

Content and Composition of Embroidery Dataset Archived in Luoyang Folk Museum

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Abstract: The dataset of embroidery exhibited in the Embroidery Hall of Luoyang Folk Museum has a collection of 260 pieces (sets) of embroidery costumes and accessories from the middle and late Qing dynasty to the Republic of China, among which are 18 pieces (sets) of treasured vases, 12 pieces (sets) of Chinese bellybands, 46 of purses, 9 of ear warmers, 10 of skirt belts, 18 of children hats, 18 of hoods, 4 of bibs, 3 of pants, 12 of brides' hats, 24 of embroidered skirts, 6 of embroidered shoes, 8 of embroidered clothes, 31 of fanons, 25 of pillow tops, 6 of table skirts and other 10 items. These exhibits in the museum are mostly from Heluo area in recent 30 years, well known for their craftsmanship, themes, decorations and etc. The dataset includes: (1) photos of 260 embroidery relics; (2) statistical table of embroidery relics, including serial number, name, thumbnail, filing code, type, the time of production and collection. The dataset archived in .jpg and .xls data formats, consists of 261 data files with data size of 1.45 GB (compressed into 4 files with a capacity of 1.45 GB).

Keywords: Luoyang; Luoyang Folk Museum; embroidery; middle and late Qing dynasty; Republic of China (1912–1949)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3974/geodp.2021.04.11>

CSTR: <https://cstr.escience.org.cn/CSTR:20146.14.2021.04.11>

Dataset Availability Statement:

The dataset supporting this paper was published and is accessible through the *Digital Journal of Global Change Data Repository* at: <https://doi.org/10.3974/geodb.2021.07.03.V1> or <https://cstr.escience.org.cn/CSTR:20146.11.2021.07.03.V1>.

1 Introduction

Embroidery, also known as the needle embroidery, is a handiwork of various patterns embroidered by using embroidery needles to lead colored threads on textiles. With a long history, China's hand-made embroidery was also called “Zhi” and “Zhen Zhi”. To please people's own sense of beauty, they used tattoos, tattooed faces, tattooed clothes and other ways to decorate themselves in prehistoric age, on which the tattooed patterns would peel off and be damaged due to friction. Later, people gradually found that the patterns embroidered on clothes looked both firm and beautiful, hence the name of embroidery. According to the record of Yiji of Book of History, rulers used such way to decorate clothes

Received: 05-07-2021; **Accepted:** 05-10-2021; **Published:** 30-12-2021

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Data Citation: [1] Ge, S. Content and composition of embroidery dataset archived in Luoyang Folk Museum [J]. *Journal of Global Change Data & Discovery*, 2021, 5(4): 470–478. <https://doi.org/10.3974/geodp.2021.04.11>. <https://cstr.escience.org.cn/CSTR:20146.14.04.11>.
[2] Ge, S. Dataset of embroidery cultural relics in Luoyang Folk Museum [J/DB/OL]. *Digital Journal of Global Change Data Repository*, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.3974/geodb.2021.07.03.V1>. <https://cstr.escience.org.cn/CSTR:20146.11.2021.07.03.V1>.

with patterns such as Zongyi, algae, fire, powdered rice, square patch on official costume embroidered with white and black axes, embroidery in square pattern on official gowns and so on. The embroidery of Warring States and Han dynasty unearthed in Hubei and Hunan witnesses a high-level of embroidery technology. The embroidery patterns in the Southern and Northern dynasties are mostly of Buddhist style while patterns in Tang and Song dynasties are characterized by well-proportioned embroidering and rich colors, popularly used for painting, calligraphy, decoration and so on. Embroidery Administration was established in the Song dynasty, mainly in charge of weaving embroidery for emperor and offering embroidery as sacrifice to gods or ancestors. In Yuan dynasty did the elements of gold be applied to dynasties embroidery, which may look splendid and imposing^[1]. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, there were a lot of imperial embroiderers employed, who contributed to the rapid development of embroidery industry, therefore, the Top 5 Embroidery earned the fame, including Suzhou Embroidery, Guangdong Embroidery, Gansu Embroidery, Hunan Embroidery and Shu Embroidery in the Qing dynasty. In addition, Gu Embroidery, Beijing Embroidery, Ou Embroidery, Lu Embroidery, Min Embroidery, Bian Embroidery, Han Embroidery, Ma Embroidery and Miao Embroidery all have their own styles and have been passed down to this day.

