
**Abstract:** Kashmiri shawls serve as a material vector to trace how European assumptions of geographical determinism, racial hierarchy, and gender essentialism underpinned the seemingly disparate nineteenth-century narratives about design history and various theories about an “Asiatic mode of production” in labor history. The continuing strength of these assumptions is demonstrated by the contemporary marketing in 2001 of pashmina (“woven goat hair” or cashmere) shawls, using the recycled tropes of exoticism and fantasy ethnography crafted during the heyday of British colonialism.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, wealthy Europeans embraced Kashmiri shawl cloth with as much enthusiasm as Americans who discovered polyester fleece at the end of the twentieth century. \(^1\) Kashmiri shawls were fabric rectangles worn primarily as shoulder mantles from the 1770s until the 1870s, and they came in a wide variety of sizes, patterns, and modes throughout the century of their widespread popularity in Europe and the United States. Handloom weavers in Kashmir produced this soft, warm, goat-hair fabric for a world market long before affluent Western women draped their bodies with these distinctive wraps. \(^2\) Luxurious Kashmiri shawl fabric was wound as men’s turbans in Egypt, stitched into wealthy Iranian women’s jackets, prized for men’s coats in Turkestan, worn as sashes in Tibet, and gifted to both “dancing girls” and male nobles from Delhi to Istanbul. \(^3\)

The word “cashmere,” from the eighteenth-century English spelling of Kashmiri shawls’ geographical home, was popularly linked with “exotic” luxury in nineteenth-century Britain. European and American firms used “cashmere” to give distinction to locally manufactured shawls, fabrics, and even toiletries. (A talcum powder named “Cashmere Bouquet” is still sold by an American mail order business which specializes in commodity nostalgia, with an advertisement situating the product in the 1870s.) \(^4\) Western manufacturers produced imitation Kashmiri shawls and used the word “cashmere” to promote their own products. \(^5\) Similarly, in the late 1990s western European and American marketing relied on the exoticism of a different Subcontinental word, *pashmina*, to sell plain-weave shawls made from the same goat hair as “cashmere.” \(^6\) *Pashmina* shawls went from being exclusive high fashion to middle-class popularity in 2000.

The domestication of Subcontinental textiles in Europe and America has been within historically contingent cycles of appropriating and renaming Asian
handcrafted textiles for home markets. First, Europeans tried to monopolize the collection of commodities in Asia and their transportation home. Second, Europeans manufactured import substitutes which copied the commodities, from Chinese porcelain to Kashmiri shawls. Third, Europeans incorporated both the imports and their European-made copies into the western European and Euro-American “fashion cycles” for Chinoiserie, Orientalism, Japonisme, “Indian style,” and so on. Kashmiri shawls serve as a material vector to trace persistent patterns within the historical context of one such cycle. 

European and American art historians constructed a “rise and fall” narrative about Kashmiri shawls in which both their production and their consumption were driven by European fashion demands and design trends. Briefly, the story started when eighteenth-century European traders “discovered” Kashmiri shawls marked by a characteristic woven design, a teardrop with a bent tip. This design, the buta (or boteh, literally “flower”) inspired one of the most often repeated Western textile motifs, commonly known today as the “paisley” in the United States and Canada. Technological invention and design innovation made the nineteenth-century machine-made shawls competitive with Kashmiri shawls and intensified the degeneration of authentic Kashmiri designs and weaving techniques caused by European influences. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Scottish town of Paisley, near Glasgow, became famous for its imitation Kashmiri shawls with the buta motif, and, after about 1850, many English speakers started to use the town’s name to describe any shawl with this design. Around 1870, according to this story, European fashion changes and political events ended the demand for Kashmiri shawls and ruined the shawl business in Kashmir.

European shawl manufacturers “transformed” shawls “into a European taste and business” to the extent that a Paisley-made imitation Kashmiri shawl and “an English at-home dress of the same period might [both] be seen as indigenous western dress” (Martin 1995, 209). This appropriation, a naturalization of the violence enabling colonial possession of shawl design as well as the earlier possession of Kashmiri shawls as trade goods, continues today in Europe and America. In the following 1999 U.S. catalog merchandising of a skirt, for instance, the transportation of the “exotic paisley” seems independent of the British imperial economic regime that brought model shawls to Europe, and the design’s availability for Euro-American consumption is individualized: “From Kashmir to Scotland, via Egypt and France, with a few additional stops en route. The exotic paisley, serpentine and mesmerizing, has traveled through history and across the world to enfold you in its embrace.” Kashmiri shawls had once followed a similar route. Uncritical of such commercial discourse or complicitous with it, many European and American textile historians who
have written about and helped display vintage Kashmiri shawls have overestimated the importance of European consumption (for example, Levi-Strauss 1998). They have likewise underestimated the importance of colonialism for the procurement of Kashmiri model shawls and their characteristic design.

This essay is divided into five sections; the first traces the Asian trade in Kashmiri shawls from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. Specifically western European and Euro-American consumption of Kashmiri shawls is the subject of the second section, followed by a third sketching western European and American manufacture of imitation shawls. The fourth section considers eighteenth- and nineteenth-century changes in the Kashmiri production and Asian consumption of shawls in light of British imperial economic, political, and cultural goals in Asia. The final section explores implications for Eurocentric narratives about Asian workers. I argue that gender was as important as race in nineteenth-century colonial labor discourses about handloom weavers and their products. The commonplaces of contemporary U.S. marketing for South Asian textiles, including pashmina shawls, remain the recycled tropes of exoticism and fantasy ethnography crafted during the heyday of British colonialism (see also “ethnic” textiles from South America in Hendrickson 1996).

The Asian Shawl Trade 1500–1800

Kashmiri shawls and shawl cloth were well-known exports within Asia and moved through established trade networks linking international areas of demand long before the shawls became European commodities. From the sixteenth through the eighteenth century, Kashmiri artisans wove cloth from Central Asian goat fleece, silk, and other materials. Dealers brought unprocessed goat hair to Kashmir from the city of Leh in Ladakh (see Map 1), the long-established entrépot between Kashmir and Central Asia. Merchants and peddlers in caravans carried the finished shawls overland, some going north to Central Asia and east to China, while others ventured west to Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Although western historiography of India’s domestic and foreign trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has stressed European sea trade with India, exports to Europe “were [still] exceeded by far by the volume of India’s trade with Asian and African countries” (Tchitcherov 1998, 136). The intra-Asian overland exchange continued to compete successfully with European traders on some routes and for some goods in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. For example, the Central Asian trade which carried Kashmiri shawls to Russia continued well into the nineteenth century. P.N.K. Bamzai (1980) repeated a mid-nineteenth-century British estimate that shawls worth Rs. 50,000 annually were still being exported from Kashmir through Ladakh
to the “Chinese provinces.” Both Asian and European merchants moved Subcontinental shawls from their sites of production to their sites of consumption along distribution networks that evolved gradually from Asian-focused seventeenth-century routes to the bustling colonial trade routes of the nineteenth century (Veinstein 1999; Chaudhury and Morineau 2000).

The Emperors of the Safavid, Zand, and Qajar empires in Iran (c. 1500-1924) and the Mughal court of North India and its regional satellites (1526–1848) used Kashmiri shawls and shawl cloth within their “established and evolving social relations of consumption” (Howes 1996, 2). For example, they bestowed shawls as *khil’at* (“robes of honor”) within their political and religious practices. In the Iranian-influenced culture of the Mughal Indian court, fine garments given in political settings were intended to establish a hierarchical relationship between the giver and the recipient, whose acceptance acknowledged submission. Indeed, the word “*khil’at*” originally meant “something [End Page 32] passed on,” especially a “garment cast off” (Buckler 1922, 197 and 1928, 240). The robes of honor typically were exorbitantly expensive fabrics. The Mughal *khil’at* consisted of a sumptuous set of clothes, which could include a turban, long coat, gown, fitted jacket, sash, shawl, trousers, shirt, and scarf. One or all of these could be made of *pashmina* (shawl cloth) and embellished further with gold-thread.
embroidery. Symbolic of the greatly reduced circumstances of the last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah (r. 1837–58), were the audiences he gave at the Red Fort in Delhi, when he would present cheap pieces of fabric to British visitors as a token khil‘at (Fisher 1990, 455).

Zahiruddin Babur (1483–1530) founded the Mughal (from “Mongol”) Empire in 1526 C.E., and established the custom of rewarding allies with robes of honor. A pair of Kashmiri shawls became an expected part of khil‘at ceremonies under his grandson, the Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1606). After conquering Kashmir in 1568, Akbar showed great interest in the production of Kashmiri shawls, and encouraged their use through his personal example. He initiated shawl cloth production in imperial workshops at Lahore, Patna, and Agra, directing changes in how these shawls were to be woven and dyed (Chandra 1989, 65, 67). In addition to the finest shawls made of white shah tush (wild ibex hair) supposedly reserved for the Emperor and his family, artisans wove shawls from domesticated goat hair, silk, sheep wool, or combinations of fibers (67; Ames 1997, 360; Saraf 1982, 2). During Akbar’s reign, robes of honor were normally given within the emperor’s ruling circle, but the practice was greatly expanded under his successors.

