

Analysis on the Artistic Characteristics and Cultural Context of Huangmei Cross-Stitch

Contemporary Research of Chinese Traditional Handicraft

Jing Zhao^{1,*}

¹School of Fashion, Wuhan Textile University, Wuhan, Hubei 430073, China

*Corresponding author. Email: 46679687@qq.com

ABSTRACT

Huangmei cross-stitch is one of the traditional handicrafts of Jingchu area in China. Huangmei cross-stitch, also called shelf cross and cross stitch. Because of its unique artistic style and charming pattern, Huangmei cross-stitch was took to be included in the first batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006 in China. People use local weaving cloth, also called Da cloth, on which forms different patterns by "-" stitch based on the warp yarn. Labor women spin, weave, dyeing, make cross-stitch and then sew a series of accessories such as turban, edge decoration on clothes, door curtain, edge decoration on mosquito net, edge decoration on sheet to beautify their life. At the beginning, cross-stitch was used to sew clothes by people, and then it became a unique handmade folk art after been handed down from age to age gradually. Due to its pregnant meaning pattern design, countless changes pattern combination, delicate symmetry of the screen layout, and bright brilliant color configuration, Huangmei cross-stitch shows strong geographical characteristics. The uniform skill, unique pattern application and aesthetic taste, full of geographical characteristics of color features has formed its own unique handicraft culture character. In fact, the pattern of Huangmei cross-stitch has the most attractive characteristics, such as rich subject matter and simple composition, but the intension is metaphorical. Based on analyzing its artistic features, we hope that Huangmei cross-stitch from farming civilization can be one part of people's lives in modern society and it will have a good inheritance and development. In the modern society, the traditional manual skills both as a kind of living culture continues to develop and get innovation, and change to integrate the needs of the times, which are giving higher requirements to Huangmei cross-stitch. Fully understanding the artistic characteristics of this traditional craft will help to contribute to improve Huangmei's current stage of development.

Keywords: *Huangmei cross-stitch, artistic characteristics, development and prospect*

I. INTRODUCTION

Huangmei county is located in the eastern Hubei Province, close to Jiangxi and Anhui. It has profound cultural accumulation. Huangmei cross-stitch in this region, Huangmei Opera, and Wuzu Temple (Zen Culture) are known as the "three treasures of Huangmei" and are famous all over the world. The cross-stitch craft in CaiShan, XinKai, KongLong is the

most prosperous. Because of its unique artistic style and charming pattern, Huangmei cross-stitch was took to be included in the first batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006 in China. Today the protection and inheritance of Huangmei cross-stitch has certain scale and progress. In the modern social context, traditional handicraft should not only as a kind of living culture continue to develop, but also innovate, change into the era demand, so fully understanding the artistic characteristics of Huangmei cross-stitch will contribute to its development in the present stage.

II. THE OVERVIEW OF HUANGMEI CROSS-STITCH

Huangmei cross-stitch has been called the shelf cross, and cross stitch, and it has been used in Hubei

*Funds: philosophy and social science research project of Hubei education department in 2019 ('Innovation of Han Embroidery in Chinese wedding dress from the perspective of revitalizing traditional crafts'; 18Q083); philosophy and social science research project of Hubei education department in 2019 ('A study on the living Innovation path of intangible cultural heritage about embroidery in Jingchu'; 19Q090)

