Plate 2: Red gauze summer robe for a Manchu woman. The under-sleeves are blue gauze; The cuffs and bands are black with shades of green, lavender, rose and others. Wisteria and *shou* character.
Colors of silk floss: Shades of green and lavender.
Metallic thread: Paper gold wrapped on silk yarns.
Stitches: Float and Chinese knots.
Early 20th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1929, Acc. No. 30.76.3.
Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Chinese Women's Skirts of The Qing Dynasty

Mary V. Hays

Introduction

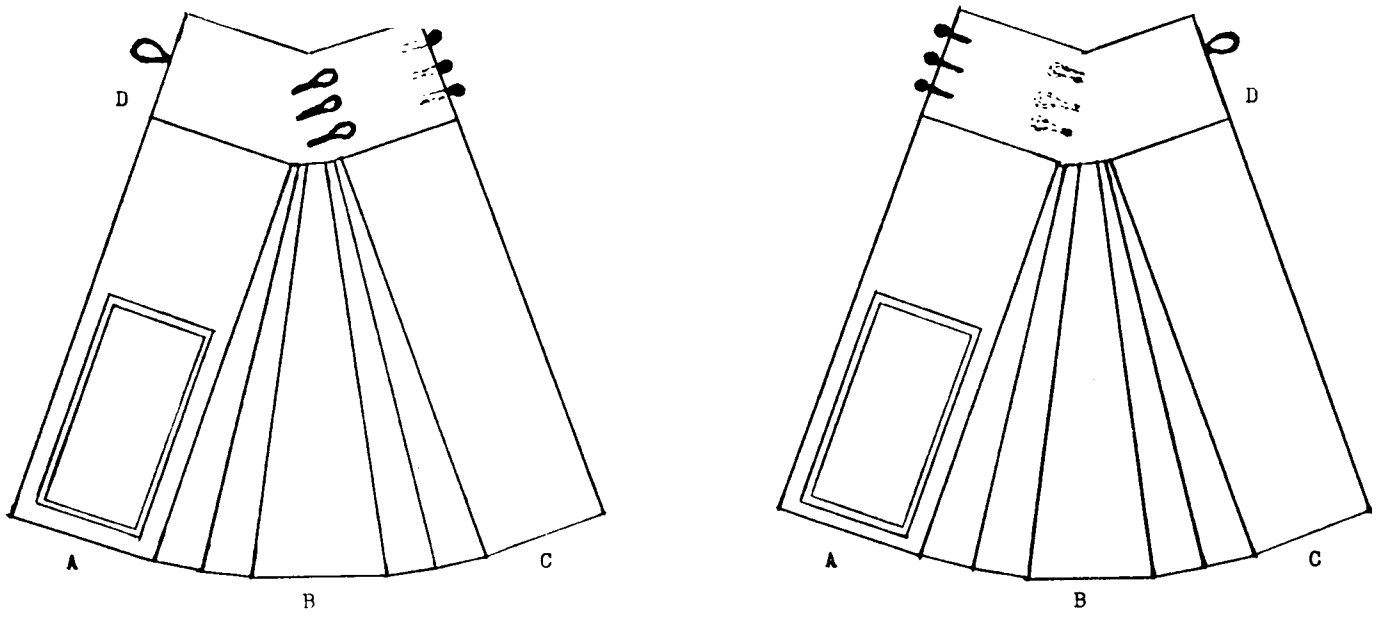
Silk skirts that are ingeniously fashioned and imaginatively decorated, usually with embroidery, are found in almost every collection of Chinese costumes. They represent a type of garment worn by Chinese women during the Qing dynasty, 1644-1911. Throughout this period the patterning on the skirt and the tailoring of the side panels reflect the changes in the social and economic conditions of the time in which it was made. Consequently, each skirt is a social document. This article is divided into five parts in order to discuss the Chinese skirt within this context and to organize the information relevant to its documentation. Part one is a brief history of the Chinese skirt. Part two discusses the dating of these skirts. Part three examines these skirts from the point of view of the women who wore them, discussing not only the occasions on which they were worn but the significance of the colors and decoration. Part four concentrates on the symbolism of the decoration. The final section, part five, is devoted exclusively to the symbolism of the flowers, which are the predominant motifs on Chinese skirts.

Secondary source material for the study of Chinese skirts varies greatly in its reliability. Paintings and literary reminiscences are apt to depict a highly romanticized China. The nineteenth-century photographs that have been published give no specific information about the women wearing these skirts or the source of the skirt. The properties in the photographic studios in China were passed on from firm to firm throughout the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s. The possibility exists that in some photographs the skirts were among these properties and the women who wore them were the photographer's models. Even if the photographer signed his print, there is no documentation as to whether the skirt is of that period or earlier.

The early twentieth-century books written by women who were born and raised in China are one of the most reliable sources for information on the Chinese skirt. Dorothea Soothill, who later became Lady Hosie, was raised in the social environment in which these skirts were worn. In 1911, immediately following the collapse of the Qing dynasty, she sought asylum in the household of a Chinese judge. As a young woman in her early twenties, she was very conscious of clothing styles as was the second daughter, Wan Lan, Orchis Flower. In a delightfully feminine ritual of friendship, these young women exchanged their clothing. The detailed description of each Chinese garment as it ws put on by Miss Soothill is valuable documentation of an early twentieth-century winter outfit.

> First, there was the *tou t'ou,* a diamond-shaped piece of cotton material, something like an apron, for the front of the person, tied with strings that

How a Qing Dynasty Skirt is Worn



The two identical halves of the skirt are assembled in the following manner.

Right half as worn.

A. Back with this decorated panel showing.
B. Tailored side panel.
C. Front with this narrower panel hidden by the overlapping decorated panel of the left half.

Left Half as worn.

A. Front with this decorated panel showing.
B. Tailored side panel.
C. Back with this narrower panel hidden by the overlapping decorated panel of the right half.

D. The band on both the left and right half had fabric loops and knotted fabic buttons to fasten the two halves together. Two tapes, or strings, hold the assembled skirt firmly in place. Since the two assembled halves overlap, a tape is first secured to the underneath single loop (at the back) on the narrower panel and then tied around the waist. Another tape then secures the front single loop (which would be showing) on the decorated panel and it too is tied around the waist.

Note: The two halves, although identical, are not reversible because one set of the loops are place inside the band on the left half and one set of the knotted buttons are placed inside the band on the right half to allow for the overlapping of the two halves.

Plate 1: Diagram showing how the skirts are constructed. Many skirts in Western collections have the two halves of the skirt sewn to a single waistband. This alteration may have been made because the Western women who purchased these skirts were accustomed to wearing a skirt with a single waistband.

went round the waist and back again to the front and fastened round the neck by a silver chain stitched to its highest point . . . the *tou t'ou* was of flowered black and white printed calico . . . Then came the inner pair of trousers, fitting fairly tightly down to the ankle, of flannelette, and fastened at the waist by a tape. The next thing to be put on was the inner tunic, again of flannelette, the long white sleeves being visible at the wrist when the lady is dressed. Then the outer flowered cotton trousers, thickly padded with cotton-wool wadding . . . reaching to the ankle, and folded over in a bulging lump at the front of the waist, where they were tied with tape . . . Over the trousers, I put Flower's pretty black skirt . . . on top of everything I donned her every-day blue tunic reaching to the hips, which was lined with wolfskin.[1]

The fact that "Flower's pretty black skirt" was necessary to complete the outfit indicated that the exchange of clothing was considered a ceremonial occasion. By this ritual Orchis Flower and Miss Soothill declared that they had become "blood sisters."[2] On another occasion Orchis Flower discusses the use of the skirt.

Girls did not wear skirts or put up their hair until they were seventeen or so, but they preferred to wear trousers after that, skirts being essential only on the wedding day. It was . . . so much easier to walk in trousers.[3]

Chinese woman of the upper classes with her badly deformed bound feet needed a skirt that permitted her to walk without catching the toes of her shoes in the skirt. Yet the skirt had to have enough fullness to cover layers of bulky garments and the trousers always worn underneath. The fullness of the Chinese skirt is in the side panels. A single straight rectangular piece of fabric is used for both the front and back so that while walking the skirt will not wrap around the legs. As seen in Plate 1 even greater freedom of movement is possible because the skirt is made in two separate pieces that overlap but are not sewn together from the waistline to the hemline. Thus the skirt freely expanded and contracted as the Chinese woman walked with tiny shuffling steps, swaying to maintain her balance.

Throughout the entire period of the Qing dynasty, two very different styles of dress existed in China, that of the reigning Manchus and that of the Chinese people they ruled. To remind themselves that they were of a different ethnic background, the conquering Manchus always retained their native dress. The A-line, ankle-length robe in Plate 2 is slit at the sides to give a Manchu woman sufficient room to walk with ease because Manchu women never bound their feet. Also they never wore the Chinese skirt.

I *The History of the Chinese Skirt*

The necessity for a skirt that would expand and contract easily did not arise until the practice of foot binding became popular during the Song dynasty, A.D. 960-1279. This crippling practice may have begun sometime around the year 900, when an emperor insisted that his court dancers bind their feet into an arch so that they could

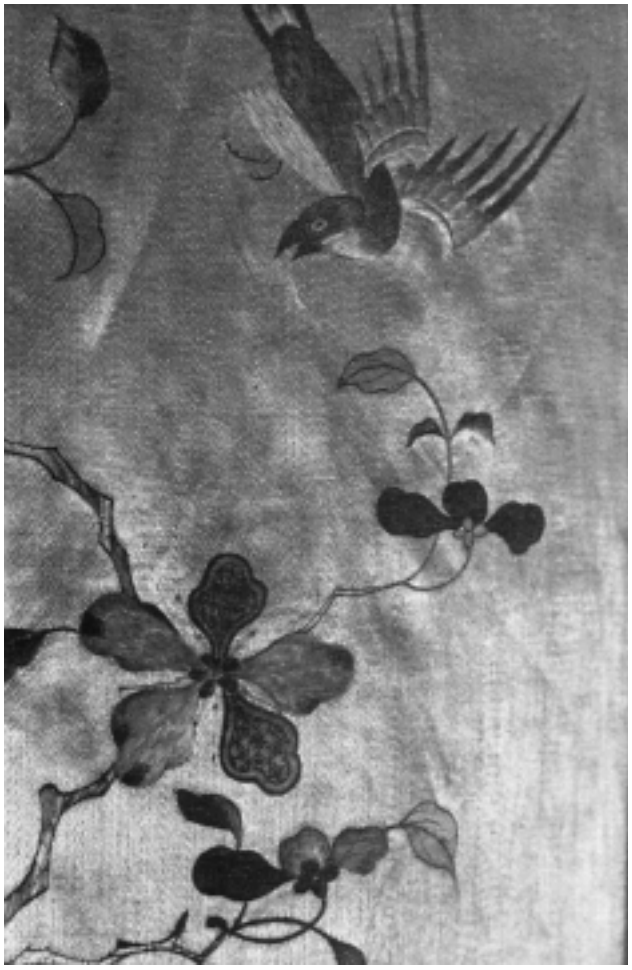


Plate 4: Detail of Plate 3. Two peach blossoms petals are painted in black ink and three leaves are painted a yellowish-green. The black outlines of the larger stems were completely covered originally with light brown silk floss.

Plate 3: The lower part of a rectangular panel and the knife-pleated side of a white satin skirt. Some swallows and each blossoms are embroidered, others are painted. Colors of silk floss: Red, yellow, lavender, grey, brown, white; two shades of pink; three shades of green and blue.
Colors of paint: Red, yellow, lavender, brown, black, pale green, pale blue.
Stitches: Satin, long and short, split, stem, straight, or float, Chinese knot.
18th century. Private collection.

tiptoe in a seductive sway. Paintings. sculptured figures, literary works, and actual skirts found in recent archaeological excavations confirm that skirts of many different styles were worn thrughout Chinese history. A simple straight-sided Zhou dynasty skirt is worn by a sculptured figurine found in a tomb of the Warring States period, 481-221 B.C.[4] In 1982 two unlined skirts, one of yellow silk, were found in another tomb of this period.[5] Skirts that appear to be pleated or gored appear on the decoration of a bronze *hu* but it is impossible to tell whether they are separate skirts or the skirts of inner robes.[6]

In 1972 in an Early Han dynasty tomb of circa 150 B.C. were found two unlined, four panel wrap-around skirts. The two center panels are slightly flared. Each skirt has a waistband with a smaller band attached to each end. These are used to tie the skirt at the waistline. Both skirts were silk, woven in plain weave or tabby and the color of one was scarlet.[7] It is possible that some of the more elaborate skirts seen on Han dynasty tomb figurines and in tomb paintings may be separate garments.

It is during the Tang dynasty, A.D. 618-906, that the separate skirt becomes the predominant garment in fashionable dress. The Tang woman's costume was influenced by the "Turkish and East Iranian modes of dress."[8] Instead of the traditional Chinese robe, *pao,* she wore a short blouse and coat, with a diaphanous scarf draped over the arms; a full, floor-length skirt with a very high waistline; and a separate sash. Shoes with turned-up toes, only partly hidden by the flowing skirt, show that women's feet were not bound.

