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Paper-cutting in Western Henan: Design and Development of Cultural and Creative Products in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to study (i) the history and knowledge development of papercutting in Western Henan, and (ii) the process of studying cultural heritage learning design and development of cultural and creative products. Qualitative research methods were used. Field data were collected through research documents and surveys, interviews, observations, group discussions, and seminars. The data came from 36 participants, it was analyzed according to the objectives, and the results were presented in a descriptive analysis. The research results found that: (i) Paper-cutting in Western Henan is a traditional folk art with local characteristics, reflecting the aesthetics of the Central Plains farming culture and the life values of the people in Western Henan. Black paper cutting reflects the influence of a folk culture that worships the black color and the Xia culture. With the development of the times, the inheritors of papercutting in Western Henan are aging, and the inheritance methods are backward. It is urgent to protect it, inherit it, and pass it on to young people and others who are interested. (ii) The art of paper-cutting is combined with the design of cultural products to inherit and learn the art of paper-cutting in Western Henan. It is developed into a teaching model through art design. The developed teaching media can convey the cultural history of paper-cutting in Western Henan and the content of art design. Students can acquire knowledge by learning the design process and scanning QR codes. Students can easily obtain information and learn at any time.

Key words: Henan, Western Henan, Paper-cutting, Cultural and Creative Product Design, Digital Design, Learning, Cultural Heritage

INTRODUCTION

Henan is the birthplace of Chinese civilization, referred to as "Yu," and is divided into four regions: East Henan, West Henan, South Henan, and North Henan. West Henan is located in the west of Henan, including the cities of Luoyang and Sanmenxia. It features steep terrain, and is an important tourist destination (Huang, 2013). West Henan is the birthplace of Taoist culture, and its cultural relics are deeply rooted in Chinese civilization. As an art form passed down from generation to generation in the local area, paper-cutting in West Henan reflects people's value judgments from creation to use. It has a unique style, a long history, and a wide range of themes, showing the aesthetic characteristics of the Central Plains farming culture.

Paper-cutting in West Henan is geographically concentrated north of the Nanyang Basin and south of the Jinyu Grand Canyon, represented by the cities of Sanmenxia, Luoning, and Mengjin. The style is influenced by the culture of the north and the south, characterized by both the roughness of the north and the exquisiteness of the south. Papercutting in West Henan has exaggerated shapes, concise and

simple knife techniques, and contains a variety of color techniques. Particularly, unique black paper-cutting symbolizes good luck and happiness, reflecting the local folk culture of black (Guo & Gao, 2013). Paper-cutting artists in Western Henan usually do not make drafts, and incorporate subjective emotions into their creations. Their works carry the aesthetic pursuits of the people of Western Henan and the spiritual connotation of farming culture. With the development of modern society, paper-cutting in Western Henan faces crises and challenges. Western China attaches great importance to the protection of intangible cultural heritage.

In modern society, paper-cutting in Western Henan faces challenges in cultural value, identity, protection and inheritance. With the impact of social development and cultural diversity, paper-cutting in Western Henan is undergoing a period of transformation and needs to enrich its cultural diversity and dissemination methods with the help of modern means. The design of cultural and creative products provides new development opportunities for paper-cutting in Western Henan. In modern society, cultural and creative products not only show the aesthetic value of paper-cutting in Western Henan through visual, audio, and interactive technologies,

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but they also enhance user experience and enhance cultural identity through AR/VR technology (Bi et al., 2023). At the same time, the diversification and market-oriented dissemination of cultural and creative products enable paper-cutting in Western Henan to reach a wider audience, especially the younger generation. Through the combination of innovative design and modern technology, cultural and creative products give new vitality to paper-cutting in Western Henan, realize the sustainable development of culture, and show its unique charm on the global cultural stage (Nie, 2022). Cultural and creative design in education not only involves the inheritance and dissemination of culture, but also shows an important way to improve the quality of education and cultivate students' comprehensive quality.

