THE ORIGIN OF KESI (1), THE CHINESE SILK TAPESTRY

In the history of kesi there are a few questions still to be solved, and among them the one regarding its origin is perhaps the most important.

Several interpretations have been put forth since kesi became an art during the Southern Song dynasty, but so far none of them can be accepted as definitive.

During the Qing dynasty Wei Song (2) stated that «kesi (3) originated in the Zhou dynasty» (1). In order to give evidence to his statement, he quotes Zhou Qi (4), in his turn referring to a passage from the Zhou li (5) in which it is said «Officials wear a black dress with pheasant patterns, with light blue sleeves and a red final part, all painted and carved (ke) (6) in forms of pheasants».

* A special thank to prof. Calza for his help and support.
1 The question of the origin is very important also because it is in strict relation with the historic and iconographic evaluation of the kesi of the period between the VII and the XI cent., as we shall see further on.
2 Wei Song, Yi shi ji shi (Encyclopedia on the origin of things), Beijing, 1842, juan 18, pp. 1-2.
3 Zhou Qi, Ming yi kao (16) (Word's exam and interpretation), in Hubei xiaozheng yishu (17) (Collection of rare books), Shanghai, 1923, ben 60, tiao 87. After this quotation Zhou Qi adds the comment «it is mistaken to say carved (ke) (6)», which is not reproduced by Wei Song. According to Camman, «apparently he wanted to make it clear that the workmanship on the pheasant robes had no connection whatever with k'o-ssu under its popular name «carved silk». (Camman, Schuyler, «Notes on the origin of Chinese k'o-ssu tapestry», in Artibus Asiae, 1948 (vol. XI), p. 93. Nevertheless it might also be that Zhou Qi merely wanted to mean that also in that context the writing was wrong, and that the character to be used was the ke meaning «to weave wefts» (18) and not the one meaning «to carve» (6). If the fact that Wei Song omits the comment can be interpreted as done on purpose «in order to make his readers think that the Chinese wove tapestry robes more than two thousand years ago» (Camman, ibid., p. 94), it might also be that he regarded the comment as meaningless and superfluous to repeat it. Zhou Qi and his integral
This attempt to trace back *kesi* to a very ancient tradition is in tune with the nationalistic spirit of his time, that is soon after the restauaration of the Han race dominion, which leads to the glorification of the ancient Chinese dynasties. But the *Zhou li* sentence alone, not being supported by any other archeological or literary evidence, and being in itself very questionable, cannot be accepted as a proof of the existence of *kesi* in Zhou times.

In 1921 and 1928 Sir Aurel Stein published the records of his excavations in Central-East Asia, among which he asserts to have found a *kesi* of the Han dynasty.\(^1\)

Actually, there haven’t been found any Han *kesi* up until present day. Schuyler Camman has infact proved that the piece was of Western Asiatic patterns and manufacture; on the other hand, Stein passage from the *Zhou li* is also quoted by Chen Yuanlong of the Qing dynasty in his encyclopedy. He does not add any personal judgement, but quotes also another disappeared text of the late Ming or early Qing,*the Shi shi* (19) (The origin of things), in which it is affirmed that *kesi* originated in the Song dynasty (CHEN YUANLONG (20), *Ge zhi jing yuan* (21) (Natural science encyclopedy), Beijing, 1717-35, *juan* 27, p. 10).

\(^1\) The two books are respectively *Serindia*, Oxford, 1921, (5 vols.) (from now on referred to as S), and *Innermost Asia*, Oxford, 1928, (3 vols.) (from now on referred to as IA). The pieces are illustrated in IA, vol. III, ill. XXXI L. Lv. 02 a; LXXXVII. kaa.v.019. This last fragment is also well illustrated in YAMANOBE, TOMOYUKI, *Shiraku rōdo no senshoku. Sutain korekushon. Nyūderi kokuritsu hakubutsukan zō* (Textiles from the silk road: the Stein collection, National Museum, New Delhi), Kyoto, 1979, ill. 67.

\(^1\) «In the first place, all the motives were Western Asiatic or Hellenistic in feeling. Some were strikingly so, notably the chiaroscuro portrait of an individual of pronounced European type. Even the so called “Chinese motive” is a Western one. This chimera, composed of the head and wings of a bird, horse’s forelegs, and another creature for its tail, bears no remote resemblance to the bird-headed winged horse at Wu-Liang-Tzū, with which it is said to have the “closest connection”. Beyond the fact that they are both composite monsters, they have almost nothing in common. Phillis Ackerman says the chimeras are Scytho-Samaritan in spirit, which seems very reasonable.

