

The language expression of folk paper-cutting art under the perspective of Chinese painting

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the language expression of folk traditional paper-cutting art form in the view of Chinese painting. First of all, it systematically analyzes the relationship between traditional paper-cutting art and Chinese painting from three aspects: thinking concept, visual symbol and image color. Secondly, using Charles Saunders Pierce's theory, the characteristics of a work that combines paper-cutting and Chinese painting with examples are analyzed, and it is pointed out that the combination of paper-cut and Chinese painting can effectively express the theme and emotion. Finally, the paper discusses the application of traditional paper-cutting art in Chinese painting, reveals the deep relationship and interaction between them in the perspective of Chinese painting, and provides theoretical support and practical guidance for the integration of the two art forms.

Key Words: language expression, folk traditional paper-cutting art, Chinese painting, merge, visual arts

Introduction

Traditional folk paper-cutting art has a long history. It was originally used as a pattern recording method to record people's daily life and beliefs (Yan 2024). Paper-cutting art falls under the category of traditional folk handicrafts. Craftsmen, using just a few pairs of scissors and certain colored paper, can depict scenes from daily life and blessings for the future life on the paper, presenting a strong artistic appeal and cultural characteristics. Through various artistic expression forms such as carving, engraving, polishing and inlaying, as well as the related cultural connotations it contains, the work

has significantly improved in terms of artistic aesthetics. Paper-cutting embodies the original thinking in its design concepts. It is regarded as an "unconscious" element that is accumulated in the creative concept, thereby shaping the perspective of "anthropomorphic" imagery. This art form is simple and expressive, with strong visual impact and symbolic meaning (Zhao and Kim 2024). Chinese painting embodies the ancient Chinese literati's in-depth observation and understanding of the natural landscape, social features and philosophical thoughts, and emphasizes the artistic conception and emotional expression between the brush and ink (Geng 2024). Chinese landscape painting cannot be created without ink and brush. Using ink and brush to depict objects is the most distinctive feature of Chinese painting. Throughout history, painters have employed various methods in their use of ink and brush. The varying degrees of pressure when drawing reflect the rhythm of a person's life, and ink and brush have become the most vivid portrayal of a painter's unique personality. The combination of traditional paper-cutting art and Chinese painting is not only the integration of techniques, but also the reflection of deep dialogue between culture and philosophy. Traditional paper-cutting patterns are mostly simplified and abstract, meaning auspicious, while Chinese painting conveys more delicate and far-reaching emotions and philosophy through delicate strokes and distinct colors (Guo 2023).

In recent years, with our new understanding and emphasis on the value of traditional culture and art, the cross-border cooperation between folk paper-cutting and Chinese painting in the art field is increasing progressively, showing rich innovation and development potential (Cao 2023). According to Charles Saunders Peirce's Semiotic Triadic Division (Susanti and Agustin 2017), we can analyze this work from three aspects: representamen, object and interpretant, with special attention to the cow image in paper cutting, and then explain the integration of paper cutting and Chinese painting. Although in art practice, the combination of these two forms has seen in many beautiful works, but the theoretical research is relatively lagging behind (Bi 2023).

1. The relationship between traditional folk paper-cutting and Chinese painting

1.1 Conception of thinking

As two important branches of traditional Chinese art, traditional paper-cutting and Chinese painting are deeply rooted in the rich cultural soil of China. Although these two art forms are different in expression techniques, they have many similarities in cultural connotation and symbolic meaning, especially in the use of auspicious flower and bird schematics.

In traditional paper-cutting, flower and bird patterns are often used to express people's expectations and wishes for a better life. For example, the common paper-cutting pattern of "Double-Xi" is usually accompanied by magpies and plum blossoms (Figure 1), symbolizing double happiness and beauty. This design is very beautiful, and rich in profound cultural connotations, meaning "happy eyebrows", is regarded as a good omen. Another example is the paper-cutting pattern of "Carp leaping over the dragon gate"

(Figure 2). The carp symbolizes abundance every year, while the dragon gate represents elevation or test. The whole pattern implies success through efforts to change one's destiny. Furthermore, the character "fish" in the name of carp is pronounced the same as the word "yú" in Chinese, which conveys the meaning of abundance and prosperity. It is deeply loved by people. The phenomenon of homophonic expressions from the perspective of language and culture reflects the human mind. The essence of homophonic folk customs is the worship of language and words; the worship of language is a manifestation of animism.

