



CHINESE EXPORT SILKS FOR THE WEST

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As both dealers and collectors for many years, Alastair Gibson & I have found we are both drawn to the aesthetic appeal and exceptional craftsmanship of Chinese export embroidered textiles.

It was while having a very nice lunch with John & Eleanor Vollmer, that by coincidence, photographs arrived on my phone enabling us to buy possibly the most interesting pieces in this field to have come on the market for some years. Simultaneously we realised we had collated the most exceptional group of Chinese silks, and hence, with the encouragement from John, decided to produce a catalogue on the subject.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank John Vollmer for the fascinating and illuminating introduction he has kindly written. Additionally we would also like to thank Alan Kennedy, for his detailed description of pieces I and II.

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Fig 1: Ptolemy World Map taken from the first printed edition, 1472, the Rome edition 1508.

Chinese Export Silks for the West by John E. Vollmer

Western maps of the late medieval period relied on far older descriptions contained in Ptolemy's *Geography* written in Alexandrian Egypt during the second century CE. Based on Ptolemy (Fig. 1), the easternmost country in Asia is *Serica regio*, the "Land of Silk." Translated from the Latin adoption of a Greek term, *serikos* (silken), this was the territory of the *Seres*, the people whom the Greeks identified as the makers of silk.

Although ancient Greek literature rarely mentioned silk, the mid-fifth century BCE sculptures on the Parthenon depicting clinging, revealing garments and Aristophanes's contemporary descriptions of women's fashions in his comedy *Lysistrata* strongly suggest these garment are evidence for Chinese silk in the West. Aristophanes identified these garments as "Amorgian chitons," named for the Cyclades island of Amorgos, the Athenian port of entry for international trade. This regional fashion descriptor was echoed five hundred years later when Romans used the term "dresses of Cos" (*vestes Coae*) to describe the nearly transparent silk garments that scandalized Seneca the Younger in the first century CE.

Over the centuries matters involving "silk" and "China," as well as "trade," have profoundly shaped Western ideas about Asia. The Chinese export silk textiles gathered for this catalogue address the continuing allure of the East that has captured Western imagination since ancient times. Despite the fact that each of these silk textile types could have been produced locally, each was specifically designed and manufactured to meet the expectations of foreign consumers. Nonetheless, the identifier for these silk trade goods as "Chinese" persists as an essential and inextricable aspect of their renown.

Nearly sixteen hundred years separate the "dresses of Cos" from the dazzling Chinese silk embroideries that appeared in the port of Lisbon.

Transported by Portuguese merchants from Macau near the port of Guangzhou (Canton), the latter were the direct precursors of the works in this catalogue. During that time, while the allure of China's silk seldom waned in the West, how such goods were transported to the West, whether by camel or by ship, were rarely reliable.

Control of land trade routes and shipping lanes was contested by rival states, resulting in frequent wars and restraint of trade. Similarly, sources of supply for silk textiles were similarly erratic.

For more than four millennia China had maintained a monopoly on silk production, carefully guarding a technology called sericulture. Sericulture required the successful breeding and feeding of millions of silk moths as an annual "crop," harvesting their cocoons, stifling the moth's living chrysalis within each cocoon, and unreeling (unwinding) the single continuous silk filament from which each cocoon was formed, and combining these filaments as needed to form threads strong enough for weaving and sewing. Early fourth century CE Chinese immigrants to Korea had introduced sericulture to that peninsula, and from there, the secrets of this technology eventually spread to Japan. The knowledge of sericulture took longer to move westward, arriving in the oases of the Tarim Basin in the early fifth century CE, coinciding with a period of great disunity in China. Europe's acquisition of silk weaving and sericulture occurred during the reign of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I (ca. 482-565), who dispatched monks as emissaries to China in order to smuggle out silkworm eggs concealed in stalks of bamboo. Perhaps more importantly, the monks returned with several Chinese servants who were skilled practitioners of sericulture.

The Mongol unification of Eurasia during the thirteenth century diminished the turbulence of conflicting interests along the land routes and assured greater security for long distance trade. Although overland trans-Asian trade was conducted almost entirely on foot, the domestication of the Bactrian camel, begun during the third millennium BCE, greatly increased the volume of goods that could be transported (up to 500 pounds per animal). Camels made long distance commerce feasible, although most camel caravans traversed only relatively short relay stages of the entire route, with their goods exchanged and cargoes reconfigured many times along the way. Camels had to be unloaded, fed and rested at the end of each day before being reloaded for the next day's trek.

Farther south, sailing ships crossing the Indian Ocean between South Asia and the Islamic Caliphate transported significantly larger

cargoes. A ninth-century CE Arab dhow might carry cargo weighing 40 to 60 tons, far more than overland camel caravans could handle; a seventeenth-century Portuguese carrack could carry up to 250 tons. Maritime routes also had direct access to the most profitable of international commodities: spices. From the seventh century, maritime trade was largely controlled by the Buddhist Srivijaya Empire, which dominated the Malay Archipelago's access to the spices, exotic woods, metals and gemstones of Southeast Asia and the textiles and porcelains of China. Arab Muslim traders controlled the Indian Ocean routes to the West, with access to tea, cotton, pearls and pepper.

Pioneering a new route around Africa to avoid Muslim duties and interference, well-armed Portuguese merchant ships reached South Asian ports via the Indian Ocean in 1497, and the coast of southern China in 1513, marking the beginning of international maritime trade organized on a truly global scale. Portuguese, Spanish and other European powers quickly gained control of the Indian and western Pacific international shipping lanes, establishing colonial outposts to secure sources of supply and defend their access to East Asian ports.

