

Images and Historical Facts: A Study of Cross-cultural Textiles in Chen Juzhong's Painting *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu*

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Abstract

This article explores the cross-cultural textiles depicted in Chen Juzhong's (陳居中) painting *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* (文姬歸漢圖), which is housed in the National Palace Museum, Taipei. By comparing cross-cultural textile representations with historical records, artifacts, and other contemporary images, this study demonstrates that their forms and features align with historical facts from the Song and Jin dynasties. The article further analyzes the origins and evolution of cross-cultural textile styles depicted in the image, noting that the robes worn by attendants and women were influenced by Islamic *tiraz* fabrics, while the golden robes and decorative motifs evolved within Mongolian clothing traditions. This supports the idea of multicultural exchanges during the Song and Jin dynasties. Finally, the article suggests that the rich information and metaphors embedded in the textiles imply that *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* can be interpreted as a form of "espionage painting."

Keywords: Cross-cultural textiles, *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* (文姬歸漢圖), Song and Jin dynasties, Espionage painting

1. Introduction



Figure 1. Chen Juzhong's *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* (housed in the National Palace Museum, Taipei)

Wen Ji Gui Han Tu (color on silk, 147.7 cm in length, 107.7 cm in width) is currently housed in the National Palace Museum, Taipei (figure 1). The painting bears eight collection stamps, including the "Shiqu Baoji" (石渠寶笈) seal. According to the records in *Qinding Shiqu Baoji Xubian* (欽定石渠寶笈續編), the painting was originally housed in the The Hall of Mental Cultivation (養心殿) and is attributed to the artist Chen Juzhong. Chinese scholars, including 沈從文 (Shen, 1959), 余輝 (H. Yu, 1990), 王照宇 (Z. Y. Wang, 2011), 彭慧萍 (Peng, 2023), have examined the painting's historical background and iconographic metaphors. The story *Wen Ji Gui Han* refers to the return of Cai Wenji to the Han Dynasty after being held captive by the Xiongnu, and her return symbolized the restoration of family and national unity during a tumultuous period. Therefore, *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* is often cited as iconographic evidence in studies of costume history during the Song and Jin dynasties. The painting is widely regarded as an authentic work by Chen Juzhong. However, previous research on the

painting's date has mainly relied on Chen Juzhong's documented activities, while interpretations of the painting's metaphors have primarily focused on the relationship between the Song and Jin dynasties. However, the information embedded in the cross-cultural textiles depicted in the painting has not been fully explored.







2. Domestic and Cross-cultural Textiles in Chen Juzhong's *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu*

Scholars generally agree on the historical and cultural background of *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu*. The story of *Wen Ji Gui Han* shares the same theme as the *Hu Jia Shiba Pai* (胡笳十八拍, *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute*), both depicting Cai Yan's (蔡琰, known as Cai Wen Ji) return to China after captivity among the Xiongnu. According to the *Tuhua Jianwen Zhi* (圖畫見聞志), this theme first emerged during the Five Dynasties period, with the painter Zhu Jianzhang (朱簡章) known for depicting various historical stories and subjects, including *Wen Ji* story. Surviving works suggest that depictions of this theme became widespread during the Song and Yuan periods, closely tied to the political relationship between the Song and Jin. The social context of the *Wen Ji* story can be inferred from Cai Yan's *Bei Fen Shi* (悲憤詩, *Song of Grief and Anger*), which describes the invasion of the Hu and Qiang peoples into China, painting a picture that parallels the Jin military's advance (G. Y. Yu, 2010). This may have led to the use of *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* as a metaphor for the Southern Song Dynasty's return of Empress Wei (韋皇后, mother of Emperor Gaozong) and the spirit tablets of Emperors Huizong and Qinzong (Huang, 2010).

Historical records about the artist Chen Juzhong are scarce. The *Tu Hui Bao Jian* (圖繪寶鑒) (W. Y. Xia, 1937) and the *Hua Ji Bu Yi* (畫繼補遺) (Zhuang, 2016) describes him as a court artist during the Jiatai (嘉泰) reign, specializing in depictions of people and foreign cavalry, with a style comparable to that of Huang Zongdao (黃宗道). This suggests that Chen Juzhong was a realist painter, a characteristic that can be further evaluated by analyzing the depiction of textiles in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu*. Based on the scenes in which the textiles appear, they can be categorized into six types, as shown in the following table. These textile types correspond to styles found in other contemporary images, providing a basis for evaluating the painting's realism.

