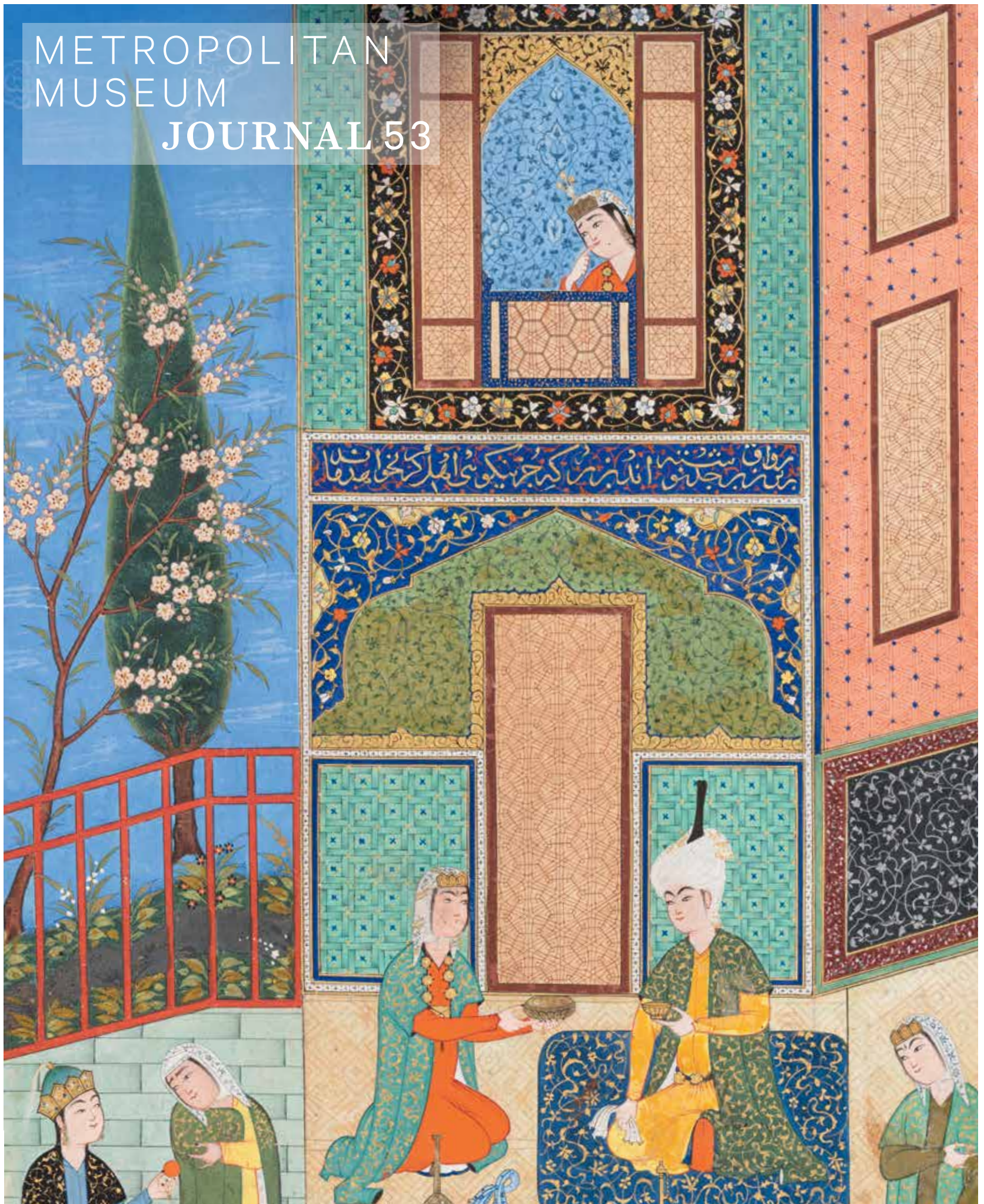


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Illustration on p. 2: Ruan Zude (Chinese, 16th or early 17th century), Ming dynasty (1368–1644). *Portrait of the Artist's Great-Granduncle Yizhai at the Age of Eighty-Five*, 1561 or 1621. See fig. 1, p. 48.

Opposite: Attic red-figure bell-krater attributed to the Persephone Painter. Greek, ca. 440 B.C. Terracotta, H. 16½ in. (41 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1928 (28.57.23)

For Joan Mertens

IN HONOR OF HER YEARS OF DEDICATION TO THIS PUBLICATION
AND HER EXEMPLARY ERUDITION, GENEROSITY, AND WIT



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ABBREVIATIONS

MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art
MMAB *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*

MMJ *Metropolitan Museum Journal*

Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.

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QUINCY NGAN

The Significance of Azurite Blue in Two Ming Dynasty Birthday Portraits

A pair of seated portraits from the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644) in The Metropolitan Museum of Art depicts an elderly husband and wife wearing similar garments rendered in layers of azurite blue (figs. 1, 2). An inscription on the male portrait identifies the artist as Ruan Zude, the sitter's great-grandnephew, and asserts that the work was created for the subject's eighty-fifth birthday in either 1561 or 1621.¹ The robes in both paintings resemble those seen in contemporaneous portraits of Ming dynasty officials and match descriptions of the garments such officials were legally compelled to wear during their leisure time.² Ruan's use of azurite to depict his relatives' robes not only offers a glimpse into the materiality of this natural mineral pigment but also prompts an investigation into a trend then current among ordinary Chinese citizens for adopting the sartorial styles of ranked officials. To decipher the relationship

fig. 1 Ruan Zude (Chinese, 16th or early 17th century). Ming dynasty (1368–1644). *Portrait of the Artist's Great-Granduncle Yizhai at the Age of Eighty-Five*, 1561 or 1621. Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk, image 61¾ × 37¾ in. (156.8 × 96.2 cm). Inscribed at upper left are the title, date (*xinyou* [1561 or 1621]), and artist's seal. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Seymour Fund, 1959 (59.49.1)

fig. 2 Ruan Zude. *Portrait of an Old Lady*, 1561 or 1621. Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk, image 61¼ × 37½ in. (156.8 × 96.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Seymour Fund, 1959 (59.49.2)





GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS' ROBES IN THE LATE MING DYNASTY

