



FRONTISPIECE. MING 5TH RANK OFFICIAL, XVII CENTURY, PETERS COLLECTION.

FOUR ANCESTRAL PORTRAITS (FRONTISPIECE, FIG. 5, FIG. 10B AND FIG. 13), ILLUSTRATING THE USE OF MANDARIN SQUARES IN THE MING AND CH'ING DYNASTIES, SHOW HOW THE FORM OF THE SQUARE WAS ALTERED BY THE MANCHUS, AND HOW THE COMPOSITION OF THE SQUARES THEMSELVES DIFFERED ACCORDING TO PERIOD WITHIN EACH DYNASTY.

NOTES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MANDARIN SQUARES

Some Newly Discovered Ming Textiles

By

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THE “mandarin squares” which Chinese officials and their wives used to wear on the chest and back of their robes to indicate rank are among the most commonly known Oriental textiles and are found in many of our museums and private collections. In spite of this, little is generally known about them, except that those for the nine grades of civil officials were woven, or embroidered, with certain species of birds, while those for military officers of corresponding ranks, and for the lesser nobles, had various animals. In particular, no attempt has ever been made to trace their evolution, although such a study was bound to offer clues to the development of Chinese textiles in general. As a matter of historical fact, these insignia were used over a long period—from their introduction by the Ming court in 1393 to the fall of the Manchu Dynasty in 1912—and, as Chinese culture was by no means as static as popularly supposed, they inevitably underwent many changes in form and design.*

One difficulty which has hitherto prevented students from tracing these changes has been the apparent lack of examples of the earlier types. Actually a number of our museums have had early squares in their collections, but they were not recognized as such. Curators and collectors familiar with the relatively common, late Ch’ing squares have apparently considered them typical of the whole dynasty, and have usually labeled any squares that differed markedly in size or design as “Ming.” Meanwhile, actual Ming examples—since they bore very little resemblance to those of Ch’ing, lacking even a border to identify them as “squares”—have been dismissed as mere “textile fragments,” though their superior workmanship has saved them from being ignored completely. I first became aware of this confused situation through a study of Chinese ancestral portraits, many of which showed Ming squares in use. In an effort

* The Ming Dynasty covered the years 1368-1644, the Manchu 1644-1912.

to solve this problem, I spent some time searching in old Chinese books for cuts and descriptions of squares, and then looked for actual examples corresponding to these references and to the squares figured in the portraits. As a result, I found in our museums a number of early squares which should be useful as pattern types for dating.

I—*Ming Squares*

The first Ming examples turned up in the Cooper Union Museum, in New York City, where they were being exhibited as 19th century Japanese textile fragments. That attribution might have explained the date and place of purchase, but there was nothing about these pieces of fine silk tapestry which could be called characteristically Japanese. In fact, in form of presentation, in subject, and in colors, they were quite un-Japanese (see Figs. 1A, 1B, and 1C).

A Japanese designer might have used a bird or birds in a medallion to form part of an ornamental pattern, or he might have displayed these subjects in more naturalistic fashion—as a heron beside a lotus pond, but not two herons arched against the sky; a peacock posing beneath a tree, but not peacocks soaring among clouds (the Japanese are literal-minded enough to know that peacocks cannot fly much better than barnyard chickens). Clearly the birds were symbolic or heraldic, rather than merely decorative, and yet they obviously did not conform to Japanese heraldic conventions, which call for compact, circular medallions. Furthermore, each fragment represented, in whole or in part, one of the specific types of bird or animal used on Ming insignia, as prescribed in the Dynastic Statutes. One of these (Fig. 1C) showed the hind quarters and brightly colored tail of a *pai-she*, a mythical horned lion unknown to Japanese art and folklore but commonly represented on Ming mandarin squares (Fig. 2), while its background, showing an auspicious fungus growing from a rock, and scroll-shaped clouds against a golden sky, recalled a Ming animal square in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 3).

