

Exploration of Inheritance Relationship of Taiwan Flying Embroidery

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Abstract

This study investigates the inheritance relationship of Taiwan Flying Embroidery and focuses on its founders, Sixue Chen (1924–2014) and Wenxun Tsai (1958–2016). This study applied case studies, data collect through document and interview. The study intends to determine the following: 1. over three generations of Taiwan Flying Embroidery has seen different social and economic conditions and the development of different techniques. 2. According to situated learning, two generation have different styles: Sixue Chen prefers traditional embroidery forms and principles, working with full embroidery in a more elegant and meticulous style. Wenxun Tsai considers modern uses of a composite media to develop new forms of embroidery, supplemented by a painting or a composite media in the embroidery, and showing a preference for a bright and lively style.

Keywords: Embroidery, Situated Learning, Intersecting Embroidery, Taiwan Flying Embroidery, Intangible Cultural Heritage

1 Introduction

Taiwan Flying Embroidery originates from intersecting embroidery in China, with the addition of two main techniques and Taiwanese cultural elements. Intersecting embroidery is a popular embroidery faction and has been around for nearly 86 years in China. It was developed around the 1930s and originated in Suzhou, China (Lin, 2007 ; Lu, 2011). It is part of the intangible cultural heritage of China and lends to creative industry brand development.

Intersecting embroidery is an irregular, multi-level stitch embroidery art form (Lu, 2011). It places

a strong emphasis on painting techniques and embroidery skills using coloured silk and showing a number of Western painting and lighting techniques (Lin, 2007). It was inspired by Embroidery Master Shen Shou (1874–1921) and Pointillism Master Georges-Pierre Seurat (1859–1891). The use of different lengths in different directions, cross-stitching, points layering and an overlapping approach, makes the embroidery rich, colourful and three-dimensional; it is a fusion of western painting techniques and Han Chinese traditional embroidery techniques.

Sixue Chen combined her own painting literacy and wonderful embroidery skills and actively promoted the new art form. She significantly influence Taiwan embroidery arts. Sixue Chen won the Taiwan Jiaoyu Bu ‘National Art Heritage Award’, CCA ‘Jin Jue Award’ and other important art awards. She excelled at intersecting embroidery in Taiwan with the innovative use of the ‘Wire Around Method’, ‘Cotton Laying Method’, ‘Foil Method’, ‘White Act Method’, ‘Actual Situation Method’ and other kinds of methods, making her embroidering creations more flexible and easier to manage. Though it is still a combination of painting and embroidery, she added more sketch lines so that the needle ‘flies’ on the screen, which is how ‘Flying Embroidery’ got its name. She was one of the most important embroidery masters in Taiwan. Owing to her excellent high-profile artistic family background as well as the strength of her own exquisite embroidery, Sixue Chen became the spiritual mentor of Taiwan Flying Embroidery. Sixue Chen’s daughter Wenxun Tsai was a watercolour painter. She used multi-elements of both painting and compound media materials in her Taiwan Flying Embroidery, adding more modern art elements. Wenxun Tsai was in charge of marketing and cross-border cooperation.

2 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate the inheritance relationship of Taiwan Flying Embroidery and apply Situated Learning Theory to explore the inheritance relationship of Sixue Chen. As the first generation of Taiwan Flying Embroidery, her learning environment and relationship with her father, Zhifo Chen, her daughter Wenxun Tsai and students were important contributing factors to her becoming an embroidery master. These key people provided her with strong support so she could continue her efforts to promote the work of embroidery. Through Sixue Chen’s case, we can understand the history of an intangible cultural heritage of the people, helping us to shape the future of this heritage work.

3 Research Methodology and Theory

3.1 Method

This study adopted document analysis and field study methods. The research period spanned two years (2014–2016), during which time observations and interviews were conducted as fieldwork. Document collation and interviews were conducted to understand the inheritance relationship of Taiwan Flying Embroidery, and data was finalized as field notes. Interview outlines were prepared in advance and approval was sought after the finalization of transcripts, field notes and other data coding analysis. Interviews were conducted with Sixue Chen and Wenxun Tsai, the founders of R.O.C. Association of Intersecting Embroidery Painting. The interviews focused on the inheritance relationship of the founders of Taiwan Flying Embroidery: Sixue Chen (1924–2014) and Wenxun Tsai (1958–2016).

