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WEST LAKE FICTION OF THE LATE MING: ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT, BACKGROUND AND LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS

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Abstract

In the history of Chinese traditional vernacular fiction Hangzhou has played a more important role than any other city, judging from references in titles and statements of authorship. Numerous texts of short vernacular fiction also have Hangzhou, and in particular the city's West Lake, as their backdrop, forming a sizable body of "West Lake fiction", written for the most part during the late Ming period. The present article offers a detailed study of the development and characteristics of this corpus, with a special interest in its regionalism as well as the merging of popular and elite culture and the aspects of urban culture as represented in local customs and mentality. The author also discusses the scene in West Lake fiction. He concludes that Hangzhou's unique position in the history of traditional fiction was mainly due to its rich cultural sedimentation and the strong influence of literati culture, which, however, distanced West Lake fiction from the marketplace where it had originated.

Previous discussions of regionalism in classical Chinese literature have frequently pointed out the differences between the northern and the southern style. In post-Song literature this difference has continuously been expressed, such as in the obvious example of the contrast between "northern tunes" (*beiqu* 北曲) and "southern drama" (*nanxi* 南戲). Apparently in fictional narrative there also exists a gap between north and south.² However, for vernacular stories, yet an-

1 This article was originally conceived as one piece, but published in two separate parts as LIU 2001a and 2001b. For the present translation the two parts were merged into one and revised by the author. The reference system was adjusted to the conventions of the Western academy. Some of the original source quotations were left out. All the editorial adjustments, additions and changes by the translator were approved by the author. The translator wishes to thank Margaret Wan (The University of Utah) for proofreading, but takes full responsibility for any remaining flaws.

2 The Ming author Ye Sheng 葉盛, in referring to bookshops' commerce with the printing of fictional narrative, pointed out: "Southerners love stories about Han Xiaowang, Cai Bojie or Yang Liushi, whereas northerners love stories such as that about a virtuous stepmother." *Shuidong riji*, 21.213–214. Han Xiaowang 漢小王 was famed for his brilliant military feats,

other kind of regionalism might have been even more important, that is, the gradually emerging regional characteristic of focusing on the city. This fact was evidently related to conditions of production and genre characteristics. The vernacular story (*huaben* 話本) had originally been a product of cultural entertainment of the city folk, therefore it naturally stood in a close relationship to that particular city from which it arose. A specifically urban culture was a gift with regard to its spiritual content, but inevitably it also meant a limitation, therefore regionalism often bore witness to its historical and cultural value. Nevertheless, since the manifestation of regionalism was a gradual process, it became a basic prerequisite for the study of particular works to pay attention to the way regionalism had formed and developed in them. Based precisely on these reasons, in the present article I intend to focus on West Lake fiction as an extremely exemplary case, in order to offer a general layout of the development and the manifold manifestations of regionalism in short vernacular fiction.

By the term “West Lake fiction” (*Xihu xiaoshuo* 西湖小說) I mean to refer primarily to fiction produced in Hangzhou, but also to fiction in which West Lake provided the setting, such as the *Second West Lake collection* (*Xihu erji* 西湖二集) by the Hangzhou author Zhou Qingyuan 周清源.³ In the history of Chinese fictional narrative prior to the late Qing, besides Hangzhou’s West Lake, no other specific place name appeared in any book title. The output of West Lake fiction reached its peak around the late Ming period which was a crucial period in the history of traditional fiction. Moreover, while Hangzhou’s unique urban character emerged in contrast to the rural village, it also manifested itself in comparison to other cities. Therefore, the fictional representations of city life also mirror the authors’ perspectives and degrees of familiarity with

Cai Bojie 蔡伯喈 was famous for his extensive learning and Yang Liushi 楊六使 was a member of a legendary family of warriors. This reflects regionally different preferences with regard to the subject matter of narratives.

- 3 Tan Qian 談遷, who lived around the dynastic transition from Ming to Qing, in a note about Zhou Qingyuan, dated to the 7th month of 1654, for the very first time used the term “West Lake fiction” (*Xihu xiaoshuo*). See *Bei you lu*, 65. In the present article I mainly discuss the short vernacular stories among West Lake fiction. Long fiction, such as the novel *Gourd of vinegar* (*Cu hulu* 醋葫蘆), equally conforms to the criteria of West Lake fiction. Moreover, there is also a number of classical tales with similar characteristics, such as the “Story of the person in green” (“*Lü yi ren zhuan*” 綠衣人傳) from the collection *New stories while trimming the wick* (*Jian deng xin hua* 剪燈新話) by the Hangzhou author Qu You 瞿佑 (1347–1433). However, due to slight differences of genre character, they will remain excluded from the scope of the present article.

their city. This, too, was of profound cultural significance to the process of modernization in Chinese society.

1 The City as a Background to the Emergence and Development of Regionalism

In the history of short vernacular fiction some places emerged as important centers. Among particularly noteworthy places were the Northern Song capital Dongjing 東京 (i.e. present-day Kaifeng, also referred to as Bianliang 汴梁 or Bianjing 汴京), Hangzhou since the Southern Song, as well as Nanjing, Suzhou and Yangzhou during the Ming and Qing period. As viewed from the perspective of historical development, Hangzhou was the center of production of fictional narrative that had the longest continuity and the most far-reaching importance.

Dongjing was the earliest manifestation of regionalism in short vernacular fiction. Chapter five from the *Record of the Dongjing dream of splendour* (*Dongjing meng hua lu* 東京夢華錄), entitled “Performances in the Capital’s entertainment quarters” (“Jing wa ji yi” 京瓦伎藝), recorded the richness and diversity of popular entertainment in Dongjing during the Northern Song. The vernacular stories from the Song and Yuan that have been passed down to us also provide a sufficient testimony of the advanced level in the art of storytelling at that time. It is beyond doubt that, among these texts, those which took the city of Dongjing as their backdrop had the strongest degree of realism, such as “Master Song Four greatly torments tightwad Zhang” (“Song Si gong da nao jin hun Zhang” 宋四公大鬧禁魂張, GJXS 36), “Honest clerk Zhang” (“Zhicheng Zhang zhuguan” 志誠張主管, JBTSXS 4),⁴ “The story of Li Cuilian the quick-tongued” (“Kuaizui Li Cuilian ji” 快嘴李翠蓮記, QPSTHB 7),⁵ “The monk

4 The numbering of the stories in the collection known by the title *Jingben tongshu xiaoshuo* 京本通俗小說 (*Popular stories in a Capital edition*) follows the edition *Jingben tongshu xiaoshuo (deng wu zhong)*. Among researchers of Chinese literature in the West, this collection is generally believed to be a forgery by the scholar who published it, Miao Quansun 繆荃孫 (1844–1919). Moreover, all of its seven stories are also included in Feng Menglong’s three collections, and compared to those they are considered inferior versions.

5 The numbering of the stories in the collection titled in modern editions as *Qingping Shantang huaben* 清平山堂話本, but originally named *Liu shi jia xiaoshuo* 六十家小說 (Sixty stories), follows HANAN, 1973:234–235.

with the love-letter” (“Jiantie heshang” 簡貼和尚, QPSTHB 2), or “Passionate Zhou Shengxian stirs up trouble at Fan Building” (“Nao Fanlou duoqing Zhou Shengxian” 鬧樊樓多情周勝仙, XSHY 14). All of these tales directly describe the lives of citizens in contemporary Dongjing, thus they create a series of their own within the corpus of vernacular stories. This was, in fact, the first time an old Chinese city became the subject of intense and distinct representation in literary writing.

At the same time, the role of Hangzhou in the creation and development of the vernacular story should not be underestimated. Especially in the Southern Song, after the political center had moved south, the political and cultural status of Lin'an 臨安 was continuously rising, further increasing the city's prosperity and also bringing with it the flourishing of fictional narrative. The booming of the various performing arts in the entertainment quarters of Southern Song Hangzhou have been documented in the collections of private records and descriptions of the Southern Song capital, such as the *Description of the attractions in the Capital* (*Ducheng jisheng* 都城紀勝), *The Old Man from West Lake's record of flourishing and luxury* (*Xihu Laoren fansheng lu* 西湖老人繁勝錄), the *Record of the millet dream* (*Meng liang lu* 夢梁錄), and *Old stories from Wulin* (*Wulin jiushi* 武林舊事). For instance, in *Old stories from Wulin* there is a record from the reign of Song Emperor Xiaozong 孝宗 (r. 1163–1189) according to which there were in Hangzhou about ninety storytelling performers.⁶ The genres and categories of the art of storytelling were very clear-cut, too. The statement that “there were four schools of storytelling” is found, for the first time, in the *Description of the attractions in the Capital* (mentioned above) by the Southern Song author Naide Weng 耐得翁.⁷

In discussions of the early vernacular story, materials from books like *Record of the Dongjing dream of splendour* and *Description of the attractions in the Capital* are frequently quoted. But there are avenues left which deserve to be explored one step further. Firstly, Dongjing and Hangzhou served as consecutive capitals or temporary locations of the imperial residence. Thus they offered some conditions other places could not have had, and therefore they became the cradle of the vernacular story. It is believed that fictional narrative was a product of the reign of Song emperor Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1023–1063), because this emperor himself found pleasure in it.⁸ Thereafter this has frequently been repeated.

6 *Wulin jiushi*, 6.454–456.

7 *Ducheng jisheng*, 98.

8 Cf. *Qixiu leigao*, 1:22.330.

In the *Record of the millet dream*, there is also an entry about how the most famous among the “storytelling” (*shuohua* 說話) performers often were summoned by the emperor to display their skills at the inner court. This was referred to as “offering a story before the emperor”.⁹ In a preface to *Stories old and new* (*Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說), the Ming author Master of Green Sky Studio (Lütianquan Zhuren 綠天館主人) especially pointed out that “affiliated with the Bureau of Court Services of the Southern Song dynasty were storytellers [*shuohuaren* 說話人], not unlike the marketplace storytellers [*shuoshu* 說書] of our day”.¹⁰ The supreme ruler’s predilection is likely to have been one reason for the advancement of fictional narrative. However, in the extant vernacular stories from the Song and Yuan, apparently there is hardly any trace of the imperial household. In this aspect they are quite different from the extant Yuan dramas the majority of which were “inner court editions” (*neifuben* 內府本), and which were interspersed with phrases praising the emperor. For this reason, it would seem intriguing that the art of storytelling, while being a folk-art, would still have been popular primarily in the capital where the imperial court was located. It even might have received the emperor’s favor, so there must have occurred contradictions in its ideological tendency. How then could the authors of fictional narrative have harmonized this relationship?

Secondly, Dongjing culture exerted an enormous impact in Hangzhou, but also underwent a subtle transformation, which should also be taken into due regard.¹¹ One passage from Tian Rucheng’s 田汝成 (1503–1577) *Supplement to the sightseer’s gazetteer of West Lake* (*Xihu youlan zhiyu* 西湖游覽志餘) is constantly quoted:

Many of the blind men and women of Hangzhou learn to play the lute. They sing old and new stories and popular tales, whereby they earn a living. This genre is called *taozhen* 陶真. For the most part, they narrate Song period affairs, which was basically a custom carried over from Bianjing. In a poem about passing through Bianliang, Qu Zongji 瞿宗吉 wrote: “[...] Blind women on unfamiliar roads have no resentments, / they can grasp their lute and relate stories about the Zhao family.” This custom was almost unaltered in Hangzhou. The stories “Red Lotus” [“Honglian” 紅蓮], “Liu Cui” [“Liu Cui” 柳翠], “Crazy Ji” [“Ji Dian” 濟顛], “Thunder Peak Pagoda” [“Leifengta” 雷峰塔], and “The twin-fish fan pendant” [“Shuangyu shanzhui” 雙魚扇墜], and similar ones all narrate miraculous events of Hangzhou, or they have been imitative works by authors from recent times.¹²

9 *Meng liang lu*, 20.313.

10 *Gujin xiaoshuo*, 646; translation adapted from YANG/YANG, 2000:5.

11 On the influence of Dongjing culture on Hangzhou, see CHENG, 1997:371–389.

12 *Xihu youlan zhiyu*, 20.298–299.

There are two remarkable points in this passage: One is that in Hangzhou storytelling craft quite a lot of stories about events from the Song period were being performed, which was perhaps due to the influence from Dongjing storytelling craft. In some vernacular stories we frequently find the formulation: “Thus it has been handed down to us by the venerated old masters [of the storytelling profession] in the capital”, which refers precisely to this connection.¹³ But, merely based on this and on the reference to blind women singing to the lute, according to Qu Zongji’s poem, it would probably be a little lopsided to believe that Hangzhou storytelling craft would have been “a custom carried over from Bianjing” exclusively dealing with Song period affairs. There is no way to prove with certainty that, during the Northern Song, there was not any similar art of oral narrative performance in Hangzhou. The other remarkable point is that in Ming dynasty Hangzhou storytelling there were quite a few stories about “miraculous events of Hangzhou”, and Tian Rucheng believed that they were “imitative works” (*nizuo* 擬作), as he called them. However, since the pieces he brought up were also mostly about “Song period affairs”, how could he have judged that they were not part of the so-called “custom carried over from Bianjing”? This indicates that the cultural relationship between Dongjing and Hangzhou still awaits more in-depth study. I assume that, in order to assess the Dongjing connection of Hangzhou prosimetric storytelling literature, we might as well start out from an analysis of actual description of reality in fictional narrative.

In fact, in some tales the temporal and spatial construction even involved both places, Dongjing and Hangzhou. For instance, the story “The calamity brought to Guardian Ji by the golden eel” (“Ji Yafan jin man chan huo” 計押番金鰻產禍, JSTY 20) begins in Dongjing, but then moves on to Hangzhou. In “The oil vendor monopolizes the flower-queen” (“Maiyoulang du zhan huakui” 賣油郎獨占花魁, XSHY 3) Shen Yaoqin 莘瑤琴 originates from Anle Village (Anlecun 安樂村), located right outside the city wall of Bianliang. But her family is scattered in the turmoil of war while fleeing from calamity, so she ends up as a courtesan at West Lake. The oil vendor, Qin Zhong 秦重, following his foster father, also moves from Bianliang to Hangzhou. This temporal and spatial transition was perhaps not just a change in the characters’ place of action, but might as well have adapted to the recipients’ peculiar situation. In fact, mov-

13 Cf. HU 1980, 1:73. For an example, cf. *Gujin xiaoshuo*, 37. At the end of the story “The fake neighbor’s daughter gives birth to a true son” (“Jia linnü dansheng zhen zi” 假鄰女誕生真子, XHEJ 21), there is the relatively rare formulation: “This has been passed down by the venerated old masters [of the storytelling profession] in the city of Hangzhou.” See *Xihu erji*, 364. This shows that the storytelling craft in Hangzhou had a tradition of its own.

ing the state power to the South also involved the dislocation of a large part of the population. In “The calamity brought to Guardian Ji by the golden eel” (JSTY 20), referred to above, this is explicitly described. Some members of Ji Yafan’s family had served as officials in the Northern Song government. Upon the Jingkang 靖康 catastrophe,¹⁴ Ji Yafan learned that “the imperial carriage had put up temporary residence in Hangzhou, and therefore all the officials followed it to Lin’an”,¹⁵ therefore he also rushed there. To the contemporary “gentle reader” this state of affairs must have felt like a part of their own personal experience. In other words, the author’s arrangement of the story’s place of action is very likely to have adapted to the recipients’ experience and mental condition.

Due to Hangzhou’s unceasing development, its significance for the vernacular story was all the more outstanding. This manifested itself with regard to two major aspects: numerous authors of fictional narrative had a connection to West Lake; and a major number of narratives took Hangzhou or West Lake as their setting. There was a considerable number of fiction writers whose pen-names included place names like “West Lake”, “Old Hangzhou”, or “Qiantang”, or who claimed to be Hangzhou expatriates, or were believed to be of Hangzhou origin; and some fictional narratives were edited and printed by Hangzhou people, too. For example, both the men who have traditionally been attributed with the authorship of *The water margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳), Shi Naian 施耐庵 (14th c.) and Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (14th c.), were said to have been from Qiantang. Even though this cannot be taken as evidence, it nevertheless reflects the indissoluble bond the production of the linked-chapter novel, at its early stage, had forged with Hangzhou.¹⁶ The relatively early linked-chapter novel *The story of the three Sui’s quelling of the demons’ revolt* (*San Sui ping yao zhuan* 三遂平妖傳) was also edited by a Qiantang 錢塘 native, Wang Shenxiu 王慎修. Throughout the late Ming period and slightly beyond, the number of authors, preface writers, and critics whose pen-names referred to West Lake or any other place name related to Hangzhou (such as Wulin 武林, or Qiantang), as well as the number of works written, edited, and published in Hangzhou were beyond

14 I.e. the 1127 invasion of the Northern Song empire and the sacking of the capital Bianliang by Jurchen troops, and the subsequent abduction of emperor Qinzong 欽宗 (r. 1126–1127) and of his father, emperor emeritus Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100–1126), along with many members of the Song court.

