

# The image expression of Beijing embroidery art in Qing Dynasty from the perspective of art anthropology

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**Abstract.** To explore the relationship between art and society in the history and culture of Beijing embroidery, and the embodiment of the social hierarchy system of the Qing Dynasty in Beijing embroidery. In this paper, from the historical origin of palace embroidery as the breakthrough point, combined with the theory of art initiative from the craftsman and the service object to explain the Beijing embroidery ontology, explore the social attributes of Beijing embroidery. Based on the field investigation method of art anthropology, this paper analyzes the separation of the specific objects of Beijing embroidery needlework, which is manifested in the luxurious embroidery materials, the pattern theme of the program composition, the color setting principle of five colors, and the needlework technique of north-south integration, so as to provide a new perspective and theoretical framework for Beijing embroidery needlework.

**Keywords :** Beijing embroidery; Theory of artistic initiative; Split performance.

## 1. Historical origin of Beijing embroidery

Beijing embroidery is the embroidery of the capital of the Qing Dynasty in Beijing, which was developed for the court to make various imperial embroidery. The Qing Dynasty was a highly centralized period of great unification, forming a set of hierarchical and orderly clothing system. The production form of Beijing embroidery needs to be examined layer by layer. It can be seen that the tedious and strict court costume culture has shaped the luxurious artistic expression style of Beijing embroidery, making it a mature royal embroidery system. The development process is shown in Figure 1.

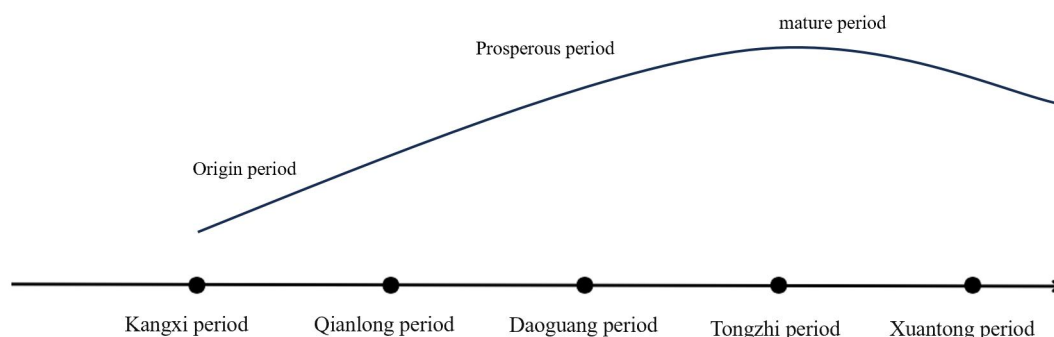


Fig. 1 The development process of Beijing embroidery

### 1.1 Origin period-lay the style of Beijing embroidery needlework

In the early Qing Dynasty, Yongzheng put forward the concept of the style of the inner court. During the Qianlong period, the office was established, and the demand of the service object formed the style of the Qing Dynasty Beijing embroidery. At that time, the construction office concentrated the best art and technical personnel in the country at that time, so that the Beijing

embroidery needlework absorbed the advantages of many families, and laid the standard aesthetic of Beijing embroidery as fine, quaint and beautiful. It is an extension and symbol of the Qing Dynasty 's ruling concept and the emperor 's political ideal.

### **1.2 Prosperous period- Integrate the aesthetic characteristics of ethnic minorities**

The development period of Jing embroidery in the Qing Dynasty was in the middle of the Qing Dynasty. During the Qianlong period, the costume system maintained the characteristics of Manchu costumes and absorbed the colors and patterns of Han emperors ' costumes, making Jing embroidery a paradigm of Manchu-Han integration with the aesthetics of ethnic minorities. During the Qianlong period, the production of Suzhou Weaving Bureau decreased rapidly. During the Daoguang period, the production of Jiangning Weaving Bureau and Suzhou Weaving Bureau decreased and paused, [1]which expanded the royal family 's demand for Beijing embroidery clothing.

