Shawl Design

There are several stories giving the origin of the cone design associated with Kashmir shawls (Plate 51). It is at least as old as sixth century Egypt and Sassanian Persia, where it appeared as a curled leaf motif, and it is very common today. One theory is that it derived from the cone of the date palm and symbolized fertility and renewal of life in ancient Chaldea. Another theory dates the motif to the Mogul Emperor Babur who wore in his turban a jeweled ornament, almond shaped with an aigrette of feathers. A weaver purportedly copied it and started a fad. The motif has been said to represent the picturesque windings of the Jhelum River, the side impression of a fist (fist palm), a little onion (in Venice), the Persian sacred flame, the wind-blown cypress, a mango (Hindu Kaity), a butha (or buta, a general Indian name for flower), and a cone or a pine. In the West it is called a paisley.

Kashmir shawl designs were mostly floral until the middle of the eighteenth century, when they began to take on the characteristic cone arrangements. Cones were rather short and fat until the 1830s, when they became elongated with slender tips. By the 1850s they were almost abstract scrolls. Many shawl designs originated in Europe, and at one time Frenchmen went to Kashmir with the purpose of improving the patterns.

Famine struck Kashmir periodically, but never devastated the weavers as completely as in the 1870s when the Franco-Prussian War closed the French market and the fashion for Kashmir shawls died.

CHINESE TEXTILE HISTORY

Chinese chronology divides into dynasties, or periods of rule by members of the same family. Although no fabrics survive from the Shang dynasty (1523–1028 B.C.), pseudomorphs of textiles used to wrap elaborately cast bronzes have yielded some information about fibers and weaves. The pseudomorphs are the result of the organic structure of the textiles being replaced by the products of bronze corrosion. The Chou dynasty (1122–256 B.C.) is important in that it coincided with the Scythian period in Central Asia. Chinese figured silks and embroideries were found in Scythian graves, indicating the extent of Chinese trade at that time.

Han Silks

The Han dynasty (202 B.C.–220 A.D.) is one of the most important for textile historians. It was a period of great political and social change, and one of the great periods in Chinese history when the arts were highly advanced. This has been demonstrated by the 1968 excavation near Peking of the tomb of a Han prince and his consort. Her funeral suit was made of over two thousand jade tablets stitched together with gold wire.

Sir Marc Aurel Stein, an early twentieth century archaeologist, was responsible
for the major collections of Han textiles now found outside China. Stein excavated along the Silk Road and provided vivid descriptions of the terrible Tarim Basin (see Figure 2.16), Lou Lan (the City of the Dead), and the magnificent figured silks, embroideries, tapestries, and gauzes that had been on their way to Rome (Plates 52, 53). Some of the walled outposts, once manned by prisoners and outcasts from Chinese society, have yielded an amazing variety of textile fragments. These specimens seem to prove that the Chinese mastered pattern weaving long before the West.

The outstanding weave of the Han dynasty, and a weave unequalled in later periods, is best described as a compound warp-faced tabby. It is a reed construction (more warp than weft) and the patterns were made by floating pattern warps. Because similar patterns were later made in Damascus, these Han silks came to be called damasks even though they were polychrome—not monochrome as damask usually is. They were probably woven on a pattern rod loom not a drawloom. Patterns of lozenges, birds, trees, and animals integrated by cloud bands or scrolls were common.

Gauze weave was probably an innovation of the Han dynasty. Made with a special device to move the warp, the leno construction gave firmness to low count, lacy fabrics, which were patterned with lozenges. Gauze continued to be woven into the twentieth century and was used for summer robes that were frequently embroidered.

**T’ang Textiles**

All through the Six Dynasties, a period of internal disunity and strife, the Han textile techniques were preserved and then were carried on into the T’ang dynasty (618-906 A.D.) The T’ang was another great period in Chinese history, marked by prosperity and an expansion of the empire. Trade with India was developed. A money economy replaced a barter economy when the government lost control of the major silk producing center in Hopeh. Prior to that rolls of silk were used as the means of exchange or for storing wealth. A network of small rural markets fed the larger centers, and exports increased until the Central Asian routes were closed by the barbarians.

Weft-faced compound twills are associated with the T’ang dynasty. They are known today from fragments found along the Silk Road and from textiles in the Shosoin, an eighth century repository in Nara, Japan. This weave may have developed in the Near East and spread eastward with the drawloom, but textile historians have no conclusive proof. The patterns on T’ang figured fabrics are quite different from those on the warp-faced Han textiles. Motifs reflect the adoption of Buddhist, Indian, Sasanian, and Hellenistic elements. Animals are arranged symmetrically, usually facing each other (affronté). Vines and rosette medallions are characteristic.