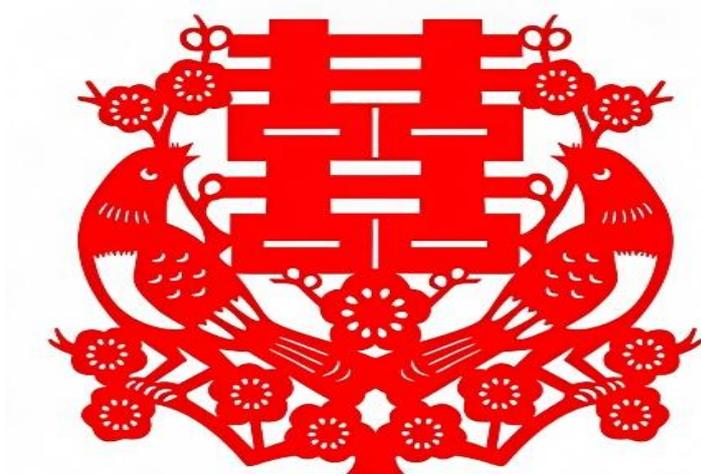


Figure 1. The traditional Chinese paper-cutting of "囍(Xi)" .



Figure 2. Paper-cutting pattern of "Carp leaping over the dragon gate".

Similarly, in Chinese painting, flower-and-bird painting is not only a representation of natural beauty, but also an expression of culture and philosophy. For instance, pine and cranes are often painted together, representing longevity and purity, showing people's

pursuit and reverence for noble morality. Lotus, for example, is often used as a symbol of cleanliness and purity in Chinese paintings, because the lotus can grow in the mud without staining, symbolizing the ideal of maintaining integrity in difficult situations. The application of the above schema in paper-cutting and Chinese painting beautifies the visual arts, and it becomes an important carrier of Chinese traditional culture and philosophical thoughts. Through these symbolic patterns, the art works link the physical images of nature and humanistic thoughts, reflecting people's cognition and understanding of the world, as well as their emotional expression of longing for a better life. Whether it is paper-cutting or Chinese painting, flower and bird patterns are the theme of artistic creation and the bridge of cultural communication. Through the art works loaded with auspicious meanings, Chinese people's love and respect for nature and life, as well as their pursuit and expectation for a better life. The far-reaching influence of this art form proves their irreplaceability in inheriting and developing traditional Chinese culture.

1.2 Visual sign

Visual symbols, as the key elements to convey deep cultural and emotional information in artistic works, play an extremely important role in traditional folk paper-cutting and Chinese painting. These symbols are deeply rooted in the symbolic system of traditional Chinese culture and are the link of cultural inheritance and innovation.

In traditional culture, paper-cutting is one of the most representative visual symbols. Paper-cut decorations usually cut and pasted on Windows during traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival to keep away evil spirits and keep people safe. The patterns of paper-cuttings are rich and varied, such as the Chinese character for good fortune, zodiac patterns and various mascots such as bats and fish, which all signify good fortune and wealth. These patterns are visually direct and strong, conveying good wishes for the future and inheriting and developing traditional culture. When these traditional paper-cutting patterns are applied to Chinese paintings, such as the background or border of the painting, they enhance the visual appeal of the picture, deepen the cultural level of the painting, and create a deeper emotional resonance between the painting and the audience.

The theme of "Cloud dragon Picture" common in Chinese painting is also a good example. In traditional culture, the dragon is a symbol of strength, authority and prosperity. The dragon in Chinese painting is usually depicted as flying clouds and mist, full of motion, vividly showing the majesty and mystery of the dragon. For example, Southern Song Dynasty painter Chen Rong's "The Nine Dragons Scroll" (Figure 3) shows a vivid scene of dragons shuttling back and forth among clouds through delicate lines and smooth brushstrokes, fully reflecting the dynamic beauty and lofty status of dragons. Through such visual symbols, Chinese painting shows the artist's technical virtuosity, and it also conveys the admiration for authority and justice, and the pride of the country and the nation through the image of the dragon.



Figure 3. Chen Rong's "The Nine Dragons Scroll" (part). It is currently housed in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in the United States.

