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# Peripheral Matters: Selvage/Chef-de-piece Inscriptions on Chinese Silk Textiles

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*Throughout Chinese history, dynastic states time and again inscribed the artifact with product-related information, such as the maker's, commissioner's, or owner's names, or the date and site of production. Functional inscriptions were authorized with reference to one and the same quote in a traditional canon on rites situated within a moral discourse on production and consumption. In practice, content and formats, however, changed substantially. In a previous article I argued that reign marks, mostly known from porcelain, must be understood as a peculiar derivative of such functional inscriptions, and that they reflect a growing concern of the Ming state to lay claim on artifacts and propagate imperial rights. Merchants and craftsmen across trades drew on imperial marks among others to invoke trust in their markings which served advertising purposes. This Article highlights inscriptions as a conceptual framework to analyze the complex influences that affected marking practices on silk textiles. Information on silk was first stamped, or written on the silk, then woven into the selvage or chef-de-piece and later on embroidered. Personal names were replaced by institutional affiliations. Shifts in techniques reveal changing modes of trust, while alterations in content and interpretation resulted from institutional reorganization and the varying roles of silks in everyday life and as a ritual item, tributary ware, and commodity.*

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In recent years, historians have shown an exponential growth of interest in the flow of things and materials, highlighting within global studies expanding webs of trade and communication and a world that grew together through joint networks of producing and consuming goods such as rice, coffee, chocolate, porcelain, or cotton. Within this context, provenance and branding, or other product identifications also came into the view. The legal and economic perspective dominates historical research on marking practices and cultural approaches to the expression of individual or cooperative creativity or rights of production.<sup>1</sup> Studies on China herein quickly embarked on the spread of branding and trademark concepts and property rights rooted in nineteenth century British (or more broadly European/Western) legal frameworks and emerging markets.<sup>2</sup> Traces of branding were identified in the commercialized society of the late Ming era, but even more so in the eighteenth century Qing world. Qiu Pengsheng 邱澎生, for example, has drawn attention to how workshop owners began to use marks (*zihao* 字號) that were initially added to manage payments and guarantee issues when outsourcing processes such as dyeing or pattern imprints, to gain a reputation in the private market.<sup>3</sup>

Reign marks<sup>4</sup> discussed in modern literature mainly by Asian art historians and collectors, have an important role in this story. Before

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<sup>1</sup> See LI BOZHONG (李伯重), *JIANGNAN DE ZAOQI GONGYE HUA: 1550–1850 NIAN* (江南的早期工業化: 1550–1850 年) [EARLY INDUSTRIALIZATION IN JIANGNAN: 1550–1850] 80, 82–83 (2000) (studying Chinese marking practices and cultural approaches).

<sup>2</sup> See generally WILLIAM P. ALFORD, *TO STEAL A BOOK IS AN ELEGANT OFFENSE: INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY LAW IN CHINESE CIVILIZATION* (1995) (examining the law of intellectual property in China from imperial times to the present); John R. Allison & Lianlian Lin, *The Evolution of Chinese Attitudes Toward Property Rights in Invention and Discovery*, 20 U. PA. J. INT'L ECON. L. 735 (1999) (discussing the recently rapid evolution of China's attitudes toward property rights in invention and discovery).

<sup>3</sup> See Qiu Pengsheng (邱澎生), *You fang liao dao gongchang: Qingdai qianqi Suzhou mianbu zihao de jingji yu falü fenxi* (由放料到工廠: 清代前期蘇州棉布字號的經濟與法律分析) [For the Logistics of Materials: An Analysis of the Legal and Economic Background of Suzhou's Cotton Trademarks During the Early Qing Era], 1 LISHI YANJIU 75, 75–87 (2002) (China) [hereinafter *Logistics of Materials*]; see also Li Wei (李偉), *Hongjiang gu shangcheng Ming Qing guanggao yangshi jiqi neihan jiedu* (洪江古商城明清廣告樣式及其內涵解讀) [The Style and the Connotation of the Advertisements from Ming Dynasty to Qing Dynasty of Hongjiang Ancient Commercial City], 10 YISHU YU SHEJI 122, 122–24 (2009) (China) (discussing the culture of advertisement in Ming/Qing China).

<sup>4</sup> Ming and Qing emperors named their periods of reigns (*nianhao* 年號) and time was counted accordingly in terms of years passed under the rule of a specific era name

the introduction of modern property rights in the 1920s, their iconography and scripture, representing elite culture and imperial production control, invoked trust in the quality of artifacts in and across the Chinese world. Modern globalized trade still draws on them as a means to confer “Chinese-ness” on almost any arts and crafts product from the region. As I have shown elsewhere, reign marks originated in a long tradition of imperial quality control of “carving the craftsman name” (*wule gongming* 物勒工名).<sup>5</sup> Its iconography developed within a complex culture of inscriptions (*kuanzhi* 款識), achieving a new meaning in particular in the fourteenth century, when Ming rulers began to employ them systematically as a means to advertise their power and rights in fields such as porcelain and silk.<sup>6</sup> Because the Ming state and its elite, that is, the scholar-officials, had established the trustworthiness of product inscriptions, private entrepreneurs of the sixteenth century could reference the iconography of reign marks to guarantee quality or add value to their artifacts.

In his study of Mesopotamia, David Wengrow has drawn attention to branding as a historic tradition of many cultures achieving importance in the dissemination of urban lifestyle, arguing that “[t]he intense fusion of mass-produced homogeneity and powerful cultural symbolism — an instantly recognizable feature of contemporary brands — is not in fact unique to modern material culture.”<sup>7</sup> Wengrow has shown how the branding function of seals and marking practices in Mesopotamia were situated within many concerns that targeted, like in China, the monitoring of production and quality, and a labeling that altered the nature of the commodity flows, and, in the same breath, linked anonymous objects to central cultural concerns. In this

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(such as year xx of the Kangxi reign era). Since the Ming era Yongle (1402–1424), imperial porcelain workshops increasingly signified the reign name at the bottom of the wares. This signature became known as a reign mark. Reign marks can be made up of four to six Chinese characters, in normal script (*kaishu* 楷書) or archaic seal script (*zhuanshu* 篆書) stating that production took place, for instance, during the reign era Kangxi (*Kangxi chengzao* 康熙製造).

<sup>5</sup> See Dagmar Schäfer, *Inscribing the Artifact and Inspiring Trust: The Changing Role of Markings in the Ming Era*, 5 E. ASIAN SCI. TECH. & SOC'Y INT'L J. 239, 247 (2011).

<sup>6</sup> See YIHUA TONG, *ZHONGGUO LIDAI TAOCI KUANSHI HUIJI* (中國歷代陶瓷款識彙集) [COMPILATION OF HISTORIC INSCRIPTIONS ON CERAMICS OF CHINA] 8 (1989).

<sup>7</sup> David Wengrow, *Prehistories of Commodity Branding*, 49 CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY 7, 28 (2008); see also David Wengrow, *Introduction: Commodity Branding in Archaeological and Anthropological Perspectives*, in CULTURES OF COMMODITY BRANDING 11, 12 (Andrew Bevan & David Wengrow eds., 2010) (continuing discussion on this topic).

