

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Visual storytelling: Character illustration for Chinese Mohist culture and technology

HanWang

2024

## Thesis declaration

Visual storytelling: Character illustration for Chinese Mohist culture and technology

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master in Design at MasseyUniversity,  
Wellington, New Zealand

Han Wang

2024

## **Abstract**

In the modern era of rapid information development, visual storytelling presented through graphic novels has become an engaging form of cultural communication. Visual stories have the capacity to convey profound meanings in Chinese moral vision and life wisdom. This design project develops new character illustrations to convey a story that promotes greater understanding of the Mohist culture and technology in the worlds of historical and future China.

Illustration work for a proposed graphic novel aims to create visually engaging characters for a story that represents the history, culture, and technology of the Mohist School in a way that is easily understood by younger people and reflects on boundaries between modern technology and humanity.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my mentors, Deb Cumming and Donald Preston, for the invaluable suggestions and patient assistance they provided throughout my project. Their expert guidance and encouragement were crucial to its completion, and I am deeply grateful for their continued support and belief in my work. Additionally, I would like to thank my family for their unwavering support throughout my studies. Their encouragement and understanding have been a constant source of strength, for which I am profoundly grateful.

# Table of Contents

<b>1.0 Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>2.0 Context Review</b> .....	<b>5</b>
2.1 History of Mohist culture and values for education .....	5
2.2 Mohist technologies and machines for Illustration .....	7
2.3 Visual Storytelling .....	10
2.4 Design Precedents .....	11
2.41 Character Empathy: Shaping Audience Identity with Characters ....	11
2.42 Dual Protagonist .....	15
2.43 Use and Respect of historical culture .....	17
2.44 Visual Style Analysis .....	18
<b>3.0 Method and Design Process</b> .....	<b>22</b>
3.1 The storyline .....	22
3.2 Character Development .....	31
<b>4.0 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>5.0 References</b> .....	<b>44</b>

## 1.0 Introduction

According to Benedetto Croce, 'all history is contemporary history,' meaning that history must be viewed, discussed, and reconstructed through the perspective of the present. Contemporary history is not defined by a specific time frame but rather by whether historical facts can be connected to a current key point. (D'Amico, Trafton & Verdicchio, 1999) Therefore, the culture of history is also the culture of the present.

Just as Mohist culture occupies a significant position in Chinese historical and cultural heritage, its memory cannot be confined or suppressed. It should be preserved as a cultural symbol ingrained in the collective consciousness of every Chinese individual (Gensburger, 2016). The cultural symbols of Mohism have become blurred over time due to historical changes, and the difficulty in understanding ancient language further prevents contemporary youth from accurately comprehending Mohist culture.

In 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces', Joseph Campbell summarizes a universal narrative pattern used to tell mythological stories across different cultures. He explains the role of storytelling in conveying cultural and human universal experiences. Campbell argues that stories communicate deeper meanings through symbolism, personality, plot, helping individuals understand their growth and challenges. (Campbell, 2008). Campbell (2008) used mythological stories as examples, and the myths served as cultural carriers. The framework presented in 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces' provides a framework for creating a visual story about contemporary Mohism within the project. Joseph Campbell summarized the hero's growth process into three stages: "Ordinary World," "Growth," and "Return," a universal pattern called the Monomyth (Campbell, 2008).

This paper will use the framework summarized by Campbell as a basis, combining it with contemporary visual examples for analysis and synthesis. The goal is to create a visual story and characters that resonate with contemporary youth, fostering empathy and identity. The aim is to awaken the latent understanding of Mohist cultural symbols among today's young people, helping them better interpret Mohist culture. It will explore methods of presenting Mohist visual stories through graphic novels in contemporary China.

## 2.0 Context Review

### 2.1 History of Mohist culture and values for Education

Mohism was founded by Mozi, originating over two thousand years ago during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods of ancient China, when society was in chaos and instability due to constant warfare. As one of the major pre-Qin philosophical schools, Mohism was as prominent as Confucianism and Daoism. Led by Mozi, its members were mostly from the lower strata of society. Although Mohist thought bears some similarities to certain Western religions, it does not have a defined system of deity worship, emphasizing instead rational thought and practical action (Huili, & Chengyong., 2022).

Under Mozi's leadership, Mohism conducted extensive research in the fields of natural sciences, philosophy, and social and political thought, surpassing the intellectual depth of Confucianism during the same period (Harbsmeier, 2013).

Mozi is considered one of China's earliest scientists, mathematicians, and philosophers. In mathematics, he provided precise definitions of the relationships between points, lines, and planes. In physics, historical records indicate that he discussed concepts akin to Newton's Second Law of Motion and discovered principles like the lever and the pinhole imaging effect (Huili, X & Chengyong., 2022).

Based on his scientific knowledge, Mozi created many advanced wooden machines that were ahead of their time, primarily used for city defense and improving people's production and daily lives. These inventions included the Mu Yuan (Wooden Kite), the Lian Nu Che (Repeating Crossbow Cart), and various mechanical devices for transportation (Huili, & Chengyong., 2022).

In philosophy, Mozi advocated for concepts such as 'unity of the world', 'integration of morality and benefit', 'respect for rules', 'peaceful coexistence', and 'mutual benefit and assistance'(Weixiang., 2013). These ideas reflected Mozi's emphasis on a just and harmonious society where moral values align with practical benefits to achieve collective welfare.

Its core concepts include: **兼爱**(Jian Ai), **非攻**(Fei Gong), **尚贤**(Shang Xian), **尚同**(Shang Tong), **节用**(Jie Yong),

**非乐**(Fei Le).The following is explained in English:

- **兼爱** (Jian Ai) - Universal Love

This advocates equal care without distinguishing between close or distant relations, believing that only if everyone loves each other can society be harmonious and stable.

- **非攻** (Fei Gong) - Non-offensive Warfare

This opposes the great suffering that war brings to people; unless it is for self-defense, it is morally unacceptable.

- **尚贤** (Shang Xian) - Promoting the Worthy

This advocates appointing people with talent and virtue to achieve effective governance.

- **尚同** (Shang Tong) - Promoting Conformity

This advocates preventing chaos by promoting hierarchical harmony.

- **节用** (Jie Yong) - Frugality in Use

This condemns luxury and waste, emphasizing that resources should be used to meet basic needs and utilized reasonably.

- **非乐** (Fei Le) - Opposition to Extravagant and Resource-Wasting Entertainment

This opposes endless indulgence to prevent resources from being wasted.

(Defoort, 2011)

Mozi developed a rigorous and comprehensive system of thought based on practical scientific principles. In a sense, Mozi's ideas were ahead of his time and closely aligned with modern perspectives (Huili, & Chengyong, 2022). However, despite their advanced Ideological principles, Mohist philosophy did not become mainstream in Chinese society.

Contemporary Chinese literary scholars confirmed that after the Qin Dynasty, Mohism gradually faded from Chinese history and was largely forgotten until ancient texts were discovered in tomb excavations in recent times, bringing renewed awareness of Mozi's contributions. Contemporary cultural scholars argue that the mainstream ideology and social system of ancient China lacked adequate understanding and respect for Mohist culture, resulting in its significant marginalization over the two millennia from the Qin to the Han dynasties.(Huili, & Chengyong, 2022).

There has been a significant cultural loss in numerous scientific and technological achievements created by Mozi, and in the broader ideological system of Mohism over time. The loss of the documents of Mozi, and the practical rationality and empirical thinking of traditional Confucianism have become cultural factors restricting the further development of science, technology and spiritual civilization (Huili, & Chengyong,2022).

The European Renaissance is commonly highlighted as a period of renewed focus on ancient Greek classical literature, leading to an unprecedented flourishing of European art. In that historical context, many artists were born and created outstanding artworks, such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, and others (LI Chenyang, 2008) Mohist culture in China holds a position like that of ancient Greek culture in Europe. It deeply influenced ancient China in philosophy and science (LI Chenyang, 2008). Although some of its concepts have many limitations in modern society, many ideas and scientific research are still suitable for contemporary society (Lee, H. C. 2021).

Unlike Confucianism, which served the rulers, Mohist philosophy is the closest to modern human thought (Harbsmeier, 2013). However, due to the ancient nature of Mohist culture, and the differences between ancient and modern languages, it has become difficult for contemporary young people to understand. Finding a way to better communicate with today's youth has become particularly important in visual design.

From my research, it is evident that although Mohist thought originated over two thousand years ago during the Warring States period, its core principles, such as **兼爱**(Jian Ai), **非攻**(Fei Gong), **节用**(Jie Yong), **非乐**(Fei Le), still have the potential to guide young people. **兼爱**(Jian Ai) advocates for universal love and care, and has the potential to help young people develop empathy. Additionally, Mohist thought of **非攻**(Fei Gong) opposes violence and aggression, guiding young people to resolve conflicts through peaceful means, reducing tendencies toward violence. In addition, **节用**(Jie Yong) and **非乐**(Fei Le) teachings encourage young people to practice frugality in their consumption, It advocates resisting overconsumption and promotes the rational use of resources(Lee, 2022).

By incorporating these Mohist cultural ideas into visual stories we can provide moral and value-based guidance for young people, helping them cultivate a positive lifestyle and attitude.

In 'New Democracy,' Founder of New China Mao Tse Tung stressed "A splendid old culture was created during the long period of Chinese feudal society. To study the development of this old culture, to reject its feudal dross and assimilate its democratic essence is a necessary condition for developing our new national culture and increasing our national self-confidence, but we should never swallow anything and everything uncritically (Mao, 1967)".

Therefore, it is necessary to redesign the ancient Mohist culture, transforming it into contemporary visual graphics to suit the reading habits of young people who are seeking self-identity today.

## 2.2 Mohist technologies and machines

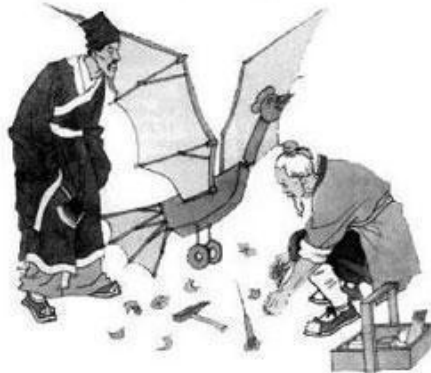
木鸢(Mùyūān)

The term "**木鸢**" (Mùyūān) can be broken down into two Chinese characters

**木**:means "wood", **鸢**:typically refers to a kite.

According to historical records, Mozi said to his students“**今我为鸢,三年成,蜚一日而败**”(Defoort, 2011). This means that Mozi once spent three years crafting a bird-like kite from wood, which flew in the sky for only one day before being destroyed.

From a contemporary perspective, we might find Mozi amusing. However, as an ancient Chinese figure from over two thousand years ago, in an era of scarce resources and limited knowledge, his ability to master such technology and craftsmanship through his own efforts is truly admirable. Moreover, his courage to experiment and explore—spending three years developing a wooden kite to achieve flight—and his willingness to acknowledge his mistakes after failure embody a spirit that modern people can learn from.

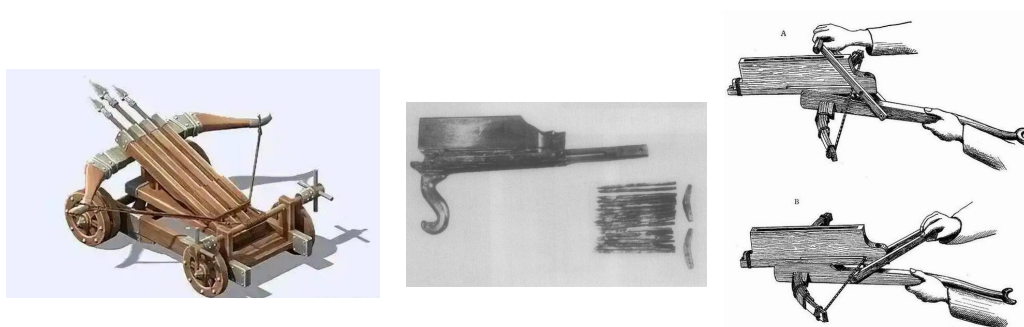


木鸢(Mùyūān). (n.d.). [Photograph]. Source unknown.

