

Large print exhibition text



China's hidden century

**Please do not remove
from the exhibition**

We believe that by understanding the past, we all have the opportunity to define the future. In the Citi exhibition **China's hidden century**, the Museum uses its incredible collection together with loans from over 30 lenders to bring to life, in a global first, the phenomenal cultural creativity of 19th-century China.

This exhibition is the result of a four-year research project, undertaken by over 100 scholars from 14 countries. It includes 300 objects from around the world. As the world's most global bank, we recognise the importance of an international network, giving us the ability to connect and do business in nearly 160 countries. This in turn enables us to use our insights and local knowledge to serve as a trusted partner to our clients, by responsibly providing financial services that enable growth and economic progress.

Sponsor's statement

We are incredibly proud to partner with the British Museum, supporting it in its role as one of the most important global guardians of history.

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China's hidden century

The Qing was China's last dynasty, ruling from 1644 to 1912.

The final century of Qing rule was one of turmoil, but also extraordinary resilience and creativity.

Here, the stories of China's remarkable people emerge from the shadows...

**Exhibition introduction panel,
to left of entrance:**

China's hidden century

Manchu armies from the northeast of China overthrew the Ming dynasty, founding the Qing dynasty and ruling China from 1644 to 1912. By 1796, the Qing ruled over one-third of all humanity and established one of the most prosperous empires in world history. In 1912 imperial rule collapsed. The dynasty's final years were challenged by natural disasters, internal uprisings and foreign invasions. Despite this, the nineteenth century was an era of extraordinary cultural creativity, and of political, social and technological innovation, as people across China lived resourceful and resilient lives.

Display case, labels left to right:

Bilingual imperial document

候選員外郎加二級李立德之本生父母

Manchu, an ethnic group from modern-day northeast China, had a different language and different beliefs, tastes and customs to the Han people of central China they ruled over. Manchu language was written down as part of state-building policy in northeast Asia in the early 1600s. It remained an official language across the Qing empire, representing a channel of communication to the throne. In this Manchu and Chinese patent, the Jiaqing emperor (ruled 1796–1820) records titles awarded posthumously to the parents of an official.

Handscroll; inks on paper-backed silk

20 January 1806

Beijing

The British Library

Part of an imperially commissioned dictionary

御製五體清文鑑

Qing China was multi-ethnic and multilingual. This dictionary comprises 2,580 pages in five languages: Manchu, Tibetan, Mongolian, vernacular Chagatai or Eastern Turki (spoken in Uyghur regions) and Chinese. It also includes transliterations (to help pronunciation) of the scripts into Manchu. These pages feature food names – grape-coloured flatbread, red flatbread, sachima with goji berries, sachima with raisins, plain sachima and flaxseed oil.

Book; ink on paper

1794

Beijing

The British Library

Image caption:


Sachima, recorded in the dictionary, is a pastry of fried batter mixed with sugar syrup that originated in Manchuria and is still popular in China today.

© Freerlaw | Dreamstime.com

A multilingual empire

You can hear the food names recorded in this multilingual dictionary spoken in Manchu by Lars Laamann, Tibetan by Wandejia, Mongolian by Terigele, Chagatai by Mukaddes Muhata'er and Chinese by Wenyuan Xin.

The words grape-coloured flatbread, red flatbread, sachima with goji berries, sachima with raisins, plain sachima, and flaxseed oil are spoken.

 Duration: about 1 minute

Central display case:

All-under-heaven complete map of the everlasting unified Qing empire

大清萬年一統地理全圖

In 1800, Qing China's population was 330 million, rising to 430 million by 1850, while only 10.5 million people lived in Britain. Qing China was larger in land mass than China is today. On this map the states are not shown to scale; their size reflects their relative importance to the Qing emperors. Europe is just visible in the margins on the left.

Blue ink on eight rolls of paper

About 1800 (based on a map of 1767)

Beijing

The British Library

Image caption:

During the later 1800s, European empires and economies grew massively and the USA rose to prominence on the world stage. These foreign powers threatened the Qing. This postcard shows humanised foreign forces including a Russian bear, British bulldog, French frog and American eagle menacing Qing China.

© By permission of the British Library, Cartographic Items
Maps C.1.a.9.(184.)

Display to the right, labels right to left:**Quote:**

I'm all dressed up and my face is freshly adorned...
I can only bewail the fate that forbids me to roam.

Unknown Manchu woman

This exhibition aims to humanise a century that has been dismissed as a period of decline, sandwiched between the glories of the 1700s and momentous changes of the 1900s. Qing China was controlled by men. Women were rarely recorded except through the actions of their fathers, husbands or sons. The style of painting and costume suggest that this young woman was part of the imperial court. On formal occasions, Manchu women wore three earrings in each earlobe as a marker of their ethnicity.

Unknown artist, Portrait of an unknown Manchu woman
1796–1880


Album leaf; ink and colours on silk

Beijing

British Museum, 2023,3001.1

The words of a Manchu woman

Listen to the imagined words of a Manchu woman, spoken in Chinese and English.

 Duration: about 1 minute

Scan the QR code or visit britishmuseum.org/china-resources#court-lady to read a transcript



Map of Beijing

京師全圖

After 1644, Manchu Qing rulers divided Beijing and other cities along ethnic lines as they feared uprisings by the Han majority. Han was, and still is, the dominant ethnic group in China. The rectangle with an orange square on this map is the imperial palace complex, surrounded by the area reserved for Manchus. Han residents lived to the south in the walled part of the city. Foreigners from outside China lived in the diplomatic quarter (highlighted in the enlarged detail at top right).

Paper and printing inks
About 1900, Beijing
The British Library

Court

Section panel, to the right:

Court

Qing emperors claimed universal power over all things spiritual and temporal. Six emperors ruled in succession between 1796 and 1912 from imperial palaces in Beijing (the Forbidden City and Summer Palaces), and from Rehe in Chengde, northeast of the capital. Three adults were followed by three children whose reigns were dominated by Empress Dowager Cixi as regent.

Representations of people at court changed dramatically with the advent of photography. While still ethnically distinct, the Manchu imperial family increasingly adopted Han-Chinese culture. As well as state religion, courtiers held their own varied beliefs. Palace fashion saw creative innovations in dress and furnishings. New forms of entertainment engaged the court, including Peking opera and contemporary dance.

Imperial timeline, right to left:

Underestimated emperor

The Jiaqing emperor

Ruled 1796–1820

Emperor forced to open China

The Daoguang emperor

Ruled 1821–1850

Witness of Qing decline

The Xianfeng emperor

Ruled 1851–1861

Controversial ruler

Empress Dowager Cixi

Lived 1835–1908

Puppet emperor

The Tongzhi emperor

Ruled 1862–1874

Court

Reforming emperor

The Guangxu emperor

Ruled 1875–1908

Last emperor

The Xuantong emperor (Puyi)

Ruled 1908–1912

Imperial blue robe

Emperors were believed to control the universe. This full-length garment is decorated with nine gold dragons (one is hidden under the inner front fold). The multicoloured auspicious clouds indicate that a sage ruler is on the throne.

The emperor's robe is further distinguished by 12 imperial symbols: sun, moon, constellations, mountains, paired dragons, a pheasant, ritual cups (with tigers), water weed, millet, fire, an axe and a **fu** symbol.

Silk, embroidered in multicoloured silks and couched gold thread, about 1800, Imperial workshops: Nanjing, Suzhou or Hangzhou

The Teresa Coleman Collection

Central display case:

Quote:

I have often thought that I am the cleverest woman that ever lived... I have heard much about Queen Victoria ... her life was not half as eventful as mine.

Court

Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908)

Cixi was the de-facto ruler of China from 1861 to 1908. She was a consort of the Xianfeng emperor. Her son became the Tongzhi emperor, and her nephew ruled as the Guangxu emperor. She was a direct contemporary of Queen Victoria, whose life fascinated her. Cixi's reputation suffered in China after she effectively deposed her nephew. After this, she was increasingly seen as a power-hungry old woman.

Made for the Empress Dowager, this informal outer gown incorporates Japanese Meiji-period (1868–1912) motifs from contemporary kimono designs, including a swooping phoenix with peacock tail feathers. Cixi had hundreds of casual robes and changed her costume about 10 times daily.

Robe; kesi with embroidery


About 1880–1908

Nanjing, Suzhou or Hangzhou

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
gift of Mrs. William H. Bliss, 1927 (27.33)

Cixi's own words

Listen to the words of Empress Dowager Cixi, spoken in Manchu, Chinese and English.

 Duration: about 1 minute

Scan the QR code or visit britishmuseum.org/china-resources#cixi to read a transcript



Image caption:

Photography made images of the imperial family widely accessible for the first time. Cixi posed as a theatrical performer, a religious figure or with foreign diplomats.

© Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives

Court

Display cases to left of central case:

Snuff bottles

Snuff bottles kept powdered tobacco dry.

Before 1860, high-status bannermen, government officials and wealthy merchants were the main consumers of fine quality examples. After 1860, they became more widespread across China as fashionable male accessories. For the market outside the court, craftsmen made bottles from less precious materials, including tangerine skin or coconut.

Porcelain, coral, rock crystal, silver, ivory, pearl, glass, hardstone, enamel, lacquer, gold, bronze and kingfisher feather

1800–1900

China

British Museum

Boy emperor's informal robe

Festive robes showing dragons against a yellow background were only worn by the emperor. Few made for child emperors survive. This robe was probably worn by the Guangxu emperor (ruled 1875–1908). Manchu rulers had five categories of formal wear – official, festive, regular, travelling and military. They were worn on specified state occasions and had a summer and winter version. Each style came with accessories such as hats, boots and jewellery.

Embroidered silk and gold thread

1875–1900

Nanjing, Suzhou or Hangzhou

Chris Hall Collection

Image caption:

The Guangxu emperor as a child, wearing a similar robe to that displayed here. Photograph from **Intimate China: The Chinese as I Have Seen Them**, Archibald Little, 1899.

© Society for Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge in China

Thumb rings

Manchu archers and cavalrymen commissioned rings to wear on the hand that pulled the bowstring, to allow for a snappier release during archery on horseback. In the late 1800s, their use spread to the merchant class and other elites. What had originated as a sign of Manchu ancestry also became an accessory, and a symbol of masculinity, for Han-Chinese men.

Jadeite, lapis lazuli, chalcedony, ivory, silver,
ceramic, glass, horn and boxwood
1800–1900

China

Gift of Mr and Mrs William Reid

British Museum, 2022,3037.1–16

Pair of royal vases

Cloisonné was made predominantly during the Ming and Qing dynasties to decorate imperial halls and temples, or to bestow as gifts. The last Qing emperor Xuantong (ruled 1908–12), also called Puyi, had this pair of tall vases presented as a diplomatic gift to King George V and Queen

Mary, to mark their coronation in June 1911. They are decorated with dragons which face each other. The bases have seal marks of the Qianlong emperor (1736–95), a homage to the finest cloisonné of previous rulers. The vases are still displayed at Buckingham Palace.

Cloisonné enamel on copper
with carved wooden stands

1908–11

Beijing

Lent by His Majesty The King

Image caption:

Coronation portrait of King George V
and Queen Mary, 1911–12.

© Lebrecht Music & Arts / Alamy Stock Photo

Court beliefs

Qing emperors believed themselves to be, and were seen as divine rulers, holding the 'Mandate of Heaven' to govern. Following Confucian tradition, they fasted, prayed and performed ceremonies to maintain heaven's blessings for their people. Individual court members had their own beliefs – Shamanistic (from their Manchu homelands), Buddhist and Daoist. Outside the court, Christianity grew through contact with Catholic and Protestant missionaries, and new cults such as the Taiping and Boxers emerged. Muslims lived all over China.

