

## Original Paper

# Research on the Connotation of Shu Embroidery Culture and Its Promotion Paths in the New Era

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### Abstract

*Shu Embroidery, one of China's Four Great Embroideries, boasts a history of over two thousand years. It is a significant cultural symbol of the Sichuan region and a National Intangible Cultural Heritage. Renowned for its exquisite stitching techniques, rich subject matter, and distinct regional characteristics, Shu Embroidery is not only a traditional craft but also a representative of China's outstanding traditional culture. However, with rapid modernization and the spread of industrial production, the inheritance and development of Shu Embroidery face serious challenges. These include an aging pool of skilled artisans, shrinking market demand, and insufficient awareness among younger generations. Exploring the cultural value of Shu Embroidery and finding innovative ways to preserve and promote it in the new era are urgent tasks. This paper proposes practical measures for the development and international promotion of Shu Embroidery, focusing on three key areas: deepening its cultural narrative, building tourism-integrated business models, and overcoming language barriers in international communication.*

### Keywords

*Shu embroidery, External communication, Marketing strategy*

## 1. The Connotation and Historical Inheritance of Shu Embroidery Culture

### 1.1 Cultural Characteristics of Shu Embroidery

#### 1.1.1 Regional Features

Rooted in Sichuan culture, Shu Embroidery often depicts local scenery such as pandas, bamboo forests, flowers, and birds, as well as historical stories like the Three Kingdoms era and folk tales, giving it strong regional identity. Its use of bright, vivid colors and bold contrasts reflects the passionate and unrestrained

aesthetic taste of the Sichuan people.

#### 1.1.2 Technical Features

Shu Embroidery is famous for its delicate and multi-layered stitching. Key techniques include: Shading Stitch (Yunzhen): Creates light and shadow effects using gradual color changes, often used for flowers and birds. Sand Stitch (Shazhen): Uses dense, short stitches to depict texture, such as animal fur. Rolling Stitch (Gunzhen): Outlines contours with smooth, flexible lines. Shu Embroidery emphasizes “using threads as brushstrokes,” achieving painterly effects through variations in thread thickness and density. It is celebrated as “Chinese painting on needle tips.”

### 1.2 Historical Development of Shu Embroidery

#### 1.2.1 Origin and Early Development

Traced back to the Han Dynasty (206BC–220AD), unearthed Han Dynasty brocades from Sichuan show advanced embroidery skills. By the Tang Dynasty (618–907), Shu Embroidery became a tribute item to the imperial court, even praised by the poet Du Fu.

#### 1.2.2 Golden Age

During the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912) Dynasties, Shu Embroidery developed a mature system. Professional workshops emerged in Chengdu, and it became officially recognized alongside Su, Xiang, and Yue embroidery as one of the “Four Great Embroideries.” In the Republican era (1912–1949), it won numerous awards at international expositions, becoming a key vehicle for Chinese cultural export.

#### 1.2.3 Modern Inheritance and Challenges

In the late 20th century, Shu Embroidery declined due to mechanized production. Since the 21st century, aided by intangible cultural heritage protection policies, it has gradually recovered but still faces challenges like a shortage of inheritors and a niche market.

## 2. Current State of Shu Embroidery Communication

There is a significant imbalance in the content communicated about Shu Embroidery. Technical demonstrations (stitch techniques, production processes) make up 68% of content, while in-depth explorations of its cultural meaning (symbolism, history, aesthetic value) account for only 22%. This imbalance limits audience understanding to the technical level, hindering deep cultural connection.

In the digital era, Shu Embroidery faces technical application hurdles. Data shows that within cultural tourism projects, only 12% of Shu Embroidery experiences use VR/AR technology, far lower than Su Embroidery (34%) and Xiang Embroidery (21%) (China Tourism Academy, 2024). Digital collectible development lags severely; Shu Embroidery digital collectible sales total only 3.8 million RMB, less than 18% of Su Embroidery’s sales.

International promotion faces three major barriers: Language Barriers: 92% of content lacks multilingual versions, severely limiting global reach. Cultural Discount: Western audiences understand less than 30% of the cultural meanings behind Shu Embroidery patterns, weakening its impact. These barriers contribute to Shu Embroidery’s marginal position in the international craft market, with overseas sales

making up less than 5% of its annual total output value.

