



JIN PING MEI, CH. 41-50

GRAIN REFORMS & GRAFT

EXOTIC MONKS AND FAWNING NUNS

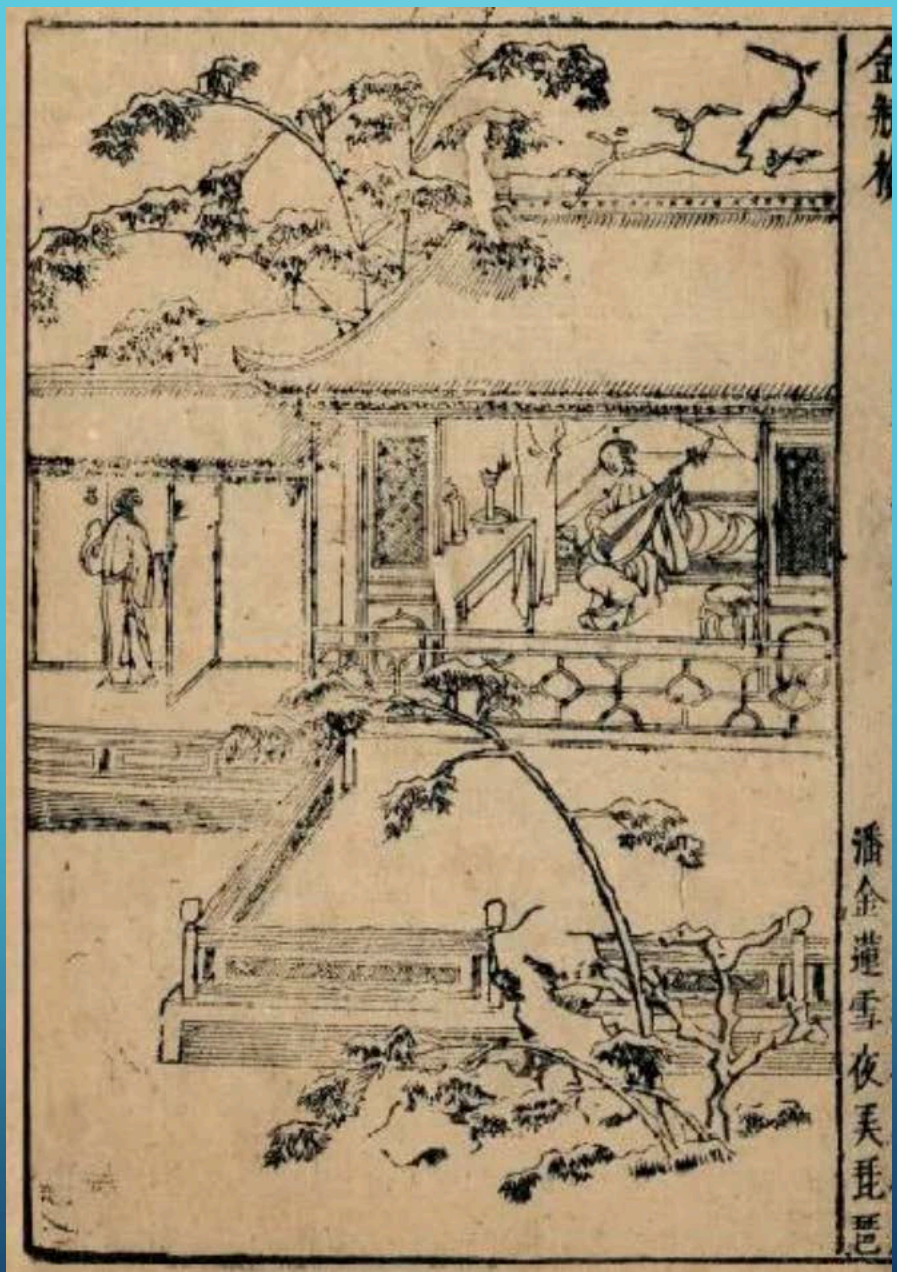
MORE MUSIC

Daitokuji



CHAPTERS 31-40: ADAGIO

- The household is busy with celebrations, building projects, court cases
- #1 (Yueh-niang), #6 (Chin-lien) are preoccupied by Kuan-ko's birth & his implications for their future; #2 (Li Chiao-erh) & #4 (Sun Hsueh-o) recede into background; #3 (Meng Yü-lou) plays the role of mediator ("voice of author")
- Hsi-men Ch'ing's ascent into officialdom opens new opportunities for graft
- His affair with his manager Han Tao-kuo's wife (Wang Liu-erh) begins



