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## **A STUDY OF BABA-NYONYA'S EMBROIDERY STITCH TECHNIQUES IN THE LATE 19TH-EARLY 20TH CENTURY**

**Chen XiuMian<sup>1\*</sup> , Rose Dahlina Rusli<sup>2</sup>, Rohana Binti Zur<sup>3</sup> &  
Kang Sujuan<sup>4</sup>**

*<sup>1,2,3</sup> College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam,  
Selangor, Malaysia*

*<sup>4</sup> College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Perak Branch,  
Seri Iskandar Campus, Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia*

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Corresponding Author:  
2022897834@student.uitm.edu.my

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### **ABSTRACT**

Baba Nyonya is a unique community in Malaysia, as their lifestyle seamlessly integrates Malay and Chinese cultures. The traditional dress and houseware adorned with Baba-Nyonya embroidery carry specific cultural connotations. There is still an unabated demand for Nyonya traditional embroidered clothing and accessories both locally and globally. This article explored the stitching techniques of Baba-Nyonya traditional embroidery in late 19th-early 20th century. The methods employed by researchers include fieldwork, analysis of physical items and images. It was found that there were seven stitching techniques of BaBa-Nyonya's embroidery which was often applied to traditional attire. The coiled gold embroidery and bead embroidery were two the most distinctive among seven stitch techniques. These stitching techniques incorporated features from Malay, Chinese and Western cultures. The younger Peranakan generation actively inherits and practices Nyonya embroidery skills, allowing them to connect with their identity and cultural heritage.

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## **1. Introduction**

According to the history, the existence of Baba Nyonya ethnicity could be principally dated back to the 15th century (Khoo,1996). This Straits-born Chinese community known as

Peranakans (else known as Baba Nyonya) is a result of mix-marriage between the Chinese and the Malay people (Azam Azmi et al., 2018). The Peranakan men are commonly called BaBa, and the women called Nyonya (Kim, 2008). Baba Nyonya community has developed from being the initial communication between the Chinese and the Malays in the state of Malacca, which is the original center of the Baba Nyonya culture, when Penang and Singapore became developed and progressed, many Baba Nyonyas moved to these two states. They formed a unique hybrid identity expressed in their fused cultural traditions, language, religion, fashion, foodways, social etiquette, architecture and material culture (e.g., jewellery, porcelain, embroidery and beadwork (Henderson, 2003).

Straits Chinese, Strait-born Chinese, Peranakan, Peranakan Chinese and BaBa Nyonya all referred to the same people, which described the BaBa Nyonya community in Malaysia (Wee, 2011). Those who settled in what eventually became the British Straits Settlements of Penang, Melaka, and Singapore were also known as Straits Chinese; their men were called Babas and women Nyonyas. In the last century BaBa Nyonya mainly lived in Malacca, Penang and Singapore (Sankar et al., 2016). So, this article focused on BaBa Nyonya in Penang, Melacca, and Singapore.

To the Nyonya, the family household was the only world that mattered, they were expect to learn domestic arts such as cooking, cleaning, embroidering and crafting under the tutelage of their mothers, grandmothers or aunts (Seri, 2012). They spent much time on sewing clothes, shoes, purses, wedding bed drapes, etc. with brightly colored silk and embroider flowers and plants on them, using hand embroidery and openwork methods in their crafts. According to Kim (2008), the kebaya sulam with its elaborate embroidery used to take six months to make by hand in the past. But in modern times, many descendants of BaBa Nyonya have not been aware of their special ethnic identity since they were born, they have opted for western dress in their everyday life (Wee, 2011). Growing up in a globalized and modernized society, some of the younger generations of BaBa Nyonya have not even had the opportunity to be exposed to or be told about their own BaBa Nyonya culture. This study is important because it is the effort to understand the culture of the arts of a nation has led the younger generation to pass it on.