Aprons appear as colorful accessories that cover the upper part of some skirts in the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties that preceded the Manchu conquest of China in 1644. On these aprons the tailoring is completed so that they are aesthetically pleasing when worn on top of the skirt.[9]

Plate 5: Rectangular panel and some of the side gores of a pale green satin skirt. The landscape with figures continues from the rectangular panels into the side gores. Colors of silk floss: Black, white, shades of salmon, yellow, green, blue. Stitches: Float stitches, Chinese knot, laid work, couched gold-wrapped silk. 18th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, William Christian Paul Bequest, 1930. Acc. No. 30.75.84.
Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

In 1977, in his catalogue for an exhibition of Chinese costumes at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, John Vollmer called the two-piece, overlapping skirts worn by Chinese women during the Qing dynasty "paired aprons." He says that "trousers and paired aprons worn informally by Chinese women since at least the second century B.C. relate directly to the Manchu male court coats. Both undoubtedly derived from a common general source, although each represents a separate line of development."[10]

In *Mongol Costumes* published in 1950, Henny Harald Hansen says that in China "The open wrapped petticoat . . . consisting of two halves sewn to a band which is wrapped round the waist . . . is known as early as the Wei dynasty [founded A.D. 386] and has remained a part of a Manchurian guardsman's uniform."[11]

A photograph of a Song dynasty gauze skirt shows that it is in two overlapping pieces sewn to a single wide waistband with ties. Where visible, the vertical edges and the hemline are bound with embroidered bands.[12] When wrapped around the body, it would not permit as much freedom of movement as a Qing dynasty skirt since there are no gored or pleated side panels. This skirt may be a forerunner of the Qing dynasty skirt. A Yuan dynasty skirt appears to be in two parts and may be pleated.[13] A Ming dynasty skirt is deeply pleated.[14] Both have embroidered bands along the hemline. Each of the three skirts has a single waistband made of a fabric that is different than that used for the skirt.

On the Qing dynasty skirts, these waistbands are much wider than those on the earlier skirts. They are made of cotton or ramie, a linen-like fabric, and it was necessary to cover them with another garment when the skirt was worn. Therefore, these skirts are not aprons as defined in the dictionary, namely, "An article of dress . . . worn on the forepart of the body, to protect the clothes, or as a covering." However, whichever word "petticoat," "apron," or "skirt" is used, it identifies the same garment.

The tailoring of the Qing dynasty skirt never changed except for the variations in the construction of the side panels. For almost two hundred years, this skirt was made in two separate pieces, each one exactly the same as the other. Each piece is composed of a straight rectangular panel, a side section composed of several panels, and another straight rectangular panel narrower than the first one. All these panels are attached to a waistband. When worn, one of the smaller panels will be underneath each of the larger rectangular panels, since the two skirt pieces overlap. The two larger rectangular panels form the visible front and back of the skirt. They are usually about the same width but the length varies according to the height of the wearer. Stylistic changes in the side panels include the variation in the width and number of gores and the manner in which they are pleated. Side panels with many fine pleats are made from straight pieces of fabric that are knife-pleated. These may fall freely or they may be held in place by controlling stitches in various arrangements.

II *The Dating of Chinese Women's Skirts*

Throughout the Qing dynasty there are very subtle changes in both the cut and decoration of Chinese skirts. In a scroll made for the K'ang-hsi Emperor's sixtieth-birthday celebrations in 1714, there is a vignette of a Chinese woman wearing a skirt with a narrow front panel and side panels that are knife-pleated.[15] The white satin skirt in Plate 3 has similar tailoring. Each half of the skirt is tailored from four widths of white satin woven on a nineteen-inch loom. Each of the four rectangular panels, which range in width from nine to ten inches, is completely embroidered and any panel could be worn outermost. The original waistbands would have had a complete set of fabric loops and knotted buttons on both the front and back. These narrow

panels do not have embroidered borders or appliquéd ribbons. They are a part of the same nineteen-inch width of fabric that forms a part of the knife-pleating of the side panels. On both the rectangular panels and the pleated side panels, some of the designs of swallows and peach blossoms are embroidered in colored silks, while others are painted. The painted petals in Plate 4 are filled with finely drawn fret patterns. These painted areas were not intended for embroidery because there is no colored painting or black lines beneath the embroidered motifs. Both the fabric and the embroidery of this skirt can be dated as eighteenth century.

The majority of the eighteenth-century skirts available for study have side panels of five wide gores, the center gore being considerably wider than the two gores on either side. Since this particular style of skirt is used also for later skirts, these skirts cannot be dated from their tailoring. The patterning typical of eighteenth-century skirts can be described as a unified composition drawn with an economy of line and with adequate open areas to fulfill the intent of the design. A landscape on the rectangular panel may continue uninterrupted across the vertical seam line onto the side gores as on the skirt in Plate 5. Even when the subject of the patterning is completed on the rectangular panel, the side panels will depict the same subject. The characteristics of eighteenth-century embroidery will be discussed later.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, merchants and travelers brought back from China sets of watercolors and oil paintings in which are illustrated many of the costumes of China. Some were done by Westerners, others were export items produced by the Chinese for the western market. Unfortunately, these have limited use in dating Chinese women's skirts. The artists, both Chinese and Western, used a considerable amount of poetic license in their drawing, and their sketches are not detailed enough to illustrate accurately the intricate designs in the patterning of the skirts. The tailoring of the side panels is only partly visible because the figures are drawn facing the artist. Three different paintings dated between 1820 and 1840 depict different styles of side panels. A watercolor, circa 1840, shows a woman wearing a skirt with four wide side gores visible.[16] An oil painting, circa 1835, shows three many-gored skirts. On one skirt seven gores are visible.[17] A watercolor, circa 1820-1840, has a skirt with nine small side panels visible.[18] On all these skirts the embroidery is drawn in curlicues that merely show the placement of the design.

Throughout the nineteenth century skirts were made with side panels of five, seven, nine, and eleven gores.[19] On these skirts the larger center panel may be either tapered or pleated. many five-gored skirts are sparsely decorated but on the five-gored formal skirts and the white mourning skirts, there is extensive decoration. Skirts with side panels made of twelve gores, each gore of the same width, are profusely decorated. A logical explanation of the variation in the number of gores and the amount of decoration was given by a Chinese woman from a prominent Hong Kong family. She said that skirts which required less material and had less decoration were worn by the women within the household who occupied a position of lesser importance. Skirts requiring more material and embroidery were worn by women of higher status.[20]

Early nineteenth-century skirts with twelve gores on each side panel often are not pleated. The embroidered motifs on each gore are either three stylized motifs, usually flowers or butterflies, arranged one above the other, or an elongated spray of flowers. If the twelve gores were pleated, they could be folded like a fan with the folds made along the seams of the gores. This would create six pleats without creasing the embroidery. This may have been the manner in which these skirts were pleated originally. S. Wells Williams, who went to China in 1833 and published his first edition of "The Middle Kingdom" in 1848, illustrates in this work a "Procession of Ladies to an Ancestral Temple." This is his description of their skirts.

> Each side of the skirt is plaited [pleated] about six times, and in front and rear are two pieces of buckram to which they are attached; the plaits and front pieces are stiffened with wire and lining. Embroidery is worked upon these two pieces and the plaits in such a way that as the wearer steps the action of the feet alternately opens and shuts them on each side disclosing a part or whole of two different colored figures . . . the effect is more elegant when the colors are well contrasted.[21]

In western collections there are many ninteenth-century skirts, usually of twelve gores, that have each gore made of a different colored fabric. These skirts have been called "rainbow skirts." Such a skirt, Plate 6, is tailored in the traditional manner and should not be confused with the overskirt of multicolored streamers in Plate 7, with a large red panel front and back on which is embroidered a dragon and a fêng huang. The dragon and the fêng huang are associated with weddings and therefore, these overskirts are apt to be considered an accessory for a bride. A bride from a family of social prominence, however, would not be likely to wear such a frivolous accessory but a professional dancer at the wedding would find such an overskirt suitable for her performance.

Some twelve-gored skirts have a crease down the center of the embroidery on each of the side gores creating twelve pleats. This may indicate that these skirts have been remodeled. Such a pleat not only conceals the embroidery but in time will weaken the embroidery threads in the crease. It does not seem characteristic of a people as frugal as the Chinese either to hide or destroy expensive embroidery. Undoubtedly older skirts that were remodeled in a manner that ignores the aesthetic appeal of the skirt and the quality of the embroidery may have been done for the merchants who sold skirts to the foreign market. If the appliquéd woven ribbons cover some of the embroidery, these may be a later addition. When the appliquéd embroidered or woven bands on the rectangular panels reach all the way to the waistline, this could be remodeling circa 1920 to make the skirt wearable with the short waist-length jackets popular at that time. Many older formal skirts appear to have been remodeled in this manner to meet the demands of the western market for dragon-patterned textiles.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century not only were mechanical looms in operation in China but bolts of silk fabrics were being imported.[22] Since these less expensive silk fabrics could be used for everyday clothing, larger amounts of handwoven silk fabrics were available for the expensive embroidered garments. Full

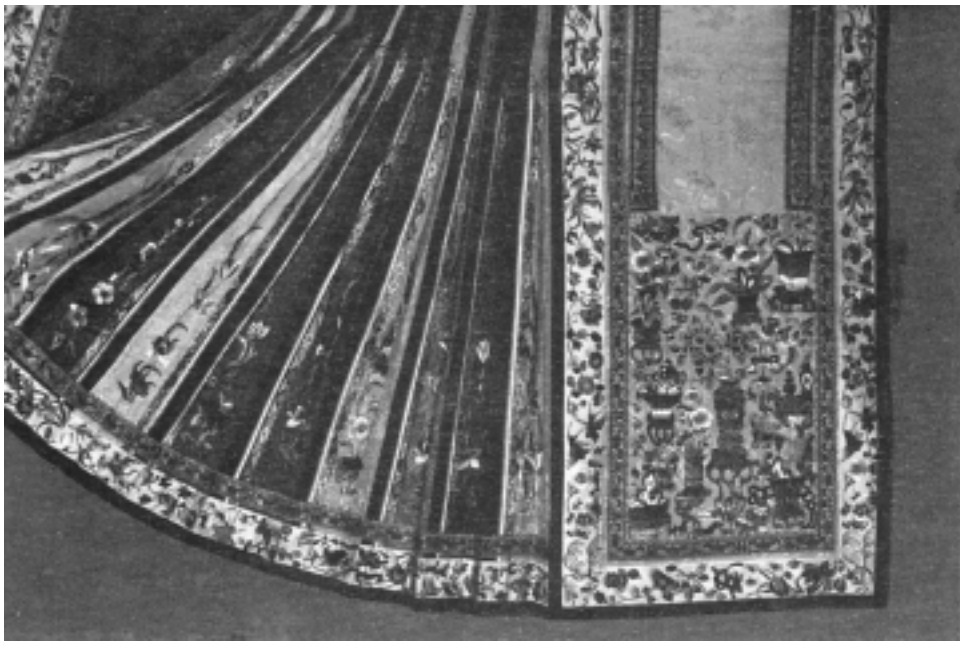


Plate 6: The lower part of a pale yellow rectangular panel and the twelve many-colored gores of one side of a "rainbow" skirt. Both the rectangular panel and gores are made from damask-like silk fabrics.
Color of gores starting from panel: Deep yellow, dark grey, light brown, pink, medium blue, red, white, medium green, peach, light blue, medium yellow, blue green.
Colors of silk floss: Red, chartreuse, lavender (now grey), black, white; two shades of pink, yellow, brown; three shades of green; four shades of blue.
Metallic thread: Gold-wrapped thread couched with red silk floss.
Stitches: Satin, long and short, split, straight, couching, Chinese knot.
Mid-19th century. Remodeled in the late 19th century with wide woven ribbons.
Private collection.

widths of cloth could be used for the side panels of skirts. They were vertically seamed and then pleated. These pleats were held in place by making a small controlling stitch at regular intervals underneath the leading edge of a pleat from the waistband to the hemline. On the adjoining pleat the first stitch is made half way between the stitches used on the first pleat. Plate 8 shows that when these pleats are expanded they resemble a honeycomb. These "honeycomb-pleated" side panels were popular even after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the pleats became shallower and closer together. Sometimes they were covered with a large amount of embroidery. Narrow streamers either floated over the honeycomb pleating or were sewn to it.

