

The Origins, Cultural Connotations, and Contemporary Commercial Development of Gu Embroidery

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Abstract

Gu embroidery is a traditional embroidery craft with a long history and a unique artistic structure. Its commercialization in the context of new media is a key pathway for transforming it from a cultural symbol into a commercial product, promoting cultural regeneration and sustainable development, and is of great significance for the modern transformation and value enhancement of traditional crafts. This paper focuses on home goods through literature review, case analysis, SWOT analysis, and the “pain point-itch point-pleasure point” model to analyze the historical origins and artistic structure of Gu embroidery, explore cross-media image reconstruction, and assess the consumption potential and cultural value of its home products. The conclusion shows that Gu embroidery has significant potential for cultural and commercial integration in the new media era. Its innovative paths combined with other media, such as paper-cutting, and product designs addressing consumer pain points can effectively promote the translation and application of traditional crafts in modern life scenarios, providing actionable, practical ideas for cultural regeneration.

Keywords

Gu Embroidery, Product Design, Intangible Cultural Heritage Transformation, Market Model

1. Introduction

1.1. Background for the Topic Selection

Driven by the evolution of The Times and technological innovation, the new media

era, characterized by personalization and openness, has emerged and is showing a rapidly developing mature trend. The traditional communication paradigm has become difficult to adapt to the current communication needs of intangible cultural heritage protection and inheritance. Meanwhile, the dissemination practices of intangible cultural heritage always face a core dilemma: how to effectively enhance the breadth and depth of communication, promote inheritance and promotion, while ensuring that its cultural authenticity and core connotations do not dissipate.

As the pace of contemporary urban life accelerates, traditional crafts have not been completely marginalized; instead, they can enter people's daily scenes in a more flexible and micro manner.

Emerging in the Ming Dynasty in Songjiang, Gu embroidery, as an art form that once relied on the aesthetic system of the nobility, has long been on the fringes of art history and craft history research. However, it has not remained silent; instead, it seeks opportunities for contemporary regeneration in the transformation of new media ecology and consumer structure. Compared to the inherent model of static exhibition in museums, the revitalization path of contemporary Gu embroidery needs to break away from this superficial form of cultural symbolization and deeply explore its mechanisms for carrying emotional value, demonstrating cultural tension, and gaining consumer recognition in contemporary contexts.

Current academic research on Gu embroidery mainly focuses on historical literature verification, technique lineage organization, and intangible cultural heritage protection strategies, significantly lacking systematic exploration of its application paths in the contemporary market, especially regarding the expression space and market mechanisms of Gu embroidery as an intangible cultural heritage.

This research is conducted against this background, attempting to analyze the reconstruction methods of Gu embroidery based on its technical characteristics and aesthetic logic in the market environment; on the other hand, it observes how handicrafts participate in the market.

More importantly, this article will not stop at the visual representation level, but will attempt to further reveal the economic channels that the product form of Gu embroidery may establish among user consumption motivations, market structural gaps, and brand narrative logic.

1.2. Literature Review

Lei (2022) traced the historical background, craft characteristics, and status of Gu embroidery, arguing for the value of the integration of "painting and embroidery", analyzing its trajectory from tribute to the brink of extinction. The literature is rich and the argument is clear, but it focuses on literature review and lacks field research and in-depth analysis of techniques, indicating a need for strengthened field investigations in the future.

Chen (2024b) divided the research on Gu embroidery into two categories: its ontology and its relationship with literati painting, presenting the development tra-

jectory from simple records in the late Ming and early Qing to systematic research after 2006. The framework is clear and the literature is comprehensive, but it lacks foreign research and interdisciplinary perspectives, suggesting a need to broaden perspectives and strengthen international comparisons. Xu (2020) analyzed the conceptual evolution of “Gu embroidery” → “Luxiangyuan Gu embroidery” → “Luxiangyuan style” through historical material verification, clarifying misunderstandings not named after “Luxiangyuan”, revealing the trajectory of transformation from art to commodity. The historical materials are rigorous, but the analysis of the socio-economic background of the transformation is not deep enough, and should be combined with physical verification. Lei (2022) analyzed the transformation of Gu embroidery from a perspective of social and cultural change, exploring factors such as the culture of the literati, and proposed ideas for inheritance in the era of experience economy. The perspective is novel but lacks details on techniques, suggesting a need to explore transformation patterns and strengthen comparisons. Yang (2014) outlined three stages of Gu embroidery research, focusing on five aspects of “the combination of embroidery and painting”. The literature review is comprehensive but lacks in-depth theoretical analysis, suggesting a need to explore the mechanisms of the combination of embroidery and painting. Liu (2023) interpreted the inscriptions by Dong Qichang, revealing the deep influence of his thoughts on Gu embroidery, filling a gap but lacking clarity in defining “codes”, suggesting a need to explore the interaction patterns between literati and traditional crafts. Zhang (2024) analyzed the relationship between Gu embroidery and the four famous embroideries, providing a comprehensive perspective but superficial analysis, suggesting a need to deepen historical material excavation and strengthen comparative research.

The artistic style of Gu embroidery is rooted in the late Ming Songjiang literati cultural circle, with “the unity of painting and embroidery” as its core feature, forming a unique system that combines the connotations of literati painting and the essence of boudoir craftsmanship. Its artistic expression is first reflected in the literati-oriented themes and compositions: Gu embroidery often uses famous paintings from the Song and Yuan dynasties and works from the Yunji school as the basis, such as Han Ximeng’s “Album of Famous Works from the Song and Yuan Dynasties”, which emulates Mi Fu’s landscapes and Zhao Mengfu’s horses, pursuing the literati painting realm of “vitality and spirit, as if ink-dyed”, according to Xu (2021) and Chen (2024a). In terms of techniques, Gu embroidery breaks through traditional embroidery patterns, creating a unique expressive language of “half painting and half embroidery”—using needles instead of brushes, and lines instead of ink, through splitting threads as fine as 1/64, as noted by Wu (2024), with more than a dozen needle techniques flexibly converted, such as using the outline stitch to express the volume of flowers and fruits, the rolling stitch to outline the texture of hair, and the net stitch to create layers of reality and illusion, achieving a seamless effect of embroidery and painting. The “Squirrel and Grape” piece replicates the realistic details of insect-eaten leaf veins through connecting

