

EMBROIDERY  
IN THE COLLECTION OF  
THE NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM

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## EMBROIDERY

Embroidery is a craft having practical value as decoration. There are, on the other hand, some works of embroidery, the function of which falls into the realm of pure aesthetic appreciation, but works of this class are decidedly less numerous than those of practical use. The embroidery works in the collection of the National Palace Museum belong for the most part to the latter category, among which are works that do not want attention to fineness of execution or depth of conception.

### Origin and Early Period of Embroidery

The origin of Chinese embroidery lies in the far distant past. Embroidered patterns of the ancient ceremonial robes, referred to in the *Classic of History*, indicate that embroidery already existed in the times of Yü and Shun. A gloss to the section "On Painting" of the *Chou-li* says, "Whatever is embroidered needs also to be painted, whereafter it may be stitched. Thus painting and embroidery are united under the same directing office." Inasmuch as the *Chou-li* would appear to be a work of the Eastern Chou period, the establishment of a bureau solely to oversee embroidery work must at the latest be prior to the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period. Embroidery produced under the supervision of the Court for its own use already existed in the Han period. In the period of the Three Kingdoms Sun Ch'üan, Hege-mon of the Kingdom of Wu, commissioned a certain Madame Chao to make embroidered representations of mountains and streams, physical terrain, and battle formations. In the first year of the Yung-chen reign period (806) of the T'ang dynasty Lu Mei-niang embroidered seven chapters of the Lotus Sutra on a length of silk. Embroidery had already become a distinguished art fit for the apartments of courtly ladies during the period spanning the Han and T'ang dynasties.

The earliest surviving examples of embroidery are works of the Han period. In the course of two expeditions, one in 1906-1908 and one in 1913-1916, the English sinologist Sir Aurel Stein discovered examples of embroidery in the Thous and Buddha Cave at Tunhuang. In 1924-1925, Major P. Kozlov, an officer of the Russian army, discovered fragments of embroidered works at Noin-ula, a site in northern Mongolia. And, in 1959-1960, silk weaving and embroidery were discovered at the ancient cemetery of the abandoned ruins of the village Ni-ya in Min-feng hsien, Sinkiang, and in the ancient tombs north of Assatana village in Turfan. All are reliable research materials for the arts of weaving from the Han to the T'ang dynasty. From the embroideries of the Han period appearing among these materials, it is possible to gain at least a glimpse of the stylistic characteristics of embroidery of the period. I. The subjects of decorative designs of Han embroidery mostly comprise: wave-like cloud patterns; phoenixes and birds wheeling in the air; ferocious animals represented in the "flying gallop"; clusters of mountains arranged in layers; figures of huntsmen and donors; as well as the interlace design frequently seen on mirrors

of the Ch'in and Han periods, and a variety of geometrical and abstract motifs. Compositions are in most cases well organized, vivacious and full of lively movement.

II. The foundation used for embroidery is fine silk, which may itself be woven with letters. Auspicious phrases, popular at the time, may be stitched on the foundation, phrases such as "Years Prolonged—Longevity Increased," "Everlasting Happiness—Bright Refulgence," "May You Have a Myriad Years, as Profuse as the Clouds, as Bright as the Sun, Bringing Benefit to Sons and Grandsons," or "New Gods Vast in Spiritual Effect Perfect Longevity's Formation of a Myriad Years." Others are related to legends of Gods and Immortals, such as "Intertwined Dragons," "Climbing Aloft," and "Vast Mountains."

III. The technique of embroidery, with chain stitch being the most popular of the different techniques, had already achieved a fair standard of accomplishment. Chain stitch embroidery is one type found among the methods of folk embroidery, and being a rather simple technique of stitchery, it is often used by beginners. The technique was still popular in the middle of the T'ang period.

There are only three known examples of embroidery surviving from the T'ang period.

I. An embroidered banner of Śākyamuni expounding the scriptures on the Vulture Peak which was discovered in the Thousand Buddha Cave at Tun-huang, now housed in the British Museum. This piece depicts Śākyamuni standing on the pod of an open lotus with the hem of part of his robe gathered up in his left hand, and his right hand at his side. Behind him appear cliffs and rocks, while a pair of bodhisattvas and a pair of monks are divided between the left and right flanks. Below are images of donors. The foundation of this banner is coarse hempen cloth in its natural color. The motifs have been embroidered with threads of several different colors, including iron red, dark grey, dark green, pale grey, pink, and two kinds of green. Wherever an image of a human figure occurs, chain stitch has been used for the embroidery.

II. "Śākyamuni Expounding the Law," now housed in Japan's Nara National Museum. Śākyamuni, wearing a red costume, is seated upon a lion throne. To the left and right are assembled bodhisattvas, while in front appear lohans and ordinary people of the world. Toward the top of the panel immortals ride flying phoenixes, and heavenly musicians play their instruments. Chain stitch is still the principal technique used for the embroidery of this scroll, the silk surface of which is filled with embroidery. The cheeks of the faces of the figures have been embroidered with chain stitch to form spiral-like patterns.

Both this piece and the previous one are works of the ninth century prior to the full development of satin-stitch embroidery.

III. An embroidered costume, discovered in the Thousand Buddha Cave at Tun-huang and now housed in the British Museum, London. The period of execution of this work falls somewhere in the eighth and ninth centuries. Satin-stitch embroidery has been used for the leaves of the flowers, together with colored threads to render the transition of tones from light to dark. Outlines are couched with

silver-wrapped silk twist, while the birds have been embroidered with gold-wrapped silk twist coiled around and around on the surface of the foundation and then couched in place with fine thread.

