THE MANILA SHAWL ROUTE

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ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the description of the embroidered shawl which mirrors a reality that has evolved hand in hand with the world around us. The work is a reflection of the artistic and social taste and tradition which have transformed from Eastern exquisiteness to Western Modernism and have moved and evolved from continent to continent, rendering them more diverse in terms of shape and colour.

The study of the colours in the embroidered shawl offers information about the taste, use and the colour techniques over more than two centuries. The embroidered shawl route crossed historic Eastern and Western ports where commercial and cultural exchanges had been taking place for a long time. Spain was the starting point of the embroidered shawl’s expansion towards Europe. Nowadays, this garment has become a unique symbol of the Spanish costume. However, there is evidence of Europeans’ taste for shawls in countless pictures and photos dating back to the beginning of the 19th century.

KEY WORDS: colour, embroidered shawl, historic research

1. INTRODUCTION

The embroidered shawl mirrors a reality that has evolved hand in hand with the world around us. This work is a reflection of the artistic and social taste and tradition transformed from Eastern exquisiteness to Western Modernism which have moved and evolved from continent to continent, rendering them more diverse in terms of shape and colour.

Colour has constantly evolved in these works of art. The embroidered shawl route crossed historic Eastern and Western ports where commercial and cultural exchanges had been taking place for a long time.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There is a common misconception in the origin of the shawl. There is a common misconception about the origin of the shawl. Manila shawls did not originate from Manila, Philippines, although Manila was indeed one of the nuclei at which the Eastern route merchants stopped to acquire these products. The real origin of the embroidered shawl was China, with outstanding centres such as Macau or Guangzhou. The colour of these shawls evolved not only with contemporary tastes, but also according to the different areas where it was made. Trade routes where established in order to transfer products, distribute them and to stock up on supplies, which would lead us to an initial first journey in search of new lands (Figure 1). The San Pedro Galleon dropped its first anchor in 1565 and did its last voyage in 1815. These ships carried a different cargo when they set off than on their return trip: it was a very heavy cargo of silks, porcelain and woods among various other Eastern products, while the return cargo was usually silver and men (Ortiz 1999: 216-219).

When regular navigation commenced, there were no regulations as to the number of ships that could sail a year; in some ways it was a matter of free trade, until Philip II’s Royal Decree in 1593 with its limit of two trips a year (Olle, 2002: 302). Most of the galleons were built in Cavite, Manila Bay. Each part of the boat was built with a different type of wood that could be found on the islands, and each timber was adapted to the most suitable part of the boat according to its characteristics. The fleet was to leave from Cavite, on the shores of the Philippines, in late June to reach the coast of Mexico at the beginning of the year. An average navigation lasted about 6 months. Ships could only stay there until the end of March at the latest, or else the return trip would mean facing difficult weather conditions. The crew was exposed not only to difficulties in navigation, but also to hunger and diseases. In this sense, we wish to highlight how costly these trips were in terms of not only the cargoes, but also human lives. It was little wonder then how highly valuable, expensive and exquisite the goods they carried were considered. (Luque and Mongragón, 2006: 351-379).
Eastern shawl from another are the following: the exquisiteness and fineness of the basis fabrics and the embroideries, the colour and the short fringe, at the beginning.

The embroidery on the shawls was characterised by small floral motifs which depicted great symbolism and iconography, an unavoidable feature of religious and reflective people. Indeed, each motif on the fabrics had a purpose and was a metaphor. This symbolism will be lost in time as it has been completely removed by Western tastes.

Regarding the colours of the threads, a fine, rich range was used to “paint with the needle”. Eastern shawl colours and motifs may be classified by regions and work techniques (Bertin-Guest, 2003).

1- **Su**: Originated in Suzhou, in the Jiangsu province. It was the style that was most appreciated by the imperial court; it was an elegant and delicate style to work, and designs were beautiful, of good taste and with fine colour combinations. Colours ranged from 750 to 1000 tones, and the threads for each embroidery were specifically dyed.

2- **Xiang**: This style stems from the popular embroidery from the province of Hunan. It uses bright colours. Its style is considered to...
The manila shawl route

Figure 4. Details of a Phoenix on a Manila shawl belonging to a particular collection

Figure 5. Embroidered details of a Manila shawl belonging to a particular collection depicting a scene of Chinese people. It has been done very much to Occidental taste for Oriental exoticism.

Figure 6. A Manila shawl done in exotic Oriental and Mexican taste using the typical flora and fauna of the area.

Figure 7. A Manila shawl done in Mexican taste with enormous peonies which virtually cover the complete base of the shawl.
The use of colours was enhanced to the limit. Small Chinese embroideries were replaced by large floral motifs full of exotic flora, typical of a tropical climate characterised by splashes of colour. Nowadays, the Manila shawl and its characteristic embroidery is an important element of the Mexican folklore. Seville, Spain

There is confusion in Spain as to where the first place the shawl originates from. It is assumed that the shawl should come from both places if we take into account its lucrative business. Flower-full Latin American embroideries were refined in Spain, and resulted in a harmonised taste for chromatic combinations. Typical Spanish imagery was also added in a very realistic way (Aguilar, 1998) (Figure 8).

Spain was the starting point of the embroidered shawl's expansion towards Europe. Nowadays, this garment has become a unique symbol of the Spanish national costume. However, there is evidence of Europeans' taste for shawls in uncountable pictures and photos dating back to the beginning of the 19th century (Stone, 1997) (Figure 9).

The date when shawls began to be woven remains unclear, but it certainly relates with the loss of the Philippines in 1898 by Spain and the decline of this lucrative business. A shawl made in Seville, Spain, was put on show at the 1929 Universal Exposition. It is thought that the origin and expansion of the women embroiders' workshops began in villages around Seville, such as Villarquermado (VVAA 1998).

3. CONCLUSIONS

Our research aims at cataloguing the shapes of shawls that have been produced over time by simplifying its classification without ignoring the mixture of styles and the subgroups of shapes.
Figure 9. Details of part of the embroidery on a Manila shawl with only Occidental motifs
The Manila shawl was an important example of trade in Eastern products, which was driven by the eager and universal coloniser who embodied the rule of the Spanish Crown at the time of its greatest splendor and decline when Spain ruled in both America and the Philippines.

“The path of the Manila shawl” leads us to cover three major nuclei: China, America and Spain during the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries which began when galleons sailed the seas until the steam engine era, and it also felt the effects of political and economic movements.

The conquest of the Philippines accounted for the direct opening of the Eastern world to the Western world and, hence, the arrival of new products which would even change the way people dressed, as is our case.

It was a harmonious link between the material (silk) and art (embroidery) with taste, use, and original traditions, and its later transformation according to local tastes and own traditions and use of the garments at the given destination. There were also other factors that we took into account when we considered enriching and enhancing the aesthetic response and variety of these works of art. The passage and use of this garment from China to America and Spain, means that it has evolved as a link among three continents: Asia, America and, finally, Europe, thus giving it a unique character.

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