

Abstract Exploration of Paper-cut Art

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Abstract: Chinese paper-cutting art carries the profound and abstract ancient folk culture, uniquely reflects thousands of years of tradition of image recording and information transmission, and at the same time adapts to the ever-changing cultural environment. Among the people, paper-cutting has become a symbol system that integrates images and words, classical and modern, and is an "artistic language" used by artists to express complex emotions about life. Through abstract thinking, the creator combines various symbols to show unique expression techniques and embodies the uniqueness of paper-cutting art. Paper-cutting is a cultural collective and a static carrier of my country's thousands of years of culture. Our research cannot just be limited to the static itself, but the spiritual understanding of this human culture is more important.

Keywords: Paper-cut art, abstract, Semiotics, symbol.

1. Introduction

Abstraction is the core of Chinese paper-cut art, which expresses complex emotions and deep meanings through symbols. These symbols not only showcase craftsmanship and materials, but are also rich in non-intuitive values, emotions and symbolic abstractions. The paper-cut symbol combines "drawing" and "xiang", becoming the key to understanding its cultural and emotional depth. Through the analysis of these symbolic abstractions, we can gain a deep insight into the unique value of folk paper-cutting.

2. Conveying the Meaning of Abstract Symbols

2.1. Signs and semiotics

2.1.1. The concept of semiotics

Pierce, the founder of American semiotics, regards symbols as tools to represent or express things, which are deeply rooted in people's psychological cognition. Susan Lange further believes that symbols represent different things through established traditions or language rules, and are the key to communicating emotions, experiences, and culture. Chinese paper-cutting art, based on the inheritance of ancient symbols, has constructed a unique visual symbol system and has become a "special language" to express folk culture and religious beliefs, reflecting the intuitive expression and deep cultural value of folk artists.

2.2. Characteristics of paper-cut symbols

Lange pointed out that abstraction and deconstruction of art forms are primarily intended to become symbols for the expression of human emotions. Artistic symbols combine abstraction, rationality and physical images, and present them as formal experiences for people to understand.

The characteristics of Chinese paper-cut symbols include: indicative, which directly expresses specific things; configuration, which uses visual elements to form abstract symbols; abstract, which generates symbols through the abstraction process; and convention, which is a model based on consensus. From the Han and Wei Dynasties to the Tang and Song Dynasties, paper-cutting adapted to feudal civilization. Its abstraction reflected the spirit of the times,

broke away from primitive religion, and was rich in the depth of folk culture. When studying the meaning of paper-cutting, it is necessary to consider its cultural background and changes in the times.

2.3. Abstract meaning

"Abstraction" is of vital importance in Chinese aesthetics, embodying the fusion of subjective emotions and objective objects. Through abstraction through metaphors, symbols and other techniques, paper-cut art uses these methods to create graphics and symbols with deep abstract meanings, reflecting people's intuitive understanding of nature and culture and their inherent harmony and unity.

2.4. The cultural connotation of paper-cut abstraction

Paper-cut art is different from pure art. It does not pursue the imitation of beauty or skills, but shows the creator's intuition and experience, reflecting the authenticity and traditional concepts of life culture. Through "borrowing meanings from objects" and "taking meaning from homophones", paper-cutting expresses simple intuitive feelings and human beings' inner experience of nature. This abstraction is deeply recognized by the people and passed down from generation to generation.

Paper-cut abstract shapes are based on "image" and are divided into three categories: natural objects, civil life and virtual conception. Natural objects include flowers, fruits and animals; civil life reflects daily activities such as farming and festivals; virtual concepts originate from folk beliefs and myths, such as the Eight Immortals crossing the sea. The core "abstraction" of paper-cutting represents the people's deep understanding and cultural psychology of specific images, embodying values such as auspiciousness, reproduction and harmony. These abstractions not only solidify into symbols of collective wisdom, but also form an abstract system of folk art, showing the influence of Chinese national moral concepts and traditional beliefs, and are a collective expression of folk spirit.

