

Preface

A RECORD OF
DREAMING A DREAM OF SPLENDORS PAST
IN THE EASTERN CAPITAL

BY
MENG YUANLAO
HERMIT OF THE HIDDEN THOROUGHWORT

TRANSLATED BY STEPHEN H. WEST

Preface

I followed my father¹ on his official travels north and south. In the year *guiwei* of the Chongning reign period [1103], we arrived at the capital city and sited our residence in the western part of the prefecture, west of the Jinliang Bridge and south of a road that ran along the wall where, by and by, I grew up.² Just at that time, peace stretched on day after day beneath the hub of the [imperial] chariot—people were numerous, things abundant. Youths with trailing locks practiced naught but drumming and dancing, the aged with white speckled hair knew neither shield nor spear. Season and festival followed one upon the other, each with its own sights to enjoy.³ Lamplit nights⁴ there were and moonlit eves,⁵ intervals of snow⁶ and periods of blossoming,⁷ time to seek skills,⁸ to ascend heights,⁹ to

1. On Meng's father, see Kong Xianyi 孔憲易, "Meng Yuanlao qi ren" 孟元老其人, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 4(1980): 143–48, and Stephen H. West, "The Interpretation of a Dream: The Sources, Evaluation, and Influence of the *Dongjing meng Hua lu*," *T'oung Pao* 71(1985):63–108.

2. Jinliang Bridge, the fourth bridge up the Bian River from the central Bridge of Dragon's Ford, passageway for the Imperial Way. The phrase *jiadao* 夾道 normally means a road that is lined by walls or a palisade of trees. The annotators of DJM6 suggest that it simply means "alley" but it could possibly refer to a road that ran alongside the old city wall or along the Bian River. It is possible that it is a proper name, "River Road." This line could, therefore, also possibly be translated "south of the road that ran along [the Bian River] west of the Jinliang Bridge." Direction would argue strongly for this last interpretation, since the bridge ran north-south and his house would, theoretically, face the river and its road on the south side. Iriya and Umeharu understand it to mean "west of Jinliang Bridge, south of the road that follows the city wall." See DJM5, p. 3. This area was close to a huge entertainment complex that held several winehouses notable for their size and service. See below, Section 0.0

3. Season and festival: some of the following passages are allusions to specific festivals or annual events that are treated at length in the text. In this way the "Preface" functions as a literary table of contents. In following notes, I will simply list the festival or period to which the text refers and give its title and the location in the original text; the first number of the citation is the chapter in which the passage is found; the translation can be found through the Table of Contents. Detailed notes will be found in each section.

4. Lamplit nights refers to the Lantern Festival of the First Prime, the fifteenth day of the first civil month. Sections that discuss this occasion are found in: "Prime Eve" (6.2a–3a) and "Sixteenth Day" (6.4b–5a).

5. The Mid-Autumn Festival of which moon viewing was part: "Mid-Autumn" (8.44a)

6. Feasts of the rich to celebrate snowfalls and hold competitions in which lions and other beasts were sculpted in snow and ice: "Twelfth Month" (10.5b–6a)

7. Times of blossom: spring tours through the famous gardens of Bianliang's suburbs to view flowering plants and trees: "Taking in the Lamps, the People of the Metrocapital Go out of the City to Seek the Spring" (6.5b–6b.)

8. Beseeking skills: the festival of the seventh day of the seventh month, when young women asked heaven to grant them the distaff skills: "Seventh Eve" (8.2a–3a.)

9. Climbing the heights: the festival of the ninth day of the ninth month, noted for its appreciation of

roam in the training reservoir and garden.¹⁰

Raise the eyes and there were green bowers and painted chambers, embroidered gates and pearly shades. Decorated chariots vied to park in the Heavenly Avenue and bejeweled horses competed to spur through the Imperial Street. Gold and kingfisher dazzled the eye, silky cloth and silken gauze let float their perfumes. New songs and sly giggles were found in the willowy lanes and flowered paths, pipes were fingered and strings were harmonized in the tea districts and wine wards.¹¹

The eight wilds strived to assemble in Bianliang, the myriad states were all in communication [with the capital]. Gathered together were the valued and the rare from the four seas—all found their way to market for trade. Assembled were the extraordinary flavors of the whole world—all were in the kitchens of Bianliang.¹² The radiance of flowers filled the roads—what limit to spring excursions? Pipes and drums throbbed in the empty air—so many nighttime feasts in households. The skills and crafts—these startled a person's eyes and ears; the waste and extravagance—they prolonged a person's inner spirit.

