

# Research on the Types of Fujian Paper Cutting Art Symbols

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## ABSTRACT

Fujian paper-cut is reflected in all aspects of Fujian people's life. As a miniature of Fujian culture, Fujian paper-cut shows the stigma of migration of northern people to the south of China and cultural integration. This paper interprets the splendid art of Fujian paper-cut from the perspective of symbol reference, and analyzes three types of art symbols of Fujian paper-cut: pictorial symbol, indicative symbol and symbolic symbol. As a kind of image symbol, Fujian paper-cut art has the characteristics of bionics and deformation. The theme is mostly drawn from the natural and artificial objects that can be seen in our daily life; the theme of Fujian paper-cut art also has the distinctive characteristics of marine culture, which reflects the profound brand of Fujian's paper-cut in the special geographical environment along the southeast coast of China. After the simplification of paper-cut artists, it presents a unique form of beauty. In the form of Fujian paper cutting, there are some characteristics of imitation, decoration and exaggeration. As a kind of indicative symbol, Fujian paper-cut art is instructive and educational, which embodies Fujian people's customs and habits, worship concepts, moral concepts and values. As a symbol, Fujian paper-cut art is often used to sacrifice ancestors. The main theme is sacrificial gifts. It is mainly used for sacrificial ceremonies and festival gifts. It has a certain divine consciousness and is a symbol of divine consciousness; it is also a symbol of aesthetics and auspiciousness.

**Keywords:** Fujian paper cutting art, art symbol type, pictorial symbols, indicative symbols, symbolic symbols

## I. INTRODUCTION

Paper cutting is one of the traditional handicrafts in Fujian Province. Pucheng paper-cut is the representative of Northern Fujian. People in Pucheng make paper-cut to set off the atmosphere when there are festivals, weddings and ancestor worship. Pucheng paper-cut is mostly used on the gifts. According to the shape of the gift, some patterns are cut and pasted on the gift. This paper-cut is called "gift flower" in Pucheng. Pucheng belonged to Pucheng County of Jianning Prefecture in ancient times. During the Western Jin Dynasty, the northern population moved to Pucheng, and the paper-cut art was introduced. In addition, Pucheng has developed economy, which provides a material basis for the prevalence of paper-cut art. Most of the ancestors in Southern Fujian came from the northern immigrants. Paper cutting originated in the Tang Dynasty and prevailed in the Song Dynasty. The most representative paper-cut in Southern Fujian is Quanzhou kezhi. The paper-cut works are completed by knife cutting. This custom was also brought to Taiwan

by the ancestors of Southern Fujian who moved to Taiwan, confirming the same origin of ethnic migration and cultural heritage on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

The style of paper-cut in eastern Fujian represented by Zherong is different from that in Southern Fujian, but it shows a rough style similar to the folk paper-cut in Northern Shaanxi.[1] Zherong was a dependency of Yangzhou in ancient times. After the Tang Dynasty, the Central Plains residents moved to Zherong because of the war. In the relatively closed geographical environment of eastern Fujian, the northern culture and the indigenous culture blend with each other, forming a unique one. Therefore, Zherong paper cutting has the characteristics of marine culture and fusion culture.

Paper cutting is a kind of Fujian folk custom, which reflects the spiritual and material needs of Fujian people. People often cover paper-cut on objects, such as cupboards, closets, doors, rice warehouses, etc. Minnan paper-cut is used for gifts and sacrifices, and lanterns decoration. South Fujian is located in the southeast coast of China. The people are in awe of the sea. Many of the paper-cut works reflect the coastal life and work at sea. Therefore, Fujian folk paper-cut art reflects the brand of marine culture.

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In the history of Fujian, the simple concept of ancestor worship is one of the important themes and inspiration sources of Fujian folk paper-cut. With the migration of the northern people to the South after the Tang Dynasty, the Central Plains culture integrated into Fujian and spread rapidly. However, the brand left by the above-mentioned simple worship concept did not fade away, but permeated and blended with the introduced northern culture. It is precisely because of the different immigration and the blend of folk culture in Fujian, the cultural migration of northern people moving to the South and the mutual influence of local culture, resulting in a rich genre of Fujian folk paper-cut. Therefore, the study of the types of art symbols of Fujian paper-cut is of great significance to the study of Fujian history and culture.

