A Study on Kesi Tapestry

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1. The History of Kesi

- Kesi, also known as "carved silk", refers to a variety of patterns and images by the use of weaving through warp/weft thread interwoven with raw silk and colored boiled-off silk.
- It is said that the origin of the silk originated from western Asia.
- Since Song Dynasty and Yuan Dynasty, it has been one of the royal household fabrics, which is often used for the weaving of the emperor's clothing and the royal painting.
Magpie
蟠桃仙图
Kesi Tapestry of Immortals of Longevity
万寿菊
Tagetes
Archaeological Research and Discovery

• Earthenware period (2500BC): kesi fabric had existed.
  Shang Dynasty (1600BC-1046BC): kesi fabric were well made.
• Han Dynasty (202BC-8th century): kesi had a Chinese and western mixed style.
• In early 20th century, British archaeologists Marc Aurel Stein speculated that kesi originate from woolen yarn of the western minority in China.
• Chinese archaeologists explored that the belt of a dancing figurine (7th century) is the earliest kesi products that had been found.
唐宋元明清(618年-1912年)缂丝发展/Development of Kesi from Tang Dynasty to Qing Dynasty

唐代/ Tang Dynasty (618–907)
• Kesi production are mainly ribbons.
• Geometric-shaped patterns are quite common.

北宋/ Earlier Song Dynasty (960–1127)
• The pattern is more delicate.
• The pattern structure is symmetrical and full of changes.
• Kesi is often used for book cover and painting.
• The production of kesi gradually moved from north to south.

南宋/ Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279)
• Kesi is produced in north China on a large scale.
• Most kesi tapestry are replica of famous paintings.
• Knitting, knotting and other techniques are widely used in kesi process.
• A lot of craftsmen have also been moved to the south as the capital was moved to Lin'an (now Hangzhou).
Ducklings in the Lotus Pond
青碧山水/Blue-Green Landscape
元代/Yuan Dynasty (1206 - 1368)

• Kesi is often used in temple supplies and officials' suits.
• Kesi turned to be concise and unconstrained.
• The worship of gold became a fashion, which was also reflected in kesi.
Scroll Painting of the Eight Star Deities
Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644)

- Kesi is only used as a imperial mandate, so there is little kesi production.
- In the middle period of the Ming dynasty, kesi was flourished in Suzhou, Nanjing and Beijing.
- The artistic style was greatly influenced by the paintings by the southern literati.
- The peacock feathers is used in kesi to show the imperial characters.
- Kesi is used to make imperial robe. The imperial robe excavated in the Ming Tombs in Beijing is an example.
瑶池献寿图/Kesi Tapestry of Birthday Celebration in the Fairyland
明万历衮服/Emperor's Ceremonial Robe in 16th Century
清 代/ Qing Dynasty (1644-1912)

- From late Ming Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty, the silk industry in the south of Yangtze River was firmly controlled by the imperial power and the kesi became the symbol of imperial power.
- Imperial robes, official suits and daily necessities are masterpieces of kesi.
- Kesi is better mixed with embroidery, painting and other crafts.
香色缂丝金龙夹龙袍/Emperor's Robe decorated with Gold Dragon Kesi Tapestry
三星图
Kesi Tapestry of Three Deities
2. 缂丝工艺 / Kesi Technique

从古至今一直使用水平式的平纹织机进行织造。
(2) 工具/Tools

梭子 移简 拨子 竹筘 剪刀
(3) 原材料 / Raw Materials

经线：使用没有经过练染的生丝线，规格一般为2×2或3×2经线，也就是两根或三根单丝为一股，分左右两股，并用它打捻出左右方向的两股丝，通过并线合为一股。
(3)原材料/Raw Materials

纬线：采用经过练染加工的熟丝线，一般为8×2纬线，宫廷缂丝一般选用4×2纬线，加弱捻或无捻。用作纬线的还有捻金线、孔雀羽线、麻线及毛线。
缂丝的织造技法为：结、掼、勾、戗、绕、盘梭、搭梭、子母经等技法众多。结、掼、勾、戗是四种基本的技法。
3. 故宫藏缂丝文物概况
Overview of Kesi Collection in the Palace Museum

• The Palace Museum has a kesi collection of about 8,000 pieces, including clothings, materials, living supplies, decorations, thangka, calligraphy and painting, from Song dynasty and Qing dynasty.

• Mounted kesi refers to kesi objects pasted by multi-layer backing papers, including plaque, scroll painting, hanging screen and so on.
Scroll Painting of Pavilion and Mountain in the Fairyland
Scroll Painting of Wild Goose
Kesi Tapestry Screen with Sandalwood Frame for Longevity
Hanging Kesi Tapestry with Gourd-shaped Vase
缂丝孝钦后书正大光明匾 / A Kesi Tapestry Plaque
Kesi Tapestry Screen of Three Deities
缂丝宝座/Wooden Chair with Kesi Tapestry