

HOW TO SELECT

EMBROIDERED ART

Rhys Wesley & Ren Yue Yuan



Marshall
Cavendish
名创国际出版集团

上海传播出版社



HOW TO SELECT

EMBROIDERED ART

Rhys Wesley & Ren Yue Yuan

图书馆
章

图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

如何挑选中国刺绣：英文 / (澳大利亚) 卫瑞斯, 任月圆著.

—北京：五洲传播出版社，2009.1

ISBN 978-7-5085-1483-3

I. 如… II. ①卫…②任… III. 刺绣—简介—中国—英文 IV. J523.6

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字 (2008) 第182829号

著 者：Rhys Wesley (澳大利亚) 任月圆

选题编辑：张丽平 荆孝敏

责任编辑：张美景 李阳

装帧设计：熊晓莹 宋索迪

设计制作：宋微微

出版发行：五洲传播出版社

地 址：北京市海淀区北小马厂6号华天大厦

邮 编：100038

网 址：www.cicc.org.cn

电 话：010-58891281

印 刷：恒美印务 (广州) 有限公司

开 本：100×185mm 1/32

印 张：4.875

版 次：2009年1月第1版 2009年1月第1次印刷

06800 (平)

Foreword

All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware.

Martin Buber, German philosopher

It may seem odd to begin a guide on the right purchase of different types of embroidery with a quote about traveling, but traveling is an indispensable part of the Western experience of China. For thousands of years, the West's knowledge of China has not been a story told by Chinese people themselves, but were experiences narrated by the visiting travelers.

As a result, the Western imagination of the Middle Kingdom has often taken on a fascinating, and at times, fantastical edge. The tendency to misinform, exaggerate, or simply make things up was exacerbated by the vast distance that was covered en route to access this distant and exotic land. This Oriental awe was also magnified by the mysterious valuables that made its way through different cultures, religions, and kingdoms, in places as far as Western Europe, before reaching their final destinations.

China, 中國 “Zhong guo” means “middle kingdom”. It gives the outsider some idea as to where the Chinese had traditionally placed themselves on the map. Furthermore, the incredibly rich indigenous culture is replete with practices and beliefs. These were not known by the outside world for thousands of years. This isolationism continues. Perhaps, it was not until the recent years that there has been any real effort by the Chinese to communicate with the outside world.

Since time immemorial, silk has been a jealously guarded secret in China, and remained a highly prized tradable good, as far as Europe in the west.

Perhaps it is the intransigence of the Chinese that makes the Middle Kingdom so magnetically attractive to the Western imagination. It is a possible hangover from the wonderful, mysterious treasures that

used to travel thousands of miles along the Silk Road. Perhaps it is because of the fact the country has long been difficult to access for the outsiders. Perhaps today it is a combination of these aspects, along with an admiration for the country's fast economic development

Modern China looks like it is adopting Western ways. From Western technology and medicine, to KFC, Adidas, and basketball, China seems to be a country moving away from its historical and cultural legacy at a breakneck speed. However, deep within, the cultural gap between the East and the West remains vast.

Even in interpersonal communications, cultural mannerisms present a number of barriers to effective communication, not to mention the disparity of language. Although we now have the ability to fly to China from anywhere in the world within a few hours, developing a mutual understanding of the inherent differences, still has a long way to go.

Furthermore, it could be argued that China is not moving away from its historical legacy due to its present, swift economic transformation, but is journeying back toward it. Throughout history, the Middle Kingdom has been one of the world's most powerful economic and cultural middle points, even if in Western history books express awe over its distance and inaccessibility. With an economy that has grown at 10 percent for 30 years, a netizen population that has already overtaken the United States in terms of numbers, well over half a billion mobile phones, and an inexhaustible supply of cheap labor; the Chinese economic juggernaut is going to roll on for quite some time to come.

My own journey to China began, without me being quite aware of it, about 10 years ago when I began a degree in Asian Studies. I had yet not decided what I wanted to do in life. After battling through to graduation, I was still none the wiser! Through a combination of luck and fate I found myself teaching English in Taiwan. After a short time in Taiwan, I realized that my future did not lie in teaching, but I was still at a loss as to where exactly it should be. I had already begun studying Chinese at this stage, and after a year and a half in the classroom, something snapped inside me and I decided to dedicate myself to the full-time study of the language.

Your journey to China may consist of a two-week trip through the great cultural and economic centers of the country. You may be a long-term China resident with no plans to head to your country of origin, any time soon. Or it may so be that the journey you are undertaking in China now has a secret destination chartered for you that you are unaware of at present.