The use of specific visual symbols greatly enhances the artistic expression of the works, and also makes the works of art form a unique way of visual and cultural communication. The audience can feel the profound heritage of traditional Chinese culture and the artist's emotional sustenance, and then understand and feel the deeper cultural and philosophical significance by these symbols. Artistic expression techniques allow traditional Chinese culture to spread, and art works themselves become an important carrier of Chinese cultural spirit and aesthetic taste.

1.3 Image color

The use of color plays a crucial role in artistic expression and is an important medium for emotional and cultural communication. In folk paper-cutting and Chinese painting, the application of color has its own characteristics, which deeply reflects the profound heritage of Chinese culture and unique aesthetics.

In the folk paper-cutting art, the use of color often presents a sharp contrast effect due to the different materials and techniques, and this strong visual impact is an important part of its artistic charm. For example, the combination of red and black is very common in paper-cutting, red usually represents jubilation, warmth and auspiciousness, while black can provide a strong background contrast, making the red pattern more prominent. In traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival, red paper-cutting is often used for decoration, representing the joy and prosperity of the New Year, such as fish and bats in window paper-cut. In Chinese, the word for "fish" is pronounced as "Yu", which is the same as the character "余" (meaning abundance and wealth). Similarly, the Chinese pronunciation of "bat" is "Fu", which is pronounced the same as the word "福" (meaning happiness and prosperity), decorating the home and convey people's good wishes for the future.

In contrast, Chinese painting pays more attention to the level and delicacy in the use of

color, especially in the traditional ink painting, the use of color is simple and profound (Zhong 2024). Ink painting relies on the shade of ink and the change of dry and wet to create an ethereal and far-reaching artistic realm (Chung and Huang, 2023). For example, in Zheng Banqiao's bamboo painting, the simple ink bamboo expresses the character and vitality of bamboo, and reflects the artist's artistic accomplishment and personal character (Campbell 2023, Figure 4) . The use of ink in the visual form of rich layers, so that the picture is both powerful and clever. Traditional landscape paintings, such as the Ming Dynasty painter Shen zhou's “Painting of Mount Lu” (Figure 5), often use elegant green tones to depict the outline and details of distant mountains, the application of this color not only enhances the depth and sense of space, but also makes the whole picture more fresh and quiet. This is in stark contrast to the direct and bright colors of traditional folk paper-cuttings, demonstrating the unique aesthetic and philosophical depth of Chinese painting in expressing natural landscapes (Yang *et al*, 2024).



Figure 4. Zheng Banqiao's “Bamboo and Rock Painting”

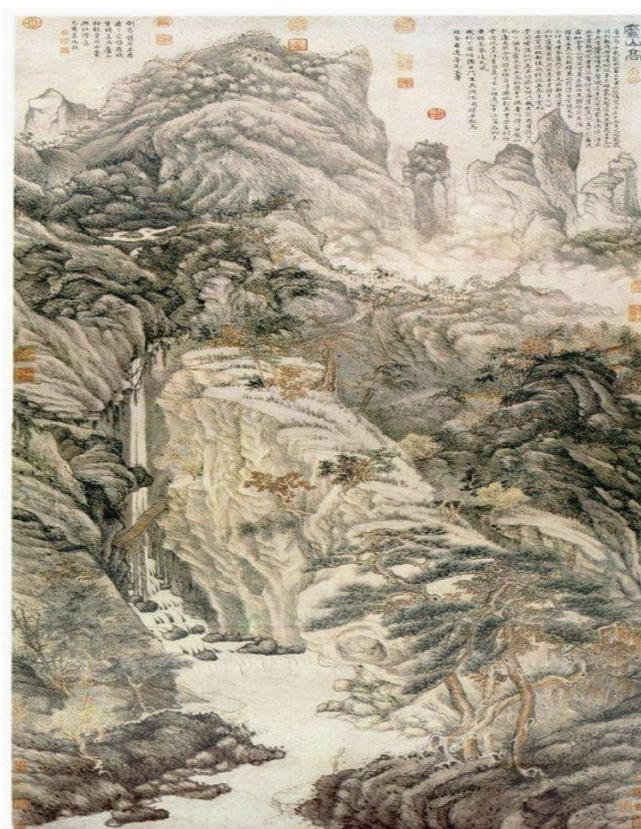


Figure 5. Shen Zhou's Painting of Mount Lu. It is currently housed in the Taipei Palace Museum.

