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On the Road: From China to Europe

China has been exporting goods to Europe since Neolithic times, though then the desired commodity was jade. Silk only came to prominence during the Han dynasty, around 130-100 BCE, with the creation of various silk routes (by land and by sea), going to ancient Egypt, Persia, and the Greek and Roman empires.

China guarded the secret of silk production well, with heavy penalties (capital punishment) for infringement. A few tales attest to early industrial espionage. Around 440 CE a Chinese princess supposedly smuggled silkworm eggs to a prince of Khotan, a kingdom on the edge of the Taklamakan desert. And in the mid-sixth century CE, Emperor Justinian apparently hired Nestorian monks to smuggle silkworm eggs out of China, bringing sericulture to Constantinople and Byzantium.

Knowledge of silk production moved westward through various channels. By the end of the third century BCE, for instance, waves of Chinese immigrants had brought sericulture to Korea, and by the third century CE Japan had also learned the art of sericulture. Shortly after 300 CE, domesticated silkworms were bred in India; and by the sixth century, the Persians had mastered silk technology, as well as Islamic kingdoms around the Mediterranean. Sericulture finally arrived in Europe around the 10th century, with the Italians establishing important centres of silk cultivation in such key cities as Lucca, Genoa, Florence and Venice.

在路上：從中國到歐洲

中國自新石器時代開始，一直向歐洲出口商品，最初有所需求的則為玉。直到漢朝，約公元前130-100年，隨著海陸多條絲綢之路建立，連接中國及古埃及、波斯、希臘和羅馬帝國，絲綢方才開始盛行。

當時中國嚴守絲綢生產的秘密，對於任何洩密行為均處以極刑（死刑）。絲綢令人嚮往的程度，在數個早期工業間諜事件中可見一斑。大約公元440年左右，據說一位中國公主將蠶卵偷運予于闐國王子，該王國位處塔克拉瑪干沙漠邊緣。而公元六世紀中葉，查士丁尼大帝顯然聘請景教僧人，從中國偷運蠶卵，將養蠶業帶到君士坦丁堡和拜占庭。

絲綢生產的知識透過多個渠道西傳，例如，公元前三世紀末，中國移民潮將養蠶業帶入韓國，而至公元三世紀，日本也學會了養蠶技術。公元300年後左右，印度開始飼養家蠶，而到了六世紀，波斯以至地中海一帶的伊斯蘭國家，亦掌握了製絲技術。到了十世紀，養蠶業終於傳至歐洲，而意大利在重要城市如盧卡、熱那亞、佛羅倫斯及威尼斯，亦建立了重要的產絲中心。



France Takes the Lead

The art of silk weaving came to France from Italy, imported by French kings in the 15th and 16th centuries. Various rulers invested in sericulture, from the planting of mulberry trees and the farming of silkworms to the silk weaving workshops. However, it was only in the 17th century that French silk could rival that made in Italy, when workshops in Lyon learned how to produce figured, coloured patterned silk. By this time the Italian city states could no longer compete, having been invaded by foreign powers. France's dominance remained unchallenged for the next three centuries, with its silks coming from Lyon.

French technical innovations transformed the silk industry, especially with the introduction of the mechanized Jacquard loom. From the 17th to the end of the 18th centuries the Lyon manufacturers prospered under royal patronage, providing furnishings, clothing, and accessories, which in turn set the fashion for the rest of Europe. The French Revolution of 1789 put an abrupt end both to royalty and to luxury fashion. But a few decades later, under Napoleon (1769-1821) and the First French Empire (1804-1814), the Lyon silk industry was again the central supplier of all types of silk, from simple monochrome to the richest brocades, depending on the tastes and whims of the royal patrons. Throughout the 19th century silk from Lyon was France's number one export, losing its prominence only towards the end of the century.



