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## THE STYLISTIC FEATURES OF THE DESIGN OF POSTERS OF THE XI'AN FILM STUDIO

**Purpose** of the study is to clarify the artistic features, style characteristics, and existing flaws in the poster design of different genre films produced by Xi'an Film Studio at different stages of its development, through the analysis of a large number of historical posters from Xi'an Film Studio; the use and development of graphics, colors, and symbols in the poster design; the exploration of the influence of the aesthetics of Western cinema.

**Methodology** is based on the system-analytical, comparative, figurative-stylistic, compositional-constructive, comprehensive-historical and semiotic methods. This made it possible to comprehensively investigate the specified problem, made generalization and reach reasonable conclusions.

**Results.** The main features of Xi'an Film Studio's movie poster design are revealed. The main characteristics of the design, existing flaws, and the application of the poster design of Xi'an Film Studio are summarized. According to the results of the research, the use and development of graphics, colors, and symbols in the poster design of Western cinema are summarized and applied.

**Scientific novelty.** The characteristics and the application of Xi'an Film Studio's movie poster design are analyzed, the regional symbols that are applied in the design are revealed, and some practical results and solution of Xi'an Film Studio's movie poster design are summarized. Moreover, an perspective that integrates media convergence and interdisciplinary approaches, combining theories from semiotics and communication studies to analyze various dimensions of poster design at the Xi'an Film Studio are developed. A substantial amount of primary visual and textual materials has been gathered to facilitate a comprehensive analysis.

**Practical significance.** The results of the study can be used to analyze and develop the application of design principles in the poster designs, brand designs, digital media and interactive design, provide practical experience for incorporating cultural elements into design, and offer a pathway for designing local cultural products in Shaanxi.

**Keywords:** Xi'an Film Studio; poster design; Chinese style; color; tradition; historical and cultural context.

**Introduction.** Surveying the developmental trajectory of Chinese cinema, the incorporation of traditional cultural symbols into poster design showcases the unique charm of Chinese culture, conveying a distinctive Eastern essence. Poster designs from various major film studios exhibit different characteristics in their approaches to graphics, imagery, and color, with regional variations leading to the development of diverse elements and symbols.

In the era of new media, the widespread use of traditional Chinese elements in poster design is more innovative in form, reaching a broader audience. While the academic community increasingly emphasizes the study of film posters, most analyses focus on design

aesthetic elements and features, with few taking a holistic semiotic perspective. This study adopted a perspective of media convergence and interdisciplinary analysis, combining theories from semiotics and communication studies to analyze different dimensions of Xi'an Film Studio's movie poster design.

**Analysis of previous researches.** Grounded in collected literature, the research involves comprehensive analysis. It conducted on-site investigations at the China Film Museum, China Film Archive, and Xi'an Film Studio Museum, gathering a substantial amount of primary visual and textual materials.

It was conducted on the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) using the theme "film posters", subsequent searches

focused on "Xi'an Film Studio film posters" yielded zero relevant literature, indicating a gap in domestic research. It has been researched in the following areas: Firstly, research from an artistic and aesthetic perspective employs principle of design and relevant knowledge in literary aesthetics to study the design of film posters during specific periods and for specific types of films in China. This involves analyzing the elements of film poster design (such as color and imagery) and providing instance analyses of the application of classical Chinese cultural elements. Examples include articles by Li Xiang and Mu Zhou, the studies combine insights from different historical stages of the Chinese film industry with an analysis of the artistic characteristics of film poster design during these periods [1], [2]. For instance, Cao Jiang focused on the aesthetic features of film posters created by designer Yi Meikai from Chang Chun Film Studio [3].

Secondly, studies select representative film poster works from a specific historical period of a film studio, utilizing theories such as semiotics and communication to analyze their audience communication effects, showcasing an interdisciplinary perspective. An example is the study about Changchun Film Studio Film Posters, which analyzes the phenomenon of "gaze" in Changchun Film Studio film posters from 1949 to 1999 based on the "visual grammar" framework's three major indicators: "gaze contact" "social distance" and "attitude". The study concludes by determining the audience's reception of the posters [4].

In terms of research on Xi'an Film Studio in China, the focus has mainly been on two aspects: the industrial perspective, exploring the studio's enterprise transition and industrial development patterns, and the cultural aesthetics of Western films produced by Xi'an Film Studio in the 1990s. However, there remains a gap in research specifically related to Xi'an Film Studio posters.

