

Study on the Adaptation Strategy of Chinese Folk Story Picture Books in the Modern Context

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ABSTRACT

As a bridge connecting traditional culture and the inner world of modern children, the picture book of Chinese folk stories with profound cultural heritage plays an important role in the transmission of national spirit and cultural enlightenment. In recent years, inspired by cultural confidence and influenced by foreign picture books, the publication of Chinese folk story picture books has been in a blowout trend, but there are problems such as fragmentation, single topic selection, and language limitations. This paper explores the innovative editing strategies of folk story picture books from four aspects: content and theme selection, story adaptation, picture language, and reading experience, in order to provide ideas for the modern context transformation and integration of traditional folk stories and children's picture books.

Keywords: *Traditional culture, Chinese folk stories, Picture book adaptation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Mr. Duan Baolin said: "Folk stories are the general name of narrative prose works in people's oral creation, which can be divided into six categories according to the content of the subject matter and the different conditions of circulation, such as myths, legends, life stories, jokes, fables and fairy tales." [1] Because the imaginative plot, concise volume and simple language of folk stories contain simple philosophy, which is conducive to the formation of children's correct outlook on life, world outlook and values, many picture book writers are keen to adapt and re-create folk stories. However, there are many Chinese folk stories. How to revitalize the Chinese folk stories with a long history, and how to adapt the complex and diverse folk stories into the content form of modern children's reading in accordance with the spirit of the times in modern language form, is worthy of in-depth discussion by art scholars and educators.

2. CURRENT SITUATION OF FOLK STORY PICTURE BOOK PUBLISHING ENVIRONMENT AND DEMAND

2.1 *The Change in Reading Concept Led by Policy Has Led to a Surge in Demand for Picture Books*

On the one hand, the 13th Five-Year Plan lists reading and the popularization of scientific knowledge as one of the major cultural projects in the 13th Five-Year Plan period, elevates reading for all to the national strategic height, promotes the upsurge of reading for all, and vigorously promotes reading for children and teenagers, resulting in a sharp increase in the demand for children's books. On the other hand, with the popularization of the concept of parent-child reading, modern young parents attach great importance to the early reading enlightenment, generally welcome and recognize picture books, and the opening of three children and the implementation of the double reduction policy have increased the demand for children's picture books. According to the analysis of Beijing open-book data, in 2020, unlike the year-on-year decline of other categories of picture books, the children's

book market in the children's book market has bucked the trend of young enlightenment, children's general encyclopedia, game puzzle, and children's picture books, of which children's picture books

and children's general encyclopedia have the largest year-on-year growth rates, reaching 21.76% and 17.93% respectively ("Figure 1"), which has the most obvious effect on the market upward [3].