法國領先

絲織技藝從意大利傳入法國，由法國國王在十五及十六世紀引入。雖然歷代統治者皆有投資蠶業，從種植桑樹、養殖蠶蟲到建立絲織工場，然而，直到十七世紀，當里昂的工場能夠生產具提花及彩色圖案的絲綢，法國絲綢才可媲美意大利的出品。當時意大利城邦受外敵入侵，已無力競爭。此後三個世紀，法國在製絲的地位未曾動搖，而所有絲綢都在里昂生產。

法國的創新技術改變了製絲業，當中機械式的雅卡爾提花機尤其重要。從十七世紀至十八世紀末，里昂絲織業在皇室的光顧下蓬勃發展，它為皇室提供家具、服裝及配飾，同時領導歐洲其他地區的潮流。1789年的法國大革命使皇室和奢華風尚戛然而止，然而數十年後，在拿破崙（1769-1821年）及法蘭西第一帝國（1804-1814年）的統治下，里昂的製絲業再次成為各類絲綢的主要供應中心，由簡單的單色絲綢，到最華麗豐富的錦緞，完全取決於皇室客人的品味及興致。在整個十九世紀，里昂的絲綢一直是法國第一大出口商品，直到世紀末才失去其重要性。

Chinese Silk in the 20th Century

Throughout the Republican era (1912-1949) and the People's Republic of China (PRC, established in 1949), silk retained its historical, cultural and economic status. The silk industry contributed significantly to the economic activities of the Republican era and certain regions, like Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Sichuan, were known for their silk production. The PRC government also sought to modernize the silk industry, promoting and expanding it to help the economy. This included introducing scientific and technological improvements to the processes of reeling, spinning, and weaving using modern—even foreign—machinery to increase their efficiency. By safeguarding silk weaving and embroidery techniques, the government has also ensured the preservation of traditional craftsmanship, especially in protected cultural heritage sites such as Suzhou Silk and Hangzhou Silk.

二十世紀中國絲綢

在整個民國時期（1912-1949年）和中華人民共和國（1949年成立），絲綢的歷史、文化和經濟維持重要地位。絲綢業對民國時期的經濟作出巨大貢獻，當中江蘇、浙江、四川等地的絲綢生產尤其著名。中華人民共和國政府亦著力令絲綢業現代化，推廣及擴張業界，務求促進經濟發展，包括利用現代，甚至是外國機械，在科技層面改進，提高繅絲、紡紗和編織程序的效率。透過保護紡織及刺繡技術，政府確保傳統工藝得以留存，尤其是在受保護的文化遺產地點，如蘇州絲綢和杭州絲綢。



French Silk in the 20th Century

Between the two World Wars, the silk-making centres of Lyon helped spread the Art Deco style embraced by the new, emancipated woman. However, the Lyon industry was badly decimated by the Second World War, and post-war it faced stiff competition from both ready-made garments and artificial silk, such as rayon. As a result, most workshops either closed or shifted to producing artificial silk. A few surviving firms carried on the traditional silk making for designers of luxury furnishings and accessories. Today, the craftsmanship survives and even thrives in this specialized sector, called upon to produce unique, magnificent garments, such as the cape worn by Saint Pope John-Paul II for the Golden Jubilee of December 24, 1999.

二十世紀法國絲綢

兩次世界大戰之間，里昂的製絲中心令嶄新的裝飾藝術風格更為風行，當時裝飾藝術風格深受解放的新女性歡迎。然而，里昂的工業在第二次世界大戰中，遭受嚴重破壞，而戰後又面臨成衣及人造絲（如尼龍）的激烈競爭，結果大部分工場不是倒閉，就是轉型生產人造絲。少數倖存的工場延續製絲傳統，為豪華家品或配件的設計師服務。時至今日，此專門工藝仍然存在，甚至相當蓬勃，用以製作獨特且華麗的服裝，例如教宗若望保祿二世在1999年12月24日禧年紀念日所穿的長袍。

Presented by CityU 香港城市大學 City University of Hong Kong

從中國到歐洲之路
The Road from China to Europe

絲織繁華

A Passion for Silk

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般哥展覽館

Indra and Harry Banga Gallery

Organized by CityU Indra and Harry Banga Gallery
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A Passion for Silk: The Road from China to Europe

The art of silk (sericulture) emerged in China in 8,500 BCE, becoming an important financial industry over the succeeding millennia. Chinese farmers cultivated silkworms and the mulberry trees, while master craftsmen and women wove and embroidered shimmering, colourful fabric. The value of silk was so high that it was used for payments like gold. Though kept a state secret, by the third century CE the production of silk had become known to China's neighbours while India had independently developed its own silk weaving tradition. In Europe, Italy first learned sericulture in the medieval period, followed by France a few centuries later. Through technological and artistic innovations, these two countries dominated the European silk market, while Chinese silk remained a luxury item for royalty and aristocrats. The fame of Chinese silk was such that in the 19th century China's early trade routes came to be called the Silk Road.

