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VISUALIZING CHINESE NURSERY RHYMES IN CONTEMPORARY PICTUREBOOKS: A MULTIMODAL PERSPECTIVE¹

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Abstract

This study investigates how Chinese nursery rhymes are visualized in contemporary picturebooks from a multimodal perspective. The data for case analysis are selected from three Chinese rhyming picturebooks. Based on Jakobson's (1959) typology of translation, this study regards picturebooks as multimodal texts and examines the adaptation of Chinese nursery rhymes into contemporary picturebooks as a process of intralingual and intersemiotic translations. It first analyzes the modern adaptations of traditional Chinese nursery rhymes in the verbal texts and then discusses the text-image interactions in picturebooks to explore the intersemiotic translation from the verbal to the visual. The research results indicate that the didactical function or political implication of traditional Chinese nursery rhymes is usually weakened or omitted in the intralingual translation, while more creative and amusing narrative rhymes are adapted to tailor for contemporary children's hobbies and lifestyle. Besides, in the intersemiotic translation between texts and images in picturebooks, flexible and varied methods are employed according to different text-image interplays.

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Keywords: Chinese nursery rhyme. Picturebook. Intralingual translation. Intersemiotic translation. Multimodality.

Resumen

Este estudio investiga cómo se visualizan las canciones infantiles chinas en los libros ilustrados contemporáneos desde una perspectiva multimodal. Los datos para el análisis de casos se seleccionan de tres libros ilustrados de rimas chinas. Basándose en la tipología de la traducción de Jakobson (1959), el estudio considera los libros ilustrados como textos multimodales y examina la adaptación de las canciones infantiles chinas a los libros ilustrados contemporáneos como un proceso de traducción intralingüística e intersemiótica. Analiza en primer lugar las adaptaciones modernas de las canciones infantiles chinas tradicionales en los textos verbales, y a continuación discute las interacciones texto-imagen en los libros ilustrados para explorar la traducción intersemiótica de lo verbal a lo visual. Los resultados de la investigación indican que la función didáctica o la implicación política de las canciones infantiles chinas se debilita o se omite, por lo general, en la traducción intralingüística, mientras que las canciones narrativas más creativas y divertidas se adaptan para confeccionar los pasatiempos y el estilo de vida de los niños contemporáneos. Además, en la traducción intersemiótica entre textos e imágenes en los libros ilustrados, se emplean métodos flexibles y variados de acuerdo con las diferentes interrelaciones texto-imagen.

Palabras clave: Canción infantil china. Libro ilustrado. Traducción intralingüística. Traducción intersemiótica. Multimodalidad.

1. Introduction

The nursery rhyme refers to a short poem or verse traditionally read or sung for young children. They are usually anonymous and some famous nursery rhymes have been passed down from generation to generation as an important part of oral culture. The usage of this term can be traced back to the 18th and 19th centuries when *Tommy Thumb's Song Book* (1744) and *Mother Goose Melody* (1780) were published in England. Currently, the term “Mother Goose rhymes” can be interchanged with “nursery rhymes”. Many Mother Goose rhymes are quite popular among children all over the world, such as “Baa, Baa, Black Sheep”, “Humpty Dumpty”, “Hickory Dickory Dock”, “Jack and Jill”, etc.

As a special genre of children's literature, a nursery rhyme always possesses rhythm and rhyme to make it more readable and memorable for young children. Besides, nursery rhymes can be further classified into different sub-categories, such as lullabies, finger-plays, riddles, counting-out rhymes and nonsense rhymes. These different sub-categories have different functions: some rhymes are designed for amusement and play, while others may have some educational purposes to help children learn numbers or things. In the 20th century, there appeared some children's picturebooks based on or adapted from nursery rhymes, such as *The Hey Diddle Diddle Picture Book* (1909) and *Mother Goose* (1913). Over the years, with the boom of picturebooks and related studies, a large variety of rhyming picturebooks based on the adaptations of classical nursery rhymes have been produced in the West. Meanwhile, the rapid development of the Internet has accelerated the communications and cultural exchanges among nations; some representative rhyming picturebooks have been translated into different languages and have been well accepted by children from different countries.

Apart from the continued development of nursery rhymes, there have been various studies in this field. Some earliest examples of nursery rhyme research include Halliwell-Phillipps' (1886, 1968) explorations on the origins, meanings and categories of nursery rhymes. With a historical review of nursery rhymes, Delamar (1987) provides a chronological bibliography of important Mother Goose books and relevant secondary sources. Besides, Maclean, Bryant and Bradley (1987) investigate the relationship between nursery rhymes and phonological skills in children's early reading experiences. It is also noteworthy that Opie and Opie's *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (1969) is one of the most influential works on nursery rhyme scholarship, which not only includes hundreds of nursery rhymes but also provides comprehensive notes for the interpretation and analysis of these vast ranges of rhymes. Over the past three decades, new fields of academic research have been defined and established, two of which are translation studies and children's literature studies (Tabbert 2002: 303). Therefore, there has been an increasing interest in the translation of children's literature and some studies on nursery rhyme translation have also been conducted from different perspectives, such as the metric patterns in nursery rhymes (Arleo

2006), the oral tradition and features of nursery rhymes (Opie 1996), and the intercultural transformation of nursery rhymes in translation (Desmet 2001).

