

# Research on Grass Cloth Art Embroidery of Characteristics and Handmade

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## Abstract

Grass cloth is made of ramie fiber. Grass cloth art embroidery is based on the evolution of folk Ma embroidery in China. The paper through trace Chinese ramie and Ma embroidery of the history, show the origin of grass cloth art embroidery. By visited Yuzhou grass cloth embroidery workshop in Jiangxi province, reveal the key technology about grass cloth art embroidery of handmade, sum up grass cloth art embroidery of characteristics. Research shows that grass cloth art embroidery used grass cloth as embroidered bottom to integrate calligraphy and painting of theme, turn to the artistic decoration of style. However, grass cloth art embroidery fine works mainly by copying the ancients paintings, so that lack creativity. Inheritance and development of grass cloth embroidery, it needs to develop their own original works.

**Keywords:** grass cloth art embroidery, calligraphy and painting, characteristic, handmade, ramie

Grass cloth embroidery is named from embroidered bottom of grass cloth; it ranked one of Chinese 28 major embroidery. Grass cloth refers to ecological and original ramie fiber manual textile fabric, because it conduct heat and transfer moisture very fast, sweating non-stick, feel cool and comfortable wearing it in summer, so named summer of cloth, or grass cloth. Within the territory of China, the Yellow River has plenty of rain and warm sunshine, where is the birthplace of Chinese civilization, the piece of land suitable for the ramie growth. At home in Yuzhou Jiangxi, Longchang Sichuan, Rongchang Chongqing and Liuyang Hunan four places grass cloth weaving industry, there are the most of developed. As extensions of art fabric, Jiangxi grass cloth embroidery has the most prestigious in China. In 2014, Yuzhou grass cloth embroidery was selected China's national intangible cultural heritage representative projects list. On the inheritance and development of folk Ma embroidery, grass cloth embroidery based on the style of grass cloth characteristics, it formed celebrity calligraphy and painting as a theme, combine poetry, paintings, embroidery, stone art of decorative embroidery. At present, about grass cloth art embroidery of research are mainly journalists of interview, academic lack of systematic study on grass cloth embroidery techniques. Therefore, by looked up some sources, visited Yuzhou grass cloth embroidery workshop, interviewed Ms. Zhang Xiaohong, who belong to grass cloth embroidery intangible cultural heritage of spreader and grass cloth art embroidery of exploiter, to reveals inductive grass cloth art embroidery of characteristics, and its handmade of key technology points.

## 1. Grass Cloth of History

Embroidered bottom of grass cloth by ramie textile, ancestor has a long history about planted ramie and used grass cloth. Ramie of producing area distribute mainly in China, so called its name "China grass" in the world, ramie (Figure 1) is a natural filament plant bast fiber. Pengtoushan Li county in Hunan province, Daxi culture layer trench sites unearthed more than 6000 years history of coarse Ma fabric, which prove that ancestors understood the bast fiber crops twiddling hemp threads and weaving cloth in the Neolithic Age (Cheng, 2007).

By the spring-autumn and the warring states period (770 B. C. - 221 B. C.), ancient Yue nation began to understand in ramie cloth printing. 1979-1980, Guixi Longhushan in hanging tomb unearthed a large number of sacrificial relics, included unearthed from tomb No. 5 and No. 11 of printed ramie cloth, according to China textile academy of sciences through the C14 dating its age to around 2600, which is found so far the earliest of printed cloth (Li et al., 2008). Contrast with other bast fiber crops, ramie fiber has soft, strength and white color of characteristics after ramie original skin degummed. Its high cellulose content in the raw skin, spinning refined dried-jute rate is higher. Relative to the other major kind of textile materials as silk, silk production is much less than ramie. Before Song dynasty (960-1279) planting on cotton have not been widespread, with ramie textile cloth is a major clothing of civilians. Jiangxi is the origin of high quality ramie in ancient China, Qing dynasty (1616-1912) Huang Houyu in "Ramie planting methods" describe: "Yuzhang fabric performance of ramie is the first" (Huang, 1930). Yu zhang is provincial capital of nanchang city in Jiangxi province, where still can look for the traditional grass cloth weaving (Figure 2). Because Ma textiles had the potential development of the green environmental protection (Rajesh & Sunshine, 2007), the ramie planting also began to get the Chinese government vigorously promoted. Grass cloth witnessed the evolution of Chinese clothing culture, it is a living fossil of Chinese civilization (Liao & Yang, 2016).



