

# ***Fashion Expression and Design of Miao Embroidery in the Contemporary Context***

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**Abstract:** Miao embroidery, as one of the traditional Chinese handicrafts, has always been concerned and loved by people. However, in the contemporary social environment, Miao embroidery culture and design are facing many challenges and opportunities. It is necessary to draw nutrition from tradition and pay attention to development and innovation. The purpose of this study is to explore the fashion expression and design of Miao embroidery in the contemporary context, and to deeply analyze the design principles, technical characteristics, characteristics and trends of Miao embroidery, as well as the design education and industrial development of Miao embroidery, so as to provide theoretical support and practical reference for the development of Miao embroidery fashion expression and design. This paper adopts literature review, case analysis, field research and other research methods to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth discussion and analysis on the fashion expression and design of Miao embroidery. The conclusion of this study is that the fashion expression and design of Miao embroidery need to pay attention to innovation on the basis of tradition, dig out its own cultural connotation, dig deeper into the design principles and technical characteristics of Miao embroidery, and inject modern elements with the times to realize the fashion expression and design value of Miao embroidery. At the same time, the design education and industrial development of Miao embroidery should also be paid attention to, and the development and growth of Miao embroidery should be promoted continuously. This paper comprehensively analyzes the characteristics, trends, education and industry of Miao embroidery fashion expression and design in the contemporary context, and provides new ideas and directions for the inheritance and innovation of Miao embroidery culture. In the future, we should continue to pay attention to the development of Miao embroidery and further tap its potential and value.

Historically, the Miao people formed a tradition of embroidering patterns on clothes during the three great migrations from north to south. Each unforgettable pattern was sewn with the memories of generations of ancestors [1]. Nowadays, against the backdrop of cultural diversity, Miao embroidery culture, as a core component of China's traditional culture, has gradually gained more attention. The fundamental embroidery techniques consist of flat stitch, counted-thread work, and cross-stitch, with counted-thread being the most prevalent method [2].

With the rise of the fashion industry, Miao embroidery elements have been widely integrated into cultural and creative product designs, gradually developing into a dominant trend in ethnic cultural design. However, this field still faces issues such as monotonous expression techniques and lack of

design sophistication, which require further in-depth research and improvement.

Therefore, this paper takes the fashion expression and design of Miao embroidery as its research core, exploring the expressive techniques and design concepts of Miao embroidery culture in the modern context. Through in-depth excavation and summarization of the aesthetic characteristics of Miao embroidery, and integrating them with modern design concepts, this study explores new modes of Miao embroidery expression, showcasing the beauty of Miao embroidery through modern artistic techniques [3]. Simultaneously, this paper investigates how to expand modern product design ideas and formal languages, providing new pathways and support for the inheritance and innovation of Miao embroidery culture.

In terms of research methods, this paper comprehensively employs literature review, field surveys, and design practice to systematically study the history, development, and forms of expression of Miao embroidery culture. By refining and transforming Miao embroidery elements, it aims to create Miao embroidery products with a sense of design and fashion, while providing references and inspiration for practitioners in Miao embroidery research and application.

In summary, this paper aims to explore how to integrate traditional Miao embroidery elements with modern design concepts from the perspective of fashion expression and design, uncover the aesthetic qualities of Miao embroidery, and create Miao embroidery products with a sense of design and fashion, thereby providing support and assistance to practitioners in their research and application of Miao embroidery.

This paper focuses on the fashion expression and design of Miao embroidery in the contemporary context. Miao embroidery is one of China's folk handicrafts, with a history of over 5,000 years and profound cultural significance. It has been included in the national list of intangible cultural heritage. Compared to other handicrafts and cultural heritage items, Miao embroidery's design principles and technical characteristics possess a unique style.

## **1. History and Cultural Significance of Miao Embroidery**

### **1.1 Origins and Development of Miao Embroidery**

Miao embroidery, as a traditional hand-embroidered art of China's Miao ethnic group, originated during the Xia and Shang periods around 2200 BCE. It has gone through stages of inception, development, peak, and revival, gradually evolving into a distinctive cultural symbol.

