

# The Meaning and Evolution of the Name “Hangzhou Silk”

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## Abstract

With regard to the meaning and evolution of "Hangzhou Silk", the author uses the documentary research methodology to trim and verify from three aspects of industry name, product name and brand name respectively, attempting to find out the source of "Hangzhou Silk" from historical documents. Research shows that, as the industry name being called as "Hangzhou satin industry" or "Hangzhou silk weaving industry", it was generally called as the "Hangzhou Silk and Satin Industry" after the combination of Hangzhou Silk Reeling Industry Association and Hangzhou Silk Weaving Industry Association until 1952. As the product name being called as "Hangzhou silk" or "Hangzhou satin", it was called as "Hangzhou silk" after the China liberation. As the brand name, it referred to the specific silk products of Hangzhou region in particular after being awarded of protection as Chinese national geographical mark product since September 2011.

**Keywords:** Hangzhou silk, Hangzhou Satin, Industry, Grand

Hangzhou silk is a combination of the geographical name "Hangzhou" and the product name "silk" from the literal meaning and a phrase with three connotations as industry, product and brand appeared in modern and contemporary writings from historical documents. The author is going to verify the source and connotation of "Hangzhou silk" from these three aspects respectively.

## 1. “Hangzhou Silk” as the Name of the Industry

The rise and development of Hangzhou silk industry can be traced back to the Liangzhu culture period (4000 to 5300 years ago). It is with a long history which originated from agriculture (mulberry planting, silkworms cultivation and silk reeling as peasants' subsidiaries), extended to the silk weaving industry and commerce, and experienced the separation of silkworm mulberry planting industry and silk weaving industry, silk reeling industry and silk weaving industry, and integration of silk reeling industry and silk weaving industry with the upstream and downstream industry chain after the Chinese liberation. The connotation and replacement of "Hangzhou silk" are highly related to the development of silk industry.

### 1.1 The Development of Hangzhou Silk Industry

Inference that clothing mainly consisted of three categories including silk, kudzu and hemp during the Liangzhu culture period, Hangzhou ancestors had begun to engage in mulberry planting, silkworms cultivation and silk production four thousand seven hundred years ago. (Xu & Yuan, 2011, p. 9) During the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods, mulberry planting, silkworms cultivation and silk production were important economy pillars in Wu kingdom and Yue kingdom." Reduction of taxation and encouragement of mulberry planting" was an important content in the great power plan proposed by Fan Li.

Continuous development of Hangzhou silk industry has been gained since Hangzhou was set up in replacement of Qiantang County since the ninth year of Sui Dynasty (589, AD). Thin silk fabrics produced in Hangzhou, being praised as "world-crowned" during the Tang Dynasty, became the royal court tribute, and was sold to the northwest border and Central Asian countries along the "Silk Road".

In the first year (995, AD) of Zhidao period of Song dynasty, the Emperor Taizong "decreed to set up silk weaving bureau in Hangzhou and buy silk from other provinces to its use". In the first year (1102, AD) of Chongning period of Song dynasty, the Emperor Huizong "commanded the eunuch Guan Tong to set up a bureau

in Suzhou and Hangzhou to fabricate weaving utensils.....achieving delicacy through complicated weaving and embroidery craftsmanship". "Hangzhou as capital of former dynasties has the tradition of admiring exquisite techniques" was mentioned by Buzhi Chao in the *Seven Narrations*. Due to capital relocation to Hangzhou by the Southern Song Dynasty, a large number of officials, wealthy and influential families, merchants and craftsmen came and brought exquisite silkworms cultivation and silk weaving techniques, making Hangzhou the national center of silk production, trade, technology and information at that time, thus obtaining the reputation as "Home of Silk" around the world.

During the Yuan Dynasty, the silk weaving industry in Hangzhou was still on a large scale. "Most of the locals were wearing silk and brocade clothes on account of large quantity of silk and satin produced in Hangzhou and shipped from other provinces." was recorded in *The Travels of Marco Polo*. Through the introduction by the famous Italian traveler Marco Polo, Hangzhou silk was renowned in Europe, especially in Italy.

According to records of *Hangzhou Chronicles of the Ming Dynasty*, silk and satin trade was flourishing in Hangzhou. Hangzhou private silk industry gained the reputation of "most exquisite craftsmanship and best selling all over the world". During this period, handicraft workshops with the nature of capitalism appeared in Hangzhou silk industry. With rapid development of private silk weaving industry, a relatively concentrated silk weaving industry zone was gradually formed. The most concentrated area of household workshops were at Zhongqing Lane and Xiangnan alley (now Xinhua Road area), being described as "so far all people in this county were engaged in the silk and brocade weaving industry."

