

Ka Bo Tsang



TOUCHED BY  
**INDIGO**

Chinese Blue-and-White Textiles and Embroidery

藍染  
中國藍印花布與挑花展覽



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In the first two weeks of September 2003, I visited indigo dye-shops and museums in Shanghai, Nantong, Wuzhen, Hangzhou, Wenzhou, Guiyang, and Kaili, talked to indigo growers and dyers, conferred with textile experts, and gathered published research data.



I am particularly indebted to Dr. Zhao Feng, Deputy Director of the China National Silk Museum in Hangzhou, who suggested places of research interest and provided me with contacts. Xu Guohua, Deputy Director of Nantong Textile Museum, and Wu Yuanxin, Curator of China Nantong Blue Calico Art Gallery, too, went out of their way to make my visit to their institutions both very educational and enjoyable.

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This publication was envisaged as an exhibition guide to enhance the visitor experience. Due to popular demand, it has been redesigned by Elia Kanaki, Creative Director of Rossul Design, and produced by Tim Kacurov, a member of the Bishop White Committee, for the wider public. Mrs. Patricia Harris, Chairperson of the Textiles & Costume Committee, showed much enthusiasm and support throughout this project. Their initiative to make it a reality is greatly appreciated.

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Finally, to all who have shown interest and encouragement in one way or another, I offer my sincere thanks.

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## MAP OF CHINA





## CHRONOLOGY

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Xia dynasty	21st–16th century bc	Later Liang	ad 907–923
Shang dynasty	16th–11th century bc	Later Tang	ad 923–936
Zhou dynasty	11th century–256 bc	Later Jin	ad 936–946
Western Zhou	11th century–771 bc	Later Han	ad 947–950
Eastern Zhou	770–256 bc	Later Zhou	ad 951–960
Spring and Autumn period	770–476 bc	Song dynasty	ad 960–1279
Warring States period	475–221 bc	Northern Song	ad 960–1127
Qin dynasty	221–207 bc	Southern Song	ad 1127–1279
Han dynasty	206 bc–ad 220	Liao dynasty	ad 916–1125
Western Han	206 bc–ad 24	Xixia	ad 1038–1127
Eastern Han	ad 25–220	Jin dynasty	ad 1115–1234
Three Kingdoms	ad 220–265	Yuan dynasty	ad 1271–1368
Wei	ad 220–265	Ming dynasty	ad 1368–1644
Shu Han	ad 221–263	Qing dynasty	ad 1644–1911
Wu	ad 222–280	Republic of China	ad 1912–
Jin dynasty	ad 265–420		
Western Jin	ad 265–316		
Eastern Jin	ad 317–420		
Northern and Southern dynasties	ad 420–589		
Southern dynasties			
Song	ad 420–479		
Qi	ad 479–502		
Liang	ad 502–557		
Chen	ad 557–589		
Northern dynasties			
Northern Wei	ad 386–534		
Eastern Wei	ad 534–550		
Western Wei	ad 535–556		
Northern Qi	ad 550–577		
Northern Zhou	ad 557–581		
Sui dynasty	ad 581–618		
Tang dynasty	ad 618–907		
Five dynasties	ad 907–960		

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## INTRODUCTION

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As early as the Shang and Zhou dynasties Chinese people had already developed a good understanding of colour. Red, yellow, blue, black, and white were identified as primary colours. Hues resulting from mixing any of these together were classified as secondary colours. For a long time, primary colours were regarded as symbolic of nobleness, and secondary colours were perceived to represent humbleness. As a result, primary colours were reserved for the use of the privileged classes, while secondary colours were relegated to the use of the common people.<sup>1</sup> The symbolic value of colour, however, changed every so often over the centuries. In the end, almost by general consensus, warm and radiant colours, such as red and yellow, became associated with regality, opulence, and celebration typical of the luxurious lifestyles of the aristocrats. Subdued and cold colours, such as blue, green, and white, became associated with poverty, simplicity, and sadness which usually characterized the frugal lives of the masses.

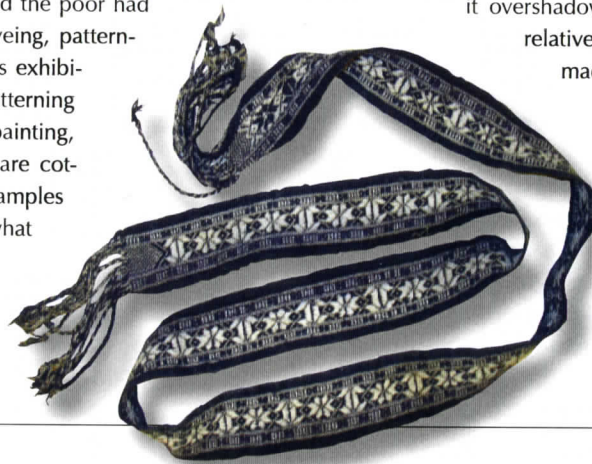
In the same vein, textiles enjoyed by the upper classes were fabricated for comfort and visual delight. Sensuous silks and brocades were always replete with colourful and intricate designs. Those used by the ordinary people were plain or simply patterned hemp, ramie, and cotton, materials cheap and durable. Early on, many ways of embellishing textiles destined both for the rich and the poor had been already created. They included painting, dyeing, pattern-weaving, stamping, printing, and embroidery. This exhibition guide describes various methods of textile patterning for consumers at large, namely weaving, dyeing, painting, appliqué, and embroidery. The textiles involved are cotton, hemp, linen, and silk. The majority of the examples selected here are contemporary, but they reflect what the common people, whether Han Chinese or ethnic nationals, used in their daily lives during the last few hundred years.

The blue in these textiles comes from

indigo, a hardy annual that grows in many parts of China. Indigo was used for dyeing at least as early as the Zhou dynasty. One of its advantages is the fastness of the colour pigment on cloths dyed with it. This is evidenced by several pieces of silk dyed in different shades of blue unearthed in 1972 from a Western Han tomb at Mawangdui in the city of Changsha in Hunan province. The blue colour, which testing revealed to have been obtained from indigo, is reported to have still retained its freshness after more than two thousand years.<sup>2</sup> Another advantage is the wide range of shades (from pale blue to blue-black) that can be obtained simply by controlling the number of dippings of the dyed material in the bath. Indigo, too, can be used in conjunction with other vegetable dyes to obtain a different colour, for example, indigo and carthamus (red) produce purple, while indigo and cape jasmine (yellow) produce green. To the peasants and working classes, however, indigo is perhaps more welcome than other dye pigments for their clothing for two practical reasons: the dark blue colour does not show dirt easily; it has medicinal properties beneficial to health.

Prior to the Song dynasty hemp was the most commonly available plant for producing an inexpensive but durable fabric. The use of cotton became more widespread in the Song dynasty. Eventually it overshadowed hemp not only because it was a plant relatively easy to grow, but also because the cloth made from it was softer yet still stood up to wear and tear. Cotton tabby, a simple-weave fabric frequently dyed with indigo, is creamy or off-white when woven. It becomes white only after bleaching.

Cotton fabric has been used in the production of both clothing and household furnishings. Various methods have been employed to make this plain cloth attractive. A type of cloth called *liangbu*



(glossy cloth) produced by certain ethnic groups, for example, is specially treated to give off a sheen. Occasionally, a simple pattern may even be woven into the cloth before it is dyed and treated so that in addition to the sheen it is also textured. Patterning can also be achieved by weaving together dyed and undyed yarns. Stripes, bands, checks, or geometric configurations appearing in one colour against a background of another colour certainly make a fabric look more interesting than a plain one.

More often, cotton-patterning is achieved by different techniques of resist-dyeing, namely tie-dye, wax-resist, clamp-resist, and paste-resist. Each technique relies on a medium to prevent the dye from touching the cloth where patterns are to be created. Such dyed products may show patterns either in reserve against a dyed ground (white on blue) or the reverse (blue on white). Although each technique has its limitations, they all produce patterns that have their own unique flavour. While all four techniques were practised by the Han Chinese in the past, today wax-resist dyeing is done almost exclusively by ethnic groups. Among these four techniques tie-dye is widely practised, more among certain ethnic groups than Han Chinese. Paste-resist dyeing also remains a prevalent form of conventional dyeing. Clamp-resist dyeing, while still done nowadays in a few localities in Zhejiang province, is on the verge of fading out. Nevertheless, with the advent of the modern textile industry, changing tastes, and a lack of interest among the younger generation to learn these traditional skills, the survival of all these time-honoured crafts is uncertain.

Of the four dyeing techniques we see today, wax-resist and clamp-resist are used mainly for creating patterns on articles with specific usages. In the case of wax-resist dyeing, because of the time-consuming designing and preparation processes, patterns are drawn on precut parts of a garment or small squares and rectangles. After dyeing these are assembled to create the desired article. Patterned cotton made by clamp-resist dyeing is used exclusively for making

quilt covers. Only tie-dye and paste-resist dyed patterns are produced in lengths of cloth as well as on specially designed articles of clothing (e.g., bibs) and household furnishings (e.g., quilt covers, wrappers, tablecloths).

No matter what the end-products are used for or how varied the visual effects of the different patterns may be, as a rule, the two-toned blue-and-white layout is elaborated to the utmost possible. Motifs are designed to complement one another in shape and colour distribution. The arrangement of these images, defined by a combination of dots, lines, and blocks, creates a good balance of contrasts between elements of solid (images) and void (their surrounding spaces). Denseness is preferred over sparseness, since repeat elements in an overall pattern engender an invigorating rhythm. Symmetry, too, often plays an important role.

Embroidery is yet another method used to both embellish and enhance the durability of plain cotton. Although the simple cross stitch predominates, many other techniques are employed to make the designs look more impressive. Embroidery is done only on articles with predetermined purposes. Similar to patterns that appear in resist-dyed fabrics, embroidered motifs are rarely realistic images. Their designers enjoy using artist's licence, taking delight in abstraction, exaggeration, repetition, fragmentation, and a total disregard to relative proportions. Strangely, it is exactly this lack of sophistication that makes them charming and unique.

As in most other art forms, symbolism also serves as an essential element in textile decoration. In the past designers and consumers were both well versed in the extensive repertoire of symbolic motifs passed down from generation to generation. These were images derived mainly from the flora and fauna, mythology, legends, histori-





cal events, religion, social customs, and geometric designs. Through association and punning, the images were used to express wishes for longevity, harmonious marriage, numerous progeny, happiness, wealth, and prosperity. To the simple folk, adorning their clothes and household furnishings with these auspicious symbols was one way of reminding them of the good things to look forward to in life. Seeing them constantly also made them feel that their aspirations would more likely come true one day. Today unfortunately, this rich symbolic tradition has become widely neglected due to changing times and cultural values. Many motifs now need to be decoded to be fully appreciated.

Blue-and-white textiles and embroidery may look too subdued or sterile to people in the modern age. Yet, for centuries the common people in China have found them spiritually satisfying. To them, the simple colour scheme epitomized contentment, tranquillity, and harmony between human beings and nature. Notwithstanding the wide acceptance of this simple colour scheme, it must be pointed out that ordinary Chinese did not dress themselves in just blue and white. They also dressed in other colours. The ethnic groups, in particular, who were and still are passionate about colours, would always mix and match clothes or accessories made from blue-and-white textiles and embroidery with articles adorned

in more vibrant colours. In most cases, blue and white blend just as effectively with a multicolour scheme as they do when used on their own in a much simpler colour scheme.



## INDIGO

The Chinese obtain blue dye from several plants. Among them the *liaolan* (*Polygonum tinctorium*) is the most popular. This is an annual herbaceous plant having alternating bluish-green leaves on a fleshy stem. Its small flowers range in shade from white to dark pink. Some believe that the pink-flower varieties yield more dye than the white ones.



*Liaolan* has been cultivated in China since the Zhou dynasty. Over time, this useful plant became more and more widely grown. In China's eastern province of Zhejiang, the best indigo is produced from the village of Huangtandong near the city of Yueqing. Their traditional method of production is briefly described here.<sup>1</sup>

The plant is harvested in mid-October when it reaches about 85 cm tall. Women and children help to pick the leaves and tender twigs that will be used to make indigo dye. The denuded stalks are then cut at about 4 cm above the ground, tied into bundles, and stored away to be replanted in the spring.

The production process, which takes approximately twenty days, is undertaken by men only. It takes place on a gentle slope in the field where three artificial ponds have been dug. The largest, measuring 2 m in diameter and 1 m deep, is situated in the middle. It is flanked by two smaller ones located one above and the other below. During the first week, the leaves and twigs are thoroughly soaked in water in the big pond. They need to be stirred three times a day to ensure even fermentation and release of the dye matter.

The decomposed leaves and twigs are then scooped up and placed in the upper pond. At this time slaked lime

(calcium hydroxide) is added to the liquid left in the big pond.<sup>2</sup> This step needs great care since the amount added is critical to the quality of the end-product. First, two people use a wooden bucket with two long upright handles to scoop out some liquid. While one person keeps stirring the liquid in the bucket, the other adds the slaked lime. When a suitable amount has been added, they lower the bucket into the pond until its rim is about the same level as the liquid in the pond. Turning the bucket in a circular motion all the time, they gradually add the mixed liquid to the indigo in the pond, taking care not to let the residues in the bucket spill over into the pond. This step has to be repeated four times. How much slaked lime should be mixed into the indigo is judged by tasting. When the indigo is bitter to the taste, it means it has attained its optimum alkalinity.



The next step must be done either before sunrise or after sunset so the dye-maker can judge the hue of the indigo unaffected by sunlight. Standing on opposite sides of the pond, each man uses a wooden plough to push and stir the liquid towards the centre. Thirty minutes of this vigorous stirring causes a thick and fast-moving frothy foam to gather on the surface. When the foamy layer reaches a height of 30 cm, one of the men adds a few spoonfuls of vegetable oil. At this point they switch tools, now using skimpily constructed long-handle scoops to continue to stir and





beat the foam down. The foam will gradually disappear and the blue liquid becomes clear. It is then left undisturbed for more than five hours, letting the indigo settle. A final step is required to get rid of impurities. The big pond has two small holes dug out on its wall, one higher and the other close to the bottom. The liquid in it is drained by removing the stopper in the upper hole from outside. When the water level reaches just above the lower hole (used mainly for drainage), bottom residue is scooped up with a small bucket and poured into a rectangular sieve placed across the long side of the smaller pond located below the big pond, allowing the indigo to strain into the pond. This strained content is again left to settle for at least seven days. When the time is considered to be right, excess water is carefully sucked up by a rubber hose and the still wet indigo dyestuff is retrieved from the bottom of the pond. It is placed in a pre-soaked woven bamboo basket dusted with a layer of plant ash and lined with a wet cloth. After the moisture in the dye has seeped through the cloth and basket the indigo is taken out using the cloth and is allowed to harden on its own into a cake.

When dyeing textiles using indigo, a dye vat is filled with warm alkaline solution to dissolve and reduce the insoluble dyestuff.<sup>3</sup> The dye liquid turns yellowish-green when indigo is temporarily transformed by hydrogen into a leuco-derivative called "indigo white." Textiles immersed in the dye first appear yellowish-green. However, after they are lifted out of the dye vat for brief airing, oxygen converts the dye back to its permanent blue form again.

Indigo is the most versatile of all natural dyes. It is particularly well suited to dyeing cotton, hemp, and ramie because these cellu-



losic fibres are unaffected by the alkaline medium of the indigo vat. Animal fibres of silk and wool, too, can be dyed by indigo beautifully, but they need a less alkaline vat. Whatever the fibres used, the desired shade of blue is controlled by the number of dippings and aeration. The built-up layers of colour not only strengthen the fibres, but also give indigo its unique durable quality. Once dyed a deep blue, indigo is so colourfast that it can last for centuries, as is evident in textiles discovered in archaeological excavations. If there is any undesirable quality about indigo, it is its susceptibility to rubbing. After a fabric has been dyed repeatedly with indigo, the dye is deposited on its fibres as sheets of flat molecules. Whenever the fabric is rubbed, friction will cause them to slide apart relatively easily. As a result, indigo blue tends to fade after extensive washing or rubbing, but it never loses its hue completely.

Indigo can be mixed with other colorants to achieve different hues. It is also used as an antidote to poisoning in China. The Chinese still use indigo to treat bleeding, boils, insect bites, fever, and respiratory ailments.

## COTTON

The origin of cotton in China is enigmatic. Traditionally, most people accepted the view represented in Chu Hua's *Mumian pu* (Treatise on Cotton), an eighteenth-century work: cotton was transmitted from India and although it was presented to the central government as a tribute item during the period spanning the Han and Tang dynasties, because it was not yet grown, neither the people used it as a clothing fabric nor the government identified it as a taxable commodity; seeds were brought to the northwestern and southeastern regions in China during the Song and Yuan dynasties by both land and sea.<sup>1</sup>



In modern times, easier access to historical records and newly unearthed archaeological finds have stimulated fresh speculations. In 1978, for example, when a small fragment of greyish cloth was found in a cave burial at Wuyi Mountain in Chong'an county, Fujian province, certain scholars eagerly embraced this discovery as evidence of cotton having been in use in China for a long time and the earliest region of cotton cultivation being the southeastern coastal provinces because results of scientific tests proved that it was woven with cotton fibre and suggested a date of 3000 years.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, other scholars using different data think otherwise. Some believe that cotton was transmitted from India to China by two routes. The southern routes involved both land and sea. By land, it reached the western part of Yunnan province through Burma. By sea, it arrived in Hainan Island via Vietnam. This happened during the end of the Western Han period. The northern route took place much later, during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Traversing Central Asia, it reached the Turfan basin in present-day Xinjiang province.<sup>3</sup>

Still others, who also base their theory on archaeological evidence and scientific tests, think that the cotton seeds discovered from Tang-dynasty tombs in Bachu belonged to a variety originally from Africa and assert that it was transmitted to present-day Xinjiang by way of the Silk Road and from there spread to the northwestern provinces of Gansu and Shaanxi.<sup>4</sup>

In any case, most people agree that cotton became popularized during the Southern Song and Yuan periods because of several factors. First, publications about proper methods of cotton cultivation began to come out during the Southern Song period. They were written by intellectuals who had migrated to the south to seek political refuge. Second, the Mongol rulers, who were aware of the importance of cotton, encouraged the cultivation of this useful crop as soon as they had gained complete control over the whole of China. The information provided by the Song writers proved to be useful. In addition, the Yuan government established a special department to oversee the production and collection of cotton. In documentation, too, another office in charge of farming affairs compiled the *Nongsang jiyao* (Essentials about Agriculture and Sericulture), a compendium that preserved all previously published works related to every aspect of farming, including cotton cultivation. Third, a woman commonly known as Huang *daopo* (Granny Huang, the Daoist adept, b. ca. 1245), is credited to have travelled to Yazhou in Hainan Island during her youth, where she learned cotton-weaving techniques from women of the Li ethnic group, and later returned to





her hometown Nijing to impart her newly acquired knowledge to fellow weavers as well as to redesign some of the necessary tools.<sup>5</sup> As a result, cotton production flourished in the Songjiang area where the town of Nijing was situated. The quality of the product, too, was highly esteemed.

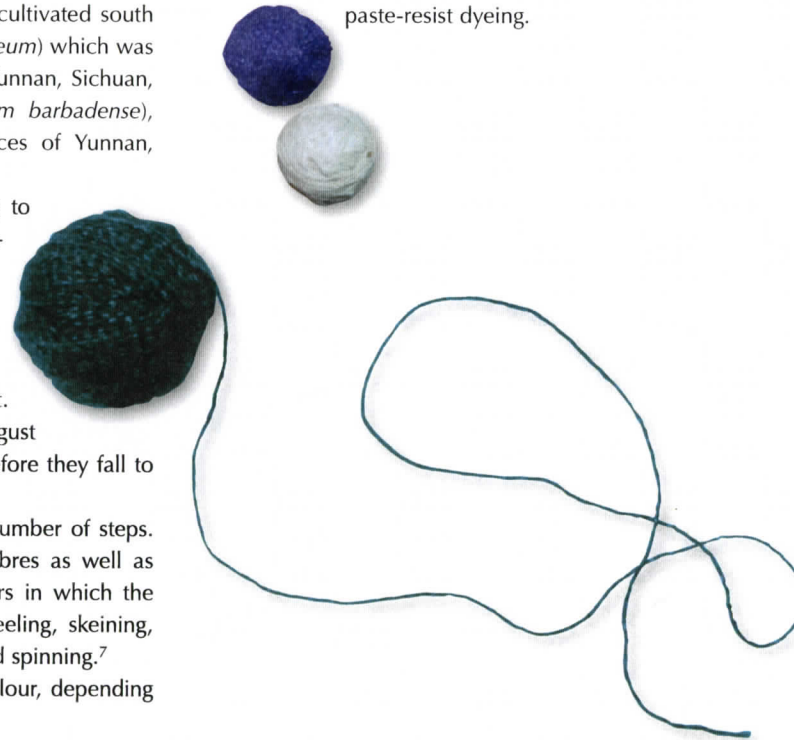
Cotton cultivation and weaving continued to flourish during the Ming and Qing dynasties. During the better part of the Ming dynasty cotton was in such high demand that many peasants living in the Yangzi River delta devoted as much as seven-tenths of their land allotment to growing cotton, leaving only three-tenths of it for rice.<sup>6</sup> By this time the most common varieties of cotton cultivated were the *shumian* (*Gossypium arboreum*) which was widely cultivated south of the Yellow River, the *caomian* (*Gossypium herbaceum*) which was largely cultivated in the provinces of Guangdong, Yunnan, Sichuan, Gansu, and Xinjiang, and the *mumian* (*Gossypium barbadense*), which was most popular in the southern provinces of Yunnan, Guangxi, Guangdong, Fujian, and Taiwan.

Methods of cotton cultivation vary according to geographical location and climate. Generally speaking, seeds are sown in the spring. Great care must be taken when seedlings are transplanted. During the growing period, thinning, weeding, watering, and fertilization are essential for proper development. Flowers begin to bloom in late July or early August. The fruit forms in capsules called bolls ripen from August to October. The opened bolls must be harvested before they fall to the ground.

Preparing raw cotton for weaving requires a number of steps. Ginning removes the seeds. Fluffing loosens the fibres as well as removes impurities. Carding turns cotton into slivers in which the fibres are evenly distributed. This is followed by reeling, skeining, washing, starching, steaming, drying, unwinding, and spinning.<sup>7</sup>

Cotton yarn is creamy white or off-white in colour, depending

on variety and quality. It can be bleached to become really white. Whether treated or not, it can be used for embroidery and weaving. The finished products of the untreated cotton would be plain, but cotton yarn can also be dyed into many desirable colours. By mixing dyed and undyed cotton yarns in embroidery and weaving, endless colour combinations and designs can be achieved in the end-products. An alternative way of embellishment is by dyeing after cotton yarns in their natural state have been woven into cloth. Not only solid-colour cloth in any hue can be produced, but also a great variety of attractive designs can be created on cloth by a variety of dyeing techniques, notably tie-dyeing, wax-resist, clamp-resist, and paste-resist dyeing.



## WOVEN FABRICS: PLAIN AND DECORATED

Woven fabrics may be plain, subtly patterned, or sumptuously adorned, depending on the method used to manufacture them. Although numerous techniques have developed over time, most



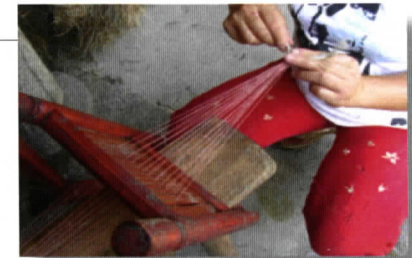
fabrics are created with one of three basic weaves: plain (or tabby), twill, and satin. Plain weave, being the simplest, involves only interlacing the warp (longitudinal) threads with the weft (transverse) threads in a regular over-and-under sequence. The fabric produced has an even and firm structure identical on both faces. Since ancient times hemp, linen, and cotton have been woven mostly in this simple and fast manner, for practical and economic reasons.

Over the years, weavers learned that by varying the interlacing sequence of the warp and weft threads and the number of strands that made up these structural elements, floats could be created.<sup>1</sup>

Floats aligned differently would produce interesting variations, such as twill, satin, and other float weaves. Silk, a smooth, pliable, and lustrous fibre, has been woven mostly by these more complex methods. These richly textured and patterned fabrics are not only sensuous to the touch, but also much more pleasing to the eye.

In China various kinds of simple looms were already in use by the early Neolithic Age. Two of them, the back-strap loom and the card loom, are still used today predominantly by ethnic minorities.<sup>2</sup> While the back-strap loom produces lengths of fabric of narrow width, the card loom can only be used to weave figured sashes. Han Chinese peasants have been using various styles of horizontal or low-warp looms for weaving hemp and linen since pre-Qin times. They used them for cotton ever since cotton was

extensively cultivated all over China after the thirteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Their products may have narrow or wide widths. To make figured sashes and ribbons, they use a small and handy ribbon loom.<sup>4</sup> Weavers of figured silk, on the other hand, rely on a variety of sophisticated looms to meet the more demanding requirements. The multi-heapd and multi-pedal loom, and a patterning loom which requires two people to operate, are some examples.<sup>5</sup>



**FOUR CHARACTERS** highlighted in red above the two central figures identify them as “the venerable immortals Mei and Ge.” Mei is generally taken to mean Mei Fu, a prefect of Nanchang during the Han dynasty. He resigned his office to roam about in search of immortality after the country came under the sway of the despotic usurper, Wang Mang (45 bc–ad 23). Ge has been occasionally identified as Ge Xuan (ad 164–244), an alchemist, but more often as his grandson, Ge Hong (ad 284–364), the renowned Daoist philosopher, physician, and alchemist.

Although these historical figures lived in different periods, many legends linking Mei Fu and one of the Ges have been created to explain how indigo came to be used for dyeing textiles.



