Research on Visual Design based on Chinese Mythological Elements

-- Taking the Shan Hai Jing as an Example

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Abstract: With the development of science and technology, the speed of information transmission is also rapidly increasing, and culture and art from all over the world come to our eyes through this network, and when we are immersed in and marvel at Western culture and art, we gradually ignore traditional culture and craftsmanship. This project aims to provide a new perspective for the creation and development of visual art, fully integrate national elements and spirit, and integrate contemporary art into the cultural and historical context. Through reviewing the literature, we collected the cultural and artistic value of the image of the gods and monsters of the Shan Hai Jing in artistic creation, and analyzed its artistic concepts, and explored the artistic feasibility of combining visual design with the images of the gods and monsters of the Shan Hai Jing. And through case studies of works in contemporary visual design, Trying the mythological images and artistic conceptions in the Shan Hai Jing as the source of inspiration for this article, closely following the development characteristics of the current era, and analyzing the meaning of the application of elements in contemporary design, it provides new research ideas and theoretical foundations for the development of visual design and the combination of traditional culture. Explore the practical significance of Chinese mythological elements in modern visual design.

Keywords: Shan Hai Jing; Mythology; Visual Design; Packaging Design.

1. Introduction

Myths have been closely related to the changes of the entire human society since ancient times, in the continuous development of history, in the continuous evolution of the history of human civilization, myths and stories have also formed a variety of mythological systems, philosopher Cahill once said: art from the beginning, and myths are closely linked. The rich variety of myths and stories is also an important factor in our descendants' artistic creation. The Shan Hai Jing is an ancient Chinese text that describes Chinese mythology. Many cultures, religions, politics, geography, folklore, plant myths, and so on are represented in the book and have significant historical and scientific value. The Shan Hai Jing contains many bizarre depictions of exotic beasts that present us with a completely different visual world. The book's words and pictures reflect the national character, the primitive ancestors' living conditions, and the prototype of the psychological trajectory, reflecting the ancient people's imagination and simple aesthetic value.

With the mutual exchange and integration of cultures around the world, as well as the influence of Western culture since the development of modern society, Chinese mythology has gradually faded from people's perceptions in recent years. The elements of Chinese mythology, on the other hand, incorporate wisdom passed down over thousands of years, carry the oldest memory of the Chinese nation, and are a great treasure in the Chinese cultural tradition from ancient times to today's understanding and vision of life, the natural world, and unknown creatures. Chinese began applying mythological elements to various artefacts as decorations as early as ancient times to show different meanings, the most prominent of which are the dragon and phoenix totems. Now, the use of mythological elements in modern design is gradually increasing, as seen in "Jingwei Reclamation," "Cowherd and Weaver Girl," "Fox Demon Little Red Lady," and other film and television works on similar themes, which has sparked people's interest in traditional mythological stories. The artistic image of the Shan Hai Jing requires a new interpretation, revealing its ability to express culture and convey emotions in visual design through the analysis of mythological elements and the study of practical cases, and exploring its commercial value in brand recognition, consumer behavior, and market competitiveness. Integrating its image into visual design can not only improve the discourse power of local design, but also explore the essence of traditional culture from the consumer's perspective, to resonate with consumers and promote the development of traditional Chinese culture and the contemporary visual design industry. As a result, this paper closely follows the current era's development characteristics, uses the image of the beast in the Shan Hai Jing as an example, and investigates the practical significance of Chinese mythological elements in visual design by studying and analyzing the meaning of its application in contemporary design.

2. Problem Statement

The folk traditional patterns and totem art contained in Chinese mythological elements are widely used in modern art design, but the development history of visual art design in China is short in time, which leads to a large gap in strength and low originality [9]. This results in Chinese works in many creative processes without considering the cultural factors behind them, forcibly copying, and integrating Chinese and Western cultures, resulting in design works lacking spirituality and rigidity. Furthermore, today's youth may have
certain misconceptions and a lack of understanding of traditional Chinese culture and the content of the Shan Hai Jing, traditional myths and stories. Because the Shan Hai Jing is lengthy and primarily expressed in ancient Chinese, it is unlikely to be used as a daily popular reading, and related books are not particularly appealing to young people. Under these conditions, the majority of Shanhaijing culture's design works are in a state of copying and inheritance, and the development of various digital cultural and creative derivatives is not mature enough and must be continuously improved. The reason for this is that the visual art design industry in China has paid little attention to traditional culture, even though some designers are gradually exploring the application of traditional cultural elements in visual art design under the influence of the concept of "cultural confidence," but this effort remains limited. As a result, in the visual art design industry, it is necessary to apply traditional cultural elements to visual art design, investigate the connotation of new forms of works, and then highlight the Chinese characteristics of visual art design.