The analysis of the types of Fujian paper-cut art symbols can study Fujian paper-cut art deeply, and understand the connotation, manifestation, style type and symbolic symbol of Fujian paper-cut art more. There are many kinds of paper-cut art symbols in Fujian. To fully understand, we can divide it into three levels, namely, pictorial symbol, indicative symbol and symbolic symbol. We will focus on the way of Fujian paper-cut symbol creation, rather than its content. Through the research of Fujian paper-cut patterns in the past, most of them focus on the technology of paper-cut art, the inheritance of paper-cut art, or explore the types and artistic characteristics of its patterns, and explore the transmission mode of its visual language. From the perspective of semiotics, there are few studies on the classification of Fujian paper-cut art. Therefore, this paper takes the type of Fujian paper-cut art symbols as the starting point, analyzes the expression form and connotation of Fujian paper-cut art, hoping to expand the research field of Fujian paper-cut art.

## II. THE IMAGE SYMBOL CHARACTERISTICS OF FUJIAN PAPER CUTTING ART

Image symbol is a kind of visual symbol which takes the image as the main feature to transmit information.[2] This is the most intuitive way for human to express images. It is simple and clear, accurate and easy to identify. Therefore, the original art of human beings mostly uses visual symbols to express and transmit. Fujian paper-cut art is such a kind of image symbol, which has three distinct characteristics: bionic, decorative and exaggerated.

### A. Bionic-character

Fujian paper-cut themes are diverse, and a large part of them are mainly bionic. Bionics is to simulate the image of things to create. This part of the bionic paper-cut works are mostly based on nature, taking the initial form of the objective things as the prototype, and then carrying out bionic, exaggerated deformation and

regular arrangement and combination of the prototype to form image symbols. On the basis of this image symbol material, the paper-cut patterns of flowers and vegetables, birds and animals, life scenes and so on are created.

The big pig pattern (as shown in "Fig. 1") is the most representative pattern theme in Fujian paper-cut. Pigs play an important role in Fujian people's life. When sacrificing ancestors in July and at the end of the year, pigs, pork, pig legs and feet become indispensable tributes on the table. Pigs have symbolic significance of food, wealth and happiness in the context of and Fujian culture. The pig pattern in Fujian paper-cut is the result of bionics, which is used for sacrificial rites. From this, there are also paper-cut patterns for sacrifice, such as pig's feet pattern, moon cake pattern, big cake pattern, dianxin pattern, chopsticks pattern, rice bowl pattern and so on. These patterns are bionics of real objects.



Fig. 1. Zhangpu paper cut big pig pattern.

### B. Decoration

Fujian paper-cut art level is exquisite, and decorative pattern is its important feature. There are two reasons for the decoration of Fujian paper-cut, one is the characteristics of paper-cut technology itself, the other is the need to simplify the shape in the process of paper-cut creation. According to the technological characteristics of paper-cut, paper-cut is different from painting. The patterns of paper-cut must be closely connected, and there should be no broken lines. The arrangement of the pictures should be appropriate. In the process of paper-cut creation, it is necessary to use some decorative patterns to ensure the coordination and continuity of the picture, so it is easy to appear some decorative pattern symbols with distinct yin-yang contrast. In the process of adapting to the simplification and abstraction of object shape, paper cutting simplifies and generalizes the image of objective things to form decorative patterns. However, the communication of symbolic meaning is still based on indication and symbol. The form of concrete symbol has changed, but the connotation will not change accordingly.

Fujian paper-cut art works emphasize decoration, complete composition, symmetry and balance, pay attention to the rhythm of lines, and pay attention to change and unity. These are the important decorative style features of Fujian paper-cut art. In Fujian paper-cut, there are some unique techniques, such as the "row cut" of Zhangpu paper-cut, and the "long row cutting" technique created by some paper-cut masters, which are also the elements forming the decorative characteristics of Fujian paper-cut.

C. Exaggeration

In the process of creation, paper-cut artists will magnify and exaggerate some features of the object, so as to highlight the aesthetic feeling of the part and weaken the others, which makes the symbolic characteristics of Fujian paper-cut art have the characteristics of exaggeration. In addition, the paper-cut art in Fujian has its unique abstract aesthetic feeling.

