

From Myth to Visual Symbol: Semiotic Analysis of Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea in Penglai Folk Paper-Cutting

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the symbolic and cultural meanings of the Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea window-paper cutting from Penglai, Shandong. As a representative work of Shandong folk art, it reflects the region's integration of myth, belief, and visual expression. The research aims to explore how the visual form, compositional language, and symbolic imagery of this paper-cutting transform a traditional Taoist myth into a meaningful system of visual communication.

Using semiotic and iconographic methods, the study analyzes the work's symbolic structure and semantic content. The eight immortals and related motifs—such as phoenix, cloud, willow, and longevity peach—construct a rich network of visual symbols that express moral virtue, cosmic harmony, and collective blessing. The circular composition and rhythmic arrangement embody the Shandong aesthetic of fullness and balance, translating mythological transcendence into familiar cultural signs.

The findings show that this folk paper-cutting converts myth into visual communication through three main processes: symbolic simplification, compositional harmony, and cultural recontextualization. It functions not only as decoration but also as a living medium of belief and moral education. The research highlights how Shandong folk art transforms intangible spiritual heritage into enduring visual language, contributing to the preservation and revitalization of local culture.

Keywords—Shandong folk paper-cutting, Penglai, Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea, visual communication, symbolism, semiotic analysis

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the cultural background and academic history of the Eight Immortals, explaining their evolution from religious figures to popular mythological icons. It outlines the study's research question and objective—examining how the *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* paper-cutting conveys local belief through symbolic and visual means—and clarifies its dual significance in theory and practice. As the foundation of the thesis, this chapter situates the work within the broader discourse of Shandong folk culture, Taoist art, and visual communication studies.

A. Research Background

Cao Cao once said, “To the east lies Mount Penglai, the gate to heaven above.” Su Shi also wrote in memory of Bai Juyi: “Lotte is no longer a guest of Penglai; he now dwells as a master in the Western Land.” Likewise, Lu You expressed in his verse, “My old friend has gone to the Palace of Penglai, where phoenix flutes and celestial strings play in the spring breeze.” For centuries, Penglai has been known as the earthly “fairyland” in the Chinese

imagination, a metaphor for the ultimate realm of immortality and transcendence.

Zhang Chongfu (Zhang, 2014), in his study *A Brief History of Academic Research on the Eight Immortals*, divided the research on Eight Immortals culture into four historical stages: the Ming–Qing period, the 1930s, the 1940s–1970s, and the post-1980s era. During the Ming–Qing period, scholars such as Wang Shizhen, Hu Yinglin, and Zhu Quan conducted textual studies on the origins, prototypes, and evolution of the Eight Immortals, establishing the foundation for later research. In the 1930s, the renowned scholar Pu Jiangqing published *A Study of the Eight Immortals*, which offered an in-depth textual analysis and became one of the most authoritative works on the subject. Around the same time, Zhao Jingshen, a famous historian of Chinese opera, analyzed the Eight Immortals and their literary and theatrical representations in *The Legend of the Eight Immortals*.

Between the 1940s and 1970s, research on the Eight Immortals was limited due to the socio-political climate, as religious studies declined. After China’s Reform and Opening in the 1980s, scholars renewed their interest in Taoist culture, and research on the Eight Immortals flourished once again (Tian, n.d.). New archaeological discoveries and literary materials deepened the understanding of their historical formation and symbolic meanings. Scholars such as Shan Man, a folklorist, further enriched the field by collecting folk songs and New Year pictures related to the Eight Immortals, publishing illustrated works that provided valuable references for later artistic creations.

The myth of Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea is one of the most widely known folk stories in China. The Eight Immortals—Han Zhongli, Tieguai Li, Lü Dongbin, Zhang Guolao, Lan Caihe, Han Xiangzi, Cao Guojiu, and He Xiangu—form a group of divine figures who transcend social class and gender, symbolizing diversity and unity in Chinese mythology.

B. The Origin of the Eight Immortals

The earliest mention of the term “Eight Immortals” (*Baxian*) appears in the Eastern Han text *Treatise on Dispelling Doubt* by Mou Rong, which refers to “the seal script of the Eight Immortals,” likely describing “a group of transcendent beings.” Over time, the concept evolved: the Western Han period recorded the “Eight Immortals of Huainan,” the Five Dynasties mentioned the “Eight Immortals of Shu,” and the Tang dynasty saw the rise of the “Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup.” These changing versions demonstrate the richness and adaptability of Eight Immortals culture.

By the Song and Jin dynasties, the Eight Immortals gradually took shape as a collective, though their members were not fixed until the Ming dynasty, when Emperor Jiajing’s devotion to Taoism encouraged the popularization of Eight Immortals imagery. Wang Shizhen noted that although the precise origin of Eight Immortals paintings was unclear, depictions of these figures became widely circulated by the Jiajing reign.

Another related development was the creation of the “Hidden Eight Immortals” (*An Baxian*) motif, which used eight symbolic objects—the gourd, sword, fish drum, flower basket, lotus, jade tablet, flute, and fan—to represent the immortals indirectly. These motifs became popular auspicious patterns in temples, gardens, and folk architecture, visually integrating Taoist ideals into daily life.

C. The Myth of “Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea”

The story of Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea has been retold and reshaped through generations. Its earliest theatrical version appeared in the Yuan-dynasty play *The Eight Immortals Cross the Sea to Compete for the Jade Tablet*. In the story, the immortals display their magical powers as they journey to the Eastern Sea. When the Dragon Prince captures Lan Caihe, the Eight Immortals fight back, defeating the Four Dragon Kings and eventually reconciling through the mediation of the Buddha. The story expresses themes of courage, unity, and

moral strength, which have been deeply embedded in Chinese cultural consciousness.

D. Research Question and Objective

Research Question: In what ways does Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea in Penglai folk paper-cutting reflect and communicate local mythological beliefs through visual symbolism?

Research Objective: To interpret how visual forms, compositional language, and symbolic imagery in Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea transform mythological narratives into culturally meaningful visual communication.

E. Research Significance

Theoretical Significance: This study deepens the understanding of the Eight Immortals culture and enriches the theoretical discussion of visual communication in mythological folk art. By applying semiotic and semantic analysis to the Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea paper-cutting, the research expands the interpretive framework of folk myth visualization. It also explores new ways to communicate and reinterpret the myth within the contemporary context of cultural tourism integration, using Penglai folk paper-cutting as a medium for transmitting traditional stories.

