Design and Application of the Illustrations
of *Zhuangzi*

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Abstract. *Zhuangzi* is a Chinese cultural treasure. *Zhuangzi* is of inestimable value due to its preservation of ancient mythological material, its literary and philosophical innovation, its eccentric imagery and rich creativity, and the strong narrative quality of its many allegories. It was often the subject of illustrations in classical works. Efforts to preserve the messages of *Zhuangzi*, to transform its abstract ideas into tangible forms as illustrations, and to excavate its treasures have proven to be a great struggle. The present study uses the notion of "Poetic techniques of shape-spirit transformation" proposed by Yeh et al. (2011) as its primary reference point. In her theory of the form and essence of traditional Chinese paintings, she first takes inventory to conduct a comparative analysis of modern illustrations derived from *Zhuangzi*, and then advances a further step toward creating a design model for transforming the artistry of *Zhuangzi* into illustrations.

Keywords: *Zhuangzi* · Transformation · Application · Animation · Illustrations

1 Introduction

Zhuangzi has had a profound influence on Chinese culture. Familiar proverbs such as "a mantis attempting to stop a chariot", "Zhuang Zhou dreams of a butterfly", and "abandoning the sacrificial vessels for the saucepans", among others, all originated from Zhuangzi, and there is no shortage of similar examples. However, due to the length of years, its difficult classical language is an obstacle even for many native Chinese speakers, giving rise to commentaries, references, and adaptations. Among the commentaries are *Zhuangzi Commentary* by Guo Xiang of the Western Jin Dynasty, *Commentary on True Scripture of Southern Florescence* by Cheng Xuanying of the Tang Dynasty, and *Zhuangzi Modern Annotated Edition and Translation* by Chen Guying in modern times. Zhuangzi has been referenced countless times. For example, the line "The immortals leave the world and do not look back, but in the world, life and death are like morning and night" from "Comments from a Visit to the City of

Immortals" by Su Dongpo derives from the phrase "life and death are day and night" from "The Great Original Teacher" chapter of *Zhuangzi*. Similarly, the phrase "Who wakes up first from the great dream?" from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* references the phrase "There will be a great awakening, and afterward it will be known that all was a great dream" from the "Making All Things Even" chapter of Zhuangzi. The story "Zhuang Zhou Drums on a Bowl and Attains the Great Dao" in Feng Menglong's Stories to Caution the World is an adaptation of the line "beating on a drum and singing" from *Zhuangzi*. This story was later turned into numerous plays and movies.

However, in this age of digital multimedia, the cultural resources of a wide-ranging, profound, diverse, conceptually rich, and idiosyncratic work like Zhuangzi have yet to be fully tapped. Under these conditions, retracing how the abstract artistic elements of Zhuangzi have been transformed into concrete illustrations, and then into outstanding cultural products such as cartoon animation, is a path of inquiry worth pursuing.

At present, animated versions of Zhuangzi are relatively few. The best-known are Tsai Chih Chung's *Zhuangzi Says* from 2004, the corporate anime xxxHOLiC: Shunmuki from 2010, and Zhuang Zhou Dreams of a Butterfly by the China Central Academy of Fine Arts from 2015. In general, the screen adaptations of the artistry of Zhuangzi have not yet reached their full potential. The present study employs the design model of "Poetic techniques of shape-spirit Transformation" proposed by Mo-Li Yeh in 2011 as its standard of judgment, undertaking a multi-faceted comparison of the successes and failures of these three two-dimensional (2D) works (illustrations). Based on an analysis of the successes and failures of the three works, the present study assembles a theory and produces a model for adapting the artistry of Zhuangzi featuring four ideal illustrations.

