

Idea Change and Inheritance Practice of the Modernity Transformation of Canton Embroidery: "Painting Embroidery" to "Embroidery Painting"

Yuan Yuan¹

¹ Guangzhou University, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China

ABSTRACT

This article explores the modernity idea change of Canton Embroidery art from traditional handicraft "painting embroidery" to "embroidery painting" creation with a "picturesque realm". Taking the cultural inheritance practice of this Lingnan intangible cultural heritage project carried out by the School of Art and Design of Guangzhou University as an example, this article demonstrates a new path for the innovation of the modernity transformation of Canton Embroidery intangible cultural heritage art resources.

Keywords: *Painting embroidery, Embroidery painting, Canton Embroidery, Idea change, Inheritance practice.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Canton Embroidery art is a cultural heritage with both material and spiritual connotations in the process of civilization in the Lingnan region. This folk embroidery craft has originated with the consciousness of the Baiyue civilization. It can be regarded as the records of the living conditions of the agricultural society, and the traces of the spiritual trajectory of the historical context. As one of the first projects to be included in the national intangible cultural heritage representative list in 2006, Canton Embroidery has been passed down since the Tang Dynasty and has been passed down in Guangzhou, Panyu, Shunde, the South China Sea, and other places. It is a Lingnan arts and crafts form with complete technological inheritance. The sericulture and embroidery industry in the agricultural society was widely spread among the people. In the mid to late Ming Dynasty in the Lingnan region, agricultural culture and marine culture were the sources. By continuously absorbing the essence of important cultural exchanges between China and the West, Canton Embroidery has gradually formed its own characteristics in terms of themes, styles, techniques, and applications.

Guangxiu art creation pays attention to the combination of material form and quality. There are four categories of real silk velvet embroidery, gold and silver thread embroidery, thread embroidery, and bead embroidery. Real silk velvet embroidery uses silk as the embroidery material, with strong expressive power, and is the oldest and most complete Canton Embroidery variety with the longest history and the most complete inheritance of skills. "Guangzhou Embroidery Needle Technique"[1] records that there are seven categories of embroidery techniques in Canton Embroidery, including straight twisting needles, binding and biting needles, continuous inserting needles, auxiliary needles, weaving embroidery, winding embroidery, and variant embroidery. Within each category, there are different classifications of embroidery techniques.

The functional and aesthetic consciousness possessed by primitive creators gradually differentiated after humans entered class society, from the traditional decorative handicraft product "painting embroidery" that was close to daily life to the "embroidery painting" that combines the nobility of palace art, the elegance of literati art, the solemnity of religious art, and the simplicity of folk art. Canton Embroidery art not only directly inherits the primitive cultural representation of

Guangfu region, but also has opened up a picturesque realm with a modernity concept of creation. Throughout the various works of Canton Embroidery art, from manual style to painting creative thinking, its creation idea change closely overlaps with the trajectory of Lingnan cultural development.

2. THE IDEA CHANGE FROM "PAINTING EMBROIDERY" TO "EMBROIDERY PAINTING"

"Painting embroidery" is a term composed of "painting" and "embroidery", which involves two media: "painting" and "embroidery". Due to differences in tools, language, and production methods, these two media have had vastly different evaluation concepts throughout Chinese history. "Embroidery" is generally classified as a category of arts and crafts, with craftsmanship art effects such as practicability, ornamental value, and decorativeness, and its status is relatively low compared to painting. Although people can trace the origin of the word "embroidery", it is often pointed out in ancient Chinese history that "embroidery" and "painting" have the same root and source. In the "Book of Shangshu · Xiashu · Yiji", it is recorded that Emperor Shun ordered Yu to "observe the image of ancient people"[2] "Taking vessels, algae, powder and rice, square patch and Chi embroidery are applied to the five colors to make clothing."[3] Observing ancient people's paintings in this way, creating a painting-like effect with algae, flames, axes, geometric shapes, etc., ancient people use colorful "painted clothes and embroidered clothes" to create clothing; In the "Book of Diverse Crafts", it is recorded that "embroidery" is the process of creating colors and completing various types of painting production; however, "embroidery" is not directly "painting" or "drawing". The concept subject of "painting embroidery" formed in the Chinese history is that existing paintings or portraits are used as powder drafts (or replicas) for embroidery, and the finished products are handicraft embroidery products. It is said that "embroidery is created from painting, and painting is used for embroidery".