Embroidery of the T'ang period already sees the use of many kinds of stitchery and colored threads, and the kinds of material used for the foundation also vary considerably.

### Embroidery of the Sung, Yüan and Later Periods

Being the high period of Buddhism, the T'ang dynasty largely produced embroideries related to matters of religious belief. From the Sung dynasty onwards, however, the technical skills of embroidery turned to other directions, which, aside from practical application, such as the embroidery of clothing, notably included the rise of "embroidered painting," or painting rendered into embroidery, imbued with poetic feeling and meaning. Painting styles thereafter directly affected styles of making embroidery, so that once one understands painting styles, it is no longer difficult to grasp the evolution of embroidery.

The *Ts'uan-tsu ying-hua* says, "By the time of the Hsüan-ho era (1119-1126) of the Sung dynasty the various kinds of stitchery developed during the T'ang dynasty had undergone a gradual process of simplification." If one looks at this so-called "simplification" with the embroidered surfaces in mind, then it will be seen that T'ang techniques of embroidery completely fill the surface of the panel with embroidery, no matter whether a place on the surface does or does not have a specific motif. Sung embroidery is not like this, but rather it embroiders only the principal contents. A preliminary layout having first been sketched out, its prominent formal aspects are then produced at the time of embroidery. Embroidery thus tended toward superbly artful effects. The *Ts'uan-tsu ying-hua* consequently goes on to say, "When embroidery meant to be appreciated, made with simplified stitchery, appeared at the appropriate time, it truly belonged to the category of the unprecedented event. At this time the T'ang and Sung differed well-nigh to the point of complete divergence over the technique of 'embroidered painting.' Nevertheless, embroidery meant to be appreciated, made with simplified techniques of embroidery, exercised a magnitude of influence throughout the Sung and Yüan periods, as well as the Ch'ing period, that can be considered singularly astonishing."

The development of embroidery during the Sung period was due to government sponsorship, about which the *Ts'uan-tsu ying-hua* says, "During the Sung dynasty the Bureau of Fine Textiles at Ch'eng-tu, long delapidated and defunct, was reactivated for the first time in the sixth year of the Yüan-feng era (1063) of Emperor Shen-tsung. Lü Ta-fang, Left Ministerial Executive in the Secretariat, set up the Bureau of Fine Textiles in Ch'eng-tu and established an administrative official to gather together five hundred famous embroiderers and makers of fine textiles from the whole country. The *Chih-kuan-chih* section of the *Sung History* notes: 'The Bureau of Refined Embroideries was in charge of weaving and embroidery for use on carriages and as regalia and for use in sacri-

fices made by honored guests. Over three hundred embroiderers were brought together in the Bureau.' In the Ch'ung-ning era (1102-1106) Emperor Hui-tsung (r. 1101-1126) set up a specialized division devoted to 'embroidered painting' and split 'embroidered painting' into the categories of landscape, buildings, figures, and flowers and birds. Because of the effect of a policy of encouragement through incentive prizes, several famous embroiderers, hereupon appeared in continuous succession. In the Hsüan-ho era (1119-1126) every kind of fine art developed and quickly came to flower; contemporary 'embroidered painting' reached the highest realms as well. At the beginning of the Southern Sung, in the third year of the Chien-yen era (1129) of Emperor Kao-tsung, a Bureau of Fine Textiles was set up in Hangchow. An Officer of Tea and Horses and an Officer of Transport saw to the manufacture of every kind of high-class fine textile and embroidery. Consequently, Sung 'embroidered painting' and tapestry, discussed above, showed the greatest advances in development, having benefited from the strength of the wealth and authority of the court as well as from the nurturing of contemporary culture."

The famous connoisseur, critic and artist of the late Ming, Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636) also praised Sung embroidery in his *Yün-ch'ing-kan mi-lu*, where he says: "The stitchery of embroidery made by people of the Sung dynasty is fine and tight. Floss is used so that not more than one or two strands are used per stitch, and the needlework is as fine as human hair. The coloring is marvellous in an ingeniously fine manner, its splendor quite dazzling the eye. Landscapes distinguish the qualities of the distant and the near; buildings capture the solid form of deep perspective recession. Glances cast by human figures have an expressive feeling of life-like movement, while birds capture extremely well the attitudes of mildness or rapacity. The finest ones are even better than painting. The quality of feeling from gazing at them is that all has been realized in perfect completeness. The warm good nature of the dexterous embroideress is indeed sealed within. My family keeps a scroll in its collection which shows T'ao Yüan-ming at the eastern fence of his garden despairing over his lot in life. The landscape, trees and rocks, and elements of scenery form a panoply of gaily sparkling beauty. At the side are more than ten graphs in tiny, fly-speck standard script, which also has a concentrated vigor quite out of the ordinary. This scroll is hung in co-ordination with the prose poem 'Returning to the Fields,' a masterpiece of calligraphy by Chao Mêng-fu, where it would seem to have found a fitting place."

Very little embroidery of the Yüan period has survived through the ages. Tung Ch'i-ch'ang gives an account of embroidery of the Yüan period in his *Yün-ch'ing-kan mi-lu*, where he says: "Floss as used by the people of the Yüan period was somewhat coarse, and the needlework was not particularly tight. Now and then they used ink to trace out the eyebrows and eyes. They no longer attained the masterful skill of the Sung people."