## 连弩车(Lian Lu Car)

Although the topic of Mozi's wooden kite may be controversial in contemporary times, the repeating crossbow chariot is documented in Mozi text“备临以连弩之车”(Defoort, 2011). The literature provides a detailed description of the repeating crossbow chariot, portraying it as a large-scale urban warfare weapon capable of releasing sixty large arrows and countless small arrows at once. The massive arrow tails are tied with ropes to the wheel, allowing them to be retracted and reused (Defoort, 2011).

Zhu Ge Liang also from the Warring States period, designed a small repeating crossbow based on Mozi's repeating crossbow. According to historical records, the repeating crossbow was equipped with a wooden box that could hold ten arrows. When the wooden string was pressed down, one arrow would be fired, and the iron arrows in the box would drop into the arrow groove due to their weight. By repeatedly pulling the trigger string, arrows could be continuously launched. Such devices have been found in excavated Warring States artifacts (Hsiao & Yan, 2012).



连弩车(Lian Lu Car) and Repeating crossbow. (n.d.). [Photograph]. Source unknown.

Limited by the historical context and technological conditions, over two thousand years ago, Mozi, the leader of the Mohist school, explored optics, engineering, defensive technologies, logical reasoning, and practical methods. Mozi described various engineering technologies, especially in fortifications and weapon design. He advocated pragmatism, emphasizing that science and technology should serve the actual needs of humanity and improve people's lives(Defoort, 2011).

This aligns with the concept that Science and technology are merely auxiliary tools to serve people, not to replace human labor. Therefore, I believe that Mohist technology is more like an extension of human wisdom.

In contemporary society, with the development of artificial intelligence and automation technologies, there is a trend across various industries where modern technology is replacing human labor with machines. German philosopher Martin Heidegger discussed the boundaries of technology and science emphasizing that technology is a way for humans to understand and participate in the world, but over-reliance on technology may lead to alienation between humans and their own existence (Hadjoannou, Merwin, & Wendland, 2018).

Numerous science fiction works, such as *'The Terminator'* and *'Resident Evil'*, have warned about boundary issues between technology and humanity. In the movie *Resident Evil*, due to a biological virus leak, most of humanity around the world is infected and turned into zombies (Anderson, 2002). In *Terminator*, humanity's excessive reliance on artificial intelligence leads to its uncontrolled development, ultimately resulting in the destruction of the world (Cameron, 1984).

This project explores the design of future characters by integrating Biopunk and Post-apocalyptic style. Biopunk, shifts its focus from information technology to biotechnology, reflecting concerns about biotechnology's implications (Schmeink, L. (2017). Post-apocalyptic style, on the other hand, depicts a post-apocalyptic world filled with resource scarcity and societal collapse, resonating with humanity's worries about war and decline (Murphy, A. 2013). The combination of these two styles not only aligns with popular visual trends in China but also creates a strong visual and philosophical contrast for Mohist technology.

The project retains traditional costumes and wooden technology elements of Mohist members from the Qin Dynasty in China. Through the contrast of combining ancient and modern elements, the project's purpose is to help contemporary teenagers better understand the differences between ancient and future technologies. Although no one has truly experienced machines completely replacing humans, the rapid development of technology has already sparked widespread concern and discussion. The project aims to guide young audiences to consider maintaining boundaries between humans and machines in future technological progress, ensuring that technological advancement does not erode the essence and value of humanity.

## 2.3 Understanding the audience for Visual Storytelling

My project's target audience is teenagers aged 16 to 20. They are at a critical stage transitioning from adolescence to adulthood in their way of thinking. Their psychological characteristics include; strong self-awareness, significant emotional fluctuations longing for independence, seeking of self-identity, and questioning of authority and traditional concepts. At the same time, they are emotionally sensitive and may exhibit impulsive behavior (Erikson, 1968).

In Contemporary China, many teenagers are influenced by consumerism, excessively pursuing material enjoyment, leading to phenomena like overspending and competitive consumption

with dependence on material goods (Erikson, 1968).

China has experienced unprecedented information technology development. However, this phenomenon has led to many jobs being replaced by machines, causing many people to lose their jobs (Tran, Le, & Hang, 2023). In today's highly competitive social environment, teenagers face intense competition and pressure in both academics and employment (Guo, 2024). This can cause a level of anxiety and lack of attention.

Purely focusing on historical and cultural dissemination can be too dry; choosing a more relaxed visual communication approach is more likely to be accepted by teenagers.

Storytelling can introduce cultural values and heritage to younger generations to spread, transmit, and preserve cultural values (Zort, Karabacak, Öznur, & Dağlı, 2023).

American cartoonist Will Eisner, known as the 'Father of the Graphic Novel' pointed out that illustrations, as an art form combining images and text, can more effectively convey complex stories and emotions across language and cultural barriers (Eisner, 1985).

Creating a visual story about Mohist culture set in contemporary society can communicate more effectively and directly with teenagers, gaining their recognition (Jin ' e, Harun, & Nasir, 2024). Using graphic novels as a medium for telling visual stories can be an effective tool for young people's fragmented reading habits. This helps them gain a complete story experience in a short period.

Visual novels, with their reflective narrative style, can guide them to revisit the content repeatedly over a longer period (Ensslin et al., 2016), providing ample space for understanding and contemplating Mohist culture.

## 2.4 Design Precedents

### 2.41 Character Empathy: Shaping Audience Identity with Characters

Nezha's original depiction comes from the Chinese classical novel 'Investiture of the Gods' (Lu Xixing, 1570).

As a child god in Chinese mythology, his story has been adapted into various forms of media. In the analysis of Nezha's story, child education scholars have suggested "Anthropological studies show that the cult of Nezha is widespread in Chinese-speaking areas, including Taiwan, Singapore and mainland China(Jin, J., & Wang, C. Y. (2023)". Therefore, I will analyze the Nezha stories from two different periods to explore methods for creating Mohist characters.

In the 1979 published Nezha comics and animated stories, both the storyline and character design replicated the content of the novel. It tells how Nezha showed amazing martial arts and magic from birth. To protect his family and village, Nezha was forced to sacrifice himself by committing suicide during a battle with the evil Dragon King. His master, Taiyi Zhenren, used lotus roots as his body to resurrect him, and he gained powerful magic that allowed him to transform into three heads and six arms, holding various weapons and stepping on flaming wheels. In the end, he defeated the evil Dragon King and became a hero admired by the people (Wang, Yan, & Xu, 1979).

This version of the visual image has strong political overtones, with the colours used being gold and red, which are the colours of the Chinese national flag, symbolising the triumphs and achievements of the Chinese revolution. Specifically, the evil character Ao Bing is portrayed in shades of grey and white, a colour scheme meant to symbolise evil and darkness. In contrast, the visual portrayal of the protagonist, Nezha, takes on a very different look: his features include bright, shining eyes, fair skin, and a determined stance in his fight against the Ao Bing. This portrayal not only creates a nearly perfect image of a child hero in the eyes of Chinese audiences, but also, more deeply, celebrates the great victory of the Chinese peasant revolution in the context of the historical narrative of the time, with rich political and cultural implications(Jin, & Wang,(2023).

Although it had a profound impact on several generations of audiences and shaped the standard of traditional hero images, it can be argued that is no longer directly applicable in a contemporary social context(Jin& Wang, (2023).



Nezha Conquers the Dragon King(Wang, Yan, & Xu, 1979).

The popular contemporary Chinese film 'Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child' (2019) features a new version of Nezha influenced by Western animation character design, particularly Disney, portrayed in a three-dimensional animation style that emphasizes more character details. The design retains iconic elements from the original novel, such as Nezha's bun-like hairstyle and the broad, red-and-yellow robes. However, the storyline is transformed by director JiaoZi, who subverts the traditional depiction of Nezha and Ao Bing. In this version, Nezha represents the cursed demon orb, while Ao Bing represents the blessed spirit orb. While the story still revolves around the bond between Nezha and Ao Bing, it tells a new tale of their growth together from a reversed perspective based on their redefined roles (JiaoZi, 2019).

The new visual design incorporates Gothic elements, with the bright red and yellow hues transformed into darker, crimson tones to symbolize anger and rebellion (Byron & Townshend, 2014). In terms of character appearance, the large eyes are retained, but smoky eye makeup has been added. The short-statured Nezha, with his hands in his pockets and a laid-back posture, conveys a sense of rebellion. His expressions make him resemble a rebellious teenager rather than a guardian of the village. Throughout the story, although he is clumsy and playful, often making things worse, He ultimately becomes a hero who protects the village, with the support of his parents (JiaoZi, 2019).



Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child - Ne Zha (JiaoZi, 2019)

The new version of 'Ao Bing, the dragon', shifts from a dark color palette to bright blue and white tones, combined with his tall and handsome appearance, presenting an image of a righteous teenager to the audience (JiaoZi, 2019).



Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child - Ao Bing (JiaoZi, 2019)

In 'Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child', the character design breaks away from the traditional perfect hero image. For the average viewer, the hero is no longer an unattainable figure of success, but rather resembles an ordinary person. From birth, Nezha is labeled as a 'demon child' and faces prejudice and rejection from the villagers. He seeks attention through rebellious acts, reflecting the emptiness and loneliness of his inner world.

Whyke and Mugica (2022), argue 'New Nezha' in Chinese animation expresses the need and call for a traditional heroic image in a particular era. This version of Nezha, influenced by the context of contemporary Chinese society, symbolizes individualism and represents the struggle of the modern Chinese individual, resonating with marginalized and vulnerable groups.

Drawing on the precedents above, this exploration provides a direction for creating character resonance to shape audience identification with the characters.

The design of this type of hero highlights their imperfect side. The hero grows through significant self-doubt and inner struggle, ultimately returning to become a hero. These experiences make him appear more human, more real, and more distinctive than the traditional hero character, making it easier to establish an emotional connection because his ordinariness is more like a microcosm of modern young people. After all, in real life, most ordinary people seem unremarkable in appearance, personality, and ability. Everyone is 'growing' with constant mistakes and difficulties.

In the real world, most ordinary people share Nezha's sense of 'ordinariness' and the challenges he faces, yet not everyone can "return" and become a hero like Nezha. The story and personality of the new Nezha is more likely to emotionally resonate with young people who have not yet succeeded in their own journey of 'return'.

There is relevant data that contemporary young people define themselves and build their sense of self by identifying with groups that share similar interests, values, and lifestyles. This also helps them find their place in society and further shape their personality and life direction (Sussman, Pokhrel, Ashmore, & Brown, 2007).

In visual design, the characters are the sum of visual symbols. The key to enabling young people to develop a sense of self-identity lies in the characters of a story. Creating a visual character that reflects the personality of contemporary youth, including appearance, personality, posture, and motivations, allows visible similarities to themselves, thereby empathy and imitation of the character.

Scott McCloud (1994) emphasized the importance of various visual symbols in *Understanding Comics*, noting that complex concepts and emotions can be expressed through visual symbols. (Mohist philosophy can similarly be distilled into symbolic elements that can be integrated into the appearance, personality, and costume design of the story's visual characters. When the audience identifies with these characters, they can serve as positive role models. Additionally, they can offer spiritual support to young people facing various challenges and the high levels of mental stress in modern life.

Therefore, I conclude that a successful Mohist cultural visual story must feature authentic and complex characters as visual symbols, incorporating personality traits and growth experiences. It is essential to guide the audience in establishing a sense of identity and evoke empathy, considering the contemporary context.

In many visual stories popular with contemporary Chinese audiences(Box Office Mojo, 2020), we can see similar ordinary elements. For example, Sony Pictures adapted the comic 'Venom: Lethal Protector' into a movie in 2018, telling the story of an ordinary reporter, Eddie, who loses his job and accidentally merges with an alien symbiote to gain powerful abilities. He names himself Venom and starts protecting vulnerable groups from harm (Fleischer, Pinkner, Rosenberg, & Marcel, 2018).



Venom(Fleischer, Pinkner, Rosenberg, & Marcel, 2018).

In 2019, Joker was released, produced by Warner Bros. Pictures, adapted from the comic 'Batman: The Killing Joke' (1988). It depicts his story as a failed comedian who cannot control his occasional laughter due to illness. But he always remains optimistic and longs to make the audience happy through his performances but goes insane due to a series of unfortunate events (Phillips & Silver, 2019).

