

The Combination of Literal Language and Visual Language

When Poetry Meets Design*

Tingjin Shi

Xiamen University Tan Kah Kee College
Xiamen, China

Abstract—As a graphic designer, the author deeply explores the spiritual connotation of ancient poetry and gives new inspiration to poster design. The expression of images to ancient poems can often carry more information and a modern meaning. Literal language starts from visual language and then turns back to it, which makes ancient poetry and modern design connect with each other, poets and designers get to know each other. The author's cross-boundary research reminds us that when we carry out research on the relationship between literal language and visual language, we should combine theory with creative practice to avoid empty talk and rhetorical criticism, seek logic in the dialogue between watching and creating and give play to their aesthetic and social value in the contemporary context.

Keywords—poetry; poster design; written language; visual language; image

I. INTRODUCTION

Poetry meeting design is an unexpected and reasonable collision and fusion. As Chen Liang of the Song dynasty once said in one of the second of the *Four Poems of Lv Bogong*, "Things in the world are often unexpected. If you like what other likes, you can draw on each other." And the reason why it's unexpected is that they're from different areas. Why is it reasonable for the two to combine with each other? Poetry and design works have something in common, that is, both of them use the method of imaginal thinking in the creative process. "Why should a poem be written in a pictorial manner but not in a direct manner like prose, and why should it be written in a way in which one thing is used to describe another or make another thing arise? This is to illustrate an abstract concept with concrete object images, which is called imaginal thinking. In Leo Tolstoy's view, "art is based on the ability of people to be affected by the feelings of others. The acme of visual art lies in the use of concrete images to express immaterialized feelings."

Classical poetry is the essence of traditional literature. It is also the most unique form, and is the literary heritage, in the

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history of world literature, attracting scholars from different regions and ages to study. The author tries to transcend language barriers and interpret the important life experience in poetry through images. At the same time, the author also expresses the understanding and imagination of all the things in universe. Therefore, images have become an important footnote of poetry. It can also be said that image is a spatial symbol or carrier of ancient poetry creation and modern art design.

Ancient poetry is a literary genre that uses written language to narrate, having a rich emotion and imagination. However, poster creation also needs to expand the wings of imagination and endow poetry with a more beautiful and more modern imaginal space through visual language. The creation process of both of them adheres to the idea that "art originates from life, but is higher than life", which is a process of re-creation of beauty. Wang Guowei wrote in *The Notes and Comments on Ci Poetry*: "the poet must enter into the realistic life and at the same time transcend it." A poet can be both submerged in and transcendent out, of the creative process of their works. The creative process of poster design is no different. It is also said in the *Preamble of Yi* that "to make the best of the image to show one's feeling" and "to view the image to get the idea". The creative process is a reproduction process of observation, feeling, brewing and expression process to life. Based on the feelings on poster creation, the author analyzed how to transform the written language of poetry into visual language and how does the realm of poetry affect the realm of artistic design.

II. POETRY MEETS POSTER DESIGN — UNIQUE IMAGINATION

Since the childhood, the author was always excited about and curious to poems, having a boundless imagination to its images. It was like the author was in the scene described by the poems and was filled with nameless warmth and touch. It not only exercised my imagination, but also made me pay attention to the details in life and taught me how to find the beauty of life and art, laying a foundation for future poster design.

"Poetry, art and literature are felt by people every day. They are everywhere and can be found at any time as long as people observe things around them." Gunter Rambles once

