

RESEARCH ON CLOUD PATTERNS ON TEXTILES OF HAN DYNASTY IN CHINA

Gao Xia

*PhD student, Shaanxi University of Science and Technology, China, Kyiv National University of
Technologies and Design, Ukraine
summeroro@foxmail.com*

Yezhova Olga




*Professor Dr., Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, Ukraine
ORCID: 0000-0002-5920-1611
oyezhova70@gmail.com*

Annotation. This article conducts research on cloud patterns and explores the reasons why they have become the representative of traditional Chinese patterns. It shows the appearance of this pattern on Han Dynasty textiles, and summarizes the shape characteristics of cloud patterns through typology methods. Research has found that the cloud pattern was widely used in ancient Chinese textiles and bronzes, lacquerware and other utensils. It is an important decorative pattern and has a strong symbolic meaning to this day.

Keywords : traditional cultures, textiles patterns, Chinese.

Introduction. The Han Dynasty (202 BC - 220 AD) was an important period in Chinese history. More than 200 pieces of silk and linen fabrics and clothing were unearthed from the Mawangdui Han Tomb that was excavated in 1972, which is of high research value. Among them, the most representative pattern of textiles is undoubtedly the cloud pattern. This pattern, which is based on natural scenes, contains human beings' awe and yearning for the unknown. Its abstract artistic expression has brought charm to this day.

Theoretical part. Clouds in the Han Dynasty were celestial phenomena and "qi" that could change. They have different styling features on different carriers. In the decoration of silk fabrics, it is mainly represented by floating and rhythmic lines of different lengths and thicknesses. Among them are cirrus clouds like fringe and grass, and long clouds like ribbons and mountains.




		
Figure 1. "Chengyun Embroidery" silk fragment from the National Museum of China	Figure 2. Fragment of tawny "Chengyun Embroidery" from Hunan Museum	Figure 3. Ocher brown "Chengyun Embroidery" fragment from Hunan Museum

For example, this piece of silk fabric unearthed from the Mawangdui Han Tomb has swirling patterns embroidered with colorful threads (Fig.1). This kind of swirl pattern is occasionally mixed with hornless loong head-like figures, which is a transitional form from the hornless loong pattern to the cloud pattern.

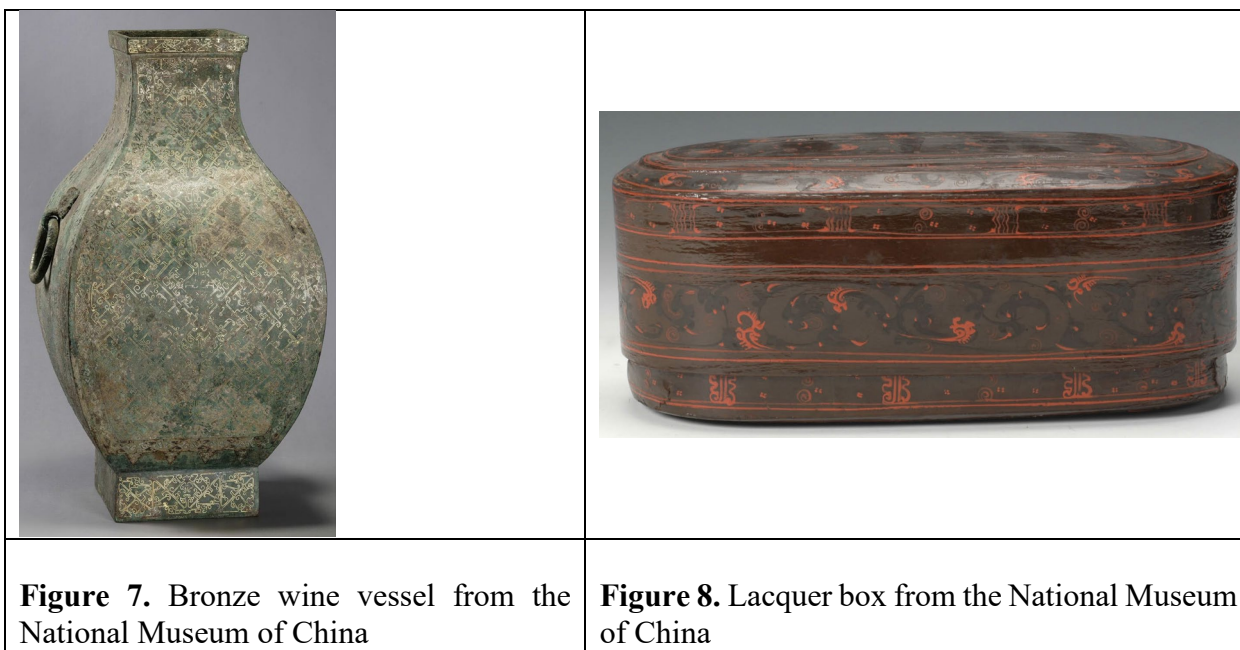
There are several other fragments with similar themes (Fig.2, Fig.3). Although the colors are different, they are all covered with curly patterns. The bamboo unearthed from the tomb that recorded the funerary objects referred to this silk fabric as "Chengyun Embroidery". It was also confirmed from the side that the main body of the pattern was a cloud pattern, implying the desire to ascend to the sky by soaring into the clouds and mist.