## **2. Literature Review**

Embroidery is a craft of decorating fabric or other materials using a needle to apply threads. According to (Sharma & Rao, 2019), there are variety of threads based on their aesthetic and functional qualities like cotton, silken, twisted and untwisted etc. Sometimes embroidery can also be combined with other materials such as sequins, quills, beads and pearls. Embroidery generally is viewed by people as a form decoration or embellishment but its origins may lie in the decorative stitching together of leather or woven cloth as well as in the strengthening of cloth (Dhamija, 2004). Embroidery has a long history that can date back thousands of years. For example, the buttonhole stitch, which is still in use today, dates back to at least 8,000 B.C.E. Needles with eyes have been found as far back as 30,000 B.C.E. while clothing decorated with stone beads and animal teeth dates back even farther, to 38,000 B.C.E (Schoeser, 2022).

The embroidery was carried out across the Straits Settlements. BaBa Nyonya embroidery is a unique handicraft art with patterns and techniques influenced by both Chinese and Malay cultures. BaBa Nyonya embroidery first originated in the Malacca region (Ahmad et al., 2019). During the 19th and early 20th centuries, it evolved into a popular handicraft art. The embroidery patterns of BaBa Nyonya are often ornate and elaborate, which are decorated with gold and silver threads, beads, scraps of silk, wool and ribbons (Meng, 1987).

Embroidery played a significant role in the lives of the Nyonyas. Young Nyonya are expected to

be skilled in needlework and embroidery, and the value of a girl's dowry is usually determined by the quality of her embroidery. Nyonyas paid great attention to the quality of materials and craftsmanship used in their embroidery work, and they were also very good at new ideas and methods. The most iconic of these is the Peranakan style, which is often embroidered in bright colours, with an emphasis on symmetry and balance, and includes a variety of botanical, animal and geometric designs (Yong, 2017).

The stitch techniques are interconnected and embroidery stitches can be found in the different techniques (Draper,2022). Stitch direction is one thing you have to understand, to know why it is that certain stitches are occurring in a given locality. Generally in India you stitch away from yourself and in the UK generally towards yourself (Morrell,2006). It is important to observe people stitching to see the way they move the fabric around. it does become at times necessary to turn the fabric, this is not apparent when you are just looking at the finished stitch on the cloth (Fortelny et al., 2022). The techniques of the automatic embroidery machines are based on traditional embroidery stitich techniques, such as computer machine embroidery (Dai,2021), embroidered textile strain sensors (Colli Alfaro,2023), Machine Embroidery CAD System (Lim, J., & Heo, 2022) and so on.

These were primary components while executing embroidery which included, stitch type, direction of stitches and outline stitch(Arora et al.,2014)).Since stitches are constructed only by threads, the thread distributions should be more complicated than those of the existing art maps which only include parallel or vertical strokes, in order to convey different image contents( Yang et al.,2018).The stitch techniques of the allow artists to create intricate and beautiful patterns on fabric. Different stitching technique can produce varied textures, shapes, and line effects, providing artists with a comprehensive means to express their creativity. BaBa-Nyonya's embroidery is often considered a symbol of Peranakan culture. Wearing items adorned with embroidery helps BaBa Nyonya community and individuals establish a sense of identity in society.

### **3. Methodology**

Since the subject of this article is from the past, this descriptive qualitative research employs a philological method and field survey images to interpret the Stitching techniques of Nyonya embroidery. As recommended by Charles Busha and Stephen Harter (1980), the following steps of this article methodology such as literature review method, field investigation method, sample selection and data analysis.

#### **3.1 Literature review method**

The literature review method refers to obtaining the required information and data for research by reviewing literature and documents (Wasserfuhr, 2022). This method can be used to analyze data related to historical events, social phenomena, institutional regulations, and so on. Literature review method can obtain literature materials through electronic databases, libraries, and the internet (Cooper et al., 2018).The research began with the data collection from secondary sources, including documents, books, master's theses, doctoral dissertations and journals related to Straits Chinese BaBa Nyonya and Baba-Nyonya's Embroidery in the late 19th-early 20th century.

