

ASIAN TEXTILES

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Library of Congress photos of the Kyrgyz from the 1860s

Also in this issue: The Royal Weaves of Malaysia, Tie and dye from Pakistan, Turkmen weavers in Afghanistan and Silk Road textiles.

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Editorial

I hope readers will find plenty to engage with in this slightly delayed (and shortened) edition of *Asian Textiles*. We have a detailed review of the *Traditional Textile Arts of Malaysia* exhibition held in London at the Prince's School of Traditional Arts that shows the enduring importance of *songket* weaving to that society.

An article on the Turkmen weavers of Afghanistan makes the point that a woman's skill in carpet weaving influences her bride price and encourages parents to have as many girls as possible.

Azra Nafees has written another excellent article on the textile traditions of her native Pakistan, this time looking at the exquisite tie and dye art of *chunri*, as practised in Bahawalpur and Multan.

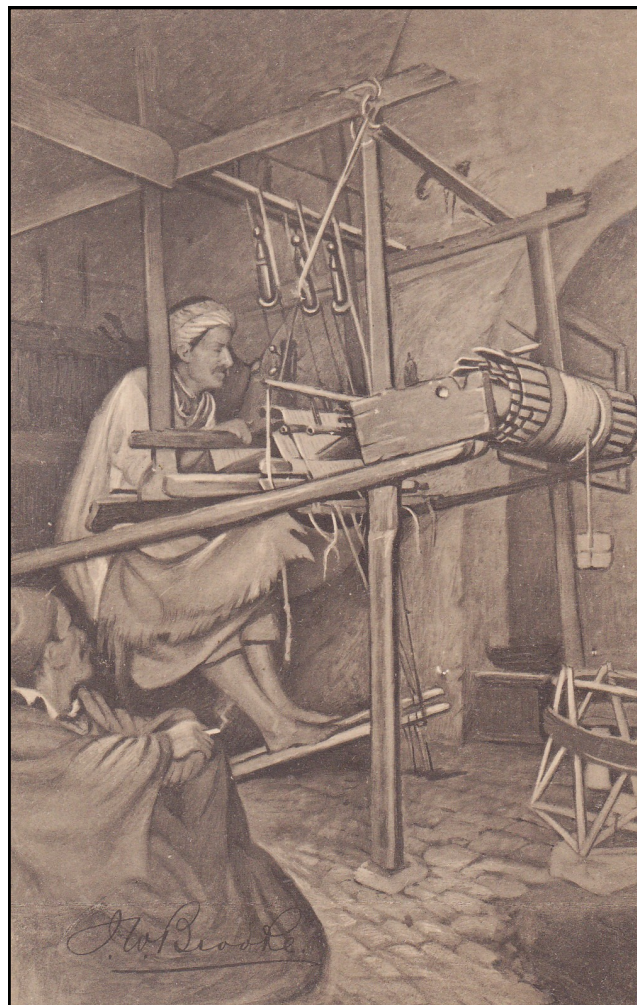
Susanna Reece continues her journey along the Silk Road, this time writing about the court textiles of China and Japan. A fourth article will appear in the next issue of the magazine.

Finally, I have included a number of remarkable photographs of Kyrgyz nomads, taken in the 1860s and now held in the collection of the US Library of Congress. Many more similar and startling photos can be found on the Library's website.

The Editor

The image on my postcard for this edition comes from somewhere on the Indian subcontinent.

If anyone can identify the type of weaving frame please let me know and I will publish the details in our next edition.



OATG EVENTS PROGRAMME

Wednesday 3 August 2011

Fashionable Abayas: Inventing Traditions

Christina Lindholm

Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.

Muslim women of Qatar have been covering their Euro-American style dress since a wave of Islamism swept through the Persian Gulf in the 1990s. After a decade of being swathed in plain black, the abaya has evolved into a fashionable garment. This talk will discuss the evolution of the abaya from a plain concealing garment meant to protect women from prying eyes, to remarkable fashion garments which demand attention.

Wednesday 24 August 2011

Visit to the Horniman Museum

A joint visit with Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum

As well as Ethnographic and Natural History collections, there is an aquarium and a 16-acre award-winning garden. At this time the exhibition: '*Bali - Dancing for the Gods*' is on and Fiona Kerlogue, Curator of the Exhibition, will give an introduction.

This is a follow up of her talk to OATG in February 2010 entitled '*Researching Stories and Dance in Bali.*'

Price: £21 (non-members £24) special rates for children negotiable.

Please contact either Fiona Sutcliffe or Rosemary Lee by 8 August to secure a reservation.

Wednesday 9 November 2011

AGM at 5.45pm followed at 6.15pm by

Krishna Riboud, a one-of-a kind collector

Aurélie Samuel

Assistant Curator in charge of textile collections at the Musée Guimet, Paris

Mme Riboud, a relation of Tagore and friend of Henri Cartier Bresson, started collecting ancient textiles from Bengal and over the years her collection grew to over 4000 pieces. During the 1960s she made a special study of Central Asian textiles combining technical and historical research.. Her collection was bequeathed to the Musée Guimet and forms one of the most comprehensive in the world.

Talks are held at the Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford.

Refreshments from 5.15pm. Visitors welcome (£2)

Programme Coordinators:

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The glittering *songkets* of Malaysia

Asian art historian and critic **Jasleen Kandhari** reviews
The *Royal Weaves: Traditional Textile Arts of Malaysia* exhibition
held in London at the Prince's School of Traditional Arts

Exquisite, elegant and enigmatic - terms which describe the luxurious textiles from the Malay world known as the *songket*. The *Royal Weaves: Traditional Textile Arts of Malaysia* exhibition held in London at the Prince's School of Traditional Arts (PSTA) in collaboration with the British Malaysian Society and the Islamic Arts Museum of Malaysia showcased 50 glittering pieces dated from the early twentieth century up to contemporary times, providing an insight into the traditional and contemporary use of these textiles as well as current initiatives to promote them.

The term '*songket*' is derived from the Malay word *menyongket*, meaning to embroider with gold or silver threads. Songket is a brocaded textile woven in silk or cotton using the supplementary weft technique in which colourful metallic threads are inserted between the silk wefts of the ground cloth to form the songket motifs during the weaving process. It was interesting to see live demonstrations of this weaving process by local artisans from Terengganu in the gallery amidst the *songkets* on display.