Figure 1. Ramie crop



Figure 2. Grass cloth weaving

## 2. Grass Cloth Art Embroidery of Characteristics

### 2.1 From Ma Embroidery to Grass Cloth Art Embroidery

Grass cloth art embroidery originate from Ma embroidery, experiences from etiquette, practical and beautiful to enter the decorative art embroidery. In the beginning of human civilization, ancestors started embroidering pattern on apparel. In the "book of changes - copulative" records: "By formulating rules and regulations of the clothing to distinguish people of status, this is king Huangdi manage country and individuals of strategy, is also the Chinese etiquette civilization of origin." (Su, 1989) According to the "book of history" records: "Painting and embroidery on the dress have the function of decoration and etiquette, embroidered show magnificence." (Wang, 1991) "Zhou rites - Kaogongji - Paint and embroidery" recorded the process of painting and embroidering on clothing of craft (Yang, 2008). According to system of clothing more than 4000 years ago, the clothing worn by emperor, officials and civilians, its color and pattern have strict all kind of regulations, through the coat painting, embroidering on bottoms, established relations of etiquette. To the spring-autumn and the warring states period aristocratic dress is "All clothing will embroidering", show the apparel humble or noble. And the function of folk Ma embroidery is mainly take into account practical and beautiful, folk Ma embroidery

has a broad space for survival in China, grass cloth by manual textile used local ramie. Grass cloth was used to make the sheets, mosquito nets, pillow towel, handkerchief, sweet bursa, wallet, bag and other articles for daily. Ingenuity embroidered workwomen made embroidery on the grass cloth, on the one hand, can reduced fabric abrasion, make grass clothing more solid and durable, on the other hand, also keep them looking beautiful.

Folk Ma embroidery (Figure 3) have funny, simple characteristics, and vibrant color, carrying people's psychological feeling and aesthetic taste (Wu, Hong, & Shen, 2008). For thousands of years, folk Ma embroidery are close to glad and peace, themes mainly focused on festival such as marriage, parenthood, pray for the enrichment life and so on, in order to convey auspicious valuable, lucky good wishes (Li & Wang, 2014). However, with the development of the market economy in the 1980s, industrial machinery goods began gradually take for traditional arts and crafts, grass cloth embroidery of development was in trouble. Lucky, people give grass cloth embroidered new vitality, on the basis of folk Ma embroidery, forming the grass cloth art embroidery, it adapt to both technology and artistry of requires, absorb a lots Su embroidery, Xiang embroidery of technology, play grass cloth of material features, with embroidery needle to depict the celebrity calligraphy and painting, making the embroidered rise again (Figure 4).



Figure 3. Badu Ma embroidery “Sixitongtang”



Figure 4. Grass cloth art embroidery Cao Zhibai works “River”

## 2.2 Grass Cloth Art Embroidery of Theme

Grass cloth art embroidery is a cultural site which turned give priority to depict the celebrity of calligraphy and painting art. Its themes included landscape, architecture, insects, fish, birds and flowers, figures, and folk customs, but focus on celebrity calligraphy and painting works or a little of local flavor characteristics of works. To achieve the same effect as the copy, make track for a copy of original pen and ink lines, even the main image of the modeling and spatial forms reflect reality, build the artistic conception of literati painting and calligraphy or imperial-court decorative painting of artistically. Combined calligraphy and painting works with embroidered bottom of grass cloth, bring into play the advantages of both art and material. It is good at using embroidered bottom of texture and color (Figure 5), intentionally set aside blank, pay attention to the line, weaken the color, online mark appear between simple texture partly hidden and partly visible. Embroidery works of quality depends both in drawing and acupuncture, thread and embroidered on the bottom of the texture (Yao & Jiang, 2008), grass cloth art embroidery based on the idea transformation.



