

## ROMANTIC ENCOUNTER AND URBAN SPACE

“**A**ll civilisations have traditions for choosing a fortunate site for a city and symbol systems for relating the city and its various parts to the gods and to the forces of nature.”<sup>1)</sup> From my experiences of living in a historical Chinese city – Beijing – for most time of my life, and of conducting archaeological fieldwork in several Chinese historical cities, I dare say, no matter which site people chose, the city of the non-human life, including plants, animals, fairies, monsters, and the dead, they always predated the city of the living people. In one sense, the city of non-human life is the forerunner, almost the core, of every living city. This proximity with the non-human life, whose living space was invaded and occupied by human being, has haunted urban culture throughout its historical development. This proximity with the non-human life constitutes part of a historical city’s heterogeneous and palimpsestic character.

Stories about non-human life who metamorphosised into human form, involving into the worldly lives and urban cultures, is an important genre in Chinese traditional literature, performing arts, ballads, folk songs, even in modern films and TV dramas. Generally, the non-human creature<sup>2)</sup> in these stories would transform into a female human form, no matter what the original

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<sup>1)</sup> Wright (1977: 33).

<sup>2)</sup> There is no agreed Chinese or English term for such creatures. Chinese scholars use the words from the original text, call them *Mei* (魅) or *Jingguai* (精怪), or *Yao* (妖), in English, there are phantom, or ghost, or specter, or monster, but none of them could cover all the meaning of those kind of creatures. I prefer to call them *Yilei* (异类) in Chinese, and non-human life in English.

species or gender it was, married or had affairs with one or more mortal men. When I traced the origin and the history of adaptations of the stories, explored all their transmitted versions we could still read nowadays, I noticed that the development, or the history of the adaption of these stories was also a development, or history of how people's <sup>3)</sup> attitude or opinions changed regarding the non-human life involved in their mundane lives. The general inclination of changing is quite notable: the heroine's identity changed from deity or fairy in early texts into demon or monster, or evil animal in later ones; the hero's identity changed from the elegant patrician or scholar into a greedy and rampant urban petty bourgeois. The pattern of the intercourse between the non-human female and the mortal men also switched along with the changing of locations where they met each other.

### 1. BEAUTY IN THE WILD

In early texts till the 6–7th century, this this type of story always concerned how how a king or emperor courted a goddess in her fairyland, and how they are well treated; or a noble man encountered a fairy in a wild place, and flirted with each other, or maybe had some romance.<sup>4)</sup> But finally, they departed from each other's life respectively and happily. Like this story written down in the Former Han dynasty (2nd century BC – 1st century AD):

Two princesses of the Yangtze River, nobody knows where they are from. They met Zheng Jiaofu while they were meandering at the confluence point of the Yangtze and Han rivers. Jiaofu enjoyed seeing them although he had no idea that they were fairies. He told his servant: "I am going down to flirt with them and ask for their jade ornament." His servant said: "People in this area are well-spoken, I'm afraid you might find yourself humiliated rather than getting any gift." Jiaofu did not listen to him, went down and talked to them, "My ladies, do you mind if I trouble you?" The

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<sup>3)</sup> By people, I mean both the outsiders (story producers and readers) and the insiders (characters of the stories).

<sup>4)</sup> The most popular goddess used to be courted by the ancient kings was the *Xi Wangmu* (西王母 the West Queen), who was recorded in numbers of pre-Qin period literature. According to *Mu Tianzi zhuan* (穆天子传, Biography of King Mu), the manuscript unearthed from a tomb of 3rd century BC by a tomb looter in the 3rd century AD, King Mu of Western Zhou (周穆王, r. 976-922 BCE or 1001-947 BCE) visited the goddess in the Kunlun Mountain after a long journey, and was hospitably entertained by her company.

two women said: “Not at all, sir, may I help you?” Jiaofu said: “Orange is a kind of citrus. I put it in a round basket. Along the Han River it drifts. I crouch down so that I pick it up and eat it. You ladies should forgive that I am bold to ask for your jade ornament as a souvenir.” The two women answered: “Orange is a kind of citrus. I put it in a square basket. Along the Han River it drifts. I crouch down so that I pick it up and eat it.” Then they undid their jade ornaments and gave to Jiaofu. Jiaofu was joyful of receiving the gift. He went back holding the jade dearly in his arms. After dozens of steps, he checked the jade. There was nothing in his arms. He looked back at the two ladies. They suddenly vanished. The verse in *Shijing* – There are ladies, whom no man could court, meandering along the Han River – refers to this.<sup>5)</sup>

