

**Innovation and Preservation of Manichaean Textiles
In Southern Costal China in the 17th – 20th Centuries**
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Figure 1. Ink Painted Wool Tapestry Mantle, Northwest China Yuan-Ming Dynasty. Permission: Gion Matsuri Yamaboko Rengokai. Image by Yuge Sei. 158 x 85 cm.

This wool mantle (*fig. 1*) was woven by Monguors, a Chinese minority living along the Yellow River, during the Yuan and Ming Dynasties (1279-1368 and 1368-1644) in Gansu Province, China. The Monguors practiced a religion called Manichaeism after its founder Mani, who was born in Babylonia and lived in third century Persia. The Manichaeans believe that the universe is divided between the forces of Good, exemplified by Light and the forces of Evil, demonstrated by Dark.¹ The duty of the Manichaean is to increase and protect Light. The faith is sometimes called "The Religion of Light" and several of their artworks exhibit a luminous quality. The two forces are thought to have engaged in a continuous struggle for dominance. The vertical segments of light and dark backgrounds on all the tapestries illustrate this duality. The peacocks pictured in the foreground are perceived as guardians against evil, due to their their proclivity for killing snakes in gardens.

¹ A clear and detailed description of the religion may be found in Lieu, Samuel N.C., *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1992), 8-32.



Figure 2. Ink Painted Wool Tapestry Mantle, Northwest China Yuan-Ming Dynasty. Permission: Gion Matsuri Yamaboko Rengokai. Image by Yuge Sei. 158 x 85 cm.

The peacock image, usually shown in pairs, appears in a variety of formats. Other Manichaean images, including branches of The Tree of Life, and also the Sun, perceived as a Deity by Manichaeans, are prominent. Peonies, implying abundance, surrounding the sun, are included to appeal to the Mongols, rulers of China during this period, who favored this image. The Sun Deity is surrounded by a Manichaean motif known in China as The Curly Grass Motif. This motif is seen on Monguor tapestries, on costume, on architecture, and on carpets. The apricot colored ground, characteristic of most of the tapestries, was originally the bright red-orange obtained from safflower dye. Tapestry weave with single dovetailing was employed to create the mantles (the adjacent colors of weft yarns turn on a single warp). Curvilinear forms resulted from the insertion of extra wefts, a technique called “eccentric weave.” Details and outlines were added with pen and black ink painted directly on the wool surface.

The Monguor were descendants of the Uyghurs who left their homeland in Mongolia in the ninth century,² the females taken as mates by their Mongol conquerors by the thirteenth century. By 1368 the Chinese routed the Mongols and established the Ming Dynasty. The Ming were determined to wipe out all foreign influences in China, including Manichaeism, along with the Mongols.

² Drompp, Michael, *Tang China and the Collapse of the Uighur Empire: A Documentary History*, Brill's Inner Asian Library 13, (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 197-203; Ma, Yin, *China's Minority Nationalities*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1989), 114; Schram, Louis M. J., *The Monguors of the Kansu—Tibetan Frontier [3]: Their Origin, History, and Social Organization*, Vol. 44, [1], (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1954), 27; Yan, Zhengde and Yiwu Wang, ed., “Winghai Baike Dacidian [Winghai Encyclopedic Dictionary], Zinghai Baike Dacidian, (Beijing: China Financial and Economic Press, 1944); Yang, Fuxue, “Where Did the Ghanzou Uighurs Go After the Kingdom Collapsed?,” *A Summary of the Research History in China*, (Beijing: Minzu Press, 1998). Schramm quotes Lama Ling Mi, superintendent Erhkulung, who stated that all Monguors were of “Uyghur origin.”

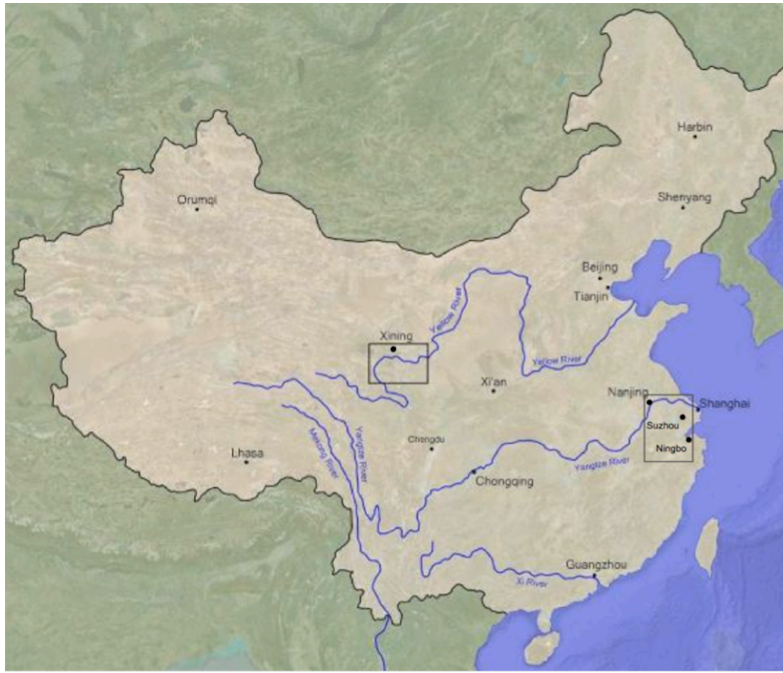


Figure 3. Map of Northwest China with the city of Xining outlined. The coastal cities of Nanjing, Suzhou, Shanghai and Ningpo appear in a second outlined area to the southeast. Courtesy of Google Maps.