The abstract classification of paper-cutting in my country is roughly divided into the following categories:

Blessings and prayers: such as auspiciousness, dragons and phoenixes, abundant auspiciousness, peace in all seasons,

prosperity of the three Yangs, wealth and peace, a house full of gold and jade, great joy at the door, blessings from the heavenly officials, perfect wealth, five sons passing the imperial examination, being granted the title of marquis immediately, etc.

Prolong life: deer and crane spring together, turtle and crane prolong life, five blessings and longevity, blessings and longevity, auspicious clouds and cranes, pines and cypresses are evergreen, etc.

Love marriage: such as happy brows, mandarin ducks playing in the water, carps playing with lotus, two dragons playing with pearls, phoenixes coming to the ceremony, phoenixes playing with peonies, mandarin ducks coupling, growing old together, dragons and phoenixes facing the sun, etc.

Types of warding off evil spirits and suppressing monsters: such as Zhong Kui catching ghosts, Lu Zu subduing monsters, Aihu warding off evil spirits, tigers suppressing five poisons, gourds collecting poisons, door gods, etc.

Types of praying for children and heirs: such as lotus to give birth to a noble son, dolls holding buns (Figure 1), gourds to give birth to children, mandarin ducks to send children, melons to make a lot of money, egrets to explore lotuses, buckle bowls to harmonize, etc.



Figure 1. bun doll

Sages and gods: such as the Eight Immortals crossing the sea, Liu Hai playing with toads (Figure 2), Magu offering birthdays, Taigong fishing, Cowherd and Weaver Girl, Xu Xian and White Snake, etc.



Figure 2. Liu Hai playing with toads

3. Basic Composition of Paper Cut Abstract Symbols

The reason why Chinese paper-cutting has been able to maintain its unique charm across a long history is due to its unique artistic language and its ability to fulfill its folklore role. Paper-cut art, through the simple tools of scissors and paper, creators can build an ideal world and incorporate personal aesthetic emotions. This art form is independent of other arts, and its unique expressive power and beauty proves the value and abstraction of its existence.

Paper-cutting techniques are divided into three types: Yin-cutting, Yang-cutting and Yin-Yang combination. The negative cut removes the inside of the outline, leaving a blocky shape, which is decorated with details to add beauty; the positive cut removes the outside of the outline and depicts details with thin lines, creating works with rich layers that appear fresh and delicate. The unique "knife-cut flavor" of paper-cutting forms a unique and charming graphic art through cutting, engraving and hollowing techniques, combined with techniques such as tearing, ironing and painting. This art form requires precise skills to ensure the coherence and integrity of the work, demonstrating the particularity and complexity of paper-cut art.

Hollowing out and hooking, as the core characteristics of paper-cutting, reflect the modeling abstraction since the Neolithic period. Chinese sculpture art has a long history, and hollowing out techniques developed from early crafts such as jade carving and ivory carving. For example, the jade with dragon and phoenix patterns unearthed from the tomb of the King of Nanyue in the Western Han Dynasty (Figure 3) shows fine openwork carving techniques. Its overall oblate shape and internal and external ring structure are decorated with incised patterns, showing a unique and dynamic aesthetic feature. The hollow patterns of paper-cut art can be seen as the continuation and development of this ancient carving form.



Figure 3. Western Han Dynasty openwork jade with double rings and dragon and phoenix patterns

“The paper-cut pattern must connect the paper strips to each other without breaking the brush, so the composition and shape need to be simple and avoid being too delicate and trivial. Otherwise, even if the cut pattern is not tattered, it will be difficult to paste it on the window paper. (Ai Qing , Jiang Feng, 1949) "The particularity of paper-cutting has certain restrictions on paper-cutting. From the surface of paper-

cutting, in addition to the color itself, the most important basic elements are the line elements that constitute the symbolic language.

