

# Analysis of the Development History and Cultural Value of the Chinese Panjin Embroidery Technique

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**Abstract:** Panjin embroidery is one of China's most characteristic and functional embroidery stitches. It is developed from nail thread embroidery. It is often used to outline lines and highlight edges. It can fully express the luxury and gorgeousness of the clothes. Therefore, Panjin embroidery is often used to make clothes showing the owner's wealth and power, such as dragon robes (ancient emperor clothes) and Yunjian (ancient Chinese clothing). With the development of social life and the change in clothing culture, the skill of panjin embroidery mostly appeared on the opera stage. It became one of the leading production techniques of opera costumes.

**Keywords:** Panjin embroidery; Nail thread embroidery; Imperial robe; Yunjian (capelet); Opera costumes

## 1. Introduction

Panjin embroidery is a unique style of Chinese embroidery stitches, which can express natural lines and veins and reflect the beauty of elegant and flexible lines. Groups of gold and silver threads coil around, highlighting the richness and expressing the luxury, a shining scenery in Chinese embroidery. Panjin embroidery was first discovered in the Tang Dynasty. It is considered to be developed from nail thread embroidery. Because gold, silver and other precious metals are used as materials, they can better show the beauty and preciousness of clothing, so it is primarily used in the clothing of influential people. During the production, with the change of social costumes, it has become an indispensable beautiful scenery on the opera stage.

## 2. The development history of panjin embroidery in China

### 2.1 Nail thread embroidery

In April 1987, a group of exquisite embroidery fabrics from the Tang Dynasty were rediscovered in the underground palace of Famen Temple in Fufeng County, Shaanxi Province. Among them, several golden materials attracted everyone's attention. These fabrics used the technique of nail gold embroidery, which may have been called knuckle gold embroidery or pan gold embroidery at that time. It would be best to start with nail thread embroidery to understand this stitch more deeply.

Nail thread embroidery is an embroidery method in which various ribbons and threads are stitched and embroidered on clothing or textiles according to a particular pattern. According to the spiral shape of the nail thread, it can be divided into a straight line, curved line, coiled thread or cross thread, etc. The source of nail thread embroidery is far away. A piece of brocade embroidery with diamond patterns was unearthed in the Chu tomb in Wangshan, Jiangling, Hubei. There are two kinds of A and B, the first is dark brown, and the second is khaki. During the Tang and Song dynasties, nail thread embroidery became popular, mainly used for outline patterns and the linear patterns of some vines. During the Jin and Yuan dynasties, some people twisted silk into threads for flat nailing, usually directly printed on clothing as a unique decoration.<sup>[1]</sup>

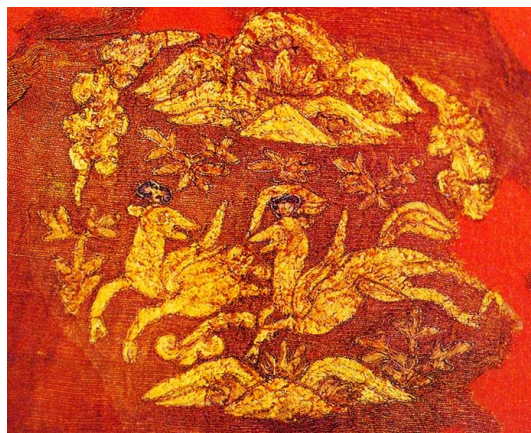
### 2.2 Nail Gold Embroidery

The effect of nail thread embroidery makes the stitched thread not need to pass through the fabric, reducing damage, and at the same time, makes the nail thread as much as possible to display in people's

