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Decorative Image and Cultural Implication of Embroidery in Jinnan (Southern Shanxi)

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Abstract
Jinnan (*Southern Shanxi*) embroidery is a traditional Chinese folk handicraft. In this study, we collected a large number of historical resources and theoretical materials of *Jinnan* embroidery and randomly sampled 100 works as research objects. These works were compared, and the artistic expression and implication in these works were analysed. We found that animal patterns are the main object of *Jinnan* embroidery and that the colour scheme in *Jinnan* embroidery is simple, with red and yellow as the main colours. After an in-depth analysis of their theme and value, the embroidery patterns were shown to convey totem worship, reproduction worship and auspicious worship, reflecting the long-term aesthetic concepts and living customs in southern *Shanxi*.

Keywords
embroidery, *Jinnan*, decorative image, cultural implication.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Objectives

Jinnan (South of Shanxi) embroidery, a traditional Chinese folk handicraft which boasts a unique artistic style influenced by the geographical environment and local customs, is the embodiment of the wisdom of the working people [1]. In the beginning, the embroidery was made for family members; thus it was always refined but not perfect. This artistic achievement formed the essence of Chinese folk art and culture, with different characteristics in different times and regions.

Jinnan embroidery boasts a high artistic, academic and practical value, and its characteristics should be given attention and integrated with modern art. It not only continues the traditional cultural style but also enriches the cultural implication of modern art design. New design methods should be explored by using contemporary high-tech achievements to provide a combined visual impact on tradition and fashion. This study aims to explore deeply the artistic value and aesthetics of *Jinnan* folk embroidery, inherit embroidery patterns, and improve the design and quality of products to abide with the rapid social development and adapt to modern consumption and aesthetics. This research will allow common people to understand the continuous development and progress of *Jinnan* folk embroidery, attract the attention of researchers from different fields, and introduce folk embroidery in southern *Shanxi*.

1.2. Research Objects and Methods

Taking traditional folk embroidery art as the research object, this study collected a large number of historical resources and theoretical material on *Jinnan* embroidery and summarises the characteristics of *Shanxi* folk embroidery art to provide a general understanding of *Jinnan* folk embroidery.

This study collected 1856 pieces of embroidery works in *Jinnan* and randomly selected 100 pieces as research objects. It considered the embroidery works in southern *Shanxi,* with their different pattern designs, embroidery methods and mascot implications, compared the research objects, and analysed the artistic expression and implication in these works.

2. Overview of *Jinnan* embroidery

2.1. Origin of *Jinnan* embroidery

According to legend, *Leizu* invented mulberry planting and silkworm rearing in ancient times. As early as the Zhou Dynasty, the saying ‘Painting and embroidery support one’s life’ was already known. In Chapter Tang Feng of the Book of Songs, the line ‘With white clothes and red embroidery, I follow you to the *city of Gao*’, refers to *Shanxi* folk embroidery [2]. In around 745 B.C. to 738 B.C., embroidery began to be one part of local life in *Shanxi* Province, starting from women’s embroidered shoes in the state of *Jin*, which refers to the *Quwo* area of today. In 677 B.C., *Duke Xian* of *Jin* became the king of the country and made great achievements in expanding territory areas. To preserve his achievements, he ordered that all women should embroider pomegranate , peach , persimmon and other flower and fruit patterns on their wedding shoes to promote the aim of ‘Annexation of ten countries’. In the long run, the range of embroidery skills gradually extended from embroidered shoes to other items, and embroidery patterns were not limited to flower and fruit patterns anymore. According to relevant materials [3-5], *Shanxi* folk embroidery took shape at

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that time, which laid the foundation for the development of embroidery culture for future generations. Moreover, embroidery at that time was not only related to aesthetics, but it also symbolised various social relations of the ruling class, restricted by the types of raw materials and production technology available at that time.

