

# Dragons in the Drawing Room: Chinese Embroideries in British Homes, 1860–1949

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*Chinese embroideries have featured in British domestic interiors since at least the seventeenth century. However, Western imperial interests in China during the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created a particular set of meanings around Chinese material culture, and especially a colonial form of nostalgia for pre-nineteenth-century China, with its emperors and ‘exotic’ court etiquette. This article examines the use of Chinese satin-stitch embroideries in British homes between 1860 and 1949, and explores how a range of British identities was constructed through the ownership, manipulation and display of these luxury Chinese textiles.*

## INTRODUCTION

Chinese embroideries have had many decorative uses in British homes, including as table centres, decorative trimming on clothing, and soft furnishings. Traded by sea between China and Europe from the seventeenth century onwards, they could be brand-new export wares or antique and collectible goods. Embroideries and brocades have also been important sources of Chinese imagery in the West, so that books on Chinese art can sometimes be far more evocative of the domestic drawing room than of the museum, revealing the extent to which Eastern imagery has been integrated into Western homes through embroidery. For example, Winifred Reed Tredwell, in *Chinese Art Motifs* (1915), wrote: ‘One of the busiest animals in the world is the Chinese dragon who, when he is not half-way between heaven and earth, spitting flames or fighting tigers, is kept on the jump, guarding — amongst other things — vases, tea-table covers, tea-napkins, household furniture, and mandarin coats!’<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this article is to consider how Chinese embroideries have been used to provide an understanding of China in Britain, and how British imperial relationships with China were materially involved in British home-making and the formation of British subjectivities between the end of the Opium Wars in 1860 and the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. The use of Chinese embroideries around respectable and often highly elite British drawing rooms, highlights the processes by which domestic displays of textiles came to play a role within intersecting discourses of gender, class and race, through systems of cultural appropriation. The role of cross-cultural consumption within the generation of national identities is rendered all the more pertinent when possession of Chinese material culture becomes so very ‘British’, especially where a tendency to treat Japanese and Chinese embroideries as interchangeable products is noted.

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Books such as Tredwell's position things from China, especially textiles, at a very gendered point of tension between the 'properly' artistic and the domestically 'trivial'. Moreover, her book was taken seriously enough to be included in a 1935 bibliography of Chinese art by Roger Fry, who considered that the history of European chinoiserie had allowed Chinese art to become 'acclimatized in our drawing-rooms'.<sup>2</sup> The legacy of an earlier China trade had indeed created a situation where Chinese arts and crafts were not only familiar, but could also connote high social status due to an association with the collections of eighteenth-century stately homes. Yet, between 1860 and 1949, the conditions under which Chinese embroideries were obtained from China, and Western understandings of China itself, underwent many changes. Thus, it could also be argued that the domestic 'acclimatization' of Chinese embroideries was overlaid by Western colonial developments in China, and the construction of new British and Chinese identities.<sup>3</sup> By 1890, the British Consul in China was expressing his deep disapproval of old Chinese embroideries that were apparently in some demand in Britain.<sup>4</sup> In the Consul's view, these were not genuinely valuable embroideries, but merely pieces of cast-off clothing, so that the eagerness with which they were sought was nothing short of a British national embarrassment. Chinese embroideries, therefore, could also be soiled by their own authenticity, forming part of the intriguingly ambiguous longing that characterizes Western fascinations with the Orient as a site of 'fearful desire'.<sup>5</sup>

Small textiles pieces are easily manipulated and altered by cutting and sewing, and thus lend themselves to amateur and domestic forms of cultural appropriation. Domesticity is one of the defining elements of femininity, and the home as a location for Chinese things takes on a number of key roles within the interconnected ideologies of gender, class, race and nation, in which the use of such embroideries as decorative objects within the home might seem to domesticate the exotic and tame the unknown.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the recycling of old embroideries is not peculiar to Sino-British contexts. Eastern embroideries in general were used in this way, and their recycling forms part of wider debates about how Western urban or elite societies use traditional crafts to create links between the past and the present, and to secure certain cultural values within modern identity. However, the meanings that adhered to Chinese embroidery pieces, even after they had been reused in Britain, were also very specific to the imperialist relationships that existed between Britain and China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### THE HISTORY OF CHINESE EMBROIDERIES IN BRITAIN: EMBROIDERING IMPERIALISM

Chinese silk textiles appear to have found their way into European Christian church treasuries as early as the thirteenth century.<sup>7</sup> However, it was the sea trade between China and Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that brought Chinese silks and linens into Britain as part of the vast cargoes of tea, and also ceramics, wallpapers, and the many other luxury goods that fuelled a mania for Chinese design in the West. Nankeen [cotton], silks, damasks and satins were imported for a wide variety of uses such as window blinds, undergarments, umbrellas, handkerchiefs and shoes.<sup>8</sup> Ornatly painted and embroidered Chinese silks were used to create fashionable, highly decorated bed hangings and covers, gowns and waistcoats that matched the painted wallpapers and Indian calicoes of Western chinoiserie interiors.

Traditional Chinese embroidery principally uses silk and metal threads, worked in a variety of satin stitches (Fig. 1). This kind of embroidery was generally applied to silk clothing, shoes, household objects, and domestic and ceremonial hangings. Common motifs include birds, butterflies, bats, human figures, flowers and trees, the most socially prestigious being the dragon designs worn by the Chinese imperial court and governmental officials. As satin-stitch embroidery was also used to decorate Chinese garments, as well as to produce items for the domestic and export textile industries, it is the type of embroidery most readily linked with China. Other styles such as cross-stitch were also used, for example in the dark blue cross-stitch medallions applied to the white cotton household textiles of western China, and cross-stitch was also encouraged by Christian missionary organizations in China as a simple way of producing items to be sold in the West to raise money for the missions.<sup>9</sup> However, these ‘folk’ embroideries have not been as desirable as the rich satin-stitch embroideries on silk, which have associations with Chinese court ceremony, luxury, and the exotic.

Whilst the China trade had declined by the mid-nineteenth century, Sino-British warfare appears to have sparked a renewed interest in Chinese things, with London exhibitions of Nathan Dunn’s Chinese collection in 1842, and of a Chinese Junk on the Thames in 1848.<sup>10</sup> Embroidered garments and furniture coverings were displayed by British importers of oriental fancy goods in the Chinese section of the Great Exhibition at Hyde Park in 1851. These ranged from simple hangings to entire Mandarin’s costumes, and the objects were mainly provided by British merchants, as the Chinese government had declined the invitation to participate.<sup>11</sup> The exhibition occurred in the wake of the Opium War of 1839–42, when British business interests had led to military action in China. However, the transparent edifices of the Crystal Palace contained a vast elision of the realities of Empire, presenting the abundance and availability of the fruits of Empire, but not its formation and maintenance through violence and subjugation.<sup>12</sup> China did not represent itself, as the Chinese exhibits were chosen by the British as representative of China, a point that can be closely connected to the processes of western colonial expansion and regimes of cultural and economic domination that involve the suppression of native colonial voices.<sup>13</sup>

The circumstances of mid- to late nineteenth-century trade with China differed considerably from that of the eighteenth century, when the Qing government had strictly regulated the China trade through the Canton System. This System prevented Western incursion into Chinese territory and controlled not only customs duties but also Western contact with Chinese producers and consumers. Diplomatic attempts, such as the Macartney Mission of 1792, failed to open up reciprocal markets in China for Western industrially produced goods, and it was Chinese opposition to British opium, grown in India and smuggled illegally into China by European and American companies, that ultimately became the issue for armed conflict under the rubric of free trade. In the wars of 1839–42 and 1856–60, China was defeated and forced to sign treaties with Britain, France, the United States and Russia. These treaties granted the Western powers ever-increasing trading rights and established the 15 treaty ports where Europeans and Americans enjoyed immunity from Chinese jurisdiction, producing a semi-colonialism concentrated along the coast at key mercantile and military sites. Thus, whilst China was never formally a part of the British Empire, China was becoming an area of serious imperial interest. Pseudo-colonial attitudes arose partly from the establishment of Western settler communities that have been dubbed a ‘Chinese Raj’.<sup>14</sup>



FIG. 1. Lady's coat. Silk. China, 17th–18th century. V&A Accession No. T.184–1948 © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



FIG. 2. One of the Wolseley cushion covers from the Summer Palace; silk with gold and silk embroidery, China, c.1800. V&A Accession No. T.139-1917 © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

In the closing stages of these wars, Anglo-French forces stormed the Chinese Emperor's Summer Palace (Yuanmingyuan), and looted or destroyed its contents before burning the building to the ground. Amidst a chaotic and 'carnavalesque atmosphere', first-hand accounts of the looting tell how the soldiers put on the Chinese embroidered robes that they found and used bolts of imperial silk to make tents for their encampment.<sup>15</sup> Such details were ultimately played down in favour of accounts of a more orderly redistribution of Chinese material culture as a sign of righteous conquest, and of European civilized conduct, when the spoils of the Emperor's palace were exhibited and auctioned off in France and Britain.<sup>16</sup> Articles that related directly to the Emperor's person took on a special significance as symbols of conquest, playing a role in colonial masquerade, appropriation and domination.