In China, Chinese nursery rhymes have played different roles in history and are closely related to people's life. Now a growing number of traditional Chinese nursery rhymes have been adapted into contemporary picturebooks, which are well received by children. Meanwhile, the adaptations of children's literature begin to attract the attention of literary scholars (Hui 2011; Meeusen 2018; Van den Bossche & Geerts 2014). The adaptations of literary works have been investigated from different perspectives (Bruhn, Gjelsvik & Hanssen 2013; Hutcheon 2006; Sanders 2006). In Hutcheon's (2006: 8) classification, adaptation can be viewed as "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works", "a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation" or "an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work". She examines the creative and interpretative process of adaptation across a variety of media. In many cases, adaptations are regarded as "re-mediations", "transcoding" or "intersemiotic transpositions" from one sign system to another (Hutcheon 2006: 16). Therefore, when nursery rhymes are adapted into children's picturebooks, such intersemiotic transposition from texts into images comes closer to our understanding of translation.

However, despite the great popularity of nursery rhymes with a huge readership in China, there remain few academic studies on nursery rhymes by Chinese scholars (Shu 2011; Wang 2014). The translation of children's literature has always been under-researched in China, and there are even fewer studies on nursery rhyme translation (Niu & Wang 2020; Yang 2013). This study aims to investigate how Chinese nursery rhymes are visualized in contemporary picturebooks from a multimodal perspective. Based on Jakobson's (1959) typology of translation, this study regards picturebooks as multimodal texts and examines the adaptation of Chinese nursery rhymes into contemporary picturebooks as a process of intralingual and intersemiotic translations. It first analyzes the modern adaptations of traditional Chinese nursery rhymes in different picturebooks and then discusses the text-image interactions in picturebooks to explore the intersemiotic translation from the verbal to the visual.

2. Chinese nursery rhymes and rhyming picturebooks

Nursery rhymes exist in all countries and cultures of the world. As a part of the ballad, traditional nursery rhymes generally belong to folklore. However, the composers of nursery rhymes are not necessarily children. No matter a nursery rhyme is created by adults for children or not, as long as it is read, sung or well accepted by children, it can be regarded as a nursery rhyme. With strong local characteristics, humorous expressions, rhymes and rhythms, nursery rhymes are usually short and catchy for children to read and sing.

Nursery rhymes have a long history of about three thousand years in China. The earliest Chinese nursery rhymes originate from *Shijing (Book of Songs)* which is the oldest existing Chinese poetry collection dating from the 11th to 7th centuries BC. Different nursery rhymes circulated in different historical periods of China; however, before the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), most Chinese nursery rhymes were related to political themes as the tool in political struggles (Shu 2011). Since the Ming Dynasty, people began to consciously write and collect some nursery rhymes that truly reflected children's life. The earliest existing collection of Chinese nursery rhymes is *Yan Xiao Er Yu (Words of Children)* compiled by Kun Lü in 1593, which includes 46 adapted Chinese nursery rhymes that are collected in central and northern China. In ancient China, nursery rhymes were significant resources for children to understand the world, which covered a lot of topics, such as folk customs, festival ceremonies, natural phenomena and history stories. In 2008, nursery rhymes of Beijing and southern Fujian were included in the list of China Intangible Culture Heritage (China Intangible Cultural Heritage Website 2008), which demonstrated the precious status of Chinese nursery rhymes.

Through years of development, now Chinese nursery rhymes have formed their characteristics. Firstly, Chinese nursery rhymes are closely related to nature and children's life, with easy content and simple thoughts. To make it easy for children to understand, Chinese nursery rhymes usually describe or narrate events in a simple way, or express common truths for children in a concise and interesting rhyme. For example, in a Chinese nursery rhyme “布娃娃，不听话，喂她吃东西，不肯张嘴巴 (Ragdoll, disobedient, feeding

her food, refusing to open its mouth)”, such naïve expressions of children’s daily life will make young children associate themselves with the scene of eating and remind them to develop good living habits. Secondly, Chinese nursery rhymes are short and concise with fixed structures, which usually include four to eight sentences with three to seven Chinese characters in each sentence. Take a Chinese nursery rhyme “小青蛙，叫呱呱，捉害虫，保庄稼，我们大家都爱它 (Little frogs, croak croak; catch pests, protect crops; we all love them)” as an example. This short nursery rhyme only contains nineteen Chinese characters, but it vividly depicts a picture of frogs croaking in the field and, meanwhile, tells children some general knowledge about frogs. Thirdly, with lively language, catchy rhyme and rhythm, Chinese nursery rhymes are highly readable and memorable for Chinese children. To a great extent, nursery rhymes circulate through the games among children, so they are required to present a distinct sense of music and rhythm in order to match with the game process and be suitable for children to chant.

