Analyzing Image-text Relations in Chinese Classic Comic: A Social Semiotic Perspective

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Abstract

Since comics comprise images and texts, the relations between them should be a major concern of comics studies. However, few studies have focused on the intersemiotic interaction between images and texts in the meaning construction of Chinese classic comics. This study applies Martinec and Salway's system to Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects of Confucius (The Analects)*, attempting to explore the image-text relations in Chinese classic comics. It is found that the image-text relations in Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version of *The Analects* can be summarized as unequal-status and logico-semantics combined. Quantitative analysis shows that the images are always subordinate to the texts, and in terms of logico-semantic relations, all of subsystems but "image more general" are included. Besides, the distribution of the logico-semantic relations of image and text indicates that two different subsystems, namely expansion and projection, integrate and work together to create meanings in this version. Qualitative analysis shows that the tactful deployment of the combinations of image-text relation in *The Analects* makes it visually-verbally coherent. The intersemiotic interaction between images and texts also contributes a lot to the discourse meaning construction of Tsai Chih-Chung's English comic version. However, in *The Analects*, the image-text relation relies too much on the extension of the image by the text as well as the projection of locution. This study provides a case reference for the analysis of Chinese classic comic as multimodal discourse, and also contributes to promoting the overseas dissemination of traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: image-text relations, *The Analects of Confucius*, Tsai Chih-Chung, English comic version

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1. Introduction

As the essence of Chinese culture, Chinese classics play an irreplaceable role in the history of Chinese culture (Ren, 2018). In recent years, to promote cultural communication between China and foreign countries, many Chinese classics have been translated into different versions. *The Analects of Confucius (The Analects)* is a classic work that recorded Confucius and his disciples' sayings and ideas in the form of quotes and dialogues. It was seen as the top of ancient Chinese classics and the essence of Chinese traditional culture (Tsai & Bruya, 2018). Statistics reveal that there are over fifty English versions of *The Analects*, which include both complete and abridged translations, which are in line with the interests of different overseas reader groups. Among them, the English comic version of *The Analects*, written and illustrated by Tsai Chih-Chung (Tsai), has sold over 40 million copies in more than 44 countries, causing a worldwide sensation (Tan & Bruya, 2021). By virtue of multimodal means, Tsai's English comic versions of *The Analects* have a greater potential in spreading Chinese culture than pure text versions.

As one of Asia's most famous cartoonists, Tsai is well known for his comic series of Chinese classics, which have been translated into over 20 languages. A review of the relevant literature shows that Chinese domestic scholars used to focus on the introduction to Tsai's works, studies on artistic style and characteristics of Tsai's Chinese classic comics, and cultural dissemination research based on Tsai's Chinese classic comics. In recent years, with the increasing popularity of Tsai's Chinese classic comics in overseas markets, related research has shifted to the field of translation (Qi & Hemchua, 2022). The number of studies on Chinese classics translation began to increase greatly since 2013 and has remained at a relatively high level (Ren, 2018). Among them, some Chinese scholars studied Tsai's English comic version of Chinese classics from the perspective of intersemiotic translation (An, 2018; Gu, 2021; Huang & Zhu, 2018; Liu, 2021; Tang, 2014). The multimodal approach underscores that meaning is communicated not just through language but also through a variety of other modes, such as images, gesture and gaze (Derakhshan, 2024; Wang & Hemchua, 2022). A few scholars attempted to discuss Tsai's Chinese classic comics from the perspective of multimodality (Pi, 2023; Wei, 2018; Zeng & Zhu, 2020), however, the current research is far from complete and

systematic.

Since comics comprise images and texts, reading comics often means making sense of the ways in which texts and images are combined to make meaning, therefore, the relations between image and text should be a major concern of comics studies. This study mainly focuses on the intersemiotic interaction between images and texts in the meaning construction of Chinese classic comics. It aims to analyze image-text relations in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects*, and try to find out the characteristics in the distribution of the status relations and logico-semantic relations of images and texts, and the contribution of intersemiotic interaction to the meaning construction of Tsai's English comic version.

Compared with the few studies on Tsai's Chinese classic comics from the perspective of multimodality, this study is innovative in that it conducts an in-depth analysis of the interplay between semiotic modes through case study. From social semiotic perceptive, this study could provide a case reference for the analysis of multimodal discourse in Chinese classic comics. Besides, Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects* has a wide range of readers overseas, including those from academic circle as well as nonspecialist readers. Therefore, research on it is conductive to promoting the overseas dissemination of traditional Chinese culture.

Research Question

How are the visual and verbal modes related to one another in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects*?

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Different Approaches to Analyzing Image-text Relations*

French semiotician Roland Barthes (1977) is one of the early scholars to tackle the issue of image-text relations. He used his semiotic approach to analyze diverse objects such as photographs, advertisements, film and comics. In his analyses, he demonstrated that the boundaries between the textual modes and the visual modes

were not impossible to surmount. Based on a simple logic of possibilities of how images and text relate to one another, Barthes (1977) identified three possible image–text relations, namely "anchorage", "illustration" and "relay". "Relay" is used to indicate the two being equal, of which Barthes argues that comics are a prime example. Barthes starts to analyze images and texts as well as the other arts using the same underlying logic. However, his approach relies on penetrating observations instead of specific realizations.