Embroidery began to be well-developed once again after the Hsüan-te era (1426-1435) of the Ming dynasty. From time to time



Sung embroideries were copied. The Chia-ching era (1522-1566) saw the rise of Ku-Family embroidery, which attained a position of leading dominance. Embroidery in the Ku-Family style began in the "Garden of the Fragrance of Dew," erected in Shanghai by Ku Ming-shih. Han Hsi-meng, the wife of Ku Ming-shih's second grandson Ku Shou-ch'ien, who was himself a student of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, excelled at embroidery and was also skilled in painting flowering plants. Those embroideries made by her are termed "Miss Han embroidery." Ku Ming-shih's great granddaughter also excelled at embroidery, giving rise to the name "Ku-Family embroidery." Aside from these two, the maids-in-waiting of Ku T'ai-hsüeh's household and Ku Yen-p'ing's household, Ku Hui-hai's concubine Lan-yü, and Ku Po-lu's mother were all proficient in embroidery. Thus the term Ku-Family embroidery came into current use. Embroideries made in later generations copying their idiom are also called Ku-Family embroidery.

On making embroidery in the Ku-Family style, Ku Shou-ch'ien once wrote a colophon to a square album of embroidery made by his wife Han Hsi-meng after famous masterpieces of the Sung and Yüan, in which he recounts the prominent details. The pertinent passage reads: "My wife, the good Miss Hsi-meng, distinct in her painstaking nature, often scoffs at the excessiveness found in embroidery. In the spring of the *chia-hsü* year (1634) she copied in stitchery famous masterpieces of the Sung and Yüan, copying eight different examples in all. Having completed them one by one, she collected them together in a square album. There was not one viewer who failed to be struck dumb with admiration upon looking at this album. Having seen that which had never been seen, they could not fathom her profound mastery or the artfulness of her workmanship. Whether asleep or awake she was making plans and preparations, in which regard she has already expended several years of mental energy. Master Tsung-po (Tung Ch'i-ch'ang) saw it and appreciated it with heartfelt enjoyment, questioning me intensely about how her technical skill could reach such a level. I had nothing to say in response. With respectful caution I replied that it is not something which dare be pursued during the keen chill of winter, the steamy sultriness of summer, the dim obscurity of blowing winds, or the gloomy darkness of rain. Often in fair weather, when the sun is bright and crisp, the birds cheerful and flowers luxuriantly thick, she absorbs the breath of the vital, alert life before her eyes and stitches satin from Su-chou. The Master simply gasped with astonishment and gave his opinion that they were not the products of human effort." (Quoted in Chu Ch'i-ch'ien's *Ssu-hsiu pi-chi*)

The *Ts'uan-tsu ying-hua* says that although embroidery in the Ku-Family style uses satin stitch as its principal technique, it is nonetheless a kind of embroidery technique in which one can follow one's own volition. Moreover, it uses material with economy, lacking superfluous extravagance. Apart from the use of silken floss, it makes use of plied twist, the down from the tail feathers of the Siamese fighting cock, gold slit, and finally human hair. From the point of view of embroidery techniques and the use of materials,

embroidery is truly an artistic craft rich in creative possibilities, but it is necessary to have both intelligence and insight before one can work the materials and stitchery with a sense of keen vitality.

Colored threads as used in Ming embroidery lack the concentrated purity of primary colors seen in Sung embroidery. The variety of colored threads in Ming embroidery surpasses that of the Sung period. Consequently, Ming embroidery gradually tends toward gorgeousness. Those places that the embroiderer was unable to render fully with embroidery are touched in with a brush and graded tints of color. Expertise in embroidery tends to become more and more artful, and also the cartoons used for the embroidery come completely under the influence of contemporary painting.

In embroidery of the Ch'ing period, "Suchow embroidery" supplanted all others in fame. In addition, each region produced its own distinct style of embroidery, among which the more prominent include Kwangtung embroidery, Szechuan embroidery, Hunan embroidery, Peiping embroidery, Chekiang embroidery and Fukien embroidery. Most of these styles were used only in the embroidery of garments and regalia; works that answer the demands of pure artistic appreciation are very rare indeed.

Famous masters of embroidery of the Ch'ing period are rather numerous. Any list of leading artists would include, for instance, Madame Wang, who was the mother of Ch'iu Yüeh-hsiu, Chiang P'u's wife of the Yü Family, Lu Yüan-su, Ting P'ei, Ni Jen-chi, and Shen Shou. Ting P'ei wrote the book entitled *Manual of Embroidery (Hsiu-p'u)*. Shen Shou (1874-1921) was a renowned master of the Suchow style who followed the Ku-Family style of embroidery. She travelled to Japan to study, and there paid close attention to the fine art embroidery of that country, in consequence of which her own technical skill in embroidery became especially fine. She was even able to judge the authenticity of ancient embroidery on the basis of the stitchery. She brought out the book *Hsüeh-huan's Manual of Embroidery* for specialists engaged in the study of embroidery. It is indeed a pity that none of her works are housed in the collections of the National Palace Museum.

### Embroidery in the Collections of the National Palace Museum

Most of the embroidery works housed in the collections of the National Palace Museum may be classed as items of pure artistic appreciation. In all, one hundred and seventy-nine items are included in the collections. Among these only one can be dated to the Five Dynasties period, while thirty-four are of Sung date, one is a product of the Yüan period, and twenty date from the Ming dynasty. Ch'ing embroideries and embroideries of uncertain date make up the largest number, comprising together some one hundred and twenty-three items.

The lone example of embroidery from the Five Dynasties period is the piece entitled "The Gods of Happiness, Longevity, and Prosperity." The forms of the embroidered figures, rocks, and trees have an antique look that is straightforward and unadorned. The embroidery technique is itself elegant in a refined way. Most of



the motifs have been rendered in satin-stitch embroidery, over which net-like decorative patterns have been applied in fine silk twist. Further, outlines and decorative patterns have been couched with gold-wrapped silk twist. Although both the foundation and the embroidery work itself are filled with unaffected antiquity and classical feeling, we have not yet dared to fix the date of the piece with complete certainty.

