

VISUAL-STORYTELLING POWER OF COMIC COMMUNICATION:

APPLICATION OF CHINESE SOCIOCULTURAL BELIEFS FOR TEACHING MORALITY

STUDENT NAME: KAN GU

STUDENT ID: 15901698

FACULTY: DESIGN & CREATIVE
TECHNOLOGIES

SCHOOL: ART & DESIGN

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Figure0.1 *A reading room full of comic bookshelves. The shot was taken in September 2016 at Hotel Mifuji of Japan. (©Kan Gu)*

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."

Kan Gu, May 2018

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kan Gu', written in a cursive style.

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To my supervisor, Professor Leong Yap who accompanies me during every stage of the research process. Although he was very strict with me, he always encouraged and motivated me.

To the three experts, I have interviewed:

1

My ex-boss, Emma Wei, Senior Vice President and CSO of Wanda Media Co., Ltd.

2

My professional cartoonist friend, Yingxue Zhang.

3

My former University tutor, Zhaochen Ding, Director of New Media Department, Faculty of Art & Design.

All of them have spent much quality time and interest critiquing and encouraging me during the initial concepts and story building stages of my project.

I would also like to thank my classmates who provide enlightenment and inspiration for my project.

Finally, to my parents, who unswervingly supported me with selfless love and concern during the most demanding stages of my research and design in the past 18 months.

ABSTRACT

Comics are a delightful communication medium. Most of us, mainly the older generation, have grown up with comics, such as Superman, Batman, Saint Seiya, and Dragon Ball. A comic is, in many ways, more superior in communication potency than technology-driven visual stories, or a website, because it could excite the five senses of the reader. For example, one could feel the texture of paper, smell the ink, see the typography and printing technology, and appreciate the creativity and artistic skill of the story and drawings.

Each picture is created by an imaginative artist and storyteller to convey a meaningful experience and emotional information to narrate a visual story. Most people, both young and old, would enjoy holding a well-designed comic book with beautiful images, typefaces, and emotional

storylines that they will read, re-read, even introduce to others. For these reasons, I have chosen this medium to tell a story to bridge the communication generation-gap in modern society.

The main aim of my design project is to use illustration and storytelling to teach morality in a Chinese sociocultural context. The story focuses on the four Saint Beasts in Chinese Mythology. Besides symbolising the Four Saint beast with essential elements in Chinese culture, I have humanised them - for the first in Chinese legend - to give them the personified characters with the potency of imparting traditional Chinese virtues in the comic.

I believe that the power of comics and illustrations are the best medium to tell a story. While growing up in China, I read various comics,

cartoons, and picture-story books from different countries. Imaginative plots impressed me emotionally with meaningful experiences. They touched me and educated me in a way that is more profound than any other media. Comics - storytelling and illustration - that I have experienced since I was a child have shaped my professional career and research direction.

Visual-Storytelling Power of Comic Communication: Application of Chinese Sociocultural Beliefs for Teaching Morality employs a comic format involving The Four Saint Beast to tell a story to change the behaviour of a young boy. To do this well, I researched and applied relevant theories and principles from the humanities literature to support my design intention. Humanities that have

informed my design included: Maslow's hierarchy of needs, behavioural changes theories, and the five virtues.

The purpose of this project is to apply traditional Chinese culture to help people to solve a family issue in a Western context. One of the challenges is not how to design a comic book, but how to meaningfully transfer the concepts of a specific culture into an acceptable and relevant way for western audiences.

The creative process has necessitated hundreds of trials and errors, and iterations, in both storytelling and visualisation. Therefore, the Heuristic Methodology has been used in the ideation process. However, this particular practice-based research in comic design has also followed a very

systematic design process. It is not only based on my heuristic thinking and drawing. Besides the application of culture and behavioural-change theories, the research and design are informed by the opinions of three experts who I have interviewed in the field. Their judgement and points of views in the form of wise counsel have helped me to improve my concepts. Their critiques have prompted me to modify characters, change the layout, and recast many plots.

The feedback of the comic book design has so far been relatively well received by the experts and my design peers.

The Research Project consists of two parts; a written report and a 65-page comic book. The two parts should be examined in conjunction with each other.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

I read my first comic book when I was in primary school. This experience has taught me that a story has a variety of elements. For example, different styles, sequential picture framing, perfect typography to show storyline and character relationships from different perspectives. Since then, my thoughts were having “colourful wings”, and my passion for the comic is permanently sealed! The charming characters excited me and I could also get enlightenment from the story. I find, whether, in Chinese or Western culture,

love, understanding, and faith are eternal themes of storytelling. Joseph Shaules states that people enjoy learning different lifestyles and perspectives. They respect the difference, but they could always feel the common part of human nature which connects them tightly.¹

I believe that comics are one of the best ways to represent intercultural communication, in a more relaxed and acceptable form. Moreover, storytelling in an emotional, cultural way would add memorability to the

¹ Joseph Shaules, *The Intercultural Mind : Connecting Culture, Cognition, and Global Living*, (Boston, Massachusetts ; London, England : Intercultural Press, 2015), <http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat05020a&AN=aut.b2015351x&site=eds-live>
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=1811376>. Electronic document.

reader. Both culture and emotion are
a vital communication process.
In this Research Design Project, I am
using comics as a medium to bridge
the communication gap between
father and his son.

My emphasis is using an ancient
Chinese legend involving the
Four Saint Beasts to make the plot
more memorable, entertaining,
and diffusing Chinese social
cultural values. Thus, my comic
design contains fantastic plots and
phenomenal characters. I created
“*Xin Mo*” (devil inside), the various

magical skills of the Four Saint Beasts from Chinese mythology. However, the fantasy is created to imbue an educational and entertaining message based on humanism. An “edutainment” strategy is used in the comics to enhance both the entertainment and educational value, that are especially relevant for the young generation.

A well narrated and illustrated comic book should bring deep interaction and comprehension with strong emotions to the reader to establish more creativity and imagination

than using an electronic device.² I believe that comics are a significant carrier of “edutainment”, which a reader could hold in their hands, for entertainment, but to immerse themselves in adventure, meaningful experience, nostalgia, and even spiritual transformation. I believe that the comic is significantly more potent for teaching morality and triggering behavioural change than any other form of analogue or electronic media. This Design Project is set out to explore this.

² Sabine Gabaron, “The Power of Print Reading: Comics in the Classroom,” *Journal of Cell Communication & Signaling* 11, no. 3 (2017).

1.2 Research Structure and Aims

The literature review that I have conducted to inform this design project was focussed on developing insights and contexts for the purpose, story, plot and visual communication of the comic book. The literature review is an important aspect which seeks to combine the existing research findings that relate to my topic of interest, and to expose gaps in the current knowledge base.³ Apart from analysing the principle of comic design itself, the contextual literature review has extended my knowledge of the project. I

have been better-informed that a comic, which is used for teaching morality and behaviour change, needs to include a combination of art practice, humanistic spirit, and scientific knowledge. This multidisciplinary approach will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 of the report.

In my methodology, I am collecting stories to my typography how the virtual characters from ancient Chinese legend are developed. I pay attention to the meaning in the old image of Chinese Saint Beasts

³ Cory Neill, "Writing & Research. Writing a Literature Review," *Radiation Therapist* 26, no. 1 (2017).

and transform them into pictorial, for instance, one of the most distinctive animals in China is the Dragon. All the design concepts of the characters would ask for feedback from both self-reflection and experts' suggestions. Then I dig the deep meaning of humanities involving human emotions and virtues, as well as concern for the social condition, so that the communication gap between family members could be understood by scientific knowledge.

My main purpose is about

delivering good communication behaviour to the community. It is not just about art and science, but also caring about people, their emotions, their experiences, and the sadness of the family in modern society. It is hoped that my comic would help people to change their behaviour, to establish confidence, and bridge the communication gap by exploring the entertaining function of visual design and educational value of Chinese culture, belief, and morality.

1.3 Structure of Thesis

This Design Project consists of six chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction introduces the theme of my comic, the general research framework and the main purpose of the project.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 gathers and discusses current knowledge in the literature to inform and contextualise the design and development of the comic. Fundamental analysis of the comic elements, the technique of visual expression, storytelling and plot development, Chinese mythology and legends, and the humanities in sociocultural belief, behaviour and emotion.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter 3 describes my research and design processes. This includes some deep discussions and the approaches I have taken to contextualise information and knowledge - in humanities and design - to transform them into the story, plots and visual communications of the comic book. The connection between art, science and humanities is demonstrated through the methodology.

Chapter4: Concept Design & Development

This chapter shows the detailed process of ideation, design and development of the comic. It includes the study of history, origin, culture, and the symbolic meaning of the Chinese Four Saint Beasts. The designing phases of integrating a variety of illustrations to demonstrate the story plot, characters, and the entertaining and educational meaning of the story are explored and captured in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Evaluation & Significant Findings

This chapter discusses some significant findings from evaluations of the comic through expert interviews and critical self-reflection. The appropriateness of the character design, and the proposed first draft and the subsequently revised draft are discussed. Present results of the expert interviews and discussion of key feedback to ensure that the comic is effective for spreading Chinese culture, moral teaching, and bridging the communication gap.

Chapter6: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter discusses my experience in the design project. It is a self-reflection of my research journey with the candid observation of what has been achieved and what has been missed and improved.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

⁴ Jake Jakaitis and James F. Wurtz, *Crossing Boundaries in Graphic Narrative : Essays on Forms, Series and Genres*, (Jefferson, N.C. : McFarland & Co., 2012), <http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat05020a&AN=aut.b12430304&site=eds-live>

<http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=876782>. Electronic document.

⁵ Bart Beaty and Stephen Weiner, *Critical Survey of Graphic Novels : History, Theme, and Technique*, (Maynard, Mass. : Salem Press, 2013), <http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat05020a&AN=aut.b15344800&site=eds-live>

<http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=3400536>. Electronic document.

⁶ Hillary Chute, "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative," *PMLA* 123, no. 2 (March 2008).

At the height of new technological development, many people are gradually turning to acquire information accurately and efficiently based on graphic narrative. A graphic narrative involves various fields of art, culture and literary communication. It is interdisciplinary, combining different types of genres, forms, and languages.⁴

The major forms of graphic narrative are graphic novels, cartoons or comics. The graphic novel is a collection of grandiose scenes and a record of real content that might cover a long history. The scholars of comic Bart Beaty and Stephen Weiner represent this.⁵ However, comics reveal the serialised stories of 21-24 pages, which are shorter than graphic novels. Hillary Chute shows that comics are composed of multiple frames, pictures and the

different narrative manner in the promotion of a plot. For a cartoon, it has evolved from the Italian word “cartone” which is equal to cardboard; that means the drawing of a single picture or sketch and spreading it widely.⁶

Consequently, as far as I understand it, comic and cartoon would be collected in the format of the graphic novel. In this project, I will choose comic to be one of the most representative carriers for spreading Chinese culture. The literature review explores the understanding of comic principles and its unique form of expression. I also discuss other related aspects, including sociality, culture, belief and moral education, behaviour change, and relevant disciplines, which are closely related to my research design project.

2.1 Sequential Art: Comics

Comics belong to the graphic narrative which are a wonderful visual effect skilfully organised by artists in the typical arrangement of image integration. As Rebecca M. Marrall said: “Sequential art is a unique storytelling medium that combines visuals and content in a specific delivery to engage audiences on emotional and cognitive levels.” **(Figure 2.1)**⁷ Therefore, for my design project, my artistic work should hold various pictures, and a variety of characters, different timelines and plots. The famous cartoonist and

comics theorist, Scott McCloud, tried to manifest a more detailed concept of a comic, through “the juxtaposed pictorial”. He also proposes other forms of images in “deliberate sequence” that would diffuse information or “produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” by using graphical representation, multiple-frames with space and a fantastic script.⁸

That is to say, these parts of the comic constitute the integrated graphic narrative together. In the following paragraphs, I will illustrate how these are done.

⁷ Rebecca M. Marrall, "Sequential Art in Library Credit Instruction: Exploring Multiple Literacies through Graphic Novels, Comics, and Comix," *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian* 35, no. 1 (2016).

⁸ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York : HarperPerennial, 2008).



Figure2.1 <Comics & Sequential Art> by Will Eisner. These sequential pictures present the process of producing a character with different facial expressions.

2.1.1 Multiple-frame With Space

The fundamental function of a comic is to describe a process of occurrence, evolution, climax, and the end of the story. When artists have to deal with time flows, they would divide these events into continuous segments in visual narrative form and connect them by a multiple-frame. One of the greatest American cartoonists, Will Eisner, demonstrates the segments of “frozen” scenes as the flow of uninterrupted narration that are arranged by the authors which have the function of comprehensibility and visualisation. These segments are addressed as panels.⁹ For my research project, I also follow this principle to create panels of multiple-frames to offset the gaps of action that are the fluency



Figure 2.2 <Comics & Sequential Art> by Will Eisner. This fragment of comic presents the transition of scenarios with different panel modalities. The common shape is rectangular to coordinate with other panels, but sometimes the artist would create diversiform panels (such as an unframed panel and built-in form in this picture) to achieve the distinction of scenes and space.

⁹ Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (Tamarac Fla. : Poorhouse Press, 1991).

expression in a movie or animation. I intend to split the course of the whole plot, then make the selection of turning points that I attempt to emphasise. Each panel in the multiple-frame of my comic story is executed in different patterns to form clear recognition towards story structure by the reader (**Figure 2.2**). “Much of this is done with the emotion or intuitiveness embodied in the different artist’s ‘style’.” said Eisner.

However, from my point of view, the multiple-frame arrangement could not be the only standard to judge the “style” of each cartoonist. It is a common regulation to read a

comic from left to right and then top to bottom (**Figure 2.3**). Although the habitual behaviour of the audience will lead to disorderly reading when they flick through the comic book, they would follow a certain order to acquire correct image sequence of the plot. As a result, I will use this traditional segmentation scheme to unfold the story plot.

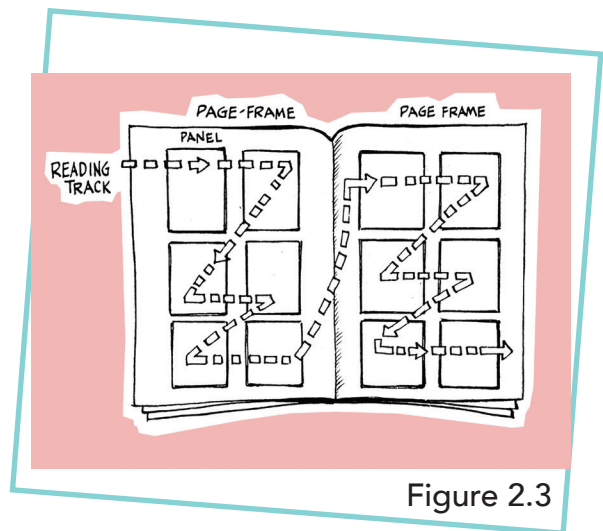


Figure 2.3

2.1.2 Graphical Representation

The function of comic images is explanatory. Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith describe the interpretive pictures which could carry a great responsibility to use linguistic and graphical elements in ways that bring clear meaning for readers.¹⁰

■ WORDS WOULD TELL

Words do not mean the usage of vocabulary or language in the comic but refer to all the elements that could provide a clear story logic and relationship of figures for storytelling, such as the different shapes, the texture of letters and different types of dialogue-box. One of the most significant

transformations of the comic is the shape of the word which would be changed; the changeable letters are also used in different scenes which could cause the thrilling, touching, and shocked feelings (**Figuer2.4**) r other realistic and emotional visual perception (**Figuer2.5**).

¹⁰ Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith, *The Power of Comics : History, Form, and Culture* (New York : Continuum, 2009).

Dialogue-boxes are the main carrier of words and plot advancement (**Figure 2.6**). They always occupy lots of screen space, especially the vast dialogue between characters and the introduction of the story background. If the whole page is filled by dialogue-boxes, the artist will apply different

forms, regarding the round, the rectangle, the sharp, and other irregular boxes which are abundant visual effects that highlight the mood of person (**Figure 2.7-2.9**). It is noteworthy that the explanation or asides usually are arranged on the edges of the panel in a rectangle dialogue-box (**Figure 2.9**).

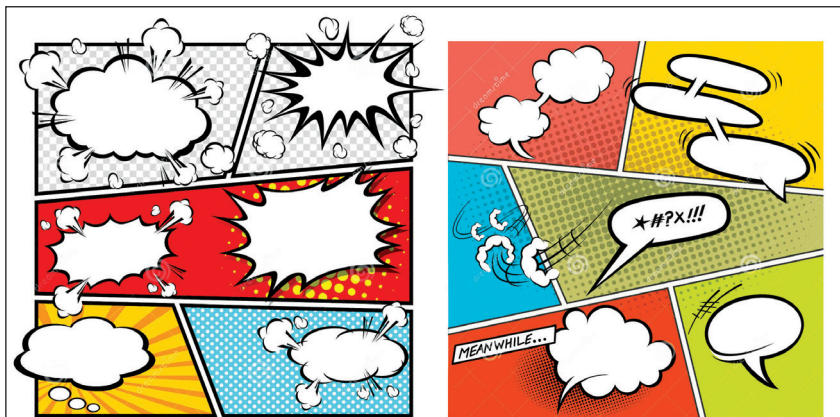


Figure 2.6 There are a huge number of dialogue-boxes; the readers could easily accept the meaning of the content they convey because of their different shapes as if they are alive and flexible locations are in the comic book.

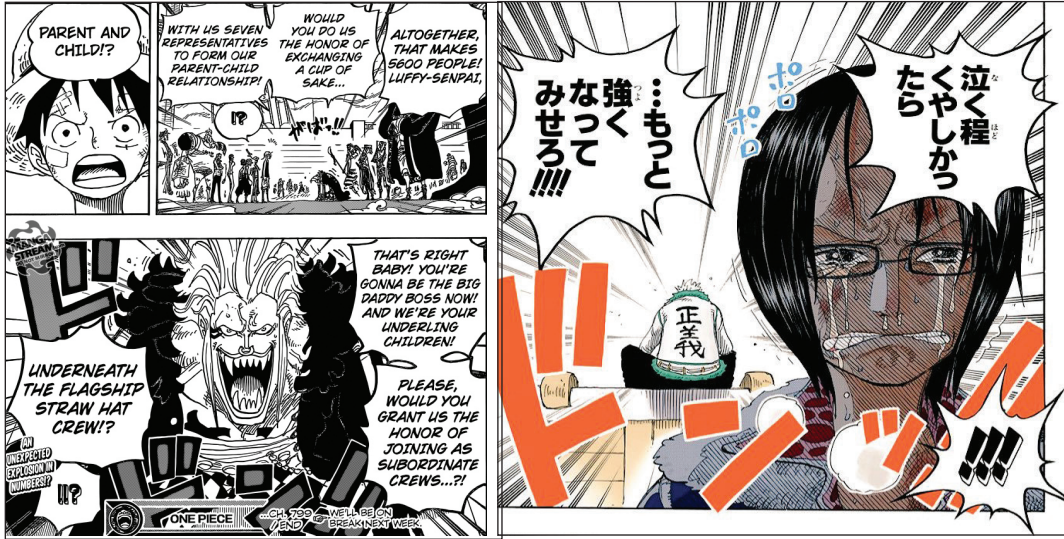


Figure 2.7-2.8 <One Piece> by Eiichiro Oda. The normal dialogue-boxes are round, but if the artist intends to express excitement, sorrow or fearful emotions, they might use an explosive-form dialogue-box.

Also, in Figure 2.9, the rectangular dialogue-boxes in black are the explication of the plot which is the obvious difference compared to the others.



■ THE MOVEMENT AND STATE CHANGES

Although comics could be regarded as sequential art, they present the development of a story, an event in a spatially-related angle that differs from the sequential art in time like animation or film. For instance, the expression of speed, sound, intensity, and variation would have different kinds of modalities in comics.



Figure2.10 <Naruto> by Kishimoto Masashi. Large numbers of bold texts in the screenplay have an advantageous role in assisting image narration. Four panels on the right show the powerful ninjutsu released by four different ninjas from the different angles of space; horizontal lines of sketch form spread rapidly by the character-centred that stimulate the extremely speedy environment. Accordingly, the audience would be shocked by the scene with the lightning, sandstorm and strong wind.

The panels on the left are also divided into different scenarios; they are the features of facial expression, a view of the character's back, and other figures in different angles. Nevertheless, their sight line concentrates on the same point: the intense explosion which is caused by the four ninjas.

The manifestation of speed and power is used in a large-scale scene because the progress of rapid changes will be tedious if they appear sequentially in single images (**Figure2.10-2.11**). Moreover, the performance of this aspect might be the standard to measure the essential skills of the outstanding comic creator.

Although the readers do not see the macroscopic view through alternating long shots and close-ups the same as film, the drastic fighting scenes are still formed by the audience through these elements.

Figure2.11 <Naruto> by Kishimoto Masashi. This image illustrates the intense feeling. The collision of two characters causes severe shaking resulting in the overlapping shadow around them. A blast produced by the colliding centre with the giant text demonstrates the visual effect full of power.



¹¹ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*.

¹² Aaron Meskin, "Comics as Literature?," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49, no. 3 (2009).

2.1.3 Fantastic Script: Sociality and Humanism

Comics rely on excellent visual effects to create excitement and imagination space to the reader, but a fascinating script is an inseparable part of successful comic works. The concept of a comic may be a hybrid art form which evolves from the expression form of literature.¹²

Coming up with a comic that has both entertaining effect and educational significance is the most significant challenge for me. Some pictorials are regarded as a classic by readers, comic fans and critics, due to their emotional or educational story with literary value. In this design project, I have applied a humanistic approach to emphasise the social condition that is promoted by the characters, because ancient Chinese culture

always contains philosophic, humanistic, and educational functions.

According to the analysis of comic plots, I believe that the virtual world, which is created by comics, would not only allow people to experience an adventure they have not been through in the real world, but they can also generate emotional and educational values for the readers. In my comic plot, I have applied the principles of edutainment to change the bad behaviour of a boy. Thus, my comic design may be considered as visual literature that promotes mutual understanding between the designer and the wider audience to advance cultural communication and moral education.

2.2 The Carrier of Culture and Belief

“There are many formats for comics, which all carry unique cultural baggage,” said Chute.¹³ As the symbol of visual narration, comic undertakes a vital mission in cultural transmission as same as the other patterns of mass media. Most of the culture and mainstream values in different countries could be reflected vividly in this particular method, and forms the apparently distinct regional culture step by step.

Based on the development of the current attitude towards comics, Mila Bongco states that studies could be accessed to the wider context of popular culture owing to the popularity of comics among the

public. Besides, comics probably touch people’s lives and help them to understand their aspirations through these stories.¹⁴ The arguments of this article give me enlightenment as to how to convey beliefs through the experience and change.

In my childhood, almost every young Chinese was obsessed by the story of “Sun Wu Kong” (known as the Monkey King) (**Figure 2.12**). The experiences of Monkey King influence our growing-up and the formation of our belief in coping with difficulties, suffering, resistance, endurance and morality. Nonetheless, we achieved good morality promotion and a great

¹³ Chute, “Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative.”

¹⁴ Mila Bongco, *Reading Comics : Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books*, (London : Routledge, 2014), <http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cab05020a&AN=aut.b20238320&site=eds-live>
<http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=1665746>. Electronic document.

¹⁵ Whalen Lai, “From Protean Ape to Handsome Saint: The Monkey King,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 53, no. 1 (1994).

relationship with our companions during this process. At the end of Monkey King's journey, he was guided by Guanyin (the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy) and was taught to find "his true-self" to defeat the demon: "in his monkey mind."¹⁵ These principles could easily arouse people's empathy. Thus, this brave, smart and loyal image of the

monkey has enjoyed broad support in Chinese popular culture up to the present day.

Even the current young generation is emotionally touched by the story of the Monkey King, because the essential part of Chinese culture is eternal, no matter in which era we may be now. My story plot is based

on these vital theoretical and experiential cultural roots. I integrated the traditional morality, which could be regarded as ancient Chinese beliefs, into my project to stimulate my audience, through storytelling and visualisation, employing a wide range of cultural phenomena.



