

Global Circulation and Transformation of Two Types of Embroideries Transmitted in Japan

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Several silk textiles embroidered with flower and bird motifs have been handed down in Japan (these are referred to as the Japan group). The research by the present author clarified that these pieces were produced in China and traded to Japan mainly from the second half of the 16th century through the first half of the 17th century. The design of these pieces consists of two types : Type 1 is of Chinese origin, and Type 2 is of European origin.

The present author discusses these two types respectively, as this is the first attempt to discuss both types together from a broad view point, especially regarding their trade routes. In this article, both Types 1 and 2 will be equally introduced, their features will be summarized, and their trade routes and related primary sources will be discussed. The aim of this article is to indicate that the design of these pieces is the result of a large scale world trade from East to West and West to East.

Features of the Japan group

Type 1

Type 1 includes a large peony and two flying phoenixes in the center, based on the traditional Chinese design. The cock and hen phoenixes facing each other symbolize the love, happiness and harmony of a married couple. At least 16 pieces of Type 1 have been handed down in Japan.¹ Type 1 pieces are an embroidered plain weave. The present author examined the Japan group Type 1 pieces and comparable Chinese embroideries produced in the Guangzhou area and found a striking correspondence in materials, techniques and colorations.² The research results indicated that Type 1 is Yue embroidery. Yue is the former name of the Guangzhou area in China. In the late 16th to 17th centuries, Macao flourished as a foreign trade port. And next to Macao is the Guangzhou area where Type 1 embroideries were produced.

Type 2

Type 2 includes a large bird which alights on a peony branch, and her chicks are under her. This is not a common Chinese motif. As mentioned below, a comparative study of variations produced outside of China suggest that the design origin of Type 2 is the European pelican. At least 3 pieces of Type 2 have remained in Japan.³ Type 2 pieces are embroidered velvets, and the present author's research confirmed that these are Chinese productions.⁴

Embroidered peonies in the Type 2 pieces are the same style as those seen in the Chinese porcelain produced in Zhangzhou in Fujian province during the late Ming dynasty.⁵ As Zhangzhou was famous for its velvet production and was an active international trading port at the time, this is the most likely place for the production of Type 2. However, one should not rule out the possibility of other velvet embroidery-producing areas, like Quanzhou, Suzhou, and Nanjing.

Owners and trade routes of the Japan group

Fortunately, some pieces in the Japan group have inscriptions in which owners, production periods and trade routes can be deduced.

Type 1: The piece in the Saikyō-ji in Shiga

Inscriptions on a Type 1 piece transmitted in Saikyō-ji temple in Shiga Prefecture indicates that this piece was donated in 1616 by Hasegawa Fujihito. Research confirms that he was a top official of Nagasaki from 1606 to 1614, and that he supervised the trade with Europe and China and purchased import items for the Japanese Shogun.⁶ It is highly probable that Fujihito acquired this piece while he was in office.

In the late 16th to early 17th centuries, the routes through which the Japan group were traded from Guangzhou, Zhangzhou, Quanzhou, and Nanjing in China to Japan can be divided into two types. One is the direct route from Macao to Nagasaki by Portuguese ships. The other is indirect routes via South East Asia by ships from several nations. At this time, Chinese junks could not sail directly to Japan. Therefore, Chinese junks first brought commodities to South East Asian trading points. Then, from such points, Chinese junks, as well as Spanish, Dutch, English, Chinese, Japanese, and Ryuquwan ships brought them to Japan.

