

Research Article

Multi-modal Metaphorical Analysis of Children's Picturebook *Little Stone Lion*

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Abstract

"Little Stone Lion" stands out as a member of Xiong Liang's "Chinese Illustrated Book" series. This work tells the story from the perspective of the stone lion at the bridgehead of the town, recounting its observations, experiences, and feelings. This book integrates traditional Chinese ink painting techniques with cultural elements, presenting a Chinese-style visual creation. Drawing upon a qualitative research approach, the study employed a comprehensive analysis of Little Stone lion, focusing on identifying and interpreting the verbal, pictorial, and multimodal metaphors employed in the illustrations and their relation to the accompanying text. The study delved into the interplay between visual and textual elements, examining how they contribute to the creation of metaphoric meaning and literary depth in the picturebook. This research sought to uncover metaphorical meanings derived from the situational and conceptual-cognitive contexts as well as the underlying thematic and emotional layers embedded within the picturebook. As the only guardian deity of the town, the little stone lion has witnessed the growth and departures of countless generations, silently guarding this land and its people. Multimodal metaphors identified from camera angles, colors, and its plain monologue are enough to touch the heartstrings and evoke a deep sense of nostalgia for one's hometown and loved ones.

Keywords

Multimodal Metaphor, Pictorial Metaphor, Picturebooks for Children, Verbal Metaphor

1. Introduction

The compound word, "picturebook", recognizes the union of text and art that results in something beyond what each form separately contributes [18]. Arizpe and Styles (2003) define a picturebook as a "book in which the story depends on the interaction between written text and image and where both have been created with a conscious aesthetic intention" (p. 22) [1]. In this study, picturebook rather than picture book is used.

Picturebooks have a long and rich history that dates back to several centuries. The earliest examples of picturebooks were created for adults, rather than children. These early books

typically contained images with accompanying text that told stories or provided information on various topics. In China, the first two children's picturebooks "Reading and Knowing History" (guàn wén jiàn gǔ tú) and "Illustrations and Lessons from Three Dynasties" (sān cháo xùn jiàn tú) were published in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127 A.D.), 1000 years ago, much earlier than *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (Visible World in Pictures) in 1658. These two books were made for princes of royal family to know great fairs done by their ancestors and learn lessons from previous dynasties.

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Received: 24 March 2024; **Accepted:** 15 April 2024; **Published:** 28 April 2024



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In the west, one of the first successful children's picture-books was "Orbis Sensualium Pictus" or Visible World in Pictures, which was published in 1658 by Czech educator John Amos Comenius and has been more widely accepted as the first picturebook for children in the world than the Chinese two picturebooks. The book contains illustrated information on a variety of subjects, including animals, plants, and human anatomy. With the rising and flourishing of children's literature in the 18th and 19th centuries, picturebooks for children became increasingly popular after the introduction of mass printing and lithography. Many classic children's books illustrated with pictures were published later, including "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll and "The Tale of Peter Rabbit" by Beatrix Potter.

In the 20th century, advances in printing technology allowed for even more complex and detailed illustrations in children's books. Picturebooks also became more diverse, with authors and illustrators from different backgrounds and cultures creating books that reflected their own experiences and perspectives.

Today, children's picturebooks continue to be an important and beloved part of children's literature. Modern children's picturebooks composed of concise texts and exquisite vivid pictures are in accordance with children's physical and mental characteristics, cognitive experience about various stories of natural science, life or emotional experience and human history. So picturebooks for children usually have a unique and irreplaceable value for growth of children.

2. Multi-Modal Metaphorical Theories

Communication has been usually not speech or text but supplemented with other symbolic systems of information, or even to be directly replaced by it. Whether it is people's daily communication or the mass media, multimodality has been increasingly becoming more popular. The field of multimodal discourse is broad, including various forms of carrier (paper, film, videotape, bits and bytes, stone, cloth, etc.), mode (written language, spoken, visual, sound, music, gestures, smells, touch, etc.) and genres (art, advertising, instructions, movies, etc.) [10]. Therefore, at the end of the 20th century, with the popularization of multimodal interaction methods, research gradually expanded to multimodal metaphor since the book *Metaphors We Live By* written by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) opened a new era of metaphor study [14]. The publishing of Forceville's doctoral dissertation *Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising* in 1996 started the the research trend on multimodal metaphor [6]. In the book, Forceville first proposed the concept of "pictorial metaphor", claiming that pictures are another effective expression of metaphorical thinking, and detailed the classification and interpretation of pictorial metaphors in advertising (mainly print ads). Afterwards, Forceville continued to develop and complete the theoretical framework of pictorial metaphor and finally published *Multimodal Metaphor* in collaboration with Hartel and

Savolainen in 2009, which broadened the scope [8, 13].