Figure2.12 Sun Wu Kong has created a variety of images, and is widely used in various media, such as cartoon books, computer games, and films.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A methodology is a collection of research methods which could provide the theoretical basis to improve the explicit understanding of the research project.¹⁶

The design and development of comics to teach morality is a complex undertaking. It involves scientific and factual knowledge about human behaviour to change a person from bad to good. The process would involve many aspects of scientific knowledge and humanities consisting of culture, society, psychology, behaviour and societal beliefs.

¹⁶ Martyn Hammersley, *Methodology : Who Needs It?*, (Los Angeles, Calif. ; London : SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011), <http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat05020a&AN=aut.b22712847&site=eds-live>
<http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=689522>. Electronic document.

Designing and developing the comic to deliver a purpose requires imagination, knowledge about information design, the target audience and their aspirations. It is also a test of the ability of the creator to arrange, transform and design the information into story, plot and visualisation. A comic is the combination of visual story, an assembly of pictures, words, typography, emotions for delivering a meaningful visual story rather than just a great piece of visual effect. In my project, the purpose is to improve the habits of

communication and spread culture by using Chinese elements; this purpose is of great importance. These demands require an understanding of artistic skills and experiences in storytelling, plotting and drawing. These are the tacit knowledge that enables the artist to explore, propose and adopt ideas in an iterative trial and error process or to use a heuristic method. Heuristic thinking is also a reflective cyclical creative process that has enabled me to ideate, sketch, draw and design my comic.



3.1 Purpose of my Comic

However, perhaps more importantly, my project is not just about designing a comic book through sketching and drawing. The main purpose of my comic is about teaching morality in a Chinese sociocultural perspective. Many relevant principles from the humanities were harnessed to ensure that the comic will achieve its purpose. The research aims to capture insights from known human factor sources to inform my story and the visual communication in the comic. This will ensure that the outcome is effective in changing the behaviour of a little boy who has trouble with interpersonal relationships due to his lack of communication skills.

In the story, I transform his communication and personality styles from negative to positive. Thus, to design this well, my methodology includes humanities, culture, belief, and morality. In addition, I judiciously and sensitively apply these characters from the relevant Chinese legends to make the comic more meaningful, exciting and with a Chinese cultural theme. Therefore, the main methodological framework that I am using is interdisciplinary. It involves scientific knowledge, humanities or humanism to enable me to develop the story and plots that are meaningful and emotional, and the trial and error process of heuristics to hone my story writing, sketching and drawing for my plot.

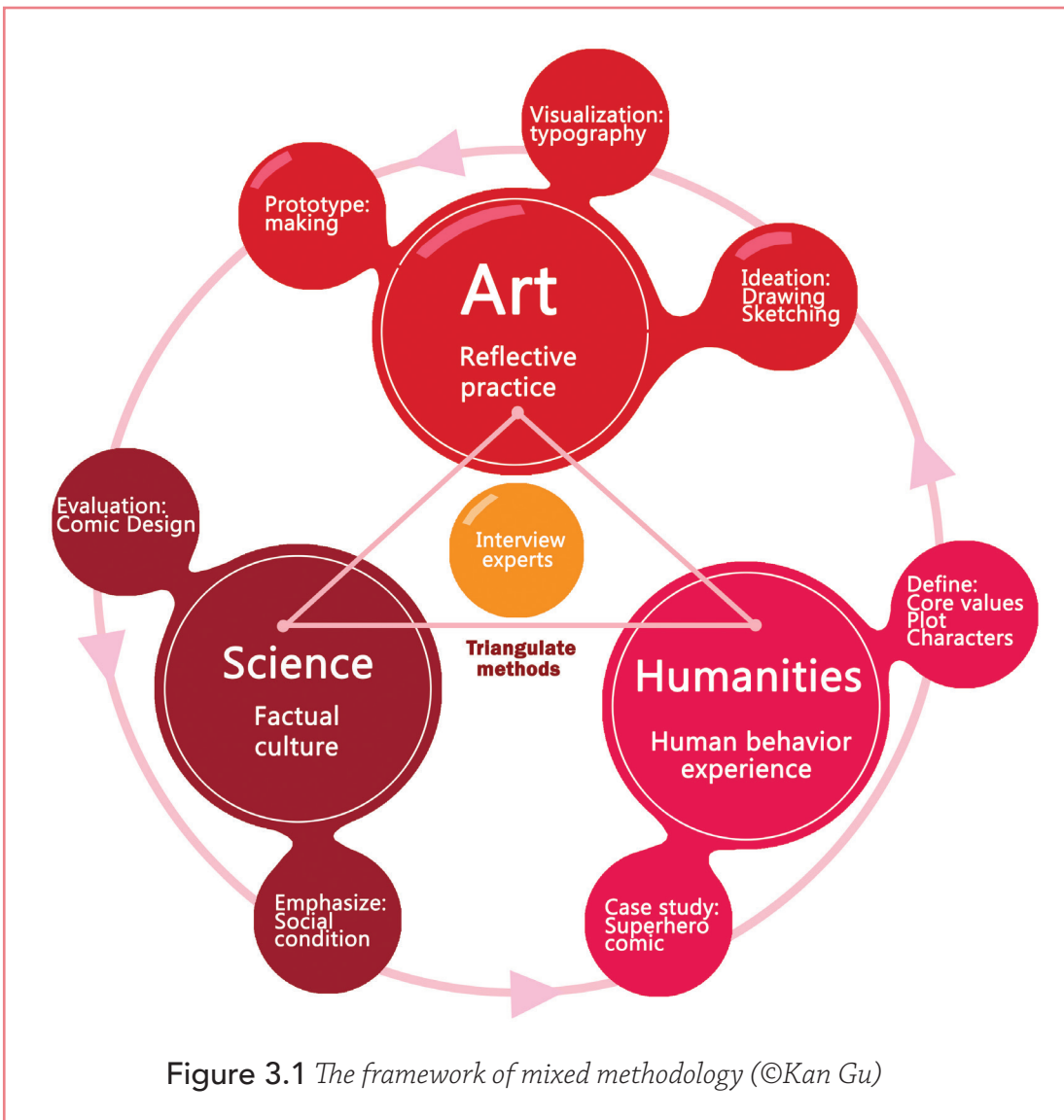


Figure 3.1 *The framework of mixed methodology* (©Kan Gu)

Designing the four characters has depended on the integration of the three key methodologies, art, humanities and science (Figure 3.1). Figure 3.1 demonstrates the relationship between three segments of my research. The three methodologies are mutually interdependent and supportive in an iterative cycle. This triangulation ensures that my research is imaginative, reliable, and culturally relevant.



3.2

Art: The Reflective Practice

Heuristics, trial and error in art making, is the most important of the three methodologies because a comic is about the visual expression of a graphic narrative. When I focus on the art and design of my comic book, I realise that the method I use in this part could be considered as reflective practice. **Figure 3.2** clearly states the design process before I make the prototype of the comic.

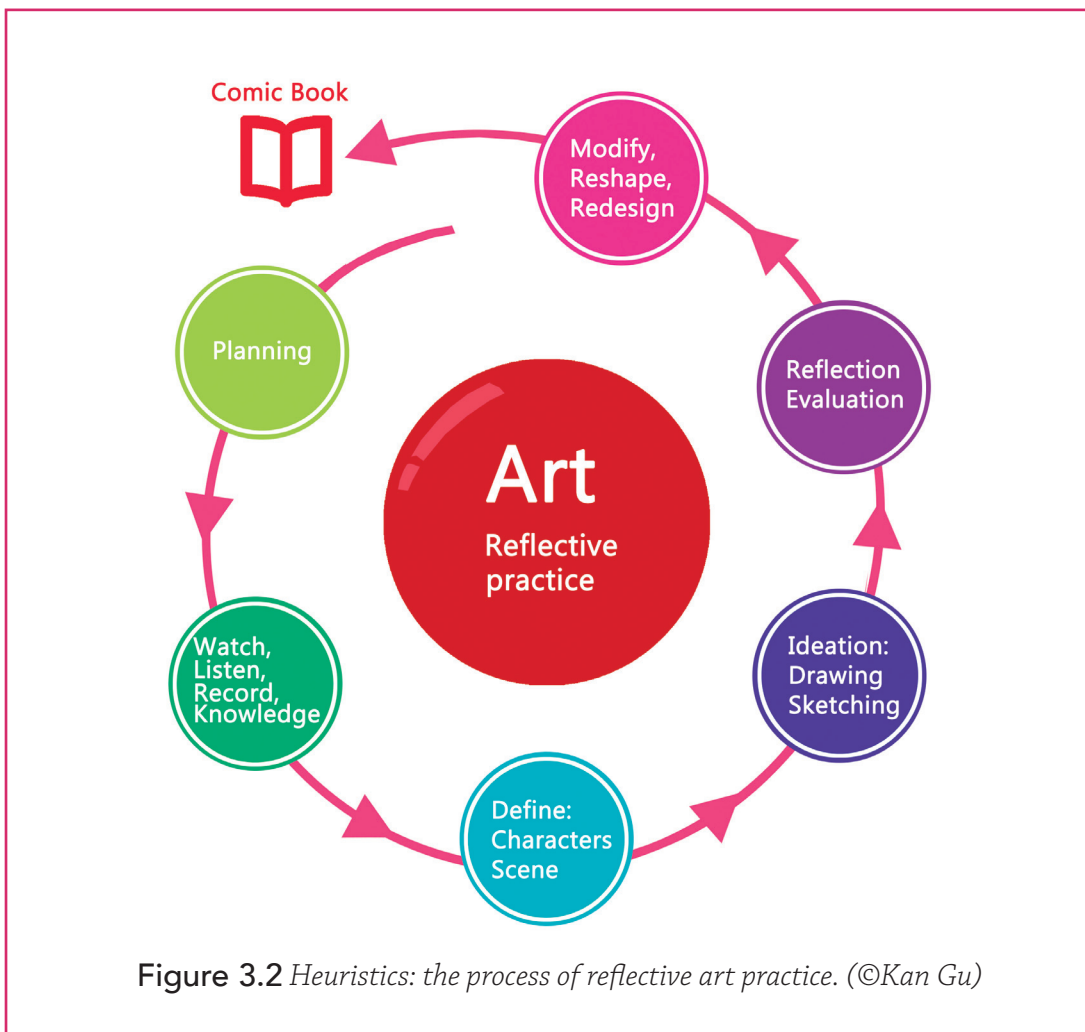


Figure 3.2 Heuristics: the process of reflective art practice. (©Kan Gu)

Heuristics provides a framework/process for me to explore love, communication, family affection and humanism. At first I planned the project to illustrate Chinese culture through special cartoon images, but as I gathered the information from various fields through observation, collection, and organisation, I found that comics could not only show fantastic pictures and typesetting, but would also solve some social problems, curing the trauma of the psychological and have a certain educational significance. So, the scientific cultural facts and the humanities are put into my research. As a result, the comic

book is given values.

Initially, I should understand the humanities that people have, and develop the relationship with myself; however, the story should be based on the scientific knowledge and the social condition.

Then, the analysis of traditional Chinese culture, including history, legend, and ancient symbols, is very essential to make my major characters cultural, attractive and representative.

Subsequently, the process of sketching and drawing is also a trial

and error practice for seeking the most appropriate form of visual expression. Ideation is the iterative process that shows variable changes; for instance, when I compare it with other artworks, or when I ask peers for reflection as advice.

Except for noting the changes, interviewing the professional remains quite an effective way and the experts always “defend the ‘knowledge’ that they see as central to their unique practice”; this is something that Hargreaves and Page indicate.¹⁷ I would have sufficient reflection when I gather the information and knowledge by

scientific methods, although I do not have the large data analysis, I still could observe and document a measure to understand the human behaviour, experience, and feeling in the humanities. I will document diverse reflections in different areas, and evaluate them so that the design of the characters will be improved; thus, the meaning and values of the comic will be enhanced. Therefore, the process of art and design as reflective practice in my research cover the three methodologies that were previously mentioned.

¹⁷ Janet Hargreaves and Louise Page, *Reflective Practice*, (Cambridge ; Malden, Massachusetts : Polity Press, 2013), <http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cab05020a&AN=aut.b13366531&site=eds-live>
<http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=1582842>. Electronic document.

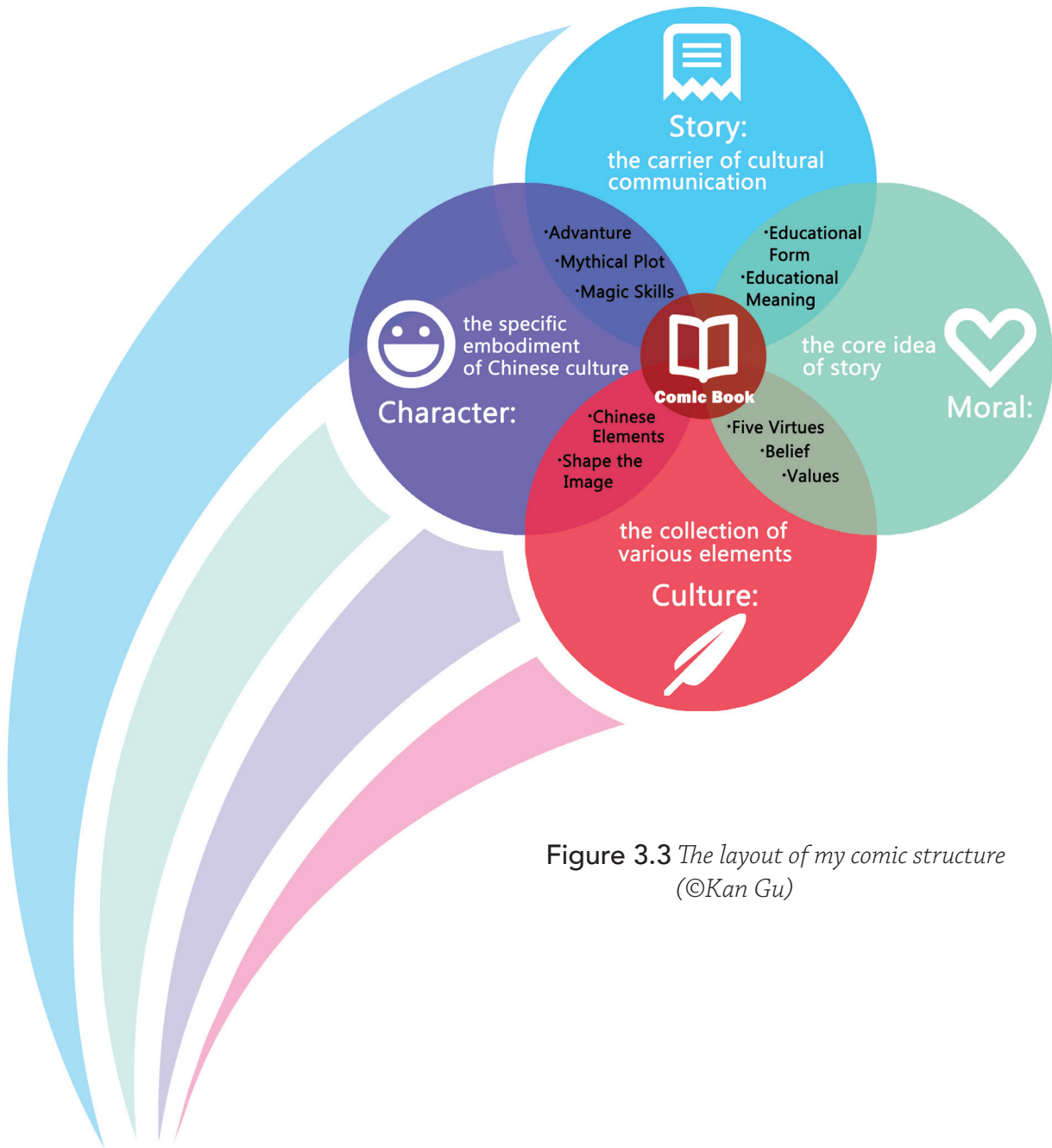


Figure 3.3 *The layout of my comic structure*
 (©Kan Gu)

3.2.2 Creativity: Structure of the Comic & Symbols of the Beasts

The research and design framework of the comic is made up of four main elements. They are: Development of the story, Development of characters, Applying Chinese culture, and The teaching morality.

The main theme of my comic is culture-centric to Chinese people. It is delicate and predicated with emotional factors to reflect the character of Chinese people. Thus, Chinese culture, historical elements, morality, and belief are captured from the humanities, and

the storytelling and visualisation of the comic characters come through the heuristic process (**Figure 3.3**). It is a complex and sensitive process to understand the Chinese culture. Each aspect is carefully described in my comic by using visual narrative. The component of Chinese culture is made up of five moralities: ancient belief, and the Four Saint Beasts. They are combined in the comic as a complete sociocultural system to manifest the bridging of the misunderstanding and to establish good communication relations with others.

My design process consisted of hundreds of iterations, trials and errors, and transformations. In particular, during the character design process, heuristics has enabled me to explore and reject hundreds of ideas and permutations to arrive at the current comic.

The design and development of the four main characters follow a strict legend from Chinese mythology. As early as the Shang Dynasty, ancient Chinese mythology believed that the sky had four directions: East, West, North and South, and they were named, respectively, as the Blue Dragon, White Tiger, Rose Finch, and Black Tortoise.¹⁸ In fact, they gave the name for the shapes that are connected to the seven main stars in the four directions of the sky.

From the ancient text (**Figure 3.4**) to arrive at the current figures of my characters is a heuristic process in search of a relationship to the demands of current visual art and aesthetics interpretation. I transformed them in novel ways to simplify and contextualise the main characteristics from old pictures. This was the first step I decided upon to develop my comic characters. It has been a great challenge to me to arrive at the four unique icons for each of the Four Saint Beasts. Because of the different representational meanings of the Four Saint Beasts, the transforming process had to go through many iterations and reflective judgements to arrive at the different characteristics of each beast (**Figure 3.5**).

Transform
is a worth
developm



Figure 3.4
Dragon, White Tiger, Rose Finch, and Black Tortoise

ation and experimentation through the heuristic process
ny process for character development; I will illustrate the
ment of the final images in the following chapter.



*Shows the original images of the Four Saint Beasts (from left to right: Blue
ite Tiger, Rose Finch, and Black Tortoise) were depicted long ago on the eave tiles
n the Han Dynasty.*

¹⁸ Mark Schumacher "Four Guardians of the Four Compass Directions"
<http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/ssu'ling'shtm>

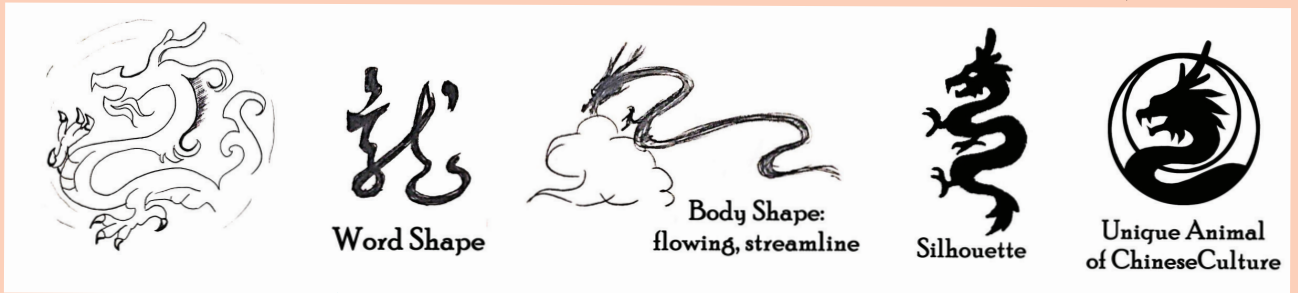
TRANSFORMATION

THE ORIGINAL

PROCESS:

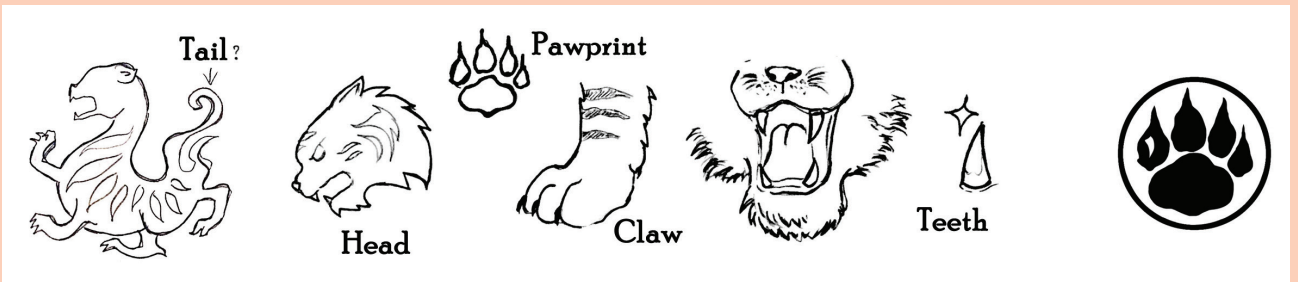
ICON & SYMBOL

TO COLLECT THE MAIN FEATURES AND SIMPLIFY



BLUE DRAGON:

The Chinese Dragon is not a specific creature, but it consists of many different animals. So I start from the Chinese word (pictogram) “龍,” to keep its streamlined shape as the dragon’s body. Finally, the logo is a silhouette to highlight the total image of the dragon.



WHITE TIGER:

The characteristics of the White Tiger are obvious. In the design process, I chose the different parts of the body, to use them as essential design elements, such as the tiger’s head, tiger’s paw, even the tiger’s teeth. However, for a logo, they are unsatisfactory, until I used the paw prints as the White Tiger’s logo, then it achieved good visual effects.



Beautiful Wing
with Red Feather

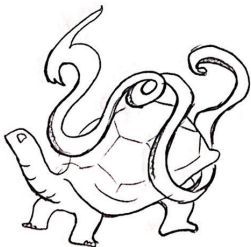


Feather & Burning Fire



In the design of the Rose Finch, I selected the most obvious characteristics of the birds, the wings and feathers. In Chinese legend, the Rose Finch was a big bird with red feathers. It was like a burning fire when it flew. Therefore, the image of the logo depicted the fusing of feathers and flames together.

ROSE FINCH:



Realistic



Hidden in the waves



Attribute of Tortoise: water

The Black Tortoise is a special creature. It is made up of a snake and a turtle. As a result, I could not independently select a single feature from the two animals during the design process. I consider its attribute in the ancient legend, water. Turtles and snakes are creatures that can survive in the water, so the wave is transformed into a pattern that is similar to the two creatures. (©Kan Gu)

BLACK TORTOISE:



Figure 3.5 *The icon design for each saint beast based on an analysis of the symbolic meaning of ancient images. I tried to make the transformation of them and develop the design concept which is more suitable for modern visual communication. (©Kan Gu)*



3.3 The Use of Humanism

Except for the visual design of the characters, my comic story is about bridging the communication gap between father and son. It is a very common problem in modern society, resulting in bad relationships between parents and their children. Therefore, my story is based on understanding human nature that is focused on emotion, sadness, and cultural comprehension of the young boy in order to change his behaviour, modify his thinking, and develop his style of communication. These issues are common to modern society where the parents are always busy with work that leads to the neglect of their children, and even family break-

ups. Thus, I want to use my comic to tell the story in a way that is current, meaningful and informative.

I use visual narrative to illustrate the changing process because the comic is more entertaining. When we design with a purpose, the comic can also be highly educational. A “edutainment” strategy which is informed by the humanities and scientific principles formed an important part in the design and development of my storyline and visual communication.

One of the humanistic principles that are important to my comic is the

five levels of psychological demands proposed in the “hierarchy of needs” by Abraham Maslow. This is because, for my comic story, the main purpose is to change the behaviour of a young boy, helping him to be sociable with

his classmates, making him feel a sense of belonging in family life, and finally to be a confident, positive, and energetic student. It is the process to achieve self-actualisation.

