

*Exploring Cross-Cultural Understanding Through Chinese Paper-Cutting:  
An Observational Study in Welsh Communities*

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**Abstract**

In the contemporary globalised world, cross-cultural communication has become a subject of widespread concern, with cross-cultural understanding being a key component. Traditional folk art and cultural heritage can be potent vehicles for promoting cross-cultural understanding. This research seeks to explore how the art of Chinese papercutting can be utilised as a medium for cross-cultural communication. As an educator and scholar of culture studies and communication, with prior experience in field research on Chinese paper-cutting in Zherong, Fujian province, the author aims to investigate this subject by delivering paper-cutting education and practice workshops in Swansea, Wales. Through a series of workshops, seminars, and exhibitions in local art galleries, including the learning of the history, storytelling techniques craft skills of Chinese paper-cutting, this research intends to explore the experiences and reactions of Welsh communities and individuals to this exotic art form. The research will employ a combination of observational research and narrative interviews with participants to collect data and analyse the impact of Chinese paper-cutting on participants' cross-cultural understanding. The findings of this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of traditional art in promoting cross-cultural communication and will provide insights into how cultural heritage can be utilised to enhance cross-cultural understanding, especially in the context of everyday life practices. This research aims to address the gaps in knowledge regarding the capacity of regional cultural heritage and traditional arts in enhancing cross-cultural communication and hopes to contribute to the academic discussions in the fields of art and humanity.

Keywords: Chinese Papercutting, Cultural Heritage, Cross-Cultural Communication

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## Introduction

Cross-cultural communication has become increasingly important in our globalised world (Lifintsev & Wellbrock, 2019) for globalisation has created a need for individuals from various cultures and countries to engage and collaborate. Successful intercultural communication aims to modify the way messages are crafted and conveyed to individuals with varying cultural origins (Aririguzoh, 2022), of which art is a very important approach to enhance cross-cultural communication (Letts, 2015).

In the context of cross-cultural communication, understanding entails the capacity to discern and appreciate the distinctions and resemblances existing among diverse cultures. The academic spheres of cross-cultural studies encompass research frameworks that juxtapose human conduct across two or more cultures<sup>1</sup>. This methodological approach predominantly centers on scrutinizing the extent to which our understanding of individuals and their actions within one cultural context may be transferable or distinct when applied to individuals from other cultures, which is a key issue of many cross-cultural communication, as well as for Chinese papercutting (Yang, 2012).

By exploring how papercutting could possibly enhance cross-cultural communication between Welsh and Chinese adults, this research could potentially contribute to better understanding and positive relationships between these two cultures (Yang, 2012) (Wales Art International, 2019), Chinese Papercutting is a traditional art form with a long history in Chinese culture (Chen, 2007). It dates to the second century AD and has evolved over time to become an important cultural practice.

Chinese folk papercutting has a rich historical and cultural significance, originating from the creative endeavours of generations of Chinese laborers (Huang, 2014). As a more cultural-oriented interpretation with folk culture paradigm, Chinese papercutting has the function of 'Making Civilisation and Recording History' (Wu, 2015).

Today, this art form not only serves as a means of creative expression, but also offers practical benefits in promoting cognitive and communication skills, as well as fostering social connections (Jia, 2022). Paper craft is perceived as a means of honouring the past and maintaining tradition, as well as promoting innovation, shaping cultural identity, and fostering sustainability (Kornienko & Brovko, 2020).

As an esteemed academician and cultural studies specialist, having garnered extensive expertise in the realm of communication and culture, the author brings forth a rich background rooted in field research conducted in Zherong, Fujian province (Jia, 2022), focusing on the intricate art of Chinese papercutting. With a pedagogical inclination, the author endeavours to embark on a comprehensive inquiry into this subject through the facilitation of paper-cutting educational modules and practical workshops within Swansea, Wales. This undertaking is poised to unfold through a meticulously structured series of workshops, seminars, and curated exhibitions hosted within local art galleries. The research initiative encompasses a multifaceted exploration, encompassing an in-depth study of the historical underpinnings, narrative techniques, and craft intricacies intrinsic to Chinese paper cutting. Rooted in the principles of scholarly inquiry, this research endeavours to untangle the intricate facets that define the viewpoints and reactions of Welsh communities and individuals in relation to this culturally distinctive artistic expression.

