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## A B S T R A C T

Part I of this thesis examines the historical origins and development of three items of Chinese hardwood furniture; namely, the bed, the table, and the chair.

In Part II, pictorial representations of household furniture which appear on tomb walls, in woodcut illustrations, and on painted scrolls, are assessed.

This research emphasizes the practical value of furniture studies, and shows how this field of knowledge can be of great value as a dating tool in related fields of Chinese Studies.

January, 1975.

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF HARDWOOD DOMESTIC FURNITURE  
IN CHINA

Jan Chapman

M.A. THESIS

JANUARY, 1975

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## FOREWORD

I am happy to acknowledge the invaluable help extended to me during the research required for this thesis by the following individuals. Primarily, Mr. Lazlo Legeza who was appointed to supervise my work. No student could wish for a more constructive yet sympathetic supervisor. Dr. Margaret Scott at the University Library in Cambridge has constantly responded to my urgent requests for little known Chinese works with unfailing efficiency. I must also thank Dr. Roderick Whitfield for kindly making available to me his unpublished thesis. In America, I had the privilege of personally talking to Mr. William Drummond who gave me information not mentioned in any reference books. Miss Jean Gordon Lee's monograph on furniture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art has been the source of most of the photographs used in this study.

All place names in this thesis are spelled in accordance with the system adopted by the compilers of The Times Atlas of China. London, 1974. The romanization used throughout is that of the Wade-Giles system.

THE CHINESE DYNASTIES

SHANG	.	.	.	.	c.1500 - c.1028 B.C.
CHOU	.	.	.	.	c.1027 - 249 B.C.
Warring States 481 - 221 B.C.					
CH'IN	.	.	.	.	221 - 206 B.C.
HAN	.	.	.	.	206 B.C. - A.D. 220
SIX DYNASTIES	.	.	.	.	A.D. 221 - 589
SUI	.	.	.	.	581 - 618
T'ANG	.	.	.	.	618 - 906
FIVE DYNASTIES	.	.	.	.	907 - 960
SUNG	.	.	.	.	960 - 1279
YUAN	.	.	.	.	1280 - 1368
MING	.	.	.	.	1368 - 1644
CH'ING	.	.	.	.	1644 - 1912

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The origins of Chinese furniture stretch back at least 3,000 years to the Chou period, which is the date of our earliest extant examples, yet it is possible to trace the origins of later hardwood tables right back to the early bronze sacrificial table which forms part of the Tuan Fang Treasure. This table - which might more properly be described as a stand - dates from the Shang dynasty and is on display at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. The evidence for the early periods is very sparse, relying as it does on the results of current archaeological investigations which continue to unearth more examples of wall paintings and stone reliefs, as well as pottery models, from dated tombs throughout China. From the Sung dynasty to the end of the Ch'ing, however, it becomes progressively easier to trace the development of furniture, for it is possible to work with full size wooden pieces. Even so, the scarcity of pre-Ch'ing wooden furniture in the West has resulted in a dearth of scholarly works on this subject.

The part played by furniture in the daily lives of the Chinese people differs according to their social class. The huge carved wooden furniture specially constructed for use in royal palaces is naturally very different from the roughly made furniture put together by the peasant for his own use.

Palace furniture falls into its own special category, for it was built and decorated for a very restricted use in the capital city; often ornately carved and lacquered, or inlaid at great expense, it thus falls outside the scope of this paper, as does lacquer furniture built on a smaller scale.

The household furniture to which this paper refers is the fine wooden furniture which graced the homes of the educated scholar class and the mansions of the merchants wealthy enough to afford it. Examples of the types and styles which developed from the Ming dynasty onwards may be seen in various museums and private collections throughout the world.<sup>(1)</sup> Only the larger furniture types will be dealt with here, since the material available for the study of smaller pieces such as lampstands or screens does not merit their inclusion.

The paucity of scholarship in the field of Chinese furniture, allied with the dearth of actual examples available for study, seems surprising when one compares it with the amount that has been written on the subject of Western furniture and the relatively large number of pieces still extant from early periods. One reason for this is that the Chinese themselves did not consider that furniture making was an artistic pursuit, so, only recently, have Chinese scholars turned their attention to this hitherto neglected field.<sup>(2)</sup> This is explained by the fact that within the rigid confines of Chinese society, where literacy was

the only tool possible for social advancement, the highly skilled but illiterate cabinetmaker could never be regarded as more than an artisan.

No names of furniture designers have come down to us from the Chinese histories. Moreover, it seems impossible to trace any marked stylistic offshoots from the slow and conservative development in furniture design during the one thousand years which elapsed between the beginning of the Sung and the end of the Ch'ing dynasties. Due to the impermanent nature of the hardwoods used in furniture making, comparatively little wooden furniture still exists. The continuous use in China of wood as a house-building material, has meant that the incidence of fire has been a greater hazard than in Europe where stone buildings are common.

The pioneering work of scholarship in furniture studies was carried out by Gustav Ecke, whose Chinese Domestic Furniture was first published in Peking in 1944 at a time when he was teaching at the Catholic University. Ecke attempted the first study of furniture in its historical setting, based on a study of Chinese texts, stone carvings and paintings. He also took into account extant examples of bronze and wooden furniture from the earliest period to the end of the Empire.

During the early twentieth century the foreign community in Peking began to recognize the artistic excellence of the hardwood furniture which filled their houses, and some started to collect examples with discriminating taste. Ecke took this a stage further; he dismantled many interesting pieces in order that detailed architectural drawings could be made of their construction.

Smaller, and less ambitious in scope, is George N. Kates' Chinese Household Furniture published in 1948. Kates relates in his introduction how a handful of Peking residents became interested in selecting a representative and comprehensive selection of hardwood furniture from the houses of members of the foreign community in Peking so that they could be photographed for posterity. Many of the photographs in Kates' book show pieces, also illustrated by Ecke, which can now be seen in American museums.

It was not until 1972 that the first colour photographs were published in Robert Ellsworth's Chinese Furniture, so that for the first time the student was able to see the richness and variety in colour made possible by the use of various types of expensive hardwood imported to China for the construction of furniture.

There are, however, two glaring deficiencies in all the extant textbooks on Chinese furniture. Firstly, although the subject of the origins and development of the Chinese chair merits two complete works,<sup>(3)</sup> the equally fascinating subject of the Chinese bed is hardly mentioned. In this thesis too, a disproportionate amount of research has gone into the study of the chair. The reason for this is that it is the study of the chair that raises the thorniest questions. The historical development of the bed and table are, comparatively speaking, straightforward and uncontroversial.

Secondly, and far more serious, Western authors have, consciously or unconsciously, omitted a complete range of furniture styles from their considerations. Two distinct styles of furniture have existed side by side from the Sung period to the Ch'ing, namely:-

- a) the straight and severe;
- b) the curvilinear and decorated.

Ecke, Kates and Ellsworth concentrate all their attention on the 'severe' style under the mistaken impression that this preceded the 'ornate'. However it is possible that their neglect of the second category was primarily due to aesthetic sympathies, since the 'severe' style is undoubtedly more attractive to Western connoisseurs than is the dark coloured, heavy, and elaborate 'ornate' style. Unfortunately, it is not possible to redress the balance in this study due to lack of photographic examples of the 'ornate' style.

Part I of this paper will examine the historical development of the bed, the table and the chair, placing particular emphasis on the re-assessment of the evidence that has emerged from archaeological excavations. The three-dimensional objects that have come to light during this century in China mostly consist of miniature pottery models of chairs and tables but, in addition, tombs have yielded full sized bronze pieces such as the Shou-hsien table, the lacquered wooden furniture from Hsin-yang, and the wood and metal table from Lo-lang in Korea.

In addition to these important tomb finds, we have the all important evidence of the undamaged wooden chair and table taken from a house at Chū-lu which were found in situ with other household objects buried by floods in 1108.

Two archaeological magazines published in Peking, namely Wen-wu and K'ao-ku, have provided the great bulk of information in this field, so the drawbacks to these two publications must be pointed out here. In the first place, the archaeological reports themselves do not place equal emphasis on the artefacts that have been excavated. Thus, for instance, a piece of Yüan dynasty blue and white porcelain is far more likely to be fully reported, with the help of line drawings, than is a miniature earthenware chair. The Western student, who is unable to see and handle the objects for himself, has to rely on the texts of the report plus the photographs which, in both magazines, are less than adequate. Not only are the photos, particularly in back numbers, fuzzy and indistinct in themselves, but they are arbitrarily selected so that comprehensive coverage of a tomb find is seldom given. This point is especially applicable to tomb murals, for it is surely here that the student will in future find the key to the problems of early types and uses of domestic furniture. In addition to the drawbacks already mentioned, both magazines ceased publication for some years as a result of the Cultural Revolution, so that there is a gap in the series between mid 1966 and 1972.

The evidence available from the Ming dynasty onwards, both as regards tomb finds and wooden examples, has been adequately covered by Ellsworth. Mr. Ellsworth has had the unique good fortune to be able to examine hundreds of examples of hardwood furniture which have passed through his hands, as well as to dismember many pieces that have been in his ownership. This paper makes no attempt to analyse his material, simply because of lack of comparable research pieces.

Part I of this study, therefore, is an attempt to bring together all the current material available concerning the ancient origins of three main types of hardwood furniture. The whole purpose of this section of the thesis is to build up a framework from which it will be possible, in Part II, to take the knowledge gained for specific use in other fields. Thus, Part II will be devoted to a discussion of pictorial representations of Chinese furniture from the Han to the Yüan dynasties, and their value as evidence for dating the pieces they depict. Two-dimensional representations of furniture that will be discussed include:

Tomb Murals

Stone engravings and sculpture

Woodcuts and carvings

Paintings on paper and silk.

It cannot be over-emphasized that, in Part II of this thesis, the author aims to underline the practical value of furniture studies in fields beyond the restrictive confines of furniture itself. Because an inter-related study of this kind has never before been attempted, the author has merely been able to skim the surface of four different fields of specialised knowledge. Chapter 8, for instance, examines only a handful of the hundreds, if not thousands, of extant Chinese paintings which depict furniture. Even so, from this small handful of paintings, two important lines of practical value have emerged. It will be seen that, not only can a knowledge of furniture styles be used in a positive way to help the dating of Chinese paintings on silk and paper but, in addition, the furniture scholar is in a position to refute dating claims previously made.

In 1953 the noted Chinese scholar Tung Tso-pin proclaimed that a scroll formerly in Chicago and known as the pi-fu scroll, was in fact a 12th century painting by the painter Chang Tse-tuan. For a scholar armed with sufficient knowledge of furniture types and styles it should have been possible, even in 1953, to immediately refute this claim solely on the internal evidence afforded by the furniture seen in the pi-fu scroll. It was not, in fact, until 1965 that Roderick Whitfield<sup>(4)</sup> successfully demonstrated that the pi-fu scroll is of late Ming date - despite the fact that he completely ignored the value of furniture as a dating tool.



Chapter 7 consists of the first attempt ever made at a systematic analysis of a selected group of dated woodcut prints. These prints all show early furniture within the specific setting of a Yüan dynasty romantic drama. Moreover, most of the scenes portrayed in the woodcuts take place within a single household compound. Evidence of this kind is not only of value in dating early furniture styles, but can also tell us a great deal about the part which furniture played in the lives of the Chinese scholar class.

The remaining sections of Part II of this study will examine representations of furniture which appear on the walls of tombs, once more using the evidence put forward in Part I as a framework from which to expand. In addition, carvings in wood and stone are not neglected, for they too have a story to tell of the origins and development of hardwood furniture in China.

INTRODUCTIONNOTES

- (1) In England, the student can see a small number of fine examples of early tables in huang-hua-li at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The outstanding museum collections in America are to be found in Kansas, Philadelphia and Cleveland, as well as in Honolulu. A glance through the catalogue of Ellsworth's Chinese Furniture. London, 1972, will show where examples in private hands can be located.
- (2) Two recent studies, neither of which break any new ground, are: Lo Wu-yi "The Art of Ming Dynasty Furniture" in China Reconstructs. Peking, May 1962; and Chu Chia-chin "Random Talks on Chairs and Stools and Methods of Arrangement" in Wen-wu. Peking, 1959 No. 6. This article has been translated into English and appears as Appendix A in Ellsworth, loc.cit.
- (3) Stone, L.H. The Chair in China. Toronto, 1952, which has been superseded by C. P. Fitzgerald's Barbarian Beds. London, 1965.
- (4) Whitfield, R. Chang Tse-tuan's "Ch'ing-ming shang-ho t'u". Unpublished doctoral thesis. Princeton University, 1965.

PART I

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

---

## CHAPTER 1

MATERIALS AND CRAFTSMANSHIP<sup>(1)</sup>

The climatic conditions of China, which range from the severe cold of the northern regions to the sub-tropical heat of the south, make it desirable for furniture to be constructed from woods able to withstand severe changes of temperature. Even in Ming times the best of the cabinet woods seem to have been imported, usually from south-east Asian tropical rain forests.

These imported woods came into China at the southern ports. From the seaports the wood was transported in the form of logs by seagoing junks to the city of Su-chou on the Yangtze River near modern Shang-hai. Here, the wood was made into furniture by skilled craftsmen in their workshops. If we take the distribution methods for porcelain as a blue-print for the furniture industry also, we may assume that merchants travelled to Su-chou to examine the goods at the workshops of the various cabinetmakers, and that it was these middlemen who either arranged direct onward shipment to buyers or else to their own distribution points round the country. Examination of joint markings on many old pieces shows that the furniture was dismembered before being transported, many, no doubt, via the Grand Canal to Tientsin and by the Imperial

Canal to Peking. "In the northern suburbs of Peking it was re-assembled or finished, possibly by agents of the Soochow workshops and delivered to buyers".<sup>(2)</sup>

Tzu-t'an is unanimously considered by the Chinese to be the most distinguished cabinet wood,<sup>(3)</sup> and it may well have been the most costly to buy. The tree can sometimes be found in Kwangsi Province, although it is native not to China but to South India, Annam and the Phillipines. When first cut, it has a reddish appearance which turns to purple as the wood seasons. Craftsmen through the centuries have tried to fake the appearance of this wood by applying dark stain to less costly woods, but the denseness of grain and sheer weight for size allow tzu-t'an to stand apart from all these imitations.

From the Sung dynasty or earlier, until the beginning of the Ch'ing, high grade hua-li wood was the common raw material for fine domestic cabinet work. In appearance it is not dissimilar to the European rosewoods, and it is the strength and elasticity of the rosewood family which makes possible not only the intricate joints of the best cabinet work, but also the slender legs of many Ming forms. Ecke<sup>(4)</sup> states that the sources of huang-hua-li, 'Yellow hua-li', dried up in the 17th century, and that lao-hua-li, 'Old hua-li', had completely replaced it by the mid-18th century.

The next most prized wood after tzu-t'an and hua-li is chi-ch'ih-mu or 'Chicken Wing Wood'. It is of rougher grain and not so translucent as the other woods, and the colour is greyer and browner. Ellsworth<sup>(5)</sup> illustrates the colour and grain of this unique wood as they appear before and after the application of lacquer.

Quite obviously, the costliness of these imported woods would debar them from the consideration of the less wealthy buyers when they placed their orders with the craftsmen of their choice. But furniture could be made up to order in less expensive woods to suit the purses of all those who could afford it: "all the general forms of furniture.. were also common enough in humbler materials in the poorest houses." (6)

The Chinese never seem to have given the cabinet-maker the artistic recognition which was freely accorded to the gifted calligrapher, for example, or the artist in general. There were no families of craftsmen in the European sense of belonging to a particular school, nor were there individuals like Thomas Chippendale (d.1779) who created a style and attached his name to it. It was the flexibility of the European social setting which allowed Chippendale to rise from his comparatively humble situation as a carpenter and, as a result of his own genius, become recognized as an arbiter of taste and fashion. The only possible change in social status in China was wholly linked with examination success

which, in turn, demanded literacy. Thus, the illiterate cabinet-maker was considered to be an artisan, not an artist, despite the fact that woods considered appropriate for the best cabinet work were procured at great expense and labour.

The time and skill that were lavished on good furniture are remarkable. Ellsworth<sup>(7)</sup> points out that "the foundation upon which Chinese furniture..was built was the miter, mortise and tenon joint", and that the innumerable variations of this joint all follow three basic concepts:-

- i) Where two members meet on an equal plane, the exposed part of the joint should be mitred.
- ii) Floating panels within the frame enable the piece to withstand violent temperature changes without damage.
- iii) A mortise and tenon joint, properly fitted, can secure any member in its proper position without the use of glue.

The invariable use of the mitre, mortise and tenon combination prior to the end of the 18th century, whilst demanding the highest possible standard of skill in the craftsman, had many advantages. Firstly, the strength of the join when perfectly executed allows for simplicity and delicacy in the finished product. Secondly, since there is no need for glue to strengthen the joins, it makes pieces joined in this manner simple to dismember for either storage or transportation. Thirdly, the tenon can either be a hidden peg or, if desired, used as part of the frame in order to create an ornamental effect.

The use of mortise and tenon joints is particularly useful in the case of cupboards, for it is quite an easy matter for the user to remove the central batten in a cupboard. These battens perform the dual function of retaining the contents of the cupboard which have been laid out horizontally within it, as well as acting as the central piece of the locking system for the cupboard doors. The batten is equipped with a pierced metal piece corresponding to two others - one on the frame of each cupboard door - so that the three together form a horizontal row above the door pulls. A long metal pin can then be threaded through all three projections in order to lock the two doors. Examination of the brass locking device on the wardrobe illustrated in Plate C will make this explanation clear.

The Chinese never used a locking system in which one or both doors are connected to the doorframe at a central point; so that in cupboards where there is no central batten, the door fastening is very insecure. (see plate D.)

The metal mounts which embellish Chinese furniture are not only functional, but intrinsically beautiful. The earliest examples are found on the Warring States tester bed excavated at Hsin-yang (see fig. 1) and on Chou and Han dynasty tables. Later, the mounts are made of pai-tung which is a copper-zinc-nickel alloy, or of a goldish-yellow brass which is copper with a high content of tin and zinc and sometimes silver. (8)



Although the exposed metal mounts themselves are of fine quality, the hidden parts of the locking arrangement are often inferior. The method of attaching the lock and handle plates to the frames themselves is usually a crude arrangement of soft iron pins passed through holes in the wood and clinched or fastened to the wood on the inside surface of the furniture. On the outside surface of drawers in frame pieces, these wires serve as loops for handles and pulls, or they are part of the massive loop pieces for the locking device. The hinge plates are fastened with separate cotter pins - ground flush - or else provided with ornamental heads.

Early shapes were extremely simple; either circular or rectangular in form. The later 17th and 18th century bat shaped escutcheon attracted the eyes of Europeans who adapted it for use on Western furniture - but they mistakenly turned the bat upside down when they applied it as a support for bail handles. (9)

The Chinese use of metal mounts is not simply functional; the striking pale gold colour, the size of the mount in relation to that of the piece which it embellishes, as well as its actual positioning on the wood, unerringly highlight the perfection of the whole.

"Metal mounts are to Chinese furniture what ormulus are to the Rococo. Wardrobes, cabinets and chests of drawers derive much of their beauty from the distribution of such fittings, which sometimes seem to have been accomplished with a knowledge of the Medial Section." (10)

The Chinese place special emphasis on the position from which the furniture is to be viewed, so that tables intended to be placed up against a wall may be carefully finished on three sides, whilst plain on the side which will remain unseen. In direct contradiction to this practice, however, furniture that is intended for palace use is immediately recognizable, since every portion of the piece - even the insides and underneath of a cupboard - is finished with the same care and attention to detail lavished on the parts that are immediately visible.

Endless care was taken in the choice of wood for each part of the finished object. Graining and colour were naturally of prime importance, to ensure that the natural shapes of the grain could be seen to best advantage. These main sections were, in their turn, set off to best advantage by the use of beadings, which often contrasted sharply both in grain and colour.

No colouring matter was added to the wax polish with which high grade furniture was finished. However, a thin transparent lacquer might be used to fill the grain of the wood beneath the polish, and on the inside doors and undersides of furniture not open to view. Drummond states "in only a few cases did Ming pieces come to my attention in their original condition as received from the country, covered with a hard black coating resembling black paint, apparently the accumulation of time. This could be scraped off, revealing a pristine wood surface beneath."<sup>(11)</sup>

Architectural drawings published by Ecke in 1944 show that the proportions of the furniture he illustrates are crucial to the perfection of the design. Examination of the overall shapes of cupboards, tables, chairs, etc. reveals a progressive diminution of the sides, so that the top is narrower than the base. It is this factor which contributes so much to the lightening of the proportions of pieces which might otherwise be heavy and cumbersome. The proportions of the entire piece, of the various parts, and that between the parts and the whole, range in ratio of width to height and width to length of 1:1 to 1:18. This ratio is an essential factor to the sense of stability which the furniture imparts. The old saying "Add one-tenth of an inch and it will be too long, take away one-tenth and it will be too short" aptly describes the perfect proportions of the best Ming furniture.

The tactile properties of these old pieces are especially noteworthy; the furniture seems to have been made to be 'felt'. The surfaces of the exposed areas of wood are as smooth as silk, with a deep lustre built up through years of hand rubbing. This patina gives an additional beauty to the perfection of material, form and workmanship always evident in the superb craftsmanship of the best Chinese furniture.

CHAPTER 1NOTES

- (1) The controversial subject of Chinese woods used in fine furniture making is only touched on in a general way in this chapter. (see Appendix for more detailed information.) The interested reader is referred to the bibliography of Ecke's Chinese Domestic Furniture, Peking, 1944, although it is regretted that since most of the titles he lists were published many years ago in the Far East, it has proved impossible to trace copies through the usual channels.
- (2) Drummond, William Chinese Furniture. New York, n.d. (no pagination)
- (3) Ecke, Gustav op.cit. p. 22
- (4) Ecke, Gustav op.cit. p. 32
- (5) Ellsworth, R.H. Chinese Furniture. London, 1972, plate 12
- (6) Kates, George N. Chinese Household Furniture. New York, 1948, p. 8
- (7) Ellsworth, R.H. op.cit. p. 58
- (8) see Ellsworth, op.cit. pp. 77-80 for a full discussion of methods of manufacture and fixing of metal mounts.
- (9) Gordon Lee, J. Philadelphia Museum Bulletin. Winter, 1963, p. 45
- (10) Ecke, Gustav op.cit. p. 26
- (11) Drummond, William loc.cit.

## CHAPTER 2

THE K'ANG, THE BED, STORAGE UNITS

The climatic differences between north and south China have directly influenced the development and appearance of the furniture which can be found in the two regions. In the north, the severe winter climate leads to a special type of architecture, as well as to a specially adapted sleeping arrangement not found in the south. This is the k'ang, a raised and heated brick platform which usually runs across one side of nearly all the rooms used for communal living. As the k'ang is part of the actual construction of the house, it probably dates from a very remote period. It is heated by interior flues carrying warm air under its brick surface from a source of heat. There is a k'ang to be found inside many palaces of the Forbidden City, and among the lower classes the k'ang is the centre of household life - "it was a permanent part of the Northern Chinese interior."<sup>(1)</sup>

The platform is covered either with felts or mats, and is slightly lower than the average seat in height, whilst the depth is sufficient for the user to recline comfortably. In the north, the k'ang was the basic unit of furniture and was used as a bed, as a platform to kneel on and as a table. Furniture that has been

specially made for use whilst sitting on the k'ang platform can be recognized immediately by its small size. K'ang tables not only have very low legs, about six inches in height, but the feet of these tables are frequently protected by shaped pads made of wood which act not only as a heat shield to prevent the expensive hardwood from cracking and splitting, but also have the effect of raising the level of the whole table so that the entire length of the shaped legs can be seen above the thick mats into which they would otherwise have sunk. As well as special tables for use on the k'ang, drawers and cupboards were placed on the platform for storage of the sleeping quilts whilst not in use. The cupboards, which were never very deep, usually came in pairs and had to be low enough to be convenient for use at a sitting position.

The k'ang continued to be used in the cold north, whilst the wooden bed had its origins in the warmer southern regions. In the sub-tropical climate of southern China, the furniture used for sleeping was also known as a k'ang, but the radical used for this character represents a box and not fire (see Glossary for relevant Chinese characters). The wooden k'ang of the south was very large, usually six or more feet long and five feet deep, but was movable and so could be carried out of doors if desired.

In addition to the huge beds used throughout the country, whether made of wood or of brick, which were communal sitting or sleeping areas, there were smaller pieces of wooden furniture for

PLATE A



A Ch'uang and small table (k'ang chi)

late 16th - early 17th c.

individual use. The larger of these couches was the ch'uang, big enough for lying on, whilst the smaller couch on which an individual would sit or lounge was the t'a.<sup>(2)</sup> In Han times these couches looked like extra large tables (see fig. 28) but by the end of the T'ang the ch'uang had become converted slightly by the addition of backrests (see Plate A).

A free-standing wooden framed lacquered bed raised on six low carved feet has been found at a tomb excavation in Hsin-yang, South Honan, dating from the 3rd or 4th century B.C. (see fig. 1). This area, just north of the Yangtze and Huai River divide, formed part of the Kingdom of Ch'u during the Warring States period, (481 - 221 B.C.). This bed must have been made for a member of the ruling class of that period, and may prove to be the first piece of elevated furniture made in China. The whole construction is of good workmanship and elegant design, and both the wooden frame and the light rail which would have held the bedding in place, are lacquered. A decorated border in key-fret pattern runs round the base of the bed.

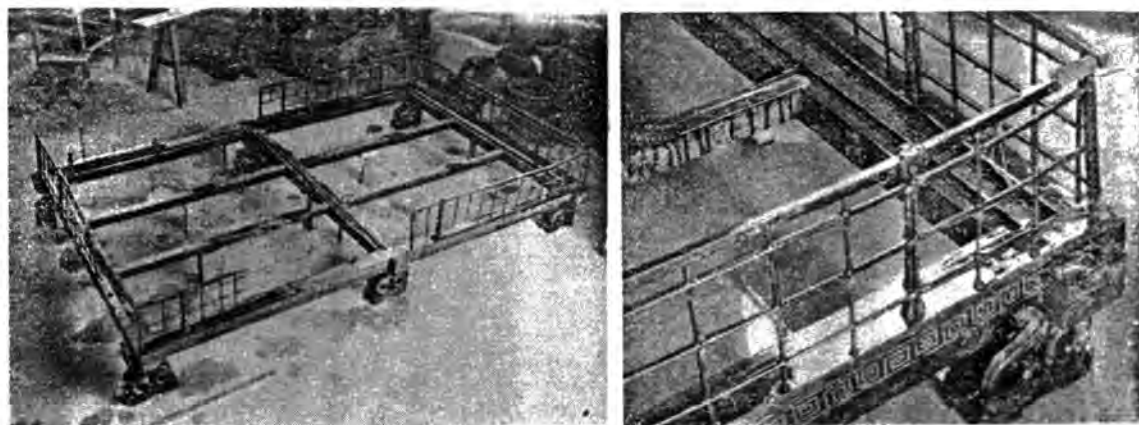


Fig. 1.



Although it is certain that such beds had undergone a long period of development and were in general use - at least among the nobility - in the mild climate of South Honan, it is, as Fitzgerald points out, "impossible to decide whether the Hsinyang bed represents the consequences of adapting a northern custom to a milder climate, or is the native product of a southern culture." (3)

In literary sources as early as the Later Han Dynasty, there are references to 'dust catching' canopies above the bed platforms of that time, as well as to the elegant arrangements with curtaining. In Ellsworth's opinion such canopies also existed as early as the Warring States period, for he states that at the time of the excavation of the Hsin-yang bed:

"..it was reported to be merely a raised platform; however, it was obvious from the illustrations that the bed had not been completely re-assembled and that the canopy of the Chia Tzu Ch'uang clearly visible in these illustrations, was mistakenly thought to have been made for some other purpose. The dimensions, shape and style of these pieces make it obvious that they are the canopy for this bed." (4)

But the illustration in K'ao-ku to which Ellsworth refers (see fig. 1 above) is not clear enough for such a conclusion as regards the canopy to be accepted without further confirmation.

The bed illustrated in the scroll painting, attributed to Ku K'ai-chih (c.A.D. 344-406) or else copied after him, shows some interesting variations from the lacquered wood bed excavated at Hsin-yang.

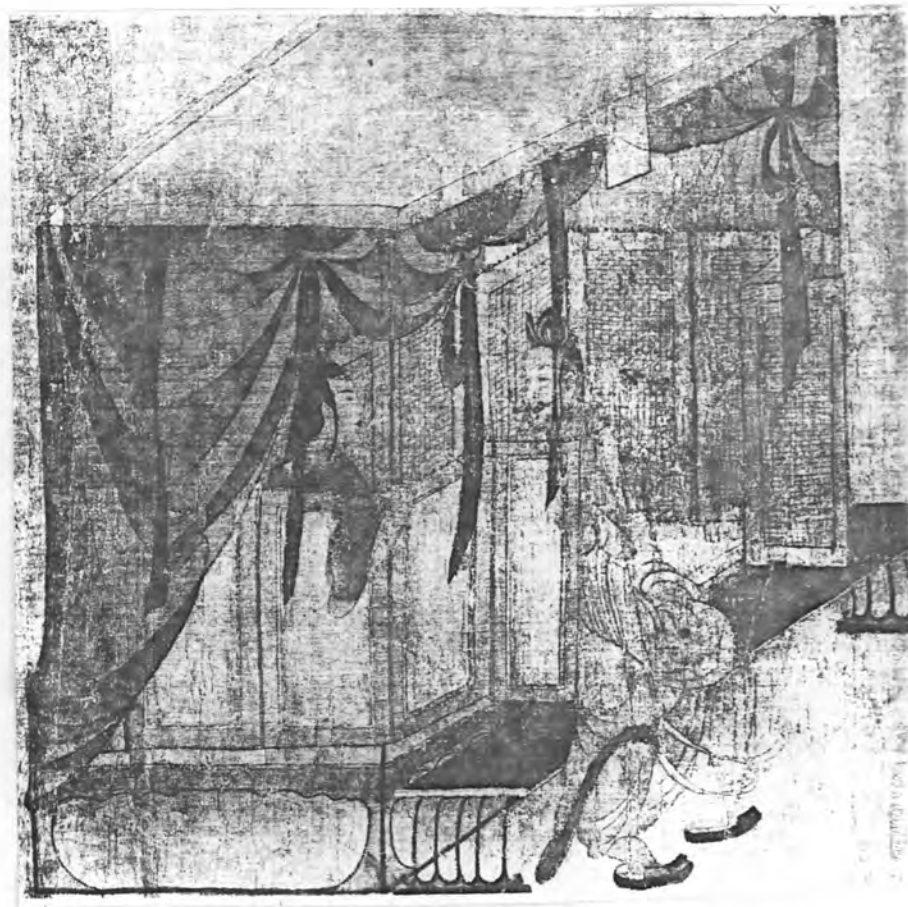


Fig. 2

Unlike the earlier Hsin-yang bed which stands on six low carved wooden feet, the bed shown in fig. 2 is raised from the floor on a light wooden platform. Both the front of the platform and the side that is visible are largely cut away to make a decorative effect - the development of frames of this kind, known technically as the 'box and cut-out' type, will be discussed at length in Ch. 3. Above the platform a room has been erected comprising a number of narrow wooden frames which use the top of the platform as their base. As some of these frames at the front of the sleeping chamber have been turned at right angles to the platform so as to make an opening, it seems extremely likely that these frames are, in fact, a series of hinged wooden screens placed loosely in position. If we are to judge by the painting in fig. 2 each screen is inset with loosely woven semi-transparent matting on the inside, whilst slats of wood have been inserted half way up the outer side of each frame to provide some privacy for the occupant of the bed. It is not easy to see how the drapery and canopy are supported - presumably they are held in place by vertical rods rising from each corner of the platform.

From the literary sources comes the suggestion that other materials than wood were used in the construction of the earliest beds:

"From its dark corner she shifts her glassy bed .

And under the garden window she sets it down".

