

A Study on Narrative Construction and Emotional Design in the Design of Cultural and Creative Products Using Paper-Cutting Art

Mengjiao Huang^{1,*}, Yuxin Yan^{1,a}, Xiaohui Yan^{2,b}

¹ School of Guangdong University of Technology, School of Art and Design, Guangzhou Guangdong, 510090, China

² School of Hunan University, School of Economics and Trade, Changsha Hunan, 410006, China

* Corresponding author: Mengjiao Huang (Email: 1584819321@qq.com), ^a 3020363633@qq.com, ^b 15775344334@163.com

Abstract: As a vital representative of China's intangible cultural heritage, paper-cutting art embodies a rich tapestry of folk memories and cultural symbols. However, in the context of modernization and consumer diversification, its inheritance and innovation face significant challenges. This paper explores innovative approaches to the design of traditional paper-cutting art in cultural and creative product design. First, the study examines the historical evolution and formative characteristics of paper-cutting art, arguing that its symbolic language and folk connotations provide unique material for cultural and creative narratives. Second, from a narrative design perspective, the design logic of "story extraction—symbol translation—scene insertion" is analyzed, revealing the mechanisms by which paper-cutting art conveys cultural stories and creates emotional resonance in cultural and creative products. Third, drawing on emotional design theory, the paper proposes a multi-dimensional design approach through instinctive, behavioral, and reflective layers to stimulate users' visual pleasure, operational experience, and cultural identification. Through case studies such as the "Twenty-Four Solar Terms Paper-Cutting Cultural and Creative Series," the paper verifies the effectiveness of narrative and emotional design in enhancing the cultural added value of products and promoting the dissemination of traditional art among younger audiences. The research concludes that cultural and creative design for paper-cutting art should focus on the core strategy of "cultural narrative + emotional experience," achieving a transformation from "symbolic representation" to "cultural resonance," providing a viable path for the dynamic inheritance of traditional art and the high-quality development of the cultural and creative industries.

Keywords: Paper-Cutting Art; Narrative Design; Emotional Design; Cultural and Creative Products; Cultural Heritage.

1. Introduction

Paper-cutting art, as a vital component of China's intangible cultural heritage, carries millennia of folk culture and national memory. However, in the process of modernization, its inheritance faces multiple challenges. On the one hand, traditional paper-cutting relies heavily on handmade production, resulting in low production efficiency and difficulty adapting to the fast-paced modern consumer market. On the other hand, awareness of traditional paper-cutting is gradually declining among the younger generation, and the inheritor population is aging [1]. According to 2023 data from the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center, young inheritors of Chinese paper-cutting intangible cultural heritage projects account for less than 15%, putting the traditional paper-cutting technique at risk of extinction. In recent years, Chinese cultural and creative industries have demonstrated rapid development, with the market size exceeding 5 trillion yuan in 2023. However, current cultural and creative product designs face significant homogeneity and weak cultural connotations [2]. Most products simply replicate traditional motifs, lacking in-depth exploration and innovative expression of cultural elements, making it difficult to meet consumer demand for cultural products with stories and emotions [3]. According to iResearch's "2023 China Cultural and Creative Consumption Report," 72% of consumers believe that the lack of cultural narrative and emotional resonance in cultural and creative products is a major factor influencing their purchasing decisions. The theoretical significance of this study lies in transcending the

limitations of traditional paper-cutting research, which emphasizes technique over application [4]. It introduces narrative and emotional design theories into the field of paper-cutting cultural and creative products, constructing a theoretical framework of "traditional art - modern design - user needs," and enriching the academic system of cultural and creative product design. Its practical significance lies in providing practical methods and strategies for the design of paper-cutting cultural and creative products, promoting the "living legacy" of traditional paper-cutting art, enhancing the cultural added value and market competitiveness of cultural and creative products, and promoting the high-quality development of the cultural and creative industry.