In the 1960s and 1970s, *Jinnan* folk embroidery appeared in daily necessities, such as aprons and purses, instead of only on shoes. In the 1980s, many of its embroidery works began to appear on children's toys, purses and insoles [1]. The characters embroidered were mainly symbolised with 'more children, more blessings' and 'good luck'. The content of embroidery covered animals, plants and human beings, with its range being from simple clothing and accessories to handicrafts and collectibles. In addition to the original function of decoration, its decorative crafts and some small accessories gradually became the symbol of people's gender, marital status and social status.

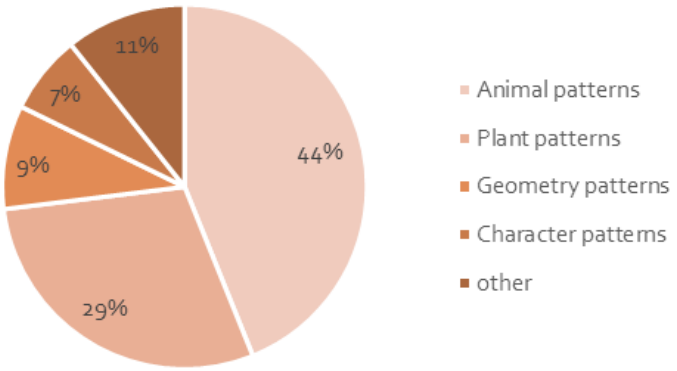


Fig. 1. Pattern design of Jinnan embroidery

2.2. Classification and artistic features of *Jinnan* embroidery

Based on function, *Jinnan* embroidery can be divided into two categories: ornamental and practical, with the characteristics of 'gorgeous but not vulgar, with exquisite and chic feature' [6]. From the perspective of craft, *Jinnan* embroidery can be divided into several categories: silk, velvet cutting, pulling, piling, cross and cloth sticking. According to the production era and craft features, it can be divided into traditional and modern types.

Embroidery in the southern *Shanxi* area has many types with rich colours and exquisite composition. In *Jinnan*, the custom of using silk thread of five colours in the Dragon Boat Festival is still retained, which is the basic material for embroidery [6] . The embroiderer usually smooths the thread and matches colours according to it before starting a project. From the overview, *Jinnan* embroidery enjoys a well-balanced tension, with a concordant picture and rich subject matters. In terms of layout, *Jinnan* embroidery is mostly composed of scattered patterns with a centre, most of which reflects the yearning of hardworking, honest and kind people for a better life. *Jinnan* embroidery has different themes in different historical periods, and animal, plant and geometric patterns are mostly used. Other embroidery patterns include traditional images, such as dragons, phoenixes, zodiac signs, peonies and magpies.

Jinnan embroidery works are uniquely made of hard materials. To be a master of *Jinnan* embroidery, one needs to have a solid foundation of 'thread' skills and years of accumulation and practice [7]. In the rural areas of southern *Shanxi*, embroidery is decorated on most daily necessities and clothes, including collars, cuffs, skirts, hats, shoes and the bibs of children, as well as the bed quilts, pillows, wedding curtains, tablecloths and cushions used in marriage customs.

Due to the influence of local customs, *Jinnan* folk embroidery has its own special and popular emotional expression themes, the most general of which include a peacock spreading its tail feathers, a magpie in plum blossom, pines and cranes symbolising longevity, two dragons playing with a pearl, phoenix and peony, a lotus and kingfisher, fish leaping over a dragon gate, butterflies flying through flowers, a lion rolling an embroidered ball, a lotus bearing noble son, and a hundred flowers competing. Vegetables and fruits, animals and plants, beautiful scenery of mountains and rivers, towers and pavilions, and popular opera characters and plots are other common themes in life.

Jinnan folk embroidery is mainly distributed and developed in *Linfen*, Houma, Yuncheng and other areas in southern *Shanxi*. The embroidery in these areas boasts a representative style and runs through the social life. It is closely combined with *Shanxi* folk customs and inherits the simple and elegant style of *Jinnan* folk embroidery, which integrates practicality, decoration and folk custom.