Since we began this introduction with the thought of a European philosopher, it seems only fitting to conclude it with a quote of Chinese wisdom. A quote that works on a metaphysical and practical level, and is as applicable to traveling and pondering upon the deeper meaning of life as it is to, well, appreciating the world of Chinese embroidery.

A good traveler has no fixed plans, and is not intent on arriving.

Lao Zi, Taoist sage.

Rhys Wesley

Contents

Why Embroidery? 7

Legends and Truth	8
The Art of the Needle	11
A Valuable Investment	13
A Cultural Gift to the World	14
The Silk Road Continues...	18

A Fabulous Show 20

Four Beauties of the Embroidery Family	21
Horsetail Embroidery	34

Embroidery Process 35

Ingredients for an Embroidery Recipe	36
Preparation for the embroidery cook-up	42
Add Auspicious Elements	49
Use Classic Embroidery Patterns	51

Sharp Eyes 65

Quality Detection	66
Points to note	67
Hand vs Machine: Spotting the difference	70
Keep an eagle eye on “Ancient Pieces”	73

Reference Price 78

The Market	79
Price Calculator	82
Calculating Hint No. 1	82
Sample Embroidery Art Pieces	85
Souvenirs and Presents	104

Shopping Spots 135

Some Buying Practice	136
Sharpening Your Bargaining Skills	136
Details of Stores	139

Appendix 148

Chinese Phrases Used in Buying Embroidery	148
Watch Your Tone	153

How to Select series is jointly published by Marshall Cavendish and China Intercontinental Press in 2008. The advices given in the series are independent. No advertising arrangement has been involved. No payment has been accepted by the publishers for listing or introducing any business. The authors of the series have not accepted any discount or payment in exchange for any positive coverage either. The authors and publishers have taken all reasonable care in preparing the series, we disclaim all liability arising from using the series.

《如何选购》系列由五洲传播出版社和名创出版集团于2008年合作出版，书中的有关建议是独立的，没有涉及任何广告安排。出版社未向书中介绍或者列名的任何商家索取报酬。本系列的作者也未曾因对商家进行正面报道而接受商家的折扣优惠或酬谢。在本系列图书出版准备过程中，作者和出版社均已尽最大努力做到客观、中立，我们对使用本系列图书出现的问题概不予负责。

Why Embroidery?

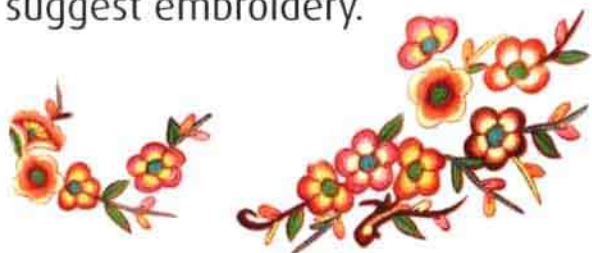




◆ Welcome to the world of embroidery: A glance inside an embroidery store.
 (Photographed in White Peacock Art World).

Is this your first visit to China? Maybe you have been living here for many years. Whether you are a long-term resident or a flying visitor, everyone who visits China looks, at some stage, for a piece of treasure that captures the essence of this ancient culture.

I'm not talking about a typical piece of electronics. If you are looking for something enduring, practical, relatively affordable, and unique to China, then I suggest embroidery.



