

Chinese Reverse Glass Paintings
from the Mei Lin Collection

梅林珍藏的中國玻璃畫

Reflected Beauty

鏡花薈萃



24.09.2021–30.01.2022

Foreword

前言

Chinese reverse glass paintings have rarely been displayed in museums and few studies have considered their compositional elements and iconographic themes. In the eighteenth century, they were primarily created for the export market and catered to the taste of western patrons in Europe and North America. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the production of reverse paintings became much more locally focused, with artists creating scenes filled with auspicious symbols and literary references that merchants sold mainly within China.

The subject matter of the current exhibition is the large and multifaceted phenomenon of the more indigenous paintings rendered in finely executed detail. Thanks to the fruitful collaboration with the Mei Lin Collection, we have been able to assemble a group of late Qing dynasty and early Republican period paintings. Some of these images are styled as mirrors and mounted as pocket mirrors or table screens that depict scenes from mythology or popular literature, auspicious objects or portraits of women and children, as well as ‘reflected beauties’ in both intimate and larger sizes.

中國反向玻璃畫鮮有在博物館展出，亦甚少重視其構圖和圖像主題。十八世紀時，玻璃畫主要為向歐美市場出口的外銷畫，符合西洋購藏人士之審美眼光。十九世紀和二十世紀初期，玻璃畫之創作生產面向本土市場，主要購藏人為中國商人，畫師繪製帶有吉祥寓意的場景及與中國文學息息相關的主題。

是次展覽從多個層次呈現這些刻畫細緻的中國本土玻璃畫。香港大學美術博物館感謝與梅林珍藏的寶貴合作機會，集合呈現一批晚晴和民國早期的玻璃畫精品。部分圖像以玻璃鏡、手執化妝鏡或屏風擺件等不同形式風格出現，描繪神話傳說和民間傳統故事、吉祥清供、婦女兒童肖像畫及美人肖像玻璃畫，尺寸各異。

是次展覽陳列這批專為中國市場創製的玻璃畫，主題內容豐富。十八世紀時，人

By introducing such diversity, the artworks provide a general overview of the themes represented for the Chinese market. While in the eighteenth century the pleasure of viewing a Canton harbour scene in London was typical for export trade paintings, in later centuries the cultural identity of the painted subjects took on greater significance, as an increasing number of Chinese—not simply the affluent merchant class of the eighteenth century—were well versed in the literary and musical references.

These portraits also focus on domestic scenes and the shifting standards of beauty, which can be viewed as historic records documenting Chinese civilisation at a time when the dynastic system had ended, and modernity characterised not just politics, but also sociocultural developments. These values give importance to a medium that bridges folk and fine art and highlights the paintings’ significance when viewed as exceptional documents offering rarely preserved insights into an increasingly urban lifestyle.

們在倫敦的家中透過外銷玻璃畫自如地欣賞遠在廣東港的佳景。數世紀後，除了十八世紀的富裕商人，愈來愈多中國民眾熟諳畫中的文學主題及相關戲劇內容和音樂，從而賦予這些玻璃畫更為豐富而深刻的文化身份。

此外玻璃畫聚焦家居場景和變化中的的審美標準。這些圖畫可被視作中國文明之歷史記載，從政治、文化和社會發展多個方向，見證皇朝政權結束後中國社會的現代性轉型。這些珍貴的視覺材料作為連接民間藝術和精緻藝術的媒介之意義從而變得尤為重要。

Scenes from Popular Literature

民間傳統故事

The colloquial character of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reverse glass paintings is exemplified in those scenes taken from mythology and popular literature. The clientele of these artworks were familiar with the references to the literary tales, dramatic performances and musical compositions.

Some of the commonly painted scenes, such as the *White Snake Stealing Medicinal Herbs*, existed in many versions in different renderings as both reverse glass paintings and popular prints, some with extended surroundings, additional details or a larger cast of characters. Other depictions show the Green Snake in the *Fight at Duanqiao Bridge* or refer to the story of *Taking a Boat Trip on West Lake*, all of which are episodes from the vernacular tale *The Legend of the White Snake*. Other paintings depict a *Fishing Scene*, *Women Playing Go*, *Xichun* and *Qingwen*, as well as other episodes and characters from the classic novel *Hongloumeng* ('The Dream of the Red Chamber'). Several other works illustrate scenes from Peking opera. Together, they represent a set of images that links directly to the literary and performing arts.

