

# An Investigation of Chinese Gods and Monsters in Contemporary Film within the Context of Popular Culture through Printmaking

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## Abstract

The research project explores the aesthetic visualisations of traditional Chinese supernatural characters of Gods and Monsters within the context of Chinese popular culture in the contemporary film industry, which focuses on the design elements and principles employed in popular Chinese cinema. The "divine and monstrous" characters are among the most beloved genres in Chinese cinema and have evolved alongside modernisation. Drawing from traditional fantastic literature and integrating emerging technologies, these films construct more complex and diverse supernatural beings that resonate with international audiences. The key artists in this study are Chen Siyu, Guo Zikai, Shan Ze, and LianYang who engage in deconstructing and reconstructing traditional supernatural characters, contributing to the portrayal of modernised supernatural characters and values. Utilising printmaking as a creative and constructive medium, this research project investigates and elucidates the modern visualisations of gods and monsters in Chinese contemporary popular film culture. By merging modern popular elements with traditional supernatural elements, the project showcases contemporary lifestyles and cultural significance, facilitating the continuity of traditional culture and its integration into popular design elements that cater to the aesthetic demands of contemporary entertainment markets.

**Keywords:** Chinese Gods and Monsters, Supernatural, Film, Popular Culture, Visualisation

## Introduction

As the new millennium unfolded, Chinese cinema entered a transformative phase driven by intensified global cultural integration. Within this context, the "gods and monsters" genre has emerged as a strategically significant cultural form. It has evolved beyond its mythological roots to become a vital mechanism for preserving cultural identity, stimulating economic growth, and fostering technological innovation within the creative industries (Li, 2020; Wang,

2021). Its widespread appeal among Chinese audiences highlights not only its entertainment value but also its embeddedness in deeper cultural, ideological, and symbolic narratives.

Rooted in ancient folklore and mythology, this genre has effectively adapted to contemporary sensibilities by integrating modern cinematic techniques, such as CGI and digital animation, alongside culturally resonant storytelling structures. These adaptations have facilitated the modernization of traditional figures, allowing them to engage with present-day aesthetic preferences and socio-cultural concerns. As noted by Zhang (2022), narratives grounded in folkloric and ethnic traditions tend to resonate more strongly with Chinese audiences, aligning closely with their visual and moral expectations and increasing the likelihood of both cultural relevance and market success.

The importance of this study lies in its exploration of how mythological and folkloric narratives are reinterpreted through contemporary film and visual culture—particularly through the lens of printmaking as a parallel artistic expression. This investigation enables a deeper understanding of how traditional stories evolve in response to global influences while maintaining local cultural roots. Moreover, it illustrates how such narratives continue to shape national identity, cultural discourse, and collective memory in a rapidly modernizing society (Chen, 2019).

In addition, the significance of this topic extends to broader academic domains such as media studies, cultural theory, art history, and visual communication. Through examining the intersection of folklore, film, and contemporary artistic practice, this research contributes to scholarly discussions on cultural hybridity, identity negotiation, and the preservation of intangible heritage. The genre's capacity to entertain, educate, and symbolically reaffirm shared values makes it a particularly potent subject for critical inquiry (Liu & Huang, 2018; Sun, 2021).

Furthermore, the gods and monsters genre provides valuable insight into the ways traditional symbolism is repackaged for mass consumption in a digital age. It offers a platform for analyzing how visual reinterpretations—through printmaking and film—mediate cultural continuity and transformation. These creative adaptations not only foster artistic innovation but also serve as instruments of cultural diplomacy and soft power (Zhao, 2020). Furthermore, the evolution of the gods and monsters genre in Chinese cinema represents a dynamic fusion of heritage and modernity. As both a cultural and artistic phenomenon, it offers fertile ground for academic inquiry into the interplay between myth, media, and society. By studying this genre through contemporary film and printmaking, scholars can uncover how traditional cultural expressions continue to thrive, adapt, and resonate in the context of global popular culture.