Sung dynasty embroideries in the collections of the National Palace Museum include fourteen hanging scrolls and one album of twenty leaves bringing the total to thirty-four separate panels. Counting those of superb quality within this group, it can be acknowledged with certainty that existing works of the Sung period are not numerous either. As examples of superb quality one may point to the "Thousand-armed Kuan-yin" (color pl. 18), the "White Falcon" (color pl. 7), and to "Autumn Hibiscus and Butterflies" (color pl. 17).

Embroidery of the Ming dynasty is frequently made in imitation of Sung embroidery, so that among Ming embroideries one does encounter pieces labelled as Sung, which are in fact only Ming copies. In the collections of the National Palace Museum the series of twelve panels entitled "Eight Immortals Rejoicing in Longevity," embroidered in the Ku-Family style, not only is Ming embroidery of extremely fine quality, but one may very well suspect that the work may be from the hand of Madame Han Hsi-meng herself. The superb quality of the artistry of the embroidery is far above the level which the general run of Ming embroiderers could equal.

Embroidery of the Ch'ing dynasty is most numerous in the collections of the National Palace Museum. The use of brush and graded tints of color to make up for the inadequacies of the embroidery work parallels the practices of tapestry of the Ch'ing dynasty. There are two albums of birds and flowers, one entitled "Embroidered and Painted Flowers and Birds," the other called "Embroidered and Painted Birds and Flowers," which are clearly labelled "Embroidered and painted." Their motifs are rendered partly in embroidery and partly in painting. The combination of embroidery and painting to form a pictorial surface may be appreciated for its novelty value. Apart from this, one may point to such decidedly distinctive articles of embroidery as the album "Everlasting Verdure of Elysian Parks" (color pls. 38, 39, 40, and 41), the album of the "West Lake" (color pls. 30, 31), the scroll entitled "Cassia," embroidered in the Ku-Family style (color pls. 36, 37), and the album "Sixteen Lohans after Paintings Commissioned by Emperor Ch'ien-lung and Calligraphy by Pi Yüan." (color pls. 53, 54).

## NOTES ON THE PLATES

### 1 THE GODS OF HAPPINESS, LONGEVITY AND PROSPERITY

*Five Dynasties, hanging scroll*  
*size: 194.3 cm × 111.2 cm*  
*foundation: ordinary woven silk twist*

Embroidered here are the three gods of Happiness, Longevity, and Prosperity, shown seated in a row, in front of which immortal maidens dance and sing to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Above in each corner Emperor Ch'ien-lung of the Ch'ing dynasty has added his inscriptions in praise of the work.

The forms and shapes of the figures, birds and animals, and trees and flowers are all infused with a certain antique awkwardness. The interior areas of the motifs are first applied to the foundation in satin-stitch embroidery using finely plied silk floss, next a net-like pattern of single threads is made to press tightly on the surface of the embroidery, and finally outlines of gold-wrapped silk twist are couched on the embroidery. Drapery lines of the costumes of the figures are in most places rendered in couched gold-wrapped silk twist, while the facial portions of the figures are done in finely plied and flossed satin-stitch embroidery, in which the direction of the stitches has precluded achieving a naturalistic appearance. Ink has been used to dot in the eyebrows and central parts of the eyes.

The branches and trunk of the pine tree have been embroidered in such a way that a realistic sense of pine bark is conveyed. The pine needles have however been reduced to symbolic clusters embroidered in daisy stitches. Cloud patterns are rendered in gold-wrapped silk twist couched on the foundation, and in most places the lines have not been traced out following the ink of the original underpainting, making it obvious that the original brushed ink lines of the cartoon were never rendered into embroidery. Techniques of embroidery such as those used in this piece are very unusual.

The piece has been recorded in the *Shih-ch'ü pao-chi*, *Chu-lin, hsü-pien* and in the *Tz'u-hsiu shu-hua lu* of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

Collectors' seals: Various imperial seals of Ch'ien-lung, Chia-ch'ing and Hsüan-t'ung of the Ch'ing dynasty.

### 2.3 SUN RISING OVER A TURBULENT SEA

*Sung dynasty, hanging scroll*  
*size: 144.3 cm × 49.3 cm*  
*foundation: satin-tinted yellow*

Embroidered here are fantastic mountains of immortal realms and the Red-leafed Tree of the Rising Sun. Ocean waters shoot huge turbulent waves upward as an orange-red sun rises from the sea among propitious clouds cast in the five lucky colors.

Color is used in this piece in a gracefully elegant, understated way, and transitions of tones attain an extraordinary degree of finely graded smoothness. In the technique employed here the needlework follows the rhythmic movement of the water and mountains and the directions in which the trees grow. The technique of embroidery captures the sense of an actual painting very well; and in rendering mountains and rocks the application of color and the embroidery are combined in a naturalistic manner, as though a brush had been used to apply graded tints of color. Places embroidered with patterns of waves have been divided into three zones in order to distinguish degrees of spatial depth. Those most distant are embroidered with dark grey threads, while those in the middle distance employ a tannish color. The nearest zone has not however been completely filled up with embroidery, but rather, areas of the pale yellow satin ground have been reserved to indicate designs of waves. In those areas of the water where waves have not been explicitly depicted in embroidery, as in

the interval between the waves and the mountain cliffs, the needlework of the blank embroidery still follows a wave-like pattern. Reflections coming from the gleaming threads on the surface of the embroidery produce a feeling of water and waves in flowing movement and agitation, thus enhancing a life-like movement that is quite extraordinary. The trunks of the trees toward the bottom of the scroll have been touched up with brush and ink.