2   Zhuangzi and Related Visual Works

Zhuangzi's surname was Zhou, and his courtesy name was Zixiu. He lived in the town of Meng in the state of Song. His year of birth is not known, but he probably lived at the same time as Mencius (372–289 BC), and worked as a supervisor of lacquer work in Meng. He lived in poverty, and made shoes in exchange for rice when he lacked money. In fact, he looked down on wealth, social status, fame, and power. The *Historical Records* state that King Wei of Chu once asked Zhuang Zhou to become a minister, but Zhuang Zhou replied: "I would rather amuse myself in a filthy ditch than be subject to the rules of the leader of a state. I will never take office, and will continue to enjoy my freedom." He did his best to protect himself in turbulent times, to attain release, and to pursue spiritual freedom and ease. The *dao* that is ever-present in Zhuangzi's philosophy represents the origin of the world and its essence, and also refers to the highest ideal in life. It is generally thought that Zhuangzi developed and innovated upon the philosophy of Laozi. However, Ch'ien Mu and Feng Youlan believe that in terms of the history of philosophy, Zhuangzi came before Laozi, and that he formed a critical link between pre-Qin philosophers and Daoists. The 33 chapters in his work *Zhuangzi* are separated into inner, outer, and miscellaneous chapters. It is generally believed that the inner chapters are the work of Zhuangzi, whereas the outer

and miscellaneous chapters were written by disciples. Throughout *Zhuangzi*, allegories are abundant, which is why the work professes to be "nine-tenths allegory" in "Allegories". Although there are relatively few animated versions of *Zhuangzi*, their number is considerable in comparison with those of other classical works, and the quality is high. Among these are comic books that have been adapted into works of animation, for instance, the adaptation of Tsai Chih Chung's comic book *Zhuangzi Says* (2004), the adaptation of *xxxHOLiC: Shunmuki* by Japanese manga studio Clamp, and *Xia Chong Guo* by the studio Ink Man. There are also animated adaptations that are not based on comics, such as *Zhuang Zhou Dreams of a Butterfly* by the China Central Academy of Fine Arts and *The Cowboy's Flute* by Shanghai Animation Film Studio. These works have all been widely praised. *Zhuangzi Says* in particular was appreciated by old and young alike, and turned into a three-dimensional (3D) version in 2010.

3   Poetic Techniques of Shape-Spirit Transformation

In the chapter "The World", Zhuangzi says in his own work *Zhuangzi* that it "employs words to offer constant insight, with important quotations to communicate the truth, and an abundance of allegories." As can be seen here, allegories occupy a key position in the artistry of Zhuangzi. Zhuangzi's allegories display a magnanimous, peculiar imagination and a style of "wild ideas and an eccentric flow of thought" which is described in *Generalization of Art/Generalization of Prose* by Liu Xizai. The mysterious philosophy behind the allegories, while constituting an advantage for adaptations, also presents numerous challenges for the creation of a perfect adaptation. Chen et al. (2012) proposes investigating the sensory characteristics of "emotions," "reason," "events," and "scenes" in the imagery and ideas of poetry, and using the attributes of sensory products to analyze four ideally designed products whose design concepts are based on said poetry. Although this model is highly reliable, and some aspects of it are praiseworthy, if used to adapt an expansive, unbridled work of classical Chinese prose such as *Zhuangzi*, the amount of work involved would be extraordinary. Comparatively speaking, the design model of "Poetic techniques of shape-spirit transformation", which is present as "adapting the form and essence of poetry for design" in this paper, constructed by Yeh et al. (2011) in *Applying Poetic Techniques of Shape-Spirit Transformation in Cultural Creative Design* proves easier to use when applied to animated adaptations of the artistry of *Zhuangzi*. "Poetic techniques of shape-spirit transformation" are based on the poet's state of mind as expressed through the poetry, and involve an investigation of the "compositional approach" and an integration of visual sensory activity and imagination as a designer would undertake to deeply penetrate the interior essence of the subject of analysis and assimilate the results, that is, to conduct an "analysis of the structure of meaning." Then comes the process of "putting pen to paper," as a method of specifically applying design adaptations, and "adapting the external forms and internal meanings of poetry," as a method of actually determining related elements such as imagery, material quality, functions, emotions, etc. Finally, the design is put into practice in a "poetic cultural product." This model

can be separated into four concrete forms based on cause and effect, namely, "using form to depict form," "using form to depict essence," "attaining essence to depict form," and "depending on essence and emitting essence," that is, the four main models of "using concrete images to depict concrete images," "transforming abstract images into concrete images," "transforming concrete images into abstract images," and "using abstract images to depict abstract images." Although there are four main models, there are only two main elements, "form" and "essence." When adapting the surface "things" in *Zhuangzi* as well as the "situations" behind them from text into imagery, simplifying the four main elements of "emotions," "reason," "events," and "scenes" into the two main elements of "form" and "essence" not only reduces the number of complex procedures but also makes the train of thought easier to follow and puts greater stress on the focal points.

