

# Cantonese Embroidery Art Development and Technical Language Evolution-analysis Of the Transformation and Application of Nail Gold Embroidery in Fashion Design Cases

Jing Jin<sup>1</sup>, Quanyue Zheng<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*Nail embroidery is a typical technique of Cantonese embroidery, which is dominated by gold and silver thread, combined with techniques such as nailing, winding, winding, stabbing and padding, and forms a unique skill of embroidery school. This paper tries to combine the traditional embroidery technique with the fashion design in Cantonese embroidery and discusses the development path of traditional embroidery technique from the innovative application of technology and materials, the design of fashion structure and the aesthetic level of fashion series.*

**Keywords:** *Cantonese Embroidery, Nail Embroidery, Fashion Design, Inheritance and Innovation*

## INTRODUCTION

Cantonese embroidery and Guangzhou Embroidery are collectively called Cantonese Embroidery, and together with Suzhou Embroidery, Shu Embroidery and Xiang Embroidery, they are also called four famous embroideries in China. Embroidery has a strong local color, full and balanced composition, various stitches, clear texture, inlaid with gold and silver thread, high cushion on the ground, rich colors and strong decoration, especially the cushion-high embroidery method with relief effect is different from other embroidery methods (Pan,1992).

The 1970s and 1980s were the heyday of Cantonese embroidery. Many embroidery companies, research institutes and embroidery societies were set up in Chaozhou, and many Cantonese embroidery factories, garment factories, machine embroidery factories, bead embroidery factories and so on were opened, which expanded the new development of Cantonese embroidery. However, in the past twenty years, under the social background of mechanization, electronization and informatization, the traditional handicrafts in Chaoshan area, like other traditional arts, have the problems of no successors and fail to combine with the needs of modern society, and are facing the development dilemma(Cai,& Qiu, 2012).

This paper narrows the viewpoint, focusing on the nail embroidery process, which is one of the four major processes of Cantonese embroidery, compares the visual features of all kinds of embroidery threads and different embroidery bases, summarizes the application features of nail embroidery in international clothing brand cases, and summarizes the innovative application experience of nail embroidery in the author's teaching practice. From several aspects, this paper explores the development ways of Cantonese embroidery.

## Cantonese Embroidery and Nail Embroidery

Four techniques of Cantonese embroidery: the first embroidery, the second stitching, the third pad and the fourth nail. Among them, nail gold embroidery, also known as gold and silver embroidery (Zeng, n.d.); Gold and silver thread is the main thread, and wool thread is the auxiliary thread. There are more than 60 kinds of stitches in gold embroidery, such as crossing the bridge, stepping on the needle, catching petals, padding the ground, concave needles and hook-and-loop embroidery, among which the "two-needle-to-scale" stitch is not found in other kinds of embroidery. "Cantonese embroidery nails and gold embroidery are unique in the world. When applying for the evaluation, we must seize the characteristics of Cantonese embroidery and show the skills that others do not have, so as to convince everyone."Yang Jianping said. There are many kinds of nail

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<sup>1</sup> Industrial artist, Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts Email: [jijin46433@gmail.com](mailto:jijin46433@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Doctor of Philosophy Program in fine arts and design, Academy of Arts and Philosophy Shinawatra University Email: [laimistory@gmail.com](mailto:laimistory@gmail.com)

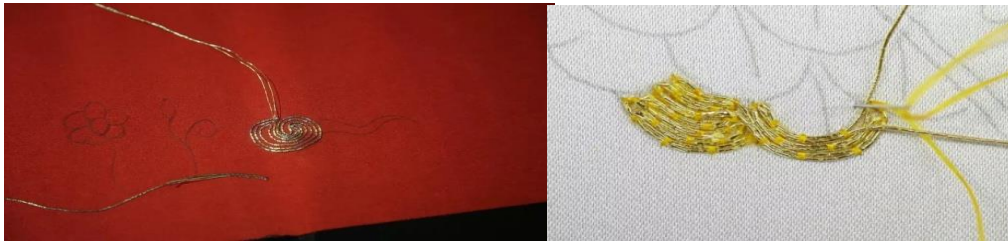
embroidery methods, such as Ping Xiu, brocade, weaving embroidery, winding embroidery, raised embroidery and applique embroidery (Pan, 1992). The embroidery thread used in gold embroidery is cotton thread wrapped with gold foil or silver foil, hence the name. There is such a saying: "Nail gold, the rich in embroidery are also."