According to the dictionary *Sea of Phrases* and the *T'ien-wen* section of the *Huai-nan tzu*, the body of water depicted here, known as the *Hsien-ch'ih*, was thought to be the place of the rising sun in ancient days.

The piece has been recorded in the *Shih-ch'ü pao-chi, san-pien* and in the *Tz'u-hsiu shu-hua lu* of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

Collectors' seals: Various imperial seals of Chia-ch'ing and Hsüan-t'ung of the Ch'ing dynasty.

#### 4 PHOENIX, CRANE, MANDARIN DUCK, WAGTAIL AND ORIOLE

*Sung dynasty, hanging scroll*  
size: 116.3 cm × 62.3 cm  
foundation: woven silk gauze with raised weft

Embroidered here among bamboo, mixed flowers and the *wu-t'ung* tree are a phoenix, cranes, mandarin ducks, pied wagtails, and orioles, all as a veiled reference alluding to the Five Human Relationships.

Both the cartoon and the embroidery work of this piece may be ranked in the superlative class. The embroidery work does not, however, share the same arrangement and ordering of stitches as the general run of embroidery, nor does it make use of the technique of needlework where the stitches vary in length. Rather, it looks as though a technique similar to needlepoint has been used to make the piece, a technique rarely seen in Chinese embroidery. Each stitch spans two strands of the weft in the loosely woven surface of the foundation. The needle passes over these two threads in a vertical direction perpendicular to the weft. The process is repeated until the interior of a design has been completely filled in with embroidery, producing a rather schematic effect. The outlines of the rocks, the feathers of the birds, and the blossoms of the peony are rendered most prominently. In the right part of the bamboos there are two leaves of bamboo where the guidelines of the original cartoon may still be seen. Either because of the demands of the embroidery technique or because the form as drawn was not good, the shapes of the leaves were changed. The blackish, dull brown threads of the crane's tail feathers and throat patch rotted away at some points, perhaps because of the dye used, so that what appears there now are later additions in brush and ink.

The piece has been recorded in the *Shih-ch'ü pao-chi, hsü-pien* and in the *Tz'u-hsiu shu-hua lu* of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

Collectors' seals: Various imperial seals of Ch'ien-lung and Chia-ch'ing of the Ch'ing dynasty.

#### 5.6 WILD FOWL AMONG BAMBOOS AND PLUM BLOSSOM

*Sung dynasty, hanging scroll*  
size: 130.5 cm × 54.5 cm  
foundation: tightly woven fine silk twist

Above and below, perched on a gnarled branch of a plum tree are three pairs of wild birds depicted in embroidery. In the upper right corner appears a large imperial seal reading *Ming-ch'ang yü-lan*.

The embroidery work of this piece is naturalistic and elegant in a fine, detailed way, capturing the feeling of an actual painting extremely well. It would seem that the embroiderer understood the special characteristics of birds, for the bearing and air of the wild birds appear in most realistic terms—feathers and fine down seem to be growing naturally. The thread used in the embroidery here is not, however, silken, but rather, it resembles a kind of thread which might be used in tailoring. Only the plum blossoms

and other minutiae are silken floss, which consequently leaves the surface of the picture looking simple and unadorned, lacking all flashiness. Both the feathers of the wild birds and the trunk of the tree have places that have been touched in with brush and tints of color.

The original cartoon and the style of composition of this piece show a general resemblance to *BIRDS AND FLOWERS OF THE EARLY SPRING*, a tapestry work of the Sung period, which may be found by referring to color pl. 13 in the companion volume on tapestry. Perhaps the two pieces might be considered as being works close to one another in date.

The large imperial seal in the upper right corner reading *Ming-ch'ang yü-lan* belongs to Emperor Chang-tsung of the Chin dynasty. The question of its authenticity must await further research.

The piece has been recorded in the *Tz'u-hsiu shu-hua lu* of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

Collectors' seals: Various imperial seals of Ch'ien-lung, Chia-ch'ing and Hsüan-t'ung of the Ch'ing dynasty.

## 7 WHITE FALCON

*Sung dynasty, hanging scroll*  
size: 96 cm X 47.7 cm  
foundation: ordinary woven silk twist

The white falcon depicted here has been embroidered with fine white strands of plied silk floss using a satin-stitch technique in which the embroidered forms follow the natural growth pattern of feathers and down. Because the directions in which the threads have been arranged vary, the gleaming white strands produce an effect of uneven reflection. A natural feeling of feathers and down has been captured extremely well.

After the background of the perch on which the falcon stands expectantly was completely filled with satin-stitch embroidery, the outlines and schematic floral designs were then traced out in gold-wrapped silk twist couched on the surface of the embroidery. In the place where the blue cord tethering the falcon has been tied into a knot, coarse lots of silken thread coil about to form a knot-like pattern, which is then secured in place with stitchery. That is, after those parts where the strands appear as though combed into flowing bundles have been arranged in order with coarse thread, they are then secured in place with stitchery, all of which leads to a most realistic effect. The original brown threads of the falcon's beak have been mutilated, and its foundation damaged, exposing the embroidery in the lower parts. The embroidery of the sharp talons has also been lost.

The threads vary in fineness throughout the embroidery. The embroidery work is neat, but it is without a rigidly fixed technique. Its style is elegant in an understated way and is rather close to the Sung embroidery *AUTUMN HIBISCUS AND BUTTERFLIES* (color pl. 17). This piece must be regarded as a product of the highest level of craftsmanship.

