

Jacqueline **Simcox**

Chinese Textiles and Works of Art

2005

All works of art in this catalogue are for sale

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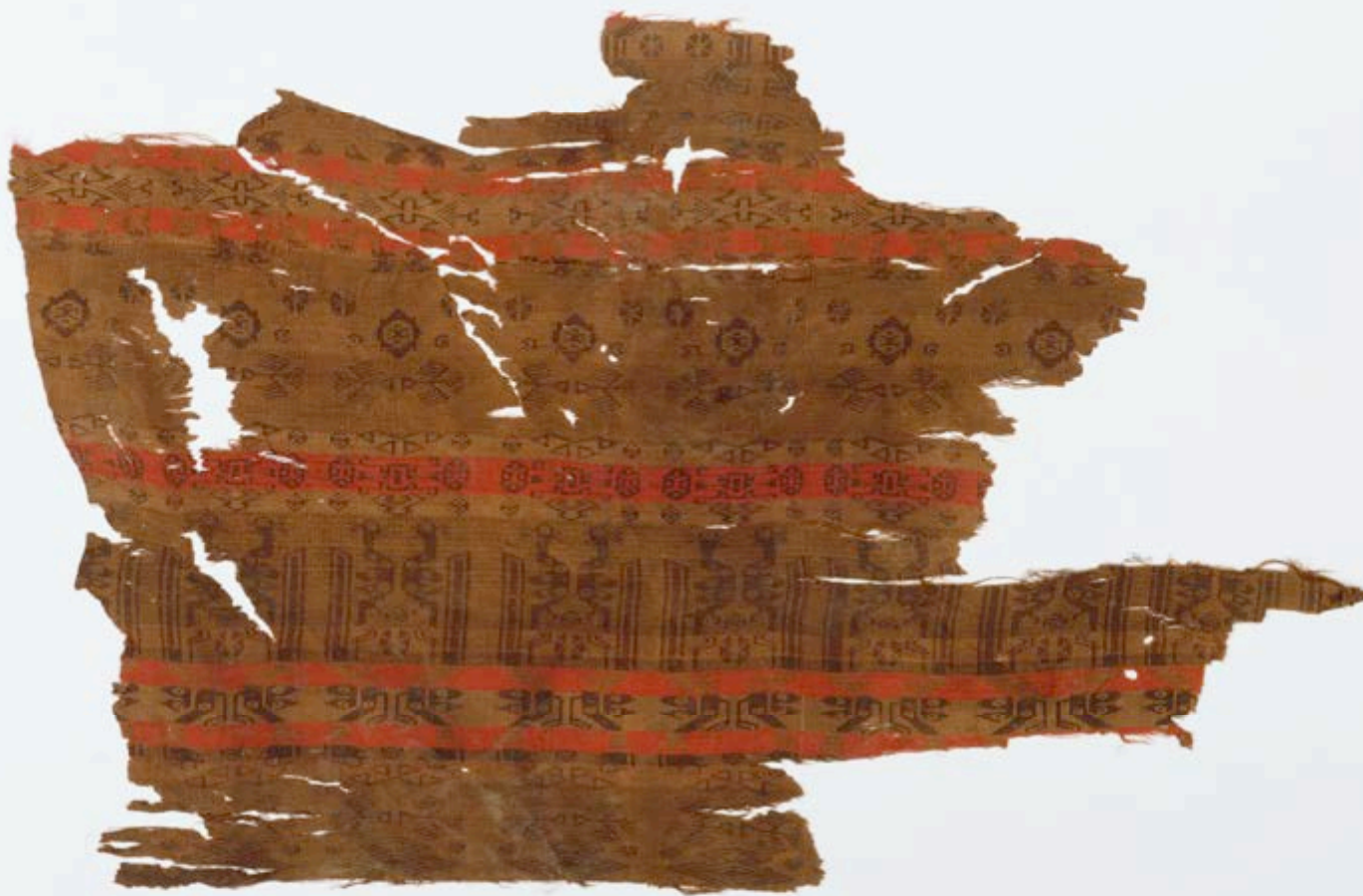


Introduction

I am delighted to present a selection of Textiles and Works of Art from China and Central Asia. In some small measure the textiles show the wonderful skills of the weavers, or embroiderers, which were combined with those of the dyers and designers to produce luxurious and dazzling silks.