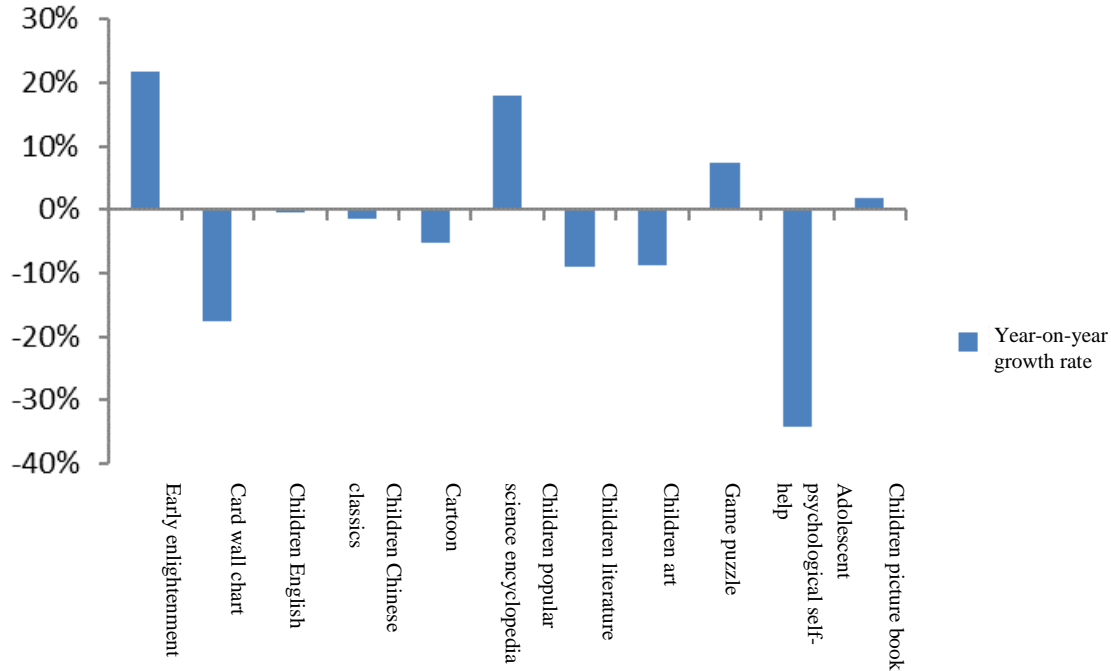


Figure 1 Year-over-year growth rate of children's book segments in 2020.

2.2 The Promotion of the Government Provides Favorable Conditions for the Innovation of Folk Story Picture Books

The Party and the government have formulated a number of measures to promote the innovation of folk story picture books. In 2017, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on the Implementation of the Inheritance and Development Project of Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture", which required the creation of a series of picture books, nursery rhymes, nursery rhymes, and animations around Chinese traditional culture; In 2019, the National Press and Publication Administration promoted the implementation of the Chinese classic folk story animation creation and publishing project, selecting 40 of the most classic folk stories from more than 10000 stories to create comic strips and picture books [4]; In June 2021, launch 72 comic strips and picture books were launched, including folk fairy tales, celebrity stories, myths and legends. The promotion of the

government has enhanced the enthusiasm of the creation of folk story picture books, and also aroused the traditional cultural awareness of the people. The strong creative team and financial support are expected to greatly improve the quantity and quality of Chinese folk story picture books. Therefore, both external environment and internal demand provide favorable conditions for the prosperity and development of folk story picture books.

2.3 The Rise of Local Original Power Has Accelerated the Pace of Picture-book Folk Stories

In recent years, under the influence of a large number of excellent picture books abroad, Chinese original picture books have gradually received attention. Many publishers have been involved in the drawing and publishing of folk story picture books. Many scholars, painters and children's literature writers have participated in the creation of folk story picture books, and many picture books have begun to go overseas. Chinese local illustrators, represented by Cai Gao and Xiong

Liang, actively explore the pictorial representation of folk stories. Cai Gao's series of folk stories have won many international awards, among which "The Story of Peach Blossom Land" has been selected into Japanese textbooks; "Walking with the Wind" by Xiong Liang was shortlisted for the 2018 International Andersen Illustration Award; Yang Zhicheng's "Wolf Grandmother" won three Kaidick Awards; Chen Jiangong (representative works "Fire Dragon" and "Little Lotus") won the excellent prize of the Frankfurt Book Fair. These have played a very important role in promoting the development of Chinese folk story picture books.

3. PROBLEMS IN THE ADAPTATION OF CHINESE FOLK STORY PICTURE BOOKS

The oriental culture and wisdom contained in Chinese folk stories have always attracted the attention of many publishers and illustrators, and are also favored by foreign illustrators, including many excellent works. However, in terms of the proportion of the number of Chinese traditional story picture books to the award-winning works on the market at present, although the number of picture books is large, the number of excellent works is relatively small. According to the investigation of the folk story picture books in recent years, although the Chinese folk story picture books have made great progress compared with the past, the quality of the folk story picture books on the market is uneven due to the eagerness of some publishers for quick success and instant profits, which is reflected in the following aspects:

3.1 Traditional Themes Lack In-depth Exploration, and Some Stories Have a High Repetition Rate

The low-quality repetition of folk story picture books is serious. Many traditional festival stories, classic folktales, folk idiom stories, and 24 solar terms stories have dozens or even dozens of versions. Among them, there are 17 versions of the picture books of "The Mouse Marries the Daughter" and "Chang'e Runs to the Moon" sold on Dangdang Online. However, ethnic minority stories or regional folktales with regional characteristics and stories rich in philosophy are rarely involved. In addition, a large number of picture book creations are only the transplantation and adaptation of stories, and the proportion of innovative adaptation is too small. Most of them are the restatement of folk stories in the form of picture

books, lacking the theme framework connected with the times.

