



# SENSES *of the* CITY

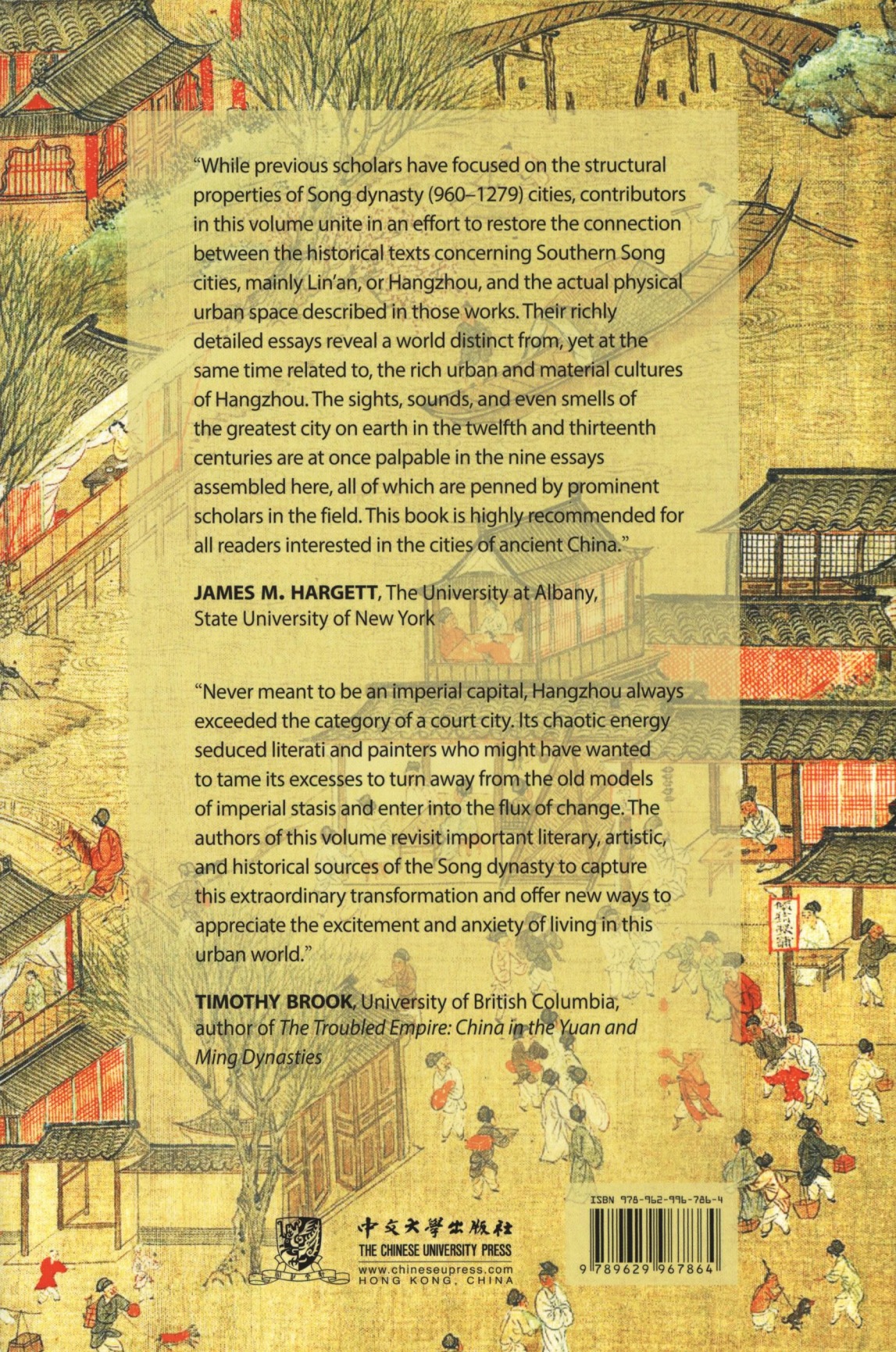
PERCEPTIONS OF HANGZHOU &  
SOUTHERN SONG CHINA 1127-1279

EDITED BY

JOSEPH S. C. LAM, SHUEN-FU LIN,  
CHRISTIAN DE PEE & MARTIN POWERS

CUHKPRESS





“While previous scholars have focused on the structural properties of Song dynasty (960–1279) cities, contributors in this volume unite in an effort to restore the connection between the historical texts concerning Southern Song cities, mainly Lin’an, or Hangzhou, and the actual physical urban space described in those works. Their richly detailed essays reveal a world distinct from, yet at the same time related to, the rich urban and material cultures of Hangzhou. The sights, sounds, and even smells of the greatest city on earth in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are at once palpable in the nine essays assembled here, all of which are penned by prominent scholars in the field. This book is highly recommended for all readers interested in the cities of ancient China.”

