

## An Exploration of Visual Sign Languages in Chinese Film Poster Design

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### Abstract

Film posters have the characteristics of intuitiveness, forms, culture and contampareity. Their propaganda environments are also extensive. Thus posters can spread film information effectively and quickly. To fully realize their propaganda effects, designers should deeply analyze the key elements and art characters of the visual signs of film posters, explore the principles and methods of words signs, illustration signs, color signs in designing film posters, and improve design connotations of film posters.

**Keywords:** Film posters; Design; Visual signs; Language

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### INTRODUCTION

Posters are an important carrier in film information propaganda. Their main role is to motivate audiences' imaginations, associations, emotions and other thinking psychology, make them perceive the thoughts and themes of films, and create desire and even take actions to watch movies by intuitionistic illustration signs, beautiful words, and scientific colors. Moreover, film posters have a large audience group. The powerful aesthetic cognition, entertainment, educational functions of film posters have huge social influence. Therefore, scientific and reasonable application of visual sign language has great significance in improving cultural connotations of film posters.

## 1. THE ELEMENTS OF VISUAL SIGN LANGUAGE IN FILM POSTERS

### 1.1 Color Signs

Colors, which occupy an important position in the film posters, are the most dynamic and expressive visual sign language. The hue, saturation, and brightness of colors have direct influence on human visual senses. Their unique psychological effects give special emotional experience to audiences. Different combination modes create kinds of visual experiences: absurd, floating, strong and so on. In fact, the existence of colors is just a kind of physical phenomenon. They have no emotional warmth. But people have different emotional experiences from specific pictures. Psychologists point out that long-term life experiences have made people form common color consciousness. When people see a kind of color, they will use their association, imagination, emotions and other thinking to have warm, cool, cold or scaring psychological experiences.

### 1.2 Illustration Signs

Poster illustrations are the most intuitive visual signs, which often apply a shot or several shots to express film themes and the contents of the words in posters. They are the two-dimensional visual representation of film information. In the information age, the paces of life and work are very fast. Everyone needs to get information quickly. The intuitiveness of illustration signs satisfies the needs. So illustration signs are the important means of designers to express emotions and themes of films.

### 1.3 Words Signs

Words signs are the most basic elements of visual signs, typically including the layout designs of the words to describe film information and the creative fonts to convey effects. The main function of words in film posters is to convey the contents of films and intentions of designers by visual transmission. Words can provide audiences with

multi-dimensional visual space and emotional interaction, and make them virtualize the images, colors, space, time and sounds to perceive the thoughts and connotations of posters, which can make them have pleasant visual experiences and good emotional effects.

## 2. THE ART CHARACTERS OF VISUAL SIGN LANGUAGE IN FILM POSTERS

### 2.1 Intuitiveness

Intuitiveness is an important feature of film posters. The images posters create have direct influence on human's visual senses. Poster languages, such as light, lines, colors, shapes, illustrations, can not only form artistic images, but also have their own aesthetic value. In addition, film posters attach great importance to follow the laws and rules of formal beauty, which makes audiences have rich visual aesthetic feelings while watching them. Furthermore, the symbol of excellent film posters is that they not only attract people to watch the movies, but also make people and poster field remember them as outstanding works. For example, in the poster of *Go Away! Mr. Tumor*, designers use highly pure yellow, blue and red to create joyful atmosphere. The main characters, Xiongduan and Doctor Liang, occupy most space and the most important location of the poster, which makes them the center of the poster, with their family members and friends far away. This layout of illustration not only shows the optimistic spirit of Xiongduan, who will not give up hope and struggle to enjoy life even when he cannot avoid illness and death, but also forms the relationship of supporting and being supported between he and his family members and friends who are in distance in the poster, which leaves deep impression on audiences.

