

# 41 THE ATTRACTIONS OF THE CAPITAL

*The two Song capitals, Kaifeng and Hangzhou, were not merely administrative centers; they were also flourishing commercial cities. Both were located at centers of communication—Kaifeng at the juncture of the Yellow River and the Bian Canal, Hangzhou midway between the Yangzi and the seacoast, at the other end of the canal. In these two cities, with their concentration of people and wealth, a distinctly urban style of life evolved. Numerous amenities, including a great variety in food, entertainment, and luxury goods, were available to city residents. The division of labor reached a very high level, with many workers engaged in highly specialized enterprises.*

*Below is a description of the city of Hangzhou written in 1235. At that time the city encompassed seven to eight square miles.*

## MARKETS

During the morning hours, markets extend from Tranquility Gate of the palace all the way to the north and south sides of the New Boulevard. Here we find pearl, jade, talismans, exotic plants and fruits, seasonal catches from the sea, wild game—all the rarities of the world seem to be gathered here. The food and commodity markets at the Heavenly-View Gate, River Market Place, Central Square, Ba Creek, the end of Superior Lane, Tent Place, and Universal Peace Bridge are all crowded and full of traffic.

In the evening, with the exception of the square in front of the palace, the markets are as busy as during the day. The most attractive one is at Central Square, where all sorts of exquisite artifacts, instruments, containers, and hundreds of varieties of goods are for sale. In other marketplaces, sales, auctions, and exchanges go on constantly. In the wine shops and inns business also thrives. Only after the fourth drum does the city gradually quiet down, but by the fifth drum, court officials already start preparing for audiences and merchants are getting ready for the morning market again. This cycle goes on all year round without respite.

By far the most exciting time of the year is the Lantern Festival. Rows upon rows of businesses and private residences are all richly decorated, and numerous tents are set up for various spectacles and activities. (It is impossible for me to give an exhaustive description here.) During the Longxing reign [A.D. 1163-1164], the Imperial Temple and the Noble Ladies' Quarters were located at Central Square, opposite the present imperial dye and bleach works. Once, after performing the state sacrifice, Emperor Xiaozong [r. 1162-1189] stopped to see the lantern displays. We saw the rows of imperial attendants in front of the curtain of the emperor's carriage, and the piles of cash that they spent to buy food. They also gave out cash and gifts liberally to the onlookers, some of whom were fortunate enough to get real gold or silver pieces.

Whenever there is an imperial procession or a religious parade, the carriages form a spectacular, long wall, the tip of one touching that of another.

On the lot in front of the wall of the city building, there are always various acting troupes performing, and this usually attracts a large crowd. The same kind of activity is seen in almost any vacant lot, including those at the meat market of the Great Common, the herb market at Charcoal Bridge, the book market at the Orange Grove, the vegetable market on the east side of the city, and the rice market on the north side. There are many more interesting markets, such as the candy center at the Five Buildings, but I cannot name them all.

## COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS

Various businesses are designated by the word “company,” which is a taxation category imposed by the government and is used for all businesses dealing in commodities, regardless of their size. Even physicians and fortunetellers are included. Other trades sometimes also borrow the word “company” for their own use, such as liquor company and food company. Some businesses are called “gatherings,” such as a flower gathering, fruit gathering, dried-fish gathering. . . . Artisans sometimes call their businesses “workshops,” such as comb workshop, belt workshop, gold-and-silver plating workshop. There are some businesses that use unusual names; for example, shops dealing in the “seven treasures” (gold, silver, pearl, amber, etc.) may call themselves curio companies, whereas a bathhouse may be designated a fragrant-water company.

In general, the capital attracts the greatest variety of goods and has the best craftsmen. For instance, the flower company at Superior Lane does a truly excellent job of flower arrangement, and its caps, hairpins, and collars are unsurpassed in craftsmanship. Some of the most famous specialties of the capital are the sweet-bean soup at the Miscellaneous Market, the pickled dates of the Ge family, the thick soup of the Guang family at Superior Lane, the fruit at the Great Commons marketplace, the cooked meats in front of Eternal Mercy Temple, Sister Song’s fish broth at Penny Pond Gate, the juicy lungs at Flowing Gold Gate, the “lamb rice” of the Zhi family at Central Square, the boots of the Peng family, the fine clothing of the Xuan family at Southern Commons, the sticky rice pastry of the Zhang family, the flutes made by Gu the Fourth, and the Qiu family’s Tatar whistles at the Great Commons.

