒,大小如粳米而色红。每当寝处之际,则含香一粒,助情发兴,筋力不倦。帝秘之曰:"此亦汉之慎恤胶也." Especially in the latter two anecdotes, the narratives delve into matters of sexual intimacy between men and women. The language verges on the sensual but never lapses into vulgarity or obscenity, revealing instead the implicit restraint and suggestive expressiveness characteristic of literati style.

If *Surviving Anecdotes from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Eras* displays the reserved and implicit style characteristic of literati, then in *Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song*, the art of conversation is brought into full play in many passages. The "Story of Li Shishi" brims with the humor and charm of urban commoners, such as the episode of Emperor Huizong and Li Shishi parting in the early morning: "Emperor Huizong lay with Li Shishi, while Yang Jian and Gao Qiu slept elsewhere. Unawares, the sound of the dripping clepsydra urged on the approach of dawn, and the blast of the painted horn announced that the night watch was nearly over. This startled Gao Qiu and Yang Jian. They hastily dressed and went to the window of Li Shishi's bedchamber. Gao Qiu, lowering his voice, reported, 'My emperor, the day has already broken. If the court officials arrive for the audience and do not find you, the civil and military officials will take notice, and it will reflect poorly on you.' The emperor, upon hearing this, quickly rose and dressed. Li Shishi also got up and put her clothes in order. The emperor, having washed and drunk some medicinal decoction, bade Li Shishi farewell and prepared to leave. Li Shishi pressed him to stay. Seeing her insistence, the emperor said, 'Beloved, do not be troubled. We shall delight together again this evening.' Li Shishi asked, 'What token will you give as proof?' The emperor replied, 'I fear you will not believe me.' He then removed a piece of fine gauze clothing with loong and phoenix patterns, handed it to Li Shishi and said, 'The words I speak are my command. There has never been a sovereign whose word did not hold true, just as the Buddha never utters a falsehood.' Li Shishi received it, placed it in her chest, and then saw the emperor to the door" 徽宗伴师师共寝,杨戬、高俅别一处眠睡。不觉铜壶催漏尽,画角报更残,惊觉高俅、杨戬二人,急起穿了衣服,走至师师卧房前款窗下,高俅低低的奏曰:"陛下,天色明也,若班部来朝不见,文武察知,相我王不好。"天子闻之,急起穿了衣服。师师亦起,系了衣服。天子洗漱了,吃了些汤药,辞师师欲去。师师紧留。天子见师师意坚,官家道:"卿休要烦恼。寡人今夜再来与你同欢。"师师道:"何以取信?"天子道:"恐卿不信。"遂解下了龙凤绞绡直系,与了师师道:"朕语下为敕,岂有浪舌天子脱空佛?"师师接了,收拾箱中,送天子出门. Here, the emperor's manner and tone are skillfully imitated, while the passage is also infused with the wit and playful irony of popular literati.

More worthy of careful consideration are the differing thematic orientations and cultural stances upheld by these two works. The Rebellion by An Lushan and Shi Siming 史思明 and the disorders of the Jingkang period stand as the greatest calamities to befall the Tang and Song dynasties, respectively. By recounting events that took place in the capital, one can trace the missteps in state governance, the origins of the disasters, and the processes by which the situations deteriorated, thereby offering profound lessons for later generations. Literati who upheld orthodox ideals regarded themselves as historians. Their prose was composed with calm dignity, uprightness, and rigor, and their overall style was measured and expansive. By contrast, literati from among the common people reflected the perspectives of the urban populace. They might lament or cry out in indignation and could turn jest, anger, or satire alike into literature. In terms of underlying intent and purpose, the two works reveal a marked divergence.

Surviving Anecdotes from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Eras adopts the perspective of the scholar-official class, extolling the virtues of an enlightened sovereign while at the same time offering subtle criticism of errors in state governance; *Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song* instead speaks on behalf of the urban citizenry, denouncing an unprincipled ruler and censuring treacherous ministers. The two works establish sharply contrasting tones from their very opening passages. For instance, the opening chapter of *Surviving Anecdotes from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Eras*, "The Jade Inscribed with 'Great Peace across the Country'" 玉有太平字, recounts, "In the first year of the Kaiyuan reign, after a rainfall in the palace, the ground became slightly damp and cracked. That night, a radiant light appeared. The guards marked the location and at daybreak reported it to the emperor. The emperor ordered an excavation of the spot, and a piece of jade was found, shaped like a clapper, with ancient seal script reading 'Great Peace across the Country.' The assembled officials all offered congratulations, and the jade was placed in the inner treasury of the palace" 开元元年,内中因雨过,地润微裂,至夜有光。宿卫者记其处所,晓乃奏之。上令凿其地,得宝玉一片,如拍板样,上有古篆"天下太平"字。百僚称贺,收之内库. The three subsequent accounts all narrate Emperor Xuanzong's appreciation of eminent ministers such as Yao Chong 姚崇 and Song Jing, thus highlighting his ability to recognize and employ virtuous men. As the title *Surviving Anecdotes from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Eras* suggests, harmony and prosperity form its main theme. Even when speaking of traitorous ministers or those who brought harm to the state, the text delivers no more than a trace of veiled satire. For example, "The Gold Plaque Abstention from Alcohol" 金牌断酒 relates, "An Lushan, favored by the emperor, often dined with the imperial consort without restraint. The emperor, fearing that outsiders might poison him with alcohol, bestowed upon him a gold plaque to be worn on his arm. Whenever princes or high officials invited him to a banquet and tried to press him to drink from large cups, An Lushan would display the plaque and say that he was under the emperor's command to abstain from alcohol" 安禄山受帝眷爱,常与妃子同食,无所不至。帝恐外人以酒毒之,遂赐金牌子,系于臂上。每有王公召宴,欲沃以巨觥,禄山即以牌示之,云准敕断酒. This clearly illustrates the depth of imperial favor An

Lushan enjoyed at the time, making his eventual disgrace unsurprising. Even with respect to already-condemned traitorous officials such as Li Linfu 李林甫, "The Fighting Cock" 索斗鸡 records, "Li Linfu was by nature crafty and cruel, winning no favor among the literati. In most matters, he acted contrary to the opinions of others, and his countenance bore no cordiality. The people of the realm said that his spirit was harsh and aggressive, as though he were always ready to fight like a fighting cock" 李林甫为性狼狡，不得士心，每有所行之事，多不协群议，而面无和气。国人谓林甫精神刚戾，常如索斗鸡. This was already the text's most severe criticism. The account "The Withered Pine Revives" 枯松再生 carries an even more refined and implicitly protective tone: "When Emperor Xuanzong of Tang was forced to flee westward due to the Rebellion by An Lushand [and Shi Siming], the withered pines in the palace put forth branches once more, lush and verdant as if newly planted. Later, when Emperor Suzong pacified the rebellion, the Tang Dynasty's fortunes were revived. The revival of the withered pines was truly an auspicious sign" 明皇遭禄山之乱，銮舆西幸，禁中枯松复生枝叶，葱蒨，宛若新植者。后肃宗平内难，重兴唐祚。枯松再生，祥不诬矣. In reality, after the Rebellion by An Lushan and Shi Siming, the Tang Dynasty's fortunes steadily declined, and its downfall had already become irreversible.

Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song fully reflects the stance of popular storytellers. Its opening remarks declare, "Surveying that vast and distant past, from one generation to the next, extending to the present day, more than three thousand years have passed, during which there have been hundreds of thousands of instances of rise and fall. Roughly speaking, times of clear governance and peaceful prosperity have been few, while periods clouded in darkness and obscurity have been many; times of social stability and cultural flourishing have been few, while eras marked by constant warfare and unending campaigns have been many" 茫茫往古，继继来今，上下三千余年，兴废百千万事，大概光风霁月之时少，阴雨晦暝之时多；衣冠文物之时少，干戈征战之时多. The script for storytelling brims with the storyteller's deep indignation, expressing heartfelt sentiments in a forthright and unrestrained manner: "What we are going to speak of today is also a muddleheaded and unprincipled ruler. He listened only to and trusted treacherous petty men, indulging himself in debauchery without restraint, thereby ruining the peaceful realm painstakingly established by his forebears. In the end, father and son alike were forced to flee to the north. He gave no thought at all to how arduous it had been for his ancestors to found their realm in the first place!" 今日话说的，也说一个无道的君王，信用小人，荒淫无度，把那祖宗混沌的世界坏了，父子将身投北去也。全不思量祖宗创造基业时，直不是容易也！

The text provides a detailed and vivid account of Emperor Huizong's many acts of misrule, showcasing the storyteller's sharp wit and rhetorical skill, with every sentence charged with explosive criticism and imposing force: "When Emperor Zhezong passed away, Emperor Huizong ascended the throne. This emperor was truly gifted: He could compose poems offhand and could, with a single glance, count the number of sheep in a flock; he excelled at painting ink bamboo and could wield a brush to write calligraphy in the style of Xue

Ji 薛稷; he was well versed in the classics of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, and knowledgeable in the various schools of thought. He spent his days indulging in pleasures from dawn till dusk, behaving much like Emperor Gaozu of Later Shu [Meng Zhixiang 孟知祥] of Jiange; in his lust for beauty and fondness for wine, he resembled Chen Shubao 陈叔宝 of Jinling, the last emperor of the Chen Dynasty. Every beautiful season—whether it was during flower festivals or on moonlit nights—he summoned Tong Guan 童贯 and Cai Jing 蔡京 to the palace; at moments of delight, he commanded Gao Qiu and Yang Jian to accompany him. Within the nine-*li* and 13-*bu* imperial city, there was not a single day without singing and dancing, revelry and pleasure. He constructed numerous palaces, such as Baolu Palace 宝箓宫, and imperial gardens like Genyue 艮岳 filled with exotic flowers, rare beasts, strange rocks, and rare birds; countless high buildings with carved beams and painted rafters, tranquil pavilions, and secluded towers filled the city beyond count. Millions upon millions of laborers were conscripted to build roads stretching from Bianliang all the way to Suzhou and Hangzhou—vast and unbroken works that exhausted the common people to death, with the dead piled upon one another" 哲宗崩，徽宗即位，说这个官家，才俊过人：口赓诗韵，目数群羊；善写墨君竹，能挥薛稷书；通三教之书，晓九流之法。朝欢暮乐，依稀似剑阁孟蜀王；论爱色贪杯，仿佛如金陵陈后主。遇花朝月夜，宣童贯、蔡京；值好景良辰，命高俅、杨戬。向九里十三步皇城，无日不歌欢作乐。盖宝箓诸宫，起寿山艮岳，异花奇兽，怪石珍禽，充满其间；绘栋雕梁，高楼邃阁，不可胜计。役民夫百千万，自汴梁直至苏杭，尾尾相含，人民劳苦，相枕而亡. When reflecting on the reasons for the Northern Song's demise, the script for storytelling harshly criticizes a group of officials, including Wang Anshi 王安石: "If one speaks of the corruption that caused the fall of the Song, the root of disaster lies with Wang Anshi recommending his son-in-law Cai Bian 蔡卞 and relative Cai Jing to court. They framed the loyal and virtuous, were deceitful and sly, deceived the emperor, and oppressed the people to the point of ruining the realm" 话说宋朝失政，国丧家亡，祸根起于王安石引用婿蔡卞及姻党蔡京在朝，陷害忠良，奸佞变诈，欺君虐民，以致坏了宋朝天下. From a historical perspective, these judgments—especially the harsh critique of Wang Anshi—may not be entirely accurate. However, this anguished outcry from the common people reflects the heartfelt demands of the grassroots, with deep and moving emotions, the influence of which should not be underestimated. It can also be said that the traditional narrative system of capital cities was greatly expanded, adding to the solemn and measured narrative style a piercing voice of popular lament and righteous indignation.

In summary, compared with *Surviving Anecdotes from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Eras*, the capital narratives in *Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song* resonate closely with the contemporary transformations of the city. The focus of its narrative shifts downward—from the imperial palace and inner courts to the popular society—manifesting unique characteristics in the depiction of urban spatial landscapes, the psychological states of the citizens, and the everyday interests of the common people. This seems to foreshadow that, after the Song and Yuan dynasties, narratives centered on court life would gradually fade from public view and cease to be the mainstream of capital narratives.

2 Shift in Narrative Content: From the "Qujiang Lake Narrative of Chang'an" to the "West Lake Narrative of Lin'an"

There are numerous differences between Tang legendary stories (*chuanqi* 传奇) and Song-Yuan scripts for storytelling in terms of capital narratives. Due to the spatial characteristics of the capitals, distinctly different cultural themes emerged. By comparing *Surviving Anecdotes from the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Eras* with *Surviving Anecdotes from the Xuanhe Era of the Great Song*, one can observe the differing narrative perspectives of the court and the common people. Furthermore, contrasting the narratives of Chang'an in Tang legendary stories with those of Lin'an in Song-Yuan scripts for storytelling reveals even more clearly the thematic differences in capital narratives across different eras and capitals.