During the inception stage of Miao embroidery, the earliest techniques involved extracting natural dyes from wild fruits and vegetables to dye threads, which were then embroidered onto clothing for warmth and aesthetic purposes. At this stage, Miao embroidery had simple forms, consisting merely of stitching threads onto fabric to create basic patterns or text.

With historical progression, Miao embroidery entered the development stage, where techniques improved and patterns became more complex and diverse. The color palette expanded from monochrome to vibrant hues, and applications extended beyond clothing to include household items such as quilts, tablecloths, and curtains. Influenced by geographical and ethnic folk factors, Miao embroidery formed distinctive schools of style during its self-development and refinement.

During its peak stage, Miao embroidery, after thousands of years of evolution, achieved masterful craftsmanship. Its exquisite needlework, rich patterns, and unique style became widely celebrated. As a distinctive embroidery tradition of the Miao ethnic group, Miao embroidery gradually gained acceptance among other regions and ethnic groups, becoming a treasure of Chinese and global embroidery culture.

However, with societal changes, Miao embroidery entered a revival stage. After years of effort, it has stepped onto an open and international stage. The introduction of new materials and technologies has enhanced its market recognition and appeal. Simultaneously, Miao embroidery has become an

artwork that blends traditional culture with fashion elements, permeating modern daily life and acquiring new meanings and values.

In summary, Miao embroidery has preserved timeless splendor throughout history, radiating the brilliance of embroidery art. Its historical and cultural significance has become an integral part of Chinese traditional culture, handicrafts, and aesthetic concepts. It not only inspires people's love for traditional culture but also shoulders the social responsibility of inheriting and promoting Chinese culture.

## **1.2 The Status and Role of Miao Embroidery in Folk Culture**

Miao embroidery is one of China's traditional hand-embroidered crafts, originating from the folk embroidery culture of the Miao ethnic group. It boasts a long history and profound cultural heritage. In folk culture, Miao embroidery is an indispensable element in the production and daily life of the Miao people, holding significant status and serving important functions.

First, as a traditional handicraft, Miao embroidery integrates elements of local Miao culture, folk customs, religious beliefs, and daily life. It showcases the cultural spirit and lifestyle of the Miao people, reflecting the diversity and richness of Chinese culture. Through its patterns, colors, and styles, Miao embroidery conveys cultural messages, ethnic spirit, and aesthetic ideals of the Miao people, making it a vital component of Chinese embroidery culture.

Second, Miao embroidery also holds high practical value and social significance in folk culture. It is widely used in clothing, bedding, furniture, and accessories, becoming a daily necessity for the Miao people. The embroidery techniques, patterns, and colors of Miao embroidery are highly favored by consumers, making it a popular product in cultural tourism and contributing significantly to the economic development of Miao regions.

Finally, Miao embroidery also plays an important role in the fashion industry. With the evolution of times and cultural exchanges, Miao embroidery has gradually entered the lives and fashion spheres of modern people. Due to its unique embroidery techniques, inherited cultural connotations, and exquisite designs, Miao embroidery has garnered increasing attention and appreciation in the fashion world. At the same time, the modernization, personalization, and artistic innovation of Miao embroidery have injected new vitality and momentum into the development and inheritance of embroidery culture.

In conclusion, Miao embroidery holds a crucial position and role in Chinese embroidery culture. In folk culture, it is regarded as an essential component of Miao culture, carrying rich cultural connotations and historical significance. In modern society, with its unique cultural essence, traditional craftsmanship, and contemporary fashion designs, Miao embroidery has become an important medium for showcasing cultural confidence and ethnic spirit.

## **1.3 The Importance of Miao Embroidery in the Fashion Field**

As an important art form in Chinese traditional culture, Miao embroidery has always held a significant position in the fashion field. Especially in recent years, with the rise of cultural confidence in China and the rapid development of the cultural industry, the fashion value of Miao embroidery has been rediscovered and explored, gradually becoming a hot element in the fashion circle.

First, in the field of apparel design, Miao embroidery is often used to make robes, skirts, embroidered shoes, and other clothing items, earning the reputation as one of the representatives of Chinese traditional culture. With the rapid development of China's cultural industry, Miao embroidery, as a traditional handicraft, has also made significant progress. Its application in apparel design has gradually moved toward refinement to better meet the needs of modern consumers.

