

Visual Interpretation of Cultural Symbols of Shandong Folk Shoe Embroidery Pattern Paper Cutting

Guo YueTong¹, Dr. Neesa Ameer Mohamed Salim^{2*}

^{1,2*}Jalan Ilmu 1/1, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Universiti Teknologi MARA

¹Email ID: 2022630762@student.uitm.edu.my

***Corresponding author:**

Dr. Neesa Ameer Mohamed Salim

Email ID: neesa@uitm.edu.my

Cite this paper as: Guo YueTong, Dr. Neesa Ameer Mohamed Salim, (2025) Visual Interpretation of Cultural Symbols of Shandong Folk Shoe Embroidery Pattern Paper Cutting. *Journal of Neonatal Surgery*, 14 (32s), 1609-1618.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the cultural symbolism embedded in *Shandong Folk Shoe Embroidery Pattern Paper Cutting*, with a focus on how these visual forms convey shared cultural values and collective identity. The research seeks to identify key cultural symbols that represent the transmissibility of common cultural beliefs and to examine how semiotic methods can be used to interpret these symbols. Drawing upon Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic concepts of "reference" and "denotation," this study adopts a qualitative research design to analyze selected examples of folk paper cutting. The findings reveal that recurring motifs—such as butterflies, lotuses, bats, and magpies—serve as visual narratives symbolizing values like fortune, prosperity, longevity, and happiness. These symbols not only fulfill decorative purposes but also embody emotional resonance and social meaning, reflecting the aesthetic ideals and spiritual aspirations of local communities. The study concludes that this form of paper cutting integrates realism and symbolism, functioning as a medium of cultural expression and emotional articulation. Ultimately, this research offers insight into how traditional Chinese folk art operates as a vehicle for cultural transmission and emphasizes its relevance in contemporary efforts toward the preservation and revitalization of intangible heritage.

Keywords: Paper cutting, Pattern, Symbolic analysis, Cultural heritage

1. INTRODUCTION

Shoe insoles, which are used in daily life, have evolved over thousands of years and have relatively stable shapes and varied decorations. The design of the insole decoration is not visual art because of the function of the insole under the foot, and the uniqueness of the design and its intention is reflected here. Paper-cut insole pattern is an important part of Shandong folk culture and an important form of Chinese folk art, which exists in the profound background of Chinese life with distinctive regional characteristics, the form of paper-cut insole pattern can be divided into several subgroups: for example, the "northern group" in Shanxi and Shandong provinces is mainly based on longevity themes, while the "Jiangsu and Zhejiang group" in Jiangsu province is mainly based on longevity themes. Jiangsu Province's "Jiangsu and Zhejiang Group" to the national essence and practical subjects, Guizhou and Yunnan, Sichuan Province's "Southwest Group" to the theme of love (Zhang, 2018). This paper takes Shandong folk paper cutting as a typical example. According to the folklore fieldwork conducted by several scholars in the region, despite the great historical upheavals, the style of Shandong folk paper-cutting has remained relatively stable, with a focus on wholeness and a sense of completeness in the composition, which is in line with the traditional Chinese concept of aesthetics and aesthetic psychology. The working people incorporate their own joys and sorrows into the creative process, explore their ideals and beliefs, and endow people with a spiritual attachment, giving paper-cutting a more profound means of folk art expression. In particular, it's unique image-based modeling, internal decoration, the use of figurative modeling with the type of decoration, the use of abstract patterns, and the combination of yin and yang line carving modeling characteristics, image-based modeling as the foundation of the art of paper-cutting, coupled with the shaping of the outer contour modeling, with a distinctive and prominent features of the object, and further with the internal decorations, the details can be full of touching. It not only makes the modeling means of Shandong paper-cutting full of charm but also gives its modeling a vigorous vitality.

1.1. Research Questions

- 1.1.1 What are the key cultural symbols in Shandong Folk Shoe Embroidery Pattern Paper Cutting that represent the contagiousness of a common culture, and how can semiotics be used to identify and define them?
- 1.1.2 Shandong Folk Shoe Embroidery Pattern Paper Cutting How can shared cultural content be interpreted visually, and what semiotic methods can be used to analyze these interpretations?

1.2. Research Objectives

- 1.2.1 Identify and analyze the key cultural symbols embedded in Shandong folk shoe embroidery pattern paper cuttings in order to symbolize and convey common cultural values and collective identity.
- 1.2.2. Use semiotic analysis to interpret the meanings and cultural narratives embedded in the visual compositions and visual and symbolic elements of Shandong folk shoe embroidery pattern paper cuttings

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Theoretical Basis

The concepts of “reference” and “denotation” are two fundamental concepts in linguistics, first introduced by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. These two concepts are used to explain how symbols or languages relate to the real-world things or concepts they represent (Culler, 1986; Long & He, 2021; Salupere, 2013; Sedda, 2015). Canonicity refers to the sound or formal part of a symbol or linguistic unit, i.e. the specific form of expression that we hear or see. For example, in the word “cat,” the sound or written form of the word “cat” is its referent. The referent is the concept or meaning that the symbol or linguistic unit evokes in people's minds. Continuing with the example of “cat”, when we say or think of “cat”, the image that comes to our mind is that of a small mammal with four legs and a tail, usually with fur, as well as various concepts and associations associated with it, which is the This is what

In Saussure's linguistic theory, the relationship between reference and denotation is arbitrary, that is to say, there is no necessary logical connection as to why we use the word “cat” to refer to that particular animal, and this connection is made by social and cultural conventions. This viewpoint has had a profound influence on the later theories of structuralism, post-structuralism, and semiotics.

2.2 Research Design

In this section, the researcher will discuss the methods, tools, and procedures used by the researcher for data collection. The purpose of this study is to conduct a cultural symbolic interpretation of Shandong folk shoe embroidery pattern paper cutting. This approach will use qualitative research methods to answer the research objectives of this study. In order to answer the first aim of this study, the researcher will use qualitative methods and data collection as tools to study and analyze the existing Shandong folk shoe embroidery pattern paper cutting and decide which medium to use as a quasi-experimental intervention in the future stages of this study.

