Introduction

We may conjecture that lacquer, readily available as a natural product to the natives of all the countries of East Asia, was used by them in prehistoric times as a means of providing a durable waterproof covering for such materials as wood, basketry and textiles. Very little evidence is available, however, to support this conjecture. The lack of durability, not of the lacquer, which when set is one of the most durable of all vegetable products, but of the materials to which it was applied, must have caused the destruction of most of the artifacts exposed over the centuries to changeable atmospheric conditions, particularly in tropical and subtropical countries. In China, no evidence, up to the present, seems to have come to light on prehistoric lacquer.\(^1\)

It is not too much to hope that, sooner or later, evidence of prehistoric lacquer in China will emerge. Fortunately, when we come to the early civilization in China, certainly by the fourteenth century B.C. if not earlier, the conditions were much more favourable for the preservation of lacquer. The practice of burying ritual objects in well constructed tombs enabled lacquer artifacts to be kept in more uniform conditions, both in temperature and humidity, than those of a casual burying. Even so, the decomposition of the wooden base to which the lacquer was generally applied was such that there was nothing left but an earth impression covered with a thin skin of lacquer or, worse still, only the skin itself. But, with the use of modern techniques, some ideas can be formulated about the shape and decoration of the original lacquer artifacts.

In the past many objects that were excavated in a fragile state afterwards deteriorated in the hands of ignorant excavators and dealers to such an extent that the most devoted care afterwards could do little to preserve them. Nor were the conditions for conservation so well understood as they are today. It is only in the last twenty or thirty years that steps have been taken in China to ensure that any lacquerwares uncovered were brought to the museum laboratory without suffering any further deterioration and then treated by modern conservation methods so that their permanent preservation was assured.

The development of Chinese lacquer, stretching over a period of more than three thousand years, can be divided into two phases. In the first the Chinese had the whole field of manufacture of lacquer, in any sophisticated form, to themselves. The surviving material from this phase has been obtained entirely from excavations.

\(^1\) In Japan a number of crude lacquered artifacts made round about the beginning of the Christian Era have been excavated recently. These are prehistoric in the Japanese civilization, but are more than a thousand years later than the date of manufacture of the earliest fine lacquerwares in China.
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In the second phase, manufacture spread to the other countries of East Asia, first to Korea and Japan and later to South-East Asia and the Ryukyu Islands. In Japan the first objects of importance were made round about the seventh century A.D. and this date is generally regarded as separating the two phases. The influence of the Chinese on the developing Japanese culture was enormous and it is likely that the earliest lacquer wares in Japan were made by Chinese or Korean craftsmen. But soon a distinctive style had developed in Japan and from then onwards the greater part of Japanese lacquer was independent of outside influence.

In China itself, the splendid lacquer wares of the T'ang dynasty decorated with mother-of-pearl, which had launched the Japanese lacquerers on a highly distinctive style, in which decoration in gold in many techniques was added to decoration in mother-of-pearl, were superseded by the simple undecorated lacquer wares of the Sung dynasty, dependent, like much of the Sung ceramics, on form, colour and texture for their appeal. Beautiful as these are, they are only an interlude in the development of Chinese lacquer, and they were superseded by a bewildering variety of styles and techniques after the conquest of China by the Mongols in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The development of lacquer manufacture in the Yuan dynasty is similar in many ways to that of ceramics. In the latter, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were periods of intense experimentation which led, in the fifteenth century, to the establishment of a few main types of porcelain which persisted during the whole of the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties. The decorative blue and white and polychrome porcelains dominated the ceramic field in the Ming dynasty and it was not until the Ch'ing dynasty that monochrome porcelains, including a large variety of new colours, came back into favour. In lacquer, the dominating type in the Yuan and Ming dynasties was carved lacquer, first in single colours and then in polychrome, and carved lacquer remained popular down to the reign of Ch'ien-lung (1736-95), when vast amounts were made for the court. In addition to carved lacquer, another innovation of the Yuan dynasty was an entirely new style of decoration in mother-of-pearl inlay, with delicate depiction of landscape and flowers based on Sung and Yuan paintings, very different in style and technique from the formal decoration of the T'ang dynasty. Ch'ing-chin decoration, with linear incised designs filled in with gold, was an entirely new type, important in its own right but also because it formed the basis for the so-called filled-in lacquer, a brilliant type of lacquer in many colours which was well established in the fifteenth century and became very popular in the sixteenth. Without this embellishment of colour, the more simple ch'ing-chin lacquer was introduced by the Chinese to Okinawa, where the Ryukyu craftsmen, under Chinese guidance, produced a very individual style of decoration in the fifteenth century which continued down to the nineteenth century.