Children's picturebooks are composed of verbal and pictorial modes and there are some multimodal metaphor researches on children's picturebooks. Wang (2021) explores pictorial and multimodal metaphors in informational picturebooks and studies how they contribute to children's understanding of the information or facts and arouse their interest in the plot of the story [17]. Analyses of the metaphors in Chinese picturebooks on sex education were made in order to promote children's better understanding of sex in their early cognitive development; Chinese scholars, such as Gui (2016) [12], focus on the research on poetic iconicity in children's picturebooks; Other scholars, such as Zhang (2020) conducted a comparative study of cognitive mechanisms of multimodal metaphors in Chinese-English children's kinship-theme [20].

However, compared with the more popular research subjects in multimodal studies like advertisements and posters, just a few studies are on children's picturebooks relatively, especially those on a certain writer and illustrator. Moreover, these studies focused on just a certain topic like sex education, or kinship-theme. Many good picturebooks of various topics are waiting to be studied so that the researcher tends to study not a certain topic of picturebooks but a certain writer and illustrator.

As a teacher in a preschool education college and researcher interested in children's literature, the researcher thinks that metaphors play an important role in language development, especially in the early years of childhood. Carriedo et al. stated that children start using metaphors around the age of two and half, and that their understanding of metaphors continues to develop throughout childhood [2]. By studying multimodal metaphors in children's picturebooks, researchers can gain a better cognitive understanding of how children learn and use metaphors in different contexts.

Metaphors can be expressed through different modalities, including visual, auditory, and tactile. Children's picturebooks often combine different modalities to convey meaning, making them an ideal context for studying multimodal metaphors. By examining how different modalities contribute to metaphor comprehension, researchers can gain insights into how different modes of communication interact with one another.

Children's picturebooks are a popular and widely-used tool for teaching language and literacy skills to young children. By studying multimodal metaphors in these books, researchers can identify effective strategies for teaching metaphors to children. This research could potentially have practical applications for educators, helping them to design more effective language and literacy curricula.

Overall, a multimodal metaphor research on children's picturebooks has the potential to deepen our understanding of how children learn and use metaphors, as well as to inform educational practice.

This study aims particularly at identifying types of metaphors in a Xiong Liang's picturebook for children *Little Stone*

Lion [19]. Xiong Liang is a representative best selling writer and illustrator of Chinese original picturebooks for children. Based on related multimodal metaphorical method, this study analyzes the metaphorical representations of texts and pictures in Little Stone Lion written and illustrated by Xiong Liang, in order to explore classification of metaphors and conceptual and various contextual factors in which these metaphors are used to construct meaning. Such attempt not only enriches the research subjects of cognitive metaphor study, but also enlightens future design of children's picturebooks and casts implications on educational patterns of children's early emotional and cognitive development.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Little Stone Lion

This research will examine a picturebook named Little Stone Lion created by Xiong Liang. Xiong Liang was born in 1974 in China. He is a productive writer and illustrator. He wrote and illustrated more than 30 picturebooks for children in total. He is regarded as the leading writer and illustrator of Chinese original picturebooks for children. Xiong Liang was shortlisted for the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2018 and the 2017 Winner of a Chen Bochui Children's Literature Award for Walk With the Wind. In his early working times, he created picturebooks for adults, but later, he tends to write and illustrate picturebooks for children after his daughter was born. He makes use of Chinese traditional art like paper cutting, wood carving, clay sculpture, shadow play, Peking Opera facial makeup, ink painting to create a new story or rewrite and illustrate Chinese legends or ancient stories. The introduction of Lion Stone Lion is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Little Stone Lion.*