## WINE SHOPS

Among the various kinds of wine shops, the tea-and-food shops sell not only wine, but also various foods to go with it. However, to get seasonal delicacies not available in these shops, one should go to the inns, for they also have a menu from which one can make selections. The pastry-and-wine shops sell pastries with duckling and goose fillings, various fixings of pig tripe, intestines and blood, fish fat and spawn; but they are rather expensive. The mansion-style inns are either decorated in the same way as officials’ mansions or are actually remodeled from such mansions. The garden-style inns are often located in the suburbs, though some are also situated in town. Their decoration is usually an imitation of a studio-garden combination. Among other kinds of wine shops are the straight ones that do not sell food. There are also the small retail wine shops which sell house wine as well as wine from other stores. Instead of the common emblem—a painted branching twig—used by all other winehouses, they have bamboo fences and canvas awnings. To go drinking in such a place is called “hitting the cup,” meaning that a person drinks only one cup; it is therefore not the most respectable place and is unfit for polite company.

The “luxuriant inns” have prostitutes residing in them, and the wine chambers are equipped with beds. At the gate of such an inn, on top of the red gardenia lantern, there is always a cover made of bamboo leaves. Rain or shine, this cover is always present, serving as a trademark. In other inns, the girls only keep the guests company. If a guest has other wishes, he has to go to the girl’s place. . . .

The emblems of wine shops are a branching twig painted red, crimson curtains with laces of red and gold tones, and a gardenia lantern. It is said that this convention started with the visit of Emperor Guo (of the Five Dynasties) to the Panlou winehouse in Bianjing.

The wine chambers are usually named. If the building has several stories, they may be distinguished by the term “mountain.” Thus there may be a first mountain, a second mountain, a third mountain, etc. These “mountains” are figurative heights indicating the capacity for wine. For this reason, when you go to a wine shop, refrain from going upstairs if you only intend to order a few drinks and to stay for a short time. If you do not order too many drinks, you can sit downstairs, in the area designated as “tables facing the door and the streets.”

After you are seated, the waiter will bring you a few sample delicacies. He will then ask you what you would like to have and in what quantity. Only afterwards will he bring you your order. People who are unfamiliar with this custom often start eating these samples and make themselves the laughingstock of the day.

The expenses incurred on visiting an inn can vary widely. If you order food, but no drinks, it is called “having the lowly soup-and-stuff,” and is quite inexpensive. If your order of wine and food falls within the range of 100-5000 cash, it is called a small order. However, if you ask for female company, then it is most likely that the girls will order the most expensive delicacies. You are well advised to appear shrewd and experienced, so as not to be robbed. One trick, for instance, in ordering wines is to give a large order, of say, ten bottles, but open them one by one. In the end, you will probably have used only five or six bottles of the best. You can then return the rest....

## **RESTAURANTS**

Most restaurants here are operated by people from the old capital, like the lamb rice shops which also serve wine. There is an art to ordering dishes: if you wish to fill yourself quickly, then you should first order the heavy items (such as bean soup, rib-and-rice, sticky-rice, etc.) and then the light ones (such as fried gizzards, tripe, and kidneys); if you prefer to enjoy the good taste of the foods before you fill yourself, then order the light dishes first and the heavy ones last.

The so-called southern style is a misnomer. These restaurants were originally established in the old capital to serve southerners who were not used to the northern diet. Now that they *are* in the South, the term southern style becomes misleading. At any rate, noodles and seafood are the specialty of these restaurants, and each has its own house menu.

There are special food shops such as meat-pie shops and vegetable-noodle shops, but these are not very formal, and therefore you should not invite your guests to eat there. The vegetarian restaurants cater to religious banquets and vegetarian dinners. The Quzhou rice shops are reputed for steamed rice and home-style food; they are good places to go to eat your fill but not suitable for elegant company.

There are also shops specializing in snacks. Depending on the season, they sell a variety of delicacies from fried meats, pastries, stewed ginger, and soy beans to pickled pig’s feet. In the evening, food vendors of all sorts parade the streets and alleys, supporting trays on their heads or carrying baskets on a pole, and chanting their trade songs. The residents in the capital are used to them, but visitors from other parts of the country find them a curious breed....

## **TEAHOUSES**

In large teahouses there are usually paintings and calligraphies by famous artists on display. In the old capital, only restaurants had them, to enable their patrons to while away the time as the food was

being prepared, but now it is customary for teahouses as well to display paintings and the like.