stitches. In terms of color philosophy, Gu embroidery has developed a revolutionary “intermediate color and complementary color” system: abandoning bright inherent colors, it skillfully uses intermediate tones. The “Peony” piece primarily uses gray and white silk threads, with partial touches of light red, achieving the ink charm of famous works from the Song and Yuan dynasties through low-purity complementary color contrasts. The “Spring Pine” piece features red and green blending and delicate color transitions from blue to purple in grapes with a 256-silk gradient, creating an ancient and elegant literati painting ink charm, as noted by [Chen \(2009\)](#) and [Yun and Zhou \(2024\)](#). The formation of this style is directly nourished by the literati gatherings and natural landscapes of Luxiangyuan: the “plain and naive” aesthetic orientation praised by Dong Qichang and other Yunji school artists leads to the elegant tendency of the embroidery’s colors, as seen in “Bamboo and Stone”, imitating the brushwork of Ni Zan; the flowers, trees, and rocks in the garden provide references for the boudoir ladies to sketch, prompting Miao to use slanting stitches to reproduce the biological mechanism of the begonia, according to [Yun and Zhou \(2024\)](#). Thus, Gu embroidery transcends the category of craftsmanship, becoming an artistic carrier for female creators to integrate the refined tastes of the literati with their self-aesthetic cognition, achieving an aesthetic revolution of “the silk logic is the painting logic” through needle and thread, as noted by [Xu \(2021\)](#).

At the same time, the artistic style of Gu embroidery has undergone significant changes in the process of commercialization, with its core characteristic of “the unity of painting and embroidery” presenting a distinction between elegance and vulgarity as it transforms in function. During the late Ming boudoir period, Gu embroidery relied on the literati gatherings at Luxiangyuan, where Dong Qichang inscribed Han Ximeng’s works as “not human effort”, practicing the literati painting concept with the extreme craftsmanship of splitting threads down to 1/256, as noted by [Wu \(2024\)](#)—for example, the “Flower and Bird Album” employs more than a dozen needle techniques such as outline and rolling stitches, using the “intermediate color and complementary color” system with gray and white silk threads as the main, with partial touches of low-purity red and green to achieve the ink charm transformation of famous works from the Song and Yuan dynasties, according to [Yang \(2016\)](#). After the mid-Qing period’s commercialization, market demand led to the simplification of craftsmanship: the size of the embroidery was reduced to four or five feet, and the value plummeted to “five or six coins per piece” (Ye Mengzhu’s “Reading the World Compilation”), with needle techniques degrading to “empty embroidery outlines”, and themes shifting to practical items such as dragon robes and pouches, resulting in the dissolution of the “painting and embroidery” style, according to [Yang \(2016\)](#). This transformation from “the silk logic is the painting logic” to “using needles to earn a living” reflects the aesthetic compromise of handicrafts in the commodity economy and highlights the key supporting role of the literati circle in the elegant art style.

Regarding inheritance and development, according to [Tu and Chen \(2025\)](#), Gu

embroidery originated in the Ming Dynasty in Songjiang, Shanghai, closely related to the Gu family and the Songjiang school of painting. It has undergone a development period: from the late Ming to the early Qing, Gu embroidery was used by the royal family. The decline period: during the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty, it moved to the folk, and at this time, it declined due to the proliferation of imitations. However, due to its unique cultural, commercial, and social sample value, Gu embroidery became one of the first national-level intangible cultural heritages in 2006, receiving support from national policies. According to Han et al. (2024), Gu embroidery is now developing through international exhibitions and auctions.

According to Liu (2021), there are offline practical experiences and university-based. There are also traditional media used to promote Gu embroidery, such as books, newspapers, news reports, documentaries, and film creations. However, this has disadvantages such as poor interactivity and time-space limitations. At the same time, new media can also be used for dissemination, enhancing interaction through Weibo, and using video live streaming and short video shooting for promotion. These methods can reduce costs but also have issues of distortion. Combining new and old media can strengthen artistic value through promotion, increase audience participation, and enhance the recognition of Gu embroidery. It can also open up innovative communication ideas, creating brands and industrial parks. The protection and innovation of Gu embroidery are also quite important. The government can establish Gu embroidery study classes, utilize university platforms for teaching, and set up Gu embroidery design classes while exchanging with other embroidery types.

The Gu embroidery market still faces some contradictions. According to Li (2019), there are still contradictions in supply and demand, pricing, and product forms, such as long production cycles, high costs, and a single form.

The inheritance of Gu embroidery currently also faces the problem of aging, with a shrinking scale and low participation from young people. At the same time, the craftsmanship of Gu embroidery is relatively complex, requiring high standards for embroiderers. Therefore, it takes a long time to train a qualified embroiderer, leading to a shortage of talent. Gu embroidery can be introduced into schools, collaborating with universities and vocational colleges to establish master studios and integrate Gu embroidery into teaching to cultivate talent.

2. The Origins, Historical Evolution, and Cultural Artistic Characteristics of Gu Embroidery

2.1. Origin Time and Family Background

Chinese embroidery has a long history and a profound cultural background, being an important part of traditional Chinese culture. As representatives of Chinese embroidery, the four famous embroideries—Su embroidery, Shu embroidery, Xiang embroidery, and Yue embroidery—represent the high-level skills and techniques of Chinese embroidery. Gu embroidery, known for its exquisite stitching and unique

artistic style, has influenced the development of the four famous embroideries and has elevated the overall level of Chinese embroidery. Gu embroidery, also known as “Guige embroidery”, originated from the Gu family in Songjiang Prefecture during the Ming Dynasty, and its rise is closely related to the economic and cultural prosperity of the Songjiang region. During the Jiajing period of the Ming Dynasty, Songjiang was under the jurisdiction of Shanghai, a wealthy area in Jiangnan. Gu Mingshi, a Jinshi (a successful candidate in the highest imperial examination), built the Luxiang Garden in Songjiang City, where gatherings of scholars were frequent, and many literati emerged. In such a cultural atmosphere, the women of the Gu family gradually began to depict famous paintings with needle and thread, and the style of their embroidery became increasingly independent and refined, ultimately forming a family-style embroidery system. The Gu embroidery that emerged from this was no longer just a continuation of women’s needlework skills but became a form of embroidered painting with aesthetic depth and artistic pursuit.