Most studies related to film studios tend to focus on the broader film industry. A notable work by Danny Miller and Jamal Shamsie,

explores the industrial resources of major Hollywood film studios during the period from 1936 to 1965 [5]. Brian Jacobson's study focuses on early film corporations in the United States and France, describing how filmmakers envisioned and created cinematic spaces using modern materials [6]. Ben Goldsmith and Tom O'Regan discuss the crucial role of studios in the economic development of the film industry globally [7].

When searching international databases like CORE and PubMed with the keywords such as "Xi'an Film Studio film poster", "Xi'an Film Studio" or "film studio", no directly related literature was found. These studies often focus on a specific film studio, a historical period, or a particular national film industry, either in the context of industrial economics or cultural communication. Examples include Markus Wohlfeil's and Ewa Ciszewska's study [8], [9]. In summary, whether in China or abroad, research on the keywords "Xi'an Film Studio" and "poster design" is lacking. There is a noticeable gap in studying these topics, especially in terms of applying fundamental principles of design aesthetics, considering the evolution of aesthetic preferences over time, summarizing local cultural elements, and incorporating contemporary design practices.

**Statement of the problem.** The goal is to use relevant theories, combined with historical data, to outline the developmental history of Xi'an Film Studio's movie posters, analyze text creation, and explore future directions and applications. Through the study of movie posters from various major Chinese film studios, the research aims to contribute to the aesthetic development of film poster design in China.

**Results of the research.** First of all, the overall theme predominantly features vibrant colors, capturing the audience's attention. Looking at the poster designs from the establishment of the Xi'an Film Studio in 1958 until the recent redesign of posters for classic films produced by the studio in the 1980s and 1990s, despite spanning five historical periods,

the author finds that compared to posters from other studios of the same period, the posters from Xi'an Film Studio generally exhibit more vibrant colors, often using highly saturated primary colors, such as red. This distinctive use of color in posters sets Xi'an Film Studio apart from other studios of the same era.

The most typical examples are the posters for the mainland China release of "Red Sorghum" in 1988 and the 2018 re-release (Fig. 1). Clearly, all three posters feature a dominant, highly saturated red color as the main tone, with red occupying more than half of the poster's area. The impact and allure of this color scheme are evident, effectively conveying the passionate and free-spirited emotions depicted in the films. The first poster even incorporates flame shapes in red, echoing the narrative of resistance against invasion in the film and conveying its emotional tone.

Additionally, as an adjacent color to red, yellow becomes the second most important color in the posters. The use of adjacent colors can create a rich and dynamic visual effect. In the poster designs for this film, yellow occupies the largest area besides red, with its prominence even more emphasized in the re-release poster [10]. The yellow circular shape, representing the sun, also becomes an important symbolic element in the poster, symbolizing the awakening of the nation.

In some of the posters with darker background colors, the Xi'an Film Studio's poster designs often incorporate a significant amount of red in the font design, serving to highlight key points. The most representative examples include the 1986 realistic drama "Lao Jing" and the 1991 martial arts film "Swordsmen in Double Flag Town".

In 2022, Xi'an Film Studio launched the "Re-see" project, inviting 10 young designers and illustrators to reinterpret posters for classic Xi'an films from a fresh perspective, which garnered significant attention domestically. Among the 11 posters initially released, both

"Lao Jing" and "Swordsmen in Double Flag Town" retained the original font design, featuring prominently bold red titles that not only catch the eye but also exude a profound sense of traditional cultural charm due to their classical font style (Fig. 2, 3).

Additionally, designers often utilize complementary colors to create contrast in the posters, such as yellow with blue, red with green, and so forth. In the poster for the 1987 thriller "Eastern Tomb Robber", the design divides the space into two parts, with the upper portion in warm yellow tones and the lower portion in cool blue tones, creating a sense of suspense and intrigue that aligns with the film's theme (Fig. 4). In the two versions of the poster for the 1999 family comedy "Shower", red and green are used in juxtaposition, generating a light-hearted and humorous atmosphere.

