THE INTERPRETATION OF A DREAM
THE SOURCES, EVALUATION, AND INFLUENCE
OF THE DONGJING MENG HUA LU

BY

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No other work is such a focal point for information on urban life in the Northern Song as the Dongjing meng Hua lu 東京夢華録 A Record of Dreaming of Hua [Xu] in the Eastern Capital. Unprecedented in the history of Chinese occasional writing, it has consistently been plundered by modern social and cultural historians, by economists concerned with market systems and transportation complexes, by literary historians who eke information on urban entertainments from their slim mention, and by art historians seeking documentation for the great Xiangguo Temple or written parallels to the crowded panorama that unrolls in the Qingming shang he tu 清明上河圖, Zhang Zeduan's famous handscroll, "Up the River at Qingming Festival."
But the modernists who assiduously mine the *Dream of Hua* for its specific data often extract these gems without concern for the contextual matrix in which they are embedded. A reasoned evaluation of the reliability or worth of the *Dongjing meng Hua lu* as source material is generally lacking in modern research. And, unhappy as this lack of caution is, what is even more lamentable is the absence of a comprehensive study of the *Dream of Hua* as an integral reflection of the kaleidoscopic life of Kaifeng. One of the reasons for this neglect, apart from the very real problem of the extensive research needed in secondary materials to make a large part of the text comprehensible, is the influence of traditional attitudes toward the work. Earlier scholars approached the work with something like indignant admiration: admiration for the text's realistic and lively treatment of the customs and material life of the Eastern Capital, and indignation at the rustic style that fills its pages with such an exuberant and coarse vitality. The text is full of regional color, marketplace argot, and street slang, and its grammar is so poor that it is simply impossible to parse the lines in some places with any great degree of certainty. Thus, the writings of earlier scholars express a decidedly ambivalent view.

This paper attempts a preliminary evaluation of the traditional interpretations of the *Dream of Hua*, drawing primarily on three kinds of sources. The first kind is the bibliographical material that has accreted to the text in its passage through time, including colophons, postfaces, and entries in library catalogues from its first publication in 1187 to the modern age. Second are the penned notes, the *biji* 筆記, of contemporary or later scholars that make comments upon the text. Third are the literary imitations of the *Dongjing meng Hua lu*.

Two major modes of interpretation stem from these sources: one concerned with classification and definition of the text, the other with its functional role as a literary model. The first mode is based primarily upon textual investigation: the transmission, collation, and

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7 Cf. Deng 57:xv–xvi: “True indeed [that Meng Yuanlao was no scholar]. The section on ‘Talents and Skills in Capital Pleasure Precincts’ is narrated without the slightest bit of syntactical structure (zhangfa). Nowadays, already ignorant of either the people mentioned in this section or their talents, we are moreover unable to decode them from the pattern of the language, even to the point that one cannot read it by discrete lines. As for other cases, where characters are written in vulgar style, or where items are called by their vulgar names, they cannot be deeply criticized.” This confession by a man who was member of the history faculty at both Beijing and Yanjing University is echoed by Gan 76:23–26, Iriya 51:passim, and Hervouet 79:151–152.