

# A STUDY ON THE AUSPICIOUS ANIMAL MOTIFS ON HAN TEXTILES IN ANCIENT CHINA

Zhang Wen 張文  
Xu Chunzhong 徐純中  
Wu Zhuo 吳焯  
Qiu Yiping 邱夷平

Chinese textiles have many animal motifs, found especially in combination with traditional Chinese cloud-designs. Such textiles were manufactured during the period of the Han 漢代 and Northern Dynasties (206 BCE – 589 CE), with many of the highest quality examples produced in the Eastern Han period, (25 – 220 CE). In earlier research, most scholars thought motifs such as the winged monster originated in Chinese traditional culture: such auspicious animals have other names, e.g., *qilin* 麒麟, *tianlu* 天祿, *bixie* 辟邪. Of interest though is the fact that similar depictions have been found in other places far away from China – Central Asia, Western Asia, and even in ancient Greece. The monster characterized by a wing and horn, which was called a griffin, has flown and hovered all over Eurasia. Some scholars have found that this phenomenon of the griffin can provide very important evidence about communication between East and West. Yet up to now, the winged monster in Chinese tapestry has never been compared with the griffin to determine what might be the similarities between them.<sup>1</sup> In this article then, we will explore the larger question of communication between East and West through the lens of depictions of this winged monster.

The manufacture in China of cloud-and-animal pattern textiles was very popular from 25 to 589 CE. From the standpoint of style and weaving technology, such textiles have much in common, two features in particular (Zhao 2005, p. 125). The first is that, almost without exception, they are warp-faced compound tabby weave: “a warp-patterned weave made up of a surface warp and complementary ... inner warps ... arranged in two or more series as well as one weft ... The ground and pattern are thus formed simultaneously, and the entire surface is covered by warp floats, which hide the weft” (Kuhn 2012, p. 523). The other feature is that the repeats along the weft direction will be much longer than in the warp direction. The warp repeats never extend more than 9 cm, whereas the

weft ones will be from 1/3 up to nearly all of of the cloth width (Zhao 2005, p. 132). There are many different kinds of animals in the designs on these textiles. To begin, we will classify in the table on the next page all the auspicious animals on the textiles by “species,” the individual pieces often identified by the inscriptions on them.

All the textiles in the list represent some of the finest examples of world textile art. Most of them were manufactured during the period from the Han to the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Such silk textiles have been found in different sites, evidence for Silk Road trade across Eurasia, from Korea in the east to England in the west (Lesnichenko 1998). Of particular interest here are the textiles decorated with animal-and-cloud patterns which have been excavated at Silk Road sites and which we have listed in the table below. Most of them were found in northwestern China – Gansu Province and the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region. The combination of auspicious animals and inscriptions made them appropriate to commemorate the dead and ensure good fortune in the afterlife.

In the period of the Han Dynasty, there are many depictions of monsters with wings and horns, often in compositions with cloud patterns. It is possible that some of these monsters are embodiments of the Qiongqi 窮奇 or Xianyang 咸羊 described in the “Classics of Mountains and Seas” (*Shan hai jing* 山海經) (Zhou 2010, p. 142), an amazing book about the geography and myths in ancient China.<sup>3</sup> It seems likely though that the ultimate source for one of the winged monsters on the textiles is the creature with an eagle head and lion body known as a griffin or griffon (Hopkins 1960). Alternatively, some of the monsters on the textiles might be construed as winged carnivores or more specifically lions (without an eagle head) (Goldman 1960). The strange thing is that at the time these textiles were made, there could have been no lions in

*Text continues on p. 106.*

**Table 1. A selection of early Chinese silk textiles described by motifs of auspicious animals and inscription text.**

Classification of auspicious animals	Textile description	Findspot <sup>2</sup>	Date
winged carnivore with two horns	‘Changle Mingguang’ 長樂明光 (or ‘Changle da Mingguang’) (Enduring Joy and Shining Brightness). Includes carnivores and horse with rider (Fig. 1.)	Niya 尼雅, Minfeng 民豐	Eastern Han 漢代 Dynasty (25 – 220 CE)
	‘Yinian yishou changbao zisun’ 延年益壽長葆子孫 (May your years be extended and long life increased, and your sons and grandsons be long preserved.) (Fig. 2)	Niya	Eastern Han Dynasty (25 – 220 CE)
	<i>jin</i> silk with animal motifs in zig-zag or diamond frame (Fig.3)	Palmyra, Syria	Western and Eastern Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE)
	dragon, phoenix, tiger and bird motif in an arched dragon frame (Fig. 4)	Dunhuang 敦煌, Gansu 甘肅	Northern dynasties (420 – 589 CE)
winged lions without horn	‘Deng gao ming wang sihai guifu shou wei guo qin’ 登高明望四海貴富壽為國慶 (Ascending to a height and looking clearly into the distance at the Four Seas, honors, wealth, and long life are what the state celebrates.), with animal and bird motif (Fig. 5)	Yingpan, Yuli, Xinjiang 尉犁县营盘	Eastern Han Dynasty (25 – 220 CE)
winged composite beast with a single horn	‘Wuxing chu dongfang li Zhong-guo’ 五星出東方利中國 (When the Five Planets rise in the East, the advantage will be to the Middle Kingdom). Images include birds and a lion or carnivore. (Fig. 6)	Niya	Western Jin 晉 Dynasty (265–317CE)
three-winged composite beast with a single horn	weft-faced silk with animal motif, attached to a cotton robe. Images include carnivore/lion and mounted archer. (Fig. 7)	Zagunluk 扎滾魯克, Qiemo, Xinjiang 且末, 新疆	Western Jin Dynasty (265 – 317 CE)
composite beast possibly with horns	“Wanshi ruyi, yannian yishou.” 萬事如意延年益壽 (May your wishes be granted, and may your years be extended.) Cloud pattern with humans and animals that include birds, deer and lions. (Fig. 8)	Niya	Western Jin Dynasty (265 – 317 CE)

