

TRANSLATION EXPERIMENT OF TRADITIONAL INK-WASH TECHNIQUES IN FANTASY ILLUSTRATIONS: CONNECTING THAI MYTHOLOGY WITH CONTEMPORARY VISUAL NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

Against the background of global visual exchange, this study focuses on the cross-cultural adaptability of traditional artistic languages. Taking the Thai mythological figure Hanuman as the subject, it explores the feasibility of translating mythological imagery and the potential of Chinese ink-wash techniques in reconstructing hybrid fantasy illustrations. Using qualitative methods including literature review and visual analysis, the study finds that shared mythological archetypes support cross-cultural cognition, and ink-wash shows strong expressive adaptability beyond realism. It provides a methodological framework for integrating traditional art into global visual storytelling.

Keywords: traditional Ink Painting, Fantasy Illustration, Thai Mythology, Cross-cultural Visual Translation, Visual Narrative

INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of deepening global cultural exchange, visual arts are gradually breaking through the limitations of geography and traditional media, presenting a trend of cross-cultural integration [3]. Artists are no longer limited to a single cultural system, but explore new ways of expression by absorbing diverse visual resources. In this process, how to establish an understandable visual language while respecting cultural differences has become one of the important issues in art research.

Mythology provides rich narrative resources for visual art [6]. Although different civilizations have their own independent mythological systems, they exhibit astonishing similarities in hero prototypes, spiritual symbols, and expression of values. American mythologist Joseph Campbell's "THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES" mentions that mythological characters often carry universal spirits such as courage, sacrifice, and protection, which gives them the potential foundation for cross-cultural dissemination.

The Thai mythological figure Hanuman is an important representative of this phenomenon. As a heroic figure who combines the roles of a warrior and a guardian, Hanuman not only has a high degree of recognition in Southeast Asian visual traditions [3], but also symbolically echoes the heroic figure Sun Wukong in Chinese mythology. This structural commonality provides a theoretical premise for cross-cultural visual translation.

At the same time, Chinese ink painting emphasizes "using form to express spirit" and values spiritual expression and formal summarization. This highly condensed visual language gives it the potential to transform when faced with new themes. Therefore, introducing ink painting techniques into the study of Thai mythological characters not only helps to expand the expressive boundaries of traditional media, but may also provide new paths for contemporary fantasy visual storytelling.

Based on the above background, this study takes Hanuman as the research object, explores the possibility of visual translation of mythological characters in cross-cultural contexts, and analyzes the expressive potential of Chinese ink language in reconstructing cross-cultural images.

OBJECTIVE

This research focuses on two aspects: cross-cultural visual creation and the transformation of traditional media. The specific goals are as follows:

1. How to highlight Hanuman's image features in ink-wash paintings? Which contents, graphics and techniques should be selected for drawing?
2. Explore the expressive potential of Chinese ink-wash language in reconstructing the images of characters from different cultures.

METHODOLOGY

His study focuses on the cross-cultural integration of Chinese ink art and Thai mythology, using qualitative research methods to systematically examine the translation paths and expressive potential of traditional media in contemporary visual contexts. The study analyzes from multiple dimensions such as formal language, color structure, and decorative patterns, and focuses on exploring how to use ink art to highlight the unique artistic features and cultural connotations of Thai mythology.

To ensure the systematicity and operability of the research process, this study constructed a research path consisting of five stages:

Phase 1: Literature research and theoretical construction.

Systematically review the origin and development of Hanuman in traditional Thai culture, with a focus on analyzing its role evolution in religious narratives, folklore, and theatrical traditions. At the same time, summarizing the stylistic features and symbolic meanings gradually formed in visual arts provides a theoretical basis for cross-cultural visual translation.

Phase 2: Visual sample collection and organization.

Based on theoretical research, extensively collect visual materials related to Hanuman, including traditional masks, dance and Kong opera performance images, murals, sculptures and other art forms. These samples can visually present the logical and aesthetic features of characters in different media, establishing an observable visual database for subsequent analysis.

Phase 3: Image Analysis and Core Symbol Extraction.

Using image analysis methods, systematic observation and comparison are conducted from aspects such as character posture, dynamic structure, facial features, clothing decoration, and symbolic elements to identify stable core visual symbols. This process aims to clarify which key elements should

be prioritized for preservation in cross-cultural translation to maintain the cultural identity of the characters.