Members of the Mughal imperial court consumed large quantities of Kashmiri shawls between the sixteenth and mid-nineteenth century. Imperial patronage by the Mughal Emperors was reflected in the names of certain designs, such as “Shah Pasand” (Emperor’s Delight), and “Buta Muhammad Shah” (Muhammad Shah’s Flower), named after the emperor who reigned from 1720 until 1742. As late as the reign of Akbar II (1806–37), a painting of the Mughal court displayed the continued desirability of these textiles; every figure in the painting appears to be wearing one or more shawls (Mikosch 1985, 9; Saraf 72).

Kashmiri shawls were also in continual demand in Iran from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries. The emperors and family members of the Safavid, Zand, and Qajar dynasties often wore Kashmiri shawl fabrics (Bier 1987), and Iranian emperors gifted Kashmiri shawls as robes of honor throughout their rule. Both women and men of the Iranian elite likewise provided a large market for Kashmiri shawl cloth; they did not wear shawls in the English-language sense of a loose wrap about the upper body, but shawl cloth was tailored into their fitted clothes (Scarce 1988 /89, 23). Fath Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834) promoted Iranian shawl-weaving using the fleece of Kermani goats and sheep and tried to limit competition by restricting shawl imports from Kashmir (Bier, 25). At the end of the eighteenth century, a senior British official reported that Kashmiri shawls reached Iran both overland, through Afghanistan, and by sea, via the Persian Gulf (Malcolm cited in Issawi, 1971, 266).
Kashmiri products had to compete with shawl cloth designed specifically for Iranian consumption, woven by artisans in Kerman, Mashad, and Yazd. For example, in 1849–50, Kerman alone had 2,200 looms for weaving shawls along with looms for woolen cloth, together producing approximately £40,000 to 45,000 worth of goods (Abbott quoted in Issawi 1971, 267). Jakob Polak, a German physician who lived in Iran in the 1850s, wrote that “Persian shawls... are comparable in design and color to those of Kashmir, but are far inferior in suppleness and closeness of weave.” Kermani shawls, reported Polak, were exported to “Constantinople and Alexandria,” while those made at Yazd were sent to “Constantinople and Russia” (cited in Issawi, 269, 271).

Until the early twentieth century, Kermani and Kashmiri shawl cloth continued to be used by the Qajar court in Iran as gifts from the shah to those he wished to honor, as formal attire for members of the court, and as shrouds for the wealthy (Scarce, 33; Bier, 31).

The Kashmiri shawl trade in Asia was often disrupted by political turmoil in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and by the heavy tax demands of the Afghan and Sikh regimes that conquered Kashmir. By the last decades of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb’s reign (1658–1707), imperial attention and military strength had shifted south, and northern shawl merchants were forced to alter their trade routes according to the less secure times. The Sikh armies of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1781–1839), whose kingdom centered on the Punjab plains, conquered Kashmir in 1819. Contemporary European travelers wrote in [End Page 34] amazement about the lavish decorative use of Kashmiri shawls and shawl cloth at Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s court in Lahore in the 1840s. The Maharaja encouraged Kashmiri weavers to settle in Punjabi cities, and he used shawl cloth to pay allowances to his followers, to grant robes of honor, and to send gifts to other rulers, including officials of the British East India Company (Bajwa 1982, 236-37; Datta 1970; Ahad 1987, 103–104).

Asian trade in Kashmiri shawls thus antedated the British conquest of India by several centuries, and Kashmiri shawls retained their capital as valued gifts in local regimes after the British Raj was established. Yet, Eurocentric textile histories of this early trade, treating it as merely the background for the later trade with Europe, focused on the supposed non-Kashmiri origins of the characteristic shawl designs and weaving techniques rather than the Asian trade itself. The Asian trade continued to carry shawls overland from Kashmir to their widespread sites of consumption well into the nineteenth century. I argue below that the Asian trade was at least as important as European demand for changes in the production of Kashmiri shawls.
European and Euro-American Consumption of Kashmiri Shawls

Changing European patterns of consumption for Kashmiri shawls over the course of the nineteenth century developed contrapuntally with Western social scientific and cultural theories concerning European industrial commodities and European labor. The representations of Kashmiri shawls in Europe and the United States cannot be understood independently of the representations of European-made imitations. Both the shawls and the artisans who made them were deployed as mirrors and foils for European products and workers.

Western European consumption began with the eighteenth-century importation of Kashmiri shawls with the characteristic teardrop-with-a-bent-tip design, which also appeared in similar Iranian (Persian) textiles. It became known as the “paisley” in the United States and Canada, and as the “pine,” the “cone,” and the “palme” or “palmette” in western Europe. A Kashmiri shawl with the design woven on the loom is known as the *kāni*, the *kanikar*, the “twill tapestry,” or the “brocade weaving” shawl (Keller 1996, 803; Reilly 1996, 10–11; for less Eurocentric views, see Ahad 1987; Chandra 1989; Chattopadhyay 1995).

British imperial rule in India, from its modest seventeenth-century coastal beginnings to its most dramatic early twentieth-century manifestations throughout the Subcontinent, was inextricably bound up with the international textile trade. The British East India Company (hereafter BEIC) monopolized the maritime transportation of Kashmiri shawls to Europe in the eighteenth century. The BEIC adopted a policy of supplying shawls similar to what they had already established for the seventeenth-century importation of Indian handloomed cloth called “chintz” (painted or hand printed cotton). The increased demand for nonwool cloth inspired the most famous examples of British manufacturers’ import substitutions: spinning cotton thread and weaving cotton cloth by machine. With the help of early eighteenth-century legal restrictions on the importation of Indian cotton textiles into England and the copying of Indian cloth-dying technology, British manufacturers invested some of the capital gained from their colonies to produce textiles that substituted for imported Indian cottons.

The long list of industrial innovations in yarn-spinning technology, including the flying shuttle, the spinning jenny, and the water-powered spinning mill—in combination with the roller printing machine, steam engines, and power looms—all enabled British manufacturers to supply their home market and to export machine-spun cotton yarn and machine-loomed cotton cloth to their colonies. When the British “cotton craze” for Indian printed hand-woven cottons waned, there was a wide range of British textiles
available which manufacturers had developed specifically for the home market. The BEIC had bowed to the demands of British manufacturers for economic protection while they developed these import substitutions for Indian textiles throughout this period, half a century before Kashmiri shawls first appeared around the shoulders of women in London (Schoeser and Rufey 1989, 29–30; Lyons 1996, 173; Mukherji 1983).

In eighteenth-century Great Britain, BEIC employees and other travelers brought home Kashmiri shawls as souvenirs and gifts for their relatives and friends. The social practices of women and men who had lived in India showed Britons how to wear the shawls (Irwin 1955, 19; 1973, 32; Shrimpton 1992, 67). Eurocentric accounts often have assumed that Kashmiri shawls only became fashionable through being displayed in Europe, claiming that fashion is a purely Western phenomenon. 18 Textile historians fixed a starting date for Kashmiri shawl fashion which reflected when English women wore these shawls in England, even though English women (and men) had worn such shawls earlier in India. The British who lived in India might adapt indigenous fabrics to European clothing styles, but fashion supposedly moved solely from England to India and never the reverse. One of the earliest mentions of an Englishwoman wearing a Kashmiri shawl in England occurred in a 1767 letter; consequently, Kashmiri shawl fashion was dated to the following decade (Irwin 1973, 32).

As in India and Iran, the desirability of Kashmiri shawls in Britain rested on people incorporating them into their “relations of consumption” (Howes 1996, 2). These gendered relations in the nineteenth century included conceptualizations of clothing fashion, the distribution [End Page 37] of financial resources for consumption, various gift-giving occasions, inheritance practices, and the like. The primary purchasers of Kashmiri shawls and shawl cloth in eighteenth-century Britain were probably men, since they most frequently controlled finances within affluent families that could afford Kashmiri shawls (Fine and Leopold 1990, 178). Many wealthy late-eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century men “wore robes and vests of exotic oriental cloth as well as shawls for lounging, sport and travel” (Rudzki 1986, n.p. [25–26]). Davidoff and Hall mention no Kashmiri shawls among the clothing worn by middle-class Birmingham English women in the late eighteenth century, but a young manufacturer took his first trip to London in a new “cashmere” waistcoat in the 1780s (1987, 410).

In nineteenth-century English writing, despite the evidence of contrary sartorial practices, Kashmiri shawls became coded as women’s luxuries. Elizabeth Gaskell’s 1849–50 novel, North and South, portrayed “Indian shawls and scarfs” as highly desired items for the English bourgeois trousseau (Gaskell 1986, 37; 299). Margaret, the heroine, modeled a Kashmiri shawl from her cousin’s trousseau early in the novel; Gaskell used the incident to
extol the “spicy Eastern smell,” the “soft feel” and the “brilliant color” of the shawl. Margaret’s tall figure “set off the long beautiful folds of the gorgeous shawl,” and, looking in a mirror, she smiled at her familiar features in the “unusual garb of a princess” (39). Gaskell later described Margaret’s attire when she met her future husband as completed by “a large Indian shawl which hung about her in heavy folds and which she wore as an empress wears her drapery” (99). Thus, for one popular nineteenth-century English novelist, Kashmiri shawls evoked both fairytale status and marriage for bourgeois women.