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Article I have chosen, instead, to embark on the practice itself and introduce “inscriptions” as a conceptual framework for the analysis of branding strategies and expressions of claims to property and ownership, creativity, or originality. Highlighting the many roles of inscribing the artifact in Chinese culture, my study discusses the silk trade between the tenth and eighteenth centuries. Like porcelain production, the Song (960–1279)/ Liao (916–1125)/ Jin (115–1234), Yuan (1278–1368), Ming (1368–1644), and Qing (1636/44–1911) dynasties tied silk all in one way or the other closely into state governance: silks such as plain tabby was taxed, while local exotica, such as cloth (tabby) woven in plant fibers and silk woven in other structures (e.g., gauze, twill, satin, etc.), were given to the court as local tribute. For the latter, gradually state-owned manufactures were established. Throughout these periods, inscriptions were used to manage silk production and consumption. Yet, in contrast to fine china in which marking soon became standardized, inscriptions on silks remained more closely affected by ritual needs and aesthetic judgments, and the various functions of silk textiles as a currency, a ritual and tributary good, and a symbol of status and imperial patronage.<sup>8</sup>

In an analysis of the role the product played in the manifestation of property and other claims on issues, such as individual creativity or cultural originality, the nature of the evidence is of relevance. Silk is fragile and only a few pieces have survived. Full bolts with heads and ends (chef-de-piece), where functional markings were usually placed, are rare. In tailored garments or other textile goods such as tablewares or cushions, the heads and ends were cut off. Most remaining silks are furthermore in one way or the other connected to the court or imperial and state while everyday silks have hardly survived. With increased levels of contemporary construction activity in modern China, archaeological excavations unearth new evidence by the day. Some silks represent the remains of the deceased’s most valuable worldly supplies, and thus allow conclusions on contemporary market practices. Other silks were specifically produced as funeral objects (*mingqi* 冥器). Their inscriptions could reference a ritual context, the origin of a sacrifice or other social relations. According to the statesman and philosopher Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), the

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<sup>8</sup> For the early imperial roots of this practice and its appropriation within the first Chinese dynastic statecraft and unification efforts of the Qin 秦 (221 A.D.–206 B.C.), see Lothar Ledderose, *Qualitätskontrolle im Alten China*, in *MARKT UND MACHT IN DER GESCHICHTE* 239–64 (Helga Breuninger & Rolf Peter Sieferle eds., 1995) (Ger.).

ritual codex, however, also required funeral objects to mimic everyday items in every detail acting as “miniaturized portrayals of commonly-used beds, curtains, carpets, mats, tables and chairs” (*chuangzhang yinxi yizhuo zhi lei . . . jie xiang pingsheng suo yong er xiao ye* 床帐茵席倚卓之类 . . . 皆象平生所用而小也).<sup>9</sup> The funeral silks hence indicate the degree to which market and ritual codices coincided and were both put into practice or not.

As regards claims towards property and originality, I argue that in the Chinese case the artifact inscription challenges the role of written codices as the mandatory or even sole historical format for the appropriation of material culture within statecraft, for market control or the expression of individual rights. As I will exemplify in the following paragraphs, Chinese literati-officials from the Song to the Qing grounded the application of product inscription consistently and throughout all ages based on one and the same classic reference, while inscriptions in practice drew their authority from iconographic and content references to other inscriptions with ritual, political, or social purposes. Practice and use confirmed the validity of changing functions and meanings with great authority, while the written codex created continuity and thus helped to establish trust.

#### I. INSCRIPTIONS IN CHINESE CULTURE — AN OVERVIEW

Within Chinese culture the term “inscriptions” (*kuanzhi* 款識) encompasses an extensive gamut of practices that attached textual (or numerical) information to an object. Chinese art history traditionally distinguishes two conceptual traditions: “patterned seals” (*feng* 封, *huajia kuan* 花甲款) and “epigraphs” (*kuanzhi* 款識).<sup>10</sup> Epigraphs specified events, people, or institutions ranging from poetry to name-dropping. Seals were used analogous to the way a signature is used in modern times to personalize items. The best-known examples of seals

<sup>9</sup> SIMA GUANG (司馬光), *SHUYI* (書儀) 8B [LETTERS AND CEREMONIES] *Siku quanshu*-edition, *juan* 7 (n.d.). Song and Ming burial sites confirm that the ritual practice Sima Guang describes in his guide to familial rituals was actually implemented. See Xia Nai (夏鼐), *Shilu Jiangnan Ming mo chutu zhi mingqi* (試論江南明墓出土之模型明器) [A Study of Burial Objects from Ming Dynastic Tombs in the Jiangnan Area], 115 *JIANGNAN KAOGU* 95, 95-102 (2010) (China). Song dynastic ritual rulings were constantly referenced during the subsequent Ming and Qing era. See He Jiyong (何继英), *Shanghai Mingdai muzang gaishu* (上海明代墓葬概述) [Excavation Report of Shanghai's Ming Dynastic Burial Sites], 9 *SHANGHAI BOWUGUAN JIKAN* 653, 653-67 (2002) (China).

<sup>10</sup> See *ZHONGGUO GUDAI TAICI KUANSHI* (中國古代陶瓷款識) [MARKS ON CHINESE ANCIENT PORCELAIN] 6-7 (Hong Quan (弘全) ed., 2009).

might be the collectors' marks on paintings or artworks. The square, rectangular, or round framing scripts in seals and epigraphs became emblematic, authorizing ownership or validating claims of origin within gift-giving ceremonies with social, economic, and political functions. Length or design is not necessarily helpful for drawing a line between an inscription and owners' marks. A mark of individual ownership could be long. An inscription could be an epitaph, a single grapheme (i.e., a character as a pure decorative element), or auspicious symbolism (blessings *jiyan kuan* 吉言款, eulogizing sayings *zansong kuan* 讚頌款).<sup>11</sup> Inscriptions on porcelain and bronzes elaborately list affiliations, showing that elites established social relationships or confirmed historical events within gift-giving ceremonies and material culture as well as in bookish written account. Markings could also be of a quite sober nature. In the sixteenth century, the merchant collector Xiang Yuanbian 項元汴 (1525–1590), for instance, inscribed the price and details on the circumstances of his purchase directly on the artifact.<sup>12</sup> Artifacts were inscribed to identify raw material use (e.g., silverwares) or for registration purposes (*zihao* 字號) or for tracking taxes.<sup>13</sup>

Important to note is that individuals, communities, or states did not only use inscriptions to contextualize the artifact. The artifact also gave credence to the inscribed information. The latter became of increasing importance with the advance of woodblock printing by the tenth century, when scholars worried about the uncontrolled spread of the philosophical ideas and information, the authenticity of texts and how contemporary thought and novel tracts had “polluted” ancient truths, or previous generations had misinterpreted the texts of the past.<sup>14</sup> Casting information in bronze or carving it in stone had always been considered a way to guarantee long-term memorization. But in this discussion the durability of the carrier became central to invoke trust and reliability in a text version.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See *id.* at 195, 230.

<sup>12</sup> See CRAIG CLUNAS, *SUPERFLUOUS THINGS: MATERIAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL STATUS IN EARLY MODERN CHINA* 124-25 (1991).

<sup>13</sup> See BULL. CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART, *THE FINE ART OF DRINKING. THE CHINESE SILVERSMITH ZHU BISHAN AND HIS SCULPTURAL CUPS* 382-86 (1994) (displaying photographs of inscribed silverware); Angela Sheng, *Determining the Value of Textiles in the Tang Dynasty in Memory of Professor Denis Twitchett (1925–2006)*, 23 J. ROYAL ASIATIC SOC'Y 175, 187 (2013) (discussing tax marks on silk).

<sup>14</sup> See JUNCHENG CHEN (陳俊成), *SONGDAI JINSHIXUE ZHUSHUKAO (宋代金石學著述考)* [STUDY OF SONG DYNASTIC EPIGRAPHY DEBATES] 2-15 (1976).

<sup>15</sup> For the study of the material culture of the book trade in the Song-Dynasty, see

Eighteenth-century intellectuals, confronted with a broad heritage of inscriptions including extensive tracts, poetry, symbolic marks, and signatures on a multitude of material objects such as manuscripts and books, bamboo rods, bronze vessels or items as diverse as powder tins intensively pondered the role of the writing material for the validity of a text's content, purpose, and interpretation. The compilers of the vast imperial *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete library in four branches of literature, 1773–1782) discussed the value of product inscriptions as a way to authenticate rare antiques or verify exceptional historical or ideological value, substantiating individuals, regions or institutions, and dates. In the same breath, these scholars also qualified them as of minor importance as they were of little use for philological studies and of none for philosophical debates.<sup>16</sup>

Chinese scholars acknowledged overlapping meanings or changing interpretations of inscriptions even though it does not seem to have concerned them much. As ambitious women artists, such as Zhu Kerong 朱克融 (died 826), elevated silk tapestry (*kesi* 繡絲) to an art form and won the appreciation of the ruling elite, the names originally noted down within the tradition of “carving the object and naming the craftsmen” as a way to guarantee that the quality of their work became indicators of artistic provenance.<sup>17</sup> Mural wall painters noted down their names within the tradition of carving the craftsman's name as well as part of a ritual performance.<sup>18</sup>

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LUCILLE CHIA, PRINTING FOR PROFIT: THE COMMERCIAL PUBLISHERS OF JIANYANG, FUJIAN (11TH TO 17TH CENTURIES) 65-67 (2002). Studies on stone inscriptions are abundant, too, but hitherto research has not given much attention to how the emergence of printing culture impacted Chinese approaches to information and their carrier materials.