To these new types of lacquer that originated in the Yuan dynasty a number of others were added later. In the Ming dynasty painted lacquer wares of a type not previously known, often associated with basketry, and inlays with materials other than mother-of-pearl were added. One might have expected that all the possible techniques in lacquer manufacture would have been exploited by the end of the

* But there is increasing evidence that in Korea lacquer objects of distinction were made earlier than this.
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Ming dynasty, but the manufacture of an entirely new type incorporating both carving and painting techniques, the so-called 'Coromandel' lacquer, in the seventeenth century, showed that the Chinese inventive genius was by no means exhausted.

This book deals mainly with the development of the Chinese lacquerwares made from the Yuan dynasty onwards. These have almost all survived above ground, although a few have been excavated in China. A large proportion of the wares, and particularly those belonging to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, have been handed down in Japan, where they have been greatly treasured. One of the most important types, the ch'ing-chin lacquer of the Yuan dynasty, is quite unknown in China today, although no less than nine large sutra boxes in this technique have been handed down in various Japanese temples. The preservation of so many pieces in Japan was hardly known to the Western world until about twenty years ago, when a flood of Chinese lacquerwares of high quality from Japan began to reach Western museums and collectors. We owe a good deal of our understanding of the Japanese scene to Sir John Figgess, who has written a number of papers on various aspects of Chinese lacquer in Japan. A contributing factor to the preservation is the moist climate of Japan. This, and the method of storing the lacquerware in wooden boxes when not in use, have ensured that the pieces have survived in very good state.

Although the subject of this book is the later lacquerwares, it has been necessary to say something about the earlier wares, since the development of many of the types originated long before the Yuan dynasty. This is all the more important since no Western writer has attempted to cover the subject of the earlier lacquerwares in a general way. The most important contributions on these, and then only in special groups, have been made by Japanese scholars such as Umehara, to whom we owe most of the information available on the inscribed and dated lacquerwares of the Han dynasty. But even if any general account had been written it would, in the light of recent excavations in China, have needed considerable revision today.

Indeed, it is probably too early yet for an authoritative account to be written. Such an account would probably need to compare the decorative motifs of early painted lacquer with those of the closely associated painted textiles and inlaid bronzes. It cannot be claimed that the account of the earlier lacquerwares in Chapter 3 of this book is more than a mere sketch of our present knowledge, but it is supplemented by information on individual techniques in other chapters. For example, Chapter 5 deals at length with the origins of carved lacquer, in which the earlier attempts at three-dimensional representation are discussed.

The decision to confine this book mainly to the development of lacquer from the Yuan dynasty onwards still left unsettled the question of whether lacquerwares made outside China should be included. Every student of the later lacquerwares soon discovers that there are many pieces that show strong Chinese characteristics but cannot be positively attributed to China. Until recently the only lacquerwares attributed to the Ryukyu Islands were crude wares in Japanese style not considered

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\(^4\) See Bibliography, Refs. E23, E26 and E31.
\(^4\) Umehara Sueji, Shina Kandi Jinmei Shikki Zutsu, Kyoto, 1943.
\(^4\) The section in W. Willetts, Chinese Art, Vol. 1, 1958, dealing with lacquer and silk in the Han dynasty, is a very good summary for its date.
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sufficiently notable to be ascribed to Japan. We know that there are many pieces of
fine quality made in the Islands that have in the past been attributed either to China
or Japan. The amount of lacquer that has survived in South-East Asia is very small,
and most of it is late, but the development of this from its undoubted Chinese origin
needs study. Finally, the development of Korean mother-of-pearl lacquer, with its
association with China on the one hand and Japan on the other, presents fascinating
problems which demand careful scrutiny. It seemed essential therefore that some
attempt should be made to study all the lacquewares showing Chinese influence
with a view to determining their real provenance. On the other hand, by far the
greater part of Japanese lacquer pursued its independent existence and is therefore
outside the scope of this book. Writers on Japanese lacquer have generally ignored
the wares made in Japan that show strong Chinese influence. Thus any attempt to
classify these lacquewares is breaking new ground and is fraught with considerable
uncertainty. The discussion of these has proved to be the most difficult part of the
book.