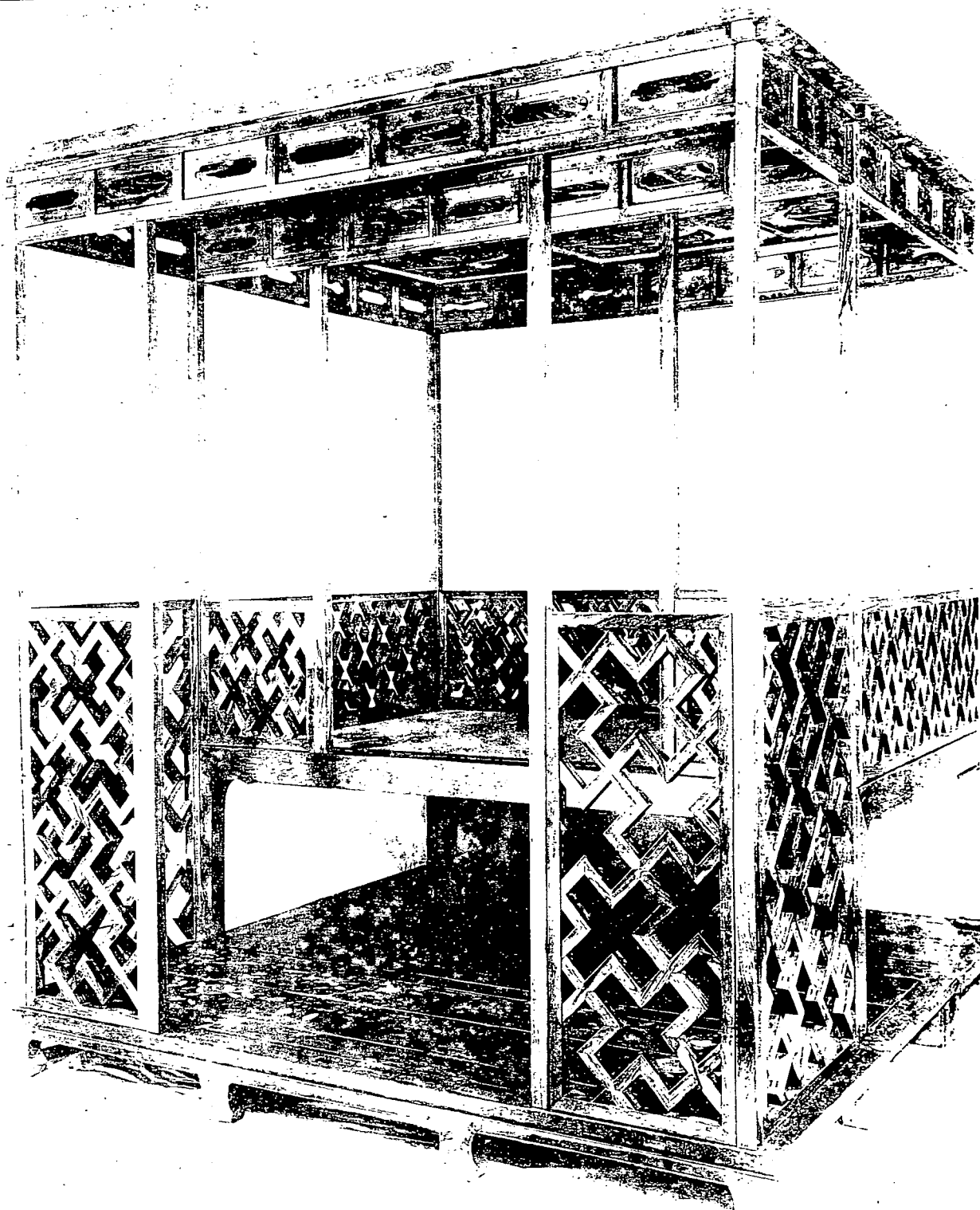
Yo Fu Shih Chi, 73, f.2

Arthur Waley in his translation of this poem in The Temple and Other Poems (1923) explains glassy as "made of glazed tiles". Penney thinks that this is not improbable, since there was a pre-Han tradition of stone bedsteads. (5)



Fig. 3

The tester bed illustrated in the 16th century woodcut illustration (fig. 3) above can be likened to a small moveable room. The canopy and curtains ensure complete privacy, and the bed can be moved to any part of the house. The extended family households living in one compound must have made this privacy very desirable in a society which regarded the locked door as a social offence. The beds had a shallow mattress, folded quilts, and hard pillows. In the daytime the curtains, usually made of gauze, were held up by large sickle-shaped hooks, generally of metal with hanging tassels.

PLATE B

Chinese Tester Bed (17th - 18th c.)


Plate B shows the large alcove bed, which is the property of the Nelson Rockhill Gallery in Kansas, photographed in Peking by Ecke before it was bought by the Museum. This type of bed is equipped with an attached roofed ante-chamber, wide enough to accommodate a pair of small chests on either side of the door aperture. The whole unit is built on feet, with raised flooring, so that when the curtaining is drawn it forms an isolated sleeping compartment. Inside this compartment the owner could hang her favourite painted scrolls and place flower arrangements on the chests by the door.

The bed formed a major part of a bride's dowry, and when she left her family home for that of her husband, her bed naturally travelled with her. Obviously the demands of family honour and status would ensure that she took with her the most sumptuous bed that the finances of her family could afford. When a girl became betrothed at an early age, her father would have ordered the bed to be made by craftsmen from the finest imported woods. The length of time that would have elapsed between the placing of the order and the delivery of the bed is not known, but it may well have been a matter of years. The difficulties of transporting such a large item of furniture are not so great as may appear at first sight, since the whole construction can be quickly and easily dismembered and packed into a relatively small space. (6)

There is a proper etiquette connected with the bed in China. Beds are not made in sizes larger than eighty inches wide, which is the width of the Western three-quarter size bed. This larger bed would be the property of the wife and would be slept in by her alone. It was usual for the husband to occupy his own single bed when not visiting the larger 'sleeping compartment' of his wife. No stranger is ever admitted to a room where a bed is situated, but the numerous servants and members of one household would wander freely through the rooms. Thus, the Chinese etiquette made a clear distinction between sleeping and love-making, with the latter being more private than the former.

Since bedrooms were the most private rooms inside the household compound, it was only natural that they should be used for the storage of valuable articles. In the north, chests were constructed specifically so as to fit onto the sleeping platform itself, but, in the south, these storage units were built on a scale to fit the proportions of the room.

The earliest reference to a storage unit constructed for valuable articles occurs in the Shu-ching (Book of History) where it is stated that "The King of Shang placed the tablets in a metal bound coffer after a ceremony of divination". Legge<sup>(7)</sup> explains that this was a "special chest in which important archives of the dynasty, to be referred to in great emergencies, were kept".

Cupboards with open shelves are known from ancient times. The seal character ch'ieh  is said to be the pictorial representation of a cupboard with shelves. (8) Such a resemblance is clear from the shape of the miniature earthenware chest, (see fig. 4 below) which was excavated as part of a set of tomb furniture. (9)

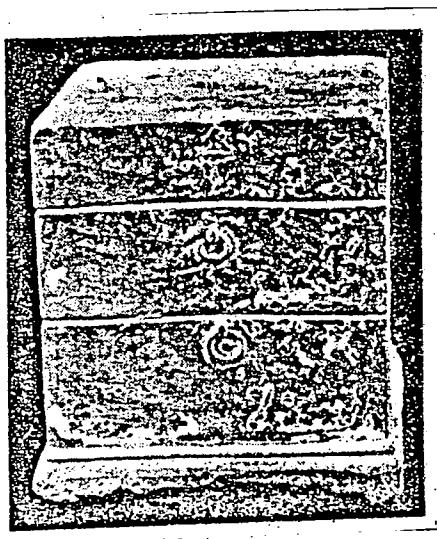


Fig. 4

Unfortunately, no ancient wooden cupboards have come to light in tomb finds, but we may assume that they have existed from the Shang times onwards.

The need for storage of differing types of household articles, naturally enough, led to the construction of functional pieces of furniture designed for this purpose. Valuable articles were, as already mentioned, made secure in 'metal bound' chests, but valuable paintings required special storage facilities.



Scroll paintings are rolled round spindles which project from each end of the paper or silk and are provided with knobs to make identification easier. The more valuable of these rolled paintings are placed on wide narrow shelves inside closed and dust-repellant cupboards. Less valuable scrolls, on the other hand, can be slotted into an open frame arrangement of nine or more rectangular compartments supported on four legs which would be found in the scholar's study.

This kind of stacked open-shelf construction is illustrated in a Ming dynasty woodcut illustration to a Yüan drama. (10)

Cabinets with shelves and drawers for holding books or works of art came into use during the latter half of the Ming dynasty, and became popular during the reign of Ch'ien-lung (1736-1795) in the subsequent Ch'ing dynasty. Some of them are superb examples of woodcarving.

Wardrobes almost invariably come in pairs, often placed side by side or symmetrically along one wall (see Plates C & D). A complete set consists of four pieces - two large cupboards set on the floor, and above them a further pair of small top cupboards which were used to store headwear. The Chinese do not hang their clothes, as is customary in the West, but fold their gowns into rectangular piles which would be laid in the lower part of the wardrobe for storage.

PLATE C



One of a pair of Cupboards

late 17th - early 18th c.

PLATE D

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One of a pair of Cupboards  
late 17th - early 18th c.

CHAPTER 2NOTES

- (1) Kates, G.N. Chinese Household Furniture. New York, 1948, p.43
- (2) Fitzgerald, C.P. Barbarian Beds: The Origin of the Chair in China. London, 1965, p.53
- (3) Fitzgerald, C.P. op.cit. p. 52
- (4) Ellsworth, R.H. Chinese Furniture: Hardwood Examples of the Ming and Early Ch'ing Dynasties. London, 1972, p.21 Note 3
- (5) Penney, J.M.F. Domestic Furniture and Utensils of the Han Period. London, n.d., p.183
- (6) Mr. William Drummond told me that he had been able to dismember a large Ming tester bed that he owned in ten minutes, and then to pack it onto the roof rack of his car for transportation.
- (7) Legge, J. The Chinese Classics. Vol. III. Hong Kong, 1960, p. 356
- (8) Kates, G.N. op.cit. p. 28
- (9) Wen-wu ts'an-k'ao tzu-liao. Peking, 1958, No. 11.
- (10) Ku-pen hsi-ch'ü ts'ung-k'an. (Collections of photographic reprints of early editions of Chinese drama). Shanghai, 1953-64.

## CHAPTER 3

THE TABLE

Wooden tables were used as stands for sacrificial dishes at least as far back as the Chou dynasty, possibly as early as the Shang, and it is quite probable that low tables were the earliest type of furniture used in China. All that remains of the Chou dynasty table excavated from the late Chou tomb (No. VII) at Lo-yang in Honan are six bronze legs in the shape of monsters, each nearly 5" high. White states that these legs would have been "attached to the wooden framework of the table by a spike which extended up from the base inside the angle."<sup>(1)</sup>

The oldest tables still extant are, however, constructed entirely of bronze. Fig. 5 shows the larger of two bronze tables found about ten miles from Pao-chi in Shensi Province in 1901. The Pao-chi district was ruled by the Ch'in dukes from the mid-7th century B.C., and the tables cannot be dated before this. Siren, however, would prefer to date them one or two centuries later on the evidence of the ornamental style of the bronze.<sup>(2)</sup>

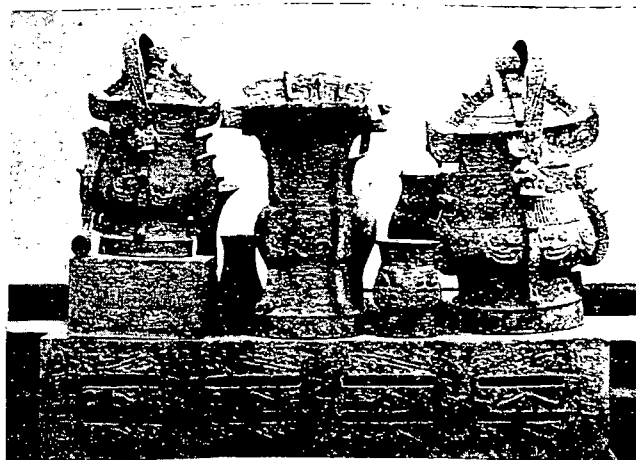


Fig. 5

The rectangular bronze table of box construction illustrated above was an altar table for sacrificial wine vessels. Both the tables and their accompanying vessels passed into the possession of the Viceroy Tuan Fang from whom they were acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where they are now exhibited under the title "The Tuan Fang Treasure".

The table illustrated in Fig. 6 probably dates from the 3rd century B.C. It was found at Shou-hsien in 1933 and is thus known as the Shou-hsien table. Although this table too is classified as a bronze sacrificial table, it will be seen at once that the style is very much more advanced than that of the earlier Tuan Fang table (fig. 5).

The flat top of the Shou-hsien table measures 15" long and 8" wide, whilst the four splayed legs are 7" high.

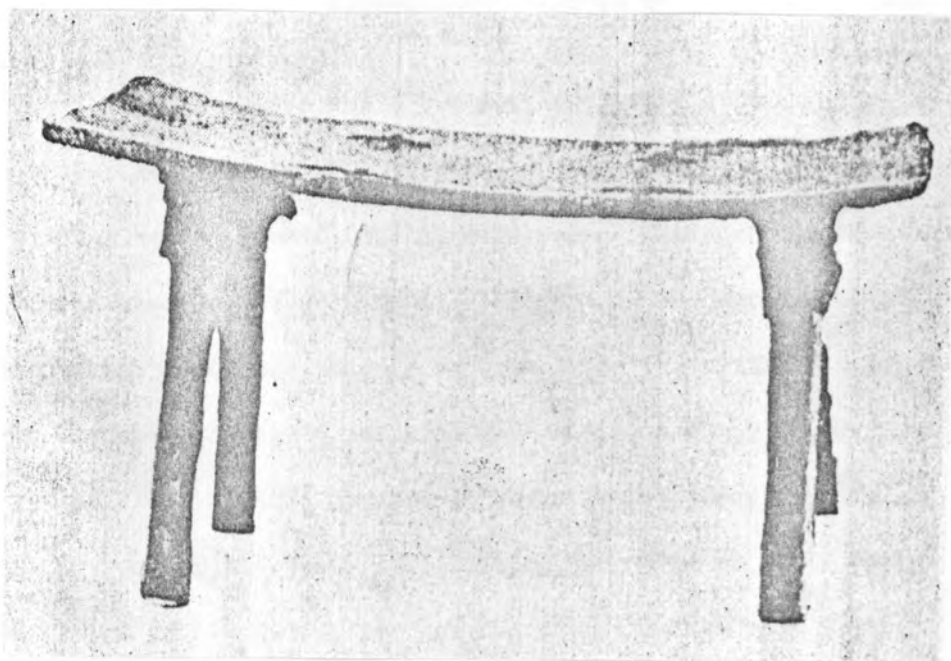


Fig. 6

The theory that the bronze sacrificial tables were made in imitation of contemporary wooden constructions has been verified by the recent excavation of a lacquered wood table in a Warring States tomb at Chang-sha in Hunan.<sup>(3)</sup> The similarity between the table shown in Fig. 6 and the Chang-sha table is very striking, for both have flat rectangular tops measuring about 15" long. However, whereas the Shou-hsien table is 8" wide with four splayed legs each about 7" high, the Ch'ang-sha table is narrower, and the legs are only about 2" high.<sup>(4)</sup> The four delicate, slightly curved legs of the smaller table are tenoned right through the table top so that the join shows on the top surface which is decorated with twelve Taoist symbols.

The Shou-hsien table has four cruciform slits in the top which, according to Penney, were to allow the blood to run through as the sacrificial animals were killed. Yetts, however, likens them to the perforations present in the horizontal plate between steamer and boiler, so that these perforations suggest to him that the table was used for cooking meat by steaming it. In addition, further support is given to his theory by the dimensions of the table itself, since the table is small enough to stand inside one of the cooking pots from the same find. (5)

In "Concerning Chinese Furniture" Yetts advances the theory of the etymological significance of the Shou-hsien table, since, set up on one end and seen from the side, it resembles part of the character for shang, to cook:-



Below is the vessel itself, the ting 鼎, which the Shuo Wen dictionary defines as: "a valued vessel with three legs and two ears for blending the Five Savours". Above it are a slice of meat (月) and, on the left, the supposed table (几) with a spoon (匕) to separate the meat and distribute it after cooking. The archaic form of this character is dated to the beginning of the Chou dynasty.



Wang Kuo-wei,<sup>(6)</sup> as well as being a protagonist of the "shang theory", also thought of the ingenious stool or table theory in which he identifies the supposed table depicted as (𠄎) with the tsu. The tsu is often mentioned in ritual texts, apparently as a stand for meat offerings in ancestor worship. Fig. 7 which is classified as a "stone tsu" was found with the contents of a tomb excavation in An-yang.<sup>(7)</sup>



Fig. 7

The resemblance between the shape of the tsu when placed on its end to the shape of the character 𠄎 is even more conclusive than that of the Shou-hsien table (fig.6) mentioned earlier.

Ecke<sup>(8)</sup> states that the ancestry of this group of early tables is indicated in the Shang pictograph of the modern character chi 几, a small table, since "it suggests the arm-support for a reclining person" and, at the same time, a low table placed on the ground or on the couch. Yetts, on the other hand, doubts that any character containing the element 几 can be traced back as far as the Shang-Yin period.

Tsu and chi seem to be interchangeable, for Yetts goes on to say that "there is recorded only one other bronze piece which may be classified either as a tsu or as a chi. It belongs to the Sumitomo collection, in the catalogue of which it is called a chi: Jung Keng calls it tsu".<sup>(9)</sup> Fig. 8 shows the bronze table in question, and highlights the difficulties facing the furniture historian on the vexed question of nomenclature.

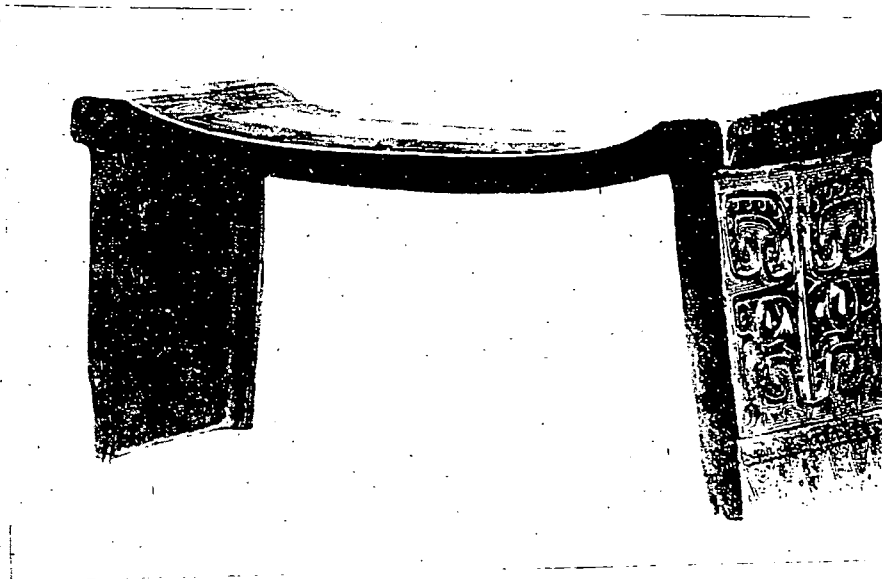


Fig. 8

The theory that the shape of ancient characters originally resembled the shape of the objects they described may be of prime importance to the furniture historian. For, if the evidence

brought forward here concerning the significance of the shapes of tsu ㄩ and chi ㄩ to their respective counterparts in fig. 7 and fig. 8 is accepted, it follows that the Sumitomo bronze table shown in fig. 8 should henceforth be classified as a chi and not as a tsu.

Clearly the chi (see fig. 9) found with the Warring States bed excavated at Hsin-yang<sup>(10)</sup> is a close relative of the table from the Sumitomo collection shown in fig. 8. The heavily carved rectangular top of the chi argues against its use as a table, however, as does the fact that the carved top piece is not straight, but gently concave, so that articles placed on the surface would necessarily tip over.

Comparison of figs. 9 and 10, which show the Hsin-yang chi alongside the carved feet of the bed from the same excavation, seem to indicate that the chi and the bed were intended to form companion pieces of furniture, judging by the similarity of decoration.

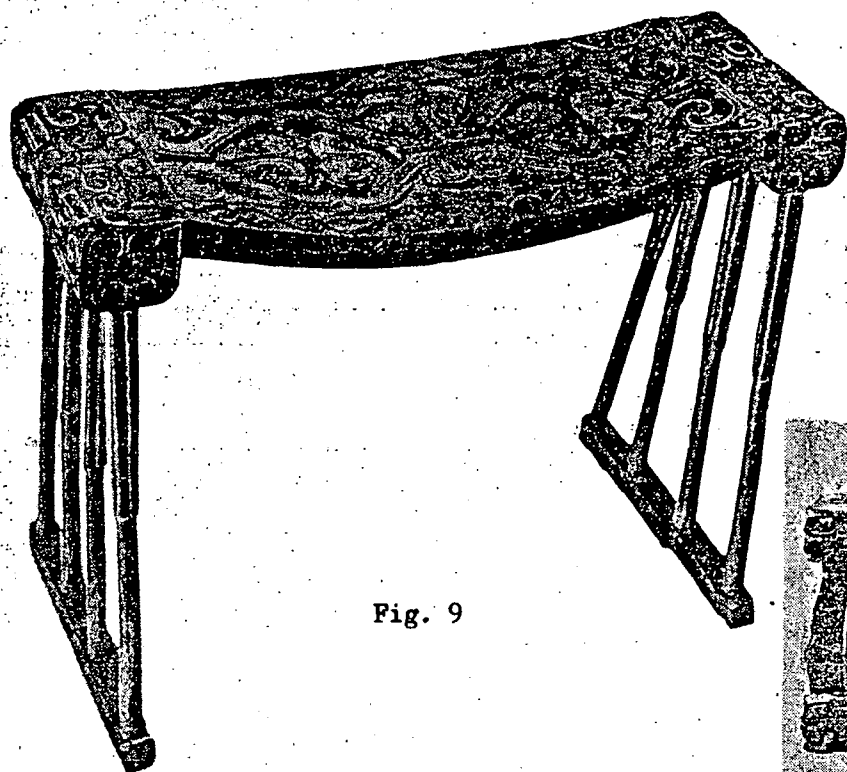


Fig. 9

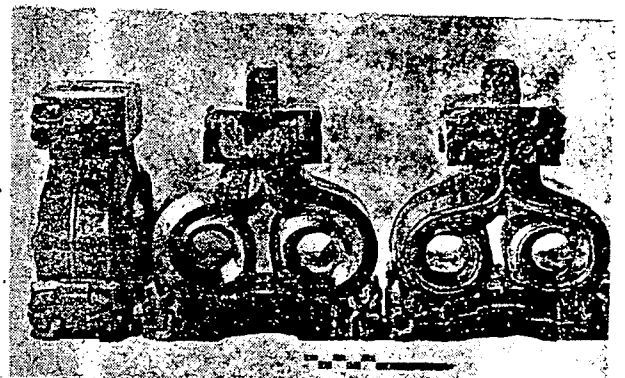


Fig. 10

Early representations of the chi show that it was used both as an armrest and as a table. Fig. 11 shows the chi being used in Han times as a long low table by the banqueters depicted in the wall murals which decorate the tomb of General Chu Wei at Chin-hsiang, (see Ch. 7 for a full description of this evidence).



Fig. 11

The same type of table has also come to light in The Tomb of the Painted Basket in Korea.<sup>(11)</sup> (see fig. 12 below)

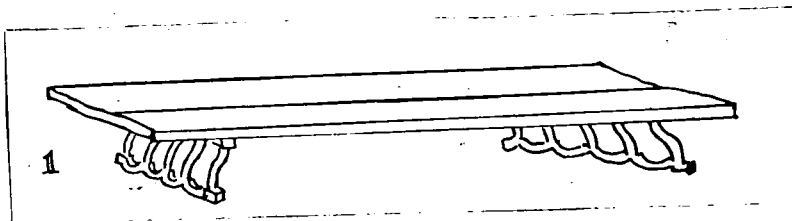


Fig. 12

The legs of the tables shown in figs. 11 and 12 are made of metal. It will be noted, however, that the table tops are depicted in one plank width in the Chu Wei murals, whereas the Korean artefact is made up of narrow planks; both these versions appear to be less sophisticated and costly pieces of furniture than the Warring States chi (see fig. 9) with its joined metal legs at each end and the heavily carved and lacquered top piece.

This type of table/bench continues after the Han period, for we find it again in the famous Bedroom Scene from the Six Dynasties handscroll entitled "Admonitions of the Imperial Instructress" owned by the British Museum, (see Ch. 2 fig. 2). In that scroll the chi acts as a bench and step, for it is placed alongside the entrance to the free-standing sleeping compartment of one of the Emperor's wives. At first sight, the Emperor appears to be sitting on the chi, but since the angle is so awkward it is far more likely that he is actually sitting inside the doorway. If we take the evidence of this very early handscroll, together with the great similarity in design of the Six Dynasties chi to the chi found with the Warring States bed (fig. 9), we may safely assume that the functions of both were the same.

As pointed out earlier, however, this assumption raises certain difficulties. We know that the chi was placed adjacent to the bed - yet two points militate against its use as a bench.

Firstly, the fact that the Emperor is sitting not on the chi but inside the aperture of the bed compartment and, secondly, that the very deeply carved top surface of the chi in fig.9 would be extremely uncomfortable for sitting on. It has already been stated that the height from the ground of the Warring States chi is known to be 48 cms, and this makes it just too high to make it a functional piece of furniture for resting against. This leaves a third possibility, and one which cannot be disputed, which is that the chi acted as a step between the bed and the floor (see fig. 2 for the pictorial evidence of this fact).

Later evidence concerning the chi shows that a change in shape and height has converted the piece into a particularly comfortable arm-rest. Stone stelae dating from the 6th century onwards show Taoist and Buddhist figures resting on the chi, which has become semi-circular in shape to fit the front of the body and is raised from the ground by means of short legs at both ends and in the centre. A grey earthenware model of this type of 3-legged chi, 19 cms. high and 33 cms. long, has been unearthed from a Six Dynasties Tomb at Ssu-pan near Nan-ching. <sup>(12)</sup> (see fig. 13)

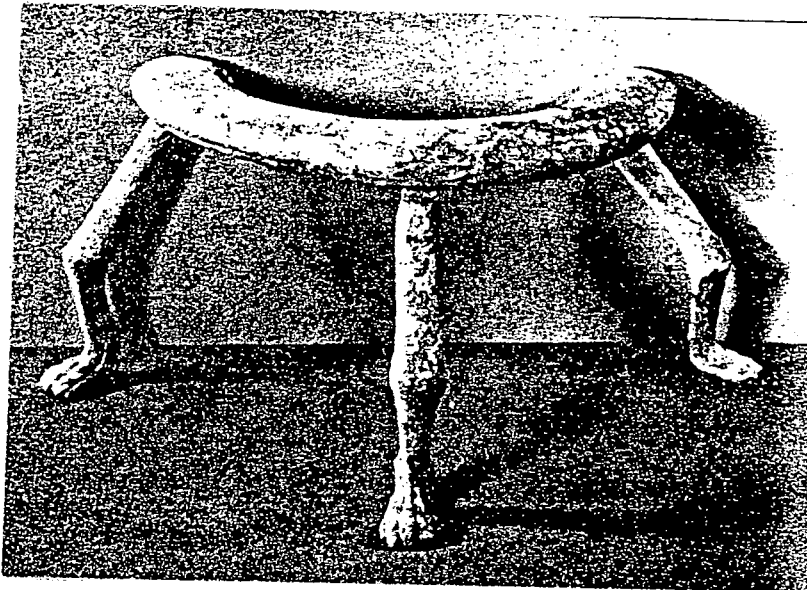
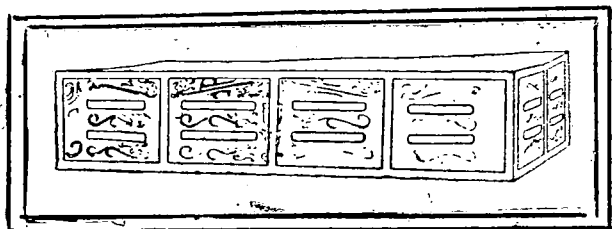


Fig. 13

For evidence of the development of the table during the T'ang dynasty, we must rely on examples depicted in early paintings. <sup>(13)</sup> What is clear is that the Chou dynasty box table in fig. 5 gradually became lightened and refined by means of cut-outs. A sequence of outline drawings published by Ecke (see Plate E), shows the sequence which led from the Shang dynasty box to the Sung dynasty free standing table.

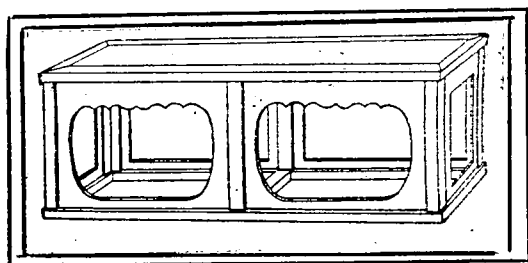
P L A T E E

The Evolution from the Box Table of the Shang Dynasty to  
the Free Standing Table of the Sung Dynasty according  
to Gustav Ecke



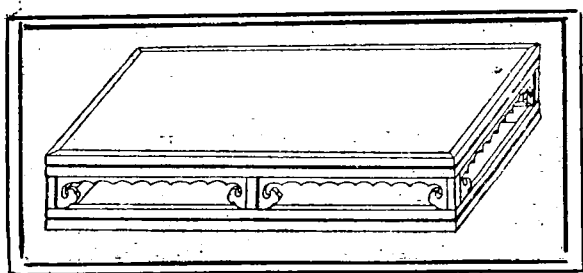
Shang Dynasty  
Bronze Table (see fig.5)

Solid construction with  
narrow vents



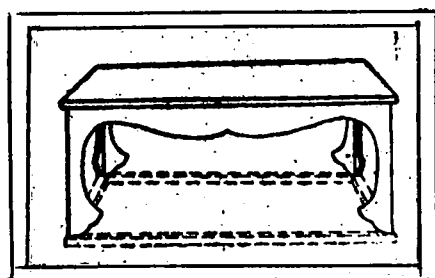
Han Dynasty - T'ang  
Wooden Platform (see fig. 2)

Frame and Panel Construction  
with ornamental cut-outs



9th century  
Wooden Platform/Table

First appearance of division  
between upper and lower sections  
by means of a scroll foot



Sung dynasty  
Wooden table

Disappearance of bottom frame and  
consequent freeing of leg with its  
scroll foot ending



The earliest example so far discovered of a free-standing hardwood table comes from Chü-lu in Hopei. This table (see fig.21) is rather small when compared to the wooden chair found with it, and should properly be described as a 'side table' or 'small table'. It is constructed entirely of wood and has several advanced features: reference to fig.21 will show that the long narrow legs are shaped pieces of wood which stand at a slightly splayed angle to the top surface. These rounded leg members are strengthened by a stretcher placed between them a quarter of the distance from the table surface to the ground. In addition, immediately below the table top and joining the tops of the leg members, one can see ornamental cut-out pieces of wood which are called spandrels. The table top is a piece of wood which has been positioned over the supporting legs so as to leave both ends overhanging in the style described as 'Yoke'.

Additional evidence for the widespread acceptance and use of the Yoke Style of table is found in the Sung handscroll Ch'ing-ming shang-ho (see Ch. 8) and in the Sung dynasty tomb mural dated A.D. 1110 from the Chao family tomb (see Ch. 5). Thus, both the evidence of the Chü-lu table and chair, and the representational evidence of contemporary paintings, lead us to the assumption that the Yoke style of furniture had completely superseded the box-and-cutout constructions of earlier dynasties.

The considerable technical advance achieved by Chinese cabinetmakers between the 11th and 13th centuries is immediately apparent from fig. 14 which shows a table securely dated to 1289. This table forms part of a wall mural in the tomb of Feng T'ao-chen at Ta-t'ung in Shensi Province. (14)



Fig. 14

It will be seen at once that the joinery construction necessary for this sophisticated type of table is much advanced from the simpler Yoke style table of the Sung dynasty, in which the weight of a heavy wooden table top overhanging four slightly splayed leg members, is sufficient to make a steady table with only minimal joints.

Although the method of the construction of the Ta-t'ung table is not clearly visible from the mural (fig. 14), it is almost certain that it was joined together by a method of double-tenoning. Just below the double-locked tenons that secure the leg to the mitred frame of the top, is an apron which is attached to the leg at the corner of the table. This apron is thus mitred, mortised and tenoned, and half-lapped to the leg.

Between the table illustrated in fig. 21, which dates from 1108, and the Ta-tung table of 1289, it can safely be assumed that three important advances in joinery technique occurred:-

- i) Mitred corner joins introduced
- ii) Double tenons to lock the members without the need for glue
- iii) The presence of an apron between the table-top and the leg members which effectively spreads the weight.

A second example of this Yuan style of table is present in the hardwood panels in the collection of the Honolulu Academy of Arts and illustrated by Ellsworth.<sup>(15)</sup> This table lacks the single stretchers which appear in the Ta-t'ung table, but is otherwise identical even down to the scroll feet.