province Huangmei County. A local proverb says: "All the females in Huangmei can make cross-stitch", which shows the universality of its existence. Geographically, southern Huangmei was a vast alluvial plain, with a long history of cotton cultivation, which provides rich material basis for the formation of Huangmei cross-stitch. Huangmei County records, in the early Song Dynasty, Huangmei has had very exquisite cross-stitch." In 1958, an colorful line cross-stitch "Fu Shou Shuang Tao" kerchief was unearthed at the foot of the Mount Cai in Huangmei county, which is in 1561 AD tomb, it became the direct testimony to writing the history of Huangmei cross-stitch. ("Fig. 1") People use local weaving cloth, also called Da cloth, on which forms different patterns by "-" stitch based on the warp yarn. Labor women spin, weave, dyeing, make cross-stitch and then sew a series of accessories such as turban, edge decoration on clothes, door curtain, edge decoration on mosquito net, edge decoration on sheet to beautify their life. At the beginning, cross-stitch were used to sew clothes by people, then it became a unique handmade folk art after been handed down from age to age gradually. Due to its pregnant meaning pattern design, countless changes pattern combination, delicate symmetry of the screen layout, bright brilliant color configuration, Huangmei cross-stitch shows a strong geographical characteristics. In 1959, Huangmei cross-stitch was selected to decorate the Hubei hall in the Great Hall of the People and was highly praised by the Premier Zhou. Nowadays it is regrettable that Huangmei cross-stitch has been far away from people's life.



Fig. 1. "FuShouShuangTao"scarf unearthed.

III. THE ARTISTIC FEATURES OF THE HUANGMEI CROSS-STITCH

Due to its unique style, Huangmei cross-stitch was took to be included in the first batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage in China among many traditional handicraft art. With the high praise from Wang Zhaowen, the cultural character of Huangmei cross itself also moves people. It has neither myriads of changes and gorgeous of embroidery, nor elegant of brocade, Huangmei cross-stitch has a simple beauty and

an unique lingering charm. People can feel this from its characteristic, pattern and color techniques.

A. The technology of Huangmei cross-stitch

Technology is a very important aspect of traditional craftsmanship, the technology of Huangmei cross-stitch is so simple, with a different kind of simple beauty. It makes all kinds of pictures with thousands of "-" shape of the short-term. Huangmei cross-stitch belongs to cross-stitch, sewing and embroidery which is folk arts and crafts. The embroidery pays attention to needle's puncture, and cross-stitch pays attention to thread alternating. "Cross-stitch works such as sewing and mending, the difficulty of embroidery is thread matching." It illustrates that the technical characteristics of cross-stitch is needlework. Huangmei cross-stitch uses white cotton thread as a ridge frame, by means of cross stitch to form pattern. Cross-stitch is dominated by cross stitch, matching with straight stitch usually. Cross stitch works according to the eyelet formed by warp and weft crossing (general three yarns or four yarns as a stitch). Straight stitch works with cross stitch form the main pattern, and then use straight stitch in the cross, straight, oblique direction to get special effects.

In terms of cross stitch, it forms pattern by stitch crossing. The "X" pin calls "cross stitch", and the "X" pin calls flat embroidery line. People usually think that the cross-stitch products come from abroad, but it is only a stitch of cross-stitch. In addition, the traditional Huangmei cross-stitch product's front shows "X" stitch, the back stitch looks very neatly, showing "-" stitch. There is absolutely no "X" stitch overleaf. The famous handicraftsman, Hu Dewen, introduces that a complete pattern only has one knot, the first stitch and the last stitch in the same position. During the cross-stitch process, if one thread is not long enough to finish a pattern, people must add one thread through a twisting way, ensuring that no thread on the outside, which is strictly adhered to in the traditional Huangmei cross-stitch. In addition, like double-sided embroidery, Huangmei cross-stitch also has double-sided cross stitch. The pattern on the front and back is the same, but with a slightly higher demand on technique. ("Fig. 2")



Fig. 2. The back of cross-stitch scarf.

Because the cross-stitch's bottom material is coarse cloth, and this cloth is rough in texture, so people work strictly in accordance with the warp and weft yarn, unlike embroidery is arbitrary. "-" stitch constitutes many patterns of Huangmei cross-stitch. Huangmei cross-stitch appears to easy to learn, but people should have a head for figures when working with complex patterns. If there is an error, it would be very obvious. It needs high proficiency skills.