這些十九世紀與二十世紀初的反向玻璃畫取材自膾炙人口的民間傳統故事，描繪神話演義和通俗文學的場景。玻璃畫的購藏人熟知其中的傳說故事、戲劇內容和音樂。

反向玻璃畫和通俗版畫繪製常採用傳說故事之場景，並演繹出不同的版本。如「白蛇盜仙草」曾多次出現在玻璃畫和版畫的諸多版本中，繪製者時而延申故事場景，時而添加細節，亦會增加人物。其他場景如「青蛇斷橋之戰」和「遊西湖」均出自民間傳說《白蛇傳》。另有以《紅樓夢》故事為背景的玻璃畫描繪諸如「四美釣魚」、「女子圍棋對弈」、惜春和晴雯等場景和人物。其他玻璃畫作品則描繪京劇場景。這些玻璃畫集合呈現一系列與文學和表演藝術直接關聯的圖像。



Taking a boat trip on West Lake

Probably Hebei province, Northern China, ca. 1930

393 x 597 mm

Mei Lin Collection, B414

遊西湖

中國北方，河北省（傳），約 1930 年

393 x 597 毫米

梅林珍藏，B414

Auspicious Objects

吉祥清供

Reverse glass paintings, like classical Chinese paintings, regularly depict auspicious objects and symbols. Magpies are known as heralds of good fortune and peonies are representative of wealth and good luck. These and other images relate to the richness of the local pictorial language. Widely employed in gift-giving and holiday celebrations, the symbolism of the auspicious objects is found throughout Chinese culture.

These particular reverse paintings also regularly include lotus flowers and seedpods, along with other images that relate to Buddhism. Certain symbolic objects, such as bright yellow fruit or flowers resemble the moon and indicate the new beginnings and good fortune brought about by the Lunar New Year festival.

Painted flora and fauna are also indicative of nature's beauty, and many of the life-like depictions are reminiscent of the celebrated genre of Chinese bird-and-flower paintings. Due to the inherent difficulty of matching the finesse of ink paintings in the reverse glass format, it is often the subject matter and colour scheme of the vernacular style that most firmly embed these artefacts in everyday life and customs.

於玻璃平板背面反筆繪製的玻璃畫，類同傳統中國繪畫，常描繪象徵吉祥寓意的清雅供品。喜鵲寓意傳達喜訊，牡丹則象徵財富和如意好運。這些包含美好寓意的圖像與中國豐富多彩的地方性圖像語匯緊密相連。吉祥清供常用於佳禮餽贈和節日慶賀等場合，體現中國傳統文化。

這些反筆繪製的玻璃畫常包含蓮花、蓮蓬和其他與佛教相關的圖像。明亮的黃色花果猶如皎潔之月，於慶賀農曆新年的場景，寓意新的起點和好運。

玻璃畫繪製的動植物題材生動展現自然之美，使人聯想到著名的傳統中國花鳥畫。由於玻璃畫由反筆起稿繪製而成，難以模仿水墨畫細緻精湛的筆墨，但其主題內容及用色具有民間地方特色，使玻璃畫成為參與人們日常生活和民間習俗的重要文物。



Flowers and scholars' objects

China, late Qing dynasty

348 x 495 mm

Mei Lin Collection, B124

鮮花及學士書齋清供

中國，晚清

348 x 495 毫米

梅林珍藏，B124

Portraits of Women and Children

婦女兒童肖像

Reverse glass paintings depicting women with children are endearing and symbolic images that celebrate the family and the continuity of generations within a clan.

Stylistically many of these paintings also reveal much about the rapidly changing fashions of early twentieth-century China. Women are shown wearing traditional dresses while carrying modern, western-style handbags. They also portray natural feet, even though foot-binding was still practiced at the time. Here, the naturalistic style and western perspective of the contemporary calendar illustration appear to have been models for this genre of glass painting.