#### *Gods and Monsters in Contemporary Chinese Fantasy Films*

Gods and monsters in contemporary Chinese fantasy films demonstrate cross-industry utility. From early Hong Kong films like *A Chinese Ghost Story* and *Mr. Vampire*, which featured traditional representations of "ghosts," to the rise of "new monsters" in the context of modern cultural integration, along with franchise films like *Journey to the West* and *Investiture of the Gods*, there has been a notable evolution. These works draw from traditional literature on gods and monsters, merging them with emerging film technologies

to create more complex and varied representations of these figures. According to Liu (2017), demons and ghosts, as classic images in Chinese mythology, have always played a crucial role in attracting audiences to these films.

The "new monsters" have evolved from traditional Chinese depictions, undergoing transformations influenced by globalization, leading to entirely new portrayals. For example, in *Journey to the West: The Monsters Strike Back*, the Red Boy, traditionally depicted as a rosy-cheeked child, is reimagined as a toy puppet, with special effects used to challenge the established public image of the character. These special effects expand the boundaries of the audience's imagination. The film's stylized characters not only highlight their multifaceted personalities but also deepen the exploration of cultural identity (Jia, 2020, p.128). While maintaining the core storyline, the characters' traits and appearances are updated to reflect modern aesthetics and trends, enhanced by increasingly realistic visual effects to provide the audience with a fresh and impactful visual experience.



*Figure 1.* The depiction of the Red Boy in "Journey to the West".

In *The Great Wall*, the cinematic representation of the Taotie draws clear visual parallels with Hollywood-style special effects creatures such as *Godzilla* and *The Host*, reflecting an intentional strategy to appeal to international audiences through familiar visual tropes. However, despite these globalized design influences, the film retains critical elements rooted in traditional Chinese cultural iconography. As Zhang (2020) notes, the depiction of the Taotie is informed by descriptions found in the *Shan Hai Jing*, which characterize the creature as possessing the body of a sheep, the teeth of a tiger, human-like claws, and eyes located beneath the armpits—an anatomical vulnerability embedded within ancient myth. This hybridized design not only preserves cultural authenticity but also enhances the creature's symbolic complexity.

The collision of traditional Chinese culture and Hollywood special effects allows audiences accustomed to Western monster imagery to experience the unique impact and shock of Chinese gods and monsters. Zhang (2020) also argues that the representation of the Taotie in the film is rooted in a long history of ethnic evolution, reflecting a shared value system, thereby providing a traceable origin for the Taotie's image and character.



Figure 2. The depiction of the Taotie in "The Great Wall."

In the film *Zhong Kui Subdues the Demon - Snow Demon Spirit*, the snow demon Xue Qing possesses various magical abilities. She typically wears simple clothing, giving her a fresh and elegant appearance. However, beneath her icy exterior lies a heart full of intense emotions, making her a monster character with a striking contrast (Liu, 2017, p. 29).



Figure 3. The snow demon in "Zhong Kui Subdues the Devil - Snow Demon"

As Liu (2017, p. 4) states, the portrayal of monsters in Chinese monster films within the context of globalization is not only drawn from the surface representations of monsters in traditional national culture, but also reflects the alienation of the human psyche in a modern, rapidly developing economic society.

### Project Outline

The project employs relief printmaking as a medium to investigate the artistic representation of characters from traditional Chinese supernatural stories in contemporary cinema. This project utilizes printmaking as a medium to explore the artistic portrayal of characters from traditional Chinese supernatural tales in contemporary cinema. It examines how modern popular films influence the depiction of Chinese gods and mythical creatures, while also tracing the transformation of traditional culture within the landscape of contemporary popular cinema. Furthermore, the research investigates how elements of supernatural culture are reimagined and merged with current fashion and trends to align with the aesthetic tastes of today's audiences. Visual references will be drawn from screenshots and posters of some of the most acclaimed Chinese fantasy films in recent years. The project specifically centers on the traits and pattern development of supernatural figures in these films, with a focus on the following key aspects:

- To investigate how traditional supernatural elements are preserved and reinterpreted in contemporary fantasy films, alongside the integration of modern design concepts and ethnic traditional aesthetics.
- To examine how modern fantasy films, capture their core essence and reflect the dominant aesthetic preferences of contemporary audiences.

