

KESI/Silk Tapestries between Chinese and Islamic Arts "Artistic and Technical Exchange via the Silk Roads during the 7th–9th AH/13th–15th CE Centuries"

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Abstract: Not only are the textiles and costumes a facet of the local social identity of China but they also express the artistic, political, economic, and social identities of China in the deeper places. As the ideal ambassador for China the Chinese silk reflected the Chinese face to the world. During periods parallel to the Islamic era, Chinese artists used the Coptic technique in the manufacture of Chinese silk textiles called "KESI". KESI was very important in demonstrating influences between China and Islamic World, these influences were covering the technic and elements of decoration. So, KESI was a perfect proof for artistic and civilization influences transportation between the Far East and Middle East from long term ago. KESI was including exchange influences, which in turn included silk as a raw material of Chinese origin, and the tapestry technique as an ancient Middle Eastern influence brought to China by Muslims. The studyhistorically traces Kasi textiles along the Silk Roads between China and the Islamic East. It further demonstrates the mutual artistic influences between the arts of China and the arts of the Islamic world, particularly in the manufacture and decoration of textiles that in turn expressed the two artistic identities, Islamic and Chinese.

Key words: China- KESI- Silk Tapestry- Islamic Art- Silk Roads.

نسائج كاسي/القباطي الحريرية بين الفنون الصينية والإسلامية "التبادل الفني والتقني عبر طرق

الحرير في الفترة ما بين القرنين ٧-٩هـ/١٣-١٥م

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الملخص: لا تُعدّ المنسوجات والأزياء جزءًا من الهوية الاجتماعية المحلية للصين فحسب، بل تُعبّر أيضًا في دلالاتها العميقة عن هوياتها الفنية والسياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية فيه، ولا سيما الحرير الصيني، الذي يعكس الوجه الصيني للعالم، ويُعدّ سفيرًا مثاليًا بين بلاد الصين والعالم الإسلامي. استخدم الفنان الصيني في فترات موازية للعصر الإسلامي تقنية القباطي في صناعة النسائج الحريرية الصينية، فقد صُنعت منسوجات نسيج الحرير الصيني، التي عُرفت باسم "كاسي". وقد برزت أهمية نسيج "كاسي" في إظهار التأثيرات بين الصين والعالم الإسلامي، حيث شملت هذه التأثيرات التقنيات وعناصر الزخرفة. لذا، يُعدّ نسيج "كاسي" دليلًا واضحًا على انتقال التأثيرات الفنية والحضارية بين الشرق الأقصى والشرق الأوسط منذ زمن بعيد، والتي اشتملت بدورها الحرير كمادة خام صينية المنشأ، وتقنية القباطي كتأثير شرق أوسطي قديم نقله المسلمون إلى بلاد الصين. عليه، يُمكننا دراسة تأثير نسيج "كاسي" بين الصين والعالم الإسلامي من خلال محاور هذه الدراسة، والتي تشتمل على التتبع التاريخي لنسائج كاسي عبر طرق الحرير بين بلاد الصين والشرق الإسلامي، حيث أثبتت الدراسة التأثيرات الفنية المتبادلة بين فنون الصين وفنون العالم الإسلامي؛ لاسيما في صناعة وزخرفة المنسوجات، والتي عبّرت بدورها عن الهويتين الفنييتين الإسلامية والصينية.

الكلمات الدالة: الصين - كاسي - القباطي الحريرية - الفن الإسلامي - طرق الحرير.

Silk 丝绸-*Sīchóu* is China's gift to the world:

Natural silk is the fine, strong, shiny hairs that come out of the silkworm's mouth to build the cocoon. The silk is manually separated from the cocoons in simple ways; the cocoons are placed in boiling water to dissolve the threads. Then they are wrapped in the form of skeins and struck over flat stones, and then immersed in water. In order to obtain silk with a bright white color free of impurities¹.

China was the first country to produce silk and used it in spinning and weaving, as China produced silk during (3000) BC and exported it to the world, and the ancient Greeks and Romans resources identified China as "*Serica*", which meant "the land of silk"².

Specifically, China has exported silk products to Iran since the beginning of the Han Dynasty in China (206 BC-250 AD)³. These relations between China and ancient Iran continued before and after the entry of Islam in Iran,. In fact, trade and cultural relations expanded in the Islamic era between China and all the countries of the Islamic East⁴.

A kind of transparent silk decorated on the two faces was found in the *Mogao/Thousand Buddha* Caves in Dunhuang District.,). More than forty objects of silk, from silk fabric, to a silk dress with bird feathers, dating back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD,, were also discovered, featuring four different colors. They were found in **Turpan 吐鲁番市, Xinjiang Province**⁵.

