

# Research on Clothing Narrative of White-Yarn-Ground Female Coats with Sprinkled Thread Embroidery of Drama Characters: Based on Clothing Representation and Narrative Expression of Clothing Pattern

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Received: February 10, 2022

Accepted: February 23, 2022

Online Published: March 30, 2022

doi:10.5539/ass.v18n4p14

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v18n4p14>

*Fund Project: Supported by the National Social Science Fund Art Major Project "Research on Design Aesthetics", Project No. 19ZD23*

## Abstract

This paper studies the inherent representation of "white-yarn-ground female coats with sprinkled thread embroidery of drama characters" and the narrative of the clothing pattern. Through the in-depth analysis of its inherent characteristics, the identity of its consumption and the process of production sequence can be inferred, which can provide a basis for the subsequent researchers to refine the study of the figure pattern. Through the narrative structure of multiple scenes, it is proved that the layout of the clothing pattern is an extension variant of "Tuanke", and made an in-depth interpretation of the narrative content in "TuanKe".

**Keywords:** Late Qing Dynasty, Women's Clothing, Patterns, Romance of the West Chamber, Clothing Narrative

## 1. Introduction

"White-yarn-ground female coats with sprinkled thread embroidery of drama characters" (hereinafter referred to as "female coats with drama characters") is based on sprinkled thread embroidery and embroidering the patterns of drama story characters. At present, there are few studies on the refinement of drama story patterns, which is only a branch of clothing patterns. This paper interprets the dress representation in the "female coats with drama characters" and the spatial narration of the drama scene, which provides a new research direction for the detailed research of the drama story patterns.

## 2. Basic Information of "White-Yarn-Ground Female Coats with Sprinkled Thread Embroidery of Drama Characters"

"White-yarn-ground female coats with sprinkled thread embroidery of drama characters" is now stored in China Silk Museum, No.2015.12.6, length of 84cm. The style is characterized by a stand-up collar and wide flat sleeves. The collar and shoulders are inlaid with four-sided cloud-shaped shoulders, three-button loops are sewn on the placket, with flower and animal pattern upturned sleeves, the cuffs and the outer edge of the hem are inlaid with sky blue floral pattern. The cloth is lined with cream-colored diameter yarn and embroidered with geometric pattern patterns through several yarn holes. The main colors are blue, green, and orange, and embroidered with more than 10 colored threads, cashmere, and twisted gold threads. The clothing body part is embroidered with the characters' stories of the drama "The Story of the West Chamber", pavilions, lakes, stones, flowers, landscapes, etc., the hem and both sides are embroidered with character scene patterns. The overall layout is dense and orderly, and the color tone is harmonious and elegant.

It is worth noting that these "female coats with drama characters" are named for their multi-themed embroidery patterns of drama characters, not for drama performances. The shapes of their costumes, such as the shoulders and necks with cloud shoulders, the wide straight sleeves with front stitched and upturned sleeves, and the ruyi cloud heads at the hem of the clothing, are all typical of the Han nationality in the late Qing Dynasty. In addition, according to the ancient books of the Qing Dynasty: "You should not wear bright gauze in summer. It's evil to

see the skin, and replace it with solid gauze, as a tribute." Although women can wear gauze in summer, it is indecent to wear a bright gauze to reveal the skin, and it is necessary to wear dense gauze on ceremonial occasions. Therefore, the white-yarn-ground is full of embroidered geometric patterns and drama figures. In addition to being beautiful, it can also cover the skin inside the gauze furthermore. In conclusion, this cloth should be worn by women in the late Qing Dynasty when they attended ceremonial occasions in summer.

### **3. Inherent Representation of "White-Yarn-Ground Female Coats with Sprinkled Thread Embroidery of Drama Characters"**

#### *3.1 Clothing Shapes*

##### 3.1.1 Cloud Shoulder

According to the "Yiwei Clothing Color" in "Yuan Dynasty Yu Fu": "The cloud shoulder, shaped like a four-sided cloud, with blue edge, yellow and red and other five colors, inlaid with gold." Four-sided cloud shoulder, that is, "Sihe Ruyi" style, seen earlier in the Sui Dynasty Dunhuang painting Guanyin. In the Qing Dynasty, the cloud shoulder was gradually fixed on the clothing and became a part of the clothing, mostly made of colorful embroidery. In the early Qing Dynasty, Li Yu stated in his "Occasional Love": "It must be sewn with thread and not separated from clothing", In the middle and late Qing Dynasty, cloud shoulders were not only popular among diverse groups of people, but also combined with clothing as a decorative pattern, making the whole cloth more delicate and elegant because of the cloud shoulder decoration. The "white-yarn-ground female coats with sprinkled thread embroidery of drama characters" is fixed on the clothing body with the "Sihe Ruyi" style cloud shoulder as a decorative pattern, and the cloud shoulder is embroidered with the theme pattern of "Dream of Red Mansions", scenes including "Daiyu buried flowers", "Baochai fluttering butterfly" and so on.

