Research on the Illustration Design of Shanhaijing Stories in Cross-cultural Perspective

Muhan Huang[1] and Pairoj Jamuni[2]

Faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University, Thailand

Corresponding Author, E-mail: [1]2385024875@qq.com

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Abstract

As a visual symbol carrier of Chinese classical culture, the illustrations of the Shanhaijing demonstrate unique narrative tension in cross-cultural communication. This study uses cross-cultural communication theory as a framework to analyse the cross-cultural translation of mythological symbols in the illustration design and explore contemporary revitalisation paths for traditional visual language. Through case analysis and comparative analysis, the study deconstructs the symbols and compares the narrative logic of illustration versions in different cultural contexts. The research conclusions indicate that successful cross-cultural illustration design requires balancing the cultural core of the original text with the reception habits of the target culture, achieving effective communication through the abstraction of symbols and the reconstruction of narrative contexts. The significance of this study lies in providing theoretical references for visual cross-cultural research on classical texts, while offering operational methodologies for the internationalisation of traditional cultural IP design.

Keywords: Shanhaijing Stories; Illustration Design; Cross-Cultural Perspective; Cultural Exchange; Artistic Expression

Introduction

As an important part of ancient Chinese culture, the Shanhaijing is not only a collection of myths and legends, but also a reflection of the Chinese people's understanding and imagination of nature, mystery and supernatural phenomena at that time. With the great fusion of world cultures, the stories

and images in the Shanhaijing are no longer confined to China itself, but have become cultural symbols and artistic expressions that cross cultural boundaries.

The mythical beast imagery from the Shanhaijing is not only a symbolic representation of ancient people's imagination of natural forces, but also constitutes a highly recognisable visual gene in the Eastern mythological system. These mythical beasts, which combine animal characteristics with supernatural attributes, reflect the ancient Chinese cosmological view of "unity between heaven and humanity," and their bizarre and mysterious forms make them the most interpretive symbols in cross-cultural communication. In the context of global cultural integration, the imagery of mythical beasts has transcended regional cultural boundaries, becoming an important medium for visual dialogue between East and West from the line drawings of mythical beasts in Hu Wenhuang's Ming Dynasty woodblock prints to the "ghost story" imagery in Japanese ukiyo-e, from the deconstruction of fantastical creatures in Western illustrations to the cybernetic reinterpretation in contemporary digital art, the visual translations of mythical beasts across cultures fundamentally represent cross-contextual interpretations of the Eastern mythological gene.

On today's world stage, the research background of Shanhaijing story illustration design reflects the communication and integration between multiple cultures. Through the illustrative representation of the unique creatures, fantastical scenes and mysterious geography of the Shanhaijing, artists and researchers are able to explore the understanding and interpretation of these images in different cultural contexts.

Through the exploration and image redesign of the Shanhaijing story illustration design, not only can enhance people's knowledge of traditional Chinese culture, but also build a bridge of communication and understanding between different cultures. This kind of research in cross-cultural perspective not only enriches the content of artistic creation, but also helps to promote the protection and development of global cultural diversity and the common prosperity of human civilisation.

Research Objectives

1. Analysing the images of divine beasts in the Shanhaijing stories through a cross-cultural perspective.

2. Sorting out representative images of gods and beasts and redesigning the illustrations.

Literature Review

This study adopts a mixed-method approach with the aim of establishing a link between Shanhaijing culture and modern life and exploring the redesign of traditional culture using illustration as a form of expression. The study can be divided into four stages. The first stage is a quantitative study, which aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research object. In the second stage, the materials and results collected in the first stage are used to design a qualitative study, aiming to determine the results of the quantitative study through the qualitative study. The third stage is an experimental study that explores how to redesign the image of the Shanhaijing beasts in combination with digital media technology. Based on the third stage, the results will be applied to the fourth stage to produce ornamental illustration design works that can be decorated or used in daily life to promote the inheritance and revival of traditional culture.