Curly lines are one of the earliest geometric patterns. They often appeared in the form of shading in the decoration of pre-Qin bronzes. The graceful curves are easily associated with many moving and imaginary objects in nature, such as flowing water, flames, smoke, and of course clouds. Therefore, cloud patterns are sometimes indistinguishable from water ripples, and therefore there are patterns such as cloud patterns, swirl patterns, and fire patterns that are all presented in scrolling curves (Dai, 2015).

The scroll pattern is an enduring classic pattern in the history of Chinese patterns. And this image not only appears in China, but also occupies a place in the history of Eastern and Western patterns. This may be because the origins of ancient civilizations all appeared in water basins with lush aquatic plants, so people all worshiped water in the same way, and they naturally extracted elements from it and used it in their daily lives. However, this scroll form has its own different image and image evolution in each cultural system. In Chinese culture, it has evolved more into phoenix patterns and cloud patterns.

		
<p>Figure 4. Fragments of "Xinqi Embroidery" from the National Museum of China</p>	<p>Figure 5. Fragments of tawny "longevity embroidery" from Hunan Museum</p>	<p>Figure 6. Fragment of crimson "longevity embroidery" from Hunan Museum</p>

Another kind of silk fabric unearthed from the tomb is called "Xinqi Embroidery" (Fig.4). On the ribbed ground woven with rhombus patterns, continuous patterns such as spike-shaped flowing clouds and curling branches of flowers and grass are embroidered. There is also a pattern embroidered with deformed cloud patterns, flower buds, branches and leaves and bird heads called "longevity embroidery" (Fig.5, Fig.6), which expresses the wish for immortality. These patterns all show the smooth use of curves, and the use of cloud patterns is indispensable. They are the embodiment of the superb embroidery skills of the Han Dynasty. They also show the yearning for the fairy world with floating fairy air and clouds and mist, and the desire to become immortals.



Other artifacts unearthed during the Han Dynasty also confirm the popularity of cloud patterns. As shown in the picture, the wine vessel is decorated with an oblique lattice pattern of interlocking clouds (Fig.7). The middle part of the bottle is divided longitudinally as the central axis, forming a symmetrical pattern on the left and right. The lacquerware is painted with cloud patterns, cloud loong patterns, fish patterns, and leopard patterns (Fig.8). The colors are bright and the lines are smooth.

Conclusions. The cloud patterns of fabrics in the Han Dynasty can be roughly divided into two types, namely cirrus clouds like fringe and cirrus clouds like grass (Zhang, 2013).

Fringe-shaped cirrus clouds are composed of curling flowers dragging out the tail of the spike. Some of the shapes of the tails are made up of several thin lines arranged in parallel and bent according to the situation; some have two or three stripes that gradually become narrower and narrower from the curled flower, forming a light gesture of clouds blowing and dispersing in the wind.

The shape of this type of cloud pattern is like the shape of the wings of a phoenix bird. The phoenix bird flaps its wings and flies, causing wind and clouds to surge and bring about changes in the clouds. Therefore, the phoenix bird and the clouds have a natural connection. This kind of artistic expression is also more reasonable.

Cirrus clouds are like grass, which refers to a comprehensive cirrus cloud shape that combines the characteristics of phoenixes, flowers, and clouds. Some of the cirrus cloud patterns are rolled up like the branches of plants, and appear together with the shape of flower buds, which is similar to the dogwood pattern at that time. Occasionally, cirrus cloud patterns and dogwood patterns are used in combination. Scholars only judge the pattern based on whether its shape is more similar to a plant or a cloud pattern, and then named it. It is difficult for modern people to determine the true intention of the creators thousands of years ago, and they can only appreciate it from the perspective of modern art.

References

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