

On Artistic Dissemination of Image Text in Urban Media of Late Qing Dynasty: Taking *Dian-shi Zhai Pictorial* (1884-1898) as the Core Research Object^{*}

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The *Dian-shi Zhai Pictorial* was founded under the conflict of new and old culture in the late Qing Dynasty. Based on China, it innovates and adjusts the characters and pictures in the pictorial. This pictorial perfectly integrates news and art in the form of artistic dissemination of pictures and texts, and adapts to the needs of the society for news and new knowledge at that time. At the same time, Wu Youru, the editor in chief and main painter of pictorial, reflected some problems in the artistic dissemination of pictures and texts.

Keywords: *Dian-shi Zhai pictorial*, late Qing Dynasty, artistic dissemination, Wu Youru

Preface

In *The Book of Changes*, “Hsi Tzu” (系辞) said, “Image means something like this. If the image changes, it will show the external good and bad, observe the achievements, and also show the sage’s thoughts” (Lan, 2016, p. 282). The meaning of this passage is that “image” is like something, and “Yao” (The whole and broken linear symbols making up the eight trigrams in *The Book of Changes*) is a highly abstract and gradually shaped “image”. When the two merge, people can observe the auspicious, unlucky, and hidden worries in the static state, see the signs before the success of career in the dynamic state, and also see the real thoughts of saints.

The nature of *Hsi Tzu* is mainly to explain the purpose of Zhou Yi. If we put aside this primary task for a while and look at it purely, we can feel how profound the truth is contained in this short space and how the process from “images” to “words” is comprehensively demonstrated. “Images” were originally the source of “words”, but it was ultimately fixed on the imitation of the outline of things, while “words” truly stabilized humanity, which were enough to record the secrets of the world.

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“Xiang”¹ became “image” and “ci” gradually developed into a stable character symbol system. The distinction and rank between the two has long been settled. People watch images to obtain the visual information and aesthetic pleasure. People use words to record more information, express more profound meaning, and convey more diversified information. It can be said that words can always broaden and extend human’s perception of the outside and the inside, reaching deeper levels that cannot be touched by images.

Therefore, in cultural communication, words shoulder the important task of storing culture and carrying history, while images remain in the visual field of “visual animals” for a long time, which cannot be widely used to interpret meaning. So they go their separate ways. However, the two symbols have reversed their positions in the contemporary era. In theory, images can exhaust all space and are more attractive than words. In recent years, however, people have started to advocate reading and worry about the ability of writing. This is still a manifestation of the different attributes of the two symbols, but their positions are reversed. As Wang Xizhi said, “future generations look at us today just as we look back on the past” (Wu, 2017, p. 159).

In general, finding the ultimate balance between words and images is very difficult. Since ancient times, human beings have responded to this issue with surprisingly similar methods. There is no breakthrough in essence. They still use images to complete intuitive expression and words to complete ideological expression. The picture of “the era when words occupy the mainstream” is always an auxiliary means in the expression of ideas, while the text of “the era when images occupy the mainstream” acts as a tool to increase the ideological content of images. To their credit, people are trying to strike a balance between words and images, hoping for a “win-win” middle way.

The Evolution of the Expression of Chinese Characters in the Late Qing Dynasty From the Perspective of Images

In the late Qing Dynasty, pictorials emerged. In a sense, this is the product of the “middle way” as mentioned above.

The *Dian-shi Zhai Pictorial* founded in May 1884 (as a supplement to *Shen Daily*), said in its advertisement, “There may be people who don’t understand daily newspapers or like daily newspapers, but there is no people who don’t like pictorial newspapers” (The Master of *Dian-shi Zhai Pictorial*, 1983, p. 16). This is a very candid assessment of the interest and need of the public in reading and the confidence of the future mass production of pictorial news. For the founder, this was not innovation; his ideas came from the west. “We have to choose people who are good at painting to depict something new and interesting.” He added: “from the news collected by our departments, we can select those that are particularly new and interesting, such as a new invention of an object or a sudden occurrence of something rare, which can become the subject matter of painting, so as to gain the favor of readers” (Journalism History Teaching and Research Office, 1987, p. 17). To explain the current politics with images, to express novel things, to depict accurately, to show the real social life picture, these are enough to match the words of the picture produced new requirements. Simply put, it is necessary to consider the matching news text in the picture and write it in the most suitable style for the picture.