15 *Jingshi tongyan*, 267.

16 As a matter of fact, *The water margin* had a particularly close relationship with Hangzhou; cf. MA 1998.

counting. A rough survey, based on the various catalogues, finds the following authors and titles:

Hermit of the Big and Small Bird from West Lake (Xihu Pengyan Jushi 西湖鵬鷗居士):
The merry history of intense passion (Nong qing kuai shi 濃情快史);

Amourous Student from Old Hangzhou (Guhang Yanyansheng 古杭艷艷生):
The charming history of imperial concubine Jade (Yu fei mei shi 玉妃媚史);
The amusing history of Zhaoyang (Zhaoyang qu shi 昭陽趣史);

Sun Gao liang 孫高亮, native from Qiantang:
The complete story of how Junior Guardian Yu gathered loyal men (Yu Shaobao cui zhong quanzhuan 于少保萃忠全傳);

Qiantang Pheasant Recluse from Mount Heng (Qiantang Zhi Hengshanren 錢塘雉衡山人), editor; Immortal Supreme Harmony from Wulin (Wulin Taihe Xianke 武林泰和仙客), commentator:
The complete story of Han Xiangzi (Han Xiangzi quanzhuan 韓湘子全傳);

Shen Mengpan 沈孟拌, narrator:
Recorded sayings of the reclusive fisherman at Qiantang Lake, the Chan master Crazy Ji (Qiantang yuyin Ji Dian chanshi yulu 錢塘漁隱濟顛禪師語錄);

Daoist Clear Brook (Qingxi Daoren 清溪道人), editor; Master Bright Pavilion at Old Hangzhou (Guhang Shuangge Zhuren 古杭爽閣主人), author of editorial principles:
The lost history of true Chan (Chanzhen yishi 禪真逸史), earliest edition from Hangzhou;

Upright Man of West Lake (Xihu Yishi 西湖義士):
The story of the Ming dynasty's resurgence through supreme martyrdom (Huangming zhongxing shenglie zhuan 皇明中興聖烈傳);

Master Drunken with the Moon in the Middle of West Lake (Zui Xihu Xinyue Zhuren 醉西湖心月主人):
Fragrant essences of spring (Yi chun xiang zhi 宜春香質);
Cap and hairpins (Bian er chai 弁而釵);

Believer in the Landing of the Female Phoenix at West Lake (Xizihu Fuci Jiaozhu 西子湖伏雌教主), editor:
The gourd of vinegar (Cu hulu 醋葫蘆);

Master Reclusive Fisherman from West Lake (Xihu Yuyin Zhuren 西湖漁隱主人):
Antagonists in love (Huanxi yuanjia 歡喜冤家);

Unofficial Historian of West Lake (Xihu Yishi 西湖逸史):
Cleverness performed by heaven (Tian cou qiao 天湊巧);

Immortal of the Tree of Heaven from the Prosperous Empire (Peiguo Chuxian 沛國樗仙),
 written on the occasion of a boat stop at West Lake:
The element of passion (Yi pian qing 一片情);

Daoist Stone Heap (Lei Daoren 磊道人), preface written at West Lake for:
Embellished history of personalities from the seventy-two eras (Qi shi er chao renwu yanyi 七十二朝人物演義);

Zhou Qingyuan 周清源:
Second West Lake collection (Xihu erji);

Disobedient Student from Qiantang River (Qianjiang Aosheng 錢江拗生), evaluative punctuation:
The woodcutter historian's popularized embellished history (Qiao shi tongsu yanyi 樵史通俗演義);

Lu Yunlong 陸雲龍, from Qiantang:
Words as a model for the world (Xing shi yan 型世言), also known by the title Illusory shadows (Huan ying 幻影);

Prodigal Son of West Lake (Xihu Langzi 西湖浪子), compiler:
The bell in a silent night (Qing ye zhong 清夜鐘);

Lu Yunlong, preface for:
Record of loyalty at Liaodong (Liaohai danzhong lu 遼海丹忠錄)

Humorous Daoist (Xie Daoren 諧道人), preface written at West Lake for:
The cup that reflects the world (Zhao shi bei 照世杯);

Li Yu 李漁, works written primarily in Hangzhou:
Silent operas (Wusheng xi 無聲戲);
Twelve buildings (Shier lou 十二樓);

Madman of Western Coldness [Bridge] (Xiling Kuangzhe 西冷狂者):
The boat loaded with flowers (Zai hua chuan 載花船);

Old Angler at West Lake (Xihu Diaosou 西湖釣叟):
Sequel to plums in a golden vase (Xu jin ping mei 續金瓶梅);

Prodigal Son of Ink at West Lake (Xihu Molangzi 西湖墨浪子):

Complete story of the great teacher Crazy Ji, the drunken Puti (Ji Dian dashi zui puti quanzhuan 濟顛大師醉菩提全傳);

Recluse Fragrant Infant of West Lake (Xihu Xiangying Jushi 西湖香嬰居士), editor of the revised edition of:

The complete story of Master Ji (Ji gong quanzhuan 濟公全傳);

Recluse Aina (Aina Jushi 艾衲居士):

Idle talks under the bean arbor (Doupeng xianhua 豆棚閑話);

The Student from Hangzhou's Renhe [district] (Hangzhou Renhe Shusheng 杭州仁和書生), preface for:

The fascinating history of the spring lamp (Chun deng mi shi 春燈迷史);

Indicated as "passed down from Wulin" (*chuan zi Wulin* 傳自武林):¹⁷

A story of karmic destiny to awaken the world (Xingshi yinyuan zhuan 醒世姻緣傳);

Chen Shuji 陳樹基, native of Qiantang:

Collected reminiscences of West Lake (Xihu shiyi 西湖拾遺);

Recluse at West Lake (Xihu Jushi 西湖居士), editor:

Embellished history of the building of myriads of flowers (Wanhualou yanyi 萬花樓演義);

The Woodcutter in the Wilderness at Western Coldness [Bridge] (Xiling Yeqiao 西冷野樵):

A record of painted flowers (Hui fang lu 繪芳錄);

etc.

That the writing of the great majority of these works was related to Hangzhou is a literary phenomenon, which as such already deserves attention.

Uncountable works also take Hangzhou or West Lake as their backdrop. Among the extant vernacular stories from the Song and Yuan, there are several pieces, such as: "The three stupas of West Lake" ("Xihu san ta ji" 西湖三塔記, QPSTHB 3), "The amorous rendezvous where throats were cut" ("Wen jing yuanyanghui" 刎頸鴛鴦會, QPSTHB 14), "The falsely identified corpse" ("Cuo ren shi" 錯認尸, QPSTHB 18), "Carving the jade Guanyin" ("Nian yu guanyin" 碾玉觀音, JBTSXS 1), "Cui Ning wrongly executed" ("Cuo zhan Cui Ning" 錯斬崔寧, JBTSXS 6), and "The book handed over by the heavenly fox at Shal-

17 *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, 3:1537 ("Xingshi yinyuan zhuan fanli" 醒世姻緣傳凡例 [Editorial principles for *A story of karmic destiny to awaken the world*]).

low Water Bay (“Xiaoshuiwan tianhu yishu” 小水灣天狐詒書, XSHY 6).¹⁸ It is interesting to see how pleasantly they contrast with some contemporary narratives written in Dongjing. Seven out of the 27 extant pieces of *Stories from the Serene Mountain Hall* (*Qingping Shantang huaben* 清平山堂話本) refer to Hangzhou.¹⁹ Among the 120 pieces of Feng Menglong’s 馮夢龍 three collections of vernacular stories – *Stories old and new* (*Gujin xiaoshuo*), *Comprehensive words to admonish the world* (*Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言) and *Lasting words to awaken the world* (*Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恆言), known collectively as the *Three words* (*San yan* 三言) – the subject matter of at least twenty pieces, including several tales presumably originating from the Song and Yuan, relate to Hangzhou. There are some well-known pieces among them, such as “Young Master Shen takes seven lives with one bird” (“Shen xiaoguan yi niao hai qi ming” 沈小官一鳥害七命, GJXS 26), “Madam Bai is eternally banned under Thunder Peak Pagoda” (“Bai niangzi yong zhen Leifengta” 白娘子永鎮雷峰塔, JSTY 28), “The oil vendor monopolizes the flower-queen” (XSHY 3), and “Prefect Qiao willfully interchanges names in the register of marriages” (“Qiao tai-shou luan dian yuanyangpu” 喬太守亂點鴛鴦譜, XSHY 8). Among the seventy-eight pieces included in the two parts of the collection *Slapping the table in amazement* (*Paian jingqi* 拍案驚奇) by Ling Mengchu 凌濛初 (1580–1644), there are also at least fourteen pieces that touch upon Hangzhou in either the introductory tale or the main story. In yet another late Ming collection of narratives, entitled *Antagonists in love* (*Huanxi yuanjia*), six out of twenty-four pieces refer to Hangzhou. Other collections of vernacular stories also include quite a few works related to Hangzhou. At the time of the publication of the *Second West Lake collection* (*Xihu erji*), West Lake fiction had reached its peak. Under its influence, other specialized collections, such as the *Charming stories from West Lake* (*Xihu jiahua* 西湖佳話), were published shortly thereafter.

In a panoramic view, the creation of West Lake fiction already took shape during the Song dynasty, reached its climax in the late Ming, and was still quite

18 There are conflicting views about the dating of the works listed above. E.g., Hu Shiyong definitely considered them to be works from the Song and Yuan. See HU, 1980, 1:292, 295. However, others believe that they should be considered Ming works, based on the occurrence of Ming dynasty place names in them; cf. OUYANG, 1994:143–156.

19 The publisher of this collection, Hong Pian 洪楩, lived in Hangzhou’s Benevolence and Filial Piety Lane (Renxiao Fang 仁孝坊), which was popularly called Serene Alley (Qingpingxiang 清平巷), and therefore his printing office was named Serene Mountain Hall (Qingping Shantang 清平山堂). Perhaps this was not entirely unrelated to his selection of stories.

impressive in the eras Kangxi (1666–1722) and Qianlong (1735–1796) of the Qing dynasty. After the middle period of the Qing there were hardly any remarkable new works anymore. The *Charming stories from West Lake* had already drawn on older works by authors from the past. The first tale in the collection *Eight pieces of silk* (*Ba duan jin* 八段錦), by the Recluse to Awaken the World (Xingshi Jushi 醒世居士), entitled “Punishing a lecher” (“Cheng tan se” 懲貪色, BDJ 1), also simply rendered a story from *Stories old and new*, “Han Five sells her charms at New Bridge Town” (“Xinqiaoshi Han Wu mai chunqing” 新橋市韓五賣春情, GJXS 3), with a renamed protagonist. *Collected reminiscences from West Lake* (*Xihu shiyi*) basically was an anthology of selected pieces from the *Second West Lake collection* and the *Charming stories from West Lake*.²⁰ The novella *The legend of Thunder Peak Pagoda* (*Leifengta chuanqi* 雷峰塔傳奇), too, was nothing else but an elaboration of the tale “Madam Bai is eternally banned under Thunder Peak Pagoda” (JSTY 28). All this indicates a decline in the creativity of West Lake fiction. By and large the development of West Lake fiction was consistent with the general tendency of popular fictional narrative, but at the same time it might also have been related to Hangzhou’s economic and cultural development.

What requires some explanation is that certain narratives termed as “West Lake fiction” in fact had no direct link with either Hangzhou or West Lake. This is even true for specialized volumes of fiction like the *Second West Lake collection*. For instance, in one of this collection’s narratives, entitled “The extreme filial piety of Master Yao Bohua finds a striking recompensation” (“Yao Bozi zhi xiao shou xian rong” 姚伯子至孝受顯榮, XHEJ 6), the protagonist is native from Tonglu 桐廬 district in Zhejiang’s Yanzhou 嚴州 prefecture. The story is

20 Chen Shuji, the editor of the *Collected reminiscences from West Lake*, obviously did not have a very broad horizon, to judge from the extremely narrow scope of his selection. If the story “Banning the demon under a seven-story pagoda” (“Zhen yao qi ceng jian baota” 鎮妖七層建寶塔, XHSY 24) is not counted, because it was actually derived from *Charming stories from West Lake* (XHJH 15), only one single piece was taken from Feng Menglong’s three collections, being “The oil vendor becomes conjugally attached to the flower-queen” (“Maiyoulang qianquan de huakui” 賣油郎繾綣得花魁, XHSY 36; cf. XSHY 3). Perhaps Chen had only seen an anthology edition like the *Remarkable spectacles new and old* (*Jingu qiguan* 今古奇觀). As for the revisions he made, they were for the most part mere textual corrections, which do not deserve to be mentioned. But the illustration section, covering the first three fascicles of this book, nevertheless renders the narratives’ regionalist trait all the more manifest, for it includes “A panorama of West Lake” (“Xihu quantu” 西湖全圖), “The Ten Views of West Lake” (“Xihu shijing tu” 西湖十景圖), and “Portraits of West Lake personalities” (“Xihu renwu tu” 西湖人物圖).

not related to Hangzhou in any way. There is merely a statement in the piece that, “as the story goes, this Tonglu district was located in the upper reaches of Zhe River, very close to Hangzhou”,²¹ which apparently was considered as establishing a sufficient connection to Hangzhou. Another piece in the same collection, “Loyalty and filial piety assembled in one family” (“Zhongxiao cui yi men” 忠孝萃一門, XHEJ 31), has an introductory tale with a protagonist Wang Yuan 王原 and a main tale about one Wang Wei 王偉, both of whom are unrelated to Hangzhou. The presumably only link to West Lake is established by the fact that Wang Wei is native from Yiwu 義烏 district in Jinhua 金華 prefecture, which belongs to the same province as Hangzhou. This also indicates that the fiction writer, in the course of writing, occasionally was not at all sticking too fast to the Hangzhou region. As viewed from the reverse angle, however, this may also reveal the limitations of using regional materials. Moreover, this was perhaps also one reason for the ultimate decline of West Lake fiction.

After the middle period of the Ming, the output of fictional narrative in places like Nanjing, Suzhou, or Yangzhou grew rapidly. These places had certain things in common with Hangzhou, but also some marked differences. Nanjing was politically, economically, and culturally very similar to Hangzhou, and it was also one of the centers of the publication and distribution of popular literature. Although Nanjing was frequently referred to in fictional narratives as the old capital of the Six Dynasties, for some unknown reason, it had not really been taken as a significant setting for a narrative until the appearance of the early Qing novel *Unofficial history of the scholars* (*Rulin waishi* 儒林外史, ca. 1750, first known edition 1803). The economies of Suzhou and Yangzhou were very advanced, too, and both cities had a long history as gathering places of the cultural elite, but they had never become political centers. Therefore, their thematic range was naturally subject to certain limitations. This becomes evident in the fact that the local professional storytellers turned to the copious mechanical copying of ready-made works. According to a statistics based on over fifty traditional catalogues of Yangzhou storytelling (*pinghua* 評話), the large majority of works belonged to *The three kingdoms* (*Sanguo* 三國) and *The water margin* (*Shuihu* 水滸) cycles, whereas only a small minority of works drew its materials from actual local life.²² Of course, in the development of Yangzhou storytelling craft, there have also emerged some strongly regionalist works. For instance, *Yangzhou talk* (*Yangzhou hua* 揚州話), by one Huang Chensi 謊陳四, was re-

21 *Xihu erji*, 92.

22 WEI/WEI, 1985:37.

ferred to in Li Dou's 李斗 (18th c.) *Records from Yangzhou pleasure boats* (*Yangzhou huafang lu* 揚州畫舫錄, 1797) as having been "quite unique in its time" (*dubu yi shi* 獨步一時).²³ It is likely to have been a work which expressed local subject matter in local dialect. A certain Pu Lin's novel *Qingfeng sluice* (*Qingfeng zha* 清風閘), which appeared during the Qianlong era, even more so "passionately described the scenery, mentality, and customs of contemporary Yangzhou".²⁴ Shortly thereafter, there were also Shi Chengjin's 石成金 (c. 1659 – after 1739) collections of tales *Fragrance of flowers in the rain* (*Yuhua xiang* 雨花香) and *Joy reaching up to heaven* (*Tongtian le* 通天樂), which specialized in "recent events of Yangzhou" (*Yangzhou jinshi* 揚州近事).²⁵ Thus they compare well to West Lake fiction. However, if placed side by side, these works tend toward the trivial in subject matter and content, and they lack the richness and density of connotation of West Lake fiction.