Ritual vessels

As part of state religion, the Qing emperors conducted services using vessels. These porcelain versions copied the bronze containers used for serving food and drink offerings during the Shang and Zhou dynasties (about 1600–221 BC). The blue vessels are from the Temple of Heaven, the yellow ones from the Temple of

Agriculture in Beijing. Annual ceremonies were conducted at both sites by the emperor to ensure good harvests.

Glazed porcelain, 1821–50, Jingdezhen
British Museum, 1925,1021.1 and 2; on loan from The Sir Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, PDF,A.534; PDF.586

Unknown artist, Portrait of a Daoist priest

張誠五清照

This painting shows Zhang Chengwu, a Daoist priest from the White Cloud Monastery in Beijing, who served two temples near the palace. The monastery was a place for discussing late-Qing political reforms and state-building programmes. Gao Rentong (1841–1907), who wrote the inscription above this portrait, received Cixi's patronage and that of her favoured eunuch, Liu Chengyin (died 1894). In turn, Gao bestowed Daoist titles on Cixi.

Framed hanging scroll; ink and colours on paper
1886
Beijing
Jacqueline Simcox Ltd

Court

Buddhist figure

Buddhism was an important component of the Qing court's belief system, with Mongolian and Tibetan lamas (teachers) and monks conducting services at court. Palace complexes had places to worship, but there were also imperially supported temples outside palace walls, such as Yonghegong in northeast Beijing, where this figure comes from. It was made during the Jiaqing emperor's reign and donated by A-wang-luo-jie, a monk.

Gilt-bronze and cold painting in
coral red, blue and black pigment
1811, Beijing
Donated by Dr George Witt
British Museum, W.412

Display cases to right of central case:**Court dress**

In the early 1800s, imperial robes had Manchu horse-hoof shaped cuffs extending over the wrist. During the reign of the Daoguang emperor (1821–50) new styles were created as court costume absorbed styles from Han fashion, including wider sleeves. Palace women incorporated design innovations into their informal wear. From about the 1870s they used European dyes in new colours, and motifs based on Japanese dress. By the 1900s, the influence of Western fashion brought a slimmer silhouette to both male and female garments. The changes were more visible in formal than official robes.

Court

Woman's court vest and robe

Manchu women wore full length robes, while Han women dressed in jackets and skirts. With a detachable collar and wide armholes, this sleeveless vest features a pierced rock and bamboo with artemisia leaves against a patterned border. This new style of outer garment was popularly worn over a full-length robe, like the example decorated with butterflies, which in China are a symbol of longevity. The robe was owned by Der Ling (1881–1944), a lady-in-waiting for Cixi who wrote **Two years in the Forbidden City**, an account of her life as a courtier.

1895–1911

Nanjing, Suzhou or Hangzhou

Blue silk vest; lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Florance Waterbury, 1945 (45.125.13)

Red silk robe; lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Mr. and Mrs. George F. Miller, 1970 (1970.145)

Image caption:

Hand-coloured photograph showing court women wearing colourful robes, Manchu headdresses and short vest jackets, alongside the wives of Western diplomats in the Forbidden City, Beijing, 1902–5.

© CPA Media Pte Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo

Court

Hair and body ornaments

Court women were given jewellery for special celebrations such as marriage or birthdays, however the items remained the property of the imperial household. Hairpins were elaborate three-dimensional creations, with tassels and moving parts. The examples here feature coral, kingfisher feathers and freshwater pearls from the rivers of the northeast Manchu home territories. The fingernail guards, made to protect the long nails on the little finger, are gold filigree with a design of plum blossom.

Jade, coral, gold, pearls, kingfisher
feathers and glass

1800–1900

China

Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston
Franks, British Museum, AF.64;
The Teresa Coleman Collection

Image caption:

In this painting from the workshop of Zhou Peichun (active about 1880–1910), a jeweller makes a hair ornament by applying kingfisher feathers to a silver-gilt hairpin.

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Court furnishings

Qing emperors and their households worked and relaxed within complexes comprising ritual and devotional spaces, living quarters and gardens. In furnishing these palaces, the court showed its fascination for foreign objects, personal taste and creativity. Interiors displayed European goods such as carpets and clocks alongside Japanese screens and crystal balls. Artisans in the palace workshops used new techniques for glassmaking. Innovative porcelain designs were commissioned from the famous kiln at Jingdezhen, 735 miles from Beijing.

Court

Late-Qing glass

Using new technology, these red and white vases were made by blowing colourless glass with small white inclusions ('snowflake' glass) into a bottle shape before overlaying it with copper-red glass. The red glass was painstakingly cut away, revealing the snowflake glass below. The multicoloured vase is a new and unusual colour combination. The yellow glass dish is carved with two fish in a lotus pond.

Carved coloured cameo glass

1800–1900

China

Bristol Museums: Bristol Museum and Art Gallery

Late-Qing lacquerwares

In China, bats are a symbol for happiness and usually appear only as a decorative motif. This pair of boxes are unusual in being formed in the shape of bats. They bear a double 'happiness' character, suggesting that they were perhaps a marriage gift. The other boxes – one with auspicious characters; the other representing a stack of books – are examples of **trompe l'oeil** lacquer.

Carved lacquer

1800–50

Possibly Suzhou

Victoria and Albert Museum; on loan courtesy
of National Museums Scotland

Court

Late-Qing porcelains

Before the Taiping Civil War (1851–64), one of the bloodiest civil wars in world history, Jingdezhen – the headquarters of high-class porcelain manufacture in central China – received large-scale commissions from the imperial household. Crockery was made to specific designs and shipped in vast quantities to Beijing. Specific bowl colours were used by different ranks at court.

Porcelain rice bowls, 1796–1850, Jingdezhen

Given by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks

British Museum, Franks.363; Franks.632.+; Franks.633.+a

Porcelain commissioned by the Empress Dowager Cixi

On Ci'an and Cixi's official retirement in 1873, the Garden of Beautiful Spring was reconstructed within the new Summer Palace. Cixi made her compound grander and more lavish than her co-regent Ci'an's. The imperial kilns at Jingdezhen made colourful porcelain sets at the Empress Dowager's request. The act flaunted convention, since commissioning palace ceramics was traditionally a task for the emperor.

Porcelain bowl with overglaze and grisaille enamels
1874–5

Jingdezhen

British Museum, 1963,0719.1

Court

Empress Dowager Cixi, Tree peonies

慈禧太后御筆牡丹圖軸

Cixi gifted artworks to visiting diplomats and officials, particularly after the anti-foreign Boxer uprising (1899–1901) that happened during her time as co-regent, as she tried to improve China's image abroad. She used 'ghost' artists as mentors to improve her own work, and to meet the demand for imperially-authored gifts. Several were female artists, such as her tutor, Miao Jiahui. As the artworks circulated, this female group became widely known outside the court.

Hanging scroll; ink and colours on paper

1902, Beijing

Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery,
Exeter City Council

Opera at the Qing court

Cixi invited famous Beijing actors to the palace to perform Chinese operas (sung plays) in extravagant fashion. These all-male or all-female performances were spectacular, with colourful costumes and headgear and elaborately made-up faces. A vast repertoire of movements including mime, dance, stylised gestures, martial arts and acrobatics accompanied the songs and music. Professional performers also presented this new style of court opera to the wider population.

Court

Monumental hanging

Dramatic textiles such as this perhaps served as a backdrop for an operatic performance, but originally derived from hangings for religious festivals or banners in ritual processions. In the centre is a theatrical warrior figure, with a yak hair beard and padded-out face. The colours and method of depicting the figures is similar to woodblock printed images of popular deities.

Silk and metallic thread embroidery on
plain-weave wool with animal fibres
1800–1900

China

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

Opera costume for the role of a princess

This multicoloured, embroidered costume has a round neck, layered cloud shoulders and collar. The skirt has two layers of narrow streamers with pointed tips, tassels and jade pendants. From surviving paintings of opera characters, we know that it was made in the late-Qing era, for the role of a princess or emperor's consort. Performers playing goddesses or fairies also sometimes wore this costume.

Silk, satin and embroidery

1870–1900

China

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
gift of John A. Bross, 1970 (1970.274)

Image caption:

Album leaf portrait showing the makeup and costume of a princess in a Peking opera, about 1851–74.

© National Library of China

Court

Display and film on left wall:

Yu Rongling (1882–1973)

Yu Rongling was the younger daughter of the Manchu diplomat, Yu Geng. When her father became China's ambassador to Japan in 1895, she accompanied him and learned Japanese ancient dances. After he was appointed ambassador to Paris in 1899, she began to study ballet and later trained with Isadora Duncan, a famous American dancer, who was then performing and teaching in Paris. Rongling returned to China in 1903. She caught Cixi's eye and introduced Western dances to court.

Image caption:

Yu Rongling in 1902 playing 'Butterfly girl' in **Rose and butterfly**, a dance inspired by the American actress and dancer Loie Fuller (1862–1928). Published in **Xin guan cha**, 1957 (13).

© SOAS Library C Per /82379, University of London

Yu Rongling's sword dance

Here, Yu Rongling performs a dance with swords. The performance was filmed at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, in June 1926.

 Duration: about 2 minutes

This is silent

© John Van Antwerp MacMurray Papers, MC094,
Public Policy Papers, Department of Special Collections,
Princeton University Library

Section panel, to the right:

Military

Foreign and domestic wars raged across Qing China throughout the 1800s. Civil conflicts including the White Lotus Insurrection (1796–about 1806), Xinjiang wars (1820s and 1860s) and Taiping Civil War (1851–64) caused the death of millions. International imperialism provoked the Opium Wars (1839–42 and 1856–60), Sino-French War (1884–5), Sino-Japanese War (1894–5) and Boxer War (1899–1901).

Fierce competition for work and resources drove unrest among the educated and the poor. As a result of warfare in their own home regions, people migrated to safer cities and to the borderlands in search of food and work. A combination of army mutinies and civil uprisings eventually ended the imperial era in 1912.

Display case to the left:

Bannermen

Bannermen were elite hereditary soldiers who commanded divisions called the Eight Banners, identified by eight coloured flags. They were mostly Manchus, Mongols and some Chinese whose ancestors fought against the Ming dynasty in 1644. Most bannermen lived in the region around Beijing. In provincial garrisons they lived apart from the local population, often in walled sections of major cities. Bannermen were paid a state salary and enjoyed preferential treatment under the law and in the national and regional exam system, success in which led to a government post.

Unknown artist, Ancestor portrait of a bannerman

八旗將領像

This bannerman commander sits next to a spear on a round-backed armchair draped with a tiger skin. He wears padded silk ceremonial armour with protective brass studs and polished metal plates. A contemporary viewer would recognise the eagle feathers and sable-tail plumes in his helmet as belonging to a senior elite officer.

Hanging scroll; ink and colour on silk

About 1796–1820

China

Royal Ontario Museum. The George Crofts Collection

Image caption:

Photograph of bannerman Huang Peisong by S. Schoenke, a photographer and watchmaker active in Fuzhou from 1862–89.

© Published in **A collection of essays
in honour of Huang Manshi, 1976**

Central display case:

Quote:

Alone I commanded a road full of soldiers,
killing wave after wave of the evil rovers.

Bannerman

An officer of the Imperial Guards wore this silk military uniform, white metal helmet and quiver. It was not made to measure, but bought 'off the shelf' in the 'Established Sisheng Shop' on the west side of Small Market Street, Guangzhou (Canton). Located in the banner garrison district, the shop specialised in making armour, sabres, quivers, banners and saddles. Such trappings were not for sale to ordinary Chinese people. The short sword in a tortoiseshell scabbard and curved sword in a fish skin scabbard are typical Qing weapons.


About 1840–80
Guangzhou

Uniform; cotton, silk, copper alloy, steel, gold, silver, wood, yak hair, leather, lacquer, paper and pigment
Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase, George C. Stone Bequest, 1936 (36.25.4a–s)
Weapons; tortoiseshell, fish skin and steel
British Museum

Boots; silk and cotton
Given by Sir Edward Belcher
British Museum, As1842,1210.16.a–b

Voice of a bannerman

Listen to the words of General Mingliang (1735–1822), spoken in Manchu and English.

