

## PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

# Narrative Design and Construction of Chinese Characters From the Perspective of Aesthetic Education

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to form innovative designs for narrative texts by means of combining character design with narrative approaches, and exploring how to give better play to the role of aesthetic education of Chinese characters in the context of modern society. Furthermore, this study divides the aesthetic education of Chinese characters into two categories: single character and multi characters, discusses how visual elements are connected with narrative logic and what kind of narrative intervention methods are used to expand the path of aesthetic education of Chinese characters, and constructs the narrative design of Chinese characters from the perspective of aesthetic education. Meanwhile, this study aims to provide practical design strategies for the aesthetic education of Chinese character through the narrative intervention of character design, in order to realize the process of Chinese character design from "practical education" to "applicable education" and then to "aesthetic education".

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aesthetic education of Chinese characters refers to the application of aesthetic education in the use of Chinese characters and the subtle development of the ability to perceive the beauty of culture through various ways and means [1]. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued the "Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools in the New Era" in 2020, emphasizing the need to advance the work of aesthetic education. In this context, universities are facing unprecedented opportunities and challenges in aesthetic education work [2]. Reviewing the existing studies on aesthetic education, it can be found that most of the current studies on aesthetic education are only from the perspective of pedagogy, with an emphasis on the comprehensiveness and systematicness at the macro level, while the study on practical application of aesthetic education from the meso level and micro level is still to be enriched.

As an important carrier of Chinese civilization and spirit, Chinese characters have deeply influenced the

aesthetic construction of society from ancient times to the present. From the initial ideographic writing to modern alphabetization writing, Chinese characters have gone through a process from being simple to being complex, from being easy to being difficult. And that "form" is a main line running through the process. Unlike the purely phonetic characters of the West, Chinese characters have retained natural genes of form and meaning during the development. The narratives formed by Chinese characters have carried the meaning and beauty of the nation's culture for five thousand years. In a feature article on aesthetic education in "Art and Design" published in July 2021, it is stated that aesthetic education of Chinese characters implicitly incorporates aesthetic education into the use of Chinese characters through a variety of ways and means, which is based on fully grasping the multiple connotations of Chinese characters.

Narrative design, as one of the main expressions of modern design, aims to apply the narrative theory of literary creation to the realm of design, to better convey the connotations of design through narrative, and to emphasize the meaning of design content and

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the narrative expression of design form [3]. As economic globalization continues, communication and integration between countries around the world are becoming more close, and people from different cultures begin to pay attention to each other's living conditions and emotional experiences. In this process, design is gradually moving towards a diversified development. In visual communication design, the intervention of narrative design aims to compensate for the deficiency of modern design in cultural connotation, meaning and diversified expression.

Visual communication design narration mainly includes three narrative forms of text, image and graph. Existing practice and research often focus on image narratives, while research on textual narrative design still needs to improve. This study aims to investigate how narrative design can be used in the aesthetic education of Chinese characters in the context of modern society, and to provide a practical design strategy for this education through the study on intervention of narrative design and the formation of a perspective of innovative narrative text design.

## **2. AESTHETIC EDUCATION OF CHINESE CHARACTERS WITH INTERVENTION OF NARRATIVE DESIGN**

Narrative consists of three stages: narration, communication and interpretation [4]. Text narrative includes both verbal and visual forms of narrative. However, it is generally accepted that a textual narrative is a verbal narrative. This thinking tacitly assumes that language is the only symbolic vehicle for speech and that its narrative activity is confined to the sound-verbal system. For such a textual narrative, the function of aesthetic education of words is mainly reflected in the stage of interpretation. However, the symbolic carrier is not the only basic function of text, and its own visual form can also carry many other social functions. Thus, from an aesthetic point of view, textual narratives are not purely literary, but visual narratives are also an important narrative device [5].