In China, some traditional nursery rhymes have circulated through different generations and developed into various adapted versions. In the contemporary era, the flourishing development of Chinese children’s literature has greatly promoted the publishing of Chinese picturebooks. With particular cultural features and artistic values, Chinese picturebooks have become valuable resources for research on children’s literature. In addition, among contemporary Chinese picturebooks, there are a number of rhyming picturebooks that are adapted from traditional Chinese nursery rhymes (Lu 2012; Wang 2017; Yuan 2018; Zhou 2012). These Chinese rhyming picturebooks are especially popular among young children. On the one hand, the rhythmic language in these rhyming picturebooks suits children’s language receptivity. Young children are at a sensitive stage of language learning, so the lively expression, clear rhythm and musicality of nursery rhymes could not only arouse children’s sense of beauty and pleasure but also stimulate their enthusiasm in language learning. On the other hand, the playful content of rhyming picturebooks just meets children’s spiritual needs (Wang, Yu & Liu 2019). In games, children could find a sense of control to a certain extent and obtain a sense of certainty about self and social relations. Therefore, the expression techniques commonly used in nursery rhymes and rhyming picturebooks, such as metaphor, irony and hyperbole, happen to

coincide with the nature of playfulness for children. Moreover, the performativity of rhyming picturebooks could stimulate children's natural desire for performance. Many excellent nursery rhymes are not only catchy and melodious but also narrate lively stories that are suitable for performance. For example, in the rhyming picturebook *Yi Yuan Qing Cai Cheng Le Jing* (*The Day Vegetables Became Goblins*, 2008), the interesting nursery rhyme and dynamic images may easily attract children into an imaginary world where vegetables have become living goblins that fight each other.

3. Multimodality and intersemiotic translation in picturebooks

Multimodality, a concept widely discussed in the field of social semiotics, is "the combination of different semiotic modes in a communicative artifact or event" (Van Leeuwen 2005: 281). It includes "the diverse ways in which a number of distinct semiotic resource systems are both co-deployed and co-contextualized in the making of a text-specific meaning" (Baldry and Thibault 2006: 21). Now multimodal approaches have been utilized to investigate different semiotic resources and intersemiotic relations.

The semiotic concept in translation studies originates from Roman Jakobson's article "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (1959). In his typology of translation, Jakobson classifies three types of translation within a semiotic framework: intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translations (1959/1966: 233). Intralingual translation refers to "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language"; interlingual translation is "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language", which refers to the translation in the broadest sense; intersemiotic translation is "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems" (ibid). According to Jakobson's typology, the adapted versions of Chinese nursery rhymes in contemporary picturebooks can be regarded as the intralingual translation of traditional nursery rhymes, while the images in these adapted rhyming picturebooks can be considered as a kind of intersemiotic translation of the texts in picturebooks.

After Jakobson, several new concepts were proposed within or on the borderline of intersemiotic translation, expanding or developing Jakobson's typology. Toury (1986: 1128) broadens the definition of translating to "a

series of operations whereby one semiotic entity is transformed into, and replaced by, another entity, pertaining to another [sub-]code or semiotic system". He restructures Jakobson's schema by distinguishing two types of translating: intrasemiotic translating and intersemiotic translating. His interpretation of intersemiotic translating involves the translation in which "the two codes [are] two different sign-systems, whether one of them is verbal or not" (Toury 1986: 1129). Under the influence of Peircean semiotics, Eco (2001) emphasizes that meaning is a "translation of a sign into another system of signs" and supports Pierce in using "translation in a figurative sense: not like a metaphor, but pars pro toto (in the sense that he assumes 'translation' as a synecdoche for 'interpretation')" (Eco 2001: 69). Besides, Gorrée (2010: 58) argues that "intersemiotic translation is sequentially triadic (or even more complex), since it involves the union of intermedial translations into an embedded one".

With the development of multimedia in the digital era, multimodal texts have been added to translation typology and broadened the concept of intersemiotic translation. From this perspective, intersemiotic translation is regarded as the basis of cultural communication rather than verbal communication (O'Halloran, Tan & Wignell 2016: 200). In this regard, Kaindl (2013) offers a more detailed division of translation including multimodal texts. Kaindl (2013: 261) regards translation as "a conventionalized cultural interaction which modally and medially transfers texts from a communication entity for a target group that is different from the initially intended target group", which reveals their understanding of translation from a multimodal perspective. The modes of translation are classified into intramodal and intermodal types; the media cover the intramedial and intermedial types; the cultures refer to both the intracultural and transcultural types. In accordance with Kaindl's typology, the adaptation of Chinese nursery rhymes into contemporary picturebooks can be regarded as a process of intermodal intracultural translation.

These different translation typologies help broaden the horizon of translation studies and enrich our understanding of intersemiotic translation. We can examine translation from the perspective of semiotics and regard translation as a semiotic act involving the transition from one semiotic system to another.

Picturebooks combine “two levels of communication, the visual and the verbal” (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001: 29), and are regarded as “multimodal texts, where image and writing come together to convey a message and constructing meaning” (Coifman 2013: 21). Owing to the multimodal nature of picturebooks, the text-image interaction in picturebooks has been an important research aspect in picturebook studies (Doonan 1993; Nodelman 1988; Schwarcz 1982). From a multimodal perspective, such text-image interplay is also a kind of intersemiotic translation between different semiotic systems (Chen 2018). Pereira (2008) considers the pictures in illustrated books as the intersemiotic translations of the texts, in which the verbal texts can be regarded as the source texts and the visual images as the target texts. He also summarizes three particular methods for the intersemiotic translation between texts and images: to reproduce the textual elements literally in the picture, to emphasize a specific narrative element, and to adapt the pictures to a certain ideology or artistic trend (Pereira 2008: 104). In this study, the adaptation of Chinese nursery rhymes into contemporary picturebooks is regarded as a process of multimodal translation which combines the intralingual translation of verbal texts as well as the intersemiotic translation between verbal texts and visual images.

