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Silks from the Silk Road

Origin, Transmission
and Exchange

絲路之網

起源、传播与交流

ZHAO Feng *Chief Editor*



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Wall Paintings in the Tomb of Han Xiu (provided by Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology.)





絲路之綢

起源、传播与交流

Date: Sep. 15–Oct. 15, 2015

Place: Hangzhou West Lake Museum

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Organizers

State Administration of Cultural Heritage
The People's Government of Zhejiang Province

Co-organizers

Zhejiang Provincial Cultural Heritage Bureau
Henan Provincial Cultural Heritage Bureau
Hubei Provincial Cultural Heritage Bureau
Hunan Provincial Cultural Heritage Bureau
Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Heritage Bureau
Gansu Provincial Cultural Heritage Bureau
Qinghai Provincial Cultural Heritage Bureau
Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Cultural Heritage Bureau

Host

China National Silk Museum

Exhibitors

Dingzhou Museum Zhejiang Provincial Museum China National Silk Museum
Hangzhou West Lake Museum Liangzhu Museum Henan Museum
Zhengzhou Municipal Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute
Luoyang Museum Guo State Museum Jingzhou Museum
Hunan Provincial Museum Shaanxi History Museum
Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology Xi'an Museum
Xi'an Beilin Museum Hanyangling Museum Gansu Provincial Museum
Gansu Provincial Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute
Gansu Bamboo Slips Museum Dunhuang Academy China Gaotai Museum
Qinghai Provincial Museum Qinghai Provincial Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute
Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Museum
Xinjiang Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute
Khotan Museum Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture Museum



Forward I

Silk has a long-time relationship with Zhejiang Province.

In 1977, a piece of ivory carved with the pattern of a silkworm excavated at the Hemudu Site in Yuyao, Ningbo. Dating back to about 7,000 years ago, it is the earliest drawing of a silkworm we have known. In 1986, six jade objects (three pairs) were unearthed at Liangzhu Culture Tomb M23 at Fanshan, Yuhang, Hangzhou, becoming the earliest and most complete loom parts in China so far. In the 1950s, archaeologists found a batch of silk threads, belts and fabrics that were made more than 4,200 years ago during their two times' excavations at the Qianshanyang Site in Huzhou. Archaeologists and textile experts agree that they were the earliest silk works found in the Yangtze River Basin. Those findings prove that the silkworm raising and silk making had existed in China's Yangtze River Basin during the Neolithic Age, establishing the status of

this region as the place where silk originated.

Afterwards, silkworm raising and silk making did not stop in Zhejiang Province. Since the Southern Song Dynasty, the Hangzhou-Jiaxing-Huzhou Region has been the most important region of silk making. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the central governments set up official silk making plants in Hangzhou. A number of towns rose to fame thanks to their excellent products. Zhejiang, due to its location, is one node of the maritime Silk Road. During the Three Kingdoms, the Sun Quan administration hired consultants from Southeast Asian countries, which laid a foundation for overseas silk trade. Later on, the Mingzhou Port in the Tang and Song dynasties, the Hangzhou Port, Wenzhou Port and Ganpu Port during the Song and Yuan dynasties as well as the Qingyuan Port during the Yuan Dynasty saw unprecedented prosperity. Zhejiang was home to four of seven China's overseas

trade administrations in the Yuan Dynasty. They enabled silk products and silk making techniques from Zhejiang Province and other parts of the country to spread to the world, facilitating economic and cultural exchanges between the East and the West.

Today, the Silk Road with silk as its carrier has transcended its name's meaning. It serves as a symbol of exchanges and cooperation among different nations and cultures and offers the world an example of world peace and development. As a province that has a long history of silk making and overseas trade, it is Zhejiang's mission to think about how to demonstrate and carry forward the spirit of friendship and cooperation of the ancient Silk Road, how to renew China's great contribution

to humanity and how to consolidate the social and public basis of the Belt and Road initiative. That is also why we stage the exhibition titled "Silks from the Silk Road: Origin, Transmission and Exchange".