3. Literature Review

3.1. The Meaning of Mythological Elements in the Shan Hai Jing Sutra

The myth arose as a result of early human beings' limited thinking and consciousness ability, inability to scientifically explain various natural phenomena encountered in the process of survival and development, and inability to have a clear understanding of birth, old age, illness, and death. As a result, they use supernatural imagination to express their understanding of the origin of the world and the awe of nature through their own life experiences. They believed that gods controlled natural phenomena, and because they couldn't explain the origin of humans, the concept of "gods" was born, and they fantasized about Pangu and Nuwa, from which these ancestors’ created gods and all things, believing that this is the origin of humans, and myths and legends have been based on fantasy stories such as ghosts and demons, and usually through rituals, dances, murals, or operas. In a totemic sense, the Shan Hai Jing is an artistic process of primitive imagination. The Shan Hai Jing is made up of five mountain sutras and one sea sutra. The Wuzang Mountain Sutra, also known as the Mountain Sutra, records the five directions of mountain and river areas, as well as hundreds of mountain names and directions, as well as detailed descriptions of animals, plants, minerals, medicines, and so on. The Sea Classic, like the Records of All Nations, primarily records mythological stories and characters. Liu Xin combined this with his father's "Classic of the Sea" in the first year of Emperor Yuan's Jianping of the Western Han Dynasty, and only then did he have eighteen copies of the "Shan Hai Jing."

3.2. Characteristics of Mythological Elements in the Shan Hai Jing

The Shan Hai Jing as a whole is a work of geographical interpretation. Various mythological elements are performed concurrently with the description of the geographical structure system, and different mythological elements have different physical characteristics that can be roughly classified into four categories:

The first category is based on animal changes that give them superpowers. For example, a fish with the body of a fish, and the head of a snake has six legs and eyes like horse ears, and after eating, it can keep grass out of people's eyes and resist danger.

The second is a half-man, half-beast hybrid. The combination of man and animal creates duality in animals. That is, to be endowed with both human sincerity and animal ability. Nuwa, Nuwa is an ancient goddess and emperor, and after a person's face takes on the body of a snake, it changes seventy times per day, and its stomach becomes this god. Third, the image is human-like but has superhuman abilities, and it is the "god" that human’s worship. They are no longer bound to the animal at this point. Queen Mother of the West, for example.

The fourth is that after death, people will transform into animals, and the representative is "Jingwei reclamation." This means that after the girl drowns and dies, she is reborn as a Jingwei bird, as is typical of the transformation of a human into a beast.

3.3. The Concept Embodied in the Mythological Elements of the Shan Hai Jing Sutra

(1) Nature worship and totem worship

In 1871, the British anthropologist Taylor proposed the "nature cult", known as "animism". That is, he believes that everything is spiritual, whether alive or not. This coincides with the reason why primitive societies with limited human consciousness could not understand what was happening around them, so they were afraid of natural phenomena or animals full of mystery and unknown, which is why the ancestors gave these phenomena miracles and held primitive worship of nature.

There is a mythical beast named "TUO JI" in the Western Mountain Sutra, which translates to "There is a bird in the Ji Ji Mountains, shaped like a falcon, with a human-like face, and only one foot, which can be seen in winter and dormant in summer." If you drink the soup made with it, you will not be afraid of thunder." Similarly, the flying fish in the "Second Classic of the Middle Order", eating it cannot be afraid of thunder. People created sacred beasts with auspicious meanings to resolve frightening natural phenomena, embodying the vision of victory over mysterious nature [3].