W. J. T. Mitchell, a scholar and theorist of media, visual art, and literature, sought to challenge the dominance of a language-based semiotics approach in his research of image-text relations. In his essay, Mitchell argued against what Richard Rorty calls the "linguistic turn"—a development that saw different models of "textuality" become the central avenue of research in the study of culture, society, and even psychology (Mitchell, 1994), and argued for a "pictorial turn" in the humanities. The shift in the position of the image in the humanities definitely influenced the analysis of image-text relations. Mitchell adds a historical or cultural dimension to former discussions of form and content, which is the strength of his approach to image-text relations. However, this cultural-oriented approach does not concern itself with the details of how text and images work together.

Will Eisner (1990) and Scott McCloud (1994) are two of the most famous comics practitioner-theorists who have a lasting influence on comics. Comics, for Eisner, are a form of reading which looks at the interplay of image and text in comic books. Thus, he broadens the concept of reading to include both images and texts. He argues that images and texts in comics are read together and there is no fundamental difference between images and texts (Eisner, 1990). Eisner's approach highlights Mitchell's point about image-text relations that the two modalities have no essential difference. His approach to the analysis of image-text relations in comics puts more emphasis on how the two modalities approach each other than on how they differ. In this approach, however, the differences between the two modalities in a comic are not able to be reasoned away completely. In *Understanding Comics* (1994), McCloud adopts Will Eisner's definition that comics are "sequential art" and agrees implicitly with Eisner's statement that images and texts share ancestry. McCloud also shows that if images and texts are mixed together successfully, they can push

a narrative forward well. However, he doesn't place image-text relations at the core of comics as Eisner.

In short, the above-mentioned influential scholars' studies on image-text relations in the wider discourses in the humanities laid a foundation for the further discussion of the taxonomies of image-text relations, especially in comics.

2.2. A Review of Taxonomies of Image-text Relations

Some scholars have attempted to classify the possible relationships between images and texts, among whom Schwarcz (1982) offered one of the earliest analyses. Schwarcz suggests two major types of image-text interactions, namely "congruency" and "deviation", each having a number of subcategories. Nodelman elaborates on the image–text relations, and suggests that images and texts have a "combative relationship" because "they work together by limiting each other's meanings" (Nodelman, 1988, p. 221).

Others have sought to classify the relationships between images and texts into specific types. For example, Scott McCloud (1994) proposed a taxonomy of specific relationships between text-image combinations. For current comics, he distinguishes seven types of relationships between images and texts in terms of their equal or unequal contributions to meaning. McCloud's taxonomy gives a generalized view of image-text balance of meaning, and helps us to understand different ways in which images and texts can interact in comics. However, the problem is that it is quite difficult to distinguish between those categories.

The relationships between image and text arouse increasing academic concerns in children's literature, where the visual representations have been discussed by many scholars (Doonan, 1993; Lewis, 2001; Nodelman, 1988; Sipe, 1998). Picture book is a unique vehicle of children's literature, which combines visual and verbal narratives in a book format. Golden (1990) describes five types of image–text relations in picture books and differentiates these types of relationships based on how much "work" the images or the texts do in conveying meaning of picture book stories. However, his typology is problematic because for one thing, these types

seem too blurred to be useful, and for another, it focuses too much on the relative amounts of "power" that images and texts have, thus ignoring the joint influence of them.

Different from the work that has been done concerning the taxonomies of image-text relations based on practitioners' brilliant intuitions, there are two main perspectives to explore visual and verbal relations in multimodal texts: inter-semiotic relations and logico-semantic relations. The former is represented by Royce (2007), who examines visual and verbal cohesive connection with categories of lexical cohesion developed by Halliday and Hasan (1985); the latter is represented by Martinec and Salway (2005), who interpret the logico–semantic relation between image and text across structural syntagmatic units. Logico–semantic relations could account systematically for the relations across different semiotic modes.

Martinec and Salway's (2005) system is based on a combination of Halliday's (1994) logico–semantic and status relations, and Barthes' (1977) image-text relations, which deals with relations between images and texts more systematically. Halliday (1994) has made an explicit and systematic distinction between status and logico–semantic relations to classify the relationship between clauses in the clause complex. Martinec and Salway draw on Halliday mainly for the logico–semantic relations, and also partly on relative status of image and text. In addition, they consider Barthes' (1977) image-text relations to do with relative status, and 'relay', a complementary relationship between images and texts, plays an important role in their system.

Compared to other systemic–functional semioticians who have also inquired into intersemiotic relations (e.g. Lemke, 1998; Martinec, 1998; O'Halloran, 1999; Royce, 1998), Martinec and Salway develop a relatively generalized semantic system of image–text relations which aims to account for how images and texts interact in different genres of multimodal discourse. This study seeks to examine the extent to which Martinec and Salway's system applies to the analysis of the image-text relations in Chinese classic comics.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Object

This study takes Tsai's latest edition of *The Analects,* translated by Brian Bruya and published by Princeton University Press in 2018, as research object. It is an abridged version, which contains 146 representative episodes selected from the original 512 episodes. The main body of the book consists of 146 comic stories with distinct themes. Different from the pure verbal versions, most of the space in this comic version is given over to the images. Therefore, it is considered as a typical multimodal discourse, where the visual components and verbal components are both important in reading.