"Embroidery painting" is different from "painting embroidery" in that embroidery painting emphasizes that embroidery is only the use of tools, and the process of artistic creation focuses on pictorial language, artistic conception, etc., forming a "picturesque realm" with silk as the brush. The

finished product is not considered a handicraft, but a fully pictorial artwork. From this, it can be seen that the main concept emphasized by "embroidery painting" lies in its pictorial nature, just as "lacquer painting" differs from the concept of "lacquer art". It requires a high level of artistic cultivation from embroidery craftsmen, and poetry, calligraphy, and painting are all basic skills. Scholars and literati in the late Ming Dynasty praised Song Dynasty embroidery as the exquisite work that replaces embroidery with painting, includes half embroidery with half painting, and combines painting with embroidery. Zhang Yingwen, a scholar of the late Ming Dynasty, recorded in his "Qing Penetrabilia": "The embroidery needles of the Song Dynasty are delicate and the colors are exquisite and dazzling. Ten fingers are like spring breeze, being so amazing!"[4] The famous collector and connoisseur of the Ming Dynasty, Xiang Yuanbian, wrote in his "Jiao Chuang Jiu Lu - Painting Record": "In the embroidery of the Song Dynasty's embroidery painting, there are figures in the mountains and rivers, flowers and birds on the balcony, with fine stitches that do not show any edges or seams. One or two threads are used with needles, and the needles are as thin as hair. Therefore, the eyebrows and eyes are formed. The velvet color is dazzling and full of vitality, and the colors are dyed, which is better than the painting."[5] In the late Ming Dynasty, there was also Gu's embroidery in the "Lu Xiang Garden", which is recorded as the "so-called embroidery painting" can reach a picturesque and better than picturesque level, leaving behind exquisite works for the world.

The inheritors of contemporary Canton Embroidery art silently cultivate in the soil of Lingnan traditional culture. Generations of people have passed down the tradition from generation to generation, standing at the starting point of the new era, considering the historical heritage and context, following the trend of the times to explore and innovate, and actively advocating for the transformation of modernity art concepts from "painting embroidery" to "embroidery painting". Firstly, embroidery painting will be regarded as a form of artistic creation (or even as a new type of painting), which first requires Canton Embroidery artists to identify and transform their self-identity, that is, to transform from Canton Embroidery craftsmen to artists. They need to possess the ability to express painting shapes, high artistic aesthetic cultivation, and innovative creative abilities. Secondly, the modernity concept transformation from "painting embroidery" to "embroidery

painting" means that "embroidery" is only a medium tool, and the combination of embroidery and painting, the expression of painting language, and the creation of painting artistic conception are the key elements. Therefore, "painting" is the first and "embroidery" is the second. In this way, on the one hand, people can draw on the strengths of other painting styles such as Chinese painting, printmaking, oil painting, and apply different painting techniques such as realism, decoration, and abstraction to achieve appropriate artistic expression. On the other hand, it is necessary to carry forward the unique media advantages of contemporary embroidery techniques and explore new materials, techniques, and techniques for embroidery in the new era; the combination of the two forms the unique craftsmanship and creative style of embroidery painting works in the new era. Thirdly, in terms of "embroidery painting" creation, there is a greater emphasis on the updating of conceptual forms and aesthetic consciousness, emphasizing the development of creative individuality and the formation of artistic style, strengthening the artistic expression of the subject's spiritual world, and continuously updating and expanding the image language and media materials of embroidery painting expression forms. Fourthly, craftsmanship and painting are not the absolute standards for distinguishing between "painting embroidery" and "embroidery painting". Canton Embroidery, with its profound cultural heritage, has formed rich and rigorous expression techniques and production processes. The concept of "painting embroidery" has changed to "embroidery painting", which not only breaks through traditional craft thinking, but also relies on tradition to seek the "possibility" of development and innovation representing the times. This "possibility" lies in the deconstruction and disintegration of the old "painting embroidery" craft language, with an open attitude towards tradition and a diversified exploration of transformation in the contemporary context.

3. THE INHERITANCE PRACTICE OF THE MODERNITY OF CANTON EMBROIDERY ART RESOURCES

In recent years, exploring the modernity innovation of traditional handicraft heritage has become an important driving force for the development of innovative design in many countries. For example, Japan attaches great importance to the active use and protection of folk

art, and has organized rich activities for active inheritance from three levels. Firstly, the Japanese government coordinated and planned various important intangible cultural projects for exhibition and discussion activities; Secondly, groups of holders of intangible cultural heritage actively carry out a digital humanities service system, establish a digital center for Japanese art and humanities materials, and provide digital data preservation and services for important intangible cultural heritage, folk arts and crafts; Thirdly, it is to classify, protect and support the skills of the holders (inheritors) recognized by the state, and adopt a comprehensive perspective of "holistic correlation" to promote the innovative development, training, education, and other active inheritance of intangible cultural property inheritors.

