

## Analyzing the English Comic Version of *The Analects of Confucius* Based on Visual Grammar

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### Abstract

*The Analects of Confucius* is one of the representative works of traditional Chinese culture and has been translated into different versions. Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version is one of the most popular among the different translated versions. It has a considerable potential to spread Chinese culture by multimodal means. A brief review shows that so far, there have been few studies on Tsai Chih-Chung's Chinese classic comics from the perspective of multimodality. This study applies the analytical framework based on Kress and van Leeuwen's "Visual Grammar" to Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius*, attempting to explore how the visual modes realize three meta-meanings in the English comic version. Through the analysis, it is found that the images in Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version fully realize the representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning. Furthermore, most of the images in Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version realize more than just one meta-meaning, and more frequently include all three meta-meanings. By combining the texts and images organically, Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version has been successful in attracting readers to read the classic, deepening the readers' understanding of the classic and finally making them accept the cultural essence embedded in it. This study provides a case reference for the analysis of multimodal discourse in Chinese classic comics, and also contributes to optimizing Chinese classic comics' design and innovation.

**Keywords:** *The Analects of Confucius*, Tsai Chih-Chung, English comic version, Visual Grammar

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## 1. Introduction

*The Analects of Confucius* is the most important classic of Confucianism. It embodies the essence of traditional Chinese culture and has exceptionally high dissemination value. According to statistics, there have been more than 50 English versions of *The Analects of Confucius*, including complete and abridged translations (Tao, 2018). However, most of them just involve interlingual translation, which is too abstract and complex for Western readers to understand, making the spread of *The Analects of Confucius* in the Western countries far from ideal. Compared with the pure text versions, the English comic versions of *The Analects of Confucius* have vast potential to spread Chinese culture by multimodal means, which is conducive to Chinese culture going to the world more proactively.

Tsai Chih-Chung is one of Asia's most famous cartoonists. His comic series of the Chinese classics have been translated into more than 20 languages and widely spread around the world. Among them, the English version of *The Analects*, translated by Brian Bruya, a professor of philosophy at Eastern Michigan University, has sold more than 40 million copies in over 44 countries, causing a global sensation (Tan & Bruya, 2021). In recent years, with their popularity in both Chinese and overseas markets, Chinese classic comics, with *The Analects of Confucius* as one of the representatives, have begun to draw the attention of Chinese academic circles and related research is mainly concentrated in the field of translation. For example, Qiang (2014) analyzed the translation difficulties of *The Analects of Confucius* from the three aspects of register—field, tenor and mode respectively, and then discussed the potential of comics as a medium to solve these difficulties. He specifically examined the pros and cons of the three English comic versions of *The Analects of Confucius* in terms of the practical translation process, which aroused the attention of the academic circles on the research on translating *The Analects of Confucius* with comics. Later, some Chinese scholars studied Tsai Chih-Chung's comic version of *The Analects of Confucius* as well as its English version from the perspective of intersemiotic translation, and analyzed how to interpret texts with images, which further expanded the field of translation and provided new ideas for the study of translation and introduction of Chinese classics (An, 2018; Huang & Zhu, 2018; Tang, 2014). Chinese classic comics have the

characteristics that are typical of multimodal genre, and images play an indispensable role in the process of overall meaning construction of comics. However, few studies have discussed Chinese classic comics from the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis.

This research aims to analyze Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius* based on "Visual Grammar" proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen. It seeks to make an in-depth analysis of the metafunctions of images in Tsai's English comic version.

This research contributes insightful understanding of Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius*, and provides a reference for the optimization of Chinese classic comics' design and innovation. It is expected that those images in Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version also express meanings, and play an influential role in the intersemiotic translation, thus contributing to the success of the English comic version. Therefore, based on Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar, this research attempts to analyze the images in three meta-meanings and find out how the images function within this comic version.

### Research Question

How do the visual modes in Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius* realize the three meta-meanings, namely representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Related Studies on Tsai Chih-Chung's Chinese Classic Comics

According to China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), the total of articles and papers on "Tsai Chih-Chung's comics" published from 1989 to 2022 are 92 pieces. The number of articles and papers has been on the rise since 2008, and in the recent years, the number is approaching a high level.