To look upon the Heavenly countenance there were the events of Prime Eve and the training reservoir,¹³ the Suburban Sacrifices¹⁴ and the Ancestral Rites of the First [Days of the Quarters].¹⁵ Time after time we observed imperial princesses being handed down in marriage and august princes

chrysanthemums, wine, and picnic outings, part of which included ascending heights: “Doubled Yang” (8.4b)

10. Training reservoir: festivals of the third month held at the Reservoir of Metal's Luster (金明池) and the Garden of the Chalcedony Grove (瓊林苑), where units of the imperial army put on an annual spectacle for the emperor, to be shared with the citizens of Kaifeng: “Third Month, First Day: the Reservoir of Metal's Luster and the Garden of the Chalcedony Grove are Opened” (7.1b–2b); “The Imperial Retinue Visits the Hall that Overlooks the Water to Observe the Contest for the Marker and to Give a Feast” (7.2b–3b); “The Imperial Retinue Visits the Garden of the Chalcedony Grove” (7.3b–4a); “The Imperial Retinue Visits the Feasting Halls and the Tower of the Ford of Treasures” (7.4a); “The Imperial Retinue Ascends the Tower of the Ford of Treasures and the Various Troops Display the Hundred Entertainments” (7.4b–6b); “The Imperial Retinue Visits the Halls of Archery to Shoot” (7.6b); “People are Allowed to Gamble for Goods and Roam for Pleasure in the Gardens inside the Reservoir” (7.7a–b); “The Formal Guard for the Return of the Imperial Retinue” (7.7b–8a)

11. The pleasure precincts of Kaifeng: brothels, theaters, winehouses, restaurants, that were found scattered throughout the capital.

12. A truly astounding array of foodstuffs is found in the text. Other works on the capital, notably three rhymeprose pieces, give extensive, if somewhat fanciful lists of goods, foodstuffs, and other items imported into the capital for luxury consumption. These works must be used with some care since they are derivative in large measure from earlier sources. The three poems are “A Rhyme Prose on the August Precincts” (*Huangji fu* 皇畿賦) by Yang Kan 楊侃 (fl. 1105) “A Rhyme Prose on Bian Capital” (*Biandu fu* 汴都賦) submitted to the throne in 1084 by Zhou Bangyan 周邦彥 (1058–1123) and “Expanding the Rhyme Prose on Bian Capital (*Guang Biandu fu* 廣汴都賦) submitted to Huizong by Li Changmin 李長民 (fl. 1115–45) in 1122. There is an excellent annotated edition of Zhou Bangyan's piece in *Zhou Bangyan Qingzhen ji jian* 周邦彥清真集淺, ed. Luo Kanglie 羅抗烈 (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1985), pp. 345–421. For complete information on these rhymeprose pieces, see Appendix II.

13. The two major public appearances by the emperor, the first full moon of the year, Prime Eve, and the opening of the Reservoir of Metal's Luster in the third month. Cf. n. 5, 8.

14. Only that of the winter quarter, the Southern Suburban Sacrifice, is described in a detail: “Rehearsal of Conveyances and Elephants for the Great Ritual” (10.1a–1b); “The Imperial Retinue Resides Overnight at the Hall of Grand Felicity” (10.1b–2a); “The Formal Guard of the Progress of the Imperial Retinue” (10.2a–3a); “The Imperial Retinue Resides Overnight at the Ancestral Halls and Bearing the Spirit Tablets He Goes Out of the Building” (10.3a–4b); “The Imperial Retinue Visits the Fasting Palace at Qingcheng” (10.5a)

15. Ancestral sacrifices held in the first month of each quarter (孟春、孟夏、孟秋、孟冬). These were

receiving their consorts.¹⁶ As for refurbishing and construction, there was the raising of the Bright Hall;¹⁷ as for casting and moulding, there was the creation of the Great Cauldrons.¹⁸

As for observing the registry of the sing-song girls: [they performed] on the days-off of the sub-functionaries of [Kaifeng] Superior Prefecture and at feasts in the Inner Councils.¹⁹ As for looking at changes and transformations,²⁰ there were the calling out of names of recommended scholars²¹ and the

performed at the Grand Temple (太廟) Eastern and Western Palaces of Refulgent Spirits (*Jingling dong xi gong* 景靈東·西宮).

