

# Discover the Beauty of Huangmei Cross-stitch

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**Abstract.** In Huangmei, Huangmei cross-stitch, Huangmei opera and Zen Buddhism are called "The three most precious treasures of Huangmei". As an important part of the intangible cultural heritage of Jingchu, Huangmei cross-stitch is defined as a traditional folk embroidery craft with a long history and strong decorative effect. The handicraft form of folk art is produced by the traditional natural economy of farming society. Throughout the development history of folk art in the traditional society, it not only truthfully reflects the living customs of the traditional society at that time, but also conveys to us the aesthetic taste and emotional pursuit of the traditional craftsman. Due to the influence of local and surrounding areas cultural arts and humanistic aesthetics for a long time, Huangmei cross-stitch has gradually been endowed with more profound significance under the background of the integration and infiltration of various cultures. Huangmei cross-stitch not only reflects the powerful creativity of human beings, but also shows the extraordinary wisdom of human beings. Through the classic cross-stitch works with the beauty of practicality, decoration and humanity, we can find that the colorful and far-reaching patterns and themes not only show the aesthetic taste of the workers, but also show their positive attitude and spiritual sustention for the pursuit of a better life.

**Keywords:** Huangmei Cross-stitch; Traditional Culture; Beauty.

## 1. Introduction

Huangmei cross-stitch is a traditional Chinese folk embroidery craft and is classified as a national intangible cultural heritage of traditional fine arts. Due to its profound and long history of development and strong sense of decoration, it is also called set flower, cross stitch, cross stitch, etc., compared with embroidery, paying more attention to couching is one of its characteristics.

Among all types of cross-stitch factions, Huangmei cross-stitch originated earliest and has been widely spread among local and surrounding areas' folk because of its unique representation and influence. Just as the saying goes, "women in Huangmei are good at making cross-stitch". Huangmei cross-stitch originated in the Tang and Song dynasties and flourished in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. It takes the black cloth that the laborer spin personally as the base, through using needles to pick colorful silk threads on the black cloth of the warp and weft intersecting grid, finally formed Mosaic pattern with bright colors and a strong sense of three-dimensional. Influenced by Huangmei's unique regional culture, local people's traditional customs, aesthetic taste, spiritual pursuit, and various human and geographical environments in surrounding areas, Huangmei cross-stitch has a wide range of patterns and themes, which conveys profound meanings. After years of continuous development and innovation, Huangmei cross-stitch finally forms a kind of unique local style with abstract romance, bright colors, and full composition, as well as a kind of Unsophisticated and rugged, vigorous and simple ethnic characteristics. Because of Huangmei cross-stitch the present a lofty aesthetic pursuit, and positive style of humanity and art, with a continuous development, it has become one of the most representative local specialties. Huangmei cross-stitch was approved by The State Council on May 20, 2006 and listed in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage list. On December 29, 2010, the former General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine approved the implementation of geographical indication product protection for "Huangmei cross-stitch".

## 2. The Three Beauties of Huangmei Cross-stitch

Art comes from life and is above life. The reason why Huangmei cross-stitch could be able to get developed and innovated in the long river of history is influenced to a certain extent by the geographical environment and cultural environment of the local and surrounding areas. In the context

of the integration and infiltration of various cultures, Huangmei cross-stitch has gradually been endowed with more profound significance. Huangmei County is located at the junction of Hubei, Anhui and Jiangxi provinces. It was also known as "On the borders between the two kingdoms Wu and Chu" in ancient times. Under the influence of such a strong atmosphere, Huangmei folk people had a very strong spiritual pursuit and psychological sustenance for such prayers as exorcism, god's blessing and safety. The continuous development and growth of Huangmei cross-stitch are complementary to the local traditional folk customs, and it is the unique traditional folk culture of Huangmei that has endowed Huangmei cross-stitch with the vitality of traditional Chinese culture the great added value of art aesthetics. Huangmei cross-stitch is an important part of Jingchu culture with its ever-changing pattern design, colorful color collocation and full and standard layout composition. At the beginning, Huangmei cross-stitch was only used by local rural women to sew and repair clothes. After years of precipitation and evolution, it eventually formed a unique traditional folk handicraft skill. In Huangmei, local rural women are generally good at making cross-stitch. As the saying goes, "women in Huangmei are good at making cross-stitch". Over time, Huangmei cross-stitch has gradually become a carrier of local culture. They not only reflect the powerful creativity of human beings, show the extraordinary wisdom of human beings, but also show the broad masses of laboring people's artistic aesthetics, the pursuit of interest. Folk art is the product of mass aesthetic pursuit on the basis of people's satisfaction with practical functions. Through folk art and culture, we can not only learn and understand traditional artistic expression methods, but also explore and summarize some principles and laws of artistic expression. Finally, we can summarize Huangmei cross-stitch into three beauties: practical beauty, decorative beauty and cultural beauty.

