

# Recontextualizing Literary Classics With Modernity: A Social Semiotic Analysis of a Comic Adaptation of *Journey to the West*

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## Abstract

A large number of literary classics have been transformed into comic works with varied adaptation strategies. As a typical example, Cai Zhizhong's comic adaptation of *Journey to the West* has made successful attempts in rewriting the story with modern elements that carry socio-cultural values. Under the general theoretical frameworks of social semiotics, this article seeks to explain what and how these elements are presented and explore how such elements are infused with values that affiliate people of different communities and provoke thoughts on cultural diversity and global issues. It is found that (a) modern elements have been presented with particular ideational, interpersonal, and textual semiotic options and (b) different values have been implanted into these elements through bondicons, iconization, and visual attitudes.

## Keywords

*Journey to the West*, comic adaptation, social semiotics, modernity, value

## Introduction

Many literary classics have been adapted into comic works over the past few decades, because comics have advantages in conveying ideas through multiple semiotic resources. In the meanwhile, adaptation strategies have undergone changes from faithfulness to creative rewriting in history (c.f. Jones, 2017). The classics that have been adapted repeatedly over the years tend to be reinterpreted by the subsequent adapters. For example, the comic versions of Shakespeare have been incorporated with personal thoughts of the comic author (Perret, 2004). The works of Aristophanes, a famous playwright of ancient Athens, have been recreated with verbal humor and visible feminism (Asimakoulas, 2016). *Journey to the West*, known as the leading one of the “four famous novels” in China, has witnessed a similar process. It has been adapted into over 400 versions of picture books in the modern society (Wang, 2006). One of the most popular versions of the adaptations is the comic work by Cai Zhizhong (hereafter Cai), or Tsai Chih-chung, one of the most famous cartoonists in China. His works of comic adaptation have been translated into over 20 languages and published in more than 49 countries worldwide, with sales reaching over 40 million copies (Bi & Zhu, 2011). The most prominent feature of his comic work adapted from *Journey to the West* is that it recontextualizes the ancient world with modernity through adding a wide variety of modern elements, such as atomic bombs, cigarettes, and rockets, thus presenting to the readers a vivid

world that bridges the past and the present. As will be shown below, the adapted comic story plays two roles through multimodal devices (images, call-outs, nonverbal cues, etc.). One is to entertain the readers with fun, magical characters and stories, and the other is to offer them an opportunity to reflect on both sides of a coin surrounding the modernity.

However, there has been insufficient scholarly attention to Cai's comic adaptation. Not until very recently, did researchers begin to show interests in Cai's adaptation of Chinese classics. Yu (2019), for instance, focuses on how the comic presents a different story from the accompanying text, a phenomenon called semiotic dissonance. She concludes that there is significant extension and treason against the original work. However, the creative aspects of the adaption have not been sufficiently investigated through a semiotic lens. Therefore, this article attempts to explore how Cai transformed the literary classics of *Journey to the West* with modern elements, using the analytical frameworks offered in social semiotics. It is hoped that the study will explain the success of Cai's comic adaptation and how classics could be

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**Table 1.** Continuum of Adaptation Strategies.

Literature	Fidelity -----> Creativity		
Wagner (1975)	Transposition	Commentary	Analogy
Andrew (1984)	Transformation	Borrowing	Intersecting
Roche et al. (2018)	Not adapted	Multifaceted	Mixed with adaptations and original creation
Hutcheon (2006)	Transposition	Intertextual engagement	Appropriation
Stam (2000)	Transposition		Transformation

restructured into a popular art. More importantly, the study will also demonstrate the intricate and peculiar meaning-making behaviors of comic production and adaptation in general. First, we will examine what and how many modern elements are added in the multimodal storytelling. Then, we will conduct a semiotic analysis on how these elements are presented. Finally, we will discuss how they are infused with various values.

## Research on Comic Adaptation

Research on comic adaptation is rooted in adaptation studies. In general, adaptation studies stem from concerns on literary adaptation to film. In this domain, scholars typically discuss the adaptation mechanism with regards to fidelity (e.g., Andrew, 1984; Hutcheon, 2006; Vanderbeke, 2010; Wagner, 1975). Various adaptation strategies can be viewed in a continuum between fidelity and creativity, as shown in Table 1.

Even with the natural bond between comics and adaptation (Roche et al., 2018, p. 7), comic adaptation has not been investigated until the recent years. Overall, there are two approaches in comic adaptation research: (a) product-orientated approach and (b) process-orientated approach.

Product-oriented approach mainly concerns the advantage in meaning-making in the comic medium and looks into how comic adapters are able to make use of a range of semiotic resources such as dialogue balloons, captions, and panels. Many studies show that comic has its advantages in constructing identities (e.g., Asimakoulas, 2016; Beineke, 2011; Sabeti, 2014; Vanderbeke, 2010). For example, Beineke (2011, pp. 33–34) finds that comic adaptation can draw readers' attention to various images by visualizing appearance, action, behavior and thoughts. Therefore, comics show the mental and metaphysical worlds in the literary classics (Beineke, 2011, p. 23–25; Groensteen, 2007, p. 124). Moreover, one of the important roles of comics is to leave room for imagination in the gutter (Goggin & Hassler-Forest, 2010; McCloud, 1993).