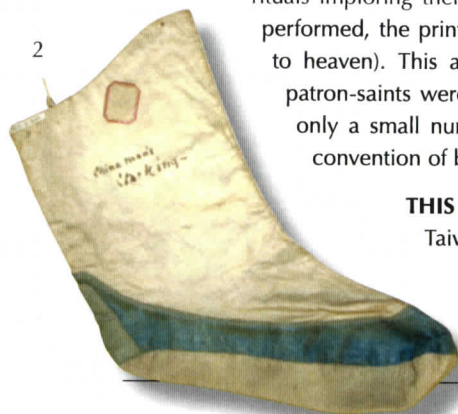
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1. MEI FU AND GE HONG, PATRON SAINTS OF TEXTILE-DYEING, Woodblock print, Ink and colour on paper, Early 20th century, On loan from Dr. W.J. Zurowski, L2004.11.1, H. 31.6 cm x W. 26.7 cm



One charming legend has it that in ancient times people wore white clothes before they learned about dyeing. One day Mei fell on the muddy river shore and his clothes were stained yellow. When news of using mud to dye clothes yellow spread, people began to wear yellow. Not satisfied with this new-found colour, which would fade after a few washings, Mei and his friend, Ge, searched for another more stable colour. Another time, they noticed a piece of yellow cloth drying on a tree branch had been blown to the ground covered with vegetation and had become stained with green and blue markings. Gathering some of the plant, they pulverized its leaves, put the paste in water, and soaked some white cloth in the liquid. The white cloth turned blue. From then on, people were able to wear blue clothes. Furthermore, Ge is credited for having discovered by chance a method of using wine dregs to induce fermentation and revive coagulated indigo. This happened when he drank wine too hastily and, seized by a fit of choking, inadvertently spit out the wine into a dye-pot.<sup>6</sup>

Over the centuries, Mei and Ge have been honoured as patron-saints for their reputed contributions to textile-dyeing. They are commemorated each year on the fourteenth day of the fourth month and the ninth day of the ninth month in the lunar calendar. On these days woodblock prints depicting Mei and Ge, such as this one, are pasted on walls or placed on altars with offerings. After rituals imploring their continuous blessings have been performed, the prints are burned (to send them back to heaven). This and similar prints depicting other patron-saints were once mass-produced. However, only a small number have survived owing to the convention of burning them.



**THIS MAN'S SOCK** was collected in Taiwan by Dr. George Leslie Mackay (1844–1901), a Canadian missionary sent by the

Presbyterian Church in Canada to do good work and spread the Gospel in Taiwan (then known as Formosa).<sup>7</sup> Arriving first at the southern seaport of Gaoxiong at the end of 1871, he soon moved to Danshui in northern Taiwan and remained there until he died. For thirty years he preached, healed, and educated the people within his parish. A naturalist and anthropologist, he also collected plant specimens and daily use articles that he thought interesting or unique.

In 1893, while on his second furlough, he brought back to Canada hundreds of objects, collected with the intention that they be used as teaching aids to foster a fuller understanding of the cultures of the different peoples living in Taiwan. Two years later he donated his collection to his alma mater, the Knox College of the University of Toronto. In 1915 more than six hundred objects were transferred to the custody of the Royal Ontario Museum. Since then, they have formed a solid base for the study of the lives and customs of the Han Chinese as well as the aboriginals in Taiwan.<sup>8</sup>

The white sock is double-layered. For further reinforcement, the upper is edged with a blue border and at the heel another layer of quilted light blue cloth is stitched on. These additional protective features also serve as a means of simple ornamentation. They evoke the illusion of spats. Another subtle structural design worthy of note is the gently curving edge of the top which makes the sock look much more stylish than one with a flat top. The sole is also reinforced by quilting, for greater durability as well as for warmth and comfort. Socks like this would have been worn with shoes and pulled over the hem of the trousers. Puttees would be needed to keep them in place.

Stuck on one side of the top is a small paper label with a hand-

2. MAN'S SOCK, Cotton, Qing dynasty, last quarter of 19th century, Taiwan, Knox College Collection, 915.3.146, H. 18 cm x L. 23.2 cm (sole) x W. 6.2 cm (sole)

written number "160." Below it is a note in English which reads, "China man's stocking."

Both were likely written by Dr. Mackay himself who, in providing the information, made quite certain that the provenance of the sock and its function could not be mistaken by his compatriots who lived far away from its place of origin and would be unfamiliar with the culture from which it came. Perhaps because the sock was perceived to be nothing more than a specimen and all such socks looked alike, one was deemed to be enough to serve its educational function.

**THIS MATCHING SET OF CASUAL WEAR** for the working classes is made of indigo-dyed coarse cotton tabby. The jacket is cut in a style that became popular by the end of the Qing dynasty. It has a centre front opening with a standup collar, long narrow sleeves, and a loose-fitting body with side slits. The cutting makes the best use of the narrow width of the handloom-woven fabric. The body of the jacket is made of two long strips of cloth, draped over the shoulder and down the front and back. The strips are sewn together at the back, and hemmed at the front to create the opening. The sleeves, collar, and five buttons and loops are separately sewn in.

Although the jacket looks rather plain, actually it does have a few subtle decorative details. The stitching, for example, is executed with white thread (now tinted pale grey-blue by the indigo in the cloth after many washings) and prominently shown on the surface, creating a dotted outline at places where two pieces of fabric are joined together. The narrow piping around the base of the standup collar is another feature that is both functional and decorative. The



3

five knotted buttons and loop-fastenings, too, serve the same purposes. Such jackets are invariably fastened with an odd number of buttons and loops. This is because odd numbers are representative of the *yang* (male) element in the dual forces.<sup>9</sup>

The voluminous trousers are popularly called *dadangku* (literally big-crotch trousers). The legs are straight tubes made up of four seams at front and back, with gussets forming the crotch. They are joined to a wide dark blue waistband.<sup>10</sup> The wide waistband not only makes it easy for the wearer to step into and out of the trousers, but also for him to secure the trousers without the use of a tie or a belt. To fasten, the wearer simply gathers the excess waistband in his two hands, folds one side so as to overlap the other side, then rolls the waistband downward. In this way the trousers stay put for all but the most vigorous activities.<sup>11</sup> The loose-fitting legs allow him greater freedom of movement while working. On rainy days he can also roll them high up to prevent soiling if he happens to be travelling or working outdoors. In fact, the loose-fitting characteristic of the whole outfit also makes it possible for swapping clothes in a family, such as between father and a grown-up son or between the siblings. When a toiling peasant or worker is covered with perspiration, to some degree

this feature would also prevent the garment from sticking to the skin, for air circulation would help to reduce the amount of sweat.

3. MAN'S JACKET AND TROUSERS, Cotton, 1900–1925, *Gift of Toronto Diocesan Anglican Church Women*, 971.166.53 a–b, L. 63 cm x W. 131 cm (jacket), L. 100 cm x W. 66 cm (trousers)



**THIS UPPER GARMENT** is loose-fitting and long, reaching to the calf. Called *ao*, it would have been worn with a pair of trousers.<sup>12</sup> The main parts are made of white cotton tabby. The neckband, diagonal side opening, side vents, and hem are all appliquéd with indigo-dyed cotton. The appliquéd motifs located at the side vents are the *ruyi*. Those positioned at the hem repeat the same motifs but they have been reconfigured in a fanciful way so that the corner motifs may also be interpreted as bats with outspread wings, and the middle one, with the addition of a four-leaf pattern suggestive of the calyx of a persimmon (*shizi*), may evoke the auspicious phrase *shishi ruyi* (everything happens as one wishes). The bat (*fu*) supplies a homophone commonly used to symbolize good fortune or happiness (*fu*). In addition, the coin motif (also doubling as the head of the bat) located at each corner of the hem symbolizes wealth as well as fertility.

A variety of showy colours have been added to soften the sombreness of the wide border trimming and the stark contrast between the large areas of blue and white. Pink, red, bright yellow, and different shades of green, for example, are provided by the silk-embroidered floral meander on the black standup collar. A cotton tape, woven with green and pale yellow motifs, sewn as an inside border around the appliquéd, contributes to the whole a pervasive and intense shade of pink. Furthermore, the bright orange wool twill sleeve band attached to a black border is edged with another cotton tape adorned with repeat images of butterflies, zigzags, and *ruyi* picked out in green, purple, and orange against a white background. The same bright orange wool twill has also been used as appliquéd in the large *ruyi* at the side vent and as insertions below some of the piercings of the

appliquéd work at the hem. Silk-wrapped threads in red and green, too, are each combined with a similarly constructed beige thread to create (using a couching stitch) a double outline to accentuate the contours of the large *ruyi*.

The great variety of materials, colours, and techniques of weaving, embroidery, and sewing that have been employed in the creation of this garment makes it a truly amazing work. We may imagine how proud its creator must have felt when she wore it on a festive occasion.

**THIS STRAIGHT-CUT HIP-LENGTH GARMENT** has a front opening with no fastening device. It is lined with unbleached cotton. The shell is also made of cotton. Called *liangbu* or glossy cloth, it has been treated by dyeing and a special process to engender the jet-black sheen. The sleeveless coat is embellished in two distinctively different ways. The edges of the front opening are reinforced subtly by a red thread sewn with running stitch. The neck is finished with an applied collar decorated with flashy appliquéd work and embroidery.

Set against a dark background, three groups of *ruyi* are embroidered with close-ring chain stitch (black outline) and double-ring chain stitch (white outline) on three separate pieces of rectangular orange cotton appliquéd. They are divided and enclosed by an appliquéd orange border embroidered with green and yellow geometric



4. WOMAN'S COAT, Cotton and wool twill, 1900–1925, Miao ethnic group, Guizhou province, Gift of Mr. W.G. Windsor, 932.8.5, L. 140 cm x W. 130 cm



5

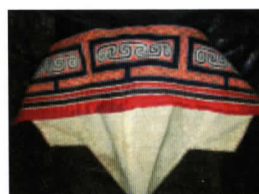
leaf and floral patterns. The leaf-like green and yellow triangles are interconnected to form two intertwining zigzags. All appliqué components are then defined with a white outline sewn with cotton thread using back stitch. More appliqué trimmings in red and white are added as stepped borders to complement the vibrant colour scheme.

Several features make this simple garment a striking work: clean lines, harmonious mix of vivid hues, sharp colour contrast, and innovative embroidery designs. It is actually part of a festive ensemble which includes a matching but more elaborately embroidered long-sleeve jacket

of the same material and a full-pleated skirt with wax-resist-dyed patterns.<sup>13</sup>

The glossy cloth is highly cherished by many ethnic groups, in particular the Miao, Dong, Yao, Shui, and Zhuang. It is very time-consuming and labour-intensive to produce. Essentially, indigo-dyed cloth in very dark blue is coated with two different solutions one after the other, each time after the cloth has been left to dry. The first is a purplish black solution made by boiling the rhizome of a thorny vine called *jingang teng* (*Smilax china*) in water. The second is diluted animal glue. The now purplish black cloth needs to be dipped in the indigo bath again, possibly several times to make sure the colour is fast.

When dry, the colour-fast cloth is folded up, placed on a



smooth stone slab, and pounded with a wooden pestle until it is smooth and flat. To give it high gloss, it needs to be further treated with three different solutions in succession after each applied coating has been dried. These are a liquid obtained by straining soya bean paste, diluted egg white, and lye. When finished, the dried cloth is returned one more time to the indigo bath for another round of dipping, rinsing, and drying. In the final step, the dried purplish black cloth is again folded up, placed on the stone slab and beaten with a wooden mallet until it gives off a high gloss.<sup>14</sup>

**PLAIN HANDWOVEN COTTON** in shades of off-white, white, blue, and black has been widely used by the ordinary people because of its easy production, low cost, and versatility. Handwoven cotton may also be adorned with patterns in multiple colours.<sup>15</sup> The selection shown here is worked mainly in the blue-and-white colour scheme. Red has been added in two specimens to enliven the subtle palette.

Stripes and checkers are two basic patterns. Many variations can be created by changing the width of each stripe, the number of stripes, the spacing between them, and the infinite ways of positioning each additional



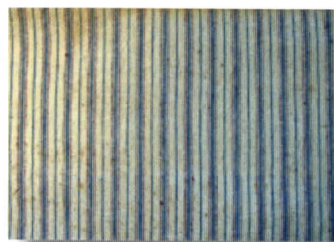
6a



6b

5. WOMAN'S SLEEVELESS COAT, Cotton, beaten, 1925–1945, Miao ethnic group, Gulin, Sichuan province, Gift of Mr. John E. Vollmer, 979.174c, L. 97.5 cm x W. 56.5 cm





6c



6d

colour thread. In the specimen with blue-and-white stripes (a) the fine vertical lines are all of irregular widths. These randomly executed parallels produce an interesting, slightly psychedelic visual effect. The blue-and-white checkered specimen (b) is also more interesting than it appears to be at first glance. The lines making up the grid are designed to be wide enough so that at each intersection where the vertical and horizontal cross they create a pattern resembling a pinwheel. In one

of the two specimens where the red colour has been added, the set of red dotted lines flanking each of the wider stripes imparts a sense of daintiness to the otherwise rather uninspiring pattern (c). The checkered pattern of the other (d) has a more complicated look. It gives the impression of a red-accented grid dividing a background of fine horizontal lines into squares. Added to this is another network of intermittent white lines which crisscross at the centres of the squares, creating yet another visual dimension that enhances the attractiveness of the overall design.

Multicoloured and patterned cotton fabrics are mainly used for clothing and accessories. They are more expensive than plain cotton fabric because yarns dyed in different colours are used, designs need to be planned, and the intricate weaving takes much more time.



7

**THIS WORK APRON** typifies the kind many peasant women in the southern part of Zhejiang province wear no matter what kind of work they may be doing. It was made during the 1920s as part of a trousseau. Because a great amount of time, thought, and energy has been devoted to its making, the creator took great pride in it and never used it. It was passed down to a daughter as an heirloom.

The apron is rectangular in shape. The skirt is made of a length of blue-and-white handwoven cotton with a checkered pattern against a background of interlinking and overlapping squares. Its bottom edge is finished with braided yarns that serve as fringes. The beautiful fabric is attached to a waistband made of indigo-dyed cotton. Also attached to the waistband is a large flap made of the same plain material. It hangs freely in front of the apron and protects it from dirt.

Another unusual feature is the woven patterned ties used for securing the apron around the waist. They are exceptionally wide and finished off with

6. FOUR LENGTHS OF CLOTH, Cotton, 2003, Nantong, Jiangsu province, *Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung*, 2004.68.2, 3, 4, 5, W. 45.8 cm, (a. blue and white stripes), 43.6 cm (b. blue and white checkers), 44.3 cm (c. blue, white, and red stripes), 47 cm (d. blue, white, and red checkers)

7. APRON, Cotton, 1920s, Huangtandong village, Yueqing county, Zhejiang province, *Gift of Ms. Tammy H.W. Yue*, 2004.69.2, L. 74 cm x W. 48 cm

braided fringes. To one of the fringes is attached a short and narrow band woven with a small floral design. It may have served as a reinforcing tie or a simple decorative element. The pattern of the much wider ties, bordered by dark blue bands with minute dots, is composed of irregular forms—both characters and symbols—enclosed in interlocking diamond-shaped frames of different sizes. They are all arranged diagonally, paralleling one another. Yet in the haphazard positioning of the forms, they may be represented facing any direction. Appearing in blue on white, the characters are all constructed as angular configurations composed of simple straight lines or straight lines that make right-angle turns. Some of the Chinese characters can be easily recognized, but many are so abstracted and fragmented as to make them impossible to decipher. If a message is embodied in these characters, it is too cryptic to understand.

Nevertheless, several characters expressing popular auspicious wishes, such as *fu* (good fortune), *lu* (wealth), *shou* (longevity), and the twin form of *xi* (double happiness), are among the recognizable ones. Symbols that have been mixed in the jumble include the *wan* 卐 or swastika-like sign, the double open cross, double closed cross, interlocking arcs, and interlocking lozenges. The *wan* symbol means ten thousand and, by extension, long life. The symbol made up of two interlocking lozenges is called *fangsheng*. It signifies prosperity. The significance of the rest is ambiguous.

Since the Han dynasty Chinese characters have been woven into silk, brocade, wool, and cotton.<sup>16</sup> Whether they appeared as single images or as inscriptions, they were always meant to convey auspicious blessings or admonitions. In the light of this long history, the jumble of characters we see in the two ties is baffling. Perhaps the weaver had only minimal education. Yet she saw the attractive potential in using Chinese characters as a decorative element and the challenge of using threads to “write” them out in ways that pleased her.



As a rule, such ties are embellished with geometric or floral motifs.<sup>17</sup> This pair, therefore, is quite unique.

**THIS SCARF**, made of a narrow strip of unbleached cotton, is woven with sets of three horizontal lines across the width.<sup>18</sup> The sets are spaced apart at equidistance at both ends, but are spaced further apart as they progress towards the mid-section to allow for additional bands of patterns. The patterns are structured by interweaving one set of ground warp with two sets of wefts—with the ground weft forming the plain weave while the blue-coloured weft forms the patterns.

No less than twenty-eight patterns are shown here and only one pattern—a chain pattern—has been repeated once (the beginning and ending bands are identical). The repertoire includes simple patterns made up of repeat crosses, wavy lines, triangles, meanders, lattices, linking trapeziums, as well as more complex patterns depicting facing ducks, three variations of single file of dancers holding hands, double files of them represented back to back, zigzags, the *wan* motif, eight-point stars, and densely structured geometric configurations.

This scarf was created by a girl or woman of the Miao ethnic nationality. By exhibiting a great variety of patterns in her work, she succeeds not only in making this humble head piece look attractive, but also makes known her knowledge and skill in weaving. In fact, she may well have used it also as a convenient sampler, unraveling to interested friends the intricacies of some of the more complex patterns.

8. SCARF, Cotton, 1980s, Miao ethnic group, Kailli, Guizhou province, *Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung, 2004.68.7, L. 86.5 cm x W. 24.5 cm*



## PATTERN-DYED FABRICS: TIE-DYE

Tie-dye is a popular modern term used to describe textiles embellished with patterns made by shaping and tying with thread prior to dyeing. The Chinese name given to this kind of pattern-dyeing technique is *jiaoxie*, literally meaning "patterned textiles [made by] tying." "Tying" may mean knotting the fabric before it is dyed. This method produces a diagonal striped motif. Tie-dyeing may also mean two other methods. One is drawing up and binding a small portion of a fabric with thread. The other is drawing up a thread after stitches shaping the outline of a desired pattern have been made. The first kind creates motifs of a ring or a square with a dot, while the second kind brings forth an even greater variety of motifs, notably different kinds of patterned lines, and geometric and floral shapes. Furthermore, a multitude of shape-resisted designs may be



achieved by using various additional means. In manipulating the fabric, for example, folding, pleating, crumpling, and twisting produce different results. Divergent effects, too, can be obtained through various styles of stitching, tying, and knotting. Wrapping the fabric over objects, such as a bean, a rope, or a short tube, before tying the thread around is another way of creating

patterns. Using impenetrable material to wrap a certain part of a fabric before tying is yet another possibility. Clamping a folded fabric with a set of two wooden sticks, too, is only one of many other tricks that can be used to engender more intricate patterns. Combining two or more of these techniques during the production process gives an enormous design potential.

All of these means are employed for two purposes: to prevent dye from permeating the details of a design that should remain in the original colour of the fabric and to create multifarious colour grada-

tions in the dyed areas to enhance visual appeal. Tie-dyed designs are all characterized by soft edges. Blurred images of shapes and chance colour fusion and diffusion that develop during the dyeing stage are just some of the fascinating aspects of tie-dyed fabrics.

Tie-dyeing is generally believed to be the oldest and simplest fabric pattern-dyeing technique.<sup>1</sup> Although some people think it came into use as early as the Han dynasty, to date only one possible piece of evidence from that period has been discovered. This is a piece of silk with handwriting found in Gansu province. The text, written on a white ground, is enclosed in a dyed red frame.<sup>2</sup> More archaeological evidence from Gansu and Xinjiang, however, shows that starting from the fourth century tie-dyed fabrics became more commonly used for clothing and by the Sui and Tang dynasties were in vogue.<sup>3</sup> From the works of many well-known Tang poets we also learn about the descriptive names given to some of the most popular tie-dyed motifs, such as fish roes (*yuzixie*), bleary eyes (*zuiyanxie*), interlocking lozenges (*fangshengxie*), rosettes (*tuangongxie*), and blurred images (*cuoyunxie*).<sup>4</sup> The first two refer to two kinds of small spots. The third alludes to a geometric pattern. The last two are self-explanatory. From Song and Yuan writings, a few more names can be gathered. These include agate (*manuoxie*), multi-folds (*zhexie*), and deer embryos (*lutaixie*).<sup>5</sup> The last-mentioned name probably describes a white spotted pattern on a purplish red ground.<sup>6</sup>

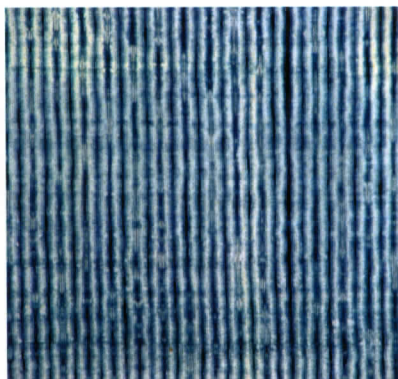
Two major factors affected the development of the tie-dye technique after the Tang dynasty. During the reign of Emperor Renzong (r. 1023–1063) of the Northern Song period decrees were issued repeatedly forbidding government textile-manufacturing workshops from purchasing any



textiles from Sichuan and Shaanxi other than those required for the making of army uniforms and banning common people from wearing clothes with tie-dyed patterns. Although these economical constraints were lifted in the Southern Song period, by then the previous strong interest in this kind of textile-pattern dyeing technique had been lost. After the Song technological breakthroughs in other weaving and dyeing methods made possible the production of many varieties of patterned textiles, time-consuming tie-dyed fabrics were largely neglected. The basic technique, however, has survived to the modern times and is still practised on a small scale, mostly in the provinces of Jiangsu, Hunan, Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu, and Guizhou.

**THE VERTICAL STRIPES IN THIS YARDAGE** are made by pleating the white cloth along the warp at regular intervals from selvedge to selvedge. The pleats are held in place by parallel horizontal rows of stitches on both sides of the cloth, also made at regular intervals. The cloth becomes a long strip once it is gathered together tightly by drawing up all the threads. This is then bound by stout thread, soaked in water to eliminate the air in the cloth, and dipped in the dye vat. Since only the edge of each pleat comes into direct contact with indigo, a pattern of blue stripes results. Slight differences in the tension of the stitches and the binding thread, as well as uneven moisture distribution in the cloth all help to create a very special design effect. The stripes are soft-edged. Each one also shows individual or interlinking crystal-like bubbles at different places. Such details add much visual interest to the dyed fabric. Instead of rigid and

9



sharp-edged stripes, the pattern evokes images of a curtain made of strings of beads or an outdoor grille in the winter, with its accumulated ice starting to melt in the early morning sun, dripping slowly and hardening again in crystal forms later in the day when cold winds whip through.

**THE BARBED WIRE LATTICE PATTERN** in this yardage is made essentially by folding, stitching, and tying. The cloth is folded horizontally in accordion fashion. Sets of diagonal lines resembling the Chinese character for the number eight 八 are first marked side by side on each fold, with both ends of each line stopping short at the two edges of the fold. Cloth is pinched with the fingers along each line and a single row of running stitches is made close to the edge of the fold. When all the stitching is completed, the threads are drawn up tight and knotted. After dyeing and removal of the threads the lines are each flanked by two rows of asym-



10

9. LENGTH OF FABRIC WITH STRIPED PATTERN, Linen, 2003, Nantong, Jiangsu province, *Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung, 2004*. 68.8m, W. 133.5 cm

10. LENGTH OF FABRIC WITH BARBED-WIRE LATTICE PATTERN, Cotton, 1988, Kunming, Yunnan province, *On loan from Mrs. Sara Irwin, L2004.7.2*, W. 87 cm



metrically arranged white dots. Two names have been given to lines of this shape. People living in western Hunan province refer to them as "centipede" lines; women of the Bai ethnic group in Yunnan province simply call them "caterpillars."

The floret in the centre of each open-square unit is made by stitching and tying. Each centre is first marked with a circle. The circle is folded in half and running stitches are made along the semi-circumference. The thread is then drawn up tight and tied around the base of the resulting protrusion. The cloth is dyed after all the steps for creating the lines and florets have been completed. The regularity inherent in this overall pattern is offset by a great variety of subtle shapes and tonal gradations engendered by the diverse ways the wrinkles in the cloth are formed when the threads used for stitching are drawn up. The variegated pattern imparts a strong sense of unpredictability within a predictable design format.

**THIS LINED SHORT JACKET** is cut in the modern style. The front opening is edged with a wide dark blue band having a narrow silk trim in light purplish blue. The band is extended around the trimmed standup collar. This is also used as a decorative detail for the side vents. Five pairs of loops and knotted buttons made from the same trimming material are used for closing the opening.

The fabric's design shows three kinds of floral motifs. The largest one is a six-petalled flower. Each petal is first marked in oval shape on the cloth and each is worked by stitching along the edge of the two adjacent arc-shaped folds of cloth that have been pinched together. The rest of the process and the method of making the flower centre are similar to those described for the line and floret in No. 10.



11

The round flower head is produced in a way also similar to the floret described in No. 10, except that after tying at the base the protrusion is further bound tightly with thread. This extra step creates a network of filaments in the dyed image and enhances visual interest. Because of this special effect, women of the Bai ethnic group call this motif *zhizhu hua* (spider flower).

The smallest motif is the most popular one. It has acquired several names, all based on different interpretations of its image. These include *hudie hua* (butterfly-shaped flower), *gou zuzhua hua* (dog's claws-shaped flower), and *ezi hua* or *e'e hua* (both meaning wasp-shaped flower).<sup>7</sup> This motif does not need preliminarily marked guiding lines.

At the desired spot the cloth is first folded into two halves. Both layers are then folded two more times, once forward and once backward, to form a triangle with an apex shaped with a 60-degree angle. The apex is then bent down to one side and secured with stitches forming a V shape. After dyeing and removing the thread an image showing a cluster of five white oval spots and one oval spot with only a white outline will emerge.<sup>8</sup> This delightful motif may be viewed as a flower or a butterfly. On this jacket it is probably meant to be butterflies fluttering among interspersed flowers. The tiny greyish dots visible along most of the outlines of the motifs are preliminary marks made to guide the needleworker who does the stitching. Although not planned for as part of the design, their chance presence gives a stronger sense of depth to the design.

11. WOMAN'S JACKET, Cotton, 1999, Lanzhou, Gansu province, On loan from Mrs. Sara Irwin, L2004.7.1, L. 61.5 cm

**THE DESIGN OF THIS TABLECLOTH** or wrapper is composed of a number of overlapping squares of different sizes, with each progressively larger one forming a decorative border for the inner one. Cowrie-shaped motifs in various sizes and slightly different forms are repeated as a filler. The largest kind, which appears in lozenge shape, fills the outermost border. The medium-size kind is oval in shape. Four of them are arranged surrounding a squarish version, making up a conventional coin motif. The coin motif is repeated to fill each of the diamond-shaped spaces in the latticework executed in machine-couched white thread made stout by combining more than ten strands together.

The design in the centre shows a square with round corners standing on one of its corners within a square frame. Its four sides are flanked by a pair of triangles, each triangle being separated from the other by a light blue line. Within the square with round corners are four identical floral motifs, each positioned at one corner. They enclose an eight-petal floret in the centre. The floret is formed by eight small cowrie-shaped motifs and a small round one as the centre.

