

***The Reconstruction of Rural Places Through Paper-Cutting Art:  
A Case Study of a "Paper-Cutting Village" in Fujian Province, China***

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**Abstract**

Xuelingwei is a village in Zhe Rong County, Ningde City, Fujian Province, China, which is renowned as the "paper-cutting village." The village can be regarded as an "overall space" from a spatial sociological perspective. In my research, I examined the spatial practices of the paper-cutting village of Xuelingwei based on participant observation and interviews with local paper-cutting inheritors, practitioners, villagers, government staff, and tourists. I discovered that through the cultural practice of paper-cutting folk art, Xuelingwei village is endowed with multiple spatial connotations. In the process of spatial socialization, the art of paper-cutting is gradually integrated into the villagers' daily lives. The village space is continuously enlarged, altered, depicted, and reproduced based on the perception, selection, and active practice of various spatial mechanisms. Through new village space such as rural paper-cutting museum, oil painting gallery, or activities like workshops, paper-cutting courses for villagers, paper-cutting experiences and souvenirs for tourists, and so on, paper-cutting art promotes the construction of the relationship between people and rural space, becoming a new way to investigate the reproduction of rural space and a reasonable effort to revive traditional folk art.

Keywords: Paper-Cutting, Folk Art, Rural Space, Spatial Reproduction

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## Introduction

This research is based on the background of Chinese intangible cultural heritage protection rural revitalization. These national policies have made it possible for the countryside to undergo tremendous changes that extend into space. Urban space is increasingly expanding into the countryside. The reorganization of urban spatial structure has occurred, affecting the inherent form of rural space, and social transformation has involved villages in the process of spatial production and reproduction.

Market-driven industrialization and urbanization have led to a macroscopic tendency for the spatial structure of villages to increase in size, decrease in number, and vary significantly in staggered density, with hollow villages co-existing with some super villages in the spatial configuration. With the existence of many hollow villages in rural China, the loss of use of rural space and its reproduction is quite urgent.

Changes in the space of rural social relations, the decay of rural public space, and the impact on the micro space of interpersonal relations.

With current rapid development of digitalization, the influence of media and technology on spatial relations; many villages have neglected the function of real space when investing in the construction of various virtual digital spaces.

Many villages are uniform in spatial transformation and production, imitating and transplanting, lacking the support of spatial cultural elements to be attractive and vital; there are also many misconceptions in the path selection of culture + revitalization.

Therefore, based on these backgrounds, This study of rural space is a synthesis of spatial research from the perspective of the state society, spatial analysis from the paradigm of daily life and spatial research from the perspective of rural governance (Lei lin,2021).

The research summarises case studies and distills an extensible theoretical framework. The study also provides a new perspective on the understanding and perception of the current development and function of intangible cultural heritage.

In the village of Xuelingwei in Ningde City, Fujian Province, the national non-traditional heritage of paper-cutting in Zhe Rong is used as a rural culture to develop rural cultural tourism and revitalization strategies, in the process of which the rural space of Xuelingwei is also reproduced. Based on Henri Lefebvre's triadic model of social space, this research analyses in detail how the intervention of paper-cutting, an intangible cultural heritage, has changed the state and structure of space at three levels: perceptual space, conceptual space and living space. This study is based on the triadic model of Henri Lefebvre's social space.

This study places rural intangible cultural heritage and traditional cultural art (paper-cutting as a case study) in the context of social space, providing an analytical framework to generate a new perspective for understanding and perceiving the current development and function of intangible traditional art. At the same time, in the process of analyzing how the folk paper-cutting in the village of Xuelingwei interacts with the three spaces, the scope of spatial theory interpretation is expanded on the one hand, and a new mediated vision is derived on the other. The study also provides a new perspective on the understanding and perception of the current development and function of non-traditional traditional arts.

## **Research questions**

My study starts with research questions as follows:

- Does the integration of paper-cutting as a cultural core into industrialization have an impact on rural space? What kind of influence does it have?
- How can this influence be better interpreted to the spatial triad theory?
- How can intangible cultural heritage play a role in the development of rural spaces?

## **Theoretical Framework of this research**

The theoretical framework that supports my study is: Henri Lefebvre's Sociological Space Theory---“The production of space”. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre first introduced his core categories of the spatial triadic dialectic:

- Spatial practice. It encompasses production and reproduction, as well as the particular place and spatial characteristics of each social form. The continuity and extent of this union is reinforced in spatial practice in social space and every relationship between society and space.
- Representations of space. This is closely linked to the relations of production, to the "order" that affects these relations, and thus to knowledge, symbols, codes and "frontier" relations.
- Representational spaces. It is the concrete expression of a complex system of symbols linked to the hidden side of social life (Lefebvre,1991).

