

**THE CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY OF VISUAL  
NARRATIVES IN CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS  
IN CHINA**

**QI FENFEN**

**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

**2024**

# **THE CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY OF VISUAL NARRATIVES IN CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS IN CHINA**

by

**QI FENFEN**

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**March 2024**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Four years of academic work at the University of Science Malaysia University provided me with a wealth of academic knowledge and a most valuable multicultural environment that subconsciously fuelled my interest in multicultural subjects. I would never have been able to complete my dissertation without the help, support, and encouragement of some extraordinary people. I am very grateful to my supervisor, Dr Tetriana Ahmed Fauzi, for helping me to collect sample children's books and related materials for my study and research. And for guiding me in the right direction during my research and always encouraging and supporting me to complete my dissertation research. I am particularly grateful to Dr Siti Rohaya Yahaya, who provided much support during my research, guided me in the right direction during the methodological study, and gave me great encouragement and admirable insights. It would not have been possible to complete my thesis without her strong recommendations, valuable criticisms and suggestions. I am also grateful to Mr Ajia, the advocate and leader of Chinese children's picture books, who introduced me to authoritative scholars and artists of Chinese children's picture books, enabled me to obtain interviews with academic experts, and helped to provide me with the right to cite the illustrations from the copyright owners of academic knowledge. I am grateful for his great encouragement and confidence in my ability to do more precise work. I also wish to thank picture book artist Ms Xiao Aozi, who, as a creator of children's picture books on the front line, provided me with a lot of expertise and valuable information to build up many ideas for my dissertation. I would also like to thank all my very special friends, especially Dr Niu Xiang, who got me started in the field of children's literature, helped me discover my research direction, and gave me moral

support. Finally, I would like to give special thanks to my family, my parents, and my daughter. They have given me unconditional financial and spiritual support so that I can concentrate on my research without worries. Thanks to my 11-year-old daughter, Mido, whose need for picture books inspired me to enter this field of research and has given me many new perspectives on my research as a child reader.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>xvii</b>
<b>ABSTRAK .....</b>	<b>xviii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>xix</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background .....	1
1.2 Problem Statement .....	6
1.2.1 The Visual Narrative Function of Chinese Picture Books is Vague .....	7
1.2.2 Stereotypes and imitation in Chinese picture book.....	9
1.2.3 Chinese Picture Books Lack Independent Visual Narrative Framework .....	11
1.3 Research Objective.....	12
1.3.1 Research Objective 1.....	13
1.3.2 Research Objective 2.....	13
1.3.3 Research Objective 3.....	14
1.4 Research Questions .....	16
1.4.1 Research Question 1 .....	16
1.4.2 Research Question 2.....	16
1.4.3 Research Question 3.....	17
1.5 Research Methodology.....	17
1.5.1 Coding Samples with Models .....	18

1.5.2	Interview .....	19
1.5.3	Justification of Data Selection .....	20
1.6	Theoretical Study .....	22
1.6.1	Theory 1- Multimodal Discourse Analysis .....	22
1.6.2	Theory 2- Visual Narrative Framework from Clare Painter .....	23
1.7	Conceptual Framework .....	25
1.8	Significance of the Research .....	25
1.8.1	Field of Practical .....	26
1.8.2	Field of Theoretical Knowledge.....	28
1.9	Scope of Study .....	29
1.10	Research Dilemmas and Limitations of the Study .....	29
1.11	Organization of the Study .....	30
1.12	Definition of Key Terms .....	31
1.12.1	Illustration .....	31
1.12.2	Authentic .....	32
1.12.3	Visual Narrative .....	32
1.12.4	Visual Text and Written Text.....	32
1.12.5	Traditional Culture .....	32
1.13	Summary .....	33
<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>		<b>34</b>
2.1	Introduction .....	34
2.2	The Importance of Authenticity Culture in Picture Book .....	36
2.3	Cultural Authenticity and Stereotypes in Picture Books.....	38
2.3.1	Culture and Cultural Authenticity .....	39
2.3.2	Cultural Authenticity in Picture Books .....	43
2.4	The Differences Between Eastern and Western Cultures in Picture Books...	51
2.5	Theoretical Study .....	55

2.5.1	Pictorial Narratives in Picture Books.....	56
2.5.2	Multimodal Discourse Analysis.....	59
2.5.3	The Visual Narrative Framework.....	64
2.5.4	Kress and van Leeuwen & Clare Painter et al.'s Theoretical Framework in Chinese Picture Book. ....	65
2.6	Conceptual Study .....	67
2.6.1	Phase 1 .....	68
2.6.2	Phase 2 .....	69
2.6.3	Phase 3 .....	70
2.7	Summary .....	71
<b>CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>		<b>73</b>
3.1	Introduction .....	73
3.1.1	Research Design.....	75
3.1.2	Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Visual Modality by Clare Painter. ....	76
3.1.3	Triangulation Method.....	78
3.2	Data Collection.....	79
3.2.1	Establishment of Criteria for Selection .....	80
3.2.1(a)	Picture Storybooks.....	80
3.2.1(b)	Picture Books Reflecting the Authentic Culture .....	81
3.2.1(c)	Balanced Selection .....	82
3.2.2	Selection of Picture Book.....	84
3.2.3	Balanced Choice Embodiment.....	85
3.2.3(a)	Different Ethnic Backgrounds of Illustrators .....	86
3.2.3(b)	Different Artistic Expression Techniques and Themes of Illustrators .....	87
3.2.4	Final Sample Picture Books .....	88
3.3	Data Coding for Picture Book.....	93

3.3.1	Creation of the Basic Codes .....	94
3.3.1(a)	Interpersonal of Picture Book.....	95
3.3.1(b)	Representation of Picture Book.....	97
3.3.1(c)	Composing Visual Space of Picture Book .....	100
3.3.2	Sample Image and Code One-to-one Correspondence .....	102
3.3.2(a)	The Sample Corresponds to the Coding Category of <i>Interpersonal</i> .....	103
3.3.2(b)	The Sample Corresponds to the Coding Category <i>Representation</i> .....	104
3.3.2(c)	The Sample Corresponds to the Coding Category Composition Visual Space.....	105
3.3.3	Establishing the Coding Categories (Identify the Nature of the Codes and Conventions ) .....	107
3.4	Data Coding for Hand Scroll Painting .....	107
3.4.1	Data Selection of Traditional Chinese Artworks .....	108
3.4.2	Data Coding for Traditional Chinese Artworks .....	111
3.4.3	Comparison of data on Traditional Chinese Artworks and Picture Books .....	112
3.5	Thematic Analysis-Interpretation.....	116
3.6	Validation of Research Outcomes.....	119
3.7	Research Strengths and Limitations of the Study .....	121
3.8	Summary .....	123
<b>CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS AND FINDING .....</b>		<b>126</b>
4.1	Introduction .....	126
4.2	Picture Book Analysis.....	127
4.2.1	Interpersonal.....	130
4.2.1(a)	Reader-character Relationships .....	132
4.2.1(b)	Inter-character Relationships .....	140
4.2.2	Representation.....	143



