**Pith paper painting**

Pith paper painting, exported from China, is a kind of watercolor painting on thin slices cut from the stems of Tetrapanax papyrifer that flourished near Thirteen Hongs of Canton in the 19th century. The work has vivid shapes and strong colors. The paint applied on the pith paper is sucked into the surface of the paper. Because the different light and shadow effects make the paint produce different colour effects, and the picture has three-dimensional effects.

One can’t talk about pith paper painting without mentioning the Thirteen Hongs of Canton. The Thirteenth Hongs was a China official franchise institution designated by the government to specialize in foreign trade during the Qing Dynasty from the 17th to19th century. In the 18th century during the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty, only Guangdong Customs was open for international trade. The Thirteenth Hongs become the only trade agency between China and the West. Almost all major countries and regions in Asia, Europe, and the Americas have had direct trade relations with the Thirteen Hongs. It had global trade routes to Europe, Latin America, South Asia, the East and Oceania. It is the only surviving Maritime Silk Road under the closed-door policy of the Qing government.

Countless Westerners came to China along the Maritime Silk Road and engaged in trade activities with the Qing Dynasty in Guangzhou. They stepped into this mysterious east, which is full of gold and adventurers' amusement park in Western legends. They were fascinated by commodities such as silk, tea and porcelain. They were also curious and amazed at the Chinese society and culture at that time, and they couldn't help but want to share what they saw and heard with their family and friends. Therefore, the painter of pith paper painting uses the western perspective painting technique to depict the traditional Chinese cultural elements and the content of the Eastern style on the traditional Chinese pith paper according to the preferences and aesthetic tastes of Westerners. Those merchants, travellers, and missionaries who came across the ocean used it as a tourist souvenir to show exotic customs. Pith Paper paintings can be regarded as "Chinese postcards" sent to the West in that period.

Pith paper painting is a significant manifestation of the cultural exchanges between China and the West and the spirit of the Silk Road. It played a very important role in introducing Chinese culture to the West at that time. It is also an indispensable reference material for us to understand the Chinese history and culture of that period. This lecture is also a supporting theme promotion of the first historical experiential documentary film "Thirteen Hongs" on Sky TV "China Hour" channel.

通草画是一种19世纪兴盛于广州十三行附近由通草茎髓切割而成的薄片上的水彩画，主要用于出口贸易。作品造型生动，色彩浓艳。涂在通草纸上的颜料被吸入纸的表层内，因为不同的光影作用使得颜料产生不同的色彩效果，画面看起来特别有立体感。

提到通草画不得不提到十三行。十三行是清朝时期政府指定专营对外贸易的官方特许机构。在清朝乾隆年间仅留粤海关一口对外通商时期十三行成为中国和西方贸易的唯一机构。几乎所有亚洲、欧洲、美洲的主要国家和地区都与十三行发生过直接的贸易关系。这里拥有通往欧洲、拉美、南亚、东洋和大洋洲的环球贸易航线，是清政府闭关政策下唯一幸存的[海上丝绸之路](https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%B5%B7%E4%B8%8A%E4%B8%9D%E7%BB%B8%E4%B9%8B%E8%B7%AF/439948)。

无数西方人沿着海上丝绸之路远渡而来，在广州从事着与清朝的贸易活动，踏入这个在西方传说中满地黄金、冒险家游乐园的神秘东方。他们着迷于丝绸、茶叶和瓷器等商品，又对当时的中国社会文化充满好奇与惊叹，忍不住想要和亲友分享所见所闻。于是通草画画家在中国特有的通草纸上，按照西方人的喜好和审美情趣，采用西方透视绘画技法，在通草纸上描绘中国传统文化元素和东方风情的内容。那些漂洋而来的商人、旅行者、传教士把它当作旅游手信，用以展示异域风情。通草画可以看作19世纪寄往西方的“中国明信片”。

通草画是中西文化交流、丝路精神的显著体现，对在当时向西方介绍中国社会和文化起着十分重要的作用，也是现在我们了解那个时期中国历史文化不可缺少的参考资料。此次讲座也是与Sky TV 频道《中国时间》（China Hour）栏目同期播放中国第一部历史体验式纪录片《十三行》配套主题讲座。

于芃

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