winged deer	‘En ze xia sui da shu 恩澤下歲大孰’ (May favors be bestowed and the harvest be a good one.) (Fig. 9)	Niya	Western Jin Dynasty (265 – 317 CE)
winged deer, winged lions or tigers	‘Wannian fengyi’ 萬年豐益 (May every year for ten thousand years have a good harvest.) (Fig. 10)		Eastern Han Dynasty (25 – 220 CE)
winged composite creature with antlers and a possible bird beak	pattern includes a wide range of birds, animals and fantastic creatures; found in tomb of Northern Liang royal heir Juqu Fendai (d. 455 CE). (Figs. 11a–c)	Astana 阿斯塔那 Cemetery, Tomb 177, Turpan	Northern Liang Dynasty (397– 445 CE)
winged and horned carnivores	‘Han ren xiu wen yi you zisun wuji’ 韓仁繡文衣右子孫無極 (This was embroidered by Han Ren; may you have sons and grandsons without limit.) (Fig. 12)	Loulan 樓蘭	Eastern Han Dynasty (25 – 220 CE)



Fig. 1. Jin silk inscribed “Changle da Mingguang” 長樂大明光 (Enduring Joy, and Shining Brightness), excavated at Niya, Mingfeng, Xinjiang. 1:3 warp-faced compound tabby; warp count 176/cm; weft count 20/cm; pattern repeat in warp direction.  
After: Zhao and Yu 2000, p. 59, Fig. 21d.





Fig. 2. Detail of jin silk inscribed “Yannian yishou changbao zisun” 延年益壽長葆子孫 (May your years be extended and long life increased, and your sons and grandsons be long preserved.). Excavated at Niya; found attached to cotton pants. 1:3 warp-faced compound tabby; warp count 176/cm; weft count 24/cm; pattern repeat in warp direction) After: Zhao and Yu 2000, p. 32, Fig. 01.

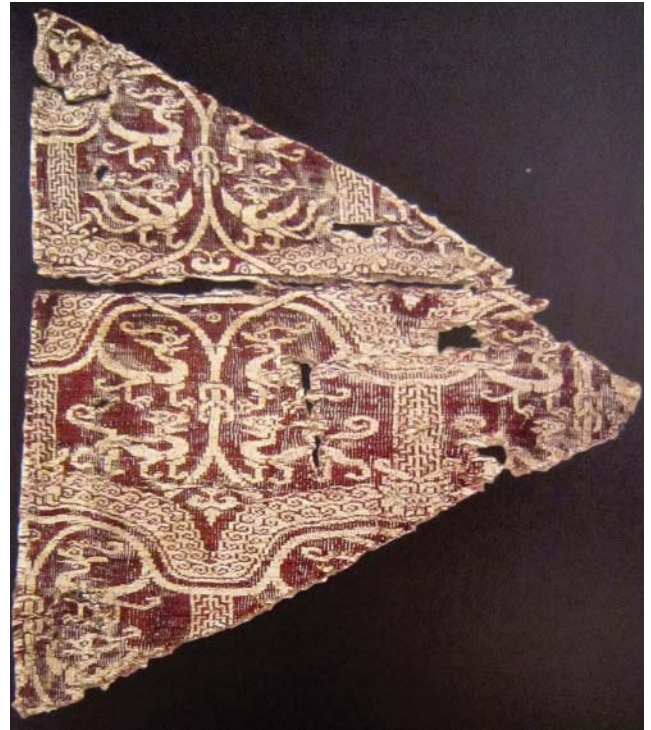


Fig. 4. Warp-faced compound tabby with dragons, tigers phoenixes and birds on arched dragon frame. 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Found in Mogao Cave 17 at Dunhuang. After: Zhao 1999, p. 85.

