



Jin Ping Mei

金瓶梅

Plum in the Golden Vase

Chapters 1-5

Water Margin

January 20, 1981



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Wanli Emperor (Shenzong, r. 1572-1620)





Savoring *Jin Ping Mei*

- A “pastiche” of a vast range of literary and historical texts, beginning with *The Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)* and *Water Margin* but including diverse registers from classical verse to bawdy song, theater
- A biting indictment of contemporary social mores, from court officials & the imperial family to the lowest echelons of the proletariat
- A lovingly detailed record of the minutiae of daily life in the late-Ming period, including food, clothing, medicine, housing, urban space, rites
- A psychologically penetrating portrait of human folly, especially of self-delusion linked to excess (e.g. the “four vices”)
- An inspiration for *Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓夢 (ca. 1793/4)

The three recensions of *Jin Ping Mei*

- **A.** *Jin Ping Mei cihua* (ca. 1610?): the *ur*-text that was first printed around 1618 but was subsequently lost until the 1930s
- **B.** *Jin Ping Mei Chongzhen* edition (printed sometime during 1628-1644): a slimmed-down revision that cut the original prologue & tiger-slaying episode, many songs & poems, & rewrote Chapter 1
- **C.** *Jin Ping Mei Zhang Zhupo* Commentary Edition (ca. 1695): this version circulated and was reprinted multiple times from ca. 1700 till recently when the *cihua* recension gained popularity; it is mostly identical to the *Chongzhen* edition but with commentary by Zhang Zhupo (1670-98)



Zhang Zhupo's "*Jin Ping Mei* is not a dirty book"

- ▶ ...The author of *Jin Ping Mei* carefully imitated [the poems of the Confucian *Classic of Poetry*]...Subtle admonition may inspire literati to change their ways, but it takes direct language to strike fear into the hearts of commoners. Who knew that those who read this book today take it not as a warning, but as a guide to finding pleasure! And thus it has come to be seen as a dirty book...People do not realize that dirty-minded readers reveal their own licentiousness....To the contrary, the book begins with the words "brotherly affection" [of Wu Song and Wu Da] and ends with the words "filial devotion" [of Ximen Qing's son Xiaoge]...and thus I have taken it upon myself to dispel the errant views of the filthy-minded toward *Jin Ping Mei*!



Zhang Zhupo on “Heat and Cold” 冷熱金針 (1 : 西門慶熱結十弟兄/武二郎冷遇親哥嫂)

- ▶ *Jin Ping Mei* begins with the words “cold and hot”. Who knew that these two words are the priceless keys to the entire work?...Using the clues [of characters’ names], the author intimates how disaster and good fortune lurk around the corner from one another, and cold and heat steal one another’s vapors. This is the way of nature...Han [“Mr. Cold”) Daoguo does not appear in a frigid situation, but at the beginning of a warm spell, while the Scholar Wen (“Mr. Warm”) does not enter the novel in a heated moment, but at the beginning of a cold snap.

Wu Song, "Pilgrim"
Chen Hongshou (1599-1652)





行者 武松 景陽岡に 虎を殺す





“Slaying a tiger”

VS.

“Swearing an oath of friendship”

- ▶ Wu Song’s barehanded killing of a tiger on Jingyang Ridge—an iconic scene in *Water Margin*—is completely retained in Recension A
- ▶ Recensions B & C only describe this event through second-hand reports; they take up Wu Song’s story as he is carried into the magistrate’s office with the tiger’s carcass
- ▶ B & C replace the slaying of the tiger (and the other two prologues of Xiang Yu’s death and Lady Qi’s mutilation) with a lengthy banquet scene
- ▶ “The ten friends”—especially Ying Bojue and Xie Xida—engage in absurd antics that highlight Ximen Qing’s obtuseness; he can’t see how his own unscrupulousness makes him vulnerable to even more venal scoundrels such as these (among many others who similarly “sponge”)

Pan Jinlian plays the lute
on a snowy night (Ch. 38)



Moon Guitar





Music, Verse, Theater

- ▶ Pan Jinlian has trained as a “singing girl” in her childhood & through her first two patrons, and is highly skilled as an instrumentalist
- ▶ Another concubine whom Ximen Qing marries in Chapter 7, Meng Yulou, is also good at the moon guitar, something that (other than her wealth) piques his interest immediately during the bride price negotiations with her deceased husband’s aunt
- ▶ The words “*cihua*” or “lyric tale” in the title of the “A” recension emphasize the plethora of verse lyrics of this version of the novel
- ▶ These verses range from classical regulated poems, to doggerel, to popular songs and lyrics from dramatic works of the Yuan and Ming
- ▶ Jinlian frequently sings her heart out, both to entertain Ximen Qing, but also to complain of his neglect or to vent her jealousy toward his other lovers