There was a news report “The Golden Rooster Was Captured” in *Zhen Collection*, *Dian-shi Zhai Pictorial*, which read as follows:

¹ The ideas on image in China were originated in the *Book of Changes* which was also the origin of the culture of Confucianism and Taoism.

There was a servant, who can be called A temporarily. A said that he used to live in an inn in Baoding City, Hebei Province, and had a very hard time. The innkeeper often tried to drive him away, so he kept begging to be kept. Later, the owner let him live in an empty room in the backyard. One night, the moon was as bright as day. He couldn't sleep and suddenly heard a trampling sound outside (月明如昼, 愁思未眠, 忽闻窗外蹴践声). Look carefully, it's a colorful rooster, very robust. It's no surprise that he thought it was raised by the innkeeper. After that, the rooster appeared every evening and disappeared the next morning (既而每夕必出, 及晓隐去). The man was so surprised that he wanted to wait for the rooster. When the rooster came, the man immediately drew out his knife and chased after it. He found that the rooster was gone when he ran to the corner of the wall. He dug quickly and got one ingot of gold, which weighed about fifty Liang (It goes to 1,562.5 grams). He immediately picked it up and put it in his bag and hurried back to his residence (藏诸囊, 负装而归). From then on, he always felt a little stabbing pain in his left hand, as if he had been scratched by the knife he used to kill the rooster last time. His wound became more and more serious, so he had to call the doctor again and again for treatment. He spent all the gold and recovered the wound on his hand. This story tells us that wealth that does not belong to oneself cannot be acquired by force (至家疮大发, 延医调治, 金尽始愈. 财其可强求乎). (Zhang, 2018, p. 19)



Figure 1. The Golden Rooster Was Captured.

This story originally came from *Zui-Cha Collection About Tales of Anomalies* (《醉茶志怪》), which was written by Li Qingchen of the Qing Dynasty. It is the story of “golden rooster” written in this book. The original text is as follows:

There was a man who was a servant, and he was not of a quiet disposition, and not a man who was good at managing human relations (长随某, 淡泊寡营, 不类长安道人). He said that in previous years, he used to live in an inn in Baoding in Baoding City, Hebei Province, and lived in great poverty. The innkeeper often wanted to drive him away. He had to beg repeatedly for permission to stay. The innkeeper had no choice but to let him live in an empty house in the backyard. One night, the moon was as bright as a mirror, as if it could reflect everything in the world. The man was not sleepy because of his worries, when he suddenly heard that kind of trampling sound outside the window (月明鉴物, 愁思未眠, 闻窗外蹴践声). When he looked at it carefully, he found that it was a colorful rooster, very robust, and he thought it was raised by the innkeeper, so he was not surprised. After that, the rooster appeared every evening and just disappeared in the next morning (既而每夕必出, 及晓则隐). This man found this rule, when the rooster came, he took a knife to chase, chase to the wall, the rooster suddenly disappeared. He began to dig where the rooster had disappeared, and found a lump of gold, about fifty or so pounds. He quickly hid the gold in his coat pocket and carried it back (掘其下, 得黄金一铤, 重五十两, 藏诸衣囊, 负装而归). On the way, he felt some tingling in his left hand, which had been cut by the knife he was going to kill the rooster. When he got home, the wound became very serious, almost killing him (至家疮大作, 几至陨命). He had to sell the gold and use the money to see a doctor and treat the wound. From then on, he believed that there was a definite amount of money in each person's life, which should never be forced (卖金调理, 金尽疾瘳, 始信财有定数, 不可妄求也). (Li, 2004, p. 111)

In terms of the length of the article, the length of the story published in the pictorial is obviously shorter, only 176 words in the original Chinese works. According to the traditional typesetting method of Chinese ancient books, that is to use vertical typesetting format. These 176 words are arranged in six vertical lines, not counting the sub-headings of the story, to match the single picture.

