

## NATIONAL CULTURE OF UKRAINE AND JAPAN

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### **UKRAINIAN EMBROIDERY AS A CULTURAL CODE OF THE NATION**

Ukrainian embroidery is a pearl of folk culture, a landmark of the Ukrainian people and a true cultural code that holds the traditions of our ancestors, beautiful ornaments and harmonious colour combinations. Vyshyvanka is a symbol and an important component of Ukrainian traditional clothing.

“The code of the nation” is what Ukrainian vyshyvanka is called. And these are not just beautiful words. Depending on the historical region of Ukraine, the details and themes of the embroidery ornament differ. And in the early 20th century, when Ukrainian nation began to fight for its political rights, embroidery was used in patriotic and religious clothes as a symbol of Ukrainian identity.

#### **The History of Ukrainian Embroidery**

The oldest Ukrainian motifs were geometric patterns, such as those of Trypillian culture. Wavy lines, rhombuses, zigzags, circles and specks – these were the first fragments of Ukrainian ornaments. Since ancient times, they have had a certain meaning. For example, the Trypillian spiral symbolised the eternity of life, the continuous running of the sun. The idea of the sun moving across the sky can be clearly seen in those spirals where the sun signs (circles with crosses in the middle) are represented on the bends. The triangle is a sign of the spirit; with its top up, it symbolises the masculine principle and represents the connection between the past, present and future. The rhombus is a symbol of fertility, the embodiment of the masculine and feminine.

Since the 18th century, beads have been gaining popularity among embroiderers. According to the history of Ukrainian embroidery, small glass beads were especially popular in western Ukraine.

Ivan Franko played a significant role in the popularisation of embroidery as an element of everyday clothing among the Ukrainian elite. He was the first to bravely and quite successfully combine a classic embroidered shirt with a business style (jacket). And his example is now being followed by modern Ukrainian politicians.

The history of Ukrainian embroidery has taken another turn after gaining independence and since the Orange Revolution. Clothing with ornaments is no longer perceived only as an element of a folk costume for a stage performance, but has become clothing that demonstrates national identity, patriotism and origin.

### The Meaning of the Symbolism of Ukrainian Embroidery

Our ancestors honoured and worshipped the elements of nature. The most common elements of embroidery were symbols representing the elements of the sun and water. The sun was shown as an eight-pointed star or a cross of lines, and water was depicted as wavy lines. These symbols served as protection from evil forces. Another common symbol is a rhombus with a dot in the centre, which symbolises fertility. Ukrainian clothes with the image of rhombuses were worn by couples who wanted to become parents.

Embroidered shirts often depicted one of the Ukrainian national symbols, kalyna. Kalyna is considered to be the personification of the Sun, Moon and stars. The red colour of kalyna has different symbolic meanings. The first is the immortality of the family. The second meaning of kalyna is a symbol of the difficult fate of a person, often a woman's fate. Another meaning of kalyna is the blood of the nation, spilled in the struggle for freedom and independence.

Men's embroidered shirts often feature the image of an oak tree. Oak symbolises masculine strength, the energy of life and development.

The symbol of a happy family life on Ukrainian embroidery is grapes. Grape bunches were depicted not only on shirts, but also on towels and tablecloths.

And here's another plant common on Ukrainian embroidery. This is the vinca. This plant has long symbolised youth, determination, and development. That is why embroidered clothes with vinca were and are often worn by young people.

The red poppy on embroidery is considered to be a family amulet and protection from evil spirits. The poppy is also a symbol of memory of the dead, a symbol of the connection between the living and the dead. If a family had fallen soldiers, women from that family would depict poppies on their clothes in memory of them.

Roses are often depicted on women's clothing or towels. They represent love, mercy and Christian faith.