Legends and Truth

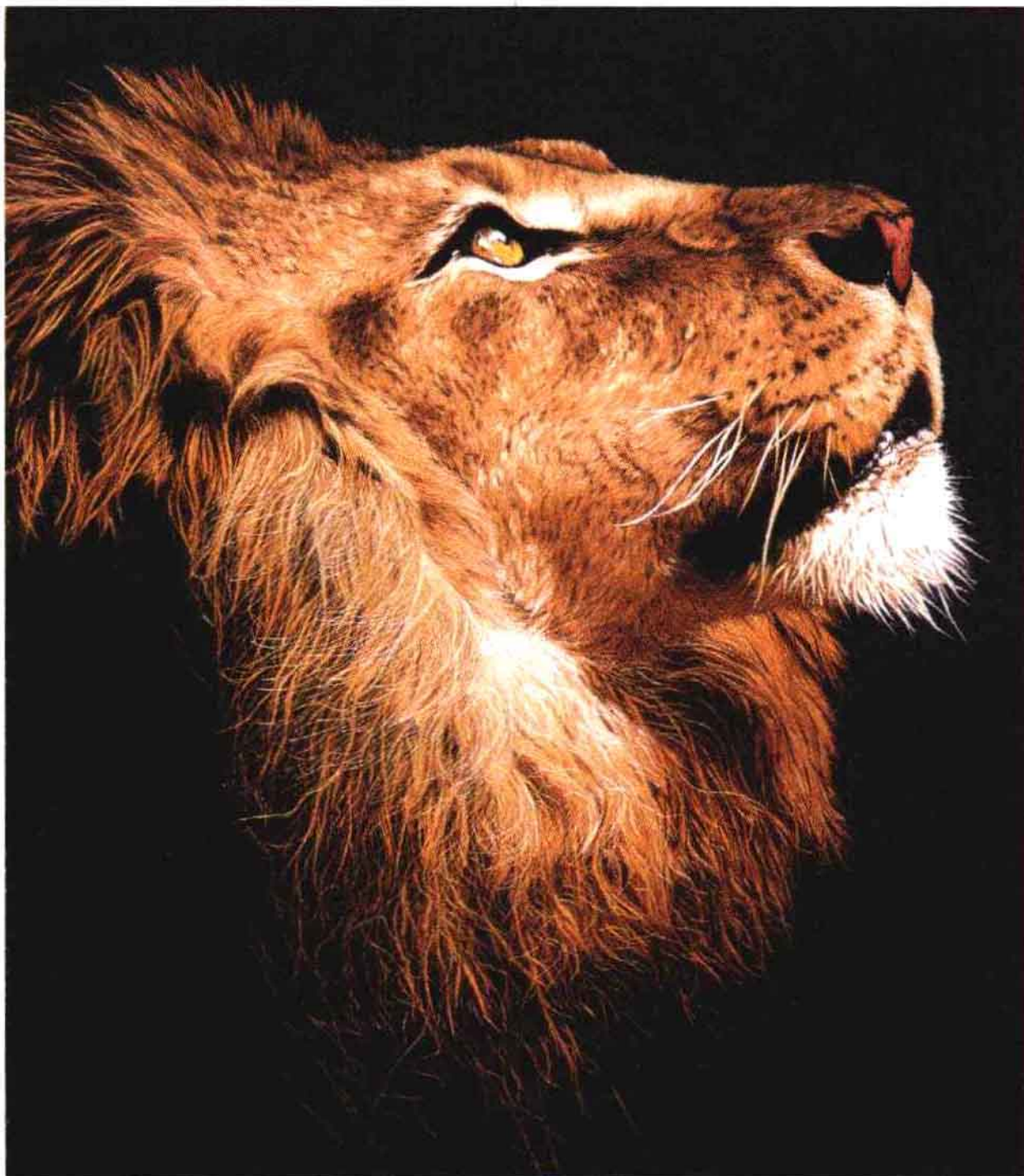
When I first arrived in China, 3 years ago, I was mesmerised by the stunning embroidery products on display in the market at Wangfujing, Beijing. What particularly caught my eye on that first day were the extraordinarily life-like tigers lounging indolently on the wall hangings. Delving further into the back corners of small stores I was amazed at the variety of embroidered goods that could be found. Fancying myself as a bit of a China buff, I became determined to find out more. The question uppermost on my

mind was how and where did this fantastic art form originate?

The first thing you will learn about China is that everything is several thousand years old. Embroidery is no exception. And like all ancient things, there are many legends about its origin. The following is my favorite.

In ancient times, the people in humid, tropical southern China experienced one water-borne

disaster after another. Typhoons, floods, storms, and tempests unleashed their fury and wreaked terrible vengeance upon the land. The people experienced untold suffering. In despair, they turned to the dragon god — master of the sea and the water, for protection. To display their devotion, they tattooed their bodies with fantastic images of dragons. Sounds painful, doesn't it? I'd probably stick with the storms and tempests!



◆ Lion: King of the beasts! (Provided by Goulswon)

Concerned for his people's welfare, or perhaps unable to endure the pain himself of having thousands of needles stuck into his body, a tribal chieftain named Zhong Yong organized a meeting to discuss possible alternatives to tattooing. Wise and venerable scholars, priests, and shamans gathered to chew the fat. Zhong Yong's granddaughter was also sitting in the room, eavesdropping on their conversation as she sewed. She was so fascinated by the conversation that she lost focus on her sewing. The needle slipped and punctured her skin. Blood dripped onto the cloth. Gasping with pain, Zhong Yong's granddaughter stared intently at the blood as it spread over her sewing. Slowly an idea began to unfold in her mind. For seven days and seven nights she labored

intensively. When she was ready, she presented her creation to her grandfather. The chief was amazed. His granddaughter had tattooed the sacred dragon image directly onto his clothes!

On an auspicious day, the chief convened a tribal meeting and proudly displayed his beautiful new outfit. "From this day forward," he proclaimed to the tribe, "we will no longer tattoo our bodies." Inwardly he may have breathed a sigh of relief!

As for his granddaughter, she is remembered to this day. A style of needlework, Nü Hong (女红), was named after her.



