

From the Silk Road to the World: Historical Changes and Influence of Guangdong Embroidery's Export Embroideries

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Abstract

Cantonese embroidery, a true gem of traditional Chinese craftsmanship, has been highly sought-after for centuries. Its exquisite beauty and intricate designs have made it a valuable commodity in international trade, dating back to the ancient Silk Road. This article provides a concise overview of the research work on the rise and legacy of Cantonese embroidery, including its origin, development, and trade history. The article proceeds to examine the craftsmanship and stylistic development of export embroidery, exploring production techniques and artistic characteristics. An analysis is conducted on the market development of contemporary export embroidery, shedding light on its significance in the international market. The paper focuses on the significance of Cantonese embroidery in the current global market, as well as its critical contribution to China's rich cultural heritage and global cultural exchange. In a broader perspective, the historical shifts and influence of Cantonese embroidery and export embroidery showcase the assimilation of traditional Chinese crafts into global culture, contributing to the world's cultural heritage and fostering cultural diversity and cross-cultural collaboration.

Keywords: Guangdong Embroidery, Export of Guangdong Embroidery Goods, Silk Road, Textile Culture, Transcultural Communication.

Introduction

Chinese embroidery is renowned for its ability to enhance objects and artworks

while also embodying rich cultural, historical, traditional, and aesthetic significance. The history of Guangdong embroidery has been examined by several scholars (Cai & Huang, 2019; Cheang & Kramer, 2021; Chen et al., 2023; Zhang & Pei, 2021; Zhou, 2023). The earliest extant documentary records can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty, specifically around 805 AD. Lu Meiniang, a woman from the Panyu area of Guangzhou, made a significant contribution by creating a distinctive seven-volume Dharma Sutra embroidery. The embroidery was characterised by minute handwriting, comparable to the size of a grain of corn, and intricate detail that allowed for the visibility of titles, chapters, and sentences. The title, chapters, and sentences are all accessible. In addition, she created a large zhang (over 3m) of the "Flying Fairy Cover," which featured embroidered landscapes, deities, and Jaady. The artwork depicted a building with a section that held no less than a thousand children. According to records from "Guangdong Tongzhi," during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), there were changes in clothing habits in Guangdong, leading to a shift in common people's attire in alignment with the Chinese state (Finnane, 2008)".

The Qing Dynasty witnessed a significant period of prosperity in the field of embroidery. This was primarily due to the lifting of the sea prohibition by the court in the twenty-fourth year of Kangxi's reign (1685), which resulted in rapid development of embroidery. Guangzhou emerged as the central hub of the embroidery industry during this time. Qu Dajun (1630-1696), one of the three great masters of Lingnan, wrote in his poem "New Words of Guangdong", "The foreign ships are government merchants, and the cross door is open like two oceans. Five silks and eight silks of Canton satin are good, and silver money is piled up in thirteen rows (Schoeser)." Qianlong forty-nine years old (1784), from the United States on their maiden voyage to Guangzhou Huangpu port "China Queen" ship captain wrote in the logbook: "Chinese painters and painters, although the lack of creativity, but there is a strong ability to imitate, able to imitate most of the Western works of art (Sullivan, 2023). " The Shunde County Record of 1852 recorded: "Counting the spit silk item, the province's annual output is about 40,000,000 yuan, and our town accounts for three-fourths of the total." In 1913, the Nanyang Persuasion Report stated, "Our country's embroidery foreigners, Guangdong is the most."

The practice of decorating fabric inspired Chinese embroidery. In the mid-

1970s, archaeologists discovered ancient Chinese embroidery artefacts from the Shang and Zhou periods. One notable discovery was a fragment of lock-stitch embroidery dating back to the Western Zhou period, found in 1974 in Rujiashuang, Baoji, Shaanxi Province. This fragment featured a combination of embroidery and colourful paintings, where the fabric pattern was presented in a complementary manner. This is in line with the statement in the Zhou Rites about "painting" that "all embroidery must be painted and then stabbed, so painting and embroidery are common duties"; remnants of rhombic embroidery were discovered on a copper goblet that was excavated from the tomb of Muhao in Yinxu, Anyang, Henan Province, in 1976. In 1976, excavators from the Yin Hui Women's Tomb in Anyang, Henan Province, discovered remnants of diamond-shaped embroidery on the surface of a bronze goblet. Both of these pieces utilise lockstitch for the stitches. These are the oldest known Chinese embroidery stitches. They also provide evidence of the ancient origins of Chinese embroidery.

Early embroideries in ancient China served practical purposes. Embroidery was not limited to clothing, but also adorned various textile-related items, such as flags, robes, trimmings, and scented pouches. The embroidery created during that period was known for its delicate and exquisite craftsmanship, reflecting the prevailing technical and cultural influences. An important example of early embroidery is a collection of silk embroidery pieces discovered in 1982 in the Chu Tomb No. 1 of Mashan Brickworks in Jiangling, Hubei Province. These pieces date back to the Warring States period. For this batch of embroidery, Mr. Tian Zibing commented in the History of Arts and Crafts of China, "There are embroidered coverlet, embroidered clothes, embroidered robes, embroidered pants, and there are also the edges of the baggage and the clothes, which are also made of embroidery. Most of the embroidered ground was made of silk, and a few of them were made of Luo. Embroidery patterns include dragons, phoenixes, tigers, and three-headed birds, as well as grass, leaves, branches, flowers, and geometric patterns. The needlework is mainly braid embroidery (Deng, 2023), with localized interludes of flat embroidery." Among them, "there is a dragon, phoenix and tiger pattern embroidered clothes, coiled dragon and flying phoenix, interspersed with natural, smooth lines, head raised and tailed mottled tiger, open mouth, seems to be fighting with the dragon. Tiger body red and black spots, become an

important picture embellishment", he thought, "this is an outstanding embroidery work, it reflects the craftsmen more than two thousand years ago, excellent craftsmen and high technology" (Yin, 2021). This work is now in the Jiangling Museum in Hubei Province.