3.2. Research Design

This study makes quantitative and qualitative analyses of image-text relations in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects*. Based on combining Halliday's logico–semantic relations with Barthes' text relations, Martinec and Salway (2005) proposed a system for image-text relations, consisting of status relations and logico-semantic relations of image and text. They hold that this system should be useful for distinguishing between image–text relations for both new and old media. Martinec and Salway's system is applied in this study to examine image-text relations in Chinese classic comics. The specific analytical framework for this study is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Martinec & Salway's System for Image-text Relations
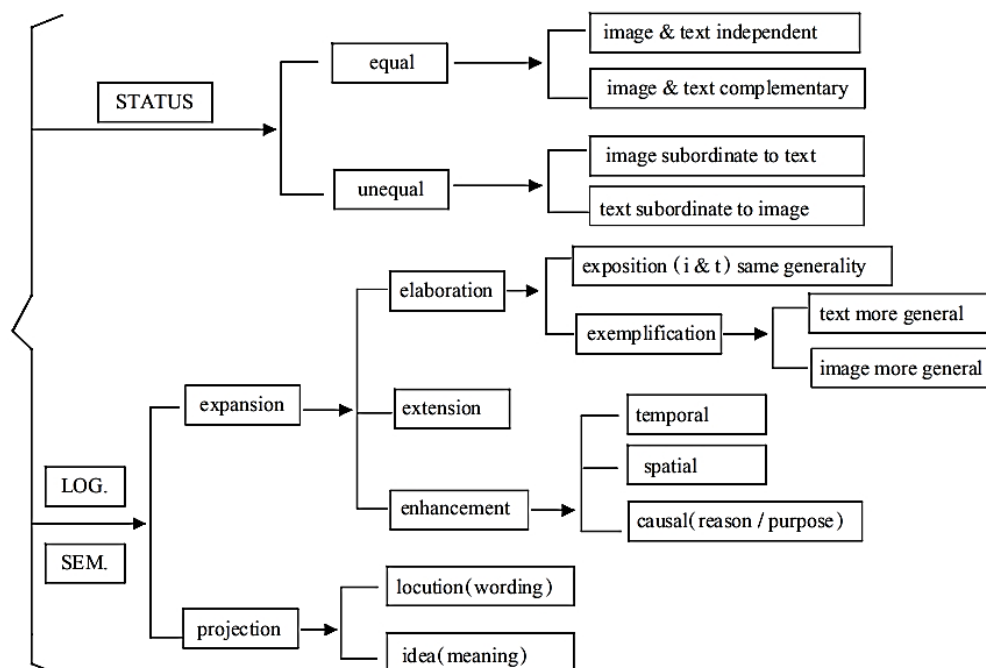
3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis are carried out as follows. Firstly, based on the analytical framework of "System for Image-text Relations", classify all the image-text combinations in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects*, and build image-text corpus in terms of status relations and logico-semantic relations. Secondly, a qualitative analysis is made to figure out whether the images and the texts in Tsai's English comic version are joined on equal footing or not, and the reasons are further explored. Thirdly, based on Martinec and Salway's system, all the image-text combinations belonging to projection layout, expansion layout and mixed layout are analyzed and categorized respectively, so as to figure out the characteristics in the distribution of logico-semantic relations of image and text in Tsai's English comic version. All the data are collected and analyzed by Excel, and typical examples are given to illustrate how the image and the text relate to each other and make meanings together.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis presented below first identifies image-text status relations, and then further explores how images and texts relate to one another in terms of logico–semantics, so as to provide a full picture of the image-text relations in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects* from the perspective of social semiotics.

4.1. Status Relations

Relative status contains two subsystems: equal status and unequal status. According to Martinec and Salway (2005), a text and an image are in equal status when they are joined on equal footing and the whole image is connected with the whole text, otherwise they are in unequal status.

Equal status can be further divided into image-text independent and image-text complementary. When the status is independent, the image and the text are put on equal terms without one modifying the other. And the status is considered complementary when they are joined on equal footing with one modifying the other, and they each form a part of a larger syntagm. Unequal status can also be further classified into image subordination where the image is related to only a part of the content of the text and text subordination where the text is connected with only a part of the image.

A thorough analysis of the data shows that only one subsystem of relative status relations can be found in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects*, namely the unequal status, and the images and texts are in the relation of image subordinate to text. Tsai's English comic version is adapted from the original version of *The Analects*, which is a pure-text version in ancient Chinese. The texts in the comic strip serve as an interpretation of the original texts and the images are always subordinate to the texts because the images are dependent on the texts to convey the meaning of the original version. Therefore, the texts in Tsai's English comic version are in a dominant position and the images and texts are not joined on equal footing.

Tsai's English comic version retained the style of the original version, and accordingly, quite a few episodes in the comic book present the dialogues between

Confucius and his disciples, or that between the disciples themselves. For example, Figure 2 depicted a conversation concerning governing between Confucius and his student Zhong You. The successive images show the communication process vividly. However, without the projection of locution in the speech bubble, we can never figure out what they are talking about. In such cases, the images are not able to convey the meaning of the original texts by themselves. Therefore, the images and texts are not equal in status, and the former is subordinate to the latter. In other cases, the images could convey part of the meaning of the original texts, but are still dependent on the verbal texts to provide the whole meaning for the readers.

Figure 2
An Example of Image-subordinate-to-text Relation from The Analects (13:1)

The fact that the image-subordinate-to-text relations run through the whole book indicates that although images play an important role in Tsai's English comic version and contribute a lot to constructing the discourse meaning, the texts still take the dominant place.

