Research

Peer Review:

Copyright:

Open Access:

Digital Preservation:

RESEARCH

Guoxue Comics: Visualising Philosophical Concepts and Cultural Values through Sequential Narratives

Xiyuan Tan

School of the Arts, English and Drama, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK
x.tan@lboro.ac.uk

Guoxue, often translated as 'national learning' or 'sinology', is one of the compulsory subjects that Chinese children and teenagers are required to study. The main area it explores is traditional Chinese academia, covering philosophy, literature, arts, history, geography, mathematics and many other aspects. This article is a critical analysis of comic books for *guoxue* learning. Firstly, it investigates the current *guoxue* comic market and the most commonly adapted fields of *guoxue* literature and knowledge in comic books, namely traditional philosophy, traditional culture values and history. Selected significant works are discussed using methods of visual research and content analysis. To create a comic – a format often seen as a sequential narrative – the artists need to consider, for example, contents for each panel, links between panels and visual symbols for representing non-visual matters. These comic art essentials make the process of adapting philosophical and cultural values rather challenging, as it is a procedure of visualising thoughts and concepts instead of stories. *Guoxue* comics not only succeed in this adaptation, but also in visual narratives that are easy-to-understand and child-friendly. This distinctive feature is the heart of *guoxue* comics and is highlighted through the examination of example works in this paper. Methods used by artists to visualise concepts through means of comic art will be useful to comic artists in the future and will help them explore innovative approaches to creating sequential visual art.

Keywords: Cai Zhizhong; Confucius Analects; sequential narrative; traditional Chinese philosophy; visualisation

Introduction

As a nation that attaches great importance to traditional culture and national spirit, China has put much effort into educating citizens related subjects, especially children. School children are required to study a wide range of subjects, such as

national history, cultural geography, ancient Chinese philosophy and other related areas. These subjects are part of the national curriculum and some contents are considered compulsory.

Among the compulsory subjects is *guoxue* (国学), which translates literally as 'national learning'. It mainly explores classical Chinese academia, including traditional philosophy, art, geography, history and cultural values. *Guoxue* is believed to have originated from the late Qing dynasty (1644–1911) and has been seen as a crucial aspect in forming national identity (Dirlik, 2011). The term *guoxue* is said to have been adapted from a Japanese term *kokugaku*, which referred to a scholarly movement in Japan that tried to revive early Japanese literature as a means of rejection to canonical Chinese text which was then so-called *kangaku* (Makeham, 2011). The definition of *guoxue* is still ambiguous. Liu Dong emphasises that *guoxue* should have 'roots in Chinese culture' (Liu, 2011: 49) and that it should be distinctive from western learning. Xie Shaobo investigates a number of definitions given by early scholars and summarises the definitions into three definitions: previous cultural legacies, literature and thoughts produced in China till the end of the nineteenth century; studies of the six classics and classical Chinese thought and learning. He then argues that the confusing definitions bring 'inconsistency surrounding the contemporary *guoxue re*' (Xie, 2011: 40). There is much more literature on definitions of *guoxue* that the scope of this research will not cover. In this paper, the definition of *guoxue* will be regarded as the third definition summarised by Xie: the classical Chinese thought and learning.

Although *guoxue* is not a standalone subject in the national curriculum, it is often embedded within Chinese literature (*Yu Wen*, 语文), which is considered one of the most important subjects in school. *Guoxue* contents often appear as chapters in Chinese literature textbooks. As mentioned earlier, *guoxue* is a broad subject that consists of many aspects. Since this paper mainly discusses comic visualisation of philosophical concepts and cultural values, I would only explore these areas in the following analysis of what students are required to learn. Ideally, older students are expected to read excerpts from classical literature to understand traditional philosophy and values, such as *Confucius Analects* (*Lun Yu*, 论语) or *Mencius* (*Mengzi*, 孟子). The contents would appear as classical Chinese (*Wen Yan Wen*, 文言文), a type of

literary language used in ancient China, accompanied with translations in modern Chinese to help the students understand. This helps students not only learn the values and thoughts conveyed by *guoxue* literacy, but also trains the students' ability to read and understand classical Chinese, a skill required for Chinese literature exams. For younger students, reading and understanding classical Chinese can be difficult. Instead of works like *Confucius Analects*, younger students would be asked to read simple works such as *Three Character Classic* (*San Zi Jing*, 三字经), which is also written in classical Chinese but much easier to comprehend, and is aimed at children to help them build up a base for Confucianist thoughts in ancient China. Like materials for older students, *Three Character Classic* for schoolchildren is also accompanied with translations in modern Chinese. In summary, *guoxue* knowledge, especially the philosophical and the homiletic, comes from classical literature. The fact that they are text-based is what provoked the market for creating visualisations of *guoxue* knowledge in an era of multi-media.