If the one “Chinese element is not Chinese – and there is not the slightest reason that it is – the fact that these Lou-lan tapestries were made of wool is no evidence of local manufacture. Wool tapestry was made throughout the Near East and into Western Asia. Moreover, as Lou-lan and the other oasis cities of the Tarim Basin owed their importance to being on the great trade routes between the empires of Rome and China, they must have been dependent on trade goods rather than on local manufactures. Middle men are seldom producers, and there is no reason to believe that these were. Highly technical arts like tapestry weaving do not flourish under such conditions. If all the silks found at Lou-lan were acknowledged to be imports from China, why could not these technically high-quality, wool tapestries have been imports too, from the opposite direction?» (CAMMAN, op. cit., p. 103-104).
himself admitted in Innermost Asia that its motives are «non-Chinese, and in some pieces of distinctly Hellenistic character» and that it was made of wool and not of silk.

In the same years the Kozlov expedition was said to have found a Han kesi. This piece was produced in China and with Chinese ichonography, but it was then discovered not to be a tapestry but a damask.

No other kesi ascribed to the Han dynasty has been so far unearthed, and the existing most ancient kesi date back to the Tang dynasty. These kesi consist of a shoe found by Stein at Astana and

"The decorative motives of these tapestry pieces will best be considered below in their relation to those exhibited by the polychrome figured silks. But it should be pointed out at this stage that the style of these woollen tapestry works differs strikingly from that of the latter by being of non-Chinese, and in some pieces of distinctly Hellenistic character. It is obvious that this difference in decorative style strongly supports what has been suggested above as to the local origin of the woollen fabrics in general." (STEIN, IA, vol. I, cap. VII, sec. iv, p. 231).

"It is certainly courteous that tapestry work, the technique nearest akin to pure loom work, is not represented at all among the silk fabrics of L.C., while we have from the same site quite a number of fine tapestry fragments executed in wool. This absence of silk tapestry work may be purely accidental, and this is the more probable seeing that a small number of specimens, among them one or two appear distinctly early in style, are found among Ch'ien-lo-tung textiles. Or might the suggestion be hazarded that this technique of hand-work on the loom with the needle was an acquisition from the West? That it existed there is attested from very early time by Assyrian reliefs as well as by Greek vases of the sixth century B.C." (STEIN, IA, vol. I, cap. VII, sec. iv, p. 235). In the same chapter Stein also observes: «By an oversight the material of the tapestry has there erroneously indicated as silk instead of wool» (STEIN, ibid., p. 242, note 21).


"The only specimen of silk tapestry work is the finely woven shoe vi. 4. 01 (pl. XCIII) which by its design as well as by the Chinese characters inserted in bands is clearly proved to be of Chinese workmanship» STEIN, IA, cap. XIX, sec. v, p. 674, ill. XCIII, Ast. vi. 4. 0/1.) Further on in a note he gives a more detailed description: «Silk tapestry woven shoe, wove to shape. Pattern of side and back is in three horizontal bands divided into oblong panels, each panel containing a standing goose with winds extend. Top and bottom bands pole blue and buff. Middle red and buff. Colours of ground and bird in each panel counterchange alternately, in their respective band colours. Vertically the order is, a yellow bird in all three alternating with a red bird between two blue birds. In each panel in R. and L. lower corners, a dot and a ring respectively (sun and moon?). Narrow bands of dull and light buff with counterchange spot pattern devide the panel horizontally. At the toe (mostly missing) red, buff and blue bands, with small Chinese characters in counterchange, are witted into sides, but woven in one piece with other part. Upper edge red, neatly turned over and sewn. Lining, strong canvas in one piece woven to shape. Sole, thick coiled card. Very good work. As usual with these shoes, the warp is of vegetable fibre and has perished. Colours bright». STEIN, IA, cap. XIX, sec. vi, p. 701.

281
some long narrow strips found at Astana too in 1973 \(^{10}\). The shoe and the strips belong to the first part of the VII century.

Another series of small strips, found by Stein \(^{11}\) and Pelliot \(^{12}\) in the Thousand Buddhas Cave at Dunhuang, often mounted on sutra

Camman denied also this statement of Stein's. "This shoe from Astana was considered by Stein and Andrews as having Chinese characters on the toe, which led them to say that it is a Chinese shoe. These characters do not show in the photograph, and as neither Stein nor Andrews could read Chinese, we are inclined to be sceptical. However, since all the other motives are obviously non-Chinese Central Asian ones, it is likely that even if these are authentic characters, they are auspicious ones, like the shou for longevity, which were considered lucky by the "barbarians" as well, and frequently copied from Chinese things. Thus we see no reason to believe that this was not made in Central Asia rather than in China." (Camman, op. cit., p. 104).