Thanks to support from the State Administration of Cultural Heritage as well as departments of cultural heritage from many provinces and autonomous regions, the exhibition presents more than 140 pieces (sets) of precious collections from 27 organizations of the whole country, that demonstrate from different perspectives how silk originated in China and spread from the East to the West as well as cultural exchanges along the Silk Road. It also conveys the idea of "civilizations become colourful through exchanges and diversified through mutual appreciation".

Zheng Jiwei

Vice Governor of Zhejiang Province

Foreword II

China has a long history of silk weaving technique, characterized by home-raised silkworms, and the silk culture derived from the technique. There have long been historic recordings and mythical legends about the origin of silk in China. The modern archaeological excavations of the silkworm cocoons, textile tools and silk fragments of the Neolithic Age have sufficiently proved in science that as early as more than 5,000 years ago, sericulture and silk industry had appeared in China in the East of the world and become one of the features of the Chinese civilization.

In the mid-20th century, Soviet Union archaeologist discovered exquisite Chinese silk textiles from the tombs of the ancient nomads at Pazyrik, Altayskiy Autonomous Province at the west foot of the Altay Mountain. On these products, there were patterns of phoenix and birds embroidered with colour silk and wool. The patterns, structure of fiber, artistic skill, etc., were highly identical with the silk textiles unearthed from the tombs of the Chu Kingdom during the Warring States Period. Similar silk products were also found in the ancient tombs at Alagou, Toksun County, Turfan, Xinjiang. This indicates that as early as in the fifth century B.C., silk products had been spread to the world from China. Zhang Qian, a Chinese diplomat during the Emperor Wudi of the Western Han Dynasty

had visited the Western Regions twice and basically connected the central plain with the Central Asia, Western Asia and Europe, forming a silk trading channel that lied across the Eurasia Continent. It reached at its prime time during the Han, Wei, Sui and Tang periods. Since then, the Silk Road has become the most important trading and cultural exchange channel between the East and West of the world in ancient time. For more than 1,000 years, numerous camel caravans of business people came back and forth along the route, bringing produces of different areas to all corners of the world. At the same time, they also helped the spread of the local region, culture and science, extremely promoting the exchanges and integration of the Eastern and Western culture. As the most important carrier of the Silk Road, the silk products, silkworm-raising and silk weaving technique originated from China had been spread to the world through the path and realized the localization of the silk production technique, producing great influence on the social, economic and cultural development of different countries in the world.

On June 22, 2013, the 38th World Heritage Convention held in Doha, Qatar, examined inscribed the "Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor", jointly nominated by China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, on the World Heritage

List. The World Heritage Committee deems that the Silk Road has been the road of integration, exchange and dialogue between the East and the West and has made significant contributions to the common prosperity of the mankind for nearly 2,000 years. In recent years, Chinese President Xi Jinping initiated to build “the New Silk Road Economic Belt” and “the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” which has become the national major strategy to construct “the Belt and Road” and is of great significance for setting up a new layout for China’s overall opening-up, and promoting the peaceful development of different regions and the world.

The museum shoulders the social responsibility and obligations of inheriting civilization and promoting cultural dissemination. Many institutions of museum, from the aspect of their own mission, uphold the cultural spirit that crosses time and space, countries, has lasting charm and owns contemporary value by means of jointly hosting themed exhibition. In recent years, a series of exhibitions successfully revealed the historical changes and magnificent achievements of the ancient Silk Road, demonstrated the exchanges, dialogue and integration of the economic, trading, cultural and social development.

The precious cultural relics, one by one, have vividly reflected the spirit of the Silk Road of peaceful cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual study and mutual benefits.

The exhibition is jointly hosted by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage and the People’s Government of Zhejiang Province. It is jointly organized by the departments of cultural heritage of Zhejiang, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Shaanxi, Gansu and Qinghai provinces and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. It collects 140 pieces (sets) of the precious cultural relics from 27 cultural relics departments of eight provinces and one autonomous region. Although it is not the largest themed show in scale with the most exhibits about the Silk Road in recent years, it focuses on silk, the most important carrier of the Silk Road, with unique perspective and complete contents. It realistically depicts the origin of silk in China, its spread and the exchanges of textile culture between the East and the West, and reflects the significance of ancient cultural and trading exchanges. Though the time for the exhibition is limited, with the publication of the research achievements of the research personnel, such an exhibition of academic and social significance will be spread wider, further and longer in another form.

