

Research on Urban Poster Design Methods in China—Take Taizhou Poster Design as an Example

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Abstract: Urban cultural posters serve as vital tools for promoting city culture and the tourism industry, fulfilling the significant mission of enriching the visual aesthetics of citizens, and disseminating urban culture. Governments utilize various means, such as propagating policy guidelines, promoting the cultural and tourism industry, conserving cultural heritage and humanistic history, showcasing academic and cultural events, and propagating the mainstream values, to harness the potential of urban cultural posters as windows that exhibit the city's cultural heritage and charm, thus providing both tourists and citizens with diverse visual delights. In this study, we embark on a journey through the evolution of urban cultural posters in China, focusing on the application of semiotics theory. By examining the techniques and design approaches employed in Chinese urban posters, and using Taizhou city's poster design as a case study, we aim to uncover the essence of Chinese urban poster design. Through the analysis of gathered data, we put forth valuable suggestions for the application of techniques in Chinese urban poster design, which can serve as a guideline for other cities in their poster design efforts.

Keywords: Urban cultural poster; Semiotics; Chinese poster design; Techniques; Cultural and tourism promotion

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1. The urban development process of China

1.1. Overview of China's urban development

The development of urban poster design in China has undergone a continuous process of innovation. From simple combinations of text and images in the early days to gradually incorporating artistic elements and adopting diverse design styles, urban posters have evolved to meet the growing demand for visual aesthetics and cultural experiences ^[1]. With the widespread application of digital technology, urban poster designs have become more flexible and versatile, utilizing computer graphics software and printing techniques to create more exquisite and distinctive works. Additionally, the rise of social media has presented new opportunities for poster dissemination, making use of mobile internet and social media platforms to reach a wider audience ^[2].

Moreover, urban posters effectively promote tourist attractions, cultural events, and distinctive products, thereby increasing tourists' interest and engagement, leading to the prosperity of the tourism industry ^[3].

In the process of continuous innovation, Chinese urban poster design not only meets the urgent demand for cultural products but also enhances the quality of urban life and cultural awareness ^[4].

1.2. History of the development of Chinese urban poster culture

In ancient China, the development of cities followed a long and gradual process, giving rise to some renowned cities, such as the capital city during the Northern Song period. This city flourished as the capital of the Northern Song dynasty, and its commercial districts experienced robust growth, with the shops lining the streets and riversides becoming a common sight ^[5].

This period witnessed a transformation from the closed and compartmentalized residential quarters to a more open and vibrant urban environment ^[6].

An iconic representation of the cityscape during this period can be found in the famous painting “Along the River During the Qingming Festival,” which provides us with vivid historical insights into the city’s appearance and life during that time ^[7], as shown in **Figure 1**.



Figure 1. Riverside scene at Qingming Festival (part)

The Yuan Dynasty capital city of China (now Beijing) was very famous in its history. Different from other ancient cities, the center of Dadu was not the imperial palace, but the bell and drum towers, the urban culture of the Yuan Dynasty, with the symbol of imperial power and the majesty of the ruler ^[8]. There were several forms of urban cultural posters in the Yuan Dynasty.

Business posters advertise their services in the form of calligraphy and painting, by posting it in front of stores or on the street. There are also types of government announcements, usually related to policing and taxation, to strengthen the management of the state.

The Beijing capital, which began in the Jin Yuan, and flourished in Ming and Qing dynasties, is a masterpiece of this period on a grand scale. It is the greatest urban masterpiece in the world, and it is unique even to this day. Beijing has many buildings, such as the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, the Temple of Earth, and the Imperial Temple, and is relatively advanced in the development of science and technology, culture, education, politics, philosophy, and traditional thought as shown in **Figure 2**.



Figure 2. Beijing’s urban culture during the Ming and Qing Dynasties

Beijing is the capital of emperors, and there are many activities, including various celebrations, ancestor worship, and city posters with gorgeous fonts and exquisite patterns of the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

In the 1930s, China experienced a period of economic prosperity, and one of the most prominent cities during that time was Shanghai. The urban poster culture in Shanghai flourished and exhibited a remarkable diversity, reflecting the city's economic prosperity, cultural diversity, and societal changes. Notably, the posters from this era were characterized by an abundance of calendar posters, which subtly showcased Shanghai's economic boom and internationalization.