3. Decorative image of *Jinnan* embroidery

3.1. Pattern design of *Jinnan* embroidery

Jinnan embroidery patterns are mostly designed according to local conditions. The design of patterns mostly comes from the perception and understanding of life, combined with the ideas of locals, flexible forms of expression, and various themes. Influenced by the deep-rooted traditional culture, the Houma embroidery pattern with its enriched native flavour also reflects the hope, yearning and pursuit of local people for a better life.

This study analyses the common animal, plant and geometric patterns in *Jinnan* embroidery and explores the design rules. Through the analysis of 100 random samples, the main patterns were divided into five categories, namely, animals, plants, geometry, character, and others. Animals accounted for the highest

Animal	Implication	Diagram
Tiger#	Bless the children to be safe,, brave, and promising, as well as to grow healthily	
Dragon	Peace and harvest	
	Regarded as the God of Rain or Protection	
	Symbol of love and a happy life together with a phoenix	
Phoenix	Truth, goodness and beauty, benevolent government	
	Symbol of beautiful life and love together with a dragon	
	Phoenix with spreading wings means women's desire for a better life	
Fish	Like fish in water	
	Rich food and clothing, happy life	
	Abundant wealth	
Butterfly	A firm and beautiful love and a perfect marriage together with a flower	
Crane	Spirit and merit	
	Longevity and peace	
Lion	Authority and supremacy	
	Growth and prosperity	

Table 1. Animal patterns of Jinnan embroidery
#Image Source: https://www.sohu.com/a/317046436_782283

Plant	Implication	Diagram
Peony	Prosperity and happiness Luck and wealth	
Lotus	Noble moral character and sentiment Homonym 'Lian' implies prosperity of future generations	
Gourd	Precious and lucky Homonym 'fulu' means 'fortune', to express the hope for a high official position and wealth by taking its good omen of wealth and luck. Having seeds in the gourd means many children and many blessings for future generations	

Table 2. Plant patterns of Jinnan embroidery

proportion of 44%, followed by plants (29%), and the least was character (7%), as shown in Figure 1.

1) Animal patterns

The animal patterns in *Jinnan* embroidery can be divided into divine and common ones. Divine animals include green dragons, white tigers, unicorns and so on, among which dragons, phoenixes and tigers are the majority , as shown in Table 1. Common animals include butterflies, fish, lions, bats, cranes, and so on. All animals play different roles in human life and are ubiquitous in the relationship between humans and nature, humans and society, and even humans and others. Through the temperament of animals, we can carry forward traditional beliefs and convey our admiration for nature.

2) Plant patterns

The plant patterns in *Jinnan* embroidery mainly include peonies, lotuses, pomegranates, watermelons and so on, as shown in Table 2. Each type of plant is endowed with different meanings by craftsmen because of its different characteristics. These craftsmen were not specially trained but completely understood the common wishes of the masses to summarise the existing images in nature and convey the beautiful implication in their works.

3) Geometric patterns

The geometric patterns in Jinnan embroidery include clouds, persimmons and others. In the book History of Chinese Patterns, Tian Zibing wrote that geometric patterns are a universal primitive decoration shared by all countries in the world and are common in craft culture [8]. Geometric patterns have been popular since ancient times not only because of their simple and rich decorative characteristics but also their close relation to the primitive thinking of human beings. The basic form of the persimmon pedicel pattern is a tetragonal flower with pointed petals, which is slightly rhombic or square. Persimmons reportedly have seven virtues: long life, shady trees, without a bird's nest, without insects, enjoyable frosty leaves, rich and beautiful fruit, and large fallen leaves for writing [9]. Persimmons have enjoyed the implication of auspiciousness since ancient times. In the folk embroidery of the *Jinnan* area, persimmons usually appear in double, implying that everything is going well. In embroidery, different patterns are often applied in combination.

