

# Study on Paper-cut of Ku Shulan and Matisse

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**Abstract**—Both Ku Shulan's and Matisse's paper-cut are famous in the world. That has epoch-making significance, which can be called the bright pearl of the world paper-cut. There are some differences in the visual form and color concept, because of the difference of the original ideas between the East and the West, Ku Shulan's paper-cut is like a chorus full of rhythm, while Matisse's paper-cut is like a solo with distinct melody. With the exchange and development of Eastern and Western cultures, their artistic styles are gradually intermingled with each other.

**Keywords**—*paper-cut; Ku Shulan; Matisse; artistic style*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Paper-cut is filled with strong regional and decorative characteristics as a form of expression of folk art. There are different forms of expression Paper-cut in East and West presents, because of different geographical environment and national customs. Henry Matisse was born in the town of Le Catu in northern France. He began to learn painting at the age of 21 and received professional education. He is the founder of the Western Beast style School, known for his bold use of color. Paper-cut works are mainly made in his later years. Ku Shulan is an ordinary farm woman in Xunyi County, Shanxi Province. She dropped out of school at the age of 15 and did not receive professional art education. Her paper-cutting skills are mainly learned from the folk heritage. She pioneered color collage paper-cut. Art has no boundaries, they are in different regions, and paper-cut works have landmark symbolic significance, in the whole process of paper-cut far-reaching impact. There are essential differences and internal unity between Ku Shulan's and Matisse's paper-cut.

## II. FORM AND DECORATION-FORM FITS IN CONTENT

Paper-cut, is embodied in the organic unity of the content and form of art works, which means the integration of national psychology, folk consciousness, national spirit and national art forms, as a traditional intangible cultural heritage. Ku Shulan's and Matisse's paper-cut has great difference, from the formal point of view, the decoration of the main image. Ku Shulan's paper-cut shows the poetic charm while Matisse's shows the determination of reality, the differences of their respective levels of concern in the performance content.

### A. Straight and Vertical Contours

Ku Shulan's paper-cut and Matisse's paper-cut have opposition and unity in visual communication. Ku Shulan's paper-cut appeals to people's vision, leaving the impression of implicit, rich, and more emotional expression. The pursuit of emotional natural beauty, not accustomed to the geometric form of pure reason, is actually the pursuit of harmony between man and nature, showing human nature, without violating the premise of rationality, paying more attention to emotional expression and catharsis. Matisse's works have bright colors, bright patterns and relaxed postures, giving people a direct, simple and rational intuitive feeling. Many of his paper-cut contours are composed of free curves, but most of them have the tendency of geometric curves. Matisse's paper-cut is mostly in the form of horizontal lines. From the aesthetic symbolic point of view, the vertical line is rational, but the horizontal line is full of emotion. Matisse's paper-cut is mostly in the form of horizontal lines. The large area of green grass in *Dance* is represented by a horizontal line, while the four erratic horizontal lines in *Lagoon* that show the beauty full of original modern decorative.

### B. Complexity and Conciseness of Subject Graphics

Ku Shulan's and Matisse's works are also complicated and concise in form. Ku Shulan's paper-cut works pursue the perfect combination of principal graphics and decorative patterns. Paper with different colors is cut into principal patterns and decorative patterns. Paper-cut also carries her pursuit and yearning for a better life. Ku Shulan's paper-cut layers are like notes in music. If each note is separated from the group, it will not only appear dull, but also deficiency existence of life.

Enlightened by Eastern painting and calligraphy, Matisse, a Beast Painter, has a very concise paper-cut model, striving to exaggerate and purify, and is full of decoration. Matisse's gouache paper-cut *Icarus* combines painting with music. It is one of the 20 illustrations collected in *Jazz*. It is bold and game-like. It combines ancient myths with modern forms and emphasizes the sense of form drifting. The abstract form of planarization and the large area of pure color have been applied to a large and elegant level. Structural disorders and changes have a sense of overall beauty, which coincides with the theory of structuralism. It breaks the barrier of interpreting abstract works with "form fits content".