This was a typical mode of intercourse between the main roles in the stories of this period. The female roles were mostly goddesses and fairies. They were beautiful, mysterious and superior. They met male humans in the wild places that the mortals had not explored yet. They flirted and entertained each other. After that, the mortal men had to leave the land that did not belong to them. For them, it could be nothing but a romantic adventure of exploring some virgin land, of which full of fantasies and curiosities in their imaginations. We see strong desire and delicate prudence in exploring the unknown region.

Later, in the Six Dynasties (222 – 589 AD) *zhiguai* (志怪 record of the strange) stories, goddess and fairies faded while more and more animals and ghosts appeared. Romantic encounters with non-humans, or actually, all kinds of encounters with other species happened when people transported themselves from one place to another, during a trip, along some bleak road, in the middle of nowhere. The following story comes from Jin dynasty (280 – 420 AD):

Zhang, Fu, from Xingyang county, berthed in a wild area one night during his river trip. A very beautiful woman sailed to him with a small boat by

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<sup>5)</sup> Liu, 1990. English translation by the author, original Chinese version: 江妃二女者，不知何所人也。出游于江汉之湄，逢郑交甫。见而悦之，不知其神人也。谓其仆曰：“我欲下，请其佩。”仆曰：“此间之人，皆习于辞，不得，恐罹悔焉。”交甫不听，遂下，与之言曰：“二女劳矣。”二女曰：“客子有劳，妾何劳之有！”交甫曰：“橘是柚也，我盛之以筥。令附汉水，将流而下。我遵其傍，采其芝而茹之。以知吾为不逊也，愿请子之佩。”二女曰：“橘是柚也，我盛之以筥。令附汉水，将流而下。我遵其旁，采其芝而茹之。”遂手解佩与交甫。交甫悦，受而怀之中当心。趋去数十步，视佩，空怀无佩。顾二女，忽然不见。《诗》曰：“汉有游女，不可求思。”此之谓也。

herself. She said: “It is too late to keep going, I am afraid of tigers.” Fu said: “What’s your name? Sailing in the rain without a hat, carrying so little luggage? Please come into my ship for a shelter.” They flirted with each other. The woman boarded Fu’s ship and slept with him. Her small boat was lashed alongside Fu’s. At midnight, when the rain stopped, the moonlight shone. Fu woke up and looked at the woman, finding a huge crocodile lying on his arm. In shock, Fu tried to catch it, while the crocodile quickly fled into the river. The former boat turned out to be some dead wood, about 10 feet long.<sup>6)</sup>

While the mysterious and superior halo being stripped, heroines in *zhiguai* stories became more approachable figures whose identity or species could be recognised. They could be animals like a crocodile, fox, snake, etc., they could be plants like a piece of dead wood, a peony, a peach tree, etc., or they could even be inorganics like a rock.<sup>7)</sup> When the men in these stories found out the real identities of those women, they were shocked but not frightened. They might have regarded it as quite natural or a mundane situation. Or maybe, when they met at the beginning, he had already suspected, but did not care. People were becoming more conscious of the circumstances in which they lived as well as the species they met. They were curious, but not afraid of them. Humans and non-humans shared equal right to wander in the wild land. The spaces in the two example stories and in most of the *zhiguai* stories were visible but not legible. Both writers and readers could picture them but neither of them could locate them exactly, since man had not claimed or completely occupied the land yet.