4. Multimodal Translation of Chinese Nursery Rhymes in Contemporary Picturebooks

In this section, the multimodal translations of Chinese nursery rhymes in contemporary picturebooks are analyzed with detailed case studies. The data under investigation are selected from three representative Chinese rhyming picturebooks that are adapted from traditional Chinese nursery rhymes. These three picturebooks are very popular among Chinese audiences and have won picturebook awards in China, so they are representative enough as the research data. In these three cases, both the verbal texts and visual images are examined in terms of intralingual and intersemiotic translations.

4.1. *Little Mouse Goes Up to the Lamp Again* (2018)

Xiao Lao Shu You Shang Deng Tai Lou (*Little Mouse Goes Up to the Lamp Again*, 2018) is a contemporary picturebook adapted from the Chinese nursery

rhyme “*Xiao Lao Shu Shang Deng Tai* (Little Mouse Goes Up to the Lamp)”, which is one of the most well-known nursery rhymes in China. Like “Jack and Jill” in the English world, this short nursery rhyme is so popular among young children that almost every kindergarten child in China could sing this rhyme. Through years of development, there are several adapted versions of this nursery rhyme and some versions are even created in Chinese dialects. The representative versions of this nursery rhyme are shown in Example 1 as follows:

Example 1

Chinese version 1

xiǎo lǎo shǔ shàng dēng tái
小 老 鼠 ， 上 灯 台 ，

Little mouse goes up to the lamp,

tōu yóu chī xià bu lái
偷 油 吃 ， 下 不 来 。

to steal oil but cannot get down.

miāo miāo miāo māo mī lái
喵 喵 喵 ， 猫 咪 来 ，

Meow meow meow, a cat is coming,

jī li gū lū gǔn xià lái
叽 哩 咕 噜 滚 下 来 。

while the little mouse rolls down and rolls down.

Chinese version 2

xiǎo lǎo shǔ shàng dēng tái
小 老 鼠 ， 上 灯 台 ，

Little mouse goes up to the lamp,

tōu yóu chī xià bu lái
偷 油 吃 ， 下 不 来 。

to steal oil but cannot get down.

jiào mā mā, mā bù zài,
叫 妈 妈, 妈 不 在,

Calling mom, yet mom is not here,

gǔ liù gǔ liù gǔn xià lái.
骨 碌 骨 碌 滚 下 来。

while the little mouse rolls down and rolls down.

Example 1 includes the two most popular versions of this nursery rhyme. Version 1 depicts the scene of a little mouse climbing up the lamp to steal oil but rolling down when a cat comes. In Version 2, the illustration of a cat has been replaced by a mouse mom. The little mouse keeps calling its mom for help, but the mouse mom is not coming, so the little mouse rolls down the lamp. These two versions indicate the didactical implication of this traditional Chinese nursery rhyme. Passed through generations, it has always been used to warn children about the punishment of disobedient behavior behind their parents. Just like the little mouse rolling down the lamp because it steals oil, if the children steal food or misbehave in front of their parents, they will also be punished in some way.

This nursery rhyme has quite a long history and it might evolve from some rituals in ancient China. Ordinary families in ancient China usually used oil lamps for lighting and the oil in these lamps was mainly made of animal fat, so mice would steal oil from the lamp to eat. However, in modern times, due to the invention of the electric lamp, most Chinese people no longer use oil lamps and most Chinese children have never seen an oil lamp. Therefore, contemporary children cannot see the mouse stealing oil and may not easily empathize with the context of this nursery rhyme. In the picturebook *Little Mouse Goes Up to the Lamp Again* (2018), the traditional nursery rhyme has been adapted into a creative narrative rhyme to fit contemporary children's life and habits. Selected texts of this adapted version in the picturebook are shown in example 2.

Example 2

xiǎo lǎo shǔ shàng dēng tái,
小 老 鼠 ， 上 灯 台 ，

Little mouse goes up to the lamp,

zhǎo péng yǒu yì qǐ lái。
找 朋 友 ， 一 起 来 。

to find friends in company,

yì qǐ bǎ shū dú qǐ lái。
一 起 把 书 读 起 来 。

and read books together.

xiǎo lǎo shǔ shàng dēng tái,
小 老 鼠 ， 上 灯 台 ，

Little mouse goes up to the lamp,

gù shì shū lǐ māo mī lái。
故 事 书 里 猫 咪 来 。

to read the storybook which includes a cat.

māo mī liē zuǐ xiào mī mī,
猫 咪 咧 嘴 笑 咪 咪 ，

The cat grins and grins,

xiǎng gēn lǎo shǔ wán yóu xì。
想 跟 老 鼠 玩 游 戏 。

hoping to play games with the mouse.

In the intralingual translation, through several creative adaptations, the traditional nursery rhyme has been transformed into a rhyming picturebook of 33 pages. Example 2 shows the rhyming patterns selected from the long narrative rhyme in this picturebook. In Example 2, it is found that the little mouse no longer steals oil, but goes to the lamp to find friends and read books together. Contemporary children do not need to worry about being punished by their parents all the time; instead, they can play lightheartedly and explore the world with intense curiosity. To cater to the interest of

contemporary children, Example 2 adapts a creative method for children to explore the world through reading books. Books are like mysterious doors that may lead children to an unknown world. In the adapted version of the picturebook, little mice find an interesting world in the books and make friends with a kitten, a big cat, a yellow dog and several children through reading. They read books together and play happily with each other. Through intralingual translation, the traditional nursery rhyme with didactical implications is adapted into an ingenious narrative rhyme with the theme of expecting friendship and trusting friends, which may stimulate contemporary children's curiosity about the charm of reading in this picturebook.

