

The Inheritance and Development of Traditional Chinese Needlework under the "the Belt and Road Initiative"

Lv Huanhuan^{1,a}, and Wang Lili^{1,b,*}

¹School of Urban Design, Wuhan University, Wuhan, Hubei, China

a. 469160169@qq.com, b. 312393501@qq.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: As an important part of the intangible cultural heritage, traditional Chinese women's needlework is facing the challenge of inheritance and development. The cultural connotations embodied in Chinese women's needlework art are concentrated in three aspects: the natural view of the unity of man and nature, the primitive folk view, and the artistic view of auspiciousness. It still has high social and cultural value in contemporary society. Therefore, in response to the impact of large-scale mechanized production, women's needlework culture urgently needs to innovate and develop through new designs, new techniques, new media, new ideas, and new models. At the same time, under the background of the "Belt and Road" construction, Chinese women's needlework, as a characteristic cultural business card, plays a role in international exchange and cooperation, cultural output, and China's image building. Providing constructive suggestions for its development and inheritance is conducive to promoting Chinese women's needlework to compose a new chapter of the Silk Road in the contemporary international arena.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese needlework, intangible cultural heritage protection, the Belt and Road initiative, inheritance and development

1. Introduction

Throughout the history of China, the Chinese nation has left a rich heritage of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). However, many ICHs have declined and faced extinction. In recent years, the state has prioritized revitalizing and protecting ICH, achieving remarkable results. However, due to the variety and dynamic nature of ICH in China, as well as the late start of protection efforts, public understanding of its value is insufficient. Traditional Chinese women's needlework, associated with various types of ICH, faces similar challenges. Originating from maternal clan society, women's needlework has been considered outdated with the development of industrial machines. Additionally, the time and energy investment required for learning and producing needlework, along with its low practicality, has led to a decrease in people willing to inherit it. This article aims to address the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese women's needlework.

The academic community has diverse research perspectives on women's needlework, with emerging literature on its development and inheritance in modern society. Ji Xianghong proposed suggestions for the creative transformation of women's needlework in contemporary society by analyzing its survival crisis [1]. Focusing on the inheritance of women's needlework, Guo Shumin

and Liu Bokang suggested development strategies that combine modern art and design concepts while preserving its fundamental characteristics [2].

This article explores the value and status of women's needlework in contemporary society, its innovation and transformation, and its role in cultural exchanges within the "One Belt, One Road" construction. It proposes constructive suggestions for its inheritance and development, aiming to contribute to the contemporary international silk road of Chinese women's needlework.

2. The cultural connotation of Chinese traditional women's needlework

The term "women's needlework" has a long history in China and is deeply ingrained in traditional Chinese culture. Any handcrafted skills by women, such as weaving, washing, embroidery, sewing, and knitting, are classified as "women's needlework." The origin of women's needlework can be traced back to the distant maternal society and has been passed down from generation to generation. It is closely related to the emotional and cultural values of Chinese women. The cultural connotation of Chinese women's needlework art is primarily embodied in three aspects: the philosophy of unity between heaven and humanity, primitive folk beliefs, and auspicious symbols and art theory [3].

The philosophy of unity between heaven and humanity is reflected in the creation of women's needlework. It involves observing and empathizing with natural objects, such as plant and animal forms (Figure 1-3). The process of creating women's needlework embodies the creator's thinking and affection towards nature, representing the unity of nature and humanity.

Primitive folk beliefs are reflected in women's needlework as a form of folk art closely related to production and life. The creation of women's needlework initially served practical functions, and practicality is still a primary consideration in its creation.

Auspicious symbols and art theory are reflected in the beautiful wishes and prayers of women's needlework creators. Ancient witchcraft beliefs and ancient Chinese philosophical views have influenced the designs of women's needlework, emphasizing auspicious and festive patterns and colors. Reproductive symbols, such as fish, lotus, pomegranate, and unicorn, are commonly used in women's needlework to symbolize good luck and happiness.

In summary, women's needlework in China has a rich cultural heritage and embodies the philosophy of unity between heaven and humanity, primitive folk beliefs, and auspicious symbols and art theory.