Nail embroidery has always appeared in all kinds of finished products of Chaozhou traditional embroidery in a colorful way, such as clothing, ancestral hall supplies, furniture supplies, etc. Cushion embroidery is often used in the decoration of modern fashion brands (Nie, & Liu, 2011). Domestic brands include Rose Square, LAURENCE XU, NE•TIGER, Liangzi Tianyi, dark black Clothes, Tang Dynasty and many other brands. International famous brands such as Alexander McQueen, Givenchy, Chanel, Trussardi, Dries van Noten, Dolce & Gabbana, Cristobal Balenciaga, etc. Therefore, the research on the innovative application of Chaozhou nail embroidery in garment decoration meets the needs of the development of the garment industry.

### **The Analysis of Nail Embroidery Stitch and Embroidery Thread**

Nail embroidery needle method

Nail embroidery stitch is a kind of embroidery stitch method in which floating threads are coiled and fixed on the embroidery floor in a vertical direction with fine threads, and the stitch spacing is controlled to be equal, thus forming a neat and beautiful decorative effect. (Figure .1, Figure .2) Nail gold embroidery is the most representative embroidery of Cantonese embroidery (Hujie.n.d.). The needling methods are divided into two categories: Ping Jin and cushion gold; Ping Jin is divided into four types: straight line, spiral needle, lace and knitting; cushion gold is divided into two types: straight line and disc needle.



**Figure .1, Figure .2:** Embroidery molding process of gold-nailed embroidery process

(Photo source: Photo courtesy of Tang Zhiru, the representative inheritor of the production skills of the embroidered skirt in Xiaoru skirt workshop)



**Figure.3:** Partial details of table skirt cross ball

(Photo source: The author was photographed at the exhibition "Cross-cutting Golden Needle-Cantonese embroidery and Life" in Guangdong Art Museum)

**Figure .4:** Cantonese embroidery Wedding Dress

(Source: FAMORY. Mingrui Wedding Dress Evening Dress <http://www.famory.com>)

The application of the gold embroidery process has the gorgeous effect of decorating the edge of the embroidered pattern and covering the whole pattern with gold thread. Because of its special craft, it can highlight and emphasize the effect of patterns. Therefore, in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, a large number of "gold-nailed embroidery" was used for dragon patterns in dragon robes and lion patterns in ancestral hall supplies. (Figure.3), the Chinese wedding dress "Feng Guai" can also show the gorgeous decorative effect of its sewing process. (Figure.4)

### Embroidery Thread Used in Nail Gold Embroidery Process

Nail embroidery technology is simple and rich in decorative effect, which belongs to one of the common embroidery decorative techniques in traditional costumes. Embroidery thread is made of many kinds of materials, such as cotton thread, hemp thread, wool thread, gold and silver thread, chemical fiber thread, silk thread and so on (Huang,2014, p. 152).



**Figure.5:** Fine copper wire is inserted into Indian wire to make it firm, so that various shapes and curves can be molded.

(Image source: <http://www.huitu.com>)

**Figure.6:** The Indian silk is fixed on the embroidery base by the gold-nailing embroidery process, which is mostly used to outline the outer contour of the pattern.

(Image source: <http://www.huitu.com>)

All kinds of embroidery threads with different textures play different roles and express different languages in different application environments. For example, gold and silver threads are mostly used in Ping Jin embroidery, with twisted gold threads and twisted silver threads forming a single or double disk pattern, and colored threads are nailed to the embroidery base by copper spring-shaped Indian silk (shock silk), which is called Indian silk because it was first born in India. In French embroidery, a tiny copper wire is usually used to penetrate into Indian silk to make it firm and shape various shapes and curves (Figure.5), and then it is fixed on the embroidery base by the sewing process, which is mostly used to outline the outer contour of the pattern. (Figure .6)m by sewing thread, giving off magnificent luster (Shen,2004).

