

# Semiotic Analysis of Cantonese and Middle Eastern Embroidery Patterns in Clothing

Jing Jin<sup>1</sup> and Parichart Kluensuwan<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*This study adopts semiotics as a theoretical tool to analyse Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery in depth. As an important part of Guang Fu culture, Cantonese embroidery is explored in detail in terms of its historical development, cultural status and symbolism of motifs. Middle Eastern embroidery is famous for its exquisite patterns and deep cultural heritage. This paper focuses on analyzing the cultural symbolism of its patterns and status in Middle Eastern culture. A comparative analysis of the two embroidery arts reveals the similarities and differences in symbolism and representation, as well as the influence of regional cultures, religions and beliefs on the symbolism of the motifs. The study aims to promote and protect the traditional art of embroidery, facilitate multicultural understanding and exchange, and promote the economic development of foreign trade in garments between Guangdong and the Middle East, providing a new perspective on cultural heritage and economic development.*

**Keywords:** *Semiotics, Cantonese Embroidery, Middle Eastern Embroidery, Pattern Analysis, Cultural Symbols*

## INTRODUCTION

In the context of contemporary globalization, clothing patterns, a significant aspect of visual culture, embody aesthetic values and convey a wealth of culturally specific symbolic meanings. Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery as two representative regional cultural symbols, possess their own unique position in global cultural diversities, and have received much attention from academics and the cultural industry. Cantonese embroidery has a long history and has become one of the important symbols of Guangdong culture through historical precipitation and inheritance; while Middle Eastern embroidery, as a traditional craft of the Arab world and Persian culture, is rich in religious and cultural symbols. Their pattern designs are usually rich in symbolism, such as dragons and phoenixes representing power and honor, harmony and prosperity; peonies symbolizing wealth and prosperity, and plum blossoms symbolizing resilience and purity. These motifs not only reflect the aesthetic sensibilities of the Guang Fu region, but also the Chinese pursuit of auspicious symbolism (Chen, 2023; Yang, 2023). Geometric motifs in Islamic art symbolize the order and infinity of the universe, while botanical motifs such as ears of wheat and olive branches represent the prosperity of life and peace (Guo, 2003; Qin, 1999). With the promotion of China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative, cross-cultural exchanges in the Middle East and Southeast Asia have deepened (Zhe, & Wei, 2024).

In recent years, the research on Canton embroidery mainly focuses on exploring its historical background, cultural value and artistic characteristics. This includes examining how to combine this traditional handicraft with modern design concepts, and understanding consumer demand through market research, with the aim of enhancing the market value and cultural influence of Canton embroidery (Zhou, 2011). Chinese scholars have done less research on Middle East embroidery, mostly focusing on the history and culture of the Middle East, international politics and foreign trade marketing mode (Ma, 2023). With the fashion industry's emphasis on multiculturalism and handicrafts, Middle Eastern embroidery has begun to be integrated into modern design and has a high potential for collection and investment in the global market. Semiotic research on both Canton and Middle Eastern embroidery is necessary, not only to help deepen the excavation and understanding of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Candidate, Semiotics and Cultural Studies Program, Academy of Arts and Philosophy Shinawatra University; Email: [jinj46433@gmail.com](mailto:jinj46433@gmail.com) (Corresponding Author)

<sup>2</sup> Ph.D. (Linguistics) Lecturer & Advisor, Semiotics and Cultural Studies Program, Academy of Arts and Philosophy Shinawatra University Email: [parichart.k@siu.ac.th](mailto:parichart.k@siu.ac.th)

cultural and aesthetic values of these traditional art forms, but also to promote their inheritance and development in contemporary society.

While most research on Cantonese and Middle Eastern embroidery has focused on historical research, intangible cultural heritage, and sociological anthropology (Zhou, 2011; Yang, 2020; Ma, 2023), limited studies have applied semiotic methods to these two traditional crafts. By employing semiotic methods, it is possible to observe the intrinsic meaning, cultural value, and heritage significance of Cantonese and Middle Eastern embroidery.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Three Research Questions in the current paper are:

What are the typical symbols embedded in the patterns of Cantonese and Middle Eastern embroidery?

What meanings do the symbols of the two regions carry in their embroidery patterns?