We do not agree with Camman; the motives do not look to us so "obviously non-Chinese," and his supposition that the Chinese characters are only auspicious ones, although it is possible, it is not more likely than others, as demonstrated by an earlier example of a similar pair of shoes found in 1964 at Astana and dating back to the Eastern Jin dynasty (317-420 A.D.), on the toe of which there is a sentence with a personal dedication. It says: "Happiness and glory to marquise Wangfu. His longevity be long." See Siechouzilu – Han Tang zhiwu (22) (The silk road – Han and Tang dynasties textiles), ed. by Xinjiang Waiwuer zizhiu bowuguan (23) and Chutu wenwu zhanlan gongzhuzhu (24), Beijing, 1973, ill. 22.

\(^{10}\) "The kesi strips were used as tight belts around the waist of the dancing women funeral statues we spoke about before. They are 1 cm. wide and every piece has been cut to a length of 9.5 cm. Eight colours make up a four leaf motive; scarlet red, orange, yellowish-brown, navy-blue, sky-blue, white, agalloch and other colours show up on a grass-green background. The motive adopts the fendaun tuyen (25) (clear changes of contrasting colours) method, often used in Tang frescoes and architecture, by which we have motives with bundles of contrasting colours. In the strongly weft-patterned cloth weave (in which it is the weft that gives form to the motive) we count in all 15 warp threads, 116 weft threads per square centimeter. The weaving technique is tongying duanwei (26) (continuous warp with cut weft), they used at least eight different coloured shuttles in every part of the motive (pl. 1, 4). In the past we believed that kesi originated in China during the Five Dynasties and that it had flourished during the two Song dynasties. Now it seems that kesi had already appeared in China at least in the middle of the VII cent." (Xinjiang Waiwuer zizhiu bowuguan (23) and Xibe daxue lishi xi kaogu kaoye (27), "1973 nian Tulufan Astana gu muqun fazue jiangbao" (28) (Bulletin of the 1973 excavations in an ancient group of tombs at Astana, Turfan), in Wenwu (29) (Relics), 1973, n. 7, pp. 17-18).

\(^{11}\) Stein, S. ill. CVI. Ch. 0058; CVI, lv. 0034; CVII. Ch. 00166 in xlviii. 001; CXII. Ch. 00300; and CXIII. 00301. They are now at the New Delhi National Museum and at the British Museum in London; also published in The Arts of Central Asia. The Stein collection in the British Museum, Tokyō, 1985, ill. 6; 43, 44.

Covers, date back to the later part of the Tang dynasty. And a group of kesi stored in the Shosōin at Nara, also mainly strips but of bigger dimensions, belong at least to the second half of the VIII

Camman contested the Chinese manufacture and the Tang dynasty dating assigned to these pieces by Stein and Pelliot. "The "late T'ang" fragments of silk tapestry found by Stein and Pelliot in the "Cave of the Thousand Buddhas" (Ch'ien-Fo-tung) in Tun-huang are very well known. Tun-huang was a station on the old Silk Road, in Northwestern Kansu on the frontier of Chinese Turkestan, but it was also noted for its Buddhist shrines in great, rock-cut caves. After the westward expansion of the Han Empire, in the second century B.C., and the opening of the route across Turkestan, Tun-huang was ruled by the Chinese, off and on for almost a thousand years. However, about 847 A.D. in the later T'ang period, it became part of the Uighur Empire, and the Uighurs held it until about 1031, during the early Sung, when it was taken from them by the Tanguts, a Tibetan people who were founding the Hsi-hsia Empire. The few pieces of silk tapestry found there by Stein and Pelliot were discovered among a rich store of manuscripts and paintings that had been walled up in a side chapel off the main cave, sometime shortly before the Tangut invasion. Since, according to Stein, the large majority of the dated documents found in the chapel belonged to the tenth century of our era, it would seem likely that the tapestries were of approximately the same date, which would make them relics of the Uighur occupation at a period equivalent to the Five Dynasties or early Sung in China.

Stein reported that all the silk tapestry fragments found at Ch'ien-Fo-tung were of exceptional fineness in technique, and "all were hand-made with the needle". He pointed out that the great value attached to such work was illustrated by the fact that twice he found small pieces of the identical fabric forming part of the mountings for different head-pieces to paintings and manuscript-roll covers.

