

Law of Inheritance and Development for Modern Application of Traditional Art - Starting with the Modernization of Paper-Cutting Art

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Abstract:

The spread, development, innovation and reappearance of paper-cutting technology are closely related to its own characteristics. With its unique and distinct characteristics, its ideas are frequently integrated in modern design. Meanwhile, new ideas emerge in the collision--the ingenious combination and application of traditional paper-cutting style characteristics and modern design. Based on the development of the paper-cutting art transformed from an ancient traditional art to a modern art with the characteristics of the times and history, and in-depth analysis of the traditional Chinese art under the modern inheritance and development, we shall uphold the development laws to avoid falling into the “modernization” misunderstandings and traps, grasp the creative development of the essence of traditional art while removing the “masking” and “inertialization” thinking of creators and recipients, and dialectically look at the possibility of combining traditional art with modernity and its internal development and laws under contradictions.

Keywords:

Paper-Cutting Art, Artistic Innovation, Traditional Art, Art Modernization, Laws of Inheritance and Development

1. Introduction

The culture of the Chinese nation has a long history. With the hard work and creation of the people of all ethnic groups up to five thousand years, the culture has a long history of fruitful achievements. For example, there are too many traditional folk arts and crafts, such as shadow puppets, prints, clay sculptures, cloth art, bamboo weaving, wood carvings, paper-cutting, lacquer art, etc., each of which has its own characteristics and exquisite ingenuity. The seemingly simple paper-cutting art which is exquisite, ingenious, simple and full of vitality, still maintains its own purity and freshness in the evolution of the long history. In addition, it contains countless crystallizations of wisdom and preserves the analysis of Chinese aesthetics, decorative beauty, artistic expression, and custom psychology. With the development of the

times, this ancient folk art with its own unique contains the characteristics and vitality and shows the endless life in modern times, so it is integrated in all kinds of art design.

The spread and analysis of paper-cutting art has been countless and there is no shortage of its presence in the decoration, art, literature and even architecture of all dynasties and generations. As early as the Western Zhou Dynasty, how did the paper-cutting art, which had already made its appearance, spread to the present day, infiltrate into modern art, form a link of cultural ecology, form a representative example of traditional innovation and apply to modern art, modern life, and modern aesthetic theory in the historical evolution, the changes of the times, and the changes of aesthetic forms? Is it just because of the characteristics of paper-cutting art itself, or its strong flavor of life, or the special way of integration in the inheritance? The discussion of it can not only clearly explore the integration of modern art development of paper-cutting art from multiple dimensions, but also give some enlightenment in the development and innovation of other kinds of traditional art.

2. Historical Development and Characteristics of Paper-Cutting Art

The inheritance and development of traditional paper-cutting art will rejuvenate its brilliance in countless emerging arts. The foundation and focus are to explore its inherent features and characteristics. Since there is no papermaking technology, the paper-cutting art which is decorative and aesthetically interesting has appeared; in terms of the materials, tools and implementation methods of paper-cutting, it constitutes its unique art form with the irreplaceable advantages of other traditional art types. After thousands of years of accumulation, the Chinese culture which has strong national characteristics and vitality has been skillfully integrated with traditional philosophy, aesthetics and folk custom. Based on the creation of folk real life, it has natural and simple emotional and intuitive basis, and has concise and bright aesthetic characteristics. [1]

2.1. Simple Beauty of Applied Materials

Before the emergence of papermaking technology, the paper-cutting art had been applied to the sheet materials with various techniques. Most of these materials were the common things in daily life, such as leaves, leather, silk, gold foil, etc. After the emergence of paper, the paper-cutting art was formally formed. At the same time, the daily materials used in the paper-cutting art were endless, such as various kinds of cloth, wood, etc. A series of folk stories, such as cutting paulownia leaf to seal younger brother, dressing up in front of the mirror and calling back the spirit of the dead by cutting paper, fully illustrate that daily simple materials are endowed with paper-cutting skills and applied to life needs, decoration, emotional expression and other rich and simple life charm. Being close to life and showing the spirit of art everywhere are the most important foundation for the paper-cutting art to have continuous existence and innovation.

2.2. Hollowed-out Beauty of Threads

The skills of paper-cutting: carving, engraving, chopping, inscribing, and cutting, determine that the paper-cutting works have an unalterable inter-thread hollow feature. Regardless of whether the threads of the yang pattern are connected or the threads of the yin pattern are broken, they have a structure that is rigid and unbroken. In addition to giving the viewer with a transparent and light visual aesthetic experience, this hollowed-out structure creates a brisk atmosphere with mottled lights and shadows,

and a clear and ethereal atmosphere. This aesthetic feature is still applicable to this day and is highly respected. The brisk paper-cutting hollowing, a major feature that is different from other art, naturally unifies expressiveness and formal beauty.

