Rugs and Textiles of Late Imperial China

Carol Bier, The Textile Museum
Lorna Carmel, The Textile Museum

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RUGS AND TEXTILES
OF LATE
IMPERIAL CHINA

THE TEXTILE MUSEUM
With successive conquests of the highlands beyond the Great Wall, the Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911) formed what was to become China's last empire. Their political expansion encompassed Han Chinese, Mongolians, Turks, Tibetans, and other peoples with diverse ethnic origins, languages and religious beliefs, whose regional economies often relied upon physical features of the land.

Within the Great Wall, to the east and south, silk and sericulture had a long history. Silkworms and mulberry trees thrived in the low-lying agricultural regions populated by Han Chinese. From inland regions rivers flowed to the sea, where coastal cities flourished as centers of silk manufacture and trade.

Beyond the Great Wall, to the west and north, wool was produced by nomadic peoples whose lives depended on animal husbandry and the herding of sheep in upland pastures. Cotton was cultivated in areas of sparse rain, relying on intensive irrigation. Together, cotton and wool were made into rugs in oasis towns that lay at the edge of the desert.

*Rugs and Textiles of Late Imperial China* explores textile arts of the Qing Empire that reflect both cultural diversity and vast imperial domain.

**IN THE COURT  Expressions of Hierarchy**

When the Manchu conquered China in the 17th century, they replaced the voluminous red robes of preceding rulers, promoting an A-shaped coat with tapered sleeves and a characteristic cuff in the shape of a horse's hoof. Garments were worn in prescribed layers, the formality of the occasion dictating selection. Each layer displayed colors and symbols related to status within the official hierarchy of the imperial court.

Court garments depict a diagram of the world order. At the hem is water and land, represented respectively by foaming waves and mountain peaks. Above is the sky with clouds, inhabited by benevolent dragons, emblematic of imperial power. When worn by the imperial clan and officials of the state bureaucracy, a visual message was delivered for all to see: China at the center of a harmonious universe.

Events and activities throughout the highly regulated empire were considered official or non-official, each with designated clothing styles. Religious ceremonies and weddings that had parallels in court ritual may be considered quasi-official, with vestments and furnishings, including rugs, often drawing upon the imperial repertory for their visual symbols.

**AT HOME  Wishes for Harmony, Prosperity, and Longevity**

In China the traditional household was an extended family. The desire for a harmonious home, essential for financial stability and advancement, is expressed by symbols on clothing and furnishings. Carefully selected images convey wishes for health, wealth, long life, success, and progeny.
As at court, styles of domestic garments were dictated by levels of formality. But unlike official garments for the court, clothing worn at home for most occasions distinguished the two main populations of eastern China, the ruling Manchu and the majority Han Chinese. Manchu women wore full-length coats with long vests or waist-length coats, while Han women wore pleated skirts with shorter vests or calf-length coats.

Women's garments were more elaborately decorated than corresponding male attire. The proliferation of visual symbols on women's clothing is perhaps one reason why they have survived in larger quantity. Symbols abound not only singly, but also in pairs and groups, forming puns and rebuses.

CREDITS

Lenders to the exhibition
Shirley Z. Johnson, Moke Mokotoff, Thomas A. Rutherford, Wendel R. and Diane L. Swan

Curatorial Consultants
John E. Vollmer, Textiles; Charles Grant Ellis, Rugs; James A. Millward, History; Jan Stuart, Art and Culture

Photography
National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency; Franko Khoury