Compared to Japan, India proposed in the latest version of the "Indian National Design Policy and Action Plan": "5. It is necessary to improve the level of design education in India to reach an international level. 6. It is a must to utilize traditional Indian craftsmanship and cultural heritage to cultivate local Indian designers in the field of products and services, as well as utilizing India's traditional craftsmanship and cultural heritage to generate Indian original designs in the field of products and services." [6] From this "Indian National Design Policy and Action Plan", it can be seen that India places great importance on traditional craftsmanship and cultural heritage, as well as the demand for innovative application in the field of product services and the goal of promoting local original design.

The practical teaching project on the inheritance and development of the modernity of Canton Embroidery art resources carried out by the School of Art and Design of Guangzhou University is based on a comprehensive examination of the regulations, rules, systems, and successful cases of traditional handicraft heritage excavation and development in other countries around the world (such as Finland, Japan, India, etc.), adopting a localized operation method, thus forming certain teaching characteristics and results.

Canton Embroidery, as one of the four famous embroideries in China, includes Chaozhou embroidery, Canton Embroidery, Yao embroidery, and other embroidery styles based on the inheritance region and artistic characteristics. It has a variety of needle techniques, strong color contrast, and a vivid Lingnan regional decorative style depicted by gold and silver threads; It also has rich

patterns, clear textures, and good retention of waterways that demonstrate the artistic characteristics of three-dimensional form. The content of Canton Embroidery is widely sourced, with themes such as celebration, blessings, and auspiciousness, as well as seafood and fruits that are rich in local characteristics. The classic work "Red Litchi and White Goose" by Xu Chiguang ("Figure 1"), the inheritor of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, and the lively theme works such as "Bamboo for Peace" ("Figure 2") by Liang Guikai, the master of Canton embroidery [7], depict the living conditions of rural folk in the Guangfu region. Due to the rapid development of Guangdong's economy since the reform and opening up in the 1980s, the introduction and promotion of embroidery machine production in Canton Embroidery once fell into a sluggish state, and many state-owned enterprises and research institutions went bankrupt. However, in recent years, with the implementation of policies related to the protection and innovation of intangible cultural heritage by the country, Canton Embroidery has shed new brilliance at the forefront of the new era. Not only have the inheritors of Canton Embroidery intangible cultural heritage emerged, such as Chen Shaofang, Wu Hongnong, Tan Zhanpeng, Liang Xingguo, etc., but also they have created works such as "Dawn", "Fish and Dragon Changing" ("Figure 3"), "Women's Statue" ("Figure 4"), and "Spring in Shuixiang".[8] They have actively explored the innovative creative path of transforming Canton Embroidery from a status of arts and crafts to embroidery, and attempting to combine Canton Embroidery with modern printing techniques and digital media in design.



Figure 1 Canton Embroidery work "Red Litchi and White Goose" by Xu Chiguang.



Figure 2 Canton Embroidery work "Bamboo for Peace" by Liang Guikai.



Figure 3 Canton Embroidery work "Fish and Dragon Changing" by Wu Hongnuang.



Figure 4 Canton Embroidery work "Women's Statue" by Wu Hongnuang.

For exploring the history, current situation, and innovative exploration of future possibilities of Canton Embroidery, the School of Arts and Design of Guangzhou University has taken the lead in organizing the "Lingnan Traditional Crafts Talent Training and Guangdong Embroidery Innovative Application Research" art master's program training direction nationwide. Based on this master's program, the school has carried out the construction of Canton Embroidery digital archives, Canton Embroidery Exhibition Hall, Canton Embroidery

Master Studio, Canton Embroidery Cultural and Creative IP Active Inheritance Research Base Multiple off campus training bases for the development and design of modern soft clothing in Canton Embroidery, holding innovative design exhibitions in Canton Embroidery, and sharing meetings with famous embroidery masters; The school has also established a teaching and research team with university professors, doctoral students, and postdoctoral fellows as the main body, and hired national level inheritors of Canton Embroidery to participate in the formation of a team, striving to open up the channel for folk intangible cultural heritage craft culture to enter university teaching and research. The school has also developed and applied scientific digital library to modern design education and innovative development of Canton Embroidery, and referred to the Art and Culture Digital Humanities Development Center (DH-JA) model of Ritsumeikan University in Japan, [9] which not only effectively connects the fields of digital collection, research, education, etc., but also expands the coordination and cooperation between Canton Embroidery art resources and university design innovation education to achieve interdisciplinary and interdisciplinary integration of industry, academia, and research, striving to demonstrate its unique influence and radiation in the international digital intangible cultural and artistic heritage protection and research process.

