

# A Study on the Picture-Book Practice of Frontier Poems in Tang Dynasty

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## Abstracts

Frontier poetry is one of the most representative types of Tang poetry, which is regarded as an excellent representative of Chinese traditional culture. It mainly describes frontier scenery, frontier wars and military and civilian life. However, the frontier poetry of Tang Dynasty in the flourishing Tang Dynasty was faced with the situation of dull form, lack of innovation and difficulty in the dissemination and promotion of young people. This paper adopts a mixed research method which combines quantitative research, qualitative research and practical research. Taking Wang Changling's "Army" as a representative work, the paper carries out cartoon design practice on the frontier fortress poetry of the flourishing Tang Dynasty, and finally draws a conclusion that it is feasible to transform the abstract frontier fortress poetry of the Tang Dynasty into a specific comic visual art form and promote it in the form of exhibition, which can effectively improve the target audience's cognition and love of the frontier fortress poetry of the Tang Dynasty.

**Keywords:** A study on the Picture-Book Practice; Frontier Poems; Tang Dynasty

## Introduction

Frontier poetry of the Tang Dynasty is one of the important types of Tang poetry, mainly describing frontier scenery, frontier wars and military and civilian life, although the length is short, it contains profound historical, cultural and artistic connotations (Zhang Runqiu;2022). As the Tang poetry education in China is mainly concentrated in the young age, the Tang poetry education for young people is very scarce, so the contemporary young people lack a deep understanding and memory of the connotation of the frontier poetry in the flourishing Tang Dynasty, which gradually weakens the cultural significance of the frontier poetry in the Tang Dynasty. However, in today's entertainment society, the border poetry in the flourishing Tang Dynasty is faced with problems such as inflexible form, lack of innovation, and difficulty in communication in the dissemination and promotion of young people, which makes it difficult for more young people to appreciate the charm of Tang poetry (Yu Siqiang;2017). This paper aims to improve the communication efficiency of Tang Dynasty frontier fortress poetry, arouse the contemporary young people's love and understanding of traditional culture, and promote the better development of Chinese traditional culture and animation art by applying the picture book practice of Tang Dynasty frontier Fortress poetry and the communication means of cartoon exhibition.

## Research Objective

1. Transform frontier poetry of the Tang Dynasty into "visual" comic art, and integrate art forms with more traditional Chinese characteristics into contemporary Chinese comic art to make it more Chinese.

2. Through innovative design, it creates an educational model that combines education with entertainment, interprets the cultural connotation of Tang Dynasty poetry, inspires the cultural confidence of contemporary Chinese people, encourages the young generation of China to establish the patriotic spirit of protecting the home and the country, and improves their literary and aesthetic qualities.

## Research Methods

A hybrid approach is a method that uses both quantitative and qualitative data in the research process to obtain more comprehensive, detailed and in-depth data and improve the credibility and validity of the research. This study adopts a mixed approach and collects quantitative and qualitative data to complete the research on the cognitive effectiveness of Tang Biansai poems and cartoons on young people, including the following four stages:

The first stage: the investigation of the experimental data of the "pictorial sense" of frontier fortress poems in the Tang Dynasty (Hu Dajun; 1986 : 57-58). In this study, research tools and questionnaires need to be created, representative groups selected for the survey and data on "image perception" collected. These data will form the main survey data of the first phase and provide a solid foundation for the second phase of research.

The second stage: qualitative research. Through literature research, case studies, field observations and expert interviews, the theory is explored and verified, and this hypothesis lays the foundation for the third stage.

The third stage: experimental research. The Tang Dynasty frontier fortress poetry is transformed into a comedic visual art form and presented to the target audience for evaluation to test the feasibility of the hypothesis.

The fourth stage: the researchers hold relevant exhibitions. Through the survey of the satisfaction of the exhibition, the researchers concluded that the study of the picture-book practice of the frontier fortress poems of the Tang Dynasty can effectively improve the public's understanding of the frontier fortress poems of the Tang Dynasty, and improve their patriotism and cultural literacy.

