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The inscriptions and signatures of master craftsmen are the pieces themselves, and today their few remaining works still quietly radiate a calm perfection. *Curtis Evarts*

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# Furniture in the Novel *Jin Ping Mei*: A Comparison of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Illustrations

Curtis Evarts

The woodcut illustrations for the novel *Jin Ping Mei* have been used as a source of reference for identifying and dating Ming-style furniture since the early part of the twentieth century. More recently, with Lévy's translation of the novel into French and an English translation in progress by David Roy, new attention has been focused on the richly detailed text, whose panorama of late Ming social and material

culture contains a multitude of references to furniture and how it was used. These textual references, together with the seventeenth-century woodcut illustrations and an eighteenth-century set of paintings that illustrate the same scenes, provide a unique body of evidence to refine our ideas about dating and deepen our understanding of Chinese furniture.

The novel *Jin Ping Mei* was published anonymously.



Plate I



Plate II



mously in the final years of the Wanli reign, circa 1618. Its early popularity prompted the printing of an illustrated edition sometime during the Chongzhen reign (1628-1644), perhaps twenty years later, which included two hundred woodblock prints, depicting two scenes from each of the one hundred chapters (plate I, m11b,\* p. 21). These scenes illustrate the many rooms, halls, gardens, and shops around which the lives and intrigues of Ximen Qing and his six wives revolve. Although set in the Song dynasty, scholars agree that text and illustrations reflect life during the late Ming. Ximen, the central figure of the novel, is an uneducated, yet wealthy, rogue, supported by his landholdings and enterprises, who becomes a minor gentry official in his native town of Cheng Ho. Behind his apparent joviality lurks a master of bribery and exploitation who continually seeks to increase his status, property, wealth, and power. Even his six beautiful wives cannot satisfy his abundant sexual appetite, and he is often involved in complicated affairs with mistresses. He is protected from the consequences of his misdeeds through a *guanxi* relationship with a high official at the Imperial Court, who on more than one occasion is mollified with substantial gifts of gold and silver. Ximen Qing dies at last, ignobly, from a malady brought on by his own lust.

This controversial book was banned by Kangxi in 1684 because of its explicit sexual references. Despite censorship, it continued to be printed, however, and Kangxi's brother is even said to have made a Manchu translation of it. The set of album paintings corresponding to the Chongzhen illustrations of *Jin Ping Mei*, entitled "Two Hundred Beauties: A Treasure of the Royal Palace" (*Qinggong zhenbao [shuang] baimeitu*), may have been associated with that translation. The paintings are finely rendered on silk (plate II, q11b, p. 21). For the most part, they illustrate the same scenes as do the late Ming woodblock prints, but the interiors and furnishings depicted in the paintings are contemporary with the later period during which they were created. For example, in the episode in which Ximen Qing and his cohorts are partying at a courtesan's home, the

groupings of figures are the same in both versions, but the woodcut illustration is set in the garden while the corresponding painted scene is rendered in an interior. The folding screen has been replaced with a standing screen and the stools with chairs. The dating of these paintings has not been firmly established. A preface to one of the second-generation reproductions of the set of paintings indicates, however, that the original set was marked with Qianlong's seals. It is possible that they were painted in the early to mid eighteenth century.

It is said that the entire set of album paintings



was taken from the Imperial Palace in Beijing to Taiwan by one of Chang Kai Shek's military advisors. Most of these original paintings are now scattered or lost, although eight can be found in the Nelson-Atkins Mu-

seum in Kansas City, Missouri.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, before their dispersal, two hundred copies of the album were printed on a collotype press.

At one point in the novel, an associate of Ximen Qing is negotiating for the purchase of an estate and is reminded of a proverb: "The establishment of an estate is an expensive business, and though in a thousand years a house may change hands a hundred times, each new master will have it re-done his own way from top to bottom."<sup>2</sup> These two sets of parallel illustrations provide a unique opportunity to compare furnishings in late Ming interiors with those, several generations later, of the Qing dynasty. And more specifically, the furniture can be closely examined in order to understand trends in its design and ornamentation during this approximately one-hundred-year period.

*It must be assumed that the furniture depicted in these two sets of illustrations more or less represents actual pieces contemporary with or earlier to the period in which they were done, or perhaps even contemporary pieces that imitated an earlier style.* Thus the appearance of new designs not seen in earlier illustrations may reflect developments and changes in design. Although artists sometimes used painting manuals that included stock furniture pat-

\*In the following pages, figure references to the Ming woodblock illustrations are designated with an "m," followed by the page number used in Chongzhen edition of *Jin Ping Mei*. For convenience, the same numbering system, preceded by a "q," is used to refer to the corresponding Qing paintings, the originals of which are unnumbered.



terns, the variety of furniture found in woodblock prints, and the even greater variety found in Qing paintings, would suggest that many artists were attempting realistic depictions of familiar furnishings.

The practice of illustrating books with woodblock prints had become quite popular by the late Ming dynasty, to the extent that individual artists often signed their work. Of the two hundred illustrations to the Chongzhen edition, twenty-seven are signed by several well-known engravers from Shexian in Anhui province. Although less gifted engravers may have had limited vocabularies, Liu Qixian, who carved at least seventeen of the Chongzhen prints, seldom repeats a furniture form.<sup>3</sup>

It has been argued that woodblock prints cannot be used for dating because the furniture is not depicted in sufficient detail to permit comparison with extant examples. Craig Clunas recently wrote of the furniture in the Chongzhen illustrations to *Jin Ping Mei* that "the tendency of woodblock artists generally to omit stretchers between the legs of tables . . . gives them an unstable appearance not necessarily in accord with reality."<sup>4</sup> While it may be generally true that many late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century illustrations show a preponderance of flat-sided corner-leg tables without additional reinforcing, Clunas inadvertently overlooked the fact that the table to which he was referring (fig. m4a, facing page), engraved by Liu

Qixian, actually has giant's arm braces, which are even more clearly depicted in the previous scene of the same room and table (fig. m3b, right). These braces were a common reinforcing device in late Ming furniture and are much less frequent in Qing furniture. Also, a number of hardwood examples of flat-sided corner-leg tables without additional braces have recently appeared, suggesting that this form is not an anomaly.<sup>5</sup> When woodblock prints are closely examined, great detail can be discovered. The woodcarver's knowledge of furniture should not be underestimated—his occupation and materials were not so distant from those of the furniture-maker, and his callused hands were probably more familiar with furniture construction



than were those of gentry writers or painters.

In addition to the question of form, there remains the problem of material and finishes, which for the most part cannot be rendered in woodblock prints. Of nearly five hundred furniture references found in Egerton's English translation<sup>6</sup> and checked against a copy of *Jin Ping Mei Cihua*,<sup>7</sup> only a handful of pieces are described in any detail—most are simple references to chairs (*yi*), tables (*zhuo*), screens (*ping*), and beds (*chuang* or *kang*). A few pieces are described more fully, apparently to emphasize their luxuriousness and value, for they are generally carved, lacquered, or gilt, and sometimes decorated with inlaid mother-of-pearl or marble panels. From one point of view, the novel and the two sets of illustrations provide three different interpretations of the sumptuous late Ming lifestyle—that of the author, who had his own literary purposes; that of the late Ming engravers, who carved lines in wooden blocks to represent well-known types of fine furnishings to correspond to the story; and that of the Qing painter (or painters), who, a century later, seems to have rendered sumptuous furnishings in contemporary styles and in realistic and colorful detail.

As the first step in this comparative analysis, each piece of furniture was isolated from the context of its scene, permitting a focus solely on form, construction, and details without peripheral distractions. In doing so, however, it quickly became apparent how much is lost when objects are taken out of context. Many of the illustrations, not to mention the richly detailed text, offer a fascinating insight into the customary uses and arrangements of furniture. Therefore, relevant information has been drawn from the text and added where appropriate to color our understanding of Chinese furniture. The furniture has been divided into categories based on form and construction, and representative examples have been selected for comparison.

## STOOLS

Round stools, drum stools, square stools, and a few hexagonal stools are found in the Chongzhen woodblock prints illustrating *Jin Ping Mei*. The round stools are all rendered with four unsupported legs (plate XVII, p. 39; plate XIX, p. 42). While caned seats are never depicted, stools are occasionally padded with cushions secured around the waist, suggesting that some of the seat panels may have been hard





(fig. m40a, left). It is interesting to note that, in the prints, round stools outnumber square and rectangular stools by nearly five to one. Yet, today, a survey of one hundred extant stools reveals

not a single similar round stool. This preponderance of round stools continues in the eighteenth-century paintings, with the addition of reinforcing giant's arm braces (plate XI, p. 33), decorative stretchers (plate XIII, p. 36), crossed stretchers (fig. q98b, below), and combinations thereof. Stools with lobed seats also appear, sometimes resembling the four-petaled peach blossom (plate VIII, p. 30). A six-petaled hibiscus-blossom seat has four unusual, outflaring legs whose beaded edges are carved with a scrolling tendril design (plate XX, p. 42). A number of rather overly delicate stools with five-lobed plum blossom seats are also illustrated, and, if they indeed existed outside of the artist's fanciful imagination, it is no wonder that not one such stool has survived (plate VII, p. 29).



Drum stools, made of porcelain, wood, and cane, commonly furnished gardens and outdoor pavilions; thus the low survival rate of the latter two may be explained by the frequent exposure of degradable materials to the elements. To pad their hard and sometimes cold seats, porcelain stools were also fitted with cushions secured with a tie just below the raised bosses around the top (fig. q3b, right). The wooden drum stools in both sets of illustrations are usually depicted with five long, oval openings (plate I, p. 21; plate IV, p. 26).