Although the tailoring of the rectangular panels that form the front and back of the skirt never changed, there was a change in the number of motifs used and

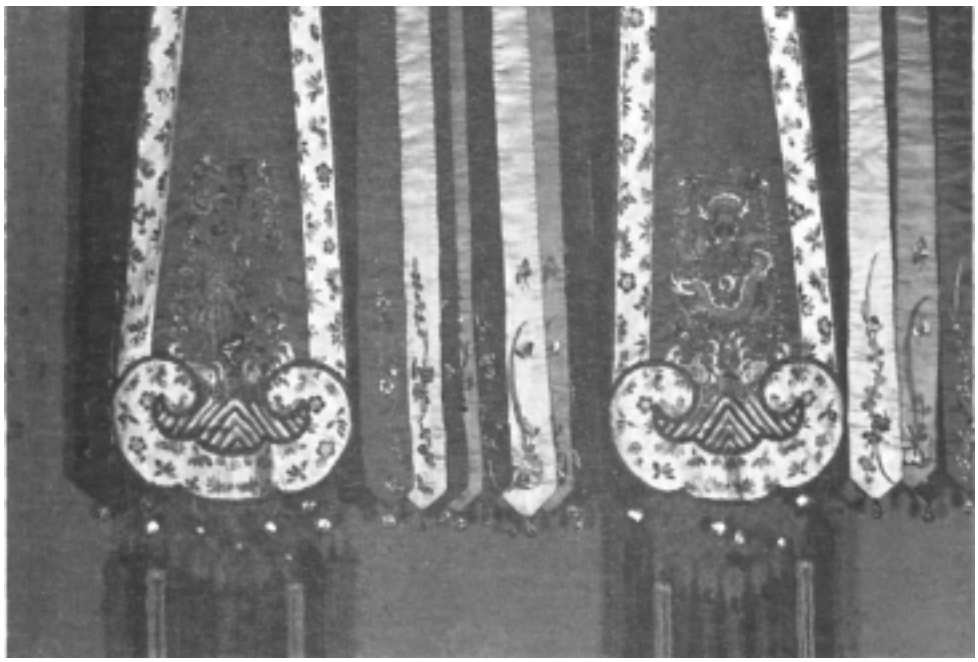


Plate 7: The lower part of a satin overskirt of two red panels with twelve many-colored streamers on each side. The back of every streamer is a different color from the front and the embroidered design is also different.
Colors used for streamers: Red, magenta, orange, yellow, chartreuse, green, pale and medium blue, lavender, dark brown, white.
Colors of silk floss: Orange, chartreuse, purple; two shades of red, pink, brown; three shades of yellow and green; four shades of blue.
Metallic thread: Gold-wrapped thread couched with red silk floss.
Stitches: Satin, long and short, split, buttonhole, straight, couching.
Late 19th century. Private collection.

their placement in the design area. On skirts dating to the early part of the nineteenth century, the central motif of a large peony, sometimes with buds, may be surrounded by one large flower or butterfly in each of the four corners, as can be seen in Plate 9. The few other flowers or lucky symbols that fill the interstices are also quite large. By the second half of the nineteenth century many more motifs surround the large central peony, as in Plate 10. To fit the design into the space allotted, these motifs must be drawn smaller and with fewer details. Ultimately, this led to the stylization of the motifs and a tedious repetition of the motifs in the patterning. These repetitious designs requiring less expensive embroidery exemplified the deteriorating economic conditions of the second half of the nineteenth century.

C. P. Fitzgerald says that "The real cause of the decline of the Manchu Empire in the 19th century was intellectual stagnation brought about by the domination of a small alien ruling class, itself dominated by a petrified cultural tradition."[23] Such

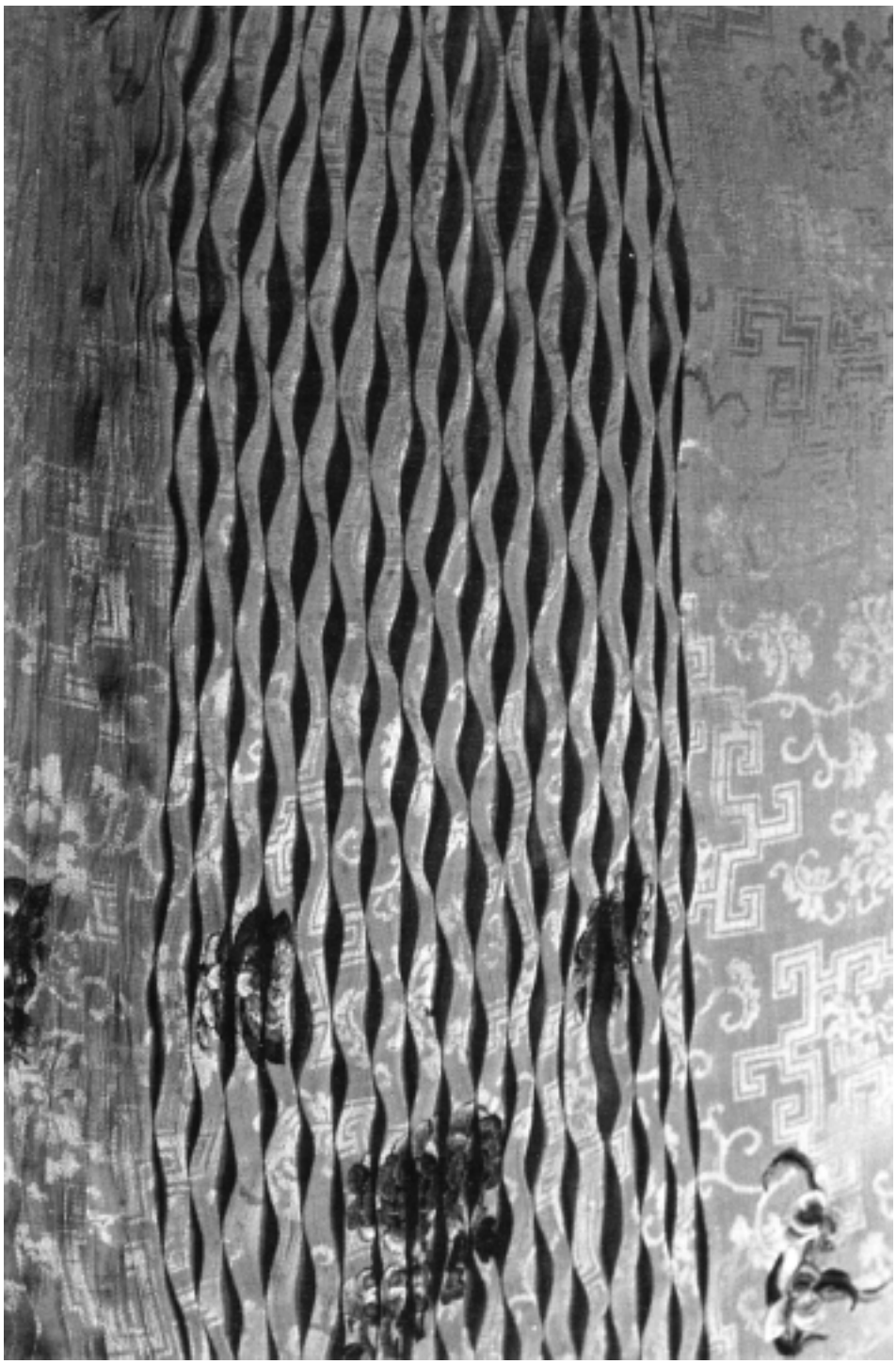


Plate 8: Detail of honeycomb pleating. The embroidery is worked on the pale blue damask-like silk before it is pleated and is designed so that the motifs are recognizeable even when the pleats are expanded.
Colors of silk floss: Red, orange, yellow, black, white; two shades of pink; three shades of green and blue.
Stitches: Satin, long and short, straight, couching.
Circa 1875. Private collection.

a ruling class was unable to defend the nation against the various foreign invasions, and by 1860 China was dependent on the goodwill of the western maritime powers. During this same period the Manchus were waging devasting warfare in the Yangtze Valley in their many campaigns to destroy the Taiping Rebellion, 1850-1866. As a result the silk-producing areas of the Yangtze Valley and the industrial areas around Nanking where most of the Imperial silks were woven and embroidered were destroyed. Consequently, textile workers in other parts of the country, especially in the north, were overworked to fill the demands for clothing and household furnishings.

In early silk tapestry *(kesi)*, usually all the details are woven in. If painting is used, it is used with great restraint.[24] Some of the necessary short-cuts taken by the weavers in the mid-nineteenth century can be seen in the patterning of a skirt woven in silk tapestry shown in Plate 11. On this skirt the areas reserved for some of the larger motifs are woven in a single color. Painting is then used to shade the motif and to complete the details of the drawings. On this skirt the painting is done skillfully creating colorful and imaginative designs but by the end of the century, the designs often are hastily painted with a minimum of details.

Early in the nineteenth century very narrow woven ribbons were used as an edging between the patterning on the lower part of the rectangular panel and the one-inch appliquéd band that forms a border on all three sides. As the century progressed these woven ribbons became wider and more colorful as commercial dyes became more readily available. By the twentieth century so many rows of ribbons were used that the center area reserved for the principal patterning became a narrow vertical strip. In Plate 12 this strip is decorated by sewing on a separate piece of embroidery. This must have been the ultimate economy in an age beset by economic difficulties.

Wealthy families still did commission very finely embroidered skirts. In Plate 13 the embroidery worked on the rectangular panel imitates the several woven ribbons appliquéd to less expensive skirts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century! In Plate 14 very realistic birds typical of South China are seen amidst flowering branches on the honeycomb-pleated side panels and on the narrow vertical strip in the center of the rectangular panel. This embroidery appears to be closely related to that seen on the Cantonese shawls China exported to the West in this period.

Even though the textile industries of the Yangtze Valley were rebuilt after the Taiping Rebellion, the textiles produced never attained the quality of workmanship and design of those produced in the first half of the nineteenth century. Wages were low and the people overworked. China began to import from western nations inferior silk fabrics, metallic thread, and commercial aniline dyes.

Custom records show that aniline dyes were entering China through the ports of Shanghai and Tientsin in 1871.[25] The bright green and vivid reddish-purple dyes were of great interest to the Chinese because for centuries they had found it difficult to produce a stable green or purple dye from plant material. Now that greens and purples that did not fade were available, they were used as a popular color combination in the textiles of the 1870s and 1880s. However, a textile must not be dated to this

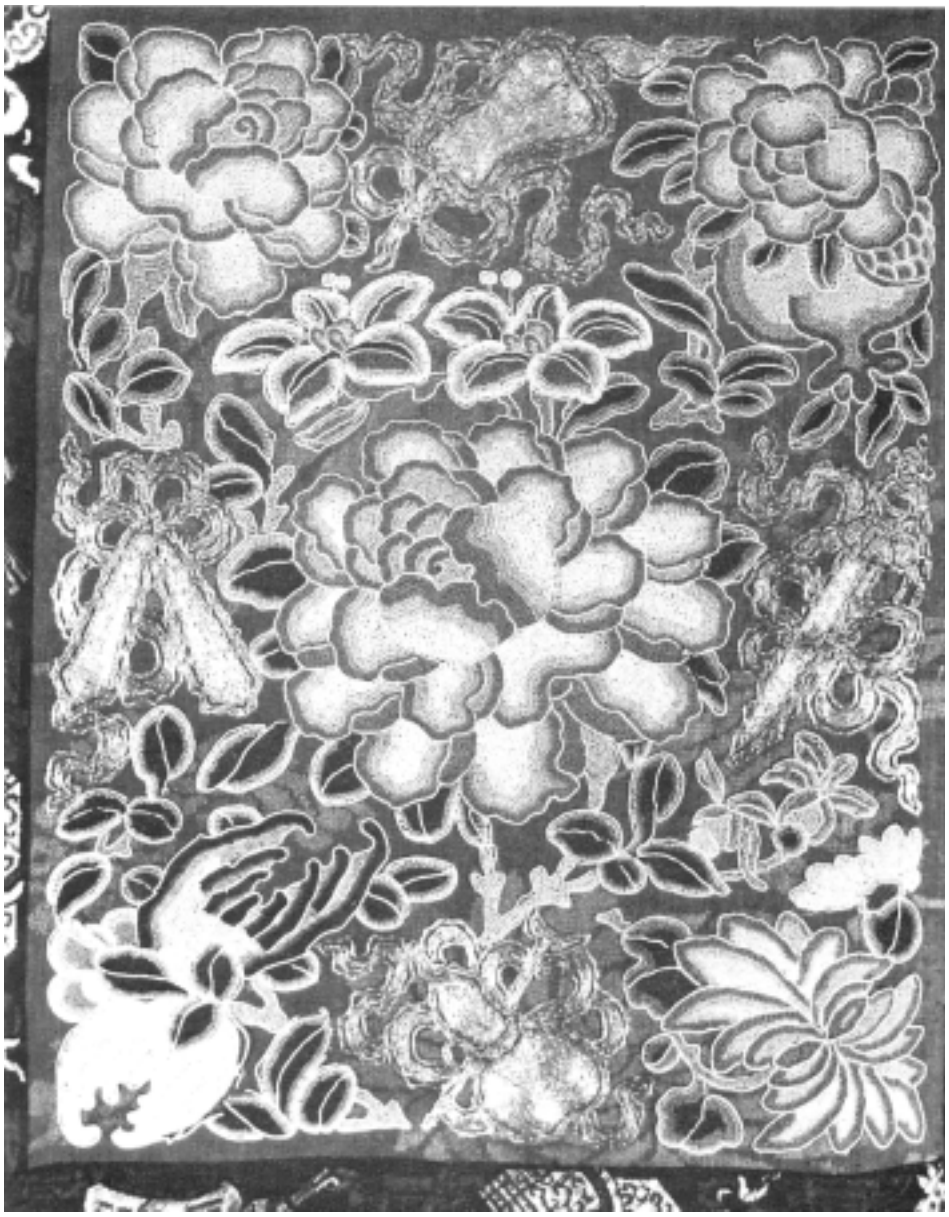


Plate 9: The embroidery of a rectangular panel of a dark green damask-like silk skirt. Taoist symbols and flowers with a large peony dominating the center and two day lilies above. Clockwise from the upper left corner another peony, a fan, a pomegranate flower and fruit, a sword, chrysanthemums, a gourd and crutch, Buddha's hand citron and castenets.
Colors of silk floss: Red, orange, chartreuse, brown, white; two shades of yellow, green, purple (now grey); three shades of pink; four shades of blue.
Metallic thread: Two shades of gold-wrapped thread. One couched with white, the other with red silk floss.
Stitches: Chinese knot, couching.
Early 19th century. Private collection.

Plate 10: The embroidery of the rectangular panel in Plate 6. The Hundred Antiques, Flowers of the Twelve Months and other lucky symbols, some of which are arranged to form rebuses, which can be read as puns wishing good fortune. See Plate 6 caption for colors of silk floss, metallic thread and stitches.