Han and Tang dynasties, China's ancient embroidery technology into an important development and turning period, at this time not only did a wide variety of embroidery, appeared Ban Gu "Xidu Fugu" in the description of the "house does not present material, wall does not show shape, bag to algae embroidery, Luan to Lun embroidery "phenomenon, and embroidery is very widely distributed. Xinjiang Minfeng, Gansu Wuwei, Hebei Wulujong, Beijing Dabaotai, Changsha Mawangdui, Jiangsu Gaoyou, and Donghai have unearthed a large number of Han Dynasty embroidery, especially Mawangdui unearthed embroidery works, a large number, and rich in color and color varieties. In addition, the emergence of new needlework, as well as Wang Chong's "on the balance" in the "Qi County world embroidery, the constant female cannot" "embroidery of the teacher, can sew curtains and clothes, the work of the strand of silk, cannot weave brocade," and other records can be shown, the popularity of the Han Dynasty embroidery and specialization has reached a fairly high degree. degree. Subsequently, the establishment of the Silk Road facilitated the export of Chinese embroidery as a commodity and cultural artefact in Chinese and foreign economic trade. Additionally, the introduction of Buddhism created a new demand for embroidery, leading to a departure from the traditional focus on daily lifestyle in ancient Chinese embroidery. The peak of these two points was reached during the Tang Dynasty.

The British Museum currently houses the largest known ancient Chinese embroidery work, titled "Sakyamuni Lingwu Mountain Saying Picture" (Guoqing, 2022). In the early 1980s, a collaborative publication between British and Japanese scholars titled "Western Art: The British Museum Stein Collection," Volume III, focused on a detailed analysis of embroidery works. This analysis encompassed various aspects, such as the content, style, and techniques employed in these works. The publication also underscored the production of these embroideries in the 8th century, specifically during the Tang dynasty. Furthermore, the publication drew a comparison between these embroideries and the cave murals discovered in Dunhuang, as well as a similar collection residing in the Nara National Museum in Japan. The 8th century, specifically the Tang Dynasty, is

significant for its Dunhuang-related cave murals. Researchers can conduct comparative studies with similar collections found in Japan's Nara National Museum (Orozco, 2019). Domestic Dunhuang research experts have suggested that the embroidery on this work should be "Liangzhou Ruixiang Tu". Jane Portal, Director of the Department of Asia at the British Museum, describes this work as "the most wonderful thing about it is that when you look at it from a distance it looks like a painting, and when you look at it closely you realize that it's a piece of embroidery. The stitches are very fine, made of different colors of silk threads, and the stitches go in different directions, in some places, there are rotating stitches. Black stitches are used for the outlines so that it looks like ink painting" (Cheang et al., 2021). The allure of Chinese painting embroidery is quite similar.

Indeed, prior to the Tang Dynasty, Chinese embroidery served as a decorative addition to fabric, like the finishing touch on a cake. The patterns, arrangements, and techniques of embroidery were primarily centred around lockstitch. During the Tang Dynasty, there was a shift in artistic focus from ancient gods and beasts to the intricate and lifelike depiction of flowers. This period also saw the emergence of new embroidery techniques, such as the Qi needle and bumping the needle, which allowed for more intricate and detailed designs. Additionally, lock embroidery reached its peak during this time. Meanwhile, a new form of embroidery, known as painting embroidery, began to demonstrate promising qualities through its application in religious artwork. The Song Dynasty and subsequent periods undoubtedly solidified the connection between pictorial embroidery and ink painting. Thus, the rise of painting embroidery marks a significant departure from traditional Chinese embroidery. By incorporating elements of Chinese painting, painting embroidery has evolved into a pioneering force in the realm of Chinese embroidery techniques. Moreover, its reach and appeal have expanded considerably, reaching a wider audience through various channels of dissemination. The dissemination channels and audiences have also become more diverse.

This highlights the unique aspects of embroidery development in ancient China, where a harmonious blend of functionality and decorative elements persisted over an extended period. The pronunciation of the word for "red" in "women's red" being "gong" (with the same sound as "work") appears to serve as a form of confirmation. During certain formal events, embroidery serves as more than just a form of expression. It is a

decorative technique that has evolved to fulfil ceremonial and spiritual requirements. Various techniques played a role in shaping distinct regional styles, leading to the development of the "Four Famous Embroideries" and other regional embroidery styles. These styles undoubtedly had a functional relationship with their historical background.

Research on the records of Guangdong embroidery during the Qing Dynasty reveals that its development was remarkably rapid and widespread, likely due to its location at the time (Silberstein, 2019). Simultaneously, as a result of the flourishing exports of Western culture, a distinct style gradually emerged (Lianhai & Hansheng, 2023). Throughout its history, Guangdong embroidery has been passed down from generation to generation through the teachings of skilled artisans. However, there has been a scarcity of written documentation capturing the intricate techniques involved. By studying the literature, it was discovered that Guangdong embroidery has its roots in the Central Plains culture (Silberstein, 2020). During the Tang and Song dynasties, Guangdong embroidery was highly esteemed and cherished by the royal family. It played a significant role in establishing the silk industry in the Pearl River Delta (Wang et al., 2023). During the Qing Dynasty, Guangdong embroidery flourished and established its unique artistic characteristics, becoming a significant handicraft in the Lingnan area. And it was exported both domestically and internationally. Research on Guangdong embroidery has evolved alongside its development, as embroidery techniques have been refined over time.

Various influences, from the ancient Silk Road trade to the contemporary global market, have shaped Guangdong embroidery throughout its history, undergoing multiple stages of growth. However, at this stage, there is a limited amount of research on the development process of export embroidery in Guangdong. Therefore, this paper aims to conduct a thorough investigation.