## **I Research Questions**

- How does Chinese papercutting as an artistic practice contribute to cross-cultural communication and understanding between Wales and China?
- How do Welsh locals perceive, comprehend, and appreciate Chinese paper-cutting?
- How do Chinese diasporas in Wales engage with Chinese papercutting to connect with their memories and establish cultural identity?
- How do the understanding, cognition, practices, and experiences of all participants in Wales interact with and influence Chinese paper-cutting?
- How can innovative communication strategies be developed and implemented to effectively promote the external dissemination and integration of Chinese papercutting as an art form?

## **II Significance of this Research**

This research holds multifaceted significance in both the realm of cross-cultural communication and the exploration of artistic interventions, supported by a unique amalgamation of observational research and participatory workshops.

**Advancing Knowledge:** At its core, this study delves into the distinctive and hitherto underexplored role of Chinese paper cutting as a medium of cross-cultural communication. Through this investigation, it contributes to an enhanced comprehension of the dynamics that underpin artistic expressions as conduits for intercultural dialogue and cultural engagement.

**Cultural Appreciation:** Notably, this research stands as a catalyst for fostering cultural appreciation within the Welsh community. By probing their interaction with Chinese paper cutting, it illuminates the way artistic practices can serve as conduits for the mutual exchange of cultural values and traditions.

**Cognitive Health Promotion:** An integral facet of this research involves addressing an existing research lacuna by delving into the potential therapeutic attributes of artistic engagement, particularly in the context of Chinese papercutting, to promote cognitive well-being. This inquiry acknowledges the burgeoning significance of artistic endeavours in augmenting cognitive health and positions Chinese paper cutting as a culturally infused vehicle for cognitive enrichment.

**Methodological Innovation:** A distinctive and pioneering facet of this study is the incorporation of arts workshops as a methodological tool. By blending observational research with participatory arts engagement, this research underscores the efficacy of workshops as an innovative means of examining cross-cultural communication and artistic interventions. This methodological synergy not only contributes to the scholarly discourse but also presents a novel approach for probing the intricate nuances of cultural interaction and creative expressions.

In sum, the conjunction of observational research and participatory workshops is poised to enrich the scholarly landscape by unravelling the manifold dimensions of cross-cultural communication, artistic interventions, and the potential cognitive implications inherent in the practice of Chinese papercutting.

### **III A Comprehensive Literature Review**

The ensuing literature review is intricately structured to illuminate the multifaceted facets underpinning cross-cultural communication within the purview of Chinese papercutting. This choice stems from an astute recognition of the pivotal role cross-cultural communication occupies in our contemporary globalised milieu (Lifintsev & Wellbrock, 2019). Embracing the convergence of artistic expression and cultural interchange, this review is poised to meticulously excavate the historical underpinnings and contemporary relevance of Chinese papercutting as an intermediary in cross-cultural communication endeavours (Chen, 2007). An equally pivotal dimension of this inquiry is the unveiling of the therapeutic potential harbored by Chinese papercutting, aligning harmoniously with the burgeoning recognition of the manifold contributions art offers to cognitive well-being (Chen, 2019; TO et al., 2021). Furthermore, a distinctive facet of this study is its exploration of indigenous Welsh craft traditions, their symbiotic liaison with Chinese papercutting, and the ensuing cross-cultural dialogue engendered by this fusion (Jones, C. 2003; Gildersleeve, 2014). Through the amalgamation of these four distinct themes, this literature review aspires to present a holistic and nuanced comprehension of the intricate tapestry that binds Chinese papercutting, cross-cultural communication dynamics, cognitive health, and indigenous craftsmanship, thus ushering in a heightened understanding of the intricate interplay between art, culture, and holistic well-being.

#### **1. Significance of Global Cross-Cultural Communication**

In the context of an increasingly globalised world, the significance of cross-cultural communication has attained paramount importance (Lifintsev & Wellbrock, 2019). A discerning exploration into the potential enhancement of cross-cultural communication between Welsh and Chinese adults through the medium of paper cutting holds the promise of engendering a more profound comprehension and fostering positive intercultural relationships (Yang, 2012) (Wales Art International, 2019).

#### **2. Chinese Papercutting: Historical Foundations and Cross-Cultural Role**

Papercutting, deeply ingrained in Chinese cultural heritage, stands as a venerable artistic tradition with origins dating back to the second century AD (Chen, 2007). Evolving through the ages, this art form has manifested into a significant cultural practice, enmeshed with historical and cultural connotations, tracing its roots to the innovative endeavors of successive generations of Chinese artisans (Huang, 2014). Today, while continuing to serve as a vehicle for artistic expression, Chinese papercutting extends its influence to the realm of cognitive enhancement, communication skills, and societal connections (Jia, 2022). Scholarly discourse highlights its capacity to ameliorate cognitive function (TO et al. 2021), amplify cross-cultural communication (Qiao & Pei, 2021), and its therapeutic utility in fostering mindfulness, creativity, and communal cohesion (Chen, 2019) (Mai et al., 2008).