It was during the T’ang dynasty that k’o-ssu, the most highly prized fabric of China (and indeed the entire world), was first woven. It is likely that the tapestry
technique used in k'o-su originated in Syrian wool weaving. When adapted to silk, it made superlative document covers, hangings, and robes that sometimes cannot be distinguished from paintings. The word k'o-su meant broken or cracked silk and referred to the tiny slits formed along the design edges giving a clever three-dimensional effect (Plate 54).

The imperial families of other dynasties encouraged silk tapestry weaving. During the fifteenth century some of the finest k'o-su was made when the famous weavers of South China were assembled in Peking to reproduce the great pictures of the T'ang dynasty. A weaver might spend his entire lifetime on one commemorative hanging or imperial robe. K'o-su was the single fabric too highly esteemed by the Chinese to be included among their exports.

**Sung Silks**

The China of the Sung dynasty (960-1279 A.D.) was far ahead of its contemporary states. Agricultural innovations (including cotton cultivation) and advanced manufacturing techniques raised the standard of living. Transportation facilities improved and sea trade expanded. Literacy and education spread with the development of block printing. Paradoxically, sex segregation increased and the practice of foot binding, which effectively crippled women, became widespread.

Satin, which may have originated in Zatun, was important during the Sung dynasty. Genghis Khan probably introduced satin to Europe in the thirteenth century; it made wonderful banners. Sung weavers made elaborate brocaded satins.

The earliest extant brocades come from the Sung dynasty, although the weave was probably known in China as early as the Han period. Over fifty T'ang brocade patterns were recorded in a Sung book, two of them named “dragon coiling through a hundred flowers” and “wild geese flying into clouds.” Yarns of strap gold—gilded leather strips—were used for brocade wefts.

**Yuan and Ming Textiles**

The Yuan dynasty (1279-1368 A.D.) was founded by Kublai Khan in completing the Mongol conquest of China. It was in Kublai Khan’s court that Marco Polo spent seventeen years as an advisor of privileged position. During the Yuan dynasty the Asian trade routes, formerly closed by the barbarians, reopened. The Ming (1368-1644 A.D.) drove out the Mongols and closed China to the rest of the world, bringing a stable period when the arts were patronized on a large scale and standards were high. The period is probably most famous for the fine quality porcelains sent to Europe in the seventeenth century.

Velvet was probably woven in China for the first time when the Portuguese brought Spanish velvets in the late sixteenth century, although it is also possible that the technique reached China from Persia via Central Asia during the Yuan dynasty. There was a limited number of velvet weaving centers, and it was strictly a luxury fabric (Plate 55). The Chinese became adept at both painting and embroidering it. A remarkable effect was obtained by the art of textiles dispersed in the early European churches as perishable chapel vestments, disintegrated. (Plate 55).

The Ming were great admirers of symbolic embroidery in high relief, worked on figure ground. Just as in early Chinese painting, red and gold figures were worked in gold and silver, and squares were worked in silver and gold. The Manchu canoes were sold off in the West.

**Ch'ing Design**

The Ch'ing ancestors of the Mongol conquerors of China were of the the eighteenth century. There were great changes in China, and the making textiles were made. Ch'ing textiles were made by playing a vital role in the court.

Some of the Chinese silk and lacquer are of the highest quality. The Emblems of Han and Ch'in Emblems of Han and Ch'in (Figure 7.4), in the finest of the century.

The feng-hui horned crest, later years he was a symbol of power. As with the yin. The duck symbolizes the sacred yin, with an ox tail, the sacred yang. Together, they are symbolic of the yin-yang concept, which is Chinese philosophy. Dragons in
When adapted to robes that sometimes had broken or cracked threads, giving a clever embroidery. The Ming were famous for embroidery. The technique, very adaptable for the rendering of symbolic motifs, predated the Han dynasty. (Stein found chain stitch embroidery in Han graves.) Later, embroidery was combined with painting and worked on figured cloth, making design upon design.

Just as in early America, every Chinese girl learned to embroider. Peasants did a cross stitch with indigo yarn on homespun cotton and grass cloth for bed hangings and squares to pin on dress fronts. The embroidery told stories or offered felicitations. More sophisticated silks were done in satin, stem, long, and short, and Peking stitches. The last, actually a French knot, was known as "the forbidden stitch," because it eventually was banned when women went blind doing it. Couching, especially with gold thread, and appliqué were common.

Purely Chinese were the Mandarin squares (pectoralis) embroidered with animals and other symbols used to identify the ranks of various officials. The squares were worn front and back on the full robes of Chinese dignitaries. When the Manchus came to power the emblems of the Ming were rendered obsolete and sold off in the West.

Ch'ing Design

The Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1912 A.D.) was the period of rule by the Manchus, ancestors of the present-day Manchurians. The crafts were most important during the eighteenth century when the largest amount of Chinese fabric was exported to Europe. There were several large textile centers with factory-type operations making textiles for export, while fabrics for home consumption and the Chinese court were made in smaller workshops. Embroidery was delightful (Plate 58). Ch'ing textiles also reflected many centuries of symbolism.

