

# The Traditional Art of Painting with Silk — Kesi

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## ABSTRACT

Kesi(缂丝), also known as "Kesi(刻丝)", "Kesi(剡丝)", and "Kesi(克丝)", is a unique traditional silk weaving craft of the Chinese nation. Due to its exquisite craftsmanship and superiority over ordinary silk fabrics, it has extremely high collectible value and is known as the "saint of weaving" and "an inch of Kesi is worth an inch of gold". This ancient handicraft art originated from the wool weaving craft introduced along the ancient Silk Road, integrating silk weaving techniques. It has many unique characteristics in the weaving process, which distinguishes it from the general weaving method of "passing through warp and weft". Kesi uses raw silk as the warp and colored cooked silk as the weft, adopting the method of "passing through warp and breaking weft" to form the pattern boundaries, presenting a carved and engraved effect - looking like a carving when viewed from the hollow. This paper aims to explore the profound historical origins of Kesi art through literature research, case analysis, induction, and summarization, to understand its development trajectory in different periods from ancient times to the present, to fully analyze the relevant theoretical knowledge of Kesi craftsmanship, summarizing its technical characteristics from three aspects: weaving, color, and pattern, to systematically analyze the specific presentation of Kesi art in calligraphy and painting works, demonstrating its unique artistic characteristics from three aspects: perspective, composition, and content, and to analyze and sort out the profound cultural connotations contained in Kesi art through Buddhist scriptures, Buddha statues, and auspicious patterns.

**Keywords:** Kesi, Traditional craftsmanship, Artistic characteristics, Unique connotation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kesi has a long and profound history, representing the essence of traditional Chinese silk art. It is one of the most skilled and artistically valuable silk weaving crafts among ancient textile artworks. Due to its appearance, which "appears hollow when viewed, resembling carved imagery", akin to silk that has been carved by a knife, it is also known as "carved silk". Because the weaving process of Kesi is extremely complex and time-consuming, the surviving works are very rare, and its price is higher than gold. A successful Kesi artwork requires a level of labor and material resources that ordinary households cannot afford during its production process. Therefore, since ancient times, there have been sayings such as "the saint of weaving" and "an inch of Kesi is worth an inch of gold" to illustrate the preciousness of Kesi works. At the same time, Kesi possesses unique artistic characteristics that distinguish it from ordinary silk fabrics. Its combination with painting

art can reduce the difficulty and cost of weaving, making it not only a weaving skill but also a decorative method.

In recent years, with the surge in enthusiasm for the protection of intangible cultural heritage, the excellent traditional Chinese culture has garnered significant attention and comprehensive promotion from both the state and various sectors of society. This has led to the gradual emergence of the excellent traditional Chinese culture and ancient traditional craftsmanship, which embody the wisdom of our ancestors, into the public eye. Consequently, people's awareness of the art of Kesi has also been gradually enhanced.

Kesi art is a traditional craft category that has enjoyed a high reputation and far-reaching influence in the history of the Chinese nation. However, in the present era, Kesi is still influenced and constrained by various reasons and is often overlooked by the public. In the era of rapid development of online media, images, and data, a

wide variety of mass-produced art reproductions have brought people a tremendous audio-visual impact, making the development of Kesi art a difficult task. Nevertheless, in the era of machine production, Kesi is the only craft that cannot be replaced by machines. The patterns and structures of Kesi can be woven in combination with various crafts and become different products according to people's different aesthetic and practical needs. In the creative process, the unique personality of the author is fully reflected due to the flexibility of Kesi weaving. Developing Kesi craftsmanship is not only a supplement to the excessive standardization and homogenization of modern society's machine production lines, but also a full expansion of our own creativity and imagination.

The craft of Kesi embodies profound cultural genes and artistic connotations. Its profound influence on future generations is not only reflected in the exquisite craftsmanship and superb wisdom displayed in its masterpieces, but also in the beliefs and values of the society of that time, which are carried through this art form. As a unique skill in manual labor, Kesi art has undergone several changes in the long history, enhancing the national self-confidence and cohesion. Its role in inheriting Chinese traditional culture and national spirit cannot be underestimated.