4) Character patterns

In some cases, characters are directly embroidered in works as art patterns. Full of direct feelings by literal expression, these embroidery patterns can be found everywhere in daily life, such as a pair of insoles embroidered with the character 囍 (pronounced as 'xi' and represents happiness) in wedding customs to express blessing for the new couple. Many characters also represent an auspicious meaning, shown in Figure 2: 福 (pronounced as 'fu' and represents blessing), 禄 (pronounced as 'lu' and represents promotion), and 壽 (pronounced as 'shou' and represents longevity). In addition to these common characters and patterns, craftsmen also connect characters and patterns to create new fancy patterns wisely and skilfully.

The most common theme of embroidery in *Jinnan* is an animal pattern. Plant and geometric patterns only play a supporting role of embellishment and decoration, filling up the empty part of pictures and promoting the cultural value of embroidery. Craftsmen use exaggerated patterns to highlight the artistic characteristics and inner spirit of *Jinnan* embroidery and leave no empty space in the composition design. For example, the 'tarpaulin towel' commonly used to cover things at home in ancient times has a suitable pattern as the centre, with slightly different lace patterns on the four corners to decorate and embellish, creating a vivid, rich and harmonious picture. Some designs pursue a combination of sparse or dense elements,

Fig. 2. Character patterns ('福' on the left and '壽' on the right)
Image Source: https://www.sohu.com/a/317046436_782283

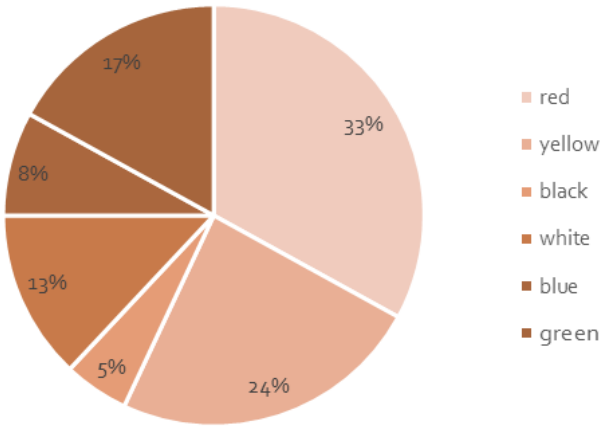


Fig. 3. Colours of Jinnan embroidery pattern

Fi. 4. Colour contrast of Jinnan embroidery pattern

whereas others take the main body as the whole picture, with some accessories expressed mainly by points and lines, highlighting the theme to make a rich and unified picture. Moreover, some pattern designs are symmetrical longitudinally and bilaterally, and the patterns are laid according to the symmetry axis to promote the rhythm and symmetry of the picture. These symmetrical and balanced themes, such as flowers and insects, trees and birds, sun and moon, combine movement and stillness, Yin and Yang, to make the picture complementary and vivid.

3.2. Colour scheme of *Jinnan* embroidery

The colour selection in *Jinnan* embroidery works is few in type but bright and bold, which is inspired by the ancient concept of the traditional five elements and colours. The North is symbolised by black, the South by red, the West by white, the East by blue, and the centre by yellow. This pattern is also the basic criterion and aesthetic standard of our ancient art concerning colour matching. Through the content embodied by the colour of the five elements, the strong contrast of colours in *Jinnan* folk embroidery is also the choice of history [10]. With dark colour as the background and silk thread of the five elements as the colour of the main object, the colour of the embroidery surface is strong in contrast and harmonious, which achieves an artistic effect of festival celebration.

Through the colour extraction of 100 samples of *Jinnan* embroidery, it can be observed that yellow or red is mostly used, where Red is 33%, and yellow 24%, which increases the lightness of the embroidery and attracts attention. Then, green accounts for 17%, white 13%, blue 8% and black 5%, as shown in Figure 3. Yellow, especially bright yellow, is regarded as a noble and sacred colour, representing supreme authority, which is always used to express hope for life. Red is common in folk embroidery, implying auspiciousness, which is the best choice to create aesthetic feeling. Other colours play a supporting role to strengthen the visual effect.