16. Weddings ceremonies of princes and princesses. See “August Imperial Princes Receive Consorts :(4.1b); “Imperial Princesses are Sent Out and Descend [to Marry]” (4.1b–2a)

17. A site, near the emperor’s residence, symbolic of dynastic legitimacy, and in which the emperor personally performed such ceremonies as the comprehensive sacrifice to the former kings (*daxiang* 大享), symbolically implemented executive commands and moral teachings (*buzheng* 布政), fêted officials, and performed seasonal sacrifices. See James T. C. Liu, “The Song Emperors and the Ming T’ang or Hall of Enlightenment,” in *Études Song* (Series 2.1) ed. Françoise Aubin. Paris: Mouton, 1971, pp. 44–58. In early Song, the ceremonies of the Mingtang were carried out in the Hall of Grand Felicitation (*Daqing dian* 大慶殿); in the fifth year of Zhenghe, February 23, 1111, Huizong issued an order that the Palace Library (*Mishu sheng* 秘書省) be moved from its site in the southeastern quadrant of the forbidden city to the eastern side of the Gate of Virtue Revealed and that a Hall of Enlightenment be constructed in its place. It was finished in the seventh year of Zhenghe, July, 1113. See “Huizong 3” 徽宗三, in SS Vol. 2, *benji* 21, pp. 395, 398; “Mingtang” 明堂, in SS 11. *zhi* 54.14, pp. 2464–78; Zhou Cheng 周成, *Song Dongjing kao* 宋東京考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), pp. 202–03.

18. Nine *ding* cast by Huizong and placed in the Palace of Nine Completions (*Jiucheng gong* 九成宮), where they were filled with the “earth and water” (*shuitu* 水土) of the eight directions, then housed in separate enclosures. They were cast at the urging of a certain Taoist priest from Sichuan, Wei Hanjin 魏漢津, who was also instrumental in persuading Huizong to undertake other construction projects. See “Wei Hanjin” in SS Vol. 39, *liejuan* 221, *fangji* 方技 2, pp. 13525–26 and “Propitious Rites 7” (*jili* 吉禮), in SS Vol. 5, *zhi* 57, *lizhi* 7, pp. 2544–45. There is no consensus on when the vessels were cast (See Xu Song’s comments in the essay on tripods in the *SHY*, Vol. 2, *ce* 45, *yufu* 輿服 6.14–17, pp. 1832c–34a), but they were probably begun in Chongning 3 and finished in Chongning 4 (ca. 1105–06). See also Zhou Cheng, *Song Dongjing kao*, pp. 202–03; Wu Zeng 吳曾, *Nenggai zhai manzhi* 能改齋漫志 Vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 1960 [1979 rpt.]), pp. 352–53; Hong Mai 洪邁, “The Eighteen Tripods” (*shiba ding* 十八鼎), *Rongzhai suibi* 容齋隨筆, Vol. 2 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 1978), pp. 571–72; Li Lian 李濂, *Bianjing yiji zhi* 汴京遺跡志 (Henan: Sanyi tang, 1922 [photorep. Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1983]) 8.4a; Cai Tiao 蔡條, *Tieweishan congfan* 鐵圍山叢談 (*Tang Song shiliao biji congkan*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), pp. 11–12.

19. Entertainers were subject to a form of corvée, called “summons to official service” (*huan guan shen* 喚官身), which took precedence over their other performance venues. Those from the Court Entertainment Bureau (*jiaofang* 教坊) and “yamen registered entertainers” (*yaqian yue* 衙前樂) were summoned to perform within the capital’s offices. See West and Idema, *Chinese Theater from 1100–1450: A Source Book* (*Münchener ostasiatische Studien*) (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1982), pp. 00–00.

20. “Changes and transformations” here is adopted from the lexicon of Buddhism, where it is particularly used to describe the change from a prior form to a new one; it is frequently used for the avatars of Buddhas and bodhisattavas. Here it is used to refer to the sudden transformation, the “rags to riches” scenario of passing the examinations and being admitted to the fraternity of the elite.