An example of the embroideries that came to Britain as a result of the looting can be found in a set of late eighteenth-century cushion and furniture covers in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Fig. 2). These consist of five cushion covers and one table cover exquisitely worked in satin stitch with a pattern of dragons, and two brocade cushion covers woven with a similar design.<sup>17</sup> The covers, together with

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two silk pendants, were brought to England as part of the Summer Palace loot by Lt.-Col. Garnet Wolseley. Their decoration of five-clawed golden dragons on a ground of yellow silk gives them a ready association with the Emperor of China, as the colour yellow belonged to the exclusive iconography of the imperial Chinese court, and the five-claw detail was only supposed to be used by the Emperor and his immediate family.<sup>18</sup> This imperial provenance was preserved and underlined by the addition of stitched labels reading 'from Summer Palace: Peking 1861: Wolseley', a phrase that was also inscribed onto other items in the Wolseley household, such as a carved jade bowl.<sup>19</sup>

The cushion covers had, ostensibly, borne the weight of the Emperor of China, and were thus corporeally connected to him. Taken from his throne as an 'object lesson' in Chinese humiliation and British superiority, they were also a synecdoche of monarchy and powerful talismans in the expression of command and domination in the British Empire.<sup>20</sup> However, not much is known of the covers' actual domestic life in Britain or in China. They were kept by the Wolseley household at Hampton Court Palace, and donated to the Museum in 1917, but there is no documentary evidence of how they were employed in the house. Signs of wear and tear, in particular fading from exposure to light and staining, point towards some history of use. However, it seems likely that some of this damage could have occurred at the time of their acquisition in China rather than being due to domestic wear and tear at Hampton Court or at Yuanmingyuan, given the rough treatment of textiles at the scene of the looting. These cushions may have been too symbolically important for practical use, and the way in which two have been reshaped to form flat rectangles is highly suggestive of the idea that they were mounted and exhibited in picture frames.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the Wolseley textiles demonstrate the preservation of specific narratives of colonial conquest through the presence of Chinese textiles in British homes.

The Opium Wars had enabled Westerners a new freedom of movement within China, so that from the 1860s embroidered objects, such as robes and hangings, could be bought by Western travellers in China as souvenirs of a touristic, diplomatic, or mercantile voyage, a military campaign, or a missionary enterprise. Such textiles could function as ethnographic curiosities or as attractive examples of decorative work, and were frequently both. British military involvement in the Taiping Rebellion in 1862 and the Boxer Uprising in 1900 brought further opportunities for looting, and Chinese embroidered robes were also presented to foreigners as diplomatic gifts.<sup>22</sup> In the increasing economic turmoil, wealthy families sold off gowns, skirts, and hangings to eager Westerners, and after the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the establishment of a new Republic in 1911, the dragon robes of Chinese court and bureaucratic dress also entered the market alongside the more usual products of the export embroidery industry. The dragon robe in particular, having become outmoded in Chinese society, took on an additional resonance as a powerful and yet subordinated symbol of rule that could be exploited by the British royal family to demonstrate the imperial strength and stability of the British monarchy in the twentieth century.

### ROYAL APPROPRIATIONS: QUEEN MARY'S CHINESE INTERIORS

Queen Mary, consort of George V, had such a strong interest in Chinese jades, lacquers and textile that they became a part of her public identity and written history. Her

biographers assert that the ‘Mandarin’ robes collected and stored away by George IV and Queen Victoria were rediscovered by Mary in the course of her famously systematic reorganization of the royal households.<sup>23</sup> She then used these old robes within new schemes for the royal residences, including Buckingham Palace. From its inception, the Palace had been a site of ‘Chinese’ interiors with large collections of eighteenth-century chinoiserie furniture and decorations from George IV’s ‘Chinese’ drawing room at Carlton House, as well as many of the ‘Chinese’ furniture, fixtures and fittings that were taken from the Royal Pavilion at Brighton in 1845. Generally, therefore, Mary was enhancing the Chineseness of existing Georgian and Victorian chinoiserie interiors. For example, in Mary’s Chinese Chippendale Room, panels of wallpaper were printed from an old piece of chinoiserie silk, and this pattern was also reproduced for the curtains and some of the upholstery.<sup>24</sup> Furniture was covered with pieces of embroidered ‘mandarin robes’ that had come from Brighton Royal Pavilion. However, it is in her ‘Chinese’ treatment of some State and Semi-State Rooms of the Palace that we begin to see the extent to which Chinese embroideries could be part of the official face of the British monarchy.

The Centre Room was one of the first rooms Mary decorated in 1911, and she turned her attentions to it again in 1923. It forms the central focus of the East Front, and has



FIG. 3. Chinese embroideries appliquéd to the Centre Room balcony curtains, Harold Clifford Smith, *Buckingham Palace: Its Furniture, Decoration and History: By Harold Clifford Smith* (London: Country Life, 1931), pl. 283. Country Life Picture Library.

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a balcony where the Royal family show themselves to the public at moments of national importance. Under Mary's direction, six panels of yellow embroidered Chinese silk were hung from new gilt wooden poles carved with dragons and bordered by Chinese fretwork.<sup>25</sup> 'Chinese' ceiling decoration was added to match the silks, and new green curtains were decorated with panels of old Chinese embroideries cut from the textiles found in the stores (Fig. 3). Thus, the balcony curtains of the Centre Room with



FIG. 4. Armchair in the Centre Room, Buckingham Palace, upholstered with Chinese embroidery. Harold Clifford Smith, *Buckingham Palace: Its Furniture, Decoration and History: By Harold Clifford Smith* (London: Country Life, 1931), pl. 287. Country Life Picture Library.

their Chinese appliqu  embroidered hangings hung at an interstitial point between the public face and the private world of the monarchy, framing their view of the world and marking the inner threshold on which the royal family moved from a back stage area of private Chineseness and into the glare of the public. Old Chinese embroideries were also applied to the silk upholstery of the chairs, and the bottom edge of a dragon robe was prominently utilized, creating a striped effect on a seat cushion cover (Fig. 4). This appropriation of imperial insignia within the Palace played upon several centuries of Sino-British relations, in which pre-colonial eighteenth-century Chinese textiles came to the fore during a new era of semi-colonial relationships with China. The British royal household could now, symbolically, sit upon China's imperial past, giving the emblems of the once great Chinese empire the potential to articulate modern British imperial subjectivities.

Whether or not Mary played any practical role in the dismembering, redesigning and sewing of the Chinese robes, her use of them was held up as an example of her modern and intelligent femininity. Katherine Woodward, discussing yet another of Mary's Chinese interiors at Windsor, claimed: 'Her mind is flexible; so too are her fingers . . . [She] was the first to see . . . the possibilities of the mandarin cloaks presented by some Oriental potentate to Queen Victoria, that had long mouldered in dusty obscurity and now do excellent service in the Chinese Room as hangings and settee covers.'<sup>26</sup> In 1935, colour images of the Chinese Chippendale room and Mary's jade collection were reproduced in the *London Illustrated News*, in a special Silver Jubilee supplement that celebrated Mary's collecting and arranging of Chinese things at the Palace.<sup>27</sup> A full-page colour image of the Central Room showed the balcony bordered by Chinese dragon embroideries, like the stage curtains of a truly imperial theatre.

