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## WRAPPED IN LUCK: a Japanese Textile Design with Chinese Amulets in the Collection of the Costume Museum Library (Madrid)

Категорија чланка: прегледни рад

**Abstract:** The Costume Museum Library in Madrid holds an exquisite collection of old Japanese textile design books or *hinagata-bon*. The paper discusses in detail an interesting print from one of these books, a volume of the *Nihon* ("Japan") series, printed in Kyoto on the first day of the tenth month of the 37<sup>th</sup> year of the Meiji era (1 October 1904). The design includes several coin-shaped amulets of Chinese origin and is laden with an intricate symbolism. Animals and flowers, magical inscriptions and lines from the Chinese Classics conjure up the idea of good wishes and magical protection for the textile design, which was probably intended to serve as a wedding gift and an auspicious present.

**Key words:** Japan, China, textiles, amulets, design books

The Costume Museum Library in Madrid holds an exquisite collection of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Japanese textile design books known as *hinagata-bon* (Siffert 1992). The books once belonged to the gifted but little-known metalwork artist Juan José García (Madrid, 1893–1962). When García died, his possessions were donated to the Spanish state. His working tools, hundreds of photographs, sketches and drawings, paintings, models and an almost endless variety of objects, including the series of Japanese books, now belong to the collections of the Costume Museum – Ethnological Heritage Research Centre. *Hinagata-bon* (雛形本, Design books) were first used in Japan in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Clients browsed them to choose clothes; they usually showed a full costume on each page, and were printed with little style variations until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the Meiji era (1868–1912), when the Museum's books were printed, *Hinagata-bon* had become more daring in their design; they no longer represented full garments but portions of patterns, sometimes in an asymmetric array, sometimes covering the whole page. New books were printed every spring and autumn, and old copies were sold in second-hand markets. Some of these old design books were discovered by appreciative Western travelers and made their way to European and American collections.

The *hinagata-bon* at the Costume Museum Library belong to three different series: *Shima shima* (縞縞, Stripes), *Keika zuan* (京華図案, Kyoto Designs) and *Nihon* (日本, Japan) (Prego and Seco 2014). Among their pages, an



1. Отисак дезена за текстил са божурима, лептирима и амuletима, *Nihon* (Јапан), том. 1, графика 67, 1904, Библиотека Музеја костима, Мадрид
1. Print for a textile design with peonies, butterflies and amulets, *Nihon* (Japan), volume 1, print 67, 1904, Costume Museum Library, Madrid

interesting print stands out.<sup>1</sup> The iconography, laden with magic and good wishes, was used not only to decorate textiles but also to add a profound symbolic meaning to the garment.

The design is diagonally divided into two sections of unequal sizes; the lower section is decorated with flowers and butterflies on a yellow background, while the upper one shows several amulets (Fig. 1).

<sup>1</sup> The print is included in the *Nihon* ("Japan") series, published in Kyoto on the first day of the tenth month of the 37<sup>th</sup> year of the Meiji era (1 October 1904), volume 1, print 67 (Costume Museum Library, MT FA-1584 v. 1–5). The Costume Museum *hinagata bon* may be browsed through the Europeana Fashion website <http://www.europeanafashion.eu/portal/browse.html?inpSearch=#searchTerm%3DNihon>.



2. Божури и птица, детаљ са манилског шала из тридесетих или четрдесетих година XX века из северне провинције Бургос, Музеј костима, Мадрид
2. Peonies and a bird, detail from a 1930s–1940s Manila-type shawl from the northern province of Burgos, Costume Museum, Madrid



3. Детаљ јапанске тканине из XIX века украшене везеним лепирима, Музеј костима, Мадрид
3. Detail from a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Japanese textile embroidered with butterflies, Costume Museum, Madrid

Chinese-style representations of red peony flowers, popular in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Spain thanks to the ubiquitous – and Chinese-produced – Manila shawls (Aguilar Criado 1999)<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 2), arrived in Japan in a considerably earlier period, in the eighth century. The symbols of good luck soon became a favorite with painters and textile artisans. The peonies in the discussed design float among little butterflies. Just like in Ancient Greece, Japanese butterflies symbolized human souls. However, unlike their Greek counterparts, they did not suffer hardship before being reunited with Eros; Japanese butterflies merely carried happiness and long life on their elegant wings (Fig. 3).