Some of the oldest motifs were the "twelve ornaments" that represented authority and power. The emperor wore all twelve. Buddhists used the "Eight Emblems of Happy Augury" (Figure 7.2), and Confucians the "Eight Precious Things" (Figure 7.3). The Taoists used the "Eight Emblems of the Immortals" (Figure 7.4). In later periods there was a tendency to mix all the figures, especially on exports.

The jeng-huang, a gaily colored bird with long fluttering tail feathers and a two-horned crest, had character. His appearance was modified from time to time, and in later years he was known as the phoenix, symbol of peace and prosperity, yang and yin. The duck spoke of fecundity and married love, and the lei-lin, a sort of antelope with an ox tail, or little scaly horse with horns, brought good luck. The dragon, of course, was China (Plates 55 and 59).

Dragons lived in rivers, the sea, and the sky. They had families, just like
mortals, and they loved them in the same way. Dragons controlled the winds, the thunder, the rains, and the rising flood waters. Usually Chinese dragons were benevolent—unless provoked. There were two kinds: The hung, with five claws, horns, scales, and a moustache—worn by the emperor and his close family; and the mang, more serpent-like with four toes or claws, worn by nobles of lesser rank. There were lots of rules concerning who could wear what kind and how many dragons on his robes until the revolution in 1911.

**JAPANESE TEXTILE HISTORY**

Very little is known about the history of Japan before the eighth century. The early Japanese made cloth from hemp, ramie, mulberry, and wisteria vine fiber. Silk was not known until the second century A.D., when the Chinese sent silk worm eggs and woven silk was imported from Korea. In the fourth and fifth centuries Chinese and Korean weavers emigrated to Japan where they were given land and titles in exchange for their knowledge.

**Nara Textiles**

The Nara period (710-785 A.D.) was a brief but golden time in Japanese history.

Close contact with T'ang China led to the development of many weaving and dyeing techniques. In the mid-eighth century, the Emperor Shomu commissioned a gigantic bronze Buddha for installation in the Shosoin, the imperial repository at Nara. Shomu died, and his widow dedicated his art treasures and household goods to the Buddha. These articles, along with dedicatory records giving detailed descriptions, were preserved for centuries in the sealed building. Western scholars believe that the thousands of textile fragments came mostly from China and Iran, because the Japanese were not using the drawloom in the eighth century. Some Japanese authors, however, attribute the textiles to their own weavers.

*Nishiki* is an important, if indefinite, term. It has been used as a name for several constructions, including brocade, and has come to mean any textile with a colorful woven design. More exactly, the Japanese use *tate nishiki* for the warp-patterned textiles of the Han dynasty and *nuki nishiki* for weft-patterned silks of the T'ang dynasty, Nara period, and Sassanian Persia.  

The word *aya* was used in the Nara period to denote a patterned fabric made by combining plain and twill, or warp-faced and weft-faced twill (like damask). In modern times, *aya* refers only to twill weave. Gauze fabrics were also woven in the Nara period. *Ska* was a simple leno weave, while *na* was stiffer and had woven lozenge and floral patterns.

During the Nara period Japanese dyers were adept at *rokechi* (wax resist dyeing) and *kokechi* (tie and dye). *Kyokechi*, called jam dyeing, reached Japan from China in the sixth century and was well developed by the Nara period. Folded cloth was pressed between two boards perforated with designs. The dye entered through the holes.

**Heian and Kamakura Textiles**

During the Heian period (785-1185 A.D.) Japan turned inward to a life of luxury, overrefinement in ceremonies, and a flourishing textile industry. Costume was voluminous; a lady might wear a dozen layers, with colors delicately coordinated. There are no extant fabrics from this period, but Lady Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji* describes some of the court costumes in detail. The ladies gave up the multitudinous layers for the *kosode*, the small-sleeved kimono, in the Kamakura period (1185-1333). Life became more practical; the military controlled the government, and resources were consumed in fending off the Mongols.

During the late Heian period the first real brocade was made in Japan after students brought it back from China. The new fabric was called *kinran* (Plate 60) after its gold threads. An overlay of gold foil was applied to fine tough paper made from mulberry fiber, and the paper was cut into strips for weft. In the Kamakura period, brocading, painting, and embroidery were used to put the *mon*, or family crest, on textiles. The designs were used to identify a certain lord, his family, and his servants.