Literature Review

The Rise and Inheritance of Guangdong Embroidery

The Origin and Development of Guangdong Embroidery

Guangdong embroidery is widely recognised as one of the most renowned forms of embroidery in China. It showcases the rich cultural heritage of the Lingnan region and boasts a truly unique artistic style. "Guangdong embroidery" is a well-

known national handicraft in the Pearl River Delta region, particularly in Guangzhou, Shunde, Nanhai, and other areas. It is commonly seen in various forms, such as screens, costumes, cheongsams, and daily necessities (Figure 1). Known for its diverse subjects, vibrant colours, lively patterns, and intricate stitching techniques, Guangdong embroidery has gained a positive reputation both domestically and internationally. Over time, it has become increasingly popular. Over time, it has become an integral part of people's daily lives, allowing more individuals to appreciate the beauty and value of Guangdong embroidery (Xu, 2020). Throughout its extensive development, Guangdong embroidery has seamlessly blended elements of Chinese and Western cultures, bridging the gap between the South and the North. Its evolution serves as a testament to the rise and fall of the "Maritime Silk Road," symbolising both commercial prosperity and decline (Figure 1).



Figure 1: ("Four panels of Guangdong Embroidery,") with Birds and Flowers.

Guangdong possesses unique natural conditions that make it suitable for growing mulberries and raising silkworms, distinguishing it from other provinces, regions, and cities in the country. Guangdong, situated in the Pearl River Delta, is a warm and humid region known for its extensive rivers and streams. It has over 2,000 years of history and is well-suited for silkworm cultivation. This document represents the earliest known record of Guangdong embroidery's craft. During the Ming Dynasty, the Portuguese established new trade routes to Guangzhou. The Guangdong embroidery, known for its reputation abroad, caught the attention of a Portuguese merchant. He purchased a Guangdong embroidery dragon garment in Guangzhou and presented it to the emperor, receiving a substantial reward in return. Guangdong

embroidery has emerged as a prominent contributor to foreign exports and has gained a favourable reputation internationally (Hsiao & Hsueh, 2020; Ou-Yang & Ling, 2020). Under the Qing Dynasty, China implemented a policy of isolation and restricted commerce to a single port in Guangzhou. This policy further stimulated the development of Guangzhou's handicraft industry. Guangdong embroidery has gained significant international recognition. Many foreign merchants come to Guangzhou specifically for the intricate embroidery work. As a result, Guangdong embroidery has incorporated various colours and techniques inspired by Western painting, including the use of lenses and the refractive properties of light. These additions have greatly contributed to the development and expressive qualities of Guangdong embroidery. During the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, a technical bureau and a school of coloured flower art were established in Guangdong Province. These institutions aimed to teach techniques in painting, embroidery, and carving. The authors conducted a comprehensive analysis of significant events in the history of Guangdong embroidery, as depicted in Figure 2.

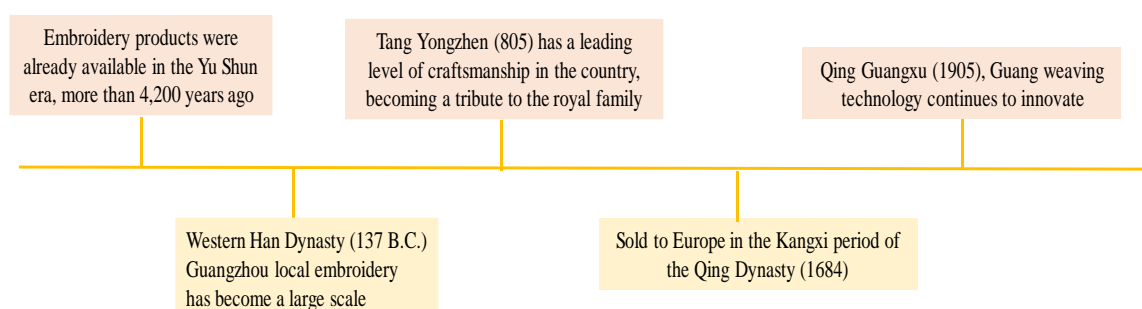


Figure 2: Sorting Out Important Events in the History of Broad Embroidery.

Generations of artists have conducted extensive research, significantly developing the Guangdong embroidery technique. Guangdong embroidery received high praise at the Nanyang Persuasion Fair in China in 1910 and the Panama International Exposition in 1915. Guangzhou City established the first embroidery society in May 1955. Nineteen embroiderers from the new district of Datang Township formed it. Initially known as the embroidery supply and marketing production cooperatives, it was later renamed the "New Embroidery Society" after two years (predecessor of the Guangdong embroidery Factory) (Chen, 2020; Xu et al., 2021). The Guangdong embroidery industry achieved full cooperation in 1956. In 1957, the

Guangzhou Arts and Crafts Research Institute was established, which facilitated the introduction of a group of embroidery artisans, the establishment of a laboratory, and the recruitment of professional art talents for the purpose of engaging in embroidery design and production. The province experienced a proliferation of embroidered flowers, which contributed to a newfound atmosphere of dynamic growth. During the economic recovery period, Cantonese embroidery production improved. Cantonese embroidery is widely recognised for its exceptional craftsmanship, traditional artistic features, and unique historical ambiance, both domestically and internationally.

Classification and Application of Cantonese Embroidery

There is a wide range of Guangdong embroidery products available that are both practical and decorative. Guangxiao embroidery products have a wide range of uses in various aspects of daily life. They can be classified into four main categories: clothing, household items, decorative items, and ancestral hall tributes, as depicted in [Figure 3](#). During the Qing Dynasty, embroidery products were exported to meet the daily needs of domestic consumers, as well as for international trade. The diverse range of exported embroideries and their exceptional craftsmanship were highly valued by westerners, resulting in significant economic advantages for Guangdong. There are two types of Guangdong embroidery costumes: those worn for everyday use and those designed specifically for the theatre. Guangdong embroidery costumes primarily consist of Cantonese opera costumes ([Liu, 2010](#)). Based on the historical records of "Guangzhou Fuzhi," the attire crafted by the Guangzhou Scholar's Workshop held significant sway in China during the Qing Dynasty. Year after year, a substantial number of garments were commissioned.

The impressive range of skills and exceptional craftsmanship in Cantonese embroidery result in a captivating array of embroidery. These exquisite creations are highly sought-after in international markets, captivating customers with their undeniable charm. Male embroiderers in this field can generate a substantial income, providing their families with sufficient sustenance. Without this skill, sustaining a living would be challenging. The art of Cantonese embroidery is truly remarkable, reminiscent of the exquisite masterpieces that originated in the

Guangdong region.