2.2. Early Dissemination and Literary Records

It is said that the embroidery techniques of Gu embroidery originated from the imperial palace, and the Gu family produced famous embroiderers such as Miao Shi, Han Ximeng, and Gu Lanyu. Gu embroidery was first initiated by Miao Shi, the concubine of Gu Huihai, and is recorded in Jiang Shaoshu’s “Silent Epic”: “The concubine of Gu Huihai in Shanghai is extremely skilled in embroidery. The figures she embroiders... this is the beginning of Gu embroidery”. In the early stages, Gu embroidery was not immediately known to the outside world, and its name underwent a gradual clarification process. Initially, this embroidery technique was often referred to as “Gu family women’s needlework” or “Luxiang Garden embroidery”, and it was not until the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, with the widespread circulation of literati notes and local chronicles, that it gradually became widely accepted under the name “Gu embroidery”. Subsequently, Gu embroidery gradually broke away from its private nature within the family, with some works entering the literati circle and even being appreciated by high-ranking officials, beginning to possess certain cultural and economic value.

2.3. From Family Heritage to Folk Dissemination

By the early Qing Dynasty, as the Gu family’s fortunes declined, the art of embroidery began to shift from family inheritance to teaching outsiders, transforming Gu embroidery from a previously closed artistic expression to a broader folk dissemination. The works from this period exhibited a certain tendency towards formalization, but the techniques remained rigorous, and the embroidery craftsmanship was meticulous, preserving the core characteristics of using needle instead of brush and conveying emotions through thread. The fate of Gu embroidery gradually evolved into a unique symbol interwoven with regional culture and the spirit of women’s craftsmanship, amidst the interplay between nobility and the folk.

2.4. The Gene of Literati Painting and the Combination of “Painting and Embroidery”

Gu embroidery not only inherits traditional embroidery techniques but also absorbs artistic elements from Chinese painting, forming a unique cultural and artistic style. The formation of Gu embroidery is inseparable from the rich literati cultural soil of Jiangnan during the Ming Dynasty. Unlike other embroidery schools of the same era that emphasized practicality, Gu embroidery has been characterized by distinct ornamental and painting attributes since its inception. Its embroidery drafts often draw from the works of famous artists from the Song and Yuan Dynasties, particularly favoring themes such as landscapes, flowers and birds, and Buddhist figures, emphasizing the unity of brushwork and composition. In the creative process, embroiderers not only need to possess skilled needlework techniques but also must understand painting principles, accurately grasping the layers of ink and the balance of composition. This ability to translate the essence of brush and ink into the language of silk threads allows Gu embroidery to transcend the category of traditional women’s needlework, becoming a form of “painting on needle” that embodies the aesthetics of literati.

This unique style is closely related to the artistic atmosphere within the Gu family. Many female embroiderers in the family, such as Miao Shi and Han Ximeng, were influenced by the literati circle, especially Han Ximeng, who had long studied the paintings of Dong Qichang. Her embroidery not only showcased exquisite and delicate techniques but also pursued an ethereal and sparse spirit, reflecting a strong “scholar’s aura”. The form of “embroidery within painting, painting within embroidery” not only elevated the artistic quality of the embroidered works but also blurred the boundaries between craftsmanship and painting, opening new expressive paths for traditional embroidery.

2.5. Technical Characteristics and Aesthetic Intentions

The technical complexity of Gu embroidery also constitutes an important part of its artistic characteristics. The silk threads used are often extremely fine, with a single thread capable of being split into more than thirty strands, combined with needles as fine as a hair, showcasing rich layers within a small area. Gu embroidery is extremely meticulous in its stitching techniques, displaying intricate textures and complex patterns that give the embroidered pieces a sense of three-dimensionality and depth. The stitching methods of Gu embroidery are diverse, commonly including techniques such as the straight stitch, seed stitch, connecting stitch, and wandering stitch, with different methods flexibly applied according to the subject matter to express light and shadow, texture, and movement. Embroiderers often use intermediate colors, complex color tones, and shading techniques, allowing the stitches to transition as naturally as brush strokes, creating a sense of three-dimensional space on a flat surface.

What is even more remarkable is that Gu embroidery does not aim to show off skills but reflects a high degree of artistic discipline and spiritual interest in its

handling of details. Gu embroidery embodies the elegant aesthetic ideals and exquisite artistic pursuits of the Chinese nation, presenting an aesthetic style that is highly favored by Chinese literati. Whether it is the subtle expressions of the faces of ladies or the gradient colors of bird feathers and flower petals, its neatness carries a sense of interest, remaining true to the original work while also radiating new vitality through the embroiderer's interpretation. This artistic pursuit that balances technique and aesthetics makes Gu embroidery stand out in traditional embroidery and establishes its status as a "prestigious name in embroidery".

3. The Inheritance and Contemporary Development of Gu Embroidery

3.1. From Noble Exclusivity to Folk Transmission

When Gu embroidery first formed a system, it was mainly circulated within the Gu family, used for collection or as gifts, possessing a clear identity symbol attribute. The embroiderers were mostly female members of the family, possessing both literary and artistic cultivation. By the mid-Qing Dynasty, as the Gu family's fortunes declined, they had to teach the embroidery skills externally to make a living, thus Gu embroidery gradually emerged from its secluded origins and entered a broader folk market. This transformation not only changed the social function of Gu embroidery but also brought about an expansion in style and subject matter. By the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Gu embroidery was not only a leisure art for women in the boudoir but also became part of economic activities at the time, promoting the development of handicrafts and commerce.