Mary had set about creating her first 'Chinese' interiors on the eve of the fall of the Qing Dynasty. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Britain's diplomatic, philanthropic and business communities were adopting a more receptive and respectful attitude towards Chinese people and their culture, to ensure a good working relationship with the new Nationalist Government of China.<sup>28</sup> However, the prominence of Chinese things in Mary's public life does not point towards this more general British capitulation, but offers a powerful denial of the decolonialization demands of the volatile new China which was emerging. Beyond colonial nostalgia, here was an active mobilization of the signs of monarchism, providing reassurance that imperial control still lived on in the hands of the British monarchy, who valued the old ways and old court robes, in the face of Communist revolution in Russia and possibly in China. On George's death, a tribute to Mary praised her unchanging love of 'all things English', in which clothing, furniture and household adornments 'must be English'.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Mary's Chinese embroideries articulated Englishness above all else, within paradigms of womanhood, home, empire and nation.

#### COLONIALISM, COLLECTING AND DISPLAY

Some embroideries, especially those that boast some historic connection, like the Wolseley cushion covers, may end up in a museum where they will at least be physically preserved. It is rare, however, for a record of the actual domestic arrangements of Chinese embroideries to survive. Queen Mary's schemes were an exceptional case due

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to the cultural importance of the palace as a site of domestic exhibition. Nonetheless, at Quex House, Birchington, Kent, it is still known how Chinese embroideries were being used in Edwardian and interwar Britain, for the simple reason that they were fixed to the walls where they remain to this day, rather than being applied to household objects and furnishing which are likely to be moved. Although they were displayed in a drawing room, generally considered to be a very feminine location of refinement, presided over by the woman of the house, these Chinese embroideries were installed by the male head of the household.

The Quex House embroideries consist of 25 separate designs, each set within 25 arched spaces in a carved-wood dado all around the drawing room. They were made by cutting out Chinese embroidered motifs and patterns, and then fixing them onto a silk backing in new arrangements (Fig. 5). Included among the many butterflies, bats and flowers are a total of eight five-clawed dragons (Fig. 6), possibly all sourced from one robe, as well as the bottom edges of a dragon robe with its characteristic blue and white stripes representing water. There are also two gold pheasant badges that are examples



FIG. 5. Arrangement of Chinese embroidery motifs, Quex House. Courtesy of Quex Museum.



FIG. 6. Dragon motif at Quex House (detail). Courtesy of Quex Museum.

of the large rectangular embroidered panels which were sewn onto the front and back of Chinese government officials' clothing during the Qing dynasty to denote rank. Other possible sources for the embroideries are women's robes, priest's mantles, domestic hangings and furniture covers, whilst one embroidered group of people is probably Japanese in origin.

The drawing room of Quex House is now part of the Quex Museum of zoology and ethnography, founded by Major Percy Powell-Cotton (1866–1940) in 1896. Powell-Cotton travelled widely in Africa and Asia between 1887 and 1939 and his main interest was in the animals that he hunted, studied, stuffed and then displayed in large dioramas in the museum that he built next to the house. However, he also collected the material culture of the peoples he encountered. The drawing room was part of an extension constructed in 1883. On inheriting the house from his father in 1894, Powell-Cotton chose to complete the room in an Oriental style, with ornately carved Kashmiri walnut, Indian and Chinese carved-wood furniture, Japanese and Chinese lacquered furniture, and an Oriental ceiling with geometric patterning. Due to his frequent and prolonged trips abroad, the decorating went slowly, but by 1909, the Oriental drawing room was ready for use. It was used only very occasionally, for example during an unusually large and formal dinner party in May 1909.<sup>30</sup> It was never an everyday family space. After Powell-Cotton's death, the museum was maintained as a charitable trust, and in the mid 1970s, parts of his house were opened to the public as an additional attraction for museum visitors. By this time, the drawing room had been used for general storage for

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many years, and so Powell-Cotton's arrangement had to be reconstructed using photographs taken in 1913 as a guide. However, the embroideries were still in place on the walls, and only needed to be cleaned and restored by remounting them onto French linen.

On the evidence of his diaries, it would seem that Powell-Cotton collected and executed the Quex House display of embroideries himself. He had purchased some Chinese embroideries during a world tour, taken from 1889 to 1891, when he devoted three weeks in China to a hectic schedule of sight-seeing and shopping.<sup>31</sup> He visited Canton (Guangdong), Shanghai, Tientsin (Tianjin), and Peking (Beijing), on a constant hunt for curios, and he shopped around a great deal, haggling and comparing prices. In his diary he recorded going from embroidery shop to embroidery shop in Canton, seeing old embroidered 'petticoats' from two to eight dollars, and with gold embroidery for ten dollars. Here he bought three second-hand 'capotes', a 'coat' and a 'petticoat' all embroidered with gold.<sup>32</sup> He also looked at new embroideries, and his description of an 'owl big enough for a cushion' perhaps gives an indication that he thought that these textiles might one day have a potential use within his home. At Peking he bought another robe, some embroidery circles and a *portière*.<sup>33</sup> Powell-Cotton was collecting his way round the world. In China he also acquired pictures, fans, lacquer ware, ceramics, cloisonné work, wood and ivory-carving, brass and silver work. His next port of call was Japan where he continued to purchase ceramics, lacquer, cloisonné work, silks and embroideries.

It was in October 1907 that Powell-Cotton began cutting out the embroidered motifs, making patterns of the spaces in the dado, and arranging the embroidered pieces. The new designs were then gummed onto plain French silk, which was tacked to frames and ultimately fixed onto the dado panelling. He worked sporadically at the embroideries between October 1907 and July 1919, and it took a total of 19 months over a period of 12 years finally to complete the scheme.<sup>34</sup> Throughout this time, Powell-Cotton did not record any comments in his diaries on the actual content of the panels, with the notable exception of the cutting out and gumming of some dragons in 1909, as befitted the high cultural status of the dragon robe.

It should be acknowledged that Powell-Cotton's diaries only furnish us with the circumstantial evidence that he did own some Chinese and Japanese embroidered textiles, and these may not have been the source of the embroideries used in the drawing room. It is even possible that the original source of the embroideries was not Chinese clothing and hangings at all, but separate embroidery motifs gummed onto paper, ready for application to clothing and rank badges by textile workers in China. Such embroideries mounted on paper were occasionally acquired by Westerners in China, especially after 1912 when the bureaucratic systems of court dress were no longer in use.<sup>35</sup> However, such was the power and mythical status of dragon robes that, regardless of their true origin, Powell-Cotton's embroideries have unquestioningly been identified as 'from an Imperial Chinese robe'.<sup>36</sup> The inclusion in his scheme of the golden pheasant badges suggests that he was only too aware of such notions of Chinese imperial prestige, so any alternative sources for his embroideries might have been concealed in favour of the more romantic and impressive Mandarin robe.

Powell-Cotton could also quite easily have bought his Chinese embroideries in England in order to execute his drawing room scheme. Western department stores were

selling heavily embroidered ‘mandarin robes’ and other Chinese garments, in addition to decorative circles of Chinese embroidery and sleeve bands (essentially, narrow strips of embroidery that were sewn onto the capacious sleeves of Chinese women’s robes). However, it is highly likely that he used the embroideries that he bought on his world trip, especially as his room was full of references to his travels abroad. He had designed the elaborate scheme for the Kashmiri walnut panelling himself, and he had personally commissioned the carving when in India in 1898.<sup>37</sup> When in France on his honeymoon in the spring of 1907, he bought a quantity of French silk and a speculative analysis suggests that it was this silk that was used to line the rest of the drawing room walls.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Powell-Cotton was an active member of the Royal Geographical Association and the Zoological Society. His life was devoted to the accumulation of natural history and ethnographic specimens in the field, and his diaries were used to provide a detailed record of acquisition. This habit was extended to the time spent in England between travels, so that he also documented the shopping trips to London involved in the furnishing of Quex, and it seems highly unlikely that he would have acquired the embroideries in Britain without including that evidence in his diary. He even recorded the times he rearranged the drawing room furniture, a task for which he sometimes drew diagrams, and he went to some trouble to collect the ornate Oriental chairs and tables which he obtained second-hand from private sellers.<sup>39</sup> Powell-Cotton’s drawing room, like his museum, was a carefully constructed site of exhibition, entirely reserved for show. It was a space in which he displayed the trophies of empire, the emblems of his cultural standing through connoisseurship and learning, and the souvenirs of his personal experiences abroad.