## **Methodology & Data Collection**

I use methodologies like participant observation, narrative inquiry and in-depth semi-structured interviews to collect data. It is worth exploring the mechanisms and pathways of the role of intangible cultural heritage in reproducing rural space in rural development. Through qualitative research methods, the changes in rural spaces based on paper-cutting and the detailed interpretation of spatial theories are obtained, to generate new ideas for the developing of rural spaces and intangible cultural heritage.

For instance, I interviewed Wu, the village branch secretary of Xuelingwei: "At the outset of the formation of the paper-cutting village, our two village committees encouraged every household to participate in reacquainting themselves with the intangible cultural heritage of paper-cutting. Every Saturday evening, the village branch invites paper-cutting experts to teach people how to cut paper, and all villagers are encouraged to attend. In order for our town to promote paper-cutting as a specialty, we must first comprehend and appreciate the non-heritage culture of paper-cutting." With this in mind, the village management supported the paper-cutting classroom activities, and the villagers participated in the course from a wait-and-see state to taking the initiative to break barriers and participate on time at a later stage, laying the groundwork for the villagers' exposure to, appreciation of, and recognition of the art of paper-cutting, as well as its active promotion.

## **Conclusion**

As a result of the intervention of paper-cutting art, the cultural tourism industry in Zhaolingwei Village has a cultural core and support, the cultural tourism experience of

tourists has been enriched, and the financial income of Xuelingwei Village has been significantly increased, which constitutes a significant experience for the revitalization and development of Xuelingwei Village from the perspective of culture-led long-term economic development.

Alternatively, the transmission of paper-cutting intangible cultural heritage as the primary image and characteristic of the village has a greater potential to raise the awareness of Zhe Rong paper-cutting intangible cultural heritage and to discover the expansion and extension of intangible cultural heritage in its existing activities.

The residents' way of life has altered drastically, and the village space has been recreated. This series of changes prompted by the involvement of the paper-cutting intangible cultural heritage is significant for study both as a novel path and method for the development of the transmission of intangible cultural heritage and as a new experience of changes in the village's residents and organisational structures.

My research indicates that paper-cutting has had a significant impact on the village space's expansion. As a result of the spatial change of the settlement of Xuelingwei village, the following three dimensions can be derived.

### **1. The emergence of new perceptual spaces: one of the roles of intangible cultural heritage**

The spatial practise component of Levi's spatial triadic dialectic consists of production and reproduction, in addition to the "specific collection of locations and spatial qualities of each social form." Spatial practise can be viewed as a form of perceptual space, a dimension that reminds us of the reality of space and the visible physical space that is the natural material basis for the existence of social space, assuring its continuity and a degree of cohesiveness(Lefebvre,1991). Physical space is referred to as perceptual space. The intervention of the paper-cutting intangible cultural heritage has modified and reconfigured the spatial practises in the village of Bootling Mei, creating a new space for villager activities.

A rural space's sense of place carries the collective memory of its inhabitants, is infused with public or private emotions, and is irreplaceable. Following the implementation of "non-heritage together with rural revitalization," Xuelingwei Village's distinctive public space has been altered. In addition to the places where villagers live and farm, a variety of public areas, including a paper-cutting museum, a paper-cutting exhibition hall, an oil painting gallery, a square, and a playground, have been built. This expands the sensory experience of the town's spatial environment and develops a new spatial representation of the hamlet.

This dimension refers to material indispensability and adaptability. For Xuelingwei, because of the paper-cutting culture, there is a significant transformation of the iconic public space in the village space. For instance, there is a paper-cutting museum displaying contemporary works by paper-cutting inheritors and artists, as well as an oil painting gallery where villagers and tourists can take art classes and workshops. Then there is the example of a visitor centre, which has a wealth of information about the village's past and present development, as well as numerous paper-cutting souvenirs.

In terms of media studies, Lefebvre's concept of perceptual space draws attention to the more material, sensory (sensual) dimension of the media; the media in the form of instruments and infrastructures that make up our everyday world.

These spaces contribute to the development of a "media space" for paper-cutting culture in the hamlet, shaping the cultural experience and cultural imagination of villagers and foreign tourists. Meanwhile, human mastery of the spatial world is simultaneously mediated by digital technology in the digital era. Under the technological trend of constructing a digital village in China, the village is a complex composite space that is both a media location and a combination of functions. In the village of Zhaolingwei, digital facilities, media activities, museums, and other elements are added to create a "media space" for paper-cutting culture, influencing the cultural experience and cultural imagination of villagers and foreign visitors, and contributing to changing the stereotypical image of the village's function, expanding the boundaries of rural public space, and removing "barriers" and "barriers" in rural society. Changing the preconceptions of village functions, widening the bounds of rural public space, and dismantling rural society's "barriers" and "silent" are significant constructive and creative functions. Villagers create public spaces for implicit cultural exchange by observing and intersecting in such composite settings.

