



# Crafting Culture in Early Childhood: Integrating Paper Cutting as an Intangible Cultural Heritage into Educational Curricula for Artistic Enrichment and Innovation

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the integration of paper cutting, a Chinese intangible cultural heritage, into early childhood education curricula, exploring its multifaceted impact on educational enrichment and the development of children's artistic literacy and innovative abilities. Against the backdrop of China's efforts to safeguard intangible cultural heritage, the research delves into effective strategies and methods for seamlessly embedding paper cutting into early childhood education. The comprehensive literature review traces the historical roots, global influence, cultural significance, and contemporary practices of paper cutting, providing a robust foundation for the analysis. The study emphasizes the role of teachers in instilling appreciation for paper cutting and contends that this traditional art form not only enhances children's creativity but also fosters teamwork and communication skills. Proposing the development of a structured teaching syllabus, an optimal teaching environment, and diverse practical activities, the research advocates for the integration of local cultural characteristics, contributing valuable insights to early childhood education and cultural heritage preservation.

**Keywords:** paper cutting, intangible cultural heritage, early childhood education, integration of production and education, curriculum reform

## Introduction

In 2011, the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage was promulgated and implemented. In 2021, the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage," which clarified and continuously improved the methods for identifying and managing national-level representatives of intangible cultural heritage, as well as the management methods for national-level cultural ecological protection areas. Thirty-one provinces (autonomous regions, municipalities) in China have promulgated regulations on the protection of intangible cultural heritage, and some cities and counties have issued local regulations<sup>[1]</sup>. The institutionalization and legalization of the protection of intangible cultural heritage have continued to improve.

As of now, China has identified over 100,000 representative projects at various levels of intangible cultural heritage, including 1,557 national-level representative projects in five batches. Over 90,000 representative inheritors have been recognized at various levels, including 3,068 national-level representative inheritors in five batches. Twenty-three national-level cultural ecological protection (experimental) areas have been established nationwide. Forty-three projects have been included in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, ranking first in the world and contributing to the diversity of world cultures<sup>[2]</sup>.

Intangible cultural heritage embodies the unique wisdom and cultural essence of the Chinese nation and carries the spiritual heritage of our country and nation. The protection and development of intangible cultural heritage have always been a matter of great concern for General Secretary Xi Jinping. The creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese culture are also matters that General Secretary Xi Jinping attaches great importance to. As a Chinese intangible cultural heritage, paper cutting possesses a unique artistic charm and cultural value. In early childhood education, paper cutting can not only cultivate children's artistic literacy and enhance their innovative abilities but also contribute to the inheritance and protection of paper cutting as an intangible cultural heritage<sup>[3]</sup>. Therefore, integrating paper cutting into early childhood education courses is of great significance.

This study aims to unravel the multifaceted impact of integrating paper cutting, a Chinese intangible cultural heritage, into early childhood education curricula. The research delves into the ways in which this integration contributes to the enrichment of educational content, exploring the depth and breadth of its implications. Additionally, the investigation focuses on the specific mechanisms through which the incorporation of paper cutting enhances children's artistic literacy, shedding light on the intricate relationship between this traditional art form and the development of creative abilities among young learners. Furthermore, the study addresses the pivotal question of identifying effective strategies and methods for integrating paper cutting into early childhood education programs. By recognizing the distinctive features and



needs of young learners, the research seeks to provide valuable insights into the optimization of instructional approaches, ensuring a harmonious integration of paper cutting into the early childhood education landscape.

### **Literature Review**

Paper cutting is a traditional craft that involves the meticulous cutting of paper into intricate designs and patterns. This art form has been practiced for centuries and holds great cultural significance in many regions around the world<sup>[4]</sup>. Paper cutting has a rich history that can be traced back to ancient China, where it was used for decorative purposes during festivals and celebrations. Over time, it spread to other countries such as Japan, Germany, and Mexico, each developing its unique style and techniques. Recent studies have explored the historical development of paper cutting in different regions, highlighting its cultural significance as a means of artistic expression, storytelling, and cultural identity.