The first Chinese silk textiles arrived directly in Lisbon in 1518. These were the remnants of goods that had been used to barter for other valuable merchandise within the intra-Asian trade. They included piece goods and entire bolts of plain and figured silks. Among the most celebrated were embroidered textiles that exhibited characteristic late Ming dynasty naturalistic floral and faunal ornament. The Portuguese Catholic Church and the royal court enthusiastically embraced them, incorporating them into public displays as demonstration of Portugal's cultural, economic and political ascendancy on a global scale. They also communicated the new global ambitions of the Catholic Church and its Jesuit missions to Asia.

By the end of the sixteenth century colonies in Goa, Malacca, Macau and Nagasaki supported Portugal's dominance. Portuguese merchants took over the intra-Asian trade established by the Arabs, often referred to as "three-corner trade." Bullion was exchanged in India for cottons and silks, textiles in turn traded for spices in the Moluccas, Sumatra and Malaysia; these organic commodities

were destined for markets in the Persian Gulf and points west. By the late sixteenth century intra-Asian trade was linked directly to Europe's markets. Until the early seventeenth century Portugal controlled the only all-water route to Asia, carrying highly coveted spices, porcelains and silks to Lisbon for distribution to eager consumers across Europe.

By 1570 Spain had established its own direct silk trade with China via the port of Manila in the Philippines, which was largely financed by the gold and other commodities produced in Spain's New World empire. Silk yarns and finished silks produced in China were transported from Canton to Manila by Chinese vessels. Spanish galleons transported these goods to the Mexican colonial port of Acapulco. The goods were then transported overland where more galleons awaited at the port of Veracruz in the Caribbean for the voyage across the Atlantic to Cadiz.



The Dutch East India Company, founded in 1597, challenged Portugal's dominance by establishing an outpost in Taiwan. During the seventeenth century, Danish and English merchants also founded chartered trading companies to compete in the lucrative Asian trade. French, Swedish and Prussian companies followed these enterprises, and by the end of the eighteenth century American traders were also active in Chinese ports.

With participation in the three-corner trade came the realization that Asian textiles could be manufactured to a variety of specifications that would satisfy the demands of various groups within regional markets. European merchants and company directors were quick to capitalize on the potential of fabrics as commodities for the West. Soon Chinese textiles destined for Lisbon or Cadiz were designed specifically for Western uses and tastes. These included objects embroidered to shape, such as the liturgical vestments of chasuble, maniple and stole (see nos. 3 and 4) or copies of Western tapestries such as the three early seventeenth century embroidered hangings depicting the *Story of Troy*, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. New design parameters were developed for export textiles that conformed with Western consumer demands, including fashionable colours, patterns and familiar motifs that appealed to their purchasers.

Rectangular panels suitable for bedcovers or hangings were configured with borders enclosing a field with a central medallion, a format familiar from imports of Near Eastern carpets since the fourteenth century. In the West this format retained a certain Eastern exoticism. Motifs such as coats of arms or the crowned double-headed eagle, long associated with the Habsburg dynasty, can be found on Asian textiles used throughout the Spanish empire, and in Portugal, which was under the Habsburg rule between 1580 and 1640. This double eagle motif was also used by the Spanish colonial Order of Saint Augustine, as a reference to the sacred heart pierced by an arrow (see no. 22).

Once set, these design schemes for Chinese export embroideries endured for the next two and a half centuries. The proliferation of Chinese goods and their spread from aristocratic to middle class clients is well represented by the array of coverlets illustrated in this catalogue. The background colours and elements of the overall design would conform to the evolving fashionable tastes of their intended markets over time. For example, the fringes that often trimmed these pieces became more elaborate as the nineteenth century progressed, keeping pace with European mass marketing of increasingly ornate trimmings for furnishings and interiors (see nos. 16 and 17).

Custom orders such as the early eighteenth century embroidered hanging, with its monumental trompe l'oeil architectural elements framing a "painting" (see no. 1), would have required a fully developed plan or cartoon, that most likely was prepared in Europe. The client may well have waited two or three trade cycles of some fourteen to eighteen months for the delivery. Such highly individualized items were risky commodities that might date or fail to please, whereas "perennial favorites," such as coverlets would always find buyers.

Many of the textiles in this collection dating from the second half of the eighteenth century reveal complex interactions among markets and production centers and the growing sophistication of Western consumers. The hanging's depiction of a flowering tree growing out of a rockery, with a pair of pheasants and a hanging cage with birds, imitates an Indian painted and resist-dyed coverlet made for the European or American export markets. The source of the flowering tree design has been demonstrated to be a European (probably British) invention. The designs and possibly full cartoons were supplied to Indian cotton painters along the northern section of India's east, or Coromandel, coast. It is obvious that the same type of cartoons were also provided to southern Chinese embroiders, possibly as a way of circumventing prohibitions of imported Indian textiles that had been enacted to protect the English and French textile industries.

Two banyans, a type of male dressing gown popular in Europe since the early eighteenth century, are also decorated with a version of the exotic flowering tree, this time as seen through the lens of late Indian Mughal designs (see no. 2), quite possibly inspired by Indian embroidery. Although never used, these kimono-like wrappers were embroidered to shape on a continuous length of cloth. A Western tailor would then cut out the pieces and assembled them to fit the customer. The survival of such unmade garments is extremely rare.

Another class of Chinese export textiles using painted, instead of embroidered, decorations, was extremely popular in Britain and northern Europe during the late eighteenth century. Worked on silk woven fabrics, their designs generally conform to the exotic flora as seen on other period Indian and Chinese export textiles.