4.2. Logico-semantic Relations

The system of logico–semantic relations include two subsystems: expansion and projection, as shown in Figure 1. According to Halliday (1994), expansion deals with relations between represented events. The subsystem of expansion is comprised of elaboration, extension and enhancement. If what is depicted in the image and what is referred to by the text are concerned with the same participants, processes and circumstances, then there is a relation of elaboration. Two kinds of elaboration between images and texts are identified, namely exposition and exemplification, depending on whether the image and the text manage the same level of generality or not. If there is the same level of generality, the image and the text are in the relation of exposition, whereas different level indicates the relation of exemplification. And when the level of generality is different, there are two possible situations: either the text is more general, or the image is more general. If new but related information is added by either the image or the text, then there is a relation of extension. "When an image and a text are related by enhancement, one qualifies the other circumstantially" (Martinec & Salway, 2005, p. 350). Three kinds of circumstantial relations have been identified — temporal relation, spatial relation and causal relation (reason/ purpose). The other subsystem is projection, which is composed of locution (wording) and idea (meaning). In short, Martinec and Salway (2005) exploited the subsystems of expansion and projection to describe how the image and the text are related to one another.

When we consider the layout of the comic strip itself on each page, we may find that an integrated layout is displayed because the English translation of the Chinese verbal texts in the column, as a visual unit, is overlaid to each corresponding image, making the texts incorporated as part of the images. According to Painter *et al.* (2013), intermodal integration options for integrated layouts are [projected] and [expanded]. It is found that there are three major types of integrated layout in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects*: projection layout, expansion layout and a mixed layout which combines projection and expansion. Episodes with a projection layout only concern the projection of meaning, either locution or idea. Episodes with an expansion layout are those episodes where the text and the image are co-located, sharing the same background. If a episode is a mixed type of integrated layout, there is a combination of projection and expansion

in it. The statistics of types of integrated layout in *The Analects* are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
The Statistics of Types of Integrated Layout in The Analects

Types of Integrated Layout in Tsai's English Comic Version	Projection	Expansion	Combination of Projection and Expansion	Total
Number of Episodes	25	40	81	146
Percentage	17.12%	27.40%	55.48%	100%

As shown in Table 1, 17.12% of all the episodes in Tsai's English comic version deployed projection layout, and 27.4% deployed expansion layout. However, about 55% of the episodes in the comic book used a mixed layout.

4.2.1. Logico-semantic relations in expansion layout

In order to figure out the characteristics in the distribution of logico-semantic relations of image and text in Tsai's English comic version, all the image-text combinations in each type of layout have been analyzed and categorized based on Martinec and Salway's system. The statistics are presented in Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4 respectively.

Table 2
The Statistics of Image-text Logico-semantic Relations in Episodes with an Expansion Layout

Logico-semantic Relation	Expansion			Extension	Enhancement	Total
	Elaboration					
	Exposition	Exemplification				
		TMG	IMG			
Image Number	28	7	0	95	1	131
Percentage	21.37%	5.34%	0%	72.52%	0.76%	100%

Table 2 shows the statistical data of image-text logico-semantic relations in those episodes with an expansion layout. As indicated in Table 1, 40 episodes in Tsai's English comic version belong to the expansion layout, where no case of projection of meaning can be found in the images. Therefore, Table 2 presents merely the sub-relations of expansion as well as their distribution. There are a total of 133 images in the episodes with an expansion layout, but only 131 images were analyzed and categorized since two images in Episode 7:5 are pure images, instead of image-text combinations. After a thorough analysis of the data, it is found that all the sub-relations but "image more general" are included in the English comic version. The relation of extension is dominant, occupying 72.52% of the episodes with an expansion layout. It is followed by the relation of elaboration, of which exposition occupies 21.37% and exemplification merely 5.34%. Enhancement is the least common relation, which only appears once.

The relation of elaboration is mainly realized by exposition, where the text and the image belong to the same level of generality. An example of such a relation is presented in Figure 3. What is depicted in the successive images is exactly consistent with what is referred to by the texts. For example, the first image depicted that Confucius was fishing with a fishing pole, and the second showed his disapproving facial expression as he saw someone fishing with a net. The accompanying texts in the first two images convey the meaning that Confucius prefers to fish by fishing pole rather than by fishing net. In this way, the participants, processes and circumstances depicted in the images are at the same level of generality as those referred to in the texts. However, sometimes an image is not able to display as much information as a text does due to the limitation of the page space, and in such case the image usually functions as an example of the text. An example of a text more general than an image is presented in Figure 4. The accompanying text in the image reads: "It's like the shameless burglar who digs a hole or scales a wall." We may infer from the context that it conveys Confucius' opinion. And the image depicted that Confucius was looking at a burglar who had stolen property and was fleeing over a wall. Thus, part of the text is exemplified by the image of the burglar scaling a wall, which enables the reader to see a vivid depiction of the burglar's behavior.