A closer look at those published papers, the total of 64 directly relevant literature (on Tsai Chih-Chung's Chinese classic comics) was selected, which mainly involves the following five aspects: (1) The introduction to Tsai Chih-Chung and his works of Chinese classic comics. More than half of the literature collected is

concerning this aspect, including Tsai's biography, the interviews with Tsai himself and the translators of his works, the book review of Tsai's masterpieces, etc. (2) Translation research based on Tsai's Chinese classic comics. The literature concerning this aspect focuses on intersemiotic translation (An, 2018; Huang & Zhu, 2018; Tang, 2014), translation strategies (Cao & Su, 2020; He, 2020; Yang & Qin, 2018), translation as rewriting (Tang, 2021a; Zhang, 2014), and topological transformation in translation (Tang, 2021b) respectively. (3) Studies on artistic style and characteristics of Tsai's Chinese classic comics. Most of the journal papers concerning this aspect only talked about the artistic style and characteristics of Tsai's Chinese classic comics in general terms without going into details (Chen, 2011; Zhao, 2014), while one paper gave a relatively detailed and profound analysis of the intertextuality between images and texts in visual narrative based on Tsai's comic art (Yang & Huang, 2014). Comparatively, two Master theses showed a more systematic analysis from the perspective of aesthetics (An, 2013; Pan, 2011). (4) Cultural dissemination research based on Tsai's Chinese classic comics. Some journal papers discussed the profound significance of Tsai's Chinese classic comics for further promoting traditional Chinese culture in China, while the other two focused on the overseas dissemination of Chinese traditional culture promoted by Tsai's Chinese classic comics (Xu et al., 2010; Zhou, 2006). Comparatively, two Master theses showed a more systematic analysis from different perspectives (Liu, 2015; Sui, 2012). (5) Multimodal research based on Tsai's Chinese classic comics. Wei (2018) analyzed the bilingual version of Tsai's Chinese classic comic, *The Analects of Confucius*, from the perspective of multimodality. He summarized the advantages of the comic version, but his research was confined to multimodality in translation studies, and focused too much on the advantages of the comic version over the text-only version, without conducting an in-depth analysis of the relative contribution of visual modes to the construction of discourse meaning. Zeng and Zhu (2020) studied the realization of the ideational meaning of multimodal projection in Chinese classic comics. Chen and Chen (2021) made a comparative analysis of the construction of interpersonal meanings in the relations between man and nature represented in English comic versions of *The Analects of Confucius*. These studies can be considered pioneer research on Chinese classic comics from the perspective of multimodality. However, the current research is far from

complete and systematic.

In summary, domestic research in China on Tsai Chih-Chung's Chinese classic comics mainly focuses on the introduction to Tsai Chih-Chung and his works. At present, there have been some studies from the perspectives of translation, aesthetics, cultural dissemination, and multimodality, but the number is small and not systematic. In particular, the multimodal research on Chinese classic comics has just started in China and needs to be further carried out. Besides, a few Chinese scholars have published English papers on Chinese classic comics in international journals, but no foreign scholars have been found to conduct research on it. Therefore, there is a lack of worldwide research on Chinese classic comics from various perspectives.

As a multimodal discourse, the Chinese classic comic embodies the interaction between visual and verbal modes. The research on the English comic version of Chinese classic comics should take its multimodal characteristics into consideration.

## **2.2 Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar**

The multimodal approach emphasizes that meaning is not only communicated by language but also by many other modes, including pictorial images, gesture, posture, gaze, etc. (Derakhshan, 2021; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). When it comes to the analysis of images with the multimodal social semiotic approach, one book is worth mentioning — *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996), which is co-authored by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. It is regarded as the landmark textbook in the area of visual analysis and is termed “Visual Grammar” since it gives an outline of the “grammar” of visual design in detail. Later on, the second edition of the book was published in 2006, in which Kress and van Leeuwen addressed the new issues of moving images and color, and updated the data source with a number of examples from websites.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) stated that they aimed to produce a “grammar of visual design” to present a socially-based theory of visual representation. They used the term “grammar” to imply that they focus on how to combine what is depicted in the image into a coherent and meaningful whole. Taking the multimodal social

semiotic approach inspired by Hallidayan grammar of language, they attempted to interpret visual meaning by connecting the images with their producers and particular social contexts (Jam et al., 2021). They criticized Barthes's (1964) famous notion of the interdependence of image and text that texts "anchor" or "relay" the images they accompany and argued that "the visual component of a text is an independently organized and structured message — connected with verbal text, but in no way dependent on it. And similarly, the other way round" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 17). Consequently, they took the view that "language and visual communication both realize the same more fundamental and far-reaching systems of meaning that constitute our culture, each by its own specific forms, and independently" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.17). From their perspective, both image and text are realizations of social semiotic systems, and they are chosen by communicators to express the same kinds of meanings in different ways. The meanings of visual and verbal modes are social in nature, and arise out of their cultural context.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) applied Halliday's theoretical notion of metafunctions to visual modes and proposed a model of three meanings for images, which corresponds with three metafunctions in systemic functional linguistics.