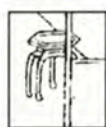
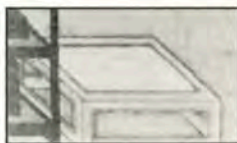


A Ming print illustrates a recessed-leg stool used as a small stand outside a bean-curd shop (fig. m68b, left). Corner-leg stools with flat sides were used in more formal arrangements (plate I, p. 21). The eighteenth-century paintings illustrate corner-leg

stools with humpback stretchers (fig. q88b, below right), spandrels, and stretchers (fig. q7b, below left). While a number of stools appear to be made from spotted bamboo, a large bamboo-like stool (*xiaowu*, chap. 8/1b)



which provides a seat for a lonely mistress longing for Ximen Qing may, because of its regular spacing of nodes and lack of an attempt to simulate spotted bamboo, represent bamboo imitated in another wood (fig. q8a, right). The Qing edition also depicts several large stools, which today are called meditation platforms or single daybeds (fig. q40a, right). There they are used, however, simply as large stools in typical domestic settings, and occasionally as a seat for two.



Hexagonal stools, both flat-sided (plate V, p. 28) and waisted (fig. m1a, left), are illustrated three times in the Ming woodcuts. In the Qing paintings, seven hexagonal stools appear, all made of speckled bamboo and similarly constructed (fig. q86b, right), along with other unusual varieties such as fan-shaped stools (plate VIII, p. 30).



The ubiquitous bench appears in both versions in passageways outside well-furnished rooms, at shops,



and in the interiors of humble dwellings. In one scene, an itinerant mirror polisher straddles a bench to polish tarnished bronze mirrors for Ximen's wives (fig. m58b, left). In the courtyard, clothes are

washed and pounded with a clothes-beater upon a bench (fig. q72a, below). Both waisted and flat-sided corner-leg benches are found in the Ming woodcuts (plate XVII, p. 39) as well as the Qing paintings, and, once again, in the latter the use of spandrels and stretchers has become commonplace (plate IV, p. 26).





## CHAIRS

Most of the chairs depicted in the Ming prints are yokeback armchairs; none, however, can be found in the later paintings, with the exception of a few side chairs. The yokeback chairs exhibit the classical form found in extant examples of hard-



wood furniture: arched yokes with rounded ends, S-shaped back splats, recessed front posts, and most often double side stretchers below the seat

frame (fig. m7a, above). In an early episode of the story, a go-between introduces Ximen Qing to the young widow Meng Yulou, hoping to interest him in a third wife. On arriving at her home, Ximen sits in a chair whose central position marks it as the seat of honor. In an later episode, arriving to visit a younger nobleman, Ximen is also given the seat of honor—a yokeback armchair with a footstool,



Plate III

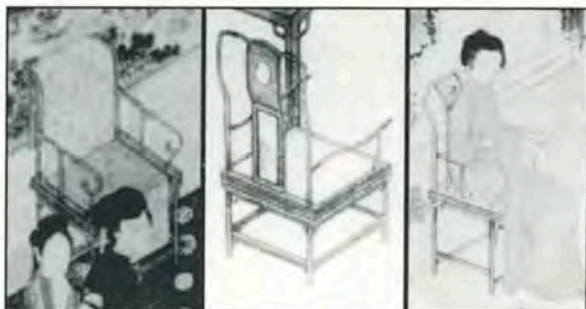
*draped with a brocade cover and set before a carpet.* At the birthday celebration for his third wife, Ximen and his first wife, Yueniang, sit in draped yokeback chairs around a large table, while the rest of the ladies sit on stools (plate III, m73a, below left).



At another gathering, the seat of honor is an unusual waisted side chair (plate I, p. 21). When officials come to offer respects to Ximen after the death of one of his wives, a reception is prepared with food and entertainment. Yoke-back side chairs of more familiar form are draped with chair covers, and before each a footstool is placed (fig. m63b, above). The few yoke-back side chairs depicted in the later paintings have details such as a crook in the rear post and open medallions (plate XII, p. 33). And, as will be seen with most of the later chairs, the stretchers, when visible, are almost always on the same level (fig. q89b, right).



The majority of the armchairs in the Qing illustrations have a crest rail more or less continuous with the back posts—the type called “southern official’s” chairs. Although the construction of many appears unconvincingly delicate, the details provide some clues to contemporary taste (plate IX, p. 32; fig. q72b, below left). Many armchairs have round openings at the tops of their splats, often with marble or caning below (fig. q58b, below center). And, although figure q52a (below right) illustrates an example whose armrests are continuous with the front posts, most extend beyond. Another chair has humpback aprons beneath both the seat





frame and stretchers (fig. q45a, right). The side chairs in the Qing paintings exhibit similar designs, both in lacquered wood (plate II, p. 21) and bamboo (fig. q80a, below). Several low-back chairs, rendered with square



members, are also found in the later illustrations. Two chairs in a garden pavilion have caned back splats as well as a lattice-like arrangement of posts in the space below the armrest (fig. q36b, below).



Rose chairs illustrated in *Jin Ping Mei* are all associated with

women's quarters. In both renditions of the scene when the maid of Li Ping'er comforts her mistress over the tragic loss of her son, the women sit in a pair of angular rose chairs (fig. m59b, below left). In the Qing paintings, several other examples are also found, including a single rose chair simulating bamboo construction, which is placed outside Li Ping'er's bedroom (fig. q48a, below right).<sup>8</sup> When Ximen Qing and Ying Boxue are entertained by the courtesan, Shuling, she sits at the table in a rose chair with cloud-shaped lattice panels (plate IV, q21b right). And, at the birthday celebration held in the quarters of Ximen's first wife, the guests, including Ximen, sit in rose chairs around a large square table in the Qing illustrations. Nevertheless, Ximen and his wife sit in the honorific position at the head of the table.



Although horseshoe-back armchairs are much less frequently illustrated, this form, such a familiar part of what is known as classical Chinese furniture, is found in both editions (plate X, p. 32). When Ximen Qing makes a pilgrimage to pay homage to the Impe-



rial Tutor at the Eastern Capital, His Eminence is seated before a large screen upon a chair draped with a tiger skin (*hupi taishiyi jiaoyi*, chap. 55/5b) and de-



scribed in the text as a *taishiyi*, or, "Grand Tutor's chair," rendered in the Ming illustration as a large, throne-like horseshoe armchair of waisted construction with thick cabriole legs (fig. m55a, left). In the corresponding later painting, the chair is no longer throne-

like but is simply a large horseshoe armchair with a brocade chair cover (fig. q55a, below). In an earlier episode, however, when Ximen Qing sends his servant with a gift of five hundred taels of silver to bribe this same high official, he is seated on a throne-like horseshoe armchair draped with an animal fur, and his feet rest on a soft pillow atop a begonia-shaped footstool (plate XV, p. 37). Another interesting horseshoe armchair, with a high and somewhat reclined



Plate IV



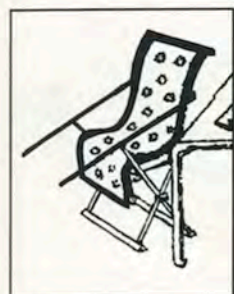
backrest extending beyond the armrest, is described in the text as a "drunken lord's chair" (*zuiwengyi*, chap. 27/11b) and is used for relaxing in the garden.



In the Ming version, a small yoke caps the top of the splat (fig. m27b, left). In the Qing version, the backrest is caned and scrolls back at the top (fig. q27b, right).



Both versions, however, also show more recognizable examples of a folding "drunken lord's chair" (*zuiwengyi*, chaps. 62/2a, 83/9a) used for erotic purposes (fig. m83b, below left; fig. q78b, below right). In the later version, ele-



ments such as the scrolled backrest appear again, as does the decorative front armpost support. Although the Chinese term for the more familiar folding horseshoe armchair, *jiaoyi*, occurs numerous times in the text in reference to chairs, the only illustration of a folding horseshoe armchair is found in the Qing edition in a traditional ancestral portrait that hangs in Yueniang's room (fig. q39a, right).<sup>9</sup> It may represent the style of an earlier period, as it already appears comparatively antique amid the contemporary furnishings in the room.



When Ximen Qing visits a local temple, he meets a monk sitting with crossed legs upon a meditation chair (*chanchuang*, chap. 49, 13a) fashioned from gnarled roots with a high arching back of woven cane (fig. m49b, left). And in an earlier and perhaps somewhat ironic scene, the en-



raged and spiteful Jin Lian is enthroned upon a gnarled root chair, prescribing an unjustified beating of her maid (fig. q41b, right). Also in the later paintings is a throne chair modeled



like a small bed with three railings (fig. q22a, left).

## BEDS



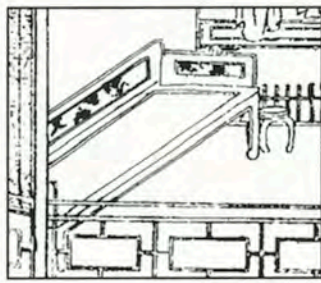
Of the various textual references to beds (*chuang*, *kang*, *chuangkang*, *kangchuang*, *liangchuang*, and *babuchuang*), fewer than ten percent are de-

scribed in detail sufficient to indicate the materials from which they are made, nor is there much contextual evidence to differentiate canopy beds from couch-beds or daybeds. Couch-beds illustrated in the Ming woodcuts show little variation. Corner-leg construction with straight aprons and undecorated surfaces is the most common, resembling many of the extant hardwood examples in collections today (plate V, p. 28).<sup>10</sup> The legs are generally hoofed and the railings at the back are generally higher than the side rails. Some variation is seen in the railings, such as those in Ximen's study (*chuang*, chap. 40/3a), which appear to be either molded or paneled (fig. m40a, right).



Two of the seventeen Ming couch-beds have marble-paneled railings (*dalishichuang*, chap. 52/3a) (fig. m99b, below).

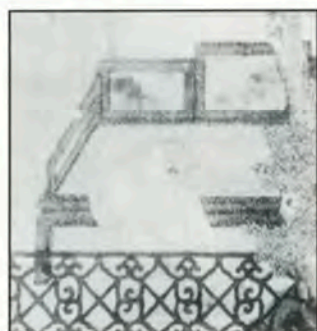
In the later series of paintings, however, most of the railings of couch-beds are paneled with decorative marble (plate XIII, p. 36). Feet terminating in cloudheads recall those in early depictions of furniture, but are seldom seen in extant examples. Nearly one of every four of these





later couch-beds has three paneled back railings, of which the central section is higher (fig. q84a, below).