III. FUJIAN PAPER CUTTING ART IS A KIND OF INDICATIVE SYMBOL

Indicative symbols have logical similarity, that is to say, these symbols show their unique symbolic meaning through the things they refer to, so that the viewer can understand the meaning. Fujian paper-cut indicative symbols also have such characteristics. There is a certain logical relationship and one-to-one pairing referential between the surface form and the Semantic Connotation of paper-cut patterns. The following is from the Fujian paper-cut symbols from the two aspects of instruction education and instruction differentiation to analyze the characteristics of Fujian paper-cut art as an indicative symbol.[3]

A. Instructiveness

Due to the fact that there are more educational themes in Fujian paper-cut, the indicative symbols of Fujian paper-cut have certain instructive and educational functions. Fujian paper-cut is often used to worship and sacrifice ancestors in the realistic context, which is one of the common sacrificial rites in Fujian. According to Fujian folk culture, the descendants should be filial piety and worship their ancestors, which is the instruction and education of the divinity consciousness of Fujian folk paper-cut art. On the other hand, the instructive nature of Fujian paper cutting lies in the fact that the contents of publicity and education theme have a considerable weight. According to the theme and content of Fujian paper cutting, the symbols of educational propaganda and education can be summarized into the following two categories.

The first is historical stories, fables and legends, customs and habits. With the contents of historical stories, fables, legends and customs, the visual display in the form of paper cutting is used as the publicity and

education materials to convey some traditional Chinese spiritual culture, such as Mu Guiying as commander-in-chief, Silang visiting his mother, little mouse stealing oil and other classic historical stories, fables and legends as the blueprint for the creation of paper-cut works. Artists express their sense of worth through paper cutting of literature, opera and other themes, and repose their wishes for a better life. As shown in "Fig. 2", it is Chen Jinkuang's work "breast beating dance", which records Fujian's custom and educates the public.



Fig. 2. Works of Chen Jinkuang: customs in Southern Fujian-"breast clapping dance".

The second is filial piety, modesty, diligence and thrift. Fujian paper-cut mostly uses some stories to convey the traditional virtues of the Chinese nation, and teaches some contents of spiritual civilization, such as caring for life, filial piety, helping others and thrifty. As shown in "Fig. 3", the paper-cut works are filial piety by Chinese paper-cut artist Chen Jinkuang, which shows the spirit of filial piety.



Fig. 3. Filial piety by Chen Jinkuang.

B. Distinction of indication

The important function of indicative symbols is indicative differentiation. The indicative distinctiveness of Fujian paper-cut art is mainly reflected in the subject matter and form. The paper-cut in Fujian has different characteristics and strong local folk customs.

Due to the difference of subject matter and function, Fujian paper-cut shows great difference in pattern

composition, reflecting the indicative and distinguishing function of artistic symbols. The "gift patterns" in Pucheng and Putian are vivid and simple, and the main purpose is to pray for blessings, worship ancestors and act as gifts. The paper-cut, which is similar to many physical objects, such as pig leg, chicken claw and pancake, has various forms, lively and interesting. It is considered as a medium to communicate with the soul of the ancestors, and is also a kind of exquisite handicraft in Fujian. Zhangpu's paper-cut has a variety of patterns and exquisite techniques. The decorative pictures are mostly auspicious animals, plants, and buildings, as well as scenes of people's life and fishing and other labor scenes.

#### **IV. FUJIAN PAPER CUTTING ART IS A SYMBOLIC SYMBOL**

Symbol is a way to represent a feeling or connotation with things. The expression of a symbol is a symbol, and the object to be represented is its representative object. There is no similarity or existential relationship between symbolic symbols and the objects they represent. There is neither causal relationship nor inevitable or internal relationship between them. There is no similarity or existential relationship between symbolic symbols and the objects they represent. There is neither causal relationship nor inevitable connection between them. The representation of symbolic symbols is only based on social conventions, and is a symbol that represents something based on traditional reasons.[4] Fujian paper-cut art symbol is not only a kind of artistic work to show beauty, but also a symbolic symbol used to express by Fujian people. Each pattern in Fujian paper-cut has a certain symbolic significance. The symbolic symbols in Fujian paper-cut art can be divided into three categories: divine symbols, aesthetic symbols and auspicious symbols.