2.3. Rhythmic Beauty of Styling Composition

Limited by tools and materials, traditional paper-cutting needs to focus on the characteristics of objects during modeling. According to the relationship of objects in content expression, the paper-cutting highlights the main image through exaggeration and deformation in modeling and makes many objects in the same picture with symmetry, balance, continuity and uniformity. Such compositional expression and composition methods often form the mysterious dynamic beauty of “layers of barriers” and “change of scenery between objects”. Combined with the simple, generous, exaggerated and beautiful form of objects, the vivid story-telling form is produced on the two-dimensional surface, which has a strong sense of rhythm sensation and rhythmic beauty. Actually, this sense of rhythm sensation and rhythmic beauty is an indispensable aesthetic experience in any kind of art design, which is needed in practical art, plastic art, expression art, language art and even comprehensive art.

2.4. Simple Beauty of Pure Color

Created in the two-dimensional state of the same material, paper-cutting is characterized by simple color and coordination. The physical effect of color directly affects the aesthetic feeling and psychology of the viewer. Simple color directly produces the physiological and sensory comfort of the viewer, and produces a concise and clear feeling. Furthermore, simple color matching characterized by joy and diversity can make the picture produce a comfortable sense of contrast, gradual change and fusion, which makes the aesthetic comfort better. This is one of the reasons why paper-cutting can be integrated into all kinds of arts.

3. Modern Development and Application of Paper-Cutting Art

The paper-cutting art has already emerged in garden design, furniture, and utensil design in the early days, and has been skillfully applied. In addition, the paper-cutting art is no longer constrained to tradition since its development, but it is developing and transforming in the washing of tradition and modernity, and is reborn in innovation. In the long history, what it conveys will flourish in a new carrier. The integration of paper-cutting art with modern art will leave new and different traces in the development of art. [3]

Because of the unique and distinctive characteristics of paper-cutting art, the concept of traditional paper-cutting art frequently appears in modern design. Besides directly using the concept of characteristics, new ideas have been developed. The combination of traditional paper-cutting art style and modern design makes paper-cutting cut have its new function in all aspects and fields of design. Combining modern designers' divergent design thinking with Chinese traditional handicraft culture does not only inherit and develop traditional art, and enrich design resources, but also enlightens modern design art concept, and gives new and fresh life force to traditional art.

3.1. Application of Paper Cutting Art in Graphic Design

The paper-cutting art is most widely used in graphic design of two-dimensional category in modern development. Because of the characteristics of original color, shape, composition and dimension of paper-cutting art, the paper-cutting art has strong and unique expressive power. In modern graphic design, rich sensory experience and visual language with strong emotional expression can be produced only by extracting, transforming, refining and rebuilding the traditional graphics or some elements. Therefore, in the field of early graphic design, the traces of paper-cutting art can already be found, including setting, animation modeling, illustrated comics, poster design, book binding, printing, packaging, etc. In addition to refining, integrating, deconstructing and reorganizing the ideas, concepts and characteristics of traditional Chinese paper-cutting art, the designer combines them with modern life, selects and extracts the required elements, and then recreates the art that meets the needs of the times for innovative design visual experience. [4]



Figure 1. *Flipping Effect.*



Figure 2. *Superimposed Effect.*



Figure 3. *Contrast Dynamic Effect.*



Figure 4. *Compound Effect.*

If the early use of graphics was simply a direct application of the paper-cutting art, a comprehensive form of expression using the paper-cutting art has emerged in the field of graphic design recently.

First of all, in addition to using the hollowing-out characteristics of paper-cutting, the image is flipped, superimposed and bent. The static paper begins to have dynamic characteristics in different forms, and bending and turning produce three-dimensional and dynamic feeling. Under the superposition of layers of paper, there is a sense of perspectivity and extension. Therefore, a dynamic story form forms in a picture (Figure 1 Flipping Effect). A paper-cutting poster that has been superimposed and bent can present a story-telling and dynamic image, and under the viewer's appreciation and thoughts, different story developments and inner intentions can be produced. Furthermore, as the color of paper-cutting is simple, contrast and gradient can be carried out to enrich the texture of the picture and produce a fresh and concise image with impact (Figure 2 Superimposed Effect). The monochrome paper-cutting simply echoes and with the bent and flipped paper surface, it produces a dynamic and impressive visual effect (Figure 3 Contrast Dynamic Effect). After multi-color superimposition, color gradient or contrast together with the use of plane composition methods strengthens the extension effect of the picture and highlights the impact of the picture. The combination of color changes and paper-cutting hollows makes the expressiveness of the picture more prominent. The artistic image that combines the two characteristics is extremely eye-catching (Figure 4 Compound Effect).