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**Edo Dyeing**

During the Edo period (1603-1867), the outside world (Tokyo) to the outside continued, the Commodore Perry. Thus, Edo textile artists that printing were unrivaled anywhere. A famous kimono, is *Yuzen*, perfect.
of many weaving and embroidery commissions. Imperial courts and households ordered goods such as textiles and silks giving detailed designs. Western scholars, from China and Iran, admired these fabrics in the eighth century. Some of the finest woven fabrics were those made by the T'ang dynasty. These fabrics were named for their patterned silk threads. T’ang silks were also known for their high quality and durability.

**Muromachi and Momoyama Textiles**

The *Muromachi* (Ashikaga) period (1334–1573 A.D.) was a time of continued warfare and the flowering of the arts. Almost contemporary with the Ming dynasty, the Muromachi period coincided with two centuries of strife and change in Europe. The Ashikaga moved the capital to Kyoto, a major weaving and embroidery center since the eighth century. Magnificent fabrics were woven for costumes worn in the newly popular Noh dramas. Japan was united in the Momoyama period (1573–1615 A.D.) and industry prospered. Each year trading ships carried Japanese goods to southeast Asian ports, and soon Europeans were in Nagasaki seeking Japanese silks.

Seigo, a stiff silk that made trousers stand straight out sideways and yukate, a soft cotton crepe weave made with irregular floats, were two quite contrasting fabrics of the Muromachi period. Cotton was also used for warp in a silk tapestry called *tsuzure nishiki*. The Japanese called it "fingernail tapestry," because the weavers batten the weft with long, specially grooved nails. Tsuzure nishiki was a development of *tsuzure-ori* (linked weaving), copied from and nearly identical to Chinese *k'o-ssu* (Plate 54).

Brocades were important during the Muromachi and Momoyama periods, when Ming imports were copied. A most sumptuous gold brocade, *kasa-ori* (Plate 61) was woven with satin design on a twill ground and had elaborate plant, animal, and bird designs (Plate 62).

Velvet (*budo*) belongs to the late Momoyama and early Edo periods. Several stories were told about how the Japanese first learned to make it—one that a Chinese weaver happened to leave in one of the weaves used to hold up the pile warp. The Japanese invented a method for resist dyeing velvets woven with delicate floral patterns.

**Edo Dyeing**

During the *Edo* (Tokugawa) period (1615–1867 A.D.) Japan closed its doors to the outside world and artistic extravagance was patronized in courts set up at Edo (Tokyo) to occupy the feudal lords. Although some trade with the Dutch continued, the quantity of textiles that reached the West was small until Commodore Perry opened Japan to American trade in 1854.

Thus, Edo fabrics were made for the Japanese alone, and as the period advanced textile artists turned to age-old dyeing techniques and used them with a perfection unrivaled anywhere. *ikat* (*Kasuri*), tie-dyeing (Plate 63), jam dyeing, and block printing were well developed.

A famous fabric of the Edo period, and one still popular for the ceremonial kimono, is *Yuzen* work (Plate 64). A seventeenth century fan painter, Miyazaki Yuzen, perfected an old method for applying resist paste with sharpened sticks in
order to retain very precise design outlines. He was also adept at "twilight
dyeing"—one color shaded off into an entirely different one. Yuzen published
a catalog of kimono designs for which his dealers took orders. Many individual
designs were available, bamboo and plum blossoms ranking highest. Ideographs
telling messages such as "I like a fight" remind us of the screen-printed T-shirts of
the 1970s. The beautiful stencils used to apply resist paste have been collected as art
objects. Very thin paper layers are reinforced with webs of hair, so fine as not
to hinder the work.

Japanese design is a combination of native and Chinese motifs. Stories of filial
affection, Chinese legend, Japanese mythology, tales of chivalry, fantastic
creatures, plants both naturalistic and symbolic have all been represented on Japan-
ese textiles. During the second half of the nineteenth century Japanese design had a
particularly strong influence on Western art and interior decoration, giving rise to a
style called Japonaiserie.

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5. Marc Aurel Stein wrote several books including Setinda (Oxford: Clarendon Press,
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Kashmir shawl.

PLATE 52 (above) / Chinese silk fragment, from the Han dynasty period. Note cock. (Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Bloomfield Moore Fund)

PLATE 53 (left) / Chinese silk gauze fragment, from the Han dynasty period. Cream colored. (Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Bloomfield Moore Fund)
PLATE 55 / Chinese velvet hanging. (Crown Copyright. Victoria and Albert Museum)
PLATE 56 (above) / Seventeenth century Chinese damask. (Crown Copyright, Victoria and Albert Museum)  PLATE 57 (below) / Ming dynasty silk. Yellow ground with blue, red, green, pink, and white design, and gold thread. (Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1934)
PLATE 59 (above) / Seventeenth or eighteenth century Chinese dragon roundel and diaper silk. (Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Nellie B. Hussey, 1942)

PLATE 60 (below) / Detail of a seventeenth century Japanese priest's robe in gold brocade from the Nishijin Looms, Kyoto. (Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Pulitzer Bequest, 1919)