The couple portrayed in the Metropolitan Museum's paintings wear robes resembling *zhong jing fu* (the robe of loyalty and [self-reflection] in quietude), a garment that government officials were required to wear during their leisure time (fig. 3). In the portraits, ink-rendered cloud patterns can be seen through the azurite pigment. A badge with crane patterns adorns the woman's robe, signifying a government position of the first and highest rank.⁵ The man's waist is encircled by a blue belt, its two hanging ends nearly reaching the hem of his robe. According to an imperial edict issued in 1527 and recorded in *Da Ming hui dian* (The collected statutes of the Ming dynasty) in 1587, government officials were to wear casual attire made of

deep blue (*shenqing*) gauze woven from ramie threads. The robes of officials in the first to the third ranks should have cloud patterns. The robes of other officials should have no pattern at all and should be trimmed in a deeper blue. Both the front and back of the robes should carry a badge with an animal motif indicating the official's rank. The inner garment should be jade-colored. Following ancient custom, the belt has no pattern; its exterior should be blue, and its trim, green. Blue shoes with blue-green ropes and white socks should be worn.⁶

between azurite and clothing in the Museum's two portraits, this article explores the production and consumption of government officials' robes in the Ming era. The portraits' celebratory function occasions a consideration of birthday paintings, a distinct genre in Chinese art comprising works customarily given as gifts to the elderly on their birthdays. In addition, an examination of the symbolism of azurite, one of the most expensive and versatile pigments in traditional China, deepens our understanding of one of the least studied subjects in Chinese painting: color.³

While the present study relies heavily on visual evidence from paintings and artifacts, a wide range of textual material helps to explain the complex relationships of azurite, birthday paintings, and the robes of government officials. Sumptuary laws of the late Ming dynasty are one such resource. *Jin Ping Mei* (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*), an early seventeenth-century novel famous for its explicit eroticism and detailed descriptions of material culture—notably, clothing—in the late Ming dynasty, is another.⁴ Finally, contemporaneous writings about the birthday-painting genre, together with Ming records reflecting the prized status of azurite, have proved invaluable.

During the Ming dynasty, men and women of all classes—aristocrats and eunuchs to ordinary citizens—were known to wear garments unsuited to their rank and social status.⁷ *Zhong jing fu* was intended to counter this practice, specifically among government officials who dressed in expensive, ostentatious clothing during their free time, competing with one another and dishonoring their respected offices.⁸ Issued to government officials, the edict requiring the wearing of *zhong jing fu*, which was modeled on ancient ceremonial attire, criticizes the absence of rules regulating the casual dress of government officials.⁹ It reads, in part: "Early emperors of the Ming dynasty designated different court and ritual robes to register different ranks of government officials. . . . Lately, clothing is becoming strange. There is no distinction between high and low. How can this stabilize the heart of people under heaven?"¹⁰ The decree was clearly intended to differentiate government officials from civilians and to identify their ranks at a time when people of all classes were eagerly following the latest fashions, often overstepping social boundaries in the process.¹¹

The design of the new robe soon became known to the public. Eight months after the edict was issued,

fig. 3 Illustration showing robe known as *zhong jing fu*. From Li Dongyang et al., *Da Ming huidian* (1964 ed., p. 1065)

fig. 4 Illustration showing kerchief worn by Ming dynasty scholars (1368–1644). From Wang Qi, *Sancai tuhui* (1988 ed., p. 1502)



Prince Zhu Chongrang submitted a proposed amendment to Emperor Jiajing (1507–1567; r. 1521–67), twelfth emperor of the Ming dynasty, requesting that the decree be amended. The prince observed that Jiajing had awarded certain members of the royal family the right to wear *zhong jing fu*, and he pointed out that royal family members were not government officials.¹² He asked that more royals be allowed to wear the robe and suggested that ornaments be added to their hats to distinguish them. The emperor acceded, and Zhu's suggestions became law. In addition, and more importantly, Jiajing authorized generals and teachers of Confucian doctrine to wear the robe, effectively exposing not only the elite but a large portion of the population to the new design.¹³ Clearly, the emperor did not foresee the adverse repercussions these

new measures would have. By authorizing several segments of the population to wear *zhong jing fu* and disseminating the garment's design, the emperor was in fact introducing a new mark of social status. This aspect of *zhong jing fu* was likely what made the robe most appealing to Ruan Zude and his elderly sitters.

Tellingly, not all the sartorial elements in the Museum's birthday portraits conform to the regulated design of the attire. The man's robe, for example, lacks a rank badge, and his shoes are red, not blue. Furthermore, his hat—a black kerchief with back flap—is of the informal sort worn by commoners and scholars (fig. 4).¹⁴ Finally, neither his nor his wife's robe is trimmed at the sleeves.

Although women were barred from holding government positions, the chief wife (*mingfu*) of a government official was authorized to wear the robe and badge associated with her husband's rank. In the early Hongwu era (1368–98), state law required the ceremonial robe of a *mingfu* to be red and embroidered with a double-pheasant pattern. Beginning in the twenty-fourth year of the Hongwu era (1391), the formal robes of a *mingfu* were either blue or red and embroidered with a bird pattern that was associated with her husband's rank.¹⁵ The official daily attire (*changfu*) of a *mingfu* corresponded to the design of her husband's robe, the color of which was determined by rank.¹⁶ Since the robe in the woman's portrait is blue and features a cloud pattern, it is *zhong jing fu*. However, her belt, worn below the badge, is mismatched: it was a component of an official's working garb (*gongfu*).¹⁷ The couples' eclectic attire and its nonconformity with state law make it clear that the sitters are not a government official and a *mingfu*.

The trend for wearing *zhong jing fu* is captured by the poet, scholar, and politician Wang Shizhen (1526–1590) in *Gu bu gu lu* (*About a Goblet Not Being a Goblet*), a treatise critical of mores that were perceived to be disrupting social norms:¹⁸

Those rich families who use money to buy government positions—their children do not know a thing. They speak like babies. They often wear the purple-yang kerchief and the robe of government officials' casual attire (*Zhong jing fu*). They walk carrying scrolls inscribed with poems and letters under their arms. All call themselves "Yulin" (Li Panlong, 1514–1570) and "Boyu" (Wang Daokun, 1525–1593). And when one asks for more details, it turns out that they have never met Li or Wang.¹⁹

Zhong jing fu was worn, then, not just by government officials and authorized others but by young men whose wealthy fathers had bought government



fig. 5 *Ximen Foolishly Presents His New Wife, Mistress Ping, to His Worthless and Bibulous Guests* from the album of illustrations to *Jin Ping Mei* (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*), late 17th century. Chinese, Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Album leaf; ink and color on silk, 15% × 12% in. (39 × 31.4 cm). Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Purchase, the Mrs. Kenneth A. Spencer Fund (F80-10/4)

positions for themselves.²⁰ They wore the robe with ill-assorted garments, such as the purple-*yang* kerchief, recalling the husband's head covering in the Museum's portrait. It is reported in *Ming shilu* (Veritable records of the Ming dynasty) that military officials under the emperor Yingzong (1427–1464; r. 1435–49, 1457–64), sixth and eighth emperor of the Ming dynasty, failed to follow the rules governing their attire; they wore garments with patterns (*huayang*) unsuited to their rank and adopted sleeve and headgear designs from foreigners.²¹ The 1527 edict announcing the design of *zhongjing fu* decried the fact that the python-dragon (*manglong*) pattern, which the emperor Jiajing had awarded to government officials who had made exceptional contributions to the state, was seen on women's robes.²² Examples such as this compare to the hybrid assortment of official garments in the Museum's birthday portraits. Judging from the elderly couple's clothing, the sitters shared their contemporaries' taste for luxury.