In all these Cooper Union examples, moreover, the long, attenuated cloud streamers are stretched across the gold background in a fashion that would have seemed too regular and monotonous—not to say unnatural—to the Japanese eye. This cloud convention was common on Ming squares, however, as shown by the accompanying portrait of an early Ming official from the Peters' Collection (frontispiece), in which the subject is wearing the same type of square, but of a different rank. At the same time, these Cooper Union squares are so brightly colored that

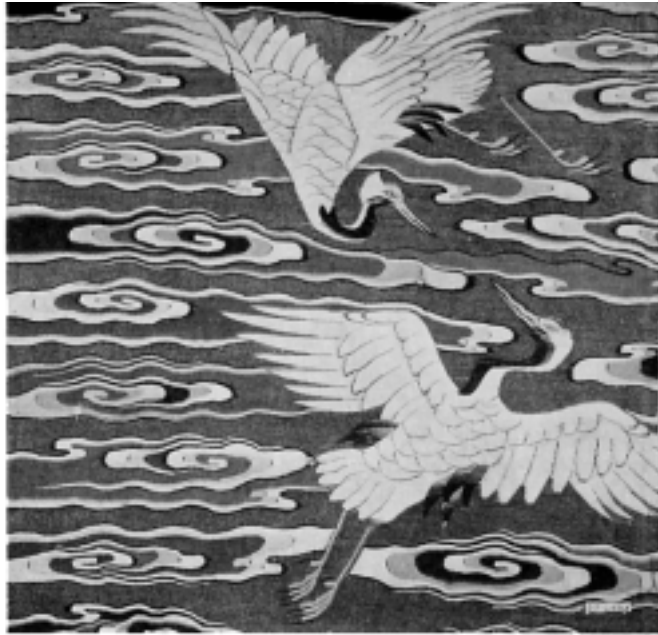


FIG. 1A
PART OF MING 1ST RANK SQUARE (K'O-SSU).
COOPER UNION MUSEUM.



FIG. 1B
MING 3RD RANK SQUARE (K'O-SSU), XVTH CENTURY.
COOPER UNION MUSEUM.



FIG. 1C
FRAGMENT OF MING MARQUIS'
SQUARE (K'O-SSU), XVTH CENTURY.
COOPER UNION MUSEUM.

EIGHT MING SQUARES (FIGS. 1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 3, 4, 6 AND 7), MOST OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NEWLY RECOGNIZED AS SUCH, ILLUSTRATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPOSITION AND TECHNIQUES DURING THE COURSE OF THE DYNASTY.



FIG. 2
MING MARQUIS' SQUARE (EMBROIDERED), LATE XVIITH OR
XVIIITH CENTURY, NISHIJIN ORIMONOKAN, KYOTO.
(SHINA KOGEI ZUKAN, VOL. III, PT. II, PL. 15)



FIG. 3
MING CENSOR'S SQUARE (K'O-SSU), XVIIth CENTURY, METROPOLITAN MUSEUM.

they undoubtedly would have offended the refined sensibilities of the decadent courtiers of the late Tokugawa period, when they would have been woven if the museum's labels are correct. But here, too, the coloring suggests an affinity with that of other surviving Ming textiles, such as the animal square in the Metropolitan, which shows identical bright shades. It is possible that the makers of silk tapestry (k'o-ssu) and the best dyers of Ming China were concentrated in important centers such as Yangchow and Nanking, which were especially devastated at the time of the Manchu Conquest. Whatever the immediate reason, their work ended with the fall of Ming, and the later Chinese were never able to reproduce the high quality of the earlier productions. The later k'o-ssu seems crude by comparison, and the colors in Ch'ing squares tend to be harsh or grayed. In any case, these Cooper Union textiles, in addition to their historical value as being among the few surviving examples of Ming weaving, are of extreme interest as technical achievements.

Another portion of an early Ming square of the same technique, and about the same period, has long been in the textile collection of the Metropolitan,¹ but, although it has been labeled as a Ming textile, it has not previously been identified as part of a square, even though it has the proper proportions. However, the mythical creature, called in Chinese "rhinoceros,"² which appears on it, was the required badge for eighth-rank military officials, and does not appear elsewhere in Ming art. This piece is especially rare, as scarcely any of the lowest-rank military squares have survived, even from the Ch'ing.

Although the Ming appears to have been a rather static and conservative dynasty, to judge by the relatively few changes in its sumptuary laws, the design of the squares did not remain unchanged. The cuts accompanying the last edition of the Ming Dynastic Statutes, published in 1587, show that toward the end of the dynasty the restraint and good taste characteristic of the earlier squares had fallen victim to an over-elaboration that was probably a symptom of dynastic decay. The birds or animals on the squares were now represented in more naturalistic settings, with plants and shrubs typical of their environment; while on the rocks, or in the waves, of the foreground, magic jewels were scattered to bring luck to

⁽¹⁾ See Priest and Simmons, *Chinese Textiles*, Fig. 1, p. 17.