Susan Stewart defines the souvenir as a trace of ‘authentic experience’, in contrast to the collection in which individual items are severed from their original contexts to become part of a new set of meanings that frame and motivate the collection.<sup>40</sup> Yet, collecting itself has been analysed as an exercise in cultural definition, in which the formation of social meaning and individual subjectivities combine so that the collection is both a representation and a construction of identity, with much slippage between the ‘authentic’ and the ‘inauthentic’ self.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, it is a social purpose of the contents of the drawing room to define its inhabitants to the wider world through displays of material culture reflecting desirable social values, but not necessarily the ‘true’ self.<sup>42</sup> Powell-Cotton’s display of Chinese embroideries, composed of personal souvenirs and yet exhibited in a drawing room, and with a leaky interchange of meanings with his museum next door, is therefore doubly implicated in Mieke Bal’s definition of collecting as a narrative of social struggle, where competition from other collectors and matters of taste produce complex issues in subject formation with respect to gender, colonialism and capitalism.<sup>43</sup>

Comparison can usefully be made with other British collectors of non-Western art and material culture whose museums also straddled the line between scientific/scholarly collecting and souvenirs of personal adventure. Late Victorian and Edwardian collectors such as Frederick John Horniman (1835–1906), Thomas Brassey (1836–1918) and his wife Annie (died 1887), and Merton Russell-Coates (1835–1921) also opened private museums in or beside their private residences, with collections that were formed around, or supplemented by, touristic travel. Lady Brassey’s collections were displayed at Lord Brassey’s London home in a three-storey ‘Durbar Hall’ lined with ornate Punjabi wood

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carving, used as a smoking room.<sup>44</sup> Horniman's extensive collection of art, material culture and natural history at Forest Hill was open to the public, and during the 1890s was exhibited in rooms with Oriental decor, such as Chinese lanterns, whilst the entrance hall was decorated with Japanese and Chinese embroideries.<sup>45</sup> Russell-Coates's collections were first displayed in Bath in his Japanese Drawing Room. Together with his tales of travel, he used the objects in his museum to provide proof of a possibly spurious scientific and elite social standing (he does not appear to have done any actual research or exploration abroad, and his collections were formed by his wife).<sup>46</sup> By contrast, Powell-Cotton's scientific and collecting credibility cannot be doubted. However, it is clear that his activities were part of a trend in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century upper-middle-class masculine interactions with material culture in which the museum formed a nexus for amateur and benevolent enthusiasts, professional curators, and learned societies. As James Clifford has argued, collecting, including ethnographic collecting, is a form of Western subjectivity related to 'a changing set of powerful institutional practices'.<sup>47</sup>

The Chinese embroideries at Quex House were part of Powell-Cotton's very conscious definition of self, as an expert in the non-Western and the exotic, and as a learned member of the English gentry, but his total involvement in their display is problematic given the gendering of both embroideries and also drawing rooms as traditionally feminine concerns. Although both men and women collected Chinese embroideries in Britain, as part of a wider early twentieth-century fashion for the didactic appreciation of pictorial embroidery, Powell-Cotton's manipulation of the Chinese embroideries seems, on the surface, to have involved him in some intriguingly feminine cultural practices.<sup>48</sup> Decorative needlework was seen as women's work, and in creating small, decorative domestic objects from the embroideries, women were seen to be reducing art to the level of knick-knacks. Thus, paradigms of femininity were played out through the discourses of design, gender and collecting, in which the perceived irrationality of women was being pitted against the genius of male artists and architects in a battle of the bric-a-brac.<sup>49</sup> However, the sheer scale of Powell-Cotton's interior decorating project, and his use of individual motifs to create a permanent display of original pictures fixed to the walls, aligns his work with that very architectural vision which was sometimes found lacking in women's application of embroidery pieces to small, mobile, decorative items around the home. Furthermore, whilst Powell-Cotton's Oriental room was always termed a drawing room from its inception, it does not seem to have been used for this purpose, but instead formed a part of Powell-Cotton's wider project of collecting. At the same time, his apparent readiness to destroy original garments and hangings indicates a certain ambivalence towards their ethnographic, artistic or monetary value which is at odds with his wider museological project.<sup>50</sup>

The highly ornate nature of Powell-Cotton's room also differed from nascent modernist design sensibilities of the early 1900s, where more 'authentic' and less commercial Japanese and Chinese objects were being sought, as opposed to goods made for the Western market. For example, the interiors of artist Mortimer Menpes's London home had been designed and constructed in Japan by Japanese craftsmen before being packed up and shipped to London. Menpes's home was celebrated by *Studio* magazine for its minimal decoration, said to exemplify the 'true' Japanese qualities of 'frank simplicity, absence of pretence, beauty of proportion and perfection of workmanship', even though,

confusingly, some Chinese furniture had been included.<sup>51</sup> These interiors foreshadowed one of modernism's key characteristics — absence of surface decoration — and they form an alternative view of Japanese design as 'tastefully' minimalist, as opposed to 'tastelessly' over-decorated. Powell-Cotton, on the other hand, visited Menpes's house in 1909, and, although he liked some of the ceilings, generally pronounced the decoration and furniture 'dirty', 'worn out' and 'not one bit up to the standard of ours'.<sup>52</sup>

The ability to labour continuously on minute and repetitive tasks, such as embroidery or ivory carving, was a common stereotype of Chineseness. Arthur H. Smith's authoritative guide to 'the Chinese character' included a chapter on Chinese industry, and a chapter on Chinese patience and perseverance which he saw as coming from innate racial qualities such as 'absence of nerves', 'disregard of time' and 'industry'.<sup>53</sup> Chinese craft-products were therefore also viewed in terms of these so-called racial characteristics, the proof of which could be found in the time-consuming and labour-intensive art of Chinese embroidery. The fascination and perceived relevance of this idea can be seen in the way that J. Dyer Ball, in his authoritative guide to things Chinese, felt the need to state that a Chinese embroidered spectacle case, measuring six inches by two would need 20,000 stitches, whilst a robe would occupy 10 or 12 workers for four or five years.<sup>54</sup> Thus Chinese craftwork, however intricate and beautiful, was understood to be the product of the painfully dull and repetitive labour in which the Chinese specialized, rather than any inspired artistry. In the drawing room at Quex House, every surface was rippling with decoration, with the notable exception of an Occidental grand piano, and the tiny stitches of the Chinese embroideries were placed in close relation to the intricate carving of the Kashmiri panelling, and the carving of the other Indian, Chinese and Japanese furniture in the room. The embroideries were therefore framed by an interest in excessive surface decoration as an Eastern characteristic. Powell-Cotton's embroidery designs thus further reinforced the significance of the dragon as an appropriated symbol of ancient Chinese rule, and the positioning of China within a generalized orient that was both an object of knowledge and location of colonial pleasures for the privileged. This elite symbolism continued to be important at points of sale and purchase of the robes in Britain, even in the potentially more demotic space of the department store.

