

# On the Artistic Characteristics of Paper-cut Patterns

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## Abstract

**Paper-cut is one of the most popular folk arts in China, with strong national artistic characteristics, and it is a manifestation of national cultural art. The shapes of paper-cut patterns are exaggerated, generalized and vivid; the lines are gentle and rounded with a strong generalization ability. Paper-cut art also has a strong decorative flavor, and the modification of "sawtooth" and "crescent moon" further enhances its decorativeness. At the same time, China's long history and rich folk culture have provided an endless source of materials for paper-cut. In different folk life, it decorates and enriches life everywhere.**

## Keywords

**Folk paper-cut; Patterns; Artistic characteristic.**

## 1. Overview of Folk Paper-cut

Folk paper-cut is an art form created by working people to meet their own spiritual needs. Closely combined with people's living customs, beliefs and aspirations, folk paper-cut contains national psychology and basic national qualities, and is an organic part of national traditional culture. All seasonal festivals, birthdays, weddings and funerals, birthday banquets and other events are reflected in paper-cut. The themes of folk paper-cut are mostly common things in life such as animals, flowers and plants, and figures, which form meaningful artistic pictures through homophony and implied meaning.

## 2. Artistic Characteristics of Paper-cut Patterns

### 2.1. Modeling

#### (1) Exaggeration and generalization

Exaggerated and deformed modeling is one of the main characteristics of paper-cut. Folk paper-cut artists live in a free and unrestrained environment, and so is their paper-cut. They can let their imagination run wild and cut as they like to make the paper-cut beautiful. They grasp the main parts of things, boldly abandon the secondary parts, and express the things to be depicted. Exaggerating and highlighting the characteristics of things makes them more perfectly reflected, with rough and vigorous structure, simple and unadorned artistic style, and intimate paper-cut content. It is unreasonable but reasonable, giving people a strong visual impact and spiritual shock.

The creation process of folk paper-cut is a beautiful image expressed by folk artists through exaggeration on the basis of the real images of things in real life, integrating their own thoughts, feelings and aesthetic characteristics through long-term observation and comprehension combined with their own life practice.

#### (2) Line modeling

As a special folk art form, paper-cut has a special production process. Cutting with scissors or hollowing out on paper with a knife are two techniques of paper-cut. Paper-cut is a kind of hollow art. The unnecessary parts are cut off on the paper, and the remaining lines form the work. The whole work should be connected without breaking, that is, the lines should be

connected with each other, and it must be "liftable and pastable". Based on practical experience, the lines of paper-cut are summarized into five characters: "round, sharp, square, notched and linear". The requirements are: "round as the autumn moon, sharp as wheat awns, square as blue bricks, notched as sawteeth, and linear as beards". It can be said that lines are the foundation of paper-cut modeling.

### (3) Symmetry

Symmetry is the most basic modeling feature of Chinese traditional art. In the process of cutting with scissors, the paper is first folded several times. Only one pattern is cut, and when opened, multiple connected patterns are formed, which are symmetrical. \*Pair of Horses\* in the Southern and Northern Dynasties is a typical symmetrical paper-cut, in which the paper is folded four times, and the artist only cuts one horse image to get twelve horse shapes.

## 2.2. Decorativeness of Patterns

The tools for making paper-cut are scissors and paper, which make it difficult to express the precise effect of things. Folk artists modify the characteristics of things on the basis of exaggerating and generalizing the images. They intentionally exaggerate the patterns of clothes, match patterns on the bodies of animals, or directly add patterns on the bodies of animals. They also often add "sawtooth" and "crescent moon" decorations. The length, density, curvature, hardness and softness of "sawteeth" form a rich sense of rhythm and aesthetic interest. Sawtooth patterns can represent the soft down of birds and beasts, the teeth of animals, fish scales, the edges of petals, etc. "Crescent moon" is also a variety of arc decorations naturally produced during cutting, which is mainly based on intaglio and mainly expresses the characteristics and shapes of characters. It can be long or short, wide or narrow, curved or straight, and can be transformed into various types. The "sawtooth" and "crescent moon" patterns are not only the patterns naturally left by relief or intaglio, but also smooth and gentle, simple and bright, and delicate in image in themselves. As a whole, they have a sense of rhythm and cadence.

Folk paper-cut art is widely used. The decorative patterns on folk lanterns, the patterns on fans, the decorations on tea cups and vases, and the patterns for embroidery all use paper-cut as decoration for further processing. Paper-cut is often used as a decoration for homes in Chinese folk, such as door decorations, window flowers, cabinet flowers, wedding flowers, ceiling flowers, etc., all of which are paper-cuts used to decorate doors, windows and rooms.

