



Exploring the Visual Narrative Characteristics of Chinese Classical Poetry Picture Books in Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

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Purpose: This scholarly investigation undertook a comparative analysis and discussion on the Visual Narrative Characteristics discernible in Chinese classical poetry picture books and storytelling picture books. **Method:** Purpose of the study is achieved by employing qualitative coding methodologies. The examination focused on the three dimensions of Visual Narrative Characteristics, namely Interpersonal Meaning, Ideational Meaning, and Textual Meaning, thereby contributing to the extant body of multimodal discourse analysis in the realm of children's picture books. The study adopted Visual Narrative theory as theoretical framework, employing qualitative analyses of individual images, sequential images, and the interplay between images and text on a page-by-page basis.

Findings: The comparative analyses brought to light certain observations. Notably, Chinese classical poetry picture books were found to necessitate a heightened sense of pictorial immersion in the construction of Interpersonal Meaning. Furthermore, the construction of Ideational Meaning necessitated the establishment of a cohesive continuum of images and narrative logic. The examination of Textual Meaning construction revealed a deficiency in image-text interaction, prompting the identification of a need for increased variety and flexibility in the visual subjects. It is imperative, however, to underscore the necessity of contextualizing Visual Narrative analysis within the disparities inherent in Chinese and Western cultural contexts, particularly in light of the distinctive features of Chinese traditional culture. **Implications for Research and Practice:** The study's findings not only provide insights into the cultural distinctions between Chinese and Western contexts but also advocate for a nuanced exploration of the Visual Narrative Characteristics framework to enhance its applicability across diverse cultural milieus.

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Introduction

In the contemporary era, there has been a notable surge in multimodal discourse research within the domain of picture books (Martinec & Salway, 2005; Yang & Xin, 2010), with a pronounced emphasis on the examination of static images. Despite the abundance of studies investigating the interplay between textual and visual elements, a discernible gap exists in the discourse analysis of picture books characterized by distinctive textual attributes. This prompts an inquiry into the distinctive features of picture books that incorporate Chinese classical poetry, specifically in terms of textual content, visual relationships, and pictorial expressions. A comparative exploration is warranted, particularly concerning how these features diverge from conventional storytelling picture books.

Chinese classical poetry is renowned for its succinct language and profound meanings, posing both challenges and offering distinctive artistic patterns in the creation of picture books. Picture books featuring Chinese classical poetry (CCPPB), characterized by sparse text and resonant rhymes, have the potential to serve as invaluable literary resources for the intellectual development of young Chinese children (Du, 2018; Yang, 2018). Despite the perceived advantages, these books have not gained widespread popularity among Chinese youth (Liu, 2021; Yang, 2018). Presently, the dominance of foreign-imported picture books in the Chinese market surpasses that of original Chinese picture books. The production of indigenous children's picture books faces challenges such as homogeneity, a dearth of innovation, and a lack of distinctive competitive edges within the genre (Chen & M., 2019). An urgent imperative arises to enhance the design strategy of Chinese original picture books (Li, 2023).

Hence, there is value in crafting high-quality picture books tailored for modern Chinese children by drawing inspiration from foreign counterparts and integrating Chinese classical poetry with traditional cultural symbols. Chinese classical poetry offers a distinctive aesthetic and cultural metaphors suitable for narration and illustration (Yang, 2018). Employing multimodal discourse analysis to assess Visual Narrative Characteristics in tandem with China's artistic standards allows a holistic examination, encompassing textual content, graphic style, and cultural connotations in these books.

This research employed the Visual Narrative (VN) theory proposed by Painter, Martin, and Unsworth (2013) as the theoretical framework. It systematically examined a sample of Chinese classical poetry picture books (CCPPB) and storytelling picture books (SPB), addressing the following research inquiries: (1) To what extent do Chinese classical poetry picture books (CCPPB) exhibit distinctive Visual Narrative Characteristics (specifically, in Interpersonal Meaning, Ideational Meaning, and Textual Meaning) when compared to storytelling picture books (SPB)? (2) What key disparities characterize CCPPB in contrast to SPB? (3) How can the integration of the Visual Narrative framework be leveraged to enhance the pictorial narrative design strategy of CCPPB?

Literature Review

Picture books employ diverse symbolic coding systems to effectively convey information, with the arrangement of images and textual content playing a pivotal role in achieving communicative goals. After the introduction of the meta-functional theory of

complex social symbol systems, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) introduced the concept of 'the Grammar of Visual Design' centred on static images. Painter et al. (2013), building upon these foundations, conducted an analysis of children's picture books. They delineated visual elements that serve narrative functions within the VN analysis framework, categorizing them into Interpersonal, Ideational, and Textual dimensions. Visual Narrative Characteristics (VNC) offer a comprehensive approach to analysing information in picture books, encapsulating all pertinent elements. The VNC framework developed by Painter et al. (2013) has gained widespread recognition as a pragmatic analytical tool.

