

Original Paper

The Inheritance and Innovation of Shu Embroidery Technique and Culture in the New Era

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Abstract

Shu embroidery is a type of embroidery art originating from the western Sichuan plain, renowned for its exquisite appearance. The cultural value of Shu embroidery runs deep, and it has taken on new significance in modern times. In ancient times, Shu embroidery experienced a period of peak development; however, under the impact of modern society, the inheritance and future development of Shu embroidery also face some difficulties and challenges, such as monotonous styles, slow updates, a small number of people inheriting the skills, the lack of a complete industrial chain, small scale, and the absence of representative brands. This article delves into the cultural value behind Shu embroidery while also proposing solutions to these issues, including accelerating research and development, popularizing knowledge about Shu embroidery, increasing promotional efforts, and cultivating relevant technical talent.

Keywords

Shu embroidery, Inheritance and innovation of Shu embroidery

1. Introduction

Shu embroidery, also known as Sichuan embroidery, ranks alongside Suzhou embroidery, Hunan embroidery, and Guangdong embroidery as one of China's Four Great Embroideries, highlighting its unique cultural status. As a fine embroidery technique passed down in the Bashu region, Shu embroidery has been recognized as a Chinese National Geographical Indication product. It has always been an essential intangible cultural heritage in the Bashu area, with its history traceable back to the Sanxingdui civilization period. Shu embroidery mainly uses silk threads made from silkworms to

embroider exquisite patterns on silk or other fabrics, often featuring flowers, birds, insects, fish, and various animals and plants. Today, in the face of the rapid development of the era, inheriting and innovating Shu embroidery culture has become necessary. This not only serves to protect Shu embroidery culture but also enhances people's livelihood and raises the profile of Shu embroidery by further exploring its commercial value, making it a highly meaningful and necessary measure.

2. The Value and Significance of Shu Embroidery

2.1 The Cultural Value of Shu Embroidery

Shu embroidery, also known as Sichuan embroidery, originated among the folk in the western part of Sichuan Province, China. Due to Sichuan being referred to as the Bashu region, this embroidery technique is also called Shu embroidery. At that time, the western part of Sichuan was abundant in silk, which was not only used as raw material for making luxurious clothing but also for creating Shu embroidery. By the Jin Dynasty, embroidered products had already become specialties of the ancient Shu Kingdom. After the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the Silk Road opened up new trade routes between the East and West, and the exquisite silk fabrics became very popular among foreigners, leading to an increased demand for embroidered products. During this period, Shu embroidery experienced rapid development. Due to the characteristic of ancient Chinese society where men tilled the fields and women wove, many Chinese women were familiar with the embroidery techniques of Shu embroidery, which led to its widespread dissemination among the populace. Shu embroidery is famous for its stitching techniques, with a total of 122 different embroidery stitches. Different stitching methods are used to embroider different themes, and upon completion, the animals appear lifelike, with natural and vivid expressions, while landscapes are grand and majestic, allowing people to experience the unique charm of traditional culture. Shu embroidery is not only a form of intangible cultural heritage but also carries profound cultural significance. It has witnessed thousands of years of changes and developments in Sichuan, representing the cultural characteristics and local customs of the Sichuan region, and stands as one of the most representative cultural calling cards of Sichuan.

2.2 The Commercial Value of Shu Embroidery

Nowadays, the commercial value of Shu embroidery culture has become increasingly prominent. It is not only a traditional handicraft but also possesses high artistic value and cultural significance. With the development of society and the improvement of people's aesthetic standards, there have been many creative applications that integrate Shu embroidery culture with various aspects of modern cities, generating commercial value while expanding the influence of Shu embroidery culture. To tap into the potential of Shu embroidery, it is necessary to combine traditional culture with the needs and trends of modern society. A clear example today is the cultural and creative market, which integrates traditional handicrafts with everyday items used by people, promoting Shu embroidery to thousands of households while creating profits. Shu embroidery, as a well-known high-end folk art, can also be given as gifts to others, especially foreign friends, thereby enhancing the influence of Chinese culture. Moreover, the

fashion industry is another commercial market that Shu embroidery can consider entering. With its diverse natural themes and exquisite embroidery techniques, these elements are highly sought after in the fashion industry. The exquisite appearance and unique cultural status of Shu embroidery determine its significant commercial value. By adopting appropriate innovative ideas, this value can be tapped into, both preserving culture and fostering economic development.