## 2. THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF KESI

In existing literary records, the term for Kesi (a traditional Chinese handicraft) varies. In the Song Dynasty, Zhuang Chuo's "Ji Lei Pian" and Cao Zhao's "Ge Gu Yao Lun" refer to it as "Kesi(刻丝)", while Hong Hao's "Song Mo Ji Wen" in the Song Dynasty writes it as "Kesi(剡丝)". In the Ming Dynasty, Gu Tai's "Bo Wu Yao Lan" also calls it "Kesi(克丝)", and Ming Dynasty scholar Zhou Qi's "Ming Yi Kao" states, "The meaning of 'ke(刻)' is not clear. In 'Guang Yun', it says 'ke, a kind of weaving skill', Therefore, the character 'ke(刻)' in 'Kesi(刻丝)' should be originally written as 'ke(剡)', but it was mistakenly written as 'ke(刻)'." This clarifies the correct term for Kesi. Kesi is not only a part of China's intangible cultural heritage but also one of the world's intangible cultural heritages, with a history of at least two thousand years. Kesi possesses profound cultural genes and artistic connotations, and has been preserved and passed down through generations of Kesi craftsmen, becoming a wonderful flower in the garden of Chinese craftsmanship.

### 2.1 The Origin and Formation of Kesi

According to research, Chinese Kesi has a history of at least over two thousand years, and there are still various views on its origin. Judging from the Kesi woolen fabrics unearthed so far, "as early as the Han and Wei dynasties, the Western Regions already had 'warp-through and weft-cutting' Kesi woolen fabrics, such as the horse and human pattern Kesi woolen fabric unearthed in Shanpula, Hotan, Xinjiang". In the British "Encyclopedia Britannica", there is a relevant record on the origin of the "warp-through and weft-cutting" weaving technique: "The weaving technique of warp-through and weft-cutting originated in Syria and Egypt, and later spread to China's Xinjiang via Persia, Central Asia, and the Pamir Plateau". As these regions are mostly located in highland and mountainous areas with cold, damp, and humid climates, as well as significant temperature differences between day and night, the fluffy and thick-textured Kesi woolen fabrics played an important role in keeping warm and preventing cold.

Through the continuous integration and development of wool embroidery and silk weaving techniques, the craft was introduced to the Central Plains from the Han and Wei dynasties to the Tang dynasty. The use of silk threads increased steadily, gradually replacing wool threads and evolving into Kesi (a type of silk embroidery). Shang Gang records in "The History of Arts and Crafts in the Yuan Dynasty": "The earliest known Kesi works date back to the Tang dynasty, and they are primarily found in northwest China. They should mainly originate from the shuttles of local ethnic minority weavers. The patterns and color matching often exhibit a 'foreign' style, with faint traces of Western wool embroidery influence."

During the Tang Dynasty, the political environment was open, and the Silk Road saw thriving trade. Its exchanges with Sassanid Persia, as one of the important aspects of cultural exchanges between the East and the West, not only brought people material enjoyment and economic prosperity, but also different regional commodities brought them distinct spiritual stimuli. Changes in clothing patterns recorded the surge of diverse cultural trends. The greatest influence of Persian fabrics on Kesi was mainly reflected in two aspects: firstly, the adoption of twill weave and weft patterning in weaving techniques; secondly, the unique style of pattern design, with the interlocking bead pattern being the most typical. In 1972, a very

precious geometric Kesi dance figurine belt was discovered in the ancient tombs of Astana, Turpan, which absorbed Persian weaving techniques and pattern styles and is the earliest verifiable Kesi fabric to date. In "Archaeological Records of the Western Regions," the famous British archaeologist Stein published a Tang Dynasty Kesi eight-treasure belt with a yellow-green lotus flower pattern, which shares the same style as the geometric Kesi dance figurine belt mentioned earlier.

## **2.2 The Emergence and Development of Kesi**

The Kesi art of the Northern Song Dynasty inherited from the Tang Dynasty, and a large number of Kesi artworks based on famous paintings and calligraphy emerged. The patterns of these artworks were more exquisite and magnificent compared to those of the previous dynasties. Among them, the Kesi from Dingzhou (now Ding County, Hebei Province) was the most renowned. According to Zhuang Chuo (styled Ji Yu) in his book "Ji Lei Pian" during the Song Dynasty, "Dingzhou's woven Kesi does not use large looms. Instead, it uses cooked colored silk threads on a wooden frame, and freely creates patterns of flowers, plants, birds, and animals. When weaving with small shuttles, the weaver first leaves empty spaces, and then adds mixed-color threads on the warp and weft to form patterns that appear to be carved, hence the name 'Kesi'."

