

從中國走向世界，再歸來： 一趙精緻畫作之旅

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香港中文大學圖書館較早前出版的西文善本學術圖錄《融會中國與西方》，迎來了大學六十周年校慶。這部圖錄來到 18 世紀末，讓我們透過生動有趣的通草紙畫館藏，進一步踏入清朝歷史。這些色彩明麗的圖畫描畫不同的生活場景，創作於 1820 至 1900 年代的廣州及周邊地區。如今，廣州和香港成為了大灣區兩大樞紐，連結著中國和世界。自這些畫作面世至今，時代已經發生了巨大轉變——2024 年，每日有近五十億張照片被拍下，資訊以光速在全球流動。

在 19 世紀中葉的中國，通訊依靠悠久的印刷傳統，圖像逐漸成為傳達訊息的重要方式。歐洲商人和旅人隨行帶來技術，最終也包括攝影。「真正在中國推動大規模生產廉價印刷和雕版複製品的是傳教士，他們將西方的活字印刷和石版印刷引入中國。」*然而在西方遊客熟知的廣州，當地工匠發明了一種精巧的工藝，用本土植物製作出獨特紙材，用其作畫並大量銷售予外國商人和水手當作紀念品帶回家。

這些由廣州藝術家創作的畫作，比起當時報刊的書面報道更容易接觸得到，我可以想像在大清帝國晚期，這些畫作有助縮小中西之間彼此理解的差距。書中收錄的畫作描繪了一些典型主題，展示了中國的農業和工業生產，尤其是交易頻繁的商品，如茶葉和大米。描畫該區景象的圖畫也以日常生活的現實寫照為特色，包括船舶、穿戴和自然風景的描繪。儘管用色明亮，但並非所有畫作的主题都如此歡愉，部分畫作刻劃了一系列刑罰，包括行刑的過程。這些圖畫的風格和主题滿足西方顧客的興趣，亦有別於傳統的中國藝術展現。儘管如此，通草紙畫似乎呈現了廣州相當真實、甚至平淡無奇的城市百態，由生活、工作以至死亡，而並未充斥同期創作的諷刺畫和石印版畫所隱含的政治宣傳。

From China to the World and Back: Exquisite Paintings on a Journey

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The previous publication from the Chinese University of Hong Kong Library marked the university's 60th anniversary with a scholarly catalogue of our Western Rare Book Collection, *Bringing Together China and The West*. As we reached the end of the 18th century in that last opus, let us move further in time into the Qing dynasty with this lighthearted presentation of our pith paper watercolours. These brightly-coloured illustrations of aspects of life were produced in and around Guangzhou between 1820 into the 1900s. Today, Guangzhou and Hong Kong form two major hubs of the Greater Bay Area, connecting China and the rest of the world. Times have greatly changed since these paintings were first produced: in 2024, nearly five billion photographs are taken daily and information flows around the globe at the speed of light.

In mid-19th century China, communication relied on the long tradition of printing, and images were becoming a more important means of conveying messages. European merchants and travellers would bring technologies on their visits—eventually including photography. “The real promoters of mass reproduction of inexpensive printings and cheap engraving in China were the missionaries, who introduced Western movable-type printing and lithography to China.” * However in Canton, as Guangzhou was known to Western visitors, local craftsmen devised an ingenious process to make a unique type of paper from indigenous plants, to paint and to sell in large volumes to foreign traders and sailors as souvenirs to take back home.

I can imagine that these paintings by Cantonese artists contributed to closing the gap in understanding between China and the West in the latter days of Imperial China, in a more accessible way than written reports in the contemporary press. Typical themes are illustrated in this book, showing agricultural or industrial production in China, particularly those goods that were heavily traded like tea and rice. The sights and scenes of the region also feature realistic illustrations of daily life, including boats, costumes and natural scenes. Despite the bright colours, not all the topics are cheerful: some of the pictures present a range of punishments, including graphic executions. The style and themes of the images cater to an European audience and differ from traditional Chinese representations. Nonetheless, the depictions from the pith paintings seem to present a reasonably authentic, even prosaic, image of life, work and death in Canton. They do not seem to share the propagandist or political connotations of cartoons and lithographic images produced during the same period.