In terms of the use of colour, contrast colours are always used in *Jinnan* embroidery, which form a sharp collision: a) the contrast of different colour systems, such as typical red with green, and blue with orange, which comes from nature; b) the contrast of the same colour system: fewer colours are used in *Jinnan*

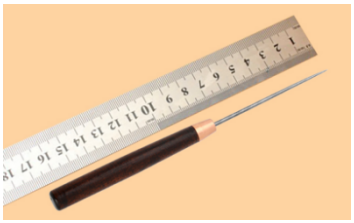
Name	Introduction	Diagram
Textile ground[1]	Common fabrics in *Jinnan* embroidery are wool or cotton. Coarse and loose fabrics are best matched with thick threads, whereas fine fabrics are matched with fine threads.	
Needle[2]	As a tool to lead the line, the needle can be divided into different sizes catering to different needs to embroider different patterns.	
Thimble[3]	The small pinhole on the circular object can block the needle from twisting back and forth. It is usually worn on the middle finger, helping the needle pass quickly to fix and prevent wearing.	
Embroidery thread[4]	Cotton thread is commonly used in Jinnan folk embroidery. Given its low cost, it often appears in the embroidery of daily necessities.	
Awl[5]	An awl is used to drill holes in the insole to facilitate the shuttle of the needle and thread.	
Paste	Paste can be made by stirring water and powder with tools. It is used to attach Spring Festival couplets or window patterns.	
Scissors[6]	The tip of the embroidery scissors should be tilted to one side and tilted flat without erecting while cutting thread, instead of being tilted to the background cloth, which might scratch the embroidery.	

Table 3. Auxiliary tools of Jinnan embroidery

[1] *https://item.taobao.com/item.htm?spm=a230r.1.999.1.4ca8523cwpKknZ&id=591088948111&ns=1#detail*
[2] *https://item.taobao.com/item.htm?spm=a230r.1.999.7.85da523cRBn0Ew&id=579499180087&ns=1#detail*
[3] *https://item.taobao.com/item.htm?spm=a230r.1.999.8.3c50523cde3YC6&id=641148011208&ns=1#detail*
[4] *https://detail.tmall.com/item.htm?spm=a230r.1.999.13.1c7f523cdzTv3M&id=623466120994&ns=1*
[5] *https://item.taobao.com/item.htm?spm=a230r.1.999.1.5dc0523c3yYA7J&id=601354291038&ns=1#detail*
[6] *https://item.taobao.com/item.htm?spm=a230r.1.999.1.5850523cZpFwIV&id=635188652340&ns=1#detail*

folk embroidery to avoid complicating the whole embroidery; instead, colour in the same system makes the picture a whole unity; c) the contrast of light and shade: through the observation of light and shade, the bright or dim colours of embroidery thread are combined to show a 3D picture; d) unequal contrast of colour blocks: the dynamic and static unity and harmonious coexistence of the whole embroidery surface can be achieved by distinguishing the number of colours, as shown in Figure 4.

In conclusion, the characteristics of *Jinnan* embroidery are as follows: Firstly, the colour scheme is appropriate. If we take red, green and black as 'tough colours' and pink, pink green and light yellow as 'soft colours', we will find that only when the strong and weak are properly matched can the overall picture achieve harmony and unity. Secondly, patterns and colours of advance and retreat are balanced. Perspective and shadow are less involved in *Jinnan* embroidery, whereas the law of colour change and matching principles are mastered. The embroidery perfectly combines the shape and colour of embroidery patterns to produce a strong visual effect. Thirdly, colours imply happiness. Festive colours, such as red and yellow, which symbolise auspiciousness, are commonly used in *Jinnan* embroidery. The collocation of colours expresses thoughts and wishes for a better life. Fourthly, less is better than more. Only five to seven types of basic colours are commonly used in *Jinnan* embroidery. Through the collocation and combination, a variety of colour effects can be created.