Through these examples, we can see that the use of color is closely related to its cultural meaning and artistic expression, whether it is paper-cutting or Chinese painting. The choice and application of each color is for visual beauty, and also a choice of the artist in the cultural tradition and personal emotion, which makes each work of art unique and can have a profound resonance with the audience both visually and spiritually.

2. The application of traditional folk paper-cutting in Chinese painting art

2.1 The application of folk traditional paper-cutting in literati painting

Plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum, known as the "Four gentlemen" (Figure 6), symbolize the noble, tough and humble human spirit in Chinese art. These four kinds of plants not only appear frequently in literati paintings, but also are commonly used visual symbols in traditional paper cuts, and their patterns are often used to decorate homes or as holiday gifts, symbolizing luck and good wishes.

For example, the plum blossom pattern in the paper cut, usually uses simple and strong lines to express the toughness and purity of the plum blossom, and uses cold colors to enhance the visual cold sense, which reminds people of the transcendent character of the plum blossom. Orchid in the paper-cutting is a symbol of noble, paper-cutting artists depict orchid delicate leaves and flowers, through the layers of paper-cutting technology, so that the orchid pattern is vivid and full of literary atmosphere, implying the noble

sentiment of literati. Bamboo represents humility and tenacity in Chinese culture, and the patterns of paper-cutting bamboo are often combined with elements such as rocks and birds to form a picture full of vitality and dynamic beauty, reflecting the spirit of perseverance and self-improvement in the face of adversity. Chrysanthemum is a symbol of purity and strength in traditional folk paper-cutting. paper-cutting artists usually use golden yellow and dark green to depict chrysanthemums, showing their vitality and rich emotional levels with their intense colors and cascading petals.



Figure 6. Paper-cutting pattern of plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum. The four plants are collectively known as the "Four Gentlemen", symbolizing indomitable spirit, perseverance and noble character.

In literati paintings, special plants are often used to attach the deep meaning of the painting. For instance, the Song Dynasty scholar Zhou Dunyi's "On Loving the Lotus", by praising the lotus flower out of the mud without staining the characteristics, symbolizing the moral character of the gentleman (Liu 2017). Through the use of delicate brush strokes and ink, literati paintings not only show the natural beauty of flowers, but also deeply express the literati's outlook on life and world.

2.2 The application of traditional folk paper-cutting in flower-and-bird painting

The freehand flower-and-bird painting in Chinese painting emphasizes the refinement and simplification of artistic techniques to express the spiritual characteristics of flowers and birds, rather than the depiction of pure physical forms. Artists often choose representative fragments of flower branches and arrange them in the corner of the painting to highlight the vivid characteristics and artistic charm of flowers in this way. For example, in Qi Baishi's flower-and-bird paintings (**Figure 7**), he often describes the vitality and temperament of flowers and insects through a few brushstrokes and simple

lines, combined with white space skills, so that the works have a strong visual dynamic and expressive force.



Figure 7. Qi Baishi's painting of lotus and drogenfly.

Correspondingly, when dealing with the theme of flowers and birds, paper-cutting also adopts a similar method of breaking branches composition, but due to the material nature and technical limitations of paper-cutting, its composition is often more precise and rigorous. Yangzhou paper-cutting art is a typical example (Li 2020), paper-cutting artists will skillfully use scissors to complete the complex effect of breaking branches, through fine cutting and clever layout, enhance the visual sense of layer and space. For example, when depicting peonies or orchids, paper-cutting artists will depict details and adjust the positions of flowers and leaves, so that the entire work not only shows the complex beauty of flowers, but also maintains the overall elegance and harmony. In addition, the freehand flower-and-bird painting of Chinese painting has a unique expressive force in creating artistic conception (Li *et al*, 2023). These paper-cuttings show the dynamic beauty of objects, and convey a kind of philosophical thinking and emotional expression beyond nature through the exquisite design (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Paper-cuttings of peony and magpie, lotus and butterfly.