How do the two regions similar or differ in their selection of symbolic patterns for the expression of their respective cultures?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **THE HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CANTONESE EMBROIDERY AND ITS STATUS AS GUANG FU CULTURE**

#### **THE HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CANTONESE EMBROIDERY**

Cantonese embroidery has a long history, dating back to the Tang Dynasty, when the embroidery skills have been quite a level. According to the Guangzhou City Records, the works of Cantonese embroidery in the Tang Dynasty were exported to Southeast Asia, showing its early overseas influence. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Cantonese embroidery entered a period of prosperity, especially in the Ming Dynasty, which was its heyday. It was a among the royal family as well as the literati, and was given as a tribute, and was highly praised among the emperors. During the Qing Dynasty, Cantonese embroidery became even more exquisite and won many awards. With the change of time, Cantonese embroidery was not only popular in China, but also exported to Europe and the U.S. In 1915, at the San Francisco World's Fair in the U.S.A., Cantonese embroidery caused a sensation and won a gold medal, demonstrating its international influence. The unique cultural environment and economic prosperity of the Lingnan region laid the foundation for the development of Cantonese embroidery, which suffered a decline in production and sales due to the war in the early 20th century. However, Cantonese embroidery artists did not give up and actively innovated, absorbing foreign artistic elements, such as Western perspective, to give their works a more vivid and three-dimensional character. After the reform and opening up of China, the government and society have paid more attention to Cantonese embroidery, and a number of funds and awards have been set up to promote the inheritance and development of Cantonese embroidery techniques. Cantonese embroidery has transcended the art field and is widely used in modern life and cultural and creative products, and the value of the industry continues to grow, becoming one of the important cultural industries. The glorious history and continuous innovation of Cantonese embroidery reflect the unremitting efforts of Cantonese embroidery craftsmen and the importance of cultural inheritance, adding a precious chapter to the treasury of Chinese arts and crafts.

#### **THE STATUS OF CANTONESE EMBROIDERY IN GUANG FU CULTURE**

As one of the Four Famous Embroideries of China, Cantonese embroidery has a high status and special symbolic significance in Guang Fu Culture. In the aesthetics of Guang Fu people, Cantonese embroidery is regarded as a treasure of traditional culture and one of the important symbols representing the essence of Lingnan culture. With its exquisite craftsmanship and gorgeous patterns, it carries layers of cultural connotation and historical precipitation, and has become a vivid carrier of Guang Fu's cultural heritage. In the minds of Guang Fu people, Cantonese embroidery is not only an embroidery technique, but also a cultural symbol of prosperity, affluence, reunion and happiness. The people of Guang Fu attach great importance to the inheritance and protection of Cantonese embroidery, and regard it as the pride of local culture and the

continuation of tradition. The status of Cantonese embroidery in Guang Fu Culture is not only reflected in its application in daily life, but also plays an important role in the cultural identity and spiritual belonging of Guang Fu people.

## **HISTORY AND CULTURE OF MIDDLE EASTERN EMBROIDERY AND ITS POSITION AS MIDDLE EASTERN CULTURE**

### **HISTORY OF MIDDLE EASTERN EMBROIDERY**

As a traditional handicraft with a long history, Middle Eastern embroidery has a long history of development, dating back to around 3000 BC. Archaeological evidence shows that embroidery was an integral part of ancient Middle Eastern societies as early as the development of their civilizations. For example, embroidery fragments unearthed from several archaeological sites, such as those from the Tabas site in Iran dating from around 2650 BC, demonstrate the level of development of embroidery techniques at that time. During the ancient Babylonian and Assyrian periods, the embroidery craft gradually grew, and a large number of beautifully embroidered decorations appeared in royal palaces and temples, with geometric shapes as the main motifs and incorporating natural elements such as animals and plants, reflecting the religious beliefs and social status of the time. With the evolution of history, embroidery reached its peak during the Persian Empire, and the royal family even adopted such advanced techniques as gold thread embroidery, which became a symbol of the luxurious life of the Persian royal family. During the Ottoman period, embroidery was even more significantly developed, becoming a decorative feature of court and high-ranking officials' costumes, and even used for interior decorations. To this day, Middle Eastern embroidery maintains an important cultural and economic status, such as Palestinian embroidery as an important craft heritage for local women and a symbol of cultural identity. Embroidery techniques have continued to innovate in modern times, incorporating modern design elements and new materials, which has led to a wider range of applications and injected new life into traditional crafts. The development history of Middle Eastern embroidery fully demonstrates its cultural value and irreplaceable status, and provides us with an important perspective to deeply understand and cherish Middle Eastern culture.