3.3. Technical features of *Jinnan* embroidery

In embroidery, aside from the basic embroidery cloth and thread, many auxiliary tools, such as needle, thimble, awl and scissors, are used [11,12]. These tools help accomplish different embroidery patterns, as shown in Table 3.

The popular embroidery styles in the *Jinnan* area are vivid and simple, the techniques of which are always changeable, mainly regarding flat needlings, Na embroidery, cross stitch embroidery and seed embroidery[12] are shown in Table 4. Moreover, the various techniques are flexible and special, which brings a good sense of decoration and rich texture to embroidery projects [11].

According to different regions, various embroidery techniques were formed in *Jinnan* folk embroidery. In addition to the main techniques summarised in the table above, women select and adjust the techniques according to the actual needs and the situation of complicated graphics. The diversity of techniques leads to different decorative styles and reflects the warm and unrestrained personality of the Shanxi people.

4. Cultural implication of Jinnan embroidery

4.1. *Jinnan* embroidery and reproduction worship

For reproduction worship, *Jinnan* folk also embroidery conveys it by patterns. Due to the extreme desire to reproduce, several folk stories about reproduction appear in embroidery works to long for more children and more happiness. In the Da Ya·Mian chapter of *Book of Songs*, a detailed expression goes 'The extension of melon vine implies the birth of the people' [13]. The continuously growing melons and fruit have many seeds in their bellies with strong vitality, which symbolises the continuous reproduction of future generations. Melons and fruit refer to the mother of life, who gives birth to generation after generation. In the folk embroidery of *Jinnan*, the pattern of melon and fruit is usually embroidered on a purse, with interesting and auspicious implications. For example, a 'squirrel grape' belly wrapped in a 'squirrel grape' pattern, shown in Figure 5 [14], in the middle part, and auspicious patterns, such as a peach [9], pomegranate, fish or phoenix in the four corners, is a common practice of free pattern selection in *Jinnan*. The squirrel refers to a rat, which is often called a 'rat charm' in the 'dizhi' (earthly branches), and represents a god that is depicted as a rat in Chinese tradition. In addition, the grape is full

Fig. 5. 'Squirrel grape pattern

of fruits with numerous seeds. The combination of grape and squirrel means many children, many blessings and the prosperity of future generations. The 'early birth of a noble son' is composed of red dates, peanuts, as well as longan and lotus seeds, which implicitly express reproduction worship in *Jinnan*.

4.2. *Jinnan* embroidery and festivals and celebrations

As a special spiritual production, the art production of folk embroidery is the most natural expression and most real existence because one is always happy because of happy things and sad because of unhappy things [16]. In social life, the happiest thing brings about the custom of festivity, and the saddest thing brings about the custom of funeral, which is also called 'red and white celebrations'. *Jinnan* embroidery plays an important role in festivities and funerals. The new birth itself is a kind of joy, which is worthy of celebration. Relatives and elders always express their joy in the arrival of new life by giving gifts, such as hat rings, tiger shoes and card necklaces. Small gifts like belly wraps and bibs with popular auspicious patterns are also sometimes welcomed. In addition to new birth, when celebrating an elder's birthday, the younger generation should present clothing items to them, as shown in Figure 6.

These clothes are generally embroidered with 'shou', longevity patterns. Moreover, in a variety of sacrificial activities, such as the offering to God of Wealth on the first day or the 15th day