When the four floral motifs are viewed with a cowrie-shaped motif directly below, they resemble four fleur-de-lis designs.

The fleur-de-lis designs are achieved by stitching along the pre-marked shapes on the cloth before dyeing. The techniques used for making the cowrie-shaped motif are similar to those described for

the six-petalled flower and the round flower head in No. 11. Of particular interest here are the three types of narrow border patterns. The innermost one that shows a line with white dots on both sides is commonly called a "centipede" line. The method for producing it has been discussed in No. 10.

Adjacent to it is a broad line with faint bluish interlinking elongated diamonds against a white ground as the middle part and white dots forming fringes on both sides. It is made by folding the cloth three times (for the last two times, one forward and one backward) to create four layers. The four layers are then sewn together along the edges by a line of running stitches.<sup>9</sup> The cloth is dyed after the thread has been drawn up and knotted. Because the stitching resists the dye from touching the two middle layers directly, a faint pattern in light blue is obtained after dyeing.

The outermost border is executed in a similar way. The only difference is the folding method. After the cloth has been folded once the two layers are folded together one more time before the same kind of stitching process is done. After dyeing, the line obtained is characterized by two patterns. One side shows two rows of asymmetrically arranged white dots. The other side shows a white line divided by numerous faint blue short lines. Women of the Bai ethnic group fondly call this pattern *mayachi* (horse teeth).<sup>10</sup>

Two of the border patterns, the "centipede" line and light blue tape with fringes, are also used in the square at the centre of the tablecloth. The use of light blue softens the stark contrast between blue and white. It also exerts a harmonizing function in the overall design, which, cleverly conceived, looks the same no matter how the tablecloth/wrapper is turned.

12. TABLECLOTH / WRAPPER, Cotton, 2002, Yunnan province, On loan from Mrs. Patty Proctor, L2004.8.1, L. 142 cm x W. 145 cm

12





**THE DESIGN IN THIS YARDAGE** relies on two kinds of dyed motifs to create a continuous floral scroll across the length of each divided segment. One is a white square with a dark blue dot. Repeated numerous times, the squares are arranged closely and neatly in a diagonal grid to form a ground pattern. Uncovered areas are reserved for the scrolling branches, slender leaves, and fully opened blossoms to take shape. The other is a white square ring. It is repeated and linked to form the linear details of the stylized flowers.

The techniques of making the two motifs are somewhat different. However, certain preliminary steps are applicable to both. The silk, for example, must be stretched taut to be sized first. Sizing gives body to silk, making it easier to both stencil a design onto it and to remove the stencil marks later. Sized silk is easier to bind as well. It also holds creases, a decided advantage that helps prevent the binding thread from slipping.

Shaping and binding can be done only after the design on a stencil has been transferred onto the silk using a fugitive colour. In order to produce the ground pattern, a fold on the bias where a dot is indicated is pinched. Then the silk is folded again, doubling the bias fold. The tiny folded point is given a 180-degree counterclockwise twist to compress it into a conical shape. The nub of silk is then bound with thread in a clockwise direction five or six times. Care must be taken to make sure that each turn of thread is in tight contact with the previous one because space inadvertently created between them would allow dye to penetrate and mar the clarity of the resisted square. Before tying a knot, the

thread needs to be moistened on the lips or tongue. It is not cut, but continues to the next unit. As a rule, the work progresses from lower left to upper right in diagonal rows.

The square ring motif is usually somewhat irregular in size and form. As can be seen in this yardage, a less structured grouping of such resisted rings may create a subtle and casual effect. It is often made by using a stand equipped with a hook. The hook is designed to catch the stenciled mark on the silk after it has been folded on the bias once. It also facilitates the making of a second fold and the binding and knotting processes.

After the silk is bound, it needs to be thoroughly soaked to remove the stenciled marks and any dirt. It is then dyed and dried, after which the bindings are removed by stretching the silk on the bias evenly. The specially tied threads pop off during this operation. In the final steps the silk is finished with steaming and pressing.



13

13. LENGTH OF FABRIC WITH FLORAL SCROLLS, Figured silk, 2003, Nantong, Jiangsu province, On loan from Ms. Tammy H.W. Yue, L2004.10.3, W. 38.8 cm



14a

**BOTH SCARVES** are made of white figured silk of great suppleness. The longer one (with fringes) is woven with a six-point star pattern. The shorter one (with a ruffle) has a more intricate pattern consisting of sprays of chrysanthemum and orchid dispersed against a ground pattern commonly called *wanzi buduantou* or "wan ideogram without ends." The presence of these subtle patterns gives the monochromatic silk a textured look. This in turn adds extra visual delight to the end-product.

Two sections of the longer scarf (a) are decorated with an identical abstract design composed of what appears like four connecting strokes sweeping across the width of the strip against a white background with dots. The strokes are detailed with a few white spots amidst concentric circles and arcs.

These images may be interpreted as old tree branches marred with scales and knots. They may also be perceived as pebbles having been thrown into a crisscrossing stream causing a series of ripples to spread.

Similar to the yardage in No. 13, this design makes use of carefully aligned white squares with dots for the background and casually arranged white square rings for detailing the dominant visual elements. It has also included another kind of resist motif to enhance visual interest. The squarish white spots are produced by capping. Each spot is first outlined with stitches and the stitching thread is drawn up and knotted. The shaped cloth is then wrapped with a square of paper-lined impermeable material. Its base is bound with thread two or



14b

three times, after which the thread is crisscrossed to the top, bound again, knotted, and cut. The protected area remains white after dyeing.

The shorter scarf (b) is adorned with six flower heads, each having six petals. Two of these motifs are individually depicted. The other four are divided into two pairs, each positioned at one end of the scarf. Each pair, too, is bound together by a border resembling the arabic number eight (8) and represented against a ground pattern made up of interlinking coin motifs. Surprisingly, all these elements are produced by means of only one method, that which generates white squares with dark blue dots. Because textural quality is desired in this work, the scarf has not been pressed flat. Left in this state, the deeply textured fabric is not only elastic to the touch but also presents an entirely different visual effect.<sup>11</sup> When it is worn or handled, each time it is shifted the dense, tiny, and raised jewel-like shapes in the affected areas would change from predominantly blue to white or vice versa.

14. TWO SCARVES, Figured silk, (a) 2003, (b) 2002, (a) Shanghai municipality, (b) Nantong, Jiangsu province. Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung, 2004.68.11, 12, (a) L. 169 cm x W. 28.6 cm, (b) L. 132.4 cm x W. 20.1 cm

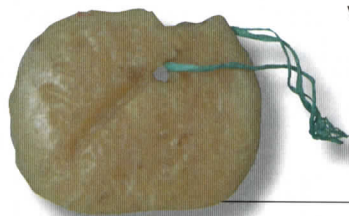


## PATTERN-DYED FABRICS: WAX-RESIST

Wax-resist dyeing is popularly known as batik. The technique relies on wax as a resist agent to protect either the ground or the pattern from contact with dye so covered areas keep the original colour of the fabric after dyeing. Its origin is still debatable. While some think it was invented in Egypt, or India, or Indonesia, others believe that it was a Chinese creation.<sup>1</sup> To date the earliest archaeological evidence in China for patterned fabric using this technique is a fragment of a garment recovered from a cave burial at Fengxiang xia in Sichuan province.<sup>2</sup> It was judged to be datable to a time spanning from the Warring States period to the Qin and Han dynasties (a period of over 400 years). Based on this discovery and early records, there now exists a hypothesis that in those early times a number of ethnic groups living in mountainous southwestern China had already mastered the technique and over time their wax-dyeing knowledge spread to the central plain as well as other parts of the country. By the sixth century, many people wore clothes embellished with wax-resist patterns.

The high point in the development of this technique was reached in the Tang dynasty. During that period wax-resist patterning was no longer limited to a monochromatic blue scheme, but had extended to a multicolour palette.<sup>3</sup> After the Tang dynasty, however, interest in this particular dyeing technique gradually dwindled. The decline is attributed to the complex and time-consuming production process and the high cost of wax because of its scarce supply.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately the technique did not die out. It was carried on by many ethnic groups, including the Miao, Yao, Buyi, Dong, Shui, and Gelao.

In the past several methods were used for applying wax to a fabric to create patterns. A brush was one method.<sup>5</sup> Another was a hand tool shaped at one end with a group of prongs with rounded ends. This tool was designed for creating dotted floral patterns.<sup>6</sup> A third method



was to clamp a piece of fabric between two identically cut woodblocks (something like a stencil) and pour molten wax into the perforations of the design to resist the parts that were intended to remain in the fabric's original colour.<sup>7</sup> A fourth method was to use wax-knives (*ladao*). These simple tools were made of axe-shaped copper blades attached to slender bamboo holders. A wax-knife with a small double-layered blade was for drawing fine lines. One with a larger and multi-layered blade was for drawing thick lines. The last method is still widely in use today.

Based on today's Miao practice, wax-dyeing starts with thoroughly cleaning the fabric (cotton or hemp) to be dyed. This involves repeated soaking, beating, washing, and sun-drying in order to remove dirt, foreign substances enmeshed in the fibres, and gum. The next step is to cut the desired shape (sleeve, collar, etc.) from the fabric. While some people start planning the design on the piece right away, others prefer to starch and burnish the back of the piece to stiffen it for easier drawing.<sup>8</sup> The design planning stage depends a lot on the experience and skill of each individual. An adept can just use fingernails to map out the general layout of a design and then draw in the details she has already thought out in her mind with wax and an assortment of wax-knives. A less confident person would mark out the shapes and positions of motifs by following the outlines of paper design cutouts she has arranged on the fabric to obtain an ideal composition.

Acquiring a knack in drawing with wax takes years of experience. However, since Miao girls start learning this skill at the young age of six or seven, most become quite proficient at it by the time they reach their teenage years. When drawing with wax, the blade of a wax-knife is dipped into a



bowl of molten wax kept warm in a brazier. Although the heat-retaining copper blades help keep the wax in its molten form, the wax still hardens quickly if one is not fast enough with drawing on the fabric.



Too much wax gathered on the blade in a dipping could produce blobs or a line thicker than desired. Insufficient wax in a single dipping, on the other hand, would produce a disjointed line. Drawing a design with even and flowing lines, therefore, is not easy to achieve. Furthermore, an understanding of the ambient temperature of molten wax is equally difficult to acquire. Overheated wax tends to spread out into the fabric's fibres when it is applied and causes fussy edges in the designs after dyeing. Underheated wax hardens on the tip of the fibres and cannot prevent dye from entering the fibres. In fact, during the wax-drawing process

any hesitation or lapse in concentration would also produce unsatisfactory results.

Dyeing entails first soaking the fabric with waxed patterns in warm water. It is then taken out to drip, be smoothed out, and slipped into an indigo dye bath for 20 to 30 minutes. This is followed by airing to induce oxidation. Repeated dyeing and airing will eventually produce the desired shade of blue. However, in order to make sure the colour is fast, the fabric must receive one or two coats of diluted soya bean juice prior to each of the last few rounds of dyeing and airing. When dyeing is complete, the fabric must be soaked in

cold water to remove superfluous dye matters. Afterwards it is deposited in boiling water to remove the wax. Molten wax is scooped out to be reused later. As a final step the fabric still needs another round of thorough cleaning by boiling it in soapy water for half an hour and soaking it in clean water overnight.<sup>9</sup>

The different ethnic groups also use other materials for resist-dyeing besides beeswax. These include maple resin, pine resin, and paraffin wax. Different dye-resist substances produce different visual effects in dyed fabrics. Beeswax, for example, being more fluid in molten form, enables fine and smooth lines to be made. Paraffin wax, on the other hand, being more brittle, cracks easily when the waxed fabric is manipulated during the dyeing process, creating more crackle in the end-product.

Among dyestuffs indigo is best suited to wax-dyeing, because it can be kept in normal or slightly warm temperatures without wax dissolving into it. Although most wax-resist patterned fabrics are in blue and white, a few other colours can be added to the simple palette. Red and yellow vegetable dyes, for instance, are often painted on selected details to brighten up the subdued colour scheme either after the wax in the dyed fabric has been removed or before the fabric is immersed in indigo.<sup>10</sup> In the latter case, the hand-painted coloured areas must be covered with wax before dyeing takes place. Other ways to enliven the basic blue-and-white scheme frequently employed are multicolour embroidery and appliqué work.





**TYPICAL OF ALL SQUARE SCARVES** produced in Huangping county, these two examples are decorated with a centrally located principal motif surrounded by a decorative border. One (a) shows



15a

a coiled centipede-dragon that resembles the letter "C". Series of arcs forming a dense pattern of overlapping striped triangles on the beast's body together with its bristling hair (or moving legs) instill into this strange image a strong sense of vibrancy. Bulging eyes and a beak-like mouth also enhance the compelling visual effect. At each corner of the square frame enclosing the beast is a butterfly, all represented facing the centre. The decorative border is made up of a lattice pattern embellished with tear-shaped dots concentrated at the

centre and corners of each square unit, which create full and partial florets. The latticework is further enhanced on both sides by a narrow row of short stripes.

The dragon is an imaginary animal. Whereas the Han Chinese perceive it mainly as a ferocious creature symbolizing dignity and power, most ethnic groups view it as a benevolent and variable creature that co-exists harmoniously with all living things. Based on this common belief, they freely combine elements from familiar plants and animals to create dragons in a great variety of shapes. Water-buffalo-dragon, fish-dragon, silkworm-dragon, leaf-dragon, and bird-dragon are just some of the naively rendered dragon motifs that one might come across in textiles and embroideries produced by

these people.<sup>11</sup> They see such dragons as auspicious symbols having the power to safeguard and bless.

The other scarf (b) depicts in reverse mirror-image a pair of cocks, each holding a fish in its mouth. Their fantastic forms are made up of a number of composite elements including a paisley-shaped fish body, snake-shaped tail, multi-spike crown, clusters of leaf-like feathers for the wings, and a sun-like head and eyes. These uncommon features, coupled with other devices such as exaggeration and contortion, afford us only a tiny glimpse into the fertile imagination and excellent artistic creativity of the Gejia women. Similar to the

first example, this one is also enclosed by a border pattern framed with rows of narrow short stripes. The border pattern in this case is made up of repeat images of butterflies which, on closer scrutiny, may also be interpreted as pairs of fish. It is this hybrid nature of motifs that makes this kind of folk art especially fascinating.



15b

15. TWO SCARVES, Cotton, 2003, Gejia ethnic group, Huangping county, Guizhou province. Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung, 2004.68.14, 16, (a) L. 33.5 cm x W. 33.8 cm, (b) L. 33.8 cm x W. 34.5 cm

**WHEN A GEJIA WOMAN PUTS ON HER FESTIVE REGALIA,** she uses a colourful sash to tie this small apron (a) on top of the skirt of a larger apron with a wide white border. From a distance, this small piece would appear to have a wide white border.<sup>12</sup> The geometric design resembles a tangram (Chinese geometrical puzzle). The differently shaped angular panels are all framed by a border made up of two rows of compactly arranged crosses. These panels are also all separated by five white lines. Except the band at the top and the rhomboids located at the lower corners, all panels are filled with a scroll pattern reminiscent of clouds or the *ruyi*. The pattern, however,

is embedded with more meanings. The configuration seen at the centre of the square panel and the two triangular ones above it is composed of a coin-like centre enclosed by two sets of eight connected concave arcs which in turn are surrounded by a ring of eight interlinking scrolls. The centre represents the sun. The ring with pointed edges stands for the sky, while the eight interlinking scrolls portray the eight trigrams.<sup>13</sup>



16a

The pattern in the uppermost band depicts gently undulating lines accompanied with double-outlined arcs on both sides. They signify terraced fields.<sup>14</sup> The identical designs (depicted in mirror image) in the rhomboids may be highly stylized images of a tiger.<sup>15</sup>

If the symbolism hidden in these motifs is fascinating, the technical skills required to produce this work is no less captivating. The

white lines are actually the resisted areas. They are drawn with beeswax in order that they remain white after dyeing. Here, they are all drawn very close to one another so that the thin spaces between them would become blue after dyeing. These fine blue lines give shape, creating the several motifs. Considering the usual drafting tools the Gejia women use are no more than rice straws, bamboo strips and sectioned bamboo culms for rendering straight lines and circles, it is really amazing how well the motifs have been executed.

The other apron (b) combines small pieces of wax-dyed cotton with multicolour embroidery on linen. The blue-and-white rectangle serves as a patch pocket in the centre. Its design resembles the upper part of a garment with what appears to be a neck opening, having a large medallion with the sun symbol as a focal point. This in turn is surrounded on three sides by a continuous border pattern made up of two alternating motifs: a winding or keyfret motif and a chessboard motif. The pocket also is surrounded on three sides by an embroi-



16b

16. TWO APRONS, Cotton and linen, 1990s, (a) Gejia ethnic group, (b) Miao ethnic group, Huangping county, Guizhou province, *Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung, 2004.68.17, 18. (a) L. 26.2 cm x W. 33.4 cm, (b) L. 34.6 cm x W. 41 cm*



dered red band, and this in turn is enclosed by a border with blue-and-white motifs sewn onto the base cloth. This border is composed of three strips, all adorned with the same repeat pattern of a sun superimposed at regular intervals on a continuous row of clover-leaf-like motifs. More embroidered patterns, arranged in narrow bands and small squares cover the exterior areas of the apron.<sup>16</sup> The intricate embroidery, done in satin, cross, seed, and back stitches, relies on a wide range of brilliant hues, from orange to fuchsia (interspersed with tiny greens and blacks), counterbalancing the more subdued blue-and-white patterned details. These fiery colours, however, are again offset by another white border whose middle is sewn with a blue band embroidered in white giving an illusion of a twisted ribbon. When all the decorative components of the apron are viewed together, the repeated interplay between elements of subtlety and striking visual appeal contributes significantly to make it an endearing article.

**THIS LOOSE-FITTING ROBE** has a collarless neck opening, side closing, wide sleeves, and side vents. After each constituent part is cut out from a fabric, paper cutouts of the different design elements are placed on them and organized to obtain the best arrangement. General outlines are then sketched on the cloth following the contours of the templates and the details are worked out in any way that pleases the designer/seamstress. The parts are sewn together after the patterns have been made on them by wax-resist dyeing.



The motifs depicted here include human figures, mythical beasts, birds, insects, and geometric shapes. These are dispersed from the front to the back. Although there are slight differences in variety and placement, their general arrangements are quite similar. The men and women are all dressed in festive garb. While the men play reed pipes, the women dance. They are likely participating in a sacrificial ceremony held in honour of the drum every thirteen years.<sup>17</sup> In paying homage to the drum, an object much revered among many ethnic groups, this event actually also lauds tradition and the memory of ancestors.

The dragon was a totem in many parts of ancient China. The Miao people regard this symbol with great respect. They have invented many forms for this mythical beast. Here, the coiled dragons on the front (male) and back (female, with two young) of the robe are called centipede-dragons. The circle made up of four segments at upper right of the back is a so-called headless dragon, while the two pinwheel-like clusters located on each side

17. MAN'S FESTIVE ROBE, Cotton, First half of 20th century, Miao ethnic group, Yongjiang county, Guizhou province, This purchase was made possible by the Textile Endowment Fund, 2004.28.1, L. 144 cm x W. 140 cm

of the coiled centipede-dragon on the back may be grass dragons.<sup>18</sup> No matter how the dragons are represented, they are perceived to have powers to bestow good fortune and dispel evil influences.

Butterflies and birds play an important role in folklore relating to the origin of the Miao people. In this folklore a maple was transformed into a butterfly, which fell in love with a bubble and laid twelve eggs. A wagtail happened upon the eggs and helped to hatch them. The eggs then gave forth to all living things in the world. One of them produced Jiangyang, the ancestor of the Miao people.<sup>19</sup> Butterflies and birds, therefore, have very special significance to the Miao.

**THIS ENSEMBLE** consists of blouse, skirt, waistband, and pair of puttees. The blouse is a straight-cut of hemp, with straight sleeves decorated with geometric patterns woven in red and black wools. The wide collar extends over the shoulders and down the back, resembling a cape. Its decorated upper layer is woven separately and attached to an under layer of hemp. The geometric pattern of this upper layer includes connecting lozenges of cotton appliqué of small wax-resist-dyed rosettes in their centres. It has also a small extra hanging collar in blue and white trimmed with figured silk ribbons attached to the vertical opening on the back.

The skirt is also made of hemp. It is tightly pleated along the upper edge and full to a wide waistband also made of plain hemp. A line of angled chevrons runs across the lower edge above a solid guard. A few widely spaced rows of small interlinking lozenges



18

spread horizontally in the field. These are accentuated at intervals by short bands of red and dark brown cotton appliqué. The decoration is completed with additional motifs of a row of connecting double-outlined crosses and several unrecognizable marks on the front.

Although this decoration looks simple, it is not very easy to achieve. Since the white background needs to remain as white as possible, large areas have to be resisted by wax. The thin layer of wax protecting the cloth from the dye cracks while the cloth is being handled during the dyeing process. This of course leads to the dye seeping through the cracks to affect the cloth. It ends up having an uneven crackle pattern of thin blue lines. While many people find this kind of accidental effect of great visual appeal, the women who wear this style of costume, nicknamed Dahua Miao (Miao people who wear large patterned costume), would judge the quality of the dyed work by the amount of crackle lines. To them, it is the fewer the better. They prefer to see very fine blue lines defining the decorative elements against a background as white as possible.<sup>20</sup>

The Miao people who wear this style of costume live in mountainous areas in western Guizhou. The construction of the cape-like collar and the use of wool in their clothing are for giving the body extra protection against the chill.<sup>21</sup>

18. LITTLE GIRL'S ENSEMBLE, Hemp, wool, cotton, silk ribbons, 1930s, Miao ethnic group, Weining county, Guizhou province, *Gift of Dr. L.C. Walmsley*, 969.166.1a,b,d,e. Blouse L. 35 cm x W. 75 cm, Skirt L. 42 cm x W. 303 cm



**THIS LENGTH OF CLOTH** is decorated throughout by two plain bands and four patterned bands separated by rows of dog-teeth. Essentially, the major band is positioned in mid-section. It is composed of repeat tile-like square units, each consisting of five small squares with a cross form and four triangular corner pieces.



19

Above and below this are two identical bands of eight-point stars. At the bottom is the fourth patterned band made up of interlocking double-outlined octagons. The two plain bands at the top are slightly different. While one is a solid line, the other is enhanced with narrow borders.

Although most lines are neither straight nor even, and overlapping or missing parts are everywhere, such imperfections indicate the serendipitous nature of the handicraft made by women of the ethnic groups primarily for their own use. They have at their disposal only crudely made tools, sporadic leisure time, and far from ideal working environments. This yardage possibly may be for use as sleeve bands. It also could be used for either the upper or lower part of a full pleated skirt, in which case the defects would become hardly noticeable.<sup>22</sup> The blue-on-blue colour scheme is achieved by first dyeing the whole cloth to obtain the pale blue shade before proceeding to other steps of the wax-resist process to create the patterns.

**ABSTRACTED SILHOUETTES OF ANIMALS AND BIRDS** are arranged neatly in rows to form an overall pattern for this fabric.<sup>23</sup> They appear to have been stamped on the cloth ground using wax and square blocks engraved with images in relief. Judging by the slight spatial variations among the rows and columns, two different blocks have been used. One has in each of its quadrants in clockwise direction a swan (?), a horse, a crane together with a turtle, and a tiger (?). Similarly, the other has a cormorant with a snake, an ox, an egret with a fish, and a deer. The two groups of motifs alternate across the width of the fabric, forming two rows of images when stamping is completed. The following double rows are achieved in the same way, but the sequence of the blocks is reversed. This creates a final overall pattern that is more interesting. Other factors also lessen the feeling of regularity and sameness generated by infinite repetition. The slight variation in pressure exerted on the block and the amount of wax transferred from



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19. BOLT OF FABRIC WITH GEOMETRIC PATTERN, Linen, 1990s, Miao ethnic group, Duyun county, Guizhou province. Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung. 2004.68.13, W. 30.6 cm

20. LENGTH OF FABRIC WITH ANIMAL PATTERN, Cotton, Early 1980s, Guizhou province, On loan from Mrs. Patty Proctor, L2004.8.5, W. 83.7 cm

the block to the fabric produces different results. While some images are sharp, others may be faint. While most have clean edges, a few do suffer from blurred contours or even the loss of certain details. Yet, notwithstanding the minor defects, the unpredictable crackle pattern created during the dyeing process gives each creature an individual look. It is precisely this element of surprise that gives wax-resisted products such a special visual charm.

**THIS DOOR CURTAIN** is a factory product. The centre of the design depicts a bird perched on a lotus stem enclosed by a circle. It is framed by four lotuses and their stems. Eight goldfish outside this frame swim from different directions towards it, and identical fanciful forms of a curly plant disposed at both short ends complete the arrangement. The border patterns at the bottom include a band of spikes and another band with circled dots and dots filling the lozenges and triangles formed by connecting crosses. The spiked band enhances the fringes, making them look longer.

Goldfish (*jinyu*) swimming in a pond (*shuitang*) calls to mind the expression, *jinyu mantang*, which means abundant wealth. As a composite motif, fish swimming among flowers (usually lotuses) embodies the desire for a harmonious marital union and abundant offspring.

As a commercial product, this door curtain suffers from an overly contrived design and a



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mechanical quality inherent in the drawing. The static visual effect is a far cry from the intriguing vibrancy inherent in works from the hands of women of various ethnic groups who practise the art of traditional wax-dyeing everyday.