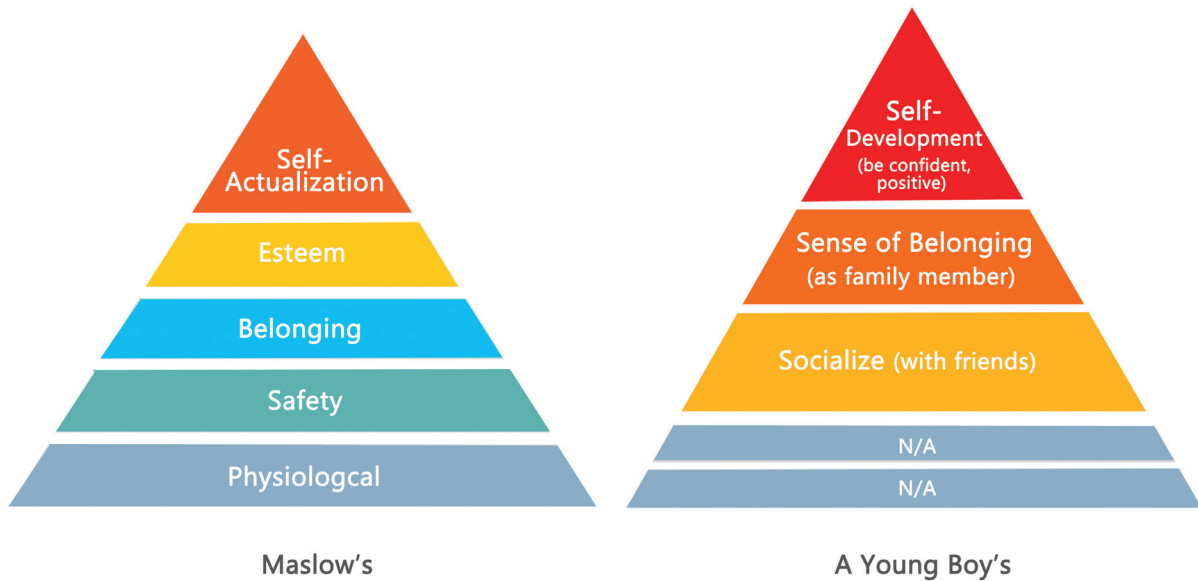


Figure 3.6 Maslow's hierarchy of needs model and the humanistic paradigm of my comic design concept. (©Kan Gu)

3.3.1 Case Study: Superhero Comic

Superhero comics play a positive role in influencing the young generation and even inspire adults. The features of superheroes would be regarded as the dreams of almost all children, like speed, power, and superior knowledge.¹⁹ The story plot in my comic, however, besides the heroism of the Four Saint Beast, is about faith, justice over evil, friendship, and the arousal of sympathy and care.

From 1937 to the present, when Batman was first published in Detective Comics#27 (**Figure3.7**) of DC Comics, the main character and equipment have been changed gradually by the creators (**Figure3.8**). Even his personality has changed from always being alone to an easy-going tough guy among his friends (in The LEGO Batman Movie, 2017) (**Figure3.9**).

¹⁹ Bongco, *Reading Comics : Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books*.

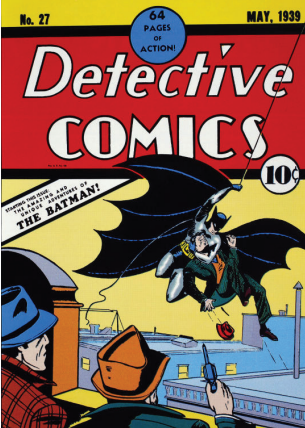


Figure 3.7-3.9 From when it first appeared in *Detective Comics* in 1939, Batman has changed from the simple plane image to a well-developed character (both appearance and personality).



This change humanises the cartoon character so that the artwork could portray humanistic feelings. Humanism is a significant element to the world which helps people to improve as an individual or as a society.²⁰ Many comic stories are about humanism. I care about human feelings and I apply humanistic principles to bridge the communication gap between father and the young boy to good effect. All this is revealed in my comic.

Modelling from the changes of Batman, it is through communication that a son could learn from the father because the father is always the superhero to a

son. However, in a modern society, school education is not entirely effective. That is why there are so many teenage problems. As Terry M. Williams presents, teenagers do not want to go to school, and the incidence of suicide is on the increase because of a breakdown in the family structure.²¹ They need to be schooled with a humanistic approach and be taught in an integrated, entertaining and educational manner to ensure effective delivery of meaningful messages that are life-changing. That is why I use the Four Saint Beasts to attract young people to my comic.

²⁰ Stephen Chatelier, "Towards a Renewed Flourishing of Humanistic Education?," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 36, no. 1 (2015).

²¹ Terry M. Williams, *Teenage Suicide Notes : An Ethnography of Self-Harm*, (New York : Columbia University Press, 2017), <http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat05020a&AN=aut.b19757402&site=eds-live>
<http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/AUT/detail.action?docID=4774011>. Electronic document.



3.4 Scientific Knowledge

Study of scientific knowledge is focusing on the social condition and the effects of science, to solve social problems by using scientific methods.²²

It is a regular situation in the world today that many teenagers are living in a household from which their parents have separated. It is not only the family issue but also a serious social phenomenon. Although the comic could not fundamentally prevent this situation, to ease

the misunderstandings or contradictions between family members is a possible solution through scientific methods. Hence, it is the reason why I am using ancient belief and morality as the educational form to solve the modern problem because “science is a cultural tradition that preserved and transmitted from generation to generation.”²³ My comic can become a trigger for changing the young boy from negativity to confidence.

²² Joseph Ben-David and Teresa A. Sullivan, "Sociology of Science," *Annual Review of Sociology* 1, no. 1 (1975).

²³ *Ibid*



CHAPTER 4

CONCEPT DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

4.1 The Origin

The Four Saint Beasts come from the ancient Chinese legends of the Beasts. They are The Blue Dragon, White Tiger, Rose Finch, and Black Tortoise. As such, they belong to a combination of ancient mythology and astronomy.

Ancient Chinese astronomers divided the fixed stars into *San Yuan* 三垣 (Three Enclosures) and *Si Xiang* 四象 (Four Symbols) in the Shang Dynasty.²⁴ “Three Enclosures” means the wall that surrounds the land and ranges around the pole star in a triangular form. “Four symbols” represent

the four directions (north, south, west, and east) outside of the three enclosures (**Figure 4.1**). Also, the “Four symbols” are thought of like the characters of the four Saint Beasts that correspond to the four directions by the ancient people (**Figure 4.2**).

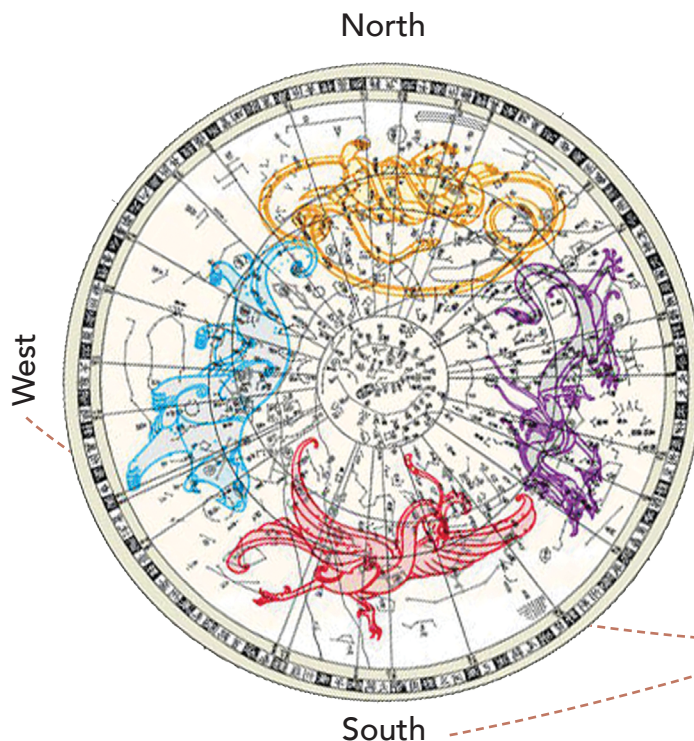


Figure 4.1 “Three enclosures” and “Four symbols” (*San Yuan* and *Si Xiang*) are the important components of Chinese traditional culture which reflect the organisation of the Chinese nation.

They have been widely used in various fields including ancient astronomy, religion, literature, astrology, divination and feng shui. “Three Enclosures” and “Four Symbols” possess complex connotations in a different area that have long been part of the Chinese culture.²⁵

²⁴ “English-Chinese Glossary of Chinese Star Regions, Asterisms and Star Names,” Hong Kong Space Museum, https://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/Museum/Space/en_US/web/spm/starshine/resources/constemyth/glossary.html.

²⁵ “Chinese Stars and Constellations,” Chinasage, <http://www.chinasage.info/stars.htm>.



Figure 4.2 “Four Symbols” are imagined as the Four Saint Beasts. The Black Tortoise represents the North; the Rose Finch is the South, the East is represented by the Blue Dragon, and the White Tiger is the West.

4.2 Identifying the Characters

The Four Saint Beasts are also associated with another unique attribute of the traditional Chinese culture, *Wu Xing* 五行 (Five Elements), except for the close contact with the position. The ancients classified the universe as the “Five Elements” depending on their different properties: Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth. Ancient Chinese philosophers illustrate the formation of the world and the mutual relations by using the “Five Elements” theory. It emphasises the whole structure; they intend to describe the movement of objects and the transforming relationship between them. “Five Elements” reflect a deep understanding of the natural law.²⁶

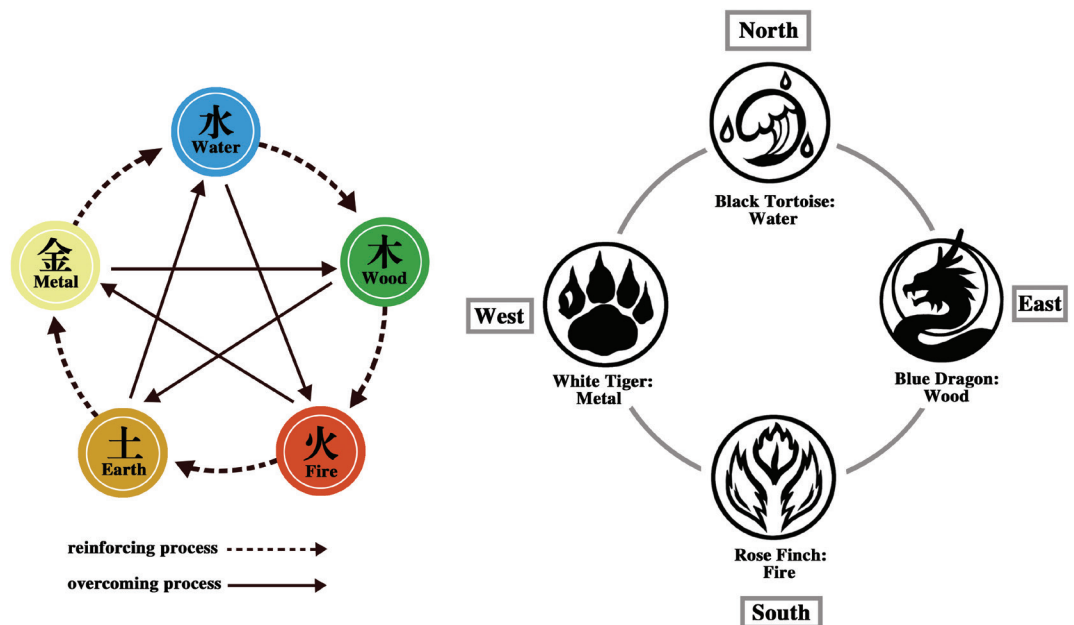


Figure 4.3 (©Kan Gu)

Therefore, the two different interactions – “reinforcing process” and “overcoming process” – exist between them (**Figure 4.3**). The Four Saint Beasts represent the different directions in the sky; correspondingly, they also stand for the four different “Five Elements”.²⁷

The attributes of Black Tortoise is water, according to 《后汉书·王梁传》：“玄武，水神之名。” (<Hou Han Shu · Wang Liang Zhuan> - a book of the later Han Dynasty · biography of Liang Wang. “Black Tortoise: the name of water gods.”).²⁸ The Chinese name of Rose Finch is Zhu Que. The meaning of “Zhu” is vermillion, so the Rose Finch stands for fire and occupies the South. The White Tiger represents the West; the West is metal. The stars of the East are like the Blue Dragon, which is Wood. A Chinese proverb says: “February 2, dragon lifting its head” meaning everything in nature blooms when spring is coming.²⁹

²⁶ “Five Element Framework,” Traditional Chinese Medicine World Foundation, <https://www.tcmworld.org/what-is-tcm/five-elements/>.

²⁷ “The Four Symbols of Chinese Astrology,” LivePsychics, <http://www.livepsychics.co.uk/chinese-astrology/four-symbols/>.

²⁸ JiuJin Chen, *The Legend of Chinese Zodiac*, (2005), <http://www.worldcat.org/title/zhong-guo-xing-zuo-shen-hua/oclc/148380213/viewport>.

²⁹ “Culture Headlines,” HuaXia Website, <http://www.huaxia.com/zhwh/whrd/2010/03/1789462.html>.

4.3 The Original Design of Characters

³⁰ Dong Liu, *Chinese Civilization: A Reader*, (Jan 1, 2009), <http://www.worldcat.org/title/zhong-hua-wen-ming-du-ben/oclc/421569976/viewport>.

4.3.1 The Relationship of Characters

China has established the principle and framework of an imperial political system for two thousand years as early as the Qin Dynasty.³⁰ According to the similar imperial structure of Western and Eastern societies, I establish the relationship of the Four Saint Beasts. For the comic story, the combination of the main characters is like a small team. Each of them holds their different positions (**Figure 4.4**).

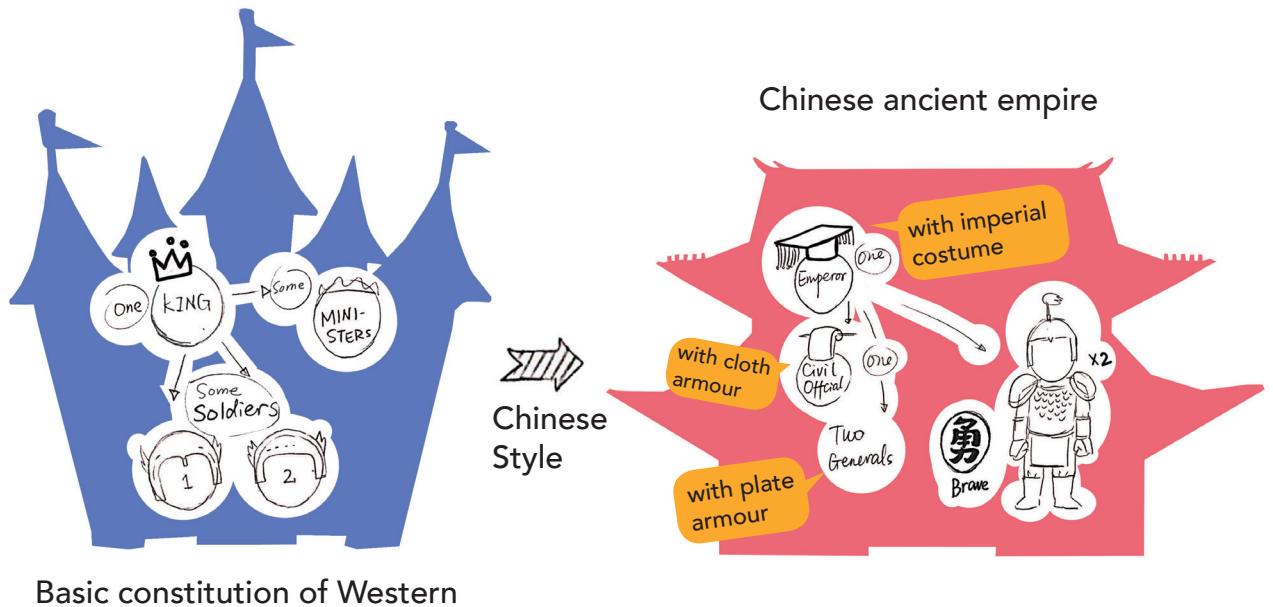


Figure 4.4 Generally, the basic constitution of autocratic monarchy is one king at the top of the pyramid, the next level is the ministers or generals, the bottom level should be the soldiers. For my Four Saint Beasts, the comparable constitution in designing characters could be one team leader (as an emperor), one team member for giving suggestions (as a civil official) and two team members for execution (as generals). (©Kan Gu)



4.3.2 Blue Dragon

■ HISTORICAL STUDIES:

Chinese Dragons are entirely different from western dragons. In western myths, typically, dragons are like a giant lizard with big wings and the long tail of a snake. Most of them love treasures, living in caves and breathing fire. In the Middle Ages, the dragon was a symbol of sin, which was derived from the biblical story (*Figure 4.5*).³¹

A Chinese Dragon is used as a symbol of power, benevolence and auspiciousness (*Figure 4.6*). It is one of the most representative traditional cultures of China.³²



Figure 4.5-4.6 *The Western Dragon and the Chinese Dragon.*

³¹ Sara Lynn Hua: "Difference between a Chinese Dragon and a Western Dragon" <http://blog.tutorming.com/expats/chinese-dragon-western-difference-lucky>

³² "Chinese Dragons - Facts, Culture, Origins, and Art," China Highlights, <https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/article-chinese-dragons.htm>.

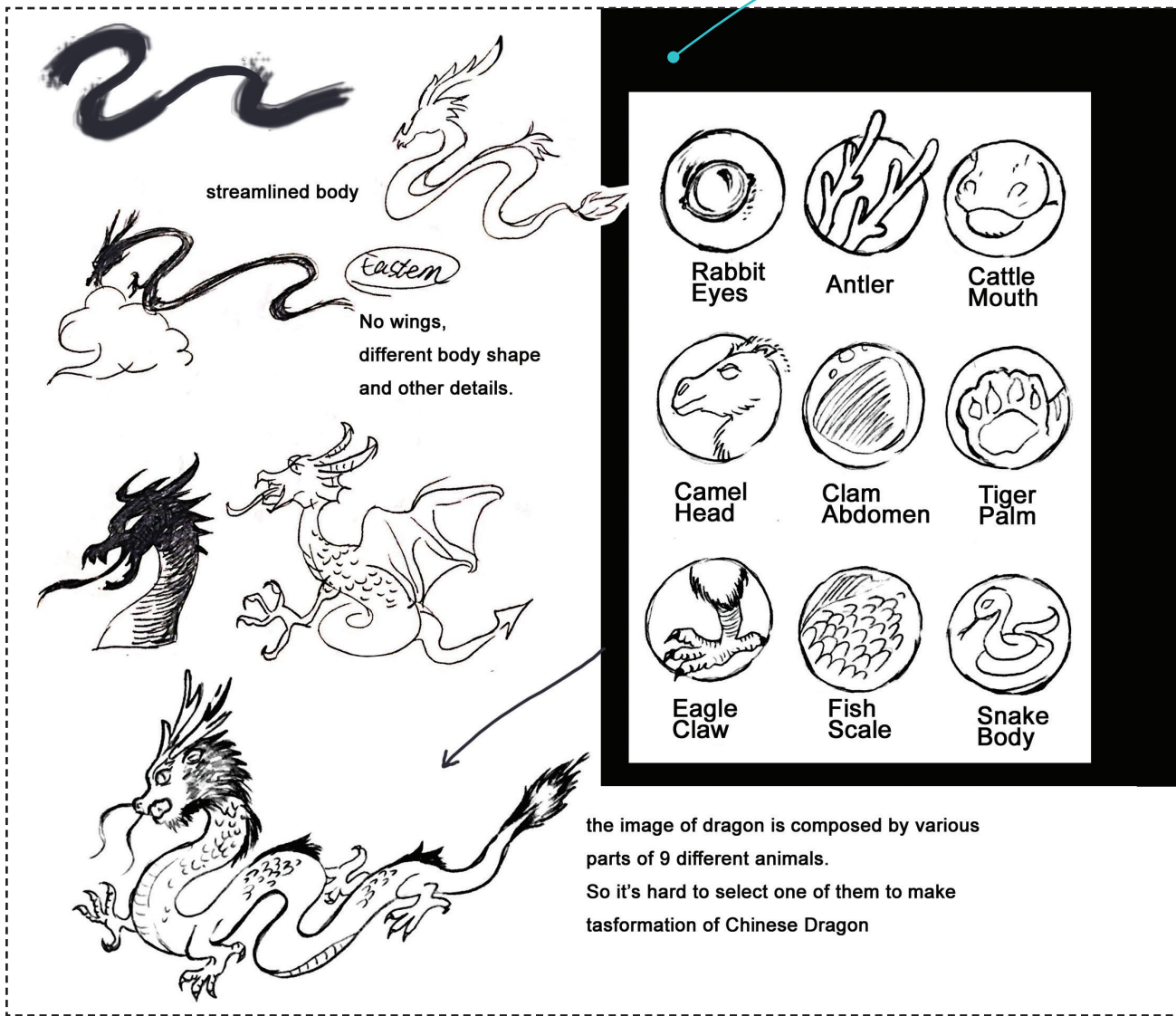
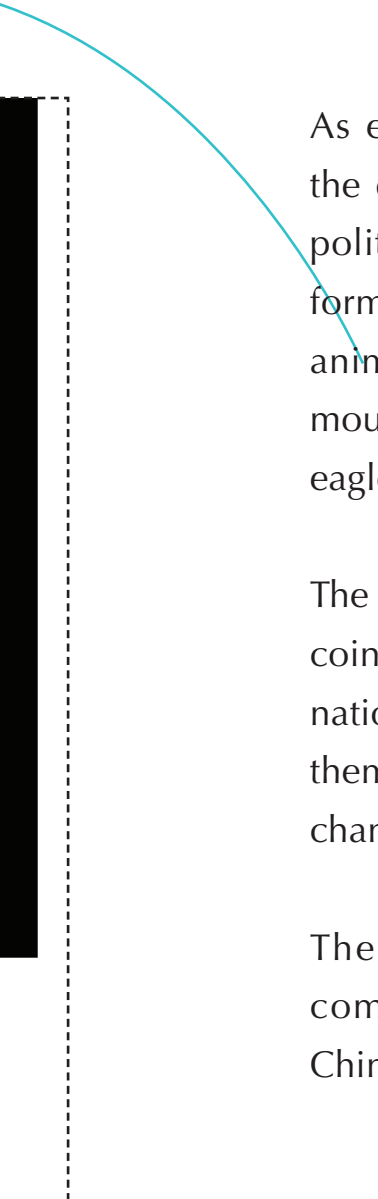


Figure 4.7 The dragon, as an ancient totem, is not a single creature but a collection of many animals which means gathering the essence of all things and possessing all kinds of power. (©Kan Gu)



As early as the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the feature of the dragon could be found in artefacts. The ideologist and politician of Eastern Han Dynasty, Wang Fu, said that the form of a dragon contains different characteristics of nine animals. The eyes of the rabbit, antlers of the deer, cattle mouth, head of the camel, abdomen of clam, tiger's palm, eagle's claw, scales and the body of the snake (**Figure 4.7**).³³

The dragon culture is the developing process which almost coincides with the formation and integration of the Chinese nation. Historically, the ancient Chinese emperors regarded themselves as “real dragons”; no matter how the dynasties changed, the inheritance of the dragon culture is consistent.

The profound implied meaning and complex visual composition of the Dragon image is enough to reflect Chinese civilisation.

³³ Xinyu Liang, *Dragon and Phoenix Totem*, (Shantou University Press, Jan 2017), <https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=UcNIDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=zh-CN#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

■ FOR THE IMAGE DESIGN:

In my comic, the Blue Dragon is not only the most representative Chinese cultural symbol but it also plays an irreplaceable role to advance the plot and enhance the relationship between Saint Beasts and other characters. 《淮南子·卷三》曰：“天神之贵者，莫贵于青龙。” (<Huai Nan Zi · Volume 3 said: “the most exalted God is the blue dragon among the Four Saint Beasts.”)³⁴ Therefore, the Dragon is a very important character of my comic. The design of the Chinese dragon should be the wise and benevolent leader of the group who has decision-making power. I transform this legendary ancient animal into a handsome man of the Han Dynasty (**Figure 4.8**).



Figure 4.8 To illustrate the characteristics of the people of ancient Chinese society, I designed different hairstyles for him and designed the Han clothes as his costume to reference Chinese culture. (©Kan Gu)

The Chinese Blue Dragon is composed of different animals. It is hard to select the specific characteristics to create the image. So I choose one specific thing, Dragon eyes as the key feature of this character. His eyes shine with limpidity and stateliness which have the function of predicting the future and connecting the past (**Figure 4.9**).