The French sinologist Henri Maspero wrote about Taoism: “the Chinese never separated Spirit and Matter, and for them the world was a continuum passing from the void at one end to the grossest matter at the other; hence the ‘soul’ never took up this antithetical character in relation to matter.” Actually, from the pre-Tang *zhiguai* stories, we can also find that Chinese people at

<sup>6)</sup> Gan, 1980. English translation by the author, original Chinese version: 荃阳人张福船行，泊野水边，夜有一女子，容色甚美，自乘小船来投福，云：“日暮，畏虎，不敢夜行。”福曰：“汝何姓？作此轻行。无笠，雨驶，可入船就避雨。”因共相调，遂入就福船寝。以所乘小舟，系福船边，三更许，雨晴，月照，福视妇人，乃是一大鼈枕臂而卧，福惊起，欲执之，遽走入水。向小舟是一枯槎段，长丈余。

<sup>7)</sup> Thousands of stories derived from the primary time to the 10th century about almost all kinds of non-human species we could see or call to mind on the earth transformed into human being were recorded in *Taiping guangji* (太平广记, Extensive gleanings in Taiping ear), a collection of old stories edited in 977-978 AD.

that time had not set human being and non-human life in opposition to one another, they were also living in a continuum world. The metamorphosed animals, monsters, were reasonably supposed to be involved in human life. When such an encounter happened, those non-humans were always cute and simple creatures, without any mean intention. Such stories romanticised journeys into unknown territory and relieved people's fear when they had to commute to settlements by crossing a bleak wild field, which had not been claimed by them yet.

## 2. THE INTRUDERS SHOULD BE EXILED

However, during the Tang dynasty (6–10th century), things changed notably. More and more stories of romance between human and non-human creatures emerged, with more complicated plot and details. As the location of the encounter, i.e. setting of the stories, switched from the middle of nowhere to some legible and recognizable places, such as a real courier station with a certain name, from which a reader with basic sense of the geography knowledge of the country could immediately locate it in his mind, like this:

Cui, Tao, from the Puzhou prefecture, went to Liyang city through the Chuzhou prefecture. He left Chuzhou in early morning, stopped at Renyi courier station. The station officer said: "This place is dangerous, you'd better not to sleep over." Tao did not listen to him. He entered the room with his luggage. The officer prepared candles for him. Around midnight, when Tao was retiring to bed, he saw a giant claw seemingly belonging to a beast in the gateway. With the gate suddenly opened, a tiger came in. Tao was appalled. He fled and hid himself in a shadow. He saw the tiger shed its skin, to transform into a beautiful woman. She entered the room, heading for Tao's bed. Tao came out and asked: "Why are you sleeping in my bed? I saw you enter as a beast, how did you do it?" The woman got up and told Tao: "I beg your pardon sir. My father and brother live on hunting. Since my family is poor, there is no chance for me to find a good marriage. I have to walk at midnight under the protection of a tiger skin's. I know only the privileged gentlemen have right to sleep in this post station. I want to recommend myself as a good wife. All the former passengers died of fright. I am so lucky tonight to meet you sir. I hope you can understand and accept me." Tao said: "I would like to accept you as long as you are earnest." The next

day, Tao discarded the beast skin into the dry well behind the room, and left with the woman.

Tao was promoted to be the magistrate of Xuancheng county later. His wife and son went with him for his new position. After more than one month traveling, the family stopped in Renyi station again. Tao smiled at his wife: "This is where we met for the first time." Tao went to see the well, finding the beast skin still there without change. Tao again smiled at his wife: "Your old cloth is still there." His wife said: "You may ask people to fetch it." When she got it, Tao's wife smiled at him: "Let me try it on." She put the beast skin on while she walked down the steps, transforming to a tiger immediately. She jumped onto the room, ate Tao and his son, then left.<sup>8)</sup>

The animal, in this case, a tiger, showed its ill nature. The basic substance of this story was still about a transformed non-human creature who had intercourse with a mana man and then left. However, the plot of the story became more complicated. The tiger woman had a background and history. She came to a specific location – a station occupied by human – with a specific purpose, to seek for a marriage with a gentleman. Although it did not make a great deal of sense when she ate both her husband and her son at the end, we can still extract some new information from this stage of the story: 1) the secular life of a human being was so attractive that animals wanted to be involved; and 2) although the animal could have a normal life, even build a family with a man, she would eventually hurt him.