Feng (2015) encapsulated the evolution of VN theory, delineating its progression along two principal dimensions. Firstly, the theory broadened its scope of inquiry beyond singular images, incorporating the examination of intricate visual narratives comprised of multiple images, transcending the initial focus on single images such as those found in advertising pictures. The second dimension involved the refinement of the theoretical framework. This refinement entailed both modification and elucidation of the contentious perspectives articulated by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) concerning the spatial compositional representation of "ideal" and "reality."

Painter et al. (2013) introduced crucial sub-dimensions to VN analysis, including the Pathos System (related to artistic drawing style), Character Representation (relating to stylized character features), and Event Relation (linked to narrative across multiple drawings). Interpersonal Meaning examines character-reader relationships, shaping the picture's atmosphere and emotional tone through colour, style, perspective, composition, depth of focus, and other sub-dimensions (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000). Ideational Meaning delves into the logical ties between the objective and characters' inner worlds, observing changes in external image traits, motivational forces, scene alterations, and sub-dimensions of language or psychological shifts in the story's progression (Painter et al., 2013). Textual Meaning analysis centres on organizing pictures, words, or characters in composition, exploring how the picture layout forms visual statements with varying complexity. The amalgamation of these dimensions, as outlined by Painter et al. (2013), alongside the distinctive visual symbolic language and narrative style in picture books, enhances reader comprehension of the narrative.

Nonetheless, CCPPB exhibit distinctive traits. In terms of graphic layout, CCPPB typically adheres to the traditional convention of "one poem with one picture," influenced by classical poetry and painting traditions. This approach, however, does not foster the cohesive development of images found in conventional picture books. The illustrations in CCPPB often lack artistic diversity, potentially falling short of satisfying the aesthetic preferences of the intended child audience. This study seeks to investigate the visual narrative characteristics of CCPPB through multimodal discourse analysis, integrating them with traditional Chinese artistic expression techniques. Furthermore, it aims to offer a pictorial interpretation by applying the concepts inherent in traditional Chinese art.

Research Methodology

Research Subject

In accordance with the principle of typicality sample selection, the determination of

research samples (CCPPB and SPB) adhered to the following criteria: (1) Quality assurance was prioritized, with all selected samples being recipients of prestigious awards; (2) To ensure widespread acceptance, the chosen samples represented top-selling titles among mainstream book retailers in mainland China; (3) To facilitate differentiation and comparison, CCPPB selections comprised original Chinese picture books, while SPB selections were sourced from international markets. Adhering to the aforementioned screening criteria, the final samples were procured from prominent online bookstores in China, including Dangdang, Taobao, and Jingdong, as delineated in [Table 1](#).

Table 1

Information on the Research Samples

Book Title	Authors & Translators	Publishers	Date of Publication
Feng Zikai Caricatures of Ancient Poetry	Illustrator: Feng Zikai Commentary: Chang Yingchun	Shanghai Social Sciences Press	2018.09
The Great Poems for Thousands of Generations	Editor: Tang Yunke Illustrator: Fu Weiwei	Dolphin Press	2020.01
Ancient Poems for Children	Editor: The Research Centre for Preschool Education of the Chinese Academy of Educational Sciences Editor: Wang Yuyan Illustrator: Yuan Yanqin	Educational Science Publishing House	2018.05
Tang Poetry Picture Book	Editor: Starr Bear Culture Illustrator: Doudou Fish	Jiangxi University Press	2020.11
Ancient Poetry Hidden in Maps	Editor: Starr Bear Culture Illustrator: Doudou Fish	Shandong Province Map Publishing House	2017.11
We're Going on a Bear Hunt	Text: (UK) Michael Rosen Illustrations: (UK) Helen Oxenbury Translator: Lin Liang	Hebei Education Press	2009.08
Emotion Monster Goes to School (El Monster De Colors Va A L'Escola)	Text & Illustrator: (Spain) Ana Yenas Translator: Zhang Yiqi	Tomorrow Publishing House with Hsinex International Corp	2019.8
David Gets in Trouble	Text & Illustrator: (USA) David Shannon Translator: Yu Zhiying	Hebei Education Press	2009.3
It's Great to Meet You (DEAETEHONTOUNI YOKATTA)	Text & Illustrator: (Japan) Tatsuya Nishinomiya Translator: POPLAR Publishing	Twenty-first Century Press POPLAR Publishing Co., Ltd.	2013.8
A lion in Paris (Un Lion à Paris)	Text & Illustrator: (Italian) Beatriz Alemannia Translator: Kosei Zhao	Guangxi Normal University Press Group Co., Ltd.	2016.12

Research Design

The analysis of the study sample utilized Painter et al.'s (2013) visual narrative framework as a structural template, complemented by multimodal discourse analysis. No a priori theoretical assumptions were posited before the commencement of the study.