Figure 3
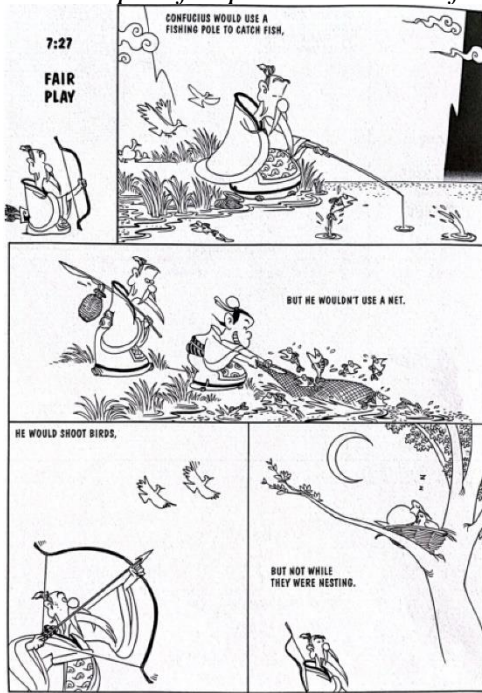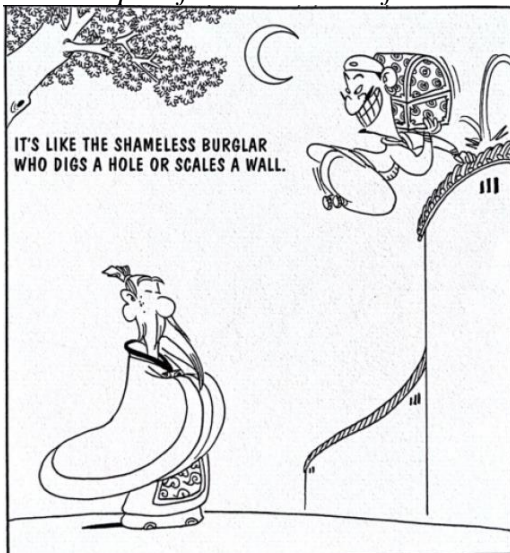*An Example of Exposition Relation from The Analects (7:27)*


Figure 4
An Example of TMG Relation from The Analects (17:12)

The relation of extension plays an important role in episodes with an expansion layout. Two types of extension have been found in the relevant episodes. An example of an extension of the image by the text is presented in Figure 5. The image depicted that Confucius was looking admiringly at an old man dressed like an official, whose image appears to be much larger than Confucius. The blurred background behind him implies that Confucius just sees him in imagination. It is obvious that the text adds new but related information to the content of the image, that is, the information about the old man, which is described as "Old Peng, the great minister of the Shang Dynasty" in the accompanying text. It is found that in most cases, the relation of extension is realized by the text adding new but related information to the image, rather than the other way around.

Figure 5
*An Example of Extension Relation from The Analects (7:1)*
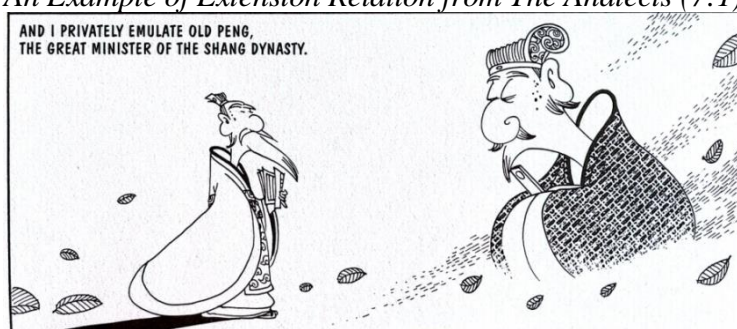
The reason why the image-text relation of extension is far more than that of elaboration might be as follows: On the one hand, the English text in Tsai's English comic version is an interpretation of the original version. In order to be faithful to the the original version, the English version has not made major changes to the content of the original version, except for adding some annotations. Therefore, the text of the English version also carries a large amount of information like the original version. On the other hand, the general page layout in Tsai's English comic version is one page for one episode and no more than 6 images per page. Such a space limitation makes it difficult for the relation of elaboration to be realized. As a result, the relation

of extension, more specifically, an extension of the image by the text, becomes dominant in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects.*

The relation of enhancement is rare, and the only example found in the relevant episodes is presented in Figure 6. In the image, Confucius was depicted on the left side. He was looking at two men sitting at the foot of the mountain, who were surrounded by a flock of vultures, a kind of bird that eats the flesh of dead animals. The black color of the mountain creates the ambience of death. From the texts in the image, we can learn about the two men's name and identity: ...Bo Yi and Shu Qi (Brothers who refused the crown out of principle)...The words in brackets are annotation provided by the translator Brian Bruya to introduce the legendary brothers. What's more, the spatial information of "Shou Yang mountain" is also provided in the texts, which enhances the specific location depicted in the image, thus realizing a relation of enhancement. Obviously, there is also an image-text relation of extension in this image, and the text adds much new information to the content of the image, such as the depicted characters' name and identity, their popularity among people, etc. However, it is taken as an example of enhancement for the reason that in the context of this episode, the relation of enhancement is more salient in this image.