The motifs on most Chinese painted silks have black outlines, which are in fact tarnished fine silver pigments, and when new probably once created a shimmering effect similar to contemporary gilded and silvered export chintzes from India. The painted export silk used for a chasuble, stole and maniple (see no. 3) was recycled from fabric initially produced as yardage for a 1780s dress with columns of twining flowering branches against a plain ground.

Two damask panels (see no. 19) reveal another aspect of the charms of export textile design. When faced with an order for large-scale, single color silk damask with a bisymmetrical floral pattern probably intended for Western use as a wall covering, the inventive Chinese weaving workshop improvised by depicting lotus leaves and other locally familiar floral motifs already in their repertoire.

With the decline of Iberian maritime power, the Dutch, and later British, trade companies assumed control of Asian exports trade. By the late seventeenth century Amsterdam was a major European entrepôt for Chinese silk, although spices and other commodities still held a larger market share. In contrast, silk held greater economic importance in London until the mid-eighteenth century. However, the bulk of British silk imports arrived as raw silk to be processed by Britain's maturing silk-weaving industry. As a consequence, the price of Chinese silk yarns increased rapidly while the demand for finished export silk textile products declined. By the mid-eighteenth century, although Chinese silk merchants continued to prosper, Chinese weavers and others involved in silk textile production were adversely affected, leading to imperial-sanctioned restrictions on spun silk and reeled silk thread exports. By 1757 the imperial government ordered that Canton (Guangzhou) would be the only port open to foreign commerce.

As their profits declined, the Dutch East India Company stopped shipping silk altogether in 1820s; the English East Indian Company followed suit in the 1830s, leaving the silk exports to private traders. The British-led Opium War of 1842 resulted in the opening of the five "treaty ports" in the late 1840s: Shanghai, Canton, Ningbo, Fuzhou, and Xiamen. As expanded access to Chinese silk exports began to surge Shanghai supplanted the old port of Canton as the major supplier of export silks.

In the mid-nineteenth century, a fungal infection of European silkworm larvae ruined European sericulture. Chinese silk textiles as well as reeled silk and unprocessed cocoons helped meet the market demands of European silk mills. Following the American Civil War, the United States became a major market for Chinese silk. Attempts to develop an American sericulture industry were not successful. In the absence of a reliable domestic supply of silk yarns, the United States was forced to import virtually all of the silk yarns it required.

This rise in American demand for silk yarns led to a dramatic upsurge in Chinese exports during the second half of the nineteenth century. Canton remained the second most important port in the silk export trade. Expanded opportunities for foreign trade stimulated the spread of sericulture across the Canton delta. During the 1880s, Canton's silk industry adapted new technologies from the West, and machine-reeled silk came to dominate exports. But, by the end of the nineteenth century, China's share of the world silk market had been greatly reduced by vigorously expanding competition from Japanese silk industries. China would remain unable to surmount the difficulties that arose from the industry's rapid transformation on a global scale until the last quarter of the twentieth century.

After the long heyday of Chinese export embroidered silk textiles, the early twentieth century trade only survived in a much-reduced form, concentrated on the fringed and colorfully embroidered "Manila shawls" that became a fashion trend during the 1920s. Nevertheless, this collection of Chinese export textiles, documenting two centuries of production, provides a testament to a millennium of international trade and transcultural collaborations. The silks seen here demonstrate many ways in which the world has been, and continues to be, connected by the circulation of goods and commodities.

Selected further reading

Allsen, Thomas T., *Commodity and exchange in the Mongol empire: a cultural history of Islamic textiles*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Ferreira, Maria João Pacheco, "Chinese textiles for Portuguese Tastes," in Amelia Peck, ed., *Interwoven Globe. The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013, pp. 46-55.

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Stockwell, Foster, *Westerners in China: a history of exploration and trade, ancient times through the present*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Publishers, 2003,

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Manton de Manila by Juan Luna, circa 1880

1) Monumental Chinese embroidered hanging made for europe

Embroidery on silk in silk, silver and gold threads

extensive brushwork in ink and colours

First half of the 18th century

356 x 224 cm. (140 x 88 inches)

Provenance: Private collection, Paris

This monumental embroidery, measuring over 3.5 meters in height, was perhaps commissioned in China as a hanging intended for a European palace, chateau or country house, or may actually have been used in the Yuanmingyuan (commonly known as the Summer Palace), a palace compound outside of Beijing that was known for its European-influenced architecture. It is architectural both in scale and in its overall design, and may have been one of a set of similar wall hangings, none of which, other than the current example, have yet to be identified. The quality of the materials employed, and the excellence of the execution of the embroidery are befitting of a luxury product of the 18th century.

The two columns at either side of the textile, as well as the pediment at the bottom and the archway between the columns, relate to molded plasterwork and wood-carved wall décor found in fashionable 18th century European interiors, as well as in earlier Renaissance and Baroque design. Within these architectural-like elements are design motifs that are of either European or Chinese origin. At the midpoint within the columns are two standing musicians wearing robes and footwear that recall the dress of Classical antiquity. One musician plays a flute, and the other a tambourine. The musicians are beneath a canopy in Chinoiserie style dripping with hanging crystals and orbs. Further Europeanized motifs within the columns include seashells, ribbons and scrolling and interlacing vegetal motifs that are typical of the Rococo style. It is interesting to note the extensive use of ink drawing on many of the embroidered motifs in the border.