Chang'an's Qujiang Lake represented the political and cultural space of the capital, with the most famous event being the "Qujiang Lake Banquet" 曲江会 held by the newly successful *jinshi* during the Tang Dynasty, attracting the refined and distinguished figures of Qujiang. The so-called "Qujiang Lake Banquet" refers collectively to various banquets and outings organized by these newly successful *jinshi* on Qujiang Lake. Li Zhao 李肇 briefly recorded this in "Supplement to the History of the Tang Dynasty" 唐国史补: "After passing the imperial examinations, the newly successful imperial examination candidates would have their names inscribed on the Ci'en Temple pagoda, an event called the 'Name Inscription Banquet' 题名会. They would also hold grand banquets at the Qujiang Lake pavilion, known as the 'Qujiang Lake Banquet'" (Li 2000, 193). Compared with ordinary banquets and gatherings, the Qujiang Lake Banquet included not only drinking, poetry composition, and enjoying performances by musicians and dancers, but also many special customs and fashions, each with its own name. Chapter III, "Names of Banquets" of *Collected Stories from the Tang Dynasty* 唐摭言 lists many banquet names such as *Da Xiangshi* 大相识, *Ci Xiangshi* 次相识, *Xiao Xiangshi* 小相识, *Wenxi* 闻喜, *Yingtao* 樱桃, *Yuedeng Daqiu* 月灯打球, *Mudan* 牡丹, *Kan Foya* 看佛牙, and *Guan Yan* 关宴. The Qujiang Lake Banquet gradually became a celebratory banquet primarily held by the newly successful *jinshi*, growing larger in scale until even the emperor would attend. It was recorded that "the emperor ascended the Ziyun Tower, lowered the curtains, and watched the splendor of the Qujiang Lake Banquet," and that "when the Qujiang Lake Banquet was held, the stalls in the market streets were set up, and Chang'an city seemed half empty" (Wang 2000, 1959). This almost marked the liveliest time in Chang'an. In the poem "Banquet on Qujiang Lake after Passing the Imperial Examination" 及第后宴曲江, Liu Cang 刘沧 wrote, "After passing the imperial examination in early spring, I chose this scenic spot to enjoy myself. / At Apricot Garden, I first held a banquet on the banks of Qujiang Lake. // Holding a purple brush, I solemnly inscribed my name on the whitewashed wall, as if entering the roster of immortals. / Before my eyes, willows lightly brushed, and the sound of the flute floated gently, as if softly caressing the imperial palace" 及第新春选胜游，杏园初宴曲江头。紫毫粉壁题仙籍，柳色箫声拂御楼. Activities such as the Apricot Garden banquet for the *jinshi* who ranked third overall 杏园探花, name inscriptions at the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda 雁塔题名, floating

drinks on Qujiang Lake 曲江流饮, and banquets on Qujiang Lake 曲江游宴 were praised as the foremost refined and elegant cultural events for distinguished individuals, becoming celebrated stories passed down through the ages.

Chang'an's Qujiang bore witness to the formation of scholar culture during the Tang Dynasty. What scholars gained through the imperial examinations in Chang'an was not merely the title of *jinshi*. More crucially, it was the series of ritualized activities that followed their success, such as thanksgiving ceremonies, scheduled gatherings, official audiences, name inscriptions, and banquets. On one hand, scholars leveraged these grand public ceremonies, which attracted nationwide attention, to proudly display their honor to the world. Through these rituals, they symbolically obtained recognition and confirmation of their social status. More importantly, these activities provided scholars with opportunities to pay respects to powerful court ministers and to smooth complicated networks of relationships, thus laying a solid foundation for their political careers. It should be noted that such opportunities were difficult to replace by other means. The imperial examination system broke many traditional restrictions, such as lineage and social status, causing numerous scholars to enthusiastically pursue official careers with hopes of instant fame and a smooth path to success. Because of this, Qujiang Lake, owing to its unique political and geographic significance, became a sacred place in the minds of the literati. For example, Chu Guangxi 储光羲 wrote in "An Excursion to Qujiang Lake with Officials after the First Clear Autumn Rain, Looking Down on the Southern Mountains from Afar" 同诸公秋霁曲江俯见南山: "The emperor and his ministers feasted and enjoyed themselves together, / With their joyful conversations sounding harmonious and pleasant like the chirping of birds" 大君及群臣,宴乐方嘤鸣. Yao He 姚合 expressed in "Thanking the Chief Examiner at the Apricot Garden Banquet" 杏园宴上谢座主: "I am fortunate to accompany the outstanding *jinshi* among my peers, / And I am especially grateful to you, the chief examiner, whose great kindness nurtures and fosters me like the mythical Taihao" 得陪桃李植芳丛,别感生成太昊功. Quan Deyu 权德舆 wrote in "Reply to Minister Zhao after Getting Drunk under the Apricot Garden Flowers" 酬赵尚书杏园花下醉后见寄: "On the lush western banks of Qujiang Lake in springtime, / Eight high officials were elegant and carefree, with their horses' hooves stepping at leisure" 春光深处曲江西,八座风流信马蹄. Thus, Qujiang Lake itself had long transcended the general notion of a scenic spot in Chang'an, thereby becoming a political and cultural symbol with profound spiritual significance and wide influence. The relationship between the literati and Qujiang Lake clearly reflects the spirit of the specific era. Because of this, the cultural connotation of Qujiang Lake is even more prominent in legendary novels. In *The Tale of Li Wa*, Zheng Sheng 郑生 from Xingyang sings a dirge on Tianmen Street and is discovered by his father, who regards this as a deep disgrace. The account states, "He then set out on foot, walked to the east side of the Apricot Garden at the western bank of Qujiang Lake, stripped off his son's clothes, and whipped him hundreds of times with a horsewhip" 乃徒行出,至曲江西杏园东,去其衣服,以马鞭鞭之数百. The deliberate choice of this geographic location carries profound significance: It expresses the father's high hopes for his son's success in the

imperial examinations and the glory of the family, as well as the profound disappointment and anger upon the shattering of those dreams. Here, the image of Qujiang Lake can be viewed as a culturally symbolic metaphor.

In contrast, Lin'an was clearly a bustling urban space deeply saturated with worldly desires. Su Shi 苏轼 once wrote a poem: "The brimming waves delight the eyes on sunny days, / While the dimming hills present rare views in rainy haze" 水光潋滟晴方好，山色空濛雨亦奇. For the people of Lin'an, West Lake was an ideal destination to visit in all four seasons. Chapter III of *Ancient Matters from the Wulin Garden* 武林旧事 records, "West Lake is a world-famous scenic spot. Whether at dawn or dusk, on sunny or rainy days, each season offers its own pleasing sights. People of Hangzhou are out enjoying themselves throughout the year, with spring outings being especially popular ... Every day, a great deal of money is spent without limit. Hence there is a saying in Hangzhou: The 'venue entailing enormous expenditure' 销金锅儿, which is not an exaggeration at all." West Lake functioned like a gigantic amusement park where people from all social strata mingled and enjoyed themselves. Many were so engrossed in pleasure that they drifted through life in a daze. As the Imperial College 太学 student Yu Guobao 俞国宝 wrote in his "Wind in the Pines" 风入松 inscribed on a folding screen in a West Lake tavern: "The whole spring is spent lavishly on buying flowers, with daily revelry beside the West Lake. The jade-colored steed already knows well the road to Xiling, neighing joyfully as it passes in front of the wine sellers' pavilion. Amid the fragrance of red apricot blossoms, people sing and dance freely. Beneath the shade of green willows, some happily swing on swings. The breeze caresses the ten-*li* long causeway, a time when beauties abound like clouds, with blossoms seemingly resting askew upon their hair. The exquisite painted boats carry the springtime away, yet the pleasure of the outing is not over, lingering still between lake water and mist. Tomorrow, with the leftover wine, I will return again to find the floral hairpins lost along the way" 一春长费买花钱，日日醉湖边。玉骢惯识西泠路，骄嘶过，沽酒楼前。红杏香中歌舞，绿杨影里秋千。东风十里丽人天，花压鬓云偏。画船载取春归去，余情在，湖水湖烟。明日再携残酒，来寻陌上花钿 (Meng et al. 1998, 351–352). This vividly reveals the prevailing custom in Lin'an of indulgence in leisure and amusement.