During the Southern Song Dynasty, the royal family relocated southward, and the Kesi art, once exclusive to the court aristocracy, underwent changes and eventually settled in the Suzhou-Songjiang region. The ancient city of Suzhou has always been renowned for its silk production, earning the title of "Hometown of Silk." The local silk is of superior quality and serves as the best material to showcase the unique artistic charm of Kesi. Therefore, once Kesi was introduced, it quickly took root and developed its own characteristics locally. The art of Kesi reached great heights during this period, with numerous masterpieces handed down through generations. A group of renowned Kesi masters with extremely high craftsmanship left their names in history, ushering in an era of artistic Kesi.

During the Yuan Dynasty, the art of Kesi was extensively used in the robes of royalty and nobility, incorporating round gold threads for weaving to demonstrate status. The style was luxurious and unrestrained, reversing the delicate and graceful

style of the Southern Song Dynasty. The rulers of the Ming Dynasty opposed extravagance and advocated frugality, resulting in a scarcity of Kesi products until the Xuande period when it was revived. Kesi was deeply influenced by the artistic style of literati paintings from the Wu region, becoming increasingly elegant and refined. Technically, there were also advancements, particularly the incorporation of peacock feathers mixed into the weaving, which was dazzlingly golden and jade-like, demonstrating the supreme royal demeanor. In the Qing Dynasty, Kesi reached its heyday, with increasingly rich expressive means. Kesi products reached their peak in both quantity and form, and the demand for luxury textiles both inside and outside the palace greatly increased. Kesi entered the homes of ordinary people to some extent, as evidenced by the fact that Xiaoqin Cao's novel "Dream of the Red Chamber" mentions that Xirun, a servant girl from the Jia family, had a "peach-pink and white bird Kesi silver jacket".

During the late Qing Dynasty, as the nation's power declined and the political situation became unstable, the Kesi industry gradually shrank, and this ancient craft was in danger of being lost. In the early years of the Republic of China, with the change of dynasties and the reform of the clothing system, a large number of Kesi looms were shut down. The Mingbao newspaper in Suzhou carried an article titled "Kesi Craft in Suzhou" which stated: "Before the war, there were about a hundred people in Wuzhong who practiced this craft. Over the past few decades, many have died due to old age, and quite a few have been forced to flee due to the war. Now, there are probably less than sixty people who can weave, and among the skilled artists, there are no more than twenty or thirty."

In the decades following the liberation of the country, the Kesi industry experienced a revival, and this ancient craft was revived. Against the backdrop of China's reform and opening up, as well as deep cultural exchanges between China and Japan, Japan's love and pursuit for gorgeous and exquisite Kesi products, represented by kimono obi, propelled the unprecedented development of the Kesi industry. However, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, due to the blind development of the Kesi industry, disorderly operation by individual businesses, and uneven market quality, the Kesi industry once again declined from its peak.

In today's society, due to the country's high level of protection and promotion of intangible cultural heritage, people's awareness of the art of

Kesi (a traditional Chinese silk weaving technique) has gradually increased. Traditional Kesi has begun to enter contemporary life, and many schools and institutions have specially launched Kesi inheritance courses, carrying out socialized teaching and inheritance work based on the research and creation of Chinese traditional Kesi weaving culture. In the context of the creative transformation and innovative development of excellent traditional Chinese culture in the new era, Kesi patterns, culture, and modern clothing are seamlessly integrated within a small space. Kesi art is applied to products such as scarves, ties, round fans, sachets, shoes, bags, and so on. It is rooted in the fascinating ancient Chinese methods while closely integrating with modern fashion, becoming an excellent carrier for China to practice the spirit of traditional craftsmanship. At the same time, it reflects people's love and respect for excellent traditional culture. In addition, a "trend" of collecting Kesi has emerged in China. Some ancient imperial Kesi artworks such as paintings, calligraphy, and screens have been sold at high prices at auctions.

### **3. THE TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF KESI**

Throughout history, Kesi (a traditional Chinese art of silk weaving) products have always been favored by emperors and nobles. "Birds stepping on flowers from a plain silk, I once asked someone about the difficulty of Kesi weaving. It should be a product of the Xuanhe era, don't treat it as ordinary embroidery." This is wrote by Emperor Huizong of Song, Zhao Ji, in his poem "Green Peach, Butterfly, and Sparrow". This poem depicts Kesi, known as the "saint of weaving," and it is not difficult to read Emperor Huizong's high praise for the exquisite craftsmanship of Kesi from these lines. Kesi uses silk as the raw material and employs the technique of "passing through the warp and breaking the weft" to create its products. The combination of raw materials and techniques embodies the wisdom and emotions of craftsmen, while presenting a refined and elegant aesthetic of craftsmanship.