Indicative symbols can be divided into informative symbols and distinguishing symbols. The most representative symbol classification in China is that from the perspective of function, symbols are divided into unity and sex symbol, indicative symbol, expressive symbol and normative symbol.[5]

##### *A. Symbolic symbols of divinity*

Fujian paper-cut art as a symbolic symbol, daily paper-cut works are often used to sacrifice ancestors, the main theme is sacrificial gifts, mainly used for sacrificial ceremonies, festival gifts, with a certain degree of divine consciousness, is a symbol of divine consciousness. In Zhangpu, Fujian Province, when offering sacrifices, paper-cut patterns such as big pig pattern, pig foot pattern and cake pattern are used instead of pork and pastry. At the end of the worship

ceremony, these paper cuts are burned to communicate with the ancestors and let the ancestors enjoy the tribute. This kind of Fujian paper-cut is a symbol of divinity.

##### *B. Symbolic symbols of aesthetics*

The reason why Fujian folk paper-cut art is as a symbolic symbol is mainly because of its aesthetic.

From the perspective of modeling, it has the beauty of modeling. Fujian paper-cut patterns can be divided into realistic patterns and abstract patterns. The realistic patterns, even the bionic patterns mentioned above, reflect the original aesthetic feeling of things; the abstract patterns, which are the decorative and exaggerated patterns mentioned above, have their own decorative aesthetic feeling.

From the perspective of color, Fujian paper-cut mainly adopts bright red, which symbolizes auspiciousness and happiness. The color is striking and has color beauty. The colors used in Fujian paper-cut patterns are in line with people's psychological needs of positive pursuit of happiness, symbolizing the flourishing life and giving people a harmonious and happy feeling.[6]

Fujian paper-cut patterns are natural and simple, and have their unique rules of formal beauty. It emphasizes decoration, perfect composition, symmetry and balance of patterns, rhythm of lines, change and unity. On the two-dimensional paper surface, it shows the rich visual world of three-dimensional, with the dual aesthetic feeling of dynamic and static, forming the unique beauty of Fujian paper-cut art.

##### *C. Symbolic symbols of auspiciousness*

The symbolic symbols of Fujian paper-cut art, on the one hand, are aesthetic, on the other hand, they also have auspicious symbols. Fujian is located in the southeast coast of China. It is humid and hot, and its products are rich. Most of the paper-cut works are based on the life around them. Many works also pray for good weather, abundant fishing and safe sailing. The paper-cut works are deeply branded with marine culture. Fujian paper-cut mostly uses some things in life to express auspicious meaning. The paper-cut patterns created by Fujian people are not simply a simulation of natural scenery, but add their own understanding of life, which makes Fujian paper-cut symbols have their various meanings and symbols.

For example, the fish culture symbol in Fujian paper-cut reflects the characteristics of Fujian coastal life and the expectation of rich life. In Fujian paper-cut, there are many animal and plant images to express auspicious meaning, for example, pomegranate represents more offspring, bats represent good luck, lotus symbolizes love between husband and wife, etc.,

which are the auspicious implication of Fujian paper-cut symbols.

## V. CONCLUSION

Based on the reference object of symbols, this paper analyzes and studies Fujian paper-cut art from three types: pictorial symbol, indicative symbol and symbolic symbol. This paper analyzes the image symbol of Fujian paper-cut art, which has three distinct characteristics: bionic, decorative and exaggerated. From the perspective of Fujian paper-cut art as a kind of indicative symbol, this paper analyzes the instructive differentiation of Fujian paper-cut art symbols. As a symbolic symbol, Fujian paper-cut art is not only a symbol of divinity, but also a symbol of aesthetics and auspiciousness.

In terms of the division of symbols, these three types of symbols are not three distinct aspects, but a complementary overall perspective. In other words, the classification of a symbol depends on the angle of division. Taking the pig pattern, which is the most representative of Fujian paper-cut patterns, as an example, from the perspective of the simulation of things, it is a kind of bionic image symbol, which simulates the image of pig; from the logical connection between the symbol and its expression object, it has indicative distinction and is an indicative symbol, indicating its tribute function of communicating with ancestors; from the perspective of the conventional meaning expressed by the symbol of "big pig pattern", it is a symbol of auspiciousness, which often appears in sacrificial rites and is also a symbol of divinity. To sum up, we can conclude that Fujian paper-cut art symbol type is to achieve its symbolic significance through the above three aspects.

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