⁽²⁾ Although "rhinoceros" happens to be the English translation for its Chinese name *hsi-niu*, this strange creature would seem to bear no relation to the original beast. This was the recognized convention for representing the "rhinoceros," however, as may be seen if one examines the cuts of Ming squares in the *San-t'sai t'u-hui* (1585), h. 7, *i-fu*, ch. 2, p. 35a. Note, however, that through some error of the compiler the animal is labeled as the insignia for the 9th rank, although contemporary laws (preserved in the *Ta Ming Hui-tien*, Wan-li ed. [1587], ch. 61) assign him to the 8th military rank.



FIG. 4
MING 7TH RANK SQUARE (K'O-SSU), XVITH CENTURY, BIEBER COLLECTION,
NELSON GALLERY.

the wearer. The Bieber Collection,** loaned to the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery, Kansas City, Mo., has a textile of this general description (Fig. 4). The two mandarin ducks of the seventh rank are arranged in quasi-natural surroundings, like those in the cuts, while the sacred pearls, placed in sets of three according to the requirements of Lamaist symbology, would have been out of place on anything but a square. To settle the question, one of the Ming portraits in the Peters Collection (Fig. 5) shows a similar square, complete to willow branch and lotus plant.

The Bieber Collection also contains a pair of late Ming squares in gold brocade (Fig. 6),³ which were undoubtedly cut from a robe on which they had been woven directly. This type of robe was worn by Ming nobles, and (after 1528) by officials who had been awarded the right to wear it for some act of merit.⁴ The fact that each of these squares has a central seam made by the joining of two selvages proves that Ming robes were woven in four pieces and sewn together, as the portraits would indicate.

Apparently some Ming officials also wore embroidered squares, though these are extremely rare in American collections. Figure 7 shows a late Ming square from the Nelson Gallery with paired phoenixes in satin stitch against a ribbed background of floss silk. Cuts in Ming encyclopædias and a few portraits also indicate that late Ming squares sometimes had backgrounds of gold couching, in rhythmic cloud patterns.

II—*Early Ch'ing Squares*

Not only have Ming squares often been unrecognized as such, but a whole class of early Ch'ing squares has frequently been mislabeled as Ming types. This is probably because they appear so different from the later squares which have come to be considered as typical of the Ch'ing Dynasty. It is not generally realized that the Manchus, when they conquered China, imposed their own costume on the Chinese, along with the queue. But this is apparent from their dynastic records, which state that their original national dress used jeweled hat and belt ornaments to

** The collection of Miss C. F. Bieber, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York.

(³) The small sphere near the head of the ch'i-lin on this square might possibly be mistaken for a sun-disk, in spite of its small size. Actually it is the pearl of Wisdom which is often depicted in the exhalation of the ch'i-lin in place of the more frequently shown sacred book. This tradition seems to have lapsed somewhat in Ch'ing, and the jewel or book rarely if ever appear on squares of this dynasty, but they are still figured in sculptured or painted representations of the ch'i-lin in Chinese and Annamite temples. The pearl is shown in the *San-t'sai t'u-hui* cut of this animal (*op. cit.*, p. 33a).

(⁴) Cf., *Ta Ming Hui-tien*. Wan-li ed., 61.24.



FIG. 5
MING 7TH RANK OFFICIAL, LATE XVITH CENTURY, PETERS COLLECTION.



FIG. 6
MING DUKE'S SQUARE (SATIN BROCADE), LATE XVIITH CENTURY,
BIEBER COLLECTION, BROOKLYN MUSEUM.



FIG. 7
MING PRINCESS' SQUARE (EMBROIDERED), LATE XVIITH OR EARLY XVIIITH CENTURY,
NELSON GALLERY.

indicate rank, and that they did not adopt the use of squares until 1652, nine years after they entered China. The new squares were fundamentally different from those of Ming, however, partly because of the different way they were worn.⁵ On Ming robes the insignia had extended unbroken across the front and back of the robe, from one side seam to the other (except on the brocaded robes, on which each square was bisected by the central seam). The Manchus, on the other hand, wore their badges on slightly smaller plaques, woven or embroidered, sewn to the riding jackets which they commonly wore over their regular robes. As these jackets opened down the front, the front square had to be split down the middle, while the rear one was made in one piece. Also, since these squares were somewhat smaller, with plenty of room for a margin, the earliest ones, in particular, had very ornamental borders.