3.1. Color composition of paper cutting

Chinese folk paper-cutting mainly consists of three colors: red, yellow and white. Among the colors of paper-cutting, red is auspicious, symbolizing good fortune and happiness. It is often used to create a festive atmosphere at births, full moons, one-year-olds, weddings, and New Years. To avoid evil, yellow is mainly used as a symbol of religious color. Yellow paper-cutting is generally used to hold sacrifices to gods, witchcraft or other religious activities. The two colors of red and yellow are auspicious colors formed along with the concepts of five elements and four directions.

Since the Han Dynasty, red has become the main color for auspicious, festive, and lively occasions; while golden yellow has always been the symbolic color of imperial power and an important symbol of sacrifice, spiritual communication, and exorcism. With the metaphorical representation of these two colors, Chinese paper-cutting forms the main body to characterize Jirui's paper-cutting folk form.

White paper-cutting is generally used in funeral ceremonies after a person dies to express condolences. The red, white and yellow colors of paper-cuts are used respectively for celebrations, funerals and memorial activities. They represent the three basic forms of folk activities and also symbolize life, death and transcendence, the three worlds of humans, ghosts and gods.

3.2. Paper cut line composition

Lines are one of the most basic building blocks in the world of paper-cut symbols. Paper-cutters create many "elements" used to shape images through the outline of lines, such as crescents, circles, triangles, zigzags, cloud hooks, etc. In our country, the cultural characteristics of paper-cutting are different in each region. The combination of paper-cutting lines is different, the emphasis is also different, the components used are matched differently, used for paper-cutting in different styles, and the paper-cutting patterns used for different occasions, to convey one's own prayers or various This kind of emotional abstraction creates the unique paper-cut style of each region.

For example, the painting concept of "respecting lines as the basis" was put forward by Confucius in the early days. Therefore, influenced by the Qilu culture, in our Jiaodong area, women like to use delicate and smooth lines to express emotions, which has led to the formation of Jiaodong paper-cuts. style (Figure 4)

The most essential purpose of paper-cutting is for decoration. Since the paper is thin and fragile, its composition requires the creator to be steady, accurate, and ruthless. It must be done in one go. Repeated cutting and engraving must be avoided. The structure must be compact and avoid being messy and loose. The composition is concise and the layout is well-proportioned. The image needs to be reorganized and preserved, the theme highlighted, concise and expressive. Pay attention to seeking unity in change, coordination in uniformity, harmony in contrast, and echo in symmetry.



Figure 4. Jiaodong paper-cutting

Curves are an important component of the feminine aesthetic concept of the Chinese nation, and are also the most commonly used lines by paper-cutters. Everything in the world within our field of vision is composed of lines, mainly curves. "Circle" has always been an important symbol in our country's folk culture, and circular curves are also the basic features of Chinese paper-cut symbols.

Such as the sun, moon, glasses, fruits, etc. Patterns constructed using curved outlines, such as bird and animal patterns, flower patterns, water ripples, etc., can best reflect the soft and charming characteristics of women. Circle is a symbol of harmony, "harmony" means peace, harmony, and harmony, and "he" means cooperation, combination, and integration. Zhao Xingliang pointed out in "The Value Spirit of Chinese Culture: A Review of the Chinese Humanistic Spirit": "The thinking mode of Hehe is the unity of nature and man, and the value standard is that harmony is the most precious."

From the numerous invisible circular compositions in paper-cutting, we can feel the profound influence of this cultural psychology of "harmony". In our country's folk paper-cutting, paper-cutting for birthdays, weddings, full moons and other celebrations is used to represent joy, beauty, entertainment, and to wish for happiness, reunion, longevity, happiness, etc. Most of them use abstract symbols based on curves, while window grilles, Most of the flowers on the top of the tent and around the Kang adopt a circular composition, symbolizing perfection, harmony and vividness.