 Duration: about 1 minute

Scan the QR code or visit britishmuseum.org/china-resources#bannerman to read a transcript



Display case to the right:

**Unknown artist, Album of an official career
at land and sea**

四營會哨、禮佛報恩

Many graduates of the civil service exams were posted to positions across the country which included the supervision of troops. This illustrated album records the postings of such a man in the eastern province of Zhejiang. His activities include inspecting naval exercises at sea and visiting the Jingci temple in Hangzhou to celebrate his 60th birthday and have sutras chanted for him.

Ink and colours on paper

1884

Zhejiang

Donated by Mrs Alfred Wingate

British Museum, 1938,1210,0.5.1-6

**Wanyan Linqing (1791–1846), Wild swan
tracks on snow: an illustrated record of
my pre-ordained life**

鴻雪因緣圖記

Wanyan Linqing, a Manchu bannerman and high-ranking official, wrote this three-volume book. Part-travelogue, part-diary, it shows how one man used his travels to make sense of his life. His sons had it printed in Yangzhou, with 240 engravings by leading contemporary artists illustrating episodes from their father's life. Linqing achieved the **jìnshì** degree (the highest possible) in 1809, aged just 18, and served the government and inner cabinet. He assisted his mother (pictured here) in the compilation of an anthology of poems by Qing women writers.

Books; printing ink on paper

1847–50

Yangzhou

Courtesy of The University of Manchester

Large freestanding display case behind:

Green Standard army

Soldiers in the Green Standard army – mostly Han Chinese – were treated as inferiors to the hereditary Manchu bannermen. In the Green Standard, officers rotated regularly so that personal loyalties could not be easily formed.

This group of mostly infantry soldiers was vast, numbering about 700,000, some three times the size of the bannerman army. Units were dispersed across China, reporting to local administrators, to maintain law and order.

Military flags

The triangular banner with a silver dragon and a flame-red border was attached to a long pole and held aloft in battle, as a rallying point for troops loyal to the Qing government. The rectangular flag featuring a winged tiger on its hind legs was flown from a tall pole. Printed texts regulated the use and design of flags.

Silk, cotton, paper and paint

1800–1900

China

Bristol Museums: Bristol Museum and Art Gallery

Soldiers' uniforms and weapons

The roundels at the centre of the jackets identified a soldier's unit. The white and red jacket was worn by a soldier of the Huai army from Anhui in eastern China; the red and black jacket is of a soldier from the border defence troops. Such jackets were worn over an undershirt and with loose black cotton trousers. Infantry often wore rattan hats and carried shields and guns.

1850–90, Anhui and Shandong

Uniforms; paper, lacquer, cotton, leather and wool
On loan from Plymouth City Council, The Box

Hats and shield; rattan and paint
British Museum

Weapons; wood and metal
British Museum

Image caption:

A Qing government soldier from North China.

© **Illustrations of China and its people: a series of two hundred photographs, with letterpress descriptive of the places and people represented** / by J. Thomson, F.R.G.S.

Label on wall to left of display case:

Military exercises

Soldiers trained to use different weapons, depending on whether they were in the cavalry or infantry. This set of images depicts with meticulous detail uniforms, postures and names of weapons including anvil lifting, double swords, trident, swallowtail shaped shield, infantry archery, sword with shield, long spear, long sword with curved blade, musket shooting, superintendence in the battlefield, advanced sword-fighting technique and mounted archery.

Album; ink on paper, 1800–30, Guangzhou

Donated by Sarah Maria Reeves

British Museum, 1877,0714,0.288-299, Ch.Ptg.413

Large freestanding display case to the right:

First Opium War (1839–1842)

In the early 1800s, ships began smuggling opium (an illegal narcotic) from British India into south China. As opium consumption increased, the Daoguang emperor banned the trade. The British surrendered 20,283 chests of British-owned opium, promising compensation to the merchants concerned. Lin Zexu (1785–1850), the emperor's special commissioner, confiscated and destroyed it all. The British government sent a fleet of ships to recoup compensation of lost opium profits. William Gladstone, future British Prime Minister said: 'A war more unjust in its origins ... a war more calculated ... to cover this country with permanent disgrace, I ... have not read of.'

A coastal map of the seven provinces

七省沿海圖

Commissioned by the Qing court, this map includes useful practical details on navigation and instructions for ships moving between eastern ports. It records distances between off-shore islands, reefs and sandbars, as well as places vital for coastal defences. In the early 1800s Qing officials perceived the main threat to the coast to be from pirates and natural disasters.

Handscroll; ink and watercolour on paper

About 1800

China

The British Library

Lin Zexu (1785–1850)

A talented administrator and crisis manager, Lin Zexu (shown above) travelled throughout the empire. In the 1830s, the Qing court concluded that addiction to opium had swamped the bureaucracy, the military and the aristocracy, and cracked down on trade. In 1838, the Daoguang emperor commissioned Lin Zexu to eradicate foreign opium importation through the city of Guangzhou (Canton). Lin wrote to Queen Victoria condemning the British opium trade and pressurised Guangzhou merchants to cease dealing in the drug.

Fa Kunhou, **Lin Zexu examining a sword and drinking wine**, about 1800–50

© Palace Museum, Beijing

Unknown artist, **Small portrait of Queen Victoria of England**

英吉利女主威多烈小照

An artist from Guangzhou painted this copy of a British print of Queen Victoria. He inscribed it: 'In 1842, the United Kingdom invaded Jinling [Nanjing]. After negotiation and submission, our responsible official boarded their boat several times. The foreign chief, George Tradescant Lay, showed him a small portrait of his Queen, and gave it as a gift. He also praised his Queen as very talented, only twenty-one years old and having chosen a compatriot, Prince Albert, as her consort.'

Hanging scroll; ink and colours on silk

1842

Guangzhou

Donated by E. Brake

British Museum, 1954,1009,0.14

Image caption:

This lithograph after Walter S. Sherwill shows a stacking room in the opium factory at Patna, India.

© Contraband Collection / Alamy Stock Photo

Beijing

The British Library

The Treaty of Nanjing

南京條約

This treaty, signed on 29 August 1842, marked the end of the First Opium War. Made between the Qing and Britain, it was the first of China's unequal treaties with foreign powers. It ended the 'Canton system', whereby European and American traders were restricted to Guangzhou. Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo and Shanghai were subsequently opened to European and American merchants. The Qing were ordered to pay an indemnity of \$21 million over three years and relinquish Hong Kong to the British.

Document; ink and wax on paper

29 August 1842

Nanjing

On loan from The National Archives, UK, FO 93/23/1b

Image caption:

This painting records the signing of the Treaty,
off the coast of Nanjing, aboard HMS **Cornwallis**.
It was ratified in Hong Kong on 26 June 1843.

© National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

Display case to the right:

Second Opium War (1856–1860)

Britain began the Second Opium War to force China to legalise the opium trade, and to secure profits. The 1858 Treaty of Tianjin opened 11 further ports to Western trade. In 1859, the Qing military defeated an Anglo-French fleet sent to Beijing to ratify the treaty. In 1860, more Anglo-French forces marched on Beijing. They looted the Summer Palace, home to the emperor. Prince Gong, the emperor's brother, signed the Convention of Beijing, bringing the war to an end. Reformers subsequently began to strengthen and modernise Qing rule.

Friedrich Wilhelm Keyl (1823–1873), Looty

Thought to belong to the Xianfeng emperor, Looty was the first of what became known as 'Pekinese' dogs in Britain. He was brought back from China after the Second Opium War, having been taken in the looting of the Summer Palace by Captain Dunne of the 99th Regiment. He was presented to Queen Victoria in April 1861. The **London Illustrated News** of 1861 reported: 'Looty is considered by everyone who has seen it the smallest and by far the most beautiful little animal that has appeared in this country.'

Painting; oil on canvas

1861

England

Lent by His Majesty The King

Remnants of the Summer Palace

Few items better evoke the 1860 loss and destruction of the Summer Palace (authorised by British High Commissioner to China, Lord Elgin (1811–63)) than these broken glazed turquoise architectural tiles. Little was added to the palace complex in the 1800s, and the brick and stone ruins of the European-inspired buildings have become the defining symbol of European violence against 19th-century China. Other areas of the site have been built upon to accommodate parts of the campuses of Peking University (China's first modern university) and Tsinghua University.

Turquoise glazed stoneware
1747–70
Beijing

Left: donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks,
British Museum, Franks.2543

Right: Victoria and Albert Museum

Large freestanding display case behind:**Hong Xiuquan (1814–1864)**

A village schoolmaster and failed examination candidate, Hong Xiuquan was exposed to Christian teachings through a missionary pamphlet. After suffering a nervous breakdown he became convinced that he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ and appointed himself 'Heavenly King', effectively first emperor of the Taiping. His Taiping Heavenly Kingdom occupied much of China. These garments were made for a member of the Taiping court.

Embroidered silk, 1851–64, Nanjing

Jacket; on loan courtesy of National Museums Scotland

Hood and boots; on loan from the Royal Engineers

Museum and Gordon's School

Image caption:

No authentic image of Hong Xiuquan survives. This portrait of Hong is from the frontispiece of **L'insurrection en Chine depuis son origine jusqu'à la prise de Nankin, 1853.**

© 'Courtesy of HathiTrust', public domain, Google-digitized

Taiping Civil War (1851–1864)

The Taiping Civil War was the deadliest in human history, causing the death of at least 20 million people. Hong Xiuquan (1814–64) proposed an alternative form of Christian government – the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom – that would remove the Qing from power. With about 200 million people under its control, the Taiping had its own rulers, officials, civil service exams, calendar, currency and laws. Western mercenaries fought on both sides. Foreigners pursued and protected their interests by supplying both the Qing and Taiping with weapons.

Taiping document forbidding destruction

This notice was pasted onto the house of a British missionary in Hangzhou by Taiping leaders to avoid its destruction by their army.

It names Huang Wenjin (1832–64) and Fan Ruzeng (1840–67) who were prominent figures in the Taiping movement. Later promoted to ‘kings’, they were killed in battle.

Ink on paper

1851–64, Hangzhou

On loan from the Syndics of Cambridge
University Library

Military

Taiping coins and seal

British and French smugglers supplied the Taiping army with foreign weapons between 1853 and 1864. The Taiping controlled foundries and metal supplies, enabling them to mint coins and cast cannon. They created their own calendar and engaged in diplomacy like a rival dynasty. This wood seal reads: 'Commander of the Left Rear Battalion of the First Central Battalion of the Army of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in Jiading County, Suzhou.'

1851–64, Nanjing
Coins; gold and copper-alloy
British Museum

Seal; wood
Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery,
Exeter City Council

Hong Xiuquan's handwriting and Taiping bible

The letter on blue paper was written by the British missionary Joseph Edkins, with hand-written corrections in red ink by Hong Xiuquan. Edkins wrote in large script because Hong's eyesight was failing and he refused to wear spectacles. Some of Hong's corrections include striking the word ~~only~~ from a description of Jesus as the only begotten Son. Taiping bibles had their own calendar and imperial seals.

Letter; ink on paper

1861

Nanjing

The British Library

Books; ink on paper

1851-64

Nanjing

The British Library

The defeat of the Taiping

The Taiping made Nanjing their capital in 1853, fortifying the former Ming capital with an outer wall. They destroyed the city's Porcelain Pagoda. Here the city of Nanjing is shown under siege by Qing troops, led by the commander Xiang Rong (died 1856). However, it is a fantasy victory as Xiang's army was defeated in 1856. The Taiping remained a threat to the Qing until 1864.