The textiles range in date over a period of 2,500 years and during that time many new designs and ideas were absorbed into the culture: new patterns came via trade from every direction, different weaving techniques came from the west and new religious ideas in the form of Buddhism arrived from India, Tibet and Central Asia. Some of these influences are shown here.

Jacqueline Simcox



Dragon and Phoenix Fragment

A warp figured silk brocade, the design reading in both vertical directions. The colours in two tones of brown and red. The main design showing confronting paired phoenixes placed between larger pairs of phoenixes with long tails and triangular wings, but shown in the reverse direction. At the upper edge of the fragment are the heads of confronting dragons. The main designs separated by horizontal bands of small motifs including hexagons, linked triangles, geometricised birds in flight and small confronting four legged prancing animals.

Chinese, Warring States period, 475 - 221 BC

Height: 23 cm (9 1/16 in)

Width: 34 cm (13 3/8 in)

Compare with a textile from No. 44 Chu State Grave, Zuojiatang, Changsha, Hunan Province which is illustrated: *The Great Treasury of Chinese Fine Arts*, vol. 6, no. 10 now in Hunan Provincial Museum.

See also: *Oriental Art, The Influence of Textile Designs on Bronzes, Lacquer and Ceramic Decorative Styles during the Warring States Period*, by Colin Mackenzie, September 1999.

*The textile reversed to show the design more clearly.



Confronting Phoenixes

A warp patterned silk fragment, woven with paired confronting phoenixes above two leaf sprays. Each group framed by horizontal and vertical undulating bands of small scrolls and a narrow band of circles. Below the phoenixes a row of confronting horned dragons, partly shown, each separated by a vertical stepped column supported on a *taotie* mask and leaves. The design of small curls is considered to be of Greek or Roman origin.

The upper edge with a horizontal selvedge; all other edges cut. Lined with thin beige silk tabby.

Elements of the design, such as the leaves, scrolls and phoenixes can be seen in two carved stone bases of the Northern Wei dynasty, from Shanxi Provincial Museum, illustrated in The Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition catalogue, 'China: Dawn of a Golden Age, 200 - 750 AD', by James C.Y. Watt, nos. 71 and 72.

Chinese, Six Dynasties period, 265 - 581, and probably Northern Wei dynasty, 386 - 535

Height: 9.5 cm (3 3/4 in)

Overall width: 19.5 cm (7 3/4 in)

Carbon 14 dated in 2001, Zurich Institute of Particle Physics, ETH 24399: 98% confidence 374 - 564

Compare with two textiles in The British Museum, The Stein Collection, ref. nos. OA MAS 926 a and b, found in Cave 17 at Dunhuang and dated 3rd - 5th century, showing a closely similar design with phoenixes, dragons and tigers, but on a larger scale. For a discussion of these pieces see *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas*, by Roderick Whitfield and Anne Farrer, no. 93 and *Treasures in Silk*, by Feng Zhao, no. 02.07.



Recumbent Djeiran Observing the Moon

A red silk textile, brocaded with gold on animal substrate and designed with staggered rows of pear-shaped medallions each containing a djeiran, or Central Asian antelope, recumbent among flowering plants and with its head turned over its back to gaze upwards at the full moon above clouds.

The textile a full loom width including both selvages.

Jin dynasty, 1115 - 1234
Height: 56.2 cm (22 1/8 in)
Width: 57.2 cm (22 1/2 in)

The pattern and its ancient Sogdian origin is discussed in detail with relation to a similar example from The Cleveland Museum of Art and is illustrated in the exhibition catalogue, *When Silk Was Gold*, by James C.Y. Watt and Anne E. Wardwell, no. 29.

Dragon Finial

A wood finial, elegantly carved with two dragon heads, each dragon with a pearl within its jaws, the horns sweeping back towards the intertwined manes and the two sinuous necks joining at the base of the finial. The surface embellished with gold leaf.

Liao dynasty, 907 - 1125
Height including stand: 16.4 cm (6 1/2 in)

The carving is exceptionally light in weight.





Buddhist Gold Plaque, Dated 1043

A rectangular gold plaque, decorated with nine figures from the Buddhist pantheon in circular medallions flanked by clouds, the background with ring-punched decoration. The upper and lower border decorated with flowers within shaped cartouches and, to the right, a long inscription dating the plaque to 1043.