Late Ming texts reveal that women of lower status, such as prostitutes and wives of officials' retainers, were among those who wore badges on their robes.²³ The scholar Zhang Jinlan points out that this violation of protocol is parodied several times in the novel *The Plum in the Golden Vase*. In one instance, a wife of the main character desires a robe adorned with a badge showing the mythical creature Qilin even though the motif is reserved for princes and sons-in-law of the emperor.²⁴ A seventeenth-century illustrator of *The Plum in the Golden Vase* heightened the book's satirical edge by departing slightly from the description of a wedding scene in which the bride of the vain, boorish protagonist is said to wear "a full-sleeved robe of scarlet variegated silk."²⁵ Rather than adhering strictly to the text, the illustration shows the bride dressed in a government official's red robe, complete with a badge (fig. 5). This intentional visual discrepancy serves to underscore the class tension parodied in the novel and spotlights women's role in provoking it.²⁶ As noted by the late Ming author Ye Mengzhu, clothing worn by women in the private inner chambers of their households could not be regulated by law.²⁷ This might explain why women who were not authorized to wear robes with badges were more likely than their male counterparts to do so and why, in the Museum's birthday portraits, the wife's robe, but not the husband's, is adorned with a badge.

While it was technically illegal to wear robes unsuited to one's status, in reality, the sumptuary laws were toothless. Recurring criticism by literati and government officials indicates that the practice was pervasive.²⁸ In the late Ming period, the scholar and critic Shen Defu (1578–1642) reported that relatives of the emperor, eunuchs, and wives and daughters of the educated dressed in a manner inconsistent with their social positions when traveling and meeting with others. Senior government officials were often indifferent to such behavior.²⁹ Customs that defied sumptuary laws were widespread at the time and thus invited little opposition. Wedding ceremonies of ordinary civilians, for example, were modeled on those of government officials. According to the *Ming shi* (History of the Ming dynasty), composed in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), grooms were permitted to wear garments resembling the robes of government officials of the ninth rank. They could also choose to wear the daily attire (*changfu*) worn by all officials.³⁰ It is certainly conceivable that ordinary men and women who married during the late Ming dynasty might have worn robes similar to those of government officials

fig. 6 Imperial Court overvest, 1595. Chinese, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), reign of Emperor Wanli (1572–1620). Silk satin embroidered in canvas stitch and satin stitch, and overembroidered in silver and gold couching. Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Museum purchase, City Arts Trust Fund (1990.214)

on other celebratory occasions—such as birthdays—as well.

The seventeenth-century scholar Ye Mengzhu observed that magnates “took pride in wearing clothing designed to resemble the garb of government officials. Those who could not afford to do so were ashamed of themselves. Even the moderately rich would spend most of the wealth they had accumulated during the year on such clothing.”³¹ Ye adds that by the Chongzhen period (1611–44), the taste for extravagance had become ubiquitous.³² Magnates would have found *zhong jing fu* particularly appealing: the robe not only suggested the prestige of high office but also advertised the wearer’s ability to afford the luxurious, elegant fabric from which it was made.

Weaving ramie threads, a material often used in the clothes of government officials and the imperial

family, into gauze was a complicated, labor-intensive process.³³ According to *Tian gong kai wu* (The exploitation of the works of nature), gauze could be woven only on a treadle loom.³⁴ To produce gauze with patterns, one worker was needed to operate the figure tower at the top of the loom while another attended to the drawer board and rigid rods. Frequent mention is made in *Da Ming hui dian* of gauze woven from ramie threads. These garments were costly, as the Ming official Wang Qiao informed his son, who had just assumed a government post. The elder Wang advised the younger to reuse the robes woven of red ramie threads that he himself had worn.³⁵

Through the ages, delicate ramie fabric has stirred the imagination of poets. A poem in *Gu Yuefu* (Six Dynasties poems) declares plain white ramie to be as precious as the moon and as light as a silver-colored cloud.³⁶ The Song poet Dai Fugu (1167–1248) compares the textile’s weft and warp to clouds and jade, respectively. For Dai, the fabric is as clear as ice.³⁷ It is easy to imagine how pleased the sitters in the Museum’s birthday portraits would have been to see themselves depicted wearing this marvelous material. Their robes, however, were an emblem of the social tensions that roiled the late Ming dynasty. As the upstanding civil servant Lü Kun (1536–1618) lamented, “Nowadays, merchants, laborers, and farmers all dress like the royal family, eunuchs, and government officials.”³⁸

PORTRAITS AS BIRTHDAY GIFTS

In Ruan Zude’s day, gifts of clothing figured prominently in birthday celebrations. A garment made in 1595, probably for the fiftieth birthday of Empress Dowager Li (1544–1614), is an opulent example (fig. 6).³⁹ Another is described in *Sui shi yi wen* (The lost text from the history of the Sui dynasty), a late Ming picaresque novel by Yuan Yuling.⁴⁰ In the narrative, the protagonist is instructed by his master to send numerous birthday gifts to the duke of Yue. Among them, ten garments of the highest quality, in five colors and with gold threads, must be made to order—a task that requires considerable time. Nonetheless, the master insists that the rest of the gifts, including a birthday scroll painting, not be sent without these custom-made articles of clothing, indicating their importance. Clothing and paintings were quintessential birthday gifts for the rich and powerful; that such presents were among those chosen for the duke is not surprising.⁴¹ The Museum’s portraits, showing the sitters in costly robes, are thus indexical of not one but two kinds of birthday gifts that were popular at the time.





fig. 7 Detail of Portrait of the Artist's Great-Granduncle Yizhai at the Age of Eighty-Five (fig. 1) showing swastika pattern incorporated into an interlocking H pattern on the sleeve of the sitter's inner garment

fig. 8 Line drawing of imperial ceremonial robe (detail). Chinese, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), reign of Emperor Wanli (1572–1620). Gold threads, peacock feathers, overall 53 1/8 x 92 1/8 in. (135 x 234 cm). Dingling Museum, Beijing

fig. 9a, b Textile patterns of peonies and chrysanthemums depicted in (a) Portrait of the Artist's Great-Granduncle Yizhai at the Age of Eighty-Five (fig. 1) and (b) Portrait of an Old Lady (fig. 2)

The term *shòutu* (birthday painting), which appears in Ruan's inscription on the husband's portrait, denotes a time-honored painting category with a great variety of themes.⁴² Birthday paintings recorded in *Xuanhe huapu* (Xuanhe painting catalogue), the twelfth-century inventory of the painting collection of Emperor Huizong (1082–1135; r. 1100–26), the eighth emperor of the Song dynasty, include hanging scrolls inscribed with auspicious characters—*shòu* (longevity), *fu* (blessing)—and phrases. The inventory also lists textiles embroidered with cypress trees (evergreens, symbols of longevity) and figures representing the eight immortals in Chinese folklore, the King Father of the East, and the Queen Mother of the West.⁴³ Paintings with titles similar to those recorded in the Xuanhe catalogue appear in the sixteenth-century *Tianshui bingshan lu* (Record of heavenly water and ice mountains), an inventory of the confiscated property of the government official Yan Song.⁴⁴