There is no description of the domestic life of this couple in the story, although they might have had a normal family life in some urban space, since the hero Tao was a county magistrate. The locale for a romantic encounter

<sup>8)</sup> Xue, 1980. English translation by the author, original Chinese version: 崔韬，蒲州人也，旅游滁州，南抵历阳。晓发滁州，至仁义馆宿，馆吏曰“此馆凶恶，幸无宿也。”韬不听，负笈升厅。馆吏备灯烛讫。而韬至二更，展衾方欲就寝，忽见馆门有一大足如兽。俄然其门豁开，见一虎自门而入。韬惊走，于暗处潜伏视之，见兽于中庭脱去兽皮，见一女子，奇丽严饰，升厅而上，乃就韬衾。出问之曰：“何故宿余衾而寝？韬适见汝为兽入来，何也？”女子起谓韬曰：“愿君子无所怪。妾父兄以畋猎为事，家贫，欲求良匹，无从自达，乃夜潜将虎皮为衣。知君子宿于是馆，故欲托身，以备洒扫。前后宾旅，皆自怖而殒。妾今夜幸逢达人，愿察斯志。”韬曰：“诚如此意，愿奉欢好。”来日，韬取兽皮衣，弃厅后枯井中，乃挈女子而去。后韬明经擢第，任宣城，时韬妻及男将赴任，与俱行。月馀。复宿仁义馆。韬笑曰：“此馆乃与子始会之地也。”韬往视井中，兽皮衣宛然如故。韬又笑谓其妻子曰：“往日卿所著之衣犹在。”妻曰：“可令人取之。”既得，妻笑谓韬曰：“妾试更著之。”妻乃下阶，将兽皮衣著之。才毕，乃化为虎，跳踉哮吼，奋而上厅，食子及韬而去。

between a man and an animal was a neutral place – a courtier station in the ancient world was a small human settlement in a wild area. Both of animals and humans could claim for the space. Even though the female tiger finally ate the man at last, she did not show any ugliness, or viciousness character. It is more like a joke than a horror story for both the writer and readers.

However, whenever animals stepped into a city, trying to intrude some urban space, the writers' attitude toward them and the situation changed even more notably:

During the second year of Yuan-He's reign (806–820 AD), Li Huang, from Longxi, stayed in his uncle's house in the capital city, Chang'an. ... He was enjoying a free day at the eastern market of the city when a carriage came into his sight, with quite a few maidservants standing around. Li peeked into the carriage, catching a glimpse of an exceptionally beautiful lady in white trading in the carriage, who was exceptionally beautiful. Li inquired of the servants, who replied that "the lady whose maiden name was Gardener, was now a widow of the Li family. The mourning period for her late husband had just elapsed, she could resume her usual dress and therefore comes to the market to buy new colourful cloth." Li made a further inquiry: "Is she able to marry again?" The servants replied with a smile, "We do not know." Li paid for the silk that the lady had been looking at previously. The servants then sent the lady's words to Li, asking him to follow her carriage to the left chambers of the Sovereign Temple and she should pay him the costs of it. Although it was already quite late, Li delightfully followed their carriage and did not arrive until it was dark. ... Her aunt gave thanks to Li, "Thank you sir for buying the silk, those pieces are better than anything else we have bought lately. Yet it is so embarrassing to let you pay as, we do not know if we could afford it." Li replied, "The coloured silk pieces are just crudely woven and may hardly match the beauty of your lady. How could I ask for money from you for that!" The aunt replied, "Our lady is probably too humble to serve you, yet we have a debt of thirty thousand and if you sir do not mind being involved in this debt, our lady shall serve you as a company." Li happily agreed and sent his servant to fetch the thirty thousand of money. ... Li stayed at the lady's house for three days, drinking and enjoying himself as in heaven. On the fourth day, the aunt said to him, "Why not go home for now so that your uncle will not blame you for being too late? You could always come back, right?" Li also had the intention of returning. He took

the aunt's advice and left. When he mounted his horse, his servant found him to be bearing a strong, terrible odour. Li arrived home. When he was asked where he had been for the past few days, he made up a story. Soon he felt bout of dizziness and went to bed. ... While he was still talking, he gradually could not feel his body under the quilt. When the quilt was lifted, there was only water under it was found. The only thing left of him was his head. Horrified, his family called in the servant who accompanied Li during the last few days. Upon interrogation, he gave up the whole story. When people came back to the said lady's house, they could only find a deserted garden, in which stood a honey locust tree, with fifteen thousand coins hung on a tree branch and another fifteen thousand under the tree. They inquired of the neighbours and the answer was "that except for a huge white snake which is usually under the tree, there is nothing and no one else". As for why the lady took the surname Gardener, it was probably because it was this empty garden that she inhabited.