A comparison reveals that the textile styles depicted in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* largely correspond to those in other contemporary images. The clothing of the Han envoys and their attendants, such as the beam crown, red robes and *fu tou* (幘頭), resemble those in other images, including *Lu Bo Yu Lu Tu* (溷薄玉輅圖) and *Rui Ying Tu Juan* (瑞應圖卷). These appear to be formal, standardized court robes. However, the attendants' clothing differs slightly. In the aforementioned reference images, as well as in the *Da Jia Lu Bu Tu* (大駕溷簿圖) housed in the China National Museum, attendants holding staffs are depicted wearing narrow-sleeved robes, in contrast to the wide-sleeved robes shown in the painting.

Table 1. A comparison of textiles in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* and other images

No.	Types	Textiles in <i>Wen Ji Gui Han Tu</i>	Textiles in Other Images (1)	Textiles in Other Images(2)
1	Attire of the Han Envoy			
			Attire of the officials in <i>Lu Bo Yu Lu Tu</i> (溷薄玉輅圖)	Attire of the officials in <i>Xiao Jing Tu</i> painted by Ma Hezhi autographed by Gaozong (宋高宗書孝經馬和之繪圖)
2	Attire of Han Attendants			
			Attire of the attendants in <i>Lu Bo Yu Lu Tu</i> (溷薄玉輅圖)	Attire of the attendants in <i>Rui Ying Tu Juan</i> (瑞應圖卷)by Xiao Zhao(蕭照)

<p>3 Robes with drop-shaped pattern</p>			
		<p>Drop-shaped dragon patterned textile in the portrait of Empress Guo(仁宗皇后坐像圖)</p>	<p>Drop-shaped medallions on the textile in the portrait of a Yuan dynasty empress.</p>
<p>4 Textiles with Pseudo inscriptions</p>			
<p>5 Dazi(搭子) patterned textiles</p>			
		<p>Dazi patterned dress in Nv Xiao Jing Tu Juan (女孝經圖卷)</p>	<p>Double-birds patterned robe in the portrait of Empress Guo</p>
<p>6 Other Textiles (e.g., saddle pads)</p>			
		<p>Saddle pads in <i>Hu Qi Chun Lie Tu</i> (胡騎春獵圖) by Chen Ju Zhong</p>	<p>Saddle pads in <i>Wen Ji Tu</i> (文姬圖) by Gu Deqian (顧德謙)</p>

The official attire in the *Lu Bo Yu Lu Tu* is likely that of Song Dynasty court dress. The *Song Shi* (宋史) mentions the *Yu Lu* (玉輅, jade chariot), which had been in use since the Tang Dynasty (Tuo, 1977). By the Song Dynasty, it became known as the "*Xianqing Lu* (顯慶輅)," used for state rituals. The *Ji Li* (吉禮) records a scene where the emperor used the jade chariot during a sacrificial ritual: "In the sixth year of Yuanfeng (1083AD), after the ritual, the emperor wore the Tongtian crown (通天冠) and a scarlet gauze robe and rode in the jade chariot to the Grand Ancestral Temple." On the return journey, the large chariot (大輦) was sometimes substituted for the jade chariot: "After the ritual, the emperor returned to the Palace of Abstinence in the large chariot, as there was no discrepancy in the ritual." Ministers participating in the sacrificial ritual wore either ritual robes or court attire, depending on their roles. Since the large chariot was a substitute for the jade chariot, the court attire of the officials in the *Yu Lu Tu* should be considered court robes. Similarly, the robes worn by the Han envoys in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* should also be considered court robes. Moreover, the description of court attire in the *Song Shi* supports this interpretation: "The court attire includes the Jin Xian crown (進賢冠)... all of which are red robes and red skirts," and "scarlet gauze robes with white flowers," matching the attire depicted in the painting (Tuo, 1977).

The clothing of the women in the painting also aligns with styles seen in other referenced images. For example,

the double-bird pattern on the kneeling attendant's robe resembles the bird motif found on the robes of Song Dynasty empresses. Cai Yan's outer garment features a double-tree pattern, and she wears an inner gold brocade gown with small floral designs, similar to textiles found in the *Nv Xiao Jing Tu Juan* (女孝經圖卷).