The inscription has slight differences of interpretation, but most likely translates:

*zhongxi shi'er nian si yue ba ri wu shi zang xiang fa zhi
ba nian tidian shangjing senglu xuanyan tai shuai ci
zi zheng mensheng ji*

'Interred at midday on the eighth day of the fourth month of the twelfth year of Zhongxi [after] only eight years [in the] Buddhist Faith. Commemorated by the Abbot General of the Central Monastic Registry of the Supreme Capital, the Supreme Head of Dissemination of the Faith, and Alumni of the Senior Ecclesiastical Administration.'

Liao dynasty, 907 - 1125, dated 1043
Height: 9.6 cm (3 3/4 in)
Width: 17.1 cm (6 3/4 in)



Dragons Chasing Flaming Pearls

A red silk fragment, brocaded with gold on animal substrate and designed with staggered rows of circular medallions, each composed of a five-clawed dragon chasing a flaming pearl; the body of the dragon coiled in a circle and the tail wrapped round a back leg.

The textile cut on all edges.

Jin dynasty, 1115 - 1234
Height: 55 cm (21 5/8 in)
Width: 10 cm (4 1/8 in)

A similar example in The Metropolitan Museum of Art is illustrated and discussed in the exhibition catalogue, *When Silk Was Gold*, by James C.Y. Watt and Anne E. Wardwell, no. 30.





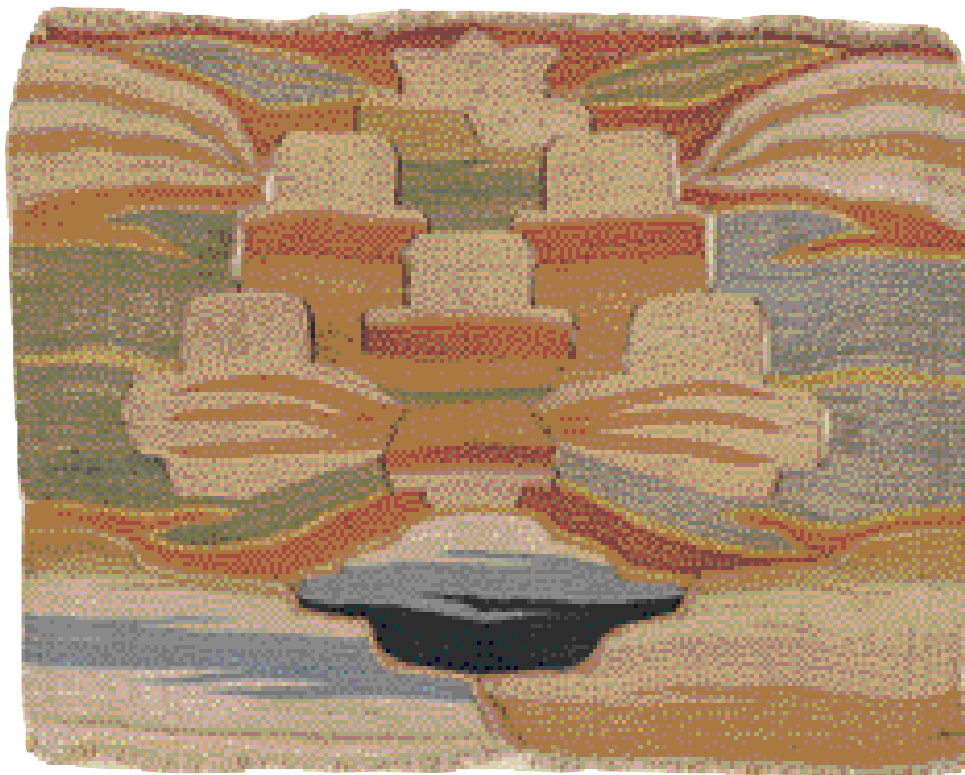
Pair of Sutra Covers

A pair of silk *kesi* (tapestry) sutra covers, each cover woven with a large central peony flower head and leaves. The background of suggested clouds and water.

Chinese, early Ming dynasty, 1368 - 1644

Height: 18.5 cm (7 1/4 in)

Width: 24 cm (9 1/2 in)



New Year's Festival Silk

A silk brocade panel, woven with a large double gourd suspended from a richly decorated canopy. The double gourd decorated with dragons chasing flaming pearls and *shou* characters for long life. Beribboned musical stones hang beneath the canopy and Buddhist emblems are suspended from the dragon head mounts.