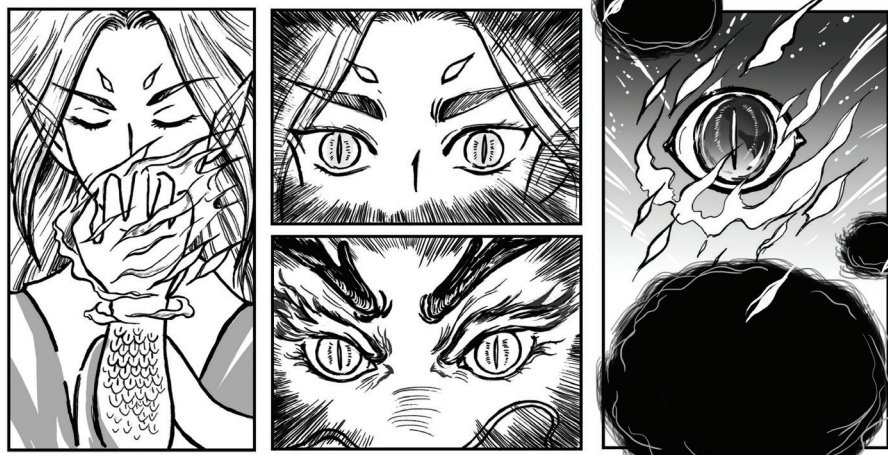
Figure 4.9 *The feature of the Blue Dragon: Dragon Eyes. As he applied this skill, his appearance also changed from the human form to the original form of the Dragon. (©Kan Gu)*



Dragon eyes: Stateliness

Special skills: Predicting the future

Connecting the ancient god



³⁴ Dianjue Liu, *Text and Textual Criticism of the <Huai Nan Zi >with Rhymes Marked*, (Chinese University Press, May 2013), https://www.chineseupress.com/index.php?route=product/product&product_id=2404.

青



龍

Figure 4.10 *The first draft of Blue Dragon* (©Kan Gu)

■ FOR THE PLOT DESIGN:

The Blue Dragon is a leader with powerful magic skills. Other Saint Beasts trust and support him when the Dragon uses his eyes to acquire the guidance of the ancient God and gives the little helpless boy “Saint Beasts Jades” to help him overcome “Xin Mo” (Figure 4.11).



Figure 4.11

*This episode (P38 of the comic book) shows Dragon's decision-making power and foresight as **a team leader.***

(©Kan Gu)



4.3.3 Rose Finch

■ HISTORICAL STUDIES:

Sometimes the name of “ 朱雀 ” Rose Finch is translated into English as the Phoenix. In fact, the Rose Finch and the Phoenix are two different creatures. The Phoenix is the king of birds. In the Chinese legend, a male Phoenix is called “ 凤 ”, and the female is called “ 凰 ”, collectively known as the “ 凤凰 ” - Phoenix. Since the Qin and Han Dynasties, the empresses started to identify themselves as the Phoenix. The image of the Phoenix became a whole. Even so, the Phoenix is always the symbol of good fortune and harmony which has gorgeous feathers that represent the five virtues (**Figure 4.12**).³⁵

³⁵ Liz Leafloor, "Ancient Symbolism of the Magical Phoenix," <http://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends/ancient-symbolism-magical-phoenix-002020>.



Figure 4.12 The two pictures indicate the different shapes of the Phoenix (top) and the Rose Finch (bottom).



Figure 4.13 “Si Shen Cloud Chart” was created in the early Western Han Dynasty. It was unearthed in the Shiyuan Tomb of Mount Mangdang, Yongcheng County, Henan Province, 1987. The main contents of the mural are the Four Saint Beasts, Ganoderma, cloud patterns and other artefacts. The Rose Finch was located at the top of the mural with slender body shape and long, elegant feathers.

Different from the Phoenix, the representative significance of the Rose Finch is more special. The Rose Finch appeared in the Shang Dynasty with inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells. Its image is defined as a giant bird with red feathers like burning fire. (the bottom picture of figure 4.12).

In the Han Dynasty, the Rose Finch was printed on murals of tombs, because in ancient China, the process of guiding the dead souls into paradise was considered to be a very important ritual. Thus, the Rose Finch is revered as a holy bird that could guide the souls becoming immortal. The analysis of historical materials gives me much enlightenment on understanding this Saint Beast. For example, 《四神云气图》 (“Si Shen Cloud Chart”) (**Figure 4.13**) - one of the grandest murals, which contains the highest value of art.³⁶

³⁶ "Before Dunhuang Era- Si Shen Cloud Chart", Mount MangDang Scenic, http://www.mangshan.net/culture_info.php?softid=56.

■ FOR THE IMAGE DESIGN:

I take account of the characteristics and appearance of the Rose Finch. It is a very brilliant and intelligent creature. I portray her as an inspirational female civil official of the small group. She could provide intelligent ideas and possess magical skills (**Figure 4.14-4.16**).

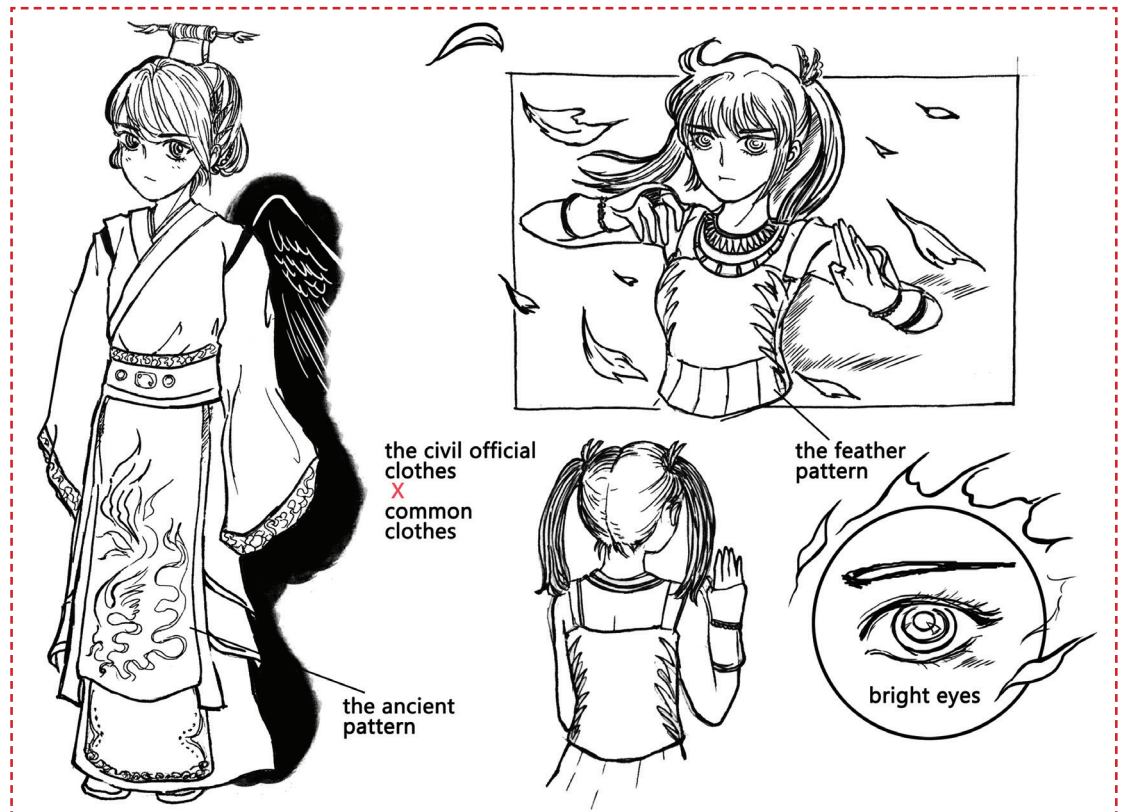


Figure 4.14 Illustrates the different designs of the Rose Finch. I designed two suits of clothes for her. One is the official clothes of the Han Dynasty to match the Blue Dragon's costume. The others are the ordinary clothes which are shown in the comic book (because it will make the pictures repeatedly if I draw two characters with Han clothes).

I also designed bunches hairstyle and two bright eyes for her to highlight her femininity, which makes her look very adorable. (©Kan Gu)

朱雀

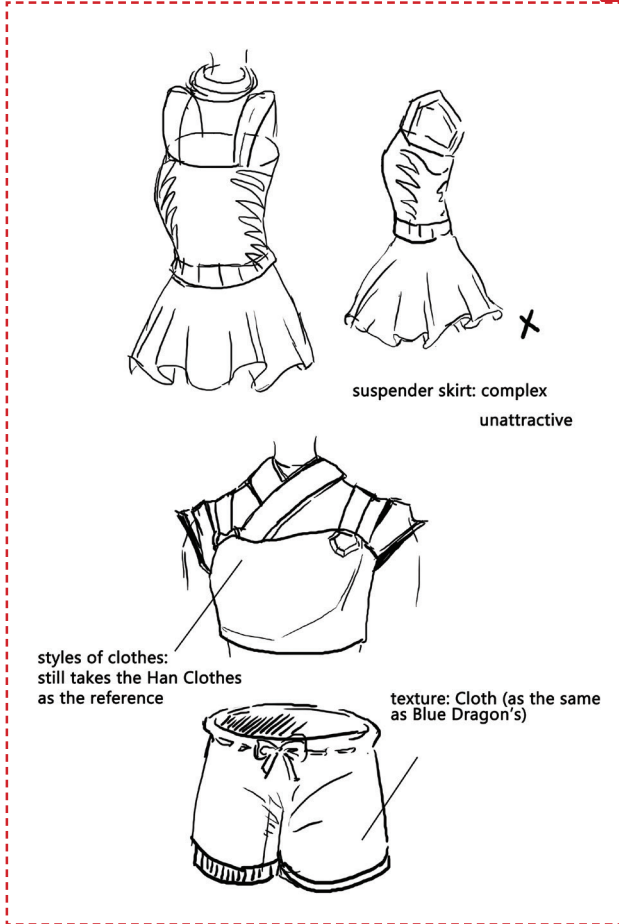


Figure 4.15-4.16 The process of changing in the Rose Finch and the first draft of her. (©Kan Gu)

However, this suit does not satisfy me, because it is not particularly good-looking because it looks too much like a swimsuit. So I changed the clothes significantly.

From Figure 4.14, it shows the transformation of the clothes design, to avoid the dress of this female is not too casual. I believe it would be good for the overall image of the Rose Finch to make her more able, capable and smart.

■ **FOR THE PLOT DESIGN:**

At the end of my comic, I created a scene to enable the Rose Finch to show her magnificent form by exhibiting her extraordinary abilities (*Figure 4.17*).

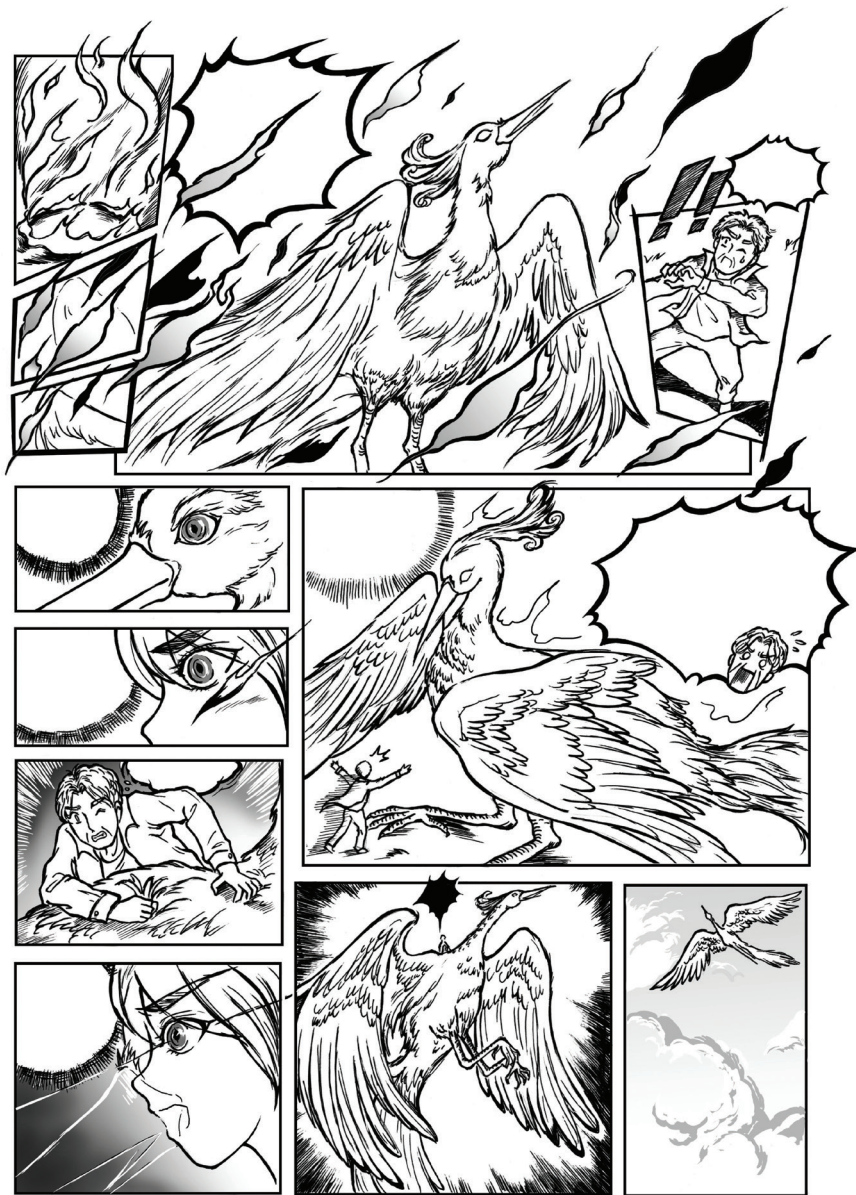


Figure 4.17 The morphing of the Rose Finch is very challenging: to bring the father to Jimmy's school as soon as possible, she tries her best to help them most directly: fly. The scenario of my comic reflects the ancient function of the Rose Finch that accords with her **guiding role**. (©Kan Gu)



4.3.4 White Tiger

■ HISTORICAL STUDIES:



Figure 4.18 *The seven constellations (奎 (kuī), 娄 (lóu), 胃 (wèi), 昂 (mǎo), 毕 (bì), 觜 (zī), 参 (shēn) of west shaped the White Tiger.*

The origin of the White Tiger is the seven constellations of the western sky, which are connected like a Tiger (**Figure 4.18**). In Chinese culture, the Tiger is the king of all animals, and its image means mighty, brave, and righteous which has great symbolic significance. The White Tiger is a real creature among the Four Saint Beasts. Therefore, it has been loved by many Chinese minorities since ancient times; for instance, the tiger emerged as the tribal totem of the *Bai*, *Ba*, and *Xi Qiang* people in history.³⁷ They believed that the Tiger could give them strength and protect them from misfortune or evil. 《中兴征祥》曰：“王者仁而不害，则白虎见。” (<Zhong Xing Zheng Xiang>said: “when the world is peaceful, White Tiger will appear.”³⁸) Hence, the White Tiger is an auspicious sign similar to the Blue Dragon.

³⁷ Xingliang He, *Totemism in Chinese Minority Ethnic Groups*, (China International Press, 2006), <http://www.worldcat.org/title/zhongguo-shao-shu-min-zu-tu-teng-chong-bai/oclc/123909657/viewport>.

³⁸ "Yi Wen Lei Ju - Auspicious Sign," Beijing Normal University, <http://course.bnu.edu.cn/course/classicalliterature/doc/text/ywlj/099.htm>.

The White Tiger of the West represents Metal among the “Five Elements”. It is also seen as the God of Fighting. The Tiger pattern was usually carved on ancient Chinese weapons or shields. This results in people’s admiration for the Tiger (**Figure 4.19**). The generals and soldiers consider that the Tigers would give them courage and victory, so they introduced themselves as the “Flying Tiger Army”. Also, one of the most special things is “Hu Fu” (“a tiger-shaped tally issued to generals as imperial authorisation for troop movement in ancient China”³⁹). “Hu Fu” was made of bronze or gold. It was sent to the general by the emperor to symbolise the supreme dominion of the army (**Figure 4.20**).



Figure 4.19 *The patterns of the Tiger were engraved vividly on two different weapons in ancient China.*



Figure 4.20 “Hu Fu” was also called “Bing Fu” (commander’s tally); this delicate thing was divided into two parts: one half is the emperor’s hand, and the other half is the general’s hand. Only when the emperor gave it to the general through the messenger, when the left and right merge into a complete tiger, the general has the right to mobilise the army.⁴⁰

³⁹ Guanghua Wu, in *New Chinese-English Dictionary*, ed. Guanghua Wu (Shanghai JiaoTong University Press, July 2003).

⁴⁰ Editorial Board, *Legend of National Treasure*, (Jilin Publishing Group Co., Ltd., September 2008), <http://www.worldcat.org/title/guo-bao-chuan-qi/oclc/320783699/viewport>.

■ FOR THE IMAGE DESIGN:

I, therefore, could make clear from the above explanation that the White Tiger's armour would be gorgeous because of its valour and prestige. Unlike the cloth armour of the Blue Dragon and the Rose Finch, the White Tiger and the Black Tortoise wore hard plate armour as "generals".

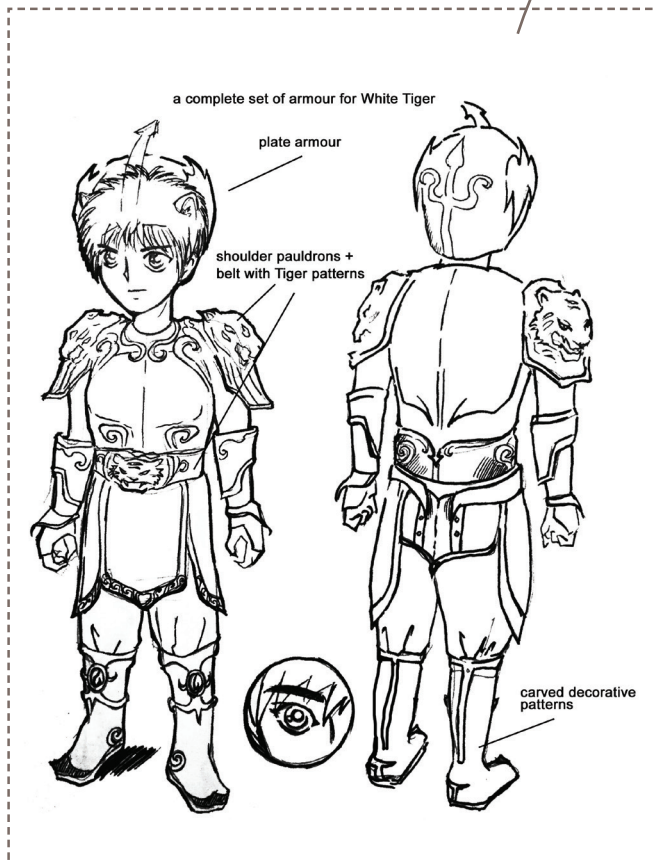


Figure 4.21 (©Kan Gu)

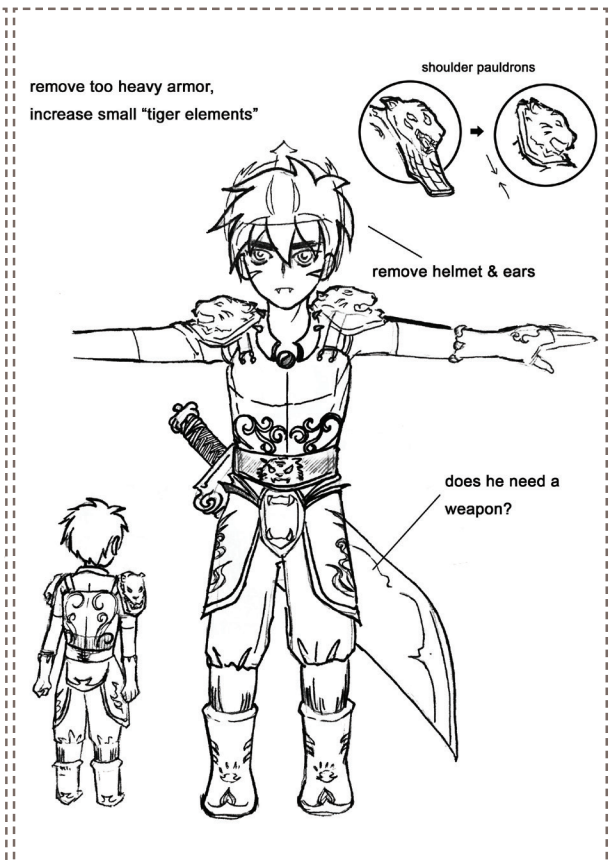


Figure 4.22 (©Kan Gu)

Figure 4.21-4.22 *The image design of the Tiger on the left picture seems too heavy and gorgeous. Especially the armour on the shoulder, hand and waist looked too complicated to draw (in the following comic making). So I made them exquisite and smaller than the first design. For example, the shape of the pauldron is shorter; other parts are also changed. From the right picture, the obvious difference could be found; the whole feeling of the Tiger becomes simplified.*

*However, this is not enough. There are still a lot of patterns and armour parts, at which point I keep simplifying them by removing excessive patterns, weapon and waist support. The first draft of the White Tiger seems smart (**Figure 4.23**).*

白虎



Figure 4.23 *The first draft of White Tiger (©Kan Gu)*

■ FOR THE PLOT DESIGN:

I concentrated on the characteristics and personality of White Tiger. He is like portrayed with brotherly love. He changed his form twice to accompany the boy to school. During the process, they established a deep friendship (*Figure 4.24*).

When Jimmy's mind was occupied by the Black Fire of "Xin Mo", the White Tiger used his "Shield" and power to absorb the wickedness of darkness and ease the pain in Jimmy's heart. Meanwhile, the Tiger also made an enchantment to protect him although this skill would cost too much of his power. This fragment is quite touching, and an excellent demonstration of the Tiger's role as *a protector* (*Figure 4.25*).

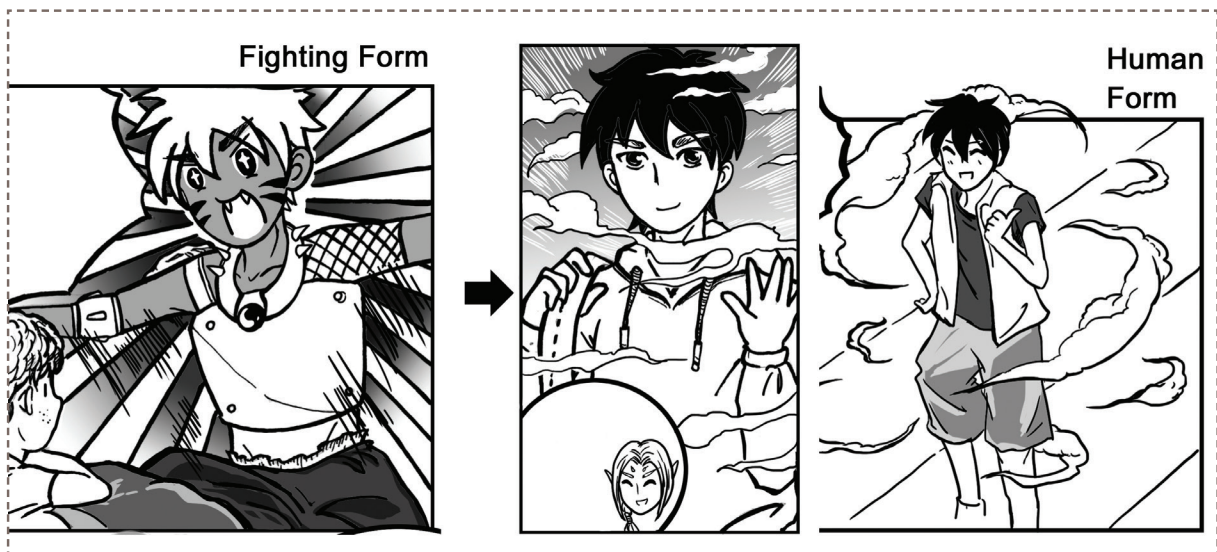


Figure 4.24 The White Tiger changed his form twice to accompany the boy (P25, 26, 42 of the comic book). (©Kan Gu)

* A Shield Of White Tiger :
Jimmy's father saw an illusion of tiger when he opened the classroom door. Actually, that was the magic skill of White Tiger which could absorb the dark fire from Jimmy and produce an enchantment to protect him.