In terms of the deletion and modification of the article, there are mainly the following:

First of all, the description of the protagonist's character and moral character in the original work was deleted, and he was directly called “A”, directly into the news theme.

Secondly, pictorials adjust the elegant language and rhetoric in the novel, and adopt a more popular and colloquial way of expression. For example, change “the moon was as bright as a mirror, as if it could reflect everything in the world” (月明如昼) to “the moon was as bright as day” (月明鉴物). This reduces a more complicated semantic meaning brought by rhetoric, which is to compare the moon to a mirror that reflects everything, and then to describe the moon as very bright. After the modification of pictorial, although it still uses figurative rhetoric, the relationship between rhetoric noumenon and metaphor of rhetoric becomes simple and clear, and the final grammatical meaning is quickly realized. That is to say, the brightness of the moon can set off the atmosphere, indicating that things can be seen clearly that night.

Thirdly, the pictorial has also modified the plot in the process of simplifying language and rhetoric. For example, the extreme description of the protagonist's injury was deleted, so that the story could be transformed into a report with a more fluent and credible context.

Finally, the pictorial's comments on the whole thing are adjusted more intuitively and clearly, so as to point to the end and not to do too much value elevation. This makes it easier and faster for people to get information from reading reports, and the pictorial itself also can play a role in guiding public opinion and value evaluation.

It is worth noting that Li Qingchen's *Zui-Cha Collection About Tales of Anomalies* is a collection of short stories, which keeps the tradition of Chinese traditional note novels and has the characteristics of unofficial history and legend. This book pays attention to the vivid characters, the twists, and turns of the story and the interesting plots. As the author said, "people and things in the world are too complex, so I use ghosts and gods to talk about it" (事有难言聊志怪, 人非吾与更搜神). Obviously, the original intention of the novel and its expectation for the audience are quite different from those of pictorial. The pictorial needs to make the tortuous story as easy to understand as possible so that more people can read it. At the same time, it can also play a news oriented function of warning evil and persuading people to do good deeds. Therefore, this pictorial does not need the distinctive characters and conclusions with specific points in the story. What it needs is to make the original special characters become ordinary and random in the crowd, and make the original value judgment of the story more concise, clear, and universal.

This kind of literary innovation that makes novels like news mainly focuses on the two major categories of "karma" and "strange news", which accounts for a large proportion in *Dian-shi Zhai Pictorial*. And it is enough to make future generations see that the style and pattern of language are gradually changing. It is just like people walking in the snow, leaving footprints of different depths, with clear traces. From the point of view of writing method and reconstruction of text, the two categories of "new knowledge and things" and "current events" which are highly valued by contemporary scholars, choose to sinicize the traditional Western news reporting mode, so as to cater to the cultural interest and aesthetic taste of Chinese people. Like these articles in the pictorial, *Westerners Treat Prisoners Kindly* (《西人恤囚》), *Women's Party* (《裙钗大会》), *His Cross-the-world Cycling* (《同轨蒙麻》), although they are all about what happened abroad, they are all written in accordance with the Chinese people's customary names, appellations, solar terms, and moral evaluation methods. In addition, the "six elements of news" in these short stories are all available, and the narrative logic is also very clear. It can be said that it is like using classical Chinese to translate foreign languages, as long as the main audience of pictorial—Chinese people can understand it.