The exhibition was divided into sections highlighting traditional usage of songkets and the technique of gold embroidery called *tekat* as well as contemporary pieces and samples of work produced as a result of the design projects developed by PSTA tutors in collaboration with weavers and embroiders of Terengganu and Perak.

In Malaysia, textiles play an essential role in the Royal Courts, ceremonial rituals and daily



The golden *Alhambra sampang*, a new *songket* design inspired by the arabesque geometric interlacing tiling motif of the Al-Hambra palace in Granada, Spain.



life. *Songket* textiles in these sections of the display were predominantly from the collection of Tengku Ismail Bin Tengku Su, the cousin of the Sultan of Terengganu and Custodian of the Royal Heirlooms, *pusaka diaraja*, including nineteenth century Royal *Songkets* from the Royal Courts of Terengganu with photographs from Tengku Ismail's personal photo album providing an intimate glimpse into life in the Royal Courts and how these textiles were used.

Highlights of this section included *Kain lepas besar*, the large ceremonial shoulder or skirt cloths which are now family heirlooms. The dark red *songket* worn by Tengku Asmak in the 1900s and used during the *bersiram sampat* or ceremonial bath preceding traditional Malay ceremonies was on display as was the *Kain lepas besar* worn by Tengku Ismail during his coming of age ritual, the circumcision process, whereby this *songket* was held over him, to act as a filter after which the blessed and purified water was poured over him.

Songket textiles and items embellished with rich *tekat gubah* embroidery couched in gold thread were on display in the section on wedding rituals. *Raja sehari* is the wedding tradition in which the bride and groom are considered to be royalty and treated as if they are king and queen for the day, clothed in gold *sarongs*.

Items on display produced by the King's foundation, Yayasan Sultan Azlan Shah, included richly embroidered gold *songkets*, a pair of *tekat* embroidered velvet shoes, *tekat* velvet cushion covers couch embroidered with gilt thread and *tekat* velvet fans embroidered with the *bunga kekwna* or chrysanthemum motif which the bride uses to shield her face when the groom first sees her during the wedding ceremony.

Comparative masterpieces from the Islamic Arts Museum of Malaysia were on display. The *telepuk* textile with gold stamping illustrated the impression of gold as opposed to being embroidered with gold thread whilst the long, *kain lepas* created by the *limar* or weft *ikat* technique portrayed a vibrant *chora berjalo* or striped pattern decorative effect.

The contemporary section displayed twenty three contemporary *songket* textiles from the Royal *Songket Terengganu* brand as well as those designed by Tengku Ismail Bin Tengku Su.

Tengku Ismail has been involved with the preservation and revival of traditional *songket* weaving traditions. Having been raised in the inner court of Dalam Kota in the palace grounds at Kuala Terengganu, this Malay prince experienced a ritualised palace upbringing, steeped in ancient royal customs that has led him to become an active promoter of Malay culture.

From his traditional houses in Terengganu, he teaches local weavers the art of *songket* weaving, retaining classical *songket* motifs and patterns from heirloom pieces such as the *pucuk rebang* or bamboo shoot, *lami ayam* or cockerel's tail feathers, *tampuk kesemak* or persimmon fruit corolla and *teluk berantai* or chained bays.

Highlights of this section include the golden *Alhambra samping*, a new *songket* design inspired by the arabesque geometric interlacing tiling motif of the Al-Hambra palace in Granada from fourteenth century Islamic Spain and the *Kain sarong* of *lemak ketan* or pink crab roe background, featuring the *tampuk kesemak* and *pucuk rebang lawi ayam* motifs.

"To make *songket* more appealing to discerning clientele, I incorporate paler shades and produce *songket* as lengths of fabric," Tengku Ismail remarked, for he is interested in promoting



Top and bottom: contemporary *songkets*



A betel nut box (l) and a *tekat* velvet fan (r) embroidered with the *bunga kekwna* or chrysanthemum motif which the bride uses to shield her face when the groom first sees her during the wedding ceremony

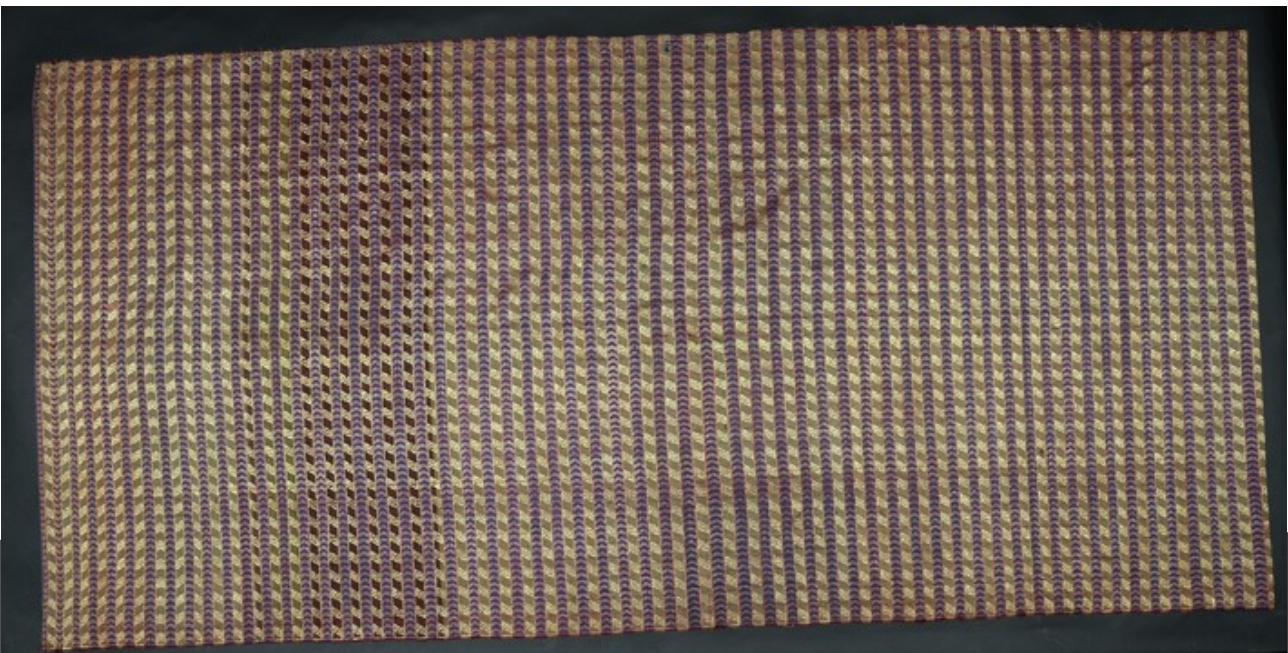
songket as a garment to be worn as a hallmark of Malay culture and identity.