The variety and complexity of the lacquewares from the Yuan dynasty onwards
has made it desirable to adopt a treatment based on techniques. Thus individual
chapters, each dealing with a particular technique, are devoted to such subjects as
carved lacquer, lacquer inlaid with mother-of-pearl and other materials, girt-incised
lacquer (ch’i-ang-chin) and painted lacquer. In these chapters the pieces discussed
may range from country to country. Under this arrangement there has been of
necessity a certain amount of repetition from chapter to chapter. This however has
the compensation that the reader can consult the separate chapters on particular
types without the need to refer to the rest of the book.

There is an extensive Chinese literature on lacquer which has demanded much
study. Some of it is of great importance, but much of it is of little value, although in
the past it has gained a high reputation among Chinese scholars. One objective has
been to sort out the reliable from the unreliable accounts, thus enabling the student
to concentrate on the relatively few important works. The literature is discussed in
Chapter 4 and it is supplemented in the Chinese Bibliography (with the items listed
under letter C), which gives full reference to Chinese works, including the relevant
Chinese characters, so that the student who wishes to go into any aspect of lacquer
detail is given enough information to enable him to do so. By this arrangement
the need for Chinese characters in the rest of the book has been avoided except in a
few places. As for Chinese terms, in Romanized form, these are so complex and
often so vague that their use has been reduced to a minimum. The use of Japanese
terms to describe types of Chinese lacquer is still less desirable, although the term
guri for carved marbled lacquer is so well established that its use in a Chinese con-
text is difficult to avoid. The extensive literature in European languages is listed in
the Bibliography under letter E. This has enabled the references in the text and
footnotes to be kept as short as possible, so that the general reader can follow the
text more easily. The specialist reader can follow up the argument, particularly in
the Chinese references, at some length. References to the Japanese literature are
given throughout the text.

* The best account of Japanese lacquer by any Western writer is that of Beatrix von
Ragué (Ref. E30), but this barely touches the pieces made under Chinese influence.
CHAPTER 2

The Nature of Lacquer and the Distribution of Lacquer Trees in East Asia

The term 'lacquer', which so spelt seems first to have occurred in English in 1697, is used today to describe many types of protective covering applied to wood, fabric, metal and other materials. The word 'lac' is of Hindustani origin and its first use in English, probably derived from the Portuguese word *laca*, occurred in 1553. At this time it was used to describe a material produced from certain Indian and Indo-Chinese trees by the insect *Coccus lacca*, which pierced the bark and exuded a dark red gum which was collected as a solid resin from the twigs of the tree. In the eighteenth century the word 'shellac' was used to describe layers of the dried material prepared for commercial use and this is the term used to describe the material today.

One of the earliest uses of this 'lacquer' was to dye silk a crimson colour and it was sent to China from Annam for this purpose during the T'ang dynasty. It was also used as an adhesive by the T'ang jewellers and in the manufacture of cosmetic rouge. There is no evidence that it was ever used in China to produce a covering for wood or any other material, as it was in Europe for the decoration of furniture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, the Chinese had evolved, long before the Christian era, a far more durable material for this purpose. It is this lacquer that forms the subject of this book.

The lacquer of the East Asian countries, including Vietnam (Annam and Tongking), Formosa and the Ryukyu Islands, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma as well as the major countries China, Japan and Korea, is derived from the sap of a lacquer tree. There are many species of lacquer tree, by far the most important being *Rhus verniciflua*, a native of China which is said traditionally to have been transplanted first to Korea and then to Japan. The date at which it reached Japan has been variously stated to be from the third to the seventh century A.D. I have been unable to find any positive evidence to support this tradition except that of Rein whose account in his *Industries of Japan* was summarized long ago by Bushell. Rein stated that *Rhus verniciflua* has not been found growing wild in Japan and then goes on to say that 'we may be safe in concluding that the lacquer art and probably the lacquer tree with it became known to the Japanese from their western neighbours

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1 Sometimes known as *Laccafer lacca* or *Carteria lacca*.
3 Previously known as *Rhus vernicifera*, *Rhus verniciflua* is the correct botanical name.
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just after the commencement of the third century, or after their first expedition to Korea.\footnote{Beatrix von Raguë, \textit{Geschichte der Japanischen Lackkunst}, 1967, pp. 1–2.}