Cultural and creative design plays an important role in education, enriching teaching content and stimulating students' creativity and cultural identity. While integrating traditional cultural elements into modern design, cultural and creative design allows students to more intuitively have contact with and understand cultural heritage, which helps to enhance their interest and identity in local culture. In addition, the development and design process of cultural and creative products can also be used as part of education to cultivate students' innovative thinking and design ability, so that they can learn how to combine cultural elements with modern needs in practice, thereby improving their comprehensive quality and competitiveness (Zhang, 2020). Cultural and creative design is integrated into education through means such as creative courses, art projects, and museum exhibitions. These provide rich learning resources and experiences, helping students to better understand and inherit cultural traditions. At the same time, it stimulates the spirit of inquiry and enables students to think actively in the learning process. This is the origin of this study.

Research Objectives

- To explore the history and knowledge development of paper-cutting in Western Henan, and
- To investigate the process of cultural heritage learning, designing and developing cultural and creative products.

RESEARCH METHOD

We followed the steps below to design this study:

- We studied the history, cultural background and artistic value of paper-cutting in Western Henan and conducted an in-depth literature review, including analyzing existing relevant research and theories to guide subsequent design and protection work.
- We explored the unique elements of paper-cutting art in Western Henan, collected and organized patterns, symbols, and cultural symbols in paper-cutting art through field visits and expert interviews; and selected representative elements as the basis for creative product design.
- We developed specific methods and processes for creative product design, used design software and rendering tools to productize the extracted paper-cutting elements, and designed preliminary product styles. Research tools

- included design surveys, user feedback interviews and product prototype testing.
- 4. We combined paper-cutting elements with modern design concepts to develop cultural and creative products suitable for learning at different ages. Products included teaching materials, teaching tools and cultural and creative commodities, with the aim to promote cultural inheritance and education in physical and digital forms.
- We applied the developed cultural and creative products to school education and community cultural activities, promoted them through digital platforms and field courses, and collected feedback from students and educators to improve design and functionality
- 6. We analyze the collected user feedback and application effect data to evaluate the effectiveness of the product in learning and cultural heritage protection, and adjusted the design strategy to enhance the educational value and cultural significance of the product.
- 7. We wrote a research report based on the analysis results, summarized the effectiveness of cultural and creative product design, and published articles in international journals to display the relevant cultural and design exhibitions and promote the cultural value and innovative design of Henan Western paper-cutting.

RESULTS

The results of the study are reported in this section.

Development History and Cultural Value of Paper-Cutting in Western Henan for Students

First, students were introduced to the historical origins of paper-cutting in Western Henan and its importance in the development of Western Henan culture. Paper-cutting in Western Henan reflects the regional characteristics of the Central Plains culture. Influenced by geographical environment and historical factors, it has formed unique folk cultures such as sunken courtyard dwellings, black aesthetics, and men's paper-cutting. It is deeply influenced by the legacy of the Xia Dynasty, Taoist culture, and Yangshao painted pottery patterns, showing the characteristics of black coloring and simplicity. The study started with the materials, tools, and production techniques of paper-cutting, analysis of its creation process and form, and observation of its evolution over time.

Students learned and analyzed the cultural value of paper-cutting in Western Henan. Paper-cutting is not only a work of art, but also a symbolic medium that carries the cultural memory and traditional beliefs of Western Henan, such as reverence for nature, ancestors, and totems. Through the transmission of cultural symbols, paper-cutting expresses the local people's concept and lifestyle of harmonious coexistence with nature. Paper-cutting in Western Henan is not only a skill, but also an art of survival, integrating thoughts, emotions, and beliefs. These include being people-oriented, expressing the joy of life and death, and revealing its cultural inheritance of reproduction and life. Utilizing the concept of Saussure's semiotics, the cultural symbolic value of

paper-cutting in Western Henan can be explained, showing the unique regional aesthetics and the inheritance of living cultural beliefs. Paper-cutting in Western Henan provides an important reference for studying the development of culture in Western Henan. Through the evolution of themes and patterns, the cultural significance contained therein is analyzed.