The scroll foot endings of the Ta-t'ung table have been shown by Ecke to have evolved from the T'ang dynasty box-and-cutout construction (see Plate E). Ecke describes them in Chinese Domestic Furniture as "fashioned into far projecting, crocketed and pointed scrolls".<sup>(16)</sup>



Fig. 15

Pottery models of sacrificial tables which were found in the Ta-t'ung tomb of Feng T'ao-chen, also show the same cloud pattern scrolls. This time the scrolls are in the form of spandrels (Fig. 15) which join the legs to the top, and not in the form of the foot endings seen on the large table (Fig. 14).

From the Ming dynasty onwards, there are sufficient wooden tables extant for rough dating methods to be determined. Thus, both Ellsworth and Ecke have been able to assign approximate dates to the tables they illustrate.

Turning our attention to the subject of style in the historical development of the Chinese table, the type of foot ending has been shown by Ecke to be a clear progression from the solid box construction of the Shang dynasty. This progression has taken the form of a continuous reduction in volume (see Plate E.) By the T'ang dynasty, the solid sides of the box had shrunk by means of cut-outs. These cut-outs continued to diminish the sides of the piece until the only supporting elements that remained were the scroll feet endings seen in examples such as the

Yüan tables (fig. 14). These feet, in turn, were gradually reduced and refined until the classic ma-t'i, or horse-hoof foot, of the Ming dynasty emerged (see fig. 16 below.)

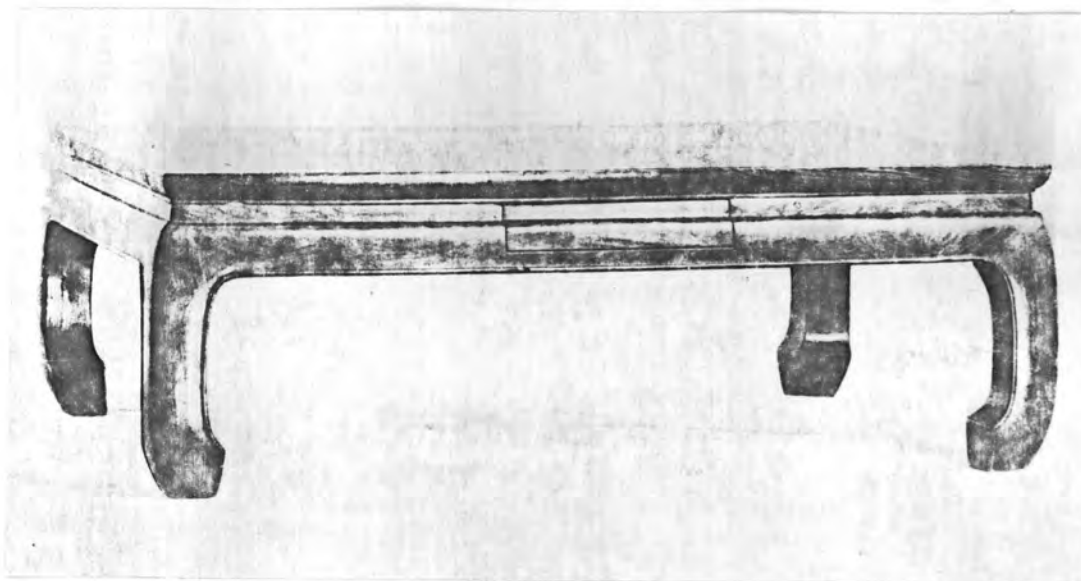


Fig. 16

There are several types of table familiar to the Chinese which have no Western counterparts. The tiao-an, for example, is supported not by legs but by a framework set near each end into which panels of carving are set. They are higher than ordinary tables, and their elongation and lack of breadth means that they were to be placed up against a wall. When the ends curved upwards, thus making the piece even more formal, they are named ch'iao-t'ou (see Plate F.) The link between the tiao-an and the much earlier tsu shape of the Chou dynasty (fig. 7) is very apparent.

PLATE F



Side Table (ch'iao-t'ou-an)

late 17th century

The lute table, which can be semi-circular, in shape was made especially to hold a Chinese zither. Special care was taken over the construction and materials of this type of table, since the Chinese attached great importance to the instrument. The zither was placed on top of the table whilst the musician stood to play it, and the table surface acted as a resonant part of the instrument.

A small table might be felt to be too bare, and was often enriched by the addition of an apron of fabric. This apron might be used only on the side facing the middle of the room or, at most, around the three sides standing free of the wall. The top of the table was then left uncovered, in contrast to the completely fabric covered tables of Victorian England. But, the practice of throwing a piece of fabric or fur over the tops of chairs and stools is common both in China and in England.

According to Kates<sup>(17)</sup> the most popular table for dining within the family was a large round one, for dishes placed in the centre of the table could be reached by all the diners using chopsticks. There is also a square dining table, which is used at feasts, called the pa-hsien-cho or Eight Immortals Table. At a larger dinner party there were always a number of tables, each seating ten or twelve persons, rather than the single long banqueting table favoured in the West.

PLATE G

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Desk (shu cho)

late 18th - 19th century



Before the introduction of the knee-hole desk, the Chinese scholar used a long flat-topped table for writing and painting. The knee-hole desk may have evolved from two simple trestle stands supporting a long board which could be easily dismantled. There is an example in the Kansas City Museum of an official's collapsible travelling desk in which the writing surface fits into two containers which are used to support it when erected.

"Desks with drawers were a later development; we have no record of their use before the 18th century".<sup>(18)</sup> In an effort to supply more usable space, the stands were turned into small chests fitted with drawers and the board became a long box also fitted with drawers, each bearing brass lock shields and handles. (see Plate G.)

CHAPTER 3NOTES

- (1) White, W.C. Tombs of Old Lo-yang. Shanghai, 1934, p. 31 and Plate LIV, No. 131b.
- (2) Siren, O. A History of Early Chinese Art. Vol.I. London, 1929, p.25
- (3) Illustrated in Akiyama, T. Arts of China. California, 1968, p. 59, No. 106. The photograph is too dark to reproduce successfully here.
- (4) The height of the legs of the Ch'ang-sha table has been calculated by the author from the photograph (see note 3 above) and the given length of the table top.
- (5) Yetts, C.P. "Concerning Chinese Furniture" in Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. London, 1949, p. 132
- (6) Wang Kuo-wei "Ku-li-ch'i l'eh-shuo" in Lo, Chen-yü Hs'ieh-t'ang ts'ung-k'o. n.d.
- (7) K'ao-ku. Peking, 1964, No. 8.
- (8) Ecke, Gustav Chinese Domestic Furniture. Peking, 1944, p. 13
- (9) Yetts, C.P. op.cit. p. 133
- (10) Wen-wu ts'an-k'ao tzu-liao. Peking, 1957, No. 9 p. 21
- (11) Koizumi, A. The Tomb of Painted Basket of Lo-lang. Vol. I. Keijo (Seoul), 1934. Fig. 8 is taken from a drawing published by Wilma Fairbank in her article "A Structural Key to Han Mural Art" in Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies. Cambridge, 1942.
- (12) K'ao-ku. Peking, 1959, No. 3.
- (13) Until recently, the wooden furniture in the Shosoin Collection, Nara, Japan, was accepted as Chinese cabinet work of the 8th century. This theory has recently been refuted by Ellsworth in his book Chinese Furniture. London, 1972, who states that some pieces are definitely of Japanese manufacture. For this reason the Shosoin Collection of furniture will not be discussed in this thesis.

- (14) Wen-wu. Peking, 1959, No. 3.
- (15) Ellsworth, R.H. op.cit. p. 20 fig. 6
- (16) Ecke, Gustav op.cit. p. 4
- (17) Kates, G.N. Chinese Household Furniture. New York, 1948, p. 7
- (18) Gordon Lee, J. Philadelphia Museum Bulletin. Winter, 1963,  
p. 44 and Plate 22

## CHAPTER 4

THE CHAIR

The reason why scholars have devoted more study to the origins and development of the chair than to any other aspect of Chinese furniture, is simply because the evidence so far uncovered is not sufficient to lead to any firm conclusions. Unlike the bed and the table, whose development has been slow and gradual up to the end of the Empire, the origins of the Chinese chair are still subject to debate.

C. P. Fitzgerald brought together both the literary and factual evidence concerning the development of the chair in his book Barbarian Beds: The Origin of the Chair in China. (1965), but even so his findings are both tentative and inconclusive as he himself admits.

One of the earliest pictorial representations of the Chinese chair occurs amongst the decorations in the tomb of General Chu Wei at Chin-hsiang in south-west Shantung Province which Fischer dates c. 50 A.D. <sup>(1)</sup> Fig.17 below illustrates a small section of the engravings, and shows three guests at a banquet sitting on a raised platform which is protected on three sides by screens.

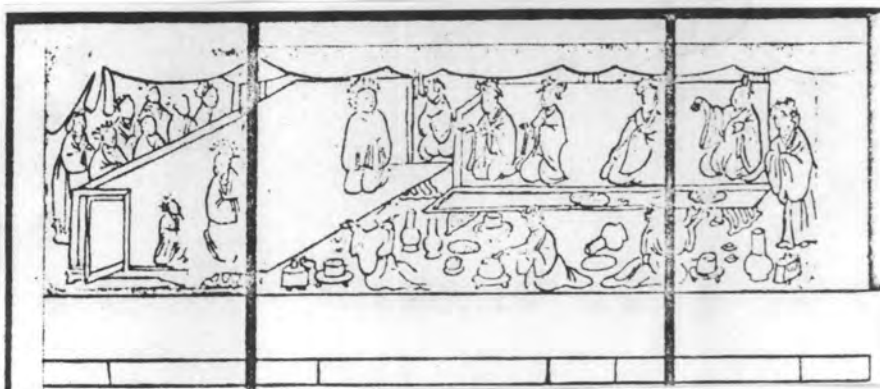


Fig. 17

These screens, which protected the users from draughts, are high enough to shield the heads of the users as they sit with legs folded under whilst, at the same time, allowing two rows of spectators standing behind the platform to see over the top. These onlookers may be attendants at the feast or, more likely, guests of lower rank who are not entitled to the 'front row boxes'. It seems certain that at this period the vast majority of the Chinese people sat on the floor on mats, whilst pieces of furniture which had the effect of raising the user off the ground were reserved solely for use by the nobility.

Wilma Fairbank's reconstructed drawings of the stone rubbings in Chu Wei's tomb<sup>(2)</sup> show quite clearly that the platforms known as ch'uang (see Chapter 2) are heavy wooden bases raised three or four inches off the floor on a wooden supporting frame that has low feet at each corner (see fig. 17 above).

Other tomb finds <sup>(3)</sup> confirm that at this period the large ch'uang and the smaller t'a were used as seats, but the conflicting evidence contained in works of reference concerning the nature and uses of ancient furniture makes present day reconstruction very difficult. In the case of the t'a, for example, one of the earliest Chinese dictionaries Erh Ya, which dates from the Han dynasty states:-

"Ch'uang and t'a are what men sleep on"

This assertion certainly does not preclude the additional use of either piece of furniture for sitting on during the daytime, yet the fact that there was a difference between the two pieces is confirmed by a later reference work which states:-

"A ch'uang that is three feet five inches is called a t'a." <sup>(4)</sup>

This measurement, which converts to approximately four English feet in length, would make the t'a very cramped indeed for sleeping purposes, and it is far more likely that in later times it was a couch used simply for lounging.

Fortunately, it is not disputed that the ch'uang was an extremely large bed or couch used both for sitting and sleeping. Even so, when one considers the above facts concerning the smaller t'a, it seems surprising that it was the description 'hu ch'uang' meaning 'barbarian bed' that was chosen to represent the foreign folding stool which was introduced to China between A.D. 168-188.

Surely the description hu "t'a" would seem more appropriate to describe the piece illustrated in fig. 18 below, which is the earliest known representation of the folding stool or hu ch'uang and dates from A.D. 547.

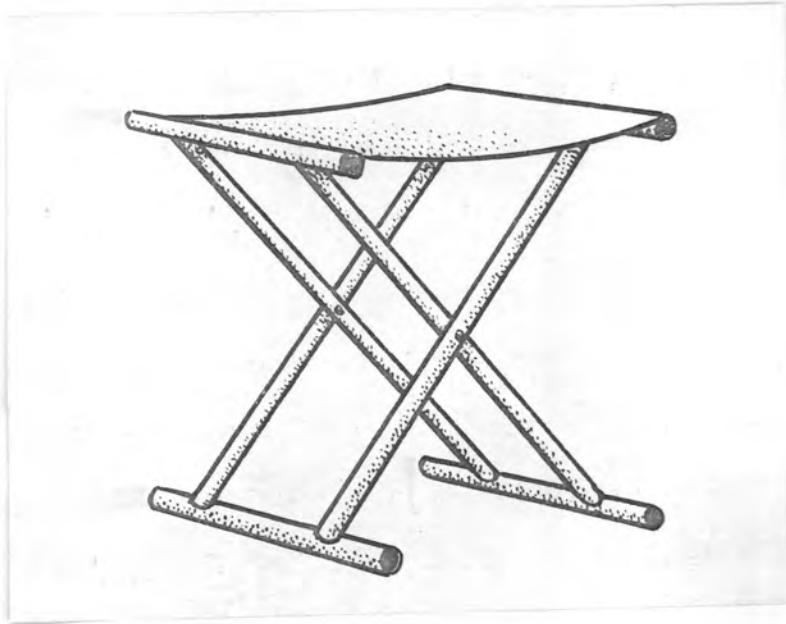


Fig. 18

Literary evidence would seem to point to the conclusion that, in some cases at least, the folding stool was rather wider than the normal folding stool which is commonly used in China to the present day. Fitzgerald (p.10) quotes a story dating from about A.D. 500 which tells how Yang Kung-tse was narrowly missed by an enemy arrow which pierced the hu ch'uang on which he sat. We have no record of the size of the hu ch'uang, but perhaps it was in the region of "three feet five inches"?

The introduction of the hu ch'uang to China took place in the reign of Emperor Ling Ti (A.D. 168-188). In Vol. 3 of the Ming encyclopaedia San-ts'ai t'u-hui we read as follows (fig. 19):-



Fig. 19.

"It is said in the Sou Shen Chi that the hu ch'uang is of foreign origin. The Feng-su t'ung-i says that Emperor Ling Ti of the Han dynasty liked foreign clothes and had hu ch'uang made at the capital. This was, perhaps, the beginning (of chairs in China). The drinking old man's chairs of today are made from bamboo and wood. There are many different types (of chair) but they can all be traced to the hu ch'uang."<sup>(5)</sup>



Two other translations have been made of the passage reproduced in fig. 19 above, but these translations not only differ from each other, but also disagree with the translation offered here. The first of these translations was made by Mrs. Stone in her book The Chair in China. (1952) and it reads:-

"The Feng Su Tung (12th century AD) says that the Emperor of the Han Dynasty was fond of the Hu-bed. Ching Shih made the Hu-bed which was its origin. The easy chair of today, for the "drinking old man" (see Plate XXIV below) is made either of bamboo or wood. The ways of making the chairs are different, but the origin can be traced to the Hu-bed." (p.13 Note to Plate VI).

Although the second half of Mrs. Stone's translation is comparable to mine, her second sentence differs entirely. She has taken the character ching (see fig. 19 above which is also Stone's Plate VI) at its face value and translated it as a personal name. Had Mrs. Stone consulted the Feng-su t'ung-i, she would quickly have seen that the character ching 宗, which appears there, has been mis-copied by a later scribe and appears in the San-ts'ai t'u-hui as ching 景. Her second error is to attribute the Feng-su t'ung-i to the 12th century, when this work was first compiled in the Han dynasty although it was subsequently lost and afterwards re-assembled in the Sung.

Fitzgerald's shorter translation is the result of an entirely different interpretation. He chooses the following rendering:

"The contemporary Tsui Weng (a sobriquet of Ou-Yang Hsiu) made chairs of bamboo and wood, but all different, and all derived from the idea of the hu ch'uang."<sup>(6)</sup>

Neither Stone nor Fitzgerald has turned to the official History of the Later Han Dynasty, the Hou Han Shu, which covers the period of Emperor Ling Ti's reign. In that volume they would have found that the original passage referring to the introduction of the hu ch'uang contains two characters of the utmost importance to this study which are not included in any of the later reference sources. The relevant passage (Hou Han Shu c. 23/6b) reads:-

兩  
帝 好 胡 服 胡 帳  
胡 牀 胡 坐 胡 飯  
胡 空 侯 胡 笛 胡 舞  
京 都 貴 戚 皆 競 為 之  
此 服 妖 也

"Ling Ti liked barbarian clothes, barbarian tents, barbarian couches, barbarian seats, barbarian food, barbarian k'ung-hou (25 stringed musical instrument), barbarian pipes and barbarian dances. In the capital the imperial clan (by marriage) all competed in adopting these customs. This is why their clothes were so weird."

So, not only did Emperor Ling Ti show a preference for barbarian couches (hu ch'uang 胡床), otherwise known as folding stools, but he also adopted barbarian seats (hu tso 胡坐). What did the hu tso look like, and what was the ancient tso from which it derived its name? These questions will be discussed later in this chapter when the factual evidence for the development of the Chinese chair has first been outlined.

For long after its introduction to China during the Han dynasty, the hu ch'uang was kept for ceremonial use, whilst the people continued in their traditional method of sitting on mats spread over the damp floor surfaces. The seat became a status symbol used as a means of honouring the great and the aged, but the user squatted on the stool and did not sit with legs pendant. Only after the 6th century did this light and portable stool become an accepted piece of furniture inside the house, whilst for centuries it continued to be used in the garden and as a camp fixture, i.e. to be taken as part of the baggage when hunting or waging war.

Pictorial and literary evidence confirm that by the early Sung dynasty the rigid frame chair i 椅 was widely accepted and used throughout China; and with the excavation of the Chao family tomb at Pai-sha in Honan<sup>(7)</sup> we have our first securely dated pictorial evidence for the development of this type of chair. The moulded and painted murals on the walls of a tomb bearing the date "9th moon, 2nd year of Yüan-fu", i.e. the year A.D. 1099, portray members of the Chao family seated on either side of a table, each in a high yoke-backed four legged chair. (see fig. 20 below.)



Fig. 20

Both tables and chairs, depicted in the Chao tomb murals, have round straight legs with double stretchers, and the table top and back rails of the chairs project slightly over their supports in typical yoke style. One can see that both chairs, shown in Fig. 20, have an identically shaped spandrel between the top stretcher and

the seat, and that there is a similar spandrel filling the angle between the table leg and overhanging top. In other words, although it is difficult to be certain when judging from a photograph, it looks as if the table and chair shown in fig. 20 were made as a pair.

Regrettably, it is impossible to see from the angle of the chairs, which appear in the Chao family tomb mural (fig. 20) whether the chairs had back splats, but the fact that this feature is present in Sung dynasty furniture is apparent from the chair excavated at Chü-lu in Hopeh, (see fig. 21 below)

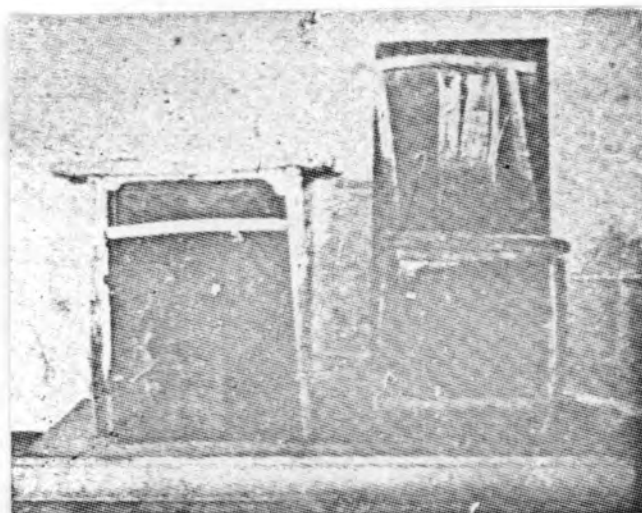


Fig. 21

The site of this very significant find had been overwhelmed by flood in A.D. 1108, which accounts for the preservation of the fragile wooden pieces until they were brought to light by Japanese

archaeologists in 1920.<sup>(8)</sup> As well as the wooden furniture seen in fig. 21, pottery bowls and dishes and woven mats were also found inside the buried house. The chair and table are almost identical with those shown in the Chao family tomb mural (fig. 20), but the single stretcher on the wooden chair from Chü-lu suggests that it is, in fact, of later date.

As it has proved impossible to consult the original archaeological report, I quote here Mrs. Stone's full description<sup>(9)</sup>

" The chair is rough in workmanship, but reconstructed drawings, which it has not been possible to reproduce, show that it has a distinct air of refinement. It is constructed entirely of wood. The back splat is plain and on either side of it there are posts; these are not squared off as if made by a common carpenter, but are rounded pieces of wood which bear a bow-shaped yoke. A simply carved piece under the seat at the corner of each front leg makes a dignified ornament. A plain stretcher runs between the two front legs and there were probably similar stretchers between all the legs."

The discovery of this wooden chair, dated not later than A.D.1108, marks the turning point in the development of household furniture in China. Not only is this the oldest piece of non-lacquered wooden furniture extant, but it indicates the beginning of a new era in social life. From this time onwards, the

Chinese people rejected the ground level daily life of neighbouring countries and adopted the Western habit of sitting upright on frame chairs with their legs hanging down.

As a consequence of the adoption of the high frame chair, many other aspects of daily life were necessarily affected. Not only did the table have to be raised high enough for comfort whilst sitting with legs pendant, but this new posture used different leg muscles and required a new style of clothing which would keep the legs concealed. It followed that the new height of the table and chair combination led to a revision in the height of all ancillary domestic furniture such as wardrobes, lamps, mirrors, etc., and that the floor matting of earlier times could be entirely discarded.

From the Sung dynasty onwards the development of the Chinese chair becomes easier to trace. The original hu ch'uang of Emperor Han Ling Ti was adapted into the folding chair by the addition of back and arm rests so successfully that the hu ch'uang, or folding stool, had entirely disappeared from use indoors by the latter half of the 12th century. The folding chair comes in two styles, namely the straight backed chair known as the 'Drunken Man's Chair' (see fig. 19), and the more usual style with a semi-circular back rail. Numerous models of this latter style have been excavated from Ming tombs (see fig. 22).

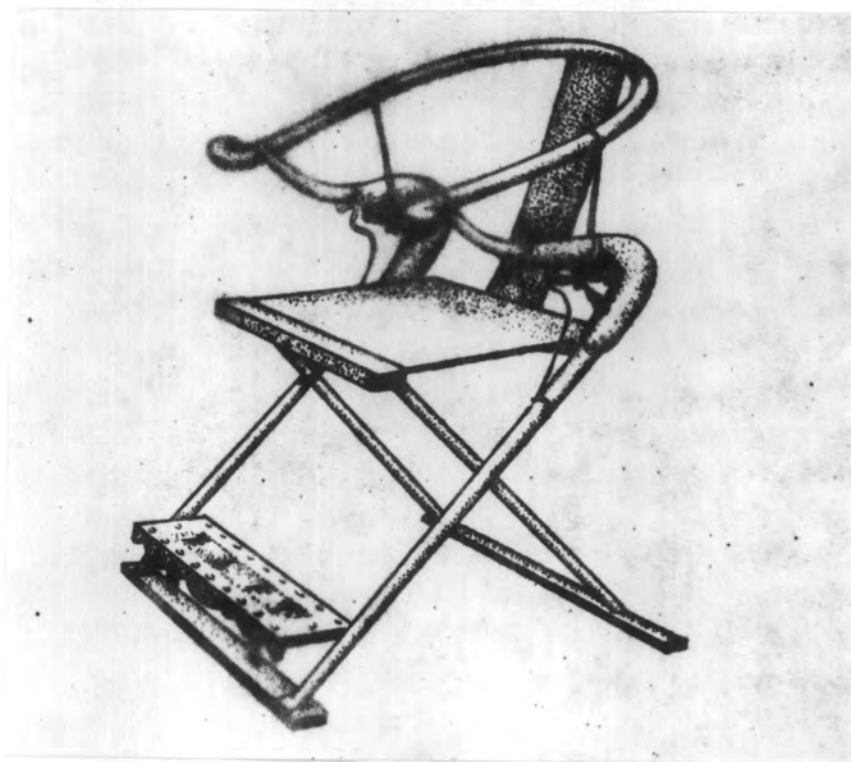


Fig. 22

The first securely dated pottery model of a frame chair, with the type of curvilinear back rail illustrated in Fig. 22, comes from the tomb of Feng Tao-chen dated 1289 in Shensi Province. (see fig. 23)

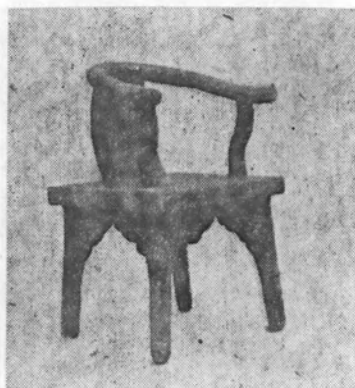


Fig. 23



The archaeological report describes the chair (fig. 23) thus:-

Height: 27.6 cms.      Seat: 17.2 cms.square.

Shaped like a Grand Tutor's Chair (T'ai Shih I).

Made of grey earthenware. Between the four legs  
are eight decorative inserts. (10)

From the 13th century onwards, the chair slowly progresses to the apex of refinement which was reached in the classical perfection of Ming furniture (see Plate H). The straight and the curvilinear types, as well as the severe and the ornamented styles, still survive from this period and have been admirably illustrated by Ellsworth and others. The basic shapes had become fixed as early as the Sung dynasty, and the only changes possible during later centuries were ancillary embellishments such as inlay work, carved edgings, and even marble medallions shown in the late 18th century chair from the Philadelphia Museum collection, (see Plate I).

The cause of the introduction and consequent widespread use of the frame chair is not known, although this change is an extraordinarily significant one since it set the Chinese nation apart from its neighbours who continued to sit on mats on the floor. Up to the present time, scholars have summarised the development of the Chinese chair as follows:-

- i) Everyone from the nobility down to the peasants sitting on mats on the floor.

PLATE H

One of a pair of Armchairs (Ch'üan-i)

late 16th - early 17th century

PLATE I



One of a pair of Armchairs

late 19th century

- ii) The nobility adopt the couch (t'a) both to raise themselves from the cold draughty floor and as a mark of status.
- iii) The folding stool (hu ch'uang), introduced to China from the north during the reign of Emperor Han Ling Ti (A.D. 168-188), becomes an accepted piece of furniture inside the house after the 6th century, when users either squatted on it or possibly sat on it with legs pendant.
- iv) The widespread adoption by all sections of the community of the frame chair by the 11th century, allied with the complete disappearance of the habit of sitting cross-legged or with legs folded under within the confines of the house.

The first difficulty in accepting this line of argument concerning the theory of the development of the chair, lies in accepting the hypothesis that the frame chair with its four rigid legs developed out of the hu ch'uang with its two folding legs. Secondly, there is the unexplained phenomenon of the whole population adopting the habit of sitting with legs pendant with all the disruption in their mode of living that this new custom entailed.

Literary evidence shows that a change occurred in mid-6th century texts in the use of the verb 'to sit'. Fitzgerald quotes from the earliest dynastic histories to confirm that the verb chü 踞 which means 'to sit with legs folded under' was customarily used in conjunction with the noun hu ch'uang prior to the 6th century, whereas "this expression does not occur at all in the later texts (Liang Shu and others)" (11)

After the 6th century, the verb used in association with hu ch'uang changed to tso 坐 which means 'to sit with legs hanging down'. According to Fitzgerald, this change in the use of the verb tso in mid-6th century texts opens up two possibilities:-

- a) the verb tso is specifically linked with a change in sitting habits associated with the hu ch'uang, or
- b) The use of the verb tso indicates that frame chairs were known and used with legs pendant in 6th century China, despite the fact that we have no concrete evidence to confirm this theory.

In support of the first hypothesis is the text quoted by Fitzgerald from Liang Shu (History of the Liang Dynasty) which tells how the barbarian soldier Hou Ching, who was of Tartar birth, drove the Emperor Liang Wu Ti from the throne in A.D. 550.

"When Hou Ching had just usurped the throne he used to wear a white gauze cap, a green robe, and an ivory comb in his hair. On a bed he put a hu ch'uang and a yak's tail banner. He wore boots and sat (on the hu ch'uang) with his legs hanging down."<sup>(12)</sup>

The new evidence concerning the existence of the hu tso, contained in the passage from the Hou Han Shu quoted earlier in this chapter, can now be discussed in more detail, since the existence of this furniture changes our whole conception of the development of the frame chair and the habit of sitting with legs pendant, as well as showing previously examined literary evidence in an entirely new light.

At the present time, the hu tso has not been identified with any tomb furniture that has so far been excavated - although this is hardly surprising in view of the fact that hitherto scholars have not known of the hu tso's existence. So, although at present no hu tso is known to exist, we can nevertheless draw certain inferences from the literary evidence at our disposal concerning its appearance.

In the passage from Hou Han Shu (c. 23/6b) quoted earlier, the hu tso is mentioned in association with the hu ch'uang - thus it is possible that the two types form some sort of pair.

This theory is supported by the literary evidence which has now come to light concerning the ancient tso, since this piece too is mentioned in association with the ancient ch'uang. The passage which demonstrates that the tso (seat) and the ch'uang (couch/bed) were in use in the Warring States period (475-221 B.C.) occurs in the Li Chi (Book of Rites) Chapter X, Nei Tse. Art 1:-

襦 衾 几 牀 請 將 坐 夕 從  
 之 篋 斂 與 何 在 奉 慈 其  
   枕 席 坐 趾 長 席 母 以 事  
   斂 與 御 少 者 請 舅 旨 日  
   簞 簞 者 者 何 姑 甘 入  
   而 縣 舉 執 席 鄉 將 而

"When the parents wish to go to bed, the eldest (children) bring them their mats and enquire in what position they wish to lie. The younger ones hand them couches and seats, and the servants present them with armrests."

The translation of this passage by Couvreur <sup>(13)</sup> in 1950 is an excellent example of the misinterpretation of concrete grammatical rules which allow tso in this case to be used solely as a noun. Presumably it was because Couvreur had no knowledge of the existence of the tso in the sense of a seat that he translates the character in question as a verb. Couvreur's translation runs as follows:-

"Les plus jeunes leur presentent des bancs,  
afin qu'ils s'assoient; les serviteurs leur  
presentent des escabeaux (pour leur servir  
d'appuis)."

It is very difficult to envisage the scene described in the above passage without knowing exactly what the ch'uang and the tso looked like at that time, but the use of the verb chih 執 does indicate that these two pieces were light enough to be grasped in the hand. Whether the armrest was intended for use on the mats alone, or in conjunction with the ch'uang or the tso is impossible to say.

Obviously, the ancient ch'uang and the tso must differ from each other in at least one essential feature, otherwise it would not have been necessary to use two different characters with which to describe them. As it is certain that the ancient ch'uang was intended for lounging on by the user, since it was far too low for any other method of sitting, I would suggest that the ancient tso was a seat higher off the ground than the ch'uang, and consequently that it was possible to sit on it with the legs hanging down. The clues which lead me to put forward this hypothesis are of necessity inconclusive, owing to the absence of factual evidence from pre-Han tombs, but can be stated as follows:—



The verb tso means 'to sit with legs pendant', as the text quoted above concerning the barbarian Hou Ching unequivocally demonstrates. It is now proved beyond doubt that a piece of furniture existed that was named by this same character tso used as a noun. Thus, it would be logical to assume from this fact that the verbal use of tso mirrors the way in which the user sat on the tso seat. In other words, one sat on the tso with legs pendant.

My hypothesis concerning the use of the ancient tso is necessarily tentative, relying as it does entirely on etymological considerations; but, there is other evidence available which tends to support this theory.

We know that the user sat on the ancient ch'uang with his legs folded under or crossed, for we have the evidence of early tomb pictures to prove the fact. We also know from a study of literary sources that the user sat with crossed legs on the later barbarian bed (hu ch'uang). The difference between the two types of furniture bearing the name ch'uang, therefore, lies entirely in the method of construction of the two pieces. The early type rested on four feet, as has been shown in Chapter 2, whereas the later hu ch'uang has two folding legs, both types being too low for the user to sit with legs hanging down.

Can one correlate the evidence of the two versions of the ch'uang just discussed with our scanty knowledge of the two types of tso? Such a correlation would lead us to the assumption that, just as the difference in the ancient and barbarian types of ch'uang lay solely in their methods of construction, so the ancient and barbarian tso also differed in the same way, i. e. in construction. I have already proposed that both types of tso were used with legs pendant, and this factor clearly pre-supposes the condition that the seat is high enough off the ground to make this method of sitting comfortable.

At this point I must refer the reader back to Chapter 3 and my discussion of the various pieces of furniture classified under the titles chi and tsu, for they immediately spring to mind as answering the requirements of the ancient tso, should my conjectures prove correct.