Although the Museum's portraits do not contain such easily recognizable symbols of longevity, subtle pictorial elements show that they are birthday gifts. The left sleeve of the husband's robe falls back to reveal an inner garment with a whirling swastika pattern incorporated into an interlocking H pattern (fig. 7).⁴⁵ *Wan*, the Chinese word for "swastika," is a homophone of "ten thousand." A ceremonial robe from the tomb of Emperor Wanli features vertical columns of repeat-pattern embroidery in which swastikas appear above the character *shòu* (fig. 8). This pairing,

which also occurs in the husband's portrait, forms a rebus denoting the greeting *wanshou* ("ten thousand [years of] longevity").⁴⁶ Next to the patterned inner garment, the sitter's hand emerges to grasp the belt. "Hand" in Chinese is *shǒu*, which sounds similar to "longevity" (*shòu*). Thus, it would seem that Ruan Zude used the pattern on the inner garment to imply "ten thousand [years of] longevity," indicating that the portrait is a birthday painting.

Other patterns, too, hint at the paintings' auspicious function. For instance, the couple sit on chairs covered with a textile patterned with blossoming peonies against a background of meandering vines (fig. 9a, b). In Chinese culture, peonies symbolize nobility and wealth.⁴⁷ Chrysanthemums, long-lasting flowers often paired with peonies in Ming textiles, also appear in the design.⁴⁸ *Ju*, the Chinese character for chrysanthemum, is pronounced like *zhu*, meaning "to express good wishes"; thus, the pairing of chrysanthemums and peonies may have an auspicious meaning that resonates with the themes of wealth and birthday celebration.⁴⁹

The Immortal Zhang Guolao, a fifteenth-century painting with motifs related to longevity and birthdays, features a deity in a blue robe colored with azurite, like the robes in the Museum's portraits (fig. 10). Now in the National Palace Museum in Taipei, the work features the immortal Zhang under a robust tree that has sprung from a mountain cliff.⁵⁰ More than a dozen peaches, symbols of immortality, hang from the branches that

fig. 10 Chinese, Ming dynasty (1368–1644). *The Immortal Zhang Guolao*, 15th century. Hanging scroll; ink and colors on silk, 72¾ × 41 in. (183.8 × 104.1 cm). The Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei



bend down toward the immortal. Interestingly, Zhang's right hand is disproportionately large. This motif reinforces the painting's subject matter: the Chinese word for *hand*, as mentioned above, sounds similar to the word for *longevity*. A crane, a bird often associated with immortals in traditional Chinese culture, is depicted amid the bamboo stalks, its head turned to the right, toward the deity.⁵¹ The trim of Zhang's outer garment is patterned with cranes and clouds. Importantly, the badge on the wife's robe in the Metropolitan Museum's portrait also bears a crane motif (see fig. 2). While such a badge is properly associated with government officials of the first rank, the crane is also associated with immortals and is therefore an auspicious motif for a birthday painting, as demonstrated in *The Immortal Zhang Guolao*.⁵² Thus, the crane in the wife's portrait can be understood as an allusion to her birthday.

Few inscribed birthday portraits have come down to us from the Ming dynasty, making the Museum's

male portrait exceptionally rare. However, many of the texts (sometimes known as "prefaces") inscribed on those portraits were collected and published in their day and have survived to provide important insights into the Museum's paintings. Although the published inscriptions were written by literati, and although Ruan Zude and his sitters apparently were not members of the elite class, there are good reasons for relating the published prefaces to the Museum's portraits. Modern scholars agree that during the second half of the Ming dynasty, social boundaries eroded to such an extent that people of lower social standing could well have adopted the gift-giving etiquette of the upper class.⁵³

The Museum's portraits belong to the tradition in which an elderly woman's birthday was celebrated together with her husband's. In Ruan's time, prefaces to *shuang shou tu* (double birthday paintings) were composed and inscribed by members of the learned elite on the front of paintings. Subsequently published in anthologies, the texts were a literary genre unto themselves. The prefaces indicate that most double birthday paintings were portraits. A richly informative example is the politician and scholar Qiu Jun's preface to a series of poems inscribed on a pair of birthday paintings for a Mr. Wang, from Lujiang. Qiu reports that Wang is eighty years old and that his wife is sixty.⁵⁴ The husband's birthday was on the twenty-seventh day of the sixth month, whereas his wife's was in the twelfth month. Although their birthdays were six months apart, the wife's portrait was made when their son commissioned a portrait for his father's birthday. Qiu observes that it was rare for a son to be able to celebrate the birthdays of his elderly parents together, and that it was a priceless occasion in this case because of the couple's long shared experience. Before being presented to the son's parents, the portraits were circulated among his friends, who inscribed poems dedicated to each recipient on the front of the paintings. Qiu anticipates that Wang will feel comforted when he sees the magnificent paintings, with their elegant, caring poems, and when he senses the filial piety of his son.⁵⁵ In another preface, this one for a double birthday painting, the government official Wang Shunmin (d. 1507) advises an elderly couple to "play" (*wan*) with their portrait and have a singer chant the poems inscribed on the work.⁵⁶

Descriptions of clothing worn by sitters in double birthday paintings have not come down to us, yet the celebratory nature of the genre suggests that couples would have been depicted in their finest garments. Descriptions of birthday portraits with a single sitter



have survived, however, and may be presumed to shed light on the genre as a whole. One such description was left by Ni Qian, a government official, who was asked to write a preface on a birthday painting portraying their mutual friend Zhang Yiyun. When shown Zhang's portrait, Ni saw that the subject was clearly a man of virtue: he was depicted wearing a tall hat and ample robe, seated in a grove of bamboo, reading the classics.⁵⁷ Zhang's birthday portrait, like others we know only through written descriptions, presented an idealized image of its subject. It would seem reasonable, therefore, for Ruan Zude to have idealized the appearance of his great-granduncle and his wife, depicting them dressed in luxurious *zhong jing fu*. The couple may even have owned such robes and worn them at their birthday celebration.