Double gourds and canopies suggesting lanterns were popular decorations for the New Year celebrations and for the Lantern Festival which occurred fifteen days later, at the time of the full moon. The panel presented here was probably part of a bolt of silk with a repeating pattern.

Both selvages intact; the lower edge cut.

Chinese, 17th/18th century

Height: 95 cm (37 3/8 in)

Width: 76.5 cm (30 1/4 in)





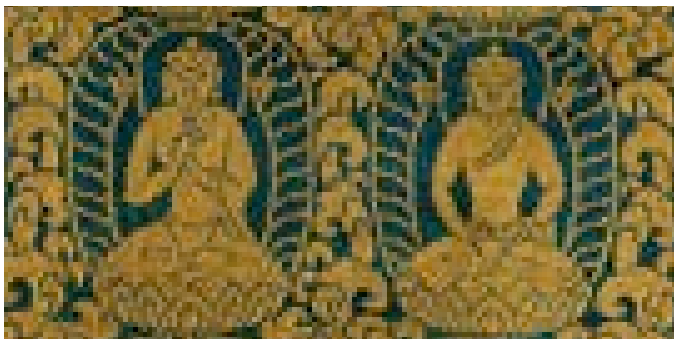
Phoenixes in Flight with Flowers

A silk *kesi* (tapestry) fragment, woven with phoenixes in flight against a densely packed floral ground. The bodies of the phoenixes and some flower and leaf edgings woven in gilded animal substrate, the gold now worn away.

A selvedge to the left side, all other edges cut.

East Central Asia, 13th century
 Height: 29.5 cm (11 5/8 in)
 Width: 32.2 cm (12 5/8 in)

For a group of similar *kesi* panels, from The Cleveland Museum of Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, see the exhibition catalogue *When Silk Was Gold*, by James C.Y. Watt and Anne E. Wardwell, nos. 13-19. Thought to be the product of Uighur weavers, the material was used for costumes.



Five Dhyani Buddhas

A blue silk lampas panel, woven with gold on paper wrapped around a silk core, depicting rows of the five Dhyani Buddhas seated on lotus petal bases. From left to right, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Vairocana, Amitabha and Amoghasiddhi, their hands in appropriate mudra, except for Ratnasambhava where the hands repeat the gesture of Akshobhya. Each deity with a halo and mandorla behind; the background with curling leaves and the sides of the textile with a floral border.

The textile a full loom width including both selvages.
An identical textile Carbon 14 dated in Oxford:
95% confidence 990 - 1215

Chinese, 10th-13th century
Length: 96.5 cm (38 in)
Width: 41.8 cm (16 1/2 in)

Another example of this textile is in The Musée Guimet, Paris.

Further commentaries are published in *Orientations*, see articles *Chinese Fabrics of the Song and Yuan Dynasties preserved in Japan*, by Sae Ogasawara, August 1989 and *Buddhist Silk Textiles: Evidence for Patronage and Ritual Practice in China and Tibet*, by Valrae Reynolds, April 1997.





Scrolling Lotus Flowers

A pink silk fragment embroidered with lotus flowers, emblems of purity, encircled by leafy stems and flower buds. The embroidery finely worked in pink, blue, green and yellow and with many shaded tones.

The lotus is associated with Buddhism and this fragment may have been part of the border of a *kesa*, or Buddhist priest's robe. Sumptuary laws forbade the use of luxury fabrics. To conform with this rule and to destroy their worldly value the finest silks were cut into strips and sewn together again to form the rectangular garment.

Chinese, early 15th century, Ming dynasty, 1368 - 1644

Height: 11.5 cm (4 1/2 in)

Width: 68 cm (26 3/4 in)





Phoenix Wall Hanging

A large silk *kesi* (tapestry) wall hanging, displaying two phoenixes perched on a rock, one bird with its head turned to gaze at the sun. The phoenixes surrounded by pairs of small birds in flight, including Mandarin ducks, swallows, sparrows, peacocks and pheasants, while further pairs of birds perch on flowering branches of camellia and prunus. In the lower foreground three egrets wade in a lotus-filled pool beside curving stems of peony blossoms and a *lingzhi* fungus. To the sides, large rocks frame the scene.