Figure 5. YuZhou embroidery workshop grass cloth art embroidery “Fuchunshan live picture”

### 2.3 Embroidered Bottom of Artistic Features

Compared with silk fabrics, grass cloth texture have straightforward and warp-weft clearly, grass cloth embroidery convey primitive of style and feeling of vicissitudes history. Material is carrier the art of embroidery, the change of the material will inevitably lead to changes in the art style (Xu, 2008). Yuzhou grass cloth art embroidery use native ramie as materials which plant in Jiangxi province, it has original natural fiber qualities. Pure ramie spinning of grass cloth which fiber residue have a lots numbers, when it reduce, the color show from brown to yellow, white, fine textile of grass cloth color is white. As a result of the existence of wax and colloid, grass cloth have a little of color spots. Initial modulus of ramie fiber, make it with high intensity. Ramie fiber contains natural antibacterial molecules, make it compare with silk or cotton as the bottom of the embroidery, it have mildew proof and mothproof of ability. Compared with the delicate silk, it is easy to save.

### 2.4 Grass Cloth Art Embroidery Was Made by Handicrafts

Grass cloth that ramie by traditional manual process performance of yarn, then woven into ramie fabric. Modern enterprise have advanced grass cloth degumming of technology and textile production line, as a result of traditional hand woven grass cloth have simple natural tonal, straightforward and crisp texture, grass cloth art embroider of raw material choose pure handmade grass cloth. In addition, because the traditional hand woven grass cloth have hard and hang wire of drawback, so the grass cloth art embroidery works are made by embroidered women worker pure handmade. Pure hand-made woven grass cloth with pure manual embroidery, made grass cloth art embroidery have both double quality manual crafts, it catered to the modern people pursue green philosophy. Grass cloth art embroidery belong to the pure manual craft, complex production process, it takes the form of embroidery workshop production, there are such problems as small scale, single brand, has not formed the scale effect. In the market economy, the production of individual and family workshops is difficult to form a large economic performance.

## 3. Grass Cloth Art Embroidery of Handmade

### 3.1 Embroidered Bottom of Finishing

As the saying goes “Embroidering on Ma cloth, embroidered bottom is weak”, well bottom is a key step of embroidering on the grass cloth. Embroidery workshop choose grass cloth products which supplied by ramie spinning enterprise, it is customize of high-counts yarns, the color-luster is downy, the density of grass cloth embroidered bottom. Grass cloth material rough, hard texture, it need to preorder textile and postorder textile finishing to checks. Ramie textile into grass cloth, the procedures need to go through scraping ramie, cutting ramie, degumming, twiddling ramie threads, airing, brushing slurry, weaving, cleaning, bleaching and other multi-channel processes, each process need high quality requirements. Grass cloth enterprise with local farmers signed purchase contraction, they will buy yarn or manual grass cloth, by soaking in acid, alkali impregnating, water washing, pickling, dewatering, drying, so a alkali cook process degumming to purpose of softening. To produce a high degree of simulation art embroidery works, embroidery workshop need finishing of grass cloth, make its surface texture turn to smooth and soft. Folk Ma embroidery of workwomen use a traditional way to place grass cloth under the wood-made steamer steaming, through steam take off grass cloth of colloid and soluble substances in the fiber. For 20 minutes after the water boils, then remove, dry by airing, wash clothes, stack neatly, with the hard wooden hammered its surface, so as to achieve the smooth effect. Yuzhou grass cloth embroidery workshop of grass cloth was soaked in about 70°C plant ash water for about 2 hours, after the temperature is reduced, and artificial rub, then beat, after grass cloth wrapped in 20 kg drum surface, rolling back and forth 4 ~ 6 min, in order to achieve the smooth effect.

