

Innovative Applications of Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Inheritance of Manchu Embroidery in Modern Clothing Design

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Abstract

“New Chinese Style” is a popular topic in modern clothing design in recent years. As a source of “New Chinese Style” design, Manchu embroidery features natural, simple, and sincere visual effects. It possesses high aesthetic value in aspects such as composition, modeling, and color matching. Combining modern clothing design with embroidery is beneficial for promoting Manchu culture and showcasing the essence of modern design. Incorporating Manchu clothing elements into modern clothing design can better emphasize the characteristics of the clothing itself. Therefore, this article takes Manchu embroidery patterns as the basis, provides a detailed analysis of the overview and innovation of Manchu embroidery culture, and on this basis, analyzes specific cases.

Keywords: Manchu embroidery, innovative design

1. Overview of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Manchu Embroidery Culture

1.1 Introduction to the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Manchu Embroidery

Manchu folk embroidery is an important part of intangible cultural heritage, commonly known as “needle embroidery,” “stitched flowers,” or “embroidery.” It features strong ethnic and regional characteristics. Its style is exaggerated, bold, and simple; the colors are vivid, with strong contrasts between warm and cool tones; the composition is delicate, and the emotions conveyed are genuine and straightforward. It embodies the labor wisdom of the Manchu people and displays their folk consciousness, religious beliefs, and aesthetic preferences. As times continuously evolve, Manchu folk embroidery should also develop and innovate with the era, allowing the traditional techniques of Manchu folk embroidery to be preserved and developed throughout the course of history.

Since its inception, Manchu embroidery has a history of over 400 years. The simple craft of Jurchen leather patch embroidery served as the foundation for early Manchu embroidery, representing an embroidery technique that combines aesthetics with practicality. During the Ming Dynasty, the ancestors of the Manchu people, the Jurchens, (Yang Fan & Li Guoping, 2020) influenced by geographic and ethnic factors and through their study of Han culture, developed their own unique local characteristics and ethnic style in Manchu embroidery art. This style is marked by vivid colors, conveying a strong regional characteristic and simple emotions. The popularity of embroidery art during the Qing Dynasty created a wide range of embroidery skills and aesthetics among the Manchu people. Patch embroidery inherited the handcrafting skills of the Jurchen people. Patch embroidery has absorbed Han culture in the selection of embroidery lines and background colors, utilizing colorful embroidery threads and backgrounds. It has continuously developed with the evolution of social customs, leaving behind excellent embroidery works for future generations, thus forming an embroidery craft with distinctive ethnic

characteristics. Today, with the development and influence of some foreign cultures, Manchu embroidery is gradually undergoing changes. Despite challenges, with the protection of intangible cultural heritage, the resurgence of Manchu embroidery is expected to happen soon.

1.2 Art Categories of Intangible Cultural Heritage Manchu Embroidery

1.2.1 Embroidered Apparel

Manchu folk costume embroidery products mainly include embroidered shoes, bellybands, embroidered skirts, cloud shoulders, etc. (Lyu Mingze, 2021) Among these, the embroidered shawl is the most favored embroidered attire by Manchu women. The shawl, also known as a vest, resembles a waistcoat and was commonly worn over the robe as outerwear during the late Qing period, with a loose fit. Since it is worn on the outside, the durability of the embroidery on the shoulders is the primary consideration.

1.2.2 Decorative Items

The embroidery culture of the Manchu people is not only reflected in clothing but also in many items decorated with embroidery. Decorative pouches are often used for daily use and matching, holding an important place in Manchu folk art. The design of the pouch's shape and decorative patterns has symbolic significance and conveys the cultural connotations captured by the pouch through homophony or the visual imagery of the patterns. Manchu clothing embroidery products are diverse, with a wide range of embroidery themes. The application of embroidery techniques in apparel not only reflects the wearer's personality but also has aesthetic value. The use of embroidery techniques in Manchu daily life items possesses strong visual appeal. Common daily items include curtains, embroidered pillows, and canopies. The decorative beauty of curtains is deeply rooted in people's hearts and is an essential element of the dowry for Manchu girls. Before marriage, several pieces must be meticulously crafted, and embroidered pillows are also a mandatory skill for Manchu girls.

2. Intangible Cultural Heritage: Manchu Embroidery Craftsmanship and Embroidery Techniques

2.1 Materials and Tools for Intangible Cultural Heritage Manchu Embroidery

2.1.1 Materials

Fabric and thread are the primary materials for Manchu embroidery. Commonly used cotton fabrics for embroidery include plain weave fabrics, satin fabrics, washed fabrics, as well as synthetic and blended fabrics. In Manchu embroidery, different base fabrics have various requirements for the use of thread, handiwork, and patterns, thereby lending an aesthetic quality to the embroidery produced. Based on the type of material, it can roughly be divided into three categories: plant fiber fabrics, animal fibers, and synthetic fibers. Wool is divided into fine, medium, and plied yarns, typically suitable for making crewel embroidery. However, due to its relatively coarse texture, it is not suitable for creating more complex hand embroidery.

