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Visual aesthetic characteristics of Chinese movie posters

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Abstract

Chinese poster art is deeply influenced by ancient Chinese aesthetics, and therefore exhibits a unique visual aesthetic charm. This study focuses on the four major visual aesthetic characteristics contained in Chinese movie posters: the beauty of artistic conception, the beauty of reality and illusion, the beauty of vivid charm and the beauty of harmony. By applying the theoretical framework of design and narratology, we deeply analyze the specific manifestations of these aesthetic characteristics in Chinese movie posters. The purpose of the study is to deeply grasp the visual aesthetic essence of Chinese posters, to help designers create more poster masterpieces rich in Chinese charm. The results show that the beauty of artistic conception can lead the audience to explore the deep meaning behind the work; the beauty of reality and illusion highlights the core information through clever blank space and contrast techniques, creating a gripping artistic conception; beauty of vivid charm emphasizes the vitality and distinct rhythm of the work; and the beauty of harmony pursues a steady and balanced aesthetic view, and is committed to achieving perfect harmony in visual presentation and content communication.

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Keywords

Movie poster, China, visual aesthetic characteristics, artistic conception, reality and illusion, vivid charm, harmony.

Introduction

The concept of beauty is not limited to the natural world but is also reflected in the visual art of humans. As a collective of visual elements, posters possess distinctive regional aesthetic characteristics, shaped by the cultural contexts in which they are created. In China, poster art carries a unique visual aesthetic feature which is deeply influenced by ancient Chinese aesthetic concepts.

Since antiquity, the Chinese have espoused a philosophy of "harmony between man and nature." The concept posits that the universe is a living entity and that man, as a part of nature, maintains a close and harmonious relationship with it. "Harmony between man and nature" represents a life ideal, a moral realm, and an aesthetic sentiment [Changbei, 2022, 49]. Harmony between man and nature "serves as a guiding principle for integrating nature and emotion through aesthetics, thereby creating an artistic world imbued with profound meaning. In the aesthetic experience, individuals not only perceive the external beauty of things but also appreciate the inner harmony that arises from being one with nature.

Movie posters, as the visual impression and soul of a movie [Nie Hui, 2009, 21], not only carry commercial value, but also contain profound artistic connotations. An exemplary movie poster can frequently evoke a state of anticipation and reverie in the audience prior to the film's release [Cao Jingzhen, 2019, 123]. In recent years, with the rise of Chinese films, Chinese film posters have gradually emerged on the international stage. The posters are not only of a high standard, but also reflect the distinct traditional Chinese aesthetic in visual design.

This study aims to explore the four main visual aesthetic characteristics of Chinese movie posters: artistic conception, reality and illusion, vivid charm and harmony. The theoretical framework of design and narratology will be employed to analyze the specific manifestations of these aesthetic characteristics in Chinese movie posters and the cultural connotations behind them. It is the intention of this study to further explore the visual aesthetic characteristics of Chinese movie posters and to provide useful guidance and inspiration for the development of Chinese poster design.

Literature review

The concept of the "Chinese aesthetic spirit" encapsulates the fundamental essence of traditional Chinese aesthetics and exemplifies the Chinese people's comprehension, appreciation, and creation of beauty. Regarding the perception of nature, the concept places great emphasis on the harmonious coexistence of humanity and the natural world, and it advocates for the unity of humanity and nature. In social relations, harmony is the basis of stability [Nie Mengling, 2024, 76]. Posters are a type of visual design that employs a distinctive combination of visual elements and narrative techniques to convey a unique visual aesthetic. Posters serve as an essential conduit for disseminating film information and propaganda, effectively conveying the film's ideas and themes, stimulating interest in the film, and even prompting action [Hao Yinzhong, 2016, 58].

As China's film industries have experienced a period of rapid growth, posters have emerged as a key visual information transmission tool. This has led to a growing interest among scholars and designers in the design style and aesthetic characteristics of posters. In recent years, numerous researchers have conducted comprehensive investigations into the visual aesthetic characteristics of Chinese posters, resulting in a substantial body of research findings. These studies elucidate the visual aesthetic characteristics of Chinese posters from multiple vantages. Chen Huishu [Chen Huishu, 2019] undertook a detailed analysis of the fundamental elements of poster visual communication, including graphics, colors, text, and layout. The author elucidated the manner in which these elements function