After collecting all the necessary data, the researcher will enter the analysis stage and conduct cultural symbol analysis through the semiotic analysis method. The scope of the theme is the existing paper-cut works of Shandong folk shoe embroidery pattern theatre, and everything revolves around this theme.

3. SHOE INSOLE CUTOOT PATTERN SYMBOL ANALYSIS

Shandong, including Lunan, Jiaodong, and Northwest Lu, is the center of ancient culture in China and is famous for Qilu culture (Xu, 2017). Among them, the paper-cutting in Jiaodong region is famous for its combination of beautiful and delicate and simple and childish styles. From the point of view of symbolic language, the abstract patterns commonly used in Shandong paper-cutting include geometric patterns and sawtooth patterns. In terms of sawtooth patterns, they can be decorated on flowers and trees, as well as on the interior and edges of animal shapes. In figure paper-cutting, jagged patterns can decorate eyebrows, eyes, hair and body. Paper cuttings in the Gaomi region make good use of serrated motifs, which are skillfully used in many shapes to form beautiful rhythms and rhymes and increase the attractiveness of the image. These abstract patterns are versatile, pleasing in appearance and complex, reflecting the ingenuity and creativity of the laborers. In some works, it is even more impressive than the figurative modeling and decoration. For example, in the paper-cutting depicting butterflies, the paper-cutting is decorated with abstract geometric patterns arranged in sequence, and the whole picture is very vivid and rhythmic. Most of the paper-cutting works in Shandong combine abstract and figurative forms to portray objects. The skillful combination of the two modeling techniques makes nature and art one and enriches the language of paper-cutting.

Shandong is known as “the state of Qilu, the land of etiquette”, and the cultures of Qi and Lu coexist side by side, collectively known as the Qilu culture, which is deeply rooted. Qi culture originated in the coastal state of Qi, absorbing local traditions and emphasizing innovation to support state rule. In contrast, the Lu culture is rooted in Confucianism from the Spring and Autumn periods, emphasizing etiquette and the state's ritual and music system. The fusion of these two cultures gave

Shandong a rich and profound cultural identity. Qilu culture represents the main elements of Shandong's regional culture, including the principles of being people-oriented, focusing on etiquette, and the Three Principles and Five Constants. The Qilu culture is guided by the "Middle Way", which pursues harmony between man and nature and is thus able to adapt and develop over time. This cultural foundation has profoundly influenced Shandong folklore, especially Confucianism, which has shaped the local people's way of thinking, emotional structure, and values (Liu, 2011; Qu, 2020). The people of Shandong revere filial piety and are guided by teachings such as "When parents are present, they do not travel far" and the principles of cultivating one's body, aligning the family, and governing the country. The Confucian Book of Filial Piety from the state of Lu during the Spring and Autumn Period epitomizes these values.

The regional culture of Shandong is characterized by modesty, respect, and humility. Regional diversity creates different customs, such as the differences between coastal and inland cities. For example, the Jiaodong region on the coast of Shandong is influenced by the abundance of seafood (Xu, 2017; Zhang, 2018), giving rise to unique folk arts, such as paper-cutting, with a maritime flavor. In contrast, the inland region displays artistic symbols such as the Han pictorial stones from the Wushu Ancestral Shrine in Jining, which combine aesthetic values with didactic narratives, reflecting local values and traditions of the times. As a major agricultural province, Shandong's farming culture is reflected in its folk art. Laborers transform everyday objects such as noodles into artistic expressions, demonstrating their creativity in daily life. These regional characteristics, shaped by geography and culture, emphasize Shandong's diversity and distinguish its folk art traditions from the rest of China. Shandong's cultural traditions are heavily influenced by Confucian values and regional differences, making it a unique symbol of Chinese culture. Through the fusion of Qilu culture, Shandong continues to embody a balance between tradition and innovation, preserving rich traditions while adapting to modern developments.

Folk insole art, as an element of women's red culture in folk art, has always been disdained by elite artists because it is the culture of the feet (Qi & Bai, n. d.). However, many court painters and literati painters from ancient times to the present have drawn inspiration and sustenance from folk art (Wang, 2022). People have found that the modern art, which is highly respected by the art world, has a lot in common with the primitive wildness of folk primitive art. What's more important is that the folk art embodies the people's true desire for life and nature, the persistent pursuit of good luck and happiness, as well as the folk artists' pure aesthetic interest and superb creativity, which have been fully embodied and verified in the Shandong folk paper-cutting insoles patterns. The pattern of Shandong folk paper-cut insoles has been fully realized and verified.

Shandong paper-cut insole patterns are known for their plant and animal forms, as well as compact, plain monochrome displays, focusing on lines, emphasizing shapes, and thick decorative techniques to make their simple and fresh appearance fuller and richer. It is characterized by an overall sprightliness and detailed interior decoration. As a matter of fact, paper-cut insole patterns are usually made for proofing embroidery patterns on insoles, which, as one of the blessed gifts given by the elderly to their juniors in Chinese culture, usually have strong blessing symbols. The cultural symbols embedded in the paper-cut insole patterns, as exemplified in the sample (Fig 1), can be summarized in two categories: animals and plants. Animal symbols mainly include butterflies, phoenixes, bats, goldfish, and magpies. The plant symbols are mainly the lotus, the juxtaposed lotus and the sunflower. Some of these symbols have the same syllabic blessing words in Chinese; bat is the same sound as blessing and magpie is the same sound as joy. Each paper-cutting pattern has a rich cultural connotation and represents the symbolism of the diverse cultures of the art of paper-cutting.