## Research process

**Research basis:**The frontier poems of Tang Dynasty are the most representative poems

Table 1. The most representative frontier poems of Tang Dynasty in online voting

Row list	Attention list	Likes list
01 "Military line · the fourth" ● Tang Wang Changling Huangsha battle wear gold armor not break Loulan eventually not also Index score:97.6		
02 "Young line. One" Tang: Wang Wei meet spirit for the king drink/the horse high-rise weeping willows Index score:97.3		
03 "The second "Tang Wang Wei who knows not to edge court bitter/longitudinal death still smell chivalric bone incense Index score:96.5		
04 "Make to the plug" ● Tang Wang Wei desert lonely smoke straight river falling Y yen Index score:96.0		
05 "Guan Shanyue" ● Tang Li shot, Changfeng tens of thousands of miles/blow degree Yumen Pass Index score:95.4		
06 "Out of the first" ● Tang Wang Changling but make Longcheng fly will not teach Huma degree Yin Shan Index score:95.0		
07 "Liangzhou Ci · The First" ● Tang Wang Zhihuan, Qiang flute why blame willow spring breeze not to Yumen pass Index score:94.2		
08 The Snow Song Sent the Martial Judge Back to Beijing Index score:93.4		
09 "Jam song · second" ● Tang Dai Shulun, wish to serve the country with this long/why must be born into Yumen Pass Index score:92.8		
10 Liangzhou Ci Two Poems - Tang Dynasty. You cannot laugh when you come to battle in ancient times Index score:92.3		

Source: Top 10 Most Classic Frontier Poetry The Most Famous Frontier Poetry 100 Ancient Poems about Frontier Poetry →MAIGOO Life List, (2021)

According to the ten most representative frontier poems of the Tang Dynasty selected by the "Poetry and Beauty" network, a total of 12,000 people voted. In the end, Wang Changling's "Marching in the Army" ranked first and this study will also take this poem as a case study (Wang Yan ; 2021 : 361).

### **Design considerations: About design style**

#### **(1) Line draft style: white drawing**



Figure 1. Dai Dunbang draws "Line Drawing Characters"  
Source: Romance of the Three Kingdoms (1980)

In the design practice of this study, the modeling design of the characters and the subject matter is presented by drawing lessons from the art form of Chinese painting. The reason is: white painting itself is an important technique of Chinese painting, referring to the simple use of ink lines to draw the image, and the traditional Chinese picture book comics - comic book, also inherited and developed this technique. The use of this technique in this study is the inheritance and development of traditional techniques (Yang Xiangrong; 2014 : 66-68). At the same time, the white painting technique can better show the details of the characters, and it is easy to use Photoshop to imitate Chinese painting techniques.

(2) Color style: mainly black, white and gray in Han and Tang Dynasty stone rubbings, combined with traditional Chinese color matching "vermillion red" and "gold"

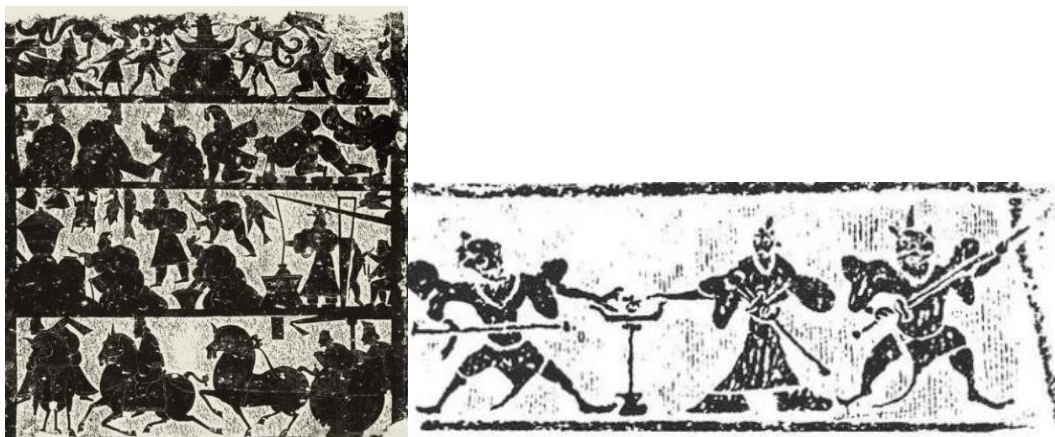


Figure 2. Stone Relief  
Source: Shaanxi Provincial Museum of History (2017)

In the coloring way, the researchers based on the Han and Tang Dynasty stone rubbings with black, white and gray as the main color collocation way, while using the rubbings "anti-white" technical characteristics to color (Wang Shoude ; 2019 : 74). Han and Tang Dynasty stone sculptures, known as the originator of Chinese comics, have a deep origin with today's Chinese comics, and have been used for reference in the form of Chinese traditional comics "comic books" for many times.