In any case, once the text in pictorial is written on the screen, it will be adjusted to a highly unified style with the screen, as an extension of image information, so as to make up the gap between the information obtained by the readers through vision and the actual content of the report. Generally speaking, more than 4,000 art works and more than 4,000 news stories share the same theme, that is to say, the name of the painting is the title of the article, and the title of the article is the name of the painting. Therefore, the original way to determine the title of the novel has been unified in the pictorial, and the length has become basically the same. Most of the titles in the pictorial are composed of four Chinese characters, some of them are composed of two or three Chinese characters, and few titles with more than four characters are used. Of course, there are exceptions to the way of naming. For example, *Anecdotes of Fang Minke I* (《方敏恪公逸事一》), *Anecdotes of Fang Minke II* (《方敏恪公逸事二》), the character's name is composed of three Chinese characters, and the story is a series report. The title has to take into account these two characteristics, so the number of Chinese characters used has correspondingly increased. This makes the *Dian-shi Zhai Pictorial* have a relatively stable example, highlighting the newspaper characteristics of systematic and large-scale supply of content.

In addition, specific to the title of each article, the pictorial adapted the way of naming traditional Chinese novels in the past. It transforms the title with many nouns and static aesthetic feeling into a specific phrase with the combination of nouns and verbs, which plays the role of clarifying the theme and sublimating the theme in

an instant. For example, the example above changes *Golden Rooster* (《金鸡》) to *Contribution for Sterling Golden Rooster* (《金鸡获报》), which shows the purpose of the event to the readers intuitively, and also shows the attitude, position, and value judgment of the press.

Another story, which is also selected from *Zui-Cha Collection about Tales of Anomalies*, its original title was *The Yamen Runner of Changzhou* (《常州役》). The story is that a yamen servant in Changzhou stopped other colleagues from raping a female prisoner escorted. When he returned home, he found that an old man in the neighborhood had saved his daughter, who was almost defiled by the bully. He thanked the old man quickly, but when he looked up, he found that the old man had disappeared suddenly. At that moment, he remembered that the old man had already passed away. Such a story is really mysterious and amazing. The pictorial changed its title to *God Rewards Good People* (《天道好还》) and accurately grasped the core meaning of the story. At the same time, it also conforms to the reading psychology of ordinary people, that is, people prefer to believe that this kind of story is real, no matter how incredible this kind of story is. There are many stories like this in this pictorial, so I will not list them any more.



Figure 2. God Rewards Good People.

The Evolution of the Expression of Images in the Late Qing Dynasty From the Perspective of Chinese Characters

“If the aesthetic nature of the image is left aside,” said Peter Burke (2018) in *Prove History With Images* (《图像证史》), “then any image can be used as historical evidence” (p. 12). Nowadays, there are three basic tools for disseminating information: text, data, and image. In theory, among these three tools, image is considered to be able to exhaust all space. “Picture” also falls under the category of “image”. In the sense of “spatial extension”, images can well express the part of content and meaning that words can’t show perfectly,

thus providing more direct, distinct, and accurate information, which does not need to spend time, energy, and abstract thinking ability to re-analyze and combine. If some passages in the pictorial are literary works that have been treated as “news”, then the content and information provided by the painters are essentially the same for their creation. However, from the perspective of “picture theory”, “picture history”, and “image news”, the pictorial has a rigid demand for the authenticity of image narration. Therefore, compared with the traditional Chinese painting, it is inevitable that the painting techniques and painting ideas are changed.

Among these changes, the most important is how to deal with the “characters in the picture”:

The first is the number of people in the picture. Traditional Chinese painter, whether he is an ordinary painter, a talented artist, or an emperor or a minister, will actively pursue a kind of implicit and elegant aesthetic interest. Therefore, traditional Chinese painters are not too fond of painting people intensively in general size pictures (Murals, long rolls, and other pictures with large size are not included). Like Raffaello Santi’s classic work, *The Athenian School* (《雅典学派》), there are many characters in the painting, and each character’s dynamic has a detailed description, which is not the style that Chinese traditional painting likes. In Chinese painting, even if a lot of people are to be painted, they will be cleverly classified and grouped into gardens and landscapes. Among the characters in the picture, the size ratio between the core characters and the ordinary characters is not strict. The painter will draw the important figures larger, so that the viewer can see the main body of the picture very intuitively. The essence of this way is to control the number of characters in the screen and give the screen enough sense of space.