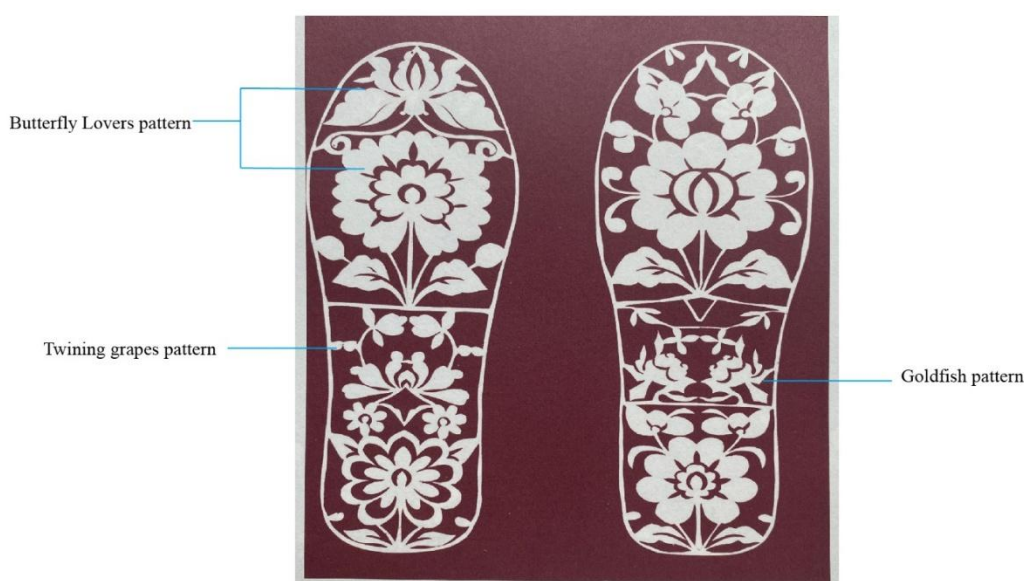


Fig. 1 Shandong Folk Shoe Embroidery Pattern Paper Cutting, (Bao, 2017)

3.1. Butterfly Lovers Pattern

According to the available information, similar butterfly utensils first appeared in the Zhejiang Hemudu Neolithic site, in the 5th century BC, “Erya” has appeared in the word “butterfly”, and in a number of ancient texts have been recorded. Butterfly pattern development has gone through a long process, in different stages with different forms of presentation, the Tang Dynasty began butterfly patterns in small-scale porcelain application of engraved patterns; the Song Dynasty butterfly patterns were favored by many literati and elegant people, by the influence of humanities bird and flower painting, began to prevail; the Ming Dynasty began to butterfly pattern gradually as the main pattern appeared in porcelain; butterfly decorations in the Qing Dynasty reached the highest peak of the development of this period is the first time in history that butterflies are the most common pattern in the Qing Dynasty, this period is the first time that butterflies are the most common pattern in the Qing Dynasty. Butterfly patterns in this period are the most diverse forms since the dynasties, the most exaggerated structure, the most colorful, the most widely used, and very decorative. Most of the butterfly patterns used in Shandong folk paper-cut insole flowers are Ming system patterns, butterfly wings stretching, with bright colors, beautiful shapes, and strong styling features.

Butterfly pattern of the Ming Dynasty is characterized by appropriate distortion and exaggeration on the basis of realism, butterfly features clear, natural and beautiful form, very three-dimensional, rich in decorative. There are many butterfly pattern in the butterfly wings on the design of the conscious expansion, the use of color has gradually become bold, there is a trend of competition, but the layout of the picture is still not lack of rigorous style. They are often combined with flowers, fruits and phoenixes to form auspicious patterns, and they send out worldly good desires. Butterfly also known as the “Flower and Butterfly Pattern”, is a combination of butterflies and flowers, this pattern in the Qing Dynasty has been very common, and is widely used in embroidery and porcelain, peony, chrysanthemums, magnolias, and other plants are often used with butterflies to form the flower and butterfly pattern. The most representative one is the peony, whose delicate posture symbolizes nobility and elegance. It is often used in combination with butterflies to symbolize prosperity and happiness and is loved by the world. Peony’s elegance is regarded as so supreme and impressive that Zhou Dunyi, a famous academic of the Song Dynasty, praised it as the representative of the rich and the influential in his article “Discussion on Loving the Lotus”. Thus, the Peony flower became the most common symbol of wealth and stature on a papercut (Wang, 2013).

The butterfly pattern in Fig1 is a bipartite continuous modeling. Bipartite continuity refers to the unit pattern up and down or left and right, repeatedly and continuously organized to form horizontal or vertical stripes, especially scattered, wavy lines, folded lines, vertical, diagonal, horizontal, rotating and other forms of organization, this form of organization has a very rich rhythm and rhyme. This kind of composition is also often used as the decoration of the collar, cuffs, side seams, and seams of garments. The butterfly's life is as short and beautiful as a flash in the pan and can evoke an emotional resonance for beautiful and broken things. Therefore, the butterfly pattern expresses people's desire for freedom and love and is considered a symbol of happiness and beauty. Butterflies in love with flowers are often used to symbolize good love and happy marriage, showing people's desire for the best and the most beautiful. The butterfly pattern always gives people the feeling of the human atmosphere that people generally aspire to in real life, showing a strong human flavor. This also echoes the fact that insole flowers are usually items prepared by the elderly at home for their children and grandchildren, with a strong emotional attachment.

In addition, the butterfly pattern, as an important symbol of the Miao culture, carries a rich semantic meaning. In the legends and myths of the Miao people, butterflies are often regarded as symbols of life and reproduction, which is closely related to the importance the Miao people attach to fertility and offspring (SHEN, 2024). The Miao people worship butterflies, believing them to be spiritual beings in the natural world and the link between them and nature in a harmonious coexistence.