### **THE POSITION OF MIDDLE EASTERN EMBROIDERY IN MIDDLE EASTERN CULTURE**

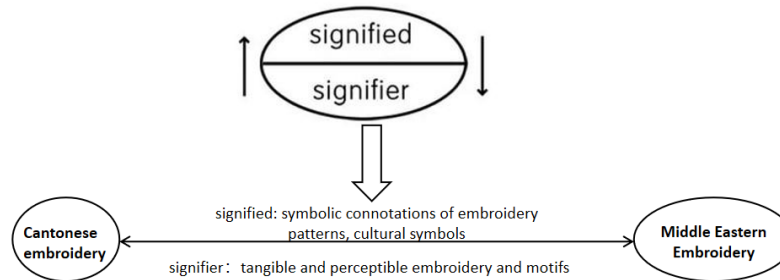
Middle Eastern embroidery plays an irreplaceable role in Middle Eastern culture, and its unique forms and techniques are deeply rooted in local cultural traditions, becoming one of the cultural brands of the Middle East. Through elaborate and detailed craftsmanship and colorful patterns, Middle Eastern embroidery demonstrates the unique aesthetic interests and artistic emotions of the Middle Eastern people, reflecting their love and respect for life, beliefs and traditions. In Middle Eastern societies, embroidery, as an important form of artistic expression, is not only a decoration, but also a symbol of cultural memory and cultural identity. Through embroidery, people pass on and express their history, religious beliefs and social consciousness, uniting the cohesion and inheritance of Middle Eastern culture. The status of Middle Eastern embroidery is not only reflected in the field of art, but also profoundly affects many levels of Middle Eastern society, including economy, religion, social structure and so on. The inheritance and development of Middle Eastern embroidery skills reflect the unique charm and vitality of Middle Eastern culture, and also make an important contribution to the diversity and richness of culture in today's world.

### **RELEVANT THEORIES OF SEMIOTICS**

Saussure's Theory of Semiotics in Relation to the Symbols of Cantonese and Middle Eastern Embroidery Patterns

Saussure introduced the semiotics terms "capable of referring" and "referring to", the so-called "capable of referring" refers to those tangible and perceptible symbolic media, which are the physical and aesthetic parts of symbolic expressions. They are the physical part of a symbolic representation and usually include visual and auditory elements. These elements, such as sounds or images, trigger our thoughts and associations with

particular objects. As shown in the figure below Figure 1: Saussure an semiotic analysis of embroidery relationship model



The "referent" is the internal conception of what the symbols refer to, the thoughts and feelings that the symbols evoke in people's minds. Can mean and referent are closely linked, initially defined by social consensus, and gradually evolving into diverse meanings with the passage of time, social change, economic development, and personal experience, among other factors.

Applying Saussure's theory to a comparative study of Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery, we can see that both embroidery arts are rich in symbolism. In Cantonese embroidery, motifs such as the "dragon and phoenix presenting auspiciousness" are visual representations (signifier) that symbolize good fortune and good wishes (signified), such as happiness in marriage and family.

Middle Eastern embroidery, on the other hand, uses motifs and decorations with regional characteristics to express religious beliefs, social status, or personal identity (signified), which are reflected in the visual elements (signifier).

Through Saussure's lens, the researcher is able to deeply analyses the symbolic systems in these embroidery arts and gain insight into how they convey deeper cultural and symbolic meanings. Such analyses not only promote cross-cultural communication and artistic understanding, but also provide a solid theoretical foundation for the preservation and transmission of embroidery art.

### PIERCE'S TERNARY MODEL IN RELATION TO CANTONESE AND MIDDLE EASTERN EMBROIDERY PATTERN SYMBOLS

By applying Charles Sanders Peirce's ternary model of semiotics, we can appreciate and understand the rich and colorful cultural meanings embedded in embroidery motifs in a deeper way. This model consists of three basic parts: the sign (Representamen), the object (Object) and the interpretant (Interpretant). It provides us with a new as shown in the figure below Figure 2: Application of Peirce's semiotic ternary model to the symbolic analysis of embroidery patterns

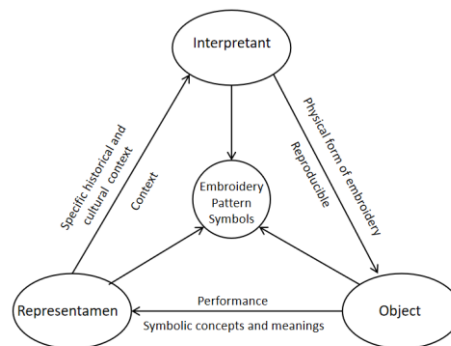


Figure Source: Self-drawn by the author

perspective for analyzing embroidery motifs, enabling us to better respect and appreciate their cultural values. In Peirce's model, symbols, or representers, are the physical forms of embroidery motifs, including their colors, shapes and designs. These are the intuitive elements of the motif, such as specific symbols, geometric shapes, flowers and birds, and other motif designs. Objects, the things represented, are entities or concepts in the external world to which the symbols refer. In the context of embroidery motifs, objects may include historical context, cultural identity, or symbolism. For example, a motif may be associated with a specific historical period or event, or show the characteristics of a certain cultural group, or it may symbolize abstract concepts such as happiness and power. Interpreters are the receivers and interpreters of symbolic meanings and may be insiders or outsiders from a particular cultural background. Their understanding and interpretation will vary according to their personal background, culture and experience. For someone from a traditional embroidery culture, the motifs may be seen as symbols of heritage and identity, whereas for an outsider, they may see the motifs only as an exotic or aesthetically beautiful, without knowing their deeper cultural meaning. Over time, the interpreter's understanding and interpretation may change as the cultural meaning evolves or the motif is used in different contexts, such as changes in fashion trends.