As already stated, we have no factual evidence for the hu tso introduced to China by Emperor Han Ling Ti between AD 168-188, but here again we have some clues which point to a reconstruction of the piece entirely in accordance with the assumptions made above.

Fig. 24 shows part of a wall mural discovered by Japanese archaeologists in a tomb known by the description "Tomb of the Dancers". This mounded tomb is situated in the far north-east of China, just inside the confines of the Great Wall in an area

that was the capital of the Korean kingdom of Koguryo until A.D. 427. The date of the tomb is uncertain; estimates ranging from the 3rd to the 6th century A.D. (14)

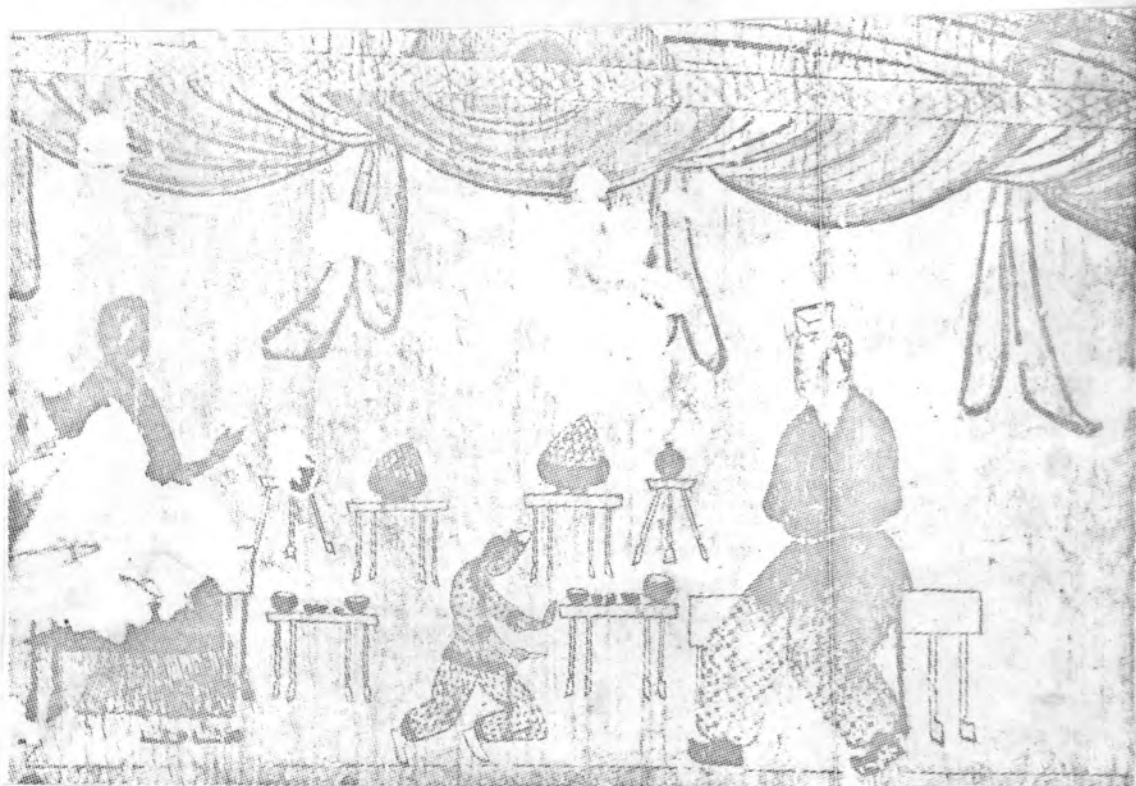


Fig. 24

The mural illustrated above depicts several individuals dressed in trousers and sitting with legs pendant on slab-like individual seats, each with four spindly legs, one at each corner. The seats shown in the mural clearly form pairs with the tables, and it looks as if the custom at that time was for each guest to eat his food from individual small tables.

This mural is important for several reasons, primarily because it demonstrates that, contrary to Fitzgerald's opinion, the barbarian tribes on the northern borders of China were already in the habit of sitting on four-legged seats not long after the introduction of the hu tso to China in the 2nd century A.D. Secondly, this type of seat has not so far been discovered in any tomb mural in China proper; and thirdly, the construction of the slab-like seat not only answers the requirements of our conjectural hu tso, but is also so close in style to the rigid frame chair that this seat must surely be the 'missing link' in the line of development from the ancient t'a and tso to the yoke-backed rigid frame chair of the Sung dynasty.

The fact that the seats, shown in the mural in The Tomb of the Dancers, show the custom of a people who would be described by the native Chinese as 'hu' or barbarian, adds extra weight to the conclusion that this was the sort of seat known by the title hu tso. Fitzgerald discusses the question of the descriptive character 'hu' at some length in his study, but rejects the simple explanation that the 'hu' described the northern border tribes - which is the normal use of the word - and opts instead for the less common meaning of 'hu' as "Anything or man who came to China by (the caravan route to Western Asia)" (15)

Fitzgerald entirely rejects the idea that the northern border tribes sat on rigid seats: "The Chinese are the only people in the Eastern half of Asia who, before modern times, used chairs. All other peoples sat on the floor; on mats, on carpets, or on cushions" (16) so that he was forced to the conclusion that the rigid frame chair originated in the Byzantine Empire.

Fitzgerald's failure to take account of the mural in The Tomb of the Dancers at T'ung-kou (fig. 24) is both unaccountable and inexcusable, for this mural, taken in conjunction with the proved existence of the hu tso, completely changes the whole concept of the origin of the frame chair.

Additional re-inforcement against Fitzgerald's theory that the border tribes were not accustomed to sitting upright on seats, comes in the form of a stool excavated by Dr. Aurel Stein at the Ni-ya River site in the far north-west of China. The seat is heavily carved with designs showing a strong Indian influence (see fig. 25) and is thought to date somewhere between the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. The similarity of this stool and the T'ung-kou example (fig. 24) is striking. Moreover, since its height is 23", the Ni-ya stool is surely intended for sitting with legs pendant.

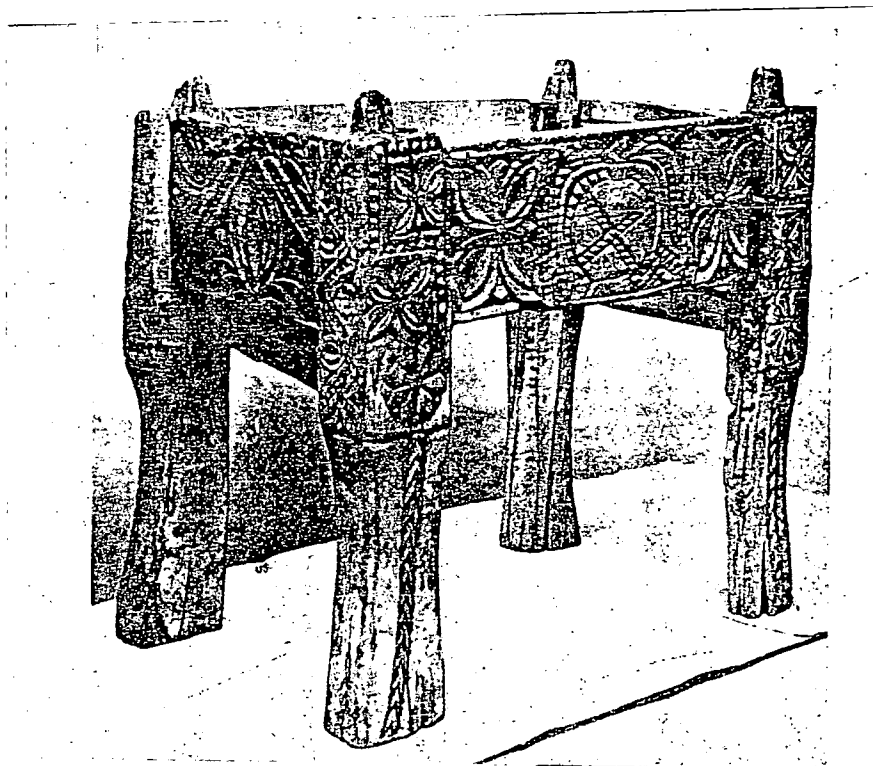


Fig. 25

The single piece of factual evidence concerning the early frame chair so far to come out of a tomb excavation is a bronze figurine now in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. The bronze is stated to have been found with other objects associated with the Han dynasty, but, although Stone<sup>(17)</sup> accepts a Han date, Fitzgerald (p.60) attributes the piece to the T'ang.

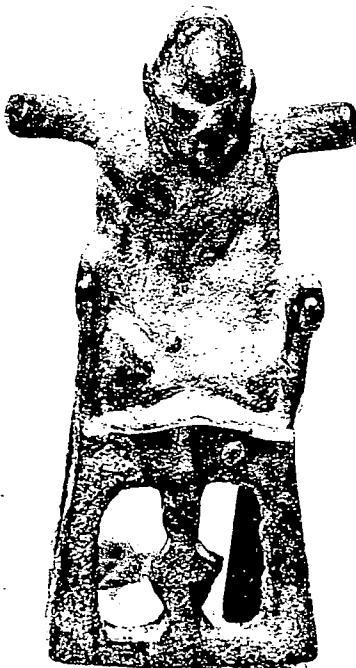


Fig. 26

The 2½" high bronze figurine depicts a man seated in a rigid frame chair and, even if the T'ang date put forward by Fitzgerald is accepted in preference to Stone's attribution to the Han, this is still the earliest model of a frame chair in China. From a stylistic point of view, the piece is quite definitely in a direct line of development from the raised bench, shown in fig. 17, via the four legged seats of T'ung-kou (fig. 24) to the wooden

frame chair from Chü-lu, shown in fig. 21. The back rail of the bronze chair is in the yoke style associated with the Sung period, whilst the base of the chair is a mixture of the T'ang box-and-cutout style of table (see Plate E) and the earlier free standing corner leg construction of Chou tables. The model chair in the Toronto collection presents numerous problems to the furniture historian due to its mixture of stylistic features and, above all, to the fact that the man who sits in the chair does so with his legs crossed. It is obvious from the illustration (fig. 26) that the chair is too narrow for the man to sit comfortably in the cross legged position and, in addition, it is obvious that the relative height of the seat from the ground indicates that the chair was intended for using with the legs hanging down.

The relationship between the hu ch'uang current in the early-3rd century A.D. and the development of the rigid frame chair, which appears from the end of the T'ang dynasty onwards, must now be re-assessed. The points at issue can be stated as follows:-

- i) Was the frame chair a natural adaptation of the folding stool (hu ch'uang)?
- ii) Was the frame chair a foreign importation?
- iii) Is it possible to trace the frame chair back to the indigenous tso known from ancient literature?

The difficulties raised in answering these points are enormous, for the i 椅 frame chair is not mentioned in literary texts until the 11th century and there is no securely dated evidence prior to the wooden chair found at Chü-lu (fig. 21). Even so, an evaluation of the points at issue under each of the three headings will, I think, tend to show that the third hypothesis may at some future date be confirmed by tomb finds. Let us consider these points one by one:-

- a) Is the frame chair a natural adaptation of the folding stool?

That the chiao-i (folding chair) (see fig. 19) is a natural adaptation of the hu ch'uang (folding stool) is fully accepted by Chinese and Western scholars alike. But it is quite a different matter to accept that the four-legged rigid frame chair, i is a natural outcome of the folding stool, despite the statement contained in the Ming encyclopaedia San-ts'ai t'u-hui quoted earlier in the chapter (fig. 19). The construction of these two types are so completely dissimilar that, in my view, this hypothesis must be refuted.

- b) Was the frame chair introduced to China from outside?

Perhaps the strongest evidence against this proposition is etymological. The foreign source of the hu ch'uang and hu tso was, from the beginning, acknowledged as such in their descriptive names 'barbarian' couch and 'barbarian' seat. On the other hand,



the first literary references to the rigid frame chair use the character 椅 which had appeared in the ancient Shih-ching (Book of Poetry) as the name of a tree. Thus, the choice of an existing Chinese character with which to describe the new frame chair, definitely supports the contention that the frame chair is of native Chinese origin.

Fitzgerald (p.16) favours the Byzantine Empire as "the only possible source" of the frame chair and suggests that the Nestorian missionaries imported the chair to China in the 8th century. Even so, he goes on to say that "it is no-where suggested that they (frame chairs) were of foreign origin or importation".

- c) Is it possible to trace the frame chair back to the indigenous tso known from ancient literature?

The chief reason for the theory that the frame chair came to China from outside has been the major difficulty encountered when one tries to trace a single line of development from the hu ch'uang to the frame chair. It is against all common sense to assert that the two legged folding stool gave rise to the four legged rigid frame chair - but until now scholars have not been aware of the existence of the tso and the hu tso.

As already stated, the ch'uang and the tso must differ in at least one essential feature to merit the difference in nomenclature.

The known essentials of the hu ch'uang are:-

- i) that it is a low stool with folding legs
- ii) that it is portable
- iii) that it was originally used for informal comfort outside the house

As the third feature listed above is a direct outcome of the first two, namely height and portability, I would discount it as a primary feature. Now we are left with two essential features which distinguish the hu ch'uang from all other types of seat and, in my opinion, the crucial element here is the method of construction - that is, folding legs. If we can, therefore, assume that the hu tso differed from the hu ch'uang by virtue of its rigid construction, then the basic stumbling block contained in the theory that it was the folding stool that gave rise to the rigid framed chair at once disappears. There is no difficulty whatsoever in accepting that it was the four-legged rigid backless seat that evolved into the rigid framed four-legged chair by the simple addition of a backrest. Whether or not one accepts that the T'ung-kou seats are the furniture described as tso or hu tso, it is still quite obvious that the rigid frame chair of the Sung dynasty is of essentially the same basic construction. This factor alone must altogether discount the role of the hu ch'uang in the development of the i chair.

In the light of the knowledge that has come to light regarding the tso and the hu tso, and taking account of the reconstruction of their appearance attempted above, a new summary of the origin and development of the Chinese frame chair would now be as follows:-

a) By the time of the Warring States period, it had become customary for the nobility (and possibly the aged) to sleep on a raised bed (ch'uang) and to use a tso (seat) and chi (armrest) to ensure their comfort. It is not certain whether the user sat on the tso with legs pendant or not, but the height of the piece of lacquered wood furniture discovered with the Hsin-yang bed would argue that this is a distinct possibility. The seat in question (fig. 9) has previously been called a chi, but this may be a misnomer since the chi may refer only to an armrest of the same construction low enough to lean against.

b) During the reign of Emperor Han Ling Ti (A.D. 168-188), two pieces of furniture for sitting - namely the hu ch'uang and the hu tso - were introduced to the capital of Loyang. The hu ch'uang was a low folding stool which initially was used out of doors, and on which the user sat cross legged. The hu tso has not so far been identified with any known piece of furniture, but there is a strong possibility that its appearance resembled that of the four legged slab-like seat seen in the wall mural found in the Tomb of the Dancers at T'ung-kou (fig. 24). The user sat on this seat with legs pendant and, since the legs are fixed, it would have been impracticable to carry it around with ease. Thus, it was probably restricted to use indoors.

c) Between the 2nd and 6th centuries, the hu ch'uang was used out of doors whilst the hu tso was used as a seat inside. People continued to sit cross legged on the ch'uang and the t'a.

d) In the 6th century, the hu tso is converted to a fixed frame chair (i) by the simple addition of a backrest, whilst the hu ch'uang begins to be used inside the house.

e) By the 11th century, everyone, from the Emperor down to the lowliest peasant, used frame chairs inside his house, and the custom of sitting with legs pendant was completely accepted. Accordingly, the old hu ch'uang was adapted into a comfortable chair by the addition of a backrest, and was called the chiao-i (folding chair).

Until such time as a wall mural is uncovered from an early dated tomb showing a hu tso in use, the above argument must remain entirely inconclusive. Nonetheless, we now know that such a piece of furniture did exist, and it remains only for us to be certain what it looked like.

CHAPTER 4NOTES

- (1) Fischer, O. Die Chinesische Malerei der Han-dynastie. Berlin, 1931, p. 54
- (2) Fairbank, W. "A Structural Key to Han Mural Art" in Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies. Cambridge, 1942. This drawing is also reproduced by Siren, O. Chinese Painting. Vol. I. London, 1956, fig. 5.
- (3) See Chapter 5, fig. 27 depicting a t'a discovered in 1955 on a painted mural in a Liao-yang tomb. There are also the engravings of ch'uang, very similar to those from Chu Wei's tomb, which can be seen on the walls of a tomb at An-ch'iu in Shantung (see Ch. 6 fig. 36).
- (4) Ku-chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng. Vol. 797. Shanghai, 1885-88, p. 49 Wen Ch'ao c.l.
- (5) San-ts'ai t'u-hui. Vol. 3. Taipei, 1970, p. 1339
- (6) Fitzgerald, C.P. Barbarian Beds. London, 1965, p. 45
- (7) Pai, Su Pai-sha Sung-mu. Peking, 1957.
- (8) National Museum Historical Bulletin. Vol. 1. No. 1. Peking, 1926. This reference is quoted by Stone, L.H. The Chair in China. Toronto, 1952, but the author has been unable to consult this Bulletin.
- (9) Stone, L.H. op.cit. p. 18 and Plate VI
- (10) Wen-wu. Peking, 1962, No. 10 p. 34
- (11) Fitzgerald, C.P. op.cit. p. 28 and footnote 16
- (12) Fitzgerald, C.P. op.cit. p. 27 translating Liang Shu the biography of Hou Ching.

- (13) Couvreur, S. Li-ki: Mémoires sur les Bienséances et les Cérémonies. Vol. 1. Paris, 1950, p. 626
- (14) Siren, O. Chinese Painting. Vol. 1. London, 1956, p. 53
- (15) Fitzgerald, C.P. op.cit. p. 8
- (16) Fitzgerald, C.P. op.cit. p. 1
- (17) Stone, L.H. op.cit. p. 5

P A R T I I

THE EVIDENCE OF PICTORIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF  
CHINESE FURNITURE

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## CHAPTER 5

THE EVIDENCE OF PAINTED MURALS IN CHINESE  
TOMBS

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The difficulties facing any researcher concerned with tomb murals seem almost insuperable when this research is attempted without access to the original tombs. Whereas, in the case of paintings on silk and paper, it is possible to work from adequate photographs in easily accessible publications, it is quite another matter in the case of tomb murals.

The two available publications which cover this subject, namely Wen-wu and K'ao-ku, are published in Peking and are devoted primarily to archaeological reports on current excavations in China. But the length of these reports varies considerably, ranging from the commendable to the cursory. The photographs illustrating the various finds are comparatively few and, regrettably, so poor in quality that identification is made extremely difficult. These remarks do not apply, however, to the coloured photographs which are occasionally included in these journals.

The problems facing the archaeologist attempting to take photographs of wall murals inside tombs are formidable - the example of the Tun-huang caves immediately springs to mind, since



these problems have been well described by Basil Gray in his book Buddhist Cave Paintings at Tun-huang.<sup>(1)</sup> Mr and Mrs. Vincent took photographs in the caves by flashlight in 1948, and brought back a series of ninety colour transparencies of the interiors of thirty four different caves. Since then, the Tun-huang Institute has been engaged in a detailed archaeological and photographic survey of the vast complex of caves, but the results of these investigations have not yet appeared in final form. Siren writes:-

"It need hardly be pointed out that a thorough classification of nearly a hundred caves is quite impossible without a sufficient number of photographic reproductions".<sup>(2)</sup>

Pelliot's six volumes Les Grottes de Touen-houang, containing numerous black and white photographs, was published in 1920, but the quality of the photographs is by no means up to present day standards. A really thorough study of the wealth of research material concerning the origins and development of Chinese hardwood furniture, which unquestionably exists on the walls of the caves, is as yet impossible, although an interim study, produced by the Institute entitled Tunhuang pi-hua, Peking, 1959, gives a tantalising glimpse of the material still to come. This short study contains 213 excellent photographs, many in colour, covering material from the Northern Wei to Yüan periods.

Tomb murals vary considerably in size and style, ranging from the small framed vignette (see Plate J) to an endless vista continued round the four walls of a tomb (see fig. 30). Needless to say, photographic reproductions of the first type are of much more value than photographs of the second type, which may very well exclude items of furniture not selected for inclusion by the photographer.

The actual technique of painting wall murals - which doubtless applies to most of the examples discussed here - has been vividly described by Masao Kitano, who is himself an artist. Kitano reached the following conclusions as a result of carrying out the detailed work of copying the wall paintings on a tomb at Pei-yuan, Liao-yang, over a period of several months. (3)

In his opinion, the murals are painted, apparently with glue medium, directly on the smooth surface of the tomb walls. He found no sign of preparation of the surfaces with a base of gesso or other material. Several sizes of brush were used, ranging from the short haired ones used to paint the lines, to larger long-haired brushes for filling in the solid colour. As a result of his own experience in copying paintings, Kitano suggests that several painters worked on the murals. These artists painted from a standing position (whilst the walls were already in position, rather than beforehand when the slabs could be laid flat). First of all, the black outlines were painted in, after which the artists filled in the solid colour areas before finally adding the details.

Over the course of centuries some deterioration of the painted surfaces inevitably occurs, often in the form of flaking. Frequently, large portions of plaster have flaked off the wall and, in some cases, the flaking occurs around the furniture with which this chapter deals. This has happened in the important mural from T'ung-kou (see fig.24) and the earliest mural showing a frame chair (fig. 29).

Once again I must stress that, although this short study emphasizes the very great importance of tomb murals for furniture research, nonetheless it is essential that, in future, furniture historians should examine the murals in person wherever possible.

It is generally thought that the purpose of murals painted round the walls of the inner tomb chamber, which contained the coffin of the deceased owner of the tomb, was to comfort the soul of the dead man with reminders of his life on earth. The ming-ch'i (miniature models of people, animals, etc.) and other valuables, often found grouped near the coffin, are thought to have been placed there for the same purpose.

In cases where tombs can be accurately dated as, for example, the Chao family tomb, their value as research tools is incalculable. There need be no arguments concerning the originality of the paintings on the walls of the Chao family tomb - here we have incontrovertable evidence that these scenes of daily life were painted shortly before A.D. 1099, so that the furniture we see in these scenes are genuine representations of types and styles current at that particular date.

Now let us proceed to a discussion of a series of murals found in Chinese tombs showing representations of various types of furniture which enable us to construct a chronology of different types and styles. For the purpose of this study the term 'tomb mural' will include not only the painted scene on a flat surface, but also those instances where outline details of the scenes have been incized into the tomb wall and the prominent surface painted with colour.

In 1955, two early tombs decorated with multi-coloured wall murals were discovered near Liao-yang.<sup>(4)</sup> Unfortunately, the quality of the photographs in the archaeological report are exceptionally poor and, moreover, the authors of the report repeatedly stress that the state of the original paintings is unclear or incomplete.<sup>(5)</sup> Both tombs are thought to date between c.25 B.C. and A.D. 265, and each of the murals contained in them is of special significance. In the first tomb, we see two people sitting facing each other with their legs tucked beneath them on low square t'a, whilst a chi is placed before them.<sup>(6)</sup> The chi seems to be identical to the type represented on the walls of General Chu Wei's tomb which dates from c. A.D. 150 (see Chapter 3 fig. 11). As I have already pointed out, the quality of the original photograph in Wen-wu is exceptionally poor, and fig. 27 showing the Liao-yang mural is necessarily even less clear, since it is only a copy.



Fig. 27

In Tomb 2, on the other hand, a man and his wife sit facing each other on the floor. Although there are no illustrations of the scenes in Tomb 2, the information contained in the excavation report is sufficient to pinpoint the phenomenon that here we have two tombs, of very similar date, yet each portraying a different means of sitting.<sup>(7)</sup>

Historians assume that the custom of sitting above floor level, which came into vogue at this time, was a fixed habit of the nobility. The evidence of these two murals, on the other hand, clearly demonstrates that the practice of sitting on mats on the floor had by no means completely died out in the Later Han Dynasty. It was, of course, during this same period that the Han Emperor Ling Ti (A.D. 168-188) introduced the hu tso and hu ch'uang to Lo-yang which is also in the far north of China.

It is on a painted tomb mural that we see one of the earliest frame chairs so far discovered in China. This chair (see Plate J) is depicted in a scene which forms just one picture in a line of separate vignettes decorating the top of the northern corner of Cave 285 at Tun-huang. Moreover, in the same cave there is a large niche in the wall which contains a statue of a Buddha who sits in an armchair with his legs pendant (see Chapter 6 fig.40). The difference in the two frame chairs, both attributed to the Western Wei period (c. A.D. 550) is considerable. In Plate J, the chair legs are narrow members which connect the seat and the arm rail. The seat itself is rectangular, and is clearly marked with a diamond shaped pattern which may, perhaps, represent a woven seat. The side panels are obviously solid, but the condition of the mural makes it extremely difficult to judge from the large photograph (Plate 61, Tunhuang pi-hua reproduced here as Plate J) how the back of the chair is constructed. Examined through a magnifying glass, it is just possible to follow the line of the back nearside chair leg upwards to the neck level of the sitter, and to make out a straight narrow back rail which projects in yoke style. It is possible, therefore, that this chair was once represented with a high solid back.

The remarkable feature of the mural (Plate J) is the fact that the sitter, who is described in the caption as an "immortal of the mountains and forests" (shan-lin hsien-jen), has his legs drawn up beneath him as he sits in his wooden armchair meditating.

## PLATE J



Hermit meditating in Armchair. (c.A.D. 550)  
Mural from Cave 285 at Tun-huang.

I have drawn this conclusion from the relative position of his knees - although other people may deduce from the same evidence that he is sitting with his legs crossed! Moreover, it is worth noting that this hermit is the only one in the line of vignettes who has a chair; all the others are shown sitting cross legged on the ground. It seems quite extraordinary that this aesthete must have carried his unwieldy frame chair up a mountain to a remote cave top.

The sculpture of the seated Buddha, which also forms part of the decorations of Cave 285 at Tun-huang, is difficult to reconstruct from the photographic evidence. Judging by the position of the sitter's arm, it would seem that the chair is indeed an armchair, but this deduction can only be verified by on-the-spot examination of the statue. I shall return to this 6th century sculpture in Chapter 6, which deals with stone engravings and sculpture.

Whereas in the Liao-yang tombs we had the evidence of the two sitting aids, namely the mat and the t'a, at Tun-huang we are shown two armchairs, but each used in a different manner. From Cave 285 alone, we have learned that during the 6th century armchairs did exist in China, and that they were used not only for sitting with legs pendant (see fig.40 p.129) but also for sitting in the meditation posture as in Plate J. This information must surely throw new light on the dating of the unique model frame chair which forms part of the Royal Ontario Museum collection, the date of which was discussed at length in Chapter 4, see fig. 26.



It is certain that unpublished murals from Tun-huang will, in future, reveal additional information on furniture types and styles, since the negligible quantity of photographic evidence now available already reveals that such evidence exists. In addition to the frame chair portrayed in Cave 285 discussed above, Caves 405, 334 and 196 all contain murals which represent furniture.<sup>(8)</sup>

The tomb murals discovered in T'ung-kou in the far north east of China by Japanese archaeologists, have been fully published by Ikeuchi and Umehara.<sup>(9)</sup> Their excellent photographs of the Tomb of the Dancers, which forms part of the Kao-kou-li tombs, provide us with the vital evidence concerning the occurrence of the practice of sitting with legs pendant, fully discussed in Chapter 4. In addition, the mural clearly shows that the seats and the tables seen in the murals have been constructed in identical fashion (see fig. 28)

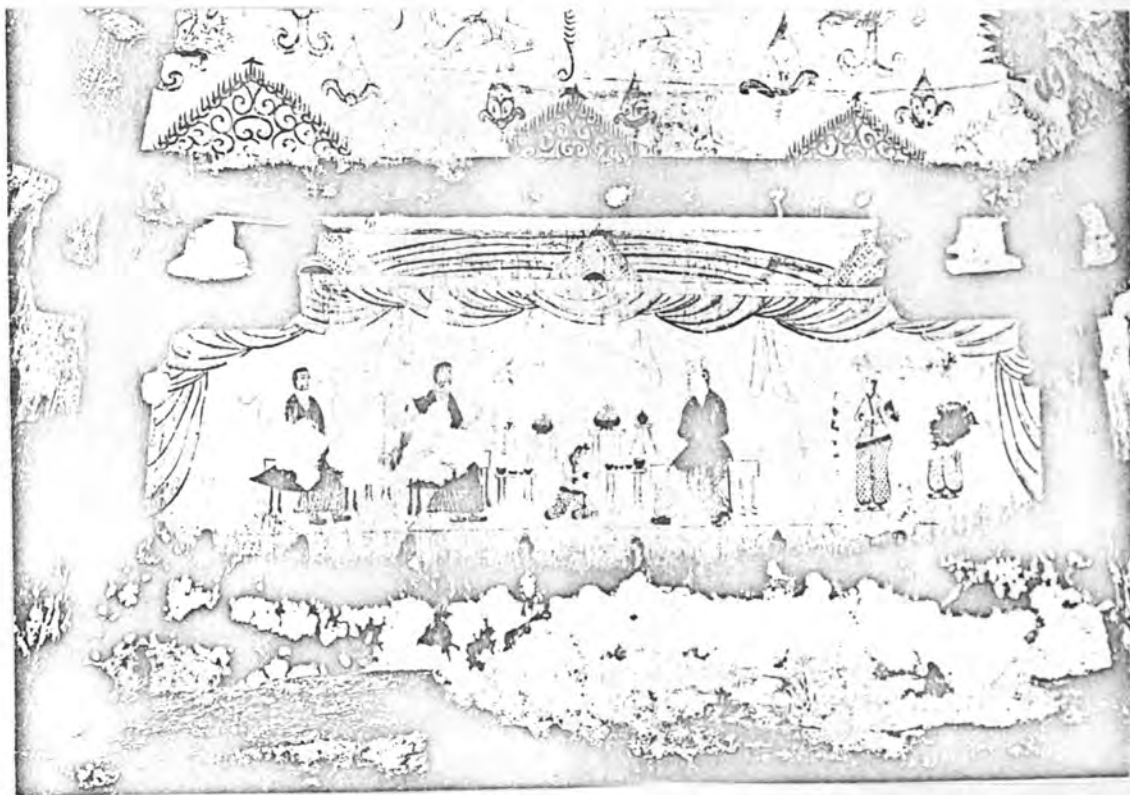


Fig. 28

As I have already pointed out in Chapter 4, the date of these tombs is uncertain. However, the most recent date advanced, till now, by any art historian is the 6th century, thus placing the chronology of the seats they show between the t'a, shown in fig. 27, and the frame chair seen in the Tun-huang wall mural illustrated in Plate J.

Probably the earliest securely dated frame chair, seen in a tomb mural comes from the Hsi-an tomb of Kao Yüan-kuei excavated in 1959.<sup>(10)</sup> Kao died in A.D. 756, and in fig. 29 we see him painted on the wall of his tomb sitting in a large frame chair with his legs hanging down.



Fig. 29

The serious extent of the flaking that has occurred in this mural is clearly seen in fig. 29. None of the seat of the chair remains - all we have is the distinctive shape of the back rail and a tantalising glimpse of two unshaped foot endings. The most unusual feature of the construction of the chair occurs in the join between the side posts and back rail. The side posts each seem to have been finished off with a square top knob which has resulted in the deeply bowed back rail being attached behind these knobs. A join of this kind has never been seen by the author in any other early chair, since the usual method is to place the back rail directly over the tops of the side posts.

The Hsi-an chair, seen in fig. 29, is securely dated to rather less than a hundred years prior to a frame chair which has been reported in the tomb of the official Shih Ching which dates from A.D. 831-858. The single archaeological report so far published on this Hopeh tomb mentions only that on the west wall is a table, whilst on the north wall of the tomb chamber is a coloured stone engraving of both a chi and a chair.<sup>(11)</sup> There is no photograph with the report, and no more details of this find have yet been released.

When we come to the Sung dynasty, the evidence of wall murals is much more secure. Three murals, all dated within a short period of forty years, namely A.D. 1060 to 1099, show very similar furniture. The first of these murals dated 1060 was discovered in November 1959 in a tomb at Huai-an in the province of Kiangsu<sup>(12)</sup> (see figs. 30 and 31.)