The most controversial aspect of the painting is the attire of the Zuo Xian Wang (左賢王) and his attendants. Zuo Xian Wang in the image wears a dragon robe adorned with drop-shaped medallions and dragon motifs. The medallions are arranged in a 2-2 sequence, with bird motifs as filler patterns. Although the material cannot be definitively identified, the visual representation closely resembles *hun jin* (渾金), a textile woven with gold threads, probably gold brocade. The earliest concrete references to *hun jin* textiles appear in *the Secret History of the Mongols* (蒙古秘史), written between 1228 and 1324. It is recorded that the Mongolian leader Yiduwu (亦都兀) sent envoys, Atiqilahei (阿惕乞刺黑) and Daerbo (荅儿伯), to report to Genghis Khan, saying: "We have heard of the emperor's reputation, like the clear sky after the clouds have dispersed and the pure water after the ice has melted. We are extremely delighted. If we receive your grace, we are willing to be your fifth son and contribute our efforts." Genghis Khan said: "Come here. I will give you a girl and make you my fifth son." Thus, Yiduwu came to visit Genghis Khan with gold, silver, pearls, and fabrics (Wu, 2012). Genghis Khan married his daughter, Ale Ale Tun (阿勒阿勒屯), to him. Among these gold, silver, and fabrics, the types of the fabrics are clearly indicated, including *tuo er he ti* (脫兒合惕, annotated as textiles), *nachetti* (納赤惕, annotated as *jin duan zi*, gold fabric), *dardas* (annotated as *hun jin duan zi*, *hunjin* fabric), and *awulasun* (阿兀刺孫, annotated as textiles), and Yiduwu submitted to Genghis Khan around the Kherlen River from the summer of 1210 to the spring of 1211 (Rashid, 1983). This indicates that the technology for producing these fabrics was already relatively advanced at that time. According to Mr. Wang Zhaoyu's inference (Z. Y. Wang, 2011), the painting *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* should have been completed during the reign of Emperor Ningzong (寧宗), possibly around the year 1207. This suggests that Zuo Xian Wang's robe may have been made of *hun jin* fabric. However, current archaeological findings from the Jin Dynasty have not unearthed similar textiles.

In the painting, Zuo Xian Wang's attendants wear narrow-sleeved robes adorned with golden pseudo-script patterns along the collar, cuffs, lapels, and hem, arranged in cycles of four, similar to the motifs seen on Cai Yan, the female attendants, and the horse's saddle pads. Cai Yan and the female attendants wear similar robes, but with additional gold stripes (金襴) and extra pseudo-script decoration on the knee. Although this type of clothing is not found in other contemporary images, it is documented in historical records and material culture. Since the Tang Dynasty, it became customary to add stripes (襴) to robes, a practice formalized during the Jin Dynasty, especially in the Dading (大定) period. According to the *Dajin Jili* (大金集禮), a decree was issued in 1175 to standardize the use of stripes in official court robes after a discussion among officials and the study of Ma Zhou (馬周) and Zhangsun Wujing's (長孫無忌) suggestions on adding stripes to robes in the Tang Dynasty (Zhang, 2019).

The standardized official robes of the Jin Dynasty were established in 1171, based on the systems described in the *Tang Che Fu Zhi* (唐車服志) and the *Song Hui Yao* (宋會要). These robes are characterized by specific patterns and distinctions based on rank (Zhang, 2019). The higher the official's rank, the larger the pattern elements in their robes. In the painting, Cai Yan is depicted in a robe with small floral patterns, while the attendants wear robes with distinct *dazi* (搭子) pattern, indicating their different statuses. A similar robe with gold trim and intricate patterns was unearthed from the tomb of Prince Qi (齊國王墓) in Acheng District, Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, indicating that these textiles were used during that period (P. C. Zhao, 2001).

Furthermore, the saddle pads in the painting are of particular interest. They are adorned with cloud motifs and auspicious beasts, and the edge patterns align with those on the robes worn by Zuo Xian Wang's attendants. These patterns also appear in other artworks, such as *Wen Ji Tu* (文姬圖) and *Pingyuan She Lu Tu* (平原射鹿圖), with *Wen Ji Tu* displaying edge decorations similar to those in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu*. Professor Peng Huiping has examined these decorative motifs and their appearance in artworks, noting that these patterns—found on horse hips, saddle pads, and robe edges—represent distinctive symbols linked to Liao and Jin cultures. These symbols resemble the painting style of Chen Juzhong, suggesting the use of a distinct iconographic system (Peng, 2023).

In conclusion, the depiction of textiles and clothing in the painting aligns closely with historical descriptions from the Song and Jin periods. The only ambiguity concerns the oversized robes worn by the attendants of the Han envoy. However, it can be concluded that the image demonstrates a strong realist approach in depicting textiles.