Yet another period later, Shanghai gradually became the creative center of fictional narrative. Zhang Nanzhuang's 張南莊 *What classical reference* (*He dian* 何典, earliest known edition 1878) was perhaps an early sign for this process. This fictional narrative of modest length had been written by using Shanghai dialect expressions, moreover it was printed and distributed by the publishing house of the newspaper *Shen bao* 申報, which indicated a new mode of creation and circulation. The true embodiment of Shanghai regionalism, however, were works in the style of *Lives of Shanghai flowers* (*Haishang hua liezhuan* 海上花列傳, 1892–1894) which straightforwardly described life in the foreign concessions. The emergence of a series of Shanghai novels marked the opening of a new page in the history of Chinese regionalist fictional narrative.

Regionalism was not the only soil on which the creation of fictional narrative relied, but it exerted a deep influence on every aspect of fictional narrative, such as its cultural style, its narrative mode, or the molding of its imagery. However, these aspects are by no means easy to grasp, on the one hand, because a regional culture does *per se* have variation, and on the other hand, because literary creation contains a certain degree of arbitrariness. For instance, in a specialized scholarly article about Hangzhou fiction a comparison was drawn between the tales "Du Shiniang sinks her jewel box in anger" ("Du Shiniang nu chen baibaoxiang" 杜十娘怒沉百寶箱, JSTY 32) and "The oil vendor monopolizes

23 *Yangzhou huafang lu*, 11.246.

24 WEI/WEI, 1985:50.

25 The expression "recent events of Yangzhou" is included in the full titles of the two collections as they appear in front of the respective table of contents. Cf. the modern editions of *Yuhua xiang* and *Tongtian le*.

the flower-queen” (XSHY 3). It argued that the story of Du Shiniang took place in the northern capital Yanjing 燕京, where the center of the feudal nobility was, and where the feudal forces accumulated; therefore the story was a tragedy. The story of the flower-queen, however, was set in Hangzhou, where the handicrafts and trade were flourishing, so the oil-vendor, being a merchant, could overcome a noble son from an aristocratic family; therefore this narrative was a comedy.²⁶ This kind of comparison, while having its original points, is nevertheless incomplete. One would naturally have to raise the following question: If we attributed the authorship of both stories to Feng Menglong, which regionalism would then be the more important one, that of Feng’s biographical background, or that of the story’s setting?

2 The Cultural Background and Literary Foundation of West Lake Fiction

After emperor Wen of the Sui dynasty (Sui Wendi 隋文帝) had set up Hangzhou, in the ninth year of his reign (589), the city went through successive periods of cumulative development. Thus Hangzhou had gained a certain size at a relatively early stage. As for West Lake, however, we do not have any records about it prior to the Tang. Only after the famous sites of the landscape had taken shape one after another, from the mid Tang onwards, it gradually became a sightseeing place. However, in terms of luxury and prestige Hangzhou then still “could not be compared to the district of Kuaiji [會稽] or to Gusu [姑蘇, i.e. Suzhou].”²⁷ Due to the planning and construction work throughout the period of the Wu-Yue kingdom and the two periods of the Song dynasty, but particularly during the Southern Song, latecomer Hangzhou eventually surpassed the old timers. A Northern Song author from Hangzhou, Shen Kuo 沈括 (1031–1095), already claimed: “Hangzhou is a large prefecture. As the center of the Yue people in the Southeast, it is probably second to none with regard to geographical extension and population as well as human and material resources.”²⁸ Due to Hangzhou’s privileged status it gradually became the converging point of traditional Chinese culture, and thereby West Lake fiction, too, was provided with a profound and

26 ZHONG, 1998.

27 *Yu zhao xin zhi* 5.84.

28 *Chang xing ji*, 24:5.15b (“Hangzhou xin zuo zhouxue ji” 杭州新作州學記 [Note on the newly created prefectural school of Hangzhou]).

extensive cultural background and literary fundament. In West Lake fiction, China's traditional culture found its lively expression in all its aspects and facets.

Buddhist culture was an extremely important component among the inertia of Hangzhou's rich historical culture. Generations after generations of eminent monks had emerged there, and there were old Buddhist temples and monasteries in great numbers. The intense Buddhist atmosphere also meant that subject matters related to Buddhism emerged in an endless stream in West Lake fiction. As a matter of fact, this might have been one major difference between West Lake fiction and Dongjing fiction. In Dongjing fiction, of course, there were also some works that dealt with Buddhist contents, but far less prominently than in West Lake fiction. The categories of Song dynasty storytelling were listed in the various descriptions of the northern and the southern capital, such as the *Record of the Dongjing dream of splendour* or *Description of the attractions in the capital*. According to these listings, the rubrics of "petty narrative" (*xiaoshuo* 小說) and "embellished history" (*jiang shi* 講史) existed in both Dongjing and Hangzhou. The storytelling crafts of obvious Buddhist interest, such as "sutra recitation" (*shuo jing* 說經), "performing Chan discourses" (*shuo canqing* 說參請), and "mock sutra recitation" (*shuo hunjing* 說誦經), were not listed in the *Record of the Dongjing dream of splendour*, but appeared in *Description of the attractions in the capital* and *Old stories from Wulin*.²⁹ Therefore it would seem extremely likely that they represented a creation of distinct Hangzhou origin.

However, we should pay attention to the fact that, although some West Lake fiction did indeed advocate Buddhist thought, it nevertheless was by no means the actual intention of these narratives to spread the *dharma*. What the professional storytellers loved to put on display was, rather, how the Buddhist topics were linked up to city life and secular ideas. For example, the tale "Chan master Mingwu refutes the Five Avoidances" ("Mingwu chanshi gan wu jie" 明悟禪師趕五戒, GJXS 30) described the fictionalized biography of an eminent monk from the two angles of libido and politics. Exactly for this reason, the Buddhist ideas expressed in West Lake fiction were not that strict. The population of Hangzhou put strong emphasis on the practice of "liberating live [animals]" (*fangsheng* 放生). In *A record of the millet dream* it is pointed out that in the Song "West Lake was considered a basin for liberating live fish".³⁰ Later on, the "Basin for liberating live fish" (*Fangshengchi* 放生池) became a famous site

29 *Ducheng jisheng*, 98; *Wulin jiushi*, 6.455.

30 *Meng liang lu*, 12.230.

at West Lake.³¹ Quite a few texts of West Lake fiction were stories about the practice of liberating live fish. The two tales “Chan master [Yan]shou fulfills the requests of destiny in two existences” (“Shou chanshi liang sheng fu su yuan” 壽禪師兩生符宿願, XHEJ 8) and “Traces of benevolence at the [Basin for] liberating live fish” (“Fangsheng shan ji” 放生善蹟, XHJH 16) even took it as their main topic, demonstrating the common people’s acceptance and promotion of Buddhist thought. But in yet another West Lake tale, entitled “A sly student misses his interview at Golden Bell [Palace]” (“Qiao shusheng Jinluan shi dui” 巧書生金鑾失對, XHEJ 3), we find a rather different representation. Its protagonist Zhen Longyou 甄龍友, in the course of his extensive discussions about the *dharma* with a monk at a monastery, has won the monk community’s highest respect. At that very moment, all of a sudden, a hen comes walking along. This is actually the chicken from which an old master at the monastery requires an egg to prepare a medicine. Zhen Longyou states that he never liked vegetarianism and proposes to kill the chicken. There is even a eulogy about it:

[...] You lay eggs, and from these eggs your children are born, and so on and on, infinitely; men eat animals, and animals also eat men, enmity without end! If you wanted to remove the root of evil [*yezhang* 業障], you would have to cut off the six twigs [*liu gen* 六根], and all the people could take it to cook a tasty Boluo soup from it: At first you peel off the feathers and skin of the head. Then you apply the Bodhisattva’s knife of wisdom and cut out its entrails. Tut! The tasty soup continuously transforms into steam, the boiling pot of soup turns into sweet dew [*ganlu* 甘露]. Whoever drinks that sweet dew rides on that steam cloud, enters the depths of the Buddha’s tooth right away, and is reincarnated in that other realm of supreme joy.³²

When the monks read this eulogy, quite surprisingly, they are very pleased and say: “When the chicken gets to know this poem, it won’t regret to die anymore.” This kind of slick and sly, unconventional idea was in fact quite exactly the jargon by which secular culture approached orthodox Buddhism. As a rather similar case, there is also the representation of Crazy Ji (Ji gong 濟公) in “Traces of drunkenness at Southern Shield” (“Nanping zui ji” 南屏醉蹟, XHJH 9), which projects the image of a monk with an obviously vulgar flavor. In traditional Chinese fiction there was a whole series of narratives about Crazy Ji, and it may justly be said that this unique character was an artistic offspring of West Lake fiction.

31 *Hushan bianlan*, 3.69–70.

32 *Xihu erji*, 48.

It would seem as if the influence of Daoism upon Hangzhou was not as strong as that of Buddhism, but it also has a history of its own. In the Jin dynasty (265–420), according to legend, Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343) practiced self-cultivation and achieved immortality on the mountains right next to West Lake, making Ge Peak (Geling 葛嶺) become one of the major scenic sites of West Lake. His story has also repeatedly been taken up by authors of fictional narrative, such as in “Traces of immortality on Ge Peak” (“Geling xian ji” 葛嶺仙蹟, XHJH 1). Among the historical personalities in West Lake fiction, this was probably the one which could be traced back the furthest. From the fiction writer’s perspective, Ge Hong was of almost symbolic significance. He represented one important aspect of West Lake culture, and as a consequence, the epoch in which he lived became rather irrelevant. Thus, “Traces of immortality on Ge Peak” includes an episode in which “Ge Hong leisurely strolls on Broken Bridge”, even though the place referred to here as “Broken Bridge” (Duanqiao 斷橋), according to *The tourist’s gazetteer of West Lake* (*Xihu youlan zhi* 西湖游覽志), “was originally named Precious Protection Bridge [Baoyouqiao 寶佑橋], and was called Broken Bridge from the Tang dynasty on”.³³ The term “West Lake” which appears throughout the tale “Traces of immortality on Ge Peak” “did not occur until in the collected works of individual Tang authors”.³⁴ In fact, this kind of anachronistic description reflected the idea prevalent among fiction writers to regard West Lake as a synchronic entirety. To an immortal, time posed even less of an obstacle. In the course of tradition, Daoism also became an indispensable ingredient of West Lake culture. The stereotypical descriptions as they occur in Song and Yuan vernacular stories, such as “The story of the three stupas in West Lake” (QPSTHB 3), of how “realized men” (*zhenren* 真人, i.e., men who have attained immortality through Daoist self-cultivation) subdued demons, reveal certain popular Daoist beliefs.

Since time immemorial, distinguished literati have gathered at West Lake, poets and men of letters have left behind innumerable beautiful lines and famous pieces. They reappear in West Lake fiction in large numbers. They add to the narrative text an ingredient expressing emotion and providing the story’s atmosphere with a prestigious foundation rich with sentiment and metaphorical meaning. This has already fully manifested itself in some Song and Yuan vernacular stories, such as in the introductory tale of “The story of the three stupas in West Lake”. There poetry in all its varieties is being exploited for praising “West

33 *Xihu youlan zhi*, 2.8.

34 *Hushan bianlan*, 1.11.

Lake's assets" (*Xihu haochu* 西湖好處) over and over again, thus creating a distinctly ironic foil for the sinister story of the main tale. To quote another example, "The Qiantang dream" ("Qiantang meng" 錢塘夢, earliest known edition 1498) has an extremely simple plot, but in the numerous quotations from poems and essays it included, it did not spare any effort to emphasize the poetic beauty and picturesque scenery of West Lake.³⁵ To the fiction writer, the use of poetry, first of all, remained closely connected to the narrative's plot. For instance, Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), while serving as the Prefect of Hangzhou, left behind more than two hundred poems in praise of West Lake. Accordingly, the tale "Traces of politics at Bai Dike" ("Baidi zheng ji" 白堤政蹟, XHJH 2) employed some of his poems, but none of the verses of landscape description with trivial sentiment. As a matter of fact, the more famous West Lake poems by Bai Juyi, such as "Spring stroll at Qiantang Lake" ("Qiantanghu chun xing" 錢塘湖春行), "On the Soul Retreat Monastery and the India Monasteries" ("Ti Lingyinsi yu Tianzhusi" 題靈隱寺與天竺寺), or "On the lake in spring" ("Chun ti hu shang" 春題湖上), have never been used in any fictional narrative. The tale "Traces of politics at Bai Dike" emphasizes the description of an episode about how Bai Juyi and Yuan Weizhi 元微之 (i.e. Yuan Zhen 元稹, 779–831), during their terms in office, competed with each other in the writing of landscape poetry. The respective poems by Bai Juyi and Yuan Weizhi were included in anthologies. The author added some slight retouches and some elaboration to the actual events behind this exchange of poems, so they exhibit both poetic sentiment and spirited wit. The author's attitude, of course, was by no means pedantic. Rather, just like any other author of popular fiction, for the sake of the plot he would deliberately fabricate episodes and make up fake verses.³⁶ The use of these lines still mainly lies in highlighting the beauty of the West Lake scenery.

At this point, Hangzhou drama should also be brought into the discussion. In *Old stories from Wulin* there is a section "Enumeration of drama pieces in official editions" ("Guanben zaju duan shu" 官本雜劇段數) which lists about 280 individual titles.³⁷ This mirrors the advanced level of Southern Song variety (*zaju* 雜劇) drama. The large majority of these titles are likely to have been produced or performed in Hangzhou. Moreover, there is evidence from books like

35 The story of "The Qiantang dream" has been recorded in various books, but its original text is not easy to identify. Cf. Hu, 1980, 1:339–342, where the full text has been rendered on the basis of a reprint appended to a Ming edition (1498) of *The story of the western wing* (*Xixiang ji* 西廂記).

36 E.g., see *Xihu jiahua*, 29.

37 *Wulin jiushi*, 10.508–512.

Description of the attractions in the capital,³⁸ that Song variety drama in Hangzhou brought about a qualitative leap. It is only due to the fact that none of the contemporary libretti have been preserved in any integral form, that we can hardly substantially describe or assess the nature of this leap. In the Yuan dynasty, for some time, Hangzhou became the center of variety drama with northern songs (*beiqu zaju* 北曲雜劇). The local drama of Wenzhou 溫州 also achieved its sudden and rapid development in Hangzhou. Based on entries in Zhuang Yifu's 莊一拂 *Comprehensive survey of extant catalogues of classic drama*,³⁹ there were in the Song and Yuan dynasties 16 authors native to Hangzhou, in the Ming dynasty 32, and in the Qing dynasty 36. Not included in these numbers are those important playwrights who lived in Hangzhou temporarily, such as Ma Zhiyuan 馬致遠 (c. 1260–1325), Zheng Guangzu 鄭光祖 (c. 1260 – c. 1320), Qiao Ji 喬吉 (c. 1280–1345), Qin Jianfu 秦簡夫 (unknown biographical data), and Li Yu (1611–1680). And there are clearly over one hundred plays about Hangzhou-related topics.⁴⁰ There are some parallels, but also some discrepancies between Hangzhou fiction and Hangzhou drama. Starting with those aspects they have in common, drama and fiction often share a similar ideological purport. For instance, the drama *Song of the Thunder Peak Pagoda by the Pavilion for Watching the Mountain* (*Kanshan'ge yuefu Leifengta* 看山閣樂府雷峰塔, 1738) by Huang Tubi 黃圖珌 (1700 – c. 1771), an author from Hangzhou, was closely based on the vernacular story and established the basic pattern of the “White Snake” (*Baishe* 白蛇) plays. The slightly later southern style drama (*chuanqi* 傳奇) *Thunder Peak Pagoda* (*Leifengta* 雷峰塔, 1771), by Fang Chengpei 方成培 (Qianlong era), introduced some changes to the thematic structure of this dramatic subject matter, allowing the advocacy of “passion” (*qing* 情) to reach new heights. Arguing from a different position, if compared to fictional narrative, the drama manifested a certain weakness with regard to the width and depth of subject matter and representation of life content, which was due to genre and the influence from the literati's conventions of literary creation. For instance, more than half the theatrical plays with a Hangzhou setting are historical plays. The kind of vivid representation of life in the marketplace, as it is found in fictional narrative, could hardly ever be seen on stage. However, at any rate, as the sister-art of vernacular fiction, the theatrical play provided a background for the development of fiction that deserves to be emphasized.

38 *Ducheng jisheng*, 96–97.

39 ZHUANG, 1982.

40 Cf. ZHONG, 1998:333–334.

While in the majority of cases fictional narrative provided the subject matter for theatrical plays, this kind of adaptation in itself might also have urged the fiction writers to pursue a certain dramatizing tendency in constructing their plots. Li Yu's position of regarding fiction as "silent opera" (*wusheng xi* 無聲戲)⁴¹ also had its origin therein.