21. TWO DOOR CURTAINS, Cotton, 2003, Kaili, Guizhou province, Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung, 2004.68.21, 22, L. 171 cm x W. 86 cm (with dyed pattern), L. 188 cm x W. 91.5 cm (with partially waxed pattern)



## PATTERN-DYED FABRICS: CLAMP-RESIST

Although the author of *Eryi shilu* (A Veritable Account of the Dual Forces) asserts that the technique of clamp-resist dyeing originated from the Qin and Han periods, to date no evidence has been discovered from archaeological finds datable to those times.<sup>1</sup> Extant artifacts preserved in several museums around the world point to the fact that this textile-dyeing technique was already in full blossom during the Tang dynasty.<sup>2</sup> These artifacts indicate that the fabric used was mainly silk embellished with mirror-image designs dyed in several colours using engraved woodblocks. Clothing, furniture covers, Buddhist banners, and screen panels were among things made out of the beautiful fabric. Much visual and textual evidence, too, help us gauge the extensiveness of its use. The murals in the caves at Dunhuang, for instance, depicted many donors, people of high social standing, wearing sumptuous garments with clamp-resist-dyed patterns. Even clay sculptures of bodhisattvas were fashioned clad in similarly adorned fabric.<sup>3</sup>

A miscellany by Wang Dang, entitled *Tang yulin* (A Collection of Notes on the Tang Dynasty), tells us how even the imperial household became enamoured with silks with clamp-resist-dyed patterns.<sup>4</sup> It happened when Emperor Xuanzong (r. 713–755) saw a bolt of silk

sent to the empress as a birthday present from one of the imperial concubines, Liu jieyu.<sup>5</sup> Liu actually obtained the silk from her sister who lived in Luzhou in Zhejiang province. It was this sister who had commissioned a set of woodblocks engraved with a special floral design for dyeing the



silk. In any case, the emperor liked it so much that he immediately gave order that the imperial dyeing workshop replicate the pattern using the same production method. The technique, once mastered by the imperial dyers, was at first kept secret.<sup>6</sup> However, as time went by and the novelty wore off, details of the technique became known well beyond the palace walls. Even the poor were able to wear clothes with clamp-resist-dyed patterns. By the ninth century, if not before, knowledge of the technique reached even the southwestern part of China. The city of Chengdu in Sichuan province became one of the foremost production centres.<sup>7</sup>

During the Song dynasty constant defensive warfare conducted against the unrelenting invasions of the northern barbarians and high indemnities paid to them in exchange for temporary peace caused China's economy to decline drastically. Beginning from the latter part of the Northern Song period, around the last quarter of the eleventh century, the government undertook actions to economize. One of the many injunctions issued was that regimental flags and insignias of the soldiers' uniforms be dyed by means of the clamp-resist dyeing technique. At the same time it was also promulgated that the common people were prohibited from producing and selling engraved woodblocks required by the clamp-resist dyeing technique. The government established this monopoly not only to save money, but also to ensure that there was no chance for discontented people to disguise themselves in facsimile military uniforms and cause social unrest. Furthermore, the official historical record of the Song dynasty tells us that when the political and economic situations became so bad during the last two reigns of the Northern Song period, even at the imperial court lavish brocade and embroidered clothes that members of the royalty used to wear were replaced by garments made with much less expensive fabrics having clamp-resist dyed patterns. While the ban was never fully observed, it adversely affected development of the craft. To date examples of textiles with clamp-resist-dyed patterns from the Song dynasty have not been discovered.

While the technique must have suffered considerably in areas situated close to the central administration, fortunately it continued to flourish in areas under the rule of the Liao and Xixia, two barbarian political powers that co-existed with the Song and were located to the north and west of China.<sup>8</sup> During the Ming and early Qing periods, although the technique was still practised, it seemed to be confined to certain



areas. The multicoloured clamp-resist-dyed fabrics manufactured were mainly used for covering tankas (religious paintings). Many of them are still preserved in Tibet.<sup>9</sup>

A serious lack of records and extant examples after the early Qing led many twentieth-century Chinese textile scholars to assume that clamp-resist dyeing had completely died out. Fortunately, though, during the latter half of the 1980s, it became known that the technique was actually still alive in southern Zhejiang

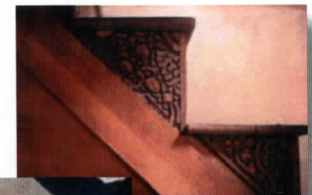
province, in particular, in rural areas around the coastal cities of Wenzhou and Taizhou. The modern product, however, is quite different from those manufactured in the preceding periods. Instead of multicoloured repeat patterns dyed all over a luxurious silk fabric, it has now changed to a monochromatic assemblage of individual linear designs dyed on cotton, a utilitarian fibre. Instead of serving multi-purposes, it is now primarily used for making quilt covers.



The modern technique involves essentially cleaning and marking of a length of handwoven cotton (10 m long and 25 cm wide); wrapping it in accordion fashion around a set of seventeen engraved woodblocks, with each block being positioned one on top of the other; setting a metal or wooden clamp in place to tighten the stack of cloth-wrapped woodblocks at both ends; and placing the whole apparatus in an indigo dye bath for twenty-five minutes before lifting it out for five minutes to bring about oxidation. The actual dyeing needs to be repeated four times to reach optimum intensity of the blue colour.<sup>10</sup>

A design is made up of outlines cut in deep and wide grooves on the surface of a woodblock. These grooves are mostly interconnected to allow the indigo dye to flow through from several small holes made on one long edge of the woodblock. Because the relief lines and surfaces of the woodblocks are clamped together firmly, the cotton sandwiched tightly between does not come into contact with the dye and remains white. After dyeing, washing, and sun-drying, the long strip is cut into four strips of equal length and sewn together to make a large rectangular piece, ready to be used as the top of a quilt cover.

For various reasons, such as the labour-intensive and time-consuming nature of both the preparation of the raw materials and the dyeing process, changing social values, and unfavourable marketing prospects, there is hardly any demand for clamp-resist-dyed products nowadays. In the area around Wenzhou woodblock engravers and dyers have closed shop





and taken up other jobs to make a living. The woodblocks that have fallen into disuse frequently ended up being used as stringers for the steps of a staircase, or as make-shift covers for large pottery jars, or bases for supporting such storage containers. The future of clamp-resist dyeing is grim indeed unless an official program to sustain this technique is put into place soon.

**IN THE RURAL AREA** surrounding the cities of Wenzhou and Taizhou, located along the southern coast of Zhejiang province, it was customary for the family of a prospective bride to prepare as part of her trousseau one or more quilts with the covers embellished with auspicious designs.<sup>11</sup> Those that had images of dragons and phoenixes were called “dragon-and-phoenix” quilts (*longfeng bei*). Others decorated with many boys were called “hundred children” quilts (*baizi bei*). Still others that showed children dressed in traditional scholar’s attire were called “champions” quilts (*zhuangyuan bei*). These designs expressed blessings for a harmonious married life, abundant offspring, and success in the children’s future careers. According to superstition, failure to provide such quilts would cause discord in the daily life of the new couple, or their inability to produce sons, or worse still, one of them dying prematurely. If such misfortune did eventually happen, the bride’s family would be blamed.

As a rule, cotton to be used for a quilt cover would be woven with double yarns to ensure durability. Only poor families that could

not afford the expense would use a single yarn. Naturally quilt covers made of a single yarn would be lighter, less warm, and less durable. Irrespective of quality, however, when the newlyweds covered themselves with new quilts at night, they would find themselves tinted with indigo dust when they rose in the morning. This inevitable phenomenon was deemed to be good for safeguarding health, as indigo was also reputed for its medicinal qualities.

When sewn together, these two unconstructed panels with a design dyed in mirror image form the top of a quilt cover. The decorative elements, composed of dots, curves, and straight lines, are neatly grouped into three registers. The principal composite motif in the middle register consists of two pairs of phoenixes surrounding a lotus with a seed pod in the centre and two peonies beside it. It calls to mind two traditional motifs euphemistically termed *feng chuan lian* (phoenix penetrating a lotus) and *feng chuan mudan*



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22. UNCONSTRUCTED TOP OF A QUILT COVER WITH PHOENIX DESIGN, Cotton, 1997, Badai village, Yishan county, Zhejiang province, Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung, 2004.68.23.1-2, (each) L. 190 cm x W. 73.7 cm

(phoenix penetrating a peony), both symbolizing sexual union and fertility.

The first and third register are identical in design. They are arranged in mirror-image fashion. Each consists of a lotus in the centre flanked by identical groups of motifs. These motifs include the twin form of the character *xi* (i.e., *shuangxi* or double happiness) framed by two melon-like lanterns with tassels, and a chrysanthemum flower head. The character *shuangxi* is an ubiquitous decorative element in happy events, in particular wedding celebrations. The melon-shaped lanterns symbolize abundant offspring because a melon has many seeds. Their tassels (*shou*) and the chrysanthemum are both emblematic of long life (*shou*), a desire further strengthened by the butterflies adorning all border corners.<sup>12</sup>

The design of this quilt cover was created in the 1980s. Although images of dragons have not been incorporated into the composition, it can still be regarded as one kind of “dragon-and-phoenix” quilt design. The mirror-image arrangement of the compositional elements needs some explanation. In certain rural areas in southern Zhejiang there has been a long-established custom where a married couple, when they retired to bed, must sleep side by side, but head to foot. The mirror-image layout was devised to ensure both husband and wife saw the design on the far side of the quilt cover the way it should be viewed as soon as they sat up in bed in the morning and be pleasantly reminded of all the blessings that might come true.

**THIS QUILT-COVER TOP** is made up of four strips of equal length, each adorned with four designs. The sixteen designs have been carefully planned so that although they seem to look alike, actually they are all different. The illusive effect is created by repeating certain compositional elements in a calculated way, such as a uniform number of children depicted in each square, with similar poses, and similar geometric or floral shapes enclosing them. The differences lie mainly in the diverse details serving as fillers for each

design.

The overall design typifies the standard decorative format of the so-called “hundred-boys” quilt (*baizi bei*). The number “one hundred” is only a convenient round number meaning abundant. As a rule, there are images of six children in each individual design, making a total of only ninety-six children in the sixteen designs.<sup>13</sup> Here, the boys are depicted *en face* and spread out in a row as if they are taking their places on a stage. The two at the centre of each frame are cast as the principal players. They wear a variety of military garb and assume stances expressive of strength and might. Long ribbons around their necks tied into a big flowery bow in front of their chests indicate that they are assuming the guise of *wuzhuangyuan* or distinguished achievers in the military service exami-



23

23. TOP OF A QUILT COVER WITH “HUNDRED-BOYS” DESIGN, Cotton, 1940s, Huangtandong village, Yueqing city, Zhejiang province, Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung, 2004.68.24, L. 215.8 cm x W. 173.7 cm



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nations. They are flanked by playmates acting as attendants. For visual variation and additional symbolic significance, two designs are slightly different. They show the principal players playing the role of *laosheng* (a middle- or old-age military character), wearing hats with a high crown and long false beards that cover their chests.<sup>14</sup> They are probably relied on to evoke the idea of longevity to complement two other more obvious messages inherent in the majority of designs—fecundity and career success. Because the boys are depicted playing the role of military champions, this quilt top may also be called a “champions” quilt (*zhuangyuan bei*).



Technically, half of each design is the mirror image of the other half. This is one of the fundamental features of clamp-resist dyeing. The crease running down the centre of the design is another indication of the strip of cloth being folded in half lengthwise during the dyeing process. Many children's features are either lost or faded. The defects are caused other than by age, constant use, and periodic cleaning, by the way human features are engraved on a woodblock. Not being connected with the deep grooves that would allow the dye to flow through, small areas indicating eyebrows, eyes, nose, and mouth need to be treated differently. After the features have been engraved on the surface of the woodblock, small interlinking side holes need to be added to allow the dye to reach these small areas. We may surmise that in the present specimen, either the woodblock engraver did not do a good job in this delicate step or the narrow labyrinth became clogged up through constant use of this set of woodblocks.

The antithetical arrangement of the top two horizontal rows and the bottom two rows is typical of all quilt cover tops produced by the technique of clamp-resist dyeing.<sup>15</sup>

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## PATTERN-DYED FABRICS: PASTE-RESIST

The technique of paste-resist dyeing came into use much later than the three previously introduced resist-dyeing methods. It evolved from a combination of wax-resist dyeing and clamp-resist dyeing. During the Tang dynasty, when the limited supply of wax could not meet the growing need, dyers began to look for substitutes. Starch was used, but it did not work well because of its solubility. Eventually, a new method was devised whereby glue mixed with ashes of plant or burnt clam shells served as a resist-paste. The process involved applying paste to a silk fabric through the cutout areas of a wooden stencil or by using pattern-engraved stamps.<sup>1</sup> After dyeing and removal of the paste the pattern reproduced would be in reserve against a coloured ground. Silks patterned in this manner were called *huixie* (patterned textiles [resist-dyed with] ashes).<sup>2</sup> This at first appeared to be the solution to getting around the short supply of wax. Yet, one major drawback was soon discovered. The high alkaline content of the ash in the paste was found to damage the delicate surface structure of the silk. Another way had to be found.

In time, by trial and error, soya bean flour and slaked lime proved to be readily available ingredients that can be conveniently



made into paste form. Paper stencils, which were a lot easier to cut, also gradually replaced wooden ones. During the Song dynasty, when the cultivation of cotton became more widespread in China, cotton, too, was favoured over silk for patterning using this method because alkaline paste produced no adverse effect on cotton fibres.

The blue-and-white patterned cotton we see today has its distant origin in this period. According to record, a man from a family named Gui living in the town of Jiading in Jiangsu province created a textile called *yaoban bu* (cloth with dyed markings). The cloth was simply described as being dyed in indigo using ashes as a resist agent. Decorated with patterns including figures, birds, flowers, and poetic texts in blue and white, it was mainly used for making quilt covers and bed curtains.<sup>3</sup> Apparently this new product was well received and dyers were quick to imitate.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties this kind of decorated cloth became so popular that it was produced wherever cotton was grown. It also acquired another name, *jiaohua bu* (cloth with stenciled motifs). By this time, paste made of soya bean flour and slaked lime was preferred over paste made with plant or shell ashes. Although patterns dyed in blue and white predominated, they were dyed in other colours as well. Among the tens of thousands of rural workshops that specialized in producing the *jiaohua bu* those located in the provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Hubei, and Hunan became particularly renowned for their products. Stencils made in Suzhou, for instance, were in such great demand that they were eagerly sought after not only by dyers living in other towns in the same Jiangsu province, but also by those living in other provinces, such as Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, and faraway Shandong.<sup>4</sup> Stencils produced in Changde in Hunan province also reached as





far as Guangdong, Guangxi, and Guizhou.<sup>5</sup> During those flourishing periods *jiaohua bu*-dyeing was conducted in two manners. An average shop would set up a shop front with a variety of pattern samples on display for customers to make their choices. Orders would be processed in the back of the shop. Dyers with fewer assets would carry their equipment and samples on shoulder poles, making the round of remote villages looking for promising clients. Their arrival was always welcomed by the peasants.



Paste-resist dyeing is still done today, although in considerably fewer places. The products are mostly for tourist consumption. The method used by dyers now has hardly changed from the tradition established several hun-

dred years ago. In order to have a better understanding of this dyeing process, the major steps are briefly described here. Paper stencil and soya bean paste are the two essential requirements in paste-resist dyeing. While multi-layered mulberry-bark paper glued together with diluted wild persimmon juice is favoured by some stencil-makers, thickened Korean paper also serves the purpose. After the desired pattern has been drawn on or transferred (from an old stencil) to the paper, engraving knives with differently shaped blades, gouges, and punches are used to cut out undesired areas. All outlines must be meticulous and crisp. When this is done, the stencil is burnished, waxed, and coated with tung oil to make it impermeable and durable.<sup>6</sup> Paste is prepared by adding water to bind



together three parts of soya bean flour with seven parts of slaked lime. The flour must be as fine as possible, since lumpy flour would affect the quality of the dyed patterns.

When transferring the pattern, the stencil is placed on the fabric and paste is applied through the perforations onto the fabric with a wooden or ox-bone spatula. Preliminary marks are made on the fabric to ensure alignment if the pattern is to be repeated. After drying the paste-covered fabric in the sun, it is soaked in warm water mixed with a suitable amount of pig's blood, a necessary ingredient to help congeal the paste. Once the fabric has softened, it can be dipped in the indigo bath. After dyeing, cleaning, and sun-drying, the hardened paste is scraped off. In the final step the patterned fabric is thoroughly cleaned and sun-dried.

Some of the fundamental characteristics of patterns produced by paste-resist dyeing are worthy of note. Because stencils are made of paper and are intended for repeated use, extremely fine or long lines that can break easily are avoided. Instead, long lines are usually made up of a series of short lines. Also, for practical reasons, large empty areas in a composition are never allowed, since a stencil having large empty areas will not hold up well while being handled. As a result, images can only be constructed with carefully planned broken lines, short curves, and dots of all shapes. The success of any pattern depends largely on how well the compositional elements in a stencil are arranged and executed.



Basically patterns in this kind of dyed fabric appear either as white images on a blue ground or as blue images on a white ground. In the former case, only one stencil is required. In the latter, in addition to the stencil cut with the desired motifs with broken lines and unconnected dots, which is called *huaban*, an auxiliary stencil, called *gaiban* or covering stencil, is required to cover up any area that is intended to be in white. Since this more complex technique was invented in Suzhou, fabrics patterned in this manner are called *Suyin* (Suzhou-style patterning). They are characterized by bold motifs with rough edges. Somehow, the unpolished quality has its robust charm, making the fabric attractive and striking.

**BOTH EXAMPLES** are decorated using a design concept called *sanhua* (scattered motifs). In (a) the overall dense pattern is made up of repeat horizontal units, each comprising two rows of deer (*lu*) and bees (*feng*) amidst a great variety of floral medallions.<sup>7</sup> The deer

and bees provide key sounds to evoke an idiomatic expression, *lulu feng shun* ([May Heaven grant] seasonable weather [all year round]).<sup>8</sup> The floral medallions suggest many kinds of flowers in full blossom, which in turn evoke a sense of prosperity.

In (b), what may be sprigs of pomegranate are mingled with stylized single-flower sprays and individual flower heads in a varied yet orderly fashion.<sup>9</sup> The pomegranate is a favourite symbol for many descendants because of its abundant seeds. The cloth is dyed light blue first before stenciling is done. The dark blue against light blue colour scheme

is a modern invention.<sup>10</sup> It is seen infrequently because it involves an extra dyeing step. Two stencils are required as well to produce this effective result of dark motifs against a light background. The elaborate procedure inevitably affects the smoothness of the outlines. Yet, fortunately in the present example their unrefined quality imparts a certain charm of naïvety.

**THE THREE NARROW-WIDTH YARDAGES** (a–c) are products of a handloom. Patterns on both sides of these cloths indicate that they have been produced by using two identical stencils during the production stage. The other much wider specimen (d) is woven on a larger loom, patterned on one side only using one stencil. All, however, have been decorated with the design concept called *mandi hua* (ground entirely filled with motifs).

In specimen (a) two alternating rectangular patterns are separated by a wide band. This arrangement is repeated throughout the whole length. Each rectangle is divided into three rows of four square segments within a floral border finished with a dotted edge. Each segment is filled with a motif framed by either a square, or a lozenge, or a hexagon defined with dotted outlines.<sup>11</sup> Six of them (first row, centre two; second row, first and last; third row, centre two) are emboldened with another quatrefoil border. Most motifs, such as the twin fish, deer, phoenix, butterfly, and mandarin duck, are represented as mirror images and placed at opposite ends of an imaginary diagonal or a horizontal line. Two individual images, a goldfish and a bat with a coin, are located in the segments at the centre. Pairs of animals

24a



24b

24. TWO LENGTHS OF FABRIC WITH DESIGNS OF (A) BEES AND DEER AMONG FLOWERS AND, (B) POMEGRANATE FLOWERS AND FRUIT, Cotton, 2002, (a) Jiangsu province; (b) Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, *Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung, 2004.68.27, 28, W. (a) 77.7 cm, (b) 89.3 cm*





25a

larly intriguing appeal.

The pattern in specimen (b) is composed of scattered sprays of flowers (chrysanthemums, orchids, camellias, roses, pinks ....) and fruiting plants (grapes and double gourds) with bees flitting among them.<sup>12</sup> These highly stylized elements are depicted superimposed on a background filled with clusters of four small dots. To the Chinese, flowers in bloom always portend a bright prospect. Bees (*feng*) suggest abundance (*fengdeng*). Pairs of them may also imply a happy marriage. Grapes and double gourds, which bear many seeds, are popular emblems of fecundity.

The pattern in specimen (c) depicts a similar theme. Yet, the compositional elements are arranged in a much more orderly manner. The floral sprays are enclosed in double-dotted quatrefoil frames and are surrounded in each direction by a bee.<sup>13</sup> These also are superimposed on

and birds signify a harmonious marriage. The goldfish (*jinyu*) means wealth (*jin* = gold; *yu* = jade) through wordplay. It can also symbolize many descendants because goldfish lay abundant eggs. The bat (*fu*) with a coin (*qian*) is another visual pun expressing the desire embodied in a phrase, *fu zai yanqian*, or "good fortune is not far away." Because all motifs are depicted with small dots, minute shapes, and short lines, they blend in with the overall dotted background immediately outside their frames. It is this visual ambiguity that gives *mandi hua* designs a particularly intriguing appeal.

25b



25c

a ground filled with clusters of seven dots. While the previous specimen shows a freer design approach, this one is more organized and balanced.

If specimens (b) and (c) are similar in design to a certain extent, specimen (d) is entirely different. It is fully covered with repeat zones of geometric motifs composed mainly of dots of various sizes and shapes. The great variety includes concentric circles, sunbursts, snowflakes, and waves. Since the zones are irregular in shape, the different motifs seem to be meshed in a spontaneous way which in turn creates a very satisfying overall visual effect. The use of dots as a principal design element is traditional. Yet, this specimen shows what enormous potential a traditional idiom has when a talented designer in modern times knows how to make full and free use of it.

25d



25. FOUR LENGTHS OF FABRIC WITH (A) GEOMETRIC DESIGNS AND AUSPICIOUS MOTIFS, (B) BUTTERFLIES AMONG FLOWERS AND FRUIT, (C) FLORAL SPRAYS IN QUATREFOIL FRAMES, AND (D) MULTIPLE PATTERNS, Cotton, (a) 1990s; (b) 2002; (c) 1983; (d) 2002, (a, b, d) Jiangsu province, (c) Sichuan province, (a, b, d) Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung, 2004.68.30, 31, 32, (c) On loan from Dr. Doris Dohrenwend, L2004.9.1, W. (a) 37.8 cm, (b) 38 cm, (c) 37.2 cm, (d) 86.2 cm

**CUT IN THE TRADITIONAL WAY**, this unlined jacket is characterized by a high collar rounded at the front, a front opening attached with five pairs of knotted buttons and loops for closing, and side slits.

The pattern is dyed on one side only. Unlike most patterns arranged in a grid format, the irregular layout of the motifs makes this pattern look free and spontaneous. Clusters of flowers intermittently connected with slender twigs are randomly scattered among patches of dots. Their picturesque quality evokes various poetic images, such as: in the aftermath of a sudden snowstorm in late spring severed twigs with blossoms scatter on the ground covered with melting snow; or windblown flowering twigs afloat on water with glistening sunlight;

or windblown flowering twigs settling on a mossy ground in a summer garden.

Another unusual feature to be noted about this pattern is the mottled effect on most of the flower petals. It appears to have been achieved by removing a certain amount of the top layer of the paste that have been applied to these areas before it hardened completely. This would allow a tiny quantity of indigo to seep through the thinned paste when the fabric was dyed. The resulting variegation not only makes the flowers look more interesting than if they were uniformly solid whites against a blue ground. It also evokes a feeling of soil or wrinkles, damages suffered by the delicate flowers. Following this train of thought, the extra texturing further heightens the poignancy of the unpredictable fate of flowers in changeable nature.



26

**THIS UNLINED TRADITIONAL-STYLE JACKET** has a modern cut. The sleeves are joined to the front and back at the armpit instead of at the arm. They are also slightly tapered at the cuffs. Two patch pockets have been added to the front. Their pattern matching the ground pattern so perfectly that they are hardly noticeable. Otherwise, the front opening, standup collar, side vents, and froggings are all classical features.

The design concept on which the pattern on both sides of the jacket's fabric is based is called *gezi hua* (framed motifs). Here, the frame resembles the markings on a turtle's carapace. The turtle has a long lifespan and is a fitting symbol of longevity. This auspicious association suggested by the frame pattern is reinforced by chrysanthemum flower heads enclosed in octagons and simplified images of prunus that fill all the small squares.

Chrysanthemum is said to be beneficial to humans. Drinking tea made by dipping chrysanthemum flower heads in hot water not only cleanses the system, but also strengthens the eyes. Perhaps based on this common belief, a Chinese folklore claims that people living in Jingzhou who drank water from a pool surrounded



27

26. WOMAN'S JACKET, Cotton, 1993, Xi'an, Shaanxi province, On loan from Mrs. Sara Irwin, L2004.7.3, L. 70 cm x W. 147.7 cm

27. WOMAN'S JACKET, Cotton, 2002, Shanghai municipality, On loan from Mrs. Patty Proctor, L2004.8.2, L. 76.2 cm x W. 150 cm



by chrysanthemums lived to a grand old age. The prunus acquires its symbolic longevity meaning because of a play on words. Its name, *mei*, is homophonous with another word that means eyebrows (*mei*). Since bushy eyebrows constitute a sign of old age, the image of a prunus may be interpreted in this sense.

Although the turtle's carapace pattern is regular, a number of devices have been employed to make the overall pattern interesting. The framework, for instance, is made up of three rows of tiny dots for the long sides of the octagons and two rows of dots for the adjoining squares. This subtle variation in elements of the design is also evident in the images of the chrysanthemum flower heads. Close examination reveals that there are actually several variant forms. As well, the solid dark background colour within each octagon is also relied on to set off the delicate jewel-like flower heads as well as the seeming diamond-studded frames.



28

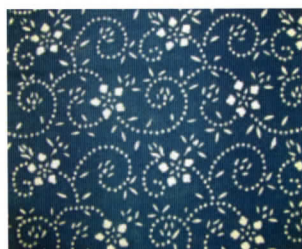
**THIS PAIR OF GIRL'S TROUSERS** is constructed for loose fitting. The wide waistband enables the wearer to step into and out of the trousers easily. When worn, the surplus cloth of the waistband would be folded across the body and secured in place with a cord. The edge of the waistband above the tied cord would then be folded down and tucked in to ensure that the cord does not slide out of place.<sup>14</sup> The use of a wide waistband and cord also allows the wearer to adjust the trousers to her comfort at any time, for example, before and after meals, and in poor or good health when the waistline would likely change. Furthermore, this flexibility makes it possible for a family of several children of close ages to share the use of the trousers or, if their ages are far apart, to pass it down from the elder to the younger.

The loose-fitting trouser legs and the ample crotch area are also designed for comfort. These trousers would fit many different figures. As well, the loose fit makes the trousers much more comfortable in hot weather: the material does not adhere to perspiring legs and the refreshing cool air from any breeze can be delightfully felt.

The material used for this pair of trousers is indigo-dyed cotton tabby. It has a reserve design in white consisting of stenciled repeat pattern of birds and butterflies interlacing on a ground filled with endless knots and sprays of roses, bamboo, and chrysanthemums. This array of motifs is embedded with three auspicious wishes. The bird implies the idea of high official rank (*jue*) because one of its general names, *que*, is phonetically close enough to *jue* to permit it to serve as a pun to evoke this connotation. The chrysanthemum and endless knot are standard symbols of longevity. The butterfly (*die*), too, is often enlisted as a visual pun for a word having the same sound but meaning an elderly person having reached ninety years of age (*die*). As for the rose and bamboo, together they summon to mind the common saying *yueyue ping'an* (be safe and sound every month) or *siji ping'an* (be safe and sound throughout the four seasons). These similar interpretations are derived from the fact that the rose is called *yueji* (literally meaning "months and seasons"), so named on account of its long flowering characteristic. The bamboo, too, imparts the meaning of safety because in ancient times people cut bamboo stems in small sections and threw them into the fire to make cracking noises, believing that by doing so, evil spirits would be scared away and peace and safety would be guaranteed.

