

***The Mediatization of Folk Art:
-A Narrative Study of Paper-Cutting in Fujian, China***

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Abstract

Paper-cutting in China is considered a culturally-based interpretation. With a paradigm of folk culture built within it, paper-cutting creates civilization and documents history. "Mediatization" refers to a process of media and social change, and research on it focuses on the role that various media rings play in the process of social and cultural development. Developments in media technology have influenced the content, form, and method of operation of folk art, as well as widened the scope of creative companies that employ such practices. These changes may be observed in the substance of paper-cutting: the original folklore, historical stories, proverbs, and political propaganda have been replaced by feminism, new age political slogans, popular culture, and postmodern cultural content in paper-cutting stories. In the meantime, there are new trends among paper-cutting practitioners and organizations, all of which are worthy of investigation. These changes in content are not unintentional, but rather indirect results of mediatization. My research focuses on demonstrating how this influence happens and identifying its underlying mechanisms using a story research approach. I collect information about paper cutting in Zherong county, Fujian province, China, where paper cutting has been designated a "Chinese national Intangible Cultural Heritage" due to its significant impact on the region. Interview records will be used to collect narrative data from inheritors, connected villagers, and governors. With the help of this narrative inquiry and the theoretical framework of media studies and mediatization, we can understand the mechanism of narrative change in a folk art such as paper-cutting under the influence of mediatization, and a better understanding of the relationship between media, art, culture and society will be gained by examining this angle.

Keywords: Mediatization, Narrative Inquiry, Paper-Cutting

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Introduction

Folk art is a very significant and important resource in any culture, embodying the behaviour of people at the grassroots level and serving as a vital link between individuals and society. With the advent of the digital age, technological advancements and alterations have created a new environment for the evolution of folk art and posed new obstacles. As a result of this setting, the substance and formal presentation of folk art, as well as its practitioners and the way society is organized, have evolved significantly.

As a kind of folk art, paper-cutting has its research value. Paper-cutting is “A more cultural-oriented interpretation, and is folk culture paradigm which makes civilization and records history”(Wu,2015).

Paper-cutting which is cut and engraved on a flat surface, has a certain ancestry with the craftsmanship of stone, pottery, and even bone and jade and openwork gold from early history. So the beginnings may be traced back to Neolithic craft creation(Bo min, 2006). Chinese paper-cutting is a long-established folk art form and was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009. The inspiration for taking paper-cutting as a subject came from my past working experience of ‘rural revitalization’ practice, and from the field study in a village, where is also a workstation of the university I worked for. In the Xuelingwei village, paper-cutting plays an important role in economy and cultural industries, which sparked my curiosity: what further possibilities folk art could create in the society and cultural development.

Specific media and communication techniques can have a micro to macro impact on societal organization(Jansson,2015). The purpose of this thesis is to examine the development of folk art in China, taking paper-cutting in Fujian province,China as a case, to discover a longer-term process of social and cultural mechanisms and patterns of interaction brought to paper-cutting by the growing influence of media and technology. This study uses narrative research as the main method and perspective to discover the interaction of this medium with folk art.

The study of paper-cutting as a folk art form explores the institutional and mediated paths of its development and change through the institutional paths of change in the media, as well as in the social and cultural spheres (Stig Hjarvard, 2013), identifies the emergence of new forms of media and their impact on the techniques and carriers of paper-cutting; (changes in the social and cultural spheres are also increasingly taking the form of media), looks at changes in the media and social. The study takes a macro view of the impact of technology on cultural and social change, using the theoretical framework of "mediatization" as an entry point for non-heritage folk art, and taking paper-cutting in Fujian as a case study.

On the one hand, the reproduction of paper-cutting culture in the media is investigated, which is the mediating process. On the other hand, it is possible to discover how new cultural and social frameworks have been shaped by such changes and have shaped all aspects of how people interact with each other in their daily lives.

To reveal this, it is needed to understand exactly how the art of paper-cutting has changed over the years in terms of content, form, creators, practitioners and social function under the influence of media technology, and what trends and possibilities there are for the future. My research uses the narrative research method to give a glimpse into the life story of the

paper-cutting inheritors and the changing narrative of the content of the paper-cuttings.