### 3.2 Stretched Frame

Grass cloth art embroidery stretched frame are divided into hand stretch (Figure 6) and shelf-type frame (Figure 7). Hand stretched choose good elasticity of bamboo sticks piece bent into two circles, at joint by turnbuckle fixed circle, small circle embedded inside. Through fine-tuning turnbuckle, to adjust the small circle of firmness. It is available for song dynasty painting similar works, also used to make small screen or home textile decorative accessories. Shelf-type frame by the wood through the mortise and tenon joint structure connecting, retractable batten control the length of bottom stitch (Figure 8). When it stretch, the first roll up the extra length of the fabric, then the strip embedded axis of the strip groove, after the wedge into the oblique wood mortise to fixed, the broadside is penetrated through the coarse hemp twine tight on the gallows. Manual grass cloth easy to curl, stretching tightly to maintain embroidery cloth be in smooth and uniform tension of state. Grass cloth of warp-weft yarn have large interval, force over the general assembly makes embroidery leave space. When tension removed can lead to embroider foot out-of-flatness, not beautiful.



Figure 6. Hand stretch



Figure 7. Shelf-type frame

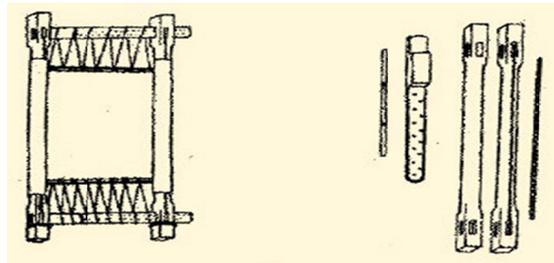


Figure 8. Shelf-type frame of plane structures

### 3.3 Drafting of Method

Grass cloth art embroidery is given priority to with celebrity calligraphy and painting works, the works have high artistic standard, the choice needs to estimate the degree of difficulty in the process of embroidered and the final effect. Drafting of method can directly describe, copy for drafting or print with the help of computer. Grass cloth art embroidery make the method of carbon paper to copy for drafting. First of all, to choose a good pattern, the size of pattern match with embroidered bottom. Second, put a good copy pattern on the top of the embroidery, then put a carbon paper between the pattern and the embroidered bottom. According to the pattern descript, the pattern of color is not the same as the description of the line pen, draw the design outline, the outline through carbon paper to display in the embroidered bottom. Finally, adjust. The pattern on the embroidered bottom is not clear lines to depict again and the wrong line change to come over, at the same time, it can be processed properly. In the traditional small pieces of Ma embroidery, usually use cutting good pattern applied directly on the embroidered bottom. A very high degree of simulation works, that need to draw outline and color, at the same time in the process of embroidering carefully refer to the original. Fine grass cloth embroidery, can even more than the original in color level transition.

### 3.4 The Choice of Thread and Embroidered Method

Grass cloth art embroidery of thread choose cotton thread, silk thread, synthetic fiber thread, wool thread and so

on, the thread can be split, also can be double or more color threads to combine, impose different stitches, can meet the requirements of different embroidery. Grass cloth art embroidery draw lessons from a variety of embroidery method, including flat embroidery, twisted embroidered, cross-stitch embroidered, variant embroidered and other varieties. Stitch pursuit actual situation of changes, the subject use fine descript, background suitable for using the grass cloth embroidered on the bottom of color and texture, impose virtual needle (Figure 9). Mainly adopts the embroidery method, embroidering bright eyes, use Xiang embroidery of needle technique to achieve vivid effect. With pine needles, inclined plain needle, kink mixed needle painted pine trees. To describing clothes, give priority to with flat needle, with mixed straight needle, a needle more threads, makes the color transition and change. Use flat needle, canine tooth needle, small cross needle and other needles, showed distant haze misty mountains. And long-short and thick-thin of disorderly needles to describe grassland and slopes, which show subtle colors and levels.