### **1.3 Mature period - absorb the essence of North and South embroidery techniques**

The mature period of Beijing embroidery in the Qing Dynasty was in the late Qing Dynasty. Due to the lack of manpower in the office, famous embroidery artists will be invited to Beijing to teach and supervise the production, so that Beijing embroidery can integrate the essence of other embroidery techniques. During the reign of Guangxu, Jiangning weaving bureau was abolished, and the official weaving industry showed a trend of decline[2]. The Beijing embroidery labor market has formed a pattern dominated by government-run institutions and supplemented by private workshops. Exporting abroad has revitalized trade and increased the economic value of Beijing embroidery[3].

## **2. Ontological interpretation of Beijing embroidery**

Alfred Gell puts forward the theory of artistic agency, regards art as a social agent like human beings, pays attention to how it plays the function of regulating social agency, and puts forward the four factors of artist, prototype, representation and receiver, which are combined into an artistic analysis framework, as shown in Figure 2. As a unified era, the Qing Dynasty was highly centralized and constituted a functional expression of a specific civilization. Beijing embroidery was embellished on clothing as one of the factors showing hierarchical characteristics on court clothing. The expression of initiative in the social network of the Qing Dynasty was given personality. Because of the complex needlework skills and extremely strict production process of Beijing embroidery, the emperors of the service object of Beijing embroidery will trace it back to the recipient, and the service object here is the recipient ; at the same time, the complexity of craftsmanship is the reason why works of art can play a role in different cultural contexts and coordinate social initiatives[4]. The craftsmen in the Qing Dynasty could only meet the needs of the service objects and could not create themselves. They could only be used as a technical carrier and were in the same position as the objects. Strictly in accordance with the stylized production process, they were subject to the actuator-Beijing embroidery objects.

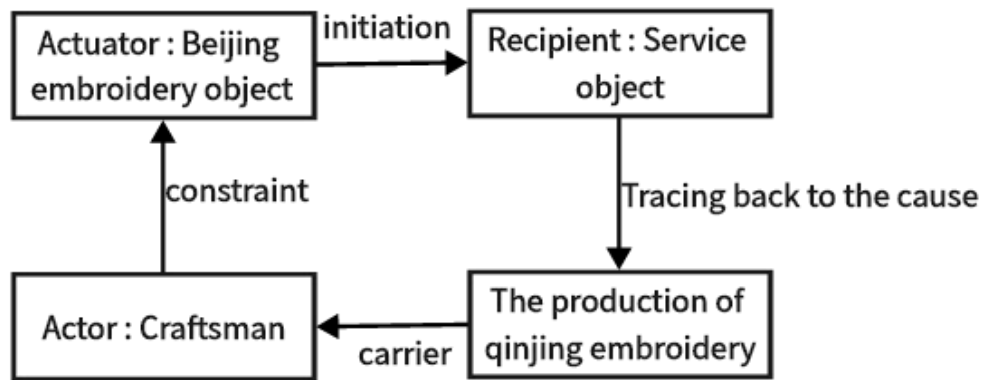


Fig. 2 Analysis framework of Beijing embroidery art

### 2.1 Craftsman-people as the carrier of technology

The core of Beijing embroidery is palace embroidery. According to the 'imperial ritual pattern', 'Qing Dynasty ceremony legend' and 'Qing history manuscripts and costumes', it is found that palace costumes are divided into 'royal life manufacturing' and 'national public manufacturing'. The needs of the two parts, the manufacturing process, the inspection system and the fabric code are very strict, so the craftsmen's production process cannot be arbitrary and subjective. Creative, can only be used as a carrier of skills. First of all, the dress production process and satin specifications were planned by the Ministry of Rites. After the emperor's approval, the dress pattern was drawn by the painter of Ruyi Museum. After the emperor's imperial examination and approval, the Imperial Household Department sent it to the royal weaving institution for embroidery. Each product was marked with the names of weaving ministers, weavers and acceptance officials for inspection, as shown in Figure 3.