<sup>16</sup> See QINGDING SIKU QUANSHU ZONGMU TIYAO (欽定四庫全書總目提要) [IMPERIAL CATALOGUE OF THE COMPLETE LIBRARY IN FOUR BRANCHES OF LITERATURE] juan 86, shibu, mulu lei er, jinshi, at 743.

<sup>17</sup> See Liu An-ding (劉安定), Li Qiang (李強) & Qiu Yi-pin (邱夷平), *Zhongguo gudai sizhiwu zhikuan yanjiu* (中國古代絲織物織款研究) [Study on Silk Textiles with Inscription in Ancient China], 49 SICHOU 5, 45-55 (2012) (China) (distinguishing categorically between marks on *kesi* and other silk textiles). The shift in the assessment of *kesi* is obvious by the fact that imperial art catalogues and collections began to mention tapestry including the name of the artist. See, e.g., ZHU QIQIAN (朱啓鈞), SIXIU BIJI (絲繡筆記) [PRIVATE WRITING ABOUT SILK EMBROIDERY] (Taipei, Guangwen Shuju, 1970) (commenting on a compilation from classical sources). For the relation between *kesi* and painting/prints, see Claudia Brown, *The Weaving of Pictures: Tapestry, Painting and Woodblock Prints in Late Ming and Early Qing Dynasty China*, 47 ORIENTAL ART 8, 8-13 (2001).

<sup>18</sup> Lennert Gesterkamp's description of signatures and marks on murals implies that the shift happened during the Mongolian Yuan era (14th century). See LENNERT



Functional inscriptions were one of many means with which the Chinese elite tied the artifact (and thus material production) to the state. Using material culture to establish cultural identity and status, and align society and state, the ruling literati authorized inscriptions as a means to regulate resources, which, yet again, was part of their duty to care for the people. A recurring set of classical texts — among them the *Kaogong ji* 考工記 (Artificers record), the *Guo yu* 國語 (Discourses of the State), and the *Zhou Li* 周禮 (Rites of Zhou) — were referenced to ground rules on the production and use of ritual implements which then set quintessential standards for the everyday good: “[K]nowing the rituals/rules (*zhili* 知禮)” was the harbinger of “making things” (*zaowu* 造物).<sup>19</sup> While connected to art and influenced by consumption patterns, design in Chinese history was an issue of communal and governmental concern and practice, and thus more than a result of imperial or elite patronage or caused by this groups’ tastes. In accordance, the dynastic codes of each reign thoroughly laid out the details of imperial design in the sections of their dynastic ritual code (*lifa* 禮法), and put the Ministry of Rites (*libu* 禮部) in charge.<sup>20</sup> Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), along those lines, pondered the appropriate place for the ancestral shrine in private homes, consolidating them as the nucleus of state and societal order.<sup>21</sup>

Design also related to issues of status display and morality, and therefore walked a tightrope of aesthetic concern and economic (resource) management. Guidelines of statecraft such as Zhen Dexiu’s 真德秀 (1178–1235) *Da Xue Yanyi* 大學演義 (Supplement on the *Great Learning*) invigorated classical debates to urge moral and intellectual control over the aesthetic design of palace construction, tableware, display items, food, etc. Forebodings on the disastrous effects of imperial prodigality are a common trope in this kind of literature reflecting officials and scholars’ attempts to balance imperial desires, and their own demands, with the people’s needs. Directly

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GESTERKAMP, THE HEAVENLY COURT: DAOIST TEMPLE PAINTING IN CHINA, 1200–1400, at 202-03 (2011); see also Alexandra Tunstall, *Beyond Categorization: Zhu Kerong’s Tapestry Painting, Butterfly and Camellia*, 36 E. ASIAN SCI. TECH. & MED. 39 (forthcoming 2013).

<sup>19</sup> See ZHOULI (周禮) [RITES OF ZHOU], ch. Dongguan (冬官), *Kaogong ji* (考工記), 1a-b (n.d.).

<sup>20</sup> See TUO TUO (脫脫) (1313–1355), SONG SHI (宋史) [HISTORY OF THE SONG DYNASTY] Volume 11, juan 149, zhi 102, yufu 1, p. 3477f (1977).

<sup>21</sup> See Francesca Bray, *Technics and Civilization in Late Imperial China: An Essay in the Cultural History of Technology*, 13 OSIRIS 11, 11 (1998).

related to this discourse is the growth of a textual canon of rules and methods (*fa* 法, *fashi* 法式) during the Song reign, when a markedly literary-trained elite advanced into the official ranks. Li Jie's 李誡 (1065–1110) *Yingzao Fashi* (Building manual, 1103) exemplifies the different style of this rather sober handbook culture that aimed at the standardization and management of materials, styles, and format. Here the ritual also reached far into technical proceedings (and vice versa).<sup>22</sup> Song scholarly debates on product inscriptions highlighted issue of rites and morals rather than warranty. For Zhen inscribing the craftsman's name was a means to hold the practitioner accountable in case the product invoked a gentleman's greed or avarice and caused him to act selfish, harming society and state.

Qiu Jun 邱浚 (1418–1495), minister of rites (*libu shangshu* 禮部尚書, rank 1a), and Chen Hongmou 陳宏牟 (1696–1771), a high ranking provincial official, reaffirmed this interpretation over the periods of Ming and Qing dynastic rulership in their compilations on statecraft. In his *Daxue Yanyibu* 大學演義補 (Supplement to the elaborations on the *Great Learning* (by Zhen Dexiu)), Qiu noted that inscriptions helped emperor and officials to regulate the skillfulness of craftsman, and keep his extravagances in check. Craftsmen should strive to produce plain and useful wares that would “not stipulate unwanted desires in a gentleman.”<sup>23</sup> Qiu also quoted from the original *Liji* (Book of Rites) that “the artefact has to be carved and the craftsman has to be named to enable scrutiny of its making” (*wule gong ming yikao qicheng* 物勒工名一考其成). Qiu, in line with many scholars of his time, herein rooted creativity in antiquity:

The *Yijing* 易經 [Book of Changes] says: As for the preparation of things for usage, and the creation of devices for the profit of all under heaven (the world), nothing is greater than the sages (*shengren* 聖人). Xu Ji 徐幾 (of the Southern Song)<sup>24</sup> said: Wise man invented things (*chuangwu* 創物), the skil[1]ful ones transmitted them. This altogether brought about sufficient

<sup>22</sup> Li was an architect in the Song Directorate of Building. He acted as a practitioner and manager of the state. Later he advanced to the position of the Director of this office.

<sup>23</sup> QIU JUN (邱浚), *DAXUE YANYI BU* (大學衍義補) [EXTENDED MEANING OF THE GREAT LEARNING] *juan* 197, 2a-4a (Wenyuan ge Siku quanshu ed., 1974) (referencing ZHEN DEXIU (貞德秀), *DAXUE YANYI* [THE MEANING OF THE GREAT LEARNING] (1178–1235), which came earlier).

<sup>24</sup> Xu Ji (徐幾), Zi Yu (子與) [courtesy name], Jin Zhai (號進齋) [pseudonym].

profit and everybody used things that were then multiplied. Only the sages are great in establishing the tools and devices that benefit all under heaven.<sup>25</sup>

In this discourse, Qiu even denied his own era the ability to create novelty at all, suggesting that all ideas originated from the sages and antiquity, which was the source of everything: “There is not one thing under heaven that does not arise from the sages, even the apex of ploughs and ploughshares and the details of a door. Each [item] that is of any profit to the world is obtained from a phenomenon (*qu xiang* 取象) and must have an origin (*ben* 本).”<sup>26</sup> Only things with a history and thoroughly pegged into other things and affairs could be of relevance to the present. Scholars participating in the debate on “the origin of things” (*wuyuan* 物原) emphasized that the ruling elite had to know a thing’s history and all its relations in order to be able to rule properly.

