

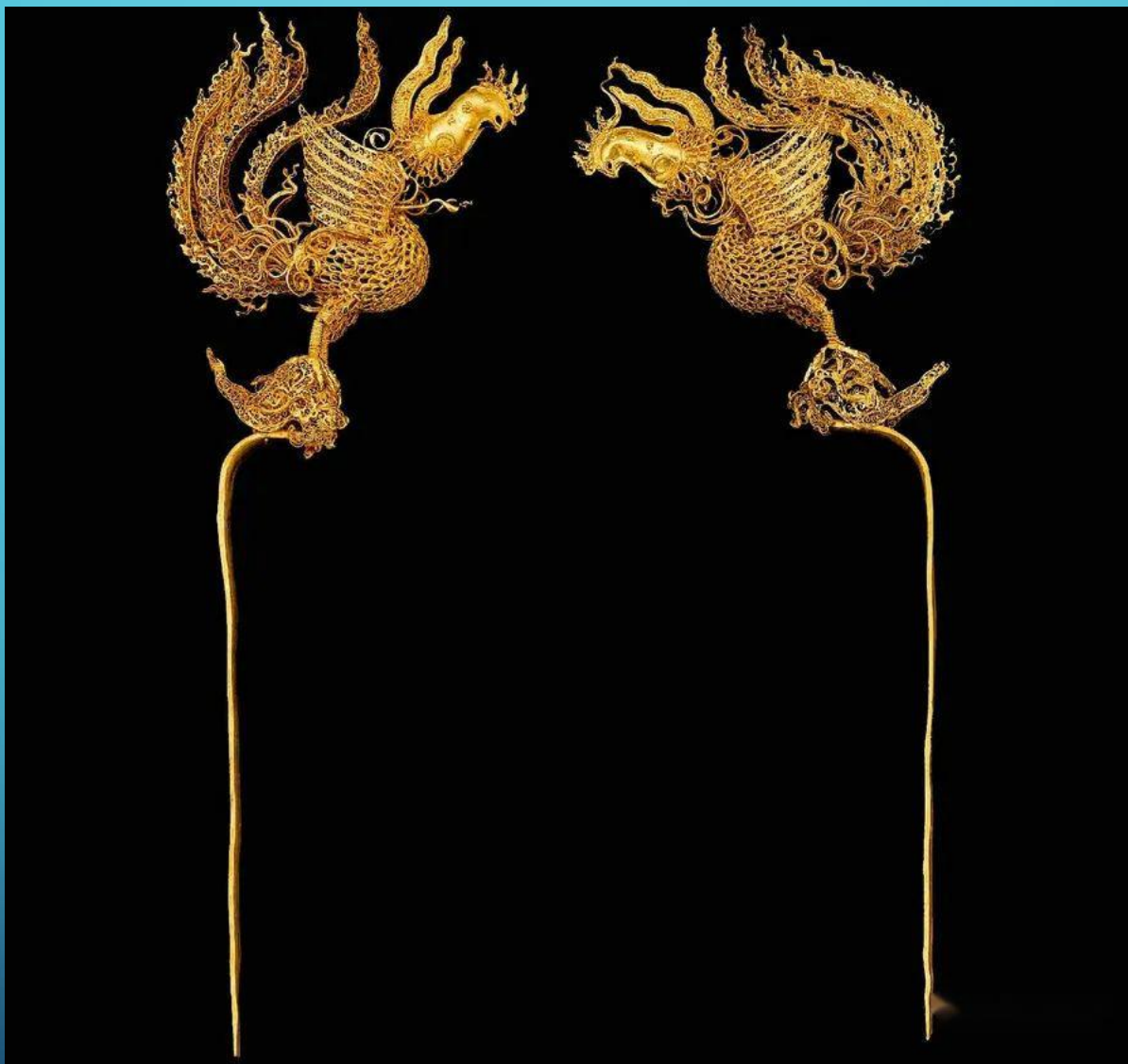


CHAPTERS 26-30

EXTREMES OF WEATHER AND OF PLEASURE

GIFTS AND APPOINTMENTS

FAVORS AND PUNISHMENTS

