

The paper-cutting art of Yangzhou

Grand tradition slowly fading away as artists struggle to earn a living and pass on their skills to next generations

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The art of Chinese paper-cutting has been popular in Yangzhou, Jiangsu province, since the Sui Dynasty (581-618) and is closely linked to the city's local customs.

During the Tang Dynasty (618-907), paper was cut into patterns of birds and flowers and placed in women's hair or used as floral decorations on Lichun Day — the first of the 24 divisions of the solar year according to the traditional Chinese calendar — to celebrate the beginning of spring.

During the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the art of paper-cutting rose to prominence because of economic prosperity at the time. There was a surge in the number of paper-cutting artisans and the use of paper-cuts expanded to include patterns for embroideries. Tailors made small handkerchiefs and big quilts using embroidery patterns based on paper-cutting.

In 2006, Yangzhou paper-cutting was listed among the country's first batch of state-level intangible cultural heritages. Chinese paper-cutting was included on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2009.

The Yangzhou artform represents the paper-cutting style of southern China, which is intricate, uses delicate colors, has a heavy influence on embroidery patterns and is collected as paintings. Paper cuts in northern China prefer bright colors, which are bold and vigorous, and are mostly used as window decorations.

Today, the art of paper-cutting is on the decline. It is often difficult for artisans to live on sales of their paper cuts and to find young apprentices to inherit their skills.

To preserve the art, the govern-



ment has hosted exhibitions of paper-cutting to introduce the art to the public and set up funds to encourage apprenticeships.

In 2007, the Chinese Paper-Cutting Museum opened in Yangzhou for tourists to appreciate masterpieces and shop for souvenirs. Popular items include desk lamps covered in paper cuts and paper-cut postcards of the city's tourist attractions.

The museum has a large workshop devoted to paper-cutting masters Zhang Xiufang and Zhang Muli. Zhang Xiufang, 71, was appointed by the Ministry of Culture as the representative inheritor of Yangzhou paper-cutting in 2007. Zhang Muli is the daughter of Zhang Yongshou (1907-1989), the most respected modern paper-cutting artist in Yangzhou. Visitors to the museum can watch the two masters display their skills in the workshop.



IF YOU GO

The **Chinese Paper-Cutting Museum**, located at 2 Majia Xiang, Dongguan Street, in the Guangling district of Yangzhou, Jiangsu province, is open from 8 am - 5:30 pm. The telephone number is 0514-87335122. Yangzhou is a 90-minute bus ride from Nanjing.



Yixing clay teapot

By XU JINGXI

The clay teapot is a cultural symbol of Yixing, a county-level city under the administration of Wuxi, Jiangsu province. The Yixing clay teapot is known for its high artistic value and is made from Yixi clay, or *zisha*. The city's traditional style of making the teapot dates back to the 15th century.

Zisha, which translates to "purple sand or clay", is stoneware that is purple, red and brown. After it is fired in a kiln at a temperature between 1,100 C and 1,200 C, the stoneware can be turned into an assortment of colors such as claret, copper, sunflower yellow and blackish green.

Yixing clay teapot is known for its artistic quality. In 2006, it was listed in the country's first batch of state-level intangible cultural heritages. It retains heat well and has good air permeability. It gradually takes in the scent and color of tea after prolonged use — you can smell the fragrances of tea even if you just pour hot water in it.

Chinese painting, calligraphy and seal cutting are all compulsory education for a Yixing clay teapot maker. By molding teapots into different shapes and engraving paintings and verses onto them, craftsmen deliver their artistic views and values of life.

The teapots became popular during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) after a monk from Jinsha Temple in Yixing handcrafted a teapot from local clay during the reign of Emperor Zhengde. Word

about the teapots spread all over the world and especially along the Maritime Silk Road, from Europe to Japan and Southeast Asia. European nobility bought them as valuable collectibles and some had them inlaid with gold and silver. The Yixing clay teapot stimulated the development of ceramics in Europe and Japan soon after.

In recent years, the Yixing clay teapot has become a hot item in the art auction market. A pot by Gu Jingzhou (1915-96) was auctioned in 2010 for a record price of 12.32 million yuan (\$2 million).

Those who want to browse museum pieces or buy teapots at an affordable price may find Yixing's Dingshu town a good place to visit. Most of the clay used for making Yixing teapots comes from Huanglong Mountain located in Dingshu.

In ancient times, kilns for ceramics in China were built like dragons. There are only three such kilns still in use in China. One of them is located in Qianshu village of Dingshu town and was built 800 years ago. It has been used to fire *zisha* ware since the mid-Ming Dynasty.

Yixing Ceramics Museum, accredited by the China Arts-Crafts Association to be the "China Zisha Museum" in January, has about 2,000 pottery items out of its collection of nearly 10,000 artifacts. Visitors can talk with Yixing clay teapot craftsmen at their workshops in the museum to learn more about the art.

IF YOU GO

The **Yixing Ceramics Museum**, located at 150 Dingshan Bei Lu in Dingshu town of Yixing, Jiangsu province, is open from 8 am to 4:45 pm. The telephone number is 0510-87188321.