The mythical phoenixes are shown here in their role as rulers of all birds.

Chinese, Ming dynasty, 1368 - 1644

Height: 165 cm (65 in)

Width: 156 cm (61 3/8 in)

Carbon 14 dated, Zurich Institute of Particle Physics, ETH 24392:
100% confidence 1460 - 1641

Illustrated:

Treasures in Silk, by Feng Zhao, p. 282





Needle-loop Flowers

A red silk pendant, decorated with three large peony flowers embroidered in needle-loop stitch and applied to the floral damask ground. Each flower head underlaid with a sheet of gold leaf on paper which sparkles through the open work of the embroidery.

Needle-loop is a detached buttonhole stitch which was used in the Ming dynasty for religious and secular textile decoration. Precious embroideries were traditionally recycled or given as donations to monasteries.

Chinese, 15th century, Ming dynasty, 1368 - 1644

Height: 67.3 cm (26 1/2 in)

Width: 10.5 cm (4 1/8 in)

A group of needle-loop decorated silks, now in the Musée Guimet, Paris, are discussed and illustrated: *Chinese Buddhist Silks*, from the A.E.D.T.A. Collection, Paris, 1996.



Thangka Mount for Mahakala

A green silk fragment embroidered with lotus buds resting on lotus leaves and encircled by leafy stems. Each bud embroidered with the Tibetan characters from a mantra, of which the second line reads '... om shri ma ha ka la ye hum phats om ...', an invocation to Mahakala, the Protector of the Tent and one of the most highly venerated deities of Tibetan Buddhism.

The textile would have formed the upper mount for an embroidered thangka depicting Mahakala and shows the close relationship between professional embroidery ateliers in China and religious textiles donated to, or commissioned for, Tibetan monasteries.

Chinese, early 15th century, Ming dynasty, 1368 - 1644
Height: 26 cm (10 1/4 in)
Width: 65 cm (25 1/2 in)

A thangka with identical patterned mounts, embroidered with Vajrasattva and consort, is illustrated in *Orientalism*, see article *The Woven Image: Tibeto-Chinese Textile Thangkas of the Yuan and Early Ming Dynasties*, by Michael Henss, fig. 5, November 1997.





Peony and Phoenix Sleeveband

A silk *kesi* (tapestry) fragment from a sleeveband, woven with large peony flowers and leaves growing from a blue pierced rock and with a phoenix in flight against a gold thread ground.

Both selvages preserved.

Chinese, 15th century, Ming dynasty, 1368 - 1644

Height: 58 cm (22 7/8 in)

Width: 11.5 cm (4 1/2 in)



Feng Huang in Five Colours

A small yellow silk panel embroidered with a male and female phoenix, or *feng huang*, in flight amongst clouds. The border decorated with a meandering scroll in couched gold thread. The embroidery worked in the Five Colours: white, blue, green, red and yellow, which also represent the Five Elements, Five Directions and the Five Planets.

Chinese, 15th century, Ming dynasty, 1368 - 1644
Height: 19.7 cm (7 3/4 in)
Width: 23 cm (9 in)





Boys Riding Goats

A black silk satin fragment, woven with a repeating pattern of boys riding goats. Each figure wears fur trimmed winter garments and carries over his shoulder a flowering prunus branch, from which a bird cage is suspended. The boys ride white goats, or rams, which are surrounded by camellias and small Precious Objects: flaming pearls, coral branches, jewels, *ruyi* heads, lozenges, scrolls, cash and double axe heads.

The design was popular in China and is probably associated with the Winter Solstice. The word 'ram' (*yang*) being a homonym for 'sun', which also represents the male principle. The Winter Solstice marked the rebirth of the sun and the beginning of the *yang*, or male, half of the year, while prunus and camellia flowers are some of the first Spring blossoms.

All edges cut.

Chinese, 15th/16th century, Ming dynasty, 1368 - 1644

Height: 59 cm (23 1/4 in)

Width: 23.5 cm (9 1/4 in)

A identical example on a brown ground is illustrated: *Treasures in Silk*, by Feng Zhao, no. 08.09.



Quatrefoil Medallions

A silk brocade panel, woven with rows of quatrefoil medallions, divided into the four colours of red, blue, green and white and filled with soaring and diving phoenixes amongst multi-coloured clouds. The fifth colour, yellow, forming the ground between each medallion and decorated with pairs of *feng huang* amongst clouds. The textile lavishly embellished with gilded paper.