There is another version of the story:

During the years of Yuan-He, Li Guan took a tour from the Yong-ning ward (in the city of Chang'an), while arriving at the city Gate of An-hua, he ran into a carriage, beautifully decorated in silver and pulled by a white ox, followed by two maidservants in plain white dresses, riding on white horses. They looked quite lovely and charming. Guan was quite a pampered boy from a wealthy family. He followed them. ... it was not until twilight when he finally was able to see the beauty, who was about 16 years old, plainly dressed, but as beautiful as the immortals of heaven. It cannot be adequately described how pleased he was to see her, and then she invited him to stay for the night. The next morning when Guan walked out of the door, his horse and his men were already there waiting for him and with them he left for home. He was hit by a headache just when he reached his house. It worsened and worse quickly and soon he died when his head cracked when it was still early in the morning. His family asked the servants where he had been the night before and recounted the whole story, saying: "Our sir said that he had smelt a wonderful fragrance there, yet for us, it was the terrible odour of snakes". Horrified and upset, the family sent the servants to inspect the place they had been last night. The only thing they found was a withered locust tree, in which there were traces of a large snake dwelling inside. They cut down the tree and dug out



its root. The big white snake had already gone and only a few small ones were left, all white. The servants returned home after they had killed all the white snakes they could find.<sup>9)</sup>

Here, we have a real story,<sup>10)</sup> with a dramatic plot, a description of the characters' feature, disposition, and behaviour as well as a mysterious atmosphere and suspense. The most distinguished character discussed in this paper, compared with the ones we can read above, is, the location. In both versions of the story, the capital city of Chang'an, the grandest city with the largest population of the world during the middle ages, played an indispensable role.

The Chang'an city, established in the Sui dynasty (581–618 AD) and flourishing in the Tang dynasty, was a beautifully designed city. As a miniature model of the cosmology or, at least a model of the country, it was unreasonably huge, 83.1 square kilometres, consisting of 110 wards organised in a grid pattern.<sup>11)</sup> Every location mentioned in the story was a real place with an exact name and

<sup>9)</sup> Gu, 1981. English translation by the author, original Chinese version: 元和二年，隴西李黃…乘暇于長安市，瞥見一犢車，侍婢數人，于車中貨易。李潛目車中，因見白衣之姝，綽約有絕代之色。李子求問，侍者曰：“娘子孀居，袁氏之女，前事李家，今身依李之服。方除服，所以市此耳。”又詢：“可能再從人乎？”乃笑曰：“不知。”李子乃出與錢帛，貨諸錦繡。婢輩遂傳言云：“且貨錢買之，請隨到莊嚴寺左側宅中，相還不負。”李子悅。時已晚，遂逐犢車而行，礙夜方至所止。…婢坐謝曰：“垂情與貨諸彩色，比日來市者，皆不如之，然所假如何？深忧愧。”李子曰：“綵帛粗繆，不足以奉佳人服飾，何敢指價乎？”答曰：“渠淺陋，不足侍君子巾櫛，然貧居有三十千債負，郎君儻不棄，則願侍左右矣。”李子悅，拜於侍側，俯而圖之。…一住三日，飲樂無所不至。第四日，婢云：“李郎君且歸，恐尚書怪遲，後往來亦何難也。”李亦有歸志，承命拜辭而出。上馬，仆人覺李子有腥臊氣異常。遂歸宅，問：“何處，許日不見？”以他語對。遂覺身重頭旋，命被而寢。…口雖語，但覺被底身漸消盡。揭被而視，空注水而已，唯有頭存。家大驚懼，呼從出之僕考之，具言其事。及去尋舊宅所，乃空園，有一皂莢樹，樹上有十五千，樹下有十五千，余了無所見。問彼處人，云：“往往有巨白蛇在樹下，更無別物。”姓袁者，蓋以空園為姓耳。