eyes, so it is especially suitable for noble and fragile gold, silver, etc. Material made of thread. In this regard, a gold thread is used for nailing, which becomes nail gold embroidery. Although the stitching method of nailing gold embroidery is relatively simple, there are some changes in the embroidery method so that it can be divided into four types: panjin embroidery, nailing gold thread embroidery, embroidered gold embroidery and colour embroidery embossing gold: panjin embroidery refers to all The embroidery method, which uses twisted gold thread and nail thread embroidery method to coil into block patterns, can also be called Jinjin embroidery. It was a prevalent embroidery method in the Tang Dynasty. The embroidery thread is mainly twisted gold thread and partially silver thread; Gold thread embroidery refers to the embroidery method that uses twisted gold thread or silver thread to embroider into line-like patterns with nail thread embroidery. It uses less gold, but the effect is also good; Jin Caixiu refers to the combination of Jin embroidery and colour embroidery to complete different embroidery methods. The embroidery method in the pattern area is widespread; colour embroidery and embossing gold, that is, first use colour embroidery to embroider the basic shape of the pattern, and then use twisted gold thread to outline the outline with nail thread embroidery after completion. This embroidery method was viral in the Liao and Jin Dynasties, preserving many natural objects. In addition, some scholars have found that nail gold embroidery techniques include flat gold embroidery and cushion gold embroidery. Use the direction of the thread to form an independent pattern or outline the edge of the pattern. When outlining the edge of the pattern, it will be combined with other decorative techniques; flat gold embroidery mainly focuses on the plate-shaped pattern; pad gold embroidery is combined with backing paper, cotton wool and other materials. Patterns combined to express relief effect.

Judging from the unearthed embroideries, gold nail embroidery in the Tang Dynasty was mainly made of twisted gold thread—the gold was beaten into extremely thin gold leaves. Then the gold leaves were beaten into gold leaves, and then the gold leaf was processed and cut into thin gold strips. The gold piece is processed and twisted on the silk thread to twist the gold thread. The twisted gold thread used in embroidery is thinner than human hair and is still as bright as new after thousands of years. This embroidery method was very popular from the end of the Tang Dynasty to the beginning of the Liao Dynasty.<sup>[2]</sup>

In the underground palace of the Tang Dynasty in the Famen Temple in Fufeng, Shaanxi, most embroideries with coloured embroidery and gold thread outlines were found. Later, it was also very common in the historical materials of the Liao Dynasty. In the list of Khitan congratulatory birthday gifts to the Song Dynasty was an item of "two red boxes with gold thread embroidered square box". Some scholars believe through research that the "box" here should be "pressed". Another way of writing is the colour embroidery embossed gold mentioned above. There are also a large number of similar embroidery works in the Liao tomb, especially in the tomb of Yeluyu, such as "Luodi pressed gold colour embroidered group nest flying eagle pecking deer", "Luodi pressed gold colour embroidered mountain double forest deer" (*Figure 1*) and "embroidered flowers pair mandarin ducks" etc. Gold-twisted and silver-twisted threads, either singly or in pairs, are used in these plain embroidery outlines, but silver is less frequently exemplified than gold. In the Jin Dynasty, the Jin people also used this embroidery method. There were sayings such as "gold thread pressing" and "gold bar pressing embroidery" in the historical materials, which all referred to this kind of embroidery method.



*Figure 1: Luo Di Pressed Gold Color Embroidery Mountain Forest Double Deer Collection of China National Silk Museum [3]*

### 2.3 Panjin embroidery

Panjin embroidery is based on the line pattern, and the gold thread is coiled and coiled. The embroidery thread is different from "single gold" and "double gold": one gold thread is called single gold embroidery, and two gold threads embroidered together are called double gold embroidery. , generally based on double gold. Later, in Chinese traditional Han embroidery, Guangdong embroidery, Suzhou embroidery, Beijing embroidery and other techniques, the unique style of Panjin embroidery continued. In the jargon of Han embroidery artists, "panjin" is often called "piece of gold". According to the shape of the pan gold, it can be divided into the arc, right angle and horn. The larger the angle, the more difficult it is, so the right angle and the bullhorn are more complicated. When embroidering, it is required to use hands, eyes, and heart together, and the skilful coordination of both hands can achieve the perfect pan-jin effect. The jumping dragon needle in the Han embroidery technique is innovated on this basis. In addition, among the four famous embroideries, Guangdong embroidery is also good at using a gold plate. Still, Cantonese embroidery is the base first and then plate gold. In contrast, Han embroidery does not use the substrate, directly plating gold on the base material, and uses multiple superimposed gold plate techniques to express the Embossed effect.