Second, in the field of home decor, Miao embroidery is also widely used. In recent years, more

and more people have been seeking unique home decor items with local cultural characteristics. Driven by this demand, Miao embroidery textiles have been increasingly applied in home decoration, becoming a common method for embellishing living spaces.

Additionally, in the field of fashion accessories, Miao embroidery is highly favored. Handwoven and embroidered Miao embroidery products have been incorporated into fashion accessory designs, becoming a popular element, especially beloved by young people. Miao handicrafts possess a distinctive style and can blend well with modern design elements, which is why Miao embroidery accessories continue to gain attention in the fashion field.

In summary, Miao embroidery holds high value and broad application prospects in the fashion field. It is not only an important part of Chinese traditional culture but also a valuable resource for the cultural and creative industry. Therefore, we should pay more attention to Miao embroidery handicrafts, continuously explore their potential in the fashion field, and strive to let more people understand and appreciate this beautiful cultural heritage, contributing to its inheritance and promotion.

## **2. Design Principles and Technical Characteristics of Miao Embroidery**

### **2.1 Aesthetic Principles and Style Characteristics of Miao Embroidery Design**

As an outstanding traditional hand-embroidered art in China, Miao embroidery is widely loved by people for its fresh and simple style and unique innovations. To achieve the fashion expression and innovative design of Miao embroidery, the key lies in grasping its aesthetic principles and style characteristics.

The aesthetic principles of Miao embroidery design mainly include color coordination, line application, pattern conception, and embroidery craftsmanship. Its style characteristics manifest the unique charm of traditional Chinese ethnic handicrafts, characterized by intricate details and distinctive features. Simplicity reveals complex conceptions, breaking the monotony and dullness of traditional embroidery designs, presenting a lively, fresh, and natural beauty with a unique artistic charm. This inspires designers and consumers alike to cherish Miao embroidery and inherit traditional ethnic culture.

Among the style characteristics of Miao embroidery, the use of lines is particularly noteworthy. The lines in Miao embroidery are clear, smooth, orderly, and powerful, harmoniously natural. The beauty of the design is showcased through the coordination of lines and overall colors. Pattern conception is a crucial aspect of Miao embroidery design. The patterns are highly complex, with geometric shapes interweaving and transforming, becoming the protagonists of the design. Whether for decoration, emotional expression, or cultural communication, patterns play a key role, which is also the essential element for integrating Miao embroidery into fashion design.

The craftsmanship of embroidery is the soul of Miao embroidery design. Details in Miao embroidery significantly impact the design, and skillful use of details can yield unexpected effects. Moreover, the "skilled artisans" of Miao embroidery are vital talents for inheriting and promoting this ethnic craft culture. They not only master the details and techniques of Miao embroidery but also elevate it to a higher artistic level. The ingenuity of these artisans successfully brings the traditional charm of Miao embroidery into the modern design context. In Miao embroidery practice, color application is highly deliberate, and the stitching techniques demonstrate remarkable depth and complexity. A prime example is cross-stitch embroidery (known as counted-thread work), which requires no pre-designed patterns. Instead, artisans create directly on the fabric by following the warp and weft threads. This technique not only tests the embroiderer's skill but also embodies the improvisational and innovative nature of Miao embroidery. [4]

The color system of Miao embroidery is renowned for its bold contrasts and rich layering effects.

It typically combines highly saturated primary colors like red, blue, and yellow with neutral tones such as black and white, creating vibrant yet harmonious color relationships [5] (as see in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).

In conclusion, the aesthetic principles and style characteristics of Miao embroidery design greatly influence its fashion expression and design. By skillfully utilizing the details of Miao embroidery, designers can uncover more beauty, break traditional constraints, and infuse designs with greater vitality. This will also have profound significance for the inheritance and development of Miao embroidery.



A female dress with the counted cross stitch and Batik (the Miao ethnic group)

Fig. 1 Miao embroidery costume: Wax-resist dyed women's attire



Hundred-bird embroidered costume (the Miao ethnic group)

Fig. 2 Miao embroidery costume: Hundred-Birds Garment

## 2.2 Embroidery Techniques and Process of Miao Embroidery

Miao embroidery is a general term for the folk embroidered works of the Miao ethnic group and is one of China's outstanding folk embroidery crafts. The style of Miao embroidery is vivid, lively,



imaginative, and versatile. The embroidery techniques and process of Miao embroidery are the sources of its unique artistic charm.