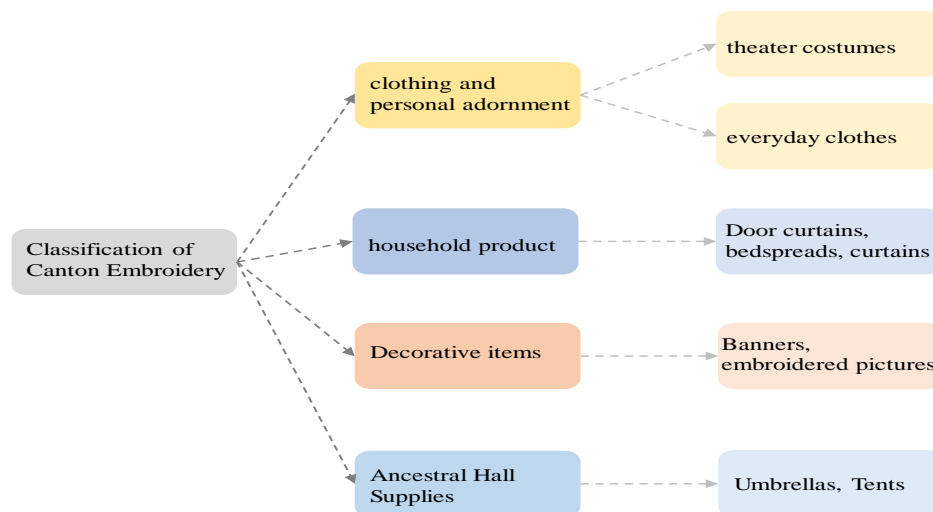


Figure 3: Categorization of Guangdong Embroidery Products.

Guangxiao Trade on the Silk Road

Significant events occurred during the Tang Dynasty. The expansion of the Maritime Silk Road led to increased trade and cultural exchanges. The royal family's growing appreciation for embroidery simultaneously contributed to the advancement of this craft. Furthermore, the traditional textile industry experienced increased prosperity. The Hublot Department's establishment in Guangzhou was a significant development that contributed to the enhancement of craftsmanship. The wars in the Central Plains led to a shift of the economic centre towards the south, resulting in the gradual replacement of land routes by the Maritime Silk Road. Consequently, Guangzhou emerged as the largest port in China during that period. The sericulture and silk weaving industries in Guangdong experienced significant growth during this period. During the Song Dynasty, the market system in Guangdong became more comprehensive, leading to the gradual development of silkworm production. This resulted in the production of weaving silk machines and the establishment of machine shops, which produced various products as tribute. Additionally, Guangdong embroidery made a significant transition from its confinement to small courtyards and the palace court to becoming a prominent presence in the social market. It flourished as an important folk-side business (Millward, 2013). After the Yuan Dynasty, the Guangdong silk industry experienced a gradual recovery. However, it later faced

negative impacts due to the increasing popularity of textiles. The government's implementation of the "official ship" system during the Song Dynasty hindered the silk trade in Guangdong. This system prioritised government-run export trade, while suppressing and even prohibiting private transactions. High import and export tariffs further limited Guangdong's silk export trade compared to Shanghai. During the early Ming Dynasty, Guangdong embroidery emerged as a prominent traditional handicraft in folk art. Additionally, sericulture production in Guangzhou and its surrounding regions experienced significant growth and development. During the middle and late Ming Dynasties, Guangdong embroidery developed its distinctive style. Guangdong embroidery artists creatively utilised materials such as peacock feathers, horsetail thread, and strings. Guangdong embroidery artists employed the technique of "gold and silver thread embroidery" to create a visually rich and layered effect. Europe gained popularity for this style and exported it to countries like the United Kingdom, France, and Portugal (Perez-Garcia, 2020).



Figure 4: ("Maritime silk road in tang dynasty,").

During the early Qing Dynasty, Guangzhou emerged as the exclusive hub for foreign trade in China, resulting in a swift expansion of the embroidery industry in Guangdong Province. Embroidered products were significant export commodities,

reaching markets in Europe, the Middle East, and Near East countries. During this historical period, Guangzhou played a significant role in China's foreign trade. Concurrently, Guangdong embroidery assimilated elements of Western art and incorporated principles of perspective and light refraction. This fusion had a significant impact on Guangdong embroidery's evolution. During the Kangxi period, the Qing court lifted the ban on maritime activities and established Guangdong Customs. This led to the transition of Guangdong embroidery from small-scale production by individual families to larger-scale commodity production. As a result, the embroidery industry was centred in Guangzhou, specifically in areas such as Scholar's Square, Xinsheng Street, and Shamian. In 1759, during the Qianlong era, the Qing court enforced a restriction on the export of lake silk from Hangzhou, known as the "silk ban." The Qing court implemented this measure in response to the growing demand for overseas silk and the significant progress in sericulture in the Pearl River Delta. Consequently, Guangzhou, Nanhai, and Shunde emerged as the primary hubs for the development of Guangdong embroidery. "From the end of the Ming Dynasty to the middle of the Qing Dynasty was the heyday of Chinese Guangdong embroidery, although embroidery works are expensive, the large size of the embroidery alone to pay taxes required silver one point two taels each." During this period, the range of embroidery threads expanded significantly, allowing floral embroidery to be more widely used in architectural interiors and everyday clothing. During the Qing Dynasty, Cantonese opera costumes started to incorporate embroidery. During the Jiaqing and Daoguang years (1790–1850), the embroidery industry experienced significant growth. Embroidery farms and stores became more established, and their products were exported to various countries, including Spain, the Philippines, Britain, the United States, and Germany (Lemire & Riello, 2008).

The trade of Cantonese embroidery in its early stages had a significant influence on both Chinese and Western cultures. Southern China has inherited and integrated Guangdong embroidery, a traditional craft in China, into its cultural fabric. Guangdong embroidery incorporates traditional Chinese symbols and patterns with cultural and religious significance. Along the Silk Road, Guangdong embroidery served as a medium for cultural transmission and a symbol of Chinese culture.