## 3. Panjin embroidery satisfies the aesthetic orientation of the royal family and dignitaries to show their financial resources and power

### 3.1 Imperial robe

The imperial robe, as a symbol of the supremacy of the feudal emperor, can be described as extravagantly embroidered. It is said that the golden dragon on the emperor's dragon robe is made of gold thread twisted with 99.9% gold hammer foil, and the stitching thread (that is, the coloured line used to fix the gold and silver thread to the embroidery ground) is mostly silk. Of course, some scholars have also pointed out that the "gold" used to make gold wire is not pure gold but a gold-silver alloy, and the ratio of gold and silver contained is unstable. For example, the Tang Dynasty gold-wrapped thread unearthed from the underground palace of Famen Temple has a gold content of 70%-94% and a silver content of 6%-30%. The gold content of gold foil is different, and the transparent colour is also different. According to the regulations of the Ministry of Industry in the Qing Dynasty, the gold foil was divided into "Ku Jin Foil", "Su Da Chi", and "Tian Chi Gold". Ku Jin Foil had the highest gold content and was red; Poor; "Tianchi Gold" is light and whitish, and more silver is mixed in it, also known as "selected gold".<sup>[4]</sup>

Panjin embroidery not only has clear rules on materials but also has very high requirements for embroidery techniques. Take the double gold in pan gold embroidery as an example. When embroidering, the embroiderer first puts two gold threads together, places them along the pattern, presses them flat, then starts to stitch and uses lines of similar colours to tie the two gold threads together. One gold wire is firmly nailed to the pattern so that the two gold wires circle according to the continuous change of the pattern and then are fixed in turn. At each corner, one thread should be turned to select a stitch first, and then another thread should be coiled similarly. Since the metal wire has a certain hardness, it is easy to break if the corner is not appropriately handled. In addition, the embroiderer must know the length of the gold thread required for each pattern because in the embroidery of a pattern, the two gold threads must be wound from the beginning to the end, and the thread cannot be broken or changed in the middle. Otherwise, it won't be easy. All previous efforts will be wasted. However, the Royal Panjin Embroidery has more stringent requirements: in spring, when the wind is high, every silk thread must be waxed; in winter, once the northwest wind blows, the embroiderers must stop working to avoid the formation of bruises on their hands due to dryness. Barbs and thread scraping; embroiderers who have just eaten can't even embroider because they fear the turbid air in their mouths will hit the embroidery pieces.

The very symbolic pattern in the imperial robe is Tuanlong, a form of expression of the group nest pattern. The dragon is placed inside the circle, called "Tuanlong", one of the main fields of application of Panjin embroidery. The group nest composition is a widespread pattern of silk and brocade in the Tang Dynasty, and for a long time after the middle and late Tang Dynasty, people of the surrounding ethnic groups in the Central Plains still wore narrow-sleeved gowns, especially fond of colourful brocade, embroidery, and gold decorated. For example, in the K409 murals in Dunhuang, there is an image of the king of Xixia (also known as the king of Uighur) wearing a Tuanke imperial robe. There are two shapes of dragons in the group nest, one is ascending dragon, and the other is descending

dragon. The group dragon pattern maintains the integrity of the dragon and has strong applicability as decoration. Therefore, the group dragon has become a high-level and important Robe decoration (Figure 2).



*Figure 2: Fragrant yellow satin pan gold multicoloured embroidered imperial robe Collection of National Costume Museum [5]*

According to research, Tuanlongpao may have been used as the emperor's or royal costume as early as the Tang Dynasty. The crimson gauze robes worn by emperors in the Song Dynasty were made of red and gold strips woven into Yunlong. "Song History·Yu Fu Zhi" recorded the Song Dynasty Tianzi album box is also decorated with clouds and dragons, painted with vermilion lacquer, gold engraved with hundreds of flowers to protrude dragons, and also covered with red embroidered dragons and golden handkerchiefs. [6] After the Song eradicated gold, Wanyan Aguda's gold-pinned pan long red silk robe was seized. This imperial robe was made by pinning gold (pasting gold or printing gold) on the red silk fabric. It can be seen that the Tuanlong pattern in the past dynasties has an inseparable relationship with the gold thread. It is a symbol and display of the royal dignitaries and a manifestation of the cultural exchange of multi-ethnic costumes.