**Table 1**

*Systemic Functional Linguistics Versus Visual Grammar*

Systemic Functional Linguistics	Visual Grammar
Ideational Metafunction	Representational Meaning
Interpersonal Metafunction	Interactive Meaning
Textual Metafunction	Compositional Meaning

The representational meaning corresponds with the ideational metafunction of systemic functional linguistics. It is concerned with the way images represent the relations between the people, places and things they depict. It can be divided into two categories: narrative representation and conceptual representation. They are distinguished by a "vector", which is a motion, an eye line, an arrow, etc., pointing to a clear direction. The narrative representation is a vectorial pattern presenting "unfolding actions and events, process of change, transitory spatial arrangements". In contrast, conceptual representation is a non-vectorial pattern, representing

participants “in terms of their more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence, in terms of class, or structure or meaning.” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.79).

The interactive meaning is equivalent to the interpersonal metafunction of systemic functional linguistics. The interactive meaning focuses on the interaction between images and their viewers, which is concerned with the representation of social relations between images and viewers. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argued that the interactive meaning is realized by three subsystems, namely, contact, social distance and perspective.

The compositional meaning corresponds with the textual metafunction of systemic functional linguistics. It is related to “the way in which the representational and interactive elements are made to relate to each other, the way they are integrated into a meaningful whole” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.176). There are three routes to realize the compositional meaning: information value, salience and framing.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) emphasized that visual systems are multidimensional structures in which representational, interactive and compositional meanings occur and project their meanings at the same time. They provide a systematic and comprehensive account of the grammar of visual design. Their “Visual Grammar” serves as a ready-made “tool-kit” and is of great practical value for those who want to break down the visuals and understand their meanings.

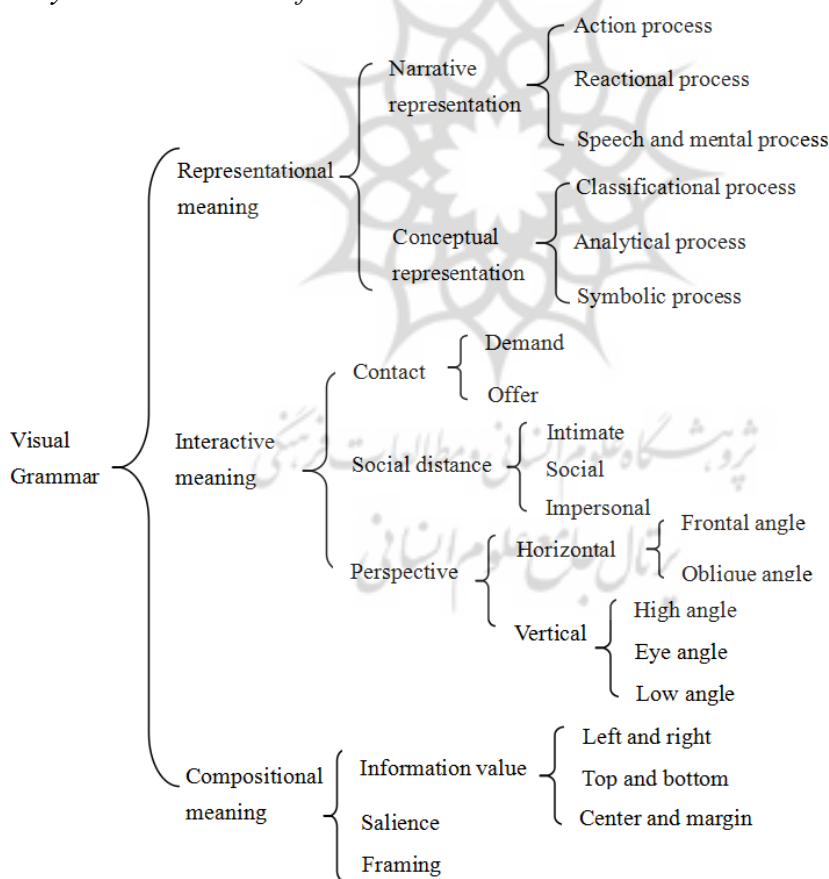
The research on multimodal discourse analysis in China began with the introduction of Kress and van Leeuwen’s “Visual Grammar” by Li (2003). It is found that most studies, on the basis of “Visual Grammar” in social semiotics, proposed multimodal analytical models suitable for specific genres, and attempted to reveal the semantic contributions of two symbolic systems of text and image to specific genres (Pan & Li, 2017). In terms of applied research, Chinese scholars are committed to applying “Visual Grammar” to case studies of specific genres. At present, various genres have been involved, such as advertisements (Liu, 2020; Mu & Zhang, 2022), websites (Wang & Yu, 2022), textbooks (Liu, 2019; Wang & Hemchua, 2022), videos (Wen, 2019), picture books (Teng & Miao, 2018), posters (Wang, 2020), political comics (Mo, 2020).