復一說：元和中，鳳翔節度李聽從子瑄，任金吾參軍。自永寧里出游，及安化門外，乃遇一車子，通以銀裝，頗極鮮麗，駕以白牛，從二女奴，皆乘白馬，衣服皆素，而姿容宛媚。瑄貴家子，不知檢束，即隨之。…黃昏後，方見一女子，素衣，年十六七，姿艷若神仙。瑄自喜之，心所不能論。因留止宿。及明而出，已見人馬在門外，遂別而歸。纔及家，便覺腦痛，斯須益甚，至辰巳間，腦裂而卒。其家詢問奴僕昨夜所曆之處，從者具述其事，云：“郎君頗聞異香，某輩所聞，但蛇臊不可近。”舉家冤駭，遽命仆入，于昨夜所止之處覆驗之。但見枯槐樹中，有大蛇蟠屈之跡。乃伐其樹，發掘，已失大蛇，但有小蛇數條，盡白，皆殺之而歸。

<sup>10)</sup> *Tang chuanqi* (傳奇 legend) was a genre favoured by literati in the middle and late Tang dynasty. It was a form of short story written in classical Chinese, mostly concerning the romances between scholar-officials and beautiful women. Metamorphosed beauties constituted a large slice of those women.

<sup>11)</sup> Cao (1981).

coordinates on the grid of the grand city. Along with the process of the urbanisation, the world of all kinds of creatures, from the wild human settlement was separated by this elaborately designed city. The non-human creatures suffered degradation by being designated as an evil power with a sinister purpose, and under the influence of Dualism,<sup>12)</sup> their being and personality gained a negative connotation gained in the popular imagination. They were greedy and malicious, although it was not explained in this story that why those white snakes needed to scam secular money from men, or what kind of advantage they could get by hurting a human. They just did it, because they were non-human. They were not tacitly the natural habitants of the place where they encountered their prey. The urban space with visibility and legibility did not belong to them. They were intruders inside the city. They secretly occupied places abandoned by humans, set up their agenda for taking advantage of mankind's weakness, and eventually, they needed to be driven away or even killed.

Nevertheless, in the atmosphere of horror, we can still perceive the timidity and lack of confidence among the human characters and the writer of the story. Chang'an city was a planned city of the middle ages, with its glory of sacred meaning as well as strong military defence function. It was not a naturally formed city for commercial or secular reasons. The smallest ward among the 110 covered an area of 2500 square meters, with the largest being 7700 square meters. Each one was enclosed by high walls with gates, which were opened and locked by wardens according to the strikes of the city bell and drum every morning and evening. The width of the street ranged from 20 to 150 meters. From archaeological reports, we know that since the population of Chang'an city was not large enough to fill the city, some wards were actually empty, or deserted and people even grew crops inside.<sup>13)</sup> Because of the curfew, we can imagine the bleak appearance between those closed wards and in the deserted wards. It would be just like from one town to another, when the hero Li Huang (or, Li Guan, in the alternative version) of the story took his journey from one ward to another in the empty and broad street in the evening when every ward was about to be locked. In his itinerary, the urban places presented here had not been fully practiced as urban space<sup>14)</sup>, the city served as an external transaction linking two smaller units inside the city. People who were living there did realise that

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<sup>12)</sup> For this process, see Conway (1879, chapter 1).

<sup>13)</sup> Ma (1963).

<sup>14)</sup> Here I borrowed Michel de Certeau's definition "the space is a practiced place". Certeau (1984).

they were the true owners of the city, while they did not have enough confidence to deal with the haunted ghosts or animals, because they had not been capable of controlling every single inch of the land in the city; therefore, they had to admit that these creatures might be reasonable, although not entirely legitimate, inhabitants. Both groups still lived in the habitual recognition of natural forces.