Note that in this article, the given names and surnames of the Chinese scholars and comic artists will be displayed in the Chinese conventional order, which puts surnames before the given name. Names of people will be written in *Hanyu Pinyin* (汉语拼音), which is the official romanisation system used in mainland China. Names of works and special terms will be written in italic and in English translations, followed by their *Hanyu Pinyin* romanisations and original names in Chinese characters in brackets. Names of Chinese institutions and organisations will also be written in their English translations, followed by their *Hanyu Pinyin* romanisations and original names in Chinese characters in brackets.

The market of *guoxue* comics and Cai Zhizhong's dominance

Inspired and driven by the '*guoxue* fever' several years ago and the demand that Chinese schoolchildren should learn *guoxue* in the national curriculum, national artists began creating comics to interpret the essence of national philosophy and cultural values depicted in *guoxue*. *Guoxue*-related comic books can be found in major bookstores as well as online, appearing in different styles of narratives and artistic features. **Table 1** is a collection of examples of *guoxue* comics. The criteria for selection

Table 1: A list of *guoxue* comics.

Year published	Artist	Name of work	English translation
1986	Cai Zhizhong	自然的箫声——庄子说 I	Zhuangzi Speaks: The Music of Nature
1987	Cai Zhizhong	智者的低语——老子说 I	Laozi Speaks
1987	Cai Zhizhong	御风而行的哲思——列子说	Liezi Speaks
1987	Cai Zhizhong	仁者的叮咛——孔子说	Confucius Speaks
1988	Cai Zhizhong	和谐的人生——中庸	The Doctrine of the Mean
1988	Cai Zhizhong	人生的滋味——菜根谭	Caigentan
1988	Cai Zhizhong	博大的学问——大学	The Great Learning
1988	Cai Zhizhong	儒者的诤言——论语	Confucius Analects
1989	Cai Zhizhong	法家的峻言——韩非子说	Hanfeizi Speaks
1989	Cai Zhizhong	乱世的哲思——孟子说	Mencius Speaks
1989	Cai Zhizhong	自然的箫声——庄子说 II	Zhuangzi Speaks: The Music of Nature II
1989	Cai Zhizhong	智者的低语——老子说 II	Laozi Speaks II
1990	Cai Zhizhong	兵学的先知——孙子说	Sun Tzu Speaks
2007	Sun Yuanwei	漫画《庄子》心得	Zhuangzi: The Comic
2009	Sun Yuanwei	漫画国学馆：漫画三十六计（上/下）	Guoxue Comics: Thirty-six Strategies
2009	Sun Yuanwei	漫画孙子兵法（上/下）	Art of War: The Comic
2009	Sun Yuanwei	漫画孟子	Mencius: The Comic
2010	Sun Yuanwei	漫画国学馆：漫画鬼谷子	Guoxue Comics: Guiguzi
2010	Sun Yuanwei	漫画国学系列：漫画韩非子	Guoxue Comics: Hanfeizi
2010	Sun Yuanwei	漫画国学系列：漫画大学中庸	Guoxue Comics: The Great Learning & The Doctrine of the Mean
2011	Zhou Chuncai	国学漫画典藏系列·论语图典·中国人精神生活的食粮	Classical Guoxue Comics: Confucius Analects — the Food for the Mind
2011	Tong Le	漫画百喻经	Bai Yu Jing the Comic
2012	Yangmei Yangguang	青少年一定要读的国学经典：论语	Classical Guoxue for Youths: Confucius Analects

(Contd.)

