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The Bird with S-Curves in Southwestern China

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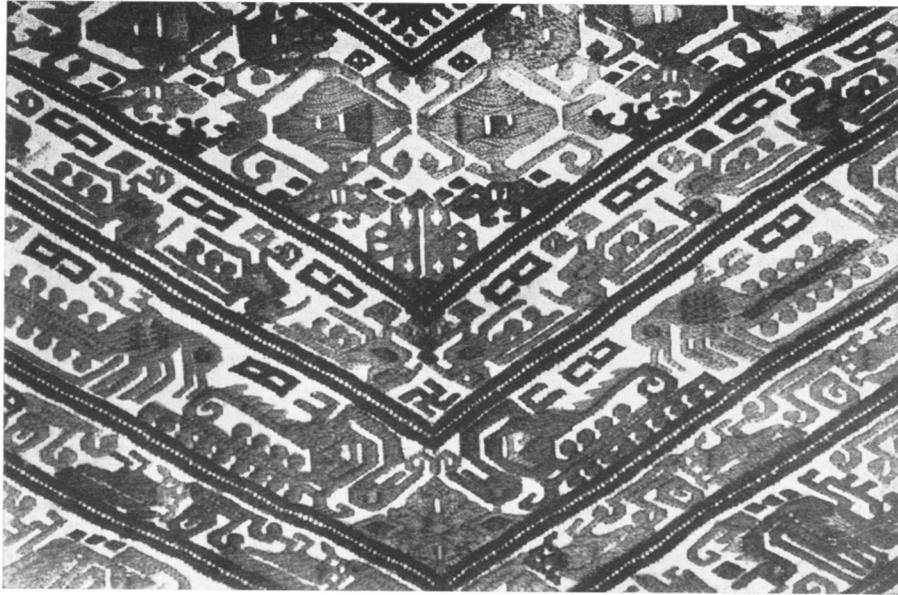
wahrscheinlich, daß es sich um einen an mehreren Stellen vor sich gegangenen Prozeß gehandelt hat, bei dem unter Einfluß der gleichen Tendenz in verschiedenen Gebieten verschiedene alte Lokalgöttinnen mit Avalokiteśvara gleichgesetzt wurden.¹⁰

CARL SCHUSTER:
THE BIRD WITH S-CURVES IN SOUTHWESTERN CHINA

IN AN ARTICLE IN THE PRECEDING ISSUE OF THIS JOURNAL, ENTITLED "SOME Comparative Considerations about Western Asiatic Carpet Designs" (pp. 68—92), I called attention to the association of a geometric and symbolic motive, the S-curve, with representations of birds in the textile arts of various regions in Europe and Asia. In note 8 of that article I expressed some hesitation in regarding one of these designs, which appears on a cross-stitch embroidery from Southwestern China, Fig. 10, as a true example of this association, my hesitation arising from the circumstance that that particular embroidery was the only specimen of its class showing this combination of motives which had come to my attention. I am now able to support what then seemed a doubtful identification by another specimen of textile design from the same region. The accompanying illustration shows a section of a fabric woven in brightly colored silks on a white cotton ground. Though its exact provenience is not known, there can be no doubt that it is from the general region of Southwestern China; in the first place because it formed part of a collection from that region recently offered to an American museum for purchase, and in the second place because it shows stylistic affinity with a class of fabrics turned out by peasants of Thai race, the so called *Chuang jên* of Kwangsi province, who are in every respect except language largely acculturated to the surrounding Chinese. (Cf.

Sculpture, zurzeit leider nicht erreichbar ist. In dem schönen Aufsatz von Boerschmann, Die Kultstätte des T'ien lung shan, *Artibus Asiæ* 1925, 262—279, und der anschaulichen Schilderung bei Otto Fischer, *Wanderfahrten eines Kunstfreundes in China und Japan* (1939), p. 394/98, ist nichts Einschlägiges enthalten.

¹⁰ Einen noch vielfach hypothetischen, in seinen Grundzügen aber sicherlich zutreffenden Überblick über die Muttergöttinnen der Altkulturen Chinas gibt Rousselle, *Die Idee der großen Göttin-Mutter in der Geschichte des chinesischen Mythos*, *Sinica* 16 (1941), 140—151.



Portion of a fabric from Southwestern China. 19th century.

V. K. Ting, "Notes on the Language of the Chuang in Northern Kwangsi" *BMFEA*, no. 1, Stockholm, 1929, pp. 61—64). The design of these fabrics, locally known as *Chuang chin* (about which more is to be said in my forthcoming book, *The Sunbird*, Chapter IV), show Chinese influence in varying degrees; though even where the Chinese influence is marked, as it seems to be in the accompanying example, the coloring tends to remain un-Chinese. Our interest in this piece lies in the fact that it clearly shows the specific association of S-curves with bird motives. Because of the hybrid character of such fabrics, it is not possible, at least without further data, to say whether the combination as it occurs here is an expression of a native, non-Chinese, tradition, or of Chinese influence upon a native (probably Thai) design. Quite apart from this question, however, the very fact that such a fabric was made in Southwestern China proves that the motive of the bird with the S-curve was well known in this area—perhaps as well known as in the peasant art of Europe—and this circumstance provides welcome support for our identification of the motive of the bird with the S-curve in the Chinese peasant embroidery, Fig. 11, as representative of this type in the popular artistic traditions of the Far East.