From the appearances of these two characters, we can see that they are not traditional hero images, even somewhat ugly or alternative like Nezha,. In such character designs, their appearance may not meet traditional hero standards, but they often shoulder great responsibilities and possess an inner sense of justice. By challenging social prejudices and external perceptions, they try to prove their uniqueness and value, and they are heroes in their own field.

Therefore, designing characters with ordinary appearances but rich inner worlds in contemporary design can make the connection between characters and audiences closer.



JOKER(Phillips & Silver, 2019).

## 2.42 The narrative mode of the hero's journey

In the book 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces', myths and cultural stories were compared from all over the world (Campbell, 2008). The hero's growth process is conveyed in three stages: Ordinary World, Growth, and Return, a universal pattern called the Monomyth (Campbell, 2008). A story of hero's growth in conveys culture and universal human experiences. The hero represents the common psychological and spiritual journey of mankind. Hero's stories convey deeper meanings about human life through symbols, patterns, and characters, helping people understand their own growth and challenges (Campbell, 2008). Mythology itself is a form of cultural storytelling.



'The Mythmakers: The Remarkable Fellowship of C.S. Lewis & J.R.R. Tolkien (John Hendrix, 2018)

Contemporary illustrator John Hendrix created 'The Mythmakers: The Remarkable Fellowship of C.S. Lewis & J.R.R. Tolkien', a graphic novel that captures the essence of two legendary authors' lives. In this story, Hendrix employs a dual-protagonist approach, presenting the cultural narrative in an engaging, child-like picture book format that makes it more accessible to audiences. By contrasting the personalities of the two authors—C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien—he effectively highlights their unique characteristics. The story details the lives of the two most influential fantasy authors of the 20th century, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. It starts with their idyllic childhoods, moves through the trauma of World War I, and progresses to their creative breakthroughs during the World War II period. Through their mutual support and encouragement, they inspired each other to create iconic works such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Their friendship—one of mutual inspiration and support—forms the core of the narrative (Hunter, S. 2024).

In this "hero" story, the challenges are not battles or explorations in a fantasy realm, but struggles in the real world. John Hendrix uses characters as symbolic visual elements. In the illustrated poster, he depicts a lion—symbolizing courage, sacrifice, and sacred power—to represent C.S. Lewis, a clear reference to Aslan, the character from Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*. He also uses a wise wizard to represent J.R.R. Tolkien, which draws from the character Gandalf in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (Hunter, S. 2024). The hero's journey is not just a story about a few great individuals; it symbolizes the universal experiences of everyone as they face challenges, overcome obstacles, gain wisdom, and ultimately return to society. Heroes often embody an idealized version of ourselves, or who we aspire to become. The challenges faced by these heroes reflect common issues encountered by many people in their everyday lives.

Considering the many differences between Mohist culture and technology and contemporary culture and technology, the narrative style of multiple protagonists will be adopted in this project and characters with symbolic meaning.

In related literary studies, it has been found that multiple protagonist stories provide more opportunities for audience empathy. Instead of passively accepting the narrative of a single character, viewers are encouraged to actively compare multiple characters and select one with whom they identify (Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis, & Ralf Schneider, 2010). By comparing the similarities and differences in the appearance, personality, and attire of the characters, audiences can either empathize with certain characters or distance themselves from others. This, in turn, helps deepen the cultural understanding and meaning derived from visual storytelling.

As discussed earlier, Mohism, as part of ancient Chinese culture, exists in the cultural memory of every Chinese person, however the specific visual forms of Mohist culture are unfamiliar to contemporary audiences. Whether it is Mohist culture, Mohist clothing, or Mohist technology, contemporary audiences cannot imagine their specific appearances.

Considering the significant differences between Mohist culture and technology and those appreciated by contemporary youth, this project adopts a dual-protagonist approach by creating an adventure story featuring two characters from different timelines—one in ancient China during the Qin Dynasty, where Mohism was present, and the other in a post-apocalyptic future where humanity has been devastated by the overdevelopment of technology. The two characters and their respective worlds symbolize the positive aspects of Mohist culture and the negative aspects of contemporary culture. Their distinct yet similar destinies intersect when they meet each other through time travel.

On the one hand, the strong contrast between Mohist elements and modern elements enables viewers to clearly distinguish the differences through visual perception, deepening their understanding. On the other hand, the theme of the human-machine relationship encourages young people to reflect on the boundaries between humans and machines. Mohist culture is no longer just a distant historical concept, but rather a time-travel adventure story relevant to today's culture.

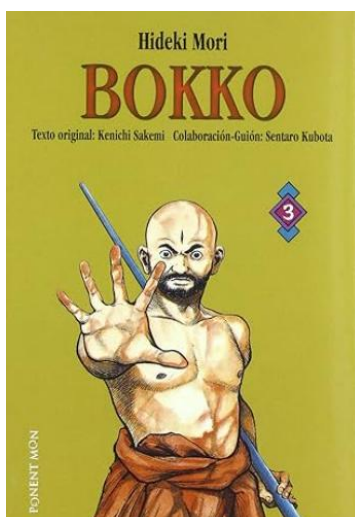
### 2.43 Use and Respect of Historical Culture

Mohist culture has been featured in some other contemporary films and illustrations; 'Mohist Mechanism'( Yili2021),'The Legend of Qin '( Shen, 2012), 'A Battle of Wits'( Cheung, 2006),Bokko(Mori, 1996).

Japanese cartoonist Hideki Mori's cartoon work 'Bokko', which is adapted from a novel of the same name in Japan, describes the story that Mohism helped other countries resist during the Warring States period and achieved short-term success in Japan. The manga series 'Bokko' (Sakemi & Mori, 1992-1996) was recognized for its narrative and artwork with the Shogakukan Manga Award in 1995.

Mohist culture is not native to Japan, so this work will naturally have many differences in creating historical characters and adapting historical plots. Goodwin, Williams, and Snell Herzog, through their analysis of American and Western European cultures, pointed out that when people from foreign countries study the indigenous cultures of other nations, even if they have some translated literature as references, there will still be many deviations(Goodwin, Williams, & Herzog, 2020).

Considering the differences in cultural background, beliefs and moral values between Japan and China, their over-adapted plots and painting styles may not be suitable for contemporary young people in China. We need to make adaptations based on respecting the original culture of history. Cartoonist Marcos Mateu (ref year?) believes composition, characters, and design all need to serve the story's worldview, otherwise, the audience will not be able to connect characters and the story. The characters in storybooks are the best visual symbols, including their expressions, costumes, personality traits, motivations, beliefs and values. My intentions in creating visual Mohist characters, and settings in the story conform to the core ideas of Mohist culture recorded in Chinese history. Moreover, elements like costumes and appearance do not deviate significantly from historical records, as this is key to audience acceptance of illustrated characters.



BOKKO(Ken'ichi Sakemi , 2012)

## 2.44 Visual style analysis:

### The Future is Now: Nightfall

Josan Gonzalez is a well-known contemporary cyberpunk illustrator using cyberpunk illustrations. He has created a series of future worlds filled with chaos, technology, and the fusion of humans and machines (Josan Gonzale, 2016).

In Gonzalez's works, he emphasizes the use of lines, particularly in depicting details through precise outlines. Every small corner of his artwork is filled with numerous elements, such as street corners, mechanical devices on characters, and weapons on vehicles. The combination of high-precision lines and high-contrast colors creates a highly impactful visual effect. Despite the complexity of his compositions, viewers can clearly perceive the individual elements and the concepts he aims to convey (Josan Gonzale, 2016).

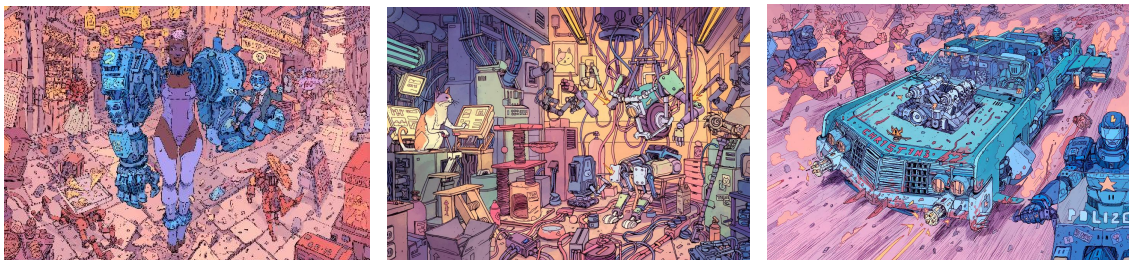
Scott McCloud (1993) explains in 'Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art' that visual art can convey complex emotions instantly through the use of lines and colors, allowing the audience to connect more quickly and deeply with the story. This multisensory engagement means that readers are not just "reading" comics, but "experiencing" them ( McCloud, 1993).

This precedent is linked to this project in style. By varying line thickness and combining curves with straight lines, the artist can highlight key parts of the composition and make the characters' emotions more intuitive. For instance, the combination of straight, thick lines can convey tension and oppression, while the combination of thin lines and curves can create a sense of relaxation. This approach not only enhances the emotional expressiveness of the composition but also ensures the uniqueness of each character.

In the Mohist cultural story, it revolves around two different characters and different worlds. By adopting Josan Gonzalez's lines and color style, audiences can more clearly distinguish the various elements in the two worlds.

The contrast of warm and cool colors not only provides a strong visual impact but also highlights the contrasting elements of ancient Chinese Mohist technology, and the atmosphere of future high technology.

I believe that fashion is a cycle, and the same goes for art styles. A particular style may be popular in the present, but it doesn't necessarily guarantee its popularity in the future. This project aims to promote Mohist culture, focusing on a more enduring cultural influence. Adopting this linear style ensures broad acceptance in the field of visual storytelling.

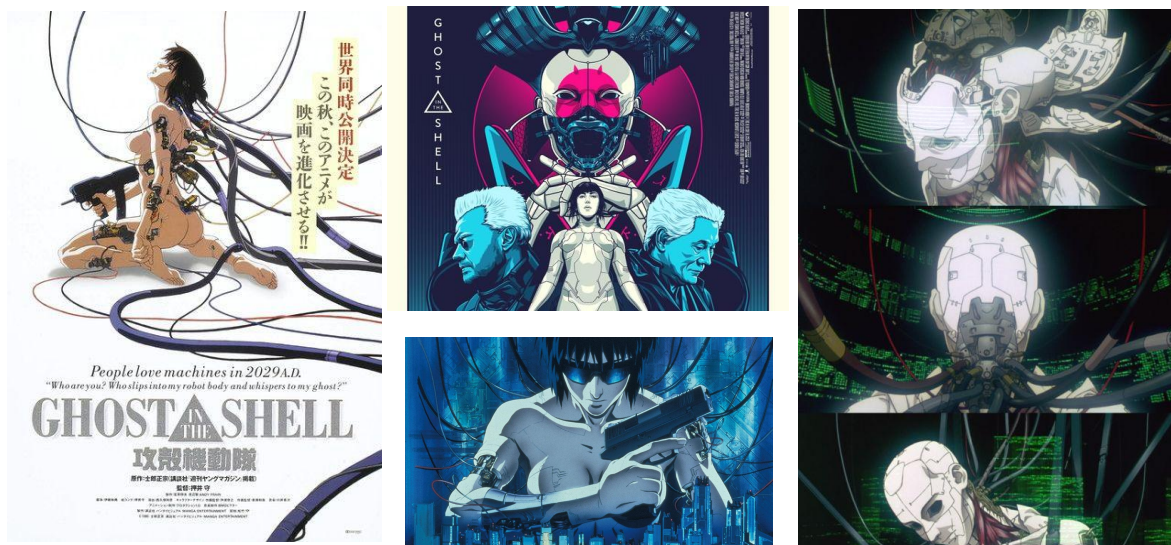


The Future is Now: Nightfall(Josan Gonzalez, 2022)

## Ghost in the Shell

Masamune Shirow's manga 'Ghost in the Shell' deeply explores the relationship between technology, humans, and society. Its illustrative style and content depict a cyberpunk future where technology is highly advanced, and the boundaries between humans and technology become increasingly blurred. Cyberpunk often features high technology replacing the human body and data substituting for the human brain. The protagonist, Motoko Kusanagi, created by Masamune Shirow, is a product of the combination of a cybernetic body and human consciousness. The story raises an important question: does human consciousness need to rely on biological flesh? When our bodies are mechanized and our consciousness digitized, can we still retain a "self"? (Shirow, 1989)

This precedent is linked to this project with the use of symbolic stories. Although this manga is set in a cyberpunk context, it provided me with an initial inspiration in terms of story structure and meaning. In today's technologically advanced China, the cyberpunk style is very popular among young people (Sun & Zhou, 2022). As a designer, I need to think about the relationship between humans and machines. Mohist philosophy views technology quite differently from the cyberpunk perspective, seeing it as a tool that should assist humanity and improve human life. To highlight the contrast between these two perspectives and enhance the story's conflict, I created another future character strongly integrated with technology. This character symbolizes humanity's control and use of technology, emphasizing the Mohist idea that technology should be an auxiliary tool rather than a dominant force.