## Related Theoretical Ideas

### *Popular Culture Theory*

With the advancement of globalization, modern popular culture has infiltrated various aspects of Chinese society, shaping people's thoughts and behaviors. As Li (2015, p. 93) notes, "China was experiencing a period of social transformation at that time... Meanwhile, popular culture was gradually forming and rapidly expanding across different areas. For instance, network communications, popular music, film and television, newspapers and magazines, as well as media and video, all witnessed significant growth."

Despite the ongoing tensions between technology and art, mainstream and avant-garde, standardization and individualism, as well as daily life and aesthetics, popular culture, as a multifaceted entity, has effectively blended these elements, making them key drivers of its development. As Morin (2011, p. 5) explains:

A culture constitutes a complex of norms, symbols, myths, and images that deeply penetrate the individual's inner self, organizing their instincts and guiding their emotions. This depth is achieved through the spiritual activities of projection and assimilation, which focus on the various symbols, myths, and images inherent in the culture, such as characters in myths or reality that embody cultural values (ancestors, heroes, deities). A culture provides imaginative support to practical life and practical support to imaginative life. It nurtures the semi-imaginary and semi-real existence secreted within each individual's self (their soul), and the semi-real and semi-imaginary existence secreted outside their self, with the latter enveloping the self (forming their personality).

The vast spectrum of human emotions and the expansive emotional realm, combined with the rise of new communication technologies and a diverse array of popular culture products, have heightened emotional engagement. This has greatly enhanced the projection-identification effect in emotional psychology. The imagined world relies on the support of people's real-world experiences and perceptions, which are infused with imaginative elements. Furthermore, emotional participation is crucial in both real-world cognition and imaginative experiences, with every form of emotional involvement involving both projection and identification processes (Morin, 2014, p. 83). Emotional projection forms the basis for identifying with others and objects, while the process of identification further intensifies emotional projection.

Popular culture derives its energy from this dual movement—imitating reality through imagined elements and infusing reality with the hues of the imagined (Morin, 2011, p. 32). It actively draws from all previous cultural traditions, inheriting the imaginative legacies of myth, fable, folklore, rituals, fairy tales, and legends.

**Related Art Practice**

*Chen Siyu*



*Figure 3.* Chen Siyu , Xuan Gui, 2015, Illustration.

This artist has illustrated all the images for the revised edition of the *Shan Hai Jing*, focusing predominantly on the portrayal of gods and monsters and drawing inspiration from various passages of the ancient text. The image shown features the Xuan Gui (Rotating Turtle). Unlike Bi Kuang's depiction during the Qing dynasty, Chen Siyu's rendition of the Xuan Gui stands out with its unique stylistic approach and distinct artistic expression.

Chen's structural design of the Xuan Gui adheres closely to ancient representations and textual descriptions, primarily utilizing line work to define its form, texture, and volume. In traditional Chinese painting, lines are a core mode of expression—distinct from Western techniques that rely on light and shadow to convey spatial depth. This line-based modeling reflects a distinctly Eastern aesthetic, imbuing the work with a singular emotional resonance.

In the illustration, lines around the Xuan Gui's head, shell, and tail are deliberately thickened to suggest subtle shadows, giving the creature a sense of three-dimensional presence. The background is composed of finely drawn cloud motifs, framed by a black ink wash that enhances the overall composition. As Wang (2022) notes, Chen employs highly imaginative and original illustrations to reimagine these mythical beings, creating a fresh visual language that aligns with modern aesthetic sensibilities.

*Guo ZiKai*



Figure 4. Guo ZiKai , Huan Xi, 2021, painting in water colours.