Based on the literature review, some representative books and literature are covered, such as "Straits Chinese Embroidery&Beadwork", "Nyonya Needlework Embroidery and Beadwork in the Peranaka World", "the nyonya kebaya: A Century of Straits Chinese Costume", 'Sketch&Stitch: Interactive Embroidery for E-textiles', "Embroidery- An Embellishment on Women 's wear", 'Sustaining Baba-Nyonya Cultural Heritage Products: Malacca as a Case Study', 'Defining the

Aesthetics of the Nyonyas Defining the Aesthetics of the Nyonyas' Batik Sarongs in the Straits Settlements, Late Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Century, Chinese Culture and Customs in Peranakan, Funerals in Malaysia and Singapore, and others. Chinese Culture and Customs in Peranakan', 'Funerals in Malaysia and Singapore', etc. A systematic understood clothing items and household items of Malacca, Penang, and Singapore's Straits Settlements in the late 19th-early 20th century, as well as their embroidery on clothing items and household items. These provide the basis for subsequent summaries of the types of Nyonya embroidery and analyses of the various stitch techniques of the period. Through reading a large amount of literature, it was found that the stitch techniques of BaBa Nyonya embroidery could be analyzed in the characteristics of the various stitches and the embroidery applications in Straits Chinese lives.

### **3.2 Field investigation method**

The data sources of qualitative research methods can be existing literature and data, as well as data obtained through fieldwork (Njie & Asimiran, 2014). This study collected primary sources from fieldwork, including objects, documents and photographs. Collecting as much relevant information as possible from field studies, describing various types of Nyonya embroidery among the Straits Chinese in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. The fieldwork sites were the Straits Settlements that are Baba&Nyonya Heritage Museum in Malacca, Pinang Peranakan Mansion in Penang, Peranakan Museum in Singapore.

Through field investigation at Baba&Nyonya Heritage Museum in Malacca, Pinang Peranakan Mansion in Penang, Peranakan Museum in Singapore, most of the objects, documents and photographs of BaBa-Nyonya embroidery in these museums were taken in the late 19th or early 20th century. The types of BaBa Nyonya embroidery in the Straits Settlements were described and initially categorized into three types of Nyonya embroidery. Based on careful observation of the Nyonya embroideries in the museum and discussion with the professionals in the museum when authors did not understand something, the main author found out the characteristics of the stitch techniques of Nyonya embroideries at that time. For example, the satin stitch is the basic stitch; couched stitch and bead embroidery are the two most characteristic embroidery techniques of BaBa Nyonya embroidery.

### **3.3 Sample selection**

After Various secondary and primary sources were selected from different sources related to Baba-Nyonya's embroidery to gain a comprehensive understanding. The secondary sources mainly include books, master's theses, doctoral dissertations and journals related to Straits Chinese embroidery, and the details of these sources were carefully read. Primary sources were derived from fieldwork, and the samples had to meet all three of the following criteria: the Nyonya Museum, dating from the late 19th or early 20th century, and having embroidered textile objects or pictures. The samples selected for the fieldwork were: textile embroidery objects and pictures from the late 19th century or early 20th century in Baba&Nyonya Heritage Museum, six objects containing embroidery were identified and selected from large number of pictures taken, which consisted of apparel, accessory and houseware. Textile embroidery objects and photographs from the late 19th or early 20th century in Pinang Peranakan Mansion. Eight objects with extensive embroidery were identified and selected from lots of photographs taken, and the six objects included apparel, accessory and houseware. Textile embroidery objects and photographs from the late 19th or early 20th century in Peranakan Museum which is located Singapore. Five objects were identified and selected from plenty of photographs taken of apparel, accessory and houseware.