### 3. THE DEVILS MUST BE OVERPOWERED

A remarkable turning-point in the course of the urbanisation of this ancient Chinese city happened during the Song dynasty (960 – 1279 AD): “The unplanned and utilitarian character of the city was, in a way, not inappropriate for the capital of China far different from early Tang. There was no longer glory in overwhelming military power and expanded frontiers; in an old aristocracy, opulent and leisured; in omnipresent and often magnificent Buddhist shrines; in an easy sense of superiority over neighbors. Instead, within narrowed frontiers China bent her efforts to maintain nearly twice the Tang population; life involved continuous and intense competition in every realm.”<sup>15)</sup>

The capital city of Northern Song (960–1127 AD), Dongjing Bianliang, a.k.a. Kaifeng, was the first Chinese capital that was basically a ‘natural’ city, less than 28 square kilometres, one third of the Chang’an city in area, while maintaining twice the population of Tang Chang’an. Robert Hartwell, who made intensive studies of the economic history of the Song, says: “During the Northern Song, K’ai-feng became a multi-functional urban center, quite possibly unsurpassed by any metropolis in the world before the nineteenth century.”<sup>16)</sup> When the curfew rule was cancelled in 965 AD, shops and ateliers invaded every corner of the city, and trading went on day and night.<sup>17)</sup> Hangzhou, even more natural, had already been a flourishing city before it was chosen as the capital city of Southern Song (1027-1279 AD). It was densely populated. The main approach to the city was by road or canal to its northwestern corner and the streets were not on a grid plan any more. This city totally abandoned the tradition idea of a city plan, and developed in a spontaneous way, followed the requirements of commerce function and urban life. Places of public entertainment kept open day and night, packed with people who spent money to enjoy themselves.<sup>18)</sup>

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<sup>15)</sup> Kracke (1975).

<sup>16)</sup> Hartwell (1982).

<sup>17)</sup> Yang (1993: 285-287).

<sup>18)</sup> Yang (1993: 344-407).

The texts we shall refer to from this period also presented a completely new appearance. The story of the White Snake from Tang *chuanqi* remained popular in Song dynasty and afterwards.<sup>19)</sup> The new stage of the much longer and more complicated story moved from Chang'an to Hangzhou, in which many details of urban life and landscape were presented:

Xu Xuan, a young man who lived in downtown Hangzhou, the capital city of the Southern Song dynasty, met a beautiful widow, madam White, and her maid Greeny, on his way home from visiting his ancestor's tomb. Xu was captivated by her beauty and paid a visit to her mansion the next day. Madam White gave him some silver ingots to prepare their wedding. What Xu did not know was that the mansion had been cursed by witchcraft, and the silver ingots was stolen from the warehouse of the city hall; therefore, he was caught when he tried to use the ingots. Xu met madam White in Suzhou, a smaller city near Hangzhou, where he was exiled. He accepted her apology and explanation and married her. A Taoist priest claimed that he identified Xu's wife as a demon, but failed to prove it. Xu was caught again when he went to the street wearing fancy clothes which was – a gift from his wife – because they were too. He was exiled again to Zhenjiang, a small town near both Hangzhou and Suzhou, and reconciled with his wife, who followed him there one more time. Although more facts gradually revealed that madam White was actually a huge white snake and her maid Greeny a black fish, Xu was totally ignorant of this, until the day he paid a visit at the Jinshan temple and learned the truth from the Buddhist monk Fahai. Xu fled to his family in Hangzhou to avoid his wife. However, he found madam White waiting for him when he stepped into his sister's house. Xu was too scared to do anything but turned to monk Fahai, who finally overpowered the white snake and buried it alive under the Leifeng Pagoda beside the West Lake of Hangzhou city. Xu eventually embraced Buddhism and became a student of Monk Fahai.<sup>20)</sup>

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<sup>19)</sup> The Legend of Madam White Snake became one of the four most famous and popular folklores in ancient and nowadays China. Besides the origin and adapted versions before 13th century AD discussed in this paper, dozens of adaptations of the story handed down since then. New ones still emerged in form of film or TV dramas almost every decade.

<sup>20)</sup> Feng (1991). Since the story text is too long to be presented here as a literally translation, this is a brief summary. For a passage of the original text as an example, see below.

There was no one version of the same story being handed down from the Song dynasty. In an alternative one with a similar plot, Madam White Snake had two accomplices, a young maid transformed from a beaver and an old lady from a crow. All three were eventually overpowered by a Taoist priest and buried under the Three Pagodas in the West lake of Hangzhou city, which are still standing in the lake nowadays.<sup>21)</sup> The divergence of the two versions reflected the competition between Buddhism and Taoism which were trying to show their influence in secular civil life. However, points in common rather than in divergence are the issues with which this paper is concerned.