Ch'ing squares also differed from those of Ming in discontinuing the tradition of two birds, though this was not a sudden break, as the cuts in the *San-ts'ai t'u-hui*, a late Ming encyclopædia, show that single birds had already come into use at the end of the sixteenth century, while a few early Ch'ing squares still have paired birds. Another characteristic that immediately identifies a Ch'ing square is the presence of a sun disk, in an upper corner of each square, at which the bird or animal stares fixedly.⁶ Perhaps the creature looking up at the sun symbolized the official looking up to his Emperor; but, whatever its original meaning, the sun disk was considered very significant, for when one type of late Ch'ing square (c. 1898-1912) was purged of all excess details, this sun disk was retained, along with the symbol of rank. In early Ch'ing the tradition was not yet firmly fixed, and a few of the earliest squares lack the sun, but by the late seventeenth century the custom had become so strongly rooted that when the K'ang-hsi Encyclopædia (*T'u-shu-chi-ch'êng*) was being compiled, the artists, who were ostensibly reproducing the cuts of mandarin squares from the *San-ts'ai t'u-hui*, felt obliged to include suns even when copying typical Ming squares (see Figs. 8A and 8B).

Figures 9A to 9D show a series of typical early Ch'ing squares. All are

⁽⁵⁾ One cannot sufficiently emphasize the sharp break between Ming and Ch'ing costume styles, and the resulting differences in squares. Not only did the national dress of the Manchus demand a different form of square, as described above, but the nine years during which no squares were worn made for a cultural gap, after which the Chinese craftsmen at least partially forgot the old styles. Thus when the use of squares was resumed, they were inevitably of a new and rather distinct type, though we find a few elements of transition (see p. 6.).

⁽⁶⁾ The sun disk does not appear on the squares pictured in either the Ming editions of the *San-ts'ai t'u-hui*, or the *Ta Ming Hui-tien*, nor have I ever seen it represented in authenticated Ming portraits.