But Kashmiri shawls could mean more to individual women than luxurious wraps. As nineteenth-century British law and custom greatly limited women’s inheritance rights to real property, the ownership of Kashmiri shawls and other clothing items of exchange value could be of obvious importance. Nupur Chaudhuri observed that “aesthetic value aside, the Kashmir shawl was also considered to be an item of tangible wealth… [which was] regarded as a valued inheritance” (1992, 234). Even used shawls had considerable exchange value; Chaudhuri traced the largely noncash market for Kashmiri shawls through private letters, newspapers’ “exchange columns,” and “advertisements in women’s periodical literature” (232-33, 235). London’s Regent Street, the epicenter of wealthy women’s public consumption practices, catered to individual women’s differing economic situations through the India and British Shawl warehouse which advertised that they cleaned, exchanged, or purchased customers’ own shawls, as well as selling new ones (Adburgham 1989, 99; see also, Vickery 1993).

Napoleon and his officers brought Kashmiri shawls back from the 1798–1801 French Egyptian campaign, and Empress Josephine (1804–1809) started the fashion of wearing them in Paris. French consumers obtained shawls by way of the famous Russian fair at Nizhnnii Novgorod, as well as from resident agents in Istanbul and Moscow. Kashmiri shawls also arrived in France from Alexandria and Smyrna via Marseilles (Fitzpatrick 1990; Ames, 130). The Kashmiri shawl was a symbol of French bourgeois status from the Restoration (1815–8) through the Second Empire (1852–70). Middle-class French women “actively participated in the formation of the bourgeoisie as a class with tastes distinctive from aristocrats and workers,” and they did so primarily through spending their husbands’ incomes to obtain appropriate clothing and household furnishings. Kashmiri shawls and other goods used as class markers satisfied nineteenth-century bourgeois French taste because “they looked rich,” had “extensive ornamentation, artistic qualities,” and were made of “expensive raw materials” (Walton 1992, 53, 100, 225; Levi-Strauss 1988, 16-19; Auslander 1996 a). In 1866 Paris, the Grands Magasins du Louvre, “where elegant Parisians shopped,” sold “Indian cashmeres for up to 3,500 francs ‘and more’” (Keller, 810, #19).
Kashmiri shawls were favorite nineteenth-century wedding gifts in France as well as in Britain. Napoleon’s wedding gifts to Marie-Louise, his second wife, included seventeen Kashmiri shawls, and a painting of the guests at their 1810 wedding showed many of the women with “a cashmere shawl carefully folded over one arm” (Levi-Strauss 1988, 19). Wealthy Frenchmen often presented a “fine cashmere shawl… [as] part of la corbeille, the groom’s gifts to his bride; and this item was frequently the most valuable among the women’s clothing in the inventories [of household possessions]” (Walton, 99). Unmarried nineteenth-century French women, no matter how wealthy, were discouraged from wearing Kashmiri shawls, for to do so would “lead people to believe that they are possessed of an unbridled love of luxury and deprive themselves of the pleasure of receiving such finery from a husband” (1863 deportment manual cited by Perrot 1994, 100).

Euro-American women on the northeastern coast of the United States started to wear Kashmiri shawls about the same time that they became fashionable in Britain. When trade with the European empires was curtailed for the new country in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, American ships sought out new markets in Asia. Kashmiri shawls reached the United States in the 1780s and 1790s when ship captains bound for China and Turkey acquired them in various ports of call (Dow 1921, 114). Some still unknown but no doubt changing mixture of Iranian, Kashmiri, north Indian, and western European-made shawls, as well as shawls from China, were available in U.S. eastern cities during the first half of the nineteenth century (Leavitt 1972, 55; Harrington 1970, 4546; Bean 1990).

Shawl fashion in the United States, as characterized in popular nineteenth-century women’s magazines such as Godey’s Lady’s Book, published in Philadelphia, and Harper’s Bazaar, published in New York City, followed western European fashion trends. French shawls with imitation Kashmiri designs became widely available in the 1840s, and a decade later small-town stores commonly stocked embroidered shawls from “Thibet,” although it is impossible to know if this geographical designation referred to shawls from Kashmir or north India. An American advertisement in Godey’s Lady’s Book in 1860 listed the types and prices of Indian shawls obtained from the East India company in London. These ranged from the least expensive, a “Delhi scarf for the shoulders” at $15, to square shawls, “ladylike and desirable” from $50 to $250, and reached the most expensive, “long shawls” costing as much as $1200. Shawls served as “attractive holiday presents” throughout the 1860s, and “India shawls were still considered wise purchases” in 1870. They continued thereafter to be advertised at all price ranges, with a new emphasis on the bottom end, and “imitation shawls were starting to eclipse the genuine Indian” in these advertisements by the end of the 1870s. Good quality shawls were then
being tailored into “fitted jackets” or “men’s dressing gowns,” as well as used for “carriage robes” and “country clothes” (Harrington, 50–56, 71–79).

When the Great Exhibition celebrating British industrial productivity and imperial grandeur opened at London’s Crystal Palace in 1851, Kashmiri shawls and other colonial Indian “art-wares” received prominent display. Industrial exhibitions and world’s fairs in the second half of the nineteenth century intensified the interpenetration of the European and the Indo-Iranian trading networks, driven by the ever greater political and economic power of the imperial states to appropriate designs and technologies from their colonies and to facilitate their imitation by home manufacturers. Britain’s national policies became ever more closely connected to its imperial role in India during the second half of the nineteenth century, and Indian handicrafts as a whole had their most extensive display and consumption within Britain (MacKenzie 1995; Grewal 1996, 125-27 for “merchandising [End Page 40] the Orient”; for parallel trends and Iranian handicrafts, especially carpets, see Helfgott 1994). 19

Indian hand-woven textiles appealed to late-nineteenth-century British designers who perpetuated the omnivorous vogue for Continental European and English antiques (Wainwright 1989). Conventional philological scholarship and many popular writings maintained that India’s present represented a stage that Europe had gone through in its own past. Contemporary Indian handicrafts were thus living antiques, in the sense that they were products of a civilization that was itself considered antique. 20 It was but a short step from recuperating objects and designs from Europe’s historical past to promoting objects and designs from colonial India. Kashmiri shawls and many embroidered Indian goods became fashionable as “antique” household furnishings in the United States, France, and Britain during this period (Harrington, 81; Schoeser and Rufey, 107; Levi-Strauss 1988, 52).

In 1881, advertising copy for Liberty and Company (a British firm) transferred Kashmiri shawls from the dust bin of unfashionable clothing to this category of the antique. Its catalog of that year advertised “Indian embroidered table covers” and “Indian cashmere curtains... made like the old Indian shawls and embroidered all over.” The “Antique Embroideries” from India available at Liberty’s were “adjuncts of Eastern luxury and pageantry [and] priceless for adaptation in interior decorations.” The merchandising of the textiles stressed that they were “impossible to reproduce” and would soon be unavailable, since “[t]he whole East [was] being ransacked for [them].” The same Kashmiri shawls, or very similar ones, could have been sold at Liberty’s as fashionable clothing in 1865 or as home furnishings in the 1880s. This was not merely because of ineffective nineteenth-century methods of dating textiles. All Kashmiri shawls carried “romantic associations with the
‘mysterious and unchanging East,’” whatever nineteenth-century year they were removed from the loom (Irwin 1955, 14). 21 [End Page 41]

From the 1880s until World War I, wealthy European and Euro-American women learned to drape their Kashmiri shawls over their pianos instead of their own shoulders. This high period of “Indian style” for British home decoration was part of late-Victorian eclecticism. Even as the manufacturers of European machine-made textiles tried to improve their designs, the British design reform, the Aesthetic, and the Arts and Crafts movements all emphasized in one way or another differentiating between the machine-made and the hand-crafted. By the late nineteenth century, the overall influence of these movements had transformed the political economy of taste in Britain and the United States. Using Kashmiri shawls as curtains or furniture covers attracted consumers whose tastes had been educated to appreciate the aesthetic superiority of artisan-made textiles in contrast to the aesthetic inferiority of the machine-made (Greenhalgh 1997, 105). It was no coincidence that the hand embroidery on Kashmiri shawls seemed to have made them desirable for interior decoration at the same historical moment that machine-stitched embroidery replaced hand embroidery in British textile manufacturing (Parker 1989, 178).