3. The Origins and Development of Cross-cultural Textiles in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu*

As previously discussed, the cross-cultural textiles in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* can be categorized into three main types: the *hun jin* robe worn by Zuo Xian Wang, the gold brocade robes worn by the women and attendants, and

the rugs and saddle pads.

The authenticity of the robe worn by Zuo Xian Wang remains uncertain, as existing evidence does not substantiate its historical accuracy. As illustrated in the previous table, drop-shaped medallions have been found in textiles from the Song and Jin periods. For example, the drop-shaped pattern in the portrait of Empress Guo (郭皇后), who married Emperor Renzong (仁宗), and the drop-shaped hunting patterned gold brocade in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (figure 2) both confirm its presence.

However, both visual representations and physical examples show that these textiles were woven with colored silk threads as the base fabric, not *hun jin* gold-thread fabrics. Large-scale use of gold in drop-shaped patterned brocades, such as the drop-shaped rabbit patterned gold brocade in the China National Silk Museum collection (figure 3), appears only during the Yuan Dynasty. No physical evidence has been found to suggest the use of such *hun jin* brocades during the Jin Dynasty.



Figure 2. The drop-shaped hunting patterned gold brocade from the Jin dynasty (in the Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Figure 3. The drop-shaped rabbit patterned gold brocade from the Yuan dynasty (in the China National Silk Museum)

From a pattern perspective, the drop-shaped patterns on the robe appear to feature a dragon motif, with a phoenix in flight as the secondary motif. Both motifs were prevalent in textiles from the Jin and Yuan periods, making it challenging to distinguish them based solely on their shape. For example, the phoenix in flight appears in the Song Dynasty tapestry *Lotus Pond* (figure 5), the Jin Dynasty drop-shaped phoenix patterned gold brocade (figure 6), and the Yuan Dynasty makara-and-phoenix patterned *nasij* (figure 7). Similarly, the dragon motif is also present (figure 8, 9, 10).



Figure 4. Phoenix on Zuo Xian Wang's robe in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu*



Figure 5. The tapestry *Lotus Pond* from the Song dynasty



Figure 6. The drop-shaped phoenix patterned gold brocade from the Jin dynasty (in the Cleveland Museum of Art)

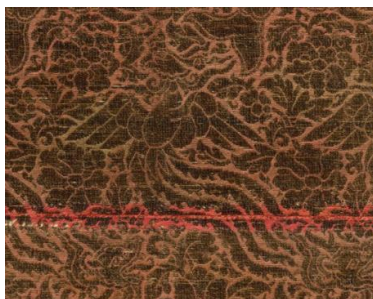


Figure 7. The makara-and-phoenix patterned *nasij* from the Yuan dynasty (in the Cleveland Museum of Art)

Notably, some dragon patterned *nasij* from the Yuan Dynasty feature borders adorned with drop-shaped medallions, a detail reminiscent of those seen in the painting. For instance, a gold brocade featuring a drop-shaped dragon and phoenix pattern in the Cleveland Museum of Art (figure 8), and a similar brocade in the Palace Museum in Beijing, both display this feature. In contrast, Jin Dynasty dragon patterns were typically integrated into the *dazi* pattern, woven with colored silk as the base fabric (figure 9), similar to earlier gold brocades with drop-shaped patterns. The combination of dragon and phoenix motifs was also prevalent in Yuan Dynasty textiles. Therefore, it can be concluded that the robe in the painting incorporates various design elements characteristic of Yuan Dynasty textiles. If this painting was indeed created by Chen Juzhong, it would indicate a strong connection between the robe and Mongol culture. Historical records, such as the *Mengda Beilu* (蒙鞑備錄), support this claim (Meng, 1985), stating, "The Jin invaders once fought with us, but later they frequently traded silk and gold with the Jin," suggesting that these textiles likely entered the Mongol textile system through such exchanges.