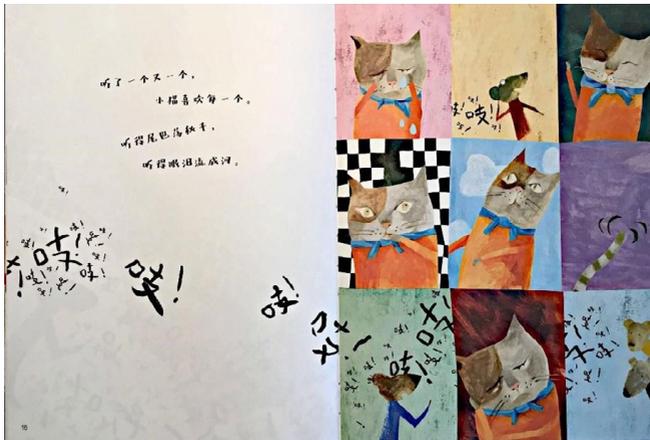


Figure 1. *Little Mouse Goes Up to the Lamp Again* (2018: 16-17)²

In terms of the intersemiotic translation between texts and images in this picturebook, different strategies are employed to produce different text-image interactions and visual narratives. For example, Figure 1 illustrates the scene when the kitten is fully attracted by the wonderful content of books. In this picturebook, the images are shown double-spread, with the texts printed within the images. On the verso page, the Chinese texts are printed on the white background:

2. Text copyright © 2018 by Xiaofeng Yuan; Illustration copyright © 2018 by Xiaoyin Zhao, China Children's Press & Publication Group.

听了一个又一个，小猫喜欢每一个。听得尾巴荡秋千，听得眼泪流成河。(Listening to one story after another, the kitten likes every story. These stories are so attractive that sometimes the kitten wags its tail while sometimes it bursts into tears).

Below the verbal texts, there are several Chinese characters “吱” (zhi, squeak of the mouse) in different font sizes. These Chinese characters are printed in a special font that imitates children’s handwriting, which produces a sense of playfulness in the picturebook. Arranged across the verso page, these Chinese characters tactfully connect with the image on the recto page. On the recto page, nine different small images are juxtaposed together, demonstrating vivid postures and facial expressions of the kitten through the close-up and middle shot. The kitten sheds tears, grins, wags the tail, stares with a surprised look or bends its head with a glum look, which accords with the content of the verbal texts on the verso page. Through the intersemiotic translation, the image vividly reproduces the textual elements in the verbal text.



Figure 2. *Little Mouse Goes Up to the Lamp Again* (2018: 26-27)³

3. Text copyright © 2018 by Xiaofeng Yuan; Illustration copyright © 2018 by Xiaoyin Zhao, China Children’s Press & Publication Group.

Figure 2 shows the scene when the mice and cats read and play together in the picturebook. With the double-spread layout and no framing, the two pages constitute a whole image, producing a closer interpersonal relationship with the reader. On the top right corner of the recto page, the Chinese text in black seems salient on the colorful background:

小老鼠，找朋友，找到一群好朋友。一起读书一起玩，好朋友们乐悠悠。(Little mouse looks for friends and finally finds a group of good friends. Reading and playing together, good friends have a happy time)

It is noteworthy that the images of cats and mice are presented in shadow play, an ancient entertainment form in China, which uses flat cut-out figures to provide performances or tell stories. The black silhouette of big cats and small mice becomes more salient in contrast with the colorful background, which emphasizes the happy facial expressions of the cats and the cheerful dancing movements of the mice. The special visual expression by shadow play reinforces and highlights the depiction of the happy scene in the verbal text when the cats and mice happily read and play together. Through the intersemiotic translation, some narrative elements in the verbal text are selectively emphasized in the visual image.

4.2. *The Day Vegetables Became Goblins* (2008)

Yi Yuan Qing Cai Cheng Le Jing (*The Day Vegetables Became Goblins*, 2008) is a famous Chinese rhyming picturebook adapted from a vibrant and imaginative Chinese nursery rhyme with the same name. This picturebook is illustrated by the well-known Chinese children's writer Xiang Zhou and has won the Judging Panel's Recommended Illustration Award of the First Feng Zikai Chinese Children's Picture Book Award (Feng Zikai Chinese Children's Picture Book Award Committee 2009), which is the most prestigious picturebook award in China. In this nursery rhyme, the vegetables in the garden become living and vivid figures which fight each other and produce a series of humorous and interesting stories. In Chinese folklore, *yaojing* are malevolent animals or plant spirits that have gained mana or acquired magical powers through the cultivation process. Not all the *yaojing* are evil spirits and demons, and they can also be regarded as lovely and nifty fairies, elves or goblins in Western cultures. Such type of *yaojing* is common in Chinese

classics, such as *Journey to the West* and *Legend of the White Snake*. Therefore, when all the vegetables become goblins in this nursery rhyme, a charming imaginary world is created for contemporary children. The catchy expressions, funny imagination, ingenious personification and bold exaggeration in this picturebook are well received by Chinese children.