A gilt bed (*miaojin kangchuang*, chap. 34/9b) in

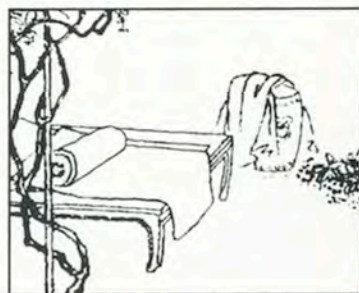


Li Ping'er's quarters is one of several whose railings are depicted in the Ming prints as solid, undecorated planks (plate V, m34a, below left). The corresponding bed in the later painting has carved aprons and cloudhead hoofs, hint-

ing at other stylistic developments (plate VI, q34a, below right). Couch-beds of speckled bamboo furnish rooms in the later version (plate VIII, p. 30). When Ximen Qing visits his future sixth wife, Li Ping'er, they cuddle on a couch-bed with C-curved legs and floor stretcher, which appears to be of dark or lacquered wood with panels decorated in the "three friends of winter" motif (plate VII, q16a, facing page). The softly sculpted line of cloudheads on the apron is typical of eighteenth-century furniture.

Daybeds—differentiated from couch-beds by the lack of railings—occur throughout both editions

(plate XIX, p. 42). Their relative portability allowed them to be used as garden furniture for a banquet celebrating Wu Sung's banishment. In this scene, Ximen and his first wife sit on a daybed, while the others are arranged according to their relative status in the household (fig. m10b, right). In a later episode, servants have brought a daybed to the Arbor of the Vines for Jin Lian to rest upon (fig. m27b, right).<sup>11</sup> Several other flat-sided corner-leg daybeds with corner spandrels, as well as an unusually large platform made of speckled bamboo (fig. q40a, facing page, top left), also appear in the Qing paintings.





A common accessory for the railless daybed is the backrest, which, if one were to base a judgment solely upon the evidence in the Qing paintings, ap-



pears to be used exclusively for love-making. Most are of the folding type (fig. q99b, below), which could be conveniently stored under the couch or daybed, and appear to have caned back-supports with scrolled headrests.



The canopy bed is well represented in both editions. In the Ming prints, however, no six-post canopy beds are illustrated—only four-post beds, of which one-third have a box-like platform on top of which the four-post canopy rests. Such is the bed (*chuang*, chap. 62/7a) in which Ximen's sixth and dearest wife, Li Ping'er, passes away. Ximen stands on a footrest grieving over her limp body (fig. m62b, below). The footrest extends the entire length of the bed and rests on *ruyi*-shaped feet. (While several other long footrests appear before canopy beds in the Ming prints, only short footrests appear in the Qing paintings, placed before both four- and six-post beds.)

The canopy beds with open bases in the Ming woodblock prints all appear to be of standard corner-leg construction, with beaded aprons and hoof feet.



In a scene in which Ximen's wives play dominoes at a square table, a canopy bed is visible with geometric patterned lattice railings and brocade curtains (fig. m18b, top right) (*chuang*, chap. 18/8b). The lattice designs for all of the beds in the

Ming prints are based on linear geometric patterns, possibly because the woodcut engraver found them easier to carve. In a later scene, however, when Li Ping'er is awakened by an apparition, the curvilinear line of the bed's (*chuang*, chap. 60/1b) apron is revealed behind the raised curtain (fig. m60a, below).



In the Qing paintings, considerably more variety is found, both in basic form and in decorative motifs. More than a third of the beds are six-post canopy beds. Their curtains are consistently hung on the inside of the bed, leaving the variously decorated panels visible from the outside. Jin Lian's bed (*chuang*, chap. 51/12a) is supported on large C-

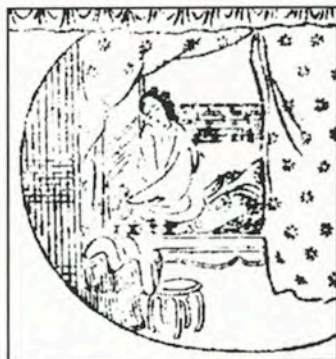
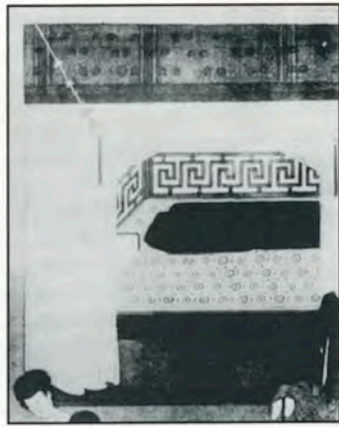
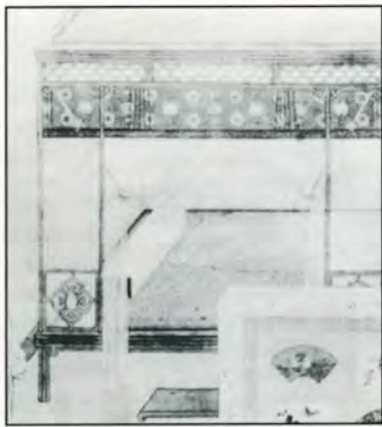
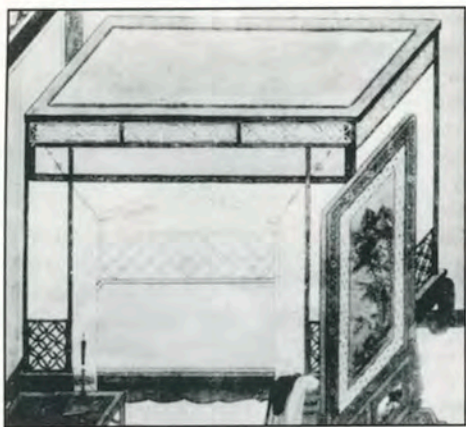


Plate VII





curved legs and decorated with panels with a coin pattern (fig. q51a, above left). The bed in figure q83a (above center) resembles one made in speckled bamboo (plate VIII, q14a, below), although its construction suggests that it is made of a stronger material. The front panels of both are shaped with *ruyi* cloudheads.

Both Ming and Qing four-post beds consistently have curtains draped around the outside of the bed. Those around one of Jin Lian's beds are described as mosquito netting dyed with the juice of hibiscus flowers (*furongzhang*, chap. 38/8a). Several of the beds have lattice rails decorated with the *leiwen* or running thunder pattern (fig. q39b, above right). The bed that Ximen

uses during a visit to the Eastern capital has lattice railings decorated with rather fanciful chrysanthemum designs. After Ximen's death, his third wife ponders remarriage while sitting in her round-leg bed (fig. q91a, below). It is again molded to resemble bamboo, with a lattice design of double circles joined with long straight lines symbolic of harmony and longevity.

Although the alcove bed had developed by the late Ming dynasty,<sup>12</sup> the arrangement used by Jingji and his new wife, Han Aijie, may illustrate a precursor that could have still been in use when the Ming edition was published (plate XIX, p. 42). The rectangular structure is simply fashioned from a series of screen panels and a roof, forming a private, sheltered enclosure in which a daybed and other necessary conveniences could fit. A second illustration depicts a similar enclosure, which rests upon a low platform set up outside on a verandah. This further suggests that its relative portability allowed it to be appropriately located according to the season. The translucent netting reveals an interior furnished with a daybed, incense stand, stool, and side table.

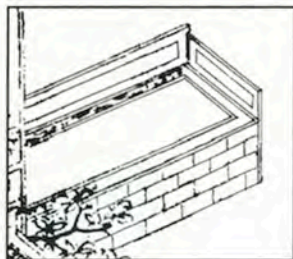
The Qing painting of this scene depicts a large alcove bed with a more developed structure, whose panels are decorated with figured marble, paintings of flowers and birds, and the double circle and longevity line motif (plate XX, p. 42). The front vertical supports are molded in the melon shape, and stand on lobed pads. A low platform supported with cloud-shaped feet raises the entire bed off the floor.



Plate VIII

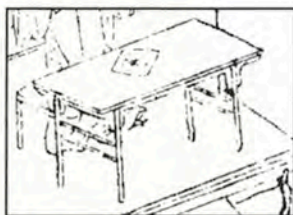


The quarters of one of Ximen's ladies has a room furnished with a *chuang* (*chuangfang*, chap. 75/5a) and another with a *kang* (*kangfang*, chap. 75/5a). The *kang* in this instance may refer to the heated brick *kang* used during the colder seasons. Chapter 73 opens with Ximen Qing watching a group of masons installing a brick *kang* (*dilukang*, chap. 73/1a), which is described as being heated with a flue from the outside. Both *kangs* are probably similar to the small brick *kang* (*rekang*, chap. 93/2a) with rails at the home of one of Ximen's mistresses (fig. m77b, below). Unlike the charcoal brazier, which filled rooms with smoke and fumes, the brick *kang* with its external fire provided warmth without spoiling the interior air and furnishings.



#### TABLES

The recessed-leg table with double stretchers appears throughout both editions, furnishing rich and poor households alike.



It serves various functions. In one scene, Ximen gives some silver to one of his destitute cohorts, who returns home and lays it on a recessed-leg table to quiet his nagging wife (fig. m56b, above). In another, as a last attempt to save Ximen's favorite wife, whose death appears imminent, a Daoist priest is called to exorcise evil spirits. The illustration shows the priest reciting incantations before a recessed-leg table (*fa'an*, chap. 62/16a) with a frontal, candles and incense (fig. m62a, below left).<sup>13</sup> In the later paintings, the simple forms of recessed-leg tables are often embellished with spandrels (fig. q67a, below right) or



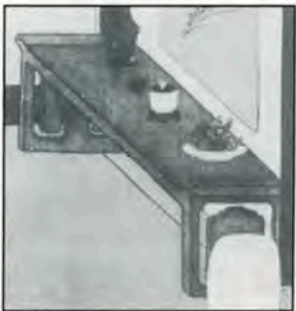
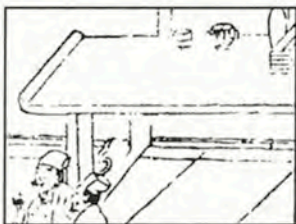
lobed legs and struts between the double stretchers (fig. q90b, left).