經歷近一世紀的遺忘後，通草紙畫近來被重新發掘。集體遺忘的原因就交由其他人探索和解釋，於我而言，對通草紙畫重燃興趣的起源故事當中，最令我著迷的是來自英國、出於好奇的外行人伊凡·威廉斯先生與中港學者那近乎不可能發生的機緣，當中包括為這本書撰寫前言、畢業於香港中文大學新聞與傳播學系的程美寶教授。有時，大學被視為一座獨立自足的智慧堡壘，但威廉斯先生在院校研究系統以外的考察，說明了大學與外界保持開放連結的重要性。中大圖書館致力於促進開放學術研究，將聯同世界各地多間不同的學術圖書館，努力在院校專家與市民之間創造更多合作機會，這些市民的專業知識可能有助推動文化和技術知識發展。

通草紙畫似乎被視為瑣碎無用之物，大批製作出來賣給外行的洋人。或許是時候發掘這些看似無用的圖畫的意義，認可開創這種貿易的藝術家和工匠了。綜觀而言，隨著中國和其他地區展開相關項目，通草紙畫的重要性將獲得更好的理解。其中一項值得留意的項目，是由倫敦維多利亞和艾伯特博物館於 2023 年開展的「中國外銷水彩畫」項目。通草紙畫用紙極其脆弱，對於收藏者而言，妥善保存是一項挑戰。中大圖書館收藏的通草紙畫，構成了館內眾多水彩畫藏品的一部分，這些藏品橫跨不同年代，由古代畫作至當代藝術。我們希望鼓勵更多以這批通草紙畫藏品作為資源的研究合作，從而加深大眾對這些工藝品和中國文化的理解。為了實現中大「結合傳統與現代，融會中國與西方」的使命，我們非常高興能在線上圖書館展示館藏的電子版本，這使得世界各地的藝術愛好者和研究中國形象的學者能夠欣賞這些作品，同時確保脆弱的原作得以保存。跟隨特藏主管李麗芳女士的導賞，探索過中大圖書館的通草紙畫收藏後，看著半透明的紙片在色彩亮麗、筆觸精緻的人物後面閃閃發光，我對這些圖畫的美學特質感到著迷。這些圖畫本身就如花瓣或蝶翅，看似過於脆弱而無法作為紀念品或禮物歷經漫長旅途帶回西方，更別說保存兩百年了。人們懷著誠惶誠恐的心情，就如《玻璃動物園》中田納西·威廉斯的舞台指導所喚起的感受：

當你看見一片玻璃翩翩旋轉，你會想到兩件事：這玻璃多麼美麗，卻又多麼容易破碎。

* 彭麗君，《哈哈鏡：中國視覺現代性》(*The Distorting Mirror: Visual Modernity in China*) (檀香山：夏威夷大學出版社，2007)，頁 40。

Pith paintings have recently been rediscovered after nearly a century of neglect. The reasons for that collective forgetfulness may be explored and explained by others. What struck me in the origin story of the renewed interest in pith paintings is the unlikely collaboration between Mr. Ifan Williams, an inquisitive layperson from the UK, and academics from Hong Kong and China including Professor Ching May Bo, who graduated from the School of Journalism and Communication at CUHK, and authored the Foreword to this collection. Universities are sometimes perceived as self-contained bastions of wisdom, but the example of Mr. Williams' investigation outside institutional research systems illustrates the importance of openness between the university and the outside world. CUHK Library is committed to fostering a culture of Open Scholarship, and along with many other academic libraries around the world, we will seek to create more opportunities for collaborations between experts within our institutions and citizens whose own expertise may contribute to the advancement of cultural and technical knowledge.

It seems pith paintings were regarded as frivolous objects, made en masse to be sold to foreigners who knew no better. Perhaps the time is coming to uncover the usefulness of these seemingly useless pictures, and to recognise the artists and craftsmen who built up this trade. By all accounts, the significance of pith paintings will become better understood as projects in China and in other regions are conducted. One notable initiative is the Chinese Export Watercolours (CEW) Project, launched by the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London in 2023. Pith paper is an incredibly fragile material and conservation is a challenge for those who hold such collections. At CUHK Library, the pith paintings form part of a large watercolour collection, spanning from very ancient paintings to contemporary art. We hope to encourage more research collaborations using the pith paintings collection as a resource, to further our collective understanding of these artistic artefacts and of Chinese culture. In pursuit of our university mission “to combine tradition and modernity and to bring together China and the West,” we are thrilled to present the digitised versions of our collection in our online library. This allows art enthusiasts and scholars of portrayals of China worldwide to appreciate these works, while ensuring the preservation of the fragile originals. After exploring the pith painting collection in the Chinese University of Hong Kong Library under the guidance of our Head of Special Collections, Ms. Li Lai Fong, I was enchanted by the aesthetic qualities of the images, with the translucent sheets shimmering behind the bright and detailed figures. The paintings are themselves akin to the petals of a flower, or the wings of butterflies: they seem too frail to be taken back on the long journey back to the West as mementos or gifts, let alone to last two hundred years. One gets the combined feeling of awe and trepidation evoked in Tennessee Williams' stage directions from *The Glass Menagerie*:

When you look at a piece of delicately spun glass you think of two things: how beautiful it is and how easily it can be broken.

* Pang, Laikwan, *The Distorting Mirror: Visual Modernity in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 40.

通草紙畫： 自遠方回流的土產

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呈獻到讀者手上的這盒小禮物，是香港中文大學圖書館收藏的一批相信是 19 世紀廣州繪製的「通草紙畫」（又稱「蒹畫」）的複製品。因為它是印刷而成的複製品，所以無法呈現通草紙的特性，難以如實反映水彩塗在通草紙上呈現的斑斕。但它只能是複製品，它是複製品，才有可能讓我們肆意手持著它，仔細欣賞圖中的人、物、景致和情事，為個別笨拙的造型嘆喟一笑，為好些精緻的筆觸嘖嘖稱奇。它的原件，本來就是人手繪畫批量生產的商品，那也是一種複製方式。在大量生產的年代，它不是價格高昂的藝術創作，而是唾手可得的廉價畫片；畫它的是中國人，但中國人不會買它。

所謂「通草紙畫」，是指 19 世紀主要在廣州生產，由本地畫師用西洋水彩在一種叫「通草紙」或「蒹紙」的紙張上繪畫各種與中國有關的題材、銷售給時在廣州通商的西方客人的小畫片。有別於一般紙張，通草紙並不是用木漿製造出來的，而是從通脫木（學名 *Tetrapanax papyrifera* 或 *Aralia papyrifera*，產於湖南、四川、雲南、貴州、廣東、廣西、台灣等地區）的樹莖中白色海綿狀的樹芯切割而成的。切割者抽出樹芯後，會將之置於瓷片或玻璃片上，一手將樹芯由裡而外滾動，另一手則持刀沿著樹芯往滾動方向切割。換句話說，通草紙是一張一張切出來的。由於樹芯大小有限，要切割大張的通草紙，並不容易，因此，通草紙畫一般大小都不超過 12 英寸乘 8 英寸。這種看來很原始的方法，當代仍有沿用。2004 年，我有幸與參與造訪貴州一家「通片」加工廠，廠主王先生向我們示範用人手切割通草紙的工序，並說自己在四川學會這門手藝，1979 年便開始從事有關工作。他還向我們展示用通草紙製作的紙花、小鳥、小青蛙和其他小擺設。這些工藝品在 20 世紀下半葉仍行銷海外，可見用通草紙製作外銷貨品的傳統，跨越了一個世紀。

Pith Paper Watercolours: Our Local Souvenirs Returning from Afar

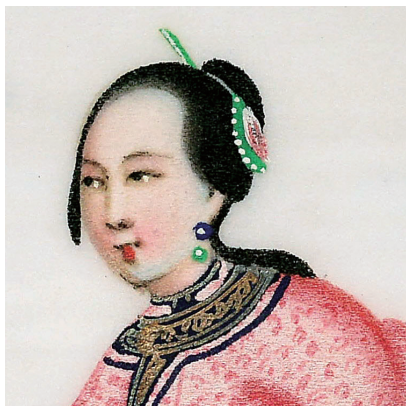
CHING May Bo

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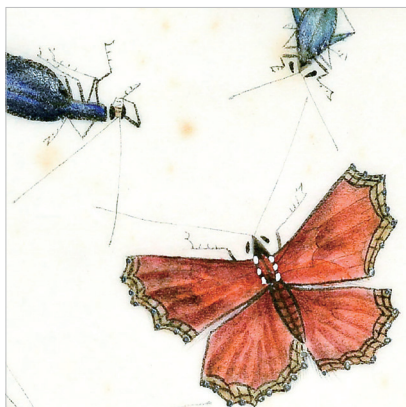
Translated by Charlie Cheung