Practical Significance: The study offers symbolic and cultural insights for the redesign and revitalization of Penglai's intangible heritage. By analyzing the paper-cutting's visual symbols and cultural aesthetics, it provides practical guidance for enhancing the communication of the *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* myth in modern contexts, contributing to both cultural education and local tourism development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Overview of the Myth of “Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea”

The earliest written record of the Eight Immortals appeared in the Tang dynasty *Taiping Guangji*. After centuries of oral transmission and continuous refinement by poets and storytellers, the Eight Immortals were formally established as a fixed group of seven men and one woman in Wu Yuntai's Ming dynasty novel *The Legend of the Eight Immortals' Journey to the East*. The Eight Immortals include Han Zhongli (Zhongli Quan), Zhang Guolao, Han Xiangzi, Tieguai Li, Cao Guojiu, Lü Dongbin, Lan Caihe, and He Xiangnu (Wang, n.d.).

The Eight Immortals are said to travel the world, punishing evil, helping the poor, and performing good deeds for humanity. Among their many stories, the most famous is the myth of *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea*. According to the legend, after attending the Queen Mother of the West's Peach Banquet, the immortals gathered on Penglai's fairy island to drink and celebrate. Iron Crutch Li suggested: “Why not cross the sea for pleasure while we are still merry?” All agreed, and to show their divine power, each used his or her own magical instrument to cross the waves. When they reached the middle of the sea, they clashed with the Dragon Prince. The battle was fierce until the Bodhisattva Guanyin intervened and restored peace. The Eight Immortals thanked her and continued their journey across the sea, each manifesting unique supernatural powers.

The phrase “Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea, each showing their powers” (*Baxian guohai, geshi shentong*) became a well-known Chinese proverb, symbolizing unity and individual skill. Numerous Penglai legends relate to the Eight Immortals, including “The Dog Bites Lü Dongbin,” “Su Dongpo Visits the Eight Immortals,” and “The Bridge beneath the Penglai Pavilion.”

The Eight Immortals represent various social classes of ordinary life: Cao Guojiu was a royal relative, Han Zhongli a general, Lü Dongbin a scholar, Lan Caihe a minstrel, Tieguai Li a beggar-official, Han Xiangzi a young aristocrat turned Taoist, He Xiangnu a common woman, and Zhang Guolao an aged hermit. Collectively,

they represent male and female, old and young, rich and poor, noble and humble—embodying the values of justice, compassion, and the pursuit of virtue in popular belief(Li, 2024).

B. The Value of the “Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea” Myth

Cultural Value: Regional differences in geography, customs, and lifestyle have shaped distinct cultural identities and aesthetic sensibilities. As an important part of Chinese folk culture, the *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* myth reflects the creativity and imagination of generations(Xu , 2017). In Penglai, where the story originates, the myth is deeply tied to local geography and social life. The long-standing influence of Taoist “immortal culture” (*xiandao wenhua*) has fostered a local identity that regards Penglai as a land of immortals. This belief not only reveals people’s longing for a better life but also demonstrates how culture shapes local consciousness and aesthetics.

Ideological Value: The *Eight Immortals* myth reflects the people’s understanding of life and society. Under harsh natural and social conditions in ancient times, people used imagination to personify powerful forces and express desires that reality could not fulfill(Wang, 2022). The myth thus serves as both psychological comfort and moral aspiration. Unlike distant, solemn deities, the Eight Immortals include figures from all walks of life—noble and poor, beautiful and ugly, male and female, young and old—representing tolerance, equality, and harmony. The story embodies the people’s hope for coexistence and mutual respect, giving the Eight Immortals culture lasting vitality and emotional appeal.

Social Value: The story conveys a strong sense of unity and cooperation. Each immortal crosses the sea using his or her own skill and magical tool, symbolizing collective effort and individual strength(Li et al., 2020). Their courage to resist authority and help the common people also reflects China’s traditional spirit of justice and moral virtue. Today, the idiom “Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea” continues to express teamwork and resourcefulness, proving the myth’s enduring relevance in both historical and modern contexts.

Artistic Value: After centuries of retelling and artistic adaptation, the *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* myth has inspired countless literary and artistic creations—novels, poems, dramas, and paintings(Bao JiaHu, 2019). The “Hidden Eight Immortals” motifs (*An Baxian*), representing the eight sacred objects, remain common decorative elements in temples, gardens, and architecture. These artistic derivatives show that the myth is not only a literary subject but also a vital part of China’s visual and material culture, continuing to inspire creativity in contemporary art and design.

C. Visual Representation of Mythological Themes in Chinese Folk Art

From the 1950s to the late 1970s, Chinese art was shaped by socialist ideology, serving political and educational functions. Yet, even during this period, artists drew inspiration from folk traditions. The 1942 Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art, led by Mao Zedong, emphasized that art should “serve the people” and “merge with the emotions of workers, peasants, and soldiers.” After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, this principle continued to influence artistic practice. Artists went to villages and factories to learn from the people, incorporating folk motifs and color styles into their work.

Between 1949 and 1967, mythological and legendary figures such as the Monkey King, Mulan, and the Jade Emperor frequently appeared in propaganda and popular art as symbols of strength and virtue. Folk imagery provided a bridge between political ideals and familiar cultural memory(Tian, n.d.).

In modern times, the visual character of folk art—vivid color, direct composition, and festive atmosphere—has remained an essential part of popular aesthetics. Folk art differs from literati and court art by its emphasis on strong color contrast, emotional warmth, and decorative energy. It embodies sincerity, vitality, and joy,

expressing people's love for life and optimism toward the world.

D. Research Gap

Although numerous studies have examined Chinese folk paper-cutting as an important medium of intangible cultural heritage and visual expression, most existing research has focused on general typological or stylistic descriptions rather than in-depth semiotic interpretation. Previous scholarship on Shandong paper-cutting, for example, has primarily addressed regional distribution, craftsmanship, or decorative features, often overlooking the cultural logic embedded in mythological imagery.