However, as Gu embroidery began to cater to the public, the internal standards that originally relied heavily on the family aesthetic system became unstable. Some workshops simplified processes and replicated embroidery designs to cater to popular tastes, inevitably leading to a decline in the precision of the embroidered pieces. Nevertheless, Gu embroidery still gained widespread acceptance in the Jiangnan region due to its unique painted embroidery form and regional recognition, continuing to exist in folk occasions such as local temple fairs, wedding gifts, and decorative screens, becoming a way for ordinary people to engage with art.

3.2. The Periodic Revival during the Republic of China and New China

Entering the 20th century, Gu embroidery experienced a brief period of artistic revival. Some scholars and collectors recognized the artistic value of this embroidery type and began to organize literature and collect samples. A representative figure, Xu Weinan, wrote "A Study of Gu Embroidery", which became an important starting point for Gu embroidery research. Although the embroidered pieces from this period were not as exquisite as ancient works, they played a key role in preserving tradition and disseminating techniques.

After the founding of New China, the artistic status of Gu embroidery received institutional recognition. Especially in the late 1970s, relevant departments began

to consciously restore traditional crafts. The Songjiang Craft Factory established a special group for Gu embroidery, organizing and replicating designs and retraining traditional stitching methods, marking the shift of Gu embroidery from “individual self-rescue” to “institutional intervention”. In 2006, Gu embroidery was included in the national intangible cultural heritage list, receiving new policy support. Since then, Gu embroidery has gained attention from various parties, and the number of researchers has gradually increased, leading to continuous promotion and the formal establishment of the “heir” mechanism.

3.3. Inheritance Practices and Real Challenges in the New Era

The current inheritance system of Gu embroidery is becoming more improved at the institutional level; however, it still faces many issues in practical operation. On one hand, the traditional embroidery art has a high threshold for creators, requiring mastery of stitching techniques and a certain level of understanding of calligraphy and painting. Over the course of a century, there are fewer than 200 surviving works of Gu embroidery, highlighting the difficulty of producing high-quality Gu embroidery pieces. Additionally, the long learning cycle leads to a lack of willingness among young people to enter the field. On the other hand, with changes in public aesthetics, the style of Gu embroidery, which is primarily realistic and honors antiquity, faces limited market acceptance.

Although the inheritance system has protected the integrity of the craft chain to a certain extent, it has also exposed limitations such as regional dispersion, single funding sources, and insufficient circulation channels. Currently, the main dissemination of Gu embroidery still relies on exhibition displays and the integration of intangible cultural heritage into schools, which are relatively conservative forms and difficult to mobilize broad social resources for involvement. Additionally, the high price of embroidered products concentrates the consumer group in the collection circle and cultural institutions, lacking stable industrial chain support, which invisibly limits the reproduction capacity of Gu embroidery.

3.4. Digitalization and New Media Communication Pathways

The commercialization of traditional handicrafts, compared to purely artistic crafts or luxury crafts consumed by a minority, can better highlight the valuable value of serving and integrating into society (Liu, 2004). In recent years, with the transformation of information dissemination methods, the communication of Gu embroidery has encountered new opportunities. With the help of new media platforms, some young inheritors have publicly demonstrated Gu embroidery techniques, shared designs, and visualized the creative process through short videos, graphic accounts, and live teaching, giving this traditional craft unprecedented exposure. At the same time, through cooperation with universities and cultural creative institutions, Gu embroidery works have begun to be cross-applied to clothing, bags, stationery, and other carriers, reconstructing their usage paths in contemporary life.

More forward-looking is that some research teams and design companies are attempting to combine artificial intelligence with Gu embroidery, using algorithms to generate embroidery patterns, simulate the texture of traditional embroidery threads, and explore virtual displays and digital modeling. Although this technological intervention has not completely replaced manual creation, it has provided great convenience in terms of communication efficiency and public education. At the same time, it has also raised cultural and ethical questions about the “authenticity of tradition” and “the boundaries of machine participation”, prompting new reflections on the future inheritance of Gu embroidery.

At this intersection of old and new eras, Gu embroidery is at a crossroads of artistic inheritance and reinvention. How to connect with the modern context and integrate with industrial mechanisms while maintaining the spirit of craftsmanship and historical context is an important proposition faced both now and in the future.

4. Discussion on the Integration Innovation and Business Model of Gu Embroidery

4.1. Exploration of the Business Model of Gu Embroidery Home Products

Among the innovative approaches to integrating Gu embroidery with modern home design, the cross-border combination of Gu embroidery and paper-cutting art holds significant potential. As an intangible cultural heritage (ICH) category equally bearing profound folk culture and exquisite craftsmanship, paper-cutting, with its unique features of “hollowed-out light and shadow” and “pattern narration”, is naturally compatible with Gu embroidery’s strengths in “silk texture” and “textural layering”.

From the product design perspective, the auspicious patterns of paper-cutting (such as window grilles, Chinese zodiac signs, and folk story motifs) can be “three-dimensionally translated” through Gu embroidery techniques. Specifically, embroidery threads are used to simulate the hollowed-out effect of paper-cutting, while the luster and layering of the threads enhance the artistic expressiveness of the patterns. For instance, paper-cutting-style “Fu, Lu, Shou” (three symbols of fortune, prosperity, and longevity) patterns can be presented on Gu embroidery lampshades. This not only preserves the cultural symbolic meaning of paper-cutting but also endows the patterns with a soft and delicate touch and a new visual experience of interlaced light and shadow through embroidery craftsmanship.

In terms of market logic, this combination can simultaneously attract the attention of two groups of ICH enthusiasts, creating a “1 + 1 > 2” cultural appeal. For consumers, the products not only possess the high-end handcrafted texture of Gu embroidery but also gain folk warmth and scenario adaptability (e.g., home decoration for traditional festivals like the Spring Festival and weddings) due to the paper-cutting elements. From the industrial perspective, the integration of the two crafts also provides a practical model for the cross-border inheritance of ICH tech-

niques. Leveraging the cultural endorsement of “dual ICH heritages” to enhance the product premium capacity, it builds a differentiated competitive barrier in the new Chinese-style home market, thereby promoting the dual realization of cultural value and economic value of Gu embroidery home products in commercial transformation.