Sponsors
Sammy Yukuan Lee Foundation

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Buddhism  major world religion founded in India which spread along the main trade routes across Asia to China
chanting mat  small format rug for use in Tibetan Buddhist temples and monasteries
chao fu  Manchu official, formal court coat
chi fu  Manchu official, semi-formal court coat
Confucianism  moral precepts and way of life advanced by Confucius, which influenced the practice of Buddhism, Daoism and Christianity in late imperial China
Daoism  (Taoism) system of philosophical and religious beliefs, encouraging spontaneity and acceptance of nature, based upon the teachings of Lao-Tse
dynasty  succession of rulers along family lines; the Ming dynasty ruled China from 1368 to 1644; the Manchu dynasty (Qing Empire) ruled from 1644 to 1911
fret-work  ornamental pattern based on a square grid
fu  written character in Chinese for bat or happiness; thus associated, the image of a bat is a symbol for good luck
Great Wall  system of fortified walls built to protect China from the nomadic populations of what is today Mongolia and Manchuria; although completed in the 3rd century B.C., it has been repaired and modified many times
kang  platform in a Chinese household for sleeping and sitting, often heated and covered with a rug
knot cluster technical peculiarity of Chinese rugs in which selective designs are achieved by grouping knots
Lama spiritual leader in Tibetan Buddhism
Manchu rulers of the Qing Empire (1644-1911), last imperial dynasty in China
pillar rug large format rug designed to wrap around a pillar in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery or temple
pinyin current standard for romanizing the Chinese language
Qing (Ch’ing) empire founded by the Manchu (1644-1911)
rank badge for use on a garment, textile plaque that identifies civil or military rank (sometimes called Mandarin square)
sericulture silk cultivation process, including the raising of silkworms
shou written character in Chinese for long life, often stylized as a visual symbol
Tibetan Buddhism esoteric form of Buddhism that evolved in Tibet and had a strong influence on Manchu rulers of China
Wade-Giles older standard for romanizing the Chinese language

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Hyde, Nina 1984, Silk: The Queen of Textiles, National Geographic, 165/1, January, pp. 2-49.
Museum Boymans van Beuningen 1990, The Forbidden City: Court Culture of the Chinese Emperors (1644-1911), Rotterdam.
Vollmer, John 1983, Decoding Dragons: Status Garments in Ch’ing Dynasty China, University of Oregon Museum of Art, Eugene.
EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

length measurements given first

1 CHAIR SEAT
Ningxia, 18th century
Wool pile on cotton
R51.1.1, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1949
Formerly in the Friedrich Sarre Collection
40" x 42"

2 CARPET
Xinjiang, 19th century
Silk pile with brocading on cotton
1979.29.1, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Arpad
156" x 60"

3 SHAPED CHAIR BACK
Ningxia, 19th century
Wool pile on cotton
R51.4.5, acquired by George Hewitt Myers before 1940
30" x 30"

4 SMALL RUG
Xinjiang, 19th century or earlier
Silk pile on cotton
R56.1.1, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1927
34" x 32 ½"

5 CARPET (half)
Ningxia, 19th century
Wool pile on cotton
R51.1.10, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1949
47 ¾" x 131"

6 FURNISHING FRAGMENT
China, 17th century
Voided velvet 51.62, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1949
12" x 20"

7 PORTRAIT, MANCHU IMPERIAL CLANSWOMAN
China, 19th century
Watercolor on paper, Private collection
95" x 47"

8 MANCHU MAN’S COAT
China, first half 18th century
Silk gauze 51.23, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1929
45 ½" x 68"

9 MANCHU IMPERIAL CLANSMAN’S COAT (chi fu)
China, middle 19th century
Gauze and embroidered silk 1973.30.1, Gift of Brigadier General Regan Fuller
58" x 28"

10 PILLAR RUG
Ningxia, 19th century
Wool pile on cotton
R51.2.1, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1927
95" x 48"

11 KANG RUG
Ningxia, 18th century
Wool pile on cotton
R51.1.5, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1920
105" x 44"

12 CHANTING RUG
Ningxia, 19th century
Wool pile on cotton
1973.31.52, Gift of Dr. William H. S. Stevens
28" x 18"

13 DAOIST (?) STATUE COAT
China, late 19th century
Damask and embroidered silk
1976.26.12, Gift of Jerome A. and Mary Jane Straka
42 ½" x 66"

14 BUDDHIST PRIEST’S COAT
China, early 19th century
Silk tapestry 51.66, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1949
46" x 94"

15 DAOIST PRIEST’S COAT
China, 19th/20th century
Damask and embroidered silk
1976.26.8, Gift of Jerome A. and Mary Jane Straka
56 ½" x 64"

16 DAOIST PRIEST’S COAT
China, 18th/19th century
Satin and embroidered silk 1985.22.1, Gift of Ann S. Ling in memory of Hellen Dalling Ling
56" x 72"