Song Xinchao
*Deputy Director General of
State Administration of Cultural Heritage*

Acknowledgments

China National Silk Museum (CNSM), since established and opened to the public in 1992, has been dedicated to the research of the Silk Road, especially the unearthed silk from the Silk Road. At that time, the remnant of more than 30 pieces of unearthed silk articles of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Museum, Xinjiang Institute of Archaeology and Turfan Cultural Relics Protection Institute have provided exhibits of the Silk Road and the first batch of study samples for us. In the following more than 20 years, CNSM has cooperated with Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Xinjiang and other provinces (autonomous regions) along the Silk Road, and has been dedicated to identification and protection of unearthed silk articles while holding or participating in organization of exhibitions related to the Silk Road across the world. After the Key Scientific Research Base of State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) on Textile conservation was approved at CNSM in 2010, we have strengthened research and conservation to the unearthed silk and textile along the Silk Road and cooperated with counterparts along the Silk Road by setting up a workstation in Xinjiang and a joint workstation in Tibet, with Gansu workstation in preparation.

President Xi Jinping proposed to build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in 2013 on an international occasion. Since then the Silk Road has become a hot word in the international community, resulting in profound responses from countries along the Silk Road. In 2014, China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have successfully inscribed the "Silk Roads: the

Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor" to the World Heritage List, further highlighting the cultural value and significance of the Silk Road. Since then SACH has deployed protection and study missions of the Silk Road on several occasions after the successful inscription.

In order to enable silk to play a better role in the protection and study of the cultural heritage along the Silk Road and the construction of "the Belt and Road", CNSM, with vigorous support from Zhejiang Provincial Cultural Heritage Bureau, prepared to stage a silk exhibition dubbed "Silks from the Silk Road: Origin, Transmission and Exchange" in the initiative at the end of 2014. This concept received great support from leaders in charge at various levels of SACH. On May 11, 2015, a coordination meeting was held in Beijing, which was chaired by SACH and participated by 16 cultural relics organizations from six provinces and an autonomous region. Song Xinchao, Deputy Director General of SACH, made a pep talk and all participants agreed to support the exhibition. Later CNSM started to contact and coordinate with 27 cultural relics museums across China to decide the list of exhibits. On June 22, on the occasion of the first anniversary of successful inscription of the Silk Road to the World Heritage List, CNSM convened an expert meeting for the organization of the exhibition and made a special report to SACH after the meeting before finally adopting the exhibition scheme. Therefore, under the unified organization and coordination of SACH, specific guidance of the People's Government of Zhejiang Province and Zhejiang Provincial Cultural Heritage Bureau, and support and collaboration

of 26 counterparts from eight province and an autonomous region, nearly 140 pieces (sets) of select silk and related exhibits were collected, demonstrating the origin and transmission of silk in China, exchanges of the textile culture between the East and the West along the Silk Road and significance of business exchanges in ancient times.

We CNSM, planner and organizer of the exhibition, would like to especially thank the sponsors of the exhibition—SACH and the People's Government of Zhejiang Province and the following people for their support: Li Xiaojie, Director General of SACH made a written reply for the exhibition, Song Xinchao, Deputy Director General, Duan Yong, Department Director, Luo Jing, Deputy Department Director and Guo Changhong, Division Director have chaired meetings, offered suggestions and examined the exhibition outline, and Tong Mingkang, Deputy Director General of SACH, also offer instructions from the angle of the Silk Road as world heritage. Zheng Jiwei, Deputy Governor of Zhejiang Province, offered suggestions for the exhibition plan. Chen Yao, Director of Zhejiang Provincial Cultural Heritage Bureau, Zheng Jianhua, Deputy Director, Yang Xinping, Division Director, and Jin Ping, Deputy Division Director of Zhejiang Provincial Cultural Heritage Bureau offered specific instructions. Moreover, Prof. Rong Xinjiang of Peking University, E Jun, Director of Gansu Provincial Museum, Tian Kai, Director of Henan Museum and Li Yuxin, Director of the History Department, Zhejiang Provincial Museum and other invited experts offered their valuable advice and academic quality control for the exhibition.