### **3. Innovative Promotion Paths for Shu Embroidery in the New Era**

#### *3.1 Deepening the Cultural Narrative of Shu Embroidery*

The root cause of the communication imbalance is superficial treatment of cultural symbols (Zhou Xing, 2018). Solving this requires focusing on “deep content development” and using structured storytelling to make cultural meaning clear. For example:

Apply “cultural gene decoding” to systematically analyze Shu patterns (e.g., dragons, phoenixes, butterflies), historical development (e.g., skill inheritance from Han brocade to Tang embroidery), and aesthetic features (e.g., the “five-color” philosophy system).

Produce short video series like “Cultural Codes in Shu Embroidery Patterns,” using a “Pattern-History-Aesthetics” framework to explain cultural significance, addressing the current “technique without meaning” issue.

#### *3.2 Building Tourism-Integrated Business Models*

##### *3.2.1 Creating Immersive Experiences*

Set up “Living Shu Embroidery Exhibits” in Chengdu tourist spots like Kuanzhai Alley and Jinli, using a “front shop, back workshop” model where visitors watch artisans work live. Data (China Tourism Academy) shows this model tripled visitor stay times in Suzhou’s Zhenhu Embroidery Street.

Develop “Half-Day Artisan” workshops: Provide kits (pattern, threads, frame) guided by masters to create simple pieces. Practice in Chengdu’s Anjing Town shows a 41% repeat customer rate.

##### *3.2.2 Empowering of Cultural Tourism digitally*

Develop an “AR Fitting Mirror for Shu Patterns” (like Shanghai Textile Museum’s): Visitors see themselves “wearing” historical garments with Shu embroidery; scanning provides cultural info. This boosted souvenir sales significantly in Shanghai.

Create a “Digital Embroidery Workshop” cloud platform: Users upload photos transformed into Shu-style portraits via AI; they can pay to have the physical embroidery made. A similar project in Hangzhou generated over 6 million RMB annually.

#### *3.3 Overcoming Language Barriers in International Communication*

##### *3.3.1 Building Regionalized Term Databases*

Create specialized “Shu Embroidery Culture Term Databases” tailored to different languages and cultural contexts. For example: For English audiences: Explain nuances between terms like “needlework” and “textile art.” For Arabic audiences: Include analyses comparing Shu patterns with Islamic geometric art. This reduces meaning loss in translation and improves understanding of technical terms.

##### *3.3.2 Establishing an International Volunteer Language Network*

Collaborate with overseas Sinology departments and Confucius Institutes to recruit multilingual volunteers for translation and proofreading. For instance: Partner with the University of Cambridge’s China Centre to form a “Shu Embroidery International Communication Volunteer Alliance,” using online

platforms for real-time global collaboration. This lowers translation costs and improves cultural relevance.

### 3.3.3 Linking Cross-Border E-commerce with Overseas Warehouses

Open official flagship stores on Amazon and Etsy. Establish presence in high-end department stores like Le Bon Marché (France) and Isetan (Japan), creating an “online + offline” sales network. Set up overseas warehouses in New York and London for “72-hour delivery,” reducing logistics costs.

## 4. Conclusion

As a treasure of Chinese traditional culture, Shu Embroidery carries the profound historical and cultural essence of the Sichuan region. Its preservation and promotion are crucial for carrying forward China’s outstanding traditional culture. While Shu Embroidery currently faces challenges in communication content, digital application, and international reach, innovative approaches—deepening its narrative, building tourism-integrated business models, and overcoming language barriers—offer the potential for renewed vitality in the new era. With the implementation of these promotion strategies, Shu Embroidery can hopefully break through geographical and cultural boundaries to gain wider recognition and appreciation. Continued attention and support from all sectors of society are essential to ensure this ancient craft endures in the modern world, serving as a cultural bridge connecting tradition and modernity, China and the world. Through collective efforts, Shu Embroidery will undoubtedly shine even brighter in the new era, contributing to the flourishing development of Chinese culture.

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