Various facts suggest that the ship transporting the Saikyō-ji embroidery to Japan was most probably Portuguese. First, of the European countries docking at Nagasaki at this time, only Portugal also had a Chinese trade base. That base was Macao, the city near Guangzhou where Type 1 embroideries were produced. Second, the active period of Macao-Nagasaki trade overlaps with Fujihito's term in office. Third, similar pieces, mentioned later, can be associated with places on the Portuguese trade route, such as Lisbon and India.⁷

Type 1: The piece in the Jōden-ji in Tottori

The Type 1 piece handed down in the Jōden-ji-temple in Tottori Prefecture is said to have been donated by Kamei Korenori, a daimyo who governed the Tottori region.⁸ In the mid-16th century, due to fear of pirates roaming the China seas, the Chinese court prohibited official trade with Japan. In the first half of the 17th century, the Japanese regime responded by issuing a trade authorization in the form of a red seal to selected Japanese boats. These "Red-seal boats" sailed to

South China, including Macao, or to South East Asia, where they traded with Chinese boats. Korenori dispatched “Red-seal boats” three times: in 1607 to south China, and in 1609 and 1610, to Thailand.⁹ There is a high possibility that Korenori procured Type 1 embroideries during these navigations.

Type 1: Comparative piece in the Museo Diocesano in Chavari

A similar Chinese production belongs to the Museo Diocesano in Chavari, Italy. This piece was donated by a prosperous aristocrat Achille Costaguta in 1651 to a rosary society affiliated with Chavari’s church of the San Giovanni Battista.¹⁰ However, there are no clues to ascertain its trade backgrounds.

Type 2: The pieces in the Banna-ji in Tochigi and Chion-ji in Kyoto

The Type 2 piece handed down in Banna-ji temple in Tochigi Prefecture has an inscription which indicates that it was produced in China and traded to Japan prior to 1592.¹¹ Inscriptions on the Type 2 handed down in Chion-ji temple in Kyoto indicate that the former owner of this piece was the Imperial Prince Yoshihito. As he passed away in 1638, it can be deduced that this piece was produced and brought to Japan prior to this time.¹²

Although specific trade routes cannot be confirmed by these inscriptions, trade routes of the Type 2 can be assumed from the trade history for that time. In 1557, the Portuguese settled in Macao, and in 1571 the Spanish settled in Manila, both setting up trade stations. By 1630 the Dutch visited China, trading from Taiwan, and, in 1637, the British came, trading through ports in South East Asia. It is, therefore, highly possible that the Banna-ji piece, produced and traded prior to 1592, was ordered in China and brought to Japan by the Portuguese or Spanish. The same may be true of the Chion-ji piece, produced and traded prior to 1638, though the Dutch or English may also have been involved.

Primary sources regarding Type 2

Three primary sources provide evidence of these tradings of the Type 2 pieces, which are made of velvet.

Alvaro Semedo, a Portuguese Jesuit missionary, traveled to China in 1613 and 1644. In *Imperio de la China*, he reported the fact that the most and the best commodities of China were brought to Macao, and the Portuguese loaded chests of velvets for India, Japan and Manila.¹³

(...) To the City called also Cantone (though the proper name thereof bee Guamcheufu) the Portugesses go twice every year with their marchandice. It is

distant from Macao an hundred and five miles: (...) The most and best comodities of that Kingdome are brought thither, because it is the most open and free feat of trade in that nation. And to say nothing of the six neighbouring kingdomes, from whence all sorts of merchandise is brought thither, as well by natives as strangers: only that which the Portugesses take in for India, Giappone and Manila, cometh one year with another to five thousand three hundred chests of severall silke stuffes; each chest including 100 peices of the most substantial silks, as velvet damask and satin: (...)

(*underlines by author)

Antonio de Morga, a Spanish colonial official, arrived in Manila in 1594. In *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, he reported that merchandise was brought to the Philippine Islands from China; Spanish merchants in the Philippines exported it to Mexico and Japan; The merchandise that the Chinese brought and sold to the Spaniards consisted of items such as plain velvets, embroidered velvets, velvets embroidered with gold, coverlets, and tapestries of embroidered velvet.¹⁴ These items match the features of the Japan group Type 2.

(...) The merchants and business men form the bulk of the residents of the islands, because of the great amount of merchandise brought there - outside of native products - from China, Japon, Maluco, Malaca, Sian, Camboja, Borneo, and other districts. They invest in this merchandise and export it annually in the vessels that sail to Nueva Espana, and at times to Japon, where great profits are made from raw silk. (...)