4.2.2(a)	Character Attributes.....	143
4.2.2(b)	Character Appearance.....	145
4.2.2(c)	Process .....	147
4.2.2(d)	Inter-circumstances.....	154
4.2.3	Composing Visual Space .....	156
4.2.3(a)	Image and Text Layout.....	157
4.2.3(b)	Framing.....	159
4.2.3(c)	Focus.....	164
4.2.4	Summary .....	169
4.3	Analysis of Hand Scroll Paintings .....	170
4.3.1	Interpersonal (Single image) .....	174
4.3.1(a)	Painting Style.....	175
4.3.1(b)	Colour .....	177
4.3.1(c)	Focalisation.....	180
4.3.1(d)	Involvement .....	183
4.3.1(e)	Three distances .....	185
4.3.1(f)	Orientation .....	186
4.3.1(g)	Social distance .....	189
4.3.1(h)	Proximity .....	189
4.3.2	Representation (Multiple Consecutive Images) .....	190
4.3.2(a)	Participants .....	191
4.3.2(b)	Process .....	192
4.3.2(c)	Inter Circumstance.....	193
4.3.3	Composing Visual Space .....	195
4.3.3(a)	Layout.....	195
4.3.3(b)	Frame .....	198
4.3.3(c)	Focus.....	200

4.4	Summary .....	203
<b>CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION .....</b>		<b>205</b>
5.1	Individual Images Display Interpersonal .....	207
5.1.1	Style .....	208
5.1.2	Colour.....	211
5.1.3	Focalisation .....	214
5.1.4	Pictorial Viewing Perspective .....	217
	5.1.4(a) Cavalier Perspective .....	217
	5.1.4(b) Three Distances .....	219
5.1.5	Potential Social Distance.....	221
5.1.6	Orientation.....	222
5.2	Multiple Consecutive Images Display Representation .....	225
5.2.1	Character .....	225
5.2.2	Process .....	227
5.2.3	Process (Inter-event) .....	229
5.2.4	Inter Circumstance .....	230
5.3	Composing Visual Space (Visual Text and Written Text).....	234
5.3.1	Layout .....	235
5.3.2	Framing .....	238
5.3.3	Focus .....	240
5.4	Summary and Findings .....	245
5.5	Main Model .....	247
5.6	Verification and Reflection on Findings .....	253
5.6.1	Cultural authenticity is Necessary for Readers .....	254
5.6.2	The traditional Art Form for Conveying Artistic Aesthetic and Cultural Ideas .....	255
5.6.3	The Summary Reflected on the Findings.....	259

<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>264</b>
6.1	Conclusion of the Study .....	264
6.2	Limitation of the Study .....	267
6.3	Contribution of the Study .....	269
6.3.1	Educator .....	269
6.3.2	Publisher.....	272
6.3.3	Illustrator .....	274
6.3.4	Picture Book Theory Research Area.....	274
6.4	Recommendations for Other Areas of Potential Research .....	275
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>		<b>279</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>		

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1.1      Research Question and Research Objective .....	17
Table 3.1      Research Paradigm.....	73
Table 3.2      Research design .....	76
Table 3.3      Triangulation method.....	79
Table 3.4      Balance of author and illustrator.....	87
Table 3.5      Balance of techniques .....	87
Table 3.6      Balance of themes .....	88
Table 3.7      Details of sample information.....	91
Table 3.8      Data coding and analysis flow chat .....	93
Table 3.9      Code table of Interpersonal .....	97
Table 3.10      Code table of representation .....	99
Table 3.11      Code table of Composing visual space .....	101
Table 3.12      Picture book" The Boy Who Outfoxed a Fox", coding the images page by page in <i>interpersonal</i> .....	104
Table 3.13      Picture books in <i>interpersonal</i> with categories and attributes with data coding sheet and data percentages.....	104
Table 3.14      Picture book" The Boy Who Outfoxed a Fox, "coding the images page by page in <i>representation</i> .....	105
Table 3.15      Picture books in representation with categories and attributes data coding sheet and data on percentages .....	105
Table 3.16      Picture book" The Boy Who Outfoxed a Fox, "coding the images page by page in composing visual space .....	106
Table 3.17      10 picture books in composing visual space with categories and attributes data coding sheet and data on percentages.....	106

Table 3.18	Hand scroll painting in interpersonal with categories and attributes with data coding sheet and data percentages .....	112
Table 3.19	Hand scroll painting in representation with categories and attributes with data coding sheet and data percentages.....	112
Table 3.20	Hand scroll painting in composing visual space with categories and attributes with data coding sheet and data percentages.....	112
Table 3.21	Comparison table of interpersonal data .....	114
Table 3.22	Comparison table of representation data.....	115
Table 3.23	Comparison table of composing visual space data .....	115
Table 3.24	The process of interpreting categories of interpersonal .....	118
Table 3.25	The process of interpreting categories of representation.....	119
Table 3.26	The process of interpreting categories of composing visual space ..	119
Table 4.1	Interpersonal Data .....	131
Table 4.2	Data of Representation.....	143
Table 4.3	Composing Visual Space .....	156
Table 4.4	The structure of visual narrative in traditional picture books in an individual image.....	190
Table 4.5	The structure of visual narrative in traditional picture books in a sequential image.....	195
Table 4.6	The structure of visual narrative in traditional picture books in visual space .....	202
Table 5.1	A visual narrative model for the interpersonal in traditional Chinese genre picture books .....	223
Table 5.2	A visual narrative model for the representation of sequential images in traditional Chinese genre picture books .....	233
Table 5.3	A visual narrative model for the spatial placement in traditional Chinese genre picture books .....	243
Table 5.4	Three objectives and the corresponding findings .....	247

## LIST OF FIGURES

	<b>Page</b>
Figure 1.1 Information of picture book sample.....	18
Figure 1.2 Theoretical Framework .....	22
Figure 2.1 Conceptual framework .....	68
Figure 3.1 Category of Picture Books .....	81
Figure 3.2 Criteria and process for sample selection .....	85
Figure 3.3 Nymph of the Luo River by Gu Kaizhi (348- 409 AD).....	110
Figure 3.4 Night Entertainment of Han Xizai by Gu Hongzhong (910? -980?).....	111
Figure 3.5 Refinement of visual elements in line with Chinese cultural expressions.....	119
Figure 4.1 Gongbi colour with bright and muted (The Magic Horse, Jianghong Chen,2017) .....	133
Figure 4.2 Fork art with vibrant colour. (The Monkey King, Zhicheng Yang, 2018) .....	133
Figure 4.3 Focalisation: contact from The Boy Who Outfoxed a Fox (Yi Xin, Gao Cai,2008) .....	137
Figure 4.4 Involvement: involved from Meng Jiangnu Weeps for the Great Wall (Yaming Tang, Gao Cai, 2015).....	138
Figure 4.5 Involvement: detached from The Magic Horse (Jianghong, Chen, 2017) .....	139
Figure 4.6 Power: top-down angle from Meng Jiangnu Weeps for the Great Wall (Yaming Tang, Gao Cai, 2015).....	140
Figure 4.7 Social distance: medium shot and close-up shot from A Walk with the Wind (Liang, Xiong 2018).....	141
Figure 4.8 The orientation from A Walk with the Wind (Liang, Xiong 2018). .....	142