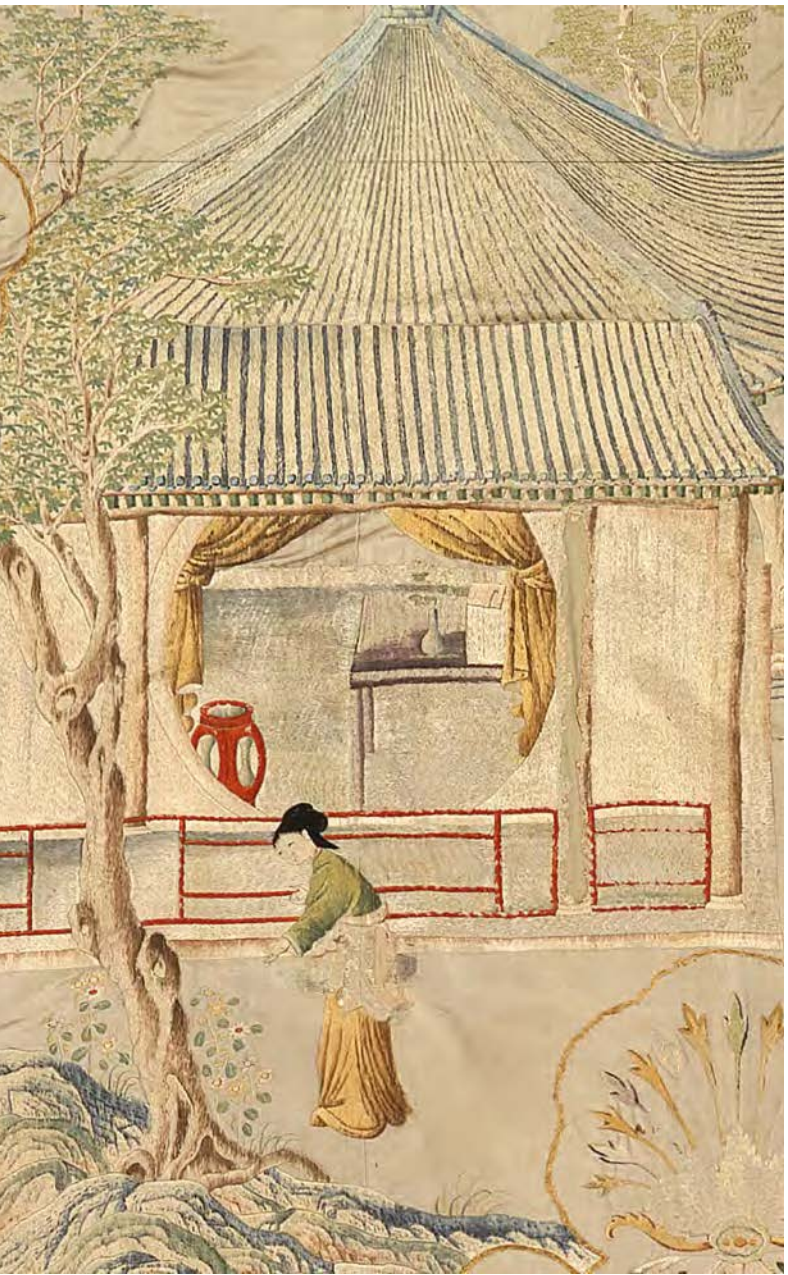
The inked detailing has been used for the so-called 'egg and dart' pattern in the cartouches framing the musicians, for a series of arched lines along the tops of the canopies, and for the patterning of the hanging orbs. There are also ink-darkened areas on lighter-coloured embroidered motifs, such

as the ribbons above the canopies, all for the intent of creating a three-dimensional effect, borrowing from the European chiaroscuro technique.

Other European motifs appear in the pediment, including two grotesque heads, recalling the earlier Renaissance and Baroque periods. Within the cartouche of the pediment, embroidered on a lighter-colored silk ground, are two mythic Chinese beasts in a Chinese-style landscape setting. On the left is a xiezhai, a lion-like creature with one horn, while the two-horned beast with hooves can be identified as a qilin. The tree, rocks and grasses that surround the creatures are typical of traditional Chinese landscapes, and provide a counterpoint to the Europeanized sinuous scrolling vegetation of the columns and pediment.

The mix of European and Chinese design motifs is even more pronounced in the central panel of the hanging. Framed between the columns, and embroidered on a somewhat lighter-coloured satin-weave silk ground, the central panel can be seen as a doorway or window providing a view of a scene lifted from traditional Chinese painting. In keeping with the hybrid nature of the textile, the Chinese figures, a man, woman and a child, along with their dwelling and its furnishings, as well as the landscape setting, are all rendered in a manner that makes use of European pictorial techniques, such as perspective and chiaroscuro. The chiaroscuro effect that is seen throughout the textile is created by ink brushwork in various colours (black, green and blue) that have been added over the surface of many of the embroidered motifs, including the figures, the mountains, the trees and the pavilions.

A parallel to the hybrid juxtaposition of a Chinese scene within a European style archway flanked by columns can be seen in a portrait of Hongyan, Prince Guo (1733-1765) in the collection of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington, D.C. (1) In the portrait Hongyan is seated



while dressed in an informal Chinese robe, while wearing the typical hat and necklace of a court official. In the background framing the prince is a European-style archway supported by columns, such as might have existed in the Yuanmingyuan, destroyed in 1860, but known through many extant engravings and paintings. An 18th century painting that may have been painted by a Jesuit artist employed by the Chinese court shows a European-style interior with wall panelling that incorporates columns and niches. (2) This painting provides further evidence that European interior décor was a subject of interest in 18th century China.