Another traditional flower for Ukrainian embroidery is the sunflower. It symbolises the energy of life, the desire for peaceful work, and the happiness of living in one's native land. In Ukraine, especially in its central part, there are huge fields of sunflowers. This is the result of the hard work of many people. A lot of sunflowers have been grown in Ukraine for a long time, so it is no surprise that this flower appeared on Ukrainian embroidery.

Not only do the patterns on the shirt have a symbolic meaning, but also their colour:

- red is the colour of the sun, good luck, protection, love and passion;
- green symbolises the processes of birth and growth;
- yellow is the colour of solar energy, life, joy, wealth and prosperity;
- blue is a symbol of feminine energy, calmness, the colour of water and sky;
- white is the colour of spiritual purity, holiness, good intentions;
- black symbolises pain, suffering, death, evil (Ukrainians wear black vyshyvankas when a disaster happens in the family or to bury the dead).

In Ukraine, different embroidery techniques are used.

Cross-stitch is when threads are laid in a cross-shaped pattern, which is a talisman against evil forces and a symbol of Christ. It is one of the oldest techniques of Ukrainian embroidery.

Satin stitch embroidery is a technique in which stitches fill the entire surface of the fabric along the edge. This embroidery came to Ukraine from Eastern countries.

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Merezhka (lace) embroidery is the highest level of skill for an embroiderer. The craftswoman has to pull some threads out of the fabric and then process the remaining threads with specific stitches. Merezhka always looks elegant and expensive.

### **Embroidery in Different Regions of Ukraine**

There are many different regions in Ukraine, and each of them has specific features of Ukrainian embroidery.

#### *The West*

In western regions, geometric shapes are preferred: rhombuses, broken lines and stars. Although in Zakarpattia, Bukovyna and southern Volyn, floral ornaments are not ignored. However, each region has its own colour range. For example, in Khmelnytskyi region, black is the most popular colour, and in Bukovyna, a mix of black and dark red is used, which is additionally decorated with silver and gold threads. In Zakarpattia, more than ten colours are used. Another feature of embroidery in Prykarpattia and Zakarpattia is the depiction of mountains, because in these regions the Carpathian Mountains determine the weather, natural phenomena, and people's lifestyle. That is why ornaments resembling mountains are traditional here.

#### *Central Part*

In the central part of the country, the most common motifs are floral ones, symbolising the fertility of the land and the process of growing crops, which our ancestors have been doing for a long time. These are mostly bunches of grapes, roses, sunflowers, and poppies.

Often, images of flowers and vines are combined with geometric shapes, the most typical of which is the rhombus. Poltava embroidery is characterised by delicate colours and pastel tones. Most often in the Poltava region, floral or geometric ornaments are embroidered in white on white. People associated them with patterns in winter, when the temperature difference created an amazing ornament on the window. To increase the effect of the embroidery, ash-coloured threads were added to the white.

White (or white thread) embroidery is one of the most complex and original types of Ukrainian folk embroidery. It originated in Reshetylivka, Poltava region, and has become a landmark of this region. This embroidery contains ancient patterns that serve as amulets. By the way, Poltava embroidery often includes various laces or embroidered paths. They represent a person's life path, his or her life journey, which should be straight and honest. Poltava embroidery is very gentle and delicate. The canvas for this embroidery and the threads are thinner than in other regions. This is due to the fact that there is always a lot of sunshine in Poltava region, the natural conditions are very comfortable, and our land is very beautiful. Therefore, embroidery has long performed an aesthetic function, showing the magnificent beauty of the land.

#### *The North*

In the north of the country, both geometric ornaments and floral patterns are embroidered. The Kyiv region is characterised by ornaments depicting bunches of grapes, viburnum, hops, and roses. Mostly coral red and black colours are used in embroidery. The combination of red and black is also popular in the Zhytomyr region. Sometimes there are floral and vegetal ornaments: leaves, birches, hops, periwinkles. In Sumy region, you can also see images of

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birds (eagles, swans, pigeons).