Year published	Artist	Name of work	English translation
2012	Yangmei Yangguang	青少年一定要读的国学经典：三字经	Classical Guoxue for Youths: Three Character Classic
2012	Yangmei Yangguang	青少年一定要读的国学经典：孙子兵法	Classical Guoxue for Youths: Art of War
2012	Yangmei Yangguang	青少年一定要读的国学经典：三十六计	Classical Guoxue for Youths: Thirty-six Strategies
2012	Tong Dan	漫画版经典国学：论语	Classical Guoxue Comics: Confucius Analects
2012	Tong Dan	漫画版经典国学：弟子规	Classical Guoxue Comics: Rules for Students
2012	Tong Dan	漫画版经典国学：三十六计	Classical Guoxue Comics: Thirty-six Strategies
2012	Tong Dan	漫画版经典国学：增广贤文	Classical Guoxue Comics: Wisdom of Ancient Aphorisms
2012	Tong Dan	漫画版经典国学：幼学琼林	Classical Guoxue Comics: Youxue Qionglin
2012	Tong Dan	漫画版经典国学：庄子	Classical Guoxue Comics: Zhuangzi
2013	Wang Huan	小欢的《论语》	Xiaohuan's Confucius Analects
2013	Wang Huan	小欢的《弟子规》	Xiaohuan's Rules for Students
2013	Wang Huan	小欢的《三字经》	Xiaohuan's Three Character Classic
2013	Wang Huan	小欢的《孟子》	Xiaohuan's Mencius
2013	Wang Huan	小欢的《庄子》	Xiaohuan's Zhuangzi
2013	Wang Huan	小欢的《大学》《中庸》	Xiaohuan's The Great Learning & The Doctrine of the Mean
2013	Wang Huan	小欢的《老子》	Xiaohuan's Laozi
2015	Sun Yuanwei	漫画中国：漫画国学启蒙（套装）	Comic China: Guoxue Comics for Children (Collection)

(Contd.)

Year published	Artist	Name of work	English translation
2016	Tong Le	漫画三十六计+孙子兵法（套装）	Art of War & Thirty-six Strategies: The Comic (Collection)
2016	Tong Le	漫画庄子	Zhuangzi: The Comic
2016	Tong Le	漫画论语	Confucius Analects: The Comic
2017	Tong Le	漫画百家姓	One Hundred Surnames: The Comic
2017	Tong Le	漫画弟子规	Rules for Students: The Comic
2017	Tong Le	漫画颜氏家训	Yan's Family Rules: The Comic
2017	Tong Le	漫画孟子	Mencius: The Comic
2017	Tong Le	漫画千字文	Thousand Character Classic: The Comic
2017	Tong Le	漫画增广贤文	Wisdom of Ancient Aphorisms: The Comic
2017	Tong Le	漫画幼学琼林	Youxue Qionglin: The Comic
2017	Wang Wenhua, Sana	看漫画，学论语	Read Comics and Learn Confucius Analects

are as follows: a) it is based on a piece of classical *guoxue* literature; b) the literature it is based on is primarily a homiletic piece that depicts philosophical thoughts, principles of living and studying or cultural values; c) it is in the form of comics. The search results come from major online book retailers in China such as JD.com and Amazon.cn, and popular Chinese online book forums such as Douban.com.

The pioneer *guoxue* comic artist is Cai Zhizhong (in many other essays his name is spelt as Tsai Chih-Chung, which uses Wade-Giles romanisation system), a famous Taiwanese comic artist. The table shows that Cai began creating *guoxue* comics in the 1980s, a period when the 'culture fever' in China was taking place. Cai's *guoxue* comics are so popular that he has been described as 'cartoonist who has received the largest readership' (Lent, 1987: 194) in Taiwan and 'rare among Taiwanese cartoonists in that he has broken into foreign markets' (1987: 194). Cai was also praised for his

skills in 'convert[ing] mystic and abstract thoughts into understandable and interesting stories while avoiding distortions' (Lent, 2009: 18). His comics have been translated into several languages including English (Lent, 1987) and have been adapted into animation series (YouTube, 2010) . Wei Shu-chu's in-depth analysis of Cai's comics further justifies his reputation. Wei has stated the worldwide influence of Cai's works by pointing out that *Zhuangzi Speaks* has been 'used in college classrooms and never fails to amaze American students, who marvel at how such depth of thought is illustrated by cartoons' (Wei, 2001: 155). It is also mentioned that after realizing how helpful *Zhuangzi Speaks* was, high school students from Taiwan had requested Cai to make comics on Confucius to help them with their national exams, as some of the subjects required relevant knowledge. Since the original publications of his comics were quite old, several publishers have reprinted his comics and among which many have tried to make the comics more appealing to readers by adding colour. Cai's comics, though originally created several decades ago, remain on the top of the list while searching for *guoxue* comics online. Surprisingly, popular Chinese online comics websites like Tencent Animation and Comics (*Tengxun Dongman*, 腾讯动漫) and Netease Comics (*Wangyi Manhua*, 网易漫画) have also included Cai's comics in their collections, regardless that the majority of works in these two websites are recently-created comics by young artists of the twenty-first century.