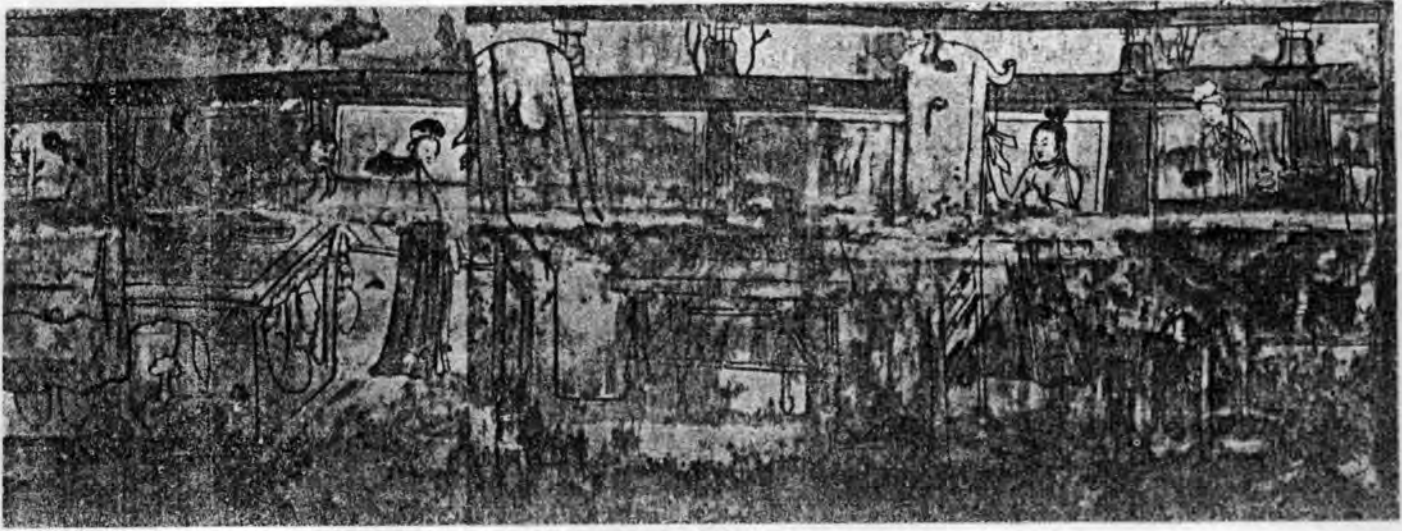


Fig. 30

Fig. 30 shows the mural appearing on the east wall of the tomb chamber and illustrates a banqueting scene. Since the quality of the illustration above is almost identical to the photograph in Wen-wu, from which it is copied, the reader can judge for himself the difficulties in interpreting the figures and furniture. Moreover, fig. 30 shows only part of the total mural on the wall, since the scene must continue further than the left of the illustration we see here.

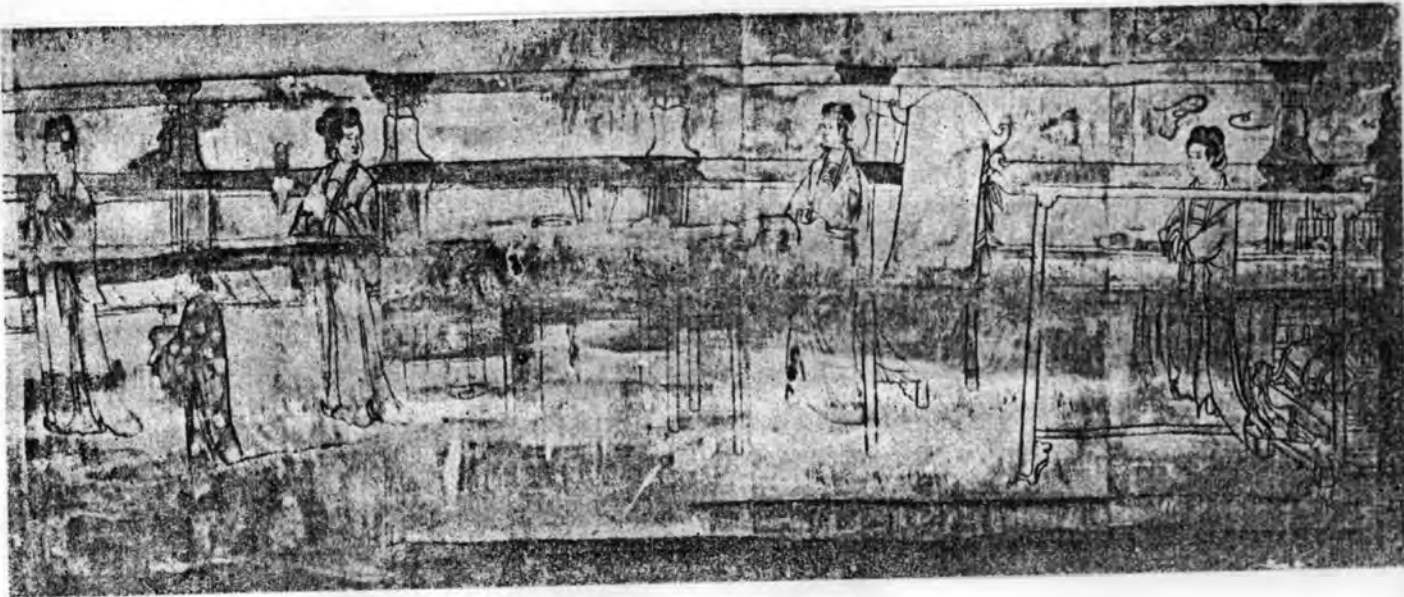


Fig. 31

Much of the detail in fig. 31, which shows the west wall of the tomb, is also obscured, yet it is clear that both illustrations above are in the same style and show a single feasting scene. Three draped Lantern Hanging Chairs are clearly visible in the illustrations, yet none is occupied. In addition, we see tables and a clothes stand. The heights of the backs of the three chairs, seen in figs. 30 and 31, is a puzzling feature of the murals. At first sight, one may suppose that their height is due to the artist's attempt to convey depth - since he has drawn the servants so small that their heads reach only partly up the backs of the chairs. But, if this was so, one wonders why the table, which is placed between the two chairs in fig. 30, is not larger than it is.

The second dated Sung mural comes from a tomb in Shantung province. This tomb, discovered at Chi-nan, bears an inscription which gives its date as A.D. 1076.<sup>(13)</sup> Only the barest details are given in the excavation report<sup>(14)</sup> but there are six small photographs of details of the tomb pictures reproduced here as Plate K. The appearance of the tomb is likened in the report to that of the Pai-sha tomb, and indeed the style and contents of the murals strongly resemble scenes in the Chao family tomb at Pai-sha.

The Sung tombs at Pai-sha were discovered in 1951 and are fully published by Pai Su in his book Pai-sha sung-mu. Peking, 1957. An inscription, found on some stone tablets placed in a box near the skeleton, reads "The day of the 9th moon of the 2nd year of Ylan-fu of the great Sung dynasty, Chao"<sup>(15)</sup>. This date, which corresponds to the year A.D. 1099, is again repeated on the walls of the passage.



PLATE K



Details from wall murals in a tomb dated A.D. 1076

Chi-nan, Shantung Province.

Pai Su not only incorporates a set of excellent colour photographs in his book, but he also takes the opportunity of comparing the furniture depicted in the tomb murals with similar items of furniture from different sources.<sup>(16)</sup> He reports that the whole of the tomb is colourfully painted. With the exception of the exterior of the tomb gate, which is dilapidated, the tomb is on the whole in good condition.

Several murals show furniture in scenes of surprisingly realistic detail. Fig. 32 includes chairs, tables and a clothes stand actually in use in a domestic scene taking place in the women's apartments. Although the mural has flaked at the bottom, the left corner of the scene appears to consist of a sewing table.



Fig. 32



Fig. 33

Fig. 33 illustrates a banqueting scene with the master and mistress of the tomb sitting at a table heavily laden with food and wine. It is unfortunate that the inscription appearing on the screen standing behind the male figure in fig. 33 has proved undecipherable.<sup>(17)</sup> This tomb was not the property of a noble family, but rather that of a wealthy Honan merchant family of the Chao clan. Their luxuriant style of living is obvious from the scenes painted on the walls of their tomb.



The importance of these widely published Sung tomb murals is well recognized, since they set a standard of furniture types and styles current at the turn of the 12th century.

A slight variation from the standard style of Sung tables and chairs is to be found in an undated Sung tomb discovered at Kung-hsien, Honan, in 1965.<sup>(18)</sup> Fig. 34 shows a couple sitting on two extremely high chairs at a banqueting table. The table and chair form a pair, since not only have they the same basic construction with high leg stretcher, but both are decorated by means of a pie-crust edging beneath the top surface of the table and the seats of the two chairs. Another variation will be found if one compares the chairs in this tomb with those found in the three Sung tombs already discussed. In the Kung-hsien murals, the back rails of the chairs are attached to the seat at a slight angle, whereas, in the examples from the dated tombs already described, the back of the chair is a continuation of the leg members. These variations suggest that the Kung-hsien tomb may, in fact, be of later date than the Sung.

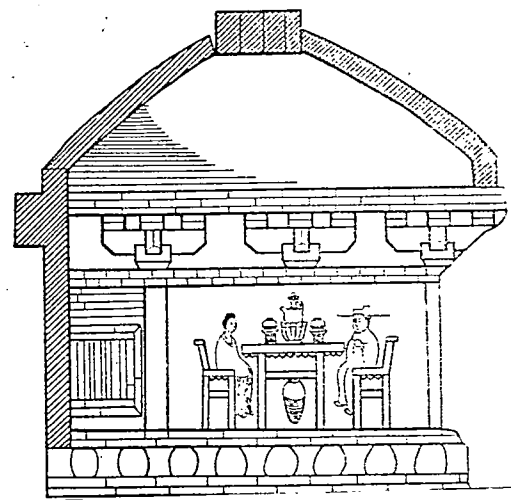


Fig. 34



Fig. 35

Fig. 35 illustrates a tomb mural from a tomb dated between A.D. 1126-1134<sup>(19)</sup> yet the furniture it depicts is of less advanced construction than that from the supposedly Sung tomb described above (fig. 34). The tomb in question comes from an area of northern China ruled over by the Chin (Jurchen) dynasty between A.D. 1115 - 1234. Here again, the owners of the tomb sit with their feet well off the floor, but the table in fig. 35 has two stretchers which strengthen the legs of the table seen in the mural. The double stretcher is a more primitive method of construction which gave way to a single stretcher before the final advance in carpentry technique was achieved in which no leg stretchers are needed. This evidence alone would strengthen the hypothesis that the furniture shown in fig. 34 is, in fact, of later date than the table and chairs shown in the Chin mural illustrated in fig. 35.

The final painted tomb mural to be considered in this chapter dates from A.D. 1289.<sup>(20)</sup> The importance of the furniture depicted in Feng Tao-chen's tomb lies in the evidence it shows of the marked advance that has occurred since the Sung dynasty in the constructional techniques known to cabinet workers. It demonstrates that no longer do we have the simple yoke construction with four leg members attached beneath; instead we have the sophisticated apron join where the leg members are made to become an integral part of the construction of the top surface of the table. From the illustration shown in Chapter 3, fig. 14, it will be apparent that the leg now continues in a smooth uninterrupted line from each corner point of the table downwards. Indeed, no more advanced joinery technique of attaching the legs to a flat surface is known even today. The highly advanced technique is accomplished by means of an extra piece of hardwood known as the 'apron'. It is this piece which forms the link, as it were, between the two different angles it connects.

Since our knowledge of furniture styles and types from the Ming dynasty onwards is well established, it is not necessary in this chapter to consider murals of later date than the Yuan dynasty tomb of Feng Tao-chen. The evidence of the murals already discussed has been sufficient to show that we can trace the origin and development of the Chinese table and chair in logical and comprehensible sequence from the Han period, when it was customary to sit on the floor, through the first appearance of the frame chair in dated murals of the 8th century, up to the point reached in the Yuan dynasty from which no further constructional advance has since been made.

CHAPTER 5NOTES

- (1) Gray, B. Buddhist Cave Paintings at Tun-huang. London, 1959, p. 15
- (2) Siren, O. Chinese Painting. Vol. 1. London, 1956, p. 86
- (3) Fairbank, W. and Kitano, M. "Han Mural Paintings in the Pei-yüan Tomb at Liao-yang, South Manchuria" in Artibus Asiae. Vol. XVII, 1954, p. 244
- (4) Wen-wu. Peking, 1955, No. 12 pp. 49-58
- (5) ibid. 但形家不太清楚
- (6) ibid. 二人对坐於方榻上,前置短几
- (7) ibid. 男女对坐在方席上
- (8) Gray, B. op. cit. includes most of the photographs taken by Mr. and Mrs. Vincent in 70 plates at the end of his book. From this small number, Plates 58, 48 and 29, all show representations of furniture occurring in caves 196, 334, and 405 respectively.
- (9) Ikeuchi, H. and Umehara, S. T'ung-kou. Vol. II. Tokyo, 1940.
- (10) Wen-wu. Peking, 1959, No. 8 p. 31
- (11) K'ao-ku. Peking, 1966, No. 1 p. 51 reads: 西壁上  
有磚砌桌子, 北壁上有茶几,  
椅子,...
- (12) Wen-wu. Peking, 1960, No. 8 p. 43. The inscription, written in grass script, reads: 嘉祐五年十月初口
- (13) Wen-wu. Peking, 1960, No. 2 p. 78. The inscription reads: 熙寧八年
- (14) Wen-wu. Peking, 1960, No. 2 p. 78.

- (15) Pai, Su Pai-sha sung-mu. Peking, 1957. This inscription reads: 元符二年趙大翁
- (16) Pai, Su op.cit. On p. 23 the author considers seven Sung dynasty table types, including the tables seen in the stone engraving illustrated in Ch. 6 fig. 39 of this thesis.
- (17) Pai, Su op.cit. p. 58 states: 但駢心墨書  
文字四行, 字迹草率, 不可辨識
- (18) K'ao-ku. Peking, 1965, No. 8 p. 428
- (19) K'ao-ku. Peking, 1955, No. 4 p. 58 ff.
- (20) Wen-wu. Peking, 1962, No. 10 p. 34

## CHAPTER 6

THE EVIDENCE OF STONE ENGRAVINGS AND SCULPTURE

Stone engravings which show representations of domestic furniture are comparable to tomb murals in importance, especially when they can be accurately dated. In Chapter 5, which discussed the evidence of coloured tomb paintings, the author included some examples which could equally well be included in this chapter under the heading 'Stone Engravings'. These were the cases in which outline details of the tomb pictures had been chiselled into the stone surface so as to highlight specific details of the scene in question. In every instance, however, the scene bore traces of the paint with which it had originally been decorated. This chapter, in contrast, will include only those stone engravings which have not at any time been decorated with colour.

It is a moot point whether engravings in intaglio or relief are the 'poor man's paintings' or, on the other hand, whether painted scenes on tomb walls are the 'poor man's engravings'. The decisive factor must surely have been the relative cost between the hire of artisans skilled in painting, as compared to those skilled in engraving. Which of these two skills was the most highly valued, we do not know. Kitano<sup>(1)</sup> has speculated that

several artists worked together to complete the painted tomb murals discussed in Chapter 5, but we do not know whether the stone engravings discussed in this chapter were the work of one or of several stone cutters.

Wilma Fairbank<sup>(2)</sup> has pointed out that, even within the field of stone engraving, there is a hierarchy of expertise - and hence of costliness. Thus, the formalized stamped figures which make up the various scenes decorating the walls of the famous Wu Liang Tz'u tombs in Shantung, c. A.D. 151, would have been carried out by less skilled artisans than those engaged to incise the freely posed figures depicted in the engravings which decorate the shrine of General Chu Wei at Chin-hsiang in Shantung, c. A.D. 50. Fairbank concludes that the difference in style results from the fact that the Wu tomb engravings - which unfortunately show no furniture - were carried out in imitation of the stamped hollow tiles which formed the walls of less expensive, and hence probably less noble, Han dynasty shrines. The Chu Wei engravings, on the other hand, were probably made to imitate paintings on plaster.

The tile-stamping technique used in the Wu tombs consisted of repeatedly pressing carved wooden blocks into a wet clay surface in order to make an intaglio impression, i.e. where the outlines of the figures, or even the complete figures, are indented. The intaglio engravings in the Wu tombs have been further embellished by means of striations between the delineated

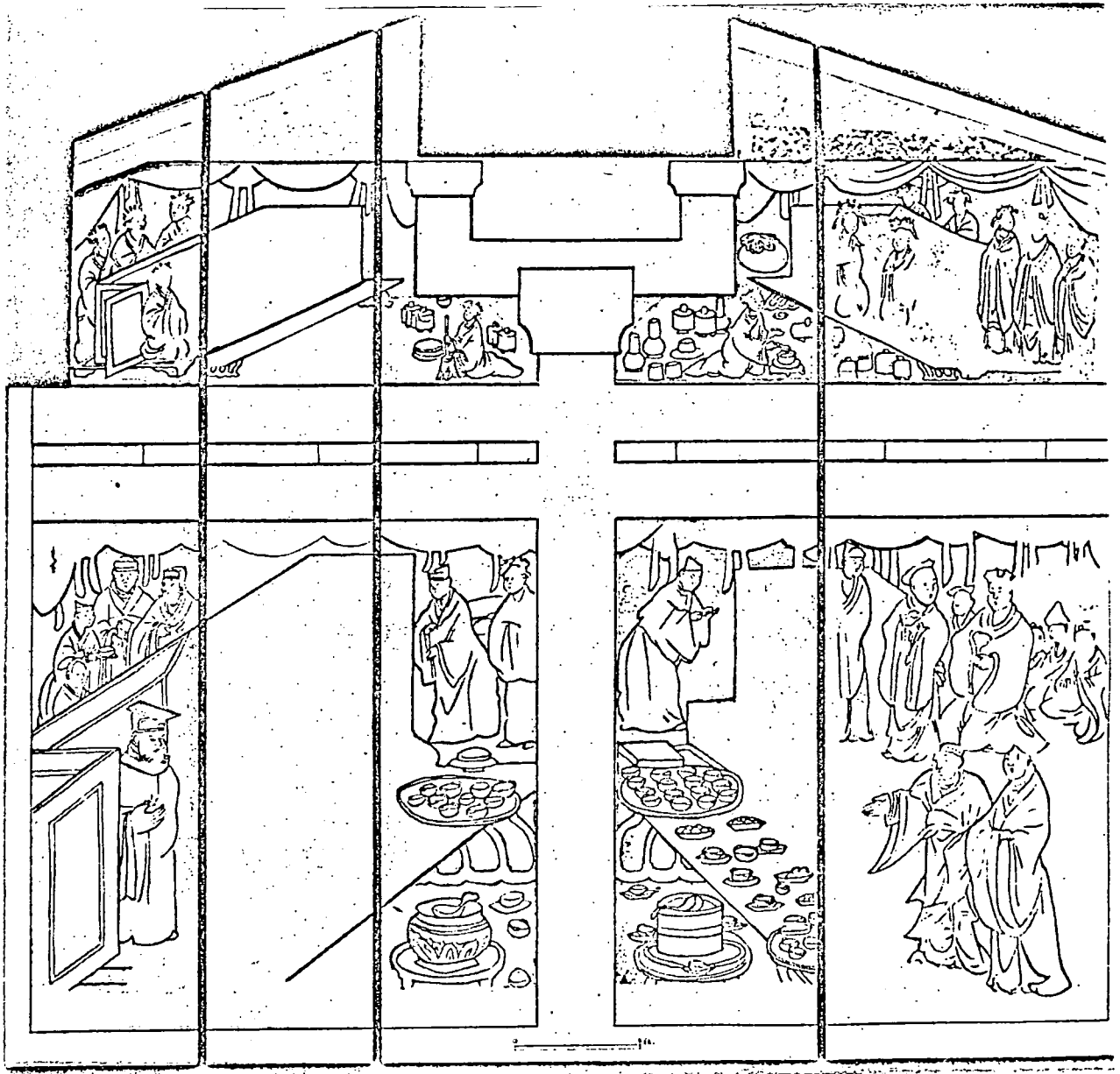
figures so as to produce a more spectacular difference between the figures and their background. This type of low relief engraving is, of course, much the most economical method of making pictures, since the artisan uses only a limited number of carved wooden moulds with which to build up his basic composition. For this reason, the skill involved lies not in the engraver's cutting technique, but rather in his compositional skill.

The Chu Wei carvings which depict items of domestic furniture, occur on all three walls of the shrine, each of which is divided into four parts. The shrine became buried sometime between the 11th and 19th centuries, and was not re-discovered until 1857. Unfortunately, neither Chavannes<sup>(3)</sup>, who took photographs of the shrine in 1907, nor Fischer<sup>(4)</sup>, who published in 1930, realized that their conclusions were drawn from incomplete evidence. Chavannes' photographs show only the top sections of the three shrine walls, whereas Fischer's rubbings are incomplete because the main designs were still one-third buried.

Fairbank also points out that, of the three supposedly complete sets of rubbings from the tomb engravings of the Chu Wei shrine, none was in fact complete.<sup>(5)</sup> Moreover, all these incomplete sets were made up from different component parts. It seems that the individual who took the rubbings chose to omit those parts of the slabs which were not to his taste. What more striking instance could one find which would demonstrate so



PLATE L



The West Wall of General Chu Wei's offering shrine  
Chin-hsiang, Shantung Province. c. A.D. 50.

tellingly the degree of suspicion that must be attached to evidence of this type not collected by the researcher in person!

The stone offering shrine of the Han General Chu Wei was erected in about the year A.D. 50, and thus pre-dates the Wu tombs by a century. The carvings, which adorn three of the walls of this early shrine, were, moreover, much more costly to execute than the decorations in the Wu tombs. Unlike the Wu carvings, the Chu Wei decorations are the work of a skilled stone engraver working in free compositional style. This artist, doubtless, first drew in charcoal the scenes he wished to execute on the flat walls of the shrine before he set to work to chisel away his outlines.

Three walls of the shrine show a continuous scene of feasting. The women of the family are portrayed in small scale on the upper sections of the walls, whilst the main participants are shown as larger scale figures in the lower sections. These principal figures stand or sit on screened platforms that have long low wooden chi placed before them. (see Plate L) Here is our evidence that in the Han dynasty the nobility were extremely concerned with keeping off draughts - for this reason high wooden screens have been erected round three sides of the huge wooden platforms which are each large enough to seat four persons.

The details of the carvings on the west wall of General Chu Wei's shrine, illustrated in Plate L, are not, however, the actual engravings which Wilma Fairbank discovered when she visited the site of the shrine in 1934. Instead, they are drawings made after the date of her visit which have been reconstructed with the additional help of photographs and a set of rubbings. She discovered that, at some period after the original shrine had been completed, an engraver had attempted to deepen and renew the worn carvings. She states that this later artist "had not only been clumsy in his line but has made numerous mistakes of observation".<sup>(6)</sup> Even so, she believes that "the original composition of curtains, platforms and screens, the disposition of the principals, spectators, and servants, the recognizably Han bowls and jars, are all preserved."<sup>(7)</sup>

So, not only were previously published rubbings incomplete - due to the omission of various portions of the engravings - but the engravings themselves are now found to have been inaccurately restored. It is, of course, possible that if General Chu Wei's engravings had been coloured when they were first made, later mistakes in re-carving might not have occurred since the later engraver would have had colours to guide him.

Due to the scarcity of research material, it is not possible to present a logical progression of stone engravings to show the origins and development of furniture in the way that has been possible for tomb paintings (see Chapter 5). This chapter will, therefore, take notice of the evidence that does exist, whilst considering its merits as comparative material.

From the evidence illustrated in fig. 36, we can, for instance, compare the furniture shown in General Chu Wei's shrine (see Plate L) with the furniture depicted in this Han tomb. Both tombs are situated in Shantung Province, but the scene below emanates from the district of An-ch'iu.

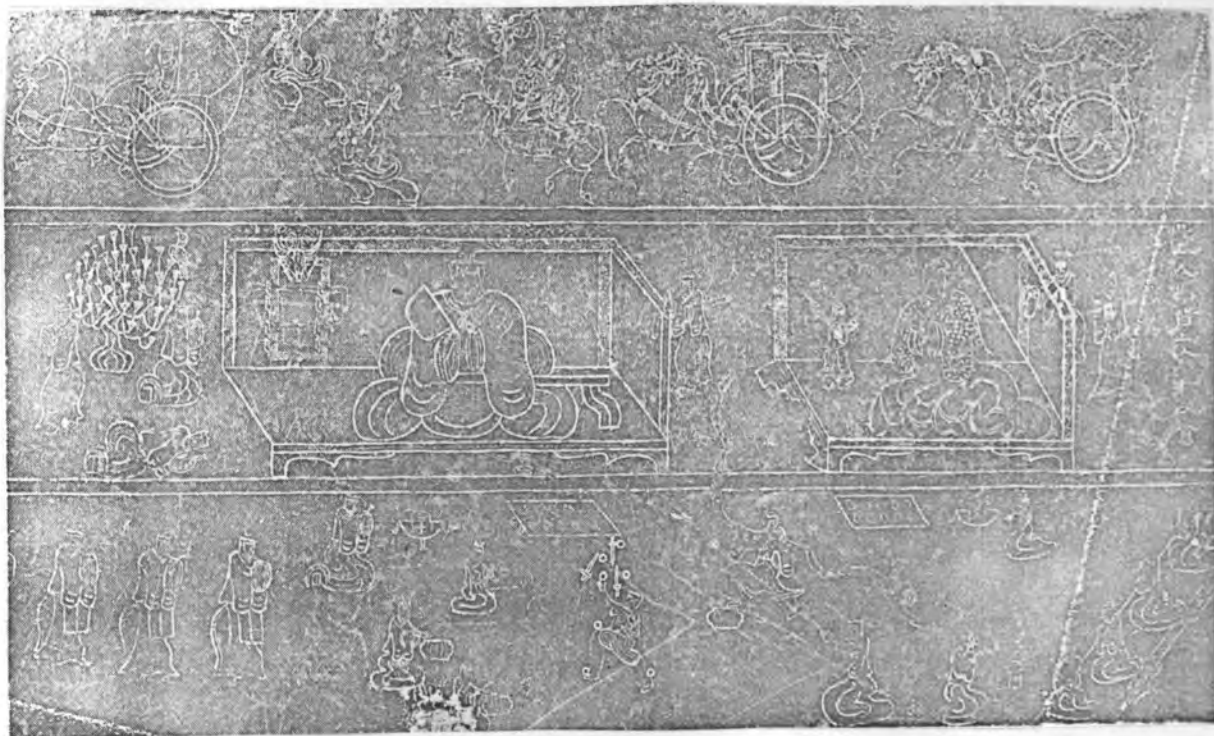


Fig. 36

The An-ch'iu tomb engravings are executed in the stamped tile technique already discussed. It is easy to see that the artisan has created his scene by using a basic set of models - for instance, the three serving men at the bottom left hand side of fig. 36 are identical. The details of this section of the engravings, published in 1955,<sup>(8)</sup> are extremely difficult to reconstruct from the photograph. Fitzgerald, who has studied the same material, states:

"A frieze of chariots runs along the upper wall, beneath which, on a low long dais, are seated two figures of important people, men in official robes. They are sitting in the cross legged or legs folded position, the feet and legs hidden in the folds of their robes, but they are not sitting on the dais itself. Very clearly shown are the low couches on which they sit, perhaps intended to be four or five feet long, one much shorter than the other, quite flat, without arms, but raised perhaps six inches from the ground on low legs. Between these legs, along the front of the couch, there is a carved and curving flange, a feature characteristic of Chinese furniture right down to modern times. One side and the backs of both couches are protected against draughts by high screens which seem to be integral parts of the couch, not detached. It is hardly possible to determine whether the back screen is sufficiently solid to lean against, but it is evident that neither figure is actually doing this."<sup>(9)</sup>

It seems to me, however, that there are strong reasons to suspect that Fitzgerald is mistaken in his recognition of a 'dais'. The fact that this engraving is executed in the stamped tile method is the first of my reasons for supposing that the so-called dais is no more than a dividing line between friezes. In order to compose his scene, the artist took his various carved moulds and worked along the walls from right to left in lines, pressing his moulds into the wet plaster. Thus, having completed his line of chariots, he drew a line which would serve to separate his upper section. Next, in order to delineate the middle section of his wall surface - so enabling him to compose a new frieze - he drew a second line just below the first. This latter line became the outline for the top of the second, or middle, line of frieze. Having then stamped out his design of men sitting on platforms, which is so well described by Fitzgerald, he drew a finishing bottom line. The third and final frieze, shown in fig. 36, has been delineated in the same manner, just below the bottom line of the middle frieze.

Fitzgerald, on the other hand, has regarded the picture not as a set of three parallel friezes, but as a single scene. Thus, in his description, he discusses the middle and bottom sections of the wall engravings as one scene:

"In front, below the dais, are several more indistinct figures, some standing but others sitting on the floor in the folded-legs position. It is probable, that these are attendants.."(10)

He is certainly right in describing the lower panel as a scene showing attendants and entertainers, but I am sure he is incorrect in stating that the two platforms in the middle section are raised on a dais. Moreover, when we look at the large screened platforms seen in General Chu Wei's shrine engravings (Plate L) no dais is present, despite the fact that the tomb is from the same district and comparable in date. General Chu Wei's tomb pictures are not, however, executed in the stamped tile technique but are freely drawn, using the whole wall surface as the picture plane.

A third type of engraving, which occasionally show representations of domestic furniture, are small engraved bricks which were used to decorate the interior walls of tombs. These bricks are described by Cheng Te-k'un as 'decorated stone wall panels'. Figs. 37 and 38 illustrate two little carvings of this type which Dr. Cheng states came from a Sung tomb in Ch'eng-tu. (11)



Fig. 37



Fig. 38

These same panels from Ch'eng-tu appear as Plates 4 and 5 in Mrs. Stone's monograph The Chair in China. Toronto, 1952. She describes both the rubbings as of Han date - an attribution which is earlier than any later writers are prepared to venture.

An engraved brick of similar type, which also shows wooden domestic furniture, was excavated in 1958 from a tomb situated at Yen-shih in Honan Province.<sup>(12)</sup> Although the short archaeological report attributes the group of six engravings found on the north wall of the tomb to the Sung period, one of the group - the lady cooking fish - (illustrated below as fig. 39) has been published by Abe Capek and attributed to the Han dynasty.<sup>(13)</sup> Furniture historians, however, would not hesitate to place this engraving into the Sung dynasty for the reason that the large and small tables in fig. 39 are so similar in style to the wooden table excavated at Chü-lu. (see Chapter 4 fig. 21)



Fig. 39



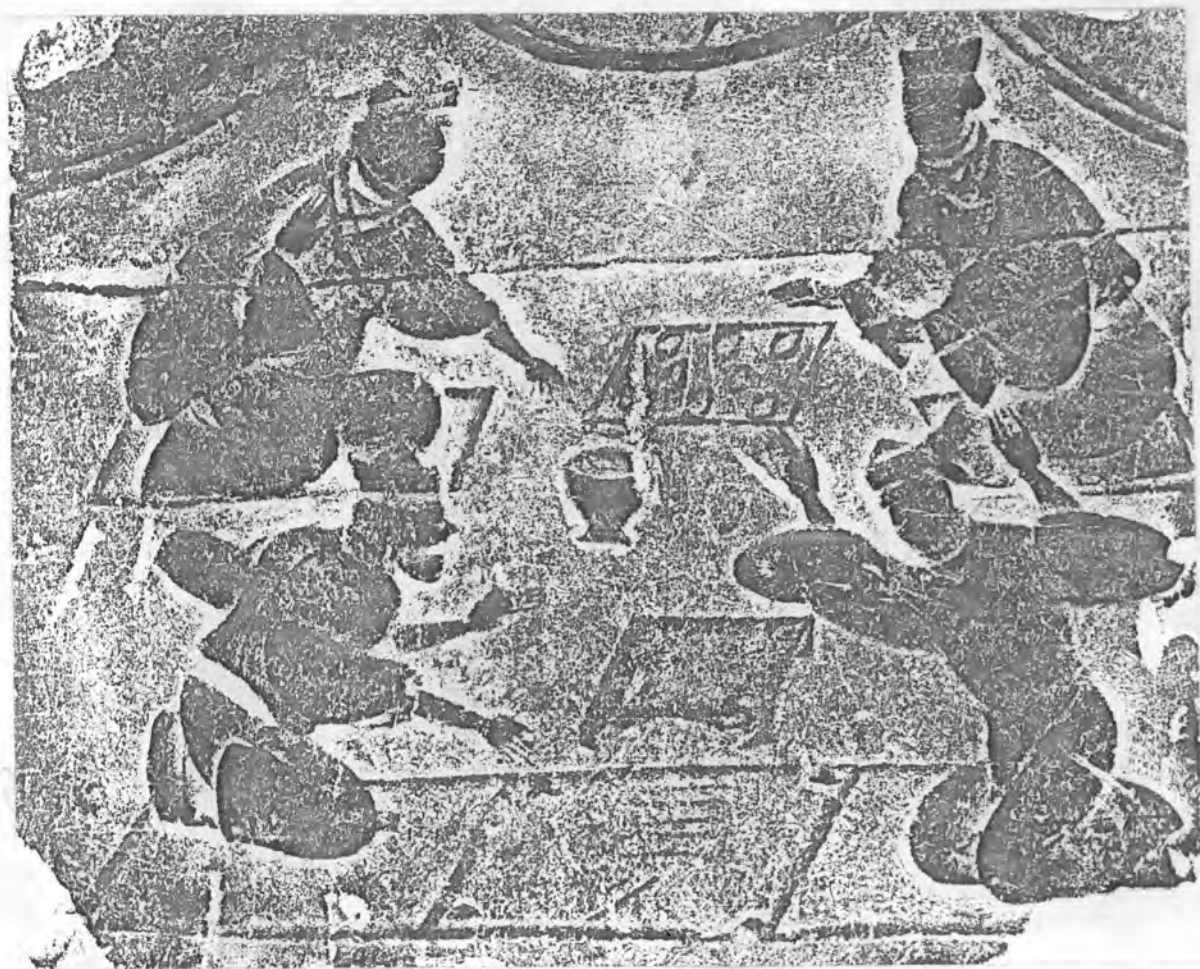
The nature of brick tiles makes their removal from the site of excavation especially easy since they are small, portable, and of outstanding decorative interest to non-specialists. Fortunately, however, when they are engraved with dateable items of furniture, the whole system of cross-dating the tiles with their place of origin becomes much easier.