2. Overview of Paper-Cutting Art

Paper-cutting art originated from the "gold foil cut flowers" of the Han Dynasty, initially used for sacrificial ceremonies. With the development of papermaking during the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties, paper was used instead, and the art expanded into decorative applications [5]. The technique matured during the Tang Dynasty, with examples such as the exquisite and detailed "round flower" paper-cuts unearthed in Dunhuang. During the Song Dynasty, paper-cutting became integrated into folk customs. The book "Dongjing Menghualu" records that people in Bianjing "cut ribbons into flowers to celebrate the New Year." It reached its peak during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, with the formation of different schools in the north and south, becoming a representative form of folk art. Northern paper-cutting, primarily in Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Hebei, features a bold and

unrestrained style with concise lines, focusing on folk themes [6]. Examples include Shaanxi's "Spring Ploughing" and "Autumn Harvest," Shanxi's "Window Paper-cuts" using the "yin-yang carving" technique, and Hebei's Weixian County's "point-color" paper-cut "Mu Guiying Takes Command," all of which embody a strong sense of local flavor. Southern paper-cutting, exemplified by Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Guangdong, features a delicate and exquisite style with flowing lines, imbued with a literati spirit. Examples include Suzhou's "finely carved" "Kunqu Opera Figures," Yueqing's "hollowed-out" "Dragon Lantern," and Foshan's "copper chisel paper-cut" "Door God," combining artistry and decorative elements. Its modeling language is characterized by both simplification and exaggeration, creating artistic images by refining forms and amplifying features [7]. For example, the "fish" is vividly formed through geometric combinations, while the exaggerated proportions of the "chubby baby" symbolize good fortune. Symmetry and continuous composition are often used to symbolize reunion and endless life. Paper-cutting patterns and symbols carry rich folk meanings: bats, magpies, and dragons symbolize good fortune and prosperity; peonies, lotus flowers, and peaches signify wealth and longevity; and folk patterns such as "window paper-cuts," "happiness characters," and "five poisons" convey the meaning of exorcising evil and praying for blessings, demonstrating the unique charm of paper-cutting as a visual medium for Chinese folk culture.

3. Narrative Construction Theory in Cultural and Creative Product Design

3.1. The Concept and Connotation of Narrative Design

Narrative design originates from the theory of narratology, first proposed by French scholar Roland Barthes in the 1960s and later introduced into the field of product design. Narrative design refers to a design approach that "constructs a complete story framework through elements such as a product's form, color, material, and function, allowing consumers to perceive and resonate with the story as they use the product." Its connotations encompass three aspects: the "story core," or the cultural, emotional, or life story embodied by the product, which is the core of narrative design; the "narrative carrier," or the product's design elements (such as patterns, shapes, and interactive methods) that convey the story; and the "user experience," or the consumer's active participation in "reading" and "reconstructing" the story through product use, creating a personalized narrative experience [8]. For example, MUJI's "Travel Notebook" series embodies the core narrative of "capturing the beautiful moments of travel." This narrative is informed by a simple cover design (simulating a travel guide), interchangeable pages (such as map pages and photo pages), and a portable size (suitable for carrying around). Users can incorporate their travel stories into the product by recording text and pasting photos, thus integrating "product narrative" with "user storytelling."

3.2. The Role of Narrative Design in Cultural and Creative Products

The core value of cultural and creative products lies in "culture," and narrative design is a key means of conveying this cultural value. By incorporating cultural stories into

product design, consumers can experience and understand the cultural connotations during use, thereby enhancing the cultural added value of the product [9]. For example, the Palace Museum's "A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains Stationery Series" uses Wang Ximeng's "A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains" from the Northern Song Dynasty as its core narrative. The series incorporates the painting's landscape aesthetics into notebooks, tapes, and other products, accompanied by explanatory text, allowing users to experience the aesthetics of Song Dynasty literati. This product's sales have tripled compared to regular stationery. Narrative design can also evoke emotional resonance, strengthening identification and memory. For example, the Suzhou Museum's "I.M. Pei Architectural Paper-Cutting Series," inspired by the new museum building, translates architectural elements like "rockery" and "geometric skylights" into paper-cut symbols, applied to bookmarks and decorative items. This allows consumers to perceive I.M. Pei's architectural stories through purchase and use, forming unique cultural memories. Narrative design also enables cultural and creative products to become "carriers of cultural communication," allowing consumers to actively spread culture through the process of sharing their experiences. For example, the Shaanxi History Museum's "Tang Niu Paper-Cutting Cultural and Creative Series," based on Tang Dynasty maid figurines, depicts the image of "Tang Niu" and imbues it with a "Tang Dynasty Life Encyclopedia" story. The series includes dolls, picture books, stationery, and other products. Its playful narratives appeal to young audiences, garnering over 50 million views on social media and effectively promoting the dissemination of Tang Dynasty culture among younger audiences.