Compared with Jiangning and Suzhou Weaving Bureau, Hangzhou Weaving Bureau was with the largest scale and quantity of production in the Qing Dynasty. The unprecedented splendor of "tens of thousands of household workshops" emerged in Hangzhou private silk weaving industry, of which E Li of Qing Dynasty recorded in the *City East Miscellanies*: "sounds of looms can be heard in every household in the city east of Hangzhou". At that time, a number of local production was named after "Hang", such as Hang gauze, Hang fabrics, Hang silk (Nanjing silk), Hangzhou satin, etc. among abundant categories of silk products.

### 1.2 Used Names of Hangzhou Silk Industry

Hangzhou silk industry, on the expression, was called as Hangzhou silk industry or Hangzhou satin industry during most of ancient times. Clear appearance of expression which can be verified as "Hangzhou silk industry", "Hangzhou satin industry" or "Hangzhou silk and satin industry" in the historical materials from ancient times to the present is as follows.

On the records of "Hangzhou silk industry". In the twenty-second year (1817, AD) of Emperor Jiaqing, "Satin Industry Guild Hall" (ie. Guancheng Hall) located besides the Confucian Temple at Zhongqing Lane in Hangzhou was funded by satin merchants. In the thirtieth year (1904, AD) of Emperor Guangxu, the "Satin Industry Guild Hall" was reconstructed and relocated to Buru Garden previously belonged to Bing Ding (a renowned book collector in Qing Dynasty) at Baoxin Lane besides Yindong Bridge, in which a stele with the inscription of "*Reconstruction of The Guancheng Hall*" recorded: "Hangzhou satin industry was renowned around the world while the Guancheng Hall was only known to satin industry practitioners..... Zai Chu, the ninth grandson of Suiliang Chu, returned with looming technique from Guangling (now Yangzhou) and the boom of satin industry in Hangzhou was triggered thereafter." (Zhu, 1985, p. 112) In early years of the Republic of China, the buyers and sellers of the silk industry were accustomed to negotiate at the "Arong Teahouse" on the street (now Xinhua Road) before the White Lotus Temple, gradually developing into the "Tea Chamber of Satin Industry Trade". In the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the Republic of China (1926, AD), with organization from Hangzhou Silk Industry Guild (Guancheng Hall), the trade venue was relocated to the entrance to Wangma Lane and "Hangzhou Satin Public Trade Market" was officially established. In the 24<sup>th</sup> year (1935, AD) of the Republic of China, it was relocated to Changqing Street and Restructured as a government-supervised and civilian-run "Hangzhou Satin Industry Market", becoming an important transaction venue for household workshops and satin shops. In the 26<sup>th</sup> year (1937, AD) of the Republic of China, satin transaction paused and the venue was taken as stud farm after Hangzhou was occupied by Japanese. In the 29<sup>th</sup> year (1940, AD) of the Republic of China, the Ministry of Construction under Japanese Puppet Regime took over the satin market on the Changqing Street and changed the name to Zhejiang Provincial Satin Trade Market. (Zhejiang Province Silk Compilation Committee, 1999, p. 181) In the 34<sup>th</sup> year (1945, AD) of the Republic of China, Hangzhou Municipal Government took over the satin trade market and the Satin Merchants Association applied to operate by itself and changed name to Hangzhou Satin Market, in which raw materials (Note 1) were mostly transacted. In June 1951, the silk industry market was established at No. 2, Daijia Lane, East Street Road by the Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Commerce (Zhejiang Province Silk Compilation Committee, 1999, p. 316). Hereto, Hangzhou satin industry and Hangzhou silk

industry were indeed two parallel industry.

On the records of "silk industry and satin industry". In the fifty-fourth year (1789) of Emperor Qianlong, Wuxing Guild Hall was built in Suzhou by Huzhou merchants to promote the success of silk industry and satin industry. In the third year (1911) of Emperor Xuantong, "like residents in the north-eastern district of Hangzhou, half of women were engaged in silk winding. Due to failure of satin industry recently and decline of silk industry as well..." was recorded by the *China Silk Industry Association Journal*. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Year (1930, AD) of the Republic of China, "Imported crystal and rayon flooded into the market in recent years, bringing continuous blow to domestic silk and causing shut-down or rest to more than half of silk factories belonged to Huzhou merchants. Even sporadic weaving industry was also non-profitable due to the disastrous decline of both silk and satin industry." was stated in the "*Report to Zhejiang Provincial Government to Maintain Silk Industry in Huzhou District*" from Huzhou committee organized by Huzhou silk merchants. In the 36<sup>th</sup> year (1947, AD) of the Republic of China, Shunfu Yao (1903 ~ 1973) participated in the preparation and served as standing director of the National Silk Industry Association, and director-general of Zhejiang Provincial Silk Industry Association. Silk industry was restructured to register membership after the victory of Anti-Japanese war. Large-scale silk factories belonged to the "Guancheng Hall", the Hangzhou Silk Weaving Industry Association and household workshops belonged to the "Dajing Hall", the Hangzhou Silk Industry Association. They were re-divided into silk industry Association and mechanical and electrical silk industry Association afterwards. These records indicated that silk industry and satin industry were gradually converging to be classified as an industry ultimately.