The Chinese-style attire of the female figure in the foreground was embroidered in silk threads, and then brushed with ink in order to create the illusion of three-dimensionality. This Western artistic convention is foreign to traditional Chinese pictorial representation, however it is often seen in Chinese export art. The woman stands next to a tree that employs shading effects rendered in needlework and brushwork, thereby creating the illusion of roundness for the tree trunk and the branches. The dwelling behind her has a moon-gate type of opening providing a view of European-style gathered curtains and a table shown in slight perspective, upon which a shadow is cast. Chiaroscuro and perspective are further European pictorial conventions, and were introduced to China by Jesuit missionary artists at the Chinese court.

The dress of the older male figure and the boy also make use of chiaroscuro that have been largely created by brushwork on the embroidery threads. In the upper register of the central panel the mountains and the pavilion are unmistakably Chinese, however European perspective and an atypical colour sense add to the hybrid Chinese-European appearance of the central scene.

Rococo floral and vegetal motifs provide a decorative edging for the central scene, and surrounding the panel is a very European-style scene that includes three putti barely garbed in flowing drapery. Two of the putti surround a lidded vase in the process of being opened, allowing a dragon to escape. Are the playful putti unleashing a menacing monster? In China the dragon is an auspicious creature, but this is a more European-style dragon, and such dragons have sinister associations in European lore. Further Western motifs include a matching, ornate lidded vase resting on a stand, along with the third putto. Topmost at the centre is the mask-like face of a goddess with an elaborate tresses and an ornate crown, and further rococo curlicues and a bejewelled shell.

On a technical note, the gold embroidery threads are made by applying gold leaf to a paper support. In this example, a red substrate has been applied to the paper. This is a characteristic of Chinese-made gold threads. An unusual embroidery technique has been used for the part of the textile at the centre top of the hanging just below the mask and sea shell motifs. Long strands of untwisted white silk threads are couched down by short spans of blue threads that are anchored by tiny red thread stitches spaces at even intervals. The use of different silk fabrics for the ground of the textile is representative of a European technical characteristic. In this example, the ground fabric used for the area within the central arch, and for the cartouche within the bottom border, are both different that the silk ground fabric used for the rest of the textile. A detailed study of the textile techniques and the dyes that are used in this hanging could provide further information as to its history.

In summary, this embroidered and painted hanging reflects a sophisticated understanding of both European and Chinese art and decoration in the 18th century. The use of European and Chinese pictorial and textile techniques in the creation of this monumental embroidery further underscores the meeting of East and West as seen in this exceptional piece.

The textile was in a damaged state when acquired, and has now been expertly restored.

(1) see p. 122, no. 5.4, Jan Stuart & Evelyn Rawski, *Worshipping the Ancestors: Chinese Commemorative Portraits*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. 2001

(2) see plate 6 in Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art*, Berkeley 1998



2) A rare and previously unrecorded pair of uncut robes
Chinese export embroidered white silk ‘Japon’ robe

Qing Dynasty, Qianlong period, circa 1760
Probably made for the Dutch-market
The Japon comprising two un-cut panels, each finely embroidered with a floral meander with capsicum flowers and developing seed pods, perched amongst the tendrils are six pairs of brightly coloured peacock and pen-hens, three pairs to each side of the completed garment, the design further enhanced by sixteen tree shrews clambering over the framework of the plant and over the shoulders, each panel also embroidered with a pair of floral collar bands, the selvedge woven in red and blue silk, a basket of flowers separately embroidered on the white silk, one with a paper label inscribed in Dutch: ‘Leu Witte Satyne geborduurde, Mans Japon N30i0’
Each panel 28in by 115in.,
Condition: In excellent condition, uncut and unused.
Provenance: Acquired in Germany, by repute from a Friesland Collection, The Netherlands.

The design of this ‘Mans Japon’ is based upon the ‘Tree of Life’ inspired by printed and painted cotton palampores from the Coromandel Coast of India in the mid 18th Century.

According to Claire Roberts, Curator Asian Decorative Arts & Design, Decorative Arts and Design FromThe Powerhouse Museum, Powerhouse Publishing, 1991, p.39, “The tree of life motif is a hybrid form, which in the course of its evolution appears to have drawn on the diverse visual and artistic traditions of India and Europe as well as Persia and China. The white ground and symmetrical design reflect the taste and style of the Western client for whom the palampore was intended. The sinuous lines and pleasing floral display catered to the 18th-century fashion for Chinoiserie and the rococo style”.

Having remained uncut and untailored, these embroidered banyan yardage’s are in pristine condition. The fact that the pieces were once held in the same Dutch collection (as indicated by the attached paper label stating: “Leu Witte Satyne geborduurde, Mans Japon N3i0” and “... N3i2”) and that they are nearly identical technically and stylistically suggest that the pair were manufactured as a single order from an embroidery workshop in Guangzhou (Canton); and have not been separated in the two and a half centuries since their creation. Although the production of Asian trade textiles was in nearly all cases a matter of commercial production and many similar or identical items once existed, today we only occasionally are able to identify them. To have a pair of yardages more of less as they were received off the ship, probably in Amsterdam, is truly a rare occurrence.

Background: The loose garments worn by seventeenth century Westerners in tropical Southeast Asia inspired the untailored T-shaped construction known in the West as banyan—the name is derived from the Hindi word for trader. International Asian trade introduced the garment to fashionable European gentlemen and it remained a staple of upper class male wardrobe throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Banyans were worn for private leisure, such as writing, reading and eventually smoking. Whether constructed of European textiles or imported fabrics from Asia, the banyan retained a level of luxurious indulgence, which contrasted sharply a man’s public male wardrobe with its rigidly defined categories and occasions.