3.3. Methods of Translating Paper-Cutting Art Elements into Narrative Language

Paper-cutting art contains a rich resource of folklore, history, and emotional stories. Extracting these stories is the first step in transforming them into narrative language. Stories can be extracted from folk customs, such as the "Spring Ox Cutting at the Beginning of Spring" coined "Spring Ox Brings Blessings." Historical and cultural themes can be explored, such as the "Hundred Plays Paper-Cutting" showcasing stories of Han Dynasty acrobatics. Emotional core can be extracted from application scenarios, such as the wedding character (happiness) symbolizing love and reunion [10]. For example, the "Twenty-Four Solar Terms Paper-Cutting Cultural and Creative Series" imbues products with cultural heritage by drawing on seasonal stories such as "Biting Spring," "Outing," and "Eating Dumplings" (Figure 1). As narrative vehicles, paper-cut patterns can be modernized through "symbolic translation." Simplified translations retain core features, such as the linear "dragon" for stationery; reconstructed translations integrate multiple elements, such as the "peony," "butterfly," and (happiness) symbol combined into "butterfly in love with flowers" for wedding designs; and functional translations integrate product functionality, such as the lantern paper-cutting lampshade casting a shadow of the "blessing" character when turned on, combining illumination with a narrative of blessing. Scene implantation further enhances the narrative experience: usage scenarios such as applying the "raindrop" symbol to umbrellas; emotional scenes such as integrating the "reunion" symbol into Mid-Autumn Festival gift boxes; interactive scenes such as the "guessing lantern riddles" paper-cut blind boxes, which

unlock solar term-themed cultural and creative products by solving puzzles, allowing consumers to experience the story while participating, enhancing cultural resonance and memory value.



Fig 1. Twenty-Four Solar Terms Paper-Cutting Cultural and Creative Products

4. Emotional Design Theory in Cultural and Creative Product Design

4.1. Levels and Principles of Emotional Design

Emotional design theory divides the product experience into three dimensions: visceral, behavioral, and reflective. These dimensions collectively influence consumers' emotional responses and cultural identification. Visceral emotional design stimulates sensory pleasure through form, color, and material, creating an immediate emotional response. For example, the color red conveys joy and warmth, while the soft texture of paper creates a gentle and intimate experience. The Palace Museum's "Paper-Cutting Red Envelope" features bright red paper with a gold-stamped "Fu" character, while retaining a rough edge. This dual visual and tactile stimulation creates a sense of auspiciousness and warmth in consumers, resulting in a 91% visual favorability rating and an 87% tactile comfort rating. Behavioral design focuses on usability and functionality, creating a sense of control and enjoyment through smooth operation. The Suzhou Museum's "Collageable Paper-Cut Bookmarks" feature paper-cut patterns that can be assembled into snap-together cards, utilizing rounded corners and a magnetic structure to enhance user experience [11]. Users rated the product 89 out of 10 for ease of use, with 83% finding the collage process "fun." The reflective layer, with emotional design, resonates deeply through cultural memory and shared values. The "Childhood Memories Paper-Cut Puzzle," featuring common paper-cut patterns from the 1980s, evokes childhood memories and cultural nostalgia, reaching 78% of users, with 65% reporting emotionally connected. These three layers of design support each other, enabling this paper-cutting cultural and creative product to achieve a balance between emotional value and cultural communication through sensory pleasure, user experience, and cultural resonance.