### 3.4 Data analysis

After Data Collection, the researcher needs to organize and analyze the material. Organizing and analyzing data refers to the systematic and organized process of focusing and condensing the raw data according to the research purpose, and ultimately interpreting the meaning of the data (Ngulube, 2015). Organizing and analyzing data is a crucial part of the research, as it involves seeking meaning and interpretation in the raw material. Selecting and organizing the most pertinent information collected, explaining the stitch techniques of various types of BaBa-Nyonya embroidery in the late 19th-early 20th century and these embroidery stitches were used in their daily lives. There are many unnoticed aspects of embroidery stitch techniques. Embroidery stitch technique characteristics were observed through a detailed study of embroidered textiles from the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the collections of Baba-Nyonya museums throughout Malaysia and Singapore. Technical features are the main components of embroidery such as stitch direction, outline stitches and colors. Stitch techniques of the Baba-Nyonya's embroidery were discussed in detail in this study.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 The Category of Baba-Nyonya's Embroidery

The embroidery of Baba Nyonya is a unique handicraft originating from the Peranakan culture in Malaysia and Singapore. It is clear that Baba Nyonya's embroidery works typically span various fields such as apparel, accessory, and houseware. The data collected from field surveys conducted at Baba&Nyonya Heritage Museum in Malacca, Pinang Peranakan Mansion in Penang and Peranakan Museum in Singapore. These embroidered works are all from the late 19th-early 20th century during the Straits Settlements Baba-Nyonya hand embroidery, showcasing rich Peranakan cultural characteristics and the exquisite craftsmanship of hand embroidery.

Baba Nyonya's embroidery is often applied to traditional Peranakan attire (Seri,2012). These garments may include ceremonial wedding robe, wedding skirt, embroidered jacket, kebaya, and attire for other special occasions (Tong,2015). The embroidery is typically presented on the clothing with rich colors and intricate patterns, adding a unique charm to the wearer. Baba Nyonya's embroidery is also widely used in various accessories such as hats, headbands, collars, belts, shoes, wallets, handkerchiefs, and more (Cheah,2017). Nyonyas typically use these accessories to complement the traditional attires, highlighting the overall look's delicacy and elegance. Baba Nyonya's embroidery is also commonly found in housewares such as altar tablecloths, bed curtains, pillowcases, embroidered paintings, and more. Through exquisite embroidery craftsmanship, these items bring a unique artistic atmosphere to the home space, reflecting the owner's appreciation for traditional culture.

Table 1  
*The Category of Baba-Nyonya's Embroidery*

Apparel	Accessory	Houseware
		

Wedding robe  
Baba&Nyonya  
Heritage Museum



Wedding skirt  
Baba&Nyonya  
Heritage Museum



Embroidered jacket  
Baba&Nyonya  
Heritage Museum



Wedding robe  
Pinang Peranakan  
Mansion

Wedding handkerchief  
Baba&Nyonya Heritage Museum



Collar  
Peranakan Museum (Singapore)



Spectacle case  
Pinang Peranakan Mansion



Woman's headband  
Pinang Peranakan Mansion

Altar tablecloth  
Baba&Nyonya  
Heritage Museum



Canopy bed curtain  
Pinang Peranakan Mansion



Curtain ties  
Peranakan Museum  
(Singapore)



Pillow cover  
Baba&Nyonya  
Heritage Museum



Kebaya (Pinang)  
Pinang Peranakan  
Mansion



Flat-nose slippers  
Peranakan Museum (Singapore)



Embroidery panel  
Pinang Peranakan Mansion



Kebaya  
Peranakan  
(Singapore) Museum



Bead embroidery bag  
Pinang Peranakan Mansion



Embroidery painting  
Pinang Peranakan Mansion

#### 4.2 The Stitch Techniques of Baba-Nyonya's Embroidery

In the late 19th-early 20th century, BaBa Nyonyas used various stitching techniques to embroider the aforementioned works. These stitching techniques were delicate and unique, expressing rich patterns and a three-dimensional effect in the embroidery (Day et al., 2008). Here are some common stitching techniques of BaBa-Nyonya's embroidery.