Plate 11: The woven pattern of a rectangular panel of a green-blue *k'o-ssu* or *kesi* skirt.
Warp: Silk, sericin left in. White.
Weft: Silk, sericin removed. Red, pink, yellow, brown, white; two shades of green and blue.
Colors of paint: Shades of red, pink, orange, yellow, blue, green, purple, black.
The mottled effect in the tail of the upper butterfly-bat is the result of using both a blue weft and white weft in the same row and manipulating them to show the amount of blue or white desired.
Mid-19th century. Private collection.

period simply because it has unfaded greens or purples. It is the harsh bright colors and the use of many shades of the same color that identifies commercial dyes. An embroidery worked with threads dyed with vegetable dyes may not be faded if it had never had a lengthy exposure to bright light. Vegetable dyes were used even after the commercial dyes came to China.

Certain characteristics of embroidery floss can be used to confirm the date suggested by the styling of the skirt and the design of the patterned areas. In general, eighteenth-century silk floss is made of very thin, straight filaments of silk and only a few ends are visible under a magnifying glass. Nineteenth-century floss usually has thicker and shorter filaments and more filaments are used to create a denser thread. The eighteenth-century thread creates embroidery with a delicate, soft quality and it lies quite flat. In contrast, nineteenth-century floss creates embroidery with an opulent, full-bodied quality.

The twisted threads in eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century embroideries are two strands of floss that are softly twisted together by the embroiderer before being couched down. The machine-twisted thread used in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century embroideries has a tight, even twist. It lies flatter and some threads have very few filament ends visible.

Some nineteenth-century skirts, possibly the less expensive ones, have long satin stitches that use less thread. Other skirts have many short satin stitches that require more thread and more time to complete the embroidery.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, Chinese knots often were used for all the motifs, which were then outlined with a couched twisted silk cord. By the end of the century, Chinese knots were used only for the central motif or for carefully selected smaller motifs.

In the embroidery of the first half of the nineteenth century, a novel effect could be created by simply twisting two different colored threads together and couching them down, but gradually, more stitches were used to create a variety of textures. Chinese embroidery has the distinction of being some of the finest embroidery known, but by the Qing period it is not the number of different stitches used in surviving examples that determines its superior quality but the precision with which the embroiderer places the stitches. It is beyond the scope of this article to list these stitches. They can be found in catalogues of exhibitions and in articles in scholarly journals.[26]

All during the Qing dynasty gold-wrapped and silver-wrapped thread of varying quality was made by glueing gold and silver leaf to paper. This paper is cut into fine strips which are tightly wrapped around a thread of silk or vegetable fiber. On thread of higher quality yellow, red, or pink lacquer or reddish bole (clay) is used to glue the metal to the paper. If some of the gold or silver foil has rubbed off, the lacquer is visible. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century an invisible adhesive is used. Usually if the fabric has been washed, the gold or silver foil is missing. Metallic thread that is tarnished may be thread that was imported in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On the earlier embroideries gold-wrapped thread usually is couched

Plate 12: The lower part of a rectangular panel and two of the fifteen side gores of an orange damask-like satin skirt. Fifteen different woven ribbons and cords are used as decoration. The small white satin appliquéd plaque is embroidered with forty motifs.
Colors of silk floss: Red, magenta, orange, chartreuse, brown, black, white; two shades of pink, green, blue, purple.
Metallic thread: Gold-wrapped thread couched with white silk floss.
Stitches: Satin, long and short, split, straight, couching, Chinese knot.
Early 20th century. Private collection.

with white or yellow silk floss and silver-wrapped thread, with white. By the late nineteenth century and sometimes earlier, gold-wrapped thread usually is couched with red floss. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century embroidery using only gold or silver-wrapped thread had each motif couched with a different colored floss, so that each acquired the color of the couching floss.

An expensive thread, used sparingly, especially on skirts, is made by splitting the shafts of feathers from the Malaysian peacock, wetting them, and wrapping them around a silk thread so that only the filaments of the feathers are visible. Since this thread is very fragile, sometimes only a few filaments of the feathers may remain on the silk thread and will be visible under a magnifying glass. On some embroideries the feather shafts are not wrapped around a silk thread but are couched directly to the fabric. Sometimes the bunched filaments are woven as wefts through twisted paired silk warps spaced in the gauze-like ground fabric thus formed. Then the filaments extending between warp pairs are clipped to form tufted or furry yarns, known in the West as chenille, and couched on a ground fabric with fine silk threads.

Techniques other than embroidery or weaving are also used for the patterning of skirts. The fabric may be hand painted, paste resist-dyed using stencils, or printed with woodblocks. Sometimes the only patterning is the appliquéd ribbons. Some skirts have no auxiliary decoration. By the very end of the Qing dynasty these skirts may be tailored in a semi-western style. Skirts of this type can be found among the clothing of Chinese families who emigrated to the West Coast.

III *The Occasions on Which Chinese Women Wore Skirts*

The robes, coats, jackets, vests, and skirts seen in western collections and in paintings and photographs conjure up the vision of a society in which people are going about their daily routines dressed in elaborately patterned costumes. Dorothea Soothill's description of the everyday clothing of the family of a Chinese judge gives quite a different picture.

> Aunt Kung was dressed with extreme simplicity. Her tunic and trousers were of black figured silk, plain, and unadorned. No ornament was in her black hair . . . Her only spot of color was the gold of the ear-rings . . . Later I was invited to meet Kung Ta Jen, and he was as quietly arrayed as his wife, in a thin, pale blue, summer silk gown falling from neck to ankle. Li Cheng, the son . . . and the girls . . . affected lighter colours, but their dress, too was studiously plain.[27]

Colorful, elaborately patterned garments were worn only on special occasions. Chiang Yee describes the color of the garments his sister wore when she was married around 1912. "She . . . put on her bridal robes, all of which were pink and red in colour."[28] On the day of a wedding, not only the bride but all persons related to her wore red.[29] Red being the color of joy was used on all joyful occasions, such as birthdays and the New Year. Green, blue, and other colors were worn by the women who were not related to the bride. In the house of the bride as she made her departure, there was a large gathering of ladies in colorful skirts. Li Cheng describes the departure

Plate 13: Almost the entire length of the rectangular panel and a part of the honeycomb-pleated side panel of a lavender damask-like skirt.
Colors of silk floss: Red, magenta, grey, black, white; two shades of pink, orange, yellow, green, blue, lavender, brown.
Stitches; Satin, stem, split, straight, couching, laid and couched, Chinese knot.
Early 20th century. Private collection.

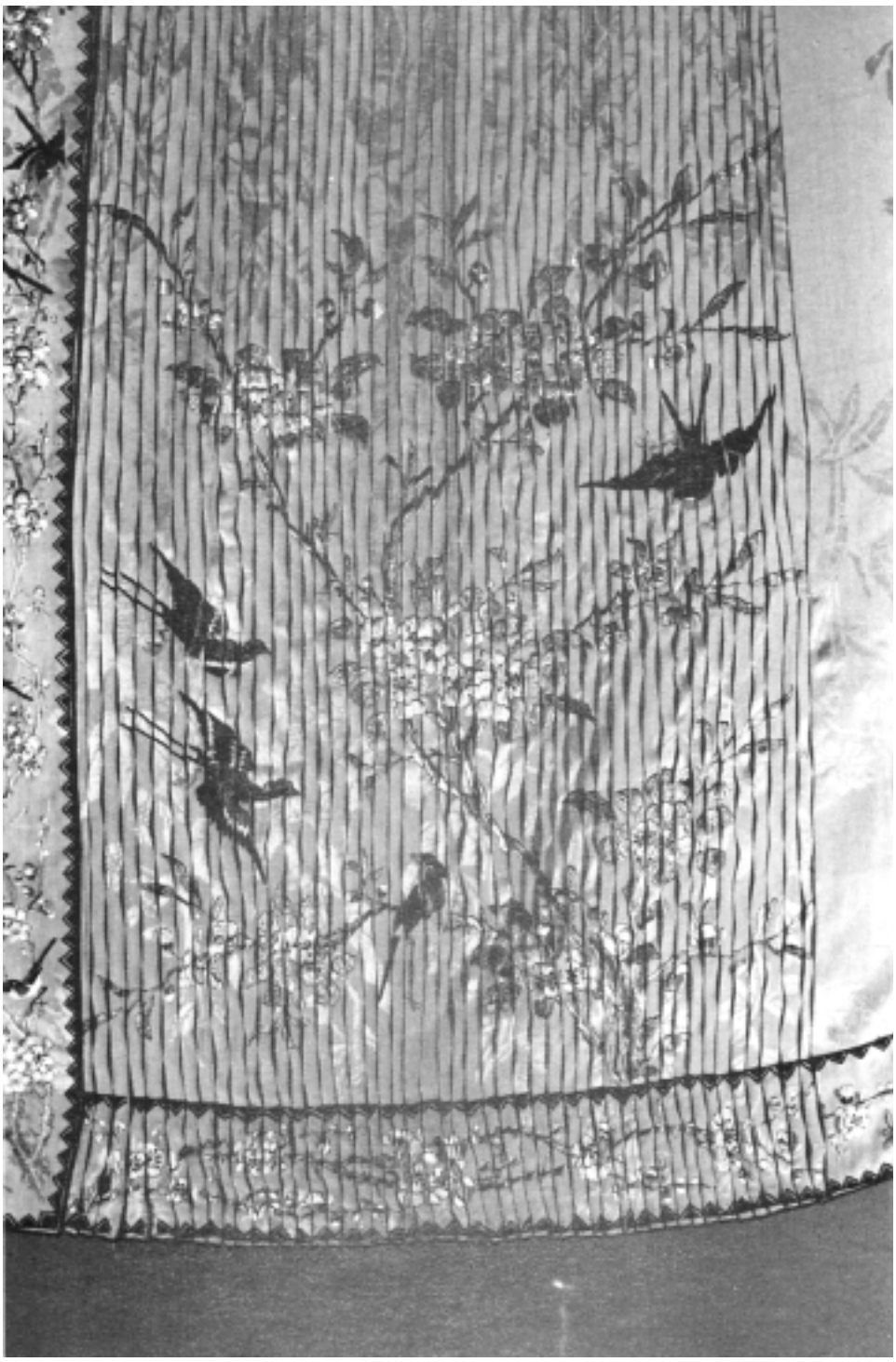


Plate 14: The entire width of the side panel in Plate 13. A design of birds in a flowering tree creates a unity of design with the rectangular panel and its borders. Compare this continuation of patterning with that of Plates 3 and 5. The embroidery is worked before it is pleated.

Plate 15: The embroidery of a rectangular panel of a green satin formal skirt. On a woman's garment the addition of the *fêng huang*, a symbol of the empress, to the cosmological iconography is appropriate.
Colors of silk floss: Red, orange, brown, black, white; two shades of pink, yellow, green, lavender; three shades of blue.
Metallic thread: Gold-wrapped and silver-wrapped thread couched with white silk floss.
Stitches: Satin, long and short, split, stem, straight, couching, laid and couched.
Mid-19th century. Private collection.

of his sister, *Wan Lan,* Flower, from her home on her wedding day. "Many guests came to see it and to give their congratulations, about fifty ladies and sixty gentlemen . . . she wore a long scarlet dress embroidered all over, and a scarlet skirt with many tinkling bells on it."[30] In the house of the groom, awaiting the arrival of the bride, were other ladies dressed in their colorful skirts.

Not every red skirt is a wedding skirt. A bride's skirt could be patterned with flowers, bats, and butterflies or with a *fêng huang,* the emblem of the Empress, because the bride was "The Empress of the Day." A red skirt patterned with a dragon floating in the sky above a mountain arising from the sea is the formal skirt for the wife of the head of the household. On the occasions when the wife sat beside her husband to receive important guests or members of the household, it was appropriate that her costume be patterned with the same symbols as those on the ceremonial court robes which her husband wore as a member of the Manchu bureauocracy. These red skirts patterned with this cosmological iconography would not have been appropriate for a bride on her wedding day. The bride would be entering the household as a consort of one of the sons of the family. Only when the husband, upon the death of his father, became the head of the household could she wear a red skirt with this cosmological iconography.

A secondary wife never wore the red color that was the exclusive right of the first wife. The legal code of the Qing dynasty states in Section 102,

> A man cannot mate again with scarlet banners and a procession during the life of his first wife. If there is a need of a handmaiden to bear children, she shall be taken into the household quietly. A wife cannot be degraded to the position of a Green Skirt, nor the Green Skirt raised to the position of a wife, so long as the wife is alive.[31]

If the wife died and the secondary wife, the Green Skirt, became the female head of the household, she wore a formal skirt with the same cosmological iconography but is was a green skirt, not a red one. (See Plate 15) White or blue formal skirts were worn for ceremonies held during periods of mourning.

Skirts were made also in pink, orange, yellow, many shades of blue, purple and lavender, brown, grey, black, and white. The color chosen had to be not only appropriate for the occasion but also for the age of the wearer. As late as the 1930s

> . . . the young usually wore the brightest, and the old the softest and most muted shades . . . The old wore . . . shades of dull blue or dark plum color, or dim greys . . . such colors as darkest green, the browns and greys of tree bark, or dull steele, or . . . purple-blue-black.[32]

Just as happy occasions required a bright or "warm" color, a sad occasion such as a death with its periods of mourning required the "cold" colors. White garments made of coarse cotton were worn during the first period of mourning and after sixty days grey was worn.[33] According to Confucius mourning should last for three years.[34] During this time dark blue was worn, replaced in the later stages by lavender.