Figure 8. The dragon medallion patterned gold brocade from the Yuan dynasty (in the Cleveland Museum of Art)

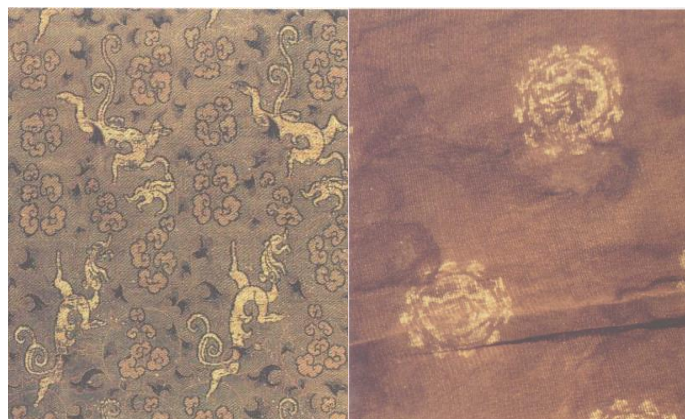


Figure 9. The dragon motifs from the Jin dynasty (in Prince Qi's tomb)



Figure 10. The robe with pseudo inscriptions from the Jin dynasty (in Prince Qi's tomb)

The gold brocade robes worn by the women and attendants reflect the styles of the Jin Dynasty. Similar gold brocade robes have been unearthed from the tomb of Prince Qi (figure 10). These garments were well-preserved, featuring continuous gold brocade on the shoulders and knees, similar to the gold brocade placement seen on the robes of the women in the painting. The "gold-lettered stripes" style had not previously appeared in Chinese attire, but similar styles are documented in historical records from the Song and Jin periods.

For example, Zhao Rushi's (趙汝適) *Zhu Fan Zhi* (諸蕃志) describes the production of such textiles in various regions (Feng, 1956), with the most detailed account found in the section on the "Lumei Kingdom" (蘆眉), stating: "There are 40,000 households engaged in weaving brocades, producing twisted silk, gold-threaded fabrics, and brocades woven with both gold and silk." Similar references are made to the "Daqin Kingdom" (大秦), which produced "silk brocades with gold-threaded headgear," as well as to other regions, such as the "Jici Ni Kingdom" (吉慈尼) and the "Dashi Kingdom" (大食). Scholars have identified the "Lumei Kingdom" as the Seljuk Sultanate in Asia Minor, the "Jici Ni Kingdom" as the Ghaznavid Dynasty in Afghanistan, and the "Dashi Kingdom" as the Arab states of West Asia.

Textiles featuring "gold-threaded twisted fabric" and "gold-threaded headgear" in Seljuk period imagery align with the descriptions in these records. These textiles are known as *tiraz* in the Islamic textile system (figure 11). The term *tiraz* is derived from the Persian word for "embroidery" and later came to denote textiles featuring Arabic script (Serjeant, 1972). During the Seljuk period, *tiraz* textiles were frequently adorned with script, typically placed on the arms of garments or along the borders of items such as curtains.

Clearly, following the Tang Dynasty tradition, the robes from the tomb of Prince Qi featured gold brocade on the knees, a style likely influenced by Seljuk *tiraz* textiles. A 14th-century record by the Islamic historian Umarī describes the clothing of the upper classes in Delhi (Serjeant, 1972), noting: "Most Tatar robes feature gold embroidery (muzarkasha bi-dhabab), and some include gold-embroidered *tiraz* on the sleeves (zarkash)." This corresponds with the clothing of the attendants and children in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* (figure 12), supporting the interpretation that the gold-lettered edge decorations on the robes are derived from Islamic regions. Compared to the brocades in the tomb of Prince Qi, the robes in the painting more closely resemble the *tiraz* robes worn by the Tatars, as described by Umarī.



Figure 11. Tiraz in the image Al-Harith Witnesses Abu Zayd and His Son Fighting in Front of a Judge, from the Maqamat by Hariri



Figure 12. The attendant's robe in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu*

The rugs and saddle pads in the painting also display Islamic stylistic features. The edge patterns on the saddle pads, as well as on Zuo Xian Wang's and the attendants' robes, are identical, suggesting both originated from Islamic regions. The rugs in the painting clearly display Islamic decorative elements, similar to those found in contemporaneous Islamic artifacts.

For example, a painted wooden box from the Seljuk period in the David Collection in Copenhagen (figure 13), when compared with textile fragments from the al-Sabah Collection in Kuwait (figure 14), can be traced to northern Afghanistan. The painted design on the box features medallions with Kufic Arabic script along the borders (Folsach, 2003), matching the edge patterns on the rugs in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu*. Similarly, Seljuk textiles from Herat, Afghanistan, which were discovered with Arabic script in the same style, also combine script with bead motifs, similar to the rugs in the painting (figure 15).