Within the broader field of mythological themes in folk art, researchers have explored subjects such as *The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl*, *Lady White Snake*, or *Mazu Belief*, yet *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea*—a narrative deeply rooted in Taoist cosmology and particularly associated with the Penglai region—has seldom been analyzed from a symbolic or semantic perspective. Existing writings usually treat it as an icon of auspiciousness or festival ornamentation, without unpacking its internal structure of meanings or its transformation from sacred myth to popular visual language.

Moreover, despite the growing application of semiotic and iconographic theories to contemporary visual communication, few studies have applied these frameworks systematically to the study of Shandong folk paper-cutting. There remains a significant lack of research connecting semiotic theory, folk belief, and regional visual culture. The visual system of *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea*—which integrates mythology, religious symbolism, and local aesthetics—offers a rich but underexplored field for such inquiry.

Therefore, this research aims to fill these gaps by conducting a symbolic and semantic interpretation of *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* in Penglai folk window-paper cutting, revealing how visual symbols mediate between mythological narratives and local cultural identity within the Shandong context.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter establishes the methodological foundation for analyzing the *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* paper-cutting. Guided by semiotic and iconographic theories, the study applies a qualitative, interpretive approach to examine the artwork's symbolic system and cultural logic.

By combining visual, symbolic, and semantic analysis, the chapter provides a coherent framework for understanding how mythological imagery operates as a language of cultural communication in Shandong folk art.

A. Theoretical Foundation

Barthian Visual Semiotics: The central idea of Roland Barthes' visual semiotics lies in the layering of meaning. According to Barthes, every visual image contains two main levels of signification: the *denotative* and the *connotative* (Bouzida, n.d.; Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2010).

The first layer—denotation—answers the question “What or who is shown here?” It refers to the literal representation of the object, person, or scene. The second layer—connotation—asks “What ideas or values are expressed through what is represented and how it is represented?” It involves the symbolic, emotional, and cultural meanings generated by the image.

In the context of *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea*, Barthian semiotics provides a tool to decode how visual elements such as composition, figure, and color create layers of meaning that connect myth and local culture.

Saussure's Theory of Signifier and Signified: Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theory introduced the dual

concept of the *signifier* (the form of a sign) and the *signified* (the concept it represents) (Culler, 1986; Long & He, 2021; Salupere, 2013; Sedda, 2015).

The relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary, meaning that the connection between the two depends on social convention rather than logic. This idea profoundly influenced later structuralist and semiotic approaches to art and communication.

In visual analysis, the *signifier* may refer to the visible shapes, colors, or patterns of a paper-cutting, while the *signified* refers to the abstract ideas or beliefs these visual forms express—such as immortality, harmony, or virtue. This theory enables the decoding of symbolic patterns in folk art to uncover their deeper cultural meanings.

B. Research Framework

This study combines semiotic theory with visual communication analysis to interpret how *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* transforms mythological content into cultural expression. The framework consists of three analytical stages:

1. Visual Form Analysis – observing compositional structure, color, and spatial organization to identify aesthetic and formal patterns.
2. Symbolic Analysis – decoding primary and auxiliary symbols to interpret their referential and connotative meanings based on semiotic theory.
3. Semantic Interpretation – linking visual and symbolic meanings to broader cultural contexts, including local belief systems, folk morality, and Taoist cosmology.

Through this tripartite approach, the research aims to reveal how mythological symbols function as carriers of cultural meaning within Shandong folk visual culture.

C. Research Methods and Procedures

Qualitative Visual Analysis: A qualitative approach was adopted to examine symbolic representation in the selected paper-cutting. This method allows for the interpretation of meaning rather than measurement, focusing on cultural logic, symbolic association, and aesthetic form.

Semiotic and Iconographic Interpretation: Semiotic analysis is used to identify signifiers and their corresponding signifieds within the artwork, while iconographic interpretation traces their mythological and religious origins. Together, these methods uncover how visual elements embody moral, spiritual, and cultural messages.

Literature and Historical Review: Existing academic literature on Eight Immortals culture, Taoist symbolism, and Shandong folk art was reviewed to build a historical and theoretical foundation. Comparative references to similar mythological motifs in other Chinese folk arts (such as New Year paintings and temple murals) provided contextual support.

D. Research Object and Sample Description

The research object is the Penglai folk window-paper cutting “Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea.” This sample was chosen for its representative value in both theme and regional style. As a mythological subject rooted in Taoist tradition, it integrates narrative, symbolism, and local aesthetics. Its composition—centered on a circular “window-heart”—embodies the harmony and fullness characteristic of Shandong paper-cutting.

The analysis focuses on:

1. Main figures: the Eight Immortals and their personal attributes (fan, flute, sword, etc.);
2. Auxiliary motifs: floral vines, clouds, phoenixes, and auspicious patterns;
3. Color and composition: use of symmetry, circular framing, and color contrast.

The work represents both religious imagination and everyday visual culture, making it ideal for exploring the transformation of myth into folk visual communication.

E. Research Process and Structure

The research process followed a logical sequence from observation to interpretation:

1. Data Collection: Gathering visual materials (high-resolution images) and relevant literature.
2. Visual Observation: Recording the structural and stylistic features of the paper-cutting.
3. Semiotic Decoding: Identifying signifiers (shapes, motifs, colors) and linking them with cultural signifieds.
4. Semantic Integration: Analyzing how visual and symbolic elements work together to express mythological meaning.
5. Thematic Interpretation: Explaining how the artwork communicates Taoist and folk beliefs to the public.
6. Conclusion and Application: Summarizing how symbolic and semantic findings can inform cultural communication and heritage design.

This systematic process ensures that the interpretation remains grounded in both theory and empirical observation.

Case Analysis: Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea



Plate 4.1 Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea

Sources: Collection of Shandong Folk Paper Cuttings

A. Visual Composition

The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea paper-cutting from Penglai represents a typical example of a Shandong-style window-flower composition, in which symbolic figures, ornamental frames, and spatial rhythms are harmoniously integrated within the circular format of the window center. As the visual and symbolic nucleus of the whole window structure, the window heart functions as a microcosm of the mythological narrative and embodies the auspicious worldview of the local folk culture.

Structural Layout: The composition is constructed around a double semi-circular form, vertically divided into upper and lower sections. The upper segment depicts five immortals riding auspicious clouds and waves, while the lower part features three immortals on land, surrounded by decorative flora and fauna. This bifurcated structure visually simulates the Taoist cosmology of “heaven above, earth below,” suggesting a vertical hierarchy that corresponds to the mythic journey from the human world to the divine realm. The concentric symmetry—framed by continuous floral borders—creates a sense of completeness and cosmic order, echoing the folk notion of *tianyuan difang* (heaven is round, earth is square).