3.2. Twining grapes pattern

The Chinese have the design principle that “the picture must be meaningful and the meaning must be auspicious” for the pattern decoration. In ancient times, people usually used decorative motifs to express their heartfelt wishes, and the use of these auspicious motifs has been widely spread to the present. Whether in form or content, twining pattern has unique national sentiment and artistic spirit. Tangled branch motifs are also known as trailing grass motifs, wanshou vines, turning branch motifs, and continuous branch motifs. It is a traditional auspicious decoration based on vines and curly grass, which means that the vines are growing and spreading, entangled and continuous.

The twining branch pattern originated in the Han Dynasty, formed during the Wei, Jin, and North and South Dynasties, and became widespread during the Tang and Song Dynasties. Auspicious motifs such as concentric knots and linked branches appeared in popular door god paintings during the Tang Dynasty, and developed to its peak during the Ming Dynasty, where it was influenced by foreign cultures and derived rich structural styles during its long history of development. Plant motifs were widely used in the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. From the Greek Corinthian to the Roman twining motifs, most of them used the theme of Lonicera (honeysuckle) and grapevines. Lonicera was spread to the east from the late Hellenistic period to the period of the Roman Empire, and along with the expansion of the Empire, it spread to the Ganges River and the Indus River Basin, which had a great influence on the decoration of the early days of Ancient India, and it can even be said that the decorative art of Ancient India “had elements of Greek art in its beginning”, and we can say that the

decorative art of Ancient India “has elements of Greek art”. Elements of Greek art”, we see in Gandhara art of those with obvious Greek style statues and decorations is proof. Lonicera also became a common form of decoration in ancient India, and finally, it was introduced to China. However, Lonicera decoration in China only popular in the large number of absorption of foreign styles of the North and South Dynasties period, to the Tang Dynasty has gradually evolved into a unique Chinese characteristics of the twining pattern - Tang scroll pattern, the original form of Lonicera has been less used. China to Lonicera as the theme of the earliest is in the Han Dynasty bronze mirror edge of the use of scrolling cloud pattern (Wang, 2023), but this is only the use of a very basic leaf style. To the North and South Dynasties to be popular, to the Tang Dynasty has evolved into a complex scroll grass (also known as vanilla in recent times), this theme in the subsequent generations gradually evolved into a variety of twining branches like flowers, peonies, lotus decorations.

Tangled branch pattern exactly from where the origin of the current academic community has not yet a unified statement. Can be roughly divided into the evolution of native patterns and foreign pattern evolution of two categories. Native pattern evolution theory and there are two main arguments. One is the twining branch pattern by the dogwood pattern changes. The second is that the twining branch pattern comes from the cloudy pattern (Qin and Han) of the scrolling cloud pattern, and changes on the basis of the scrolling grass pattern and Lonicera pattern. In the late era of change absorbed a lot of foreign culture, and in the traditional craft and aesthetic changes in the interests of gradually evolved into today's visual form. Some scholars believe that the twining branch pattern is fundamentally a foreign pattern, originating from the Egyptian region, the Mediterranean region of the scroll pattern. This argument was put forward by Isis Riegel and is widely recognized in the Western academic community. It is believed that the twining branch pattern is changed from the foreign Lonicera pattern, in the Han Dynasty with the introduction of other cultures, and through the spread of some Central Asian architectural decoration. (Lonicera is the classic botanical pattern in the decorative art of grottoes from the Wei Jin Dynasty to the North and South Dynasties).

In traditional Chinese cultural imagery, long and continuous things are often associated with longevity, coupled with the evergreen, endless characteristics of vines, twining branch pattern also got an alias: longevity vine. Twining pattern has a special sense of rhythm, there are ups and downs, there are ups and downs, there is sound, just like a stage of life, but also as a life handshake connected, meaning “generations of long”. The repetitive layout gives people a sense of overall coordination, and the extended vines link up the whole picture, making the pattern richer and fuller, with vitality. Taking the vines or branches of plants as the skeleton, and combining them with single flowers or fruits, composite twining patterns are formed, such as twining lotus, twining peony, twining chrysanthemum, twining grapes, twining pomegranate, twining ganoderma lucidum, twining gourd, twining passion flower, etc., which add more symbolism to the design. For example, in Buddhism, the lotus flower, which symbolizes pure virtue and cool wisdom, meets with the auspicious twining branch pattern, so that the blessings will be more “lotus” unceasingly.

The time and strong vitality of the twining branch pattern is due to its changes and development in different times and social backgrounds. Botanical patterns are widely distributed in human culture and civilization. It has appeared in different cultures. And similar structures have appeared. Based on the abstraction of plant forms, most of them are based on swirling shapes. The biggest difference between the twining branch pattern and other twining branch patterns is the strong cultural attributes in it. The cultural attributes give the twining branch pattern rich variability.

After Zhang Qian's mission to the Western Regions in the Han Dynasty, a large number of grapes entered China via the Silk Road, which influenced the design of the twining branch pattern and gave rise to a kind of grape twining branch pattern. Grapes themselves have curly branches, which are more suitable for the form of twining pattern. In addition, grapes have many seeds, which symbolize many children, many grandchildren and prosperity, therefore, one of the popular subjects of the twining branch pattern is the twining branch grape pattern.

3.3. Goldfish

Among the many traditional patterns in China, the fish pattern is one of the oldest, most common, and longest-developed patterns, with its origins dating back to the Paleolithic era (Li, 2016). Totem worship is a religious belief that arose during the primitive clan period. In the primitive society, due to the low productivity and production level, people know little about nature, they are “heaven” for “their” appearance by the initial curiosity, fear, in the continuous exploration, especially found that some creatures in the natural world and their own Have a subtle connection, can help their own survival, from the thought of deification, and then into worship, resulting in totem worship. Totem worship arises when there is a totem picture. For example, fish is regarded as the god of water, and people have the belief that fish has the function of the rainmaker. And because of its strong reproductive ability, the fish is gradually worshipped as a symbol of reproductive beliefs. Chinese traditional fish pattern has a long history of development, before the modern society, the development was very slow, traditional fish pattern basically maintain the original style. But in modern society, with the development of industry, economic, social and cultural prosperity and the impact of Western modernist culture, traditional fish patterns have been affected to a certain extent, and many styles are facing the crisis of substitution.