In Guo Zikai's painting *Phantom Play*, the depiction of women's makeup, hairstyles, and clothing draws inspiration from traditional Chinese "beauty" portraits, while the color palette and line work are heavily influenced by Ukiyo-e, blending Japanese and Chinese cultural aesthetics across the canvas. The fantastical representations of gods and monsters enhance the mysterious and haunting tone of the work, punctuated by vivid splashes of color. This piece exemplifies a harmonious fusion and creative evolution of artistic styles from different cultural traditions. It conveys a graceful, ethereal, and subtly unsettling atmosphere, maintaining the refined elegance and antique charm characteristic of traditional Chinese painting.

As Wang (2025, p. 31) notes, whether portraying immortals, deities, buddhas, ghosts, or spirits, Guo Zikai's brushwork consistently conveys a quiet, poignant aesthetic imbued with unspoken emotion. His delicate and refined watercolor techniques invite viewers into a space of imaginative reflection, allowing them to experience the layered beauty within his work—a blend of the eerie melancholy found in traditional Chinese art and the stylized elegance of Ukiyo-e.

*Shan Ze*



Figure 5. Shan Ze, View of Mountains and Seas, 2017, Illustration

Shan Ze's artworks demonstrate a distinct departure from traditional painting conventions. He presents figures from side or multi-perspective angles and boldly experiments with color, using the traditional Chinese palette of red, yellow, blue, white, and black as a foundational

scheme. His intricate attention to detail—particularly in depicting the fur, limbs, and facial expressions of mythical beings—imbues his figures with a striking sense of vitality.

In the piece *Wu Luo*, for example, the dominant use of vivid red and earthy yellow not only symbolizes festivity and good fortune but also evokes the creature's leopard-like coat and natural habitat. Shan Ze also integrates touches of white and blue, with the blue accessories visually linking to the "berry grass" above, thus merging Wu Luo's fiery and dynamic energy with an underlying calm and softness.

Zhao and Pei (2021) observe that while Shan Ze remains faithful to the essential traits of mythical beings rooted in traditional culture, he enriches their design through the lens of contemporary aesthetics. Unlike earlier, more straightforward reproductions of these creatures, his interpretations are more imaginative, symbolic, and visually compelling. The mythical figures featured in *Guan Shan Hai* not only retain strong ethnic identity and cultural roots but also reflect modern artistic sensibilities—offering fresh creative approaches and new perspectives on reimagining traditional mythological imagery.

### *Lian Yang*



Figure 6. Lian Yang, Dong Hao, 2019, Rock painting

This artist's work draws heavily from the deep well of traditional Chinese cultural heritage, including folklore and the enchanting, romantic tales of mythology. Their artistic style is both vibrant and lavish, blending elements reminiscent of traditional prints and festive New Year paintings. Employing a warm, saturated color palette, their pieces embody the essence of Chinese aesthetics, offering viewers a visually invigorating experience.

The dragon portrayed in the image is named Dong Hao. Depending on the viewing angle, the folding screen reveals dragons in dynamic poses that seem to surge toward the observer. One black dragon twists through the sky, which has been painted using a blend of animal bone gelatin and mineral pigments. The dragon's body is formed with obsidian and iron powder, while its horns are highlighted with copper foil. When illuminated, the dragon's skin sparkles, its sheen enhanced by the reflective properties of obsidian powder.

A particularly fascinating element is the unpredictable nature of the mineral-based pigments. For instance, when the piece was initially completed, the dragon's claws appeared gray. However, as the iron powder oxidized over time, their color gradually shifted to a yellow-brown hue. Li and Jin (2023) observe that Lian Yang's work, situated within a contemporary context, holds the capacity for multidimensional exploration. On one level, it maintains the

inherent lineage and logic of traditional Eastern painting, while on another, it actively expands its interpretive scope within evolving temporal and spatial dimensions.