This box of gifts in your hands, contains the reproduction of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Library's collections of "pith paper watercolours," which are believed to be created in Guangzhou (previously known as "Canton") in the 19th century. As they are printed copies, they fail to present the features of pith paper, as well as its iridescence created by the watercolours on it. But they could only be reproductions, so that we can freely hold them as we wish, attentively appreciate the characters, objects, landscapes and stories painted on them, burst into laughter for some clumsy figures, and be amazed by all those exquisite strokes. The pith watercolours themselves were commodities painted by hand and produced in large quantities, which was also a process of reproducing. In the ages when pith watercolours were massively produced, they were not costly art pieces, but cheap and accessible small paintings. They were created by the Chinese, but Chinese people never bought them.

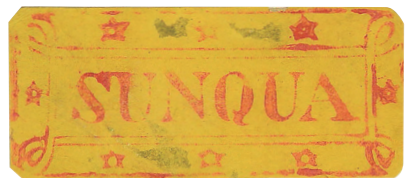
Pith paper watercolours were mainly produced in Guangzhou in the 19th century, referring to the little pictures created by local painters, who depicted various topics about China on sheets of pith paper with watercolours. These little pictures were sold to the western traders in Guangzhou at that time. Different from the ordinary paper, pith paper is not made of the pulp of wood but cut directly from the white inner spongy tissue of a small tree called *Tetrapanax papyrifera* or *Aralia papyrifera* (native in regions such as Hunan, Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Taiwan). After extraction, the stick of pith was placed on a ceramic or glass base-plate and cut with a knife by rolling it along the plate. In other words, pith paper was cut sheet by sheet. Due to its limited size, it was not easy to cut large sheets of pith, therefore pith paper would usually measure not more than twelve inches by eight. And this seemingly traditional cutting method is still in use today. In 2004, I had the honour to visit a "pith factory" in Guizhou. The owner, Mr. Wang, demonstrated to us the procedures of cutting pith paper by hand. He said that he learned this craft in Sichuan and started working in this field in 1979. He also showed us some decorations made by pith paper, like paper flowers, birds and frogs. These handicrafts were still circulating among the overseas markets in the second half of the 20th century, indicating that the tradition of exporting goods made of pith paper has spanned a century.



為什麼 19 世紀的廣州畫師會選用通草紙來繪製小型畫品賣給外國客人呢？相比畫布、西洋畫紙和中國宣紙，通草紙成本低廉，小張畫片的構圖畫法比較簡單，因而也價格相宜，讓留駐口岸的歐美商人、水手和其他人士，都可買一些帶回祖家，向親朋戚友展示東方風情。另一方面，通草紙最大的優點，在於通草細胞性的結構能吸收水溶性顏料，筆觸因而可做到極為細緻，尤其在繪製微型畫時，新上的顏色不會流到其他顏色上而變得混濁不清。在一般紙張塗上水彩，會容易流於平板呆滯，在通草紙上著色，經過光的折射，則能呈現出幾近馬賽克玻璃斑斕繽紛的效果。畫師逐漸又發展出其他技巧。例如，在繪畫人物臉部的時候，會在通草紙背後著上一層又一層的肉色或白色，這樣便能把人臉的輪廓和肌肉突出。此外，通草紙的紙面，也較易吸收纖細線條的墨色，畫師在繪畫一些細緻的部分如蝴蝶的觸角時，會用一絲毛髮輕描，達致最佳的效果。



現存 19 世紀的通草紙畫，絕大部分在廣州生產。自 18 世紀中至 1842 年簽署《南京條約》開放五口通商前幾近一個世紀裡，廣州是清政府容許進行西洋貿易的唯一口岸。西洋商人在省城西面的城牆外也就是下西關一帶珠江岸邊的商館區留駐，附近街巷匯聚了大量批發零售運往西洋的中國貨品的商鋪，其中便包括多家專門為迎合西方顧客口味而設的生產各種油畫和水彩畫的畫室。這些畫師與外國人打交道時，會在自己的姓或名後加上一個帶有尊稱之意的「呱」字（一般認為即「官」字的閩南語發音）。他們讓人印象最深刻的作品，大都是畫在來自西洋的畫布和紙張上的大幅油畫與水彩畫，這類畫既有看來千篇一律的「行貨」，也有好些是英國東印度公司或個別西洋商人特地訂製的作品。這些畫室同時也繪製大量通草紙畫，尤其出名的是「新呱」(Sunqua)、「庭呱」(Tingqua)、「煜呱」(Youqua 的音譯)等。時人對「新呱」讚譽有加，1857 年 8 月 29 日的《倫敦時事畫報》，謂新呱「可能是攝影師的競爭對手」。在中文大學圖書館的藏品中，就有兩本分別貼有「Sunqua」和「Youqua」商標的畫冊。