Preserving and safeguarding paper cutting as intangible cultural heritage has become a priority for many nations and organizations. Researchers<sup>[5]</sup> have focused on documenting and digitizing paper cutting designs, techniques, and associated cultural knowledge to ensure their long-term preservation. Recent studies have also examined the challenges faced in preserving paper cutting, including issues related to material deterioration, the transmission of skills, and the balance between tradition and innovation<sup>[6]</sup>. Recent research<sup>[7]</sup> has explored the evolving role of paper cutting in various domains, including fashion, interior design, and digital media. These studies investigate how artists and designers blend traditional paper cutting techniques with modern technologies and materials, creating innovative and culturally relevant artworks. Paper cutting as intangible cultural heritage has numerous benefits, both cultural and socio-economic. Recent studies<sup>[8]</sup> have highlighted its potential for promoting cultural tourism, fostering community engagement, and supporting local economies. Researchers have examined the impact of paper cutting festivals, workshops, and exhibitions on raising awareness, preserving traditions, and enhancing cultural diversity.

### **The Significance of Paper Cutting in Early Childhood Education**

#### **Cultivation of Artistic Literacy in Children**

Paper cutting, as a longstanding folk art, holds unique artistic charm and cultural value. Its integration into early childhood education serves to cultivate children's artistic literacy, fostering their perception and appreciation of beauty. Through paper cutting activities, children engage with diverse art forms and techniques, enhancing aesthetic abilities and fostering an interest in art<sup>[9]</sup>. Teachers, in the process, should focus on nurturing children's innovative spirit and practical skills. Integrating paper cutting with other artistic elements, such as painting, clay sculpture, and fabric art, creates an interdisciplinary approach, enhancing children's flexibility, coordination, spatial concepts, and innovative abilities.

Emphasizing the respect and love for paper cutting as an intangible cultural heritage is crucial in early childhood education. Teachers play a vital role in instilling this appreciation within children, allowing them to thrive under the influence of paper cutting art. By integrating this cultural heritage into the curriculum, educators contribute to the preservation and promotion of paper cutting within the broader context of Chinese cultural heritage.

In conclusion, the integration of paper cutting into early childhood education not only contributes to the artistic and creative development of children but also serves as a means to preserve and promote the rich cultural legacy encapsulated in this intangible cultural heritage. This approach aligns with the vision of General Secretary Xi Jinping, emphasizing the innovative development and dynamic inheritance of China's cultural heritage in the contemporary era.

#### **Enhancing Children's Innovative Ability**

Paper cutting creation constitutes a creative and challenging endeavor. For children, it transcends mere artistic expression, serving as a platform to ignite imagination and foster creativity. In the process of paper cutting creation, children confront various challenges, unlocking their inventive potential by integrating paper cutting with diverse elements, thereby enriching and enhancing their innovative abilities.

Firstly, paper cutting creation demands children to harness their imagination and creativity fully. Throughout the paper cutting process, children must conceive the shape, pattern, and color elements of their creations, necessitating robust imagination and creativity. Engaging in paper cutting creation allows children to continually challenge themselves, fostering a rich imagination and creativity. Secondly, paper cutting creation encourages children to amalgamate paper cutting with other artistic elements. Teachers, in the paper cutting teaching process, can guide children to integrate paper cutting with painting, clay sculpture, fabric art, and other forms, thereby stimulating their innovative instincts. Consequently, children not only refine the flexibility and coordination of their hand muscles but also advance their spatial concepts and innovative capabilities. Furthermore, paper cutting creation contributes to the cultivation of children's spirit of teamwork and communication skills. In collaborative paper cutting activities, children collaborate to complete their works, fostering the ability to listen to others' opinions, respect diverse viewpoints, enhance communication skills, and nurture a sense of teamwork.

Paper cutting creation plays a pivotal role in enhancing children's innovative ability. Through paper cutting teaching, children tap into their imagination, integrate paper cutting with other artistic elements, and elevate their innovative prowess. Simultaneously, paper cutting creation nurtures children's spirit of teamwork and communication skills, laying a robust foundation for their holistic development.

#### **Preserving and Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Contemporary students are increasingly influenced by modern culture, often lacking exposure to traditional cultural roots. To instill an appreciation for our esteemed traditional culture, the gradual incorporation of traditional intangible cultural art into education holds significant practical importance. As a Chinese intangible cultural heritage, paper cutting boasts a profound history and cultural legacy. The integration of paper cutting into early childhood education contributes to the inheritance and protection of this intangible cultural heritage, providing children early exposure to the art of paper cutting, fostering their affection for this cultural form, and propelling the preservation and development of paper cutting culture. Primarily, integrating paper cutting into early childhood education kindles children's interest and love for this artistic form. Through hands-on paper cutting activities, children experience the creative process, feeling the allure of paper cutting art and kindling an interest and affection for it<sup>[10]</sup>. This interest and love become motivational factors for children to willingly learn and carry forward the art of paper cutting. Secondly, paper cutting teaching enables children to delve into the history and cultural connotations of this art form. Teachers, in the course of paper cutting instruction, can introduce the origin, development, characteristics, and regional styles of paper cutting, enabling children to grasp the historical and cultural underpinnings of this art and contribute to its ongoing legacy. Additionally, integrating paper cutting into early childhood education fosters children's hands-on ability and sense of innovation. Paper cutting creation demands the full utilization of imagination and creativity, further enhanced through hands-on practice. Children, in this process, refine the flexibility and coordination of their hand muscles, advance spatial concepts, and hone innovative abilities. This integration contributes significantly to the inheritance and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. Through paper cutting teaching, children cultivate affection for paper cutting art, grasp its history and cultural depth, and concurrently develop hands-on ability and innovative instincts, thus becoming contributors to the preservation and protection of intangible cultural heritage.

