ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to study the urban culture of Song dynasty through microscopic analysis of Song huaben fiction. The umbrella of urban culture encompasses the habits and the customs of the urban centers of the Song dynasty, the social and domestic life of its people, and the outlooks and attitudes of men in that particular age. Zheng Shi, (official histories) record the rise and fall of dynasties. It dealt exclusively with institutions and political events, but ignored the social and domestic life of the people. Writers during Song dynasty left a number of records describing life in the capitals. Works such as Dong Jing Meng Hua Lu (Reminiscences of the Eastern Capital, 1147 AD), Meng Liang Lu (Reminiscences of Hang Zhou, 1274 AD), Xi Hu Lao Ren Fan Sheng Lu (Hang Zhou in its Heyday, 1235 AD), Du Cheng Ji Sheng ( Notes of the Chief Sights in the Capital, 1235AD) and Wu Lin Jiu Shi ( Anecdotes of Old Times at Hang Zhou, 1280 AD ) provides detailed descriptions of life in urban cities. However, these writers were themselves government officials and their works were written for the leisure reading of the gentry’s class officials. These contemporary documents are of great value for the study on the daily living of upper class gentry’ dwellers but one has to rely on huaben fiction for a genuine view on the life of the lower urban classes. Though huaben fiction has been regarded as a plebeian literature, it is a realistic reflection of the everyday living and the outlooks of the great majority of urban dwellers within the Song Capitals.
The main purpose of this dissertation is to offer a new perspective on the urban culture of Song dynasty by approaching it from an economic point of view. It seeks to examine the effect of rapid economic development on the changing urban landscape of Song Capital, and the subsequent effect on the daily living of the urban dwellers as a result of such a structural redefinition. By conducting an in-depth study on the economic activities within the cities, the lower class urban dwellers, as well as the recreational and social activities of the urban dwellers, this thesis seeks to portray the urban life in the Song dynasty.