This study applied qualitative approach with data analysis methods and situational learning theory to discuss the inheritance relationship of Taiwan Flying Embroidery. Knowledge is a tool and a product of the learners' interactions with the environment and the impact of activities and cultural context (Brow, Collins, & Dugid, 1989). Lave & Wenger (1991) developed Situated Learning Theory by studying artisans in African societies. The focus was not on cognitive processes, but on learning through interactions between individuals, cultural tools and social communities. 'Formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour' (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Wenxun Tsai actively assisted in the promotion of Taiwan Flying Embroidery, but also leading the way for 'Taiwan Flying Embroidery' trademark application. In particular, they invited the well-known calligrapher, Mr. Fu Chuan-fu, to design a calligraphy as a registered trademark for Taiwan Flying Embroidery (Wang, 2012), using multiple mediums to combine the characteristics of Chinese embroidery art and Western art fibres, by the Taiwan Ministry of Economic Affairs intellectual property Office, approved and registered in 2008 (Personal communication, 2014/01/03).

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The main source of information was obtained from document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed in order to identify the themes and categories relating to the proposed research questions. The main research questions in this study

were as follows:

- A. What is the inheritance relationship of Taiwan Flying Embroidery?
- B. What is the learning environment of the inheritance relationship for develop the Taiwan Flying Embroidery?
- C. What is the interactive knowledge of the inheritance relationship?

All qualitative data was thematically and inductively coded, compared and organized into different categories. Triangulation was achieved with the use of field notes and site observations to ensure validity and reliability in the interpretation of the research findings.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Learning environment of the inheritance relationship

4.1.1 Family background

According to Situated Learning Theory, learning often occurs in the social context of an activity or behaviour. Often it is not based on inner symbolic representation about the world and adjusted behaviour; on the contrary, it is through contact with the situation, interactive selection or determination of one's own behaviour. Sixue Chen's family background provided a wonderful learning environment for embroidery painting creation. She mentioned, *'I was very lucky to learn a lot at home. When my father was painting, I was happy to work as his assistant; grind the ink and change the water for painting. I could carefully observe how father used pen and paint colour. Things I admire most was how he could grab four to five different coloured pens in one hand, intertwining the use of colour and rendering the water to reach nirvana'* (Chen 2006:1).

Her family have been associated with the dyeing and weaving industry for a long time; Grandfather Ya-Chiau Chen had two dye houses, and Grandmother Zhuxiang Hu, grew up in a silk merchant family. Her father, Zhifo Chen, was the first Chinese student to study pattern design from Japan. He also had the skills of making knitted landscape and portrait painting. What's more, her father edited the first pattern textbook in Chinese, 'pictorial handout', codified the dyeing and weaving patterns as well as fabric artistic conception, providing essential knowledge for Hangzhou brocade (Personal communication, 2014/10/9). He is a famous Chinese fine brushwork flower-and-bird painting artist and educator in China (Chen, 2006; Chen, 2009). One of his artworks titled 'Pine

and crane longevity' was created as a double-sided embroidery by the Suzhou Embroidery Research Institute, is displayed at Great Hall in Beijing (Personal communication, 2016/01/03)

While studying at Central University, Sixue Chen's father gave her the nickname 'Sixue', because the signature on his paintings is 'Xueweng', meaning 'Sixue' as inherited from Xueweng. She inherited her father's passion for art and fully revealed her gratitude for her father; he offered her the embroidery creative enlightenment and power sources. The strict and dedicated educational style of her father was an important model for her. *'He often said: "To brilliant and impressive colour, light and affectionate, the most beautiful in meticulous is the line performance, you need to be flexible and powerful"'. I keep these words in mind and later used them in embroidery'* (Chen, 2006, p.1).

When Sixue Chen got married and moved to Taiwan, she became a housewife and no longer painted or made embroidery, until she got the message of her father's death.