**JAMES M. HARGETT**, The University at Albany,  
State University of New York

“Never meant to be an imperial capital, Hangzhou always exceeded the category of a court city. Its chaotic energy seduced literati and painters who might have wanted to tame its excesses to turn away from the old models of imperial stasis and enter into the flux of change. The authors of this volume revisit important literary, artistic, and historical sources of the Song dynasty to capture this extraordinary transformation and offer new ways to appreciate the excitement and anxiety of living in this urban world.”

**TIMOTHY BROOK**, University of British Columbia,  
author of *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties*



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The Chinese University Press

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*Senses of the City: Perceptions of Hangzhou and Southern Song China,  
1127–1279*

Edited by Joseph S. C. Lam, Shuen-fu Lin, Christian de Pee, and Martin Powers

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## SENSES OF THE CITY



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## Introduction

*Christian de Pee and Joseph Lam*

ACCORDING TO ITS admirers, the temporary capital of the Song at Hangzhou surpassed the Eastern Capital at Kaifeng ten times, a hundred times. Its residents lived during the night as they did during the day, purchasing wares, visiting wine houses and theaters, and eating at restaurants under the lanterns of the night markets, until officials rode to court at dawn and shopkeepers opened the morning stalls. This urban culture extended to the water and the scenic spots of West Lake, where the population made outings in all seasons, at all hours. Ringed by hills and gardens, the lake reflected the earth and the sky, and all endeavors of man: imperial outings and illicit trysts, puppet plays and official banquets, accomplished music and practiced crime, poetic competitions and vulgar commerce, weddings and funerals. After the Song court had fled the armies of the Yuan and the night was foreclosed by curfew, this temporary capital was remembered as though it had been a dream. And even when it flourished, the city had to some seemed ephemeral, “almost like a dream” 殆如夢寐, a mirage in the waves of West Lake—“that we might well doubt,” as John Ruskin (1819–1900) wrote of another dreamlike city at a water’s edge, “which was the City, and which the Shadow.”<sup>1</sup>

From its first designation as temporary capital in 1138, the city of Hangzhou (then called Lin’an) was deemed representative of the

diminished empire of the Song (960–1279), in all its contradictory aspects. The exquisite beauty of the city confirmed its destiny to become an imperial residence, but it also portended its fatal corruption. The wealth and ease of Hangzhou epitomized the vigor of the southern empire as well as its oblivious decadence. The city was paramount and feeble, awe-inspiring and threatened, the most admired city in the civilized world and a disgrace to the dynastic founders. Rather than perpetuating the debate about the merit of these polemical judgments, the contributors to the present volume treat them as expressions of their historical moment, revealing of ideological conviction or aesthetic preference, rather than of historical truth. Indeed, many of the essays reveal the misconceptions produced and reiterated by the received opinions of loyalist critics during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), of righteous scholars during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1636–1912), and of bitter nationalists during the twentieth century. By reading the sources as expressions of individual experience and political conviction, rather than as general records of universal conditions, the contributors defy the impassioned rhetoric of past generations in order to recover the solid ground of historical evidence. As they relate changes in literary convention to shifts in territorial boundaries, and analyze writing, painting, dance, and music as means by which individual literati placed themselves in time and space, the contributors re-establish the historical connections between writing and meaningful action, between text and world, between the sources and their own words, between the page and the senses.