Silk became the most famous and sought-after worldwide in the Middle Ages and enjoyed imperial importance in China and was attractive to Mamluk Sultans in the Arab world. Mamluk production during the reign of the Mamluk Sultan *al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun* (his life 684-741 AH/1285-1341 AD) witnessed a high degree of quality and techniques as well. This required great skill in its workmanship; Mamluk silk was found with simple, ordinary, and complex weaving structures, as well as the silk Mamluk markets, including the imported Chinese silk tapestry "Kesi"⁶.

¹ Ahmed Ali Mahmoud Salman, *Textile Materials*, (Helwan University: Faculty of Applied Arts Press, Helwan University, 1996), 1-3

² John W. Chaffee, *Merchants of an Imperial Trade*, (Cambridge: Published by Cambridge University Press, 2018) 23,31.

³ Jea and Jean, *History of China, Series of the Great Wall of China*, 1st ed. part I, (Beijing: Building China publisher, 1986), 70.

⁴ Wu Lee Zhou, "Silk Road in History", *China Today Magazine*, Beijing, January (2014):15.

⁵ Roderick Whitfield, *Dunhuang: Caves of the Singing Sands: Buddhist Art from the Silk Road*, vol.1. (London: Textile Arts Publications, 1995), 133-135.

⁶ Shreen el-Kassm, "Lustrous silk in the Mamluk state", translated by Nouran Ibrahim, *Rawi, Egypt's Heritage Review, Egypt's Costume History*, Cairo, Issue 11, (2021): 49.



Plate 1: Striped cap with inscriptions, lampas and silk, Kesi technic, Egypt or Syria, Mamluk period, probably the sultanate of al-Nasir Muhammad (r. 1293-1341). © The Cleveland Museum of Art\ J.H. WADE FUND.

Many Islamic resources of travelers reported that textiles brought from China to the Islamic countries were the best worldwide, and the Chinese were unparalleled skillful in clothing and furnishing¹. Silk was extensively required in Islamic countries, therefore it was one of the most important imported goods from China². Moreover, Muslim travelers in the 3-4 AH/9-10 AD centuries were primarily interested in silk and elaborated its different types³. The most luxurious transparent silk clothes were used by the kings and men of the court, including eunuchs (servants), tax collectors, and senior leaders⁴. Sulaimān at-Tājir reported that these silk fabrics spread during the Tang Dynasty, as they flourished in industries, crafts, and arts. It is worth noting that archaeological discoveries revealed silk artifacts, especially the remains of flags, clothes, and covers of musical instruments, that were thought to be sewed in the 2nd G. century date back to the Tang Dynasty. About 20,000 artifacts were discovered, dating back to this era. Moreover, the Tang Dynasty established manufacturing silk fabrics,

¹ Esani Shafeeqa, "the Indian Subcontinent and China in the Writings of Muslim Explorers and Geographers from the Third to the Eighth Hijri Century," (Unpublished MA. Thesis, University of Algiers, 2009), 14.

² Nadia Fiussello, *Following the path of Islam in Asia, the world of Islam from North Africa to China and Beyond from the collections of the Vatican Ethnological Museum*, (Vatican: Sharia Museums department, 2014), 23.

³ Craig Clunas, and Jessica Hall, *The BP Exhibition Ming 50 Years That Changed China*, (London: The British Museum Press, 2014), 262.

⁴ Sayda Ismail Kashef, "China's Relationships with the Islamic Countries", *Journal of the Faculty of Archeology*, Vol. 1, (1975): 33.

including solid, Moche, transparent, and Damask made using sheets of gold and silver wrapped around silk threads and printed fabrics. In China, silk was not expensive, and hence it was the clothing of the poor and needy. In contrast, cotton fabrics were few compared to silk, and one cotton cloth was bought for several silk pieces¹.

On his travel, the Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta described the textile industry and progress in China, including *Alkamkha*, *Atlas*, *Alkhasawia*, and *Alkhanbalaqia*. He also mentioned the types of Chinese textile popular on the Islamic markets and reported that Quanzhou 泉州市 was one of the most important cities on the land and marine silk roads where Alkamkha, Atlas, and Satin plants were established. On the Arab markets, Chinese silk textiles were attributed to their Chinese city of origin². For instance, *Alkhasawia* was named after Hangzhou 杭州市, and *Alkhanbalaqia* was named after Beijing 北京 which were manufactured, dyed, and decorated during the Yuan Dynasty in China (669-769 AH/1271-1368AD)³.