Plate 16: The embroidery on gauze of a rectangular panel of a red skirt.
Colors of silk floss: Black, white, vivid shades of red, pink, yellow, green, blue, brown.
Metallic thread: Two weights of gold-wrapped silk.
Stitches: Vertical counted stitch, float stitches, couched gold-wrapped silk.
Early 19th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. William Christian Paul Bequest, 1930. Acc. No. 30.75.89.
Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

If a festival occurred during a period of mourning, the drapery in the house and on the altars were the "cold" colors but the fabrics were silks patterned with the appropriate symbols for the festival.[35] Skirts worn at that time were of the same "cold" color. White silk skirts with the symbols associated with mourning may have been worn for the special rites held on the anniversary of the death of a spouse. Usually these skirts have very costly decoration and they may have been commissioned in anticipation of widowhood by the wife of the household while she still held the family purse strings.

There was at least one festival each month. Warm colors were worn at the New Year. In the second month at the Festival of the Flowers, young girls wore pastel colors. On the fifth day of the fifth month, when the Dragon Boat Festival was held, red gauze summer skirts similar to the one in Plate 16 were worn because on this most "poisonous" day of the year, a fiery red color warded off evil.[36] At the time of the Moon Festival in the eighth month, a pale bluish-white, reminiscent of moonlight, was a favorite color. In the next month at the Chrysanthemum Festival, skirts in purples or browns would contrast nicely with the yellow, lavender, and white of the flowers.

The fabrics used for clothing changed with the seasons. On a day decreed by the government all members of the upper classes changed their seasonal garments. Only the servants could adapt their dress to the temperature.[37] During the winter in the north, satin, velvet, and woolen skirts were worn. Some skirts were padded with silk or cotton wadding and others were lined with fur. During the winter in the south, satin skirts with padded linings would provide adequate warmth. During the cooler days of spring and autumn in the north, skirts made of lighter weight fabrics such as silk plain weave, or tabby, or a monochromatic self-patterned damask-like fabric, were lightly padded for warmth. During the late spring and early summer and in the very early days of autumn, unlined skirts of silk tapestry and of plain weave patterned with gauze were worn. The gauze weave created tiny holes through which the cool air could pass. During the warmest days of summer, silk skirts woven either in plain or pattterned gauze were worn with a second gauze skirt underneath, to preserve the modesty of the wearer. Summer skirts also were made of ramie producing a linen-like fabric that was embroidered with counted stitches.

IV *The Symbols Used On Chinese Women's Skirts*

The designs used most often to pattern skirts are landscapes, usually with human figures; various other animate creatures, both real and imaginary, including animals, birds, and insects; auspicious symbols, especially those of the three major schemes; the objects called the "Hundred Antiques;" and the Flowers of the Four Seasons that bloom throughout the year. Almost all of the motifs in these designs have a symbolic meaning.[38]

Landscapes on skirts because they resemble painting may be a reference to the artistic accomplishments of the wearer or her husband. A landscape with many children, the "Hundred Sons," carries a wish for fertility. Various gods and characters from novels, plays, and operas appear in landscapes and each one signifies some subtle attribute.

Plate 17: The embroidery of a rectangular panel of a yellow wool broadcloth skirt. The two butterfly-bats are comparable in size and importance to the large central peony. The other flowers are chrysanthemum and magnolia.
Colors of silk floss: Red, black, white; two shades of pink, green, lavender (now grey); three shades of blue.
Stitches: Satin, split, stem, straight, couching, Chinese knot.
Early 19th century. Private collection.

Animals, birds, and insects appear in landscapes and among flowers. The animal or bird may be one that represents one of the nine civil or military ranks but since evidence is lacking as to the rank of the husband of the original wearer, it must not be assumed that the animal or bird is a symbol of rank. The animate creature seen most often on skirts is the bat. Its name *fu* when pronounced differently means "blessings." Around the middle of the nineteenth century, the bat acquired the wings of the butterfly, the insect seen most often on skirts. In South China the butterfly is called *hu,* which is pronounced like the *fu* for "bat" and "blessings." Butterflies also are called *"tieh,"* which can be pronounced to mean "eighty years of age," obviously a wish for a long life. Thus the butterfly-bat seen in Plate 17 carries a double wish. Butterflies are also associated with various legends that carry wishes for marital happiness and fidelity.

The objects in the three major schemes of auspicious symbols are entwined with ribbons or fillets denoting their sacredness. The oldest group is called the Eight Precious Things. Originally these were the pearl, a lozenge, a stone chime (an inverted "V"), rhinoceros horns, a coin, a mirror, a scroll, and an artemisia leaf. By the Qing dynasty many other objects had been designated as "precious," a branch of coral, a scepter, an ingot, ivory tusks, rolls of silk, and the Wish-granting Jewel, a pearl from which issues three or five flames.

The symbols of the Eight Taoist Immortals are a feathered fan, a flower basket, a fly whisk and a sword, castenets, a flute, a drum, a lotus, and a crutch with a gourd. All the conditions of humanity are represented in the many tales associated with these Immortals.[39]

The Eight Buddhist Symbols are the canopy, the umbrella, the conch shell, the fish, the jar, the endless or mystic knot, the lotus, and the Wheel of the Law. Religious significence and popular folklore are interwoven in the symbolic attributes of these objects.[40]

Characters, or ideograms used on skirts are the *shou,* which carries a wish for long life and the *shuangxi,* using the character for "happiness" twice in a motif used on wedding skirts. The swastika, *wan,* meaning "ten thousand," increases the proposed wish. The term "hundred" is used to designate an assortment of many motifs. The "Hundred Antiques" refers to objects found in the scholar's study, such as brushes, ink stones, seals, scepters, bowls and vases holding flowers and fruit. They are symbolic of scholarly accomplishment and aesthetic excellence.

Many motifs can be combined to from pictorial puns, or rebuses. This game of visual punning is suited to the Chinese language because a basic sound may be intoned in several ways, each tone conveying a different meaning. For example, a part of the words for butterfly, *hu-tieh,* and for the Buddha's hand citron, *fo-shou,* suggests the phrase *tieh-shou,* to attain old age, a wish for longevity.[41] Most of these puns carry wishes for happiness, health, fertility, wealth, promotion in rank, longevity, and immortality.

V *Floral Symbolism on Chinese Women's Skirts*

The patterning most frequently found on skirts are floral compositions with a central motif of a large peony, usually with buds symbolic of fertility. The flowers surrounding the peony may be the four flowers that represent The Four Beloved Ones, also called The Four Gentlemen. They represent the personalities of four poets: the prunus blossom for Mêng Haoran; the orchid for Wang Wei; the lotus for Zhou Duny; and the chrysanthemum of Tao Qian. The most common listing for another set of four flowers, The Flowers of the Four Seasons, is the prunus blossom for winter, symbolic of beauty; the tree peony for spring, symbolizing wealth; the lotus for summer, symbolic of purity; and the chrysanthemum for autumn, symbolizing steadfast friendship. Variations occur in this list because the same flower will bloom in different seasons in a country whose boundaries extend from 20 degrees to 50 degrees north latitude. The prunus blossom is somethimes assigned to spring.[42] The tree peony can become the symbol for summer; the orchid, cymbidium, can be a winter flower; and bamboo is both a winter and a summer plant. The combination of three plants, pine, bamboo, and prunus blossom, "The Three Friends of Winter," is seldom seen on skirts. In South China, a pun of this popular combination, is poldcarpus, Chinese yew; nandina, heavenly bamboo; and wintersweet, the wax plum.[43]

The flowers surrounding the central peony may be some of The Flowers of the Twelve Months. These floral combinations, conveying a wish for happiness throughout the year, were very popular from the mid-nineteenth century until the early part of the twentieth century. The four charts in the Appendix of this article, "Flowers of the Twelve Months," lists the flowers for each month as they appear in eleven lists, only four of which are in complete agreement.

Until 1927 the first month of the Chinese year began midway between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. This occurs around the first week of February. The first chart in the Appendix is for winter and includes the eleventh Chinese month, December; the twelfth, January; and February, the first month of the Chinese year. The common, the botanical, and the Chinese names of the flowers are given, followed by the symbolism, if known. Illustrations of the flowers can be found in standard botanical reference works. At the bottom of each chart is a list of other plants of the season used as motifs but not assigned to a specific month in the eleven lists studied. Many other plants could have been included: almond, artemisia, arum, asters, azalea, crocus (autumn), dahlia, Davidia, gourds (round), grapes, iris, Joseph's coat, lilac, melons, millet, mimosa, mock orange (Philadelphus), oleander, oranges, podecarpus, rhododendron, sunflower, viburnum, water caltrop, water lilies, water weed, and willow. Most of these have symbolic attributes.[44]

Chart no. 5 is a "Supplement to the Flowers of the Twelve Months" that gives the names of legendary, historical, and literary figures associated with the Flowers of the Twelve Months. At the bottom of the chart are the qualities assigned to flowers in the Song period by artist-scholars, who imagined the flowers to be their "guests."

The profusion of flowers on the skirts of the last half of the nineteenth century is actually a "language of flowers."[45] These flowers reveal that the Chinese woman, so limited in her activities, was a mistress of subtle communication. For example, the wild orchid, a tiny cymbidium, one or two flowers of which often decorate the two hidden rectangular panels, is not only a symbol of modesty, humility, and a retiring nature but also designates great refinement. Confucius speaks of it as the emblem of the Superior Man.

> The orchid is not easily distinguished from the grass around it: one must look carefully in order to find it. Thus the Superior Man resembles the Common Man is appearance, and if men wish to know him, they must seek out his hidden virtue and excellence.[46]

So too, if the beauty and meaning of the Chinese skirt is sought for, its "hidden virtue and excellence" will be revealed.

A special thank you to Miss Jean Mailey for her encouragement and assistance with Figures 2, 5 and 16. Photographs for Figures 2, 5, and 16 are from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. All other photographs are by R. E. Hays.

Notes

1. Lady Dorothea Hosie, *Two Gentlemen of China,* London, 1924, p. 212.
2. Ibid., pp. 208-211.
3. Ibid., p. 162.
4. Xi, Baozhai. *Zhongguo gudai fushi,* 1984, p. 70, Illus. 18. Both the front and the back of the skirt are shown. A colored drawing of this skirt appears in the two works published simultaneously by the Shanghai School of Traditional Opera, Chinese Costumes Research Group (Shixiqu xuexiao. Zhongguo fuzhuang shi yanjiuzu). Both were published in 1984. It is Illus. No. 41 in *Zhongguo lidai fushi; [Chinese Clothing and Adornment in Various Dynasties],* published in Shanghai. It is Illus. No. 25 in *Zhongguo fushi wuqian nian; [5000 Years of Chinese Costumes)* published in Hong Kong.
5. Xue qin li, (Li Xueqin), *Eastern Zhou and Qin Civilizations,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985, p. 364. The deceased was wearing a skirt. The other skirt of yellow silk was among the many textiles found in this tomb, Mashan Tomb No. 1 in Hubei Province.
6. Jean E. Mailey and Calvin S. Hathaway, "A Bonnet and a Pair of Mitts from *Changsha," Chronicle of the Museum for the Arts of Decoration of the Cooper Union,* New York, Vol. 2, no. 10 (Dec. 1958), p. 322. A drawing based on a rubbing of the same bronze *hu* is Illus. no. 48 in *Chinese Clothing and Adornment in Various Dynasties.* See Note 4 for the author.

7. Hunan. Provincial Museum, *Changstia Ma wang dui yihao Han mu.* 1973, p. 3 of English insert; Vol. 1, p. 70, Illus. no. 57 (drawing); Vol. 2, p. 88, Plates nos. 99-100 (photographs of both skirts). Also listed in Hsio-Yen Shih, "Textile Finds in the People's Republic of China," Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, *Studies in Textile History,* 1977, p. 308.

8. Edward H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand,* Berkeley, University of California, 1963, pp. 28-29.

9. See Illus. nos. 319, 368, 396, and 467 in *Chinese Clothing and Adornment in Various Dynasties* and Illus. nos. 234, 243, and 279 in *5000 Years of Chinese Costumes.* See Note 4 for the author of these two books.

10. John E. Vollmer, *In the Presence of the Dragon Throne,* Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, 1977, p. 16.

11. Henny Harald Hansen, *Mongol Costumes,* Copenhagen, 1950, p. 108.

12. *5000 Years of Chinese Costumes,* Illus. no. 218. See Note 4 for the author.

13. *Chinese Clothing and Adornment in Various Dynasties,* Illus. no. 392. See Note 4 for the author.

14. Ibid., Illus. no. 457.

15. Jonathan D. Spence, *Emperor of China, Self-portrait of K'ang-hsi,* New York, 1975, p. 121. A woodcut based on the scroll compiled by Wang Yüan -ch'i and others published under the title *Wan-shou sheng-tien.*

16. Carl L. Crossman, *The China Trade,* Princeton, 1972, p. 103, Illus. no. 86.

17. Ibid., p. 88, Illus. no. 71.

18. Craig Clunus, *Chinese Export Watercolours,* London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984, p. 55, Illus. no. 30.

19. See the many skirts illustrated in John E. Vollmer, *Decoding Dragons: Status Garments in Ch'ing Dynasty China,* Eugene, University of Oregon, 1983.

20. An interview in 1978 with Lady Lo, the daughter of Sir Robert Hotung, recorded by Chere Lai Mah.

21. S. Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom,* New York, 1907, Vol. II, pp. 764-765.

22. Schuyler Cammann, *China's Dragon Robes,* New York, 1952, p. 124.

23. C. P. Fitzgerald, *China, a Short Cultural History,* 3rd ed., New York, 1961, p. 549.

24. See the many examples of silk tapestry weaving in Jean Mailey, *Chinese Silk Tapestry:* New York, China House Gallery, 1971.