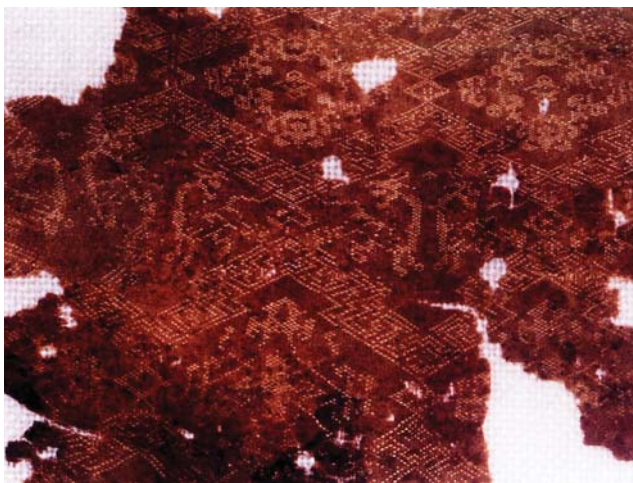


Fig. 3. Jin silk with animal in a zig-zag frame, found at Palmyra. After: Zhao 1999, p. 70.

Fig. 5. Jin silk with animal and bird motif, inscribed “Deng gao ming wang sihai guifu shou wei guo qin” 登高明望四海貴富壽為國慶 (Ascending to a height and looking clearly into the distance at the Four Seas, honors, wealth, and long life are what the state celebrates.). After: Chen 1984, appendix 18. (For a detail, see Zhao 1999, p. 78, Fig. 2.03a.)







Fig. 6. Polychrome jin armguard, with inscription “Wuxing chu dongfang li Zhongguo” 五星出東方利中國 (When the Five Planets rise in the East, the advantage will be to the Middle Kingdom [China].), excavated in Tomb 8 at Niya, Mingfeng, Xinjiang. 1:4 warp-faced compound tabby; warp count 220/cm; weft count 24/cm; pattern repeat in warp direction. (See Kuhn 2012, p. 123; Zhao 1999, pp. 78-79). After: Zhao and Yu 2000, p. 63, Fig. 24f.



Fig. 8. Jin silk with cloud, animal and human motif, excavated at Niya, inscribed “Wanshi ruyi, yannian yishou” 萬事如意延年益壽 (May your wishes be granted, and may your years be extended.) After: Zhao 1999, p. 68

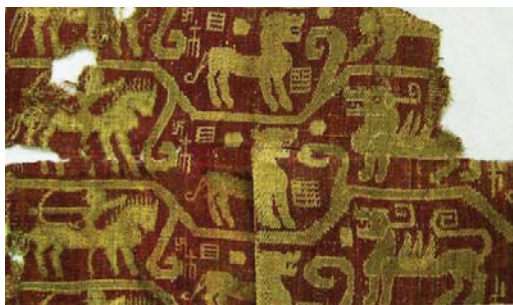


Fig. 7. Weft-faced tabby with animal motif, found attached to a cotton garment, Yingpan, Yuli, Xinjiang, tomb 8 (Cf. Kuhn 2012, p. 174, Fig. 4.3).



Fig. 9. Polychrome jin fabric, with winged deer and inscription “En ze xia sui da shu” 恩澤下歲大孰 (May favors be bestowed and the harvest be a good one.), excavated at Niya. After: Zhao 2005, color pl. 9.

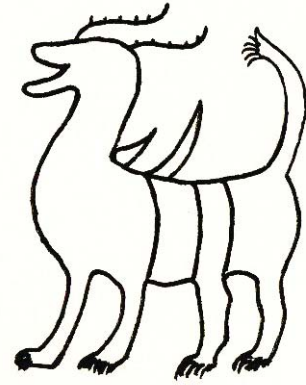


Fig. 10. Jin silk depicting winged deer, winged lions or tigers and birds, with inscription “Wannian fengyi” 萬年豐益 (May every year for ten thousand years have a good harvest.). After: Chen 1984, appendix 20.





11a



11c

Figs. 11a-c. Warp-faced compound twill with complex design that includes many animals, Eastern Jin/Northern Liang dynasty, 4<sup>th</sup>–mid-5<sup>th</sup> century. Excavated from Tomb 177, Astana Cemetery, Turpan, the tomb that of Juqu Fengdai, governor of Turpan until his death in 455 CE. Collection of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Museum, Urumqi. Fig. 11a, after: Li 2003, no. 37; Fig. 11b, photo 2009 Daniel C. Waugh; Fig. 11c, schematic drawing by Zhang Wen.



11b



Fig 12. Jin silk with various animals including lions, caprids, and winged and horned carnivores, inscribed "Han ren xiu wen yi you zisun wuji" 韓仁繡文衣右子孫無極 (This was embroidered by Han Ren; may you have sons and grandsons without limit.) Excavated at Loulan. After: Chen 1984, appendix 19.





Fig. 13. Glazed tile frieze depicting winged lion-griffin, from the Achaemenid palace of Darius I, ca. 510 BCE, Susa, Iran. Collection of the Louvre Museum. Photo © 2012 Daniel C. Waugh.

China, since the natural environment was unsuited for them to survive. As we know, the lions which were brought from Western Asia are not indigenous to China, and the lions with wings were found in China antedate the time when a real lion would have been seen there (Hornblower 1933).

So, what could have been the origin of the winged monster? The distinguishing features of the griffin point to it as a source: one type has wings, the other horns. The winged monster like a griffin which spread to China through the Eurasian steppe is a motif from Western Asia. It can further be divided into two kinds, one with bird or eagle head, the other a mammal's head; these features can be seen in various animals — the winged carnivore or lion, winged deer or ibex — which tend to merge into a single creature.