#### ***3.1 The Weaving of Kesi: Being Parallel and Non-interlaced***

The production tools for Kesi (a traditional Chinese silk weaving technique) are relatively simple, yet the craftsmanship is particularly intricate. Some production enterprises, such as the former Wuxian Kesi General Factory, produce their

own colored threads (weft threads) in pursuit of the color effects of Kesi works. Their process involves as many as over thirty steps, divided into warp and weft directions. Generally, artists purchase ready-made warp and weft threads, and during the weaving process, they need to go through twelve main steps, including selecting the design, adjusting the warp, pulling the warp, selecting the weft, turning over the warp, blocking the warp, drawing the design, matching the threads, shaking the threads, weaving, finishing, and mounting.

In his book "Ji Lei Pian", Zhuang Chuo of the Song Dynasty provided a detailed account of the production process of Kesi (a type of silk weaving): "It's like a woman's garment, which can be completed throughout the year. Even if it features various flowers, they may not resemble each other, because the weft threads are not woven by a shuttle." This shows that it takes a considerable amount of time to weave a finished Kesi product.

The difference between Kesi (a traditional Chinese silk weaving technique) and general fabrics such as embroidery and brocade lies in the "weft insertion" method. General fabrics are woven with "continuous warp and continuous weft", while Kesi is woven with "continuous warp and broken weft". In Kesi weaving, raw silk is used as the warp, and various colored cooked silk is used as the weft. During the weaving process of Kesi fabric, the colored weft threads are wrapped around the warp threads within the pattern area, creating a weave pattern that only reveals the colored threads on the surface. The woven pattern has consistent effects on both the front and back sides, with both the color and pattern of Kesi being revealed through the weft threads. At the same time, due to the disconnected rotation of the weft threads, gaps resembling saw teeth are left at the junctions between patterns and patterns, as well as between patterns and the ground pattern, producing a relief-like effect akin to carving or engraving, which is extremely decorative.

#### ***3.2 The Color of Kesi: Being Ancient and Elegant***

Kesi, with its unique weaving method of "passing through the warp and breaking the weft", possesses the characteristic of relying on the weft to show the pattern. During the weaving process, various colored wefts are used to wrap around the warp threads, so the overall color of Kesi is expressed entirely by the colors of the weft threads. Therefore, the overall color of Kesi presents a soft

and elegant style, bright yet not gaudy, and is very pleasing to the eye.

Kesi products can be divided into two major categories: domestic Kesi and ornamental Kesi. Domestic Kesi includes round fans, bookmarks, cushions, table mats, handbags, and kimono belts. Its patterns are mostly simple geometric shapes, with simpler color usage and fewer contrasting colors, mainly in monochromatic tones. Ornamental Kesi, on the other hand, includes central halls, screens, screen strips, and picture pages. The weaving difficulty of ornamental Kesi is greater than that of domestic Kesi, with more complex color usage and more contrasting colors, placing great emphasis on artistic quality. Mastering and applying contrasting colors plays an extremely important role in Kesi works. Kesi achieves the artistic effect of infinite color variations and strong layering through the back-and-forth stretching of the contrasting head, thus portraying the vivid and lifelike forms of the woven objects. Even a single flower or leaf can exhibit many differences in terms of color weaving. Kesi artist Zhang Yuming introduces in the book "Wu Zhong Jue Ji · Chinese Kesi" that "in terms of color usage, buds are darker, blooming flowers are lighter, the petals are darker, the reverse petals are lighter, and the folded petals are darker where they are placed below and slightly lighter where they are placed above, making the flowers vivid and graceful. Adding yellow stamens in the middle makes them even more fragrant and enticing to bees and butterflies". From this, it can be concluded that the selection, matching, and blending of colors in Kesi artworks are inseparable from the skills and aesthetic level of the Kesi artists.