25. Cammann, *China's Dragon Robes,* pp. 62-64.

26. For the stitches used in Chinese embroidery see Jean Mailey, *Embroidery of Imperial China,* New York, China House Gallery, 1978, and Schuyler Cammann, "Embroidery Techniques in Old China,[22] *Archives of the Chinese Art Society in America,* XVI, 1962, pp. 16-40.

27. Lady Dorothea Hosie, op. cit., p. 83.

28. Chiang Yee, *A Chinese Childhood,* London, 1940, p. 138. On p. 136 in a drawing he made of his sister, her wedding skirt is visible below her three-quarter length coat.

29. An interview with Mrs. Chingie Young on September 9, 1981, recorded by the author. In 1910 Mrs. Young was a Chinese-American school teacher living with an upper class Chinese family in Shanghai. She lived in China until the 1930's.

30. Lady Dorothea Hosie, op. cit., p. 305.

31. Nora Waln, *The House of Exile,* New York, 1935, p. 132.

32. George N. Kates, *The Years That Were Fat,* New York, 1952, pp. 95-96.

33. Nora Waln, op. cit., p. 109.

34. Chiang Yee, op. cit., p. 252.

35. An interview with Dora Fugh Lee in June 1975 recorded by Ruth Fisher, Washington, D. C.

36. Terese Tse Bartholomew, *The Hundred Flowers,* San Francisco, The Asian Art Museum, 1985. Text for Illus. no. 32.

37. Interview with Mrs. Chingie Young cited in Note 29.

38. See C. A. S. Williams, *Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motives,* Rutland, Vt. and Tokyo, 1974, and Terese Tse Bartholomew, *Myths and Rebuses in Chinese Art,* San Francisco, The Asian Art Museum, 1988.

39. Judith and Arthur Hart Burling, *Chinese Art,* New York, 1953, pp. 345-349.

40. Ibid., p. 349.

41. Alfred Koehn, "Chinese Flower Symbolism," *Monumenta Nipponica,* Sophia University, Tokyo, 1952, Vol VIII, no. 1-2, p. 145.

42. Although not always observed, there are specific rules for drawing blossoms. Prunus blossoms have rounded petals and no leaves; cherry blossoms have a small indentation on the edge of each petal and small heart-shaped leaves; and peach blossoms have more elongated petals and long slender leaves.

43. Terese Tse Bartholomew, *The Hundred Flowers.* Text for Illus. no. 81.

44. Compiled from the author's symbolism file.

45. Walter Perceval Yetts, "Notes on Flower Symbolism in China," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* London, January 1941, pp. 4-9.

46. Judith and Arthur Hart Burling, op. cit., p. 35.

FLOWERS OF THE TWELVE MONTHS

Winter Month	*Common*	*Name of Flower Botanical*	*Chinese*	*Flower of the Season*	*Symbolism, if any*
11th, Dec.	Orchid, winter var.	Cymbidium spp.	Lanhua		Refinement, Humility, Love and Beauty
	Camellia (see 1st mo.)	C. oleifera			
	Poppy[1] (see "Spring plant . . .")	Papaver somniferum			
	Lichee, fruit (see "Summer plants . . .")				
	Gardenia (see "Summer plants . . .")				
12th, Jan.	Wintersweet, Wax plum blossoms	Chimonanthus praecox (also fragrans)	Lamei		
	Narcissus (see 1st mo.)				
	Prunus (see 1st mo.)				
	Poppy (see 11th mo. and "Spring plants . . .")				
1st, Feb.[2]	Prunus, Plum, Japanese apricot blossoms	Prunus mume	Mei	Yes	Purity, Perserverance
	Peach blossoms (for fruit, see "Summer plants . . .")	Prunus persica	Tao, Taozi		Feminine grace and beauty
	Camellia	C. japonica	Shancha		
		C. spp.	Chahua		
	Narcissus	N. tazetta var. orientalis	Shuixian		Good fortune, Prosperity
Winter plants used as decorative motifs but not assigned to any specific month					
	Nandina	N. domestica	Tianzhu		
	Rhodea	R. japonica	Wannianqing		Prosperity, Longevity
	Quince blossoms	Chaenomeles lagenaria	Tiegeng haitang		
	Sacred fungus	Polyporus lucidus	Lingzhi		Immortality, Wish-fulfilling symbol

[1] The poppy, lichee, and gardenia neither bloom or produce fruit at this time. They are simply decorative motifs.
[2] All the flowers for the first month and the "Winter plants used as decorative motifs but not assigned to any specific month" are auspicious symbols used at the New Year.

FLOWERS OF THE TWELVE MONTHS

Spring Month	*Name of Flower* *Common*	*Botanical*	*Chinese*	*Flower of the Season*	*Symbolism, if any*
2nd, March	Tree peony	Paeonia suffructicosa	Mudan; Fuguihua	Yes	Wealth, Rank
	Magnolia, white	M. denudata	Yulan		Purity, Feminine beauty and sweetness
	Magnolia, purple	M. liliflora	Mulan, Ziyulan		Same as above
	Apricot blossoms	Prunus armeniaca	Xing		Feminine beauty
	Crab apple blossoms	Malus spectabilis	Haitang		Feminine beauty
	Cherry, Wild, blossoms (see 3rd mo.)				
	Peach blossoms (see 1st mo.)				
3rd, April	Peach blossoms (see 1st mo.)				
	Cherry, Wild, blossoms	Prunus pseudocerasus	Yingtao		
	Tree peony (see 2nd mo.)				
4th, May	Rose	Rosa multiflora	Jiangwei		
	Magnolia (see 2nd mo.)	M. obovata			
	Herbaceous peony	Paeonia lactiflora	Shaoyao		Feminine beauty, Love and affection
	Cherry, Wild, blossoms (see 3rd mo.)				
Spring plants used as decorative motifs but not assigned to any specific month					
	Orchid, spring var.	Cymbidium virescens	Chunlan	Yes	Refinement, Love and beauty, Numerous children
	Wisteria	W. sinensis	Ziteng		
	Poppy	Papaver somniferum	Yingzisu		
	Poppy	Papaver rhoeas	Yumeiren		
	Pinks	Dianthus chinensis	Shizhu		
	Camellia (see 1st mo.)			Yes	

FLOWERS OF THE TWELVE MONTHS

Summer Month	*Common*	*Name of Flower Botanical*	*Chinese*	*Flower of the Season*	*Symbolism, if any*
5th, June	Pomegranate blossoms	Punica granatum	Shiliu		Worn on 5th day of 5th month to ward off evil
	Crab apple blossoms (see 2nd mo.)				
	Magnolia (see 2nd mo.)				
	Peony (see 4th mo.)				
6th, July	Lotus	Nelumbo nucifera	Hehua; Lian	Yes	Buddhist symbol of Purity, Integrity, Fertility, Prosperity
	Peony (see 4th mo.)				
	Pomegranate (see 5th mo.)				
7th, August	Balsam	Impatiens balsamina	Fêngxian		
	Lotus (see 6th mo.)				
	"Crab apple" i.e. Begonia (see 9th mo.)				
	Rose (see 4th mo.)				
	Cassia (see 8th mo.)				
	Tuberose				
Summer plants used as decorative motifs but not assigned to any specific month					
	Gardenia	G. jasminoides	Zhizi hua		
	Morning glory	Convolvulus spp.	Qianniuhua; Labahua		Marital bliss
	Day lily	Hemerocallis spp.	Xuancao		Wish for a son, Dispels grief
	Lily	Lilium spp.	Baihe		Pun for "100," Harmony, Friendship
	Lichee, fruit	Nephilium litchi Litchi chinensis	Lizhi		Wish for a son
	Yangmei, fruit	Myrica rubra	Yangmei		
	Peaches, fruit (For blossoms see 1st mo.)	Prunus persica	Taozi		Longevity, Immortality, Good luck

FLOWERS OF THE TWELVE MONTHS

Autumn Month	*Common*	*Name of Flower Botanical*	*Chinese*	*Flower of the Season*	*Symbolism, if any*
8th, Sept.	Cassia, Cinnamon tree, Fragrant olive	Osmanthus fragrans	Guihua		Literary success
	Pomegranate, fruit (For blossoms see 5th mo.)				Fertility
	Pear, fruit	Pyrus sinensis	Tangli, Li		Good government, Longevity
	Mallow, Field (Hibiscus) (see 10th mo.)				
9th, Oct.	Chrysanthemum	Dendranthema spp.	Juhua	Yes	Joviality, Ease, Retirement, Longevity
	Mallow (see 10th mo.)				
10th, Nov.	Mallow, Field (Hibiscus)	H. mutabilis	Furong Mufurong		
	Chrysanthemum (see 9th mo.)				
	Camillia (see 1st mo.)				
	Gardenia (see "Summer plants . . .")				
	Mimosa	Acacia spp.			
Autumn plants used as decorative motifs but not assigned to any specific month					
	"Crab apple, Autumn"	Begonia spp.	Qiuhaitang		
	Buddha's hand	Citrus medica var. sarcodactylis	Foshou		Wealth, Good fortune, Happiness, Longevity
	Gourd, Bottle	Lagenaria siceraria	Hulu		Magic, Purity, Longevity, Fertility
	Jujube "Date, Chinese"	Ziziphus jujuba	Zaozi		
	Hibiscus, Yellow	Abelmoschus manihot	Qiukui		

SUPPLEMENT TO FLOWERS OF THE TWELVE MONTHS

Month	*Common Name of Flower*[1]	*Literary Figures Associated With Flowers*[2]	*Qualities Assigned to Flowers*[3]
11th, Dec.	Orchid, winter var.	Wang Wei, 699-759, poet	Retiring, *yu*
12th, Jan.	Wintersweet, Wax plum blossoms	Huang Tingjian, 1045-1105, poet Lao Lingpo, mother of Song General Yang Yanzhao	
1st, Feb.	Prunus, Plum, Japanese apricot blossoms	Meng Haoran, 689-740 Liu Mengmei, actor in Peony Pavilion, c.1580	Pure, *qing*
	Camellia	Bo Juyi, 772-846, poet	
2nd, March	Apricot blossoms	Yang Yuhuan, i.e. Yang Guifei, 8th century	
3rd, April	Peach blossoms	Yang Yanzhao, Song general	
4th, May	Rose	Zhang Lihua, concubine, c.580	
5th, June	Pomegranate	Zhong Kui, mythological exorcist	
6th, July	Lotus	He Xiangu, Taoist immortal Xi Shi, 5th century B.C., famous beauty Zhou Dunyi, 1017-1073, essayist	Tranquil, *jing* Volatile, *fou*
7th, Aug.	Balsam	Shi Chong, fl. 265-316, nobleman	
8th, Sept.	Cassia, Cinnamon tree Fragrant olive	Wu Gang, and immortal Lu Zhu, fl. 265-316, concubine of Shi Chong	Fairy, *xian*
9th, Oct.	Chrysanthemum	Tao Qian, known as Tao Yuanming, 365-427, poet	Elegant, *jia* Long-lived, *shou*
10th, Nov.	Mallow, Field	Xia Suqiu,unknown woman	

FLOWERS WITH ASSIGNED QUALITIES BUT NO MONTHLY DESIGNATION

Clove tree	Bot. name unknown	Ding Xiang	Simple, *su*
Crabapple blossoms			Renowned, *ming*
Daphne	D. spp.	Rui Xiang	Elegant, *Chia;* Rare, *shu*
Gardenia			Meditative, *tan po*
Jasmine	Jasminum spp.	Moli	Remote, *yüan,* Refined, *ya*
Herbaceous peony			Intimate, *jin;* Fascinating, *yan*
Tree peony			Bountiful, *shang*
Rose, Brier	Rosa eglanteria	Tu Mi, Ci Mei	Refined,*ya;* Harmonious, *yün*
Rose, Cinnamon	Rosa Cinnomomea	Qiang Wei	Rustic, *Yeh*

[1] The botanical and Chinese names appear on the "Flowers of the Twelve Months" chart. However, there are five additional flowers on the supplementary chart and for these the botanical and Chinese name are given.

[2] Both popular association and a list compiled by Yu Ru, c. 1850. See W. P. Yetts, "Notes on Flower Symbolism in China," pp. 7-9.