Figure 6
An Example of Enhancement Relation from The Analects (16:12)
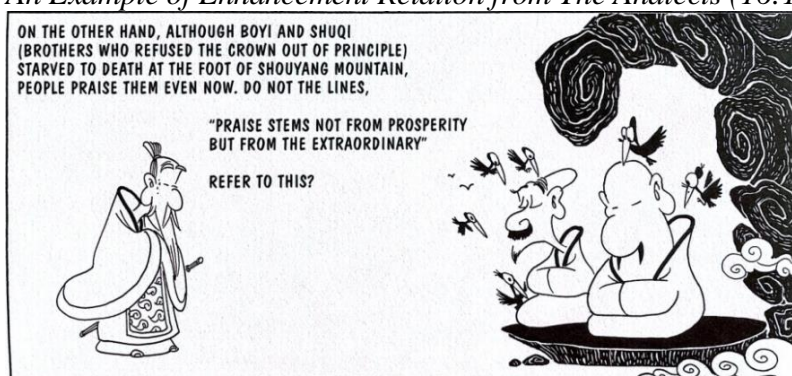
4.2.2. Logico-semantic relations in projection layout

The statistical data of image-text logico-semantic relations in the episodes with a

projection layout is shown in Table 3. As indicated in Table 1, 25 episodes in Tsai's English comic version belong to the pure projection layout, which means that the image and the text in these episodes are integrated to form a visual unity merely through the projection of meaning. Therefore, Table 3 only presents the sub-relations of projection as well as their distribution.

Table 3
Image-text Logico-semantic Relations in Episodes with a Projection Layout

| Logico-semantic Relation	Projection		Total
	Locution	Idea	
Image Number	68	3	71
Percentage	95.77%	4.23%	100%

There are a total of 71 images in these episodes belonging to a projection layout. The data analysis shows that both sub-relations are included in the English comic version. However, the projection of locution is absolutely dominant, occupying 95.77% of the relevant episodes, while the projection of idea is rarely used. It is found that in the image where the projection of idea occurs, the projection of locution also exists, that is, the two kinds of projection of meaning would coexist in a single image. In this case, this image is classified into the statistics of "idea" since the projection of idea plays a more prominent role in the meaning-making of the episode.

An example of the projection of idea is presented in Figure 7. Episode 13:23 in the English comic version of *The Analects* is entitled "Harmonize". The first image depicted that Confucius was watching a group of people communicating with each other, who behaved humbly and harmoniously. However, the people in the second image appeared to conform with one another, but in fact didn't maintain a harmonious relationship with one another, which is revealed by the projected thought in the thought bubbles. The skull and the blood-splattered dagger depicted in the thought bubble are generally recognized symbols which represent death. Thus, their seemingly harmonious facial expression and behavior are in sharp contrast to their

true ideas. In this case, the characters' ideas were projected in the form of symbolic images instead of the texts, which presents the related ideational meanings in a more straightforward and effective way.

Figure 7
An Example of Projection of Idea from The Analects (13:23)
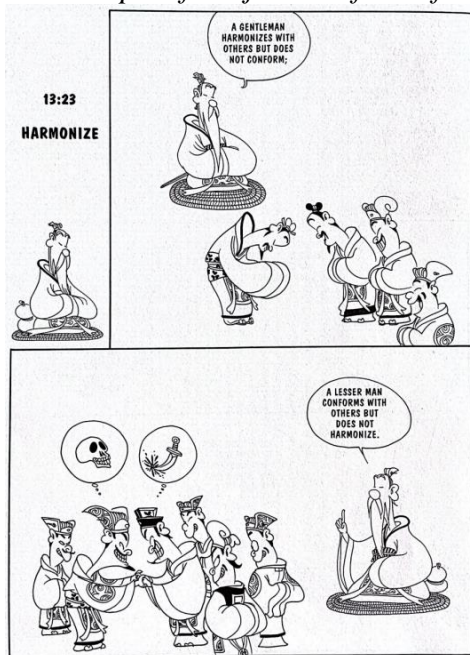
As a primary way of meaning projection in Tsai's English comic version, the projection of locution usually occurs in the episodes which depict the following scenarios: First, the successive images depicted that Confucius was talking with his students about his philosophy of ethics, education or politics. Second, in the successive images, Confucius (and his disciples) acted as a bystander and commented on what he/they saw. Through the comments that are projected by the texts in the speech balloons, we could have access to the philosophical thoughts of Confucius. Third, the successive images depicted a situation that is created according to the verbal context, where Confucius not only acted as a bystander, but also a participant involved in the activity, as shown in Figure 8. In the second image, Confucius is

trying to hold Zi Lu back and stop him from fighting with others. His words are projected by the texts "minor impatience disrupts great plans" in the speech balloon. Nevertheless, Zi Lu's words are not presented with a speech balloon, but with a semi-enclosed frame composed of a few lines, which shows his angry roar vividly. Moreover, in the third image, what Confucius said is not given in the original text, but supplemented by Tsai based on the context. It is this projection of locution that adds a sense of humor. Comparatively speaking, by creating a situation according to the verbal context and projecting the locution spoken by Confucius as a participant rather than an observer, the story would be made more vivid and attractive to the readers. However, it is regrettable that such cases are rare in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects.*

Figure 8
An Example of Projection of Locution from The Analects (15:27)

It is not always the case that the text plays the role of projected wording. It is found that in some episodes, images play the role together with the texts in the projection

of locution. This way of projection makes full use of the image-text combinations in the speech bubbles to highlight the distinctive features of the characters, so as to impress the readers.

4.2.3. Logico-semantic relations in mixed layout

Table 4 displays the statistical data of image-text logico-semantic relations in the episodes with a mixed layout, where the image and the text are integrated through both relations of projection and expansion. As indicated in Table 1, 81 episodes belong to the mixed type of integrated layout, which is the most common layout in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects.* Table 4 presents the sub-relations of projection and expansion as well as their distribution in episodes with a mixed layout.