1. Overview of the story of the Shanhaijing

The Shanhaijing, this absurd and bizarre literature pre-Qin ancient books, its time of writing, compilation of the author is not a moment of one person, but through a long period of time, and constantly gained into a book (Zhou,2015). It brings together a wealth of myths, legends and geographic knowledge, is considered to be the ancient Chinese geography and folklore of the sum. Divided into two parts, the Shanjing and the Haijing, this classic records as many as 500 kinds of sacred animals, monsters and strange creatures, describing the rich imagination and knowledge of ancient Chinese people about nature, geography and mysterious phenomena. As shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Shanhaijing guangzhu(source: Created by researchers, 2023)

To this day, the Shanhaijing is regarded as one of the treasures of China's cultural heritage, not only important in scholarly research, but also deeply influencing China's cultural imagination and creativity. Almost all of the mythological parts in the work "History of Chinese Literature" edited by Yuan Xingjue mention "Shanhaijing", and in the first volume of the work, it is given the status of "the work that preserves the most mythological materials in ancient China" (Yuan,2008). The divine animals in the Shanhaijing often have specific symbolic meanings and cultural values. For example, the unicorn symbolises good luck, the dragon symbolises power and majesty, and the phoenix symbolises beauty and rebirth.

2. Status of Research on Shanhaijing

In modern times, the study of the " Shanhaijing " is divided into three directions: direction one is the " Shanhaijing " of the original author of why people, when the book was written as a book, the nature of the book is what, the book's length of the chapter and its geography and history of the content and other aspects of the evidence;Chen Lianshan's "Shanhaijing" "witch book" critique – reaffirmation of the "Shanhaijing" for the original geography "(Chen,2010) Sun Zhizhong" "Shanhaijing" of the author and writings of the era "(Sun,1986) and so on. Direction two is from the encyclopaedic point of view focusing on the book of myths and legends and folklore for collation and verification; such as: Yuan Ke "Shanhaijing"(Yuan,1980), Ye Shuxian "Shanhaijing of the cultural tracing –" Imagination Geography "and East-West cultural The Cultural Tracing of Shanhaijing – "Imaginary Geography" and East-West Cultural Encounter (Ye,2004), and so on. Direction three is the study of the "Shanhaijing" research results; for example: Yi Shuyan "Guo Pu "Shanhaijing Note" (Yi,2013), Sun Jianwei "Shanhaijing Notes and Spurts" (Sun,2011) and so on.

3. Research status of Shanhaijing illustration design

The original version of the Shanhaijing was illustrated, but it was gradually lost in the process of circulation, and the ancient people in the Ming and Qing dynasties supplemented the illustrations in accordance with the textual descriptions when they read the stories in it, which have been passed down to the present day (Hu,2020).

The art of illustration is the use of beautiful, imaginative patterns to express the creator's world view or aesthetic tendencies, and most of the illustrations are set in the book, and the text and stories in the book to form a close link, illustration in the ancient books is used to restore an important scene or plot in the book. In modern illustration design, it is also necessary to use the form of drawings to show

a certain content (Zhao,2021). At present, the research on the design and illustration application of the elements of the sacred beasts of Shanhaijing is getting more and more attention. For example, Wang Zilong's "Research and Creation of Illustration Based on the Image of Gods and Beasts in the Shanhaijing" (Wang,2016) mainly analyses and re-designs the images of gods and monsters in the Shanhaijing; Jin Qiu's "Research on Visual Design of the Theme Culture of the Shanhaijing" (Jin,2017) mainly analyses and re-designs the images of gods and goddesses in the Shanhaijing such as red crocodiles, crocodiles, and whirligig tortoises, and so on. Modern plane graphic design was carried out.