### 2.2 Formality

A prominent feature of contemporary film posters is attaching great importance to forms. Designers need to construct pictures with artistic beauty and convey the atmosphere, styles, emotions and intentions of the films by using colors, graphics, characters, lines, words, points, plane and other visual signs, and also by the form beauty principle of visual transmission. For example, in the poster of the film, *The Mermaid*, designers show the images of Liuxuan, octopus Bage, mermaids Shanshan and so on in the picture by using the popular design styles—flat and retro, and also by using linear definition and flat painting. So the picture is primitive, simple and harmonious, seeming to recall some kind of memory and trace some kind of feeling, telling a fairy tale which has been forgotten by adults.

### 2.3 Contemporaneity

Contemporaneity of visual sign language of film posters refers to the contemporaneity of the expressing materials

and design styles. The contemporaneity of expressing materials means that films often reflect the thoughts, emotions and ideals of a specific age. So, as an important propaganda means, film posters inevitably reflect the themes of the films. The contemporaneity of design styles means that design styles of different ages necessarily have influence on the designing of film posters. For example, the controversial film *Goodbye Mr. Loser* makes a success in market. It applies a kind of sub-cultural network narration mode which is called "Diaosi" culture, expressing the contradictions and conflicts of "Diaosi", "the people who are tall, rich and handsome" and "Goddesses". The poster for the film is a picture of a family, with Xialuo in the center. Other characters appear one by one. It transmits the contents and the theme of the film, and also illustrates the popular Deconstruction Culture—"Diaosi" culture.

## 3. THE APPLICATION OF VISUAL SIGN LANGUAGE IN FILM POSTER DESIGN

Creativity is the core of film poster design. Basing on the complete understanding of the themes and thoughts of the film, applying imagination, associations, combinations and reproduction, designers create the colors, illustrations, words and other expressions of visual sign languages. The purpose is to use proper art form to promote new needs, cultivate new fancy and needs of audiences, enhance new marketing of films, explain the themes of new films, stimulate and convince audiences to have the desire to watch films.

### 3.1 The Application of Color Signs in the Design of Film Posters

Colors have been recognized and applied since the existence of human beings, forming a conventional common sense and notion. Colors of different hues, brightness, purity have the characters of magnificence, simplicity, weight, hardness, pleasure, melancholy, sourness, sweetness, bitterness, spiciness, warmth and so on, which can have different effects on people physically and psychologically. In film poster designs, designers should fully consider the characters of colors, grasping the proportion, the purity, the contrast and coordination of coldness and warmth, brightness and darkness of colors, handling the relationship between graphs and ground colors, and using appropriate colors to express themes of films. On the other hand, designers should use scientific colors to create pictures with aesthetic connotations. For instance, the poster of the film *Monk Comes down the Mountain* has strong Chinese style. Clean and calm cyan background, matches well with the color—cyan, which is advocated by Chinese Taoism, adding with the peacock blue Qipao of Yuzhen, the cyan frock of He Anxia, the white gown of Boss Zha, the dark gray frock of Zhou

Xiyu, the Chinese gown of Cui Daoning, the green clothes with both Chinese and western styles of Cui Daorong. The picture is delicate and beautiful, showing the clothes of the Republic of China. "1911 Revolution" is a big epic film, expressing the significance of the revolution in the specific times. In the poster, the background, the characters and the words are all black, only the flag and the stamp red. It is full of heavy and oppressing dark clouds, which symbolizes the changeable history of that period of time. In the suffocating atmosphere, the floating red flag makes people see light and hope, and also represents the first flag of Chinese national revolution. It is the milestone of Chinese people to save and revitalize their own country.