Silk tapestry would indeed have been rare in Tun-huang, as this was primarily a religious center at that time, and not a place where textiles would be produced. Such luxuries had to be brought from long distances. We do not, however, accept Stein's statement that the tapestries must have been brought from China because the motives on them were "purely Chinese". The motives are certainly not typical of Chinese art — though some of them show traces of Far Eastern feeling — and their closest relatives appear to be in the fragments of Uighur tapestry found by Stein and von le Coq at various sites in the region of Turfan. None of the latter were precisely dated, but they are believed to have come from the late T'ang or Five Dynasties period. In fact, since Tun-huang belonged to the Uighurs, and was nearer to their oasis-centers in Eastern Turkestan than it was to any of the larger cities in China proper, it probably drew most of its gifts and supplies from Uighur patrons, rather than Chinese. Thus, the tapestry fragments recovered from Tun-huang were probably Uighur, and like the earlier ones discovered at Lou-Ian, were undoubtedly imported from regions further to the west of the place where they were found. (Camman, op. cit., p. 104-106).

Camman's statements in our opinion are not plausible. The more or less stylized flowers that decorate these strips belong to the Tang repertoire in cloth design as seen on many other Tang textiles and on the dresses represented on paintings. It is true that they are more typical of brocade iconography rather than of tapestry, but they still belong to the Tang decorative iconography and taste. As to the reasoning on the Uighur manufacture, it is quite logical but somewhat questionable, because there are some elements that challenge the dating of the pieces. Very similar pieces
century\(^{11}\), (figs. 1, 2, 3).

Another very important specimen of kesi from middle Tang has also been preserved in Japan. It is the famous representation of Amitabha Western Paradise better known as Taima Mandara\(^{12}\). It has deteriorated greatly now, but it was originally all made of silk by tapestry technique and dated back to 763.

Unluckily we have no literary evidence for the Tang period\(^{16}\), but these specimens are sufficient to testify that kesi was produced at

of certain Tang period have been found in two different places. They are the strips found in 1973 at Astana and a group of fragments preserved in the Shosoin in Japan, of which we shall speak about further on. If, as we think, the Dun-huang pieces are to be assigned at least to the second half of the VIII cent., in that period Dun-huang was still under Chinese rule.

\(^{11}\) The Shosoin deposits were locked in about 756 A.D. See: Shosoin honotsu: senshoku (Textiles in the Shosoin), Tokyo, 1963, vol. II, ill. 37-42; Shosoin, ed. by Ishida Mosaku and Wada Gunichi, Tokyo, 1954, ill. 4, 57, 151; Senshoku Nihon no bijutsu (Outlines of Japanese history of arts), Tokyo, 1970-72, vol. IV, ill. 122-124.

\(^{12}\) It is a very large kesi (391 cm. high and 397 cm. long) whose name comes from the temple in which it was preserved, the Taimadera, in the Nara prefecture. It was discovered to be a tapestry by dr. Ohga Ichiro in the thirties. There are two articles by him in Kokka, July 1938 (n. 572), pp. 202-206, and August 1938, (n. 573), pp. 229-238, and in 1963 he published Kakubo tsuzure-ori Taima Mandara (The tapestry-woven national treasure Taima Mandara), with the complete record of his research. See also Grotenshuis, Elisabeth ten, The revival of the Taima Mandala in Medieval Japan, Oxford, Harvard University, 1980.

\(^{16}\) A Ming scholar wrote in 1496 about Tang tapestry in a colophon to Zhu Kerou (30)'s kesi «Peony». He says: «kesi (31) flourished in the period between Zhen Guang and Kai Yuan of the Tang dynasty. The Emperors cultivated culture, and had all paintings and calligraphies mounted with [kesi]. These mountings are now known as baoshoujin (32). This habit went on with the Song dynasty and in the difficulties of the year 1126 many [kesi] were lost among the people. When the amateur saw the elegance of their lines, their delicacy and refinement, he wondered wether painting and drawing could equall them. So they were bound in albums for aesthetic delight. Someone cut them into pieces to insert them in robes. When Emperor Sheng Zu saw this art degraded to such a level, he forbade its production and therefore it is now difficult to find some among the people». (From the original by Zhang Xizhi (33) reproduced on the illustration n. 7 in Liaoning sheng bowu guang ceng kesi cixtu (34) (Chinese silk tapestry and embroidery in the collection of the Museum of Liaoning Province), dir. by Yang Renkai (35), Tokyö, 1983. It is also reproduced in An Yizhou (36), Mo yuan bui guan (37) (Classification of paintings), ed. Congshu jicheng (38) (Great collection of miscellaneous works)). Yet these statements have been proved groundless, because they are a misinterpretation of an earlier Ming writer, Tao Zongyi (39). In fact, many sentences are exactly the same, but the sense has changed a lot. Tao Zongyi does not speak of tapestry in Tang times, but, at the beginning of the chapter intitled «Mounting for paintings and calligraphies», he only says that «in the Tang periods of Zhen Guang and Kai Yuan, Emperors cultivated culture and had all painting and calligraphies mounted with purple red damasks on the rear, and with phoenixes and dragons on the front, and had them rolled up in green damask». (Tao Zongyi, Zhuo geng lu (40) (Notes
that time in China by Chinese craftsmen.