Process-oriented approach primarily deals with the narrative transformation from the original to the comic adaptation. This approach is often referred to as “comparative narratology.” Studies show that adapters might retain the narrative structure in the original text with personal interpretation (e.g., Gelly, 2018; Labarre, 2017) or playful engagement

(Schlensag, 2015, p. 169). Jones (2017) analyzes the comic adaptations of many literary classics in the western countries and concludes that their adaptation strategies experience three stages in history, namely, interpretive stage, hybrid stage, and faithful stage. He believes that fidelity is the key regardless of the type of adaptation strategy adopted. Asimakoulas (2016) examines how Aristophanes are adapted into comics and identifies that the process of humor transformation involves creative adaptations such as language simplification and the addition of explanatory texts and the removal of erotic expressions and traces of feminism. Therefore, it can be seen that comic adaptation is influenced by the type of the source text.

Some researchers also attempt to study the adaptation mechanism from the socio-cultural perspective. For example, Goldstein (2014) explores the comic adaptation of 911 reports and proposes that the adaptation strategy adopted is likely to be influenced by the news reporting norm as a result of its genre as picture-based news report. Therefore, the whole adaptation is based on facts retrieved from the social environment in an attempt to seek the truth especially the one that raises the most controversy. Manzar & Aravind (2016) study the comics adapted from a movie named ‘Scholay 1975’ and identifies masculine identity and onscreen aggression as a main theme preserved in the graphic novel. Maestre-Brotons (2016) examines a series of adaptations from the Spanish Civil War, with particular notes that the comic adaptation of *1936: la Batalla de Madrid* appropriates the history by adapting the war into one fought among superheroes. The adaptations reconstruct the identity and motives of the warriors to turn the story into a “depoliticized” literary fiction. Wright (2018) studies the South African superhero comic strip *Kwezi* which features the collision of different black identities, predatory, transformative and ethnic, forming a multiplicity of postmodern South African blackness.

Social semiotics has been widely adopted as the theoretical framework for analyses of picture books (Guijarro & Sanz, 2008; Guijorro, 2014; Painter et al., 2013; Tian, 2010; Unsworth, 2015) and comics (Bateman et al., 2017; Veloso, 2015; Yang & Webster, 2015). However, it is not until very recently that comic adaptation starts to attract attention from semiotic scholars. For instance, Yu (2019) looks into Cai's work of *Journey to the West* and elaborates on the dissonance in different processes between the verbal narrative and comic strip. She concludes that the dissonance bears

contextual considerations of being simultaneously faithful to the original and understandable to the modern readers. Chen & Zhong (forthcoming) analyze how Cai adapted *Three Hundred Tang Poems* into comics and concludes that various process types have been transformed intricately to display the poetic world.

In a nutshell, the research on comic adaptation has been on the rise only in the recent few years, with fruitful achievement that enhances our understanding on the underlying mechanism of comic adaptation. However, there are also evident limitations. First, comic adaptations have not been fully investigated with a semiotic approach. A semiotic perspective would be beneficial to this field because (a) semiotic theories could offer insight on the particular adaptation techniques, and (b) a close look at the micro deployments of various semiotic resources would deepen our understanding of particular adaptation strategies. Furthermore, most of the research centers on the discourse in the classic literature in the West with very few studies on Chinese classic comics. Our data will show the peculiarities of comic adaptation in Chinese context. Therefore, this article contributes to the existing line of research by offering insight on how literary classics can be reconstructed in the Chinese context via social semiotic analysis. As will be shown shortly, the comic work of *Journey to the West* is featured with a range of modern elements and particular semiotic patterns that help scaffold such modernity.

## Theoretical Framework and Methodology

### Theoretical Framework

One of the earliest attempts in unraveling the semantic patterns of comic production was McCloud (1993), who laid the foundation for our understanding of the productive techniques of comic works. Another important line of research has been pursued through the cognitive lens (e.g., Cohn, 2013; Cohn et al., 2017), which throws light on the narrative structure of comic sequences and how it is processed by human brains. These studies have been complemented by those from the perspective of social semiotics, which mainly draws from systemic functional linguistics and takes social context into account (e.g., Bateman et al., 2017; Chen, 2017; Yu, 2019).

To reveal the intricate semiotic choices of comic adaptation, this article uses the analytical frameworks offered in social semiotics (c.f. Halliday, 1978; Jewitt et al., 2016), which has been applied to the research on images (e.g., Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Painter et al., 2013). The assumption is that semiotic meanings can be classified into ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning and textual meaning. The ideational function helps human beings to communicate and reflect on the physical and abstract world. The interpersonal function maintains interpersonal relationship by enabling

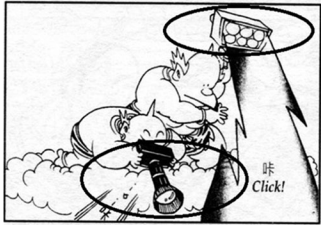



people to act upon each other or express their attitude. The textual function provides resources to enable the ideational and interpersonal meanings to hang together so that it becomes a comprehensible text/discourse. The analysis of comics in this article is based on the visual grammar proposed by Painter et al. (2013). In their framework, ideational meaning is described in terms of participants, processes, circumstances, and their inter-relations. Interpersonal meaning is analyzed through choices in focalization, pathos, ambience, and graduation. Textual meaning is observed in terms of layout, framing, and focus. All these terms will be explained throughout our analyses in due course.