The comparatively recent excavation of simple lacquer artifacts in Japan, which have been dated to prehistoric times, between the third century B.C. and the fourth century A.D., raises problems in connection with the tradition of importation to Japan of \textit{Rhus verniciflua}. Dr. von Raguë has assumed that the results of the excavations conflict with the tradition.\footnote{T. Motoyama, \textit{Shippo Nippon Shokubutsu Zukan} (New Illustrated Flora of Japan), 1964 (in Japanese).} But this ignores the fact that there are indigenous species of lacquer trees that could have been used for the manufacture of the prehistoric artifacts. There are nine species of the \textit{Rhus} family that grow in Japan and at least three of them are suitable for the manufacture of lacquerwares.\footnote{T. Hedley Barry, \textit{Natural Varnish Resins}, 1932.} These are \textit{Rhus succedanea}, \textit{Rhus ambigua} (or \textit{orientalis}) and \textit{Rhus trichocarpa}. The first grows in South-East Asia as well as Japan and the Ryukyu Islands and provides the standard material for the manufacture of the Annamese lacquerwares today. The second grows in Formosa and the Ryukyu Islands as well as Japan and is said to have been used for the manufacture of lacquer in Formosa.\footnote{But we cannot rule out the possibility that lacquerwares were made in the extreme south of China from \textit{Rhus succedanea}, the species used for the Annamese wares.} The third grows in China, Korea and Japan and Dr. Makino has suggested that it may have grown in Neolithic times in North Japan, where most of the prehistoric wares were excavated.\footnote{Beatrix von Raguë, \textit{Geschichte der Japanischen Lackkunst}, 1967, pp. 1–2.} It can be seen from all this that the composition of the artifacts and the reliability of the Japanese tradition are both uncertain. In the absence of chemical examination of the prehistoric artifacts, which would identify the molecular structure of the lacquer and hence the species of lacquer tree, a problem of great difficulty, we would have to rely on the views of botanists on the various indigenous lacquer trees and would need to have information on the climatic conditions in North Japan some three thousand years ago, which may have been very different from those pertaining today. It seems, however, to be firmly established that all the Japanese lacquer wares of historic times were made from \textit{Rhus verniciflua}, as were all the Chinese and Korean wares.\footnote{T. Motoyama, \textit{Shippo Nippon Shokubutsu Zukan} (New Illustrated Flora of Japan), 1964 (in Japanese).}

Other species known to have been used for the manufacture of lacquer are \textit{Melanorrhoea laccafera} and \textit{Melanorrhoea usitata}, both of which are natives of South-East Asia. The former is used in Cambodia and the latter in Burma and Thailand for the manufacture of lacquerwares today.

The chemical properties of the raw lacquer obtained from trees of different species differ a good deal and they may affect the setting qualities to some extent, so that the techniques needed to deal with the different types may vary from country to country. But broadly the methods adopted in China to collect, purify and store the raw lacquer from \textit{Rhus verniciflua} are similar to those used in other countries for lacquer from trees of different species. The Chinese lacquer tree grows wild over a large area of China today up to altitudes of five hundred metres and there is evidence that at one time it grew over a still larger area. There is an extensive Chinese literature on the cultivation of the lacquer tree and the methods of extracting and
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preserving the raw material, but the most informative account available to the Western reader is that given by the Jesuit priest Père d'Incarrville, who lived in Peking for seventeen years and sent a long account on lacquer to the Academy of Sciences in Paris just before his death in 1757. The paper was published in 1760. D'Incarrville was a distinguished botanist and his descriptions, from observations at first hand, are clear and precise. Only when he is dealing with details of manufacture, at second hand, do we detect some uncertainties in his account.

A general study of the Chinese literature on lacquer and the methods of extracting and preserving it suggests that the methods of the eighteenth century described in detail by d'Incarrville agree substantially with those used in China from early times. It seems likely that at first lacquer was collected from wild trees but cultivation must have been introduced well back in the first millennium B.C. There is a description of the cultivation of lacquer trees in the Chi min yao shu, written by Chia Ssu-hsieh under the Northern Wei (C. A.D. 540), at a time when attempts were being made to reintroduce lacquer trees into parts of Honan where they had formerly flourished.

The raw lacquer is tapped by cutting notches in the bark of the tree and placing small containers to receive the viscous liquid, or latex, that trickles from the cuts. When it first exudes from the tree it is creamy-grey in colour, but on exposure to light and warmth it turns dark brown and later still dull black. After being strained to remove solid particles the latex is generally stored in air-tight containers until it is required for use. Under suitable conditions the latex can be preserved without change for several years. Some lacquer of inferior quality is obtained by boiling small branches of the tree in water. The quality of the lacquer varies according to the district in which the tree is grown, the time of year at which tapping takes place and other factors. Lacquer was always a valuable product and to cke it out the best grades were often adulterated by the addition of other materials such as t'ung oil, oil of tea (derived from the fruit of a variety of tea-tree) and pig's gall. For special types of lacquer the material had to be of high quality and then little adulteration was added; for others a considerable amount of adulterant was permissible.