Integrating Gu embroidery with modern home design is an important attempt in the transformation of traditional crafts to the contemporary market. These products not only retain the aesthetic value of intangible cultural heritage techniques but also meet the current consumers’ multiple demands for “handmade feel”, “cultural significance”, and “lifestyle aesthetics”, showing considerable commercialization prospects. Compared to the “collectible” positioning of traditional Gu embroidery products, their home attributes make them easier to enter daily usage scenarios, gaining attention in the wave of lifestyle consumption.

From a market perspective, the core advantages of Gu embroidery home products are: first, the unique integration of materials and craftsmanship, possessing differentiated competitiveness of “paper light and shadow + silk thread texture”; second, a rich cultural background that facilitates the storytelling of “intangible cultural heritage”, meeting the spiritual consumption needs of middle-class consumers; third, the novelty of product categories, making it easy to land in scenarios such as “new Chinese aesthetics”, “national trend lifestyle”, and “Eastern space”. Currently, lighting fixtures belong to the category of “high participation” aesthetic consumer products in home decor, where users pay more attention to unique styles, rich connotations, and natural materials, which Gu embroidery precisely possesses.

In terms of operational models, such products are suitable for a “cultural creative boutique” route rather than large-scale standardized production. On one hand, they can collaborate with independent designers and Gu embroidery inheritor studios to launch customized series, enhancing product identity through means such as “limited editions” and “hand-numbering”; on the other hand, they can also cooperate with cultural heritage units or cultural tourism institutions to develop “museum editions” and “venue custom editions”, such as local cultural centers, intangible cultural heritage centers, and scenic spots in Jiangnan, the birthplace of Gu embroidery. Such collaborations not only enhance brand endorsement but also help expand offline display and sales channels.

The channel strategy should form a two-way cycle of “online reach + offline experience”. Online, it can rely on platforms such as WeChat Official Accounts, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin to create visual content that attracts attention, using three types of content: “production process display + home space matching + light and shadow effect shooting” to accurately drive traffic and strengthen brand tone and cultural depth. Offline, exhibition and sales areas can be set up in places like intangible cultural heritage markets, art bookstores, and home selection spaces, enhancing tactile experiences through physical displays and stimulating users’ spontaneous purchasing intentions.

In addition, derivative designs centered around lampshades can be explored—such as pairing with custom bases to become independent light and shadow installations, or providing custom services as decorative solutions for weddings, festivals, and holiday scenes, expanding their application value in B-end space arrangements and gift channels. Furthermore, if “Gu Embroidery Light and Shadow Aesthetic Space” or “Handmade Workshop + Lifestyle Store” composite experience venues are created in places like Songjiang, a complete consumption chain can be established in “appreciation-purchase-participation-communication”, endowing traditional craftsmanship with new economic fluidity.

The commercial path of Gu embroidery home products is not merely a process of turning “culture” into “goods”, but also a reinterpretation and revitalization of traditional craftsmanship in a modern context. Its value extends beyond the material level, reflecting the activation and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage spirit, the re-narration of regional cultural context, and the reawakening of “slow craftsmanship aesthetics”.

4.2. Gu Embroidery Home Products Brand SWOT Analysis and Market Opportunity Exploration

In the current context of a continuous emergence of cultural and creative products, Gu embroidery home products, with their unique integration of intangible cultural heritage craftsmanship, visual expressiveness, and home adaptability, are gradually revealing their potential brand value and commercial feasibility. This chapter will analyze from three aspects: SWOT model, market structure gaps, and user needs, clarifying its core advantages, positioning entry points, and emotional transformation mechanisms.

4.2.1. SWOT Model Analysis

SWOT analysis (**Table 1**) indicates that the greatest value of Gu embroidery home products lies in its unique cultural symbols and ability to create spatial atmospheres; challenges mainly exist in cost, channels, and user education. If it can leverage content storytelling and experiential strategies, it is hoped to gradually expand from niche exquisite categories to lifestyle aesthetic products.

4.2.2. Market Gaps and Entry Point Analysis

In the existing market for ordinary home and cultural creative products, Gu embroidery home products are situated in a structurally neglected but growth-potential area. The following are its five main gaps and opportunities:

1) Aesthetic Gap: Most furniture products, while visually appealing, lack cultural depth and aesthetic stories. The rhythmic stitching of Gu embroidery and the hollow light effects of paper-cutting can serve as a “visual + cultural” composite expression, distinguishing them from conventional lighting products.

2) Price Band Gap: Currently, the market generally exhibits a polarization between “affordable industrial products” and “high-end custom products”. The Gu embroidery paper-cut lampshade can fill the “thousand-yuan level handmade

Table 1. SWOT model analysis.

Category	Content
Strengths	Gu embroidery is a national-level intangible cultural heritage with clear cultural attributes; it has a unique combination effect; lampshade products possess both functional and decorative properties, making them easily integrated into daily spaces; the identity of handmade art enhances their collectible and gift attributes.
Weaknesses	High costs, long production cycles, and unaffordable prices; few inheritors, strong reliance on craftsmanship; weak brand recognition, and significant challenges in early market education; users still hold misconceptions that “decorative value exceeds practicality”.
Opportunities	Clear trends in new Chinese-style home decor, expanding demand for Eastern aesthetics; a surge in cultural tourism scenarios, leading to strong demand for spatial decoration; users increasingly pursue spiritual consumption and “content-based” products; government continues to support the transformation of the intangible cultural heritage market.
Threats	Similar imitation products or low-priced handicraft competitors can easily impact the pricing system; information explosion in the short video era makes cultural value dissemination more challenging; contradictions between handicrafts and “fast consumption” logic; long brand growth cycles and significant challenges in scaling.

cultural and creative” market, meeting the aesthetic and spiritual consumption needs of the middle class.

3) Application Scenario Gap: Traditional Gu embroidery works are mostly limited to framed static objects, lacking mediums to enter contemporary spatial contexts. Furniture, due to its dual characteristics of practicality and atmosphere creation, provides a new entry point for Gu embroidery.

4) Consumer Behavior Gap: Consumers are shifting from “looking expensive” to “looking meaningful”. Gu embroidery home products do not rely on metals or luxury materials, but instead depend on “craftsmanship + stories + spatial emotions” to express value.