A considerable number of somas and junks (which are large vessels) generally come from Great China to Manila, laden with merchandise. (...) They belong to the provinces of Canton, Chincheo, and Ucheo [Fo-Kien], and sail from those provinces. They make their voyage to the city of Manila in fifteen or twenty days, sell their merchandise, and return in good season, before the vendavals set in - the end of May and a few days of June - in order not to endanger their voyage. (...)

The merchandise that they generally bring and sell to the Spaniards consists of raw silk in bundles, of the fineness of two strands [dos cabecas], and other silk of poorer quality; fine untwisted silk, white and of all colors, wound in small skeins; quantities of velvets, some plain, and some embroidered in all sorts of figures, colors, and fashions - others with body of gold, and embroidered with gold; (...) They also bring musk, benzoin, and ivory; many bed ornaments,

hangings, coverlets, and tapestries of embroidered velvet; (...)

(*underlines by author)

John Saris, a factor of the British East India Company, sailed to Bantam in 1604, and to Japan in 1613. In his diary, he recorded the facts that junk boats sailed from China to Bantam with cargos, such as velvet hangings embroidered with gold¹⁵, which exactly fits the Japan group Type 2. He also reported requestable commodities, such as velvets of all colors and velvet-like fabrics with needlework, were vendible in Japan.¹⁶ His letter suggests the possibility that English ships acquired Chinese velvets in Bantam and exported them to Japan.

Bantam, a Towne situate in the Hand of Iaua Maior, standeth in the latitude of sixe degrees to the South of the Equinoctiall, and hath three degrees variation West. To this place is great resort of diuers Nations, in sundrie sorts of commodities. (...)

Item, in the Moneths of February and March, here commeth three or foure Iunckes from China, very richly laden with silkes raw and wrought, China Cashes, Purseline, Cotton cloath of diuers fashions and prices, as followeth, viz. Raw-silke of Lamking, which is the best, an hundred and ninetie Rialls the Peecull. (...) Veluets all colours, thirteene yards the peece, twelue Rialls the peece. (...) Veluet Hangings imbroydered with gold, eighteene Rialls: (...)

A note of requestable Commodities vendible in Iapan, together with their prices there Current, being Masses and Canderines, each Canderine contayning the 1/10 of a Masse, viz.

Broad-Clothes of all sorts, viz. Blackes, Yellowes and Reds, which cost in Holland eight or nine Guilders the Flemmish ell, two ells three quarters is worth three, foure too fiue hundred. (...) Veluets of all colors, eight els the peece, worth from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and thirtie. Wrought Veluets like fabricke, worth from one hundred & eighty to two hundred. (...)

(*underlines by author)

Type 2: Comparative piece in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London

A similar Type 2 piece is preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. An attached letter suggests that the piece was brought to England by Elihu Yale, who served in the British East India Company, acting as governor of Fort St. George in Madras, India from 1687 to 1692.¹⁷ Yale must have acquired the piece brought by the Portuguese or Chinese ship to India.

Variations produced outside of China

Designs of Types 1 and 2 were also used outside of China. There are several examples produced in India, Europe, and Andes as below.

(a) Indian production

Type 1: The piece in the Calico Museum in Ahmedabad

According to Dr. Irwin, the embroidery with the phoenix and peony design was made in Gujarat, India sometime between the late 17th to early 18th century as a canopy or a bed cover for European export.¹⁸ Although the Indian phoenixes and peonies in this piece are quite transformed, it is apparent that these motifs are based on the Chinese Type 1 design.

Type 2: The piece in the Casa Museu Guerra Junqueiro in Port

The Type 2 design is also used in another embroidered bed cover which was produced in Gujarat for the Portuguese market and is currently preserved in the Casa Museu Guerra Junqueiro (CMGJ) in Porto.¹⁹ Gujarat embroideries used silk threads imported from China on cotton textiles produced in India. Dra. Pinto pointed out that the bird in the medallion is modeled after the European pelican.²⁰ In Europe, based on a folk tale in which the pelican picks its own breast to nourish its young with its own blood symbolizes Christ's redemption, sacrifice, and resurrection. This is called the "Pelican in her Piety".