There were amazingly large quantities of other West Lake documents, which provided plenty of source material for the creative work of fiction writers.⁴² The numerous specialized works about West Lake, such as Liu Yiqing's 劉一清 *Anecdotes of Qiantang* (*Qiantang yishi* 錢塘遺事), Wang Heyu's 汪何玉 *Remaining conversations from West Lake gatherings* (*Xizihu shicui yutan* 西子湖拾翠餘談), and Tian Rucheng's *Sightseer's gazetteer of West Lake* with its *Supplement*, were of even greater significance to the creative writing of fiction. For so many of the pieces in the *Second West Lake collection*, the source materials were directly derived from documents of local history like *The sightseer's gazetteer of West Lake* and its *Supplement*.⁴³ What needs to be especially emphasized here, however, is that the fiction writers, when they based themselves on such source material, usually further enhanced its regionalist flavor. For instance, the tale "Jin Yunu thrashes her fickle lover" ("Jin Yunu bang da boqinglang" 金玉奴棒打薄情郎, GJXS 27) includes some fairly vivid descriptions of Hangzhou's local folk customs and the sentiments of the people. Its subject matter was derived from the *Supplement to the sightseer's gazetteer of West Lake*, where there is merely a reference to "a beggar from Hangzhou",⁴⁴ whereas no particular details about local conditions and customs are given. In the story as it appears in *History of passion* (*Qing shi* 情史), even the reference to Hangzhou was dropped.⁴⁵ In "Lu Wuhan insists on keeping the embroidered shoes" ("Lu Wuhan ying liu hese xie" 陸五漢硬留合色鞋, XSHY 16), the local Hangzhou flavor is very strong, too. The corresponding entry in *History of passion* did not even refer to Hangzhou with a single word.⁴⁶ Apart from the peculiarities of the genre, such as conciseness, or exaggeration, far more important for

41 Cf. his collection of tales by the same title, *Wusheng xi*.

42 The six volumes of the series ZHOU, 1997, also include period-wise title lists of writings about Hangzhou.

43 On the sources of the *Second West Lake collection*, see: DAI, 1980; cf. HU, 1980, 2:596–608.

44 *Xihu youlan zhiyu*, 23.337.

45 *Qing shi*, 2.71–72 ("Shaoxing shiren" 紹興士人 [The scholar from Shaoxing]).

46 *Qing shi*, 18.603–604 ("Zhang Jin" 張蓋 [Zhang Jin]), quoted from *Jinglin xuji* 涇林續記 (Sequel to notes of Jinglin) by Zhou Yuanwei 周元暉 (*juren* 1585).

this state of affairs was, it seems, the conditioning by the recipients of vernacular fiction and their function, which was quite different from the classical story of the “jotting” (*biji* 筆記) type.

Hangzhou's rich cultural characteristics not only manifested themselves in written documents, but also in some kind of tradition and atmosphere diffused throughout the streets and alleys and floating among the landscape of lake and mountains. Quoting a word from the author's preface to the *Charming stories from West Lake*, “all over the place there are poetic inscriptions, and site after site ultimately turns into a charming story.”⁴⁷ For this reason, in selecting a topic or writing a description, quite naturally the fiction writers were influenced by this background of local culture. For instance, the tale “Young Master Shen takes seven lives with one bird” (GJXS 26) was derived from a story which widely circulated in Hangzhou. In Lang Ying's 郎瑛 (1487–1566) *Categorized draft notes on seven categories of learning* (*Qixiu leigao* 七修類稿), following the recorded narrative of this story, it is especially mentioned that “up to our days, the Hangzhou people refer to a source of trouble as ‘Shen's little bird’ [*Shen niaor* 沈鳥兒].”⁴⁸ To give another example, the tale “Traces of the dream at Three Terraces” (“Santai meng ji” 三台夢蹟, XHJH 8) relates the story of Yu Qian 于謙 (1398–1457). Its title includes the word “dream”, but it is also related to a folk legend of Hangzhou. Preceding it, the ending of the Ming dynasty novel *The complete story of how Junior Guardian Yu gathered loyal men* (*Yu shaobao cui zhong quanzhuan* 于少保萃忠全傳) already had mentioned that Duke Yu (Yu gong 于公) appeared in somebody's dream and made a revelation.⁴⁹ The tale “Traces of the dream at Three Terraces” gave prominence to this episode, claiming that, after the Wanli 萬曆 period (1573–1619), “there was an endless stream of people who came to Yu Shrine to pray for a dream [of revelation]. Consequently, annexes were built to the shrine as ‘sites of praying for dreams [of revelation]’ [*qimengsuo* 祈夢所], in which lanterns and candles turned the night into broad daylight. Bows and prayers offered with an upright heart would unfailingly be responded by a dream manifestation.”⁵⁰ Li Yu, in his collection of vernacular stories *Priceless jade* (*Liancheng bi* 連城璧), also mentioned the ritual practice of praying for dreams at Yu Shrine, and that everybody was amazed about it.⁵¹ And in the Qing dynasty, Lu Ciyun 陸次雲, in his *Miscella-*

47 *Xihu jiahua*, 260.

48 *Qi xiu lei gao*, 2:45.653–654.

49 *Yu shaobao cui zhong quanzhuan*, 40.206.

50 *Xihu jiahua*, 139.

51 *Liancheng bi*, “Waibian juan ci” 外編卷次, 5.359.

neous notes about the cowards at the lake (*Hunuo zaji* 湖儒雜記), stated that “there have been numerous amazing responses to dream prayers at Yu’s tomb”, and that “the extraordinary dreams at Yu’s tomb are innumerable”.⁵² This can prove that the fiction writers’ seemingly insignificant descriptions actually were based on reality.

In fact, quite a lot of fictional narratives refer to the regionalist background and the factual basis of the content represented in the text. In “An artisan from Tiantai is erroneously called in for pleasure” (“Tiantai jiang wu zhao lequ” 天台匠誤招樂趣, XHEJ 28), it is stated that “this episode was being told all over Hangzhou, and everybody thought it was a contemporary legend”.⁵³ Another tale from the same collection, “Scented flowers and stinky grass do not fit into the same vase” (“Xun you bu tong qi” 薰蕕不同器, XHEJ 32), relates the story of Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596–658), a prime minister under the Taizong 太宗 reign (627–649) of the Tang dynasty. In the ending it mentions that “due to his loyalty and uprightness, up to the present day, the Hangzhou people have continued to call the place where he had been living ‘Zhu’s Hall’. The place has been considered so important that, up to the present day, incense and candles have continuously been offered there.”⁵⁴ Statements such as these are not necessarily always true and reliable. For instance, in “Prefect Qiao willfully interchanges names in the register of marriages” (XSHY 8), the main story takes place in Hangzhou, and it is also explicitly stated that “this episode stirred up trouble in Hangzhou prefecture”.⁵⁵ However, the story in its original form was about people from Guangzhou or Kunshan 昆山, but apparently did not refer to Hangzhou.⁵⁶ The intention behind such a procedure of shifting by the author is not easy to assess. But the episode, which in the ending is referred to as “the false matching on the register of marriages”, “was considered a good story in the streets and alleys of Hangzhou”.⁵⁷ To some extent this mirrors the author’s sensitivity to the social thought and mentality of Hangzhou. Therefore, it is important to understand that the fiction writers’ plot composition and description closely corresponded to Hangzhou people’s ways of thinking and feeling. For instance, in the tale “Li Fengniang’s cruel jealousy gets punished by Heaven” (“Li Fengniang kudu zao tian qian” 李鳳娘酷妒遭天譴, XHEJ 5), Li Feng-

52 *Hunuo zaji*, 14.

53 *Xihu erji*, 483.

54 *Xihu erji*, 556.

55 *Xingshi hengyan*, 175.

56 Cf. TAN, 1980, 2:424–427.

57 *Xingshi hengyan*, 175.

niang's "cruel jealousy" is extremely exaggerated, while her tragic end is also described. In the ending the author commented as follows: "All the common folk of Lin'an and the people in the palace alike without exception said that Heaven has eyes [to watch the goings-on in the world]." ⁵⁸ It can be said that statements of a similar kind are extremely common in West Lake fiction. Evidently, this was a narrative strategy by the authors who hoped to display thus that they themselves shared the standpoint of the Hangzhou people, and thereby stimulated the readers' identification with the regionalism in their works.

Intriguingly, the development of West Lake fiction apparently paralleled the ups and downs of West Lake landscape. In the Northern Song, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) devoted great efforts to the renovation of West Lake, ⁵⁹ and in the Southern Song, Zhou Cong 周淙 (fl. 1160–1170) and Zhao Jiezhai 趙節齋 also successively dredged the lake. It was exactly against this background that the first major wave of West Lake fiction emerged. In the Yuan, when the court let West Lake fall into disrepair and turned it into a basin for liberating live fish, the lake gradually filled up with silt and its surface was unbearably covered with water plants. Quite correspondingly, in the period from the late Yuan to the early Ming, West Lake fiction also showed slight signs of desolation. As late as the era Hongzhi 弘治 (1488–1505) of the Ming dynasty, when Yang Mengying 楊孟瑛 served as prefect of Hangzhou, between 1503 and 1508, there was another major project of dredging West Lake, and it did not take long for West Lake fiction to respond with a new wave. As another intriguing fact, the majority of those officials who had put in order West Lake, throughout the ages, had their good names recorded in history. They were praised by the people and also were frequently described by fiction writers, as it was the case for Bai Juyi, Su Shi and others. Those, however, who had built up the city of Hangzhou, were rarely mentioned, although they would equally have deserved to be lauded for their achievements. They did not become the object of commendation in fiction, either. Qian Liu 錢鏐 (852–932), for instance, had twice extended the city of Hangzhou and shaped up the city's basic layout throughout history. Although fiction writers thought extremely highly of Qian Liu as a character, they men-

58 *Xihu erji*, 86.

59 In 1089, when Su Shi came to Hangzhou for the second time, almost half of West Lake had been silted up. Consequently he submitted to the court the "Petition [to use the funds gained from the issuing of] monks' certificates for a renovation of Hangzhou's West Lake" ("Hangzhou qi dudie kai Xihu zhuang" 杭州乞度牒開西湖狀), in which he powerfully laid out five arguments why West Lake must not fall into disrepair. This petition is a famous piece among the West Lake writings. See *Su Shi wenji*, 3:30.863–866.

tioned his historical achievements in constructing the city frequently only in passing, for instance, in “The king of Wu and Yue is reborn to the world to [take back] his former empire” (“Wu-Yue wang zai shi suo jiangshan” 吳越王再世索江山, XHEJ 1). This tendency in the treatment of historical subject matters in fact also mirrored the fiction writers’ interests to style the king as a hero, but not as a city founder.

Therefore, in discussing the cultural background, the ideological influences must not be ignored. While in the history of Hangzhou’s cultural development works appeared which offered a comprehensive description of the city, such as the *Record of the millet dream* or *The tourist’s gazetteer of West Lake*, nevertheless, the literati’s concern for the city’s features, generally speaking, hardly ever went beyond an interest in the natural landscape and the sites of human civilization. While, on the one hand, they admittedly enjoyed the comfortable and pleasant sides of urban life, on the other hand, they inevitably adopted a certain critical attitude toward the prevailing customs of life in the city. In the literati’s collected works we easily find statements such as the following one by Su Shi:

The folk customs in the three Wu⁶⁰ have degenerated ever since antiquity, but most severely in Qiantang. Although the houses there are luxurious and in good condition, and although their bedding and clothing look fresh, nine out of ten houses lack a store room for storing grain.⁶¹

Similar statements are found in the following quotations: “Hangzhou people are simple, superficial, and given to bragging, as well as good-natured, pretty, and clean”;⁶² or Hangzhou people “are frivolous and shallow in their customs and habits”.⁶³ Statements like these reflect a common tendency of thinking, that is, a critique of urban consumer culture. This sort of critique nearly accompanies to Hangzhou’s development, the only exception to the rule being the late Ming. On the one hand, the late Ming literati continued to retain the inherent mentality of

60 The geographical expression “three Wu” (*san Wu* 三吳) had varying references. In the Song it referred to either the three prefectures of Suzhou, Changzhou, and Huzhou, or more generally the region of the lower reaches of the Yangzi River.

61 *Su Shi wenji*, 4:48.1402 (“Shang Lü Bushe lun Zhexi zaishang shu” 上呂仆射論浙西災傷書 [Letter to Lü Bushe on the catastrophe in western Zhejiang]).

62 *Songchao shishi leiyan*, 2:60.789 (“Hangren hao shi men chuang shen qi” 杭人好飾門窗什器 [About the things Hangzhou people love to decorate their doors and windows with]).

63 *Guling xiansheng wenji*, 20.1b (“Hangzhou quan xue wen” 杭州勸學文 [Essay on how to encourage learning in Hangzhou]).

men of letters, and thus were full of praise for the high elegance of West Lake, whereby they clearly dissociated themselves from the vulgar masses; on the other hand, they also were subject to the “materialist” and “sensualist” *zeitgeist* of their era, and they indulged in the sensual pleasures of life as they are distinctly given expression to in the writings of men like Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610) and Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597 – ca. 1684). Essentially, it seems, this was still a reflection of Hangzhou’s urban particularities. With regard to West Lake fiction, it should also be viewed in this way. That is to say, the exceptional cultural background of West Lake exerted a profound influence on the basic character of fiction.

3 The Popular and Learned Character of West Lake Fiction

In the above I have presented an outline of the origin and background of West Lake fiction, whereas I have not touched upon its particularities and its literary character yet. But this is exactly what I believe to be the one point in its regionalism which most deserves our attention. As it is commonly known, the art of storytelling has usually addressed a particularly urban audience. Therefore it was quite natural that the storytellers wanted to cater to the tastes of their audience by using characters, stories, and language that they were familiar with and which they liked. This habitude has still remained ubiquitous even after the vernacular story had been turned into written form. To give a trivial example, in the opening section of the narrative “Madam Bai is eternally banned under Thunder Peak Pagoda” (JSTY 28), when referring to Hangzhou’s West Gate (Ximen 西門) during the Jin dynasty, the author points out that “it is present-day Golden Flood Gate [Yongjinmen 涌金門]”. He also mentions that “at the foot of the mountain there is a pavilion, which is nowadays called Cold Spring Pavilion [Lengquanting 冷泉亭]”.⁶⁴ In relating how Xu Xuan 許宣 went to say prayers for his ancestors, the author moreover adds the following description:

Xu Xuan left the shop, passed through Longevity and Peace Lane [Shouanfang 壽安坊] and Flower Market Street [Huashijie 花市街], crossed Well Pavilion Bridge [Jingtingqiao 井亭橋], and made for Qiantang Gate behind Clear River Street [Qinghejie 清河街]. Presently he crossed Stone Receptacle Bridge [Shihanqiao 石函橋], went past the Reprieved Creatures Tablet [Fangshengbei 放生碑], and reached Baoshu Pagoda Monastery [Baoshu-

64 *Jingshi tongyan*, 416; translation adapted from CHANG, 1973:218.

tasi 保叔塔寺]. [...] He walked with unhurried steps along Western Calm Bridge [Xiningqiao 西寧橋], Solitary Hill Road [Gushanlu 孤山路], and the Four Sages' Temple [Sishengguan 四聖觀], intending to pay a visit to the tomb of Lin Bu and linger near the Six-in-Unity Fountain [Liuyiquan 六一泉].⁶⁵

Similar descriptions are fairly common in some related tales. These real place names, as they are especially pointed out and listed, provide a prerequisite condition to the narrative's meaningfulness, that is, the extreme familiarity with the local topography on the side of both author and readers, whereby the recipients' feelings of intimacy and immediate presence could be stimulated. It goes without saying that such feelings can only be one aspect of regionalist literature. Essentially, both the popular character of vernacular fiction and the literati standpoint of fiction writers found their distinct expression in West Lake fiction. This expression, moreover, in all respects was closely related to Hangzhou and West Lake. This is probably the one point among the literary characteristics of West Lake fiction that deserves our attention most.

The opposition as well as contact of the "elegant" (*ya* 雅) and the "vulgar" (*su* 俗) is a frequently occurring phenomenon in literature since the Song. However, there has been some occasional controversy about the actual nature of this phenomenon and even about whether it existed or not. At so many instances, this controversy ignored one important fact. What is usually referred to as the "elegant" and the "vulgar" is not a simple representation in art, and even less it is a question of character or status. Rather, each category has a specific corresponding socio-cultural foundation. Only if we start out from this constantly changing socio-cultural foundation, can we achieve a more in-depth grasp of the "elegant" and the "vulgar" and their mutual relationship. As a great capital Hangzhou stands out as a representative case in the history of the development of the traditional Chinese city. There were "in the markets pearls displayed, / houses filled with silks – / all vie in extravagance",⁶⁶ but the city also embraced the cultural ethos of romantic landscape and eccentric life style. This dual character naturally also found its expression in West Lake fiction, constituting the unique cultural tension and artistic life of West Lake fiction.

First of all, West Lake fiction possesses the traits of popular culture to a rather uneven extent. The growth of these traits is not only related to the charac-

65 *Jingshi tongyan*, 419–420; translation adapted from CHANG, 1973:219–220.

