

## Hair-Embroidered Guanyin

Fine embroidery work done using human hair has a rich history whose origin dates back 1300 years to the Tang Dynasty in China. At that time, girls of the Buddhist faith would sometimes cut off their long hair, which they prized like life itself, to embroider images of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Each day they would burn incense and honor these images as an expression of their deep commitment and true devotion.

According to sacred texts which recount Himalayan traditions dating back thousands of years, hair can bear a lineage. Because of this, self-realized yogis used to allow their hair to grow very long. Monks who followed Sakyamuni Buddha cropped their hair, but his alone was long and flowing. As some people know, a skullcap braided from the hair of a dakini is an amazing treasure told of in wondrous tales. Imbued with spiritual qualities from the mingled evolutionary streams of father and mother, its meaning reaches back to the source and flows toward the ocean as do the Ganges or Yarlung rivers.

To bear a lineage means that the hair can carry and transmit the energy of a dharma line of descent from a timeless, unchanging source, but this cannot happen without the presence of supreme wisdom and courage. Only the hair of someone in a spiritually radiant, selflessly loving state, with the blood of sages in their veins, can embody the energy of a dharma lineage. Such hair has the potential to effect a dharma transmission.

Yuan Miao's bloodline carries the genes of holy sages, both of Han and Tibetan ethnicity. Her maternal great grandfather was a Nyingma rinpoche and *terton* – a discoverer of secret hidden spiritual treasures, called *terma*; her maternal grandmother was a *dakini*; her maternal grandfather was a Zen master and head of a lay Buddhist society. From the time she was born she began to absorb the teachings of her dakini grandmother. As for herself, she once served as director of a series of much admired prime-time documentary films on CCTV, but through Guanyin Bodhisattva's guidance she renounced everything and journeyed alone to America, where she founded the New Century Foundation. She has tasted the milk of human kindness and suffered deep despair. She was once blessed with a happy family life, but the loss of her only child, her daughter, left her bereft of everything. Through the heights and depths of her life experiences, she became fully enlightened and a transmitter of dakini teachings, like a phoenix reborn into Nirvana. Everything about her, including her paintings, her mantric singing, her speech, her hair, even a body movement or glance from her eyes, can transmit maternal compassion and wisdom from the universe's source.

Knowing its value, those close to her have long collected her hair, strand by precious strand. It has now been stitched into beautiful, detailed works of embroidery depicting Guanyin Bodhisattva and the *Heart Sutra*. In this form, her hair, carrying her life-essence, becomes an offering to the ancestors and past sages; it is also an offering to the future and to all those who share an affinity with her.

The embroidery master who makes these "hair-stitched Guanyins" comes from an ancient town in China, a place renowned for fine embroidery work. Not only can she claim 30 years of mastery in the craft, she too exemplifies Guanyin Bodhisattva's kindness and loving heart.

While engaged in this demanding work of stitching images with hair, she silently recites the Bodhisattva's mantra: *Om mani padme hum*. She strives for perfection every step of the way—from combing, softening, oil-removing, sterilizing to outlining, embroidering and mounting. Each of the “hair-stitched Guanyins” is completed by this expert artisan to ensure the artistic and spiritual value of each piece.

A precious “hair-stitched Guanyin” transcends religion, country and culture, transmitting dakini teachings through every strand of hair, and expressing the devotion of each hand that has touched it. This unbroken chain connects those who view the image to a wellspring of maternal energy direct from the universal source. It exudes intrinsic benefits of both blessing and healing power.

Each “hair-stitched Guanyin” is a unique *yantra* image. You are invited to gaze upon it quietly, to offer prayers, and to listen. Let your ears be receptive to the breath in each hair, as it extends the heartfelt summons of the universal mother, calling her children to come home. For those who are drawn to collect a “hair-stitched Guanyin,” rejoice **in your** blessedness and insight; you will be enfolded in each moment by the universal mother's embrace. This “hair-stitched Guanyin” is a unique, valuable and enduring treasure. By choosing and cherishing it, you will enable countless successors to partake with you of a gift from heaven.