Character Arrangement and Narrative Rhythm: The eight immortals are arranged in a circular progression, forming a continuous narrative flow that guides the viewer’s gaze along the perimeter. Each immortal maintains a distinct posture and gesture: some holding their signature attributes (such as Lü Dongbin’s sword or He Xiangyu’s lotus), others shown in dialogue or motion. This rhythm of alternating static and dynamic poses produces a visual cadence reminiscent of theatrical performance, where narrative continuity is suggested rather than fully depicted. The distribution of the immortals between cloud and ground elements reinforces the transitional theme of “crossing,” symbolizing the passage between realms and the unity of opposites.

Decorative Frame and Spatial Layers: Encircling the central scene is an elaborate floral border composed of grapevines, lotus blossoms, and curling branches. The interlacing vines not only serve as ornamental motifs but also function as visual connectors between mythic and natural realms, integrating human figures, deities, and vegetation into a single symbolic ecology. The multi-layered spatial organization—foregrounded by floral tendrils and backgrounded by circular lattice—creates a visual depth uncommon in traditional monochrome paper-cuttings, indicating the sophisticated aesthetic of the Penglai artisans.

Color and Material Features: Unlike the single-color red paper-cuttings common in northern Shandong, this work employs hand-painted coloration in red, brown, and indigo tones. The selective use of color delineates the immortals’ garments, divine attributes, and surrounding flora, enhancing narrative differentiation and symbolic hierarchy. Red predominates in the framing and central motifs, signifying joy and festivity; indigo is used for Taoist robes, suggesting spiritual transcendence; while ochre and brown hues ground the composition in an earthy warmth. The coexistence of these tones reflects both visual hierarchy and the syncretic blending of sacred and secular aesthetics in local folk art.

Symbolic Center and Visual Balance: At the geometric center lies a potted plant motif, from which symmetrical blossoms extend outward. This device not only stabilizes the composition but also symbolizes growth, prosperity, and immortality—values associated with the *Eight Immortals* myth. The radiating floral stems from a visual link between inner and outer layers, acting as an axis mundi that connects heaven, earth, and humanity. This central motif underscores the holistic worldview of Shandong folk belief, where all elements—divine and mortal, floral and human—coexist within a balanced cosmic order.

In sum, the visual composition of this *chuāngxīn* integrates narrative symmetry, symbolic centrality, and decorative rhythm into a coherent whole. It transforms the linear myth of *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* into a cyclical, spatially embedded image, reflecting both the Taoist philosophy of harmony and the Shandong aesthetic preference for fullness, auspiciousness, and dynamic equilibrium.

B. Symbolic Analysis

The Symbolic Significance of the Eight Immortals: The *Eight Immortals* are among the most widely recognized figures in Chinese mythology, embodying the Daoist ideal of transcendence and the folk aspiration for health, longevity, and moral virtue. In Shandong folk paper-cutting, their imagery is not merely decorative but functions as a complex semiotic system through which moral, cosmological, and social values are visually encoded. Each immortal carries distinct attributes that serve as visual signifiers of their spiritual role and human archetype.

Name of pattern	Graphic symbols	Symbolic meaning keywords
Lü Dongbin (吕洞宾)		Wisdom, Morality, Transcendence
Tieguai Li (铁拐李)		Compassion, Healing, Redemption
He Xianggu (何仙姑)		Purity, Femininity, Longevity
Han Xiangzi (韩湘子)		Musician, Harmony, Enlightenment
Lan Caihe (蓝采和)		Freedom, Joy, Transience

Cao Guojiu (曹国舅)		Justice, Integrity, Nobility
Zhang Guolao (张果老)		Wisdom, Reversal, Immortality
Han Zhongli (汉钟离)		Regeneration, Teaching, Transformation

Figure 4.1 The Symbolic Significance of the Eight Immortals

1. Lü Dongbin (吕洞宾)

Lü Dongbin, often depicted as a scholar-swordsman wearing a Taoist robe, is a central figure in the *Eight Immortals* ensemble. His sword (*baojian*, 宝剑) functions as the principal symbol of wisdom and exorcistic power. Within the context of folk paper-cutting, the raised sword signifies the triumph of righteousness over evil and the purification of human desires. In Shandong’s cultural milieu, Lü Dongbin represents the Confucian scholar who attains spiritual transcendence through moral cultivation—an ideal synthesis of intellectual virtue and Daoist enlightenment. The dynamic posture of his figure in the paper-cut evokes courage and discipline, qualities admired by the agrarian and fishing communities of Penglai, where self-reliance and moral rectitude were key social virtues.

2. Tiegua Li (铁拐李)

Tiegua Li, the “Iron-Crutch Immortal,” embodies the Daoist paradox of deformity and divine power. His iron crutch and gourd are dual symbols: the crutch denotes physical imperfection and human suffering, while the gourd—believed to contain medicine or elixirs—symbolizes healing, compassion, and the salvation of ordinary people. In the paper-cut image, Tiegua Li’s slightly bent posture and flowing beard emphasize his liminality between the mortal and the immortal. For rural Shandong people, he is the protector of the sick and poor—a reminder that spiritual virtue transcends physical appearance. The gourd also functions as a sign of containment and transformation, aligning with the Daoist concept of cyclical renewal.

3. He Xiang (何仙姑)

He Xiang, the sole female among the Eight Immortals, introduces a symbolic balance of yin within the group. She holds a lotus blossom, an emblem of purity, rebirth, and feminine virtue. In Shandong folk cosmology, the lotus—emerging unstained from muddy waters—signifies moral integrity and fertility, linking divine chastity to agrarian abundance. The depiction of He Xiang in paper-cut form, with soft lines and serene expression,

highlights the aesthetic ideal of gentleness imbued with inner strength. Her image conveys blessings for family harmony, female virtue, and generational continuity, reflecting the social emphasis on domestic prosperity.