For example, my country's earliest paper-cut flower form symbolizes happy reunion; another example is the "Fushouhua" in Lijiang, Yunnan (Figure 5), which has four bats praying for birthdays, five bats holding birthdays, six bats celebrating birthdays, eight bats celebrating birthdays, and plum magpies. Longevity and so on are often surrounded by curved patterns, which convey good fortune, longevity and good luck, and have a long history. These curves have become important elements in the paper-cutting, which are smooth, natural, vivid and soft, and are consistent with the Chinese people's pursuit of perfect happiness and the spirit of harmony and well-being.



Figure 5. Circular composition of five bats holding birthdays

Straight lines are also frequently used lines in folk paper-cutting. Abstract symbols composed of straight lines include zigzag patterns, diamond patterns, angular patterns, triangle patterns, cross patterns, "卍" patterns, etc., which have a strong sense of solemnity, stability, order, magic, and progress, and are more conducive to depiction. The strictness and mystery of religion are especially used to express themes such as worshiping gods, witchcraft and prayer, and are a metaphor for seeking good luck and avoiding evil.

In my country's paper-cut symbol system, the "卍" pattern is very common. Sometimes it appears at the core of the paper-cut theme composition, and sometimes it is attached to the corners of the theme pattern. Folks call "卍" the "Wan" character pattern, which means everything is auspicious, boundless forever, long and eternal, etc. The "十" character pattern and the "卍" character pattern are variations of each other. In the religious folk customs of ancient my country, it is a symbol of yin and yang culture, and has witchcraft functions such as removing evil spirits, exorcising evil spirits, and avoiding disasters. Due to the profound heritage of the "ten" and "swastika" patterns in ancient Chinese culture, they are widely spread in various folk activities including paper-cutting, especially in ethnic minority areas, catering to sun worship and fertility worship. , the "十" character pattern and the "卍" character pattern have more common folk meanings.

3.3. The main form of paper-cut symbol generation - symbol

3.3.1. Metaphorical symbol

The main form of paper-cut symbols is symbolism. In paper-cut works, metaphorical symbolism is a very common form, which is the so-called borrowed meaning. Chinese people are relatively reserved in expressing their thoughts and emotions. Most of the decorative patterns in ancient China are "the picture must be intentional, and the meaning must be auspicious." Among the paper-cut patterns, some are the concretization of abstract ideas, and some are the abstraction of concrete things, and the abstract symbols are mostly derived from real objects. The following plants, animals, utensils, etc. are commonly used in traditional paper-cut works.

Plants: pine and evergreen—symbolizing immortality,

wealth and longevity; pomegranates and grapes—symbolizing many children and grandchildren, blessings and longevity; lilies—symbolizing the unity of everything, a hundred years of good cooperation; melons and fruits—symbolizing descendants. If there are many, the family will be prosperous; Osmanthus - symbolizes the good flowers and the full moon.

Animals: turtles and cranes - symbolizing longevity; phoenix - symbolizing harmony between husband and wife and happy life; magpie - symbolizing joy; mouse - symbolizing having many children.

Character categories: longevity star - symbolizes longevity; lucky star - symbolizes blessing; God of Wealth - symbolizes wealth; Guanyin - symbolizes giving children and blessing.

Utensils: cornucopia and money tree - symbolizing wealth; zither - reconciliation between husband and wife and happy life; longevity lock - symbolizing longevity.

These metaphorical symbols are not only used in paper-cut works, but are also widely used in other forms of folk culture. In my country's paper-cut symbol system, there is also a common symbol that combines calligraphy and painting. It mainly relies on the support of specific cultural abstractions in the people's spiritual world. It associates the visual image of the symbol with the abstract content. After a long period of cultural accumulation, It is inherited and shaped by the recognition of the public.

For example, the origin of the folk word "囍" is said to be that Wang Anshi won the first prize in the examination and coincided with the marriage of the poem, which made him even more happy. Therefore, he added "xi" to the word "xi" at the wedding to express the happiness. Extra joy, double happiness. Since then, the word "囍" has become a symbol and is defined as the inscription on the golden list. Marriage is festive and widely spread, and it also frequently appears in various other folk cultural forms. The longevity character pattern has also been passed down and interpreted among the people, forming many variations such as longevity (the font is thin and elongated, a metaphor for longevity), Wanshou (a combination of swastika and longevity), and Baishou (a combination of one hundred longevity).