Ghost in the Shell(Masamune Shirow, 1989)

## Human Target

Greg Smallwood is a comic artist who works for Marvel. 'Human Target' is a comic he co-created with writer Tom King. His style mainly features bold pencil lines that shape the details of characters and rich colors that create the atmosphere of the images.

This comic tells the story of the protagonist Christopher Chance, who acts as the 'Human Target' disguising himself help clients escape danger while investigating and eliminating those threats. In addition to action and adventure elements, the story also depicts Christopher Chance's struggles with losing himself due to money, as well as his complex relationships with clients, enemies, and allies (Smallwood & King, 2022).

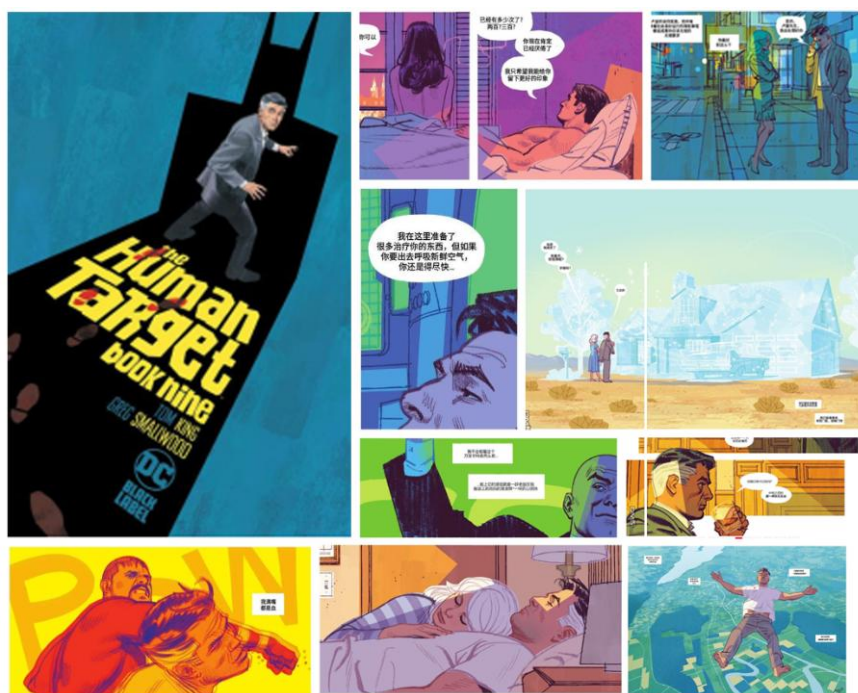
Greg Smallwood's rich use of color plays a crucial role in depicting the emotional changes of the characters and the atmosphere of different scenes. When the protagonist is in danger, high-saturation black and deep blue are used to create a tense atmosphere. In combat scenes, red conveys violence and conflict, while blue suggests the protagonist's calm and rational thinking. When there is a complicated relationship, the scene is rendered in mysterious purple. It is evident that the overall warm and cool tones of the environment also shift to fit different scenarios, such as warm colors in safe spaces and cool colors when facing danger. Additionally, Smallwood changes color saturation and contrasting colors to highlight key elements of the scene for draw the gaze of audiences (Smallwood & King, 2022).

The artist Wassily Kandinsky states, "Color is a power which directly influences the soul" (Brandabur, 1973).

A visual story can use rich colors and imagery to quickly convey emotions and themes to the audience.

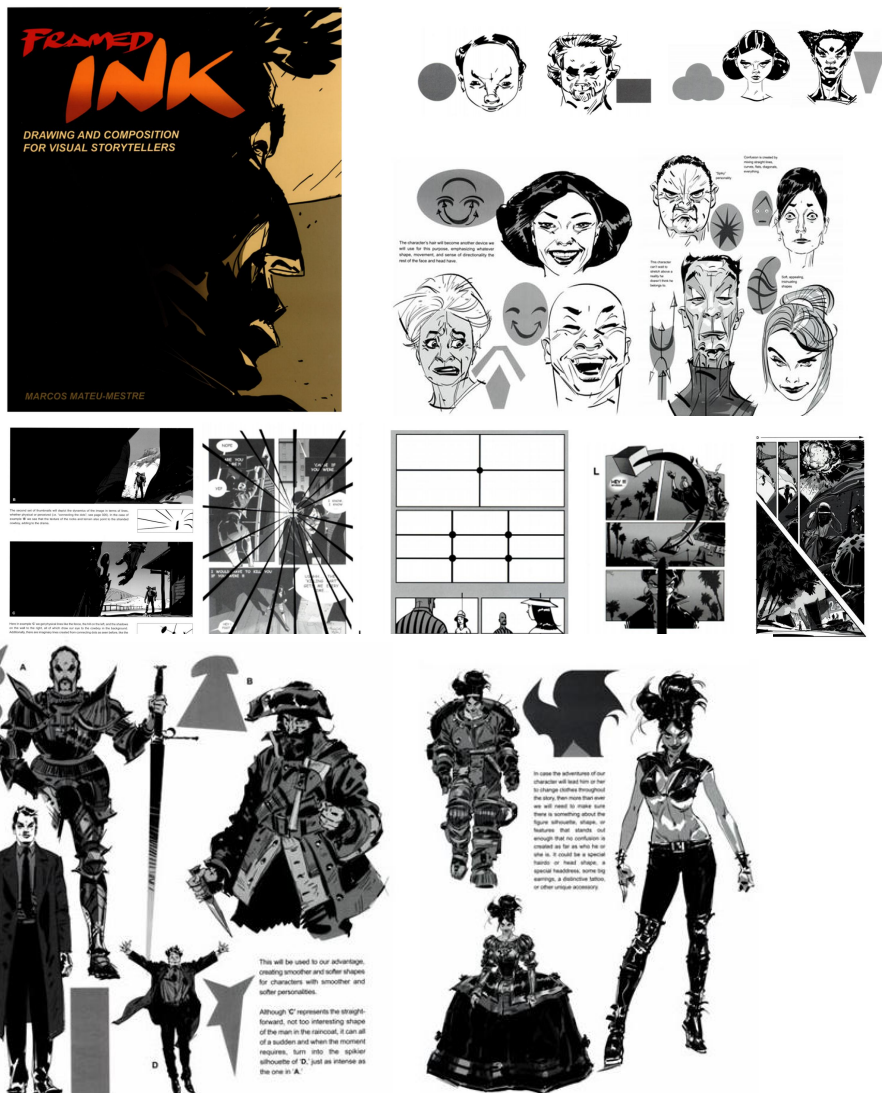
The use of color is an important exploration in the creation of illustration in this project.

In today's highly developed internet era, designing visually rich works with vibrant colors for contemporary young people can better communicate emotions. In this project, there are many complex elements that need to be expressed with two opposing characters and two different worlds. Coloring methods distinguish between the Mohist and future technology elements in the images, as well as scenes in different timelines serve as a reference.



Human Target(Smallwood & King, 2022)

## Framed Ink: Drawing and Composition for Visual Storytellers



Framed Ink: Drawing and Composition for Visual Storytellers(Mateu-Mestre, 2021)

In illustrator Marcos Mateu-Mestre's book 'Framed Ink: Drawing and Composition for Visual Storytellers', he discusses that in character creation, the use of straight lines can make the audience feel the character's seriousness, while curves make them feel softness (Mateu-Mestre, 2021).

He argues that simplifying complex shapes into basic geometric forms provides a more direct method for conveying emotions. By first using geometric shapes to establish a character's personality, details can then be added to the simplified geometry (Mateu-Mestre, 2021).

The character's expression and posture are very important in showing the character's personality. Mateu-Mestre (2021) explains that in scenes, you can use changes in light and shadow and composition to highlight the visual center and guide the audience's gaze, as well as convey different emotions like fear, anticipation, and tension (Mateu-Mestre, 2021).

This project is based on his theories to convey character personalities, establish contrasting relationships and motivations, and better engage the audience in understanding the conveyed values. The use of distinct simplified shapes enhances the recognizability of multiple characters within the project, thereby reinforcing audience recognition and facilitating deeper retention of each character's identity.

### 3.0 Method and Design Process

Methods employing secondary research and iterative design development for illustrative character development is used throughout the project. To begin, it was considered important to write a brief storyline to give context to the character illustrations.

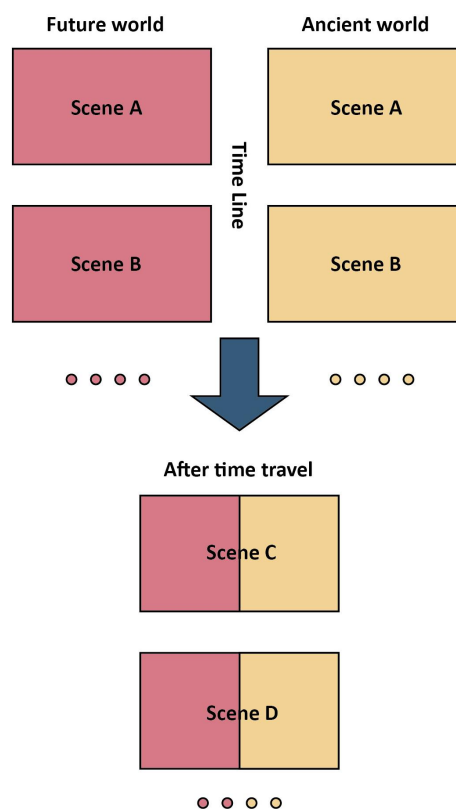
#### 3.1 The storyline and Early Renditions

Based on previous exploration and investigation, my story will feature two opposing protagonists and two different world timelines. One timeline is a future post-apocalyptic world, and the other is set during the period of ancient Chinese Mohist culture.

The story tells of their completely different yet somewhat similar births and growth experiences. At the beginning, two separate storylines develop in their respective times. At a certain point, something happens that causes the two timelines to merge.

The merging of the timelines is when the two protagonists meet each other. After their initial fighting, they become friends and embark on an adventure together. This is a time-travel adventure story.

Figure provides a brief description of the development of two world timelines until they intersect.



(Fig. 1) Han Wang's work, Time line of story

Below are the storylines of the four parts of the story, along with the initial storyboard sketches.

### Part One: The Post-Apocalyptic World of the Future (2055)

After a nuclear war that destroyed global civilization, the world in 2055 fell into a desolate apocalypse. Humanity was nearly extinct, with survivors barely living underground, while the surface was dominated by terrifying radiation-mutated creatures. To combat the mutants, scientists attempted to fuse the genes of mutated creatures with newborns, creating half-human, half-mechanical warriors. These warriors have no individual names and are collectively known as ‘Shadows’ symbolizing the covert forces that protect humanity. Although the mutated cells grant them immense power, they also cause uncontrollable personalities and physical mutations, which are barely controlled through mechanical means.

Among them is a 12-year-old boy named ‘Ying’ (影). Due to his terrifying appearance and introverted personality, he is ostracized by his peers. He often sits alone among the ruins, staring at his own arms, pondering why he is always lonely. He longs for friendship but is afraid to get close to others.