Figure 4.9	Character attributes: Metonymic (The Boy Who Outfoxed a Fox, Yi Xin, Cai Gao,2008) .....	145
Figure 4.10	Character appearance: varied from Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai (Yaming Tang, Chenghong Yu, 2018) .....	147
Figure 4.11	Process: perception from A Tiger Being Afraid of Leaking (Chuan Liang, 2010).....	148
Figure 4.12	Process: Material action from The Plum Rain Monster (Liang, Xiong 2018) .....	149
Figure 4.13	Process: shift pace from The Plum Rain Monster (Liang, Xiong 2018) .....	150
Figure 4.14	A Walk with the Wind .....	151
Figure 4.15	Process: projection from The Plum Rain Monster (Liang, Xiong 2018) .....	153
Figure 4.16	Inter-circumstances: home in/out from Bao Er (Yi Xin, Gao Cai, 2008) .....	155
Figure 4.17	Image and text share a background.....	157
Figure 4.18	Text and figures share the white background .....	158
Figure 4.19	The image and text are separate, with the image weighted .....	159
Figure 4.20	Setting filled the whole page from A Tiger Being Afraid of Leaking (Chuan Liang, 2010) .....	161
Figure 4.21	No border bindings, blank background.....	162
Figure 4.22	Image surrounded by borders.....	163
Figure 4.23	Breaking the border.....	163
Figure 4.24	Centrifocall options, with examples a-i , in Reading Visual Narratives Image Analysis of Children's Picture Books (Painter et al.2012, p114 twenty-four image).....	165
Figure 4.25	Polarised: two focal points presented vertically, from Bao Er (Xin Yi, Cai Gao,2008) .....	166

Figure 4.26	Unbalanced, from Into the City (Lin Xiuhui, Liao Jianhong, 2010)	167
Figure 4.27	Iterative form of the rule .....	168
Figure 4.28	Scattered iteration .....	168
Figure 4.29	Nymph of the Luo River by Gu Kaizhi (348- 409 AD).....	172
Figure 4.30	Night Entertainment of Han Xizai by Gu Hongzhong (910? -980?)	173
Figure 4.31	The division of a single picture in a long roll .....	174
Figure 4.32	Verification Chart at Interpersonal Level .....	174
Figure 4.33	Flatness and linearity in hand scroll painting.....	175
Figure 4.34	A Tiger Being Afraid of Leaking.....	176
Figure 4.35	Into the City .....	177
Figure 4.36	Burnt, thick, heavy, light, and clear ink from Chinese Painting for Beginners (Guangsheng Wang, 2016) .....	178
Figure 4.37	Night Entertainment of Han Xizai in the first image of the line of sight.....	182
Figure 4.38	Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai .....	185
Figure 4.39	Cavalier perspective from Bao Er (Yi Xin, Gao Cai, 2008) .....	185
Figure 4.40	The orientation in Nymph of the Luo River .....	188
Figure 4.41	The orientation in Night Entertainment of Han Xizai.....	188
Figure 4.42	The relationship between characters .....	189
Figure 4.43	Verification chart at representation level .....	190
Figure 4.44	The variations of protagonists' clothing and accessories .....	192
Figure 4.45	Verification chart at composing visual space level.....	195
Figure 4.46	Integrated from A Tiger Being Afraid of Leaking.....	197
Figure 4.47	Integrated from The Plum Rain Monster .....	197
Figure 4.48	The use of liubai in “Into the City” .....	200



Figure 5.1	Chinese landscape painting reflects the artist's inner emotions towards the landscape and is not a realistic reproduction. (Songquan Gaoshi Tu, Shi Tao, 1642–1708) .....	210
Figure 5.2	Tai Bai Xing Yin, Liang Kai, Southern Song Dynasty, Vertical scroll, ink and wash on paper, 81.2 cm long, 30.4 cm wide .....	213
Figure 5.3	The change from adopts visual narrative to new visual narrative model under the category of interpersonal.....	225
Figure 5.4	The change from adopts visual narrative to new visual narrative model under the category of representation.....	234
Figure 5.5	The change from adopts visual narrative to new visual narrative model under the category of spatial placement.....	244
Figure 5.6	Visual narrative model of traditional Chinese picture book .....	252

## LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Coding the images page by page in <i>interpersonal</i>
Appendix 2	Coding the images page by page in representation
Appendix 3	Coding the images page by page in composing visual space
Appendix 4	Interview question to the picture book's creator
Appendix 5	Interview question to picture book's editor
Appendix 6	Details of all picture book samples and hand scroll paintings

# **KEASLIAN KEBUDAYAAN PENCERITAAN VISUAL DALAM BUKU BERGAMBAR KANAK-KANAK DI CHINA**

## **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini terinspirasi oleh analisis pasaran buku bergambar China, di mana lebih daripada 80% jualan buku bergambar kanak-kanak di China adalah hasil import. Pendedahan yang meluas kepada budaya asing adalah merugikan bagi pembangunan identiti kebangsaan dan rasa keterikatan dalam kalangan kanak-kanak. Oleh itu, buku bergambar asli China perlu memasukkan bahasa seni tradisional China, ciri-ciri kebangsaan, dan panduan estetika. Kajian ini akan menggunakan sampel buku bergambar kanak-kanak yang menggambarkan gaya seni tradisional China untuk menganalisis imej naratif visual. Kajian ini menggunakan analisis kualitatif untuk kod sampel dengan menggunakan analisis wacana multimodal sebagai model rangka kerja, dan dapatan disahkan melalui temubual. Ungkapan ketulenan budaya dalam bentuk naratif buku bergambar merupakan instrumen penting bagi pendedahan budaya kanak-kanak dan sumber maklumat 'ideologi' terbuka dan tersirat tentang dunia dan nilai-nilai sosial. Oleh itu, kajian ini menyelidiki elemen visual imej buku bergambar genre tradisional, bermula dengan struktur dalaman buku bergambar. Selain itu, kajian ini juga memberi tumpuan kepada ekspresi naratif visual panduan komunikasi visual mengenai undang-undang konstitutif imej dalam buku bergambar. Akhirnya, kajian ini bertujuan untuk membangunkan model naratif visual bagi genre tradisional buku bergambar kanak-kanak China yang mewakili seni klasik dan budaya secara autentik. Kajian ini akan membolehkan pencipta buku bergambar dan editor penerbitan memahami bagaimana budaya tertanam dalam buku bergambar China.

# **THE CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY OF VISUAL NARRATIVES IN CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS IN CHINA**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study was inspired by an analysis of the Chinese picture book market, where imported foreign picture books account for more than 80% of children's picture book sales in China. Extensive exposure to a foreign culture is detrimental to developing national identity and a sense of belonging in young children. As a result, original Chinese picture books must incorporate traditional Chinese artistic language, national characteristics, and aesthetic guidelines. As a starting point, the research sample was consist of children's picture books that express traditional Chinese art styles. In order to analyse the visual narrative images of the selected samples, this study used qualitative analysis to code the samples by using multimodal discourse analysis as a model framework, and the findings were validated using interviews. The expression of cultural authenticity in picture books in narrative form was an essential instrument for children's exposure to culture and a source of overt and covert 'ideological' information about the world and social values. Therefore, this study examined the visual elements of traditional genre picture book images, beginning with the internal structure of picture books. Besides that, this research also focused on the visual narrative expression of visual communication guidelines regarding the constitutive laws of images within picture books. Finally, this study aimed to develop a visual narrative model for children's picture books in traditional Chinese genres that authentically represent classic art and culture. Specifically, this research assists picture book creators and publishing editors in understanding the culture embedded in Chinese picture books.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The picture book is a child's first reading resource, which can help children construct their spiritual world and develop multiple intelligences. The books contain characters such as shapes, colours, text rhymes, and story topics that give children visual enjoyment. Children who read picture books receive education and indirectly learn about the social environment, values conveyed, and behaviour and language patterns presented in children's picture books, which profoundly impact the socialization process (L. Sipe, 2001); (Yohlin, 2012).