So why would the artists in Guangzhou in the 19th century choose to paint on pith paper and sell them to foreigners? Compared to canvas, imported paper from the west, and the rice paper from China, the cost of pith paper was lower and the composition on these small sheets was simpler. Therefore, pith paper watercolours were at fair prices, which allowed people at the port, such as the European and American traders and sailors, to purchase and take them to their hometowns to show the oriental exoticism to their family and friends. Another great advantage of pith paper is its cellular structure which could absorb waterborne dyes, and this allows very fine details, especially on a miniature scale, without spreading one colour to the others. If we apply watercolour on ordinary paper, it may look flat and dull, while on pith paper, with the refraction of light, it becomes iridescent and brilliantly coloured, similar to a mosaic. Gradually, painters developed other skills as well. For example, when painting a character's face, layers of white or flesh colours would be applied under the pith paper, in order to highlight the contours and muscles of the face. In addition, as the surface of pith paper could easily absorb the ink of thin threads, painters would adopt a trace of hair to lightly depict some details, such as the antennae of a butterfly, to achieve the best effect.

Most of the existing 19th century pith paper watercolours were created in Guangzhou. For almost a century from the mid-18th century to 1842, before the Treaty of Nanking was signed and five ports were opened for trades, Guangzhou was the only port allowed by the Qing government for trading with the West. Western merchants stayed outside the city wall to the west of Guangzhou (the provincial capital at that time), an area known as the “hongs” or “factories” on the bank of the Pearl River in Lower West End (Sai Kwan / Xiguan). Plenty of shops that sold Chinese goods to the West, either wholesale or retail, gathered in the nearby streets and alleys. And there were many studios that produced various oil paintings and watercolour paintings, specifically catering to the taste of the western customers. When dealing with foreigners, artists from these studios would add an honourific suffix “*qua*” (呱 commonly believed to have the same pronunciation as “*guan*” [官, term used by servants to address their masters] in Southern Min dialect) to their surnames or given names. Their most impressive works were mainly large-scale oil paintings and watercolours on canvases and paper from the West. These paintings included the “stock painting” which looked identical, and some customised works ordered by the British East India Company or some western merchants. These studios also produced a large number of pith paper watercolours, and Sunqua, Tingqua, and Youqua were especially well-known. Sunqua gained high praise by the people at that time, and was regarded as “a possible competitor against photographers” by *The Illustrated London News* on August 29, 1857. Among the collections in the Chinese University of Hong Kong Library, there are two albums with labels respectively bearing the trademarks “Sunqua” and “Youqua.”

As far as is known, the earliest pith paper watercolours that could be conclusively dated are from the 1820s. According to a report from *The Chinese Repository* in late 1835, there were around thirty studios and shops around the hongs in Guangzhou, selling paintings for export, many of which were painted on pith. The Bodleian Library of Oxford University has a collection of Chow Kwa's pith paper watercolours, who is indicated to have been active in Shanghai until 1885. Another artist Chou Pai Chuen, who also painted for export, is said to have been creating pith paper works in Beijing in the 1890s. Some have also pointed out that greeting cards on pith or small glass topped boxed sets of paintings on pith were still available in Hong Kong well into the 20th century, indicating that until early 20th century, pith paper watercolours were still for sale in some studios in Hong Kong, though with much inferior quality compared to those of the 19th century. We are uncertain when the creation of pith paper watercolours was discontinued, but we may guess that along with the prevalence of photography and new printing techniques, notably lithography, the functions and features of pith paper, including mass production, high quality with low cost, great portability, and depiction of exoticness, were gradually replaced by new products such as postcards produced with such technologies.