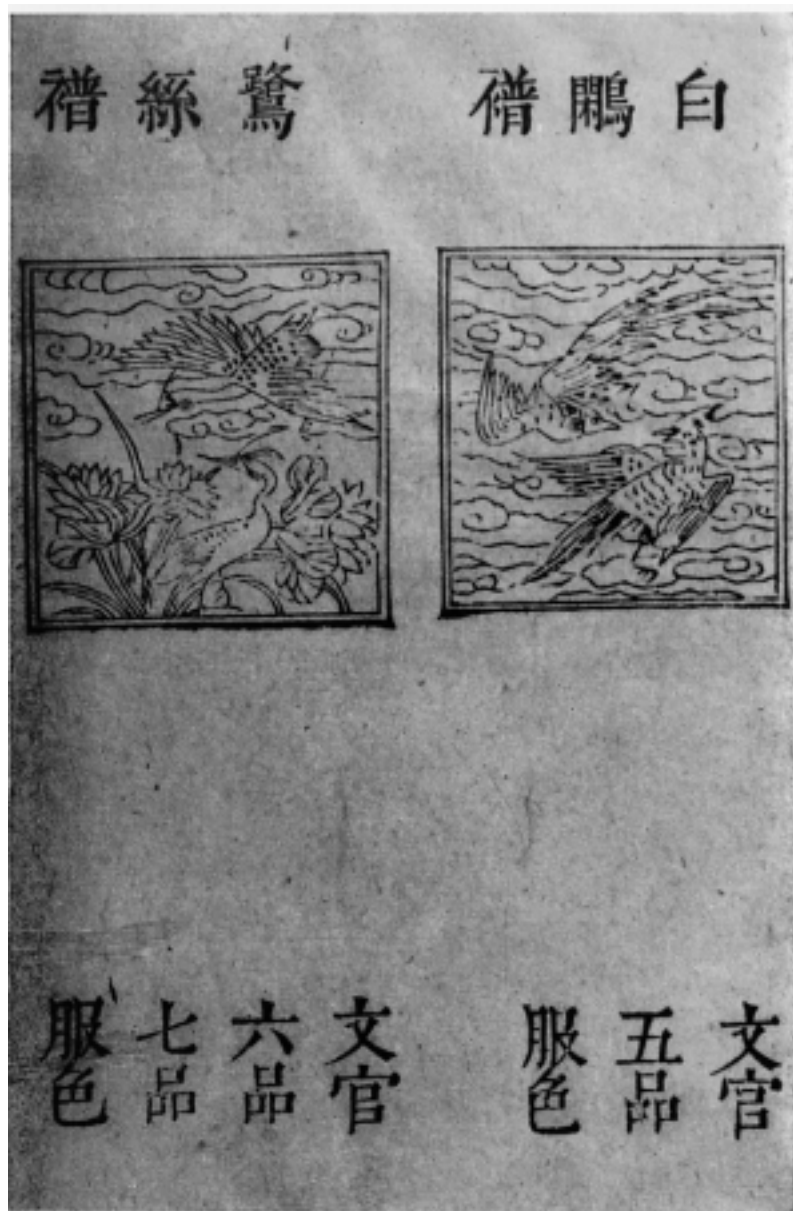


FIG. 8A

PAGE FROM A LATE MING ENCYCLOPÆDIA (SAN-TS'AI-T'U-HUI),
SHOWING 5TH AND 6TH RANK MING SQUARES.

THIS AND THE PAGE OPPOSITE SHOW HOW THE MANCHUS, PERHAPS INTENTIONALLY, ALTERED THE REPRESENTATIONS OF MING SQUARES; AND ILLUSTRATING THE DANGER OF DEPENDING ON A SECONDARY SOURCE LIKE THE SECOND BOOK, WITHOUT CHECKING IT BY OTHER EVIDENCE.

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FIG. 8B

PAGE FROM THE K'ANG-HSI ENCYCLOPÆDIA (T'U-SHU-CHI-CH'ENG); OSTENSIBLY SHOWING 5TH AND 6TH RANK MING SQUARES FROM THE PRECEDING. ACTUALLY THE LOWER CUT SHOWS A PURELY CH'ING TYPE, WHILE THE UPPER ONE HAS A SUN DISK ADDED.



FIG. 9A
EARLY CH'ING 3RD RANK SQUARE
(EMBROIDERED), XVIII CENTURY,
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM.



FIG. 9B
EARLY CH'ING 1ST RANK SQUARE
(EMBROIDERED), XVIII CENTURY,
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON.



FIG. 9C
EARLY CH'ING 3RD RANK SQUARE
(EMBROIDERED), LATE XVIII CENTURY,
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM.



FIG. 9D
EARLY CH'ING 3RD RANK SQUARE
(EMBROIDERED), LATE XVIII OR
EARLY XVIII CENTURY, METRO-
POLITAN MUSEUM.

FOUR EARLY CH'ING SQUARES, ILLUSTRATING THE TRANSITION FROM
SURVIVING MING TRADITIONS TO A FULLY DEVELOPED MANCHU STYLE.

obviously of the same general style. Each has an ornate border in which paired scrolls in gold are set off by couched peacock feathers, like those used for the rock in the foreground. The background of the square proper is of couched gold, with the field broken into irregular masses in order to prevent excessive glare.⁷ (The same technique was used to relieve the solid color background on contemporary vases, producing the famous "crackle-ice" ground.) Lastly, the birds, clouds, waves, and Lamaist jewels, have all been worked in satin stitch with somewhat grayed colors. Within this one style, however, we have four squares which, whether or not they were made in this chronological sequence, clearly show progressive steps in the transition from Ming survivals to a characteristic Ch'ing type. In the first, we have paired birds in two medallions, and no sun disk; in the second, paired birds (for a different rank) in a single medallion, with the sun included;⁸ the third has a single bird in a medallion; while the fourth shows the bird uncurled in the rather heraldic style that was to persist throughout the dynasty.