Table 4
Image-text Logico-semantic Relations in Episodes with a Mixed Layout

Logico-semantic Relation	Expansion					Projection		Total
	Elaboration			Extension	Enhancement	Locution	Idea	
	Exposition	Exemplification						
		TMG	IMG					
Image Number	25	11	0	103	4	146	12	301
Percentage	8.31%	3.65%	0%	34.22%	1.33%	48.50%	3.99%	100%

There are a total of 302 images in the episodes with a mixed layout, but only 301 images were analyzed and categorized since one image in Episode 17:20 is a pure image without accompanying texts. The data analysis shows that the two main subsystems of image-text logico-semantic relations, namely expansion and projection, play an equivalent role in the relevant episodes, with the relation of projection occupying a slightly higher percentage than that of expansion. As shown in Table 4, all the sub-relations but "image more general" are included in the English comic version, and the sub-relation of locution, which stands at 48.50% of the total, occupies the

largest percentage. It is followed by the sub-relation of extension, which stands at 34.22% and ranks the second place among the seven subsystems.

As for the distribution of sub-relations within the relation of expansion, extension remains dominant, followed by elaboration, of which exposition occupies 8.31% and exemplification (text more general) only 3.65%. The relation of enhancement remains the least common relation, which merely appears four times. As for the distribution of sub-relations within the relation of projection, the projection of locution is definitely predominant compared to that of idea, and the latter only accounts for 3.99%. It is found that in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects,* the distribution features of various sub-relationships is similar no matter what type of layout the episodes belong to. To be more specific, a similar distribution pattern— the sub-relation of extension being the most frequently deployed relation, followed by elaboration and enhancement — can be seen in the episodes either with an expansion layout or a mixed layout. Similarly, the distribution pattern that the sub-relation of locution is deployed much more than that of idea can also be seen in the episodes either with a projection layout or a mixed layout.

In relation to the episodes with a mixed layout, the relations of two different subsystems usually integrate in the successive images and work together to create meanings. The most frequently deployed combination of image-text relations in Tsai's English comic version is that of [extension] and [locution]. In some episodes where this combination of image-text relations occur, the meaning of the image is generally extended by the text, which provides background information about a depicted character, while the locution of the character is projected in the speech bubbles. In other cases, the text offers an interpretation of the original version, which extends the meaning of the image to a large extent, while the projection of locution is used to present the situational conversation that is created according to the verbal context. Figure 9 shows such an example. In the first and third panels, the accompanying texts provide much information about Confucius' idea of governing, while the images only highlight the two key words "penalty" and "virtue". This is a typical example of extension of the image by the text. The second and fourth panels, which contain the projection of locution, vividly depict the different consequences

resulted from two ways of governing. The contrasting situational conversation were created by Tsai based on his understanding of the original version.

Figure 9
*An Example of a Combination of [extension] and [locution] from The Analects (2:3)*
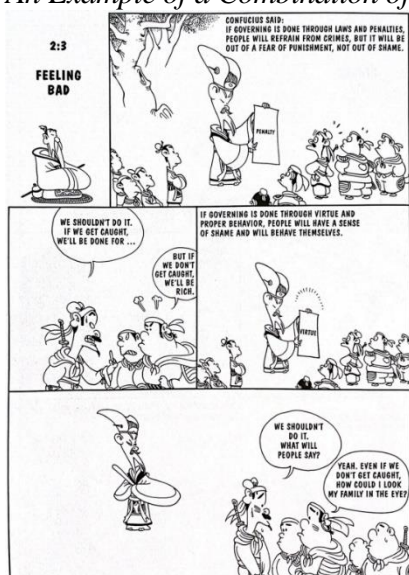
Apart from the combination of image-text relations of [extension] and [locution], it is found that Tsai also deployed combinations of three sub-relations in the English comic version of *The Analects*, and more sub-relations of expansion come into play in a single episode. Figure 10 presents an example of a combination of [exposition] and [locution] and [enhancement]. Episode 14:29 in the English comic version of *The Analects* is entitled "Throwing stones". In the first panel, we can see Zi Gong pointed at Zi Yuan and Zi Lu, laughing at them loudly. What is depicted in the image is at the same level of generality as what is referred to in the text. Therefore, the image and the text are of the relation of exposition. The projection of locution can be found in the second and third panels, and the wording is presented in the speech balloons pointing to Confucius. However, in the second panel, an image-text relation of enhancement can also be found. The image shows that Confucius pointed at Zi Gong, who looked ashamed and were sweating profusely, while Zi Yuan and Zi Lu were

snickering on the other side. We can infer the reason why Zi Gong felt ashamed from Confucius' question projected in the speech balloon, that is, he himself is not perfect either. In this case, the text qualifies the image by providing causal information, thus realizing an image-text relation of enhancement.