Peirce's ternary model reveals how the parts of a symbol are interconnected and interact. The symbol is the visible physical form, the object is the entity or concept to which it is directed, and the interpreter is the understanding and interpretation of meaning. This model helps us understand how symbols operate in different cultures and reveals the deeper meaning behind visual symbols such as embroidery patterns. Through this analysis, we can better appreciate and understand the art of embroidery, as well as provide strong theoretical support for the preservation and transmission of these valuable cultural heritages.

## **RECENT RESEARCH**

### **CURRENT RESEARCH STATUS OF CANTONESE EMBROIDERY**

Yang (2023) explored the integration of cultural inheritance and innovation to promote the cultural value of Cantonese embroidery, a traditional Chinese handicraft. The study focused on blending traditional embroidery with modern design concepts to create innovative designs that cater to contemporary market and aesthetic needs. Similarly, Wu (2022) conducted market research to understand consumer demand for Cantonese embroidery products and investigated strategies to promote and enhance Cantonese embroidery on a global scale. To protect and increase awareness of this intangible cultural heritage, Wang (2022) examined the use of modern information technology for the digital preservation and dissemination of Cantonese embroidery.

Saeid (2017) addressed advancements in embroidery technology, highlighting new opportunities for the embroidery market. This technology has enabled richer, more realistic, and three-dimensional embroidery designs, enhancing the creative expression of embroidery masters. Saeid also discussed the challenges of balancing traditional hand embroidery with modern machine embroidery, maintaining the quality and uniqueness of embroidery works, and competing in the market.

Recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of cross-cultural marketing, focusing on the need to adapt to local cultures and customs to improve marketing efficiency (Ma, 2023, p. 20). Although many aspects of Cantonese embroidery have been researched and discussed, no study has yet compared Cantonese embroidery with Middle Eastern embroidery, particularly through the use of a semiotic approach. This gap in the literature presents an opportunity for current research to employ semiotic approach to examine the similarities and differences between these two rich embroidery traditions.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This paper uses the literature research method to collect academic literature, historical data, artwork atlases, and related books and journal articles on Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery. The goal is to review and organize the historical origins, technical characteristics, and pattern symbols of both embroidery traditions. Semiotic analysis, based on Peirce's and Saussure's theories, is used to interpret and explore motif symbols within their cultural contexts. Comparative research is then employed to analyze the similarities and

differences in the use of motif symbols in Cantonese and Middle Eastern embroidery, highlighting how these differences and similarities reflect the cultural characteristics of each tradition.

## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This paper uses a combination of semiotic theories to analyse and explain the role of Cantonese and Middle Eastern embroidery motifs in cultural communication. As shown in Figure 3: Research framework diagram of this paper

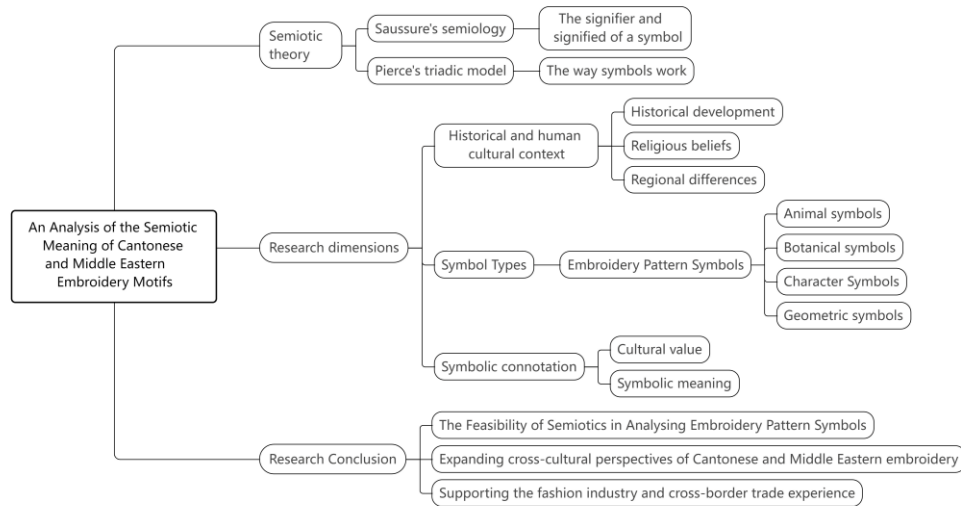



Figure Source: Self-drawn by the author

The study is based on Saussure's theory of the relationship between "signified" and "signifier" and the interaction between sign, object and interpreter in Peirce's triadic model, in order to deepen the understanding of motif symbols. The analytical tools include semiotic analysis and comparative research, aiming at identifying and classifying motif symbols, as well as exploring their meanings in specific cultures and the differences in their use in the two art forms. The research steps involve literature review, semiotic meaning analysis and comparative analysis to reveal the cultural meanings and social functions behind Cantonese and Middle Eastern embroidery motifs. Ultimately, the research results will be applied to cultural exchange, artistic design and economic development.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### SEMIOTIC MEANING AND CULTURAL SYMBOLS OF CANTONESE EMBROIDERY PATTERNS