Pages	36 pages
Words	200 Chinese characters
Year of Publishing	2005 (1 st edition) 2016 (2 nd edition, used in study)
Publisher	Tianjin People's Publisher
Awards	1. the best children's book from the China Times; 2. One of the top ten books of the year from Taiwan Chengpin Bookstore; 3. selected into the booklist of 2022 by the Hans Christian Andersen Award Committee

3.2. Instrumentation

In collecting the data, the researcher will use a qualitative research to code and calculate frequency of types of meta-

phors, which will enable her to record relevant information in an organized manner during the analysis. The copy of the picturebook for children written and illustrated by Xiong Liang are mainly transferred to PDF and stored in computer. Then Forceville's way is used to identify the metaphors among a small group of three members to make sure more objective:

1. an identity relation has been created between two phenomena that, in the given context, belong to different categories;
2. the phenomena are to be understood as target (domain) and source (domain), respectively;
3. target and source are not, in the given context, reversible; at least one characteristic, connotation, emotion, or attitude associated with the source domain can be pertinently "mapped" onto the target domain; often a cluster of internally related connotations is to be so mapped. It is this mapping of (clusters of) features that constitutes the interpretation of the metaphor." [7, 11].

4. Results & Discussions

Table 2 presents the types of metaphors in Xiong Liang's picturebooks for children. Based on the data, 17 metaphors in total identified in the Xiong Liang's picturebook for children, 36-page Little Stone Lion are classified into 3 verbal, 7 pictorial and 7 multimodal metaphors. Some metaphors of various modes are conceptualized within master metaphor list [15].

Table 2. *Types of Metaphors.*

Verbal	Pictorial	Multimodal	Total
3	7	7	17

4.1. Verbal Metaphors in Xiong Liang's Picturebooks for Children

Verbal metaphor refers to linguistic structure of "A IS B". The structure of a metaphor is in principle TARGET IS SOURCE [10]. Metaphors in verbal form are usually marked by an "is" or "is like" syntax to relate the source and target domains. The following are examples of verbal metaphors of the structure "is" in the picturebook "Little Stone Lion":

我是小镇的守护神。(P4)

I am the patron saint of the town.[Translated Version]

我是小镇里唯一的石狮子。(P5)

I am the only stone lion in the town.

唯一的守护神。(P8)

The only patron saint.

In the above example, "The Little Stone Lion" is narrated in

the first person “I” referring to a little stone lion in a town. The target domain is the character of the story “the little stone lion” while the source domain is “the patron saint of the town. The verbal metaphor “STONE LION IS PATRON SAINT” with supporting picture of stone lion, which is defined as a multimodal metaphor according to Feng’s identification [4, 5] is repeated from the beginning to the end three times.

However, not all sentences containing verbal metaphors are structured “is” or “is like”, but all metaphors can be written as “is” or “is like” syntax. Like many picturebooks for children, personification is used in the book *Little Stone Lion*, the character of the story, is described as a person. Hence, the metaphor “STONE LION IS PERSON” is employed in the book *Little Stone Lion* For example:

而我什么都记得，
记得镇上所有的人

所有发生过得事。(P19)

And I remember everything,
remember everyone in town
Everything that happened.

可是，我记得他们，想念他们。(P26)

However, I remember them and miss them.

我不会忘记每一个人。(P30)

I will not forget everyone.

The little stone lion, though motionless, is depicted as a person who has human memory and emotions like missing, remembering and forgetting textually in the pages of P19, 26, and 30, and can speak and think like a human. According to some scholars [8], personification is the prototypical metaphor and occurs more frequently than other metaphors, especially during the early stages of child development. Correspondingly, personification is much used in the picturebooks for children.

Moreover, conceptual metaphors are also identified in the picturebook. The following are examples of verbal metaphors in *Little Stone Lion* not originally structured as “is” or “is like”:

孩子们长大了，就会离开..... (P21)

When children grow up, they will leave.

The text in page 21 “The little Stone Lion” contains a conceptual metaphor. the metaphor “GROWTH IS DEPARTURE FROM HOME” is identified and construed. Behind the metaphor is rural hollowing and rapid urbanization in China. When children in the rural area grow up, they will leave their hometown for cities for seeking better education or job opportunities. This metaphor “GROWTH IS DEPARTURE FROM HOME” reflects not only natural principle, but also Chinese social situation.