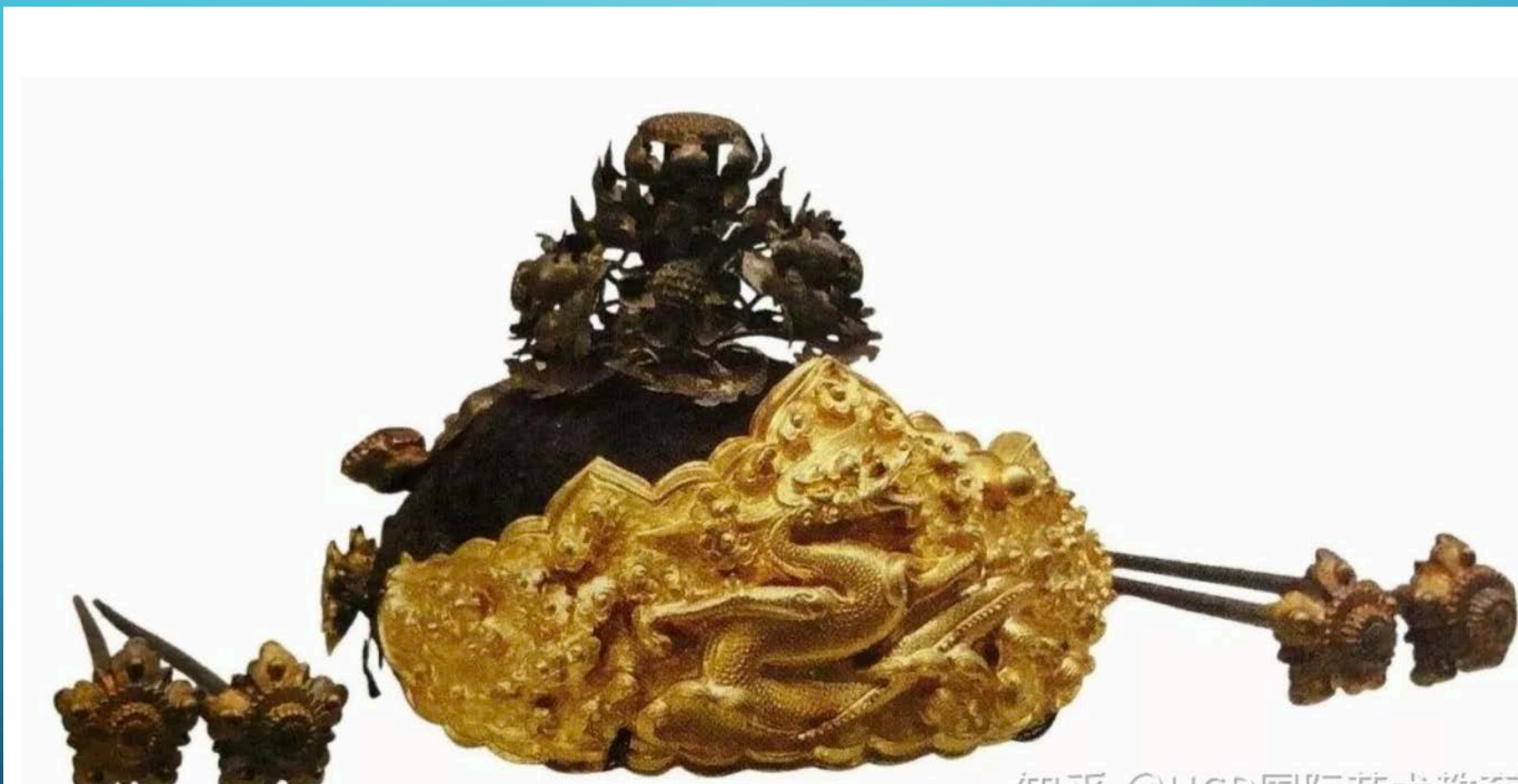


髻髻 JIUJI “FRET”









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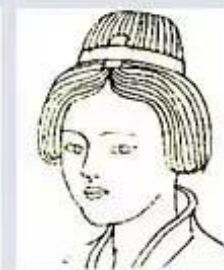
明代梳
牡丹头女子