3.2 The Child-oriented Concept Is Weak and the Content Grading Is Not Obvious

On the one hand, the existing Chinese folk story picture books have a wide range of stories, and the difficulty of language is very large, and there is a lack of classification and grading system in line with children's cognition. In children's cognitive psychology, children's cognition is strictly differentiated by age. At present, many folk story picture books do not have strict age differentiation, and do not form a ladder classification according to children's cognitive rules. Children have different cognitive abilities in different periods of infancy and early children. The content of folk story picture books is not graded, which is easy to cause pressure and burden on children's understanding, and make children lose interest and confidence in reading. On the other hand, many traditional stories excessively pursue the educational function, and do not connect the story with modern children's life, children's psychology and children's state, which is lack of interest.

3.3 The Visual Forms of Most Picture Books Lack Affinity and Appeal, and Are Not Integrated with the Artistic Expression Techniques Familiar to Children

Many local picture book designers use traditional artistic expression techniques in their works, such as Xiong Liang, Cai Gao, and Yu Hongcheng. However, some creators only pursue the use of traditional forms and ignore the interesting expression of picture elements in picture books. They simply misappropriate and stack traditional folk elements, ignore the reading interest of children's readers, and ignore the integration with the content of picture books, putting the cart before the horse. The above factors hinder the spread of folk story picture books, which are not favored by readers and publishers in the picture book market, and form a bad cycle.

4. INNOVATIVE EDITING STRATEGIES OF CHINESE FOLK STORY PICTURE BOOKS

4.1 *Listening to the Childlike Innocence: Selecting Folk Story Resources Guided by Children-oriented and Literary Values*

The story script is the soul of children's picture books. Traditional folk stories have a wide variety and a long history. Many ideas and concepts do not conform to modern social values. Some stories are not suitable for adaptation into children's picture books. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct in-depth screening of folk stories.

The selection of folktale picture book resources should follow two principles. The first is to follow the child-oriented concept and explore folktales that can connect with children's life or psychology. The biggest purpose of picture books being read by children is to make children like reading, so as to achieve the purpose of teaching and entertaining, or to obtain happiness from the story and satisfy their inner feelings. There are many folk stories in China, but some of them are not in line with the trend of the times due to historical limitations. For example, especially complex stories that contain violence or cultural values that are not suitable for the aesthetic perception of modern children should be abandoned. The important audience of folk story picture books is children. Therefore, when selecting stories, it is necessary to take the child-oriented as the guide, select stories from the perspective of children's psychology and children's cognition, and let children and childcare workers participate in the selection of stories. The second is to evaluate whether the story contains children's literary value and explore the poetic culture in folk stories. Tang Yaming, the top editor of the Japan Gospel Museum, believes that happiness is far more important than knowledge, and literary and aesthetic enjoyment are the foundation of life. Only works of children's literary value are nutritious reading for children. Folk stories not only contain traditional culture, but also that some stories themselves are excellent literary works and the crystallization of the wisdom of ancestors. When choosing a folk tale, it is necessary to first confirm whether the story has the quality of an excellent literary work, and pay attention to the rhythm of the language. Mr. Matsui believes that when introducing folklore stories to children, it is not necessary to select all of them because they are

national heritage, but to use the criteria of children's literature to select the content [5]. Therefore, when editors select folk tales, they first ask children's writers to review or adapt the stories from a literary point of view, and strictly grade them according to the cognitive characteristics of children, and then conduct multi-party research, so that kindergarten teachers, children's mothers, children's librarians, and children participate in reading and selection, and finally select the most popular stories for children through evaluation, and then enter the editing and drawing stage.