Figure 1: Plant pattern beanie. Figure 2: Gourd shaped purse. Figure 3: Fish pattern bellyband.

3. Reconsidering the Value of Traditional Chinese Women's Needlework

The development of traditional Chinese women's needlework culture faces challenges but also new opportunities in the modern era. It serves as a counter-balance to industrial machinery, providing emotional depth and personalization. It cannot be fully replaced by machines due to craft requirements and environmental concerns. The use of natural plant dyes and eco-friendly clothing handicrafts opens up new possibilities for the industry [1].

Women's needlework culture reflects art and folk customs, integrating aesthetic, functional, spiritual, and cultural elements. It is a microcosm of traditional Chinese creative culture with profound foundations in both art and folk customs [4].

As a symbol of national cultural spirit, women's needlework art combines national identity with contemporary aesthetics. It is widely used in contemporary design and valued by artists. Its value lies in constructing the cognitive and spiritual world of contemporary individuals, going beyond surface aesthetics.

In conclusion, women's needlework culture offers a model for a green and sustainable clothing industry and embodies human emotions and personality. Its contemporary value is found in its artistic and folk customs dimensions. Reevaluating and exploring the value of women's needlework culture can contribute to the inheritance and promotion of tradition while fostering the development and innovation of contemporary culture.

4. Rethinking Innovation in Traditional Chinese Women's Needlework

When considering the value of women's needlework, its unique advantages cannot be replaced by machines. However, in a market-oriented society, innovative development is necessary to adapt and preserve its cultural value. Additionally, women's needlework can tap into the tourism industry and commercialize its art form. For example, Jin Wen, a master of cloud brocade art, successfully incorporated modern elements into her works and appealed to contemporary aesthetics.

Furthermore, innovative development in women's needlework can be achieved through new designs, techniques, media, ideas, and models. Traditional culture and modern science and technology can coexist and benefit each other. Digital technology can aid in information collection, analysis, and dissemination of women's needlework heritage [5].

Lastly, traditional Chinese women's needlework culture can be elevated by learning from and absorbing excellent foreign cultures, combining the essence of tradition and modernity to represent both Chinese culture and fashion.

5. The Role of Chinese Women's Needlework in the Belt and Road Initiative

The prosperity of the ancient Silk Road was closely linked to the traditional Chinese women's needlework culture. Today, with the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese women's needlework continues to inherit the spirit of Chinese tradition and aesthetic experience, serving as a unique cultural icon that contributes to international exchange, cultural output, and the building of Chinese image, creating a new chapter in the Silk Road.

5.1. Strengthening Exchange and Cooperation

China's traditional women's needlework culture, represented by silk, embroidery, and textiles, has had a widespread influence throughout China's history. As recorded in the book "Chinese Export Art in the Eighteenth Century," 18th-century British aristocrats were fond of using Chinese embroidered double-sided scarves and even commissioned Chinese embroidery artisans to create tailored clothing

and business cards. In the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese women's needlework continues to exhibit vitality and potential.

As a country known for its etiquette, China has frequently gifted silk and embroidery products as national gifts to friendly countries. For example, in 2014, China presented the "Prosperity" handbag set, which included a silk handkerchief embroidered with the Beijing-stitch technique, to the spouses of APEC leaders. In 2015, China gifted a 1.18-meter-long embroidery to the Queen of England, while in 2016, silk scarves were presented as national gifts to the wives of G20 leaders. Women's needlework culture, represented by silk and embroidery, plays an important role in promoting international exchange and cooperation. The Belt and Road Initiative provides more opportunities for communication and cooperation along the route, as economic and political cooperation between countries increases and cultural exchange becomes more frequent. Chinese women's needlework, as a treasure of Chinese traditional culture, has unique advantages and value in cross-cultural exchange.

5.2. Promoting Cultural Output

Throughout the development of China's five-thousand-year-old civilization, textiles and clothing have been two of its most colorful elements, with embroidery closely linked to China's long-standing and rich cultural heritage. Women's needlework, represented by silk, embroidery, and textiles, has been an important part of foreign trade since ancient times. With the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, promoting economic and trade exchanges between countries along the route, Chinese women's needlework culture has been greatly inherited and promoted. During the Sixth China Chengdu International Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival, the "Five Continents' Emotions" pavilion hosted the first Belt and Road Countries Handicraft Exhibition, where more than 30 handicraft projects from over 20 countries and regions along the Belt and Road were displayed and sold. This open platform not only showcased the colorful intangible cultural heritage of various countries but also highlighted the charm of each country's culture [6].