4. Han Xiangzi (韩湘子)

Han Xiangzi, often portrayed with a flute, symbolizes spiritual freedom and artistic enlightenment. His flute represents the Daoist pursuit of harmony between man and nature, as music bridges the sensory and the transcendent realms. In Shandong window-paper cutting, Han Xiangzi's figure is rendered with rhythmic curves, visually echoing the sound waves of the flute and the fluidity of air. The flute becomes a semiotic metaphor for communication between heaven and earth. Within the rural visual imagination, Han Xiangzi personifies scholarly detachment, aesthetic refinement, and the joy of spontaneity—values deeply resonant with Shandong's Confucian-Daoist synthesis.

5. Lan Caihe (蓝采和)

Lan Caihe is the most enigmatic of the Eight, often shown as a youthful figure carrying a flower basket. The basket overflowing with blossoms represents transience, renewal, and the unity of life and decay. In folk belief, Lan Caihe's gender ambiguity and carefree demeanor challenge social conventions, embodying the Daoist ideal of natural spontaneity. In the paper-cut composition, Lan Caihe's stance—light, unrestrained—conveys a sense of wandering between the mundane and the divine. For Penglai artisans, this figure symbolizes liberation from worldly constraint, artistic eccentricity, and the cyclical beauty of nature.

6. Cao Guojiu (曹国舅)

Cao Guojiu, dressed in a court official's robe and holding castanets or jade tablets, symbolizes moral rectitude within worldly authority. His noble lineage—traditionally associated with Song dynasty royalty—represents purity amid corruption. In paper-cut form, the angular folds of his robe and upright posture contrast with the fluid lines of other immortals, visually reinforcing his association with order, justice, and discipline. In Shandong folk culture, Cao Guojiu embodies the aspiration for official integrity and social harmony, functioning as a moral exemplar that unites Confucian ethics with Daoist transcendence.

7. Zhang Guolao (张果老)

Zhang Guolao is depicted riding a white mule and carrying a bamboo tube-drum. The mule, which he can fold into paper and store in his gourd, represents transformation and paradox—matter rendered immaterial through spiritual mastery. The drum, used to accompany songs of enlightenment, symbolizes the rhythm of time and the Daoist cyclical understanding of existence. In paper-cut iconography, Zhang Guolao's backward-facing pose signifies retrospection and immortality achieved through awareness of the past. Within the agrarian worldview of Shandong, his imagery evokes wisdom, age, and continuity—a link between ancestral knowledge and divine truth.

8. Han Zhongli (汉钟离)

Han Zhongli, often shown as a robust elder holding a palm-leaf fan, serves as the group's patriarchal figure. The fan is not a mundane accessory but a magical implement capable of reviving the dead or transforming stones into gold, symbolizing both regeneration and the Daoist quest for immortality. In the Penglai paper-cut, Han Zhongli occupies a stabilizing compositional position, anchoring the group's visual equilibrium. His presence connotes benevolence, instruction, and cosmic balance. The fan's circular motion mirrors the wind element and the circulation central to Daoist cosmology, aligning the physical world with spiritual transformation.

Symbolism of Auxiliary Motifs: Beyond the eight central figures, the *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* paper-

cutting incorporates a rich array of auxiliary motifs that reinforce and extend the mythological narrative. These symbols—comprising plants, animals, and ornamental patterns—form a visual lexicon through which folk beliefs and regional aesthetics are expressed. Each motif functions not only as a decorative filler but as a semiotic signifier contributing to the overall cosmological harmony of the composition.

Type	Name of pattern	Graphic symbols	Symbolic meaning keywords
Animal with Floral pattern	Butterfly and Flower Motif		Love, Harmony, Renewal
Religious symbol patterns	Morning Glory Motif		Vitality, Growth, Auspiciousness
Floral pattern	Grape Vine Pattern		Fertility, Continuity, Abundance
Floral pattern	Willow Pattern		Resilience, Farewell, Hope
Floral pattern	Pine and Cypress Motif		Longevity, Integrity, Endurance

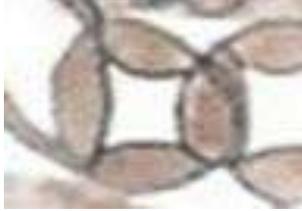
Animal with Floral pattern	Birds and Flowers Motif		Prosperity, Joy, Harmony
Floral pattern	Longevity Peach		Longevity, Blessing, Immortality
Animal patterns	Goldfish Motif		Wealth, Prosperity, Luck
Animal patterns	Phoenix Motif		Rebirth, Nobility, Harmony
Religious symbol patterns	Auspicious Cloud Pattern		Transcendence, Blessing, Divinity
Religious symbol patterns	Ancient Coin Motif		Fortune, Protection, Balance

Figure 4.2 Symbolism of Auxiliary Motifs

1. Butterfly and Flower Motif

The *die lian hua* motif, or “butterfly in love with flower,” symbolizes romantic harmony, prosperity, and the union of yin and yang. In Chinese folk art, the butterfly (*die*, 蝶) is homophonous with *die* (叠), meaning

“repetition” or “multiplication,” thus signifying abundant generations and recurring blessings. In Shandong window-paper cutting, the butterfly hovering around blossoms conveys the ideal of emotional reciprocity and cyclical vitality. It also resonates with the Daoist notion of metamorphosis, as the butterfly’s transformation from caterpillar to winged creature parallels spiritual transcendence.

2. Morning Glory Motif

The morning glory (*labahua*) represents vitality and the perpetual renewal of life. Its trumpet-shaped bloom, which opens with sunrise and closes by dusk, embodies the rhythm of nature and the harmony between human labor and cosmic cycles. In the Penglai paper-cutting, morning glories entwine around the floral borders, their curling tendrils echoing the flowing motion of the sea waves and clouds. This repetition visually reinforces the Daoist idea of *wu wei* (无为)—natural unfolding without forced control. The motif thus becomes a metaphor for the spontaneous flourishing of virtue and fortune.

3. Grape Vine Pattern

The grapevine, characterized by its intertwined branches and clusters of fruit, carries the auspicious meaning of fertility, prosperity, and family continuity. In Shandong folk visual culture, the coiling tendrils form rhythmic, endless loops symbolizing unbroken lineage and abundance. The entangled-branch pattern also implies the interconnectedness of life forms and the cyclical regeneration of nature. Its visual density within the window border suggests a boundary between the sacred mythic space and the living world, echoing the structural logic of folk cosmology—abundance encircling transcendence.

