

Questions for Chapters 51-60

1. Does Hsi-men Ch'ing's visit to the capital in Chapter 55 showcase a previously unseen ability to conduct himself properly in high society? Or instead, of a willingness to fawn and grovel in the presence of the highest official in the land? And what effect does this episode have, coming just after the ribald, vulgar partying with Ying Po-chueh and the "brothers"?
2. Does Miao Ch'ing's reappearance as a successful merchant seem particularly jarring, given his sordid record? Do you believe his gift of the two singing boys to Hsi-men portends further trouble?
3. Do you think Kuan-ko has an inherently sickly constitution? Or can his frailness and death be blamed squarely on Chin-lien (and the two incidents with the cats, whether it is inadvertent on her part or not)?
4. Do the medical diagnoses and prescriptions for Kuan-ko, P'ing-erh, and Yueh-niang seem similar to the appearances of doctors, herbs, and rituals in earlier chapters? Do you detect any changes in their efficacy or accuracy?
5. Has the Hsi-men household (servants, wives, Hsi-men himself, Ch'en Ching-chi, etc.) become more dissolute by the end of these chapters? Is there a noticeable breakdown in adherence to normative rules (even if these were perfunctory in earlier chapters)?