As an important part of China's traditional culture, women's needlework culture inherits Chinese Confucianism's aesthetics of life, Taoism's spirit of freedom, and traditional artistic thinking, while also deeply infused with the folk culture and art's imagery construction, which is close to nature and integrated into daily life, with rich cultural connotations. Its external exchanges have driven China's traditional culture's external dissemination, greatly promoting China's soft power and enhancing its cultural confidence, making it an indispensable part of promoting Chinese culture abroad.

5.3. Building China's Image

With the steady promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative, China and countries along the route have established a good international cooperation relationship, not only achieving economic cooperation and trade exchanges among countries but also promoting cross-cultural exchanges and collaborative development among countries [7]. In December 2018, the Chaozhou International Embroidery Art Biennial was held, attracting 176 embroidery artists from 13 countries and regions around the world, featuring 249 embroidery works [8]. This was also the first national-level, international embroidery art biennial held in China. The event allowed embroidery artists from China and around the world to learn from one another, exchange techniques, and revitalize and develop traditional embroidery craftsmanships, showcasing the unique value and infinite charm of traditional embroidery skills to the world.

In the process of cultural exchange, more countries feel the ancient history and splendid civilization of China through its traditional culture, enhancing the image of China as a great country that insists on peaceful development. Women's needlework culture, as a treasure of China's traditional culture, symbolizes the personality and virtues of Chinese women, carrying the simplicity and

pleasing beauty commonly found in traditional Chinese culture. Promoting the exchange of Chinese women's needlework culture abroad helps establish a more comprehensive and three-dimensional image of China, with positive significance for building a good international image and spreading traditional culture.

6. The Inheritance and Development of Chinese Women's Needlework

6.1. Exploring Cultural Value for Revitalization

Women's needlework culture in China has undergone thousands of years of cultural development, carrying the changes in society and history. Therefore, China's women's needlework culture has a deep accumulation and rich connotations, and in its inheritance and development, it is necessary to focus on exploring the cultural value of women's needlework. In the context of cultural globalization, how to develop ethnic cultural art that adapts to new era requirements while inheriting traditional ethnic spirit is a very important and complex issue. For women's needlework art, to achieve development and innovation in this context, it is not only necessary to fully tap into its role as a symbol of ethnic culture, but also to combine contemporary aesthetic cultural context, understand the cultural logic inherent in this new aesthetic culture, grasp the development law of contemporary art, and fully expand the manifestation of the essential power of women's needlework art. Only then can its symbolic language system be further constructed, integrated into contemporary social life, and fully explore its cultural value. Conversely, the expansion and realization of the function of women's needlework culture can promote the real activation of women's needlework art. Therefore, the cultural horizon where "art" and "folk customs" blend, as well as the intuitive, concrete, and vivid aesthetic practice of contemporary women's needlework culture art, are all necessary paths to promote the revitalization of contemporary women's needlework [4].

6.2. Developing Cultural and Creative Brands for Display and Promotion

Women's needlework, including weaving, embroidery, printing and dyeing, and other traditional handicraft skills, are the material carriers of traditional (ethnic, folk, regional, etc.) culture, carrying many characteristics of traditional culture. In the design of cultural and creative tourism products, we can fully interpret specific traditional cultures through innovative design language forms, and also use the reasonable application of related traditional cultural elements to evoke consumer emotional resonance with specific traditional cultures. For example, the design of travel luggage and peripheral cultural and creative products with Dong ethnic group brocade, a minority ethnic group's characteristic women's needlework, abstracts and reconstructs Dong brocade patterns through geometric induction, disassembly, and modern design composition principles and design rules to process shapes and colors. Meanwhile, bold material transformations in design not only reflect the characteristics of traditional ethnic culture but also have fashionable design aesthetics, which are favored by young consumers [9]. The development of women's needlework cultural creativity needs to be built on industrialization, and the most important thing is brand building. It is necessary to establish cultural and creative park areas in China, vigorously promote the construction of cultural and creative parks and exhibition halls related to women's needlework culture, showcase and promote various cultural and creative products related to women's needlework culture through large international conferences or exchange activities, and attract foreign tourists to experience women's needlework culture in China through various channels, while promoting Chinese women's needlework culture to further go global.