The first appearance of kesi in a Chinese text dates back only to the Northern Song dynasty, when Zhuang Chuo (7) in his Ji lei bian (8) describes its technique and main characteristics; and when his contemporary Hong Hao (9) says that the Uighur tribe weaved a dress which they called "kesi" (10). This statement of Hong Hao has suggested to Schuyler Camman the central idea of his theory by which the Chinese had drawn from the Uighurs (and the Uighurs from the Sogdians) the technique of weaving kesi towards the end of the XI cent., technique apparently unknown in China before.

on the activities during agriculture work breaks), ed. Congshu jicheng, op. cit.). Then he goes on minutely describing the rolls and other mountings, and examining those of the Song dynasty. "After Emperor Gao Zong crossed the river, he made peace, and such objects were found in great quantities at the markets. They soon made a list of paintings, and established the Imperial textile manufacture in Shaoxing. I had may say. I made this list of pieces that I personally saw, in order to offer the scholars some elements for their research" (ibid.). Then follows a list of "Mountings in brocade", of which the first four are: "Palaces and pavilions in kesi (41); Water dragons in kesi; Hundred flowers and dragons in kesi; Phoenixes and dragons in kesi" (ibid.). It is apparent that Zhang Xizhi altered the information about kesi "flourishing" in the Tang period, and that during the Song dynasty the same kesi were mounted as paintings. Zhang Xizhi's words are therefore not reliable.

"At Dingzhou they weave kesi (42). They do not use big looms and use boiled colored silk. The warp is set on wooden beams. They weave motives of flowers, plants, birds and animals where and how they want using a small shuttle. When they weave the wefts, they first form the shed, and then, with different colour threads, interweave it on warp and weft, and joining them it forms a continuous pattern. Watching it against light it looks like an engraving, and it is because of this that it is called "carved silk (kesi) (42)". The work for a woman's robe requires a whole year. Even though they make a hundred motives, they are all different because the weft-threads are not woven through the whole width of the cloth" (Zhuang Chuo, Ji lei bian (Book about little things), ed. Congshu jicheng, op. cit.).

"They weave a multicoloured dress that they call "kesi" (10) and which is very beautiful" (Hong Hao, Song mo ji wen (43) (News from the pine desert), in Jingying Yuan Ming shangben congshu shizong – Li dai xiaoshi (44) (Tenth collection of rare Yuan and Ming works – Short history of the past dynasties), Shanghai, 1940, n. 19).

In the "Conclusion" of his article, Camman states: "We have seen that, despite the claim of modern Chinese that k'or-ssu originated at Ting-chou in the Sung dynasty, the technique as such was apparently acquired from the Uighurs. The Uighur word for their silk tapestry robes, rendered in Chinese as k'or-ssu, seems to have been an attempt to transcribe the Persian word qaaz, or the Arabic kbazz, also used in Persian, to mean fabrics of raw silk. While the use fo the latter word in the Near East sounds as though it could have referred to a cloth of special technique, there is no sufficient evidence to prove that this was the same sort of tapestry-

285
The theory by which the origin of kesi is to be put not before the Northern Song dynasty had been also the most prevailing among Ming and Qing writers 20, even if founded on very different basis than Camman’s 21. But it is now obvious that, after the discoveries of 1973, the publication of the Shōsōin treasures and the study on the Taima Mandara, it has to be dropped 22.

There are today, on the basis of what is known, three possible theories on the origin of kesi. The first one can be considered as a remake of Camman’s theory after the new discoveries. According to it, kesi appears for the first time in the Chinese history of textiles at the beginning of the VII cent. as a complete novelty brought from the West or as a inner development favoured by Western influences.

weaving that turned up at Ting-chou in the Sung. Unless further evidence is found to prove this, we feel more justified in assuming a more Central Asian origin for the Uighur technique.