When the construction of this artistic conception is applied to the theme of flowers and birds in Chinese painting, the painter usually chooses the appropriate expression method according to the ecological characteristics and symbolic significance of flowers and birds. For example, when depicting plum blossoms, it emphasizes the vigor of the branches and the purity of the flowers, and enhances the depth of the artistic conception of the picture through the combination of plum blossoms with distant mountains, flowing water and other elements, making the works rich in poetry and philosophy. By comparing the treatment of flower and bird themes in Chinese painting and traditional paper-cutting, we can deeply understand the similarities and differences between them in expression techniques and cultural connotations, as well as their unique status and value in traditional Chinese art.

2.3 The application of traditional folk paper-cutting in panoramic landscape painting

As an art form deeply influenced by Chinese traditional culture, paper-cutting has its unique characteristics in the expression of landscape types (Wu *et al*, 2022), especially when dealing with panoramic landscape painting. Paper-cutting artists are able to show a vast landscape panorama on a limited piece of paper through meticulous cutting, a technique that requires not only superb manual skills, but also deep artistic understanding and creativity. For example, the landscape scene in paper-cutting is often expressed through the hierarchical cutting technology, and the elements such as mountain peaks, clouds, water and trees advance layer by layer, creating a profound and rhythmic visual effect. This technique of expression is vividly demonstrated in the traditional paper-cutting work "Beautiful Southern Yangtze" (Figure 9), in which water waves, boats, houses, distant mountains and clouds are finely cut out, although only red and white, because of the precise visual transmission and artistic treatment, so that the viewer can feel a quiet and poetic style of the Yangtze River town.

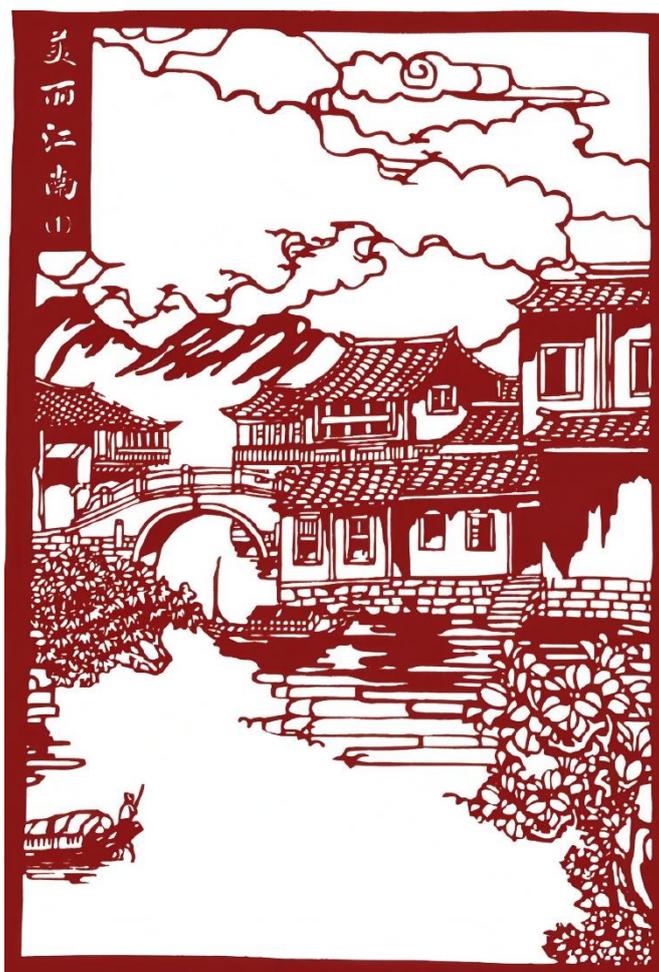


Figure 9. Paper-cutting pattern of “Beautiful Southern Yangtze”. The characteristics of the water towns in the Jiangnan region are vividly and thoroughly presented.

2.4 The Peirce’s trichotomy analysis of traditional paper-cutting art

For the paper-cutting artworks within the context of traditional Chinese painting, when we apply Peirce's triadic theory of semiotics for analysis, it will perfectly align with our aforementioned argumentative viewpoint. Yan Qian's work "Spring Back to the Earth" (Figure 10) is an example of the perfect combination of the unique skills of folk paper-cutting and Chinese painting.



Figure 10. Yan Qian's painting "Spring Back to the Earth".