Figure 13. Pseudo inscriptions on a painted Seljuk wooden box



Figure 14. Kufic inscription on a Seljuk textile found in Herat



Figure 15. Pseudo inscriptions on a rug in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu*

In conclusion, the imagery in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* clearly incorporates decorative elements from both Mongol and Islamic cultures. The *hun jin* robe depicted in the painting suggests a strong connection between Jurchen and Mongol cultures. The robe worn by the women and the attendants demonstrate the cross-cultural features of China and Islamic world. The saddle pads and rugs likely originate from the Seljuk Empire, reflecting Islamic cultural influences.

4. The Types of "Golden Letters" in Cross-cultural Textiles

During the Song and Jin periods, *tiraz* textiles were integrated into the attire systems of ethnic minorities, but their styles underwent significant evolution. Based on these stylistic changes, we can broadly categorize the cultural exchange of textiles between China and foreign regions into two distinct types.

The first type consists of textiles that imitate cross-cultural styles, primarily *tiraz* textiles, in which the text is enclosed within medallions. The text is typically in Arabic script, and the interior of the medallions often feature paired animal motifs. This style combines traditional medallions with Arabic script designs and was widespread along the Silk Roads, including northwest China, Central Asia, and West Asia. Due to the interconnected textile systems in northwest China and Central Asia, pinpointing the exact production locations of these textiles is often challenging. However, the details of the letters and patterns can aid in distinguishing them.

Arabic *tiraz* textiles from West Asia and Central Asia typically feature Kufic or Naskh scripts, characterized by clear letter strokes and regular shapes. The spelling is usually accurate. For example, an 11th-12th century brocade in the David Collection in Copenhagen features Kufic script inside the circular border (figure 16), spelling "al-na'im" (meaning "blessing").



Figure 16. The textile with confronted birds and islamic inscriptions (in the David collection)

Additionally, some textiles feature pseudo-Arabic characters resembling Arabic script. These characters mimic Kufic script but are distorted, with unclear strokes and misspellings. These textiles were likely produced by non-Islamic weavers imitating Islamic lettered designs. For example, a griffin patterned brocade from the China National Silk Museum features a 1/2 weave structure, with a red-orange ground weft made from red and yellow silk threads—a technique that was already present in Tang Dynasty brocades from northwest China. Notably, the

first half of the text on this brocade reads "baraka" (blessing), while the second half forms an indecipherable pattern resembling Arabic script, with skewed characters. This suggests that it is a counterfeit.



Figure 17. The textile with confronted griffins and pseudo inscriptions in medallions(in the China National Silk Museum)

A similar case is found in the confronted goats patterned brocade (figure 17) from Aral, Xinjiang, where the outer circle of the medallions features Kufic script "عز و باق" (glory and wealth). However, this script does not form a readable word and is likely a distorted representation of "عز و باق" (glory and wealth).



Figure 17. The robe with confronted goats and islamic inscriptions found in Aral, Xinjiang uygur autonomous region

The decorative motifs on these textiles strongly reflect cross-cultural styles. Common motifs from Central Asia and West Asia include paired animal and bird designs, as well as drop-shaped patterns featuring Arabic script. For example, a textile from the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology features heavily distorted Arabic script, with "بركة" (blessing) legible, but the rest unreadable. This combination of drop-shaped patterns and Arabic script was commonly used in Central Asia and West Asia. For instance, a 12th-century ceramic mold at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco features drop-shaped designs, with a Persian four-line poem inside the circular border (figure 18). The spelling on this ceramic mold closely resembles that on the brocade described above. The drop-shaped designs on both the ceramic mold and the brocade feature animal motifs at the center of small roundels or leaf-shaped tree patterns. However, the highly stylized and distorted text suggests that both are imitations of Arabic textile and design motifs created by Chinese weavers (figure 19).



Figure 18. Mold for conical bowls with drop-shaped medallions and kufic inscriptions



Figure 19. “قَم” on the textile and mold



Figure 20. The double lotus patterned textile with pseudo inscriptions from the Song dynasty in the Textile Museum

The second type involves transforming text into graphic patterns by omitting Arabic sentences or phrases. In this case, Arabic letters, such as "ل" and "ا" (representing elongated lines), are combined into motifs, such as "ل با" and "ل عا," while Arabic sentences or phrases are omitted. This design is not unique to China; it has also been present in textiles, ceramics, and metalwork in Central Asia and West Asia for a long time. The motifs associated with these graphic patterns also incorporate Chinese stylistic influences.

