

Princeton University. Library
Department of Rare Books and Special Collections

Exhibition Catalogues

Number 19

G E S T O R I E N T A L L I B R A R Y
E X H I B I T I O N S

" CHINESE BROCADE DESIGNS "

(March-April, 1956)

" CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATIONS IN PRE-REPUBLICAN CHINA "

(May-June, 1956)

Arranged by
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Princeton

1956

Note

For other Gest Oriental Library exhibitions on display during the academic year 1955-1956, see:

Catalogue No. 16, of this series : "Fifty Years of American Drama, etc.", which includes notes on the exhibition, "INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE DRAMA"

and

Catalogue No. 17 : "Chapters from the History of Music," which includes notes on the exhibition, "INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE MUSIC."

CHINESE BROCADE DESIGNS

The Chinese name for brocade is called chin, a character compounded of 'gold' (on the left) and 'silk' (on the right) because, as it is often said, the labour expended on it makes it as costly as gold.

Brocading in China seems to be of considerable antiquity. According to a 1621 book entitled Po Wu Yao Lan (General Survey of Art Objects), beginning with the Han dynasty (B.C.206-220 A.D.), many of the ornamental designs still used, such as "Dragons and Phoenixes", "Water-weeds and Playing Fish", "Peach-stones and Grapes", etc. were already woven in silk brocade. It is also recorded that in the year A.D. 238, five rolls of brocade with dragons woven on a crimson ground were presented by the Emperor Ming Ti of the Wei dynasty to the reigning empress of Japan, who in that year sent an embassy to the Chinese court.

The designs used in weaving brocade are of varied character. Under the Sung dynasty (A.D.960-1279), the names of some fifty brocade patterns of the time were given, ranging from flowers to animals--apart from striped and diapered designs of a more simple nature, felicitous combinations of Chinese characters, and groups of symbols of happy augury. As the brocade-weavers, being most the conservative of artisans, continue to turn out all the old patterns from their handlooms, the above-mentioned themes of compositions might almost serve for to-day.

It is interesting to note that the looms, too, have hardly changed over the years, except in their increased size. The Chinese loom is upright and is worked by two hands; the weaver is seated below, while the assistant, perched at the top of the frame, pulls the treadles and helps to change the threads. A picture of the most complicated loom, that used for weaving flowered brocades, is given in the table case indicated by the number '6'.

In China, silk brocade serves many different purposes. Book-covers or book-cases (as shown in the upright case) is but one way of utilizing it. All the designs exhibited here in these five wall cases are copies after the real brocade covers of the Buddhist Tripitaka which was printed between the years of 1403 and 1449 of the Ming period.

BROCADE-WEAVERS AT WORK

1. "Reeling silk from the cocoons"
 - (Historical Record of Chinese Useful Arts and Industries, Their Manufacture, etc.); comp. by Sung Ying-hsing in 1771. 3 vols.
2. "Spinning silk"
 - (Collection of Works on Silkworm Rearing and Mulberry Cultivation); comp. by Hsu Shu-ming in 1880. 8 vols.
3. "Dying silk"
 - (A Collection of Illustrations Depicting the Processes of Tillage and Weaving; with a Short Stanza Appended to Each); by Lou Shou. Original Palace edition in 1696.
4. "Stretching silk"
 - (Chinese Encyclopaedia), printed with movable copper type in 1728. 5,020 vols.
5. "Setting the loom with silk"
 - Same as Item 2
6. "Weaving silk into brocade"
 - Same as Item 3

T'AO IN BROCADE

Chinese volumes as they come from the printer are only stitched between paper or cloth covers. A bibliophile engages a binder to make a t'ao or binding to protect the volumes. As a rule, the rarer the books are, the fancier the t'ao will be. At times, an outer t'ao is made--as here illustrated--to give further protection to an inner t'ao of fine brocade.

CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATIONS IN PRE-REPUBLICAN CHINA

There is perhaps no country in the world that has a more passionate and earnest desire for education than the Chinese. In the four great classes into which all society has been traditionally divided, the scholar is placed at the head of the list. The making of a fortune in China holds no such possibilities of prestige as in the West, but through education a man's immediate family, his ancestral line, and even his native town may receive praise and renown. For many centuries, literary distinctions have constituted the main avenue to officialdom in China, and the system of civil service examinations has played an important part in the stimulus to her national education.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (the 1953 edition): "The oldest known system of examination was used in China for the selection of officers for the public service (c.1115 B.C.)." Apparently, the statement of the Encyclopaedia is based on the Chinese Classics. As a matter of fact, the system of recommendation and examination, laying emphasis on moral excellence, was first developed under the Former Han dynasty, a little before the beginning of the Christian Era. Thereafter, examinations both oral and written were gradually improved. Although the method of examination varied from one dynasty to another, examinations themselves as a system were inaugurated in the Sui dynasty (606 A.D.). Beginning with the T'ang dynasty (626 A.D.), a system of preparing and selecting civilians was firmly founded. Many degrees or titles were then conferred upon successful candidates of different classes. It was from the Sung dynasty (1071 A.D.), under the influence of the Orthodox school, that Confucian canons became the major subject of the examination, and from the Ming dynasty (1384) on, a complete series of three examinations was steadily regulated. The Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1911) followed this system with great regularity and rigidity until its abolition by an imperial edict in 1905.