4.2 *Casting "Classics": Innovative Adaptations of Story Texts*

The language of folk stories is popular and the audience ranges from a wide age range, and the adaptation of folk stories needs to be adapted in a language form suitable for children's cognition and understanding. There are two forms of text adaptation of folk story picture books, one is transplantation adaptation, that is, the complete transplantation of the storyline or text, without any deletion or only partial language modification, which is generally suitable for the adaptation of folk songs and folk nursery rhymes. Cai Gao's "Moon Dumpling" and Zhou Xiang's "A Garden of Greens Become Fairies" basically all quote the lyrics of folk songs, and only replace local languages. For example, in "Moon Dumpling", "cutting off the braincase" is replaced by "chestnut shell", which has deleted the language containing violence, and the vivid image is close to the life of children; The text of "A Garden of Greens Become Fairies" has modified the parts of nursery rhymes that contain historical and political metaphors, making the narrative more coherent and easier for children to understand.

The other is reconstruction and adaptation, for folk stories suitable for adaptation into children's picture books, on the basis of retaining the imaginative and absurd and interesting folk tales, the adaptors give them themes that conform to modern children's psychology, place the stories in modern scenes that are easy for children to understand, and finally present them in a form that children enjoy. This type of adaptation has a large space and can be classified into four types of adaptation: The first is to retain the plot of the story and extract the elements from the original story for modern adaptation, such as replacing them with the familiar animal images of children and expressing them in the language that children understand; The

second is to add or delete the story, add the prequel, postscript or expand it by using the intermediate plot; The third is to retain the characters in the story and change the plot and scene of the story; the fourth is to reconstruct the characters or plots in classic stories with modern thinking or scenes. The core of these four types of adaptation is to connect traditional stories with the psychological or life scenes of modern children, throw away some functional purposes, and adapt them into picture book stories that conform to children's cognition, so that they can understand and read without obstacles.

Most of the existing picture books of folk stories are adaptations of transplant type, and the reconstructive type is relatively few. In China, a representative example is the "Monkey King! Good" series of picture books created by the picture book creation studio of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, which puts the familiar Monkey King into their life scenes, tells about the problems encountered by Monkey King and other small partners and has been solved. The sense of substitution is strong, and children are easy to have emotional resonance. The series of picture books of "Peking Opera Cat" created by Xiong Liang skillfully interprets familiar folk stories such as "Changbanpo" and "Wusong Beats the Tiger" through the form of cat stage play, which not only brings the distance with children closer from the role, but also makes people refreshing. These picture books, which reintroduce the traditional story or characters from the perspective of children, are examples of innovative and adapted picture books. However, it is worth noting that no matter what kind of adaptation form, the new folk story picture book should be compared with the previous picture book, and the content form, expression method and other aspects of the new picture book should be examined, and whether the new picture book has innovation and breakthrough should be reviewed to avoid the recurrence of low-quality picture books.

4.3 Breakthrough and Innovation: Breaking the Shackles of Traditional Painting Techniques and Forming a Picture Language for Cross-cultural Communication

A good art form is not equal to a good picture book. The picture language of the picture book should not only attract the attention of the small readers from the macro, but also catch the heart of the small readers from the details, so that they can

think, reason and find surprises about the content of the picture book. The original intention of letting children feel the charm of traditional art is good, but they cannot blindly pursue the performance of traditional art and ignore the cognitive characteristics and understanding ability of children. When adopting traditional art forms, they must be deeply integrated with the style and role of picture books, and show the story plot in pictures to produce a 1+1 greater than 2 effect, otherwise it will only backfire.

In terms of the picture language expression of the folk story picture book, the first is to rely on the innovative expression of the traditional art form, combine the traditional art form with the modern image, and re-combine it from the perspective of children and aesthetic taste. Visual image and story content and character characteristics should be unified, fit children's aesthetic taste, express and present contemporary children's life and feelings, and use modern picture language for interpretation and transformation. For example, Xiong Liang's "Changbanpo" combines the facial makeup of Peking Opera with the lines on the cat's body, which not only shows the characteristics of the cat, but also reflects the culture of Peking Opera, which is very interesting in modeling and screen expression.