#### CLASS, GENDER AND THE CONSUMPTION OF CHINESE EMBROIDERIES

In terms of domestic interiors, Powell-Cotton's scheme had a precedent in late nineteenth-century Oriental smoking rooms, 'Indian' rooms and 'Japanese' rooms in Britain, and can be related to the construction of upper-class identities through the possession of trophies of empire and cultural emblems of wealth, inheritance and rulership. Ownership of Chinese and chinoiserie items in domestic space also formed a link with the notions of prestige and heritage inherent in the legacy of elite eighteenth-century fascinations with China. Thus, it is interesting to note that in the selling of Chinese embroideries, culturally elite London stores such as Liberty or Debenham and Freebody invoked notions of Qing dynasty court etiquette at every opportunity, no matter how tenuous, describing a hanging as 'produced, in all probability, as a present to a Mandarin of high rank by his colleagues on his appointment to office'.<sup>55</sup> Any article showing a five-clawed dragon, 'only found on pieces made for use in the Imperial household', was of especial interest.<sup>56</sup> As Verity Wilson emphasizes in her exploration of the

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dragon robe as a souvenir of China, there was a need to construct stories of acquisition that elided any quotidian buying and selling and that foregrounded any connection with the court. She writes: 'At the very time that Chinese society was going through a series of disastrous dislocations, dragon robes were held up as symbols of an ordered empire, static and wisely ruled. This picture, as we know and as many knew at the time, was far from the truth . . . they took these robes as tangible evidence of a myth.'<sup>57</sup>

Ownership of such embroideries was therefore not only related to 'the act of defeating China and the constitution of colonialist subjects', but also maintained a Western construction of China situated within the commercial and the domestic.<sup>58</sup> References to mandarins, the 'Manchu aristocracy', dragon motifs with five claws, and religious ceremony reinforced the authenticity, rarity and high cultural status of the goods on offer, and confirmed notions of China as a place of exotic and traditional ceremony that was being made available to the Western consumer.<sup>59</sup> Thus, when high-class department stores made frequent allusions to the Chinese court in the selling of old Chinese embroideries, they confirmed the superior social station of their potential customers, whilst mobilizing a highly potent and colonial form of nostalgia for the China that once was.<sup>60</sup>

Whilst entire Chinese robes were available in Britain through department stores, the most common domestic use for Chinese embroidered garments between the 1890s and the 1920s was as a decoration for soft furnishings, involving the physical and conceptual dismemberment of these souvenirs of former China.<sup>61</sup> On the evidence of early twentieth-century sales catalogues, magazine articles, photographs and painting, it would appear that women in Britain generally wore Chinese robes in public only for fancy dress, or to pose for a portrait.<sup>62</sup> In the home, the ornate gowns served as loose, comfortable and luxurious lounging garments.<sup>63</sup> Some Chinese embroidered garments were sold in forms that had been adapted for Western use, such as evening capes made from embroidered Chinese women's skirts that were altered by gathering in the waist and adding a collar.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, Liberty's Chinese robes were sold through the embroidery department with the general expectation that they would be cut up for their embroideries, and catalogues did not suggest that they would be worn as anything other than fancy dress until 1937.

It was this practice of adapting Chinese clothing into cushions, footstools, mantel-piece covers, and antimacassars which had been condemned by the British consul in China, on the grounds that the textiles were second-hand and had been tainted by Chinese bodies. The custom was also criticized on artistic merit as well, because women were choosing the products of the modern Chinese embroidery export market (regarded by some arbiters of taste such as Walter Crane as 'synonymous with vulgarity'), instead of 'specimens of the Art made years ago for Art's sake'.<sup>65</sup> This may explain why Liberty's chose to advertise certain Chinese embroideries under the interesting heading of 'Rare Old Chinese Embroidery Made-Up into Useful Bric-A-Brac'.<sup>66</sup> From at least 1898, through to 1933, Liberty's were selling Chinese embroideries incorporated into a range of small and decorative leather household items, such as book stands, glove, handkerchief, tie and trinket boxes, purses, card cases, photograph albums and frames, writing pads, and pocket books (Fig. 7).<sup>67</sup> By 1928, cigarette cases, vanity cases, playing card cases, and bridge sets had also been introduced, but the size of embroidery pieces being used became increasingly smaller, perhaps implying that 'old' Chinese embroidery became more precious and/or less easy to acquire.<sup>68</sup>

RARE OLD CHINESE EMBROIDERY MADE-UP INTO USEFUL BRIC-A-BRAC East India House

**No. 1.**  
Book Stands.  
Wood frame 10/6  
Leather frame 12/6

**No. 2.**  
Glove (or Tie) Boxes.  
In green, or blue,  
leather. 12 by 4½ ins.  
8/6

**No. 3.**  
Purses.  
In blue Persian leather.  
4½ ins. long. 4/6

**No. 4.** Card Cases.  
In green, or blue, leather.  
4 by 2½ inches.  
3/6

**No. 5.**  
Pocket Photograph Albums.  
To hold 24. In blue  
leather. 3½ by 2½ ins.  
1/6

**No. 6.**  
Rocker Blotters.  
In green, or blue,  
leather. 6 by 3 ins.  
4/6

**No. 7.**  
Paper Weights.  
In green, blue, red or brown  
leather. 3½ by 3 ins. 1/-

**No. 8.**  
Pocket Photograph Albums.  
To hold 24. In green  
leather. 3½ by 2½ ins.  
1/6

**No. 9.**  
Pocket Books.  
In green, or blue,  
leather. 3½ by 2½ ins.  
1/6

**No. 10.**  
Writing Pads.  
In blue, or green, Persian leather. Fitted at side  
with note-book, pen, pencil, etc. 10 by 11½ ins.  
15/6 and 17/6

**No. 11.**  
Card Cases.  
In green, or blue,  
leather. 4 by 2½ ins.  
3/6

LIBERTY & CO [Inventors and Makers of Artistic Wares and Fabrics] LONDON & PARIS

FIG. 7. Chinese embroideries made into domestic objects. Liberty & Co., *Liberty's Yule-Tide Gifts* (London: Liberty, 1909), p. 29. With kind permission of Liberty plc and City of Westminster Archives Centre.

## *Dragons in the Drawing Room*

The gift catalogues produced by Liberty give some indication of how embroidered 'Mandarin' robes were used to create domestic objects, distinct from 'art', that might be interpreted in some circles as tasteless clutter. According to Rosamund Marriott Watson, writing in 1897, a modern decline in housewifely pride may have been due to 'Oriental cheap labour in the form of twopenny fans, flimsy draperies and low-priced Japanese faïence'.<sup>69</sup> These luxury novelties flourished 'in vicious prosperity throughout many an otherwise innocent household', inserting a note of moral dilemma into the ownership of Oriental products. In Watson's opinion, middle-class homes of taste were 'dishonoured' by 'the ordinary trophies of travel . . . : debased Japanese grotesques, common Chinoiserie, ill-selected spoils of all sorts from the East, representative of everything that is tiresome and obvious in Oriental decoration'.<sup>70</sup> Thus the 'correct' placement of Oriental textiles in the home was deeply dependent on a discourse of 'good taste', the rhetoric of which reveals a complex interdependence between gender identity, class identity, imperialism, aesthetics, and taste and commodity cultures.

Mrs C. S. Peel was a contemporary of Watson who wrote for a lower-middle-class readership and advocated the outmoded practice of festooning mantelpieces with textiles in order to hide 'ugly' chimney-pieces. Mrs Peel's suggestions may have been out of step with notions of modern design, but late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs show that her schemes reflected the use of exotic textiles to decorate the fireplaces of feminine domestic spaces, such as the boudoir, the morning room and the drawing room.<sup>71</sup> Peel recommended the use of Chinese embroideries in the creation of an 'unorthodox' overmantel for the morning room, a room generally intended for the feminine activities of answering correspondence and doing needlework. Her illustrated example showed two pieces of embroidery fixed to the wall above the fireplace and framed with moulding, an arrangement she claimed to have seen and admired in the house of an acquaintance (Fig. 8). This display of embroideries was combined with a cheap curving mantelshelf, made of deal painted ivory and draped with gold velveteen, and an additional narrow shelf with a rail, displaying copper bowls, green and turquoise ceramic bowls and a tall vase containing a bough of cherry blossom. The walls were papered in turquoise blue.<sup>72</sup>

Peel's scheme drew strongly from *japonisme*, and also showed confusion between China and Japan. By referring to both embroidery pieces as Chinese, but later calling one piece 'Japanese', she demonstrated a certain indifference to the very real challenge of correctly classifying Chinese and Japanese products, especially where there are no distinctive garment shapes as a point of reference. Indeed, the embroidered dragons that were seen as so symbolic of China also appeared on Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese court attire, and many other designs and techniques were shared across East Asian embroidery, so that it is sometimes the cut of East Asian garments rather than close scrutiny of stitching that may provide the strongest clues for correct attribution.<sup>73</sup> Peel's apparently casual interest in taxonomy was by no means new or unusual. In the culturally sophisticated realm of the fine arts, as in the reception of the work of Whistler, the terms 'Chinese' and 'Japanese' appear to have been interchangeable in relation to textiles.<sup>74</sup> The mixing of Chinese and Japanese embroideries is also an indication that the domestic manipulation of textiles provided an opportunity for women to be the creators of their own notions of what 'China' and 'Chinese' meant in material terms.