First, the embroidery techniques of Miao embroidery are one of its unique artistic expressions. Miao embroiderers pierce colorful threads through silk or satin to create moving patterns. Its most distinctive feature is the use of straight-line stitching, also known as "thread-piercing embroidery." Sometimes, thread ends are snapped off to maintain neat and beautiful lines. Second, the materials, color combinations, and skillful use of threads in Miao embroidery are indispensable parts of the design process. The threads used in Miao embroidery are diverse, including brocade threads, gold and silver threads, etc. The color combinations follow unique conventions, such as red symbolizing passion and fire, yellow representing gold and nobility, and blue expressing the sky and ocean. The proper use of these materials and colors can effectively highlight the charm and beauty of the embroidered patterns.

Second, the process of Miao embroidery is one of the representatives of Miao folk art. The process includes essential steps such as thread cutting, thread binding, embroidery stitching, tracing, and cutting. These steps are the necessary path for creating Miao embroidery. The most basic tools for Miao embroidery are needles and threads. Needles come in various sizes, and threads vary in material and thickness. Thread binding is one of the prominent steps in the Miao embroidery process, where threads are manually tied and attached to the silk fabric. During thread binding, thread ends are neatly combed with a small comb and then firmly tied to the silk. Proper thread binding ensures that the embroidered Miao patterns are more beautiful and captivating.

Finally, the embroidery techniques and process of Miao embroidery provide a solid foundation for the development and progress of Miao embroidery art. The patterns of Miao embroidery are exquisite and elegant, deeply loved and appreciated by people. More importantly, in the trends of modern society, Miao embroidery has become a creative and unique fashion element and thematic design. As shown in Fig.3, the designs no longer adhere to the previous black-and-white color scheme, instead embracing a rich and diverse palette. Designers meticulously select Miao embroidery patterns with cultural symbolism—such as butterflies, birds, and flowers—which carry profound cultural meaning while gaining recognition in the design world for their distinctive aesthetic. Through reinterpretation and innovative redesign, the application of these traditional patterns in fashion has become more diversified and modernized. The application of Miao embroidery techniques and process in contemporary art design is limitless, injecting continuous creative vitality into the inheritance and development of Miao folk art [6].

In summary, the embroidery techniques and process of Miao embroidery are indispensable aspects of Miao embroidery art. Through its unique artistic expressions, careful use of materials and color combinations, and adherence to, inheritance of, and innovation in craftsmanship, the sophistication and charm of Miao embroidery artworks can be realized.



Fig. 3 Color and decorative pattern designs of Miao embroidery

## 2.3 Materials and Color Techniques of Miao Embroidery

As a distinctive traditional ethnic handicraft, the design process of Miao embroidery highlights two key elements: materials and color combinations. Therefore, designers must master diverse materials and color techniques to ensure the creation of Miao embroidery works with high aesthetic value.

First, in terms of material selection for Miao embroidery works, natural fiber materials such as ramie, cotton-linen, linen, and silk are commonly used. Among them, ramie is the preferred traditional material due to its tough texture, elasticity, and durability. The use of other natural materials like cotton-linen, linen, or silk can create unique textures and feels. During material selection, designers must flexibly combine different materials based on the style and aesthetic requirements of the work. For example, to highlight the vibrant colors of Miao embroidery works, white-based colored ramie fabric can be chosen. Its clean, clear, saturated, and bright colors provide an eye-catching visual experience for viewers.

Furthermore, in terms of color combinations for Miao embroidery works, like Fig. 4 designers must consider style coordination and follow basic principles of color matching, such as color tone, contrast coordination, and harmony of brightness and hue. When selecting colors, the performance of different materials under various lighting conditions and the stability of dyes must be considered to prevent color changes or dye cracking. At the same time, designers should pay attention to the rhythm and sense of order in color combinations to avoid monotony or chaos. For example, to express the natural and rustic style of Miao embroidery, works dominated by green and brown tones can be used to convey a natural, elegant, and simple style. To showcase the luxurious and vibrant style of Miao embroidery, works dominated by gold and red tones can be chosen to present a magnificent, gorgeous, and passionate ambiance.

