

CHINESE FURNITURE



Night Revels of Han Xizai by Gu Hongzhong, the Five Dynasties
Different sorts of high furniture in painting are used in a coordinated manner.

completely matured at the time. The drum stool was used as a type of throne during the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern dynasties and became more exquisite and popular during the Tang Dynasty. The pattern of the drum stool also diversified during the Tang Dynasty.

New patterns also emerged such as the crescent-shaped stool on *Portrait of a Noble Lady and a Servant Waving Fan (Huishan Shinu Tu)* by Zhou Fang, painted during the Tang Dynasty, the round-shape drum stool, the lotus throne and the rattan stool on the Dunhuang Murals. The complicated techniques



including carved lacquer, gold-inlaid lacquer, mother-of-pearl inlay and Chinese lacquer painting make the furniture more beautiful.

The furniture of the Tang Dynasty made great impact on Japanese furniture in its technique, style and decoration. It used ideas from the post-and-beam framing of Chinese architecture and formed the frame structure between the late Tang Dynasty and Five Dynasties (907–960). The simple, firm and graceful structure replaced the chamber structure and became the basic structure of Chinese furniture at the time.

Chinese furniture developed systematically and could be divided into the following types: furniture for sitting and lying, for supporting and placing other articles, for storage and bracket-type furniture. The indoor furnishing and utilization of the unit furniture are shown in the pictures of *Night Revels of Han Xizai by Gu Hongzhong* (Han Xizai was a high-ranking official of the Southern Tang Dynasty), the *Chongping Huiqi Tu*

(which describing the imperial family of the Southern Tang Dynasty playing Weiqi in a room with a painted screen and other furniture) and the *Collating Texts* (Kanshu Tu). According to those pictures, notable families adopted various furniture for banquets such as tables, chairs, long narrow tables, screens, beds, couches and stools while completely giving up the old habit of sitting on the ground.

High furniture matured with each passing day.

It's worth noting that the furniture at that time was beautiful in style and simple in decoration, changing the luxurious preferences from the Tang Dynasty into a simple and unvarnished style, laying the foundation for the development of furniture preferred during the Song Dynasty.

Meeting Guests on Beds

Before the Eastern Han Dynasty, sitting cross-legged on where you were was popular among Chinese. So beds became the life center as receiving guests during that period. Beds were not only used for sleep but also for meeting guests. Such custom was kept till the Qing Dynasty and even the early Republic of China. Today, some Chinese still prefer to receive guests in bedroom or on *kang* (a sleeping platform with heating system). If you pay a visit to a family in the northern part of China in winter, the hospitable host would invite you to sit on the warm *kang*.



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High Furniture Centered with Table, Chair and Stool in the Song and Yuan Dynasties

The Song Dynasty (960–1279), which reigned over a prosperous period both economically and culturally, provided a sound social environment for the vigorous development of the furniture industry. The habit of sitting on chairs became popular and high furniture began to predominate, entering into the lifestyles of ordinary families. Patterns of furniture used centered on the table, chair and stool. The periods of the Song and Yuan dynasties are important stages in the development of Chinese furniture.

Various kinds of high furniture emerged. The basics—bed, couch, desk, table, stool, chest, cabinet, clothes stand, towel stand and basin stand—had been established and improved upon. The table and desk were also subdivided by their use. The *yanji*, a kind of desk that could be assembled into different patterns using



The Qingming Festival by the Riverside by Zhang Zeduan, the Northern Song Dynasty
According to the painting, the high furniture was very popular among the people.





Portraits of the Eighteen Scholars, the Song Dynasty

The furniture in painting was different from the furniture of the Sui and Tang dynasties in structure, shape and style.

seven single pieces, emerged during the Song and Yuan dynasties and became the first piece of assembled furniture in the world.

The furniture of the Song Dynasty is various in style and exquisite in technique. Based on traditional techniques, the furniture that emerged during the Song Dynasty extensively adopted the tenon-and-mortise structure and continuously improved in shape. It became more comfortable and beautiful. Chairs with higher backs and legs emerged, while the protruding end of top rail furred inwards. Chair backs were designed to support the weight of the human body and suit the curve of the body. Some new forms of chairs, including the *Taishi Chair* named after the

official rank, emerged.

The furniture of the Song Dynasty borrowed ideas from the post-and-beam framing of Chinese architecture and established the basic structure centered with post-and-beam framing. The frame structure was refined and simple and put together with linear-type frame parts. Various new ornamental and structural parts including waist (and inset panel between the top and the apron), apron, pillar-shaped strut, giant's arm brace, continuous floor stretcher, cabriole leg and the convex apron and bulging leg ending in a horse-hoof foot and new manufacturing techniques laid a firm foundation for the further development of frame furniture of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

The furniture of the Song Dynasty is elegant and very popular. The furniture is simple in style and graceful in pattern. It



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followed the style of the Five Dynasties and pursued simplicity. The large-scale complicated chasing decoration is rare on the furniture of the Song Dynasty. It only added finishing touches in small scale. The extremely simple structure and the most simple but elegant ornamental style fully display the aesthetic perception of simplicity and pithiness.

The Yuan Dynasty (1206–1368) was relatively short-lived. Unlike the furniture of the Song Dynasty, the furniture of the Yuan Dynasty is grand and vigorous in style and sought luxurious pleasure. The furniture is massive, rough in style and full and shapely as well as varied and heavily decorated. Beds and couches are large. Seats are mainly the stools in the horse-hoof shape. Tables follow the style and pattern of the furniture of the Northern Song and Southern Song dynasties, while high tables become more popular. Moreover, tables with drawers emerged during the Yuan Dynasty. Drawers, which can be used for storage, are one of the important inventions of the period. The convenient invention greatly enhances the function of the furniture.

Ming-style Furniture of Hardwood— Classical Furniture during the Ming Dynasty

Commerce gained momentum during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). An ocean shipping industry emerged and vast quantities of hard wood entered the market, which promoted the development of the furniture industry. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the golden age of Chinese antiques, furniture matured and reached its peak. Ming-style furniture of hardwood and Qing-style furniture represented the height of Chinese classical furniture. Collecting, researching and appreciating Ming