In addition to commercial advertisements, posters also featured cultural events, entertainment activities, and social campaigns, reflecting the multifaceted urban life of 1930s Shanghai. The artistic styles of the posters were diverse, blending traditional Chinese art with modern Western influences, thus capturing the unique fusion of cultures in the city.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the urban poster design underwent multiple transformative stages. During the initial period from the 1950s to the 1960s, posters were heavily influenced by socialist realism, promoting socialist construction, rural cooperatives, and the achievements of people's communes. These posters featured simplistic yet impactful designs, emphasizing prominent text and images.

The late 1970s witnessed significant economic reforms and the opening-up policy in China. Urban poster design shifted towards a market-oriented approach. With the booming economy, commercial advertisements proliferated, resulting in diverse styles and content in posters. Entering the digital age since the 2000s, China's urban culture saw the rise of technology-driven propaganda in posters, as shown in **Figure 3**. The evolution of posters shifted from traditional media to a focus on technology and science, presenting a comprehensive challenge to traditional approaches. The advent of multimedia, integrated media, virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI), and other advanced technologies enriched the poster content, making it more dynamic and engaging.

Therefore, China's urban poster design has evolved from political propaganda to market-oriented advertising, reflecting the country's historical and economic changes.

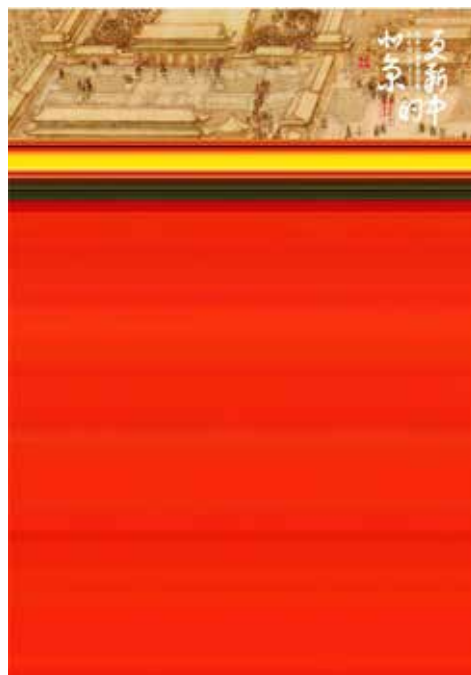


Figure 3. Urban poster design for the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics (Source: Yang JianKang work)

2. Symbolotic theory study using Peirce’s theory of symboliology

According to Peirce’s trichotomy of signs, the sign involves a triadic relationship of the representamen, the object, and the interpretant. The representamen is the perceptible and explicit part of the sign, the object is what the sign represents, and the interpretant is the cognitive and psychological impression the sign produces in the mind. Each element in this triadic relationship is interconnected and indispensable. Based on this triadic relationship, Peirce developed the “triad of sign types” in his semiotic theory. Indexical signs are related to their objects through physical or logical association, while symbolic signs are related to their objects through conventional or agreed-upon meanings.

To extract symbols for poster elements and obtain visual symbols (iconic signs and indexical signs), Peirce’s trichotomy of signs guides the design of urban posters.

3. Urban symbol research

The merit and extract of the Peirce’s semiotic theory is shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Through the combination of Peirce’s semiotics theory and urban symbols

Semiotic theory	Apply	Merit	Extract
	Based on ternary relationship construction poster design model	Provide analytic ideas and focus for poster design	Sign application poster design
Peirce’s semiotic theory	The article is based on the trichotomy chemical symbol extraction	Get surface symbols and deep symbols	Focus on the extraction of cultural elements

Urban symbols and posters are not only essential components of urban culture but also vital tools for shaping the city’s image and cultural dissemination. They foster cultural diversity and openness in the city, thus driving cultural innovation and integration.