## 2.3. Bright and Simple Colors

Folk artists live in a self-sufficient environment and rarely receive education on aesthetics such as color. Therefore, they seldom consider the principles of aesthetics in creation, but act according to experience and unique intuition, "doing whatever looks good". So like other folk art works, the colors of folk paper-cut works are basically bright, lively and complex in simplicity. Some artists are good at matching complex colors on a white background, and others set various color blocks into the main draft cut in black or gold, so as to obtain coordination, brightness and a strong sense of rhythm, as if showing a grand movement.

The concept of auspiciousness also affects the color tone of paper-cut, which is bright and simple. For example, when a girl gets married, red paper-cut festival flowers must be placed on all the dowry gifts from her natal family. The bridal chamber of the bride and groom must be pasted with red paper-cuts to create a festive atmosphere.

### 3. Themes Derived from Folk Culture

#### 3.1. Worship of Ancient Totems

The creators of folk paper-cut regard paper-cut as a part of life. The worship of ancient totems and the yearning for a better life are the main contents expressed by folk paper-cut. In the minds of primitive people, gods are everywhere. People believe that some surrounding things are the incarnations of gods, and place their wishes on these things, thus giving birth to totems. A totem refers to an animal, plant or inanimate object regarded by primitive people as their relative, ancestor or patron saint. They believe that these totems will not only not harm them, but also protect them, and they can obtain their superhuman strength, courage and skills.

Witchcraft is also closely linked with paper-cut. For example, paper-cut window flowers for the Spring Festival are used to ward off evil spirits and pray for blessings, hoping for a bumper grain harvest and national peace and prosperity in the new year; "door-keeping dolls" are used to prevent plagues and ensure health; door gods, big roosters and cattle can ward off ghosts and demons; tigers and lions are pasted indoors to protect the house. The reason why paper-cut door gods are cut to look fierce is to hope to scare away ghosts and demons with the help of door gods. People are very pious when cutting these paper-cuts to pray for the protection of gods.

It can be said that the root of folk paper-cut art first comes from witchcraft belief, and then the pursuit of aesthetics. With witchcraft belief and the spiritual connotation of folk custom, paper-cut, as their material and cultural carrier, can spread continuously among the people and create a beautiful world at the same time.

#### 3.2. Folk Culture

Festivals are a concentrated reflection of people's folk wishes and a happy time for all people to celebrate together. On every festival, wedding and other auspicious days, people decorate their houses with lanterns and streamers, wear new clothes, eat festival meals, visit relatives and friends, and folk arts such as yangko dance, opera, acrobatics, clay toys, embroidery, couplets and paper-cut appear together, pushing the festival atmosphere to a climax. Every festive festival is accompanied by paper-cut, which is closely connected with folk custom.

Cutting and pasting window flowers during the Spring Festival is one of the important cultural activities in traditional customs. Praying for blessings and welcoming auspiciousness is its eternal theme. People pray for favorable weather, adequate food and clothing, a prosperous population and a long life. Therefore, they express these simple wishes through paper-cut. Immortals, auspicious dragons, auspicious clouds, birds, figures, beasts, plants and other images and objects that can place people's good wishes and reflect people's pursuits are all turned into "auspicious" works of art by paper-cut artists. Whether using a single image or a combination of multiple images, the modeling is based on "implying meaning with images" and "constructing images with meaning", rather than according to the objective natural form. At the same time, artists are good at creating a variety of auspicious objects with the technique of bi and xing, and combining conventional images to express their psychology. The pursuit of auspicious implication has become one of the ultimate goals of image combination.

In folk paper-cut, we can see many pictures reflecting life. The biggest common feature of these works is that they use those conventional conceptualized images to place people's yearning for a better life and expectation for auspiciousness and happiness. Through paper-cut, people fabricate beautiful images to comfort their souls. Folk paper-cut integrates these auspicious implications into various national events to meet the spiritual and psychological needs of the general public, support human survival and enrich human life.

#### 4. Conclusion

In today's era of industrialization and economic globalization, the self-sufficient rural society is transforming into an industrial society, which will inevitably drive the transformation of the entire civilization. With the acceleration of industrialization and urbanization, all cultural forms and methods under the original agricultural civilization structure are rapidly disintegrating and dying out. Folk paper-cut art is also facing an unprecedented impact, and we are losing it bit by bit. "The history of paper-cut art is a precious treasure of Chinese culture and art. It is our responsibility and obligation to inherit and carry forward its essence in its entirety. Only in this way can we truly be worthy descendants of our ancestors and worthy ancestors of our later generations!"

#### References

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