3.1 The Contemporary "Embroidery Painting" Creation of Canton Embroidery

It is necessary to hire inheritors of Canton Embroidery to teach the cultural traditions, materials, and techniques of Canton Embroidery on campus, including the needle thread, pattern, and embroidery techniques. Based on this, university professors from the perspective of artistic creation epistemology encourage graduate students to conduct thematic research on themes, material craftsmanship, needlework craftsmanship, formal craftsmanship, and craftsmanship, exploring the creation of Canton Embroidery as a contemporary "embroidery painting" art work. By combining the creative thinking of traditional embroidery painting with contemporary painting, as well as the expressive forms of modern painting, it is also necessary to actively explore the theme content with contemporary life atmosphere, expand the creative mode of combining multiple language media such as painting, embroidery, printing, and

dyeing, as well as modern technologies such as acrylic embroidery materials and laser cutting, and explore the transition of Canton Embroidery from flat form to three-dimensional form, and even large-scale spatial installation form, which will undoubtedly greatly expand the various possibilities of traditional embroidery creation.

3.2 The Digitization Research of Canton Embroidery

There is a must to make full use of the "Guangzhou University Canton Embroidery Intangible Cultural Heritage Workstation" and the "Lingnan Traditional Crafts Talent Training and Canton Embroidery Innovation Application Research" art master's program, invest funds in the development of Canton Embroidery Intangible Cultural Heritage Digital Library, and construct digital archives and materials related to the protection of Canton Embroidery Cultural Heritage projects, including datasets of various information resources related to Canton Embroidery craftsmanship and culture, such as various embroidery materials, needle and thread techniques, famous works, interview videos, demonstration videos, research literature, etc. On the one hand, the Canton Embroidery Digitalization Database provides strong support for graduate teaching and research; On the other hand, it is a necessity to encourage interdisciplinary scientific researchers in humanities, music and dance, communication, and computer science to participate in the research on digital inheritance and translation creation of Canton Embroidery, and establish a postdoctoral team based on this center to carry out global promotion projects for Canton Embroidery craft research. At the same time, there is also a necessity to establish digital and artistic humanities exchange platforms with universities such as Hong Kong and Japan, and face the society and undertake training projects for intangible cultural heritage inheritance projects assigned by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

3.3 The Active Inheritance of Canton Embroidery Cultural and Creative IP

It is necessary to establish a research base for the active inheritance and development of Canton Embroidery cultural and creative IP, explore the unique cultural heritage of Canton Embroidery, such as cultural history and image elements, which have Guangdong regional characteristics, encourage undergraduate and graduate students in

visual communication and product design majors, as well as professional teachers to form a team for the active inheritance and development of Canton Embroidery cultural and creative IP, and connect with local government cultural and tourism development projects to empower regional tourism development, cultural and creative design, and urban brand image design, forming distinctive teaching and research achievements.

3.4 Soft Decoration Design of Canton Embroidery from the Perspective of Semiotics

People can use the principles of design semiotics to deconstruct the content and pattern features of Canton Embroidery in terms of symbolic semantics, analyze the interconnectivity between product attributes and Canton Embroidery content and typical patterns starting from the perspective of soft decoration product design, and extract and innovatively design symbolic elements of Canton Embroidery to meet the current lifestyle needs of different groups of people, which has a traditional cultural spirit, regional style, and a unique modernity "picturesque" and home life appeal of soft decoration design. It can be extended to a variety of products such as the backrest, cushion, armrest, curtains, bedding, etc. of soft sofa.

4. CONCLUSION

In general, people are accustomed to viewing Canton Embroidery as a handicraft within the scope of arts and crafts. However, with the development of today's era, breaking through the inherent historical concept of "painting embroidery" belonging to painting creation, Canton Embroidery has been transformed into a modern form of painting expression concept of "embroidery painting", which has injected new blood and vitality into the modernity development of Canton Embroidery, and endowed it with many possibilities for inheritance and innovative development that meet the needs of the new era. On the basis of exploring the modernity idea change of Canton Embroidery from traditional craft of "painting embroidery" to the creation of embroidery painting of "picturesque realm", this article takes the inheritance practice of Canton Embroidery carried out by the School of Arts and Design of Guangzhou University as an example to demonstrate a new path for the modernity transformation and innovation of Canton Embroidery art resources. At the same time, it

provides certain experience and reference for the exploration of modernity innovation in Chinese traditional handicraft heritage.

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