Thus, Kashmiri shawls could be represented as quite different types of commodities, from wraps that made women look like princesses to draperies for the piano, depending upon the fashion of the moment. In the early nineteenth century, representations of Kashmiri shawls were independent of their mode of production because European imitative shawls were also hand-woven. Shawls from Kashmir were then valued for their lightweight warmth, their attractive exoticism, and the exceptional sensual pleasures of wearing them. European mass-produced textiles were never able to compete successfully with Kashmiri shawls as far as the sensual characteristics of the fabric were concerned, and they were far too expensive for all but the very well off. European-made shawls, however, did come to offer design distinction through the appropriation and modification of Kashmiri designs to suit European and Euro-American tastes, and this distinction was available at middle-range and inexpensive prices. Asian commodities like Kashmiri shawls became key objects for late-nineteenth-century aesthetic pronouncements by “taste professionals” who then preferred hand-crafted [End Page 42] textiles and other handicrafts in contrast to machine-made products of all kinds (see Auslander 1996 a for “taste professionals” in France and Greenhalgh 1997). Tracing the European development of an aesthetic taste for the hand-crafted instead of the machine-made requires separate treatment and can only be suggested here.
European Manufacture of Imitative Shawls

British and French textile manufacturers responded to the initial popularity of Kashmiri shawls by copying them. Britain had long produced woolen textiles, and the first successful manufacture of imitation Kashmiri shawls took place in established weaving centers. The textile merchants of Norwich had sold woolens to the BEIC since the seventeenth century, and imported Kashmiri shawls held “an instant appeal to the manufacturers of the city” because its weavers already possessed the expertise necessary to create lightweight fabrics woven of mixed yarns (Clabburn 1995, 10-14). British artisans experimented with various fiber blends to reproduce the softness and the warmth of the Kashmiri shawl cloth. The late-eighteenth-century Norwich imitation “Indian” shawls, made of “silk for strength in the warp and wool for the weft,” were plain weaves with patterns embroidered by young girls. One prominent Norwich manufacturer, P. J. Knights, produced his own “shawling,” “a plain off-white” weave with embroidered designs, which he sold both by the yard and, around 1800, as ready-made dresses in London. Knights eventually advertised shawls woven from cashmere yarn, “the same material from which the real Indian shawls are made,” in 1804 (cited in Clabburn, 14).

British attempts to fashion imitation Kashmiri shawls by importing either pashm [unwoven goat hair; “shawl wool”] or the animals that produced it were not very successful. As early as the 1660s, the BEIC, in competition with Dutch and French trading companies, had experimented with importing Persian shawl wool, which was felted as a substitute for beaver fur in men’s hats (Bradburd 1990, 34–40, 203 note 4). A century later, British adventurers attempted to obtain this raw material, or breed pairs of the animals that produced it, from Tibet or Central Asia, but the French were more successful in obtaining shawl wool. Abdul Ahad reported that French entrepreneurs also imported large quantities of used Indian and Iranian shawls which were taken apart and the pashm “recycled” in French shawl production (110). European manufacturers could never obtain enough of the highest-quality pashm that Kashmiri weavers used to produce their finest shawls, and European imitative fabrics were therefore never their equal in lightweight warmth and softness. 22

Norwich and Edinburgh started to manufacture replicas of Kashmiri shawls by the 1770s. Within Britain, weavers in Paisley came to dominate the production of imitations. In the 1820s and 1830s, Paisley’s products were known as “Thibet shawls,” and it was only after Paisley dominated the market in mid-century that British-made shawls with the “Indian pine” pattern began to be called “paisleys” (Rothstein 1994, 14). Paisley manufacturers obtained their success through “superior powers of organisation,” the “loyalty of the workforce,” underpaying weavers, pirating
designs, and “above all... mass production,” including the use of the new Jacquard loom from France (Reilly, 17, 34, 72–79). 23

American corporations started manufacturing shawls using handlooms in the Middle Atlantic states in the early nineteenth century, but mechanized production quickly followed in Lowell and Lawrence, Massachusetts. The Lawrence “Bay State shawls, composed of a medium-grade American wool and woven in a simple plaid design, quickly became best sellers.” Shawls from the Bay State Mills and “cashmeres” produced by the Vasselborough Manufacturing Company in Maine were sent to the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, where they were largely ignored, in part due to their inferior quality and in part because of the accolades heaped on French cashmeres. Late-nineteenth-century U.S. production included woven, printed, and embroidered shawls, as well as books with knitting instructions for women to make their own (Leavitt, 55--58).

French designs and French production came to dominate the shawl trade in western Europe and the United States before the middle of the nineteenth century. A Kashmiri story linked the genealogy of French shawls to Sayyid Yahya, “a blind [Kashmiri] man,” who visited Egypt in 1796 and presented the “Khedive of Egypt” with “the” shawl that Napoleon eventually took back to France (Khandy 1986, 110 note 24). French shawl manufacturers quickly developed imitations, spurred on when Napoleon’s 1806 continental system interfered with French purchases of Kashmiri shawls brought to Europe by British ships (Ames, 136–45). French manufacturers were able to obtain raw material from Iran, and French shawls woven with pure cashmere warp and weft, called “French Kashmir shawls,” appeared in 1816. Two years later the first designs woven on Jacquard looms followed, and, in 1819, a French manufacturer created the “harlequin shawl,” a distinctly French variation on Kashmiri design. Popular in the 1820s, this shawl had multi-colored compartments on each end which contrasted with the enclosed buta design. The invention of the Jacquard loom in France changed the design possibilities for European shawl production, and the application of power to Jacquard looms by the 1870s greatly increased the number of shawls that could be produced (Ames, 359; Levi-Strauss 1988, 23–28; Schoeser and Rufey, 104).

The European and American popularity of French shawl designs followed and confirmed France’s established reputation for fashion innovation and design leadership. French shawl designers were determined to impress their own taste on European-made shawls from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Some early French critics characterized the original Kashmiri shawl ornamentation as “bizarre and muddled” rather than beautiful. French designers tried “to bring about the demise of the fantastical decorative schemes of Oriental shawls” for over half a century, but “they failed to convince women that Europe could outdo the East in artistry” (Levi-Strauss...
Nevertheless, experimentation with the Kashmiri buta design and the invention of new kinds of machinery to weave elaborate European variations combined to produce a wide variety of commercially successful shawls. By the 1820s, distinctly French shawl designs vied for prizes at national industrial exhibitions, and French shawl manufacturers had started to export shawls, with a few supposedly sold in Asia. Individual designers such as Amedee Couder (1797–1865) started creating shawl patterns in the 1830s and became famous for using “Persian” style and “as many motifs reminiscent of the East as possible.” 

In the 1840s, “British manufacturers were imitating the French imitations of the Kashmiri shawls” (Reilly, 17). American shawl designs and fabrics followed European innovations and, by mid-century, shawls with French designs were the most popular ones sold in the United States (Godey’s Lady’s Book 1863). French shawl designs were also commonly woven by artisans working in Kashmir, so that French designs inspired a large proportion of all nineteenth-century Kashmiri and Kashmiri-imitation shawls (Karpinski 1963).

French design success inspired British attempts to improve their national art education to create superior industrial designers. A British Parliamentary Committee convened in 1835 to evaluate the “aesthetic quality” of English industrial products as a whole, and concluded that they were “inferior to those produced on the [European] Continent” (Mitter 1992, 223). Spokespeople for the subsequent design reform movement sought to teach British artisans principles of design that would beautify utilitarian objects, and the 1851 Great Exhibition in London was intended to display British industrial products in a space shared with other European, American, and colonial-world products, both to facilitate comparison and to provide instruction.

Kashmiri design with its characteristic buta motif was either extolled or denigrated depending upon the standpoint of a particular critic, but observers of all persuasions saw many Kashmiri shawls at the Crystal Palace. One British critic who opposed design reform reacted to the Indian non-illusionist design on display in 1851 by criticizing “European designers for their slavish imitation of Indian shawls. Instead of copying ‘the crude patterns of the hereditary weavers of the East,’ the educated and skilled weavers of the West could produce far better patterns if they did not spend much of their time making ‘spurious Cashmeres’” (Mitter quoting Ralph Wornum, 225). The French economist L. Blanqui offered his highest praise to the Great Exhibition’s Indian collection when he claimed, “There is truly an Indian art which has the same distinction as French art and moreover an originality often elegant and of good taste… Indians are the French of the East…” (cited in Mitter, 226; for the overall French experience at the Crystal Palace, see Walton).

The Great Exhibition enhanced an ideological link between the critique of Western industrial products based on poor design, and the...
The celebration of Indian hand-crafted products because of their supposedly appropriate style of ornament. Henry Cole, who led the movement to teach “practical art” in Britain, believed that “industrial design was different from pictorial art and should be concerned with natural forms in outline and with their flat ornament,” while design reform opponents argued that “it was essential to imitate nature in design” (Mitter, 224–25). Cole showcased Indian textiles and other handicrafts because he believed Indian textiles served as examples of design principles that reformers wished to promote. His position at the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert Museum) made it the privileged repository of textile samples for industrial design. The museum staff’s commitment to developing the collections primarily to benefit British designers and manufacturers and to make them as competitive as possible in world markets was always clear (Skelton 1978; Barringer and Flynn 1998).