This research attempts to apply the analytical framework of Kress and van Leeuwen’s “Visual Grammar” to Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius*, exploring the realization of three meta-meanings of images in this English comic version.

### 3. Methodology

This research is a qualitative analysis of Chinese classic comic based on “Visual Grammar”. The analytical framework of this research is adapted from Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
*Analytical Framework of Visual Grammar*





The representational meaning can be divided into narrative representation and conceptual representation. According to the kind of vector and the number and kind of participants involved, the narrative process is subdivided into action process, reactional process, and speech and mental process. In the action process, the vector is a physical action, and it links two participants — the “actor” and the “goal”. The “actor” refers to “the participant from whom or which the vector departs, and which may be fused with the vector to different degrees” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.59), and the “goal” means “the passive participant at which the vector is directed” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.74). In the reactional process, the vector is formed by an eyeline, by the direction of the glance of the represented participants shown in images. Here, the “actor” and the “goal” are mentioned as the “reactor” and the “phenomenon”. The “reactor” has to be the participant who does the looking. Concerning the action process and reactional process, they can be either transactional or non-transactional. The transactional processes contain the “actor” and the “goal”, or the “reactor” and the “phenomenon”, while the non-transactional one only has the “actor” or the “reactor”. In speech and mental process, thought bubbles or dialogue balloons become the “vector”, which relates the thinker or speaker to their thought or speech. In terms of class, structure and meaning, the conceptual representation can be achieved by three processes: the classificational process, analytical process and symbolic process. The classificational processes relate participants in terms of a taxonomy, and in the process, “at least one set of participants will play the role of Subordinates with respect to at least one other participant, the Superordinate” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.79). The analytical processes relate participants in terms of a part-whole structure. The symbolic processes indicate what participants mean.

As for the interactive meaning, the first dimension is “contact”, which indicates “eye contact” between represented participants and the viewer. If the participants in images look directly at the viewer, the “demand” relationship is formed. In that case, the participants appeal to the viewer, “demand something from the viewer and demand that the viewer enters into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.118). On the contrary, if there is no eye contact between the represented participants and the viewer, this is the “offer”

relationship that “‘offers’ the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.119). The second dimension to the interactive meanings of images is related to the “size of frame”. Close-up, medium shot and long shot suggest increasing social distance between the represented participants and the viewer. The close-up shot shows the head and shoulder of the participants, indicating an intimate relationship. The medium shot shows the participant’s knees and the waist, establishing a social relationship. The long shot shows the entire figure or anything ‘wider’ than that, imposing an impersonal relationship (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The third dimension is “perspective” — the selection of an angle, which “implies the possibility of expressing subjective attitudes towards represented participants, human or otherwise” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.129). It consists of horizontal and vertical angles. The horizontal angle can be frontal or oblique. The former implies the viewer is “involved” with the represented participants, while the latter suggests the detachment of the viewer. For the vertical angle, it is a matter of power. The high angle brings the viewer power over the represented participants. On the contrary, the low angle brings the represented participants power over the viewer. If the image is at eye level, then the angle is one of equality, and there is no power difference between the represented participants and the viewer.

The compositional meaning can be realized by information value, salience and framing. “The placement of elements endows them with the specific informational values attached to the various ‘zones’ of the image: left and right, top and bottom, centre and margin” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.177). When the represented participant lies in the left of an image, it is implied that the information might have been recognized or understood by the viewer, compared with the new information on the right, which is possibly unknown for the viewer. For the top-bottom structure, the represented participant on the top holds the ideal or general information while the one on the bottom expresses the real or detailed information. To mention the center-margin structure, the represented participant in the center is more important, while those at the margin are less important in the image. Salience creates “a hierarchy of importance among the elements, selecting some as more

important, more worthy of attention than others.” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.201). Techniques to implement salience include size, foregrounding/backgrounding, color, etc. (Forceville, 1999). Framing is presented by the presence or absence of framing devices signifying the sense of belonging or not. The framing devices can be boxes, lines, space, colors, and so forth. Framing deals with the connection and disconnection of the constituents of a visual composition. For disconnection, the elements are visually separated from other elements through framing lines, devices of pictorial framing, empty space between elements, discontinuities of color, shape, and so on. For connection, elements are visually joined together into a meaningful whole through the absence of framing devices, through vectors, and continuities or similarities of color, visual shape, etc. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The principles of information value, salience and framing are not only valid in a single picture, but also in composite images which include texts, images or other multimodal resources.

