

Unknown weaver, Kashgar



Untitled, 1942
woven carpet

La Trobe University, Geoff Raby Collection of Chinese Art. Donated by Dr Geoff Raby AO through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019. Photo: Jia De

Carpets serve both decorative and practical purposes. However, they are also well-placed to transport visual propaganda and political ideology into the domestic realm. This carpet from 1942 was made in Hetian and acquired in a carpet shop in Kashgar, an oasis town along the Silk Road in the region of Xinjiang with a long history of carpet production. The seventh-century pilgrim Xuanzang noted that the people of the region produced fine wool carpets there.

The unknown weaver incorporates Soviet-era propaganda motifs into the carpet's design, with two figures standing on a podium in front of the Soviet flag, each one holding up a sheaf of wheat with one hand. Both figures direct their attention upward and out beyond the frame – as is typical in much Soviet propaganda – representing the heroic figure of the rural worker. On the lower left of the composition we can identify a group of animals including a camel, horse, cow and sheep, while at the lower right we can see a group of buildings representing the Soviet consulate.

Under the Chinese warlord Sheng Shicai, who ruled it from 1933 to 1944, Xinjiang had a close relationship with the Soviet Union. In April 1942, Sheng grew suspicious of a conspiracy to overthrow him, which led to a series of conflicts between Xinjiang and the Soviet Union. The Guomindang, also known as the Chinese Nationalist Party, ultimately centralised control over the region in 1944 (Jianlang 2010, pp. 160–61). This particular carpet is not only the product of a distinctive aesthetic encounter but also marks a significant moment in the history of Sino–Soviet relations.

Shanti Shea-An, 2022

Reference:

Jianlang, W 2010, 'The return of Xinjiang to Chinese central control during the late period of the Sino–Japanese War: a reappraisal based on "Chiang Kai-shek's diary"', *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 145–62.