Western businesses sometimes purchased Kashmiri shawls to copy their designs, but more often simply pirated both plans and production technology for European-made shawls. French counterfeit shawls, hand-woven of *pashm* by orphan girls using a loom “of the Indian type” and using a weaving technique very similar to the Kashmiri, were sold at the Exposition of 1823 “daily as Indian ones without any suspicion they were made in France” and “[i]n spite of their cost” (Hericart de Thury 1823, cited in Ames, 138–42). Rather than claim their shawls were produced in Kashmir, some manufacturers blatantly misrepresented their products, naming local fabrics “cashmere” or “thibet” to suggest that they were imported. French printed shawls on both cotton and wool from the Alsace region “were perfect imitations of the woven paisleys” (Keller, 802–806). “Artists designing for Alsatian printworks... used ‘hatchings and parallel lines’ to achieve virtuoso trompe d’oeil effects imitating woven patterns” (807). Both British and French firms experimented with systems of design copyrights, but European manufacturers were generally as willing to pirate designs from each other as they were from Asia.

In this business environment, a late-nineteenth-century Western European preoccupation with product “authenticity” was directly linked to pragmatic economic considerations. With so many marketing efforts to mislead the unwary and with astronomical prices charged for shawls made in Kashmir, the verification of Kashmiri shawl “authenticity” became ever more acute for wealthy consumers. Generally speaking, imperial British ideas about “pure” design and cultural “authenticity” had developed from the Continental study of folklore and folk life (Bendix 1997). Authentic South Asian designs and art wares were supposedly those which were most distinct and therefore least contaminated by European design influence. The racial and cultural assumptions of these theories will be taken up in the fifth section.
Disruptions of the Kashmiri Shawl Trade

According to conventional narratives about Kashmiri shawls, the late-nineteenth-century disruption of the Kashmiri shawl business in colonial India was caused primarily by the “vagaries of fashion” in Europe (MacKenzie, 115). European textile historians date the end of the Kashmiri shawl “fashion cycle” to the 1870s and attribute it variously to the economic disruption of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the beginning of the “fashion cycle” for women’s dresses with bustles, or overexposure of the “Indian pine” [buta] design. I argue below that the dramatic downturn of the Kashmiri shawl industry in the 1870s was as much due to long-term imperial policies that both reduced elite resources to purchase luxury textiles and helped British and indigenous merchants supply British manufactured goods to compete with local textiles, as it was due to short-term decreased demand.

Affluent French women, who had been early and enthusiastic converts to wearing Kashmiri shawls, were major Western consumers until 1870, when the Franco-Prussian War began. When the consumers of couture fashion in Paris ceased buying shawls around 1870, not everyone started a new fashion cycle. For example, Alice Mackrell argued it was primarily the “Paisley shawl,” the imitation Kashmiri shawls manufactured in Scotland, that went out of fashion in Britain. Shawls from northern India, northern Africa, and China maintained their popularity throughout the 1870s, “the vogue for the originals [from Kashmir] returned in the 1880s,” and “Indian shawls were alive and well in the early twentieth century,” complete with “the immortal cone [buta] design” (1986, 72). Shawls continued to be worn by some women who did not adopt the latest fashion, and were also sold in department stores as soft furnishings for interior decoration. Liberty’s of London was still advertising Kashmiri shawls in 1887 at prices that ranged from £30 to £500 (Adburgham 1975, 58).

The nineteenth-century British drive for military and political dominance in the Subcontinent reduced the large eighteenth-century Indo-Iranian market for Kashmiri shawls in two important ways. First, the British eliminated a number of Native States and curtailed the expenditures of many others, thereby limiting the resources of the major consumption centers for Kashmiri shawls. British economic pressures on the regimes of the Ottoman Empire and the Qajar Iranian court likewise diminished their demand for Kashmiri shawls and other luxury goods. By the late nineteenth century, Russo-British imperial and commercial rivalry in Iran and the Russian conquest of Central Asia further disrupted the demand for Kashmiri shawls in both of these areas (Ray 1995, 471; Ahad, 108–10; Entner 1965).

The second way that the British constricted the Indo-Iranian markets for shawls was through the overall restructuring of trade. C. A. Bayly argued that British
policies in India should be seen as part of a “world crisis” between 1780 and 1820 in which “the population of large parts of the world… was faced with a sharp realignment of trade… at the very time that the demands of the state through taxation and extraordinary requisitions was at its height” (1989, 187). As part of this reorganization, the British facilitated Indian exports of grains and other agricultural produce like opium and cotton. British agency houses working in conjunction with local merchant groups also dampened the demand for indigenous textiles when they moved British machine-made goods further and further along local trade networks in the 1820s.

British political relations with Kashmir reflected these imperial goals. Even when Kashmiri shawls were considered high fashion in Europe, British Indian officials declined the opportunity to control the home of Kashmiri shawl production. In 1846, the colonial government’s troops defeated Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s successors in the northwest. [End Page 49] but, instead of annexing Kashmir outright, the British apportioned it to a local ruler, Gulab Singh of Jammu, in return for a token annual tribute of shawls and shawl fleece-bearing animals. The Governor-General of India, Lord Hardinge, did attempt to amend an 1842 treaty between China and the Sikhs which had stipulated that Kashmir would continue to have a monopoly on the trade in Tibetan and Ladakhi shawl wool. Hardinge wanted to abrogate this trade agreement to make it easier for the rival Kashmiri-type shawl production centers in British India to obtain the raw material for shawls, but he was unsuccessful. In any case, the British home government was focused on the promotion of British textiles in competition with all Subcontinental ones. Queen Victoria was rumored to give the Kashmiri shawls she received annually as tribute to her ladies-in-waiting and she appeared publicly in Paisley-made shawls (Blair 1904, 26; Irwin 1973, 24; Datta, 25). The British purchased some Kashmiri shawls for diplomatic gifts, but they never replaced the patronage extended to Kashmiri weavers by indigenous rulers. 28 Maharaja Ranjit Singh made use of Kashmiri handloomed shawls as enthusiastically as had the Mughals in former centuries, but British officials patronized British manufacturers instead, both as a matter of colonial policy and because of their Eurocentric tastes (Siddiqi 1995, 52, 54; Bayly 1992, 279-80).

At least as important for the Asian trade in Kashmiri shawls were the problems on the supply side. Epidemics, famines (famously in 1834), and internal political problems caused Kashmiri weavers to migrate south to Punjab, where they found it more difficult to obtain their raw materials. The supply of shawl wool to Kashmir itself became constricted due to its diversion to the British-protected Kashmiri-type [End Page 50] shawl production centers in the Punjab hills near Jammu and in Punjabi cities on the plains. Shawl imports into the British territories drastically declined in the mid-1830s “and in 1836, the Hardwar Fair, which was essentially a great shawl market, failed for the first time on record” (Bayly 1992, 279-80).
Political uncertainties in Afghanistan, Iran, Central Asia, and Nepal made the shawl export trade less profitable in the 1830s, coincident with conditions within Kashmir that diminished the supply of shawls. Thus, well before the 1870s, political and economic changes in colonial India and Kashmir altered adversely the production of Kashmiri shawls.

The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 depressed the European demand for Kashmiri shawls, but the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir greatly increased his own shawl purchases to shore up demand in the short run. The decade of the 1870s was “the nadir” of the Kashmiri shawl industry, as lessened European demand was followed by the 1878–79 famine, which drove many shawl weavers out of the state (Bates 1980 [1873], 59). However, the original decline in the production of woven shawl patterns had started a century earlier. Changes in production from shawls with woven patterns, the famous kani shawls, to those with embroidered patterns, amli shawls, had several causes. These included the high taxes on kani shawls levied by successive conquerors, a scarcity of raw materials due to epidemics among the shawl-wool goats, and the unsettled political and economic circumstances in colonial India, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The diminished European demand “merely accelerated decline which was already in place” (Ahad, 103–11).

The demand for Kashmiri shawls among Indians living in British-controlled territories decreased during the nineteenth century, but it did not cease altogether, and the shawls regained some of their popularity in the early twentieth century. They were among the Subcontinental manufactured goods “previously gifted or bartered” which had become commodities within India by the latter part of the nineteenth century (Roy 1999, 4). While some aristocratic Indians continued to purchase and wear foreign-made cloth and clothing as they had in the nineteenth century, other wealthy consumers were inspired by Indian nationalists to return to indigenous styles and fabrics. Ritu Kumar’s textile history of “royal” India (1999) provides sumptuous photographs of aristocratic fabric collections from the nineteenth century, which include shawls for both genders, as well as men’s coats, turbans, and robes of honor (khil’at), along with women’s saris, head scarves, and shirts (kurta or phiren), all made of shawl cloth. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who had worn Indian-made fabrics and Kashmiri shawls while working for India’s independence, assisted handicraft revivalists in their efforts to support indigenous weaving and embroidery traditions after 1947 (for nationalist clothing styles and the swadeshi movement, see Ahad, Chattopadhyay, and Tarlo 1996). However, much research remains to be done to gain a nuanced understanding of South Asian textile consumption, which will in turn enable scholars to counter Eurocentric stereotypes about fashion and consumption.
Thus, a constellation of imperial, political, and economic events systematically helped shrink Asian markets for Kashmiri shawls in the nineteenth century. British policies within the Muslim Empires of Eurasia diminished demand by eliminating many indigenous rulers, and limiting the financial resources of others. After 1858, when the British Crown took over direct rule of colonial India, government officials continued to intensify their promotion of British manufactured products in substitution for the manufactures of the Subcontinent. The nationalist movement, however, worked to reverse this trend and to promote indigenous textiles of all kinds in the early twentieth century. Independent India and Pakistan both claimed Kashmiri shawls as their indigenous commodities and promoted their sale in Europe and the United States in the second half of the twentieth century.