The space around West Lake in Lin'an, as depicted in the script for storytelling, presents a thoroughly secular scene. "Ghosts in a Cave of the Western Hills" 西山一窟鬼 provides a detailed description of Wu Xiucai's 吴秀才 (Cultivated Talent Wu, a qualified scholar candidate) Qingming Festival outing route. After passing Wansong Ridge, Wu Xiucai first arrives at a tavern opposite Jingci Temple and then sets off with Wang Qisan 王七三 to visit a grave. It is said, "At Fuxin Road intersection, they hired a boat, rowing all the way to Maojia Bu, where they disembarked, and then walked straight past Yuquan Longjing. Wang Qisan's family grave happened to be located at the foot of Chixian Ridge in the Western Hills. What a towering ridge that was! After descending to the foot of the ridge and walking another *li*, they arrived at the grave. Zhang An 张安, who was guarding the grave, came out to greet them. Wang Qisan immediately instructed Zhang An to prepare some snacks and wine. Nearby

there was a small garden, where the two entered and sat down. The wine was homemade, and they drank themselves into a drunken stupor" 甫新路口讨一只船,直到毛家步上岸,迄逼过玉泉龙井。王七三官人家里坟,直在西山驰献岭下。好座高岭！下那岭去,行过一里,到了坟头。看坟的张安接见了。王七三官人即时叫张安安排些点心酒来。侧首一个小小花园内,两个人去坐地。又是自做的杜酝,吃得大醉. As dusk fell, Wang proposed, "Let's cross Chixian Ridge and stay overnight at the brothel on Jiulisong Road" 我们过驰献岭、九里松路上,妓弟人家睡一夜. Within the secular context of the capital city, the constantly shifting spaces are vividly portrayed in the script for storytelling, enabling readers to truly feel the authentic texture of such leisurely excursions. The daytime scenes are lively, and the nights are no less so. "Pei Xiuniang's Night Outing on the West Lake" 裴秀娘夜游西湖记 depicts the bustling nightlife around West Lake: "Shopkeepers in Lin'an city are busy with business during the day, leaving no time for West Lake outings. But during festivals, between the hours known as *weipai* [1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.], they prepare wine and food, then together exit through Yongjin Gate, hire painted boats or small rowing boats, call friends and relatives, and bring their children along to enjoy the trip" 这临安府城内开铺店坊之人,日间无工夫去游西湖,每遇佳节之日,未牌时分,打点酒樽、食品,俱出涌金门外,雇请画坊或小划船,呼朋唤友,携子提孙 (Yu 1994, 203–204).

Unlike Qujiang Lake in Tang-era Chang'an, Lin'an's West Lake, as an urban popular space, can be summarized by several notable characteristics: First, this space is marked by openness and universal participation—that is, regardless of social status or wealth, and irrespective of season or time, everyone could share in it. Although Lin'an, like Chang'an, served as a capital city, Lin'an's secular urban space continuously expanded, with the political nature of the city space gradually diminishing. Festive gatherings and outings were no longer exclusive privileges of the scholars. Second, West Lake exhibited features of superseding ritual and secularization. The ritualistic elements prominent at the Qujiang Lake Banquet no longer existed here. Former political customs and ceremonial festivals of great significance were overshadowed by the everyday fashions of secular life. The bustling city life was dominated by citizens from all trades who were entirely free from the constraints of rites and laws, freely expressing and performing their joys, sorrows, loves, hates, and grievances amid the scenic landscape of West Lake.

3 Late Tang Variations on Urban Romance: From "Liu the Administrative Aide in Huazhou" to "Madam White Is Kept Forever under the Thunder Peak Tower"

If the protagonists in the narratives related to Qujiang Lake in Chang'an were mostly scholars, knights, and courtesans, then in the stories set around West Lake in Lin'an, the main characters are more often monks, merchants, and women. It is worth noting that the shift toward a more urban, popular orientation in storytelling did not occur abruptly between the Tang and Song dynasties. In the late Tang capital narratives, one can already vaguely

perceive the emerging secular atmosphere. Let us compare “Liu the Administrative Aide in Huazhou,” written by Wen Tingyun 温庭筠 and belonging to the late Tang legendary stories, with “Madam White Is Kept Forever under the Thunder Peak Tower,” considered a Song-Yuan script for storytelling in the old version (hereafter referred to as “Huazhou” and “Madam White,” respectively). Both are romantic tales set by Qujiang Lake and West Lake, respectively. Among them, “Huazhou” already exhibits a distinct capital narrative style differing from earlier traditions. It can be seen both as a variation on Tang-era storytelling and an early variation of the Song stylistic mode.

Wen Tingyun’s “Huazhou” depicts a romantic encounter during the Shangsi Festival on Qujiang Lake: “There was Liu the Administrative Aide in Huazhou, born into a prestigious family. He was indifferent to desires, having lost his parents early and having no siblings. After resigning from office, he wandered around Chang’an. On the day of the Shangsi Festival, he saw a carriage by Qujiang Lake, adorned with gold and jade brilliance. Beside the carriage was a maidservant, also quite beautiful. Soon, the emerald-green carriage curtain slowly lifted, revealing a hand as white as jade pointing to the maid to pick lotus flowers. The woman inside the carriage was a peerless beauty, casting sideways glances at Liu the Administrative Aide for a long while. Liu then cracked his whip and rode after the carriage, which soon entered Yongchongli ...” 华州柳参军，名族之子，寡欲早孤，无兄弟。罢官，于长安闲游。上巳日，于曲江见一车子，饰以金碧。从一青衣殊亦俊雅。已而翠帘徐褰，见掺手如玉，指画青衣令摘芙蕖。女之容色绝代，斜睨柳生良久。生鞭马从之，即见车入永崇里…… (Li et al. 1961, 2713) In contrast, “Madam White” narrates the meeting of Xu Xuan 许宣 and Madam White at West Lake during the Qingming Festival. Let us compare the two scenes: Both stories begin with the male protagonist’s introduction, but their social statuses differ greatly. Liu is a scion of a noble family and a recently retired official, whereas Xu is merely an assistant at a medicinal herb shop. Regarding their means of transport, Liu sees a carriage adorned with “gold and jade brilliance,” while Xu takes a small boat owned by Zhang Agong 张阿公: “Xu Xuan noticed his feet had gotten wet, so he took off his new shoes and socks. He went out of the Four Saints Temple seeking a boat but saw none. Not knowing what to do, he suddenly saw an old man rowing a boat approach. Xu Xuan was secretly pleased, recognizing him as Zhang Agong” 许宣见脚下湿，脱下了新鞋袜，走出四圣观来寻船，不见一只。正没摆布处，只见一个老儿，摇着一只船过来。许宣暗喜，认识正是张阿公. As for the women they encounter, the woman in Liu’s story is described as an unparalleled beauty with a jade-like hand, accompanied by a strikingly beautiful maidservant. In Xu’s case, the woman is described: “She was a woman wearing a mourning-style topknot, with black hair adorned by plain hairpins and combs, dressed in a white silk blouse and a fine hemp skirt. Beside her was a maid in a blue dress, with her hair styled in double-horn buns adorned with two large red tassels and two pieces of jewelry, holding a bundle as she prepared to board the boat” 是一个妇人，头戴孝头髻，乌云畔插着些素钗梳，穿一领白绢衫儿，下穿一条细麻布裙。这妇人肩下一个丫鬟，身上穿着青衣服，头上一双角髻，戴两条大红头须，插着两件首饰，手中捧着一个包儿要搭船. In Liu’s story, he only watches from