To analyze how modern elements are charged with various values, we adopt the framework of appraisal theory which belongs to the interpersonal line of meaning (Economou, 2009; Martin & White, 2005). Appraisal theory offers an analytical framework for categorizing semiotic options for expressing attitudes, engagements, and extents. More precisely, the system of appraisal is divided into three sub-systems, engagement, attitude, and graduation. This study will use the system of attitude in particular. The systems of engagement and graduation are not chosen because they are less relevant to the value of modernity we aim to reveal in this study. The attitude system comprises of three strains of values of affect, judgment, and appreciation. Affect indicates the expression of people's emotions or feelings. Judgment refers to ethical evaluation of people's behavior or character while appreciation concerns that of things, whether material, abstract, or semiotic. The framework could be used to analyze images (as shown in Economou, 2009).

### Methodology and Data

Under the theoretical frameworks mentioned above, we are able to code different semiotic options in the images and conduct qualitative analysis to reveal how the various semiotic resources are utilized to make meaning. There are altogether 316 pages in Cai's *Journey to the West*, with each page consisting of two comic strips and most strips made up of four comic panels (Cai, 2006). This is known also a particular format named *Yokoma manga*. Before coding, we have scanned the whole comic book into pdf format and input the images into an image analysis software named UAM Image Tool, which is accessible through the webpage: <http://www.wagsoft.com/ImageTool/>. As our initial observation shows that the comic version of *Journey to The West* is fulfilled with prominent modern elements (e.g., atomic bombs, cigarettes, factories, etc.), we have designed a set of criteria for identifying and calculating modern elements from the perspective of ideational function. The ideational function is achieved mainly through a system of semiotic options called transitivity. The system includes participant, action, location, manner and verbiage (Painter et al., 2013). With such a system, it is possible to code the modern elements in the book as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Coding Criteria of Modern Elements in Terms of Ideational Function.

Modern elements	Coding criteria	Examples
Participant	The first appearance of a person with modern clothing or item used in a modern context is counted as one while reappearance of the same person or item is neglected. Group participant, that is, participant of the same type, is recognized as a whole and therefore only counted as one.	 <p>Sample 1 One camera and one flashlight are counted as two participants. Photo taking is counted as one action.</p>
Action	A person or an item with a clear vector that is only possible in the modern context is counted as one. Group action, that is, action of the same type, is recognized as a whole and therefore only counted as one.	 <p>Sample 2 Boxing gloves (group) are counted as one participant. A number of punches (group) are counted as one action.</p>
Location	The shift of location to the modern world is counted as one.	 <p>Sample 3 Buildings (group) are counted as one location. The statue of liberty and the cruise are recognized as two participants.</p>
Manner	This forms an “either . . . or . . .” relationship with “action.” If there is no clear vector, but the distance or state between participants implies the implantation of the modern context, it is counted as one.	 <p>Sample 4 Cups (Group) are recognized as one participant. Drinking wine with cups of modern design without clear vector is counted as one manner.</p>

(continued)



Table 2. (continued)


Modern elements	Coding criteria	Examples
Verbiage	A complete dialogue with modern languages or a billboard. It should be noted that a billboard is counted as one but reappearance of the same billboard is ignored.	
Sample 5 A billboard with modern languages is counted as one verbiage.		

Table 3. Semiotic Options in Language and Image According to Three Metafunctions.

Metafunction	Image in picture books Painter et al. (2013)
Ideational meaning	Participant Process Inter-event Circumstance Inter-circumstance
Interpersonal meaning	Focalization Pathos and affect Ambience Graduation
Textual meaning	Layout Framing Focus

In addition, we conduct qualitative analysis on the semiotic choices made to recontextualize literary classics with modernity through three strains of functions, ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning according to the classification proposed by Painter et al. (2013), as outlined in Table 3. To analyze how these modern elements are infused with modern values, we adopt the framework of appraisal theory and use Martin’s (2010) notions of bondicons and iconization and Economou’s (2009) visual attitudes.

Findings

Modern Elements in Comic Adaptation

According to the statistical findings in Table 4, verbiage takes up the largest percentage among the five types of semiotic elements (40.99%), closely followed by participant (37.42%). Action, as the only process type that is relevant to our study, represents 7.92%, slightly higher than

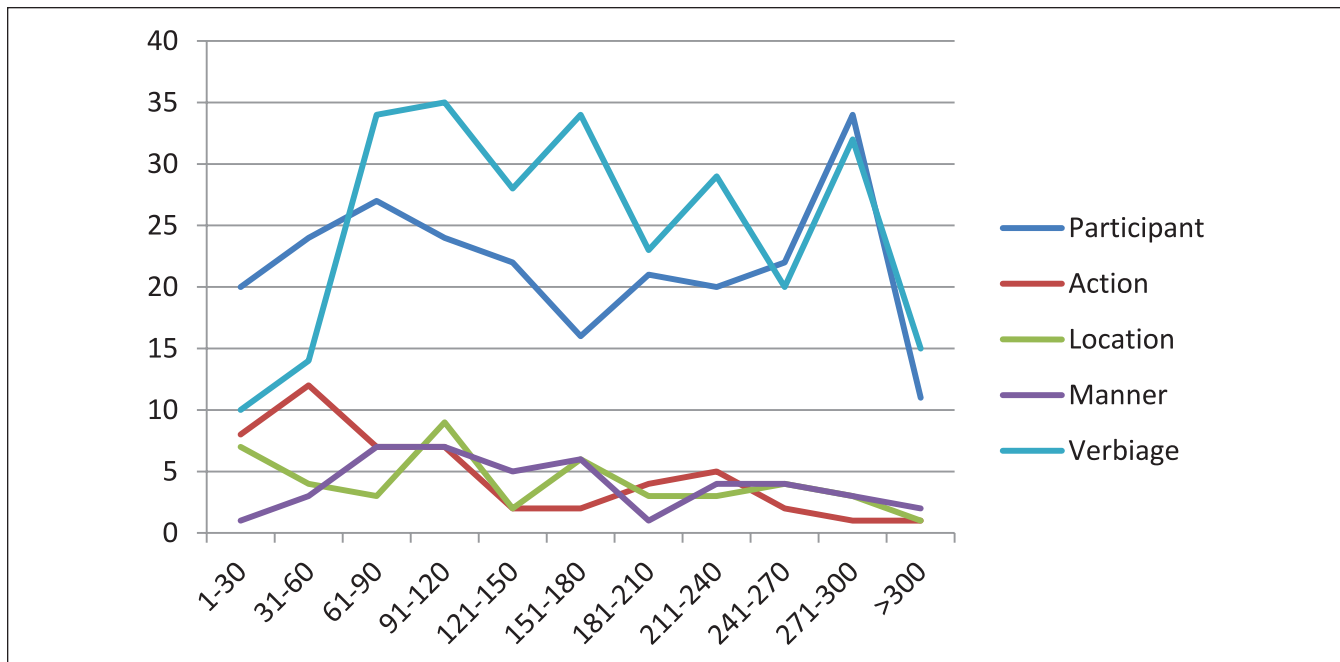
Table 4. Total Number and Percentage of Modern Elements.