Figure3. Color scheme

Source: Design by Luo Chen (2023)

Based on this, the researchers added Chinese red -- vermilion, the "C0, M100, Y100, K10" standard color, which is officially defined by China as the most Chinese red. Because traditional Chinese ink paintings have vermilion-colored seals to blend in the monotony of black and white ink paintings and to add color to them, the researchers incorporated this color to make the paintings more Chinese (Wang Ziqiang, 2021 : 31-33). Moreover, "yellow" and "gold" are words that often appear in frontier fortress poems. For example, desert, armor and other elements are all golden, so researchers believe that "yellow gold" is a very important color factor in frontier fortress poems of the prosperous Tang Dynasty (Qi Qingxian, 2021 : 79-83). For example, in the study "Military Travel", "Yellow sand wears golden armor in a hundred battles, and will not return until the building is broken." In the poem, there are color words of "yellow" and "gold", so the combination of gold in the picture is in line with the research theme.

(3) Composition form: carrying the picture in the form of long scroll painting



Figure 4. Luo Shen Fu

Source: The Palace Museum, Beijing (2013)

Scrolls are one of the most important composition forms in traditional Chinese painting, and the famous narrative Chinese painting Ode to the Goddess of Luo and Night Banquet are both in the form of long-scroll painting (Wang Shengyan, 2020 : 41). The frontier fortress poems of Tang Dynasty in this study have a certain narrative character, and the researchers believe that using long-scroll painting as the composition method is consistent with the content of frontier fortress poems of Tang Dynasty, which is conducive to highlighting the theme characteristics.

## **Expert interview**

### **1. First group of experts**

Cao Lusheng: Professor of Dramatic Literature Department of Shanghai Theatre Academy, drama scriptwriter, literature education expert. He thinks that the creativity of the caricature of Shengtang frontier Fortress poems is very good, which can stimulate students' interest in learning (Wei Jiao, 2016 : 252). At the same time, this study is also consistent with the current national call in the field of education. The institute's current target audience is both necessary and highly discerning. As an ancient style of Tang poetry, just at the time when students enter the university, their outlook on life and values gradually take shape, let them use the form of poetry and painting to understand Tang poetry, we will increase national confidence, increase patriotic thoughts.

Wang Lizhou: Professor, Doctor of Philosophy, Vice President of School of Marxism, Ma Chang'an University, Vice President of Xi 'an Education Innovation Association. He thinks that this research has certain aesthetic significance, so he is also very much approved of this research (Marycz Adam, 2022 : 89). This generation of young people, more attention to comics, and like fashion, interesting things, he thought it was a very good way to use the young people's favorite form to spread frontier poetry. But we should also pay attention to the seriousness, after all, this is not a pure entertainment creation.

It can be seen that experts recognize the direction of this research and the choice of subject matter of frontier fortress poetry in the prosperous Tang Dynasty, which can be characterized by Confucianism and patriotism in the poetry (Zheng Yuanxia, 2022 : 23). And experts also suggest choosing characters, scenery, atmosphere, plot and complete story; The choice of poems with patriotic feelings should reflect a certain seriousness, not too entertaining; The diversity of geological landforms should be reflected through the picture; Choose museums, art galleries, shopping malls and other places with high traffic to hold exhibitions; Choose a poem with three elements of frontier frontier poetry, namely: defending the home and the country, military life, frontier frontier scenery (Zhang Zhixiang, 2016 : 41). Collect more literature materials, restore the real appearance of the Tang Dynasty.

### **2. The second group of experts**

Leng Lin is a professor at the Department of Visual Communication, School of Design and Art, Xi 'an Academy of Fine Arts. He believes that attention should be paid to how to integrate design knowledge into the research process, and suggests holding workshops to introduce the research topic into professional courses, because the target audience happens to be between 18 and 22 years old, which matches the age of current students (Hu Dajun, 1990 :12). Let them not only passively accept the results of the research, but also participate in the process. Workshops can be held to demonstrate the correctness of the research.

Yang Bo is an associate professor and animation director, director of the Animation Teaching and Research Department of Film and Television Animation Department, Xi 'an Academy of Fine Arts. He believes that traditional art forms are integrated into picture books to make them more Chinese in style. You don't need a lot of color, but you need a lot of history. The production cost and difficulty of picture books are not as high as that of animation, which is more conducive to mass production (Lu Siqi, 2021 : 52). At the same time, it can also take into account the delicate visual expression language of cartoon. In addition, dynamic and sound is a trend, which has more advantages than static pictures.

It can be seen that experts recognize the research direction, the subject choice of frontier fortress poems of the prosperous Tang Dynasty, the Confucian thought of frontier

fortress poems of the prosperous Tang Dynasty, and the patriotic feelings in the poems. Experts also suggest workshops to validate design methods; It is suggested to integrate into the traditional art form of the nation; It is suggested that the extended form can have dynamic comics; Color does not need to be too much, but should reflect the historical sense of weight, etc.