Let us begin with the origin of the winged carnivore or lion motif on the textiles, which resembles the typical griffin with lion head found in different areas in

Fig. 14. Lion griffin, felt appliqué from Ak-Alakha 3, Siberian Altai, Tomb 1, saddle cloth of horse No. 3, 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Collection of the Museum of Archaeology, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Siberian Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences. Courtesy of Hayashi Toshiyo, Sōka University.



Western and Central Asia. The features of Achaemenid lion-griffins (Fig. 13) — the example here from ca. 510 BCE — include: (1) a lion head; (2) curling horns; (3) a horse ear; (4) a short mane that encloses the throat; (5) enlarged wings; (6) markings on the rump and buttock; (7) back legs of an eagle. This motif is then found in the nomad graves of the Siberian Altai in the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE (Fig. 14), where one notes the markings on the rump and the pointed leaf-like tip of the tail. This western type of lion-headed griffin seems to be reflected in a Chinese sculpture of a winged monster from Luoyang 洛陽 dating to the Eastern Han Dynasty (Fig. 15a, b). Its appearance is largely that of the real animal, except for the single horn and beard — rather like the winged horse and ibex in Greek culture. So we might infer that the winged monster in Luoyang was influenced by Hellenistic or Bactrian models. Bactrian influences are known to have been important in China in the early centuries of the Common Era. That



Fig. 15a, b. One of a pair of stone winged lions, found near the River Luo, Luoyang. Collection of the National Museum of China. Photos by Zhang Wen.







Fig. 16. Woolen embroidery from the cemetery at Noyon uul, Mongolia, Barrow 6, late 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE – 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, depicting a horned lion-griffin. Collection of the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Courtesy of Hayashi Toshiyo, Sōka University.

said, we should note that the wings on the Luoyang sculpture differ from those in the Achaemenid images. The Achaemenid wings are large and extended, but in this sculpture the wings are small and folded back along the body, perhaps merely to suggest that this sculpture does not represent a real animal. Although as a whole the sculpture lacks the refinement of the best examples of Chinese work in this period, it does illustrate how the basic elements of the model have been given Chinese characteristics. Figure 16 depicts a textile fragment excavated in a Xiongnu tomb at Noyon uul in Mongolia (probably dating from the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE or 1<sup>st</sup> century CE). In this example, one can see elements found in the Achaemenid model such as big wings and the curling horn, although rendered in sketchy outline.

One can thus suggest a possible route of transmission of the griffin motif, which would explain how it could then appear in Han Dynasty textiles. The possible models could have come from Iran into Central Asia and then made their way through Xinjiang, reaching both Mongolia and Central China.

The griffin-like monster was very popular in China in the period following the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty and can be found in stone sculptures at mausolea during the period of the Six Dynasties (Yang 2006). Most scholars think that in China the winged monster is to be identified with the *tianlu* 天祿 and *bixie* 辟邪, which are mentioned even in historical texts such as the *Hou Han Shu* 後漢書. Some scholars have suggested that images of these monsters, which were considered to be auspicious animals in China, may in fact have been based the art of the Eurasian steppe or central and even western Asia (Li 2004, p. 362; Bunker 1993; So and Bunker 1995, esp. Ch. 5).

A striking compound weave *jin* silk with “griffin imagery,” produced in the Northern Liang

Fig. 17. “He” ritual vessel shaped like a “leopard-bird” (475 – mid-4<sup>th</sup> century BCE). Collection of the Shanghai Museum. Photo by Zhang Wen.



北涼 period, was found in an elite tomb in the Astana Cemetery in the Turpan oasis (Figs. 11a-c). The pattern includes various kinds of animals, at least a couple of them seeming to represent birds (although in one case with four legs). Of particular interest are the composite “griffin” figures, with wings, clawed feet, pointed tails, antlers and snouts that in some cases curl up, the mouths open to reveal teeth. These various elements were common across the northern regions by the second half of the first millennium BCE and even at a very early stage can be found in China. For example, the figure that forms the body of a 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>-century BCE ritual vessel (Fig. 17) can be called a bird-headed griffin: it has a bird's beak, a horse's ear, monster claws and wings. A rich nomad burial from around the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE in the remote Altai mountain region of Southern Siberia contained the body of a man whose forearm was tattooed with monster images [Fig. 18]. One of the beasts, a hooved animal that is probably in the first instance a horse, is shown with twisted hind-

Fig. 18. Tattooed human skin depicting a monster, from the right arm of a man buried in Pazyryk Kurgan 2 (Siberian Altai), 300–290 BCE. Collection of the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Photo © 2006 Daniel C. Waugh.







Fig. 19. Horse-monster, a gold headdress ornament, found at Nalingaotu, Shenmu Xian, Shaanxi Province, late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Courtesy of Hayashi Toshiyo, Sōka University.

quarters, a beak and exaggerated antlers, with raptor heads decorating them as well as the animal's mane. An elegantly designed gold headdress ornament [Fig. 19], found in Shaanxi Province and dated to the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE has been termed a "horse-monster." It too has a beaked snout, large antlers with the raptor heads (found as well on the tip of the tail) and a clearly articulated "horse" ear. Belt plaques such as one excavated at Aluchaideng in Inner Mongolia [Fig. 20], dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, frequently display composite beasts, some evoking carnivores, others hooved animals, with elaborate antlers decorated with raptor heads.