'My biggest push in 1962 by the death of my father... I suddenly woke up, and put grief into strength, to pick up the pen and embroidery creations again. Arguably at home and work hard, it took five years and the creation of fifty works, I organized the first solo exhibition painting embroidery in the new park Provincial Museum' (Chen, 2009, p.1). Her motivation of art creation echoes the situated learning theory that learning often occurs in the social context of an activity or behaviour, through contact with the situation, interactive selection or determination of one's own behaviour. Only then can it be embedded in the learning context and be given real meaning. Embroidery is a meaningful situation for Sixue Chen to recall the memory of her father.

Figure I illustrates the three generation family tree of Sixue Chen as follows:

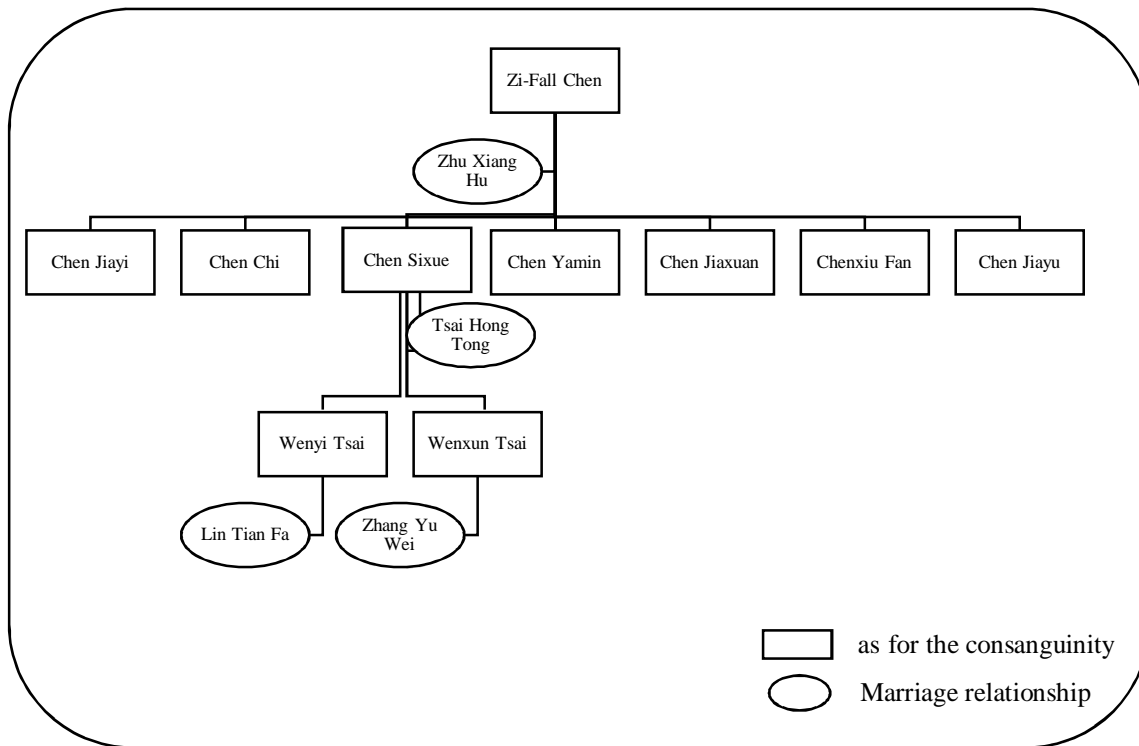


Figure I: Family Tree of Sixue Chen

4.1.2 Simulated apprenticeship: school education

Since the age of 10, Sixue Chen was often accompanied by her father to visit art exhibitions, and under a chance encounter, Sixue Chen entered the Regular Girl's Vocational School to follow Shouyu Yang (1896–1981) in the study of intersecting embroidery for one year. In order to understand the sophisticated painting techniques, she entered the Department of Arts, Central University, was taught by several famous teachers and majored in Chinese painting. Sixue Chen thought: *'Four years of university life, there were many teachers teaching art theory of painting and sketching skills to build a solid foundation, the capacity, when I abandoned ten years later, I still can embroider analogy such as animals, feathers, figures, still life and other subjects works'* (Chen, 2009, p.1). School education provided her with knowledge and techniques for art.