Although this chapter is concerned in the broadest sense with stone engravings, pictorial evidence of value to furniture historians has also come to light in the form of engravings in low relief on pottery bricks. Two pottery bricks seen in Plate M are the property of the Hsi-ch'eng Museum in Szechwan Province. On one of these bricks (Plate Ma) seven people are enjoying a feast. They are sitting back on their heels on long low mats placed on the floor, and two low tables are placed before the sitters. The tables are probably made of wood, though they differ in style from the usual chi type by having four spindly legs. Plate Mb depicts four men kneeling on small individual mats whilst engaged in a gambling game using the six sticks which are visible at the lower edge of the brick. A small square table, which stands on four low feet, is placed next to the sticks. Here, we have two bricks of Han date which each show a different type of table - the single table in Plate Mb is almost certainly made of bronze. Thus, by cross reference to the tables shown on the tomb murals in Liao-yang (Chapter 5, fig. 27) and An-ch'iu (fig. 36) our knowledge of table types and styles in the Han period is considerably extended.

## PLATE M



(a)



(b)

Pottery Bricks (Hsi-ch'eng Museum)

Han Dynasty



Fig. 40

In Chapter 5, I touched briefly on the stone sculpture illustrated in Plate 55 of Tun-huang pi-hua. Peking, 1959, which shows the south-west corner of Cave 285, dating from the Western Wei period, c. A.D. 550. The Buddha is seated with legs pendant on a square seat which, from the evidence of the photograph (fig. 40), appears to have arms, and thus could be classified as a frame chair. It is impossible to make any definite statement from the evidence of a single photograph, but, if this sculpture does portray a frame chair, this piece of

furniture must be one of the earliest representations in the round so far discovered. It will be remembered that Cave 285 also reveals a painted vignette mural which shows a hermit sitting in a wooden armchair (Plate J).

Most furniture historians have recognized the important part played by religion in the development of the chair - the number of instances where the chair is associated with religious paintings or sculpture makes this an obvious link. In Chapter 4 the origins of the chair were traced back to the ancient tso, known and used in ancient China. Later, in the 2nd century A.D., the hu tso made its appearance at Lo-yang as a result of the interest shown by the Han Emperor Ling Ti in barbarian customs. We know that the frame chair depicted in fig. 40 and the painted armchair (Plate J), also found in Cave 285 at Tun-huang, could each be constructed by the simple addition of arms and back rests to the basic shape of the hu tso. Yet, what was the impetus that sparked off this transformation from the seat into the chair?

Ecke is quite specific in his statement that "With the introduction of Buddhism, the Chinese gradually got accustomed to the Western sitting posture".<sup>(14)</sup> Fitzgerald, on the other hand, postulates that the habit of sitting with legs pendant in frame chairs must first have been copied by the Chinese from the habit already practiced in the Byzantine Empire, which was introduced to China by the Nestorian Christians in the 7th century A.D.

"It does not seem reasonable to think that such chair-sitting people, even when long resident in China, would wholly abandon the habits of their own country and adopt those of the land of their residence."<sup>(15)</sup>

But the introduction of Nestorian Christianity to China occurred in A.D. 637 when a Syrian Nestorian monk arrived in Ch'ang-an and the Emperor T'ai-tsung gave him permission to build a church and establish his mission at the capital. Here, we have a contradiction in dates. The two instances of the frame chair from Cave 285 at Tun-huang are stated to date from the Western Wei period, c. A.D. 550, which is a century prior to the introduction of Nestorian Christianity.

Having established that the habit of sitting in a frame chair was already known in China in the 6th century A.D. - that is, if the Northern Wei dates are accepted as accurate - we are left with the hypothesis that the new practice is connected to a greater or lesser extent with the introduction of Buddhism to China in the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. This latter theory is the one preferred by Wen Tung, who has recently written that in his opinion the armchair - which he describes as sheng ch'uan - was "introduced to China by Buddhist missionaries from Central Asia or India who had started to preach Buddhism in China".<sup>(16)</sup> He goes on to say :

"It is significant that the early record of a sheng ch'uan is associated with a Buddhist, and that the Buddhist is from Central Asia, a vitally important area for the eastward movement of Buddhism. I presume that the sheng ch'uan used by the priest Fou-t'u-teng in the fourth century A.D. should not be too different from the one painted in Cave 285, Tunhuang, about two hundred years later."

No doubt historians will continue to argue about the specific reasons which set in motion the adaptation of the seat into the frame chair, as well as the circumstances which brought about this important change in custom. But we can conclude ... from the evidence contained in Cave 285 at Tun-huang, firstly, that the armchair was already in use in China in the mid-6th century and, secondly, that the armchair was associated with religious practice.

N O T E S

CHAPTER 6

- (1) Fairbank, W. and Kitano, M. "Han Mural Paintings in the Pei-yüan Tomb at Liao-yang, South Manchuria" in Artibus Asiae, Vol. XVII, 1954.
- (2) Fairbank, W. "A Structural Key to Han Mural Art" in Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies. Cambridge: Harvard Yenching Institute, 1942.
- (3) Chavannes, E. Mission archæologique dans la Chine septentrionale. 3 Vols. Paris, 1909-15.
- (4) Fischer, O. Die Chinesische Malerei der Han-dynastie. Berlin, 1931.
- (5) Fairbank, W. op. cit. p. 72.
- (6) Fairbank, W. op. cit. p. 79.
- (7) ibid.
- (8) Wen-wu. Peking, 1955, No. 3 p. 169.
- (9) Fitzgerald, C.P. Barbarian Beds: The Origin of the Chair in China. London, 1965, p. 53.
- (10) ibid.
- (11) Cheng Te-k'un. Archæological Studies in Szechwan. Cambridge, 1957, pl. 97.
- (12) Wen-wu. Peking, 1959, No. 9 p. 84.
- (13) Capek, A. Chinese Stone Pictures: A Distinctive Form of Chinese Art. London, 1962.
- (14) Ecke, G. Chinese Domestic Furniture. Peking, 1944, p. 8.
- (15) Fitzgerald, C.P. op. cit. p. 41.
- (16) Wu Tung. "From Imported 'Nomadic Seat' to Chinese Folding Armchair" in Boston Museum Bulletin. Vol. LXXI, 1973, No. 363 note 8 p.47.

## CHAPTER 7

THE EVIDENCE OF WOODCUTS AND CARVINGS

In his book Chinese Household Furniture, 1948, George N. Kates advances the interesting hypothesis that "woodcut illustrations in securely dated books, especially of contemporary scenes of the Ming and Ch'ing periods, may further permit us to form a helpful series of familiar pieces in common use at the time of their publication". (1)

To find suitable material from which to make an examination of the validity of Kates' theory, at first seemed insuperably difficult. However, my attention was drawn to the contents of a little-known and rare collection of photographic reprints of illustrated Ming editions of Yuan dramas in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. (2) Most of the four hundred odd fascicles in the set contain woodcut illustrations, and it was originally my intention to select all the plays in the set which had dated prefaces and work from their illustrations. Close examination of the entire group, however, revealed that the instances of furniture in exactly datable editions were so few and scattered that no useful material could be extracted from the group as a whole.



This chapter will, therefore, be restricted to a study of a single play, preface dated 1498-9, whose fifty black and white woodcut illustrations yield the type of valuable information concerning hardwood domestic furniture to which Kates refers. This play, entitled Ch'i-miao ch'üan-hsiang chu-shih shi-hsiang chi<sup>(3)</sup>, concerns the courtship by a scholar, Mr. Chang, of a beautiful young girl called Ying-ying, and ends happily with their marriage. The text of the play is contained in two slim volumes, with a woodcut illustration taking up the upper section of each page. The illustrations on most pages are single ones, but occasionally a single illustration runs across the top of both right and left sheets of the open book. Where this happens, I have retained the double size in the reproductions contained in this chapter. Out of a total of fifty woodcuts contained in two volumes of the play, only twelve show no furniture. These twelve have thus been excluded from the thirty-eight examples discussed in this chapter. All captions are retained where they exist in the original.

It may be noted that the quality of the Xerox copies which make up Plates N to U compare very well to the photographic reprints that I examined in London. The lines of the master copy were heavy and blurred, as many of the following plates will testify.

In order to make the analysis of the furniture shown in the woodcuts simple to follow, I have split the illustrations into four main groups. These groups are divided as follows:-

Group 1.	Couches	...	Plates N,O,P,Q
2.	Tables	...	" R,S
3.	Tables/Stools..		" T
4.	Chairs	...	" U

Each of the four groups will be examined separately with regard to furniture types, styles and settings, before I discuss the validity of Kates' theory in practical terms. First, however, some general points should now be raised concerning the illustrations of the play considered as a whole.

The viewer will be struck by the fact that in the overwhelming majority of instances the engraver takes his viewpoint from outside the rooms which he depicts. Because of this, we are able to see the plants and trees growing in the courtyard of the wealthy household where most of the action of the play occurs. This phenomenon is not restricted to woodcut illustrations, but is also apparent to even a casual observer who leafs through an album of Chinese brush paintings. Nature plays a vital part in the daily life of the southern Chinese population where the climate is semi-tropical. This leads on to the second observation of the woodcuts seen as a single group. The artist has conveyed to the viewer the season of the year in which the action of the play takes place. The fact that it is summer, and very hot, is indicated by the sparsely furnished rooms, the bamboo blinds, the presence of fans, and the awnings outside windows which shield the occupants from the worst glare of the sun.

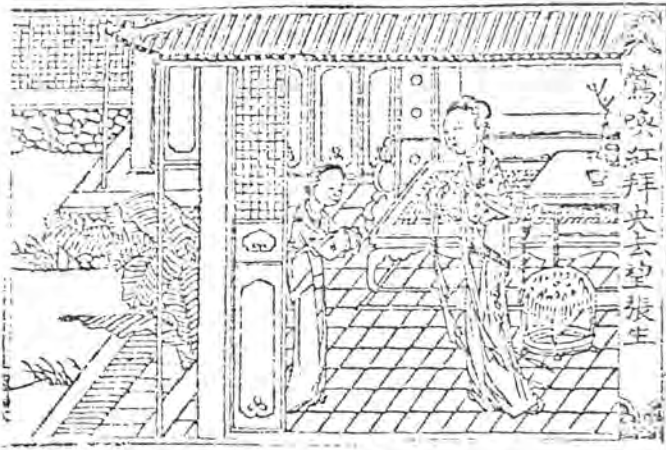
I shall now discuss the first of the four groups into which the woodcut illustrations have been divided, taking each plate in order.

Group 1. Couches .. Plates N - Q

In Chapter 2 it has been stated that:-

"... there were smaller pieces of wooden furniture for individual use. The larger of these couches was the ch'uang, big enough for lying on, whilst the smaller couch on which an individual would sit or lounge, was the t'a."

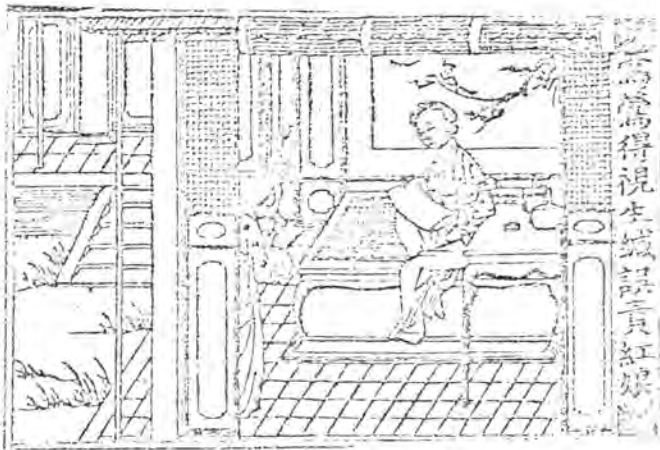
Plate N (i) to (v) shows the heroine of the play, Ying-ying, in the privacy of her bedroom. In this plate, the wide ch'uang is being used for purposes other than sleep. Let us look more closely at the contents of this room. Firstly, the centre of interest, which is the low wide daybed itself. It will be seen at once that the artist has drawn a different piece of furniture in each of the illustrations - the only points of similarity being the size of the ch'uangs and their woven rattan seats. Whereas (ii) and (v) have frame panel bases - both different in style - the remaining three illustrations show low cabriole legs. Here again, each differs slightly from the others, and (iii) is the only ch'uang which has a footstool attached.



(i)



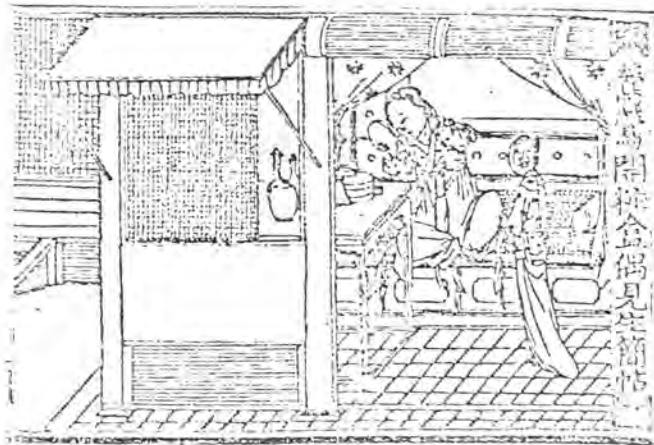
(ii)



(iii)



(iv)



(v)

Ch'i-miao ch'uan-hsiang chu-shih shi-hsiang chi.

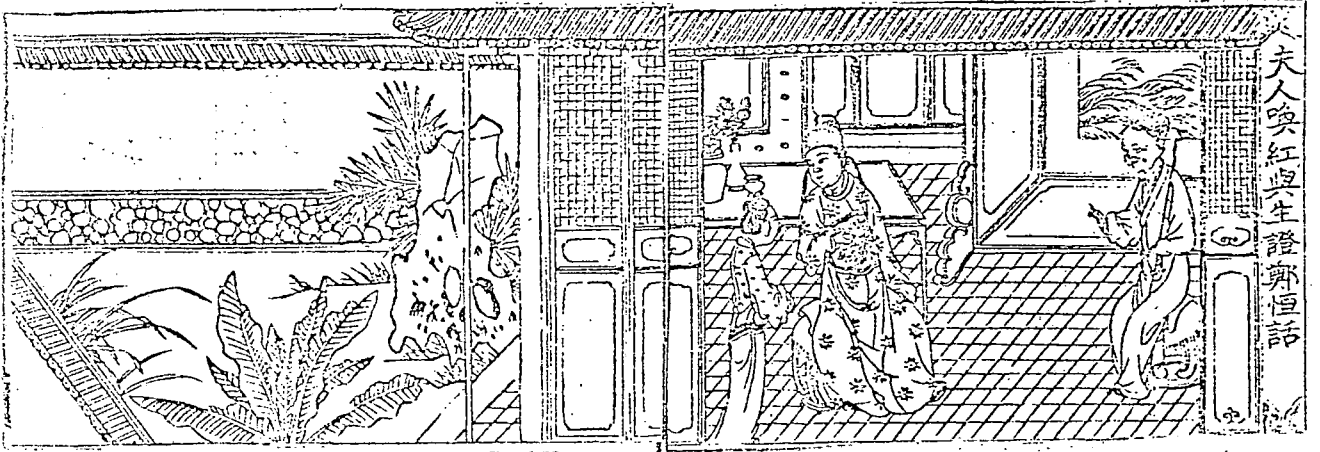
Couches .. Ying-ying's bedroom.

Although the artist has drawn each scene from the same viewpoint, i.e. showing the open doorway and interior of Ying-ying's room, which occupy the right side of the compositions, whilst the left side of the area is used to show a small area of courtyard or garden, once again, no two aspects are the same.

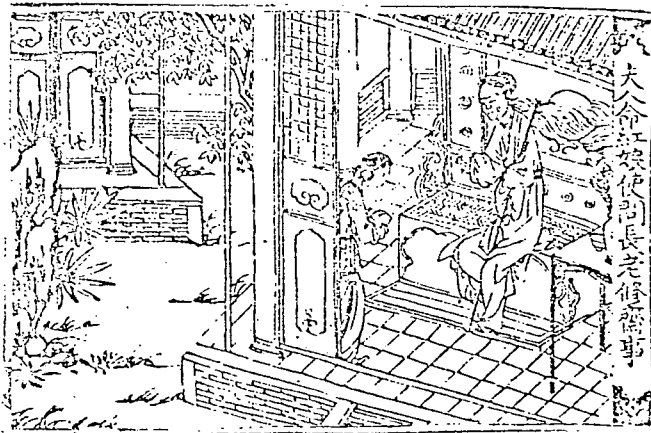
Each of the interiors contains a table, all except (v) placed on the right of the doorway. Two of these tables appear identical, namely (i) and (iv). The remaining three tables are very similar indeed, apart from the slight difference that (ii) and (v) have ground stretchers.

Next, we come to the huge standing screens at the back of the ch'uang. Here, a very interesting point arises. None of the details of the screens on Plate N are the same but, if we turn to Plate O, it will be seen that both screens shown, i.e. (i) and (ii), are painted with a wave pattern identical to that on N(iv). But, more important, is the evidence of Plate O (i). Here we see a double width illustration of Ying-ying's mother talking to Mr. Chang. Behind the hostess is a huge standing screen decorated with the same wave pattern but, between the painted surface of the screen and the low carved side supports appears to be an empty recess. No such piece of furniture has previously come to the attention of the author. Although, on the one hand, the artist could perhaps be depicting two screens placed to form an angle, on the other hand he could be trying to convey the empty space which remains after the removal from that position of a portable wooden ch'uang.

PLATE 0



(i)



(ii)

Ch'i-miao ch'uan-hsiang chu-shih shi-hsiang chi.

Couches .. t'a

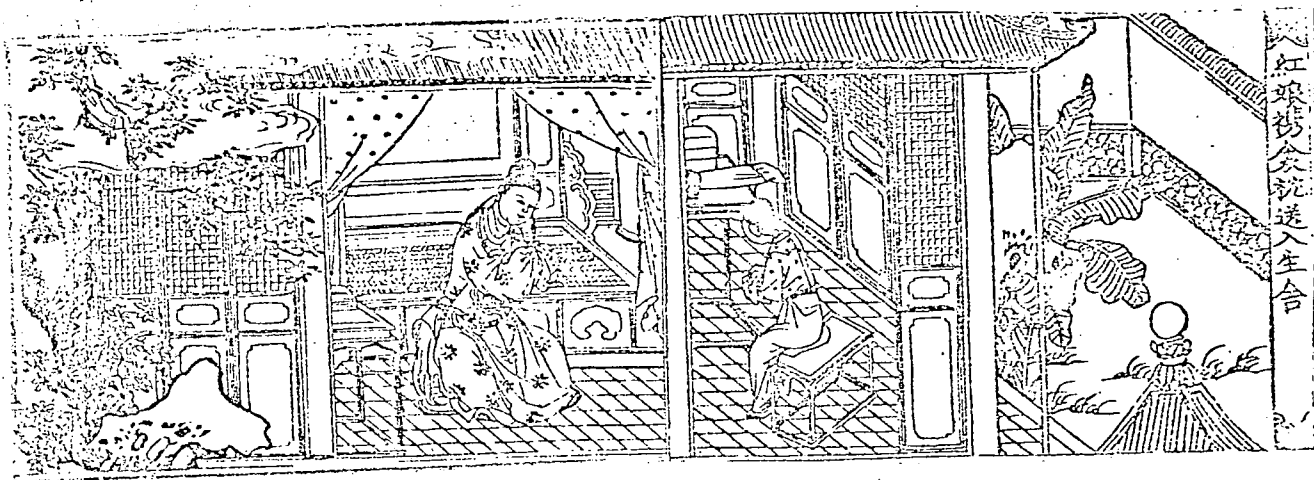
In addition, Plate O (ii) shows the only example of a t'a which appears in the fifty woodcut illustrations which make up the two volume play. One side of the narrow couch in question is placed in front of a screen showing the same wave pattern already discussed, i.e. N (iv) and O (i). Perhaps the ch'uang has, in this scene of the play, been replaced by a narrower t'a.

Turning to the third set of woodcuts in Group 1, see Plate P, we have more illustrations of the ch'uang used as a daybed, but in this set the user of the bed is Mr. Chang. All three woodcuts show Mr. Chang at his lodgings but, once again, all three interiors differ in detail. Although each of the ch'uang shown has a solid side panel, the style of the cut-out decoration in each case is different. In addition, although it is rather difficult to tell from the drawings whether two of the woodcuts (ii) and (iii) have footstools adjoining the couch, there is a gap in the floor tiling pattern which suggests that this is the case. In order to strengthen the impression that we are looking into a different room from that occupied by Ying-ying, the artist has varied his usual pattern. Instead of the garden appearing at the left of the composition (see Plate N), as in Ying-ying's room, illustrations P (ii) and P (iii) show a small portion of the garden at the right of the composition.

Now let us consider the ch'uang used as a bed for sleeping - although I have also included in Plate Q a charming illustration of the hero and his new bride on their wedding night preparing for bed.



(i)



(ii)

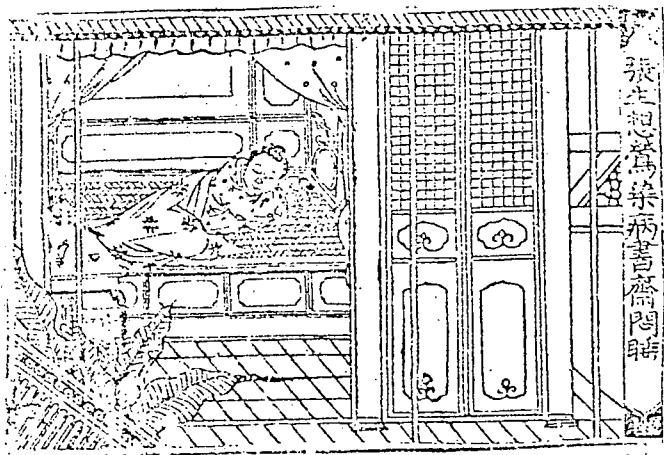


(iii)

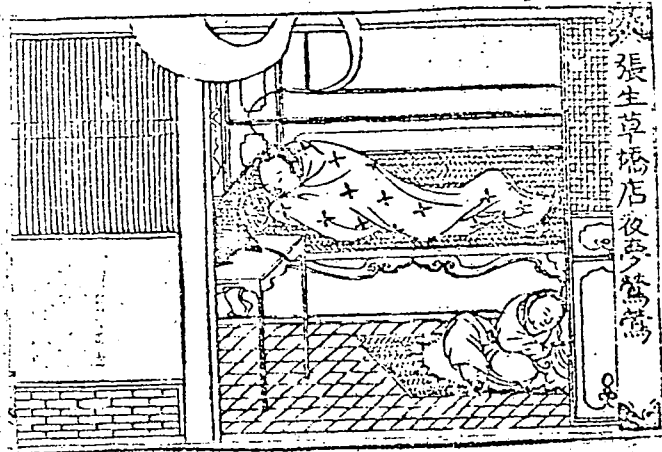
Ch'i-miao ch'üan-hsiang chu-shih shi-hsiang chi.

Couches .. Mr. Chang's room

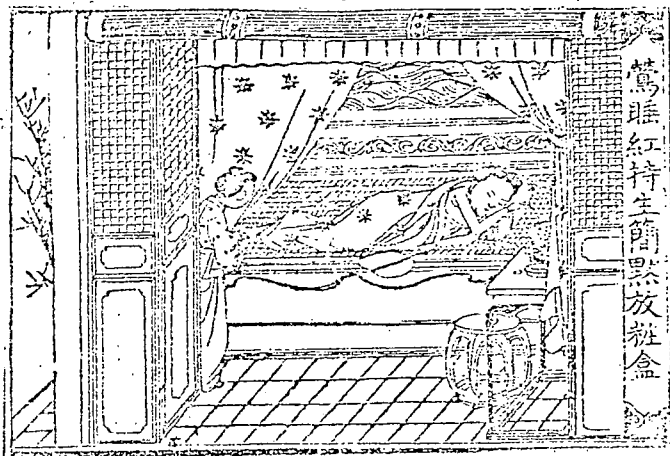




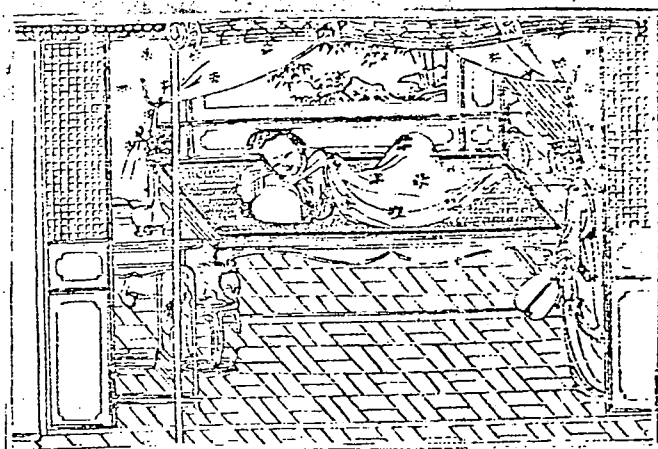
(i)



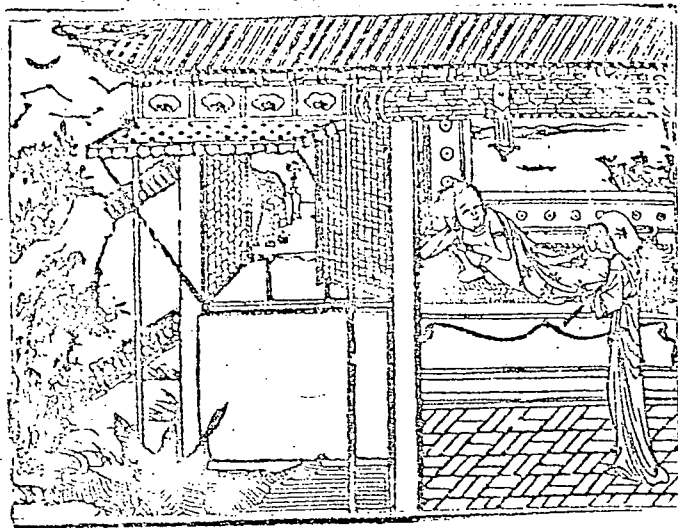
(ii)



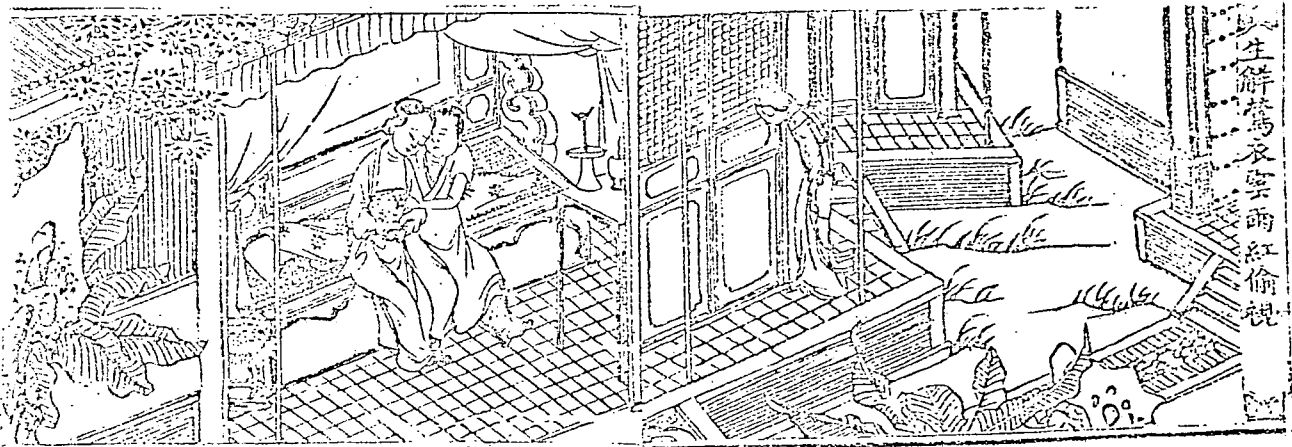
(iii)



(iv)



(v)



(vi)

Ch'i-miao ch'uan-hsiang chu-shih shi-hsiang chi.

Couches .. Used for sleeping

Q (i) and (ii) show Mr. Chang asleep in his bedroom dreaming of Ying-ying. These two scenes take place at the Grass Bridge Inn where Mr. Chang is lodging, and can, therefore, be compared with the interiors of the same lodging house shown in Plate P. In Q (i), the artist has once more associated the hero with a strong frame and panel style of ch'uang, whereas in Q (ii), we find Mr. Chang asleep on a style of bed rather less masculine in type. The tables placed by the left door of each room once more differ in stylistic detail.

Q (iii), (iv) and (v) show Ying-ying and her maid Miss Hung. The ch'uang on which the heroine lies is the same style in each case, but the artist has shown her lying with her head away from the garden in Q (iii) although, in every other case, her pillow has been placed at the opposite end of the ch'uang. Comparison with Q (i) and (ii) will show that Mr. Chang is also shown lying in a different sleeping position in each case. Other details of Ying-ying's bedroom also change from drawing to drawing. The painted screen behind the sleeping girl shows a boat floating in an expanse of water in Q (v), rocks and bamboo in (iv), and in (iii) the wave pattern appears which has already been discussed from Plates N and O. In addition, the tables and stools placed in the room show differences of style and setting, and the shape of the floor tiles differs from scene to scene. The awning erected over the two open windows at the corner of Ying-ying's room in Q (v) is similar to the awning seen in N (v), but small differences of detail are noticeable. The material is spotted in Q (v) but plain in N (v), and the poles which prop up the awning are differently attached.

Group 2.      Tables      ..      Plates R - S

In Plate R (i) and (ii) the principal pieces of furniture are tables set out with food. The first of the scenes shows Ying-ying's mother sharing a meal with Mr. Chang at the Buddhist Temple where they first meet. The simple, square, undraped table has been placed on a verandah. An Elder of the temple is also present at the meal, and he is shown sitting with his back to the ubiquitous wave patterned, standing screen. In the second illustration, we see the wedding feast of Mr. Chang and his bride. Although the food shown by the artist seems comparable to that in R (i), the table in R (ii) is draped and frilled in consequence of the greater formality of the occasion. Here again the screen is the same as in R (i) although this scene takes place inside a room - note the rolled up bamboo blind above the doorway.

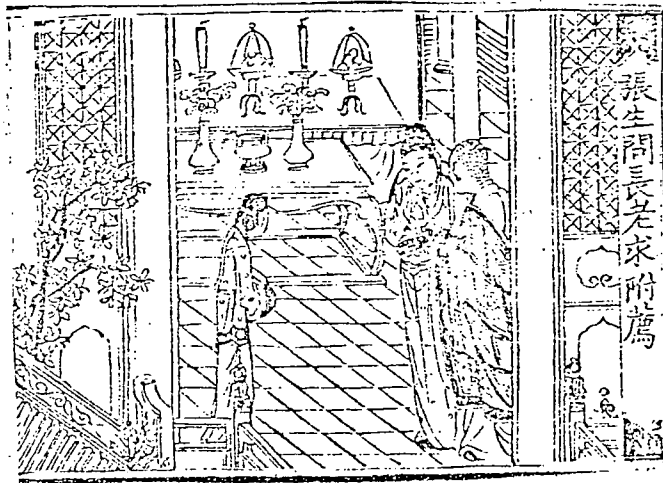
The location of illustrations R (iii) and (iv) has moved to the interior of the Temple. The title of the Chinese caption to R (iii) reads: "Mr. Chang asking The Elder to engage priests to pray for the dead." Behind Mr. Chang, who stands in the doorway, the smaller of two tables is set with flowers in narrow vases, and a tripod shaped vessel. Whether these are made of porcelain or bronze, it is difficult to say, since containers of both materials are well known. In this instance, however, we can safely assume that the vases are made of porcelain. There are two reasons for this assumption; firstly, the vases are raised on shallow stands and, secondly, the two vases in R (iii) are left white.