During the second half of the seventeenth century the Dutch East India Company introduced Japanese kimono, known locally as a “rock” (gown). The supply was extremely limited as the privilege of trading granted by the Japanese government restricted contact to a single annual trip. To capitalize on the fashion, Dutch traders were quick to order and supply imitations of these rocken with mordant painted and resist-dyed cotton Indian cotton chintz. The fashion spread to England and France, where in the absence of Asian-sourced fabrics or garments, silk was the preferred material.

These yardages, being embroidered to shape, add previously unknown examples of the range of Chinese trade textiles that were produced for this male fashion market niche during the latter half of the eighteenth century.



Although banyan constructed of Chinese woven trade silks exist in several collections (See: Kyoto Costume Institute AC5631-87-22; Los Angeles County Museum of Art 2007.211.797; Metropolitan Museum of Art 1978.135.1 and 2008.75; Victoria and Albert Museum T31-2012), no example constructed from Chinese embroidered satin, either yardage or embroidered to shape, is known to any specialists in this field. It may seem surprising considering Chinese silk embroideries made for European markets were a major category of trade goods dating from the seventeenth century. Yet, only this pair of banyan yardages appears to survive.

Insights and cross-cultural linkages: This pair of yardages offers both new knowledge and insights into far-reaching cross-cultural influences at work within the Asian textile trade during the eighteenth century. Like many trade textiles dating from the eighteenth century the banyan yardages reveal a web of complex interactions among markets and production centres and the growing sophistication of Western consumers.

The principle design on the yardages features a flowering tree with small birds and animals, a stock Asian trade textile design known across several media. It had been documented by John Irvin and Katharine Brett to be a seventeenth century European (and probably English) invention that was created to appeal to Western tastes for the exotic (see; Origins of Chintz, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970, pp. 16-22).

What is remarkable about the tree design for the two banyan yardages is that it has been re-envisioned through lens of early-eighteenth century Indian embroidery. This is interesting on two levels. The first, which has very little to do with export Chinese textiles as we know them, is that the Chinese imperial court of the Qianlong emperor was particularly fond of Mughal Indian designs, particular in jade. Secondly, the designer for these banyan patterns, possibly a Western draftsman, must have had access to original Mughal Indian chain stitch or tambour work embroidery prototypes of in silk on fine cotton, such the eighteenth century coverlets or summer carpets, in order to create the design plan fitted to Western garment shapes. The Chinese embroiderers of the banyan yardages translated what originally would have been chain stitch to more familiar Chinese style satin stitch embroidery using floss silk on silk satin. The pieces offer additional insight into how the Chinese craftsman attempted to translate an order for a European man's garment that would require borders at the hem and along the front opening, but also something that might be needed to create a collar. One panel has an as yet unexplained single flower basket motif along an outer selvage edge. At the moment it is a unique feature of export embroideries of the period: possibly a test for colour and stitches, or a bit of wit added by a bored needle worker.



3) Chasuble, Maniple and Stole

Guangzhou, mid 18th Century

Designed with three vibrantly coloured flowering branches on an ivory ground, with gilt metal braiding forming Christian iconography. Constructed from painted Export silk. The yardage originally imported for exclusive Court fashion.



4) Chasuble, Maniple and Stole

Guangzhou. Mid 18th century.

The three ecclesiastical vestments, embroidered in coloured silks on an ivory ground, the front divided into three panels with meandering floral scrolls. The central panel with a vase issuing stylised pomegranates. The stole embroidered with three crosses and the back designed with integral panelled cross with further meandering foliage.



5) Gauze Silk Panel

Guangzhou. Circa 1770

57" x 55" - 145 x 140cm

A square panel, delicately painted on gauze silk with butterflies amongst meandering scrolls of pomegranates and grapes, within scrolling flower borders.

Note: an attached hand written note to an accompanying textile 'brought back from China by Richard Staveley in 1780'. Several members of the Staveley family were involved in the China Trade and employed by the British East India Company.



6) Birdcage coverlet

Guangzhou circa 1760.

232 x 255 cm (one border reduced.)

Embroidered in coloured silks on a cream satin ground, with a long tailed cock pheasant and hen, perched on a rocky mound beneath a stylised prunus tree with flowering branches and a hanging basket of fruit and further flowers. A hanging bird cage containing 2 song birds within a border of flowering shrubs with birds and flowers.

Note: A similar painted silk textile depicting an identical scene is in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, T.3-1948, given by Mr. G.W. Dobson.



7) Rich Claret Ground Silk Coverlet

Guangzhou. Circa 1760.

260 x 220cm

A Chinese satin embroidered coverlet. Embroidered on a rich red claret ground, with central medallion and double-headed eagles with outstretched wings. With barley-twist columns to each corner, issuing from a blue scroll-work vine, scattered with birds and butterflies.



8) Blue Coverlet

Guangzhou. Circa 1760

260 x 220 cm approx.

A Chinese satin embroidered European-market coverlet. The central cartouche sumptuously embroidered with cornucopias of plenty, mirrored to each corner. The border with meandering floral vines and scrolling floral tendrils, on a teal blue ground.