## **Strategies and Methods for Integrating Paper Cutting into Early Childhood Education Programs**

### **Development of Paper Cutting Teaching Syllabus**

Aligned with the characteristics and requirements of early childhood education, a comprehensive paper cutting teaching syllabus should be formulated, clearly outlining the objectives, content, and methods of paper cutting instruction. This syllabus functions as a guiding document for implementing paper cutting activities and must be tailored to the distinctive features and needs of early childhood education.

#### **Teaching Objectives**

Instill in children an interest and appreciation for paper cutting art, fostering enjoyment in participating in paper cutting activities and an understanding of the creative process.

Enhance children's aesthetic, innovative, and manual dexterity skills. Through paper cutting activities, children will develop an appreciation for beauty, cultivate the ability to create aesthetically pleasing works, and improve the flexibility and coordination of their hand muscles.

Cultivate children's cultural confidence and national pride, providing insights into the history and cultural connotations of paper cutting art. This aims to instill respect and love for intangible cultural heritage.

Foster children's spirit of teamwork and communication skills, encouraging collaboration in the paper cutting creation process. This collaborative approach enhances communication skills and nurtures a sense of teamwork.

#### **Teaching Content**

Basic concepts and history of paper cutting art: Introduce the origin, development, characteristics, and styles of paper cutting from diverse regions, enabling children to grasp the historical and cultural context of paper cutting art.

Paper cutting techniques and methods: Educate children in the fundamental techniques and methods of paper cutting, such as folding, cutting, and carving, enabling them to acquire essential paper cutting skills for independent creation.

Integration of paper cutting art with other art forms: Guide children in combining paper cutting with painting, clay sculpture, fabric art, and other art forms. This fosters innovative thinking and enhances spatial concepts and creative abilities.

Paper cutting creation practice: Engage children in practical paper cutting activities, applying learned skills to hands-on projects. This not only refines hand muscles' flexibility and coordination but also cultivates innovative abilities.

Appreciation of paper cutting art: Organize visits to paper cutting art exhibitions and screen videos showcasing exemplary paper cutting works. This enables children to appreciate and draw inspiration from outstanding paper cutting pieces, refining their aesthetic sensibilities.

#### **Teaching Methods**

Situational teaching method: Create engaging paper cutting scenarios to stimulate children's interest and curiosity, fostering a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere for learning paper cutting art.

Interactive teaching method: Employ group cooperation, peer evaluation, and other interactive methods in paper cutting instruction. This encourages children to enhance communication skills and develop a sense of teamwork through collaborative efforts.

Experiential teaching method: Emphasize practical operation and hands-on experiences to help children develop innovative and hands-on abilities through direct engagement in paper cutting activities.

Appreciation teaching method: Utilize exposure to excellent paper cutting works to enable children to appreciate and create beauty, thereby refining their aesthetic abilities.

Game-based teaching method: Integrate paper cutting instruction into game activities, allowing children to learn paper cutting techniques while increasing their interest in learning through enjoyable games.

### **Establishing an Optimal Paper Cutting Teaching Environment**

The creation of a conducive paper cutting teaching environment is foundational to effective paper cutting instruction. To stimulate children's interest in paper cutting and elevate the quality of teaching, educators must ensure a rich, safe, and captivating atmosphere.