These early Ch'ing squares are not very uncommon—both the Metropolitan Museum and the Nelson Gallery have several—but some of the most interesting turn up in strange places. The one in Fig. 9A, for example, had been made into a Japanese standard, and was formerly exhibited in the Japanese armor section of the Metropolitan, where it was discovered by Miss Pauline Simmons. There was ample excuse for mistaking this textile for a Japanese production, both because of its mounting and because the birds are stylized in the medallion form used for Japanese *mon*. However, a detailed search of all available manuals of Japanese heraldry has failed to produce a crest with a peacock, and it therefore seems probable that this square was mounted thus by some dealer, either through ignorance or in hopes of a better sale. That in Fig. 9B, on the other hand, had reclined for some years in the storage vaults of Boston Museum, regarded with suspicion because of its unconventional presentation of two birds. Another unusually fine example

⁽⁷⁾ Note that this type of background is quite different from those on the late Ming squares, which as previously mentioned, had gold threads couched in definite patterns—as illustrated somewhat crudely in a few of the *San-t'sai t'u-hui* cuts, and shown distinctly in the splendid Ming portrait of the wife of a marquis, in the Brooklyn Museum. (Though the gilt paint has tarnished in the latter, the pattern is still clear.)

⁽⁸⁾ Note that this second square in the series was originally made in two pieces so that it might be worn on the breast of a Manchu formal jacket, which buttoned down the front in an un-Chinese fashion. When such squares are still found in pairs, one is invariably split for this reason, removing the slightest doubt that they are of Ch'ing origin. Mrs. D. C. Martin and Mr. C. E. Wells both have pairs of such squares.

may be seen in the Tibetan Hall of the American Museum of Natural History, sewn to the mounting of a Lama "temple banner," probably intended as a votive offering to the demigod depicted in the painting.

III—*Brief Survey of Ch'ing Development*

The early Ch'ing squares previously described, with their glittering gold surfaces and iridescent peacock feather trimmings, were rich and barbaric, reflecting the flashy tastes of parvenu nobles. Yet we cannot say that these represented the only type of the period, for the contemporary military squares, largely similar in other respects, had smaller borders, often merely two or three gold threads as edging,⁹ and these are sometimes found on the civil squares as well.

The trend toward greater sophistication in all branches of culture increased toward the end of the K'ang-hsi reign,† and, as a result of this, the squares of the early eighteenth century, while still large, were quite straightforward and functional, with subdued gold backgrounds, very narrow borders, and the symbols of rank emphasized as they should be (see Fig. 10A, and the portrait, Fig. 10B, showing one of these squares in use¹⁰). This type of square was comparatively short-lived, for the elegance of the Ch'ien-lung‡ period produced a new kind of insignia, which, though very beautiful, æsthetically speaking, already showed elements of decadence. These were somewhat smaller, embroidered in satin stitch on dark satin, and generally, had a border of simple keyfret in gold thread.¹¹ As the latter were rather loosely couched they frayed easily, and damaged borders were often removed before sale; this probably accounts for the occasional borderless squares of this type in United States collections (see Fig. 11). From this time on, the squares were apparently considered as pleasant fields for decoration on an otherwise drab jacket,

† 1662-1727.

‡ 1736-1795.

⁽⁹⁾ See the portrait of Li Chu-hsü, painted about 1652, in the *Ch'i-yang shih-chia wen-wu fu-hsiang* (13th gen.), for a fine example of early Ch'ing second-rank square, of the type here discussed.

⁽¹⁰⁾ This portrait must have been painted after 1727, as the spherical hat button—in contrast to the more formal jeweled spike—was not invented until 1727 (as cited in the *Ta Ch'ing hui-tien shih-li*, Kuang-hsü ed., ch. 328, under "Yung-chêng wu nien"). On the other hand, this type of robe suggests a date before the Ch'ien-lung period, for early in the last-named reign the base of the robes for officials became fairly standardized, with the convention of long, slanted stripes known as *li-shui*, intended to symbolize the deep sea below the wave crests. (*Li-shui* had appeared even earlier on imperial robes, but its general adoption was rather gradual.)

⁽¹¹⁾ Squares of this type first appear on portraits of the Ch'ien-lung period, and there is absolutely no evidence of their earlier use. In fact, as they represent the first signs of enervation in the Manchu tradition, one could not expect to find them much earlier.



FIG. 10A
CH'ING 5TH RANK SQUARE (EMBROIDERED), EARLY XVIIIITH CENTURY,
YALE GALLERY.

FIVE CH'ING SQUARES (FIGS. 10A, 11, 12, 14 AND 15),
SHOW THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN DECORATION, WHICH,
IN A SENSE, MIRRORED THE DECLINE OF THE DYNASTY.



FIG. 10B

CH'ING 2ND RANK OFFICIAL, EARLY XVIIIITH CENTURY, NELSON GALLERY.