Secondly, students used modern design software such as Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator and 3D modeling, combined with symbolic cultural connotations and graphic line extraction, to carry out creative design, so that traditional paper-cutting in Western Henan can be reinterpreted and innovated, giving it a new cultural expression. This innovation not only promoted the development of educational models and cultural heritage protection, but also inspired the younger generation's interest in and cultural identity of paper-cutting in Western Henan, and promoted cultural inheritance.

Finally, the researchers used the developed cultural and creative products as modern educational tools to spread and protect the paper-cutting culture in Western Henan (Figure 1). Through practical platforms, digital platforms and multimedia means, students could more intuitively understand the historical and cultural value of paper-cutting in Western Henan and enhance their recognition of their cultural identity. In summary, this study summarizes the historical origins, artistic value and cultural identity of paper-cutting in Western Henan, combines the current inheritance and protection issues, and proposes new protection ideas through the design of cultural and creative products. It also provides a developmental direction for the cultural education of paper-cutting in Western Henan, and will be applied in the inheritance and protection of more intangible cultural heritage, bringing new cultural experiences and creative product enjoyment.

Design and Development of the Design Process for Cultural and Creative Products in Learning Cultural Heritage

With the goal of inheriting and protecting paper-cutting in Western Henan, students design paper-cutting derivatives in Western Henan from the perspective of art and culture in the new social environment. In this process, they combine traditional elements with modern design, and are guided by market demand to enable consumers to pay attention to paper-cutting in Western Henan and promote its sustainable development. In the design process, the basic design of the product is completed through concept extraction, logo design, graphic innovation, and situational illustrations. It is further applied to cultural and creative products such as office supplies, daily necessities, and tourist souvenirs.

Based on the theory of semiotics, design psychology, and cultural and creative product design, a cultural and creative product design model for paper-cutting in Western Henan is constructed for students. Paper-cutting in Western Henan embodies the unique regional characteristics of "the fusion of Chinese north and south cultures," as well as the cultural inheritance characterized as "people-oriented," "expressing joy of life and death," "embodying reproduction and life," and "depicting life connotations with auspicious expression".



Figure 1. Part of the cultural and creative display of paper-cutting in Western Henan

By symbolizing life emotions, metaphorically praying for life and death, and expressing reverence for nature and gods, paper-cutting in Western Henan shows unique regional aesthetics and cultural beliefs. These cultural symbols embody the collective memory and identity of the people in Western Henan, and have important ethnic cohesion. Therefore, the innovative design of paper-cutting in Western Henan not only enriches the research of this art form, but also provides new ideas for the research of traditional handicrafts, and attracts more students to pay attention to the inheritance and application of traditional handicrafts, making paper-cutting in Western Henan glow with new vitality.

By exploring the cultural and creative product design of paper-cutting in Western Henan, one can study how to cater to the psychological needs of contemporary consumers, integrate paper-cutting in Western Henan into modern life, and enhance people's understanding and recognition of its art. Based on the principles of culture, communication, inheritance, practicality and creativity, the creators extract symbols from paper-cutting in Western Henan through image simplification, image element extraction, and picture extension, and then integrate them into visual design, which fully reflects its cultural value. Based on the theory of semiotics and the application of cultural and creative design as the entry point, inheriting and developing the paper-cutting culture in Western Henan, can be reborn into a new era, which is also in line with the development direction of China's cultural industry. The design method that combines modern art with traditional culture helps to create unique cultural symbols and cultural identity, and promote the inheritance and development of paper-cutting culture in Western Henan.

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The course of learning to design and develop cultural and creative products is used to impart knowledge to students at Henan University of Science and Technology. For students interested in art design and cultural heritage protection, a multimedia teaching method was used, covering 36 students, including ten first-year students, 12 second-year students, eight third-year students, and six fourth-year students. Through the multimedia teaching model, students use cultural and creative product design knowledge to gain a new understanding and experience of the paper-cutting art of Western Henan. Figure 2 displays the QR code for the Western Henan paper-cutting introduction and cultural and creative design.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study found that the concepts, theories and research results were consistent and different, but still aligned with the purpose of the study. The following is a discussion of the results in combination with the knowledge and attitudes found about the inheritance of the paper-cutting art culture in Western Henan and other related cultural heritage studies.