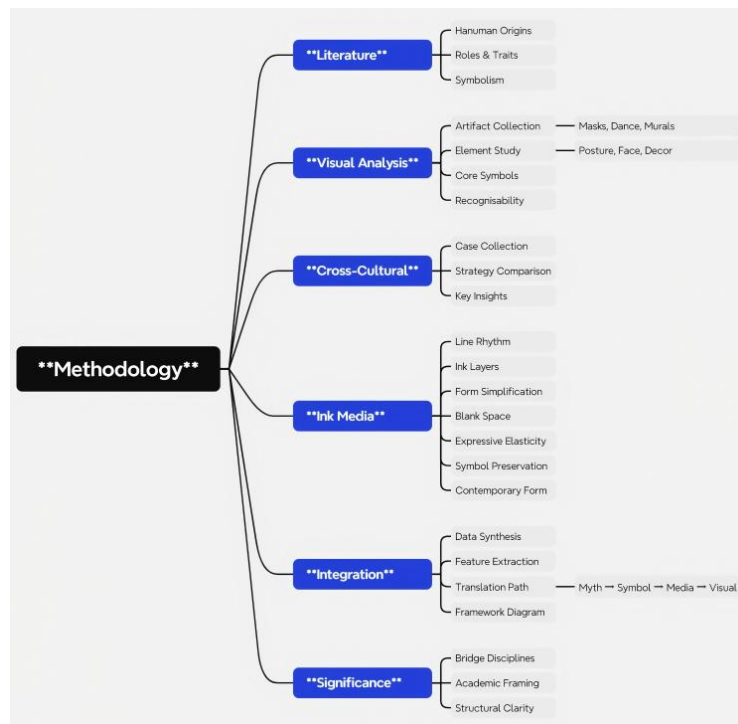
Phase 4: Comparative Study of Cross Cultural Cases.

Select representative cross-cultural art integration cases through online resources and professional databases, and focus on analyzing the transformation strategies adopted by traditional media when entering the contemporary visual system. By comparing the differences in element integration methods, visual expression effects, and cultural transmission paths among these cases, we summarize practical fusion experiences and provide methodological insights for this study.

Stage 5: Analysis of Ink Media Language

Based on the above analysis, further examine the expressive advantages of Chinese ink painting in cross-cultural character construction, with a focus on the strengthening effect of line rhythm, ink color hierarchy, spatial organization, and formal summarization on spiritual expression.

The main conceptual framework of this study adopts the following mind map:



1. The origin, evolution, and visual significance of Hanuman in traditional Thai culture

Hanuman originated from the Ramayana epic, which was formed in the ancient religious and mythological traditions of India, shaping a monkey god image that combines divinity and heroic qualities. With the spread of Indian culture to Thailand, this character was incorporated into the Thai national epic Ramajian and underwent deep localization and reconstruction. The Thai version, while retaining its core qualities of loyalty, bravery, and wisdom, weakens the ascetic spirit in Indian tradition, making the characters more secular and emotional, thus better fitting the aesthetic psychology and cultural needs of Thai society.

At the level of religious narrative, Hanuman gradually transcended the scope of literary roles and transformed into a symbolic existence with spiritual refuge significance. Its image is often associated with concepts such as guarding, defeating evil, and maintaining order, reflecting a cultural structure that integrates diverse religious traditions. In this process, Hanuman transformed from the epic Monkey General to a cultural symbol with protective functions, reflecting the typical path of mythological characters transforming into social and spiritual symbols[4].

In the context of folk culture, Hanuman has further become a carrier of social values. The story surrounding it not only emphasizes loyalty and courage, but also highlights wit and action, making it an important medium for conveying moral concepts and group identity. This process of extending from mythological narrative to social ethics enables Hanuman to possess both supernatural attributes and be understood and accepted by the public in a more realistic way[7].

The theatrical tradition reinforces the dynamic characteristics and stage performance of this character. In Thai classical costume dramas, Hanuman is usually portrayed as a character with agile movements, strong power, and dramatic tension, whose image combines heroic temperament and entertainment. (As shown in Figure 1、2) This performative shift not only enhances the visual appeal of characters, but also marks an important transformation of mythological narratives from religious contexts to public cultural spaces.