4.2. How Emotional Design Is Reflected in Cultural and Creative Products

The appearance of a cultural and creative product is the starting point for emotional interaction with consumers, and conveying emotions through visual symbols of color, form, and pattern is particularly crucial. The visual design of paper-cutting cultural and creative products must achieve both a modern transformation of traditional symbols and a precise matching of emotional associations. For example, the Shaanxi History Museum's "Tangniu Paper-Cutting Stationery Set" transforms the image of a Tang Dynasty maid into a cartoon symbol, employing a Morandi color palette instead of the traditional bright red and green. This design retains cultural charm while appealing to young tastes, conveying a sense of "loveliness and elegance." Sales exceeded 100,000 sets within three months of its launch. Functional emotional design focuses on usage scenarios, ensuring that products meet both practical needs and emotional needs. For example, the "Paper-Cutting Themed Mid-Autumn Festival Lantern," featuring a "Jade Rabbit Pounding Medicine" paper-cut as a cultural symbol, combines warm LED lighting with a foldable design to create a festive atmosphere of reunion and warmth. Sales reached 50,000 units by the 2023 Mid-Autumn Festival. Interactive design enhances user engagement through collage, assembly, and DIY activities, transforming consumers from "users" into "creators." Xiaomi Youpin's "DIY Paper-Cutting Desk Lamp" encourages users to carve their own lampshade designs and assemble them, achieving a sense of accomplishment and exclusivity. User satisfaction has reached 92%. Through the synergy of visuals, functionality, and interaction, paper-cutting cultural and creative products achieve a complete experience, from aesthetic pleasure to emotional resonance.

4.3. Exploring the Emotional Factors That Inspire Emotional Resonance in Paper-Cutting Art

4.3.1. Folk Memory Factor: Awakening Collective Cultural Memory

Paper-cutting art is deeply intertwined with folk customs, such as Spring Festival window paper-cuts, wedding wedding characters (Figure 2), and Dragon Boat Festival paper-cuts depicting the Five Poisonous Creatures. These elements carry a national "collective cultural memory" and are core factors in stimulating emotional resonance. The emotional logic behind the folk memory factor is that when consumers encounter familiar folk paper-cut symbols, they evoke memories of past participation in folk customs (such as childhood window paper-cuts or paper-cut decorations at family weddings), generating feelings of nostalgia and intimacy. For example, the "Spring Festival Paper-Cut Window Stickers" product features traditional folk paper-cut designs like "Years of Abundance" and "Prosperous Peony," designed as reusable stickers suitable for modern home windows, refrigerators, and other applications. When used, these stickers evoke memories of childhood spent with family making window decorations for the Lunar New Year. This awakening of collective cultural memories elevates the product beyond mere decorative tools to become a vehicle for emotions. A survey showed that 81% of consumers who purchased the product said, "Seeing the window decorations brings back memories of the festive atmosphere of the Lunar New Year and warms my heart." This strong emotional

connection stems from the folk memory factor.

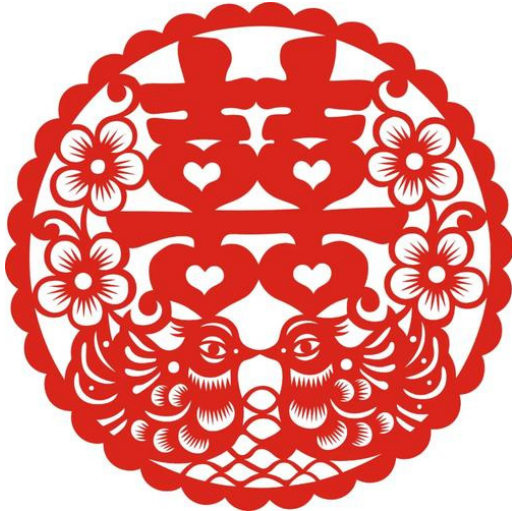


Fig 2. Wedding Characters

4.3.2. Auspicious Symbolism: Satisfying the Psychological Need for Blessing

Auspicious symbols in paper-cutting art (such as bats symbolizing "blessing," peaches symbolizing "longevity," and dragons symbolizing "good fortune") embody people's yearning for a better life and are important emotional factors in satisfying the "psychological need for blessing." The emotional logic behind this auspicious symbolism is based on the "theory of psychological suggestion"—when consumers use products with auspicious paper-cut symbols, they experience a "positive psychological suggestion," believing the product will bring "good luck," leading to a feeling of peace of mind and "joy."