The so-called open competitive examination system, from 1384 on, was mainly one of three series leading to what roughly correspond to the academic degrees of the Occident. The three degrees were known as Hsiu-tsai (or, flowering talent), Chu-iên (or, promoted man) and Chin-shih (or, advanced scholar) which are said to be equivalent to the B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. degrees awarded by the Western universities.

The first degree was competed for, twice in every three years, at the home district, under the supervision of the magistrate and the chief literary officer; the second degree, at triennial intervals, in the provincial capital, under the prefect and the imperial commissioners; and the third degree, as a rule in the autumn of every third year, in the national capital, under an imperial examining board aided by thirteen scholars of repute.

In fact, still another examination was held, theoretically, in the presence of the Emperor. Those who succeeded in this final contest were given the literary title Han-lin (meaning 'Forest of Scholars'), and the first named was called Chuang-yüan (meaning 'Model Scholar of the Empire'), the highest honor that a scholar could obtain.

The competition was very keen. Only a very small percentage of the contestants at each of the successive examinations achieved the coveted degrees. Candidates often tried again and again and occasionally a grandfather, father and son appeared at the same time to compete for the same degree. It was not uncommon that there were candidates who spent almost all their lives in a vain attempt to "leap the Dragon Gate"--meaning to win a literary title.

Parallel to civil service examinations were military examinations conducted after much the same pattern. Held by district, province, and capital, they conferred the same degrees but with the character for 'military' added to each.

The examinations usually took place at permanent quarters which were erected on a plot of ground in different cities especially for this purpose. The halls were arranged in streets and further disposed in rows of cells-- each street being named and each cell, numbered. The cells were about six-feet deep by four-feet wide and open on but one side. Grooves were made in the wall to admit a plank, serving as a table by day and a bed by night.

Before entering the examination hall, all the candidates had to be narrowly examined: their pockets, shoes, robes, ink-stones, etc., all being searched, lest "Skinning paper" or "cribbing compositions" be smuggled in. After they had been seated in their proper places, the doors, windows and other entrances were all guarded.

Each examination consisted of three sessions, lasting for a period of about three days. In the name of the Emperor, the chief examiner called upon the spirits to inspire the minds of the candidates according to their deserts. As he intoned this prayer, many fire-crackers were set off. Thus the examination began.

During the three days of confinement in the cramped cells, neither examiners nor candidates were allowed outside communication. No book or written paper was permitted to be carried upon any person. Names were sealed, and each paper was marked with a cipher; thus no examiner could discover the possible identity of the candidates. Strict regulations concerning the examination and severe punishments for offenders were enacted so as to guarantee honor, spirit and fair play. A single instance of cheating in the examination might lead to wholesale capital execution of all involved, examiners and candidates alike. However, such unhappy incidents actually occurred not once, but many times. Facing the stern necessity of three days' utmost concentration, the candidates' mere physical strain was by no means slight, and it was quite frequent for a candidate to die under it.

After candidates of different stages had been successful in their examinations, many opportunities were open to them.

The Hsiu-tsai (B.A.) found themselves in an advantageous situation: they were exempted from payment of taxes and from liability to corporal punishment; they were invited to share in the discussion of local affairs, they were eligible as candidates for the second degree; and sometimes they were provided with subsidy from the district government to continue their studies.

High privileges were shown to the Chu-jên (M.A.). The proclamation which contained their names was posted on the governor's office under a salute of three guns. On the appointed day, they were the objects of flattering attention in the whole city. The governor feasted them and gave them each a certain amount of silver so that they might erect flag-poles over the gates of their home residences to inform passers-by that this family had produced a "promoted man". Furthermore, they could try the examination for the third degree or be appointed to office.