The second is the composition of the people in the picture. The identity of the figures in the paintings of literati is usually single and stable, which can be summarized into some relatively fixed images with high frequency of selection: emperors, saints, ladies, fishermen, woodcutters, children, monks, Taoists, etc. Even to draw the most ordinary people in the social structure at that time, painters also used to paint them as embellishments of riverbanks, houses, restaurants, roads, fields, and other places in landscape painting, as long as the outline and actions are well drawn. In such a painting, the characters are only painted to express the profound, harmonious mood and broad-minded, unrestrained spirit. They are an integral part of this artistic conception and spirit, and do not need to highlight themselves.

It should be noted that in the pictorial news, a large number of ordinary people emerge, including: non-agricultural workers who work as servants in other people’s homes, female workers who leave home to work, rogues everywhere in the city, aggressive bandits, merchants who rent houses to do business in various places, etc. Of course, there are also a large number of foreigners pouring into China. As the objects of news reports, they are all “people with stories” in ordinary life, striving to survive and live in a transitional historical period. Then, for the painters of the pictorial, when depicting images and stories of all kinds of people, they should strive to cooperate with the authenticity of the text information in the pictures. The founder of pictorial said: “Western painting pursues lifelike, while Chinese painting pursues expression. The former must show the authenticity, but the latter does not need to take the real representation as the purpose. Since authenticity is not what traditional Chinese painting pursues, how can we accurately describe people and events if we use Chinese painting to express current events and news?” He hoped that the painters would change the painting tradition of “not deliberately pursuing the truth”, and strive to achieve the accuracy of the outline, proportion, and line, so as to be highly consistent with the truth-seeking and realistic news spirit.

From the beginning of the pictorial, painter Wu Jiayou was invited to join as the main writer. Wu Jiayou styled himself Wu Youru, famous for his excellent artistic expression, has established the style of

“current-event painting”, which is a combination of Chinese and Western painting, accurate and vivid. During the 10 years when he was the main writer of this pictorial, Wu and other seventeen painters, together to build up a new school of “painting pictorial significance”, gradually shed the past kind of “painting album” habits. These painters were very famous at that time, including He Yuanjun (何元俊), Jin chanxiang (金蟾香), Zhang Zhiying (张志瀛), Zhou Muqiao (周慕桥), Fu genxin (符良心), Jin naiqing (金耐青), Zhu Ruxian (朱儒贤), etc. To some extent, their understanding and thinking of “characters” and “events”, “personnel” and “human life” often surpass the writers of the pictorial.

Take Wu Youru for example. He is best at painting portraits of young lady. However, when drawing the women in the pictorial, he still needs to break through the way that traditional Chinese painting deals with this kind of subject matter and strive to create the image of “new women”. For example, the story in the pictorial is entitled *Fight Between Women Doctors*:

When two people have a conflict, the Chinese people have two ways to deal with it: those who are grumpy will usually start immediately; those who are more reserved will choose to tolerate it, and will not easily fight with others. However, no matter what temperament, people seldom choose to solve the conflict by fighting, let alone inviting people around to watch to prove that the fight is effective. This way should originate from foreign countries. Before that, our pictorial reported a French soldier named Bruno. Because he was dissatisfied with Roosevelt, the leader of a newspaper, he asked him to duel, so as to dispel his resentment. As for the relationship between the two after the duel, we don't know how, so there is no more report. So this time, we translate a story from a foreign language newspaper published in Hong Kong to share with you. There are two female doctors fighting with each other. One is American and the other is British. As for the cause of the fight, it is because they all think their knowledge is the best and the other side is inferior to themselves. As a result, they have accumulated a lot of resentment, which must be solved through duels. When dueling, they each hold a knife and attack each other. It wasn't long before the American woman doctor, who was wounded in the arm, ed by the witness to leave. However, she believes that at least this has washed away the shame of the past. Our newspaper believes that there are still some problems in duels. The winner may be able to send depression through duels, but the loser will certainly be more angry than before. In addition, the weapons used in duels are also very sharp. In case the Dueller uses the weapon without control, and directly stabs the opponent's vital point, so that the opponent dies, it will be very tragic. It's worth mentioning that the two beauties are wearing skirts with narrow waist and sleeves when dueling. Their eyes are wide open and they fight fiercely. They are like Xiang Zhuang (项庄) and Xiang Bo (项伯) performing a sword dance, show a very interesting scene! (Zhang, 2018, p. 29)