With the development of science and technology, modern embroidery works are not limited to conventional silk thread, even rough wool, thick fishing line and Indian silk can be used for embroidery. For example, the raw material

### **Embroidery Bottom of Nail Thread Embroidery Process**



**Figure.7:** Application of Stitching Thread Embroidery in Satin Embroidery Bottom

(Image source: <http://www.oushinet.com>)

**Figure.8:** Application of Stitching Thread Embroidery at the Bottom of Knitting Embroidery (Image source: <http://www.oushinet.com>)

**Figure .9:** Application of Stitching Thread Embroidery at the Bottom of Wool Embroidery

(source: <https://www.vogue.com>)

Generally, the embroidery base of gold embroidery is divided into silk, satin ( Figure .7), silk (Figure.8), yarn, silk, cotton, hemp, etc. China has always used silk as the mainstream embroidery base (Chang, 2013), but its production process is complicated, the cost is high, it is easy to draw and fluff when using, and it is not easy to take care of, which greatly weakens the market competitiveness of embroidered garments. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the exploration and development of new materials when stitching embroidery technology is combined with modern clothing design, and to give full play to different material languages when it is combined with different material bottoms, such as fresh and elegant cotton and linen, comfortable and soft knitting, fashionable and high-grade woolen cloth and the collocation of various embroidery patterns (Figure.9), thus increasing the style and aesthetic value of clothing.

### **The Modern Application of Nail Embroidery**

With the rapid development of China's economy and the improvement of people's living standard, and the holding of the 2008 Olympic Games, more and more foreign high-definition brands began to launch Chinese element series, aiming at opening up the Chinese consumer market from the cultural design. It is one of the most common design methods for foreign Gaoding brands to use Chinese traditional hand embroidery and integrate brand style ( Zhang, 2011) . China's traditional hand embroidery techniques are varied, and the works are exquisite and vivid, which bring higher economic and artistic value to foreign high-definition brands. This paper makes an analysis of the present situation of the application of the following foreign high-definition brands to the traditional Chinese hand embroidery (Wei,2009).



## Application Cases of Nail Embroidery In International Brands



**Figure.10** Gucci Spring/Summer 2016 Collection

( source: <https://www.vogue.com> )

**Figure.11**Valentino Spring/Summer 2016 Gaoding Series

( source: <https://www.vogue.com> )

Gucci's spring/summer 2016 products used the gold embroidery process. (Figure.10) His works are inspired by the "Eight Treasures Lishui Pattern" in the official robes of the Qing Dynasty, and express a gorgeous and solemn visual decorative effect by using the traditional application technique of gold-nailing embroidery. Valentino (Valentino)' s 2016 Spring/Summer Gaoding Dragon Robe Cover uses the process of nail gold embroidery. Each stitch is vivid and vivid, and the classical luxury of Chinese style is vividly interpreted (Figure.11).



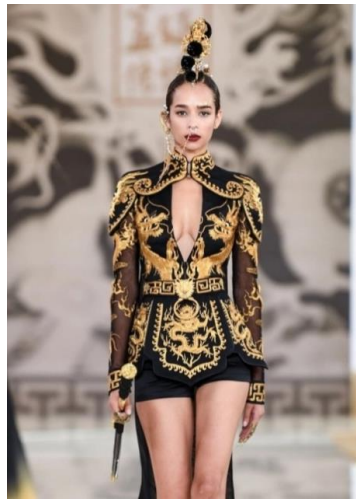
**Figure.11** zuhair Murad's Early Fall 2019 Series

( source: <https://www.vogue.com> )

Zuhair Murad (Murad, Zu Hai) used gold-nailing embroidery in his 2019 Pre- Fal series of works. (Figure.11) The work mainly uses the combination of nail gold embroidery and bead embroidery to express the plant and auspicious cloud pattern, which creates an elegant and dignified style image.

The application of nail gold embroidery technology in domestic high-definition brands

China's high standards are rooted in national traditional culture, exploring traditional elements, combining modern fashion and innovative design. In the application of embroidery, four famous embroideries are mainly used, especially Suzhou embroidery, and ethnic embroidery is often used. Chinese haute couture generally adopts the combination of western three-dimensional outline and Chinese embroidery, which is more traditional in color, material and pattern, and full of Chinese classical beauty. This paper makes an analysis of the present situation of the following domestic haute couture brands using hand-embroidered stitching embroidery.



**Figure.12** Gaia Legend's Spring/Summer 2020 series of "Playing Rhyme, Dreaming and Floating Life" with the theme of "Harmony"

(source: <http://www.oushinet.com>)

On September 30, 2019, HEAVEN GAIA, a Chinese high-end women's clothing brand, released the Spring/Summer 2020 series theme show with the theme of "Harmony" at the Little Palace Museum in Paris. This museum is open to Chinese designers for the first time. Among them, Youlong series uses the combination of Chinese and western silhouettes, and uses aesthetic art to "hide" traditional totems in the cuffs, backs and hem of clothing, and integrates dragon shapes into clothing. The strong contrast with the black gold thread embroidery process reflects the grandeur and magnificence of this garment, and at the same time, it contains full national strength. (Figure.12)