Chinese traditional fish pattern is the materialization of the workers' true feelings, it can satisfy people's spiritual pursuit, and it is the carrier of people's good wishes. The desire for a better life and good fortune is the common wish of everyone, which

is well reflected in both the traditional fish pattern and the use of modern design. In the Chinese context, fish is often used as a harmonic expression, such as “fish” and “Yu” meaning year after year, “Carp” and “Li Carp” and ‘Li’ mean ‘to exchange gifts’. In auspicious patterns, the meaning of fish is more diverse. For example, in the “Golden Jade (Fish) Full Hall” pattern, the fish conveys the meaning of wealth and prosperity. In the “Carp Leaping Dragon Gate” motif, the image of a fish conveys the meaning of soaring to great heights and a sudden change in status. In folk activities, fish also occupy a high position, the fish lantern dance in Qingtian, Zhejiang Province, and the fish and dragon change dance in Sanyuan, Shaanxi Province are all very spectacular. Through the inheritance of folk culture, the fish has gradually become a collective consciousness, an idea solidified, and a symbolic representation, which has become part of the value of traditional fish patterns with its profound connotation and beautiful symbolism.

In Figure 1, the goldfish and the flower branches and leaves form a complementary bipartite continuous symmetrical pattern, signifying the blossoming of wealth and prosperity, which mirrors the entwined grapevine pattern in the left insole. In Figure 2, the goldfish is styled with double fins and a wide tail, which is more artistically expressive in addition to retaining the realistic style. In the layout, techniques such as repetition and dislocation are also added, with a kind of simple compositional interest.

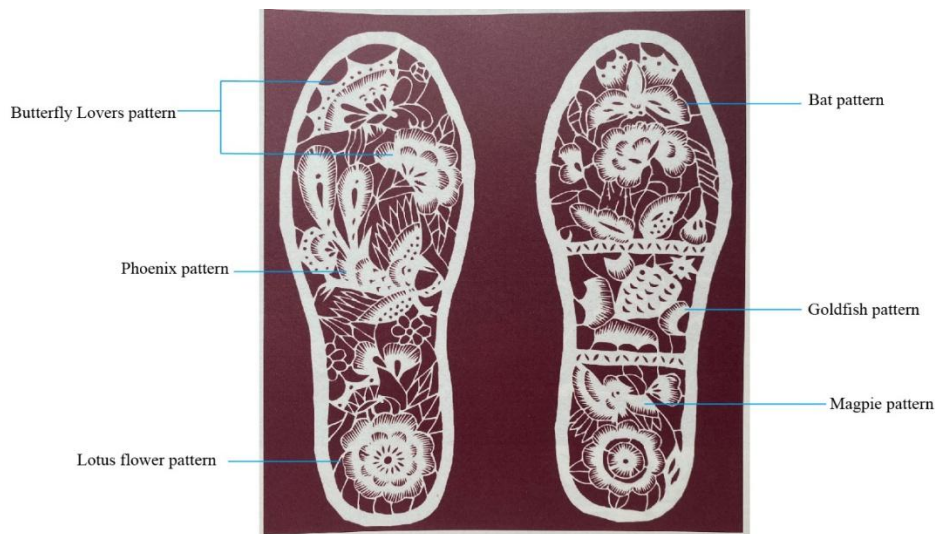


Fig. 2 Shandong Folk Shoe Embroidery Pattern Paper Cutting, (Bao, 2017)

3.4. Phoenix pattern

The phoenix image exists as a totem symbol in Chinese society, with different meanings and expressions depending on the degree of social development and civilization. In the primitive clan society, people created the phoenix image to resist unknowable natural disasters and hope for the peace of the clan; in the more economically developed period, the phoenix image appeared as a symbol with totemic rituals in daily life objects and arts and crafts, praying for people's happiness (Guo & Chen, 2015; Ren, 2018).

First of all, unlike the Western phoenix image, the phoenix image in traditional Chinese folk paper cutting is mostly a combination of triangles, circles and burlap (regular pattern of fine triangles arranged). The second is the strengthening and weakening of the changes in the form of the phoenix pattern. The phoenix image is inspired by birds in nature, but in the artistic creation, artistic trade-offs are made, so that the beauty of nature forms the beauty of the pattern. From imitating birds to depicting and carving them, and then to the surreal artistic expression, human's artistic creation thinking has made a qualitative leap and performance. The artistic creative expression of the details of the wind crown, tail feathers, and wings of the phoenix image, combined with the forms of plants and animals, such as the phoenix crown transformed into the shape of the edge of the flower, and the tail feathers changed into the shape of the plant leaves, which is the enhancement of the art creators to the forms of plants in nature. This surreal expression often makes the animal images and plant patterns in paper-cutting combine naturally and complement each other.

The phoenix was a totem worship object in early Chinese clan society, and was endowed with many divine and spiritual symbols. Both the phoenix image and the bird image have existed as totem worship objects around the world, and still have an important totemic function in economically backward and culturally homogeneous regions. The bird as a totem worship object has been given a variety of meanings, but one of the most important symbols is “eternal life”, no matter what kind of difficulties encountered, the bird totem will be “reborn”. The phoenix is a totem image created by the Chinese by combining the characteristics of different birds, and it also has the symbols of “immortality” and “eternal life”, and the allusion to the

“phoenix nirvana” describes this divine nature of the phoenix. The allusion to the “Phoenix Nirvana” describes this divine nature of the phoenix. The many supernatural powers of the phoenix made it a highly respected totem image in early society. Myths and legends are one of the most important sources for the creation of phoenix images. Many auspicious phoenix patterns are related to legends and stories, such as the double phoenix and peony, the hundred birds facing the wind, the sunrise and singing phoenix, the style peony, and the colorful phoenix flying in a circle, all of them are combinations that often appear in the paper-cutting patterns. There are also legends showing the wind and phoenix with other spirits, such as the phoenix and forest. There are also some that are associated with folklore, symbolizing brightness and happiness for wedding and marriage, and praying for auspicious omens for life, such as the nine phoenixes presenting longevity, the dragon and phoenix presenting good fortune, and the swimming dragon playing with the phoenix. Phoenix myths and legends with a certain religious nature, the ideology of the believers have a binding effect, they will believe that the phoenix is a real bird, which is also the meaning of the phoenix as a totem worship, people need to use the phoenix to give themselves the strength and courage to survive in nature, and in the continuous adaptation and change, to promote the development of human beings and the progress of society.