Works by other artists listed in the table were all published in the twenty-first century. Most artists tend to publish a series of comics (Sun Yuanwei and Tong Le, for example), since the *guoxue* subject is often regarded as a series of disciplines. Many other forms of *guoxue*-related materials (e.g. textbooks, video clips) have also been made into series. Despite this fact, there are still a few others who preferred adapting one piece of *guoxue* literature that drew most of their interest. For example, Zhou Chuncai, Wang Wenhua and Sana have only adapted *Confucius Analects*, an important piece believed to be the basis of *guoxue* knowledge. Regardless of their effort to promote and excite young readers' interest in this particular type of traditional Chinese knowledge, only a few of them are well-known in the current Chinese comics industry, judging from their reputation on major Chinese comic websites.

Previous discussions on *guoxue* comics

There is little literature primarily regarding to the study of *guoxue* comics, whether in English or Chinese. However, there are quite a number of essays on Cai Zhizhong's comics. As mentioned earlier, John A. Lent has written several papers complimenting the achievements of Cai and his skills in successfully depicting abstract *guoxue* concepts with sequential narrative. Wei has mentioned his influence on the education of traditional Chinese literature on Chinese high school students. Cai's impact on other countries besides China is also discussed, such as helping promote Confucianism in Singapore (Zhou, 2006). On the other hand, there are also criticisms. For example, Zhou Xian (2005) is sceptical about Cai's comics, arguing that comics have simplified the ancient philosophers' complex thoughts, and that the fixed images provided by the comics may restrict the reader's imagination and also preventing the reader from enjoying the poetic language of the original classical literature. Gong Tiantian (2014) discusses some historical inaccuracies in Cai's comic adaptation of *Shi Shuo Xin Yu* (世说新语), mentioning that the character's clothing, the items they are using and the architecture design in the comics are not accurate from the perspective of history.

There is a lack of literature in the area for studying more recent *guoxue* comics. This is expected as none of these new artists have made such a huge success as Cai. This is probably due to two reasons: firstly, Cai is the first acknowledged comic artist to have adapted *guoxue* into comics and his dominance in the field makes it more difficult for new artists making similar works to outstand; secondly, unlike Cai who was aiming his comics at the general audience, most recent works tend to aim at schoolchildren, serving as extra studying materials. This causes the reduction of readers and thus the decrease in significance. However, I believe it would be helpful to conduct a comparative analysis between Cai's work and more recent works. This analysis would not only fill in the gap of this research area, but also explore the differences in visualising abstract thoughts between an artist from the 1980s and artists from the new era.

Methodology and scope

I will be using visual research methodologies to analyse the selected comic works. Visual research is defined as 'study of images, forms and objects in both visual and material culture' (Muratovski, 2016: 158). In this case, the study subjects are the pan-

els in the pages of the comics. Since comics are graphical artworks created by artists, I will apply an analysis method specifically proposed for graphical arts: to deconstruct the visual work and uncover new artistic approaches (Noble, 2005). Additionally, Pauwels (2011) states several focus points of analysis in visual research: the depicted, the style and the form. As a summary, I will break down the comic pages into several aspects of visual construction regarding depiction, style and form: 1) layout of the page; 2) character designs; 3) graphical adaptation of textual contents through panels; 4) text and dialogues in the comic; 5) narrative; 6) drawing style. I will conduct a comparative analysis to accentuate the different styles that different artists work with.