Figure 4.25 *The White Tiger was so tired because he used too much of his power. Even the Rose Finch felt deeply distressed.* (©Kan Gu)

4.3.5 Black Tortoise

■ HISTORICAL STUDIES:

The Black Tortoise is made up of two animals: the turtle and the snake. The Black Tortoise is also known as “*Xuan Ming*”, a serpent that wraps around the body of a Tortoise. He is very mighty and powerful (**Figure 4.26**).

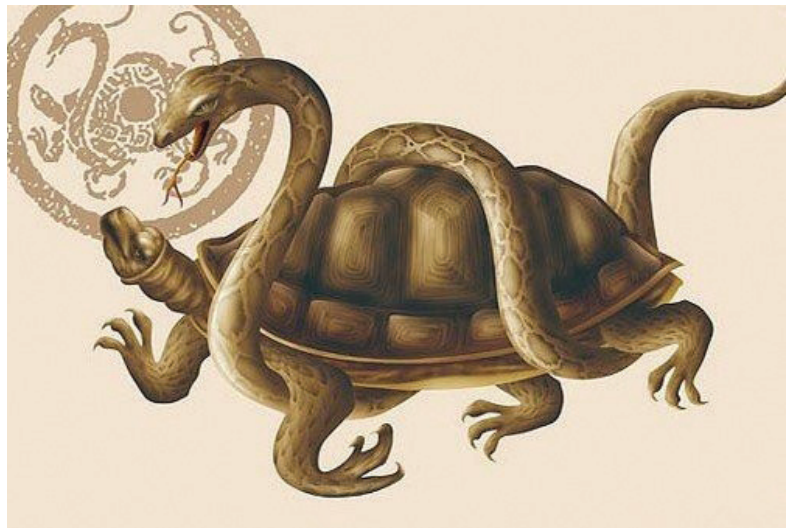


Figure 4.26 *Black Tortoise*

When the ancients offered sacrifices, the tortoise's shell was always used for future divination, good luck or avoidance of misfortune. The longevity of the Tortoise was bestowed with the ability to communicate with God. For the snake, it was spiritual and mysterious that would exuviate and burrow into the earth.

Thus, people believed that there was some connection between the snake and the netherworld. Therefore, the totem of these two animals is greatly revered and awed by people. In particular, Taoism in China advocates the theory that life is immortal and can lead the believer to have contact with God and Ghosts. It happened to coincide with the characteristics of the two animals at this point.⁴¹ Accordingly, Taoism respected the Black Tortoise as the God of the constellations in the northern sky. Even, Taoism made personification of the Black Tortoise, which is called “**真武大帝**” (“Zhen Wu the great”).⁴²

⁴¹ Congjun Zhang, *Black Tortoise and the Origin of Taoism*, (Shandong Province Cultural Relics Bureau, December 2000), <http://publications.nichibun.ac.jp/region/d/NSH/series/kosh/2000-12-22/s001/s019/pdf/article.pdf>.

⁴² Lujun Xie and Sheng Chen, *Taoism*, (China Democracy and Law Press, September 2005), <https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=iCkDAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=zh-CN#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

■ FOR THE IMAGE DESIGN:

As the second general of my Saint Beasts team, the Black Tortoise is still powerful. In the beginning, I gathered the two features of the Snake and the Tortoise for armour design (**Figure4.27**). But during piloting the images of him with my classmates, they said that his appearance looked too alike to the little boy, Jimmy, and his armour was complicated.

So I conducted more changes to make it better and appropriate to the plot (**Figure4.28-4.29**).

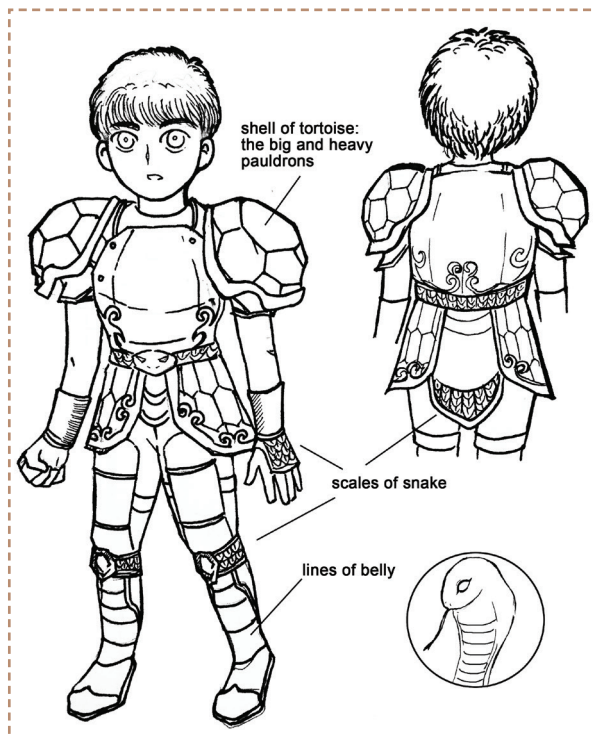


Figure4.27 To emphasise the figures of the two animals, I added many elements, like the shell, the scales, the lines of the snake's belly.

However, the visual effects are still unsatisfactory: the plate armour seemed too complex and disconnected with the other Saint Beasts. (©Kan Gu)

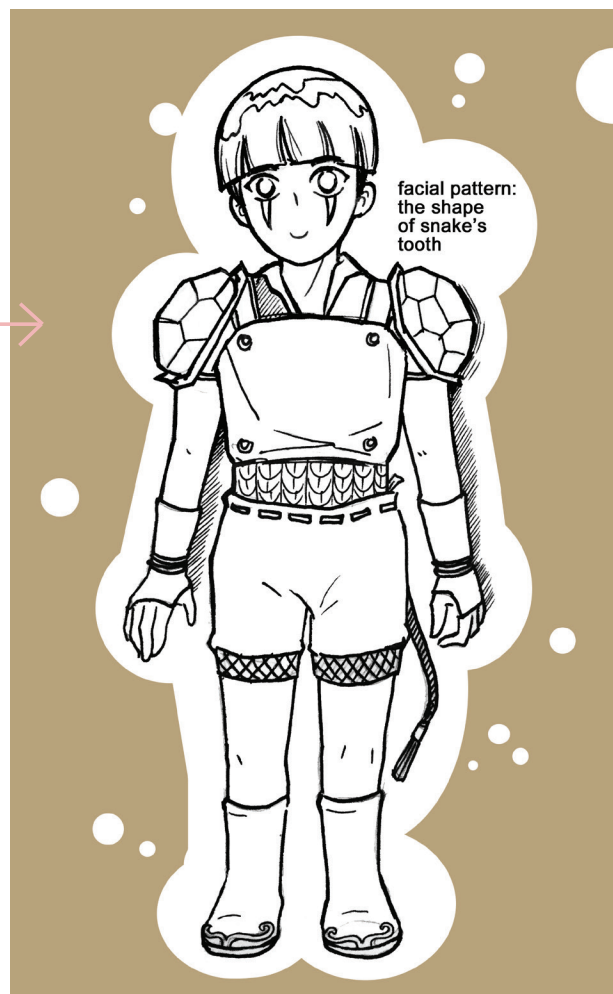


Figure 4.28-4.29 Firstly, I simplified the design of the armour. I removed the excessive elements and patterns, and reduced the heavy feeling.

Then, I drew the edge of the shorts with the same mesh cloth on the shoulder of the White Tiger while keeping the details of the Snake and the Tortoise.

Finally, I changed the hairstyle of the Black Tortoise into the “mushroom head” which is a very fashionable hairstyle for the little Chinese boy; and I created a special tattoo – “fangs of a snake” – under his eyes that makes the Black Tortoise looks peculiar. (©Kan Gu)

When I put the character of the Black Tortoise into the plot, I drew him as a lovely boy with gentle personality. I wanted to make a notable contrast and visual interest that would surprise the audience, although the totem represents power and stateliness. **Figure4.30** illustrates the innocent and lovely side of the Black Tortoise. He loves human food: doughnuts! (even they do not need to eat them as the Saint Beasts). However, when the situation is urgent, he becomes the most loyal and reliable partner (**Figure4.31**). Obviously, the vastly different facial expressions of the Black Tortoise are shown in the two scenes.

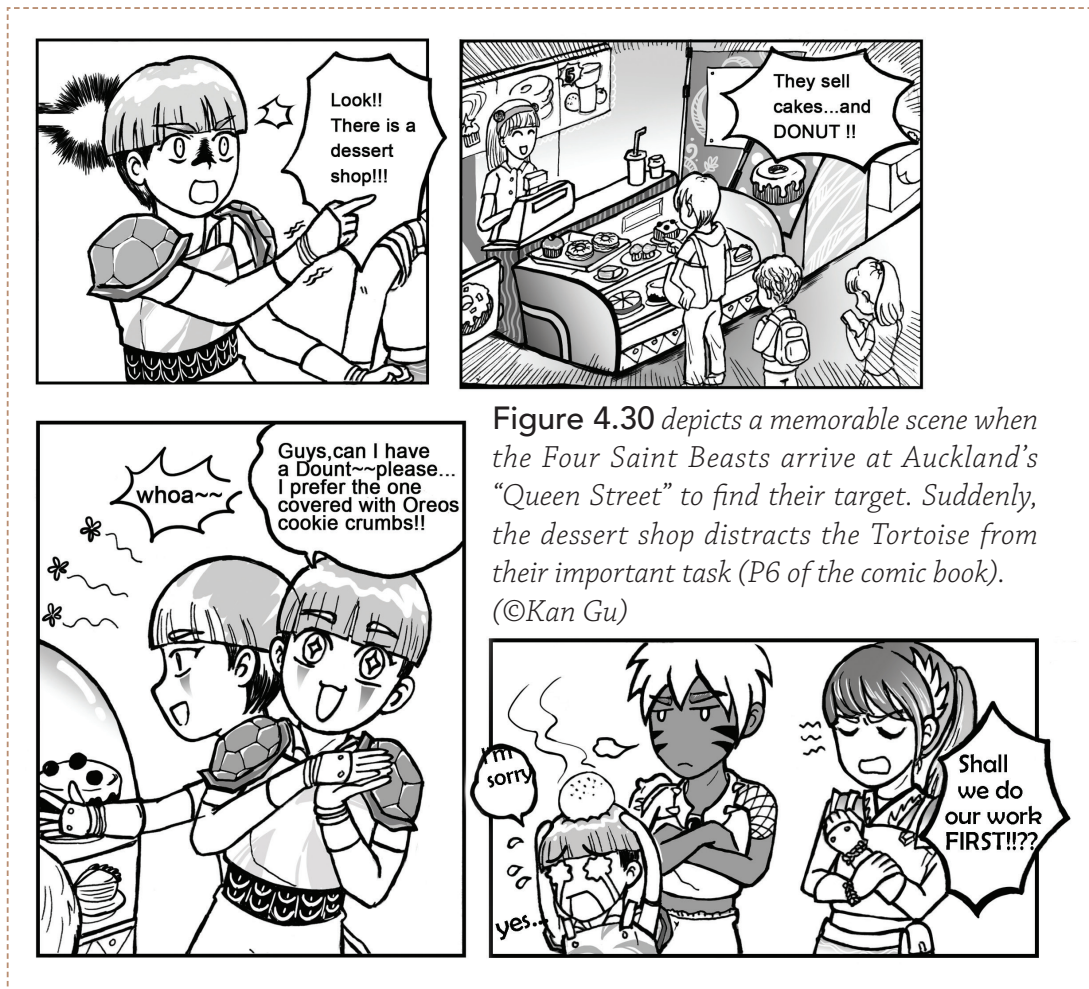


Figure 4.30 depicts a memorable scene when the Four Saint Beasts arrive at Auckland's "Queen Street" to find their target. Suddenly, the dessert shop distracts the Tortoise from their important task (P6 of the comic book). (©Kan Gu)

■ FOR THE PLOT DESIGN:



Figure4.31 This scene shows the final battle in Jimmy's inner world. The Black Tortoise uses his best skills to give the devil a final blow. The magic is different from the guardian skill of the White Tiger. They are all attack skills. The role of the Black Tortoise - **a fighting general** - is well presented. (©Kan Gu)

4.4 Traditional Chinese Moral Education

In the traditional culture of China, the Four Beasts are like deities. They possess all the virtues of a human being. According to *Lun Yu* 论语 of Confucius, “Heaven has its nature, and human abides by “*Tian Ming*” 天命 (heavenly ordinance) which means that they would follow the five constant virtues”.

As indicated by the scholar of philosophy school of Renmin University of China, Shiling Xiang, in terms of “*Ren*” 仁 (benevolence: having a tolerant, amicable heart); “*Yi*” 义 (righteousness: a man of integrity and full of a sense of justice); “*Li*” 礼 (propriety: behaving or speaking in a polite way and show respect to others); “*Zhi*” 智 (wisdom:

great sense, clear logic and judgement); “*Xin*” 信 (trustworthiness: loyalty, the fulfillment of promises, duties or friendship between others).⁴³

The ancient Chinese traditional culture has profound effects on the formation and development of morality. Chinese people call this process as “*Xiu Xing*” 修行, which can be known as “practice”: cultivate oneself according to religious doctrine. The five constant moralities are the fundamental principles for a human being to find the way of harmony with other people and nature. Since ancient times, China has been called the land of ceremonies. It is not only about

⁴³ Shiling Xiang and Deyuan Huang, “Inquiry into the Transcendence of Tang Dynasty Confucians to Han Dynasty Confucians and the Transformation of Traditional Confucianism in Terms of Lunyu Bijie,” *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, no. 4 (2010).

⁴⁴ Kenneth Holloway, “The Five Aspects of Conduct’ 五行: Introduction and Translation,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, no. 2 (2005).

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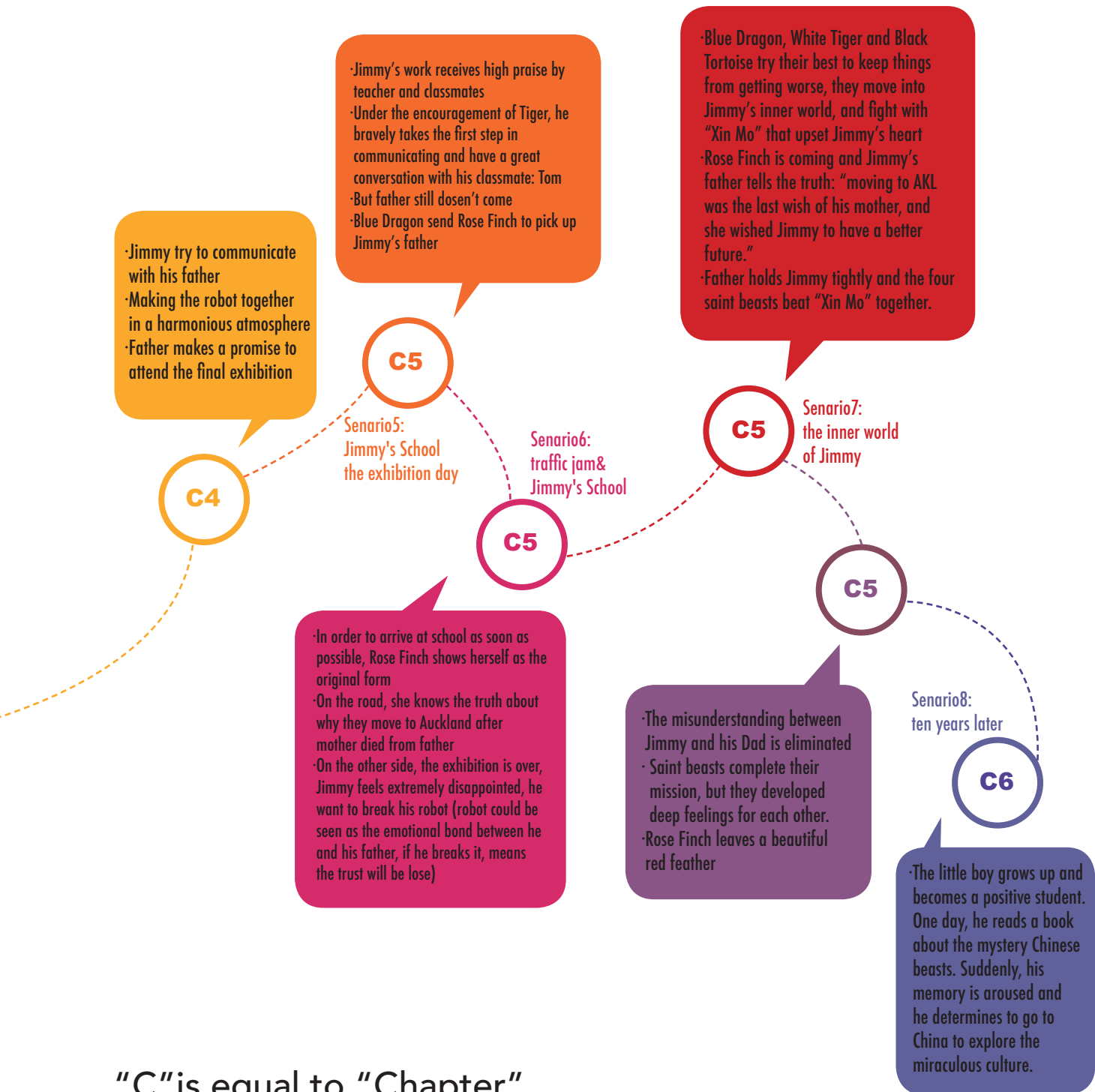
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people’s view of things, but also the attitude toward others. Kenneth Holloway points out, “Humanity is fundamental to the process of self-cultivation.”⁴⁴ That is why the Four Saint Beasts heard a sound for help from a distant place, and all of them came to find him, and help him. In the process of helping people to solve problems, the Saint Beasts have not only completed the moral teaching but also achieved “*Xiu Xing*” (cultivating themselves). This is the main purpose of my project, and it is focused on changing behaviour, bridging the communication gap and developing virtues by Chinese traditional culture.

4.5 The schematic plot of my comic story

The story is about the communication gap between father and son. The young boy, Jimmy has a deep misunderstanding about his father because he suffered by the psychological trauma after the mother has gone away, and they moved from their hometown to a new place. The theme of the story is delivering of love, belief and mutual understanding by traditional moral education, and it also has a fantastic plot based on the Chinese legend of Four Saint Beasts.





“C”is equal to “Chapter”

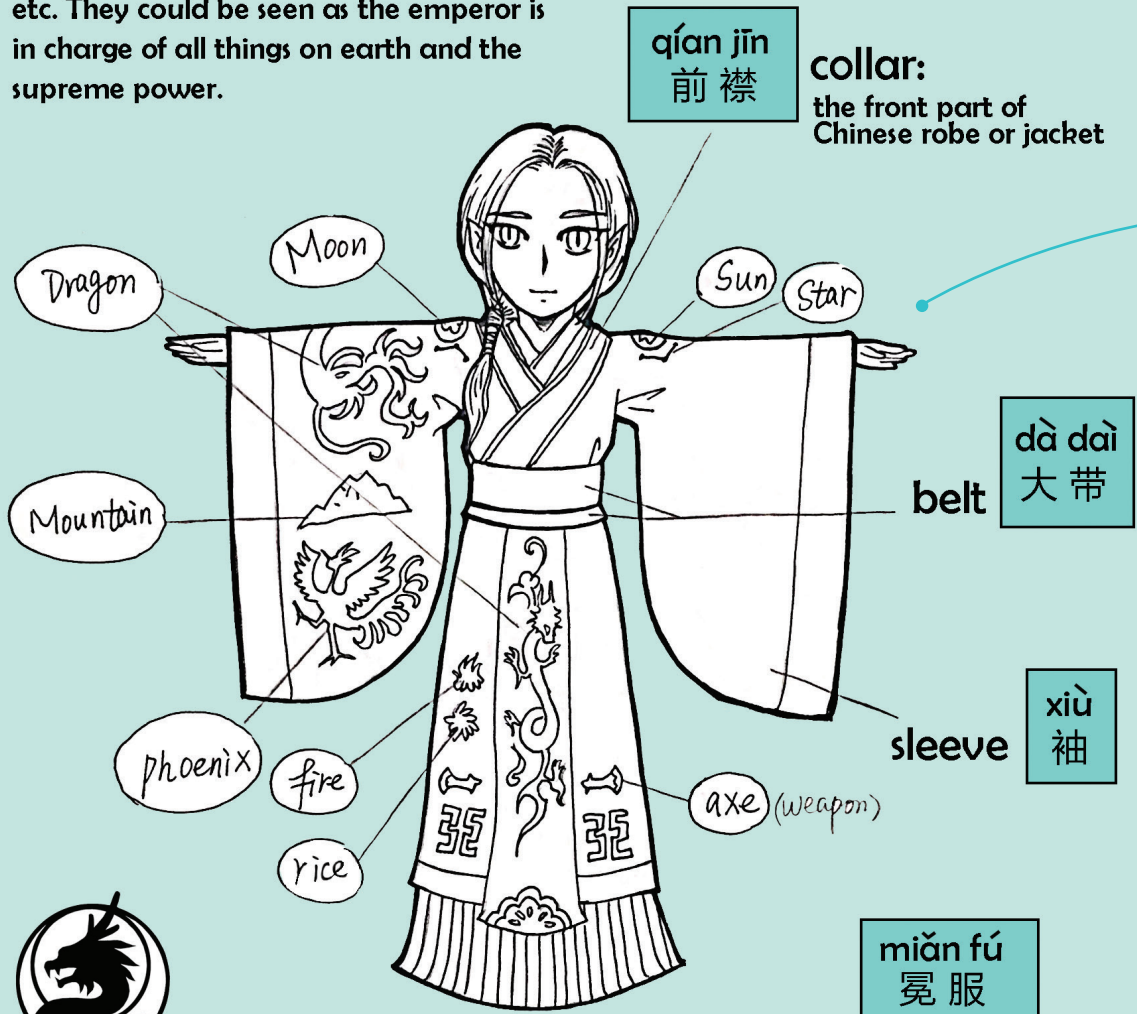


CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION & SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

5.1 Prototype & Evaluation

- The patterns gather up the sun, moon, constellations, elements of nature, mountain, animals, cereals and weapon etc. They could be seen as the emperor is in charge of all things on earth and the supreme power.



Blue Dragon

- represents East
- the attribute is Wood which means the lord of nature
- wise, calm, elegant.

5.1.1 The Evolvement of Characters

Through the first version of character design, I collected some valuable feedback from my tutor and classmates. The feedback enables me to improve my characters. These improvements are shown here: They include more details, research, and explanations (Figure 5.1-5.4).

Figure 5.1 *The Dragon is the head of the Four Saint Beasts. Thus, I chose “冕服” (“the emperor’s cloth of Han Dynasty. (Figure 5.1.1)” as his costume rather than the ordinary Han clothes of the first draft.*

There are many complex, delicate patterns which are decorated on both left and right of clothes. The main character of the Han Dynasty costume is the overlapping collar. Usually, the left collar holds down the right one. No buttons, but using the string to bind, gives the impression of free and elegant.⁴⁵ (©Kan Gu)

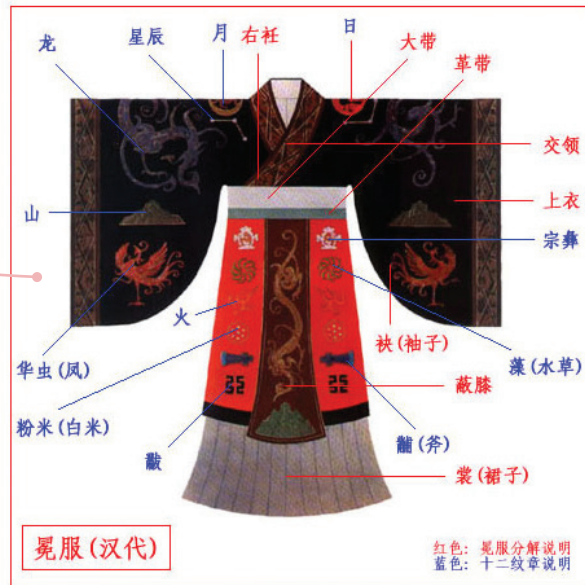


Figure 5.1.1 The archetype of Mian Fu “冕服”

⁴⁵ Xiyi Zhu and Weihong Xu, *The Knowledge of Traditional Chinese Costume*, (Baishan Study Press, October 2016), <http://www.worldcat.org/title/zhong-guo-chuan-tong-fu-shi-wen-hua-chang-shi-wen-da/oclc/988563764/viewport>.