### **2.1 The Beauty of Practical**

Huangmei geographical resources are very superior, the lower half of the area is impact plain, so the quality of cotton produced locally is very good. In that era of traditional self-sufficient natural economy, this provided a strong material basis for the germination and development of Huangmei cross-stitch. The allocation of natural resources also determines the daily living habits of local people. In xinkai, Hushibai, Konglong and other areas along the river, almost every family could be able to spin cotton and make cross-stitch in the age that men plowed the fields and women wove cloth. The cross-stitch works made by rural women who are good at making cross-stitch are both practical and decorative, and the trend of making cross-stitch has become popular in all surrounding areas. From the beginning, it was only used to decorate headscarves, but as time went by it gradually evolved into a sewing skill used by local rural women to repair clothes, they skillfully put clothes collar, cuffs, trouser-knees and other easily worn parts with colorful threads to sew the pattern is both firm and elegant. As cross-stitch techniques become more and more widely known, the scope of cross-stitch gradually extends to all aspects of daily necessities such as headscarves, clothes and quilt covers. Huangmei cross-stitch has become more and more influential and even become a unique traditional folk embroidery craft. the most outstanding characteristic of folk craft is the perfect combination of practicality and decoration. Huangmei cross-stitch is no exception. It pursues beauty of all kinds of decoration on the basis of meeting practical needs. at that time when there was lack of beauty, they decorated themselves by mending various patterns on clothes, headscarves and other daily articles of clothing. The positive spirit of pursuing beauty and creating beauty displayed by them made the craft of cross-stitch endure and spread widely.

### **2.2 The Beauty of Decoration**

Huangmei cross-stitch has bright colors and rich decorations. Its patterns can be roughly divided into four categories: group flowers, side flowers, corner flowers and filled flowers. The group flowers located in the visual center are mostly presented in the form of symmetry and square continuity. The surrounding side flowers and corner flowers are presented in centrifugal form, so that their orientation is directed towards the central point of vision. Perfect patterns also need color to render, creating visual impact by using different colors to make strong contrast. The person who makes the stitch uses

a needle to sew on the cotton, through color matching, that makes Huangmei cross-stitch works look like a flowing painting. Classic Huangmei cross-stitch works are mostly made of dark cloth with various colors of cotton threads. In the early stage, Huangmei cross-stitch was mainly plain color, and it gradually became colorful. Nowadays, the colorful is better known and has the highest commercial and artistic value. After long-term development and innovation, Huangmei cross-stitch can be matched with corresponding colors according to different themes. The most striking contrast is between wedding dowries and funeral offerings. For example, the cross-stitch of wedding dowry is generally used in bright red, pink and peach colors; The cross-stitch of funeral and sacrificial objects is generally in plain color, just like black and white. Huangmei cross-stitch has become an important part of local culture, local people are decorated with cross-stitch at important moments in their lives from birth to death. During the five ceremony of life (nativity, coming-of-age, wedding, birthday and funeral), people always through the use of Huangmei cross-stitch to convey their emotional pursuit and spiritual sustenance.

Huangmei cross-stitch has a full and symmetrical layout, its composition is characterized by the beauty of symmetry and harmony pursued by China since ancient times. The structure layout of Huangmei cross-stitch can be divided into up-down symmetry and left-right symmetry. This form of artistic expression can be traced back to the architecture of the Tang Dynasty in China, where the rigorous and tidy layout reflects people's aesthetic attitude and spiritual pursuit. Huangmei cross-stitch is also greatly influenced by it as a traditional folk handicraft. In addition to symmetrical composition, repetition is also one of the composition forms of Huangmei cross-stitch. The pattern is enriched by the repeated transformation of symmetry and quadrilateral continuity, although the final visual effect is very complicated but it is particularly harmonious and unified. In addition, the picture is filled with a variety of edge flowers and corner flowers, which makes the picture layout fuller. The concept of "completeness" is widely advocated among the people. On the one hand, many Huangmei cross-stitch squares are a combination of squares and circles, which intangibly inherits the ancient Chinese traditional motto about people and things, making Huangmei cross-stitch a carrier for inheriting the fine traditions of Chinese culture; On the other hand, the polka dot pattern, centripetal pattern and circular rotation pattern in the cross-stitch pattern all express people's yearning for a happy and complete life. Although the composition of Huangmei cross-stitch is regular and the layout is rigorous, it does not mean that it is rigid. Through the skillful and flexible use of different elements, the complex and gorgeous Huangmei cross-stitch works with high artistic value are finally presented to the public.

There is a saying that one side of the needle is called picking, and two sides of the needle is called embroidery. Cross-stitch workers make cross-stitch patterns by crossing back and forth the warp and weft threads of the base cloth, and ensure that the stitches between each two are equidistance. Finally, the cross-stitch works are presented to the public with exactly the same patterns on both sides. For this reason, the unique and exquisite Huangmei cross-stitch is also called "double-sided embroidery".

