

## INTEGRATING MYTHICAL BEASTS FROM SHAN HAI JING INTO TRADITIONAL CULTURE TEACHING

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### Abstract

This study explores the integration of mythical creatures from Shan Hai Jing in animation education to enhance students' cultural understanding and creative skills. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations to assess the impact of these mythical elements on students' cultural interest, character design skills, and creative expression. The course design involved three stages: cultural background instruction, character design, and animation production, gradually guiding students to understand and create works infused with cultural significance. Results showed that after integrating Shan Hai Jing elements, students demonstrated a marked increase in interest in traditional culture and exhibited enhanced creativity and cultural identity in their projects. The study indicates that combining cultural content with technical instruction helps students not only master animation skills but also strengthens their cultural identity and creative expression. This educational model offers a reference for integrating traditional cultural content into technical courses, demonstrating that animation education can facilitate both the preservation and innovation of traditional culture in modern creative practices.

**Keywords:** Shan Hai Jing, Animation Education, Traditional Culture, Mythological Beasts

### Introduction

Integrating traditional culture into modern education is crucial for fostering cultural appreciation and developing creative thinking among students. The Shan Hai Jing (Classic of Mountains and Seas), a foundational text in Chinese mythology, provides a rich source of mythical beasts and folklore that have shaped the cultural landscape. These mythical creatures offer an opportunity to explore themes of symbolism, artistry, and imagination in educational contexts.

This research aims to explore how integrating these mythical beasts into traditional culture teaching can enhance students' understanding of cultural heritage while stimulating their creativity. By examining the significance of these mythical figures within Chinese culture and their potential pedagogical benefits, this study seeks to establish a framework for incorporating them into contemporary educational practices.

### Objective

- 1) To study the educational benefits of integrating mythological beasts from Shan Hai Jing into animation curricula.
- 2) To integrate the impact of this integration on students' understanding and appreciation of traditional Chinese culture, and to analyze students' perceptions and experiences regarding the inclusion of traditional Chinese narratives in their education.

### Literature Review

This literature review examines the integration of mythical beasts from Shan Hai Jing into traditional culture teaching. It focuses on the cultural significance of these mythical creatures, their application in educational settings, and the impact of this integration on students' cultural understanding and engagement.

## Introduction to Shan Hai Jing

### Definition and Origin

Shan Hai Jing is an ancient Chinese text from the Warring States period (475-221 BCE), containing mythological, geographical, and cultural stories. It provides insights into early Chinese cosmology and philosophy, featuring various mythical creatures and landscapes.

### Symbolism and Mythological Elements

The text includes gods, monsters, and legendary heroes, each embodying virtues and lessons. These creatures offer rich visual inspiration for animation, allowing animators to preserve Chinese cultural heritage through modern storytelling.

### Educational Applications

Shan Hai Jing has been used in education to teach Chinese mythology, history, and culture. Integrating its elements into curricula enhances student engagement and cultural awareness, promoting a deeper understanding of Chinese heritage.

### Overview of Mythological Beasts from Shan Hai Jing

The mythical creatures in Shan Hai Jing hold significant cultural and philosophical meaning. They reflect ancient Chinese beliefs and provide material for creative and educational exploration.

### Detailed Descriptions of Mythological Beasts

Key creatures like the Qi Lin (benevolence and peace), Phoenix (renewal and harmony), Bai Ze (wisdom and protection), and Xuan Wu (longevity and guardianship) symbolize core virtues in Chinese culture. Each creature has its own story that conveys moral lessons and cultural values.



**Fig.1** The ancient book image of Qi Lin



**Fig.2** The ancient book image of Phoenix



**Fig.3** The ancient book image of Bai Ze



**Fig.4** The ancient book image of Xuan Wu



Fig.5 Taotie by artist Shan Ze



Fig.6 The ancient book image of Qiong Qi



Fig.7 The ancient book image of Hun Dun



Fig.8 The ancient book image of Tao Wu

## **Theoretical Frameworks for Cultural Integration**

### Cultural Relevance in Education

Culturally relevant pedagogy emphasizes integrating students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum. This approach helps create a learning environment that is meaningful and engaging, fostering a deeper connection to the material.

### Benefits and Challenges

Cultural integration in animation education increases creativity, engagement, and cultural appreciation. However, challenges include adapting complex cultural content to modern educational frameworks and balancing technical skills with cultural exploration.

### ***Current Approaches to Animation Education***

Many animation programs focus on technical skills without incorporating cultural content. This research seeks to fill that gap by integrating Shan Hai Jing into animation courses, offering a more culturally diverse curriculum that encourages students to explore traditional Chinese myths.

### **Case Studies of Cultural Integration**

Successful case studies, such as Studio Ghibli's incorporation of Japanese folklore, show how cultural narratives can be effectively integrated into animation. These examples highlight the potential of Shan Hai Jing in preserving and promoting Chinese culture through animation education.

### **Gaps in Existing Literature**

There is limited research on integrating Shan Hai Jing into animation education. This study aims to fill that gap by offering practical guidelines for educators, focusing on the cultural integration aspect that is often overlooked in existing literature.