##### Satin Stitch

The satin stitch, also known as straight stitch, is one of the basic stitching techniques in Baba-Nyonya's embroidery. From Figure 1, the basic operation of the satin stitch involves starting the thread from one side of the pattern outline, pulling it straight across to the other side, and then bringing the needle down. Following the pattern outline, the design is filled using straight lines. In satin stitch, parallel or radiating stitches were worked together, completely covering the ground material both back and front (Fumiyasu et al., 2016). The satin stitch is widely utilized in Baba-Nyonya's embroidery of the Straits Settlements. It is particularly suitable for areas of the design that require flat color blocks, such as floral elements, plants, figures, and text.

It is clear from Figure 2 that the direction of the satin stitch can be categorized into horizontal, vertical, and diagonal, all requiring achieving a flat, even, smooth, and continuous result. "Flat" implies that the embroidered surface should be smooth without irregularities; "Even" means the stitches should be evenly spaced, without overlap, crossing, or showing the base fabric; "Smooth" indicates that the needle should move smoothly along the pattern; "Continuous" means the stitches should follow the form of the pattern. In Baba-Nyonya's embroidery, when representing mountains, stones, or fruits growing vertically, or when creating compositions in a vertical direction, the vertical satin stitch is often used. When depicting vines, branches, or objects with winding and twisting growth patterns, the diagonal satin stitch is more commonly employed. Additionally, the diagonal satin stitch is often applied to embroider text. In Figure 3, the embroidered houseware curtain from the Pinang Peranakan Mansion uses a vertical-horizontal satin stitch direction for depicting figures and a diagonal satin stitch direction for depicting flowers and leaves.

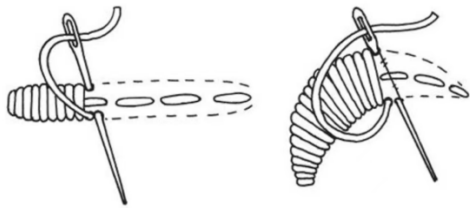


Figure 1. The satin stitch

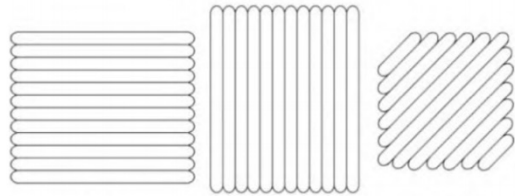


Figure 2. The direction of the satin stitch

The characteristics of the embroidery produced using the satin stitch in Baba Nyonya culture are intricate, and rich in texture. Satin stitch embroidery, although appearing simple, showcases a diverse range of effects due to variations in stitching techniques, differences in color styles, contrasts between different textured fabrics and threads, and the integration with other embroidery methods. The resulting pieces exhibit meticulous attention to detail, capturing the finest nuances and textures, contributing to a visually rich and varied artistic outcome.



Figure 3. The satin stitch of canopy bed curtain

### **Long and Short Stitch**

Long and short stitch is also a fundamental embroidery technique in Baba-Nyonya's embroidery, involving the alternating use of long and short stitches on fabric. When employing the long and short stitch, it can be worked from the inside out or from the outside in. From Figure 4, in the first row, long and short stitches are alternately arranged, where a long stitch is followed by a short one. In the second row, stitches of equal length are irregularly spaced, inserted into the gaps of the first row. The third row and subsequent rows continue this pattern, with the middle



rows all using stitches of equal length. Only the outermost and innermost rows maintain the alternating pattern of one long stitch followed by one short stitch. This technique creates a textured and gradient effect in the embroidery (Harlaar et al., 2010).