## **Workshop**

### **(1) Workshop overview**

In this workshop "Visual Composition of Frontier Poems of Prosperous Tang Dynasty" of Art Design major of Xi 'an Academy of Fine Arts, 64 first-year undergraduates of University of Art and Design, Chang 'an Campus of Xi 'an Academy of Fine Arts, Shaanxi Province, China, researchers combined Tang poetry with design composition under modern design teaching system, based on modern aesthetic principles of composition, This paper explores the feasibility of the visualization of Tang poetry from three dimensions of plane, color and four-grid cartoon. The course lasts for eight weeks. In the second week, the theoretical knowledge and field investigation data of Shengtang Bianshu poetry will be shared with students in class (Li Xin,2022). After fully understanding Tang poetry, students will practice how to visually express Tang poetry from the perspectives of plane composition, color composition and four-grid cartoons in the following six weeks. Finally, we will organize exhibitions and collect feedback data from audiences.

### **(2) Design evolution analysis**

Let's take Ma Shi by Li He as an example to analyze the process of decomposition demonstration:

The desert sand is like snow, Yanshan moon is like a hook.

What when Jinluo brain, fast walk step Qingqiu.

First, understand the meaning of the poem. The flat sand covered the desert like boundless snow, and the moon hung over the Yanshan Mountains like a curved hook. When can I put a golden collar on it and gallop across the clear autumn fields! This poem seems to be about horses, but in fact, it expresses the poet's emotion through horses. The poet is underappreciated and unappreciated by the ruler, but he is eager to display his ambition and build achievements for the country.

The plane composition of the design is mainly black and white, and the key scenes are analyzed, and then based on their elements, these scenes are simplified into abstract visual elements, and their own understanding is added to complete the design composition. As shown in the picture below:

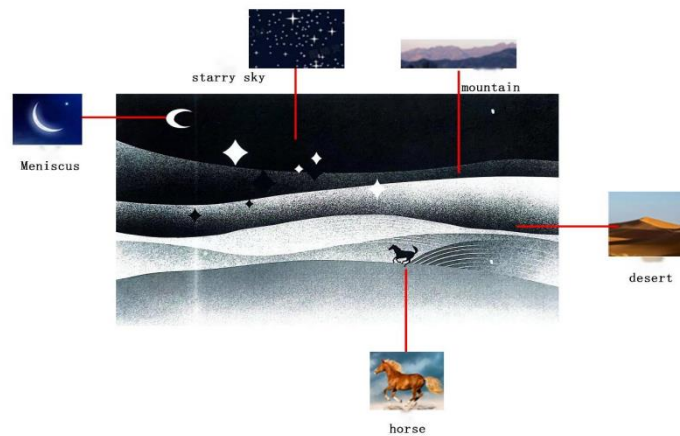


Figure 5. Schematic diagram of the planar composition design of Tang poetry visualization

Source: Designed by Luo Chen. (2023)

### (3) Workshop summary

In this practice study, the students who participated in the study successfully transformed the rhyme and rhythm in the poem into visual elements mainly composed of points, lines and surfaces, and combined concrete visual symbols on the basis of abstract points, lines and surfaces to convey the specific information about time, place and events in the poem (Yao Yuan, Qin Zhenyan ; 2022 : 77-81). Through this workshop, the researchers worked out the design methodology for the cartoon design of frontier poems in the prosperous Tang Dynasty. This design methodology is divided into three stages:

The first stage is poetry interpretation. The frontier fortress poetry of the prosperous Tang Dynasty is firstly an ancient text, which should first be translated into modern vernacular, and then comprehensively interpret the poet's life, age and the background of the poem according to the references, so as to understand the mood of the poet when he creates the poem and comprehensively interpret the poem. After that, key words are extracted and interpreted.

The second stage is comic design. Researchers will first sort out suitable picture materials for keywords, draw them into electronic document in Photoshop format in the form of digital painting by means of drawing lines and colors, and then integrate these background elements and main elements into a coherent story according to the content of the poem text. Finally, they will match the text and decorative patterns for the cartoon, and express them in the form of long scroll painting. The output is an electronic file image in Photoshop format with layer properties.

The third stage is the exhibition stage. Through the exhibition, the researchers completed the promotion work of Bian Sai poem cartoon in the Sheng Tang Dynasty, and finally verified the practical effect of the design study, and drew a conclusion.