Children's picture books are narrative books with pictures as the main focus and text as a supplement, a perfect blend of art and literature. The images are related to the artistry of picture books and the meaning and value of picture book reading. As Lawrence Sipe said, "*Visual texts are on an equal footing with verbal texts*" (L. R. Sipe, 1998). Picture books must logically tell a story through a continuous combination of images, convey a deeper meaning, and follow visual narrative grammar. The interpretation of visual grammar depends on different cultural backgrounds and perceptions of pictorial symbols (Eisner, 1992);(McCloud, 1993). Therefore, studying picture books requires an in-depth understanding and exploration of images' unique expressions and narrative systems.

In China, most ancient story murals, story scrolls, hand scrolls, and the "full-phase pictures in novels and operas tell stories with images, some with additional information in text, which already has the function of combining narratives with pictures and texts (Han Jin, 2016). Some scholars have researched the extant Ming dynasty Jiajing 21 (1542 A.C.) Xiong Damu's annotated version of "Diary Stories", a

storybook with the following picture above, is jokingly called "a picture book for children of the Ming dynasty" (Xingfang, 2021). Since the combination of graphic and textual visual forms has been seen in China for a long time, there must be traditional art forms in these ancient works of art that can be learned from and explored.

In the 1950s in China, storybooks with combined illustrations were called comic books, and their audience was mostly less educated. After the 1950s, the Chinese Communist Party reorganized and reformed comic books. The new comic books provided the need for politics, which saw a climax in its development while serving society and promoting political ideas (Han Jin, 2016). After the mid-1980s, comic books gradually shifted to the collector's market (Wenqi, 2016). Although there are images and text in this comic book format, the reader can understand the story without using images and only read the text. The images do not complement or advance the text. This is essentially different from a modern picture book, in which the elements in the photographs are chosen, arranged out, and typeset to complement the text.

Only in the 1990s was the picture book concept introduced from a contemporary Western picture book that had evolved in Japan and was reintroduced to China as a new species (Han Jin, 2016). (Xudong, 2018) believes that the peak of children's books and picture book publishing in China was after 2006 when those born in the 1970s and 1980s entered the post-marital childbirth period. Since most of them are only children and their families are better off than previous generations, the post-1970s and post-1980s have invested more in their children's early reading. As a result, there is a huge demand for children's and picture books (Xudong, 2018).

In addition, in the early 1990s, the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY)<sup>1</sup> established a chapter in Beijing. It began importing a huge quantity of quality Western children's picture books. The largest Chinese book market retailer, the debut of children's books and genres did not occur until ten years before, from 1990 to 2008. According to data recorded by Beijing Open Book 1999, there was a dramatic increase in the publication of new children's books. The proportion of imported picture books accounted for over 50% of published books and reached 80% in 2008 (Beijing open book, 2020)<sup>2</sup>.

Before 2008, most picture books popular in China were imported from outside countries such as Europe, the United States, and Japan. Within the last three decades, there has been an exponential growth in the market for children's literature in China.

The proportion of internationally imported picture books is significantly higher than that of domestic original picture books. (Dangdang Books 2017 user behaviours report). According to the data monitored by Open Book, between 2013 and 2017, original and imported products accounted for 33% and 67% of sales, respectively. Chinese children grow up reading Western children's picture books, subconsciously receiving Western aesthetic education, indirectly learning Western culture, and understanding Western social history. The knowledge of ancient Chinese myths, legends, and festivals is getting less and less from generation to generation, and traditional culture is becoming increasingly faded in people's minds. This cultural crisis is gradually gaining attention (Xudong, 2018);(Miaomiao, 2012).

After 2008, a number of picture book creators in China began to concentrate on creating domestic picture books and even set up picture book studios. Until 2017, the Chinese government advocated strengthening national and traditional cultural

---

<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1953 in Zurich, Switzerland, and headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, its mission has been to promote international understanding and maintain world peace through high-quality children's books.

<sup>2</sup> Beijing Open Book is the largest Chinese book market retail data continuous tracking monitoring system.

education for young people and started to pay attention to teaching traditional culture (Council, 2017). In 2018, the introduction of picture books into the Chinese market began to slow down. This was followed by domestic publishers that were no longer eager to raise many foreign picture books but instead began to focus on developing their original picture books.

The West and Japan have mainly influenced the concepts of Chinese picture books. Currently, there are two primary standards for evaluating picture books in China - the Western system and the Japanese system - as there is no domestic theory established for this purpose yet (Han Jin, 2016). Xiong Liang, a picture book creator, noted that it is challenging to create picture books with Chinese characteristics judged by the same Western aesthetic standards; thus, Chinese picture books should possess a unique quality (Xiong Lei, 2008). Although it has been proposed that Chinese picture books should have a specific quality, their precise form is unknown. It is now the time for "China's Picture Book" to develop its standards for evaluation and foundational framework.

In an effort to identify China's unique language in picture books, this study begins with the illustrations of picture books. Picture books rely heavily on visual storytelling, so images are just as essential as text. A unique decoding system must be mastered to adapt to readers' reading habits and cognitive systems. Picture books have the advantage of expressing content that may be difficult to convey in words and can even communicate more information than words alone. As a result, this study aims to locate China's distinct language in picture books by drawing on Western picture book theoretical systems and incorporating traditional Chinese artworks and art theories. This is essential for enhancing readers' comprehension of the story's meaning, evoking emotions, and strengthening their national identity by integrating traditional art forms.



A suitable evaluation standard and conceptual model for Chinese cultural aesthetics must be established to achieve this goal. Western research has established a solid foundation in the study of visual images and picture book theory, and this study will build upon these existing findings. The study of visual narratives in Chinese picture books cannot be undertaken in isolation and requires a strong theoretical basis.

Western vision theory has a substantial research base. Inspired by the semiotic work of Barthes (Barthes, 1965), Moebius (W, 1986) wrote a pioneering article that described several critical elements of design and representation, or "visual codes and conventions," using the visual texts of several picture books as examples. Since then, the visual texts of picture books have increasingly become the subject of research as symbolic systems that produce narrative meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996); (Nodelman, 1989a); (Lewis, 2001); (Schwarcz, H, 1982); (W, 1986). Nikolajeva and Scott (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001) used picture book coding to explore the interrelationship between visual and written texts to create an international meta-language and system to describe the interplay of dual symbol systems. Schwarcz, Moebius, and Nodelman have introduced new tools to explain how visual texts are "encoded and decoded in a grammar of relations." Kress and van Leeuwen (Kress & Van, Leeuwen, 1996) focus on the social semiotics of a particular illustration based on Halliday's (1985) systemic functional grammar of the verbal and written language. Additionally, Lewis (2001) and others, including (Climas & Montaigne, 2018) and (Williams, 1996), have attempted to adopt and apply visual grammar in picture book illustration, building upon the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). These scholars demonstrate that visual texts can be analysed systematically and functionally.