In modern times, there are also many modern illustrators who have drawn beasts for the Shanhaijing, but most of the illustrations are excerpts, with representatives of such illustrators as Shanze, Cheng Shiyu, and Lin Hai. As shown in Figure 2, from the first and second left are the White Ape in the illustration of Hu Wenhuan of the Ming Dynasty and the White Ape in the illustration of Wangfu of the Qing Dynasty, respectively.

Figure 2 White Ape (source: Created by researchers, 2022)

Xu Ke's "Shanhaijing Tu Shuo" is also a summary of the contents of the ancient texts. Not only in China, but also in Japan, there have been studies on the Shanhaijing, such as the traditional Japanese picture book of demons and monsters, the Hyakki no Yakusho, in which more than 60 per cent of the archetypes of demons and monsters come from the Shanhaijing, as well as beautiful works depicting the images of some of the divine beasts in the Shanhaijing, such as the Scrolls of Strange Fowls and Animal Creatures. As shown in Figure 3, the artist Shanze drew nearly 200 images of divine beasts in his paintings, referring to the Encyclopaedia of Chinese Demons and Monsters and other ancient texts. Along with textual explanations and interpretations, combined with the characteristic expression

techniques of traditional Chinese painting, the appearance and forms of the divine beasts in the Shanhaijing are vividly depicted.

Figure 3 Shanze Shanhaijing (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

As shown in Figure 4, this is the People's Literature Publishing House–Humanities Gems and young Chinese artist Li Yunzhong's collaborative reprint of "The Illustrated Dictionary of the Shanhaijing." Artist Li Yunzhong created a more vivid image of the beasts, a full–colour album of nearly 400 pages, with textual interpretations and images of the beasts designed in accordance with a left–right layout, and an overall pictorial background tone of lime green, echoing the symbolism of green mountains and green water.

Figure 4 Liyunzhong Shanhaijing (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

4. Classification of the meanings of the images of divine beasts in the Shanhaijing

There are many images of mythical beasts in the Shanhaijing, and not all of them are auspicious and symbolic mythical beasts, which can be classified into three main categories according to their meanings. They are auspicious, neutral and negative. Auspicious beasts usually have positive meanings and symbolise wealth and good fortune. These beasts can cure all diseases or ward off evil spirits, and

their presence often brings good luck to people. They can fulfil people's wishes and fantasies about the future. As shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Auspicious beast

auspicious beast	medical value	Eaten, applied externally to cure diseases, have medicinal value, and can gain magical powers.
	ward off evil spirits	The beast's own positive energy can dispel evil spirits and avoid evil spirits.
	Foretelling	Predicting what will happen, e.g. rain falling from the sky, good harvest of grains.
	Symbolism	Fulfil people's wishes for good or positive results

In the Shanhaijing, there are fewer descriptions of divine beasts that do not have clear attributes of good and evil. People define these divine beasts as neutral allegorical divine beasts, which do not distinguish between good and evil. Neutral divine beasts are the result of continuous development, both of the development of the divine beasts themselves and of the transformation of people's understanding of the divine beasts with the development of the times. People's understanding of these divine beasts varied in different eras. Table 2 summarises the meaning of "Neutral Divine Beasts".

Table 2 Neutral Divine Beasts

The Neutral Beast	good and evil coexist	Can be good, bad or in a grey area
	symbolise	Different meanings in different eras, symbolism is indeterminate

Table 3 below summarises the meanings of the negative sacred beasts. Negative Divine Beasts are one of the most numerous beasts in the Shanhaijing. As the name suggests, negative divine beasts often represent darkness and terror. In the records of the primitive ancient texts, ferocious beasts appeared as horrible images, with ugly appearance and ferocious character, and were regarded as symbols of disaster and bad luck.

Table 3 Negative Divine Beasts

fierce beast	Oppress the people	They feed on humans. They are fierce and terrifying.
	scourge	Compulsive and leads to negative results
	prophecy	Predicts what will happen, such as natural disasters, war woes
	Symbolism	Explaining death and disaster

5. The relationship between cross-culture and digital innovation design

There is a close relationship and interaction between intercultural and digital innovation design, which together promote cultural exchange, innovation and development in the era of globalisation.