The collection of pith paper watercolours at CUHK is quite similar to the pith paper works I have seen before. In terms of themes, which mainly aim to gratify the westerners' interests and imaginations about China, topics include the production of Chinese plants such as tea and rice, which was of particular interest to the western traders and various boats scattered along the Pearl River, which were partly familiar to the western businessmen and sailors. Other themes related to social life include theatrical performances, religious activities, men and women with various characteristics, as well as flora and fauna in nature, all of which could be easily composed as series with rich contents. As for the frightening punishment of the Qing dynasty, it could especially arouse the curiosity of the westerners towards the East.

Some works collected by CUHK have been bound into albums, and the binding method also includes some notable details. In the 19th century, quality pith watercolours were sold in bound albums, usually of ten or twelve paintings, covered with brightly coloured locally-made brocade. The four edges of each pith were wrapped by silk or paper tapes to ensure the paper had enough room for shrinkage and expansion so that it would not be easily broken. To sell as an album like this not only provided protections for the fragile pith paper against the distant journey to the West, but also protected the watercolour paints from the sunlight. Therefore, many pith paper watercolours we see today could maintain the vivid colours for more than a hundred years, while those hung in frames and exposed to light or sunlight will inevitably lose their colours gradually.

All the above-mentioned knowledge about pith paper watercolours was from my British friend Mr. Ifan Williams.* Among all the exported handicrafts from Guangzhou, pith paper watercolours have long been the most easily overlooked items by researchers



我以上有關通草紙畫的知識，全部從英國友人伊凡·威廉斯 (Ifan Williams) 先生學得。^{*} 長期以來，在各種廣州外銷工藝品中，通草紙畫是最容易被研究者甚至藏家忽略的品種。威廉斯先生獨具慧眼，自 1970 年代收入第一套以花卉蝴蝶為題材的通草紙畫後，便對這種廣州製造的小畫片念念不忘。不諳中文的他，花了半生業餘的時間，跑遍歐美多家博物館、圖書館和畫廊，閱覽通草紙畫藏品，潛心研究，使我們得知通草紙畫遍布英國、法國、荷蘭、葡萄牙、意大利、奧地利、西班牙、瑞典、俄羅斯、美國、埃及，甚至愛沙尼亞等地的博物館和圖書館。此外，在古董市場和私人手中，也流通著數量不菲的通草紙畫。大量的通草紙畫流散海外，既與過去兩百多年外國人到中國通商旅遊的經歷有關，也是由於它入不了中國藝術研究界的法眼。自威廉斯先生在 2001 年捐獻了一批他私人的藏品給廣州博物館後，中國內地的公藏機構才擁有第一批通草紙畫，這種過去被認為其貌不揚的小畫片，才在中國人的世界得到青睞。

這種本屬「土產」的手信，19 世紀在廣州口岸商館區隨意擺售，輾轉流入歐美各國的尋常百姓家，部分變成公共藏品，部分散落在古董市場，近二十多年好些又回流到中國。如今，香港中文大學圖書館這批藏品得以複製出版，回復通草紙畫作為「禮物」的本色。如果讓我選一個人率先送出這份禮物的話，我會送給已晉耄耋之年的威廉斯先生，感謝他教曉我們細味通草紙畫，教曉我們感受兩百多年前無名畫師的獨運匠心。

小小蓮畫，敬希笑納，物輕情重，聊表寸心！

^{*} 有關威廉斯先生的經歷與研究，可參考中山大學歷史系、廣州博物館編：《西方人眼裡的中國情調：伊凡·威廉斯捐贈十九世紀廣州外銷通草紙水彩畫》（北京：中華書局，2001）；伊凡·威廉斯著、程美寶譯編：《廣州製作：歐美藏十九世紀中國通草紙畫》（廣州：嶺南美術出版社，2014）。

and collectors. Mr. Williams is so discerning that he has been absorbed in these little paintings from Guangzhou since he got his first collection of pith paper watercolours, featuring flowers and butterflies, in the 1970s. Despite a lack of knowledge of Chinese, he spent half his spare time visiting many museums, libraries and galleries around Europe and the United States, seeing collections of pith paper watercolours, and studying them with great effort, which led us to know that pith paper works can be found in museums and libraries in Britain, France, Netherlands, Portugal, Italy, Austria, Spain, Sweden, Russia, the United States, Egypt and many other places even in Estonia. In addition, a considerable number of pith paper watercolours are also circulating among the antique markets and individual collectors. The fact that many pith watercolours have been dispersed overseas is not only related to the experience of foreigners travelling to China for business and tourism in the past two hundred years, but also due to the underestimate of the art research field in China. It was not until 2001 when Mr. Williams donated some of his collections to the Guangzhou Museum that public institutions in mainland China have owned the first collection of pith watercolours. And since then, these little paintings which were considered ordinary and unimpressive in the past, have become prized in Chinese people's eyes.