With the support of the theories that suggest visual narratives can be analysed, a visual model for Chinese picture books can be developed. This framework can be

fused with ideological content and artistic expressions that reflect the Chinese spirit. The cultural values, painting styles, expressions, and contexts of Chinese picture books are clearly distinct from those of the West. This will be discussed specifically in Chapter 2.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Based on the idea presented in the previous paragraph, the Chinese picture book industry still faces significant challenges in terms of originality, cultural authenticity, and conceptual construction. Although self-generated picture books have flourished in China, they continue to imitate Western and Japanese picture books in both illustration and text. They have yet to surpass foreign picture books' conceptual and formal standards (Xudong, 2018).

In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the current state of Chinese picture books, an extensive review of relevant literature, encompassing both professional and consumer reviews, was conducted. These reviews revealed that while Chinese picture books are growing in popularity, there remains a lower level of acceptance among consumers, including parents and readers, who often prefer to purchase imported picture books that are perceived as being of higher quality and having received greater international recognition.

Observations and interviews conducted in bookstores in various cities in China and in Kuala Lumpur and Penang have shown that Chinese picture books do not constitute a significant proportion of daily sales, and readers generally have low acceptance of them. This lack of acceptance may be attributed to the absence of independent conceptual construction in Chinese picture books and the prevalence of stereotypes and cultural inauthenticity in some Chinese-themed picture books.

Collectively, these elements demonstrate the necessity for a more in-depth comprehension of the issues facing the area of Chinese picture books. The statement of the problem may be broken down into three significant aspects: the undefined function of visual narrative in Chinese picture books, the lack of authenticity in unique cultural performance, and the absence of independent conceptual development in Chinese picture books.

### **1.2.1 The Visual Narrative Function of Chinese Picture Books is Vague**

The visual narrative is a key element in conveying meaning in picture books. The French iconographer Mikel Dufrenne suggests that each art has its techniques and requires a specific composition, with a painting different from a novel. Therefore, when analysing a work of art, the first thing that needs to be considered is the formal patterns of composition that are determined by the genre of the work. The genre imposes these patterns on the author, and the aesthete must also follow these rules. Picture books are composed of two components, text and images, and the images are central to the artistry, meaning, and value of the picture book reading. Lawrence Sipe argues that "*visual texts are on an equal footing with verbal texts*" (L. R. Sipe, 1998 p107). Although images appear to be presented statically, specific rules guide the interpretation process, and the eye follows these rules when reading pictures. Through the concatenation of images and the turning of the page, picture books acquire temporality and spatiality based on two-dimensional images, enabling them to convey meaning, create an environment, portray characters, create an atmosphere, and interlace time and space. Although individual images may not be able to tell a narrative independently, combining narrative elements, strategies, and design structures can create a complete sense of the narrative content.

Thus, illustrated images play a critical role in the advancement of the story content. The interpretation of meaning in picture books heavily relies on the arrangement and taking of various elements in a single image, which requires careful design. Furthermore, the presence of multiple images in a continuous narrative, the turning of pages, and the back-and-forth succession of each image dominate the rhythm of the narrative, making images a unique narrative medium.

Ge Zhaoguang points out that many studies of images have a fatal blind spot in that they often ignore that images are "diagrams." They frequently translate images into content and content into textual narratives, viewing image information as auxiliary illustrative material for textual information and thus reading image content in the same manner that words are interpreted. Therefore, he believes that attention should be paid to what images show that text does not, such as "colour," "composition," "position," "style," and other characteristics (Ge Zhaoguang, 2005).

Therefore, when examining picture book narratives, more focus is placed on the information transfer of image elements. In imported picture books, the text provides only a synopsis of the story, while the illustrations offer a concrete, detailed depiction of the story's development. In contrast, many domestically produced picture books for young children in China have a rigid combination of text and images. The text narrates the story with relentless detail while the images mechanically repeat the text. This phenomenon was observed in almost a dozen domestic children's picture books the researcher reviewed. After reading the text, one can understand the story without looking at the pictures.

Furthermore, an article on domestic children's book creation by the China Industry Research Network revealed that many domestic picture book studios treat picture books as industrial products on an assembly line, resulting in crude text and a

lack of artistic expression, creativity, and drawing techniques (Chenchun, 2013). A sharp observation was made by a researcher who pointed out that imported children's books have distinctive painting characteristics and styles, clear themes, and a careful combination of illustration and text full of observations of life. In contrast, similar books in China lack attention to details such as painting style, colour, composition, and the combination of words and images. The result is a confusing and inattentive portrayal, with many crude computer graphics. These books fail to bring beauty to children and hinder their visual development (Miaomiao, 2012).

The current situation of Chinese picture books reveals a lack of attention to images. They rely too heavily on words to describe the story and lack the narrative expression of visual images. The images do not play a role in advancing, illustrating, strengthening, or even reversing the story. The limited performance of the narrative function of images in Chinese picture books is a concerning issue.

### **1.2.2 Stereotypes and imitation in Chinese picture book**

The authenticity of Chinese picture book cultural performance falls short, limited to stereotypes and imitation. Since 2017, the Chinese government has advocated strengthening national and traditional culture education for young people. The inheritance of excellent traditional culture for school-age children is mainly reflected in three aspects: firstly, a large number of early childhood books are adaptations of folk tales; secondly, classical literature works have been adapted to become the content of young children's books; and thirdly, most picture books suitable for young children are based on folk tales, stories of ancient celebrities, war stories and classical literature. Therefore, integrating traditional Chinese cultural themes in picture books is to meet the needs of mainstream cultural propaganda and education (Xudong, 2020). However, the authenticity of the original picture book's cultural

performance is not enough, only in stereotypes and imitations. Some scholars have suggested that retelling Chinese myths and folk tales in picture books adapts the stories without digesting their cultural factors. They argue that there is a lack of creative adaptations and retellings of these stories. As a result, some creators have conceptualized, homogenized, and stereotyped Chinese picture books in pursuit of a superficial "Chinese style".

Furthermore, many publishers coincidentally publish picture books on similar subjects, such as traditional Chinese festivals, the 24 solar terms, folk tales, and myths and legends. They often use traditional techniques such as ink, printmaking, paper-cutting, and painting styles such as the Dunhuang painting style and Chinese landscapes to highlight Chinese characteristics. However, the publication of picture books on similar subjects and painting methods is not equivalent to the reproduction of traditional culture and art (Xudong, 2018); (Wang Lei, 2019).

The concept of "Chinese style" is multifaceted and can be expressed in various ways, including the use of certain words or phrases, particular painting styles or techniques, the subject matter or theme of the story, and even the personal motivations and choices of the author (Xiang Chen, 2019). For visual research, it is important to not only appropriate traditional visual elements such as ancient costumes, architectural styles, and Chinese symbols like dragon and phoenix patterns, the Great Wall, and lanterns, but also to explore the cultural roots and conceptual underpinnings behind these elements. Simply replicating traditional visual elements and techniques without incorporating cultural connotations and creative adaptations may result in superficial and homogenized representations of Chinese culture.

### **1.2.3 Chinese Picture Books Lack Independent Visual Narrative Framework**

The influence of Western aesthetic theories on the industry complicates the discourse surrounding Chinese picture books. The images of imported Western picture books reflect the aesthetic values of their culture, which are often incompatible with the values of Chinese literature and art. Western aesthetic theory has dominated the field of aesthetics for a long time, and its influence on Chinese aesthetics is profound. This influence has led to the establishment of Western aesthetics-centred value standards, which have been used to judge Chinese literature and art. As a result, the unique aesthetic value of Chinese literature and art is often obscured or devalued (Xun, 2008). To create genuinely Chinese picture books, it is essential to separate the expression of images from the guidance of Western picture book theories and find a distinct Chinese picture language. However, this is easier said than done, as Chinese picture books need to seek theoretical support from the traditional Chinese art theory system and form a complete conceptual framework that reflects the unique cultural values, painting styles, expressions, and contexts of Chinese picture books.