During the 80 years of development of intersecting embroidery, heritage systems have also been developed in three generations. The first generation of the intersecting embroidery are teachers of the Regular Girl's Vocational School, Danyang, Sichuan, China. They include embroidery teacher Shouyu Yang and principal as well as an artist Feng Zi Lu (1886–1959). Since embroidery was

founded by 'Regular Girl's Vocational School', it is also known as 'Regular Embroidery' (Lu, 2011). Moreover, according to the main inventor Shouyu Yang, the alias of this embroidery is 'Yang Embroidery'. During the Chinese Anti-Japanese War period, it expanded into Bishan County in Chongqing, Sichuan, China (Liu, 2003).

The second generation of intersecting embroidery and the completion of their studies of the flourishing style, individual differences began to appear. Disciples who had followed Shouyu Yang in learning embroidery also learnt drawing skills from Feng Zi Lu. One of the apprentices was Lu's son Chu-Ji Lu (1909–2007). He continued the tradition of 'Regular Embroidery' and later was awarded by UNESCO and the Chinese folk literature and Art Association the '1st level of Chinese folk arts and crafts artist' award, of the CN delicious-regular embroidery, specializing in oil painting, embroidery and Emboss creations, and became the founder principal of Danyang Normal School in China (Shi, 2015). The disciples of Shouyu Yang included: Huixian Ren and Xun Zhou development in Suzhou, China. Their embroidery style is more like painting and is known as virtual intersecting embroidery (Zhang & Zhang, 2007). Ya-Shen Chen lived in Changzhou, dominated by embroidered portrait with works similar to painting styles (Xia, 2013). Furthermore, there were at least three disciples: Sixue Chen, Jiabin Tong, Wu-Jo Lu who moved to Taiwan.

The third generation intersecting embroidery apprentices live in China and Taiwan, some of disciples are supported by government, such as Chun Lu, who is the third generation of Regular Embroidery in China, and eligible for UNESCO awarded the Folk Arts and Crafts Masters' title (Lu, 2011). Some of them established their own workshops or associations and enterprises, such as: Wenxun Tsai. Wenxun Tsai focused on diversification and cross-border cooperation embroidery. She is a water painting artist as well, she integrates intersecting embroidery creation. Wenxun Tsai preferred to use different materials and transform the traditional intersecting embroidery to fibre art (Personal communication, 2014/06/15). She lived in Canada in 2010-2016, though, still mindful of the promotion and development of Taiwan Flying Embroidery, as she believed it can be inherited grandfather and mother pass on the art of style, make embroidery arts to be continued (Personal communication, 2016/01/03).

The techniques of intersecting embroidery in China that were introduced by the disciples of Shouyu Yang, included: Sixue Chen, Jiabin Tong and Wujiu Lu in Taiwan. Jiabin Tong was the first embroidery lecturer taught at Shih Chien University in Taipei. In 1959, Wujiu Lu was invited to

exhibit Intersecting Embroidery Painting works at the Chicago World's fair, the Illinois State University, Washington, New Jersey, New York and other local exhibitions (China Business News, 2009). When Sixue Chen moved to Taiwan and became a housewife for many years, after being inspired by the Jiabin Tong's exhibition and being informed of her father's death, she began to actively create again (Feng, 2000; Personal communication, 2014/12/03).

4.2 Communities of practice - Interactive knowledge of inheritance relationship

Barab & Duffy (2000) pointed out that some people do not only gain knowledge and skills through practice, but also from the formation of their community member identity. Lave & Wenger (1991) stated that the pedagogical importance of the master is his/her individuality. The apprentice also learns a great deal from other apprentices as well as through trial and error. Since 2001, Sixue Chen and Wenxun Tsai have concentrated on embroidery skills and teaching, they held intersecting embroidery courses in several community college, included Xinyi, Neihu, Songsan, Shinden, Yongho, Wenshan as well as several social education halls, for promoting intersecting embroidery and extending the inheritance relationship. They have already taught more than 200 students in community college, allowing intersecting embroidery to become a featured program in northern Taiwan.

Sixue Chen held art exhibitions for teacher and students. In 2004, she established the R.O.C. Association of Intersecting Embroidery Painting to recruit embroidery enthusiasts. Moreover, she became a community colleges' lecturer of embroidery, and working for adult education, allowed for the intersecting embroidery to gradually take root in Taiwan (Wang, 2012).