The Chin-shih (Ph.D.), especially those who passed at or near the head of the list, were crowned with all distinctions by the government as well as by the public--similar to the celebration for a president-elect in the modern republic. Their name-lists were hawked about all over the country, and their parents were publicly favored by the civic authorities. The Emperor banqueted them in a very distinguished manner and presented to them embroidered gowns and official caps with gilded buttons. The top three scholars were enrolled as members of the highest literary institution, Han-lin Academy, and the remaining ones were awarded official posts by the Board of Civil Service. As to the Chuang-yüan, he was now an acknowledged superior among all the contending scholars, with solid prospects of an official position from which he might rise step by step to the highest office in the Empire.

For century after century, the Chinese civil service examination system formed an impartial and purely intellectual arch that each candidate had to pass, through his own efforts, in order to enter the ranks of the scholar-officials. In theory and to a large extent in practice, no one even in the nobility was allowed to hold any actual office unless he had passed examinations as a common citizen. It offered equal opportunities to all members of society, with trifling exceptions. It broke down feudalism, class distinction, and artificial barriers of race, tribe, color as well as religion. A youth of humble stock might, through this system, rise automatically to premiership, while the son of a prince might fail to the end of his life. Scholarship and equality of chance played together in this big game, permitting no interference from influence or favor.

However, this examination system was not without its defects, of which one is worth mentioning: i.e., a premium was put upon the ability to write according to the standard of an arbitrary literary style, rather than upon originality of thought and promise in administrative skill. Toward the end of last century, as a result of contact with the Occident, the Manchu government began to realize that the solely literary achievements of a person do not entirely determine ability in administration, and the trends of the time convinced them that the employment of scientific knowledge in Western countries was the main cause of material advancement. It was with this realization in mind that in 1905 the Empress Dowager issued an edict for its abolishment.

During the past half-century, although literary attainments in China have not necessarily been qualifications for political appointments, her educated class has still enjoyed a prestige probably greater than that accorded to scholars in any other nation. The tradition of respecting the learned has been so deeply rooted in the Chinese society that even the "new nobles" of the present regime find it difficult to make any radical change.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. A typical old-fashioned village common school
2. The student reciting his lessons turns his back on the master--"backing the book", as it is called, thus preventing any possibility of his peeping at it.
3. Candidates for literary degrees waiting for being admitted into the examination hall
4. Competitors for military degrees exhibiting their skill in archery
5. Entrance to the provincial examination park of 12,000 brick stalls at Canton (rows of cells bearing Chinese characters are seen on both sides)
6. Sheds containing the examination cells to accommodate 20,000 candidates in Nanking. The tall building in the background being a watch-tower.
7. A newly-made Hsiu-tsai (B.A.) worshipping his ancestral tablets, after taking the degree
8. A Chu-jên (M.A.) relaxing at the entrance of his family residence between a pair of flag-poles
9. A toast to a successful Chin-shih (Ph.D.)
10. A young scholar in official dress

The subject matter of the triennial examination was strictly literary and along classical lines, stressing general learning rather than technical knowledge, and was chiefly that of the Confucian school, especially the 'Four Books' and 'Five Classics'. Every examination was divided into three sessions, each with its appropriate topics. Most of them consisted of composing poems on current political problems, writing from memory portions of the sacred edicts, producing essays on the art of government, supporting statements with reference to great historical ideas, etc. Of course, sometimes the questions took a more extended range, but all the examination papers were judged for the power of memory, criterion of style, grace of diction, and particularly beauty of penmanship.

Speaking of penmanship, it is perhaps worthwhile to note that to the Chinese, calligraphy means beauty and power and inspiration. Written characters have always been regarded as among the greatest of gifts. Manuscripts written by great scholars are treasured above gold. On the occasion of a birthday or marriage, no present is considered so elegant as a pair of scrolls inscribed with a complimentary distich. Beautiful calligraphs are used for ornamental purposes everywhere. No wonder that paper, pens (brushes), ink and ink-stone are called "four jewels of the study" in China.

1. Huang-ming teng-k'o mo-chüan hsüan

(Selections of fine imperial examination papers under the Ming dynasty (1368-1643,)
1573-1620 48 volumes

2. Han-lin ching hsüan chia lun

(A collection of examination essays by Han-lin scholars, together with discussions thereof); edited by Yao Lai
1485 10 volumes

3. Jên-tsai-t'ang shih i hsiang

(A collection of pa-ku-wên--the so-called 'eight-legged essay'); by Tung Hsün
1878 6 volumes

4. Chü yeh chih yen

(A work on literary composition and study); by Wu Chih-wang
1599 4 volumes

5. A clipping from "The United States in a New World (II: Pacific Relations--Supplement to Fortune, August, 1942) Manchu China: An Oriental despotism, nevertheless had an independent civil service. The middle-aged student above takes his competitive examinations in a narrow cell guarded by soldiers, along with several thousand other candidates in identical cells. At the right, a row of these cells in Chang-sha. The examinations lasted for days, mostly feats of memory, calligraphy, and knowledge of the classics, they came to be scorned by young Western-educated Chinese, and were abolished in 1905.

