

characteristics and national spirit. It reflects the system of philosophy, art and color composition in the original Chinese culture. Some popular categories include paper-cutting; floury flower; dress and ornament; embroidery; dye and knitting; exorciser related masks and customs; painting; New Year picture; leather silhouette; puppet; toy; kite; paper folding and lighting art; folk theatrical mask; chess; puzzle; pottery; engraving; residential building; vehicle decoration; household appliance; etc.

4. It is a sector of Chinese parent art. Emerged in primitive society, Chinese folk art inherited the cultural tradition of national literature and art development throughout each and every period in a history of over several thousand years.

5. It is distinctively characterized by individual nationality and geographical region.

6. It is created with commonplace tools and indigent raw materials, characterized by rural natural economy of the region.

In sum, folk art is a unique sector among Chinese national art that enjoys the most popularity and with the richest resource of historical culture. It is directly embedded in people's every day life and best characterized by the geographical region it represents. It is a long-standing, signature art form of Chinese nation with over 8000 years of history and cultural progress going all the way back to primitive society. From the worship of nature, totem and ancestor; to the urban residence culture of modern capitalist commodity economy; the cultural identity of each historical period is recognizable in single piece of art work in some cases. It is truly a living fossil and a museum of national historical culture.

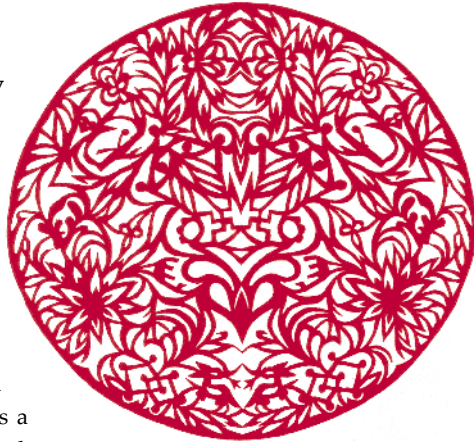
It is also necessary to address some misinterpretations in defining the concept of Chinese folk art:

Firstly, the notion to characterize Chinese folk art as "willful creations." I disagree. Willfulness can be found in Chinese paintings, art work and art style of career artists or professionals. It is not a definition of folk art. On the other hand, there is a variety of categories and diverse art styles in folk art. They are not all willful creations.

Secondly, "change of appearance" is the basic feature. I disagree. Change of appearance is not an exclusive technique employed in Chinese folk art. It is used by career artists too. In modern art, the style of changing appearance attempts to lead the trend of its time. The issue is not the appearance, or the change; it is to show what and how to change. The change of appearance in Chinese folk art is determined by the original Chinese philosophical comprehension, art system and its aesthetic view, apart

Totem

A ball flower paper-cut “Baby with coiled hair” is very popular among the folks on the loess plateau along the Yellow River basin. In the center of the ball is this baby with coiled hair, who is patron saint and god of propagation on loess plateau. Wearing a hair style with double coils upward to the sky, and holding a pair of fish in both arms, she assumes a squatting posture as if giving birth. The lower part



of her body is a pair of scissors pointing downward to imply the nature of male or yang, which, corresponding with her hair coils implies that she is hermaphroditic god of the universe. Scissors is yang by nature, a sharp tool that keeps away evil spirits and disasters. As a folk proverb goes: “Awl and scissors drive away the five poisonous creatures.” Some folk art works make the eyes of god as the sun. The two breasts are the two eyes of a cicada, a legendary animal of propagation, to symbolize a continued and never ending posterity. On each side are symbols of “Sheng” (A music instrument, hegemony of “birth” in Chinese), or lotus flowers. “Sheng” is “birth” and lotus is a proliferous symbol with male nature. A local folk proverb goes: “When lotus and sweet osmanthus growing out of a bucket, we have sons, daughters and nephews; when golden cicada blowing ‘Sheng,’ family posterity never ends.” “A ripe persimmon bears eight precious ‘Sheng (kids),’ and a lotus plants the seeds.” In this art work, god of the universe holds yin and yang two fish,