Researcher Zhu (2023) deeply analyzed the artistic characteristics, inheritance, and development of paper-cutting in Western Henan. Paper-cutting in Western Henan shows unique local colors because it is deeply influenced by regional culture. However, over time, this traditional art form has faced challenges such as inheritance difficulties and technology loss. As society pays more attention to traditional culture, more and more researchers are paying attention to this field and exploring better ways of inheritance and development.

In a similar vein, Huang and Laoakka (2024) explored the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage through digital media, focusing on the Yiwulv Mountain Manchu paper-cutting tradition. Their study, titled "Yiwulv Mountain Manchu paper-cutting: Designing and developing digital media for learning about cultural heritage," provides a contemporary perspective on how traditional art forms can



Figure 2. "YUJIANJIANZHI" Western Henan paper-cutting introduction and cultural and creative design display QR code

be preserved and taught using modern technology. This approach offers a potential solution to the inheritance challenges faced by traditional paper-cutting arts, not only in Western Henan but also in other regions with rich cultural heritage.

Ye and Hu (2022) analyzed paper-cutting in Western Henan from the perspective of regional culture and modeling language, emphasizing its uniqueness from paper-cutting in other places. Paper-cutting in Western Henan has a long history and profound cultural heritage, showing the unique cultural characteristics of Western Henan, such as the coexistence of rough and bold styles, and gentle and elegant styles of the fusion of northern and southern cultures.

This study uses semiotic theory to systematically analyze paper-cutting in Western Henan, especially in the design of cultural and creative products. Through Saussure's semiotic concept, the study divides the artistic value of paper-cutting in Western Henan into concrete value (signifier) and abstract value (symbol), and explores the unique application potential of paper-cutting in Western Henan in modern design. This combination not only preserves the cultural value and artistic beauty of paper-cutting in Western Henan but also provides new vitality and theoretical perspectives for the design of cultural and creative products.

The work of Huang and Laoakka (2024) complements this approach by demonstrating how digital media can be leveraged to preserve and teach traditional paper-cutting techniques. Their research suggests that digital platforms can serve as a bridge between traditional art forms and modern learning methods, potentially addressing some of the inheritance challenges identified in the Western Henan paper-cutting tradition.

Through a literature review, the inheritance and preservation dilemma of paper-cutting in Western Henan was studied, and it was found that there are currently three main inheritance modes: family-based, master-apprentice-based, and social-based. Family and master-apprentice inheritance are still the mainstream, but they face the risk of the lack of young heirs and a narrowing scope of inheritance. Through interviews and surveys, the study revealed that the average age of the new generation of inheritors of paper-cutting in Western Henan is between 60 and 70 years old, and inheritance faces severe challenges.

The digital approach proposed by Huang and Laoakka (2024) could potentially address some of these challenges by making the art form more accessible to younger generations and widening the scope of inheritance beyond traditional family and master-apprentice relationships. Their research suggests that digital media can not only preserve the techniques and designs of traditional paper-cutting but also make them more engaging and interactive for modern learners.

In addition, the study also found other problems, such as challenges in public awareness, commercialization, economic benefits of inheritors, and protection of intangible cultural heritage. These issues are not unique to Western Henan but are common challenges faced by many traditional art forms around the world. The integration of digital technologies, as demonstrated by Huang and Laoakka's (2024) work, could offer new avenues for raising public awareness, creating

commercial opportunities, and enhancing the economic viability of these cultural practices while ensuring their protection as intangible cultural heritage.