### ***3.3 The Pattern of Kesi: Free Style***

Kesi has a rich variety of pattern themes, capable of flexibly weaving various painting patterns, demonstrating good adaptability. According to historical Kesi products, Kesi patterns do not exist independently. Kesi patterns vary across different eras and reflect their respective characteristics of the times, embodying the economy, politics, and culture of the society at that time. For example, during the Northern Song and Southern Song dynasties, calligraphy and painting art flourished. The patterns of Kesi works were mainly imitative paintings, with representative works including the Northern Song Kesi artwork "Purple Phoenix Magpie Chart" and Shen Zifan's "Plum and Magpie Scroll" from the Southern Song dynasty. In the Qing dynasty, as Kesi products were

largely used by the royal family, the clothing of emperors, empresses, concubines, and officials incorporated Kesi techniques. The pattern structures were extremely complex, using patterns such as dragons and phoenixes, birds and beasts, landscapes, and auspicious clouds, with strict customization.

## **4. UNIQUE ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS**

Kesi art appreciation pieces have always been based on famous paintings and calligraphy. In the past, literati and collectors believed that expressing and passing down paintings and calligraphy works through Kesi techniques not only conveyed the profound artistic conception and charm of Chinese paintings but also differed from conceptual paintings, offering a unique charm. In fact, many Kesi works surpassed the original paintings. At the end of the Northern Song Dynasty, Emperor Huizong of Song, Zhao Ji, had a particular passion for painting art. During his reign, he vigorously established painting academies and also developed and expanded court craft institutions such as the Wenxiu Academy, which led the social trend for a time. As a result, Kesi gradually integrated with painting techniques and developed into a unique art form combining weaving and painting. Collecting Kesi works based on famous paintings was once regarded as an elegant pursuit and gradually became a trend that persisted until the end of the Qing Dynasty.

The combination of Kesi art and painting skills is a fusion of various comprehensive elements such as craftsmanship, painting, and fabrics. It is a unique Kesi weaving technique developed based on the Kesi craft. First, the outline of the image is woven using the method of "continuing the warp and breaking the weft". Then, the difficult-to-weave small parts are treated with "painting instead of Kesi weaving". The introduction of this method makes the fine details of the work more precise and concise, giving Kesi art a unique artistic characteristic of blending with painting skills and complementing each other.

### ***4.1 Perspective: Every Step Brings a New Scenery***

From the perspective of perspective, the creation of the images in Kesi artworks belongs to the category of "scattered perspective". This refers to the organization of the overall image in Kesi

works, where there is no centralized, clear focal point. Instead, a dispersed group of viewpoints, known as "stepping and changing scenery", is adopted, dispersing them to various parts of the image. This bears a striking resemblance to the creation of traditional Chinese paintings. Although when observing the entire work from a certain part, it may seem to violate the basic principles of perspective, as the Kesi image gradually unfolds, each part presents a flat perspective effect, which is more conducive to fully displaying the overall and detailed aspects of the work. The Kesi work "The Pavilion on the Immortal Mountain", currently housed in the Palace Museum, has a dense layout and a serene and vast realm. The artist, when depicting mountains, was not limited by objective things and did not simulate a specific mountain peak in a photographic manner. Instead, he could "search for all the wonderful peaks and make rough sketches", depicting the mountains he imagined in his heart.

#### **4.2 Composition: Fullness Is Beauty**

Kesi artworks feature rich and intricate compositions, exquisite and elegant color matching, clear hierarchy, and strong expressiveness. For example, the Kesi work "The Three Stars Scroll Inscribed by Emperor Qianlong" from the Qing Dynasty's Qianlong period depicts the three stars of fortune, wealth, and longevity, as well as patterns of pine trees, cranes, and deer, symbolizing longevity. The work employs various weaving techniques, complemented by silk embroidery in subtle details to depict the texture of different objects. The entire painting uses more than 20 different colored silks, showcasing exquisite Kesi embroidery and a rich overall composition. Another example is the Kesi and embroidery work "Nine Yangs Dispelling Winter" from the same period. The painting is a color Kesi and embroidery piece, with the background being Kesi and the main characters, animals, and trees being embellished on the Kesi. The overall composition appears complex, but through the contrast of blue and red, white, and other colors, the theme is highlighted and the objects are clearly defined.