Square tables with recessed legs and corner spandrels are found in both versions. In the Ming prints, a cloth covers the surface of a square table



with giant's arm braces while the women of Ximen's household play dominoes (fig. m18b, below). In the Qing illustration of a later episode, Ximen and his cronies play drinking games while sitting around a similar table with perhaps a marble top (plate IX, q35b, p. 32). Although they all sit in similar chairs, Ximen sits in the seat of honor, distinguished by its position and the only one with a footstool. In the Ming woodcut of this scene, the group is seated at a flat-sided corner-leg square table (*baxian-zhuo'er*, chap. 35/13a). Ximen sits in a yokeback armchair with his feet on a footstool, while the others sit in smaller horseshoe armchairs without footstools (plate X, m35b, p. 32).

A group of long, narrow tables found in the halls of Ximen's residence appears in both versions. Such tables conform to the taste of the late Ming aesthete, Wen Zhengheng, who discusses "natural tables"—tables made with solid plank tops—in his *Treatise on Superfluous Things*. He states that their legs should be constructed with "thick, wide timber like that of the top, hollow them out and carve them lightly with designs such as cloud scrolls and *ruyi* heads. They must not be carved with such vulgar patterns as dragons, phoenixes, flowers, and grasses"<sup>14</sup> (fig. m63a, above; fig. q2a, right).



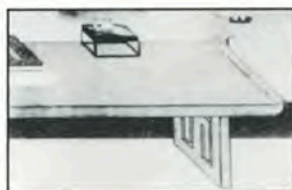




He also states that “the flanges must not be too sharp, but smooth and rounded”; therefore the table at Meng Yulou’s home would fall short of his standards (fig. m7a, left). These tables were generally used as side

tables set with a few carefully placed objects: an arrangement of flowers in an elegant and perhaps antique vase, sometimes a bowl of fruit, and, frequently, incense accouterments. On the Qing tables, these “three friends of incense”—the incense tool vase, incense burner, and incense powder box—are often arranged upon another small table-like stand (fig. q45a, above). When the occasion required, however, these tables could easily serve as formal altar tables. One was set with offerings when the great hall of Ximen’s residence was rearranged for a final tribute to his deceased wife (fig. q66b, right column, top).

Everted flanges also appear on the elaborately carved corner-leg side table, probably representing a lacquered piece, that furnishes the Imperial



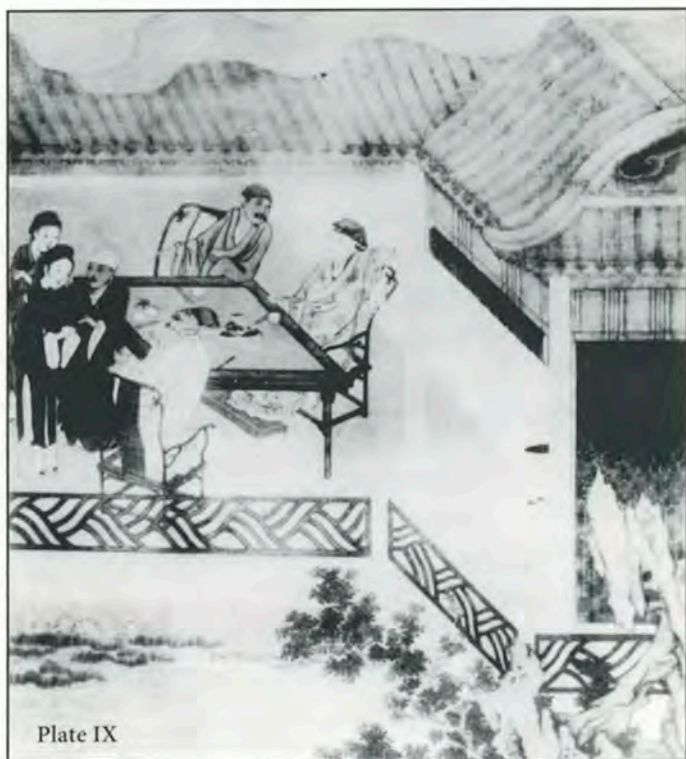
Tutors hall (plate XIV, p. 37). Of a more rare form and elegant style is the long, narrow corner-leg table with upturned ends drawn before Meng Yulou’s bed (fig. m91a, below).<sup>15</sup>

The corner-leg table with flat-sided construction and horsehoof feet is the most common table found in either edition, far outnumbering all other types. In the Ming prints, most of the tables appear to be without decoration and have a standard form with straight aprons and horsehoof feet. Square tables of this form are commonly depicted in dining scenes



(plate X, below). Jin Lian is sewing at a square table with giant’s arm braces when Ximen is first introduced by the procurress, Old Lady Wang (see fig. m3b, p. 23). In a later episode, Ximen is enraged

when he discovers a favorite courtesan with another man, and throws over a square table, smashes plates,







and tears down the curtains. The upturned table clearly reveals the construction of its underside, with transverse braces and giant's arm braces (plate XI, m20b, below left).

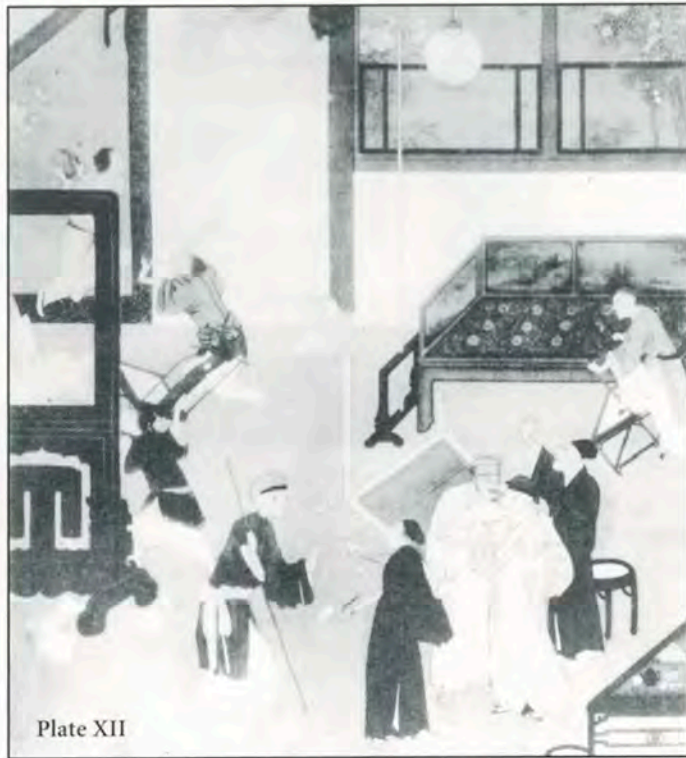
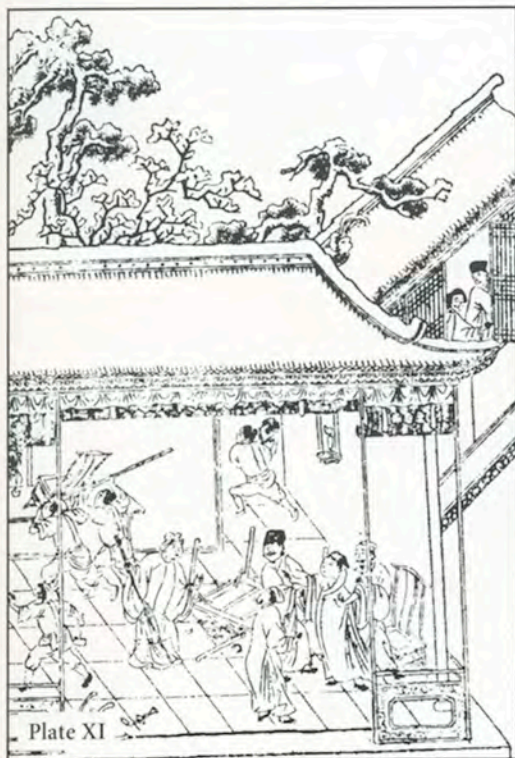
(This additional reinforcement was not sufficient, however, to prevent one of the legs from breaking.) Six of the forty-eight corner-leg tables depicted in the Ming prints have giant's arm braces.

Spandrels, stretchers, and decorative struts are found on most corner-leg tables in the later paintings. A table in Li Ping'er's room has double stretchers with inset cloud- and *ruyi*-shaped medallions (fig. q54b, above). Humpback stretchers are also commonly used and are often secured to the table top with decorative struts shaped in symbolic motifs such as joined circles (fig. q48a, right) and auspicious blossom patterns. Square tables, too, are generally rendered with curved- and cloud-shaped spandrels, such as that upon which Li Ping'er plays chess with



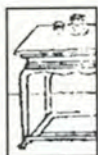
her maid (fig. q44b, left). The corresponding square table knocked over and broken by Ximen Qing also has two C-curved spandrels replacing the giant's arm braces in the original rendering (plate XII, q20b, below right). One of the most exquisitely refined tables is found at the home of Li Ping'er before she is betrothed to Ximen (plate VII, p. 29). It has a marble panel and delicate stretchers, finished with gold lacquer and inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

In the Ming prints, only one of seven corner-leg tables is waisted (fig. m98b, above); in the Qing paintings, only one of ten. This is rather remarkable, considering that the opposite is true of extant examples. The corner-leg tables in the early illustrations, again, have no spandrels or intermediate stretchers. Several, however, have floor stretchers, as does the elegant waisted side table with cabriole legs found in a room of Ximen's residence (fig. m33a, above).





An unusual railing around its top mimics galleries on large altar tables found in temples. Below, the floor stretcher is shaped along its lower edge, which turns into small hoofed feet. More clearly recognizable in



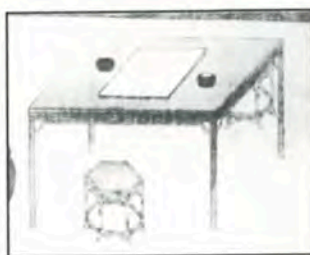
another table is the additional molding below the waist, typical of the high-waisted form (fig. m83a, left). In the Qing paintings there are no high-waisted tables, and, as with the previous flat-sided tables, those with narrow waists are detailed with cloud-shaped spandrels (fig. q1a, left) and humpback stretchers (fig. q46b, right).