The continuity of traditional arts in a country depends on the commitment of influential institutions who understand the inherent value of traditional crafts. The royal families of the Malay world have indeed adopted this role and their continued use and patronage of *songket* and *tekat* through the Yayasan Sultan Azlan Shah and the Yayasan Tuanku Nur Zahirah or the Queen's Foundation have been instrumental in keeping these textile traditions alive.

The Queen's foundation aims to commercialize the contemporary hand-woven *songket* for broader usage in order to ensure its sustainability under the Royal Terengganu Songket brand produced in Kuala Terengganu and Kuching.

On display were a range of narrow shawls which had been produced by young women who had been trained by this foundation to earn a livelihood from *songket* weaving. Illustrated are shawls decorated with the *puchuk rebang* or bamboo shoot motif and *bunga pecah empat* of flowers which are split in fourways motif. These textiles are more lightweight than the traditional *songkets* and therefore easy to wear on a daily basis.

Following the display of Royal Weaves in London, it will move to the Islamic Arts Museum of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur later this year with emphasis on the curation of displays for a Malay audience.



A fine *songket* used in circumcision rituals

***Chunri* - Tie and Dye Pakistan-style**

Our regular contributor, Azra Nafees, explains the history and background to this remarkably fine art from Bahawalpur

The history of *chunri* - or tie and dye - can be dated back to pre-historic times, as countless dyers through the ages have experimented with the use of bindings to create patterns on cloth immersed in vats of dye. Different types of tie and dyes have been practiced in Pakistan, India, Japan and Africa for centuries.

Tie and dye became fully developed in China during the T'ang Dynasty (618-906 AD). The availability of silk and hemp, which are very useful in the resist technique, made this art outstanding among others. Some early tribes in China and South East Asia tied and dyed threads before weaving their cloth. When it was woven into material, beautiful designs appeared where the white lines of the tie contrasted with the colour dyes. This method was known as *Ikat*.

The term *chunri* derives its name from the Urdu word *chunat* which means crinkles or crushing of the fabric. *Chunri* is an art practiced mainly in Multan and Bahawalpur in Pakistan and in particular in the village of Abbass Nagar. The wide variety of patterns and techniques evolved over the centuries because of its close links with the socio-cultural customs of different people. *Chunri* involves tying and dyeing of pieces of cotton or silk cloth.

The main colours used in *chunri* are yellow, maroon, navy and red. After the processing is over, the final product of *chunri* work results into inventions with a variety of symbols including dots, squares, waves and stripes. The colours used in *chunri* are mostly natural. Most dark colours



Tiny grains of wheat are used to create the intricate patterns found in *chunri* textiles



Traditionally, tying is done by women and dyeing by men

are used. The prominent colour contrast is always well balanced by an inimitable sense of composition and symmetry of the design forms.

Chunri artisans of the state today have gone far beyond the traditional ethos to express their creativity in riots of colour combinations. Fabric dyed in red, maroon, pink, yellow, ochre, orange, green, mauve, violet, sky blue, indigo, black, white and many more hues radiates the proficiency and ingenuity of the dyers in Pakistan.

Bahawalpur and Multan are the largest centres of tying and dyeing textiles in Pakistan. The *chunri* work has a rich history and was originated exclusively by the Muslim *khatri* community of Kutch. These women carried out the tradition from one generation to another and became the preservers and protectors of this art form. The art of *chunri* involves a piece of cloth with hundreds of tiny individual knots. These knots form a design when opened after dyeing in bright colours.

Chunri has become very popular throughout Pakistan. This art work is used for many occasions and imparts a new meaning. One of the commonest designs in *chunri* is a chain of grains represented by dots on the fabric called *dana* pattern. The *pallu* of the scarf - which are at the short ends of the scarf (or *dupatta*) - carries a series of semi-circular motifs which detach in linear design.

In the present days *chunri* art work has attracted both men and women. The garments that take in the gorgeous art include saris, *shalwar qamees*, shawls, scarves, *dupattas*, turbans and bedspreads.

The production of *chunri* work is very tedious but is appealing. The manufacture is carried out both by men and women. Men do the dyeing while women do the tying, which is very intricately done, each dot as tiny as a pin-head. The cloth is first washed and bleached to prepare it for absorbing the dyes.

After bleaching, the cloth is sent to the women who do the tying. They learn to lift a small portion of the fabric around a grain of wheat and tightly tie a thread around it. This process is called *bandhini*. The tied textiles are then dipped in the light colours first, while the tied areas