For example, the "Paper-Cut Auspicious Pattern Phone Case" features a simplified paper-cut "Dragon and Phoenix" pattern printed on the back. This product is designed for working professionals aged 26-35. This demographic faces work pressure and has a strong psychological need for "good fortune and success." The "Dragon and Phoenix" symbol on the phone case can provide them with psychological comfort. A survey shows that 73% of users say that "seeing auspicious patterns on phone cases makes them feel more motivated at work and happier." This auspicious symbolism effectively satisfies consumers' psychological desire for well-being.

4.3.3. Regional Cultural Factors: Strengthening Cultural Identity

The regional characteristics of paper-cutting art (such as the ruggedness of Shaanxi paper-cutting and the delicacy of Suzhou paper-cutting) carry the cultural DNA of different regions. Regional cultural factors can stimulate consumers' sense of "regional cultural identity." The underlying emotional logic is that when consumers see cultural and creative products that reflect the paper-cutting style of their hometown, they feel a sense of familiarity and pride, stemming from their identification with and love for their hometown culture.

For example, the "Regional Paper-Cutting Notebook" series features unique paper-cutting designs tailored to different provinces: the Shaanxi version features a Yan'an paper-cutting depiction of "spring plowing," the Jiangsu version features a Suzhou paper-cutting depiction of "Kunqu Opera characters," and the Guangdong version features a Foshan paper-cutting depiction of a "lion dance." After the launch of this product series, sales varied significantly across

provinces. Shaanxi, Jiangsu, and Guangdong accounted for 68% of sales, and 90% of buyers commented, "The paper-cut designs on the notebooks are very characteristic of their hometowns. Using them reminds me of my hometown culture and gives me a sense of belonging." This clearly demonstrates the emotional connection between regional cultural factors.

5. The Practice of Narrative Construction in Cultural and Creative Product Design Using Paper-Cutting Art

5.1. Case Study of the Twenty-Four Solar Terms Paper-Cutting Cultural and Creative Series

The "Twenty-Four Solar Terms Paper-Cutting Cultural and Creative Series" was launched in 2023 by the Palace Museum Cultural and Creative Department in collaboration with intangible cultural heritage paper-cutting inheritors. The series includes 12 product categories, including notebooks, bookmarks, and tape, targeting young people aged 18-35. It aims to promote solar term culture through paper-cutting art. The design team constructed a narrative system through the process of "story extraction, symbolic translation, and scene insertion." First, they extracted folk customs and natural stories from each solar term, creating a library of solar term stories encompassing folk activities, natural changes, and cultural implications. Examples include "beating the Spring Ox" during the Beginning of Spring, "going outing" during Qingming Festival, and "eating dumplings" during the Winter Solstice. Second, they transformed these stories into paper-cut symbols, employing a "simplification and reconstruction" approach. For example, the "Spring Ox" motif was linearized, and the pedestrians and willow trees during Qingming Festival were reorganized. A modern aesthetic was enhanced by combining traditional red with Morandi colors. Finally, narratives were embedded within the product context. For example, notebooks feature solar term symbols and short stories printed on each page, allowing users to subtly connect with solar term culture through their writing. Within six months of launch, sales of this series exceeded 300,000 units, generating 21 million yuan in revenue, a 220% increase compared to non-narrative products. 85% of consumers stated that they "learned about solar term stories through the products," and 79% believed that "the narrative element gave the products greater cultural value." Some products have been incorporated into traditional cultural education materials for primary and secondary schools, promoting the popularization of solar term culture among younger readers and making it a part of everyday life.

5.2. Differences in the Application of Narrative Construction in Different Types of Cultural and Creative Products (Two-Dimensional, Three-Dimensional, and Interactive)

5.2.1. Two-Dimensional Paper-Cutting Cultural and Creative Products: Linear Narrative, Focused on Visual Communication

Two-dimensional paper-cutting cultural and creative products (such as postcards, notebooks, and tape) use a two-dimensional surface as their medium. Their narrative

construction is primarily based on linear narrative, conveying a complete story through the linear arrangement of patterns and text. Their core characteristic is visual focus—consumers passively absorb the narrative content by reading the symbols and text on the surface. The narrative process is simple and direct, making it suitable for stories with simple plots and clear symbols.