Samples of Yuan Dynasty's silk, with pure Chinese decorations, were found in Egypt. These types with pure Chinese decorations were designed to be exported to the Mamluk markets⁴. Furthermore, the decoration designs were similar to the textiles of the Yuan Dynasty and Mamluks, showing several decorative patterns, including floral ornaments, e.g., the Chinese lotus flower⁵. For instance, the frames of textiles were mutually decorated with lotus flowers in upside and downside positions. The decorations also included geometric shapes, animal figures, birds, and other shapes⁶.

¹ William Robuinson, and Hugh Edmonds, *Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds*, (London: Christie's, 4 October 2012), 181.

² Zaky Mohamed Hasan, *China and the Arts of Islam*, (Cairo: Hindawi Publishing Corporation, 2014), 11,12.

³ Adam Metz, *Islamic Culture in the Fourth Hijri Century, Renaissance in Islam*, translated by: Mohammad Abdul Hadi Abu Rida, ed. Refaat Albadrawy, Vol.2, 5th ed, (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Alketab Alaraby), 414. Yuan Dynasty in China was in the same time with Ilkhanate dynasty in Iran, the term Ilkhanate was used for the state established by Hulagu (654-754 AH/ 1256-1367 AD). It ruled Iraq and Iran. The term is taken from the Mughal word (ulus) that means inferior to the Great Khan. Mustafa Abdulkarim Al-Khatib, *Dictionary of Historical Terms and Titles*, 1st ed., (Al-Resala Foundation, Beirut, 1996), 59.

⁴ Hamada Mohammed Hagrass, "Archaeological Mosques Remaining in Ancient Beijing from the Fourth Hijri Tenth Georgian Century tenth century to the End of the Thirteenth Hijri Nineteenth Georgian Century", (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Fayoum University, 2016), 17.

⁵ American Museum Staff, *Art of Asia Recently Acquired by American Museum-Archives of Asian Art*, Vol.27, (USA: University of Hawai'i Press), 100.

⁶ Dalia Ashraf Mustafa, "Depiction of Birds and Flowers in the Chinese Art 960-1911A.D.," (Unpublished MA. thesis, Helwan University, 2012), 351.

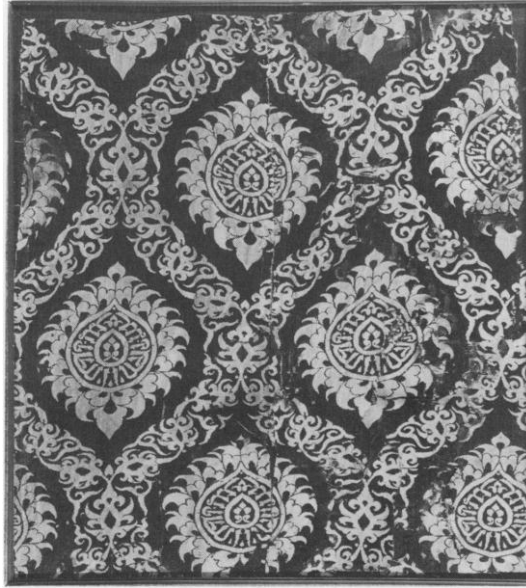


Plate 2: Blue and ivory silk, Mamluk Period, (8 A.H\14 A.D.) decorated with "the sultan, the king"; a compound weave; ©Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Museum no. 46.156.17.