9) Coverlet

Guangzhou. Circa 1760
259 x 214cm

An elegant and extremely delicately designed embroidered cream ground silk coverlet. The central medallion with peony flower head, within an interlocking design of lotus flower heads, the inner border with luxuriant flower tendrils. The outer border with rococo swags



10) Superb Chinese satin embroidered European subject coverlet.

Guangzhou, Circa 1740.

305 x 250cm

Provenance: Portuguese Private collection.

Embroidered in coloured silks on an imperial yellow ground, with a central large peony bloom, flanked by 4 peacock / eagle like birds with out stretched wings tallons supporting baskets of fruit and flowers, surrounded by a further eight phoenix- like birds without stretched wings. The field with luxuriant blooms separated at each corner with an elaborate pendant scroll incorporating a large scallop shell motif, interlace hibiscus, peony and asters, all within a further border; each side containing an arrangement of cornucopia issuing pomegranates, lilies and peonies, interspersed at each corner with a cherub's head. The scrollwork designs terminating in a peony bloom flanked by two European servants wearing red jackets and blue breaches, playing hunting horns. Yellow tassels fringe.



11) Chinese Christian Embroidery

Probably Suzhou or South China, first half of the 19th century
68.5 x 53.3 cm. (27 x 21 in.)
Framed behind glass, some fading and losses to the silk embroidery threads
Provenance: Virginia Murray of Sacramento, California, artist, teacher and world traveler.

Texts: two hanging scrolls forming the poetic couplet depicted in the composition are worked in embroidery with characters expressing Chinese Christian sentiments.
Translations: Text on the right side - The sun of Righteousness shines over the whole world eternally.
Text on left side - The stars of virtue incline to gather together in this one household.

Description: A prosperous family, consisting of the seated father, dressed in an informal robe of a scholar and holding a fan in one hand; two older sons, similarly dressed, one standing and the other leaning against a tree, both having a book in one hand; the mother, seated at a table, holding a Christian cross in one hand; with a male child reaching towards her; and a young daughter standing near her and holding a block-like object in one hand; while another young daughter who's face is not visible is seated at the same table while reading a book. Three family members have open books, and these books are presumably Christian in nature, in keeping with the numerous Christian elements that are present in the family gathering.

This family scene is set within a pavilion that is open on one side, covered by a tiled roof, and having a checkerboard floor; a window with a partial 'cracked-ice' pattern, a carved wooden railing, furniture including a low table with a tea bowl and stand resting on a kang platform having an embroidered floral- patterned valence, along with two tables, one at which the mother and one daughter are seated, and the other supporting a vase with flowers, a set of books, a gourd in a basket on a stand and a large box. The style of the furniture is typical of South China. The pavilion is framed by an arching tree, rocks, bamboo and flowers, and across the top the open side there is a rollup shade that could be lowered in order to entirely close off the pavilion.

The most striking Christian imagery is a large framed embroidery depicting the Holy Family: Joseph, Mary and the Christ child, with the dove representing God projecting its rays over them. This embroidery within the embroidery is the focal point of the scene both visually, resulting from the use of single-point perspective, and metaphorically, in that the representation of the Holy Family serves as an idealized model for the pious Chinese Christian family.

The two embroidered calligraphy scrolls flank the embroidery, and they are Christian in nature, as mentioned above. Further Christian iconography can be seen just below the roof line and above the depiction of the Holy Family. The Latin initials IHS, a Christogram, appear in a heart-shaped medallion at this key position. Jingjiao (literally “luminous teaching”) is the Chinese term for Christianity.

Discussion: Family portraits, or portraiture of any kind, with such obvious Christian imagery are extremely rare in Chinese art, whether made as textiles, prints or paintings. This embroidery is unlike any Christian-themed works made in China for export to the West. It must have been a commissioned work ordered by the family, in that the faces and setting are so individualized and detailed, and the nature of the scene is so personal. It is also possible that a family member, such as the mother in the family gathering, was the maker of the embroidery.



12) Une Famille Chrétienne

A rare Christian-subject documentary Chinese painting

Qing Dynasty, Guangxu period, dated 1881

Height: 75cm Width: 43cm

Provenance: Private French collection

Painted ink and watercolour on paper; blue silk mount, inscribed in black ink in French 'Une famille chretienne' Dessine a l'orphelinat de Chou (sic) chan-wan' depicting figures from the orphanage seated on a garden terrace, a seated Chinese scholar holding a red book, accompanied by two young male attendants, a seated lady holding a crucifix accompanied by three younger children, a European-subject painting of the Holy Family hanging on the wall behind a Chinese altar table, flanked by two colophons, inscribed with three Chinese verses and three seal impressions in red ink.

The painting was made in the library of the Tousewe (Shanghai dialect pronunciation 'Tushanwan') Orphanage which was established by Jesuit priest's in Shanghai in 1864.The painting is dated to the Summer of 1881, the calligraphy is signed by a priest, named Ci Huwei.Today the orphanage is now the Tousewe Museum, Shanghai.



13) Chinese satin embroidered European-Market Coverlet

Guangzhou, Circa 1760-70.

287 x 272 cms.

Note: 2 minor stains, small section of tasselled fringe missing.

Embroidered in coloured silks on a canary yellow ground, with a central stylised cross-hatched peony within a scrollwork rosette containing stylised pendant louts husks surrounded by sixteen butterflies within a further floral border forming in each corner a stylised shell and peony scrollwork pendant, multi-coloured tasselled fringe.