THE SYMBOLISM OF AZURITE IN THE TWO PORTRAITS

Although the Museum's portraits have not been analyzed scientifically, it is probable that the blue pigment present in the two birthday portraits is azurite (*shiqing*—literally, “stone blue”). The material is unevenly applied. Particles of the pigment, both fine and coarse and with no obvious amalgamation of other colors, are dispersed across the robes. This granular substance could not be the plant dye indigo, which would have been absorbed more evenly and deeply into the silk support.⁵⁸ Scientific analyses have revealed that the blue pigments used in ancient Chinese murals, such as

those found in the Mogao Caves, were azurite, lapis lazuli, and atacamite.⁵⁹ Atacamite, which is greenish-blue, cannot have produced the true blue in the Museum's portraits. The pigment used was most likely azurite.⁶⁰ In the painting treatises of Ruan's time, azurite, rather than lapis lazuli, was cited as the source of the color blue.⁶¹

To Ruan Zude and his contemporaries, azurite would have seemed the best choice for rendering the splendid blue of *zhong jing fu*. The hue of the actual garment was achieved by soaking its fabric in an indigo infusion mixed with lime.⁶² In the portraits, the robes' sensuous shine is imparted by the opaque and slightly iridescent azurite particles that accumulate on the painting's surface.⁶³ Indigo dye, which was frequently used in Chinese scroll painting, produces a comparatively uniform surface effect.⁶⁴

Azurite, a copper carbonate, is a unique mineral in the traditional Chinese worldview. According to Li Shizhen's sixteenth-century pharmaceutical manual *Bencao gangmu* (Compendium of materia medica), copper, after absorbing *qi*, the energy of the universe, evolves into various forms of *qing* (blue rock) that differ in shape and geographic origin but not in substance. It was recognized, for example, that *kongqing* (empty blue), a form of azurite usually composed of hollow, circular agglomerations, was considered to be the same mineral as *cengqing* (layered blue), which is flat and layered.⁶⁵

fig. 11 Qiu Ying (Chinese, 1494–1552). Ming dynasty (1368–1644). *Lady on Riverbank*, ca. 1500–22. Fan; ink and colors on gold-flecked paper, overall 12¼ × 24½ in. (31.1 × 61.2 cm). Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Museum purchase, Docent Council Subscription Fund (B81D38)

fig. 12 Zhou Lun (Chinese, late Ming dynasty). Ming dynasty (1368–1644). *Rabbit under the Moon*. Hanging scroll; ink and colors on silk, 63 × 34 3/4 in. (159.9 × 87.2 cm). Seikado Bunko Art Museum, Tokyo



Azurite is closely associated with longevity and immortality. The term *xian* refers to a stage of being in which aging is halted—the ultimate goal in the cult of immortality.⁶⁶ The alchemist Tao Hongjing (456–536) asserted that *kongqing* was the most effective medicine for curing eye and kidney diseases and a key substance for refining age-defying elixirs.⁶⁷ Tao's theory was still current one thousand years later, when it was published by Li Shizhen in *Bencao gangmu* (Compendium of materia medica).

Ruan Zude's artistic contemporaries were clearly aware of azurite's symbolic meaning and used the mineral, as both a pigment and a depicted object, to convey concepts such as lastingness, transcendence, and immortality. In the sixteenth-century master Qiu Ying's *Lady on Riverbank*, now in the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (fig. 11), a huge rock, its blue color provided by a thin wash of azurite, stands beside an elegant

female figure. Qiu portrays the painting's intended recipient, who is identified in the work's Chinese title as the "Transcendent woman of the sweet olive grove." Several pictorial motifs invoking this epithet make the work a *biehao tu*, or sobriquet painting, a popular genre in the Ming dynasty.⁶⁸ The sweet olive grove is depicted in recognizable fashion. The gender of the recipient and her high social status are represented by the exquisitely dressed court lady and the architectural features visible beyond the river. The largest element in the composition, however, is the azurite rock, which partly overlaps the sweet olive tree and, by its prominent size and placement, indicates the recipient's transcendence.

Shiqing azurite was also employed in *Rabbit under the Moon*, by the late Ming painter Zhou Lun (fig. 12).⁶⁹ The image shows a rabbit in a landscape filled with boulders colored by thin washes of azurite and malachite. Perched on the largest boulder, the rabbit gazes attentively at the moon. Above the rabbit, flowers and a sweet olive branch extend from the left side of the composition. These pictorial elements allude to a legend of a rabbit who prepares an elixir of immortality on the moon in the presence of a sweet olive tree. The tale was widely disseminated in late Ming popular culture and must have been known by Zhou Lun and his contemporaries. The sixteenth-century writer Wu Cheng'en, for example, was surely familiar with it. In his novel *Journey to the West*, Wu mentions the Moon Rabbit and a woman named Chang'e who, after ingesting an elixir, ascended to the moon and became a goddess.⁷⁰ In a poem, Wu describes a rabbit turning in circles when it finds a mortar and pestle used for making medicine. Wu's narratives clearly draw strong connections between the rabbit and elixirs.⁷¹ Ming dynasty viewers acquainted with folklore would have recognized in *Rabbit under the Moon* the medicinal powers attributed to azurite as well as its symbolic associations with lastingness, transcendence, and immortality.

Lady on Riverbank, *Rabbit under the Moon*, and the Museum's two portraits exemplify the use of azurite in Ming dynasty painting. The imposing rock beside the female figure, the boulder on which the rabbit sits, and the robes of the two sitters are all colored with this mineral pigment. Each of these motifs enjoys a dominant position in the composition.⁷² Ruan Zude's portraits, their compositions nearly engulfed by the subjects' blue robes, rely heavily on the communicative power of azurite and take full advantage of its symbolic value to indicate lastingness and immortality. The azurite on the robes channels good fortune and attests to the function and meaning of the portraits as birthday gifts.

Beyond azurite's aesthetic qualities and symbolic charge lay connotations of luxury. Ruan's contemporaries would have appreciated the extravagance of the color's use in the portraits. Li Shizhen's *Bencao gangmu* (Compendium of materia medica), one of their sources on the subject, quoted Tao Hongjing's sixth-century *Mingyi biele* (Additional notes of renowned medical men): "Azurite is the most expensive among all the medicines in the stone category. Medical recipes thus rarely use it. But very often, it is appropriated as a color for painting. This is exceptionally pitiful!"⁷³ By selecting this passage, Li Shizhen, too, seems to show disapproval of the mineral's use as a pigment. Yet the high cost of azurite was precisely what enabled the material to function so effectively as a communicative conduit in the Museum's birthday portraits. Not only did the presence of azurite appear to bestow longevity on the sitters and buoy their prestige by conveying the diaphanous quality of their elite robes, it also signaled their considerable wealth.