This research takes the latest English comic edition of *The Analects of Confucius*, translated by Brian Bruya and published by Princeton University Press in 2018, as the research object. There are 512 chapters in the complete version of *The Analects of Confucius*. The English edition (2018) is an abridged version. The main body of the book, *the Analects*, contains 146 representative chapters selected from the original version, which were adapted into 146 comic stories with distinct themes.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

According to Visual Grammar, there are three meta-meanings of images, namely, representational, interactive and compositional meanings. In this part, the realization of three meta-meanings of images in Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius* will be elucidated successively with some typical examples.

##### 4.1 Representational Meaning

Images can represent objects and their relations in the world. The narrative representation has the “vector” to connect the participants in an image, while the

conceptual representation lacks the “vector”. It is found that almost all the representational meaning of images in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius* are realized by narrative representation. The realization of narrative representation depends on the action process, reactional process and speech and mental process. The few conceptual representations are all achieved by symbolic process.

#### 4.1.1 Narrative Representation

The narrative representation mainly deals with depicted actions and events, the striking feature of which is the existence of the “vector”. In Tsai's English comic version, there are various “vectors”, such as an action, an eyeline, a speech balloon, and a thought bubble, to combine the represented participants so as to do something to or for each other. Some specific examples of the narrative representation from *The Analects of Confucius* are shown as follows:

**Figure 2**  
*An Example of Action Process*

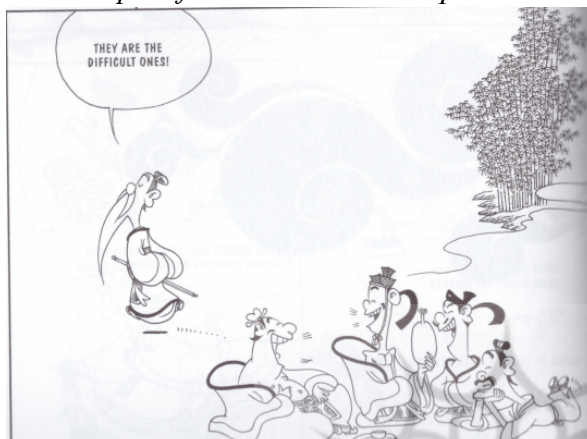


Figure2 shows a typical action process in which the vector is an action linking the “actor” and the “goal”. In Figure2, a commander is slashing at the enemy with a sword. The commander is the “actor” while the enemy is the “goal”, two of which are combined by a gesture of raising a sword and slashing. It displays a transactional process that the “actor” and the “goal” come up simultaneously in the image. This

kind of image can help viewers to understand the scenario and the context.

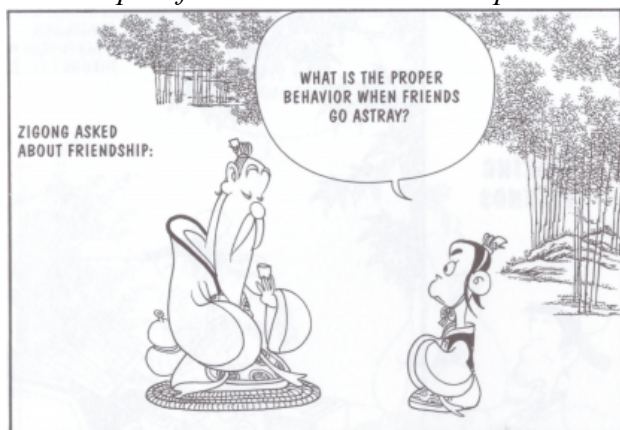
### Figure 3

#### *An Example of Action Process & Speech Process*



In most cases, the three processes are not isolated, but contribute to narrative representation together. In Figure3, we can see both the action process and the speech process. It shows that a couple of people congregate, telling jokes and acting clever but never touching on righteousness, and Confucius is walking away with disdain. Confucius's action has no goal, and the image only shows the action process of Confucius walking in a certain direction. Thus, this is a non-transactional process that lacks a goal. The speech balloon also serves as the vector, which relates Confucius to his speech. By reading the image, the viewers may wonder why Confucius is walking away, and they may be motivated to find out the reason by reading the texts in the speech balloon. This kind of image can arouse the viewers' curiosity and inspire them to understand the verbal texts.