Embroidery can be produced with textiles and embroidery thread as the base material and needles, scissors, silk frames and shelves as the tools. As the carrier of embroidery, the base material generally includes cotton, hemp, silk, satin, silk and so on while the embroidery threads used in embroidery always include the threads made from yarn, silk, wool, gold, silver, hair, sideburns, colored pearls and so on, from which silk thread is the most commonly used. There are dozens of embroidery stitches commonly used, such as Qizhen, grabbing, looping, pricking, punching, distinguishing stitch, rolling, Pingjin and so on, each with its own characteristics.

As one of the ancient handicraft in China, embroidery is a craft of folk culture and art of the Chinese nation, and has varies styles in different periods and regions. To do stitchwork is very time-consuming, and requires the hard work and wisdom of embroidery workers. Due to the unique texture of embroidery, it is hard to preserve so that to study the folk customs of a region and a certain period, the well-preserved embroidery work are precious for studying traditional culture^[2].

The factors including the physical environment, geographical trait and historical and social context play a decisive role in developing the folk culture and tangible heritages in a region^[3]. Luoyang, the ancient capital in the Central Plains, is the birthplace of Chinese culture and the center of politics, economy and culture where thirteen dynasties have built their capitals since the Xia dynasty. As the eastern starting point of the Silk Road, Luoyang plays an important role in the economic and cultural exchanges between China and the West. It is precisely for this reason that Luoyang in the Tang dynasty ranked first in China in silk production and saw the birth of the most advanced silk weaving technology, which could be conducive to the development of folk embroidery.

In 1988, Luoyang Folk Museum, located at No.433 of Xinjie, Chanhe district, Luoyang city, Henan province, was officially opened to the public to display the folk customs in Heluo area. The former site of the museum is where Luze Guild Hall, founded in the 9th year of Emperor Qianlong in Qing dynasty, is situated. At present, there are 9 halls exhibiting items unearthed in Heluo area for folk beliefs, marriage customs, longevity customs, folk crafts, embroidery, living utensils, farm tools, transportation tools and bedding. Among them, the Embroidery Hall is exclusively for displaying 260 pieces (sets) of embroidery costumes collected during the past 20 years, ranging from the late Qing dynasty to the Republic of China in Heluo area.

2 Metadata of the Dataset

The dataset full name, short name, authors, year of the dataset, data format, data size, data files, data publisher, and data sharing policy of Dataset of embroidery cultural relics in Luoyang Folk Museum^[4] are listed in the Table 1.

Table 1 Metadata summary of Dataset of embroidery cultural relics in Luoyang Folk Museum^[10]

Items	Description
Dataset full name	Dataset of embroidery cultural relics in Luoyang Folk Museum
Dataset short name	EmbroideryCulturalRelics
Author	Ge, S., Luoyang Folk Museum, lanxin8321@163.com
Geographical region	China (data of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan are temporarily unavailable)
Year	From the late Qing dynasty to the Republic of China
Data format	.jpg, .doc
Data size	1.45 GB
Data files	(1) The statistical data of embroidery antiques in Luoyang Folk Museum (2) Images of embroidery antiques
Data publisher	Global Change Research Data Publishing System, http://www.geodoi.ac.cn
Address	No. 11A, Datun Road, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100101, China
Data sharing policy	Data from the Global Change Research Data Publishing & Repository includes metadata, datasets (in the <i>Digital Journal of Global Change Data Repository</i>), and publications (in the <i>Journal of Global Change Data & Discovery</i>). Data sharing policy includes: (1) Data are openly available and can be free downloaded via the Internet; (2) End users are encouraged to use Data subject to citation; (3) Users, who are by definition also value-added service providers, are welcome to redistribute Data subject to written permission from the GCdataPR Editorial Office and the issuance of a Data redistribution license; and (4) If Data are used to compile new datasets, the ‘ten per cent principal’ should be followed such that Data records utilized should not surpass 10% of the new dataset contents, while sources should be clearly noted in suitable places in the new dataset ^[6]
Communication and searchable system	DOI, CSTR, Crossref, DCI, CSCD, CNKI, SciEngine, WDS/ISC, GEOSS