#### **4.3 Content: Being Grand and Majestic**

Kesi, with its intricate and meticulous craftsmanship, requires a tremendous amount of labor and is exceptionally expensive to produce. In ancient times, it was said that "Kesi is more precious than gold and jade". Throughout its long

history, Kesi clothing and accessories were mostly artistic masterpieces enjoyed only by the royal court and wealthy families. Therefore, the overall content and material selection of Kesi present a magnificent and imposing artistic style. This artistic characteristic became more prominent after Kesi developed and absorbed the expression and viewing methods of painting art during the Song Dynasty. Kesi and painting are complementary skills that enhance each other, resulting in many magnificent large-scale paintings, often featuring themes such as figures, landscapes, and pavilions, like fairy tales or scenic spots. The paintings are exquisite and beautiful, with vibrant and bright colors. The Kesi painting "Stone Lake Dragon Boat Race" from the Qing Dynasty's Qianlong period is woven based on the scene of the Dragon Boat Race on Stone Lake in Suzhou during the Dragon Boat Festival. The painting style is grand and distant, with a strong sense of realism. Nearby is a covered corridor for sunshade and shelter, and the waterside pavilion dock by the lake is majestic. Such Kesi craftsmanship requires extremely high standards, and there are very few exquisite works in existence. It was popular during the Qianlong period but later became rare. In addition, there are also works with delicate and rich content, many of which feature flowers and birds as the subject matter. In such Kesi works, the style of flower modeling is relatively realistic, often using plants such as hibiscus and perennial flowers to symbolize wealth and well-being. The Song Dynasty Kesi paintings "Hibiscus and Double Geese" and "Wen Shi Jin Ji" feature a profusion of flowers and intricate patterns, with rich and detailed colors. The various images combine both realism and ornamental qualities.

### **5. CULTURAL CONNOTATION OF KESI**

The art of Kesi in China boasts a long history and exquisite craftsmanship. Its history is one of cultural exchange and continuous improvement, as well as the accumulation of people's lifestyles, aesthetic tastes, and national culture over thousands of years. Kesi from different dynasties has its strong era style and distinct national characteristics, while also reflecting people's life ideals and spiritual ideals. Therefore, to promote and enhance this ancient art of Kesi, it is necessary to have a deep understanding of its unique cultural form and personality.

### **5.1 Religious Messages Filled with Kindness: Buddhist Scriptures and Statues**

Since its introduction into China during the reign of Emperor Ming of Han, Buddhism has not only had a profound impact on people's ideologies, attitudes towards life, and lifestyles, but also influenced artistic fields such as fine arts, music, and architecture. The influence of Buddhism on ancient Chinese traditional culture is immeasurable. Since the Tang Dynasty, Kesi (a type of silk weaving) has been spread among northern ethnic minorities along the Silk Road. Due to the prevalence of Buddhism in these regions, apart from being used for practical purposes, Kesi is also used to weave religious objects with Buddhist themes, mainly including Thangka, Buddhist scriptures, and prayer flags. The art of Kesi is deeply influenced by Buddhist culture, enriching the cultural connotation of the works. At the same time, Kesi works with Buddhist scriptures and statues as the theme have also played a role in promoting the spread and popularity of Buddhism in China to a certain extent.

The female-faced Guanyin tapestry statues from the Song Dynasty and the Dharani Sutra quilts from the Qing Dynasty are typical representative works of the sinicization of Buddhism. Furthermore, during the Qing Dynasty, the imperial court vigorously promoted Tibetan Buddhism. Currently, the Forbidden City houses a large collection of exquisitely crafted and beautifully designed Thangka tapestries, which constitute the largest extant collection of Buddhist-themed tapestry works. These Thangka tapestries are created through superb weaving skills under the joint guidance of eminent monks proficient in Buddhist teachings and painting masters skilled in portraying Buddha statues. They use shuttles as pens and colored silk threads instead of painting pigments, and it takes years to weave a complete work. Expressing the sacredness of the heart through silk threads is not achievable solely through skill; it is not only a virtue but also a form of spiritual practice.

The Qing Dynasty Kesi "Amitabha in the Elysium Scroll" incorporates painting techniques such as gold and color application in addition to Kesi weaving. The center of the painting depicts Amitabha, the founder of the Western Elysium, with numerous deities and bodhisattvas gathered around him, creating a lively scene. The composition is well-structured, with harmonious

color matching, fully showcasing the grandeur and beauty of Amitabha's Western Pure Land. In addition, other representative Buddhist-themed works from the Qing Dynasty include the Kesi "Three-Period Buddha Thangka," the Kesi "Intensive Vajra Statue", and the Kesi "Emperor Qianlong's Inscription on the Shakyamuni Statue Scroll". These works not only exhibit rich and natural color variations but also depict vivid and lifelike forms of deities and buddhas, reflecting the close connection between religious beliefs and silk weaving craftsmanship.