4   An Analysis of the 2D Structure of Current *Zhuangzi* Illustrations in Works of Animation

There is an extremely wide range of different illustrations in *Zhuangzi*, covering nearly every category of literary and commercial illustrations. Works of commercial illustration include animation storyboards, comic book design, and so on; this is the main multimedia area in which illustrations are applied. The Chinese word for "animation" is derived from the same word in English. In Latin, the word "animate" means "to make something become active." All animation achieves the effect of movement by displaying static pictures in succession. Moreover, the word "cartoon" is generally used for humorous or satirical works adapted from political caricatures, and its original meaning refers to a type of 2D drawing technique. In the broad sense, animation includes film cartoons as well as animated films, and both adapt still pictures into moving pictures through a process of static images in motion.

Animation generally uses exaggeration and richly creative activity and language to win the audience's appreciation. It does not rely on pure acting skill to brilliantly depict fantastical characters, and such a format seems more compatible with the stories of Zhuangzi than live-action film. In addition to this high degree of appropriateness, animation is also unique in that it has a consistent visual style, a rich array of colors, and a high degree of completeness. Therefore, the present study focuses on the 2D illustrated portions of the works of animation derived from three Zhuangzi stories, using the animation structure category chart in *Application of Chuang-tzu 2D animation* by Liu and Yeh (2015). Specifically, there are five main types of animation structures: theme and story, animation style, sound structure, static picture structure, and dynamic techniques. These models are used to conduct a comparative investigation of similarities, differences, successes, and failures in the current adaptation processes of the artistry of Zhuangzi. To put emphasis on key points, the present study deconstructs and analyzes three works of animation in detail, that is, the adaptation of Tsai Chih Chung's comic *Zhuangzi Says*, the OVA adaptation of Clamp's manga *xxxHOLiC: Shunmuki*, and the ink painting animation *Zhuang Zhou Dreams of a Butterfly* by the

Illustration title		Zhuangzi Says	xxxHOLiC: Shunmuki	Zhuang Zhou Dreams of a Butterfly
Style				
Original text		Once upon a time, I, Zhuang Zhou, dreamt that I was a butterfly, fluttering here and there, a veritable butterfly enjoying itself to the fullest. I was not aware that I was Zhuang Zhou. Before long, I awoke, and found that I was back to myself again. Now I do not know whether I had dreamt that I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly dreaming that I am a man. There must be a difference between a man and a butterfly. The transition is called the transformation of things.		
Theme and story	Theme	Zhuang Zhou dreams that he is a butterfly	Following a dream	Zhuang Zhou dreams that he is a butterfly
	Story overview	Zhuang Zhou transforms into a butterfly and cannot tell whether he is Zhuang Zhou or the butterfly. He awakens to the theory of the transformation of things.	A boy with a strange physique works for a mysterious shopkeeper. Someone invites the boy to go off and search for treasure, and the boy finds out that the dream world is interwoven with realistic elements. At last, the boy is taken into the dream world.	Zhuang Zhou dreams that he has transformed into a butterfly, and after waking up he invents a beautiful literary world.
	Characters	Zhuang Zhou is a free and easy-going recluse who narrates the film.	Watanuki Kimihiro witnesses the boy involved in a strange incident. Yuko Ichihara, the beautiful and mysterious shopkeeper, has already died, but she survives in the dream world, where time has stopped.	Zhuang Zhou is a scholar in a landscape painting.
Narrative structure		Non-dramatic narrative	Dramatic narrative	Non-dramatic narrative
Illustration style	2D	Cartoon	Manga	Ink painting
Static picture structure	Setting	Mainly set in a traditional Chinese painting-style setting with mountains, trees, and nature, with a relatively reasonable perspective.	Close shots of cherry trees and empty backgrounds, with a reasonable perspective.	Alternates between ink painting backgrounds and a layer of flowers and birds painted in ink. Ink paintings are used to join images in multiple perspectives.
	Colors	Blue-tinted gray tones, relatively vivid colors, relatively consistent tones.	The interwoven dream world images are relatively dark, tending toward purple hues. The colors are relatively simple and consistent.	Rich coloration, but the tones are relatively consistent. The main color is grayish green. The colors are faded.
	Light	Essentially no light.	Manga style, emphasizing blocks of light on the border between light and shadow as well as diffuse lighting.	A small amount of diffuse lighting.
	Composition	Mid- to close-range perspective, with golden composition, although the composition is not well-defined.	Golden ratio composition, triangular composition, with the composition well-defined.	Scroll-style composition, golden ratio, with the composition relatively well-defined.
	Character models	Characters are simple and exaggerated, and lines are elegant and neat. Characters are flamboyant, but the simplistic design reduces the degree of personality. A skillful adaptation of Cai Zhizhong`s comic book.	The weman has white kimono, long black hair, and butterfly wings. The man is dressed as students. The characters are exaggerated and slender, the lines are elegant, and the designs are simple. As an adaptation of the story, the characters have individuality, and the work appears fresh and lively.	Characters have white clothes, no hair, with beards, like Zen or Daoist ascetics, resembling images of hermits from traditional Chinese paintings. Characters are exaggerated and drawn in freehand in a traditional ink and brush style. Lines are clearly distinguished between thick and thin, but look relatively stiff.