B. The design aesthetic of Huangmei cross-stitch

The pattern application is the most special aspect of Huangmei cross-stitch. Every kind of traditional craftsmanship is self-contained, the materials in embroidery are largely used in Fu, Lu, Shou, Xi auspicious patterns, which is a show that people pursuit

a happy life in farming civilization society in China. Huangmei cross-stitch has its own unique aesthetic special patterns under the influence of Jingchu culture.

1) *The theme of pattern:* There are nearly forty main patterns and two hundred kinds of edge pattern, angle pattern, and scattered pattern in Huangmei cross-stitch. Using auspicious animal, plant, and Chinese text and drama characters as the main theme. The content relates to people's daily life, auspicious wealth marriage, entertainment, drama story and so on. The themes of patterns mainly include animals, plants, opera figures, the entertainment categories, text etc. "Table I" can be taken as an example:

TABLE I. THE THEMES OF PATTERNS

<i>animals</i>	birds	En pigeon and peach, egrets cross lotus, mandarin ducks playing in the water, red phoenix in morning sun, The Magpies plum etc.
	beasts	Four tigers looting Bao, two dragons are playing with a ball.; Two dragons play with a pearl, eight lions dribbling, kylin Songzi etc.
	Fishes and insects	Carp in lotus, FengFeiDieWu etc.
<i>plant</i>	Lotus, chrysanthemum, orchid, peach, plum, lily, gourd, Ganoderma lucidum grass etc.	
<i>opera figures</i>	Champion parade, Si Lang explore parent, Mu Guiying village, be sworn brothers, seven women from avatar, seven female send child, the Eight Immortals crossing the sea, etc.	
<i>the entertainment category</i>	DaLianXiang, Lantern Festival, playing dominoes, Youchun outing, dragon boat racing, wedding map, etc.	
<i>text</i>	Shou ,Wan, poetry, etc.	

2) *The form of pattern:* Unlike drawings used in embroidery , cross-stitch drawings in the heart of the people. The skilled people work all by heart and depict the scene unrestrictedly. Huangmei cross-stitch pattern has the characteristics of a stylized. The so-called stylized refers to Huangmei cross-stitch in the pick system is in accordance with the basic program to complete. It emphasize entirety, symmetry, balance, including circular shape. Pattern, edge pattern, angle pattern etc. In the forming style, it uses a variety of circular shape. pattern as the main pattern, ornamenting edge pattern, angle pattern around, then uses typhonium (little triangle), Jasmine (long hexagon), dog teeth (serrated) etc. In terms of square towel, it forms usually with central pattern and edge pattern. Central pattern and edge pattern can be combined with freedom, no special attention. In addition, from the whole view, cross-stitch pays attention to upper and lower symmetry, right and left symmetry, instead of the same pattern around, so the pattern from each perspective is relatively symmetric and complete. Affected by the

techniques, craftsmen are not confined to imitate natural form by using the method of exaggeration and deformation cleverly. The pattern looks magical and romantic, full of folk spirit, expressing the workwomen pursuit the happy life and have sincere feelings. ("Fig. 3", "Fig. 4", "Fig. 5", "Fig. 6", "Fig. 7", "Fig. 8", "Fig. 9", "Fig. 10", "Fig. 11", "Fig. 12")



Fig. 3. The Magpies stood in the club.



Fig. 4. Carp in lotus.



Fig. 6. Eight petals lotus.



Fig. 5. Wan patten.



Fig. 7. Two dragons play with a pearl.



Fig. 8. Two birds of wonder with sun.



Fig. 9. Seven fairy.



Fig. 10. Wedding.



Fig. 11. Taoyuan San JieYi.



Fig. 12. Seven fairy carry sons to people.