collectively to convey both the artistic connotations and commercial value of the film in question. Zhang Shushu examined the works of Chinese director Zhang Yimou and identified a unique oriental aesthetic charm in the symbolic and artistic treatment of traditional folk culture in poster design. This treatment, combined with the ingenious combination of characteristics of the time, was found to be a significant factor in the aesthetic appeal of the posters. Furthermore, Wang Min examined the "Chinese Pattern" design in movie posters from a transcultural perspective, investigating its connotations, value, visual symbols and aesthetic implications in detail. This research not only enhanced our understanding of this design model, but also provided new ideas for the innovation of poster design in the context of globalization. Additionally, Song Ziyi [Song Ziyi, 2021] also addressed the concept of "artistic conception" within Chinese aesthetics. This artistic conception is regarded as a manifestation of traditional culture and aesthetic concepts, which can arouse the audience's cultural identity and emotional resonance. In Shi Xue [Shi Xu, 2022] valuable guidance is provided for those engaged in the practical creation of posters by means of a deep and detailed analysis of the manner in which tradition and modernity are integrated and collide in the domain of poster design. Additionally, Hu Wenwei [Hu Wenwei, 2023] elucidated the oriental aesthetic elements inherent to Chinese movie poster design, including the use of blank space, balance, font strength, rhythm, and natural form. These elements collectively contribute to the distinctive visual style and aesthetic characteristics of Chinese movie posters.

In sum, the study of the visual aesthetic characteristics of Chinese posters is reflected in multiple aspects, which provides a solid research foundation for this study. Building upon previous research, this study narrows its focus to four aesthetic characteristics observed in contemporary Chinese movie posters: artistic conception, reality and illusion, vivid charm and harmony. The objective of this study is to elucidate the specific methods of traditional Chinese aesthetics in poster design through an analysis of the characteristics. This study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the visual aesthetic characteristics of Chinese posters, thereby assisting designers in creating poster works with greater Chinese characteristics and international competitiveness.

Research Methods

This study employs a combination of a literature survey and a case analysis. First, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to establish a robust theoretical foundation. This review encompassed literature related to movie posters, aesthetics, and visual expression. Second, study selected a number of representative cases and conducted a detailed analysis. This was done in order to reveal the visual aesthetic value of these posters from a practical perspective.

1. Visual aesthetic characteristics of Chinese posters.

1.1. Beauty of artistic conception.

"Artistic conception" refers to the meaning and realm conveyed by the work through the image [Zong Baihua, 2018, 70]. The beauty of artistic conception is a state of blending scene and mood, which brings people endless reverie [Wang Min, 2019, 155]. The concept of "artistic conception" first appeared in Chinese literary works and then penetrated the field of Chinese painting, which had a profound impact on the creation of traditional Chinese painting. The artistic conception of beauty pursued by Chinese landscape painters is a scene in which there is scenery in the painting, there is painting outside the painting, and the meaning is outside the painting [Yang Guangyu, 2018, 31]. The pursuit of aesthetic beauty in artistic conception is reflected in numerous areas of traditional Chinese culture. One might consider the Chinese classical garden as an illustrative example. Designers

meticulously arrange spatial elements, adeptly select vegetation, and skillfully integrate waterscape design to create a visually appealing artistic conception that harmoniously blends with nature.

Chinese posters create a distinctive ambience through the strategic integration of calligraphy, ink, and other traditional patterns, coupled with colors, graphics, and composition. This design not only provides visual enjoyment but also conveys culture, spirit, and emotion at a deeper level. The audience is able to perceive the profound heritage and wisdom of traditional Chinese culture. The contemporary concept of "beauty of artistic conception" incorporates a more innovative approach. The work of art in question places particular focus on the individual feelings and experiences of the viewer. It is designed to elicit a strong emotional response, and in so doing, to resonate with the viewer on an emotional level. Different color combinations, with their ever-changing matching methods, can create a variety of visual experiences such as absurdity, ethereal, and intense [Hao Yinzong, 2016, 58]. These experiences further lead the audience into a specific artistic conception. Figure 1 shows the poster of the Chinese movie "Big Fish and Begonia," which creates a Chinese oriental aesthetic with cold and warm colors. In the poster, the moment when the protagonist "Chun" falls into the water forms a sharp contrast with the deep eyes of the big fish. This visual contrast skillfully guides the audience's sight. Most the poster's space is reserved for a blank canvas, which serves to depict the grand scene of the protagonist falling into the water. This layout, which is devoid of any text or imagery, creates a sensation of time standing still. This sensation, in turn, serves to enhance the mysterious and dreamlike quality of the narrative presented in the film. The film's narrative revolves around themes of life, love, and separation, and it is imbued with a profound emotional resonance. The poster's poetic visual language leads into an artistic conception that is both mysterious and full of emotional resonance.

2. The Beauty of reality and illusion.

"Beauty of reality and illusion" is derived from the philosophical tradition of Taoism, which originated in traditional Chinese thought. According to Laozi, all things are unified by the interdependent and mutually transformative relationship between reality and illusion. This philosophy has also profoundly influenced China's artistic creation and aesthetic concepts. In traditional Chinese painting techniques, the concepts of reality and illusion are reflected in the sparseness and density of strokes, as well as the distinction between the invisible and visible [Cao Jingzhen, 2019, 125]. "Reality" is used to describe the specific and detailed aspects of a work of art.