Overview address these issues, this study needs to prioritize the development of a clear and distinctive visual narrative function that reflects the unique cultural values, painting styles, expressions, and contexts of Chinese picture books. This requires a shift away from imitation and stereotypes towards the continuation of traditional cultural ideas and connotations in creating picture books. In particular, there is a need for greater attention to be paid to the authenticity of original cultural performances rather than simply adapting traditional stories or relying on traditional visual elements.

Furthermore, Chinese picture books must establish independent visual narrative models to distinguish themselves from imported picture books and enhance

their appeal to domestic and international audiences. This involves developing a theoretical framework grounded in the traditional Chinese art theory and reflecting China's cultural values and aesthetic traditions. By doing so, Chinese picture books can contribute to preserving and promoting Chinese culture and establish themselves as a unique and valuable form of artistic expression with global appeal.

### **1.3 Research Objective**

This study aims to explore the visual narrative structure of Chinese picture books and implant a pictorial interpretation of traditional Chinese artistic concepts in terms of constructing individual elements in images and artistic aesthetics. In addition, it attempts to use the Western visual narrative model to detect the visual symbols of traditional Chinese cultural-themed picture books because the history of the development of Chinese picture books is only a few decades old, and there is no mature visual narrative theoretical system to refer to. Furthermore, this study seeks pictorial representations that conform to Chinese visual narratives. To determine whether the visual narratives of Chinese picture books follow the guidelines of Chinese art aesthetics and the true presentation of paintings. This allowed for supplementing the visual narrative theory of Western picture books with the visual narrative grammar of Chinese picture books. It interprets the differences conceptually by combining the principles of visual construction of traditional Chinese art to create a visual narrative model of picture books consistent with traditional Chinese.

The ultimate goal is to find a structural model that fits the visual narrative of traditional Chinese genre picture books, ensuring that children's picture books convey accurate traditional artistic aesthetics and cultural connotations from the visual narrative.



### **1.3.1 Research Objective 1**

To identify the visual narrative structure of Chinese picture books based on traditional cultural sources.

Picture books primarily rely on images to generate meaning, with text serving as an auxiliary tool to guide interpretation. The logical relationship between images in picture books is an important marker distinguishing them from other illustrated books, and the interplay between text and images forms the basis of their plot and meaning representation. Images serve as the primary narrative vehicle in picture books, and the integrity of the storyline representation relies on the narrative nature of the images. Visual language, including colour contrast, light changes, image symbolism, metaphor, composition, image layout, border position, and width, is used to establish meaning and progress the story, emotions of the characters, and expression of meaning. This visual narrative language has been extensively studied in the West, with a complete set of expressions summarizing the visual guidance of pictures. To explore the authenticity of visual culture in Chinese picture books, it is necessary to examine the sources of artistic tradition, starting with traditional genres. Therefore, this study aims to identify the visual narrative structure characterizing the picture books of Chinese traditional culture, building on the visual narrative framework of Western studies. The visual narrative structure comprises various image elements, some of which have symbolic metaphors. Before exploring the symbolic meaning, it is essential to establish the structure of the visual elements and visual narrative.

### **1.3.2 Research Objective 2**

To determine the visual narrative structure of traditional Chinese genre picture books in line with traditional Chinese conventions of artistic expression.

When young children are exposed to a large amount of foreign culture during their initial stage of self-awareness, it is not conducive to developing their sense of national identity as there is a cultural disconnect. The cultivation of the Chinese cultural source code in a child's mind from an early age is vital in order to root the mother tongue culture and provide spiritual support. Chinese children need to develop thinking and expression that is rooted in Chinese culture through their reading. Therefore, the question of how to make original Chinese picture books reflect Chinese traditional culture is worth exploring.

As previously mentioned, children's picture books currently represent traditional culture in visual texts by merely reproducing traditional cultural elements on a superficial level. To address this issue, it is necessary to examine the laws of traditional art modelling, aesthetic systems, and traditional art aesthetic theories to explore traditional culture more deeply in the structure of visual narratives. However, contemporary children are less exposed to the traditional art world in their daily lives, including how they dress, live, and shelter. Consequently, it is vital to ensure that contemporary picture book creators authentically understand traditional artistic aesthetics and that visual narratives conform to traditional artistic guidelines.

Therefore, it is necessary to find representative artworks from reliable sources that reflect an authentic traditional artistic aesthetic and the spirit of traditional culture. Picture books in the traditional culture genre require a credible reference for achieving cultural authenticity in the arts. This will ensure that subsequent research at the deeper level of ideology is not biased and detached from cultural authenticity.

### **1.3.3 Research Objective 3**

To develop a culturally authentic visual narrative model that incorporates ideological and aesthetic norms of traditional Chinese genre picture books.

The objective focuses on creating a model that is culturally authentic by incorporating the ideological and aesthetic norms of traditional Chinese genre picture books. This model aims to facilitate a deeper understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture through visual storytelling. Picture books are a complex art form that involves various fields of knowledge, including language, communication, culture, psychology, education, aesthetics, ethics, and art. They represent a comprehensive measure of cultural fields, reflecting the cultural flavour of a nation. Picture books created in a cultural context reflect the cultural concepts and values of people in a country and region. Given the significant differences between Eastern and Western cultural backgrounds, it is crucial to ensure that images representing traditional Chinese cultural themes conform to traditional Chinese artistic aesthetics. This aesthetic code is based on traditional Chinese aesthetic ideas, which cannot be fully captured by Western picture book theory. Therefore, applying Western picture book theory when creating or analysing Chinese picture books may result in cultural bias or poor interpretation. Thus, the third aim of this study is to establish China's own visual narrative model for picture books, which combines Western picture book theory with traditional Chinese aesthetic codes.

To establish a culturally authentic visual narrative model for picture books, it is essential to examine the cultural and historical context of traditional Chinese art and literature. In traditional Chinese culture, calligraphy, painting, and literature were regarded as three important forms of artistic expression. Calligraphy was viewed as the foundation of all art forms and was used to express emotions and convey ideas. Chinese paintings were typically characterized by their simplicity, harmony, and elegance, emphasising capturing the subject's essence rather than its realistic representation. Literature, particularly poetry, was highly valued and considered a

means of self-expression and self-cultivation. These cultural values and aesthetic ideals continue influencing Chinese art and literature today. As this study focuses on visual narratives, the scope of the study of traditional Chinese culture will also focus on visual artworks and the ideological orientation behind the art.

Moreover, picture books have been increasingly recognized as essential for promoting cultural awareness and diversity in children's education. In China, there is a growing interest in developing picture books that reflect the cultural heritage and values of the country. By establishing a visual narrative model for picture books that integrates both Western and traditional Chinese aesthetic codes, this study aims to contribute to the development of culturally authentic and meaningful picture books that can engage and inspire children from diverse cultural backgrounds.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

There are three research questions for this study, and after the research questions, there is a table listing the three questions and the three research objectives.