Element	Participant	Action	Location	Manner	Verbiage
Number	241	51	45	43	264
%	37.42	7.92	6.99	6.68	40.99

the remaining two of location and manner, which assumes 6.99% and 6.68%, respectively. Therefore, the proportions of the two most important elements are alike while those of the rest are also similar. Figure 1 reveals that the dominant two types of modern elements, participant and verbiage have been playing a leading role across all the pages, with verbiage outnumbering the others. The other three, action, location, and manner, show a declining trend, despite that action has a more significant number in the first 90 pages. The reason why participant and verbiage remain on the top is that characters in the modern context are often coupled with dialogue balloons and objects marked with modern languages in the form of bulletins. Action, as a result of the nature of the comics, has a minor advantage displaying modern elements since actions may mostly remain consistent in modern and ancient times. The averaged use of action, location and manner shows that the author of the comic books is able to skillfully leverage multiple modes of modern semiotic elements to recontextualize literary classics in the adapted graphic world.

Semiotic Resources That Recontextualize Literary Classics With Modernity

From the quantitative analysis above, we could see that the journey has been placed in a modern context represented by five elements in transitivity, among which participant and verbiage are the two most prominent categories. This section is an attempt to scrutinize how various semiotic resources are deployed to manifest those modern elements. We will talk about the resources in terms of three semiotic functions,



**Figure 1.** Distribution of modern elements (per 30 pages).

namely, ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning and textual meaning, following Painter et al.'s (2013) model.

**Ideational meaning.** Ideational meanings such as Participant, Process and Circumstance are the major visual resources used by the adapter to reconstruct the classic world. Here we would like to mention three major semiotic options, namely, “attribution,” “status,” and “relocate.” Through “attribution,” the adapter would depict the participant with peculiar features such as exotic garments or symbolic attributes. The two panels below demonstrate how these resources are utilized. The strips that they are in talk about how Monkey King deals with a rat demon. In the left panel, the rat demon suddenly turns into Mickey Mouse, a mouse that represents the American culture. In the right panel, Monkey King strikes back by turning into a sexy lady. The conversation shows that Monkey King intends to humiliate the rat demon with “large measurement.” Thus,

garments and symbolic attributes are both at work in character depiction. Processes of fighting, talking, and behavioral actions are used to symbolize the relative status of various cultural values. In other words, with these intricate uses of participants and processes, the duel between the two characters is turned into a contrast between Chinese and American values, in which the American value tends to take the advantageous side. It reveals how the American aesthetics and sense of beauty and sex have influenced Chinese traditional values in modern times. Another message, which might be hidden in the Mickey Mouse and the Monkey King is that the two characters may also symbolize the intercultural interaction between America and China. Aside from being receptive to the former, the latter has shown responsiveness and who-dares-win spirit in the competition between the two superpowers. The traditional Chinese values and norms seem to be depicted as fluid and responsive to new changes.

Sample 6



The second semiotic choice that should be noticed is “status.” “Status,” according to Painter et al. (2013, p. 65), refers to the moving in or out of the character in relations to the background setting. What is special in our data is that the character does not move out, but simply transforms itself from the background element. This often generates some kind of illogical playful effect. See Sample 7. When the protagonists reach the Mountain of Flames, the volcano serves as the background in the first panel. In the second panel, the background becomes the object of observation. In the third and fourth panels, the volcano turn into a man having a cigarette with the mark MARBLE, an American brand. Sample 7 indicates that the two were surprised to find the smoker enjoying smoking American cigarettes, a fashion of the crazy rich to use international brands and show off their wealth/brighten their face at the expense of the others. Furthermore,

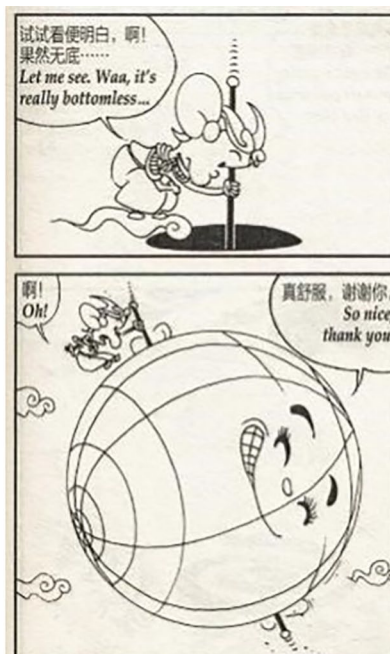
the two were shocked by the heavy air pollution from the smoke. Thus, the genuine theme is mocking the smoker’s preference for American cigarettes without any concern that the air pollution can do harm to others.