a distance, while Xu has close interaction: "The lady and her maid settled inside the boat cabin. The lady frequently cast glances at Xu Xuan. Xu Xuan, being an honest man, could not help but be captivated by such a beauty and the maid, who was also as attractive as a beauty herself" 那娘子和丫鬟舱中坐定了。娘子把秋波频转,瞧着许宣。许宣平生是个老实之人,见了此等如花似玉的美妇人,旁边又是个俊俏美女样的丫鬟,也不免动念 (Feng 1956, 253).

The characters in these two scenes show clear differences, and the narrative tones also diverge, creating distinctly different atmospheres. On one side is the scene of a noble scholar and a refined lady falling in love at first sight. Their manners are graceful and elegant, and they only exchange glances from a distance, strictly observing the Confucian principle of "do not speak unless proper." On the other side is the encounter between a shop assistant and a widowed woman sharing the same boat, communicating their feelings through glances and gestures, with language that is colloquial and lively, almost free of restraint or taboo. At first glance, the Qujiang Lake narrative emphasizes notions of social status and aristocratic taste, while the West Lake narrative reflects more straightforward secular desire and an acute awareness of everyday life. Although the story tones of these two works appear quite different, in reality, they are not so far apart.

Actually, these two stories share surprisingly close similarities. First, in terms of capital narratives, "Huazhou" begins with narration centered on Qujiang Lake, with the story mainly set in Chang'an. "Madam White" starts with narration focused on West Lake, with the story mainly set in Lin'an. Both belong to typical imperial capital narratives. "Huazhou" offers a detailed depiction of Chang'an's geographical space, with the story's spatial movement roughly from the southeast to the northwest of the city. On the Shangsi Festival day, Liu encountered his beloved by Qujiang Lake in the southeastern corner of Chang'an. Later, he "saw the carriage entering Yongchong Ward." According to maps, Yongchong Ward is also located in Chang'an's southeast, just four or five wards from Qujiang Lake. Subsequently, "Liu learned the woman's surname was Cui" 柳生访知其姓崔氏. Cui's mother, moved by her daughter's deep feelings, "sent Qinghong 轻红 to the Monastery of Monks and Taoists at Jianfu Temple to convey her daughter's intent to Liu" 乃命轻红于荐福寺僧道省院,达意柳生. After secretly agreeing to marry, "Liu brought his wife Cui and Qinghong to live in Jincheng Ward" 柳挈妻与轻红于金城里居. Jinchengli lies in the northwest of Chang'an, far from Yongchong Ward, presumably to avoid attention. Later, Jinwu 金吾 reported to the authorities and reclaimed Cui on the basis of the betrothal gift, "relocating her residence to Chongyi Ward" 移其宅于崇义里. Chongyi Ward is in the city center, near the imperial palace and close to the city's central axis, demonstrating Jinwu's financial power, influence, and status. Cui, longing for Liu, sneaked back to him with Qinghong, "which surprised and pleased Liu. Not wanting to leave the city, he moved to Qunxian Ward" 柳生惊喜,又不出城,只迁群贤里. Qunxianli is the westernmost ward in Chang'an, adjacent to Jinguang Gate, indicating Liu was prepared to leave the city at any time. Unfortunately, Cui's husband tracked them to Qunxianli and took her back, and Liu was sentenced to long-term exile in Jiangling. Comparing the novel's plot development with the Chang'an place

names given reveals the author's familiarity with Chang'an's geography. The spatial shifts and plot progress complement each other, and the "map" presented in this novel contains many points worthy of close appreciation.

What is even more astonishing is that both stories revolve around a man, a woman, and a maidservant, with a narrative structure characterized by "three meetings and three partings"—the male and female protagonists come together three times and separate three times, ultimately ending in tragedy. Regarding the characters, in "Huazhou," the female protagonist abandoned her original husband Wang during her lifetime to be with the male protagonist Liu. Even after death, her spirit lingers and, together with the maidservant's soul, travels thousands of *li* to reunite. In "Madam White," the female protagonist is originally a snake spirit transformed into human form, who repeatedly searches for Xu Xuan together with Xiaoqing 小青. Both heroines demonstrate unwavering, devoted love. What leaves an especially deep impression is the profound affection between the man and woman portrayed in the Tang work "Huazhou." Their love is so focused, so obsessive, and so steadfast that it transcends life and death. This applies not only to Liu but also to Cui and even to Jinwu (Wang). Despite Cui's repeated cold departures, Wang remains deeply devoted, accepting her without complaint or regret—such characterizations were rare before. It can be said that "Huazhou," in terms of plot construction, character portrayal, and ideological theme, nearly surpasses the spiritual realm and lifestyle sensibilities conventionally associated with the Tang people.

Perhaps by shifting our perspective, we can observe that by the late Tang period in which Wen Tingyun lived, although the Qujiang Lake narrative still retained the traditional political and aristocratic characteristics in its overall storytelling, its spiritual connotation had quietly begun to change. "Huazhou" depicts a passionate love pursuit initiated by a woman, creating a love story that transcends life and death and carries a sense of individual liberation—this ideological consciousness and spirit found a more enthusiastic response in the later Song and Yuan periods. As Cheng Yizhong 程毅中 noted, "The plot structure of 'Huazhou' shows clear influence in the Song-Yuan script for storytelling in 'The Jade Worker' 碾玉观音" (Cheng 1990, 238). This suggests that by the late Tang, the established social atmosphere was already shifting, with new popular aesthetic tastes quietly taking shape. Several major historical turning points in the history of Chinese literature reveal important foreshadowing laid down by previous generations. David Der-wei Wang once said, "If not for the late Qing, where would May Fourth be?" (Wang 2016, 3) Similarly, one might say, "If not for the late Tang, where would the Song-Yuan be?" From this perspective, "Huazhou" holds extraordinary significance as a source of inspiration for later Song-Yuan scripts for storytelling, such as "The Jade Worker," "Madam White," and "Zhou Shengxian's Romance at the Bustling Fanlou" 闹樊楼多情周胜仙. It can even be said that "Huazhou" and the thematic ideas it represents serve as a transitional model from the Tang to the Song. The shift from Qujiang Lake to West Lake, and toward the experience of everyday life in urban popular spaces, signals the inevitable trajectory of urban narrative development from the Tang Dynasty through to the Song Dynasty.

