

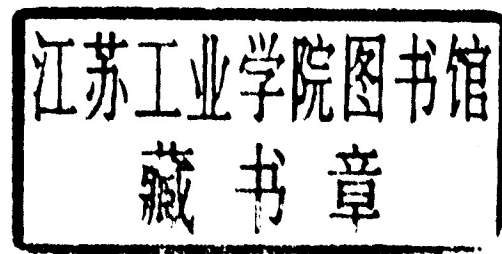
China Folk Arts Series



CHINESE CLOTH ART

CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS

Compiled by Geng Mo



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Preface

The cloth art of China refers to cloth handicrafts made by Chinese people using traditional cloth and threads as raw materials. These are tailored, sewn and adorn the different cloths. Cloth handicrafts come in such forms as embroidery, Gesi tapestry, hand stitching, embroidery paste, barbola, brocade and batik.

Chinese people were the first to raise silkworms and from the cocoons they made silk thread which was used to weave silk fabrics. Yuanfei, the concubine of the Yellow Emperor, personally raised silkworms and called on all other women to do likewise. The emperor himself personally took part in tilling and popularized silkworm raising technology among the people. In this way a traditional system was introduced for the raising of silkworms. This, plus the system introduced some 4,000 years ago for people of different social strata to wear garments with different colours and designs, prompted the fast development of the weaving and embroidering technologies in China. Using only needle and thread the Chinese quickly learned to make decorative garments. This helped to make peoples lives more colourful and satisfied the people's need for a better quality of life. This, in turn, contributed to the development of civilization in China.

Embroidering, which originated as silk embroidering, is done mostly by women. It is now called Nuhong or needlecraft. As the art was passed down historically between mother and daughter, or between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law, it became known as the "mother's art." Chinese cloth art found great popularity with the tribal groups and families for thousands of years and retains the most primitive art form of ancient China. It also reflects ancient Chinese worship and beliefs. Cloth art includes garments, toys and articles for daily use. Cloth art helps relieve the boredom of everyday life by making everyday items more colourful. It reminds the people of their history and customs through the designs and thus helps retain their individuality.

In early times in China the standard of living was primitive and the most important things were survival and procreation.

Nature changed so quickly and mysteriously that the people imagined there was a supernatural force that existed behind the changes. This lent support to their imagination that “each figure or pattern had a meaning and the meaning must be auspicious.” Gradually the people created drawings of their ancestors, lucky animals, flowers, plants, geometric lines and other patterns to bring good luck and avoid evil.

While making hats, shoes and dresses as well as a variety of pillows and cloth toys in the shape of divine beings, women always adorned them with the pattern of “A Tiger” or “A Tiger Who Suppresses the Five Poisonous Creatures” (referring to scorpions, snakes, centipedes, geckos and toads). The purpose was to pray for good luck to dispel the evil so that the children would grow up healthy. Belts, Hebao bags, pillows and other dowry items were all adorned with such patterns as “Mandarin Ducks Playing in Water,” “Lotus Bidding for Sons,” and “Carp Swimming Among the Lotus Plants.” They represent good wishes for a happy marriage and “The More the Sons the Happier the Life.” Articles presented to old people often carry patterns symbolizing “happiness, fortune and long life.” Other patterns include bats, deer and long life peaches to wish good health, more children and a healthy life. All these patterns that depict hope show how much the people believed that appeasing the Gods was essential in order to have a good and happy life.

Embroidery is the most popular method used in cloth art. There are many different embroidery styles and schools. The major ones include Suzhou embroidery, Guangdong embroidery, Sichuan embroidery and Hunan embroidery and these are the most famous in China.

A close look at the cloth art of China shows that the family concept is the basis no matter how much society changed. The cloth art of China has passed down the history of China no matter what the conditions were. In particular and importantly it contains the folk culture of the different ethnic groups.



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Children's Hats

Children's hats are used to protect the children from the different elements the sun, wind and rain, also to keep them warm. However, they also show the peoples religion and are used by the old to give good wishes to the young. Out of their love for their children, women display their creativity to create numerous kinds of children's hats.