Representations of Kashmiri Shawl Weavers

Nineteenth-century British anthropologists and folklorists claimed intellectual and cultural authority over the peoples and handicrafts of colonial India, including the right to use Eurocentric norms to judge their designs and production methods as “authentic.” Colonial rhetoric abstractly “legitimize[d] or delegitimize[d] actual people and communities” at the same time that workers served as “a merchandising device in the marketplace” for their own handicrafts (Root 1996, 78–81; Maskiell 1999). European consumers of Indian textiles could observe production of Kashmiri shawls and other South Asian textiles already selected as authentic at European and American world’s fairs and industrial exhibitions (Hoffenberg 1993, 50–54). Furthermore, the new European department stores pioneered lavish merchandise displays which emphasized the authenticity of their Indian commodities. For example, in 1885 Liberty’s of London showcased Indian textiles by creating an Indian village at the Albert Palace in Battersea Park, complete with a “contingent of Indian natives” to display their skills as “silk spinners, saree weavers, Bigaupoor carpet weavers, embroiderers, inlaid box makers, furniture carvers, Poonah figure makers and dressers, [and] beetle wing embroiderers.” These “natives” were accompanied by other craftsmen and “entertainers,” including “a dancing boy, a snake charmer and juggler, a singing and dancing master, knife juggler, dancing girls [and] acrobats” (Adburgham 1975, 60). Although this Indian village apparently was the only exhibition for which the firm imported people as well as arts and crafts, the shop specialized in creating other spectacular displays for charity bazaars, fancy balls, and art exhibitions, including one with “a complete Japanese house” (61). Thus, the authenticity of Liberty’s merchandise was supposedly guaranteed through the expensive, elaborate, and exotic settings prepared to showcase their wares.
The spectacle of Asian workers handcrafting their wares in Europe helped position them as “mirroring and foiling figure[s]” for European industrial workers (Mehaffy 1997, 141). Nineteenth-century European theories of labor deployed a largely hypothetical “Asiatic mode of production” as a defining contrast for European capitalist labor organization. Theories about an Asiatic mode of production, including though not limited to those of Karl Marx, based the concept squarely on widely accepted beliefs in geographical determinism and differing racial productive capacities (Bailey and Llobera 1981; Blaut 1996; Lewis and Wigen 1997). The ideology of European racial superiority underpinned eighteenth- and nineteenth-century explanations of industrialization as evidence of European exceptionalism. This remained true whether Karl Marx lauded nineteenth-century industrial workers for their revolutionary potential or William Morris (1834–96) exhorted them to reintegrate art into their daily lives.

British textile historian John Irwin (1955, 1973) provided a good example of how race remained an implicit category of explanation for handicraft production within Eurocentric representations of shawl [End Page 53] weavers as late as the 1970s. Irwin juxtaposed Western European and Kashmiri weavers in a manner that represented the Europeans as the technological innovators, even though the Europeans fundamentally imitated both Kashmiri shawl designs and weaving. The Kashmiris supposedly wove within an authentic, if static, tradition, but one that had degenerated under European influence. When Europeans altered shawl production, Irwin celebrated the changes as progress. But when Kashmiri weavers changed their methods of production, their innovations were interpreted as proof of the paradigmatic degeneration within colonial arts and crafts (see Coombes 1994, 43–62 for the “degenerationist thesis,” a “system for aesthetically evaluating material culture from the colonies,” 48).

In Irwin’s account, the potency of European designs was another manifestation of the inherent control which European fashion demand exercised over Kashmiri shawl manufacturing, a power that supposedly determined the “fall” of Kashmiri shawl production in the 1870s as well as the longer term aesthetic degeneration of Kashmiri design. Irwin depicted European workers as being able to manipulate Kashmiri designs without being affected themselves and without having Kashmiri design influence threaten European artistic traditions. European designers and weavers could successfully appropriate and modify Kashmiri designs which explicitly demonstrated European creativity and skills. By contrast, Irwin represented nineteenth-century Kashmiri weavers’ own creative traditions as being overwhelmed by European, especially French, design influences. Irwin’s sources included Victorians such as Sir George Birdwood, who was very influential in collecting and displaying colonial Indian arts and crafts in
Europe. Birdwood was an adamant proponent of the superiority of European individual artistic genius; he also popularized the notion that all Indian artisans created products in the second half of the nineteenth century which demonstrated the degeneration of “native” taste and craft techniques [End Page 54] resulting from European design influences (Birdwood 1880; see Ahad for Kashmiri technological innovations).

Kashmiri weavers responded to information about design preferences in Europe by producing shawls in accordance with them because they were long accustomed to weaving in response to consumer preferences, not because their “authentic” traditions were overwhelmed. Kashmiri shawls were produced by highly specialized weavers; they were never meant to be a standardized product for a mass market. As Maureen Fennell Mazzaoui argues, the handicraft producers who used sophisticated technologies to weave luxury textiles made of goat hair relied on a “high level of product differentiation” to be competitive in Asian markets (1998, xli–xlv). In addition to many varieties of shawls, weavers in the 1820s produced turban lengths, blankets, sashes, “gown-pieces,” shawl carpets, trousers, netted cloth, caps, short and long stockings, curtains, saddle cloths, elephant “housing,” quilts, coverlets, cravats, neckerchiefs, belts, linings, leggings, waist strings [izarband, to hold up pajamas], pillow covers, purses, shrouds, and wall hangings. Each type of merchandise was targeted to a particular geographical location including countries (Afghanistan, colonial India, Tibet, Iran, Russia, Armenia, Turkey, Arabia) and cities (Kabul, Istanbul, Bokhara, Baghdad) that were also nodes in long-distance trading networks. At least some of the commodities described as destined for Turkistan and Yarkand traveled on to China. Weavers also produced “plain” shawl goods for “domestic use” in Kashmir (Moorcroft cited in Irwin 1973, appendix 1).

The Western European gendering of employment skills as primarily either feminine or masculine intersected with racist colonial labor discourse in the representations of Kashmiri shawl weavers. Male refugars (“repairers” or “darners”) used embroidery to embellish Kashmiri shawls from at least the late sixteenth century, but it was the woven designs created through the very time-consuming, kani (woven twill tapestry) weaving technique that initially reached Europe and later impressed twentieth-century European and Euro-American connoisseurs (Chandra, 65–67). Eighteenth-century kani shawls contained a minor amount of embroidery, but several nineteenth-century production changes led to new types of shawls in which needlework became much more important. In the “patchwork” or “pieced” twill tapestry shawls, artisans joined many small woven pieces by intricate needlework (Beardsley 1988). Artisans also embroidered the previously woven designs of a kani shawl onto plain-weave pashmina, creating amlikari or amli shawls. European textile historians interpreted these changes in [End Page 55] production as the
opposite of progressive technical innovations, partially because they equated embroidery with nineteenth-century women’s and children’s low-skilled labor. When British manufacturers first attempted to produce imitation shawls at the end of the eighteenth century, they hired impoverished women and children to hand-embroider (or “darn”) designs on them. Joseph Clover sentimentalized this work in his 1815 painting, *The Little Norwich-Shawl Worker*, which portrayed a pretty child employing a needle. The British replacement of supposedly low-skilled (female and child) embroiderers by supposedly highly skilled (male) weavers fit Eurocentric notions of “progress,” whereas the Kashmiri changes in production were judged to be just the opposite.

Nineteenth-century British common representations of Kashmiri shawl weavers focused on the exoticism of their surroundings and emphasized the supposedly changeless nature of their technology. An 1852 article entitled “Shawls” from *Household Words*, Charles Dickens’ popular British magazine, gave assumedly entertaining misinformation about Kashmiri weavers while giving a detailed description of shawl production at Paisley. The anonymous author (Dickens?) concluded, “[it] seems a pity that… the solemn, patient Hindoo, should not come to Paisley and see how shawls are made there. To [him]… throwing his antique shuttle under the palm, how strange would be the noise, and the stench, and the speed, and the numbers employed, and the amount of production!” (11). British specialists on colonial India in the 1850s would have deplored the author’s misidentification of the Muslim Kashmiri weavers as “Hindoo,” since religious differentiation was at the heart of British official attempts to understand and to control colonial peoples in India. They might well have laughed at the idea of palm trees, found in south and east India, shading a shawl weaver in northern Kashmir. But they would have likely concurred with the description of the Kashmiri weaver as a “simple and patient Oriental” who was “not very likely” to “come up to our methods of production” (11). The details might differ and be more or less ethnographically correct in nineteenth-century positivist terms when colonial officials described Indian labor practices, but the contrast between Western European and “Hindoo” workers was as much an intellectual construct and matter of faith for colonial bureaucrats as it was for the 1852 British author (for colonial officials’ general view of Indian labor, see Chandavarkar 1998).