#### **Key Considerations:**

- (1) **Abundant Paper Cutting Materials:** Provide an array of paper materials, encompassing various colors, textures, and shapes like colored paper, rice paper, and wrinkled paper. This diverse selection empowers children with choices during the paper cutting creative process, fostering imagination and creativity. Additionally, include unconventional materials such as fabric, leaves, and bamboo pieces to encourage exploration of varied textures.
- (2) **Diverse Paper Cutting Tools:** Supply an assortment of scissors, carving knives, blades, and other paper cutting tools, enabling children to choose tools according to their needs and preferences. Prioritize safety by ensuring the safety of scissors and other tools to prevent accidents.
- (3) **Create a Warm and Secure Learning Space:** Design a spacious, well-lit, and organized learning environment for paper cutting creation. Establish a display area within the teaching space to exhibit children's paper cutting works, promoting a sense of achievement and self-confidence.
- (4) **Practical Opportunities:** Organize a range of paper cutting practice activities, including competitions, exhibitions, and workshops. These hands-on experiences allow children to enhance their paper cutting skills and develop innovative and practical abilities.
- (5) **Interactive and Cooperative Learning Atmosphere:** Foster collaboration through group activities, peer evaluation, and other interactive methods. This approach enhances children's communication skills and cultivates a sense of teamwork.
- (6) **Multimedia Teaching Methods:** Utilize multimedia resources, such as paper cutting art videos and animations, to showcase the beauty and techniques of paper cutting. This broadens children's horizons and sustains their interest in learning.
- (7) **Combine Festivals and Themed Activities:** Organize paper cutting teaching activities aligned with festivals and themed events. This allows children to delve into traditional culture, enhancing their cultural literacy through paper cutting creation.

In conclusion, establishing a paper cutting teaching environment is a multifaceted process requiring thoughtful consideration of materials, tools, space, and activities. A well-crafted environment provides optimal conditions for learning, stimulating children's interests and potentials, and facilitating effective paper cutting instruction.

### **Carrying Out Practical Paper-Cutting Activities**

Engaging in practical paper-cutting activities allows children to immerse themselves in the creative process of paper-cutting, fostering hands-on abilities and a sense of innovation. These activities hold a significant role in early childhood education, serving as a crucial avenue for children to experience the creative aspects of paper-cutting, cultivate hands-on skills, and contribute to the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage of paper-cutting.

For instance, organizing paper-cutting workshops provides children with opportunities to learn paper-cutting skills and craft works under the guidance of professional instructors. This allows children to unleash their imagination, showcase creativity, and produce works with distinctive characteristics. Hosting paper-cutting competitions encourages children to create, display, and exchange their paper-cutting works within their class or school, fostering a sense of competition, enhancing creative enthusiasm, and refining skills. Conducting paper-cutting exhibitions offers children a chance to appreciate and learn from the works of their peers. Through observation and analysis of others' creations, children can identify their own areas for improvement, further refining their paper-cutting skills. Integrating paper-cutting into festivals and thematic activities provides contextualized teaching opportunities. For instance, during the Chinese New Year, children can learn to create window flowers, gaining insights into the traditional culture of the celebration. On International Art Day, encouraging children to create their own paper-cutting artworks enhances their artistic qualities. Inclusion of paper-cutting creation in the art curriculum ensures that children learn paper-cutting skills and create their own works as part of their educational journey. Designing paper-cutting games allows children to learn skills and enhance their hands-on ability and creativity. For example, creating a "paper-cutting jigsaw puzzle" game where children complete puzzles using paper-cutting works improves spatial concepts and creativity. In summary, diverse forms of practical paper-cutting activities enable children to experience the creative process, cultivate hands-on skills, and foster innovation, contributing to the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage of paper-cutting.

### **Integrating Local Cultural Characteristics**

Tailoring early childhood education to incorporate local paper-cutting art aligns with the unique cultural characteristics of different regions, enabling young children to better comprehend and perpetuate local culture. Given China's vast cultural diversity, each region boasts distinct cultural traditions and artistic expressions. The integration of local cultural characteristics into early childhood education not only enhances children's understanding and preservation of local culture

but also nurtures their artistic literacy and creativity. Paper-cutting, a vital aspect of traditional Chinese art with broad geographical distribution and rich cultural connotations, can be effectively incorporated into early childhood education by considering the cultural characteristics of diverse regions.

### **Conclusion:**

The integration of paper cutting, an intangible cultural heritage, into early childhood education courses not only amplifies the richness of educational content but also elevates children's artistic literacy. Simultaneously, it contributes significantly to the preservation and promotion of paper cutting as an intangible cultural heritage. Early childhood education professionals are encouraged to proactively explore effective strategies and methodologies for paper cutting instruction, seamlessly embedding this cultural practice into the fabric of early childhood education. This initiative offers valuable insights for the ongoing reform of early childhood education curricula.

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