4 Cultural Psychology Shift: From "Unified Capital-State" to "Place Identity"

Gongyang Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals 春秋公羊传 states: "What does *jingshi* 京师 [capital] mean? It is the place where the emperor resides. *Jing* 京 means 'large' or 'grand.' *Shi* 师 means 'numerous' or 'many.' The place where the emperor lives must be described with words that denote vastness and multitude" (Wang and Tang 1997, 72). Since the pre-Qin period, this cultural psychology extending from the capital to the state—the cognitive model of "capital" and "state" as psychologically identical—holds that the capital is the center of the state and the symbol of national power and determines the fate of the state. This conception has decisively shaped the content and approach of capital narratives. In pre-Song capital narratives, using "capital" as a metaphor for "state" primarily manifests in two forms: First, by depicting and highlighting the city planning of the capital, the narratives showcase the grandeur of national power and the extraordinary dignity of a mandate from Heaven. Works such as Capital Rhapsody 京都赋 in the Han Dynasty employ the ancient "theory of sphere-heavens" 浑天说 to bridge the celestial realm and the human world, constructing a unique cosmic model through reasoning and imagination, with spatial concepts distinct from the secular realm. The imperial capital palace is then placed within this cosmic model for observation, demonstrating its spatial position at the center of Heaven and Earth. Due to this successful argumentation, the capital rhapsody became the principal textual form for the theory of the imperial capital as the center and has been handed down through history. Second, by meticulously portraying the life within the capital, narratives reveal the state's prosperity and magnificence, constructing the image of a state center governing the world. Tang capital narratives are more detailed and vivid than the grand rhapsody descriptions of the capitals in the Han Dynasty. Their depiction of capital life is richer in content, thereby more clearly reflecting the vastness of national power and the flourishing of economic and cultural life.

Tracing the historical trajectory and evolutionary context of capital narratives before the Song Dynasty, whether in terms of the capital's physical city planning or its literary expression of cultural spirit, Tang Chang'an holds epoch-making significance. Regarding the capital's city planning, Sui-Tang Chang'an was notably innovative and representative. Because "the capital's outer perimeter was newly expanded with an outer city wall, and a large number of residential wards [*lifang* 里坊] and markets were established, the capital became a novel residential ward-market city featuring a threefold city ring system composed of the palace city, inner city, and outer city" (Qian 2016, 35), and thus the capital's connotations and functionalities underwent profound changes. These transformations greatly promoted social progress and the restoration and development of productive forces, especially fostering the flourishing of cultural and commercial exchanges primarily between the East and West, thus laying a solid foundation for the emergence of later powerful dynasties. In terms of cultural spirit, Chang'an culture encompassed material, spiritual, and institutional dimensions. The broad integration and assimilation of diverse cultures from past and present, domestic and foreign peoples gradually forged the specific characteristics of Chang'an

culture: grandeur, progressiveness, inclusiveness, and harmony. This made Tang Chang'an an outstanding exemplar of imperial capital culture since the Qin and the Han. Huang Xinya 黄新亚 has pointed out, "The so-called Chang'an culture refers to the psychological structure exhibited by the Chinese nation during the period when Chang'an served as the capital before approximately 900 CE." Chang'an culture not only guided the culture of the Tang empire but also, "in a certain sense, constituted the spirit of the Chinese nation before 900 CE." It is further noted that, "To understand the national spirit of that era, one must first understand Chang'an, China's ancient capital of millennia" (Huang 1986, 50).[4] Whether this view is entirely accurate remains open to further discussion and debate, but from a particular perspective, it indeed reveals Chang'an culture's unique position in the history of Chinese capital development. In summary, Chang'an culture has completely transcended the scope of capital culture and is sufficient to represent the national culture of a long historical period.

From the Han and Wei periods through the Tang Dynasty, although literary narratives about the capital varied in their modes of expression, the cognitive model of "capital" and "state" as psychologically identical remained remarkably resilient and enduring. This model was an inevitable product of the combined influence of political ideology, the spirit of the era, and national consciousness. After the Song Dynasty, the cultural focus began to shift downward, and popularization and secularization became the mainstream trends of the time. The orthodox consciousness and ideals associated with the imperial capital gradually weakened, slowly being replaced by the emerging civic spirit and awareness within the city.

In a group of scripts for storytelling centered on Lin'an, represented by "The Jade Worker," "The Mistaken Beheading of Cui Ning" 错斩崔宁, "Ghosts in a Cave of the Western Hills," "Buddhist Dancers" 菩萨蛮, and "Madam White," Southern Song storytellers vividly narrated their plots while simultaneously exhibiting distinctive narrative forms and the capital sentiments embedded within these forms. What draws our attention is that in the highly characteristic "interactive spatial narratives" of the Song and Yuan periods, urban space displayed strong fluidity, and the connections between various spaces became increasingly close. The composite and three-dimensional urban spatial layout propelled and facilitated the construction of new psychological frameworks for the authors. This first manifested as a narrative strategy grounded in local settings, making the content more closely aligned with everyday life to realize interactive communication with the live audience. It is stated, "Novelists always treat the 'actual place' where the story occurs as the stage for plot development. A special logical relationship forms between real settings and fictional stories, which is not merely intended to provide a historical sense of authenticity ... For works with strong regional characteristics, this also serves to evoke a sense of intimacy and immediacy

[4] Huang's article presents a noteworthy perspective, proposing that traditional Chinese culture can be divided into three periods: before 900 CE, 900–1400 CE, and 1400–1949 CE, corresponding respectively to Chang'an culture—characterized as a hybrid, open and progressive culture of great integration and absorption among various peoples, ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign; Bianliang-Lin'an culture—an inward-looking, speculative, and contractionary culture; and Beijing culture—transitioning reluctantly from a closed, conservative culture toward an absorptive one.

for the audience" (Liu 2001, 68). Behind this narrative strategy lies the deep-seated emotion of storytellers for "place identity."