Table 1: The categories of Cantonese embroidery motif symbols are collated and typical samples are shared with motif symbolic connotations and cultural symbols, which are organized as follows

Cantonese Embroidery Pattern Symbols				
Symbol Category	Patterns	Typical Sample	Symbol Connotation	Cultural Symbol
Animal symbols	Dragon, Phoenix, Lion, Kirin		Power, honor and good fortune.	Influence of traditional Confucian culture, aspiration for a better life

Botanical symbols	Peony, Plum & Chrysanthemum		Wealth and Prosperity	The pursuit of and prayers for a happy life in the Guang Fuarea
Religion and belief symbols	Immortal maidens send their children, Blowing the Xiao to attract the phoenix, Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea		Blessing, Prayer	Embodiment of pluralistic religious beliefs
Auspicious Writings	Fortune and longevity		Good wishes.	Traditional Auspicious Allegory

## THE SYMBOLISM OF CANTONESE EMBROIDERY PATTERNS

As one of the important schools of traditional Chinese embroidery art, Cantonese embroidery patterns contain rich symbols and cultural connotations. The symbols in the patterns of Cantonese embroidery include animals, plants, religion and auspicious words, etc., which have multi-level symbolic meanings. In terms of animal symbols, dragons, phoenixes and unicorns are commonly seen in Cantonese embroidery works, representing power, honor and good fortune. Among plant symbols, peony and plum blossom are often used to symbolize qualities such as wealth, prosperity, resilience and purity. As for religious and belief symbols, motifs such as the lotus flower and the Eight Immortals crossing the sea embody blessings, prayers, good fortune and other meanings. Cantonese embroidery often uses auspicious words such as "fortune" and "longevity", which are combined with the patterns to convey a variety of beautiful meanings. According to statistics, animal motifs accounted for more than 25% of the works of Cantonese embroidery in the Qing Dynasty, plant motifs played an important role, religious and faith-related motifs accounted for about 15%, and the use of auspicious characters was also quite common. These symbols not only show the unique cultural traditions of the Guang Fuarea, but also reflect the rich spiritual traditions and aesthetic tastes of the Chinese nation, providing an important reference for the study of traditional embroidery art, as well as a rich creative resource for the innovation of modern embroidery art.

## CULTURAL SYMBOLS OF CANTONESE EMBROIDERY PATTERNS

Cantonese embroidery patterns often feature natural elements, historical allusions and religious symbols. These elements not only demonstrate the pursuit of aesthetics, but also reflect the folk culture and social history of the Guang Fuarea. For example, the dragon and phoenix motifs that often appear in Cantonese embroidery symbolize nobility and power, which on the one hand is influenced by the traditional Confucian culture and on the other hand reflects the fervent desire for a better life in the Guang Fuarea. Flower, bird, fish and insect motifs are very common in Cantonese embroidery pattern designs. These motifs are not only beautiful, but also have profound meanings. For example, the combination of butterflies and flowers symbolizes love and happiness in Cantonese embroidery, while fish motifs symbolize harvest and wealth. These symbolisms are not only a visual depiction of the natural world, but also the pursuit and prayer for a happy life of the people in the Guang Fuarea. According to relevant studies, common floral motifs in Cantonese embroidery, such as peony and lotus, symbolize wealth, purity and good fortune respectively. In particular, peony motifs occupied an important position in the works of Cantonese embroidery in the Qing Dynasty due to its graceful and luxurious image. Patterns in Cantonese embroidery was also influenced by the integration of multi-ethnic cultures in the Guang Fuarea. For example, the common motifs of auspicious animals in Cantonese embroidery, such as Qulin and Pixi, have the functions of driving away evils, avoiding disasters and praying for good fortune, and these symbolisms not only originated from the traditional beliefs of the Han people, but also fused with the totemic culture of ethnic minorities. In recent years, through statistical analyses of Cantonese embroidery works, some studies have pointed out that in museums and private collections in the Guang Fuarea, Cantonese embroidery works containing auspicious animal motifs account for more than 35% of the total number of works, which indicates that these motifs have an important position in the local culture. The constituent elements of



Cantonese embroidery motifs are not only rich and varied, but also quite ingenious in their arrangement and combination. For example, the "Ten Thousand Characters" pattern, which is common in Cantonese embroidery, symbolizes continuous good fortune, while the auspicious knot pattern signifies a good marriage and harmonious interpersonal relationships. Statistically, data from the Institute of Embroidery Craftsmanship of the two provinces in the Guang Fuarea show that of the 1,000 pieces of Cantonese embroidery works surveyed between 2000 and 2020, approximately 42 per cent used the auspicious knot and related motifs, which is a strong testament to the symbolic significance of the culture of Cantonese embroidery.