Cultural Exchange and Diversity: The cross-cultural perspective promotes the exchange and integration of different cultural backgrounds and values. Digital innovation and design has greatly accelerated the global dissemination and sharing of cultural products and information through the application of the Internet and digital technology. For example, through digital platforms, artists and designers can display and share artworks and design concepts from various cultures across language and geographical constraints, thus promoting global cultural diversity and understanding.

Innovation and Technology Integration: Digital innovation and design is more than just an extension of traditional art and design; it is a process of continuous innovation and development driven by technological advances. Cross-cultural designers and teams can use advanced technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI) to integrate traditional cultural elements into modern design, creating works with new visual and sensory experiences. As digital technology becomes more and more mature, there are more interesting ways of artistic expression on the market than the picture book, for example: the display form of ar interactive illustration, which can interact with the audience through the mobile phone screen, and the already very mature adobe painting software technology, which can greatly improve the efficiency of drawing, and realise the mass production of design works as well as the extension of the design.

Conceptual Framework

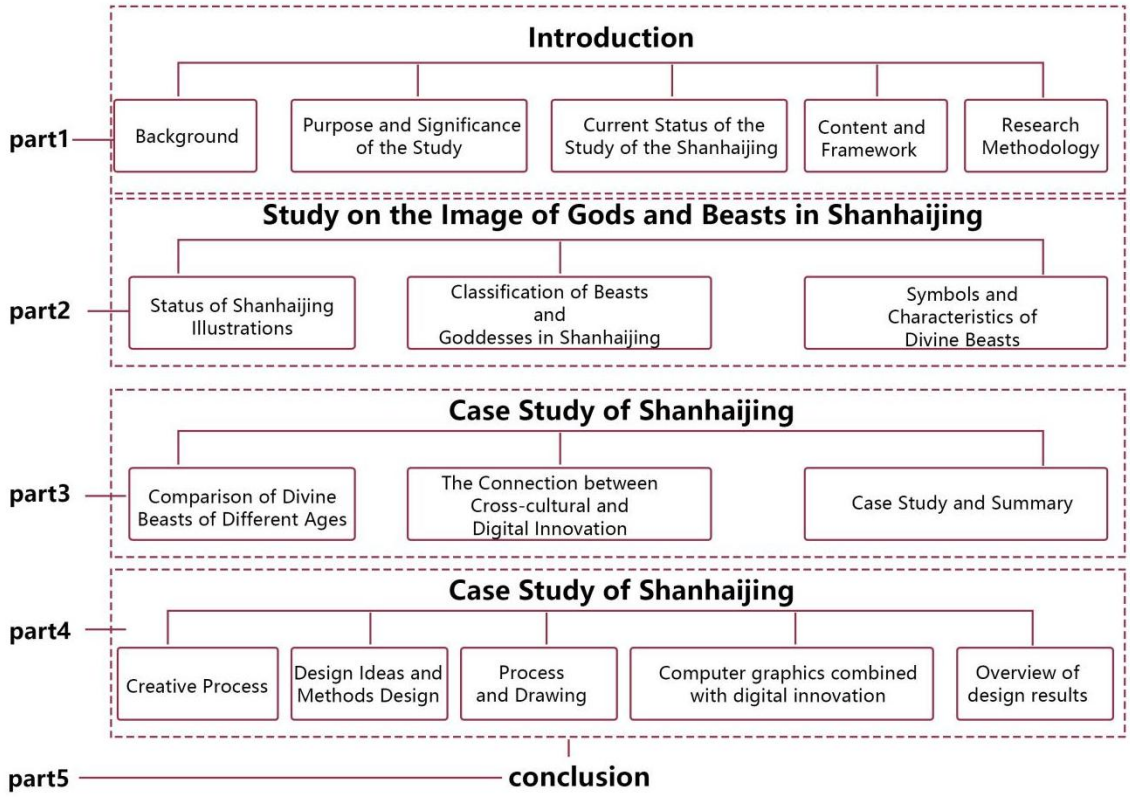

Figure 5 Conceptual Framework (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

