

# A Grammatical Analysis of Illustrations Depicting Chinese Cultural Elements: A Case Study on Alina Chua's Children's Picture Books

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**Abstract:** Using imagery as a key storytelling element in children's picture books is extremely valuable for illustrating the developing narrative of a story using limited text. Excellent children's picture books can bring the fun and inspiration of reading education to young people. With the steady development of illustrations, Chinese-style illustrations have become popular. More and more elements of Chinese-style are used in various fields. Five thousand years of accumulation have made Chinese culture profound and broad. In the process of cultural development, people have become more and more. The more attention is paid to the spread of culture, more cultural products and design works are derived, and more representative Chinese pattern symbols are understood. At the same time, the inner culture and connotation conveyed by the symbols can better interpret the works; Chinese culture will create unique, profound and educational children's illustrations among symbolic elements cartoon children's illustrations. Chinese-American author and illustrator Alina's unique illustration style is delicate, gentle, literary, and sometimes romantic, seamlessly integrating innocent traditional Chinese stories into modern children's picture book illustrations and stories. The use of Chinese elements can be seen everywhere in her paintings. Traditional Chinese mythology serves as the background and script of children's picture books. The details of the paintings also reflect traditional Chinese patterns. The composition and colors are drawn on traditional Chinese painting techniques and techniques. These elements are perfectly integrated into children's picture books to convey the meaning of the story. At the same time, it also reflects more diverse and creative features. While spreading traditional Chinese culture, it also tells traditional Chinese legends and stories. In addition, her innovative blend of Chinese and Western styles in her children's picture books has gained immense popularity worldwide. This study analyzes Chinese elements appearing in children's illustrations by utilizing Alina's unique illustrations and applying the visual transformation theory of traditional graphic symbols. The study concludes that Chinese style and cultural elements make sophisticated traditional Chinese stories accessible to a global audience. Based on this study, the researcher proposes an in-depth study to find a more unique illustration style that embodies traditional Chinese art and culture.

**Keywords:** Alina Chua, Children's Picture Book, Chinese Cultural Elements, Illustration, Traditional Graphic Symbols

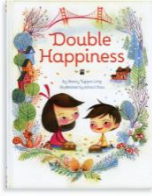
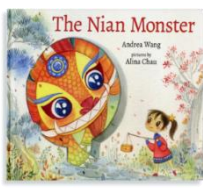
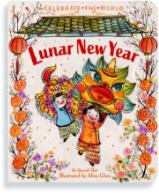
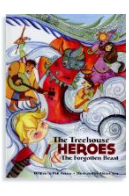
## 1. Introduction

Alina Chua is an Asian-American illustrator. Her unique growth and educational background have created a unique and lively style of painting, and she has published many best-selling children's illustration books. She is a successful illustrator with more possibilities artist. Most of her works are depicted with traditional Chinese stories as the background and creative themes. Under the influence of the pan-globalization environment, the global popularity of children's illustrations is becoming more and more important. With the development of trend culture, illustrations with Chinese-style elements and children's picture books are becoming more and more popular. Alina Chua's works skillfully integrate Western watercolor painting techniques and Chinese-style graphic symbol elements into children's picture book illustrations. The inner culture of unique Chinese style.

### 1.1 Background Shaping Alina Chua's Children's Book Illustration Style

Alina Chua was born in Xiamen, China and moved to British colonial Hong Kong, where she grew up in a Chinese-Indonesian family before immigrating to the United States. Her different cultural upbringing has strongly influenced her painting style and she is open to different cultures and voices, seeing beauty in differences. Alina Chua graduated from Hong Kong Baptist University with a bachelor's degree and a postgraduate degree from UCLA. Many of the art lessons she learned were deeply rooted in her heart and shaped her career path. Her creative vision is a multicultural fusion. Table 1 lists her painting books that are representative of Chinese style from 2014 to 2022.