### **2.3 The Beauty of Humanity**

As the saying goes, one loess cultivates one person, and the other culture cultivates one person. The diverse patterns of Huangmei cross-stitch show the broad and profound local culture. By absorbing the culture and art of the surrounding provinces and cities and combining with the local customs and traditional characteristics, Huangmei cross-stitch is endowed with a unique artistic charm. "The picture must be intentional, the meaning must be auspicious" is vividly illustrated in Huangmei cross-stitch works. The pattern theme of Huangmei cross stitch is subjective, which is characterized by diversity and complexity due to the aesthetic level, cultural background, living environment and other objective factors of the cross-stitch artist. The design theme of Huangmei cross-stitch is not only a direct reflection of cross-stitch workers' vision of a better life, but also a depiction of the positive mental outlook of the society. It vividly presents the local social customs, disaster changes, fairy tales, popular operas and other aspects of the content, and finally forms a wonderful and deeply moving social style paintings.

Huangmei County, located at the border of Hubei, Anhui and Jiangxi provinces, was also known as "Wu's head and Chu's tail" in ancient times. Influenced by Wu and Chu culture for a long time, Huangmei not only has the spirit of "pioneering" but also contains the feelings of "smart and romantic" of Chu culture; At the same time, Huangmei County has been a place of contention among soldiers since ancient times. Patriotic soldier Yue Fei's army was stationed here, and Yue's boxing was founded and carried forward here, so Huangmei County was also crowned as the hometown of martial arts. This special geographical environment has laid a good foundation for the local culture of Huangmei, its classic works have a strong cultural flavor of Chu. Visually, most of the colors of Huangmei cross-stitch are black and red, which form a sharp contrast. Black and red are the color styles of Chu culture. Chu culture is a typical representative of romanticism and advocates the spirit of totemism. In Chinese history, the representative of Chu culture is dragon and phoenix pattern, this also reflects people's love for nature. The animal patterns in cross-stitch works all contain auspicious and happy connotations.

Huangmei cross-stitch is also deeply influenced by local religious culture. The fact that "the Qihuang zen is famous for his high voice in buddhist affairs" is enough to show the unshakable status of Huangmei in the history of Chinese Buddhism. In the heyday of the Tang Dynasty, the fourth and fifth patriarchs of the Zen sect preached in Huangmei, so Huangmei was dubbed "Little Tianzhu". In particular, the legend of the fifth and sixth patriarchs of the Zen Sect is more widely known locally. Buddhist culture has gradually infiltrated into the daily life and habits of local people in the long spread and development. Many buddhism-themed patterns are displayed in Huangmei cross-stitch works. For example, the lotus that grows in mud but clean is the embodiment of sanctity and clarity. The view advocated by Zen Buddhism is keeping pure mind.

In addition, mythological figures in Buddhist stories are often presented as cross-stitch patterns, for example, the classic music of Huangmei Opera "seven fairies come down to earth" "Execution at Outer Gate of Government Official" "Lady General Mu Takes Command" "Be sworn brothers" "The Eight Immortals crossing the sea" "Number one scholar parade" and so on. Cross-stitch artists refine and simplify the most wonderful plot segments in operas in an abstract and exaggerated way, and pick them on the fabric in the form of abstract geometry. Different kinds of character theme patterns are very similar in vision, basically distinguished by showing their different characteristics, so as to convey each character's demeanor and portrayal of artistic conception. These cross-stitch works not only vividly reproduce the wonderful drama scenes, on the one hand, the artists put their beautiful vision of life on the peach blossom works; On the other hand, the opera figures' noble and simple spiritual character is promoted and spread, which plays an invisible role of warning and urging the local people.

### 3. Summary

Zhong Jingwen, a Chinese folklorist, believes that "no living person can survive without customs and habits, and no one can completely avoid relations with folk art. "There are many other folk arts and crafts handed down from generation to generation, such as Huangmei cross-stitch, which not only reflect the powerful creativity and extraordinary wisdom of human beings, but also show the aesthetic taste of working people and their pursuit of a better life and spiritual sustention. Through entering the Huangmei cross-stitch works with rich contents and far-reaching meanings, we can have a deeper understanding and understanding of the causes of local traditional customs and the influence of chu sorcery culture. Folk art is the product of perfect integration of practicality and aesthetics, which embodies the aesthetic orientation of the masses on the basis of meeting practical needs. Through numerous unique folk crafts, we can not only see the traditional artistic expression techniques, but also explore certain aesthetic principles and artistic development rules. Huangmei cross-stitch carries the task demand of contemporary art aesthetics for the development and innovation of traditional folk art, at the same time, how to inherit and develop this ancient and unique Chinese traditional folk craft and combine it with modern people's aesthetic requirements into the public life is the urgent affairs.

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