The upper area of the design shows eight amulets. Their number is not merely a coincidence. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, where 'seventy times seven' stands for an unlimited span of time, number seven symbolizes fulfillment. In Oriental traditions, the number associated with eternity is

eight. In Japanese, the expression *Yaoyorozu no Kami*, or 'eight million deities', subsumes the endless number of gods and goddesses who populate Japanese religious beliefs. Eight was certainly an auspicious number in ancient China, as it is still today.

All amulets in this print are coin-shaped charms; they have the roundness of coins and a square central hole, although they do not bear numismatic inscriptions but images and brief texts believed to bring good luck. These amulets were not invented by the Japanese master who created the print, nor were they Japanese in origin; the design reproduces Chinese amulets dating as far back as the Song dynasty (960–1279).

Basically, all ancient copper-based coins in the Far East, including Japanese coins, were derived from a Chinese model, the *banliang coin*, which was used by the famous First Emperor, Qin Shi Huang (221–207 BC), in his monetary unification. *Banliang* (Fig. 4) were round bronze pieces pierced with a square hole flanked by the ideograms *Ban* and *Liang*, which represented their value. They combined round and square shapes or, to speak in terms of Ancient Chinese symbolism, Heaven and Earth. Accordingly, they were suitable to be turned into powerful amulets (Jankowski 2016, Remmelts 1968). This celestial-terrestrial morphology of the *Banliang* coin would be used over the following two thousand years in Far East coinage and amulets; it is still used today in China and Japan in good luck charms, which actually do not differ much from the ones discussed in this paper.<sup>3</sup>

In the upper corners of the print, there are two non-epigraphic amulets. The one to the left is decorated with schematic representations of the Four Elements: (clockwise, starting from the top) Air, Fire, Earth and Water. The one to the right shows stylized vegetal motifs. Between these two charms, it is possible to distinguish a small amulet showing a horse and a brief inscription. The ideographs (top to bottom) read 馬騅, *ma zhui* or *wu zhui* (*uma sui* in Japanese), meaning 'dark horse'. Although the other side of the piece is not shown, it is known that Song charms of this type have the same horse iconography on both obverse and reverse sides.

Below the *wu zhui* piece, there is another animal charm, which presents an ox; next to it, there is a lozenge-decorated amulet, which may, or may not, be the reverse side of the ox piece. Lozenges are not uncommon on the obverse of Chinese amulets and coins. Their name is *si chu* or 'expanding four', and they embody the idea of an expansive prosperity, which spreads itself towards the four points of the compass.

Ox and horse are animals of the Chinese Zodiac and as such, they have also been present in Japan since ancient times. In both Chinese and Japanese traditions, there is a fearful Horse-headed Guardian of the Underworld, as well as an Ox-headed one.

The ox in our amulet is accompanied with the ideogram *wang* 王, 'king'. We have not been able to locate extant Song charms of this type, but the image may refer to the Chinese Emperor Taizu (Zhao Kuangyin, 927–976), the

<sup>2</sup> Manila shawls are paramount examples of East–West contacts regarding textiles and fashion in Spain – a little-trodden research path; contacts and mutual influences are more evident from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, but they are also traceable to earlier periods, e.g. the 16<sup>th</sup> century or the Rococo period (Benito García 2003).

<sup>3</sup> The most important Spanish collection of Far East numismatics, which includes amulets, is held by the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid (Seco 2005, Giménez Delgado 2014).



4. Новчић бан лианг из времена царице Лу Ци, рани период династије Хан (206 г. п. н. е. – 220 г. н. е.)  
4. *Banliang* coin of Empress Lu Zhi, early Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD)



5. Цар Таизу, родоначелник династије Сунг, осликани свитак, XI век, Музеј националне палате, Тајпеј, Тајван  
5. Emperor Taizu, the founder of the Song Dynasty, painted scroll, 11<sup>th</sup> century, National Palace Museum, Taipei (Taiwan)

founder of the Song Dynasty (Fig. 5). Later amulets show a young Taizu riding an ox or a water buffalo, indicating the humble origin of the Emperor. People wore these charms believing that they would help them fulfill their aspirations in life, even against all odds.<sup>4</sup>