To summarize the main verbal metaphors in the picture-book *Little Stone Lion* is listed in the following:

STONE LION IS PATRON SAINT.

STONE LION IS PERSON.

GROWTH IS DEPARTURE FROM HOME.

4.2. Pictorial Metaphors in *Little Stone Lion*

In the following picture of *Figure 1*, the context of the picture tells viewers that it is snowing and Spring Festival from one red Chinese character “辞 (farewell)”, which is one of four Chinese characters “辞旧迎新 (Farewell to the old and welcome the new)”. Black “辞旧迎新” written with a Chinese brush on red paper is always stuck on the door or wall of a home during Spring Festival, but here it is on the bridge of the town. From the hat and scarf the stone lion is wearing, and the snow water, Spring Festival on the cold snowing day is shown to viewers. Beside the stone lion is a blue and white porcelain bowl full of food, and a pair of chopsticks. The scene will remind readers and viewers of Spring Festival customs that Chinese worship their late ancestors or saint gods with ready-set bowls of food and pairs of chopsticks on Spring Festival. Therefore according to the context of Spring Festival, “辞 (旧迎新)” should have been stuck on the door of a home, but it is on the bridge of a town. According to the structure TARGET IS SOURCE, a pictorial metaphor BRIDGE IS DOOR is identified, and after a deep thought, another metaphor is also implied in the picture: TOWN IS HOME. Bowls of food on Spring Festival are usually presented to saint patrons or late ancestors, here instead to the little stone lion, so The metaphor STONE LION IS SAINT PATRON or ANCESTOR is constructed in the picture.



Figure 1. Spring Festival.

Additionally, from the above picture, the stone lion is the source domain and the target domain should be a person because the scarf and hat that the stone lion is wearing is usually worn by a person. So hybrid metaphor that STONE LION IS PERSON is also identified in the same picture. In addition, the stone lion is portrayed as a person who has facial expressions like smiling with closed eyes in P19 and sad look with tears in P25.

The illustrator uses dark and light colors to imply what he wants to express in pictures. The following pictures of *Figures 2, 3, 4* are the last 6 pages of the book. The colors of the pages vary from cold dark gray, white yellowish to warm orange,

which also symbolizes the feeling of the stone lion: from down to up. Therefore the metaphors GOOD IS LIGHT and BAD IS DARK are shown in these pictures.



Figure 2. Dark Color.



Figure 3. Yellowish Color.



Figure 4. Warm Color.

In short, from the context, hybrid and simile are produced the pictorial metaphors in the picturebook: BRIDGE IS DOOR, TOWN IS HOME, STONE LION IS SAINT PATRON, STONE LION IS ANCESTOR, STONE LION IS PERSON, GOOD IS LIGHT, and BAD IS DARK.

4.3. Multimodal Metaphors in *Little Stone Lion*

Multimodal metaphors are those “whose target and source are each represented exclusively or predominantly in different modes” [8, 9]. Picturebooks are usually created from the combination of visual and verbal modes, and thus include multimodal metaphors of the VISUAL A IS VERBAL B or VERBAL A IS VISUAL B variety, based on the principle structure of a metaphor that TARGET IS SOURCE. Cross-modal mapping [4] is applied in multimodal metaphor identification. The multimodal metaphors identified from the

corpus of the study are also written in the structure TARGET IS SOURCE.

The following double spread P7-8 of Figure 5 shows an extended face with salient big eyes, which viewers can recognize as the stone lion’s face. The text “only saint patron” seems to be put on the face of the stone lion. Hence, the source domain is verbal “saint patron” while the picture of “stone lion” is target domain. Based on multimodal metaphorical structure VERBAL A IS VISUAL B, the metaphor STONE LION IS SAINT PATRON is identified from the two pages.

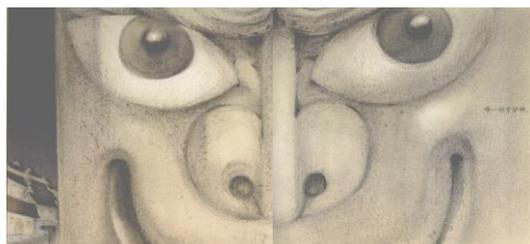


Figure 5. Salient Big Eyes.