With the arrival of spring, a speckled bamboo square table is set in the garden where Ximen's ladies play *weiqi* (fig. m23a, below). In the Ming woodcuts, this table is the only piece of furniture that appears to be made of bamboo. In the Qing paintings, however, nearly twenty percent of all the tables are made from bamboo or imitate bamboo construction. Of these, only about five percent appear to be constructed from bamboo, while the other ninety-five percent appear to simulate bamboo. This imitated form follows neither the principles of recessed-leg construction nor that of corner-leg construction, and will therefore be referred to as "double molded," although in actuality the tables are sometimes triple or quadruple molded.

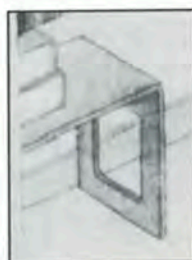


The term "double molded" refers to the two molded edges of the table top's frame, which usually is made of two pieces of wood whose outside faces are shaped with a convex profile. The four corners of the frame are radiused and appear to wrap around the round legs, resembling the wrap-around construction techniques used to make bamboo furniture. The legs have no feet terminations. In many extant hardwood pieces, the stretchers below the frame also appear to wrap around the legs. At Old Lady Wang's house, a

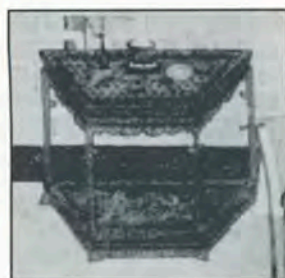


double-molded square table (actually triple-molded) is set to play *weiqi* (fig. q86b, above left). On either side is a pair of stools with similar construction that are clearly made from speckled bamboo. The table, however, has a smooth surface that probably represents lacquered or polished wood. A double-molded table in a well-furnished room at a local brothel has humpback stretchers with circular struts (fig. q93b, above right), and another in Jin Lian's room has humpback stretchers and pillar-shaped struts.

More variations of table forms continue in the Qing paintings. Furnishing Jin Lian's quarters is a rather minimalistic side table whose top is supported by panels joined at each end (fig. q85a, below left). Another hybrid form appears as a low table from



whose cloud-shaped feet long legs extend (fig. q17b, above center). A half-round table in a large hall at Ximen's estate displays an incense set with crackled glazes (fig. q24a, above right). Its surface is lacquered with a gold ground, auspiciously decorated with phoenixes and cranes among clouds, and bordered with scrolling floral motifs. Among the sumptuous furnishings at the home of Lady Lin is a waisted half-hexagonal table with traditionally shaped aprons (fig. q69a, left).



Its form would appear to be from an earlier period than the unusual half table with concave sides and butterflyed corners in the quarters





of Ximen's second wife (fig. q80b, left).

When Yueniang and her brother are fleeing from bandits, they stumble upon an old monk in a cave who is reading scriptures by candlelight, using

a low table with everted flanges (fig. m84b, below). Although numerous couch beds, canopy beds, and *kangs* are illustrated, no *kang* tables are illustrated in either version. Perhaps the Anhui illustrators were not as familiar with the *kang*, which was more widely used in northern China. A few textual references can be found, however, describing *kang* tables brought in with food and wine and placed upon the bed (*kangzhuo*, chaps. 18/12a, 29/13a, 90/7b; *xiaozhuo kangshang*, chap. 39/14a).



Tables with drawers probably preceded the enigmatic coffer form. A small recessed-leg table with one drawer bearing a domestic shrine is found at the home of one of Ximen's mistresses (fig. m61a, left). It may be similar to one with drawer(s) (*chouti'er zhuo*, chap. 86/11a), which Jin Lian was allowed to take, together with a few other token items, when she was forced to leave Ximen's household. Ximen's silk shop has a similar table with a space for a drawer, although



hidden from behind. The table probably serves as a desk for the accountant to tally the profits. The table screen would have shielded him from passers-by (plate XVIII, p. 40). Another with possibly two or three drawers is part of Han Aijie's dowry of furnishings of Nanjing make (plate XIX, p. 42). These three tables are all rendered with corner spandrels rather than the more familiar full-length aprons below the lowest stretcher. The corresponding Qing painting of the newlyweds' apartment also has a table with two drawers, although of corner-leg construction



(plate XX, p. 42); and in a medicine shop, a corner-leg table with three drawers serves as a counter. The faces of the drawers appear to have the applied *kunmen*-shaped apron design commonly found on extant coffers (fig. q19a, left column, below).<sup>16</sup>

## STANDS

Incense stands are one of the most artistic expressions of Chinese furniture. In both sets of illustrations, a variety of elegant forms is rendered. A scene from the Ming woodcuts depicts a birthday celebration, with incense wafting from a lion-shaped censer placed atop a tall, elegant incense stand (plate III, p. 25). Long, slender legs gently curve out and then curl inward at the base to rest upon a circular floor stretcher. Another large, circular incense stand graces the presence of the high official, Zhai Qian, to whom Ximen's servants have come with a substantial bribe (plate XIV, p. 37). The stand has a high waist decorated with small oval panels below which a foliated skirt extends. The cabriole legs swell outward with animated intensity and return to rest their delicate feet on a circular stretcher. A rather more austere square stand quietly supports a bowl of fruit next to a couch bed in the room of Li Ping'er (plate V, p. 28).

In the counterpart Qing painting, although still represented as a rectangular stand with a bowl of fruit, the austere form has become a waisted stand with bulging cabriole legs (plate VI, p. 28). Its lacquered surface is entirely covered with filigree designs, and figured marble is sumptuously used for the top panel, as well as for a panel within the frame of the base stretchers. In Jin Lian's quarters, another rectangular stand with a marble top and straight legs displays a flower arrangement (fig. q85a, above left). Candles were also occasionally placed upon stands to provide light inside an adjacent canopy bed (fig. q75a, above right). In Yueniang's apartments, a tall, circular incense stand with long, straight legs displays a blossoming sprig in a vase (plate XIII, q81b, p. 36).

From evidence in both the woodcuts and paintings, it can be seen that large *meiping* vases were also





sometimes supported in stands due to their high center of gravity. From the relative size of other furniture and figures in the scenes in which they are depicted, such stands appear to be the size of stools (plate II, p. 21).<sup>17</sup> At the home of Li Ping'er, a large, stool-shaped stand holds a tall, crackle-glazed vase with an arrangement of flowers (fig. m16a, right). Smaller vase stands were also used on tables.



Stands fashioned from gnarled and twisted roots appear several times in the eighteenth-century renderings, used to display fruit or burn incense. In Jin Lian's bedroom, a pair are tastefully used to exhibit *punjin*, or miniature landscapes (fig. q51a, left). In the garden, a number of *punjin* and potted flower arrangements are displayed on both high and low stands, and occasionally on lacquered as well as porcelain stools. Although these are found mostly in the Qing paintings, one low stand resembling a footstool is placed under a miniature landscape with pine and

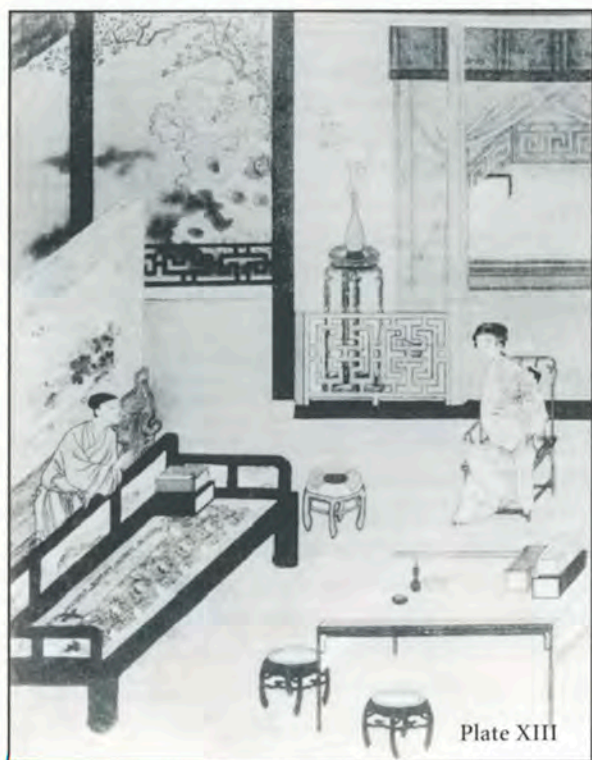


Plate XIII

rocks in a Ming woodcut garden scene (fig. m12a, right). Stands resembling washbasin stands were also used to elevate arrangements of flowering plants, brought in from the nursery during their period of bloom (fig. q99b, below).



Folding stands, of which there are a number of extant examples, would have been particularly suited to the seasonal comings and goings of potted plants, as they could be easily stored when not in use.



The Qing paintings also depict several washbasin stands in bedroom scenes (plate XX, p. 42), sometimes next to a dressing table, or hidden away in a back courtyard. The tops of the legs are all flared outwards to cradle the basins. In Chapter 8, before monks give final incantations for the deceased



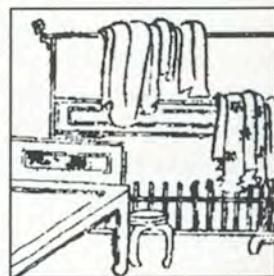
husband of Jin Lian, they wash their hands at a basin outside the window of her room (fig. q8b, right). The only washbasin and stand depicted in the Ming prints appears in the



corresponding scene. Although partially hidden behind the trunk of a tree, the stand actually appears to be a stool (fig. m8b, left). Washbasins with towel racks are not found in either set of illustrations.

In the Ming illustrations, clothes racks were often placed at the end of the bed where garments could be conveniently draped. One example with low vertical poles may have included a rack for hanging shoes (fig. m99b, below). Near the end of the novel, the bride's father provides a newlywed couple with a dowry of furniture of Nanjing make. Included is a clothes rack, depicted in the paintings with slender spandrels and decorated with auspicious designs typical of the eighteenth century (plate XX, p. 42).