17 DAOIST PRIEST’S COAT
China, 18th/19th century
Satin and embroidered silk 51.24, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1929
55" x 72"

18 CARPET
Ningxia, 18th century
Wool pile on cotton
R51.1.4, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1929
141" x 73"

19 KANG RUG
Ningxia, 18th century
Wool pile on cotton
R51.1.6, acquired by George Hewitt Myers before 1928
98" x 64 ¼"

20a MANCHU MAN’S COAT (chao fu)
China, early 19th century
Gauze and embroidered silk
Collection of Shirley Z. Johnson
55 ½" x 67"

20b MANCHU MAN’S COAT (chi fu)
China, early 19th century
Satin and embroidered silk 1973.30.2, Gift of Brigadier General Regan Fuller
56" x 96"

21a MANCHU EMPRESS’S COAT (chi fu)
China, 19th century
Silk tapestry
Collection of Shirley Z. Johnson
56" x 74"

21b MANCHU IMPERIAL CLANSWOMAN’S COAT (chi fu)
China, middle 18th century
Damask and embroidered silk
Collection of Shirley Z. Johnson
55" x 78"

22 MANCHU IMPERIAL CLANSMAN’S COAT (chi fu)
China, 19th/20th century
Twill and floating wefts 51.73, Gift of Mrs. W. R. Hearst
54" x 82"

23 CARPET
Ningxia, 19th century
Wool pile on cotton R51.1.16, acquired by George Hewitt Myers before 1928
161" x 132"
24 YARDAGE, MANCHU MAN’S COAT (chi fu)
China, 19th/20th century
Twill and embroidered silk
1980.25.1, Gift of Shirley Sun
125” x 61 ½”

25 CARPET
Xinjiang, 18th or 19th century
Silk pile on cotton
1977.36.33, Gift of Jerome A. and Mary Jane Straka
70” x 38”

26 CARPET
Xinjiang, 19th century
Wool pile on cotton
R56.1.5, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1915
144” x 82”

27 CARPET
Xinjiang, 19th/20th century
Wool pile on cotton
1977.36.29, Gift of Jerome A. and Mary Jane Straka
162” x 82”

28 SHAPED CHAIR BACK
Tibet, early 20th century
Wool pile on cotton and wool
Collection of Thomas A. Rutherford
30” x 66”

29 CARPET
Xinjiang, 19th century
Wool pile on cotton
R56.1.4, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1919
68” x 114”

30 CARPET
Xinjiang, 19th century
Wool pile on cotton
1977.36.30, Gift of Jerome A. and Mary Jane Straka
111” x 66”

31 KANG RUG
Ningxia, 18th/19th century
Wool pile on cotton
R51.1.2, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1940
93” x 51 ½”

32 CHAIR SEAT
Ningxia, 19th century
Wool pile on cotton and silk
Wendel R. and Diane L. Swan
44 ½” x 44”

33 CHAIR COVER
China, 18th century
Gauze and embroidered silk
51.385, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1956
68” x 20”

34 TABLE FRONTAL VALANCE
China, 19th century
Gauze and embroidered silk with peacock feathers
1977.37.30, Gift of Jerome A. and Mary Jane Straka
12 ½” x 37 ¼”

35 ELBOW CUSHION
China, early 19th century
Silk tapestry 51.22, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1929
10” x 10” x 10”

36 CUSHION COVER
China, late 19th century
Silk tapestry 1964.64.1
28” x 30”

37 CUSHION COVER
China, middle 19th century
Silk tapestry 51.18, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1940
40” x 54”

38 CARPET
Xinjiang, 19th century
Wool pile on cotton
1977.36.32, Gift of Jerome A. and Mary Jane Straka
86” x 46 ½”

39 HAN WOMAN’S COAT
China, late 19th century
Damask and embroidered silk
Moke Mokotoff, New York
42” x 52”

40 HAN WOMAN’S SLEEVE FACINGS
China, middle 19th century
Damask and embroidered silk
1965.66.2a,b, each 33” x 3”

41 HAN WOMAN’S SLEEVE FACINGS
China, middle 19th century
Damask and embroidered silk
1965.66.3a,b, each 31” x 3 ½”

42 HAN WOMAN’S SKIRT
China, late 19th century
Satin and embroidered silk
1977.37.9, Gift of Jerome A. and Mary Jane Straka
38 ½” x 22” (folded)