2.3 The Significance of Inheritance and Innovation of Shu Embroidery

As one of the Four Great Embroideries of China, the delicacy of Shu embroidery goes without saying. Behind the exquisitely crafted Shu embroidery pieces lies a long history and unique cultural value. Shu embroidery is a treasure of Chinese embroidery art, often featuring themes such as flowers, birds, insects, fish, and flying and walking creatures. The patterns are lifelike, rich in layers, and possess a soft luster, making them superior artistic treasures. The value of Shu embroidery extends beyond its artistic and cultural worth. Nowadays, traditional handicrafts have a broader market and definition. Shu embroidery not only represents the essence of art in the Bashu region but also serves as a vital means of livelihood for many Bashu residents. Therefore, inheriting and promoting Shu embroidery culture is a necessary and correct choice. We can analyze and understand the significance of inheriting and innovating Shu embroidery from multiple perspectives. Firstly, as one of the Four Great Embroideries of China, Shu embroidery is not only a precious legacy of historical culture but also a refined work of art, embodying the unique aesthetics and cultural depth of the Chinese nation. From these two aspects, Shu embroidery holds extraordinary value, whether in terms of culture or art, and its culture deserves to be inherited and protected. Secondly, the reason for the need to inherit Shu embroidery culture lies in the less than optimistic current state of its development. At the end of the 20th century, the emergence of computerized embroidery undoubtedly dealt a significant blow to traditional embroidery. In an era that values efficiency, many traditional techniques have gradually been abandoned, with some Shu embroidery artisans seeking alternative careers, and the remaining ones scattered in small workshops. Without dedicated brands or a certain scale, the skills of Shu embroidery are undoubtedly in crisis. If left unchecked, the techniques of Shu embroidery may even face the risk of extinction. Additionally, inheriting Shu embroidery culture is also aimed at creating new value. The economic value brought by Shu embroidery can drive local development, providing artisans with material security, and industries related to Shu embroidery can also benefit from this development.

3. Current Situation of the Development of Shu Embroidery

Among the Four Great Embroideries, the current development status of Shu embroidery is less ideal compared to Suzhou embroidery, Hunan embroidery, and Guangdong embroidery. Nowadays, most people seek jobs with stable and substantial economic income, and very few are willing to learn the embroidery techniques of Shu embroidery, with some techniques even facing the risk of being lost. The number of people engaged in the Shu embroidery industry is small, the scale is limited, there is no complete industrial chain, and there are no well-known Shu embroidery brands. These factors

collectively represent the current development status of Shu embroidery. However, there have also been more positive developments. Compared to the past, the Shu embroidery industry has made some progress. Under the background of innovation and development as well as network dissemination, the fame and influence of Shu embroidery have also seen a certain degree of enhancement.

3.1 The Number and Scale of Inheritance of Shu Embroidery

According to historical records, the development of Shu embroidery culture was most prosperous during the Ming and Qing dynasties, with the embroidery workshops in Chengdu standing out the most, and several well-known brands emerging at that time. By then, specialized embroidery workshops in Chengdu had reached over 80. In the 1970s and 1980s of the 20th century, with strong support from the state, Shu embroidery experienced new growth, and the Chengdu Shu Embroidery Factory was established in 1961, with the number of people engaged in the Shu embroidery industry reaching a considerable scale. In 2006, Shu embroidery was included in the national intangible cultural heritage list, attracting attention for its exquisite patterns and unique cultural connotations. Shu embroidery in China is found in Sichuan, and Shu embroidery in Sichuan is centered in Chengdu, with the most representative location being Anjing Town in Pi County. To promote the development of the Shu embroidery industry, Chengdu City established the 'Chengdu Shu Embroidery Industry Park' and the 'Chengdu Shu Embroidery Engineering Technology Research Center' in Anjing Town in 2009. Currently, the number of professional Shu embroidery inheritors is not large, and young people willing to learn Shu embroidery techniques are few. Although some industries have been established to develop Shu embroidery, most are relatively small in scale, and the promotional efforts are not strong enough, resulting in low visibility. Overall, there is still considerable room for improvement and development.

3.2 The Development of Shu Embroidery Industry

Over the past dozen years, the development of the Shu embroidery industry has undergone a series of changes and innovations. Firstly, the government's attention to and protection of Shu embroidery have seen a certain level of improvement. In addition to listing Shu embroidery in the intangible cultural heritage catalog, efforts have been made to establish a series of Shu embroidery industrial bases. In 2022, Jingxiuyuan Shu Embroidery Co., Ltd. in Anjing Town, Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, was designated as a provincial-level intangible cultural heritage protection and inheritance base. This indicates that significant progress has been made on the path of inheriting and protecting Shu embroidery culture and developing the Shu embroidery industry. Moreover, Shu embroidery has achieved a certain degree of industrialization, which mostly involves combining Shu embroidery with modern industries. A representative example is the integration of Shu embroidery with the fashion industry. Traditional arts and ethnic characteristics have always been favored themes for high-end clothing, and Shu embroidery undoubtedly possesses outstanding artistic value and national cultural representation. Besides the fashion industry, cultural and creative industries, cultural tourism, and home furnishings have also adopted Shu embroidery elements in their product production, pushing Shu embroidery culture into a broader market.