Some paintings commemorate particular events, such as weddings or other family celebrations. Larger scenes may include a western perspective, a stylistic quality rarely seen in early compositions. These examples testify to the varied influences in local Chinese glass painting workshops and to the fashions—in content, style and technique—that individual artists were able to express.

這些以婦女和兒童肖像為主題的玻璃畫深受人們喜愛，傳達對和睦家庭生活與家族血脈延續、薪火相傳之美好嚮往。

這些玻璃畫亦揭示中國二十世紀初演變迅速的服飾文化。婦女穿著傳統服裝，攜現代的西式手袋。亦可見自然天足，雖然當時仍有婦女纏足。這類玻璃畫的婦女形象以當時流行的月份牌女郎作模特原型。

玻璃畫亦會紀念特別的場合，如婚禮和其他家庭生活之節慶場景。在描繪大型場景時，畫師或採以西式透視技法，這在更早的玻璃畫構圖中極為罕見。足見畫師透過內容、風格和技巧，對中國本土玻璃畫作坊之發展和創作方式產生多樣影響。



Mother and children

Probably Shandong province, China,
Republican period
392 x 286 mm
Mei Lin Collection, C087

母親與孩童

中國山東省（傳）
民國
392 x 286 毫米
梅林珍藏，C087

Reflected Beauties

美人畫

From the early years of the Republican period, commercial artists created thousands of colourful poster designs that formed an essential part of modern life in the city. Conceived as advertisements of fashionable women offering goods, these posters, known as *yuefenpai* ('posters of months'), were a blend of western commercial posters and Chinese paintings of beautiful women known as *meiren hua*. They were sold cheaply as calendars or given away as gifts during the Lunar New Year.

In subject matter they focus on the beauty of the female sitter while also integrating elements that form the contents of the other genres in the glass paintings, including poems rendered in calligraphy, or flowers and other symbolic objects representative of auspicious values. The forms of fashionable dress are undeniably important, including the side-slit top decorated with an endless knot pattern or the 'civilized new dress' (*wenming xinzhuang*) that signified the modern lifestyle of a new generation of women in post-imperial China. These attributes are often combined with seductive poses and tightly fitted cheongsams to exemplify and accentuate youthful beauty and alluring figures.

自民國早期，商業藝術家們繪製上千幅彩色海報設計，構成現代都市生活一道瑰麗的風景。月份牌作廣告用途，常繪有扮相時髦的女郎展示商品，實為西式商業海報設計與中國美人畫的結合。月份牌以掛歷形式出售，價格低廉，或作為慶賀農曆新年的贈禮。

這些玻璃畫著重展現女性之美，同時融入其他內容素材，如詩詞書法作品、鮮花或其他吉祥清供器物。對時髦服飾的多樣演繹尤為重要，譬如飾以盤扣、斜側開襟的上裝，以及代表後帝制時期中國新時代女性現代生活的「文明新裝」。美人玻璃畫的特點還包括描繪女性誘人的婀娜姿態和緊身長衫（旗袍），烘托青春佳麗的迷人身姿。



Seated woman with fan
China, late Qing dynasty
653 x 449 mm
HKU.P.2020.2495

執扇女子坐像
中國，晚清
653 x 449 毫米
HKU.P.2020.2495

香港大學美術博物館

星期二至六 上午九時三十分至下午六時；

星期日 下午一時至六時

星期一、大學及公眾假期休息

免費入場

地址：香港薄扶林般咸道九十號徐展堂樓一樓

電話：2241 5500

University Museum and Art Gallery

The University of Hong Kong

Tue–Sat 9:30 am to 6:00 pm;

Sun 1:00 pm to 6:00 pm

Closed on Mondays, University and Public Holidays

Free Admission

Address: 1/F T.T. Tsui Building, 90 Bonham Road, Pokfulam, Hong Kong

Tel: 2241 5500

www.umag.hku.hk

Organised by 主辦

Supported by 支持



香港大學美術博物館
University Museum and Art Gallery
The University of Hong Kong

HKUMS 30th
Endowment Fund



ENDOWMENT FUNDS FOR
MUSIC & FINE ARTS