43 HAN WOMAN’S SKIRT
China, late 19th century
Damask and embroidered silk
1985.41.2a,b, front and back
Gift of Barbara Bischoff Hanzely
65” x 48” (each)
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<th>Description</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Acquirer</th>
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<td>44</td>
<td>HAN WOMAN'S COAT</td>
<td>China, late 19th century</td>
<td>Damask and embroidered silk</td>
<td>Gift of Mrs. Thomas Arms</td>
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<td>MANCHU WOMAN'S COAT</td>
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<td>Satin and embroidered silk</td>
<td>Gift of Mrs. Stanley Carr</td>
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<td>MANCHU WOMAN'S COAT</td>
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<td>Satin and embroidered silk</td>
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<td>1974.9.1, Gift of Mrs. Stanley Carr</td>
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<td>CHAIR SEAT</td>
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<td>Wool pile on cotton</td>
<td>R51.4.4, acquired by George Hewitt Myers before 1957</td>
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<td>BED CANOPY VALANCE</td>
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<td>MINIATURE MANCHU MAN'S COAT (pu fu)</td>
<td>China, late 19th century</td>
<td>Phain weave silk</td>
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<td>MINIATURE MANCHU COLLAR (pi ling)</td>
<td>China, late 19th century</td>
<td>Silk tapestry</td>
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<td>MINIATURE MANCHU MAN'S COAT (chi fu)</td>
<td>China, late 19th century</td>
<td>Silk tapestry</td>
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<td>52</td>
<td>MINIATURE MANCHU MAN'S SKIRT (chao fu)</td>
<td>China, late 19th century</td>
<td>Silk tapestry</td>
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<td>MINIATURE HAN BRIDAL COAT</td>
<td>China, late 19th century</td>
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<td>MINIATURE HAN BRIDAL SKIRT</td>
<td>China, late 19th century</td>
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<td>55</td>
<td>MINIATURE COAT</td>
<td>China, late 19th century</td>
<td>Satin and embroidered silk</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>SHRINE NICHE HANGING</td>
<td>China, middle 19th century</td>
<td>Silk tapestry</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td>CIVIL BADGE, 6TH RANK</td>
<td>China, late 19th century</td>
<td>Silk satin and brocaded wefts</td>
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<td>51.51, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1947</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>MILITARY BADGE, 4TH RANK</td>
<td>China, early 17th century</td>
<td>Silk satin and brocaded wefts</td>
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<td>51.58, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1948</td>
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<td>60a</td>
<td>MILITARY BADGE, 3RD RANK</td>
<td>China, early 17th century</td>
<td>Damask and embroidered silk</td>
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<td>Collection of Shirley Z. Johnson</td>
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</table>
60b CIVIL BADGE, 1ST RANK
China, late 17th century
Satin and embroidered silk with peacock feathers
Collection of Shirley Z. Johnson
19 3/4" x 12 3/4"

61 CIVIL BADGE, 6TH RANK
China, middle 19th century
Satin and embroidered silk with peacock feathers
Collection of Shirley Z. Johnson
11 3/4" x 11 3/4"

62 HAN WOMAN’S VEST
China, middle 19th century
Satin and embroidered silk
1973.12.1, Gift of Stuart J. Fuller, Jr.
45" x 20"

63 SADDLE RUG
Ningxia, early 20th century
Wool pile on cotton
64" x 23"

64 VALANCE (half)
China, 19th/20th century
Silk tapestry
1906.49.2.
13 3/4" x 54"

65 SADDLE RUG
Beijing, early 20th century
Wool pile on cotton
53" x 25"

66 SADDLE RUG
Ningxia, 19th century
Wool pile on cotton
R51.3.1, Gift of Arthur D. Jenkins, 1961
48" x 13"

67 SMALL RUG
Ningxia, 20th century
Wool pile on cotton
R51.1.15, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1923
43" x 24 1/2"

68 CARPET
Xinjiang, 19th century
Wool pile on cotton
R56.2.1, acquired by George Hewitt Myers, 1915
78" x 44"