

FROM CHINA TO CHILE: CHINESE OBJECTS IN THE *MUSEO HISTORICO NACIONAL* COLLECTION

ISABEL ALVARADO PERALES

Chief, Department of Exhibitions and Conservation, National Historical Museum, Santiago, Chile

Abstract: The textile and costume collection of the National Historical Museum in Santiago, Chile, contains many objects from China. Among these artifacts are silk Manila shawls, embroidered with flowers and fringed on all sides.

Contents: *Museo Histórico Nacional*, National Historical Museum, Santiago, Chile; Chinese Artifacts; Manila Shawls; Embroidery

Introduction

The textile and costume collection of the National Historical Museum contains a variety of clothing and textiles artifacts. Most of these objects were used in Chile; some of them were made in the country; and others were brought from Europe. However, there are a small number of pieces that were included in donations from collectors who traveled around the world in search of objects and then donated their personal collections when the museum was founded in 1911.

Artifacts from China including Manila Shawls

Examples of pieces coming from China are a pair lotus shoes decorated with embroidered flowers with colorful silk threads (*Fig. 1*), a pair of boots with embroidered decorative patterns (*Fig. 2*), and two *brisé* fans from China, one made of ivory (*Fig. 3*) and the other made in dark tortoiseshell (*Fig. 4*), both from the nineteenth century.

Also coming from China, the museum has in its collection an important number of Manila shawls, especially black ones. This kind of shawl is a square piece of silk cloth fully-embroidered. To use it as a garment, the shawl was folded in half like a triangle and worn over the shoulders. It took its name from the capital the old Spanish colony of the Philippines, Manila. From Manila, many products from the East were shipped by Spanish galleons to Spain. (*Figs. 5-8*)

These mantles were produced especially in Canton following the old tradition of embroidery in silk; from China they were shipped to Manila for export to Spain. The Spanish galleons arrived first at Acapulco where a fair was organized. Part of the products remained there. Some went to Peru, from where they probably arrived in Chile. Others were transported overland to Veracruz for shipment to Spain.

From its Chinese origins, the mantle design has changed through years. Upon its arrival in Spain, the traditional oriental motifs (dragons, toads, birds, and other Chinese symbols) fused with others more typical of European taste. Chinese shawls used softer colors than the Spanish ones, embroidered with flowers in bright and cheerful colors. The Chinese shawls had no fringe; it was in Spain that shawls were bordered all around with hand-knotted silk fringe, as we know them today.

Gallery of Photographs



Figure 1: Lotus shoes made for bound feet, decorated in the upper with embroidered flowers with silk threads. MHN 3-32597



Figure 2: Pair of boots embroidered with flower decorative patterns. Ca. 1900, China. MHN3-32628



Figure 3: Cantonese *brisé* fan, of ivory openwork and carved with human figures, animals, vegetation and architecture. In the center there is an oval cartouche with a printed Argentine shield. 1820-1830, China. MHN 3-3981



Figure 4: Cantonese *brisé* fan made in dark tortoiseshell, filigree type, with the guards carved with human figures. Ca.1860, China. MHN 3- 3931



Figure 5: Details of part of the embroidery on a Manila shawl, depicting a scene of Chinese people, pagodas, and flowers. MHN 3-3302



Figure 6: With their arrival in Spain, Manila shawls changed designs to those more typical of European taste, especially flowers in bright and cheerful colors, such as roses, carnations, lilies, and rosemary, among others. Fringes around the shawl edges were added in Spanish shawls. MHN 3-3306



Figure 7: Portrait of a woman wearing a Manila shawl, with the characteristics of Spanish shawls. Retrato de mi hermana. Francisco Javier Mandiola, 1842. Óleo sobre tela. MNBA 2-155.



Figure 8: Manila shawl embroidered with various flowers and surrounded with long fringe. 19th century. MHN 3-3294

Conclusion

Manila shawls were not present in the Chinese tradition of dress. They were an imposition of European fashion, where they served both as a garment, as a piece of decoration on tables and pianos, or hanging them on the walls. At the beginning of the 20th century, with the arrival in Spain of the first silkworms imported from China, the shawl began to be woven in the factories of Seville.

First, the shawl was a relevant garment among the women of the high society; later, its use was increased between the most popular classes. Towards 1870 its use as a fashionable garment declined, nevertheless, it survives with some adaptations as part of traditional dress in many countries of Europe and the Americas, especially in Bolivia where an adaptation of the Manila shawl can be founded.

**Photographs with MHN attribution courtesy of *Museo Histórico Nacional, Santiago, Chile*
Figure 7 courtesy of *Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago, Chile***