## **The City Material**

Historical studies of cities in the Tang (618–907) and Song dynasties have generally taken a materialist approach to their subject, using evidence from a wide variety of texts to reconstruct the physical layout and social structure of cities, and presenting these reconstructed cities as evidence of broad economic and social developments.<sup>2</sup> The first urban histories of the Tang and Song were written by Japanese scholars during the 1930s and 1940s, to illustrate and to elaborate the profound historical transformations of the ninth through the eleventh century that Naitō Konan 内藤湖南 (Naitō Torajirō 内藤虎次郎, 1866–1934) had identified as the beginning of the modern period in Chinese history.<sup>3</sup> Naitō argued that the destruction of the aristocracy by the Military Commissioners of the

late Tang and by the rulers of the Five Dynasties led to a series of structural changes—the institutionalization of imperial autocracy, the recruitment of officials through competitive examinations, the prominent role of commoners in politics and culture, the monetization of the economy—that together inaugurated a new stage in the life cycle of Chinese civilization, comparable to the wise old age of a human being.<sup>4</sup> This notion, and its development by Naitō's contemporaries, was not innocent of its political moment. By emphasizing the brittle senescence of Chinese civilization, scholarly publications of this period provided justification for the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the eventual occupation of the Republic of China.<sup>5</sup> Sogabe Shizuo's 曾我部静雄 study of Kaifeng and Hangzhou (*Kaifū to Kōshū* 開封と杭州, 1940), for example, appeared in a series on Chinese historical geography created to provide knowledge sorely wanted under “the current emergency” (*konji jihen* 今次事變) to rid the country of detrimental Western influences and to implement instead a congenial East Asian system.<sup>6</sup> If these wartime studies offered the cities of the Tang and Song as evidence of a unique Chinese trajectory toward modernity, Japanese scholars during the 1950s and 1960s debated the nature of the Tang and Song urban economy to determine whether the economic relations of the time should be characterized as modern or as medieval.<sup>7</sup> Starting in the 1970s, Shiba Yoshinobu 斯波義信 and younger historians such as Hirata Shigeki 平田茂樹, Ihara Hiroshi 伊原弘, and Umehara Kaoru 梅原郁 abandoned these debates about the general nature of Chinese civilization to place the cities of the Song within regional networks that developed and declined by an individual rhythm, each evolving away from the Tang pattern in a different manner.<sup>8</sup>

Historians in Europe, the United States, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China gradually took up these topics and debates. Étienne Balazs emphasized the importance of social and economic history for the study of Chinese civilization—and the importance of Chinese economic history for the study of Western civilization—in his studies of fairs, towns, and “the birth of capitalism in China” during the Song dynasty.<sup>9</sup> Mark Elvin made the ideas and achievements of Japanese historians accessible by translation and by paraphrase in his rendition of Shiba Yoshinobu's *Commerce and Society in Sung China* and in his *Pattern of the Chinese Past*.<sup>10</sup> In the United States, scholars examined the cities of the Song dynasty as evidence of the “extraordinary growth of commerce” during



that period,<sup>11</sup> and as the cores of macroregions that prospered and declined by independent developmental cycles.<sup>12</sup> More recently, formal studies of Chang'an, Luoyang, Kaifeng, and Suzhou have treated the architecture of those cities as an expression of Tang and Song economic development.<sup>13</sup> In Taiwan, Liang Keng-yao has written with great erudition about the economic development and social structure of cities and commercial towns during the Song.<sup>14</sup>

The study of urban history in the People's Republic of China began in the 1980s in conjunction and, indeed, in dialogue with the rapid urbanization and economic reforms during that era. After being listed among the main themes for historical research in the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1981–85), urban history became a “national key social-science research project” in the Seventh Five-Year Plan (1986–90).<sup>15</sup> During the early 1980s, urban histories of the Song dynasty helped justify economic reforms and “socialism with Chinese characteristics” by offering proof of an indigenous market economy and a long-standing tradition of maritime trade.<sup>16</sup> Urban histories of the mid-1980s through the 1990s examined the cities of the Song for lessons in urban “management” (*guanli* 管理), hygiene, exercise, and the creation of green space.<sup>17</sup> In more recent years, historians have upheld the flourishing cities of the Song as models of economic precocity and technological innovation, reminding readers that the Song Empire surpassed all its contemporaries in the size of its cities, in the volume of its economy, and in the sophistication of its material culture. In the editorial preface to a series of forty-four monographs on Hangzhou and the Southern Song, for example, Wang Guoping 王國平 writes:

In this present moment of profound transformation of ideological concepts, profound reform of the economic system, profound change in the social structure, profound adjustment in the structure of interests, and mutual agitation of different cultures and ideologies at the national and the international level, Hangzhou must not only unearth and revive the Southern Song humanistic characteristics of “exquisite elegance” and “pluralistic openness” so as to allow a mergence of traditional characteristics with the contemporary spirit, but must also use the urban humanistic spirit of “refined harmony and an open atmosphere” to strengthen the sense of pride, self-confidence, initiative, and sublimation power of the people of Hangzhou, and to renew the city's historical luster by setting even higher standards and

demands, by adopting an even broader mindset and vision, by affecting even greater boldness and literary style, and by displaying even stronger determination and dynamism.<sup>18</sup>

在思想觀念深刻變化，經濟體制深刻變革，社會結構深刻變動，利益格局深刻調整，國內外各種思想文化相互激盪的今天，杭州不僅要挖掘，重振南宋「精緻精美」、「多元開放」的人文特色，使傳統特色與時代精神有機結合，而且要用「精緻和諧、大氣開放」的城市人文精神來增強杭州人的自豪感、自信心、進取心、凝聚力，以更高的標準和要求、更寬的胸懷和視野、更大的氣魄和手筆、更強的決心和力度，再創歷史的新輝煌。

The materialist approach to Song urban history has been effective in reconstructing the extensive infrastructures that sustained the cities of the Song Empire, filling gaps in the textual record with reliable inferences from calculation and from comparative studies, whether about the yield of agricultural production, the proliferation of market towns, the efficiency of roads and waterways, the adjustment of monetary systems, the location of workshops and industries, the size of urban populations, or the revenue from commercial taxes. The materialist approach has been less successful, however, in recovering a living sense of urban space, which is a matter of individual, sensory experience rather than abstracted, numerical generalization.<sup>19</sup> Most of the scholarship thus far has preferred the general to the particular, and has used individual accounts to create composite, conjectural reconstructions of generic cities, rather than to analyze unique, fragmentary itineraries through specific places.<sup>20</sup> A unique text such as *A Dream of Paradise in the Eastern Capital* 東京夢華錄 (1148), for example, has afforded material detail for reconstructions of Northern Song Kaifeng or for general studies of Song urban life, rather than being read as the recollections of one man, remembering his individual paths through the lost metropolis of a particular class, during a distinct historical period.<sup>21</sup> This isolation of material fact from literary form reduces the historical substance of urban analysis, not only by generalizing what may have been unique or individual, but by severing the historical connection between the layout of the text and the layout of the city, between writing and walking, and thereby eliminating the resistance of the text to preconceived notions and tautological interpretations. The creation of the cities of the Song in the shifting image of the political present, whether it be the

essentialist generalizations of Japanese imperialist publications or the patriotic pride of recent Chinese studies, illustrates this tendency toward tautology. The preference for the discovery of general trends to the analysis of individual texts has also led to the widespread reproduction of mistaken assumptions, such as the assumption that walled wards (*fang* 坊) were common to all cities in the Tang Empire, and that these walls were leveled by empire-wide economic and social changes during the transition from the Tang to the Song.<sup>22</sup>

## The City Sensible

Most of the contributors to this volume, by contrast, concentrate on one text, one author, or one genre, seeking to restore the physical, historical connection between the text and the city, between writing and urban experience, so as to recover an authentic, substantive, historical urban space. By their attention to sensory perception and to generic conventions, the authors of necessity reflect on text as an historical mediation of urban experience.<sup>23</sup> Their efforts to retrieve the sounds, sights, and smells of Hangzhou from Southern Song texts thus replicate, in reverse direction, the attempts of twelfth- and thirteenth-century authors to devise effective tropes and suitable genres that would preserve their living impressions of the city in writing.<sup>24</sup>

## Hearing

The essays by Beverly Bossler and Joseph Lam both seek to recover the soundscapes of the Southern Song and urge fellow scholars to listen more intently to their sources. In her essay, “Floating Sleeves, Willow Waists, and Dreams of Spring,” Bossler warns that Southern Song literati culture was silenced only belatedly, by scholars of the Ming and Qing dynasties, who hearkened to Neo-Confucian protests against sensuous entertainments and who therefore deleted banquet songs and other musical pieces from Song-dynasty collected works. What fragments of Song musical culture have survived, moreover, have lain undiscovered and unheard in the crevices between twentieth-century disciplinary divisions, as social historians, intellectual historians, art historians, and literary scholars have largely neglected the study of music and dance. Bossler argues, however, that music and dance were central to literati