### The Studio Investigation

#### *Journey to the West: Conquering the Monsters*

The first project focuses on Sun Wukong, one of the most iconic and widely recognized figures in Chinese mythology, to explore the artistic design and the evolving aesthetics of gods and monsters in modern Chinese cinema. The studio's experimental approach involved developing design concepts based on the main characters from *Journey to the West: Conquering the Monsters*, delving into the reinterpretation of *Journey to the West* elements and how they have been adapted within modern Chinese film culture. This creative exploration aims to meet the aesthetic preferences of today's audiences by incorporating these reimagined elements and design innovations into the final artwork.

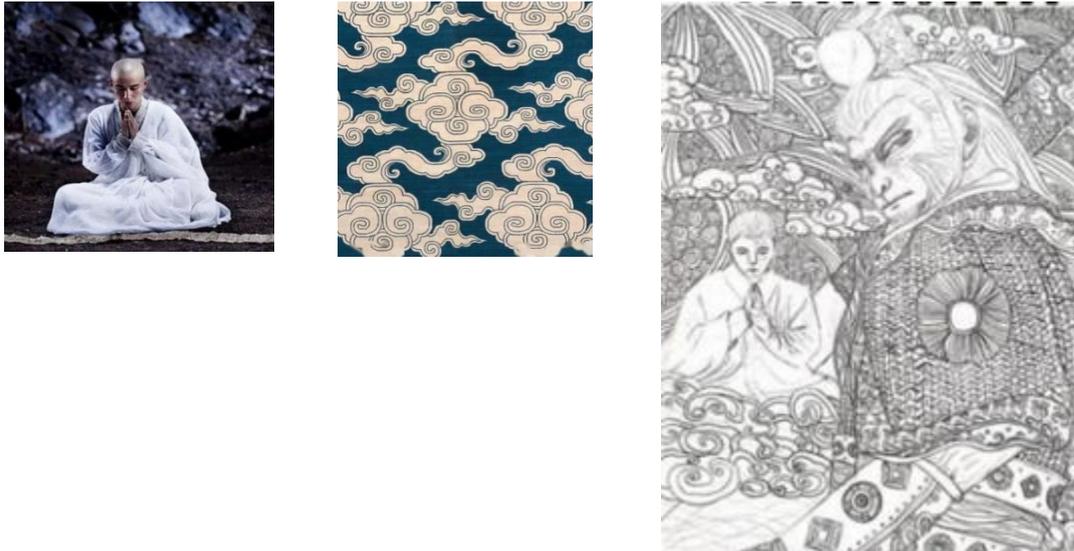


Figure 7. The three different images of Sun Wukong.

In *Journey to the West: Conquering the Monsters*, Sun Wukong is reimagined with a return to his monstrous roots, positioned in direct opposition to the Buddha. Zhang (2022) contends that the film boldly redefines Sun Wukong's character, exemplifying a broader trend toward the "monsterization" of traditional figures. Following his transformation, Sun Wukong is portrayed as short, grotesque, and malicious, engaging in brutal acts that firmly establish him as the film's primary antagonist—an interpretation that delivers a second shock to viewers. Ultimately, his true form is revealed as a giant, gorilla-like creature, further dismantling the traditional image of the beloved Monkey King and challenging the familiar perceptions held by audiences of the *Journey to the West* narrative.

In this film, the juxtaposition of Sun Wukong and Tang Seng becomes a central compositional element, symbolizing the stark contrast between good and evil and reinforcing the film's radical reinterpretation of these iconic characters.





*Figure 8.* Example of the final pencil sketch composition.

Figure 8 illustrates the stages of sketch development. The process begins with analyzing selected film imagery and identifying components relevant to the research questions. These visual elements serve as the foundation for building compositions and as tools for transferring core motifs onto the print surface. They were specifically chosen for their collective role in distinguishing modern representations of monsters from traditional ones.

To emphasize the contrast between the characters and create a visually striking composition, I adjusted their proportions based on feedback from my supervisor. Sun Wukong, portrayed as the central monster figure in the film, is deliberately depicted on a larger scale than Tang Seng to reinforce his dominant presence.