### **5.2 Strong Sense of Life: Auspicious Patterns**

The core values of Kesi can be summarized by the word "auspiciousness". Tang Chengxuanying explained, "auspiciousness refers to the good fortune brought by doing good deeds, while auspicious patterns are signs of good fortune and celebration". Auspicious patterns originated in the Shang and Zhou dynasties, developed in the Tang and Song dynasties, and flourished in the Ming and Qing dynasties, reaching a level where "every image must have a meaning, and every meaning must be auspicious". Despite the changes in lifestyle driven by urbanization, which have led to increasingly modern home furnishings, the Chinese people's beliefs in auspiciousness, longevity, and the ability to ward off evil and bring good fortune still persist. Concepts such as reunion, peace, auspiciousness, and prosperity, which are imbued with auspicious meanings, are the ultimate pursuit of all Chinese folklore and an unchanging theme throughout the artistic creation of Kesi.

In the creation of Kesi fabrics, animal and plant patterns are most commonly used as auspicious symbols. Images with homophonic meanings related to auspicious language are widely employed, imbuing the fabrics with a strong sense of life. These patterns not only embody people's wishes for good fortune and longevity but also possess a strong decorative aesthetic. According to the "Da Qing Huidian" (the Imperial Code of the Qing Dynasty), civil officials used "flying birds" patterns, while military officials used "beasts" patterns on the front and back of their official robes. A Kesi brocade patch with a golden pheasant, currently housed in the Palace Museum, features a golden pheasant with outstretched wings gazing at the high-hanging red sun, standing on a reef in the sea. The pheasant's graceful posture and vibrant plumage symbolize good wishes and

auspiciousness. The late Qing Dynasty Kesi tapestry "Three Rams Bringing Good Fortune" is a masterpiece combining Kesi and kemao (a traditional Chinese wool weaving technique) techniques. The scene depicts a red sun shining high, willow branches swaying, and three lambs playing on a grassy ground, representing the beautiful early spring scene of the earth's revival. The Kesi tapestry "Dongfang Shuo Stealing Peaches" from the late Yuan Dynasty, based on the legend of Dongfang Shuo stealing peaches, features a large immortal peach hanging from a branch amidst swirling auspicious clouds in the upper part of the scene, accompanied by reishi mushrooms, daffodils, and bamboo and stones in the lower part, symbolizing the auspicious meaning of "reishi mushrooms wishing for longevity". The Qing Dynasty Kesi tapestry "Autumn Peaches and Ribbon Birds" weaves with autumn peaches and ribbon birds as themes, embodying the meaning of wealth and longevity.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Kesi art has a long and rich history, exquisite craftsmanship, and unique style, blending the national temperament and cultural characteristics of dynasties over thousands of years. It represents both the highest standard of royal art and the humanistic characteristics of folk art. With its unique weaving techniques, distinct patterns, and calm colors, Kesi achieves a visually consistent effect on both sides, offering extraordinary artistic appreciation and practical value. Through the creation of different works, it imparts rich cultural connotations, conveys emotions and expresses aspirations, reflecting the creator's high pursuit of spirit and culture, while also possessing excellent artistic appreciation and practicality in daily life.

Traditional ethnic handicrafts constitute a significant component of China's intangible cultural heritage. As history progresses, some skills have undergone mutations and have even become unknown. Therefore, Kesi, as one of the handicraft skills still being passed down, deserves special attention and cherishment. In Kesi, people can see cultural exchange and integration, as well as the profound history. Nowadays, in the era of transformation, Kesi art is struggling, facing rapid changes in social life structures for its survival and development. However, if this skill is blindly transformed to adapt to people's lifestyles and aesthetic concepts, becoming neither fish nor fowl, then Kesi art will lose its unique charm. This is

another kind of extinction, one that is lost in the market. Currently, industrialization remains the future trend of social development, and traditional crafts that retain their original flavor are bound to become increasingly precious. Therefore, while people travel thousands of miles to "explore the extraordinary peaks" and strive to expand Kesi themes and forms, they must also constantly look back at tradition. It is necessary to recognize the historical, artistic, and cultural significance of Kesi art, uphold China's excellent traditional culture, and strive to return Kesi to its original historical appearance. This is the best way to inherit it.

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