The early trade routes for exporting Guangdong embroidery were integral to the Silk Road. For centuries, the Silk Road has transmitted Guangdong embroidery, a traditional craft with significant technical complexity, fostering cultural exchange and collaboration between Chinese and Western societies. This object's cultural and artistic values establish it as a prominent example of traditional Chinese craftsmanship, with significant influence extending to the Western world. The historical analysis of Guangdong embroidery trade routes offers valuable insights into the cultural exchange and trade that took place along the Silk Road (Hall, 2019).

Methodology

This study employs a literature analysis approach to examine the historical changes of Canton embroidery exports. By collecting relevant literature, the study aims to derive its own perspectives from the analysis.

Results

Evolution of the Technology and Style of the Export Embroidery of Guangdong Embroidery

Evolution of the Production Process of Guangdong Embroidery

Traditional Techniques

The tools of traditional Guangdong embroidery mainly include embroidery needles, flower bandages, scissors, pens, etc., as shown in [Figure 5](#):

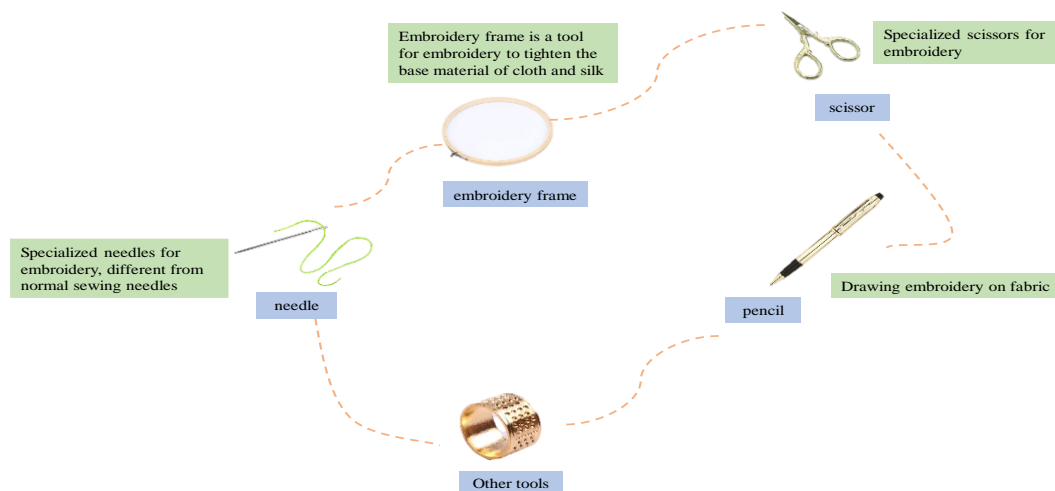


Figure 5: The Main Tools of Cantonese Embroidery.

The main division of the traditional Guangdong embroidery production process is divided into eight processes, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Practices of Each Process of Guangxiao Embroidery.

Processes	Practices For Each Process of Guangdong Embroidery
Pattern Design	Before you start designing, you need to design the pattern of the embroidery. In addition to the customer to order samples have color pattern requirements, the general embroidery appreciation products need to drawings design.
Sketching	The embroidery is started by sketching out basic drawings, variations in light and dark, etc., and then finishing the draft on the embroidery cloth.
Stitching	The embroidery material that has been traced is fixed on the embroidery frame until the material is free of wrinkles and makes a crisp sound when you play it with your fingers.
Matching Thread	Threads should be selected according to the needs of the embroidery, and the needle should be of the appropriate thickness and length. Contemporary designers select color threads for embroiders to work with, and if the right colour is not available, it is necessary to dye the floss.
Embroidery	The first step is to select the thread, design the embroidery pattern, and choose the stitch according to the embroidery pattern in the drawing, and then begin to apply the embroidery.
Processes	Practices For Each Process of Guangdong Embroidery
Organize	Comprehensively check the artistic effect for errors and omissions and do a good job of organizing and altering the work, for example, if you find sewage or water stains, wash them promptly or add embroidery to cover them.
Shimotaki	After embroidering the pattern on the taut surface, the embroidered product is removed from the taut surface, which is called "Shimotan".
Framing	Guangdong embroidery painting in order to facilitate the maintenance and appreciation, it will need to be framed, now fixed in a wooden frame (easel) on the general use of cotton thread to tighten the tic-tac-toe.

There is a wide variety of stitches in Cantonese embroidery that offer endless possibilities for creativity and versatility. Here are some examples of the stitches I have collected, as depicted in Figure 6:

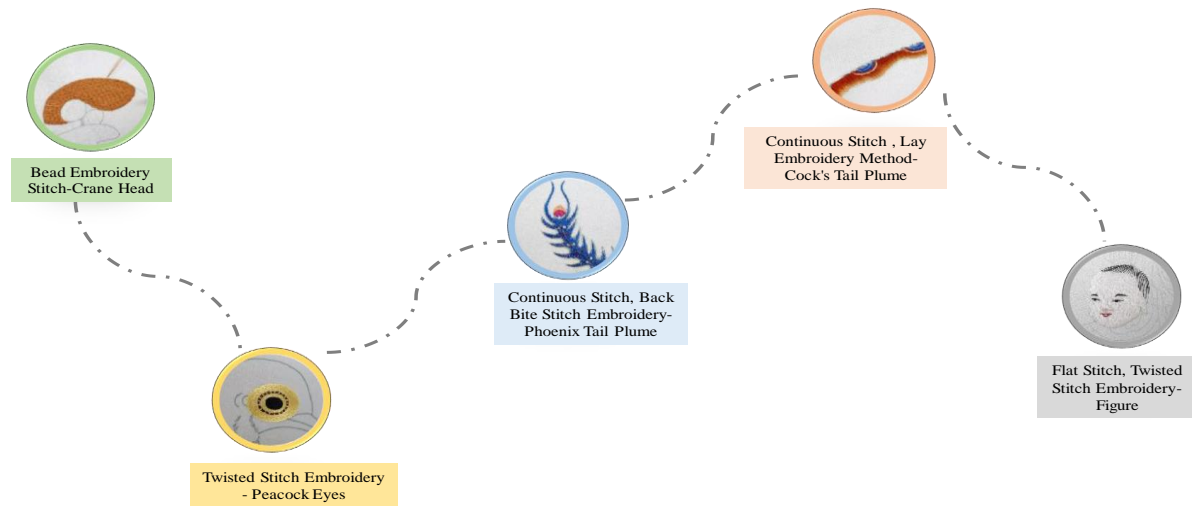


Figure 6: Schematic Diagram of the ("Combined stitches of Guangdong embroidery,")

Modern Craft

The art of Guangdong embroidery serves as a vessel for cultural and ideological legacy, embodying tradition in modern times and capturing the shifts in human lifestyles, perspectives, and beliefs. The inheritance goes beyond just skill; it also encompasses culture.

