

12 exhibition highlights
in plain English



China's hidden century

About this book

This book is written using short, easy to read sentences. It can be used by anyone, including visitors with additional learning needs, families and speakers of other languages.

This book takes you on a tour of the exhibition. It looks at 12 different objects.

A map of the exhibition shows you where to find the objects.

The exhibition has seven sections. There is an introduction to each section.

Please let us know what you think about this book.

Tell a member of staff or email
access@britishmuseum.org

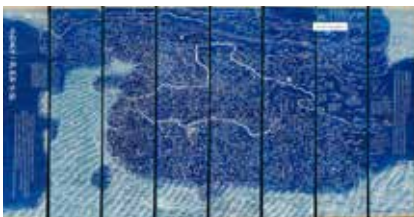
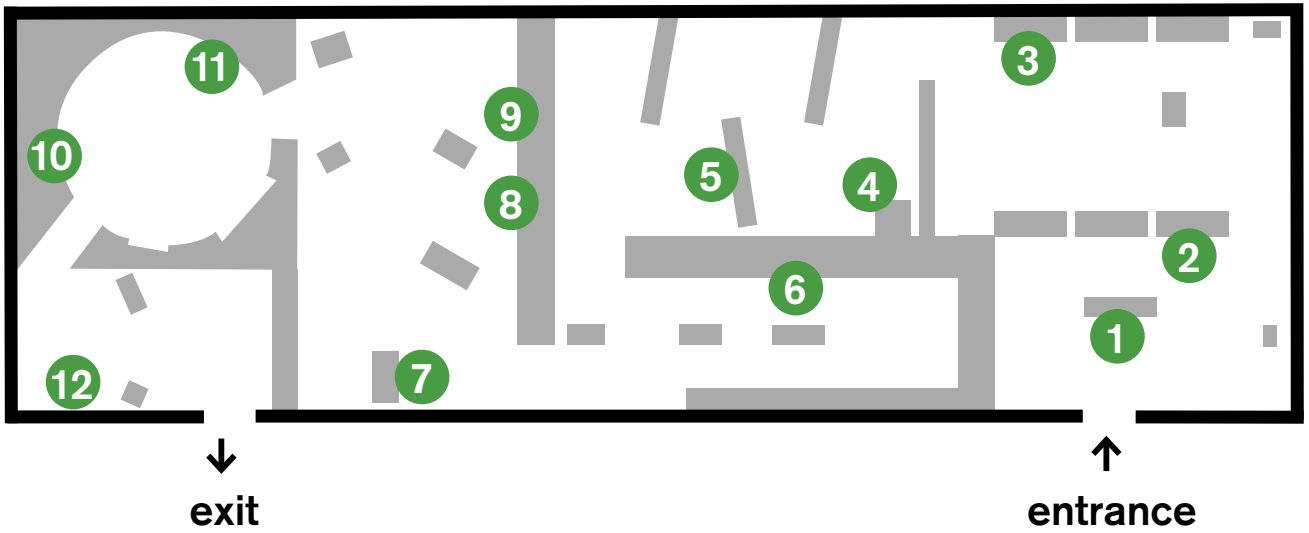
A large print guide containing the entire exhibition text is also available.

Objects

Each object has a number. These numbers are on the exhibition map on the next page. The map shows you where each object is in the exhibition.

- 1 Map
- 2 Young boy's robe
- 3 Theatre hanging
- 4 Armour
- 5 Painting of Queen Victoria
- 6 Teapot
- 7 Straw coat, hat and basket
- 8 Hair pieces
- 9 Dried seaweed
- 10 Umbrella
- 11 Medicine chest
- 12 Flag

Exhibition map



1



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12

Introduction

Introduction to China's hidden century

The last family to rule China were the Qing family.

The Qing ruled for over 250 years.

They were wealthy and powerful.

During their rule there were many wars across China.

It was also a time of change and new inventions.

People were creative despite the difficult times.

Introduction



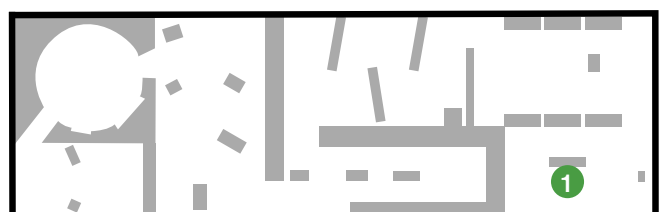
1 Map

Two hundred years ago, over 330 million people lived in China.