Art is precious in conciseness. Art theorists have always praised "one should be as ten" and preached "cherish ink as

gold". However, in many praises and teachings, there has never been a lack of famous works such as *Shang-he Tu of Qingming Dynasty* and *the Last Judgment*, which have large scenes, many characters and complex plots as examples. Art is complex from content to form, and the complexity or simplicity required by different works cannot be uniform. The same work may contain complexity and simplicity, while the same kind of work is relatively simple. Ku Shulan's paper-cut works of "complexity" and Matisse's works of "simplicity", both seemingly contradictory, but actually unified, are using paper-cut artistic language to interpret the essence of art and life.

### III. COLOR AND IDEA: PERSPECTIVE OF ORIGIN THOUGHT

There exist similarities and differences between Ku Shulan's and Matisse's paper-cut art. They are determined by different countries of their lives and different religious beliefs. One of the main functions of art is to show the inherent qualities of things. Tigers and eagles should show their ferocity; sheep should show their obedience; lotus should show their noble and unsullied from ooze; bamboo should show its temperament... The humanistic implication and historical story behind paper-cut embodies the feelings of the East and the colors of the West.

#### A. Life Experience Is Filled in Paper-cut

In the environment of Chinese traditional Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, Ku Shulan was influenced by Buddhism and Confucian culture since her childhood, but what she showed was not the illusory world in religion, but based on the world and faced reality. The artist's energy of expressing the world is always limited. The part that an individual can exert is mainly reflected in the echo of character's shape, posture, emotion and composition. Ku Shulan, with her unique artistic talent, extracted and condensed her bitter life experiences, cut them into pieces, and told the world a vivid story. The female image in Ku Shulan's paper-cut is not only a kind of reproductive worship, but also a prayer for good fortune. Ku Shulan's paper-cut method - layer pasting method, it still need to learn today.

#### B. Common Characteristics of Color Application

Ku Shulan's and Matisse's paper-cut color are bold, strong contrast, in the use of color are like to use large areas of contrast distinct pure color system. It fully illustrates the two artists' realistic artistic ideas and their super control over color. Taoism put forward the idea of "stand alone with spiritual exchange between heaven and earth" (the world). It advocates that nature cannot be changed even though it is subjected to heaven and earth. Enlightening the world should be pure and unrestrained, indulgent to protect naivety and barbarism. The spiritual realm of Taoism's natural inaction requires that color should come very naturally. Lao Tzu once refers the man keeps infantile "ignorance" and points out that it is difficult for a child to be naive if his temperament is in a submissive state. It reflects the understanding of the essence of art from the perspective of Oriental aesthetics.

### C. Natural Childlike Expression

Modern western scholars also put forward a similar conclusion, Schiller in the "Aesthetic Education Bamboo Slips" mentioned that "even the greatest genius in the field of interest (aesthetic field) also have to give up their high position, beneath the understanding of children cordially." [1] Matisse, the French master of color, also mentioned from the artist's point of view that "we should see the world with children's eyes". It can be seen from this that the gifted figures of different times all realize that art should conform to the natural expression of nature, but only the reflection of their respective spiritual levels and artistic forms is different.

Matisse, founder of modern painting color, realized the complete liberation of color. Matisse's paper-cut is actually another way of painting. It also shows the bold use of color, red and green, blue to orange, yellow to purple. This strong contrast of color application fully reflects Matisse's super control of color. [2] In Matisse's later years, the stickers became the form of choosing color to create pure color, and the paper-cut became the medium of his color experiment. Matisse's color road shows the unlimited possibility of artist's harmonious development from feeling, emotion to color in human's all-round spirit. [3] This further shows that Matisse's color discovery is a milestone in the creation of painting color in the 20th century.

### IV. EXCHANGE AND FUSION: THE CONCORDANCE OF EASTERN AND WESTERN CULTURES

Culture is also different from the East and the West and has its own characteristics. The paper-cut of the two permeates the consciousness of seeking "Man" in the East and "Simplicity" in the West.