Given the early date of such examples (many made prior to what is normally considered to be the opening of the Silk Roads across the more southerly regions of Xinjiang), it seems reasonable to posit transmission via the steppe routes of the north, the connections



then becoming stronger with the emergence of the Xiongnu on China's northern borders. It is precisely in the north and northwest of China that most of the artefacts displaying these images have been found (Shen 2009, p. 389).

While the motifs on these textiles may have come from Western Asia, what can one say about the weaving techniques? These are warp-faced textiles, not the weft-faced ones typical of Western and Central Asia. The basic structure produces a colorful effect along the weft direction, since the warps float above the weft. Among the reasons for adopting the warp-faced technique is the nature of the basic material. The length and strength of the silk thread produced in China made it especially suited for the long warps. Some scholars think that the perfection of this technique in China rather than in other regions is to be explained by the fact that sericulture first developed there (Karasuma 2004, p. 29). The silk threads can be used directly for weaving, whereas other fibers like cotton and linen must first be twisted to increase their strength. A second important reason for the adoption of the warp-faced technique lies in the early development of looms probably starting with the body-tension or backstrap loom where one end of the warp threads would be attached to the weaver's waist belt, the other being tied to a tree or a peg. The resulting textiles had a face pattern expressed by the warp yarns, thus emphasizing their importance over the weft yarns (Karasuma 2004, p. 28; see also Kuhn 2012, pp. 53–57). The textile historian Zhao Feng 趙豐 further explains (1999, p. 71; see also 2005, p. 132): "The pattern unit is short in the warp direction, but longer in the weft direction. Studies of archaeological examples show that within a single pattern unit, the number of inner wefts or weft passes is below 80 in the warp direction. However, in the weft direction, one pattern unit may occupy the complete loom width."

The sophistication of the weaving techniques suggests that most of the textiles of interest to us here were probably produced in Central China. The treadle-operated loom, which succeeded the backstrap loom, sufficed for weaving intricate motifs as long as they were symmetrical and geometrical, or of a small pattern cycle (Chen 1984, pp. 204–05). However, motifs of a large pattern cycle or of an extremely complicated

Fig. 20. Belt plaque with crouching composite predator with antlers decorated with raptor heads. Gold with turquoise inlay. Ca. 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Excavated at Aluchaideng, Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. Collection of the Inner Mongolia Museum, Hohhot. Photo © 2009 Daniel C. Waugh.

structure, such as floral and animal designs, required different technology. The result was the development of the drawloom or heddle patterning loom as early as the period between the Warring States Period and the Han Dynasty, i.e., ca. 475 BCE and 220 CE (Chen 1984, p. 210; Kuhn 2012, pp. 55–57). The range and complexity of the patterns in Han-period textiles, including the images of fantastic beasts, attests to the high technical abilities of the weavers. Sometimes the number of weft yarns that needed to be lifted for each figure unit repeat reached two hundred or more (Chen 1984, p. 212).

The patterning loom was gradually brought to perfection during the first millennium of the Common Era. In “Rhapsody on the Loom” 織機賦 by Yang Quan 楊泉 of the Western Jin 晉 period (265–316) (Yang 1984), we find explicit descriptions of the material out of which the loom was made, the principles on which the loom was assembled and the process by which patterning was carried out. Of special interest is a passage that tells how weavers work in unison on a patterning loom:

The worker below lifts the ground harness and does the wefting while the worker above pulls up the patterning warp threads according to the figure design. As soon as a signal is given by one, it is echoed by the other, and it is through this close coordination between them that beautiful designs appear on the polychrome jin fabric one by one. [Quoted by Kuhn 2012, p. 58; see also Chen 1984, pp. 210–20]

Another Jin-period work, Lu Hui’s 陆翹 “Record of Ye” (*Ye zhong ji* 鄴中記), gives a large list of motifs woven into textiles, a list which the author maintains is not exhaustive. This list points unmistakably to the increased capacities of the patterning loom and the ever wider application of the patterning technology.

One of the most evocative descriptions of weaving is in a literary work written by Wang Yi 王逸 of the Eastern Han – “Rhapsody on Women Weavers” (in Ouyang; Wang 1984; partial translation and summary in Kuhn 2012, pp 57–58). In this work, the author gives a comprehensive description of the patterning loom, using a lot of metaphor and similes, which make the work at once interesting and informative. The movement of the loom’s parts is like the rising and setting of the sun and moon. The various parts of the mechanism are likened to “soldiers setting out on campaign,” “rabbits’ ears,” and “fierce dogs.” The warp threads “resemble a pond of clear water [where] fishes swim about [after bait], swallowing it.” The cloud, animal and plant metaphors serve both to describe the technology and express the degree to which such patterns had come to be part of cultural expres-

sion by the time of the Han Dynasty. In the process of absorbing images such as the griffin though, the Chinese transformed it from a threatening or evil figure (as it would have been understood in a Western context) into an auspicious one.