To the left of the ox charm, we find one of the two main amulets in the composition; a big piece with an elaborate inscription on a wave background. Extant charms of this type have flower motifs on their reverse sides. The inscription reads (top, bottom, right and left): 宜爾子孫, *yi'er zisun* (*yoore shison* in Japanese). This is an auspicious saying about offsprings that could be translated as '[it is] fair that you [may have a plentiful] progeny'. It comes from Ode V in the *Book of Songs*, the oldest preserved collection of Chinese poetry, and one of the 'Five Classics' traditionally believed to have been compiled by Confucius. The poem that contains this saying was originally written between the eighth and seventh centuries BC.<sup>5</sup>

Below the progeny charm, a part of a smaller amulet may be observed; it also bears an inscription. The irregular design of the print hides the lower ideogram, but the visible part suffices to identify the sentence 長命富貴, *changming fugui* (*chomei fuki* in Japanese): 'long life, wealth and honors'. The third ideogram, *fu*, lacks a small vertical stroke in the upper part. This is typical of this type of Song amulets; it was believed that the lack of a 'lid' would allow wealth to grow unrestrained.

<sup>4</sup> This hypothesis has been put forward by Gary Lee Askhenazy, the author of the excellent website on Chinese coins and coin-shaped charms <http://primaltrek.com>

<sup>5</sup> The poems in the *Book of Songs* have been extensively studied in China ever since it was compiled. This line was not used only in Song amulets but also in other contexts and periods; a noteworthy example is a seal that belonged to the early Qing military commander Geng Zhaozhong (1640–1687), presently kept at the Freer Gallery of Art of the Smithsonian Institution (Washington). <http://www.asia.si.edu/songyuan/F1915.36i/F1915-36i.Documentation.pdf>.

Below right, we find the last and more complex amulet in our textile print. This is a great charm, fully laden with symbols, big and small. The inscription, inside a cartouche, reads (top to bottom, right to left): 加官進祿 *jiaguan jinlu* (*kakan shiroku* in Japanese): 'promotion in rank and salary'.

It seems that this saying was inspired by a text from the Jin dynasty (1115–1234 AD). If this were really the case, it would provide a clue to a more precise dating of this type of amulets, as the periods of the Jin and Song dynasties overlap. If we accepted the idea of Jin-inspired texts, then the charms would belong to the last two centuries of the Song Dynasty. Be it as it may, the sentence 'promotion in rank and salary' was often inscribed on ancient and modern Chinese artifacts to convey good wishes; there are many Ming (1368–1644 AD) and Qing (1644–1911 AD) examples and the words are still in use today.

The focus of the whole composition is a big horned animal, which stands just below the central hole. Though sometimes identified as an ox or a water buffalo, it is usually described as a deer. The Chinese word for 'deer', *lu*, also denotes 'salary'.<sup>6</sup> *Lu* is also the first syllable in the name of the God of Wealth, *Lu Xing*. The deer is saddled with a sort of blanket, on which stands a monkey. This is another word play: the Chinese word for 'monkey', *hou*, also means 'a high-rank official'.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the deer and monkey are the translation into images of the charm's inscription.

The animals are not alone in the amulet; there are also other symbols, all related to happiness, wealth and job prosperity. To the left of the deer's head, there is a stylized silver ingot of the *sycee o yuan bao* type. *Sycee* ingots have a long history; dating from ancient times, they had already been well established under the Song Dynasty and were used until

<sup>6</sup> As expected, the ideograms are different: deer: 鹿(*lu*); salary: 祿(*lu*).

<sup>7</sup> Monkey: 猴(*hou*); high official: 侯(*hou*).



6. Сребрни *sycee* ингот, Кинески музеј финансија и пореза, Хангжу  
 6. Silver *sycee* ingot, China Finance and Taxation Museum, Hangzhou



7. Чаша са змајевима и таласима из позног периода династије Минг, израђена од рога носорога (1368–1644), Уметнички музеј округа Лос Анђелес  
 7. Late Ming cup with dragons and waves hewn from rhinoceros horn (1368–1644 AD), Los Angeles County Museum of Art

the Communist times. *Sycee* ingots were not standardized by the state and their weight varied widely depending on the date and place of origin. Their shape also underwent some variations through their long history. Many had shapes that resembled ships or shoe soles, and due to this, they were known as 'boat money' or 'shoe money'. The Song Dynasty *sycee* similar to that shown in the amulet were flat and elongated; the long sides were concave, while the short ones were convex (Fig. 6). The symbolic value of *sycee* ingots has outlived their actual use as money; it is not unusual among the Chinese to use the representations of *sycee* or even real metallic *sycee*-like ingots in auspicious moments like the New Year.