66 These lines are taken from Liu Yong's 柳永 (987–1053) song-poem (*ci* 詞) "Wang haichao" 望海潮 (Watching the tide). Cf. *Quan Song ci*, 1:39; translation based on HIGHTOWER, 1982:40.

ter of vernacular fiction, but was even more closely linked to the city life as mirrored in these works. Fictional narratives are not source material for social history, since it would be impossible for us to find in it any comprehensive and all-encompassing descriptions of the city. But if we read related works in a sequence, we still achieve a relatively distinct and comprehensive impression of the city. For instance, in the tale “A ghost stirs up trouble in the western pavilion by sending plum flowers” (“Ji meihua gui nao xige” 寄梅花鬼鬧西閣, XHEJ 11), there is an extensive passage “offering a general description of the prosperous conditions of Lin’an”.⁶⁷ To the fiction writer this image of prosperity was far more than a superficial survey, but it was rather a reflection of a city person’s love and pride for the city in which he was born and raised. Even more importantly, this image of prosperous Hangzhou was closely related with the daily lives of ordinary people. If the fiction writer had cut himself off from the various human relationships surrounding the commercial activities in the city, his fictional characters would have had nothing to live on, and the author’s narration would have lost its foundation. Such descriptions in fictional narrative have always been linked to the trends and developments in social life, and perhaps in an even more specific manner than in any common historical source material. For instance, in traditional China, people mostly used wood as the construction material for houses, therefore fire easily broke out, and particularly so in a big city like Hangzhou. In the *Dynastic history of the Song*, there is a record of the fires in the more than 140 years while Lin’an was the capital of the Southern Song. During this time span there occurred over thirty devastating conflagrations, and this statistic is not even complete. In the largest incident “58 097 buildings burned down, [covering a range of] more than ten *li* inside and outside the city wall, [...] there were 59 casualties [from fire] and an indefinite number of people who had been trampled to death”.⁶⁸ In a tale from the *Second West Lake collection*, entitled “The moustache of the God of the Eastern Peak as a reward for taking the responsibility [for a fire incident]” (“Ren hui lu Dongyue di zhong xu” 認回祿東岳帝種須, XHEJ 24), there is a passage which had been elaborated on the basis of a related account in the *Supplement to the tourist’s gazetteer of West Lake*.⁶⁹ It includes the following description:

The story goes that there had always been a lot of fire incidents in Hangzhou. The reasons for this were that the people’s living quarters were standing so close together, and that there

67 *Xihu erji*, 182.

68 *Song shi*, 5:63.1382.

69 *Xihu youlan zhiyu*, 25.359–360.

were hardly any brick walls, but in most places only bamboo fences [separating one house from another]. Thus, there were five different kinds [of causes] for the numerous fires in Hangzhou: Due to the cramped space, a fire breaking out from a stove could easily spread. The living quarters were commonly separated by wooden fences, whereas separating walls made from bricks were particularly rare. During the Buddhist festivals there were grand offering ceremonies. The families made Buddhist halls, where lanterns were lighted all through the nights, so the pendants at the streamers could catch fire from there. When there was reckless drinking during the nights, the servants were drunk and tired, so they would carelessly cast away the ashes. The women were pretty and sluggish, so when lighting their lanterns, they would make mistakes from oversight.⁷⁰

The plot of this piece of fictional narrative revolves around the setting off of a fire incident. Although the description of the protagonist Zhou Bida 周必大, acting as the prime minister, includes some unrealistic elements, the details about the official investigation and legal persecution following the fire incident nevertheless also represent one aspect of city administration in the old days. To give another example, there is a similar episode in a tale included in the collection *Words as a model for the world* (*Xing shi yan*), “Young Wu vainly hopes for the flower in the courtyard; a rapist ingeniously applies the hand in the cloud” (“Wu lang wang yi yuan zhong hua; jiangun qiao shi yun li shou” 吳郎妄意院中花 奸棍巧施雲裡手; XSY 26). When a tailor Zhao 趙 in Qiantang district makes his testimony as a neighbor, the official suspects him of having bribed his neighbors:

Tailor Zhao hastily replied: “If you consult the ten-families plate, after Zhang Ke there comes Zhao Zhi, who is in the tailoring business, and this is my own humble person.” When the sub-prefectural magistrate asked to have a look at it, he saw that [the following names and professions] were listed on it: Zhou Ren, wine shop-keeper; Wu Yue, looms; Qian Ten, plasterer; Sun Jing, porter; Feng Huan, hairdresser; Li Zixiao, peddler; Wang Chun, furrier; Jiang Dacheng, mirror-polisher.⁷¹

What is being described in this passage is the *lijia* 里甲 system in the city.⁷² From a side aspect it also reflects the composition of Hangzhou’s society in the late Ming. Any such vivid account could not easily be found in official history.

In fact, fiction writers often displayed in their works an overall grasp of Hangzhou. For instance, in the story collection *Clapping the hands to break with the world* (*Guzhang juechen* 鼓掌絕塵), there is the tale “While amusing at

70 *Xihu erji*, 394.

71 *Xing shi yan*, 433–434.

72 Cf. HUCKER, 1975:310.

West Lake flinging at a clay Boddhisatva; on a tour to Jingzhou angrily beating up a fake immortal” (“Shua Xihu xi zhi ni pusa; zhuan Jingzhou nu da jia shen-xian” 耍西湖喜擲泥菩薩 轉荊州怒打假神仙; GZJC 13)⁷³ in which the author makes use of a Hangzhou character as a mouthpiece for the following introduction:

“[...] We Hangzhou people in the trading business can be classified into different categories: having a huge fortune, being a salt merchant, or a timber merchant, or running a pawnshop: these are the top businesses, with large capital and fixed provisions. As a second choice, there is peddling gauze and silk, running a book-shop, a shop for tin-foil-coated paper money [offered for the dead], a weaving mill, a shop for scented fans, or a clothing shop: these businesses require very little capital, just several thousand *jin* will do. Outsiders are not familiar with the special tricks of these businesses, therefore they go bankrupt. As for those who run a tiny business, it only takes a year of crop failure, or someone’s crafty fraud, for them to barely sustain themselves, just getting along, unable even to complete a single deal. [...] We Hangzhou people are truly crafty. [...] We classify the population in the city of Hangzhou in three different categories: upper, middle, and lower. [...] What we love most, here in Hangzhou, is cheating strangers. [...]”⁷⁴

But at the same time, the author of this text took great delight in describing the beautiful scenery of West Lake.⁷⁵ All this demonstrates his thorough understanding of Hangzhou, which also became the text’s narrative basis. Related to this, moreover, some fiction writers held a strong interest in some of the unique social phenomena emerging in the city. For instance, the tale from *Words as a model for the world*, referred to above, includes an extremely detailed description of a complicated case of marriage fraud, which occurred in the city of Hangzhou (XSY 26).⁷⁶ It is not only that the characters in this text are common citizens, but the peculiarities of city life also provide the precondition for this fraud case to happen. In the *Supplement to the tourist’s gazetteer of West Lake* there were already reports about some similar patterns of criminal acts that had recently occurred in the city.⁷⁷ From this we can infer that this kind of story easily gained acknowledgement from the fellow citizens who were recipients of fiction.

73 The original edition of this work included a poem of appreciation dated 1631. While the author, known by his pseudonym Carefree Man of Metal and Wood (Jinmu Sanren 金木散人) was from Suzhou, most of the commentators were from Hangzhou. Cf. HANAN, 1981:235n58.

74 *Guzhang juechen*, 13.160.

75 *Guzhang juechen*, 13.161–162.

76 *Xing shi yan*, 422–436.

77 *Xihu youlan zhiyu*, 25.368.

In some works of West Lake fiction, there was also some reflection of the attitude toward life, the cultural psychology, and the social customs unique to Hangzhou people. Descriptions of social customs and public sentiments were particularly numerous. For example, the tale “In a period of partial peace Song emperor Gaozong abandons himself to leisure and pleasure” (“Song Gaozong pianan dan yiyu” 宋高宗偏安耽逸豫, XHEJ 2) includes descriptions of how the emperor joined the common people at two social customs of Hangzhou, the “strolling and shopping” (*youguan maimai* 游觀買賣) and “watching the tide” (*guan chao* 觀潮). The extreme detail in these descriptions led A Ying 阿英 (pseudonym of Qian Xingcun 錢杏邨, 1900–1977) to the statement: “After some editing, selecting and rearranging, these passages would make a good *Gazetteer of the social customs in Hangzhou*.”⁷⁸ There had actually been quite a lot of local documents about West Lake, and the materials to be consulted about such social customs are not few, either. But the author did not adopt them in any common way; and he did not just express his deep affection for Hangzhou, either. In fact, he also mirrored the attitude commonly shared among Ming dynasty literati of having a predilection for the vulgar and of appreciating the real. As viewed from the perspective of fictional narration, the representation of these social customs was a slight digression from the plot. This is also true for the tale “Xing Junrui has a clandestine rendezvous after five years” (“Xing Junrui wu zai youqi” 邢君瑞五載幽期, XHEJ 14), when describing the social custom of sticking in willow twigs for the Pure-and-Bright (*qingming* 清明) festival.⁷⁹ But in some cases there is a connection to the plot arrangement, such as in the tale “Li Fengniang’s cruel jealousy gets punished by Heaven” (XHEJ 5), where we find the following description:

There is a Hangzhou custom for the eve of the festival of ‘praying for the skill’ [*qiqiao* 乞巧],⁸⁰ on [the seventh day] of the seventh month: They pound juice from the flowers of the touch-me-not [*fengxianhua* 鳳仙花, lit. ‘phoenix immortal’], using it to dye their fingernails red, which makes these look like red jade. They find this beautiful. [...] In Song times they called this flower ‘golden phoenix flower’ [*jinfenghua* 金鳳花] or ‘little phoenix flower’ [*fengerhua* 鳳兒花]. However, since Empress Li’s pet name was Lady Phoenix [Fengniang 鳳娘], there was a taboo [of character usage] in the six palaces, so no one dared

78 A, 1985:10.

79 Cf. *Xihu erji*, pp. 241–242.

80 This was a festival reserved for women who, on that day, commonly brought offerings to the Weaving Maiden (Zhinü 織女) and prayed to her for the skills of needlework. Cf. ZHONG, 1983:329.

to pronounce the word 'phoenix', and everyone called it 'good daughter's flower' [*haonièrhua* 好女兒花] instead.⁸¹

The description of social customs in this as well as other passages is not just simple background information, but rather it is linked to the plot arrangement and the characterization. Regardless of whether and how the representation of social customs was linked to the narrative plot, it always was a vivid manifestation of the regional flavor of fiction. For West Lake fiction, with its self-conscious and increasingly conspicuous regionalism, it was even less a dispensable element.

Due to the city's openness as a political, cultural, and economic center, throughout history, large numbers of people from other parts of the Song empire migrated to Hangzhou as fugitives in times of turmoil. Even in peaceful periods, people from other regions moved to Hangzhou and became local residents in considerable numbers. Today's local natives may have been yesterday's strangers. Therefore, the regionalism of West Lake fiction, despite its tolerance, is also full of contradictions. In fictional narratives this is evident from the attitudes of Hangzhou people toward people from other regions. On the one hand, in fiction, there are quite a lot of protagonists who originate from a different place and live away from home in Hangzhou. For instance, in the tale "The oil vendor monopolizes the flower-queen" (XSHY 3), both Qin Zhong and Shen Yaoqin are native of Dongjing and have come to Hangzhou as fugitives fleeing the turmoil of war. In the tale "A chivalrous girl distributes her wealth and dies chaste" ("Xianü san cai xun jie" 俠女散財殉節, XHEJ 19) there is a description of Mongols' lives in Hangzhou. The narrative "A sly courtesan helps her fiancé make himself a name" (*Qiao ji zuo fu cheng ming* 巧妓佐夫成名, XHEJ 20) relates the story of love and marriage between a Bianliang licentiate and a Hangzhou courtesan. Perhaps this extreme regional diversity and heterogeneity was constitutive for the city's population. The *Record of the millet dream*, in a passage introducing the folk customs of Hangzhou, especially praised the Hangzhou people's "exalted friendship toward people from other places".⁸² In some works, however, we can also discover discrimination against people from other regions. The tale "A girl seduces her neighbor by playing the phoenix flute" ("Chui fengxiao nü you dongqiang" 吹鳳簫女誘東牆, XHEJ 12) provides a fairly typical case. Its male protagonist, Pan Yongzhong 潘用中, is native of the Fujian region and

81 *Xihu erji*, 77. For a description of a Southern Song Lin'an custom originating at the imperial court, cf. a subsequent passage, *ibid.*, 79.

82 *Meng liang lu*, 18.281.

came to Lin'an as a manservant along with his father. The female protagonist, Huang Xingchun 黃杏春, on the other hand, is kin with the imperial clan and came from Bianliang by carriage. It was exactly a peculiarity of contemporary Lin'an, as the new political center, that people moved there and stayed there temporarily for official business. Both of the two people originally were not native from Hangzhou, but since the Huang family had arrived there earlier and settled down, they were considered Hangzhou people, whereas the Pan family had come there only to get hired as menservants and were still considered "non-local people". And indeed, this circumstance becomes the biggest obstacle to the marriage of the 'talent-and-beauty' couple in this tale. As for "Madam Bai is eternally banned under Thunder Peak Pagoda" (JSTY 28), one reason why Madam Bai falls so deeply in love with Xu Xuan is that "madam adores the good looks of you Hangzhou men", as she tells him.⁸³ Was there perhaps also some self-praise of the Hangzhou people implied in this?

The use of local dialect is unusually common in West Lake fiction. Some information about Hangzhou local dialect was included in books like the *The sighteer's gazetteer of West Lake*. The local dialect in fictional narrative comes from the characters' mouths, and therefore it is often more lively as compared to the language of normal documents. In the tale "The God of Literature has compassion for a talent and adds his name late on the register of careers" ("Wenchangsi lian cai man zhu luji" 文昌司怜才慢注祿籍, XHEJ 15), when relating how the words of Luo Yin 羅隱, a Hangzhou person, were responded to by the spirits, it is explained that "this was the origin of Zhejiang people's use of the phrase 'Luo Yin breaks the topic' [*Luo Yin ti po* 羅隱題破] in all kinds of situations".⁸⁴ This was a popular idiom related to regional characters. In the tale "A false match arranged by the Old Man Under the Moon was due to a previous existence" ("Yuxialao cuo pei ben shu qianyuan" 月下老錯配本屬前緣, XHEJ 16), a popular saying from Hangzhou is quoted to characterize a foolish man: "The old crow from Flown-Here Peak [Feilaifeng 飛來峰] – a thing that specializes in pecking stones."⁸⁵ This was a popular aphorism referring to a local place name. There are too many examples to be listed here one by one. Such popular proverbs with an extreme degree of regionalism could not be applied by non-local people, and probably they even were not quite comprehensible to them. The use of popular expressions from local dialect in great numbers did indeed

83 *Jingshi tongyan*, 441.

84 *Xihu erji*, 251.

85 *Xihu erji*, 270.

enhance the regionalism of fictional narrative, and it provided the works with a lively atmosphere.

The most important manifestation of urban popular culture still was, of course, the trend toward vulgarization in the fields of thought and ideas. For instance, in the tale “A sly courtesan helps her fiancé make himself a name” (XHEJ 20), the author used a character as a mouthpiece to voice a lot of opinions. His cynicism about the lettered elite of his time is saturated with the ideology of plebeian society. Cao Miaoge 曹妙哥, the “sly courtesan”, gives a speech to the impoverished student, Wu Erzhi 吳爾知, in which she vindicates gambling.⁸⁶ This was out of tune with the mainstream social ideology of the time. Quite obviously, the author assumed the common people’s stance, venting his anger about society. Moreover, the fact that he called this fraudulent courtesan a “sly courtesan” and gave a positive description of her reflects on his acknowledgement of the concept of popular society.