Fig. 1. An analysis of the 2D structure of Zhuangzi animations (Yeh and Liu 2015)

China Central Academy of Fine Arts. We have not analyzed the sound structure or dynamic techniques of three works of animation; we mainly analyzed the 2D illustration portions, specifically the theme and story, the illustration style, the static picture structure, and the appropriateness of the format for adapting stories from Zhuangzi. The study materials is the specific parts from three animations with the same subject that Zhuang Zhou dreams of a butterfly. The process of analysis is shown in Fig. 1.

5   Investigation of Application to Illustrations

Through an analysis of the illustrations above, we can first identify some commonalities in the approaches of the three illustrations to adapt the spirit of Zhuangzi. First, there is a degree of elegance and ease in the lines of the character designs in every case, which serves to adapt the free and easy-going nature of Zhuangzi's spiritual pursuits and his flamboyantly expansive writing style. Next, the characters are exaggerated and the designs are relatively simple: this is appropriate for a work of animation and is also in accordance with the eccentric, outlandish imagery of *Zhuangzi*. Additionally, in terms of composition, mid- to close-range perspectives are prevalent, and the compositions mainly use the golden ratio. The colors are relatively consistent, which serves to preserve the harmony of the images. Finally, when presenting conversations and philosophical details, the backgrounds tend to be empty or drawn in freehand, and such settings are used to place emphasis upon the storyline and the characters, or perhaps to express the fictional nature of the allegories.

  The weakness of these generally successful attempts is that despite their capture of Zhuangzi's free and easy-going nature, they overlook his magnificent prose and jocular style. The use of fixed settings to place limits on time and space represents the essence of Zhuangzi but neglects the form. In their attempts to represent the spirit of Zhuangzi's Daoism, they neglected to represent the eccentricity and wildness of the Zhuangzi School.