Additionally, I included the Ruyi Jingu Bang (the Golden Staff), a key symbol associated with Sun Wukong. The cloud patterns on the staff reflect traditional Chinese artistic motifs, enriching the visual language of the piece. The background features a stylized representation of the Buddha's handprints, inspired by their appearance in the film. Traditional Chinese cloud patterns were also incorporated to enhance the composition's aesthetic and cultural identity.

Due to the irreversible nature of woodblock carving, I had to carefully plan the distribution of black, white, and gray tones, along with the selection of carving techniques, prior to beginning the carving process. This careful preparation ensures a balanced contrast and visual harmony in the final print.



Figure 9. Final artwork "Journey to the West: Conquering the monsters" (2023) Woodcut Print, 120cm \* 90cm.

As the dominant figure in the composition, Sun Wukong demands the most intricate detailing. Given the complexity of his armor patterns, a strong contrast between black, white, and gray is essential, along with a dynamic interplay of points, lines, and surfaces. Each pattern calls for unique line variations, with a predominant use of black and gray tones to convey the weight and density of the armor. This contrasts sharply with Tang Seng's primarily white robes, highlighting the opposition between the two characters.

The cloud patterns on the Ruyi Jingu Bang are rendered mainly through linear elements, while the crown's pom-pom is given texture through a triangular knife technique. Tang Seng's form is simplified, with only the folds of his robe carved to suggest the flowing nature of the fabric. The rest of his depiction follows the white color scheme used in the film. The edges of the clouds are outlined with multiple layers of lines to evoke a sense of motion. In the background, the Buddha's handprints are presented using stark black-and-white contrast, while the sea waves are also illustrated through black-and-white patterns. The facial features of both characters are subtly shaded to create a three-dimensional effect.

Positioned at the center of the print, the two protagonists from Journey to the West: Demon Slayer, symbolizing justice and evil, serve as the visual and thematic focal point of the piece. In this film, Sun Wukong deviates from his traditional heroic role and is reimagined as a cunning, brutal, savage, bloodthirsty, and unpredictable monster (Xu & Yin, 2024).

This artwork embodies the "new gods and monsters" aesthetic seen in Journey to the West: Conquering the Monsters, offering viewers a reimagined perspective on traditional supernatural culture. It demonstrates the fusion of traditional symbolism with contemporary design, revealing how modern portrayals of gods and monsters intersect with current trends in popular culture and aesthetic preferences. This blending reflects a broader cultural shift in which ancient myths are reinterpreted to resonate with modern values and sensibilities.

Through innovative design and expressive printmaking, the work both preserves and revitalizes traditional cultural themes, making them engaging and accessible for contemporary viewers. The interplay between classic and modern elements enriches the cultural narrative and underscores the dynamic nature of mythological storytelling. By reimagining these characters through a modern lens, the artwork bridges historical narratives with contemporary culture, reinforcing the timeless significance of these figures.

Ultimately, the composition and use of visual elements reflect a thoughtful synthesis of modern artistic aesthetics with traditional forms. The piece illustrates how traditional supernatural themes can be adapted and reinterpreted within today's entertainment landscape, addressing contemporary visual and cultural expectations. It extends the legacy of *Journey to the West*, showcasing the evolution of these enduring stories within the framework of modern visual culture.

### *Painted Skin*

The second artwork is set within the context of contemporary popular entertainment culture, further exploring the artistic representation and significance of Chinese gods and monsters, with a focus on the preferences of Chinese audiences for films featuring such characters.

As Eric (2006) notes, factors like expanded trade, linguistic blending, the rise of competing religions, advancements in technology and communication, improved transportation, and greater literacy have all contributed to cultural fusion. Accordingly, the second study focuses on how the integration of artistic influences from other cultures in gods and monsters films plays a key role in the popularity of modern cinema in this genre. The theme of the second project centers around popular culture, selecting films rooted in traditional Chinese gods and monsters narratives, yet skillfully blending these figures and stories with those from other cultural traditions. One such example is *Painted Skin: The Resurrection*.