In Sample 8, Monkey King comes to the entrance of the bottomless pit. However, when he probes the pit with his cudgel, the whole circumstance is zoomed out and the hole becomes the planet earth depicted in a personified manner. This is a play of geographical science here: if the pit were bottomless, Monkey King would certainly have reached the other side of the planet, thus ridiculing the concept of “bottomless pit.” More interestingly, the action of probing is reconstructed as earpick, and the earth gives a verbal “thank you” to Monkey King. This type of circumstance-participant shift brings the audience into a world of imagination and unexpectedness.

Sample 7



Sample 8



The third most prominent semiotic resource is the use of “relocate,” namely, setting shifts to new location from the previous image. The basic strategy is that the story would suddenly be replaced in a new context that is often featured with modernity. Consider Sample 9 below. When the four characters travel to a place surrounded by smoke indicating the Mountain of Flames, the setting is suddenly shifted to the world of modern industry. The black smoke represents the modern global issue of pollution. Another case in point

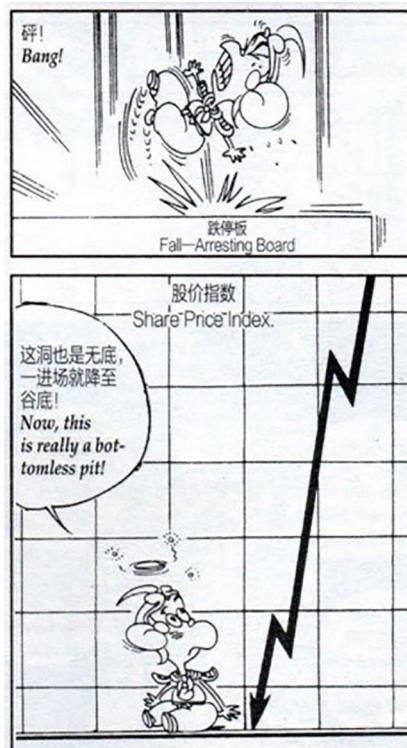
is Sample 10. The Monkey King jumps into a bottomless pit (to save his Master). However, the pit leads the Monkey to a location of the “Share Price Index”. Through “relocate,” the adapter makes an analogy between the bottomless pit and the share market, alluding to the fact that people keep losing money in the market without limit. In this way, it seems that the ancient world is reconstructed into one with a touch of anti-utopia, a satire of the modern technology.



Sample 9



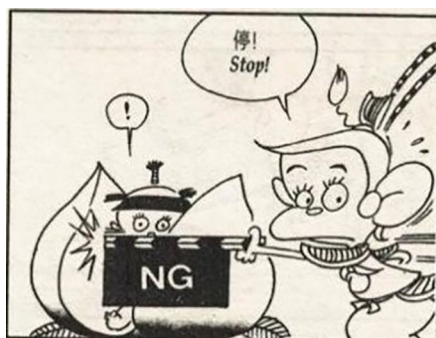
Sample 10



**Interpersonal meaning.** Interpersonal meaning also plays a crucial role in representing modernity. The first semiotic option that should be mentioned here is “contact,” one of the options for “focalization.” With the choice of contact, the adapter either portrays the character as facing the reader directly or turning head toward the reader, labeled as “direct” and “invited” (Painter et al.’s, 2013, p. 29). Two samples are offered here to illustrate how direct and invited contacts are used to put in elements of the modern world. In Sample 11, when the Monkey King cuts open the peach, a character with Japanese attributes occurs. However, the Monkey King suddenly takes on the role of a film director and asks to stop the

performance, while looking directly into the reader. This semiotic choice creates a direct connection to the real world, telling the reader that the element here comes from “your” world. The effort to engage the reader into the comic narrative is more apparent in Sample 12, in which the Buddha is going to ground Monkey King under a mountain for 500 years. Strikingly, Monkey King and the Buddha turn their heads toward the reader asking whether the reader can wait. The semiotic option of “invited” becomes an invitation in real sense, trying to synchronize the time of the reader’s world with the narrative time. In this way, the comic creates an effect that the modern elements are pertinent to our world today.

Sample 11



Sample 12

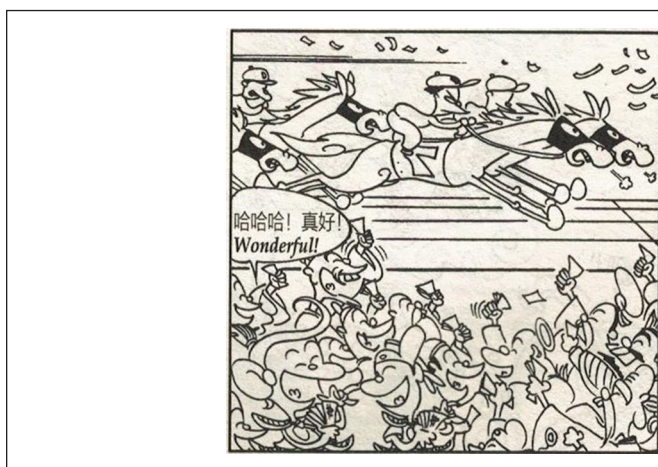




Another important interpersonal semiotic option is “quantification,” which could be further divided into number, mass/amount and extent. Quantification options are often used to support the construction of contemporary scenario. Consider Sample 13. The Monkey King, who is in charge of keeping horses, tries to make the job more interesting. Then he arranges a horse race that has drawn a great number of people. The large number indicates the popularity of horse race in modern times evoking reader’s resonance on this gambling event. Similarly, in Sample 14, the emperor asks to hold a selection to pick a scholar for the journey to the West. However, the West, originally referred to as somewhere in India, is now reinterpreted as the West today. Thus, the journey to the west becomes a craze for