Woodblock print; ink and colours on paper

About 1864

Nanjing

SOAS Library, University of London (CWP 13)

Display case behind:**Qingkuan (1848–1927) et al., Battle at the Wei River**

平定回亂戰圖

Empress Dowager Cixi commissioned court artists in the Imperial Household Department to produce a series of epic scale paintings celebrating historic Qing victories in the civil wars with Taiping, Nian (people of the central plains) and Hui (Muslim) forces. Here, commander Duo-long-a (1817–64), wearing a yellow jacket on horseback at far left, leads Qing government troops to victory against Muslim insurgents at Putaowa (eastern Shaanxi province). It was made 20 years after the battle, suggesting how long it took to restore confidence in the dynasty's survival.

Painting; ink and colour on silk with wood frame
About 1886–90, Beijing
Lent by His Majesty The King

Section panel, to the right:

Artists

Even as the Qing empire found itself under exceptional pressure from violence in the 1800s, landscape paintings, fans and albums demonstrate that artistic traditions were not in decline, but coexisted with new 'modern' art. Western techniques such as lithography were embraced by artists trained also in traditional woodblock printing design, and by new magazines and newspapers in the coastal cities.

For centuries, the educated gentry class hoped to qualify for government service through the imperial examination system, which was abolished in 1905. This three-tier system existed at local, regional and imperial level. Passing these exams was once the only path to a career in the state bureaucracy.

However, as the likelihood of winning an official job dwindled, men sought alternative livelihoods and established new artistic and literary groups.

Display case in front:

Ren Xun (1835–1893), Magu gives her birthday greetings

麻姑獻壽圖

Arguably the most impactful form of art in imperial China was not painting by educated elites, but mass-produced religious art. Images of gods and goddesses circulated in the form of woodblock prints. This extraordinary painting represents the Daoist goddess Magu, protector of women. The east-coast painter Ren Xun used gold extensively to catch the light, and the viewers' eye.

Hanging scroll; ink, colours and gold on paper

About 1850–93

Shanghai

Michael Yun-Wen Shih

Display cases along left wall:

Antiquarianism and **bapo**

Traditionally, elite education involved the study of classic texts, but a new evidence-based approach in the late 1700s advocated the scrutiny of original source material. This intensified interest in text-bearing antiquities and new styles of calligraphy based on ancient inscriptions. Artists invented a way of reproducing images of antiques through three-dimensional rubbing, which they incorporated into their paintings. This original art style sat alongside **bapo**, which resembles a collage of scraps but is in fact painted.

Xugu (1823–1896), Bronze gui with Three Friends of Winter

格伯簋拓片、歲寒三友

Xugu came from a military family. During the Taiping Civil War (1851–64) he left his post to become a monk. Shown here, the ‘Three Friends of Winter’ (pine, prunus and bamboo) are so named because they maintain their colour in winter when other plants wither. They came to symbolise the steadfastness admired by the well-educated. A red seal impression inside belonged to Ruan Yuan (1764–1849), celebrated antiquarian and official.

Hanging scroll; ink and colours on paper

About 1850–96

Shanghai, Yangzhou or Suzhou

Nanshun Shanfang, Singapore

**Sun Mingqiu (1823 – after 1903),
Congratulatory Wishes for Longevity**

慶壽圖

Although well-versed in the classics, Sun Mingqiu never passed his civil service exams. In his 50s he turned his attention to **bapo** art. This collage-style **trompe l'oeil** painting was created when he was nearly 70. It expresses, through technical artistic innovation, a conventional love of ancient things, combining paintings of the legendary Eight Immortals of Daoist mythology with rubbings of antiquities.

Album leaf; ink and colours on paper and rubbing

1892

Beijing

British Museum, 1973,0917,0.59.44

Porcelains with **bapo** and seal designs

Interest in epigraphy (the study of inscriptions) and collecting seals drove a fashion for seal impressions as patterns on porcelain in the 1800s. The brush pot has an iron-red mark dating (falsely) to the Qianlong emperor's reign on the base. The seals painted on it are connected to eight famous scenic spots in Anhui province in east China. The teapot is decorated with texts from **My Humble Hut** by the Tang-dynasty poet Liu Yuxi (AD 772–842). The vase is painted in **bapo** style.

Porcelain with overglaze enamels
Jingdezhen

Brush pot; 1800–50
On loan from The Sir Percival David
Foundation of Chinese Art, PDF,A.776

Teapot; 1875–1908
British Museum, Franks.644.+

Vase; about 1862–74
Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase by
subscription, 1879 (79.2.662)

Calligraphy

In China, calligraphy is both handwriting and art. Antiquarianism came to dominate Qing intellectual life and artistic production in the 1800s. Scholars studied ancient inscriptions on bronzes, stones and other ancient artefacts, and these writing styles impacted their work. Artists were inspired by the calligraphy of ancient stone inscriptions, such as rectilinear shapes and elongated strokes. Poems and calligraphy by women gained wider recognition as the century progressed.

Poems by Cao Zhenxiu (1762 – about 1822)

列女圖冊

China possesses a long tradition of women writing annotated biographies about famously virtuous women, as exemplars of womanly ideals. Cao Zhenxiu composed 16 poems and had the young artist Gai Qi create the delicate images in this album. Cao selected clever female artists, calligraphers and warriors, projecting a new idea of the model woman.

Album; ink on paper, 1799, Suzhou

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Bequests of Edna H. Sachs and Flora E. Whiting, by exchange; Fletcher Fund, by exchange; Gifts of Mrs. Harry Payne Bingham and Mrs. Henry J. Bernheim, by exchange; and funds from various donors, by exchange, 2016 (2016.362a–t)

Image caption:

Text on the left of this portrait of Cao Zhenxiu by Zhou Li explains that it was painted from life after snowfall had melted, and that the artist completed it in half a day.

© Palace Museum, Beijing

Vase, inkstone and teapot with ancient calligraphy

The calligrapher Yi Bingshou (1754–1815) inscribed the vase, modelled after an antique bronze bell. The inkstone was inscribed by Huo Ziye (1780–1850) and the teapot imitates a Han-dynasty brick. Scholars regarded Yi's calligraphy as highly experimental. He was part of the antiquarian 'Study of Metal and Stone' (金石學) movement, which sought inspiration from inscribed ancient bronzes, tiles, bricks and steles from 1000 BC–AD 1000, rather than from imperfect copies of calligraphers' writing.

Moulded and incised stoneware

Vase; 1812

Tingzhou fu (now Changting)

Donated by William Cleverly Alexander

British Museum, 1910,0615.1

Inkstone; early 1800s

Yixing

Nanshun Shanfang, Singapore

Teapot; early 1800s

Yixing

Gift of Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks

British Museum, Franks.2459

**Zhu Cheng (1826–1900) and
Ren Xun (about 1835–1893)
Bronze vessels and flowers**

博古花卉四條屏

This type of art, combining a composite three-dimensional rubbing of ancient bronzes with painted flowers, was an innovation of the late 1700s to early 1800s. A growing interest in the display of inscriptions on ancient bronze ritual vessels and stone stele reflected the scholarly interests of their owners. The flowers here represent the four seasons. Together, the images create visual puns for good wishes.

Hanging scrolls; ink and colours on paper

1872

Shanghai

Michael Yun-Wen Shih

Talented women

Despite the fact that late-Qing society was male-dominated, women created their own work and collaborated artistically with their husbands and close social networks. Women such as Cao Zhenxiu (1762 – about 1822) are described as amateur artists and painted to demonstrate their cultural accomplishment, rather than in a ‘professional’ capacity. Women artists are underrepresented in museum and private collections today because their work rarely circulated outside their personal networks.

Ma Quan (1700s), Wealth and prestige in Jade Hall

玉堂富貴圖

A talented female artist painted this naturalistic scene of a magnolia tree with birds, rocks and peonies. Women were encouraged to produce beautifully observed images from nature, and flowers were deemed a traditionally suitable subject. Women's histories were poorly recorded and Ma Quan's life story is unclear, but she was a forerunner for later women artists of Chaozhou in the eastern Guangdong province in South China.

Hanging scroll; ink and colour on paper
1747


Jiangxiang

Michael Yun-Wen Shih

Film on back wall:

Innovative calligraphy

This film is based on **Studio of one step-back**, a work in Shanghai Museum by calligrapher Yi Bingshou (1754–1815). Here, a contemporary artist demonstrates the angled **jinshi** style.

 Duration: 1 minute
This is silent

Scan the QR code or visit britishmuseum.org/china-resources#calligraphy to watch a longer film made by Shanghai Museum.



**Display cases behind and to the right,
along the wall:**

Painting and the impact of war

The lives of artists were scarred by the traumatic wars of the 19th century. Artists Tang Yifen and Dai Xi died in the Taiping Civil War (1851–64), fighting for the Qing government as soldiers and officials. For survivors, migration necessitated by warfare fragmented personal networks.

Longstanding circles of patronage were severed. These were often focused in the old cultural heartlands of the Jiangnan region (south of the Yangzi River), so badly affected by the war. Yet upheaval could also catalyse innovation, as displaced artists developed new networks and supporters to survive.

Artists

**Wang Jun (1816 – after 1883), Ten Sites
Associated with Ruan Yuan**

阮元遺事十景圖

Scholar-official Ruan Yuan (1764–1849) dominated cultural life in his home city of Yangzhou, where he financially supported building and publishing projects. This album includes images of his family's temples and historic sites that he patronised. Showing the trees that survived the Taiping invasion, and so demonstrating both desolation and resilience through adversity, this scene is particularly evocative of the Taiping's devastation of southern China.

Album; ink and colours on paper

1883, Yangzhou

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Julia and John Curtis, 2015 (2015.784.10a–j)

Painting the natural world

The compositions of the artists represented in this section are fresh and powerful, strikingly different from earlier, more sentimental and idealised images of plants. Artists created innovative viewpoints for their compositions or exaggerated features to make their work stand out in a competitive market. Many developed a scientific interest in the natural world by directly observing nature, mirroring the trend for the empirical investigation of antiques.

Ju Lian (1828–1904), Album of Insects and Flowers

花卉蟲草冊頁

A Guangzhou artist, Ju Lian incorporated into his own work elements of the style of paintings made for export in that city in the early 19th century. However, in his studies of plants and insects he used new colours in a freshly naturalistic way. The compositions themselves are innovative, shown from unusual or incomplete angles. Many Lingnan School masters (based in Guangzhou), from whom the ‘national art’ of the early 20th century developed, studied first with Ju Lian and then in Japan.

Album; ink and colours on paper

About 1848–1904

Guangzhou

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Robert Hatfield Ellsworth, in memory of La Ferne Hatfield Ellsworth, 1986 (1986.267.73a–h)

Ren Xun (about 1835–1893), Chrysanthemums

菊花圖卷

Ren Yu (1853–1901) wrote on this painting that his uncle, the artist Ren Xun, intended to paint 20 types of chrysanthemums for Mr Shen but poor eyesight prevented him from completing it. Accordingly, Ren Yu added some details, which he believed were inferior to his uncle's work, and humbly gave the painting to the Master of Wanyue Pavilion.

Handscroll; ink and colours on paper

About 1870–93

Shanghai

Michael Yun-Wen Shih

New patrons

By the mid-1800s, Shanghai had become the epicentre of China's artistic, banking and commercial activities. An influx of foreigners and people displaced by war made Shanghai a cosmopolitan hub. Artists reinvented themselves in this city, creating new networks of clients and patrons, and responding to fresh encounters with visual and material culture and technology. Photography, introduced from the West, had a major impact on portrait painting and the circulation of images.

Ren Yi, also known as Ren Bonian (1840–1896), Zhong Kui

鍾馗圖

Ren Yi was a prolific commercial artist. In his youth he was recruited or captured by Taiping forces. He spent time with his uncle, the painter Ren Xun (about 1835–93), and probably also studied at the Tushanwan Orphanage in Shanghai

– an arts and crafts academy established by the Jesuits. Images such as this, of the demon-queller Zhong Kui, are displayed on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month.