  The present study attempts to carry on the free and easy-going character of the 2D composition of these illustrations, as well as their temporal twists and turns and bold usage of composition, by applying Mo-Li Yeh's design model of "Poetic Techniques of Shape-Spirit Transformation", which adapts the "form" and "essence" of poetry, to some of the words and implications of *Zhuangzi* to create illustrations. Specifically, we aim to construct a more complete conceptual model of adapting the spirit of Zhuangzi by (1) adapting the original text of *Zhuangzi* using the four concrete methods of "using form to depict form," "using form to depict essence," "attaining essence to depict form," and "depending on essence and emitting essence," and (2) undergoing the two adaptation stages of "analysis of the structure of meaning" and "adapting the external forms and internal meanings of poetry" in each method to create illustrations. The process is shown in Fig. 2.
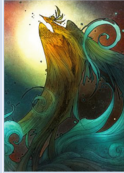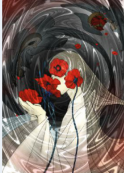
	Original text	Analysis of meaning	Adaptation of meaning		Draft
Using form to depict form	In the northern darkness, there is a fish, and its name is Kun. It is enormous, measuring I don`t know how many miles across. It also turns into a bird, and its name is Peng. Peng measures I don`t know how many miles across. When it rises in the air, its wings are like the clouds of heaven.	The transformation between Kun and Peng is a transition of sounds, and also a mythological transition. Its main significance lies in the contrasting notions that "Kun and Peng rely upon each other" and that "freedom relies on nothing."	[Form] Kun: Originally refers to fish roe. Here it is used to refer to a large fish. [Form] Peng: An ancient version of the character of "phoenix," here used to refer to a large bird. [Action] Transformation.	[Form] Select the moment that Kun transforms into Peng, when the upper part of its body has already changed into Peng and begun to fly, but its lower part is still the fish tail of Kun, which rises up from the water.	
Using form to depict essence	The lord of the south sea was Shu. The lord of the north sea was Hu. The lord of the center was Chaos...... "Every person has seven orifices from which to see, hear, eat, and breathe. Chaos does not have these. Let`s bore some holes into him." Every day they bored a hole into Chaos, but on the seventh day, Chaos died.	"Shu" and "Hu" refer to a state of hurry, and "Chaos" refers to a state of integration. Seven holes were bored into Chaos, at which point he lost his essence and died. the story shows that the selfish human behavior violates nature and the necessity of the respect for the essence of nature.	[Form] The lord of the south sea, Shu. [Form] The lord of the north sea, Hu. [Form] The lord of the center, Chaos. [Action] Boring seven holes.	[Essence] The "hurried" feeling is mainly expressed by a sense of drifting, with a combination of black, white, and red colors, which are simple and stand in strong and surprising contrast. This represents a person being tempted and losing sight of their true nature.	
attaining essence to depict form	That is why it is said that this and that are created by each other. Compare life with death, compare death with life.	Zhuangzi employs three sets of instantaneous transformation to demonstrate that opposing aspects of things rely on each other for their existence.	[Essence] Death and life rely on each other for their existence and each transforms into the other.	[Form] Growing branches and leaves represent life, and withered branches and leaves represent death, and people in a tangled, yin-yang-like state represent mutual reliance and transformation.	
depending on essence and emitting essence	I left today for Yue and arrived yesterday.	"today" and "yesterday" are relative terms. The yesterday of today is the today of yesterday; the today of today is the yesterday of tomorrow.	[Essence] The relative nature of today and yesterday. Today can be called yesterday, and yesterday can be called today.	[Essence] Abstract pictures and text indicating time give a sense of temporal and spatial dislocation.	

Fig. 2. The progress of adapting Zhuangzi to create illustrations (Yeh and Liu 2016)

6   Conclusion

Qian Mu also states in his *Comprehensive Study of Zhuangzi and Laozi* that Zhuangzi's prose "is just like a cup of water" and that "it is always flowing." "But it is as if this cup of water is always changing. It takes on every sort of strange flavor, but still you can't help but enjoy drinking it…" *Zhuangzi* is a fascinating piece of work that is greatly eccentric with a consistent vision. The present study has been guided by the design model of "Poetic techniques of shape-spirit transformation," creating a series of illustrations derived from the text in an attempt to improve the currently existing illustrations. This study also has some limitations. Simple extractions of 2D illustrated images from works of animation take these images out of context, making it difficult to appreciate the 2D characteristics of the work of animation as a whole. However, to shed light on the themes in question, this study has tentatively extracted representative images, undertaking a general analysis of their composition as static pictures and discussing visual adaptations of *Zhuangzi* from the perspective of essence and form. In so doing, this study has presented an optimal point of view.

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