##### 3.1.2 Upturned Sleeves

Upturned sleeves began in Qianlong and became popular in Tongguang. The sleeves are distributed symmetrically in a long strip shape, with various patterns and themes. After unfolding, the sleeve length passes through the hand. The inside of the cuffs is stitched with embroidered patterns and rolled wide edges; the fabrics on the outer edges of the cuffs are stitched together according to the principle of economy, and the gorgeous embroidered part of the sleeves can be exposed by pulling up, and the plain fabric stitched outside the sleeves is covered.

Unlike the Manchus, which are generally folded many times, the Han women's clothes are often rolled up once, and the folded cuffs are sewn on the sleeves. <sup>[5]</sup>In the article, the sleeves of the "female coats with drama characters" are spliced together, symmetrical to the left and right, embroidered with small scenes of flowers, plants, and animals, and the colors are in harmony with the clothing as a whole, which highlights the exquisiteness of the clothing.

##### 3.1.3 Edging

Edging refers to the use of cut cloth or lace as edge decoration on clothes. It is usually placed in the collar, underpants, sleeve edge, hem, and other parts. Before the Ming Dynasty, there was one edge, and in the Qing Dynasty, there was more than one edge. If embroidery patterns are encountered during edging, the embroidered fabric shall be cut according to the required shape, and then inlaid on the edge of the cloth. In the "female coats with drama characters", the wide edge is outside, the narrow one is in the middle, and the inner layer is light-colored ribbon; The edge of the hem is mainly blue and green, embroidered with the figure landscape pattern with the theme of a dream of Red Mansions, emphasizing the sense of left-right symmetry.

#### *3.2 Weaving and Embroidery Technology*

Sprinkled thread embroidery is a variety of Beijing embroidery. According to the needs of the pattern, the needles are regularly moved according to the length of the stitches. The embroidery thread can be processed with different lengths between the yarn holes. The pattern shape is mostly symmetrical up and down, left and right. When embroidering, the holes between the patterns must be aligned, and the diamond grid is used as a unit. In some cases, the bottom of the yarn is all embroidered into small geometric flowers, and then the main velvet flower is embroidered on the geometric small flowers. Sprinkled thread embroidery can not only beautify the appearance of the fabric, but also enhance the strength of the fabric with a compact process.

Sprinkled thread embroidery style fabrics were formed in the late Tang Dynasty and prevailed in the Ming and Qing dynasties. In the early Ming Dynasty, the technique of sprinkling thread embroidery was mostly used in court costumes, especially in the clothing of emperors and empresses of the Ming Dynasty, and embroidered the pattern of Baizi on the geometric ground pattern. Then it gradually spread to the people. There are many records

about sprinkled thread embroidery clothing in the novels of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. According to the descriptions, the wearing class is wealthy women.

The "white-yarn-ground" on the body part of the "white-yarn-ground female coats with sprinkled thread embroidery of drama characters" clothing uses a variety of colored threads to embroider geometric flowers in the gauze holes as the base, and embroider figures, scenes, and other patterns on it to present a full and gorgeous visual effect. The embroidery of the character scene pattern changes the color from the outer depth to the inner light or the upper depth to the lower light utilizing de-blooming. The edge of the pattern is bordered with twisted gold thread to highlight the layering and three-dimensional sense. Because the patterns of the "female coats with drama characters" are precisely aligned and have clear edges, it is presumed that the patterns were embroidered in advance and then the shading was embroidered with sprinkled thread.

#### 4. Clothing Patterns and Spatial Narratives

##### 4.1 Weaving and Embroidery Technology

"White-yarn-ground female coats with sprinkled thread embroidery of drama characters" is based on the pattern of "The Story of the West Chamber", supplemented by "A Dream of Red Mansions" and other landscape patterns. The clothing body is embroidered with the characters of the drama "The Story of the West Chamber", the shoulders and the hem, embroidered "Dream of Red Mansions", and the sleeves are embroidered with flowers, plants and animals. and the embroidery techniques are different from the motifs, reflecting the multi-themed features of the patterns of women's clothing in the middle and late Qing Dynasty.