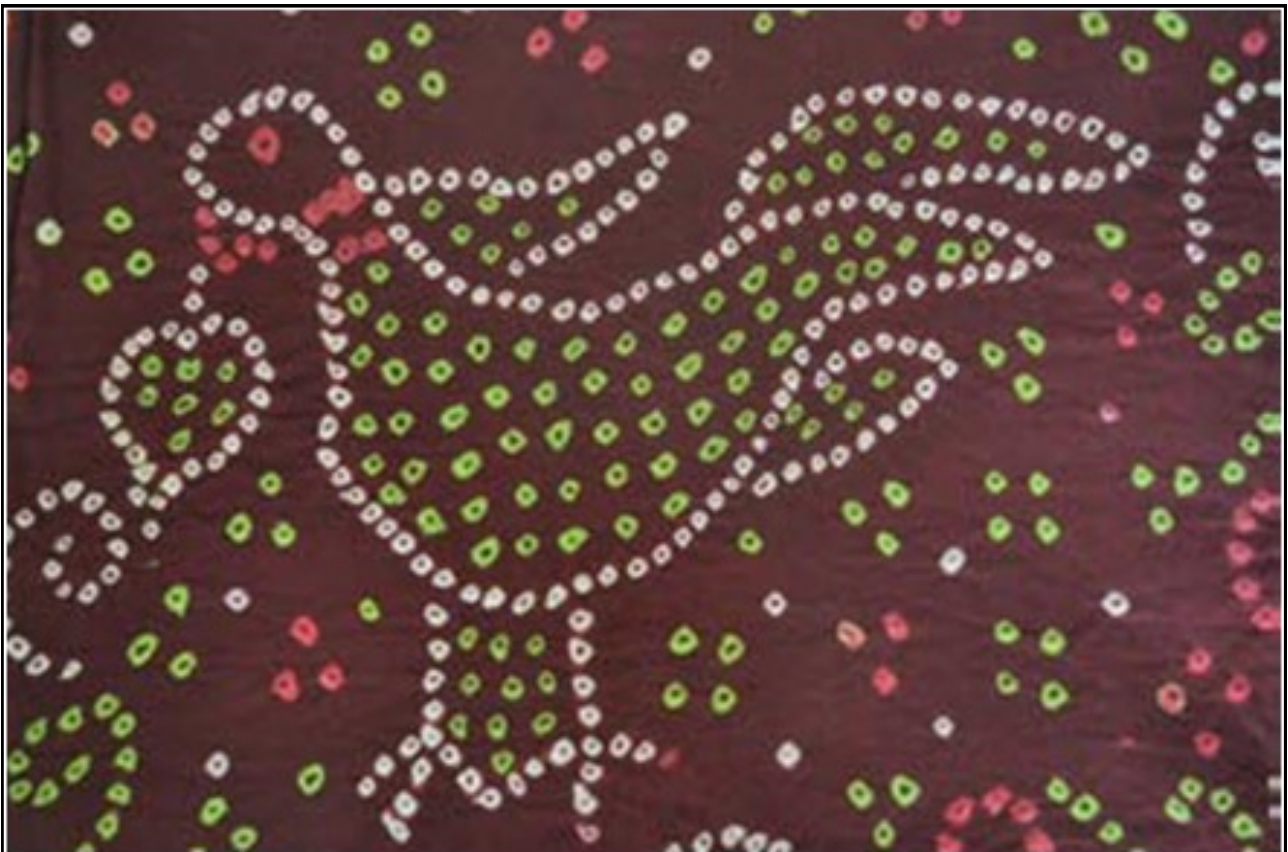
retain the original base colour. If a second dye is required, the areas to be retained in the first dye are tied for resist and the cloth dipped in the darker dye. This process is repeated, if several colours are to be combined.

The dye was traditionally done in different bright colors popular in the Cholistani area of Bahawalpur. Earlier natural dyes, referred to locally as “*Matka*” colours, named after the earthenware urns used in the process were popular but now chemical dyes are mostly used. There are very few women who know this ancient way of preparing natural dyes since chemical dyes are easily procurable and the constraint of time and resources has almost made the traditional knowledge of “*matka*” colours extinct.

According to a report from UNESCO-Norway on *Empowering Women Through Crafts* in the districts of Multan and Bahawalpur, published in December 2010 (see http://unesco.org.pk/culture/documents/ca_UNESCO-NORWAY%20FUNDED%20PROJECT-Empowering%20women%20through%20crafts.pdf) there is a need today to make a market for good quality *chunri* by encouraging the makers to go back to their original intricate and refined traditional techniques. As they note:

“The preparation of a Chunri, a predominantly women’s craft, involves the tasks of bandhini making and dying which are usually done by different persons. Fazalan Bibi, of Majnoon Basti, Abbass Nagar district Bahawalpur, binds the Chunri designs on orders for the Chunri dyers. It is an extremely difficult task and the nails get badly injured. She has been doing this work for as long as she can remember. She said that it takes her around 3-4 days to complete a pair of clothes. Nusrat Bibi and her entire family of Abbass Nagar make Chunri’s on a professional basis.

“According to them Chunri is a traditional craft of all the Saraiki families and most women of the village know the art; some of whom are considered experts and prepare the work for special orders. Most of these women know the fine and intricate traditional designs and patterns since this is the family heritage, but new designs have evolved which are coarser and easier to prepare thus more suitable for a market which pays low prices for this work.”



Dazzling patterns and colours are used for a wide variety of different usages.



The *lehriya* design is quite in style nowadays which refers to the wavy pattern resulting from the tie and dye technique. The material is rolled diagonally and certain portions resisted by lightly binding threads at a short distance from one another before the cloth is dyed. The process of dyeing is repeated until the requisite number of colours is obtained. If the distance is shorter, skill is required to prevent one colour from spilling into the other.

For a chequered pattern the fabric is opened and diagonally rolled again from the opposite corners, the rest of the process remains the same. The printing of residue on the cloth with coloured powder, gold or silver dust is known as *khari* or tinsel work.

Tying of border in *chunri* design is a very trendy technique. It is done by tying the border according to the desired pattern by passing the thread from one end to the other in loose stitch so as to ring the entire portion together by pulling the thread from one end. The border portion is then covered up. There are thousands of families relying on this handicraft work in Bahawalpur and Multan. This *chunri* work is very attractive and used in many of the other garment accessories as well.

Chunri material is sold folded and with the knots tied. One has to pull the folds apart for the knots to open. The payment is made according to the number of dots in the pattern. An intricate design in a sari would have approximately 75000 dots. What is essential in *chunri* is the minute and skillful manipulation of the fingers for tying, extensive knowledge of colour schemes and skill in dyeing materials.

It takes several years for a craftsman to perfect his skill. *Chunri* saris and dupattas are available at most shops all over Pakistan but to get the authentic material, it is advisable to buy it from Multan or Bahawalpur or their emporiums outlets in major cities around Pakistan.



Too young to marry at 21

Aria Mobasher, a freelance journalist living in Mazar-e-Sharif, in the north of Afghanistan, explains why Turkmen women weavers are so highly valued by their families, who ask bride prices of up to \$120,000 for their daughters

Gul Andam is not allowed to marry because her parents still consider her a valuable asset. Shah Pari would have wished her son Qalandar to be a girl, although she already has three daughters. She even makes the 10-year-old boy wear skirts because she is so fixated on girls. This is quite unusual in a country, where bearing a son commonly means pride, and where the birth of a daughter is often met with disappointment.

But with 58-year-old Shah Pari it's different, because she belongs to the Turkmen community in northern Afghanistan. "A girl is a blessing," she says. "Girls are like treasures for us Turkmen."

The reason is quite mundane: Girls mean good income for the family, if they know how to



Gul Andam's parents want a bride price of \$120,000 for their daughter because of her skills as a carpet weaver.

Her less-skilled sister will receive a proportionately smaller dowry.

weave expensive, hand-made carpets. A good piece costs about US\$1,200 and takes two women to work on it for a month or two. The trade has been handed down from mothers to daughters for generations. “The higher a girl’s skill, the higher her value,” says the Turkmen woman, who lives in a village in the northern province of Balkh. “Beauty doesn’t matter to us.”