Only 10.5 million people lived in Britain at that time.

This map shows the land that the Qing rulers controlled.

Image: © The British Library, London, 1540.b.14 ff1-8



Court

Introduction to Court

Qing rulers lived in the city of Beijing in northeast China.

Today we call their main palace the Forbidden City.

Six different members of the Qing family ruled China in the 1800s.

Three were adult men.

Three were young boys.

One woman also had lots of power. She was called Cixi.

Court



② Young boy's robe

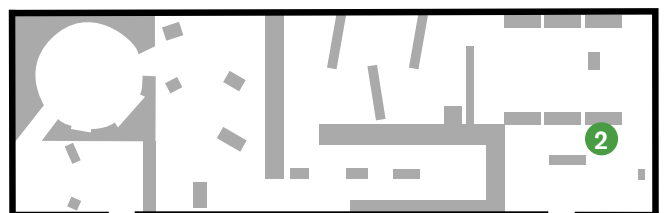
This robe was worn by a ruler called Guangxu.

He was only four years old when he became emperor.

The robe has dragons on it.

In Chinese stories, dragons controlled water and the weather.

Image: © Chris Hall
Collection



Court



3 Theatre hanging

This large textile was hung behind the actors on a stage.

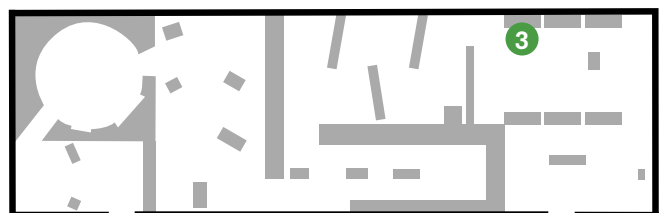
In the centre is a picture of a warrior.

His face has been padded out to look more real.

His beard is made of yak hair.

Yak is an animal like an ox.

Image: © Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Fong Chow, 1959 (59.190)



Military

Introduction to Military

During Qing rule there were lots of wars.

Some were between different groups of people in China.

Some were with other countries.

Millions of people died and many homes were destroyed.

Lots of people moved to cities for safety and to find new work.

Military



4 Armour

Some men came from families of soldiers.

They were called bannermen.

They were well paid.

They were treated better than ordinary soldiers.

This silk armour belonged to a bannerman.

Image: © Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, George C. Stone Bequest, 1936 (36.25.4a-s)



Military



5 Painting of Queen Victoria

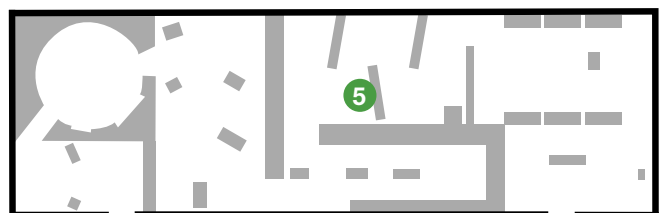
This painting shows Queen Victoria.

Victoria was queen in Britain when the Qing emperors ruled in China.

Britain and China went to war because of a drug called opium.

Britain wanted to sell opium in China but China did not want it.

Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum



Artists

Introduction to Artists

Even though war made life hard, people still made beautiful art.

Artists copied art from the past.

They were also inspired by art from other countries.

Artists



6 Teapot

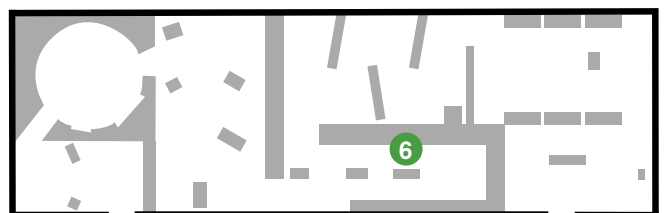
Calligraphy is a type of Chinese handwriting.

It is also art.

This teapot is made to look like a much older brick.

It is decorated with an older writing style.

Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum



Everyday life

Introduction to Everyday life

Most people in China lived ordinary lives.

Many did not live past the age of 40.

As well as war, there were floods and natural disasters.

Large cities grew as people moved for work and food.