The study coded a total of 363 pages from 10 books (164 pages of SPB and 199 pages of CCPPB) using concepts derived from the VN framework as sub-themes for categorization. Following the coding process, analysis and statistics were performed based on high

percentage reference points. The visual narrative characteristics of CCPPB were then summarized by comparing similarities and differences with five CCPPB and five SPB.

Reliability and Validity: The study devised a picture book analysis framework based on Qi's (2022) model for evaluating the Visual Narrative Characteristics of traditional Chinese original picture books. The reliability of the VN framework theme nodes was verified through expert consultation, involving a professor specializing in preschool education and an early childhood teacher with six years of experience. Following discussions, the experts recommended adjusting "communication" to "visual communication" within the interpersonal meaning construction dimension. Despite some scrutiny on the nodes "Immersive" and "subordination" (Feng, 2015), this study retained Painter et al.'s (2013) VN analysis framework for picture books in terms of validity and the comprehensiveness of the theoretical structure. The study devised a qualitative statistical form for thematic analysis of VN characteristics in picture books, delineating three dimensions (Interpersonal meaning, Ideational meaning, and Textual meaning) encompassing 15 sub-themes and 45 concepts.

Findings and Discussion

Drawing upon Qi's (2022) framework for analysing the visual narrative characteristics of CCPPB, this study constructs three primary tree nodes, each representing a dimension (Interpersonal Meaning, Ideational Meaning, and Textual Meaning). Each dimension serves as a core node, accompanied by main axis coding underlining various subcategories. The axial coding allows for further subdivisions based on the depiction of images, enabling the categorization of elements corresponding to the 363 pages into these node classifications, as detailed in Tables 2 to Table 4.

Interpersonal Meaning Construction and Characteristics

Painter et al. (2013) posited that visual images lack the capacity to establish explicit solicitation relationships akin to language. Consequently, they introduced a novel Focalization System to scrutinize the visual interaction between images and readers. Additionally, Painter et al. (2013) augmented Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) Pathos System by delineating the impact of varying levels of detail in eliciting readers' emotions, particularly in the portrayal of characters' facial expressions. Furthermore, they incorporated the nuanced use of colour (brightness, saturation, and hue) as a determinant in assessing the relationship between the image and the reader, introducing the Ambience System.

Subsequently, Painter et al. (2013) partitioned the construction of Interpersonal Meaning into two discernible components: the connection between the reader and the characters depicted in the pictures, and the connection among the characters portrayed within the images. Focalization, Ambience, Pathos, Immersive, and Subordination pertain to the connection between readers and the characters within the images, while Intimacy, Social distance, and Direction are ascribed to the relationships among the characters embedded in the visual narrative. These dual relationships collaboratively serve to guide the reader into the narrative scenario.

Through the systematic categorization and enumeration of reference points within the

Interpersonal Meaning Construction tree nodes, the distinct attributes of SPB and CCPPB in each conceptual category can be succinctly delineated and presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Comparative Analysis of Interpersonal Meaning

Sub-themes	Concepts	Node Resource		Reference Point	
		g category (5 books)	Storytelling category (5 books)	g category (164 pages)	Poetry category (199 pages)
Focalization	Observe	5	5	120	116
System	Line of Sight Communication	4	0	16	0
Ambience System	Colour Intervention	5	5	136	138
	Single Colour	3	1	28	5
Pathos System	Appreciative Style	2	0	68	0
	Empathic Style	3	5	78	132
	Personalizing Style	0	0	0	0
Immersive	Silhouette Style	2	1	3	1
	Parallel Perspective	4	5	87	134
	Angular Perspective	3	0	62	0
Subordination	Horizontal View	5	5	133	92
	Overhead View	4	3	16	17
Intimacy	Alone	5	5	49	64
	Side by Side	5	5	56	14
	Face to Face	4	4	28	18
	Opposite	3	4	12	6
Social Distance	Long-shot	4	5	33	66
	Middle-shot	5	5	85	55
	Close-shot	5	1	22	1
Direction	Static	5	5	52	49
	Rightward	5	5	54	34
	Leftward	5	5	37	35

Focalization System

The VN analysis framework by Painter et al. (2013) posits that focusing is achieved through visual communication, categorized into mediated and unmediated images. The former involves a subjective perspective, where the reader engages with characters in the picture and actively participates in the narrative (Feng, 2015). Conversely, unmediated images present an objective viewpoint, wherein the reader observes the story from the standpoint of non-participants, devoid of direct eye contact with the characters (Painter et al., 2013). SPB predominantly employ non-participants and eye contact in visual narratives, as evidenced in Table 2. In contrast, all sampled pages of CCPPB exclusively utilize the non-participants' perspective for visual representation, with other pages being either characterless or text-only. Additionally, CCPPB often depicts static characters and

maintains an ethereal emotional atmosphere in portraying the poems, contributing minimally to the storyline (Figure 1). The challenge in identifying rich figurative elements in CCPPB visuals is attributed to their adherence to Tang Dynasty poems, which commonly employ symbolic imagery such as the sun, the moon, chrysanthemums, swallows, and cicadas. The current Chinese original poetry picture books exhibit a superficial refinement of poetry's lyrical objects in visual expression and necessitate a deeper exploration of metaphorical elements.