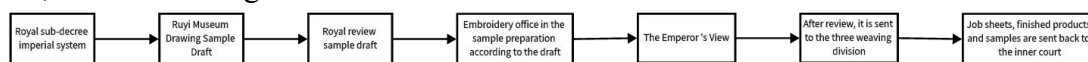


Fig. 3 Imperial process of Beijing embroidery clothing

In order to study the luxury of Beijing embroidery, the craftsmen have a fine technical division of labor and a wide variety of types of work. Therefore, Beijing embroidery is accustomed to the practice of 'no study of cashmere, no study of cashmere'. Craftsmen can only study technology according to fixed process standards, so that the level of craftsmanship can reach the highest level. The Beijing embroidery craftsmen are also mostly male embroidery workers, and the male palace embroidery is the best product[5]. In the "Zhou Li · Kao Gong Ji," it is said that the treatment of silk and hemp is to achieve it, which is called women's merit. Beijing embroidery breaks through the tradition of embroidery division of labor to women under the economy of men's farming and women's weaving in ancient China. The reason is that the gender conversion of workmanship depends on the recipient being subject to the agent. In the feudal society, men are superior to women. Beijing embroidery clothing mainly serves the royal aristocracy, so the embroidery workers who enter the palace in the Qing Dynasty are men[6]. In addition, Beijing embroidery clothing shows the royal majesty. The needlework embroidery technique is too delicate and elegant, and the male workers can better grasp the embroidery system, form an atmospheric and dignified court imperial style, and show the imperial authority.

### 2.2 Service object- Composition of social identity

As the service object of Beijing embroidery, the emperor grasped the power and resources to design and manufacture the clothing of Beijing embroidery. Influenced by the clothing system of the Qing Dynasty, the court clothing had strict hierarchical characteristics, indicating that the ruling system and ideology were mapped on the clothing system. At the same time, the collection of the director of the family, the style of the court as the standard, the Beijing embroidery clothing to

pattern pattern, material value and technological level to become the status of the explicit characteristics, so the Beijing embroidery pattern has two characteristics, the specificity and implication of the pattern, to solidify the imperial power to play an active role. As the emperor's special pattern, the dragon pattern expresses the supreme power and status; there are nine dragon patterns decorated on the emperor's dragon robe, and five dragons can be seen from the front and back of the emperor's dragon robe, which means the respect of the ninth five-year plan [7]. The dragon pattern on the dragon robe is divided into two kinds of dragons: the first kind of management position is the positive dragon pattern on the chest and back, which means the world is peaceful and the mountains are stable; the second kind of management position is the dragon on the shoulders and hem, which means loyalty.

As a part of the royal identity, Beijing embroidery costumes are precious and luxurious in order to highlight the dignity of the identity. The process is time-consuming and laborious, regardless of the cost of work. The emperor is the direct manager, the palace costume management agency is very complete, and the emperor will personally visit. According to the records of 'Internal Affairs Office Memorial', 'Internal Affairs Office Archives Wearing Files' and 'Internal Affairs Office · Treasury Collection', the emperor's edict of the Qing Dynasty repeatedly put forward requirements for clothing, and the reward and punishment were clear, which could reflect the emperor's emphasis on clothing.

Through Gail's theory of artistic initiative, this paper makes an ontological interpretation of Beijing embroidery needlework, and combs out the active role of craftsmen and service objects in Beijing embroidery needlework. As the carrier of technology, craftsmen's Beijing embroidery needlework is the key to the initiative of Beijing embroidery clothing. Based on the background of the feudal era in the Qing Dynasty, in order to highlight the hierarchical system, Beijing embroidery clothing has become an organic part of social identity and has been given personality[8]. It can be seen that the imperial power endows Beijing embroidery costumes with political implications, and craftsmen are subject to objects and objects in the same position. The Beijing embroidery technique absorbs the essence of the north and south embroidery and forms a mature royal embroidery system, which reflects the emperor's emphasis on Jing embroidery clothing as an explicit symbol of imperial power.

### **3. The split performance of the specific object image**

The split performance of specific objects refers to the modeling and external expression of specific objects. In a society with a strong hierarchical structure, especially in the Qing Dynasty, the clothing level is particularly strict. The clothing culture serves the hierarchical system of 'dividing the high and low, and distinguishing the high and low', which has strong political color and ritual significance. The core of Beijing embroidery is 'palace embroidery', which mainly serves the royal court. Therefore, its plastic art features have a strong deliberate style, stylization or symbolism. The specific objects are expressed in the official style category of the official clothing system with patterns as carriers. The external expression of these patterns, such as dragon patterns representing imperial power, python patterns representing clan relatives, and auspicious animal and bird patterns representing civil and military officials, needs to strictly follow the fixed pattern requirements.