studying overseas in the renowned universities such as Yale and Harvard in the West. A large group of people is depicted to signify such craze, which echoes the Chinese attitudes toward the West today. Sample 15 does this through extent down-scaling, which means the item is portrayed as occupying a small amount of space. In this story, Monkey King intends to transform smaller to fight with a large-sized immortal. When the immortal questions the use of small size, Monkey King calls out the Aids virus, which would certainly provoke a certain response in the reader toward the fear of the immortal. The three samples clearly show that the adapter is adept in utilizing both up-scale and down-scale of “quantification” to bring in modern elements into the novel.

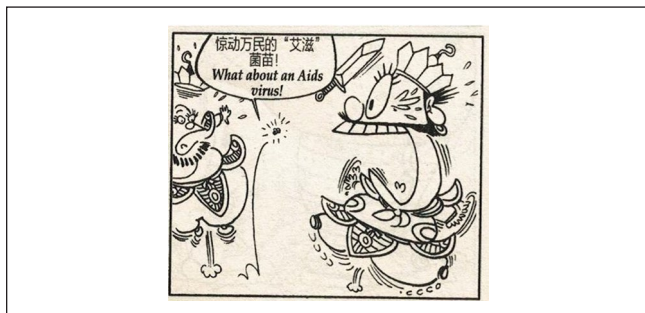
Sample 13



Sample 14



Sample 15



**Textual meaning.** As mentioned above, the comic in question is drawn in the *Yonkoma* format that consists of four cells of equal size from top to bottom. In this format, each image is bound with a frame. It is worth noting that, in this comic adaptation, even the frame has also been used to establish a link to the contemporary world. First, it seems that the adapter metaphorically regards the frame as a line between the semiotic world and the real world. We could often find the character in the image breaking the edge, a semiotic option called “breaching.” We also notice that in a few cases the adapter would even come to talk with the characters

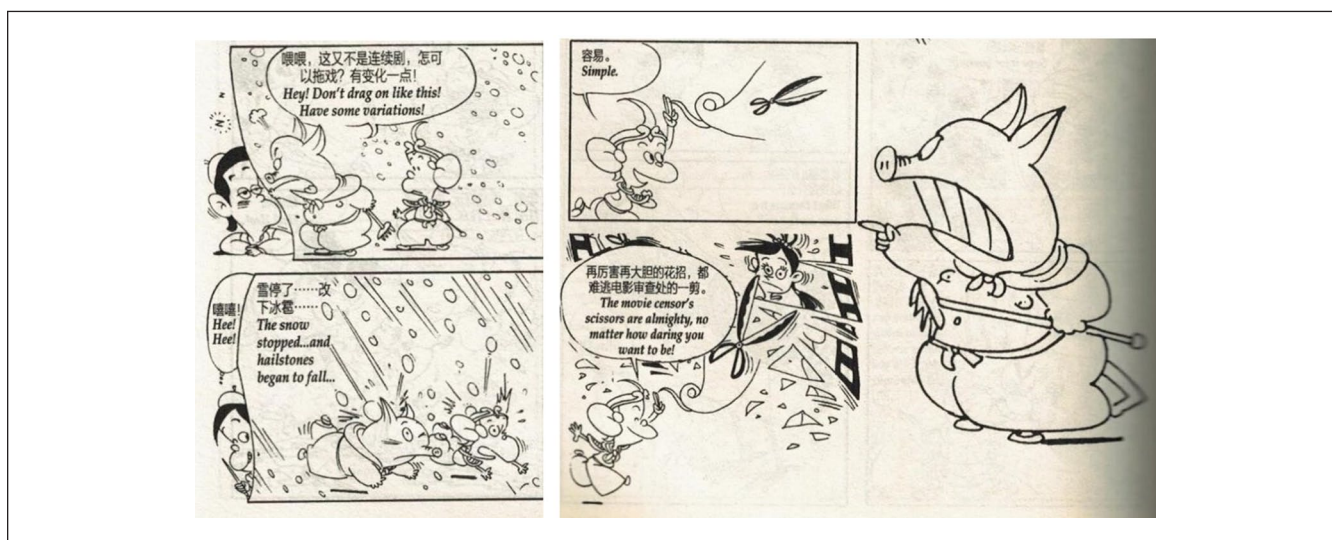
crossing the frame. Consider Sample 16. The story begins with Monkey King and Bajie (The Pig) facing a snow. However, the first three panels all depict the snow without variations. Suddenly, Bajie lifts up the frame and complains to the author on the dull storyline. In the last panel, the author changes the snow into a hailstorm and laughs behind the frame. This semiotic arrangement could be considered as a way to present the adapter’s attitudes toward the adaptation. Through this way, an interaction has been made between the comic world, the author’s world and the reader’s world. This is one particular way of generating modernity in the comic world. In some other cases, the frame even becomes an experiential element that could be taken advantage of by the protagonists to tackle the demons. In Sample 17, Monkey King summons a pair of scissors to cut out all the demons in the form of beauties. He claims that the weapon is the movie censor’s scissors, alluding to the censorship system in the reader’s world. It is interesting to note that the Pig, who is well known as a lecherous character in the novel, is outraged at this magic. We believe it is also an allusion to some people’s complaints toward the censorship system today in China. We could see several semiotic options of framing at work here. First, the last panel becomes unbound, leaving