The positive connotations of the monsters on the textiles are reinforced by the inscriptions woven alongside them. While most such inscriptions are very common felicitous expressions which cannot be associated with a particular historical context, there are some possible exceptions. Some scholars have found one of the textiles from from Niya (Fig. 6) to be of particular interest (see, e.g., Zhao and Yu 2000, p. 62; Yu 2003). On it are the characters “Wuxing chu dongfang li Zhongguo” 五星出東方利中國 (When the Five Planets rise in the East, the advantage will be to the Middle Kingdom). This piece apparently was part of a larger one, another fragment of which, found in the same tomb, has the characters “tao nan Qiang” 討南羌 on it. This then might connect with the history of the war between the rulers of central China, its forces led by Xie Ai 謝艾 against the Southern Qiang 羌 in the fourth century. The ruler of Niya seems to have been among the participants in the expedition; thus, possibly this textile commemorates the event, was gifted as a reward, and then was buried with its owner.

There is more to be said by way of explanation for the popularity of the fantastic animals on the silks of the Han and subsequent periods and the way in which they are depicted. Han textiles include a great many kinds of animals: e.g., wolf, bear, deer, tiger, lion, dog, ibex, snake, eagle, camel and various birds. Some of them then were adapted to incorporate elements of the griffin from Western Asia that was represented there with an eagle or lion head. These fantastic creatures seem to have influenced the creation of a wide range of variants when introduced into the cultures of the northern nomads. There was a process of adaptation to the belief system (and the visual representations of it) concerning the animals which were familiar. When translated to Han China, the depictions then come to include a wolf with wings, deer with wings or a winged bear. Yet, as indicated above, some of the fantastic creatures retain key elements found in the proposed West Asian sources for them.

It is important to understand the cultural context of the belief systems within which the fantastic animals flourished. Traditional nomadic culture emphasized the importance of animals for human survival. Animals might be seen to have a protective function and in traditional shamanic belief connect the various levels of the cosmos, that which is below this world, this world of humans, and the heavens (Rowland 1962). The function of the shaman was to perform the



rituals which would ensure the well-being of the community, rituals in which animals and animal spirits were invoked. There are parallels here with traditional Chinese beliefs and practices of sorcery, which can be documented, for example, in the Shang 商 and Zhou 周 dynasties and may be seen in the imagery on some of their bronzes. Thus one can suggest that there was an environment in which fantastic beasts could thrive, in the same way that they did among the steppe peoples of the north.

In particular, we should consider why lions and winged lions were popular during the Han Dynasty in China. Knowledge of the winged lion seems to have preceded any acquaintance with real lions. The latter are attested though in texts such as the *Hou Han Shu* 後漢書, *Mu Tianzi zhuan* (Biography of Mutianzi) 穆天子傳, and Li Shizhen's 李時珍 (1518–1593) *Bencao gangmu* (Collection of *materia medica*) 本草綱目. The observation of real lions might well then have stimulated an interest in their mythical depictions. The major religious belief systems in China also help to explain why lion imagery would become popular. The adoption of Buddhism at the beginning of the Common Era meant the introduction of imagery in which lions appear as protective animals (Liu 2008, pp. 46–47). To represent lions with wings may well be explained by Daoist belief, in which there was an iconography of flying auspicious figures.

The winged lions might also have been seen as analogous to other traditional monsters in China, for example, the *yuren* 羽人, which is similar to a winged griffin (Wang and Liu 2008). According to Wu Min, a specialist on ancient textiles, many of the Chinese textiles with cloud design were produced during the Six Dynasties and Tang periods in the state of Shu 蜀 (now Sichuan 四川 Province) (Lesnichenko 1993). Coincidentally, this was one of the places where the *yuren* was popular.

The griffin-like animals that originated in Western Asia might have had both good and bad connotations in various regions (Hancar 1952), but in China they were viewed only in a positive light. "These motifs began a new life in China, and acquired new meanings. At the same time, old associations disappeared and were forgotten" (Lesnichenko 1993, p. 8). The winged lions could be enlisted in the service of the dynasty to reinforce a message about the emperor's mandate from heaven. Eventually the lion-headed griffin was transformed into the Chinese auspicious monster, the *tianlu* 天祿 and *bixie* 辟邪. This example illustrates well the processes of translation of image and ideas across cultures.

## About the authors

**Zhang Wen** 張文 is a PhD candidate studying the communications between China and the West in the culture of the Silk Road. E-mail: <qitinghuabi@163.com>.

**Xu Chunzhong** 徐純中 is a professor in Fudan University's College of Humanities and Director of the Museum Studies Program. He is also a specialist on the field of Asian art and in that capacity serves as a consultant for the Bowers Museum.