3 Physical Collections and the Dataset

All antiques listed in this dataset are collected in Luoyang Folk Museum. All the embroidery exhibits are displayed in the Embroidery Hall on the east side of the museum. There are three cabinets in which the items including treasured vases, bellybands, purses, ear warmers, skirt belts, children hats, hoods, bibs, pants, brides’ hats, embroidered skirts and shoes, fanons, pillow tops, table skirts and others are on display. They are valuable art works in terms of craftsmanship, intended theme and decoration. Judged from these exhibits, the embroidery in Heluo area must have been very brilliant in history, and to a certain extent represented the national level of embroidery technology and artistic style.

Yunjian, also known as shawl or fanon, was originally a costume of concubines in royal court in Liao and Jin dynasties, and later came down to ordinary people. There are two levels of denotation, one referring to the ornament decorated on the shoulder that moves like a cloud, and the other to moire patterns mostly made of colorful brocade, which serves for decoration and prevents women’s hair from drooping and staining clothes. There are four-angle fanon (Figure 1), willow-shaped fanon (Figure 2) and square fanon (Figure 3), which are embroidered with auspicious patterns, such as prosperity-implied peony, blessings for longevity, and having surplus every year. The fanon was very popular in Ming and Qing dynasties, and mostly used in wedding and other festive occasions^[5].



Figure 1 Prosperity-and-longevity-implied beaded fanon (Qing dynasty)



Figure 2 Willow-shaped fanon (Republic of China)



Figure 3 The square lady's fanon with drooping ear (Qing dynasty)

Skirt belt (Figure 4) refers to the woman's waist belt for fastening skirt. In history, woman should wear waist belt when dressed in skirt, generally composed of one horizontal belt and several vertical belts. The horizontal belt is used for fastening while the vertical belt is embroidered with patterns mainly for decoration. Generally, there are 4 to 18 vertical belts for one skirt belt.



Figure 4 Prosperity-implied skirt belt with drooping mascot (Qing dynasty)

Bellyband, known as Doudu in ancient times, is one type of the traditional Chinese underwear that protects the chest and abdomen, which can be further classified into bagged and bagless bellyband. Small items can be held in the bagged band (Figure 5). They are mostly rhombic in shape, and embroidery patterns are used to represent good fortune, happiness and avoid disasters.

The hat is mainly used to protect wearer from coldness from the distant past while its use changes not only for practical purposes but also for presenting one's social status. The hats in the dataset are practical daily necessities of people from the late Qing dynasty to the Republic of China. Tiger-head hat (Figure 6) is a typical beanie. Bride hat (Figure 7) is used by women when they get married, and hood (Figure 8), also a symbol of status, is a decorative object for elderly woman in rich families.



Figure 5 Baby's bellyband (Qing dynasty)



Figure 6 Tiger-head hat (Republic of China)



Figure 7 Bride's embroidery hat (Qing dynasty)

Man can't go out without any shoes. Shoes in ancient times are always made from the raw materials such as grass, hemp and leather, which are also called "straw sandals". In ancient China was a bad convention of foot binding, referring to the fact that woman's feet must be tightly wrapped with cloth to make them deformed and smaller. People then call the wrapped feet as "Lian", and the feet of different sizes should be called different grades of "Lian", those longer than four inches are called "Tielian", those of four inches called

“Yinlian” and of three inches called “Jinlian”. The embroidered shoes in the dataset were made from the Qing dynasty to the Republic of China, among which the smallest pair (Figure 9) is only 11.5 cm long.