This report reported on the Western tradition of dueling to settle grievances. Chinese people are not used to this kind of approach, but they are also very curious about it, especially when female doctors like this fight over their talents.

Unless someone takes a photo of the two female doctors during their duel, Wu Youru, who cannot see the scene with his own eyes, has to exert enough imagination to draw. He needs to extract effective information from the text to help him complete the composition and show the part that can best show the highlights of the event. The picture we see now shows two women in gorgeous dresses and high chignons. Their makeup is delicate, but their expressions are angry. The men around them were pulling hard, but the two female doctors still held their heads high and wanted to fight. It's a picture that makes you instantly understand what happened. It's very funny, but it doesn't feel gross or violent at all. First of all, the painter is very persistent in showing the female body beauty, even if they are fighting. Secondly, the painter shows incisively and vividly the gallant attitude of the men who are trying to stop the quarrel, which naturally fits into the Chinese tradition of “a man should protect a woman”. In this way, he puts the theme of “women fighting”, which is absolutely impossible to appear in traditional Chinese painting, into a proper expression.



Figure 3. Fights Between Women Doctors.

Conclusion

The success of *Dian-shi Zhai Pictorial* gave birth to hundreds of pictorial newspapers in the same period, opened the era of news painting in the late Qing Dynasty, and was a model in the artistic communication of graphics and text. This pictorial not only has the merit of creation, but also is an outstanding representative of the era of lithographic printing pictorial. It makes the Chinese characters and images in the same picture can echo and support each other, and makes contributions to the enlightenment of the people at the end of the 19th century. More than 4,000 exquisite news pictures in the pictorial have preserved the track of the gradual change of social life from 1884 to 1898, which is of great historical value. It is an important way for us to explore the urban media communication in the late Qing Dynasty, as well as an important channel for us to explore the inheritance of traditional Chinese culture and the reconstruction of social ethics.

It is worth noting that Wu Youru, the main painter of *Dian-shi Zhai Pictorial*, founded *Fei-ying Ge Pictorial* (《飞影阁画报》) in 1890 and changed its name to *Fei-ying Ge Album* (《飞影阁画册》) in 1893. He wrote on the front page of his *Fei-ying Ge Pictorial*:

To those of you, who have supported me, please note that the main reason I started my own pictorial is that all the news pictures I had painted seemed to be new and fleeting. They are very hard to pass down, just like poems written for exams, which require a great deal of effort on the part of the creator but are really hard to pass down. As now to draw a single work, and finally bound into a book. Like the works of famous artists, it can allow the painter to design carefully, and can give the viewer more artistic enjoyment and inspiration. That's why I decided to start a new pictorial to repay my friends for their love of me. (Wu, 2015, p. 2)

Wu Youru spoke out his ambition and wish very frankly, that is to get rid of the domination of “news writing” and return to the traditional and pure Chinese painting art. Therefore, we can see in the *Fei-ying Ge Pictorial* that the characters no longer occupy the main body of the picture, and the image of a lady returns to the quiet and gentle temperament of traditional Chinese painting. In addition, in the *Fei-ying Ge Album*, the

words are expressed in the form of “inscription”, which is arranged in the corner of the picture together with the seal. After all, we still have problems like Wu Youru’s, which is how to choose between words and images, how to allocate energy, and how to achieve optimal expression.

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