The contemporary approach to utilising Cantonese embroidery is of utmost importance. Artificial intelligence and digital printing techniques have made it possible to showcase traditional Cantonese embroidery patterns with exceptional colour reproduction. Digital printing offers a wide range of benefits, including vibrant colours, precise details, enhanced tactile experience, faster production, and increased output. We can integrate the intricate Cantonese embroidery patterns with cutting-edge digital printing technology to emphasise the crucial elements of the image, thus elevating hand embroidery to a pivotal role in the overall masterpiece (Chan, 2019). This innovative approach enhances the transmission and promotion of Cantonese embroidery as an intangible cultural heritage in a more effective manner. Meanwhile, as technology advances and industries evolve, computerised embroidery is becoming increasingly popular. It is efficient, affordable, and convenient to clean. Computerised embroidery allows for direct design on cloth using a computer. This method is convenient and efficient, leading to an increase in the use of computerised embroidery in clothing and home textile products. As a result, embroidered products are now

more accessible and offer a wider range of options. The integration of machines, computers, and other equipment offers a significant advantage: the computer's powerful functionality allows for previewing pattern designs and making satisfactory adjustments to aspects like colour and design before proceeding with embroidery. This helps to avoid issues related to colour or composition during the embroidery process. With the continuous advancement of science and technology, concerns such as the stiffness of machine embroidery, limited colour options, and single stitch patterns have been gradually addressed and improved. This progress facilitates a more effective transformation and application of a wide range of embroidery patterns. Exploring Guangdong embroidery patterns' potential for transformation and application (Huang & Hemchua, 2023; Ruiting, 2023; Wang, 2023).

Evolution of the Artistic Characteristics of Guangdong Embroidery

The Subject Matter of Embroidery Pattern

Guangdong embroidery encompasses a wide range of subjects, including characters, animals, flowers, birds, seafood, fish, shrimp, dragons, phoenixes, landscapes, rivers, architectural features, utensils, fruits, melons, words, and various geometric patterns. Among these, the traditional styles of birds and phoenixes, dragons and phoenixes, and Bogu stand out, with birds and flower embroidery being particularly noteworthy, as depicted in [Figure 7](#). According to the English painter Polsey from the 19th century, the Chinese have a remarkable talent for embroidering intricate designs of flowers, birds, and animals. In particular, the people from Guangdong are known for their exceptional skills in this art form. Another significant aspect of Guangdong embroidery is its rich history, dating back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this time, foreign merchants flocked to Guangzhou to place orders for customised clothing patterns, family portraits, and other designs. The embroidery techniques employed in these creations were intricate and varied, utilising a combination of realistic and abstract elements as well as different stitching methods. Guangdong embroidery depicts a variety of subjects, from Greek mythology and religious figures like the Virgin Mary to fine art and portraits of royalty. Each piece showcases a vibrant and lifelike

representation of its subject matter. Furthermore, the economy, natural environment, and humanistic environment of the Lingnan region intricately link to the diverse array of themes in Cantonese embroidery.

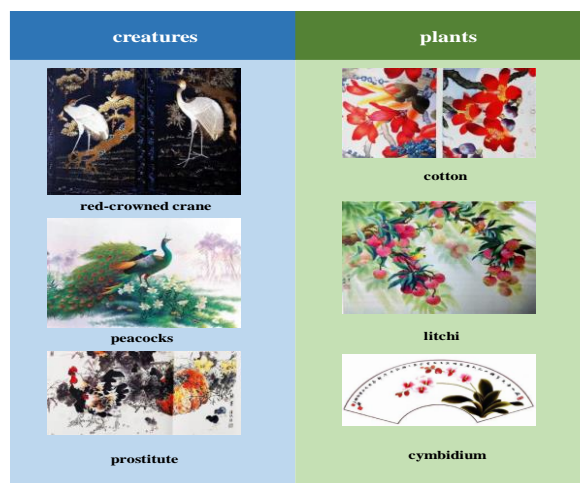


Figure 7: Common Themes in Cantonese Embroidery.

As society evolves and people's aesthetic preferences shift, the exchange of information between different locations has become increasingly seamless. This expands people's perspectives. To meet the ever-evolving aesthetic preferences of individuals, contemporary Cantonese embroidery artisans are continuously exploring innovative approaches to align their creations with the latest trends in aesthetics. They prioritise innovation and infuse modern perspectives into every creation, fostering a broader environment for the innovative growth of Cantonese embroidery. Furthermore, they provide a new platform for innovation in Cantonese embroidery preservation (Yuying, 2023; Zhu & Zhu, 2023).

Lately, there has been a growing trend of incorporating Cantonese embroidery into ink painting themes, showcasing a fresh and innovative approach. Cantonese embroidery skilfully employs various stitches and craftsmanship techniques to bring the theme to life, showcasing a beautiful fusion of painting and embroidery. In order to showcase the exquisite colour coordination in the painting, the artists employ techniques such as split silk colour mixing and colour embroidery to achieve a captivating "colour blending" effect on the canvas. The vibrant essence and dynamic nature of the Guangqi embroidery complement the delicate strokes of the ink and brush in the final portrayal of the image. The choice of ink painting themes showcases the ability of Guangdong embroidery to capture the artistic style of precision, clarity, and harmony. It beautifully

portrays a variety of stitches and prominent themes, creating a seamless blend between ink painting and Guangdong embroidery. This artwork beautifully showcases the harmonious blend of ink painting and Guangdong embroidery.