#### **3.1 Luxurious embroidery materials**

Beijing embroidery embroidery materials are luxurious and elegant. The base material is mostly plain satin. It is a pure mulberry silk yarn-dyed satin silk fabric, which was woven and produced by the government in the Qing Dynasty. The palace silk is also a special court silk, as shown in Table 1. According to the "Suzhou Weaving Bureau Records" of the Qing Dynasty, it is described that one flower palace silk needs 12 days of work, and its process is complex and fine. Embroidery thread not only uses silk, but also incorporates precious feathers into the thread. It is made of gold foil with a thousand hammers of real gold and silver, and then backlit and cut into silk. Embroidery

decorations are precious materials, such as pearls with one grain and coral beads with the same color, and the specifications are all top products, reflecting the dignity of users.

Table 1. Beijing embroidery materials

Material classification	Material	Characteristic
Fabric	Velvetsatin plain	Silk as raw material, soft should not be deformed, color diversity.
	Palace silk	The processing time is complex and fine.
Line	Lame yarn	The fabrication process is complex and the diameter is 0.12μm thick.
	Woolen	It will be mixed with precious feathers, and the color is gorgeous and bright.
Embroidery decorations	Coral, pearls, etc	Embroidery decorations make the patterns more three-dimensional and luxurious.

The Qing Dynasty peacock feather in the collection of the Forbidden City Museum wears a pearl-colored embroidered dragon-patterned gown. As shown in Figure 3, the base material is blue five-strand satin. This base material has a clear longitude and latitude and a strong gloss. Silk, gold and silver lines, rice beads, coral rice beads, and a large number of twisted peacock feather lines are used[9]. The specifications of the embroidery materials are very strict. With the design of different sizes of rice beads, coral beads are required to have no variegation. In the production of embroidery materials, the process is cumbersome, time-consuming and laborious. At the same time, it can be seen that the division of labor of craftsmen needs to be very detailed, and close coordination and cooperation are needed among various types of work to ensure excellent quality.



Fig. 4 Qing Dynasty peacock feather wearing pearl-colored embroidered dragon-patterned gown

### 3.2 Pattern theme of program composition

When embroidering the theme of Beijing embroidery patterns, the pattern structure is more stylized, the style is neat and rigorous, and the content also implies auspiciousness. In the ' Qing Dynasty Ceremony ', there are clear specifications for the theme patterns, embroidery management positions, and color requirements of the costumes of the imperial, peerage, and official ranks. The particularity of Beijing embroidery is to embroider the patterns according to the hierarchy. The embroidery patterns are not allowed to be used in other costumes as etiquette costume patterns, and the pattern layout is fixed from the Qianlong period. The grade difference can be seen in the ' imperial ritual pattern '. On the pattern, the noblest pattern has dragon pattern and twelve chapter

pattern, which represents the supremacy of imperial power and is a sacred and insurmountable special pattern used by the emperor, as shown in Figure 5. The emperor's subordinates at all levels below the emperor can not be called dragon robes, but python robes.