Modernization theories of the 1950s and 1960s sustained the denigration of Kashmiri shawl workers as thoroughly as had the imperial chauvinism of a century earlier. Thomas Leavitt, for example, deployed nineteenth-century contrasts between handloom production and “an efficient, thoroughly integrated factory system,” along with an unproblematized assumption of differing production costs, to narrate his 1970s history of Kashmiri shawls
and their European imitations. Leavitt positioned Kashmiri shawl weavers as artisans using an outmoded craft process in contrast to European manufacturers and industrial workers who were the agents of modernity. When the Kashmiri shawl “was introduced to Europe,” Leavitt maintains, it “was a costly, provincial product manufactured inefficiently and laboriously according to primitive design standards. A century later, when its popularity was at its peak, the shawl had become an international commodity, whose price was so low that every labouror’s wife could afford to own one… [and it incorporated] designs of both East and West” (62). European and American “paisleys” thus represented “democratic” fashion, because the low prices meant that many women could buy shawls with desirable patterns (Goodman 1985). European and American manufacturers did excel at making imitations of the Kashmiri designs on cheaper and cheaper fabrics, and did move from the late-eighteenth-century practice of weaving shawls using various fiber mixtures and imitative designs to the mid-nineteenth-century practice of printing Europeanized shawl designs on cotton cloth, which lowered their retail price. However, Leavitt’s suggestion that the differing costs of Kashmiri shawls and their European imitations were due primarily to differing modes of production ignores the important fact that the prices charged for Kashmiri shawls in Western Europe and America also reflected the British, French, and United States governments’ economic policies expressed through varying import duties and currency exchange rates.

All of these representations of Kashmiri shawl weavers resonate with the overtones of nineteenth-century social scientific theories about labor. Reconsidering the nineteenth-century representations of Kashmiri shawls and Kashmiri weavers and the more recent scholarship built on them is a necessary first step to eliminating the racist and sexist assumptions that continue to plague twenty-first-century analyses of both the evolution of design and the historical meanings of industrialization for the lives of global workers. As long as Western art historians continue to use the nineteenth-century categorizations of textile art and artisans as self-evident descriptions rather than as Eurocentric evaluations, it will be impossible to broaden the historical narratives about Kashmiri shawls and other specialized hand-woven textiles to construct a more accurate and a true world perspective. Similarly, when economic historians consider further the extent to which nineteenth-century race and gender stereotypes underpinned their inherited theories about labor, it will be possible to move beyond the valuable insights based on class and economic structure.
Conclusion

European and American textile historians constructed a “rise and fall” narrative about Kashmiri shawls in which both their production and their consumption were supposedly driven by European fashion demands and design trends. This narrative overestimated the importance of European consumption, and underestimated the importance of colonialism for the shawls’ procurement and the appropriation of their characteristic design. I argue instead that political and economic conditions in Kashmir and Asia were critical for Kashmiri shawl production, and that European fashion was only one of the demand factors relevant for nineteenth-century changes.

Anglophone economic historians have superimposed the history of European imitation textiles imagined as “industrial progress” over the history of Kashmiri production imagined as the “traditional” defeated by the “modern.” The same nineteenth-century European assumptions of geographical determinism, racial hierarchy, and gender essentialism underpinned the seemingly disparate narratives about the designs of Asian manufactured commodities in art history and the theories about an “Asiatic mode of production” in labor history. The continuing strength of these assumptions is demonstrated by the contemporary marketing in 2001 of pashmina (“goat hair”) shawls using the recycled tropes of exoticism and fantasy ethnography crafted during the heyday of British colonialism. Recognition of the persistence of these cyclical patterns may help to interrupt the commercial slippage that still allows South Asian commodities to be merchandised through the commodification of the global citizens who make them.

Notes

1. In the text, “Kashmiri shawls” always refers to textiles woven in Kashmir; “Kashmiri-type shawls” refers to shawls woven in colonial India by migrant Kashmiri weavers; and “imitation-Kashmiri shawls” refers to British and French shawls woven “in imitation of the Indian” (Clabburn 1990).

2. Kashmir was often spelled “Cashmere” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was a “native state” within the British Raj, 1858-1947, which meant that it was ruled by the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir under Britain’s ultimate imperial control. In 1947, Kashmir was caught in a territorial tug-of-war between the two newly independent states of India and Pakistan. Unfortunately for Kashmiris, both countries have tried to establish territorial control through violence in the late twentieth century, continuing a centuries-long pattern of political strife which devastates the land and the people who live there. Both countries claimed to be the heirs
of Kashmir’s rich textile traditions after 1947, and both governments promoted the export of Kashmiri shawls after Independence (Riazuddin 1988; Chattopadhyay 1995; Bamzai 1987).

3. All the books in the bibliography mention one or more of these uses but see especially Ahad 1987, Alder 1985, Goswamy 1993, Irwin 1955, Kalter 1983, Scarce 1988/89, and Veinstein 1999. For illustrations, see Ames 1997 and Kumar 1999.

4. The Vermont Country Store mail order catalog still sells “Cashmere Bouquet,” and claims that the talcum powder was first sold in the 1870s. Over time, repeated European and Euro-American usage disassociated the word “cashmere” from its geographical origin and may have weakened its link to the “exotic.” China and Mongolia have become geographical references for cashmere sweaters in thirty-eight U.S. mail order catalogs such as Lands’ End.


6. The plain-weave pashmina shawls currently in the marketplace are quite distinct from the intricately woven Kashmiri shawls sold in the late eighteenth century, but the raw material for both types of shawls is the same. William Safire’s “On Language” in the January 16, 2000, New York Times discussed the “advertising trick” of renaming cashmere to make it sound more exclusive under the title “Pulling soft wool over your eyes” (Magazine, 41). According to the December 6, 1999 issue of Newsweek, pashmina shawls are not made from hair specially “culled from the necks and bellies of Himalayan goats.” A U.S. scientific study compared “cashmere” fibers to “pashmina” fibers and they looked “exactly” alike under the microscope. Furthermore, the blending of silk with cashmere makes the current shawls “lighter” in weight, but should also make them cheaper as they have less cashmere (76–77).


9. Ladakh is a remote district of Jammu and Kashmir state in India, and is politically separate from Tibet. Its capital is at Leh and it lies to the east of the valley of Kashmir. Trade caravans that passed through Ladakh
historically brought tea, shawls, wool, and borax to northwestern India and took opium, saffron, and fabrics to China (Ahad 1987, 18 and 24, note 8; Bamzai 1980, 38; Frank 1998).

10. Munshi Mohan Lal, one of the host of Indians who enabled British explorers to travel inland, recorded in 1832 that the merchant Mulla Rahim Shah from Kabul took Rs. 17,000 worth of Kashmiri shawls overland “to Bokhara and onwards to… Moscow, where he realized Rs. 34,000 for his shawls” (Munshi Mohan Lal, *Journal of a Tour through the Punjab, Afghanistan, Turkistan, Khorasan, and Port of Persia in Company with Lieut. Burnes and Dr. Gerard* [1834] cited in Ray 1995, 473). In 1832, the British East India Company Board of Control sent Burnes to Central Asia to investigate the possibility of British commerce to counter a possible Russian threat to India. William Moorcroft had written a warning in 1822 that trade with Russia via Turkestan was increasing. According to C. Karpinski (1963), “Russia imported more than two million rubles worth of Turkish and Kashmir shawls in 1825–1826” (120). Karpinski gave no reference for this figure.

11. Although Mughal-era garments are very rare, Goswamy (1993) provides examples of more recent garments stitched from shawl cloth that can give an idea of the possibilities for khil’at exchange. See the illustrations of *chogas* on pages 95, 97, 100, and 101, and Kumar 1999.

12. Many portrayals of shawls and clothing made from shawl cloth survive in paintings of the Qajar, Mughal, and other southern Asian dynasties (Bier 1987; Mikosch 1985; Scarce 1988/89).

13. The Hungarian artist August Schoeft (1809-1888) painted a record of these textiles in his large canvas, *The Court of Lahore*, which has been exhaustively analyzed by Aijazuddin (1979).

14. For the similarities and differences between Iranian textiles and Kashmiri ones, see Beardsly (1988) and Scarce (1988/89). For 1990s Iran, see Bradburd 1990.