FIG. 11
CH'ING CENSOR'S SQUARE (EMBROIDERED), LATE XVIIIITH CENTURY,
NATIONAL MUSEUM, WASHINGTON, D. C.



FIG. 12
CH'ING 7TH RANK SQUARE (K'O-SSU), LAST HALF SIXTH CENTURY,
NATIONAL MUSEUM, WASHINGTON, D. C.

and, as in the decline of Ming, many rather extraneous details were introduced. The bats of Happiness and auspicious plants which first appeared on Ch'ien-lung squares were soon augmented by still other emblems of good fortune, especially in sets, such as the Eight Lucky Gems, the Eight Buddhist Symbols, the Eight Insignia of the Taoist Immortals, and assorted Lamaist Jewels. This resulted in such overcrowding that the actual symbols of rank, the reason for the squares' existence, had to be greatly reduced to leave room for them. (Fig. 12, for example, shows twenty distinct symbols, not counting the bats and lucky plants, on one square.)

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the "sea" at the bottom of the square began to be conventionalized like that on the lower edge of the contemporary "mandarin coats" (see portrait in Fig. 13),¹² which in turn were a later development of the type of robe shown in Fig. 10B, and the "sea" was widened so as to restrict still more the field of the square proper. About this time the general spirit of dynastic decay became overwhelmingly apparent in the workmanship of the squares. Mass production methods were adopted to produce the vast number of extra insignia required for those who took advantage of dynastic corruption to buy official positions, or merely the right to wear badges of office, for themselves and their families, for the sake of prestige. Among a great variety of techniques in weaving and embroidery¹³—sometimes three or four kinds of stitch were used on one square—the tapestry weave was revived for squares, but most examples of k'o-ssu from this period appear to have been hastily, and rather loosely, woven, with details added by brush (Fig. 12). New dyes of garish tints were introduced from the West; additional lucky symbols were placed in the increasingly elaborate borders; and the birds and animals were often made separately and applied, so that the wearer might change them as he rose in rank—by purchase. As the utmost sign of the degeneration of tradition, they began to make these insignia in circular form (Fig. 14), though round medallions had previously been rigidly restricted for the dragon badges of the Emperor and

⁽¹²⁾ This portrait of the Imperial Commissioner, Ch'i-ying, is reliably dated by the fact that the subject ordered it to be painted as a gift to Caleb Cushing in 1844, when the latter came to China to negotiate the first trade agreement between the United States and the Chinese Empire. Note the fully developed *li-shui* at the base of the robe, while that on the square represents a less precise, transitional type.

⁽¹³⁾ Barbara Tinker, of Ann Arbor, is now working on the development of techniques in Ch'ing mandarin squares.



FIG. 13
CH'ING 1ST RANK OFFICIAL, MIDDLE SIXTH CENTURY,
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON.



FIG. 14
CH'ING 5TH RANK CIRCULAR INSIGNIA
(WOMAN'S) (K'O-SSU), LATE SIXTH—EARLY XXTH CENTURY,
WILDE COLLECTION.



FIG. 15
CH'ING 2ND RANK SQUARE (EMBROIDERED), LATE SIXTH—EARLY XXTH CENTURY,
NATIONAL MUSEUM, WASHINGTON, D. C.

his highest kinsmen.¹⁴ As a reaction to all this, and no doubt as a symptom of the reform movement of the late 90s, a final type of square was invented in which all symbols were purged from the field of the square except the bird (or animal) and the sun disk (see Fig. 15).¹⁵ The workmanship of squares in general continued to degenerate, however, with increasing use of almost monochrome squares in metallic thread, until in 1911 the Manchu Government collapsed, and the use of squares passed with it.

In the last hectic days after the Revolution had begun, especially in the Provincial garrisons, most officials, both renegade Chinese and Manchu, hastened to destroy the robes and insignia that would identify them as servants of the alien dynasty and make them liable to torture or death. No doubt this—and the harder use to which they were normally subjected—accounts for the great scarcity of military squares. In the comparative security of Peking, however, enough robes and family relics remained to provide our American museums and collectors with very representative collections.¹⁶

If the squares thus assembled were systematically studied and organized according to their historical and stylistic development, as roughly outlined here, it should ultimately be possible to detect subdivisions within each class, and thus establish a more detailed chronology. One practical application of such a study is its use in dating ancestral portraits

⁽¹⁴⁾ Though I do not ever recall seeing in a portrait one of these round medallions for the officials (as opposed to nobles), and therefore cannot date their introduction precisely, this must have occurred very late in the dynasty, after the almost complete breakdown of old traditions. For the circular form, associated with Heaven, had always been reserved for the Emperor and his immediate relatives, while the square shape, identified with the Earth principal, was relegated to all lesser dignitaries.