Figure 8 Gold hoods (embroidered in Qing dynasty, indicating more sons, more blessings)



Figure 9 Embroidered shoes (made in Qing dynasty, indicating more sons, more blessings)

In the folklore, the treasured vases (Figure 10) are mostly used as ritual vessels in wedding ceremony. “Ping” and peace are homonyms so that the auspicious meaning of treasured vase can be understood as “peace” that people wish for. In the very beginning, the treasured vase was always made of a variety of materials, including copper, tin, porcelain and so on, and then made of embroidery when it saw flourishing in the Qing dynasty. Hanging the treasured vase on the bedside or wall does bring peace to the family also present a strong decorative effect.

Ear warmers earned the name in Ming dynasty, also known as ear caps, earmuffs, ear bags, and called “ear clothes” by people in Tang dynasty. To keep out the cold and protect ears, they are hence made in northern China. The embroidered ear warmers in the dataset were mostly made for women (Figure 11), mostly peach-shaped and divided into inner and outer layers. The outer layer is embroidered with various auspicious patterns while the inner layer is of an ear-shaped narrow edge. To put the narrow edge of inner layer on the helix can prevent people from the wind and keep their ears warm.



Figure 10 Treasured vases of longevity and happiness (Qing dynasty)



Figure 11 Ear warmers of immortality in youth (Republic of China)

In addition to the variety above, there are other categories in the dataset, including purse, pillow top, fan bag, waist mirror, pendant, glasses case, tablecloth, central scroll, edge of mosquito net, etc. There is a wide range of items placed in Embroidery Hall of Luoyang Folk Museum, which can present the visitors a full picture of embroidery technology in Heluo area from the middle and late Qing dynasty to the Republic of China.

As a very important element of embroidery, pattern decoration is the way where people rest their time-honored thoughts, wills and tastes on. Good luck, happiness, wealth and

health are always the pursuits of people for a better life, which can be seen from the embroidery patterns in the dataset^[7]. The creative elements of its decorative patterns can be roughly divided into plants and animals.

Nature is where people live. Therefore, patterns of plants account for a large proportion among all embroidery, which reflects the interdependence between man and nature. By this way do people associate beauty with goodness, and express their longing for a better life.

The plants employed in the decorative patterns in the dataset are always peony, lotus, peach tree, peach blossom, peach fruit, pomegranate, day lily, gourd, po-phase flower, camellia, grape, chrysanthemum, plum blossom, hibiscus, cockscomb, lily, Chinese rose, pine, persimmon and so on^[8].

Luoyang is the most suitable place for planting flowers, in particular with peony flowers. As the world-famous hometown of peony, Luoyang is thus reputed as City of Peony Flowers.

Peonies are often referred to as the “Queen of Flowers” and are state flowers because they are elegant, beautiful, huge and fragrant. The peony carries the symbolic meaning of romance, compassion, good luck, prosperity, a happy marriage, and even bashfulness so that peony decoration (Figure 12) is commonly used pattern in embroidery.

There WAS a saying in China “The more sons, the more blessings”. Only having a large family can they have enough working people, improve the quality of life for the elderly and live rich and happy life. Another saying is that the newly-weds can bear babies as soon as possible just like pomegranate seeds. Regarded as a mascot, pomegranate (Figure 13) is always regarded as a sign of many sons and many blessings in embroidery. Many seeds can be found in bottle gourd (Figure 14) which can be likened as a reproductive mother, a sacred mater in folk belief that there would be many children and grandchildren in the family.