As discussed further above, Hangzhou culture possessed a dual character. Apart from its urban popular character, it also exhibited a distinct literati flavor. If viewed from the perspective of the history of fictional narrative, the popular character of West Lake fiction apparently tended to decrease, while its literati flavor was constantly intensifying. In the *Second West Lake collection* there are only few pieces that really take the society of the marketplace as their object of description, such as in “Zhang Cailian takes revenge the year after having suffered injustice” (“Zhang Cailian genian yuanbao” 張采蓮隔年冤報, XHEJ 13). The West Lake tales among the vernacular fiction presumably originating from the Song and Yuan, however, have common citizens as protagonists without exception. The Ming dynasty works in Feng Menglong’s three collections of tales are also permeated with the life atmosphere of the marketplace society. In terms of cultural characteristics, the collection *Antagonists in love* (*Huanxi yuanjia*) represents a rather special case. If judged from the stories’ contents, they are generally very shallow and vulgar, but their style of writing occasionally still betrays the literati ideology. The *Collected reminiscences from West Lake* (*Xihu shiyi*) included only a single piece from Feng Menglong’s three collections, whereas all the other texts had been selected from the *Second West Lake collection* and *The charming stories from West Lake*. The exception was “The oil vendor monopolizes the flower-queen” (XSHY 3), which almost fully copied the original work. Only the “market talk about events in the brothel” in the ending

86 Cf. *Xihu erji*, 341.

was omitted.⁸⁷ In this change, however small and subtle it may have been, we can discover an increase in the story's literati flavor. In fact, after professional fiction writing had become a common practice for literati, the tales about the society of the marketplace were quite naturally enshrouded by an even more intense literati atmosphere. In the tale "The king of Wu and Yue is reborn to the world to [take back] his former empire" (XHEJ 1), there is an extensive discussion expounding the literati author's creative conception:

Gentle reader, what would you say? – Here is a highly learned young talent, who has three thousand *zhang* of heroic spirit in his breast, who has authored several hundred *juan* of marvelous writings, who can discourse about the present as well as about the past, and whose brush writes as quick as the wind, once it has been set in motion. Truly, he is shrouded in mist, blazing with color; he has Zijian's talent [to compose a verse] while making seven steps,⁸⁸ he writes rhapsodies like Wang Can on ascending the tower.⁸⁹ – Such a man should be installed in the highest official ranks, in one of the Three Communicating Agencies. He should be given luxurious housing to live in, and he should be made to enjoy the delicacies of a hundred flavors, seven precious beds, a writing table made from green jade, a clock of colored glaze, and amber cups. This would not even go too far. – But how insupportable is the God of Destiny, Heaven's eyes must be blind, making him undergo hardships instead, letting him live in utter destitution, with nothing decent to wear and to eat, not even a meal which would deserve to be called a meal. All day long he has these worn-out books in his hand, reciting without end the archaic formulae of the ancient classics. Indeed, he has nothing to cry or laugh about, to shout or dance. – What would you say? Is he a pitiful person or not? – Thus, he has no choice but to make the best out of his situation. Without any hurry he has produced this volume of fiction, which in the future will casually circulate in the world.⁹⁰

The inherent qualities of the neglected scholar and the psyche of the young talent led the literati writer of fictional narrative to seek all the more the expression of his personal emotions in the tales he wrote. And these personal emotions were derived partly from reality, partly from books. They were bound to either dilute, or to deflect from, the exploration and description of life as such.

87 *Xingshi hengyan*, 68; cf. *Xihu shiyi*, 506.

88 Allusion to Cao Zhi 曹植 (*zi* Zijian 子建, 192–232), who was famed as an ingeniously quick and brilliant poet.

89 Allusion to Wang Can 王粲 (177–217), who like Cao Zhi (cf. note above) was one of the Seven Masters of the Jian'an era, and considered the most brilliant among them. His most famous piece is "Deng lou fu" 登樓賦 (Rhapsody on ascending a tower).

90 *Xihu erji*, 2–3.

The texts about Qian Liu provide a representative individual case. Qian Liu was the foremost celebrity in the history of Hangzhou. He is referred to in so many works of West Lake fiction. A tale included in *Stories old and new*, entitled “Qian Poliu begins his career in Lin’an district” (“Lin’an li Qian Poliu faji” 臨安裡錢婆留發跡, GJXS 21), shares with other vernacular stories on the theme of a hero’s “rise to power and position” (*faji biantai* 發跡變泰)⁹¹ the common ideological tendency of envy at one who has success. Such envy has an even more realistic appeal, as it is combined with a description of the successful one’s humble life prior to his rise to power and position. The tale “The king of Wu and Yue is reborn to the world to [take back] his former empire” (XHEJ 1) has a slightly different content.⁹² The author tells us:

Now, the affair of the King of Wu and Yue’s rise to power has already been related by our forefathers. Why would my humble self have to relate it once again? Our forefathers merely have told the episodes of his descent and enfeoffment, whereas what my humble self is presenting in this fictional tale differs from that: It relates the karmic causality, the mechanism of karmic retribution across more than one existence, and the radical turnover. Thus only can be shown the relationship of *yin* and *yang*, of flower and fruit, and of action and consequence. It will appear like calculation on the abacus: one bead added to the one side, one bead subtracted on the other side. There cannot be the slightest miscalculation.⁹³

The phrase “has already been related by our forefathers” was most likely referring to *Stories old and new*. Zhou Qingyuan did not place the narrative focus on “the episodes of [the king’s] descent and enfeoffment”, but concentrated rather on the manifestation of karmic retribution. This was exactly a reflection of the fictional turn away from the temperament and taste of urban society and toward the conceptual world of the literati. In the tale from the *Charming stories of West Lake*, entitled “Traces of the hegemon at Qiantang” (“Qiantang ba ji” 錢塘霸蹟, XHJH 12), the manifestation of its literati character is even more pro-

91 Cf. HANAN, 1973:171.

92 Due to the King of Wu and Yue’s importance to Hangzhou, I believe that there must have been a story about him in the *First West Lake Collection* (*Xihu yiji* 西湖一集). As seen from the arrangement of the *Second Collection*, all the six tales in the front are about dukes and kings. This organizational feature could hardly have been arbitrary. Apart from the single reference to the *First Collection* in the *Second Collection* (*Xihu erji*, 17.283), even the prefaces to the *Second Collection* do not even refer to the *First Collection* by a single word. This would seem quite unreasonable, and therefore I have my doubts about whether the missing *First Collection* has ever been completed, edited and printed.

93 *Xihu erji*, 4.

minent. This is most evident from the discussion in high literary style by which the tale opens.⁹⁴ At the end of the tale, the author also voiced the same mood of “respect and admiration”.⁹⁵ Moreover, from the actual plot we can also infer about the author’s narrative attitude. He emphasized the hero’s actions “after he had made it”. Therefore, in relating Qian Liu’s life prior to the enfeoffment as king, he could easily pass over the description of Qian’s unworthy mixing with the marketplace. He even could attribute to his protagonist the idea that “the clandestine smuggling of salt is a shameless act of petty people, a great person could not possibly do”.⁹⁶ This is a completely different approach as compared to the version in *Stories old and new*, which relates this particular episode with great relish. Moreover, at the end, it emphasizes the episode in which Qian Liu does not comprehend the master of geomancy’s warning and insists on building his palace on Phoenix Hill (Fenghuangshan 鳳凰山), thus ignoring the wise advise. The author apparently meant to put forward his ideal of the so-called “true hero” (*zhenzheng yingxiong* 真正英雄). Zhang Dai, in his *Dream searching at West Lake* (*Xihu mengxun* 西湖夢尋), had already especially pointed out this episode.⁹⁷ This can serve as evidence for its consistency with literati thought.

To put it briefly, the literati flavor in West Lake fiction mainly manifested in the following aspects: First of all, it showed in the eulogizing of the natural landscape of West Lake as a common tendency of all the relevant works. In the prefaces to the collections of West Lake fiction, such as the *Second West Lake collection*, the *Charming stories of West Lake*, and the *Collected reminiscences from West Lake*, the fiction writers voice their high appreciation of the beautiful landscape of West Lake. In the tale “The golden carp’s rescue is repaid by the dragon king of the sea” (“Jiu jinli hailongwang bao de” 救金鯉海龍王報德, XHEJ 23), an imperial edict issued by the Jade Emperor includes the phrase: “There is splendid merit in commending the West Lake landscape.”⁹⁸ While this may have been the author’s self-praise, we find descriptions of the West Lake landscape in so many works, constituting a unique series of descriptions of scenery in West Lake fiction. It seems to have been the conception of the *Charming stories of West Lake*, in particular, to provide a specialized collection of local scenery and lore.

94 *Xihu jiahua*, 189.

95 *Xihu jiahua*, 205.

96 *Xihu jiahua*, 189.

97 *Taoan mengyi*, 4.280–281 (“Qian wang ci” 錢王祠 [The memorial shrine for King Qian]).

98 *Xihu erji*, 386.

As a second aspect, the literati authors attached even more importance to historical subject matters. The eminent persons historically related to Hangzhou were a fountainhead for these fiction writers to draw materials from. Among the thirty-four items in the *Second West Lake collection*, only seven were drawing on Ming dynasty material for the main story, and even the majority of them are set in the early Ming. As for the final piece, “The victories of Junior Guardian Hu in the quelling of the Japanese pirates” (“Hu shaobao ping wo zhangong” 胡少保平倭戰功, XHEJ 34), although the story is set in the Jiajing 嘉靖 era (1522–1566), regarding its thematic nature, it still belongs to the historical type. Furthermore, considering the collection’s arrangement, all the first six pieces are directly related to dukes and kings, whereas the subsequent stories are about common people. This is a striking contrast to the practice of arrangement by Feng Menglong, who placed the story of Jiang Xingge 蔣興哥 (GJXS 1) ahead of those of Song emperor Renzong (GJXS 11) and Liang emperor Wu (GJXS 37). This also reflects the differences in the respective authors’ key concerns. The *Charming stories of West Lake*, comprising a total of sixteen texts, provide a similar case, too. They include five pieces with Buddhist or Daoist protagonists (XHJH 1, 9, 10, 13, 16), seven items with historical characters serving as protagonists (XHJH 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 12), and four stories on courtship and marriage (XHJH 6, 11, 14, 15). This thematic distribution equally quite evidently reflects the literati’s inclinations in the choice of materials, that is, a significant reduction of stories on popular subject matters. Even in a text like “Traces of the monstrous at Thunder Peak” (“Leifeng guai ji” 雷峰怪蹟, XHJH 15), derived from “Madam Bai is eternally banned under Thunder Peak Pagoda” (JSTY 28), the original work’s intense urban atmosphere was diluted to a considerable degree. It is exactly as Hanan puts it, that the author “genuinely celebrates the romantic lore of [Hangzhou’s] cultural history”.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, in some works of West Lake fiction written by literati, the enthusiasm for serving the state and the moral didacticism were slightly enhanced. Originally, the vernacular story had primarily been a form of entertainment for the city folk. The emphasis on its social function was something that came only after the literati had become involved with writing fictional narrative on a large scale. In the *Second West Lake collection*, we even can find some practical treatises, such as “General Qi’s technique of naval fighting”, “A plan for the coastal defense”, or “A good method of famine relief”, appended to a

99 HANAN, 1981:208.

fictional tale.¹⁰⁰ This practice, while shattering the generic scope of the vernacular story, exactly mirrors the author's different intentions. To give another example, the author of *Antagonists in love* (*Huanxi yuanjia*) obviously intended to alert the world against vulgarity. One of its stories, entitled "Wang Youdao doubts his wife and abandons her" ("Wang Youdao yixin qi qizi" 王有道疑心棄妻子, HXYJ 18), relates how a scholar and his young wife incidentally take shelter in the suburbs to avoid the rain. Although the young wife's behavior remains correct, nevertheless, her husband eventually abandons her. Due to its quite original perspective and also its natural style of narration, it is actually an extremely lifelike work. In its approach to the story material, it marked a significant step forward as compared to the previous fictional narratives with their sedulous pursuit of ingeniously crafted plots. But the author repeatedly pointed out in the text that the scholar had read the popular 12th century treatise on moral retribution, entitled *The Supreme's treatise on sympathetic resonance* (*Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇), and that it was for this reason that he was able to restrain himself. The author even has his protagonist inscribe a golden tablet with the phrase: "Good will be rewarded with good", displaying a marked sense of moral preaching.¹⁰¹ Due to such mediocrity of thought, the lifelike descriptions suddenly lose their brilliance.

It deserves to be noted that the enhancement of literati flavor in West Lake fiction was by no means an isolated phenomenon. In the "West Lake drama" (*Xihu xiqu* 西湖戲曲) of the transitional period from Ming to Qing, this particular aspect manifested itself even more obviously. Xu Fuming 徐扶明 previously classified the West Lake drama in six large categories. By far the largest among them was the one in which historical characters served as the subject matter, and which at the same time extensively put on display the charming views of West Lake.¹⁰² The specific changes in some works were also very conspicuous. In the love story of petty citizens, as related in the tale "The oil vendor monopolizes the flower-queen" (XSHY 3), to be sure, some habits and characteristics of the literati had already been added, such as the male protagonist's personal name Qin Zhong (to which the word *zhongqing* 重情 ["passionate"] is readily associated). The crucial details of his tender treatment of the woman, however, are somewhat at odds with his social identity as a small peddler. Li Yu 李玉 (fl. around 1644) rewrote the vernacular story into the southern style drama *Taking*

100 Cf. *Xihu erji*, 595–599.

101 *Huanxi yuanjia*, 251, 257–259.

102 Xu, 1986.

possession of the flower-queen (*Zhan huakui* 占花魁, ca. 1637). He added even more relatively extensive changes to the identity, temperament and outcome of the characters in the original work, molding it after the pattern of 'love between the son of a high official and a young lady in distress'. Correspondingly he decreased the vernacular story's mercantile atmosphere. This shows how closely the literati flavor of West Lake fiction was linked to the peculiarities of West Lake culture in its entirety.

As a related tendency, West Lake fiction written by literati authors also formed characteristics of its own on the artistic side. First of all, these works often have a unified conception of composition, and there are inherent interrelations in terms of thought or art between some texts. For instance, the ending of the first tale from the *Second West Lake collection* (XHEJ 1) refers to Song emperor Gaozong 高宗,¹⁰³ who then becomes the protagonist of the subsequent tale (XHEJ 2), thus creating an echo device between the two pieces. The third tale (XHEJ 3) is also directly referred to in the fourth tale (XHEJ 4).¹⁰⁴ This indicates a degree of coherence in the author's writing that is rarely seen in any previous collections of vernacular stories.

As a second aspect, the author's expression of subjectivity is even more distinct. Referring to the *Second West Lake collection* again, its language of narration is likely to be the richest in emotion and flavor of all the collections of traditional short vernacular fiction. For instance, the tale "An upright scholar from Kuaiji circuit" ("Kuaiji dao zhong yishi" 會稽道中義士, XHEJ 26) is strewn with statements such as the following: "The story goes that, in the Yuan dynasty, the social customs really were those of dogs, sheep, and wild beasts." "There was yet another kind of gang, being the one of Yang Lianzhenjia [楊璉真加, fl. 1277–1291], this wicked bald ass who was particularly ferocious."¹⁰⁵ The author's feelings of indignation come through in his verbal expression. Just because of such an enhancement of subjectivity, the comments in the fictional narrative correspondingly increased in number. For instance, the introduction to the tale "Eminent monk Jue is erroneously reborn from a single thought" ("Jue sheli yi nian cuo toutai" 覺闍黎一念錯投胎, XHEJ 7) comprises a long discourse of nearly two thousand characters.¹⁰⁶ This feature, too, is very rarely seen in any early vernacular stories.

103 *Xihu erji*, 21.

104 *Xihu erji*, 57.

105 *Xihu erji*, 436 (for both quotations).

106 *Xihu erji*, 99–101.

Corresponding to the characteristics pointed out above, quite a number of texts have a rather weak plot. For instance, the tale “An artisan from Tiantai is erroneously called in for pleasure” (XHEJ 28) is very weak in terms of narrative plot. It simply relates an artisan’s nocturnal adventure with a Buddhist nun, whereas there is no complicated contradiction or intricate story whatsoever. The plot structure of the literati narrative is relatively loose, too, as it is most evident in some of the stories on historical subject matters included among the *Charming stories from West Lake*. To be sure, West Lake fiction also displayed some innovation on the structural level. For instance, in both the previously mentioned tales “An artisan from Tiantai is erroneously called in for pleasure” (XHEJ 28) and “Xing Junrui has a clandestine rendezvous after five years” (XHEJ 14), a mode of stratified narration is self-consciously being used. At one point in the tale “Chan master [Yan]shou fulfills the requests of destiny in two existences” (XHEJ 8), a conventional storyteller’s formula was inserted: “For the resolution of this story, please, listen to the next session” (*qie ting xia hui fen jie* 且聽下回分解). This phrase, however, was not fully identical to the similar formulae used in the vernacular story “Carving the jade Guanyin” (JBTSXS 1; cf. JSTY 8), which is likely to have originated in the Song or Yuan. The latter is more likely to be the trace of an actual oral storytelling form, whereas the former would seem like a vague manifestation of a new structural feature of short vernacular fiction. In some slightly later texts of short vernacular fiction we often find a narrative organization by chapter-division. It would seem probable that this structural feature originated from there.¹⁰⁷

It needs to be explained here that popular character and literati flavor were by no means contradictory to each other. Their co-existence in West Lake fiction was, once again, inseparably linked to the characteristics of Hangzhou regional culture. It hardly needs to be mentioned that, in the city of Hangzhou, there lived “a hundred thousand families”,¹⁰⁸ and that ever since the Southern Song, “the buildings along the lake were standing side by side, just as closely as inside the city”.¹⁰⁹ In the tale “Madam Bai is eternally banned under Thunder Peak Pagoda” (JSTY 28), the male protagonist Xu Xuan is the chief administrator in a store for dried medicinal herbs. Thus, when all of a sudden he inscribes a poem

107 The artistic characteristics of West Lake fiction are fully in line with the general development of short vernacular fiction. For an in-depth study of this, see LIU, 1998.