**Wu Zhuo** 吳焯 is a specialist on the history of China's contacts with the West and on archaeology and art history in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

**Qiu Yiping** 邱夷平 is a professor at Donghua University who specializes in the field of ancient textile engineering.

## References

- Aruz et al. 2000  
Joan Aruz et al., eds. *The Golden deer of Eurasia*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Azarpay 1959  
Guitty Azarpay. "Classical and Near Eastern Motifs in the Art of Pazyryk." *Artibus Asiae* 22/4 (1959): 313–39.
- Ball 2006  
Jennifer L. Ball. "A Double-Headed Eagle Embroidery: From Battlefield to Altar." *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 41 (2006): 59–64, 10 (pl. 3).
- Bunker 1993  
Emma C. Bunker. "Gold in the Ancient Chinese World: A Cultural Puzzle." *Artibus Asiae* 53/1–2 (1993): 27–50.
- Cammann 1976  
Schuyler V. R. Cammann "Symbolism in Persian Art." *History of Religions* 15/3 (1976): 193–208.
- Chang 1983  
Kwang-chi Chang 張光直. *Shang Civilization and Art, Myth and Ritual: The Path to Political Authority in Ancient China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1983.
- Chang 1990  
\_\_\_\_\_. *Zhongguo qingtong shidai* 中國青銅時代 [Chinese Bronze Age]. Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian, 1990.
- Chen 1984  
Chen Weiji 陳維稷. *Zhongguo fangzhi kexue jishu shi* 中國紡織科學技術史 [History of Textile Technology of Ancient China]. Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1984.
- Fan 1965  
Fan Ye 範曄. *Hou Han Shu* 後漢書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965.

- Goldman 1960  
Bernard Goldman. "The Development of the Lion-Griffin." *American Journal of Archaeology* 64/4 (1960): 319-28.
- Hancar 1952  
Franz Hancar. "The Eurasian Animal Style and the Altai Complex." *Artibus Asiae* 15/1-2 (1952): 171-94.
- Harper 1961  
Prudence Oliver Harper. "The Senmurv." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, N. S., 20/3 (1961): 95-101.
- Hopkins 1960  
Clark Hopkins. "The Origin of the Etruscan-Samian Griffin Cauldron." *American Journal of Archaeology* 64/4 (1960): 368-70.
- Hornblower 1933  
G[eorge] D. Hornblower. "Early Dragon-Forms." *Man* 33 (May, 1933): 79-87 + plates E,F,G,H.
- Karasuma 2004  
Karasuma Tomoko 鳥丸知子. *Zhiwu pingwen di jin fu xian hua jishu de fa sheng, fazhan he liuchuan 織物平紋地經浮顯花技術的發生、發展和流傳* [The Development and Spread of Warp-floated Faced Tabby]. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Donghua daxue 東華大學 [Donghua University], 2004.
- Keller and Schorta 2001  
Dominik Keller and Regula Schorta. *Fabulous Creatures from the Desert Sands: Central Asian Woolen Textiles from the Second Century BC to the Second Century AD*. Riggisberger Berichte, 10. Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2001.
- Krahl 1998/1989  
Regina Krahl. "Designs on Early Chinese Textiles." In: *Chinese and Central Asian Textiles: Selected Articles from Orientations 1983-1997*. Hong Kong: Orientations Magazine, 1998 (first published in *Orientations*, August 1989: 56-65).
- Kuhn 2012  
Dieter Kuhn, ed. *Chinese Silks*. New Haven; London: Yale Univ. Pr.; Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 2012.
- Li 2003  
Li Jian, ed. *The Glory of the Silk Road: Art from Ancient China*. Dayton, OH: Dayton Art Institute, 2003.
- Li 2004  
Li Ling 李零. *Rushan yu chusai 入山與出塞* [Entering the mountains & crossing the borders]. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2004.
- Lu  
Lu Hui 陸翹. *Ye zhong ji 鄴中記* [The record of Ye], online at Guoxue daohang - Zhongguo guoxue jingdian zaixian yuedu 国学导航 - 中国国学经典在线阅读 [Sinology navigation - Chinese classical Sinology read online] <<http://www.guoxue123.com/shibu/0101/0000/203.htm>>, accessed 25 September 2013.
- Liu 2008  
Liu Zibing 劉自兵. "Foijiao de dongchuan yu Zhongguo shizi wenhua" 佛教的東傳與中國的獅子文化 [Eastward Transmission of Buddhism and Lion Culture in China]. *Dongnan wenhua 東南文化* [Southeast Culture] 2008/3: 46-49.
- Lubo-Lesnichenko 1993  
E[vgenii] Lubo-Lesnitchenko. "Western Motifs in the Chinese Textiles of the Early Middle Ages." *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 28/1-2 (1993): 1-29.
- Lubo-Lesnichenko 1998/1995  
\_\_\_\_\_. "Concerning the Chronology and Ornamentation of Han Period Textiles." In: *Chinese and Central Asian Textiles: Selected Articles from Orientations 1983-1997*. Hong Kong: Orientations Magazine, 1998 (first published in *Orientations*, May 1995: 158-65).
- Ouyang  
Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢, *Yi wen lei ju 藝文類聚* [Collections of literature arranged by categories], online at Zhongguo zhexue shu dianzi hua jihua 中國哲學書電子化計劃 [Chinese Text Project] <<http://ctext.org/yiwen-leiju/65/zh>>, accessed 25 September 2013.
- Porada 1965  
Edith Porada. *The Art of Ancient Iran: pre-Islamic Cultures*. New York: Crown, 1965.
- Rowland 1962  
Benjamin Rowland. "Religious Art East and West." *History of Religions* 2/1 (1962): 11-32.
- Schmidt-Colinet et al. 2000  
Andreas Schmidt-Colinet, et al. *Die Textilien aus Palmyra: neue und alter Funde*. Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 2000.
- Shen 2009  
Shen Aifeng 沈愛鳳. *Cong qing jinshi zhilu dao sichou zhi lu 從青金石之路到絲綢之路* [From the Lapis Lazuli Road to the Silk Road]. Shandong: Shandong meishu chubanshe, 2009.
- So and Bunker 1995  
Jenny F. So and Emma C. Bunker. *Traders and Raiders on China's Northern Frontier*. Seattle; London: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; Univ. of Washington Pr., 1995.
- Stauffer 1996  
Annemarie Stauffer. "Textiles from Palmyra: Local Production and the Import and Imitation of Chinese Silk Weavings." *Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes* 42 (1996): 425-30.
- Tian and Guo 1980  
Tian Guangjin 田廣金 and Guo Suxin 郭素新. "Neimenggu Aluchaideng faxian de Xiongnu yiwu" 內蒙古阿魯柴登發現的匈奴遺物 [The Xiongnu relics from Aluchaideng in Inner Mongolia]. *Kaogu 考古* [Archaeology] 1980/4: 333-38, 364, 368.
- Wang 1984  
Wang Yi 王逸. "Zhifu" 機婦 [Rhapsody on women weavers], cited in Chen 1984, p. 211.