One day, he decided to venture alone to the most dangerous city in the post-apocalyptic world in search of the source of power. Unlike the desolate wilderness, this city was teeming with numerous mutated monsters. In the city, Ying (影) continuously injected himself with potions and engaged in fierce battles with the monsters until the side effects of the potions drove him into madness. In his final moments of consciousness, he saw a massive vortex engulfing him.



1:Biochemical Laboratory    2:Monsters and ruined cities    3:Ying alone among the ruins



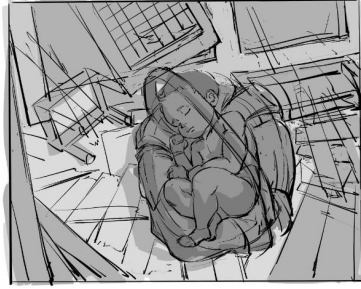
4:City in the post-apocalyptic    5: Ying fights the monster

(Fig. 2) Han Wang’s work, Group view of design results - iteration 1

### Part Two: The Warring States Period of Ancient China (770 BC – 221 BC)

During the war-torn Warring States period, China was divided into multiple nations that constantly waged war against each other. Mo's(墨) village was destroyed by the conflict, and his parents were killed. He was adopted by Mozi, the founder of the Mohist school, and joined the Mohist organization. Most members of the Mohist school were commoners who adhered to the principles of ‘universal love’ and ‘non-aggression’ helping people affected by the war everywhere and opposing invasion and violence.

At the age of 18, Mo(墨) officially became a member of the Mohist organization, carrying Mohist mechanical crossbows and mechanical birds, and traveled to various places to help those in need. Along the way, he entered a strange ancient building with a mysterious altar at its center. When he touched the altar, a powerful force knocked him down. In the moments before he fell unconscious, he saw many black shadows appearing at the center of the altar.



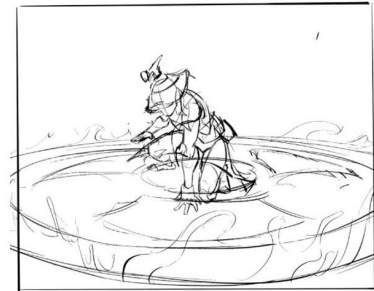
1:Orphans of war



2:Massacring Villagers During Wartime



3: Mo Embarks on an Adventure



4: Open the time gate

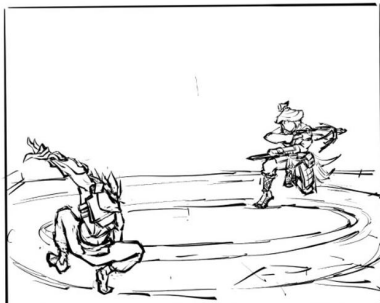
(Fig. 3)Han Wang’s work, Group view of design results - iteration 2

Part Three: The Convergence of Time and Space

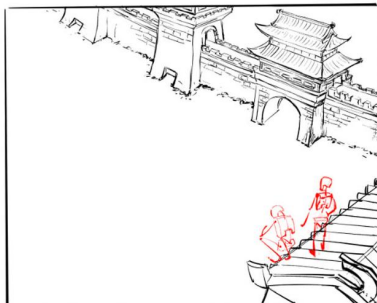
When Mo (墨) woke up, a boy with spiky hair and red eyes appeared before him, charging toward him. Mo (墨) grabbed his weapon to confront him. After a fierce battle, neither side emerged victorious, and eventually, they calmed down and began to communicate.

Mo (墨) discovered that the boy named ‘Ying’, (影) although frightening in appearance, yearned for friendship inside. He took the initiative to share his food and invited Ying(影) to accompany him, helping him find a way back to his original world. Since the building had collapsed during the fighting, Ying (影) agreed, even though he was still unfamiliar with the concept of ‘friends’.

During their journey, Mo (墨) continuously helped people affected by the war. He told Shadow, "The people you help will become your friends." Although Ying (影) remained silent, he was moved inside. He began to understand the meaning of friendship and decided to join Mo (墨) in stopping the war.



1:Ying fights Mo



2:Ying and Mo adventure

(Fig. 4)Han Wang’s work, Group view of design results - iteration 3

#### Part Four: A Shared Mission

Mo and Yingsaw soldiers from the Qin state using Mohist machinery to invade other cities from the rooftop. Mo (墨) was furious, while Ying (影) felt confused. In the palace, they discovered that the evil King of Qin was attempting to control a massive monster, which was the future mutated creature that had traveled with Ying (影) through time. The King of Qin intended to use the monster's power to unify the realm. Mo (墨) and Shadow decided to join forces to thwart the Qin King's schemes. In the final showdown, they engaged in a fierce battle with the monster.

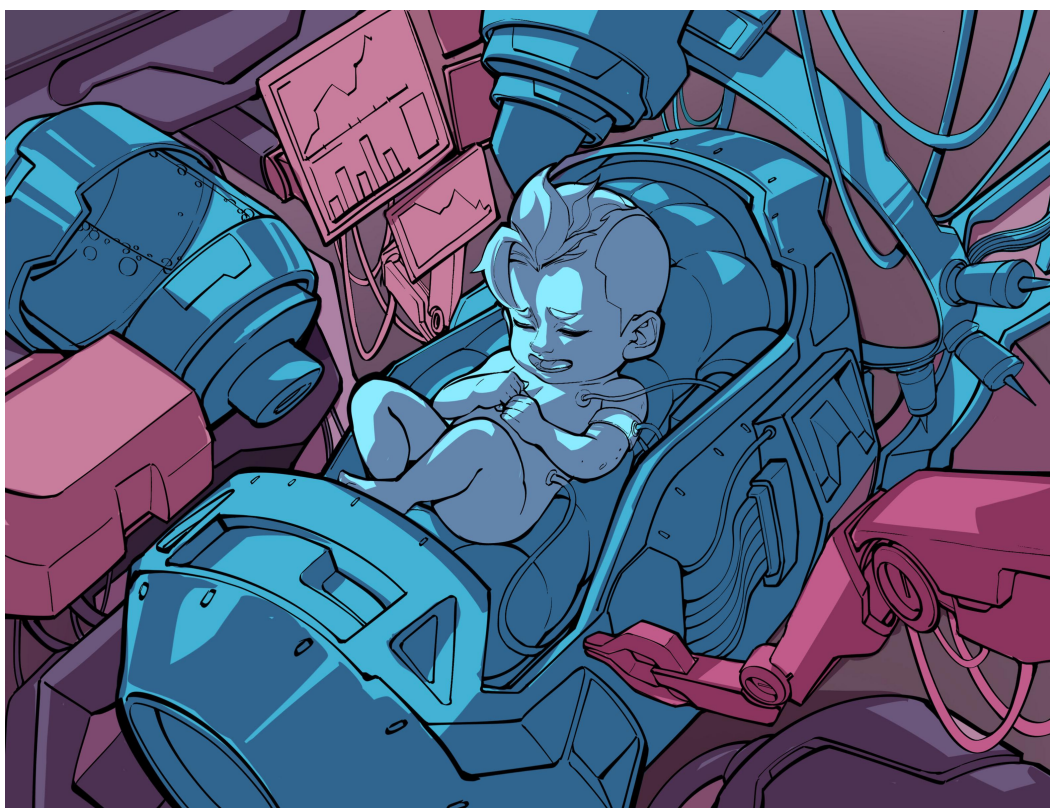
During the fight, Mo was killed by the monster while protecting Shadow and innocent people. On his deathbed, he said to Shadow, "I know you have no name. As a friend, I give you the name 'Mo.' (墨) From now on, you are 'Mo Ying.' (墨影)



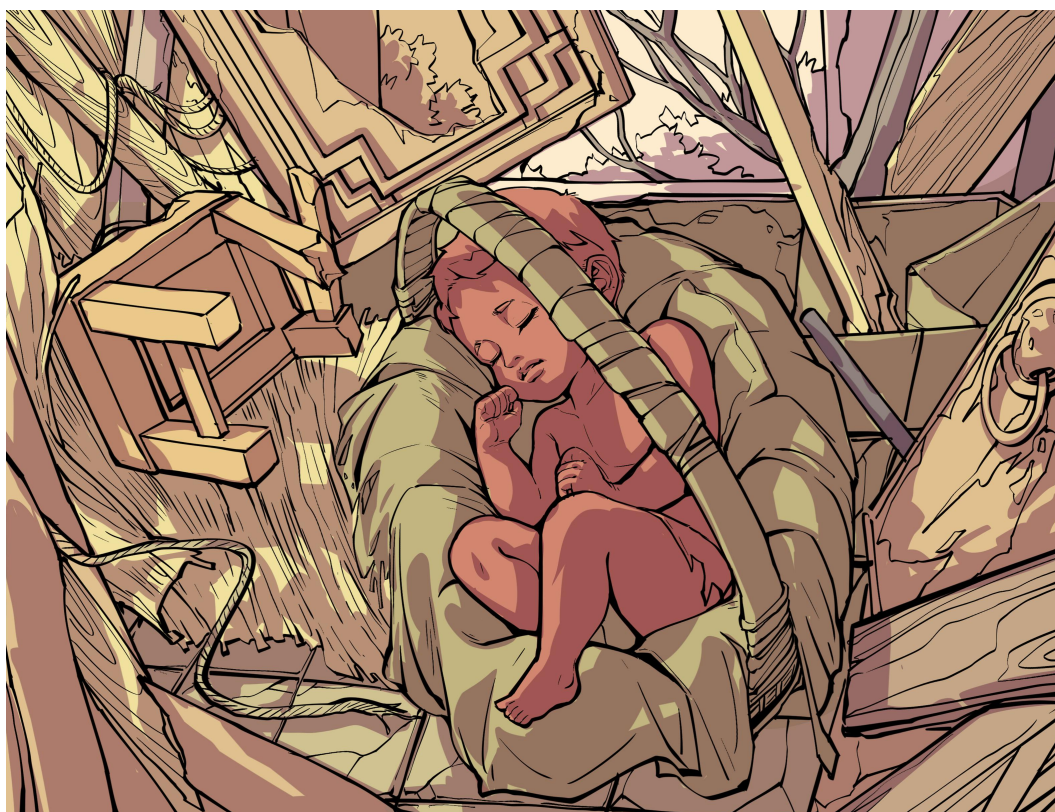
Ying and Mo fight the monster

(Fig. 5) Han Wang's work, Group view of design results - iteration 4

Inspired by Greg Smallwood and Josan Gonzalez, I used contrasting colors of varying intensities to add vibrancy to the scenes. I utilized cool, desaturated tones to convey the dark and eerie nature of the futuristic elements, while warm, vibrant hues were used to represent the essence of Mohist elements. When the two worlds begin to intersect, I blended both cool and warm tones to express their connection. I believe this approach creates a powerful visual impact for the audience, making it easier for them to perceive the different meanings represented by the two worlds.