Applying narrative theory to the Research

Because narrative research 'promises new fields of inquiry, creative solutions to persistent problems, a way to establish links with other disciplines such as cultural and literary studies, enhanced opportunities for applying research to policy and practise, and a new perspective on the politics of social research, this paper is an integral part of the aforementioned research(Andrews et al, 2013) .

Narrative research believes that stories will offer you with concrete illustrations of the points we are making. A story is first and foremost a series of signals, which may include text, vocal or other sounds, or visual, performed, built, or produced aspects that similarly transmit meaning(Squire, 2014).

In addition to universal meanings, narratives must also have specific connotations. Due to this specificity, a narrative is not a theory; it is more limited and dependent on certain situations. And because narratives construct human meanings (rather than the meanings of the physical and natural world, as in scientific equations, models, and theories), there will be social and historical constraints on when and when they can be comprehended(Squire, 2012).

Chinese paper-cutting is a popular folk activity in which individuals cut designs on paper with scissors or carving knives to decorate their homes or to supplement other folk activities. Both Zhangpu and Zherong paper-cutting in Fujian province, China, have distinctive regional characteristics and contain rich historical and cultural information, which are outstanding cases of Chinese paper-cutting art.

Paper-cutting has research value in the history of folk culture, and can also play a role in the cultivation of national aesthetic style. Research on paper cutting has covered many fields. My research try to find something new, first of all ,I approach it from the perspective of "mediatization", Secondly, try to use some new methodologies, and create more narrative contexts to discover more functions of paper-cutting. Also, as the digital era is coming , the changing technological environment provides new issues for the study of traditional craft and culture.

These lived and shared tales, as well as the conversation about the stories, are one of the ways we fill our world with meaning and appreciate one another's help in constructing lives and communities.

Narrative Inquiry of Paper-cutting inheritors

My interview subject is Zheng Pingfang, a notable inheritor of Zherong papercutting. Her autobiography is an essential work for analysing the mediated influence of paper-cutting art. As one of the present inheritors of paper-cutting, a national heritage project of Zhe Rong, Zheng Pingfang has her own unique behaviour in developing and conveying the content of the art of paper-cutting due to her unique creative philosophy, personality, and status as a people's teacher. In December 2021, I met with Zheng Pingfang at her school for an interview. The following components of her narrative can also be viewed in terms of mediated thought.

I. Expertise in the paper-cutting education and communication professions

Jia: "How did you become interested in the art and history of paper-cutting?"

Zheng: "My ancestry stems from my grandmother, who married into the Hongkeng (a village in Zherong) family after getting married."

I was raised by my grandmother, and I was nourished by the exquisite embroidered shoes she crafted. Later, when I was 16 years old, I enrolled in a teacher training programme for art. In 2001, when Zherong County Culture Hall sponsored a paper-cutting workshop, I was introduced to paper-cutting as a representative of the art teachers at Zherong No. 3 Secondary School, and it was at that time that I studied with Ms Yuan Xiuying. Students were permitted to cut it once, then innovate and distribute it."

From the learning of skills to her current identification as a legacy holder, Zheng Pingfang's experience of practise is a process of mediatization, by which is understood direct mediatization: the transformation of an unmediated action into a mediated one. That is, activities that involve some form of mediated interaction, such as paper-cutting: what was once a folk leisure, a craft, is becoming an art and culture that can be taught to more people; for instance, chess becomes a game. Another example is the transformation of a bank's face-to-face service into an online banking service.

II. Unique concepts and results in paper-cutting creation

Jia: "How do you organize the themes for your paper-cutting creations?"

Zheng: "As you can see, most of my work is inspired by the originality of traditional tales. Comparable to "The Goddess of Liberty", "The Twelve Hairpins of the Golden Palace," and "The Legend of the Horse Fairy". These works have garnered me numerous honors. In 2012, I also received the Master of Arts and Crafts from Fujian Province".

Zheng Pingfang's creative thought derives mostly from the representation of local culture through paper-cutting, which is a medium-based reproduction of cultural content. Some of the aforementioned subjects are cultural emblems in Chinese culture. In addition, 'Ma Xian' is one of the local goddess of Zhe Rong County and Ningde City. The works of Zheng Pingfang have become a vehicle for the propagation of traditional culture.