The teahouses also sell salted soybean soup in the winter and plum-flower wine in the summer. During the Shaoxing reign [1131-1162], teahouses used to play the plum-flower wine tune and serve tea with a ladle just as in wine shops.

Often many young men gather in teahouses to practice singing or playing musical instruments. To give such amateur performances is called “getting posted.”

A “social teahouse” is more of a community gathering place than a mere place that sells tea. Often tea drinking is but an excuse, and people are rather generous when it comes to the tips.

There is a special kind of teahouse where pimps and gigolos hang out. Another kind is occupied by people from various trades and crafts who use them as places to hire help, buy apprentices, and conduct business. These teahouses are called “trade heads.”

“Water teahouses” are in fact pleasure houses, the tea being a cover. Some youths are quite willing to spend their money there, which is called “dry tea money.”

Other jargon calls for explanation: A “teakettle carrier” does more than just bring wine and tea to private households; he also carries messages and functions as a social go-between. “Dirty tea” designates the kind of street vagabonds who, in the name of selling tea, actually beg for cash or gifts.

## **THE FOUR DEPARTMENTS AND SIX OFFICES**

For the households of the noble and the wealthy there are the Four Departments and Six Offices in charge of entertainment. They manage dinner parties and keep related matters in good order. In the commercial areas of the capital, one can also find people who specialize in these matters. Thus, whenever there is occasion for an elaborate party, a middle-class household simply hires these professionals to manage everything.

The Setup Department is responsible for preparing the place for the occasion: setting up tents and awnings, banquet tables and seats; providing screens, embroidered hangings, paintings, calligraphy, and so on. The Kitchen Department is in charge of the design, purchase, and preparation of food. The Tea and Wine Department takes care of the drinking needs of the guests, offering tea and drinks, warming up wines, and opening wine bottles. It is also responsible for ushering guests to their seats and for escorting them out at the end of the feast. The Serving Department specializes in serving food and drinks and in waiting on the guests.

The Fruit Office is in charge of making decorative arrangements of various kinds of fruits, as well as supplying seasonal fruits that go well with wines. The Sweetmeats Office supplies preserved fruits and sweetmeats as appetizers. The Vegetable Office provides pickled and fresh vegetables that please the eye as well as the palate. The Oil and Candle Office is in charge of illumination, performing such duties as setting up candle holders and lanterns, snuffing candles, and lighting incense. The Perfume and Medicine Office is equipped with medicine chests and supplies sachets, exotic perfumes, and herb medicines that help sober up the guests who have had too much to drink. The Decor Office is responsible for hanging up paintings and decorations, designing and displaying flower arrangements, as well as for keeping the banquet hall clean and orderly.

If the professionals of the Four Departments and Six Offices are competent, then both the host and the guests will be much more at ease. On the other hand, if these people should make mistakes, the guests will also understand that it is not the host’s fault. After the banquet, compensations and tips should be

meted out in the following order: the chef first, the persons in charge of tea and wine next, the entertainers last.

## ENTERTAINMENT CENTERS

The entertainment centers commonly called “tiles” are places where people gather and are just as easily dispersed. It is not clear when the term first came into use, but in the old capital the entertainment centers were places where many dissipated people—scholars as well as commoners—gathered, and where many young men were ruined.

In these centers there are schools for musicians offering thirteen different courses, among which the most significant is opera. The old music schools had such divisions as the flute department, big-drum department, stick-drum department, clapper department, balloon-guitar department, zither department, dance department, singing department, opera department, and military acts department. Each of these had a department head, above whom were school administrators, disciplinary officers, and masters of ceremonies. All were filled by appointment. The players wore loose robes of purple, scarlet, or green, with yellow aprons. The actors wore headdresses; the other musicians wore ordinary caps. There were also boys’ and girls’ troupes, as well as a military band; the latter gave rise to the present-day custom of the band of musicians on horseback parading behind the emperor’s carriage....

In each scene of an operatic performance there are four or five performers who first act out a short, well-known piece, which is called the gorgeous piece; then they give a performance of the opera itself, which is called the second piece.... The opera is usually based on history and teaches a moral lesson, which may also be political criticism in disguise.... A miscellaneous act is a comic scene taken from an operatic performance. In the old capital, the stock characters of a miscellaneous act were the rustic villagers from Shandong or Hebei, who were the funniest country bumpkins in the eyes of the citizens of the capital....