The piece has been recorded in the *Shih-ch'ü pao-chi, ch'u-pien* and in the *Tz'u-hsiu shu-hua lu* of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

Collectors' seals: Various imperial seals of Ch'ien-lung, Chia-ch'ing and Hsüan-t'ung of the Ch'ing dynasty.

## 8 EAGLE ON A PERCH

*Sung dynasty, hanging scroll*  
size: 107.4 cm X 54.8 cm  
foundation: blue satin

This scroll depicts a bird of prey perched upon a wooden staff. The embroidery work seen in this scroll is extremely elegant in a finely detailed, meticulous way, quite capable of capturing the vital spirit of the bird of prey. The part of the embroidery around the feet of the bird has been preserved in perfect condition. There the embroidery work reaches a point of perfection in the interest of the abstract motifs. The rough, coarse texture of the skin of the claw of the bird has been rendered with a con-

vincing feeling of power—a considerable attainment in which nothing has been left out. The feathers and down of the bird also show technical perfection in the extreme. Except for details, the embroidery has been badly worn away, which is truly a pity.

Portions within the white feathers that were tinted with light brown and also other areas colored with the same brown dye, such as the perch and the bird's talons, have unfortunately abraded away, due to a property of the dyestuff which causes the fibers to disintegrate and eventually to rot away entirely with the passage of time. In other areas, such as the cord tethering the eagle to the perch, the embroidery produces a feeling of the texture of the natural materials.

The threadwork of this piece of embroidery is extremely fine, and both the actual technique used for the bird as well as the drawing reveal an extremely accomplished maturity.

The piece has been recorded in the *Shih-ch'ü pao-chi, hsü-pien* and in the *Tz'u-hsiu shu-hua lu* of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

Collectors' seals: Various imperial seals of Ch'ien-lung, Chia-ch'ing and Hsüan-t'ung of the Ch'ing dynasty.

## 9.10 CHRYSANTHEMUM

*Sung dynasty, hanging scroll*  
size: 147.4 cm × 64.4 cm  
foundation: dark brown satin

The present scroll, which is one of a pair, displays chrysanthemums growing in a large basin, alongside of which assorted plants in pots are arranged in a row. The application of color is both delicate and elegant in a reserved way. The embroidery work captures the feeling of an actual painting very well.

The piece has been recorded in the *Shih-ch'ü pao-chi, hsü-pien* and in the *Tz'u-hsiu shu-hua lu* of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

Collectors' seals: Various imperial seals of Ch'ien-lung, Chia-ch'ing and Hsüan-tung of the Ch'ing dynasty.

## 11.12 IMMORTAL WITH THE FUNGUS OF LONGEVITY

*Sung dynasty, hanging scroll*  
size: 122.3 cm × 44.9 cm  
foundation: satin

Embroidered here is an immortal standing on a rocky slope holding a stalk of the fungus of longevity. His right hand holds a stalk of *ling-chih*, the fungus of longevity, while in his left he carries a hoe with a flower basket hanging upon its handle. All kinds of flowering branches screen the rocky path from the glare of the sun.

The embroidery work of this scroll is of inferior quality. In some parts the drawing of the original cartoon has been preserved. Neither the brushwork of the original cartoon nor the style of embroidery are of a high level of craftsmanship.

Aside from the imperial seals of the Ch'ing period, the others are all open to further study.

The piece has been recorded in the *Shih-ch'ü pao-chi, san-pien* and in the *Tz'u-hsiu shu-hua lu* of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

Collectors' seals: Eight seals of the Ming collector Hsiang Yüan-pien (1525-1950); three seals of unidentified collectors; and various imperial seals of Ch'ien-lung, Chia-ch'ing and Hsüan-t'ung of the Ch'ing dynasty.

## 13 HIBISCUS AND KINGFISHER

*Sung dynasty, album leaf*  
size: 23.1 cm × 21.1 cm  
foundation: satin

This work is the first leaf of a twenty-page album of flowers and birds embroidered after paintings by the Five Dynasties artist Huang Ch'üan. The copied inscription, which appears in the upper right corner, reads, "Fine Masterpiece by Huang Ch'üan of the Five Dynasties." The piece copies in embroidery an original painting of a kingfisher perched on a



hanging stem of a hibiscus plant.

Collectors' seals: One imperial seal of Hsüan-t'ung of the Ch'ing dynasty reading, *Hsüan-t'ung yü-lan chih pao*.

#### 14 HIBISCUS AND CRAB

*Sung dynasty, album leaf*  
size: 23.1 cm × 21.1 cm  
foundation: satin

This work is the sixteenth leaf of a twenty-page album of flowers and birds embroidered after paintings by the Five Dynasties artist Huang Ch'üan. It copies in embroidery an original painting of a crab hanging from a hibiscus plant. The crab has been touched up here and there with additions of colored tints after the completion of the embroidery.

#### 15 CHRYSANTHEMUM AND QUAIL

*Sung dynasty, album leaf*  
size: 23.1 cm × 21.1 cm  
foundation: satin

This work is the seventeenth leaf of a twenty-page album of flowers and birds embroidered after paintings by the Five Dynasties artist Huang Ch'üan. It copies in embroidery an original painting of a quail on a water-side bank below a flowering chrysanthemum plant. The feathered parts of the quail have all been touched in with a brush after the completion of the embroidery.

#### 16 SQUIRREL AND GRAPE VINE

*Sung dynasty, album leaf*  
size: 23.1 cm × 21.1 cm  
foundation: satin

This work is the last leaf of a twenty-page album of flowers and birds embroidered after paintings by the Five Dynasties artist Huang Ch'üan. It copies in embroidery an original painting of a squirrel climbing along a grape vine. The copied signature reads, "Painted by Huang Ch'üan of Ch'eng-tu."