3.5. Bat pattern

The earliest bat figures with primitive features appeared in the Red Mountain culture of China. During the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, the bat shape was combined with bronze to create a mysterious color. During the Spring and Autumn period, bat motifs were used as a kind of border decoration (Liu, 2013). During the Han Dynasty, the word “bat” was already used as the character for “rich” to take its meaning. Bat pattern reached its heyday in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, when people had a burning desire for patterns with auspicious meanings, coupled with the prosperity of folklore, making the category of pattern subjects increase dramatically.

The Chinese call bats “fairy mice” because they can fly up to the sky, in line with the Chinese concept of close to people's belief in the qualities of the sky, while most of them are higher than the ground, endowing them with mysterious, immortal symbols, representing the cultural symbolism of good luck Rui'an. In the tradition of Chinese medicine, the bat is considered a mysterious and long-lived animal. Because of its diurnal and nocturnal habits, it is believed to live up to a thousand years, and it is said that eating bats can achieve the effect of immortality. In addition, it is commonly hypothesized that bats should have excellent eyesight because of their ability to fly in the dark. Therefore, the excrement of bats is called “night-brightening sand”, which is believed to have the effect of curing eye diseases. Li Shizhen recorded this idea in his Compendium of Materia Medica, where he believed that “night-brightening sand” could be used to treat eye diseases such as internal and external cataracts, green blindness, and night blindness in children.

Analyzed from the perspective of Chinese characters, through the clever conception that “bat” and “fu” have the same sound, and “bat” harmonizes with “change fu”, people have given positive auspicious symbols to bats. Through the clever conception of “bat” and “fu”, “bat” harmonizes with “become lucky” (X. Wang, 2013), people have given the bat a positive and auspicious meaning. The happiness symbolized by the bat motif comes from the clever use of the sound of “Fu”. More interestingly, the bat's unique habit of flying upside down is interpreted as a visual symbol of “good fortune”, further reinforcing the close connection between the bat and the meaning of happiness. Such cultural symbols, embodied both phonetically and visually, enrich the connotation of the bat motif, making it a deeply auspicious cultural pattern in the Chinese context. With the development of human history, people are unconsciously and skillfully integrating all kinds of information into the coding system of symbols. Maslow's theory of psychological needs emphasizes the hierarchical and gradual sublimation of psychological needs. Physiological needs: These are the most basic needs, including food, water, sleep and other basic needs to maintain physical survival. Security needs: once physiological needs are satisfied, people seek security and stability. This includes physical safety and economic safety. Respect Needs: Includes respect for oneself and others, as well as the desire for achievement and recognition. Self-actualization needs: are the highest level of needs, including the pursuit of individual potential, self-development and the achievement of personal goals. The bat motif symbolizes good luck and longevity, which is consistent with people's psychological desire for health and longevity. The “Blessing in front of us” and “Abundant wealth and treasures” motifs carry the desire for material abundance and provide a powerful expression of people's pursuit of higher needs in life. This symbolizes the development of society and the individual's pursuit of prosperity and affluence beyond the basic needs. After these satisfactions, they usually pursue deeper psychological fulfillment, especially the desire for love and happiness. Bat motifs contain deep cultural symbols, such as the “Peaceful Five Fortunes During the Day” and “Peaceful Five Fortunes” motifs, which show people's pursuit of good fortune, well-being and celebration. The “Three Stars of Fortune and Longevity” and “Fortune and Luck” motifs are not only external artistic presentations, but also a profound expression of the individual's pursuit of officialdom and wealth in his or her life's journey.

The reason why “Fu” is ranked as the most auspicious is because it has a wide and deep meaning that can encompass all things. The old saying is “five blessings at the door”. The meanings of the five blessings in written records and folklore are somewhat different. According to the Hongfan volume of the Shangshu, the five blessings are “longevity”, “good fortune”, “health”, “well-being”, and “health”. The five blessings are “longevity”, “good fortune”, “health”, “virtue”, and “good end”. Huan Tan, a Han Dynasty philosopher, wrote in his New Treatise that the five blessings are “longevity” and “happiness,” as well as “nobility” and “peace and happiness.” (Peace and Happiness”) and descendants of the masses (“many descendants”)

. Later it became popular among the general public to refer to “fortune, prosperity, longevity, wealth, and happiness” as the Five Fortunes. Regardless of the combination of “fu”, they are all used to represent the five great goals of life. Happiness has a rich meaning of all the good things that people expect and pray for. People pray for success in their careers, for the Jade Emperor when they seek power, for longevity, for the multiplication of their children and grandchildren, and for “Guan Shiyin Bodhisattva,” but among these, “happiness” is the most all-encompassing (Wang, 2013). Sometimes their prayers do not have a specific goal, and this generalized worship often honors the blessings. To this day, the Chinese character for “Fu” is widely posted on doors and windows during the Chinese New Year for good luck.