Hanging scroll; ink and watercolour on paper

1880

Shanghai

Michael Yun-Wen Shih


Image caption:

This possibly life-sized painting by Ren Xiong made in 1851 is widely regarded as the most extraordinary self-portrait in the history of classical Chinese art.

© Palace Museum, Beijing

Ren Xiong's own words from his self-portrait

Listen to the words of Ren Xiong, translated by Professor Julia Lovell, and spoken in Chinese and English.

 Duration: about 1 minute

Scan the QR code or visit [britishmuseum.org/china-resources#ren-xiong](https://britishmuseum.org/china-resources/#ren-xiong) to read a transcript



Quote:

With the world in turmoil, what lies ahead of me?
... In the end, I have no idea. All my glancing eyes
see is the boundless void.

Ren Xiong (1823–1857)

In 1855, at the peak of his creativity, Ren Xiong painted this beautiful portrait for the poet and painter Yao Xie (1805–1864), representing one of Yao's wives. Ren spent several months as a guest at Yao's villa near the coastal city of Ningbo. The portrait reflects Ren's keen interest in popular woodblock printed illustrations of dramas, which often showed women in similar fashion. Ren's father was an aspiring scholar who earned a living as a portrait artist. Ren died aged 34 from tuberculosis.

Ren Xiong, Autumn shadow in Liangxi (Wuxi)
1840–57

Hanging scroll; ink and colours on silk
China

Michael Yun-Wen Shih

Central freestanding display cases:

Commercial publishing

From the 1850s, Shanghai became the centre of a modern publishing industry. The new technology of lithography, introduced through Western entrepreneurs, transformed printing. This boom helped generate new novels, illustrated magazines and newspapers, spreading visual representations of popular entertainments, news and history to a far wider public. Advertising also innovated as businesses sought to attract the leisured urban classes to their products.

Dianshizhai huabao

點石齋畫報

This weekly pictorial magazine was produced in Shanghai from 1884 to 1898, using the photolithographic technique invented in 1876. It introduced to Chinese readers aspects of Western life embellished with fantasy, but it

also reported on actual events. This group shows a fireman's rescue of a woman from a burning building in New York, horses being herded at the Great Wall, modern diving equipment in use, a cricket match and the underwater tunnels beneath the river Mersey, UK, which opened in 1886.

Printed ink on paper, 1884–5, Shanghai
SOAS Library, University of London; The British Library

Image caption:

The image shows the Dianshizhai lithographic printing bureau. It is by Wu Youru (about 1840–94), from **Scenic Views in and around Shanghai**, volume 1, part 2, 59b–60a, published in Shanghai by Dianshizhai, 1884.

© Courtesy of Marquand Library of Art and Archaeology,
Princeton University

After Tang Yifen (1778–1853), Garden of Pleasure

愛園圖

Tang Yifen was an artist and soldier. He was also a talented poet, swordsman and musician. He retired from service to Nanjing, where he built the beautiful garden depicted in this painting. Five years later, in 1853, Tang took his own life by drowning, having failed to defend Nanjing against the Taiping forces who captured the city.

Hanging scroll; ink and colour on paper

1848

Nanjing

British Museum, 1938,1210,0.1

Section panel, to the left:

Everyday life

By the 1850s, China's population reached a staggering 450 million. Some ninety per cent of people lived a basic life, negotiating the devastation caused by conflicts and natural disasters. Average life expectancy was just forty years old. Despite these struggles, cities rapidly developed as displaced yet resilient people migrated for safety, work and food.

A growing body of entrepreneurs developed businesses using new technologies and materials, some even taking over state roles. Handicrafts were industrialised and further commercialised. Wealthy people's homes and fashion reflected these political, cultural, technological and environmental changes, which included interactions with foreign communities.

Everyday life

Display case ahead:

Rural poor

Rapid population growth put enormous pressure on the land, leading to environmental disasters, land shortages and rural poverty. Expansion of the Han along the edges of the Qing empire into areas previously inhabited only by non-Han peoples sometimes drove tensions as people competed for their livelihoods. Extreme weather aggravated the economic crisis. The Great Northern Famine of 1876 to 1879, which followed a three-year drought, claimed at least 9.5 million lives.

Waterproofs for a worker

Rural fishermen and farmers had worn this type of waterproof raincoat and hat for centuries. In urban settings, poorer people including porters, street cleaners and labourers also wore such garments as protection from the elements.

Regional variations existed, depending on which plants were available locally. In the far south palm leaves or coconut fibres were used instead of rice or millet. This coat was made by folding layers of straw or leaves, then stitching them to the layer above using rice-straw thread.

Bamboo, palm and rice fibre, 1800–98, southern China, British Museum

Image caption:

A man in southern China wearing a straw cape and hat over cotton clothes, 1860–70.

© Peak Images / Alamy Stock Photo

Everyday life

Display case behind:

Baker's shop sign

This sign features the name of the shop 萬和 (Peace to all). The large character below reads 餅 (cakes). Literacy levels in Qing China were higher in wealthy regions. Elementary education was accessible even in rural areas. Between 30 and 45% of men, and between 2 and 10% of women could read and write by the late 1800s. In Britain in 1800, 60% of men and 40% of women were literate, and by 1900 this figure was 97% for both.

Painted wood

1880–1912

Southern China

Horniman Museum and Gardens, 10.5.51/1

A cook's jacket and trousers

Millions of people wore cotton clothing like this simple working person's jacket and trousers in 19th century China, but such everyday garments are rarely preserved. Cotton could be grown or acquired in a raw form and homespun into fabric mostly by women, purchased as finished cloth, or bought as ready-made garments. From the 1870s, machine-made cotton, recognisable for its very regular weave, became available from domestic suppliers in Shanghai and Tianjin or was imported. It soon out-sold handmade cloth.

Cotton

1890–1905

China

British Museum, As1945,03.6.a and b

Everyday life

Unknown artist, **Puqua, an itinerant dentist**

藥婆像

Many Qing citizens had trades that necessitated travelling across China. They fascinated foreigners and an industry developed, initially in Guangzhou (Canton) but later in other port cities and Beijing, for painting sets of tradespeople in vibrant colours and sometimes with commentaries. This female tooth extractor carries a placard that reads 'dental work' with strings of teeth she has pulled dangling from it like trophies.

Album leaf; ink and colour on paper

1800–20

Guangzhou

Victoria and Albert Museum

Image caption:

Weaver, 1865, by William Saunders. Such images were staged in a studio because of the time it took to capture them, and because early photographic equipment was cumbersome.

© The Loewentheil Collection of China Photography

Displays along the wall to the right:

Urbanites

Before the 1800s, people of landed wealth, merchants and those successful in the national examination system enjoyed social prestige. However, after the Taiping Civil War (1851–64), a new middle class of businessmen emerged. Some even acted as financiers for the state, replacing the roles of the state bureaucracy by building orphanages, repairing city walls and providing relief after natural disasters and wars.

Everyday life

Unknown artist, Oil painting of a woman holding a fan

Oil painting was introduced to China by Jesuit missionaries in the late 1500s. Portrait painting in oils became a speciality in Guangzhou in the 1700s. The simple background and limited props here are reminiscent of portrait photography, introduced into China after the 1840s. The woman's robe is edged with imported black lace and the fan is made from feathers.

About 1850–1900

Guangzhou

Purchased with the Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund

British Museum, 2022,3030.2

Portrait of a man

This portrait of a middle-class man is entirely stitched, but copies a photograph precisely. During the 1870s, sitting for photographic portraits was a preserve of the rich but by the close of the Qing dynasty in 1912 more of the population could afford to be recorded in this way. Stitched portraits are rare and were expensive to purchase, a piece like this took many months to complete by hand.

Embroidered silk

1860–1900

Suzhou

The Teresa Coleman Collection

Everyday life

Carved portrait

Figures of gods and goddesses have a long tradition in China, but three-dimensional sculptures of people are much rarer. This example was made by Chen Tingrong from Yanguan, modern-day Zhejiang province in eastern China. With a shaved forehead and a long plait, the figure is depicted wearing a traditional scholar's robe, and is accompanied by a pile of books.

Figure; boxwood

1805

Zhejiang

Wolverhampton Art Gallery

Quote:

I am Madame Li... I did all the household work and served my parents in-law with filial piety... The sound of the loom is constant under my hands ... and I watched over my sons as they studied late into the night.

Madame Li and her husband, Lu Xifu

These ancestral portraits were painted in a new style, inspired by photography, possibly while the couple were still alive. Their nephews, who were recognised cultural figures in the Foshan area near Guangzhou (Canton), inscribed the portraits, recording the details of a lifetime's achievements at the top of the paintings. Lu Xifu ran a successful business and his Buddhist wife managed his household, but little else is known of their lives. Such formal portraits were hung in a family shrine.

Unknown artist, Portraits of Lu Xifu and his wife, Mrs Lu (née Li)

About 1876


Framed hanging scroll; ink, colours and gilding on paper
Guangzhou

Royal Ontario Museum. Gift of Mr. Harp Ming Luk

Everyday life

The life of Madame Li

Listen to the words of Madame Li, spoken in Cantonese and English.

 Duration: about 1 minute

Scan the QR code or visit britishmuseum.org/china-resources#mrs-lu to read a transcript



**Display cases in the centre of the room,
from front to back:**

Modern fashions

Imported chemical dyes facilitating a new bright colour palette led to remarkable changes in fashion. Influenced by Western clothing, tighter-fitting garments with more defined silhouettes became popular among Qing women. Some items that were purely Manchu or previously restricted to court settings began to be worn more widely. New fabrics such as wool were imported from Europe. Foreign motifs including steamships were appropriated from European objects.

Everyday life

Clothing for special occasions

Typical of late-Qing fashion for Han women, these side-fastening jackets in eye-catching colours are embroidered with roundels showing figures from popular novels and operas, and trimmed with contrasting sleevebands. The wrap-around skirts comprise a series of embroidered silk panels and narrower pleated side panels. Leggings in contrasting colours covered the leg from thigh to calf. Hoods provided another opportunity to showcase the wearer's embroidery skills. Such garments were not for everyday use, but reserved for special occasions.

Embroidered silk, cotton and leather
1840–1900

China

British Museum; Chris Hall Collection;
The Teresa Coleman Collection

Silk and leather shoes

Foot binding was a common practice among wealthy Han families in 19th-century China. Millions of young girls' feet were tied by their mothers and other female members of the household using strips of cloth. Their broken toes were tucked under the soles making tiny stumps just 10 cm long. Despite causing excruciating pain and permanent damage, this was believed to make women more attractive and therefore capable of marrying more advantageously. Non-Han families, such as Manchus, did not bind girls' feet, nor did adherents of the Taiping movement.

Silk, leather and embroidery

1800–1900

China

Donated by Miss Vera T. P. Day

British Museum, 2021,3002.1; As1977,09.8.a-b

Everyday life

Child's jacket, trousers and shoes

This chequered design, derived from opera costumes, was believed to confuse the eye and thus keep evil forces away from the wearer. The patchwork is created from lozenges, sewn into a three-dimensional cube effect. The shoes are made in the form of tigers, symbolising courage and protection. In China, the word for 'tiger' is pronounced the same as 'to protect'.

Cotton, silk and fur

1800–1900, China

Purchased with the Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund,
British Museum; The Teresa Coleman Collection

Child's hat in the form of a fish dragon

The creative energy of many Chinese mothers in the 1800s was channelled into making headwear for their children, especially their sons. Embellished caps were worn on auspicious occasions such as New Year, but could also be protective talismans. They are embroidered and appliqued with extraordinary imagery, like this dragon with horns, fish scales, whiskers and bulging eyes, sewn with a long tail at the back.