##### **1.4.1 Research Question 1**

What are the key elements and visual codes employed in the visual narrative structures of Chinese picture books that draw inspiration from traditional cultural sources?

##### **1.4.2 Research Question 2**

How do traditional Chinese genre picture books adhere to and embody the conventions of artistic expression in their visual narrative structure?

### 1.4.3 Research Question 3

How can a visual narrative model be developed that authentically incorporates the ideological and aesthetic norms of traditional Chinese genre picture books?

The research questions and research objectives of this study can be found in Table 1.1

Table 1.1 Research Question and Research Objective

Research Question	Research Objective
1. What are the key elements and visual codes employed in the visual narrative structures of Chinese picture books that draw inspiration from traditional cultural sources?	1. To identify the visual narrative structure of Chinese picture books based on traditional cultural sources.
2. How do traditional Chinese genre picture books adhere to and embody the conventions of artistic expression in their visual narrative structure?	2. To determine the visual narrative structure of traditional Chinese genre picture books in line with traditional Chinese conventions of artistic expression.
3. How can a visual narrative model be developed that authentically incorporates the ideological and aesthetic norms of traditional Chinese genre picture books?	3. To develop a culturally authentic visual narrative model that incorporates ideological and aesthetic norms of traditional Chinese genre picture books.

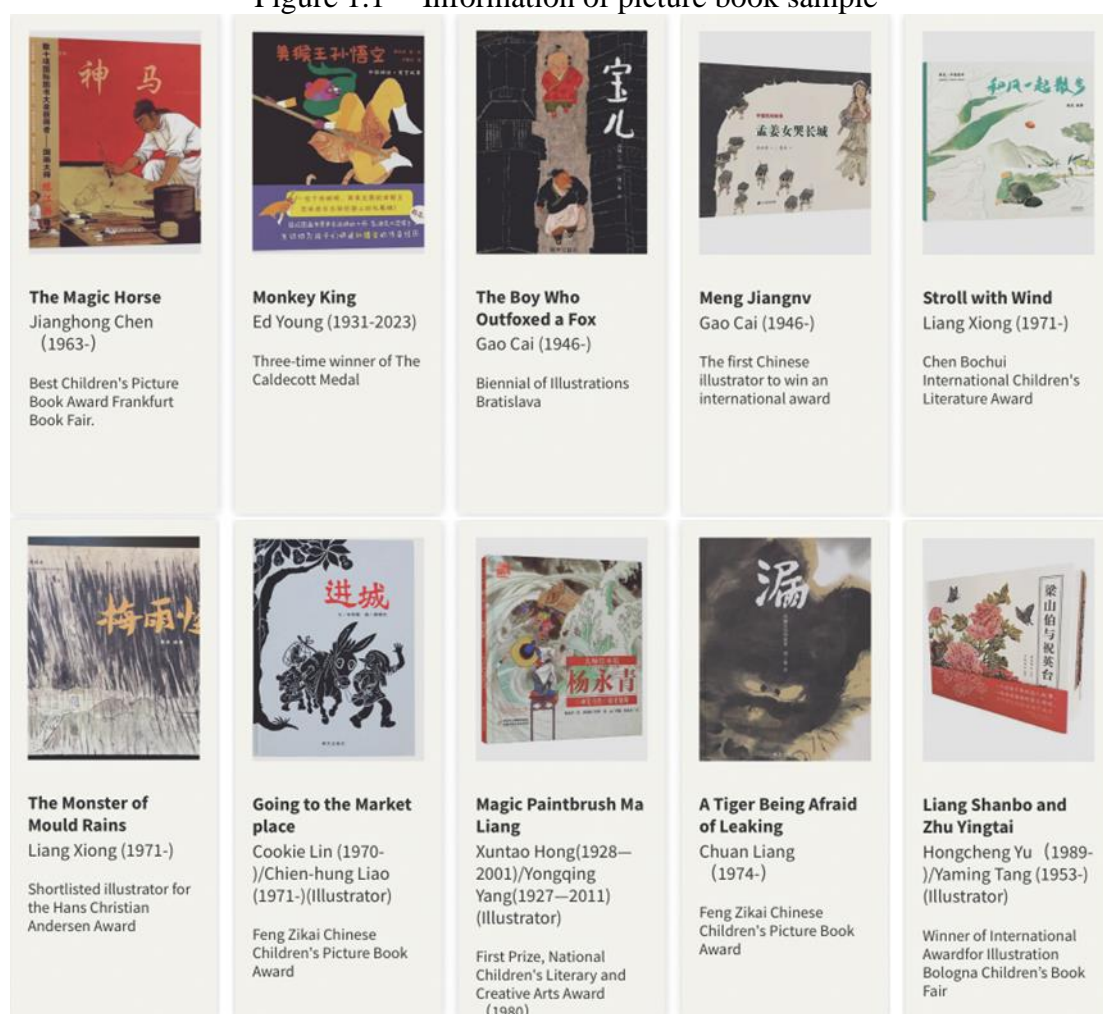
### 1.5 Research Methodology

In consideration of the interpretive and exploratory nature of the research objectives, the researcher adopted a qualitative methodological research design. This study is qualitative research through Multimodal Discourse Analysis (henceforth MDA).

MDA is an emerging paradigm in discourse studies which extends the study of language per se to the study of language in combination with images. This study focused on exploring aspects of visual and written texts of a set of 10 postmodern narrative picture books (see Figure 1.1) published in China and two traditional

Chinese artworks. MDA is drawn upon to detect the visual symbols of the traditional Chinese cultural genre of picture books. Then, the visual text data are categorised and coded to obtain the visual narrative structure. To provide a basis for the subsequent semantic interpretation of the visual narrative structure in line with traditional Chinese aesthetics.

Figure 1.1 Information of picture book sample



### 1.5.1 Coding Samples with Models

This study employs data to support its arguments and qualitative analysis and utilizes an MDA framework, combined with Clare Painter's research on the visual narrative of picture books, as its theoretical foundation. The visual narrative framework comprehensively assesses how various image elements effectively convey

storytelling information. This framework establishes specific attribute categories, which serve as a formalized means of summarizing the variations in how these attributes are represented within each category. Consequently, these categories and attributes can be employed as codes to facilitate cross-referencing images within Chinese picture books and traditional artworks. Specifically, each picture book and artwork page is assigned a unique code. In this study, the researcher will examine the outcomes of this comparative analysis, thereby summarizing the most frequently observed codes for each picture book. These identified codes will be defined as the visual narrative features intrinsic to Chinese picture books. Finally, to ascertain the research significance of the findings, the researcher conducted interviews with four experts who possess specialized knowledge and expertise in the field of picture books.

### **1.5.2 Interview**

The inclusion of expert interviews adds depth and credibility to the research study. By engaging with individuals with extensive experience and knowledge in the field, the researcher can tap into their valuable insights and perspectives. This enhances the overall robustness of the study, as it draws upon the expertise of recognized authorities in the subject area.

The interviewees were selected based on expertise and involvement in the picture book industry in China. Specifically, two individuals who held positions as child picture book editors were chosen, while the other two were picture book creators. This deliberate selection aimed to gather insights from professionals with distinct perspectives and roles within the industry. The interviews offer a unique opportunity to engage directly with experts and delve into specific topics of interest. The interviews enabled the researcher to ask targeted questions, seek clarification, and uncover nuances that might have been missed through other means of data collection.