2.1.2 Tools

The tools used in Manchu embroidery directly affect the outcome of the embroidered fabric. The main traditional Manchu embroidery tools include embroidery needles, threads, hoops, scissors, floss holders, and awls. For Manchu embroidery, the embroidery needle holds a crucial position. When selecting an embroidery needle, special attention should be paid to the two ends of the needle, namely the "needle point" and the "needle eye." An oval-shaped needle tip is considered the best. Similar to fabric, embroidery threads are mainly divided into pure cotton thread, linen thread, silk thread, wool thread, and synthetic fiber thread. Pure cotton thread, with its soft texture, has the widest range of applications. The scissors used in Manchu embroidery are quite special, requiring the use of different tools according to different situations. Scissors for cutting threads should generally have their tips bent upwards to avoid damaging the surface of the embroidery; thin and sharp scissors are specifically used for thread drawing.

2.2 Embroidery Techniques and Stitches of Intangible Cultural Heritage Manchu Embroidery

2.2.1 Embroidery Techniques

Over many years of development, Manchu embroidery has formed a variety of embroidery methods, mainly including: patch embroidery, wrapped embroidery, cutwork embroidery, and openwork carving embroidery. Mastering embroidery techniques can perfectly depict the image and characteristics of the embroidery. In addition to accurate needle shapes, it's also important to understand the outline shape of the pattern. Manchu embroidery has a variety of embroidery methods. Throughout its development, it has absorbed many advantages and ultimately formed representative artistic characteristics based on the features of the silk thread structure. Patch embroidery, with its simple splicing technique, flexible modeling, and diverse forms of expression, has a wide range of applications, such as in the embroidery of curtains, quilt covers, clothes, etc. It can also be used to alter fabrics and sew clothes. It is commonly used for simple embroidery of flowers, birds, fish, insects, human figures, animals, etc. Wrapped embroidery is suitable for depicting specific patterns such as human figures,

mountains, rocks, and animals. The cutwork embroidery technique features simple patterns and even compositions. It is commonly used in embroidered pillows and shoes, making it quite practical. Openwork carving embroidery is a method where holes are created in the base of the embroidery and the edges of these holes are decorated with embroidery threads. Openwork embroidery techniques are generally suitable for details such as the collar, cuffs, and hem of garments, as well as for decorative details on items like shawls and scarves. This method of embroidery plays an important role in the shape and style of clothing.

2.2.2 Stitches

Common stitches in Manchu embroidery include the satin stitch, chain stitch, knot stitch, and split stitch. The most common and basic stitch is the satin stitch, characterized by its evenly arranged and tight lines. Satin stitch embroidery is mostly neat and smooth, commonly used in the embroidery of items such as curtains and bedding. The chain stitch features rich and interlaced lines, full of layers, with diverse and flexible creation techniques that are casual and natural. Depending on the different patterns, the layers and colors vary, making chain stitch works detailed and lifelike. The knot stitch is often used for embroidering floral patterns. It involves passing the needle through the fabric, twisting the embroidery thread around the needle tip several times, and then inserting it back into the embroidery surface. Once the needle is inserted, the knot is secured and forms knots of different sizes on the surface of the embroidery, creating decorative textures. This stitch technique has a three-dimensional effect and can be used both for standalone artwork and as a decorative element in pieces, creating vivid and lifelike forms. The split stitch involves using threads of varying lengths to divide the pattern into different segments. This stitching technique is flexible, with no fixed pattern, making it very versatile and casual. It is suitable for the textures of plant or animal patterns, making the embroidered designs realistic, natural, and lifelike. This embroidery method has a moderate density and clear splits, giving the embroidered items a sense of realism.

3. Innovative Development of Intangible Cultural Heritage Manchu Embroidery in Modern Clothing Design

3.1 Application of Innovative Development Concepts

3.1.1 Inheriting Traditional Manchu Embroidery Patterns

Manchu traditional embroidery patterns are exquisitely shaped, finely crafted, rich in content, and have a strong inclusivity of themes, offering modern designers a vast array of design elements and expressive space. In the process of innovatively designing Manchu traditional patterns, designers start with the use of embroidery patterns, extract auspicious designs from Manchu traditional patterns, and apply them to modern clothing parts such as necklaces, cuffs, and belts, while adding embroidery techniques to embellish the patterns. (Lyu Mingze & Zeng Hui, 2020) This design approach abandons the traditional method of large-scale embroidery found in Manchu traditional clothing culture and adopts a concept of localized decoration. It not only saves textile materials but also meets people's current desire for a minimalist style. Fashion designers must not only consider the aesthetic appeal of clothing but also adhere to the current concept of sustainable development. Furthermore, based on the use of embroidery patterns, the traditional embroidery patterns are directly integrated into modern clothing styles without preservation. This not only creates a fragmented effect on the clothing but can also cause displeasure among consumers who are not familiar with Manchu culture. Therefore, when using patterns, elements can be extracted for transformation or combined with modern patterns, and traditional patterns can be redesigned to better integrate into modern clothing design concepts. Lastly, due to the complexity of content, color, and craftsmanship of traditional embroidery patterns, when combining them with modern clothing design, it is advisable not to use styles that are complex in structure and rich in color. Instead, simple designs should be used to emphasize the connotation of Manchu embroidery.

