

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 were established by what was called "the Manila Galleon route" which marked the opening of the West to the East (Figure 1). In the 19th century, products exported from this remote destination were colloquially called Chinoiserie. It would not be long before the artistic richness of silk, porcelain and furniture would be in fashion (VVAA, 1996) in Europe.

It was a rich and prosperous period, with business thriving between East and West. The products from the East were carefully packed to reach their destination in perfect condition. It is interesting to note that the knowledge of these materials helped to improve

transporting them as every likely condition that could deteriorate them was known. Thus, items were protected from a long and hard journey in such an adverse environment as the sea. An example of such attention to detail is the use of wax paper to protect silks, that is, products as permeable and delicate as silk were wrapped with a water-proof material which, at the same time, was soft enough to cover and protect it. For a trade route to work, secure settlements would need to have been 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).



Figure 1. A 16th-century ship. The collection belonging to Brueghel, the Elder. MN. For overseas commerce to develop, strong, stable ships were needed against the hard ocean waves with an excellent set of sails that are able to carry a very heavy load of artillery, provisions and merchandise.

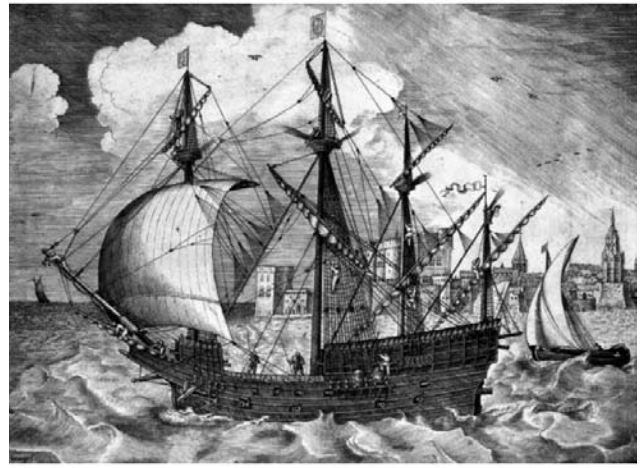


Figure 2. Amplification of an ivory-coloured appliqué sewn to a Manila shawl belonging to a particular collection.



Figure 3. Details of a butterfly embroidered on a Manila shawl

There were three main points located on the Manila shawl route with some clear differences between them:

Macao, China

Trade with Europe had existed since the 13th century, as shown in church clothes. From 1578 onwards, the Portuguese were granted permission to trade in Guangzhou which became an important trade centre in the 19th century. Two of the most important exported products were Spanish shawls and Western-style jackets with the same embroidered motifs.

China was one of the first countries to export embroidered silk, not as clothes but as decorative elements (bedspreads, furniture coverings, etc.). The Chinese marvelled at the use of their products by Westerners, and consequently adapted them to the tastes of their buyers.

To meet Western tastes, they changed the size of their embroidered fabrics and made all the required modifications, although these modifications had no future in their own country. For example, they finished clothes off with fringes (which was not a new technique for them, as they were perfectly aware of the macramé of the fringes which they sewed to the borders of the shawl). (Figure 2). They also changed the sizes and colours of the basic fabrics to match the Western taste according to the time and the fashion. The outstanding features that distinguish an

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



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



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

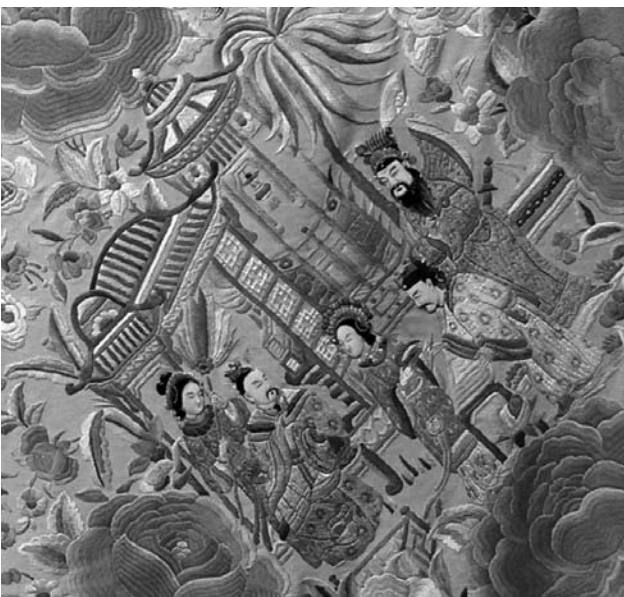


Figure 5. Embroidered details of a Manila shawl belonging to a particular collection depicting a scene of Chinese people. It has been done very much to Occidental taste for Oriental exoticism.