⁽¹⁵⁾ The earliest portraits on which these occur date from the first years of the present century. Somehow a myth has arisen that they were worn by officials of subordinate grade. However, this is not borne out by facts. The dynastic regulations make no distinction between the squares to be worn by officials of the principal and subordinate grades in each rank. As additional, positive evidence, Laurence Sickman, of the Nelson Gallery, recently sent me a photograph taken in the first decade of this century, which shows the Governor-General, Tuan-fang (rank 2, principal), wearing a flying pheasant square, much like that in Fig. 5E. The number of other officials in the same picture wearing this type of square amply testifies to its current popularity.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Among the best private collections of mandarin squares in this country are those of Mrs. Julia St. Clair Krenz (temporarily loaned to the Nelson Gallery, in Kansas City), Mrs. Herbert R. Wilde (Newtown, Conn.), Mrs. D. Clifford Martin (Port Washington, N. Y.), and Mr. L. Newton Hayes, formerly tutor in the family of Li Hung-chang (Providence, R. I.).

in which squares occur.¹⁷ For example, even if it were not actually known that the portrait in Fig. 13 was painted in 1844,¹⁸ the type of square would identify it as a mid-nineteenth century painting. One must always remember, though, that these portraits were sometimes painted long after the death of the subject, and that while the artist in such cases generally attempted to reproduce the costume of an earlier period, he could not be familiar with the minutiae of the older tradition, and was obliged to fill in such details as the decoration on squares (and belts) from contemporary examples. Thus portraits of Ming forbears of prominent Ch'ing families can often be detected as "manufactured ancestors" because of the inclusion of relatively small squares with prominent borders and sun disks, in typical Ch'ing style. This is particularly true of the forged "ancestor portraits" turned out in recent years for the tourist trade, and currently popular with decorators; while the cuts of remote ancestors in the Chinese family histories¹⁹ published within the last 150 years show Yuan, Sung, T'ang, and even Han Dynasty, officials wearing Ming or Ch'ing squares, although we know that these insignia were not invented until 1393.²⁰ Genuine ancestral portraits are invaluable for a study of the costume of any given period, and by using a knowledge of squares to detect the real from the false, and to determine the approximate date of a given painting, it should be possible for other museum curators to help students by assembling comprehensive collections of these, like that already begun by Mr. Sickman in the Nelson Gallery.

⁽¹⁷⁾ I refer to reliable ancestral portraits, which means those which were actually painted for use in the family memorial services, and not the more familiar, less formal ones, showing the deceased in familiar surroundings, or engaged in some favorite occupation, intended to preserve happy memories of the subjects. The former were very accurately and meticulously painted, especially in regard to the badges of rank, which helped to remind the descendants of the past glories and prestige of their clan. Thus they are of great value for the study of costume, especially if they were painted before the general decline in the arts which reached its nadir in the 1850's and 1860's. The best public collections of such portraits are in the Nelson Gallery and Toronto Museum, but there are some private collections, notably those of the late Harry Peters, of New York City, and Mrs. Charles B. Doolittle, of New Haven, Conn. Portraits of the second type were far less precisely painted, and seldom show the subject in official dress. There are some valuable exceptions, however, such as those reproduced in the *San-yin-chou-san Wu-shih tsu-p'u*, which portray official scenes in which typical Ming squares, like those in the Cooper Union, are being worn.

⁽¹⁸⁾ See note 12.

⁽¹⁹⁾ The Chinese Library at Columbia University has a vast collection of these family histories, but, owing to anachronisms perpetrated by ignorant artists and engravers of a later period, the portraits in all but four or five—out of several thousand of these books, which I personally examined—would seem to be useless for an accurate study of Chinese costume.

⁽²⁰⁾ In spite of the fact that the original Chinese sources all agree that these insignia were invented in early Ming, a false tradition among Western writers attributes their invention to a mythical emperor in remote antiquity (see, for example, Friedrich Hirth's *Ancient History of China*, p. 24).