The term chib-ch’eng, which some have claimed was the old expression for k’o-ssu, appears to have been a rather general term, referring primarily to brocaded fabrics, and a rather primitive type of proto-tapestry, though it seems to have been extended to include the pictorial silk tapestry produced by foreign peoples. It was apparently gradually abandoned when the Chinese learned to make the latter for themselves.

Finally, the archeological evidence, which is admittedly rather negative, provides nothing to indicate that the Chinese had a k’o-ssu industry before the Sung period. It would seem to show, however, that this technique of making pictorial silk tapestry – as opposed to the older Chinese type – arose in Central Asia, probably in Sogdiana, as a development out of the earlier wool tapestry. – Though it could also have arisen in the Near East from the same background, perhaps independently. Apparently this then reached China by way of the Uighurs, about the beginning of the 11th century, and there, under the genius of Chinese craftsmen and artists, enjoining the patronage of a highly sophisticated court, it reached its culmination in a true art capable of reproducing the finest paintings» (Camman, S., op. cit., p. 110).

20 Cfr. Lu Zhongyu (45), Yan jiu (46) (The speaking red mullet), in Zhu Qi (47), Sixiu biji (48) (Notes on silk and on embroidery), ed. Meishu congshu (49) (Collection of works on art). Shibib (The origin of things), in Chen Yuan-long, op. cit.; convinced of the Song origin of kesi, he modified Zhuang Chuo’s words in «the kesi (42) technique of the Song period originated at Dingzhou» (ibid.). Wang Ji (50), Shi wu yuan hut (51) (Miscellaneous work on the origin of things), in Sixiu biji, op. cit.

21 While the Chinese writers based their statements exclusively on literary evidence, Camman has considered and analyzed also the archeological evidence found until his time, and has drawn conclusions from a study on the term kesi used to indicate the Chinese silk tapestry.

22 Camman’s article was published in 1948, and until that time no other discoveries but Koklov, Stein and Pelliot’s had been done. Moreover, as the Shōsōin textiles were not entirely and well illustrated and catalogued at that time, the similarity between the tapestry pieces there stored and Stein’s, must have escaped Camman, even though Stein had before expressly referred to such similarity (see Stein, S., p. 900).
This theory relies exclusively on the archeological and literary elements we possess.

Moreover it is a fact that the textiles of ancient China found hitherto are all warp-patterned cloth, and that favoured by the Western influences, it is just during the Tang dynasty that it took place the passage to weft-patterned cloths which Chen Juanjuan (11) describes as «the most important progress in the Chinese weaving technique» 23. This development has certainly promoted the appearance of a new weft-pattern technique as that of tapestry.

But this first theory goes against the international weaving history by which the simple technology of tapestry has always preceded the more complex one of damask, already well known in China since the early Han.

The second and third theories hold the said general weaving history in due consideration. According to the second, tapestry technique existed in the very first period of development of the textile industry, preceeding damask. But then, prevailing techniques for warp-patterned textiles, tapestry was temporarily dropped. When during the Tang dynasty there was the return to weft-patterned cloths, tapestry came back to the scene.

So the kesi of the VII cent. have to be considered as resumption of a formerly known but obliterated technique. This theory too has a weak point: there is no evidence that the tapestry technique was known at the beginning; this is only a hypothesis which rests on the world weaving history.

According to the third theory, tapestry, of wool or of silk, has always existed in China since the very beginning, and the VII cent. kesi are nothing but a continuation of its development which has never been interrupted. This thesis presents a wide gap, lacking both archeological and literary evidence for a long historical period. Moreover, it leads to other questions: is it only by chance that there haven’t been found any kesi before the VII cent.? And is it only by chance that there haven’t been found any reference to kesi in Chinese literature before the Northern Song? If on one hand it is true that there isn’t any evidence that kesi existed before the Tang, there are a few kemao 24 (12) of that period. Yet they are so few and sometimes even doubtfully of Chinese manufacture 25 that they are of very little help.


24 Kemao is the woollen version of kesi.

25 A Han dynasty kemao is the reputed silken fragment found by Stein in Xinjiang. Yet it is not possible to determine its origin because we have only a very
It can only be supposed that *kesi* or *kemao* were not much esteemed and used before the Tang; and may be for the same reason they were not even considered worthy of a name of their own. In fact, in the earlier texts, *kesi* is often associated with two terms indicating textiles: *jin* (13) and *zhicheng* (14); their association was presumably due to a resemblance in ichonography for the former and in technique for the latter

little part of what seems a much larger motif, and, as we have seen, Camman and Stein himself believe it to be of Western origin. (Cfr. notes 4-7).