Figure 9. Zhang Xiaohong grass cloth art embroidery works “Xiangfuren”

Embroidered workwomen explore actively on the basis of traditional embroidery method, it adapt to grass cloth of texture characteristic, form its a unique of embroidery features. Grass cloth embroidery country-level inheritors Ms. Zhang Xiaohong, use flexible of needles applicant onto the grass cloth embroidery. Grass cloth of texture have hale and hearty of futures, embroidered thread puncture on the cloth, prone to hanged hair, brushed, broken. In order to overcome these defects, through shorten appropriately embroider line length, or long-short needle embroider method (Figure 10), adapt the method of line pressing lock pin, or lock needle embroider method (Figure 11). Grass cloth of texture show rough of characters, on the performance facial expressions, draw lessons from Su embroidery of stack-up techniques, the thread was twisting or splitting, form thickness changeable thread used in embroidery method. Coarse thread tracing rough contour, fine detail by repeatedly splitting thread decrypting, the key is outstanding, distinct.

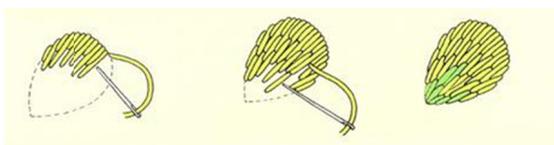


Figure 10. Long-short needle embroider method

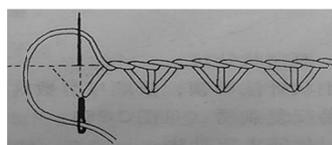


Figure 11. Lock needle embroider method

### 3.5 Clear Up and Pack

After embroidering finished, begin to clear up and pack. Because grass cloth have hairiness and rough of appearance characteristics, it need hot pressed on the embroidered surface. Embroidery works can not be leave wet places, nor insolate in the sunshine, to prevent grass cloth skin texture and color of change. Embroidery works should be pack as soon as possible. Embroidery pieces need add edge angle, its color coordinated with embroidered pieces of content (Li, 2015).

## 4. Conclusion and Suggestions

The use of ramie in China has a history of over 6000 years, before the song dynasty, ramie textile into grass cloth is a kind of main apparel fabrics. On grass cloth painting and embroidery, can convey the etiquette, also has the dual function of beautiful and practical. Under the impact of modern mechanical products on the traditional manual, the traditional folk embroidery began to move towards the road of transformation. During the heritage and development, Jiangxi grass cloth embroidery workwomen give grass cloth new look, and form grass cloth art embroidery. It build on the basis of traditional Ma embroidery, assimilated a variety of embroidery techniques,

combined with grass cloth of embroidered bottom which have primitive and simplicity of characteristics, make the famous painting as a theme, the formation of mellow and elegant style, which turn into the category of art appreciation. Grass cloth art embroidery has the soul of a traditional culture, local characteristics and modern technology. However, if it only depict the calligraphy and painting art, this would appear single of trend. Expand the subject, it should have a lot of space to development.

Grass cloth embroidery condensed the wisdom of the ancient Chinese, also contains the cultural gene of the Chinese nation, is the precious material and cultural wealth our ancestors remains down. In the environment of the market state, YuZhou embroidery workshop of grass cloth art embroidery to achieve the success of grass cloth embroidery transformation. However, to realize the sustainable development of the contemporary, not only dependent on the government level “blood transfusion” type of support, such as in the support of policy, capital, talent. But also as embroidered handicraft industry itself need keep pace with the times in the creative way, through the inheritance and innovation to restore their own “blood transfusion” function, with the help of own strength to development opportunities.

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