The imperial court was the principal consumer of azurite, using it mainly as a pigment for decorating architectural interiors: timber work, ceilings, and pillars. The court placed a high premium on the mineral and obtained it through three channels: direct taxation of civilians; purchases from provincial markets; and state-run mining.⁷⁴ Official records reveal that the excavation of azurite was a major enterprise. During the reign of the Hongwu emperor (1328–1398; r. 1368–98), the founder of the Ming dynasty, the mining of azurite was carried out by military personnel. The process was thoroughly planned, and elaborate maps were drawn up. The record states that the "resources invested were huge, while the [amount of azurite] excavated was small."⁷⁵ The emperor established a department of coloring materials (*Yanliao ju*) to oversee the grinding and filtration of azurite and malachite, which was also collected as a tax.⁷⁶ He also warned government tax collectors against cheating civilians and outlined the punishment for such offenses.⁷⁷

Azurite took a toll on the state's budget, as corrupt officials were entrusted with meeting the emperor's demand for this coveted colorant. After a fire destroyed Fengtian Palace in 1421, a report on the matter was submitted to Emperor Yongle by Zou Jian, a lecturer in the imperial academy.⁷⁸ Zou asserted that central government officials responsible for acquiring azurite and malachite were imposing random quotas on local governments that could not possibly meet them because they were located in regions where the minerals did not

naturally occur. Since paper currency was popular at that time, these officials used state funds to purchase azurite from elsewhere. As a result, the cost of one *jin* (290 to 296.8 g) of *daging* (high-quality azurite with large granules) soared to 16,000 *guan*.⁷⁹ At the time, one *guan* was worth one *liang* (36.25 to 37.1 g) of silver; thus, as Zou wrote, one *jin* of azurite cost 16,000 *liang* (580 to 593.6 kg) of silver in places where azurite did not naturally occur.⁸⁰ This astronomical price was a measure, Zou implied, of the greed of corrupt officials who were benefiting from the reconstruction of the imperial palace. He also alleged that artisans employed in the rebuilding project were siphoning off azurite pigment for personal gain, and thus profiting from the suffering of civilians.⁸¹

Continuing his argument in favor of reducing the costs of rebuilding Fengtian Palace, Zou stated that most of the azurite pigment submitted to the emperor was rejected because of its poor quality. One *jin* of usable azurite ended up costing 20,000 *guan*. Such a small amount of pigment, Zou emphasized, was not enough to color a single pillar or beam. In 1424, Emperor Yongle, probably alarmed by Zou Jian's report, addressed the problem. He canceled the collection of azurite as a tax and authorized local officials, rather than officials of the central government, to purchase the mineral.⁸² In a report written seventy-one years later, the government official He Mengchun stated that one *jin* of a mixture of coarse azurite and malachite cost only a few *liang* of silver.⁸³ This dramatic decrease in price reflected the fact that local officials were acquiring the minerals only in places where they occurred naturally.

The collection of azurite as a tax resumed in the eleventh year (1446) of the Zhenzong period.⁸⁴ The *Ming shilu* (Veritable records of the Ming dynasty) shows that emperors occasionally forgave civilians' debts, including taxes owed in the form of azurite, as a gesture of benevolence. However, the obligation to pay such taxes, though suspended for twenty-two years, was never canceled permanently. Azurite, a scarce material in high demand by the court, continued to be obtained largely through the hard labor of civilians. Its use as a pigment was associated with the government officials who collected it, the emperorship, and imperial palaces; as a symbol, it carried connotations of longevity and immortality. The Museum's portraits, colored with lavish amounts of this precious substance, would have impressed Ming viewers through their sumptuous materiality and as emblems of the prosperous long lives of the subjects they celebrated.

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The two portraits probably would have been displayed in the central hall of the couple's house. Jin Zhijun (1593–1670), a government official in both the Ming and Qing dynasties, composed a poem about a double birthday painting located at the center of such a hall. The poem mentions that wine cups, filled and ready to be enjoyed, were set out in the hall, signaling the presence of other guests and family members who would also view the painting.⁸⁵ It is not known whether birthday paintings were typically placed on permanent display or were hung only on special occasions. The seventeenth-century essayist Li Yu advised his readers to hang different paintings in their central halls in different seasons.⁸⁶ Modern scholars explain that Qing dynasty ancestral portraits were used in rituals that took place at the end of the year and during the new year festival, shedding light on the possible timing of the display of double birthday paintings.⁸⁷

Rangliguan guoyan lu (Records of paintings seen at the hall of abundant pears), a painting catalogue written in the late nineteenth century, suggests the way in which the Museum's portraits may have been valued by succeeding generations. One of the works included, a birthday portrait of the great sixteenth-century connoisseur and collector Xiang Yuanbian (1525–1590), was inscribed with poems by Wen Jia (1501–1583), Huangfu

Fang (1497–1582), and other of Xiang's contemporaries.⁸⁸ The fact that the painting, now lost, was preserved for at least three hundred years indicates that birthday portraits—at least those depicting famous people and inscribed by literati—were treasured. While the lives of Ruan Zude, his great-granduncle, and his great-granduncle's wife are unrecorded, it is certain that the artist and his two sitters would have been delighted by the paintings' auspicious message. The motif of *zhong jing fu* and the material presence of azurite together bestowed well wishes and helped the couple win the admiration of their contemporaries and, very probably, their descendants.

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NOTES

- 1 Hearn 2008, pp. 130–31. The inscription reads: "Birthday painting [made for] great-granduncle Yizhai at the age of eighty-five. [I], Zude, respectfully painted in the fifth month in the summer of the year *xinyou* [1561 or 1621]." Premodern Chinese used a calendar based on astronomical tables: dates were numbered with a combination of one of the twelve "heavenly branches" (*tiangan*) and one of the ten "earthly stems" (*dizhi*). *Xinyou* is one such combination. As there are sixty possible combinations, the cycle repeats every sixty years. The second portrait bears no inscription; the relationship of the two sitters is discussed below.
- 2 Li Dongyang et al., *Da Ming huidian*, fasc. 60 (1964 ed., pp. 1064–65).
- 3 Lapis lazuli was more costly than azurite. It may be hoped that the research presented here will lead to comparative studies of the use of these precious blue pigments in traditional Chinese and Italian Renaissance painting. See Baxandall 1988, p. 11.
- 4 Hay 2010, p. 23. For an authoritative translation of the novel, see Roy 1993–2016.
- 5 For the ranking system of government officials in imperial China, see Wilkinson 2000, p. 530.
- 6 Li Dongyang et al., *Da Ming huidian*, fasc. 60 (1964 ed., pp. 1064–65).
- 7 Lin 2002, pp. 467–509; Wu 2007, pp. 119–76. Lin Liyue and Wu Renshu contrast clothing descriptions found in state law and sumptuary law with those that appeared in literati's critiques of popular fashion trends.
- 8 Xu Xueju, *Guochao dianhui*, fasc. 111 (1965 ed., p. 1377). This document is from an edition of the edict published during the Tianqi period (1621–27). It gives background information on the measure and who was behind it. Part of the edict—the design of *zhong jing fu*—is recorded in Li Dongyang et al., *Da Ming huidian*, fasc. 60.
- 9 Emperor Jiajing was persuaded of the need for *zhong jing fu* by one of the grand secretaries, Zhang Cong (1475–1539). For a discussion of the Bureau of the Grand Secretary, the highest government institution in Ming China, see Twitchett and Mote 1998, pp. 78–79, and Dardess 2013, p. vii.
- 10 Xu Xueju, *Guochao dianhui*, fasc. 111 (1965 ed., p. 1377).
- 11 Lin 2002 provides an overview of the changing attitude toward clothing in the Ming dynasty, from the first emperor's requirement that fashion reflect social standing to the gradual, popular overturning of that principle. Wu 2007 focuses on the development of popular culture and the trend for wearing fashionable clothing in the late Ming. Styles previously reserved for