Wang and Liu 2008

Wang Li 王立 and Liu Chang 劉暢. "Cong Handai yuren kan shenxian sixiang ji qi xiangguan guannian" 從漢代羽人看神仙思想及其相關觀念 [On the basis of Han period immortals viewing the thinking about 1) celestial beings or 2) clairvoyants and related concepts]. *Heilongjiang Shehuikexue* 黑龍江社會科學 [*Heilongjiang Social Sciences*] 2008/5: 128–32.

Yang 1984

Yang Quan 楊泉. "Zhiji fu" 織機賦 [Rhapsody on a loom], cited from Chen 1984, p. 212.

Yang 2006

Yang Xiaochun 楊曉春, "Nanchao lingmu shendao shike yuanyuan yanjiu" 南朝陵墓神道石刻淵源研究 [A study of the origin of the stone sculptures along the spirit roads of tombs of the Southern Dynasties period]. *Kaogu* 考古 [*Archaeology*] 2006/8: 74–82

Yu 2003

Yu Zhiyong 於志勇. "Loulan – Niya diqu chutu Han Jin wenzi zhijin chutan" 樓蘭 – 尼雅地區出土漢晉文字織錦初探 [Study on the tapestry with Chinese characters found in the Loulan – Niya Region]. *Zhongguo lishi wenwu* 中國歷史文物 [*Chinese Historical Artifacts: Journal of the National Museum of Chinese History*] 2003/6: 38–48, 89–95.

Zhao 1999

Zhao Feng 趙豐. *Treasures in Silk*. Hong Kong: ISAT/Costume Squad, 1999.

Zhao 2005

\_\_\_\_\_. *Zhongguo sichou yishu shi* 中國絲綢藝術史 [The history of Chinese silk art]. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2005.

Zhao and Yu 2000

Zhao Feng 趙豐 and Yu Zhiyong 於志勇, eds. *Shamo wangzi yi bao. Sichou zhi lu Niya yizhi chutu wenwu* 沙漠王子遺寶: 絲綢之路尼雅遺址出土文物 / *Legacy of the Desert King: Textiles and Treasures Excavated at Niya on the Silk Road*. Hong Kong: ISAT/Costume Squad, 2000.

Zhou 2010

Zhou Mingchu 周明初. *Shan hai jing* 山海經 [Classic of mountains and seas]. Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2010.

## Notes

1. This is not to say, however, that there has been no attention to animal or monster depictions on textiles made in China and/or excavated at sites in China along the Silk Roads. In English, see, for example, Lubo-Lesnichenko 1993; Kuhn 2012 *passim*; Keller and Schorta 2001 (devoted to woolens found at Shanpula which must be of Central Asian origin). That there is as yet much to be done in tracing specific animal motifs that moved across Eurasia can also be seen in the article by Rosalind Bradford in this volume of *The Silk Road*.

2. Many silk textiles were found in the Lop-nor region of Xinjiang, notably at Loulan, the most important transit center along the eastern length of the Silk Road. Recent excavations have also produced significant textile finds at another ancient town, Niya (present Minfeng county), located not far from the Khotan oasis, along the southern branch of the Silk Road (see, in Chinese and English, Zhao and Yu 2000). The tombs at the caravan city of Palmyra, in Eastern Syria, have also preserved some textiles very similar to ones found at Loulan (Lesnichenko 1998/1995; Stauffer 1996; for their complete analysis, Schmidt-Colinet et al. 2000).

3. The tendency to connect the beasts on the textiles with those of Chinese tradition (rather than seek possible borrowings from further afield) can be seen in Li Wenying's discussion of the animal motifs in Kuhn 2012, pp. 152–54.