The term "illusion" is typically employed to describe those elements of the work that are vague and lacking in detail [Lei Ke, 2023, 54]. The concept of "illusion" is exemplified using blank space in a painting. In Chinese painting, mountains are often depicted as real, while the flowing water is often represented as virtual. The integration of the virtual and the real in the composition of the picture serves to enhance the artistic conception of the image [Shi Xue, 2022, 17].

Chinese posters pursue the beauty of reality and illusion, which is reflected in the contrast of color, quantity, movement and stillness. The distinction between reality and illusion is of particular significance. Excessive illusion will result in a soft and weak image, whereas an excess of reality will render it challenging to perceive [Shi Xue, 2022, 17]. The poster intentionally incorporates blank space to emphasize the essential information. Blank space not only allows for the incorporation of imaginative elements but also serves to set off the "real" elements, highlight the theme, and create an ethereal and profound artistic conception visually. Figure 2 is a poster for the Chinese film *The Golden Age*. A feather of light white hue floats on the surface of the water, which contrasts with its reflection in the water. This contrast between the real and the imaginary effectively conveys the duality and complexity of the heroine's character. In the narrative, the protagonist experiences the vicissitudes of life, including struggles experiences. However, in real life, she maintains a pure and innocent heart and pursues love

and freedom unremittingly [Xu Liqin, 2015, 104]. In the distance of the poster, the heroine is looming, as if she is about to go on a long journey. This design skillfully triggers the audience's infinite reverie about her fate. The poster uses a combination of reality and fiction to leave a broad space for the audience to imagine and deeply interpret the rich story behind this character.



Figure 1. Chinese movie poster "Big Fish and Begonia"



Figure 2. Chinese movie poster "The Golden Age" poster

3. The beauty of vivid charm.

Chinese art focuses on the inner experience of the works, while Western art focuses more on the stimulation of physiological senses. This difference in cultural spirit affects the different aesthetic styles of Chinese and Western design. The "vivid charm" emphasizes the vitality and rhythm contained in the

artwork. Chinese calligraphy and seal carving also have the beauty of rhyme because of the changes in the density of strokes and the unity in the changes of contrasting relationships.

The vivid charm of Chinese poster design lies not only in the transformation of the surface form, but also in the integration of the overarching connotations, rhythms, and rhymes. Chinese posters seek to unify form and content, thereby enabling the tangible elements to convey a certain inner vitality, thus resonating with the viewer emotionally. The poster for the film *The Grandmaster*, depicted in Figure 3, is imbued with the vivid charm of Chinese culture. The poster's monochromatic palette of black, white, and gray creates a distinctive visual rhythm and rhyme, showcasing the restraint and depth of Chinese classical aesthetics. In the poster, the characters are positioned within the doorway. This design employs a technique reminiscent of the "framed scenery" approach observed in traditional Chinese architecture, creating an artistic effect that may be described as a "picture in picture." The strategic combination of characters and doorways, with movement in stillness, not only accentuates the heroic posture of martial artists but also conveys a martial arts philosophy of both internal and external cultivation and overcoming hardness with softness. The clusters of dense gray branches visually create a sense of space that interweaves front and back, thereby adding layers and depth to the picture. This approach to spatial organization is a significant manifestation of the aesthetic appeal of Chinese cultural sensibilities. This approach enables the audience to gain an appreciation for the realm of Chinese martial arts while simultaneously appreciating the artistic merits of the painting. Furthermore, it allows for the transmission of the spiritual core of Chinese traditional culture in an indirect manner.

4. The beauty of harmony.

In traditional Chinese art, the concept of harmony is regarded as an important aesthetic standard. This encompasses the harmony between the subject of artistic expression and nature, the harmony with human ethics, and the harmony and perfection of the artistic form, structure, and language [Chen Huijun, 2009, 109]. The concept of "harmonious beauty" is achieved by achieving a state of balance in vision, structure, and content, thereby creating a sense of beauty and comfort. This aesthetic concept places particular emphasis on the inner harmony of the work. In painting and calligraphy, artists also create a sense of balanced beauty using pen and ink and the choice of paper. Chinese architects meticulously plan the layout and structure of buildings to achieve a harmonious balance. Even in the layout of urban areas, such as the Forbidden City in Beijing, symmetrical design techniques are employed to reflect this balanced beauty.