Figure 7. A Manila shawl done in Mexican taste with enormous peonies which virtually cover the complete base of the shawl.

mimic nature and takes into account flowers and birds. Effects were so realistic that even the fur of the animals embroidered could be seen

The fabrics used were damask silk, transparent gauze and nylon, used to create the double-sided effect. Among the products decorated with these embroideries we find spreads, cushions, pictures, screens, tablecloths, and clothes like jackets and skirts.

3-Shun: Also known as the embroidery of Siduran, this style was associated with places like Chougqing, Chengdu, Wenjiang and Beixan

One of its very well-known work methods was double-sided embroidery stitch. This is a stitch technique with up to 100 varieties which sets off damask and brocades.

4-Yue: Also known as Guang embroidery, it is associated with the Guangzhou region. It became very popular during the Ming dynasty, and its main features were:

- a. Use of a wide variety of curl threads, including fur.
- b. Contrasting, strong, bright colours.
- c. Massive use of golden curl threads to sketch designs and patterns.
- d. Designs elaborated with complicated, rich colours.
- e. The whole production was undertaken by men.

There were more styles of secondary embroideries - the embroidery of Shidao (Shandong province) was associated with popular art and was a prime example of them. Designs combined Eastern art patterns and Western drawings. At the same time, there was another style, also classified as being popular: the Guizhou province style. It featured mainly bright and vivid colours. Needles for wool, and embroidery in cotton, gold and silver within the curl thread technique were used.

Through each dynasty, the embroidered shawl was admired for specific characteristics. However, the scope of the current research deals with works relating to the nearest dynasty at the time when Manila shawls began to be embroidered, the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). The Manchu who founded this dynasty came from the North. Their tastes and styles were direct and much less refined than those of the previous dynasty, the Yuan. One of its innovations was the dragon costume, a combination of traditional embroidered costume and the riding costume of the Manchurian steppe nomads.

We can discern the different dynasties by changes to light colours, the pictures depicted and other several details. The garments that have reached us and remained with us prove that Chinese people have been great masters of silk weaving and silk dying for centuries. Some wonderful examples are the items found in the Shan dynasty tombs (1500 B.C.).

Oaxaca, Mexico

When the embroidered shawl arrived in Oaxaca (Mexico), it underwent spectacular colour transformations by the indigenous people, who were fascinated by its colours and embroideries.

Influenced by the massive use of shawls in the colonies and the teaching works of the religious orders located in these colonies, they taught women the Western art of embroidery

At the same time the embroidered shawls underwent transformations that turned them into unique specimens.

The size of the embroideries was increased and extended (Figure 7).



Figure 8. The so-called "fly's wings" Manila shawls given the colour of the base material, which were most popular in Spain.

- ✓ 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 Villarquerredo (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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Versión española

TITULO: *La ruta del mantón de Manila*.

RESUMEN: *Este documento se centra en la descripción del mantón bordado como espejo de una realidad que ha evolucionado a la par con el mundo que nos rodea. El trabajo es una reflexión sobre el gusto artístico y social y la tradición oriental que se transformó de exquisitez oriental a modernidad occidental, cambiando, de hecho, el movimiento y evolución de un continente a otro, y hacer más diversos en forma y color.*

El estudio de color en el mantón bordado ofrece información sobre el gusto, el uso del color y la técnica en más de dos siglos. Este recorrió la histórica ruta oriente- occidente, donde los puertos comerciales y los intercambios culturales se habían venido produciendo durante mucho tiempo. España fue el punto de partida de la expansión del mantón bordado hacia Europa. Hoy en día, esta prenda se ha convertido en un símbolo del vestuario español. Sin embargo, hay pruebas de la Comunidad Europea del gusto por chales en incontables imágenes y fotos que datan de principios del siglo XIX.

PALABRAS CLAVES: *color, mantón bordado, investigación histórica*