Besides the pictorial metaphors identified in the double-spread of P13-14, a multimodal metaphor is constructed from the picture and text. The text “大家都爱我，过年的时候，也不会忘了我(Everyone loves me very much, and they will never forget me during Chinese New Year.)” does not tell readers what “they will never forget” means, but from the picture, the viewers will see a blue porcelain bowl of food which is usually a tribute to late ancestors and saint patrons on Spring Festival [3]. So, a multimodal metaphor REMEMBERING IS FOOD can be produced from the textual target and pictorial source.

In the following picture P11-12, the text of the double spread is “可我的年纪，比镇上最老的人还要大许多 (But I am much older than the oldest person in the town.)”, the stone lion with aged mottles is depicted higher than the old man and it seems that the stone lion looks down at the old man. The target domain AGE is textual while the source domain POSITION is image. The metaphor OLD IS UP can be identified from the P11-12.



Figure 6. Aged.

In **Figure 7**, the point of view is high angle with the lion's chin up. The stone lion is smiling with closed eyes, which seems that he is remembering something happy. Beside the stone lion, an white bearded old man, a red dressed old woman, a child with an umbrella, a cattle with a plow on its back, a white goose, and a small person on a boat are all flying up in the sky. The text on the left, "而我什么都记得,记得镇上所有的人,所有发生过得事 (And I remember everything, remember everyone in town, everything that happened.)" combined with flying people, animals and objects, reminds readers and viewers of a known sentence, "Time flies." Hence, a metaphor **TIME IS FLYING OBJECT** can be construed.



Figure 7. *Flying Time.*

The two pages of **Figure 8**. P15-16. are covered with dark color representing night, and the moon and lantern held by a girl give light to the face of the stone lion and the dark road to the stone lion. The source domain **FEELING AT EASE** can be identified from the text, "走夜路的孩子看到我就会安心。(P16) Children who walk at night will feel at ease when they see me" and the target domain from the picture is the stone lion, the main character of the story. Therefore, the metaphor is "STONE LION IS COMFORT" from the text and picture.

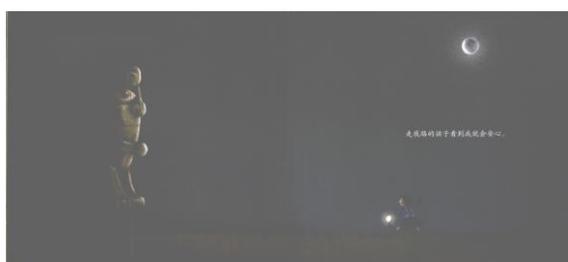


Figure 8. *Gaze.*

The picture **Figure 9**, the stone lion is back to the viewers, and a bus and an oxcart take passengers away from the town. From the text, "孩子们长大了就会离开 P. 21 When children grow up, they will leave...", the verbal leaving is represented with the picture of back on to each other, so the metaphor **LEAVING IS BACK VIEW** is identified, which also confirms Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001), and Feng (2011) statement of the relation between involvement and horizontal angle: IN-

VOLVEMENT IS FRONTAL VIEW and **DETACHMENT IS BACK VIEW** [4, 16].



Figure 9. *Departure.*

To count the multimodal metaphors in the book *Little Stone Lion*, there are six multimodal metaphors: **STONE LION IS SAINT PATRON**, **REMEMBERING IS FOOD**, **OLD IS UP**, **TIME IS FLYING OBJECT**, **STONE LION IS COMFORT**, and **LEAVING IS BACK VIEW**. Among these metaphors, the metaphor **STONE LION IS SAINT PATRON** is produced verbally, pictorially and multimodally.

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn: Metaphorical analysis demonstrates that Xiong Liang's picturebooks are a rich and complex body of work that addresses important themes and issues not only relevant to children's lives, but also to adults' lives. Through his use of metaphorical storytelling and imaginative illustrations, Xiong has created a unique narrative style that challenges and inspires young readers to think critically and reflect on their cultural heritage and social responsibilities.

Abbreviations

P: page

Funding

This research is supported by The 2020 Disciplinary Joint Construction Project of The 13th Five-Year Plan of Guangdong Provincial Philosophy and Social Science "Research on the Translation of Chinese Original Children's Picture Books in the English-speaking World" (GD20XWY08).

Author Contributions

Qingli Xu is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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