Cotton, silk, embroidery and gilded thread

1850–1900, China

Gift of Teresa Coleman

British Museum, 2022,3030.4

Everyday life

Men's fashion

Men's clothing was generally made in a more subdued colour palette than women's, although some men did wear bright hues. Worn by a middle-class man or official, this robe has brass side fastenings. The circle designs are created from voided velvet, woven with areas of pile free ground and areas of raised pile that are soft to the touch. The black velvet winter hat has a blue glass hat button and is worn with black boots.

1800–1900

China

Robe; voided velvet

The Teresa Coleman Collection

Boots; silk and cotton

Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery,
Exeter City Council

Hat; velvet, silk, glass and brass

Donated by Sir A.W. Franks, British Museum As1895,-5

Winter-wear

Winter temperatures in northern China fall well below freezing point. Clothing was usually layered to protect against the cold. Finer full-length robes were worn beneath this sheepskin-lined coat.

Curly wool trapped in the air, keeping the arms and torso snug. Flatter long-haired fur was used over the legs. The cuffs are soft and dyed a darker shade of brown.

1800–1900

China

Coat; silk and sheepskin

On loan courtesy of National Museums Scotland

Boots; silk and cotton

British Museum, As1980,Q.205 and 206

Everyday life

Display cases along right wall, cases from right to left:

Women's sleeveless jackets

During the 1800s, Manchu people appropriated some Han fashions, while the Han took on some Manchu styles. The jacket at top left was worn over a long one-piece Manchu-style robe as an outer garment. The enamel clock buttons each show a different time. The sleeveless jacket of imported red wool is embroidered with a procession scene, details of which resemble contemporary illustrated pattern books.

Cotton, silk, wood, ceramic, paint and embroidery
1830–80, China

Chris Hall Collection; Victoria and Albert Museum.
Given by HM Queen Mary

Child's bib and jacket

This child's bib (bottom right) fits over any garment, leaving the arms free. In the 1700s, foreign clocks were owned exclusively by the court. By the 1800s they were more widely available, and often featured in depictions of comfortable interiors and on textile designs. Painted but not embroidered, the sleeveless jacket (top right) is unusual and may represent an under-drawing for an embroidered design.

Cotton, silk, wood, ceramic, paint and embroidery
1830–80, China

Chris Hall Collection; The Teresa Coleman Collection

Everyday life

Hood embroidered with dragons

Women wore their hair in elaborately coiffed styles, so the embroidered hoods that formed part of their outer garments had to be large enough to accommodate the hairstyles of the day. From paintings of the period, we know that hoods were attached using embroidered or plain ribbons that tied up at the back. A crown section was sewn at the front to frame the face.

Embroidered satin weave silk with coloured silks
and gilded threads

1800–1900

China

Chris Hall Collection

Detachable collars

Experimenting with different shapes, methods of layering, colours and stitching techniques, these collars highlight the extraordinary creativity of Qing female fashion. Worn like scarves or statement necklaces, they could transform even plain robes. This group includes a child's collar with **bagua** emblems of broken and solid lines arranged in threes, from the Daoist **Book of Changes**, and an adult collar with embroidered Buddhas.

Silk and embroidery

1800–1900

China

The Teresa Coleman Collection

Everyday life

Sleevebands

Created in complementary or sometimes mirrored pairs, sleevebands (top left) were applied in contrasting colours to the edges of both Manchu and Han women's clothes. Han women's jackets had wide sleeves and the bands were attached to form an extended cuff. Thinner bands could be sewn onto the sleeve either side of a wider band, or used elsewhere on the garment.

Silk and embroidery

1800–1900

China

The Teresa Coleman Collection

Accessories

These accessories including fan cases, purses and curiosities such as a compass holder were designed to be suspended from a belt. They provided the perfect vehicle to show off a woman's talents for needlework. The women who made them used a variety of motifs, from rabbits, horses and flowers, to figures from popular stories.

Purses, fan cases and pendants;
silk, embroidery and glass
1800–1900
China
The Teresa Coleman Collection

Aniline dyes

The first person to patent aniline dyes (an example of which is shown at bottom left) and to produce them commercially was 18-year-old British chemist William Perkin (1838–1907), who in 1856 accidentally created a new purple colour. By 1860, these new colours were widely available, and very popular in China. Germany dominated the dye-production industry until the start of the First World War in 1914.

Paper, printing inks and dye
1875–1900
Germany
Chris Hall Collection

Everyday life

Sewing tools

Professional tailors and amateur sewers wore a protective wide ring thimble on the second joint of the middle finger. They kept their needles in wooden needle cases. Each region made their own local tools, with minor variations. In the late 1800s, machine-made scissors and needles were imported, severely impacting local production and the diversity of styles.

Wood and metal

1800–1900

Chongqing, Shanghai and Kunming

British Museum, As1896,-.59-60 (donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks); As1896,-.56.a-d; As,Bs.65; As1896,-.54-55; As1847,0827.6 (donated by Captain Sir Everard Home)

Elaborate headdresses

Headdresses like these were worn by Qing women on special formal occasions such as weddings. The design derived from the elaborate phoenix crowns worn by aristocratic women of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) (top). A black woven frame was covered with ornaments decorated with kingfisher feathers and semi-precious stones (middle). Varying levels of quality were available, depending on budget. The tiara-style headdress (lower) is particularly fine.

Gilt-metal, gold, kingfisher feathers, jade, tourmaline, coral, turquoise, lapis lazuli, bone, pearl, glass, resin and silk
1750–1900, China

On loan courtesy of National Museums Scotland;
The Teresa Coleman Collection

Everyday life

Earmuffs

Embroidery became increasingly commercialised in the 1800s, moving from a home craft to large-scale workshops for production and specialised shops for distribution. These embroidered earmuffs with a soft fox-fur trim were ideal during the cold winters in northern China. On the back of each muff is a semi-circular pocket which fitted snugly over the ear.

Cotton, silk and fox-fur

1800–1900

China

British Museum, As1957,07.1

Hair extensions

Complicated female hairdos, sometimes supported with wooden frames, were held in place by beautifully ornamented hairpins, bandanas, flowers and other accessories. Hairpieces, usually made from woven horsehair, were oiled and attached to the wearer's natural hair. These rare examples (bottom right) are combed straight, plaited at the sides and stitched at the top and bottom.

Horsehair

1800–60

China

Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery,
Exeter City Council

Leisure

Theatrical experiences such as Peking opera became popular outside the capital in the 1800s, as performances were enjoyed alongside traditional displays by acrobats and musicians. Pastimes included the rearing and keeping of hobby animals, playing games and sports. In city restaurants, food from every province was enjoyed alongside foreign dining experiences. A publishing boom brought novels, illustrated magazines and newspapers which included visual representations of popular entertainments, news and history.

Everyday life

Architectural elements based on opera figures

In the 1800s, models of opera figures and popular gods and goddesses were incorporated into southern Guangdong architecture, to complement carved brick friezes depicting opera figures from well-known dramas, such as **The Water Margin**. The female figure here may be Chang'e, the moon goddess, and the male figure Hou Yi, legendary archer and husband of Chang'e.

Stoneware with coloured glazes

1800–1900

Shiwan, Guangdong

Victoria and Albert Museum

Woodblock print showing female performers

This action-packed scene in a lakeside garden features a plate spinner and juggler on the carpet in the foreground, surrounded by acrobats and women playing musical instruments. Wealthy people booked troupes like these to provide entertainment for family celebrations or at community events. Such images were pasted up at New Year and replaced the following year when the colours had faded.

Ink and colours on paper

1873

Tianjin

Donated by Mrs R. E. A. Hughes-Jones

British Museum, 1954,1113,0.1

Everyday life

Mahjong set

Mahjong was invented in China in the 1800s. This set was given to the British Museum in 1908. With 140 tiles rather than 144, it is incomplete. The tiles are marked with the suits. The set also includes counting sticks to keep score, printed cards, a dice (to decide who should deal) and a marker to keep track of the dealer and round.

Bone, wood and bamboo

1800–1900

China

Donated by Mrs M. Langenbach

British Museum, As1908,0416.1.a-c

Sports and games

These whistles were tied to the feathers of pigeons, creating a distinctive sound when the birds were in flight. Bannermen in Beijing often kept pigeons, releasing them into the sky twice a day to watch them fly and listen to the music created through their whistles. Growing gourds to use as cricket cages became a popular

pastime among wealthy Manchus. The shuttlecock was kicked with the feet in a 'keepy-uppy' game that is still played in China today.

Pigeon whistles; painted wood

1840–88

Beijing

Donated by James Edge-Partington

British Museum, As,+.4606; As,+.4608; As,+.4609

Cricket cages; gourd and ivory

1750–1900

China

British Museum, As1928,1020.3 and 4; 2018,3005.484

Donated by the Sir Victor Sassoon

Chinese Ivories Trust

Shuttlecock; cotton and feathers

1800–1900

Shanghai

Donated by Captain Sir Everard Home

British Museum, As1847,0827.17

Everyday life

Regional foods

Deer sinew was used by Chinese chefs as an ingredient for making soup. Rare survivals, the two varieties of seaweed preserved as dry bundles were also added to soups as well as other dishes. Although shark's fin soup remains a delicacy in some parts of the world today, it has recently been criticised for its cruelty. The main ingredient is cut from live sharks, which then have little chance of survival.

Deer sinew, seaweed and shark's fin

1800–1900

Wusong, near Shanghai

British Museum, As1847,0827.19 and 20

(donated by Captain Sir Everard Home); As1843,1209.17

(donated by George Tradescant Lay)

Image caption:

Man having a meal, about 1910, photograph by Mactavish & Lehmann.

© Image courtesy of Alison Brooke and Special Collections, University of Bristol Library (www.hpcbristol.net)

Puppets

Glove puppets and marionettes with strings were modelled with painted clay or porcelain heads. Their faces resembled the opera stars of the day, and their costumes of silk and cotton were immediately recognisable to local audiences. These puppets are of a prince, a princess and a woman.

Clay, metal, textile, wood, fur, metal thread and embroidery
1850–1900

China

Horniman Museum and Gardens, 10.8.56/8; 10.8.56:9;
nn7874

Image caption:

This rare miniature stage is a scaled-down model of an actual stage, with two entrances for the puppet actors.

© CC BY-SA 4.0

Everyday life

Musical instruments

George Tradescant Lay (1799–1845), a British naturalist and missionary from Stradbroke in Suffolk, commissioned these musical instruments in 1842 and published them in his book **The Chinese as They Are: Their Moral, Social and Literary Character**. The **pipa** (pear-shaped lute), most often played by female musicians, accompanied singers. The **dizi** (transverse flute) was made of bamboo for greater resonance.

Wood

1800–42

Fuzhou or Guangzhou

Donated by George Tradescant Lay

British Museum, As1843,1209.6 and 13

Household interiors

Popular prints, drawings, photographs, sketches and watercolours of 19th-century homes provide more information about how people lived than in any earlier era. Architectural styles and home furnishings reflect the local climate and availability of materials. Style manuals were invented in

China in the late 1500s, and lifestyle magazines were available in port cities by the late 1800s. Courtesans (paid escorts), previously invisible to all but their special clients, became more widely known as printed media showing them modelling fashions inspired new trends.

An ideal home

This image of an idealised, fashionable home (top left) comes from a series of large watercolours commissioned before 1898. It is inspired by the exquisite prints from Suzhou made in the 1700s, depicting wealthy estates filled with beautiful women, healthy male children and luxury goods. Here, the clocks and lantern details express a fashion for all things foreign.

Album; watercolours on paper

1800–77

Ningbo

Victoria and Albert Museum

Everyday life

Qing living god of wealth opens the Company of Beauties Hall

清朝活財神大開聚美廳

Dressed in a fur coat, Hu Xueyan (1823–85), a wealthy financier and merchant from Hangzhou, is offered a tray of ingots in his luxurious home (top right). He is surrounded by a European concertina player with red hair, a Japanese musician, beauties from Guangdong, Hangzhou, Shanghai, Yangzhou and Suzhou, and a Manchu woman. The other seated male is Hu's assistant, Wei Aduo.