Take the example of Shah Pari’s three daughters. The youngest, 21-year-old Gul Andam, is not as beautiful as her sisters but the bride price her parents ask for her is the highest, because she is the most skilful weaver. Her future husband faces a “price tag” of – believe it or not – US\$120,000, an amount that was set publicly at a display of Gul Andam’s first carpets, as local custom demands.

But interested parties can expect a substantial discount as negotiations follow clearly defined rules and rituals: For every well-respected relative who campaigns on behalf of the groom, the bride’s family will grant a discount of \$4,000.

Abdul Hamid Baye, the father of one of the aspirants, who already bid 12 times for Gul Andam, confirms that it is the woman’s weaving skills that made him choose her for his son. Gulsom, the second daughter, is able to weave a six-metre-long, medium-quality carpet in one year, which is an acceptable rate. This is why her “asking price” is about \$60,000, which is still way above the average dowry amongst Turkmens. The oldest, Shah Sanam, is good looking but because her weaving skills are limited, her parents ask just a \$20,000 base price for negotiation. So far, no one has bid for her.

And the son? Shah Pari has dressed up Qalandar like a girl because she is hoping that he might develop an interest in carpet weaving, usually the domain of girls and women.

On the one hand, this valuable skill protects Turkmen girls from underage marriage, which is extremely common in Afghanistan and often leads to abusive relationships with the groom or his family. Gul Andam’s parents, for instance, have turned down more than a dozen proposals, saying that “it’s too early” for her to leave home at the age of 21. “Let her weave some more rugs, until we have found a suitable boy who can afford to build a house for us.”



Turkmen carpets from Afghanistan find a ready market and produce good incomes

Because they sit for hours without moving, many weavers suffer from a deformation of their spinal column.

On the other hand, the income that girls like her can generate leads many families to deny their daughters the right to education. "I would have really liked to learn reading and writing," says Gul Andam. "But I can't, because I have never gone to school."

Qazi Sayed Mohammad Saamay, chairman for the Human Rights Commission in the north, acknowledges that this is a serious problem: "They think that they might lose their source of income if they send their girls to school."

Viewed as investments, these women are nurtured well. "Skilled weavers are given pistachio, almonds, honey, cheese, meat, and dairy cream to eat," says Shah Pari, pointing out that these expenses have to be compensated by the future husband.

At the same time, the girls' health is gambled with by hard working conditions and extremely long hours of work. "It is common amongst rug weaving girls and women to take drugs that keep them awake," warns Daud Raateb, a doctor at the drug treatment clinic in Mazar-e Sharif. Bronchial problems and vertebral column deformation are also typical consequences of the weaving trade.

"When the costs of treatment get higher than the income from the rugs, the parents try to wed their girls, but as long as the income is high they will try to keep the bride price at a very high level," laments Abdul Raouf, one of the Turkmen tribal elders. Instead of going to school, small girls work alongside their mothers.

But woe betide any well-skilled girl who gets sick! Recently, a rural Turkmen woman was sitting with her daughter in a doctor's practice in Mazar-e-Sharif. She was noticeably concerned about the well-being of her daughter, who seemed to be suffering only from a simple cough. "She is the best weaver in the whole community," the mother explained. "From the income she brought, we could live a very good life." She went on to say that the girl was about to marry for a bride price of 8,500 dollars, two horses, 50 sheep and 50 sacks of rice.

When the young woman is brought to the groom's house, she will be accompanied by a small girl – a sign of hope that she shall bear a daughter soon.



Young Turkmen girls work with their mothers to learn the skills of carpet weaving

This article first appeared in *Afghanistan Today*. *Afghanistan Today* is a training project. The journalists taking part are mentored and advised by experienced German, British and Afghan colleagues.

Afghanistan Today is financed by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and produced by MICT (Media in Cooperation and Transition): www.afghanistan-today.org.

Help needed on the OATG committee

OATG is looking for new members on the committee: a new Membership Secretary and an additional member who could help generally, e.g. with hosting at meetings and contributing ideas.

Felicity Wood, a founder member of OATG, who has contributed enormously to the success of OATG, wishes to step down as Membership Secretary - a post she has held for the past three years.

We all look forward to the talks and events but unfortunately the Group does not run itself, and the committee really does need more pairs of hands.

If you are interested - contact Aimee Payton aimee.payton@ashmus.ox.ac.uk

Tel: 01865 270067 to discuss either of these roles.

Editor's note

I should have pointed out to readers of Chris Buckley's review of *Five Centuries of Indonesian Textiles*, which appeared in last edition of *Asian Textiles*, that it was first published on the Tribal Textiles forum (www.tribaltextiles.com). For space reasons the review was slightly shortened. If you would like to read a full version of the review you can find it on the Tribal Textiles website. Apologies to Chris.

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Power dressing to the max in Imperial China

In the third of what has become four articles on the textiles of the Silk Road, **Susanna Reece** describes the detailed dress codes of the Imperial Chinese and Japanese courts

In the time-honoured tradition of Douglas Adams and Ursula Le Guin my series of articles about my “virtual” journey along the Silk Road at the V&A in Autumn 2009 has become a trilogy in four parts! In this article, I will be concentrating on China and Japan, leaving South East Asia for a final article next time.

Gary Dickinson and Siang Chang introduced us respectively to Chinese Textiles - The Golden Age and Textiles for the World – Trade along the Silk Road. Gary’s talk was especially welcome as it was the first to take us down to the galleries by way of illustration. His focus was on Imperial Textiles, and the court dress of the Qing period (1644 – 1911). In one session he could only scratch the surface of this fascinating topic, which is covered in detail in his book, *Imperial Wardrobe* (see the Bibliography).

As in India, textiles were used to demonstrate political status; the Chinese imperial tradition took power dressing to its maximum extent. The Confucian system included a belief in Universal balance and had an ordered structure in which the Chinese Emperor was regarded as the Son of Heaven. By the mid-eighteenth century China was the wealthiest country on earth, although in the nature of things it already contained the seeds of its decay.

The definition of structure and order (“doing the right thing at the right time”) also included extremely detailed court dress laws. These elaborate provisions ensured that everyone could be accurately identified and hierarchies maintained. The V&A has illustrative examples in album



The *chao guan* or Court hat was colour-coded and seasonal

leaves that were looted from the Summer Palace in the 1860s. Among its pieces is a yellow cushion given by Viscountess Olseley whose husband had served with the British forces in China in 1860 and who wrote a book about the campaign and his experiences, in which he comments on the yellow cushions he saw in the Summer Palace and the fact that only members of the imperial family were able to use this colour.