For example, a brocade from the Song Dynasty (figure 20) in the Textile Museum in Washington features a roundel with a double lotus pattern. The visual feature of this brocade closely resembles textiles from the Northern Song period (figure 21) in Xinjiang, as well as printed silks from the Western Xia dynasty found in the *Bai Si Kou* area (白寺口) of Ningxia province. The edge decoration of this brocade features the Arabic words "ل نعنا" and "ل نا"—combinations of Arabic letters that do not form meaningful words. This transformation of Arabic letters into graphic motifs is common in Chinese textiles, where the text serves a purely decorative purpose.

The gold brocade robes from the tomb of Prince Qi, mentioned earlier, also belong to this category. The two instances of gold brocade on the robe feature graphical letter designs. The gold thread on the arms forms symmetrical patterns with linked beads, while the gold thread on the knee forms a similar pattern, but appears only on one side of the bead link. The language of the letters is unclear and cannot be deciphered. Several scholars have compared these designs with various alphabets, but none match known scripts. The pattern likely belongs to the category of pseudo-texts, similar to the decoration on the Song double-lotus brocade mentioned before.

Overall, the development of textiles evolved from imitating Arabic letters to transforming them into graphic patterns. This trend persisted into the Yuan Dynasty, with many textiles featuring highly stylized pseudo-Arabic letters. For instance, the previously mentioned drop-shaped rabbit patterned gold brocade features pseudo-Arabic

letters on the shoulders and sleeves. Similarly, a brocade robe from the Ming Shui Tomb in Dasuji county (大蘇吉鄉明水墓), Inner Mongolia (H. X. Xia & F. Zhao, 1992), also displays pseudo-Arabic letter patterns on the shoulders and cuffs (figure 22).



Figure 21. The textile with double lotus in roundels from the Northern Song dynasty found in Aral, Xinjiang uygur autonomous region

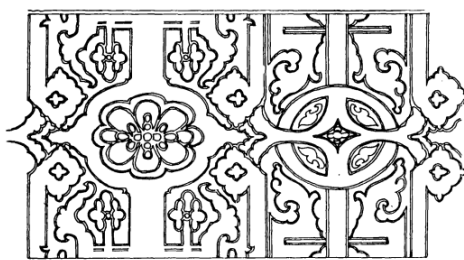


Figure 22. Pseudo inscriptions on a robe from Yuan dynasty found in the Ming Shui Tomb in Dasuji county, Baotou city, Inner Mongolia

In summary, the textual decorations on the robes worn by the women and attendants in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* belong to the category of graphic text transformation. These graphic patterns are repeated as part of the design, with a level of abstraction that falls between the styles found in the Prince Qi and Ming Shui tombs. Based on this, it can be inferred that the robes date to the later part of the Jin Dynasty, around 1207, which aligns with Wang Zhaoyu's estimate.

5. Cross-cultural Textile and Its Metaphorical Meaning in the "Espionage Paintings"

Professor Yu Hui has proposed and substantiated the existence of a distinct type of realistic painting in the Southern Song court, known as "espionage paintings." These paintings primarily depict portraits of high-ranking officials from enemy nations or scenes of geographic features. Espionage paintings emerged during the late Southern Tang and early Northern Song periods, with artists such as Wang Ai (王霽) and Chen Yaochen (陳堯臣) contributing to their creation. Emperors such as Song Taizu and Song Huizong used these espionage paintings as references for their decision-making. It is suggested that Chen Yaochen's espionage paintings contributed to the rare "victory at Yanyun" during the Northern Song period (H. Yu, 2004).

Yu Hui also suggests that Chen Juzhong may have been one of the espionage painters. According to Tao Zongyi's (陶宗儀) *Nan Cun Chuo Geng Lu* (南村輟耕錄), Chen Juzhong painted an accurate likeness of the "posthumous portrait" of the Tang beauty Cui (唐麗人崔氏) while traveling through Shaanxi with Zhao Yuan (趙元) in 1207 (Tao, 2004). By this time, Chen Juzhong had become deeply embedded in central China, and his diplomatic mission to the Jin state is well-documented.

Similarly, Wang Zhaoyu acknowledges the historical fact of Chen Juzhong's mission to the Jin but offers a different perspective on whether Chen served as a espionage painter. Based on Zhao Yuan's poetry, Wang suggests that Zhao and Chen were close friends with shared interests in calligraphy and painting, implying that their relationship was likely not one of surveillance. Therefore, he argues that Chen Juzhong was likely a regular government envoy (Z. Y. Wang, 2011).