During Qiu’s lifetime the Ming state had established a network of state-owned manufacture in fields such as porcelain and silk weaving, promoting modular working structures. The artifact thus became the result of a collective endeavor and as such became detached from individual talent or creativity. A quota system was installed for materials, while labor was recruited in the form of *corvée* across regions on a rotational scheme. As producer, the state itself had to warrant quality, and could use tax records and officials registries to retrace responsibilities and duties. The standardized imperial “reign marks” that were now introduced, vaguely identified the period of rulership in which production took place (some reign periods lasted more than twenty years) in accordance with the classical idea that a good ruler allocated labor and resources in a timely manner. Effectively, the reign mark detached the artifact from the individual maker and the place where it was made. And while the authorizing framework remained the same, the mark came to show off the emperor’s or dynasty’s ability to contain morals and align society. It was thus not a property mark or simply a sign of imperial prowess.

For a long time imperial marks were strictly regulated and exclusively appeared on wares for tributary, ritual, or court usages produced for the state by commissioned craftsmen or produced within state-owned manufacture. While such marks were widely acknowledged in China’s tributaries and through trade as far away as

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<sup>25</sup> QIU, *supra* note 23, at 1a.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 1b.

the Ottoman empire, only a very small group of elite actors in China itself recognized reign marks until the mid-sixteenth century, when the single-whip reform (*yitiao bianfa* 一條變法) brought about a substantial change of China's production and consumption culture. In the single-whip reform, which refers, in fact, to a range of reform movements that altogether span almost sixty years, the Ming state dissipated part of this state-owned manufacture system and changed in the remainder from *corvée* to paid labor.<sup>27</sup> The boundaries between state and private production became more permeable, and reign marks became more visible. By the late sixteenth century various groups such as merchants officials, artisans, and the state itself started to reinterpret the iconography of reign marks artfully to meet the needs of the changing culture of production, consumption, and use, a point that is verified by a wide range of artifactual evidence that, for reasons of space, cannot be discussed here.<sup>28</sup> Suffice it, here, to say that the Manchu Qing yet again consolidated the reign marks as a sign of exclusive imperial production after the conquest of the Ming in 1645, however, this time they drew extensively on the added meanings and values that had developed in the growing markets of the late Ming (early seventeenth century). Private entrepreneurs could apply the iconography of reign marks as their own quality indicators because the Ming state and its elite, the scholars, had established the trustworthiness of product inscriptions by situating them within a traditional perspective. Throughout all these developments, Chinese philosophical and statecraft literature referenced reign marks as a type of "product (or functional) inscription" in line with a traditional imperial approach that was rooted at least in the third century B.C.<sup>29</sup>

## II. INSCRIPTIONS IN THE TEXTILE TRADE: SILK MANUFACTURE DURING THE SONG, MING, AND QING ERA

Cotton mills and textile manufacturers in Manchester's nineteenth century marked textiles for promotional reasons. Qiu Pengsheng 邱澎生 has shown that similar practices came to be used in Chinese cotton manufacture.<sup>30</sup> Across cultures, marking practices were related to

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<sup>27</sup> See RAY HUANG, *TAXATION AND GOVERNMENTAL FINANCE IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY MING CHINA* 118-25 (1974).

<sup>28</sup> For an overview of what Chinese inscriptions on ceramics looked like throughout the ages, see generally TONG, *supra* note 6.

<sup>29</sup> See ANTHONY BARBIERI-LOW, *ARTISANS IN EARLY IMPERIAL CHINA* 75-76 (2007) (providing earlier examples).

<sup>30</sup> See Qiu, *Logistics of Materials*, *supra* note 3, at 75-87. See generally Qiu

materials and production and economic systems. Nineteenth century Manchester's cotton textiles show tax and trademarks on the heads and ends, that verified standards of length and width.<sup>31</sup> Functional inscriptions on Chinese silk textiles were at the head and end of the bolt, indicating a quota system, in which the weaver, working with commissioned raw materials (i.e., given to the weavers in advance), committed to state purposes with the first shuttle-run.<sup>32</sup> The Song, Ming, and Qing dynastic rulers all used inscriptions on silk as a way to regulate quality and quantity in the field of court, ritual, and tributary silk wares. Practices vary in relation to their diverse institutional

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Pengsheng (邱澎生), *Shiba shiji Su Song mianbuye de guanli jia gou yu falu wenhua* (十八世紀蘇松棉布業的管理架構與法律文化) [*Legal Culture and the Administrative Scaffold of the Cotton Trade in Suzhou and Songjiang During the Eighteenth Century*], 2 JIANGHAI XUEKAN 143 (2012) (China) (discussing the broader legal context of the Qing).

<sup>31</sup> The National Archives hold trade marks of the first year of the registration after the trade marks act in 1880 that claim to have been in use at least since the 1860s. The linings of many garments from the 18th and 19th century (linens and cottons) bear parts of stamps. For example, a dress of the 1790s at Platt Hall (M/C CAG 1947.27) Philip Syskas (Manchester Metropolitan University, Textile Restauration) suggests that such ends of pieces were deliberately used by dressmakers to signify that they had economically made use of the entirety of the material at their disposal. Email conversation with Philip Syskas. My thanks to him for the further clarification of this issue. For a discussion of shapes of trademarks and regulations relevant for the cotton trade from a US perspective in the nineteenth century see Henry Charles Thompson (1866-?). *The value of trademarks in cotton textiles* (Boston? 1914?): Thompson notes that trademarks in Asia on textiles by that time were mostly pictorial and used animal shapes. This format originates from the porcelain trade and was not used on silks before the mid-nineteenth century. For the broader context of the globalization of cotton see Maureen Fennell Mazzaoui, *The First European Cotton Industry: Italy and Germany, 1100–1800*, in *THE SPINNING WORLD: A GLOBAL HISTORY OF COTTON TEXTILES, 1200–1850*, at 63, 74-76 (Giorgio Riello & Prasanna Parthasarathi eds., 2011).

<sup>32</sup> The Ottoman Empire also used inscriptions within the imperial organization of silk tax and state-owned production. They took over numerous textile workshops that had formerly been controlled by Byzantine or Persian governments. Workshops from Egypt to Persia sent inscribed textiles to the caliphate as tributes. The inscription on tributary wares started with the religious statement followed by the name and title of the ruling caliph, with a blessing (usually the name of the wazir, or prime minister), the royal tiraz shop, and the city in which a garment was made, and the date by the Islamic calendar. After the eleventh century the format was simplified. See Lisa Golombek & Veronika Gervers, *Tiraz Fabrics in the Royal Ontario Museum*, in *STUDIES IN TEXTILE HISTORY* 82, 82 (Veronika Gervers ed., 1977). Byzantine silks also bear names that seem to be those of owners or masters of silk workshops. There is no agreement about their dating from the sixth to the eighth centuries. See *THE GROVE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ISLAMIC ART AND ARCHITECTURE: ABARQUH TO DAWLAT QATAR* 332, 334 (Jonathan M. Bloom & Sheila S. Blair eds., 2009); David Jacoby, *Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World, and the Christian West*, 58 *DUMBARTON OAKS PAPERS* 197, 202 (2004).

approaches to the manufacture and taxation of silk textiles. During the Song, for example, silks were mostly produced in elite households, and the state-run workshops in Sichuan, and Jiangnan, producing regional specialties.<sup>33</sup> During the Ming Dynasty, centrally organized state-workshops produced silk for ritual and court purposes, and locally administered workshops throughout the silk producing regions provided silk on an annual quota for tributary and other state-public needs.<sup>34</sup> The Qing maintained only three of the Ming era's silk weaving and dyeing centers, administering their performance and finances via court institutions.<sup>35</sup> In each period and throughout institutional changes, the official historiographies and codices repeat the necessity of inscribing the product and naming the craftsmen for purposes of tax and quality control. It is only recently that Chinese researchers have asked questions about the role of writing and silk, in general, and also looked at the long-term changes of name-tagging of silk products in textual sources — indicating that the content and format of writings on silk changed considerably. Lin Bin relates this partly to changing social and institutional settings, but also to developments in weaving techniques and regulatory (legal and ritual) approaches.<sup>36</sup> Iconography and content of an inscription, as well as its placement on the artifact, and the technology of inscription are all relevant for the analysis at this stage. As a rule of thumb, actors in practice inscribed artifacts until the mid- to late-Ming period only when social or ritual issues were at stake, or for reasons of financial control.