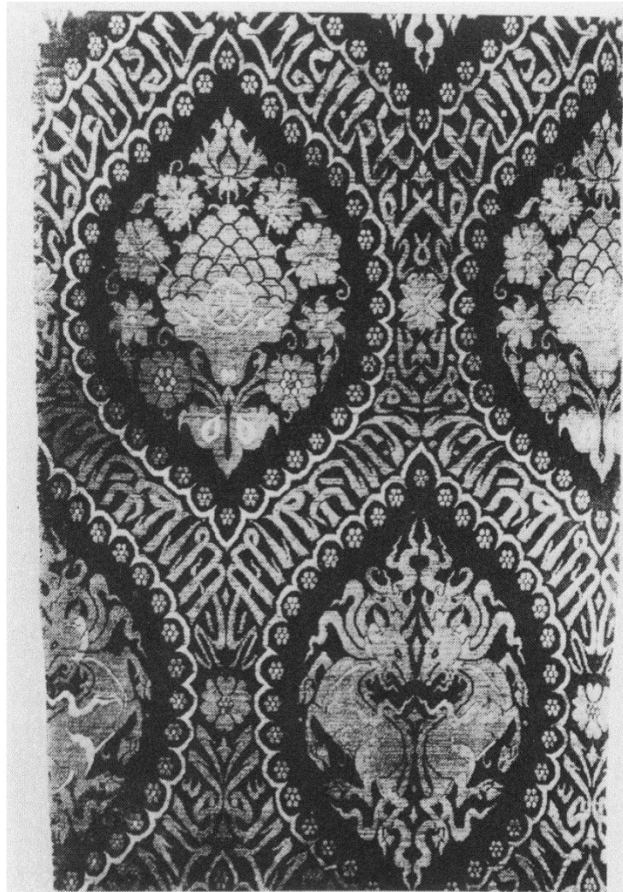


Plate 3: Chinese exported silk, gilt parchment, ogival Islamic layout for Western market, "Glory to our master the sultan, the king, the learned, the just, may his supporters be glorified," Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368); a compound weave, wrapped gilt parchment. ©Kunstgewerbe museum, Berlin, Museum no. 68.2742.

In the pre-Islamic era, white Chinese silk textiles were imported to Makkah and Arabia. Chinese silk, whether manufactured or raw, was exported extensively to the Mamluk Sultanate, especially through the (8-9 AH/14-15 AD) centuries because this era was one of the most important Islamic eras of importing Chinese silk in Egypt and the Levant¹. Historical resources reported increased Mamluk's request for Chinese silk textiles. The documents of the Mamluk era frequently reported “.... Long quilted and decorated silk jackets with gold, pearl, and gemstone embroidery”² The Sultan often gave these clothes as a robe of honor. Furthermore, the dowry property of the rich families in the Mamluk era included silk cloths and napkins. It was also reported that women in Cairo often went to public baths and markets wearing elegant silk clothes. Despite the few remains of the outer garments and undergarments of the head, body, and head made of silk gave a deeper glimpse into the silk clothes of women than those of men. Moreover, the silk imported from China was also used in the manufacturing or decoration of the accessories of Mamluk costume, such as canvas bags, silk containers used to save and move small glass bottles, and waistbands for a secure fitting of pants³.

One of the mutual artistic effects of Chinese-Islamic in the design of silk clothing was the almost matching between the Chinese costume “**Cloud Collar**” and the Iranian clothes⁴, especially those found in the Timurid and Safavid manuscripts with paintings⁵.
paintings⁵.

¹ Mohamed Ahmed Abd el-Salam, “Fashions of a Traveler: The Universality of Egyptian Costume in the Mamluk Era”, translated by Nouran Ibrahim, *Rawi, Egypt's Heritage Review, Egypt's Costume History, Cairo*, Issue 11, (2021): 53

² El-Kassm, “Lustrous silk in the Mamluk state”, 50.

³ Shawqi Abdelqawy Othman, *Trade of the Indian Ocean in the Reign of Islamic Sovereignty (41-904AH/661-1498AD)*, (Kuwait: Alam Almarefa, National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature, July, 1990), 54-57.

⁴ Yuka Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie the Art of Mongol Iran*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 19. See: Boston Museum Staff, “Persian, Arabic, and Indian Miniatures in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston”, *Art and Progress Journal*, New York, Vol. 6, no. 5 (March 1915):150.

⁵ Toh Sugimura, *The Encounter of Persia with China, Research into Cultural Contacts Based on Fifteenth Century Persian Pictorial Materials*, no.18, (Osaka, Japan: Senri Ethnological Studies, 1986), 139.



Plate 4: The sages of China bringing books on history to Uljaitu, from a majma 'al-Tawarikh of Hafiz-I Abru, Timurid, Herat, about 1425-1430 AD. © Topkapi Museum. OA 1966.10.10.013

Tapestry Technique of Waving and Decoration:

The Tapestry was a method of manufacturing and decorating textile, the fabric was woven on the loom as disconnected wefts across the textile. Tapestry dates to the ancient Egyptian civilization¹. It was adopted and spread for decorating the Chinese silk textile (KESI) as an Islamic artistic effect through the silk and trade roads with the Muslim World, especially in the reign of Chinese (Song, Ming, and Qing) dynasties².

It is worth mentioning that the textile manufacturing method tapestry, in which weavers fabricated and decorated the fabric on the loom simultaneously, appeared in ancient Egypt. Muslims knew the method from the Copts of Egypt after the Islamic conquest of Egypt,. Thus, it was called *Kepati* after the Copts (Christians of Egypt)³.

¹ Nancy Arthur Hoskins, *The Coptic Tapestry Albums and the Archaeologist of Antinoé*, (Lebanon: Albert Gayet, December 1, 2003), 23.

² Verity Wilson, *Chinese Textiles*, 1ed., (London: Victory and Albert museum, 2005), 68, 69.

