

**Outline Sheet 8 : Case studies: the mounting of textiles and dress**

After six hundred years, the famed Raktayamari thangka, a monumental Yongle presentation-marked embroidery returned to Chinese soil. When it was sold at auction in 2014 achieving a record price for any Chinese work of art, it reflected a meteoritic rise in status for textiles. Being charged with the privilege of mounting this magnificent Ming dynasty embroidery, dating from the time of the construction of the Palace Museum, provided the speaker a third opportunity over the past 20 years to examine this textile at close hand. The circumstances behind the creation of the thangka and its surprisingly traceable history over the past centuries will be highlighted before continuing on to other Chinese religious and secular textiles and dress that the speaker has prepared for display over the past thirty years.

The recent rise in popularity of Chinese and Southeast Asian textiles has fuelled and been fired by landmark exhibitions and learned publications helping collectors to become more knowledgeable and refined in their taste. Challenges in educating private collectors to display and safely maintain their collections has been a concern while in recent times identifying facsimiles has added to the need for conservators to be familiar with technologies behind the creation of valued textiles.

Preparing textiles for display is amongst the most time consuming task any conservator undertakes, however little has been directed towards the importance of preserving the conservators. The speaker will share applicable but inexpensive solutions she has found to minimise discomfort and will discuss recent notable case studies in large conservation laboratories.

**Resources:**

Kuhn, Dieter (English Editor.) and Zhao Feng (Chinese Editor) *Chinese Silks*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2012

Watt, James C.Y. and Wardwell Anne E. *When Silk Was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in cooperation with The Cleveland Museum of Art, Abrams, New York, 1997

Chinese and Central Asian Textiles, selected articles from *Oriental Art* 1983-1997

Rutherford, Judith and Menzies, Jackie. *Celestial Silks, Chinese Religious and Court Textiles*, Art Gallery, New South Wales, Sydney 2004

Hall, Chris et al. *Power Dressing: Textiles for Rulers and Priests from the Chris Hall Collection*, Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore, 2006

Hall, Chris. *Heavens' Embroidered Cloths; One Thousand Years of Chinese Textiles*, Hong Kong Museum of Art, Urban Council of Hong Kong, 1995

“Table talk”: The Development of Modified Work Systems to Reduce the Risk of Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders from Conservation Treatment. Kristin Phillips, Justin Gare and Jo Bills. AICCM 2013 National Conference – “Contexts for Conservation”  
[https://aiccm.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/NatConf\\_2013/NatConf\\_2013PubsFinal/17.%20%20Phillips\\_Gare\\_Bills\\_Table%20Talk.pdf](https://aiccm.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/NatConf_2013/NatConf_2013PubsFinal/17.%20%20Phillips_Gare_Bills_Table%20Talk.pdf)

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Presentation IIC-ITCC Training Workshop (III)  
Scientific Approaches to Textile Conservation

Case studies: Mounting and Display of Textiles and  
Dress (excerpts)

November 13-23, 2017  
Beijing, China

**Badge for Dragon Boat Festival, Ming dynasty, silk counted stitch  
on gauze Ming dynasty, Wanli period 1573-1620**

H 36cm W 37cm

This badge was made to be worn on the back of an over-dress

Originally a trapezoidal shape typical of badges of the period, this was cut in the past to fit a square border



**Nothing is without meaning**

A tiger, symbol of the *yin* or negative passive force which dominates the second part of the year is positioned with the artemisia and calamus to counteract disease and the five poisons are also represented as protectors on this badge which is one of a pair.



**Detail of a thousand Buddha *kesa* (cape) dated to 15<sup>th</sup> century China with individual Buddhas worked in silk detached looping known as needleloop embroidery on damask and plain weave.**

H 116cm W 271cm

Needleloop embroidery seems to have existed only between the late Southern Song (1127-1279) and the early Ming (1368-1644) and was used primarily for imperial and religious pieces.

Before cleaning, left.

Individual Buddhas which had been detached from the border showing paper foundation, right.





Each of the eight hundred and twenty (820) Buddhas on this *kesa* is different.

Shading and voided details are worked in needlelooping, eyes and noses are drawn in ink, embroidery and knots highlight details, gilt paper held in ladder stitch forms a mandorla encircling every head, and gilt paper wrapped thread outlines each figure.

Mud splatters and rodent loss were the major condition problems.



**Badge of rank, silk embroidery on satin – an egret designates a sixth level civil official  
Qianlong period 1736 – 1795**

W 27.5cm H 26cm

Beige silk embroidery on legs, now lost reveals:

Navy warp - upper 2/3 of badge



Brown warp - lower 1/3 of badge



## Reverse of embroidered egret badge

Gold brocade border and pale blue plain weave lining were attached after the imperial era for commercial sale.

These were becoming detached from the embroidery revealing the bi-coloured warp ends on the satin ground weave at the turned edge next to the selvedge.



↔  
Warp direction

**Detail of a  
*Jin* (warp faced  
compound plain  
weave) silk robe  
with *shuye* (tree  
leaf) motifs, 6<sup>th</sup>  
century, Northern  
dynasties**

H 272cm W 145cm

Stitched support  
patches.

Surface cleaned -  
some stains remain  
as evidence of wear.