The learning process should be designed within a team, to start gradually from the outside and inside, from shallow to deep, interact with each other and the legitimate utilization of resources and reasonable sharing of the experience process. Wenxun Tsai was also committed to community service and adult education. In 2008, she led 80 embroidery volunteers, spent two years and finish Taiwan's first large-scale public art painted embroidery, which is permanently on display at the Taipei MRT Taipei Metro Line 1 Gangqian Station hall, and won the National Award for Excellence in Public Art in 2013 (Wang, 2012). They also hold several embroidery exhibitions every fortnight. When Tsai moved to Vancouver, Canada in 2010, she displayed her watercolour paintings and Taiwan Flying Embroidery art works and received much praise. She was then invited to teach at the

Christian High School and become one of the members of the Federation of Canadian. Tsai introduced Taiwan Flying Embroidery to community artists in Canadian Vancouver (Personal communication, 2016/01/03).

Sixue Chen said, *'To create, an artist must have congenital and acquired conditions. How fortunate, God gave me these two conditions, not only inherited from my father's cells of art, but coupled with my four decades of creative work in the embroidery, I succeed in the Intersecting Embroidery world'* (Personal communication, 2015/11/16).

4.3 Tacit Knowledge

Based on the context of action hidden in the individual behaviour patterns or individual perceptions of deep tacit knowledge, a role is played in the interaction with the situation. Although she is selfless in her teaching, students learn from the knowledge of the tacit knowledge.

4.3.1 Courage

During the anti-Japanese war, Sixue Chen finished her university studies. She was impressed by the westward migration experience, thus forming her philosophy of life as: 'not afraid of hardship, courage to try, trust yourself'. She mentioned: *'I have been exhibited in Taiwan, have repeatedly travelled all over the world for exhibitions so foreign friends can enjoy the special art of embroidery.'* (Chen 2009:1).

4.3.2 Trial and error

Sixue Chen She encouraged students to try to improve their own mistakes, continuous embroidery skills. She said: *'I think a variety of methods, there are cotton shop anyway, there is wire around the matter, after the test results there is very good embroidery painting, if not this way, embroidered very dead, no way the Chinese painting charm to embroider. I always tell students to create their own techniques to achieve different effects'* (Chen 2009:1).

Sixue Chen hopes students will be able to develop all kind of ideas and without the teacher's standard constraints, students can have their own ideas, use their own colour and themes, establish self-style. Chen tried to express that she does not know everything. *'Over the years the students also become very good. Students are also likely to surpass the teacher, it is the teacher's honour ah!'* (Personal communication, 2014/06/08).

4.3. The inheritance Relationship of Taiwan Flying Embroidery

From the first generation of Mr. Zhifo Chen for improving dyeing embroidery pattern craft to become more sophisticated, created a new artistic embroidery artistic page. The second generation of Ms. Sixue Chen for intersecting embroidery arts was to enhance the value and tradition, driven by hard work and innovative spirit, so intersecting embroidery could take root in Taiwan and thrive. The third generation of Wenxun Tsai showed courage to break with tradition, demonstrating innovation across borders, and to carry out the text innovation opportunities for Taiwan Flying Embroidery.

5 Conclusion

Owing to her high-profile artistic family background as well as the strength of her exquisite embroidery, Sixue Chen is the spiritual mentor of Taiwan Flying Embroidery. Sixue Chen was diligent in her efforts to explore and research the fusion of Eastern and Western painting and embroidery features for the Chinese community as a whole, to open up new horizons, allowing intersecting embroidery in Taiwan to flourish. Faced with ever-changing modern science and technology, art and culture are part of a collective memory that carries the artisanship forward. Wenxun Tsai is in charge of marketing and cross-border cooperation. Mother Sixue Chen prefers traditional embroidery forms and principles, and her work of full embroidery is a more elegant and meticulous style. Daughter Wenxun Tsai took into account modern forms of composite media to develop new forms of embroidery, supplemented by painting or composite media within the embroidery, and showing a preference for a bright and lively style. They have made great contributions to Taiwan embroidery circles, they are very outstanding artists, as well as outstanding educators.

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