said. The author draws nutrition from the ancient poetry and triggers the connection between the ancient poetry and poster design. Containing rich philosophy, emotion and imagination, the poetry shows people's living conditions and spiritual world at a specific time in different aspects. This is the rich experience left by the predecessors and can be obtained through creative imagination. "A great writer must know a great deal about all kinds of life experiences and have a good capacity to organize those experiences meaningfully." Poster design is also a creative thinking activity. The premise of such creation is a rich knowledge system, which is an innovative activity based on rich experiences. For example, one of "the contemporary world's three largest graphic designer" Fukuda Shigeo, affected by Lu Bin from the United States with the positive and negative shape when he was young, uses the negative space art in poster design to the extreme. Gunter Rambow, on the other hand, was accompanied by potatoes through the most difficult childhood. He had a special feeling for potatoes, and he also applied potato culture to the extreme in poster design. The two masters share a common feature: they are good at capturing experience and opportunity connected with poster design and have a unique imagination, which makes them become our weathervane. As Newton said, "standing on the shoulders of giants, one can see farther." This kind of inheritance is not simply the "taken theory" but is based on the rich imagination to innovate. As a result, it will have a qualitative change.

In *Why You Read the Classics*, Calvino says, "The classic is this kind of book: the more we hear about it, the more we think we understand them. But when we actually read them, the more unique, unexpected and novel they seem to us." In poster creation, the author uses visual language to interpret poetry works and endow them with new ideas. As described in Saussure's *Introduction to Linguistics*, "In order to understand signifiers, we should always make use of other signifiers, so that the meanings of signifiers are delayed and enriched in the process of constantly borrowing from other signifiers".

III. POETRY MEETS POSTER DESIGN — THE VITALITY OF LANGUAGE

Use the visual language in poster design to render, recreate, and resublime the creation thinking of ancient poems, of visual language to render the poetry creation thinking, extract the proper visual elements to reconstruct the image, and turn the imagination of the text into direct visual images. A successful poster design should not only pursue a formal beauty or a visual impact. What's more, it should discover its inner beauty and create an atmosphere of simplicity and a shock force on psychology, giving the readers rich imagination. The following is the comprehension of the author in the creation process of eight posters that used poems as a context. The author shares with the readers about the poster creations, that is how I express fresh perceptual experience and shared humanity of both the ancient and today based on ancient poems.



Fig. 1. Culture is the Food of Our Spirit.

Culture Is the Food of Our Spirit (as seen in Fig. 1) is a poster work created by the author during my postgraduate study. I have won the bronze award of the third "east + west" international poster biennale for college students. The inspiration comes from the *Poem of Persuasion* written by Yan Zhenqing in Tang dynasty: "The lights at late night and the chicken singing in the early morning, it is the right time for the boys to study. One who does not work hard when they are young will regret when they are old." Exhortation poetry aims to encourage young people to cherish their time and pursue the cultural connotation. It embodies the profound significance of studying hard and the culture of self-restraint. Pushkin, the father of Russian literature, once said, "books are the food of the human spirit." "Books," bacon said, "are the ships of thought that sail through the waves of time, carefully passing precious goods from generation to generation." It reminds us of Nazi Germany burning more than 100 million books across Europe during the world war two. On the other side of the ocean, the United States launched the "victory book movement", calling on the emotional public to donate books and encouraged publishing houses to publish books exclusively for the military. Throughout the World War II, 140 million books were distributed to soldiers. Culture has won its war in its own tender and tenacious way. Culture is soft power. The author further derivatives the written language into visual language. In order to give viewers a more visual experience that culture is our spiritual food, the author selects the Chinese characters in the traditional culture and the most important material food---wheat to reconstruct. What's more, Chinese strokes are very similar to wheats in their shapes, the author explores the concrete visual language elements of both Chinese characters and the wheat to replace Chinese characters with the wheats, and to convey the implication that culture is our spiritual food with a vivid visual image of wheat. This aesthetic effect undoubtedly made the ancient's world view more effectively expressed.

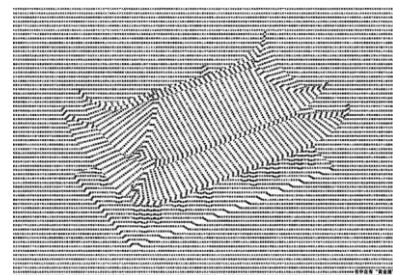


Fig. 2. The book Has Its Own "Golden House".