56. 西宁卫
Xi Ning Wei (Xining Garrison)

Figure 4. Map of the city of Xining, Northwest China, Ming Dynasty. Permission pending: Charles Young Library, UCLA Special Collections. This map illustrates the Chinese garrisons (labeled in Chinese characters) recently arrived in the region. The round tents just outside the Ming army enclosure and the figures wearing red likely illustrate the Monguor, as their ancestors, the Uyghur, were a Turkic people, known to favor the color red.

Manichaeism, perceived as a foreign religion, was outlawed in a series of laws over the next centuries and the believers were intermittently persecuted.³ Some Monguor tribes abandoned their homes on the Yellow River. These migrants were led by religious leaders southward to sites along the coast in Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces and established new communities there.

Taoism Replaces Manichaeism

When the Monguor fled south they continued to weave mantles. They were forced to use the coarse wool of marshland sheep as the soft fiber of the mountain sheep was no longer available. On this mantle the large crane in the center as well as the two smaller cranes on each side project a somewhat ominous look, with menacing sharp beaks and claws. Perhaps the cranes with their very sharp scissor-like beaks was a means of incorporating the protective role of the former peacock, now replaced by the crane of the Taoists. The Manichaean settlements were facing an increasing menace from the Chinese Taoist majority surrounding the communities in South China.⁴



Figure 5. Tapestry woven and block printed wool mantle. Southeast China Coastal region. Private Collection, Image ©Fowler Museum at UCLA, photography by Don Cole. When this mantle is wrapped around the body, the crane emblem appears at the center back of the wearer. 170.8 x 120.7 cm.

³ Lieu (1992), 237-240; 276-289.

⁴ Lieu (1992), 276-277.



Figure 6. Ink painted wool tapestry mantle. Southeast coastal China, eighteenth century. Private Collection, Image ©Fowler Museum at UCLA, photography by Don Cole. Five cranes motif. 68 x 53 cm.



Figure 7. Ink painted wool tapestry mantle, Southern Coastal China, nineteenth century. Private Collection, Image ©Fowler Museum at UCLA, photography by Don Cole. Warps: cotton, S spun 4 yarns, Z plied. Wefts:, Z spun wool, 2 yarns, S plied, mixed with some fragile sharp fibers. 337 x 118 cm.

The Taoist themes on the wood block printed and tapestry-woven mantle illustrated below (*fig. 7*), was created on the southeast China coast, of coarse and hairy wool. Included are the cranes, symbolizing longevity, and the plants in flower vases on the grey ground, emblems of harmony. The rainbow stripes at each end indicate closures, used when the mantle is wrapped around the body, and also honor elements of Nature. Safflower red dye appears, now used sparingly. The layout of the five cranes indicates this tapestry, although fairly heavy weight, was designed to be worn as costume, the largest crane placed at the center of the wearer's back.



Figure 8. Block-printed and tapestry woven wool mantle, nineteenth century. Private Collection, Image ©Fowler Museum at UCLA, photography by Don Cole. The theme is Mt. Meru, sacred to Taoists, surrounded by flying cranes, thought to be conveyances of the Taoist Immortals. The mountains are wood-block printed with multicolored inks. 171 x 130 cm.

Suzhou Tapestries

The Pure Land



Figure 9. Painted and Printed Wool Tapestry from Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, nineteenth century. Private Collection, Image ©Fowler Museum at UCLA, photography by Don Cole. 160 x 120 cm. The tapestries are now presented vertically and are used as hangings and carpets by tourists and foreigners.

The above tapestry (fig. 9) depicts a conception of The Pure Land.⁵ Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and deities are thought to inhabit a Pure Land, a far away paradise where the devout may be reborn and continue on their path to Enlightenment. Block printed with ink-painting on "the maidens" hair buns. The border stripes have become diminished in size. This block printed example depicts the port of Suzhou and its many gardens and canals as "The Pure Land."⁶ The tapestries became popular with Yangtze boatmen, who used the water resistant mantles to cover their boat canopies.

⁵ McArthur, Meher, *Reading Buddhist Art: An Illustrated Guide to Buddhist Signs and Symbols*, (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd, 2002), 173.

⁶ Woidt, Hanna, *Chinese Handicrafts*, (Beijing: Peiyang, 1944), 53-55.



Figure 10. Tapestry woven and wood block printed example depicting the port of Suzhou and its many gardens and canals as “The Pure Land,” nineteenth century. The tapestries became popular with Yangtze boatmen. Private Collection, Image ©Fowler Museum at UCLA, photography by Don Cole. 160 x 120 cm.



Figure 11: This oversized eighteenth to nineteenth century tapestry, was likely a custom order woven for a Chinese or a Chinese assimilated client. The butterflies and disks are beneficent motifs used by the Chinese population. Private Collection, Image ©Fowler Museum at UCLA, photography by Don Cole. 186 x 125 cm.



Figure 12: *The eighteenth-nineteenth century tapestry is modeled here by a young woman who demonstrates the traditional mode of wearing a Monguor decorated mantle. Private Collection, Image ©Fowler Museum at UCLA, photograph by author.*

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