### 3.2 The Application of Illustration Signs in Film Posters Design

Illustration sign language and word sign language have different functions in interpreting film posters. When a poster unfolds before the audiences, the first thing that catches their attention is not the words but the illustrations. Designers should be good at grasping audiences' attention in a short time by shocking illustration signs, making them remember the contents of the advertisement and have the same feeling as the designers, so the purpose of spreading the film can be reached. In modern film posters, illustration visual signs appear more frequently than word signs, especially in the pictures taken by cameras. They are often adopted in film posters and have excellent effects. Ogilvy (2013, pp.146-147) said, "Photos have better promoting effects than drawings. They can attract more audiences and convey more information, making audiences remember them easily." Designers should fully take audiences' aesthetic notions and accepting ability into account. Photos, scenery, and characters can be used solely in illustrations, and also can be combined into new pictures. Design styles must be unique and artistic. Images in the pictures should have strong visual attacking ability, making audiences understand the intention of the poster quickly. For instance, in the poster of "Monster Hunt", the background of the illustration is a beautiful picture of mountains and water drawn by Chinese Ink painting shading technique. Tianyin, Huo Xiaolan, Monsters and other images match well with the background. The audiences naturally feel the deep connotation that all things have spirits, and that humans, animals and nature get along harmoniously. Moreover, the image of the young King of Monsters, HuBa, is totally different from that of the monsters in Chinese traditional fantasy films. Lovely HuBa seems like a new-born baby, full of curiosity to the world. Its image is completely suitable for Chinese people's aesthetic taste.

### 3.3 The Application of Word Signs in Film Poster Designs

The role of words in posters is to deliver video information quickly and efficiently, so the layout designs

of words should have legible principle, ideological principle and artistic principle. The contents of the words should be realistic, informative and also persuasive. After all, audiences will not be persuaded to watch movies just because a simple title or some dull words. They need more information from designers. The layout of the words should correspond with the reading habits of audiences, arranging word gap, line space and blanks well, considering the primary and secondary order of the words, strengthening the overall structure of the words, by which audiences can get the useful information as quickly as possible. The layout of the words should also reflect the core contents of films, reflecting the spirits of the times and the personalities the designers. Designers rationally apply repetition and approximation, balance and symmetry, specificity and order, rhythm and cadence, and other laws of formal beauty, so that the picture has beauty of forms.

The font designs of film titles in posters are very important in film propaganda. In the analysis from the perspective of Semiotics, on the one hand, the fonts of the film titles are the signs of the information they convey. On the other hand, they are a kind of special plane graphic signs. Designers should start from the contents of the film and fully consider the connotations of the films' titles. They can change the shapes and structures of the fronts, and also can apply some artistic means, such as adding some lines inside, connecting the fonts, leaving space, overlapping, breaking up and reconstructing and so on. Furthermore, the fonts, sizes, weight and styles of the words in posters should be the same. The more fronts use, the weaker the transmission effects become. For example, in the poster of "Saving Mr. Wu", the title of the film, "Saving Mr. Wu", uses boldface as its basic font, changing a little in the shapes of some strokes. The punch line of the design lies in the two words "Save" and "Wu". In Chinese they are next to each other. The two words are connected with broken chains, which not only give audiences heavy sense of responsibility, but also convey the theme "to save me". In the poster of "Mojin—The Lost Legend", using Song typeface as the basic font, the designer expresses the three words "寻龙诀" by 3-dimension, changing of stroke shapes, and matching with gold metal metallic sense, which makes every strokes of the words as sharp as blade, just like the sharp weapons in the characters in the poster. The film "Echoes of the Rainbow", directed by Hong Kong director Alex Law, is a nostalgia film which reflects the memory of the striving days of Hong Kong people. The title of the film "Echoes of the Rainbow" is put in the middle of the poster. Graffiti style, mottled strokes, and blank strokes matches well with the plot of the film. In the poster of the film "无人区" (No Man's Land), the title applies transparent design with the near words big and the far words small. The word "人" is written in positive

and negative shape, hiding between the word “无” and the word “区”. The design conveys the connotation that in no man’s land, people’s nature will show the same instinct as animals in the absence of moral and legal constraints.

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## CONCLUSION

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Film posters have clear picture images, which can easily seize the audiences’ attention. These images can convey film information and cultivate audiences’ characters, leaving deep impression on them. In order to work out excellent posters and promote the development of film poster designs, designers must express the unique artistic and cultural glamour of film posters by improving their cultural and artistic accomplishments, fully understanding

the connotations of films, studying the aesthetic appreciation interests and ability, and reasonably using different visual sign language.

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