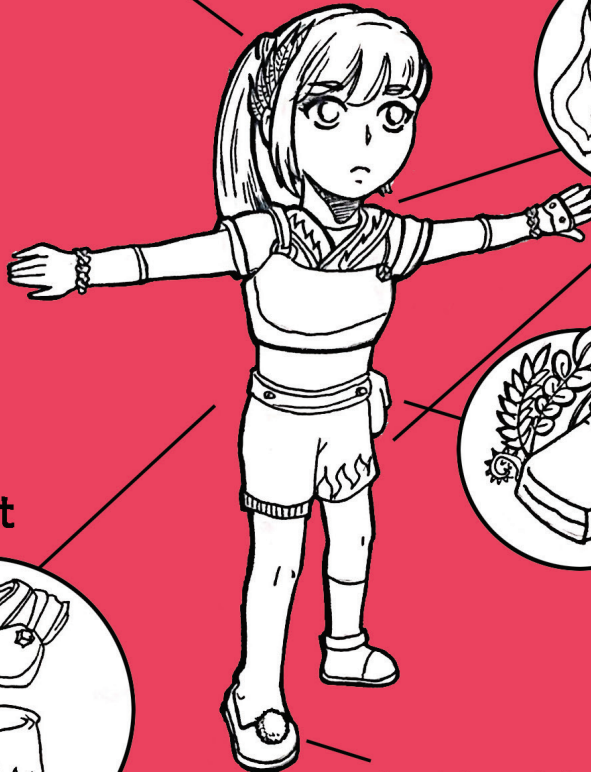
Figure5.2 *The majority of the features are preserved. The setting of the Rose Finch accords with the audience's expectations. (©Kan Gu)*



head accessory:
the red feature with fire pattern



fire pattern:
the decoration and her totem



first-aid packet:
a small bag tied round waist.
There are many amazing magic materials in it, such as herb, powder, amulet.



the suit

embroidered shoes

Rose Finch



- Rose Finch wears cloth armor which is more light and flexible than generals' armor because of her identity - she is the civil official of the group to provide ideas.

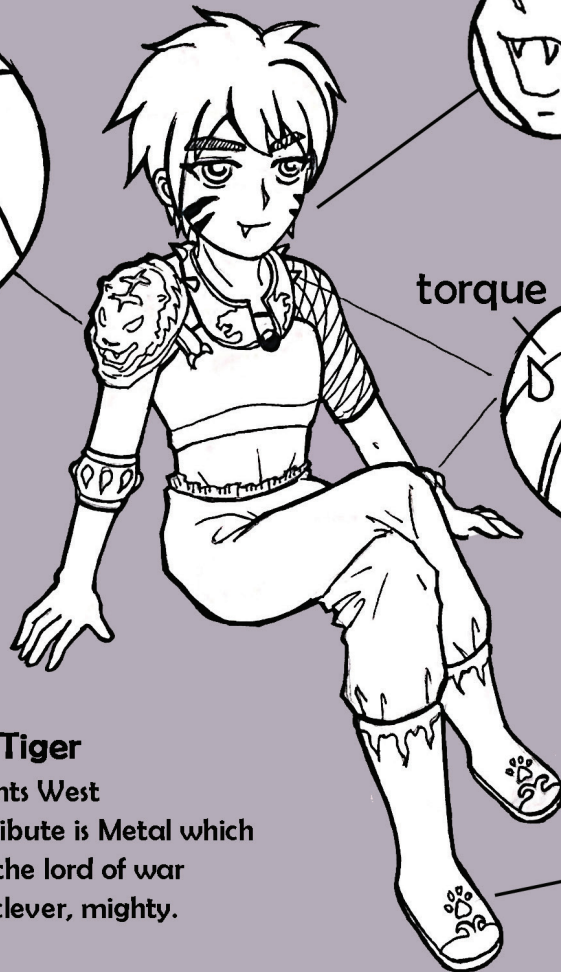
- represents South
- the attribute is Fire
- beautiful, dynamic, skilled (transfer, illusion, invisibility)

· One of the most representative feature of White Tiger's armor is the tiger head shoulder pauldron

the distinctive pattern



in order to emphasize the feature of tiger, I give White Tiger teeth and tattoo on his face



wrist guard

torque



glove

the tiger teeth as the decoration of his equipment



White Tiger

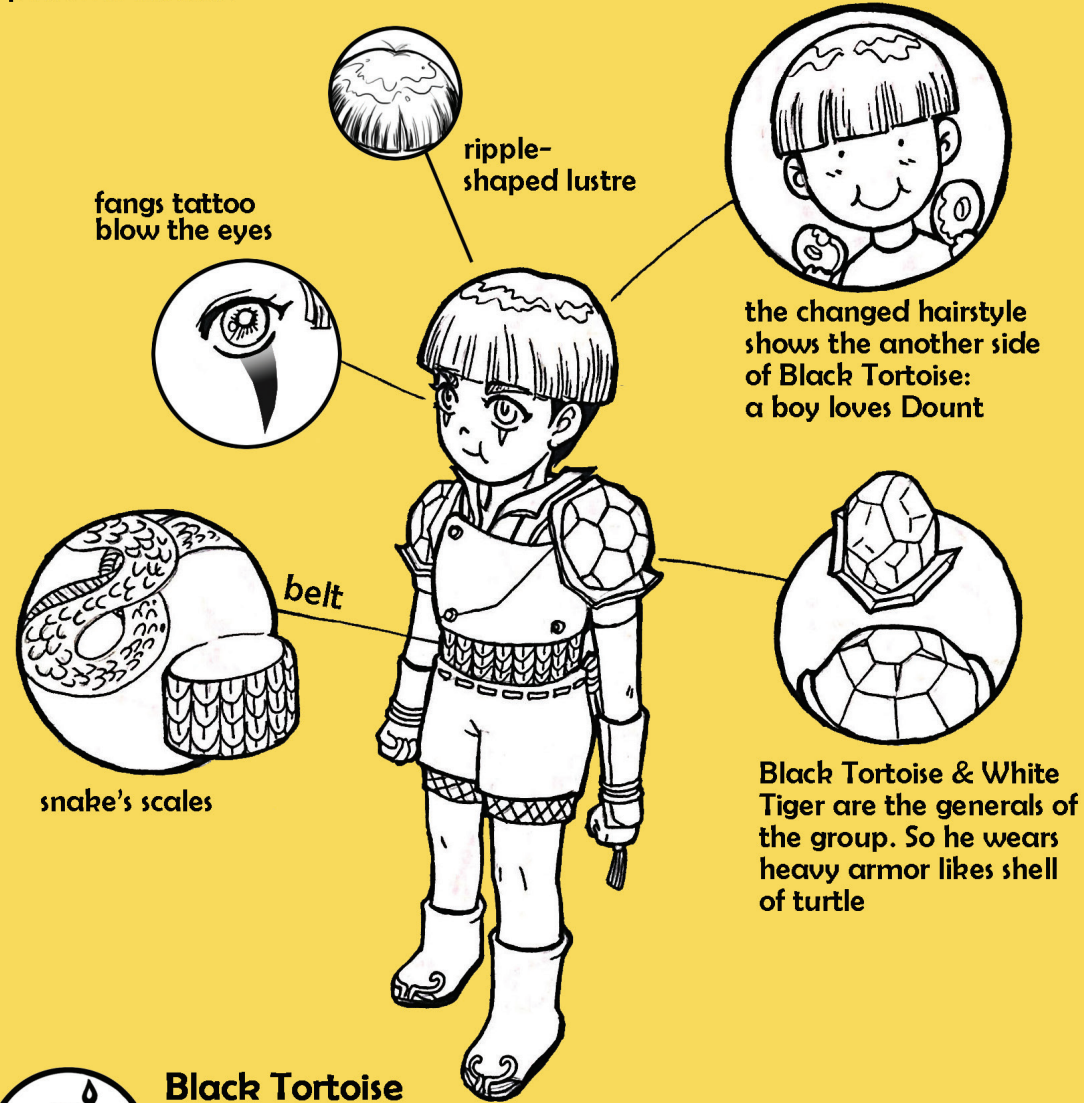
- represents West
- the attribute is Metal which means the lord of war
- brave, clever, mighty.

the symbol of tiger

Figure 5.3 *The image of the White Tiger has not changed much.*(©Kan Gu)

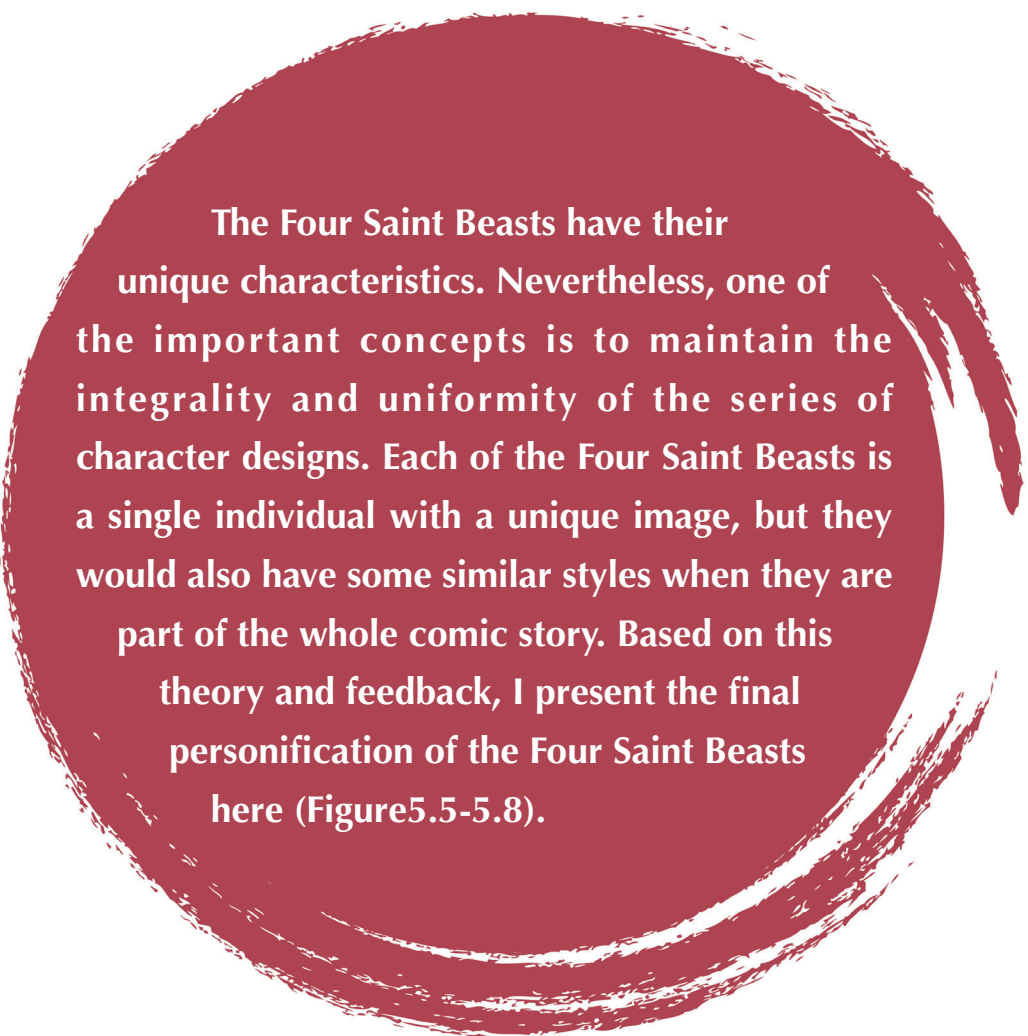
Figure 5.4 *Personally, I am satisfied with the modification of the Black Tortoise. The overall image design makes this "wonderful and terrible" totem acceptable. (©Kan Gu)*

- Black tortoise is the only one saint beast that constitute by two animals.
So I give him adorable outlook and powerful attacks.



Black Tortoise

- represents North
- the attribute is Water
- powerful, formidable, kind-hearted.



The Four Saint Beasts have their unique characteristics. Nevertheless, one of the important concepts is to maintain the integrality and uniformity of the series of character designs. Each of the Four Saint Beasts is a single individual with a unique image, but they would also have some similar styles when they are part of the whole comic story. Based on this theory and feedback, I present the final personification of the Four Saint Beasts here (Figure 5.5-5.8).

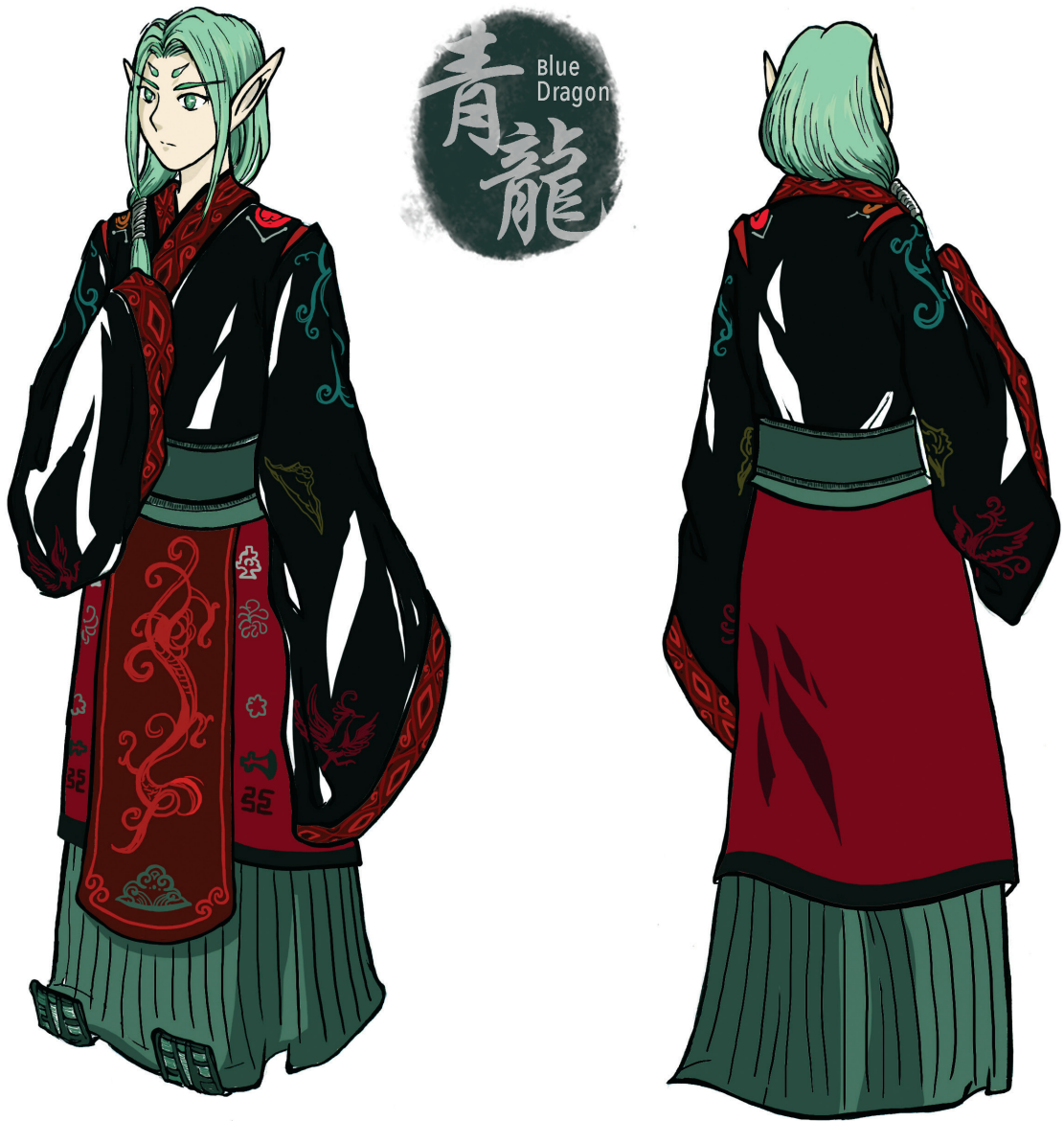


Figure5.5

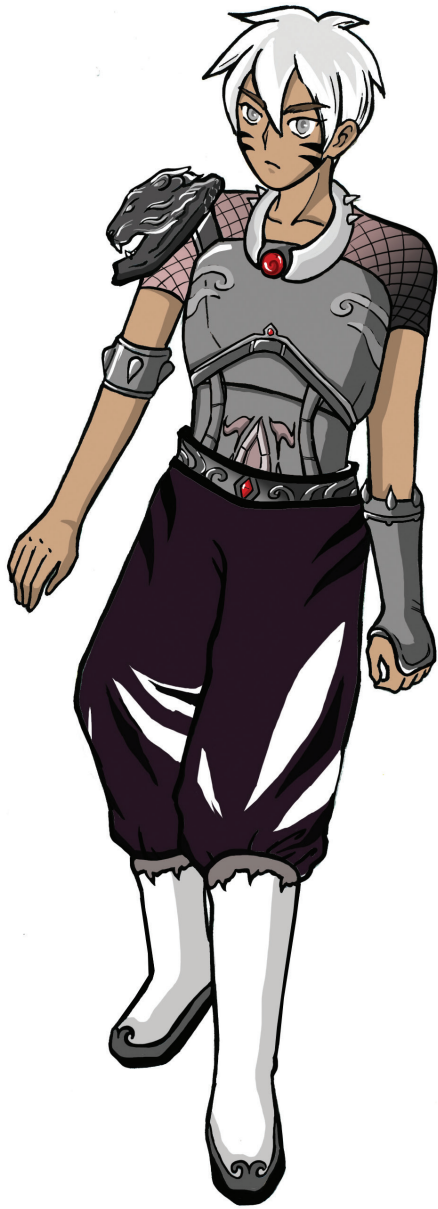


Figure5.6

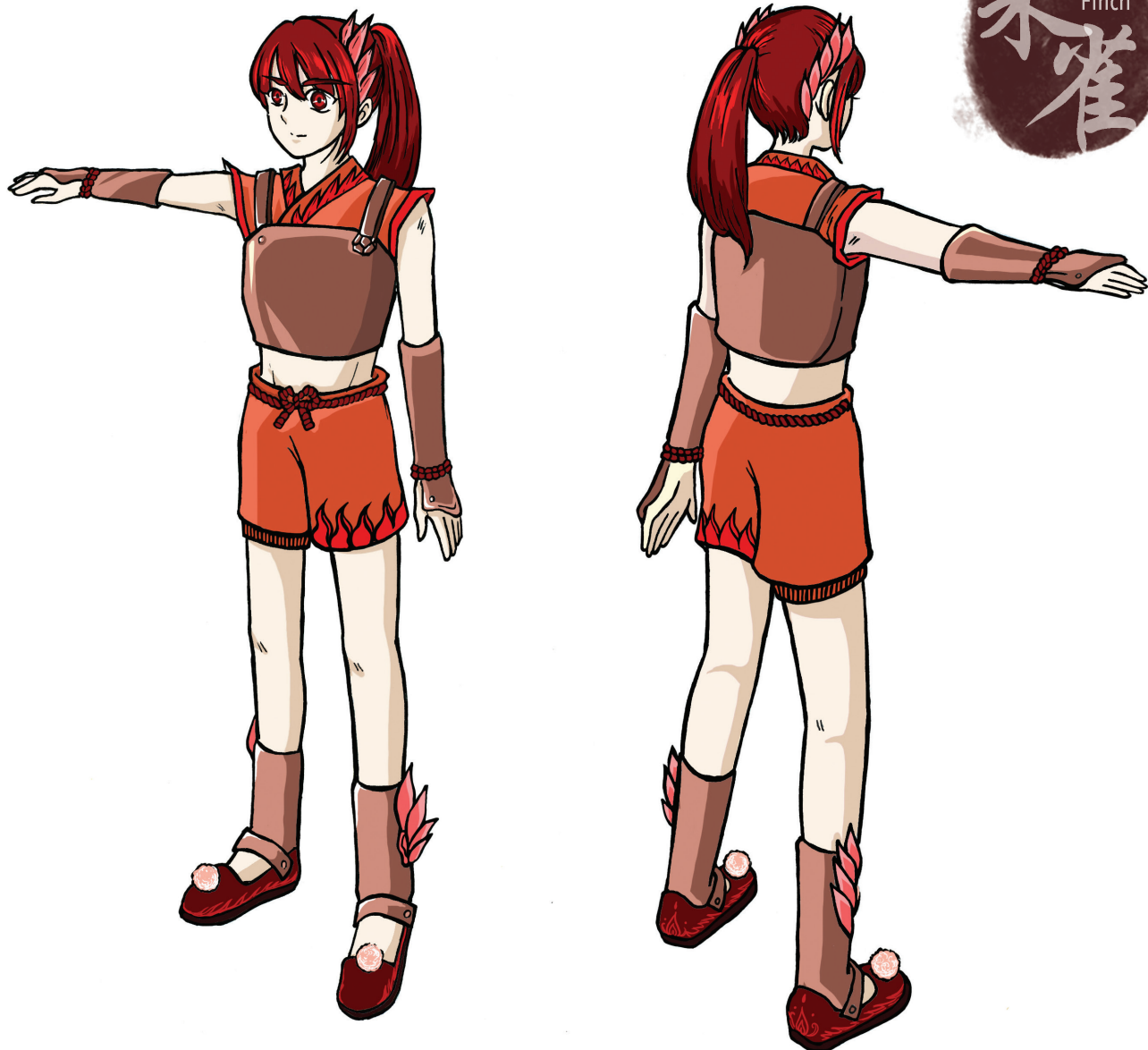


Figure5.7

Figure 5.5-5.8 *In the final design of the characters, compared with before, the biggest change is the overall style of the Four Saint Beasts - from cute-looking to realistic – portraying their features to resemble more to the real person. I also made small changes, regarding the decorations of the Rose Finch. The extra features, the White Tiger’s armour – detailed design of waist armour. I believe these changes would improve the characters’ attraction and distinction.*

As for the colours, I took the low saturation hues to enhance the classy feeling of the characters. However, to consider the overall effect of the comic pages, the details of each character could not be illustrated as the effect was drawn on the panels. (©Kan Gu)

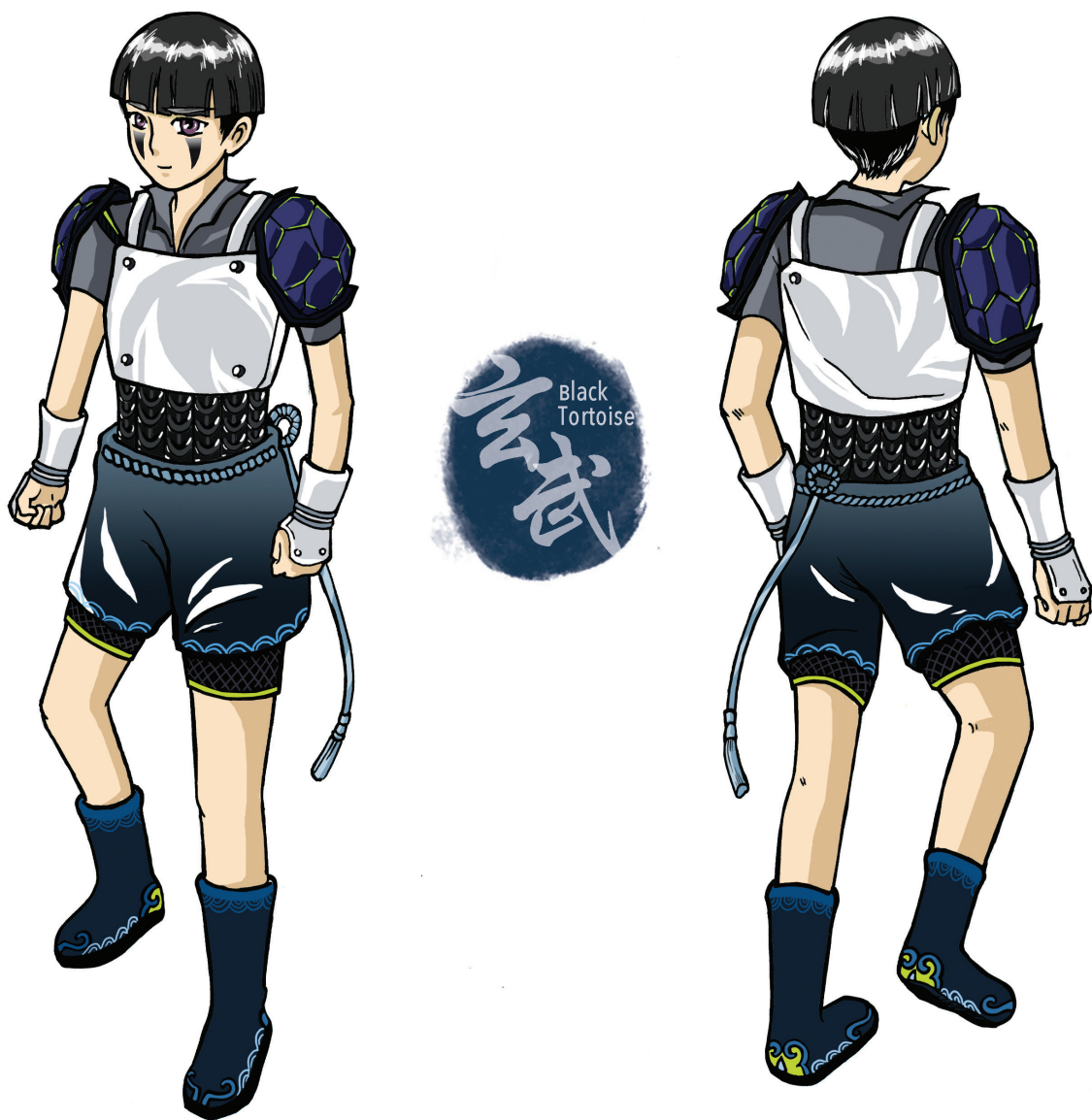


Figure5.8

5.1.2 The Layout of Comic Book

In the process of comic creating, the plot arrangement and character settings are only the first step. The final effect of the comic that is presented to an audience is the typographical form. Typography determines the modality of storytelling and plot advance which strongly reflects the individualised style of the cartoonist.