4. Willow Pattern

The willow tree (*liushu*) signifies resilience, flexibility, and renewal. In Chinese poetic imagery, the willow bends without breaking, symbolizing endurance and moral adaptability. Its phonetic association with *liu* (留, “to stay”) gives rise to connotations of affection and farewell, as seen in the custom of offering willow branches to travelers. In this paper-cutting, willow branches appear beside certain immortals, linking divine immortality to human emotion and seasonal rebirth. The willow’s flowing forms mirror the curvilinear rhythm of the waves, uniting terrestrial vitality with celestial movement.

5. Pine and Cypress Motif

The combination of pine (*song*) and cypress (*bai*) constitutes a traditional symbol of longevity, constancy, and moral integrity. Evergreen throughout the seasons, these trees epitomize steadfast virtue amid adversity. Within the context of *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea*, they resonate with the immortals’ transcendence over temporal decay. Visually, the pine needles and cypress leaves introduce a textural contrast to the rounded floral motifs, providing structural stability and moral gravity to the image. The motif’s placement near the outer ring signifies protection and the perpetuation of life energy (*shengqi*).

6. Birds and Flowers Motif

The *niao yu hua xiang* imagery—literally “birds sing and flowers give fragrance”—embodies the ideal of harmony between nature and humanity. It reflects a worldview in which aesthetic beauty and moral order coexist. In the Penglai window-heart composition, the paired birds and blooming flowers suggest conjugal happiness and environmental harmony, echoing the Confucian-Daoist vision of the unity of heaven and humanity. The motif’s decorative vitality enlivens the mythic tableau, turning transcendence into an accessible, joyous experience for the viewer.

7. Longevity Peach

The longevity peach is an explicit emblem of immortality and divine blessing. Originating from the *Queen Mother of the West's* mythical garden, where peaches ripen every three thousand years, the fruit promises eternal youth and auspicious fortune. In this paper-cutting, peaches appear in the hands of immortals or within decorative borders, signifying both personal well-being and cosmic regeneration. The rounded form of the peach parallels the circular window structure, reinforcing the theme of completeness and cyclical renewal. The motif also aligns with Shandong's local festivals celebrating long life and familial unity.

8. Goldfish Motif

The goldfish (*jinyu*) symbolizes wealth, abundance, and spiritual harmony. Its name is homophonous with *jin yu* (金玉), meaning “gold and jade,” a common metaphor for prosperity and virtue. In folk paper-cutting, goldfish are often paired or shown swimming upward, representing marital bliss and the aspiration for social ascension. Within the *Eight Immortals* composition, the fish navigate beneath waves, visually bridging the human and aquatic realms. They embody the fluid adaptability essential to Daoist wisdom—the ability to move freely through changing circumstances without losing inner equilibrium.

9. Phoenix Motif

The phoenix serves as a powerful emblem of auspicious transformation, virtue, and cosmic harmony. As the sovereign of birds, it symbolizes renewal after calamity and the cyclical balance of yin and yang. In the Penglai paper-cutting, the phoenix spreads its wings at the lower margin of the frame, anchoring the image with symmetrical grace. Its presence connects the mythic narrative of transcendence with the broader cosmological principle of rebirth through balance. For local artisans, incorporating the phoenix into a window-heart composition signifies the aspiration for peace, moral order, and the prosperity of the household.

10. Auspicious Cloud Pattern

The Cloud Pattern motif—stylized swirling clouds—is one of the most enduring symbols in Chinese visual culture, representing celestial ascent, divine protection, and good fortune. The pattern's fluid curves echo the movement of wind and water, embodying the Daoist belief in the continuity of *qi* (气). In this composition, clouds surround the immortals as they traverse the sea, visually linking heaven and earth. The cloud pattern thus acts as both narrative connector and spiritual metaphor, transforming the flat pictorial space into a realm of transcendental flow.

11. Ancient Coin Motif

The circular *tongqian* pattern—featuring a square hole within a round frame—symbolizes the unity of heaven (circle) and earth (square). As a folk talisman, it conveys wishes for wealth, stability, and cosmic balance. The motif's geometric precision provides visual counterpoint to the organic curves of the floral elements, reinforcing compositional harmony. Within Shandong folk cosmology, coins also function as protective charms against malevolent forces, representing the accumulation of both material and spiritual fortune. Their inclusion near the immortals' feet subtly grounds the divine scene in everyday life, reflecting the belief that sacred blessing manifests in worldly prosperity.

C. Semantic Interpretation

The semantic dimension of the *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* paper-cutting extends beyond iconographic representation to encompass layers of cultural belief, moral imagination, and regional cosmology. Through its complex network of human figures, natural motifs, and decorative rhythms, the work visualizes a vernacular

theology that merges Taoist transcendence with folk ideals of harmony, abundance, and moral virtue. This section interprets how the symbolic system of the window-heart composition operates semantically—how meanings are generated, circulated, and transformed within the Shandong folk context.

1. Mythological Semantics: The Visualization of Transcendence

At the most fundamental level, *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* functions as a visual myth, translating an oral narrative into an image system. The eight immortals' journey across the ocean is semantically equivalent to the quest for transcendence (*duhai*, 渡海) in Taoist cosmology—an allegory for overcoming worldly suffering and attaining spiritual enlightenment.

In this composition, each immortal embodies a moral principle: Lü Dongbin represents wisdom and moral self-cultivation; Tieguai Li symbolizes compassion and redemptive power; He Xiangu expresses purity and feminine virtue; Han Xiangzi manifests aesthetic freedom; Lan Caihe embodies spontaneity; Cao Guojiu stands for justice and integrity; Zhang Guolao symbolizes cyclical wisdom; and Han Zhongli conveys regeneration and instruction. Their collective movement from one side of the frame to the other—across stylized waves and clouds—constitutes a semantic metaphor of transcendence.

The narrative “crossing” thus signifies more than physical passage; it encodes the transformation from human limitation to divine harmony. This semantic field links mythological symbolism with existential values central to rural Shandong: perseverance, balance, and moral endurance amid hardship. The immortals' gestures and their surrounding waves embody the eternal rhythm between adversity and salvation—a rhythm that mirrors the local community's agrarian cycles and maritime environment.