THE MUSIC INTENSIFIES

- The songs and excerpts from dramatic works of Chapters 32-34 are echoed in 41-50 in ever lengthier performances by female performers like Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, boy singers like Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Wang Chu, and blind performers like Big Sister Yu, etc.; themes of inconstancy predominate
- Raucous performances of drums and gongs punctuate the lengthy Lantern Festival celebrations (Ch. 41-46), frightening Kuan-ko
- Songs of Ch. 50 are sung at Butterfly Lane brothel (“dreamland”, cf. Daoism)

CHAPTERS 47-50: A SUDDEN CRESCENDO

- Hsi-men Ch'ing's various desires—sexual, material, political, etc.—both converge and reach a new crescendo in lead-up to his meeting with “Hu-seng”
- “Hu-seng” (foreign monk): an insatiably voracious ogre who immediately follows the venal but refined Ts'ai Yun, who first appeared in Ch. 36 along with An Ch'en; he is the protégé & adopted son of Ts'ai Ching, the most powerful minister during the reign of the Hui-tsung Emperor (r. 1100-1126)
- 100 pills & 100 chapters: the countdown to the “explosion” and “implosion” of Hsi-men begins in Ch. 50, with his first use of the 2 aphrodisiacs

Burmese Bell



SEX, OR LUCRE?

- “Why does the story of Miao T’ien-hsiu come up? It is because up till now, Hsi-men’s Ch’ing’s many sins have all stemmed from his sexual desires. We haven’t yet seen the full extent of his greed for wealth. Only with Miao Ch’ing’s case does his desire for riches equal his nefariousness in the poisoning of Wu Ta or his collusion in the death of Hua Tzu-hsu. Lai Pao and Han Tao-kuo’s theft of (their master’s) money all flows out of Miao Ch’ing’s story. Truly, this shows that there is a straight line extending from one event to the next; the principles of Heaven never deviate.” Zhang Zhupo, ca. 1690

...CORRUPTION

- Tseng Hsiao-hsu's attempt to apprehend Miao Ch'ing and punish Hsi-men & Hsia Yen-ling is thwarted by Ts'ai Ching, who effortlessly subverts justice
- Ts'ai then submits a memorial to the throne advocating "seven reforms" that include radical changes to official recruitment, taxation, relief, the currency, agriculture, etc., that are vehemently opposed by Tseng (and many others)
- Historians tend to blame Ts'ai's reforms for weakening the country, making it vulnerable to invasion from the north (which occurred in 1126)

