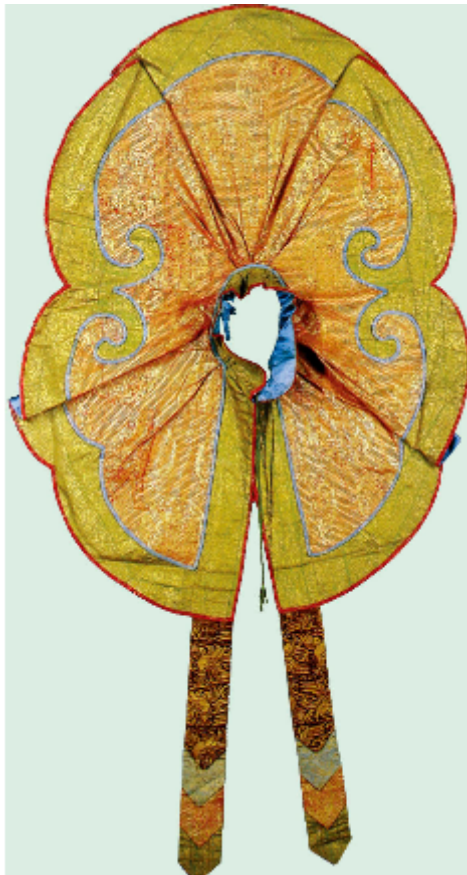


Chapter Six Traditional Clothing and Handicraft

Lesson Two Crafts

Arts and Crafts in the field of Apparel



Embroidery

Embroidery in China goes back to ancient times. Some four thousand years ago when China was passing from primitive society to slave society, there was a rule that the tribal leaders should wear formal attire with patterns of the sun, the moon, and stars embroidered on the upper garment; of weeds, fire, etc., on trousers (skirts) when grand ceremonies were held such as celebrations, sacrifice-offerings, etc.. In the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States Period, along with the progress of agriculture, the lifestyle that men plough the fields and

women weave became more firmly fixed, mulberry-and-hemp planting and spinning-and-weaving extensively spread, and the embroidery craft grew mature gradually. To date the earliest embroidery works handed down from ancient times are the two pieces unearthed from the Chu Tombs in the Warring States Period. By applying braid embroidering method (also known as locking embroidering) that features neat stitch, flowing line, and tasteful coloring, the patterns of swimming-dragon and dancing-phoenix; fierce-tiger and auspicious-beast embroidered on silks appear natural and lifelike, which gives full expression to the achievements of embroidery art in the ancient State of Chu.

When it came to Qin and Han dynasties, the art of embroidery further developed following the progress of silk-spinning. A diversified batch of embroidered works well preserved was unearthed from the Han tombs at Mawangdui of Changsha, Hu'nan Province. These embroideries, which represent the artistic style as well as the high level of embroidery in the Han Dynasty, mostly have patterns of ripple-like clouds, soaring phoenix, galloping holy beasts, ribbon-shaped flowers, geometric figures, etc., using basically locking method with neat stitching, compact composition and smooth lines. The prevailing practice of embroidering Buddha started from the last years of Han Dynasty. During the Six Dynasties, foreign culture represented by Buddhism mingled with local culture, which reflected in embroidery. Some silk fragments unearthed from the Eastern Jin Dynasty down to the Northern Dynasties unearthed in Dunhuang of Gansu

Province, and Hetian, Bachu, Turpan of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, reveal that the whole piece of work, design and blank in all, was fine and closely embroidered using locking technique, producing the effect of covering the fabrics to the full with embroidery. In the book entitled Famous Paintings through the Ages, Zhang Yanyuan, a Tang Dynasty writer writes that Lady Zhao in the court of the State of Wu was distinguished for her "three matchlessness" —matchlessness in weaving, in stitching and in silk. She was adept at weaving dragon and phoenix patterned brocade with colorful silk thread, called "matchlessness of weaving;" embroidering the Five Holy Mountains on a square piece of fabric, "called matchlessness of stitching;" and making soft curtains with a specific kind of silk named Jiaoshu silk, called "matchlessness of silk." Another notable feature of embroidery at that time is that human figures had started to appear on embroidered works.



Qing-dynasty Gu-embroidered picture album West Lake, 24.1 cm high, 26.3 cm wide, housed in Taipei Palace Museum. The picture shows the scene of "Orioles Singing in the Willows."



Flowery Brook - Fisher's Retreat: Ming-dynasty Gu-embroidered painting, 33.4 cm vertical, 24.5 cm horizontal, collected in Palace Museum.

Although the Han-Dynasty locking embroidery technique was still followed in the Tang Dynasty, another skill called plain stitching method had already been widely used together with some other stitching methods, using color thread and wider range of fabrics. Besides, patterns were edged with golden and silvery

thread to give a three-dimensional effect. During the Tang and Song dynasties, as more and more people joined in embroidery, the representative needlework among females—boudoir embroidery, emerged. At the same time, as scholar-painters widely took part in the work, there appeared embroidery painting, which combines painting with embroidery, with designs contributed by painters and embroidery made by artisans. From Tang down to Ming and Qing dynasties, the participation of scholar-painters in the business had carried forward the innovation and development of embroidery techniques: in the treatment of color silk, thread was cut into finer bits, so that the lines might appear more soft and graceful; in stitching methods, there appeared various new approaches, such as arbitrary stitching, thread nailing, gold circling, mixing stitching, rolling stitching, and linking stitching.