The earliest tuanlong robe known so far was found in the Liao Dynasty. It is a yellow embroidered tuanlong robe with golden embroideries in a private collection in London. Eleven pairs of dragons are embellished on it with embroidered gold embroidery (that is, panjin embroidery). There are two large groups of lifting dragons on the inner and outer skirts, two large groups of dragons on the back of the back, and four small groups of dragons on the shoulder sleeves. From the beginning of the Liao and Jin Dynasties, the dragon pattern became a particular pattern for the emperor that ordinary people forbade.

### **3.2 Yunjian (capelet)**

Yunjian is also one of the most common garments for panjin embroidery. Yunjian is a clothing item draped over the shoulders. It was first seen in the Dunhuang murals of the Sui Dynasty, where a Guanyin Bodhisattva is wearing a yunjian. During the Five Dynasties, there are still records of cloud shoulders and cloud shoulders in Buddhist images in the Song Dynasty. Since the Ming Dynasty, cloud shoulders have become popular daily clothing. Cloud shoulders are generally made of two layers of eight pieces of hanging clouds, and there are also strip shapes, peony shapes, willow leaf shapes, tassel shapes, and pendant beads. The embroidery techniques include piece embroidery, bead embroidery, plate gold, beading, and flat stitch (Figure 3). In the Brooklyn Museum in New York, USA collection, there is a gold embroidered willow leaf and a big yunjian on a black ground in the Qing Dynasty. Among them, the golden embroidered plate is mainly used for decoration and plays a beautifying role in harmonizing colours. [7]



*Figure 3: Plum pattern Yunjian made of Panjin embroidery from "Traditional Chinese Costume Yunjian&Dudou"[8]*

Panjin embroidery is also applied to children's clothing called "little Yunjian" - bibs. Bibs are worn mainly by infants and young children and are wrapped around children's necks to protect the inner layer of clothing. It is a reduced and simplified version of yunjian. With the development of bibs, people also express their aesthetic needs. Regardless of the colour or pattern of the bibs, they all reflect the elders' ardent hope and best wishes for children. The National Costume Museum of Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology has a lock-shaped children's bib from the Han nationality in the mid-Qing Dynasty. It comprises eight pieces, and the overall lock shape is exquisite and lovely. This bib is made of red satin, embroidered with pink and green floral patterns, and trimmed with black satin, gold plate and blue webbing, making the whole bib both noble and elegant, lively and very suitable for children to wear.

### 3.3 Other clothing

During the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, pan gold embroidery was trendy and mainly used for various clothing decorations. As we all know, "Dream of Red Mansions", one of the four classic Chinese classics, tells the luxurious life of ancient noble families. Its costumes are elegant and luxurious, and gold embroidery can be seen everywhere. For example, the third time, Baoyu wore "two-colour gold and a hundred butterflies wearing red arrow sleeves with flowers". Wearing a "waistcoat with rose and purple two-colour gold and silver thread", which is also two-colour gold thread; in the 49th chapter, Shi Xiangyun wore a "relying on the colour three-compartment leader, autumn fragrance, gold plate, five-colour embroidered dragon, narrow sleeves, small sleeves, and silver jacket". It refers to a short jacket with three borders of similar colours on the collar of the sleeves, five-colour dragon-shaped patterns embroidered in gold on the ground of autumn-coloured yarn, a waist, narrow sleeves, an oversized placket, and a stand-up collar and cuffs inlaid with ermine. In addition, the 51st Xiren is wearing a "golden embroidered cotton skirt with the light green plate", and the 52nd Baoyu is wearing a "gorilla felt plate with gold colour embroidered stone green makeup and satin fringe jacket", and so on.<sup>[9]</sup>

In 2003, a British friend presented to the China National Silk Museum a fragment of a "Purple Ground Cotton Silk Coat with Gold Embroidery and Braided Threads" decorated with gold embroidery. The braided jacket is a skirt-like robe twisted into thin threads with silk thread, sewed across the waist, and folded with delicate pleats. "Yuan History Yufu Zhi" records. The braided jacket is like a narrow-sleeved shirt, and the waist is made of thin braided pleats." It began in the Jin Dynasty and became popular in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties.<sup>[10]</sup> The left shoulder of this braided jacket fragment presented by a British friend has nearly ten gold-embroidered cloud patterns. On the upper part of the cloud patterns is a circle embroidered with gold-plated embroidery. A jade rabbit symbolizing the moon is also painted on it.