The hundred games used to be the official entertainment of the old capital. Wrestling and fighting are categorized as butting games; there are also displays of different styles of boxing techniques. The experts in kicking games feature in the ritual plucking of the golden rooster at the general pardon after an emperor’s coronation. They can climb high poles, do somersaults, walk on stilts, juggle spears, do the death dance, play with swords, display horsemanship, and so on.

The various skills of the entertainers have their respective high-sounding names. Their acts include: kicking bottles, juggling plates, kicking musical stones, twirling drumsticks, kicking writing brushes, and playing ball. There are also performances with trained insects, fish or bears, fireworks, fire shows, water shows, puppet shows, and marksmanship of all kinds.

Puppet shows include string puppets, cane-top puppets, water puppets, and flesh puppets. The stories are usually fictitious and fantastic. Shadow plays originated in the old capital. At first the figures were made with white paper; later they were made of leather and painted various colors. The stories of the shadow plays are pretty much the same as those used by the storytellers; generally speaking, they are a mixture of truth and fiction. The loyal and righteous are given a handsome appearance, whereas the wicked and treacherous are depicted as monstrously ugly—a kind of implicit criticism that is easily understood by the people in the streets. The storytellers can be divided into four groups: those who specialize in social tales, mysteries, and miracle tales; those who deal in military adventures; those who explicate sutras by telling religious tales; and those who relate historical events....

## **CLUBS**

For men of letter, there is a unique West Lake Poetry Society. Its members include both scholars residing in the capital and visiting poets from other parts of the country; over the years, many famous poets have been associated with this society. People interested in verse riddles may join such clubs as South Studio, North Studio, or West Studio, all of which are situated on the right bank of the Zhe River. People who like sports form various football and archery clubs.

The Upper Indian Temple has a Luminous Society, the members of which are wealthy Buddhists from the city and its suburbs. They donate incense, candles, and cash to help the temple with its expenses. The Tea Society provides free tea for the believers whenever any of the Buddhist temples holds a service. The Dharma Propagation Temple in the city has a Purifying Society, which gathers men on the 17th day and women on the 18th day of each month for preaching and explicating sutras. At the end of each year it also holds a seven-day-and-seven-night service. In the West Lake region, a let-live campaign is launched in the fourth month of each year to return fishermen's catches to the lake. There are also numerous sutra societies associated with various temples, which hold rituals on the birthdays of various saints and deities.

Other groups include the Physical Fitness Club, Anglers' Club, Occult Club, Young Girls' Chorus, Exotic Foods Club, Plants and Fruits Club, Antique Collectors' Club, Horse Lovers' Club, and Refined Music Society.

## **GARDENS**

The gardens within the city limits include Ten-Thousand-Pines Ridge, Garden of Good Views, Eastern Mountains, Plum Pavillion, etc.... Outside of the eastern New Gate there are the Eastern Imperial Garden and Five-Willows Imperial Garden. To the west of the city is the Vista Imperial Garden.... To the west of the South Mountain Long Bridge there is Revels Imperial Garden; in front of the Pure Mercy Temple there is a Screen-Mountain Imperial Garden; facing the Cloud Summit Tower there is a Pearl Garden.... I do not know all the names of the private gardens owned by the noble and the wealthy families. The garden next to Bao Mountain is most famous for its peach blossoms. Other gardens specialize in rare plants....

## **BOATS**

The capital is encircled by a river on the left side and by West Lake on the right; thus the most convenient way to travel is by boat. The boats for hire on West Lake vary greatly in size. Some are fifty feet long and have a capacity of more than one hundred passengers; others are twenty to thirty feet long and can take thirty to fifty passengers. All of them are exquisitely constructed, with carvings on the railings and paintings on the beams. They sail so smoothly that the passengers may forget that they are on water. These boats are for hire in all seasons and never lack patrons. They are also well equipped with everything; a tourist can get on board in the morning, drink wine, and enjoy himself; at dusk he may walk home by following a trail. It is not tiring but is rather expensive. Some wealthy families have their own pleasure boats, and these are even more exquisitely built and more luxuriously fitted out.

Dragon boat competitions are held in spring at the West Lake and in autumn at the Zhe River. The dragon boats are light and swift and make a grand spectacle.... In early and mid-autumn there are

swimmers in the Zhe River, who, brandishing pennants and poles, display the most breath-taking skills. I believe this is a unique attraction of the capital.