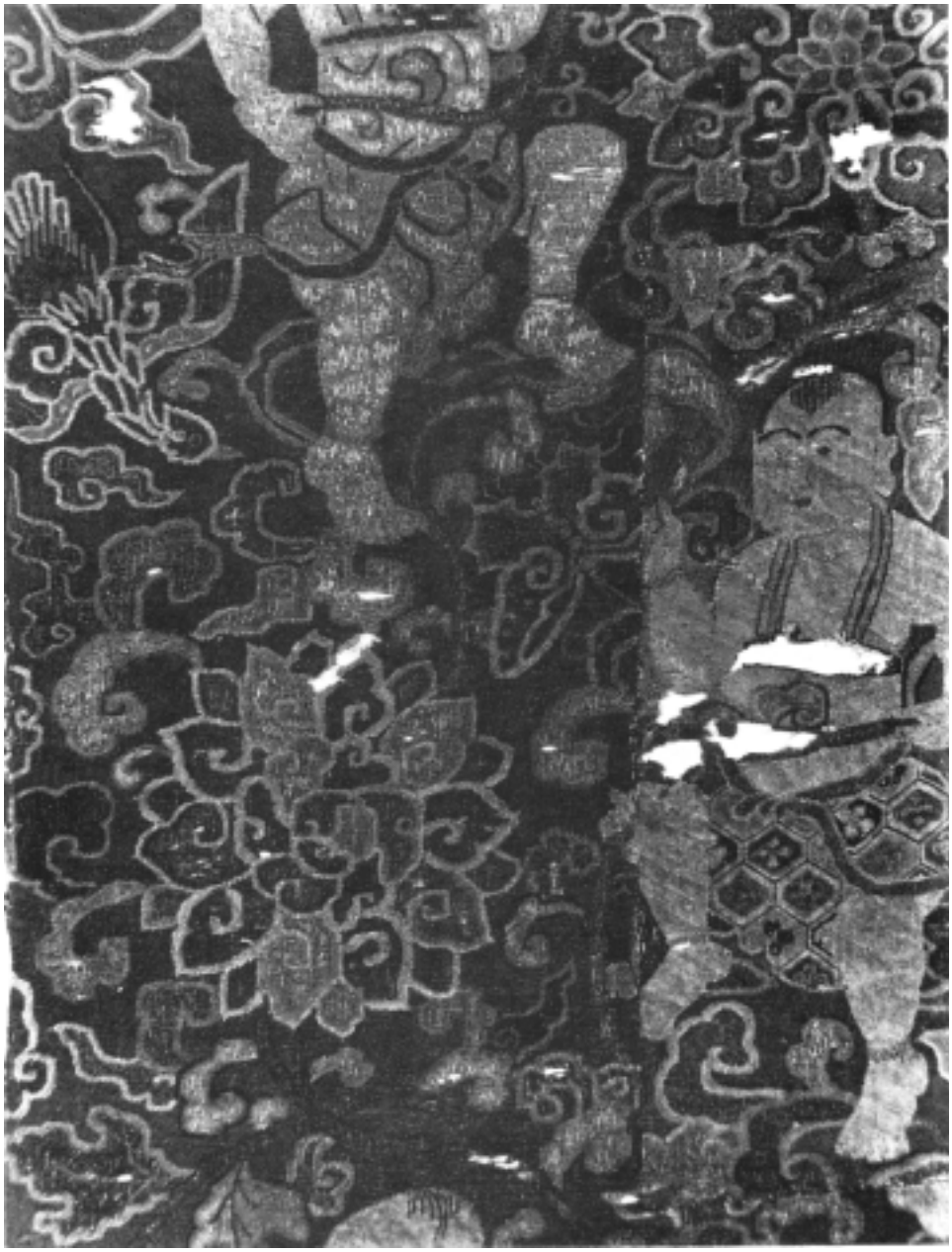
[3] See Yetts, op. cit., pp. 11-15. Qualities assigned to flowers by Song painter, Zhang Minshu and Song scholar, Zeng Zao. Although there is no monthly designation for these flowers in their lists, they are listed here according to the placement of the flowers in "Flowers of the Twelve Months."

Plates 1 & 1a Embroidery on gauze, silk and metallic strips, 58 cm. x 114 cm., China, 12th/13th century, Alan Kennedy collection
Note: Originally sewn to a similar textile of the same size now in a Tokyo private collection and another similar textile half this size and also in Japan.

Notes on the Early Usage of Flat Metallic Strips in Central and East Asian Textiles

Alan Kennedy, *with technical analysis and drawings by* Lucy Maitland

Among the many fine textiles of Central and East Asian origin that have come out of Tibet in recent years is an unusual embroidery that incorporates flat metallic strips in a novel way (plate 1). The brief study that follows includes a technical analysis by Lucy Maitland.



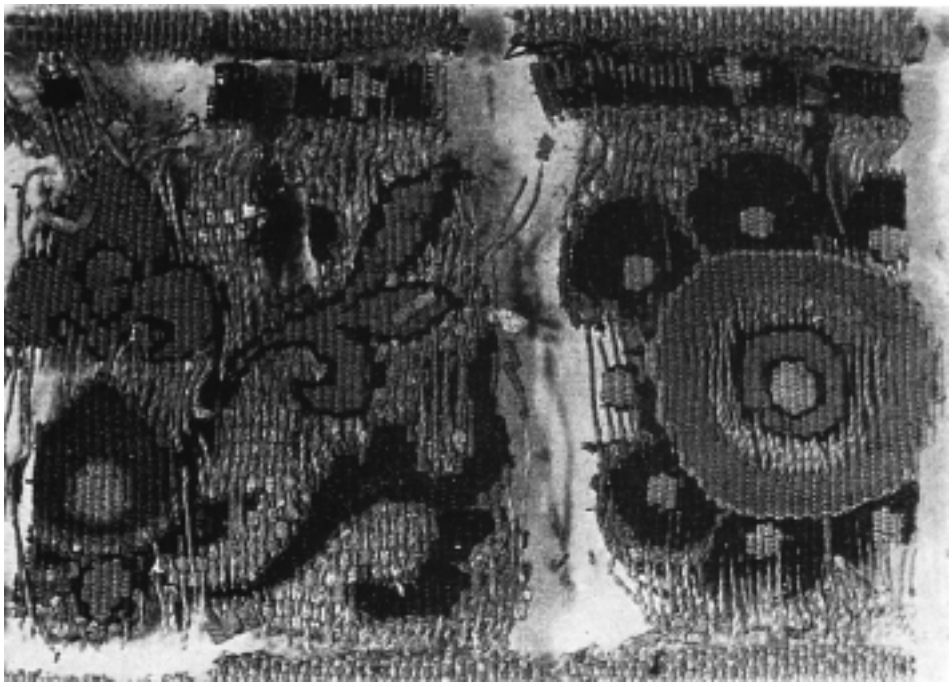


Plate 2 Reproduced from *Nihon no Bujutsu*, #220, 1984, p.1

Usually textiles are made entirely of yarns – silk, cotton, wool, linen, and so forth. Less common is the use of metal in conjunction with textile fibers. When found in Central and East Asian textiles, metal is usually in the form of foil, either silver or gold, fastened with an adhesive to paper or animal matter, such as skin or intestine, and cut into narrow strips. These metallic strips are often wrapped around a yarn core, which creates a rounded metallic element to be then incorporated into a textile product. The metallic strips are also used as they are, that is, as flat strips. It is this latter use that will be examined from both a historical and technical perspective in relation to the textile under consideration (Plate 1).

Examples of the earliest uses of metallic strips in their flat form have survived in Japan and Central Asia. From the 7th or 8th centuries and variously attributed to the Horyu-ji or the Shoso-in collections in Japan, is a narrow textile that incorporates flat metallic strips in a silk tapestry weave (plate 2). From the Central Asian region of Turfan is a textile dating to the 7th century that was used to clothe a doll. It also uses flat metallic strips in a tapestry weave (Plates 3 & 4). Embroideries found in Central Asia at Khocho and dated 9th/10th century employ flat metallic strips that are couched onto the ground fabric (plates 5 & 6). From Liaoning province in northern China is a 10th-century textile with flat metallic strips used in a tapestry weave (plate 7).

Stylistically, this textile (Plates 1 & 1A) dates to the Sung Dynasty (960-1279). The theme of boys and flowering vines, symbolic of the desire for prosperity and male heirs, is found on several other textiles preserved in China, and the United States and dateable to Sung times (Plates 8-10).

The technical description is as follows:

The foundation fabric of the embroidery is a simple white silk gauze weave. (Diagram 1) The design is outlined on the foundation fabric with black ink and worked in silk as follows:

Areas with metallic strips
A row of circling or back stitches, which at irregular intervals become long floating stitches, is worked between two pairs of the gauze crossing warps of the foundation weave. The floats vary in length by spanning 3 or 4 wefts of the foundation weave and sometimes as many as 15. (Diagram 2) In those areas which are to be covered with gold the underlying ground stitches are orange silk; in the areas that are to be covered with silver the underlying ground stitches are white.

Metallic strips are laid down between alternate wefts at right angles to the back/floating stitch rows. (Diagram 3) It seems to make no difference to the appearance of the gold whether it lies on a floating stitch or on a back stitch, therefore the floats may be a way of saving silk since a back stitch as seen here uses 2/3 on the back and 1/3 on the front.

The metallic strips are secured by attaching stitches following horizontally the direction of the metallic strips. The stitches diagonally cross two pairs of the gauze-crossing warps and two wefts of the foundation weave. (Diagram 4) These stitches which secure the metallic strips form opposing diagonals from row to row. Because the silk is thicker than the metallic strip that it is securing much of the metal is covered; the gold and silver therefore show as a subtle glimmer.

Areas without metallic strips
Areas of the pattern not covered with metallic strips such as the background and the faces of the boys are worked between each of the sets of the gauze crossing warps of the foundation weave. (Diagram 5) The back stitch rows are offset, probably to avoid a ribbed effect.

In some areas of the pattern the metallic strips do not go all the way to the edge of the pattern area leaving an "outline" of 3 or 4 back stitches. Here the back stitches are worked in the same way as in the background or, less carefully, in the same way as the metallic areas with the alternate rows filled with back stitch. The back stitches are worked either as in diagram 2 or in diagram 5.

As can be seen from the technical analysis and drawings, this textile is highly sophisticated in its use of metallic strips in combination with embroidery. None of the gauze ground is visible on the surface of the textile, which enhances the appearance of the metallic strips and embroidery yarns that are seen. The selection of gold or silver strips and their variations in width in accordance with the use of dyed or undyed embroidery yarns add further to the overall refinement of the textile. Also, the mostly unseen metallic strips contribute a touch of elegance.

By contrast, the earlier Central Asian embroideries (Plates 5 & 6) use a simple couching stitch to secure the metallic strips, and the strips are awkward in their width

Plate 3 Reproduced from *Nihon no Bijutsu*, #220, 1984, p.21

Plate 10 Lampas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 46.186.78

relative to the scale of the textiles. The Sung textile represents a significant advancement in textile technique from these earlier examples. It will be interesting to see if other Central and East Asian textiles that come to light will follow this tentative chronological (and/or geographic?) advancement that appears to have taken place in the use of flat metallic strips in embroidery.

A similar development seems to have occurred with flat metallic strips in woven textiles. The textiles found in Japan, Central Asia and China (Plates 2, 3, 4 & 7) dating to earlier periods are all tapestry woven, one of the simplest of weaving techniques. However, it was not until Sung times in China that flat metallic strips were used in compound weaves.*

**Genshoku Senshoku Daijiten* (Illustrated Textile Dictionary), Kyoto, 1978, p.332 (under definition of *kinran*).

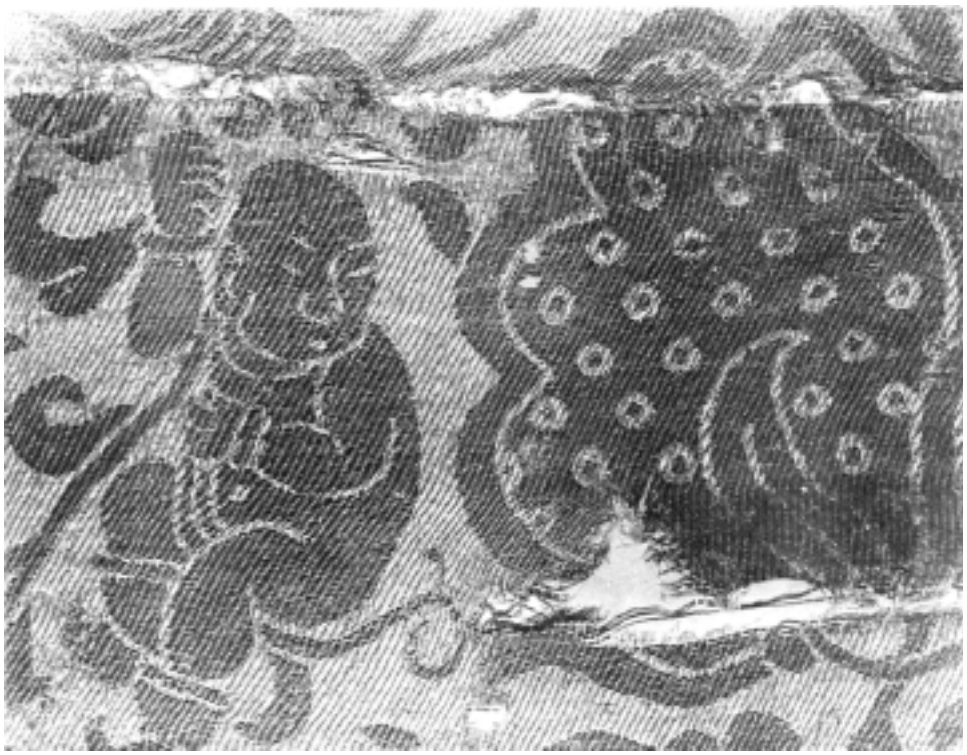


Plate 9 Damask from a Sung period tomb, reproduced from *Soieries de Chine*, p.71, note: a similar texitle is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 52.8

