

**From Patola to Paisley:
How Colonization Led to Changes within Textile Designs**

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At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, or Dutch East India Company, and the British East India Company were arriving on the shores of India, Indonesia, China and Japan in search of trade goods. There they established colonies, which created an environment for an intercultural blending of traditions and cultures. As a result of this colonization, not only did the West attempt to reform the East, but the West also experienced changes of its own following the introduction of exported oriental goods to Europe. Eastern and western ideas intertwined with one another to form new products and ideas. One instance of this new intercultural establishment occurred as a result of the introduction of oriental textile designs into European designs and fashion. The West forced design changes on the East, which in turn sparked new designs in textiles both in Europe and in Asia.

When the Dutch first arrived in eastern Indonesia, they discovered a well-established exchange system among the natives. From this observation, the Dutch quickly determined that the key to successful trade amongst the Asian countries, and ultimately to successful trade in Europe, was to monopolize the goods which were in demand in Asia. Within the previously established exchange system, cloth had become an acceptable commodity, which the Dutch quickly adopted for themselves. As the demand for Indonesian spices grew, so did the demand for a greater volume and variety

of cloths. Not only was the VOC responsible for this growth, but they also played a major role in its dispersal.

By 1619, less than twenty years after the VOC's arrival in the east, the VOC had "imposed a complete ban on all non-VOC textile trade in [Indonesia] and instituted expeditions to enforce the embargo."¹ As a way to enforce the restrictions on acceptable fabrics and to distinguish VOC textiles from non-VOC, the Dutch introduced the practice of stamping textiles with the VOC seal. The Dutch declared their exclusive right to the textile trade of the region and by the mid-1750s the factory headquarters stored between 500,000 and 1,000,000 pieces in its warehouse. Bales of Coromandel textiles, Surat *baftas*, plain cloth or dyed cloth using Indonesian pigments, chintz, calicos and silks were among the many Asian fabrics moved through the VOC factories and warehouses.²

Due to an increase in popularity in Europe, many of the patterns produced on these oriental fabrics, or even methods of creating them, were adjusted by the VOC from the ceremonial and/or cultural standards of the native market to suit that of a new European market.

For the native peoples of Indonesia, textiles were objects of display in domestic and public settings, which served both material and spiritual purposes. *Patola*, silk

1 John Guy, Woven Cargoes (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 187.

2 Guy, Woven Cargoes, 187.

cloths, were the most prized and sought after cloths in Indonesia. The Dutch realized the commercial potential of *patola* and forcibly secured the *patola* trade. Three types of *patola* designs were produced for the Indonesian market. The first featured one or more adorned elephants; the second included symbolism in which the elephant alternated with a tiger; and the last design displayed a range of geometric patterns based on flower motifs of varying degrees of abstraction.

The first mentioned design, the elephant design, was produced prior to the Dutch *patola* monopoly, and was most popular among the native Indonesians. Its popularity was due to the fabric's historic depiction of Indonesian royalty on a hunting trip. After the Dutch monopoly on *patola* was attained, the VOC banned this design for fear that it could incite an Indonesian uprising.

As a result, the elephant-and-tiger design was introduced. This design was created as a way to appease the natives, since it took a more loosely adapted version of the classic elephant design. Although this design retained the royal elephant, the princes on a royal hunt were excluded and replaced with the image of the tiger. The VOC introduced this new fabric pattern as a way to balance the demand for genuinely Indonesian design imposed by European markets against the imperative, to minimize the reference to Indonesian cultural identity. Distribution of the design was, therefore, highly regulated by the VOC, especially within the Indonesian market.

The third *patola* design of geometric patterns was permitted within wider circulation because of its lack of culturally historic significance. It also happened to be the most popular among Europeans. This popularity resulted in the emergence of the geometric-*patola* designs in textiles intended for the European market, one of which

featured the diamond-and-flower motif. This motif was produced by the VOC as a “native” Indonesian textile for the European market. By modifying the original Indonesian geometric pattern and integrating it with floral designs to give it a more typically European look, the VOC hoped the European market was more willing to absorb these textiles as Oriental fashion statements. These new European versions also modified the original layout of the Indonesian geometric *patola*. The new pattern removed the typical Indonesian scheme of centerfield, geometric borders and end panels, to create textile designs with patterns that went from edge to edge.

Indonesian cotton textiles also underwent a European transformation. Originally, the Indonesians wore these cotton textiles for ceremonial garments. Called *dodots*, these textiles were made up of a “diamond-shaped centerfield, usually decorated with a floral motif reserved on a white ground, surrounded by borders with a related pattern on a coloured ground, usually in red or blue.”³ References to the wearing of a *dodot* go back as far back as the ninth century and reveal the garment’s ancient and ceremonial importance, while indicating that the garment’s pattern had not been altered significantly since this period.⁴ However, the adaptation of Indonesian textiles by the VOC also brought considerable changes to the *dodot* garment. In order to sell the fabric to a

3 Guy, Woven Cargoes, 99.

4 Guy, Woven Cargoes, 99.

European market, the Dutch began to alter the fabric's pattern, initially by removing the diamond-shaped centerfield and by introducing a wider variety of colours. The new European *dodot* often featured more highly ornamental designs, and had a symmetrical floral pattern. Later, the Indonesian *dodot* with its distinctive diamond-shaped centerfield was removed and replaced with decorative vine embellishments, which made the garment appear highly European.

Motivation for the British East India Company to explore the Orient was very similar to that of the Dutch VOC. By the end of the seventeenth century, England had realized the importance of fabric, and began to export textiles, such as calico, cotton-woven cloths, and chintz from India. Indian textiles were altered by the British as a way to market oriental textiles to a European audience in a similar way as the VOC and native Indonesian textiles.