In the reactional process, the vector is acted by the glance or the eyeline from the "reactor". And the "goal" in the action process changes into the "phenomenon" in the reactional process. Similar to the action process, there are two types of reactional processes: transactional and non-transactional process, dependent on whether the "phenomenon" appears or not.

**Figure 4***An Example of Reactional Process & Speech Process*

In Figure 4, Zigong is looking at Confucius reverently, asking about friendship. At the same time, the latter listens with his eyes closed, which gives the viewer an impression that Confucius is an authority and his student shows great respect for him. In the image, Zigong is the “reactor”, and he has an emotional reaction to Confucius when asking questions. Thus, the two participants in the image are connected by the eyeline. Moreover, the speech balloon also serves as the vector, which relates Zigong to his question. The transactional reactional process in Figure 4 is designed to help the viewers understand the relationship between the participants.

**Figure 5***An Example of Reactional Process & Mental Process*

In Figure 5, the image represents that a depraved official is looking somewhere in a reflective mood. However, the viewer cannot catch sight of what the eyeline aims at. In other words, the “phenomenon” doesn’t exist in the image. Therefore, the reactional process is non-transactional. What’s more, the thought bubble becomes the vector, which relates the depraved official to his thought. It gives a vivid presentation of the mental process of the participant, which helps the viewers to understand the text better. This kind of image can provide more information to the viewers and assist them in getting a deeper understanding by vividly showing what the participants think.

#### 4.1.2 Conceptual Representation

The conceptual representation is a relatively static process, which represents the class, structure and meaning of the represented participants. *The Analects of Confucius* is a collection of sayings and ideas attributed to the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius. It is mainly written in the form of dialogues between Confucius and his disciples, embodying the fundamental values of the Confucian tradition. Due to the particular genre of *The Analects of Confucius*, only a few conceptual representations can be found in the English comic version, and the symbolic process is the only process to achieve conceptual representation in this comic version. For example, in Figure 6, the image exhibits a coffin and people wearing the garments of mourning, which symbolizes the funeral. The symbolic process helps to arouse associations, enrich the viewer’s imagination and promote the viewer’s understanding of the verbal contents.

**Figure 6**  
*An Example of Symbolic Process*



#### 4.2 Interactive Meaning

The interactive meaning probes into the interaction between the viewer and the participants in an image. In Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius*, the interactive meaning is realized through three subsystems of contact, social distance and perspective. It is found that the contacts are all realized by way of “offer” rather than the way of “demand”. When it comes to social distance, the social relationship is the most common, and the impersonal relationship follows, while the intimate relationship is the least common. Both horizontal perspective and vertical perspective are fully applied in Tsai's English comic version.

##### 4.2.1 Contact

Contact refers, in particular, to eye contact between the viewer and the participants in the image. If the participants directly look at the viewer, it seems that the participants demand something from the viewer; otherwise, the image just offers some information to the viewer. In Tsai's English comic version, no eye contact is formed between the represented participants and the viewers, and the participants provide a lot of information to the viewers. Some specific examples from Tsai's



English comic version are shown as follows:

**Figure 7**

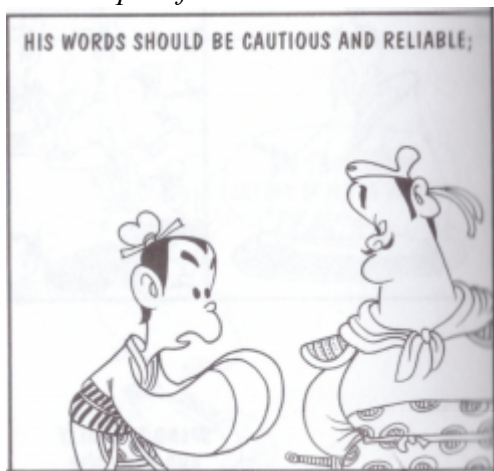
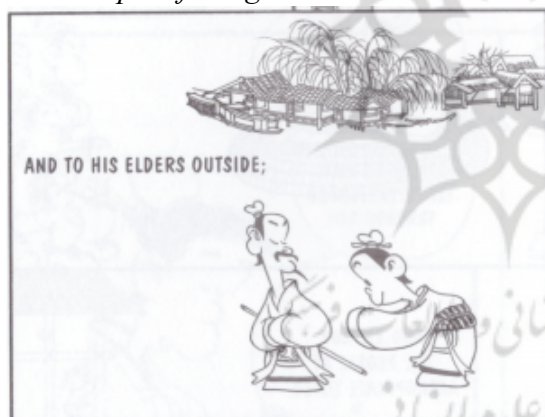
*An Example of “Offer” Image*