3.3 The Influence and Popularity of Shu Embroidery Culture in Sichuan

Sichuan embroidery, as a representative traditional embroidery art of the Sichuan region, originated from the ancient Shu Kingdom period 3,000 years ago. This profound historical background endows Sichuan embroidery with extremely significant historical and cultural status, making it well-known throughout the Sichuan region and even across the country. With the development of online platforms, the beauty of Sichuan embroidery has spread far and wide, and the comments under videos showcasing Sichuan embroidery works are filled with people's praise, clearly expressing their recognition and pride in Sichuan embroidery. Apart from the giant panda, Sichuan embroidery is undoubtedly the second most distinctive cultural calling card of Sichuan. Over the long course of time, Sichuan embroidery has evolved to be more than just a local embroidery technique; it has become an important component of Sichuan culture. However, Sichuan embroidery still lacks a certain degree of fame. The retention of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) bearers is challenging, and the salary and benefits are not optimistic. Moreover, ICH enterprises are mostly small-scale, with unsatisfactory income, which makes it difficult for these enterprises to allocate additional funds for brand building and promotion. In summary, while Sichuan embroidery has a significant influence in Sichuan, it is relatively less known in regions outside of Sichuan, which poses difficulties for its inheritance and also leaves room for future development.

4. The Challenges Faced by Shu Embroidery Today

4.1 Intense Market Competition and High Pressure

with consumers' pursuit of traditional handicrafts and their emphasis on cultural arts, the Shu embroidery market has gradually emerged and developed. However, this has also brought about a diversification and personalization of consumer demand for Shu embroidery products. Consumers not only pay attention to the exquisite craftsmanship and material quality of Shu embroidery, but also increasingly prefer customized products and services to meet their unique aesthetic and functional needs. As a high-quality handmade embroidery product, Shu embroidery has relatively high costs, including raw materials, labor costs, and other aspects. However, with the popularization of machine embroidery and the intensification of market competition, Shu embroidery manufacturers are facing pressure from price wars. How to control costs while ensuring product quality has become an important issue that enterprises need to face.

4.2 Relatively Limited Audience

Shu embroidery, as a traditional handicraft with profound historical and cultural heritage, is often limited to people who have a deep interest and understanding of Chinese traditional culture and art. In the fast-paced modern life, the younger generation may have a relatively narrow audience for Shu embroidery due to insufficient knowledge or low interest in traditional handicrafts. At the same time, the promotion of Shu embroidery is relatively insufficient, and the brand awareness is not strong, resulting in many potential consumers having limited understanding of it and difficulty in forming a broad consumer base. Shu embroidery products also have shortcomings in innovation and diversity.

4.3 Low Management Efficiency and Level

Affected by the development of the market economy, many Shu embroidery enterprises have failed to adapt to the needs of the modern business environment in their management systems in a timely manner. Compared with peers such as Su embroidery and Xiang embroidery who have specialized research institutes, the Shu embroidery industry lags behind in terms of management system and lacks efficient and scientific management mechanisms to promote the sustainable development of the industry.

In addition, there are relatively few large-scale enterprises in the Shu embroidery industry, and there are many scattered family embroidery workshops with small scale, single variety, and extensive management. This situation leads to difficulties in financing, lack of development funds, and difficulty in forming brand scale effects and agglomeration effects, which in turn affects overall management efficiency.

4.4 Lack of Relevant Skilled Personnel

The inheritance of Shu embroidery skills has always relied on the master apprentice system, but with the acceleration of social changes and the pace of life, many old artists are unable to fully inherit their skills due to their advanced age or lack of suitable successors. At the same time, due to the relatively low salary and benefits in the Shu embroidery industry, as well as the high work intensity and long and boring learning process, many young people are unwilling to engage in this industry, resulting in serious talent loss and a phenomenon of skill gap. At present, there is a lack of majors or research institutions related to Shu embroidery in universities, which hinders the cultivation of high-end design talents. Although some training institutions and vocational schools are trying to provide training on Shu embroidery skills, their scale and influence are limited, making it difficult to meet the industry's demand for talent. In addition, the teaching quality of these training institutions varies greatly, making it difficult to ensure that students can truly master the essence of Shu embroidery skills.

5. Corresponding Measures

5.1 Accelerating Research and Development to Increase Competitiveness

The government can establish a special fund for the research and development of Shu embroidery skills to support the inheritance, protection, and innovation of Shu embroidery techniques. These funds can be used to support mentorship projects, education system construction, technology research and development, and product development. In addition, tax incentives can also be provided. Provide tax incentives to enterprises and individuals engaged in the research and innovation of Shu embroidery skills, reduce their economic burden, and stimulate their enthusiasm and creativity. In addition, modern technological means can be introduced into the research and development of Shu embroidery techniques, such as digital design and intelligent production.