One alteration occurred to Indian chintz, whose original designs included a tree growing on a mound in indigo earth with floral meanders, which form a succession of border areas with blossoms similar to those in the central panel of figure.⁵ The typical native chintz also used the colours indigo, green and deep madder red. As European demand of Oriental textiles increased, so too did British modification of native textiles.

5 Kenneth G. Ponting, Discovering Textile History and Design (London: Shire Publications, 1981), 26.

The new European style of Indian chintz developed by removing the typical Indian design features and replacing them with random patterns of birds, flowers, and/or vines. “The variety, arrangement and colouring were very different from [traditional Indian cotton prints] ... [The main differences being] the detail and complexity of the filler patterns that occupy the space around the main design.”⁶ Some new Europeanized Indian chintzes introduced new colours. As a result, the chintz appears to be very similar to original Indian prints, yet its colours are non-native.

The new hybrid chintz patterns were then exported by the East India Company, sold to European nations, and incorporated in many clothing designs. Stomachers for European dresses were made with the new chintz textile; European dresses were produced using the new patterns; as were skirts and overcoats, men’s vests, and even European wallpaper designs.

Arguably, the most influential oriental textiles on the European continent were shawls from Kashmir, India. These hand-woven textiles from India became fashionable late in the eighteenth century and were later imitated by Europeans. Original Kashmir shawls had several varieties: in the Khali-matan, the central field is quite plain and without any ornamentation; in the Chand, the central field of the shawl is embellished with a medallion of flowers; when the field is ornamented with flowers in the four

6 Mary Schoeser, World Textiles (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 155.

corners we have the Kunj; and, in the Dorakha the pattern is so woven that it appears the same on both sides of the shawl.⁷ However, all the shawls had one thing in common: the design motifs were imitations of nature, the most common of which was the representation of the teardrop-shaped leaf of the Chenar tree. This motif would later become known as paisley.

Because of their exotic beauty, these shawls were highly desirable and became incorporated into fashion in England. Europeans, however, were not accustomed to native Kashmir patterns. At this time they enjoyed instead naturalistic, graceful floral patterns that were being created on complex looms and produced the effect of a painted sketch, whereas Kashmir patterns were woven on simple looms that created formal, ordered, regularly spaced images. Consequently, the differences in cultural styles began to produce visual changes in Kashmir shawls and paisley designs. The British started to demand improvements to Kashmir designs to bring them up to European standards of taste. As a result, European designs were then made into “orders” and sent to the British East India Company to be woven as *native* Indian shawls. Some shawls were even designed and produced solely in Europe at the town of Paisley, Scotland. Of course, the resulting combination of Asian and European motives was accepted by the European market as authentic. The Kashmir shawl was forced to embrace aspects of both worlds.

⁷ Rustam J. Mehta, Masterpieces of Indian Textiles (Bombay: Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1970), 15.

Although it remained an exotic foreign good, it now conformed to European taste.

When Europeans designed their Kashmir shawl's extravagant curves and dense compositions they introduced European-inspired naturalistic flower forms, which replaced the original patterns of angular contours and formal repetition. As a result, shawls which appear very far removed from the original Kashmir shawls were created. These shawls welcomed curved styles seen in European drawings and combined this type with elements that Europeans assumed were authentically Indian. Other shawl designs attempted to appear closer to the originals with only slight variations of design. These shawls would maintain the traditional Indian design yet instead of depicting the paisley teardrop shape pointed all in one direction, the Europeanized shawl would vary the direction to conform to Western aesthetics. New shawls also changed the traditional Indian teardrop shape to a similar shape with a European floral design. In many of these shawls, the borders would consist of a flowing floral form, where the flower motif would be carried throughout the design. The paisley pattern was also elongated in several shawl designs, or embellished with floral extensions. The final transgression of the paisley textile was the paisley shape made up entirely of floral patterns, which became altered in such a way that the curve on top of the teardrop was removed.

Other changes to the Kashmir shawl involved the size and shape of the textiles, the way in which they were created as well as where the paisley pattern appeared in the overall design. After production was shifted from East India Company's colonial factories to factories in England and Scotland, the shawls became oversized. These shawls were then worn folded as a way to increase the thickness and warmth of the garment. It was not unusual for original Kashmir shawls to be cut up and sewn back into

oval shawls. Oval shawls were made up of rectangular strips of fabric sewn together in such a way that the pattern was ultimately disordered. Paisley patterns also began to appear in clothing other than shawls. When paisley was originally introduced to England, women wore the pattern in shawls around their shoulders. Shortly thereafter, the paisley pattern was incorporated in jackets, vests, and dresses. Paisley was also no longer only woven into fabric. The paisley motif could be embroidered in eyelets, or simply stamped on fabric using a woodcut tool. At the final stage of this development, Kashmir shawls and the paisley pattern became so altered that cloths which contained few original Indian designs were created and marketed as authentic Indian textiles by European designers, who added “oriental” elements of their own invention like pagodas, peacocks, or exotic vegetation.⁸

Until the emergence of post-colonial theories and interpretations, history had perceived the West’s occupation of the East as improving the Orient’s culture and way of life. European countries brought technology, religion, cultivation, government or, as Edward Said stated, “the very best to these countries”, where *these* refers to countries whose cultures and customs were different than European nations.⁹ However, an

8 Ed Rossbach, The Art of Paisley (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1980), 22.

9 Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 33.

analysis of the history of European and Oriental textiles reveals that colonization was responsible for a new emergence of intercultural designs, within both the European market and the Oriental trading system.

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