28. GIRL'S TROUSERS, Cotton, Qing dynasty, late 19th century, Zhejiang province, Gift of Toronto Diocesan Anglican Church, Women, 971.166.45, L. 83 cm x W. 106 cm

**THE PATTERNS IN THIS GROUP OF TEXTILES** exemplify a design concept called *qianzhi hua* ([motif-layout similar to] entwining branches). Specimen (a) shows repeat bands of interlinking C-shaped scrolls representing vines in their prime.<sup>15</sup> Leaves, though sparse, are prim and sprightly. Flowers in bud, half-open form, or full blossom issue from different parts of the springy vines. Altogether they create a pattern that captures well the exuberant vibrancy in plant life.



29a



29b

The pattern in specimen (b) is composed of stylized flower heads.<sup>16</sup> Each resembles a huge disc surrounded by several layers of rays. Its centre has an amorphous cluster representing many developing fruits. Each disc-like image is separated from the other by two clusters of double gourds depicted in reverse mirror image. Each cluster has two leafy tendrils reaching out to twine with one another. This striking pattern has much to offer. It shows harmony and contrast in shape and distribution of colour even though it is created on a simple blue-and-white scheme.

The last specimen, (c), is decorated with a repeat pattern of goldfish swimming in a lotus pond.<sup>17</sup> Not only the lotus stems intertwine with one another, even the goldfish weaving their way in and out of the profuse growth seem to intertwine with the dense stems and leaves. The intriguing *trompe l'oeil* effect is further enhanced by the fact that numerous short lines have been used to define the surface details of the goldfish, as well as the buds, petals, and leaf veins of the lotus.



29c

**PATTERNS IN THIS GROUP OF FABRICS** are created using the *qianzhi hua* design concept. Specimen (a) shows large birds perched on prunus branches.<sup>18</sup> The compositional layout is lengthwise rather than across the narrow width. Although the profuse twigs with buds and blossoms extend in every direction to form a lace-like pattern, it is still possible to distinguish two rows of magpies represented in reverse mirror image in mid-section, flanked on each side by a row of paradise flycatchers caught at the moment when they alight on the branch. The magpie (*xique*) and prunus (*mei*) provide a rebus for the idiomatic expression *xi shang meishao*, used to describe a person beaming with happiness. Also by means of punning, the prunus may be interpreted to symbolize long life.<sup>19</sup> This idea is reinforced by the paradise flycatcher whose name, *shoudai*, evokes the sound of the word meaning longevity (*shou*). Another motif that is not so easy to detect in this busy pattern is the cicada. It is perched on a twig between two large blossoms and a paradise flycatcher. The name of this insect, *chan*, summons to mind the term *chanlian*, which means



30a

29. THREE LENGTHS OF FABRIC WITH DESIGNS OF (A) FLORAL SCROLLS, (B) FLOWERS AND DOUBLE GOURDS, AND (C) LOTUSES AND GOLDFISH, Cotton, 2002, Jiangsu province, *Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung*, 2004.68.34, 36, 37, W. (a) 38.4 cm, (b) 37.3 cm, (c) 37.2 cm

30. THREE LENGTHS OF FABRIC WITH DESIGNS OF (A) MAGPIES ON PRUNUS BRANCHES, (B) BIRDS AMONG CLUSTERS OF PINE NEEDLES, AND (C) BUTTERFLIES AMONG HISBISCUS BLOSSOMS, Cotton, 2002, Jiangsu province, *Gift of Dr. Ka Bo Tsang in memory of Mrs. Tsang Ng Sheung*, 2004.68.38, 39, 40, W. (a) 37.6 cm, (b) 78 cm, (c) 77.2 cm





30b

continuity.

The pattern of specimen (b) has been designed with great sensitivity. Resembling a paper-cut design, it depicts paradise flycatchers in various attitudes—darting about or taking respite—among clusters of pine-needles

and wisps of dissipating clouds, some of which merge to become *lingzhi*-shaped formations. The *lingzhi* (literally meaning divine fungus, more popularly known as fungus of immortality), pine, and paradise flycatcher are all conventional symbols of longevity. Clouds (*yun*) portend good fortune (*yun*).

Specimen (c) is decorated with a lively pattern of butterflies among entwining stems of flourishing hibiscus. The hibiscus (*furong*) represents wealth and eminence (*fugui ronghua*). The butterfly has a number of felicitous connotations, including long life, happy marriage (when depicted in pairs), joy (when depicted in multitude), and the idea of multiplication. Here, the flower and the insect play another role. The flower stands for the female; the butterfly represents the male. The euphemistically depicted scene of a butterfly feeding on a flower is actually implicit with courtship between the two sexes or devotion between husband and wife.

**THESE TWO STRIKING PATTERNS** are modern creations using reworked traditional motifs. Specimen (a) has an overall pattern composed of repeat images of a phoenix with outspread wings and a curly tendrill in its beak.<sup>20</sup> The images are connected side by side to form



30c



31a

a row. Each row is positioned diagonally across the width in a NE-SW orientation. Each row, too, is linked with another row in two ways. When two rows of birds are represented flying towards one another, they are joined together by the continuous curly tendrill. When two rows of birds are depicted flying away from one another, they are connected by joining the birds' outstretched wing- and tail-feathers. Through this clever artistic device, the large numbers of repetitive diagonals and curves that define various compositional details create a vivid sense of movement and grandeur in the pattern.

While the pattern in specimen (a) emphasizes organization, that shown in specimen (b) seems to delight in profusion and chaos. Its theme may depict the exuberant life in a lotus pond.<sup>21</sup> Amid robust stems of lotus blossoms, however, one can barely distinguish fish tails connected to some of the writhing snake-like forms that constitute the entangled masses. This modern creation shows strong influence by fanciful designs evident in the textiles produced by



31b

31. TWO LENGTHS OF FABRIC WITH DESIGNS OF (A) PHOENIXES IN FLIGHT AND (B) LOTUSES AND FISH, Cotton, Early 1980s, Hunan province, On loan from Mrs. Patty Proctor, L2004.8.3, 4, W. (a) 82.1 cm, (b) 88.4 cm

ethnic groups using the wax-resist dyeing technique. In fact, the ice-crackle pattern visible everywhere in this fabric is artificially induced, probably by using a silk screen, to make the product look as if it was dyed by the wax-resist method. Yet, the predominantly horizontal filaments and numerous blotches in areas where a network of thin lines occur tell the truth.

The town of Changde in Hunan province has been known for its paste-resist-dyed products' innovative designs, lively motifs, and detail-oriented representation. Apparently its major market is in southwestern China, in particular Guizhou province.<sup>22</sup> Since these regions have large concentrations of ethnic groups, these two specimens may very likely be representative of the kind of products intended for the ethnic consumers. This perhaps explains why their powerful motifs seem to be at odds with the more sedate patterns intended for the Han Chinese market.

**THIS QUILT-COVER TOP** made for newlyweds is decorated with a composite design achieved by a complex procedure involving paste-resist dyeing and painting. A narrow border made up of a repeat prunus-blossom pattern divides the rectangle into five sections: a large square enclosed by a long panel at the top and bottom as well as a short panel to its right and left. These identical long panels, which are positioned in reverse mirror-image fashion, depict a bat, birds, and a pair of deer in an idyllic setting composed of a cluster of bamboo, a gnarled flowering prunus tree, camellias, *lingzhi* (fungus of immortality), rocks, and drifting clouds. Short panels, also identical in decoration and arranged in similar fashion, depict a latticework-like design made up of intertwining formalized dragons and stylized lotuses, bats, and a *lingzhi*-head doubling as the *ruyi* symbol. These two groups of diverse images not only bring about visual delight, they also are relied upon to impart felicitous wishes, such as long life (bamboo, prunus, deer, *lingzhi*, intertwined formalized dragons, stylized scrolling foliage, rocks), marital happiness (pairs of animals



and birds, prunus and bamboo), good fortune (bats, clouds), youthful energy (camellias), and continual fulfilment of desires (lotuses or *lian* + *ruyi* = *liannian ruyi*).

The large square at the centre has one or two Daoist emblems in each corner. Clockwise from the upper right, they are a sword with a pair of clappers, a palm-leaf fan, a peony with a pair of scrolls, and a double gourd with a crutch.<sup>24</sup> These objects are attributes of some

32. TOP OF A QUILT COVER DEPICTING A REUNION SCENE, Cotton, 1900–1925, Jiangxi province (?)<sup>23</sup>, Gift of Miss Aimee Kennedy, 952.138, L. 198 cm x W. 175 cm



of the so-called Eight Immortals, including Lü Dongbin, Cao Guojiu, Zhongli Quan, Lan Caihe, Zhang Guolao, and Li Tieguai. Together, they represent longevity and protection by divine forces.

Surrounded by these auspicious objects is a scene enclosed in a circular frame. It depicts a beauty with two attendants coming out of a reception hall to greet two visitors waiting on a garden terrace, one talking while the other observing with interest a white rabbit standing on its hind legs on a flat rock pounding an elixir of immortality in a mortar with a pestle. This scene recreates the final episode in *Changsheng dian* (The Palace of Immortality), a play written by Hong Sheng (1645–1704) of the Qing dynasty.<sup>25</sup> It is about the fabled love affair of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty (r. 713–755) and his beloved concubine, Yang Yuhuan (more commonly known as Yang *guifei*<sup>26</sup>). Because the infatuated emperor neglected state affairs and allowed Yang Yuhuan's relatives to amass wealth and power, eventually a rebellion led by one of his favourite military officials erupted. The emperor and his household fled. Half way on the journey to Sichuan, the escorting soldiers blamed Yang Yuhuan for causing the downfall of the country and threatened mutiny if she was not put to death. The distraught emperor had no choice but to comply. As the story goes, the spirit of Yang Yuhuan, who had been a fairy banished from the Isle of the Blessed, returned to her celestial abode. Yet, both she and the emperor could not forget each other. After many fruitless tries, Emperor Xuanzong was finally able to secure the service of Yang Tongyou, a Daoist priest endowed with magical powers. It was through his good offices that on the fifteenth night of the eighth month the spirit of the emperor was transported to the moon and reunited with Yang Yuhuan.<sup>27</sup> The beauty depicted here is, therefore, Yang Yuhuan. The man wearing a blue robe is Yang Tongyou. Next to him, the man in a yellow robe and holding a *ruyi* sceptre is Emperor Xuanzong. Since legend claims that a rabbit is forever pounding an elixir in the moon, its presence indicates the location where the reunion took place.

The production of this quilt-cover top required careful planning. Made of six handloom-woven narrow strips sewn together, the precise alignment of the pictorial details along the edges of any two adjoining strips suggests that the strips were sewn together before dyeing to make up a canvas for the artwork. Both stencils and freehand sketching (using a water-soluble pigment) would have been used to transfer the desired motifs onto this canvas. Motifs transferred by stencils (bamboo, grass, asters, dotted ground lines, borders with prunus-blossom pattern, etc.) were dye-resisted by means of pressing paste through the perforations. Others were done by tracing the sketched outlines with paste using a special applicator or a brush.<sup>28</sup> When the outlines of all motifs have been covered with paste, the strips would then have been taken apart before each was dipped in the indigo vat. The dyed and cleaned strips, with motifs mainly in a blue-and-white scheme, would have been sewn together again for colouring. Once the rich array of colours, including royal blue, orange-red, light brown, green, yellow, and black was hand-painted, enhancing the pictorial elements, the whole composite design came alive. As well, finer details, such as the figure's facial features and drapery folds, the women's hair, the men's long beards and headgear, and even the fur of the rabbit, were also all painted in with delicate lines.

## EMBROIDERY

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Blue-and-white embroidery is a convenient term used in the West to refer to a distinctive type of Chinese embroidery characterized by a blue-on-white or white-on-blue colour scheme. The decorative motifs are delineated with cotton thread, using as a base cloth mostly cotton, but sometimes linen and other fabrics. Although many styles of stitching are employed, cross stitch is the mainstay. This is because counted thread is best suited for textiles with even weave. The Chinese have several names for cross-stitch embroidery: *tiaohua* ([embroidery with] pick-out motifs), *jiazihua* ([embroidery with] motifs worked in a frame-like stitch), and *shizihua* ([embroidery with] motifs worked in a stitch resembling the character for ten).<sup>1</sup> To distinguish embroideries executed in a single-coloured scheme from the multicoloured ones, they call the former *sutiao* ([embroidery with] monochromatic pick-out [motifs]) and the latter *caitiao* ([embroidery with] polychromatic pick-out [motifs]).<sup>2</sup>

Cross stitch is simple and easy to learn. Since embroidering with this stitch requires neither a hoop nor a frame, it can be done anytime and anywhere. The basic materials required for its execution, namely cotton, flax, and ramie, are readily available in many parts of China. It is, therefore, not surprising that this particular type of embroidery is widely practised. While *caitiao* can be found almost all over China, *sutiao* is limited to provinces in southern China and the island of Taiwan in the South China Sea.

Blue-and-white embroidery has been done strictly by women, among both the Han nationality and the ethnic groups. On the whole, the Han Chinese embroiderers belong to the peasantry or the working class living in rural areas. In addition to managing sundry chores, these women still find time to make good use of their sartorial skills which they have learned since a tender age. They make clothes and accessories for themselves and their loved ones, often lavishing delightful embroidered designs on items for their own use



and the children's wear. In order to make their humble living quarters a little more attractive, they also make household accessories, such as bed valances, bed curtains, quilt covers, pillow covers, and tablecloths, adorning them in a similar fashion.

Embroidered articles often also form part of a bride's trousseau. Her work would be displayed in her new home on her wedding day and her needlework would be judged by her in-laws, as well as their relatives and friends. Embroideries may also be given away as gifts or sold to garner extra income for the family. During the 1930s, for example, an embroidery market was organized on the first and fifteenth days of every month in Pixian, a county in western Sichuan popularly known as the "hometown of cross-stitch embroidery."<sup>3</sup> Often, as many as several thousand embroiderers would flock to the marketplace. While peddling their ware, they would also observe other people's work to seek inspiration. At the end of the day the most outstanding embroideries would be selected and prizes would be given out to their creators. The opportunity to observe, compare, and learn from other people's work, the spirit of competition, and the incentive to earn recognition and money to benefit the family all worked together to spur the embroiderers on.

Through public sale, embroidered commodities reached far and wide. Some of them became models for emulation. There were also other ways for ideas and techniques to be transmitted. As an example, when word of particularly skilled embroiderers spread, embroidery enthusiasts would travel to neighbouring or faraway villages to learn from their reputable peers. This is why certain themes and designs are quite similar in works produced in areas geographically far apart.

Foreign missionaries, too, played a role in popularizing Chinese cross-stitch embroidery abroad. During the first few decades of the twentieth century they set up embroidery cooperatives to instruct women and schoolgirls from poor families to embroider linens for sale in Western markets, thereby enabling them to augment their family income. Both



blue-and-white and multicoloured embroideries were made.

Embroiderers from ethnic groups, notably the Miao, Yao, Buyi, Dong, Jiang, Naxi, and the various aboriginal tribes in Taiwan start learning needlework at the tender age of six or seven.<sup>4</sup> Beginning with embroidering simple patterns on narrow bands for trimming, they progress to more intricate designs requiring knowledge and skill in more complex techniques. By the time they reach their early teens, the young girls become very proficient in these techniques. Only then would they be allowed to start working on their own bridal outfit, a task that takes a few years to complete. These colourful outfits are a source of pride for their creators. On festive or important occasions girls dressed in their best would be admired by their peers. They would also attract attention from potential suitors. In such outfits, blue-and-white embroidery is done on waistbands, cuffs, or attachments, forming an integral part of the overall decorative scheme. In daily wear it may appear as trimming on clothes or as a principal decorative element on accessories such as scarves and aprons.

Blue-and-white embroideries produced by women of ethnic groups show a heavy reliance on geometric patterns, whereas those executed by their Han Chinese sisters display a preference for combining geometric patterns with pictorial images. Yet, both tend to adhere to traditional designs handed down from mother to daughter. There are exceptional cases where the more artistically gifted have created new designs, often by reworking motifs culled from the traditional repertoire they have learned. As a result, while we often see a great number of examples adorned with designs that share the same subject matter with similar pictorial elements, we occasionally come across brilliant pieces with unusual designs that express traditional themes but with novel approaches.

All blue-and-white embroideries produced by the Han Chinese share several common features be they conventional or extraordinary. Geometric shapes are extensively used because their angular configu-



rations are well suited to the grid-like structure of cross stitch. Images of animals, plants, and natural phenomena are frequently abstracted, exaggerated, combined, or fragmented, either for facilitating depiction or for creating a dramatic visual effect. A mere semblance to objects in real life or in traditional perception is seen as sufficient; motifs are never depicted in logical proportion relative to one another. Thus, a peach may be considerably bigger than a melon; a melon may also be as big as a lion. Nevertheless, although an embroiderer may give free rein to her imagination in the choice of pictorial elements and the ways of representation, she follows a well-established schema in the overall layout. This is especially true for household articles and personal accessories. Irrespective of the size of such items, whether it is as small as a handkerchief or as large as a bed valance, embroiderers generally relegate large medallions to the centre field, triangular designs to the corners, and continuous patterns to the border.<sup>5</sup> All these elements are then fitted into a balanced and symmetrical composition.

The compact nature of cross-stitch embroidery makes it hardwearing. Yet, long-term use inevitably leads to damage. Many extant blue-and-white examples show patched holes, re-attached corners, reworked lost details, and new joints. From these various attempts to make them last a little longer, we have some idea of how much their creators cherished them. From investigatory accounts, we also learn that not infrequently, exceptionally beautiful pieces would be stored away as family heirlooms.<sup>6</sup> One grandmother, after saving up for years a marvelous piece of blue-and-white embroidery done by her mother, was finally willing to cut it up to make clothes for her grandchild, as a gesture showing her delight in welcoming in a new member of another generation.<sup>7</sup> Her act of allowing the little child to enjoy the carefully preserved needlework of his great grandmother was indeed a touching reflection of her respect for her forebear's labour of love.

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#### SOME STITCHING METHODS IN BLUE-AND-WHITE EMBROIDERY

**BACK STITCH** - Each forward-moving stitch meets the starting point of the previous stitch, thus making a single unbroken line.

**BUTTONHOLE STITCH** - A flat stitch is pulled to one side by looping the thread under the needle. It is often used for outlining and as an edge finish.

**CHAIN STITCH** - A chain stitch is formed similar to a buttonhole stitch, but the needle having formed the loop enters very close to the point where it first emerged. A series of interlinked loops may be used for both outlining and filling.

**CROSS STITCH** - Two identical short straight stitches crossing each other at opposite angles of a perfect square, the size of this small area (and the resulting cross stitch) is determined by counting the threads of a plain weave fabric to be worked on.

**DOUBLE RUNNING STITCH** - After making equally spaced running stitches, the space between them is filled on the return journey to make a solid line. It is important, however, that the needle enters the same holes to ensure the completeness of the resulting straight line.

**KNOT STITCH** - A pellet-shaped knot is achieved by twisting the thread into a loop, coiling it around the needle before letting it go through the fabric at a point close to where it first emerged, and tightening the thread round the needle before pulling the needle through.

**PINE-NEEDLE STITCH** - Equidistant straight stitches are made by emerging from the circumference and entering at the centre of a half/full circle, forming patterns that resemble the radiating sticks of an open folding fan or the spokes of a wheel.

**RUNNING STITCH** - The thread is carried forward in and out of

the fabric to form a line of flat stitches of equal length and at equal spacing.

**SATIN STITCH** - Parallel straight, flat stitches are arranged neatly and evenly from one edge of the design to the other to cover the foundation fabric.

**STEM STITCH** - Each forward-moving stitch overlaps half the length of the previous stitch to form a solid line.

**THESE WOMAN'S SOCKS** with round toes are constructed with two layers of cotton. The tops are joined to the quilted soles and heels first before they are sewn together at the front and back. A short slit at the top in front seam is added for style. The slit is accentuated by a small embroidered *ruyi* design which is repeated in much bigger scale at the toe. Literally the name of the design means "according to one's wishes." Its form is inspired by the shape of the *lingzhi*, a fungus the Chinese believe to have an energizing and life-prolonging property and since ancient times have regarded as an auspicious symbol.

There are other auspicious symbols. Some appear as decorative details on the widest band adjacent to the quilted part of the heel reinforcement. They include the prunus, the *wan* or swastika-



33. PAIR OF WOMAN'S SOCKS, Cotton, 1900–1925, Gift of Mrs. William C. White, 972.163.1 a–b, L. 24 cm x W. 21 cm



like design, and the begonia. Although each is endowed with several different meanings, in the present case, most likely the prunus stands for longevity,<sup>8</sup> the *wan* symbol signifies ten thousand (another way of expressing the idea of infinity), and the begonia (*haitang*) is relied upon as a homophone to call to mind the idiomatic expression *yutang fugui* (a magnificent hall filled with riches). A single motif of a melon with leaves and vines is embroidered in the middle of the quilted sole. The melon, which contains many seeds, is a conventional emblem for abundant descendants. When all the motifs are considered together, the sock is imbued with wishes for long life, continuity of the family line, wealth, and an emphatic assurance that all these wishes will be fulfilled.

All the embroidery is worked in back stitch, using white thread on a white ground. The only exception to this white-on-white scheme is the melon motif. The choice of subtle colours indicates that the socks were made for funerary use.<sup>9</sup> Whoever made them followed the traditional custom of having a best outfit ready long before one's final moment arrived. This is why the quality of the sewing and stitching evidenced here is so fine. As to all the decorative motifs, these have been chosen to express the good wishes the would-be deceased would like to convey to her descendants. They would not have been intended for herself.

**EACH OF THESE ANKLE-LENGTH CHILD'S SOCKS** is made of a single-layered white cotton upper sewn to a burn sienna-coloured cotton sole lined with pale blue cotton tabby.

Both decorative scheme and motifs are simply designed. The top is ornamented with an embroidered double-outlined dog-tooth pattern on the front-turning hem, a wide band of rosettes running parallel with a delicate line on both sides, and another band of trefoils with



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dangling diamonds.<sup>10</sup> The front seam is accentuated with a bold line which crosses a stylized butterfly on the vamp. The embroidery involves edging stitch, cross stitch, and double running stitch. On close inspection, the stitches are unevenly worked and sketchy. They reflect the work of an unskilled embroiderer.

The butterfly (*die*) is associated with femininity and joy. As a homophone, it may also suggest the ideas of repetition and longevity, for both written characters having these meanings sound the same.

**THIS PAIR OF CHILD'S TROUSERS** is constructed with loose-fitting legs attached to a wide unbleached cotton waistband. It opens at the back where a pair of loops are sewn, one on each side edge of the waistband at mid-length. Another pair of loops are located at the upper edge of the waistband at the front. Because the waistband is loose-fitting and there is no other fastening device to hold the trousers in place, a long tape would have been used when the trousers were put on. After the tape has been passed through the front pair of loops, its two ends would have been pulled over the child's shoulders, passed through the loops at the back, and then knotted. In this way, this simple device would



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34. PAIR OF CHILD'S SOCKS, Cotton, 1900–1925, *Gift of Toronto Diocesan Anglican Church Women*, 971.166.54 a–b, L. 12.5 cm x W. 17.5 cm

35. CHILD'S TROUSERS, Cotton, 1900–1940, Chengdu, Sichuan province, 980.287.20, L. 51 cm x W. 36 cm

have afforded an active child freedom of movement and comfort.

The cut-out crotch (*kaidang*) is a common feature in small children's wear. This is especially evident in small towns and rural areas. In the past working-class families often sired many children in order to safeguard a constant supply of hands and the continuity of the family line. In traditional China children in the family looked after themselves, with the older siblings not yet old enough to do heavier work looking after the younger. Or, if children in the family were too young, grandparents did the job of safeguarding the young. In the countryside these toddlers would play in front of their family's courtyards. In small towns their playground would likely be the front of their homes or the alleys in the neighbourhood. Whenever nature called, the cut-out-crotch design in the open-seam trousers allowed the children to relieve themselves wherever they happened to be at the moment, whether standing or squatting, with a minimum risk of soiling the trousers.

The legs of this pair of trousers are decorated with four embroidered bands, each having a different pattern. The bottom one, which resembles a continuous butterfly design, is worked in darning stitch and pine-needle stitch. Bold and attractive, the compactness of this border pattern would have helped the turn-up hems to fray less easily had the trousers been used over a long period. The three bands above this—an orderly arrangement of feathers, narrow meanders, and a geometric pattern made up of numerous neatly stacked crosses *patée*<sup>11</sup>—are all executed in double running, or Holbein, stitch.<sup>12</sup> The airiness of these lace-like patterns provide an effective visual contrast to the border pattern with its much stronger accent.

**THIS PAIR OF CHILD'S TROUSERS** is similar in construction to the one discussed in No. 35. The only difference is that it lacks the two pairs of loops and there is no other means of fastening. This fact suggests two possibilities: either the trousers were put away before they were completely finished or, if it was considered to be complete,

there was another way of securing them on the child's body—possibly by tying a tape around the waistband.

The edges of the legs are decorated with a continuous design of a bird perched on a flowering branch. It is worked in a variety of stitches, including satin stitch, long-and-short stitch, straight stitch, back stitch, stem stitch, cross stitch, knot stitch, running stitch, and pine-needle stitch.

The diverse stitching techniques make the embroidery more interesting. In the same sense, the symbolic meanings invested in this innocuously simple bird-and-flower design also enhance our appreciation of it. The bird, though naïvely designed, may be identified as a thrush (*huamei*, *Garrulax canorus*) on account of its two drooping tail feathers. Literally, the Chinese name

means "painted eyebrows," so coined because the thrush has a distinct white streak above its eyes.<sup>13</sup> In China, the eyebrows of most men tend to become long and hairy as they advance in age; bushy eyebrows, therefore, have been regarded as a sign of old age. Because of this common notion, the image of a thrush or its name may summon to the Chinese mind the hope of longevity. On the wing



36

36. CHILD'S TROUSERS, Cotton embroidered with cotton thread, 1900-1925, Gift of Mary and Ronald Hilborn, 984.156.5, L. 39 cm x W. 46 cm



of the bird depicted here this hope is reinforced by the addition of a *wan* or swastika-like symbol. Its meaning is ten thousand and in the present context would imply an exceedingly long life.