On the records of "Hangzhou Silk Industry". Related records on "Hangzhou Silk" appeared in historical documents in modern times. Evolution of utensils and changes in industry organization, marking the transformation of Chinese silk industry from the traditional handicraft to the large-scale machinery, "Hangzhou silk industry evolved from the household handicraft to the factory mechanical industry" (Compilation of Zhejiang Economy survey by Construction Committee, 1971, p. 351) "In the periods of Emperor Guangxu, silk chain stores stand in great numbers in Hangzhou during the prosperity of Hangzhou silk". Later on, Hangzhou silk suffered heavy setback when Japanese silk products flooded into Chinese market in a large quantity.

As an industry, "Hangzhou Silk" was once called as "Hangzhou satin industry" or "Hangzhou silk weaving industry". It generally refers to "Hangzhou Silk Industry" after combination of Hangzhou Silk Reeling Industry Association and Hangzhou Silk weaving Industry Association until 1952. As an industry name, "Hangzhou Silk" refers to the upstream and downstream industries associated with silk production, including mulberry planting, silkworm cultivation, silk reeling, silk weaving, silk machinery and the design, production and sales of silk garments and finished products, etc.

## 2. "Hangzhou Silk" as the Product Name

As the product name, "14Hangzhou Silk", mostly called as Hangzhou-produced silk and satin in ancient times, refers to various Hangzhou-produced silk products made of silk as main raw material. Names appeared as "Hangzhou Silk", "Hangzhou Satin", "Hang Silk" and "Hang Satin" etc. in historical documents can be verified as follows.

### 2.1 On the records of "Hangzhou Satin"

According to the records in "*Statutes and Government Affairs of Guangxu in Qing dynasty. The Imperial Household Department*": "change into land transportation of Hangzhou satin shipped to Beijing was discussed and approved in the forty-seventh year (1782, AD) of Emperor Qianlong." In the twenty-eighth year (1848, AD) of Emperor Daoguang, Qi Yu, the administrative officer in charge of Hangzhou silk weaving, submitted a memorial to the emperor with statement that "Satin prepared for God worships and clothes for the emperor and imperial concubines was dispatched to three cities every year routinely, among which Hangzhou occupied mostly". (Fan, 1988, p. 80-87)

### 2.2 On the records of "Hangzhou Satin"

In the first year of Emperor Shunzhi, the emperor issued a ban: "silk and satin sold on the market was precise regarding to length and width in past years, recently ... .. Order issued to all workshops and merchants in Jiangning (Now Nanjing), Suzhou and Hangzhou that weaving and sale of silk and satin must be precise in length and width and durable. Personnel involved in provision of lack, narrow, loose or thin satin would be sentenced. (Note 2) Appealed by British merchants and approved by the emperor through report from Suchang, governor of Guangdong and Guangxi province in the twenty-seventh year (1762, AD) of Emperor Qianlong, " to show the intention of benefiting foreign countries, per ship was allowed to purchase with a quota of two

thousand and five hundred kilograms native silk, one thousand and five hundred kilograms native silk made from the second batch of silkworms from Huzhou. Silk and made from the first batch of silkworms and satin in bolt in Huzhou were still prohibited to export or fudge." Hence, British merchants came to Guangzhou for inter-trade and purchasing according to the quota for each ship as routine and one thousand kilograms of satin in bolt were allowed to purchase in the next year.