Figure 12 The purse with the belly of a beautiful country (Republic of China)



Figure 13 Happiness-and-longevity-implied waist belt-pomegranate ornament (Republic of China)



Figure 14 Fan bag with bottle gourd ornament (Qing dynasty)

Lotus flower or Lianhua is a frequently used decorative pattern for the reason of “Lianzi” as a homonym of bearing son one after another, and the reason of its nobleness and purity. Lotus, which can keep clean in the dirty soil, also symbolizes incorruptibility. It is often used to represent governmental official’s noble virtues so that it has become significant themes for clean and honest officials throughout the Chinese history. What’s more, the sanctity of lotus is closely related to Buddhism, for example, Buddha pedestal and Buddhist scriptures are also called Lotus Pedestal and Lotus Sutra respectively. At last, it is also related to promotion because lotus and “Lian” are homonyms, representing the move to a higher position and get rich which are hoped by most people.

Plum blossom blooms first in a year, which can be said to be the first of all flowers rather than the king of all flowers. In mid-winter, colorful plum flowers blossom boldly against the

cold. In traditional Chinese culture, plum blossom, which symbolizes toughness, purity and grace, motivates a large body of individuals to move on regardless of the hardship. Therefore, plum blossom is often regarded as a traditional pattern for toughness, faithfulness, auspiciousness and blessing.

Pine trees, evergreen in all seasons and tall and straight, are the symbol of firmness and unyielding. Three durable plants of winter, including pine, bamboo and plum blossom, motivate a large body of individuals to move on regardless of the coldness in winter or hardship. In addition, pine trees also serve as a symbol of longevity, just as a saying “to live as long as the pine trees on southern mountain”. Pine trees and cranes are always collocated to express people’s wish for a long life.

In addition to plants, animals close to human beings are also used to imply best wishes for people’s life. Therefore, they are also the important elements in embroidery patterns. In the dataset can be seen the images of animals, including dragon, phoenix, lion, tiger, butterfly, unicorn, bat, magpie, sheep, deer, elephant, peacock, crane, rat, fish, toad and frog, etc.

As a miraculous animal in ancient Chinese legend and a totem of Chinese nation, dragon symbolizes imperial power, good fortune, auspiciousness, power over weather and water, and a pioneering spirit. All the emperors in the past compared themselves to the real dragon and son of heaven so as to show their majesty and charisma and to win the respect of their subjects. In China’s history is dragon blended into many fields such as history, religion, myth, literature, folk customs, calligraphy and painting, and the dragon culture comes into being. Especially for the Han nationality, the dragon culture has penetrated into all aspects of social life, occupied an important position in all folk beliefs.

Fenghuang or the Chinese phoenix is mythological bird found in Sinospheric mythology that reign over all other birds. The males were originally called feng and the female huang. Fenghuang, having colorful feathers and long tail, symbolize good luck, looking like a golden chicken on the head, a mandarin duck in the body and hearing like music played by the flute when crow. In feudal society, Fenghuang represents the queen while the dragon represents the emperor. Among the common people, Fenghuang is a symbol of good fortune and happiness so that it is widely circulated and many utensils are named after it, mostly related to female, such as topknot or Fengji, Fengtouxie, Fengguan and so on. There are many auspicious decorative patterns used as well. The two Chinese phoenixes fly side by side, which is used to describe couples who love each other and have a happy marriage. A Chinese phoenix has been seen to bow, which can be regarded as an omen. And it flies through shrubs of peony flowers (Figure 17), which symbolizes good fortune and wealth.