Table 1: Alina Chua children's picture book with traditional Chinese stories from 2014 to 2022

years	2014	2015	2016	2018	2022
title	The Year of the Sheep	Double Happiness	The Nian Monster	Lunar New Year (Celebrate the World)	The Treehouse Heroes: and the Forgotten Beast
inset					
introduction	The 12 zodiac signs represent different symbolic years in China, this children's picture book tells the story of the Chinese Year of the Sheep	The meaning derived from double happiness in Chinese characters and the meaning behind it	A mythical animal in traditional Chinese culture that brings luck and happiness	It tells about the traditional Chinese festival, what happens in the New Year.	The Treehouse hero also tells the story of a legendary Chinese monster

### 1.2 Contemporary Presentation of Chinese Cultural Elements

After thousands of years of precipitation and baptism, Chinese traditional culture has gradually formed a unique cultural system. Traditional culture gathers ethnic customs and cultural treasures and plays an important role in productivity and economic development. In the process of continuous exchanges with foreign cultures, the Chinese people have gradually gained a clear understanding of the value of Chinese traditional culture, paid more attention to the spread of traditional culture, and supported more outstanding designers, painters, and illustrators. It is a key step in the modernization of cross-cultural culture. The traditional Chinese symbol is also a representative symbol of a long history. The design and painting creation of Chinese style elements have unique Chinese aesthetics, which brings emotional sustenance and imagination space to people. Therefore, in contemporary design, various traditional graphic symbols are applied to various designs through methods such as splitting, refining, reorganizing, reorganizing, deconstructing, and placement. Combined with the current popular aesthetics, more people try Chinese-style illustrations. Analyzing the application of Chinese-style illustrations in Alina's children's picture books will help parents and children understand the unique Chinese culture, and will also help more illustrators create more imaginative works.

## 2. The Selection and Application of Chinese Elements in Alina Chua's Children's Picture Book Illustrations

### 2.1 Graphic Elements

China's pattern culture has been passed down to this day and has formed a complete system of colorful styles. These graphics express people's feelings and express meaning with shapes. Chinese style symbols originate from traditional patterns, ink paintings, murals, Chinese calligraphy, folk customs and other spiritual and cultural elements. Traditional patterns are widely used in Alina Chua's illustrations. Patterns are used according to the theme content and atmosphere requirements of the illustrations. The application method is to directly extract imitation or abstract design transformation. Water, clouds, fire and other highly decorative patterns are repeatedly arranged in the application part of the picture, showing an orderly and flexible beauty; the plant patterns are also rich and colorful, most of them contain beautiful

meanings, and are used alone in illustrations or by Flowers, fruits, leaves, vegetation, etc.[1] are combined together; geometric patterns such as string patterns, grain patterns, bead patterns, back patterns, cloud and thunder patterns, brocade patterns, etc. The patterns are generally expressed continuously in the picture, with a unified and neat effect. , often used for edge decoration of clothing and jewelry; zoomorphic patterns include animal face patterns, animal patterns, dragon and phoenix patterns, etc., which are usually used on character clothing and utensils that highlight the background of the story. Table 2 lists the detailed application of Chinese elements in Alina Chau's picture book. Table 3 lists the use of Chinese clothes, animals, plants and buildings in painting.

Table 2: The combination of traditional Chinese pattern symbols in Alina Chau's children's illustrations


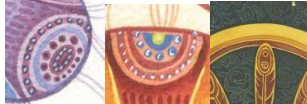




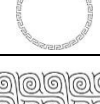
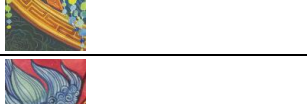










Traditional Pattern Types	Representative Patterns	Application of Patterns in Alina Chua's Children's Picture Book Illustrations
Cord Pattern		
Valley Pattern		
Beadwork Pattern		
Spiral Pattern		
Cloud and Thunder Pattern		

Table 3: "The Treehouse Heroes: and the Forgotten Beast" - Representation of Traditional Chinese Elements and Characters in Children's Picture Books

Traditional Graphic Classification	Traditional Chinese Representative Images	Alina Chua's Children's Picture Book Illustrations	Application Features
Characters			The characters' clothing and appearance draw inspiration from ancient Chinese attire.
Animals			The prototypes of the animals are derived from Chinese "dragons" and "qilins," with designs that are also rich in Chinese artistic characteristics.
Plants			Plants and nature are depicted using the techniques of traditional Chinese ink painting, achieving a balance between sparse and dense brushwork.
Architectural Landscapes			The architectural style of the houses features the iconic Chinese tiled roofs, depicted with subtle and subdued ink colors.