*Painted Skin: The Resurrection* retains the basic plot of its original novel, in which a monster disguises itself using human skin. However, the film diverges significantly from the source material, incorporating elements of magical realism. The involvement of Japanese designer Yoshitaka Amano infuses the character and scene designs with the artistic style of the Yamato people, adding a unique blend of eerie and beautiful aesthetics. This shift moves away from traditional Chinese artistic conventions, embracing a more modern, pan-Asian style that resonates with a wider audience.

The film explores the personal cost of the pursuit of freedom, grounding the narrative in elements of ancient Chinese aesthetics. It delves into the contradictions individuals face in their search for truth, goodness, and beauty, all within a specific political context, highlighting the conflicts among humans, witches, and monsters. The film's outstanding performances and stunning visual effects captivate the audience, significantly enhancing its overall impact.



Figure 10. The poster for "Painted Skin

Unlike the traditional narrative where the painted skin monster wears the skin of a beautiful woman to seduce men and consume their hearts, this film's story focuses entirely on two female characters: the monster and a human princess. The princess forms a pact with the monster to exchange their skins in pursuit of beauty. As a result, the monster becomes human, while the princess transforms into a heart-eating creature. These two characters were chosen as the central elements for the design of the second artwork, reflecting the overarching theme of the entire research project.

During the sketch design process, my goal was to incorporate different representations of the two main characters, deconstructing and recombining them in alignment with the film's narrative. The visual spectacle and the freshness of the innovative storyline are key factors driving the revival of this traditional gods and monsters theme within modern popular culture.



Figure 11. Example of the final pencil sketch composition.

The image represents the final version of the second artwork, capturing one of the most visually striking scenes from the film while effectively portraying the character of Xiaowei as a monster, in line with the central theme of this research. This scene also reflects the artistic fusion of Chinese and Japanese traditional cultures, which is why I selected it as a key reference for the sketch.

In the composition, the monster and the princess occupy the left and right sides, respectively. The monster is depicted in a way that mirrors the film's portrayal, from the Japanese-style makeup to the flowing robe, while also incorporating fox ears on the character's face. The character's pupils are transformed from human-like to vertical, fox-like pupils, directly signaling her identity as a fox monster and highlighting the hybrid nature of both human and monster elements.

On the left, the princess is represented as a human skin draped over a railing, referencing both the storyline and traditional narrative themes. The background features traditional Chinese smoke patterns, adding an eerie, supernatural atmosphere. Within the smoke, a fox leaps from the character, further emphasizing the protagonist's transformation into a fox monster.

After completing the carvings, I applied black ink evenly onto the wooden block with a roller. Once the ink was fully distributed, I covered the block with rice paper and manually printed the images using a wooden mushroom. Ultimately, I produced three black-and-white woodblock prints, selecting the clearest and most complete one as the final artwork.



Figure 12. Final artwork "Painted Skin II", 2023, Woodcut Print, 120cm x 90cm.

To achieve visual balance in the composition while emphasizing the main characters, the monster's hair and facial features are primarily rendered in shades of white and gray. I used both angled and round knives to carve facial details and hair textures, employing varying degrees of gray to create a sense of depth and three-dimensionality. The clothing patterns reflect those from the film, with the inner garments featuring a blend of black, white, and gray lines, while the outer robe is mainly black with white, vine-like patterns. I added numerous dots to these patterns using a round knife to enhance texture and depth.

The princess is similarly crafted using angled and round knives, with her pupils completely carved away to present them in white, creating a sharp contrast against the monster's white hair. Her attire is inspired by traditional "Shan Hai" motifs. The background fox is carved with angled knife strokes to depict the texture of its fur, while the cloud patterns are created using classic carving techniques.