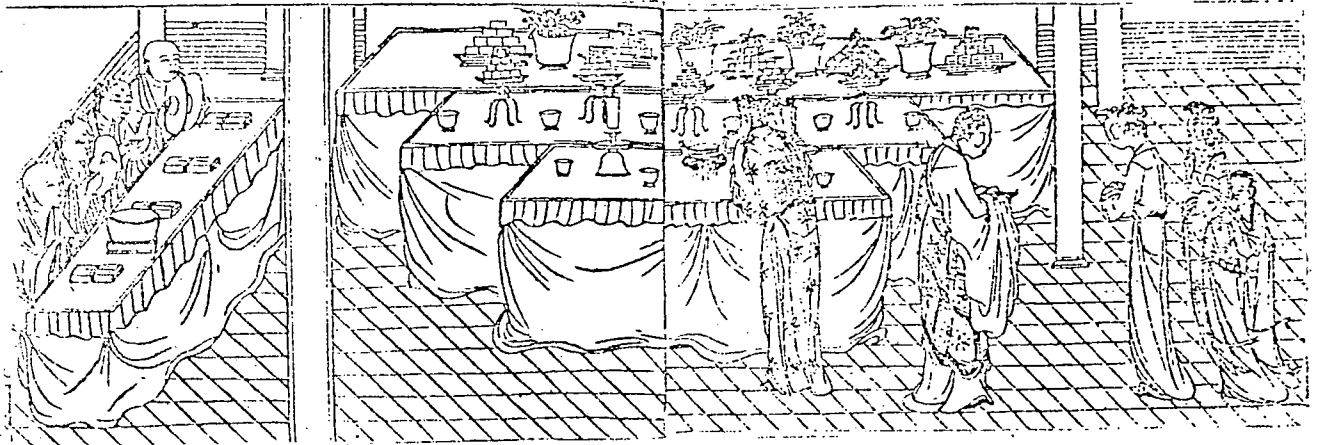
(i)



(ii)



(iii)



(iv)

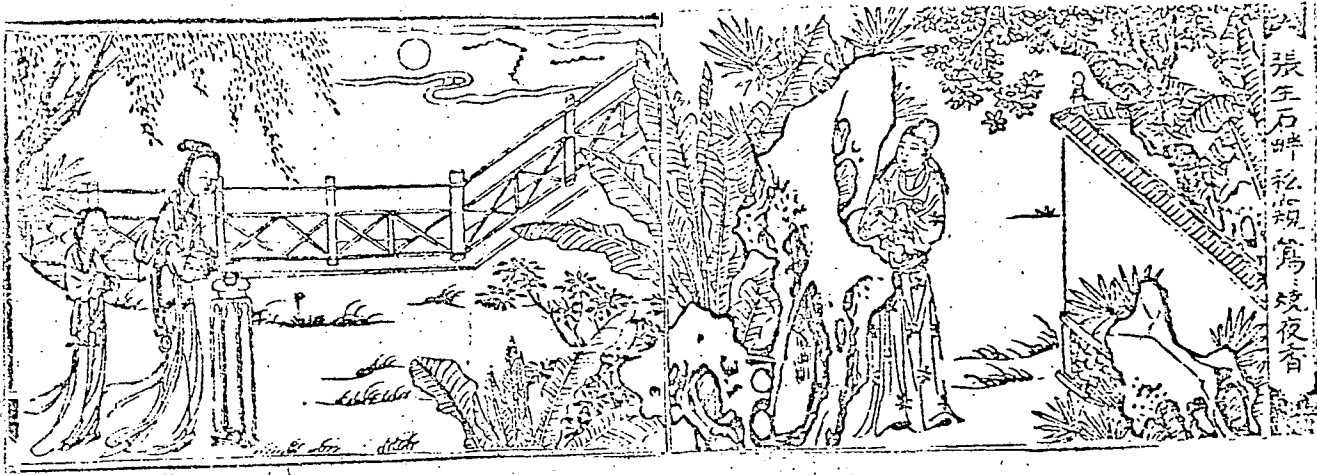
Ch'i-miao ch'uan-hsiang chu-shih shi-hsiang chi.

Tables

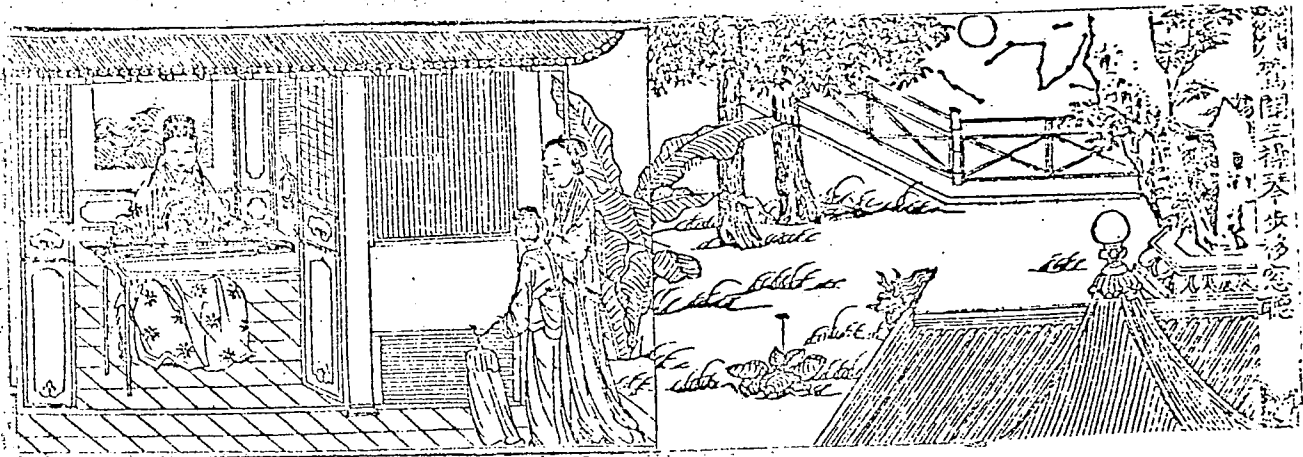
Since the tripod vessel in R (iv) is shaded to appear black - which certainly is intended to convey the appearance of bronze - we may assume that unshaded vases are intended to convey porcelain.

Illustration R (iv) has no title, but we see Mr. Chang with Ying-ying, her mother and her maid, inside the pillared ancestral shrine. Along the left wall of the room, four priests are seated behind a long draped table playing percussion instruments. Three draped oblong tables - small, medium and large - are set with offerings and utensils. It is interesting to note that the largest table carries only flowers in tub-like containers which are interspersed with shallow plates containing piles of food. Arranged alternately along the centre of the middle table are six small wine cups and five plates of food raised off the surface of the table by five identical bronze or iron supports - each having four pronged legs. On the smallest table, nearest the viewer, the arrangement is not so systematic. We see only three cups, an incense burner, and the bronze ting shaped vessel referred to above. These vessels usually form part of a set of sacrificial vessels used for rites in connection with ancestor worship, nature worship, and/or communication with the spirit world. A complete set of bronze sacrificial vessels is shown in Chapter 2, fig. 5.

Plate S shows examples of tables put to specific use on account of their size and shape. Firstly, in S (i), we see a delicately shaped little console table used by Ying-ying in the garden at night as a stand for a pot of incense. The shape and lightness of this type of small table makes it especially attractive as a stand for a single object - albeit incense or flowers.



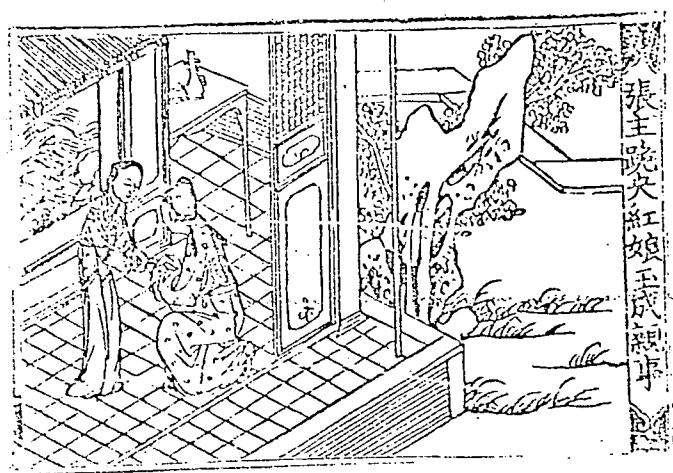
(i)



(ii)



(iii)



(iv)

Ch'i-miao ch'uan-hsiang  
chu-shih shi-hsiang chi.

Tables

The second table, shown on Plate S is a table used as a support for the lute. In Chapter 3, I pointed out that tables to hold the lute come in various sizes and that one usually sees the musician standing to play his instrument. The evidence of this woodcut, however, proves that this is not the invariable practice, for here we see Mr. Chang sitting on a stool to play his tunes whilst Ying-ying listens through the door. The lute table shown in S (ii) has no stretchers, and is oblong in shape. The lines of the photographic reprint make it a little difficult to assess the details of the table, but examination with a magnifying glass suggests that the table shown here has upturned ends.

Table (iii) on Plate S is extremely important to this analysis of the evidence of woodcut illustrations. The artist clearly indicates that he is conscious that there exists in China a special class of utilitarian furniture, made of poorer materials, and strictly functional in style, for use amongst the lower classes of society. Comparison of S (iii) with S (iv) will confirm that (iii) falls into this class of utilitarian furniture. The table concerned is an oblong piece of wood placed on four thin legs strengthened at each end by the addition of two parallel stretchers. Identical tables appear time and time again in the Sung version of the scroll entitled "Ch'ing-ming shang-ho" (discussed in Chapter 6) and are always for the use of customers in riverside inns. It is no surprise, therefore, that the table shown in Plate S (iii) is laden with cooking implements. The room where it stands is probably the

kitchen of the inn advertising 'Wine' where Mr. Chang is about to lodge for the night.

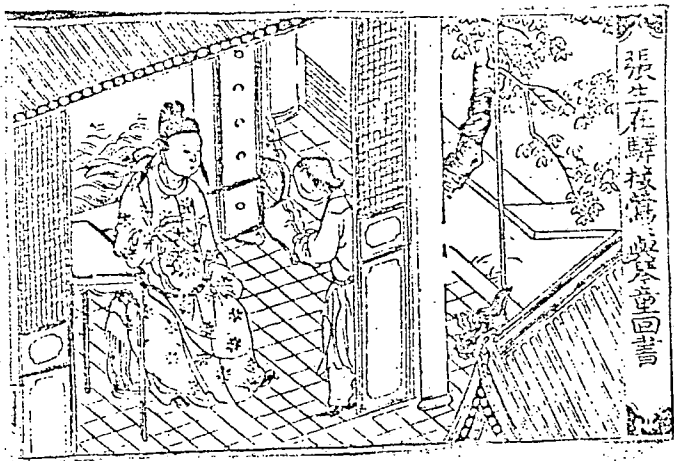
In contrast, Table S (iv) which supports a vase, a book, and is placed in the house of a rich aristocratic family, displays the refinement of detail commonly associated with the more expensive hardwood styles.

Group 3.            Tables/Stools            ..            Plate T

In the third of my groups of furniture, I have collected together a set of eight woodcuts which depict tables and stools in use in the residence of a wealthy family. This group also highlights the importance of the screen. In all the woodcuts which illustrate interior scenes, i.e. (i) - (vii), the host or hostess sits on a stool at the back of the room with his back to the screen. Visitors, meanwhile, sit or stand just inside the doorway, so as to face both their host and the painted surface of the screen. It is clear that the screen is being used in the household portrayed in these woodcuts as a divider between the reception area open to visitors, and the remainder of the household interior. Notice that although the room in (vii) is empty, the stools are nonetheless positioned in the same manner - one in front of the screen and the other just inside the door. As a point of interest, it seems that fur covered stools (see vii) were used for formal visits even in the height of the summer heat.

The table shapes and styles in Plate T are many and various. Once again, the artist seems to have delighted in exercising his talent for ornamentation and variety.

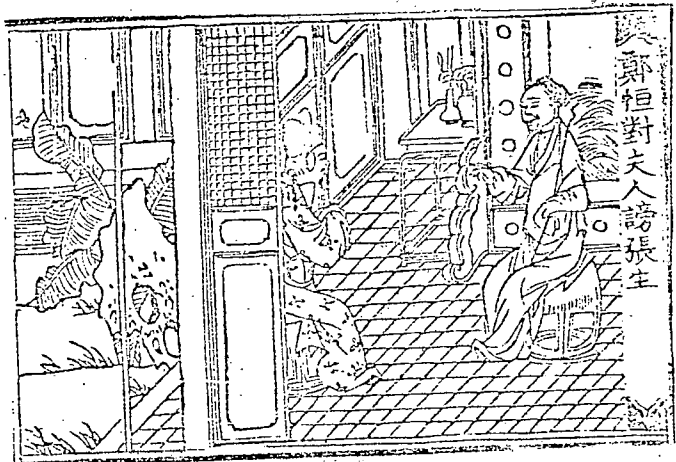




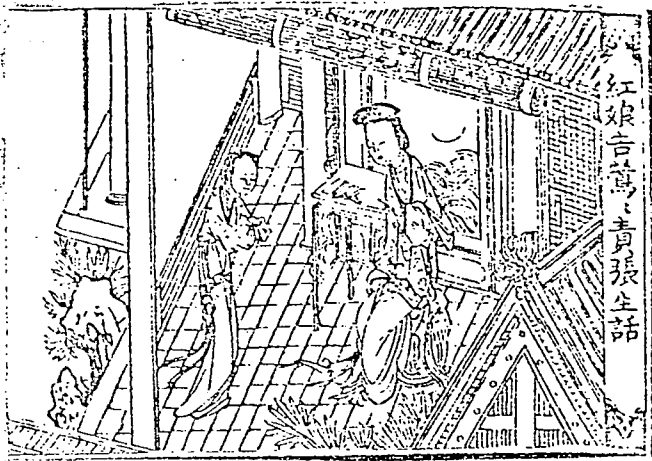
(i)



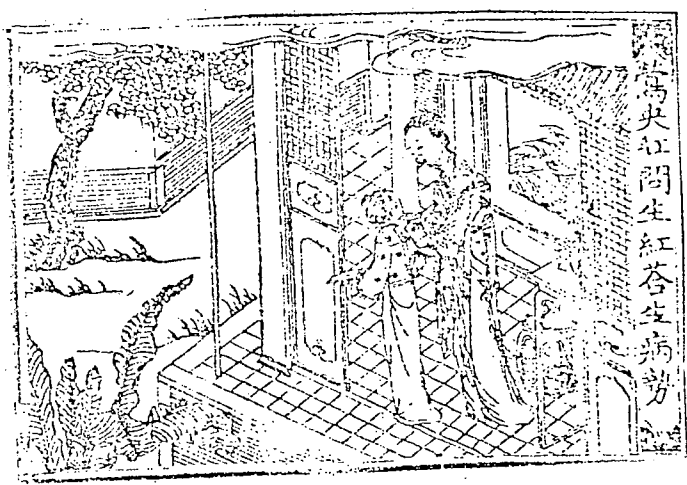
(ii)



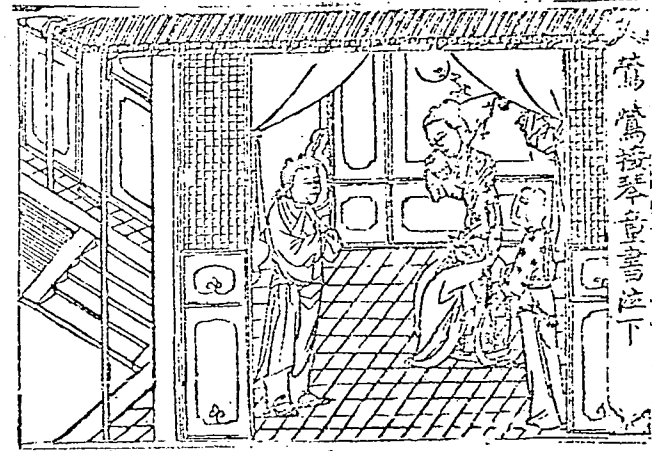
(iii)



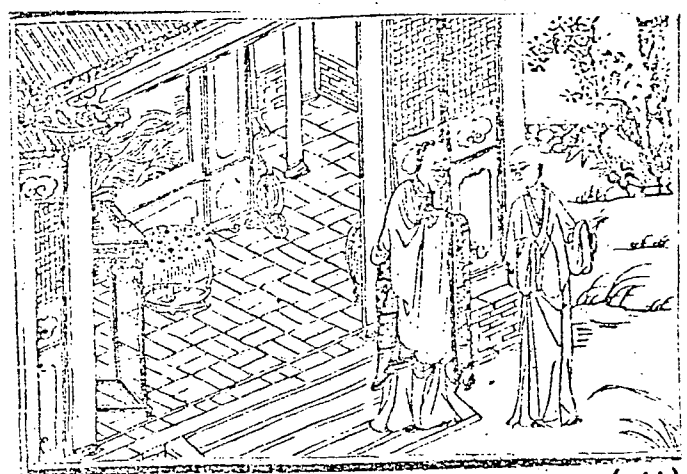
(iv)



(v)



(vi)



(vii)



(viii)

Ch'i-miao ch'uan-hsiang chu-shih shi-hsiang chi.  
Tables/Stools

Group 4.      The Chair      ..      Plate U

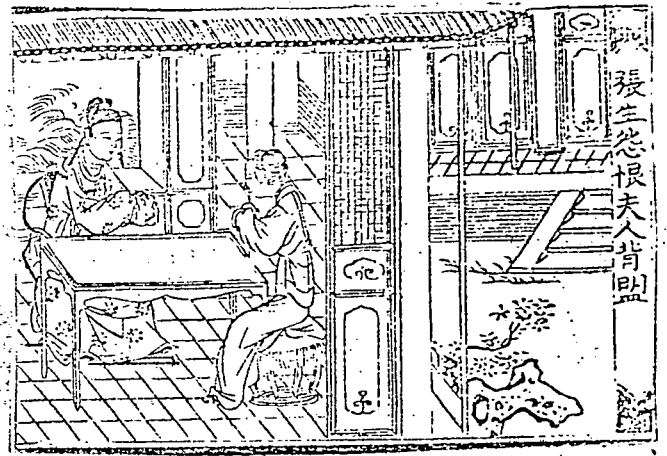
The fourth and final group of woodcut illustrations from this Yuan drama which show the chair, is surprisingly small. Out of a total of 38 woodcut illustrations of furniture, only 6 depict the chair. In the overwhelming majority of cases, it is the stool, not the chair, which is seen to be the usual type of furniture for sitting.

The first woodcut in this group, Plate U (i), closely resembles the scene in T (viii), but neither scene has an explanatory title-heading to aid identification. Both scenes take place in the splendid garden, with its wooden balustrades and carefully placed rock garden. In each scene the scholar sits to receive his guests behind a long wooden writing table - the overall style of which at first sight appears identical. However, closer inspection will reveal subtle differences. In T (viii) the table top overhangs the legs, whereas in U (i) the spandrel and top surface of the table join at right angles.

In T (viii) the host receives a group of three visitors whilst sitting on a stool. In U (i) his visitors are three scholars wearing the same type of black gauze cap which Mr. Chang himself adopts. In this case, the host sits on a folding chair drawn up to the table with his feet resting on a footrest. The footrest of the chair protects his feet from the damp ground, whilst his body is given shelter by a large standing screen which has been brought out into the garden.



(i)

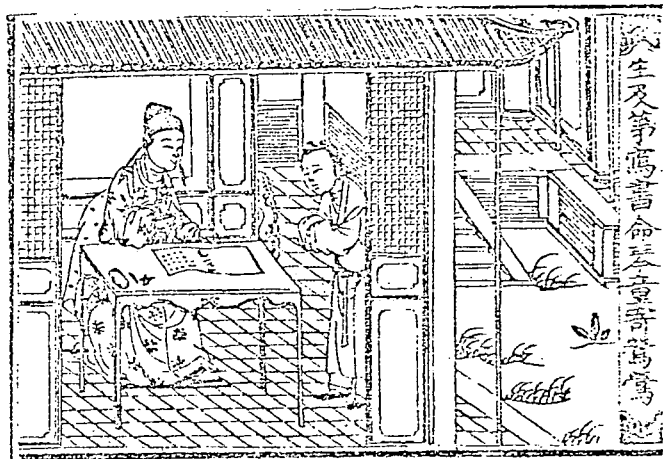


(ii)

張三怨恨夫人背盟

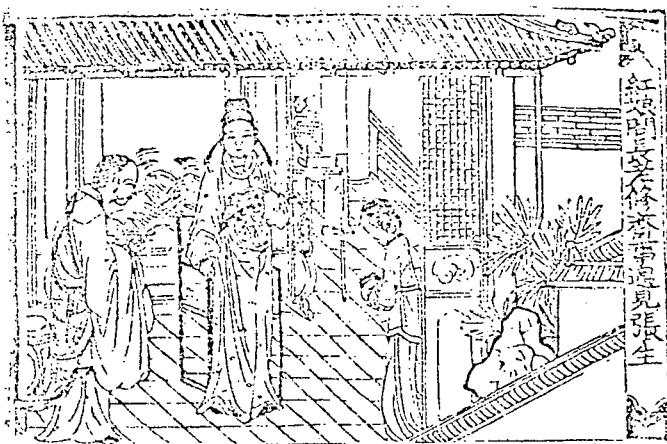


(iii)



(iv)

生及第高書命廷章奇萬萬



(v)

紅樓夢長安公修文第百四回張生



(vi)

法聰因故老問答張生至

There are four woodcut illustrations which depict the folding chair - in each case used by Mr. Chang - but the chair itself is not always the same. U (i) is armless, and has a slightly arched back rail featuring the curly end projections described as "The Lantern Hanging" style. The chair shown in U (ii) and (iii) looks the same, and has a central back splat joining the horseshoe back and armpiece to the seat. We can see that U (iv) must be a folding chair, since the footrest is identical to (i) and (ii), but the details of its stylistic features are obscured by a large piece of cloth which has been draped over the back rail and reaches below the seat.

A small detail of U (iii), which is a double sheet illustration, concerns the pattern on the standing screen. The familiar wave pattern has been included in the left half, but does not continue across the sheet to that portion of the screen behind Mr. Chang. I will return to the importance of this evidence in my discussion of the value of woodcut illustrations later in this Chapter.

Finally, we come to the only two four-legged rigid frame chairs depicted in the set of fifty illustrations to the play. U (v) is a completely angular chair which does not incorporate a single curved member. The whole chair looks mathematical in its exact right-angled proportions, and contrasts oddly with U (vi) which is the last woodcut in Plate U. This last style of chair was not previously known to the author, although its

individual features can be seen in other examples of chairs. The horsehoe shaped back and arm rail, for instance, is known from many examples of the folding chair, see U (ii) and (iii), but this chair has a very low broad rigid seat - probably circular in shape - attached to four short cabriole legs ending in curved feet. The Elder's slippers remain on the floor in front of the chair as he spreads himself comfortably in the cross-legged position. The chair is clearly intended for use in the meditation position, as it is both too low and too broad to be comfortable for sitting in the legs pendant position.

The foregoing analysis of four groups of furniture has unquestionably demonstrated the validity of Ecke's theory that woodcuts may help us to form "a helpful series of familiar pieces in common use at their time of publication". But, by subjecting this evidence to a different type of analysis, it is also possible to demonstrate that our knowledge of furniture styles can be further refined. It is necessary only to select one type of furniture from amongst the group of four already examined in order to prove this hypothesis.

Fig. 41 gives a breakdown of the 42 tables shown amongst the illustrations to our play which is dated 1498-9. Each plate has been examined in order, so that the information revealed concerning tables shown in the separate illustrations displayed on each Plate can be quickly identified. The aim of this examination is to discover which specific table styles are more commonly found within a wealthy household setting prior to the 16th century.

Plate	No. of Tables	TYPE OF TOP/LEG JOIN			STRETCHERS			Curved Legs	Leg Arch Spandrel	Drape
		Square	Yoke	Apron	Foot	End				
N	5	iv		i ii iii v		ii v		iii iv v		
O	2	ii		i				ii		
P	4	i		iiia iii		i iia iib				
Q	5	ii v		i iii iv		iii iv		i iii iv		
R	8	i		iii		iii	iii		ii iii iv a-d	
S	4	iv	ii iii	i	i	iii		ii iv		
T	7		viii	i ii iii iv v vii		iii v vii		i ii v vii viii		
U	7	i ii iiia iv v		iiib vi		vi	vi	i ii iiiab		
TOTALS	42	12	3	20	13	1	2	18	6	

Fig. 41

Even a casual glance at this breakdown shows that there is a definite pattern of preference amongst the tables. Out of the 42 tables depicted, the artist has shown that nearly half are constructed by the most sophisticated method of joining the legs to the top surface. This is the technique whereby a narrow length of wood known as the 'apron' is set back beneath the top surface of the table, so as to connect the top to its supporting members. Only three examples of the simplest constructional method are shown, namely, the yoke method. This method of construction is described in this way because the table surface projects beyond the area of the legs; moreover, there is no 'apron' piece. One quarter of the tables examined in Fig. 41 are constructed by a right angled join between the top of the legs and the ends of the table top - these tables are listed under the heading 'Square'.

The remaining 7 tables, not included in the 35 just mentioned, are either draped with material which conceals their method of construction (see Plate R); or else the details of the woodcut are not sufficiently clear (see Plate P (ii)b).

In thirteen cases, it was possible to see that the tables had four stretchers joining the legs of the table at ground level, whereas the only table shown with end stretchers was the utilitarian table in the country inn visited by Mr. Chang (see Plate S (iii)).

The two console type, small side-tables are both constructed differently. U (vi) shows a table with legs that are much more curved than that seen in R (iii), but both examples have apron joints at the top, and ground level stretchers to strengthen the legs.

Fig. 41, therefore, not only provides a quick guide to the basic construction techniques of the tables depicted by a Ming dynasty artist, but it also suggests that the tables found in pre-16th century Chinese households were more ornate than previous scholars would have us believe.

Under the heading 'Leg/Arch Spandrel' are listed all those tables seen in our set of woodcuts which possess decorative protruberances at the top of the leg members. Thus, we see that out of a total of 35 tables, 18 can be classed as 'ornamented'. As I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, the specific type of ornamentation depicted by the artist differs from table to table. Nonetheless, this factor need not disqualify the deduction that ornate furniture may account for as much as half the hardwood domestic furniture found in Ming scholar households.

Let us now turn our attention to the large standing screens depicted in so many illustrations to this play. Although the screen is not included in the four groups of furniture into which our evidence has been divided - namely, the couch, the table, tables and stools, and chairs - its constant appearance in the woodcuts has been pointed out.



It is clear from the evidence of these woodcut illustrations that the standing screen played an important part in the room settings of Ming interiors. Screens are shown not only in the wealthy household setting of Ying-ying and her mother, but also in the Buddhist temple rooms and the bedroom in Mr. Chang's lodgings. In addition, a large standing screen is shown in a garden setting where it must have been carried by servants for the convenience of Mr. Chang. Screens were clearly in constant use, and acted both as room dividers and draught excluders.

Finally, we also learn from this research material that stools seem to have been far more popular as a means of sitting than the chair. Indeed, the fact that only two frame chairs appear amongst our set of 38 woodcut illustrations is astonishing. This evidence alone must lead us to revise our assumptions concerning the use of the chair in Ming China.

Since this chapter includes wood carvings as well as woodcuts, mention must be made here of the evidence of furniture types and styles found on the four Yüan dynasty hardwood pillars published by Ellsworth.<sup>(4)</sup> These pillars, which now form part of the collection of the Honolulu Academy of Arts, are dated from the 13th-14th centuries, and are completely covered with carved illustrations in low relief of Buddhist sutras. The items of furniture depicted on the pillars are fully described by Ellsworth

who concludes that:

"The variety of furniture depicted in these columns cannot include all the types used in the 13th century, but it does cover most of the basic forms of tables and also one style of chair."

Ellsworth goes on to suggest that the types and styles of furniture depicted on these pillars may, in fact, have also been current in the Sung dynasty - since there is no evidence to the contrary.

We must not neglect the evidence of any carved representations of furniture, whether these be on silver, bronze, lacquer or stone. Taken together, they will provide the missing evidence to help us piece together a comprehensive picture of the gradual changes in type and style that occurred from the Han dynasty up to the end of the Ch'ing period.

NOTESCHAPTER 7

- (1) Kates, G. N. Chinese Household Furniture. New York, 1948, p.17
- (2) Ku-pen hsi-chü ts'ung-k'an. Shanghai, 1953-64.
- (3) 奇 妙 全 相 註 釋 西 廂 記
- (4) Ellsworth, R. H. Chinese Furniture: Hardwood Examples of the Ming and Early Ch'ing Dynasties. London, 1972, pp.19-21

## CHAPTER 8

THE EVIDENCE OF PAINTINGS ON SILK AND PAPER

Paintings on silk and paper, which show furniture, can never be regarded as primary evidence in the same way as furniture depicted on tomb murals, for most historians have argued that it is extremely unlikely that any of these perishable works of art painted before the Sung dynasty have survived. For this reason, they would relegate the paintings extant and bearing signatures of pre-Sung painters to the status of copies. The question of copying cannot be discussed here except to record the consensus among writers on the subject - namely, that such copies of early works were mostly faithful reproductions of the originals. However, even if we do accept that scroll paintings are of secondary value as evidence of furniture styles and dating, I will show that such corroboratory evidence as they do afford must not be underestimated or neglected.

When examining photographs of Chinese paintings for the purpose of this study, it became clear that the portable paintings, which show furniture, fall into two main categories:-

- a) Those in which the artist uses the furniture he depicts as a buttress to intensify immediate recognition by the viewer of the specific period of time in which the scene is set.

b) An artist sets out to copy an original painting from an earlier date but, either consciously or unconsciously, up-dates what seem to him incidental details such as furniture types and styles.

Ku Hung-chung's painting "The Night Revels of Han Hsi-tsai" is particularly important to the study of furniture, and is an excellent example of a painting which falls into the first category above. The facts surrounding the circumstances in which this picture was painted are known to us from the historical records of the period <sup>(1)</sup> where we learn that tales concerning Han Hsi-ts'ai's scandalous private behaviour reached the ears of the last Emperor of the Southern T'ang dynasty who thereupon sent his court painter Ku Hung-chung to investigate. After a visit to Han's residence, the painter produced a scroll which sets out all the details of what he had seen there during an evening party, and the Emperor proceeded to show this to Han Hsi-ts'ai as evidence of his misbehaviour. This gentle rebuke does not seem to have had any deterrent effect upon Han's behaviour, however, for we learn that the minister continued his profligate ways until all his money was spent and he was reduced to begging from his former friends. The fact that this scroll concerns an historical personage and can be accurately dated to somewhere between A.D. 943-60 is of prime importance in its role as documentary evidence for the development of Chinese furniture.

In the five main scenes, which show the interior of Han's palatial residence, we see all the accoutrements of luxurious living fully detailed and placed in their natural setting. It must be emphasized that the furniture portrayed in this scroll is of the type found in a nobleman's mansion in the capital city; whereas, of course, the table and chairs with which we can compare them - namely, those from Chü-lu (fig. 21) and the Chao family tomb in Honan (fig. 20) - are from provincial and non-aristocratic settings. In spite of this difference, the double-stretched yoke style tables and chairs are immediately recognizable as nearly identical to the two Sung provincial examples just mentioned.

It will be noted that the chairs in Han Hsi<sup>9</sup>ts'ai's house possess two features in addition to the familiar yoke style and back splat chairs seen in the pieces from Chü-lu and Honan. Firstly, the back rail, which connects the back splat and side supports of the chairs, is elaborately bowed, and the projecting ends curl up and round in a distinctive manner. This particular type of chair is named The Lantern Hanging Chair on account of these curling projections of the back rail. Secondly, many of the chairs in the scroll are covered, by means of a long length of fabric which reaches from the back rail down to the foot stretcher. This practice continues in China up to the present day, and is designed to keep off draughts.

Both a daybed and a testered bed are clearly shown in the scroll (Siren, C.P. III, pl.123) <sup>(2)</sup> and we have two views of the construction since they are painted from two different angles. The huge wooden k'ang which can seat five people at once, is of a style not seen in any Western collection, since it has an additional short curved wooden sidepiece at the front. The testered bed, however, differs very little from the one shown in the British Museum scroll "Admonitions of the Imperial Instructress" which type is known as far back as the Warring States period (see Chapter 2).