From the perspective of human geographers, the concept of the sense of place encompasses two dimensions: place attachment and place identity. As research has deepened, scholars have gained a more profound understanding and uncovered new insights into the connotations of place attachment. Different individuals exhibit varying degrees of attachment to a given place. Western scholars have categorized the place attachment in ascending order of depth as familiarity, belonging, identity, dependence, and rootedness (Zhu and Liu 2011). Among these, familiarity represents the shallowest level, while rootedness is the deepest. "Place identity"[5] manifests differently across historical periods. At the urban level, place identity has played a significant role in the development of Chinese urban narratives. Under a distinctive psychological mechanism, specific narrative subjects gradually establish emotional connections with urban space, thereby forming a sense of identity with urban life. However, this process can only truly occur after substantial changes take place within the urban space. Since the Song Dynasty, revolutionary transformations in urban space have prompted the gradual establishment of such space-related emotions.[6]

At least three levels of narrative transformation are realized in Southern Song scripts for storytelling regarding the narration of Lin'an: first, narrating from a popular, grassroots perspective; second, developing narratives based on a localized, indigenous standpoint; and third, incorporating a sense of immediacy and presence into the storytelling. On an abstract level, all Southern Song scripts for storytelling exhibit the characteristic of a popular stance, which is the overall literary style of that era's genre. Among these features, "place identity" stands out most prominently, and the specific means to achieve this feature lies in the incorporation of immediacy and presence in the narrative.

In the narratives of Southern Song storytellers, the so-called imperial capital Lin'an does not possess the solemn and majestic aura recorded in earlier poems, proses, and notes. Instead, it conveys a sense of intimacy and immediacy, as if the audiences were truly present at the scene. What the narrator recounts may be a wholly unfamiliar fictional tale, yet the

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[5] In the writings of urban philosophy researchers, "place identity" is regarded as "urban identity." Chen Zhong 陈忠, in *Studies on Space and Urban Philosophy* 空间与城市哲学研究, points out, "From the perspective of social epistemology, as a form of social collective will, shared urban knowledge, and socio-cultural psychology, urban identity is the psychological attachment and cultural belonging that urban residents feel toward a specific city. Urban identity manifests both as a social psychology—that is, people's pride in being citizens of a city and their confidence in the city's development—and as a social theory and urban public rationality, namely the city spirit, rules, and culture that citizens consciously abide by and collectively uphold" (Chen 2017, 189).

[6] Regarding the establishment of local sentiment, the Song Dynasty holds particular significance. Ye Ye 叶晔 (2013) argues that by examining the early modern local gazetteer literature, which began with the hundred poems on place names from the Song Dynasty, one can trace a process in ancient literature's outward interactive development that moves from the literarization of gazetteers back to the gazetteerization of literature. The Song Dynasty represents the temporal turning point of this reversal process. This shift in literary history is partly related to the differing periods in which literary theory consciousness and historical theory consciousness arose, and partly reflects the gradual formation and strengthening of local consciousness in Chinese society during the Song Dynasty as manifested in literature.

settings within the story feel deeply familiar to the listeners. This familiarity clearly evokes pleasant memories among the audience. For example, various famous geographic landmarks of Lin'an frequently appear in the scripts for storytelling, such as Jingting Bridge, Qiantang Gate, Baoshu Pagoda Temple, and the Four Saints Temple mentioned in "Madam White"; Qiantang Gate, Zhaoqing Temple, Broken Bridge, and Four Saints Temple in "Records of Three Pagodas of West Lake" 西湖三塔记; and Wansong Ridge and Jingci Temple in "Ghosts in a Cave of the Western Hills." Particularly, the recurring mention of "Qiantang Gate" is quite emblematic in "Ghosts in a Cave of the Western Hills," serving as a key geographical reference throughout the plot. For example, at the beginning, in the episode "Matchmaking by Madam Wang" 王婆说媒, the text states, "The old woman said, 'I just think you [teacher] have forgotten this old woman here. Nowadays, I live inside Qiantang Gate along the city wall'" 婆子道:"只道教授忘了老媳妇。如今老媳妇在钱塘门里沿城住." In the middle, in the episode "Wu Xiucai's Spring Outing" 吴秀才踏春, it records, "Even if rushing there at this time, by the time one reaches the Qiantang Gate, it would already have been closed" 便是这时候去赶钱塘门,走到那里,也关了. Next, in the episode "Encounter with a Ghost at the Tavern" 酒店遇鬼, the text recounts, "The two were so frightened that they lost their souls, hurriedly sought a way to Jiulisong Quyuan, hired a boat, and rowed all the way to Qiantang Gate before finally going ashore" 唬得两个魂不附体,急急取路到九里松曲院前讨了一只船,直到钱塘门,上了岸. Then, in the episode "Searching for the Woman Matchmaker" 寻找媒婆, the text describes, "Teacher Wu went straight to Woman Matchmaker Wang's home under Qiantang Gate city wall to check, only to find the door tightly locked with a padlock" 吴教授一径先来钱塘门城下王婆家里看时,见一把锁锁着门. Finally, in the episode "Searching for the Godmother" 寻找干娘, the text recounts, "After walking some distance away from Qiantang Gate, following the road in front of today's Jingling Palace Examination Hall, passing Meijia Bridge, they arrived by Baiyan Pond" 一程离了钱塘门,取今时景灵宫贡院前,过梅家桥,到白雁池边来. From this, it is clear the author was extremely familiar with Qiantang Gate. The outer city walls of Hangzhou had a total of thirteen stone gates and five water gates. Lin'an city's western wall bordered West Lake, with four gates on the west side: Qianhu Gate, Qingbo Gate, Fengyu Gate, and Qiantang Gate. As one of the main city gates of Lin'an, Qiantang Gate was first constructed in the 18th year of the Shaoxing reign of the Southern Song (1148). According to *Gazetteer of the Wulin Wards and Alleys* 武林坊巷志, quoting *Brief Gazetteer of West Hangzhou* 郭西小志, it notes: "Qiantang was a renowned city gate. In the 28th year of the Shaoxing reign, four city gates on Hangzhou's west side were added, namely Qiantang, Qianhu, Qingbo, and Fengyu. This marks the beginning of Qiantang's status as a famous city gate" 钱塘名门,绍兴二十八年,增作杭城西四门,曰钱塘、钱湖、清波、丰豫,此钱塘名门之始 (Ding 1990, 740). Outside Qiantang Gate were many Buddhist temples and towers. From Zhaoqing Temple and Kanjing Pavilion, one could directly reach Lingyin Temple and Tianzhu Temple. Most pilgrims heading to Lingyin and Tianzhu temples to offer incense entered and exited through this gate. This gave rise to the folk song about "baskets carrying incense offerings outside Qiantang Gate." This

demonstrates that Qiantang Gate was essentially the main passage within the city leading to West Lake, which explains its frequent mention across various scripts for storytelling and novels.