Just as important as silk's financial role is its cultural, political, technical, and religious significance. The fabric's design and usage reveal developments in art, trade, fashion, and technology (to name just a few) and expose important cross-cultural influences. With over a hundred samples of silk clothing, accessories, and furnishings from China, India, Italy and France, this exhibition provides a rare overview of the crucial cultural role played by Chinese silk making and its influence abroad. Just as important, the exhibition reveals how European silk makers adapted the Chinese methods of production and artistic styles in ways that then influenced Chinese fabrication itself in the 20th century. Silk's continuing appeal is visible in contemporary high fashion silk creations today.

What is Silk?

The art of rearing domesticated silkworms (sericulture) first arose in China as early as 8,500 BCE, and over the next millennia spread to neighbouring countries. As rulers recognised its economic potential they helped transform the production of silk from a household-based system into state-run workshops, and then into a full-fledged industry. The demand for silk was so great that all of these production centres co-existed to satisfy the expanding desire for luxury silks both within China and abroad.

Silk's prismatic structure allows it to shimmer in the light, and as a fabric it is extremely light, resilient and also warm. All these attributes have made it a textile of choice for the elite across the world. The work and cost involved in creating a woven silk fabric—from the nurturing of the silkworms to the final weaving of the threads—are staggering; before mechanization, one richly brocaded garment required a year or two of work.

絲織繁華：從中國到歐洲之路

絲綢藝術（養蠶業）於公元前 8,500 年在中國出現，並在隨後的幾千年間，成為重要的金融產業。中國農民養蠶和種植桑樹，而匠人和婦女則編織及刺繡閃閃生輝的彩布。絲綢價值之高，甚至用於支付，如同黃金。雖然養蠶技術被視為機密，但到公元三世紀，中國相鄰國家已掌握絲綢生產技術，而印度則發展出自己的絲綢編織傳統。在歐洲，意大利在中世紀時期首先學會養蠶，而數個世紀之後，法國亦得到養蠶技術。通過技術及藝術創新，這兩個國家主導了歐洲絲綢市場，與此同時，中國絲綢仍是皇室和貴族的奢侈品。中國絲綢聞名遐邇，在十九世紀時，中國早期的貿易路線因而得名絲綢之路。



絲是甚麼？

飼養家蠶的技藝於公元前 8,500 年在中國出現，並在隨後幾千年間傳至鄰近國家。當統治者發現其經濟潛力時，便將養蠶由家庭為本的生產，轉型成國營作坊，再發展成為成熟產業。由於絲綢需求甚殷，足以讓不同的生產中心共存，以滿足國內外對奢華絲綢日益增長的渴求。

絲綢的棱柱結構讓它在光線下閃閃發光，而作為布料，它極輕、具彈性且溫暖，這些特質讓絲綢成為各地精英賢達的首選布材。由培養蠶蟲開始，到最後將絲線編織成布，製作絲綢織品所需的工作量及成本驚人，在機械化之前，製作一件華麗的錦緞服裝往往需時一兩年。

As Good as Gold

From the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BCE) until the late 16th century (in the Ming dynasty), silk functioned like currency or gold. Depending on their status as farmers or silk weavers, households paid taxes in grain or bolts of silk; yet even farmers often paid with silk instead of grain. From the Warring States Period (475-221 BCE) on, the government controlled the quality of silk, establishing set standards for weight, colour, size, and type of weave.

The earliest silk weaves were plain, decorated at most with very simple geometric designs. Very quickly, by the Western Zhou dynasty (1046-771 BCE), artisans were already able to weave and embroider multi-coloured silk. And after the introduction of the drawloom in the fifth-fourth centuries BCE, craftspeople could produce extremely complex figured designs. For the most part, these luxury fabrics were made into furniture decorations and personal items rather than into garments. However, during the Tang dynasty (c. 618-905 CE), the Han elite, influenced by ethnic nomadic groups who wore silk fabrics, also began making clothes out of silk.