This artwork draws from the imagery and narrative structure of *Painted Skin: The Resurrection*, showcasing how gods and monsters in modern popular culture can transform traditional monster stories. The film's reimagining offers fresh insights and aesthetic

experiences, while incorporating elements from other cultural traditions, such as Japanese-style makeup and attire, which enhance the character of the monster.

These elements are central to the interpretation of the artwork, aligning with contemporary aesthetic preferences. While maintaining the depth and strength of Chinese traditional culture and aesthetic style, the piece allows viewers to connect with their cultural identity while also engaging with the visual impact of foreign cultural elements.

Furthermore, the inclusion of artistic influences from other cultures enriches the aesthetic of Chinese gods and monsters, setting them apart from traditional designs and reflecting the trend of cultural fusion in a globalized world. The narratives of traditional gods and monsters require inventive storytelling, imaginative visual experiences, and the integration of diverse cultural influences to make them relevant in modern popular culture. This mirrors the aesthetic expectations and projections of individuals in contemporary society.

### **Conclusion**

This project examined the transformation of traditional supernatural figures in response to popular trends through black-and-white printmaking. It merges traditional aesthetics with modern sensibilities, using artistic practice to explore the modernization of traditional supernatural characters within popular film culture, addressing both societal needs and contemporary aesthetic demands. The study underscores the significance of traditional culture in shaping national culture, supporting the advancement of traditional values across economic, cultural, and ideological domains.

The findings of this research project suggest that the portrayal of supernatural beings in contemporary Chinese fantasy films, influenced by popular culture, extends beyond mere surface-level representations rooted in traditional cultural contexts. It also reflects the manifestation of human psychological alienation within a rapidly changing socio-economic landscape. The cinematic process of dream-making enables the public's consumption of these supernatural figures. Through a dual transformation by creators and audiences, these depictions have evolved into the forms seen in modern Chinese fantasy films.

Within the field of fine art, the reinterpretation of mythological figures such as gods and monsters reflects a long-standing tradition of using visual language to express cultural identity, spirituality, and collective memory. In contemporary art practice, revisiting these traditional themes allows artists to interrogate and reinterpret inherited symbols, offering critical commentary on societal values, historical narratives, and modern transformations. Printmaking, in particular, offers a unique medium through which these mythological themes can be reimagined. As a process rooted in repetition, layering, and narrative sequencing, printmaking aligns closely with the storytelling nature of folklore. The tactile, manual nature of printmaking also contrasts with the digital manipulation of film, allowing artists to reinterpret cinematic depictions of gods and monsters through more personal, expressive, and often critical means. This dual engagement—between mass media (film) and fine art (printmaking)—fosters a dialogic relationship that enhances the aesthetic, symbolic, and intellectual depth of the work. Moreover, contemporary printmakers often utilize traditional motifs in experimental formats, such as mixed-media prints, woodcuts, lithographs, or

screenprints, to blend historical imagery with modern visual strategies. This process of transformation and translation helps preserve the cultural heritage embedded in these mythological figures while also pushing the boundaries of print as a medium.

In the broader cultural context, the representation of gods and monsters continues to serve as a repository of collective memory, spiritual belief, and moral instruction in Chinese society. These figures are not merely fantastical creations; they carry ethical codes, cosmological understanding, and national identity. The reimagining of these symbols in contemporary media—especially through printmaking—demonstrates how traditional culture remains relevant, flexible, and resilient in the face of modernization and globalization.

Furthermore, this investigation reflects how Chinese culture negotiates its place within global popular culture without losing its distinctiveness. By examining how mythological subjects are appropriated, transformed, and popularized, this study contributes to discussions around cultural hybridity, heritage preservation, and visual sovereignty—all of which are pressing issues in postmodern art discourse. Through the creative translation of mythological narratives from film into fine art print, artists are not only preserving intangible heritage but also engaging in a form of cultural storytelling that bridges generational and technological gaps. This process revitalizes traditional icons, turning them into tools for contemporary reflection and artistic experimentation.

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