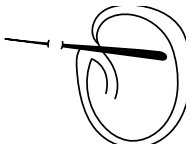
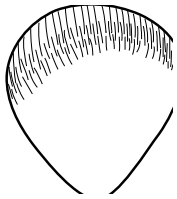
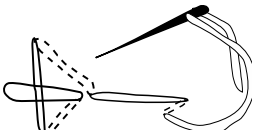
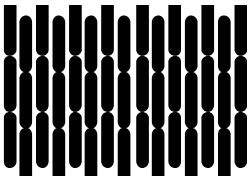
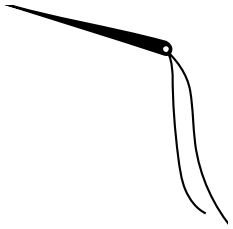
Needling	Diagram	Characteristics	Scope of application
Flat embroidery		The embroidery thread starts from one side of the outline and falls to the other side. The stitch should be flat, even, balanced and smooth. The trace should be parallel, even and straight, with its surface and edge flat and even, neither too heavy nor too exposed.	Mainly used in daily necessities and clothing accessories, such as necklines, cuffs, hats, shoes.quilt covers, pillows, wedding tents, longevity tents and table girths.
Seed embroidery		With the knot in small lines, it is placed on the embroidered surface to form a line or a surface by a dense row of particles. It can increase the level of embroidery, showing a similar effect of relief works, with a sense of smoothness, delicacy and order.	Due to the small size and flexible combination, various patterns can be embroidered in this way, usually in flower stamens, the eyes of birds, animals, insects and fish, and patterns on a purse
Round stitch embroidery		This firm and even embroidery method is composed of a ring lock with embroidered thread. The scales between embroidered threads are complex, and the teeth are staggered. When embroidered to the end of the edge, the needle still needs to be flat.	Always used in pillowcases, bibs, insoles and others
Cross stitch		Most of the embroidered patterns are traditiona,l with some abstract deformation patterns of ancient totems. Before embroidering, warp and weft should be drawn first on the cloth surface, and then cross-shaped stitches are used to form exaggerated and deformed geometric patterns on the surface, which is beautiful and practical.	Always appearing in insoles
Na embroidery		Being extremely firm and dense , this embroidery method is relatively simple, with no excessive decorative elements in the pattern design, and embroidered fully without exposing the background.	More practical, more used in rural embroidery
Drawing embroidery		According to the pattern design, the warp or weft of the pattern part should be removed while being connected to form a hollow decorative pattern. Limited by the yarn texture, the pattern shape is symmetrical longitudinally and bilaterally, mainly represented by eight knots, with diamonds, two diagonally overlapping squares and other geometric patterns.	Commonly used in tablecloths, curtains, handkerchiefs, armchairs and other daily necessities

Table 4. Techniques of Jinnan embroidery

of the lunar month, hoping that the God of Wealth can bring about wealth, and offering food to the God of Kitchen on the 25th day of the first lunar month.The tablecloth and curtain used for rituals are all elaborately designed and embroidered because they are believed to carry infinite good wishes.

4.3. Jinnan embroidery and auspicious worship

Chapter *Hongfan* in the *Book of History* puts forward 'five blessings', which are longevity, wealth, health and peace, merit and die a natural death' [14]. The common auspicious themes are 'happiness, wealth, longevity, happiness and wealth'. 福 (pronounced as 'fu') in China has a profound cultural connotation, symbolising a happy life, everything going smoothly, wealth and peace [17]. In *Jinnan* folk embroidery, most of the patterns, such as dragon and phoenix auspicious patterns, symbolise blessing. The dragon is the essence of gods, and the phoenix is the queen of birds. Men

Fig. 6. Gift of a baby's birth in Jinnan embroidery

Fig. 7. Characters福 禄 壽 and 囍 (pronounced as 'fu', 'lu', 'shou' and 'xi', respectively) in Jinnan embroidery

are described by the dragon and women by the phoenix. Dragon and phoenix auspicious patterns are always used to celebrate newlyweds, congratulating them on their happiness.

禄 (pronounced as 'lu') refers to a high official status and rich salary. In traditional Chinese culture, the pursuit of fame and wealth is very competitive. The ideological system of valuing officials is also far-reaching [18]. Some cases in *Jinnan* folk embroidery express hope for a high rank and wealth, such as a 'carp leaping over a dragon's gate' pillow top.

壽 (pronounced as 'shou') refers to health and longevity, which imply the attention paid by man to its life. Longevity, as a specific physiological and cultural phenomenon, is a concept of time in which limited life can be extended. In daily life, many rituals and patterns are designed to pray for longevity [19]. In *Jinnan* folk embroidery, women use the character pattern of 'shou' to express their wishes to the elderly, which includes their care for the family relationship and essentially reflects a kind of good feeling between people and their desire for life extension.