the participants in the white space background. Second, the frame of the third panel becomes experiential frames of a film in the last panel. The magic here represents a semiotic transformation from textual function into ideational function. That means an experiential frame that serves textual function now has become an experiential element of a film. Third, the whole page is set in a polarized manner. That is, the right side of the page is left empty to give way for the

Pig to stand outside of the story to express his feeling. In this way, the Pig could either be considered as part of the story or a symbol of how the reader feels about the censorship system in reality. These cases show that the adapter is highly capable of using textual semiotic resources to recontextualize the ancient world, through metadiscourse construction and playful conversion of experiential and textual meaning.

Sample 16

Sample 17



## Infusing Modern Elements With Values

Comics have come to serve as an important way to connect traditional and modern values (c.f. Maestre-Brotons, 2016; Wright, 2018). In our case, the classic story has been renovated with modern values. From the semiotic perspective, the values have been implanted mainly through three semiotic deployments: (a) bondicons, (b) iconization, and (c) visual attitude.

Martin (2004) first proposes the term bonding for the description of how people are aligned to form a community through shared values toward certain experiences. Generally speaking, bonding is the infusion of value (interpersonal meaning) into activities or things (ideational meaning). The activities or things that have been coupled with specific values are called bonding icon, or bondicon (e.g., Stenglin, 2009). Tann (2013) considers such kind of elements as “oracle”. Cai’s adaptation is dotted with many bondicons including people, things and activities. They show cultures of many countries and regions such as China, Northern Europe, Arab, America, and Japan. Table 5 shows the distribution of these elements by counting the number of panels involving such elements. People are often used as the bondicon. For example, Chinese culture

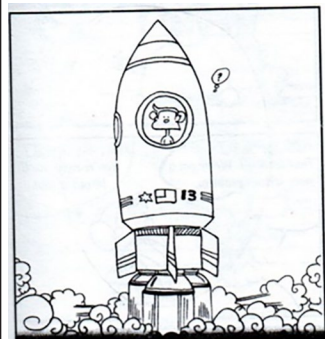
**Table 5.** National Cultures in the Modern Context.

Types	No. of panels	%
Chinese	9	16.07
Islamic	2	3.57
North European	2	3.57
Arabian	1	1.79
American	39	69.64
Japanese	3	5.36

is represented by Bruce Li and Jacky Chan, two well-known Chinese Kongfu stars, each positioned either with their iconic weapon or moves. As illustrated in Sample 18, American culture is symbolized by the participant Apolo 13 as Monkey King is given a ticket to go up to the moon. Most interestingly, there are a few actions that could also be considered as important bondicons. For example, Monkey King does a Kungfu movement called 18 subduing dragon palms [降龙十八掌], which is widely known to Chinese people (see Sample 19). Sample 20 is another case in point. The Pig tries to hide himself among a crowd of wrestlers competing on sumo, which would affiliate people in favor of Japanese culture.



Sample 18



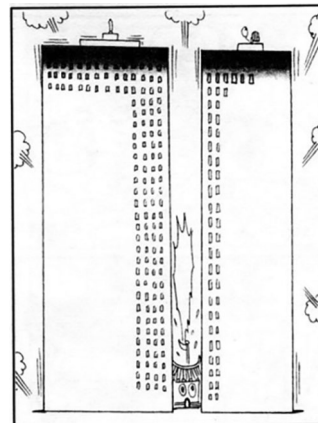
Sample 19



Sample 20



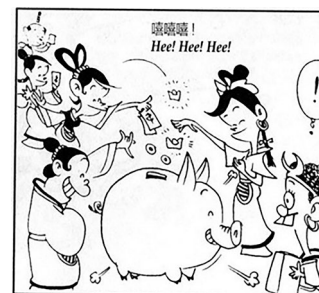
Sample 21



Sample 22



Sample 23



Sample 24



Sample 25



Iconization refers to the process of instantiation whereby ideational meaning is discharged and interpersonal meaning charged (Martin, 2010, p. 21). With this strategy, the items would be portrayed as something clearly not belonging to the reality and thus bringing the symbolic meanings to readers' consciousness. Sample 25 is a good case in point. In this image, the Great Wall has been built with bricks of Mahjong, a tile-based game that was developed in China during the Qing dynasty. This game is widely played throughout China for both entertainment and gambling. In Chinese, there is a popular saying "砌长城 (building the Great Wall)" that is often used to refer to playing Mahjong. Thus, the Great Wall has been discharged with its experiential meaning and charged with the value of Mahjong that affiliates Chinese people. But in this case, Mahjong may symbolize more of the negative value of gambling in disguise than the positive value of social gathering. Sample 21 is another case of iconization. We can see that during a fight against the immortals, the Monkey King first turns into a small clan temple to get away from them. Then the two immortals transform into two skyscrapers clamping the temple in between. The temple and the two buildings seem to represent the clash between old and new, and it reminds us of the fact that the skyscrapers would

defeat the historic site. The underlying message is that cities nowadays often expand at the cost of the traditional buildings. It therefore symbolizes the power of industrialization and urbanization. In Sample 22, a gold mountain has been personified to indicate the power of money. In this case, the gold becomes a form of debt that falls upon the Money King. It triggers resonance in the readers about how our life is seriously indebted in today's economy. A type of value may be hidden in these cases of iconization, which is based on Cai's observations on the negative effects of economic developments.