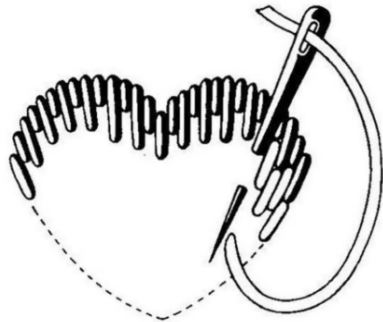


Figure 4. The long and short stitch



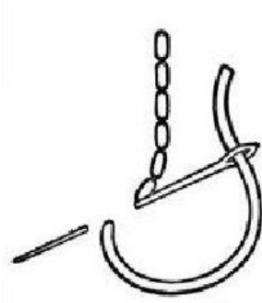
Figure 5. Embroidery painting

The long and short stitch technique involves layering one stitch over another. Through the layering of stitches and transitions in color, this technique allows for a seamless gradient effect in patterns, achieving a smooth and subtle transition between colors. In Figure 5, Baba-Nyonya's embroidery often employs the long and short stitch to fill in the feathers of animals, the petals of plant flowers, or other patterns with curves, creating a beautiful and nuanced gradient effect.

### **Backstitch**

The backstitch technique involves short and dense stitches where each stitch is closely connected, creating a consistent length. This technique serves to reinforce the fabric (Arora et al., 2014). The stitches unit of the backstitch appear like grains, forming a connected line. In Baba-Nyonya's embroidery, this technique is often used for decorating outer edges and borders.

From Figure 6, the Baba-Nyonya's backstitch technique involves the embroidery needle coming up from below for the first stitch, pulling tight; then, moving back one stitch length (about 2-4mm) and going down from above for the second stitch, pulling tight; and then, moving forward two stitch lengths and coming up from below for the third stitch, pulling tight; and so on in a continuous loop. The backstitch has short and dense stitches, each stitch connected to the next with consistent length, providing reinforcement. The stitches unit of the backstitch appear like grains, forming a connected line. In Figure 7, Baba Nyonyas used the backstitch technique to decorate and reinforce the outer edges of the floral pattern in the spectacle case from the Pinang Peranakan Mansion.



*Figure 6. The backstitch*

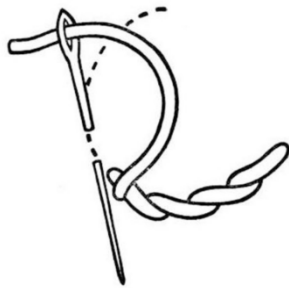


*Figure 7. Spectacle case*

### **Stem stitch**

The stem stitch is similar to the backstitch. As shown in Figure 8, when embroidering with the stem stitch, the second stitch comes out at the midpoint of the first stitch, and the needle closely follows the trace of the first stitch. After every other stitch, the needle is pulled back, creating a rolling effect where one stitch follows the other. During embroidery, except for the first stitch, both the needle-up and needle-down hands are on the fabric, making the embroidery process convenient and fast, but the stitches may not be tightly packed.

The stem stitch is used to represent curves, also known as the curved stitch. It consists of short lines interconnecting to form a continuous and rotating effect. The stem stitch is frequently employed in Baba-Nyonya's embroidery to depict water patterns, clouds, willow branches, and is effective in outlining the stems of plants from Figure 9 that is from Pinang Peranakan Mansion. It is also commonly used to portray the curved antennae of butterflies, whiskers, eyebrows, and mane of dragon heads, among other details.



*Figure 8. The stem stitch*



*Figure 9. Pillowcase*

### **Knot Stitch**

The knot stitch is a type of dot embroidery, also known as knot embroidery, circle stitch, or jade embroidery. As shown in Figure 10, in the knot stitch, after bringing the needle up through the fabric, the embroidery thread is looped around the needle to form a circle. The loop is held in place with a finger, and then the needle is pulled down, tightening the thread to create a small, circular knot. These knots are arranged in patterns to create a textured and decorative effect.

There are various forms of the knot stitch with different stitching techniques. The knots can be either hollow knots or tadpole knots, and the size and shape of the knots depend on the number of times the thread is looped around the needle and the tightness with which the knot is secured.