### **Impact of Animation on Cultural Preservation**

Animation is a powerful tool for preserving cultural heritage by bringing traditional stories to life. It also serves as an engaging educational tool, helping bridge the gap between cultural content and modern teaching methods.

### **Methodologies for Integrating Cultural Content into Animation**

Integrating cultural content into animation education requires strategies like project-based learning and curriculum development focused on cultural elements. These methods encourage creativity and enhance cultural awareness in students.

## Relevant Research

Research highlights the importance of cultural integration in education, showing that it boosts engagement and critical thinking. Animation is an effective medium for conveying cultural stories, but challenges remain in balancing technical skills with cultural content, which requires proper educator training and thoughtful curriculum design (Banks, 2006; Napier, 2005).

## Research Methodology

### Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology for integrating mythological beasts from Shan Hai Jing into animation curricula. It includes the research design, population and sample, data collection methods, tools, and ethical considerations, followed by a description of the research process.

### Research Design

A mixed-methods approach is used, combining qualitative (interviews, thematic analysis) and quantitative (surveys, statistical analysis) techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the integration process.

### Population and Sample

The study targets 40 animation students from the Department of Fine Arts at Neijiang Normal University, selected through purposive sampling to ensure direct involvement with curriculum changes.

### Research Tools

*Interview Form*

*Pre-Test and Post-Test Questionnaires*

### Data Collection

#### Literature Review

An extensive review of relevant literature established a theoretical foundation for the study.

#### Interviews

Semi-structured interviews collected students' experiences with integrating Shan Hai Jing elements into the curriculum.

#### Questionnaires

Pre- and post-test questionnaires assessed students' cultural interest, creative processes, and the impact of Shan Hai Jing elements on their work.

#### Observations

Classroom observations provided real-time data on student engagement and application of Shan Hai Jing elements in projects.

### Data Analysis

#### Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis identified patterns in students' experiences.

#### Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze changes in knowledge and attitudes, providing insights into the integration's impact.

### Research Process

#### Cultural Background Instruction

The instructor introduces the historical context and cultural significance of Shan Hai Jing, explaining the symbolism of mythical creatures such as the Qilin and Phoenix.

This phase sparks students' interest in traditional culture through storytelling and visual aids.

### Character Design

Students select specific mythical creatures and merge their cultural symbolism with modern animation aesthetics. The instructor provides guidance on balancing traditional imagery with contemporary animation techniques.

#### *Animation Production*

Students animate their characters, applying cultural symbols to their work. This phase allows for the refinement of modeling and animation skills while deepening cultural integration in their projects.

### Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from participants, and confidentiality was ensured. The study adhered to the university's ethical guidelines, ensuring integrity and respect for participants' rights.

### Research Summary

This chapter outlined the research methodology, including the design, data collection, and analysis techniques. It also described the integration of Shan Hai Jing elements through a structured teaching process. The next chapter will present the study's findings.

## Research Results

### Introduction

This chapter analyzes data collected from questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations to evaluate the impact of integrating Shan Hai Jing mythological elements into animation courses. The focus is on assessing how this integration influenced students' cultural awareness, creativity, and skills in character design and model-making.

### Pre- and Post-Test Questionnaire Analysis

#### Changes in Cultural Interest

At the start, 60% of students expressed little interest in traditional Chinese culture. Post-course, 68% showed a marked increase in cultural interest, particularly in understanding Shan Hai Jing mythological stories. This indicates that integrating mythology with animation effectively sparked students' curiosity about traditional culture.

**Table 1** Cultural Interest and Knowledge Comparison (Pre-Test and Post-Test)

Question	Pre-Test (No./%)	Post-Test (No./%)	Change Analysis
Interest in Traditional Culture	Low Interest: 24 (60%)	High Interest: 27 (68%)	Significant increase in cultural interest, especially after learning about the cultural background of Shan Hai Jing.
Understanding of Chinese Mythology	Basic Understanding: 10 (25%)	Deep Understanding: 30 (75%)	Students gained a deeper understanding of the myths in Shan Hai Jing, with 75% able to interpret the cultural symbols behind them.
Interest in Cultural Symbols from Shan Hai Jing	No Interest: 15 (38%)	High Interest: 32 (80%)	80% of students developed a strong interest in these symbols, reflecting the importance of



Question	Pre-Test (No./%)	Post-Test (No./%)	Change Analysis
			cultural elements in animation education.
Students Able to Explain Cultural Symbols	5 (12%)	25 (62%)	Significant improvement in students' ability to explain the cultural meaning of mythological creatures such as Qi Lin and Phoenix.

### Improvement in Creativity

Pre-course, only 15% of students incorporated traditional cultural elements into their work. After the course, 60% used Shan Hai Jing characters as inspiration, demonstrating that the mythology encouraged deeper creative exploration and innovative thinking in design.