Lack of Cultural Identity

Through the literature review, field investigation and interview research, it is found that under the impact of multiculturalism, the paper-cutting art in Western Henan is gradually causing the reduction of corresponding religious beliefs. Due to the fixed inheritance method of paper-cutting art in Western Henan, the thinking of inheritors is limited, which curbs the development of paper-cutting culture. In addition, paper-cutting artists in Western Henan lack the promotion of traditional culture, as well as people's weakened social recognition of the value of paper-cutting, which hinders the development of belief culture in paper-cutting art. On different traditional festivals, various paper-cutting projects should be undertaken to celebrate and express people's spiritual sustenance; but now, this traditional paper-cutting custom is being obliterated by the times. Many young people know little about the paper-cutting art of Western Henan. The paper-cutting art of Western Henan is a valuable cultural resource consciously inherited by the people of Western Henan, and a spiritual pillar of remote rural areas. Its cultural concept of maintaining family survival and maintaining the life attributes of folk friendliness, diligence, strength and simplicity is currently difficult to be widely recognized by modern society. These factors are constantly reducing the cultural identity of the people of Western Henan in the realm of paper-cutting art.

Insufficient Commercial Development

The consumption environment of paper-cutting art in China is poor. The average price of paper-cutting works of art is about 100 yuan, but the time cost of hand-made paper-cutting is much higher than the price of buying paper-cutting products. At present, a large number of mechanical paper-cutting products are flooding the market, which has severely impacted the enthusiasm of craftsmen for original design, and has reduced their lack the enthusiasm for creation. In addition, the brand awareness of paper-cutting in Western Henan is not strong and the dissemination is weak. Most paper-cutting artists regard paper-cutting creation as a daily leisure and entertainment activity. They have no awareness of investigating consumers' cultural preferences, and the paper-cutting works they create are not based on consumer needs. The main force of paper-cutting art creation in Western Henan, which is mainly done by farmers, also has certain difficulties in the publicity and promotion of paper-cutting culture.

Unbalanced Economic Benefits

Nowadays, there are fewer young people learning paper-cutting skills in Western Henan, which cannot support the long-term development of paper-cutting culture. The current high-intensity, fast-paced life has greatly changed the environment that nurtured paper-cutting culture. More and

more people are working in cities, and the main body of paper-cutting is gradually disappearing. Traditional paper-cutting themes mostly reflect farming life, and its expression elements are mostly flowers, plants and poultry commonly seen in rural areas, which is very different from people's urban life, making it difficult for urban residents to have psychological resonance and recognition of paper-cutting art.

There are few young inheritors of paper-cutting art in Western Henan. On the one hand, it is because the inheritors of intangible cultural heritage have not done enough to pass on the paper-cutting culture. Some inheritors of skills receive subsidies from the state and enjoy an empty reputation, but do not undertake the task and mission of inheritance; on the other hand, with the development of society, more employment opportunities are provided for young people. The paper-cutting industry requires more effort to learn, study, and endure hardships, so that one can learn something, but the economic benefits it brings are limited. Thus, many young people choose to give up paper-cutting art.

Through an in-depth analysis of the inheritance and development difficulties of paper-cutting in Western Henan, it can be found that with this background, exploring the brand models of paper-cutting in Western Henan, highly concentrating on the cultural value of paper-cutting in Western Henan, and producing paper-cutting derivatives that conform to modern society are crucial to improving the current vicious competition of paper-cutting in Western Henan. Further, these initiatives can open up the commercial market of paper-cutting in Western Henan. The cultural and creative product design of paper-cutting in Western Henan only echoes the impact of modern society on traditional culture. By innovating the themes and forms of paper-cutting art, constantly incorporating new elements of the times, and recreating the paper-cutting of paper-cutting artists so that paper-cutting becomes another level of commodity, it can not only counter the current mechanized paper-cutting products, but also increase the value of paper-cutting commodities and create more economic benefits for paper-cutting artists. At the same time, the branding of paper-cutting in Western Henan and the design and production of cultural and creative products will also create more jobs for artists engaged in paper-cutting creation, and provide more possibilities for the younger inheritance of paper-cutting art. The development of cultural and creative products not only drives the industrialization of paper-cutting in Western Henan, but also helps the spread of paper-cutting culture in Western Henan. With the help of modern design products, the style of paper-cutting in Western Henan can be retained, providing guarantees for the innovation, dissemination and inheritance of paper-cutting in Western Henan.