Some of the comic works mentioned earlier have borrowed resources from other classical works, such as *Stratagems of the Warring States* (*Zhan Guo Ce*, 战国策, a series of texts on politics and warfare by multiple authors from different dynasties) and *Zizhi Tongjian* (资治通鉴, a chronicle published in 1084), to illustrate the concepts in the classical work they have adapted. For instance, Sun Yuanwei and Yangmei Yangguang's comic versions of *Confucius Analects* borrow stories and fables that are not part of *Confucius Analects* to explain the ideas embedded in Confucius's quotes. They do not directly visualise what is mentioned in the original text. Borrowing stories makes the creation of comics easier, since the original text is difficult to visualise due to its didactic and conceptual attributes. However, I am doubtful about this approach as it might confuse the reader and make them believe that those alternative stories actually come from the original literature. I also argue that this approach has gone beyond a discussion of fidelity and could raise questions on whether it can be considered as adaptation. Adaptation is defined as 'appropriation of a meaning from a prior text' (Andrew, 1984: 97). Although it involves adjusting, alternating and sometimes breaking away from the 'source text' (Minier, 2014: 16), I argue that the application of other source materials cannot be simply considered as 'breaking away'. I would not go further here as it is beyond the scope of this paper. On the other hand, Cai's and Wang Huan's comics depict exactly what is in the classical literature. In Cai's comic, for example, each panel corresponds to a phrase in the original text. Wang's comics also directly depict the source literature by creating scenes to convey the ideas clearer. The scenes in each panel are correspondent to the contents of the

original text. In the following paragraphs I will analyse and compare the comics of Cai and Wang, for that they have most successfully visualised the verbally-described concepts and thoughts without adopting stories from other sources.

To make the comparison more reliable, I chose the comics that depict the same piece of classical literature. I picked out an example quote from *Confucius Analects*:

> 弟子入则孝，出则弟，谨而信，泛爱众，而亲仁；行有余力，则以学文。
>
> *Youth should be filial at home and respectful to elders when outside. He should also be sincere and trustworthy, love all and befriend with the kind. When he has done all of the above and still has time remaining, he can pursue academic knowledge.*

We can see this is a homiletic quote that tells young people to behave well. No stories or narrative features of any sort can be found in this quote. This is what makes the visualisation challenging. I have selected two works from **Table 1**, one by Cai Zhizhong and one by Wang Huan. Both have adapted this quote into comics, and I will make some visual-oriented comparisons.

Cai's comic

Figure 1 is a page from a 2013 reprint version of Cai's *Confucius Analects* comic. As the comic artist most loyal to the original classical piece, Cai has adapted this quote phrase by phrase with his comic. Each panel depicts one or two virtues mentioned in the quote. There is a main character in the comic: a young, scholarly man dressed in traditional Han robes. Cai drew the character bowing to different types of people in the first three panels – an old man, probably his father, an elder scholar and a soldier respectively to show 'filial', 'respectful' and 'sincere and trustworthy'. The first panel uses a bookshelf and a pottery display rack as background to show that the character is 'at home', while the second panel illustrates houses and willow trees to show the character is 'outside'. In the fourth panel, the character Confucius appears and the main character seems to be listening to Confucius's words. This depiction is intended

Figure 1: A page from Cai's comic (Cai, 2013. Guangzhou Publishing House 2013).

to show 'befriend with the kind'. In the last panel, the main character is reading a book next to a bookshelf, showing that he is pursing 'academic knowledge'.

As a result of traditional Chinese book layout, the panels are to be read from the top right corner to the bottom left. Although the original quote is not shown in this page, Cai used the first phrase from the quote as the title at the beginning of the comic. The panels have been numbered, but the original comic has not done so. They were probably added by the editor to assist our reading. Cai's style of drawing

is clearly influenced by traditional Chinese paintings. He used simple but fluent, smooth lines to depict characters, and left out large areas of blank in each panel – both characteristics are often seen in traditional Chinese paintings.

Wang's comic

Figure 2 is a page from Wang's comic version of *Confucius Analects*. Wang used one panel for one virtue mentioned in the quote. He depicted different scenes in our real life as an approach to visualising the thoughts conveyed in the text. He also created a main character for the comic: a young boy in the contemporary era named Xiaohuan. In the first panel, Xiaohuan is patting his mother's back to help her relieve

Figure 2: A page from Wang's comic (Wang 2013. Reproduced with author's permission).

stress, a scene Wang believed to be representative for 'filial'. The second panel is Xiaohuan helping a young girl carrying heavy luggage outside a station. Although most modern Chinese interpretations of the text tend to interpret the second virtue as 'respectful to elders', Wang interpreted it as 'kind to siblings and friends'. The third panel is depicting Xiaohuan fulfilling his promise to play with his friend after finishing his homework to show 'sincere and trustworthy'. The last panel uses a scene of Xiaohuan helping a lost kid to tell readers to 'love all'. Wang did not create any panels for 'befriend with the kind' and 'pursue academic knowledge'.