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<sup>33</sup> See FRANCESCA BRAY, *TECHNOLOGY AND GENDER: FABRICS OF POWER IN LATE IMPERIAL CHINA* 197, 204 (1997).

<sup>34</sup> All three dynasties of the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasty collected plain tabby silk as taxes, which were produced in rural areas.

<sup>35</sup> Zhang Qiong (張琼), *Huangquan yu jishu: Qing dai nei zhiranju kaocha* (皇權與技術: 清代內織染局考察) [*Imperial Power and Technology: An Examination of the Qing Dynastic Inner Weaving and Dyeing Bureau*], in GONGTING YU DIFANG: SHIQI ZHI SHIBA SHIJI DE JISHU JIAOLIU (宮廷與地方: 十七至十八世紀的技術交流) [THE COURT AND THE LOCALITIES: TECHNOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE CIRCULATION IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURY] 107, 107-09 (2010).

<sup>36</sup> See generally Li Bin (李斌) Li Qiang (李強) & Yang Xiaoming (楊曉明) *Zhongguo gudai sizhi zhong de zhizao wenzi tanxi* (中國古代絲織中的織造文字探析) [*Analysis of Chinese Characters on the Silk Fabrics in Ancient China*], 7 *PROGRESS IN TEXTILE SCI. & TECH.* 7 (2012) (China) (discussing brands within a larger context of inscribing textiles by suggesting that the writing on silk has to be addressed more globally as a concept).

## III. SILK INSCRIPTIONS DURING THE SONG AND YUAN ERA

In 1975 an archaeological team excavated several pieces of gauze with a flower pattern, produced with a now-lost technique of twisted warp (*erjing jiao hua luo* 二經絞花羅) from the tomb of the Southern Song elite wife of the eldest son of (*zongfu* 宗婦) Huang Shen, 黃昇 (n.d.) located in a mountain village of Fujian province, Jiaofu Cangshan 郊浮倉山.<sup>37</sup> In August 1986, similar pieces with warps twisted up to five times, were excavated from another Southern Song tomb of a male ancestor (*guizong* 貴宗) of the same clan in the nearby village Chayuancun 茶園村.<sup>38</sup> About 198, and thus two-thirds of the total 354 silks, were garments of *luo*-gauze (*luo* 羅), *leno* (*sha* 紗), *zheng-crepe-de-chine* (character *tbc* 帛 mit 絲), and *satin* (*duan* 緞) without any *chef-de-piece* left. Two pieces of a quite exceptional type of *ling* 綾 silks (a twill weave) were marked, though, with ink inscriptions (*moshu tiji* 墨書題記) at both ends: “[H]allmark of the official in charge of the imperial household’s office for dyeing and spinning gold-thread silks” (*zongzheng fangran jinsijuan guanji* 宗正紡染金絲絹官記). This piece (M17:1) was of an exceptional length and width. The second piece (M17:40) of 3.22 meters length and 0.54 width with an elaborate warp-pattern (*tihua* 提花) was furthermore marked with a vermilion rectangular shaped personal seal that further verified the ink scripture: (recorded/registered by) Zhaoji 趙記.<sup>39</sup>

The inscriptions on these two silk pieces tell the story of a substantial shift in Song dynastic state attitudes toward silk production, in which the deceased personages presumably played a role. Fujian had been a rather remote area of the Song Empire. But, by the Southern Song era, elites, forced to flee from the invading Jurchen Jin, had increasingly pressed into this region, building up new trades of silk and tea production. As members of the local elite, the ancestors

<sup>37</sup> See FUJIAN SHENG BOWUGUAN (福建省博物館), FUJIAN NAN SONG HUANG SHENG MU (福建南宋黃昇墓) [THE SOUTHERN SONG TOMB OF HUANG SHENG IN FUJIAN PROVINCE] 93-99 (1982); see also Fujian sheng bowuguan (福建省博物館), *Fujian shi beijiao Nan Song mu qingli jianbao* (福建市北郊南宋墓清理簡報) [Excavation Reports on the Southern Song Tombs in Fujian City’s Northern Suburb], 7 WENWU 1 (1977) (China) (describing the discoveries in the tomb and the various silks).

<sup>38</sup> See Fujian, *supra* note 37. For a TV report on the pieces of this tomb, see CCTV.COM, <http://big5.cntv.cn/gate/big5/jishi.cntv.cn/C27830/classpage/video/20101021/100826.shtml> (last visited June 4, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> M17:1 is 11.04 meters long, most were around 5 meters. Its width was 50 centimeters, others had 48-58 centimeters. FUJIAN, *supra* note 37, at 9.

of the Huang Sheng clan may have produced most of their silk garments in their own private workshops or purchased it from private workshops run by other local elite households. But, by the time Madame Huang Sheng would be buried in 1235, the situation had dramatically changed because the state began to take over silk manufacture in the region. This stately interference happened gradually. By the mid-eleventh century the Song state was well aware of the silk trade in Quanzhou and already regularly dispatched officials to skim the regional market for exceptional pieces. Soon the Song rulers decided to economize and set up a local office to collect silks as annual tax ware. In the next step, officials handed out raw or reeled silk, contracting weavers to produce on demand. Finally, by the twelfth century, the Song established the first pillars of a state-owned manufacturing system of local workshop that specialized in one or the other (already established local) production lines. In this way the state benefited from a regional clustering of expertise and resources and eventually also contributed to it.<sup>40</sup> State involvement was also responsible for the fact that the female profession of silk reeling and weaving turned into a male profession, as it moved the work from the private into the public sphere.<sup>41</sup>

The assembly of silks found in Madame Huang Sheng's tomb portrays the many levels on which this state interference affected China's material culture. During the eleventh century, Quanzhou weavers had developed a special expertise in silks with two- or three-warp twisted *luo* (*erjing* 二經, *sanjing* 三經), a fine light silk ideal for the humid and hot climate of the South. Their lenos and gauzes had also attracted the attention of court actors, and soon officials thronged to purchase the silk for imperial usages. In an attempt to reduce costs, the court taxed the region to deliver the silks. In 1129, the court gave an order to move the Southern office from Zhenjiangqian market town 鎮江遷 to Chonghou market at the Suqing Gate 肅清門外忠厚場 in Quanzhou. In 1217 and 1232, the prefect (*zhi zhou* 知州) of Quanzhou, Zhen Dexiu, who also compiled the *Daxue yanyi*,

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<sup>40</sup> State involvement also initiated an expansion of the silk trade from Sichuan into the regions of Jiangnan and Zheli. See DIETER KUHN, *THE AGE OF CONFUCIAN RULE: THE SONG TRANSFORMATION OF CHINA* 213-24 (2009).

<sup>41</sup> BRAY, *supra* note 33, at 204-59. For the changes in weaving techniques, see ZHAO CHENGZE (趙承澤), TAN FUJIAN, *JINTAN CHUTU DE NAN SONG ZHIPIN HE DANGSHI DE FANGZHI GONGYI* (談福建金壇出土的男宋織品和當時的紡織工藝) [A DISCUSSION OF THE SOUTHERN SONG TEXTILES EXCAVATED IN FUJIAN JINTAN AND THE CONTEMPORARY WEAVING CRAFT] 28-32 (1977).



emphasized the need for investments into silk production.<sup>42</sup> According to a sign tablet found in the tomb of Madame Huang, the silk bolts were buried in the year 1235 (second year of the Nansong Duanping reign 南宋端平二年). According to the inscription, the marked silk was produced by the local office in Quanzhou. The mark and the vermilion seal of the local official in charge of silk production suggest that the silk was handed over to the Huang Sheng clan as a tributary ware, presumably given to Madame Huang in combination with an official honorary title. The marking suggests that by that time the Song state had also successfully implemented an adjustment to the ancient rule of “carving the product with the artisan’s name” (*wule gong ming* 物勒工名) and now asked to “carve the product, naming the official” (*wule guanming* 物勒官名).<sup>43</sup>

Yuan and Ming literati presume that the Yuan tradition of marking wares originated from Song attempts to structuralize and regulate the production of goods, which included weapons as well as silk, carriages, or bricks. The material tradition of the Mongols themselves, whereby craftsmen signed the wares they produced and owners marked their property, may also have played a crucial role for the acceptance of inscriptions as a regulatory mechanism and its continuation within Mongolian statecraft. Thus far only two silks are known that show product-related inscriptions. The two silk textiles at the Cleveland Museum are of unknown provenance, but have an inscription dating from the Yuan Dynasty. One silk features two upright lions, back-to-back with Chinese style wings, faces surrounding beasts. Another textile features red eagles. Both textiles are labeled plainly as “official” (*guanjian* 官見), verifying that the state workshop officials of the Bureau of Gold Thread Imperial workshop (*Jinsizi Ju* 金絲資局) had inspected the ware.<sup>44</sup>

#### IV. SILK INSCRIPTIONS DURING THE MING ERA

Historians have amply noted that usually state involvement has had a negative impact on silk production in Chinese history. The Yuan

<sup>42</sup> See generally ZHEN DEXIU, XISHAN XIANSHENG ZHEN WENCHONG GONG QUANJI (西山先生真文忠公全集) [COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE MASTER OF THE WESTERN MOUNTAINS] (1968) (containing a collection of Zhen Dexiu’s writings and the above mentioned *Daxue yanyi*).