New technology led to new businesses.

Some people became rich. They decorated their homes and wore clothes in new styles.

Everyday life



7 Straw coat, hat and basket

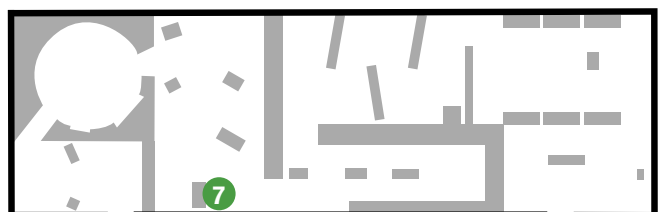
These objects were made by folding and stitching leaves or straw together.

They kept the rain out.

In the countryside, fishermen and farmers wore them.

In cities, street cleaners wore them.

Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum



Everyday life



8 Hair pieces

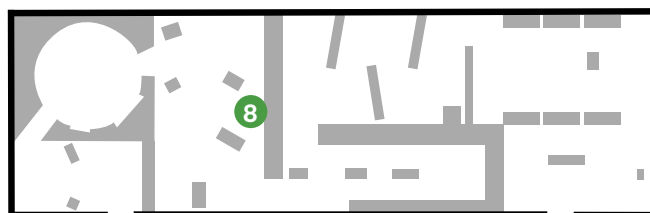
Some people used wigs to create fancy hairdos.

These wigs are made from horsehair.

They were styled then attached to natural hair.

Hairpins, jewels and flowers were also added.

Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum



Everyday life



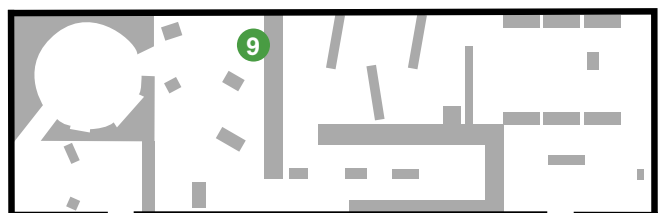
9 Dried seaweed

These are bundles of dried seaweed.

Seaweed was used as a cooking ingredient.

Chinese chefs added seaweed to soup.

Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum



Introduction to Global Qing

China traded with many other countries.

Traders bought tea, spices and luxury items.

Chinese people mixed with more people and ideas.

New technology and better transport changed people's lives.

Global Qing



10 Umbrella

Skilled Chinese craft workers made beautiful objects for foreigners.

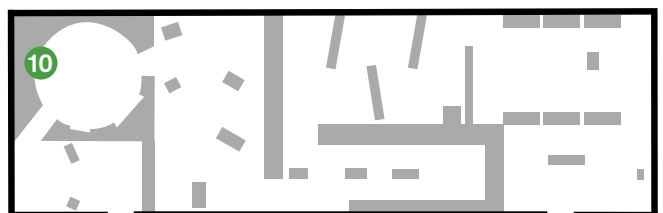
This silk umbrella – or parasol – protected its owner from the sun.

The decoration shows different people.

One holds a duck on a plate.

Another styles her hair.

Image: © The Teresa Coleman Collection



Global Qing



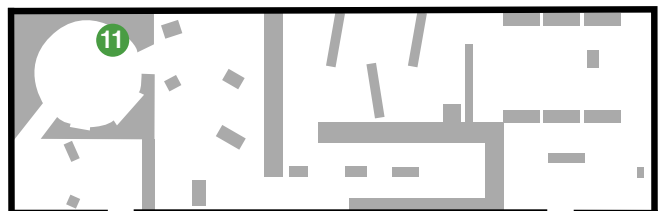
11 Medicine chest

A Chinese doctor owned this chest.

It is filled with dried insects and seahorses.

There are written charms to help a sick person get better.

Image: © Great North Museum,
Hancock



Reform to revolution

Introduction to Reform to revolution

After suffering many wars, China tried to change.

The army was updated.

Education was improved.

People visited other countries to learn.

Eventually there was a revolution.

The last Qing emperor was forced to give up his rule in 1912.

Reform to revolution



12 Flag

The army replaced its old flag with this one.

Qing flags were usually square or triangular.

This new rectangle shape was popular with other countries.

It shows a blue dragon and a red sun.

Image © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London with acknowledgements to the Royal Hospital of St Bartholomew