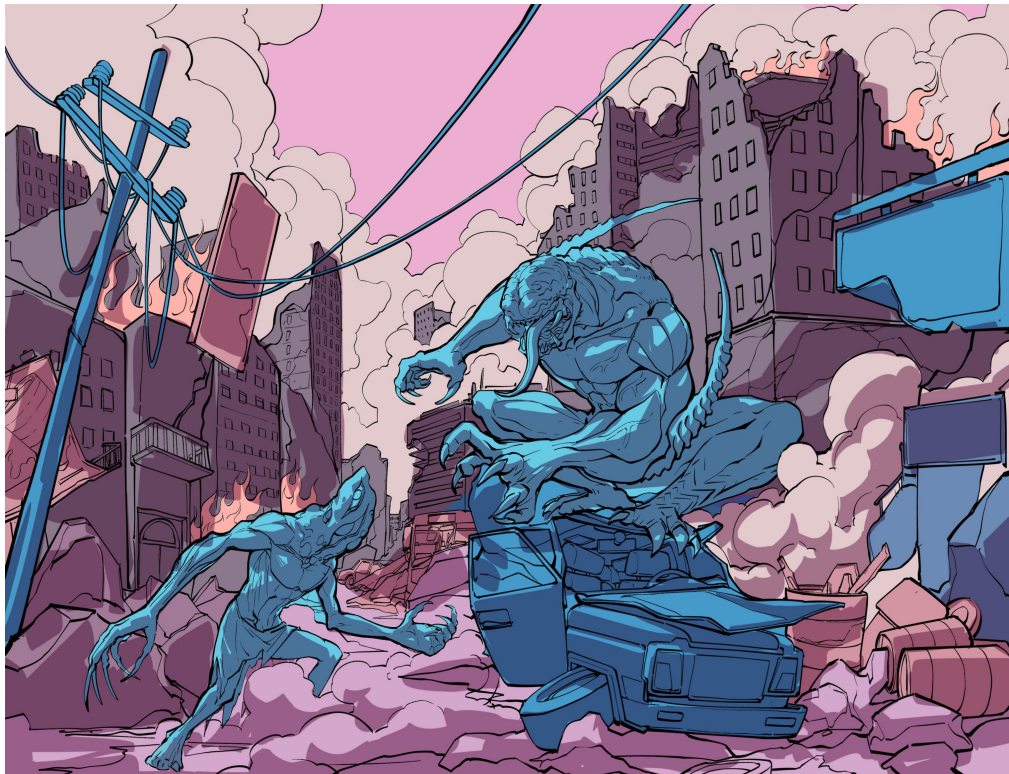
(Fig. 6) Han Wang's work, Final poster - Baby Ying



(Fig. 7) Han Wang's work, Final poster - Baby Mo



(Fig. 8) Han Wang's work, Final poster - Massacring Villagers During Wartime



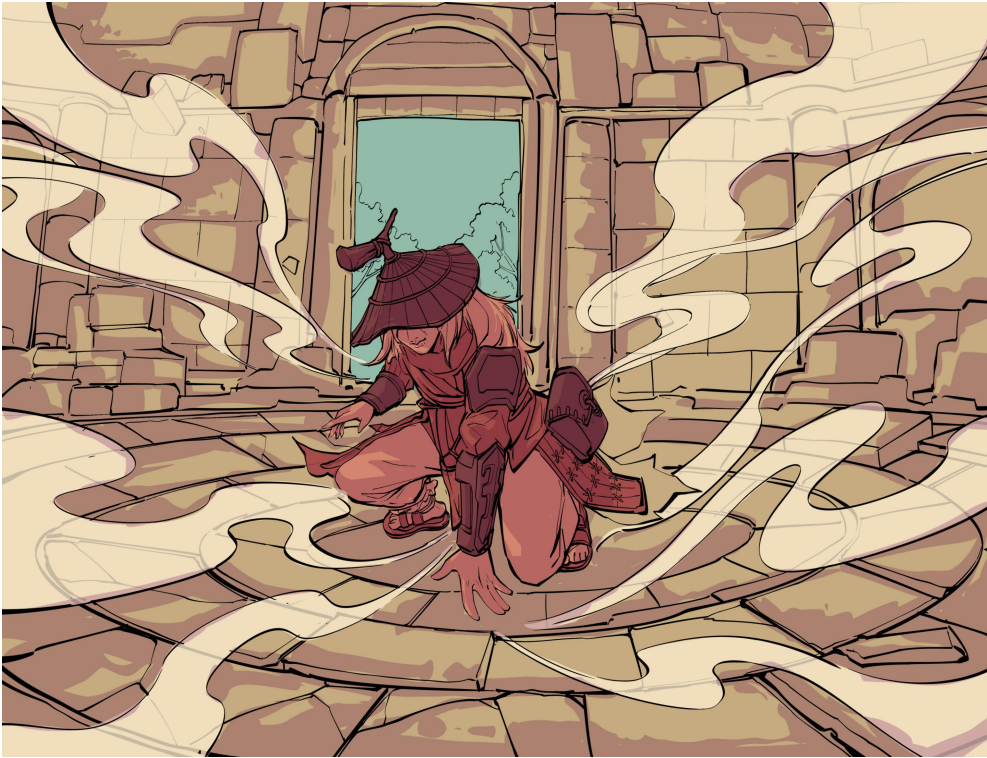
(Fig. 9) Han Wang's work, Final poster - Monsters and ruined cities



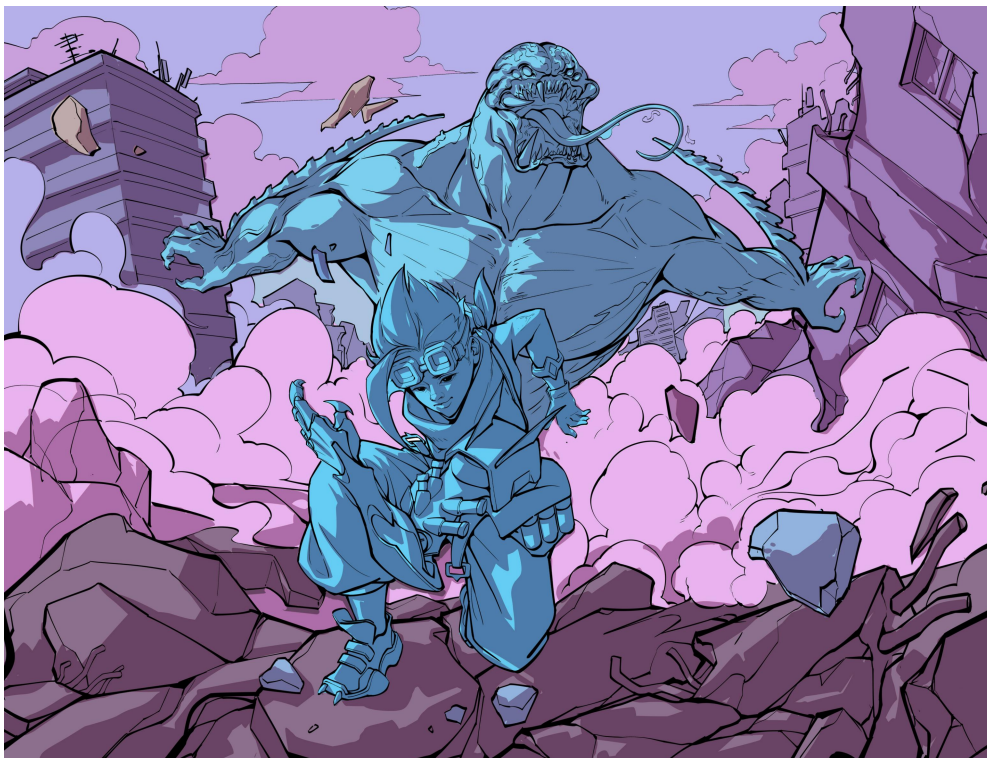
(Fig. 10) Han Wang's work, Final poster - Mo Embarks on an Adventure



(Fig. 11) Han Wang's work, Final poster - Ying alone among the ruins



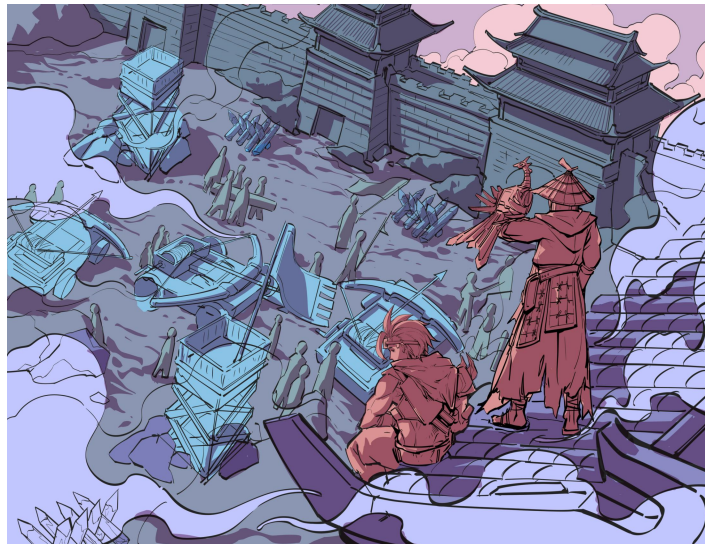
(Fig. 12) Han Wang's work, Final poster - Open the time gate



(Fig. 13) Han Wang's work, Final poster - Ying fights the monster



(Fig. 13) Han Wang's work, Final poster - Ying fights Mo



(Fig. 13) Han Wang's work, Final poster - Ying and Mo adventure



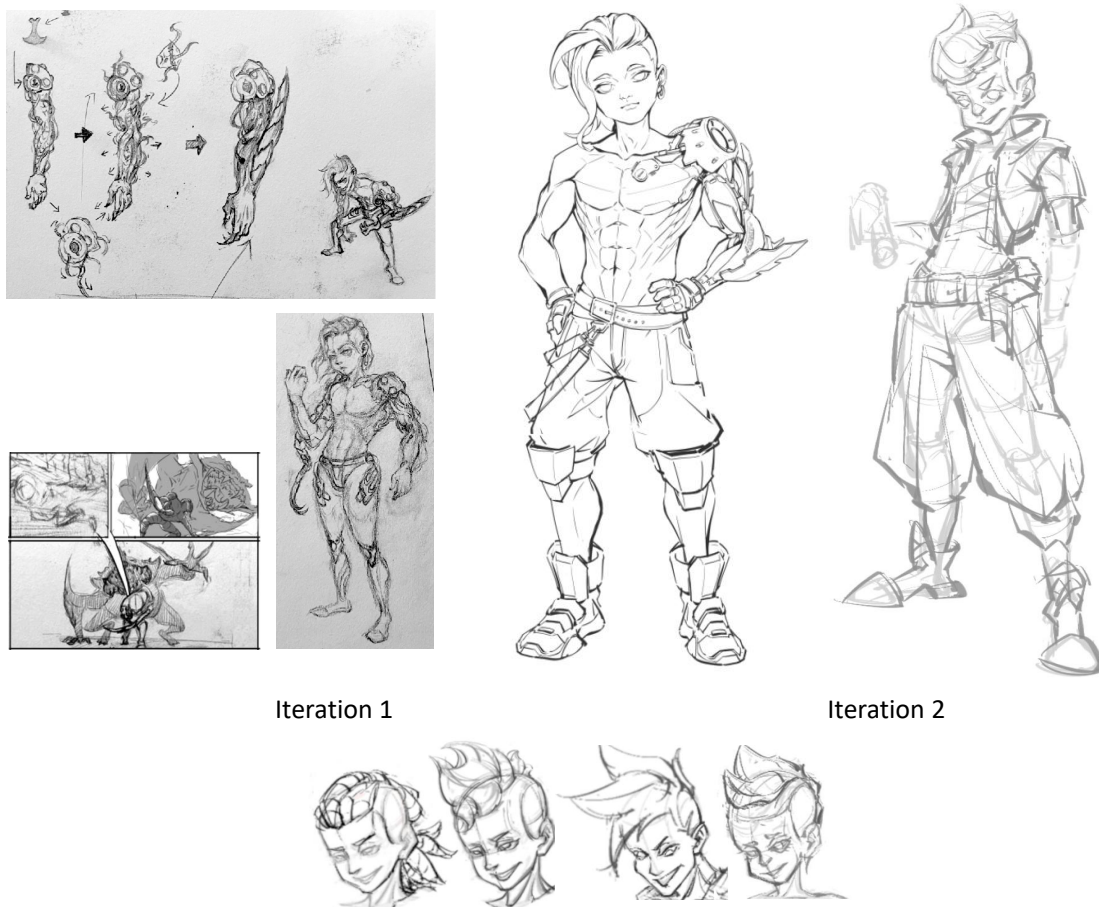
(Fig. 14) Han Wang's work, Final poster - Ying and Mo fight the monster

### 3.2 Character Development

#### Future Character - Ying (影)

He is the main character from the future post-apocalyptic world in my project. He is a thin 12-year-old boy. He underwent biochemical modifications when he was still a baby, which caused his skin to become deathly pale and gave him ugly arms filled with biochemical test tubes. Many children his age stay away from him out of fear. Therefore, he often pouts and pretends to be unfriendly. Contrary to his appearance, he longs to have a close friend.

He can inject monster blood into his body through the biochemical injectors on his left arm, transforming it into a giant arm. His waist mechanism stores three injectors. Using all three injectors will cause excessive monster blood to affect his brain, leading him into a berserk state.