◆ The legend lives: Nü Hong-style embroidered dress.

Is it just me, or does inventing tattooing before embroidery sound a trifle sadistic to you too?

However romantic the legend of Zhong Yong and his astute granddaughter may be, I cannot claim it to be 100 percent accurate. I will give a more prosaic explanation with a little more “objectivity” and with some “historical facts.” Of course, any introduction to Chinese art of embroidery cannot be separated from silk. Silk, famed as one of China’s

most enduring gifts to the world, is thought to have first been cultivated somewhere between 5000 and 3000 B.C., making it older than your grandma! Although experts are still unsure of the exact time period in which embroidery emerged, a cloth embroidered with dragons, phoenixes, and tigers was unearthed in a tomb from the period of the Warring States (475 B.C.–221 B.C.).

(One thing you will learn about China is that everything happened at least 2,000 years ago!)

Silk is so light and so strong it was actually used by Mongols as a kind of armor. The strength of the fibres meant that it



◆ *Stunning silk: Silkworms began to be bred more than 4,000 years ago.*

would reduce the chance of arrows puncturing the skin, thus reducing the possibility of infection. However, chances are, if you got hit by an arrow wearing your silk top at the Forbidden City, praising its protective qualities is probably going to be the last thing on your mind!

The Art of the Needle

Long after Nü Hong, during the period of the Three Kingdoms (A.D.220 – A.D.280), a woman once again provided an artistic



Multitalented: A top-notch embroiderer usually is a painter too.

and practical leap in the development of embroidery. However, this legend also involves a powerful man.

The King of Wu, Sun Quan, was a man known for his efficiency.

At the time of his reign, China was wrecked by civil unrest. As a preparation for war, Sun Quan wanted to find a painter with great skill and keen observation of detail to represent every available mountain, river, road, forest, and village in a single illustration. (He was a man of unreasonable demands!) The prime minister, in a true spirit of nepotism, recommended his young daughter for the job. The girl made a detailed sketch for the king, but as she was working, she paused and reflected on the disadvantages of using paper for such a valuable document. Paper could easily be destroyed by hand and ruined by water. In a flash of inspiration, she decided to embroider the entire map. So impressed was the king that he called her a “goddess of the needle.” Incidentally, she is also recorded as the first female painter in Chinese history, thus demonstrating once again the



A Song Dynasty scroll: Truly the work of a needle goddess. (Provided by Goulswon).

age-old link between the arts of painting and embroidery in this country.

Personally, the rapturous colors and amazing animals on display in an average work of Chinese embroidery leave Western embroidery for dead. But in the interests of objectivity, I think it's a good idea to take a look at some of the things that make the two styles different.

Chinese embroidery is known as "free embroidery." It is a form of "surface" embroidery, which is where the patterns and stitches are laid on top of the canvas, rather than stitched through it. That is to say, it is the opposite of counted-thread embroidery. European styles of embroidery include both counted-thread (such as cross stitch, needlepoint) and free styles (such as crewel, as used in the Bayeux Tapestry, which narrates the tale of the Norman invasion of England).

Besides technique, materials used are, of course, the major difference between Chinese and Western embroidery. Since Europeans did not develop a tradition of breeding silkworms, they never developed the knowledge of how to use silk thread and cloth for the purposes of embroidery.

A Valuable Investment

Have you spent a fortune on buying clothes, electronics, and DVDs? The average visitor shopping in China today is like a kid in a candy store, with endless treats and eager sales people everywhere! It's easy to spot a Westerner with limited time in this country. Their arms are full of bags, eyes crazed with consumer lust, and fingers are perpetually hovering at their





◆ *Musical Fairy: This is an image from the Buddhist Mogao Grotto. (Provided by Goulswon).*

hip pocket! With the opening up of the country in the late 1970s, China has played host to an ever-increasing number of tourists and outside influences. But this is not necessarily going to last forever, especially for unique Chinese goods such as embroidery.

With more and more techniques for mass production being developed all the time, coupled with China's breakneck economic growth, the days of cheap, handmade traditional Chinese embroidery purchased straight from the source are

coming to a slow but inevitable end. New opportunities help the Chinese people add value to their education and find professional jobs. The young generation keen on fast growth are leaving labor-intensive ones. Inevitably, the price of unique products, such as embroidery, will increase as less people will be willing to spend time and labor on this. Again the slow but sure appreciation of the Chinese yuan against the U.S. dollar will add to

the increase.

A Cultural Gift to the World

Right now shopping in China is a party for visitors, and it's tempting to grab as much on offer as possible. Clothes, DVDs, and electronics are just some of the goods that can be found cheaper in China than many other countries. And hey, why not enjoy these kinds of things?