Mirror stands were an important part of the





furnishings of the women's quarters. The familiar basic folding mirror stand is illustrated in both editions. The earlier representation differs only in its yoke-like crest rails and single folding support (plate XIX, p. 42; fig. q48a, below). The later paintings illustrate a mirror stand shaped like *lingzhi* fungus. The woodcuts show a mirror stand (*zhuantai*, chap. 28/5b) shaped like a *ruyi* on Jin Lian's dressing table. Although no large mirror stand with drawers is depicted, one is mentioned in the text, when wine and food are brought to one of the women's rooms and served on a small dressing stand whose mirror has been removed (*shuzhuangzhuo*, chap. 99/2b).<sup>18</sup>



## SCREENS

The folding and standing screens found in Ximen's household served many purposes. Folding screens, being lightweight and thus somewhat more portable than standing screens, were easily set out as occasions required. When Ximen Qing learns that a vengeful and dangerous adversary has been successfully exiled, a celebration is prepared in the garden with folding screens (*weiping*, chap. 10/5b) and embroidered hangings. Although this particular scene is



Plate XIV

not illustrated, in the next chapter a similar scene is rendered in the Ming woodcuts, showing Ximen and his cronies making merry at the home of one of his courtesans. A folding screen is placed in the garden, comfortably enclosing the guests who carry on around a square table, and serving as an architectural backdrop (plate I, p. 21). The use of album leaves mounted on screen panels is also seen a number of times in the Qing illustrations.

Later, when Ximen's servants are sent to bribe a magistrate, he is found seated within the surrounds of a large four-panel screen decorated with a landscape painting (plate XIV, m18a, below left). The panels of folding screens depicted in Ming woodcuts usually appear much wider than any extant examples of folding screens, of which there are probably none earlier than the Kangxi period. Their frameworks are generally completely covered with paintings, paper, or silk. In the Qing painting of the bribery scene, an eight-panel screen with more recognizable proportions and frame elements is reproduced (plate XV, q18a, below right). Here, too, most of the screen is covered with a landscape scene in which a peacock and crane forage among rocks and flowers. The lower part of the frame displays *taohuan* panels, typically shaped aprons, and feet wrapped in metal.



Plate XV



The folding screen probably concentrated heat from braziers and provided some relief from the drafts that must have chilled many in rooms often enclosed only with papered lattice frames and blinds. Late in the story and in the dead of winter, Pang Chunmei, the former servant of Jin Lian and now the rich wife of an official, returns to her former household to visit Ximen's widow, Yueniang. When she is invited to one of the inner rooms to pay respect to Ximen's tablet, coals are placed into a brazier and a screen (*weiping*, chap. 96/3a) is set up around a square table, where they partake of some delicacies. Then, after a visit to the rundown quarters of her former mistress, they return to one of the upper rooms in the inner court and a "peacock screen" (*pingkai congque*, chap. 96/5a) is set, blinds are pulled down, and more food and wine are brought in.

Folding screens are called peacock screens several times in the novel. Although two of the Qing screens are painted with peacocks, the terminology, *pingkai congque*, more likely refers to the unfolding of a richly decorated screen. The reversed phrase, *congque kaiping*, describes the opening of a peacock's beautiful plumage. When the respectable Lady Qiao



visits Ximen's ladies, she is given the seat of honor before a screen, which is decorated with a stock peacock-and-crane painting. In the text, it is referred to as a *jin-ping* (chap. 43/11b), or, literally, a finely decorated screen. The musicians stand off to one side, and a servant waits behind the end panel of the screen.

The painting covers the upper two-thirds of the screen; the lower panels bear carved *ruyi* designs.

When Ximen gives a banquet for his friends and relatives, the Ming illustration depicts the large hall set out with tables and screens facing one another; a folding screen decorated with a landscape scene on *one side, and opposite, a large single-panel screen supported with standing spandrels mounted on a paneled base* (plate XVI, m20a, left). These massive standing screens appear in both editions much more frequently than do folding screens. More than twice as many are found in the Ming prints and almost six times as many in the Qing paintings. In extant examples, however, the opposite is true. When a brawl breaks out at the brothel, Ximen and his buddies smash the marble panel in a large standing screen (plate XII, p. 33). Below the broken panel, a rather stiff, open-carved *ruyi* panel is still intact. In a later episode, an impoverished aristocratic family pawns a screen to the wealthy Ximen Qing. It is described as having a *dali* marble panel, a gilt frame inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and feet shaped like crouching lions. Its size, 3 *chi* wide by 5 *chi* high, would approximate that of a large table screen.<sup>19</sup> The Qing representation of this episode shows a pair of large standing screens with Ximen and his cohort, Ying Boxue, admiring the exquisite markings in the panels of *dali* marble (fig. q45a, above). The screens rest on thick feet and are supported by carved standing spandrels curiously joined with pearl-like carvings to

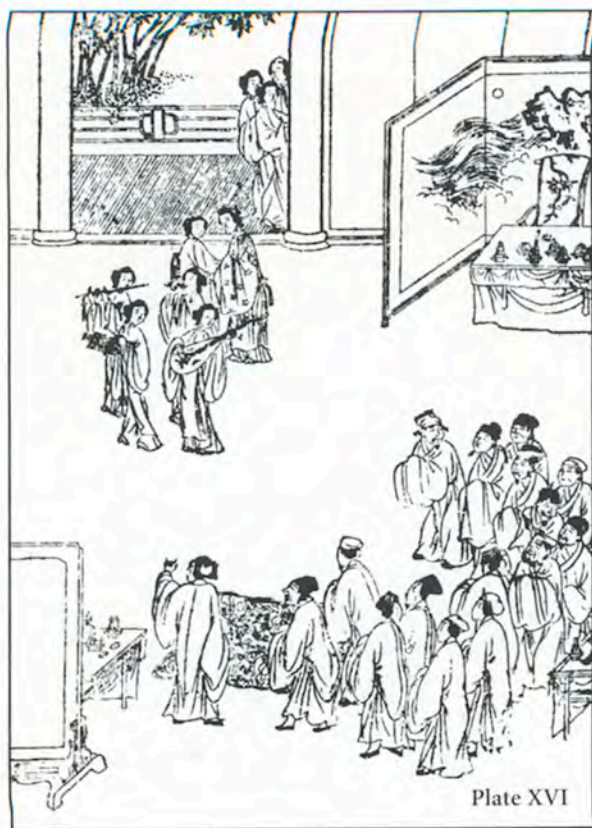
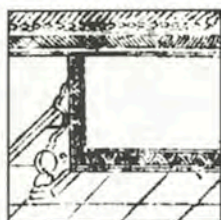


Plate XVI



drums carved with swirling hibiscus. In the Ming prints, spandrels are also commonly joined to drums (fig. m12a, right). When the top corners of the screen frame are visible, they generally have butterflyed corners that are sometimes decorated with the *ruyi*



cloudhead design, the shape of which is similar to metal corner mounts found on many extant examples of furniture (fig. m21a, left).

Inside the pharmacy, the pleasant impression of a flower arrangement and small table screen has been carefully placed upon the counter (plate XVII, m19a, below). Outside

is an advertising sign which is supported with a separate base that could easily alternate as a screen base. The sign is easily disassembled when the pharmacist's wife must quickly close up the shop after some local extortionist thugs beat up her husband.



Plate XVII



Neither the table screen on the desk in Ximen's silk shop (plate XVIII, p. 40), nor a third which frames a marble panel (fig. m7a, left) appear to have separate frame-and-base construction like that clearly recognizable in the medicine shop sign.

Also described in the text is a *dali* marble table screen with *zumizuo* pedestal base (chap. 49/15a) decorated with *taohuan* panels, a type not yet confirmed in any extant example.<sup>20</sup>

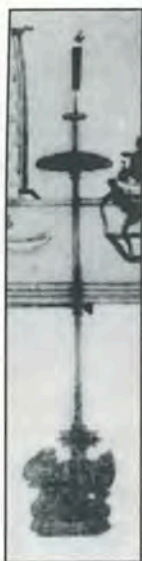
## MISCELLANEOUS

The basic structural concept of the standing screen<sup>21</sup> was used for stands with many different functions, including clothes racks, lamp stands, bell stands, balance stands, and, to a certain extent, even the frame that carries stacked food boxes. Hand-held balances and balance stands were necessary for weighing out silver in wealthy households to distribute funds necessary in running an estate, and in shops that sold goods by weight and/or for weight in silver. In one episode, one of Ximen's ladies asked the household accountant to weigh out an amount of silver to pay the flower seller for some purchases she had made. A lump of silver was then weighed, and trimmed to the asking price (chap. 23/11). The first day Ximen's new silk shop opened, the balance stand was probably in constant use, as more than five hundred taels of silver were taken in (plate XVIII, m60b, p. 40). In the corresponding Qing painting, both customer and clerk closely eye the balance pointers, which, when aligned, indicate correct balance in weight (fig. q60b, above). Most extant balance stands have one or more shallow drawers housed in a box-like stretcher construction that forms the base, and in which a set of measured weights can be stored. Thus, it is curious that the Qing balance stand is rendered with an apron more typical of a screen, and it is probably the error of the artist, who, like most, including those in the transaction he depicted, paid very close attention to the indicating needle, and perhaps less to the balance stand's construction.