**Adjustable height table** with “mechanism” from IKEA,  
easy to use and inexpensive:

- 8 x SALMA storage bins 39x28x28cm  
@ US\$4.30ea \$34.40
- 1 lid (optional) \$0.90
- 1 insert (optional) \$1.90

**TOTAL:** US\$37.20  
¥247.50

Eight bins for good height holding two cutting boards for  
elevated table surface for use with smaller textiles

= 120cm x 90cm OR 180cm x 60cm

(Uchida and Olfa cutting boards already in personal stock.)

A simple, neat solution to posture options when space and funds are limited or just for purposes of trialing a new position before committing to expensive equipment.



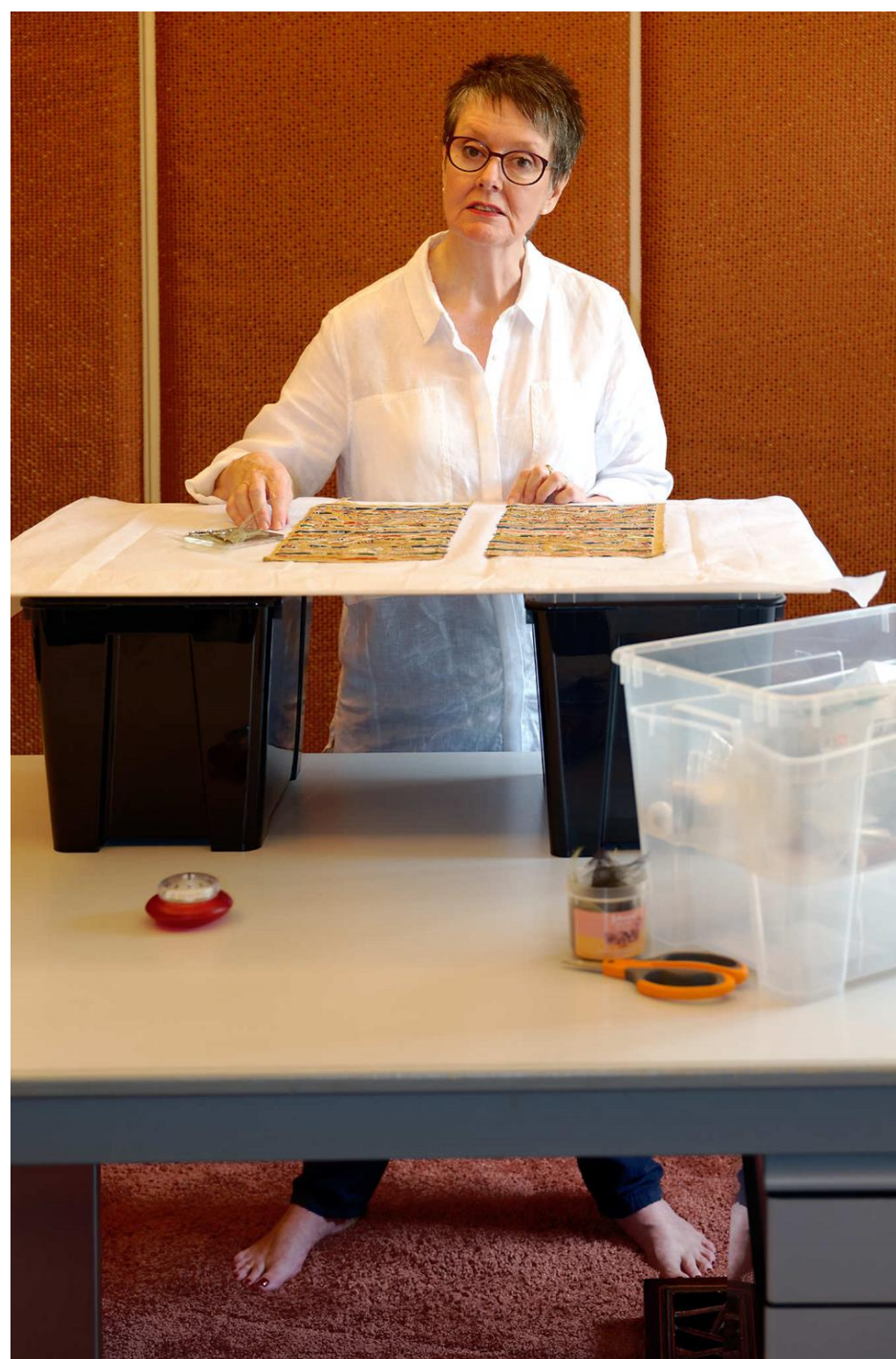
It is surprisingly comfortable to work standing however many are reluctant to try.

Feet apart for broad base of support, weight evenly distributed on both feet.

Use a phone or timer alarm to remind time for a change of foot and back position and eye rest and/or exercise. Move to reset alarm after 20 minutes.

Some textile conservators leave thread a distance away to necessitate a move when the needle needs rethreading.

Note on right a plastic insert for top storage bin which stores often used tools and thread.



Never work in bare feet!  
(Photograph taken to emphasize foot position.)

## Ask a colleague to take a photo of you while working to check posture.



Standing, while a comfortable alternative to sitting, does not correct three decades of compromised posture.

Professional help may be necessary for chronic pain.

Good practices such as rest breaks and exercises established early in a career are best.