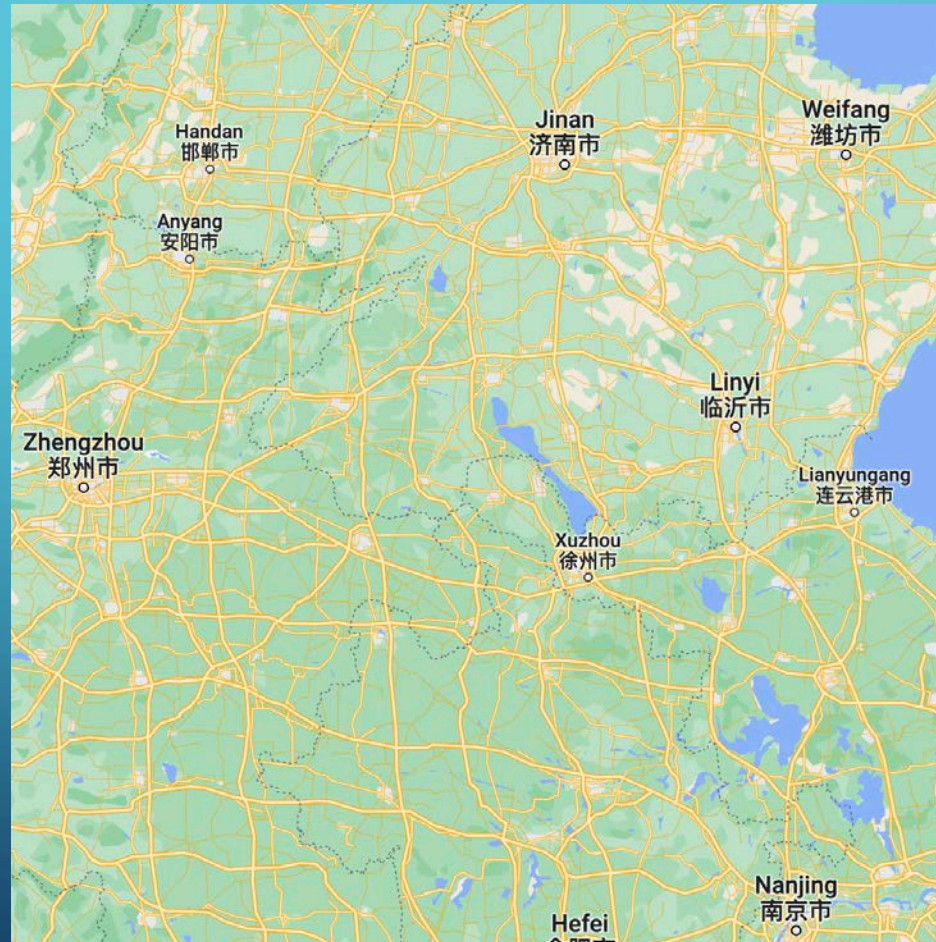
HOUSEHOLD AS MICROCOSM OF MISGOVERNMENT

- Servants' misbehavior is not properly disciplined: e.g. Hsia-hua's theft of the gold bracelet, Ch'un-mei's supercilious attitude, Yu-Hsiao & Tai-an's clandestine affair, etc.
- Ch'iu-chü is mercilessly beaten, and Tai-an is berated, in both cases by mistresses who take out their anger on them as convenient targets
- Kuan-ko is improperly betrothed, and adults fail to protect him from danger
- Sexual misconduct by both masters and servants is rampant

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CH'ING-HO, YANGZHOU, EASTERN CAPITAL



ARCHITECTONIC STRUCTURE

- The pleasure of reading Jin Ping Mei comes from connecting its innumerable correspondences, parallels, and links between events, individuals, and tendencies across its 100 chapters: Zhang Zhupo frequently alludes to this tight structure as “never losing the thread,” or “everything fits together” (井井有條)
- These structural features contribute to a kind of global coherence: patterns of behavior repeat, intensify, wax but also wane, and lead to a sense that folly usually triumphs over wisdom, greed over altruism, excess over moderation

DISCUSSION

- Does Li P'ing-erh's generosity and tolerance toward others, and reluctance to show anger, manifest an innocence that none of the other women possess?
- Is the failure of “good” officials like Tseng Hsiao-hsu to rein in abuses a kind of realism (that corruption will never be stamped out)?
- Is the rigid hierarchy of this society, which demands subservience of servants to masters and commoners toward the wealthy, titled, or powerful, make it less trenchant as a social critique than it might otherwise be?

(ORGANIZED) RELIGION

- The predictions of the wives' fates by the tortoise-wielding old woman in Ch. 46: Yueh-niang will bear a son, but he will become a monk (this child is born later, named "Hsiao-ko," Filial Brother); her devotion to monks and nuns grows stronger as the family begins to break apart, leading to further calamities
- Ch. 49-50, like Ch. 39-40, have significant encounters with clerical figures and religious rites, which Hsi-men patronizes yet also denigrates (for women)
- In contrast to Yueh-niang, Chin-lien is cynical toward religion (and everything)

AS YE SOW, SO SHALL YE REAP: CHAPTER 50

- “The first fifty chapters are the cause, the second fifty chapters are the result”
(Zhang Zhupo)
- “It is just as it is with the five grains: if you do not plant them in the spring, how can you hope to reap a harvest?” Nun Hsueh
- “Only when the iron tree bursts forth, will I ever be able to reap my just reward”
- “If persons of this ilk were really capable of attaining Buddhahood, the monks and nuns dwelling in this world would overflow like water”