

Asian Textiles in Trade, February 23, 2004-June 6, 2004

Throughout recorded history, Asian textiles have been important international trade commodities. Chinese silks began arriving in Europe over the Silk Road through Central Asia in antiquity. Indian printed cottons were exported to Egypt at least as early as the 13th century and to Europe in the 17th century. Indian silks and cottons were also sent eastward to Indonesia and Southeast Asia. Chinese and Indian textiles have found their way to Japan since very early times. Shawls from Kashmir and carpets from Turkey graced the elegant women and the great houses of Europe. After the Revolutionary War, merchants brought silks and cottons from India and China back to both North and South America. Markets existed for both simple functional textiles and for elaborate luxury goods, both generally the output of organized manufacture.

The development of trade and transmission of design and technology affected both the producing and consuming cultures. Although the novelty of exoticism frequently contributed to the initial popularity of a new product from afar, importers often later requested color and/or pattern modifications from producers in order to cater to specific markets. Demand for some fabrics became so great that new processes were found to accelerate production. The popularity of Asian goods spurred the growth of new textile industries in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The textile trade has remained vibrant into the 21st century. Some Asian countries have developed large mechanized textile industries to manufacture for global markets. Then again, some entrepreneurs and organizations have continued or re-established craft businesses, providing opportunities for sustainable local development and preserving traditional skills. Examples from the permanent collection illustrate the artistic and technical excellence of Asian textiles and how their trade has connected cultures throughout the world for hundreds of years.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

The Maki Textile Studio, est. 1990
Chiaki Maki, Japanese, b. 1960, (RISD, Textile Design)
Kaori Maki, Japanese, b. 1962, (RISD, Textile Design)
Two Scarves, ca. 2001
Wool, silk; doublecloth and silk, plain weave
Anonymous gift 2002.14.2

Chiaki and Kaori Maki are sisters and graduates of RISD's program in textile design. In 1990, Chiaki, together with Indian weaver Neeru Kumar, opened Maki Textile Studio, a venture that her sister joined in 1992. The Maki sisters live in Japan, but their studio's designs are produced in India by village artisans under the direction of Ms. Kumar. The finished goods are marketed worldwide.



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Indian

Valance, early 1700s

Cotton; plain weave, hand-painted mordants

Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 1988.017



The colorful hand-painted and block-printed cotton fabrics of India began to reach Europe in the 17th century. By 1662, European merchants were sending Westernized designs for these “chintzes,” as they came to be known in the West, to the manufacturers in India. The printed cottons were immediately popular for furnishings and informal attire. This valance, designed in the French baroque style, was originally part of a complete set of matching bed hangings.

Cambodian

Skirtcloth or hanging, late 1800s-early 1900s

Silk; twill weave, weft ikat

Bequest of Martha B. Lisle 67.454



Indian-made silks called patolu were highly valued as trade items in mainland and insular Southeast Asia at least as early as the 16th century. They became so important that the design elements and layout began to be incorporated into local textile production. This fabric is made in the twill weave characteristic of Cambodia, but copies the patolu saris that came from India. It was probably made for sale to the Thai court.

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Chinese

Man's vest, ca. 1845

Silk; satin damask

Gift of the Williams Estate 75.026.16

Most of the silk fabrics exported from China to the West in the 19th century were patterned to imitate Western styles, such as stripes, checks, and plaids, or small geometric figures or floral sprigs. In contrast, silks with Chinese designs were usually brought back to the U.S. by sailors as gifts for friends and family members. Garments made from these Chinese-style silks abound in New England collections, evidence of the influence of the China trade in this region during the 19th century. Similar silks, such as the one used in the Tibetan coat featured here, were more commonly sold to China's Asian trading partners, where they were used for both secular and religious purposes.



Tibetan; Chinese

Man's coat (chupa), 1900s

Fur, silk; satin damask

Bequest of John M. Crawford, Jr. 1989.110.100

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Chinese

Shawl, mid 1800s

Silk; plain weave, embroidered with silk twist in satin stitch

Gift of Virginia R. Stuart 2000.102.1

Soft silk shawls, either plain or embroidered and embellished with elegant hand-knotted fringe, were one of the staples of trade between China and the West from the 19th into the 20th century and included both Chinese-style designs such as dragons or peonies and Western designs as seen in this example.

For most of the 19th century, such shawls were embroidered in a single color, either matching the ground or in contrast to it. White-on-white was the most common combination. By contrast, late 19th- and early 20th-century shawls are often embroidered with several colors of silk.