5) Cooperation Path Gap: There is a rigid demand for “spatial cultural decorations” in fields such as cultural tourism, hotels, and cultural exhibition halls, yet there is no clear leading brand for such products. Gu embroidery lampshades can enter the market through themed customization and limited collaborations, building a differentiated competitive advantage.

In short, its market potential lies not in “functional filling”, but in the construction of content value in the new consumption era, such as “cultural narrative”, “spatial semantics”, and “visual experience”.

4.2.3. Consumer Demand Model: Pain Points, Itch Points, and Pleasure Points

Further refinement shows that Gu embroidery home products correspond to user demand responses, with clear emotional trigger paths. The following is an analysis

of the “Pain-Itch-Pleasure” three-dimensional model:

1) Pain Points: Current mid-to-high-end users often face aesthetic homogeneity and cultural scarcity when selecting home lighting products, making it difficult to find products that combine Eastern style and practicality. Traditional printed furniture lacks memorable points, while new Chinese styles easily fall into template designs, failing to meet emotional value.

2) Itch Points: The demand for “life as aesthetics” among consumer groups continues to grow, especially favoring objects with cultural identity and personal temperament. However, such products are scarce in the market, forcing users to “make do” between high-end customization and generic national style.

3) Pleasure Points: Gu embroidery possesses the triple attributes of “intangible cultural heritage identity + design language + light and shadow atmosphere”, which can satisfy individual expression while also being displayable and socially presentable. In actual use, it brings multiple satisfactions of “situational immersion + topic diffusion + aesthetic recognition”, forming a continuous drive for goodwill.

The model indicates that the key to the transformation of Gu embroidery furniture lies not in “persuading them to buy”, but in “providing a recognition of a lifestyle quality”, which is a product of spiritual resonance that is “satisfied by being understood”.

The fundamental value of folk culture lies in its intrinsic value that embodies the characteristics of life, rather than its extrinsic value as an object of appreciation or a commodity carrier. The intrinsic value is the “essence”, while the extrinsic value is the “periphery”. Those exquisite intangible cultural heritage crafts, whether presented as visually pleasing artworks, beautifully packaged products, or practical items, all belong to the external forms. Their true core lies in the endogenous value rooted in daily life—this value exists within the practical context of the cultural subjects, manifested as the maintenance of community identity, the transmission of traditional knowledge, and the continuation of life wisdom. When we regard the ritual of Suzhou embroidery artisans organizing threads in the morning, the ethnic memory of Miao silver craftsmen forging patterns, and the creative mindset of Gu embroidery in the phrase “only dare to stitch on a clear day” as the essence of culture, we touch upon the life rhythm that transcends the superficiality of objects (Liu, 2021).

5. Questionnaire Survey

This questionnaire survey collected a total of 47 valid responses, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the public’s awareness and attitudes towards the traditional craft of “Gu embroidery”. The questionnaire covered various aspects, including the respondents’ basic information, their level of understanding of Gu embroidery, willingness to learn, and the status of Gu embroidery in Shanghai’s culture. Through this survey, we hope to reveal the influence of Gu embroidery in contemporary society and its popularity among young people, providing a reference for further promoting and inheriting this intangible cultural heritage.

5.1. Female Participants Dominate

In this survey, it shows that female participants dominate, with young women showing a high level of interest in traditional crafts. The proportion of female participants reached 82.98%, while males accounted for only 17.02%. This indicates that among the participants, the voices and perspectives of women may be more prominent (Figure 1).

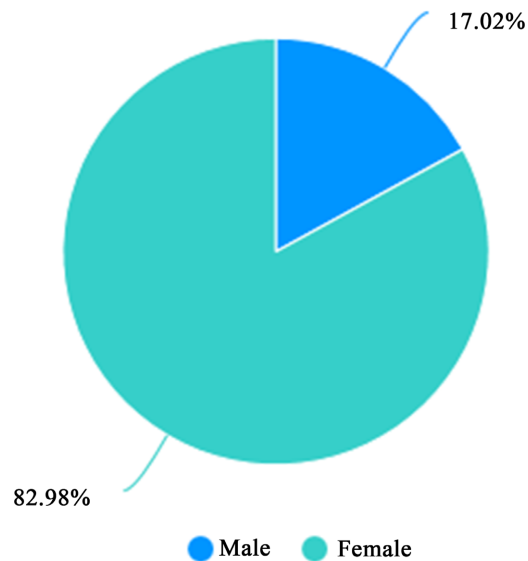


Figure 1. Gender distribution of respondents.

5.1.1. Young Women Have a High Awareness of “Gu Embroidery”

In the age group of 10 - 20 years, the awareness rate of “Gu embroidery” among female participants is 82.35%, while it is only 17.65% for males. This shows that young women have a higher level of interest in traditional crafts (Table 2).

Table 2. Age distribution of respondents.

X/Y	Male	Female	Subtotal
10 - 20	6 (17.65%)	28 (82.35%)	34
20 - 30	0 (0.00%)	7 (100%)	7
30 - 40	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	4
40 and above	0 (0.00%)	2 (100%)	2

5.1.2. Male Awareness of “Gu Embroidery” Is Relatively Low

Among the participants aware of the traditional craft of “Gu embroidery”, males account for only 15.38%, while females account for 84.62%. This indicates that males have a relatively low recognition of this traditional craft (Table 3).

5.2. The Majority of Respondents Are Aged between 10 - 20 Years

The survey results show that 72.34% of respondents are aged between 10 - 20 years, indicating a very high level of participation in this age group, which may be related

to the theme of the survey or the target audience (Figure 2).

Table 3. Distribution of awareness among respondents.