2. Folk Belief and Moral Semantics

The paper-cutting also serves as a didactic image, embedding moral lessons within decorative pleasure. Folk audiences interpret the immortals' attributes as moral prescriptions: to wield Lü Dongbin's sword is to uphold righteousness; to carry Tieguai Li's gourd is to cultivate compassion; to follow He Xiangu's purity is to maintain family harmony.

These figures collectively express the moral economy of Shandong folk culture, where ethics are transmitted visually rather than textually. The immortals represent a democratized pantheon—divinities drawn from common origins, embodying the principle that holiness is accessible through virtuous action. Their diverse social identities—scholar, beggar, woman, musician, official—mirror the human spectrum, offering moral inclusiveness within divine hierarchy.

This semantic inclusivity transforms the myth into a moral allegory of everyday life. The immortals' cooperation across difference conveys social ideals of harmony and reciprocity—values resonant with the Confucian ethical structure underlying northern Chinese rural society. The image thus performs a double function: aesthetically pleasing and morally instructive.

3. Cosmological Semantics: Harmony Between Heaven, Earth, and Humanity

At a deeper level, the composition articulates the Taoist cosmological triad of heaven (天), earth (地), and humanity (人). The semi-circular division—upper celestial zone with clouds and deities, lower terrestrial zone with flora, fauna, and mortals—spatially represents this tripartite order.

The immortals positioned between the two realms mediate the interaction of cosmic forces, performing the role of *agent*, or intermediaries between heaven and earth. Their upward and lateral motions generate a visual syntax of balance, where divine energy circulates in cyclical rhythm. The auxiliary motifs—pine, willow, clouds,

phoenix, goldfish—extend this cosmological grammar: pine and cypress denote permanence, willow denotes renewal, clouds denote divine circulation, and the phoenix signifies cyclical rebirth.

This compositional logic echoes the Taoist notion of Qi and Destiny in Harmony, the harmonious circulation of vital energy across the six directions. The window-heart thus becomes a miniature cosmogram, translating metaphysical principles into accessible visual form. The semantic meaning of “crossing the sea” becomes the reconciliation of opposites—heaven and earth, divine and human, movement and stillness—achieved through spiritual balance.

4. Ritual Semantics: Auspiciousness and Protection

As an object of domestic decoration, the *Eight Immortals* window-heart also possesses apotropaic and ritual semantics. In rural Shandong, window-paper cuttings were traditionally installed during festivals or lifecycle ceremonies to invite prosperity and repel misfortune. The circular format itself functions as a symbolic seal of wholeness and protection, while the red outline color aligns with the *yang* principle of vitality.

Within this ritual context, each symbolic element contributes to collective blessing: the phoenix ensures harmony, the peach grants longevity, the goldfish attracts wealth, the grapevine multiplies offspring, and the cloud pattern channels divine auspices. The immortals’ presence sanctifies the domestic threshold, converting the house into a microcosm of sacred order.

Thus, the semantic layer extends from individual mythological meaning to collective ritual function. The image’s decorative beauty is inseparable from its talismanic efficacy—its ability to visually manifest auspicious energy (*jixiang qi*). Through repetition in household usage, the motif acquires semiotic durability, transforming from narrative art to cultural emblem.

5. Regional Semantics: The Shandong Aesthetic of Fullness

The semantic character of this work also reflects the aesthetic psychology of the Shandong region, marked by fullness (*man* 满), symmetry, and auspicious density. Local artisans favor compact compositions where every space is occupied by symbolic content—a visual manifestation of abundance and completeness.

This regional aesthetic aligns with the folk philosophy of “plentitude brings blessing” (*manze youfu* 满则有福). In the Penglai *Eight Immortals* piece, the dense entanglement of floral vines, overlapping figures, and curvilinear frames constructs an environment of visual saturation. Semantically, this abundance equates to moral and material prosperity. The fullness of form becomes a metaphor for fullness of life—an articulation of Shandong’s agrarian optimism and communal resilience.

The integration of mythic and decorative semantics reveals the regional process of cultural localization: universal Taoist myths reinterpreted through local aesthetic logic. In this sense, the *Eight Immortals* window-heart exemplifies how Shandong artisans transformed sacred stories into vernacular images that resonate with community identity.

6. Semiotic Dynamics: From Sacred Narrative to Vernacular Expression

From a semiotic perspective, the paper-cutting operates as a dynamic system of signification and re-signification. The mythological signs (immortals, clouds, waves) function as primary signifiers; when placed within the domestic and festive environment, they acquire secondary meanings as symbols of happiness, prosperity, and protection.

This double-layered signification aligns with Roland Barthes’s concept of *myth as a second-order semiological*

system: a process where cultural narratives transform into naturalized symbols. In this paper-cutting, the myth of transcendence becomes a sign of worldly blessing—spiritual ideals materialized in everyday aesthetics.

The semantic vitality of the image thus lies in its ability to mediate between belief and life, between sacred transcendence and mundane aspiration. Each viewing act reactivates its meaning within the cultural memory of the community, ensuring the continuity of both art and faith.

7. Temporal Semantics: Continuity and Regeneration

Finally, the semantics of Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea involve an implicit meditation on time and regeneration. The mythic crossing, though a single episode, is rendered in a circular, timeless composition. This visual transformation converts linear narrative into cyclical symbol—a perpetual process of renewal that mirrors agricultural and seasonal rhythms.

The immortals' endless voyage across stylized waves becomes a metaphor for the community's cyclical life—planting and harvesting, hardship and reward, departure and return. The visual repetition of motifs such as vines and clouds reinforces this temporal circularity, transforming myth into a living calendar of existence. In this way, the artwork functions as both spiritual allegory and temporal mirror, reflecting the enduring flow of cultural continuity in Shandong folk life.

D. Transformation of Myth into Visual Communication

The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea paper-cutting from Penglai shows how a traditional myth can be transformed into a visual language that communicates cultural meaning. Through visual form, composition, and symbolic imagery, this work turns a sacred story into a shared expression of belief, morality, and identity within Shandong folk culture.

1. Visual Form: Simplifying the Story

In the paper-cutting, the long and complex myth is turned into a clear and symbolic image. Each immortal is shown through a few key signs—such as a sword, lotus, fan, or gourd—that represent their identity and spiritual power. This change from text to image allows the story to be understood by people who may not read, making the myth accessible through vision alone.