In Figure7, Confucius is answering his disciple Zhonggong’s question about benevolence. Meanwhile, he is waving his hand with his eye closed. Confucius does not gaze at the viewer, so there is no relationship of “demand” between the participant and the viewer. It just offers some information that Confucius is showing his disagreement about something. In *The Analects of Confucius*, the “offer” images prevail because the function of the comic version is mainly to pass on Confucian thoughts to the viewers. This kind of “offer” image tends to offer some objective facts or rational advice from a third-party perspective, which is more acceptable to the viewers.

#### 4.2.2 Social Distance

Different social relations are expressed by different social distances between the viewer and the participants in an image, manifested in the image with the help of various shots. Specifically, a close-up shot indicates the intimate relationship; a medium shot establishes the social relationship; a long shot builds the impersonal relationship. Here are some examples from Tsai's English comic version:

**Figure 8***An Example of Medium Shot***Figure 9***An Example of Long Shot*

In Figure8, the young man is talking to a soldier cautiously. The viewer can capture their waists and even knees, so it's a medium shot. In that way, the social relationship is set up between the two participants and the viewer. This kind of social distance is aimed at objectivity. Figure9 describes a scene in which the young man is meeting his elder outside and bowing to him to show his respect. It shows the whole figure of both participants and part of the background, which makes a long shot. Then, the impersonal relationship is formed between the viewer and the

participants, which can provide information more objectively.

However, in Figure7, only Confucius' shoulder and above emerge and take up half of the frame, which is the close-up shot. Thus, the intimate relationship is achieved between the viewer and Confucius, who conveys a sense of intimacy and friendliness like the teacher in school. This intimate relationship will bring a comfortable and familiar feeling, which would tempt the viewer to know more about Confucius' words.

In *The Analects of Confucius*, the close-up shot is usually given to the main characters, especially Confucius, when they are expressing their thoughts and ideas. Such an intimate relationship can tempt the viewer to accept what the participants convey. However, medium shot and long shot are more frequently used to show the actions of the participants and the plots of the events that are taking place, highlighting the communication and interaction between them, which objectively shows the process of interpersonal interaction for the viewers. The viewers can participate in the communication process by reading the images, and improve their understanding of the interpersonal relationship.

#### 4.2.3 Perspective

Perspective involves expressing subjective attitudes toward the represented participants in an image. Horizontal perspective deals with the viewer's degree of involvement in the participants, while vertical perspective figures out the power between the viewer and participants in the image.

In terms of horizontal perspective, frontal perspective instead of oblique perspective is fully applied in *The Analects of Confucius*, which implies the image producer's expectation of the viewer's involvement in the participants. In terms of vertical perspective, the eye level is fully applied in *The Analects of Confucius*, which symbolizes the equality between the participants and the viewers. This perspective prompts the viewer to get involved in the image, indicating empathy and integration.

### 4.3 Compositional Meaning

In Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius*, the compositional meaning integrates the representational meaning and interactive meaning into a meaningful whole through three ways: information value, salience and framing.

#### 4.3.1 Information Value

The realization of information value depends on the placement of elements in the image. Concerning the information structure, the left position shows the “given” information while the right position the “new” information. The top and bottom positions also carry metaphorical meanings. The top means the idealized or generalized information, while the bottom means the more realistic and factual information. Here is an example from Tsai's English comic version.

**Figure 10**  
*An Example of Information Value*



In Figure 10, concerning the left-right structure, the image of Confucius is located on the left and conveys the information that “Confucius said something”. However, without looking at the right half of the image, what Confucius said is unknown to the viewer. The bottom part of the image shows the scene where a group of people

is bowing and smiling at each other harmoniously, which demonstrates the right way of being a gentleman. The top part of the image is the scene where Confucius is telling the general principle of being a gentleman. Therefore, the top offers generalized information, while the bottom presents more realistic information.