Secondly, adept at employing cultural symbols specific to the Shaanxi region to evoke a sense of Western storytelling. Films produced by Xi'an Film Studio represent a unique genre in the history of Chinese cinema, known as "Western films". The concept of "Western films" has been extensively discussed in Chinese academia for decades and can be characterized by several features: stories set in the geographical and cultural space of western China, depicting life in western China, aiming to portray the spirit and character of the people of the west, showcasing their unique cultural traits and spiritual essence, and embodying the distinctive aesthetic tradition of the Chinese nation. In short, this is a Chinese film genre entirely distinct from American Westerns.

In the design of posters for such films, there is inevitably a requirement to emphasize elements of the western Chinese region, unearth symbols of western culture, and promote the traditional aesthetics of the west. Classic elements of the western region such as the Loess Plateau, traditional courtyards, the Yellow River, and the Terracotta Warriors have thus become widely used symbols.



**Fig. 1.** Examples of Xi'an Film Studio film "Red Sorghum" series poster:

- a – Chinese Mainland release Poster, 1988;
- b – mainland China Re-release Poster, 2018;
- c – mainland China Re-release Character Poster, 2018



**Fig. 2.** Examples of Xi'an Film Studio film "Lao Jing" series poster:

- a – The mainland China release poster, 1986;
- b – The reimagined poster in "Re-see" project, 2022



**Fig. 3.** Examples of Xi'an Film Studio film "Swordsmen in Double Flag Town" series poster:

- a – the mainland China release poster, 1991;
- b – the reimagined poster in "Re-see" project, 2022



**Fig. 4.** Examples of Xi'an Film Studio film "Eastern Tomb Robber" and "Shower" series poster:

- a – the mainland China release poster of "Eastern Tomb Robber", 1987;
- b, c – the mainland China release posters of "Shower", 1999



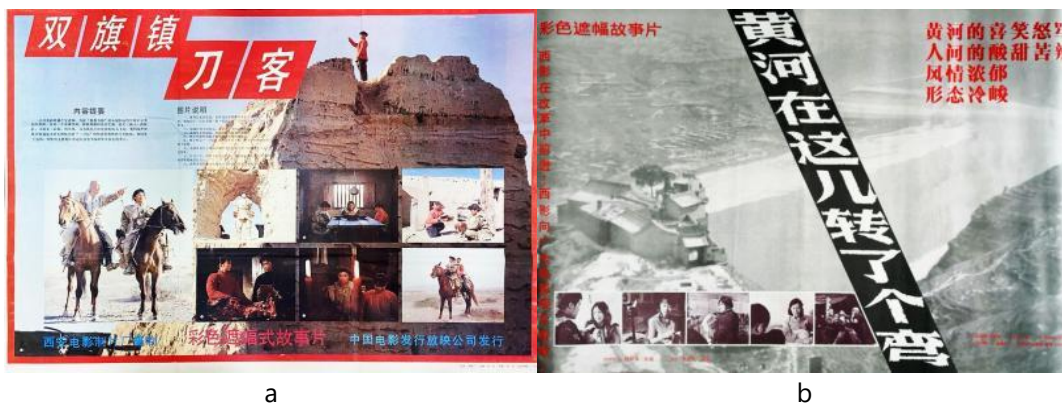


Fig. 5. Examples of the mainland China release poster of Xi'an Film Studio:  
a – "Swordsmen in Double Flag Town", 1991; b – "The Yellow River Turns Here", 1986



Fig. 6. Examples of the mainland China release poster of Xi'an Film Studio:  
a – "Wild Mountains", 1986; b – "The Yellow River Turns Here", 1986