Visual narrative refers to narrative activities that are carried out through the use of visibility. As one of the oldest forms of human narrative, visual narrative existed and was widely used long before the creation of writing. For example, in primitive times, humans relied on primitive body language, knotting, carving and primitive dance to communicate emotions and carry out narrative activities. In the current new era and context, visual narratives are in line with the need for aesthetic education of Chinese characters, and are bound to blossom with new energy [6].

The textual narrative design in this study is visually based. Visual design is used throughout the narrative process, focusing on complementing the aesthetic function of traditional verbal narrative at visual level that is difficult to achieve, and exploring the aesthetic efficacy of textual design in communication. Considering the number of words, textual narrative design can be divided into two forms: a single-text narrative design and a multi-text arrangement of narrative design. These two different forms of text narrative design play a role in aesthetic education in different ways.

### **2.1. Aesthetic Education of a Single Text With Intervention of Narrative Design**

Chen Yinke once said, "anyone who explains a word is making cultural history" [7]. The individual pictograph represented by the Chinese character was narrative in nature from the very beginning of their creation. In contrast, the sound characters represented by English are not narrative enough, and do not have a narrative function, relying on later design and arrangement to achieve the narrative goals. The unique way of creating characters in ancient China is a true reflection of human life in ancient times, but it is difficult to meet the needs of complex narratives and is gradually simplified to phonetic symbols, in order to achieve linear narratives in multi-character combinations.

As a tool for aesthetic education, Chinese characters are often interpreted as single characters and words designed for study. In contrast to continuous literary narratives, there is a greater focus on the exploration of pictorial forms, i.e. the design of Chinese characters as images. Narrative design interventions in single texts are mainly aimed at designing texts with narrative features, a narrative design of single texts that gives the text itself a certain pictorial narrative nature and narrates the rich content it contains in a visually aesthetic way of communication.

The biggest feature of narrative design of single or several characters is visual expression, that is, the secondary creation of character glyphs through graphic expression. Based on the standard paradigm of "black characters on white paper", the narrative content is enriched at the level of semiotics and cognitive psychology through information processing of font, color and texture. The context of the single-word design object itself provides vocabulary for visual narrative, and presents the narrative in the form of pure text or hieroglyph combination, giving people the enjoyment or experience of beauty [8].

The purpose of pure text narration is to realize the function of aesthetic education through the additional

meaning conveyed by visual narration. The textual narrative in the form of a combination of illustrations and text focuses on the narrative and visual interest in oriental aesthetics in communication stage. Ink posters by Kan Tai-Keung combine traditional oriental ink sentiments with western design thinking, fusing calligraphy and painting into one, performing painting within words and landscape into words, better playing the narrative role of a single word, and allowing people to view the words while gaining the cultural beauty behind them.

## **2.2. Aesthetic Education of Multi-Character Texts With Intervention of Narrative Design**

Multi-character narratives are more closely linked to linguistic narratives. Typography in visual communication design can fulfil part of the narrative activity through the arrangement between texts. But the possibilities for narrative design to intervene in multi-character text go far beyond this. Multi-character text can be visualized by means of design, yet visualization is not the same as presenting narrative beauty. The rich content contained in the visual multi-character design is often oversimplified or abstracted. This is also illustrated by the fact that narrative design interventions in multi-character text need to achieve both narrative content and visual aesthetics, as opposed to narrative interventions in single text. By distinguishing the narrative content and visual aesthetics, this study classifies narrative design interventions in multi-character text as textual narrative design dominated by vision and textual narrative design dominated by text content.

### **2.2.1. Textual Narrative Design Dominated by Vision**

One type of textual narrative design simply presents large sections of visualized text as neatly arranged 'faces' or 'dots', and although these visual elements are composed of text, they convey a primarily visual imagery context. The audience can access the main content of the visual narrative without seeing the text in detail. In the case of the STIHL power tool advertisement, large sections of text are used only as compositional tools, and the relevance of the textual content itself to the visual narrative is weak.