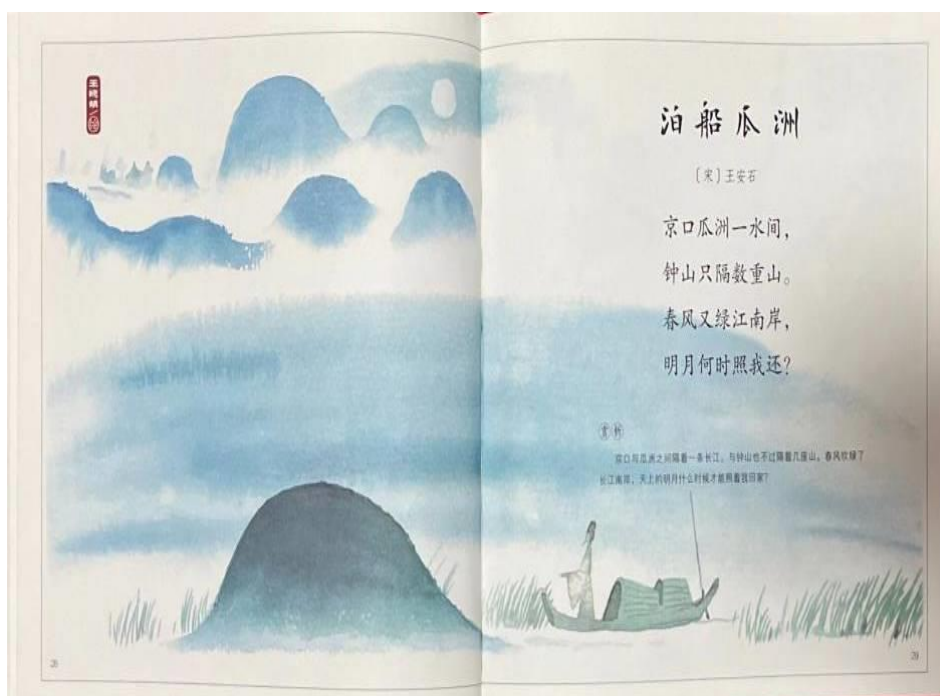


Figure 1: Ancient Poems for Children, Educational Science Publishing House (2018,05), 29.

Ambience System

The Ambience System in painting techniques contributes to the construction of interpersonal meaning by determining the use of colour and its richness. According to Painter et al. (2013), vibrant colours with high brightness and purity evoke positive and energetic emotions, while subdued tones with low brightness and purity convey sombre, restrained, gentle, and calm emotions. In traditional Chinese culture, emotional atmospheres are crafted in pictures using black and white colours, ink, and watercolour techniques. Water expression plays a crucial role in this process (Figure 2). CCPPB employ traditional Chinese ink painting techniques in their colour expression, emphasizing elegant hues, faint lines, and the intensity of ink with abstract forms (Figure 3). Among the five CCPPBs, colour pages constitute 69% of the total sample pages. In contrast, among the five SPBs, three adopt a mixed mode of expression, with colour samples accounting for 83% of the total.



Figure 2: Zhang Daqian, Lotus Flower (from Open Source Online).

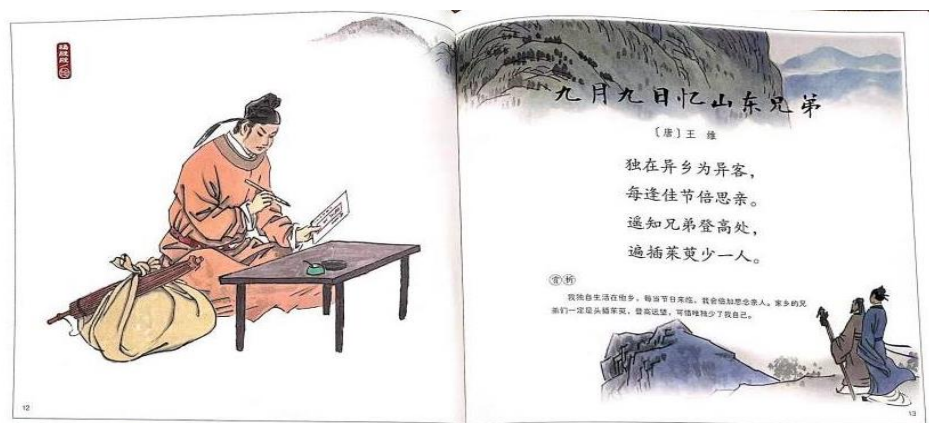


Figure 3: Ancient Poems for Children, Educational Science Publishing House (2018,05), 13.