The embroidery work of this piece is tight, fine, and neat. The grape vine has been touched up with brush and color after the completion of the embroidery.

#### 17 AUTUMN HIBISCUS AND BUTTERFLIES

*Sung dynasty, hanging scroll*  
size: 23.5 cm × 25.2 cm  
foundation: tightly woven silk gauze

Embroidered here in the format of an oblong fan are a pair of butterflies hovering above two stalks of hibiscus.

This work of embroidery captures the feeling of a Sung album painting of flowering plants so well that it causes one to forget it is embroidered. The motifs have been rendered in satin-stitch embroidery with finely plied silk floss. The area of the butterflies has been badly eaten away by the ravages of time, but from the butterfly in the upper left corner it is possible to tell that the original embroidery was a pale tan color. Below the areas where the embroidery has been lost through damage, the ground of the embroidery no longer remains, and instead there appears a pale brown silken material which one takes to be a lining material pasted to the bottom prior to embroidery. Quite superb is the effect of tinted washes of color blended subtly together as displayed in the tonal gradations of the petals of the hibiscus blossoms. The stamens of the blossoms, colors of the leaves, and leaf stems all show naturalistic qualities extremely well.

The piece has been recorded in the *Shih-ch'ü pao-chi*, *hsü-pien* and in the *Tz'u-hsin shu-hua lu* of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

Collectors' seals: Various imperial seals of Ch'ien-lung, Chia-ch'ing and Hsüan-t'ung of the Ch'ing dynasty.



## 18 THOUSAND-ARMED KUAN-YIN

*Sung dynasty, hanging scroll*  
*size: 86.7 cm × 48.5 cm*  
*foundation: satin with damask woven*  
*in a pattern of plum branches*

Kuan-yin with a thousand arms and a thousand eyes, symbolizing the aspects of omnipotence and omniscience, is shown seated on a lotus throne beneath an elaborate bejewelled canopy, while celestial flowers float in the space around the figure.

This piece is embroidered in plied but coarse silk floss. In parts the outlines have been couched in silk twist wrapped with pinkish-gold slit, which has already been badly damaged from abrasion in many places. The needlework throughout the entire scroll is loose and natural, being neither bound to a fixed uniform direction, nor restricted by the outlines. The embroidery attests to the artist's high level of craftsmanship. The application of color is delicately elegant, and although the embroidery of image and lotus throne has already faded away, it is still possible to see dimly the combined effect of the colored threads and the movement of the needle.

The piece has been recorded in the *Pi-tien chu-lin, hsü-pien* and in the *Tz'u-hsiu shu-hua lu* of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

Collectors' seals: Various imperial seals of Ch'ien-lung, Chia-ch'ing and Hsüan-t'ung of the Ch'ing dynasty.

## 19·20·21 GOATS, SYMBOL OF PROSPERITY

*Sung dynasty, hanging scroll*  
*size: 216.6 cm × 63.8 cm*  
*foundation: modified tent stitch on gauze*  
*ground*

This scroll displays an extraordinarily unusual technique, in which the boy riding a ram, the two attendant boys, and the rams, totaling nine in all, have been embroidered in satin stitch with thick strands of virtually unplied silk floss, while the blue ground and background designs have been rendered in a technique akin to tent stitch. Those places where there now appear figures and clusters of flowers in satin-stitch embroidery were left blank at the time the background and elements of scenery were embroidered in modified tent stitch. The areas done in modified tent stitch differ considerably from the strict definition of tent-stitch embroidery. Fishnet-like gauze, woven and finished prior to the application of the embroidery, serves as a ground. A strand of colored thread is threaded horizontally into an interstice of the gauze from behind and is then wrapped around the horizontal thread of the ground immediately above the interstice. The thread then passes diagonally downward behind the intersection of the warp and weft threads of the ground, coming into the adjacent interstice from behind, whence the process is repeated until the desired motif has been formed. Thus, the surface is especially thick and tight. The joints between outlining edges lack the appearance of serrated fissures usually associated with tapestry weave, which superficially resemble the appearance resulting from the technique employed in the background here. The surface of the scroll produces a pattern of diagonal lines reminiscent of the appearance, but not of the technique, of twill. From three places where the surface of the background embroidery has been torn, it is possible to see something of the composition of the modified tent stitch technique; and from one section where the satin-stitch embroidery has been badly damaged, it can be seen that the sections where satin-stitch embroidery now appears were not embroidered in tent stitch in the first place.

The use of color is delicate and maintains a classical elegance. Both types of embroidery work are of fine quality. The style of the cloud patterns and other motifs, the use of color, and the satin-stitch embroidery itself would seem to indicate that the work is close in date to two other pairs of scrolls labelled Sung, the first being the pair entitled *CHRYSANTHEMUM* (color pls. 9, 10, black-and-white pl. 3), while the second is the

pair entitled RENDERING OF THE SPIRIT OF THE VERSE "POTTED CHRYSANTHEMUMS" (black-and-white pls. 1, 2).

The piece has been recorded in the *Shih-ch'ü pao-chi, hsü-pien*.

Collectors' seals: One seal of Hung-hsiao (d. 1778), owner of the extraordinarily rich collection of paintings housed in the Ming-shan t'ang and the second Prince I. Various imperial seals of Ch'ien-lung, Chia-ch'ing and Hsüan-t'ung of the Ch'ing dynasty.

## 22•23 FOUR EARLY SPRING MAGPIES

*Yüan dynasty, hanging scroll*  
size: 86.8 cm × 48.2 cm  
foundation: blue satin

Four magpies perched on a flowering plum branch are embroidered here against a background of dark blue satin, while narcissus grows up from a bank below and wild camellias, branching out from the left edge, provide a decorative backdrop for the plum branch.