X/Y	Male	Female	Subtotal
Know	2 (15.38%)	11 (84.62%)	13
Do not know	6 (17.65%)	28 (82.35%)	34

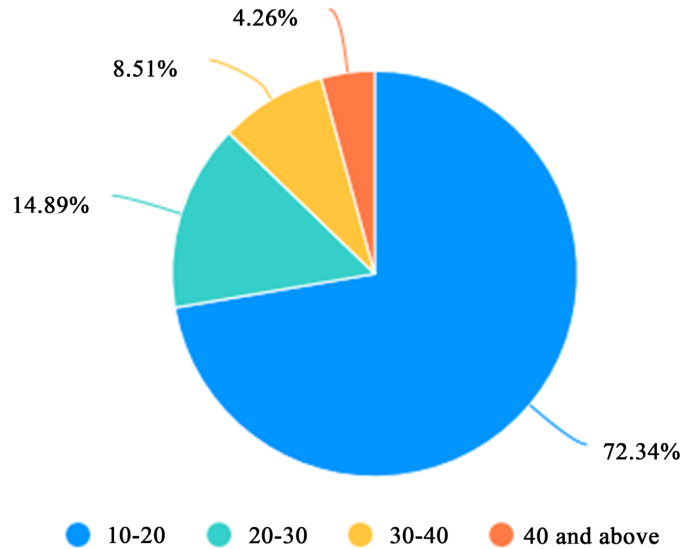


Figure 2. Age distribution of respondents.

5.3. Survey on the Popularity of Gu Embroidery

In the survey, 72.34% of respondents indicated that they were unaware of the traditional craft “Gu embroidery”, showing a low level of public awareness of this craft. This may be related to the limitations of the dissemination channels and the target audience of Gu embroidery (Figure 3).

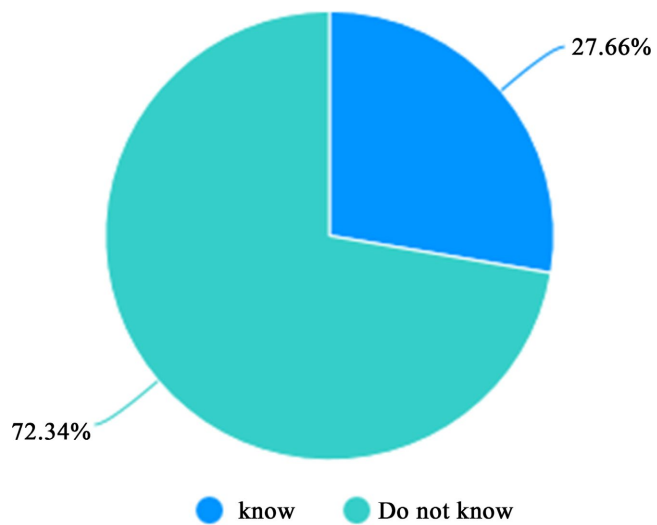


Figure 3. Popularity distribution of Gu embroidery.

Many people expressed a willingness to try learning Gu embroidery in the survey, with the main reasons including interest in traditional culture, a desire to enhance personal aesthetics and manual skills, and recognition of the artistic value of Gu embroidery. However, some individuals were unwilling to try due to time constraints or personal preferences (such as a preference for traditional decorations).

In the survey, modern young people believe that the following measures should be taken to promote the development and inheritance of Gu embroidery:

First, the culture of Gu embroidery should be vigorously promoted by publicizing its profound historical background and unique artistic value, enhancing public awareness and attracting broader attention and participation; second, flexible and convenient learning opportunities should be actively provided, such as offering online and offline Gu embroidery courses and workshops, providing more convenience in terms of time and location, and lowering the learning threshold; at the same time, innovation must be emphasized by combining Gu embroidery techniques with modern design elements to create works that better align with the aesthetics of contemporary young people, thereby significantly increasing their appeal and market value; in addition, efforts should be made to establish communities for Gu embroidery enthusiasts, encouraging communication, sharing, and collaboration among learners, forming a positively interactive learning and creation community to enhance the motivation for continuous learning and sense of belonging. To better promote Gu embroidery art, it is recommended that relevant institutions or organizations strengthen the publicity and education of Gu embroidery, especially among young people. This can be achieved by organizing exhibitions, competitions, and experiential activities to stimulate public interest. Additionally, providing diverse learning methods and flexible course arrangements to meet the needs of different groups is essential. Furthermore, by integrating modern design concepts, innovative Gu embroidery works can be created to enhance their market competitiveness and attractiveness, thus promoting the inheritance and development of this traditional art.

5.4. Modern People's Awareness of Gu Embroidery

The questionnaire survey shows that modern young people's awareness of Gu embroidery presents a dual characteristic:

On one hand, it is widely recognized as a representative of traditional craftsmanship in Shanghai, carrying the city's historical culture, artistic characteristics, and unique cultural memories, and is regarded as a classic intangible cultural heritage with profound cultural connotations; on the other hand, although its historical status is affirmed, most people point out that due to the scarcity of existing works, the current actual popularity of Gu embroidery is relatively low. In response to this situation,

The core methods proposed by respondents to promote Gu embroidery include:

Strengthening publicity to enhance public awareness, organizing exhibitions and cultural activities to showcase its artistic charm, conducting educational training programs to cultivate inheritors, and expanding influence through cooperation with domestic and international cultural institutions. To systematically protect and inherit this important heritage, it is recommended that the government and relevant departments jointly promote multi-faceted cultural promotion: relying on exhibitions, lectures, and workshops to popularize knowledge of Gu embroidery; encouraging art colleges to offer specialized courses to reserve talent; while innovatively using online displays, virtual experiences, and other technological means to attract young groups, thereby fully stimulating the vitality and social influence of Gu embroidery.

5.5. The Current Interest Status and Promotion Demands of Modern People towards Gu Embroidery as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Surveys show that young people's interest in intangible cultural heritage, such as Gu embroidery, is polarized:

Some traditional culture identifiers have a strong interest, but overall awareness is low, mainly due to limited communication channels, insufficient attractiveness of traditional forms, and a lack of motivation for active exploration.

To enhance attention, respondents suggest:

Expanding new media publicity, such as social media and short videos; promoting innovative integration (combining modern design to develop novel products); strengthening experiential interaction, such as conducting offline workshops and educational activities; and building community platforms to facilitate communication among enthusiasts. Key measures include collaborating with influencers to expand dissemination, designing immersive experience activities, establishing community support systems, and regularly holding market exhibitions and other long-term activities.