Both versions of the story adopted a restricted narrative strategy, which provided a double dose of suspense during the hero's adventure. Readers wondered about the identity of Madam White along with Xu Xuan, whom was seduced by her beauty. When the monster's real identity was gradually revealed to the readers a little earlier than to Xu Xuan, they started to worry about the fate of the man, who escaped away from the monster's grip a couple of times, yet failed every time apart from the last one. The monster, having been overpowered by either a Buddhist or a Taoist priest, was eventually buried under the monumental buildings beside the city, which are still visible and legible even now, as well as the story spanning over a thousand years.

Both these transmitted versions were written in the literature form of *huaben* (话本 text of the story teller), which was entirely in colloquial language and served as popular entertainment in bars or teahouses in the city. Some traces of the original story of Tang *chuanqi* still could be found, i.e., the heroine as a white snake, but the other two most important roles changed, the hero's identity changed from a high-born scholar official into an urban pettybourgeois; meanwhile, the location changed from the sacred city of Chang'an into the secular city of Hangzhou pervaded by a commercial and recreational atmosphere. Here I present a possibly the most beautiful passage of the text, to illustrate how much the writer regarded the urban space:

Departing from the shop, Xu Xuan went through the Shou'an ward and the Flower market street. He crossed the Well pavilion bridge, heading for the Qiantang gate behind the Lucid river street, then passed by the Stone case bridge and the Stele of Free Captives, finally ended in the Temple of Baoshu Pagoda. ... After the lunch, he said goodbye to the monk and strolled out of the temple. Passing by the Xining bridge and

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<sup>21)</sup> Hong (1955).

the Lonely Mountain road, he entered the Temple of Four Sages to visit the grave of Sir Lin Hejing and wander around the Six-one Spring. ... To avoid soaking his new shoes and socks in the rain, Xu Xuan took off them, and stepped out of the Temple of Four Sages, looking for a ferry boat ... After disembarking, Xu Xuan entered the Flush-Gold Gate, heading for the Three Bridges Street under eaves, then found himself in the medicine store owned by Li brothers. ... Feeling a little intoxicated, Xu Xuan walked under eaves carefully to refrain himself from running into other pedestrians. While he was walking, an upstairs window of a house along the street was open; Xu was struck directly by a box of dirt thrown down from the window.<sup>22)</sup>

In this text of *huaben*, whose generic history is bound up with the development of the metropolis, Xu Xuan's itinerary played a central role in illuminating and shaping the investigation of the urban condition, made a textual representation of urban environments. All the streets he walked, bridges he crossed, city sights he visited, preserved a continuous impression of the colloquial, horizontal urban space of Hangzhou city, which was present in pre-Song literature, but which became popular afterwards. Among all the details of those urban places, the writer's strong affection toward the city could be perceived, as well as the resentment toward the intruders.

With this background, non-human life was completely detached and exiled from urban life. They were supposed, or I may say, typecast as both seductive and harmful, no matter whether they hurt a human being (in this case, all the efforts of Madam White Snake were with the aim of enjoying a secular family life with Xu Xuan), they were doomed to be overpowered and then buried under some manmade monuments near the city, instead of being killed. Their lives were spared not as an act of mercy, but in order to warn others by showing their eternal suffering. Finally, mankind claimed, with confidence, and occupying the entire urban space. They had proved that they were capable of such action by the stories told and performed in the city.

<sup>22)</sup> Feng, 1991. English translation by the author, original Chinese version: 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。...吃斋罢，别了和尚，离寺迤迤闲走，过西宁桥、孤山路、四圣观，来看林和靖坟，到六一泉闲走。...许宣见脚下湿，脱下了新鞋袜，走出四圣观来寻船，...许宣入涌金门，从人家屋檐下到三桥街，见一个生药铺，正是李将仕兄弟的店...许宣觉道有些酒醉了，恐怕冲撞了人，从屋檐下回去。正走之间，只见一家楼上推开窗，将熨斗播灰下来，都倾在许宣头上。

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