In the twenty-ninth year (1764, AD) of Emperor Qianlong of Qing Dynasty, Kalaba and other countries were allowed to purchase with a quota of silk goods including five hundred kilograms native silk, three hundred kilograms native silk made from the second batch of silkworms from Huzhou per ship, and satin with a price of twenty percent off". (Zhu, 1985, p. 116) "Hangzhou silk relied on native silk as raw materials. With filature silk flowing into markets, it was realized that native silk was with too much cut-off, hollow points and odd slitting so that the filature silk gained reputation rapidly and new type of mechanical silk reeling factories emerged at that moment. Since the first year of the Republic of China, factories such as Qingcheng, Weicheng, Hulin, Tianzhang have been established in succession. However, these four factories were silk factories at the beginning of establishment and one silk reeling machine was added later on."(The History Research Center of Zhejiang of The Republic of China &, 2008, p. 334) As Leighton Stuart was a Hangzhou expert, so most of the non-government organizations presented him with local specialty, such as Hangzhou Ge (a kind of ancient cooking tripod with hollow legs), Hangzhou scissors, Du Jinsheng brand silk products, Hangzhou silk, West Lake Towels and favorite foods of Hangzhou people when he accepted the title of "honorary citizens" in Hangzhou in 1947. (Song, 2008, p. 61-63) Silk products were purchased by the provincial silk company. Filature was through manufacturing consignment before 1957 and changed to contracted raw-materials sell-out and finished products buy-back after 1957, but the satin was still through manufacturing consignment. In 1958, the provincial government decided to separate according to properties of industry and trade. Foreign sales of silk were operated by the provincial company directly with revocation of "Hangzhou Silk Branch". Filature was allocated with plan by silk industry department. Domestic sales were operated by the Hangzhou textile wholesale station and distributed uniformly by cotton and woolen cloth shops, with the exception of "Hangzhou satin shop" located in Hubin Road. (Zhejiang Province Silk Compilation Committee, 1999, p. 317)

### 2.3 On the records of "Hangzhou Silk".

Italian traveler Marco Polo described Hangzhou "producing a high quantity of raw silk, ...so with plenty of silk and satin". In the twenty-third year (1758, AD) of Emperor Qianlong, Qianjiang Guild Hall was founded by Hangzhou satin merchants. (Fan, 1998, p. 286-287) In the twenty-seventh year (1762, AD) of Emperor Qianlong, Hangzhou merchants set up a Qianjiang Guild Hall specialized in silk sales independently in Suzhou as the base with more than 130 houses consuming 7200 *Liang* (around 268.56 kilogram) of silver. It had received donations of more than 11,000 *Liang* (around 413.3 kilogram) of silver from 26 Hangzhou silk chain stores from the third year to the forty first year of Emperor Qianlong Period. Many products are still popular in foreign countries as a result that China has rich traditional experience in handicraft silk industry. For instance, stylish shirts, worn by British gentleman in the 1830s displayed at the British Museum of London, was made from Hangzhou satin of Zhejiang products (Zhu, 1985, p. 118). In the 21st year (1932, AD) of the Republic of China, Hangzhou Du Jinsheng silk factory organized a group of workers to study in Japan, brought back seven Japanese silk umbrella, and tried to make silk umbrella with its sample. "West Lake silk umbrella" was made of Hangzhou silk with images of West Lake landscape. According to the records of "the chapter of textile industry in the industrial section" of China Industrial Journal. Zhejiang Province in the 22nd year (1933, AD) of the Republic of China, major sale markets were domestic ports, with 30% sale in local and the rest in other cities. (Zhejiang Province Silk Compilation Committee, 1999, p.433)

### 3. "Hangzhou Silk" as the Brand Name

Hangzhou, located in the plains of northern Zhejiang, with densely covered water networks, fertile soil, mild climate, appropriate rainfall, is suitable for natural growth of silkworms and mulberry trees. Excellent natural conditions with typical geography features, suitable climate, and excellent water resources of Hangzhou are very suitable for silkworms cultivation, mulberry planting and high-quality silk weaving, laying a natural foundation for Hangzhou silk. Hangzhou Silk is a group concept, but not all silk produced in Hangzhou is called as "Hangzhou silk". Entrusted by the Hangzhou Municipal People's Government, the geographical mark protection products as "Hangzhou Silk" applied by the Hangzhou Silk Industry Association are different with the traditional sense of "Hang gauze", "Hang silk" and "Hang satin". "Hang gauze", "Hang silk" and "Hang satin" produced all over the country are three categories of silk products with specific indications and features, but not necessarily belong to the "Hangzhou silk".

As the brand name, "Hangzhou Silk" refers to the specific silk products produced in Hangzhou - products of Chinese national geographical mark protection (No.138 of 2011 by the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine), of which is the current Hangzhou municipal administrative area geographically, among the east longitude 118° 21' ~ 120°30' and north latitude 29°11' ~ 30°33', with a total area of 16,600 square kilometers. Hangzhou silk with standard serial number: GB/T 22860-2009 boast of quality features of soft texture, abundant colors, elegance and luxury, high quality, and rich variety. Listed in product protection as Chinese national geographical mark, being a significant milestone in the history of Hangzhou silk, it not only affirmed the excellent features and geographical culture properties of Hangzhou Silk, but also marked a new journey that it was about to step into.

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### Notes

Note 1. Done materials refer to satin weaving before silk dying; raw materials refer to satin dying after silk weaving.

Note 2. General Verification on Historical Documents. Volume 32 "Government Purchase of Grain".

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