貴重如金

從周朝（公元前 1046–256 年）到十六世紀末（明朝），絲綢具有類似貨幣或黃金的功能。家庭根據其農民或織工的官方身分，以穀物或絲綢繳稅，然而，即使農民也經常以絲綢付稅，而非穀物。從戰國時期（公元前 475–221 年）開始，政府為控制絲綢質素，制定了重量、顏色、尺寸和編織的標準。

最早的絲織品非常樸實，極其量只有非常簡單的幾何圖案。不久，到了西周（公元前 1046–771 年），工匠已經能夠編織和製作多彩的絲綢。在公元前五至四世紀，引入手工提花織機之後，工匠開始能夠生產極之複雜的圖案設計。通常，這些奢華的布料並不會製成服裝，而是家具裝飾和個人物品。然而，在唐朝（西元 618–905 年），漢族菁英受穿著絲綢服飾的遊牧民族影響，亦開始用絲綢製作衣服。



Silk from the Tang Through the Qing Dynasties

From the Tang dynasty on Chinese rulers invested heavily in the production of silk. New embroidery stitches and improved methods of weaving allowed for the blossoming of silk design and production. And as silk became more available, emperors tried to restrict its use in clothing, decreeing who could wear what, where, when, and how. These laws reveal that the latest court fashions were now being copied by the upper middle-classes.

During this period there were ongoing commercial, cultural and artistic exchanges between the Han Chinese and neighbouring kingdoms. From nomadic groups, for instance, Han Chinese adopted the complex art of gold weaving, used to create clothes of gold, so desired by all European rulers in the Middle Ages. Just as important, slit tapestry or *kesi*, developed by the Sogdians or Uygurs of Central Asia, was also transmitted to Chinese artisans in the region.

從唐朝到清朝

自唐朝起，中國統治者著力投資絲綢生產。工匠開發了新的刺繡針法，並改進了編織方法，開展絲綢設計和製作的創作空間。絲綢產量增加，亦令絲綢更加普及，中上階層及富裕人士開始模仿最新的宮廷風尚。因此，皇帝企圖控制絲綢服裝的使用，對於何人在何處何時何地，穿著何等衣服均加以管制。一如既往，這些法律始終無法抑制對於奢華絲綢服裝的需求。

數個世紀以來，漢族與鄰國不斷進行商業、文化及藝術交流，令紡織品更為多彩多姿。例如，漢族顯然從游牧民族習得黃金編織藝術，並創作出歐洲統治者趨之若鶩的金色衣裳。中亞粟特人或維吾爾人開發的緯絲技術同樣重要，此技術亦傳至當地的中國工匠。



Keeping up with Fashion

As fashion changed at court, owners could update their garments with new accessories. Collars were especially important and could be quite magnificent. Male collars tended to be triangular, flaring up slightly around the neck. Women's collars could range from quadrilobe to more dramatic shapes. Patrons could also order new borders for their sleeves and hems, and all would append beautifully woven silk pouches to their robes. Hats and shoes were also crucial silk accessories, their styles reflecting the wearers' status and the season. Silk shoes for bound feet of the Han women were minute in size, while those for the Manchu ladies, who did not bind their feet, were standard. Interestingly, some Manchu ladies mimicked the delicate, unsteady gait of Han ladies by adopting shoes with one central heel.

緊貼潮流

宮廷時尚千變萬化，利用新的配件就能讓服裝耳目一新，省卻訂製華貴長袍的高昂費用。披領尤其重要，可以相當華麗，男裝披領通常呈三角形，在頸部周圍稍為豎起，女裝披領形狀多樣，由四瓣形到更特別的形狀，另外亦可為衣袖及下擺訂製新的鑲邊。其他裝飾包括附在長袍上編織精美的絲質荷包，而帽子和鞋子亦是重要的絲綢配件，其風格反映穿戴者的身分地位，以至季節。纏足漢族婦女的鞋子尺寸極小，而滿族婦女（如無纏足），所穿絲鞋則大小較為標準。有趣的是，部分滿族婦女為了模仿漢族女子精緻且不穩的步履，特意穿著鞋跟置於鞋底正中的鞋子。