The pattern design of Cantonese embroidery not only follows the principle of aesthetics, but also focuses on realizing cultural functions. In wedding customs, Cantonese embroidery is often used in wedding garments, quilt covers and other daily necessities, on which the patterns not only decorate beautifully, but also imply the wishes for the new couple's happy marriage and early birth of a child. A study of wedding rituals in the Guang Fuarea points out that the traditional dowry is made of large red fabrics, supplemented by embroidered images of dragon and phoenix, peony and other auspicious symbols, which have become indispensable symbols of blessing at weddings. Cantonese embroidery patterns also reflect deep cultural symbols in the religious beliefs of Canton. For example, the images of Buddha and Taoist gods and goddesses in Cantonese embroidery not only show the plurality of beliefs in the Guang Fuarea, but also the people's pursuit of a better life, such as peace and health. An anthropologist's study of temple fair activities in the Guang Fuarea shows that Cantonese embroidery techniques are used on a large number of statues of worshipped deities and flags in temple fairs, and that these motifs with religious symbolism visually and psychologically strengthen the solemnity and sacredness of faith. In conclusion, Cantonese embroidery motifs are not only an aesthetic expression, but also a profound reflection of the ideals of life, religious beliefs and social customs of the people in the Guang Fuarea. These patterns transform the intangible symbols of culture into tangible ones through fine stitching and color matching, giving Cantonese embroidery its unique cultural charm and humanistic value.

## SEMIOTIC MEANING AND CULTURAL SYMBOLS OF MIDDLE EASTERN EMBROIDERY MOTIFS

**Table 2: Collation of Middle Eastern motif symbol categories and sharing of motif symbolic connotations and cultural symbols for typical samples, collated as follows**

Summary table of Middle Eastern embroidery motif symbols				
Symbol Category	Patterns	Typical Sample	Symbol Connotation	Cultural Symbol
Geometric Patterns	Hexagon, octagon, decagon		Cosmic order, harmony and infinity	Islamic art, religious connotations
Plant symbols	Wheat ears, olive branches, flowers, leaves, vines, etc.		Prosperity, peace	Agricultural civilization, wealth and abundance in the Arab cultural sphere
Animal symbols	Peacock, fish		Beauty, nobility	Wedding occasions
Regional patterns	Turkish nazir (blue eyes), Egyptian lotus flower		Ward off evil spirits. Eternal life.	Regional cultural differences and socio-historical contexts

(Source of table: author's own)

## SEMIOTICS IN MIDDLE EASTERN EMBROIDERY PATTERNS



Similar to Cantonese embroidery, Middle Eastern embroidery is rich in semiotic meaning. Middle Eastern embroidery motifs commonly use geometric shapes, and these geometric symbols are not only decorative, but also have deep symbolic meanings. In Islamic art, geometric patterns symbolize the order, harmony and infinity of the universe. Common geometric symbols include the eight-pointed star, the six-pointed star, and complex geometric patchwork patterns, which not only reflect the mastery of craftsmanship, but also convey both religious and philosophical connotations. Damascus embroidery, for example, makes extensive use of the eight-pointed star, a symbol of stability and balance in Islamic culture. According to archaeological data, this type of geometric pattern can be found in Islamic artwork from the 7th to 14th centuries AD, showing the historical origin and cultural persistence of this symbol. Botanical symbols, such as flowers and trees, are common in Middle Eastern embroidery patterns. These botanical symbols are often figurative representations of the prosperity of life and the greatness of nature. For example, in traditional Palestinian embroidery, the widely used wheat ears and olive branches are not only a tribute to agricultural civilization, but also represent prosperity and peace. The symbolism of the sheaf of wheat is not limited to the local culture, but is also seen as a sign of wealth and abundance in the wider Arab cultural circle. These botanical symbols are documented to have been used as early as the ancient Babylonian period, and their symbolic significance has become richer as history has progressed. Animal symbols also play an important role in Middle Eastern embroidery patterns, such as birds, fish and other animal images, especially the peacock is the most representative. Peacock in the Middle East culture symbolizes the beauty, nobility and sacredness, often appear in the wedding and other festive occasions in the embroidery pattern. Especially in Iranian embroidery art, the peacock's motifs are endowed with the symbolism of good luck and wealth. According to the book "History of Iranian National Art", peacock motifs became more popular after the introduction of Islam and developed a unique visual style in combination with local traditional art forms. Eye motifs, symbolizing protection and strength, also appear frequently in Middle Eastern embroidery, such as the Turkish Nazar, or blue eye, which is believed to have magical powers to ward off evil spirits and harm.