<sup>43</sup> XU SONG (徐松) (1781–1848), SONG HUIYAO JIGAO (宋會要輯稿) [CHRONOLOGICAL INDEX TO COLLECTED STATUTES OF THE SONG DYNASTY RECONSTRUCTED] 3570 (1957).

<sup>44</sup> See Liu, Li & Qiu, *supra* note 17, at 4.

dynasty is said to have heavily exploited the silk sector, pushing the production of silk with gold-threads (*nasij*).<sup>45</sup> The Mongolian rulers of the Yuan also made the trade inheritable, and forced craftsmen into state-owned production.<sup>46</sup> The Ming, in contrast, are blamed for having substantially impacted the quality of the silk production, by introduction of a quota system that restricted demand, and regulated labor force and material input. As a matter of fact, the Mongolian “Cloths of Gold” produced in Chinese and Central Asian cities, by craftsmen from conquered territories, show novel designs as well as an advance of technology. The quota system and the inheritance rule stabilized the early Ming economy and, allowing long-term individual and state planning, contributed their mite to the fact that Ming silks are among the most elaborate and refined in Chinese history.

The first Ming rulers invested heavily into silk, boosting it to a complex cross-regional network of manufacturing sites.<sup>47</sup> In contrast to the Song, who established a system based on regional expertise, the Ming era based their organization on divergent usages of silk and optimized resources and workforce in the silk sector accordingly. Six different workshops under the administration of the central state produced silks for court and state tributary usages. These comprised two Inner or Palace Weaving and Dyeing Services (*Beijing, Nanjing nei zhiran ju* 北京, 南京內織染局), one each in Beijing and Nanjing; two Offices for Weaving and Dyeing (*gongbu zhiran suo* 工部織染所), which reported to the Ministries of Public Works (*gongbu* 工部) of the two capitals; a Hall for Ritual Silks (*shenbo tang* 神帛堂); and the Weaving Workshop for Short-Term Requirements in Nanjing (*Nanjing gongying jifang* 南京供應機房). Another twenty-three local weaving and dyeing workshops were set up, either at the district (*fu* 府) or province (*sheng* 省) level. These local workshops manufactured silk products for what were known as “official” needs (*gongyong* 供用—公用). Above all, this comprised silk for the required gifts of commendation and tribute. The quota of silk products that the local weaving and dyeing workshops had to deliver to the capital each year

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<sup>45</sup> See JAMES C.Y. WATT & ANNE E. WARDWELL, WHEN SILK WAS GOLD: CENTRAL ASIAN AND CHINESE TEXTILES 14-15, 130-31 (1997).

<sup>46</sup> See THOMAS T. ALLSEN, COMMODITY AND EXCHANGE IN THE MONGOL EMPIRE: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF ISLAMIC TEXTILES 45 (1997) (speaking of “imported weavers,” many of whom were taken hostage during military campaigns).

<sup>47</sup> This is especially true for Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–1398, reign hongwu 洪武) and his son, the third ruler Zhu Di 朱棣 (1360–1424), reigning as Yongle 永樂 emperor during 1402–1424.

was stipulated in Ming-era statutes. This is why the local weaving and dyeing workshops' production was generally referred to as annual quota production (*suizao* 歲造), a system that was increasingly undermined by the court itself as it requested changes in the quantity and quality produced by these local workshops.<sup>48</sup>

Supervising officials now recorded the names of laborers, and products, or the number of required materials on paper. Still, the inscription rule applied, and was indeed even enforced in the official codex. However, rulings now specifically referred to the format and style of inscription, suggesting that the fragility and value of the material should be taken into account. Weaving offices (*zhizao ju* 織造局) henceforth had to “apply a sealed banderole (*yaofeng* 腰封) recording the number (*hao* 號) and the names of the supervising and managing officials and clerks as well as the craftsmen and workshops involved in the production: in case the product could not be used, a penalty was given according to these records.”<sup>49</sup>

Silk bolts found in tombs in fact show that the rule was implemented, if only in a ritual context. It looks, though, as if the banderole inscription added on to, rather than replaced stamps, or ink scripts. A case in point is the Wu family clan tomb site. Including the tomb of the wife of Prince Ning Jing 寧靖 in Xijian county, Northwest of Nanchang city in Jiangxi province, it was excavated in 2001, and contained twelve full suits as well as eight complete bolts of silk with undamaged heads and ends. All the bolts were entirely wrapped up in velvet. The silk bolts were thirty-four centimeters in width, which contrasts the standard fifty-four to sixty centimeter wide bolts which were normally produced in state-owned silk manufacture during the

<sup>48</sup> See DAGMAR SCHÄFER, *DES KAISERS SEIDENE KLEIDER: STAATLICHE SEIDENMANUFAKTUREN IN DER MING ZEIT (1368–1644)* [THE EMPEROR'S SILK DRESSES: STATE MANUFACTURERS IN THE MING PERIOD (1368–1644)] 20–34 (Heidelberg, 1998); see also Jin Lin (金琳), *Cong Jinlun tangji canbei kan Mingdai Zhejiang guanying zhizao* (從經綸堂記殘碑看明代浙江官營織造) [Ming Dynastic State-Owned Silk Production Seen from the Stone Stele of the Jinglun/Governmental Hall], *DONGFANG BOWU*, 2007, at 71–78.

<sup>49</sup> See 4 LI DONGYANG (李東陽) ET AL., *DA MING HUIDIAN* (大明會典) 1855 (1976). Similar to the Song, the Ming used silk to trade loyalty from its subjects. The Song often discussed silk together with weapons and also prosecuted fraud and deficiencies along the same lines. See Guillaume Carré & Christian Lamouroux, *Faux produit et marchandises contrefaites dans la Chine et le Japon premodernes. Reglementations, corps de métiers et contraintes ethiques* [Fake Products and Counterfeit Goods in Pre-modern China and Japan: Regulations, Trades and Ethical Constraints], 32 *EXTRÊME-ORIENT, EXTRÊME-OCCIDENT* 115, 119 (2010) (Fr.).

Ming era. This suggests that the bolts might have been produced specifically for the burial as funeral objects. Three of the eight floral-patterned satin bolts (*zabao xihua duan* 雜寶細化緞, NJM:67) showed ink script at the side-selvage, identifying them as being “ordered by Guang Gongding” (光共定). The banderole on all four bolts of red cloud-patterned satin (*Guza yunwen duan* 骨雜雲紋緞, NJM:62) can be read as a name “Hong Gaixin official” and/or a disguised congratulation of having achieved an official position “red transforms the mind of the official” (紅改心臣士 (Chen Bangzhan)). NJM:64 furthermore contains a script on the side-selvage naming it as the work of Mu Bugong 木卜工.<sup>50</sup>

Zhao Feng notes that silk bolts of the mid-Ming show in addition an ink-stamp indicating that officials marked the material when it entered the storage rooms of the palace.<sup>51</sup> The inscription is framed by a rectangle and stamped onto the chef-de-piece of the bolt. In some cases, officials also noted the size of the bolt. Such inscriptions obviously served an administrative purpose regulating the usage and storage of the product, as well as serving as verification that it was the requested length. The inscribed silk bolts excavated from the Ming imperial tombs seem to be a special case of a combination between administrative and ritual purposes: Bolt Nr D65 from the Dingling tomb of the Wanli emperor (Hualu silk in deep red and purple, *dahong shan zhenzi xi hualu sichou* 大红閃真紫细花潞绸) is signed at its chef-de-piece with an ink script naming the product and the entire line of officials and craftsman involved in its production and delivery, from the ordering entity down to the actual weaving household.