³ Abdul Aziz Marzouq, *Woven Ornamentation in Fatimid Fabrics*, Part 1. (Cairo: Egyptian National Library, 1942), 73,74

This was the same textile known as Tapestry. Describing tapestry as a woven decoration is not limited title because all decorations on textiles, except the embroidered, printed, and painted, are woven, although they differ in form and method¹. Therefore, decorations on the Damask (a type of silk canvas that was famous in Damascus) and Dibaj (a type of silk canvas used for making covers/ curtains) are woven decorations, as well. The tapestry decorations are made of unextended and disconnected wefts across the textile (unextended across the textile and disconnected to form the decoration elements in the required form)². Tracing the introduction of this type of textile decoration shows that it was found in Egypt from ancient Egypt to the Coptic and Islamic arts. In sum, the Tapestry is ancient in terms of origin, idea, and method³. The tapestry was the oldest decorative textile. It was the earliest attempt to obtain woven decorations made of two or more colors. It only requires dividing warps into two equal groups (single and double threads) moving interchangeably using two tools of the loom. Decoration takes place using colorful wefts woven unextended until making the decorative structure made of weft threads with a ratio of (1/1) or (1/2) or (2/2)⁴.

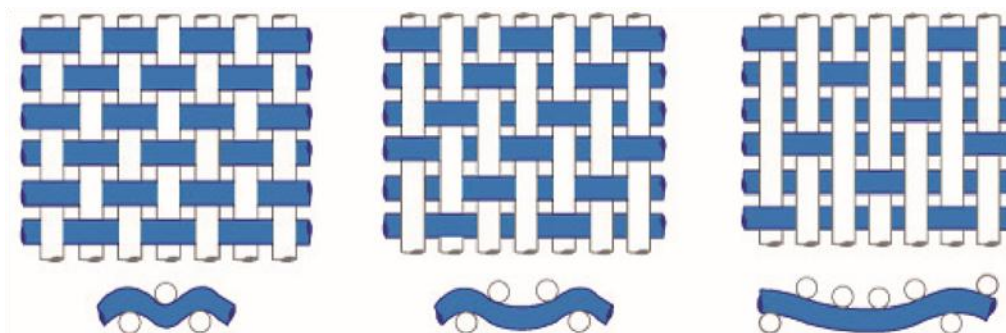


Plate 5: Several sorts of Tapestry Textiles weaving technique. The Influence of Weaving Technologies, p.6.

This technique of weaving textiles was transferred to China from the Far East across the silk roads with the Islamic Orient, especially in the Song Dynasty. Since then, China produced a set of royal Chinese costumes in tapestry⁵. Muslims did not create this method, but they introduced it to China. Chinese silk tapestry was one of the most important artistic and cultural meeting points between Muslims and China across the silk roads⁶.

Thus, we can say for sure that Egyptian Tapestry was the most popular method in the manufacturing and decorating of textile worldwide, as shown in their effect on Chinese

¹ Tharya Sayed Nasr, *History of People's Costumes*, 1st ed., (Cairo: Alam Al-Kutub, 1998), 436

² Suad Maher Muhammad, *Islamic Textiles*, (Cairo: Central Agency for University Books, 1977), 183

³ David Orrin Morgan, and Anthony Reid, *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Vol.3, The Eastern Islamic World Eleventh to Eighteenth Centuries*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 411.

⁴ Tatiana Timchenko, "The Influence of Weaving Technologies on the Integral Characteristics of Synthetic Vascular Prostheses", *CTM journal*, vol. 14, No.6, (2022): 6.

⁵ Zhou, "Silk Road in History", 17.

⁶ Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road A New History*, (New York: Book world, 2015), 71.

silk costumes. China produced a type known as silk tapestry (made of silk as a material using Tapestry as a method). Furthermore, leather clothes were decorated in tapestry and were known as leather tapestry. The textiles and costumes of Egyptian tapestry were well-known worldwide. Since the early Islamic age, Egyptian Tapestry clothes were given as diplomatic gifts, and Egyptian Tapestry filled textile markets worldwide. In short, the Tapestry was a title of Egyptian costume identity through history, from the ancient Egyptian civilization until the late Islamic age¹.