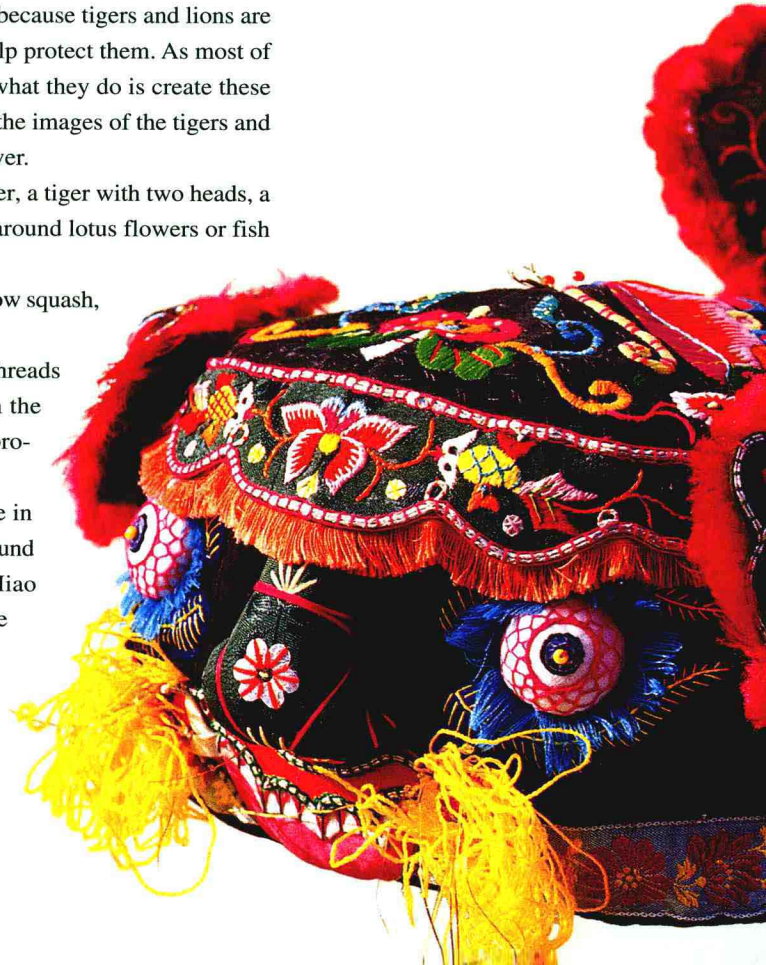
In northern China and some parts of southern China, children's hats decorated with the pattern of a tiger's or lion's head are the most common. This is because tigers and lions are thought of as kings of animals and the people hope they will help protect them. As most of the women have never had a chance to see a real tiger or lion what they do is create these animals according to what they are told. With the lapse of time the images of the tigers and the lions used to adorn the children's hats became similar all over.

Hats for boys include those having the shape of a whole tiger, a tiger with two heads, a whole lion, a lion with two heads, a unicorn, a butterfly flying around lotus flowers or fish swimming among lotus flowers.

Hats for girls include those having the shape of a lotus, marrow squash, pomegranate, or a phoenix.

All the hats are embroidered and decorated with hanging threads and silver or bronze bells. The people believe the sound from the silver or bronze bells will scare away the evil spirits and thus protect the children.

In areas in southern China, where the ethnic minorities live in compact communities, ancient hats for children that can still be found are mostly those found among the children of the Dong and Miao ethnic groups. They are embroidered with patterns such as the dragon or the phoenix, two dragons playing with a pearl, and butterflies and these are also adorned with silver or bronze chips. Some of these hats are decorated with a silver pattern of "Avalokitesvara Giving Blessings to the Children."





A Tiger's Head Hat

Most of the folk hats found today are tiger-head hats. People make tiger-head hats as a token of worship to the fierce and holy animal and also to get protection from it. The picture shows a tiger-head hat for a child from shanxi province.

A Tiger's Head Hat

This child's hat comes from Anhui Province. The green satin cloth printed with patterns is decorated with a tiger's head and the body of the animal is sewn using gold thread.





A Decorative Part of a Child's Hat

This is the decorative part of a child's hat popular among the people of Shanxi Province. This style of decorative piece is often attached to hats worn in winter. The scene embroidered here is a street scene.



A Decorative Part of a Child's Hat

This also comes from Shanxi Province and is embroidered also with a street scene. It forms a pair with the above piece.





A Tiger's Head Hat

This hat, found in the southern part of Shanxi Province, was made following a design created according to the age of the children and the changing seasons. These hats are elegant in shape and the colours are very bright. They also need good embroidery art. The “ears,” the “eyes” and the “tongues” of such hats can sway with movement.





A Lion's and Tiger's Head Hat

This hat again from the southern part of Shanxi Province features a combination design of both the lion's and tiger's heads.



A Tiger's Head Hat

This hat, another from the southern part of Shanxi Province, features rich and harmonious colours which come from the use of the sequin embroidery method.





A Tiger's Head Hat

This hat, unique to Jiangsu Province, features a black background. It was made using the barbola and inlay art to highlight the five organs of the tiger. Its two ears are decorated with two dangling embroidered balls.



A Tiger Hat

This hat comes from the Dingxiang region of Shanxi Province. It has the shape of a complete tiger.



A Child's Hat of the Dong Ethnic Group

This hat comes from the Rongjiang Dong ethnic group area of Guizhou Province. It is embroidered with a pattern of two dragons playing a pearl. This pattern is one of the most well known in China.





A Child's Hat of the Dong Ethnic Group

This hat also comes from the Rongjiang Dong ethnic group area of Guizhou Province. The top is embroidered with a dragon pattern and small pieces of silver are added to depict "Avalokitesvara Giving Blessings to the Children."