#### (4) Design experiments

##### 1) The first scheme design

In the stage of expert interview and target audience data research, each style has a certain proportion of the audience, the gap is not obvious, so the researchers will respectively design several styles, and use the form of expert demonstration as the main, the target audience research as the secondary, to carry out the design style demonstration work again (Yu Ji ; 2020 : 62). Among them, realistic style, cartoon style, white painting and Han and Tang

Dynasty stone sculpture combined classical style. The researchers used the top two styles in the poll, classical style and realistic style, and the black and white style suggested by Zhao Peng. Select the same verse in the same poem suitable for creation, and select the same composition Angle and picture elements, and then compare twice.



Figure 6. First scheme design diagram  
Source: Designed by Luo Chen. (2023)

##### 2) The second scheme design

The second scheme design is more targeted. The three sets of designs simultaneously represent Wang Changling's "Military Travel", in which the first line of the poem "Qinghai long clouds dark snow mountains". Using the same Angle and composition, the pointer identifies different styles. At the suggestion of most experts, the researchers finally chose the white painting and rubbings style among the three styles, and further sought expert confirmation on color matching. Seven experts endorsed the color scheme.

Table 2. The second scheme design chart

Source: Designed by Luo Chen. (2023)



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**Realistic style:** The focus perspective method is used in the picture, the three-dimensional realistic style technique is adopted, and the attention is paid to light and shadow presentation and atmosphere creation. Point the main light source at the protagonist to highlight the role of his visual center. The whole picture highlights a real visual feeling.

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**White painting and stone rubbings style:** The layered method is used in the picture, and the flat classical style technique is adopted. The technique is white painting, plus black, white and gray of stone rubbings of Han and Tang dynasties, combined with vermillion and gold as the main color, presenting a Chinese painting charm.

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**Black and white painting style:** The technique of black and white painting is used in the picture to highlight the change of the density of lines, and the tone of black and white gray is the main keynote, presenting a visual effect of black and white comics.

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### 3) The third scheme design

Take Wang Changling's "Military Travel" as an example to carry out the third scheme design:

Qinghai Long cloud dark snow mountain, a lonely city looking at Yumen Pass.

Yellow sand hundred battles wear gold armor, not broken Loulan will not return.

The first two sentences of this poem are "Long clouds and dark snow mountains in Qinghai Province, looking at Yumen Pass from the remote city." It summarizes the appearance of northwest frontier of China. At that time, Qinghai was the scene of many battles between the Tang army and the Tubo, and outside Yumen Pass was the area of influence of the Turks, so these two cities were important frontier cities of the Tang Dynasty. "Yellow sand and many battles wear gold armor", is a strong summary of the poem. "Hundred battles" is more abstract

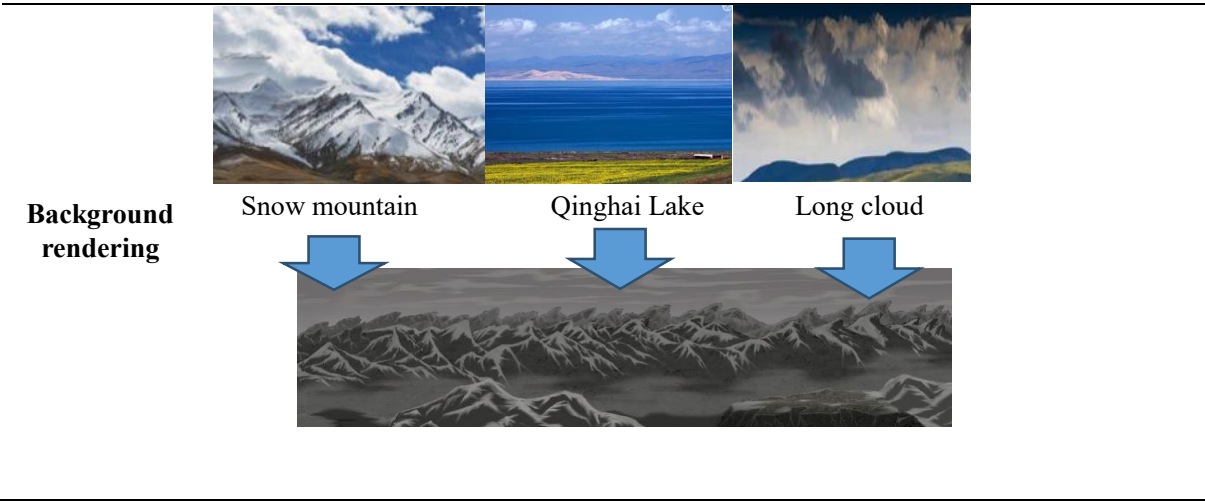
and describes multiple battles with an enemy. The word "yellow sand" refers to the yellow sand on the surface, but in fact, it highlights the hard fighting and frequent warfare in the Northwest frontier battlefield. However, although the golden armor wore out, the soldiers' ambition to serve the country did not wear out, but became more firm in the desert wind and sand. "Not broken Loulan will not return" is the brave oath of battle-hardened soldiers. The "picture sense" created by the poet in the poem has a sense of substitution, as if the reader is in a magnificent desolate frontier landscape painting.