History and Development of KESI “Silk Tapestry” in China:

Art historians report that the Chinese KESI “Silk Tapestry” was greatly influenced by the art pattern of Central Asia because the Central Asian states on the silk roads were the oldest gates of passing tapestry to China. The oldest examples of KESI “Silk Tapestry” date back to the Northern Song Dynasty (349-521AH/960-1127AD) and the Southern Song Dynasty (521-678AH/1127-1279AD) and were rich in the imported art pattern from Central Asia. Examining many Chinese KESI “Silk Tapestry” artifacts shows the huge impact of Central Asian artistic and decorative patterns. Central Asia had solid commercial bonds with the states of the Eastern Muslim World. Therefore, Central Asian cities across the silk roads were the gate of Muslim merchants to China, especially in the Middle ages during the Mamluk era in Egypt and the Levant, the Ilkhani in Iran, and the Yuan Dynasty in China. KESI “Silk Tapestry” is a meaningful expression of artistic integration between East, Central, and West Asia through decorations, including flying birds and floral motifs, without committing to decoration frames. Instead, their decoration content expresses more smoothness, vitality, and movement. Therefore, the KESI “Silk Tapestry” contains decorative elements as a Turkish influence from Turkistan and an Iranian influence from Persia. Moreover, the original Chinese decorations on the KESI-silk tapestry, including the dragon and phoenix, were implemented in artistic methods influenced by the arts of Central Asia and Iran².

¹ Abd el-Salam, “Fashions of a Traveler: The Universality of Egyptian Costume in the Mamluk Era”, 54.

² James C. Watt, Wardwell Anne E., Rossabi Morris, *When Silk Was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum press, 1997), 55,56.



Plate 6: Textiles showing partial cloud collar medallion. Eastern Central Asia, 11th-12th century, silk tapestry (Kesi). Private collection. © When the silk was gold, central Asia and Chinese Textiles, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, p.55.

Several archaeological pieces of evidence demonstrate that Khotan in East Turkistan knew the KESI “Silk Tapestry” in the 5AH/11AD century. Moreover, the Chinese historical records of the South Song Dynasty report that the cloud collar model was made in KESI-silk tapestry as a national costume of the Uighurs. According to the Uighur historical documents, the period of the 4th/7th AH/10th-13th AD centuries was the period of artistic prosperity in making KESI “Silk tapestry” and using colorful dyes for the yarns and decorations. KESI “Silk tapestry” was often used as the costume of the rich and men of the Chinese court¹.

In terms of manufacturing, the Chinese KESI “Silk tapestry” had several wefts across the weave to enable the weaver to create many decoration shapes. The blade of the wefts ranged from (36 per 1 cm) to (150 per 1 cm). With the development of the Chinese KESI “Silk tapestry”, decorations from the scenes of the Chinese environment were implemented, which required increasing the wefts per cm to enable the weaver to create all details of the scene. Microscopic examination showed that the wefts ranged from 90 to 210 per cm, additionally, the Chinese KESI-silk tapestry had no long vertical cracks by adding horizontal wefts support. The surface of the tapestry was smoother than that of Central Asia. Consequently, the Chinese KESI-silk tapestry with Chinese natural scenes became creative paintings, as if they were painted by a painter on paper, not woven, because of their weaving harmony and accuracy. At the time of the Chinese Liao Dynasty (294-519AH/ 907-1125AD) corresponding in some years with the North Song Dynasty, KESI “Silk Tapestry” was used to make covers, sheets, and curtains, and

¹ Watt, *When Silk Was Gold*, 57.

golden threads were frequently used. Additionally, this tapestry was used as a formal costume on celebrations, rituals of making offerings, and clothes of senior eunuchs in the Chinese court¹.

The Jin Dynasty (423-624AH/1032-1227AD) was an intermediate period in developing Chinese KESI-silk tapestry with the same textile and art features of the contemporary Chinese, including the Liao and Northern and Southern Song dynasties².

A paradigm shift in the manufacturing and decoration of Chinese KESI-silk tapestry occurred in the Moghul Yuan Dynasty (677-769AH/1279-1368AD). The number of personal paintings of Chinese emperors and dynasties and complete natural sciences increased. Thus, the KESI-silk tapestry was unparalleled as it required great time and effort and evolved in craftsmanship and accuracy. The historical records of the Yuan Dynasty reported the etiquettes and years of implementing imperial doctrines, which took about three years in some KESI artifacts³.

Pathways of KESI “Silk Tapestry” as a Mutual Effect between China and the Islamic World:

The previous review of the development of the KESI “Silk Tapestry” through the Chinese dynasties shows the influential art role and direct contact of the Uighurs in Central Asia and Turkistan with Muslim merchants across the silk roads they introduced and helped to develop the tapestry industry in China. As a Turkish Muslim minority, the Uighurs had close links with the Muslim world after converting to Islam and the cultural, artistic, and commercial treatments with the Islamic Orient across the trades of the land and sea silk roads. They became familiar with the tapestry method because of the abundance of silk in China. KESI “Silk Tapestry” demonstrated Chinese textiles. Recognizing the presence of KESI “Silk Tapestry” in the Turfan region since the 1AH/7AD century as a foundation of the early presence of KESI “Silk Tapestry” in Central and East Asia, this tapestry was made by the Uighur residents⁴.