While Chen Juzhong's exact role remains unclear, there is no doubt that *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* meets the criteria of a espionage painting. As noted earlier, espionage paintings aim to convey information through realistic

representation. Yu Hui cites examples such as the Southern Song *Guan Shan Xing Lü Tu* (關山行旅圖) by Xiao Zhao (蕭照), which depicts the topography of the Taihang Mountains, and *Liu Tang Mu Ma Tu* (柳塘牧馬圖), which shows Jin troops practicing water combat (H.Yu, 2004). In comparison, *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* is far richer in both visual details and metaphorical content, making it clearly suitable for interpretation as a espionage painting.

Costumes and textiles, key elements of *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu*, contain significant information that can be interpreted as details of a espionage painting. For instance, the robes and horse gear worn by the women and attendants feature Islamic *tiraz* styles, especially the women's robes, which combine typical Jin Dynasty *dazi* patterns with *tiraz* designs. However, the functional use of *tiraz* as an indicator of rank was not maintained in the Jin Dynasty's dress system. In the painting, relationships between characters are not determined by the textiles featuring inscriptions. For example, Cai Yan and the attendant wear similar *dazi* patterned gold brocade robes, but this does not imply they share the same identity. This is because the Jin Dynasty's power structure, similar to that of Islamic regions, had clear dress codes based on status, though these codes were governed by Chinese dynastic traditions.

From a textile manufacturing perspective, the presence of gold letters on the clothing suggests they were likely added after weaving, either through embroidery or sewn strips along the robe edges. This additional step, in comparison to the traditional gold-trimmed robes found in Prince Qi's tomb, demonstrates a higher level of craftsmanship. This suggests that the Jurchen nobility had a deep understanding of Islamic elite dress and the symbolism of *tiraz* textiles, reflecting frequent trade and cultural exchanges with Central and West Asia (Vorobyev, 1986).

For example, the *hun jin* robe worn by Zuo Xian Wang, as previously analyzed, is a rare type of Jin Dynasty clothing and is absent from historical records of Jin attire. However, it appears in Yuan Dynasty ceremonial dress, where it was considered a higher-ranking textile than gold *dazi* patterned fabric. The Yuan system stipulated that high-ranking officials (first and second rank) wore robes made from *hun jin* textiles, while lower-ranking officials wore *dazi* patterned robes (Song, 1976). *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* clearly reflects this hierarchy: the highest-ranking figure, Zuo Xian Wang, wears the golden-thread robe, while Cai Yan, the attendant, and the subordinates wear *dazi* patterned robes, thus illustrating the class structure of Jurchen society. This can also be interpreted as a espionage painting that visually conveys the Jin Dynasty's social order.

Additionally, two attendants of Zuo Xian Wang are depicted with their outer robes tied at the waist, revealing an inner waist garment (figure 23). This garment, named as a *hu xiong* (護胸, chest cover), *bi xi* (蔽膝, knee protector), *guo du* (裹肚, belly cover), or *san chan* (three-layered wrap) (Yang, 2021), was tied around the chest and abdomen for protection against the cold, closely linked to the Jurchen people's horseback riding and combat life style. The detailed depiction of this attire offers insight into the daily life and customs of the Jurchen people.



Figure 23. The Jurchen waist cover in *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu*

In conclusion, while the question of whether Chen Juzhong was acting as a espionage painter during his mission to the Jin Dynasty remains debated, there is no doubt that *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu* contains valuable insights from the perspective of textiles and costumes. These elements clearly reflect the daily habits of the Jurchen people, the state's power structure, and their trade and cultural exchanges with Muslims and Mongols, making the painting well-suited for interpretation as a espionage painting..

6. Summary

This paper explores the cross-cultural textiles depicted in Chen Juzhong's *Wen Ji Gui Han Tu*, focusing on their types and origins, comparing them with historical records, artifacts, and other contemporary images.

Wen Ji Gui Han Tu is an image rich in metaphor, depicting a story from the Eastern Han period. As a legendary event, it expresses the Song people's nostalgic yearning for the northern territories. However, the objects depicted in the painting realistically reflect the contemporary period. Whether in the attire of Song officials and envoys or the clothing of Jurchen aristocrats and their attendants, the depiction aligns with the historical realities of the Song and Jin periods.

Moreover, the image contains a wealth of information—particularly through its depiction of textiles—that clearly indicates the frequent commercial and cultural exchanges between the Jin and regions such as the Seljuk Empire in West and Central Asia. It also reveals the shared aesthetic preferences and power structures between the Jurchens and Mongols, as well as the close connection between their daily lives and horsemanship. Therefore, this painting can indeed be interpreted as an espionage painting, offering a rich visual record of the era's political, social, and cultural dynamics.

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