"Totem worship" can also be called "animal worship", early humans based on nature worship totem worship, usually manifested as the worship of a certain animal. In primitive societies, totems can often represent a tribal organization or a people, so the role of totems is very important, and it is the earliest organizational symbol and symbol. In primitive societies, totem art was very extensive, involving many fields: First, totem body decoration, including tattoos, hair knots, chiseled teeth, clothing, etc. [15]. Common totems in primitive societies include birds, fish, snakes, etc., and later, after continuous development over time, animal totems with composite forms gradually appeared, such as dragons and phoenixes; Mr. Hu Zhongshi wrote about the strange animal figures in the Shan Hai Jing in "Totem, God, Myth - Talking about := Shan Hai Jing", "Many animals are recorded in the Shan Hai Jing, including various strange animals, but most of them are not the entities of these animals, but totems, the symbols of a tribe or clan" [13]. For example, the bird in the Second Sutra of the West, which looks like Zhai (a long-tailed peacock) but has colorful feathers, its appearance means that the world is peaceful and has auspicious significance. It can be seen that the image of the beast in the "Shan Hai Jing" is very likely or partly derived from the totem worship at that
time and has been passed down as a symbol to this day.

4. The Application of Mythological Elements in the Shan Hai Jing in Visual Design

4.1. Analysis of Visual Design Application based on the Image of Rui Beast as an Example

We will finally set the topic of discussion in the element of gods and monsters that means "auspicious omen," that is, the element of the beast, based on the previous definition of the concept of the field of investigation, as well as the category of the "Shan Hai Jing" mentioned above.

The ancestors prayed for eternal life and eternal happiness, and all activities required auspicious wishes, which is why the image of gods and monsters that means "auspicious" was chosen as the starting point. Whatever the social environment was like at the time, the ancestors were always striving to realize their own spiritual beliefs. The natural value of the beast's image gradually evolved into a symbolic symbol, reflecting the continuous sublimation of the spiritual world and the development of the ancestors' self-awareness needs, assuming that both physical and safety needs were roughly satisfied, and spiritual needs coincided with personal liberation. To some extent, the pursuit of positive meaning merges with the eternal goal of human progress and the ultimate sense of spiritual belonging.

![Wen yao fish](Figure 1. Wen yao fish Source: Notes on the Shan Hai Jing Scriptures)

In terms of color characteristics, scholar Li Mu speculated in his "On the Color System of the Shan Hai Jing" that the ancient map of the Shan Hai Jing is most likely color map [1]. The colors in the Shan Hai Jing have strong national characteristics and are a unique cultural symbol. Its color can be mainly divided into five systems, namely: red, black, cyan and yellow. Each of these color groups has a subdivision.

However, since most of the old drawings in the "Shan Hai Jing" are only ink line drawings, the extraction of color features is mainly completed from the description of characters. The color part is mainly divided into two aspects. One is the name of the auspicious animal word that indicates the color, and the other is the color indication words in the name of the Rui beast, such as "red creep", "yellow bird", "green cultivation", the color of which is only a component of the name of the Rui beast, not the color interpretation of the image of the Rui beast; The second is to describe the colors used in the beast, such as "the pine cone has a bird, and its name is called the Qiux." It resembles a pheasant. Black body barefoot, can wrinkled skin", meaning that there is a bird in the pinecones, the name is the clam, shaped like a normal pheasant, with a black body and red paws, which can be used to treat dry and wrinkled skin. "Black body and bare feet" are the color description of the body and feet in the image of the clam. Of the seventy-four beasts, a total of thirty-six images of beasts has color descriptions.

4.1.1. Symbolic Symbolism of the Image of the Beast

Based on the previous definition of the concept of the field of investigation, as well as the category of the "Shan Hai Jing" mentioned above, we will finally set the topic of discussion in the element of gods and monsters that means "auspicious omen", that is, the element of the beast.

The reason for taking the image of gods and monsters that means "auspicious" as the starting point is that the ancestors prayed for eternal life and eternal happiness, and all activities required auspicious wishes. No matter how the social environment changed at that time, the ancients were constantly pursuing the realization of their own spiritual beliefs. The natural value of the image of the beast itself gradually evolved into a symbolic symbol, which reflected the continuous sublimation of the spiritual world and the development of the self-awareness needs of the ancestors, assuming that both physical needs and safety needs were roughly satisfied, and spiritual needs coincided with personal liberation. To some extent, the pursuit of the positive meaning of things is combined with the eternal goal of human progress and the ultimate sense of spiritual belonging.