Pathos System

The VN analysis framework by Painter et al. (2013) posits that the degree of figurativeness in an image serves as an expression of artistic style and a strategic means for the picture book to establish an emotional connection with the reader. A higher degree of figurativeness enhances the reader's empathetic perception. Emotional expression in pictures is categorized into two representations: the first involves the reader's emotional connection with the characters in the picture (e.g., Appreciative style, Empathic style, and Personalizing style); the second entails the reader's objective and detached reading attitude without an emotional connection with the characters (e.g., Silhouette style).

Upon comprehensive analysis of the entire sample, no images classified under the Personalizing style were identified. Among the five SPBs, the predominant styles were Appreciative and Empathetic, constituting 89% of the total sample. It is noteworthy that two SPBs, "Emotional Little Monster Goes to School" and "A Lion in Paris," featured 1 and 2 images in Silhouette style, respectively. Conversely, all five CCPPB predominantly featured images categorized as Empathetic style, comprising 66% of the total sample. Among these, "Feng Zikai Caricatures of Ancient Poetry" contained 1 image in Silhouette style. In terms of artistic expression, CCPPB predominantly employed brush painting techniques (e.g., "Tang Poetry Picture Book," "The Great Poems for Thousands of Generations," and "Ancient Poetry Hidden in Maps") and ink and watercolour painting (e.g., "Ancient Poems for Children" and "Feng Zikai Caricatures of Ancient Poetry"). Picture books employed simple and abstract visuals to convey the content and mood of classical poems, aligning with the artistic expression. However, the intricate lines and muted colours characteristic of these artistic styles may potentially diminish the emotional expressiveness of the visuals for young readers, consequently impacting their reading interest to some extent.

Immersive

Immersive refers to the psychological distance between the reader and picture characters determined by the picture's perspective. According to visual narrative theory (Painter et al., 2013), a parallel perspective in the picture creates a separated psychological distance, resulting in weak story content immersiveness. Conversely, an angular perspective strengthens story immersiveness. The Western painting strategy of focal perspective (angular perspective) enhances the immersive nature by directly expressing the objective external appearance of things in a three-dimensional effect. However, traditional Chinese art employs a parallel perspective (Qi, 2022). For children's picture books, parallel perspective allows more flexible artistic expression and is easily understood by children, providing a subjective and imaginative space. In this study, 61% of the total sample (221 pages) adopted parallel perspective, while 17% (62 pages) used angular perspective. Another characteristic of parallel perspective is the creation of spatial depth through the utilization of blank space in the picture (Figure 4). This blank space accentuates the pictorial arrangement of characters and scenes, allowing room for the reader's imagination to construct spatial and temporal meanings.



Figure 4: Feng Zikai Comics Ancient Poetry, Shanghai Social Sciences Press (2018,09), 88.

4.1.5 Subordination

The subordinate status signifies the hierarchical relationship between the reader and the picture character. Across the entire sample of 363 pages, 225 pages exhibit a Horizontal View, depicting an equal relationship between the reader and the picture character, constituting 62% of the total sample pages. Conversely, the Overhead View, where the reader looks down on the picture character, reflecting a subordinate relationship, is observed in 33 pages, accounting for approximately 9% of the total sample pages (the remaining 105 pages consist of text-only pages). A noteworthy instance is found in "A Lion in Paris," where six of the 16 image pages employ the overhead view, portraying the reader's perspective looking down at the lone lion wandering through the streets of Paris, evoking a sense of loneliness and helplessness in the grand city. Similarly, in the Tang Poetry Picture Book, nine out of the 35 image pages adopt the overhead view, effectively conveying the profound despondency of the characters in the poems, unable to fulfil the ideals they aspire to realize (Figure 5).

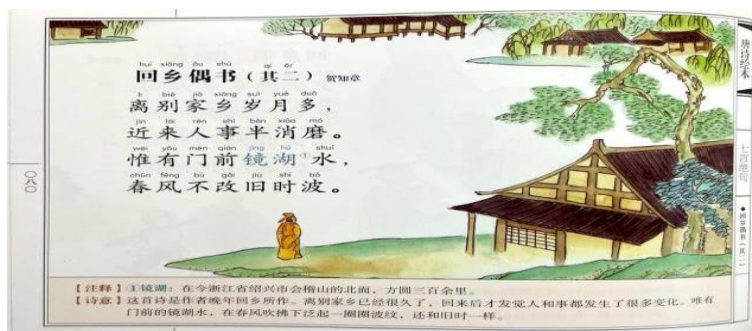


Figure 5: Tang Poetry Picture Book, Jiangxi University Publishing House (2020, 11), 80.