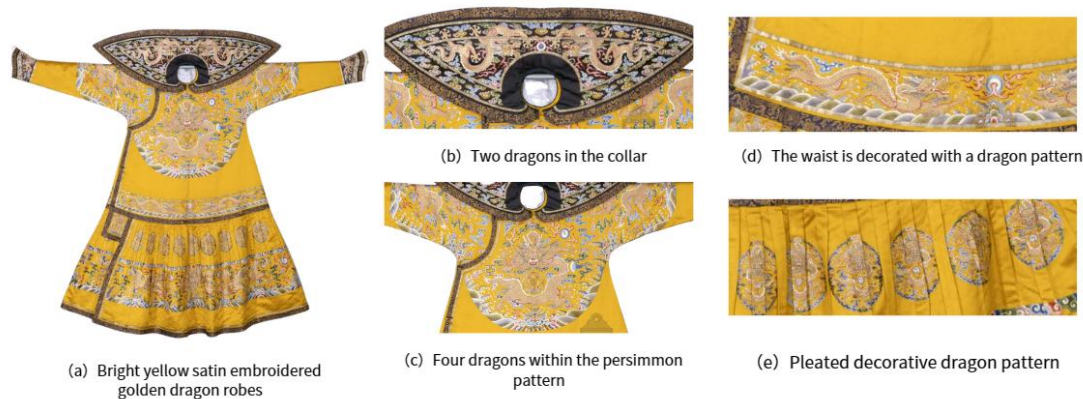


Fig. 5 Bright yellow satin embroidered gold dragon dynasty robe pattern layout

The auspicious patterns of the Qing Dynasty developed to the point of peaking, so the Beijing embroidery pattern has the artistic characteristics of 'the pattern must be intentional, the meaning must be auspicious'. As a daily life dress, the imperial concubine's casual clothes use a wide range of Beijing embroidery patterns. They should not only follow the rules that the dress should be embroidered with seasonal flowers, but also reflect the royal taste. The theme of casual wear patterns is common in four seasons of flowers, butterflies, auspicious animals, Bogu patterns, texts, character stories and combination patterns. The decoration is complicated and tasteful.

### 3.3 Coloring principle of five colors

In the period of Chinese slave society, the thinking of yin-yang and five elements came into being, which was rooted in the hearts of the ancients in the later social development. The five colors originally refer to the five elements of positive color, which are green, red, yellow, white and black. The five colors of the Qing Dynasty have exceeded these five colors, but they are still called five colors in custom. The five-color warps recorded by the dyeing and weaving bureau in the Qing Dynasty are red, bright yellow, green, blue and white, which are not the normal colors of traditional cognition. After classifying and counting the colors of embroidery thread and makeup velvet, the color names and chromatograms of colorful colors can be obtained, as shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Color Names and Chromatogram of Five Colors

color name	chromatogram
yellow	Bright yellow, golden yellow, apricot yellow, persimmon yellow, wheat yellow, sunflower yellow, beige, autumn fragrance, sauce color, brown
Red	Big red, pink, water red, red, fish red
Blue	Royal blue, navy blue, fish white, jade, moon white, cyan
Green	Official green, deep official green, yellow official green, melon skin green, pine green, water green, sand green, bean green
Purple	Lotus, deep lotus, iron purple, purple, purple, green lotus

This system constitutes the color spectrum of the palace in the Qing Dynasty, that is, the five-color system, with black, white and gray only as matching colors. According to the 'Qing Hui Dian' regulations formulated during the Qianlong period, bright yellow can only be used by emperors. The emperor's winter and summer costumes are bright yellow, and bright yellow is the main color tone of the emperor's costumes in the Qing Dynasty. In addition to the exclusive colors of the emperor, the four main colors of black, yellow, red and blue are used more frequently. This color view of black is Xuan, yellow is Quan, red is Xi, and blue is Gui has become the basic rule that people abide by in the production of Beijing embroidery, as shown in Figure 6.





Fig. 6 Beijing embroidery four main colors

### 3.4 North-South integration of acupuncture techniques

Embroidery technology in ancient China has gradually matured in the Ming Dynasty. Beijing embroidery is based on this mature embroidery system. With the germination of capitalism, the circulation and exchange of silk fabrics have enabled various embroidery schools to integrate in the capital. Beijing embroidery has taken the advantages of many families. For example, it has the characteristics of Beijing embroidery to use a large area of pan gold embroidery in the application of needlework. It is characterized by wide embroidery with gold thread. Color transition with embroidered needle is also the characteristic of Suzhou embroidery , as shown in Figure 7.



(a)The gold embroidery is used to embroider the clouds (b)Needle embroidery is used to embroider clouds (d)Needle embroidery is used to embroider flowers

Fig. 7 The characteristic stitch of Beijing embroidery

## 4. Conclusion

From the ontological interpretation of Beijing embroidery, it can be seen that the whole process of Beijing embroidery from design, production to use is to give the object the initiative under the authority of the imperial power, and to turn the craftsman into the same position as the object. The analysis of the split performance of the specific objects of Beijing embroidery art is conducive to excavating, inheriting and carrying forward the characteristics of Beijing embroidery art, and deepening people 's in-depth understanding of traditional handicrafts. It is not only conducive to the long-term development of local embroidery art, but also conducive to enhancing people 's awareness of the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. At the same time, it also has certain reference significance for the expression of embroidery skills in modern clothing accessories.

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