In its raw state lacquer is poisonous to people handling it, causing severe inflammation of the skin. The component that produces this dermatitis is, in the lacquer

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11 See Soame Jenyns, 'Chinese lacquer', Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society, 1939-40, for further particulars of early cultivation of lacquer trees in China. See also William Willetts, Chinese Art, I, 1958, pp. 188-93 for information on the distribution of the lacquer tree and lacquer factories during the Han dynasty.

12 The techniques adopted in Japan differed from those in China in some details. See note 4 above for information on Japanese techniques.

13 But it should be noted that some of the added materials are said to improve the lacquer for specific purposes. According to the Hsiu shih lu (Ref. C7, Section 81), t'ung oil improves the colour of all kinds of lacquer except black. T'ung oil and other additives may also improve the setting qualities.
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derived from *Rhus verniciflua*, urushiol. Much study has been given by research
chemists to this and allied components (laccols) derived from various species of
lacquer tree, as well as from poison ivy and some kinds of mushroom, which have
similar properties. The Chinese found out at an early date that the tissues of crabs
and shellfish provided a good antidote to the poisoning and there are many refer-
ences in Chinese literature to the cures affected. Crab tissues were also believed to
cure the urushiol allergy and to enable traces of lacquer to be readily removed from
the skin. Sinologists were inclined to regard the Chinese accounts of cures as old
wives’ tales until Needham and his colleagues established the sound scientific
basis of the Chinese records.\(^\text{14}\)

Lacquer, when applied in the form of thin layers to a material such as wood or
fabric, sets to form a hard glossy surface that is very durable. It is suitable for
domestic vessels, being impervious to liquids and unaffected by the temperatures
needed for serving hot foods and liquids. Until recently it was used extensively for
domestic purposes in China and Japan, and it has only partially been superseded
during the last thirty years by the cheaper plastics that have become available. It is
still the usual surface for laboratory benches in East Asia, because of its resistance
to strong acids.

The chemical process by which lacquer, a poisonous viscous liquid, is changed
to a harmless solid is a complex one. The process is one of polymerization, such as
occurs in the manufacture of plastics. Indeed the process has been described as ‘the
most ancient industrial plastic known to man’.\(^\text{15}\) An enormous amount of research
has been devoted to the understanding of the process, in Japan, China and Indo-
China, as well as many European countries and the United States, but in spite of
this it cannot be claimed that all the factors influencing the setting qualities of
lacquer have been identified.\(^\text{16}\) The simplified description given below of what
actually happens is necessarily sketchy.

The main constituents responsible for the polymerization of Chinese and
Japanese lacquer are urushiol,\(^\text{17}\) the component that causes dermatitis, and the
enzyme laccase. The chemical action that takes place differs from that of an
ordinary plastic in that the presence of oxygen is essential. Experiments show that
lacquer will not set in an atmosphere of nitrogen or carbon dioxide. The degree of
humidity of the atmosphere also has to be between certain limits and we have the
state of affairs, curious to the casual observer, that setting will not take place if the
conditions are too dry.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^\text{14}\) Ts’ao T’ien-ch’in, Ho Ping-yü and Joseph Needham, ‘An early mediaeval Chinese

\(^\text{15}\) Note 14 above.

\(^\text{16}\) Seventy-eight references to scientific work on lacquer have been recorded by Dr.
Victor A. Moss in an unpublished paper, and these could be extended. A few of the more
important references are given in the Bibliography.

\(^\text{17}\) In *Rhus succedanea* the analogous compound is laccol, in *Melanorrhoea usitata* it is
thitsiol and in *Melanorrhoea lacicera* it is moreacol.