In the Ming Dynasty, the chest and back (a very decorative pattern, named after the weaving and



embroidery on the chest and back of the clothes) continued to develop as an important decoration on clothing and combined with the connotation of symbolic rank, so it was also related to the plate. Jinxiu formed a close relationship. In the early and middle Ming Dynasty, the chest and back were woven or embroidered on the robes, and the title "buzi" appeared in the late Ming Dynasty. As the name suggests, "buzi" means to sew embroidered pieces on clothes, and in the dragon pattern chest and back in the Beijing Art Museum, the dragon pattern as the main decoration is almost all embroidered with gold.

The China Three Gorges Museum in Chongqing has a "Ming Qin Liangyu red silk plate with gold embroidered python and phoenix clothes", the only relic of Qin Liangyu in ancient China who was recorded in the official biography of the official history as a famous general of the dynasty. "Ming Qin Liangyu red silk plate with gold embroidered python and phoenix clothes" round neck right lapel and oversized sleeves, embroidered standing python and double phoenix on the chest and back, phoenix patterns on the front and back of both sleeves, auspicious cloud pattern embroidered in the blank space, colourful embroidery on the lower skirt feet "Shoushan Fuhai" decoration. It is said that the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology team designed the torch relay suit for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. The graphic elements of the costume are composed of traditional Chinese phoenix patterns and auspicious cloud patterns. "The golden phoenix pattern on it.

The Museum of Ethnic Costumes of Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology also has a "Dark blue, dark brocade satin inlaid with yunjian and gold edging women's coat in the Qing Dynasty", a model of the application of gold embroidered edging. The body of this women's jacket is plain white satin, and the silk thread wrapped with gold foil is tightly coiled on the blank space of the embroidery pattern on edge and fixed with stitches. The "window" is embroidered with patterns such as fair ladies, pavilions, pavilions, green plants and flowers, which not only enriches the decorative style of the border but also reduces the embroidery area of panjin thread embroidery, and embodies the ancient people's "respecting nature, cherishing things, being diligent and thrifty" Ideas and wisdom are vividly reflected.<sup>[11]</sup>

#### **4. Panjin embroidery is applied to the production of opera costumes**

##### **4.1 Jing embroidery**

In the Liao Dynasty, an embroidery academy was set up in Yanjing then, and the "palace embroidery" produced was mainly used to worship the emperor and marquis's clothing. After the Ming Dynasty, the characteristics of Beijing embroidery became more and more distinct, with exquisite needlework and materials. In the Qing Dynasty, when Beijing Embroidery peaked, the Qing Zao Office once set up a special "Embroidery Bureau" to recruit embroidery craftsmen from all over the country to make royal and official costumes. The variety and variety of court embroidery in the Qing Dynasty were unmatched by previous dynasties. During Emperor Guangxu, Beijing embroidery was known as "palace embroidery", and its development became more prosperous, and the folks followed suit. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, there were dozens of "embroidery workshops" in Beijing. Based on inheriting palace embroidery, these embroidery workshops added more folk aesthetics and needs, and later generations are called "Beijing embroidery". With the birth of Peking Opera art, due to the requirements of drama, the embroidery of opera costumes promoted the combination of "palace embroidery" and "folk embroidery". Based on the characteristics of stage performance art, the embroidery colours of the costumes are more colourful, the embroidery threads are thicker, a lot of gold work is used, and the relationship between the picture and the ground is more apparent (*Figure 4*).

After the 1950s, it was an introductory period for developing traditional Peking Opera costumes. During this period, all opera troupes had been transformed into state-owned theatre troupes. Even though gold had become a controlled material then, the government still granted special approval to specific troupes or theatres. Some actors can use natural gold thread to embroider costumes with gold indicators. A small alley in Xibanbi Street, Zhushikou, Qianmenwai, Beijing, used to be a famous costume street at the beginning of the last century, where many famous Peking Opera actors made their costumes. Today, the Beijing Theater Costume Factory is still located here. Although the space is narrow, many of the Peking Opera Theater and Qu Opera Troupe costumes have come from here for decades.