Oil painting is a highly realistic style found in contemporary embroidery. As an illustration, the initial two embroidery drafts of "The Impression of Ancient Times," "Relatively Breathless," and "The Sea" were created by the realist oil painter Guan Zegui. In these creations, Guangdong embroidery showcases its exquisite and captivating artistic charm, skilfully capturing the subtle expressions and emotions of the characters. The vibrant colour palette used in the artwork adds a touch of elegance without being overly flashy. When it comes to depicting hair, Guangdong embroidery truly showcases its expertise in capturing the rich texture and shine of dark, glossy strands using silk thread. The artwork "The Sea," created through the use of innovative needlework techniques, showcases the grandeur of the sea in a vivid and unique way. The clever fusion of oil painting themes and Guangdong embroidery results in a highly distinctive artistic creation. The artistic value of expressing the oil painting theme in Guangdong embroidery is remarkably high, particularly in its ability to capture the realistic style and evoke strong emotions through its pictorial portrayal of objects.

Compositional Characteristics of Guangdong Embroidery

The layout of Guangdong embroidery is intricate, with dense patterns and vibrant scenes. The use of colour is diverse and sets it apart from other types of embroidery. The lines have a dense and smooth appearance. There is often limited space available, but when filled with mountains, rivers, grass, and tree roots, it becomes vibrant and intimate. The intricate and delicate lines in Guangdong embroidery showcase the artistic finesse that is characteristic of local embroidery in Guangdong. The design is well-structured, with minimal empty spaces, vibrant and concise, and the colours are bold and attention-grabbing. Guangdong embroidery showcases a strong influence from the exquisite court paintings, particularly those featuring flowers and birds. The embroidery often incorporates various compositions, such as S-shaped, L-shaped, horizontal lines, diagonal lines, and triangles. The

composition of Guangdong embroidery is often characterised by the expression of emotions and the beauty of the designs. The intricate craftsmanship and attention to detail perfectly complement each other, resulting in a stunning final product. The work "Hanging Green Cicadas" utilises the realistic embroidery method to beautifully capture the texture of the lychee. The embroidery technique incorporates the sphere perspective and a unique Cantonese embroidery technique known as "leaving a water path." The "waterway" technique in Cantonese embroidery involves maintaining an equal spacing of 0.5 mm between neighbouring embroidery areas. This creates hollow lines that form a clear and even "waterway" around the lychees' edges. The "waterway" technique enhances the prominence of the front and back levels, making the main image on the embroidered surface more eye-catching. It is one of the secrets behind the intricate yet organised pictures in Cantonese embroidery.

The Unique Color Language of Cantonese Embroidery

Guangdong is located in the centre of Lingnan, where the weather is warm and humid. As Chen Shaofang, the master of Guangdong embroidery, said, "Guangdong embroidery silk is different from other places in terms of dyeing, making, storing, and applying, so we call it Canton Velvet. Canton velvet is a slender strand with bright colours. In Guangdong embroidery, although the colours used are also more, because of the good use of balance and conversion of colours, in the overall vision, it looks bright and extraordinary, radiant, and moist, and rich in texture. Exudes Lingnan charm; own Lingnan art moist beauty. As the types of embroidery are very different, so is the choice of colours. For example, wedding and happy tents use WeiCai, while the clerical room uses a light colour, as shown in [Figure 8](#):



Figure 8: Comparison of Light and Wyvern Colours in Wide Embroidery.

Development of Export Embroidery Market of Guangdong Embroidery

Guangdong embroidery boasts a rich history and unparalleled artistic value, making it a true treasure of traditional Chinese craft. In the past, Guangdong embroidery enjoyed great popularity as a valuable export on the Silk Road. However, in today's globalised world with increased cultural exchanges, the market for Guangdong embroidery has undergone significant transformations.

Shunde, Guangdong Province, has been a significant contributor to Chinese cultural exports throughout history. Even today, Guangdong embroidery shawl production remains a prominent industry, with Spain and other European countries being major importers. Exporting Guangdong embroidery not only boosts foreign trade but also facilitates economic and cultural exchanges between the East and the West. The art of Guangdong embroidery is rooted in its original style while also incorporating elements from Western oil painting. This fusion is evident in the use of light and dark perspectives and light refraction. The subject matter, drawing, and stitching techniques all showcase this unique blend of influences. Guangdong embroidery showcases a unique blend of Chinese and Western painting art, setting it apart from other local embroidery during the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

Over the past few years, Guangqi embroidery has made significant strides in both preserving tradition and pushing boundaries. The Western fashion industry continues to acknowledge and incorporate the traditional Chinese elements found in Guangdong embroidery. The research and innovation in Guangdong embroidery have made a positive impact on the development of the "Belt and Road" and the "Bay Area of Humanities". The research and innovation of traditional Cantonese embroidery not only strengthens the bonds within the Greater Bay Area but also enhances its cultural influence.

However, the modern market also brings with it new characteristics and challenges. Guangdong embroidery products have expanded beyond the traditional export market and are now in high demand both domestically and in emerging markets. Consumers have a wide range of uses for Cantonese embroidery, such as decorations, gifts, and souvenirs. Additionally, there are significant emerging markets, including India, Brazil, and other destinations, that have become crucial for Guangdong

embroidery exports. These countries possess a significant population market and demonstrate a keen interest in traditional Chinese crafts. The emergence of internet technology has opened up new avenues for sales in the Guangdong embroidery market. Guangdong embroidery products have the potential to reach a wider audience by utilising online stores, social media, and e-marketplaces. This can greatly enhance the market's accessibility and visibility on a global scale.

Cultural Impact and Challenges of Cantonese Embroidery

Influence of Cantonese Embroidery in Contemporary Western Culture

The main influences of Guangdong embroidery in contemporary Western culture are shown in [Table 2](#):

Table 2: Influences of Guangdong Embroidery in Contemporary Western Culture.