Several factors helped the integration of Chinese silk as raw material and tapestry as a method of decoration and manufacturing, especially the textile industry between China and the Muslim world across the silk roads. Silk roads played a key role in exporting Chinese textiles, especially Chinese KESI to the eastern Islamic world and Islamic textiles, which were made of linen, wool, and cotton, exported from the eastern Islamic world to China⁵.

¹ Watt, *When Silk Was Gold*, 58.

² Watt, *When Silk Was Gold*, 58.

³ Paul Ratchnevsky, *Genghis Khan: His Life and Legacy*, (London: publisher Wiley-Blackwell, 1993), 67.

⁴ Muhammad ibn Musa al-Sharif, *Scholars of Central Asia (Turkestan) between Past and Present with an Overview of the Most Important Historic Cities of Turkestan*, (Uzbekistan: Conference of Tashkent, 2007), 6.

⁵ Mohamed Ahmed Abd el-Salam, “Textiles and Identity along the Silk Roads between China and the Eastern Islamic World”, in *Textiles and Clothing along the Silk Roads*, ed: Feng Zhao, Marie-Louise Nosch, (China: China National Silk Museum, UNESCO, 2022), 261.

High-quality and well-made KESI “Silk Tapestry” was imported to be given as royal robes of honor because this custom helped spread Chinese silk in the Muslim world. A sultan or caliph used to present robes of honor to the relatives and men of the court, among others. These gifts were among the most important textile gifts in the Islamic era. Thus, these robes of honor were featured and made of luxury-imported silk from China¹.

The originality and authenticity of Chinese and Islamic clothes across ages promoted the effective existence of Chinese and Islamic textiles and costumes. Moreover, Chinese and Islamic textiles were exchanged on markets and transferred across land and sea commercial roads between China and the Muslim world. Silk and ceramics were the most important imported items from China².

Openness and *Pax Mongolica* also played a role. Muslim women in China were famous for weaving wool, cotton, and silk, especially in the Yuan Dynasty and the increasing trade and relationship ties between China and the Muslim world in the Mughal period. For instance, Huang Daopo 黄道婆 who was born in Ontshiang, Shanghai 上海, mastered the weaving method. She took this craft till the age of fifty years or more. She also taught her neighbors cotton weaving and making adorned fabrics³. Thus, her neighbors created fabrics with intersecting branches, phoenixes, chessboards, and letters of the Han Chinese language. One thousand families crafted textiles in this town, one of the most important textile centers in China⁴.

Quality cultures of Chinese and Islamic communities, pilgrimage visits of Chinese Muslims, and marriage bonds with the Muslim world promoted the exchange of tapestry between China and the Muslim World⁵.

There were mutual artistic influences on the industries and decorations of textiles between China and the Muslim world since early Islamic history, specifically during the early Abbasid era (2AH/8ADcentury). These mutual influences between the textiles of the Islamic and Far Orient continued through the effect of Islamic weavers on the Chinese textiles since the Yuan Dynasty, whose emperors moved many Muslim weavers, mainly from Iran in 690AH/1275AD, to create the designs of Chinese textiles. The historians of the Yuan Dynasty also reported that Muslim manufacturers greatly helped develop the Chinese textile industry, as they introduced many decorative and

¹ Kim Youngna, *Celebrating Events with Banquets and Ceremonies in the Joseon Dynasty*, (Korea: National Museum of Korea, 2011), 38.

² Abd el-Salam, “Textiles and Identity”, 265.

³ Joseph Breck, *Indian Cottons Four New Accessions*, Vol.23, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 359.

⁴ Chen Dezhi, *The History of Yuan Dynasty*, (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1986), 433,434.

⁵ Shafeeqa, “The Indian Subcontinent and China in the Writings of Muslim Explorers”, 38.

industrial methods that were not known in the Far East. On his famous trip to China in 670-674AH/1254-1324AD, Marco Polo reported the spread of Chinese silk tapestry in the Arab countries and the exporting the Cotton Mosul cotton textiles known as *Shash* and carpet as well from Iran, and Iraq to China¹.

Diplomatic gifts, exchange of embassies, and official visits between China and the Muslim world helped promote the exchange of artistic influences on textiles between the Far and Islamic Orients. Moreover, the Chinese KESI "Silk Tapestry" was the most important and precious item of Chinese diplomatic gifts².

Harmony of KESI-Silk Tapestry:

KESI "Silk Tapestry" in China flourished; it was used for making all Chinese silk clothes and textiles. Moreover, the Chinese KESI "Silk Tapestry" was an important item of trade with China and the markets of West, Southeast, and Central Asia; its artifacts were decorated with the original Chinese features with tapestry as a newcomer method³.