The pattern forms of these calligraphy and painting combinations, no matter how the composition, font structure, etc. are changed, are still regarded as symbols with specific abstract meanings. This kind of graphic symbol with intuitive abstract meaning can not only be defined by words, but also can be vividly represented as a "picture", a specific spiritual characteristic, which facilitates intuitive understanding of its abstract meaning.

3.3.2. Homophonic symbol

In the symbolic generation of paper-cut symbols, homophonic symbolism is the most common form. In the traditional sense, homophony is a rhetorical technique, which refers to borrowing the same or similar pronunciation to form the same expressive effect in creation, aiming to euphemistically and implicitly express the author's wishes and generate unique aesthetic value.

Homophony relies on the principle of phonetic similarity, and the effect it achieves is based on the social psychology of "association" and "misunderstanding". The homophonic symbols in Chinese paper-cutting, like the homophonic pictures in other folk forms, refer to specific objects that have evolved into stable abstract relationships through long-term

conventions.

In folk paper-cutting, the image of the bat itself is not beautiful, just because "bat" and "福" have the same pronunciation. Therefore, people's yearning for happiness is symbolized by homophones in the folk, and "bat" is used to express the meaning of happiness.

Five bats surround a longevity character, which is called "Five Blessings and Longevity"; bats and money are cut together, which is called "luck is in front of your eyes"; cutting two opposite bats means double blessings, symbolizing that you will get double the good things. Luck; Compared with bats, the shape of butterflies is quite beautiful, because "butterfly" has the same pronunciation as "耄" and "彪", so the combination of "butterfly and cat" and "butterfly and melon" paper-cuts has "Old man lives long" and "gua 彪" The meaning of "continuous".

"Lu" means high-ranking official and good fortune. In paper-cut patterns, "deer" is often used instead of "lu". A deer and a bat cut together mean "both good fortune and good fortune". Two deer cut together mean "a smooth journey." Deer and good luck. , longevity together, it means "good luck, wealth and longevity", and the deer and crane together means "six years and spring" (Figure 6).



Figure 6. six years and spring

Another example is to express "more than enough year after year" by cutting lotus flowers and fish. The pattern of a magpie standing on a plum branch expresses "joy on the brow". The magpie's borrowing of objects means "joy", and plum is a homophone for "eyebrow"; the horse and the monkey are immediately enshrined; the rugae and the vase are cut together, which means peace and peace. Ruyi; sheep is a homophone for "auspicious"; chicken is a homophone for "auspicious"; it means "a house full of gold and jade" (Figure 7). Goldfish in a cut basin, goldfish is a homophone for gold and jade; and so on.



Figure 7. Full of gold and jade

It can be seen from this that the abstract homophony of folk paper-cut symbols is not a random creation like ordinary rhetoric, but is based on the accumulation of thousands of years of Chinese folk culture. Because of its dominant characteristics, it has become the configuration of paper-cut symbols. basic means.

3.3.3. Life symbol system

In the paper-cut symbol system, the symbol of life can be specially explained. Reproduction and reproduction are the instincts of all things in the universe, and the consciousness of life and reproduction are also the most basic consciousness of human beings. In China's history of more than 5,000 years, the concept of fertility worship has always occupied a very high position in folk culture.

The core and most authentic life themes of Chinese paper-cutting are often cultural life forms that symbolize the worship of human reproduction, including birds, tigers, fish, snakes, frogs, gourds, lotus, etc., the most common of which are metaphors for male reproduction. The snake, the gourd, a symbol of female worship, and the lotus flower of erotic culture.