Personally, I prefer comic books with the theme of adventure and fighting. The protagonists of these comics are very enthusiastic, energetic, having ambitious targets, and struggling to achieve goals, finally the self-improvement although the process is usually a long and hard challenge. Because this type of comic is not only giving people certain educational significance and perfect visual enjoyment, the readers could also be touched by the friendship, affection,

and love that acco

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These kinds of stories have
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ood communication with
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d positive young man.

When creating each page of the comic plots:

- 1> I will first locate each panel based on the progress of the story (**Figure5.9**).
- 2> After that, I draw the rough characters, positions, and relationships that appear on the screen with light colour lines, and make annotations of the story script on them (**Figure5.10**).
- 3> Next, I add a transparent layer to place the dialogue-box (**Figure5.11**).
- 4> Then I will manually sketch it based on the draft.
- 5> When I am using the black ink pen to make the final version on the pages, both the position of characters and the shape of dialogue-box are reformatted according to enhanced legibility and visual effects; at last, I scan the sketch into the computer to type the words and make final adjustments of the frame (**Figure5.12-5.13**).

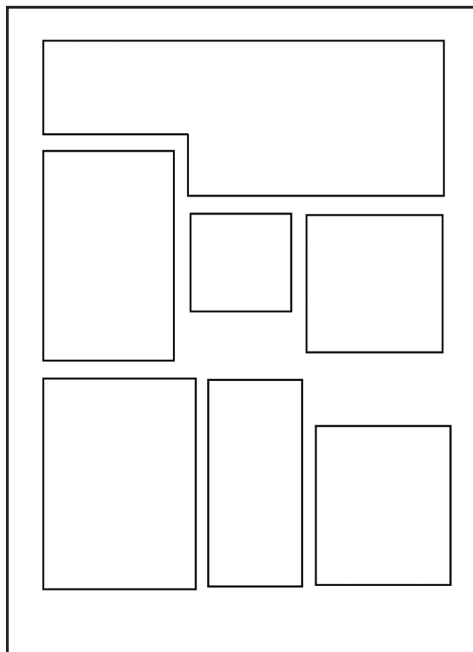


Figure5.9



Figure5.10

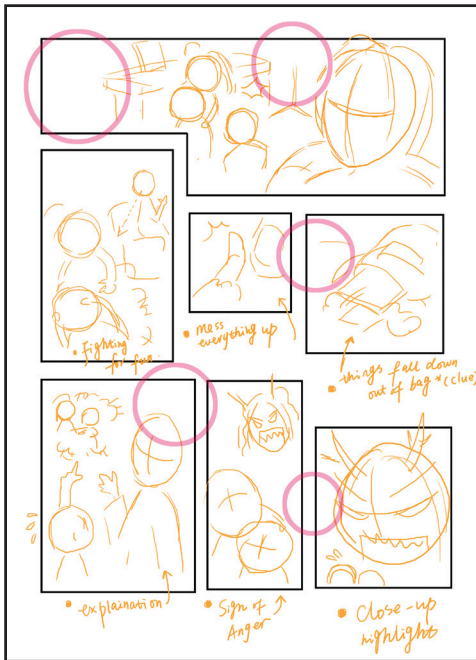
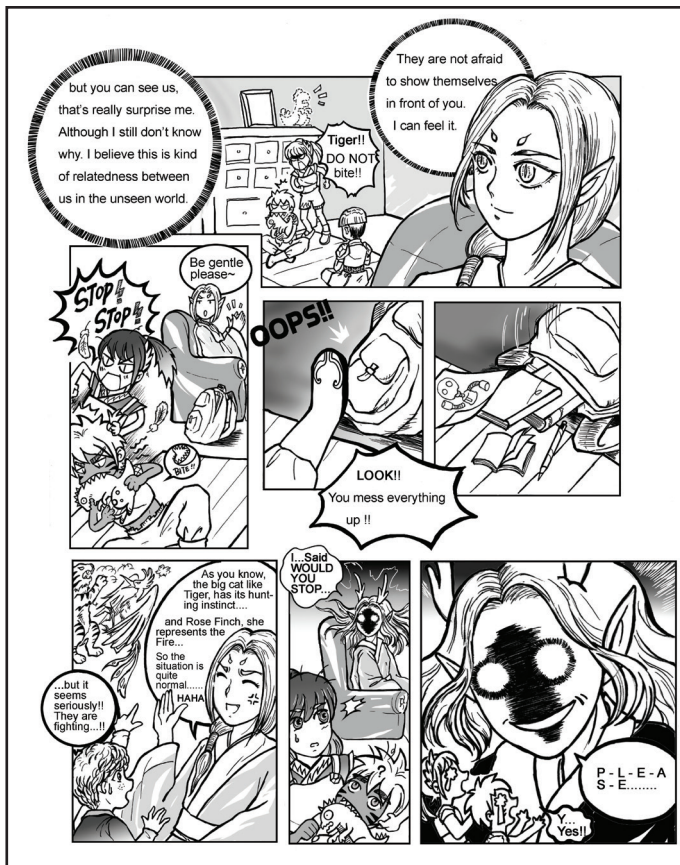


Figure5.11



Figure5.12



Of course, from **Figure5.11-5.13**, the development of visual-effects is still repeated and revised numerous times, including wiping the rough lines away, outlining every element with pencil, covering the pencil lines with black ink, scanning the paper and continuing to modify, colour, and type the words by using the computer. (©Kan Gu)

Figure5.13

However, the depiction of emotions, feelings and behavioural changes of the characters require a large number of conversations and scene transitions between different people to achieve the rationality, meaning and effect of the story plot. I also need to describe different emotions, hesitation, struggles, and contradictions in a relatively limited space. So, some of the comic pages inevitably seem too crowded because many dialogue-boxes are arranged on the same page (**Figure5.14**), which makes the visual fatigue of audience.



- Bad Example -

Figure5.14 This page illustrates the dialogue between two people: many dialogue-boxes, small and large, are shown on each panel because of the restriction of a single scenario. (©Kan Gu)

⁴⁶ Sara Berntsson, "Create a Comic: How to Plan and Lay out Your Comic," <https://design.tutsplus.com/tutorials/create-a-comic-how-to-plan-and-lay-out-your-comic--cms-24179>.

How to alleviate this situation?

“When making longer narrative-focused comics, it might be good to move the “camera” around a bit more.” She said. A picture could be painted as “close-up”, “full body shots” and using different eye view – “eye level, bird’s/worm’s eye view (**Figure5.15**)”.

That would change the feeling of a picture a lot (**Figure5.16**).⁴⁶

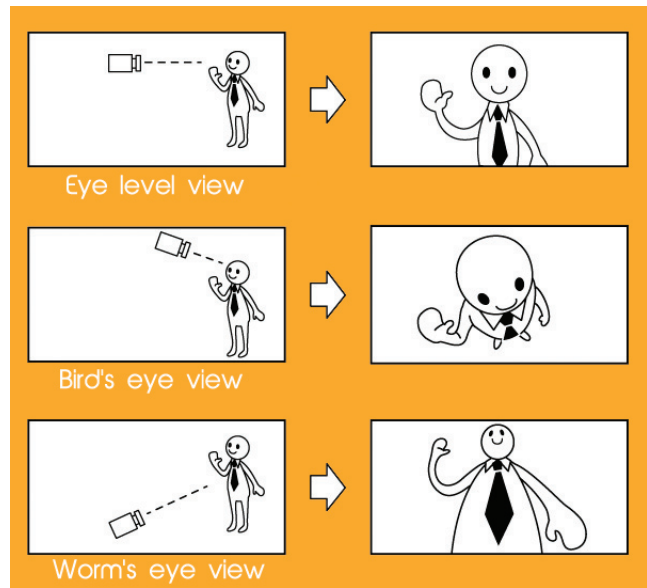
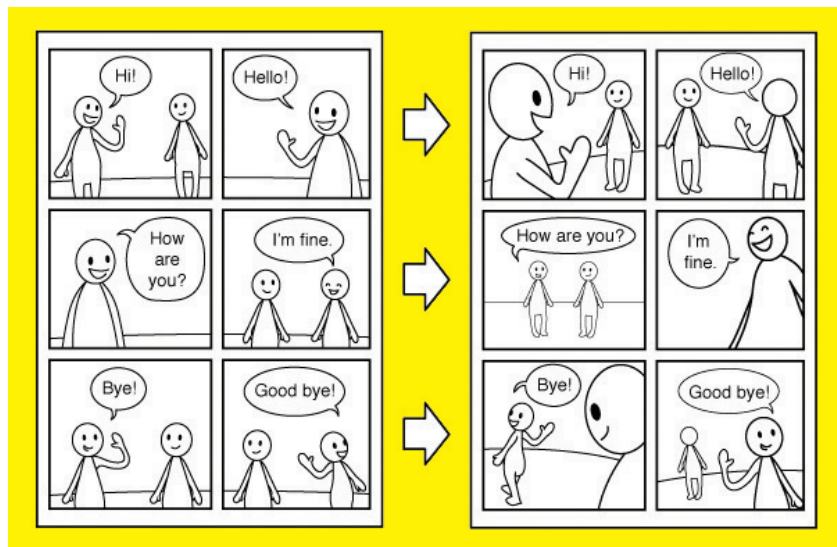


Figure5.15-5.16 state the advantages of changing angles and composition; the panels look very flexible and impressive.



I make some adjustments to my comic based on these “rules” and techniques:

1. Different angles of the dialogue between people (Figure 5.17).

Figure 5.17 The quarrel between Dad and son: a perspective transformation. (©Kan Gu)

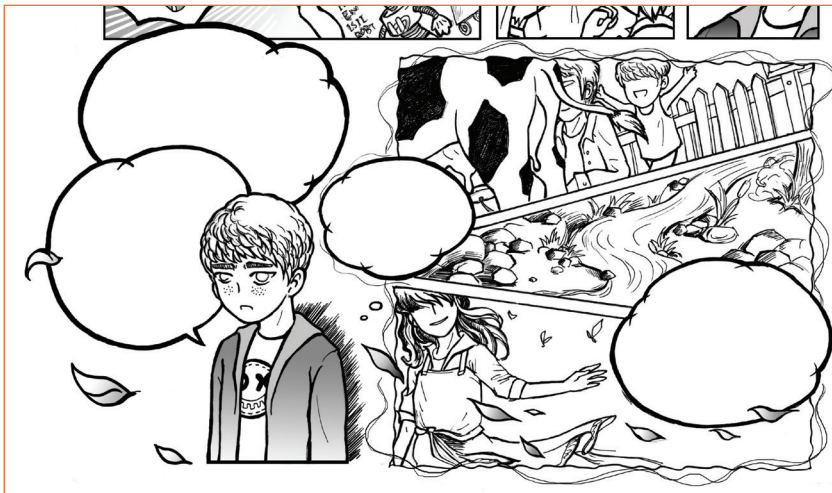


Figure 5.18 The panel with ripple shape symbolises the memory of the boy. (©Kan Gu)

2. Irregular panels (Figure 5.18) which break the limitation of rectangular outline border.



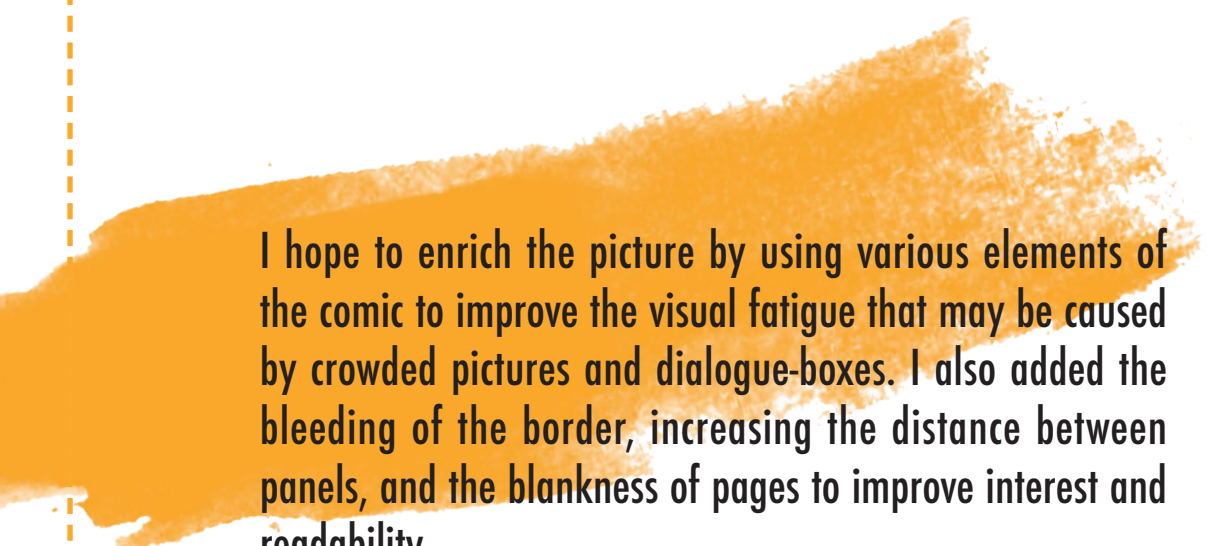
3. Add colour-block to distinguish the characters and facial expressions I want to highlight (Figure5.19).

Figure5.19 The black frame could catch the eyes of certain people. (©Kan Gu)



4. Exaggerated words to describe sounds and psychological activities (Figure5.20).

Figure5.20 Different kinds of words could create a wonderful atmosphere. (©Kan Gu)

A large, horizontal, orange brushstroke graphic that tapers from left to right, serving as a background for the text.

I hope to enrich the picture by using various elements of the comic to improve the visual fatigue that may be caused by crowded pictures and dialogue-boxes. I also added the bleeding of the border, increasing the distance between panels, and the blankness of pages to improve interest and readability.

To my relief, these approaches have improved the design of my comic book.

5.1.3 The Prototype

These pictures demonstrate the **process** of handling comic sketches: from pencil drafts to ink drafts, to computer colouring (with black grey colour-block), typesetting and the finished product.



Figure 5.21 Some sketches of my comic. (©Kan Gu)



Figure 5.24 Sketching process of every page. (©Kan Gu)



Figure5.25 All the pages and sketch of book cover design. (©Kan Gu)

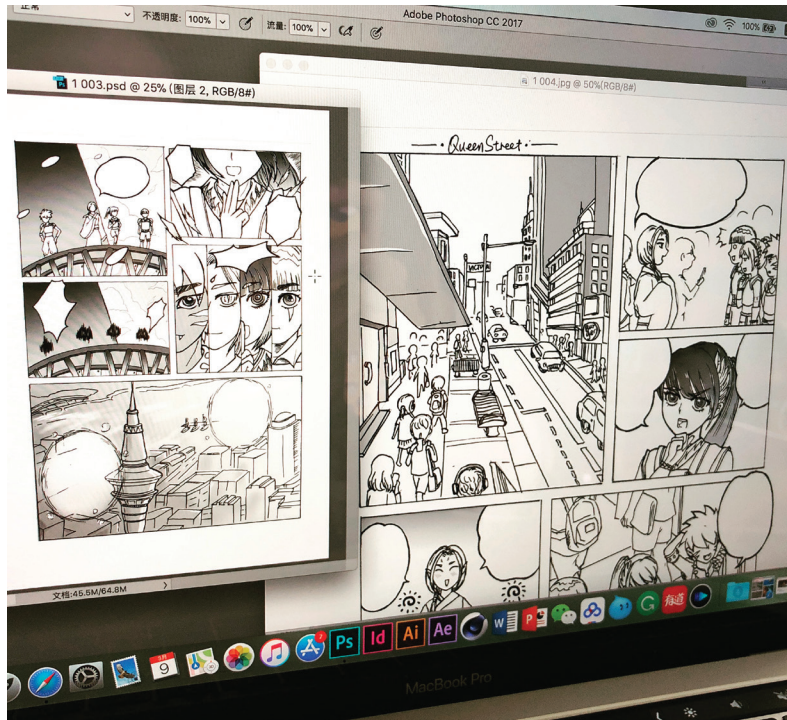


Figure5.26

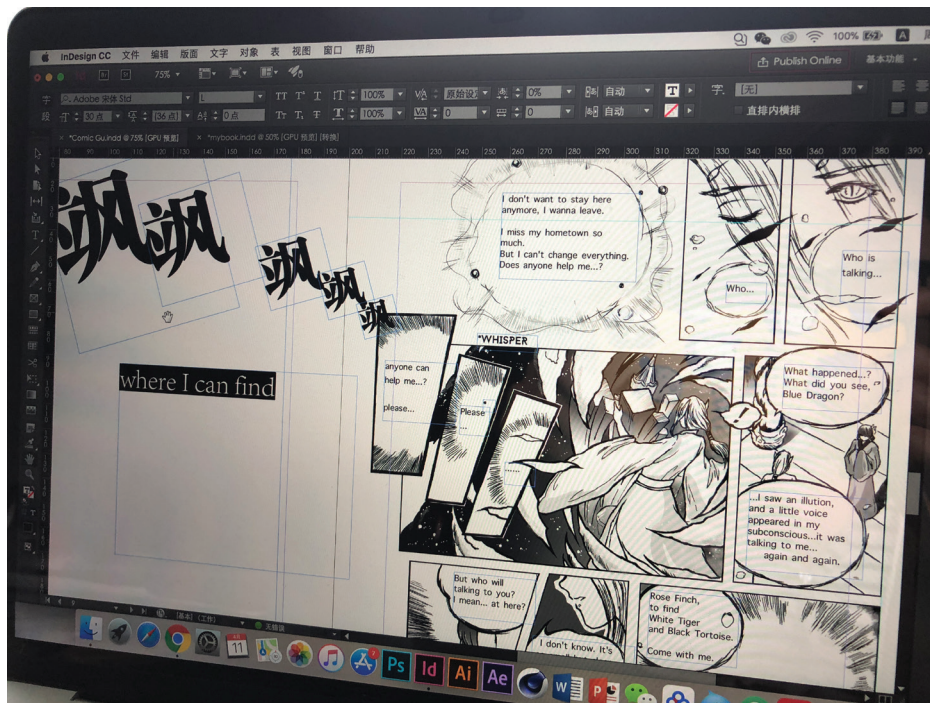
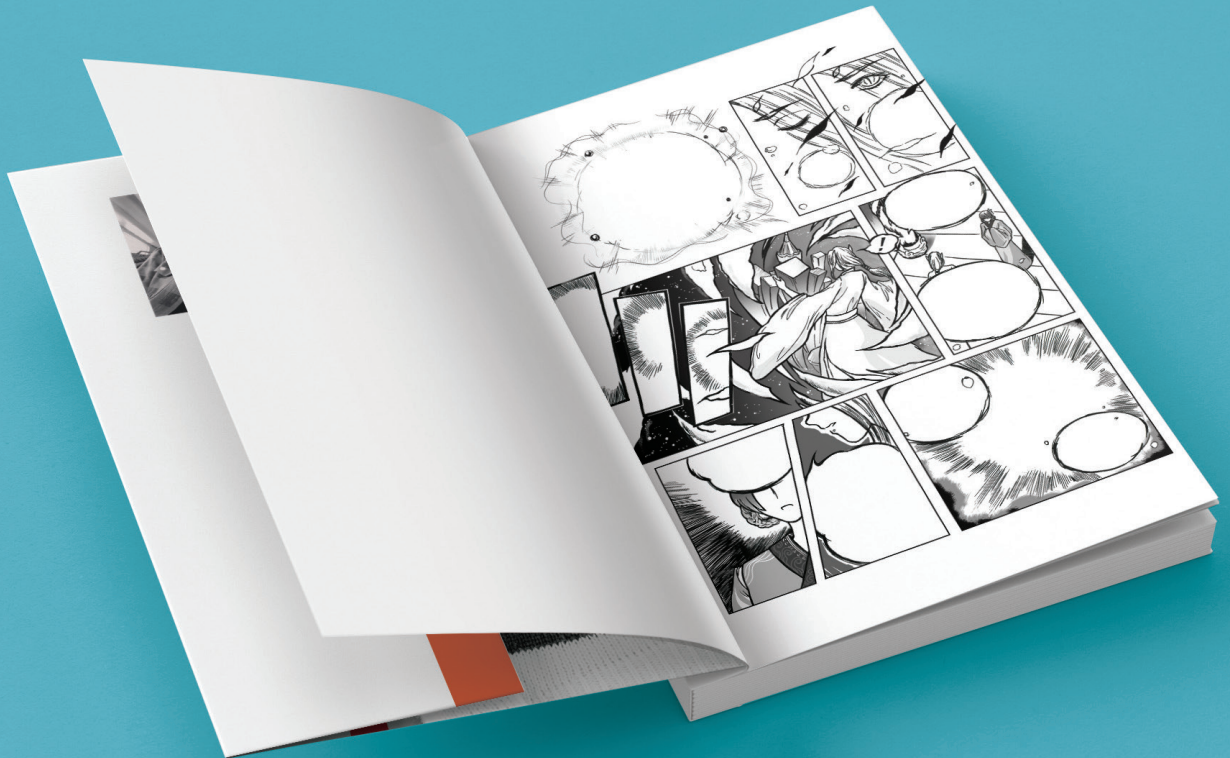


Figure5.27 Coloring, typesetting, adjusting layout design by using the software(Adobe Photoshop & Adobe Indesign) on the computer (©Kan Gu)

Figure 5.28 Mock up (©Kan Gu)





5.2 Results & Findings gathered from the interviews

My comic was evaluated at different stages of its design and development. Three experts from separate fields have been consulted and interviewed with the following questions:

1. In your opinion, what is the most important function of visual storytelling in a comic?

2. How does the comic achieve both educational significance and entertaining function?

3. In the digital age, what kind of comic could play an effective role in moral education or helping people to promote positive feelings? (if you can, give an example)

4. Basing on the characters that I have created, to what extent do you think I have communicated the Chinese culture by using Chinese elements?