3) *The connotation of pattern:* The pattern is often regarded as the expression of feelings, It means one of the most influential regional culture. It is a kind of sustenance of people yearning for a better life and a concentrated expression of aesthetic decoration. Except using common good luck and happiness patterns, the connotation of the pattern is mainly manifested in two aspects: a narrative, and rich in metaphor. Huangmei is the birthplace of Huangmei Opera, influenced by Huangmei Opera, there are a kind of patterns reflecting the local operas, such as Yuan Men chopped child, champion parades, Si Lang visit his parent, Mu Guiying goes to the village, seven female avatar, seven female send children. People stitch these familiar operas on the square towel, not only remembered conveniently, but also played a role in communication on the folk stories and legends, which is a special educational method in

traditional society. For example, "Yuan Men chopped child" tells about that Xiaoyinzong who was from Beiguo invaded southward, after Zongbao being kidnapped by Mu Guiying, They fell in love at the first sight, and then married, Marshal Yang liulang got very angry after knowing this matter, and decided to kill Zongbao at Yuan Men to warn the people. This narrative is not more than other folk art. "Fig. 13" is the part of "Yuan Men chopped child" from the late Qing Dynasty, which is collected by the Huangmei Museum now. ("Fig. 13", "Fig. 14")

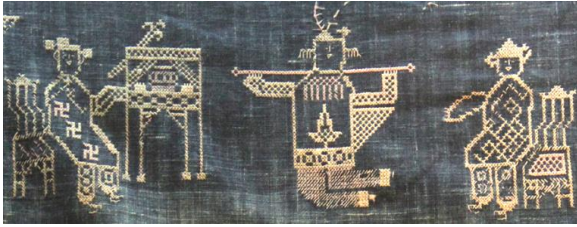


Fig. 13. Side pattern is "Yuan Men Zhan Zi".



Fig. 14. Part of "Zhuang Yuan You Jie".

The metaphor of Huangmei cross-stitch patterns is similar to the ancient Chinese traditional folk arts and crafts. In the application of certain patterns hides the symbol of men and women, such as "En pigeon and peach", En pigeon is a bird which means the men, and peach means the women, when put it together gives men and women the determination of love. People also think that the female finishes it before marriage, and sending it to her family or husband elder hood ornament as a gift when she would be married. En pigeon means that daughter does not forget the parents after she married. Then peach means obeying their parents and wishes them happiness and longevity. The charm in Huangmei cross-stitch pattern just is its unique characteristic, it is different from other traditional craftsmanship.

C. The color characteristics of Huangmei cross-stitch

Rooted in the context of Chu culture, the color matching of Huangmei cross-stitch highlights the artistic characteristics of Chu culture. It is colorful, has its own distinct personality, be lively ,vivid and with highly visual aesthetic and decorative effect. Pattern color is like a mosaic when people look closely, focusing on freehand brushwork and vivid rather than realism. The characteristics of Huangmei cross-stitch in color overall is similar to its related art on the geopolitical. It has monochrome cross-stitch and color cross-stitch which giving the different sense of color. Huangmei cross-stitch tends to using clean color as bottom material, which the blue, black, white, red bottom material is used frequently. The monochrome cross-stitch uses the same color thread to stitch, but the color cross-stitch uses the white thread to stitch the main pattern, and uses the color thread to stitch on the rest of the works. The sense of monochrome cross-stitch is dignified, with a simple beauty, and color

cross-stitch is romantic, gorgeous, relatively colors richer. Blue and black bottom material matches with red pattern is the main color combination, like the Chu lacquer ware impressive. Two types cross-stitch give person a kind of folk art of beauty, people may feel a handicrafts charm rooted in the soil of folk deeply. From the color point, Huangmei cross-stitch emphasizes "strong contrast color combination", such as "dark bottom material, light colored pattern" or "light bottom material, dark pattern". There are great color differences between the bottom material and thread. During the process of stitching, people should use one color thread in a small region. In addition, people use a small area of patterns and a large area of bottom material as the strong contrast of cool tone and warm tone. Huangmei cross-stitch shows a strong Chu romantic color by using these intrinsic color relations. ("Fig. 15", "Fig. 16")



Fig. 15. Monochrome cross-stitch "Fu Shou Shuang Tao".