In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the government-run handicraft business waned gradually. Non-governmental workshops started to arise, thus facilitating the growth of folk handicrafts. Thanks to the cooperation between scholars and artisans, embroidery skills and production became brisk and thriving. Traditional Chinese embroidery reached its summit of prosperity, with four famous schools of embroidery: Su-embroidery, Yue-embroidery, Shu-embroidery and Xiang-embroidery coming into being.



Qing-dynasty Guangdong embroidered fan kit housed in Palace Museum. On white satin background, apricot grove and swallow are embroidered on one side and peacock and peony on the other.

Centering on the city of Suzhou, Su-embroidery was developed on the basis of Gu-embroidery. Originally Gu-embroidery referred to the works done by the Gu family of Shanghai in the Ming Dynasty. Han Ximeng, wife to Gu Shouqian of the Gu family, was skilled at painting flowers and plants and in particular at embroidery, making the fame of Gu-family embroidery spread far and wide. In the Qing Dynasty, embroidery shops in the region south of the Yangtze River often hang up the sign "Gu-embroidery" to solicit customers. Su-embroidery, having extensively drawn the strong points of the Gu-embroidery, created its own varieties including the painting-imitation embroidery and portrait

embroidery. Su-embroidery features that the landscape on the embroidery can depict the difference between the background and the distant view, the buildings appear deep and imposing, the figure looks vivid and the flowers and birds lifelike. In technology, overlapping stitching is mainly used, in which floss and thread overlapping without revealing any trace of stitching. Often three or four different kinds of thread either of the same color or of similar shade are applied to produce a hazy effect. Yue-embroidery, being the general name for the embroidery in the Guangdong Province, is believed to be initiated by the Li people (a minority nationality).

The embroidery workers in former times were mostly males from Guangzhou and Chaozhou. Their embroidered works included primarily dress and adornments, hanging screens, shoulder bags, pictures on the screen, round fans, fan cases, etc.. Currently subject matters of Yue-embroidery often involve phoenix, peony, pine and crane, deer, chicken and goose. The composition is usually elaborate and vital, coloring magnificent and dazzling, stitching simple and concise. Rough and loose thread is used to make uneven stitches, some longer and some shorter, overlapping one another and raised a bit. The gold-nailing embroidery is one of its quality varieties, the process of which is using satin background knitted with golden thread or nailed with golden floss, covered with loose golden floss design so that it looks resplendent. Works made using gold-nailing technique include stage costumes, furnishings for theaters and

temples to heighten a warm and animated atmosphere.

Shu-embroidery, also known as Sichuan embroidery, is an age-old local craft based on Chengdu of Sichuan Province. According to the book *History of the State of Huayang* written by Chang Qu of Qin Dynasty, Shu-embroidery and Shu-brocade were two specialties of Sichuan Province. Shu-embroidery works mainly include quilt covers, pillow cases, garments, shoes and painted screens, mostly articles of everyday use. The designs are largely flowers, birds, insects, fish, folk auspicious words and traditional patterns, possessing jubilant flavor. Since the middle and later period of Qing Dynasty, on the basis of traditional local embroidery technique, Shu-embroidery took in the strong points in Gu-embroidery and Su-embroidery and sprang up overnight to become one of most important commodity embroidery varieties in the country. Shu-embroidery features neat stitching, smoothness and brightness, with lines clear, color gorgeous, pattern-edge uniform as if cut with knife.



Qing-dynasty Li nationality embroidered dragon quilt. On background woven from rough kapok thread is 63 cm long patterns of phoenixes and Chinese unicon.

Xiang-embroidery is the general name of embroidered works made in Hu'nan Province, Changsha being a hub. At first merchants in Changsha set up the "Gu-embroidery Shop" to cater for the newly appointed high official who rose to power by suppressing the Taiping Revolution. Soon it had prevailed over Gu-embroidery. Xiang-embroidery is characterized by using silk floss to embroider flowers. The silk floss is treated in a certain solution so as to prevent pills from appearing. Xiang-embroidery is called "fine wool embroidery" by local people. Using traditional painting as subject matter, Xiang-embroidery boasts vivid and lifelike shape and unconstrained style, well commended as "flowers

embroidered seemingly fragrant, birds embroidered seemingly chirping, tigers embroidered seemingly running and figures embroidered seemingly true to life."

Painting and Dyeing

Dyeing textiles using minerals and plants is a time honored practice in China. Early in the Neolithic Age some six to seven thousand years ago, the Chinese ancients could already dye red sackcloth with hematite powder. Through long-term practice in production, Chinese people had learnt the techniques of dye-extracting and application to yield colorful fabrics. During the Shang and Zhou dynasties, with dyeing techniques gradually improved, governmental officials were appointed such as "dyeing men," "dyestuff keepers," etc. in charge of relative affairs. In the ancient classic *The Book of Songs*, fabrics in various colors are mentioned, indicating that dyestuffs at that time were continuously increasing in varieties.



Eastern Han-dynasty blue-and-white flowery calico, 86 cm long, 45 cm wide, housed in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Museum.

Exercises:

Answering the following questions based on the text.

1. Dating back to 4,000 years, what is the costume rule for tribal leaders?
2. During the time Han dynasty, what are the patterns of embroideries?
3. Which province is the birthplace for Shu-embroidery?
4. What does Shu-embroidery mainly include?
5. Which province is the birthplace for Xiang-embroidery?