108 Cf. Liu Yong, “Wang haichao” 望海潮 (Watching the tide), *Quan Song ci*, 1:39; the translation follows HIGHTOWER, 1982:39.

109 *Qingbo za zhi jiaozhu*, 3.117.

onto a wall,¹¹⁰ this may seem incompatible with his social identity and upbringing, but if placed in the context of West Lake culture, it nevertheless would not appear as so unexpected. To the literati mind, Hangzhou and West Lake, the city and nature, supplemented each other, making it the ideal hometown. Fang Hui 方回 (1227–1306) mentioned that the Southern Song “Qiantang poets” (*Qiantang shiren* 錢塘詩人) were reluctant not to be able to stay at West Lake for the rest of their lives. Therefore, he said, “in those prosperous days, when they saw that somebody was wealthy, they all mingled at his place, so it would be less boring”.¹¹¹ This was a fairly representative description. West Lake served as a contrast to Hangzhou, adding some kind of cultural atmosphere, while West Lake relied on Hangzhou to be more than just a natural landscape of lake and hills. The writers of fictional narrative were deeply influenced by this concept. In *Casual talks under the bean arbor* there is the following interesting discussion:

The lakes, ponds, marshes and grasslands in the entire empire provide the storage of water from the myriad of mountains. But each place, year by year, also produces large amounts of edible things [...]. The poor populace living nearby is provided with clothing and food from there. The only exception to this is West Lake, located right outside Hangzhou’s city wall, with its beautiful scenery. The two peaks and the three India Monasteries, the hills being partly hidden by clouds; the inner and outer Six Bridges, the peach blossoms and the willows setting each other off; the temples and monasteries, quiet spaces encircling the mountains, more than a thousand of them; the restaurants and terraces, closer than any neighbor; the sounds of flutes and drums on the pleasure boats, never ceasing to be heard, day and night. When non-local merchants and officials come to this place, they have to spend their money. And no one knows how much the local loafers who are not in any of the primary businesses have squandered here on whoring and gambling. In Hangzhou, which would appear as pretty as flower and brocade, all the houses are empty. And the cause for this lies only in the West Lake’s being located right next to the city wall. Day by day, all the sons of all the families, wealthy ones as well as poor ones, will spend several strings of cash at the lake.¹¹²

Just because the city and the landscape of lake and hills were mutually complementary, it allowed the spiritual content of West Lake fiction to draw from both sides. In its vulgarity it did not go as far as to reach an unbearable degree; in its

110 *Jingshi tongyan*, 427.

111 *Ying kui lü sui hui ping*, 3:39.1471; Fang Hui’s note on the poem “Gushan hanshi” 孤山寒食 (Cold Food [i.e. the day before Pure-and-Bright] at Lonely Mountain) by Zhao Shixiu 趙師秀 (1170–1220).

112 *Doupeng xianhua*, 2.20.

elegance it did not reach the point at which it would have lost its concern with the mundane affairs. Bai Juyi, in his poem “On the lake in spring”, put it very aptly: “The fact I’ve yet to break away from Hangzhou, / half is because I’m held here by this lake.”¹¹³ With West Lake as their basis, the writers of literati fiction avoided the predicaments of the difficult choice between the city and the mountain forest as the right place to live. At the same time this also entailed a gradual weakening of the features unique to popular fiction as it had originated in the marketplace:

The opposition between city and country can take on different meanings, sometimes as the sink of iniquity as opposed to idyllic innocence, or as a possibility to magically acquire riches in contrast to the labour of the farmers; or as the seat of power against the powerlessness of the country people.¹¹⁴

This kind of counterpoising evidently already existed in late Ming literati thought. Yuan Hongdao wrote in one of his vignettes (*xiaopin* 小品): “I most hate to enter the city. Wu Mountain [Wushan 吳山] is located within the city walls, therefore I did not get the chance to make a complete tour of it, but only hastily passed by at Purple Sun Palace [Ziyanggong 紫陽宮].” He admired the rocks at Purple Sun Palace that appeared to him just like a wash painting. He sighed about it with feeling: “Why disgrace them by placing them within the city walls, thus preventing the secluded men in the mountain forests from being close to them?”¹¹⁵ However, West Lake fiction did not manifest any such obvious bias. Perhaps, Hangzhou’s character as a city closely attached to nature from early on resolved to some degree the tension of any such counterpoise. In fictional narrative, however, the elimination of oppositions is not necessarily a fortunate thing. The fiction writer thereby lost a perspective as well as an opportunity to observe the social contradictions.

4 The Scene in Fiction: The Narrative Significance of West Lake

Any fictional plot always unfolds in a particular scene. By the term “scene” (*changjing* 場景) I mean to refer to the spatial setting of the characters’ actions.

113 *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao*, 3:23.1544–1545; translation adapted from WATSON, 2000:115.

114 BAL, 1985:44.

115 “Xihu jishu”, 89.

It needs to be explained here that, in some of the more recent books about narratology, “scene” is being used like “episode”, that is, as the opposite of “summary”, and thus primarily to refer to a mode of narration or representation. The term “scene” as it shall be used here would actually correspond rather to the notions of “place” or “location” (*changsuo* 場所) as they are being used in these works.¹¹⁶ I have chosen to use the term “scene”, rather than the too rigid and objectifying term “place”, for referring to the setting of characters’ actions or events, because it would appear as more flexible while carrying a certain degree of subjectivity. Even more importantly, “scene” is always linked to a particular cultural background, and it never is a simple space or place. Therefore, I consider it to be better suited to the reality of fictional narrative.

In only very few works of traditional Chinese fiction, the spatial construction grew completely out of the author’s creative genius, such as in the *Dream of red mansions* (*Honglou meng* 紅樓夢) the mansion of the Jia 賈 family and Grand View Garden (Daguanyuan 大觀園). The pattern found in modern Chinese fiction influenced by foreign models, giving fictive place names (e.g., “place C in the city of B, A province”), did not occur in traditional fiction. Generally speaking, the fiction writer always employed a “real place” of action as the stage for the plot to unfold. There is a specific logical relation between the authentic location and the fictive story. It did not only provide people with a sense of historical authenticity, but, as has been shown further above, in strongly regionalist works, it was also meant to evoke feelings of familiarity and immediacy on the side of the audience. In fact, in some cases the scene could be the most concentrated expression of regionalism. If the same scene is repeatedly being used in similar descriptions, this not only constructs a particular atmosphere of regional culture, but also provides an element of narratological significance to the organization of the narrative plot. For instance, in quite a few early vernacular stories having Dongjing as their grand backdrop, the scene is Fan Building (Fanlou 樊樓). In the Northern Song, Fan Building was a famous restaurant in Dong-

116 Cf., e.g., BAL, 1985. In fact, based on my limited reading experience, I found it quite striking that in narratological theory, the concern for space is far inferior to the attention devoted to time, perspective, and so forth. This point was previously raised by Earl Miner, who critically pointed out: “It is strange how little attention place has received.” He illustrated this by pointing out that in the public catalogue of the library of his institution, Princeton University, one could discover so many subject headings for time in literature, whereas there is not a single one for place. MINER, 1990:149.

jing.¹¹⁷ As a public place, it had the capacity to bring together in one place people from all sorts of backgrounds. The tale “Zhao Bosheng meets Emperor Renzong in a teahouse” (“Zhao Bosheng chasi yu Renzong” 趙伯昇茶肆遇仁宗, GJXS 11) even goes as far as to describe the patronage of this busy restaurant by the emperor himself. Thus, Fan Building became an excellent place for unfolding the clash of differences. The tale “Passionate Zhou Shengxian stirs up trouble at Fan Building” (XSHY 14) is an exemplary piece. The protagonists’ encounter and self-introduction has a strong sense of comedy, which could only have been created in such a public place as a restaurant. In chapter seven of *The water margin*, where Lu Qian 陸謙 lures Lin Chong 林沖 to Fan Building for drinking, a booth at this restaurant becomes the setting for the unfolding of intrigue and tragic conflict.¹¹⁸ Since Fan Building was perhaps the epitome of Dongjing’s luxury and splendor, the Song-dynasty poet Liu Zihui 劉子翬 (1101–1147) wrote in his poem “Reminiscences of Bianjing” (“Bianjing jishi” 汴京紀事): “I remember the abundant pleasures of my youth, / when I went to Fan Building deep in the night [accompanied by] lanterns and torches.”¹¹⁹ In the tale “Yang Siwen meets an old friend in Yanshan” (“Yang Siwen Yanshan feng guren” 楊思溫燕山逢故人, GJXS 24) Fan Building served as a symbol for Dongjing *per se*. It was turned into a profound depiction of the pain about the empire’s fall. As a similar case, Dongjing’s lantern market was another richly varied scene frequently appearing in fictional narrative. For instance, in “Honest clerk Zhang” (JBTSXS 4),¹²⁰ there is a description of the spectacle of the lantern market at Dongjing’s Duan Gate (Duanmen 端門) on the day of the lantern fes-

117 According to several sources, the Fan Building was a restaurant of magnificent scale in Northern Song Dongjing. See, e.g.: *Nenggai Zhai manlu*, 9.21b–22a; *Dongjing meng hua lu*, 2.15–16; *Qi dong yeyu*, 11.16a. In the first two sources, the restaurant’s name is rendered as Baifanlou 白樊樓 (Alum Building). Moreover, according to *Dongjing meng hua lu*, it was later renamed into Fenglelou 豐樂樓 (Abundant Pleasures Building). In Hangzhou, there was also a famous restaurant of this name located right at West Lake, providing the scene to an episode in the story “Yu Zhongju by composing a poem meets His Excellency” (“Yu Zhongju ti shi yu shanghuang” 俞仲舉題詩遇上皇, JSTY 6); cf. *Jingshi tongyan*, 69–79. It remained a symbol of luxury and splendor up to the Qing dynasty, as exemplified by the references to it in poetry; cf. *Zhao Yi shi biannian quanji*, 2:331 (“Xihu yong gu” 西湖詠古 [Singing about the past at West Lake]); and *Muzhai you xue ji*, 1:415 (“Jinling zati” 金陵雜題 [Various topics about Jinling]).

118 *Shuihu quanzhuan*, 1:89ff.

119 *Song shi chao*, 2:1538.

120 Cf. “A young lady offers a gift of money to a youngster” (“Xiao furen jinqian zeng nian-shao” 小夫人金錢贈年少, JSTY 16).

tival. The introductory tale to “The story of Student Zhang’s colorful duck lantern” (“Zhang sheng cai luandeng zhuan” 張生彩鸞燈傳, XLF 1)¹²¹ presents a romantic episode during the lantern market in Dongjing, while its main tale, about a romantic rendezvous at Hangzhou’s lantern market, actually is a refurbished version of the preceding narrative. Another frequently encountered scene is Golden Bright Pond (Jinmingchi 金明池). In tales such as “The calamity brought to Guardian Ji by the golden eel” (JSTY 20), or “Wu Qing meets Aiai on Golden Bright Pond” (“Jinmingchi Wu Qing feng Aiai” 金明池吳清逢愛愛, JSTY 30), it provides either the starting point or the narrative center from which the plot unfolds. Moreover, ever since the Song and the Yuan, Chancellor Monastery (Xiangguosi 相國寺) served the citizens of Dongjing as a center for business and amusement. In fictional narrative, too, there are occasional descriptions of it. The scenes pointed out above had in common that all of them had an absolutely distinct marketplace flavor. This was perhaps another distinguishing feature of “Dongjing fiction” (*Dongjing xiaoshuo* 東京小說).¹²²

As discussed further above, West Lake fiction, throughout its development, vaguely manifested various different mentalities and ideas. In some of the West Lake narratives among those vernacular stories presumably passed down from the Song and Yuan, the society of the marketplace provided the scene of the story. For instance, in “Cui Ning wrongly executed” (JBTSXS 6), the story takes place in the city’s Arrow Bridge (Jianqiao 箭橋) area, which has been a prosperous quarter of the city since the Song and Yuan. In “Madam Bai is eternally banned under Thunder Peak Pagoda” (JSTY 28), the characters’ main place of action is also in the streets and lanes of the town. But in the course of the later development, West Lake increasingly became a place for which the fiction writers felt affection. This is consistent with the general trend of the subsiding of vulgarity and the enhanced literati character of West Lake fiction.

Sometimes the scene only serves as a stage for the characters’ actions, but it can also be of crucial structural significance. In West Lake fiction, the specific scene often becomes pivotal for the plot to unfold. For instance, the sweeping of

121 Cf. “Zhang Shunmei finds a fair lady during the lantern festival” (“Zhang Shunmei yuanxiao de linü” 張舜美燈宵得麗女, GJXS 23).

122 The function of Golden Bright Pond for the city of Dongjing was roughly comparable to that of West Lake for Hangzhou. However, because of its much smaller size, it apparently had an even closer relation to the city. Thus, in one tale, when it is mentioned that they go to amuse themselves at Golden Bright Pond, this is termed as “going into the city” (*ru cheng* 入城) (*Jingshi tongyan*, 30.469), quite unlike Hangzhou citizens’ “leaving the city” (*chu cheng* 出城), when going out on a tour of West Lake.

the graves and paying respect to the dead on Pure-and-Bright day was a particular Hangzhou custom. Wu Zimu 吳自牧 (fl. 1300), in his *Record of the millet dream*, gave a vivid description of it.¹²³ Such a spectacle of the whole city turning out could rarely be seen in any other city, including the former capital Dongjing. It offered an opportunity for people to get in touch with each other. Thus it provided an essential backdrop for the characters' actions. Although it may not have been a necessary precondition for the plot to unfold, it nevertheless was an indispensable presupposition. For instance, in the opening of the tale "The three stupas of West Lake" (QPSTHB 3), the author makes the following claim:

Today I shall tell you about a young man who, just because, on Pure Brightness, he came out to West Lake to amuse himself, caused this whole story to happen. [The stories about] the traces of past events at West Lake have continuously been told and retold up to our days.¹²⁴

In "Madam Bai is eternally banned under Thunder Peak Pagoda" (JSTY 28) we find the following closely corresponding statement:

I shall tell you today about a handsome young man who, just because he amused himself at West Lake, met two women, which directly brought this about: In several prefectural cities, / streets lined with blossoming trees and lanes with willows rocked with sensation. With the following result: An ingenious writer took up his pen / and wove it all into a love story.¹²⁵

"The story of Kong Shufang's double-fish fan pendant" ("Kong Shufang shuang yu shan zhui zhuan" 孔淑芳雙魚扇墜傳, XLF 4), gave an even more detailed description:

It was springtime weather, the scenery was so pleasant. [Xu Jingchun 徐景春] did not relax. He had long heard about the famous landscape of hills and lake. Thus he informed his father that he wished to go sightseeing. Thereupon he summoned a boy-servant to carry the zither and hired someone to shoulder the pole load of drinking utensils. They left through Golden Flood Gate and toured the Northern and Southern Hills, on the lake, through all the temples and monasteries, in the Grotto of the Stone Chamber [Shiwu zhi dong 石屋之洞], and at the Pavilion of the Cold Spring [Lengquan zhi ting 冷泉之亭]. He was walking and watching, on high peaks, in dark forests, on sheer precipices and overhanging rocks. Eventually, he left his trace on every single place.

123 Cf. *Meng liang lu*, 2.148.

124 *Qingping Shantang huaben*, 25.

125 *Jingshi tongyan*, 419; translation adapted from CHANG, 1973:218.

It was just the 15th day of the third lunar month. Red peach blossoms sprinkled the shore, the green of the willows offered an abundant sight. The freely swimming fish jumped up among the waves, the birds having spent the night flew up and sang on top of the trees. Jingchun drank until he was somewhat tipsy. When he looked up to the sky, the sun was going down behind the western mountains and the moon rose up from the eastern sea. He summoned the boatman to get to the shore. There he ordered the boy-servant to shoulder the pole load of drinking utensils and to take the way home. After he had settled the boat fare, he hurried along until he arrived next to Leaking Water Bridge [Loushuiqiao 漏水橋]. The boy-servant followed him at some distance. All of a sudden, Young Master Xu caught sight of a beauty, who was walking gracefully in front of him, with her maid-servant following behind. This woman had a lavish hairstyle, she was graceful and lovely, with an enchanting posture: she appeared to him like a goddess.¹²⁶

In each of the three texts quoted above, the man encounters a demon. The tale “Xing Junrui has a clandestine rendezvous after five years” (XHEJ 14), however, is slightly different. This text also includes an extensive passage elaborating on the hustle and bustle in Hangzhou on the day of the Pure-and-Bright festival. The breath of spring is very much in the air, and everything is vibrant with life: In this scene, the emotions of the male protagonist, Xing Junrui, also make themselves felt: “The story goes that Xing Junrui, while getting pushed and shoved around on Su Dike [Sudi 蘇堤], with a trace of coquetry in his eyes, saw so many fine women and girls, he didn’t know how many.”¹²⁷ But he is fortunate, since the one he encounters is a “female immortal” (*xiannü* 仙女). These texts show that there had already formed a relatively fixed pattern, which included the following narrative elements:

Time: Pure-and-Bright festival. Although being a seasonal custom, the choice of this seasonal point in time is also related to the awakening of spring feelings, which make it the perfect season to engender surprising love stories.