**Table 2** Creativity and Skill Improvement (Pre-Test and Post-Test)

Skill/Aspect	Pre-Test (No./%)	Post-Test (No./%)	Change Analysis
Use of Cultural Elements in Animation Design	6 (15%)	24 (60%)	Increased awareness and ability to incorporate cultural elements into creative work, inspired by Shan Hai Jing.
Confidence in Complex Character Design	12 (30%)	26 (65%)	Increased confidence in designing complex characters, especially in dealing with unique forms and symbolic meanings of mythical creatures.
Animation Modeling and Detail Handling Ability	12 (30%)	28 (70%)	Significant improvement in animation modeling, particularly in the treatment of details such as the feathers of the Phoenix and the structure of Xuan Wu.
Fusion of Visual Creativity and Cultural Expression	10 (25%)	30 (75%)	Students improved their ability to merge traditional cultural elements with modern animation, showcasing both creativity and cultural understanding.

### Improvement in Character Design and Model-Making Skills

Post-test data showed that 70% of students felt more confident in handling complex character shapes, compared to 30% before the course. Designing mythical creatures like the Qilin and Phoenix helped students improve their modeling and design skills, particularly in structure and detail.

#### Interview Results

Interviews revealed that students felt a strong sense of cultural pride from animating Shan Hai Jing characters. They also highlighted the challenges of balancing traditional imagery with modern design, but felt the process significantly improved their character design and model-making skills.

#### Example Quotes:

“Designing these characters made me feel like I wasn’t just creating animation, but also showcasing our culture.”

“I struggled with merging Xuanwu’s traditional image with modern animation style, but found the balance after several attempts.”

#### Classroom Observations

Classroom observations showed increased student engagement and participation. Students actively discussed the integration of cultural symbols in their designs, which enriched the learning experience.

### Major Challenges

Despite successes, students faced two main challenges:

Technical Difficulty

The complexity of the character shapes and the need for innovation while preserving traditional elements was demanding.

Time Management

The time required to design detailed characters sometimes caused pressure to meet deadlines.

### Student Works Display and Comparative Analysis

After the course, students' designs incorporated richer cultural symbols and meanings, reflecting a deeper understanding of Shan Hai Jing mythology. These works demonstrated clear improvement in both creativity and technical execution.



Fig.9 Initial Design - Wei Xiaoran

**Before learning:** At first Student Wei Xiaoran designed the image of a Western monster.



Fig.10 Integrated Design - Wei Xiaoran

**After learning:** Inspired by the Phoenix's theme of rebirth, Wei Xiaoran introduced “rebirth from ashes” elements, using gradient-colored feathers to depict regeneration. He also added ashes and newborn flames in the background, deepening the cultural significance of vitality and hope.



Fig.11 Initial Design - Zhao Ming

**Before learning:** Student Zhao Ming created a multi-eyed guardian character symbolizing wisdom and insight, with multiple eyes and wings to enhance its mysterious aura.



Fig.12 Integrated Design - Zhao Ming

**After learning:** After learning Bai Ze's story, Zhao Ming added Bai Ze's unique horns and adjusted the layout of the eyes to more closely represent Bai Ze's ability to detect evil. This revised design conveys Bai Ze's wisdom and guardian attributes, adding layers of cultural significance to the character.

### Summary

The integration of Shan Hai Jing mythology effectively enhanced students' cultural awareness, creativity, and design skills. Although challenges were encountered, these ultimately contributed to significant growth in both technical and artistic areas, demonstrating the value of incorporating traditional culture into modern animation education.

### Discussion

1) *Cultural and Creative Impact:* The integration of Shan Hai Jing mythology into animation education successfully enhanced students' cultural awareness and creativity. Students developed a stronger cultural identity and gained a deeper understanding of traditional Chinese heritage. The process of designing characters based on mythical creatures encouraged students to express cultural content in innovative ways.

2) *Technical and Artistic Development:* Combining traditional culture with modern animation techniques provided students with both technical skill development and cultural insight. Students improved in character design and model-making while learning to convey cultural symbolism through animation. This approach offers a promising model for integrating cultural education and creative practice in animation.

3) *Challenges Encountered:* Students faced difficulties in managing the complexity of character designs and preserving cultural authenticity. Many reported feeling insufficiently prepared to handle intricate design tasks. Additionally, the time-intensive nature of the projects created challenges in meeting deadlines and producing high-quality work.



### Suggestions

1) *Enhance Technical Support*: Provide more specialized guidance in character design and model-making to help students manage complex forms and maintain cultural authenticity. Workshops or individual support could address these needs.

2) *Flexible Time Management*: Extend project timelines to allow students more time to refine their designs and overcome technical challenges. Flexible deadlines would help reduce time pressure and improve the quality of the final work.

3) *Introduce Cultural Experts*: Invite traditional culture experts to lead workshops or lectures on Shan Hai Jing mythology. This would deepen students' understanding of the cultural context and enrich their creative process.

4) *Foster Interdisciplinary Collaboration*: Encourage collaboration with students from other art forms (e.g., game design, digital media) to broaden creative perspectives and promote the integration of traditional culture across various media.

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