Wang used a conventional comic form, namely the four-panel comic. The layout order of the panels is contemporary: from left to right, top to bottom. The original text is written on top of the panels, while the modern Chinese translation is underneath. The comic is coloured in monochrome. Wang's art is line-based, and the flow of the lines is illustrated in a contemporary vector cartoon style.

Both Cai and Wang have created a main character for the comic, but Cai designed a character from the ancient times while Wang designed a modern one. A character is believed to be one of the elements of a comic strip (Harvey, 1979). Cai's ancient Chinese character is more accordant with the settings of the original literature and this design makes more sense when the main character needs to appear together with Confucius, as most of the scenes in Cai's *Confucius Analects* comics have shown Confucius and his students being together. On the contrary, Wang did not depict scenes of Confucius teaching his students in his comics. He was more concerned with the ideology itself in *Confucius Analects* and was less worried about the historical settings. As a contemporary artist, he chose to use contemporary scenes with contemporary characters to convey Confucian thoughts. This would make it easier for his target audience – children – to understand those Confucian virtues, as they could refer the scenes to their daily lives.

Wang's comic is more story-like compared to Cai's. Cai's comic simply uses the main character's bowing to different people to represent virtues such as 'filial' and 'respectful'. This is also noticed by Wei (2001), stating that the bowing actions reflect the teaching of *li* (礼), meaning 'manners' or 'rite', which is the basic principle of Confucian thoughts. I argue that it would be difficult for the reader to understand

the meaning behind the character's action if the pictures had not come together with the text. Compared to Cai, Wang used more specific stories. Each panel is an independent story and the stories were made very simple for the reader to clearly understand. It is interesting that Cai has depicted almost everything mentioned in the quote but Wang has omitted the last part about pursuing academic knowledge. This is probably because Wang needed to keep his comics four-panelled, while Cai did not make himself any rules on the number of panels, thus Wang ended up depicting the first four virtues mentioned in the quote.

Cai has also shown his intention of creating a traditional Chinese atmosphere in his comics by adapting traditional painting aesthetics. Wang did not consider that as essential and used a modern cartoon style. I would claim that Cai's unique art style is a key to his success. By combining traditional painting techniques with modern comic cartooning methods, Cai made his works distinguishable in the foreign market, despite the Chinese-culture-based content of the comics. Wang, however, cared little about making his comics with traditional Chinese aesthetics, just like that he was less concerned with historical settings. He focused on depicting the thoughts, and this could be done with his contemporary drawing style without adapting traditional painting forms.

According to Robert C. Harvey, one element of the comic medium is 'a narrative…told by a sequence of pictures' (Harvey, 1979: 641). One may argue that neither Cai's nor Wang's comic has sequential connections between panels, as each panel is depicting an independent factor, thus making them less comic-like. This is to some extent true, but as *guoxue* comics, this is inevitable as long as the comic is depicting didactic contents such as the example quote. If the original text is not a story, there is no consecutiveness necessary. Of course, the artist can make up stories to link the contents in the quote in a sequential structure, but the story could turn out to be long and redundant. My view here is that being sequential does not necessarily mean following the flow of a certain story and illustrating the flow with sequential panels. For example, Cai's panels may seem independent among each other, but if viewed from the elements in the panels, they can be seen as sequential. Most of the panels contain similar elements: the main character, a person he is bowing to and a background. Except for the main character, the other elements change from panel

to panel, creating a 'pictorial sequence'. The same goes for Wang's work – each panel contains the main character Xiaohuan, a person he is interacting with and a background setting. The elements change according to the different ideas they visualise, also building up a 'pictorial sequence'. To summarise, the panels were made sequential and linked together by the elements in the pictures, even though each different scene depicted is, to some extent, discrete.

Summary: The visualisation of abstract concepts as a distinctive feature of *guoxue* comics

Through the discussions above, I will now summarise the main features of concept-depicting *guoxue* comics.