Research Methodology

1. Literature research method:

Through combing the texts of early ancient books, the researcher collated the information on divine beasts from the original records of Shanhaijing divine beasts, appearance characteristics, and symbolic connotations respectively, with the purpose of summarising representative images of divine beasts and analysing and classifying them in depth. As shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4 Analysis of images in early ancient books

Name	Original description	images	Appearance characteristics	symbolise
Lei	《南山经》：“又东四百里，曰亶爰之山，多水，无草木，不可以上。有兽焉，其状如狸而有髦，其名曰类，自为牝牡，食者不妒。”		androgynous. People eat them without jealousy.	Inner peace and tranquillity
Huan	《山海经》记载：“其状如狸，一目而三尾，其音如夺百声，是可以御凶，服之已瘅”。		One eye and three tails. It can ward off evil spirits.	Turning bad luck into good fortune; taking it is always healthy.
Dijiang	“有神焉，其状如黄囊，赤如丹火，六足四翼，浑敦无面目，是识歌舞，实为帝江也。”		The whole thing is in the form of a meatball. It has four wings.	Cheerful, good at singing and dancing
Tiangou	“有兽焉，其状如狸而白首，名曰天狗，其音如榴榴，可以御凶。”		Body like a civet cat, white head	(literary) fight against evil

2. Comparative analysis method:

The method of comparative analysis focuses on comparing the depictions of the same divine beasts in different dynasties, with the aim of analysing the symbolic meaning of divine beasts in different eras as well as the characteristics of their artistic expression through a visual perspective. As shown in Figure 6 as an example, the "Wenyao Fish" in the illustration of Hu Wenhuan in the Ming Dynasty is a divine beast with bird wings and fish body, in the form of spreading wings and leaping, with no whiskers around its mouth. The one depicted in the catalogue of the Qing dynasty artist Wangfu (Fig. 6 , second

from the left) is much more lively, with its head held high and looking mischievous and cute. According to ancient records, people who ate the skate could cure epilepsy. In addition, the skate also signified a good harvest. In ancient times, when productivity was backward, this sacred animal represented the common people's desire for a rich life.

Figure 6 Wenyao (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

3. Case study method:

The researcher used the existing Shanhaijing mythical beasts cultural and creative designs in the market as a case study to analyse the impact of digital innovation on the dissemination of traditional culture (As shown in Figure 7), the designer uses the Shanhaijing as the theme for advertising posters, clothing and other cultural and creative products. This series of cultural and creative products are in black colour. The overall design style tends to be simple totems and lines of colour blocks to express the patterns of gods and beasts.

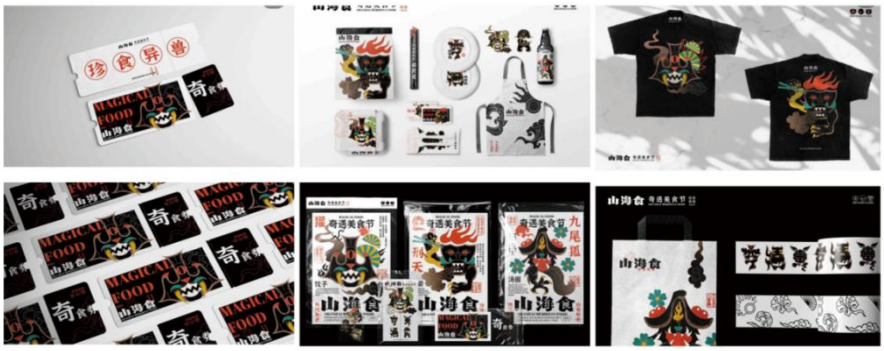

Figure 7 Shanhaijing creative cultural design (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

Research Results

1. Design outputs and findings

Design outputs and findings

Image drawing methods–Hand–drawing on paper

Hand–drawing on paper is a traditional drawing method, in which painters and designers can gradually deepen their understanding of the subject through repeated sketching.