For the knot stitch, consistency in the appearance and size of each knot is essential on the same piece of embroidery. The arrangement of knots should be even and orderly, and the colors should transition naturally. Creating a piece of the knot stitch can be a time-consuming process. In terms of composition, the knot stitch can be categorized as either full ground or exposed ground. When the knot stitch is the main stitching technique covering the entire design, it is often complemented by techniques such as coiled gold embroidery or twisted thread embroidery to depict the outer contours. As shown in Figure 11 that is from Peranakan Museum in Singapore, the advantages of knot stitch embroidery are its durability, wear resistance, strong three-dimensional sense, and rich texture. It is often used to portray the texture and stamen of objects, as well as independently embroider patterns of flowers, animals, figures.



Figure 10. The knot stitch



Figure 11. Mirror cover

### **Couched Stitch**

It is clear from Figure 12 that the technique of couched stitch involves securing a thread or fine cord onto fabric and then wrapping it with another thread, ultimately creating a decorative edge effect. This embroidery method is often used to add additional embellishments to the edges or specific areas of fabric, enhancing the overall aesthetics. It can also be applied in embroidery projects to create lace, borders, or other intricate patterns. Lace embroidery can utilize different types of threads and colors, providing a rich layering and variation along the edges to meet various design requirements.

The coiled gold embroidery is a type of couched stitch, distinguished from other embroidery techniques by the use of gold threads (Jones, L., & Nabil, S. 2022), as shown in Figure 13. The key difference lies in the use of gold threads that are wound around and secured horizontally with silk threads, giving it the alternate name nail embroidery. In the process of creating coiled gold embroidery, the embroiderer carefully lays two gold threads side by side along the pattern, flattens them, and then begins stitching. Using threads of a color close to the gold, the embroiderer tightly secures the two gold threads onto the pattern. The gold threads twist and turn along the changing pattern, and the embroiderer ensures their secure placement, giving rise to the name coiled gold embroidery. Gold threads can be used to outline the edges of the pattern or fill the entire pattern, creating a luxurious and ornate effect. The embroiderer must carefully estimate the length of gold thread required for each pattern. As the two gold threads need to be continuously wound throughout the embroidery of a pattern, without breaking or changing threads midway, it requires skill and precision; otherwise, the work may be interrupted, and even

the most skilled embroiderer cannot rectify it. The coiled gold embroidery has its origins in the Chinese imperial court, and it carries a sense of royal craftsmanship.



Figure 12. The Couched Stitch

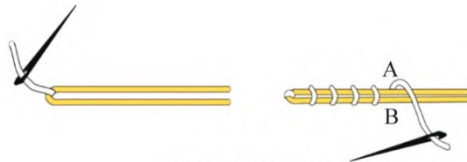


Figure 13. The coiled gold embroidery

Coiled gold embroidery is an important form of Baba-Nyonya's embroidery, typically used to decorate traditional clothing of the Baba Nyonya such as wedding robe and wedding skirt, as shown in Figure 14 that is from Baba&Nyonya Heritage Museum. Additionally, it is commonly found in accessories such as handbags, headpieces, necklaces, as well as homeware like cushions, curtains and drapery, as shown in Figure 15 that is from Pinang Peranakan Mansio. Coiled gold embroidery showcases the unique aesthetics and exquisite craftsmanship of Baba Nyonya culture. It is not only a part of clothing and accessories but also a vibrant expression of the traditions within Baba Nyonya culture.



Figure 14. Wedding skirt



Figure 15. Embroidery drapery

### **Bead embroidery**

Bead embroidery refers to a technique in which beads are used for decoration during the embroidery process. In this embroidery method, the craftsmanship of embroidery is combined with bead embellishments. Beads are secured onto the fabric using needle and thread, imparting a unique brilliance and texture to the embroidery. The primary materials used in Baba-Nyonya's bead embroidery include various types of beads, such as glass beads, crystal beads, plastic beads, and more. These beads were typically imported from countries such as Indonesia, Europe, the Middle East, etc. BaBa Nyonyas combined beads of different colors and sizes to create a rich and colorful effect, as shown in Figure 16 that is from Peranakan Museum in Singapore. The diverse sources of materials for BaBa Nyonya bead embroidery reflect the exchange and fusion of local culture with external cultures.