4.1.2. Cultural Value of the Image of the Beast

Xiangrui thought evolved from the initial worship of witch gods to the belief in heaven, and finally proposed in Dong Zhongshu (179BC) that "only the perception of heaven and man can politically clarify Xiangrui's thought."

From the analysis of Xiangrui's cultural value, it can be divided into two aspects: historical value and folk value.

Historical value (socio-political)

Xiangrui belief is a special cultural phenomenon in the history of Chinese civilization, and since ancient times, Xiangrui culture has been closely related to political values. It played a role in consolidating sovereignty and propagating the idea of royal power in ancient political culture. In the "Huainan Zi Yan Xun", which can be traced back to the ancient imperial period, the auspicious Rui symbol gives the imperial power a sacred meaning: "In the past, the Yellow Emperor ruled the world. So, the sun and the moon are shrewd, the stars do not lose their way, in the wind and rainy season, the grains are abundant, the tigers and wolves are not devoured, the irises are not vain, the phoenix soars in the court, the unicorn swims in the suburbs, the green dragon enters the car, and the yellow soap flies. This interweaving of ideas that elevates human values to the cosmic level with auspicious meanings reflects the initial formation of early political thought. During the Western Han Dynasty, Xiangrui received theoretical support in political culture. Shen Kuo of the Song Dynasty further interpreted the value and mystery of imperial power, regarded the emperor as the true dragon Tianzi, and gave Xiangrui the meaning of political symbolism. Therefore, for a dynasty to establish orthodox values politically, it must give Xiangrui rationality and sacredness, and the value of Xiangrui has become an important tool of national political thought, symbolizing the auspicious Rui descending from heaven and heralding the unified spirit of the four directions being one.

Folklore value

In modern times, Xiangrui thought has become a kind of folk psychology of people. Xiangrui culture satisfies people's
wishes for auspiciousness and well-being, which is a kind of psychological sustenance. It is believed that God can control the universe and change destiny. "Xiangrui gradually evolved into a decorative symbol, which is widely used in all walks of life. As a cultural symbol, Xiangrui is deeply integrated into the national spirit, bringing people good hope and auspicious blessings. In festive festivals, Xiangrui exists in various forms to add joyful atmosphere. The value of Xiangrui will still exist in social life today and in the future. I think the design of Xiangrui's derivative products of the "Shan Hai Jing" is very meaningful at present, Xiangrui thought has withdrawn from the political stage, but its ideology and culture are more deeply rooted in people's lives, it is a part of people's festival life, indispensable, and part of it has naturally become the target of mass consumption in the market. Among modern everyday products, various baby products that represent auspicious images are also popular. Through embroidery, sewing and other processes on the fabric, these items create children's hats and shoes with tiger head patterns symbolizing the meaning of avoiding evil and eliminating disasters, with vivid shapes, bright colors, and strong colors.

5. The Rui Beast Elements Applied to Research and Analysis in Modern Design

As an integral part of China's excellent traditional culture, the image language of gods and monsters in the "Shan Hai Jing" has a unique language and rich artistic charm, and many artistic contents have rich imagination. The content of artistic expression is diverse, among which digital illustration design, IP packaging design and other aspects have presented a wealth of art and design works.

5.1. Application of the Rui Elements of the Beast in Digital Illustration Design in the Shan Hai Jing

In this day and age of rapid digital media development, many artists prefer to use digital painting for creation, which fully demonstrates the artistic charm of the mythical image of the Shan Hai Jing and allows for more design exploration for artistic expression. Given this, we can use the case study and comparative research methods to examine the status of Rui Beast elements in contemporary digital illustration design:

Digital painting has many advantages and differences in contemporary Shan Hai Jing art from traditional painting, but the artistic connotation has not changed. Digital painting combines traditional painting techniques with cutting-edge technology to overcome the limitations of paper media. It employs a variety of tools and mediums to make images easier to preserve and disseminate, as well as to present richer colors. [18].