Finally, visual attitudes are crucial in instilling values into modern elements. In social semiotics, attitude could be analyzed through three dimensions, namely, affect, judgment, and appreciation (Economou, 2009, Chapter 4; Martin & White, 2005). Affects indicate how individual emotions and reactions are evaluated. Judgment refers to attitudes toward behaviors. Appreciation refers to evaluation of semiotic and natural subjects. In comics, behavioral actions such as smiles, weeping and laughing are important semiotic resources for the construal of affect. For example, there is a horrified facial expression on Monkey King in the last panel of Sample 6 when he is confronted with Mickey Mouse. It is likely to be interpreted as Chinese fighters being terrified at the look of amiable

American cartoon figure, thereby depreciating Chinese culture against the American one. In Cai's *Journey to the West*, judgment is used to express attitudes toward typical global issues. It is often the case that Monkey King and the Pig are helpless in the face of modern technologies, such as rockets (as in Sample 18), a nuclear reactor and an electric abattoir in the modern world. In Sample 7, smoking is attached with negative judgment as Monkey King and the Pig, omnipotent as they are, are both horrified by secondhand smoke. It reflects the author's concerns over the smokers' indifference to the people around, making them passive smokers, as well as the negative outcome brought by technological developments. In Sample 23, the Pig transforms into a piggy bank to replace the donation box used in the ancient context, which proves to be an effective strategy as more people come over to donate with smiles on their faces. This expresses positive view on saving and frugality. Appreciation is also a commonly used deployment against which cultural diversity is beautified or relationship becomes materialized. In Samples 6 and 11, American culture and Japanese culture are represented by two cartoon figures, one confronting and the other running away, with their adorable size and clothing that would equate them to children. This semiotic deployment shows that the author is ready to embrace a multicultural society as he chooses to look at the favorable side of the diverse national cultures. In Sample 24, Monkey King demands his Master to pay him retrenchment benefit on departure, which is provided but only leaves the rest in the team little to survive on. It shows that the relationship between Monkey King and his Master resembles that between the employee and the employer in the modern world where hard work should be rewarded by financial compensation. It also implies some trends of the employment relationship in China. First, the employees are becoming conscious of their workplace rights and making individual enterprise bargain. Second, employees want to be treated fairly and can challenge the authority of their employers openly.

The above analysis shows how various values have been implanted into the modern elements through bondicons, iconization and visual attitudes. However, it does not mean that the three techniques function separately. It is often the case that these techniques are at play simultaneously. For example, in Sample 25, the iconization of the Great Wall is accompanied by the Master's surprise and anger (represented by popping eyes and a string of black smoke on top of his head). This may at the same time create a sense of belonging and a feeling of disapproval on this gambling activity in some Chinese readers. Through this complicated semiotic process, Cai's *Journey to the West* has not only transformed traditional literary classics into an interesting and readable modern story, arousing the participation from readers to appraise the modern context, but also attached the modern elements with values that affiliate or engage the audience. We could therefore conclude that the adaptation is well received across the world because the adaptation

bridges the past and the present, the East and the West, affiliates people of diverse communities, and provokes people's thoughts on a range of global issues such as living conditions, technological and economic developments, and intercultural relations.

## Conclusion

Comic adaptation of literary classics has become an important way to inherit and develop traditional culture. However, there are few studies that analyze their semiotic patterns. This article answers how comics can recontextualize literary classics with modernity through adding modern elements. Our quantitative analysis shows that there are 644 modern elements added into the ancient world through various elements including Participant, Action, Location, Manner, and Verbiage, among which Participant and Verbiage are the most frequent choices. Qualitatively, using the analytical framework in social semiotics, we looked into what and how modern elements have been added or created through various semiotic options in terms of ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings. Ideationally speaking, attribution, status and relocate are the three major semiotic resources for presenting the modern elements. Interpersonally speaking, contact links the story to the reader's world and quantification plays a crucial role in representing the modern scenario. Textually speaking, the experiential frame serves as a link between the semiotic and the real worlds.

Finally, we examined how these modern elements have been infused with values through bondicons, iconization, and visual attitudes. Bondicons, which offer objects and people that symbolize cultures around the world, help reshape the novel world into an intercultural context. Iconization, which brings out the evaluative meaning of objects, calls for attention to the global issues. The author's attitude toward the modern world has also been construed through meticulous semiotic choices of visual affect, appreciation, and judgment. Through these semiotic techniques, the ancient journey becomes interwoven with a range of social and cultural values, affiliating people of varied communities, and evoking people's reflection on cultural diversity/integration and global issues. Hence, the reconstruction of the literary classic world conforms to the trend of globalization today. This, we believe, is one of the most important reasons why Cai's adaptation has gained national and international recognition.

It should be admitted, however, that there are certain limitations of this study. First, there might be some subjective interpretations in our quantitative analysis. For example, there may be some borderline cases when we need to determine whether an element is modern or not. Second, only one comic work has been examined, which might not be representative enough for generalization. Hence, future research could be done using more of Cai's works or comic adaptations of different authors to reveal a more comprehensive picture.



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