戴莲花
冠簪花女子



梳高髻
插步摇发式



髻发扎
额帕发式



双髻戴
貂皮额帕



梳挽髻
发式女子



圆髻发式



梳尖髻
扎额帕



梳椎髻
戴额帕



梳小发
髻少女



牡丹头发式



三髻髻
牡丹头





THE “THIRD DECADE” COMES TO A CLOSE

- Li P'ing-erh's status is fully consolidated with the birth of her son, “Kuan-ko” (“Official Brother”), esp. since Hsi-men has no other male children at this point
- Coming at the end of the ten chapters that begin with Yue-niang's prayers for a male heir (“either her own or a concubine's,” she says), the birth brings the preceding infidelity, suicides, orgies, etc. to a seemingly auspicious conclusion
- But Hsi-men's escalating recklessness, as well as Chin-lien's jealous anger, mar the birth with omens of his inauspicious end...which indeed comes in Ch. 59

HSI-MEN CH'ING GETS A SON AND A POSITION

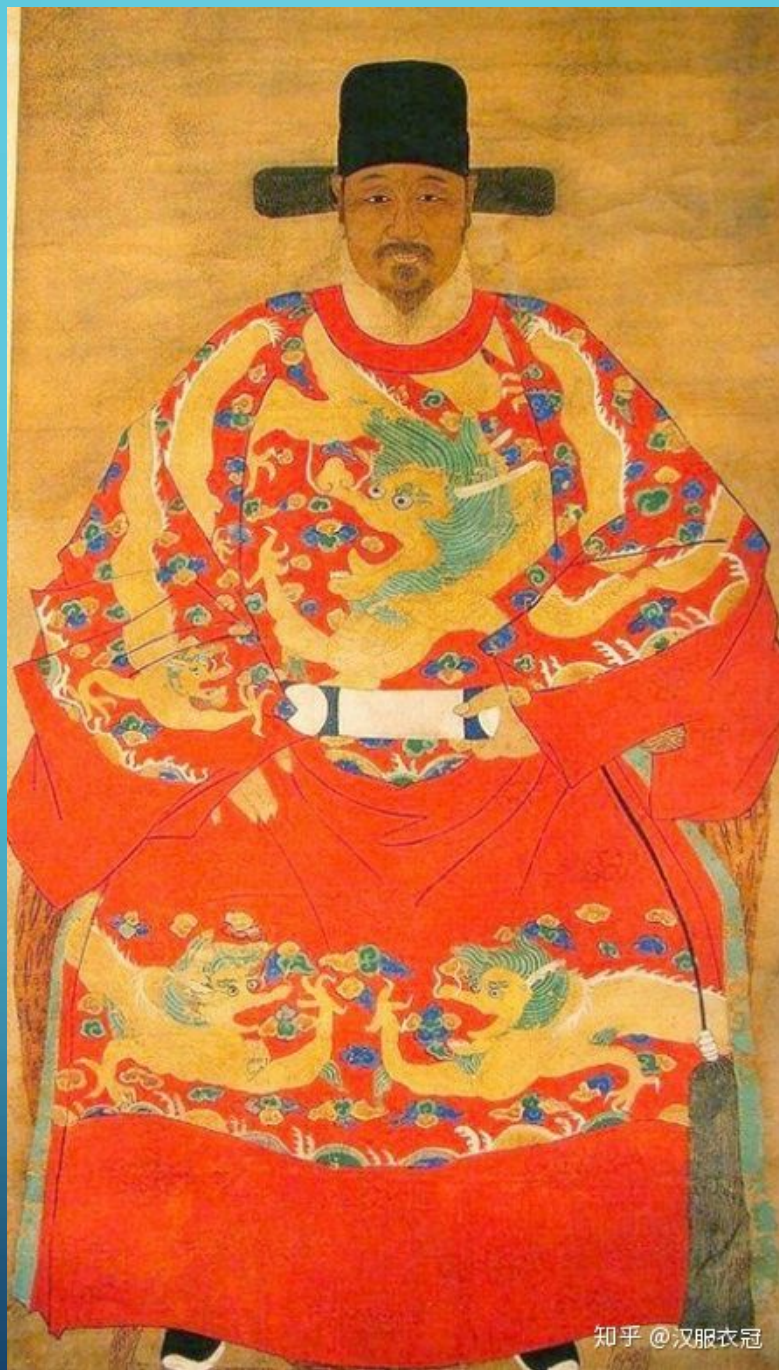
- The birth of Kuan-ko occurs nearly simultaneously with the return of Lai-pao and Wu Tien-en from the capital bringing the news of Hsi-men's appointment to a position in the Imperial insignia Guard (a kind of FBI/CIA), summarized in this couplet (p. 203):
- *Wealth and distinction are only to be gained by guile and craft; Success and fame are utterly dependent on Teng T'ung's money*
- This heavy stain of corruption carries over to the birth of his son, "Official Brother"; his father's sexual indulgence, too, is implied to impair the health of his progeny, who remains in fragile health, vulnerable to fright & illness, throughout his short life