(Figure 1: Zheng Pingfang's works of Guanyin and Ma Xian)

III. Transmission and distribution as a notion

Jia: "As a paper-cutting inheritor, do you have any novel ideas and pain points about non-genetic inheritance?"

Zheng: "Recently, I've pondered how to approach heritage by examining works, formulating theories, and turning them into craft. Also speaking with Yuan Xiuying frequently".

Starting in kindergarten, Zherong County's schools have implemented a method for teaching systematic paper-cutting skills. My occupation and self-positioning is that of a teacher, thus I pass on my teaching technique, so disseminating skills and discovering paper-cutting abilities. One of my pupils invented three-dimensional paper cutting while working with a dozen disadvantaged adults."

Zheng Pingfang connects education and history. Lin da, one of her students, developed a paper-cutting in three dimensions. Younger paper-cutting learners are better than older inheritors at documenting and disseminating the creative process using current Chinese self-media, such as Tiktok and the WeChat video platform, and have more innovative ideas for making radical alterations to the paper-cutting art form.



(Figure 2: Content from Lin Da's WeChat video platform)

Narrative features of papercutting works

I. Stories as accounts of temporally ordered events

Take Fujian papercutting as an example; many of the works depict the inhabitants' daily lives. Similar to the 'Pig's foot flower,' blossom patterns on a pig's foot represent goodness. Meanwhile, in the local community, pig's feet are a prized gift, especially for the revered village elders. Therefore, "pig's foot flower" has become a representative item of Zhangpu's paper-cutting legacy and is extensively circulated in the region.



(Figure 3: Pig's foot flower by Lin Tao)



(Figure 4: The shrimp and crabs)



(Figure 5: Go fishing at sea)

The shrimp and crabs depicted in Figure 4 and the fishing scenes depicted in figure 5 are representative of Zhangpu, Fujian's coastal culture. Along the coast of Zhangpu, farmers rely mostly on the sea and fishing for a living; this way of life is documented artistically and serves as the inspiration for paper-cutting artists.

II. Developing or expressing personal identity

Papercutting was once referred to as "feminist art" due to the fact that the vast majority of paper-cutting artists in Fujian are women. On the one hand, these works depicted many hardworking and courageous women who fit the standards of contemporary ideals, like in figure 6. On the other hand, the women who practised paper-cutting discovered greater employment opportunities and a sense of self-identity through this specialty and art. In figure 7 is Zheng Pingfang who is now a famous middle school teacher and an important inheritors of paper-cutting in Zherong.



(Figure 6: A working woman)



(Figure 7: Zheng Pingfang and her student Lin da)

III. Making sense of mental states or emotions

The expression of the emotion of 'the unity of heaven and man' and the display of the faithful picture of regional characteristics, as well as the aesthetic sentiment of ethnic characteristics in the folk art of paper-cutting, all contribute to the art of paper-cutting serving as a spiritual expression of consciousness.



(Figure 8:Picking Prince's Ginseng)

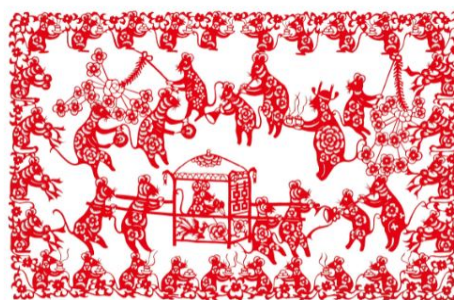


(Figure 9:Carry water and sheep)

"Picking Prince's Ginseng" by Kong Chunxia depicts the working lives of women in Zherong county. In Lin Tao's works, such as "Carry water and sheep" (figure 9), go fishing, and other labour scenes, she depicts people working in harmony with nature, evoking powerful emotions.

IV. Telling about the past

A significant portion of the paper-cutting process involves the retelling of myths and legends from Chinese history, language, and culture. In classical Chinese legendary culture, for instance, various folk artists have depicted the story of "the mouse getting married," and on the basis of this fable narrative, local characteristics have been added, such as the image of the mouse in the marriage and the characterisation with some intention of local wedding customs in Fujian.