3.2. Application of Paper-Cutting Art in Architectural Design

The traditional paper-cutting art is of a two-dimensional plane, interspersed with different plane composition laws. The paper-cutting art is mainly focused on the mutual contrast of positive and negative shapes, and on expressing the law of beauty by hollowing. In contrast, the performance of the building is three-dimensional, interlaced and changed in space, reflecting the beauty of the structure, materials, and space of the building. The application of two-dimensional concept of the paper-cutting art to the three-dimensional composition is reflected in all three-dimensional aspect to combine and complement the advantages of the two and fully express the aesthetic concept of the structure, lines and space of the building.



Figure 5. POLSKA.

Traced to the source, the application of paper-cutting art in architecture has long been reflected in various kinds of hollowed-out lattice windows in ancient buildings. Up to now, the paper-cutting art is no longer limited to the concept and method of paper-cutting art for a certain part of the building, but it is applied to the whole building facade. The combination of paper-cutting characteristics and illumination change has formed a new aesthetic form of architectural decoration. POLSKA (Figure 5) is a typical example. The external walls of the POLSKA are interwoven with paper-cutting patterns, namely, the building facade is covered with traditional paper-cutting forms. The Sun Valley in the daytime and the internal lighting at night are combined, making whole POLSKA like a standing window grille box, with light passing through the hollows. With the change of light, different lights are flashing inside/outside, “drawing” the changing patterns of light and shadow. You might feel yourself walking in the dreamy world of light and shadow from all angles.

3.3. Application of Paper-Cutting Art in Fashion Design

Modern clothing design is no longer limited to the decorative texture of flat fabrics. Under the fierce market competition, three-dimensional technique is flooded with clothing. The structural line design in fashion design is similar to the structural line treatment in traditional paper-cutting art. The combination of the two, combined with the curve characteristics of the human body, has a unique artistic charm. Therefore, the paper-cutting technology used in three-dimensional clothing design is a common technique in modern times, and even has become a basic technique in clothing design. According to the different materials, texture and thickness of clothing fabrics, the weaving, stacking, drawing, winding, folding and binding methods [2] are used for clothing to enhance the auxiliary local or finishing stereoscopic effect, so that the clothing gives people a new visual feeling (Figure 6). The unique hollowing effect can show different special texture effects on different fabrics, adding texture, layering, and modeling to the clothing to achieve luxurious and exquisite clothing.

This ancient Chinese traditional art is still booming in the modern process. The simple two-dimensional paper-cutting at the beginning is not only used to make innovative changes in materials, patterns and meanings, but it is rich and colorful in ways, methods, application fields and expression media.



Figure 6. Application of Paper-cutting in Clothing Design.

4. “Modernization” Misunderstandings and Development Laws of Traditional Art

With a set of slightly mature traditional skill development system, it is necessary to truly develop and transform in the scouring baptism of tradition and modernity as well as to carry, innovate, and give birth to a new life. While the later development which will continue to permeate all kinds of art fields, all kinds of artistic aesthetic concepts, and all kinds of daily life is blooming more fresh vitality, we shall avoid falling into the misunderstanding of the “modernization” development of traditional art. Due to the period of “modernization” sweeping the tide, modernization seems to have become an omnipotent adjective. It seems that as long as an item is modernized, the item is a correct concept. However, for the “modernization” development of traditional Chinese art, we shall be cautious of being excessively influenced by the development of contemporary art all the time.

The rationality of the term “modernization” originated from the West lies in that “modernity” is a dimensional concept of time and space, which means the time and space on the road of Western art aesthetics transits from tradition to high formalism, while the characteristics of “modernity” are rational and contradictory. Under this complex contradiction, modern art, the modernity of Western unique time and space, has been more accurately defined and more clearly bounded in the dialectical development. In the development of traditional art, the danger of falling into the misunderstanding of “modernization” [7] lies in this: defining the later development of traditional art with a concept that does not conform to the characteristic dimension will cause its innate deficiencies in modernity and cause to stifle the development of traditional art in the form of a short circuit of modernity. There is a classic example in the modern development of the paper-cutting art: seeing the value of traditional cultural elements in the modern dance drama--Hunting for Nora, the designers actively integrated them into the design of this drama and designed the stage art based on the folk paper-cutting art. However, behind this seeming promotion, there was a vacancy after careful evaluation, which became a case “discussed” by the artists during the propaganda. Clothing design, also an element of traditional art, received a lot of criticism and dissatisfaction at the 2021 Spring Festival Gala while performers in ancient dress with new design proudly showed on the stage. The fundamental reason for the criticism and dissatisfaction lies in the fact that one is that the traditional art elements are used too “inertially”, and the other is that there is over

“masking”, both of which are common problems in the development of traditional art in modern times.