In the intralingual translation, by supplementing more detailed descriptions, Zhou Xiang expands the traditional nursery rhyme into a longer rhyme with 34 short sentences, which enriches the dramatic conflicts and makes it more suitable for contemporary children. Some adaptations in the intralingual translations are shown in examples 3-4.

Example 3

Chinese version:

chū le chéng mén wǎng zhèng dōng , yì yuán qīng cài chéng le jīng 。
出了城 门 往 正 东 ， 一 园 青 菜 成 了 精 。

zǐ tóu luó bo zuò dà diàn , hóng tóu luó bo zhǎng zhèng gōng 。
紫 头 萝 卜 坐 大 殿 ， 红 头 萝 卜 掌 正 宫 。

jiāng nán fǎn le bái lián ǒu , yì fēng zhàn biǎo dǎ jìn jīng 。
江 南 反 了 白 莲 藕 ， 一 封 战 表 打 进 京 。

Back translation:

Out of the city gate to the east, a garden of vegetables became goblins. Purple radish sat at the hall, while red radish took charge of the palace. Southern regions of the Yangtze River opposed against the white lotus root, sending a letter of battle to Beijing.

Example 4

Chinese version:

chū le chéng mén wǎng zhèng dōng , yì yuán qīng cài lǜ cōng cōng 。
出了城 门 往 正 东 ， 一 园 青 菜 绿 葱 葱 。

zuì jìn jǐ tiān méi rén wèn , tā men gè gè chéng le jīng 。
最 近 几 天 没 人 问 ， 他 们 个 个 成 了 精 。

lǜ tóu luó bo chēng dà wáng , hóng tóu luó bo dāng niáng niáng 。
绿头萝卜称大王，红头萝卜当娘娘。

gé bì lián ǒu jí le yǎn , yì fēng zhàn shū dǎ jìn yuán 。
隔壁莲藕急了眼，一封战书打进园。

Back translation:

Out of the city gate to the east, a garden was full of green vegetables.

Without being noticed recently, they all became goblins.

Green radish was the king, while red radish was the queen.

Lotus root next door became anxious and angry, sending a letter of battle into the garden.

Example 3 is the beginning of the traditional nursery rhyme and Example 4 is the adapted version of the same part in the picturebook. In Example 3, “江南反了白莲藕，一封战表打进京” implies the wars of White Lotus Rebellion in Chinese history, which is a religious and political movement against the Qing government during the reign of Emperor Jiaqing (1796-1804) of the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912). Under the background of increasing social and economic discontent in the impoverished areas of China, the White Lotus Rebellion began in 1794, which was led by a secret religious organization called “White Lotus Society”. The rebellion lasted for nine years, accelerating the decline in the national power and financial resources of the Qing Dynasty. In ancient China, especially before the Ming Dynasty, many nursery rhymes served as the tool for political propaganda. These political nursery rhymes could spread quickly over a large area and attracted public attention through continuous publicity. Meanwhile, the authorship was concealed to ensure the safety of political propaganda (Shu 2011: 47). However, from generation to generation, now most political nursery rhymes have stepped down the historical arena and political implications are seldom found in contemporary nursery rhymes. In Example 3, the traditional nursery rhyme implicitly expresses the political implications of the White Lotus Rebellion through the wars between vegetables in the rhyme, but such expression is not suitable for contemporary children to understand. In Example 4, through the intralingual translation, the struggle between different regimes is tactfully transformed into the struggle between different vegetables in the garden.

This adaptation retains the traditional essence of the original text and meanwhile removes the reading barriers for contemporary children, making the whole story into a funny game. In addition, the adapted version in the picturebook repeats the beginning expression “出了城门往正东，一园青菜绿葱葱” at the end of the story, through which the beginning and the end echo with each other and work as the opening and closing of a complete drama.

As to the intersemiotic translation between texts and images in this picturebook, Zhou employs the watercolour painting to represent this children’s rhyme, in which Chinese elements are skillfully blended in the visual narrative. For instance, the fighting scenes of vegetables resemble the martial arts scenes of Peking Opera; the simple painting style is similar to famous Chinese painters Wei Xu (1521-1593) and Baishi Qi (1864-1957), who are adept in using lines to express vivid and dynamic visual effect in Chinese painting.



Figure 3. *The Day Vegetables Became Goblins* (2008: 11-12)⁴

Figure 3 illustrates the scene when the vegetables are divided into two sides and ready to fight. This picturebook adopts the double-spread layout arrangement and the texts are printed in the images. The verbal texts of Figure 3 only include two short sentences “两边兄弟来叫阵，大呼小叫争输赢 (Vegetable brothers from both sides stand apart, shouting and wrangling for a showdown)”. However, more additional information is supplemented

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in the images, enriching the content of verbal texts in a more vivid way. On the verso page, the radish army stands in lines with high spirits. The carrot general stands in the middle, with the radish troop and potato troop on each side; the shallot, leek and bean soldiers dash forward, while the big gourd stands behind, functioning as the heavy weapon in this battle. However, on the recto page, the lotus root army is in a mess. The eggplant, cucumber, pepper, peanut and garlic soldiers all stand in a state of disorder, while the lotus root king hides behind them. Such visual representation not only reproduces the information in the verbal texts but also supplements more details about the vegetable battle through the vivid depiction of different kinds of vegetables. Moreover, it is noteworthy that these different vegetable troops also carry their banners and flags. For example, the potato troop carries three flags with different troop names, such as “土豆王子队 (Potato Prince Troop)”, “铁蛋蛋 (Iron Balls)” and “滚滚军 (Rolling Troop)”. These funny troop names echo the particular features of the potato, contributing to the vivid and interesting visual narratives in the picturebook. In this way, the intersemiotic translation enriches the visual narrative of the verbal text by supplementing additional visual information in the image.