Southern Song storytellers possessed an intimate knowledge of the streets and transportation routes within Lin'an city, allowing them to casually and effortlessly recount details. For example, "Records of Three Pagodas of West Lake" records, "[Xi Xuanzan] walked straight out of Qiantang Gate, passed Zhaoqing Temple, and headed toward the direction of Shuimotou. After crossing Broken Bridge, he arrived in front of the Four Saints Temple, where a crowd was gathered, making a commotion"(奚宣赞)一直径出钱塘门,过昭庆寺,往水磨头来。行过断桥,四圣观前,只见一伙人围着闹哄哄 (Fu 1955, 298). Similarly, in "The Story of Zhang Shunmei and the Colorful Mandarin Duck Lantern" 张生彩鸾灯传, it is written: "Zhang Shunmei 张舜美 pondered to himself, 'One road leads to Qiantang Gate, another to Shigu Bridge, and yet another to Chujia Hall. There are three or four branching paths. Which one should I take?'" 舜美自思:"一条往钱唐(塘)门,一条路往师姑桥,一条路往褚家堂,三四条叉路,往那一路好?"(Wang 1958, 9) The former depicts a winding, twisting route out of the city, while the latter presents a scene of choice among travel routes. Without sufficient understanding and command of the city's geography, a storyteller could not have conveyed such confident ease. Hu Shiying 胡士莹 believes that "Madam White" can basically be identified as a Song-Yuan script for storytelling in the old version. Many authors of Southern Song scripts for storytelling resided long-term in Lin'an and were clearly very familiar with the city's geography. This explains why this script "is more rigorous and detailed in its depiction of Lin'an's wards and alleys." In "Madam White," the travel route of Xu Xuan during Qingming Festival is described: "After leaving the shop, Xu Xuan entered Shou'an Ward, passed Huashi Street, crossed Jingting Bridge, proceeded to Qiantang Gate behind Qinghe Street, passed Shihan Bridge, went by the Fangsheng Stele, and went straight to Baoshu Pagoda Temple ... After leaving the temple, he leisurely strolled around, crossed Xining Bridge and Gushan Road, arrived at the Sisheng Temple to pay respects at Lin Hejing's tomb, and then wandered to Liuyi Spring ... After leaving the Four Saints Temple, he searched for a boat" 许宣离了铺中,入寿安坊,花市街,过井亭桥,往清河街后钱塘门,行石函桥过放生碑,径到保叔塔寺……离寺迤逦闲走,过西宁桥、孤山路、四圣观,来看林和靖坟,到六一泉闲走……走出四圣观来寻船, finally "landing at Yongjin Gate" 涌金门上岸. The main route Xu Xuan took on his Qingming outing, when compared with pieces such as "Great River Bridge Road" 大河桥道 and "Wards and Alleys in the Nine Areas of the Capital" 禁城九厢坊巷 in *Records of the Capital* 梦粱录, matches precisely and clearly in terms of locations passed (Hu 1980, 228).

What further highlights the rich urban atmosphere of the scripts for storytelling is the vivid sense of presence naturally conveyed by the storytellers in their speech. Particularly, the insertion of temporal markers such as "nowadays" serves to share commonly known information with the audience from time to time, helping them quickly immerse themselves in the story's setting and creating a strong sense of immersion. For example, at the beginning

of “Madam White,” when mentioning the “West Gate” of Hangzhou during the Jin Dynasty, the author clarifies, “which is nowadays called Yongjin Gate” 即今之涌金门. It also states, “There is a pavilion in front of the mountain, nowadays called Lengquan Pavilion” 山前有一亭，今唤做冷泉亭. In “Ghosts in a Cave of the Western Hills,” it is written, “[Wu Xiucai] could only for the time being casually run a small school under what is nowadays Zhouqiao Bridge to make a living, awaiting the announcement of the spring examination results and the opening of the imperial exam venue three years later, to then seek official rank”（吴秀才）且只得胡乱在今时州桥下开一个小小学堂度日，等待后三年春榜动，选场开，再去求取功名 (Anonymous 1954, 36). In “Mistaken for a Corpse” 错认尸, it mentions, “[Qiao Jun] then had someone rent a room in front of the Copper Coin Bureau, which is nowadays directly opposite the Examination Hall”（乔俊）就央人赁房一间，在铜钱局前，今对贡院是也 (Hong 1990, 245). These expressions not only demonstrate the storytellers’ initiative and intimacy in communication, reflecting their attention to the audience and efforts to build a shared urban cultural community, but also allow one to genuinely feel the city’s inner spirit—the myriad facets of daily life and the shifting fortunes of human affairs flowing through its streets and alleys.

Similarly, the heartfelt and genuine praise for the scenery of West Lake is evident at the beginning of “Records of Three Pagodas of West Lake,” which states, “The merits of West Lake are endless and cannot be fully expressed,” followed by a detailed and richly vivid description. Behind this admiration, what deserves closer attention is the urban sentiment the author conveys. For instance, praise for the people of Hangzhou frequently appears in “Madam White.” Upon seeing Madam White, Landlord Li from Zhenjiang was captivated, exclaiming, “Hangzhou women are truly beautiful!” 杭州娘子生得俊俏 (Feng 1956, 436) “One must consider, in such a vast world, how many men are both talented and handsome! Why then is Madam White so infatuated with Xu Xuan, the assistant at the herbal medicine shop? We can find the answer in Xiaoqing’s words: It is because ‘Madam White likes your Hangzhou-born appearance’” 娘子爱你杭州人生得好 (Feng 1956, 441). Perhaps most storytellers were merely a group of wanderers from the north, displaced and living far from home, yet this city provided them with profound spiritual belonging and psychological comfort. Thus, they sighed over the city, praised it, and developed a strong attachment to it. Initially, they experienced the city’s tolerance and acceptance, which fostered a sense of belonging and integration. Ultimately, they took root in the city emotionally, generating a powerful attachment—thus giving rise to “place identity.”

In summary, rich insights can be gleaned from the naming of the two cities “Chang’an” and “Lin’an,” as the meaning of the character “an” in each context is completely different. “Chang’an” embodies a profound and enduring expectation that extends from the “capital” to the “state,” specifically reflected in Tang capital narratives, where it expresses a pronounced national will and imperial grandeur. In contrast, “Lin’an,” as the temporary seat of the Southern Song court, reflects a politically fragile atmosphere of the dynasty, adding layers of worldly indulgence in urban life and “place identity” within capital narratives. The shift from

Chang'an to Lin'an, from the Tang to the Song, mirrors a deep transformation in the cultural psychology of the capital. It can be said that by the Song Dynasty—especially the Southern Song—the spatial structure of the capital underwent great change, fostering the emergence of China's earliest vernacular literature. These early vernacular works were imbued with vivid regional characteristics and gave rise to a vibrant popular standpoint, leading to the flourishing of regional cultural features. The storytellers' awareness of "place identity" thus acquired historical value sufficient to inspire later generations and can even be regarded as one of the important origins of subsequent "place identity." Looking across the historical development of capital narratives, the significance of Lin'an's West Lake novels lies in their partial dissolution of the capital's political attributes while focusing on constructing a strongly loyal sense of place within urban storytelling. This exerted a profound influence on later Wu-language novels, Beijing-flavored novels, and even contemporary literature such as "root-seeking literature" and "new civil novels," producing a lasting and far-reaching legacy.

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