- government officials, members of the royal family, and one gender or the other were worn indiscriminately, disrupting social stability and drawing the ire of the literati. In response, sumptuary laws were issued.
- 12 The emperor probably granted this right to close male family members because the name of the robe, *zhong jing fu*, alludes to loyalty and reflection, as was noted in the original edict of 1527.
 - 13 Tan Qian, *Guo que*, fasc. 49.
 - 14 For images of scholars' head kerchiefs, see the section on mankind (*renwu*) in Wang Qi, *Sancai tuhui* (1988 ed., p. 1502). Such kerchiefs were also worn by commoners; see Gao 1997, p. 145.
 - 15 Li Dongyang et al., *Da Ming huidian* (1964 ed., pp. 1067–68).
 - 16 A government official wore *changfu* when he met with the emperor and discussed issues at the imperial court; *ibid.*, pp. 1058 and 1069. The state law did not dictate the casual attire of officials' wives, for women's activities customarily took place in the inner chambers of their households.
 - 17 Li Dongyang et al., *Da Ming huidian* (1964 ed., p. 1057). Government officials wore *gongfu* in the imperial and local courts. Many belts of this kind, notable for their valuable carved jade pendants, were among the confiscated possessions of the prodigal politician Yan Song (1480–1567). See *Tianshui bingshan lu* (1964 ed., pp. 3747–49).
 - 18 Goodrich and Fang 1976, p. 1402. One of the Seven Later Masters of Literature (*hou qi zi*), Wang Shizhen was a disciple of the leading scholar Li Panlong. Wang's treatise criticizes offensive manners and disruptive social behavior. The title, *About a Goblet Not Being a Goblet*, alludes to a complaint made by Confucius (551–479 B.C.) about a change in the size and design of the ritual wine cup, a change he regarded, among others of its kind, as subversive of social stability.
 - 19 Wang Shizhen, *Gu bu gu lu*.
 - 20 The enduring practice of selling government positions began after the financially draining Tumu crisis of 1449. See Yu Yingshi 1987, pp. 31–32.
 - 21 Chen Wen, *Ming Yingzong shilu* (1962 ed., p. 3371); also cited in Zhang 2001, p. 254.
 - 22 Tan Qian, *Guo que*, fasc. 49. For a discussion of the python robe as a sign of prestige in *Jin Ping Mei*, see Volpp 2005.
 - 23 Chen Xunrang and Ni Shimeng, eds., *Wujiang xianzhi*, fasc. 38. Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, fasc. 5; cited in Wu 2007, pp. 135–36, and Lin 2002, p. 479.
 - 24 Zhang 2001, pp. 255–56.
 - 25 See Roy 1993–2016, vol. 1 (1997), p. 415. The tastes of the novel's protagonist are indicated by the objects he possesses or desires. For a detailed discussion of this point, see Clunas 1994–97.
 - 26 Citing the novel's original preface, David T. Roy asserts that *Jin Ping Mei* was intended as a critique of prevailing customs (*shisu*) and adds that “the degree of intertextuality between the preface and the novel . . . is striking.” Roy maintains that the author, identified as the Scoffing Scholar of Lanling, alludes to Xunzi, who “scoffed contemptuously at the amoral status-seekers of his day, and who was motivated by his hatred of what they stood for.” See Roy 1993–2016, vol. 1 (1997), pp. xxii–xxiv.
 - 27 Ye Mengzhu, *Yueshi pian*, fasc. 8 (1981 ed., p. 6a); also cited in Lin 2002, p. 484.
 - 28 See Lin 2002 and Wu 2007.
 - 29 Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, fasc. 5; also cited in Wu 2007, p. 136.
 - 30 Zhang Tingyu, *Ming shi*, fasc. 55. All officials wore *changfu* of the same design; their ranks were distinguishable by the badges that were affixed to their robes.
 - 31 Lin 2002, p. 484.
 - 32 Ye Mengzhu, *Yueshi pian*, fasc. 8 (1981 ed., pp. 6a–6b); also cited in Lin 2002, p. 484.
 - 33 Ramie grows easily and produces delicate threads, but obtaining them is not simple. According to Li Shizhen (*Bencao gangmu* [2010 ed., p. 803]), the bark of the plant must be removed and the thick, underlying fiber scraped with bamboo until it falls apart, revealing the tendon-like inner strands, which are then boiled.
 - 34 Song Yingxing, *Tiangong kaiwu* (1966 ed., pp. 55–56). For the impact of the drawloom with figure tower on the Ming dynasty's textile-weaving industry, see Kuhn 2012, pp. 372–74.
 - 35 Wang Qiao, *Fanglu ji*, fasc. 9.
 - 36 Chen Menglei et al., *Gujin tushu jicheng*, book 701 (1934 ed., p. 3a).
 - 37 *Ibid.*
 - 38 Lü Kun, *Xinwu Lü xianshen shizheng lu*, fasc. 3, in *Lüzi yishu* (1827 ed., vol. 13, p. 27a). This nineteenth-century version is kept in the Joseph Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago. Throughout his life, Lü Kun consistently maintained the Confucian ideals. He was candid and law-abiding, upholding the highest moral standards. The above-cited quotation comes from one of the exhortations (*yue*) that he issued to his subordinates; Goodrich and Fang 1976, p. 1007.
 - 39 Clunas 2007, pp. 195, 197. The vest is one of the oldest and most exquisite surviving garments produced in the imperial court for birthday celebrations. The motifs appear on other birthday apparel found in the mausoleum of Emperor Wanli, son of Empress Dowager Li. See Wang Yan 1995, p. 82.
 - 40 Yuan Yuling, *Suishi yiwen*, chap. 17 (1990 ed., pp. 443–44). For a discussion of the novel and its author, see Hegel 1973, pp. 38–42.
 - 41 Silbergeld 1987; Clunas 2007.
 - 42 Silbergeld 1987.
 - 43 *Xuanhe huapu*, fasc. 2, 4, 11, 16, and 17 (2007 ed.).
 - 44 *Tianshui bingshan lu* (1964 ed.).
 - 45 The swastika motif, a symbol of meandering water, appeared on tombs and silks beginning in the Yuan dynasty. A Ming satin damask with the same pattern plus cloud motifs is in the collection of the Beijing Art Museum at Wanshou Temple. See Kuhn 2012, pp. 364–65, 441, and 456.
 - 46 Rebuses were often used in Chinese art; see Bai 1999.
 - 47 Kuhn 2012, pp. 318, 380, 424.
 - 48 *Ibid.*, pp. 379–80.
 - 49 *Ibid.*, p. 424.
 - 50 Little and Eichman 2000, pp. 328–29, no. 123.
 - 51 Guoli Gugong Bowuyuan 1996, pp. 34, 36, 48.
 - 52 For further information on the crane as a birthday motif, see Silbergeld 1987, p. 109.
 - 53 With the rise of the merchant class and the growth of the printing industry, many people, regardless of their social standing, learned to paint, write, compose poetry, and appreciate art, intellectual activities that had long been reserved for the elite. See Clunas 1991, Wu 2007, and Park 2012.
 - 54 Qiu Jun, *Zhongbian Qiongtai gao*, fasc. 15 (1983–86 ed., vol. 1248, p. 307). This anthology was compiled by Qiu's descendants during the Tianqi period (1621–27). For a discussion of the life of Qiu Jun (1421–1495), chancellor and author of *The Veritable Records (shilu)* of Emperor Xianzong, see Goodrich and Fang 1976, pp. 249–50.
 - 55 Qiu Jun, *Zhongbian Qiongtai gao* (1983–86 ed., vol. 1248, p. 307).
 - 56 Wang Shunmin, *Shuang shoutu shi xu*, in *Jingxun xiansheng wenji*, fasc. 7. According to Wang's preface, the painting was commissioned by the couple's son, who became a government