FIG. 8. Use of Chinese/Japanese embroideries around the fireplace. C. S. Peel, *The New Home: Treating of the Arrangements Decoration and Furnishing of a Home of Medium Size to be Maintained by a Moderate Income* (2nd ed. Rev. London: Constable, 1903) p. 151.

#### MODERNISM, FEMININITY AND THE DOMESTIC RECYCLING OF CHINESE EMBROIDERIES

If embroidery, as an activity and as a cultural product, was classed as feminine, the way in which Chinese embroideries fitted into gendered concepts of modernity and Modernism requires some consideration here. During the 1920s, there was also a more general resurgence of interest in Chinese design, so that Chinese embroideries, with their shiny gold threads, bright colours, tactile surfaces and imperial court associations, continued to find a place within the modern home. As Peter Wollen has argued, the vibrancy, femininity and sensual disorder associated with the Orient were an important part of the Modern movement in the early twentieth century that was subsequently played down in the story of Modernism as too difficult to reconcile with the ‘masculine’ tenets of rationalism, absence of decoration, and social improvement.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, it appears that Chinese embroidery was at odds with Modernism, but not with modernity.

Following the First World War, there were several aesthetic factors that affected the position of Chinese design in British homes. First, there had been a revival in chinoiserie, part and parcel of a more general interest in eighteenth-century styles as an antidote to the heaviness of Victorian designs.<sup>76</sup> Eighteenth-century chinoiserie wallpapers and reproduction chinoiserie furniture were therefore reintroduced into the elite modern

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home of taste.<sup>77</sup> Second, modern designers began to experiment with oriental materials and designs, for example, Eileen Gray's lacquer work, where the notional separation of China and Japan was again problematic. By the mid-1920s, both Chinese and Japanese motifs had also become incorporated into Art Deco design, and a double trajectory for Chinese designs was established.<sup>78</sup> Whilst eighteenth-century references connoted an authentically elite relationship with Chinese design — a Chinese inheritance — the new crazes that emerged for Chinese fashions, Chinese interiors, and even Chinese hairstyles quickly took on negative associations. Chinese dragons could be representative of the vagaries of fashion, the foolishness of smart women, and the vulgarity of actresses such as Clara Bow.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, Chinese culture became associated with wickedness and moral peril, through associations with popular fiction such as Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu stories, and anxiety over Chinese immigration, drug use, and the threat of miscegenation.<sup>80</sup> In general, the sensual excess of embroidery needed to be tamed before its inclusion within modern twentieth-century interiors of taste, where the discourses of Modernism perpetuated a gendered separation between elite and popular cultures, and between the intellectual and the downright corporeal.

Both cushions and bric-a-brac, conventional sites for domestic displays of embroidery, were under attack. The demise of cushioning has been associated with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anxieties about dirt that gave rise to 'hygienic

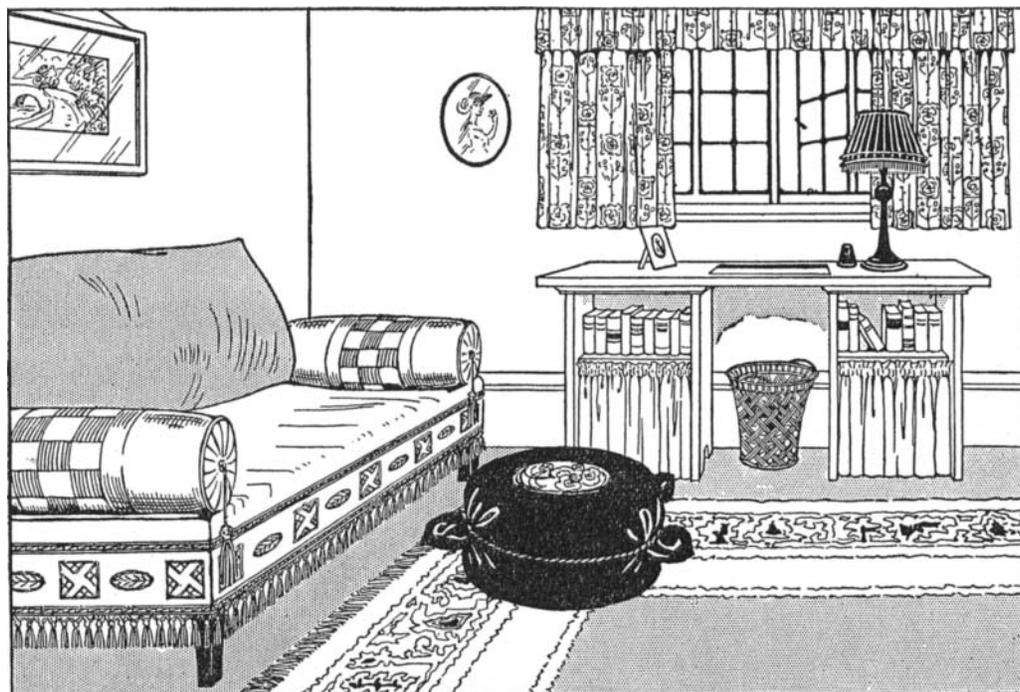


FIG. 9. Suggestions for homemade furniture, including pouf with a circle of Chinese embroidery. D. C., Minter, ed, *The Book of the Home: A Practical Guide for the Modern Household*, I (London: Gresham, 1927) p. 77.

rationalism' in interior design, and also an aesthetic discourse around domestic comfort.<sup>81</sup> Cushions were seen as untidy, and essential only in 'feminine' interiors with their comforting knick-knacks and soft furnishings.<sup>82</sup> Whereas the modernist *New Interior Decoration* of 1929 worried over the number and colour of cushions permissible on a divan,<sup>83</sup> Barbara Budden's more popular and practical *The Home Decorator* claimed: 'No room . . . is completely furnished without an abundance of cushions — of all shapes, sizes and colours.' Here cushions were to be as soft and comfortable as possible, and Budden advised the use of a 'lovely strip of genuine antique Chinese embroidery' in their creation.<sup>84</sup> The more middlebrow *Book of the Home* also recommended using Chinese sleeve-bands, in conjunction with lengths of broad ribbon to make colourful and striking cushions for a modern sitting room.<sup>85</sup> Instructions were given for the making of a pouf that incorporated Chinese embroidery by sewing a circular table mat onto the top (Fig. 9).<sup>86</sup> Like the sewing of cushions, this continued the nineteenth-century feminine domestic practice of reconfiguring Chinese textiles, and also indicated a definite use for the embroidered table mats sold at department stores and large drapers that was less to do with household propriety and more to do with modern modes of relaxation.