\(^\text{18}\) An essential part of the chemical process is the presence of minute amounts of copper
in the laccase, one of a group of copper-containing enzymes which are responsible for
oxidation in plants and animals. At one time it was thought that the active element was
manganese. Only extensive research by a number of chemists has finally settled this point.
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The need for oxygen to enable polymerization to take place imposes an important limitation on the method of application of lacquer. Indeed, it may be said to dictate the whole of the manufacturing process of carved lacquer. The oxygen comes from the air and it is not able to penetrate far into the layer, so that the layer has to be very thin if the lacquer is to set properly. If the layer is too thick a skin forms on the outside and the inside remains liquid. There is then no remedy but to remove the layer and start afresh. The maximum thickness that can be successfully applied is influenced by a number of factors, such as the quality of the lacquer and the amount and composition of solid matter, such as ash and pigment, in suspension. The individual layers of carved lacquer made in the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties are always very thin. Measurements of sections of Ming lacquer show that the thickness of individual layers is of the order of 0.03 mm or less. As there are between one and two hundred layers in a fine carved piece of this period, it can be seen that the labour involved in its construction, even before it was passed to the carver, was very great.

The difficulties in getting the lacquer to set can be overcome by the addition to the lacquer of large amounts of ash and the Chinese seem to have been familiar with this technique at least as far back as the third century B.C. From then onwards a few examples of this lacquer composition, generally moulded to shape, have survived, but it was not until the fourteenth century that it was recorded as a well-known type of lacquer. It is described in the Ko-ku yao-lun of 1388 by the term tui-hung, 'piled-up red' and scorned as a cheap substitute for carved red lacquer. A large number of pieces must have been made at this time, but none of them have so far come to light. Doubtless they were not sufficiently robust to withstand the wear and tear to which they were subjected. There are however a number of pieces known today which belong to the Ch'ing dynasty.

The development of the moulded lacquerwares is described fully in Chapter 5. All we need to consider here is why this type of lacquer sets in thick layers while pure lacquer with relatively little pigment does not. No experimental work has been done on this subject, but it is probable that the ash added to the former acts as a catalyst to provide free radical polymerization of the lacquer. This raises the question as to how far the type of ash affects the setting and whether the setting qualities vary for lacquer trees of different species. It may be significant that the best examples of moulded decoration appear to have come from Burma, where a type of moulded black lacquer, afterwards gilt, is made from the lacquer derived from Melanorrhoea usitata and a vegetable ash from paddy husk. The lacquer is said to resemble ebony, but to be superior to wood in that it has no grain.

But even the best moulded lacquer falls far short in quality of the material needed for carving to the standards laid down by Chinese craftsmen. The gritty ash

19 D'Incaville gives a clear account of the difficulties experienced by the eighteenth-century lacquerers when the layers of lacquer did not set (note 10 above).
20 Ref. E32, p. 147.
21 Tui-hung is also described in the Hsin shih lu, Ref. C7, Section 125.
22 A. P. Morris, 'Lacquer ware industry of Burma', Journal of the Burma Research Society, Vol. IX, 1919, p. 10. It should be noted that the lacquer tree in Burma has different properties from that used in Chinese lacquer and its qualities may have had something to do with the hardness of the resulting material.
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embedded in the tai-hung lacquer would clearly render it unsuitable for precision carving. To the Chinese and later the Japanese craftsmen the idea of dispensing with the laborious process of building up, layer by layer, the lacquer to be used for carving must have been ever present and many attempts must have been made to produce a suitable material which could be applied in a single coat. In spite of these attempts no substitute has ever been found and the laborious method first brought to perfection in the fourteenth century has continued to be used down to modern times.\textsuperscript{18}

The widespread distribution of lacquer trees in East Asia has already been stressed. In China \textit{Rhus verniciflua} grew over almost the whole of the country south of the Yellow River, extending from the east coast to Kansu, Szechwan and Yunnan in the west. The last province in particular had a traditional reputation for its fine lacquerwares. There is evidence from the Chinese literature that the lacquer tree grew in almost every province in China except for a few northerly ones, and that lacquerwares were made in many widely scattered districts. But the identification of lacquerwares made in particular districts is at present very difficult. In the course of this book however attempts will be made to identify some of the wares.

The possibility that lacquerwares made from \textit{Rhus succedanea} may have been produced in South China on the borders with Annam has already been mentioned. Indeed, it is likely that the wares were introduced to other countries of South-East Asia from the neighbouring provinces of China, such as Yunnan, Kwangsi and Kuangtung. There is a tradition in Burma that lacquer manufacture was introduced from Yunnan. Thus we should regard the manufacture of lacquerware in the mainland of East Asia as taking place not in a few main centres, but in widely scattered districts over the whole of China and South-East Asia.

\textsuperscript{18} In the National Palace Museum, Taiwan, copies of Ming carved lacquerwares are being made today in moulded plastic. They are very inferior, and readily distinguished from the genuine wares.