The bolts found in the Dingling tomb were produced as burial furnishings and served a ritual function. Here, ritualistic practice confirms a rule that in practice was never taken so literally, simply to show off in a ritual context the emperors’ limitless influence. The juxtaposition of artifactual evidence with rulings suggests that the state aggrandized the details given in inscriptions serving state representative purposes — displaying an ideal — while in reality, rules were only perfunctorily adhered to in most other cases. At the same time officials may, in fact, have insisted on a complete record of their ranks and names for representative reasons, or in the hope that their own efforts would be rewarded. Clearly not the maker, but

<sup>50</sup> Mu Gua also refers to a divination technique performed in Guizhou.

<sup>51</sup> See ZHAO FENG (趙豐), FANGZHIPIN KAOGU XIN FAXIAN (紡織品考古新發現) [NEW ARCHEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS: SILK TEXTILES] 22 (2002). Also see his work for a description of the different formats of the silk inscriptions.

responsibilities of production and use stand in the foreground of the inscription practice. Interestingly inscriptions of the Ming often do not seem to be related to the value of the piece. For instance, a veiled brocade (*anhua duan* 暗花緞) (M2:S8) found in the tomb of a military couple in Ningxia has the name Zhang Mengyang 張夢陽 woven into the chef-de-piece.<sup>52</sup> Compared to other pieces in the tomb, the marked piece is not particularly luxurious. Other silks in this tomb also had inscriptions, although their meaning is different as they bestow honorary ranks and titles. The place of the inscription on M2:S8 suggests the name identified either the owner or the weaver who, presumably within private manufacture, had his name woven in as evidence of the garment's provenance. Whether this also functioned as a marketing instrument along the lines of modern branding cannot yet be substantiated.

By the mid-Ming era, silks emerge that name either a state institution (that is the central or local weaving bureaus) or an individual workshop. Now the information about administrative responsibilities and labor was woven yet again into the chef-de-piece. Philadelphia Museum holds a silk bolt that is similar to the red-gold satin (*hong zhijin chanzhi siji huahui duan* 紅織金纏枝四季花卉緞) found in the Dingling tombs and probably of the same era or even production site. But this bolt now contains the inscription “[weaving and dyeing] office Hangzhou” (*Hangzhou ju* 杭州局) on the chef-de-piece.<sup>53</sup> Silk bolts from the late-Ming era stored in the Nanjing Provincial Museum equally identify just the weaving office. The Chinese Silk Museum has several pieces of phoenix silk (probably a damask) with woven inscriptions (*longwen anhua duan* 龍紋暗華緞) at both ends, among them one which identifies the ware as one “produced by the Nanjing office” (*Nanjing ju zao* 南京局造). This bolt also shows two other inscriptions that signify the silk as of highest quality (*qing shui* 清水). Also it contains a “hallmark of Sheng Yuanzhai” (*Sheng Yuanzhai ji* 聲遠齋記), which could refer to a private workshop in Qingshui or a collector's mark. Similar to the mark found on Song wares, the mark was an official's approval of delivery, verifying that the piece met imperial standards and was

<sup>52</sup> See Que Bifen (闕碧芬), *Mingdai tihua sizhi wu yanjiu* (明代提花絲織物研究) (1368–1644) [The Study of Ming Dynasty's Pattern Woven Fabric] 1, 59 (2005) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Donghua University) (on file with Wanfang database K248 TS941.42).

<sup>53</sup> See ZHAO, *supra* note 51, at 35.

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accepted as tax payment. The combination of markings further suggests that the Nanjing bureau contracted out parts of their task to private production.

The generalized reference to the weaving bureau did not enable the official any longer to trace individual labor responsibilities based on the silk bolt alone. The mark was no longer allowed to trace individual responsibilities and, instead, promoted the weaving institution. It is yet undetermined whether the reference to an imperial workshop at this point on silk also served as a brand, in the sense that it enhanced the value of the silk as being of “imperial production” for those who received such bolts as tributes. It can be said, however, that the shift in inscription contents happens alongside a range of reforms that came to be known as the single-whip reform (*yitiao bianfa* 一條變法), as mentioned above. Eventually, this shift enabled local workshops to officially recruit skilled artisans and pay them a salary after 1550, thus legalizing a practice that had spread to circumvent quota restrictions.<sup>54</sup> Officials administering silk workshops in regions with no relevant expertise closed down production and began to purchase the required tax quota from private workshops, thereby nurturing a growing private industry that then again could help satisfy a growing demand for expensive silk textiles beyond court contexts. Different from the porcelain trade, inscriptions in the silk trade were thus standardized, naming mainly institutional affiliations, in an atmosphere when state-owned production opened up and private manufacture and markets proliferated.

The Qing emperors more or less continued their production structures as they were during the late Ming era. They asked for tax silk from all regions of production and only continued three of the most successful Ming silk workshops in Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Nanjing (called Jiangnan). Yet one crucial change was made: the Qing put these workshops under the direct scrutiny of the court, rather than the ministries of rite, work, and finances that had been responsible for the design, labor, and finances (in that order) during the Ming era. Inscription practices herein reflect that claims and concerns shifted from issues of morality and resource management to express an imperial claim of the Manchu of righteous rulership.

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<sup>54</sup> See SCHÄFER, *supra* note 48, at ch. 6 (describing the system of recruitments and taxing in the Ming silk manufacture). For the political atmosphere of this time and the Wanli emperor's withdrawal from politics, see generally RAY HUANG, 1587, A YEAR OF NO SIGNIFICANCE: THE MING DYNASTY IN DECLINE (1982) (providing an overview of legal and fiscal procedures in detail and also its various implications, especially chapters 1 and 2).

Economic issues and considerations of control played a role too. Also the state was less concerned about authenticity, handing the responsibility to trace the individual craftsmen and supervising officials over to the local workshops. Similar to the mid-Ming era, the central government thus asked the local workshops mainly to inscribe the name of the local official and the institutional name into the chef-de-piece.

#### V. SILK INSCRIPTIONS DURING THE QING ERA

Silk bolts of the early Qing era also named the actual producing unit, which was either an individual workshop or a state institution, or the inscriptions specified the office by whose taxes the production was financed, as this unit was responsible for quality control. Mostly, money for silks came from the Liang Huai Salt and Transportation office and its supervisor (*Liang Huai yanyun shi* 兩淮鹽運使). Such inscriptions constituted the rule in Qing culture. These inscriptions, representing a return to the idea of inscribing accounting information on silks, then became the basis for quality judgments and textile branding in China in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the Kangxi period (1661–1722) of the Qing dynasty, all silk bolts had woven inscriptions. By the seventeenth century, officials hence began to favor methods that irreversibly included information about the production process and the individuals who were involved in the final product. The change from written to in-woven forms of inscriptions indicates not only a change of techniques, but also alludes to changing ideas on tasks, trust, and responsibilities within textile production. Initially trust was laid on the official regulating the silk trade, while the weaver was held accountable for the morality of his working piece. As markings became an instrument of state manufacturing control, the weavers name was no longer a concern and the marking came to reflect the proprietary claims and duties of a state institutional context. Finally, the state asked the weaver to weave in accounting information. Inscriptions, therefore, reflect a shifting emphasis in regulatory practices from the product to individual labor.

Looking at the artifacts, the Qing only managed to standardize inscriptions around 1795–1798 when Fo Bao 佛保 (unknown–1771), a Mongolian prince (*wanggong* 王公), took over supervision of the Jiangnan weaving offices. Before his time, inscriptions were still diverse. A silk bolt at the Nanjing Provincial museum, for instance, suggests that despite the textual confirmation of keeping silk production limited to the state institutions, the Jiangnan offices

regularly requested external weavers to produce silks on demand. In such cases the Jiangnan official requested the weavers to mark the ware with the institutional affiliation and the name of the supervising local official. The production scheme also had to be identified on the bolt: the beginning head is marked as “fixed weaving” (*ding zhi* 定織) and woven by a private weaver (*min zhi* 民織) (stored in the Nanjing Museum, no Registration or archive number given). (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Chef-de-piece of plain silk bolt of the Qing Dynasty. The center inscription identifies this as a piece of the Jiangnan Silk Weaving and Dyeing Bureau’s production and names the official in charge of the bureau’s tribute delivery. (Figures 1-3 copyright: private photo Dagmar Schäfer, taken with permission of the Nanjing Provincial Museum, Public exhibition hall 1.)