The other visualized multi-character design has a more holistic formal aesthetic and presents a slightly stronger narrative than the former. This approach is an abstraction or secondary creation of rich contents contained. The aesthetic effect is also focused on the

visual aesthetic and weakens the beauty of the textual narrative itself. After visualization, a large number of texts are presented as visual 'facets' or 'dots', of which visual poetry is a prominent representative.

Visual poetry is an artistic poetic genre that uses words to create visual images, and is a special literary phenomenon that combines poetry and painting. Visual poetry is of distinctive aesthetic value and significance, and its production and development have roots both at home and abroad. In addition, visual poetry creates a special typography of words by breaking the order and norms of statements in the context of traditional typographic types, and conveys emotions through the visual effects it creates. Zhang Qingwen explored the imaginative expression of the text of "The Book of Songs", with a specific stylized imaginative expression of the English translation of the text [9], based on the objects mentioned in the poem, in favour of the traditional pattern poem.

### **2.2.2. Textual Narrative Design Dominated by Text Content**

There is no substitute for the complex connotations recounted in text itself. Is the only optimal solution for all literary treasures, such as poetry, lyrics and writings, to cut out the visual possibility or to restrict oneself to the neat and simple "black characters on white paper"? The answer is not quite the same. In Chinese painting and calligraphy, the art of painting and calligraphy has the same origin, and Chinese calligraphers make full use of the expressive power of brushes and other tools and their writing skills to create beautiful works of calligraphy in a wide variety of styles, which can in fact be seen as a narrative Chinese art, but this narrative requires a certain amount of background knowledge to interpret it. The masterpiece of calligraphy known as the second calligraphy "Manuscript for the Sacrifice of a Nephew" came from Yan Zhenqing's heartfelt expression of grief at the loss of his nephew. It is a classic example of the aesthetic education of Chinese characters, with some scribbles and flying strokes, which is due to the difficulty of controlling one's inner pain.

However, the development of Chinese characters has gone through a tortuous process. From seal-carved characters to written characters to printed characters, each evolution has had a profound impact on Chinese characters. With the evolution of writing itself and the change of social and cultural needs, the scope of its use is also expanding. Especially in the new era of technology, with the renewal of writing tools and the restriction of the traditional calligraphic value space, new media and spaces have been added to the

environment in which Chinese characters are used, and the process of their development has given rise to many new works.

Modern visual poetry also uses the way of creating reading experience space to narrate. For example, in the book "design poetry" written by Zhu Yingchun, the humorous words constitute the picture itself expressed by the words. Poetry is like painting and painting is also like poetry. In the space composed of words, image narration and text narration are skillfully integrated into one.

In addition to the prominent representative of visual poetry, the re-creation of multi-character text semantics in modern design is also in full swing. This long-text narrative method is mainly carried out in the way of image-text narration, in which most of the ancient classic poems are used as the text content, and then the design method is used to design the content narrative. However, it is necessary to be vigilant that such design is sometimes too personalized or artistic, and it is difficult to form a universal aesthetic experience. The exploration in this area remains to be explored.

Adding interactive mechanism to break the unidirectionality of narration is a new direction of narrative design [10]. For example, the core mechanism of the creative adventure strategy game "word game" released in recent years is text. In the game, words are not just words, but the objects, characters and scenes referred to by the words themselves. Players will play a character role, wandering and solving puzzles in the word world. For example, in the game, the player controls the "I" as his name to enter the literal door, "push the word", and change the plot direction of the passage, etc.

Another game "Everlasting Regret in Painting Scene" released by Tencent studio is adapted from the classic love narrative poem "Everlasting Regret" in the history of Chinese literature. The game was launched in 2020, and the touching love tragedy between Emperor Xuanzong and Yang Yuhuan was interpreted

in the form of an ink painting scroll. The poems in "Everlasting Regret" are cleverly arranged at the beginning and end of each painting for readers to appreciate. The combination of connecting words and ancient ink aims to provide players with the beauty of words in poetry and experience the rich emotions condensed and contained in "Everlasting Regret" by Li Bai.