Figure 4: Sapphire blue satin plate with gold embroidered tufted flowers from "Chinese Peking Opera Costume Atlas." [12]

#### 4.2 Su embroidery

The Ming Dynasty was a critical historical stage for the development of Su embroidery, and during the Ming Dynasty, the theatre costumes in Suzhou flourished. During the Jiajing period of the Ming Dynasty, Kunqu Opera had already developed into an opera performed on the stage. Therefore, the embroidery form of Suzhou embroidery was increased with the embroidery of opera clothes. During the Ming Dynasty, Xu Xianqing said in a letter to the emperor. The people in Dusu County are more likely to travel and eat, that is, they have jobs, but only grind jade, touch emerald greens, weave, and machine embroidery." Here, "machine embroidery" refers to the embroidery village of autocratic costumes. Some scholars believe that the "machine" in "machine embroidery" should not be understood as a machine but should be interpreted as "adaptive", which is the name of the creative skill of embroidery in ancient times. In the Qing Dynasty, every family in Suzhou raised silkworms, and every household had embroiderers. In the Qing Dynasty, the large amount of embroidery on court clothing and daily necessities was dominated by Suzhou embroidery. [13]

#### 4.3 Cantonese embroidery

In the Qing Dynasty, Cantonese embroidery also appeared with embroidery mainly on costumes. Like Beijing embroidery and Suzhou embroidery, it developed following the emergence of Cantonese opera. According to the "Guangzhou Fuzhi", the costumes made by Zhuangyuanfang in Guangzhou during the Qing Dynasty had already enjoyed a good reputation in China. As the source and distribution centre of Guangzhou costumes, the early Zhuangyuanfang had a group of artists who were proficient in costumes. [14]

In the early years of the Republic of China, most of the costume production shops in Guangzhou gathered in the Zhuangyuanfang area. After founding New China, the costume production industry has undergone many adjustments and mergers, but it has never left Zhuangyuanfang. The last existing costume factory is also located here. In the production of costumes, the embroidery process is the essence, and most of them use Cantonese embroidery technology, which has the characteristics of fineness and richness. Generally speaking, the costumes worn by the emperors, generals, officials and other dignitaries are mostly embroidered with gold and silver thread and plate gold. In contrast, the costumes of ordinary people are mainly velvet embroidery, with relatively plain colours. The Guangdong Provincial Museum currently has a python costume with yellow satin as the base, with five flying dragons embroidered on the shoulders, arms and front, most of which are embroidered with gold and silver threads (Figure 5). [15]



Figure 5: Cantonese Embroidered Imperial Robe Collection of Guangdong Provincial Museum <sup>[15]</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

In the technique of nail thread embroidery, the embroiderers found the appropriate position for gold and silver. Thus Panjin embroidery stepped onto the stage of history and shined brilliantly in the traditional embroidery technique of China. What is embroidered is gold and silver, and what is "shown" is gorgeous. The embroidery with gold and silver satisfies the aesthetic orientation of the royal family and dignitaries to show their wealth and power. It also endows the gold embroidery on the historical stage with a more profound meaning value and meaning. Panjin embroidery not only looks resplendent and resplendent, but the embroidery itself directly reflects superior techniques and materials. Because of this, the royal family and influential people also favour Pan Jinxiu, and it shines brightly on imperial robes and other clothing. With the decline of the feudal dynasty, the old costumes have gradually lost their brilliance over time. The distance between the panjin embroidery, rich and gorgeous as the main style, and the daily clothing seems gradually drift away. It glowed with a strange light. Hand-woven embroidery methods and techniques can produce gorgeous costumes, and the costumes' decoration can enrich the stage and adapt to different roles, adding to the stage art of opera. The prosperity of Chinese opera has brought back the brilliance of embroidery, which has gradually moved away from daily clothing and brought together many embroidery artists who had been lost among the people to show their skills for various costumes on the stage of Chinese opera. In the development of opera costumes, all kinds of embroidery stitches have been well displayed, especially the classic panjin embroidery stitches, which can make imperial robes and mandarin jackets stand out. After the rise of Chinese opera, the skill of panjin embroidery has been more applied to the production of opera costumes, providing space for the inheritance and development of traditional handicrafts.

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