Another relic is the woollen cover found at Bachu in 1959, dating back to the Five Dynasties (Xinjiang Waiwuer zihiqu bowuguan (23) and Chutu wenwu zhanlan gongzuozu (24), «Sichouzhiliu» shang xin faxian de Han Tang zhiwu» (53) (Han and Tang textiles recently discovered on the «Silk road»), in Wenwu (Relics), 1972, n. 3).

As we can see the relics are very few and by consequence it is almost impossible to draw some conclusion relying on them.

-- *jin* today means «brocade», and *zhicheng* means «spolinato» (a plain weave fabric to which they are added one or more supplementary sets of colored wefts which do not pass from selvage to selvage but are woven back and forth only in the areas where the pattern requires that particular color). For a definition of *zhicheng* see *Zhongguo dabaiki quanshu: Fangzhi* (60) (Great Chinese encyclopedia: spinning and weaving), Beijing, 1984, p. 158.

*Kesi* appears together with *jin* in Zhou Mi’s *Qi dong ye yu* (op. cit.), in Tao Zongyi’s *Zhuo geng lu* (op. cit.), and in *Bo wu yao lan* (54) (Favourite models of Song weavers), ed. by Gu Yingtai (55), *Hanhai* (56) (Sea of letters), vol. 13, n. 19. In these texts *kesi* and *jin* are practically synonyms. As to *zhicheng*, it appears in Chinese literature since the Eastern Han, and it is always used in descriptions of high rank robes. Nobody ever gave a definition of *zhicheng*, perhaps because its meaning was so clear that it did not need further explanation. There is no explicit approaching of *zhicheng* and *kesi* in the literary sources, but many modern writers consider it a synonym of *kesi* too. Zhu Qi Tian for example says: «I still forbear from establishing whether they are the same thing or two different things, both from a technical and a material point of view» (ZHU QI TIAN, op. cit., p. 230), and then he divides them into two different sections. He also points out that their main difference is that *zhicheng* is mostly used in robes manufacture, while *kesi* has had a very important pictorial development. The *Cibai* (57) dictionary is also doubtful. At the *zhicheng* item it says: «Some contemporary art scholars think that *kesi* (42) and *zhicheng* are in fact the same thing and that only its ancient and modern names do not coincide» (Cibai, p. 2659). It does not declare itself for or against any of the two possibilities, it only complains of the deficiency of a deep research on *zhicheng*’s technique. In favour of an identity between the two are on the contrary Okada and Akashi, and following them J. Harada and B. Vuilleumier; in *Zuanzu ying bua* (58) the two former state that «kesi» (42) should be included in the designation *zhicheng* (Zuan zu ying bua) (Collection of artistic beauties – *kesi* and pictorial embroidery at the National Manzhou Museum), ed. by Manzhouguoli bowuguan ceng ban (59). Tōkyō, 1935, p. 3). Unlikely they do not explain better their statement: on the contrary they bring it forward as a proof of the existence of *kesi* since the Zhou dynasty.
This is true also for the period between the VII cent. and the Northern Song which remains uncovered in the other two theories (theories one and two). But if kesi had already been given a name, why should they give it a new one? Probably because with the Song

Also Camman deals with this question. He maintains that zhicheng was used as a synonym of kesi in one of the texts in which it firstly appears. It is Hong Hao’s Song mo ji wen’s sentence, that Camman translates as «... they use silk threads of all colours (lit. “the five colours”) to tapestry-weave robes, which they call k’o-ssū» (Camman, op. cit., p. 91). We do not agree with this interpretation, which seems to us a forcing of Hong Hao’s words. In the Song text the binomious zhicheng is in fact used, and Camman translates it with the verb «to tapestry-weave» instead of the simple «to weave», which seems more probable. Here in fact zhicheng is only a predicate with its complement of result and does not refer to the textile in question.

However, according to Camman, it doesn’t prove that tapestry existed in Zhou times under another name, because zhicheng was a rather general term indicating at the same time three different kinds of textiles: «... a ragger primitive form of proto-tapestry woven on a big loom, brocading, and a true tapestry produced by foreign peoples» (Camman, op. cit., p. 102). (We have to point out that what Camman calls «broacading» corresponds to what we have indicated as «polinato»).

Zhicheng therefore, Camman says, did not include kesi.