The use of color has a certain cool elegance. The strands of embroidery are thick and loose, each stitch being quite long. Intermediate color values are extremely scant, and the embroidery work in general has been reduced to the point of coarseness. The embroidery of the trunk of the tree has been worn away from rolling and unrolling, so that the white tracing threads of the cartoon have now been exposed. Grasses on the slope at the bottom of the scroll have been touched in with brush and ink.

The piece has been recorded in the *Tz'u-hsiu shu-hua lu* of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

Collectors' seals: Various imperial seals of Ch'ien-lung, Chia-ch'ing and Hsüan-t'ung of the Ch'ing dynasty.

## 24•25 ROYAL MOTHER OF THE WEST RIDING A PHOENIX, ONE PANEL FROM A SERIES ILLUSTRATING EIGHT IMMORTALS REJOICING IN LONGEVITY

*Ming dynasty, hanging scroll, detail*  
size: 66.3 cm × 48.1 cm  
foundation: satin

This panel is one of a series of twelve panels illustrating the Eight Immortals rejoicing in longevity. The principal female protagonist in the celebration of longevity, the Royal Mother of the West, is shown descending from heaven aboard a multi-colored phoenix carrying the sacred peaches of immortality. A maid-servant stands at her side in attendance. The two figures and the phoenix maintain a classical elegance while being infused with luxuriant beauty. The application of color is both exquisite and rich. Although the embroidery work itself is not fine and tight, the technique does, nonetheless, attain a sense of inner vitality and vivacious naturalness. Capturing the vital air of the figures extremely well, it shows a richly creative sense. It is no doubt the work of someone of high attainment in the cultivation of art, and perhaps it might even be from the hand of Madame Ku Han Hsi-meng herself. After the robes of the maid-servant were painted in with ink, the decorative patterns were merely embroidered with thread. Apart from the prominently embroidered lines, the cloud patterns have been traced out with a brush using pale graded tints of green and ochre red.

The other eleven panels of the series are illustrated in the section of black-and-white plates of this volume.

Collectors' seals: One seal of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

## 26•28 FLOWERS AND ANTIQUE VESSELS

*Ming dynasty, hanging scroll*  
size: 215 cm × 47 cm  
foundation: satin

This scroll is one of eight panels displaying assembled antiques of wide variety in a style of embroidery that takes its name from the province of Kwangtung. Eleven different kinds of antiques are illustrated on this panel. The embroidery work is fine and subdued. The embroidered areas

have been touched up with brush and graded tints of color.

Collectors' seals: One seal of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

## 27•29 FLOWERS AND ANTIQUE VESSELS

*Ming dynasty, hanging scroll*  
size: 215 cm × 47 cm  
foundation: satin

This scroll is one of eight panels displaying assembled antiques of wide variety embroidered in a style of embroidery that takes its name from the province of Kwangtung. Eleven different kinds of antiques are illustrated on this panel. The landscape painting and the marble pattern of the table in the middle of the panel have both been added with brush and graded tints of color. The antique lute on the table and the pedestal of the antique vase in the lower left corner have already disintegrated.

Collectors' seals: One seal of Chu Ch'i-ch'ien.

## 30 WEST LAKE (HSI-HU)

*Ch'ing dynasty, album leaf*  
size: 24.1 cm × 26.3 cm  
foundation: satin

This album leaf is one of ten scenes of the West Lake of Hangchow depicted in embroidery, and in this case it is meant to capture the poetic idea of listening to orioles in a setting of willows and waves. The embroidery work is restful and delicate. Most places have been considerably strengthened with brush and graded tints of color after the completion of the embroidery.

## 31 WEST LAKE (HSI-HU)

*Ch'ing dynasty, album leaf*  
size: 24.1 cm × 26.3 cm  
foundation: satin

This album leaf is one of ten scenes of the West Lake of Hangchow depicted in embroidery, and in this case it is meant to capture the poetic idea of twin mountain peaks rising up through the clouds. In the areas of the clouds and pine needles color was first applied to the foundation and the embroidery then added. The mountain areas were touched up with brush and color after the completion of the embroidery work.

Collectors' seals: One imperial seal of Ch'ien-lung of the Ch'ing dynasty.

## 32•33 THE WIFE OF K'UNG HSIEN-PEI, POETIC INTRODUCTION TO THE LOU-SHOU HALL BY EMPEROR CH' IEN-LUNG

*Ch'ing dynasty, hanging scroll*  
size: 127 cm × 61.5 cm  
foundation: tightly woven fine silk twist

A storied pavilion and courtyard have been embroidered in a scenery of fantastically shaped rocks, tall pines, and large mountains rising in the distance. In the upper left corner the "Poetic Introduction of the Lo-shou Hall," a seven syllable regulated verse by Emperor Ch'ien-lung, has been copied in embroidery. In the lower right corner the embroidered inscription reads, "Reverently embroidered by K'ung Hsien-p'ei's wife of the Yü Family." Below the inscription appear two embroidered seals, the first reading "Official-Servant from the Yü Family," and the second reading "Reverently Embroidered."

The motifs of this scroll are embroidered in long satin stitches using thick and rather loose and fluffy strands of silk floss. The colors are fresh and bright, while the glitter of the silken strands is quite dazzling. All of the tree trunks have been retouched with brush and color.

This piece would appear to be from approximately the same period as yet another embroidery work by K'ung Hsien-p'ei's wife (color pls. 34, 35).

Collectors' seals: Three seals of K'ung Hsien-p'ei. One imperial seal of Hsüan-t'ung of the Ch'ing dynasty.