Album; watercolours on paper

1900

Shanghai

SOAS Library, University of London (CWP 9)

Miniature furniture items

This miniature furniture set for a tomb was made following traditional forms and arranged in groups for the bedroom, reception room, dining room, washing room and family shrine. Other furnishings in wealthy households included clocks, lamps, lanterns, tableware, textiles, paintings and screens. They came in different forms, depending on their price and on the regions in which they were made, bought and sold.

Wood and textile

1800–1900, southern China

British Museum, As1972,Q.1442-1443;As1972,Q.1445-1452;
As1972,Q.1453.a-b; As1972,Q.1455; As1972,Q.1459;
As1972,Q.1461.a-j

Everyday life

Label on back wall, to the left of display case:

A family portrait

Four generations of an elite northern family are shown in this painting wearing winter clothes, on the 70th birthday of the most prominent woman, who is a widow. The men wear their official court robes with rank badges, court necklaces and hats. The women wear full-length Manchu robes. The matriarch's three grandsons bring her nine jade-inlaid wooden **ruyi** sceptres, a symbol of good fortune and wishes. The servants wear two-piece costumes typical of Han-Chinese dress.

Graphic reproduction with colours knocked-back

Ink and mineral pigments on paper

Mactaggart Art Collection (2007.23.21)

Gift of Sandy and Cécile Mactaggart

University of Alberta Museums

Section panel, to the left:

Global Qing

Until the 1840s, Guangzhou (Canton) was the only place in China where trade with Europe and the USA was legal, and where such foreigners could live and work. The signing of the Treaty of Nanjing, following the end of the First Opium War in 1842, led to more ports being forcibly opened to foreign trade, called 'treaty ports'.

During the last sixty years of Qing rule, modern technology and transport revolutionised industry and changed people's lives. Inventions such as electricity and the new postal system transformed the way people worked and communicated. Printed media and translations of foreign books provided a two-way window onto the world through travel, industry and education.

Displays running around the room, starting to the right of the section panel:

Canton trade

From October until March, Westerners in Guangzhou (Canton) negotiated deals and ordered new merchandise including tea, spices, silks, porcelains and luxuries. A passion for tea drinking and a 'Chinamania' in the West created a buoyant market for imported Qing products. Silver was keenly sought by Qing merchants in exchange, but the trade imbalance was ultimately unsustainable. When increased opium sales by mainly British traders led to the First Opium War (1839–42), Guangzhou's position as sole trading port ended.

Unknown artist, Painting of the waterfront at Guangzhou

廣州珠江全景圖

This painting shows the foreign commercial, banking and business district of Guangzhou, on the banks of the Pearl River. Its multicultural community including Parsi merchants, English sailors and Chinese traders communicated via interpreters and a kind of hybrid business language. The volume of trade in and around Guangzhou was a major factor in developing the modern global economy, connecting China, South Asia, Europe and the Americas.

Oil on canvas, 1849–56, Guangzhou
National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London,
Caird Collection

Portrait of Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy

詹塞吉·傑吉博伊爵士畫像

Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy (1783–1859) was a Bombay-born Parsi merchant and philanthropist who made a fortune trading with Qing China in commodities including opium. He founded Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy & Co with three partners: Motichund Amichund, a Jain with ties to opium producers in Malwa; Konkani Muslim and ship-owner Mohammed Ali Rogay, and the Goan Catholic Rogério de Faria, with connections to the Portuguese port authorities on India's west coast.

Oil on canvas, 1800–1900, Guangzhou
Oriental Club

Lamqua (1801–1860), British East India Company Midshipman

一名英國東印度公司中士的畫像

Artist Lamqua has captured the sunburn on this midshipman's face, and his wrongly-buttoned waistcoat. Despite the immense heat in southern China, employees of the East India Company wore uniforms designed for Britain's cooler climate. Chinese observers often remarked on their tight-fitting clothing, particularly the snug-fitting, cream-coloured trousers which were made from a Chinese cloth called nankeen.

Oil on canvas in gilt-wood frame
About 1820
Guangzhou
Anthony J. Hardy

Fine textiles

The cream silk parasol with multicoloured knotted tassels and a finely carved ivory handle has a colourfully embroidered design showing eight figures engaged in rural pursuits. The bolt of light blue silk satin is painted in silver with flowers. Patterns divided into columns were particularly popular for furnishing fabrics. Until 1833, the East India Company held a monopoly for shipping such Qing textiles to Britain. Merchants could also bring back cargo items to trade as part of a private allowance.

Parasol; satin stitch embroidery and ivory
1800–30, Guangzhou
The Teresa Coleman Collection

Bolt; pale-blue silk satin with painted design
1840–70, Guangzhou
Jacqueline Simcox Ltd

Carved ivory basket

Ivory tusks were imported into China from India and Africa and worked by skilled local craftsmen. The beautifully carved ivory panels of this basket are decorated with figures and landscape scenes. The handle is shaped like two dragons. Director of the East India Company William Fullerton Elphinstone (1740–1834) owned the basket, which was shipped home as part of his private cargo.

1800–12

Guangzhou

Private Collection

Unknown artist, Crabs

Victorian travellers to China were curious about the plant and animal life there. Many commissioned sets of realistic paintings showing creatures depicted as specimens rather than as part of a natural scene. English naturalist John Reeves (1774–1856) collected this painting of crabs as part of a large group of natural history images made by artists in Guangzhou between 1822 and 1829.

Watercolour and ink on European paper

1822–9

Guangzhou

Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London

Luxury goods for export

As an eye-catching accessory, fans were a perfect vehicle for showcasing the creativity of Guangzhou craftsmen. Here, each person's face is painted ivory. The unusual bracelet for a woman comprises a chain of alternating plaques of finely carved peach stone with gold mounts and gold filigree ribbons. It is enclosed in a painted lacquer presentation box. Such jewellery also came in sets with matching earrings and pendants. Inside the gaming chest are trays painted to look like European playing cards.

1800–40
Guangzhou

Fan; multicoloured lacquer, gouache paint, paper, silk and ivory
The Teresa Coleman Collection

Bracelet; lacquer, wood, ivory, fruit stone and gold
The Teresa Coleman Collection

Gaming chest; lacquer with gilding and colour
Bristol Museums: Bristol Museum and Art Gallery

Reverse glass paintings

喬治·華盛頓畫像、水彩靜物二幅

Still lifes and copies of Western paintings were produced alongside designs derived from popular prints. The portrait of American president George Washington was executed by Chinese artists using imported oil paints and glass. With immense precision they began the image in reverse, starting with the details nearest the surface and progressing to the background. This copy of an original painting is one of many. Legal action was taken in Philadelphia against the circulation of Chinese copies in the USA.

Reverse painted glass in wood frames

About 1800–05

Guangzhou

Anthony J. Hardy

Image caption:

Watercolour showing a reverse glass painter at work in Guangzhou, about 1790.

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Treaty ports – a two-way window

The 1842 Treaty of Nanjing forced the Qing government to cede the islands of Hong Kong to Britain, and to open treaty ports at Guangzhou, Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou and Xiamen. In the aftermath of the Second Opium War (1856–60) many further treaty ports were compulsorily opened. Foreigners lived in distinct areas governed by their own national laws rather than by the Qing legal system. As locals and foreigners mixed, a hybrid material and visual culture emerged. Hong Kong was a British Dependent Territory until 1997.

Unknown artist, Painting of Xiamen

廈門港口圖景

Xiamen (Amoy) was a port in Fujian that once rivalled Guangzhou (Canton) as a hub for European trade. Opened as a treaty port after the First Opium War (1839–42), in 1853 it was occupied by the Taiping army. This painting gives a sense of the variety of ships found in the port, from the French cutter to coastal junks and tiny sampans.

Oil on canvas

About 1850

Xiamen

Anthony J. Hardy

Treaty port silver punch set

This punch set in Qing dynasty export silver includes a punchbowl, six beakers, a sugar bowl and tongs. It has applied dragons, the initials of John Penniall and the date 1905. A mark on the base in Roman letters tells us that it was commissioned through Luen Wo, the successful retail silversmiths based in Shanghai, with offices on the Nanjing Road.

1905

Shanghai

Bequeathed by Emily Penniall

British Museum, 1993,0127.20.a-i

Silas Hardoon (1851–1931)

Originally from Baghdad in Iraq, Silas Aaron Hardoon was once one of the richest men in Asia. He made a fortune in Shanghai selling opium, renting out properties and investing in the new stock exchange. Hardoon developed the now-famous Nanjing Xi Lu (Nanjing West Road) and endowed Buddhist temples. With his wife, Liza Roos (1864–1941), Hardoon sponsored an edition of the Buddhist text **Kalavinka Canon**, completed between 1909 and 1913 and printed on his estate in Shanghai.

Book; printing ink on paper
1923, Shanghai
SOAS Library, University of London

Image caption:

Silas Hardoon's wife Liza, pictured here, had a French father and Chinese mother.

© SOAS Library RJ c.850.c.43/46574, University of London

Folding screen

This screen was exhibited at the 1867 International Exposition in Paris, which was held at the bidding of Napoleon III (ruled 1852–70). Qing China did not formally participate in the exhibition, but a committee of French businessmen, scholars and soldiers selected Qing artefacts and organised their own display reflecting Chinese culture. Some 710,000 visitors attended the exhibition over its seven-month run.

Lacquered wood with embroidered silk and kingfisher feather
1825–65

Probably Guangzhou

Victoria and Albert Museum

Round fan with a map of the Eastern and Western hemispheres

Fan design was extremely creative in the late 19th century. Some even bore phrases in English, to be read aloud if the owner encountered a foreign person. The cartography of Jesuits at the Qing court notwithstanding, until the 1800s Chinese map-making conventions were different to those of Western cartography. This fashionable round fan replicates a Western map of the world.

Colour printed orthographic projection on silk
1900–14

China

Royal Ontario Museum. The George Crofts Collection,
gift of Mrs. H.D. Warren

Poster for a Shandong line train

This propaganda poster promotes modernity and prosperity through technology, encouraging communities to accept the building of new railways and telegraph systems. It is captioned 'New Print of the Shandong Railway Line's Wei County Railway Station'. It also advertises other

markers of modernity including women with rifles, a man looking through a telescope and new telegraph poles.

Ink and colours on paper

1905

Shandong

The British Library

Robe with a border of steamships

In the 1860s, steamships from across the world travelled up and down the Yangzi River. By the 1880s three companies (two British and one Chinese) dominated the market. Before the building of the railways in the 1890s, steamships were the only form of modern transport in the Qing empire. The decorative border of steamships gave a contemporary edge to this red robe.

Silk, cotton and embroidery

1860–1900

China

Purchased with the Brooke Sewell permanent fund

British Museum, 2022,3030.3

Science, medicine and missionaries

In 1844, the Qing government and France legalised Christian missionary work in China. Missionaries offered famine relief, medicine and education, but could also interfere with local society in self-interested ways, such as intervening in court cases. The Tianjin incident of 1870, the Yangzi River riots of 1891 and the Boxer War (1899–1901) all demonstrated active, organised anti-Christian sentiment in China. Far more people were converted by the Christian Taiping religion, which inspired hybrid Christian-Qing texts and practices.

Priest's hat and ecclesiastical textiles

These textiles follow prescribed forms for celebrating the mass, including a priest's tabard to wear over a longer robe, a cover for the wine chalice and textiles onto which the host (holy bread) was placed. The embroidery is a Chinese design. Guangzhou and Macao, where this set

was made, were the first places that missionaries could live and preach in China.

