

For Immediate Release

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Contact: Sara Fox

212.636.2680

sfox@christies.com

CHRISTIE'S TO OFFER THE FIRST EVER AUCTION IN THE U.S. DEVOTED TO CHINESE TEXTILES



An exceptionally rare Imperial noblewoman's
kesi winter surcoat, Yongzheng/Qianlong (1723-1795)
Estimate: \$250,000-350,000

The Imperial Wardrobe:

Fine Chinese Costume and Textiles from the Linda Wrigglesworth Collection

March 19, 2008

New York – On March 19th Christie's will be offering a superb single owner sale of Chinese textiles from the collection of Linda Wrigglesworth, a renowned dealer and collector in Chinese textiles whose dedication and passion contributed immensely to developing the Chinese textiles field into the buoyant collecting category it is today, especially in the area of Qing dynasty material (1644-

1911). The upcoming sale at Christie's New York will be the first single owner auction in the West entirely devoted to Chinese textiles and will consist of approximately 150 lots with an expected value of US\$3.3 – 4.6 million. Several of the treasures that will be included in the sale have been published in Ms. Wrigglesworth's seminal publication, *Imperial Wardrobe*.

One of the sale's main features is that it will demonstrate the opulence and diversity of Qing costume and accessories in an unprecedented way. The section devoted to Imperial Court wear will be led by an extremely rare



Imperial yellow twelve-symbol *kesi* dragon robe for an Emperor, *jifu*, Xianfeng period (1821-1850) (*illustrated left*, estimate: US\$300,000-500,000). Entirely woven in fine silk in the *kesi*, or 'split weave' technique – the most challenging and intricate of all weaving procedures – this robe displays nine gold dragons and the twelve symbols of Imperial authority on an Imperial yellow ground. The

ancient twelve symbols of authority represented the emperor's sacrificial duties, his powers of judgement and punishment and the elements of Chinese cosmology. The robe's classic design shows nine symmetrically placed five-clawed Imperial dragons writhing amidst clouds and longevity symbols above water and wave motifs. Only emperors, empresses, and Imperial consorts of the highest degree were permitted to wear Imperial yellow and as this robe depicts the twelve symbols which could only be worn by members of the Imperial family, it was clearly made for an emperor.

Complimenting this rare example is a stunning woman's silk gauze summer surcoat, *long gua* (*illustrated right*, estimate: US\$200,000-250,000), probably worn by a first rank Imperial consort. Manchu women wore these robes for formal occasions in the presence of the emperor and this appears to be the only outer garment dating from the 18th century to have ever been offered at auction. The surcoat is sumptuously embroidered with eight dragon roundels and follows quite closely the designs specified by the Imperial court in the *Huangchao Liqi Tushu* regulations. The original tailoring shows the classic 18th century form, and the gold dragon roundels are a striking contrast to the plain dark blue silk ground.



Equally rare is an exceptionally finely woven *kesi* silk tapestry, Imperial noblewoman's sleeveless front-opening formal court vest, *chaogua*, Daoguang period (1821-1850) (*illustrated left*, estimate: US\$120,000-150,000). This design of court vest, with seven dragons, does not strictly conform to those specified in court dress laws, however, it is very close to those restricted to

use by Imperial princesses of the highest two ranks. Examples of Court vests of this type rarely survive. Also included is a beautiful example of an 18th century Imperial dragon robe of pale chocolate brown silk gauze embroidered in a counted stitch technique with colored silk floss and gold-wrapped threads (*illustrated right*, estimate: US\$100,000–150,000). The chestnut, or chocolate color, indicates that the wearer was a member of the Imperial clan. Chestnut was considered one of the five shades of Imperial yellow as seen in the 1759 Imperial regulations. A rare 19th century *kesi* dragon robe woven with three tones of gold and silver threads with elegant accents of green and coral (estimate: US\$70,000–90,000) and a rare ceremonial musician's robe worked in bold colors of magenta and blue (estimate: US\$150,000–180,000) are also in this group – both robes are published in *Imperial Wardrobe*, pls. 144 and 147–48.



A section on informal Court wear will be highlighted by a delicate fur-lined *kesi* winter surcoat for an Imperial noblewoman (estimate: US\$250,000–350,000). Woven with an elegant design of floral roundels and butterflies above a hem of wind-tossed waves from which emerge peach sprays symbolizing immortality, this robe is a masterpiece of 18th century woven silk technique, and is in pristine condition. Other examples include a 19th century Manchu noblewoman's summer semi-formal robe of a light aubergine color embroidered with eight symmetrically placed floral roundels of lotus (*illustrated left*, estimate: US\$100,000–150,000), and a beautiful cornflower-blue silk Manchu woman's full-length vest, worked with auspicious motifs of gold double gourds symbolizing fertility (*illustrated right*, estimate: US\$15,000–18,000).



A third section of the sale focuses on regalia worn by members of the Court to signify status, including rank badges, court necklaces, hats and hat ornaments. Of note is the empress's crown decorated with pearl-studded phoenixes (*illustrated left*, estimate: US\$4,000 – 6,000), made for the 1987 film, *The Last Emperor*, directed by Bernard Bertolucci. Linda Wrigglesworth was a consultant and an advisor to the filmmaker and helped design and create the breathtaking outfits that appear in the film. Not to be missed are more decorative items including 18th and 19th century roundels from robes as well as charming purses, fan cases and embroidered shoes (estimates ranging from US\$800–1,200 to



US\$15,000-18,000). A set of eight Imperial dragon roundels, late 19th century, possibly made for a surcoat worn by the Longyu Empress, consort of the Guangxu emperor (estimate: US\$40,000-60,000) and a lovely Imperial yellow double gourd purse finely embroidered with three rams (estimate: US\$12,000-18,000) are included in this group.



Apart from formal and informal costume, there are a number of important panels in the sale, including a rare embroidered pale blue silk rock and flower panel, Qianlong period (1736-1795) (*illustrated left*, estimate: US\$60,000-80,000). The piece is exquisitely embroidered with flowering branches growing beside layered rockwork, and certainly would have graced an Imperial bed chamber. Even rarer is a set of nine Imperial yellow silk panels exquisitely embroidered with an idyllic scene of female immortals probably residing in the fabled Kunlun Mountains where it is said that the peaches of immortality grow (*detail illustrated right*, estimate: US\$300,000-500,000). The condition of these panels is superb, with the details picked out in bright colors against a rich golden yellow ground. It is likely that these panels were originally set into a small floor screen that would have graced an Imperial chamber.



Also of note is the Qing general's flying tiger banner, Kangxi period (*illustrated left*, estimate: US\$150,000-180,000), which displays a muscular and defiant, yet playful tiger raising his forelegs with spotted wings against a rust ground. This type of banner is illustrated in the 1759 sumptuary regulations, *Ceremonial Paraphernalia of the Imperial Court*. Formal court portraits of the 18th century period show the Kangxi emperor (1662-1722) on tour in the southern provinces, crossing the Yangtze River with the tiger banner flying on the stern of the flotilla carrying the emperor.

In conjunction with the sale there will be a one-day symposium on Chinese Textiles entitled "You Are What You Wear: Society, Gender and Ethnicity in Qing China" to be held on Saturday March 15th at Christie's New York Rockefeller Center.

Auction:

The Imperial Wardrobe: Fine Chinese Costume and Textiles

March 19

From the Linda Wrigglesworth Collection

Viewing: Christie's Galleries at Rockefeller Center

March 14 - 18



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*Estimates do not include buyer's premium

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