Chinese, 15th/16th century, Ming dynasty, 1368 - 1644

Measurement: 67 cm (26 3/8 in) square

Both selvedges preserved.



Imperial Wishes for Long Life

An Imperial silk brocade panel, woven with large bats in flight, each bat carrying a cloud of *lingzhi* fungus on which rests a large gold *shou* character and with two reversed swastikas above.

The design reflects Chinese word play, forming a rebus meaning 'may you live for 10,000 years'. It was used as decoration on other imperial artefacts during the Wanli period, such as cinnabar lacquer boxes and ceramics, as well as on silks. The use of this combination of symbols was reserved for the Emperor.

Chinese, Wanli period, 1573 - 1619

Ming dynasty, 1368 - 1644

Height: 110 cm (43 1/4 in)

Width: 52 cm (20 1/2 in)

An identical silk was found in the Wanli Emperor's tomb and is illustrated in the full Chinese text version, p. 271, of *The Royal Treasures of Dingling Imperial Ming Tomb*.





Set of Six Chair Covers

A rare set of six red silk *kesi* (tapestry) chair covers, each woven with a bat and *shou* character above a large archaistic dragon roundel, a medallion with a phoenix and a kylin. The lower edge with waves, a pierced rock, pearls and *ruyi*-head sceptres and in the background five bats, clouds, Buddhist emblems and Precious Objects. The design expresses the beneficent period of the Kangxi Emperor's reign in the late 17th century.



Chinese, 17th century, Kangxi period, 1662 - 1722
Height: 163 cm (64 1/4 in) Width: 50 cm (19 3/4 in)

Provenance: A Private European Collection.

The chair covers were acquired from a Lamaist temple in Central China between 1936 and 1941. They formed niches on the altar where Buddhas of the past and Buddhas of the future were placed.

Painted Bolt of Silk

A bolt of cream silk woven with wide, pale blue silk satin stripes and painted with a continuous meandering band of various flowers and leaves. The pale blue stripes painted in silver with individual flower sprays and black details.

The roll with yellow selvages; one end cut.

Chinese, circa 1800, made for the western market.

Length: 9.5 m (10 1/3 yd)

Width: 75.3 cm (29 5/8 in)

Bolts of painted silk were exported to the west where they were made up into dresses for wealthy ladies.



Handwritten musical notation on a single staff, featuring a series of vertical stems and horizontal lines.

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Rank Badge of a Bear

A silk *kesi* (tapestry) badge for a fifth rank military official, woven in three tones of gold thread and coloured silks. The bear stands on a rocky outcrop, his head turned to gaze at the sun and flanked by a peach tree, lingzhi fungus and flowering plants.

Chinese, Qianlong period, 1736 - 95

Height: 28 cm (11 in)

Width: 29 cm (11 3/8 in)

Rank Badge of a Manchurian Crane

A silk rank badge, embroidered with a Manchurian crane perched on a rock amongst waves, the bird holding a *lingzhi* fungus and flower spray and gazing at a sun disc. The crane flanked by rocks, a peach tree, flowering plants and bats among clouds. With a later border made from a Chinese sleeve band.

Vietnamese, late 18th century.

Height: 39 cm (15 3/8 in)

Width: 38 5 cm (15 1/8 in)

Vietnam followed the Chinese custom of dress and ranking. The badge presented here would have been worn by a first rank civil official.

Tibetan Document

An official letter from the fourth Panchen Lama, bsTan pa'i Nyi ma, 1781 - 1854, who exercised political power in Lhasa from 1844 - 45, during the childhood of the then Dalai Lama. Written in black ink on Chinese yellow silk in Tibetan characters and sent from the Tashilhunpo monastic offices in Shigatse, Tibet, the document regulates hierarchy in a Gelugpa monastery which depended on the Tashilhunpo monastery. The document carries the red stamped seal of the Panchen Lama.

Tibetan, written in a fire year, either 1826/7, or 1846/7

Height: 108 cm (42 1/2 in)

Width: 78 cm (30 3/4 in)

Examples of other official letters from various Dalai Lamas and Pachen Lamas are in The Vatican Library; The Newark Museum, New Jersey and The Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.

Illustrated left



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