The harmonious beauty of Chinese posters is exemplified by the layout of elements within the picture, which is neither excessively crowded nor empty, but somewhat coordinated with one another. The visual feature is primarily manifested in the communication of cultural connotations and the integration of traditional elements, emphasize in the way elements are complemented and symbiotic relationships are established between them. Figure 4 is a poster for the Chinese film *Hidden Man*, which employs the eaves element for parallel composition. This integration of the public, the film title, the director's name, and the male protagonist into each layer of the eaves line creates a unique sense of harmony. As the viewer's line of sight ascends, the narrative elements gradually reveal themselves, forming an intriguing echo with the nested narrative structure of the film. This process guides the audience to a deeper comprehension of the story's underlying meanings. In terms of color, the poster is dominated by red, which is supplemented by Chinese ink color, thereby creating a sharp contrast and a harmonious visual effect. The hero's courage at the top of the poster serves as a focal point, emphasizing the central theme of the narrative. The dynamic interplay between the elements of the poster imbues the image with a sense of vitality.

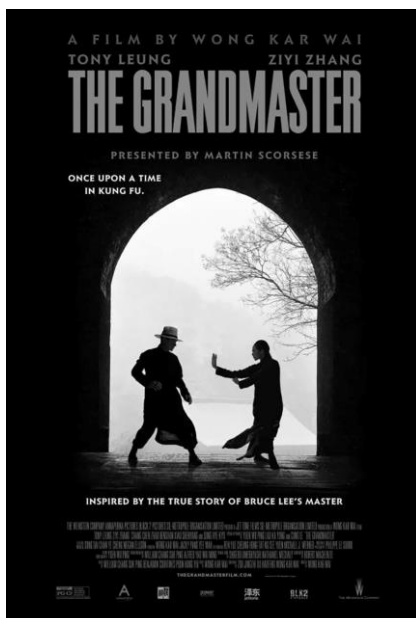


Figure 3. Chinese movie poster "The Grandmaster" poster

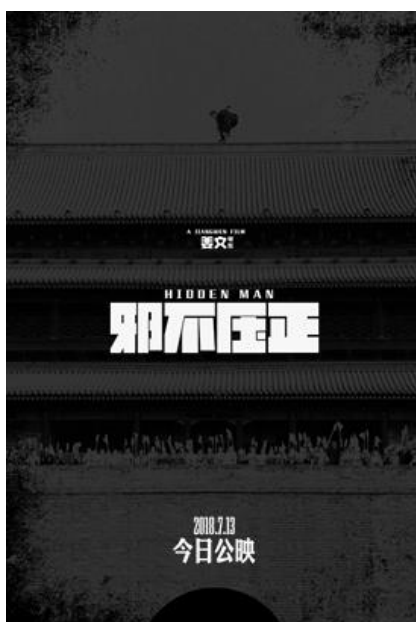


Figure 4. Chinese movie poster "Hidden Man"

Conclusion

The visual aesthetic characteristics of Chinese posters are reflected in numerous aspects. The most notable of these characteristics are the beauty of artistic conception, the beauty of reality and illusion, the beauty of vivid charm, and the beauty of harmony. These aesthetic qualities collectively define the distinctive style of Chinese poster design. The beauty of artistic conception is not limited to the visual realm; it also elucidates the narratives and multifaceted meanings inherent in the works. Concurrently, Chinese posters aspire to the beauty of reality and illusion, serving to highlight the core information and create a profound artistic conception. The vivid charm of Chinese poster design is exemplified by

the unity of its overall connotation, rhythm, and rhyme. The pursuit of harmony is reflected in the stability, balance, and symmetry of the design. These visual aesthetic features not only enhance the artistic value of the poster, but also effectively convey China's profound cultural connotations. By meticulously examining these attributes, it is our intention to facilitate the continuous evolution and advancement of Chinese movie poster design, thereby furthering the posters' aesthetic qualities and enabling the world to appreciate their distinctive allure.

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Визуально-эстетические характеристики китайских киноплакатов

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Аннотация

Китайское плакатное искусство находится под глубоким влиянием древней китайской эстетики и поэтому демонстрирует уникальное визуальное эстетическое очарование. В данном исследовании основное внимание уделяется четырем основным визуально-эстетическим характеристикам китайских киноплакатов: красоте художественной концепции, красоте реальности и иллюзий, красоте яркого очарования и красоте гармонии. Применяя теоретические основы дизайна и нарратологии, авторы детально анализируют конкретные проявления этих эстетических характеристик в китайских киноплакатах. Цель исследования – глубже понять визуально-эстетическую сущность китайских плакатов, помочь дизайнерам создавать больше плакатных шедевров, богатых китайским шармом. Результаты исследования показывают, что красота художественной концепции может побудить аудиторию исследовать глубокий смысл произведения; красота реальности и иллюзий подчеркивает основную информацию с помощью приемов пустого пространства и контраста, создавая захватывающую художественную концепцию; красота яркого очарования подчеркивает живость и отчетливый ритм произведения, а красота гармонии стремится к устойчивому и сбалансированному эстетическому взгляду и достижению идеальной гармонии в визуальном представлении и передаче контента.

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Ключевые слова

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