Through the application of modern technology, the design efficiency and production quality of Shu embroidery products can be improved, and production costs can be reduced. Develop innovative and

practical Shu embroidery products based on market demand and consumer preferences. For example, Shu embroidery elements can be integrated into modern clothing, household goods, cultural gifts, and other fields to broaden the application scope and market space of Shu embroidery products. Encourage Shu embroidery enterprises to strengthen brand building, enhance brand awareness and reputation. Through brand building, a good image of Shu embroidery products can be established and market competitiveness can be improved.

5.2 Popularizing Knowledge and Expand the Audience

5.2.1 Education and Training

Education and Training primary and secondary schools, Shu embroidery knowledge can be included as part of local cultural courses, allowing students to have a preliminary understanding of the history, culture, and skills of Shu embroidery through handicrafts, classroom lectures, and other forms. In universities and vocational schools, establish majors or courses related to Shu embroidery, cultivate professional Shu embroidery talents, and promote the popularization and in-depth development of Shu embroidery knowledge through teaching and research. The government and industry associations can jointly organize training courses on Shu embroidery techniques, inviting experienced veteran artists to teach their skills and attract more people to participate in learning. Training courses can be designed at different levels for different groups of people, such as beginner classes, improvement classes, and master classes, to meet the needs of different learners.

5.2.2 Media Promotion

Through traditional media platforms such as television, radio, and newspapers, broadcast documentaries, special reports, and advertisements related to Shu embroidery to enhance its visibility and influence. Invite Shu embroidery masters and inheritors to give media interviews, share their skills and stories, and let more people understand the charm and value of Shu embroidery. You can also use the Internet, social media and other new media platforms to publish articles, pictures and videos related to Shu embroidery to attract young people's attention and participation. Open WeChat official account, microblog account and short video platform account with Shu embroidery theme, regularly publish Shu embroidery knowledge and skills introduction, and interact with fans.

5.3 Improving Management Efficiency

The protection of intellectual property related to Shu embroidery skills should be strengthened, infringement should be combated, and the legitimate rights and interests of the inheritors of these skills should be safeguarded. By enhancing intellectual property protection, we can encourage more enterprises and individuals to engage in the research and innovation Shu embroidery. Embroidery Techniques: Optimization of the organizational structure of Shu embroidery enterprises should be clearly defined to delineate the responsibilities and authorities of each department and position, thereby preventing functional overlap and the passing of responsibility. It is essential to establish a dedicated management department or position tasked with coordinating and overseeing various aspects of Shu embroidery production, sales, and research and development. Furthermore, it is important to

comprehensively streamline the existing management processes by eliminating redundant steps, simplifying the approval process, and enhancing overall management efficiency. Advanced information management systems, such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, should be introduced to facilitate real-time sharing and automated management of production, sales, inventory, and other information. In addition, it is necessary to establish clear quality standards and strengthen quality supervision.

Develop and refine the quality standards and testing procedures pertaining to Shu embroidery products, ensuring they are in adherence to both national and industry benchmarks. Establish a comprehensive quality traceability system, which will be meticulously monitoring and documenting every stage of the production process, encompassing raw material procurement, manufacturing, processing, and final product inspection. Furthermore, a dedicated quality supervision department will be created or a specific role will be appointed, tasked with carrying out routine inspections and overseeing the quality of Shu embroidery products. Additionally, the quality management of suppliers will be bolstered to guarantee a consistent and dependable supply of raw materials.

5.4 Cultivating New Craftsmen

System Continue to promote the traditional master apprentice system, encourage experienced veteran artists to lead apprentices to pass on their skills, and ensure the complete inheritance of Shu embroidery techniques. At the same time, specialized mentorship programs can be established with funding from the government or industry associations to provide necessary funding and resource support.

Establish Shu embroidery related majors or courses in universities, vocational schools, and training institutions, and build a systematic education system from primary to advanced levels. By combining theoretical teaching with practical operation, cultivate Shu embroidery talents with solid skills and innovative abilities. Research Cooperation Encourage cooperation between Shu embroidery enterprises, universities, and research institutions to jointly develop and innovate Shu embroidery techniques. Through industry university research cooperation, various advantageous resources can be gathered to enhance the research and development efficiency and level of Shu embroidery skills.

6. Conclusion

The future of Shu embroidery will be a development process that covers skill inheritance and innovation, diversified market demand expansion, branding and internationalization strategy promotion, deep integration of technology and culture, and equal emphasis on sustainable development and environmental protection. In this process, the Shu embroidery industry will continue to radiate new vitality and energy, making greater contributions to the inheritance and promotion of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

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