(Figure 10: Different paper-cutting creative versions of mouse getting married)

In addition, the folk paper cuttings of Fujian are also used to illustrate images from classic Chinese works such as Journey to the West (Figure11)and Water Margin(Figure 12), which illustrating the paper-cuttings also contain representations of local history by one of Zherong's paper-cutting inheritors Wang Miaomei.



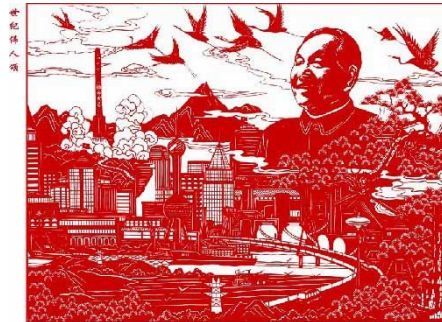
(Figure11:Journey to the West)



(Figure 12:Water Margin)

V. Having particular social effects

Paper-cutting can also have a variety of societal implications; for instance, it can be used as a tool for political propaganda(Figure 13) ,by expressing political phrases and slogans, such as the Chinese Dream(Figure 14), which can serve as an effective supplement to mainstream media communication. In addition, the art of paper-cutting is becoming a communication medium through education.



(Figure 13:Paper-cutting as paper-cutting as political propaganda)



(Figure 14: Paper-cutting as political phrases and slogans)

Conclusions

This study concludes that paper-cutting art as a text has a rich narrative function, and that narrative can be applied to more scenes as media technology develops, and that the content is more expressive, influenced by current mainstream thought and popular culture

I. Individual stories is a great perspective to show mediatization

We must acknowledge the potency and significance of regressive and discriminatory narratives, as well as the necessity of advancing narrative research's engagement with

progressive social change. Personal narratives and the language of social transformation are all components of narrative study. Both narratives and social development are crucial research perspectives for comprehending social development (Squire,2020).

As a narrative inquirer, Clandinin(2013) argues for the necessity of attending to the context in which the narrative is embedded, stating,"the focus of narrative inquiry is not only the valorization of the individual's experience, but also an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which the individual's experiences were, and continue to be, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (Clandinin,2013). Paper-cutting is a context of narrative: we can see the nature of the telling of the story or r who the story is directed at, or using visual analysis of images or interpreting images alongside words; other options for analysis include focuses on values, plot, significance, character mapping, and time(Daiute,2014).

II. Mediatization of traditional art: The Mediatization Law in the Narrative Transformation of Papercutting

Mediatization is the behaviour of media types in particular social contexts. In contrast, mediatization refers to a longer-term process of transforming social and cultural mechanisms and interaction patterns due to the growing influence of the media. How will diverse forms of media and communication affect the structure of society? "Mediatization" refers to a process of media and social change, and study on mediatization focuses on the role that various media rings play in the process of social and cultural development.

On the impact of digital media on the contemporary spatio-temporal organisation of life and the dynamics of people, much attention has been focused (Couldry,2010).Thus, mediatization is a concept that enables us to consider media-enhanced social transformations in a complex manner; not as the result of technological innovation or media "agency" (Stig Hjarvard, 2008), but as a "metaprocess" (Krotz, 2007) involving diverse combinations of morally and ideologically inflected and historically embedded microprocesses at the level of social life. In contrast to mediation, which refers to the transmission, dissemination, or circulation of something (often information) between sources, mediatization refers to the pervasive social prevalence of specific media dependence regimes.(Schulz, 2004) (Jansson,2015).

Mediatization describes the specific behaviour of media types in particular social contexts. Mediatization, by contrast, refers to a longer-term process of changing social and cultural mechanisms and patterns of interaction brought about by growing media influence.

The art of paper-cutting itself is a process of direct mediatization: from a living, artistic ritual activity, it becomes a form with a mediating role. The activity of paper-cutting now has an interactive role with the medium(Stig Hjarvard, 2013).The art of paper-cutting is also undergoing a process of indirect mediatization. Indirect mediatization means that a particular activity, in terms of its formal content organization or context, is increasingly influenced by media symbols or mechanisms(Stig Hjarvard, 2013).

Education, media technology, social trends, regional culture and folk beliefs are all involved in the mediatization of paper-cutting art in different ways, influencing the content and form of its presentation.

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