Place: The scenic sites at West Lake. This is not only due to the beauty of the landscape, but also because the sightseers are so numerous, providing another precondition for unexpected romances to take place.

Characters: A young male and a pretty female whom he meets by chance while sightseeing.

It is exactly in this almost stereotypical set of scene and character arrangement that the male character’s romantic encounter finds an opportunity to unfold itself. As for the indecision whether the encountered person is a demon or an

126 *Xiong Longfeng kanxing xiaoshuo si zhong*, 53–54.

127 *Xihu erji*, 242.

immortal, it reflects the ambivalent mixture of fear and desire involved in such a romantic encounter.¹²⁸

Similarly, due to the extreme prosperity of Hangzhou's religious culture, monasteries and temples also regularly emerge as scenes for narratives. As the lay people were frequenting the Buddhist institutions to offer incense and worship Buddha, they also had the possibility to establish a relationship or to start an argument with others. For instance, in a tale from *Antagonists in love*, entitled "Huang Huanzhi receives an official punishment for his lecherousness" ("Huang Huanzhi muse shou guanxing" 黃煥之慕色受官刑, HXYJ 22), it is mentioned in the beginning that Awareness-of-the-Causes Monastery (Mingyinsi 明因寺) demanded the official authorities to prohibit access for tourists after a ruffian had created trouble there.¹²⁹ However, even though the ban was imposed incidentally, it could not prevent from happening entanglements between monks or laymen and believers. If Xu Xuan, in "Madam Bai is eternally banned under Thunder Peak Pagoda" (JSTY 28), had not insisted on going to Golden Mountain Monastery (Jinshansi 金山寺), he would not have met Monk Fahai, and he could not possibly have gone to meet him, later on, at Pure Compassion Monastery (Jingcisi 淨慈寺), either.¹³⁰ Here, the monasteries marked crucial turning points in the character's emotional life and crisis. Among the numerous temples and monasteries at West Lake, the three India Monasteries (Tianzhusi 天竺寺) frequently became objects of description. In the tale "A sly student misses his interview at Golden Bell [Palace]" (XHEJ 3), it is related how Zhen Longyou, while touring West Lake, inscribed a poem at Upper India Monastery (Shang Tianzhu 上天竺). Later on, Emperor Xiaozong also honored this monastery with a visit for worship. When he discovered Zhen's poetic inscription, he greatly appreciated it and thereupon especially summoned him to an interview. Here, India Monastery bridges the gap, so to speak, between the emperor and the

128 There is the "Story of Pei Xiuniang's nocturnal tour on West Lake" ("Pei Xiuniang ye you Xihu ji" 裴秀娘夜游西湖記), which was included in two miscellanies of the Wanli era (1573–1619): the *Wan jin qing lin* 萬錦情林 (Myriads of beautiful things and forest of passion, 1598), compiled by Yu Xiangdou 余象斗 (ca. 1560 – ca. 1637); and the *Yan ju biji* 燕居筆記 (Jottings taken while residing in Beijing), compiled by Lin Jinyang 林近陽. Sun Kaidi 孫楷第 inferred that it was an old text from the Song or Yuan; see SUN, 1958:130. In the tale it is related how Xiuniang, while making a West Lake tour on Pure-and-Bright day, falls in love with a handsome young man at first sight, and in the end they get married. Such reversal of gender roles, ending in perfect harmony, is quite rare among this type of texts.

129 *Huanxi yuanjia*, 292.

130 *Jingshi tongyan*, 438–439, 443.

common people. This just provides an interesting contrast with the teahouse in the previously mentioned tale “Zhao Bosheng meets Emperor Renzong in a teahouse” (GJXS 11). In the tale “A sly courtesan helps her fiancé make himself a name” (XHEJ 20), there is a description of how the male and female protagonists meet while worshipping at Upper India Monastery.¹³¹ Perhaps due to the symbolism of temples and monasteries *per se*, their significance as a scene could also be used to bring the plot to an end. In the ending of “The oil vendor monopolizes the flower-queen” (XSHY 3), Qin Zhong is reunited with his father at Upper India Monastery after many years of separation.¹³² This added a mild taste of religious flavor to an otherwise heavily sentimental story.

These examples show that the structural uses of the scene may be said to be rich, varied, and quite freely applicable. Moreover, since the scene is an objectively existing reality, its functional significance is not limited to the level of form. Its treatment first of all conformed to traditional Chinese readers’ reading habits. We know that the vernacular story at the earliest stage had been a performing skill, which had placed particular emphasis on conveying the effects of live performance. With regard to this, it had indeed certain things in common with traditional drama. Chinese drama attached particular importance to the refinement of plot. In drama it is perfectly evident that the presentation of the conflict is proceeding stage by stage, from the introduction through the elucidation and the change of approach to the conclusion. Therefore, the treatment of the scene is often rather unsophisticated or, in other words, fully in line with the style of drama in general, that is, conspicuously explicit. For instance, the later-day dramatists, in rewriting the story “Madam Bai is eternally banned under Thunder Peak Pagoda” (JSTY 28), gave prominence to the scene of “Broken Bridge”, assimilating it to the style of romance, which relied on the pathetic appeal of the sad beauty. The same holds true for fictional narrative. The tale “Traces of passion at Broken Bridge” (“Duanqiao qing ji” 斷橋情蹟, XHJH 11) is also a text about love. It includes a description of how a scholar from Gusu (i.e. Suzhou’s Wu District 吳縣), named Wen Shigao 文世高, came to Hangzhou because he admired the beauty of West Lake. While roaming at the lake all day, “his steps led him to the left side of Broken Bridge”.¹³³ There he discovered the entrance to a private residence, which he entered. In the garden of the residence he eventually met a beautiful girl. In fact, the only reference to Broken

131 *Xihu erji*, 340–341.

132 *Xingshi hengyan*, 67.

133 *Xihu jiahua*, 170.

Bridge in this text is in the quoted passage. But the author nevertheless employed it in the title of the text, thus indicating its relevance. In the description of the garden scenery inside the family residence at Broken Bridge, the author's intention is all the more conspicuous: Broken Bridge apparently provided a scene of rich metaphorical significance, most suitable for a piece about the tragic love between a man and a woman.

Therefore, regardless of the scene's objective existence, once it had become part of the figurative world of fictional narrative, it inevitably carried some degree of subjectivity. Moreover, the fiction writers could often initiate a scene by bringing into play its inherent cultural connotations, and by merging the significance it had *per se* with that of the entire figurative world. To give an example, the Qiantang river tide was among the most prominent scenic views of Hangzhou. Throughout the ages, so many men of letters have expressed their admiration in poetic form. The section "Watching the tide" ("Guan chao" 觀潮) in *Old stories from Wulin* offers a detailed account of this exciting spectacle.¹³⁴ After the fall of the Southern Song, when the royal family had ceased to exist, all the tide watching places along the river that had previously been reserved for the royal family became accessible to the common people who came to watch the sight. During the Yuan dynasty, around the time of the Mid-Autumn festival, watching the tide became a mass spectacle attended by tens of thousands of people. On that day, the whole city turned out. The spectacle of watching the tide appears in quite a number of fictional narratives, such as in the tale "In a period of partial peace Song emperor Gaozong abandons himself to leisure and pleasure" (XHEJ 2). This tale includes a detailed description of the magnificent tide watching on the 18th day of the eighth month.¹³⁵ The tale "Young Master Le finds his spouse at the risk of his life" ("Le xiaoshe pan sheng mi ou" 樂小舍拚生覓偶, JSTY 23) is the outstanding piece on the topic of watching the tide, as it contains a wealth of symbolic connotations. The plot of this tale is extremely simple. It describes in hyperbolic terms the intense love between Le He 樂和 and Xi Shunniang 喜順娘. The peak of their feelings of love unfolds in the setting of the day of the river tide. The author devoted about one sixth of the text to the representation of the spectacle of the river tide, which does not only provide the story's backdrop, but also serves as a foil to the characters' upsurge of emotions. Thus, in the midst of this solemn event of watching the tide, the de-

134 *Wulin jiushi*, 3.381–382.

135 *Xihu erji*, 34.

voted mutual affection between the male and the female protagonist appears as a scene, which is equally soul-stirring as the waters of the tide:

While Le He and Xi Shunniang were gazing despairingly at each other, a sudden cry was heard: "The tide is coming!" The voices were still in the air when, with an earth-splitting roar, waves tens of feet high came sweeping in. [...] Choppier than in years past, the waves broke against the higher ground of the bank, tore open the brocade sheets, and knocked down the tents. With a cry, the crowd recoiled, but Shunniang, her mind entirely on Young Master Le, did not know what she was doing and took a few steps forward instead. Losing her foothold, she disappeared into the waves. [...] Alert to the danger, Le He had run to higher ground before the tide could get him and, his thoughts still on Shunniang, cried out toward the tent: "Get away from the water!" Suddenly, to his great alarm, he saw Shunniang fall into the water. In less time than it takes to narrate, the very moment Shunniang fell, Le He followed her into the water and was also caught in the current, for he was no swimmer. He did this out of love and at the risk of his life.¹³⁶

In my opinion, this is one of the most exquisite descriptions of love in the entire corpus of traditional Chinese fiction. In the poem concluding the tale, the author wrote: "When love reaches the deepest depths, / Storms of life and death can do it no harm."¹³⁷ This sheds light on the implied meaning as pointed out above. The expressions "river tide" and "storm waves" have a specific reference, but at the same time they are also metaphors, signifying the difficult obstacles the lovers have to overcome as well as their feelings of unswerving loyalty until the end of their lives. Watching the tide, though dangerous, is after all an exceptionally pleasant and enjoyable experience. Therefore, the atmosphere of ardor was finally turned into the most beautiful scene praising magnificent love.

From the above explanations about the treatment of scene in West Lake fiction, its different orientation as compared to Dongjing fiction, namely its tendency away from the marketplace and toward nature, becomes evident. Moreover, it also vaguely approximated the traditional Chinese literature of sentiment. When the selection of scene and description comes close to the manifestation of imagery in poetry, West Lake fiction even reveals some kind of poetic beauty. This is also one of the reasons why I emphasized the difference between scene and setting. To put it in simple words, the scene is far more than a mere key element of form and structure, but it is rather a condensation of regional culture in fictional narration.

136 *Jingshi tongyan*, 328–329; translation adapted from YANG/YANG 2005:373–374.

137 *Jingshi tongyan*, 330; translation from YANG/YANG 2005:376.

In the past decade, the application of narratological theory to traditional Chinese fiction has become fairly common. However, since all of its basic terminology has been transplanted from Europe and America, it does by no means completely conform to the reality of traditional Chinese fiction. An overly formalized line of thinking would also deprive fiction of its richness and could not sufficiently bring to light the true achievements of fiction. The widespread emergence of West Lake as a fictional scene might offer us even more far-reaching instructions. It allows us to derive some related questions from traditional fiction, which echo the concerns of other fields of research, such as configuration and plot typology. This might support the exploration of the unique narrative features of Chinese fiction and their theoretical explanation.

In summary, West Lake fiction holds an eminent position in the development of the vernacular story. As a link in the history of traditional Chinese fiction, the emergence of West Lake fiction did not happen incidentally. As a product of the economic culture since the Song, it was also closely related to the cultural background of Hangzhou. While this was by no means a phenomenon peculiar to West Lake fiction, it nevertheless was more evident here than in any other regional fiction. The regionalism of West Lake fiction involved a variety of aspects, such as language, character, customs, or mentality. Its relationship with fictional narrative was necessarily a complex one. Therefore, any comprehensive research of the history of fiction needs to consider the factor of regionalism. Even though we should not expect that this kind of research would form into a complete history of Chinese regional fiction, regionalism nevertheless offers an angle from which to grasp effectively the aesthetic characteristics of fiction, opening up a vast new field of inquiry.

As for the particular texts, the importance of West Lake fiction lies not only in the scope and depth of its representation of society, or in the exquisiteness of its artistic skill. With regard to these aspects, much other fiction would actually have been superior to it. But, what perhaps deserves to be emphasized most, are questions such as why Hangzhou and West Lake were able to produce such a large community of writers; and how, by which gestures, these texts revealed the fiction writers' acknowledgement of regional culture and its specifically urban life. As I have pointed out above, in the history of Chinese fiction, Hangzhou by no means led an unrivalled existence. Nevertheless, no single other place received any representation in Chinese fiction that would be comparable in terms of comprehensiveness and distinction. Quite obviously this was inseparably linked to the particular character of Hangzhou culture. However, exactly due to this character, or more precisely due to West Lake's rich and thick cultural

sedimentation and its outstandingly beautiful natural landscape, the popular atmosphere of Hangzhou's marketplace was diluted to a certain degree. This obstructed the fiction writers' observation of new trends in urban society. Of course, this was not only the fiction writers' limitation, but even the intellectually most liberated men of letters of the late Ming, when confronted with West Lake, finally preferred to escape into a refined and elegant spiritual world. In order to understand this, one only needs to look at Zhang Dai's famous piece "Appreciating the snow from Lake Heart Pavilion" ("Huxinting shang xue" 湖心亭賞雪),¹³⁸ which betrays a narcissistic appeal. This is also the reason why the description in the *Unofficial history of the scholars* of Second Mister Ma's (Ma Er xiansheng 馬二先生) tour around West Lake, without even the slightest understanding of the cultural history of the place, became a classic passage in that novel.¹³⁹

As is generally known, traditional Chinese short vernacular fiction gradually declined after the mid Qing. I wonder whether this was actually due to the slowing-down of the Chinese city's own development, causing a congenital deficiency of this literary form which originally had belonged to the city folk; or whether fictional narrative, consciously or unconsciously, gradually moved away from the center of city life and thus lost its vitality. To be sure, in West Lake fiction we can also find quite a few scenes that are peculiar to city life, but they appear to be virtually the same as any other description. Perhaps it did not begin any earlier than the late Qing that the city as an irresistible social entity left its lasting stamp on Chinese fiction. Han Bangqing 韓邦慶 (1856–1894), in his novel *Lives of Shanghai flowers*, very distinctly employed the representation of a village person coming to Shanghai, "venturing out into the world", as an event of symbolic significance. Thus, the city ceased to be simply a noisy scene, but became a truly new culture. Therefore, starting with Han Bangqing, traditional moral critique gradually yielded to "individual experience" as a particular psychology and value concept, which formed itself in the context of urban society.¹⁴⁰ This reminds us of a theme that European urbanization provided to the realist authors, namely, the person who goes to the city to make a living, but

138 *Taoan mengyi*, 3.73.

139 *Rulin waishi hui jiao hui ping ben*, 1:14.202–15.211.

140 David Wang previously pointed out that *Lives of Shanghai flowers* "predicted Shanghai's rise as a metropolis", and that this novel "attempted to advance in a truly dialogical manner the dialectic of virtue and seduction." For these truly precise and appropriate statements, see WANG, 1998:13 and 31.

eventually ends up in misery and defeat.¹⁴¹ Perhaps, there was after all a huge difference between the city since the Song and Ming and that of the early modern period. Although the late Ming and the late Qing may have been only one step away from each other, at least to the fiction writers, there was still a gap of several hundred years.

Title abbreviations

- BDJ *Ba duan jin* 八段錦 (*Eight pieces of silk*)
 GJXS *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說 (*Stories old and new*)
 GZJC *Guzhang juechen* 鼓掌絕塵 (*Clapping the hands to break with the world*)
 HXYJ *Huanxi yuanjia* 歡喜冤家 (*Antagonists in love*)
 JBTSXS *Jingben tongsu xiaoshuo* 京本通俗小說 (*Popular stories in a Capital edition*)
 JSTY *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言 (*Comprehensive words to admonish the world*)
 QPSTHB *Qingping Shantang huaben* 清平山堂話本 (*Stories from the Serene Mountain Hall*)
 XHEJ *Xihu erji* 西湖二集 (*Second West Lake collection*)
 XHJH *Xihu jiahua* 西湖佳話 (*Charming stories from West Lake*)
 XLF *Xiong Longfeng kanxing xiaoshuo si zhong* 熊龍峰刊行小說四種 (*Four stories published by Xiong Longfeng*)
 XSHY *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恆言 (*Lasting words to awaken the world*)
 XSY *Xing shi yan* 型世言 (*Words as a model for the world*)

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