In conclusion, the rich material choices and skillful color techniques in Miao embroidery design endow the works with unique artistic value. Designers must continuously explore and innovate, combining traditional techniques with modern aesthetics to inject new vitality into the inheritance and development of Miao embroidery art.



Fig. 4: Color combinations in Miao embroidery works

## 3. Characteristics and Trends of Contemporary Miao Embroidery Fashion Expression

### 3.1 Cultural Connotations and Aesthetic Characteristics of Contemporary Miao Embroidery Fashion

Contemporary Miao embroidery fashion, as a unique art form, centers on its cultural connotations and aesthetic characteristics, which also distinguish it significantly from traditional Miao embroidery.

First, in terms of cultural connotations, contemporary Miao embroidery fashion delves deeply into and elevates traditional Miao embroidery. Through innovations in patterns and colors, it perfectly

presents the rich cultural heritage of the Miao ethnic group. Second, in terms of aesthetic characteristics, contemporary Miao embroidery fashion is more modern and international, blending diverse cultural elements to showcase unique fashion appeal. For example, Miao embroidery patterns are no longer limited to traditional bright colors like red, green, blue, and yellow. Neutral tones such as beige and gray-blue are widely used, reflecting a trend toward refined and understated aesthetics.

Moreover, contemporary Miao embroidery fashion plays a vital role in reviving and rejuvenating traditional Miao embroidery in terms of cultural connotations and aesthetic characteristics. During the design process, contemporary Miao embroidery fashion skillfully integrates traditional and modern, domestic and international elements. For instance, modern design techniques and craftsmanship are employed to simplify and modernize traditional Miao embroidery patterns, presenting a sense of fashion and contemporaneity while retaining distinct traditional Miao embroidery characteristics. In pattern design, contemporary Miao embroidery fashion boldly innovates and reinterprets traditional motifs, using modern artistic techniques like graphic design and three-dimensional sculpture to endow ancient Miao embroidery patterns with a sense of fashion and artistic value.

In summary, the reason contemporary Miao embroidery fashion is highly recognized and sought after lies in its continuous absorption, integration, and elevation during the inheritance and development of traditional culture. Through modern techniques, it presents unique fashion characteristics, showcasing profound cultural heritage and rich fashion connotations.

### **3.2 Innovation and Practice in Contemporary Miao Embroidery Fashion Design**

President Xi emphasized the need to "consolidate systematic protection of intangible cultural heritage" [7] and to "bring more cultural relics and heritage to life, fostering a social atmosphere conducive to passing on Chinese civilization" [8]. In contemporary society, fashion, as a global cultural phenomenon, has become an indispensable part of people's lives. Miao embroidery, as a traditional Chinese handicraft, has gradually embarked on a path of fashion in the modern cultural context. Contemporary Miao embroidery fashion design not only emphasizes the inheritance of traditional Miao embroidery techniques but also caters to modern aesthetic needs, innovates fashion elements, and integrates Miao embroidery art into modern life.

The innovation in contemporary Miao embroidery fashion design is mainly reflected in the following aspects. First, designers have more choices and flexibility in styles and patterns. Traditional Miao embroidery styles and patterns are fixed and passed down systematically, making innovation difficult. In contemporary Miao embroidery fashion design, designers can freely select and create various styles of Miao embroidery patterns, enhancing the innovation and fashion sense of the designs.

Second, the incorporation of fashion elements is another innovative aspect of contemporary Miao embroidery design. Fashion elements include colors, patterns, shapes, textures, and more, which can blend with traditional Miao embroidery elements, giving the works a sense of fashion and youthfulness.

Additionally, the practice of contemporary Miao embroidery fashion design is equally important. Modern designers and artists are integrating Miao embroidery techniques with contemporary fashion elements through research and innovation, developing products tailored to modern market demands. This cross-disciplinary collaboration has infused new vitality into Miao embroidery, allowing this ancient craft to shine with renewed brilliance in the context of globalization [9].

In practice, designers must consider the combination of Miao embroidery techniques and modern materials, which requires enhancing their innovative capabilities and craftsmanship. Only through practice, understanding the characteristics of materials and techniques, can designers achieve better design and innovation.