Lamp stands are also sometimes modeled after the basic stand concept. At the home of a mistress, a candle burns upon what appears to be an adjustable-

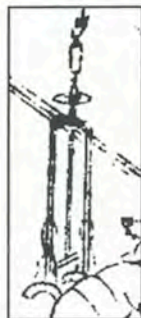






height stand (fig. m69b, right). Three lantern-hanging stands found in the Qing paintings all have low base stands about the size of a table screen (plate XII, p. 33). The top stretcher has a hole through which a lantern-hanging pole is inserted and then seated into the lower stretcher. More often the stands consist of a single pole supported by a tripod base (fig. m63b, above

left), or some more decorative animal-like form (fig. q69a, above right). Most of these also have an encircling ornament of some kind about halfway up the lamp pole, perhaps reflecting an adjustable version known to telescope.<sup>22</sup> In both sets of illustrations, all of the stands that have large candles burning without



any lantern or shade also have a round horizontal plate mounted atop their poles, probably to catch dripping wax.<sup>23</sup>

Lanterns in the *Jin Ping Mei* illustrations always hang from a pole that has a bracket, usually reinforced with a decorative spandrel (plate I, p. 21; plate II, p. 21). The lanterns themselves are covered with gauze (*shadeng*, chap. 42/3b), or are more often globe-shaped lanterns made from sheep's horn.<sup>24</sup> Ximen ordered two of the sheep's



horn lanterns from Yunnan in preparation for Li Ping'er's birthday celebration (*Yunnan yangjiu*, chap. 42/1b). In the Qing paintings, quite ornate lanterns are found hanging in the homes of wealthy families (plate VII, p. 29). Specially decorated lanterns, hung with ribbons, tassels, and ornaments, are brought out for the Lantern Festival (fig. m15a, above; fig. q15a, left).

Less sophisticated oil lamps were hung on simple stands, lighting the entrances to local wine and sing-song houses frequented by Ximen and his servants (fig. q94b, below). Hommel found these still in use in provincial China during



the 1920s, and noted that the small porcelain dish resting on top of the stand is filled with oil into which a rush wick is laid.<sup>25</sup> According to Wang Shixiang, the form of these lamphangers resembles highback chairs, thus the modern name, "lamphanger chair."



Lanterns were also commonly carried by hand at night to illuminate dark lanes. On a snowy night,

two soldiers carry lanterns marked with the large imperious characters, "Ximen's *ya(men)*," as they escort Ximen's women home from a gathering (fig. m46a, left). In the same Qing illustration, the sol-

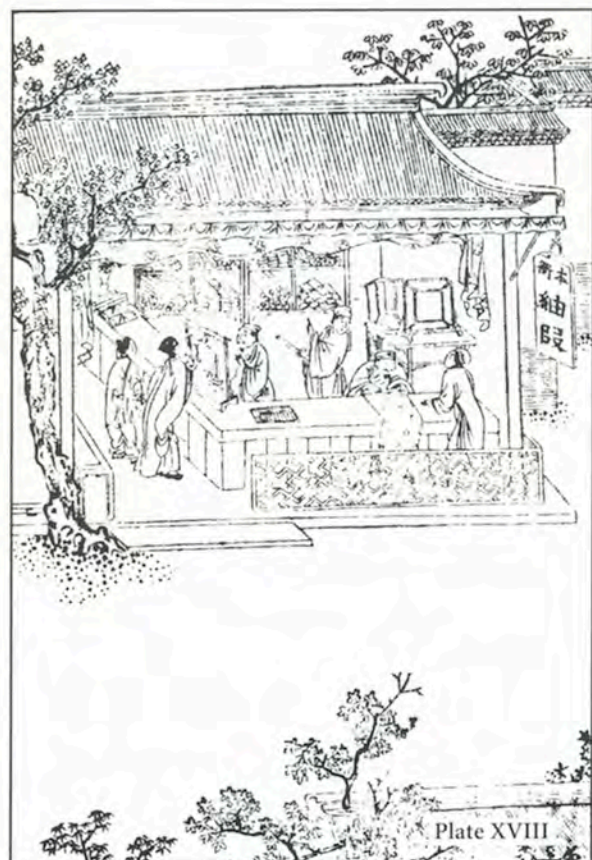
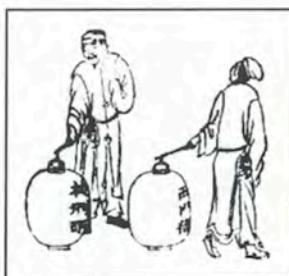


Plate XVIII

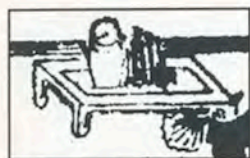
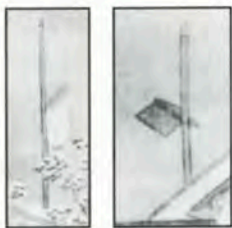




diers carry lanterns not unlike those found hanging from many lamp stands (fig. q46a, left). Here, too, lanterns are set out like street lamps, hanging along the lane high on poles with protective roofs (fig. q46a, below left). And, in a

scene occurring during the middle of the day, a lampless post is seen extending above the roof tops outside Ximen's silk shop (fig. q60b, below right), suggesting, as one would expect, that it was necessary to take them down daily to be replenished with candles or oil, relit, and hung again in the evening.

Braziers are illustrated in both editions and mentioned frequently throughout the text of *Jin Ping Mei*. Servants carried portable braziers for their masters, to ensure their warmth upon arrival at a destination, and smaller handwarmers were carried in the sedan chair. In the Qing paintings, portable braziers with glowing



coals are often illustrated, elevated on round stools (plate VIII, p. 30). In a Ming woodcut, a low brazier with horsehoof feet warms a wine pot in Jin Lian's

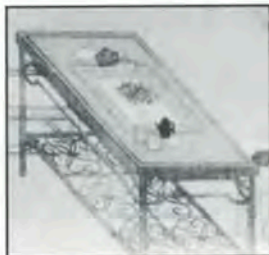
room (fig. m79a, above). During the winter, Ximen Qing used a garden studio that, although it had a heated floor (*dilu nuankang*, chap. 67/1b), still required a large bronze brazier (*huangtong houpén*, chap. 67/1b) on a cold snowy day. Low braziers were often placed under tables as footwarmers, such as one found under a square table at the house of one of Ximen's courtesans, described as a bronze brazier (*huangtong houpén*, chap. 77/6a) (fig. m77a, below). Also mentioned is a large square brazier (*dafang luhou xiang*, chap. 43/11b), which heated a special reception at a hall so well that the room was as "warm as Spring." The largest illustrated brazier, however, is found in a Qing painting, warming a wine pot and a teapot in Yueniang's bed-



room (fig. q79b, left). The later paintings depict an unusual brazier table glowing with coals<sup>26</sup> to keep wine and tea heated at Lady Lin's home (fig. q69a, below).

## CABINETS AND STORAGE

Only a few cabinets are found in the illustrations of *Jin Ping Mei*, although they are often referred to in the text as places where clothing, rolls of silk, furs, silver, and precious objects are stored. The newlyweds' suite of Nanjing furniture includes cabinets, which



are illustrated in both versions. In the woodblock print, an arrangement of chests atop two small cabinets (plate XIX, m97b, p. 42) may foreshadow the large, two-part wardrobes so difficult to find in any early illustrations. (Today, most dealers, collectors, and scholars would refer to small tapered cabinets of this proportion as *kang* cabinets.) The corresponding eighteenth-century painting, however, illustrates a square-corner wardrobe closer in form to actual known examples (plate XX, q97b, p. 42). In the text, a large cabinet (*dachu*, chap. 46/11b) in Yueniang's quarters is mentioned, inside which furs were stored. And, just behind the large screen at the entrance to another residence, appears a large square-cornered leg, hinting at the possibility of a large wardrobe (fig. m7b, above).

Ximen's study is also furnished with bookshelves stacked with papers and visiting cards as well as books, which were customary gifts from junior officials. In the Qing paintings, these shelves are sometimes built into the wall (fig. q40a, right). The Ming prints illustrate a standing bookcase in the room







of Ximen's secretary, Scholar Wen, which is also stacked with books and scrolls (fig. m76b, left). In the Qing paintings, another bookcase has paneled sides as well as a paneled space at the bottom, which could well contain a hidden compartment or a drawer

(fig. q78b, below). Open shelf units were commonly utilized to stack and store goods, such as those in Ximen's thriving silk shop (plate XVIII, p. 40). In the pharmacy, a large cabinet with many small drawers for medicinal ingredients is found (plate XVII, p. 39). In the later representation, the cabinet has been reduced to a table-top medicine chest with many drawers, which is more in accordance with the description in the text (*yaoshai xianglong*, chap. 19/10a). Like the previous tables with drawers, cabinets in the Ming prints are rendered with corner spandrels, rather than full aprons, beneath their bottom stretcher.



Various sizes of chests and trunks were commonly

used as portable containers. When Ximen learns of an accusation brought upon him at the Eastern Capital, he immediately dispatches his servants to the capital with a chest full of gold, silver, and jewels as a bribe to purchase



his acquittal (plate XIV, p. 37). Large tea chests (*chayexiang*, chap. 16/3a) in Li Ping'er's quarters were filled with quantities of aloe, white wax, quicksilver, and pepper, sufficient to pay for the construction costs of a new garden. Ximen marries his third wife because of her beauty and inherited wealth. After the betrothal, her belongings, in chests, trunks, and boxes of various sizes, are all hurriedly taken to Ximen's household by his servants during the height of a relative's dispute over exclusion from the inheritance (fig. m7b, above). In another episode, Lady Qiao attends a party given by Ximen's ladies, accompanied by an entourage of servants, two of whom carry her change of clothes in dressing cases (*yixiang*, chap. 43/

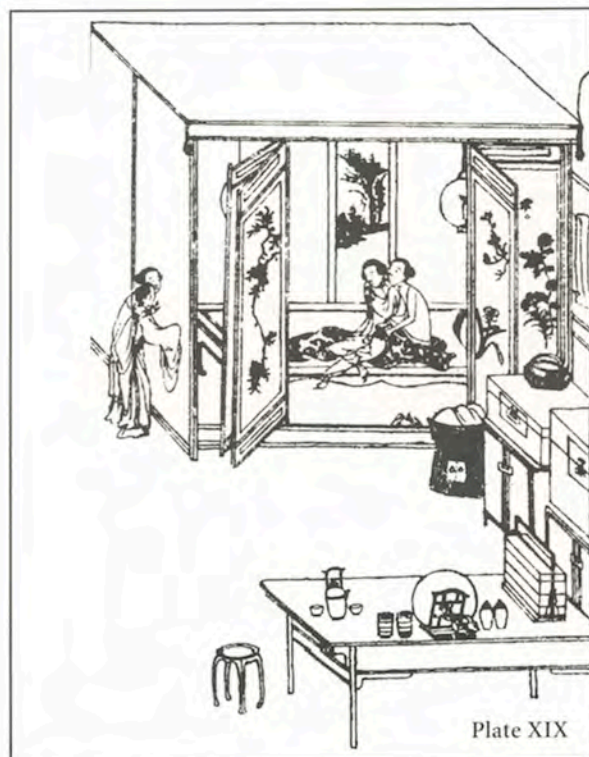


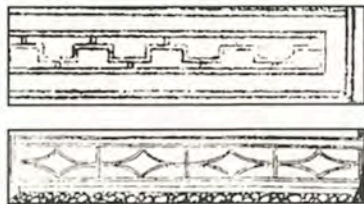
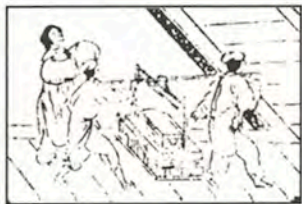
Plate XIX



Plate XX



11a) on a litter frame (fig. m43b, right). In the Ming prints, all of the hardware used on chests is rectangular in shape; occasionally, metal protects and reinforces the corners (fig. m66b, below). Only in the



Qing paintings is a box with a round lockplate found, placed inside a built-in cupboard (fig. q83b, below).