1. Cribbing Garment: rented and sewed in under lining by dishonest applicants for examination tests.--This garment, being made of white satin, 29 inches long by 25 inches wide, with two 39-inched long sleeves, contains 722 finished compositions in 'pa-ku-wên' (i.e., the so-called 'eight-legged essay' of the old examination system). Each essay is separated by a rectangular mark, the ones on the outside of the garment in red, and the inside, black. The ant-like characters, totalling about 520,400 in number, were all copied by hand in marvels of penmanship. As this practice was not only against the law but also exceedingly expensive, it is believed that only a few 'padding' like this were made during the dynastic period.
2. A Cribbing Book--A 'sleeve edition' of the Five Classics with commentaries, 260 by 145 mm. in size, printed in minute characters for use by dishonest candidates at examinations.
3. Chinese stationery (a desk set)

(1) Turquoise blue porcelain brush-holder	<u>Ch'ien-lung</u> (1736-1795)
(2) Turquoise blue porcelain pen-rest	<u>K'ang-hsi</u> (1662-1722)
(3) Turquoise blue porcelain flower-holder (in the form of an unicorn)	Same
(4) Turquoise blue porcelain water coupe (in the form of a snail)	Same
(5) Stone ink-slab in wooden box with ink	

--Lent by Mr. C. F. Yau--
4. An imperial examination paper; by Lin Ping-hsiu (a Chin-shih [Ph.D.] in 1894)

--Lent by the Library of Congress--
(Division of Orientalia)
5. Handwriting of Chin Shêng (a Chin-shih [Ph.D.] in 1742)

--Lent by Dr. Hu Shih--
6. Ch'ing Chin-shih t'i ming pei lu; enlarged and re-edited by Fang Chao-ying and Tu Lien-chê
(Indexed complete lists of the successful candidates in the final (or palace) examinations from 1646 to 1904)
1941

7. Ming chuang-yüan t'u k'ao
(A collection of illustrated notes regarding incidents in the lives of scholars who took first place at the triennial palace examinations during the Ming dynasty [1368-1643]; by Ku Ting-ch'ên
n.d. 6 volumes

8. Huang-ch'ao tz'ü lin tien-ku
(Historical survey of the Hanlin Academy, together with register of its membership during the Ch'ing dynasty up to A.D. 1805)
1887 34 volumes

PORTRAIT OF CONFUCIUS

--after a rubbing of a stone engraving--
dated 1345 A.D.

Confucius (B.C. 551-479) is China's greatest sage. His clan name was K'ung, and Confucius is merely the Latinized form of K'ung Fu-tze, meaning "the philosopher or master K'ung". For ages, he has been revered in China as the fountain of wisdom and virtue. It was chiefly the general knowledge of his teachings that was stressed in the old Chinese competitive examinations.

(Lent by Professor George Rowley)

Some Characteristic Sayings of Confucius

1. Where there is education, there is no distinction of class.
2. The man who loves learning is better than the man who knows it, and the man who finds happiness in it is better than the man who loves it.
3. Learning, undigested by thought, is labour lost; thought unassisted by learning, is perilous.
4. Refusal to instruct one who is competent to learn entails the waste of a man. Instruction of one who is incompetent to learn entails waste of words. The wise man is he who wastes neither men nor words.
5. When you know, to know that you know, and when you do not know, to know that you do not know--that is true knowledge.
6. Wisdom, compassion and courage--these are the three universally recognized moral qualities of man. Love of knowledge is akin to wisdom. Strenuous attention to conduct is akin to compassion. Sensitiveness to shame is akin to courage.
7. Do not do to others that which you do not wish to be done to yourself.
8. Those whose care extends not far ahead will find their troubles near at hand.
9. Do not worry about people not knowing your ability, but worry that you have not got it.
10. The real fault is to have faults and not try to amend them.
11. The cautious seldom err.
12. In style all that is required is that it convey the meaning.
13. A gentleman is ashamed that his words are better than his deeds.
14. When you see a good man, try to emulate his example, and when you see a bad man, search yourself for his faults.
15. It is only when the cold season comes that we know the pine and cypress to be evergreens. (Men are known in time of adversity.)

16. A man of inward virtue will have virturous words on his lips, but a man of virtuous words is not always a virtuous man. The man of perfect goodness is sure to possess courage, but the courageous man is not necessarily good.