The visual form replaces detailed storytelling with symbolic presence, turning each figure into a sign of certain virtues—wisdom, kindness, harmony, and renewal. In this way, the myth's message of transcendence and moral strength becomes a part of daily visual life.

2. Compositional Language: Order and Balance

The circular composition of the window-heart design reflects the Taoist idea of harmony between heaven, earth, and human life. The figures of the immortals are placed around the circle in balanced rhythm, suggesting continuous movement rather than a single event.

This visual rhythm changes the myth of “crossing the sea” into a symbol of eternal flow and cosmic balance. It also mirrors Shandong's folk aesthetic of fullness and symmetry, where balance means happiness and moral order. Through composition, the visual work expresses the community's understanding of the world: that peace and order come from unity and cooperation.

3. Symbolic Imagery: Cultural Translation of Belief

The symbolic images—such as the phoenix, cloud, willow, and peach—carry layers of meaning that connect the

myth to folk belief. These motifs express ideas of longevity, purity, and rebirth. When used together with the immortals, they create a visual system where divine and human values meet.

This network of symbols allows the myth to speak not only of gods but also of human hopes and emotions. The images make the invisible—faith, morality, and harmony—visible and touchable. The paper-cutting therefore becomes a bridge between spiritual belief and everyday experience.

4. Cultural Communication: From Sacred to Shared

Through repetition and display in homes and festivals, *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* becomes more than decoration—it becomes a medium of communication. People view it not only for beauty but for blessing, moral guidance, and cultural memory.

The paper-cutting transforms a religious story into a collective symbol of good life and moral balance. Its meanings are renewed every time it is seen or reproduced, allowing myth to live on through visual form rather than words.

SUMMARY

In summary, the *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* paper-cutting transforms myth into cultural communication through three processes:

1. Simplified form turns narrative into clear visual signs;
2. Ordered composition expresses harmony and continuity;
3. Symbolic imagery connects divine belief to human life.

Through these visual strategies, the artwork changes an ancient myth into a living language of folk culture, expressing the values of morality, balance, and blessing that define Shandong's regional identity.

CONCLUSION

A. Summary of the Study

This study explored the cultural meaning and symbolic system of the *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* paper-cutting from Penglai, Shandong. Using semiotic and semantic analysis, it examined how visual form, composition, and symbolic imagery transform a traditional myth into meaningful visual communication.

The research focused on three main aspects.

First, the visual structure of the work shows the aesthetic logic of balance and fullness that defines Shandong folk art. The circular layout and symmetrical rhythm create a sense of harmony between heaven, earth, and human life.

Second, the symbolic imagery—including the eight immortals and auxiliary motifs such as clouds, vines, phoenixes, and peaches—forms a rich symbolic network that reflects Taoist cosmology and folk belief.

Third, the semantic interpretation revealed how these visual signs express moral ideals and collective memory. The paper-cutting becomes a visual scripture that communicates the values of goodness, cooperation, and renewal through simple images.

B. Major Findings

The research found that *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* achieves the transformation from myth to cultural communication through three interrelated visual strategies:

1. Symbolic Simplification – The complex narrative of the myth is condensed into a visual code. Each immortal's key object (sword, fan, flute, lotus, etc.) becomes a visual sign representing moral quality and spiritual power.
2. Compositional Harmony – The circular and symmetrical structure expresses the folk ideal of cosmic order and unity. The rhythm of waves, clouds, and figures creates a continuous flow that symbolizes balance and eternity.
3. Cultural Recontextualization – The decorative motifs around the immortals translate sacred meaning into everyday language. Through repetition in domestic and festive settings, the artwork becomes a medium of blessing and protection.

These findings demonstrate that the *Eight Immortals* paper-cutting is not only a decorative craft but also a form of visual communication. It carries mythological and ethical meanings that connect art, belief, and social identity within the Shandong region.

C. Theoretical Contribution

This research contributes to the understanding of how folk art functions as a semiotic system. By applying semiotic and iconographic methods to Shandong paper-cutting, it provides a model for analyzing the relationship between visual symbol and cultural narrative.

The study shows that visual symbols in folk art are dynamic—they shift meaning according to context. When used in window-paper cuttings, sacred myths lose their narrative distance and become part of communal life. This process illustrates the principle that visual culture can translate intangible belief into visible communication.

Furthermore, the study enriches the discussion of visual communication within intangible cultural heritage. It shows that local crafts can serve as living languages for expressing identity and transmitting moral values.

D. Practical Implications

The findings suggest several implications for design and cultural heritage practice.

First, understanding traditional visual logic can inspire modern designers to integrate symbolic depth into creative work.

Second, the semantic system of Shandong paper-cutting provides a valuable resource for developing heritage-based visual design, such as cultural branding, exhibition, and educational media.

Third, promoting visual communication derived from folk art can support the revitalization of local culture, allowing traditional motifs to reach broader audiences through digital and contemporary formats.

By viewing folk paper-cutting as a communicative medium rather than a static artifact, designers and researchers can continue its life as a form of cultural storytelling.

E. Limitations

This study has certain limitations.

The analysis focused on a single work—*Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea*—which limits the scope of regional and stylistic comparison.

The interpretation was based mainly on symbolic and semantic reading rather than ethnographic field data, which may reduce the diversity of perspectives.

Future research can include more samples from different regions of Shandong and use interviews with local artisans to deepen the cultural interpretation.

F. Recommendations for Future Study

Future studies may expand in three directions:

1. Comparative Research – Analyze multiple mythological paper-cuttings (such as Cowherd and Weaver Girl, Lady White Snake) to compare visual strategies of myth translation across regions.
2. Audience Reception – Study how modern viewers interpret traditional paper-cutting symbols in exhibitions or digital media.
3. Design Application – Explore how symbolic motifs can be adapted in modern visual communication design while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Through these approaches, future research can build a broader understanding of how folk symbolism continues to evolve in contemporary contexts.

G. Final Reflection

The *Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea* paper-cutting from Penglai stands as a vivid example of how myth, art, and communication merge in Chinese folk culture. Its visual language transforms a spiritual story into a shared cultural symbol, expressing values of harmony, morality, and continuity.

By decoding its symbols and meanings, this study affirms that traditional paper-cutting is not only a craft of beauty but also a living medium of cultural transmission. In the continuous dialogue between past and present, myth and design, such works keep the spiritual essence of Shandong culture alive—turning heritage into a form of enduring visual communication.

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