Servants commonly carried small dishes of food in tiered boxes from remote kitchens to wherever their master's meal might be taken. Made in various sizes, these practical carrying boxes were used for other purposes as well. When Li Ping'er asks Ximen to bribe an official on her husband's behalf with sixty large bars of silver, Ximen sends his servants to carry away the silver in food boxes (*shihe*, chap. 14/4a) so as not to arouse the suspicions of neighbors. In a later episode, after a sacrificial ceremony at the temple, delicacies and a set of miniature priest's apparel for Ximen's newly born son were delivered to his home in a large, tiered box (fig. m39a, above). After Ximen's death and with the arrival of the Qingming festival, his one remaining widow prepares to visit his grave and make a sacrifice. She fills a large tiered box with incense, candles, paper money, and food, which is carried on a pole by two servants (fig. q89a, above).



## LATTICE RAILINGS AND PANELS

Decoration found in the architectural elements of the Ming and Qing renderings can also provide some clues to differences in design from one century to the next. The lattice railings and balustrades of walkways, as well as the decorative window panels, papered to provide semi-translucent protective screens, were of endless variety and design. In the Ming prints, however, many designs tend to be linear with emphasis upon simple space division (fig. m57b, left).

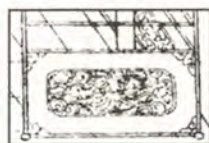


Sometimes they emphasize rhythmic movement (fig. m76b, top left), while more complex variations of *wan* (plates XVII, p. 39; XVIII, p. 40) and *jing* (fig. m79a, above right) patterns display auspicious symbols. Restrained curvilinear elements appear in



some designs (fig. m79b, above left; plate XVI, p. 38); less frequent are those with

richer, tracery-like articulation (fig. m50a, above). Entrances were often flanked with solid panels bearing traditional *haishitang* designs (fig. m15b, right above), or sometimes more elaborately carved with phoenixes and clouds (fig. m29a, right below).



Vertical panels that screened interior walls are less varied in the Ming woodcuts. The basic unit has a beaded lower panel whose *kunmen* shape turns into a *ruyi* at the base (fig. m85b, below left). Above, a narrow panel at the waist is a simple lattice spaced closely to provide a solid foundation for a translucent, oiled-paper skin. The Qing counterpart scene depicts similar screens; however, the *ruyi* has again become enlarged, as in the end panels of the above-mentioned altar tables, and the latticed framework is much more open (fig. q85b, right).



The architectural railings and panels in the Qing paintings are far more varied and incorporate more

symbolic motifs. Endless designs of intricate linear patterns occur (plates II, p. 21; VI, p. 28; VII, p. 29; XIII, p. 36). Wave patterns (plate IX, p. 32), petal designs (plates IV, p. 26; XV, p. 37), cloud de-





lished in Terese Bartholomew, "Botanical Motifs in Chinese Furniture," *Journal of the Classical Chinese Furniture Society*, 2:4 (Autumn 1992), 44.

9. A brief discussion of this problem can be found in Clunas' "The Novel *Jin Ping Mei* as a Source for the Study of Ming Furniture." He states that the folding chair (*jiaoyi*) is the type of chair most frequently specified in the novel. My research shows that twenty percent of the references to any chair used *jiaoyi*; the majority used the modern term for chair, *yi*.

10. The bed illustrated in plate m8a is referred to as a small bench or stool (*xiaowu*, chap. 8/1b) in the text. The Qing painting, however, illustrates it as a large stool. See fig. q8a, p. 24.

11. According to the Chinese text, the servant brings out a *liangxi*, literally a "cool mat" (chap. 29/9a).

12. Two miniature alcove beds were found, one in the tomb of Pan Yunzheng, dated 1589, and the other in the tomb of Wang Xijue, dated 1613.

13. In his study of *Jin Ping Mei* (p. 68), Clunas wrote that the word *an* was never used for a table. Actually it appears several times in the text: *an*, chap. 15/8a, *xiang'an*, chap. 39/4b, *shu'an*, chap. 48/1b, and *xiang'an*, chap. 62/21a. Although the *fa'an* is illustrated as a recessed-leg table in this particular case, there does not appear to have been any consistent usage of *an* for recessed-leg tables and *zhuo* for corner-leg tables. In fact, in one instance the same table is referred to as both *an* and *zhuo* (chap. 15/8a).

14. Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 43.

15. For a further discussion of this type of table, see Evarts, "Simplicity and Integrity: The Anatomy of a Masterpiece."

16. Cf. Wang Shixiang, *Classic Chinese Furniture: Ming and Early Qing Dynasties*, trans. by Sarah A. Handler and the Author (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (H.K.) Co., Ltd., 1988), 232.

17. For an extant example of a round hardwood stool with a removable seat panel, see Curtis Evarts, "Classical Chinese Furniture in the Piccus Collection," *Journal of the Classical Chinese Furniture Society*, 2:4 (Autumn 1992), 10, fig. 8. For a round incense stand with removable top panel, see Sarah Handler, "The Incense Stand and the Scholar's Mystical State," *Journal of the Classical Chinese Furniture Society*, 1:1 (Winter 1990), 9, fig. 6. Both stool and incense stand could also have served as large vase stands.

18. A combination mirror stand/dressing table can be found at the Museum of Classical Chinese Furniture, Renaissance, California. A folding mirror stand rests neatly on top of the dressing table, keyed into place by the drip-edge molding around the table top. Drawers inside probably held cosmetics, and the mirror stand could easily have been removed to allow the dressing table to be used as a low table.

19. Chapter 45/4a. Its size, 3 *chi* wide by 5 *chi*, is, according to Craig Clunas, about 90 cm x 150 cm. Clunas, "The Novel *Jin Ping Mei* as a Source for the Study of Ming Furniture."

20. Chapter 49/5a; for a discussion of *zumizuo* see Curtis Evarts, "The Development of the Waisted Form and Variations in Its Joinery," *Journal of the Classical Chinese Furniture Society* 1:3 (Summer 1991).

21. The concept is based upon two heavy feet, which ground the frame, into which vertical supports are deeply mortised and supported by standing spandrels. The supports are then tied together with a minimum of two horizontal stretchers, but usually more, placed according to the function.

22. Jin Oubo, a furniture collector in Beijing, has such an example in *huanghuali*, whose pole has a hollowed-out lower portion from which the smaller diameter upper portion telescopes to three predetermined heights.

23. A Qiu Ying painting also illustrates two lamp stands with square, flat plates that support small, square lanterns with *candles inside, which could alternately be used as table lanterns*. See Sarah Handler, "Carriers of Light: The Chinese Lampstand and Lantern," *Journal of the Classical Chinese Furniture Society* 1:2 (Spring 1991), 23.

24. According to Charlotte Horstmann, who lived in Beijing during the early part of this century, the horn was first boiled in water to a gelatinous state, and then worked with irons to flatten it into sheets. These were presumably softened again and laid around a mold. Their edges were filed and glued together imperceptibly with fish glue. The black part of the horn, being somewhat harder, was used to trim around the openings at the top and bottom, where additional strength was needed for the candle holder and lantern hanger. They were then painted on the inside, like snuff bottles.

25. Rudolf P. Hommel, *China At Work* (Cambridge and London: The M.I.T. Press, 1969), 315.

26. On cold days and evenings the brazier was customarily stoked with extra charcoal, both as a welcoming gesture and to boil water for tea. This charcoal is referred to several times as *shoutan* (chaps. 21/7b, 39/9b, 71/1b, 78/19b), literally, animal charcoal. Wang Shixiang recently discovered a recipe for *shoutan* in Gao Lian's Ming dynasty *Zun Sheng Bajian* (Qing Guangxu edition, 1884, chap. 8/24b). It describes a mixture of animal bone charcoal, animal dung, and fragrant hibiscus leaves bound with glutinous rice water and formed into auspicious animal shapes, which after drying would burn for three days. At one point in the story, an old lady is observed collecting and drying horse dung, most likely to make *shoutan* (chap. 68/18a). Other sources indicate that charcoal was made from both sheep and chicken bones, sunflower leaves, and hawthorn flowers; the water from boiled dried prunes could also be used as a binder. Upon the arrival of a court eunuch of high rank at the Eastern capital, an even more refined water-polished charcoal (*shuimo xitan*, chap. 71/2a) was added to a brazier previously burning animal charcoal. It is possible that this special charcoal gave off less of the troublesome smoke and fumes that ordinary charcoal emitted.

#### ERRATUM

In the Spring 1993 issue, the bibliography, "A History of the Scholarship of Classical Chinese Furniture" (pp. 58-70), should have included the following listing under the heading "Events and Openings": "Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration." 1992. National Gallery, Washington, D.C. Among the artifacts representing Chinese culture were several pieces of classical hardwood furniture."