I. Representamen

The paper-cut pattern of the cow is the core visual symbol, using the traditional Chinese style of red paper-cut. Red is a symbol of luck, happiness and vitality in Chinese culture, and the image of the cow also has important cultural symbolic significance in the art of paper cutting. The whole picture also contains willows, grass and other natural elements, and shows the vitality and soft atmosphere of spring through the freehand technique of traditional Chinese painting.

II. Object

The cow symbolizes hard work, tenacity and strength in Chinese culture, especially in agricultural society, where the cow is seen as a symbol of good harvest. The red paper-cut cow not only conveys the symbol of good luck and strength, but also is closely related to spring and harvest. In traditional Chinese culture, cattle are often associated with farming and land, symbolizing cultivation and return, representing hope and harvest after hard work.

Willow in Chinese culture symbolizes the arrival of spring and the revival of life, while grass further reinforces the theme of spring and the revival of all things. These natural symbols, together with the cow in the paper cutting, constitute a vibrant depiction of spring, conveying the symbolic meaning of natural harmony and the hope of harvest.

III. Interpretant

When the audience appreciates this work, the interaction between the paper-cut symbol of the cow and the willow and grass in the background will evoke the association of spring and harvest. As a symbol of hard work and strength in traditional culture, the

cow is represented by red paper-cuts, bringing a festive atmosphere and wishes for harvest. The audience naturally associated cattle with harvest and spring ploughing, which further reinforced the hope and recovery connotation of the theme of "Spring back to Earth". Willows and grass, as symbols of spring, make the whole painting a visual presentation, and also a spiritual sustenance for spring and harvest.

Through the organic combination of paper-cut cow and Chinese painting, it shows the deep meaning of symbolic symbols in traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, this piece of art is a combination of paper-cut and Chinese painting, and it also conveys the profound meaning of spring, labor and harvest in Chinese culture through symbols, showing the artist's deep understanding and expression of traditional culture.

In this regard, in-depth discussion of the application of traditional paper-cutting art in Chinese painting and its artistic value, analysis of their mutual influence from the perspective of art history, and exploration of their new significance and possibility in modern art creation will provide more theoretical support for the inheritance and innovation of excellent traditional Chinese art. This will enrich the art form, deepen the public's knowledge and understanding of traditional culture, highlighting the unique position and influence of traditional art in global cultural exchanges.

In traditional ink landscape painting, painters use the method of "freehand" to express the natural scenery. This way pays more attention to expressing the artist's emotions and understanding of natural beauty. Ink landscape is not confined to the reproduction of objects one by one, but to summarize the spirit of nature through the depth of ink and the weight of brush strokes. Through the simple ink and the ethereal layout, the tranquility and vastness of the landscape are conveyed, so that the viewer can experience a kind of transcendental tranquility and profoundness when appreciating the painting.

The application of the panoramic landscape composition method of paper-cutting to the creation of Chinese painting can realize an artistic transformation from realism to freehand brushwork, which not only enriches the expression skills, but also enhances the emotional expression and cultural connotation of the painting. For example, in the creation of modern Chinese painting, the artist may use the layers and details of paper-cutting to construct the picture, and then increase the artistic conception and depth of the picture through the brush strokes and color processing of ink painting, so that the landscape painting not only presents more fine natural details, but also brings more profound artistic experience to the viewer visually and emotionally. In addition, this integration also makes the artistic atmosphere and humanistic mood of the picture to expand, no longer limited to the framework of traditional expression techniques. By incorporating the composition technique of paper-cutting into the creation of Chinese painting, the artist can break the traditional visual limitations and create a new and dynamic viewing experience for the viewer, as if the viewer can see and deeply experience the changes and vividness of every landscape, so as to feel the infinite possibilities of nature and art more deeply.

3. Conclusion

This paper probes into the artistic characteristics of traditional folk paper-cutting from the perspective of Chinese painting, and reveals the deep connection between the two art forms in creation. Through a detailed analysis of the concept of thinking, visual symbols, and image color, the paper shows the language expression of traditional paper-cutting, emphasizing the integration of cross-art forms to enhance the expression of the work and the depth of artistic conception. Through the interaction of art forms, paper-cutting and Chinese painting not only enrich the expression of traditional Chinese art, but also provide a new perspective and source of inspiration for modern art creation, which is worth further research and promotion.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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