6.3. Emphasizing Internal and External Promotion

In the process of promoting the culture of women's needlework, attention should be paid to the acceptance of this culture in different regions and countries, and targeted promotion plans should be formulated to ensure that the influence of women's needlework can gradually expand and be in a favorable development trend. For example, in regions and countries where Chinese women's needlework culture is highly integrated, more effort should be put into exploring the ethnic characteristics of women's needlework culture, and the deeper historical development and cultural connotations of women's needlework should be presented as important supplements, so as to achieve a more comprehensive and profound understanding of this culture and stimulate the love for women's needlework culture in these areas and countries. For countries and regions with little knowledge of Chinese women's needlework culture, the focus should be on showcasing the charm and attractiveness of women's needlework culture, and considering integrating it with other classic traditional cultures for external promotion. Finally, for countries and regions that are not familiar with Chinese women's needlework culture, more emphasis should be put on explaining this culture in the promotion process, which can be achieved through the display of intuitive videos or images and explanations, to guide their understanding and love for women's needlework culture [7].

7. Conclusion

Traditional women's needlework has always been a cultural treasure for the Chinese people, and the new era has given it new cultural connotations and prompted it to create new aesthetic forms to adapt to this connotation and showcase its value, thereby realizing the dynamic development of women's needlework art. Women's needlework culture as an important part of Chinese traditional culture, its cultural promotion has great significance and humanistic value, especially as the "Belt and Road" initiative steadily advances, which provides more possibilities and feasibility for its external dissemination. Studying traditional Chinese women's needlework actually provides a new way of thinking for cultural exchange, tourism development, and cultural brand cultivation in the "Belt and Road" region, and helps to create Chinese cultural brands.

References

- [1] Ji Xianghong. *On the Inheritance and Development of Traditional Chinese Women's Needlework Culture Resources*[J]. *Art and Design (Theory)*, 2009, 2(08):346-348.
- [2] Guo Shumin, Liu Bokang. *Study on the living inheritance of traditional needlework craft —— Case study of soil cloth in Wei County, Hebei Province* [J]. *Popular Art*, 2019 (04): 37-38.
- [3] Pan Jianhua. *Women's Needlework: The Boudoir Art of Chinese Women*[J]. *Drama Art*, 2008(06):91-99.
- [4] Yu Xiaoqun. *The Charm of Art and the Vitality of Folk Customs: An Analysis of the Contemporary Cultural Value of "Women's Needlework"*[J]. *Zhejiang Social Sciences*, 2015(06):131-134+160.
- [5] Shen Shaoyun, Zhan Meiqun. *Learn from Examples and Create the Future: A Study on the Inheritance and Development Strategies of Embroidery Intangible Cultural Heritage*[J]. *Journal of Changjiang Engineering Vocational College*, 2021, 38(03):75-78.
- [6] Chen Hui. *The Sixth Chengdu International Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival was Held Grandly*[J]. *Sichuan Party Construction*, 2017(12):81.
- [7] Zhang Likun. *Research on the External Communication of Traditional Chinese Culture under the Background of "One Belt, One Road" Initiative: Taking the External Communication of "Tea Culture" as an Example*[J]. *Fujian Tea*, 2022, 44(03):15-17.
- [8] Dong Xiaoyan. *Pioneering the Biennial Exhibition of Embroidery Art: The Wonderful Presentation of the 2018 Chaozhou International Biennial Exhibition of Embroidery Art*[J]. *Textile and Clothing Weekly*, 2019(02):8-9.
- [9] Li Wei, Tang Xiang. *Research on the Design of Huxiang Women's Needlework Cultural and Creative Tourism Products under the Vision of Rural Revitalization*[J]. *Furniture and Interior Decoration*, 2022, 29(10):74-78.