4. Research on the poster practical design in Taizhou, China

4.1. Taizhou urban culture development

Taizhou has a history of over two thousand years, yet it has always remained in a corner by the sea. Before the Song Dynasty, the social and economic development lagged behind. However, during the Song Dynasty, especially the Southern Song period, social stability prevailed. With the advancement of education and the rise of Southeastern Zou Lu academic tradition, and the prosperity of the “land of literature” culture, people shifted their focus from material pursuit to spiritual pursuit. The cultural heritage, spiritual temperament, humanistic wisdom, and artistic pursuits inherited from the Song Dynasty carry profound aesthetic implications.

Taizhou culture has experienced the following parts, as shown in **Figure 4**.

Based on the questionnaire survey, the data analysis of urban poster design in Taizhou is as follows. In urban poster design, we can draw inspiration from Peirce’s trichotomy and categorize symbols into resemblance signs, index signs, and convention signs to effectively convey information and express city culture. Resemblance signs utilize visual elements to create vivid images, such as using iconic landmarks, attractions, and buildings to represent the city’s uniqueness. Color selection and composition should match the city’s atmosphere and style, hence attracting attention and sparking viewers’ interest.

About Taizhou city image poster

Questionnaire content	option
What would you think of when you mention Taizhou?	Ziyang Ancient Street, Tiantai Mountain Guoqing Temple, 26 34 Dongtou, Dachen Island 25 30
Mention of Taizhou's delicious food has to say	Fried sugar cake embedded cake walnut ginger juice stewed egg 13 41 43 sugar and sour stir-fried cake plum cake 22 21 Sweet and sour iron plate orange cake black rice 32 22 21
On what platform would you like to see our poster posters?	The Little Red Book TikTok bilibili 25 34 32
What unique experience have you had in Taizhou?	Adducted to the beauty of Tiantai Mountain in the Guoqing 46 Temple faded a impetuous other 44 2
What are you looking forward to?	Dynamic static other 45 42 5
Which form of expression do you prefer to the poster?	Highly brief and creative The visual impact is strong 31 25 Warm and emotional Colour collocation is brilliant 24 27
If Taizhou in the future production of city cultural creation whether you are willing to buy	yes no 38 14

Figure 4. Data analysis

4.2. Application of semiotics and Urban poster design

In urban poster design, cultural symbols are expressed through their visual forms, representing the cultural connotations they refer to. This process involves imbuing the intended cultural meanings into the visual representations. There are four main methods based on the application of visual forms and cultural symbols.

Method 1 involves directly using complete or partial prototype symbols, and incorporating recognizable cultural elements that resonate with the audience.

Method 2 involves employing artistic techniques such as segmentation, mirroring, and reconstruction of symbols to create innovative and captivating visual representations.

Following Peirce's trichotomy, designers extract symbols that align with Taizhou's historical culture and urban memory to capture the essence of Taizhou's tradition, heritage, and innovation within the city's cultural posters. These posters serve as a record of Taizhou's culture, highlighting its unique identity and the interplay between continuity and progress, as shown in Figure 5.

4.3. Taizhou poster design practice research

The color scheme of the poster prominently features blue, which is derived from Taizhou's characteristic colors. Bright and deep shades of blue are chosen to enhance the poster's thematic message and appeal to the target audience.

By combining symbolically rich visuals with well-chosen typography and colors, the design effectively conveys the essence of Taizhou's urban identity and cultural heritage. The fusion of urban symbols and cultural elements not only highlights the city's distinctiveness but also creates a strong emotional connection with the