- official shortly before his parents' birthday celebration. For information on Wang, see Zhang Tingyu, *Ming shi*, fasc. 180 (1974 ed., p. 4782).
- 57 Ni Qian, *Ni Wenxi ji*, fasc. 20.
- 58 Indigo is not a lake pigment. It must be diluted with water before being applied to the painting surface. See Yu Feian 1988, pp. 59–61.
- 59 Winter 2008, pp. 28, 30; Li Zuixiong 2010.
- 60 Winter 2008, pp. 28, 30; Li Zuixiong 2010.
- 61 Zou Dezhong, *Huishi zhimeng* (1959 ed., fol. 5a); Tang Yin, *Liuru huapu*, fasc. 3 (1846 ed., fol. 3b).
- 62 For the dyeing of gauze made from ramie threads, see Yu Minzhong et al., *Qinding Rixia jiuwen kao*, fasc. 39 (1968 ed., p. 4a).
- 63 Azurite is slightly iridescent under certain lighting if crystalline particles are present.
- 64 When indigotin, the molecule of indigo, suffuses into ramie fiber, the color is much brighter than on silk or paper. The quality of the silk and paper also affects the appearance of the indigo. I am grateful to the scientists at the Metropolitan Museum for making these observations.
- 65 A ninth-century (Tang dynasty) painting treatise identifies *kongqing*, *cengqing*, and *pianqing* (flat blue, a variant of *kongqing*) as painting pigments. See Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai minghua ji* (2007 ed., p. 49).
- 66 For the distinction between *xian* transcendence and *xian* immortality, see Campany 2002, pp. 4–5, and Campany 2009, pp. 33–34.
- 67 Li Shizhen, *Bencao gangmu* (2010 ed., p. 476).
- 68 Sobriquet paintings are discussed in Chou 1997, Liu 2007, and Clapp 2012.
- 69 See Seikadō Bunko Bijutsukan 2005, p. 115.
- 70 Wu wrote: “[The wind] blew till Chang’e tightly hugged the *sha-lo* tree, the jade hare spinning in search of its dish of herbs.” Wu Cheng’en, *Xi you ji*, fasc. 81, translation adapted from Anthony Yu (2012, p. 88). Yu identifies the *sha-lo* tree as *Cunninghamia lanceolata*.
- 71 Further evidence that the rabbit and moon were well-known symbols of immortality and the cessation of aging is provided by an allusion to the moon and Chang’e in the poem inscribed on Qiu Ying’s *Lady on Riverbank*.
- 72 Li Shizhen, *Bencao gangmu* (2010 ed., p. 476). The painters of *Lady on Riverbank*, *Rabbit under the Moon*, and the Museum’s two portraits were apparently aware that azurite was considered to be more potent than malachite, its green counterpart. As mentioned in Li Shizhen’s *Bencao gangmu* (Compendium of materia medica), the forms of azurite known as *kongqing* and *cengqing* evolved from *shilü* (literally, “stone green,” or malachite) after absorbing male energy from the universe.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Li Dongyang et al., *Da Ming huidian* (1964 ed., p. 2644). Mandatory tax payments in the form of azurite were introduced during the Hongwu period (1368–98). Other commodities, too, were demanded as taxes; azurite constituted only a portion of a civilian’s entire tax debt. See Tang Wenji 1991, p. 58.
- 75 *Ming shilu*, fasc. 230 (1966 ed., p. 2143). Nearly two hundred years after this record was compiled in the late fourteenth century, the situation appears to have remained unchanged. See Zhu Guozhen, *Yongchuang xiaopin* (1959 ed., p. 344).
- 76 Li Dongyang et al., *Da Ming huidian* (1964 ed., p. 2643). The department was tasked with extracting and grinding *shiqing*

- azurite and *shilü* malachite from ore based on monthly demands and with sorting the pigments into different grades. Court employees then prepared the pigments for use in the building and renovation of palaces and mansions for officials.
- 77 Zou Jian, *Fengtian dian zai shu*, in *Huang Ming jingshi wenpian*, fasc. 21.
- 78 See Zhang Tingyu, *Ming shi*, fasc. 164 (1974 ed., pp. 4435–38).
- 79 Zou Jian, *Fengtian dian zai shu*, in *Huang Ming jingshi wenpian*, fasc. 21.
- 80 For the silver value of the *guan* as set by Ming law, see Li Dongyang et al., *Da Ming huidian*, fasc. 31 (1964 ed., p. 581). The conversion of *jin* and *liang* to metric units is based on bronze weights of the Ming dynasty. See Guojia Jiliang Zongju 1981, figs. 231–33.
- 81 Zou Jian, *Fengtian dian zai shu*, in *Huang Ming jingshi wenpian*, fasc. 21.
- 82 Li Dongyang et al., *Da Ming huidian*, fasc. 195 (1964 ed., p. 2644).
- 83 He Wenjian, *Sheng yingshan yi guangzhi dao shu*, in *Huang Ming jingshi wenpian*, fasc. 127. The price mentioned in He’s report pertains to a mixture of azurite and malachite, whereas Zou’s pertains only to azurite, which was scarcer in nature. See Winter 2008, p. 26.
- 84 Pan Huang, *Pan Jianxiao Gong zuoshu er*, in *Huang Ming jingshi wenpian*, fasc. 198.
- 85 Jin Zhijun, *Jin Wentong Gong ji*, fasc. 18.
- 86 Li Yu, *Xianqing ouji*, fasc. 15.
- 87 Stuart and Rawski 2001, p. 47.
- 88 Lu Xinyuan, *Rangliguan guoyan lu*, fasc. 20.

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