3.6. Lotus flower pattern

Lotus pattern is one of the traditional decorative patterns in China. Lotus and people's lives are closely related, can be said to be the great vulgarity of things. Commonly used as food, utensils, elegant into the realm of art and religious culture. Before the introduction of Buddhism into China, cultural relics appeared on the lotus pattern. Such as the Spring and Autumn period of the bronze lotus crane square pot appeared on the show petals lotus; Han tombs have also complete lotus algal well (“Yinan ancient portrait tomb excavation report”). Influenced by Buddhism, objects, carvings and statues of Buddha in the Wei, Jin and Tang dynasties were almost all decorated with lotus flower motifs. Mogao Grottoes decorative motifs appeared in a large number of lotus pattern, and deformation and color is more and more rich, because the lotus and Buddhism of this deeper origins, only after the opening of the magnificent lotus pattern era, and opened the later plant pattern based on the development of the road. In traditional Chinese culture, the lotus flower symbolizes love and marriage, the blessing of learning achievements, high promotion in the workplace, high purity and honesty and other symbols, the lotus pattern accompanied the introduction of Buddhism into China, in the Sui and Tang dynasties were quite popular.

Most of the petals of the lotus flower in the paper-cutting pattern are even numbered, and in the image of the combination of the leaf patterns, the flower forms a radial shape. Flowers in the more empty space, patterns appear to be sparse, with the stem and trailing series, patterns and space to maintain the same amount of regular state, pattern simple and generous, layout structure and see the flow of stability. Some lotus patterns will also be combined with small daisies, tulips, and other floral patterns, the layout of symmetry, the structure is tight and delicate, and the outline of the pattern through the paper-cut negative white lines to leave white lines, so that it neat and tidy, bright and colorful.

The lotus flower pattern symbolizes fertility and wealth. Lotus in China has the concept of symbolizing fertility and has a deep influence on the folklore. The lotus flower pattern in this paper-cutting mirrors the bat pattern on the top, and because the image resembles the female reproductive organs, it also embodies the symbolism of “giving birth to a child early” in the culture of reproduction, and nurtures the folk's light-hearted and witty sentiment, symbolizing the creation of life and the reproductive reproduction of human beings.

3.7. Magpie pattern

Magpie imagery has been widely used in folk art, decorating life with art forms, expressing people's expectations of life with auspicious symbols, and placing their hopes for the future in these folk artworks. The magpie, as a symbol of various folk joyous events, is a development of the magpie's auspicious symbolism. To this day, a large number of magpie motifs still appear in folk wedding customs. This way of using magpies to express emotions and convey good expectations for joyous events has been highly respected at all stages of history.

Regarding the concept of good fortune expressed by magpies, there are many symbolic expressions of magpies in folklore, which can be divided into two main types, one of which is the verbal concept formed based on the call of magpies, such as the often-said happy events to the family, happy events at home, because the call of magpies is somewhat similar to the tone of the call of the magpies and “happy events to the family, happy events to the family”, and over time it has been given to the people. Over time, it has been given a good meaning and expectation of happy events for the family. Another is to match with other animals and plants that also have harmonic names to form harmonic idioms with good expectations, such as “Huan Tian Xi Di” and “Joy on the Eyebrows”, which are combinations of magpies with badgers and plum blossom treetops, respectively, with a badger and a magpie on top of a tree and on the top of a tree at the same time. A badger and a magpie looking at each other from above and below a tree at the same time is called “Joyful”, and the scene of a magpie flying to the top of a plum blossom tree is called “Joyful”. Similarly, a magpie landing on a sycamore tree is called “Tongxi”, and a leopard and a magpie are often collectively called “Annunciation”. There has always been a folk legend that magpies call for good news, and in “The Remains of Kaiyuan Tianbao”, it is said that “in people's houses at that time, when they heard the sound of magpies, everyone thought that it was a good omen, and so they said that magpies could report good news”, and the commonly used blessing phrase “looking up to see joy” is also derived from this. This is where the common blessing phrase “Lift your head and see joy” is derived from, which is why magpies are known as the bird of good fortune. As early as the pre-Qin period, people believed that magpies had the magical ability to foretell signs. Since then, the magpie's “skill” in sensing omens has been further enriched, mainly focusing on the two aspects of foretelling guests coming from afar and foretelling good things to come. For example, Liu Xin, a literati of the Han Dynasty, recorded in “Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital”, “The magpies are noisy and pedestrians arrive, and spiders are set to delight in a hundred things.” This is to describe the magpie can predict the guests to visit the skill. According to relevant information and local literature,

magpies since ancient times is one of the totems of the Manchu faith, not only by the Manchu people love, but also by the Manchu people endowed with divinity, worshiped as the god of joy, all the new imports, repair and build a new house, long time sick to get well, as well as out of the army to fight the war when the safe return, the Manchu people will come to worship. The Manchus believe that the magpie has the ability to perceive foresight, the ability to protect peace and the ability to communicate with people and gods, and has a sacred status in the hearts of the Manchus (Zhang, 2022). The Manchu people have created many folk legends around magpies, such as “Weaving Gog” and “Happy Forest”, and regard magpies as auspicious messengers and guides who can help people realize their wishes and foretell good and bad fortune.

As a unique Chinese national belief, magpies are an important physical object in the magpie culture, and in Chinese folklore, magpies have a variety of different symbols. As an annunciator, the magpie has been a symbol of good luck, good fortune and celebration since ancient times. As the saying goes, “the call of the magpie is more auspicious than unfortunate”, and it is often used in some artistic forms to celebrate weddings and happy events such as getting the top spot on the list of the top ten in the imperial examinations. Magpies are not only used for announcing good luck, but also for the joy of moving to a new house, announcing spring, and announcing a good harvest, depicting the joy of celebrating a good harvest and a new home with peace and happiness and plenty of food and clothing. In addition, the magpie's lively and charming image makes it a token of romantic and long-lasting love in the eyes of young people, symbolizing companionship, guardianship and good luck.