Liu Liwen's "Shan Hai Jing Beasts" works are based on learning and borrowing from the traditional painting form of the "Shan Hai Jing," and use digital painting to express the image's spirit and charm. He combines digital painting characteristics with Western realistic oil painting, and his works are vibrant and natural, with artistic appeal. The overall art design demonstrates digital painting characteristics and expresses the beauty of natural harmony.

Sugizawa's painting style for the Shan Hai Jing is primarily based on traditional Chinese watercolor style, and the artistic expression in the work is very vivid, with a lifelike depiction of the overall scene. Sugizawa creates artistic images of the gods and monsters of the "Shan Hai Jing Sutra" using digital painting, and the images he creates are mostly cute and lively, which young people enjoy. It differs greatly from the ancient paintings of the Ming and Qing dynasties in terms of artistic charm and characteristics.

To summarize, the two have created innovative designs for the Shan Hai Jing using various styles, and they also demonstrate that digital illustration design has brought many changes and innovations in contemporary Shan Hai Jing art, making the artistic image more vivid while retaining the connotation of traditional art. It is a synthesis of traditional painting and new technologies that opens up new avenues for artistic expression.
5.2. Application of Rui Beast Image in Packaging Design

5.2.1. Case Background

With the passage of time, today's aesthetics has undergone significant changes; the traditional style can no longer meet the needs of the new generation of consumer groups; at the moment, the market of Chinese characteristic trendy products is not only diverse in form, but also involves several fields, designers with their personality and unique insights on traditional culture, in a new way to present Chinese elements.

According to numerous research reports, Generation Z, those born between 1995 and 2009, have gradually become the driving force behind national tide consumption. Generation Z grew up in the information age, was influenced by a multi-faceted culture, was willing to pay for diverse interests, and had a variety of consumption attitudes, such as paying attention to appearance and personality expression, like to keep up with trends, and care about health preservation. The post-95 generation prefers cross-border co-branded goods over the various national tide new gameplay.

According to the "2021 Spring/Summer New Fashion Report," IP co-branded models are Generation Z's top fashion consumption preference, followed by national fashion products, and designer co-branded models and famous brand crossovers rank ninth and tenth, respectively.

5.2.2. Image Shaping and Color Use of Rui Beast Elements in Packaging Design

In early 2021, the "Golden Classic" milk brand and JD Mobile collaborated to launch a New Year series packaging with the theme of "Shan Hai Jing," in which the image of the Rui Beast is used as product packaging to provide consumers with novel visual effects.

This time, the packaging features four images with beautiful meanings: "auspicious," which can increase life expectancy for thousands of years, "green cultivation," which can eliminate diseases and disasters, "Yi," which can ward off evil spirits, and "wen ray," which has the world's sign of a good harvest. To commemorate the arrival of the Spring Festival, the image of Rui Beast is presented to the public in a cuter and more cordial image, emphasizing its cultural connotation and expressing the brand's good wishes for the New Year, and the bottle body of the packaging is gilded red to echo the New Year atmosphere, giving the audience a strong sense of festive substitution.

![Figure 5. Spring/Summer 2021 New Fashion Report](https://www.sohu.com/a/450841733_120065410)
For example, Adolf, a domestic brand in the cleaning and care industry, also launched the "Divine Beast Shan Hai Jing Sutra" tea branch washing and care limited gift box with a very national trend and full of national style in May 2021. Launched the "Divine Beast Shan Hai Jing Sutra" washing limited gift box. There are three products in the gift box, two of which are designed with sacred beasts from the Shan Hai Jing, namely "lei" (Food is not jealous) and "Nine-tailed Fox" (Food is not deceitful). The choice of image is not based on image allegory.

The fit with the product is selected, but according to the aesthetics, popularity and public acceptance of the image. In terms of color rendering, choose 5 days cyan as the theme color, azure is not sky blue or cyan, azure refers to the color of clouds after the rain of smoke, there is a quiet and peaceful, romantic color atmosphere, is a very advanced color, but also the charm of Chinese color. Combine Chinese cultural IP with current design aesthetics, integrate classics and trends, and carry out multiple interpretations of product personality and brand concept.