With paper as the medium, the expression of hand–drawing can provide a variety of forms of reference and choice for later computer graphics, such as Figure 8, showing the Jinwu as an example, the researcher in the early stages of combing the image of the beasts in the early books and redesign sketches, and finally to the process of displaying a single image of the beasts in the line drawings.

Figure 8 Jinwu (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

There are certain shortcomings in the way of drawing on paper, such as the lower efficiency of drawing, the lack of smooth lines or the difficulty of distinguishing between light and dark parts, and so on. Usually, the graphic presentation can only allow the viewer to understand a single side or part of the subject, as shown in Figure 9 below, which demonstrates the process of redesigning the line drawings of the mythical beast Dijiang. In terms of the graphic presentation alone, after retaining the descriptive features of the textual record, the image of Dijiang is still shown to the viewer in terms of its wings, limbs, and a body similar to a ball of flesh, but unlike the earlier drawings, the researcher has optimised the limbs of the beast, and the colour palette can also be adjusted by computer graphics to achieve better results. A better colour palette can also be achieved through computer graphics.

Figure 9 Dijiang (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

Image drawing methods-computer graphics

The researcher used computer graphics software such as SAI, Adobe illustrator and Photoshop in the experimental process. sai is mainly used for drawing and illustration creation. It provides the researcher with a rich variety of brush effects, which makes it easier to create comic and anime style illustrations.SAI emphasises on the naturalness of the brush strokes and the mixing of colours in the drawing process.Adobe Illustrator is a vector graphic design software, which focuses on the creation and editing of vector graphics. It illustrates the accuracy and extension of the way to provide a guarantee. And the combined use of Photoshop makes the extension effect of the picture better realised, it enables the designer to quickly achieve the preview effect, such as silk scarves, cards and other product materials for the landing effect. As shown in Figure 10, it shows the graphic effect of the redesign after the researcher filled in the colours based on the hand-drawn images of the beasts, and they show the external features of the individual beasts' images.

Figure10 Redesign of beasts (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

AR interactive illustration design

The display of individual images of divine beasts is the "personality photos" of different divine beasts, while the composition of a complete picture with storytelling requires a more reasonable composition and a beautiful scene. The researcher combined the living scenes and characteristics of the mythical beasts recorded in the original text, and drew a variety of plants with auspicious attributes, such as sacred trees, heavenly pools, immortal fruits, and sacred flowers, which often appear in the living scenes of the mythical beasts, as shown in Figure 11.