The snake symbolizes the foundation of male fertility. In northern Shaanxi and northern Shanxi, the "snake coiled rabbit" is a very common folk paper-cut shape. A folk song in northern Shaanxi expresses the auspicious meaning of the "snake coiled rabbit": "Men If a woman is a snake and a woman is a rabbit, a good marriage between a man and a woman will be good." "If you want to be rich, you must be rich if you have a snake coiled around a rabbit; if you have a snake coiled around a rabbit, you will definitely be rich" (Figure 8). It can be seen from this that the local people believe that if a man is a snake and a woman is a rabbit, and they get married, they will live a prosperous and happy life. This is a presupposition of ideal marriage according to the zodiac signs, and reflects people's simple wishes - a married life. Harmony and beauty, full of children and grandchildren, also embody the cultural concept of mysterious fertility.



Figure 8. Snake and Rabbit

The gourd, because it is closed and round and resembles a mother's body, has evolved into a symbol of human reproduction in folk paper-cutting. The creator connected large and small gourds with vines to form a pattern that symbolizes generations of descendants and endless supply of melons, reflecting the simple desire to continue the family line and multiply descendants, which is entirely based on the worship of the gourd's mother body. Its further evolution has become a symbol of seeking good luck and protecting the body, warding off evil spirits and avoiding disasters. During the folk Dragon Boat Festival, women cut auspicious gourds and stick them on the door lintel of the house on the morning of the first day of the Lunar New Year. Take all the poison away. In addition to gourds, many fruits and melons that can represent many children are used to symbolize the mother body that reproduces all human beings. Grapes, pumpkins, cabbage, etc. are also symbols of fertility for the mother body and many children.

The lotus is closely connected with love, childbirth, and reproduction. It is an important symbol of love culture and one of the original images of life. In folk paper-cutting, "harmony of two immortals", "bordering of stems and concentricity", "lotus (connected) gives birth to a precious son" (Figure 9), "because of lotus (harmony), lotus root (even)" are all common themes. There is also a combination of a bun doll and a lotus, which symbolizes a happy marriage and abundant descendants. Like peonies and roses, lotus has always been a metaphor for women, such as "fish playing with lotus", "mandarin duck playing with lotus", "golden rooster exploring lotus", etc. They are all common symbols of the love and union between men and women, and their origin is the worship of female reproduction.



Figure 9. lotus gives birth to a precious son

In addition, the "phenological calendar" is also worth mentioning as a symbolic basis for paper-cutting. Mr. Teng Fengqian made a careful study of this in "Traditional Theme Patterns of Folk Paper-cutting and "Phenological Calendar"". The phenological calendar refers to the ancient method of marking the seasons based on vegetation, birds, animals, natural phenomena, etc. It still has traces in real life. The paper-cut theme "Deer and Crane Spring Together" retains the "Yen Feng" in the ancient phenological calendar. The historical image of "Photographing the Year of Tige", when Zhiyan (migratory birds) and Ge (stags taking off their antlers and velvet) appear at the same time, spring of the year begins, and the "phenological calendar" has become the theme of many paper-cut patterns to express emotions. medium.

4. Conclusion

As paper-cutting has developed to this day, it can be seen that it does not exist in isolation in our lives. It is closely related to various factors such as social structure, people's material living conditions, productivity levels, and geographical environment. It is also directly related to folk life. connect. Paper-cut creators sometimes come from the lowest level of society. They are even illiterate, and their knowledge sources have certain limitations. However, they are not uneducated. Their culture is farming culture. This kind of culture is not spread by words, but by oral inheritance, or the practical proof or insights of the creators' life and production for generations.

Therefore, it can be seen that paper-cutting comes from folk life and is dependent on folk life. Folk life is the most basic condition for its survival. Paper-cutting has become the most important folk cultural symbol in traditional Chinese society. It is an organic part of folk culture and the material carrier of folk concepts. People express their good wishes for life through the medium of paper-cutting. It can be said that paper-cutting originated from folk activities such as sacrifices and weddings. Paper-cutting, both in terms of its external structure and internal meaning, is closely linked to the aesthetics, outlook on life and world view of civil society.

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