## **2. The creation of a new conceptual space**

Conceptual space can be named representations of space as well, which in Levi's spatial triad refers to a condition in which space is intertwined with knowledge, symbols, codes, and relationships, and the second dimension he specifies is "conceptual space.(Lefebvre,1991)" According to Jasson, the concept of conceptual space is related to the circulation or mediation of multiple spatial representations, highlighting the importance of media in changing our understanding and expectations of the social reality(Jansson, 2013).

This bundle of space and sign is made possible by the increasingly fluid setting between symbolic and material space precisely because of media interventions; the technological convergence that allows for increasingly free sharing or flow between different content or platform spaces; and the interactivity of information that breaks down the boundaries between different content or platform spaces. The replicated space facilitates a more intimate physical engagement between consumers and media. All of these factors accentuate the medium's capacity to shape space. Media's repeated actions shape space and produce the worlds we inhabit. In order to revitalise development in Houguan, it is essential to transcend space in a simply geographical sense and build representations of cultural space with many meanings, such as social and historical, symbol-rich settings. This idea is associated with the circulation or mediation of multiple spatial representations, highlighting the importance of media in altering our understanding and expectations of the social world.

Pre-correction of experience. This idea refers to the second dimension referred to as "conceptual space," which is associated with knowledge, symbols, codes, and relationships.

Paper-cutting is an intangible cultural heritage strengthens villagers' information communication and identification, and contributes to the building of their cultural identity and beliefs.

For example, the intermingling of paper-cutting with the regional Ma Xianggu faith culture (another regional national non-heritage culture), prince ginseng culture and Gaoshan white

tea culture has produced a number of paper-cutting works with local characteristics, both consolidating the artistic attributes of paper-cutting and further influencing the villagers' construction of their identity with local culture and beliefs.

Jasson's argument is based on the relationship between mediatization and spatial transformation, as it is this binding of space and symbols that has led to an increasingly fluid setting between symbolic and material spaces as a result of the intervention of the media; the convergence of technologies that has led to an increasingly free sharing and flow between different content or platform spaces; and the interactivity of information that has broken down the bountiful boundaries between different content or platform spaces. The replicated space facilitates a more intimate physical engagement between consumers and media. All of these factors accentuate the medium's capacity to shape space. Media's repeated actions shape space and produce the worlds we inhabit. For Houguan, the symbolic notion of space full of symbols is related to the circulation or mediation of various manifestations of space, thereby highlighting the importance of media in shaping our understanding and expectations of the social world in order to transcend the purely geographical sense of space (Soja,1996).

### **3. Reclaiming living space**

This space is named representational spaces by Lefebvre. As a result of cultural and environmental changes, which ultimately affect on the lived experience level of the space, new social interactions are lived out through the interaction of users and the environment, experiencing their associated imagery and symbols, and new living spaces are generated. Creating new spaces necessitates changes in everyday behaviour, societal conventions, and practises. Socio-spatial existence is not merely a physical object or an empty field; rather, the existence of the field, the interaction between people and nature and people, constructed by the actions of people in their daily lives, is its essence; that is, the production of space refers to the production and reproduction of social relations, the life of people in space. Dismantling compartments to create connections between groups of people.

The norms of social practice. The paper-cutting heritage has become a significant factor in promoting interaction within the villagers, creating a linkage between people and enhancing "communicability."

The paper-cutting heritage has become a significant factor in promoting interaction among the villagers, creating a linkage between people and enhancing "communicability." In the new paper-cutting and oil painting museums, villagers learn to do paper-cutting, exchange paper-cutting, reorganize and get along with each other in a new form, promote interaction among villagers, bring people a renewed sense of spatial awareness, break the inherent way of life, expand the sensory experience, promote embodied interaction in public space, and contribute to the establishment of internal communicability in the village.

Due to the profound influence of paper-cutting culture, the village of Xuelingwei has also established a centre for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage skills and an industry-academia-research base for production, sales, processing, and training, and continues to host paper-cutting training courses, to curate exhibitions of paper-cutting artworks and other exhibitions and cultural tourism events.

In addition, the spatial evolution of intangible cultural heritage reveals a trend and turn toward mediatized mediation. Because from perception to conception and representation, this

context, human activity, and media attention all produce the interplay of three places, and this is mediatization.

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