As Adolf President Li Zhizhen once said in an exclusive media interview, "As a local brand committed to promoting traditional culture, we integrate oriental aesthetics and classic IP into our products, which is to let culture enter the crowd and into daily life." By applying natural cleaning ingredients with traditional Chinese wisdom to modern cleaning and care products, we hope to let global consumers see the ancient beauty of traditional Chinese culture and feel the brand's innovative application of contemporary technology.

5.2.3. Market Feedback and Consumer Perspective

According to the "2019 Museum Cultural and Creative Products Market Data Report", nearly 70% of the consumers of cross-border cooperation products of museums are new brand customers, and the effect of attracting new products is remarkable. For example, the Forbidden City, Summer Palace, Sanxingdui and other cultural IPs have co-branded with many brands. According to the "New Cultural and Creative Consumption Trend Report" released by the Institute of Cultural Economy of Tsinghua University, the market share of cross-border derivatives of museums in the overall cultural and creative products is as high as 72%, that is, the scale of cross-border derivatives of museums is three times that of museum-operated products. It can be said that co-branded products are indeed an effective means and important marketing means to attract new brand customers, and further illustrate that brands with traditional elements can reap greater market benefit possibilities. And in the post-95 group, nearly two-thirds of respondents said they were willing to try to buy co-branded products. This also highlights the personality of the post-95 generation who dares to try and loves new things.

The packaging design of co-branded products not only helps enhance the stickiness between the brand and the new generation of consumers, but also makes the whole brand more youthful; On the other hand, the cross-border between brands and traditional cultural elements IP can make products more cultural, enhance the style of products, and promote product differentiation.

5.3. Discussion

After the above case analysis in different fields, we can find that the arrival of the digital age provides artists with more space for design exploration, it breaks through the limitations of traditional painting on painting media, and provides new possibilities for contemporary art design, and by combining traditional culture and new technologies, the current digital illustration creation is more creative, just like the image of the gods and monsters in the "Shan Hai Jing" that was originally an ink line diagram can be displayed in front of the world more gorgeously and delicately, so that the ancient book is no longer obscure and monotonous. Become livelier and more flexible.

At the same time, in the packaging design, the use of Rui Beast elements has also achieved a good job of inheriting the brilliant Chinese civilization that has lasted for thousands of years, while developing its own brand reputation and
conceptual image. Geely and keeping safe are the traditional mentality of the Chinese nation, and the Rui beast element is born from the people's general and lasting "seeking luck" mentality, and its application to packaging design can better meet people's psychological needs. Through the data analysis of market feedback and consumer views on packaging design, we can also understand that no matter what kind of product is designed and developed, understanding the needs and preferences of the target consumer group is the key. Young people are the main force of commodity consumption and the main driving force of cultural development. Only by grasping the aesthetic preferences of young people can we promote the healthy and continuous spread and development of mythological elements in the Shan Hai Jing in modern design. Based on satisfying the beauty of form, conforming to the development of the times, science and technology to progress, such as advancing from two-dimensional works to more three-dimensional, the effect of thinking is presented, and at the same time attracting consumers' attention by stimulating the user's pleasure in packaging, giving consumers more emotional care.

The Rui beast pattern appears on all important occasions in life and every important joint in the course of life, constructing a ubiquitous space of auspicious meaning, so that people are always in it. It can express abstract meaning by figurative things, take images from objects, express their profound symbolic meaning, and then infiltrate those values and meanings into the ideas of the non-literate class. The packaging design uses the elements of the beast to make it easier to communicate with consumers.

6. Conclusion

To summaries, the mythological elements that have been passed down through a long period of practice and development have formed different characteristics in different periods and implied different meanings, leaving a wealth of artistic expressions and techniques that have had a profound impact and development on modern visual design. The Shan Hai Jing, as a publication of geographical culture and traditional culture, combines mythology, ancient culture, and geography, and it plays an extremely important role in the transmission of traditional culture in China. The culture of the "Shan Hai Jing" is better promoted among the public, recognized by the market, and applied to other cultural industries through innovative design in modern society. From a deeper perspective, designers should also be based on the continuous advancement of the social development process, combined with the characteristics of the times' development, appropriate ideas will be reflected in the design category. Strive to build a bridge between the "old and new," so that more people will pay attention to, inherit, and innovate Chinese traditional culture.

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