21. The practice of the emperor himself calling out the names of the successful candidates and awarding them their degree. According to the *Origin of Events and Things*, a Song text on the sources of institutions and names, the practice was begun by the Taizong emperor: “On the fifteenth day of the third month of the second year of Yongxi (985.4.7) Taizu visited the Hall of Administration Esteemed (*Chongzheng dian* 崇政殿) to examine Advanced Scholar candidates. Liang Hao 梁顥 (963–1004) was the first to submit his examination documents (*chengshi* 程試) and the emperor was impressed by his intelligence and speed, and put him in the first category. On the sixteenth day the emperor called out each name one by one, and personally awarded each pass. The practice of calling out names to award a pass probably started with this.” See “Calling Out Names” (*changming*

evaluation of the qualities of military men so they could be assigned to appropriate positions.²²

For ten years I thoroughly enjoyed [these sights] and roamed often [through the city], yet I never grew tired. Then one morning came the first of war and in the next year, year *bingwu* of the Jingkang reign period, [1126], I went out of the capital and came south to this haven on the left side of the Yangtze. My emotions despondent and fallen, by and by [the sun] set into the mulberry and elm [and I passed into the evening of my life].

Silently remembering those years, the style and sophistication of the things that belonged to each season, of the gentleness and comeliness of human feelings—these things became naught to me but disconsolance and vexation. In recent times, when meeting with kith and kin, as the discussions turned back to former days, the younger born constantly fancied what was never so. I feared that, as time went by, those who would discuss the customs and traditions [of the capital] would be at a loss for hard fact—and this was truly lamentable. [I] have carefully recalled [what I know] and put that in order to make this collection. I would hope that, as soon as one opens a chapter, one can see the flourishing of that time.

Among the ancients was one who dreamed of roaming in the land of Hua Xu²³ where his pleasures knew no bounds. Now, when I trace my own thoughts back to that time and then turn my head back to the present in disappointment—is this not awakening from the Dream of Hua Xu? I have entitled this work *A Record of Dreaming a Dream of Splendors Past*. But from all of that widespread bustle in the capital, of all those places I myself never ventured but only heard of from others, there cannot but be omissions. If an older, more virtuous man of my home village should be met who can supplement this record and thus bring it fullness and completeness, then that would be to my good fortune.

That the language of this record is coarse and vulgar and that it is not adorned by literary style is because I wanted everyone, high or low, to understand it. Reader, please take careful note of this!

Prefaced on the last day of the year *dingmao* of the Shaoxing reign period [February 1, 1147] by the Hermit of the Hidden Thoroughwort, Meng Yuanlao

唱名) in Gao Cheng 高承, *Shiwu jiyuan* 事物紀源, ed. Li Guo 李果, punct. and ann., Jin Yuan 金園 and Xu Peicao 許沛藻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), p.170. A similar statement is found in the *Continuation of the Long Version of the Comprehensive Mirror for the Aid of Government*, see Li Tao 李濤, ed. Xu Zizhi *tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑, v. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), ch. 26, p. 595.

22. Literally “to exchange and bestow” positions (*huanshou* 換授), a system of direct appointment in which a person’s qualities were assessed by superiors in order to transfer them to a new position. It appears in the Song to have been used mainly for military persons, for bureaucratic ranks below the Nine Grade system, and for members of the imperial bureaucracy. The system is described in a memorial from Liu Qingzhi 劉清之 (1134–90), “Item four: heed exchange and bestowal. That is, civil and military officers should not be employed against their talent, yet it is inappropriate to allow them to rank themselves. It is fitting that civil and military officials of rank four and above each select one person annually who, on the basis of their inherent quality and actions or talent and strategies as well as respective civil and military arts, can be recommended for personal service; in addition to their match of qualifications, they should be given a slightly superior rating and award.” See “Liu Qingzhi” in *SS* Vol. 38, *liejuan* 196, *rulin* 儒林 7, p. 12954.

23. A reference to the dream journey of the mythical Yellow Emperor through the Land of Hua Xu, where there was no ruler, where people lived without desire, completely at ease with their lives. Because they did not fear death nor contend for things out of desire, they lived in a world where there was no hatred or struggle for self-benefit. When the Yellow Emperor awoke from his dream, he became aware that the Way could not sought through passion. Hua Xu thus becomes a standard trope for a utopian paradise. See *Book of Lieh Tzu*, trans. A. C. Graham (London: Butler and Tanner, 1960), pp. 34–35 and Zhou Shaoxian 周紹賢, *Liezi yaoyi* 列子要義 (*Essential Meanings of the Liezi*) (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), pp. 158–59.