In the development of visual arts, Hanuman gradually formed a stable image paradigm. Artworks are often characterized by white monkey bodies, exaggerated facial structures, strong body movements, and ornate decorations, which enable viewers to quickly identify the identity of the characters through visual encoding. At the same time, the posture of leaping or fighting reinforces the symbolic meaning of its guardians and victors, while exquisite clothing and ritualistic styling further enhance its sacred attributes [7].

Figure 1: Hanuman Murals

source: Google entry



Figure 2: Hanuman Sak Yant

Source: Pinterest App



2. Visual sample collection and image analysis

Based on theoretical research, this study systematically collected various visual expressions of Hanuman, including artistic samples such as traditional masks, dance performance images, murals and

sculptures. These materials can visually present the modeling logic and aesthetic features of characters in different media.

Through image analysis methods, focus on observing the following visual elements:

Attitude and dynamic structure、facial features、Decorative elements and clothing symbols (As shown in Figure 3、4

Figure 3, 4: Posture and Dynamic Structure

source: Xiaohongshu app



After comparing different samples, it was concluded that the following four core visual symbols with stability should be prioritized for retention in cross-cultural translation to identify Hanuman's cultural identity.

Primary Morphological Markers

The most essential identification mark of Hanuman is the combination of "monkey" and "divinity", therefore it should be retained: monkey face structure (prominent mouth and nose), long tail, flexible and strong body proportion

Color Identity

The white body is one of the most representative visual symbols, symbolizing the qualities of Hanuman purity, divine power, and loyalty

Status Indicators

The research results will retain the following decorative elements: crowns, high decorative clothing, and warrior accessories (such as armor and arm ornaments), which convey two key messages: divine level and hero identity.

Symbolic Core

Attention should be paid to expressing Hanuman's spiritual prototype through external visual elements, such as loyalty (absolute support for justice or leadership), courage, guardian temperament, wisdom, and agility, which are deeper levels of recognition.

4. Cross-cultural case collection and comparison

To further understand the transformation methods of traditional art in cross-cultural contexts, this study collected representative cases of cross-cultural integration through online resources and professional databases, (As shown in Figure 5、6) with a focus on the artistic practice of introducing Eastern traditional media into the contemporary visual system. Through comparative analysis, this study summarizes valuable strategies and experiences in cross-cultural integration, providing methodological insights for subsequent media analysis.

Figure 5: Mo Xiaosong.2022.

search hes for the Muse.

source: Xiaohongshu app



Figure 6: Zhang Long. 2023. Cupid

source: Xiaohongshu app



4. Media analysis of ink and wash language

After clarifying the visual characteristics of characters and cross-cultural strategies, the study further focuses on the formal language of Chinese ink painting, examining its expressive ability in shaping cross-cultural character images[6].

The analysis focuses on:

The spatial relationship formed by the ink color hierarchy. (As shown in Figure 7)

The expressiveness of lines and changes in rhythm. (As shown in Figure 8)

The strengthening effect of morphological summarization on spiritual expression.

The visual tension brought by blank space.

Figure 7: Ink gradation

source: baidu app

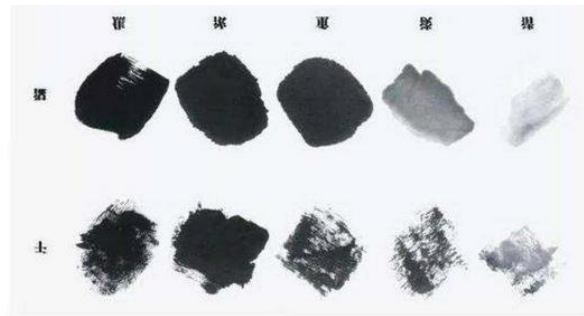


Figure 8: Jiang Zhaohe. Portrait of an old man

source: baidu app



The focus of this study is not on specific creative outcomes, but on the expressive flexibility demonstrated by ink as a traditional medium, that is, whether it can construct a visual form with contemporary consciousness while maintaining the symbolic meaning of characters.

RESULTS

This study presents the research findings in a structured manner based on a five stage methodology to clearly illustrate how the analysis process supports the research conclusions. Unlike purely descriptive explanations, the results of this study are based on observable visual evidence and comparative analysis.

1. Stable recognition of visual prototypes

Through literature research and cross validation of visual materials, this study confirms that Hanuman has a highly stable prototype structure, enabling it to be quickly recognized in cross-cultural contexts. The features that repeatedly appear in murals, sculptures, and theatrical images include:

White monkey body, exaggerated facial structure, combat oriented dynamic posture, highly decorative clothing.