5.6. Modern People's Outlook on Intangible Cultural Heritage

Currently, the level of understanding of intangible cultural heritage among modern people still needs to be improved. Surveys show that the reasons mainly include:

On one hand, although communication channels are becoming increasingly diversified, especially emerging forms such as short videos and self-media provide new platforms for the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, these promotions often appear fragmented, lacking systematic integration and effective communication strategies, resulting in poor information transmission effects; on the other hand, it is particularly prominent that young people's participation is low,

and existing activities have not fully aligned with their interests, making it difficult to stimulate their enthusiasm for active understanding and participation.

In order to change this situation and allow intangible cultural heritage to be more deeply integrated into modern life and gain widespread recognition, people generally look forward to and suggest the following measures:

Firstly, it is necessary to integrate resources from various parties, including cultural institutions, schools, and enterprises, to develop systematic publicity strategies. Additionally, fully utilize diverse communication methods such as short videos, social media, and live broadcasts to create interesting, easy-to-understand, and varied content to enhance attractiveness. Secondly, actively embrace modern technology, such as AR/VR and immersive experiences, to innovate the display methods of intangible cultural heritage, enhancing interactivity and fun. At the same time, vigorously carry out offline experience activities, such as Gu embroidery production courses, lectures, and design interactive projects that align with the interests of young people, such as cultural and creative design competitions and online challenges, allowing the public, especially the younger generation, to experience it firsthand, thereby enhancing understanding and recognition. Finally, establishing a long-term mechanism is crucial; it is essential to integrate intangible cultural heritage-related content into the education system, starting from the youth stage to cultivate awareness and interest in traditional culture, ensuring the sustainable inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage.

These measures collectively point to one goal:

To revitalize the precious intangible cultural heritage with new vitality and vigor through more efficient, innovative, and modern approaches that resonate with people's lives, especially the younger generation.

5.7. Summary of Questionnaire Research

Through this questionnaire survey, we have gained a deeper understanding of the current awareness of Gu embroidery as a traditional craft. The survey results show that although Gu embroidery, as an intangible cultural heritage of Shanghai, carries rich historical and cultural connotations, its awareness and participation among young people remain relatively low. Most respondents have limited knowledge of Gu embroidery, especially among young women aged 10 - 20, who, while showing some interest in traditional culture, still need to improve their overall awareness.

To this end, we recommend taking various measures to promote Gu embroidery and other intangible cultural heritage. Firstly, utilize modern technology and social media to create more attractive promotional content to capture the attention of young people. Secondly, combine modern design concepts to innovate Gu embroidery works and enhance their market competitiveness. Additionally, organize offline experience activities and workshops to allow young people to partic-

ipate firsthand, enhancing their sense of identity and interest in traditional crafts.

In summary, only through multi-faceted promotion and education can we effectively enhance the public's awareness of Gu embroidery, stimulate young people's enthusiasm for traditional culture, and thus achieve the inheritance and development of Gu embroidery. We hope that relevant institutions can take active action and contribute to the future of Gu embroidery.

To strengthen the connection between the proposed business model and survey findings, we explicitly align the strategies with the specific needs identified in Section 5. For instance, the online promotion strategy leveraging WeChat Official Accounts, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin directly responds to the survey's indication that young people (especially females aged 10 - 20, who constitute 72.34% of respondents) are highly engaged with social media. By creating content like "production process display + home space matching + light and shadow effect shooting", we address their demand for visually appealing and culturally rich content, which can effectively raise awareness among this demographic that currently has low recognition of Gu embroidery (only 27.66% of respondents are aware of it).

Regarding experiential workshops, the survey shows that many respondents are willing to learn Gu embroidery out of interest in traditional culture and personal aesthetics. Thus, the "Handmade Workshop + Lifestyle Store" composite experience venues and offline workshops can cater to their desire for hands-on participation, helping to bridge the gap between their positive attitude towards traditional crafts and their limited knowledge of Gu embroidery. Additionally, the proposed themed customization for cultural tourism and hotel spaces aligns with the respondents' suggestion to innovate Gu embroidery products through modern design integration, meeting their need for products that combine cultural identity with contemporary aesthetics.

6. Conclusion

The history of Gu embroidery is not only the images woven from threads but also the crystallization of multiple inheritances of culture, family, and craftsmanship. At the intersection of tradition and modernity, it faces both survival challenges and innovation opportunities. Only by deeply understanding its cultural roots and seeking breakthroughs based on craftsmanship can this delicate art, originating from the boudoir, continue to shine in the context of the new era.

This article focuses on the historical origins and artistic structure analysis of Gu embroidery, cross-media image reconstruction exploration, and the consumption potential and cultural value assessment of its home products through literature review, case analysis method, SWOT analysis, and the "pain point-itch point-pleasure point" model evaluation method. This study proposes the integration of Gu embroidery and paper-cutting in lampshade design, which is an important attempt in the transformation of traditional crafts to the contemporary market. Such products not only retain the aesthetic value of intangible cultural heritage skills but also meet the current consumers' multiple demands for "handmade feel", "cultural sig-

nificance”, and “aesthetic of life”, showing considerable commercialization prospects. The conclusion shows that Gu embroidery has significant cultural and commercial integration potential in the new media era. Its innovative paths, combined with media such as paper-cutting and product designs targeting consumer pain points, can effectively promote the translation and application of traditional crafts in modern life scenarios, providing actionable, practical ideas for cultural regeneration. This article, through questionnaire research, believes that although Gu embroidery is an intangible cultural heritage of Shanghai, its awareness and participation among young people are still relatively low, and overall awareness still needs to be improved. We recommend adopting various measures to promote Gu embroidery and other intangible cultural heritages. Only through multi-faceted promotion and education can the public’s awareness of Gu embroidery be effectively enhanced, achieving the inheritance and development of Gu embroidery.

The main shortcomings of this article lie in the fact that the proposed integration of Gu embroidery and paper-cutting in lampshade design has not yet been tested in the market and practice, and its feasibility remains to be studied and verified. Additionally, the sample size of the questionnaire survey is limited, and no regional investigation was conducted. Future research can further expand the sample size and refine the questions for related investigations.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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