#### 4.3.2 Saliency

Saliency is the matter of elements' being prominent to draw the viewer's attention in a composition. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) insisted that a specific saliency can be judged by some essential visual clues, such as size, tone, color, perspective, focus, overlap, and so on. These visual clues do not work separately but cooperatively.

In Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius*, saliency is often realized by such visual clues as size and focus. Apart from that, the center-margin position can also help to realize saliency.

**Figure 11**  
*An Example of Saliency*



For example, in Figure11, Confucius is teaching his students to do the right thing. It is obvious that the size of Confucius is much bigger than his disciples, which gives prominence to Confucius' authority. Besides, the word "righteousness" is focused with a circle of light, highlighting the importance of doing the right thing. It is evident that the participant in the center is more salient than the participants in

the margin. In this figure, Confucius is sitting in the center and surrounded by his disciples who are listening attentively. Undoubtedly, the viewer's attention will be grabbed by Confucius because his center position forms a salience in the image.

#### 4.3.3 Framing

The absence of framing stresses the connection of the constituents of visual composition, while its presence signifies disconnection. In Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius*, there are no obvious framing devices to separate the elements in the image visually, and the connection of the elements is usually emphasized by various kinds of vectors, in particular, speech balloon and thought bubbles. In this way, the visual and verbal modes interact with one another and jointly contribute to creating the meaning in the English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius*.

### 5. Conclusion

Through the analysis, it is found that the images in Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius* fully realize the representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning.

In terms of representational meaning, narrative representation, which deals with depicted actions and events, is dominant in Tsai's English comic version. The realization of narrative representation mainly depends on the combination of the action process/reactional process and speech/mental process. The narrative representation in the comic version can help the viewers to understand the scenario and the relationship between the participants, arouse the viewers' curiosity about the verbal texts, and lead to a deeper understanding of *The Analects of Confucius*. There are only a few conceptual representations in Tsai's English comic version, and the symbolic process is the only process. It contributes to arousing associations, enriching the viewer's imagination, and promoting the understanding of the verbal texts.

In terms of interactive meaning, contacts in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius* are all realized by way of "offer", for the purpose of passing on Confucian ideas and thoughts to the viewers in an objective way. Besides,

medium shot and long shot are dominant in Tsai's English comic version, which indicates the social relationship and impersonal relationship between the viewer and the participants. The social distance is thus aimed at objectivity. However, the close-up shot is also given to the main characters, especially Confucius, and the intimate relationship is conducive to viewers' acceptance of Confucian ideas and thoughts. Moreover, the frontal perspective is fully applied in Tsai's English comic version, which implies the image producer's expectation of the viewer's involvement in the participants, and the eye-to-eye angle is fully applied to symbolize the equality between the participants and the viewers.

In terms of compositional meaning, the realization of information value in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius* depends on the different placement of elements in the image like left-right and top-bottom, according to which given-new and generalized-realistic information is conveyed. Saliency in the comic version is usually realized by such visual clues as size and focus, and the center-margin position can also help to realize saliency. The viewers will be attracted to the elements in the image which are accorded saliency by those means. In Tsai's English comic version, there are no obvious framing devices, and vectors, in particular, speech balloons and thought bubbles are used for the connection of elements, making the English comic version a coherent and meaningful whole.

It is worth noting that most of the images in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius* realize more than just one meta-meaning, and more frequently include all three meta-meanings. Therefore, those images in Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version are by no means decorations, but make the classic alive and easier to understand by vividly showing Confucius's words and deeds and the dialogues between Confucius and his disciples.

As the representative work of traditional Chinese culture, *The Analects of Confucius* has been translated by numerous domestic and overseas scholars. Tsai's English comic version is one of the most popular among the different translation versions. The main reason is that it breaks the limitations of traditional unimodal translation and makes full use of the metafunctions of images. By combining the texts and images organically, Tsai's English comic version has successfully attracted readers to read the classic, deepening the readers' understanding of the

classic and finally making them accept the cultural essence embedded in it. Tsai Chih-Chung's comic design is unique, and his adaptation of *The Analects of Confucius* provides a good case reference for optimizing Chinese classic comics' design and innovation. However, it is suggested that there should be more symbolic processes in this comic version because the symbolic process plays a vital role in visualizing the abstract philosophy and culture of *The Analects*, and thus is helpful in facilitating cultural dissemination.

This research mainly focuses on how the visual modes in Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius* realize the representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning. In the future study, the intersemiotic interaction between the visual modes and verbal modes in this comic version could be further discussed, so as to give the complete picture of the multimodal discourse meaning construction of Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius*.





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