Colour was extremely important. Dark yellow, or chestnut, was confined to senior imperial family members; other yellow shades could be worn by primary consorts and orange by secondary consorts. There were nine ranks of colour for hat buttons and blue and black for everyone else. Women’s Imperial dress reflected the status of their husbands, although Gary commented that, in this as in other areas, the Empress Ci Xi did her own thing. Distinctions were also drawn between the ruling Man-

Imperial robes of state were made up of several layers and were in winter and summer versions. Note the characteristic horse-hoof cuffs.



chu and majority ethnic Han peoples, the Manchu being the founders of the Qing dynasty and in a position of power until deposed by the 1911 revolution.

The Imperial robes of state were in several complex layers together known as the *chao fu*, and had winter and summer versions, with the Emperor saying when they should be changed. A characteristic of these robes was horse-hoof cuffs, a traditional Manchu design which replaced large bell shapes. These cuffs can also be seen in the dragon robes above. The *chao guan* or Court hat also had seasonal versions and had a red floss tassel and tall hat spike, similar to the Tibetan *dorje* or thunderbolt.

Great use was made of motifs and badges to further delineate Chinese court status. The Imperial nobility had circular badges which were the symbol of heaven. Square badges denoted the earth and were worn by the Mandarins, the class of scholar-bureaucrats. They had nine ranks (three groups of three, which was considered an auspicious number) denoted by civil badges as follows: Crane (red cap), Golden Pheasant, Peacock, Goose, Silver Pheasant, Egret, Mandarin Duck, Quail, Paradise Flycatcher.

The Mandarins' badges signified successful study and achievement. There was a similar ranking of badges for military officials using animals, in theory nine but in practice six representing ferocity and courage. A merchant rank also existed and could be purchased but this status was much more precarious. Peacock feather plumes were awarded for meritorious service and there were court necklaces based on the Buddhist rosary with 108 beads.

The dragon symbol was ubiquitous and was considered a benevolent spirit, also signifying water. The famous Dragon Robe represented the final assimilation of the Manchus into China, according to Gary, a balanced ancient design adopted by the Qing with a water border on stripes of energy, symbolising the extinction of the fire of the Ming dynasty by blue and water.

Siang Chang explained to us how the domestication of the silk worm (*bombyx mori*) to improve the length and strength of the filaments encouraged household production as well as the Imperial industrial workshops. Jade models of silk worms have been found at funeral sites dating from 200 BCE. From the time of the Han Dynasty, when Wu Ti sought Central Asian allies, c.141 to 87 BCE, silk has played an important role in the trade and diplomatic exchange along the Silk Road, as the name suggests.



One of nine Chinese rank badges—all named after birds.

The route itself has never been coherent, with some parts dormant at times and others seeing much turmoil and factions. There were certain blocks on trade after the Han Dynasty, c. 200 AD, and then during the Tang Dynasty, c. 600 – 900 AD, trade was encouraged for two or three hundred years. During this time there was a raw silk trade with Central Asia and an exchange of weaving techniques between Central Asia and China.

Following the Tang Dynasty there was another period of turmoil until the Mongol period of the 13th century when blue and white porcelain designs became a particular fascination between China and the Middle East. China had white porcelain and Iran/Iraq pure blue cobalt; through cultural exchange these two were placed in combination and the designs were eventually also applied to textiles. For example, a 14th century Yuan Dynasty flask has a cloud collar, two hundred years before Central Asian textiles with the same motif; this flask also has a dragon motif. Silk fragments with similar motifs have been found in Italian church inventories, developed for the “Christian market”. Blue and white was used, also blue and yellow, and red. Some of these motifs were woven by other weavers who didn’t know China or the Orient but wanted to compete, and an industry developed in Venice, for example.

The Mongol period was the peak of the overland Silk Route. After that Vasco da Gama’s journey to Goa (1498) shifted the emphasis to shipping. This cut out the power of the middle men and led to economic viability. Spain (under Philip II and the Hapsburgs) and Portugal were the first two European countries to dominate this trade. The Portuguese were in Malacca and Macau from the early 1510s, although China was reluctant to engage and in the 1540s the Ming Dynasty banned foreign trade entirely. It was not until the 1580s that Portugal achieved good relations, as a result of helping to eradicate piracy. This gave them a virtual monopoly in Macau from 1587. Spain was in Manila from 1565 and the Philippines became an important centre for trade in silk from Japan and spices and pepper from India, despite being continually targeted by Chinese pirates.

Textiles amalgamating Cantonese, Indian and Portuguese embroidery traditions, styles and imagery have been identified. Fine silk threads in a 16th century blue and orange bedspread suggest the influence of Portuguese Castelo-Branco techniques with Chinese satin stitch embroidery. An 18th century bed cover has links to Persian carpet floral motifs and Mughal Indian patterns as well as a stylised Tang Dynasty lotus flower. Deer, rabbits and butterflies were other

traditional motifs. The Portuguese brought woollen cloth to China and exchanged it for golden thread, silk damask and woven silk.

European motifs and Christian references also became incorporated into these textiles. A Sino-Portuguese woven cloth with double-headed eagle motif suggests the symbol of Philip II's Hapsburg crown. Another embroidered panel depicts the martyrdom of St Sebastian. An 18th century Sino-Philippino cope has an eagle motif, a pierced heart and a cardinal's hat. Chinese weavers changed these symbols to ones they knew and understood: the hat becomes a vase and flowers begin to look like lotuses.

From the late 1750s Canton (Guangzhou) was designated a foreign trade centre and authentic Cantonese embroideries became popular for export, particularly those with bird and flower designs. In 1771 the English East India Company set up a factory there, and a popular trade in "Canton shawls" began that continued well into the 19th century. Other European countries followed suit and painted floral silks became a feature of European women's fashion and also wallpaper, which could produce a more efficient design repeat.

Moving from China to Japan, Christine Guth of the Royal College of Art gave a talk on Japanese dress and textiles that made me want to travel immediately to Japan, long on my wish-list. She highlighted the connections between design changes, technology and world links and pointed out that Japan was not isolated: there were early links with Korea and later on with China and India. The geography of Japan, with mainland Honshu and the archipelago, lent itself to maritime trade. Although Japanese dress, particularly the *Kimono*, is thought of as being timeless, this is not the case as there were changes in both technique and in pattern design.