This section discusses the application value of cultural and creative product design in the inheritance and protection of paper-cutting in Western Henan. The literature shows that cultural and creative design is an important form of IP transformation of handicraft cultural resources. Although traditional handicrafts have gradually lost their original use functions, their inheritance is mainly based on cultural value. The intervention of design has activated these resources.

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Through cultural and creative design and IP development, the use value of traditional handicrafts has been extended, and modern design has cultural significance, thereby conveying traditional cultural genes.

Modern cultural and creative products are a way of cultural presentation, from which consumers can gain spiritual enjoyment. Integrating intangible cultural heritage into cultural and creative design not only increases economic benefits, but also enhances the presence of intangible cultural heritage and promotes its inheritance and development. For example, cloisonné craftsmanship and rice paper making techniques are important intangible cultural heritages in this researcher's country, and their development is closely related to the social, economic and cultural background of the historical period. In the design of cultural and creative products, the use of intangible cultural heritage needs to pay attention to design form, color-matching, material application and cultural connotation to meet the practical needs of consumers, thereby enhancing cultural confidence and promoting the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage.

Integrating intangible cultural heritage into modern design has attracted widespread attention, especially in the design of cultural and creative products. Through the innovative application of intangible cultural heritage, the brand effect and influence of cultural and creative products can be enhanced, and a new way for the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage can be provided. This integration is not only a way of promoting a living inheritance, but also promotes the common development of intangible cultural heritage and modern design. According to the current situation of intangible cultural heritage, creative products are produced, such as through the development and innovation of tourism products to meet the needs of the contemporary aesthetic market. This design not only protects and inherits intangible cultural heritage, but also promotes the development of the cultural and creative industry, achieving a dual improvement in economic and cultural benefits.

In summary, the literature survey shows that the application of intangible cultural heritage in the design of cultural and creative products is mostly concentrated on design practice, and the application of design methods and concepts is rarely discussed. Based on the theory of semiotics and combined with design psychology, this study conducts a strategic analysis of the design of cultural and creative products of paper-cutting in Western Henan, emphasizing the logic, scientific-orientation, and rationality of the research.

In the context of rapid technological development, it has become particularly important to study the history and knowledge development of paper-cutting in Western Henan, as well as the process of developing cultural and creative products. Through digital technology and media, one can more effectively inherit and spread the cultural heritage of paper-cutting in Western Henan. Modern technology provides new opportunities and challenges for teaching. Teachers need to use digital technology to develop

paper-cutting course modules, integrate historical and cultural background information, enhance students' learning experience, and provide new inspiration and materials for the design of cultural and creative products. Social media also plays a facilitating role in this process, helping students understand paper-cutting culture and providing a promotion platform for the development of cultural and creative products. By combining traditional art with modern design, one can give new vitality and market potential to paper-cutting in Western Henan.

CONCLUSION

By combining traditional paper-cutting art with modern design, this unique cultural heritage can be effectively inherited and promoted. In terms of teaching, the use of digital technology and online platforms to develop innovative course modules enables students to learn the history and skills of paper-cutting anytime and anywhere. This not only improves the flexibility and interactivity of learning, but also stimulates students' interest in traditional art. By integrating paper-cutting art into the design of cultural and creative products, products with both cultural value and modern aesthetics can be created. Further, it can promote the inheritance and development of paper-cutting in Western Henan. The application of social media and digital tools provides important support for this process, making the dissemination and education of cultural content more efficient and extensive. In short, this design and teaching method that combines tradition and modernity provides new opportunities and directions for the protection and innovation of paper-cutting in Western Henan, and also provides new thinking for art design courses.

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