Talisman ornaments as antidotes to the five poisonous creatures

Upper left : Tiger ornament (Qingyang, Gansu)

Upper right : Garlic ornament (Zhengning, Gansu)

Middle left : Gourd ornament (Qingyang, Gansu)

Middle right : Mugwort stuffed tiger (Zhengning, Gansu)

Below: Eight diagram ornament (Qingyang, Gansu)

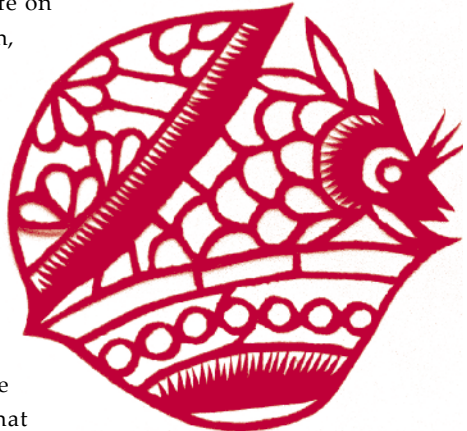
The Shaping Structure

Yin-yang Structure

On Chinese New Year of the year of rat, a woman farmer named Li Aiping sent me a paper-cut of “rat coming out of a Buckled bowl”, named “Rat biting open the sky.” According to the folklore, rat and fish are proliferation saints. The buckled bowl symbolizes the undivided universe. On the year of rat, the rat came out to bite open the sky and started life on earth. Polyspermic plants like gourd, pumpkin, grape, are also symbols of propagation. In art works, their function of producing seeds is what it matters. Therefore, in spite that the seeds can not be seen from the outside, they are still being drawn. Once I mentioned to the women that the pumpkin seeds were not visible, they said, “But pumpkin has seeds.” Then I realized that it was not the gourd, the pumpkin or the grape that they wanted to draw, it was the seeds inside. The seeds were metaphorical of the children that were conceived by the uterus (In the form of a gourd, a pumpkin and grape) of mother’s body.



Folk paper-cut “Rat biting open the sky” (Lvliang, Shanxi).



Folk paper-cut displaying the scene when the sky and earth open up, fish, the creator of the universe, comes out to produce human and all living things on earth (Huangling, Shaanxi).



"Rooster" wearing a "clouds hook" (Ansai, Shaanxi).

looking and in bright colors. I asked her why she drew only one big rooster. She said that to be big was to be strong and powerful. I asked why she drew such a big crest. "Big rooster always has a big crest." "What about the tail, and such strong legs?" "Big rooster has huge tail, and strong, hairy legs! It crows too." The generosity and the vigor shown in their art works are representative of Chinese national spirit and the emotional and psychological qualities of the Chinese community. It would be hard to find pessimistic, sentimental art works full of self-absorbency and self-admiration which are common occurrence among the works by professional artists.

When depicting human or animal eyes, they always draw a round eyeball right in the center of the eye white, without any sheltering by the eye lids. They believed that it made the eye look bright and full of life. The embroidered rats always have three colorful lines out of the eyes known as "three stitches." It is a custom to liken the eye to the sun and the lines to sun rays.

When we were in the class in the Chinese Fine Art Institute, a graduate student created a large paper-cut in the theme of birth, marriage and death. At an art work open house, our guest grannies all disagreed to include death in it. One said, "Don't let him die. Keep him alive to serve the people." Another student copied a model of Granny Hu Fenglian's paper-cut "The Rooster," but left out the symbol "Sheng" or the "Clouds hook", as unnecessary. Granny Hu said, "You can leave out other parts, but not the 'sheng,' because that is the symbol of life, the heart and the soul of this art work." These words provided us some good "food" for thought.