The basic element of an exhibition is exhibits. Therefore, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the cultural heritage administration of

Zhejiang, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai and Xinjiang for their vigorous coordination and support, and the 26 cultural relics organizations which supplied nearly 140 exhibits (see the list of exhibitors). Thanks to their generous help, these valuable cultural relics were shown to audience in Hangzhou. Although we especially entrusted Huaxie International Fine Art Freight Services Co., Ltd. to transport the exhibits, some organizations especially delivered the exhibits themselves to facilitate the exhibition.

The exhibition design was undertaken by Ms. Han Meng and her team, Hangzhou Obsidian Exhibition Design Co., Ltd. Many thanks for their carefulness and patience in works. The online exhibition promoted concurrently with the offline exhibition was undertaken by Mr. Wang Yongchao and his team of Zhejiang University. Pan Cangsang, Director of the Hangzhou West Lake Museum, helped the exhibition to be staged as scheduled by offering a venue when our museum had to be shut down for renovation.

We would like to express our most sincere thanks to all the institutions, organizations, leaders, scholars and individuals who have contributed to the successful organization of the exhibition "Silks from the Silk Road: Origin, Transmission and Exchange".

Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to Zheng Jiwei, Deputy Governor and Song Xinciao, Deputy Director General for their forewords for the book, Prof. Rong Xinjiang for his dissertation, those who contributed words and pictures and illustrators of the book. And also many thanks to Lu Dongming, Director of Zhejiang University Press, and Li Chen and Zhang Chen, editors in charge who completed the publication of the book in a very short time.

About of the Exhibition

The ancient Silk Road was the most important trade route and cultural bridge between the East and the West, connecting China and the rest of the world. For more than 1,000 years, countless traders and their camel trains delivered goods and products among different nations along the route and helped spread religion and culture as well as science and technology, promoting cultural exchanges and integration. Along this route, silk and silkworm raising as well as silk making that originated in China spread to other parts of the world. Such techniques as silk making were localized in countries along the route, bringing about great influences on their social and economic development. As exchanges were deepened, western weaving began exerting their influence on silk making in China, with examples being western styles and themes in traditional Chinese textiles.

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping put

forward the initiative to build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. In 2014, a site proposed by China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan called "Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor" was inscribed on the World Heritage List, making the ancient Silk Road a common treasure of the humankind. Today, the Silk Road wins unprecedented concern of the public, experts and leaders.

However, as the name and originator of the road, silk itself hasn't received enough concern. When was silk transported on the Silk Road for the first time? What was the proportion of silk in the trade along the Silk Road? What was the importance of silk in the economic activities along the Silk Road? Where was the silk on the Silk Road produced and even which country was the origin of the ancient silk? Numerous questions have puzzled the people who

are studying or describing the Silk Road.

Against the backdrop, based on our research over the years and cooperation with the cultural institutions museums along the Silk Road, we submitted the motion to hold the exhibition "Silks from the Silk Road: Origin, Transmission and Exchange". We hope to illustrate the domestication of silkworms in China, the origination of silk in China, the westward spread and the exchanges and development of silk during the transmission by means of the unearthed relics in archeological excavations and the most valuable historical facts. It exhibits the origin of the Silk Road, the stories about cultural exchanges along the Silk Road, the spirit of the Silk Road and the objectives of the Belt and Road Strategy.

Silks from the Silk Road: Origin, Transmission and Exchange, an exhibition sponsored by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage and Zhejiang

Provincial Government, co-sponsored by cultural heritage bureaus in Zhejiang, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai provinces as well as the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and with the participation of 27 cultural institutions museums along the Silk Road, will be held between September 15 and October 15, 2015 in the Hangzhou West Lake Museum. The exhibition, showcasing nearly 140 pieces (sets) of silk and related items are divided into four parts, namely Origins in China, Opening to the World, Integration in Western Regions and Localization and Diversity, demonstrates how silk originated in China and spread to other parts of the world as well as cultural exchanges between the East and the West through the Silk Road. It was through such exchanges that the art of silk making improved and it was thanks to the Silk Road that silk products became available worldwide.