Paper cutting is one of the most common artistic ways of symbolizing the auspiciousness of magpies. For example, many places like to post double happiness paper cutting with the pattern of “magpies on branches” when holding weddings, and use red quilts with magpie patterns to dress up the newlywed's rooms and courtyards. This is the most popular expression of the magpie as a symbol of joy, goodwill and happy events. Borrowing objects to convey feelings is an important aesthetic feature in traditional Chinese folk culture and art, and it is also a creative technique that magpies, a traditional Chinese cultural symbol, are often used to symbolize prayers and expectations and to express the good sense of joy and auspiciousness, and to merge feelings and objects into one. In folklore, the image of the magpie is not only used for joyous events such as marriage, but also often used to express joyous events such as rising high in the ranks and attaining success in the examination through the form of harmonic and allegorical picaresque.

4. FINDINGS

The analysis reveals that Shandong folk insole pattern paper-cutting common patterns are butterfly, lotus, bat, magpie, and other patterns, paper-cutting patterns through the combination of symbols form a complete visual narrative, reflecting the people's pursuit of “fortune, wealth, longevity, happiness, wealth” and other values, showing the emotional and social functions of the image.

This study is one of the very few that has investigated this specific form of folk art. To date, there appears to be no existing scholarly work focusing on the paper cuttings of Shandong folk shoe embroidery patterns. Therefore, this research represents the first attempt to analyze these cultural artifacts through the lens of semiotics. By applying Saussurean semiotic theory to decode the meanings embedded in these visual symbols, the study introduces a novel methodological perspective and provides original insights into the symbolic structure and cultural significance of these paper-cut designs.

5. CONCLUSION

As one of the disciplines of Shandong folk paper-cutting, the realistic and artistic expression of shoe insoles not only pursues the external authenticity of the object, but also expresses one's sincere feelings through the authenticity of the outside world. Just like poetry, it hides the artist's “heart” and “the truth in his heart”. Balthus, the master of Western modern art, said: “Behind the object there is something else, a real existence that cannot be seen by the eyes but can be felt by the spirit.” Then the expectation contained in the Shandong folk insole paper-cutting pattern is the true emotion of the laborers. It is the direct expression of their love of life. It is of great practical significance for the inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese paper-cutting culture, and also adds color to the retention of cultural heritage.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA . All procedures involving human participants in this study were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Institutional Research Board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Acknowledgement

Part of this article was extracted from a master's thesis submitted to Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam.

Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bao, J. (2017). *Collection of Shandong Folk Paper Cutting (First and Second Books)*. <http://www.bbtpress.com/bookview/4190.html>
- [2] Culler, J. D. (1986). *Ferdinand de Saussure*. Cornell University Press.
- [3] Guo, S., & Chen, Y. (2015, November). *THE APPLICATION OF THE CHINESE PHOENIX TOTEM CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY GRAPHIC DESIGN*.
- [4] HuiRu L., & JiaoJiao L. (2011). Interpreting Symbolic Patterns in Folk Paper Cutting. *A Hundred Schools of Art*
- [5] , 27(S1), 165–168.
- [6] Li, T. (2016, October). *Paper Cuttings modeling characteristics and inheritance and development in Jiaozhou, Qingdao, Shandong*. popular art.
- [7] Liu, D. (2011). *Qilu Culture and Shandong Folklore*.
- [8] Liu, Y. (2013). *Tasting the charm of traditional auspicious patterns—Chinese bat patterns*. https://jiangnan1.vpn.xstsg.top/https/77726476706e69737468656265737421fbf952d2243e635930068cb8/kcms2/article/abstract?v=WVDzDAe5jxbq1kER5CQFV9Qn8D_x6PkRS2ve48UEJRmSbOn3P4CGpN9J2puYaCxnU29Y8WCw5bHCGvkKy6EqOiubmHfPVyCHozQmgwzQw1sE38vwC2N7xCDU5j2xF4poKAKH6u_3BN4=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS
- [9] Long, J., & He, J. (2021). *Cultural Semiotics and the Related Interpretation: 2021 International Conference on Public Relations and Social Sciences (ICPRSS 2021)*, Kunming, China. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211020.340>
- [10] Qi, X., & Bai, S. (n.d.). “*The History Underfoot*” — *An Analysis of the Evolution of Folk Embroidered Shoe Pad Patterns—CNKI*. Retrieved 12 December 2024, from https://www.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFD2014&filename=NJYS201402027&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=tW2EJ4ZF_6bBSfWsHV4zZHSRL-LJH53_lh2rfG3EtBLOmAzNts90whySKf98JKkJ
- [11] Qu, Y. (2020). *Research on Qilu Culture and Folk Art*.
- [12] Ren, J. (2018). *The Application and Analysis of Phoenix Image in Modern Logo Design*. Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications.
- [13] Salupere, S. (Ed.). (2013). *Beginnings of the semiotics of culture*. Univ. of Tartu Press.
- [14] Sedda, F. (2015). Semiotics of Culture(s): Basic Questions and Concepts. In P. P. Trifonas (Ed.), *International Handbook of Semiotics* (pp. 675–696). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9404-6_31
- [15] SHEN, L. (2024). *Research on Butterfly Patterns in the Qing Dynasty and the Artistic Inheritance*.
- [16] Wang, L. (2023). *Aesthetic Analysis of Chinese Traditional Twig Pattern*.
- [17] Wang, R. (2022). *The Representation of Traditional Folk Art Symbols in Shandong Region in Painting*.
- [18] Wang, X. (2013). Lucky Motifs in Chinese Folk Art: Interpreting Paper-cut from Chinese Shaanxi. *Asian Studies*, 1(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.4312/as.2013.1.2.125-143>
- [19] Xu, W. (2017). *Seafood Features of Folk Paper Cuttings Art in Rongcheng, Shandong*. Humanities World .
- [20] Zhang, D. (2018). *Shandong folk Paper Cuttings art style under the influence of Qilu culture*. art appreciation .
- [21] Zhang, Z. (2022). *Research on the Application of Visual Image Design in Magpie Culture*.