It is noteworthy that the symbols in Middle Eastern embroidery motifs show significant regional differences. These differences are not only in the style of the motifs, but also in the diversity of the symbols' symbolic meanings. For example, in Lebanese and Jordanian embroidery, the more common motif is the pomegranate, which symbolizes prosperity and the continuation of life. In Egypt, on the other hand, the lotus is more common, symbolizing regeneration and purity. The frequency of motifs and the regional differences in embroidery techniques also demonstrate the interaction between cultural exchange and artistic creation. As a highly crafted art form, the design and symbols of embroidery not only reflect cultural inheritance and innovation, but also the changes and development of the social and historical context. The symbols in Middle Eastern embroidery patterns are rich and varied, ranging from geometric patterns, botanical symbols, animal images to eye motifs, and each type of symbol carries different cultural connotations and symbolic meanings.

## **CULTURAL SYMBOLS OF MIDDLE EASTERN EMBROIDERY MOTIFS**

Middle Eastern embroidery motifs are rich in cultural symbolism. They not only demonstrate exquisite craftsmanship as decorative objects, but also serve as important carriers of culture and history, conveying the deep traditions and beliefs of the Middle East. In addition, the cultural symbolism of embroidery motifs is reflected in the expression of women's identity and status, and the transmission of these embroidery techniques is not only an important inheritance between families, but also a reflection of social stability and cultural continuity. Certain elements of Middle Eastern embroidery motifs also have cross-cultural symbolism, and the extensive use of such motifs reflects the common desire of different cultures for peace and protection from bad luck. The cultural symbolism of Middle Eastern embroidery motifs is not only the expression of the specific motifs, but also the profound cultural connotations behind them. Through the study of these motifs, we can gain a deeper understanding of the rich and diverse cultural traditions and social values of the Middle East, thus providing a more comprehensive and in-depth academic perspective for the study of semiotics.

## **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SYMBOLS OF CANTONESE AND MIDDLE EASTERN EMBROIDERY PATTERNS**

**Table 3: The results of the comparative semiotic analyses for Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery are as follows**

<b>A Comparative Semiotic Analysis of Cantonese Embroidery and Middle Eastern Embroidery</b>		
<b>The semiotic dimension</b>	<b>Cantonese embroidery</b>	<b>Middle Eastern Embroidery</b>
Symbol Origins	Southern China, closely related to Lingnan culture.	Middle East, closely related to Islamic culture and local traditions.
Types of Symbols	Animal symbols (e.g. dragons, phoenixes), plant symbols (e.g. peonies, plum blossoms), religious and auspicious scripts.	Geometric shapes, plant symbols, animal figures, eye patterns, etc.
Symbolism	Animals represent power and honor, plants symbolize wealth and prosperity, and auspicious characters convey blessings.	Geometric shapes symbolize the order of the universe, plants represent life and prosperity, and animals symbolize beauty and nobility.
Cultural Symbols	They reflect the ideals of life, religious beliefs and social customs of the people in the Guang Fuarea.	They reflect the historical traditions, religious beliefs and social values of the Middle East.
Symbol Representation	Cantonese embroidery patterns transform cultural symbols into tangible symbols through fine stitching and color matching.	Middle Eastern embroidery patterns express religious and philosophical connotations through the combination of geometry and plants.
Symbol System	The symbol system of Cantonese embroidery is deeply influenced by Taoism and Buddhism, reflecting the spiritual tradition of the Chinese people.	The symbol system of Middle Eastern embroidery is deeply influenced by Islam, reflecting the integration of religion and life.
Regional Characteristics	Cantonese embroidery motifs are mostly taken from the natural landscape and cultural traditions of the Lingnan region.	Geometric and botanical patterns are used in Middle Eastern embroidery to show reverence for nature and the universe.
Color Symbol	Colors in Cantonese embroidery have specific symbolic meanings, such as red symbolizing vitality and festivity.	The color green in Middle Eastern embroidery represents life, paradise and resurrection, contrasting with other colors.

(Source of table: author's own)

Through the comparative semiotic analysis, it was revealed that religion, beliefs, nature, life, and cultural conducts are central to the semiotic dimensions of both Cantonese and Middle Eastern embroideries. However, a key difference lies in their regional characteristics. Cantonese embroidery patterns reflect the natural landscape and traditions of Lingnan, with animals such as dragons and phoenixes symbolizing power and honor. Middle Eastern embroidery often showcases a respect for the nature of the universe through geometric patterns, with animals representing beauty. Cantonese embroidery patterns often take natural elements, allusions and religious symbols as the main objects of expression. These elements not only demonstrate the pursuit of aesthetics, but also reflect the folk culture and social history of the Guang Fuarea.