Figure 15 Baby’s bellyband of pine and crane (Qing dynasty)



Figure 16 Embroidered dresses of dragon and fenghuang (Qing dynasty)



Figure 17 Beaded children’s hat with phoenix and shrubs of peony flowers (Republic of China)

As a totem used to chase away ghosts and evil spirits, the lion, a beast of prey, also signifies courage, stability and superiority. In the old days, from the royal palace down to the houses of grass roots were placed stone lions on both sides of the gate as guardians. According to the traditional custom, a male is placed on the left and a female on the right. A

ball under the male lion's hoof symbolizes the supreme power while a young lion under the lioness' hoof refers to the continuity of thriving later generations. Lion rolling hydrangea and lion dance are both very popular folk leisure activities. In the dance usually two people act as a lion: one waving the lion head and the other waving the lion body and tail. The performance is divided into Wenshi (civilian lion) and Wushi (martial lion) according to the performing styles. Wenshi depicts docile and funny images of a lion. It scratches or licks itself, or dozes off. Wushi portrays the power of the lion. Besides the usual jumping, falling and tumbling, performers also show their excellent techniques by climbing up on a high table or by stepping on five wooden stakes. Lion rolling hydrangea is always used as a decorative pattern in embroidery (Figure 18).

As one of the rarest, most awesome, and most powerful creatures ever known in China is the unicorn-like kirin, which looks like a deer in shape, with scales all over its body, horns on its head and its tail like ox's. It is a benevolent and auspicious beast, symbolizing good luck. Therefore, the image of a kirin and a baby, a symbol of virtue and kindness, is widely used as a blessing for a baby (Figure 19).

Bat, though unattractive in appearance, is indeed a beneficial bird in China where people regard it as an auspicious bird. Always hiding in the daytime and comes out at night, it could find the whereabouts of ghosts and drive out evil spirits. What's more, the association has linguistic origins: the pronunciation of "bat" in Chinese (蝠), is "fú" — the same as that of "blessing" (福)^[9]. The image of longevity peach and bat is often used as an auspicious pattern for people to enjoy both felicity and longevity (Figure 20). There are many other patterns, for example, bat flying in groups of five to represent the five blessings: fortune, longevity, happiness, virtue, and a peaceful death. When a bat is shown upside, it indicates that good fortune is here, as the Chinese phrase for "upside down" sounds similar to the characters for "arrived."



Figure 18 Belly purse with lion rolling hydrangea (Republic of China)



Figure 19 Sachet of kirin and baby (Republic of China)



Figure 20 Sachet of happiness and longevity (Qing dynasty)

In culture of Han nationality, magpie is a symbol of happiness. The singing of a magpie foretells good luck and happiness. That's why Chinese people use the theme of magpie in folk art particularly for decorative patterns. The image of a magpie and three longan or three shoe-shaped gold ingots may be compared to be a bulletin of glad tidings. Three longan or ingots symbolize that the scholar has won the first place either in provincial, court and the emperor-presided examination. Once passed the exams, the winner can secure an official position under the ancient imperial examination system so that the titles of No. 1 are what he has long dreamed of.

In the old days, people called crane as longevity bird, whose behavior just seems like that of immortal. According to volume 17 of *Huainanzi*, crane can live over one thousand years and fly everywhere, which makes people regard it as a symbol of longevity when the

birthday congratulations are offered. Also deemed as a totem of honesty and cleanliness in auspicious patterns, it foretells that a man could rank first in the imperial court and could be promoted in officialdom, and then he would behave as nobly as a crane, not greedily or corruptly.

In folklore, fish, is widely used in decorative patterns. The image of fish frolicking under the lotus flowers means that people live a very happy life, with many children and grandchildren. “Fish” and “Yu” are homonyms so that fish is often associated with a life of affluence. The hope of prosperity in the new year is always placed on the decorative pattern of fish and lotus flowers (Figure 22).



Figure 21 Waist bag of fish and lotus flowers (Qing dynasty)



Figure 22 Pillow top of fish (Qing dynasty)

In the dataset are the embroidered exhibits, which look exquisite in materials, elegant in workmanship and profound in conception. They can display the folk customs, people’s daily life and embroidery technology in Heluo area from the middle and late Qing dynasty to the Republic of China. These exhibits are of significance for us to study the folk culture and tangible heritages in the region.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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