There is an ancient specimen of zhicheng which has been preserved since Tang times in the deposits of the Shōsōin and which stresses the similarity in technique between kesi and zhicheng, being zhicheng here described as a «polinato», the closest relative of kesi among textiles from a technical point of view. «Priest’s robe. Kesa, a phonetic transcription of the Sanskrit term kasaya, means a priest’s outer vestment shaped more or less like a toga. It is in a horizontally long rectangular shape composed of several vertical strips joined horizontally, each strip consisting of same rectangular pieces of cloth joined vertically. It is called kesa in nine, seven or five strips according to the number of vertical strips.

The kesa mentioned in the Record of Imperial Treasures are nine altogether, of which one is in nine strips, the rest being in seven strips respectively. All the nine robes have survived to this day.

Plate 18 shows a detail of a Shokusei kesa in seven strips. Shokusei is a sort of tapestry weave silk, but it differs from the ordinary tapestry weave in the following points: its wefts consists of two kinds, one being the monochrome ground wefts running all the way across the width of the cloth, and the other, polychrome patterning wefts which pass over the coloured portions alone; and that the patterning wefts interwine with adjacent ones at their fold-back points.

The kesa under discussion is woven with light blue ground wefts and dark blue, green, yellow, white, brown and red patterning wefts which create irregular mottled patterns. It is lined with dark blue twillweave silk with floral patterns (Shōsōin hōmitsu kaisetsu. Kitakura. (Comment on the Shōsōin treasures. North section.), Tōkyō, 1962, p. XI. The same priest’s robe is published also in Shōsōin hōmitsu: senshoku, op. cit., vol. II, pl. 52).

Finally, we can deduce that both jin and zhicheng indicated different kinds of textiles, and that the former included kesi presumably because of the similarity in iconography, and that the latter included kesi presumably because of the similarity in technique.
dynasty kesi started to develop rapidly, and it could not be included in meaning and be confused with other textiles, nor for ichonography nor for technique. It developed particular qualities and an identity of its own, needing by consequence also a new distinctive name. Moreover, as Hong Hao suggests, foreign contacts, especially with the Central East Asian tribes, must have influenced the creation of the new name.

In the end, one should not forget that the new name was more suitable also because the meaning of the two characters ke and si, even if initially only a transcription of a foreign term, was better suited to the cloth it designated.

As we can see, even if the third theory is the most questionable, it is still maintainable, and the question of the origin of kesi remains indefinite.

\[27\] In the literary sources we find that kesi has been written using different characters. They are: 1) 良絹作 kesi (work in kesi or (in) ke silk; 2) 良絲作 kesi (work of carved silk; 3) 良絹 kesi = weft-woven silk; 4) 良色作 kese (work of carved colours. Zhuang Chuo uses n. 2), and also expressly says that «it looks like an engraving, and it is because of this that it is called “carved silk”». (ZHUANG CHUO, op. cit.). Hong Hao uses the writing 1) in the variant b).
GLOSSARY

(1) 纏絲
(2) 魏祬
(3) 健絲
(4) 周祁
(5) 周禮
(6) 刻
(7) 莊緯
(8) 鳥肋編
(9) 洪皓
(10) 剋絲
(11) 陳娟娟
(12) 縞毛
(13) 錦
(14) 織成
(15) 寶是紀始
(16) 名義考
(17) 湖北先正遺書
(18) 綹
事始

(19) 事始

(20) 陈元龙

(21) 格致镜原

(22) 纱绸之路—汉唐织物

(23) 新疆维吾尔自治区博物馆

(24) 出土文物展览工作组

(25)

(26) 通经断纬

(27) 西北大学历史系考古专业

(28) 1973年吐鲁番阿斯塔那古墓群发掘简报

(29) 文物

(30) 朱克柔

(31) 克丝

(32) 包首锦

(33) 张国志

(34) 辽宁省博物馆藏絁丝刺繍

(35) 杨仁恺
(36) 安儀周
(37) 墨緣觀
(38) 繇書集成
(39) 閔宗儀
(40) 鞫耕錄
(41) 克絲作
(42) 刻絲
(43) 松漫記聞
(44) 景印元明善本叢書十種
一歷代小史
(45) 吕維玉
(46) 余鯨
(47) 朱啟鈞
(48) 絲繡筆記
(49) 美術叢書
(50) 汪汲
(51) 事物原會
(52) 故宮博物院織錦館
(53) 丝绸之路上新发现的汉唐织物
(54) 博物要览
(55) 谷应泰
(56) 函海
(57) 辞海
(58) 纂组英华
(59) 满洲国立博物馆藏版
(60) 中国大百科全书:纺织