Figure 4. *The Day Vegetables Became Goblins* (2008: 13-14)⁵

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Example 5

xiǎo cōng duān qǐ yín gǎn qiāng ,
小葱端起银杆枪，

The shallot picked up the silver gun,

yì gè jìn ér xiàng qián chōng 。
一个劲儿向前冲。

dashing forward with great strength.

qié zǐ yì tǐng dà dù pí ,
茄子一挺大肚皮，

The eggplant stood its big belly,

xiǎo cōng zhuàng le gè dǎo zāi cōng 。
小葱撞了个倒栽葱。

making the shallot fall heads over heels.

jiǔ cài shǐ chū liǎng rèn fēng ,
韭菜使出两刃锋，

The leek used two sharp edges,

hū la hū la shàng le zhèn 。
呼啦呼啦上了阵。

joining the battle full of vigor.

huáng guā shuāi qǐ sǎo táng tuǐ ,
黄瓜甩起扫堂腿，

The cucumber lifted sweep kicks,

tī dé jiǔ cài wǎng huí bēn 。
踢得韭菜往回奔。

forcing the leek to run back.

Figure 4 illustrates the fierce fighting scene of the vegetable battle in the picturebook. As is shown in Example 5, the verbal text vividly depicts the fighting actions of different vegetables and highlights the particular features

of these vegetables. For instance, the shallot leaves are as straight as silver guns; the long and flat blade of the leek resembles a two-edged sword. In the intersemiotic translation, with white background and simple lines, the figures of these different vegetables are vividly represented, producing a sense of humorous visual expression in the image. The shallot straightens its back and rushes forward like a silver gun, but unfortunately, it hits the big belly of the eggplant and immediately falls on its face. The leek swaggers on the battlefield with peanut soldiers supporting around, but it soon rushes back after the slender cucumber lifts sweep kicks. Such visual representation lively reproduces the textual elements in the verbal text; meanwhile, the text-image interaction helps the children enter an imaginary world where they can place themselves in this magic garden and get great pleasure and satisfaction through empathizing with these funny vegetables. The rich playability of the text-image interplay in this picturebook creates enough imagination and creative space for children, caters to the inner growth power of their minds, and assists them in the achievement of subjective experience in the reading process.

4.3. *Mice at home?* (2012)

Hao Zi Da Ye Zai Jia Ma? (*Mice at home?*, 2012) is a Chinese rhyming picturebook adapted from an old Beijing nursery rhyme with the same name. The old Beijing nursery rhyme is a cheerful folk rhyme in the form of questions and answers to show the interaction between the cat and the mouse, which is just like an amusing child game. This picturebook is also illustrated by Xiang Zhou and has been included in the shortlist of the Third Feng Zikai Chinese Children's Picture Book Award.

Example 6

yī gèng gǔ lǐ yē,
一 更 鼓 里 耶，

Gongs are rung to tell the time of *Yi Geng*,

māo ér ná hào zǐ lei
猫 儿 拿 耗 子 嘞。

when the cat starts catching mice.

tiān zhǎng lǐ, yè duǎn lǐ,
天 长 哩, 夜 短 哩,

The days get longer and the nights get shorter,

hào zǐ dà yé qǐ wǎn la.
耗 子 大 爷 起 晚 啦。

while Uncle Mouse gets up late.

èr gèng tiān,
二 更 天,

Er Geng is coming.

“hào zǐ dà yé zài jiā ma?”
“耗 子 大 爷 在 家 吗？”

“Is Uncle Mouse at home?”

hào zǐ dà yé chuān yī shàng nǎ
耗 子 大 爷 穿 衣 裳 哪！”

“Uncle Mouse is wearing clothes.”

Example 7

bāng bāng bāng, bāng bāng bāng
“梆 — 梆 梆, 梆 — 梆 梆！”

“Bang—bang bang, bang—bang bang!”

yì gèng nǎ
一 更 哪——

Yi Geng is coming,

māo ér ná hào zǐ
猫 儿 拿 耗 子——

when the cat starts catching mice.

“hào zǐ dà yé zài jiā ma?”
“耗 子 大 爷 在 家 吗？”

“Is Uncle Mouse at home?”

hào zǐ dà yé hái méi qǐ nǎ
“耗子大爷还没起哪!”

“Uncle Mouse hasn’t got up yet!”

èr gèng nǎ
二更哪——

Er Geng is coming,

hào zǐ dà yé zài jiā ma
“耗子大爷在家吗?”

“Is Uncle Mouse at home?”

hào zǐ dà yé chuān yī shang nǎ
“耗子大爷穿衣裳哪!”

“Uncle Mouse is wearing clothes.”