IMPERIAL INSIGNIA GUARD

金吾衛 JINWUWEI (=MING 錦衣衛 JINYIWEI)

- Name means literally “brocaded guards”, from special insignia on clothes
- They reported directly to the emperor, not to colleagues in the bureaucracy; some (e.g. Jiang Bin, d. 1521) were notoriously sycophantic & unscrupulous
- Had power to arrest, investigate, and try anyone, including both civil & military officials; could carry out armed attacks on own initiative
- Greatly feared for their abuses during the Ming Dynasty, especially under the 1st 3 emperors, and then later in the Jiajing & Wanli eras (1522-1620)







欽命三品頂戴分巡臺灣兵備道兼提督學政劉

進

恩

士

光緒十年秋月 恩貢生卽用訓導宋及鋒

CH'UN-MEI (CHUNMEI)

- Chunmei's name, "Spring Plum", indicates her identification with the season of romance/sex/procreation/recreation (e.g. "chunhua"=pornographic art)
- She is the third of the three women named in the title: "Plum"
- The physiognomist/Daoist accurately predicts that she has a bright future as the wife of a high official, which comes true when she marries the military officer Chou Hsiu (the man who sends the physiognomist to tell everyone's fortune in Chap. 28) after being expelled from the household by Yue-niang

CH'IU-CHÜ (QIUJU)

- All of the wives have pairs of maids who serve their mistresses; they both cooperate and compete, both complement and contrast, with one another
- Qiuju ("Autumn Chrysanthemum") is the foil to Chunmei ("Spring Plum"): she is constantly out of favor, increasingly mistreated by both Chinlien and Chunmei, and like many of the other servants, subjected to unpredictable, often severe beatings (the brick on her head, etc.) and to verbal abuse by nearly all
- Not only is autumn "autumnal", the chrysanthemum is associated with funerals

CHAPTER 27: DEBAUCHERY AND SADISM

- This chapter contains the most notorious episode in the entire novel, its graphic description of Hsi-men Ch'ing's demoniacally sadistic sexual torture of Chin-lien
- The treatment of Chin-lien here mirrors his callous, malicious, physically violent treatment of others both before and after this chapter: first of Lai-wang and Hui-lien in Ch. 26, and then of Little Iron Rod in Ch. 28
- This succession of escalating incidents of barbarism has been prefigured in Yue-niang's remark (in Ch. 26) that he has become a "benighted ruler" (*hunjun*), drunk on power and incapable of restraining himself...a charge repeated later, too.

SWINGS, GRAPE ARBORS, BARBARIANS

- In Ch. 25, Hui-lien riding high on the swing is described as revealing her undergarments, leading Lai-wang to remark that southerners (he's just returned from Hangzhou) are civilized and do not “swing”, and that this practice has been introduced into China by northern barbarians
- In Ch. 27, Chin-lien's sexual torture takes place in a grape arbor, in contrast to P'ing-erh's tryst in the more elegant “kingfisher pavilion”: grapes (the word is derived from Persian bade) were associated with the far west (even now, Xinjiang grapes are considered the best, and indeed usually are)

CHAPTERS 21-30

- Seasonal changes: snowy scene (Ch. 21) to late-spring (Ch. 25), to intensely torpid midsummer (Ch. 27) that continues through end (Ch. 30)
- Hsi-men adds a new child, more properties (the Ch'iao estate), & alliances with high officials (Ts'ai Ching, Chai Ch'ien, etc.)
- Shoes (of Huilien & Chinlien) appear repeatedly (Ch. 23, 27, 28)
- Ch'un-mei emerges as central character (Ch. 22, 27, 28, 29)