The characters and mythical beasts in children's picture book illustrations usually occupy a larger part of the picture as the main subjects, and the characters are mostly from mythological stories, historical figures, literary works, etc. Traditional Chinese mythology is what most illustrators pay attention to, and it is also the most frequently depicted theme of illustrations by Alina Chua. The images of characters and mythical beasts will also refer to ancient paintings, folk statues and written materials, and be combined according to the scene and needs of the story. In addition to the main characters, the illustrations also need to include landscapes, flowers, trees, traditional buildings, etc.[2] Traditional buildings include gardens, pavilions, palaces, pagodas, temples, etc. However, whether it is a natural landscape or a traditional building, it will undergo her unique artistic treatment in the illustrations, vividly and flexibly showing new vitality.

The line shape of Chinese symbols is very important, because the line is the basis of shape in Chinese painting. The virtual reality, thickness change, straightness, rigidity, softness, weight and circumflex of lines can express the vitality and beauty of objects. The flow of lines of Chinese style elements is particularly soft, the dress and long hair flutter with the wind, and the lines are dynamic. The mountains, rivers and trees in the picture also reflect the unique rhythmic beauty of Chinese style.[3] The staggered thickness and different lines, like the ripples and shapes of water, make the picture full of charm and convey the oriental charm of the work. Alina's paintings use a large number of ancient Chinese symbols, reflecting her unique personal style in the decorative patterns of characters and animals. She also has a good grasp of relevant techniques in the use of traditional Chinese image elements and integrated them into the paintings.

## **2.2 Color Symbolism**









Color is one of the important forms of expression in Chinese style elements and cannot be ignored. As a means of expression in the picture, the traditional Chinese color has the function of expressing emotions and rendering visual effects. In the concept of traditional Chinese painting, the five elements of gold, wood, water, fire, and earth correspond to different colors. The symbols of the five colors also play a role in painting. [4]In particular, the difference in hue will bring huge differences in children's psychological feelings.

Based on the five elements of color, many secondary colors are produced, which form the traditional Chinese colors. The colors and numerical values of the colors are recorded in detail in books such as "Chromatogram", "Traditional Chinese Colors: Color Aesthetics in the Forbidden City", and "Illustrated Book of Traditional Chinese Colors". They all have obvious, vivid and intensified color themes, and the master of five colors bears the color of the earth, the source of expression. Chinese tradition is a very grand system. In traditional Chinese architecture, traditional life objects, murals and modern illustrations of ancient calligraphy and painting, after observing traditional Chinese colors, we maintain color consistency, make changes in brightness and color, and adjust the color structure. Processing, breaking the original rules, color reorganization and other methods to make it different. Integrating traditional colors with modern colors is also one of the design methods of Chinese style illustrations, inheriting traditional colors and modern decoration. Alina's children's illustrations are also very typical in the use of representative colors in China, such as traditional Chinese colors and the coloring method of ink painting.

## **2.3 Composition Features**

Illustrations with Chinese style elements will draw on the composition form of Chinese paintings in the composition of the picture. The works do not pay attention to focus perspective, do not emphasize the changes of light and shadow of objects to natural light, and do not stick to the same external image of the object. Instead, they emphasize the emotions that the author wants to express. Traditional Chinese painting pays attention to the management of white space. White space is to leave some blank space in the picture, which can maximize the expression of emotions. The blank spaces represent fog, smoke, water, sky, etc. The blank space gives the picture a sense of mystery and expresses a sense of endless space. Therefore, Alina's illustrations with Chinese style elements use white space to effectively organize the position of objects, highlight the subject, strengthen the expressiveness of the picture, and stretch the space of the picture to a certain extent. Composition is the basis of white space, so the composition of the picture is the same as the white space processing, which can enhance the contrast between reality and reality, strength and density, and density. The combination of the two can achieve the best artistic conception of the picture. Table 4 shows the application of Chinese painting composition in picture books.

Table 4: The combination of traditional Chinese composition in Alina Chau's children's illustrations

Basic Forms of Composition in Chinese	Painting Examples of Composition	Alina Chua's Children's Picture Book Illustrations Characteristics of Composition
Horizontal line composition		 <p>Expand all the images along the horizontal line. This composition gives a sense of solemnity and seriousness, which can create a monotonous feeling. However, it can also evoke a sense of calmness, stability, openness, and spaciousness.</p>
"Z" shaped composition		 <p>One common composition method in traditional Chinese flower and bird paintings is the use of a "Z"-shaped flow to connect various dispersed elements across the canvas. This approach prevents the composition from being overly biased towards one side and avoids rigid symmetry on both sides.</p>
line composition		 <p>Its composition technique is exactly opposite to the concept of "zhī" in ancient Chinese art composition theory. It possesses a strong sense of dynamism, capable of creating beautiful and diverse artistic effects. During composition, images should be interspersed in terms of size, overlapping in the foreground and background, responding to each other, and achieving overall harmony and unity.</p>
Diagonal line composition		 <p>The main image is placed on one side of the diagonal, creating a strong contrast between dense and sparse areas in the composition, imbuing the scene with a sense of dynamism and instability, aiming to achieve a surprising and triumphant effect.</p>