Whether it is the "word game" of modern style or the beautiful "Everlasting Regret in Painting Scene" based on ancient poetry, they have broken through the planar narrative design, are popular with the younger generation of audiences, spread widely, and the effectiveness of aesthetic education has been greatly enhanced. Overall, new media and technology provide a new space for the carrier of Chinese character aesthetic education. In the aesthetic education of Chinese characters involved in narrative design, the design dominated by content is still a minority.

### 2.3. Aesthetic Education Strategy of Chinese Characters With Intervention of Narrative Design

As mentioned above, this study summarizes the construction strategies of Chinese character narrative design from the perspective of aesthetic education (as shown in Table 1). According to the number of words, the narrative design of Chinese characters is divided into single text and multi-character text. Among them, the narrative direction of Chinese character narrative design of single text tends to build an image narrative mode of both picture and text. The narrative strategies corresponding to this model also tend to the four methods commonly used in image narration: symbol, metaphor, instant and plot [11]. The aesthetic education function of Chinese character design in single text is mainly reflected in the appeal of beautiful images. Through the emotional expression intensity and expressiveness of image painting, it promotes sublimation of internal spirit and emotion.

Type	Narrative Direction	Narrative Strategy	Aesthetic Education Form
Single-character text	To construct an image narration	Symbol, metaphor, moment, plot	Perceptual type
Multi-character text	Image-text narrative	Heteromorphic rhetoric	Immersive type
	To construct a space narration	Spatiotemporal interaction	Experiential type

**Table 1.** Narrative design strategy of Chinese characters from the perspective of aesthetic education.

The direction of Chinese character narrative design in multi-character text is divided into two types: image-text narrative and spatial narrative. The picture is composed of long text and illustrations of related contents. The strategy it uses is heteromorphous rhetoric, i.e. it introduces another type of media (such as image, sound, etc.) expression into one way of media expression (such as text) as a rhetorical aid. This kind of technique with both pictures and words expands the dimension of narration and presents it as a three-dimensional state. In the process of reading the text, the viewer can be more immersed in the wonderful artistic conception conveyed by the narrative, to achieve the effect of aesthetic education.

Multi-character text narrative direction, which tends to construct spatial narrative, adopts the narrative strategy of space-time interaction. Time narrative is linear, while space narrative is non-linear. The biggest difference between the two is that it does not narrate according to time sequence, development cause and effect, but uses visual expression to narrate events in a limited space. Narrative media is mainly a form of spatial expression. In the process of narration, it is carried out in a visual way, including narration, interpretation and acceptance, which are completed by visual reading in space. Such narration gives people a sense of experience to participate in it, in order to naturally understand the beauty of narration and the beauty of Chinese characters [12].

It is worth noting that these three narrative directions do not exist independently, and there will be marginal ambiguity and intersection in the process of practical use, in order to comprehensively realize the function of aesthetic education. Whether it is to guide the viewer to perceive, immerse or experience the beauty of Chinese character narration, it is to achieve the goal of Chinese character aesthetic education with the intervention of narrative design to varying degrees.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Chinese characters are the unique spiritual symbols of Chinese civilization, the foundation of contemporary Chinese literature and art, and the infinite treasure of literary and artistic innovation. "It is feasible to collect the worth of texts and rhymes in a century." It is the only way to stimulate the vitality of Chinese culture and enhance people's aesthetic quality to combine the creativity of narrative design with cultural values in Chinese characters and classics, and the essence of Chinese aesthetics with demand for contemporary aesthetic education [13]. Through the intervention of narrative design, whether it is the visual expression in

single-text narrative design, or the expression dominated by vision or content in multi-character text narrative design, or the addition of new technology to break the new direction of narrative unidirectionality and expand the narrative methods and means of Chinese characters, the aesthetic education of Chinese characters will play a greater role in the new era.

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