Intimacy

In the treatment of intimacy, there is a notable distinction between the VN of SPB and CCPPB. Intimacy is defined by the degree of closeness and the action tendencies characterizing relationships within the picture, allowing readers to discern emotional connections between characters based on their actions. Picture books predominantly exhibit a logical connection between characters across consecutive pages, evidenced by variations in closeness and actions. The categories include Face to face (19% of the samples) signifying characters in close communication, Side by side (39% of the samples) representing characters facing the same direction and in proximity, most common in SPBs, and Alone (34% of the samples) depicting a single character in the picture, prevalent in both SPBs and CCPPBs. However, the most prevalent relationship type in CCPPB samples is Alone, constituting 63% of the samples. The least common relationship type in all sample images is Opposing, where characters face in opposite directions.

Social Distance

Social distance, indicating the spatial relationship between characters and the background, is visually represented differently in SPB & CCPPB. Long-shot signifies detachment, Middle-shot is primarily employed to establish the connection between the character and the scene, and Close-shot enables the portrayal of facial features and emotions. In SPB, Middle-shot prevails as the most common representation (61% of the total sample), depicting character states or the unfolding of events. Long-shot and Close-shot are utilized in comparable frequencies. Conversely, in CCPPB, Long-shot takes precedence (54% of the total samples) in expressing the character's relationship with the background, often featuring landscapes and natural scenery. Middle-shot is the second most prevalent (45% of the total samples), creating a grand and distant atmosphere. Close-shot is employed in a solitary instance (The Cicada in the Tang Poetry Picture Book adopts the Close-shot).

Direction

Direction pertains to the positioning of main characters within the picture composition. Characters on the left side signify a concluded action, those on the right indicate influence on upcoming events, and characters in the middle denote a static state with uncertain event development. The analysis of sample pages reveals that in SPB, the majority of characters are positioned on the right side (Rightward), followed by the middle position (Static). Conversely, in CCPPB, most characters are situated in the middle of the picture (Static). Notably, in "Ancient Poems for Children," character stylistics exhibit greater variability than in other samples, with roughly equal distribution in each direction (Table 2). This diversity in character styling and actions (Figure 6) proves noteworthy as the vivid images are more appealing to young children, presenting a valuable model for emulation by others.

In the examination of Interpersonal Meaning construction, distinct reference point values corresponding to various reference nodes in SPB and CCPPB suggest divergent approaches to constructing interpersonal meaning. Notably, CCPPB exhibit a higher degree of homogeneity in visual expression.



Figure 6: Ancient Poems for Children, Educational Science Publishing House (2018,05), 29.

Ideational Meaning Construction and Characteristics

Table 3

Comparative Analysis of Ideational Meaning Construction.

Sub-themes	Concepts	Node Resource		Reference Point	
		Storytelling category (5 books)	Poetry category (5 books)	Storytelling category (164 pages)	Poetry category (199 pages)
Character Representation	The Complete Presentation of the Character Image	5	5	106	115
	The Metonymic Presentation of the Character Image	2	2	8	5
Event Relation	The Image of Character is Maintained	5	0	89	0
	The Image of Character is Changed	2	0	19	0
	Repeat the Event and Keep the Tempo	3	0	75	0
	Repeat the Event and Change the Tempo	3	0	13	0
Scene Changes	show a single event and cause and effect	4	0	60	0
	Reset Scene	4	0	32	0
	Same Scene	1	0	6	0
Scene Changes	A New Scene	5	0	94	0
	Change the Perspective in the Same Scene	3	0	15	0
Developing Process	Character Behaviour	5	5	116	55
	Character Psychology	3	5	14	46
	Props Behaviour	2	3	9	14

Painter et al. (2013) adapted the Representation Meaning Construction model proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) into Ideational Meaning Construction, aimed at scrutinizing the correlation between events in the VN of sequential images and the dynamics between background and scene alterations. The components of Ideational Meaning construction encompass Character Representation, Event Relations, Scene Changes, and the Development Process (Table 3), collectively contributing to the narrative progression.

Character Representation

Character Representation delves into how principal characters are depicted in a visual narrative and the consistency or alterations in the portrayal across consecutive images. Two primary forms of character representation are identified: Complete Presentation and Metonymic Presentation of the Character Image (Painter et al., 2013). Complete Presentation involves representing the character's facial features in their entirety, while Metonymic Presentation entails depicting the character's facial features solely through clothing or specific body parts, establishing a metaphorical relationship. In this analysis of all samples (363 pages across 10 books), Complete Presentation overwhelmingly dominates, constituting 94% of pages featuring character appearances, while Metonymic Presentation of the Character Image is minimally employed, appearing in only 6% of such pages. Notably, in the Node Resource of Image maintained/changed, all sample pages of CCPPB adhere to the "one poem with one picture" format, lacking successive pictures (i.e., more than three pictures for a poem) to depict the poem's content. Consequently, there is an absence of reference points for CCPPB in the Image of Character maintained/changed dimension.