Cushions and poufs may have been retained within modern interiors as necessary to the feminine body, but the use of Chinese textiles around the mantelpiece as recommended by Peel in 1902, and separated from the perceived physical demands of the human body, was seen as an outmoded dust-trap. Therefore, *The Book of the Home* suggested that Chinese figures and flowers cut from Chinese embroidery could be appliquéd onto lengths of ribbon or satin, and positioned along the mantelshelf. This could then be kept clean and easily dusted by covering with a glass strip cut to fit, in a slight modification of turn-of-the-century uses.<sup>87</sup> However, in the historical study of textiles, tactile sensations and embodied experiences should not be forgotten.<sup>88</sup> The luxurious smooth softness of satin and the tempting strokability of silk embroidery might well have been important. Therefore, the preservation of Chinese embroideries beneath a sanitary glass sheet performed the physical and psychological act of restraining the realm of the sensual, producing a respectably glazed sensuality and flattening the 'Chinese' feminine. In a very similar example, architect Basil Ionides's *Colour in Everyday Rooms* of 1934 showed scroll paintings that had been fixed to the walls with wooden batons, rather than left to dangle freely.<sup>89</sup> Thus, an overpoweringly feminine/ 'Chinese' interior could be rendered acceptable and held in check by the correct modern treatment, as in the following description: 'Being a woman's room, there were many small ornaments, yet the strength of the wall decorations nullifies their intensity and made the whole restful . . . The carpet was black, the curtains were of Chinese embroideries on a brown-black ground.'<sup>90</sup> Continuity of usage, from the 1880s through to the Second World War, was thus also provided by curtains as a place for fixing Chinese embroideries, from the family home to Buckingham Palace.

Due to their associations with royalty and the China of emperors and mandarins, Chinese embroideries were also still connected to upper-class identity, and played a role in the maintenance of 'authentic' traditional English interiors. In Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), the wearing of a Chinese robe, heavy with authentic details and materials, was used to characterize a 1930s femininity of great gravity: 'Julia wore the embroidered Chinese robe which she often used when we were dining alone at Brideshead; it was a robe whose weight and stiff folds stressed her repose; her neck rose

### *Dragons in the Drawing Room*

exquisitely from the plain gold circle at her throat; her hands lay still among the dragons on her lap.<sup>91</sup>

Waugh was writing during the 1939–44 war, evoking a sense of an upper class and their material culture which might not survive in an increasingly demotic society. The doomed country house which he envisions, *Brideshead*, had a Chinese drawing room ‘... adazzle with gilt pagodas and nodding mandarins, painted paper and Chippendale fretwork ...’. This was a space of heritage, and it was kept roped off and preserved as a curiosity until selected by Lord Marchmain as a place to die, watched over by Julia in her Chinese robe ‘like a pantomime’.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the notion of embroidered dragon robes in British domestic space could be used to comment on interwar society in terms of nostalgia and social authority.

### CONCLUSION

The Chinese embroideries that found inclusion in British domestic displays in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were objects that represented China, the Orient and the Empire, but they were also used to articulate gendered identity through discourses of design and domesticity. The ‘femininity’ of embroidery as a practice and the association of small decorative items and soft tactile surfaces with women contrasted with the more ‘masculine’ approach of fixing embroideries to the wall, as art to be admired through the visual rather than tactile senses.

British class identities were also expressed through the maintenance of potent mythologies of Chinese embroideries. These stressed the importance of embroidery motifs in the ordering of Chinese society, by marking out the property of the Emperor and the identity of government officials. Such ideas remained significant in British engagements with Chinese embroideries even after they had ceased to be used in China. British aristocratic identity was expressed through the appropriation of Chinese symbols of rule within sites of British prestige such as palaces, as well as through histories of colonial warfare, looting and touristic adventure. This cachet of exotic social elitism was made more generally available through the retailing of the embroideries and their insertion into British homes as decorative bric-a-brac.

Chinese satin-stitch exhibited the detailed, repetitive and highly decorative work associated with the East, but Chinese and Japanese work were also often placed in close relation, to the extent that they were treated as interchangeable. Where embroidery motifs have been cut out and reused, the problem of distinguishing between Japanese and Chinese embroideries is very real. Thus, the dismemberment of Chinese embroidered textiles for household decoration was a significant factor in their power to supply narratives of empire and nation, gender and class, providing multivalent material experiences of the idea of China that could to be fitted into British domestic interiors across a range of conditions.

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 186.

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<sup>34</sup> Diary of Percy Powell-Cotton (transcribed), Powell-Cotton Museum archive, P.H.G.P-C Diary 40, book 6, p. 23, 41–3; Diary 41, book 7, pp. 38–42; Diary 42, book 8, pp. 1, 3–4, 6, 8, 12, 42, 44; Diary 45, book 1, pp. 22, 29, 32, 38–40, 44–5; Diary 54, book 4, pp. 16–19, 22–23, 25–27.

<sup>35</sup> Chinese embroidery motifs that have been stitched or stuck onto paper can occasionally be found in Western museum collections. For example, there is a range of motifs and rank badges on paper in the collections of the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia — see textiles 1146/5, 1146/27, 1146/45, and 1458/1–9. Such ready-to-be-appliquéd motifs do not appear to have been sold by retailers in Britain, but were available to Westerners in China, and there has been little scholarship on the matter. Thanks to John E. Vollmer, Vollmer Cultural Consultants, Cory Willmott, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, and Yueh-Siang Chang, Victoria and Albert Museum, for their advice on this subject.

<sup>36</sup> Powell-Cotton Museum, *Quex Museum House and Gardens* (Norwich: Jarrold, 1990), n.p.

<sup>37</sup> Diary of Percy Powell-Cotton Diary 9, p.18; Diary 16, p.22; Diary 17, p. 10.

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Diary 42, Book 8, pp. 8, 49.

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<sup>41</sup> Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (London: Routledge, 1995); Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995); Kryztoff Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> Karen Halttunen, ‘From Parlor to Living Room: Domestic Space, Interior Designing and the Culture of Personality’, in Simon J. Bronner ed., *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America: 1880–1920* (Winterthur, DE: Winterthur Museum, 1989), pp. 157–89.

<sup>43</sup> Mieke Bal, ‘Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting’, in J. Elsner and R. Cardinal eds, *The Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion, 1994), pp. 95–115.

<sup>44</sup> Nicky Levell, *Oriental Visions: Exhibitions, Travel and Collecting in the Victorian Age* (London: Horniman Museum; Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 2000), pp. 88–91.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> Shaun Garner, 'Sir Merton Russell-Coates and his Japanese Collection: The Importance and Impact of an Unplanned Trip to Japan in 1885', in A. Shelton ed., *Collectors: Individual and Institutions* (London: Horniman; Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 2001), pp. 163–87.

<sup>47</sup> James Clifford, 'Objects and Selves — an Afterword', in G. Stocking Jr, ed. *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 240.

<sup>48</sup> On 'serious' collectors of embroidery, see for example Xanthe Brooke, "'The Art of the Home, not of the Palace": Lever and his Collection of Embroidery', *Journal of the History of Collections*, iv, no. 2 (1992), pp. 257–65.

<sup>49</sup> Remy Saisselin, *Bricabracomania: The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (London: Thames, 1985); Juliet Kinchin, 'Interiors: Nineteenth-Century Essays on the "Masculine" and the "Feminine" Room', in P. Kirkham ed., *The Gendered Object* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 12–29; Alice McEwan, 'The Antimacassar in Fact and Fiction: How Textual Resources Reveal a Domestic Textile', in M. Hayward and E. Kramer eds, *Textiles and Text: Re-establishing the Links between Archival and Object-based Research* (London: Archetype, 2007), pp. 164–72.

<sup>50</sup> This was in sharp contrast to Powell-Cotton's attitude towards his collection of Chinese ceramics that was significant investment purchased at auction in 1910, and which brought him into contact with museum experts and other collectors. Diary of Percy Powell-Cotton Diary 42, Book 8, p. 52; Diary 43, Book 9, pp. 6, 8–9, 18, 20; G. Lang, *The Powell-Cotton Collection of Chinese Ceramics* (Birchington: Powell-Cotton Museum, 1988).

<sup>51</sup> 'Mr. Mortimer Menpes' House: An Experiment in the Application of Japanese Ornament to the Decoration of an English House', *The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art*, 17 (1899), p. 170; Nick Pearce, 'The Chinese Folding Chair, Mortimer Menpes and an Aesthetic Interior,' *Apollo*, CIL, no. 445 (1999), pp. 45–53.

<sup>52</sup> Diary of Percy Powell-Cotton Diary 42, Book 8, p. 47.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur H. Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, 2nd rev. edn (London: Kegan, 1895), pp. 152–53. Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* is said to have been extremely influential. P. Conn, *Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 36.

<sup>54</sup> Ball, pp. 214–15.