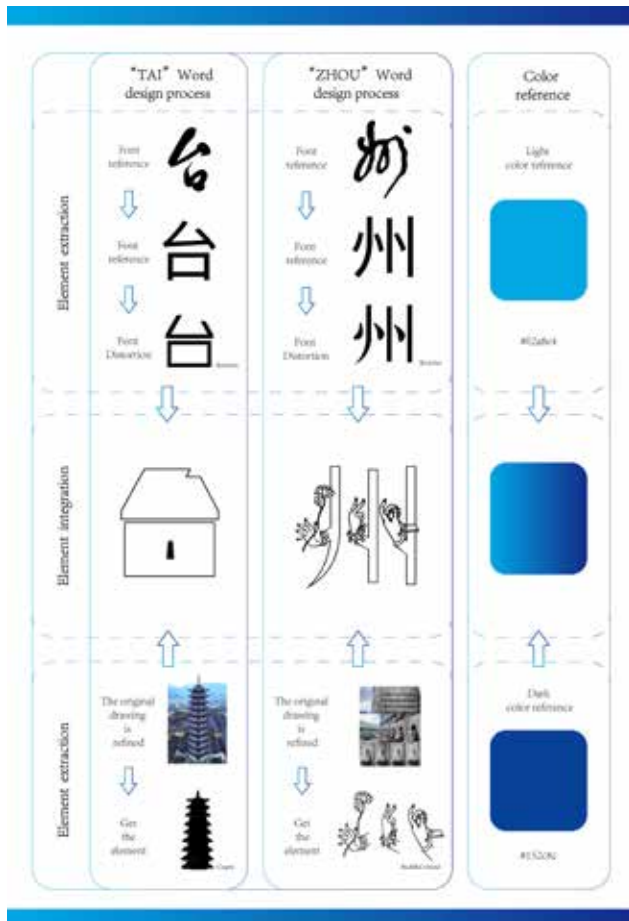


Figure 5. Urban elements are extracted and text elements are expanded according to the principle of Peirce’s trichotomy theory of semiotics

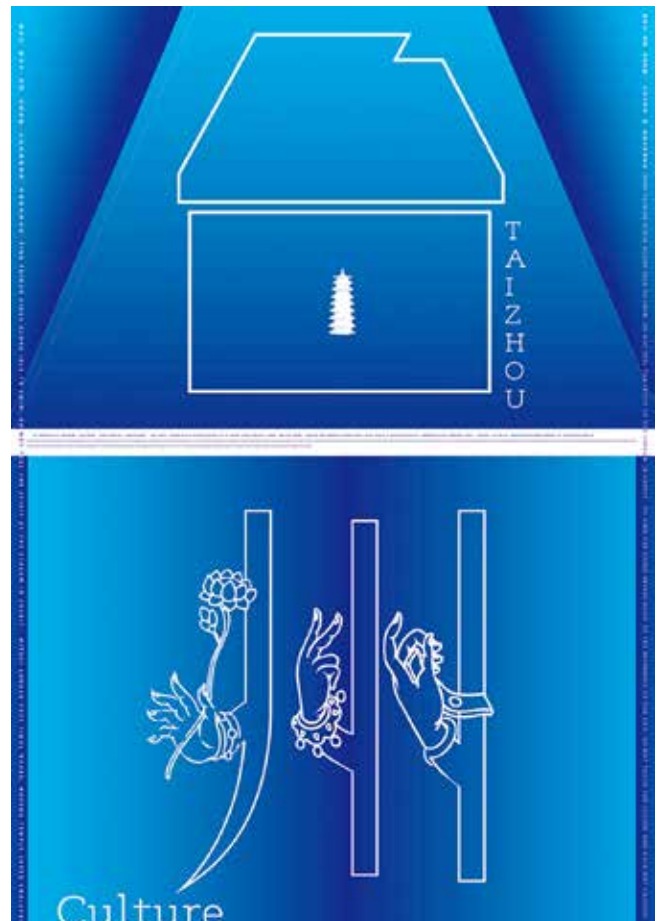


Figure 6. Taizhou city poster design by Miao Ping

viewers, as shown in **Figure 6**.

The lower part of the artwork portrays the combination of the character “zhou” with the image of the Buddha’s hand, representing the allure and cultural richness of Taizhou. The seamless blending of these symbols embodies the unique lifestyle and cultural heritage of the city.

5. Conclusion

The article examined the history of urban poster design, and the significance in traditional Chinese culture and modern society, and studied the innovative poster design in Taizhou city, which integrates traditional culture with contemporary elements to emphasize regional traits and modern trends. By analyzing the author’s works, the article suggests practical applications and reflections on Chinese urban poster design techniques, with the aim to offer valuable guidelines and inspiration for poster design endeavors of other cities.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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