As a point of interest, it is worthwhile to note that the subject of the scroll, the Minister Han Hsi-ts'ai, is never shown sitting with legs pendant in the privacy of his own home. When not standing to play his drum, he either sits on the k'ang with his ladies or on a chair with his legs crossed. The tableau, which shows Han sitting and talking to three women with his robe open to show most of his bare stomach, is clearly intended by the painter to indicate the excessive degree of Han's licentiousness. He is portrayed sitting upright but cross legged on a Lantern Hanging Chair, whilst his slippers are lying on the floor just as they were when he kicked them off for greater comfort. Can we infer from the evidence of this scene - taken in conjunction with the rest of the scroll - that, in the mid-10th century, sitting cross legged was considered completely infra-dig and not to be indulged in whilst in public?

A somewhat earlier painting that is also thought to depict a contemporary type of furniture, is a work by Han Huang (A.D. 723-87) which shows a group of scholars in a garden collating old writings (Siren, *C.P.* III, pl.102). Here we have the first evidence of a specialized type of furniture made from natural forms of wood for use out of doors. The seat on which the two scholars sit is, in fact, the hollowed out trunk of a tree which has been propped up by piles of stones to form the legs. Fitzgerald (3) cites this painting as one of the earliest portrayals of scholars sitting with legs pendant, but I must disagree with Fitzgerald on this point since Yen Li-pen, who died in A.D. 673, depicts a scholar seated with legs pendant in a scroll I shall mention shortly.

Whereas we know that Ku Hung-chung set out to portray a contemporary scene, and used the furniture which appears in the scroll as a buttress to intensify immediate recognition of this scene by the people for whom the painting was executed, namely Emperor Li Hou-chu and Han Hsi-ts'ai himself, it is clear that other artists, such as Yen Li-pen, used the furniture which they chose to depict as a means of setting the scene in a past age. In one famous handscroll, owned by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Yen has painted tableaux of thirteen Chinese Emperors from the Han to the Sui dynasties together with members of their retinues. Although ten of the Emperors are shown walking, three are shown seated on large square raised platforms of two different types.



Emperor Hsüan-ti, who reigned from A.D. 569-83, is seated on a wooden carrying seat of a type not known elsewhere, but presumably familiar enough to the artist who lived not long after the period he portrays. Examination of plate 73 in Siren C.P. III shows that the platform is a rectangular length of lacquered wood on which Hsüan-ti sits cross-legged whilst bearers grasp the narrow carrying poles formed from the extended side pieces of the platform; the seat is supported off the ground by a leg joined at the corner angle. The adjoining tableau (Siren C.P. III, pl.74), which portrays Emperor Wen-ti of the Ch'en dynasty, includes a complete platform of the box and frame type also seen in other early paintings. (4)

The fact that the same type of large raised platform, on which the artist Yen Li-pen seats the Emperor Wen-ti of the Ch'en dynasty (A.D. 560-67), reappears in another of this artist's paintings also at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston entitled "Scholars of the Northern Ch'i Dynasty Collating Classical Texts", strengthens the hypothesis that the artist was illustrating furniture that he knew to have been in vogue during the mid-6th century. Apart from the large platform on which the four scholars are working, this scroll shows another tableau in which servants cluster round a Confucian scholar Fan Hsüa who sits alone with his legs hanging down on a simple folding stool (hu ch'uang). This tableau, although not mentioned by Fitzgerald, is a relevant piece of information which helps to confirm his view that the hu ch'uang had come into use inside the house in the 6th century.

In addition, as I have already indicated in this chapter, this depiction of a man seated with legs pendant pre-dates by a hundred years the picture cited by Fitzgerald as one of the earliest pictorial representations of the legs pendant posture. The painting to which Fitzgerald refers in this connection is the one by Han Huang (A.D. 723-787), mentioned above, of two scholars sitting on a garden seat which is reproduced by Fitzgerald on p.59 of Barbarian Beds.

The paintings so far mentioned all illustrate the fact that we can use original works by painters of interior scenes in order to discover the types and styles of hardwood domestic furniture that were in use both inside and outside the house in China as far back as pre-Sung times, as well as providing us with valuable information concerning social customs and conventions centred round the domestic household. The works I have cited all happen to be early paintings but, of course, the same information can be obtained by consulting original works of art painted right up to the present day. At the beginning of this chapter, I raised the point that faithful reproductions are just as valuable as original works, for, in such cases, there is nothing lost in the information that the furniture historian seeks from their contents. Whether a specific scene is the work of the artist by whom it is signed, or to whom it is attributed, or whether in fact some later painter deliberately made an exact copy for his own purposes, the furniture shown in the painting must per se illustrate types and styles that were in vogue prior to or contemporary with the date on which the original work was executed.

The world famous scroll "Admonitions of the Imperial Instructress" illustrates the implications of this statement admirably. Controversy has raged long and fiercely as to the date of the scroll now in the British Museum, yet its attribution to the Six Dynasties master Ku K'ai-chih (A.D. 344-406) "is supported by important historical evidence and a long standing tradition"<sup>(5)</sup>. Many art historians have argued that the work is by a late T'ang artist, yet, be that as it may, there is no evidence in the contents of the scroll itself that a furniture historian can offer in support of this later date. The tester bed and long bench-like chi shown in the Bedroom scene (see fig.2 ) have already been shown in Chapter 2 to have an authentic genealogy, since they resemble so closely the Warring States bed and chi found at Hsin-yang.

The question of conscious archaism on the part of various painters of domestic furniture clearly arises as part of the class of original paintings and exact reproductions that I am now discussing. Ku k'ai-chih's painting is, in fact, a straightforward illustration of the words of a moralizing text by the poet Chang Hua (A.D. 232-300), and it seems highly probable that the artist uses the furniture to place the scene in its accurate historical setting in the same way that Yen Li-pen used furniture for this purpose in the two scrolls discussed above. The technique of conscious archaism is even more apparent in the well-known painting in the Osaka Museum collection attributed to Wang Wei (A.D. 699-757), in which he shows the semi-naked figure of the famous scholar Fu Sheng

with a copy of the Book of History.<sup>(6)</sup> The prop, which the artist uses to convey to the viewer an immediate impression of the period in which Fu Sheng lived, namely the 3rd century B.C., is a chi used as an armrest-cum-table. The great antiquity of the chi has been discussed in Chapter 3 of this study.

Although, as I have shown, a category of paintings exists which the furniture historian cannot prove to be other than exact copies of an original work; a second category of paintings does exist where the evidence of furniture is much more positive. The group of paintings I shall discuss now are those I have described at the beginning of this Chapter as Category B, or those works in which the artist has, either consciously or unconsciously, inserted details of furniture styles with which he is familiar in his own time, despite the fact that the work he is copying purports to be of an earlier period. The handscroll known as "Ch'ing-ming shang-ho", or "Going up the River at the Ch'ing Ming Festival", not only proves quite conclusively the validity of this second category, but may also prove to be an example of the means whereby art scholarship can take a new direction. This new direction is in the field of dating, for I hope now to demonstrate that a sound knowledge of furniture styles can add a new and practical weapon to the armoury of the painting expert.

The authenticity of the many scrolls bearing the title "Ching-ming shang-ho" and attributed to the Sung artist Chang Tse-tuan has been the source of acrimonious argument among experts for years. The

original scroll, inscribed by Emperor Hui-tsung (A.D. 1082-1135) is not listed in the Catalogue of the Imperial Collections (Hsüan-ho hua-p'u) published in 1120, but certainly formed part of the Yüan Imperial Collection. Roderick Whitfield, who has made a detailed study of the scroll for his doctoral thesis, states "I feel that the painting was probably executed several years before the fall of the capital, perhaps as early as c. 1110" (7). Emperor Hui-tsung had commanded the academician Chang Tse-tuan to make "a pictorial record of the misty prospects of Pien River" - the capital of the Northern Sung was known as Pien City or Pien Bridge - but shortly after the painting was made the city was burned by the Chin Tartars. (8)

Chang Tse-tuan's handscroll traces the progress of a journey which starts from the distant countryside and gradually wends its way along the course of the Pien River towards the city which was more or less on the site of modern day K'ai-feng. Once inside the city walls we see an accurate and remarkably vivid picture of metropolitan life in early 12th century China at a time when the country was rich, peaceful and well-governed. As the scroll unwinds more and more examples of furniture are depicted, not only at the roadside inns outside and inside the city walls, but also in the houses of the rich merchants at the capital.

Whitfield lists 37 scrolls on the subject of "Going up the River at the Ch'ing Ming Festival", all clearly based on a single format, and it is known that there exist a larger number than this. (9)

It was long believed that the original Northern Sung version of the scroll had been irretrievably damaged at a time when it was stolen from the Imperial Collection by a eunuch<sup>(10)</sup> but the similarity of the numerous copies that exist, not only in China but also in Europe, made it feasible to re-construct a mental image of how the original scroll must have looked.

Then, in 1953, the late Tung Tso-pin published a version of the scroll, at that time in Chicago, which he claimed to be the original 12th century work.<sup>(11)</sup> Tung's principal evidence for claiming the authenticity of the Chicago scroll was that one of the seals at the end of the scroll bore the two characters pi-fu, which he took to be the seal of the Yuan dynasty Imperial collection. In addition to giving the evidence of the seal, Tung considered one by one the appearance of the types of boats, carts and houses etc. which are shown on the scroll (referred to as the pi-fu scroll) but he failed to consider the question of the furniture.

It is no exaggeration to say that a furniture historian could, at one glance, have repudiated the claim of the pi-fu scroll to be an authentic Northern Sung work, since the furniture it depicts is clearly no earlier than Ming in type and style.

Only one year later, however, in 1954, was announced the "discovery of a scroll which, though unsigned, is in every way superior to the pi-fu version, having the presence of a masterpiece, and, by way of documentation, a set of colophons and seals linking

it with the earliest literary records of the Ch'ing-ming shang-ho t'u and making it possible to trace its submission with only minor gaps from the Northern Sung to the present day". (12)

Whitfield concludes, from his study of the many versions of the Ch'ing-ming scroll now extant, that the handscroll discovered in 1954 now in Peking<sup>(13)</sup> is the original work executed by Chang Tse-tuan at the command of Emperor Hai-tsung. In reaching this conclusion, he has naturally compared the Peking scroll to other versions in terms of style and content but, once again, furniture was not taken into consideration as a dating tool - despite the fact that such an argument could have contributed additional positive weight to the evidence assembled by Whitfield in his thesis.

Every one of the scores of examples of wooden furniture shown in the Peking scroll serves to corroborate our previous knowledge of the furniture of the period, for there is not a single example on the scroll of the curvilinear type of furniture known to exist from the Yüan dynasty onwards which, nevertheless, appears over and over again on all other versions of the scroll, including the pi-fu version. Only two types of chair and a single type of table are shown in the Peking scroll - the vast majority consisting of the simply made wooden table and chair or bench combination of the yoke style with double stretchers. From the simplest peasant hut, right up to the interiors of the two and three storey houses belonging

to merchants and nobles, we see the same basic type of yoke style furniture in use; the only difference being that the tables and chairs in the large houses are made of finer woods and more elegantly finished with spandrels than the roughly made deal furniture knocked together by the poor peasants. This is the same furniture that is already known to us from the Chü-lu and Honan finds, and can be accepted as the standard Sung type. In addition, the Peking scroll includes three examples of the folding type of chair known as chiao-i all of which are seen inside the rooms of rich private houses inside the city walls.

Here, we have a striking instance of the role that can be played in art scholarship by the evidence of the furniture historian. On the one hand, such knowledge makes it possible to repudiate a dating claim by Tung Tso-pin and, on the other hand, to add confirmation to the more recent study by Whitfield concerning the authenticity of the Peking scroll.

The beginnings of a recognition that this field of study can be of value is, however, apparent from a recent article by the Chinese scholar Cheng Wei<sup>(14)</sup> who has used the type of chair featured in an early handscroll as a standard of comparison. The handscroll entitled "The Water Mill" is owned by the Shanghai Museum, and bears the signature of the Five Dynasties court painter Wei Hsien. Cheng Wei has recognised that a chair shown in the scroll is almost identical in style to the Lantern Hanging Chair (Teng-kua shih-i) described earlier in this chapter as appearing several times in Ku Hung-chung's scroll "The Night Revels of Han Hsi-ts'ai",



and he has used this fact as evidence in his discussion of the authenticity of the Shanghai scroll.

Fitzgerald, in his book Barbarian Beds, reveals that one particular type of chair he saw in an unpublished painting at the Peking Palace Museum was the initial cause of the awakening of his interest in the origin and development of the chair in China. It is extremely likely that a systematic examination of all extant paintings, which show examples of hardwood domestic furniture, will yield a rich hoard of examples of styles and types not so far known. Because there remain so very few pieces of wooden furniture to help us construct a genealogy of types and styles, the evidence that still remains on silk and paper must not be neglected.

CHAPTER 6NOTES

- (1) Siren, O. Chinese Painters: Leading Masters and Principles. Vol. I. London, 1956, p. 167 note 1. Hereafter, this work will be referred to by the short title C.P.
- (2) Siren, O. C.P. Vol. III, pl. 123
- (3) Fitzgerald, C.P. Barbarian Beds: The Origin of the Chair in China. London, 1965, p. 59
- (4) Ecke, G. Chinese Domestic Furniture. Peking, 1944, p. 4. Outline drawings of platforms of this type are taken from early paintings, such as Yen Li-pen's "Scholars of the Northern Ch'i Collating Classical Texts" (fig. 4), and "Scenes of Grief in the Tent of a Chieftain" after Wei-ch'ih I-seng (fig. 5).
- (5) Siren, O. C.P. Vol. I, p. 30
- (6) The painting is illustrated by Siren, C.P. Vol. III, pl. 90 where it is attributed to Wang Wei. But also see Shodo Zenshu. Vol. 16. Tokyo, 1955-67, where the work is attributed to the Northern Sung artist Wu Shuo who flourished c. A.D.1133.
- (7) Whitfield, R. Chang Tse-tuan's "Ch'ing-ming shang-ho t'u". Princeton, 1965. Unpublished doctoral thesis.
- (8) Waley, A.D. "A Chinese Picture" in Burlington Magazine. Vol. XXX, No. 166. London, January 1917.
- (9) A very good quality "Ch'ing-ming shang-ho" scroll, not included in Whitfield's list, has been seen by the author at the Gulbenkian Museum of Oriental Art, Durham.

- (10) Free China. Vol. I. Peking, 1963
- (11) Tung Tso-pin Ch'ing-ming shang-ho t'u. 2nd ed. Taipei, 1954.
- (12) Whitfield, R. loc. cit. p.8
- (13) The scroll is published in its entirety in Wen-wu ching-hua. Vol. I. Peking, 1959
- (14) Cheng Wei "The Water Mill - A Handscroll" in Wen-wu. Peking, 1966, No. 2 p. 17

### CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that the study of Chinese furniture is still in its infancy, Chapters 7 and 8 of this thesis are sufficient to prove the practical value of this field of knowledge.

We have seen that a knowledge of furniture types and styles can be used as an invaluable dating tool when appraising pictures painted on silk and paper. But, in addition, this same dating aid can also be applied to fields of Chinese Art that have not been discussed here. Such items as ceramics - especially blue and white pots - lacquerware, and gold and silver metalwork, immediately spring to mind. In fact, any art object showing household scenes on its surface can be more easily dated by a knowledge of Chinese domestic interiors and furniture.

In the same way that unjustified dating claims can be disproved by a knowledge of furniture depicted in a particular painting, such as Chang Tse-tuan's "Ch'ing-ming shang-ho", so too could lacquer and metal carvings be shown to be incorrectly dated. On the other hand, perhaps additional weight might be lent to dating claims as a result of this same knowledge. Whitfield's failure to take account of furniture types and styles which would have further strengthened his claim, serves as a case in point.

The whole subject of the social context of Chinese furniture has been implicit in the study of woodcut illustrations attempted in Chapter 7. There is, without doubt, a wealth of information on this subject which remains undiscovered and unstudied in libraries of Chinese printed books throughout the world. Kates was undoubtedly correct in his assumption that a study of woodcut illustrations would permit us to form a helpful series of familiar pieces in common use at the time of their publication. But this aim is not the only goal that it is possible to achieve by such a study.

The 38 woodcuts discussed in Chapter 7 have been subjected only to a limited scrutiny. Moreover, the only specific type of furniture to be studied in greater depth was The Table (see fig. 41). Even so, it has been demonstrably proved that woodcuts of this type deserve a much fuller and more thorough investigation than has been possible here. Not only should it be possible to investigate the bed, table, and chair, but also the screen, lampstands, boxes, and other articles of household furniture which fall beyond the scope of this thesis.

Unfortunately, however, greater practical application of furniture studies will be impossible without a much greater accumulation of basic knowledge.

Because there is so little hardwood furniture that remains today from the period prior to the 20th century, and because these pieces are so fragile and vulnerable to fire, it becomes more urgent every year that a complete record should be made of all the early pieces that exist. I doubt that the pieces owned by Western museums total more than about 300 examples, although early examples of furniture in private collections must be added to this figure.

Ellsworth has done pioneering work in respect of photographing and classifying all the items that have passed through his hands - many of them going into Museum collections. But until all available Ming and Ch'ing hardwood furniture is photographed, studied, and classified, it is virtually impossible to apply a comprehensive knowledge of furniture to other fields such as Ming blue and white porcelain and 15th-18th century paintings.

As I have pointed out in this thesis, the earliest known wooden table and chair date from A.D. 1108 - but this is an isolated example. It is not until the 15th century that we have a small number of wooden pieces with which to work. This means that, for any accumulation of knowledge concerning pre-15th century domestic furniture, we must rely on other sources.

Chapters 5 and 6 have shown that tomb murals and engravings from dated tombs are an invaluable aid to dating items of furniture of which we have no wooden examples. In spite of this, the information which undoubtedly exists on tomb walls in China has been almost ignored. Tun-huang has only just begun to reveal its secrets to Western scholars, and we may have to wait several more years until the entire complex of cave paintings are published. Likewise, the representations of furniture which appear on other tomb walls throughout China have not been fully reported.

The archaeological bulletins Wen-wu and K'ao-ku have yielded numerous interesting reports of tomb finds concerning furniture. But, just as the photographs included in their Tomb Mural reports are often incomplete (see fig. 30), so too, examples of model furniture found inside tombs are occasionally incompletely reported. For instance, the archaeological report sometimes only includes "a chair", or "a table" as part of a list of objects that have been excavated.

We need photographs of all tomb finds of representations of furniture - whether painted on walls, or three-dimensional models in earthenware or bronze. Until all known examples of furniture are brought together so that they can be compared with one another, classified, and dated, furniture studies cannot be further developed along inter-disciplinary lines.

Allied to this accumulation of visual knowledge of furniture types and styles, it is possible to fill in the gaps which still exist by reference to literary sources. Chapter 4 of this thesis has proved that a re-assessment of the literary evidence concerning the origins of the chair in China has produced completely new information. Moreover, this information, concerning the existence of the hitherto unknown hu tso, or barbarian seat, may be the missing link in our search for the origins of the Chinese frame chair. Literary sources which should be researched include not only the classical texts of China, but also the texts of popular novels, histories, and plays.

It is only by means of an accumulation of practical and theoretical knowledge that we can build up a coherent picture of the origins and development of hardwood furniture in China. Once this picture is complete, furniture studies can be used as an invaluable means of extending and enriching our knowledge of Chinese life and art.



GLOSSARY OF CHINESE TERMS USED IN THE  
MAIN TEXT

- AN-CH'IU 安邱  
AN-YANG 安陽  
CHANG 張  
CHANG HUA 張華  
CHANG TSE-TUAN 張擇端  
CH'ANG-AN 長安  
CH'ANG-SHA 長沙  
CHAO 趙  
CHENG TE-K'UN 鄭德坤  
CHENG WEI 鄭為  
CH'EN DYNASTY 陳  
CH'EN CHANG-TSE 臣張擇  
CH'ENG-TU 成都  
CHI 几  
CHI-CH'IH-MU 鷄翅木  
CHI-MIAO CHUAN-HSIANG 奇妙全相  
CHU-SHIH SHI-HSIANG CHI 註釋西廂記  
CHI-NAN 濟南  
CH'I DYNASTY 齊  
CHIA-HSIANG 嘉祥  
CHIA-TZU-CH'UANG 架子牀  
CHIAO-I 交椅  
CH'IAO-T'OU 翹頭  
CH'IEH 且  
CH' IEN-LUNG 乾隆
- CHIH 執  
CHIN (JURCHEN) DYNASTY 金(女真)  
CHIN-HSIANG 金鄉  
CHIN-SHIH 進士  
CH'IN DYNASTY 秦  
CHING 京, 景  
CH'ING DYNASTY 清  
CH'ING-MING SHANG-HO 清明上河  
CHOU DYNASTY 周  
CHOU WEN-CHU 周文矩  
CHU WEI 朱鮪  
CH'U 楚  
CH'UANG 牀, 床  
CHU 踞  
CHU -LU 鉅鹿  
CH'UAN-I 圈椅  
ERH YA 爾兀  
FAN HSUN 樊遜  
FENG-SU T'UNG-I 風俗通義  
FENG TAO-CHEN 馮道真  
FOU-T'U-TENG 浮圖澄  
FU SHENG 伏生  
HAN DYNASTY 漢  
HAN HUANG 韓滉  
HAN HSI-TS'AI 韓熙載

HANG-CHOU	杭州	KIANGSU PROVINCE	江蘇
HONAN PROVINCE	河南	KOGURYO (see KAO-KOU-LI)	
HOPEH PROVINCE	河北	KU HUNG-CHUNG	顧閔中
HOU CHING	候景	KU K'AI-CHIH	顧愷之
HOU HAN SHU	後漢書	KUNG HSIEN	鞏縣
HSI-AN	西安	K'UNG-HOU	空侯
HSI-CH'ENG	希成	KWANGSI PROVINCE	廣西
HSIN-YANG	信陽	LAO	老
HSUAN-HO HUA-P'U	宣和畫譜	LI CHI	禮記
HSUAN-TI	宣帝	LI HOU-CHU	李後主
HU	胡	LIANG SHU	梁書
HU CH'UANG	胡牀	LIANG WU TI	梁武帝
HU TSO	胡坐	LIAO-YANG	遼陽
HUA-LI	花梨	LING TI	靈帝
HUAI RIVER	淮	LO-LANG	樂浪
HUAI-AN	淮安	LO-YANG	洛陽
HUANG	黃	MA-T'I	馬蹄
HUI-TSUNG	徽宗	MAI-CHI-SHAN	麥積山
HUNAN PROVINCE	湖南	MING DYNASTY	明
I	椅	MING-CH'I	明器
JUNG KENG	峇庚	MU	木
K'AI-FENG	開封	NAN-CHING	南京
K'ANG	炕	NEI TSE	內則
K'ANG	匠	NI-YA	泥壤
KAO-KOU-LI	高勾麗	OU-YANG HSIU	歐陽修
KAO YUAN-KUEI	高元珪	PA-HSIEN-CHO	八仙桌
K'AO-KU	考古	PAI-SHA	白沙

PAI-TUNG	白銅	TA-T'UNG	大同
PAO-CHI	寶鷄	T'A	榻
PEI-YUAN	北園	T'AI SHIH I	太式椅
PI-FU	秘府	T'AI-TSUNG	太宗
PIEN RIVER	汴	T'ANG DYNASTY	唐
SAN-TS'AI T'U-HUI	三才圖會	TENG-KUA SHIH-I	燈掛式椅
SHAN-LIN HSIEN-JEN	山林仙人	TIAO-AN	雕案
SHANG DYNASTY	商	TIENTSIN	天津
SHANG	巔	TING	鼎
SHANG-HAI	上海	TSU	俎
SHANG-YIN	商殷	TSUI WENG	醉翁
SHANTUNG PROVINCE	山東	TUAN FANG	端方
SHENG-CH'UAN	繩牀	TUN-HUANG	敦煌
SHENSI PROVINCE	陝西	TUNG TSO-PIN	董作賓
SHIH CHING	詩經	T'UNG-KOU	通溝
SHIH CH'ING	時清	TZU-T'AN	紫檀
SHOU-HSIEN	壽縣	WANG KUO-WEI	王國維
SHU CHING	書經	WANG WEI	王維
SHU-CHO	書桌	WEI DYNASTY	魏
SHUO WEN	說文	WEI-CH'IH I-SENG	尉遲乙僧
SOU SHEN CHI	搜神記	WEI HSIEN	衛賢
SSU-PAN	四板	WEN CH'AO	文鈔
SU-CHOU	蘇州	WEN-TI	文帝
SUI DYNASTY	隋	WEN-WU TS'AN-K'AO TZU-LIAO	文物參考資料
SUMITOMO	住友	WU LIANG TZ'U	武梁祠
SUNG DYNASTY	宋	WU SHUO	吳說
SZECHWAN PROVINCE	四川		

YANG KUNG-TSE 楊公則  
 YANGTZE RIVER 揚子本  
 YEN LI-PEN 閻立本  
 YEN-SHIH 偃師  
 YING-YING 鶯鶯  
 YO FU SHIH CHI 樂府詩集  
 " YUAN DYNASTY 元  
 " YUAN-FU 元符

A P P E N D I X

A great variety of hardwoods are used in the construction of Chinese furniture, but no two experts seem to agree as to their botanical names. In the market, and in Chinese encyclopaedias, the cabinet woods are referred to under their trade names, and it seems probable that the common Chinese names follow some generic distinctions. All experts agree, however, that the most valuable woods for cabinet making are those of the Leguminosae family. Even though this family is indigenous to China in some of its species, the bulk of the timber used was imported from Indo-China and the Malay regions.

Table I sets out Ecke's classification of the varieties of Leguminosae. Ecke repeatedly stresses the tenuous nature of his classification, and points out the difficulties of making any assumptions in the face of shortage of both wood pieces and botanical knowledge. Kates follows Ecke in all respects for the Leguminosae except where his additional classifications are marked with an asterisk.

Jean Gordon Lee has followed neither Ecke nor Kates. She includes a table of woods in her study "Chinese Furniture Collection" in the Philadelphia Museum Bulletin, Winter 1963, which is reproduced here as Table II. Miss Lee acknowledges the

help of Mr. B. Francis Kukachka in charge of the Wood Identification Research, United States Department of Agriculture, and Dr. Li Hui-lin, Taxonomist of the Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania. One may assume that Miss Lee's classification, published in 1963, conforms more with modern scientific research than does that of Ecke published in 1944.

It should be noted that Miss Lee's classification agrees with Ecke in respect of the "Tzu T'an" wood, but she labels the Dalbergia genera under the Chinese name of "Huang T'an" and gives no further information as to the derivation. As the character "huang" is the same as that used in "Huang Hua Li" (Yellow Hua Li) it is possible that her Dalbergia is Ecke's Rosewood.

Kates adds to the list of the four finest cabinet woods, i.e. "Tzu T'an", "Hua Li", "Hung Mu" and "Chi Chih Mu", two woods which are often found in conjunction with them. These are "Hua Mu" (burl) and "Wu Mu" (ebony). Burl is frequently used for the embellishment of good pieces, and it is the most favoured wood for inlay work owing to its naturally curly pattern and rich colour. Ebony is less often used, but can be seen on some of the more elaborate pieces as an inlay material.

Table III lists the woods which Kates classifies as Secondary. His "Nan Mu" seems to correlate with Lee's "Chen Nan". Kates describes it as a variety of cedar, although the best examples look like walnut. It is used for domestic furniture where a lighter tone is required - such as for provincial furniture of a simple design. The wood is native to China and close-grained.

"Chang Mu" (camphorwood) is prized for making good chests. "Pai Mu" may be Lee's "Pai K'o". "Hsiang Sha Mu" (Fragrant Pine) is used as deal, and may correspond to Lee's "Sung". There seems to be no alternative to Kates "Yu Mu" which he states can be securely identified as a genus with our own elm. The Chinese native wood has three varieties: "Yu Mu" (elm), "Lao Yu Mu" (old elm) and "Nan Yu Mu" (southern elm), all of which are primarily for sturdy serviceable pieces.

Table IV lists what Kates describes as less securely identified varieties. The first seems to correlate with Lee's "Li". Kates adds that cheaper pieces are made of local chestnut, horse chestnut and oak. Chinese mahogany is called "Ch'un" by both Kates and Lee. He states that this wood has an aromatic odour and is used for good local furniture. Neither "Huai Mu" nor "Ch'iu Mu" seem to be included in Miss Lee's table.

No summary of Chinese woods would be complete without mention of the bamboo "Tzu Chu", of which there are several varieties such as the shaped, thorny bamboo of Szechwan and the spotted bamboo of Kwangsi province. Bamboo has always been very popular as a material for the construction of garden furniture and, in addition, the wood takes a high polish and lends itself to graceful carvings of inscriptions or of landscape scenes.



TABLE I

FIRST QUALITY CABINET WOODSFamily .. Leguminosae

<u>Chinese Name</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>English Name</u>
Tzu-t'an 紫檀	<i>Pterocarpus santalinus</i> <i>Dalbergia benthamii</i> (after Duhalde)	Red sandalwood Red sanders Palisander
*Chin-ssu tzu-t'an		Golden threaded purple sandalwood
Hua-li 花梨	<i>Ormosia henryi</i> <i>Pterocarpus indicus</i> * <i>Dalbergia latifolia</i>	) ) ) Rosewood
Hung-mu 紅木	<i>Pterocarpus indicus</i> <i>Adenanthera pavonina</i> <i>Dalbergia latifolia</i>	Burmese Rosewood (Red sandalwood (Coralwood Indian Rosewood
Chi-ch'ih-mu 鷄翅木	<i>Cassia siamea</i>	) ) ) ) Chicken Wing Wood
Ch'i-tzu-mu 杞梓木	<i>Ormosia hosiei</i> Caesalpiniacea	) ) ) ) *Satinwood

TABLE II

FAMILIES	GENERA	CHINESE NAME	ENGLISH NAME	SPECIES
Leguminosae	Dalbergia	Huang T'an 黃 檀	Dalbergia	An Indian species, <i>D. sissoo</i> , <i>sissoo</i> is one species of <i>Dalbergia</i> ; another, <i>D. rubiginosa</i> is "Indian Rosewood".
	Pterocarpus	Tzu T'an 紫 檀	Pterocarpus	<i>P. indicus</i> , "Burmese Rosewood" valued as a furniture wood. <i>P. dalbergioides</i> .
Cupressaceae	Thuja	T's'e Pai 側 柏	Arbor Vitae	<i>Thuja orientalis</i> .
	Not identified	"Pai K'o" 柏 科	Cypress Fir	Several Genera - <i>Thuja? cupressus? juniperus?</i> , etc.
Pinaceae	Pinus	Sung 松	Pine	Several species - commonest are <i>P. tabulaeformis</i> in the North and <i>P. massoniana</i> in the South.
Salicaceae	Populus	Yang 楊	Poplar	Many species.
Theaceae	Schinus	Mu Ho 木 荷	Schinus	Tropical Asia - <i>S. superba</i> in South China.
Lauraceae	Machilus	Chen Nan 植 楠	Machilus	Closely related to <i>phoebe</i> in-
	Cinnamomum	Chang 樟	Camphor	<i>C. camphora</i> .
Fagaceae	Castanea	Li 栗	Chestnut	Several species - the most common is <i>C. mollissima</i> , Chinese chestnut.
Pinaceae	Picea	Yün Sha 云 杉	Spruce	Many species - use of any species of this uncommon, except perhaps in W. and N.W. China.
Juglandaceae	Juglans	Hu T'ao 胡 桃	Walnut	<i>J. regia</i> is the cultivated and common species.
Meliaceae	Cedrela	Hsiang Ch'i 香 木	Mahogany	Of the same genus (different species) as mahogany of the West. <i>C. sinensis</i> is the common species.

TABLE IIISECONDARY QUALITY CABINET WOODS

<u>Chinese name</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>English name</u>
Nan Mu	Machilus nanmu, Hemsl.	Cedarwood
Chang Mu		Camphorwood
Pai Mu		Cyprus/Cedar
Hsiang Sha Mu		Fragrant Pine
Yu Mu		Elm

TABLE IV

LESS SECURELY IDENTIFIED WOODS

<u>Chinese Name</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>English Name</u>
Li Mu and/or Li Tzu Mu	<i>Pyrus sinensis</i>	Plum ? Pear Chestnut
Ch'un Mu	<i>Cedrela sinensis</i>	Chinese Mahogany
Huai Mu	<i>Sophora japonica</i>	Japonica
Ch'iu Mu	<i>Catalpa Kaempferi</i>	Catalpa

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