In the top right section of the amulet, there is another symbol, a curious x-shaped wavy design. It is actually a musical instrument, a pair of Chinese castanets known as *yin yang ban*. It is believed that the shape of the *yin yang ban* was derived from the crossed *hu* tablets wielded by high-rank officials as an access pass to the Imperial Palace. *Yin yang ban* castanets were also a divine emblem associated with Cao Guojiu, one of the Eight Immortals of Taoism who was also believed to be the uncle of a Song Dynasty Emperor.

Finally, in the right section of the amulet, next to its rim, the last and powerful symbol can be found: the rhinoceros horn or *xi jiao*. There is another word play here, as the word *xi* also means 'happiness'.<sup>8</sup> Rhinoceros horns were

greatly appreciated in ancient times. In the Western world, they were believed to be able to detect poison, hence the high value of the cups hewn from them. Carved horn vases and decorative objects were also used in China from a very early period (Fig. 7); moreover, traditional Chinese medicine recommended rhinoceros horn powder against gout, fever and other maladies.<sup>9</sup>

To sum up, the last amulet was meant to ensure to the bearer a rank and salary rise both through words and images. It also made a toast to good fortune with a valuable rhinoceros horn, expressing the hope that its owner might be admitted into the highest spheres of government, thanks to the castanets/tablets. Finally, its magic sought to ensure endless wealth, which could be well materialized into silver ingots.

The ultimate purpose of this complex textile print, which is one of the most elaborate designs in the whole Costume Museum collection of *hinagata-bon*, cannot be established with absolute certainty. However, taking into account the accumulation of symbolic elements, it is likely that it was designed to be used in wedding costumes or wedding-related textiles. Butterflies and peonies would ensure a lucky pairing followed by a marital bliss, while the ancient Chinese amulets would bring a plentiful progeny, a brilliant professional career and the proper amount of wealth.

<sup>8</sup> Rhinoceros: 犀角 (*xi jiao*); happiness: 喜 (*xi*).

<sup>9</sup> The use of rhinoceros horn powder for medical purposes has been officially forbidden in China since 1993.

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## Резиме

### ИРЕНЕ СЕКО СЕРА

Одељење за културну сарадњу и промоцију културе, Шпанска агенција за међународну сарадњу и развој, Министарство за иностране послове и међународну сарадњу, Мадрид, Шпанија  
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## ЗАОГРНУТИ СРЕЋОМ: јапански штампани дезени за текстил са кинеским амулетима у збирци Библиотеке Музеја костима у Мадриду

У збирци Библиотеке Музеја костима у Мадриду чува се изузетна збирка старих јапанских књига са штампаним дезенима за текстил – *hinagata-bon*. Штампане су почетком XX века, а сврставају се у три различите серије: *Shima shima* (縞縞, Пруге), *Keika zuan* (京華凶案, Кјотски дезени) and *Nihon* (日本, Јапан). У овом раду детаљно се анализира отисак а из једног од три тома из серије *Nihon*.

Доњи део дезена украшен је божурима и лептирима на жутој позадини. И цветови и инсекти имају симболичко значење.

У горњој зони дезена налази се осам амулета. Према источњачким предањима, осам је број који доноси срећу и везује се за вечност. Сви амулети приказани на отиску јесу амајлије у облику новчића; кружног су облика, као и новчићи, а на средини имају прорез, иако на

њима нема нумизматичких натписа, него су украшени ликовним представама и кратким текстовима за које се веровало да доносе срећу. Занимљиво је да су приказани амулети заиста постојали. То су представе правих кинеских амулета из династије Сунг (960–1279). У раду се анализирају сви приказани амулети, као и њихова значења.

Сврха овог комплексног дезена, једног од најсложенијих у читавој збирци *hinagata-bon* књига из Музеја костима, не може се са сигурношћу утврдити. Ипак, имајући у виду мноштво симболичких елементата, вероватно се користио за свадбену одећу. Животиње и цвеће, магијски записи и стихови из класичне кинеске књижевности призивају лепе жеље и магијску заштиту који су сасвим прикладни за свадбене тканине.