

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Sino-Iberian Silk Chasuble

China, for the Iberian market, Late 18th to early 19th century

Silk satin embroidered with silk and metal threads

114 cm long, 83 cm wide

(mounted on board 124.5 x 92.5 cm)

The back half of a satin chasuble of slender tabard form, perhaps indicative of use in Spain.¹ The double-headed eagle at the centre of the vestment is a symbol of the Habsburgs, rulers of Spain, however, it holds leaves in its beaks, which is typical of the presentation of Chinese birds.²

The vestment is divided into three sections by a floral trim. Each section is embroidered in white, brown, and blue silk threads with vines of flowers, pomegranates, and pineapples. At the bottom corners of the chasuble are distinctive cornucopia motifs, which are seen on other Chinese ecclesiastic vestments, such as a pair in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession nos [61.227](#) and [1998.368](#)). This latter chasuble, dated to the late 18th or early 19th century, has the same decorative scheme as ours and was almost certainly made in the same workshop.

A Chinese altar frontal dated to the 2nd half of the 17th century, made from pale silk satin, is in the Museu Nacional de História Natural e de Ciência, Lisbon (no. [MUHNAC-11](#)); it too is embroidered with a similar double-headed eagle holding leaves in its beaks.³

Liturgical silks from China were valued in Portugal. The Portuguese chronicler Siro Ulperni wrote in 1669 'To praise it, one need only say it was from China'.⁴ It is also possible that this textile was made

for use in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the Americas. A Spanish trade route between Manila and Acapulco had been established in 1565.⁵ One shipment on this route in 1792 contained 'eleven brocade chasubles, nine of pequin [Peking] and two embroidered on China satin, all brand new'.⁶

[1] Johnstone, Pauline. *High Fashion in the Church: The Place of Church Vestments in the History of Art from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Century*. Abingdon: Maney, 2002, p. 109.

[2] Watt, Melinda, in Amelia peck (ed.) *Interwoven Globe: The worldwide textile trade 1500-1800*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013, pp. 228-229.

[3] See José Vicente, 'Frontal de Altar – Convento da Cotovia (MUHNAC)', <https://josevicente.myportfolio.com/frontal-de-altar-convento-da-cotovia-muhnac>.

[4] Siro Ulperti. *O Forasteiro Admirado*. Lisbon, 1672, p. 15 in Fernando António Baptista Pereira and Jose António Falcão "To praise it, one need only say it was from China: Chinese textiles in Portugal in the Early Modern period.", *Orientations* 53.4 (2022), pp. 54-63.

[5] Stanfield-Mazzi, Maya. 'Global Silk and Imperial Interactions at Mission San Gabriel', *Southern California Quarterly* 106.1 (2024), pp. 117-153, p. 141.

[6] Cited in Aileen Ryan Earnest, 'Trade and Commerce on the Pacific Coast in the 18th Century: A Look at Some Chinese Silks of the Mission Period', in *Imported and Domestic Textiles in 18th-century America: 1974 Proceedings*, Washington, D.C: Textile Museum, 1976, p. 11.