Event Relation

Event Relations focus on the logical connections formed by the development of the narrative in consecutive images. In children's picture books, three primary narrative approaches involve repeating the event and maintaining the Tempo, repeating the event and changing the Tempo, and presenting a single event with cause and effect. Maintaining the Tempo entails characters repeating a specific action to yield different outcomes, narrated at a consistent Tempo, resulting in a comprehensive story. Changing the Tempo involves characters attempting the same or different actions, with events narrated at varying tempos to construct a complete story. The third strategy is showcasing a single event and its cause-and-effect development, where the entire story evolves from a singular event. In the selected SPB samples, three utilize the strategy of repeating the event and maintaining the Tempo for visual narrative development, while two employ the approach of presenting a single event with cause and effect, which is the most prevalent event relation strategy. In contrast, all CCPPB samples do not form a continuous picture as they adhere to the "one poem with one picture" format. Consequently, there are no reference points for CCPPB in terms of event relationship.

Scene Changes

Scene changes in visual narratives indicate the flow of events through adjustments in

the relationship between characters and the background, typically achieved via successive images. The Reset scene involves two consecutive pictures depicting the same scene but with a varied background, indicating a shift in the reader's perspective or enhanced depth of field. Conversely, the Same scene maintains an unchanged background across consecutive pictures, emphasizing the continuity of events. Introducing a New scene entails presenting a distinct background to illustrate a new phase in the story development. Changing perspective involves enriching the visual effect by altering the background or transitioning between indoor and outdoor scenes. Among all samples in the CCPPBs, the most prevalent scene change strategy (64% of total samples) is using new scenes to advance the story, followed by the Reset scene. Pages featuring the Same scene are limited to six. In contrast, SPBs exhibit diverse expressions in Scene changes. Due to the non-continuous picture format, CCPPBs lack reference points in this node.

Developing Process

Developing Process encompasses visual elements reflecting the story's evolution. Character Behaviour involves behavioural actions within a single image indicating story progression. Character Psychology portrays emotional states to signify story development. Props Behaviour utilizes changes in prop images to narrate the story (Yao, 2019). Among the 10 sample books, all pages demonstrate diversity in depicting the developmental process. The distinction between SPBs and CCPPBs lies in SPBs emphasizing direct portrayal of character behaviours, making it more straightforward and accessible. Conversely, CCPPBs emphasize subtler character psychology depiction, which is less straightforward to comprehend.

The examination of Ideational Meaning Construction reveals that CCPPBs typically adopt the design format of "one poem with one picture" without establishing continuous images for story development. This format, influenced by traditional Chinese comic strips (Figure 7), results in images that serve merely as illustrations without contributing to narrative progression. In contrast, continuous images in picture books offer a direct understanding of the story's narrative. Employing "one picture with one poem" in picture books represents a conservative and singular expressive approach. The capacity of a single picture to convey the poem's content is limited, contributing to a pervasive homogeneity in similar picture books. Drawing from the multi-picture representation in SPBs could offer insights to enhance the visual language of CCPPBs.

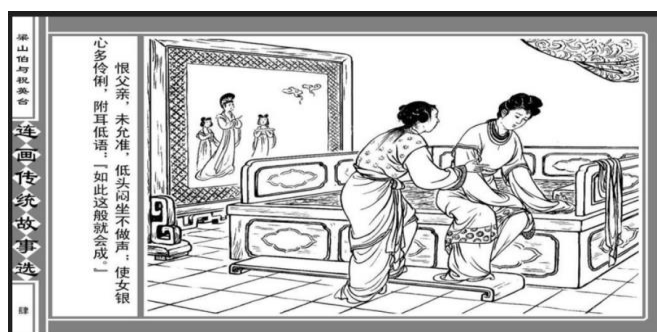


Figure 7: The Romance of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai (Open Resources Online).

Textual Meaning Construction and Characteristics

Textual Meaning Construction primarily addresses the arrangement of images and text within the same picture or the strategy of highlighting information distribution. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) introduced three dimensions of group meaning: Information Value, Framing, and Saliency. Painter et al. (2013) later revised this contentious framework by transitioning to a Textual Meaning framework (Table 4).