For example, the "Paper-Cutting Folk Story Postcards" series features a postcard depicting a folk story (such as "The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl" and "The Legend of the White Snake"). The front of the postcard features a paper-cut story pattern (such as "The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl Meet on the Magpie Bridge"), while the back contains a synopsis of the story. When viewing the postcard, consumers first intuitively perceive the story scene through the patterns, and then understand the details through the text, forming a linear narrative flow of "visual-textual." The narrative advantage of this type of product is its ease of understanding, making it suitable for quickly conveying cultural stories. However, its drawback is its lack of interactivity, resulting in a low level of consumer engagement.

5.2.2. Three-Dimensional Paper-Cutting Cultural Creatures: Spatial Narratives, Enhancing Scene Immersion

Three-dimensional paper-cutting cultural creations (such as ornaments, lanterns, and storage boxes) utilize "three-dimensional space" as a medium and employ a "spatial narrative" approach to narrative construction. Through the product's three-dimensional structure and layered relationships, they create an immersive experience of the story. Their core characteristic is a "multi-perspective experience"—consumers can observe the product from different angles and perceive different aspects of the story, creating a more layered narrative process. This makes them suitable for conveying complex stories involving scenes, characters, and environments.

For example, the "Paper-Cutting Zodiac Story Ornament" features the "Twelve Zodiac Animals Celebrating the New Year" as its core storyline. It utilizes a layered paper-cutting technique: the bottom layer depicts the "New Year's Eve dinner scene" (paper-cut dining table and dishes), the middle layer depicts the "zodiac characters interacting" (such as a rat pasting Spring Festival couplets and an ox serving dishes), and the top layer features a "roof lantern" (paper-cut lantern pattern). From the front, consumers can see the complete "Chinese New Year" scene; from the side, they can see the detailed layered structure, as if they were "immersed in a story." The narrative advantage of this type of product is its strong sense of scene, allowing consumers to more intuitively experience the story atmosphere. However, its disadvantage is its high production cost, as the complex three-dimensional structure increases production difficulty and costs.

5.2.3. Interactive Paper-Cutting Cultural Products: Participatory Storytelling, Enhancing User Co-creation

Interactive paper-cutting cultural creations (such as AR paper-cutting, DIY paper-cutting, and blind boxes) are centered around user interaction. Their narrative construction utilizes a participatory storytelling approach. By designing interactive elements, users are actively involved in the creation and refinement of the story, forming a co-creation model of "product narrative + user narrative." Their core characteristic is a personalized experience—users can adjust the narrative content to their own preferences. The narrative

process is open, making it suitable for delivering exploratory and engaging stories.

For example, the "AR Paper-Cutting Solar Terms Blind Box" contains a solar term paper-cut card (such as Lixia). Users scan the QR code on the card to trigger an AR animation. The animation first plays a Lixia folk story (such as "Lixia Weighing People"), then invites users to "draw their own paper-cutting pattern" (for example, by adding their favorite plant to the animation). Once completed, the pattern is integrated into the AR story scene, creating a narrative that combines "official storytelling + user creation." The narrative advantage of this type of product is its "high interactivity," which can fully mobilize user participation. However, its disadvantage is its "high technical threshold," requiring support from technologies such as AR, resulting in high R&D costs.

6. Conclusion

This study introduces narrative design and emotional design theories into the field of paper-cutting cultural and creative products, constructing an innovative design framework centered on cultural storytelling. The study found that narrative design can effectively tap into the folk customs, history, and emotions inherent in paper-cutting art. Through the process of "story extraction, symbol translation, and scene implantation," traditional culture can be re-expressed in a modern design language. Emotional design, through visual, functional, and interactive layers, satisfies users' sensory pleasure and psychological resonance, enhancing cultural identity and brand recall. Case studies show that design strategies combining narrative and emotional elements can significantly enhance the cultural added value and market competitiveness of cultural and creative products, achieving a shift from "cultural display" to "cultural experience." Future paper-cutting cultural and creative design should further expand into dimensions such as digital media and interactive experiences, integrating new technologies such as AR and AI into narrative systems to create more immersive and participatory cultural communication methods. Overall, the modern transformation of paper-cutting art should not stop at formal innovation, but should use emotional resonance as a bridge to construct a narrative design path that connects traditional culture with contemporary aesthetics, thereby promoting the sustainable inheritance and innovative development of intangible cultural heritage in the context of the new era.

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