### 3. The Artistic Features of Chinese Elements in Alina Chua's Children's Picture Book Illustrations

#### 3.1 Essence of Profundity

The connotation of Chinese traditional culture is the source of the creation of artistic works. Excellent illustration works express culture in a concrete or abstract way, making it a perfect fusion of cultural works and modern aesthetics. Folk customs, religious beliefs, academic thoughts, and various social systems all contain connotations. After dozens of dynasties, Chinese history has injected different national thoughts into Chinese culture, including Confucianism, Zhouyi culture, and the aesthetic spirit of Buddhism. Space, tranquility, and purity are the aesthetic references of traditional Chinese paintings,[5] adding to the paintings mood. Similarly, traditional festivals also carry a lot of cultural connotations, with diverse themes and regional, national and other characteristics.



Figure 1: Lunar New Year (Celebrate the World)

Alina's illustrations contain rich cultural elements of Chinese cultural information and traditional stories. For example, in figure 1, the content is a combination of virtual and real, exaggeration and illusion, to create a festive and auspicious festive atmosphere and express good expectations for the New Year.

### 3.2 Artistic Conception Beauty

The elements of traditional Chinese painting are mainly freehand, and the pursuit of "endless painting" art. The emphasis, cadence and rhythm of the brush and ink can convey the mood of the painter, create a sense of the past, and bring dreams and joy to the viewer. [6] Imagine the feeling of space. Illustrations with Chinese style elements pay attention not only to the picture, but also to the beauty of artistic conception. Artistic conception is a state of thought in which picture and emotion are integrated. In the process of creating Chinese illustrations, we will refer to the landscape of traditional Chinese painting, that is, to create poetry and artistic conception, and express our emotions with pictures. Illustrations with Chinese style elements not only focus on objective concrete things and copy parts, but also focus on the overall situation, both form and spirit, virtual and real. In figure 2, emotion is injected into the scene, artistic conception is constructed, connotation is conveyed, and resonance is aroused. The beauty of artistic conception is also reflected in the charm of the works. In Chinese painting, vivid charm is the aesthetic standard of Chinese painting.



Figure 2 : The Treehouse Heroes: and the Forgotten Beast

In Alina's illustrations, water waves and plants form a relationship between virtual and real, subtly expressing the situation. The virtual and real changes of lines and colors will add aura to the picture, expressing subtle emotions and moods, full of full sincerity in the subtlety, and adding more charm to the protagonist of the picture. The artistic conception is beautiful.

### 3.3 Fusion of Chinese Aesthetics

With the development of science and society, the innovation and progress of painting technology, the

development of illustrations with Chinese style elements has also pushed illustrators to create new styles.[7] The interaction of various factors has produced many novel forms of illustration styles. The commercial progress of illustrations in cultural and creative products, brand design, online media, commercial posters, product packaging, etc. has increased. Alina's innovative visual effects allow the combination of Chinese style elements to convey the essential emotion of the picture while also making the work more distinctive. It stands out from many works and achieves its own unique style.

#### 4. Conclusion

Chinese traditional culture is a precious resource of wealth, and Chinese style elements also contain huge development potential. Illustration art bridges traditional culture and modern life. Chinese-style illustrations have a unique charm under the pen of Alina Chua. In terms of graphic symbols, her illustrations use a large number of ancient Chinese patterns in the pictures. In the use of traditional images, characters, animals, plants, and architectural landscapes also refer to elements with Chinese style characteristics, creating distinctive characters image. In terms of color symbols, Alina uses ink and wash to interpret the picture, and the choice of colors also has the characteristics of Chinese-style colors. The composition of the Chinese style has a series of important features such as blank space, which is also used in her illustrations. In terms of content, her paintings have the connotation of Chinese stories and reflect the culture and charm of Chinese style. Combined with her rich personal experience and unique painting expression techniques, she has formed a charming and unique personal style.

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