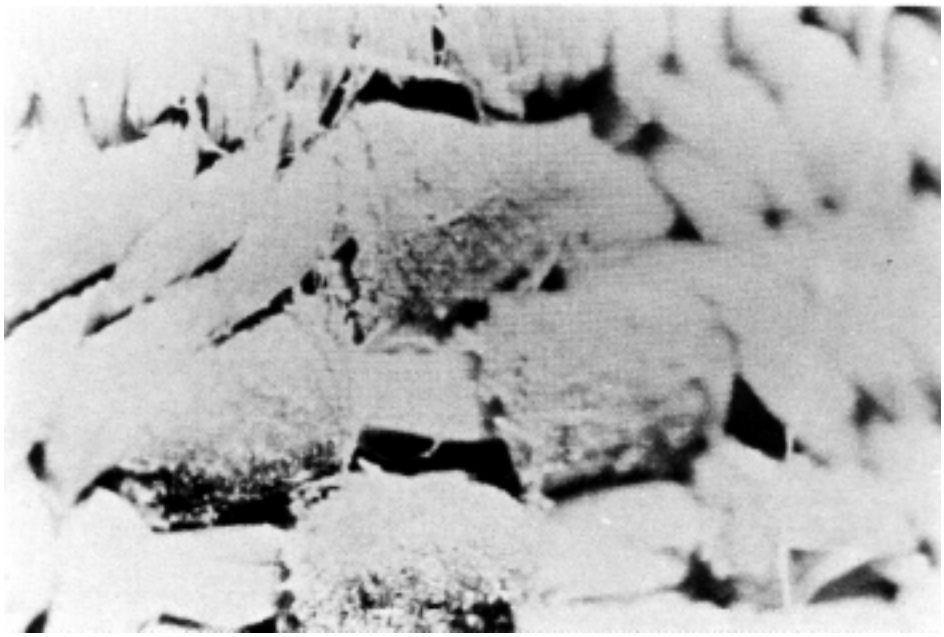


Plate 4 Reproduced from *Nihon no Bijutsu*, #220, 1984, p.21, detail pl. 3

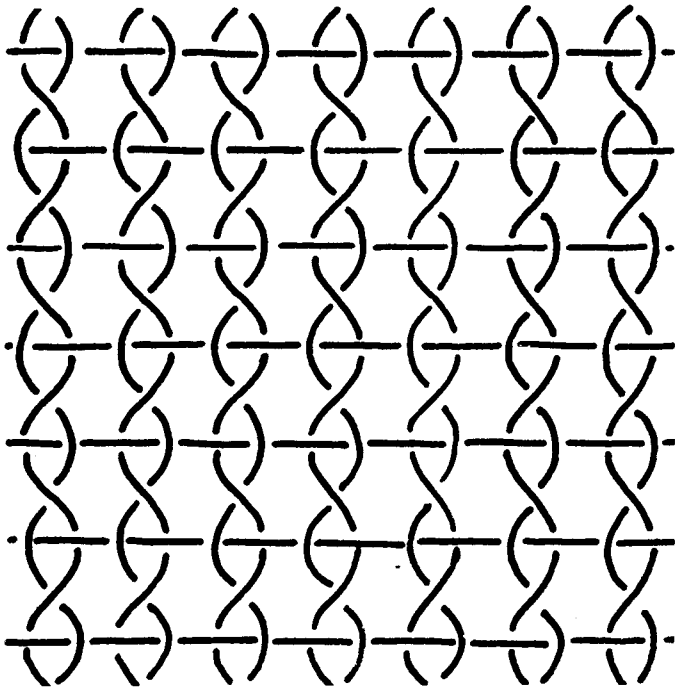


Diagram 1 The gauze weave foundation.

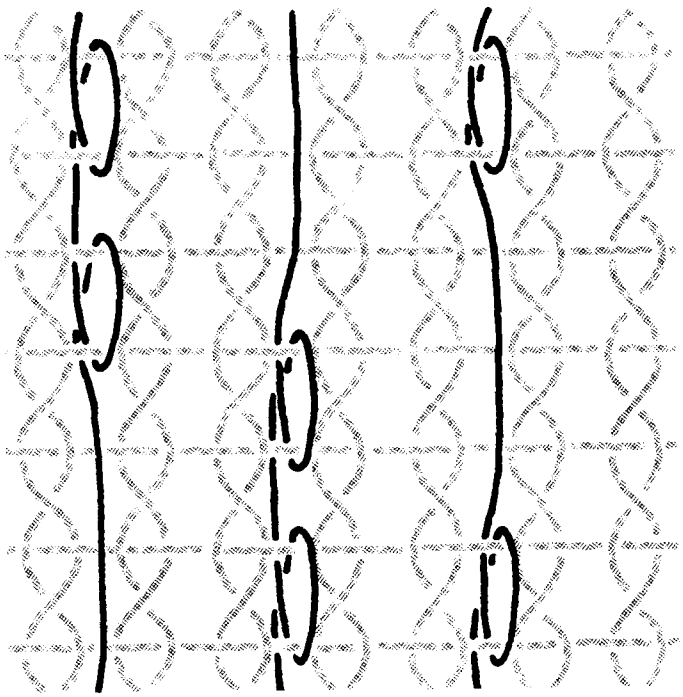


Diagram 2 Back stitches with long floating stitches in horizontal rows between two pairs of the gauze-crossing warps of the foundation weave.

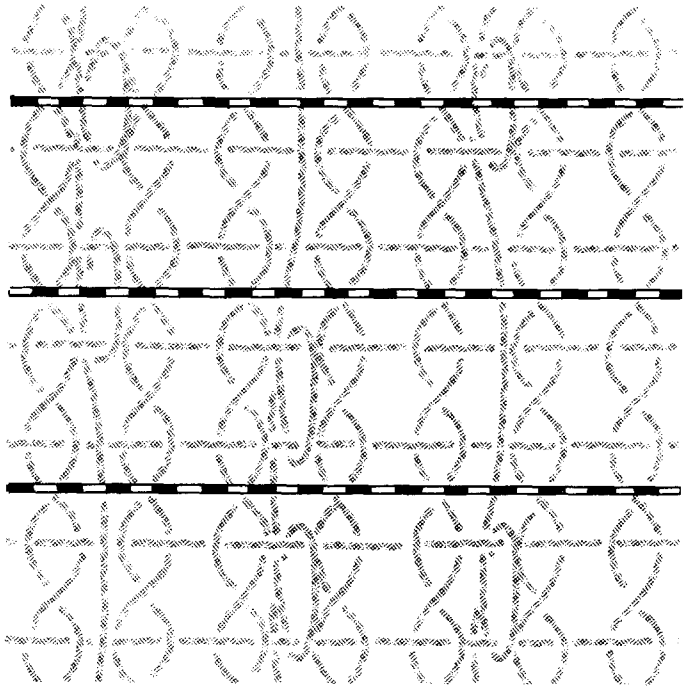


Diagram 3 Gold strips laid at right angles to the back/floating stitches, in between alternating wefts of the foundation gauze weave.

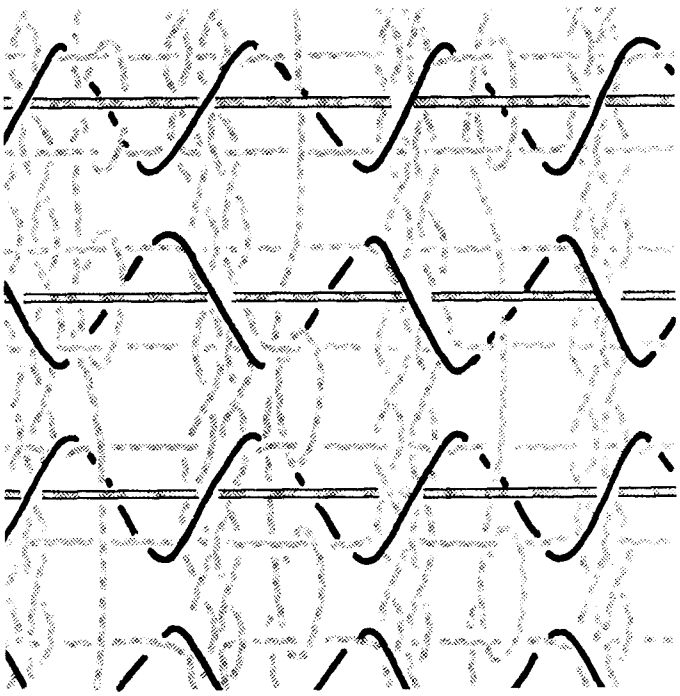


Diagram 4 Couching stitches attaching the gold strip crossing two pairs of gauze-crossing warps and two wefts of the foundation weave.

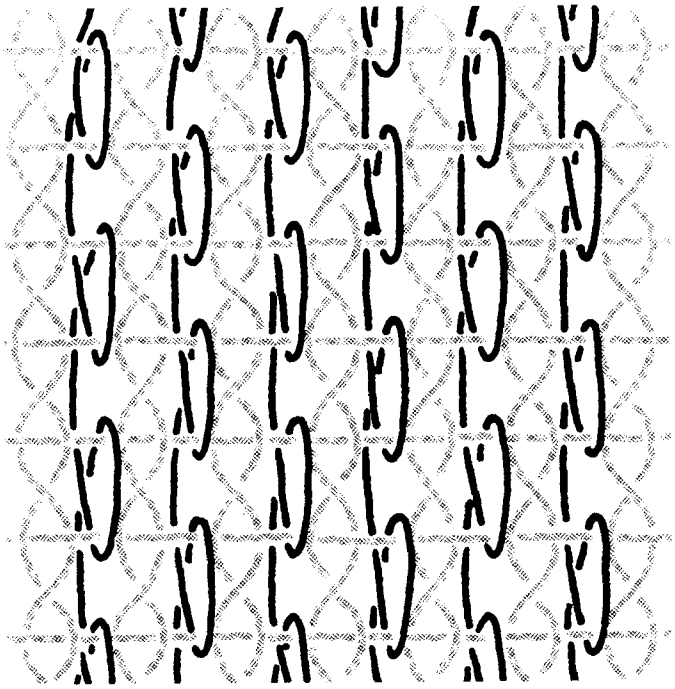


Diagram 5 Areas without metallic strips are worked in offset vertical rows of backstitch.

Plate 5 Reproduced from *Along the Ancient Silk Routes,* Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1982, p.203, collection of Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin

Plate 6 Reproduced from *Along the Ancient Silk Routes,* p.205, collection of Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin

Plate 7 Reproduced from *Nihon no Bijutsu*, #220, 1984, p.23, Warp runs crosswise

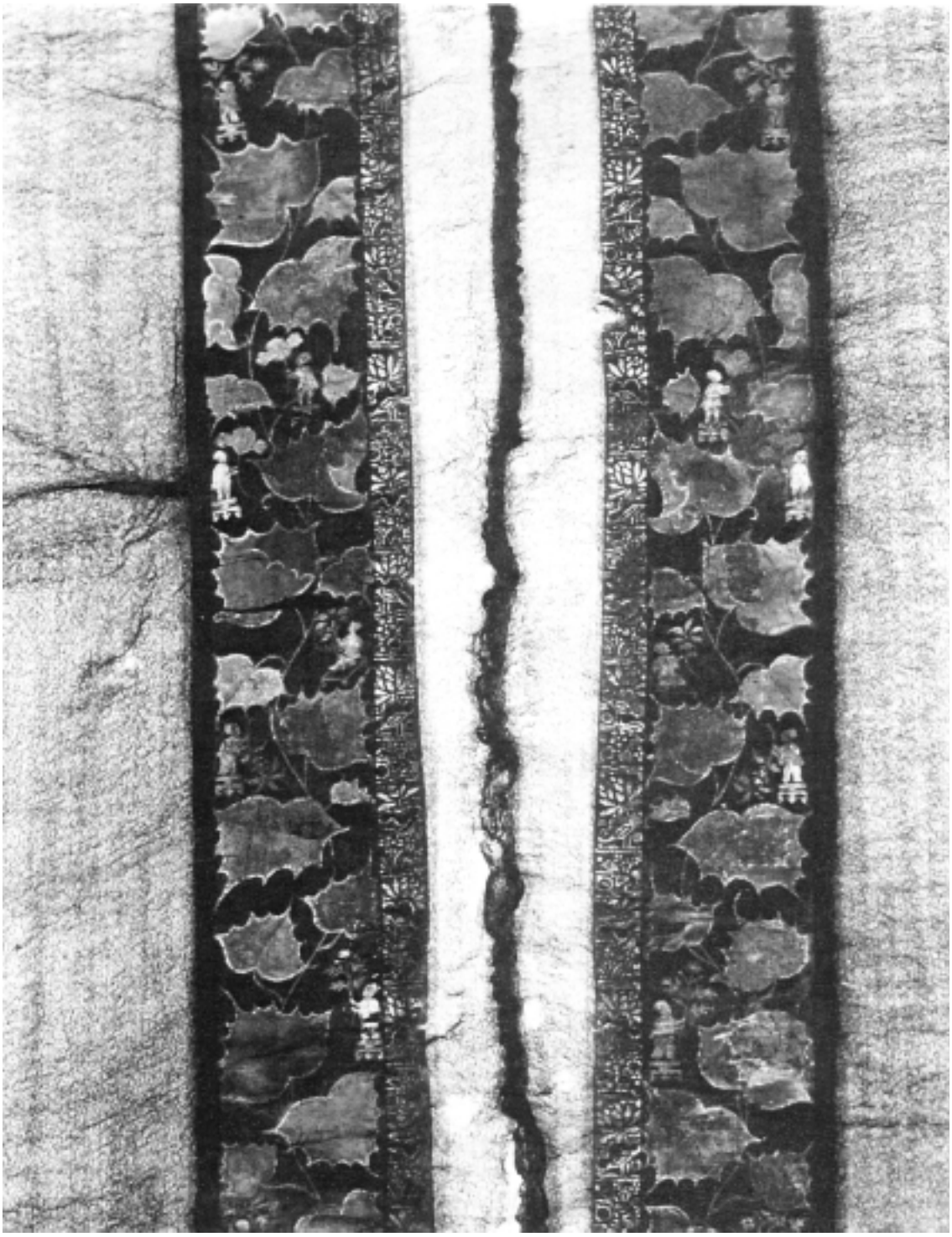


Plate 8 Gold leaf patterned textile with theme of boys and flowering vines, excavated from a Sung period tomb, reproduced from *Soieries de Chine,* Fernand Nathan, Editeur, S.A., Paris, 1987, p.220