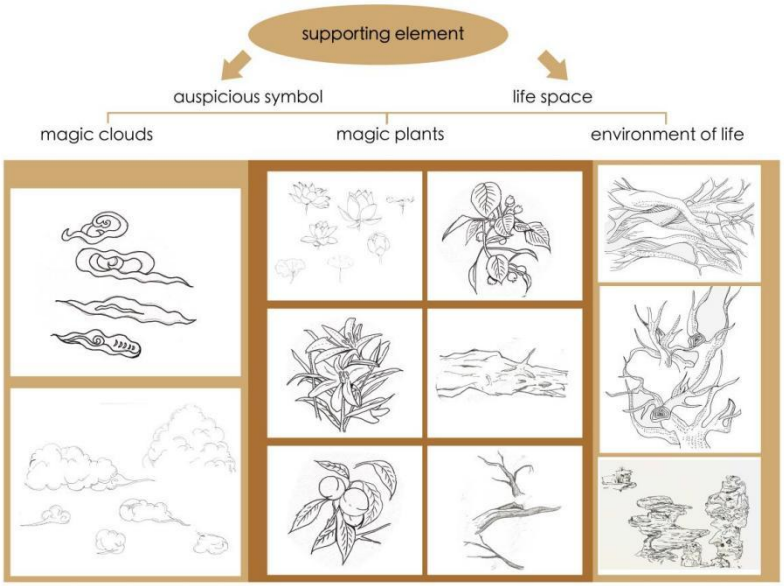

Figure 11 Redesign plants (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

Immortal mountains and immortal trees often appear in ancient texts, such as the Green Dragon, which calls the winds and rains, and which often coils up and weaves through the mountains and dives to the bottom of the sea, as shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12 Immortal trees (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

After completing the drawing of the images of each part, the researcher reorganised them, as in Figure 13, which shows the compositional design of the images of the gods and beasts with different attributes, which reflect the living conditions of the gods and beasts living on land or swimming in water.

Figure 13 Reorganised design (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

In addition, the researcher has also made attempts at compositions of other proportions, such as enlarging the characteristics of the symbolism of the same divine beast image, and drawing the central visual effect of Chenghuang Divine Beasts, as in Figure 14.The researcher combines the elements of auspicious clouds, the main body of the divine beasts, and the divine wood, and the pinkish–purple background colours increase the mysterious sense of the picture, and the holes in the tree of the Heavenly Tree seem to be leaking out some secrets.

Figure 14 Chenghuang (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

The display of plane illustration can attract more viewers to understand the culture of Shanhaijing through the image of divine beasts, and the dynamic or interactive design works can impress people more, and quickly draw the relationship between traditional culture and modern people. The researcher used ar technology combined with plane illustration original manuscript design can be swept to appear the beast picture of interactive illustration works, as shown in figure 15, the display of the mobile end lens through the code to achieve ar illustration display effect, the use of digital technology can increase the fun of illustration works and storytelling, broaden the audience of traditional culture, so as to achieve the inheritance and integration of culture.

Figure 15 AR exporing of the beasts illustration design (source: Created by researchers, 2023)

Conclusion and Suggestions

1. The fantastic scenes and mysterious creatures depicted in the Shanhaijing provide rich creative materials for illustration design. Illustration artists bring the images of ancient myths to life through lines, colours and compositions, not only demonstrating the artists' imagination and skills, but also carrying the aesthetic concepts and artistic traditions of ancient cultures.

2. Through in-depth research and analysis of Shanhaijing illustration design in the cross-cultural perspective, this thesis demonstrates its importance in artistic expression, cultural value and contemporary cultural **exchange**. Shanhaijing illustration design not only enriches the content of artistic creation, but also promotes mutual understanding and exchange between different cultures, laying a solid foundation for the diversity and sharing of world culture.

Future Research Recommendations

1. Innovation in technological media: Combining emerging technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and generative AI, this research explores the dynamic visual narrative of the mythical beasts from the Shanhaijing in immersive interactive scenarios, and investigates the algorithmic translation pathways for traditional cultural symbols in the algorithmic era (e.g., AI–generated designs of mythical beasts that align with cross–cultural aesthetic preferences).

2. Integration of Theoretical Frameworks: It is recommended to introduce the "conceptual metaphor theory" from cognitive linguistics to analyse metaphorical cognitive differences across cultures in interpreting the geographical narratives of the Shanhaijing, or to combine digital humanities methods to construct a cross–cultural illustration database, achieving quantitative breakthroughs in research through image semantic analysis.

3. Practical Application Implementation: Target the cultural dissemination needs of countries along the Belt and Road Initiative to conduct localised design experiments for Shanhaijing illustrations, such as reconstructing the image of "Qiongqi" based on Middle Eastern geometric patterns, or re–creating the form of "QingLong" by integrating African woodcarving aesthetics, providing empirical cases for the international dissemination of traditional cultural IP.

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