Chinese Papercutting also has its Therapeutic Significance. Chinese papercutting, characterised by its evocative imagery, symbolism, and mental representation (Guo, 2005), transcends its artistic essence. The potential of Chinese papercutting in enriching cognitive function, instilling mindfulness, nurturing creativity, and fostering social cohesion is substantiated through academic inquiry (Chen, 2019; Mai et al., 2008). Beyond artistic expression, its applicability as an intervention in contexts such as ameliorating negative symptoms in chronic schizophrenia (Duan, D., et al. 2016), enhancing mental well-being in

deaf children (Chen & Zhu, 2013), and promoting psychological health among university students in Hong Kong (To & Chan, 2021) underscores its therapeutic dimensions. Furthermore, the intersection of Chinese papercutting with cross-cultural communication has been duly acknowledged (Qiao & Pei, 2021), wherein its historical and thematic motifs embrace cross-cultural expressions (Yan et al., 2021), embodying introspection within the tapestry of societal realities.

### **3. Welsh Craft Tradition: Fusion With Chinese Papercutting**

Wales boasts a rich heritage of indigenous craftsmanship spanning diverse mediums, including wood, textiles, and metal (Jones, C. 2003). Rooted in tradition, craft arts wield positive implications for mental well-being, engendering concentration, and relaxation. The integration of paper-cutting within this artistic panorama emerges as a novel yet resonant entrant (Munro & Liz, 2022). Within the UK, paper-cutting artists pioneering unique styles and techniques substantiate their contribution to the broader sphere of paper craft (Gildersleeve, 2014). Evidenced as a conduit for upholding tradition while kindling innovation, shaping cultural identity, and fostering sustainability (A.B. Корнієнко & І.Д. Бровко, 2020), paper craft occupies a nuanced niche honoring the past and encapsulating cultural identities.

### **4. Chinese Papercutting: Cross-Cultural Cognitive Impact**

This study assumes an exploratory stance in unravelling the potential of Chinese papercutting as a cross-cultural conduit (Yang, 2012) toward enhancing cognitive well-being. Through a nuanced examination of how Chinese papercutting could be harnessed to amplify cross-cultural communication among Welsh and Chinese adults, the research anticipates facilitating a heightened understanding and fostering favourable intercultural relations (Yang, 2012) (Wales Art International, 2019). Moreover, delving into the utilization of art as a vehicle for the preservation and propagation of cultural heritage within Welsh and Chinese communities presents itself as an agent for the formulation of efficacious strategies aimed at nurturing cultural diversity and revitalization (Chen, 2022).

## **IV Research Gap**

There exists a noticeable research gap regarding the exploration of how Chinese papercutting workshops can yield comprehensive benefits in fostering cross-cultural communication. This study aims to scrutinise the intricate interplay between papercutting and cross-cultural communication, thereby offering novel avenues for intercultural exchange. Employing a workshop-based methodology supported by systematic observations, interviews, and surveys, the research focuses on formulating strategic frameworks to enhance optimal cross-cultural communication and facilitate positive interactions between diverse cultures.

The impetus behind this inquiry arises from the imperative to address the scholarly dearth pertaining to the role of papercutting workshops in promoting cross-cultural communication. By adopting a lens centred on Chinese papercutting, this study advances the discourse surrounding the potential communicative advantages stemming from artistic interventions. To realise this goal, participatory observation methodology is employed, entailing meticulous observation of Welsh communities engaging in Chinese papercutting activities. Through astute observation, detailed documentation of participant interactions, behaviours, and reactions during the creative process is undertaken. The amalgamation of these

methodological approaches, infused with rigor and scholarly precision, aims to provide an empirically grounded understanding of the interplay among papercutting, cross-cultural communication, and positive intercultural interactions.

## **V Methodology**

Observational studies serve as a methodological approach to address research inquiries through unadulterated researcher observation, devoid of manipulation or intervention in subjects' contexts. Notably, they lack control and treatment groups, rendering them conducive primarily to qualitative exploration and explanatory research endeavours, albeit their limited prevalence within quantitative contexts. These studies find utility across an array of disciplines encompassing the natural sciences, medicine, and social sciences, especially when ethical or practical considerations constrain traditional experimental methods. (*What Is an Observational Study? | Guide & Examples*, n.d.).