<sup>55</sup> Liberty and Co., *Descriptive Details of the Collection of Ancient and Modern, Eastern and Western Art Embroideries, Exhibited by Messrs. Liberty, April 1894* (London: Liberty, 1894), pp. 19–20; S. Cheang, 'Selling China: Class, Gender and Orientalism at the Department Store', *Journal of Design History*, xx, no. 1 (2007), pp. 1–16.

<sup>56</sup> Although the five-claw dragon motif is said to have been the special emblem of the Emperor and his family, Verity Wilson suggests that, in common with official robes in general, they had a much wider use and circulation in China. Wilson, *Chinese Dress*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>57</sup> Verity Wilson, 'Studio and Soirée: Chinese Textiles in Europe and America, 1850 to the Present', in R. Phillips and C. Steiner eds, *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 235, and see also pp. 234–39.

<sup>58</sup> Hevia, 'Loot's Fate', p. 333.

<sup>59</sup> Cheang, 'Selling China', pp. 7–9.

<sup>60</sup> Chris Bongie, *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siècle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Sarah Cheang, 'Women, Pets, and Imperialism: The British Pekingese Dog and Nostalgia for Old China', *Journal of British Studies*, xlv, no. 2 (April 2006), pp. 359–87.

<sup>61</sup> J. Dyer Ball, *Things Chinese* (first published 1892, 5th edn rev. by E. Chalmers Werner, 1925, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 216.

<sup>62</sup> 'Miss Ella Casella with Two of Her Chow Chows', *Ladies' Field*, 23 July 1898, p. 260; 'Ice Carnival Fancy Dresses', *Ladies' Field*, 22 December 1900, p. 71; C. S. Peel, *Designs for Fancy Dresses: Containing Nearly 150 Illustrated Designs for Ladies, Gentlemen and Children Arranged by Mrs C. S. Peel* (London: Beeton, [1905]) pl. XII; 'Mrs. Oliver Locker-Lampson', *Vogue*, 24 July 1929, p. 36.

## *Dragons in the Drawing Room*

<sup>63</sup> Sarah Cheang, 'Turning Chinese: Fashion, Chinoiserie and Cross-Cultural Masquerade in 1920s Britain' (unpublished symposium paper, Material Culture Institute, University of Alberta, 2 May 2008).

<sup>64</sup> Liberty and Co., *'Liberty' Yule-Tide Gifts* (London: Liberty, 1898), p. 56.

<sup>65</sup> Ball, *Things Chinese*, pp. 215–17.

<sup>66</sup> See for example, Liberty & Co., *Yule-Tide Gifts 1909* (London: Liberty, 1909), p. 29; Cheang, 'Selling China'.

<sup>67</sup> Liberty and Co., *Yule-Tide Gifts 1909*, pp. 28–29; Liberty and Co., *'Liberty' Yule-tide Gifts*, p. 47; Liberty and Co., *Liberty's Christmas Gifts 1932–33* (London: Liberty, 1932), p. 28.

<sup>68</sup> Liberty and Co., *Liberty Yule-Tide Gifts 1926–1927* (Liberty, 1926), p. 30; Liberty and Co., *Liberty Yule-Tide Gifts 1928–1929* (Liberty, 1928), pp. 34–35.

<sup>69</sup> Rosamund Marriott Watson, *The Art of the Home* (London: Bell, 1897), p. 153.

<sup>70</sup> Watson, *Art*, pp. 4, 12.

<sup>71</sup> Nicholas Cooper, *The Opulent Eye: Late Victorian and Edwardian Taste in Interior Design* (London: Architectural, 1976), pls 26, 30; 'Lady Craven's Boudoir', *Ladies' Field*, 17 March 1900, p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> Mrs C. S. Peel, *The New Home: Treating of the Arrangements Decoration and Furnishing of a House of Medium Size to Be Maintained by a Moderate Income*, 2nd edn rev. (London: Constable, 1903), pp. 150–52.

<sup>73</sup> Young Yang Chung, *Silken Threads: A History of Embroidery in China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam* (New York: Harry N. Abrams). Thanks are due to Anna Jackson, Victoria and Albert Museum, for her comments on this subject.

<sup>74</sup> Margaret F. MacDonald, 'East and West: Sources and Influences', in M. F. MacDonald et al., *Whistler, Women and Fashion* (New York: Frick, 2003), pp. 58–64; Pearce, 'Chinese Folding Chair'; J. Earle, 'The Taxonomic Obsession: British Collectors and Japanese Objects, 1852–1986', *The Burlington Magazine*, 128 (1986), pp. 864–73.

<sup>75</sup> Wollen, 'Fashion/Orientalism/The Body', p. 27.

<sup>76</sup> Cooper, *The Opulent Eye*, p. 8.

<sup>77</sup> Edward W. Gregory, *The Art and Craft of Home-Making: With an Appendix of 200 Household Recipes* (London: Murby, 1913), pp. 29, 32; Randal R. Phillips and Ellen Woolrich, *Furnishing the House* (London: Country Life, 1921), pp. 1, 20; Guy Cadogan Rothery, *Furnishing a Small House or Flat* (London: Collins, 1923), pp. 56–59.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Adam, *Eileen Gray: Architect/Designer: A Biography* (London: Thames, 1987), pp. 49–50, 82–88; Felix Marchilhac, *Jean Dunand: His Life and Works* (London: Thames, 1991), p. 170; Anna Jackson, 'Inspiration from the East', in C. Benton, T. Benton and G. Wood eds, *Art Deco 1910–1939* (London: V&A, 2003), pp. 72–77.

<sup>79</sup> Mrs M. Vince, *Decoration and Care of the Home: Some Practical Advice* (London: Collins, 1923), pp. 145–46; David Stenn, 'Clara Bow: The "It" Girl's Notorious Home in Beverley Hills', *Architectural Digest* (April 1994), pp. 128–29; Sarah Cheang, 'What's in a Chinese Room? 20<sup>th</sup> Century Chinoiserie, Modernity and Femininity', in D. Beevers ed., *Chinese Whispers: Chinoiserie in Britain 1650–1930* (Brighton: The Royal Pavilion and Museums, 2008), pp. 75–81.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Druce, 'The "Heathen Chinese" and the "Yellow Peril": Pseudo-Chinoiserie in Popular Fiction', in C. C. Barfoot and T. D'haen eds, *Oriental Prospects: Western Literature and the Lure of the East* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 131–59; Marek Kohn, *Dope Girls: The Birth of the British Drug Underground* (London: Lawrence, 1992); Andrew Blake, 'Foreign Devils and Moral Panics: Britain, Asia and the Opium Trade', in B. Schwartz ed., *The Expansion of England: Race, Ethnicity and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 232–59.

<sup>81</sup> Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1750* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), pp. 156–64; Penny Sparke, *As Long As It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (London: Pandora,

1995), pp. 50–69. For an American study, see Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850–1930* (Washington DC: Smithsonian, 1988).

<sup>82</sup> Gregory, *The Art and Craft of Home-Making*, p. 108.

<sup>83</sup> Dorothy Todd and Raymond Mortimer, *The New Interior Decoration: An Introduction to Its Principles and International Survey of Its Methods* (London: Batsford, 1929), p. 24.

<sup>84</sup> Barbara Budden, *The Home Decorator: A Practical Guide to the Decoration and Embellishment of the Home* (Coming Fashions Handbook No. 5 [1931]), p. 53.

<sup>85</sup> Davide C. Minter ed., *The Book of the Home: a Practical Guide for the Modern Household*, 1 (London: Gresham, 1927), pp. 81–82.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>88</sup> Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002), pp. 104–05, 107–11; Joanne Entwistle, ‘The Dressed Body’, in J. Entwistle and E. Wilson eds, *Body Dressing* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 40–41, 44.

<sup>89</sup> Basil Ionides, *Colour in Everyday Rooms: With Remarks on Sundry Aspects of Decoration* (London: Country Life, 1934), facing p. 99.

<sup>90</sup> Basil Ionides, *Colour and Interior Decoration* (London: Country Life, 1926), p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder* (1945, rev. 1960 Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 353.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 360–86.

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