

A large red square with a white border, containing the title text.

Placards for the Unrepresented

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Lian Lu

Lotus shoes (Foot-binding)

Song Dynasty (960 - 1279 AD)

Cotton/silk

A practice that persisted in China for a millennium, originally said to have been started around 920 AD and continued until 1911 where it was eventually banned. Initially, the practice was seen as a symbol of wealth and beauty as only girls who were from the royal family were able to bound their feet, as they could barely walk after. This eventually became a common practice as girls without bound feet are rejected by suitors. Eventually, it was spread to all social classes as hope to improve their social status. Despite the tragic story behind the lotus shoes, every pair of shoes was personally handcrafted and embroidered, often by the individual's mother or sisters. While there were generic designs, most shoes had their own design specific to region and/or personality.

Why it's included: An artifact extremely widespread in museums throughout China, it is shocking that the lotus shoes is not displayed at the Met. The shoes are not only an symbol of a practice once accepted in China but represent the inequality between females and males. As women were once viewed as subordinates and catered to the needs of their husbands, these shoes also stand for the gradual closing of the gap between both genders throughout the centuries.



Zhao Shijian (late 13th - early 14th century)

Torn Peasant Tunic

Yuan dynasty(1271-1368)

Woven hemp

A basic tunic handwoven by a peasant, this is a typical piece of clothing that farmers of the Yuan dynasty would wear in the warmer days of the year. Hemp was an abundant and strong material so it was not uncommon for people to harvest and weave the plant into outer coat-like articles of clothing and to wear outside their plain cotton garments for additional warmth when working in the cold waters of rice paddies. Garments like this tend to be plain and unadorned, valued only for their warmth.

Why it's included: Chinese fabrics were rather rare in the Met, and the ones that were on display were extravagant and lavish. Although it was a very nice showcase of the delicacy and beauty of Chinese silk weavers, it was not a good representation of the Chinese society, as robes like those were extremely rare. In fact, the pieces on display were reserved only for royalty to wear on special occasions, so this hemp tunic would provide a strong contrast as well as a look into the craftsmanship of the average Chinese.



Unknown (11th - early 12 century)

Child's doll

Song Dynasty(1271-1368)

Rag and straw

This doll belonged to the child of an unknown merchant who dealt silk from the southern part of China during the Song Dynasty. Merchants were considered the lowest class in ancient China because they did not produce any goods and were therefore shunned by most communities. The child who owned the doll was probably a very young girl who received the doll as a gift from relatives. It is unknown what became of the family, as those in the lower class were illiterate and did not keep record of their lineage. However, this doll was found amongst the meager belongings left behind by the child near the family dwelling. Dolls like this were common amongst the lower class of the Chinese society, where people could not afford carved noisemakers and figurines.

This piece belongs in the Met, not only because it represents the peasants but also because it shows the viewpoint of children. Toys and clothes for the children are very lacking. Children have been neglected in history and, much like women, were designated as belongings of the male members of the household. Their stories are almost always unheard and unseen.



Unknown(9th-10th Century)

Textile

Tang Dynasty/ Five Dynasties

Silk

This textile has been embroidered through two layers of fabric: the white twill damask and the plain white silk. The floral pattern was embroidered on the white twill damask. The work displays the qualities of Tang floral art at its best. Chinese embroidery has a long history since the Shang Dynasty (1760-1520 bc). It's a form of traditional Chinese folk art and one of the oldest extant needleworks. Originally women in China used embroidery to decorate clothes, bed sheets or pillowcases. Most embroideries are made of silk. After the establishment of the Silk Route in around 100 bc, the silk trade thrived and the embroidery production developed.

Why it's included: Most embroideries included in the museum collection are exquisite, valuable pieces made for the royals or aristocrats. From this item the visitors can see that embroidery is not a form of art exclusive to the riches; it's one of Chinese traditional crafts and this handicraft was mainly passed down by ordinary Chinese women.

Unknown(1960s-1970s)

Papercut

Paper

A red paper-cut with an image of the group portrait of five- Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph V. Stalin and Mao Zedong. The calligraphic inscription underneath says: Long live the Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.

Chinese papercutting originated from ancient activities of worshipping gods and ancestors. It's a traditional Chinese culture and a form of Chinese folk art.

Why it's included: Most items on display in the collection of Chinese art at MET have and only have aesthetic value. Although this paper cut does not have a long history, it shows the social condition and political situation of China in the 1960s.