Secondly, extract key words, key scenes. Qinghai: Qinghai Lake, in present-day Qinghai Province, China. Long cloud: a continuous cloud. Solitary City: the ancient city of Frontier Fortress. Yumen Pass: The name of a border pass set up in the Han Dynasty of China. It was west of present-day Dunhuang in Gansu Province and was an important passage to the Western Regions in ancient times. Loulan: Name of the Western Regions in ancient China, southeast of Shanshan County, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. This is a general reference to the ethnic regimes in the northwest of the Tang Dynasty that often intruded on the border. Golden Armor: indicates light armor and soldier armor. Snow Mountain: Kunlun Snow Mountain in Qinghai Province. Yellow sand: desert.

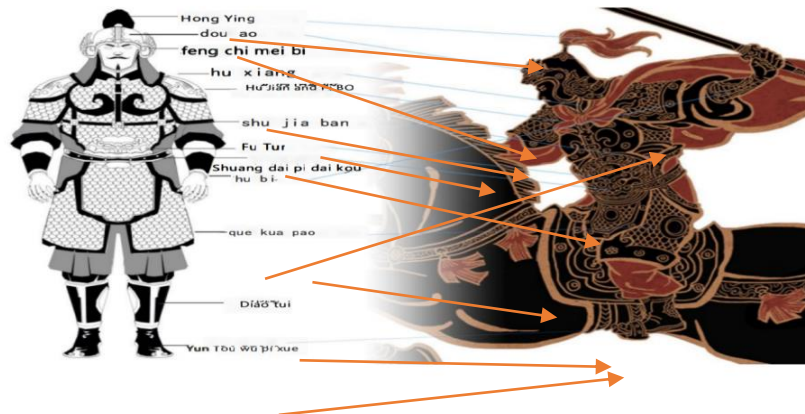
Then, it carries on the cartoon design, does the drawing of the background and the construction of characters and scenery, and makes the integration of elements, showing the complete process of frontier poetry picture book.

Table 3. The third design scheme table

Source: Designed by Luo Chen. (2023)



## Character drawing



Join the military

Long cloud dark snow mountain in Qinghai Province

## Layout composition

The lonely city looked far away at Yumen Pass

Yellow sand wears golden armor



## Discussion

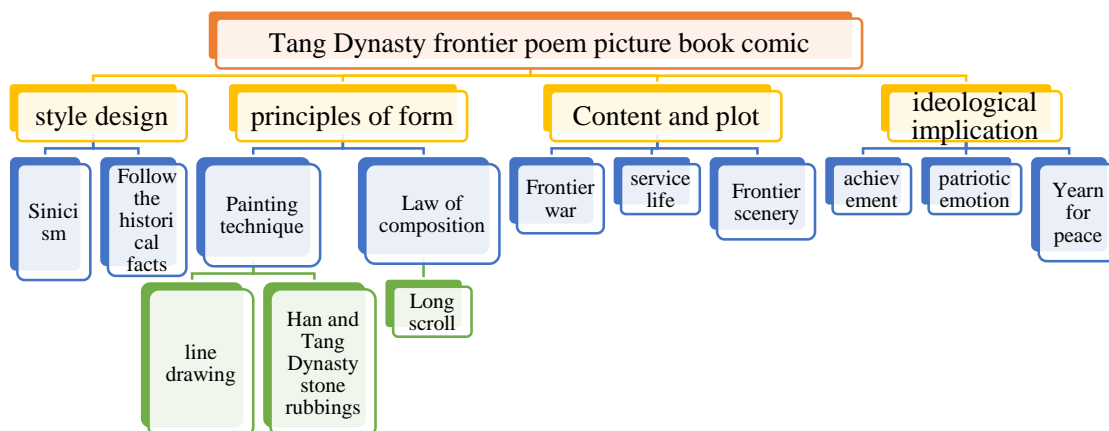


Figure 7. Regarding the creation of a schematic diagram of the four-element framework  
Source: Designed by Luo Chen. (2023)

The researchers interpreted the song from four parts: the characteristics of the shape, the form of the painting, the content and plot, and the connotation of the thought, which also set a model for future studies of the same type.