These features do not exist in isolation, but together form a 'prototype recognition system' that enables viewers to establish consistent cognition across different media.

Research has found that the stability of mythological prototypes can effectively reduce cognitive barriers for viewers from different cultural backgrounds, thereby providing a structural foundation for cross-cultural visual translation.

2. Core Visual Symbol Extraction in Cross Cultural Translation

Based on systematic image analysis, this study extracts four core symbols that should be prioritized for preservation in cross-cultural reconstruction:

Basic form symbol

The key identification factor is the anatomical structure that combines the monkey and the god. The body and torso can be designed to lean towards the "divine", but the facial features should not change their basic biological contours.

Color identity coding

A white body is an efficient visual encoding often associated with purity, loyalty, and supernatural power.

Identity indication system

Crowns, armor, and highly decorative clothing can convey divine status and hero identity.

Symbolic personality structure

Loyalty, courage, guardianship, and wisdom form the psychological framework that supports visual interpretation.

Research has found that cross-cultural recognizability primarily relies on the continuation of structural symbols rather than superficial imitation of traditional styles.

3. Conversion strategies derived from cross-cultural case comparisons

Through comparative analysis of contemporary cross-cultural art works, the following transformation strategies have been summarized:

Selective Retention, Retain key elements with cultural significance while simplifying secondary decorations.

Media Recontextualization, Integrating traditional techniques into modern composition systems.

Research has found that successful cross-cultural transformation is not about replicating tradition, but about rebuilding its symbolic logic in a new visual system.

4. The expressive advantages of ink and wash media in character reconstruction

Media analysis shows that Chinese ink painting has the following key advantages in cross-cultural character construction:

The rhythm of the lines and the writing style of the strokes can generate dynamic tension, reducing the dependence on details while enhancing the hero's momentum.

Ink color hierarchy establishes spatial depth through variations in intensity.

The openness of space and conscious blank space enhance explanatory flexibility, making it easier for viewers from different cultural backgrounds to participate in meaning construction.

Formal summarization and structural refinement guide viewers to focus on spiritual similarity rather than superficial realism.

Research has found that ink painting techniques have the potential to become a “translational medium” that connects different visual systems——

5. Construction of a cross-cultural visual translation framework

Based on comprehensive theoretical research, visual analysis, and media research, this study proposes the following structured path:

Mythical prototype recognition □ Core visual symbol extraction □ Media language analysis □ Cross cultural visual construction

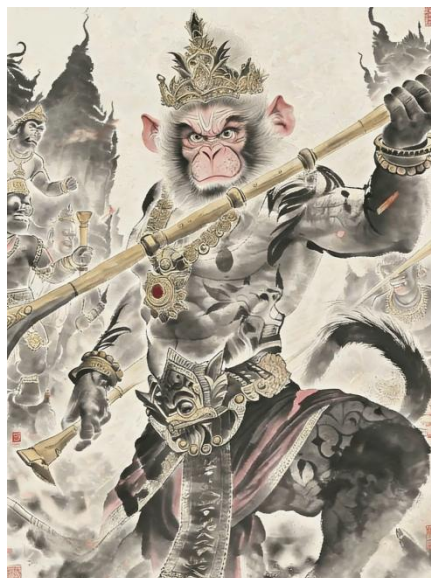
This framework transforms cross-cultural character design from an intuitive artistic practice into a research process that can be systematically discussed.

6. Practice-Based Validation

Based on the extracted visual symbols and ink painting strategies, an experimental illustration was created using an AI model at the end of this conclusion, which verified the operability of the translation framework from a visual perspective.

Figure 9: Hanuman paintings

source: Dreamina AI app



CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This study confirms that mythological characters have a structural foundation for cross-cultural communication, and their symbolic meanings can gain new explanatory space in different visual systems. At the same time, Chinese ink painting has shown positive potential in reconstructing cross-cultural images, proving that traditional media can still play an important role in contemporary contexts.

Further research indicates that cross-cultural artistic practice is not only a fusion of visual styles, but also a process of constructing cultural understanding mechanisms. By re-examining the relationship between traditional language and contemporary themes, art research can provide new possibilities for dialogue between different cultures.

Future research can be compared in a wider range of mythological systems and media forms, such as combining Nordic mythology with digital technology or dynamic imagery, to further explore the transformation paths of traditional art in contemporary visual environments.

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