Figure 10
An Example of a Combination of [exposition] and [locution] and [enhancement] from The Analects (14:29)
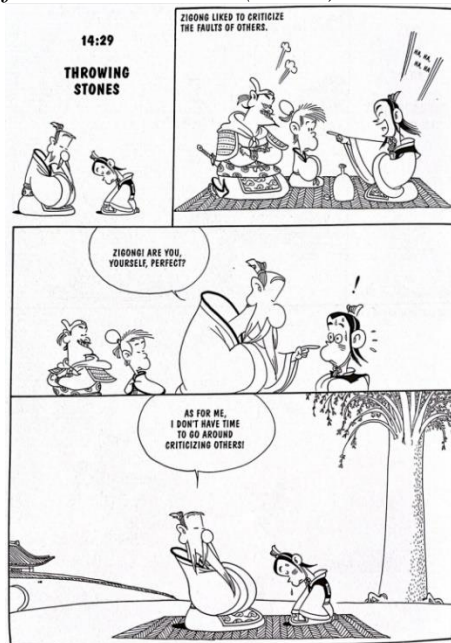
It is found that there are some episodes where the image-text relations include more than three sub-relations, which are deployed as a combination to play a role in successive images to construct the meaning of the episode. Obviously, the more image-text sub-relations are deployed in the comic book, the richer the content of the image, and the more attractive the comic book is to the readers.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Major Findings

In this study, Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects* is regarded as a multimodal discourse, and the analyses of the image-text relations focus on the comic strip within it. Through the analyses, it is found that the image-text relations in Tsai's English comic version can be summarized as unequal-status and logico-semantics combined. Some major findings are presented as follows.

In relation to the status relations, the images and texts are in the relation of image subordinate to text. The texts in the comic strip serve as an interpretation of the original texts. The images are not able to convey the meaning of the original texts by themselves, or could only convey part of the meaning of the original texts. Therefore, the images are dependent on the verbal texts to convey the meaning of the original version. It indicates that although images play an important role in Tsai's English comic version and contribute a lot to constructing the discourse meaning, the texts still take the dominant place.

In order to figure out the characteristics in the distribution of logico-semantic relations of image and text in Tsai's English comic version, all the image-text combinations in three different types of layouts have been analyzed and categorized.

In terms of the episodes with an expansion layout, it is found that all the sub-relations but "image more general" are included in the English comic version. The relation of extension is dominant, followed by the relation of elaboration, of which exposition appears more than exemplification (text more general). Enhancement is the least common relation. The relation of extension is mainly realized by the extension of the content of the image by the text, rather than the other way around.

In terms of the episodes with a projection layout, it is found that both sub-relations are included in the English comic version, but the projection of locution is dominant while the projection of idea is rare. In some cases, the characters' ideas were projected in the form of symbolic images, which presented the related ideational meanings in a more straightforward and effective way. Besides, Tsai's tactful deployment of the image-text combinations in the speech bubbles makes the readers have a deeper

impression on the characters depicted, and makes the contents of the original text easier for readers to understand as well.

The mixed layout is the most common layout in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects*, and it shares something in common with the former two layouts in terms of the distribution features of sub-relations. It is found that all the sub-relations but "image more general" are included in the English comic version, and the sub-relation of locution occupies the largest percentage, followed by that of extension. As for the distribution of sub-relations within the relation of expansion, extension remains dominant, followed by elaboration, of which exposition appears more than exemplification (text more general). The relation of enhancement remains the least common relation. As for the distribution of sub-relations within the relation of projection, the projection of locution is definitely predominant compared to that of idea. In relation to the episodes with a mixed layout, the relations of two different subsystems usually integrate in the successive images and work together to create meanings. The most frequently deployed combination of image-text relations in Tsai's English comic version is that of [extension] and [locution]. In some episodes where this combination of image-text relations occur, the meaning of the image is generally extended by the text, which provides background information about a depicted character, while the locution of the character is projected in the speech bubbles. In other cases, the text offers an interpretation of the original version, which extends the meaning of the image to a large extent, while the projection of locution is used to present the situational conversation that is created according to the verbal context. And there are also episodes where the image-text relations include three or even four various sub-relations, which are deployed as a combination to play a role in successive images to construct the meaning of the episode.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that due to the unique stylistic features and contents of the original version, the texts always take the dominant place and the images are subordinate in Tsai's English comic version. The distribution of the logico-semantic relations of image and text indicates that the relations of two different subsystems, namely expansion and projection, integrate and work together to create meanings in Tsai's English comic version. The tactful deployment of the

combination of image-text relation in Tsai's English comic version of *The Analects* makes it visually-verbally coherent. The intersemiotic interaction between images and texts also contributes a lot to the discourse meaning construction of Tsai's English comic version. However, in Tsai's English comic version, the image-text relation relies too much on the extension of the image by the text as well as the projection of locution. Various ways of intersemiotic interaction should be encouraged to create a better reading experience.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The limitations of the research are as follows. First, this research only focuses on Tsai's masterpiece *The Analects*, which implies that the conclusions drawn may not be broadly applicable to the interpretations of other Chinese classic comics. Secondly, despite the collection and analysis of quantitative data to bolster the findings, the research is predominantly qualitative. Consequently, it is inherently subject to a certain degree of subjectivity.

In the future study, more Chinese classic comic works of different cartoonists could be analyzed and compared from a social semiotic perspective, so as to better understand the meaning construction of multimodal discourse and narrative characteristics of Chinese classic comics. In addition, the visual meaning of the images in Chinese classic comics should be explored and discussed together with the intersemiotic interaction between image and text. By doing so, we can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of how the multimodal discourse constructs meaning in these comics, offering a fuller picture of the intricate interplay between visual and verbal elements that bring the narratives of Chinese classics to life.

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