#### A. Composition and Decoration

Ku Shulan's paper-cut is full of the combination of points, lines and planes and the composition and decoration of seeking perfection and beauty, while Matisse's works present a large area of structure, clean and sharp, strong contrast. Ku Shulan, as an ordinary farm woman, her paper-cut is actually a bit of reproduction of her life experience, feeding pigs, mowing grass, her man... These deep-rooted fragments of life are deeply engraved in her mind and presented in her beautiful works. Matisse's paper-cut is mostly his creation in his later years, which is a manifestation of attempt, breakthrough and innovation. The large area of color reflects the attention of the West to color. The large area of shape reflects the collective consciousness. By Matisse's hand, the unique vocabulary of modernism, the unrecognizable form and approximate form, transcends its origin in material, technology and eccentricity, and becomes a medium for converging pleasant emotions.

#### B. Artistic Expression of Natural Authenticity

Ku Shulan's and Matisse's paper-cut negate the traditional art of imitating nature. In practice, they give up the realistic principles of perspective, anatomy, light and shade, and strive to express subjective feelings and personality. They use their inner spirit to organize and

express images, abstractions and illusions to satisfy visual pleasure and arouse psychological resonance. In Ku Shulan's paper-cut works, figures, animals, plants, buildings, utensils and other images do not pay attention to perspective, but mostly appear as positive or positive side images, which retain the original and basic human understanding and observation methods of objective objects. This expression across time and space is a subjective expression, which is different from the "scatter perspective" of Chinese painting, and is different from the real reproduction of realism.

### C. Integration of the East and West

Matisse's works have certain Oriental meanings. Just as Wu Guanzhong's painting combines the beauty of lines in the East and the beauty of color in the West, Matisse's Moroccan painting and the tradition of "Orientalism" painting are in one continuous line. In artistic creation, European artists always pursue exotic sentiment and try to express the non-Western (Eastern) life scene, which is called "Orientalism" painting. In the Matisse era, it was almost fashionable for artists to travel to the East to paint. Matisse's works in Morocco, consciously or unconsciously, have also become an integral part of the Oriental tradition with a long history in Europe. [4]

## V. SUBVERSION AND LIBERATION: DEDUCTION OF FATE LEGEND

Life has never been short of accidents. Ku Shulan started her legend in the second half of her life after an accident. Ku Shulan, who calls herself a "flower-cut lady", has changed her paper-cut style from the past. She was not rigid in form. She boldly uses the method of color collage. The lines of paper-cut become smooth and mellow, and the style of paper-cut is even more unrestrained. From then on, she was reluctant to put down her scissors and entered the peak period of creation like magic. The works of this period also reflected the highest level of Ku Shulan's paper-cut art.

Similarly, accidents do not divide national boundaries. Matisse created more than 200 pieces of paper-cut works in his life. He spent almost the last two years of his life in the hospital bed. When Matisse's hands were weak and extremely painful, and he gave birth to his life's peak work — "Paper-cut". His prints of Jazz (1943) cut out the shapes in the middle of the colored paper, then printed them, put the flat shapes together, and constructed a dirge for folk stories, circuses and colorful fugues. In his later works, the most directly touching thing is the color relationship, that is, the sudden jump of color blocks into the human eye as a striking shape, character or whole. Perhaps through the experience of "rising from death to rebirth", the two artists have achieved cross-border transcendence and breakthroughs, and deduced the extraordinary legend of life.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The works of art have gradually formed their unique characteristics, because of the influence of the national historical tradition, geographical environment, social conditions, cultural atmosphere, aesthetic customs and other

factors. Both Ku Shulan and Matisse's paper-cut works have epoch-making significance. Their works are full of the pursuit of life and eulogy. They have free and pure artistic super-utilitarian Artistic Mentality in artistic expression. Ku Shulan's paper-cut works are elaborate, luxurious and delicate, with complicated decoration, and are good at expressing the depth and height of life. Matisse's paper-cut emphasizes "more with less", which is intended to show the breadth of life. Regardless of the language of paper-cut art and the works of the two artists, Ku Shulan's notes of paper-cut art form a chorus full of harmony and rhythm under the theme of paper-cut art, while Matisse's paper-cut is like instrumental solo, not very rich but with distinct melody. Art is interlinked, and the national character of art is not unchanged. With the development of society, the progress of art and the strengthening of communication among different nationalities, it will also undergo certain evolution.

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