The idea of long life is further augmented by the peach blossom, another symbol of longevity. Its association is derived from Chinese folklore which asserts that the peaches grown in the garden of the Queen Mother of the West ripened every 3,000 years. If consumed, each fruit could add 600 years to one's life span.

The turned-up hem is embroidered with darning stitch and cross stitch. The repeating pattern produced is composed of stylized butterflies placed in a right-side-up manner alternating with one executed in an upside-down position. As a visual pun, the butterfly (*die*) also evokes the idea of long life.<sup>14</sup>

**THIS WEDGE-SHAPED BIB** has a curved bottom and a large semi-circular pocket across the lower edge. Two tapes attached to the pointed ends at the waist were used to keep the lower part of the bib in place. The tapes used for tying the bib around the infant's neck are missing.

The embroidery is largely executed in cross stitch. Small details, however, are worked in straight stitch, back stitch, or knot stitch. The bib shows two scenes. The upper one depicts a boy kneeling beside a cluster of bamboo and a rock under the sun. What it illustrates is actually one of the twenty-four paragons of filial piety. The story is related to a historical figure named Meng Zong (d. ad 271) who lived in the state of Wu during the Three Kingdoms period.<sup>15</sup> Known as a loving son since his childhood, he took good care of his mother. One winter, he noticed that there was a shortage of supply of bamboo shoots. Knowing that these constituted a culinary delight his mother craved for, he went to a bamboo grove to

cry and made a supplication. As the legend goes, Heaven was moved and caused the bamboo shoots to push through the soil. Thus, Meng Zong was able to keep his mother happy.

The lower scene is composed of a jumble of seemingly unrelated motifs. In the centre is a vase with a stem of lotus, a *lingzhi*, and what may be interpreted as stalks of grain. Flanking it is a woman and a boy, both seem to be standing on a wisp of cloud. To the left of the woman are a *ruyi*-shaped lock, a rooster, and a stem of cockscomb. To the right of the boy is a flock of bats—one shown much bigger than the rest—flying down from a dissipating wisp of cloud.

Many auspicious meanings are hidden in this composite design. Punning plays a major role in conveying the messages. With regard to the *lingzhi* fungus, because its double-curved shape is imitated to form the head of the *ruyi* sceptre, it has also acquired the meaning of *ruyi* (fulfilled wishes).<sup>16</sup> As a result, when the *lingzhi* is viewed together with the lotus (*lian*), they would evoke the phrase *liannian ruyi* or "[May your] wishes come true year after year." Similarly, the ears (*sui*) of the grain stalks and the vase (*huaping*) would summon to the Chinese mind the phrase *suisui ping'an*, meaning "[May you be blessed with] peace and safety year in and year out."

The child standing on a wisp of cloud (*yun*) suggests another phrase, *pingbu qingyun*, literally, "stepping on an azure cloud;" but more plainly, "achieving goals without exerting much effort." The woman, possibly the mother, also stands on a cloud. The cloud is added under her feet as much for compositional balance as to mean that her son's success



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37. BIB, Cotton, 1900–1940, Chengdu, Sichuan province, 980.287.18, L. 37.5 cm x W. 38 cm

would also elevate her social position. The woman appears to be holding out a musical chime (*qing*) with tassels in one hand. The boy seems to be raising a stick and about to hit (*ji*) the musical chime. Their actions suggest the term *jiqing* (celebration of auspicious events).

The *ruyi*-shaped lock is actually represented by combining together two popular varieties of the *ruyi* form. It is a talisman that children used to wear around their necks to keep evil influences away.<sup>17</sup> The comb of the rooster (*jiguan*) is relied upon to provide the same sound that makes up part of the name of the cockscomb (*jiguan hua*) plant. Together, they would summon up the phrase *guan shang jia guan* (promotion to a higher rank).

Also by a play on words, the bats (*fu*) are considered to be representative of good fortune (*fu*). The swooping pose of the prominent bat adds even greater significance to the motif. It indicates the imminence of the arrival of good fortune. The wisp of dissipating cloud (*yun*) also stands for good fortune (*yun*) as it shares the same sound with another character having this similar meaning.

All edges of this bib are embroidered with a continuous pattern of melons linked together with vines and flowers, symbols of fertility and continuity. Summing up, this bib is laden with many kinds of desirable things in life, some of which pertain more to parents, such as many descendants and filial sons. Others that may be more appropriate for the child are personal safety, good fortune, career success, and auspicious events.

**THIS BIB** and No. 37 were among thirty-seven embroideries acquired in Chengdu by Mrs. Eleanor Conway during the 1940s when she worked for the West China Union Hospital as an occupational therapist. In 1980 her whole collection was purchased by the ROM with a Wintario grant made available through the Ministry of Culture and Recreation.



38 front

The construction of this bib resembles a waistcoat. The front, however, is about one-third longer than the back and, similar to the previously discussed example, has a curved bottom and a large semi-circular pocket across the lower edge. It is fastened with a pair of loops and brass buttons at left shoulder and left side seam.

Decorated with embroidery in blue cross stitch, satin stitch, straight stitch, back stitch, and knot stitch, the chest shows two small mirror-image butterflies flitting above a large one. The lower part displays a composite motif commonly called *wudu* or "five poisonous creatures."<sup>18</sup> As seen here, a vapour-exhaling toad and a viper are surrounded by a spider, a mosquito, and a scorpion. With artist's license, a fanciful centipede has been added to make this group look even more menacing.

Why would a child's bib be adorned with such pests? It was a common belief in China that on the day of the *Duanwu* (literally, Midday) festival, i.e., the fifth day of the fifth month in the lunar calendar, the *yang* (light, heat, positive) element in the universe would wax and the *yin* (darkness, cold, negative) element would wane. On this hottest day of the year all kinds of dreadful creatures would come out from their hiding places and harm people. In order to protect themselves, people would hang bouquets of artemisia and sweet flag on their doors because the distinctive fragrance of both plants were thought to be very efficacious in dispelling insects and poisonous creatures. They would also drink realgar wine and hang pictures of Zhong Kui or Zhang Daoling, both believed to possess the power to chase away ghosts and rid evil influences.<sup>19</sup> As for the children, they would receive a few drops of the realgar wine

38. BIB, Cotton, 1900–1940, Chengdu, Sichuan province, 980.287.19, L. 39.5 cm x W. 35 cm



on their foreheads, noses, faces, or behind the ears for safeguarding health. In some places adults would dip the wine with a finger and write the character *wang* (king) on the children's foreheads to symbolize the presence of the tiger (known widely as the king of all beasts and its fur markings on the forehead often resemble this character), believing that this act of invocation would double the wine's protective power. In addition, objects decorated with the *wudu* motif were also believed to be endowed with the power to frighten away all bad influences. Such notion probably stemmed from a Chinese concept which asserts that no remedy would be better than using vice to counteract vice.

38 back



The back of the bib is also embroidered with butterflies (*die*). Four of them seem to be dancing around a small insect (*cong*) with wings.<sup>20</sup> The butterfly has several symbolic meanings. Here, both butterfly and insect are used as homophones. Together they evoke the phrase *chongchong diedie* which expresses a desire for good things to happen in succession.

Two more messages are hidden in less conspicuous details on this bib. Embroidered with white thread in back stitch at each side of the pocket opening is the contour of a vase (*ping*) with a globular body. The two vase forms together suggest the phrase *pingping an'an* (peace and safety). The brass buttons all have the same molded motif of a magpie (*xiaojiao*) perched on a prunus (*meihua*) branch. This visual pun calls to mind another phrase, *xi shang meishao*, which is com-

monly used to describe a person beaming with happiness.

**PINAFORES** were made more likely for girls than for boys.<sup>21</sup> They were worn over outer padded garments to protect them from soil. This one typifies the general style. It has a close fitting neck opening and two pairs of fabric knotted buttons and loops for closing at the back. Two fabric loops in faded red sewn on the corners under the armpit are for attaching movable ties to secure the pinafore to the wearer's body at the back. To enhance durability, a cotton lining has been added to the central top part and a patch pocket has been sewn in the centre of the lower part of the front.

Arranged symmetrically, the principal motifs consist of a lock, a deer, butterflies, and a vase holding various objects. They represent several visual puns with auspicious connotations. The magpie, bamboo, and prunus decorating the lock, for example, suggest the idiomatic expression *kaichun baoxi* (announcing happy news in early spring). The lantern (*deng*) and tassels attached to the lock call to mind the term *fengdeng* (prosperity).<sup>22</sup> The deer and butterfly are each imbued with several different meanings. Here, they are likely symbolic of long life. The vase (*ping*) and the stem of blossoms evoke another idiomatic expression, *ping'an fugui* (personal safety, riches, and honour).<sup>23</sup> The halberd (*ji*), chime (*qing*), and *ruyi* sceptre jointly constitute the sounds of yet another expression, *jiqing ruyi*, which embodies the desire for



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39. CHILD'S PINAFORE, Cotton, 1930s, Chengdu, Sichuan province, Lent by Textile Museum of Canada, T97.0025, L. 59 cm x W. 50.5 cm

happy events and wish fulfilment.

The simulated lock worn around the neck with a chain reflects a time-honoured custom. In the days when ordinary people had limited knowledge of medical care and hygiene, parents of frail or sickly children would often resort to all sorts of strange ways to safeguard the lives of their offspring. In Anhui province, for instance, such parents would request eight acquaintances to be the child's foster fathers.<sup>24</sup> The eight selected men would have to pool money together to buy a silver lock which they would hang around the child's neck with a chain. From the moment the lock was put on, it was to remain with the child until he/she reached twelve years of age, at which time it would again be taken off by the same eight foster fathers. It was believed that when a lock was put on the child, it would be like closing a gate and shutting all evil spirits out. By the time the lock was removed, the child would have passed through the most dangerous period of growth in his or her life.

People in other parts of China used other ways to secure a sum of money to buy the lock. In Zhejiang province people would distribute a hundred small red packets to acquaintances to solicit small donations.<sup>25</sup> The natives of Jiangxi province would send out hundreds of red paper packages, each having seven grains of rice and seven black tea leaves.<sup>26</sup> The packages were to be returned to the senders with a small cash donation. Yet, sometimes people would simply give a beggar money for the small change he had accumulated because this would be the easiest way to obtain money that had been collected from many sources.<sup>27</sup> The inclination to obtain money in these peculiar ways was probably based on the belief that through the concerted effort of many people to provide for the lock, their collective concern would strengthen the lock's protective power.

Such locks were commonly called "hundred-families locks" (*baijia suo*) or long-life locks (*changming suo*). While most were made with silver, gold-plated or gold ones for children of wealthy families were also produced, frequently not because the children were frail

but because they were deemed to be too precious to be without these talismans of protection.



40 front

**THIS WAISTCOAT** was collected by Mrs. L.M. Edmonds during 1921–1943 while she was working in Sichuan province for the United Church of Canada. It has deeply cut armholes and a high round neck, with the front flap closing to the right fastened with knotted cord buttons and loops.

For decoration, the front is embroidered in the centre with a flower basket attached with a tassel. The basket contains a small bouquet of chrysanthemums and two stems of *lingzhi*. A cut branch with two mandarin oranges is placed to its left. A pair of butterflies flit about. The larger one seems to be interested in the opened flower. The smaller one is seen close to the tassel. To either side of this central composite motif is an identical motif made up of a butterfly and a clump of orchid. The back shows a completely different subject—a procession depicted in three rows. The blue embroidery is mainly worked in cross stitch. Small details are executed with other methods of stitching, such as straight stitch, back stitch, pine-needle stitch, and double running stitch. The mouths of all the figures, the flower in the horse rider's hat, and the hanging tongue of the horse are embroidered with pink silk floss. This subtle colour variation enlivens the otherwise rigid compositional scheme.

The array of motifs is bound up with many layers of sym-

40. CHILD'S WAISTCOAT, Cotton, 1920–1943, Sichuan province, *Gift of Mrs. L.M. Edmonds*, 975.355.10, L. 38 cm x W. 43.8 cm



bolic meanings through the usual means of association and punning. Beginning with the flower basket (*hualan*), the sound, *lan*, in its name suggests the desire for male (*nan*) offspring. The same idea is also invested in the orchid (*lan*) included in the composite corner motif. The chrysanthemum is emblematic of long life (*shou*).<sup>28</sup> This idea is reinforced by the tassel (*shou*) and the two stems of *lingzhi*. The *lingzhi*, commonly called fungus of immortality, has been used by the Chinese as an energizing herb for promoting health. In most art forms only its double-curved head is represented. In this composite motif, however, we have a rare view of it depicted with a curved stem. The complete form shows a very close resemblance to the *ruyi* sceptre, an ornament often presented as a gesture of good will, wishing the recipient have every desire realized. The pair of mandarin oranges (*ji*) imply auspicious (*ji*) happenings. Butterflies are regarded as symbols of joy because they dance about. Their fluttering movement and the colourful markings in their wings together impart a sense of cheerfulness. Butterflies, too, are often represented to convey a desire for a long life.<sup>29</sup>

The processional scene embroidered on the back of the waistcoat depicts a *zhuangyuan*, or a champion of the final civil-service examination, returning home on horseback in full regalia. He wears a hat ornamented with a flower specially awarded by the emperor. In his hand is a branch of the *guihua* (*Osmanthus fragrans*), a symbol of an honourable son (*guizi*) because *guizi* is another name of the *guihua*. In addition, a broken branch of *guihua* is reminiscent of the term *zhengui*, which in the past was frequently used to refer to a scholar having won the first place in the final of the



40 back

three-part civil-service examination held at the imperial palace.<sup>30</sup> Among the ceremonial paraphernalia held by his attendants the two placards seen in the middle row deserve particular attention. Both bear the stylized image of a sailboat which is a conventional symbol auguring smooth progress in whatever endeavour one pursues.

**THIS HANDKERCHIEF** is decorated with a large square design in the centre and an identical triangular motif at each corner. The square depicts a wedding procession arranged in two ranks on each side of a central square. In the outer rank the procession is made up of attendants carrying lanterns, placards, ceremonial fans, and the bridal trousseau which includes household furniture, such as trunks, wash-basin stands, and an armoire. The procession in the inner rank mainly consists of attendants carrying people in palanquins. The bride may well be the one dressed in pink. The bridegroom may be the horse rider.

The inner square is divided into nine panels. The five panels that form a cross are embroidered with extremely stylized characters. The one in the middle is *shou* (longevity). Above it is *fu* (good fortune or happiness), and below, *lu* (wealth, represented upside down). The two much abstracted characters to the right and left of the *shou* character may be *Wanxian*, a riverport east of Chongqing in Sichuan province.

The remaining panels located at the four corners are decorated with designs.



41

41. HANDKERCHIEF, Cotton and silk floss, 1920–1943, Sichuan province, Gift of Mrs. L.M. Edmonds, 975.355.8, L. 34 cm x W. 34 cm

The one in the southeast corner shows two *wan* or swastika-like motifs. The one in the northeast corner has an image of a persimmon (*shizi*) viewed straight down from above, with its sepal represented similar to a cross *patée*. From these two designs a popular phrase, *wanshi ruyi* (may all wishes come true) can be elicited. The coin motif seen in the northwest and southwest corners may mean wealth. It may also be interpreted as a symbol of fertility.<sup>31</sup>

As if this array of symbols is still not enough, a fanciful representation of two *foshou* (Buddha's-hand citron) growing out of a stem is added to each of the corner designs. A *foshou* is an inedible fruit valued mainly for its display potentials: it has an unusual hand-like form, gives off a nice fragrance, and better still, imparts very auspicious meanings. Here, through punning, its name is relied upon to evoke the meanings of good fortune and longevity, although the same ideas have already been made explicit by the two characters, *fu* and *shou*, embroidered in the central square. In addition, similar to the twin-headed flower motif in No. 42, its double-fruit form also implies a happy union.

Without doubt, this handkerchief must have been made by a girl for her own trousseau. Many of the desires she anticipated to happen in her new life are both implicitly and explicitly expressed in this small piece of embroidery. Although based on a popular design, several points about this work are worth mentioning. While the embroidery is mainly done in cross stitch, back stitch, straight stitch, and double running stitch have also been used. As the inner rank of the procession was much more important for the embroiderer, it has been made more prominent by the use of dense stitches to delineate the figural forms. Finally, by using pink and pale yellow silk floss for edging and to describe a variety of details in the predominantly blue-and-white scheme, the embroiderer has not only infused a sense of lightheartedness into her work. Through the choice of these subtle colours she has also succeeded in alleviating the heaviness of the otherwise sombre stitchery.

**THIS SLIGHTLY RECTANGULAR HANDKERCHIEF** is embroidered with cross stitch and back stitch. The turned-up hem with chevron stitch edging creates another border in addition to the proper border made up of repeating double-lined S-curves. Occupying a sizable area in the centre of the field is a large medallion. In its centre is a square superimposed on top of another one in kiddy-corner fashion. The lower square is decorated with an overall cross pattern. The upper one is dominated by the stylized form of a *shou* (longevity) character. It is enclosed in an octagon which in turn is enclosed in yet another square decorated with and surrounded by fillers. Since the composition of the stylized *shou* character includes the *wan* or swastika-like motif, its longevity connotation is strengthened ten thousand times.

Four stems of stylized lotus shown with the features of various stages of a lotus' development issue from the corners of the overlapped square. At each point where they meet is a bird. Seen together, these four birds appear to be flying in a clockwise circle around the pattern. In the inner ring of motifs another group of four birds are depicted flying in a counter-clockwise circle. Their flight patterns add a sense of motion to the design.<sup>32</sup> Birds flying among flowers are implicit with the desire for conjugal bliss.

Two different patterns adorn the four corners of this handkerchief. Each occupies an opposite corner. One depicts a phoenix. A pair of them symbolize a devoted married couple.



42

42. HANDKERCHIEF, Cotton, 1900–1925, Chengdu, Sichuan province, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. J.H. Mullett, 997.127.9, L. 30.4 cm x W. 27.1 cm



The other represents a stem with twin-headed flowers, a common symbol of a blissful marriage, implying two people of like mind living in harmony.

**THE GREAT VARIETY OF MOTIFS** shown in this work convey best wishes in every major aspect of a person's life. In the lower half of the large medallion two carp are swimming in frothy waves. The one on the right looks up at a dragon in the upper half with its body weaving in and out of mists and clouds. They illustrate the legend that carp swimming upstream could metamorphose into dragons if they managed to pass the most turbulent stretch of the Yellow River where a place called Longmen (literally Dragon Gate) was located at the river's narrowest point. From this legend a metaphorical phrase, *li yue Longmen* (carp leaping over the Dragon Gate), has been created to refer to the few talented and hardworking scholars who won top honours in the civil-service examination. This meaning is underscored by the addition of a scholar's hat at the bottom of the medallion, seen floating on waves between the two carp. In addition, two motifs, *wan* and persimmon (*shizi*), used to decorate the mid-section of the dragon's body are also significant. Together with some of the *ruyi*-like clouds they evoke another phrase, *wanshi ruyi* (may all desires be fulfilled).

The different designs in the four corners further enrich the symbolism embodied in this small piece of embroidery. The design in the upper right is composed of a crane, a small fish, a deer, and a toad holding a string of coins in its mouth. The crane and deer are standard symbols of long life. The deer (*lu*), furthermore, may also mean official rank and wealth (*lu*) through punning. The wealth significance is



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augmented by the toad (*chan*) and the coins, both are symbolic of the legend of Liu Haichan, one of the folk gods of wealth, giving away his riches before becoming an immortal.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, by a play on words, the fish (*yu*) suggests the notion of abundance.

A single phoenix is depicted in the lower right corner. This symbol of femininity balances with the dragons (symbol of masculinity) in the lower left corner. From the two (*shuang*) coins (*qian*) that their bodies curl around, the term *shuangquan* may be elicited. It means good things come doubly. The two stems of *lingzhi* are implicit not only with the idea of long life, but also the term *ruyi*, since the ornamental *ruyi* sceptre takes after the form of the *lingzhi*. When viewed together with the persimmon motif, the phrase *shishi ruyi* (may everything happen according to one's wish) may be evoked.

The idea of long life is also expressed in the upper left corner by the crane, the *wan* motif, as well as the meandering scrolls.

The handkerchief is embroidered with cross stitch, back stitch, and knot stitch. It is hemmed on all sides and overcast in pink, yellow, light brown, dark blue and pale blue threads in a triangle pattern.

43. HANDKERCHIEF, Cotton and silk floss, 1930–1945, Chengdu, Sichuan province, 980.287.35, L. 36 cm x W. 36 cm

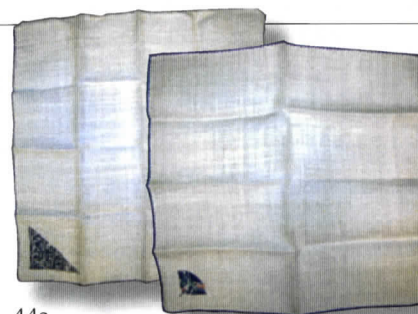
**THIS SAMPLER** shows thirty-nine border patterns and seven kinds of fancy hemming stitches, all worked with indigo-dyed cotton thread.<sup>34</sup> Except the two patterns embroidered at the lower right corner, the rest are all numbered or lettered in ink for easy reference. The numbers and letters, however, are not assigned in any particular order. The patterns depict a variety of floral and geometric motifs, using double running stitch, back stitch, and cross stitch. A small hole bound with button-hole stitch is located beneath the meander pattern.



44

According to record, this piece was acquired by Katherine Hockin (1910–1993) in the 1930s while she was a missionary in Chengdu. It may have served as a sampler for embroidery for fundraising activities for the mission.<sup>35</sup> Interested supporters could pick their choice of motifs to decorate the “linens” they wished to commission.<sup>36</sup>

During the period between the establishment of the Chinese republic in 1912 and the Communist takeover in 1949, when political strife rendered many commoners destitute, missionaries of various denominations ran embroidery workshops in different parts of China.<sup>37</sup> They engaged women who already had needlework skill or trained young novices to do cross-stitch embroidery as a means to help them make a living. With the Western market in mind, they designed products utilizing traditional Chinese motifs that were likely to be attractive to a foreign clientele. Tablecloths,



44a

44b

handkerchiefs, guest towels, pillowcases, napkins, and dresser scarves were made. Embroidered in both blue-and-white and multicolour schemes, these handicrafts were sent back home for church sales or to be sold locally to tourists.

At the beginning of such ventures, local materials were used. Later, foreign materials, such as fine-quality linen from Ireland and coloured DMC threads from France were frequently imported. Designs, too, were adapted or created to include depictions of scenes of daily activities and exotic-looking animals and architecture that people in the West would immediately associate with China.<sup>38</sup> The two napkins shown here are both decorated in one corner only, with hems turned to the back of the linen.<sup>39</sup> The triangular composite motif in specimen (a) depicts the profiles of a lotus and a Buddha's-hand citron amidst small foliage. In subject and colour scheme this specimen exemplifies export products that retained a traditional Chinese flavour. The multicoloured image of a flying crane in specimen (b) typifies another kind of product aimed at appealing to a broader range of foreign buyers.

44. SAMPLER AND TWO NAPKINS, Cotton (sampler); linen and cotton (napkins), 1920–1930, Chengdu, Sichuan province, *On loan from Textile Museum of Canada (sampler) and Mrs. Mitzi Beale (napkins)*, T98.0156 (sampler), L2004.6.1, 2 (napkins), L. 44.5 cm x W. 42 cm (sampler), L. 44 cm x W. 44 cm (napkin [a]), L. 33.5 cm x W. 33.5 cm (napkin [b])



**IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS PILLOW COVER** the large image of a fruit basket is placed on a slant in order to fit into the narrow rectangular format. This composite design is shot through with layers of symbolism. The two prominent pomegranates with their seeds revealed are emblematic of fecundity. The basket (*lan*) is implicit with the desire for male (*nan*) offspring. On the bulging body of the basket



45

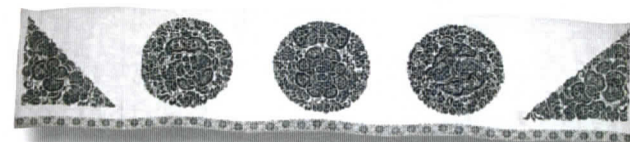
is a less conspicuous decorative pattern—bamboo and prunus depicted against ice crackles. The bamboo and prunus are standard motifs for the representation of husband and wife.<sup>40</sup> Both are also symbols of long life.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, they have often been paired together to impart a hope that a married couple may enjoy longevity. The longevity (*shou*) idea is further strengthened by long ribbons (*shou*) and the meander pattern around the neck of the basket. The ice crackles (*sui*) and the *ruyi*-shaped foot and rim of the basket would summon up in the Chinese mind the phrase *suisui ruyi* which expresses the hope that wishes are fulfilled year (*sui*) after year. While the design seems to be loaded with too many good wishes already, one more meaningful phrase, *fu zai yan qian*, is concealed in the visual pun created by a decorative element represented in the form of a bat (*fu*) on the basket's handle and a coin (*qian*) placed near the foot of the basket. It foretells forthcoming good fortune.

The embroidery is mainly done in cross stitch. Other supplementary techniques include pine-needle stitch, back stitch, blanket stitch, and double running stitch. The last few are evident in the border pattern across each end of the pillow cover. Also, both ends are hemmed with fancy overcasting.

**A TRADITIONAL CHINESE BED** was constructed as a haven for private relaxation. To ensure privacy, three sides of the four-poster bed would be enclosed by latticework and/or drawn curtains.<sup>42</sup> It would also be placed in a corner of the bedroom or against a wall.<sup>43</sup> As well, the front would be equipped with curtains that could be drawn apart in the middle. In addition to all kinds of decorative devices used to make the bed look attractive, an embroidered valance would have been hung across its top at the front.

This valance shows a simple decorating scheme. Three large medallions depicted side by side in the middle are balanced by two large triangles that fill the inside corners. They are embroidered using the pattern darning technique which creates identical motifs on both sides of the fabric with a slightly different visual effect: those shown on the front appear in blue on white, whereas their reverse images on the back appear in white on blue.<sup>44</sup> The lower border, worked in cross stitch, is a row of repeat flower heads linked by a continuous wavy vine with sparse leaves. The hem is rolled to the front and secured along the long edge with a blanket stitch.

The compactness of the darning stitch not only makes the



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45. PILLOW COVER, Cotton, 1900–1925, Chengdu, Sichuan province, 980.287.33, L. 78 cm x W. 37 cm

46. BED VALANCE, Cotton, Qing dynasty, 1870–1889, Chengdu, Sichuan province, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. J.H. Mullett, 994.28.54, L. 167.5 cm x W. 35 cm

embroidered motifs stand out, but also enhances the durability of the valance. The heaviness inherent in this kind of stitch is usually offset by incorporating tiny motifs for additional detailing. Here, delicate diamonds of various sizes have been interspersed throughout the principal motifs. Another floral surface pattern also serves the same purpose.

