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## CLOUD PATTERN DESIGN ON HAN DYNASTY TEXTILES IN CHINA

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*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 pattern through typology method. 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 for the modern design.*

**Key words:** *traditional culture, textile, pattern design, Chinese culture.*

### INTRODUCTION

Traditional Chinese patterns are of great interest to modern designers and researchers [1]. 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 [2]. 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.

### PURPOSE

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 pattern through typology method.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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.

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



relatively slender long lines, as if the slender body of the loong is flying through the clouds, faintly visible. 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. It can be seen that the overall pattern and color usage in Figure 1 and Figure 3 are quite similar, but there is a clear difference in Figure 2. The individual graphic shapes in Figure 2 are more full and rounded, with few longer and continuous lines appearing. As if all the divine beasts were hidden in the clouds, invisible. Upon closer inspection, it can be observed that there is a small diamond with a dot inside the orange red shape in Figure 3, which resembles an eye. Combined with the witchcraft worship and mythical animal imagination of this period, it cannot help but evoke relevant associations.



**Fig. 1.** "Chengyun Embroidery" silk fragment from the National Museum of China (202 BC - 220 AD)



**Fig. 2** Fragment of tawny "Chengyun Embroidery" from Hunan Museum (202 BC - 220 AD)



**Fig. 3.** Ocher brown "Chengyun Embroidery" fragment from Hunan Museum (202 BC - 220 AD)



**Fig. 4.** Fragments of "Xinqi Embroidery" from the National Museum of China (202 BC - 220 AD)



**Fig. 5.** Fragments of tawny "Longevity Embroidery" from Hunan Museum (202 BC - 220 AD)



**Fig. 6.** Fragment of crimson "Longevity Embroidery" from Hunan Museum (202 BC - 220 AD)

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 [2].

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.

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. Compared to "Chengyun Embroidery", "Xinqi Embroidery" has a more prominent vortex pattern, with thinner and longer lines, and more connections between the patterns, making it appear to have strong continuity. Visually, it looks more like a plant than a cloud.

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. Compared with the other two types of embroidery, the pattern of "Longevity Embroidery" has a more prominent shape similar to that of a phoenix, with a slender and elegant tail and wings. Continuous long lines still exist, but they are wider and thicker than "cloud embroidery".

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.

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 [3].

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.

### CONCLUSIONS

Ancient humans drew inspiration from nature for pattern design, with curved patterns resembling swirls of water and curls of clouds, making them one of the most representative patterns in human history. This article studies the cloud patterns in Chinese Han Dynasty textiles, and selects three types of embroidered silk unearthed from the Mawangdui Han Tomb as specific cases, including "Chengyun Embroidery", "Xinqi Embroidery", and "Longevity Embroidery". Their pattern designs are all very abstract, but their commonality lies in curling, and the use of individual elements has a high degree of similarity. The pattern elements of "Chengyun Embroidery" are the most abundant among them. The pattern of "Xinqi Embroidery" has thinner overall lines and a more regular curling effect. The cloud tail effect of "Longevity Embroidery" is the thinnest, longest, and most smooth. These patterns reflect the ancient human aesthetic, their reverence and worship of nature, and also express the ultimate pursuit of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

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### ГАО С., ЄЖОВА О.

#### ДИЗАЙН ВІЗЕРУНКА ХМАР НА ТЕКСТИЛІ ЕПОХИ ДИНАСТІЇ ХАНЬ У КИТАЇ

У статті досліджено хмарні візерунки і виявлено причини, за якими вони стали представниками традиційних китайських патернів. В роботі схарактеризовано зовнішній вигляд цього візерунка на текстилі часів династії Хань і узагальнено характеристики форми візерунка хмар за допомогою методу типології. Встановлено, що візерунок хмари широко використовувався в стародавньому китайському текстилі та бронзі, лакових виробів та іншому посуді. Це важливий декоративний візерунок, який має сильне символічне значення в сучасному дизайні.

**Ключові слова:** традиційна культура, текстиль, дизайн візерунка, китайська культура.