The sizes and compositions of the Japan group Types 1 and 2 are similar to Indo-European bed covers. Hence, the Japan group was presumably first produced as bed covers for Europeans. As this Indian piece was handed down in Porto, Portugal, it can be assumed that this Indian pelican was introduced as a result of the Portuguese trade. The Portuguese developed trading routes from Lisbon to Goa, Macao, and Nagasaki, settling in Gujarat towns, and shipped Indian products for the Portuguese market via Goa to Asian ports as well as to Lisbon.

(b) European production

Type 1: The piece in the Foundation of Ricardo do Espírito Santo Silva in Lisbon

A Type 1 example, owned by the Foundation of Ricardo do Espírito Santo Silva (FRESS) in Lisbon, once referred to it in their publication as a Chinese production. However, the present author's Lisbon research indicated that it is probably a European copy.²¹ The central design of this piece is similar to the Japan group Type 1; however, arrangements of surrounding animals are different from the Japan group Type 1. This piece tells us that this Chinese design was brought to Europe and altered to fit the style which was suitable to European interior settings at that time.

(c) Andean production

After the Spanish conquered the Incas in 1533, they employed local Indians to produce textiles. Designs of Types 1 and 2 were also used in the Andes during the Spanish colonial period.

Type 1: The piece in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston

Dr. Cammann introduced several tapestries made in the Andes in the late 17th to early 18th centuries. Among them, the piece belonging to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston has a similar design as Type 1.²² This piece includes large Andean birds that originated from Chinese phoenixes. It also includes altered Chinese animals as well as European animals and indigenous Andean animals.

Type 2: The piece in the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C.

The Type 2 design can also be found in Andean colonial tapestries preserved in the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C.²³ Dr. Cammann pointed out the European and Chinese influences in this piece: European unicorn, lions with crowns, and hunting dogs; and Chinese animals (xieshi) and peony-like flowers.²⁴ These eclectic Andean tapestries of Types 1 and 2 combine Andean, European, and Chinese elements.

The Spanish trade routes went across the Atlantic Ocean to Lima, Peru and from Acapulco across the Pacific Ocean to Manila in the Philippines. The Spanish were not permitted a trade base in China, so, in Manila, the Spanish traded with Chinese junk boats which had sailed from Chinese coastal towns to Manila. From 1572 to 1622, Zhangzhou was the main town from which Chinese junk boats brought Chinese silks to Manila. And Zhangzhou is the most probable production site of the Japan group Type 2.

Conclusion

The features and trade routes of the Japan group and their variations can be summarized as follows. The Japan group Type 1 has the Chinese design modified for European export bed covers. It was produced in Guangzhou and brought to Japan most probably by Portuguese or Japanese ships. Similar Chinese productions can be found in Chavari, Italy. The Type 1 design was spread and transformed in India, Europe, and Andes presumably by Portuguese and Spanish traders.

The central motif of Type 2 has a European origin. Type 2 was produced most probably in Zhangzhou. The possible trade routes for Type 2 from China to Japan were the direct routes by Portuguese ships and the indirect routes by Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, English, Chinese, Japanese and/or Ryuquwan ships. Similar Chinese productions can be found in London, which suggests the involvement of the British East India Company in India. The Type 2 design was spread by the

Portuguese, English, and Spanish traders and transformed in India and the Andes.

Thus, the design of the Japan group was circulated on a global scale. Their motifs lost their original meanings and were transformed into new designs based on each area's regional traditions. Extant early Chinese export textiles with firm date information are extremely rare. As the Japan group includes such information, the Japan group plays a significant role as the standard for estimating the production dates of relevant pieces.

Notes

¹ The Type 1 embroideries are preserved in Japan at the following places: Engaku-ji in Kanagawa; Hōjō-ji in Shizuoka; Rinzaï-ji in Shizuoka; Ryūmon-takiyama in Shiga (two works); Saikyō-ji in Shiga; Sesshōsekizan in Shiga; Honkoku-ji in Kyoto; Kankoboko in Kyoto (two works); Shōkoku-ji in Kyoto; Marubeni Company in Osaka; Kurokawa Institute of Ancient Cultures (Kurokawa Kobunka Kenkyūjo) in Hyogo; Yōmei-ji in Shimane; and Kyūshū National Museum in Fukuoka (two works).