Each medallion and triangle depicts one or two butterflies hovering over either a flower or a fruit against a background made up of smaller blossoms and leaves as fillers. They convey the desire for abundant descendants simply because butterflies assist pollination and fruits such as the pomegranate on the left and the mandarin orange on the right contain many seeds conducive to propagation. The mandarin orange (*ji*) has another layer of symbolic meaning. When viewed as a homophone, it is also implicit with the idea of auspiciousness (*ji*).

**THIS WHITE COTTON VALANCE** is decorated with a blue river scene worked in cross stitch, back stitch, running stitch, and double running stitch. A large pagoda is centrally placed. It is flanked on each side with a large phoenix flying in the air, two dragon boats carrying passengers, a smaller boat also carrying passengers, and a large handled basket containing lotuses, persimmons, and a reed pipe. Between these are smaller designs of lotuses in pots, magpies perched on prunus branches, and melons. The designer's/embroiderer's fertile imagination also finds expression in the border pattern on three sides. Among the elaborate band of waves are all kinds of creatures and plants. For example, cranes are perched on the crests; in the troughs are bats, large and

small fish, *qilin*, crabs, melons, lotuses, aquatic plants, and prunuses. This array of profuse motifs is further augmented by the two triangular designs located at the upper inside corners. The right one is composed of a branch with two Buddha's-hand citrons. The left one consists of a butterfly and flowers.

The messages concealed in these motifs represent the most cherished desires of the Chinese. These include harmonious marriage (dragon—depicted here in the form of a boat—and phoenix, crab)<sup>45</sup>, abundant male descendants (basket, melon, fish, butterfly and flower, lotus and reed pipe, boat and waves), longevity (crane, prunus, Buddha's-hand citron), and a smooth life (bat, Buddha's-hand citron, persimmon, magpie on a prunus branch).

Since the meanings of many of these motifs have been explained elsewhere, only those not yet encountered need to be elucidated here.<sup>46</sup> The mythical dragon and phoenix are considered the noblest representatives of male and female animals. When they are depicted together, they symbolize a happy union. The crab (*xie*) is homophonous with another word meaning harmony (*hexie*). Also by relying on punning, the lotus (*lian*) depicted together with the reed pipe (*sheng*) would constitute the phrase *lian sheng guizi*, which means "bear distinguished sons in suc-

cession." Similarly, a boat (*chuan*) floating on waves may evoke the term *liu-chuan*, which conveys the



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47. BED VALANCE, Cotton, 1900–1929, Chengdu, Sichuan province, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. J.H. Mullett, 994.28.64, L. 190 cm x W. 35 cm



idea of transmission. As for the fish, it is associated with fecundity on account of its ability to reproduce in large numbers. The mythical animal, *qilin*, which is characterized by a trifurcate tail, is believed to have appeared shortly before the birth of the great philosopher, Confucius (551–479 bc). This is why it has been regarded as a symbol that augurs the birth of a distinguished man.

**A VARIETY OF EMBROIDERY TECHNIQUES** have been employed to achieve an illusory painting effect in this work, namely satin stitch, long and short stitch, stem stitch, knot stitch, back stitch, and double running stitch.<sup>47</sup> This illusory effect is further enhanced by a wide band of blue cotton cut on the bias sewn on top of the white cotton ground on three sides, which gives the impression of the border of a mounted painting.

The subject matter is invariably of an auspicious nature. Distributed across the horizontal strip are three groupings of motifs.



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Bridging the spaces between them are two fluttering butterflies. Starting from the right, a brush pot decorated with two versions of the meander pattern and a landscape holds a stem of peony and a branch of prunus. A magpie perched on a twig looks down at a smaller but-

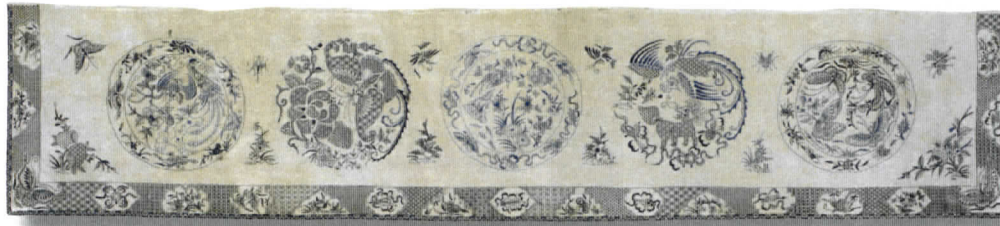
terfly and a group of objects which include a flute, a *pipa*, a flywhisk, and two mandarin oranges. In the middle is another magpie perched on a stem of chrysanthemums placed in a vase standing on an elaborate stand. Behind are a few small stones, a half-unrolled handscroll revealing a landscape with an angler in a boat, a chessboard, a garden hoe with a small flower basket slung on the handle, and two pomegranates. At the left, another vase on a stand holds a branch of magnolia and a branch of prunus. A magpie looks down from its perch at a jade pendant placed beside a large piece of folded paper with writings and drawings, at one end of which is a leafy branch of Buddha's-hand citron.

A strong desire for a leisurely life led by a retired scholar is expressed here. For instance, the musical instruments such as the *pipa* and the flute (depicted here to substitute the *qin*), the chessboard (*qi*), the piece of folded paper with handwritings (again a substitute for *shu* or books), and the handscroll (*hua*) call to mind the phrase, *qin qi shu hua*, used to refer to the so-called "four literary accomplishments." The garden hoe, flower basket, and chrysanthemums are emblematic of Tao Yuanming (ad 365 or 372–376 or 427), a renowned nature poet of the Eastern Jin period who preferred to lead a reclusive life, roaming in the countryside and tending chrysanthemums near his home. The fly-whisk provides another indication of a carefree life since this object frequently accompanied Daoist intellectuals.

48. BED VALANCE, Cotton, 1910–1929, Chengdu, Sichuan province, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. J.H. Mullett, 994.28.59, L. 171 cm x W. 37 cm

Other motifs that deserve attention here are the small stones, the endless knots decorating an embroidery with scallop edges placed on the shoulder of the vase in the middle, and the two landscapes. They all signify long life, the stones being ageless and the endless knots showing neither the beginning nor the ending. The landscapes seen both on the brush pot and the handscroll are composed of high mountains and long river courses. They are relied on to bring forth a phrase, *shan gao shui chang*, which conveys the hope that one's life span may be as long as the existence of these natural formations. As for the jade (*yu*) pendant and the magnolia (*yulan*), they summon to mind another phrase, *yutang fugui* (a magnificent hall filled with riches), when they are viewed together with the stem of peony in the brush pot.

**THE FIVE MEDALLIONS** arranged side by side are accompanied by a row of insects at the top and another row of plants at the bottom as space fillers. They themselves are decorated with many auspicious insects, birds, plants, and objects. Three of them are



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enclosed by a border with smaller designs of insects, plants, and objects belonging to a composite motif commonly called *babao* (eight precious things). Because of the delicate representation of the subject matter and the blue-on-white colour scheme, these bordered

medallions look almost like blue-and-white porcelain plates.

The butterflies (*die*) decorating the medallion on the extreme right may signify longevity or joyful events.<sup>48</sup> These beautiful insects and the great variety of other less likable bugs dispersed throughout the valance may also serve as symbols of fertility since they multiply in great numbers. Viewed together with the insects (*chong*) depicted on the border, they may even be implicit with the idea of *chongchong diedie* which means many folds. To its left, the medallion without borders is made up of the images of a phoenix, a *qilin*, the chrysanthemum, a *ruyi* in combination with a rhinoceros horn, a pair of coins, and a double gourd together with a crutch. The rhinoceros horn is one of the objects included in the so-called *zabao* (miscellaneous treasures) motif. The double coins have been dealt with previously.<sup>49</sup> The double gourd and crutch are the attributes of Li Tieguai, one of the Eight Immortals.

In the middle medallion the lotus and the duck constitute a fertility symbol popularly known as *baoya chuan lian* (literally, a duck passing through lotuses). The hibiscus (*furonghua*) puns with the term *ronghua* (wealth and social distinction). The paradise flycatcher (*shoudai*) perched on its branch is implicit with the idea of longevity (*shou*). In the next medallion a large long-tailed butterfly is about to alight on a peony. Since its visit will help the plant's cross-fertilization, its act is perceived to symbolize a desire for offspring. In the last medallion a pair of phoenixes depicted beside a stem of hibiscus represent a married couple living in opulence.

49. BED VALANCE, Cotton, Qing dynasty, 1875–1900, Chengdu, Sichuan province, 980.287.17, L. 186 cm x W. 37 cm



The medallions impart a great sense of diversity not only because of the choice of motifs and their meanings, but also because of the painstaking planning their creator has lavished on them to enhance their visual charm. To break up the uniformity in colour, the embroiderer has used threads of different shades of blue. In addition, she has used many stitching techniques, including satin stitch, stem stitch, back stitch, straight stitch, pine-needle stitch, knot stitch, and double running stitch. The potential of the last one has even been exploited to its fullest in the border running on three sides of the valance. No less than eleven lace-like diaper patterns were created to serve as a textured background to set off auspicious designs that fill reserves of scalloped or angular shapes. As well, many of these delightful patterns also appear in the component parts of the motifs that make up two of the medallions, using the *hua bao hua* decorative method.<sup>50</sup>

**THIS BED VALANCE** is unusual in the way the two fundamental colours are combined and in the layout of the decorative elements. Instead of the more common blue-on-white format, the motifs are depicted in the opposite manner—white on blue. The images, depicted in a light colour, really stand out against the dark background. Aside from aesthetic considerations, the effective colour contrast may also have two practical advantages. Since valances are not cleaned very often, the dark blue ground would stand up to soil better than a white ground; and white motifs could still be appreciated in both the soft daylight entering the bedroom and the faint illumination at night.

Also contributing to the striking visual effect of this work is the

minimalist approach undertaken by the embroiderer. The images are worked in large scale and in cross stitch only. They are laid out side by side as three groups against a background devoid of any secondary elements, such as border patterns and fillers. This straightforward design ensures that the observer's attention is focused on the designs and their symbolic messages.

Starting from the left, a cat sits gingerly on a stand in front of a chrysanthemum branch. In the middle is a lion flanked by the huge blossoms of a hydrangea. On the right is a mottled rabbit. Similar to the cat, it is perched on a stand in front of another variety of chrysanthemum.

The first composite motif signifies a desire for long life. The cat (*mao*) plays the role of a homophone to evoke the idea of advanced age which is embodied in another character having the same sound (*mao*, meaning a person having reached eighty years old). The chrysanthemum expands the idea.<sup>51</sup> A third element that reinforces the same meaning is a decorative detail on the stand: the meander pattern depicted around the apron signifies a desire for continuity.

The second motif reflects a very creative design concept. In traditional design repertoire one or two lions would be represented playing with an embroidered ball (*xiuqiu*). Underlying such motif is the idea of fertility, evoked by the belief that an offspring would emerge from a ball of entangled hair formed by a pair of playful lions during lovemaking.<sup>52</sup> When this idea is expressed visually the ball of hair assumes the guise of an embroidered ball. In the present case, the embroidered ball is replaced by a branch of hydrangea (*xiuqiu*), a plant that produces large round heads of sterile flowers. In name,



50. BED VALANCE, Cotton, 1900–1925, Chengdu, Sichuan province, 980.287.28, L. 187 cm x W. 42 cm

size, and shape they share similarities with the embroidered ball. Not only is the symbolic significance of the lion(s)-and-embroidered-ball motif preserved with the use of this unusual substitute, but also the consistency in the choice of the component parts (i.e., an animal represented together with a plant) making up the overall design for the valance is maintained.

The last motif has two possible interpretations, both of which complement the symbolic connotations of the cat and chrysanthemum motifs. In the first instance, the chrysanthemum and the rabbit may be viewed as symbols of longevity. The symbolism for the chrysanthemum is already understood. The rabbit needs particular explanation, its representation being rather involved. Since ancient times, this animal has been depicted erect, standing on its hind legs and, with mortar and pestle in hand, diligently pounding an elixir, either under the supervision of Xiwangmu (the legendary Queen Mother of the West) or in the company of Chang'e in the moon.<sup>53</sup> Its close relationship with prominent immortals and the important duty entrusted to it may therefore account for its being a symbol of longevity. In the second instance, the rabbit, too, may be seen as an emblem of fecundity, given its natural powers of proliferation.

Symbols of long life and abundant descendants are considered to be particularly appropriate for the adornment of articles used in the bedroom. This valance is a good example reflecting this common notion.

**THE EMBROIDERY OF THIS VALANCE**, similar to No. 50, is also worked in unbleached white cotton thread on an indigo-dyed ground. This example, however, shows a dense design made up of five large fruit baskets as the principal motifs, triangular corner motifs,

and a pictorial border on three sides above a wave pattern that has been added to the front-turning hem.

The fruit baskets are all designed with angular and rigid frames. Although they seem to look alike at first glance, many interesting details actually set them apart. For example, each has been given a different delicate pattern to simulate a basket-weave pattern<sup>54</sup>; each is adorned as well with differently designed accessories, such as the pair of hanging ornaments and the artistically knotted tassels attached to its bottom.



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The fruit baskets and other numerous motifs seen here are saturated with auspicious wishes. Among the recognizable motifs, the desire for long life (*shou*) is conveyed by the curving edges of the baskets' appendages, the meander and *wan* patterns decorating the flower pot in the triangular corner design at the right, the Buddha's-hand citrons (*foshou*), the peaches, the fish-drum, and the stiff fan.<sup>55</sup> Longings for a happy marriage and abundant offspring are expressed by the pairs of fruits, birds, and animals. Among these, the meanings

51. BED VALANCE, Cotton, 1900–1925, Chengdu, Sichuan province, 980.287.23, L. 193 cm x W. 31 cm

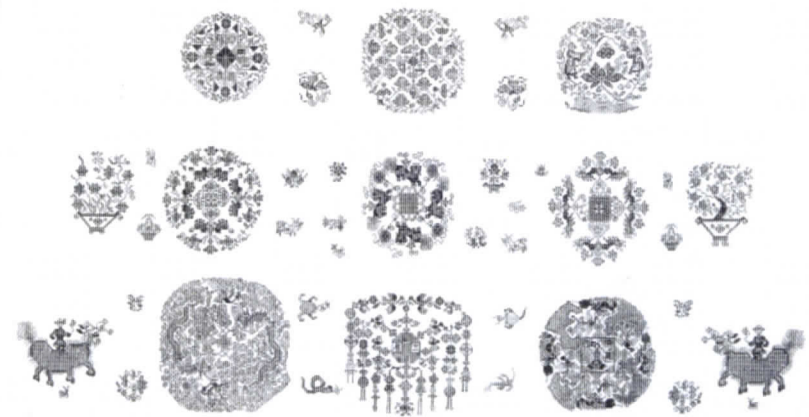


of the melons in the middle basket and the pomegranates in the one at extreme right are obvious. More subtle motifs, such as the orchid, the basket, and the melon and butterfly, also augment the ideas of fertility and continuity of the family line. This is because, through word play, both orchid (*lan*) and basket (*lan*) may suggest the word *nan* which means a boy. Likewise, melon (*gua*) and butterfly (*die*) make up a pictorial pun. They illustrate a simile from *Shijing* (The Book of Songs) which conveys a blessing: "[May your family line] continue to prosper like the melons" (*guadie mianmian*).<sup>56</sup>

More subtle puns are concealed in the basket that contains, instead of fruit, a vase with a flowering plant, a stem of *lingzhi*, and a branch bearing a persimmon. The flowering plant illustrates a saying, *hua kai fugui* (blossoms signal prosperity). Together with the vase (*ping*), another saying, *fugui ping'an* (wealth, peace, and safety) may be derived. As for the persimmon and the stem of *lingzhi*, they evoke the phrase *shishi ruyi*.<sup>57</sup> Not to be overlooked is the three-legged toad (*chan*) seen in the left side border. This image always calls to mind a Daoist immortal named Liu Haichan who has also been venerated as the god of wealth.<sup>58</sup>

Diversity is evident not only in the layout and the abundant and complex symbolic designs that fill almost the entire surface of the valance, it is also manifested in the great variety of stitching methods employed for its creation. In addition to the basic cross stitch, the satin stitch, straight stitch, back stitch, chain stitch, knot stitch, double running stitch, buttonhole stitch, and pine-needle stitch have all been used; all are exceedingly well executed.

**THE LARGE RECTANGULAR SHAPE OF THIS BED COVER** consists of three full widths, edged with two half widths of cotton. It is decorated with dark blue motifs worked mainly in cross stitch. Supplementary stitching techniques, such as straight stitch, back stitch, knot stitch, and eyebrow and eyelash stitch, have also been employed for detailing. Each full width has three large medallions



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with smaller motifs as space fillers.

From the top, the three principal motifs in the first row includes an eight-point star made up of eight trapeziums, each of which is decorated with an object taken from the large repertoire collectively called the *babao* (eight precious things).<sup>59</sup> Repeat patterns of the Buddha's-hand citron (*foshou*) and *wan* symbol fill up the circular space. They suggest the term *wanshou* which connotes an extremely long life span. The same idea is also intimated in the central medallion. A less conspicuous *wan* motif has been worked into the centre. Combined with the numerous lotuses (*lian*), the term *wannian* (ten thousand years) may be elicited. Two pairs of small ducks signify conjugal bliss. Four identical stylized representations of a lotus leaf with a

52. BED COVER, Cotton, 1900–1925, Chengdu, Sichuan province, 980.287.1, L. 210 cm x W. 142 cm

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seed-popping pod are emblematic of fecundity. While the lotus seed pods are represented sideways here, a large one in the next medallion is depicted with its seed-filled top facing forward. The *wannian* idea is clearly imbued in the large lotus since its petals are covered with the *wan* symbol. The two figures—one holding four candles while the other holding a twig of *guihua*—illustrate two of the happiest events in life: marriage and outstanding scholastic achievement.<sup>60</sup> The pairs of phoenixes and butterflies located between the medallions also reinforce the idea of a harmonious marriage.

As well, pairs of *qilin*, lions, and horses are seen in the three medallions in the second row. These striking motifs have the same associations. Surrounding the *qilin* is a ring of melons, conventional symbols of fertility. The persimmon and *ruyi* motifs at the centre of this medallion constitute a visual pun for the felicitous expression *shishi ruyi* (may all wishes come true). The centre of the central medallion may be a stylized representation of the lotus seed pod with many revealing seeds. Between the lions are embroidered balls. They form a composite motif invested with a subtle fertility connotation.<sup>61</sup> The lion's fur marking, represented by a series of meander patterns, is implicit with hopes of longevity. All these meanings permeate the motifs that make up the last medallion. They are repeated in many of the filler motifs as well.

In the third and last register the three medallions are flanked by the mirror images of a boy riding a *qilin*, another common symbol expressing the desire for male descendants.<sup>62</sup> The medallion depicting a pair of dragons frolicking with a flaming pearl and a pair of phoenixes flying among dense cloud scrolls conveys wishes for a happy marriage. Similarly, paired birds flying among strings of hanging ornaments have the same meaning. The inscribed square panels enclosed by the octagon in the centre express the hope that the three star gods, each in charge of good fortune, wealth, and longevity respectively, may bestow blessings.<sup>63</sup> In the last medallion the basic ideas of marriage, fertility, and blessings again form the central

themes. This time a dragon is paired with a phoenix in each reserve against a background intricately designed with different diaper or scroll patterns. In the square centre a child is depicted emerging from a lotus flower. Surrounding the child are symbols extracted from at least two sets of auspicious symbols, namely reed pipe and *yunluo* from an assemblage called *bayin* (eight musical instruments), and stiff fan from another assemblage made up of the attributes of the Eight Immortals.<sup>64</sup> Regarding the filler motifs, the four creatures flanking the central medallion are worth special mention. The toad, snake, and gecko are frequently represented in the *wudu* (five poisonous creatures) motif.<sup>65</sup> Though of a harmful nature, they are believed to have the power to dispel evil influences. From the mouth of the toad exude two symbols, *wan* and the four-lobed persimmon calyx, which again express in a slightly different way the phrase *wanshi ruyi*. A coin spit out by the three-legged toad makes an obvious association with wealth.<sup>66</sup>

**THIS QUILT-COVER TOP** is made up of three equal lengths of cotton joined together after having been dyed. Before the embroiderer worked on it, she first drew the general outline of the design on the dark blue ground with white tailor's chalk. Then using coarse unbleached cotton thread for stitching, she filled in only the areas bound by the white contours. Cross stitch is the mainstay of the embroidery. It is augmented by a few other types of stitches, such as back stitch, stem stitch, satin stitch, and chain stitch for the finer details. To increase the aesthetic appeal of the design, she has added liberally a great variety of small geometric motifs to the structural parts of almost all of the bird and plant motifs in the design.



The design is simple but quite attractive.<sup>67</sup> It shows a naïve pictorial rendition of a pair of paradise flycatchers (*shoudai*) with two young perched on the branches of a blooming plant depicted with exposed roots. The paradise flycatcher is a standard symbol of longevity (*shou*). The many *wan* (ten thousand) or swastika-like motifs dispersed throughout the composition amplify the desire for a long life span. The exuberant blooms portend youthful energy. Aside from their symbolic and decorative functions, the unassuming design elements also radiate a strong sense of rhythmic harmony and the joy of life.



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53. TOP OF A QUILT COVER, Cotton, 1900–1925, Taoyuan, Hunan province *This purchase was made possible by the Textile Endowment Fund, 2004.28.2, L. 200 cm x W. 177 cm*

## NOTES

### Introduction

- 1 Personal preference sometimes made exceptions. Duke Huan of the state of Qi, for example, was very partial to purple. When he changed to wearing purple robes, all his courtiers followed suit. But it was considered by the conservatives as an example of bad taste. See Huang Nengfu, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji: gongyi meishubian*, vol. 6, p. 23.
- 2 Cheng Weiji et al., *History of Textile Technology of Ancient China*, p. 316.

### Indigo

- 1 Although indigo production methods may vary somewhat from place to place, the process described here provides a frame of reference.
- 2 In some places dyers may use lime made from shells.
- 3 In some areas, a low fire is kept on during the winter to maintain the right temperature for the liquid dye. Since early times Chinese dyers added wine dregs to facilitate this process.

### Cotton

- 1 Fan Shuzhi, *Ming Qing jiangnan shizhen tanwei*, p. 134.
- 2 See Wang Ruohai, "Woguo zhimianshi shiling," p. 323. There were other scholars who interpreted the fibres as belonging to the *mumian* or kapok rather than to the cotton. See Cheng Weiji et al., *History of Textile Technology of Ancient China*, pp. 181–182. Note that in this reference the discovery date given is 1959 and the find consisted of "some scraps of grey cotton cloth."
- 3 See Chen Jialin, "Guanyu woguo lishishang kaishi zhongzhi mianhua de shijian he diqu wenti," pp. 321–322.
- 4 Wang Ruohai, "Woguo zhimianshi shiling," p. 323.
- 5 For information about Huang *daopo*, see Hu Daojing, "Huang *daopo* de shidai he zaoyu tansuo," pp. 119–121.
- 6 Fan Shuzhi, *Ming Qing jiangnan shizhen tanwei*, pp. 137–138.
- 7 For illustration of all steps, see Laura Casalis and Gianni Guadalupi, ed., *Cotton and Silk Making in Manchu China*, pls. i–viii.

### Woven Fabrics: plain and decorated

- 1 A float is any portion of a warp or weft element that extends unbound over two or more units of the opposite set on either face of a fabric.
- 2 For illustration and discussion of the operational methods of the back-strap loom and the card loom, see Cheng Weiji et al., *History of Textile Technology of Ancient China*, pp. 33–38.
- 3 For illustration and discussion of the low-warp loom, see Rudolf P. Hommel, *China*

at Work, pp. 179–182.

- 4 Ibid., pp. 185–187.
- 5 For illustration and discussion of these looms, see Cheng Weiji et al., *History of Textile Technology of Ancient China*, pp. 251–270.
- 6 Sun Jianjun, ed., *Zhongguo lanyinhubu*, p. 116.
- 7 A similar pair in the collection of the Horniman Museum in London is illustrated in Valery M. Garrett, *Traditional Chinese Clothing*, p. 24, pl. 12. Two other pairs can be seen in *A Collector's Guide to Chinese Dress Accessories* by the same author, p. 133, fig. 4.
- 8 To commemorate the centennial of Dr. Mackay's death, the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines partnered with the Royal Ontario Museum to produce an exhibition of Mackay's collection in 2001. For information about Mackay's missionary work and collecting activities, see Xu Gongming, ed., *Majie boshi shoucang Taiwan yuanzhumin wenwu: chenji bainian de haiwai yizhen*.
- 9 According to Valery M. Garrett, silk jackets constructed in exactly the same style for the wealthy had five buttons and loops as a standard number during the nineteenth century. Later, it became fashionable to have as many as seven, nine, or even eleven. See *Traditional Chinese Clothing*, p. 12.
- 10 The waistband (*kutou*) is usually of a coarser and sturdier material in a colour different from the main part. In the past a white (*bai*) or off-white (*mibai*) one was intended to evoke an idiomatic expression, *baitou dao lao* (reaching into old age when the hair turns white), which expressed a desire for longevity. Ibid., p. 10.
- 11 This commonly adopted way is described in Meng Xianming, *Minjian fushi*, p. 112. A few men, especially labourers, might prefer to use a cloth tie, as well, to make sure the trousers stay on.
- 12 A similar example with a pair of trousers is illustrated in China House Gallery, *Richly Woven Traditions: Costumes of the Miao of Southwest China and Beyond*, p. 42, no. 16.
- 13 The Miao ethnic minority has many sub-groups. They are spread out in several provinces, most notably Hunan, Hubei, Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan, Guangxi, and Hainan Island. This festive outfit compares favourably with costumes worn by Miao women living in Gulin, located in southeastern Sichuan, very close to the northwestern border of Guizhou. See illustration of a similar set of costume (without a sleeveless jacket) in Hong Kong Museum of History, *Ethnic Costumes of the Miao People in China*, p. 55.
- 14 For illustration of all the steps, see Zhang Boru, "Dongzu fushi yishu tanmi (*shang*)," pp. 76–80.
- 15 For illustrations of multicoloured and patterned handwoven cotton from rural areas around Shanghai and in the province of Hebei, see Qian Minquan, *Shanghai xiangcun minsu yongpin jicui*, pp. 92–93, and Wang Yuwen, ed., *Xiangtu yishu*, pp. 192–194, 196–198.