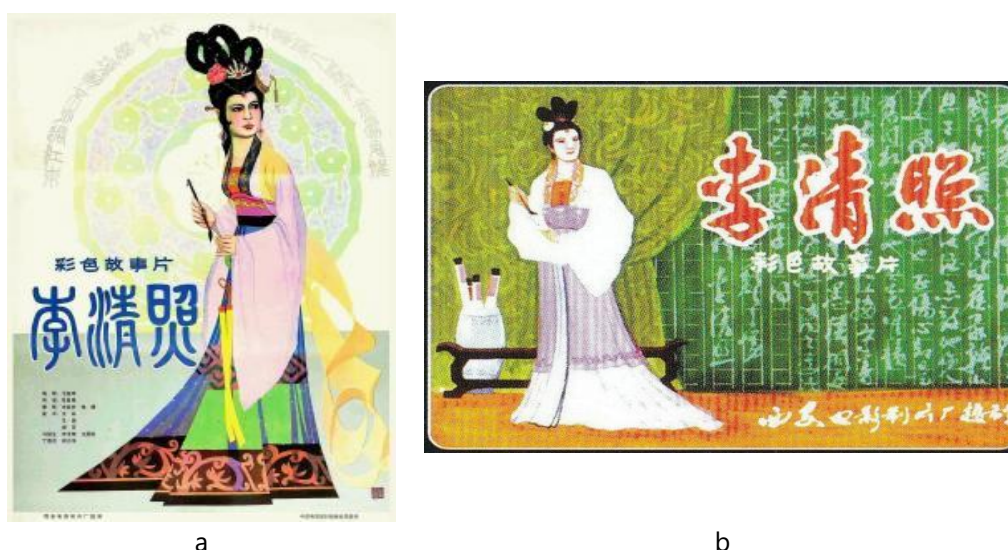


Fig. 7. Examples of Xi'an Film Studio film "Li Qingzhao" series poster:  
a – Vertical Poster, 1981; b – Horizontal Poster, 1981



a



b

**Fig. 8.** Examples of Xi'an Film Studio film "silk Road Rain" series poster:  
a – Horizontal Poster, 1982; b – Vertical Poster, 1982

The most direct design approach is to use photographic works featuring these elements as the main elements of the poster, as seen in the mainland China release posters for "The Yellow River Turns Here" in 1986 and one version of "Swordsmen in Double Flag Town" in 1991, which are straightforward but relatively lacking in design sensibility (Fig. 5).

In addition to this, using silhouettes, distorted shapes or symbolic representations of these images appears more subtle and imbued with symbolic meaning and design sensibility. For example, in the alternative posters for "Wild Mountains" and "The Yellow River Turns Here" from 1986, the mountainous background on the left side of "Wild Mountains" represents the characteristic loess slopes of the northwest region, while the silhouette of a person's face on the mountain evokes thoughts of the people living in the mountainous areas of the northwest, thus possessing a symbolic meaning of "silent ancestors facing the loess". The alternative poster for "The Yellow River Turns Here" abstracts the Yellow River into a curved pattern, which enhances the aesthetics of graphic design (Fig. 6).

Thirdly, cleverly incorporate elements of traditional Chinese culture to create imagery. In addition to widely using symbols from the western region's cultural heritage, the poster

designs of the Western Film Studios also ingeniously incorporate other elements of traditional Chinese culture to echo the storyline, creating a unique imagery and classical aesthetic.

For instance, the poster of "Li Qingzhao" in 1981 features traditional cultural elements such as brushes and scrolls in the imagery, aligning with Li Qingzhao's identity as a poet. The background showcases Li Qingzhao's poems in vertical calligraphy, while the framing incorporates traditional Chinese floral patterns. By seamlessly integrating these traditional cultural symbols into the poster design, a natural and cohesive style is achieved (Fig. 7).

One of the more representative examples is the poster for the large-scale dance film "Silk Road Rain" released in 1982 (Fig. 8). The film draws inspiration from the well-known Tang Dynasty flying celestial fresco "Rebound of the Pipa, Celebrating the Joy of Heaven". It creates a behind-the-scenes story for its artistic creation, involving a painter, a master musician and his daughter, and the joys and sorrows of West Asian merchants on the Silk Road. Therefore, the design of the movie poster centers around the flying celestial dancer, the most dynamically aesthetic figure in the fresco, and explores different variations.

In the public release's horizontal poster, the hand-drawn image of the rebounding pipa dancer is placed at the center, occupying three-quarters of the poster. The classic symbol of the Silk Road in Chinese history, the desert camel bell, is used as a background decoration, indicating the significant historical context of the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty. The elements of the desert, setting sun, and camel bell, being classical elements in Tang Dynasty poetry, inherently possess strong regional and expressive functions. A line like "The vast desert, lonely smoke straight" directly evokes a poetic sentiment among the audience, transporting them into the vast and boundless historical and cultural space.

In the vertical poster, the composition is divided into three sections. The core cultural element of the film, the Tang Dynasty flying celestial fresco "Rebound of the Pipa, Celebrating the Joy of Heaven" is placed in the center. The upper part features the movie title written in ancient Chinese seal script, exuding an ancient charm. The lower part captures a classic scene from the dance drama where the performers simulate the flying celestial. Each section of the image is filled with a dynamic and soaring beauty, collectively building an expressive traditional aesthetic.