In conclusion, contemporary Miao embroidery fashion design must possess both innovation and practicality. Innovation is not only reflected in design but also in the innovation of traditional techniques and the integration of fashion elements, enabling Miao embroidery culture to better adapt to the needs of modern development. In practice, designers must improve their craftsmanship, continuously experiment, and explore to ensure the sustainability and innovation of Miao embroidery fashion development, for example, Fig. 5 showcases innovative designs combining Miao embroidery with silver ornaments and qipao, presenting fresh visual effects.



Fig. 5 Innovative designs of Miao embroidery

### 3.3 Market Development and Commercial Operation of Contemporary Miao Embroidery Fashion

At present, China's Miao embroidery fashion has achieved remarkable results in market development, with its artistic and commercial value increasingly prominent, gradually becoming a focus of public attention. The continuous expansion of market demand has undoubtedly become an important engine driving the development trend of Miao embroidery fashion.

The market for Miao embroidery fashion can be broadly divided into two main areas: the traditional cultural market and the fashion industry market. In the traditional cultural market, Miao embroidery fashion appears as an artwork, showcasing its profound historical and cultural heritage, and thus is highly sought after by art collectors and cultural enthusiasts. In the fashion industry market, Miao embroidery fashion focuses more on practicality and commercial operation, appearing as a fashion design brand. Additionally, with the continuous rise of global environmental awareness, consumer demand for products rich in cultural connotations and eco-friendly concepts has shown sustained growth, providing strong support for the development of Miao embroidery fashion.

However, during market operations, Miao embroidery fashion also faces a series of challenges. First, efforts must be made to meet market demand and create competitive products. Second, resource allocation must be optimized, and branding must be strengthened to foster the cultivation and development of the Miao embroidery fashion market. At the same time, the Miao embroidery fashion industry must achieve deep integration in the industrial chain, improve production efficiency, and reduce costs to meet the growing demands of consumers. These challenges undoubtedly urge the Miao embroidery fashion industry to reform and innovate in multiple aspects.

Overall, the market expansion and commercial operation of Miao embroidery fashion are of great significance to its development. The Miao embroidery fashion industry should continue to strengthen brand marketing and innovative design, enhance resource integration, promote the sustainable development of the industry, and continuously expand its influence in the market. On this basis, the Miao embroidery fashion industry can explore development strategies that combine academic discourse, organically integrating traditional culture with modern aesthetics, aiming to achieve the dual goals of cultural inheritance and innovation in the process of commercialization.

## 4. Conclusion

Miao embroidery, as one of China's traditional hand-embroidered crafts, has gradually become a darling of the fashion world after modern design transformations. To explore the current status and achievements of Miao embroidery fashion expression and design, the following aspects can be examined.

First, the brand building of Miao embroidery fashion design has achieved initial success. With the vigorous development of the Miao embroidery fashion design industry and the emergence of numerous high-end domestic and international brands, Miao embroidery has gradually become recognized and accepted by more and more consumers. At the same time, the application of Miao embroidery in high-end customization, fashion, home decor, and other fields has also been widely promoted and utilized.

Second, Miao embroidery fashion design is gradually stepping onto the international stage. In today's culturally diverse world, Miao embroidery, as one of the representatives of Chinese ethnic culture, has begun to make its mark on the international stage. Many internationally renowned fashion designers have adopted Miao embroidery as a design theme, and elements of Miao embroidery frequently appear on the runways of major international fashion weeks, expanding broader spaces for the promotion and inheritance of Miao embroidery.

Furthermore, Miao embroidery fashion design has formed rich and diverse design styles and forms. In recent years, more and more designers have entered the field of Miao embroidery fashion design, and their design concepts and styles have injected new vitality into Miao embroidery. Today, Miao embroidery designs are no longer limited to traditional patterns and colors but are gradually shifting toward modern minimalism, avant-garde fashion, personalized diversity, and other design styles.

In summary, Miao embroidery fashion expression and design have achieved certain accomplishments, and future development will embrace even broader prospects. On the foundation of inheriting traditional cultural elements, greater emphasis should be placed on practical innovation, continuously exploring and advancing the development of Miao embroidery fashion expression and design.

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