Western Cultural Fields	Influence
Fashion	Guangdong embroidery still has an important place in the fashion world. Designers have incorporated elements of Guangdong embroidery into a variety of fashion products such as fashions, footwear, and handbags. This fusion creates a unique style that appeals to consumers who are looking for distinctive fashion choices. Guangdong embroidery is also used in high-fashion clothing and red-carpet gowns, adding a sense of grandeur to the fashion choices of stars and celebrities.
Home Decor	Guangdong embroidery remains popular in the field of home decoration.
Art Market	Guangdong embroidery as an art form is still present in the contemporary art market. Some artists combine the techniques of wide embroidery with contemporary themes to create stunning works of art. These works are exhibited in galleries and auctions and attract the attention of collectors and art lovers.
Handicrafts	In contemporary times, more and more people are showing keen interest in handicrafts and traditional crafts. Guangdong embroidery, an ancient and exquisite embroidery technique, has attracted many people to learn and practice it.
Cultural Exchange and Diversity	The popularity of Guangdong embroidery also reflects the contemporary society's emphasis on cultural exchange and diversity.

In contemporary Western culture, Guangdong embroidery remains highly influential and popular. Its enduring appeal not only showcases its distinctive aesthetic and skilled craftsmanship, but also underscores the significance of preserving traditional art and cultural heritage. The timeless art of embroidery continues to inspire the aesthetics and creativity of modern society.

Challenges Facing the Culture of Cantonese Embroidery

Over time, Canton embroidery, like many other traditional handicrafts, has faced

challenges from modern industry and foreign cultures. The rise of large-scale machine production has led to the decline of traditional handicrafts. With the continuous advancement of technology, computerised and machine embroidery have become increasingly efficient and diverse. As a result, it has gained popularity due to its lower cost. Because of global cultural exchanges, individuals now have a wider range of options, resulting in a gradual decline in the market for Canton embroidery. Several Guangdong embroidery craftsmen decided to exit the industry. Over the past few years, with the assistance and support of the government, the Guangdong embroidery industry has seen gradual improvement. However, it still falls short of its former glory.

The scarcity of successors is the primary challenge confronting the art of Guangdong embroidery. Families typically pass down traditional handicrafts, closely guarding the skills as secrets. As a result, these families have become the backbone of the industry. Nevertheless, various socio-political and environmental factors have expanded individuals' freedom and range of occupational choices. A significant number of descendants no longer pursue the traditional crafts inherited from their grandparents. Xu Chiguang, a Cantonese embroidery master, comes from a family with four generations involved in the business. However, his descendants have decided not to pursue careers in the industry. The descendants of Guangdong embroidery master Chen Shaofang were eventually convinced to enter the world of Guangdong embroidery by her persuasive efforts. As the aesthetic demands of the modern era evolve, the traditional Guangdong embroidery family's heritage model may also make a comeback. Nevertheless, the tradition of passing down crafts through generations has become increasingly rare in modern times. While some older artists have passed down their embroidery skills and taken on apprentices, the process of producing embroidery remains time-consuming and labour-intensive. It takes several hours to embroider a few lychee formations, and there are dozens of techniques involved. To truly master the art of embroidery and learn its essence, one must dedicate a significant amount of time. Unfortunately, many young people today lack the awareness and commitment required to fully concentrate on this craft.

Additionally, the income from embroidery is often small, which further discourages young people from pursuing it. We can support the development of

education and training programmes in Cantonese embroidery. Collaboration between the government, cultural institutions, and the Cantonese embroidery community can pave the way for the establishment of training programmes aimed at engaging young individuals in the art. These programmes may consist of workshops, school courses, and apprenticeships to effectively transfer the necessary skills. In addition to digital education, modern technology can be used to create online courses and tutorials, allowing individuals to learn the techniques of Guangdong embroidery from a distance. This will help promote awareness of Cantonese embroidery and attract a greater number of enthusiastic students.

Overall, the culture of Cantonese embroidery encounters certain challenges, yet there exist numerous avenues to support the preservation and advancement of this esteemed traditional art form.

Discussion

Representing the rich heritage of traditional Chinese embroidery crafts, Canton embroidery has a fascinating history that spans centuries. This exquisite art form, which made its way to the world through the Silk Road, has left a lasting impact on international cultural exchanges and the preservation of Chinese culture. Throughout its evolution, Guangzhou embroidery has managed to preserve its traditional skills and techniques while also embracing the influence of foreign cultures during different historical periods. This has allowed for a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation, providing the necessary drive for the sustainable development of Guangzhou embroidery. Throughout its extensive history, the techniques, and styles of export embroidery at Canton Embroidery have undergone numerous evolutions, mirroring societal and temporal changes. These adaptations also demonstrate the craftsmen's ability to flexibly adjust to market demand. With a focus on the fusion of traditional and modern craftsmanship, the evolution of Canton embroidery showcases a deep appreciation for and ability to adapt to diverse cultural aesthetics.

As a representative of traditional Chinese handicrafts, Canton Embroidery has not only preserved its rich heritage but has also made significant contributions to promoting the preservation of Chinese national culture through international trade

and cultural exchanges. By showcasing Chinese artwork to the world through exported products, Guangzhou embroidery fosters friendly communication between China and foreign countries. The historical changes and influences of Guangzhou Embroidery's exported embroidery products demonstrate the seamless integration of traditional Chinese crafts into global culture, solidifying their status as invaluable contributions to the world's cultural heritage. In addition, the globalisation era has provided a viable reference and development model for other traditional handicrafts based on the internationalisation path of Guangzhou embroidery.

Conclusion

This paper delves into the historical development of the export of Cantonese embroidery and its global impact. It provides an overview of its origins, development, and the course of trade along the Silk Road. An in-depth analysis is conducted on the evolution of the craftsmanship and style of export embroidery, including the production process and artistic characteristics. Additionally, a study is being initiated to examine the status of the contemporary export embroidery market. The final article delves into its place in the current global market and its significant contribution to China's cultural legacy and international cultural interchange. Cantonese embroidery is a true gem of Chinese culture, with its exceptional worth and universal charm that should be acknowledged and treasured worldwide.

Ethical Declaration

Conflict of Interest

No declaration required.

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