The pattern on the clothing body is a relatively symmetrical ring with an open outline, similar to an unclosed "TuanKe" (the position marked by the red circle in Figure 1). The TuanKe pattern is a common pattern form in the fabrics of the Tang, Song, and later generations. It is a circular or approximately circular, relatively independent pattern. This cloth is surrounded by landscape green plant patterns, and the interior is filled with figures patterns, which are more open than traditional circle patterns. Therefore, the author believes that the cloth pattern of the "female coats with drama characters" is an extension variant of "TuanKe".



Figure 1. Front and back of "white yarn texture embroidered female coat with opera characters"

##### 4.2 Spatial Narratives

Each "Ke" in the dress body of "White yarn embroidery Female gown of Drama Characters" is an independent drama story scene, which is connected in series to form a relatively complete narrative space, reflecting the narrative and carrying capacity of the clothing.

Different drama story scenes of the romance of the west chamber were embroidered on the clothes of "female coats with drama characters". There are five obvious repertoire information, namely "waiting for the moon", "Cui Yingying chasing butterflies", "Hongniang sending a letter", "Farewell at long pavilion", and "listening to the guzheng" on the back of the clothes (Figure 2). From the perspective of narrative layout, although the character dynamics are full of changes, the overall narrative layout is symmetrical and balanced (the red square mark in Figure 1 is the character position), and the pavilions, pavilions, and other fabric patterns are also absolutely symmetrical, continuing the traditional Chinese aesthetic standard. In addition, famous fragments in drama novels are more popular. Story fragments with large scenes and many characters will be embroidered on the clothing body with large pieces, while story fragments with few characters and small scenes are mostly embroidered on the embroidery or edge. Therefore, the embroidery scene on the clothing body should be the

subject of clothing expression. The several story fragments on the front and back of the clothes present dramatic twists and turn in an intuitive external form. The "TuanKe" pattern in the center of the front and back clothes occupies the visual focus. From the perspective of narrative techniques, due to the low density of yarn holes and high embroidery difficulty, in order to present a relatively complete storyline during embroidery, embroidery processing methods such as simplification and abstraction are used for different opera scenes.



Figure 2. Pattern summary

From the narrative meaning, the left and right lapels of the "female coats with drama characters" are deformed, and the "TuanKe" pattern is almost symmetrical, embroidered with plantain trees and double lotus. Plantain is often associated with loneliness and sadness in ancient poems. For example, Li Qingzhao once used plantain trees to express her depression and sadness in her poems. Lotus symbolizes purity and love, and expresses the continuous feelings of the hero and heroine. The willow tree is embroidered at the bottom of the cloth. In the original play, "willow" is used to express the sadness that is hard to stay. Therefore, the willow tree pattern here has the meaning of farewell, rendering and laying the tone of the sad love story. The two sleeves are embroidered with symmetrical non-closed annular pavilions and green plants, interspersed with flowers, grass, lakes and stones, which is also similar to "TuanKe". Ancient literati often used pavilions to mean parting, so the repeated appearance of "long pavilion" or pavilion patterns in clothing can be interpreted as highlighting the protagonist's love and farewell through the language of clothing. A pair of dancing butterflies are embroidered on the middle and lower parts of the left and right clothes respectively. Butterflies, especially paired butterflies, were mostly used to celebrate love in ancient times and were also recognized as a symbol of auspiciousness. The paired butterflies here echo the theme of opera.

Throughout the scene patterns in "female coats with drama characters", most of them use objects to describe feelings, which not only cover auspicious meanings, but also render the dramatic atmosphere, and fully express the producer's emotional expression in a variety of costume languages. Based on the above analysis of body patterns and their spatial narrative, the conclusions are as follows: First, situations with dramatic conflicts are

often placed in the center of vision; second, simplified embroidery patterns are used to present a relatively complete story chain; third, in addition to the decorative significance of the surface layer, the cloth patterns also have deep symbolic meaning, which creates an emotional mood for the clothing and reflects the spatial narrative of the clothing. The fourth is that the pattern of the West Chamber in the "female coats with drama characters" is different from the character scene patterns in the same type of women's coats, which shows that the embroiderers also added personal awareness and innovation when embroidering.

## 5. Conclusion

In the late Qing Dynasty, the patterns of drama characters in the women's coats were basically consistent with the content of the stories of the drama, and a relatively complete story chain was often presented in a "TuanKe" style narrative structure through simplified embroidery patterns. This paper firstly analyzes it in detail from the perspectives of clothing shape, weaving and embroidery technology and clothing patterns; secondly, it discusses the layout and artistic techniques of drama scenes in the clothing body, and holds that the clothing pattern is an extension and deformation of "TuanKe" The epitaxial variant of the clothing, with the flat clothing as the carrier, presents a three-dimensional and coherent narrative situation, which fully reflects the cultural bearing and transmission function of clothing.

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