However, the absence of control groups introduces challenges in forming robust inferences, thereby necessitating vigilance against confounding variables and observer bias. Leveraging this methodology to scrutinise the cross-cultural implications of paper-cutting art is warranted due to the intricate interplay between cultural contexts, albeit judicious caution is warranted due to inherent methodological limitations.

To implement observational studies in this research, a workshop-based approach will be adopted for data collection. The papercutting workshop offers a distinctive opportunity to:

- Delve into the historical underpinnings and narratives enshrouding this ancient Chinese artistic tradition.
- Uncover the symbolic significance embedded within Chinese papercutting, thereby gaining insights into the Oriental worldview.
- Illuminate the potential for cognitive health enhancement within a cross-cultural framework.
- Interrogate the influence of Chinese paper-cutting on fostering cross-cultural comprehension within Welsh communities.
- Probe into the cognitive benefits and underlying mechanisms underscoring the therapeutic potential inherent in Chinese papercutting art.
- Innovate strategies that foster cultural diversity revitalization within Welsh and Chinese communities, thereby identifying optimal approaches for cultural heritage preservation and transmission.

The research methodology encompasses multiple facets, commencing with interviews. Following data collection, rigorous analysis ensues, discerning patterns, themes, and insights pertaining to cross-cultural understanding and cultural exchange. Qualitative analysis methodologies, such as thematic or content analysis, will be employed to interpret the wealth of observational data amassed. Subsequently, surveys featuring various components will be deployed, encompassing demographic information, artistic backgrounds, cultural exposure, perceptions and attitudes toward cross-cultural experiences, and the impact thereof on well-being. Additionally, the workshop experience will be probed through inquiries elucidating participant engagement levels, enjoyment, perceived benefits, and reflections on potential well-being alterations resulting from their engagement. The cumulative approach extends to the exploration of cross-cultural influence and cultural identity.

In essence, the chosen methodology, characterised by its observational essence and workshop-driven data collection, seeks to holistically unravel the multifaceted facets that bridge Chinese papercutting, cross-cultural understanding, cognitive well-being, and cultural preservation.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, this study embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the intricate interplay among Chinese papercutting, cross-cultural understanding, and cognitive health within a globalized context. The paramount significance of cross-cultural communication in our interconnected world has spurred an investigation into the potential of Chinese papercutting workshops as a conduit for fostering intercultural exchange. Rooted in the recognition of a research void encompassing the integration of artistic interventions for cross-cultural communication and cognitive well-being, this research adopts a nuanced approach poised to enrich the comprehension of cultural interactions and cognitive enhancement.

The methodology employed embraces observational studies, firmly grounded in a workshop-based data collection framework, offering a robust platform to elucidate the multifaceted dynamics at play. Through meticulous observation and documentation of participant interactions, behaviours, and reactions during Chinese papercutting engagements, this study seeks to unveil the latent cross-cultural implications inherent in this artistic tradition. Beyond mere observation, the methodology delves into participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences through interviews and surveys. These diverse methodologies converge to encapsulate the essence of cross-cultural communication and its potential cognitive ramifications, contributing to a holistic understanding of the intricate interplay between art, culture, and well-being.

The envisioned outcomes of this research hold promise in deepening our comprehension of traditional art's role in promoting cross-cultural communication. Insights into leveraging cultural heritage for enhancing cross-cultural understanding, particularly within the realms of everyday practices, are anticipated. By addressing gaps in knowledge concerning regional cultural heritage and traditional arts' potential in augmenting cross-cultural communication, this research aims to enrich academic discussions within the domains of art and humanity.

It is important to acknowledge that this research is currently in its nascent stage of data collection, with the full spectrum of findings yet to be realized. Nonetheless, the meticulously outlined methodology underscores the scholarly rigor and precision that underpin this investigation. As this study unfolds, it is anticipated that the outcomes will offer valuable insights into the potential cross-cultural communication benefits of Chinese papercutting workshops and may unveil novel dimensions related to cognitive well-being. Through this ongoing inquiry, a deeper comprehension of the intricate interrelationships between cultural exchanges, artistic interventions, and cognitive health is expected to emerge, ultimately enriching the broader discourse on the intersections between culture, art, and holistic well-being.

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