² Masako Yoshida. "Saikyō-ji ya Honkoku-ji ni denraisuru kakichōjū monyō shishū" [Embroideries of flower, bird, and animal design in Honkokuji and Saikyō-ji]. *Kyoto zōkei geijutsu daigaku kenkyū kiyō* [Bulletin of Kyoto University of Art and Design], no. 11 (Kyoto, 2007), pp. 105-108.

³ The Type 2 embroideries are preserved in Japan at the following places: Banna-ji in Tochigi; Chion-ji in Kyoto; and Tokyogawa Museum in Nagoya.

⁴ Masako Yoshida. "Tokugawa bijutsukan shozō no tūji-baori ni kansite" [The tsūji-baori preserved in the Tokugawa Art Museum]. *Museum (Tokyo National Museum Journal)*, no.570 (Tokyo, 2001), pp.54-58.

⁵ Ibid. p.50.

⁶ For Hasegawa Fujihiro, see Masako Yoshida. "Trade Stories: Chinese Export Embroideries in the Metropolitan Museum". *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, vol.49 (New York, 2014), p. 171 and its footnote 22.

⁷ For the trade route of Saikyō-ji piece, see *ibid*, p. 171 and its footnotes 23, 24.

⁸ For Kamei Korenori, see *ibid*, p.171 and footnotes 25, 26.

⁹ For the trade route of Jōden-ji piece, see *ibid*, p.171-172 and its footnotes 28, 29.

¹⁰ For the piece in the San Giovanni Battista, see *ibid*, p. 166 and its footnotes 4-9.

¹¹ For the Banna-ji piece, see Yoshida, *op.cit.*, 2001, p.45.

¹² For the Chion-ji piece, see *ibid*.

¹³ Alvaro Semedo. *Imperio de la China: I cultura evangelica en èl, por los religiosos de la Compañia de Iesus* (Madrid: Impreso por Iuan Sanchez, 1642). English translation by a person of quality, *The History of That Great and Renowned Monarchy of China* (London: E.Tyler for I Crook, 1655) pp.8-9.

¹⁴ Antonio de Morga. *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (Mexico, 1609). English translation by Emma Blair and James Robertson, *Events in the Filipinas Islands in the Philippine Islands 1493-1898*, Vol. XVI, Chapter 8, (Mandaluyong, Rizal: Cachos Hermanos Inc., 1973) pp.176-179.

¹⁵ John Saris and Ernest Satow. *The Voyage of Captain John Saris to Japan 1613*, edited from contemporary records by Ernest Satow, works issued by the Hakluyt Society, 2d ser., no.5 (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967) (Reprint of the 1900 ed.). Appendix B, Observations of Saris on the eastern trade, pp.212, 216, 227-228.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ This information was kindly offered by Dr. Xiaoxin Li, Assistant Curator of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

¹⁸ For the Calico Museum piece, see Yoshida, op.cit., 2014, p.175 and its foot notes 47-50.

¹⁹ For the CMGJ piece, see Yoshida, op.cit., 2001, p.47 and its footnotes 6-9.

²⁰ Sezon Museum and Shizuoka Prefectural Museum. *Porutogaru to nanban-bunka, [Portugal and Nanban culture - Via Orientalis]* (Tokyo: Nihon-hōsō-kyōkai, 1993) pp.130-132.

²¹ For the FRESS piece, see Yoshida, op.cit., 2014, pp.175-176.

²² For the piece in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, see ibid., pp.176-177 and its footnotes 52-54.

²³ Elena Phipps, Johanna Hecht, and Cristina Martín. *The Colonial Andes: Tapestries and Silver Works, 1530–1830*. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), pp.250-252.

²⁴ Schuyler Cammann. “Chinese Influence in Colonial Peruvian Tapestries.” *Textile Museum Journal*, no. 3 (Washington, D.C., 1964), pp.26-27, 32.