Figure 2. The inscription at the right corner of the same bolt, which identifies the piece as one “produced by commoners” (*min zap* 民造).



Figure 3. The inscription on the left corner further specifies the mode of commissioning: “woven on demand” (*ding zhi* 定職).



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The inscription was simple and was woven into the chef-de-piece along the weft, written from right to left. All institutional identifications are placed in the middle of the heads or ends, addenda at the left and right. These consistencies suggest that the format of the inscription was regulated. Inscriptions became a regular feature on silk bolts produced for imperial usage. All bolts currently known to carry an inscription are now held either in the Forbidden City Palace Museum or the Nanjing Provincial Museum. According to the inscriptions, over time eighty-four different officials were in charge of weaving affairs in Nanjing (*Jiangnan zhizao ju* 江南織造局). This detailed information is not obtainable from other sources. One hundred and fourteen different local officials are identifiable on the silk bolts produced by the Suzhou weaving office, and seventy-two names appear on the bolts from the Hangzhou weaving and dyeing office.<sup>55</sup> Even weaving officials with less than a year of service were named, confirming that the selvage or chef-de-piece inscription was used as a common method of attaching administrative information to a product.<sup>56</sup> The marks helped officials to trace and confirm the use of funds. The mark indicates that, for the central state administration, the local official rather than the individual was responsible.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the situation had yet again changed dramatically. With the loss of state control, an increased influx of Western forces, and the Taiping rebellion paralyzing the country, weavers and dyers, once employed in state-owned manufacture increasingly pressed into the private sector. Establishing their own workshops and selling their goods to private customers, they continued to build on their experiences and thus applied woven inscriptions to the chef-de-piece or selvages of their silk ware. The names of the workshops were chosen in relation to scholarly studio names, or exemplified the products in which the workshops had specialized. Often these production sites called themselves factories (*chang* 廠) rather than workshops (*zuo* 作), accommodating a modernization discourse. An artifact in the Donghua University Museum has English inscriptions, illustrating that factories and workshops had already started to export their goods. Yet, despite western influences, most inscriptions imitated the format of the late Qing state-owned production marks for the purpose of marketing. The guarantee of provenance became a benefit rather than a requirement, helping weavers to build their reputation of quality and excellent

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<sup>55</sup> See ZHAO, *supra* note 51, at 817-27.

<sup>56</sup> See Liu, Li & Qiu, *supra* note 17, at 46.

service. Traditions started to mix, with many silk bolts containing both the Chinese and the English name of a workshop or factory. Other silk manufacturers started to use illustrations, such as flowers or cranes, a format that thus far had never been used on Chinese silks. In some rare cases, marks on silks then provide the name of the shop, its address, the framework of its expertise, and a sentence inviting customers to visit the shop (*Caodong jihao* 曹東記號).

Silk names still linked to their original context, referring to products widely known as being exclusive to imperial usage or tributary goods, such as the “satin from the imperial storages” (*kuduan* 庫緞). Name branding became prominent, too, and workshops labeled silks, for instance, as brocaded rose cloud *chou*-silk (*Jinxia chou* 錦霞綢) or purple damask of heavenly peace (*Tianhe chiduan* 天和赤緞). Some inscriptions now included the locality (province, city, village), whilst others only specified the workshop. Others began to add administrative seals that invoked a quality range, such as a plain red damask, which identified the silk as being of superior quality (literally “glittering white” *yingsu* 瑩素, two other categories were *jingsu* 晶素 “brilliant white,” and *fengsu* 鳳素 “phoenix white”). Another stamp framed the remark “humbly recognized and selected” (*renji xuanzhi* 仁記選置). Such marks invoked standards in accordance with previously-used official categories to give credence to particularly high-quality silks either collected as a tax from private weavers or bought by officials on the free market, as well as wares that were produced in the silk weaving offices and considered particularly outstanding. The marks also indicate that three different families produced these three bolts and that selvage or chef-de-piece branding had become a market format. Further research is necessary to see whether the three weaving workshops were connected by kinship or guild regulations and how those, as scholars have argued, may have backed the standardization of quality marks in the late Qing era.

#### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this Article was to show that inscriptions in early modern Chinese culture functioned within a complex setting of ritual, political, and social concerns. Functional inscriptions were used and interpreted to express a broad (and changing) range of claims, including property rights, state power, spiritual concerns, drawing their authority from traditional canon and habitual practices rather than legal codex alone. From the tenth century onwards, marking practices in silk production were closely linked to production

mechanisms and management practices. This contrasts, for instance, the cotton sector, which, as Qiu Pengsheng has described, was run by local entrepreneurs and in which markings for production purposes became advertising instruments.<sup>57</sup> Inscriptions on silk had to accommodate different roles than cotton.

Modern Chinese “old brands” (*laozihao* 老字號) that link back further than the nineteenth century gain their reputation from often quite anecdotal references in classical Chinese literature, mostly novels or miscellaneous private writings (*biji* 筆記). Authentication is achieved through reference to local gazetteers, which emerged with the social changes of the Song era from an aristocratic to a meritocratic system, along with the development of new printing techniques. Such literature does not mention brands, nor document product inscriptions or their use. Instead the Ming era brought forth an increase in local gazetteers whose rubrics of food and goods (*shihuo* 食貨) or local products (*tuchan* 土產) developed into important repositories for contemporaries on ancient Chinese local art and craft production or agricultural specialties. Originally compiled by the rotating local official staff to facilitate the definition and supervision of taxes, or as informative guides of traveling elites, these books are the basis, also, for modern views on China’s traditional products, such as the thousand-year-long tradition of producing Shaoxing wine, or Wu (which is a family name) moon cakes. In none of these cases, though, as far as is known, did a mark or brand play a role.

In contrast, early on, a producer’s name was central to differentiating exceptional products in Chinese culture. In imperial silk sector, the identification of the craftsman or officials name served a moral concern and quality control. Furthermore, textual references indicate that allusive naming specifying the regional origin, the fiber mixture, texture, pattern, or color was important in the silk trade. Jianyang 建陽 (modern Fujian, Northern district Min bei 閩北), for instance, was renowned for the production of red-green *jin*-silk (*honglü jin* 紅綠錦) and satin (*citong duan* 刺桐緞). Citong, which Chinese scholars consider the origin of the modern English term “satin,” at that time alluded poetically to Quanzhou 泉州 prefecture, a major export trade of damask and *luo*-silks.<sup>58</sup> Banderoles in Madame

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<sup>57</sup> See Qiu, *Logistics of Materials*, *supra* note 3, at 9-10 (commenting on Li Bozhong’s discussion of Jiangnan as a special economic zone).

<sup>58</sup> Between 1241 and 1252, local monographs confirm that the village of Wengshan (翁山) near Nan’an (南安) in Quanzhou (泉州) produced a special kind of

Huang Sheng's burial site record the name, suggesting that inscriptions may have also played a role in establishing and stabilizing the nomenclature of silk type, name-branding textiles. It looks as if state marking practices, idealizing the carving of craftsmen's names as a guaranteed method to keep silk production under tight moral control, were more central to pre-modern Chinese approaches of marking a product than a concern about the protection of individual skills or rights. Although products with name marks resurface after the 1550s, Song and Ming state-involvement in craft production efficiently monopolized artifactual inscriptions and branding methods, whereas literary culture and state institutionalization, at the same time, fostered a distinction of products by their local origin.

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*juan*-silk (絹) that became known as *Weng-juan*, which the Song regularly collected as tax. *Weng*-tabby was known as a brand meeting imperial standards. See ZHAO RUSHI (趙汝適), ZHUFANZHI (諸蕃志) [THE BARBARIAN COUNTRIES] (Commercial Press ed. 1937) (1225) (describing the areas Song considered barbarian).