Fig. 16. Color cross-stitch "Gu Pai Xing".

IV. DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPECT OF THE HUANGMEI CROSS-STITCH

After selected in the state-level intangible cultural heritage, local governments increase the protection, inheritance and development of its efforts. When we went to the field in Huangmei county, we visited the newly built Huangmei County Museum, and visited the national, provincial intangible cultural heritage, Shi Jiumei and Hu Dewen, we also visited Hubei province Huangmei cross Technology Co. Ltd. Whether the collection of historical data and in-kind or image of cross-stitch works were deeply attracted us. At present, the modern development of Huangmei cross-stitch has two kind of phenomena, One is to continue to engage in manual work in the folk artists, they usually have cross-stitch products custom-made which are mainly traditional towel retaining the traditional style. The other is the goods transacted in the market economy. Due to the updates of the technology and equipment, Huangmei cross stitch Technology Co. ltd researches and develops it, the cross stitch has become the focus of the tourism in Huangmei. From the artistic and academic point of view, their product is no longer the original Huangmei cross-stitch, but is the social popular mechanical "cross-stitch" products which have essential differences between them. The workers put different patterns on the fabric using machine printing technology, matching color thread. But in the packaging and advertising is a state-level non-material cultural heritage.

The traditional handicraft application in modern society is the main problems encountered in the industry. If a skill remains stagnant, it has only been stored in the museum at last, even it disappearance . After all, the current protection for Huangmei cross-stitch is not a static protection, but it should be protected with the development of the times. For the survival and, continuation of Huangmei cross-stitch, the government should formulate appropriate policies and strengthen government support in financial and material resources firstly, which play an important role in guiding the direction of development of Huangmei cross-stitch. in the future. In history, in the period of social transformation, Japan's also encountered enormous challenges, but the government had taken effective measures to protect and develop, making them famous in the world today. On the basis of this, Japanese modern design makes the world admire. Secondly, it protects the folk artists, whether image preservation or in-kind finishing contributes to avoid their disappearance. Finally it is the innovation of cross-stitch, whether retaining the tradition or innovating fashion should consider the change of the life style of people in the context of the times. Having been done the above three aspects of work, we should see the development and prosperity of cross-stitch craft at present.

V. CONCLUSION

Huangmei cross-stitch is one of the national intangible cultural heritages. The use of material, pattern, color and the idea behind the emotional, aesthetic and value makes this technique simple and warm. People express the feeling of the natural and social experience, which is the reason why handmade crafts are attractive. Except its artistic value, Huangmei cross-stitch is a carrier of folk culture and popular culture. These spiritual things should be worthy of attention and protection, which it will also provide ever fount inspiration to modern design. Its replacement and traditional value can't be ignored in modern civilization. Continuing to maintain the sustainable development of this folk art also needs our unremitting efforts.

References

- [1] Huangmei County of intangible cultural heritage protection center. The first batch of national intangible cultural heritage — Huangmei cross-stitch [M]. Wuhan: Chang Jiang press, 2008:1-15.
- [2] Feng Zemin, Ye Hongguang, Zheng Gaojie. Explore and analysis of the folk embroidery in Hubei district [J]. *Silk Monthly*.2011(10):51-54.
- [3] Rao Pingshan. The Chu Style of Huangmei cross-stitch [J]. *Literature and Art Studies*, 2009(06):152-153.
- [4] Zhang lang. Hubei folk art [M]. Wuhan:Hubei science and Technology Press, 1993:4.
- [5] [Japan] Liu zongyue. Zhanglu. Japanese arts and crafts [M].Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press. 2006:1-13.
- [6] Yin Yixiang, Dan Feng. Characteristics and influence of Chu culture [J], *Journal of Social Sciences of Jilin University*, 2001, (2), 93.