14) Cream Ground Coverlet

Guangzhou. Circa 1800

Approx: 9 ft x 7 ft - 275 x 213cm

The central cartouche with pink camellia florets surrounded by groups of peaches, lychee and wisteria pods, within a flowering lotus boarder. The four inner corners two with hanging flower baskets, overflowing pineapples, peony and day lilies and the others with flowering pomegranates and butterflies. The ground with random bugs, butterflies, kingfishers and birds of paradise, within a further border of lotus, asters, pineapples and large beetles.



15) Coverlet

Guangzhou. Circa 1790.

104" x 83" - 264 x 210cm

A finely embroidered coverlet in coloured silks on rich red claret ground. The central medallion containing rococo style floral lappets, the main body with further stylised flowers within a staggered border and surrounded by eight scalloped shaped shell motifs.



16) Coverlet

Guangzhou, 1st half 19th century.

214 x 184cm

Provenance: Given to the previous owners Great Grandparents as a wedding gift in 1883, Assam.

A Chinese pale yellow silk embroidered panel. Decorating with a central stylised motif and four circular panels containing peacocks, the border with leafy festoons and hanging lanterns.



17) Coverlet

Guangzhou. Late 19th century.
94" x 98" - 209 x 249cm

A large burgundy ground coverlet. The central roundel exquisitely embroidered with; a profusion of aquatic flowers, a pair of Mandarin ducks, a pair of doves, a bird of paradise and a pair of parrots, amongst a scattering of butterflies and foliage. The ground with an unusual design of interlocking circles. The four corners and border embroidered with scrolling floral designs and exotic birds.



18) Coverlet

Guangzhou. Early 19th century
99 1/2" x 102 1/2" - 253 x 260cm

An extremely unusual ivory ground coverlet, finely embroidered overall in subtle yellow silk with central cartouche depicting a golden pheasant amongst lilies and bamboo. The corners with further sprays of magnolia and exotic foliage.



19) Red & Yellow Damask Lengths

Guangzhou. 18th century

Red Bolt = 200cm

Yellow Bolt = 245cm

These extremely rare, unused lengths, of 18th century silk were specifically made for the European market, reflecting European designs of the day. They were commissioned and imported by the East India Companies as luxury items and probably to be used for furnishings.



20) Coverlet

Daoguang Period, circa 1850

Width 259cm

Height 219cm

A Chinese Export red silk embroidered coverlet, the claret red silk finely embroidered with a central medallion of exotic birds, flowers and foliage with four elaborated detachable silk tassels, with original packaging materials, including a painted cardboard slip case and a red and black lacquer box, fitting with two handles, and inscribed Chinese paper label.

Provenance: Portuguese Collection



21) Coverlet

Qianlong period, circa 1790

Width: 216cm

Height: 262cm

A Chinese Export pale blue silk embroidered coverlet, the pale blue silk finely embroidered with a central peony medallion with four deer and boys separated by bridges within an further wave pattern border scattered with phoenix and boats, all within a further rectangular border of boys and dogs at play.

Provenance: French Collection



22) A rare Chinese export silk embroidered coverlet

Qing Dynasty, Qianlong period, circa 1770

Comprised of four joined vertical ivory silk panels, finely worked overall in polychrome silks, predominantly in satin stitch, with an design of flowering scrolls, incorporating butterflies and birds, the central medallion enclosing a palmette, lotus flowers and two phoenixes in opposing directions, the corner spandrels with stylised cloud bands and double headed Eagles with a crown, with a wide border with similar scrolling floral design, with narrow inner and outer borders, with interlocking floral and foliate motifs, the reverse silk lining embroidered along the edge, with illegible Chinese characters

Width 247cm

Length 310cm



The Portuguese establishment of a sea route around Africa in 1498, gave Iberia access to Ming China and the influences of their woven and embroidered silks. Macao is recorded as producing pieces for the Spanish and Portuguese markets. Initially it was only motifs which were 'Western' influences, and they were incorporated into distinctively Chinese influenced compositions. Beginning in the 17th century the textiles were specifically manufactured for the Western markets and often made to order from patterns supplied by the merchants. The double-headed eagle motif was derived from the coat-of-arms of the Habsburg monarchs who ruled Austria and Spain in the 16th and 17th centuries and was widely used by the St Augustinian order who were sent as missionaries to South East Asia and South America.

Between 1660 and 1700, Chinese embroiderers were recorded working in Surat in India and the large number of Chinese working in Manila by the 17th century resulted in the Sino-Spanish silk trade which Chinese designs reflecting the Spanish taste, until shortly after 1800.

For examples of embroidered and woven silks and damasks for the Western, Spanish and Portuguese markets, from the 16th century through to the 18th century, see John E. Vollmer, E.J. Keall, E. Nagai-Berthrong, *Silk Roads * China Ships: An Exhibition of East-West Trade*, Exhibition, 10 September 1983 – 8 January 1984, Royal Ontario Museum, Ontario, 1983, *Silken webs of imperial dreams*, pp. 13-22, for examples of damask and brocades with the double headed eagles, similar to the motif used in the present coverlet (p. 19), and examples including an early 18th century Chinese embroidered coverlet, made for the Western market (Royal Ontario Museum, 914.7.17), which has a clear demarcation of border design, and an example of saffron yellow silk ground embroidered coverlet, specifically made for the Portuguese market, late 17th/early 18th century. For a c. 1770/90 comparable see V&A (Inv.T.387-1970).

Related Literature:

Lanto Synge, *Art of Embroidery, History of Style and Technique*, The Royal School of Needlework, London, 2001, Chp. X, China a long heritage of silk, pp. 286-309, Chinese exports to Europe, pp. 305-309;

Mary Schoeser, *Silk*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2009, *Silk in use*, pp. 66-115