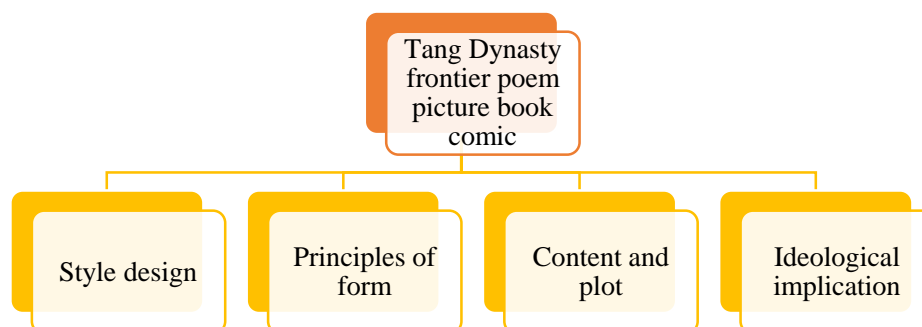


Figure 8. Schematic diagram of the core framework of the comic design research on frontier poems in the prosperous Tang Dynasty  
Source: Designed by Luo Chen. (2023)

In terms of modeling design, researchers mainly focus on the modeling characteristics of traditional Chinese realistic style, and strictly follow the requirements of modeling elements of historical materials, so as to restore the original historical appearance as far as possible.

In terms of form rule, at the technical level, researchers combined the drawing method of Chinese painting and the color matching method of stone rubbings of Han and Tang Dynasties. In the form of composition, the researchers connected the four pictures into the long scroll form of Chinese painting, and adopted the form of Chinese long scroll painting with pictures and texts, following the concept of "integrated poetry and painting" in the form.

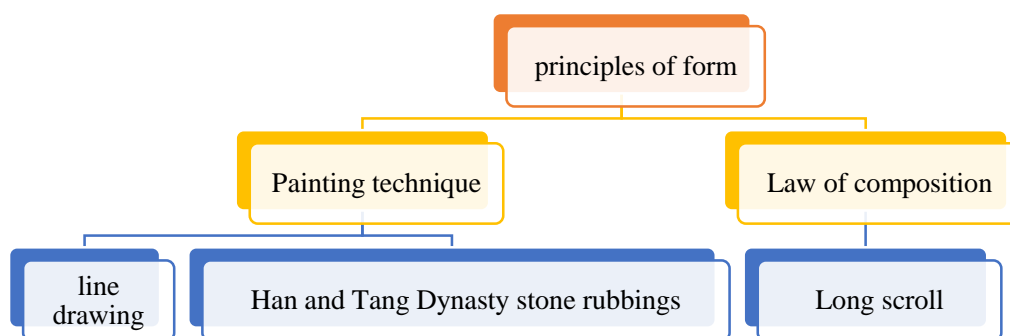


Figure 9. Schematic diagram of the design framework for the sense of form  
Source: Designed by Luo Chen. (2023)



In terms of the content and plot, the researchers chose to reflect the frontier scenery, military life and frontier war, the first sentence is to describe the frontier scenery, the second sentence reflects the military life is a very important element is homesick, from the hero's foot overlooking the city closer to the capital of Chang 'an Yumen Pass, is a kind of homesickness. The third and fourth sentences are about the description of war, so the design practice maximizes through a poem to present the three content elements of frontier fortress poetry.

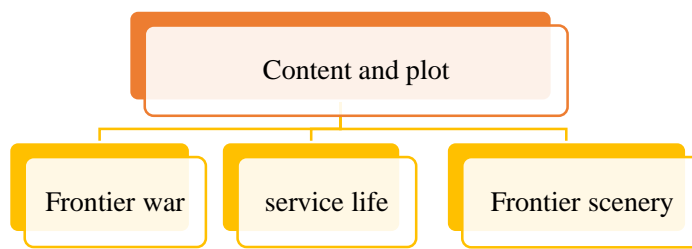


Figure 10. Schematic diagram of the content plot framework

Source: Designed by Luo Chen. (2023)

In terms of ideological connotation, the researchers present the master's mind and course in the picture. In the face of war, he does not look back, showing the fearless spirit of Confucianism and the mind of governing the country and peace. This is the concrete embodiment of the act of defending the country and the grand ambition of making contributions and patriotism. However, the act of looking at the direction of home also reflects the author's inner feeling of longing for peace. Therefore, this poem embodies the heroic spirit of bravely facing the war under the feeling of service and patriotism, as well as the ideological connotation of opposing the war and yearning for peace while missing home in the distant frontier.