15. For a contemporary description of *kani* shawls, see Harris 1991 and 1997. According to an early twentieth-century British account cited by Ahad, three weavers “worked jointly to weave [a] two threads [type] *kani*-shawl on a ‘foot’ type loom” [draw loom; see note 23 below]. The colored design was woven in by employing spools of colored thread [*tuji*s] in place of a shuttle. The *tuji*s were “eyeless needles with sharp edges and their number varied depending upon the simplicity or complexity of the pattern.” Ahad cites Moorcroft’s estimates that “[a]bout 400 *tuji*s were required for a shawl of an ordinary pattern while a complex design needed 1500” (32). Three weavers spent three months completing a shawl of an ordinary pattern, while a complex pattern required about eighteen months.
16. The BEIC was first known as the English East India Company when it received its charter in 1600. Its stated intention was to sell English woolen cloth in Asia and to obtain spices for the home market, but it was unable to establish markets in China and Japan where the weather might have helped sell English broadcloth. Its merchants soon learned that Indian cotton and silk textiles were the long-established commodities of Asian trade in the “Spice Islands” [contemporary Maluku in eastern Indonesia] (all paraphrased from Guy 1998, 14). The English East India Company agents developed their seventeenth-century trade in Indian textiles within several distinct markets, and the company was known as the British East India Company after 1707.

17. The Company supplied Indian chintz to London both as fabric lengths and as stitched clothes (Lemire 1991, 10-13, 15, 180; K N. Chaudhuri 1978, 277). The seventeenth-century craze for Indian handprinted cottons was associated with both a quantitative increase in the use of fabric for home decoration, such as “hangings and curtains” (Clabburn 1995, 6), as well as with new clothing styles. Meanwhile, the BEIC continued to ship handloomed cotton cloth from India for a profitable re-export trade with the British colonies in North America and elsewhere. The classic reference is Irwin and Schwartz 1966.

18. For the arguments that fashion is a western/capitalist phenomenon, see Fred Davis 1992, 16 note 8, 17, 105; Lipovetsky 1994, 242; Shrimpton 1996. For the critique of this “colonizer’s model of the world,” see Blaut 1992. The popular conception of the “unchanging East” had many nineteenth-century ramifications. As late as the 1860s, some British manufacturers were eager to market cloth in India because they apparently believed that “change in material and style did not exist as such, favourite patterns had been constant for centuries, [and] fashion did not have to be contended with” (Lyons 1996, 182).

19. The collection and display of colonial Indian manufactures in Victorian-era exhibitions and museums was an important way in which British imperialism claimed its authority over information about India (Breckenridge 1989). The men associated with London’s South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert), such as Henry Cole and George Birdwood, obtained Indian textiles for the collection directly from the 1851 Exhibition (Barringer and Flynn, eds. 1998).

20. Indian handicrafts were considered to be living antiques in the same sense that native American handicrafts were in the U.S.; both sets of “traditions” were supposedly facing extinction through the pressure of Euro-American commodification (Cohodas 1997).
21. Liberty’s 1881 catalog, microfiche, Victoria and Albert Museum Fine Arts Library, London. In 1975, the Victoria and Albert Museum mounted a retrospective of the fabrics, clothing, and household goods sold by Liberty & Co. from 1875 to 1975. According to the exhibit’s catalog, the handloomed textiles sold at Liberty & Co.’s Eastern Bazaar in 1889 included: “shawls from Delhi, Dacca, Amritsar and Kashmir, printed muslins, palampores [hangings or bed covers], tussore silks (imported as plain piece goods for dyeing and printing in Europe), and embroideries ‘Hindu, Mogul and savage.’” Liberty’s 1875–1975.

22. For Moorcroft’s pioneering efforts to obtain goat hair to weave shawls, see Alder 1985. The European supply of goat hair came mostly from Iran, with the British supply shipped via the Indian port of Surat. See Bradburd 1990, 34-40, and 203 note 4; Irwin and Schwartz 1966, 22; Scarce 1988/89; Bier 1987.

23. The Jacquard loom replaced the draw loom which had allowed “patterns of any desired complexity to be produced because the heddles bunched together to form cords occupy much less space than shafts actuated by treadles in the simple loom” (Seiler-Baldinger 1995, 85). In the Jacquard loom, “[e]ach line of the design is represented by one punch card. Instead of the cords of the figure harness a needle was brought up to the card. Where a hole had been punched the needle lifted the appropriate warp thread by means of a hook attached to a heddle. No drawboy was needed and the mechanism could be adapted to power-loom weaving. The device was invented by J. M. Jacquard in 1801 and came into general use in England in the later 1830s after an abortive introduction between 1823 and 1826” (Rothstein 1994, 107).


25. For Euro-Americans at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the designs of shawls made in Paisley evoked Scottish immigrants (Grassick 1940), or poor urban labor scabs (Peiss 1986), rather than Kashmir and the British empire.

26. Research about the European production of shawls is complicated by the purposeful obfuscation practiced by British and French shawl manufacturers. Jean Keller (1996, 810) lists two types of woolen cloth used for imitation Kashmiri shawls in France: “thibet” and “cachemire d’Ecosse” (light twill). In the 1880s, Liberty’s of London sold Indian-woven fabrics that were finished in Britain, using appropriated Indian designs and production techniques, alongside merchandise both manufactured and finished in colonial India. One of these fabrics was “Umritza Cashmere,” an early Liberty-fabric “triumph.” A contemporary fashion magazine praised...
“Umritza Cashmere” as possessing “all the best qualities of the Indian make, combined with the durability and closeness of English manufactures.” The fabric even had “long hairs scattered over its surface [which] give it a very foreign appearance and add to its attractions” (quoted in Adburgham 1975, 31-32). Liberty’s thus invoked Indian exoticism for their imitative fabrics by naming them for the Punjabi city of Amritsar and through using the common spelling of Kashmir.

27. An estimated eighty percent of the nineteenth-century shawls produced in the Native State of Kashmir and exported to Europe went to France (Bates [1873], 59). Britain obtained their supply of Kashmiri-type shawls and shawling from Kashmiri migrants in the geographical areas they ruled directly. The British Raj had conquered eastern Punjab and some of the Punjabi Hill States at the beginning of the nineteenth century; it took over the rest of Punjab in 1849. Kashmiri migrants established shawl workshops in several Punjabi cities, most notably Amritsar, during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

28. After the British conquered all of Punjab in 1849, their substitution of “English goods” for Kashmiri-type shawls and shawl cloth in formal political practice became a continuing source of local complaint. In 1883, the Honorary Magistrate and “principal shawl merchant” in Ludhiana, Ahsan Shah, reported that the “superior pashmina” or shawl cloth was sent to France and Persia, while the “inferior” was still sold to the Native States and used for “giving presents, Khillats, etc.” The Imperial Government had purchased robes of honor for “Chiefs and gentlemen heretofore [which had] consisted chiefly of superior Pashmina, but since the Imperial Assemblage [Durbar] of 1877 in Delhi the custom of giving such Khillats has been dropped.” One British official noted at the same time that shawl traders “complain bitterly of the falling off of patronage of the government” especially since the Governor General claimed that he “wishes to patronize manufactures of India” (Report… 1882–83, 58). The Governor General’s “wishes” have to be put into the context of the larger restructuring of British trade sketched above. British imperialists moved into Central Asia in the 1870s, disrupting Kashmiri influence over this trade as well (Ahad 1987, 108; Bamzai 1980). Quotations from Ahsan Shah, Appendix A, “Pashmina Trade and Manufacturing” for the Report on the Internal Trade and Manufactures of the Panjab for 1882–83, 1.

29. Kani shawls with hand-woven designs required the skills of an expert refugar (“repairer” or “darner”), who “could strip and recreate the defective sections of shawls and join pieces together invisibly” (Dhamija 1989, 77). To lessen the time it took to weave a kani shawl on one loom, “patchwork” or “pieced” shawls became common in the nineteenth century. Many small pieces were woven on separate looms and joined
into a whole by a *refugar* to create these shawls (Beardsley 1988). The borders of *kani* shawls had always been woven separately and attached in the finishing process. Ahad (1987) connected production changes to local taxes on shawl cloth as well as to changing European demand for shawls.


31. John Irwin published the first authoritative English-language study of Kashmiri shawl production eight years after India and Pakistan won their independence from Great Britain. The book was subtitled “Indo-European” design history. He later characterized his own research as from the “point of view of the art historian” rather than that of the “economic historian” (Irwin in Irwin and Schwartz 1966, 51). Irwin inherited his mantle of objective scholarship about Indian textiles from the intellectual traditions of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, where he was Keeper of the Indian Section when he revised his book on Kashmiri shawls in 1973. His work remains the benchmark on Kashmiri shawls against which South Asian, European, and Euro-American textile scholarship measures itself. See Ahad 1987 for a critique of Irwin’s Eurocentrism.

32. When Clover painted *The Little Norwich-Shawl Worker* in 1815, all of the Norwich female children had been put out of work by male weavers using draw looms some fifteen years previously (Claburn 1995, 16). Thomas Overton engraved Clover’s painting in 1826 and the continuing appeal of this image suggests the ongoing strength of association between embroidery and female work (for an elaboration of this association, see Parker 1989).

### References


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