From the perspective of aesthetic development, the linear development of Western aesthetics is completely different from the curvilinear, dynamic and mixed development of China. In the modernization dimension of Sinicization established on the basis of the West, “de-masking” [5] and “de-inertialization” [6] have become the key laws for the modernization of traditional art.

First of all, the non-native “masked” blind distribution might become the facehugger that damages the native art. In the west, the direct transfer of the definition of native dimension is the “mask” of art development. For example, the traditional Chinese pattern, also composed of plane images, contains totally different connotations and historical accumulation compared with that composed of western plane images. The reason lies in that they both have their own unique aesthetic concepts. Whether looking at the two from the starting point, the basic structural rules, or the spatiality, you can find that the difference between the two is not simply superficial, but each represents a different dimension of artistic laws, cultural properties, and ideological frameworks.

Furthermore, “inertialization” is a universal problem in the transformation of traditional art. As a concrete product of accumulated spiritual culture, traditional art will always be granted with a certain degree of “standards that have always been agreed upon” by inertial thinking and aesthetic trends. Take the traditional folk paper-cutting in the modern dance dram--Hunting for Nora as an example. In the context of Nordic culture, to combine drama with traditional paper-cutting art is not to simply enlarge the paper-cutting into the screen background of drama. However, enlarging the paper-cutting is the inertial thinking generated by the use of traditional artistic elements. The red hollowed-out paper-cutting screen just shows the form of paper-cutting to the audience intact, but ignores the real connotation of the stage and the emotion that needs to be conveyed through the stage. There may be voices of opposition: is it wrong to simply carry traditional art for exhibition? Not at all! Traditional paper-cutting techniques and forms do not only exist in China, but there are similar forms of artistic expression in other countries. So, is it only the exquisite and eye-catching form that it has been passed down to the present? No. It is more about the culture and spirit behind the traditional paper-cutting art. A simple display can only show its simple and ingenious skills, but it cannot continue to survive in modern development. We should emphasize that the transformation of traditional art should adapt to modern art and thus get a long-term development. It is inevitable to touch the so-called “standard”, but it is a painful and abnormal process to face up to the standard and to study and change it deeply. It seems to be more a process of losing the tradition. Because of the inertialization, it is difficult for the traditional inheritors to be separated from this magic barrier. However, its essence can only be obtained in the true sense after jumping out of this circle and combining the historical core of the times to view the traditional art.

When art creators jump out of the “inertialization” and “masking” mode of thinking, there is another target of art works, that is, art receivers. It is the key development law of the modernization of traditional art to guide the art receiver to remove the thinking of “inertialization” and “masking” of traditional art with the creator as the guide.

5. Conclusions

The modernization of traditional culture is a process of continuous exploration and practice, where misunderstanding of concepts, misuse of forms, and misunderstanding of transitions are all unavoidable experiences in the process of exploration. Although the modern application of paper-cutting art has problems of “masking” and “inertialization” to a certain extent, new developments that make people happy are constantly bursting out and we can see that a large number of traditional arts have been used in modern art, or reborn in a new way. The same is true for the paper-cutting art. As shown in Chapter II, paper-cutting art shows the charm of traditional Chinese art in various fields. This charm is the beauty of nature that is advocated by the Chinese traditional arts and the special charm of hidden things behind the beauty. The key to the transformation of traditional art is to unearth the spirit and admiration hidden under art! As the famous British philosopher G·Lowes Dickinson wrote in *A SADRED MOUNTAIN*: “but is it affectation to think they may have to pay too high a price for it, and to suggest that in acquiring our material advantages they may lose what we have gone near to lose, that fine and sensitive culture which is one of the forms of spiritual life?”. The excellent and delicate artistic aesthetic and spiritual admiration in the mouth of G·L is the biggest difference between Chinese traditional art and Western art. Things with traditional artistic elements continue to appear in our lives, ranging from cultural and creative products to buildings. These are true and modern traditional arts with the inheritance of traditional art based on the basic principle of “the end is clear, though the means be inadequate” and arts with the connotation of the beauty of the times and history at the same time. This may be the dawn that western culture will no longer affect the modern development of traditional Chinese art and under this dawn, traditional Chinese art will become an important existence that inspires western art!

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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