**SIMILARITY OF PATTERN SYMBOLS**

Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery, both rich in cultural heritage, exhibit similarities in their symbolic representations. Both traditions employ elaborate symbols that embody unique cultural connotations and social expectations. The dragon, phoenix, and floral symbols common to Cantonese embroidery and the symbols of palm trees and geometric patterns of Middle Eastern embroidery have symbolic significance, although they originate from different cultural backgrounds. The palm tree signifies strength and longevity in Middle Eastern culture. Floral motifs such as the lotus and peony express values of purity and beauty, and share similarities with the oasis and geometric motifs of Middle Eastern embroidery, which symbolize life and paradise. Both forms of embroidery focus on the inheritance and development of traditional techniques, which are not only closely linked to specific cultures, but also show similarities in symmetrical aesthetics and color matching techniques.

The similarities between Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery reflect humanity's universal quest for symbolic expression and artistic transmission. Data show that 68% of Cantonese embroidery artists and 75% of Middle Eastern embroidery artists tend to use bright colors for embroidery, a feature that further highlights the similarity in color choices between the two types of embroidery. Overall, there are significant similarities between Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery in the choice of motif symbols,

aesthetic characteristics and socio-cultural significance, and this commonality reflects the fit and commonality between the different cultures in artistic expression and symbolic communication.

## **DIFFERENCES IN PATTERN SYMBOLS**

In analyzing the similarities and differences of pattern symbols between Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery, the variability of pattern symbols is a key research direction. In terms of pattern design style, there are significant differences between the two. Cantonese embroidery usually adopts more complex and delicate patterns with a variety of contents, including flowers, birds, insects and fishes, landscapes and so on. This design style reflects the natural landscape and rich cultural traditions of the Lingnan region of China. For example, the lotus and phoenix motifs in Cantonese embroidery are highly symbolic, representing good fortune, wealth and peace. Middle Eastern embroidery, on the other hand, is mostly characterized by geometric shapes and abstraction, a design style heavily influenced by the art of Islam. Islam prohibits idolatry, so Middle Eastern embroidery seldom shows images of animals or people, but uses complex geometric patterns and plant motifs to express religious worship and spiritual pursuit. In terms of pattern design style, Cantonese embroidery favors showing nature and life, while Middle Eastern embroidery is more abstract and decorative.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

Two main points need further discussion:

Application of pattern symbols in Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery as a tool to promote international cultural and business exchange

The study of pattern symbols in Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery is of great significance to the understanding, transmission and promotion of these two traditional crafts. Firstly, such research helps to deepen the understanding of the symbols and aesthetic values of their respective cultures, thus promoting the protection of and respect for cultural diversity. Secondly, by analyzing the symbols and symbolic meanings in the patterns, it can provide inspiration for modern designers, promote the combination of traditional embroidery art and modern design, and enhance the cultural added value and market competitiveness of products. In terms of foreign export economy, in-depth study and accurate communication of the cultural significance of Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery can attract international buyers and enhance the international image of the products, thus increasing the export volume and economic returns. In addition, the study of pattern symbols can be used as an important element of cultural exchange, promoting international cultural exchange and cooperation through exhibitions, cultural festivals and other activities, and driving the development of related industries.

The role of semiotic approach as a tool for interdisciplinary research

Semiotics provides a set of theoretical tools and analytical frameworks to help researchers dig deeper into the cultural meanings and symbolic connotations behind patterns. Through the semiotic perspective, researchers are able to go beyond the intuitive image of the motifs and explore their deeper meanings in specific cultural and social contexts, including religious beliefs, regional characteristics, and social values. The uniqueness of this research method is that it focuses not only on the form and color of the motifs, but also on how the motifs interact with the viewers' perceptions and interpretations, thus influencing people's emotions and behaviors. The application of semiotics has enabled the study of Cantonese and Middle Eastern embroidery to be extended beyond the artistic and craftsmanship level into the fields of cultural studies and sociology, providing the possibility of interdisciplinary research and enriching the knowledge and understanding of these two traditional art forms.

## **CONCLUSION**

Through an in-depth study of Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery motifs, one can better understand the history, religion and social culture behind the two art forms. Semiotics provides a set of theoretical tools and analytical frameworks. As stated in the relevant semiotic theories, symbols are not only carriers of information, but also transmitters of culture, and the cultural symbols of Cantonese embroidery

motifs are the concrete embodiment of such transmission in Guang Fu Culture. The study reveals the similarities and differences between Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery in terms of symbols, cultural symbols and symbolic representations, and promotes awareness of and respect for cultural diversity. The study of Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery motifs provides inspiration for modern designers and helps to promote the combination of traditional embroidery art and modern design, enhancing the cultural added value and market competitiveness of products. In-depth research and accurate communication of the cultural significance of Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery can attract international buyers, enhance the international image of products, and increase export volume and economic returns. The application of semiotics makes the study of Cantonese embroidery and Middle Eastern embroidery not only limited to the level of art and craftsmanship, but also extends to the fields of cultural studies and sociology, providing the possibility of interdisciplinary research.

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