Chinese

Blouse, late 1800s-early 1900s

Silk, satin weave, embroidered with silk twist in satin stitch

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.281

The Parsi population in India arrived from Persia (Iran) in the 10th century. Over time they assimilated elements of Indian culture, in particular the sari as a standard woman's garment. During the 18th century, Parsis developed their own trade contacts with China and began to commission Chinese embroidered blouses, saris, and sari borders. Parsi women's dress became an amalgam of Persian, Chinese, and Indian design.

The bird and floral-sprig motif on the blouse with black ground is reminiscent of 17th-century Persian textiles, while the blouse with the red ground combines a border of Indian peacocks with a field pattern of Chinese birds and flowers.



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Chinese

Blouse, late 1800s-early 1900s

Silk, satin weave, embroidered with silk twist in knot stitch

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.277

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Indian

Shawl, 2nd quarter 1800s

Cashmere; double interlocked twill tapestry weave

Gift of Harriet S. Bucklin 02.006

Fine textiles with tapestry-woven borders were first used as sashes and shoulder cloths by Indian and Persian noblemen. By the late 18th century, shawls were being imported into Europe and America as a new fashion for women. Shortly thereafter, European merchants began sending instructions to their Indian counterparts, suggesting changes in design and color combinations to make the shawls conform to Western tastes and needs. This example – the first Kashmir shawl acquired by the Museum – shows the elongated, scrolling motifs and wide borders characteristic of the mid-19th century.



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Indian; Gujarati

Textile fragment, 1400s-1500s

Cotton; plain weave, resist-dyed

Museum Acquisition Fund 34.751

Fragments of madder- and indigo-dyed cotton textiles found in archaeological digs in the medieval Egyptian city of Al Fostat, near Cairo, have been dated to between the 13th and 18th centuries. Documentary evidence also records an important trade during that time between Egypt and Gujarat, one of the most important cotton-printing regions in India. These fragments came into the Museum's collection in 1934 as Egyptian examples. In 1938, a French historian presented evidence that they were, in fact, made in India.

China Seas Design Studio, est. 1972

Inger McCabe Elliott, Indonesian

China Seas, Inc., est. 1972

"Lim Bamboo" textile length, 1983

Cotton; plain weave, batik

Mary B. Jackson Fund 1987.137

China Seas, Inc., was founded in 1972 by Inger McCabe Elliott in an attempt to bring the traditional Indonesian craft technique of batik to broader markets in Europe and the Americas. Elliott encouraged batik artists to experiment with color and design and even to produce yard goods with repeat patterns that could be tailored into garments or furnishings. In spite of Elliott's interest and other attempts to support this local cottage industry, the number of craftspeople involved in batik continues to dwindle.

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Javanese

Hip wrapper, after 1925

Cotton; plain weave, batik

Gift of Paula and Leonard Granoff and Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2003.40.7

The port towns of Java's northern coast saw the mingling of traditional textile-making techniques with design influences from Java's many trading partners. Batik, a complex technique in which plain white cloth is patterned by drawing a design with wax, then dyeing and re-waxing the cloth for each color required in the design, has a long history in Java. In the mid 19th century, Dutch and Chinese influence along the North Coast popularized new styles, which replaced the traditional blues and browns with bright colors and geometric motifs with flowers, birds, and butterflies.



Reiko Sudo, Japanese, b. 1953

Nuno Corporation, Japanese, 1984-present

"Feather Flurries" textile length, 1993

Silk, feathers; doublecloth with interchange

Gift of Reiko Sudo 1994.058

Nuno Corporation opened in Japan in 1984 and since has been one of the most important producers of cutting-edge textiles in the world. The use of new materials and technologies are a hallmark of Nuno design. Reiko Sudo is artistic director of Nuno and has designed some of the company's most interesting and innovative fabrics. Company headquarters are in Tokyo, but its products are sold around the globe.



Indian; Gujarati

Textile fragment, 1400s-1500s

Cotton; plain weave, resist-dyed

Museum Acquisition Fund 34.766

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Indian; Gujarati
Textile fragment, 1400s-1500s
Cotton; plain weave, resist-dyed
Museum Acquisition Fund 34.767



Indian; Gujarati
Textile fragment, 1400s-1500s
Cotton; plain weave, resist-dyed
Museum Acquisition Fund 34.758

Indian; Gujarati
Textile fragment, 1400s-1500s
Cotton; plain weave, resist-dyed
Museum Acquisition Fund 34.757

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Turkish

Fragment of small patterned Holbein carpet, 1500s

Wool; knotted pile, symmetrical knot

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 12.008

Carpets displaying octagonal medallions and elaborate interlacing have become known as “Holbein” pattern because the 16th-century European artist Hans Holbein depicted such carpets in several of his paintings. This style was known in the West a century before Holbein, and it is possible that it was produced in Turkey specifically for the export market.