The *Book Has Its Own "Golden House"* (Fig. 2) is the poster work created by the author in 2013. It was exhibited in the "font design" 2013 Sino-US font design exhibition, won the excellent award of the professional group of the third China "western star" art design award, and was put in file of Volume 10 of *China Design Yearbook* (2014-2015 edition), etc. The creative inspiration comes from the famous sentence "there is a golden house in the book" in the *Chapter of Study Encouragement* written by Zhao Heng. At that time, the long war led to social instability and the country was in desperate need of talents. Song Zhenzong wrote this poem in order to encourage more people to read books and to establish a good atmosphere of people's love for reading, so as to select talents. This poem makes people all over the world intoxicated and points out the meaning of their life goals. The author visualized the written language that "the book has its own gold room", combined ancient poems with the image of the gold room, showing a three-dimensional visual effect through a two-dimensional space, vividly demonstrated the imagination and spiritual value of the past one thousand years, realizing the transformation from written language to the visual language. Emily Dickins' little poem, *No Speedboat Is Like A Book*, is a moving interpretation of the meaning of reading. "No speedboat is like a book that takes us far away. Nor does any horse can be like a page of psalms that the poorest man can travel across places but not be asked to pay for any tax. How frugal and simple this carriage of the human soul is." By reading books, we can go back to our heart and enrich our mind. This is the meaning of reading and the meaning of life.



Fig. 3. The Accord.

The *Accord* ("Fig. 3"), is one of the poster works created by the author in 2015. The work has won the special award of 2017 Ukraine COW international design festival, the top 42 of the 11th Russian golden turtle design competition in 2017, and the TOP100 of the 2016 Turkish Samson Samsun international poster design competition. It has also been exhibited on the 20th Finland Lahti international poster exhibition 2017 (one of the five most authoritative poster exhibition), Ukraine tenth *4th Block* international ecological poster Triennale, Beijing design week 2017 *Chinese Designers' Excellent Works Exhibition of International Visual Events* 2016 Scottish section plane design international poster contest, the first Ecuador international poster biennale 2016, the 12th of design (China) in Shenzhen, public welfare advertisement competition, the 4th Asian graphic design in Shanghai biennale, 2016 ADCK Asian Young Design invitational exhibition, 2016 Norwegian Blank Poster

exhibition, 2015 German Blank Poster exhibition, etc. And it was stored by the Finnish Lahti poster museum in the permanent collection, enjoying a high praise in the international world. The works is inspired by Wang Anshi's poem in Song dynasty *Singing Pomegranate Flowers*: "the thick green decorated with only one red dot, a moving spring is less needed." Later it evolved into the saying "a little red in the vast green". It means that there is a red flower in a large green bush that stands out. It contains the philosophy of "less is more". Beauty is to be proper. A little red in the green is beautiful, but a lot of red in the green is not necessarily pleasant. In the Song dynasty, a painting examination was held to gather all the world's painters together. The emperor, Zhao Ji, had a question: "a little red in the verdure, a moving spring scene needs little decoration". One of the painters won the first prize with a stroke of the pen. The painting said, "There is a small building in the jungle, a pretty girl upstairs leaning by the window with a little lipstick on her lips." The mind enters the treasure-house of knowledge by means of a direct way or memory, and inherits the knowledge acquired by its predecessors. Inspired by this, the author uses the strategy of divergent thinking and the computer to draw a red lip out of the vast green. Famous philosopher Heraclitus said, "beauty is in harmony". In poster design, people and the environment are converged in the picture. The harmonious coexistence between man and nature embodies the harmony of life and the art of living and the connotation of the color in the painting to purifies our mind. In the modern cold urban space filled with reinforced concrete, it needs the power of urban life aesthetics, and the harmonious coexistence of green plants and urban space to provide spiritual nutrients. The work seeks a path from the outside to the inner world.