- 16 For information and illustrations of some, see Wang Lianhai and Zhu Yuemei, *Minjian zhihua*, pp. 3, 5, 18, 55, 59, and 85.
- 17 For illustrations of such examples, *ibid.*, 83–84; Hubei meishu chubanshe, ed., *Minjian meishu*, p. 136.
- 18 A similar example with much simpler patterns is illustrated in Huang Nengfu, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji: gongyi meishubian*, vol. 7, p. 16, fig. 21. This example, however, was made by a weaver of the Dai ethnic nationality in Yunnan province.

#### Pattern-dyed fabrics: Tie-dye

- 1 Wu Min, *Zhixiu*, p. 141.
- 2 Zhao Feng, *Sichou yishu shi*, p. 77.
- 3 For illustration of an example from the state of Western Liang (404–421) and two examples of the Tang dynasty, see Huang Nengfu, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji: gongyi meishubian*, vol. 6, pls. 105, 127, and 129. For two more examples of Tang-dynasty tie-dyed fabrics, see Zhao Feng, ed., *Fangzhipin kaogu xinxian*, pp. 46 and 105. In addition, many more Tang-dynasty examples of fabrics and clothing with tie-dyed patterns have been preserved in the Shōsōin in Nara.
- 4 Examples of some of these motifs may be seen in Wang Xu, *Wang Xu yu fangzhi kaogu*, pp. 82–95.
- 5 Zhao Feng, *Sichou yishu shi*, p. 77.
- 6 For this interpretation, see Shen Congwen, *Huahua duoduo tantan guanguan: Shen Congwen tan yishu yu wenwu*, p. 106.
- 7 Zhong Maolan, *Minjian ranzhi meishu*, p. 113.
- 8 For diagrams showing these steps, *ibid.*, p. 114.
- 9 Zhong Maolan, *Minjian ranzhi meishu*, p. 106.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- 11 The ruffle shows that after the tie-dye process the width of the scarf has become only about half of the original width of the fabric. The different visual effects between pressed and unpressed products may be seen by comparing the two specimens discussed here.

#### Pattern-dyed fabrics: Wax-resist

- 1 Zhong Maolan, *Minjian ranzhi meishu*, p. 127.
- 2 Liu Enyuan, “Cong kaogu ji wenxian ziliao lun Zhongguo laran wenhua,” p. 124.
- 3 For illustration of some of the fine examples stored in the Shōsōin in Nara, see Zhong Maolan, *Minjian ranzhi meishu*, pp. 128–129.
- 4 Wax was rarely produced in urban areas in China. People who gathered

beeswax had to go to the countryside to search for beehives. A Tang poet named Gu Kuang in a poem relates how such workers risked their lives by climbing down cliff faces to look for beehives and how they suffered when being stung. Often tragedy happened when a helper, suddenly attacked by a swarm of bees, let go the safety rope tied around the wax-gatherer’s waist. See Zhao Feng, *Sichou yishu shi*, p. 86. To this sympathetic poet, beeswax was a luxury that caused much misery.

- 5 See a blue-and-white patterned cotton fragment unearthed from an Eastern Han tomb at Minfeng in Xinjiang illustrated in Huang Nengfu, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji: gongyi meishubian*, vol. 6, p. 113, fig. 103.
- 6 Two blue-and-white patterned wool fragments datable to the Northern dynasties are illustrated in *ibid.*, p. 123, fig. 112.
- 7 This method was probably already in use during the Tang dynasty. It was not until the Song dynasty that Zhou Qufei recorded it in his collection of notes entitled *Lingwai daida*. See Yang Wuquan, annot., *Lingwai daida jiaozhu*, p. 224.
- 8 The starch is a thick solution made by pulverizing the pulp of taro or the *baiji*, a mucilaginous root.
- 9 See illustrations of these steps in Hu Huizheng, “Anshun Miaozu guniang zuo koushuidou lahua,” pp. 31–38.
- 10 Red dye can be obtained from *xicao* (*Rubia cordifolia*), safflower (*Carthamus tinctorius*), balsam (*Impatiens balsamina*), or sappan wood (*Caesalpinia sappan*). Yellow dye is made from gardenia (*Gardenia florida*) and *huai* (*Sophora japonica*).
- 11 For illustrations, see Liu Daoguang, “Zouxian ruzhai kan Guizhou lahua,” pp. 52–53.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.
- 13 For all these interpretations, see *ibid.*, p. 30. The eight trigrams are a Han Chinese concept which asserts that changes in eight natural phenomena (heaven, earth, thunder, wind, water, fire, mountain, river) would produce different effects in the lives of human beings. The Han Chinese used a totally different symbol to represent the eight trigrams: an octagon that encloses eight groupings of broken and unbroken lines.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 15 Viewed sideways, the two closely connected scrolls represent the head seen straight on, with the scroll ends playing the role of eyes. The larger separate scroll would serve as the side view of the crouching tiger’s haunch, while the smaller scroll would stand for the tail. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 16 Another apron having the same exterior border is illustrated in Ginna Corrigan, *Miao Textiles from China*, p. 70. More examples of the same style of apron can be found in Liu Daoguang, “Laran,” pp. 26–27.
- 17 The bronze drum, which required both the raw materials and appropriate technology to make, signified wealth and advanced culture in ancient times.

It was also a requisite object in warfare, sacrificial ritual, and entertainment.

- 18 For more on these interpretations, see Liu Daoguang, "Zouxiang ruzhai kan Guizhou lahua," p. 52, and Ma Zhengrong, *Guizhou laran*, p. 6.
- 19 Ma Zhengrong, *Guizhou laran*, p. 4.
- 20 Chen Jinglin, "Dianla chengwen, randing shenghua: Guizhou laran gaishuo," p. 100.
- 21 For similar examples, see The Cultural Palace of Nationalities, Beijing, ed., *Clothings and Ornaments of China's Miao People*, pp. 140–141, and Gina Corrigan, *Miao Textiles from China*, p. 23.
- 22 For similar examples used as sleeve bands and skirts, see The Cultural Palace of Nationalities, Beijing, ed., *Clothings and Ornaments of China's Miao People*, pp. 147, 167, and 194.
- 23 A yardage of the same pattern is illustrated in *ibid.*, p. 135.
- 24 The wax used is recycled paraffin wax.

#### Pattern-dyed fabrics: Clamp-resist

- 1 *Eryi shilu* is believed to have been written either before or after the Sui dynasty. This reference is cited in Zhao Feng, "Zhenan minjian jiaxie gongyi," p. 61.
- 2 Museums that have examples of Tang-dynasty clamp-resist-dyed textiles include the Shōsōin in Nara, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Musée Guimet in Paris, and the National Museum in New Delhi. For illustration, see Zhang Daoyi, "Gudai jiaxie zuopin jieshao," pp. 30–34. In addition, two fragments of clamp-resist-dyed silk excavated from a burial ground in Dulan in Qinghai province in far western China also show how widespread this textile-dyeing technique was. See Zhao Feng, ed., *Fangzhipin kaogu xinxian*, pp. 108–109.
- 3 Zhang Daoyi, "Gudai jiaxie zuopin jieshao," pp. 8–9.
- 4 This information is in *juan* 4 and is quoted in Liu Daoguang, "Jiaxie de lishi huigu yu xiankuang," p. 63.
- 5 *Jieyu* was a title for imperial concubines.
- 6 The fact that An Lushan (d. 757) received in 750 from Emperor Xuanzong a headgear made of gauze with a clamp-resist-dyed pattern as a token of imperial favour reflects the high esteem this novel dyeing technique enjoyed at the time. Liu Daoguang, "Jiaxie de lishi huigu yu xiankuang," p. 63.
- 7 In 834 Bai Juyi (772–846) composed a poem entitled "Admiring a Half-opened Flower, Dedicated to Senior Secretary Huangfu," in which he mentioned the most recently manufactured clamp-resist-dyed fabric in Chengdu using a red colorant produced in Liang (modern-day Zhongzhou) and Han (modern-day Guanghan), also in Sichuan. *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.
- 8 At least four Liao-dynasty specimens have survived to today. One of them is a clamp-resist-dyed gauze fragment excavated from Baitazi in Qingzhou

in Inner Mongolia, datable to 1049. Three others are identical images of the Buddha Shakyamuni, found in 1974 in the wooden pagoda of Fogong si (Monastery of the Palace of the Buddha) in Yingxian in Shansi province. See Zhao Feng, *Zhixiu zhenpin*, p. 210 for an illustration of the Qingzhou piece and p. 298 for an illustration of one of the Buddha images.

- 9 The Museum of History in Beijing has three pieces of Ming-dynasty five-colour clamp-resist-dyed silk fabrics, all datable to the Xuande period (1426–1435). See Long Zongxin, *Zhongguo gongyi meishu jian shi*, p. 250. The Palace Museum in Beijing also owns a small number of silks dyed with this particular technique. One Ming example unearthed from Dingling, the mausoleum of Emperor Shenzong (r. 1573–1620) and his two consorts, is illustrated in Zhang Daoyi, "Gudai jiaxie zuopin jieshao," p. 36. Two other Ming examples can be seen in Huang Nengfu, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji: gongyi meishubian*, vol. 7, figs. 41 and 42. One Qing-dynasty example is illustrated in fig. 158. The Chris Hall Collection Trust in Hong Kong also owns two seventeenth-century specimens dyed with the eight treasures motif. See Zhao Feng, *Zhixiu zhenpin*, pp. 242–243.
- 10 For a detailed and illustrated account of the whole dyeing process, see Liu Daoguang, "Zhenan Yishan Badaicun jiaxie gongyi zhizuo jilu," pp. 40–59.
- 11 In exceptional cases, such as in the town of Yongjia, it was customary for the bridegroom's family to provide the cotton yarn for the bride to weave into cloth. The cloth would then be sent to a local dyer for embellishment. See Zhang Qin, *Xiangtu Wenzhou*, p. 42.
- 12 For the symbolism of the chrysanthemum and butterfly, see Nos. 27 and 28 respectively.
- 13 There are exceptions. Some may have images of exactly one hundred children. The total number is made up by fifteen designs each having six children plus one design consisting of ten children. See Zhao Feng, "Zhenan minjian jiaxie gongyi," p. 63. Others may have only four children in each design. Still others may depict as many as one hundred and four children. This vast number is made up by twelve designs of six children each plus four designs each of eight children. For illustrations of these, see Huang Qinkang, *Zhongguo minjian zhixiu yinran*, figs. 112 and 113.
- 14 The two images are located from left, second row, second from top, and third row, fourth from top.
- 15 See the explanation in No. 22 for the reason behind this unusual arrangement.

#### Pattern-dyed fabrics: Paste-resist

- 1 Zhao Feng, *Sichou yishu shi*, p. 86, *Zhixiu zhenpin*, p. 130.
- 2 See two examples illustrated in Zhao Feng, *Zhixiu zhenpin*, pp. 130–131.
- 3 *Tushu jicheng*, *juan* 681, quoted in Zhang Daoyi and Xu Yiyi, *Minjian yinhuabu*, p. 6.



- 4 Zhong Maolan, *Minjian ranzhi meishu*, p. 154.
- 5 Ibid., pp. 156–157.
- 6 Tung oil is a wood oil made from the seeds of *Aleurites cordata*.
- 7 This pattern is illustrated in Zuo Hanzhong, *Minjian yinran huabu tuxing*, p. 122.
- 8 This significance is provided in *ibid.* The sound *lu* is relied on to evoke the character meaning “six,” more often pronounced in an alternative sound, *liu*. The double six in the idiomatic expression refers to a custom observed by farmers of Zhejiang province who would pray to the deity of grains for good harvests on the sixth day of the sixth month in the lunar calendar. See Morohashi Tetsuji, ed., *Dai kanwa jiten*, vol. 2, p. 76. The term *fengshun* is short for *fengtiao yushun* (timely wind and rain).
- 9 A blue-on-white version of this pattern is illustrated in Sun Jianjun, ed., *Zhongguo lanyinhuabu*, p. 105.
- 10 Jiang Zhuo, “Nantong lanyinhuabu de lishi he xianzhuang,” p. 83.
- 11 Because not all motifs in one of the two rectangular patterns are readily identifiable, only the content of one pattern is discussed here. The pattern under discussion is illustrated in Zhang Daoyi and Xu Yiyi, *Minjian yinhuabu*, p. 192.
- 12 This pattern is illustrated in Sun Jianjun, ed., *Zhongguo lanyinhuabu*, p. 89.
- 13 This pattern is included in *ibid.*, p. 99.
- 14 The construction of a woman’s trousers is the same as that of a man’s. Yet, while most men would wear them without any tying device (see discussion in No. 3), nearly all women would wear their trousers with a cord.
- 15 This pattern is illustrated in Zhang Daoyi and Xu Yiyi, *Minjian yinhuabu*, p. 174.
- 16 See Sun Jianjun, ed., *Zhongguo lanyinhuabu*, p. 100 for an illustration.
- 17 This pattern is included in Zhang Daoyi and Xu Yiyi, *Minjian yinhuabu*, p. 214.
- 18 This pattern is illustrated in *ibid.*, p. 223.
- 19 See No. 27.
- 20 For comparison, see similar phoenixes illustrated in Zuo Hanzhong, ed., *Minjian yinran huabu*, pp. 39, 133–134.
- 21 See similar dense compositions in *ibid.*, pp. 129, 130, 140.
- 22 Zhong Maolan, *Minjian ranzhi meishu*, p. 156.
- 23 There is no information about the provenance of this quilt-cover top in the museum record. The Textile Museum of Canada, however, owns a similar piece depicting the Eight Immortals as the main theme (T96.0202). Its record suggests Kiangsi (Jiangxi in *pinyin*) province as a possible place of manufacture. Yet, a very distinctive border pattern created with fluid lines and forms relates it to similar motifs seen in works produced in western Hunan province, commonly referred to as Xiangxi. For one such example, see Tian Shunxin, *Xiangxi minjian wenyang ji*, p. 7. Since Xiangxi could have been mistaken for Kiangsi (or more properly, Jiangxi), Hunan province is also a possible provenance.
- 24 The peony here stands for the flower in Lan Caihe’s flower basket. The pair of scrolls are probably corrupted forms of Cao Guojiu’s fish-drum (a bamboo tube with two sticks) since there are sticks emerging from their centres. The form is repeated to counterbalance the pair of clappers in the opposite corner. For its correct form, see No. 52.
- 25 For the adapted vernacular version of this play, see Hu Guangzhou and Shen Jia Zhuang, *Zhongguo gudai shida beiju zhuanqi*, pp. 340–425.
- 26 Yang Yuhuan was bestowed the title of *guifei* in the fourth year of the Tianbao period (745).
- 27 The fifteenth day of the eighth month in the lunar calendar was the Mid-autumn Moon Festival. The full moon seen on that night signified family reunion and harmony.
- 28 The technique of freehand drawing with paste is not unlike *tsutsugaki* practised in Japan. Okinawa dyers use a cooked mixture of glutinous rice flour, rice bran, and lime as a resist agent. When they draw, they squeeze this mixture onto the fabric from a cloth bag fitted with a metal or bamboo tip. For more information, see Noriko Hirai, ed., *Tsutsugaki Textiles of Japan: Traditional Freehand Paste Resist Indigo Dyeing Technique of Auspicious Motifs*. In China the modern painter, Huang Yongyu (b. 1924), is known to have often returned to his hometown, Fenghuang county in Hunan province, to dye his artwork with indigo using soya bean paste as a resist agent and drew directly on a fabric with it. See Tian Shunxin, *Xiangxi minjian wenyang ji*, p. 107.

#### Embroidery

- 1 The Chinese character for the number ten resembles a cross.
- 2 An early *sutiao* specimen is a Yuan-dynasty cotton bag embroidered with dark brown thread using double running stitch, a technique often used in cross-stitch embroidery. It was discovered in 1999 in Dove Cave, located in Longhua county in Hebei province. For an illustration of this rare find, see Zhao Feng, ed., *Fangzhipin kaogu xinfaxian*, p. 172. Another known early specimen is a man’s white cotton jacket embroidered with blue cross-stitched peony pattern along the front opening and the cuffs. It was recovered from a Ming-dynasty tomb in Nancheng county in Jiangxi province. See Huang Nengfu, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji: gongyi meishubian*, vol. 7, p. 30.
- 3 Blue-and-white embroidery was particularly popular in Sichuan province. It was widely practised from the end of the Ming dynasty to the end of the Qing dynasty. See Huang Qinkang, *Zhongguo minjian zhixiu yinran*, pp. 35 and 41.
- 4 For illustrations of clothing and accessories adorned with blue-and-white

- embroidery made by these peoples, see *Zhongguo renmin meishu chubanshe*, compl., *Chugoku shosu minzoku fukushoku*, Wu Shizhong et al., *Zhongguo Miao zu fushi tuzhi*, and Li Shali, *Taiwan yuanzhumin yishi wenhua*.
- 5 The medallion is a favourite shape because roundness symbolizes harmony and perfection.
  - 6 See Anna G. Granger, "Rescuing a Little-known Chinese Art: How an Explorer's Wife 'Discovered' a Fascinating Style of Peasant Embroidery in Far Western China, and Helped to Save it from Oblivion," p. 53.
  - 7 See Carl Schuster, "Peasant Embroideries of China," p. 29.
  - 8 See No. 27.
  - 9 As an example, after turning fifty years of age, the women of Qiandai cun in southern Jiangsu province would start to prepare the outfits they would wear to their graves. See Wei Caiping and Tao Sihua, "Sunan shuixiang Qiandaicun funü fushi (3): liyi fushi," pp. 29–38.
  - 10 The last mentioned pattern is similar to a decorative element incorporated in a design marked in ink as no. 11 in the sampler presented in No. 44.
  - 11 For illustrations of various forms of crosses, see Pamela Clabburn, *The Needleworker's Dictionary*, p. 72.
  - 12 This kind of stitching is so called because Hans Holbein, the Younger (1497–1543), a German painter, had painted many portraits of the English nobility wearing shirts and chemises embroidered with similar patterns done in double running stitch while he resided in England as painter to the court of Henry the Eighth. In China it is called *qianhua* (connected motifs) or *shuangmianhua* (identical motifs on both sides [of the embroidered cloth]). Patterns done in this technique are frequently used to decorate the cuffs of an upper garment or the legs of trousers because even when these parts are rolled up the same pattern can still be seen.
  - 13 For an illustration and description of this bird, see Gu Wenyi, *Zhongguo guan-shang niao*, p. 115.
  - 14 See No. 28.
  - 15 For detail, see Zhanggu dacidian bianzhuanzu, comp., *Zhanggu dacidian*, p. 486.
  - 16 The *ruyi* sceptre was an ornament, often made in a great variety of materials including ivory, jade, wood, crystal, lacquer, and cloisonné. It was a favourite gift especially suitable for giving on auspicious occasions, such as the celebration of birthdays and the New Year, because of its inherent symbolic significance.
  - 17 See No. 39 for more information.
  - 18 The insects included in this composite motif vary. The gecko may be an alternate.
  - 19 Realgar is a soft orange-red arsenic ore. Bitter in taste and poisonous, it has been used in China as an antidote to counteract snake and insect bites. Zhong Kui was an imaginary figure believed to have committed suicide in protest of having been stripped of his title after he had successfully passed the civil-service examinations, but was later honoured as a demon-queller after he had rid a spirit that had caused Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty anxiety in a dream. Zhang Daoling was the highly honoured Heavenly Master of the Daoist faith.
  - 20 This may be intended to be a wasp.
  - 21 A picture of a young girl wearing a similarly constructed pinafore is illustrated in Anna G. Granger, "Rescuing a Little-known Chinese Art—How an Explorer's Wife 'Discovered' a Fascinating Style of Peasant Embroidery in Far Western China, and Helped to Save it from Oblivion," p. 60.
  - 22 Generally the tassels would be represented a little askew. Their swaying motion is relied upon to call forth the sound *feng*, supplied by the word meaning the wind. The correctly executed motif may be seen on a porcelain jar in the ROM collection (910.58.9).
  - 23 Blooming flowers are considered to augur opulence.
  - 24 In Chinese the number, "eight" (*ba*), sounds like the number "one hundred" (*bai*), used frequently to suggest innumerable. Getting eight people to donate money was probably deemed to be similar to getting money from a hundred people. See Hu Pu'an, comp., *Zhonghua quanguo fengsuzhi*, xia, *juan* 5, pp. 34–35.
  - 25 *Ibid.*, *juan* 4, p. 39.
  - 26 *Ibid.*, *juan* 5, p. 39.
  - 27 *Ibid.*, p. 40.
  - 28 See No. 27.
  - 29 See No. 28.
  - 30 For detail of the origin of this term, see Zhanggu dacidian bianzhuanzu, comp., *Zhanggu dacidian*, p. 1049.
  - 31 Because a Chinese coin has a square hole in the centre, it has been perceived to be representative of the vagina. For detail of this interpretation, see Jin Zhilin, "Mianmian guadie," p. 104.
  - 32 Designs characterized by this feature are called *fengchezi* (pinwheels) by Sichuan embroiderers.
  - 33 See Masachika Nozaki, *Zhongguo jixiang tu'an*, p. 593–594.
  - 34 For similar examples, see Muriel Baker and Margaret Lunt, *Blue and White: The Cotton Embroideries of Rural China*, pls. 3 and 4.
  - 35 Samplers were also made by Chinese embroiderers for two purposes. One was to serve as a visual record of designs for reference and instructional use. The other was similar to the function of the sampler shown here. Embroidery workshops usually kept some for customers to choose designs to their liking when they placed orders. Such samplers show far more complicated designs and in greater numbers than are seen on this one. For examples, see *ibid.*



- pl. 10; Gao Benli, *Taiwan zaoqi fushi tulu*, pp. 299–302; and Li Shali, *Taiwan yuanzhumin yishi wenhua*, p. 71.
- 36 For finished works, see Muriel Baker and Margaret Lunt, *Blue and White: The Cotton Embroideries of Rural China*, pls. 5 and 6.
- 37 Apart from those in Chengdu and other cities in southwestern China, the most prolific and best-known cooperative in northern China was located in a village west of Beijing, ran by the faculty women and faculty wives of Yanjing University (now called University of Beijing). See Sigrid Reddy Watson, "Missionary Embroidery in China," p. 50.
- 38 Several examples are illustrated in *ibid.*, p. 49.
- 39 Almost all embroidered articles for Chinese domestic consumption have their hems turned to the front of the cloth, often adding another simply decorated border to the overall design. Although some missionary pieces also share this feature, many have hems turned to the back of the cloth, as is customary in the West.
- 40 This significance is derived from a poem, entitled "Ballad of Changgan," by the renowned Tang-dynasty poet, Li Bai (701–762), in which he describes a married couple who grew up together since a very young age and how they played with plums and a hobby horse made of bamboo.
- 41 For this significance of the prunus, see No. 27. As for the bamboo, its association with long life arises from the fact that it is able to stay alive for a long time by profuse reproduction and speedy growth.
- 42 For an interesting description of a traditional Chinese bed given by the wife of an American missionary, see John S. Service, ed., *Golden Inches: The Memoirs of Grace Service*, p. 197.
- 43 Also told by Grace Service in her account of her life in China, when the wife of a Chinese businessman became ill and was forced to seek medical care in a women's hospital run by the Canadian Methodist Mission, she complained that the iron hospital bed was so open and exposed that even after it has been moved into a corner, she still felt uncomfortable about the openness and could not rest until she had dragged the mattress off onto the floor in the middle of the night and slept there. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
- 44 Called *piehua* (surface patterning) or *bianhua* (weave-in patterning) in Chinese, this technique uses running stitch to produce densely embroidered surfaces typified by vertical parallel straight stitches worked along the warp threads of the base fabric. The resulting images, whether appearing in reserve on the front or in relief on the back, imitate woven patterns. They are also strongly reminiscent of papercut designs. For explanation and illustration, see Zhong Maolan, *Minjian ranzhi meishu*, pp. 265–266.
- 45 Dragon boats are also associated with the *Duanwu* festival, held on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar, to commemorate the death of Qu Yuan (ca. 340–278 bc), a frustrated statesman and poet of the state of Chu, who drowned himself in the Miluo River more than two thousand years ago.
- 46 For explanation of the significance of the basket, see No. 45; melon, No. 33; crane, No. 43; prunus, No. 27; Buddha's-hand citron, No. 41; bat and persimmon, No. 4; magpie on a prunus branch, No. 30.
- 47 The overall coin and rosette patterns ornamenting the two vases exemplify a decorative technique known variously as *hua bao hua* (enclosing a motif with another motif), *zhuanghua* (dressing up a motif), or *tianxin hua* (filling in a motif). This technique makes use of a continuous geometric or floral pattern to fill in certain area(s) of a motif, making its surface decoration more attractive. See Zhong Maolan, *Minjian ranzhi meishu*, pp. 272–274.
- 48 See Nos. 28 and 34.
- 49 See No. 43.
- 50 See No. 48.
- 51 See No. 27 for an explanation.
- 52 See Masachika Nozaki, *Zhongguo jixiang tu'an*, pp. 504 and 508.
- 53 For the image of a rabbit pounding an elixir, see No. 32. For more detail, see Ka Bo Tsang, "Regarding Hare/Rabbit Designs," p. 20.
- 54 See Nos. 48 and 49 for details of this decorative technique.
- 55 The Buddha's-hand citrons are in the basket at extreme left. The peaches are in the basket next to it. The so-called fish drum is a hollow bamboo tube with two sticks for beating. It is one of the attributes of Zhang Guolao, and sometimes Cao Guojiu, both members of the Eight Immortals. It is included in the border pattern, between the first and second baskets at the left. The stiff fan made of palm leaf, seen in the right-hand triangular design, is the attribute of Zhongli Quan, another member of the Eight Immortals.
- 56 *Shijing* is the oldest Chinese anthology that has collected poetic compositions from the ninth to seventh century bc.
- 57 See No. 4 for an explanation.
- 58 See No. 43.
- 59 In Sichuan province embroiderers call medallions having symmetrically arranged elements facing its centre *chelunzi* (cart wheels). The two medallions at the left of the first row and all three medallions in the second row belong to this kind of design layout.
- 60 The man holding candles illustrates the saying *dongfang huazhu ye* (on the night when decorative candles are lit in the nuptial chamber). The man holding a *guihua* illustrates another saying, *jinbang guaming shi* (at the time when one's name is included in the official announcement of the results of the civil-service examination held at the court). For the significance of a twig of *guihua*, see No. 40.
- 61 See No. 50 for a fuller explanation.
- 62 See No. 47 for an explanation.
- 63 The same wish is expressed in No. 41.
- 64 The *yunluo* is a percussion instrument made up of ten small gongs mounted on a

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wooden frame. For the significance of the stiff fan, see No. 51.

65 See No. 38 for details.

66 See No. 43.

67 Two similar examples are illustrated in Xu Zhongmin, ed., *Hunan minjian meishu*, pp. 18–19.



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