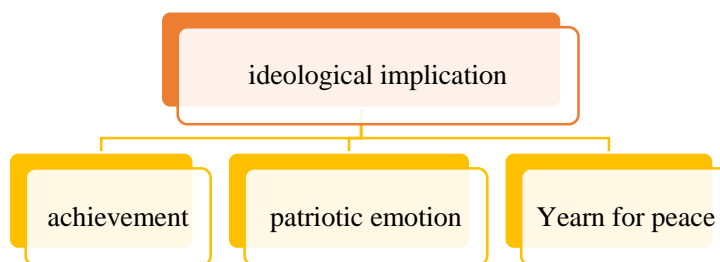


Figure 11. Schematic diagram of the framework of ideological connotation

Source: Designed by Luo Chen. (2023)

The researchers held the exhibition titled "Poetic Painting Volume -- Visual Composition Art Exhibition of Tang Poetry", in which the fourth section, Luo Chen's Cartoon Design Exhibition of Tang Frontier Fortress Poems, is the module exhibition of this research topic. The exhibition process and related research will be part of the design guide. The exhibition will be held from February 14 to March 31, 2023.

During the exhibition, ordinary citizens and tourists can visit the site. The researchers made relevant research data statistics in the form of questionnaires. 500 target audiences who

visited the exhibition were taken as the research objects, and they were investigated before and after visiting the exhibition, and the data were analyzed and compared. In order to understand whether the audience's understanding level and love degree of the frontier poetry culture of the Sheng Tang Dynasty has been improved after visiting the exhibition. To see how effective this communication method was, the researchers conducted expert evaluations. This paper demonstrates the feasibility of the cartoon design of frontier poems in the flourishing Tang Dynasty and its significance to the spread of Tang poems through differentiation and comparison.

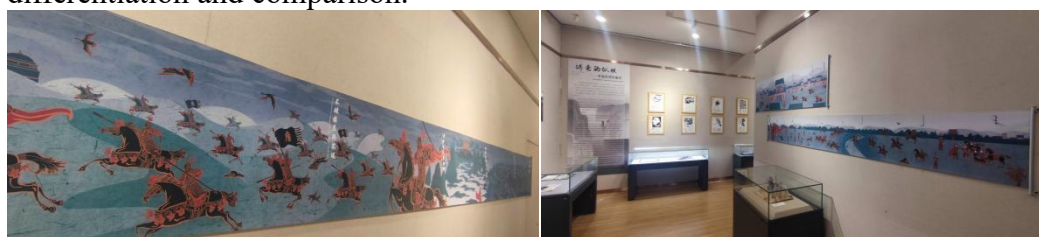


Figure 11. Display of design works, photographed by researchers (2023) Figure 116, Explained by researchers to visitors

Source: Photographed by staff (2023)



Figure 12. The audience visited other related works in the exhibition

Source: Photographed by researchers (2023)

## Conclusion

According to the results of the questionnaire, the target audience generally believed that the exhibition could enhance their understanding and interest in the frontier fortress poems of the prosperous Tang Dynasty. Nearly 80% of the audience expressed that they would continue to learn the Frontier Fortress poems of the Prosperous Tang Dynasty, and expressed that the exhibition enhanced their patriotic feelings and improved their historical and humanistic quality. The researchers believe that the research goal has been achieved, and the conclusion is drawn that the cartoon exhibition of Frontier Sai poems of the Tang Dynasty can improve the target audience's understanding and effective cognition of Frontier Sai poems of the Tang Dynasty.

Experts generally recognized the exhibition form, recognized the researchers' research direction, and believed that the research achieved the initial stated research objectives. Some experts suggest that the researchers extend this method of study to schools to reach a wider target audience. Some experts propose to design more caricatures of Tang poems according to such research methods, compile them into books, and carry out wider dissemination and promotion through publication.

### (3) Research prospect

This research has achieved phased results. The researchers demonstrated the feasibility of this design method through a series of studies and design practice, and effectively improved the dissemination of frontier fortress poetry in the prosperous Tang Dynasty through design exhibitions. In future studies, researchers will also use this design method to design other types of poems except frontier fortress poems of Tang Dynasty, in order to demonstrate the extensibility and malleability of this design methodology. In addition, researchers will also design other literary carriers besides poetry to verify whether the design methodology can adapt to the possibility of more diversified literature to visual transformation (Yu Ji:2020 : 38).

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