3.1.2 Innovation in Fabric Materials

In clothing, the choice of fabric materials is essential and plays a significant role in affecting the overall effect of the garment. In achieving innovative development of Manchu traditional embroidery materials, it is important to consider not only the innovative design of the clothing but also the creative development of embroidery materials. If one aims to achieve innovative design in traditional Manchu embroidery, changing the fabrics and materials is a more direct approach. When selecting fabrics, clothing designers must consider not only the comfort of the wearer, the fabric's aesthetic appeal, and wrinkle resistance, but also how well it integrates with Manchu embroidery. Breathable and comfortable fabrics such as botanically dyed fabrics, ice silk imitation linen knit, and stretch knit fabrics are all good choices. Furthermore, some eco-friendly fabrics like recycled polyester and recycled nylon are strong, durable, wrinkle-resistant, heat-resistant, and not prone to attracting hair, making them suitable choices. Their main advantage is having good wrinkle resistance and the ability to easily maintain shape. These fabrics can meet the requirements of garment silhouette design and are also the best choice for embroidery fabrics.

In terms of embroidery materials, traditional embroidery threads are mainly made of cotton, with a relatively simple texture effect. Manchu embroidery could experiment with materials such as metal, plastic, or wool, or combine cotton thread with other materials to enrich the visual effects of the embroidery. Using metal as an embroidery material is not an uncommon creative technique. For example, the Miao embroidery in Guizhou uses metallic tin, which is light and thin with a glossy texture, giving the embroidery a modern style. Traditional cuff embroidery can take this as a reference and try using different materials to achieve various clothing styles.

3.1.3 Highlighting Embroidery Expression Techniques

With the advent of the technological era, Manchu embroidery is divided into machine embroidery and hand embroidery. Different embroidery methods can convey different artistic styles. Efficient embroidery machines can facilitate the mass production of traditional Manchu embroidery, providing convenient conditions for the promotion of embroidery and saving manpower and material resources for industrial development. As technology plays an increasingly important role in garment production, improving production efficiency can also bring some drawbacks. For instance, the number of intangible cultural heritage inheritors of traditional Manchu embroidery decreases, and the varieties of embroidery become more similar. Unlike the past status of embroidery in clothing, people in modern society do not consider embroidery as the sole criterion for purchasing garments. Therefore, how to enhance the status of Manchu embroidery in clothing and how to make modern people accept garments with traditional Manchu embroidery elements are issues that designers should consider. From the perspective of embroidery methods, a combination of machine embroidery and hand embroidery can be considered, integrating the efficiency of machine embroidery with the exquisite creativity of hand embroidery. Using machine embroidery to create basic patterns, and then adding hand embroidery embellishments, can enhance the overall design effect, decorate details, and express a brand-new visual impact.

3.2 The Application of Intangible Cultural Heritage Manchu Embroidery in Modern Clothing Design

The GUCCI Spring/Summer 2023 collection incorporates Manchu embroidery techniques. The style design is inspired by Qing Dynasty Manchu attire, continuing the wearing characteristics of the Qing Dynasty, such as stand-up collars and piped designs. The element design adopts traditional Manchu embroidery patterns, extracting natural motifs such as plants and flowers, and creatively combines them with modern clothing silhouettes. The design of this series uses silk fabric, emphasizing the contrast between the light details and the graceful volume in the overall garment. After extracting retro elements from Manchu clothing, it effectively merges the traditional culture of this clothing style with modern elements, presenting a cross-cultural exchange and creation that reflects the design tension of Chinese ethnic elements.



4. Conclusion

Manchu embroidery is a traditional folk art form with a long history that combines functionality and beauty, coarseness and delicacy, as well as simplicity and refinement. Under the protection of intangible cultural heritage, inheriting and innovating Manchu embroidery techniques helps to preserve the diversity of Chinese original culture, strengthen national identity, and transform the vitality of traditional Chinese folk culture. Therefore, innovatively applying Manchu culture in fashion design can refresh the public's personal understanding of Manchu culture, allow the public to discover the artistic beauty of Manchu embroidery, deepen the connotation of clothing culture, and promote the deep integration of Manchu embroidery techniques with the modern fashion industry.

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