In the 8th century Japanese dress was very similar to Chinese, with high-waisted silk dresses and shawls over for women, who wore their hair up in a *chignon*. The capital, Nara, was the end point of the Silk Road and the Emperor's wife donated a repository where textiles and other artefacts are still conserved and brought out for exhibition each November. However, between the 9th and 13th centuries Japan did become more inward-focussed when ties were cut off with China, which remained a cultural mentor but *in absentia*. During this period the *Junihitoe* or twelve-layered silk robe developed as the form of dress for ladies of the Japanese court and hair was worn



Cantonese shawls became popular for export after the 1750s.

long and undressed. The *Junihitoe* was suitable for floor-sitting and consisted mostly of blocks of colour.

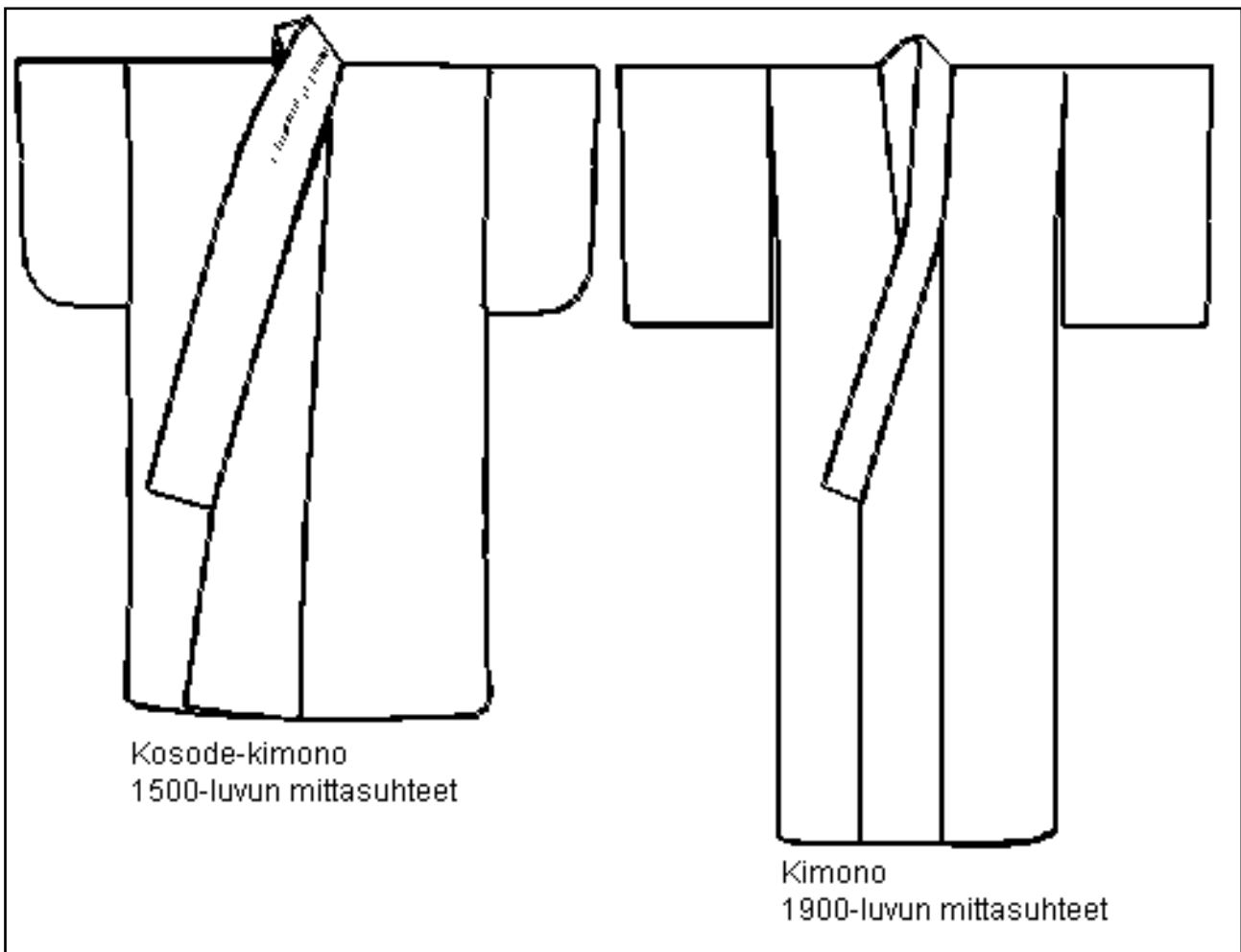
The women of the court were themselves involved in weaving and dyeing, whereas previously there had been centralised weaving and dyeing studios run by men. This led to the development of a colour sense around the concept of what was fashionable and there were links between fashions in lacquer and paper that fed into dress. Christine referred to the author of the famous *Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon* as being “catty” about colour sensibility; certainly colour took on a significance and importance with elaborate descriptive names being used such as “crimson plum of the spring”.

Although the Empress Nagako wore a *Junihitoe* for her coronation in 1926, in the fourteenth century there was near-abandonment of it due to the development of the *Kosode*, literally, “small-sleeved garment”, a closed-at-the-wrist robe, which is a forerunner of the *Kimono*. The *Kosode* was originally the undermost garment of the twelve layers. It has rounded sleeves but is otherwise very like the *Kimono*, being made from one piece of fabric of a standard, single loom width. It was non-tailored and economical to make, being adjustable for height, and was worn by both men and women, with differences based on age, gender and marital status. During this period increased patterning of garments led to a rise of textile shops and non-domestic production.

Modern interpretations of the *Kosode* are still being produced. There is also an utterly absorbing account of Lisa A. Joseph’s recreation of a traditional *Kosode* at the Wodeford Hall link below, which has an acknowledgement to Christine Guth’s work –what a strange but fascinating repository of all that is weird and wonderful out there the web is!