Fig. 4. Lotus Insights.

Lotus Insights ("Fig. 4"), is a poster work created by the author in 2015. It was included in the 11th Toyama, Japan international poster Triennale (one of the five most authoritative poster exhibition), *2018 Slovakia Outdoor Poster Design Exhibition --- Graphic Poster Design Exhibition in China*, the first Wenzhou international design biennale 2016 "one hundred famous (well-known) designer invitational exhibition. It won the teacher group of the 4th China higher education design art contest, etc., and was permanently collected by Busan County Art Museum in Japan. The works was inspired by Xin Qiji's *Qingping Yue - the Village Life* in Song dynasty. The joy and playfulness of childhood burst upon the paper. Children seeing black lotus often think about it again and again, finally get the chance to use bamboo tied to a sickle, hook the lotus down from afar.

The big dark lotus has so many black holes, like the eyes of the little guy, looking outwards. Inspired by this, the author created the poster design works *Lotus Insight*. The work uses the expression technique of displacement to present a person's head with the image of lotus, and the shape of the lotus seed is like the black and bright eyes. The work embodies people's rich inner world and profound thoughts in the lotus flower, symbolizing the meeting and integration of human and nature.



Fig. 5. Year by Year.

Year by Year ("Fig. 5") is a poster design work created in 2016. It was selected to participate in the exhibition of 2017 movable type-word art design "cool word exhibition". The creative idea of the work comes from Liu Xiyi's *Sorrow for the Old Man* in Tang dynasty, "Year after year flowers are similar, year after year people are different." With the beautiful, smooth, neat sentences, the poem makes a contrast to the relationship between the falling flowers and the old man, sighing for the perishable youth. Poetry is interesting, full of artistic conception and life philosophy, and has been widely read. When we switched to Xiamen, which was hit by the strongest typhoon, Moranti, 350, 000 trees fell down. These trees no longer have the same chance of being living for a long time. If the "year by year the people are different" expresses the pity of disappeared youth, then we have more feelings and empathy for the environment around us. As in the English poet *Naive Prophecy* William Blake wrote, "one grain of sand, one world; one flower, one heaven. In both hands we hold the infinity, and the eternity is in moments." The work put the poems and a series of imaginations of Liu Xiyi into visual graphic language. In the font design, the work integrated the work with the representational graphic which is similar to the fallen flower and had a vivid contrast between the young and the old, leaving the passing years and different life experiences in the form of mottled mark of ink on paper. Behind every good work, there is a touching story. With the warmth of the creator, a good story makes a living work.



Fig. 6. Beauty and Harmony.

Beauty and Harmony ("Fig. 6") is a poster work created by the author in 2017. It was exhibited on the 10th 4th Block international ecological poster triennial exhibition of Ukraine. The work is inspired by the *South Side of the Capital City* by Cui Hu in Tang dynasty. "This day of last year, the face with a red makeup was reflected by the peach blossoms with the same color at this door. Today, we have no idea where the people go, but the flower is still in full blossom." The peach blossom on human's face is a kind of embodiment of the beauty and the charm, which shows the rhythm of life and has profound aesthetic implication. The peach blossom in the spring breeze reflects the face to be especially ruddy and moist, which has fully set off the beauty of the style. Bright and beautiful pink renders an atmosphere where the person and the peach blossom reflecting each other. The poem gives a picture of "thick makeup or light is all suitable to make the scene enjoyable. This kind of comparative creation gimmick contains the girl's spirit as if we have seen it. Her mood, the poet's thoughts, and the joy in each other's hearts can thus be imagined. The peach blossom on human's face tells the life recognition of *Deja vu* with vivid expression. The poster is created by using the expression technique of different aspects to replace human face with peach flowers. Under the background of increasingly severe natural environment problems, it reflects the beauty of harmony between human and nature.