**Figure .13** Netiger's "Mingli" Haute Couture Costume

(source: <http://www.yoka.com>)

On October 25th, 2014, China's high-end fashion brand NE•TIGER "Mingli" haute couture clothing conference was held in Beijing Hotel. The brand Chinese elements lit the torch of Chinese costume civilization. In one of the high-definition clothing crafts, the gold-nailing embroidery method is applied to the whole pattern, and the exquisite radian achieves the effect of highly natural curving. At the same time, the tiny fine threads and some special textures of the pattern are represented by the extremely fine split threads, showing the lifelike and elegant and gorgeous picture, which has both national customs and the beautiful effect of international fashion atmosphere (Figure.13).



**Figure.14** Guopei Spring/Summer 2019 Collection

(source: <https://www.vogue.com>)

In the release of Paris Spring/Summer High School in 2019, the unique expression of Guo Pei Middle School for Western learning tells the powerful legend of the Eastern Palace (Geng,2005). In one design, gold embroidery is applied to sleeves and hem. And the gold and silver embroidery threads are perfectly attached to the blue embroidery base, setting off each other, so that vivid phoenix patterns can be seen (Figure.14).

### The innovative experiment of gold embroidery.

When we understand the inheritance of folk handicrafts and study the inheritance relationship of folk handicrafts, we should pay attention to those inheritance forms that hold a "positive" attitude towards tradition, but we should not ignore all kinds of trends that try to develop, adapt or reinterpret tradition (Yang,2004).



**Figure.15** Three strands of cotton thread with diameter of 1.2mm

(Image: taken by the author.)

**Figure.16** 0.2mm polyester colored yarn

(source: <https://www.taobao.com>)



**Figure.17** hematoxylin dye material

(Image: taken by the author.)

**Figure.18** Embroidered thread dyed with hematoxylin.

(Image: taken by the author.)



**Figures.19** Embroidered bottom of PU synthetic leather

(Image: taken by the author.)



**Figures.20** TPU embroidery bottom

(Image: taken by the author.)

In the teaching process, the author has led a team of students to try to innovate the gold embroidery process. There are two kinds of commonly used gold embroidery methods: open stitch and concealed stitch (Li,2015). The former stitch is exposed on the thread stem, while the latter is hidden in the thread stem. In practice, double cotton thread with a diameter of 1.2mm (Figure.15) is used as the main thread, three polyester colored threads with a diameter of 0.2mm (Figure.16) are used as the fixed thread, and hollow beads, bead tubes, artificial gem, hot drilling, hematoxylin dyeing (Figure.17) and ( Figure.18) are used as auxiliary materials for embroidery. TPU and PU synthetic leather are used for the embroidery bottom. (Figures.19 and 20)



**Fig.21:** The pattern designed by sewing thread with PU synthetic leather as the embroidery base combined with hollowing, beading and beading



hematoxylin dyeing.

(Image: taken by the author.)



**Fig.22:** The pattern designed with TPU as the embroidery base by using the stitching process combined with corn rivets, beading and hematoxylin dyeing.

(Image: taken by the author.)



**Fig.23:** The pattern designed with TPU as the embroidery base by using the thread-stitching embroidery process combined with corn rivets, hot drilling and hematoxylin dyeing.

(Image: taken by the author.)

The design is mainly based on geometric patterns and irregular lines, combined with current popular fashion elements, such as TPU, corn rivets, hollowing out, plant dyeing, beading and tassels. Incorporate the inspiration from traditional culture into modern design language and present it in the works. (Figure21, 22 and 23)

5.The physical display of innovative practical clothing with gold embroidery (Figure.23 and Figure.24).



**Figure.23** Demonstration of innovative practice of gold embroidery

(Image source: The author cooperates with the photography studio.)

**Figure.24** Physical demonstration of innovative practice of gold embroidery

(Image source: The author cooperates with the photography studio.)

## Problems and Thoughts

Based on the development, inheritance, innovation and exploration of Cantonese embroidery, this paper sorts out and practices the embroidery technique, and expounds and analyzes the stitch method, materials, brand application at home and abroad and the author's innovative practice. Try to sort out more ways to combine sewing with clothing. Through the design practice, we found some problems in the combination of sewing thread with modern clothing: there is a big conflict between traditional embroidery thread and clothing materials, and the clothing market positioning is currently biased towards high-end customization. How to combine it with the ready-to-wear market? How to combine it with more kinds of clothing will be the problem direction that the author will continue to explore and study.

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