Iteration 1

Iteration 2

Iteration 3

(Fig. 15) Han Wang's work, Group view of design results - iteration of Ying

The iteration 1 of Ying were designed to incorporate a cyberpunk style to facilitate contrast with Mohist culture and technology. However, the perfectly muscular physique and attractive facial features did not align with the project's exploration of an ordinary appearance and a rich inner world. To evoke empathy among contemporary Chinese youth, the traditional image of a flawless hero was deemed inappropriate. To enhance contrast and conflict, I referenced the body proportions of a frail child for adjustments in iteration 2; however, the face and hairstyle still appeared too healthy. Iteration 3 is text for hairstyle and facial expression.



Iteration 4



Iteration 5



Iteration 6

(Fig. 16) Han Wang's work, Group view of design results - iteration of Ying2

To align with the individualized aesthetic preferences of contemporary Chinese youth, the character design process borrowed Marcos's approach of simplifying characters into basic geometric shapes (Iteration 4) before adding details for further exploration, resulting in Iteration 5 and 6.

Ying (影) represents a negative implication, and I used more straight lines in the design to express this. I designed him with a lazy standing posture, holding a biochemical potion in his right hand. Making the right hand the visual center is intentional because the biochemical test tube symbolizes fear and danger, aiming to draw the audience's attention to the negative impacts of biochemical technology.

In Iteration 7, the style of biopunk was adopted. It explores the relationship between the human body and machinery more severely than the cyberpunk style, with a more extreme and complex visual form. The mechanical elements in Iteration 7 are more terrifying and grotesque.

This not only aligns with the individualized aesthetic of contemporary young people but also strengthens the contrast with Mohist wooden machinery.



Iteration 7

(Fig. 17) Han Wang's work, Group view of design results - iteration of Ying3

To fit the 'ordinary' setting discussed previously, I drew multiple iterations to develop Ying's appearance to make him look not as strong and handsome as traditional heroes. Instead, he is thin, with drooping eyelids, a round nose, pouting lips, plus hedgehog-like spiky hair and spiked earrings—making him look like an alternative and highly individual rebellious boy. I use this unique appearance to provide modern audiences with a clear memory point.

In the overall character and costume design, I combined the Post-Apocalyptic Style for his clothing and used Biopunk to design his left arm. Characters in the Post-Apocalyptic Style wear rough and damaged clothing salvaged from ruins; their accessories or weapons are mostly pieced together from modified discarded parts. The scarcity of resources and harsh environments lead to thin bodies and scars. Biopunk describes themes based on modification, body alteration, virus implantation, body mutations, showing the risks and instability of misusing technology.

In Iteration 8 it is black and white display of the final character design.



Iteration 8

(Fig. 18) Han Wang's work, Black and white display - Ying



Iteration 9  
(Fig. 19) Han Wang's work, Colors - Ying

Through experimenting with multiple color schemes in iteration 9, I intentionally make the overall atmosphere look more serious and tense. I used a low-saturation red and purple color scheme to create a dark atmosphere, making him appear eerie and dangerous.

Iteration 10 shows Ying's different expressions and postures which can show that Ying's personality arouses empathy of Chinese teenagers.



Iteration 10  
(Fig. 20) Han Wang's work, Final character - Ying



Iteration 11

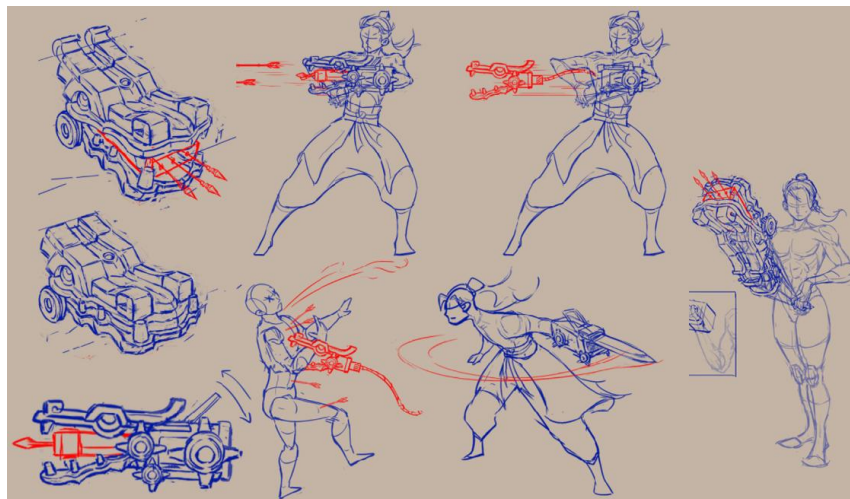
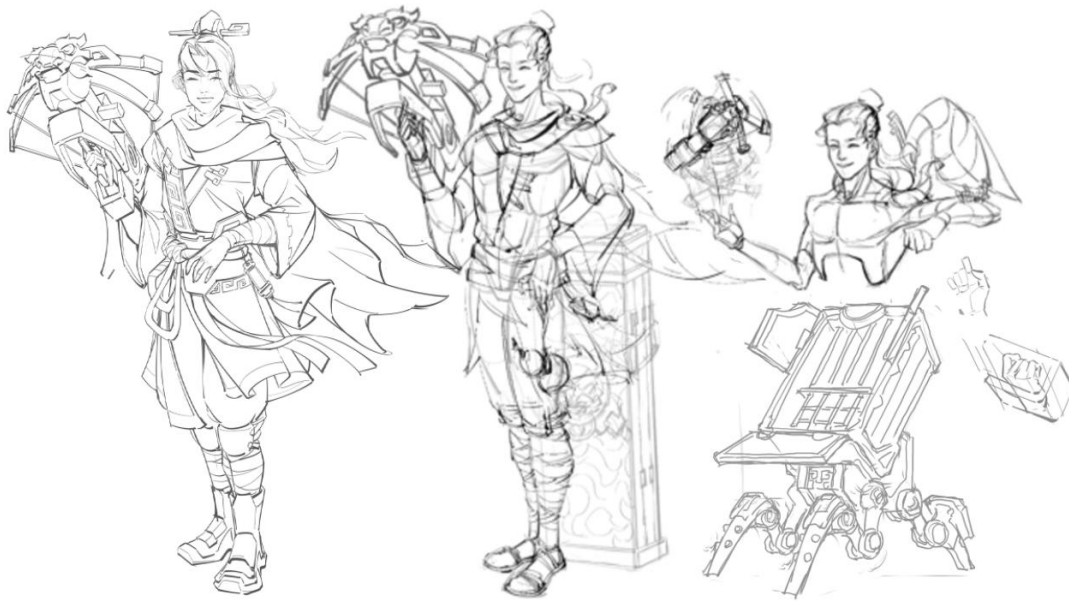
(Fig. 21) Han Wang's work, Final poster - Ying

Iteration 11 shows the final poster. Its overall tone is gray and black to show negative elements and atmosphere., and combining Chinese characters to design for cultural identity from Chinese teenagers.

## Ancient Character - Mo (墨)

'Mo' is the main character in my story set in the ancient Chinese world. He is an 18-year-old teenager. After the Qin State of ancient China launched invasion wars, he became an orphan from a village. When he was a baby, he was adopted by Mozi, the leader of the Mohist organization, and joined the Mohist group. He stands tall with his head held high, always wearing a confident smile, making people feel he is a warm-hearted young man. He respects Mohist culture, so he puts in more effort than others into study.

In Iteration 12, I initiated my first development, incorporating too many modern elements into the Mohist machinery. I felt that this could lead to misunderstandings among young people regarding Mohist technology. Therefore, I returned to developing Iteration 13, starting from simple geometric shapes.



Iteration 12

(Fig. 22) Han Wang's work, Group view of design results - iteration of Mo 1

The character 'Mo' is designed to represent positive elements, so I use more soft curves to express this, making the overall atmosphere look gentler, and I attempted to transform these geometric shapes into the form of an umbrella, symbolizing the philosophy of inclusivity and acceptance in Mohist culture.



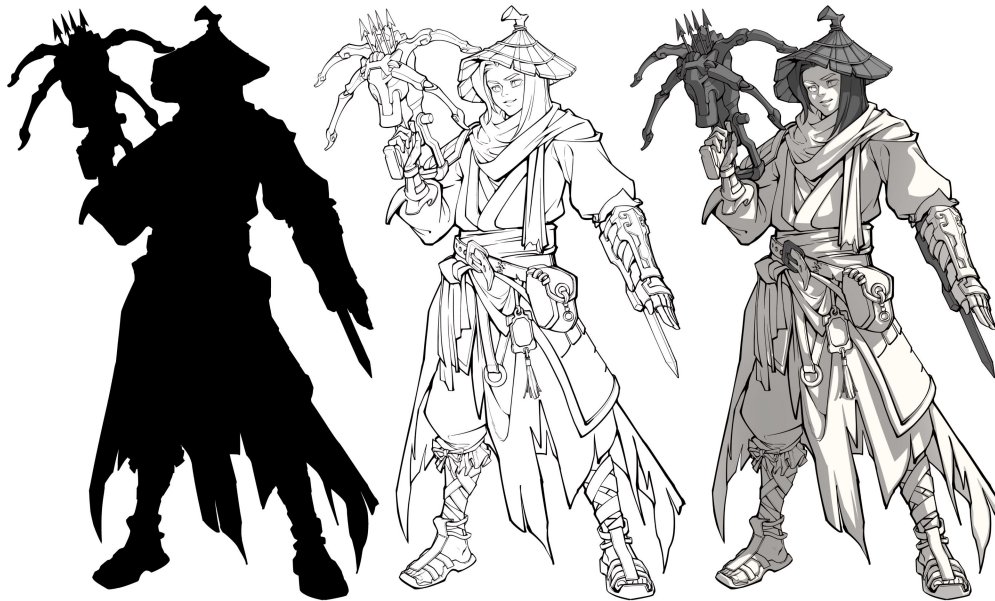
Iteration 13

Ultimately, I added the elements of hat and hemp fiber, which are the representative elements of the costumes of ancient civilian heroes in China history.



Iteration 14

(Fig. 23) Han Wang's work, Group view of design results - iteration of Mo 2



(Fig. 24) Han Wang's work, Black and white display - Mo

In Iteration 15 it is black and white display of the final character design.

In terms of appearance, his confident and handsome face and poses contrast with Ying (影). The purpose is to let contemporary teenagers understand the simple aspects of Mohist culture in ancient China, with humans using machinery only as auxiliary tools.

The ancient boy also incorporates 'ordinary' elements in appearance. Although he is depicted as confident, warm, tall, and handsome, he is also an orphan like the future boy—the nature of their birth is an 'ordinary' element. Moreover, most members of the Mohist school were commoners, so the tattered clothing and accessories are largely based on historical descriptions to recreate the attire worn by commoners during the Qin Dynasty in China, which also represents 'ordinary' elements.



(Fig. 25) Han Wang's work, Group view of design results - colors of Mo

In Iteration 16, I showed the color scheme for Mo's (墨) color scheme, I wanted to replicate the original colors of ancient Chinese peasant clothing. However, I experimented with three different garment patterns and ultimately chose bamboo, a plant that represents Chinese elements, as a strong motif. A combination of natural browns, blue and green showcases his confident and composed personality.



Iteration 17

(Fig. 26) Han Wang's work, Final character - Mo

Iteration 17 shows Mo's expression and his weapon, which can symbolize the positive influence of Mohist culture.

The Mohist youth's weapons—the bow and arrow and the wooden mechanical bird—do not incorporate many modern elements in their design but aim to restore and respect the original appearance of Mohist machinery based on historical records as much as possible. This not only showcases Mohist culture to contemporary teenagers but also provides clear memory points.



Iteration 18

(Fig. 27) Han Wang's work, Final poster - Mo

Iteration 18 shows the final poster for Mo. Its overall tone is bright blue and yellow to show the positive elements and atmosphere of Mohism. Combined with Chinese characters, it designs a cultural identity

suitable for young people in China.

### **Future Monsters - Greed and Desire**

Iteration 19 shows the development process of sending simplified geometry to sketches of two monsters. One monster is called 'Greed,' and the other is called 'Desire'. They were both humans transformed into monsters by nuclear radiation during and after the apocalypse and the war.