## **SPECIALTY STORES**

The commercial area of the capital extends from the old Qing River Market to the Southern Commons on the south and to the border on the north. It includes the Central Square, which is also called the Center of Five Flowers. From the north side of the Five Buildings to South Imperial Boulevard, there are more than one hundred gold, silver, and money exchanges. On the short walls in front of these stores, there are piles of gold, silver, and copper cash: these are called “the money that watches over the store.” Around these exchanges there are also numerous gold and silversmiths. The pearl marts are situated between the north side of Cordial Marketplace and Southtown Marketplace. Most deals made here involve over ten thousand cash. A score of pawnshops are scattered in between, all owned by very wealthy people and dealing only in the most valuable objects.

Some famous fabric stores sell exquisite brocade and fine silk which are unsurpassed elsewhere in the country. Along the river, close to the Peaceful Ford Bridge, there are numerous fabric stores, fan shops, and lacquerware and porcelain shops. Most other cities can only boast of one special product; what makes the capital unique is that it gathers goods from all places. Furthermore, because of the large population and busy commercial traffic, there is a demand for everything. There are even shops that deal exclusively in used paper or in feathers, for instance.

## **WAREHOUSES**

In Liu Yong’s [ca. 1045] poem on Qiantang, we read that there were about ten thousand families residing here; but that was before the Yuanfeng reign [1078-1085]. Today, having been the “temporary capital” for more than a hundred years, the city has over a million households. The suburbs extend to the south, west, and north; all are densely populated and prosperous in commerce as well as in agriculture. The size of the suburbs is comparable to a small county or prefecture, and it takes several days to travel through them. This again reflects the prosperity of the capital.

In the middle of the city, enclosed by the Northern Pass Dam, is White Ocean Lake. Its water spreads over several tens of *li*. Wealthy families have built scores of warehouse complexes along this waterfront. Each of these consists of several hundred to over a thousand rooms for the storage needs of the various businesses in the capital and of traveling merchants. Because these warehouses are surrounded by water, they are not endangered by fires or thieves, and therefore they offer a special convenience. In other commercial centers such as Shashi and Huangchi of Taiping prefecture there are no such facilities.

## **HUSTLERS**

These are the same breed of people as the retainers of Prince Mengchang.\* They have no regular profession, but live off of other people by providing trivial services.

Some of these hustlers are students who failed to achieve any literary distinction. Though able to read and write, and play musical instruments and chess, they are not highly skilled in any art. They end up being a kind of guide for young men from wealthy families, accompanying them in their pleasure-seeking activities. Some also serve as guides or assistants to officials on business from other parts of

the country. The lowliest of these people actually engage themselves in writing and delivering invitation cards and the like for brothels.

There are others who make their living entertaining at private parties. In the past some of these people were quite well versed in activities such as play-acting, jesting, playing musical instruments, juggling, singing, reciting poems, playing wine games, swimming, and boxing. Some who specialize in training birds are called leisure practitioners. They train hawks, eagles, pigeons, doves, quail, and cocks for fighting and gambling.

There are also professional go-betweens, nicknamed “water-treaders,” whose principal targets are pleasure houses, where they flatter the wealthy young patrons, run errands for them, and help make business deals. Some gather at brothels or scenic attractions and accost the visitors. They beg for donations for “religious purposes,” but in fact use the money to make a living for themselves and their families. If you pay attention to them, they will become greedy; if you ignore them, they will force themselves on you and will not stop until you give in. It requires art to deal with these people appropriately.

## **THE THREE TEACHINGS**

There are civil and military schools inside as well as outside the capital. Besides lineage schools, capital schools, and county schools, there are at least one or two village schools, family schools, private studios, or learning centers in every neighborhood. Often the students’ recitation of texts from one school is echoed by that of another. In the years when the imperial examinations are held, the students from the capital sometimes do quite well.

Buddhist temples are numerous. There are around one hundred Zen monasteries (such as the Numinous Mystery and Great Filial Piety monasteries) and a similar number of the Vinaya Sect temples (such as the Bright Blessings and Immortality temples) and seminaries (such as the Great Dharma Propagation, Grove of Wisdom, and Source of Wisdom seminaries). There are also convents, religious societies, and various places of worship. Whenever a big monastery holds a service, these small groups also attend. Some of the masters are highly accomplished.

Daoist worship is held in the Imperial Great Unity Temple, the Eternal Happiness Temple, and various other temples, studios, and halls. The Daoist temples house monks who have abandoned the mundane world, as well as masters from all parts of the country. There have been frequent reports of miracles and epiphanies of divine beings, which other people have recorded.

*Translated by Clara Yu*

\* A prince of the state of Qi in the third century b.c. famous for attracting retainers