**Conclusions.** The film poster design of Xi'an Film Studio exhibits unique artistic features in the use of color, regional cultural symbols, and the exploration and application of traditional Chinese cultural elements, presenting a design style filled with artistic ambiance and cultural depth.

The poster designs of Xi'an Film Studio reflect a rich cultural essence, serving not only as promotional tools for films but also as conveyors of culture. By delving into the themes and backgrounds of the film "Silk Road Rain," designers successfully integrated the historical, cultural, and aesthetic elements of the Silk Road into the poster design, showcasing the charm and richness of traditional Chinese culture. The poster design also highlights artistic and visual

appeal. Whether in landscape or portrait format, the design style reflects careful considerations in composition, color, and image selection. Regardless of the format, the designs exude artistic qualities and aesthetic sensibilities.

Moreover, the poster designs also mirror the development level and aesthetic trends of the Chinese film industry at that time. The 1980s marked a period of vigorous development for the Chinese film industry, with various film studios introducing films with distinct Chinese characteristics. As one of these studios, Xi'an Film Studio's poster design serves not only as a means to promote films but also as a window showcasing the cultural and artistic prowess of Chinese cinema.

Xi'an Film Studio's poster design not only stands out in terms of artistic and cultural content but also cleverly explores and utilizes elements and symbols of the western region, adding a distinctive touch to its design style. Through the extensive use of western regional cultural elements, these posters successfully connect the film's plot with the local history and cultural traditions, endowing the posters with profound historical and cultural significance while highlighting the regional characteristics of western films. The skillful use of traditional cultural symbols in poster design also enhances the unique charm of Chinese traditional culture visually, making it easier for the audience to understand the background and themes of the films.

In conclusion, the poster design style of Xi'an Film Studio ingeniously combines elements and symbols of the western region, making its posters not only convey information about the films but also serve as artworks with regional characteristics and cultural depth. This deep exploration and application of cultural elements in the design contribute to the development and promotion of western films, allowing the audience to deeply appreciate the unique historical and cultural essence of the western region.

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## СТИЛІСТИЧНІ ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ОФОРМЛЕННЯ ПОСТЕРІВ СІАНЬСЬКОЇ КІНОСТУДІЇ

**Мета.** Метою дослідження є з'ясування художніх особливостей, стилевих характеристик та наявних недоліків у дизайні плакатів різних жанрових фільмів, створених Сіаньською кіностудією на різних етапах її розвитку, шляхом текстуального аналізу великої кількості історичних плакатів Сіаньської кіностудії; використання графіки, кольорів та символів у дизайні плакату; дослідження впливу естетики західного кінематографа.

**Методологія** ґрунтується на системно-аналітичному, порівняльному, образно-стилістичному, композиційно-конструктивному, комплексно-історичному та семіотичному методах. Це дало змогу всебічно дослідити зазначену проблему, зробити узагальнення та дійти обґрунтованих висновків.

**Результати.** Розкрито основні особливості графічного проектування постерів кіностудії Сіань. Узагальнено основні характеристики дизайну, існуючі недоліки та застосування плакатів Сіаньської кіностудії. За результатами дослідження узагальнено та застосовано використання графіки, кольорів та символів у дизайні плакатів західного кінематографа.

**Наукова новизна.** Проаналізовано характеристики та застосування дизайну кіноплаката Сіаньської кіностудії, розкрито регіональні символи, які використовувалися в дизайні, а також узагальнено деякі практичні результати та рішення дизайну кіноплаката Сіаньської кіностудії. Крім того, окреслено перспективу, яка об'єднує конвергенцію медіа та міждисциплінарні підходи, поєднуючи теорії семіотики та комунікаційних досліджень для аналізу різних вимірів дизайну плакатів на Сіаньській кіностудії. Зібрано і структуровано значну кількість первинних візуальних і текстових матеріалів для всебічного аналізу.

**Практична значущість.** Результати дослідження можуть бути використані для аналізу та розвитку застосування принципів графічного проектування в дизайні плакатів, дизайні брендів, цифрових медіа та інтерактивному дизайні. Продемонстровано практичний досвід застосування елементів народної культури у дизайні плакату, а також запропоновано шлях для проектування об'єктів з елементами місцевої культурної складової провінції Шеньсі.

**Ключові слова:** Сіаньська кіностудія; дизайн плакатів; китайський стиль; колір; традиція; історико-культурний контекст.

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