5. I would appreciate it if you can give me some ideas to improve my comic design.



Feedback from Participant One:

Professor Ding, Director of New Media Department,
Faculty of Art & Design.

He was sent an email with some character pictures and part of an initial plot. I asked for his opinion, and this is his brief and sketchy reply:

A1:

Coveting information of the stories using graphical language.

A2:

I think it is pretty hard and kind like dating two girls at the same time. Although it is not impossible to achieve both, it is hard to manage both.

A3:

Well, I am not sure of your question.

A4:

Four animals in *Feng shui*.

A5:

I would suggest simplifying the drawing lines in characters. Communicate your comic with the story you made, not the graphical style.



Feedback from Participant Two:

A famous branding expert and advertising professional, Emma Wei, SVP (Senior Vice President) and CSO (Chief Strategy Officer) at Wanda Media Co., Ltd. She is my ex-boss and familiar with visual-communication. These are her detailed and patient responses to my questions:



A1:

I am a person who emphasises the “story plot”, and tries to be a good “storyteller”. The earliest records of mankind were murals and rock paintings. The form of pictures was earlier than the words. Interpersonal communication between adults, as well as good text, they also pay attention to “a strong sense of pictures”. It makes communication more vivid and easier to break the limitation of the text.

A2:

The comics, especially the series of comics, represent the extraordinary power in character making, theme

setting and culture spread, and it is easier to break the boundary of different culture and languages, showing common human emotions. Japanese comics and American comics are a powerful component of the national soft power which state the influence of pictures.

They are not only a good way for entertainment, but also bring topics, the extension of imagination, the fascination for the virtual world. At the same time, comics wing the imaginations and words that enhance the fascinating feeling for both children and adults in promoting or helping the formation of world



outlook.

A3:

The internet brings an equal world, especially the equality of information obtaining. Whether it is a teenager in the developed country or a child in the poor areas, they get the same information from the internet.

In this context, comics have widely spread. In the past, it had several limitations, like different cities, regions, or nations, but nowadays, a variety of comics could easily spread all over the world.

The internet promotes the diffusion of comics and makes adolescents in different regions have similar childhood memories, and similar values to share the same sadness and pleasure. The cartoonists who worked in the comics industry should have more sense of responsibility to transfer more positive energy and devote themselves to eliminate cultural barriers.

A4:

The East-West cultural exchange is an eternal theme. Chinese culture is a representative of Eastern culture, but in the field of comics, oriental culture equates with Japanese and Korean cultures. The comic design created by Kan Gu has its root in an accumulation of native Chinese culture which is based on the deep study of the essence of Japanese comics. Concerning plot setting and character design, she uses the characters to bring the profound meanings of traditional Chinese culture and moralities in a simple way.

This is not just a graduation project but also a bold attempt. It could be seen as a pioneering move.

A5:

It is suggested that the different characters could be more identifiable, whether it is appearance, dress, or personality and language.





Feedback from Participant Three:

A professional cartoonist, who has her own comic strip on the well-known cartoon website in China, Yingxue, Zhang. She answered the questions from the professional angles of comics:

A1:

Comics are easier to understand than words, and they look like static movies with plentiful content, which are suitable for young and old people.

A2:

Do not move audiences deliberately, especially using long-formed text. Make the whole story interesting and meaningful through twists and turns, rhythmic conversations between characters in the story, and close-ups (facial expressions) that illustrate the character's psychology.

A3:

Many comics have a m...
conception, so there is no...
answer to this question...
the story type, we must ke...
in mind "derived from l...
than the life", which me...
earth". For instance, creat...
a character gets along w...
the designer could put th...
of life into the story, so th...
arouse the interest and sy...
readers.

A4:

Before creating a chara...
I need to consult mu...





middle-ground
absolute right
Regardless of
keep the theory
life but higher
ans "down to
ing a plot that
with his family,
e true feelings
at it is easy to
mpathy of the

information about traditional Chinese elements; second, choose the favourite elements, and try to use them in all aspects.

A5:

The advantages of your comic are the dialogue between the roles is adequate, and the plot is full of emotions. I hope that you could add more "third-person perspectives" to the panels, which would make the images attractive.

cter, initially
ch relevant

To sum up the valuable viewpoints and feedback from the three interviewees, they have helped me to improve or re-think how my comic should be designed.

The feedback from the first participant was not really useful because it was very negative and it did not help me to develop the design. I guess that the reason is that Professor Ding was so busy on his business trip when he received my email, we did not have enough time to communicate and discuss the specific questions. Much of his feedback was abrupt which confused me. His answers were very brief and unclear to me, and he did not want to clarify with him.

However, the other two participants provided me with sufficient feedback to my questions based on their industry experiences. Another reason I conducted face-to-face interviews and discussions with both of them.

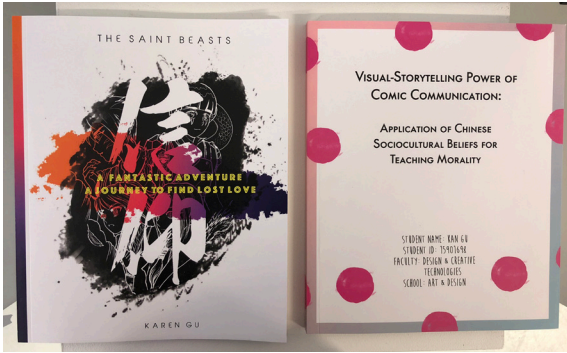
Participant two analysed the feeling that my comic brought to her from the audience's perspective, and, based on the market, gave me in-depth answers and inspiration. Her viewpoints of the functionality and social responsibility that comics can bring to the audience confirmed and encouraged me to proceed with the theme and purpose of my comic design project.

Besides answering my questions, participant three also taught me her own ideas and skills in comic creation, because the conventional rules of the designing process came from her accumulated experience in painting and her comic business for many years (*the detailed information can be seen in Appendix A*).

In fact, no matter what kind of responses the participants gave me, I sincerely thank each of them for their positive suggestions. By contrast, many issues of my comic still needed improvement and perfection.

5.3 Images of my exhibition





These images show the final work at both the exhibition and the oral examination.

The exhibition was prepared after the report was completed.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION



Having completed and reflected on my finished work, I am delighted that I have done the thesis. It has been a challenge for me to use a comic format to tell a story based on Chinese culture and beliefs to improve family relationships and change the communicating ability of a young boy.

Translating the Chinese philosophy into English has been challenging. However, I believe I have done a reasonable job. The comic itself has taken me a considerable amount of time to think through the storyline, transferring this storyline in my mind into images and characters that are based on Chinese mythology, and then planning and drawing out the whole plot with emotions.

The characters, the Four Saint Beasts, the five moralities of traditional Chinese culture, and the changing process of human relationships, feelings, and behaviour were well represented in my comic, I believe.

The comic story blends ancient belief with modern social phenomenon by using Chinese style characters, translating all the dialogue and some uncommon Chinese into English has been a steep learning process for me. I have enjoyed both the challenges and the opportunities! Although many Chinese myths and legends are not familiar to Westerners, they may be culturally difficult to digest. However, providing readers with spaces for interpretation and imagination through the visual narrative and communication is an enabling event for them to acquire new comprehension.⁴⁷ Thereupon, I have put in much time to make the dialogue meaningful, acceptable and straightforward for the English audience, although it has been extremely difficult and challenging to me.

Having my own critical reflection, and feedback from others on the whole project, I realised that the dialogues are not perfect. They need many changes and refinements to tell a better story and to accurately translate the true meaning of the Saint Beasts, the magic skills, the relationship between the Chinese virtues and Western cognition for the audiences. Also, the layout of the comic is not perfect too. Some of the pages are still too crowded. Given more time to re-layout the plots, I would look at the bleeding, blank and panel spaces, using different typefaces to make the images attractive and legible. More distinctive Chinese elements are also

necessary; I would broaden the scope to try more different styles in character design.

I also intend to get help from the English speaking editor to improve all the dialogue and words before I find a publisher to print my comic book. Moreover, I also intend to publish a Chinese version of the comic.

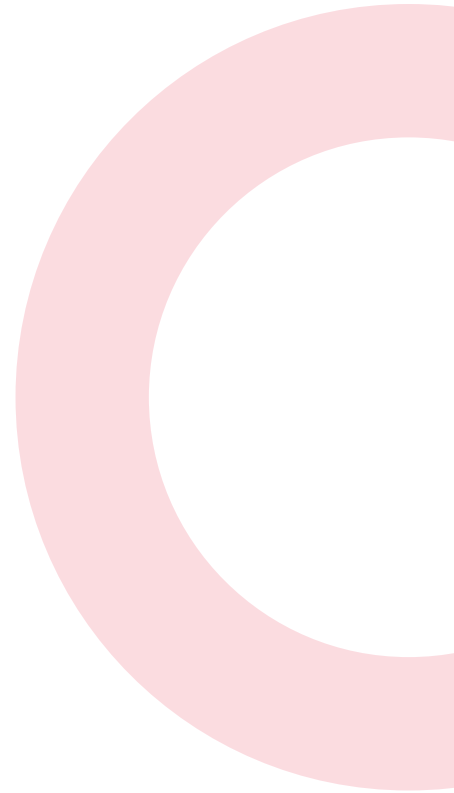
I love the visual-storytelling format of the comic. Having this childhood passion in the form of a visual narrative as my Masters Research Project is a privilege. The knowledge that I have gained from cultures, behaviours, lifestyle and the insights from the humanities of different regions have changed the way I would design in the future.

Many comics that I have read represent the spirit and humanism of a country. This has a significant impact on the style of my comic design and storytelling. In my comic story, there are still many plots, emotions, character relationships that could be improved. This, I will continue to develop and have it printed in both Chinese and English soon. The project has increased my confidence in storytelling and illustration, and this would stand me in good stead as a career illustrator.

⁴⁷ Maaheen Ahmed, *Openness of Comics : Generating Meaning within Flexible Structures*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), <http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cab05020a&AN=aut.b1492786x&site=eds-live>
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APPENDICES



Appendix A: the extra information and suggestion of the expert

Participant three provided me lots of concrete advice during our four-hours conversation (**Figure A.1**), such as how to integrate Chinese elements into the character design skilfully. She even gave me an example of her own work to prove her viewpoint (**Figure A.2-A.3**).



A.1 She shows some pictorials to me during the discussion.

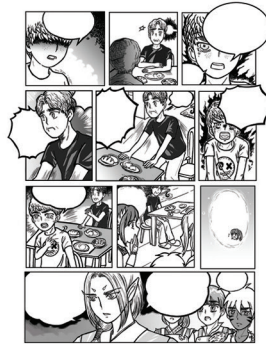
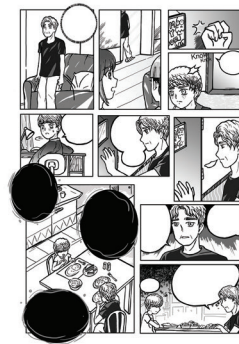
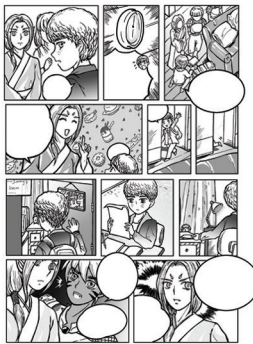
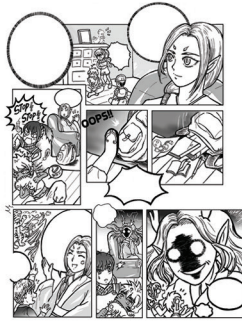
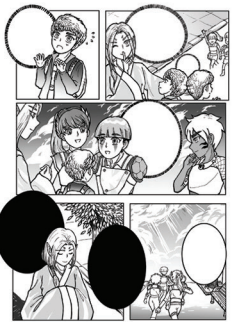
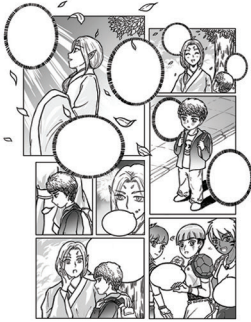
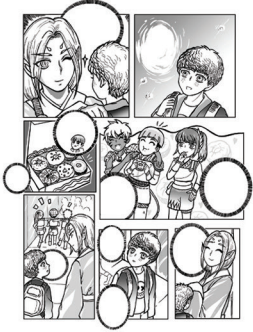
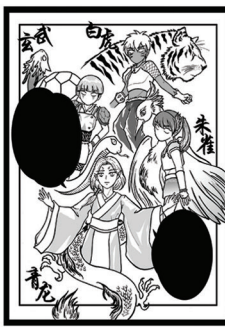
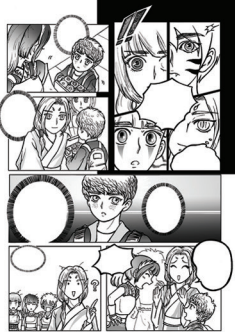
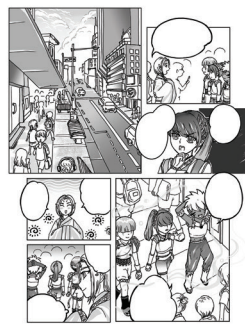
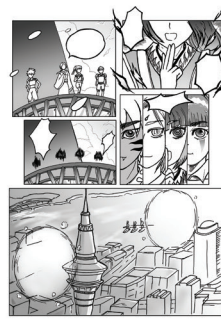
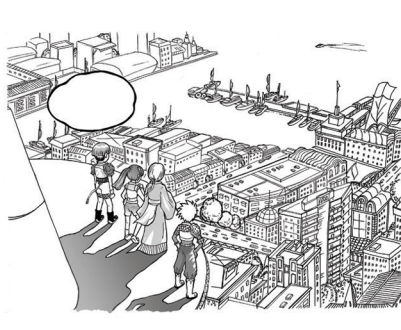


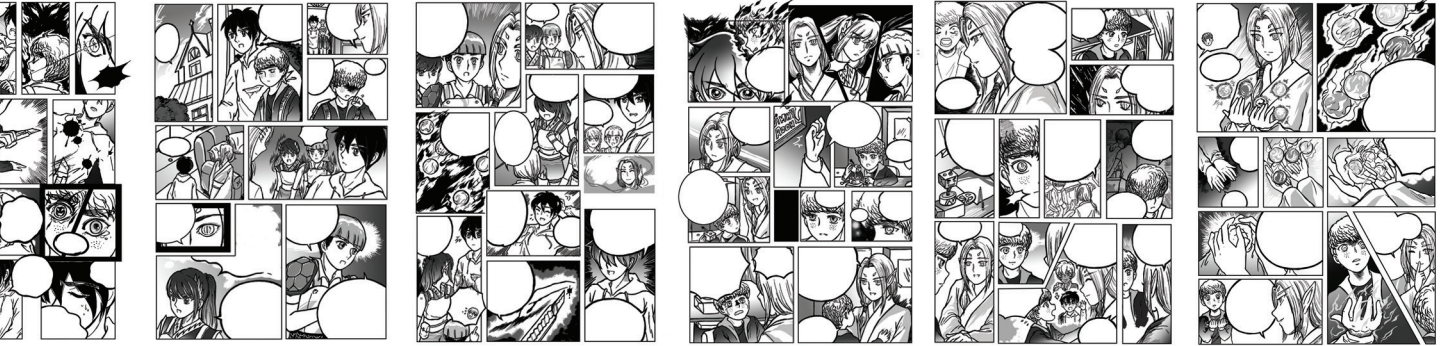
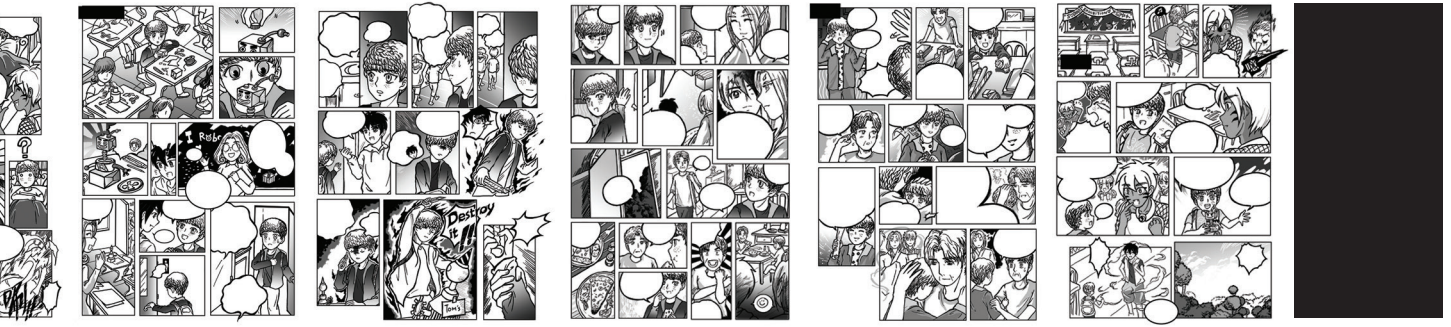
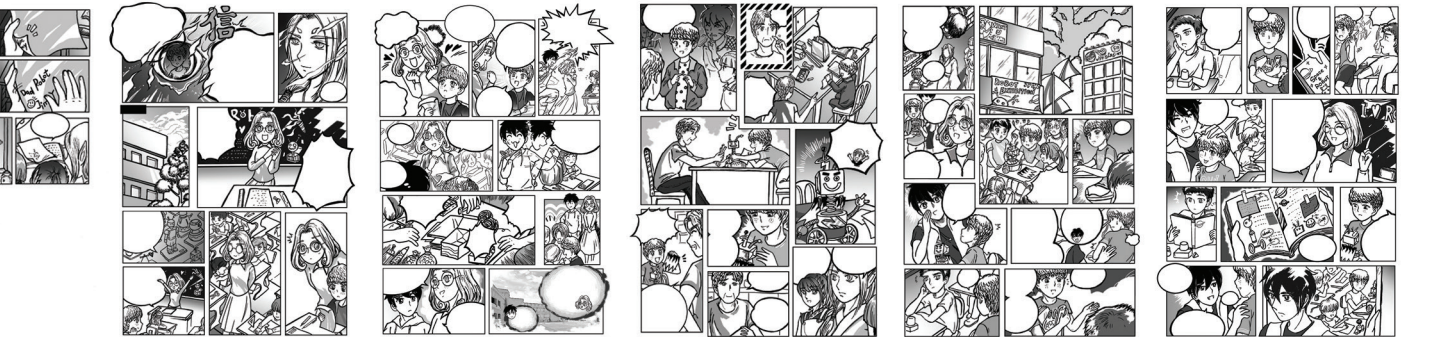
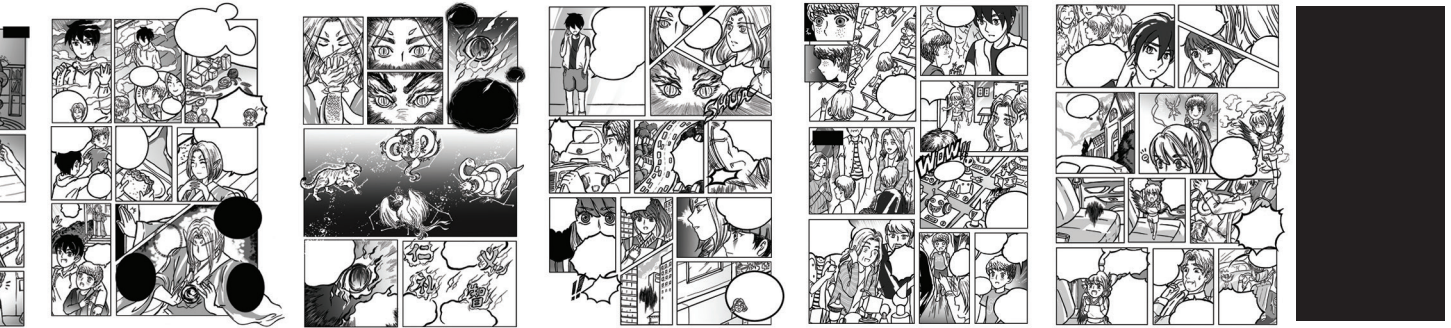
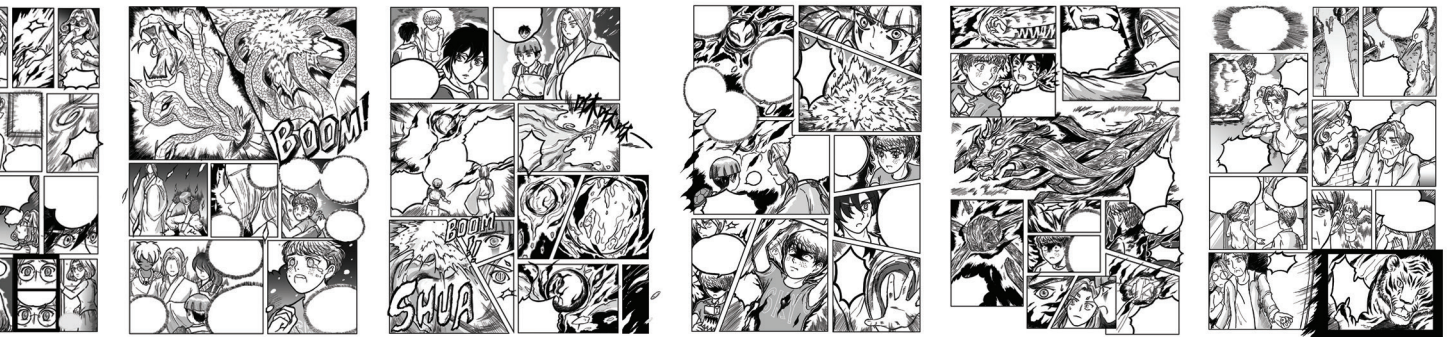
A.2 - A.3 The pictures on the left are her comic series. The right image is the character design of “Ye Cha” (also named: Yaksha).

She said: “this character is a concept from Buddhism. Ye Cha is a kind of ghost; from his clothing style to the colour, I choose “Dun Huang Mural” as the main elements. Waist decoration is added to the door-god elements of Chinese New Year Paintings; the red colour in a large area and the weapon use the “Bi An Hua” (Red Spider Lily or Manjusaka) that often appears in the concept of Buddhism. Ye Cha is the Protective God so that the design would accord with his identity and entertainment effects.”

Appendix B: the overview of my comic book

Some pages of comic.





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Fig2.6 many different dialogue-boxes. Retrieved 2017, September 9 from <http://www.taopic.com/vector/201412/628994.html>

Fig2.7 <One Piece> by Eiichiro Oda. Retrieved 2017, September 5 from <https://mangahelpers.com/forum/threads/one-piece-chapter-799-review-parent-child.3001378/>

Fig2.8 <One Piece> by Eiichiro Oda. Retrieved 2017, September 5 from <https://twitter.com/onepieceondy/status/686772873986359297>

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Fig2.11 <Naruto> by Kishimoto Masashi. Retrieved 2017, September 10 from <http://ent.qianzhan.com/detail/141007-69123c57.html>

Fig2.12 the images of Sun Wu Kong (known as Monkey King) Retrieved 2017, October 11 from:
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Fig3.1 the framework of mixed methodology .(©Kan Gu)

Fig3.2 heuristics: the process of reflective art practice. (©Kan Gu)

Fig3.3 the layout of my comic structure. (©Kan Gu)

Fig3.4 the original images of the Four Saint Beasts on the eaves tile of buildings in the Han Dynasty. Retrieved 2017, October 15 from http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_518ecadf01011u0n.html

Fig3.5 the icon design for each saint beast. (©Kan Gu)

Fig3.6 Maslow's hierarchy of needs model and the humanistic paradigm of my comic design concept. (©Kan Gu)

Fig3.7-3.9 the changes of super hero: Batman. Retrieved 2017, October 12 from:
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Fig5.1-5.4 the evolvment of the four characters: Blue Dragon, Rose Finch, White Tiger, Black Tortoise. (©Kan Gu)

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Fig5.9-5.13 the process of creating each page of the comic plots. (©Kan Gu)

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Fig A.2-A.3 the comic works of participant three.

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