Firstly, the comic artists tend to create scenes to convey the abstract thoughts, since they could not be directly visualised. Each scene tells a story that helps the reader understand a philosophical or cultural concept from a piece of classical literature. When there is not a clear story in the panel, the artist could use symbolic graphics, like Cai did in his comics, to express the thoughts and concepts. Secondly, a character is often created, though the original classical text does not necessarily consist of a specific character. However, creating a character helps the artist build up the scenes and stories, and makes the comic more comic-like. Thirdly, *guoxue* comics could come in very different styles depending on what the artist wants to emphasise. The comic could be a salute to traditional Chinese culture, like Cai's works, or it could be modern-art styled like Wang's works, as long as the traditional thoughts have been well-communicated. Lastly, the sequential feature of these *guoxue* comics lies mainly in the pictorial, since the literature they adapt are often lists of individual ideas and hardly have any consistency. Therefore, the artists adapt sequence to the pictures rather than working on the connection between scenes. As a result, I hope this research has contributed to the further interpretation of *guoxue* comics and inspire further research on this topic.

Editorial Note

This article is part of the Creating Comics, Creative Comics Special Collection, edited by Brian Fagence (University of South Wales), Geraint D'Arcy (University of South Wales) and Ernesto Priego (City, University of London). This article extends the

symposium paper '*Guoxue* Comics: Visualising Philosophical Concepts and Cultural Values Through Sequential Narrative' presented as part of the Creating Comics Creative Comics Symposium at USW, Cardiff in 2018. Any third-party images have been fully attributed and have been included in this article as scholarly references for educational purposes under Educational Fair Use/Dealing only.

Acknowledgements

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References

Andrew, D. 1984. *Concepts in film theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cai, Z. 2013. *Cai Zhizhong Dian Cang Guoxue Manhua*. Guangzhou: Guangzhou Publishing House.

Dirlik, A. 2011. 'Guoxue/National Learning in the Age of Global Modernity'. *China Perspectives*, 2011(2011/1): 90–91. Available at: http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/5371.

Gong, T. 2014. 'Cong Manhua Shi Shuo Xin Yu Kan Guoxue De Ji Cheng Yu Fa Zhan'. In *Zhongguo Chuang Yi She Ji Nian Jian Lun Wen Ji 2013*, pp. 99–102.

Harvey, RC. 1979. 'The Aesthetics of the Comic Strip'. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 12(4): 640–652. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1979.1204_640.x

Lent, JA. 1987. 'Comics in East Asian Countries: A Contemporary Survey'. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 29(1): 185–198. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1995.2901_185.x

Lent, JA. 2009. 'Comics and Philosophy'. *Philosophy Now*, 73: 18. Available at: https://www.pdcnet.org/pdc/bvdb.nsf/purchase?openform&fp=philnow&id=philnow_2009_0073_0000_0018_0018.

Liu, D. 2011. 'National learning (Guoxue): Six perspectives and six definitions'. *China Perspectives*, 2011(2011/1): 46–54. Available at: http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/5380.

Makeham, J. 2011. 'The Revival of Guoxue'. *China Perspectives*, 2011(2011/1): 14–21. Available at: http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/5372.

Minier, M. 2014. 'Definitions, Dyads, Triads and Other Points of Connection in Translation and Adaptation Discourse'. In Krebs, K (ed.), *Translation and adaptation in theatre and film*. Oxon: Routledge, pp. 13–35.

Muratovski, G. 2016. *Research for designers: A guide to methods and practice*. London: SAGE.

Noble, I. 2005. *Visual research: an introduction to research methodologies in graphic design*. Lausanne: AVA Publishing SA.

Pauwels, L. 2011. 'An Intergrated Conceptual Framework for Visual Social Research'. In Margolis, E and Paulwels, L (eds.), *The SAGE handbook of visual research methods*. London: SAGE, pp. 3–23. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446268278.n1

Wei, S. 2001. 'Redrawing the Past: Modern Presentation of Ancient Chinese Philosophy in the Cartoons of Tsai Chih-chung'. In Lent, JA (ed.), *Illustrating Asia: Comics, humor magazines, and picture books*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 153–170.

Xie, S. 2011. 'Guoxue Re and the Ambiguity of Chinese Modernity'. *China Perspectives*, 2011(2011/1): 39–45. Available at: http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/5378.

YouTube. 2010. *Mengzi shuo Mencius Book 1a, YouTube*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YP6FAQGfDPI&list=PLFAED178D735CC118 (Accessed: 6 June 2019).

Zhou, X. 2005. '"Du Tu Shi Dai" De Tu Wen "Zhan Zheng"'. *Wen Xue Ping Lun*, 6: 136–144.

Zhou, Z. 2006. 'Cartoon as A Mean for the Spreading of Confucianism in Singapore'. *Overseas Chinese History Studies*, 1: 55–61.