Plate 7: Dragon amid Flower, leaf 1 from the album *louhui jijin ce*. Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), early 12th century. Silk tapestry (Kesi). © National Palace Museum, Taipei. © When Silk Was Gold, Central Asia and Chinese Textiles, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, p.58.

¹ For further information. See: polo, Marco. *The travel of Marco polo*, ed: Thomas Wright, (London: Public library, 2002), 42.

² Kathy Ceceri, *The Silk Road "Explore the World's Most Famous Trade Route with 20 Projects"*, (China: Book World, 2011), 30.

³ Watt, *When Silk Was Gold*, 58.

Results:

Silk Tapestry cannot be decorated except after good preparation. A weaver rubs raw silk with chalk powder to remove the traces of oil that may hinder absorbing dyes. Furthermore, the quality and type of silk affect the decorations. Brush touches on silk should be fast, defined, and clear, as they dry quickly. However, it differs in the case of KESI-tapestry, which does not require fabric treatments before weaving. All technical and treatment operations of the weaved fabric were carried out on the loom because KESI “Silk Tapestry” adopted the latest manufacturing and decoration methods simultaneously by weaving decorations in tapestry- unextended and disconnected wefts across the textile to make the decoration¹.

Tapestry structure is created using looms. A loom, whether vertical or horizontal, is the tool used to manufacture fabric. It was introduced in the ancient Egyptian civilization. A horizontal loom was found in the tomb of Khnumhotep III of the 12th dynasty, and paintings of the vertical loom were discovered in the tombs of Neferhotep and Thot Nefrti in Thebes from the mid-18th dynasty. A loom is a simple tool made of two parallel beams of wood fixed between two vertical pieces of wood, encompassing a group of fixed vertical threads called warps (usually the strongest of the weaving threads) intersecting with horizontal threads called wefts².

Looms are classified according to development. For instance, the **horizontal loom** is simple and primal and still used by the nomads, while the **vertical-shaft loom** is more developed and known as *Tabrizi* loom³. The rotating loom (more advanced), which is easy to disassemble and install, comprises the horizontal loom of two wooden bars on which silk yarns are placed in the case of KESI “Silk Tapestry”. Moreover, looms varied in shape and facility according to their need and according to the types and shapes of weaves. Thus, the KESI “Silk Tapestry” is a complex composite textile requiring more advanced looms.

Although the tapestry industry began as simple and domestic, moving from one generation to another, its influences were exchanged, and the industry evolved. Moreover, public tapestry plants were established and monitored by the government with an imperial nature. A large-sized tapestry was made by a group of workers sitting side by side. Below and near the upper cylinder, there were one or two small wooden cylinders. The warps were divided into single and double (one after the other). The front warps were fixed using a transverse wooden ruler on the back warps only. Another ruler might be placed on the front warps⁴.

From time to time, the head worker or court designer passed by holding the sketch of the KESI “Silk Tapestry” to match the design to the work. The designer also gave tips to the workers and ordered their needs for the types of natural silk. In short, the KESI

¹ Salman, *Textile Materials*, 1-3

² Muhammad, *Islamic Textiles*, 30.

³ Muhammad, *Islamic Textiles*, 31.

⁴ Muhammad, *Islamic Textiles*, 33.

“Silk Tapestry” was completed based on the integration and textile harmony of three important elements: design, color, and texture¹.

From Iran, China also added the gold and silver threads in the decoration of silk textiles known as “*cloth of gold and silk*” or “Panni Tartaric”, which were abundant . This method was transferred from Iran, West Asia, and the Middle East to China. For instance, an artifact was made of silk fabric decorated with gold in Iran in “*Cangrande Della Scala*” in (729AH /1329AD)².

Conclusion:

Thus, the effect of Islamic textiles in China helped introduce a new technical term in the arts of China and the Far East. Known as KESI, the term was introduced by Islamic art. The Chinese silk decorated in this method has been known as “Chinese Silk Tapestry”. The magic and philosophy of KESI-Silk Tapestry between China and the Islamic world have been shown in the weaver’s ability to integrate and transform threads with no decorative or expressive value into the marvelous fabric after processing, treating, dyeing, and weaving. The outcome was elegant and luxurious clothes, integrating the functional purpose with the beauty of the expressive and aesthetic purposes. Therefore, fashion has been the title and identity of people’s lives, suggesting creativity and artistic progress that have not been achieved for any applied arts.

¹ Lotika Varadarajan, *Silk in Northeastern and Eastern India; "The Indigenous Tradition"*, (UK: printed in Great Britain, 1988), 561.

² Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie*, 20.

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