The pith watercolours, previously regarded as local souvenirs, were casually sold in the hongs areas at the Guangzhou port in the 19th century. Later, they flowed into ordinary people's homes in Europe and the United States, part of which became public collections, and part of which were scattered around the antique markets. And in the recent twenty years, some have returned back to China. Today, the collections by CUHK Library have been reproduced and published, restoring the nature of pith paper watercolours as souvenirs. If I were to choose someone to send this gift to, I would send it to Mr. Williams, who is already in his nineties. I would like to thank him for teaching us to appreciate pith watercolours, as well as to admire the unique ingenuity of many unknown artists from more than two hundred years ago.

I sincerely hope that you will love this little pith watercolour. May this tiny gift represent my vast respect and gratitude to you.

* For Mr. Williams' experience and research, please refer to Department of History, Sun Yat-sen University and Guangzhou Museum (eds.), *Views from the West: Collection of Pith Paper Watercolours Donated by Mr Ifan Williams to the City of Guangzhou* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2001); and Ifan Williams, Ching May Bo (trans.), *Created in Canton: Chinese Export Watercolours on Pith* (Guangzhou: Lingnan Art Publishing House, 2014).

迄今所知，可以證據確鑿地斷定繪製年份的通草紙畫，最早不超過 19 世紀 20 年代。據《中國叢報》1835 年底的報導，在廣州商館區周圍，有 30 家畫室和商店出售外銷畫，其中有不少是畫在通草紙上的。牛津大學博德萊安圖書館藏有一批周呱 (Chow Kwa 音譯) 的通草紙畫作，有資料顯示他一直到 1885 年仍活躍於上海。據稱，另一位外銷畫師周百川 (Chou Pai Chuen 音譯) 19 世紀 90 年代在北京也有繪製通草紙畫。也有人指出，時至 20 世紀，在香港仍可買到在通草紙上繪製的賀卡，或以玻璃作蓋子的小盒裝載的通草紙畫，可見遲至 20 世紀初，香港仍有畫室繪製通草紙畫出售，但質量已遠遠不及 19 世紀的產品。我們不清楚通草紙畫是在什麼時候退出歷史舞台的，可以猜想的是，隨著攝影術和新式印刷術如石印的流行，通草紙畫的功能和特性 (批量生產、價廉物美、便於攜帶、刻畫異國風情)，已逐漸被新媒體製作的新產品如明信片所取代了。



中文大學這批通草紙畫藏品，與我見過的通草紙畫大致相同。在題材方面，主要為迎合西方人對中國事物的興趣與想像，其中包括：中國作物如茶葉和稻米的種植過程，這是來華貿易的西方商人尤感興趣的；在珠江上星羅棋布的各色船舶，這也是西方商人和水手既熟悉但又不完全了解的。至於其他社會生活的題材，如地方戲劇演出、各色男女人物，還有自然界的花鳥蟲魚，都能輕易組成內容豐富的系列；而令人毛骨悚然的各種清代刑罰，則尤能吸引西方人對東方世界獵奇的眼光。



中大這批藏品有不少是裝裱成冊的，這種裝裱方式也保存了一些值得注意的細節。19 世紀時，品質較佳的通草紙畫一般以 10 或 12 張裝訂成冊出售，並用上色彩鮮艷的也是本地生產的錦緞作封套，每張通草紙畫的四邊往往會圍以絲帶或紙帶，使紙張有一定收縮和膨脹的空間，不易斷裂。這種裝訂銷售的方式，不但為運往西方踏上征途的脆弱的通草紙增添一點保護，更能讓水彩顏料免受日照。今天我們還能看見的許多通草紙畫，也因此才得以保持百多年前亮麗的色彩，而那些放進鏡框懸掛在外並暴露於燈光或日光的畫作，則不免會逐漸失色。