### *The East*

In Kharkiv and Luhansk regions, people like to embroider shirts with coarse threads that create a relief ornament. Usually, the pattern is made with a half-cross or a cross. And in Donbas, complex floral motifs are valued: flowers, bouquets and trees. Images of birds are also common.

### *The South*

In the South of Ukraine, floral motifs are preferred. In Mykolaiv region, shirts are decorated with ornaments with flowers, pine trees, oak leaves and hops. And in Kherson region, the embroidery still features the pre-Indo-European motifs of the World Tree, a symbol of the universe.

The main colours of embroidery in the Ukrainian South are black and red, but there is also white-on-white embroidery. A characteristic feature of southern embroideries is also the quadrangular neckline and loose sleeves without wrist ties.

### *Crimea*

Crimean shirts are distinguished by the contrast of colours. The main element is the ornek, a national Crimean Tatar ornament. Also important are floral motifs, which are selected depending on gender and age. For example, young boys' shirts are decorated with tulips and girls' embroidered shirts with roses. Older people's clothes are decorated with carnations.

## **Embroidery in Poetry**

In his poetry, Ukrainian poet Dmytro Pavlychko referred to the image of an embroidered shirt. Vyshyvanka (Ukrainian shirt) is an ancient Ukrainian talisman. It symbolises a mother's love and care, and an unbreakable bond with the motherland.

Dmytro Pavlychko was a Ukrainian poet, translator, and public activist. He was born in 1929 to a peasant family in the village of Stopchativ (now Kosiv district, Ivano-Frankivsk region). In 1944, in Kolomyia, where Dmytro was studying at the time, the Nazis shot his brother, so he decided to join the UPA, choosing the pseudonym Doroshenko. In 1945-1946, he was imprisoned by the Soviet authorities on charges of belonging to the UPA, but was released due to his age. In 1953, he graduated from the Faculty of Philology at Lviv University. In 1964, he moved to Kyiv, where he worked at the Dovzhenko Film Studio, later as an editor of the Ukrainian magazine "Vsesvit," and then as a secretary of the Writers' Union of Ukraine. In the 1980s and 1990s, he was involved in public activities. Dmytro Pavlychko became the chairman of the Taras Shevchenko Ukrainian Language Society and for a long time was a member of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Dmytro Pavlychko was one of the authors of the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine.

Dmytro Pavlychko is a Hero of Ukraine, a laureate of the Taras Shevchenko National Prize and other national and international awards. His fate is forever linked to the struggle for Ukraine's independence.

Dmytro Pavlychko's most famous poem is "Two Colours," which became a song. The music was written by composer Oleksandr Bilash. The Soviet authorities sought to ban the song because it used vivid colour symbolism: red and black, the colours of the OUN (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists) flag. Dmytro Pavlychko was even summoned for

questioning about the song, accused of creating a “Bandera anthem,” but he assured Soviet officials that the song used the colours of traditional Ukrainian embroidery.

### **The Modernity of Vyshyvanka and Its Value**

Every year on the third Thursday of May, the world celebrates World Vyshyvanka Day. This holiday is quite young – it is only 13 years old, but this year more than 60 countries have joined it. Vyshyvanka is a symbol that unites all Ukrainians.

That is why vyshyvanka is a talisman and a modern weapon against the enemy. During martial law on Independence Day, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wore a dark green embroidered shirt with oak leaves, which symbolises the steadfastness of the Ukrainian nation.

The meaning of vyshyvanka is very deep. It is a symbol of Ukrainian defiance, freedom, and Ukrainian solidarity. Ukrainian embroidered shirts are conquering the world, fascinating people with their identity and deep meaning of embroidery. Many world-class celebrities, including Claudia Schiffer, Nicole Kidman, Demi Moore, and Halle Berry, choose Ukrainian national clothes.

As long as Ukrainian women embroider shirts, putting their souls into them, and Ukrainian soldiers wear them, Ukraine will be invincible.

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