Secondly, in today's diverse forms of painting art, the performance of folk story picture books need not be restricted to traditional art forms, but can be combined with modern printing technology and digital media technology to express, and combined with children's familiar watercolor, crayon, cartoon and other painting forms. Yang Zhicheng, a Chinese-American, used paper-cut and collage to express traditional Chinese stories, and reproduced oriental art aesthetics in modern art forms; When British painter Brian Waldsmith adapted the "Lion and Mouse" and "Rabbit and Tortoise" in La Fontaine's "Fables", he mixed watercolor, gouache, color gouache, collage and other techniques of expression to revive and activate the original ancient and static fable, and the expression of the characters in the picture was vivid and colorful. The Chinese folk story "Five Brothers of China" drawn by American painter Kurt Wieser in the form of cartoons won twice the Kaidick International Award. It can be seen from this that traditional stories can not be expressed in traditional painting language, and modern painting forms can still be well interpreted. Only by breaking the shackles of traditional painting

language can folk story picture books achieve diversified development and go to the world.

4.4 Interest First: Creating Multidimensional Sensory Reading Experience

The visual presentation of folk story picture books should pay attention to the expression of interest. On the one hand, interactive structural design is added to the binding design of the picture book to make the picture book "toy" and stimulate children's tactile sensory experience. For example, in the form of stereoscopic book, the interaction between children and stories is increased through the structural design of turning pages, hollowing out, rotating, pulling, and three-dimensional bouncing, and the desire of children to explore can be aroused. The three-dimensional book "The Wizard of Oz" ("Figure 2") designed by Robert Sabuda of the United States and the three-dimensional book "Making a Big fuss in the Heavenly Palace" ("Figure 3") in China both use three-dimensional paper techniques to present the bizarre story scenes and plots on the page, giving readers a sense of immersive experience. In addition to presenting the story in a three-dimensional form, "New Year's Day" published by the Future Publishing House has also set up many small mechanisms to wait for children to find out. Some small props can be taken out and put in again. It tells children the origin of the Spring Festival through various ingenious interactive reading methods such as flipping, pulling, letter bags, etc., and integrates traditional stories into children's interactive games, so that children can understand the tradition in hands-on play. On the other hand, VR, AR and other technologies are widely used in folk story picture books and combined with AR animation to create an immersive reading experience. For example, the AR picture book of "Old Man Picking up Dreams", which originated from the animated film, strengthens the emotional connection between readers and stories through AR technology, and enables readers to experience surround reading. Finally, there is a must to develop digital interactive picture books, integrate the elements in the picture books and game elements relying on modern digital technology. Interactive technology will naturally be embedded in the picture books with the development of the story, and children will enter the story through interactive technology to create a participatory reading experience. The interactive picture book "Magic Flying Book" App produced by Moonbot

allows children to participate in the story content in the form of games, such as blowing the books on the screen will raise the hurricane, and moving the house blown by the hurricane will make it rotate, which can repair the books together with the owner. In the era of information flooding, it is necessary to give full play to the advantages of folk story picture books to actively develop new book presentation methods, so that readers can gain multi-sensory reading experience, and let the old story be presented with a new look.



Figure 2 "The Wizard of Oz" stereoscopic book.



Figure 3 "Making havoc in heaven" stereoscopic book.

5. CONCLUSION

Although the development of China's folk story picture books has made certain achievements, it started relatively late, and there is a large gap between the quantity and quality of China's folk story picture books and those of foreign countries. The adaptation of folk story picture books needs to draw nutrition from traditional culture and aesthetics, select and adapt stories from the perspective of children, break the shackles of traditional art language, integrate with modern painting forms, and develop multi-sensory reading

experience based on modern technology. Only by this way can Chinese traditional story picture books stand out from many classic story picture books and let traditional folk stories radiate lasting charm. With the development of technology, the presentation of picture books becomes more diversified, and it is believed that more and more excellent folk story picture books will appear in the hands of children.

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