Due to geographical conditions, the researcher was located in Malaysia, and the interviewees were based in China, so the interviews were conducted through a virtual platform. The researcher ensured that the interviewers had a comfortable and at ease interview environment, respecting the interviewees' opinions for the teleconference interviews. Participants were allowed to express their thoughts and experiences freely.

During the interviews, the researcher actively listened to the interviewees' responses, probing further when necessary to obtain deeper insights and clarification. The discussions were recorded to ensure the accurate capture of the information provided by the interviewees. Transcriptions or detailed notes from the recordings enabled a thorough data analysis.

### **1.5.3 Justification of Data Selection**

For the selection of original Chinese picture books, the following conditions are to be met:

1. The picture book represents traditional Chinese cultural themes or uses traditional Chinese artistic expressions.

The primary criteria for selecting picture books are that they demonstrate cultural consciousness. This research used the categorization approach created by Sims (1982) and subsequently utilised by Leu (2001), categorising children's literature as culturally conscious books. This study focuses on examining traditional culture in picture books to ensure that the subject matter is expressive of traditional Chinese culture, where there are themes such as folktales, ancient classic literary stories, ballads, and historical stories. Techniques represented are Chinese gong bi painting (somewhat akin to realism, as that term is understood in a Chinese context) and



Chinese ink painting. Folk art, including paper-cutting, shadow puppetry, collage and other handicraft techniques.

2. The author and illustrator were imbued with Chinese culture from a young age and received education in Chinese culture.

This research used Sims's categorization, namely her detailed examination of culturally conscious books and Leu's study, to inform the process of selecting picture books for analysis. One notable benefit of employing Sims' categorization is its emphasis on books' cultural authenticity. This is particularly relevant as culturally conscious books are characterised by an insider perspective, life experiences, and worldviews of individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. This requires the creator of the picture book to be from the same ethnic group and be aware of his country's internal culture. The successful creation of a picture book necessitates the creator with the corresponding ethnic group and a comprehensive understanding of the internal cultural intricacies of their nation. According to this concept, all of the chosen authors of picture books were born in China and underwent a comprehensive educational system in the country.

3. The work and author of the picture book have won awards at home or abroad.

If a picture book gets a high degree of national or international awards, it might demonstrate that specialists in the industry have acknowledged the picture book for both its linguistic and visual content.

4. The picture book has achieved good sales and is recognized by consumers.

The best-selling books in the picture book market can show that in the consumer group by the readers and parents. Additionally, it can provide insights on the perceived quality of these books.

The following conditions need to be met for the selection of traditional works of art:

1. The artwork should be classical, representative of the tradition, and serve as a model for the development of art for future generations.
2. The artwork has a narrative plot and dual narrative mode of image and text.

The above conditions ensure that the sample selected is typical and that the results are representative and credible in the subsequent data analysis.

## 1.6 Theoretical Study

The theoretical framework for visual narrative research on the Chinese traditional culture genre of children's picture books combines the principles of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), Clare Painter's (Painter et al., 2012) research on the visual narrative of picture books, while also drawing on the rich cultural heritage of China (Figure1.2).

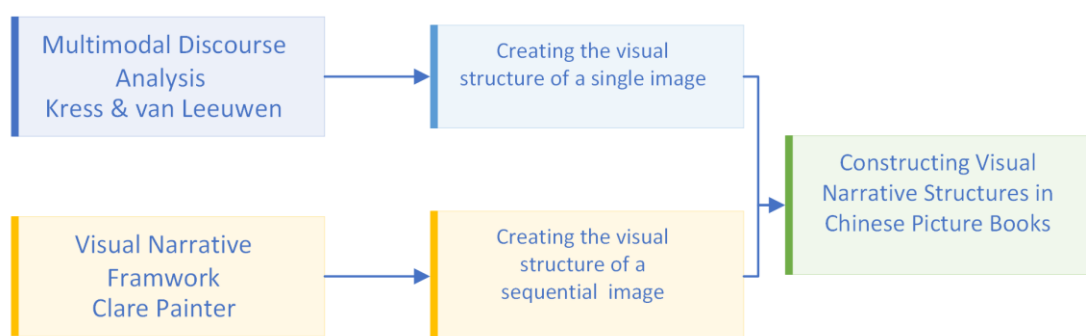


Figure 1.2 Theoretical Framework

### 1.6.1 Theory 1- Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal discourse analysis emphasizes the importance of analysing communication as a multimodal phenomenon, which involves not only language, but also other modes of expression. The interaction of semiotic choices within multimodal phenomena leads to semantic expansions as diverse resources are accessed and

integrated. This process of semantic integration can be analysed from a metafunctional perspective, where experiential, logical, interpersonal, and textual meanings interact across various elements, including word groups and images. Consequently, a multiplication of meanings occurs (Lemke, 1998), giving rise to a complex and multidimensional semantic space. This space may exhibit a compression of meaning (Baldry & Thibault, 2006) and accommodate divergent or conflicting interpretations (Y. Liu & O'Halloran, 2009). These inter-semiotic systems have the potential to establish links across hierarchical taxonomies for each resource, allowing, for example, a resemioticisation of a word group in language or an image element in illustration as integral components of a complex visual narrative.

Based on this theoretical foundation, the multimodal model will be used to examine how the visual and textual modes of expression interact in Chinese traditional culture genre children's picture books to create meaning.

Kress & van Leeuwen use multimodal analysis to focus on the semantic production of text and images. This has promising implications for picture book research. Because picture books also consist of text and images that together form the content of the picture. Specifically, Kress analyses and explores all the visual elements in a single picture, including the main characters, foreground-background, colour, position and size, and so on. This is a direct reference for the study of what constitutes a picture book image. The presentation of a picture book story also relies heavily on the various visual elements in the image.

### **1.6.2 Theory 2- Visual Narrative Framework from Clare Painter**

Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework is acknowledged as a valuable resource for comprehending the visual elements within images. However, its scope is deemed inadequate when addressing the fundamental nature of image

relationships within a sequence. Painter, Martin, and Unsworth (Painter et al., 2012) assert this limitation and highlight the need for a more comprehensive approach.

In response to this inadequacy, Painter et al. propose a comparative analysis of visual and linguistic meanings to explore and evaluate the narratives presented in picture books. This technique has gained traction in various studies on picture books, signifying its relevance and applicability within the field. By juxtaposing visual and linguistic elements, researchers can delve deeper into the intricate interplay between different semiotic modes, shedding light on the mechanisms through which picture book narratives are constructed.

Moreover, Painter (2019) expands upon the theoretical framework MDA, offering a more comprehensive account of the analytical tools embedded within these frameworks. As described by Painter, it encompasses a broad range of theoretical principles and analytical methods that facilitate the examination of meaning-making processes in various modes of communication, including both visual and linguistic. By employing this theoretical lens, researchers gain access to a robust set of tools for dissecting and interpreting the complexities of visual narratives in picture books. This expanded perspective equips scholars with the necessary tools to conduct detailed analyses of the visual narrative features present in picture books, facilitating a more nuanced examination of how meaning is constructed and conveyed through visual elements. This approach will be applied to explore how the visual narrative is built in the Chinese traditional culture genre of children's picture books and how the images contribute to the storytelling.

The study will also draw on the rich cultural heritage of China to explore how Chinese traditional cultural values and beliefs are communicated through picture books. This will involve analysing the use of visual images, symbols, and motifs