<http://www.wodefordhall.com/toseninkosode.htm>

Japanese fashion was expressed by changing pattern and design. Sixteenth century fabrics



These drawings illustrate the difference between the *kosode kimono* and the later *kimono*.

were often composed of alternating dark and light blocks, with use of floral and bridge motifs, while the 17th and 18th centuries saw more asymmetrical designs. The 17th century also saw a development of decorative patterning and the use of a narrow sash to tie the *Kosode*, which eventually developed into the wider *obi*, again distinguished by status. In the 19th century there was more concentration on the lower hem and shoulders because of increased emphasis on the *obi*, which gives shape but also controls the female form like a corset. These changes were linked to different emphases on areas of the body that were considered erotic, such as ankles or the nape of the neck; in addition, courtesans wore the *obi* at the front, while other women wore it at the back.

Japanese textile techniques between the 16th and 19th centuries were highly developed and often several different techniques were combined in one fabric. *Shibori*, a resist-dye technique, was often used in combination with embroidery techniques, for example. The result was fabric with overall pictures that were not unlike wall-hangings. *Kasuri*, a Japanese ikat technique, was also developed. Motifs used included the quatrefoil shape, which was particularly popular, as were cloves, a South East Asian import with an auspicious meaning associated with pain relief. *Yuzen* was a technique for hand painting silk with a resist paste in a tube; this led to fluid designs and was combined with embroidery and tie-dyeing. Famous artists, e.g. Ogata Korin (1658 - 1716) and Sakai Hoitsu (1761 - 1828), would be commissioned to hand paint fabric for wedding garments. Examples include a white silk robe with floral techniques by Korin and an asymmetrical flowering cherry by Hoitsu. Ink wash and mineral pigments were used.

Materials other than silk were sometimes used and include banana fibre, woven on the southern islands. This was very expensive but was light and airy for summer use. Cotton production was introduced by the Chinese in the 1600s, and became the dominant fibre for middle and lower class use, replacing coarser cloth made of hemp. Different patterns were used for cotton, showing the links to international trade, with South East Asian and Indian influences, such as checks. Wool broadcloth, known as *rasha* in Japan, had very limited success, but was used for military use and

some examples show a Portuguese influence. Woodblock printing and wax resist textile techniques were also used, although not primarily for dress. The weaving of textiles into complex picture patterns was also developed as a way of subverting the Japanese sumptuary laws, which operated in a similar way to those of the Chinese.

Throughout this period there was a constant and continuing evolution of the *Kimono* and these changes were advertised through the use of woodblock prints from the 17th century, of which the V & A has a good selection. From the 1720s fashion books were also used.

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Highly stylised Japanese *kimono*

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Last chance for back numbers of *Asian Textiles*

As all the back numbers of *Asian Textiles* magazine have now been digitalised and are available on the web, the paper copies will be disposed of by September. If anyone would like any back number please contact Felicity Wood felicitywood@gmail.com Telephone: 01865 554281

Copies of the following are available: **17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33 – 40 and 42 – 44**. They can be brought to a specified meeting or posted: P&P plus £1.

A complete set of paper copies is now held by The British Library. Almost complete sets are held by the Balfour Library at the Pitt Rivers Museum and in The Jameel Centre for the Study of Eastern Art at the Ashmolean Museum. In future the Membership Secretary will hold the spare paper copies for just a year.

A treasury of remarkable images

The Library of Congress in Washington holds some remarkable photographic images taken in Central Asia in the late 1860s. Nick Fielding takes a look at this wonderful collection.

I recently came across a wonderful collection of images from Central Asia on the website of the US Library of Congress (www.loc.gov/index.html). Taken between 1865 and 1872, they are not attributed to any particular photographer, nor are they copyrighted. These must be some of the earliest photographs ever taken of the regions around Samarkand and Bukhara and of Kyrgyz nomads.

The photos are albumen prints and of great quality. They can be downloaded, either at TIFF files or as much smaller JPEGs. I am including a few here to give an idea of what is contained in the collection. There are dozens of photos with subjects varying from landscapes and architecture to the everyday life of nomads. I have chosen to include here a small selection of photos—mostly of Kyrgyz women.

Two of the images show a woman wearing her *shirkule* or wedding hat. There are very few pictures that illustrate this form of hat so clearly. Another picture shows three women making felt panels for use in a yurt. Although this picture was taken more than 140 years ago, I saw exactly the same technique being used in Kyrgyzstan two years ago.

Another women is shown making rope, while in another picture a Kyrgyz groom inspects his bride. There are many other similar images that can easily be found online with a simple search of the Library of Congress catalogue. Most of these pictures are part of a file called *Turkestanskii al'bom, chast' étnograficheskaia, 1871-1872, part 2, vol. 1.*



Having rolled the felt into a reed screen, the women turn and pummel it to help the fibres adhere.

A woman wearing the tall hat known as a *shirkule*. The first picture shows the long train of woven decoration running down her back. She is wearing a silk robe. Her veil has been dropped to reveal her face. Note the long sleeves from the robe that hide her hands. The second woman in the first picture is wearing an ikat *chapan* and a fur-trimmed hat.



In this photo of a seated Kyrgyz woman, we can see the typical form of headdress and her extensive silver jewellery. She is wearing a fine silk brocade robe.



This nomad is making wool rope. She is wearing a coarse cotton *chapan* and traditional head-dress—now seldom seen in Kyrgyzstan.





A Kyrgyz groom inspects his bride-to-be, who is wearing an ikat *chapan* and traditional headdress. He is wearing a *malakay*—a fur hat with ear flaps.



In this picture, the groom is shown presenting a cloth to the bride inside the yurt.

THE TEXTILE SOCIETY OF AMERICA ANNOUNCES:**TSA Study Tour to South India****October 23-November 6, 2011**

Registration deadline July 29, 2011

The TSA Inc. offers study tours and professional development opportunities focused on textiles. This fall the TSA will offer a Study Tour to South India led by Indian textile scholar, Sandra Evenson. Since the days of the Roman Empire, South Indian textile artisans have been weaving, painting, dyeing, and embellishing sumptuous textiles for the courts of kings and the markets of the world. Handcrafted textiles continue to play an important role in daily life and are often associated with specific villages, where family life and the village economy are centered on traditional textile production. The focus of this tour is on these textile traditions and the textile villages where these fabrics are still produced by hand.

For costs, itinerary, and registration information, please visit http://www.textilesociety.org/events_tours.htm#tsastudytourtosouthindia. As part of its educational mission, TSA is offering a \$1,500 travel scholarship for one TSA member to participate on the trip. Please see the Awards section of the TSA website for details and application information.

For further information, contact
Michele Hardy, mhardy@ucalgary.ca
TSA Director of External Relations



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Contributions should be emailed or sent to the Editor

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