Fig. 7. Lei Feng – the "bee" spirit.

Lei Feng – The "Bee" Spirit ("Fig. 7") is a poster work created by the author in 2018. The work is inspired by the poet Luo Yin's bee in Tang dynasty: "Vast scenery has been taken no matter on the plain or at the mountains. Who are they working for when they finally made the sweet honey?" "Whether it's a plain, a mountain, or a scene of endless flowers, the bee forms a wonderful sight, and it has worked hard all its life to make the honey of life. The work uses the bee to compose the head of Lei Feng's character and compares Lei Feng to a bee, which is extended to the inheritance of Lei Feng's spirit of serving the people wholeheartedly in the contemporary absence of spiritual belief. The author describes Lei Feng's image across time and space as the spokesman of dedication spirit and combines it with the well-known bee element to reflect the power of visual language in public welfare communication.



Fig. 8. The hair of the willow girl.

The Hair of The Willow Girl ("Fig. 8") is the latest poem poster work created in 2018. It was inspired by the poem *Ode to the Willow* by He Zhizhang of Tang dynasty: "The high willow is like the tree decorated by the jade, the long wickers are soft and green, like thousands of ribbons flying in the spring wind. We have no idea who cuts out the slim wickers, maybe it is the wind in February." "The works are associated with the images of "willow", "spring breeze" and "thin leaves" in the poems, which are associated with "beauty", "scissors" and "long hair" in real life. The author raises this poem out of a rut, and the poster contains an elegant style of the ancient. The willow tree is compared to the spring girl, and the hair of the willow girl is replaced with the willow leaf. The willow girl has long hair and clear lines. The word "cut" in the poem is the most expressive one. The spring wind is compared to scissors and is the creator of beauty. The author blends his personal emotional experience and his own art style into the design works, trying to make an innovation based on the max recovery of original poem, and to present a modern art image with a combination of both the form and spirit, human and nature.

The author penetrated the personal emotional experience and artistic style into this design work, trying to restore the poetry on the basis of innovative display of the integration of man and nature.

IV. POETRY MEETS POSTER DESIGN — A REFLECTION OF MOOD

Chinese people who belong to the Chinese civilization have common memories and traditions about ancient poems. Artists can use ancient poetry as a subtle way to convey ideas and feelings. From this point of view, the creators can take advantage of the works to have the maximum range of emotional resonance with the audience in the dissemination of works. It is a response to ancient poetry to retain the spirit of poetry in modern society. It deeply explored its cultural connotation and social value. As the saying goes, "the drum should be drummed with a heavy hammer". The drum of exquisite ancient poetry language also needs the heavy hammer of visual language to make a hard hit.

V. CONCLUSION

Su Shi of the Song dynasty had written in his poem *Poems for Yan Ling Wang Zubo's Painting of Branches*: "poetry

and painting originates from the same, namely be natural and fresh." He put forward the common aesthetic pursuit of poetry and painting. The creation rules of poetry and painting are essentially the same, expressing the meaningful and natural artistic conception expressed by art form. There are paintings in the poem, poems in the picture. Having a look at this landscape, the intertextuality and the regeneration between the written language and visual language complement each other. To put the ancient Chinese poems into the poster art in the design, the written language thus has realized the transformation to the visual language. The ancient poems are further developed and contained, carrying the context of the Chinese history, society and culture. In the book of *Yi · Fen*, "To observe the astronomical changes for time, and to concern the humanities to know the world" is the earliest definition of culture: the nature integrates the human spirit, the ancient's thought and modern people's thoughts compares to each other, and individuals connect to others. The author's works of poster design idea stems from the essence of traditional culture, bringing the traditional culture into the current and future to design again. The works confirm the inheritance and development of Chinese traditional culture, the poster design creation therefore has a rich connotation and emotion. The author will continue to take the ancient poetry culture as the subject and continue his happy artistic creation activities.

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