Table 4

Comparative Analysis of Textual Meaning Construction

Sub-themes	Concepts	Node Resource Reference Point			
		Storytelling category (5 books)	Poetry category (5 books)	Storytelling category (164 pages)	Poetry category (199 pages)
Graphic Distribution	Complementarity	5	5	119	199
	Fusion	3	0	41	0
Framing	No Frames and the Picture is Full	5	1	99	9
	No Frames and More Blank Background	3	2	32	31
Framing	Framed and Partially Blank	0	3	0	43
	Framed and Regular Picture Periphery	2	3	19	46
Focus	Bipolar Focus	4	3	24	13
	Centralized Focus	4	5	47	76
Composition	Multiple Focus	5	5	66	27

Graphic Distribution

Graphic Distribution involves the layout framework of text and images, categorized into Complementarity and Fusion relationships. Complementarity entails the separation of text and images, either adjacent or distinct, while Fusion integrates text into the image. In the SPB sample, 74% of the images exhibit Complementary relationships. Notably, A Lion in Paris uses a one-page image followed by one page of text, maintaining image integrity but weakening interaction. In contrast, all CCPPBs adopt a traditional style, positioning text and images adjacent without intrinsic connection, resulting in Complementarity. For instance, Feng Zikai Caricatures of Ancient Poetry and The Great Poems for Thousands of Generations follow this pattern. Conversely, David Gets in Trouble utilizes handwritten text to enhance interaction, integrating characters, events, and textual information for a cohesive visual representation.



Figure 8: *The Great Poems for Thousands of Generations*, Dolphin Press (2020, 01), 53.



Figure 9: *David Gets in Trouble*, Hebei Education Press (2009, 03), 27~28.

Framing

Framing refers to the expression of narrative rhythm through border formats, background blanking, and related techniques, aiming to balance the narrative tension and relaxation (Qi, 2022). In the SPB samples, 87% exhibit No frames, presenting fully designed pictures. Conversely, in the CCPPB samples, only 31% lack frames, with 69% featuring frames and partial blank spaces. The interpretations of these visual elements—frames and blank spaces—differ significantly between Western and traditional Chinese cultures. According to Painter et al. (2013), blank spaces and frames convey a sense of distance from the reader, emphasizing separation between the painted world and reality. In traditional Chinese painting, however, these elements are common expressions, embodying an

elegant and ethereal mood that allows ample space for reader imagination. For instance, Feng Zikai's Caricatures of Ancient Poetry uses blank spaces and simple lines to outline a distant artistic conception, reflecting the poems' elegance and mood. Therefore, in CCPPB visual narrative analysis, regular frames and blanks may not directly correspond to psychological distance alienation between the picture and the reader.

Focus Composition

Focus composition delineates the salience level of visual elements within an image, where the creator strategically organizes these elements to accentuate the image's gravity and guide the reader's attention. Bipolar focus involves placing pivotal visual elements either vertically or horizontally to establish a reciprocal relationship. Centralized focus situates main elements at the image centre to underscore their significance. Multiple focus entails repeating crucial visual elements or employing a dispersed layout, enhancing visual flexibility and reader engagement. Among CCPPB samples, centralized focus dominates compositional techniques (68% of total samples). Conversely, SPB samples predominantly employ multiple focus (48% of total samples), yet all three methods are well-represented. Hence, CCPPBs should diversify their visual focus compositional forms to augment visual expression while effectively guiding readers to pivotal information in the images.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined 363 pages from 10 picture books (five CCPPB and five foreign-imported SPB), employing a comparative analysis across dimensions of VNC - Interpersonal Meaning, Ideational Meaning, and Textual Meaning. The findings reveal that CCPPB tends to present a unified visual representation with limited immersion, predominantly adopting an observational perspective. The Ambience System in CCPPB relies on traditional Chinese painting techniques like brush painting with ink or light colours, using parallel perspective. CCPPB characters often appear alone, maintaining a static state, contrasting the diverse character interactions in SPB. The focalization system, Pathos system, and Immersive in CCPPB are criticized for lacking realism, attributed to overreliance on cultural symbols and stereotyping. Considering the cultural context, CCPPB aligns with traditional Chinese art aesthetics, reflecting classical poetry's artistic flavour. In terms of Ideational Meaning, CCPPB's reliance on the "one poem with one picture" pattern limits continuous images, hindering narrative logic. This design choice leads to the absence of reference points in event relation, scene change, and character image alteration. Addressing this limitation is crucial to enhance CCPPB's narrative capabilities while adhering to classical poetry's stylistic characteristics. Concerning Textual Meaning, CCPPB displays insufficient interaction between pictures and text, often following the traditional "poetry and painting on the same page" format. Unlike SPB's flexible graphic layout and Fusion design, CCPPB commonly utilizes frames and blank backgrounds, aligning with poetic characteristics. The focus on Centralized focus in CCPPB, while emphasizing visual elements, lacks diversity and flexibility, limiting the pictures' separate narrative function. Given the limited sample size and the distinct visual symbolic elements in different picture books, further exploration is needed, especially in non-Western cultural contexts like CCPPB. Future research should expand sample sizes for improved representativeness and propose a VN theoretical framework applicable to diverse cultural backgrounds.

Data Availability Statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Author Contributions

Data from the study were collected by JX, who also analysed the initial data and drafted the manuscript. N. A. binti Md. Noor worked with her on further data analysis, and P. K. Hamed modified the manuscript. All authors read and approved the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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