囍 (pronounced as 'xi') refers to happiness, always seen in double with a contrasting colour and pattern, which is used at weddings [20]. In ancient times, when people prepared the wedding of their daughters, a set of 囍 (pronounced as 'xi') articles with exquisite embroidery was a must. They hoped that their daughter would be valued by her husband and implied a happy married life.

财 (pronounced as 'cai') refers to wealth. In the imagination of Shanxi locals, the pursuit and desire for wealth were important. It reflects not only the desire for wealth and other psychological states but also the ideal and goal of acquiring wealth [12,18]. In *Jinnan* folk embroidery, the pursuit of wealth is often embodied by means of homophonic characters, such as 富财 (homonymous with 蝠 and both pronounced as 'fu'), which means luck. This metaphorical method reflects the introverted and thoughtful mind of Shanxi women. The concept of auspicious worship permeated all aspects of life in southern Shanxi, which has experienced the process from abstract to concrete and from conceptualisation at the beginning to secularisation, and developed in an independent aesthetic orientation with a cherished wish for a better life, shown in Figure 7.

4.4. Modern development of *Jinnan* embroidery

As a stream of folk art, *Jinnan* folk embroidery has experienced several frustrations and tribulations until now. However, without historical records nor a systematic education system, it develops

barely by means of family heritage [6]. In addition, traditional embroidery is greatly influenced by modern culture. Due to the economic growth, traditional handicrafts are gradually replaced by industrialisation. Thus, the development of *Jinnan* folk embroidery is under such great threat. The complicated process, the high cost in time and labour, and the low speed of production lead to failure in seeking successors, which cause certain obstacles for its development.

5. Conclusion

Jinnan embroidery boasts a long history and represents the local cultural expression of Shanxi Province. Although its reputation is not as grand as other traditional embroidery, because of its location restrictions, it has preserved its unique pattern and customs and shows the most primitive part to the world, which is mysterious and attractive to people. This study starts from the historical evolution of embroidery in southern Shanxi Province, expounds the characteristics and development status of embroidery in representative areas, analyses the artistic characteristics and cultural implication of patterns, summarises the materials collected and further explores the necessity of the heritage of folk embroidery in the development of *Jinnan* embroidery to promote the development of folk embroidery in southern Shanxi through research on embroidery patterns. The following conclusions are drawn:

1. Animal patterns are the main object of embroidery in southern Shanxi, with a variety of themes penetrating each other. The patterns enjoy complex but not chaotic themes, and distinctive but orderly forms, the cultural implication of which is rich and profound.
2. The colour scheme in *Jinnan* embroidery is simple, with red and yellow as the main colours. The intensity of colours matches one other properly, with few shades and strong colour contrast.
3. The embroidery in southern Shanxi is simple and changeable.
4. After an in-depth analysis of their theme and value, the embroidery patterns appear to convey totem worship, reproduction worship and auspicious worship, reflecting the long-term aesthetic concepts and living customs in southern Shanxi.

In the later development of *Jinnan* folk embroidery, we need to identify its position and provide attention to characteristics of the cultural value of patterns and the brightness of the colour, rather than barely give it a modern or fashionable label. In today's ever-changing living conditions, people are trying to abandon the lifestyle of the past and begin to seek change, which leads to the popularity of different personalised and handmade works. Simplicity and purity could both be found in *Jinnan* folk embroidery in terms of aesthetic taste. This opportunity is good for *Jinnan* folk embroidery to attract the attention of the world again and become a cultural symbol of spiritual needs. We should also pay attention to the unity of opposites between the artistry and commerciality of heritage. We should respect the traditional culture instead of blindly catering to the needs of consumers. Only by fully respecting the intangible cultural heritage can we inherit and develop it, as well as make it infinitely appealing in the future.

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Declaration of interests

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