In this picturebook, there are not so many adaptations of the original nursery rhyme in the intralingual translation, so the verbal texts in the picturebook continue the original narrative structure of the old Beijing nursery rhyme. Example 6 shows the beginning of the original nursery rhyme and Example 7 is the adapted beginning of verbal texts in the picturebook. It is found that the storytelling progresses in the form of questions and answers: the cat proposes the question “Is Uncle Mouse at home?” and the mouse family offers different answers during different times of the day. *Da Geng* is a traditional system of telling time at night in ancient China, through which the night watchman patrols the streets and beats the wooden clappers or gongs every two hours to tell the time. In ancient times, people seldom had entertainment life at night, so they knew the time and daily routine mainly based on the watchman’s beating and announcing. In the intralingual translation, the activity of *Da Geng* is adapted into the onomatopoeic words “bang bang bang”, which represents the traditional custom for contemporary children in a more direct way. During *Yi Geng* (*Geng* is a timing unit in ancient China), which refers to the period from seven to nine in the evening, Uncle Mouse hasn’t got up yet; during *Er Geng*, which refers to the period from nine to eleven at night, Uncle Mouse is wearing clothes. Through these different interactions of questions and answers at different times of the day, the

nursery rhyme vividly depicts the lazy and fastidious lifestyle of an uncle mouse living in Beijing.



Figure 5. *Mice at home?* (2012: 3-4)⁶

In the intersemiotic translation between texts and images, the old Beijing nursery rhyme has been transformed into a modern picturebook by supplementing a lot of dramatic visual elements. For instance, Figure 5 demonstrates the beginning scene of the picturebook when the mouse family is answering the cat's question with a simple answer “耗子大爷还没起哪! (Uncle Mouse hasn't got up yet!)”. However, in the intersemiotic translation, abundant visual elements are added to the image, which greatly enriches the visual narrative in the picturebook. Here the supplementary visual narrative about the mother mouse and a group of little mice is created, providing another storyline within the mouse hole. By this means, two narrative lines are produced in this picturebook: the interaction between the cat and Uncle Mouse outside the mouse hole as well as the cozy family life of the mother mouse and little mice inside the mouse hole. In Figure 5, when the cat attacks the mouse family outside the mouse hole, the mother mouse is calmly ironing clothes inside, while the little mice are still sleeping soundly. In addition, many funny visual details in the mouse hole reveal some clues about the daily interactions between the cat and the mouse family, such as the slogan on the wall “平时多流汗, 逃时少流血 (Sweat more at ordinary times; Bleed less when running away)”, the stuck poster “天天念, 天天记, 防火放人防猫

6. Text and illustration copyright © 2012 by Xiang Zhou, Tomorrow Publishing House.

(Read every day; Remember every day; Beware of fire, people and cats)”, and *Mouse Newsletter* (耗子快报) on the bed. Such visual details evince that the mouse family has studied hard on various defensive measures against the cat in their daily routine, which is lively, amusing and closely related to the daily lifestyle of contemporary children.

5. Concluding remarks

From a multimodal perspective, this study has investigated the adaptations of Chinese nursery rhymes into contemporary picturebooks, which includes the intralingual translation of verbal texts and the intersemiotic translation of text-image interactions in the picturebook. The research results demonstrate that, in the intralingual translation, the didactical function or political implication of traditional Chinese nursery rhymes is usually weakened or omitted; instead, more creative and amusing narrative rhymes are adapted from traditional nursery rhymes to tailor for contemporary children’s hobbies and lifestyle. In the intersemiotic translation between texts and images in picturebooks, feasible and varied methods are employed according to different text-image interplays: 1) the image may faithfully reproduce the textual elements in the verbal text; 2) some narrative elements in the verbal text are selectively emphasized in the visual image; 3) the image may supplement additional visual information that does not exist in the verbal text. Through the intralingual and intersemiotic translations, the traditional Chinese nursery rhymes are successfully visualized in contemporary children’s picturebooks.

In addition, in the process of intersemiotic translation, two key points are worthy of consideration. Firstly, the folklore characteristics of nursery rhymes should be maintained to keep the nursery rhymes popular all the time across different eras. As a form of oral folk literature, nursery rhymes and rhyming picturebooks possess folklore characteristics in essence. Therefore, they can become important intermediaries for children to interact with society, history and culture, realizing the intergenerational transition of national culture. For example, the “silver gun” and “sweep kick” in *The Day Vegetables Became Goblins* reflect the martial arts elements in Chinese culture. Secondly, the visual representation in picturebooks should be closely

related to children's life. Contemporary children's rhyming picturebooks are adapted or recreated by modern illustrators to visualize traditional nursery rhymes, which endows traditional nursery rhymes with modern life and perfectly connects tradition with modernity. For instance, in the butterfly page of *Mice at home?*, the image of a runaway mouse of the computer successfully achieves the interaction between real life and the traditional nursery rhyme, which naturally integrates the daily life of contemporary children with the imaginary world of the nursery rhyme.

Owing to the limited time and space, this study is still open for further improvements. Future studies could expand the research scope with more rhyming picturebooks included in the data; in-depth analyses on visual adaptation could be conducted with the employment of related theories on multimodal analysis. It is hoped that this research could shed light on future studies on nursery rhymes and rhyming picturebooks, contributing to the adaptation of Chinese picturebooks and the transmission of Chinese culture.

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