In bead embroidery, precision in manipulating the needle and thread is crucial to systematically embed beads into the fabric, forming beautiful patterns. Additionally, the embroidery thread plays a vital role in securing the beads onto the fabric. Baba-Nyonya's bead embroidery is widely

used in the creation of garments, accessories, and home decor items, as shown in Figure 17 that is from Pinang Peranakan Mansion. Traditionally, it has been a common choice for embellishing wedding attire and special occasion outfits, showcasing its high level of artistry and intricacy.



Figure 16. The bead embroidery collar

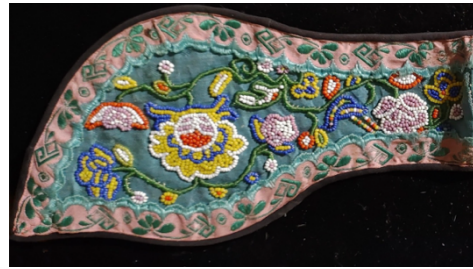


Figure 17. Bead embroidery of Woman's head band

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

In the late 19th-early 20th century, BaBa-Nyonya's embroidery in Malacca, Penang and Singapore was commonly used in traditional apparel such as wedding robe, wedding skirt and Kebaya. It was also applied to various accessories including handkerchiefs, collars, belts, shoes, bags, spectacle cases, etc. BaBa-Nyonya's embroidery was frequently used in houseware such as bed curtains, altar tablecloths, mirror covers, pillowcases, etc., adding an artistic and cultural ambiance to the household environment and festive celebrations (Cheah, 2017). These embroidered works were used as significant decorative elements in special occasions like weddings and celebrations.

The stitch techniques of the embroidery used on traditional apparel, accessories, and housewares are diverse, contributing to a three-dimensional and layered effect in BaBa-Nyonya's embroidery. Among the seven stitch techniques of Nyonya embroidery mentioned above, satin stitch, long and short stitch, and back stitch are the three most basic embroidery stitches. The four embroidery stitch techniques such as satin stitch, knot stitch, couched stitch and bead embroidery are used frequently. The two most distinctive Nyonya embroidery stitches are coiled gold embroidery and bead embroidery.

Coiled gold embroidery has its origins in the ancient Chinese imperial court, using gold and silver threads to create exceptionally ornate embroidered pieces. It is mainly used to decorate Nyonya wedding robe, wedding jacket and wedding skirt. Additionally, coiled gold embroidery is also found in accessories and homeware, such as handbags, headpieces, necklaces, cushions, curtains and drapery. Bead embroidery incorporates beads from various countries, it imparts a unique shine to the embroidery when combined with threads and fabrics.

From the stitch techniques of Baba-Nyonya's embroidery, it is evident that Peranakan embroidery possesses distinct cultural characteristics. It is a product of cultural fusion, blending elements from the local Malay culture, Chinese culture, Western culture, and other cultural influences (Seri, 2012). This showcases the unique beauty of the local multicultural heritage. The stitch techniques of Baba-Nyonya's embroidery continue to hold a significant position today, serving as part of cultural heritage and the ongoing legacy of craftsmanship.

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## Authors Contributions

Chen XiuMian : Responsible for the research, and the main author who responsible for the reliability of the article.

Rose Dahlina Rusli : Guidance on research and article revision.

Rohana Binti Zur : Suggestion for revising the article.

Kang Sujuan : Contributed indirectly to the research, providing indirect research suggestion on data collection and the topic.

### **Conflict of Interest**

No conflict of interest indicate in this article.

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