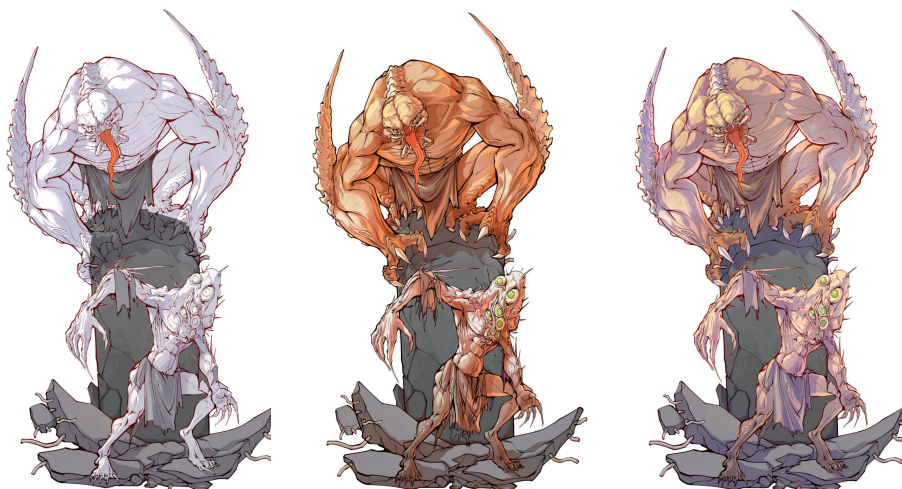
Greed has a massive mouth, with sharp, shark-like small teeth growing in its mouth and on its long tongue. Its enormous muscles and protruding bones form a blade that is exceedingly sharp. I believe the blade symbolizes danger, while the gigantic mouth represents how humanity will ultimately be devoured by its own greed.

Desire is covered with countless eyes and tiny spikes, and despite its frail physique, it has a disproportionately large belly. The multitude of eyes symbolizes human desire—the attempt to possess everything it sees, even when its belly can no longer contain it.



Iteration 19

(Fig. 28) Han Wang's work, Group view of design results - iteration of monsters



Iteration 20

(Fig. 29) Han Wang's work, Colors - monsters

Iteration 20 showing my color scheme for monsters, I chose intense red and gray to represent their danger.

Iteration 21 shows the final poster for monster. Dark red tones symbolize a tense atmosphere. Although both monsters appear as antagonists, they maintain principles of opposition and contrast, providing the audience with a stronger visual impact while prompting them to consider that these monsters, filled with negative elements, represent the inner nature of most contemporary humans.



Iteration 21

(Fig. 30) Han Wang's work, Final poster - monsters

## **4.0 Conclusion**

This illustration design research aims to educate and engage a younger Chinese audience to understand more of their history, cultural values and relationship to technologies.

In modern society, the rapid development of technology including artificial intelligence has generated many discussions about whether AI will replace humans.

Through visual storytelling I have expressed my thoughts on the topic. In my visual storytelling of the future, technology merges with the human body, like a genetically modified boy with terrifying mechanical arms and a strange personality, or monsters born from radiation mutations. These characters represent the fear and negative emotions of humans grappling with ideas of replacement.

I have also included references to ancient Chinese culture, specifically the Mohist school from over 2,000 years ago. By highlighting this, I aim to show a positive influence, not only can it introduce Mohist culture and values to young people today, but it also emphasizes that AI and machines should be tools to assist humans.

The ancient Mohist culture and Mohist technology can serve as excellent examples for young people to understand the human values important for our future. It is especially important to distinguish between technology and humanity, to prevent the erosion of human nature by machines due to excessive reliance on them.

This project has provided a foundation of cultural research and extensive explorations of new illustration work to advance my knowledge and skills of visual communication. I hope in the future to develop these characters and associated scene illustrations into a graphic novel to tell the story as this was beyond the scope of this MDes project.

## 5.0 References

- Box Office Mojo. (2020, August 1). 2018 worldwide box office. <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/world/2018/>
- Campbell, J. (2008). *The hero with a thousand faces (3rd ed.)*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Defoort, C., & Standaert, N. (2013). *The Mozi as an evolving text: Different voices in early Chinese thought*. Leuven University Press.
- D'Amico, J., Trafton, D. A., & Verdicchio, M. (1999). Croce's theory of historical judgment. In *The Legacy of Benedetto Croce: Contemporary Critical Views (pp. 89-102)*. University of Toronto Press. [https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzQ20DU4M19fQU41?sid=b1464bdb-36a8-4698-a3dc-48f939a2774b@redis&vid=0&lpid=lp\\_88&format=EB](https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzQ20DU4M19fQU41?sid=b1464bdb-36a8-4698-a3dc-48f939a2774b@redis&vid=0&lpid=lp_88&format=EB)
- Ensslin, A., Skains, L., Riley, S., Haran, J., Mackiewicz, A., & Halliwell, E. (2016). *Exploring digital fiction as a tool for teenage body image bibliotherapy*. *Digital Creativity*, 27(3), 177-195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14626268.2016.1210646>
- Eder, J., Jannidis, F., & Schneider, R. (2010). *Characters in fictional worlds: Understanding imaginary beings in literature, film, and other media*. New York, NY: De Gruyter. <https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzM0OTUwNV9fQU41?sid=ce5f31e6-70c2-42e7-a41b-2be320014f7e%40redis&vid=7&format=EB&rid=1>
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity, youth, and crisis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.
- Fraser, C. (2016). *The philosophy of the Mòzǐ: The first consequentialists*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. <https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzEzNDE5MjhX0FO0?sid=c7a5cf65-98c4-4c88-9a83-5bd6ed3e1d54@redis&vid=0&hid=http://eds.p.ebscohost.com/&format=EK>
- Gensburger, S. (2016). Halbwachs' studies in collective memory: A founding text for contemporary 'memory studies'? *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 16(4), 396-413. <https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/doi/pdf/10.1177/1468795X16656268>
- Goodwin, J., Williams, A. L., & Herzog, P. S. (2020). *Cross-cultural values: A meta-analysis of major quantitative studies in the last decade (2010-2020)*. *Religions*, 11(8), 1-42. <https://www-mdpi-com.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/2077-1444/11/8/396>
- Guo, J. (2024). *Exploring factors affecting depression among Chinese adolescents*. *Transactions on Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 4, 42-53. <https://wepub.org/index.php/TSSEHR/article/view/541>

- Grishina, A. V., & Volkova, E. N. (2017). *The evaluation of computer games addiction incidence among teenagers of young adolescent age*. Revista ESPACIOS, 38(40). <https://www.revistaespacios.com/a17v38n40/17384016.html>
- Harbsmeier, C. (2013). *The birth of Confucianism from competition with organized Mohism*. Journal of Chinese Studies, 56. <https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/journal/articles/v56p001.pdf>
- Hunter, S. (2024). *The mythmakers: The remarkable fellowship of C. S. Lewis & J. R. R. Tolkien*. Booklist, 120(21), 56. <https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=8e05ee0b-5060-4a3a-b4a3-dc3f97faf2d7%40redis>
- Hadjioannou, C. M., Merwin, C. D., & Wendland, A. J. (2018). *Heidegger on technology (1st ed.)*. London, England: Routledge. <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/books/edit/10.4324/9781315561226/heidegger-technology-aaron-james-wendland-christopher-merwin-christos-hadjioannou>
- Hsiao, K. H., & Yan, H. S. (2012). *Structural synthesis of ancient Chinese Chu State repeating crossbow*. In *Advances in Reconfigurable Mechanisms and Robots I* (pp. 749-758). Springer London. [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4471-4141-9\\_67](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4471-4141-9_67)
- Huili, X., & Chengyong, X. (2022). *The modern value of Mohist theory in ancient China*. История и современное мировоззрение, 4(3), 59-63. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/the-modern-value-of-mohist-theory-in-ancient-china>
- Jin'e, L., Harun, A., & Nasir, M. N. F. (2024). *Exploring the elements of Chinese animation appeal to Chinese teenagers*. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 14(1), 801-810. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/37ab/e3c17378e6d8ddca5289041bade7eeebf6dd.pdf>
- Brandabur, E. (1973). *Ezra Pound and Wassily Kandinsky: A language in form and color*. Journal of Aesthetic Education, 7(2), 91–107. <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/stable/3331947>
- Lee, H. C. (2021). Considering the present from the past: On Mohist thought and its modern transformation. *Journal of Chinese Humanities*, 7(1-2), 79-111. [https://brill.com/view/journals/joch/7/1-2/article-p79\\_5.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/joch/7/1-2/article-p79_5.xml)
- Li, C. (2008). The ideal of harmony in ancient Chinese and Greek philosophy. *Dao*, 7(1), 81–98. [https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/content/pdf/10.1007/s11712-008-9043-3?pdf=open\\_url](https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/content/pdf/10.1007/s11712-008-9043-3?pdf=open_url)
- Mao Ts. *On New Democracy*. Foreign Languages Press. 1967.

- McCloud, S. (1994). *Understanding comics*. New York, NY: HarperPerennial.
- Defoort, C. (2011). A translation of the Mozi. *Monumenta Serica: Journal of Oriental Studies*, 59, 491–501.  
<https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/doi/pdf/10.1179/mon.2011.59.1.025>
- Murphy, A. (2013). *Nothing like new: Our post-apocalyptic imagination as utopian desire*. *Journal of Architectural Education*, 67(2), 234-242.  
<https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/doi/pdf/10.1080/10464883.2013.817166>
- Schmeink, L. (2016). *Biopunk dystopias: Genetic engineering, society and science fiction*. Oxford, England: Liverpool University Press.  
<https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/stable/j.ctt1ps33cv>
- Sussman, S., Pokhrel, P., Ashmore, R. D., & Brown, B. B. (2007). *Adolescent peer group identification and characteristics: A review of the literature*. *Addictive Behaviors*, 32(8), 1602-1627.  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0306460306003510>
- Sun, J., & Zhou, Z. (2022, February). *Impact of the game Cyberpunk 2077 on cyberpunk culture*. In 2021 International Conference on Education, Language and Art (ICELA 2021) (pp. 640-643). Atlantis Press.  
<https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/icela-21/125969942>
- Tran, O., Le, T. D., & Hang, N. P. T. (2023). *Impacts of human capital, the fourth industrial revolution, and institutional quality on unemployment: An empirical study at Asian countries*. *Journal of Eastern European and Central Asian Research (JEECAR)*, 10(2), 238-250.  
<https://ieeca.org/journal/index.php/JEECAR/article/view/1010/476>
- Tröhler, M. (2010). *Multiple protagonist films: A transcultural everyday practice*. In J. Eder, F. Jannidis, & R. Schneider (Eds.), *Characters in fictional worlds: Understanding imaginary beings in literature, film, and other media* (pp. 459–477). De Gruyter.  
[https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHh3d19fMzQ5NTAIX19BTg2?sid=6d26711a-86ad-429f-80e2-4b0cfa39ce8b@redis&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp\\_459&rid=0](https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHh3d19fMzQ5NTAIX19BTg2?sid=6d26711a-86ad-429f-80e2-4b0cfa39ce8b@redis&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp_459&rid=0)
- Weixiang, D. I. N. G. (2013). *The realistic actualization of the Moist passion for salvation and its historical destination*. *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, 8(2), 309-331.  
[https://brill.com/view/journals/fphc/8/2/article-p309\\_13.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/fphc/8/2/article-p309_13.xml)
- Byron, G., & Townshend, D. (2014). *The Gothic world*. London; New York: Routledge.  
<https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/books/edit/10.4324/9780203490013/gothic-world-glennis-byron-dale-townshend>
- Whyke, T. W., & Mugica, J. L. (2022). *Calling for a hero: The displacement of the Nezha archetypal image from Chinese animated film Nezha Naohai (1979) to New Gods: Nezha Reborn (2021)*. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 15(3), 389–409.  
<https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/content/pdf/10.1007/s40647-021-003>

[35-5?pdf=openurl](#)

Zort, Ç., Karabacak, E., Öznur, Ş., & Dağlı, G. (2023). *Sharing of cultural values and heritage through storytelling in the digital age*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1104121. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1104121/full>