Silk and embroidery

1800–1900

Macao

Chris Hall Collection

Fan portraying the Tianjin incident

Public unrest grew in Tianjin in 1870 as rumours about ill-treatment of Chinese children by French nuns circulated. On 21 June the French consul, Henri Fontanier, fired into a crowd that included local officials. A servant was killed. Fontanier and 20 others were murdered in retaliation. Western powers demanded that 16 Chinese people face execution for the crime and an official Qing delegation was sent to France to apologise. This fan is one of many printed in Tianjin showing the turmoil of the events.

Watercolour ink on paper and bamboo supports

23 June 1870

Tianjin

Donated by Mrs C.A.M. Jamieson

British Museum, 1945,0414,0.1

Ida Kahn (1873–1931)

Ida Kahn was a pioneering female doctor. The adopted daughter of an American missionary in southeast China, she studied medicine in the USA and England. Returning to China in 1896, she was hailed as a 'modern woman', gaining the support of the local gentry and foreign missionaries alike. As well as Western medicine, Ida had knowledge of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). A doctor trained in TCM filled this travelling chest with ointments, powdered plants, dried insects and written charms to speed recovery.

1890–1910, China, on loan from the Natural History Society of Northumbria

Image caption:

Ida Kahn became a great advocate for women's education, successfully founding a hospital for women and children.

© Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan

Devil's tongue from **Poisonous plants**

毒草之蒟蒻

This illustrated manuscript describing poisonous and medicinal plants uses learning derived from observing nature rather than textbooks. It includes local knowledge from Yunnan and Guangdong provinces. This page describes devil's tongue (**Amorphophallus konjac**), also known as konjac, voodoo lily or snake palm. From the same species as the **titan arum**, it is said to be the worst-smelling plant on earth, with an odour reminiscent of rotting flesh.

Ink and colours on paper

About 1850–90, Guangdong or Yunnan

The British Library

Central display case:

Quote:

I am honourable and reliable in business...

I have spent a fortune on my vast private mansion ... with its immaculate gardens, grottoes and lakes...

Mouqua (1792–1843)

Lu Guangheng, known as Mouqua, organised trade with foreign merchants in Guangzhou, serving as head merchant of the 'Hong' – a guild with the exclusive right to trade with foreigners – from 1807 to 1811. He suffered severe financial losses in a fire in the city in 1822. Here he is dressed in the robes of a high official. However, he purchased his rank rather than earning it by passing a succession of public exams. Mouqua spoke English.

Lamqua (1801–1860) or his studio, Portrait of the Hong Merchant Mouqua, about 1841


Oil on canvas in gilt-wood frame

Guangzhou

Anthony J. Hardy

Mouqua's story

Listen to Mouqua's story, spoken in Cantonese and English.

 Duration: about 1 minute

Scan the QR code or visit britishmuseum.org/china-resources#mouqua to read a transcript



Section panel, to the right:

Reform to revolution

Qing China was shocked by its defeat to Japan in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–5). In the aftermath, Western imperialist forces increasingly vied for Qing land. In response, Chinese patriots sought to rapidly build a modern, cohesive nation that could stand up to external threats. Qing armies were modernised. Empress Dowager Cixi eventually permitted officials to create new ministries for foreign affairs, commerce, the police and education. Beyond China, Qing diplomatic delegations searched for alternative methods of governance. However, after a short, violent revolutionary insurrection in 1911, the last emperor Puyi abdicated in February 1912, ending 2,000 years of imperial rule.

Labels on wall to the right:

Boxer War (1899–1901)

The Boxer War pitted anti-Christian militants supported by Qing troops against foreign residents of China and Chinese Christians. In summer 1900, Beijing's foreign community was trapped in a 55-day siege in the capital's walled diplomatic district. Qing and Boxer armies were eventually defeated by a joint expeditionary force from Austro-Hungary, the British empire, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the USA. North China was plundered by foreign troops. The 1901 Boxer Protocol forced Qing China to pay about £67 million over 39 years to the eight foreign states.

Rout of foreign troops by Boxers at Beicang near Tianjin

天津北倉義和團民大破洋兵

Prints reporting wars celebrated successful battles and disseminated news and propaganda. This example records a victory by the Boxers at Tianjin. The rebels, shown in the foreground wearing turbans, were called Boxers after the martial art training exercises they practised, which some believed made them invulnerable. Commanders of the Qing troops wear yellow silk. Foreigners, at bottom left, hold the Union Jack flag aloft.

Woodblock colour print on paper
1900, Tianjin
Donated by Edward Butts Howell
British Museum, 1948,0710,0.6

Labels on wall to the left:

Military reforms and the national Qing flag

After defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–5), the Qing army was restructured. New weapons were produced at arsenals in Nanjing and Fuzhou. Modern uniforms replaced styles that had been worn for centuries. This flag was adopted by the Qing government in 1888 as a state banner and ensign for the Beiyang fleet – the largest modernised naval force in the empire. The rectangular shape copied the flags of foreign countries rather than the triangular or square flags previously used by Qing armies.

Embroidered cotton, 1898–1904, China
National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London with
acknowledgements to the Royal Hospital of St Bartholomew

Diplomacy and global travel

During and after the crises of the 1890s, the Qing sought to increase diplomatic representation abroad. Travellers on diplomatic missions wrote accounts, made sketches, took photographs and engaged with foreign societies. More Chinese people travelled abroad, particularly for education. Such students often became interested in alternative models of government. Emigration also increased as people of diverse social backgrounds sought work in other countries.

Small display case:

Li Hongzhang (1823–1901)

Li Hongzhang was a modernising scholar-official, military leader, loyalist and diplomat. He survived an assassination attempt in 1895, during negotiations to end the Sino-Japanese War. In 1896 he represented the Qing empire at Nikolai II's coronation in Russia, met the Kaiser and Chancellor Otto von Bismarck in Germany,

and Queen Victoria in England. The culmination of his diplomatic career was the signing of the punishing treaty ending the Boxer War in 1901. An image of Li is painted inside this bottle for powdered tobacco.

Snuff bottle; glass and rock crystal, about 1900–10, Beijing
The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat Collection

Image caption:

George Watmough Webster (1842–1919) photographed the occasion of Li Hongzhang meeting British politician William Gladstone on 15 August 1896, during Li's diplomatic trip to England.

© National Portrait Gallery, London

Silver medal showing Cixi and Guangxu

This souvenir medal commemorates Li Hongzhang's visit to Berlin, Germany, to meet Kaiser Wilhelm II. On one side is a portrait of the Empress Dowager Cixi with her name in German and in Chinese. The other side shows the Guangxu emperor. Unlike western coins, Chinese coins do not have portraits of rulers on them. Before the 19th century, imperial images were not widely circulated.

Silver

About 1895

Berlin, Germany

British Museum, 1982,0631.8

Opposite wall:

Education reform

Intellectuals searched for new forms of governance after the 1895 defeat by Japan.

They wanted to overhaul the old education system, which focused on knowledge of Confucian philosophy. The imperial exam system was abolished in 1905 and a revised curriculum for schools was introduced, including new subjects such as Western sciences and languages. Across China, new universities were founded, among them Peking University, which remains one of China's top universities today.

Reform to revolution

Large display case:

Kang Youwei (1858–1927)

The failed Hundred Days' Reform movement of 1898 attempted to radically modernise China but was opposed by conservatives at court. In 1904, Cixi pardoned all involved, except the reforming intellectuals Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao.

Kang became one of China's first world travellers, only returning home in 1913. This text by Kang reads: 'Climbing to the top of the mountain, I look at the floating clouds. Wind cannot shake me, rain cannot disgrace me. My heart is comfortable, at peace; I have no worries or guilt.'

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

About 1914–27, China

Donated by Gordon and Kristen Barrass

British Museum, 2002,0130,0.32

Image caption:

Kang advocated an end to traditional family structures, including marriage, but married six times (generating 16 children). Here, in **Celebration for Kang Youwei's 60th Birthday** by Xu Beihong (1895–1953), Kang is surrounded by his family, including his third wife, Chinese-American Lily Haw (He Zhanli).

© Private collection

Official's hat on porcelain stand

For Qing officials, the conical **liang mao** (cool hat) was formal summer attire. This one has a chin-strap and red silk tassels. Peacock plumes, awarded for commendable service, could be attached. A finial of coloured glass or semi-precious stones indicated rank. The porcelain stand is painted in pale colours characteristic of the 1850s to 1900s. Its shape is innovative.

Rattan, bamboo, reeds, straw, grass, silk, porcelain and enamels

Hat; 1850–1900; stand; 1873, Jingdezhen
British Museum; Trevor Ford

Labels on wall behind display case:

Qing exam paper

This is the very last exam paper for the Triennial Examinations, held in the Provincial Examination Hall at Nanjing in September 1902. With 20,644 cells, it was the largest exam hall in China. Passing official exams in the 18th century had guaranteed a job for life with a good salary, however by the 19th century officials were increasingly underemployed. In the late Qing period, positions could also be purchased outright, bypassing the official exams and creating a new class of official.

Paper and ink, 1902, Nanjing

On loan from the Syndics of Cambridge University Library

Reformers and revolutionaries

Reformers and revolutionaries had conflicting ideas about China's future. Intellectual reformers looked to Japan because it had modernised whilst retaining the emperor. Revolutionaries also found inspiration in Japan, but they wanted to overturn Qing rule. Many educated men and a few women left China for Japan, where some were radicalised. Pockets of resistance were established across China, but ultimately an uprising in Hubei on 10 October 1911 was the catalyst for change. It brought an end to imperial rule, leading to the establishment of the Republic in 1912.

The changing role of women

Women of the late-Qing, who wore clothing such as this, lived through an era of transition.

Opportunities for education and political participation began to increase. Women from wealthy families studied abroad, sometimes bringing revolutionary ideas back to China.

The written words of the poet Qiu Jin, translated by Yilin Wang, are emblematic: 'As my heart shatters with rage over my homeland's troubles, how can I linger, a guest abroad, savouring spring winds?'

Scan the QR code or visit britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/chinas-hidden-century/qiu-jin to find out more



Woven silk gauze inset with patterned silk
1900–20, China
The Teresa Coleman Collection

Qiu Jin (1875–1907)

Qiu Jin was a revolutionary, feminist and poet. A transitional figure between the Qing empire and the modern world, she remains a celebrated figure in China today. Listen to the words of Qiu Jin, translated by Yilin Wang, and spoken in Chinese.

 Duration: about 2 minutes

Scan the QR code or visit britishmuseum.org/china-resources#qiu-jin to find out more.



Reform to revolution

**A River of Crimson: A Brief Stay
in the Glorious Capital
(translated by Yilin Wang)**

A brief stay in the glorious Capital;
soon, it's Mid-Autumn Festival again.

Sheltering by the fence, chrysanthemums bloom everywhere,
the autumn air cool and clear, as if freshly cleansed.

War songs from all four directions falter
as I finally break through the siege of encircling foes;

the aftertaste of these past eight years
makes me long wistfully for Zhejiang.

Bitterly forced to behave as a wife with painted brows,
I'm full of disdain!

Not a man in the flesh,
unable to walk among them;

but my heart is stronger,
more fierce than a man's!

I think of my inner spirit,
stirring often with passion on others' behalf.

How can narrow, uncultivated minds
comprehend my nature?

A hero at the path's end
must suffer trials and tribulations.

In the vast, worldly dust, where can I find my soulmate?
My robe is stained with tears!

Find out more

Find out more

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Military walls

Battle Scene from the Nian Rebellion,
late 1870s

Ink and colour on silk

Mactaggart Art Collection (2004.19.49)

Gift of Sandy and Cécile Mactaggart

University of Alberta Museums

**Battle Scene from the Muslim Rebellions
in Shaanxi, Gansu and Xinjiang Provinces,**
1875–1908

Ink and colour on silk

Mactaggart Art Collection (2004.19.92)

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Qiu Jin

Poem written by Qiu Jin and translated by Yilin Wang

Song written by Qiu Jin and performed by London Chinese Philharmonic Choir

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