Effective movie title sequence: a challenge to Chinese designers

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Effective movie title sequence: A challenge to Chinese designers

by

Bo Chen

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major: Graphic Design

Program of Study Committee:
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Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my major professor Paul Bruski and my two committee members Anson Call and Geoffrey Sauer. I sincerely thank their guidance, patience, and offering valuable and intellectual suggestions for my thesis research.

I extrordinarily thank my families who always support me. I would like to dedicate this thesis in memory of my dad Xiaozheng Chen. I thank my mom Yue Lei, my sister Lei Chen and her family for being my backbone.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my friends Yin-sin Chang, Chen Zhang and other friends who helped me during the hard time I experienced in writing thesis.
ABSTRACT

This paper aims to identify the criteria of effective movie title sequence design. The research method is to generalize views common to different senior title designers and practitioners with regard to the criteria of effective movie title sequence design and then use these criteria to evaluate top box office Chinese domestic movies. The paper also analyzes problems of present Chinese domestic movie title sequence design and provides suggestions for improving them.

An effective movie title sequence needs to set the mood and anticipations to the audience. Additionally, it must have the following characteristics: (1) It must express the story in some metaphorical way. (2) It needs to be narrative in nature. (3) It needs to have visual consistency and be integrated, and (4) It must have appropriate typographic rhythm and movement that complements the movie’s theme.

Key words: movie title sequence design, Chinese movie title sequence
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: MOVIE TITLE SEQUENCE IN CHINA

The movie, a hybrid of arts such as literature, photography, lighting, and design, is ultimately presented in a comprehensive visual and acoustic form. The movie title sequence, acting as both an introduction to the movie and a part of the movie, functions as a bridge.

Movie title sequences mainly use title cards—“often created by lettering artists employed by major studios—typically presented as white type on a black background” (Byrne, 2010). Because of limits of technology, “the movie was just a technique used for documenting human activities. The title functioned as a substitute for audio.” (Zhang, 2014) “Because of limits of technique, condition and design concept, title sequence design was only for illustrate title and functioned monotonous.” However, with the development of motion graphics, the improvement of movie production and people’s improvement on aesthetics, movie title sequence design is becoming not only a simple visual manifestation, but a matter of visual appreciation.

A movie title sequence includes elements such as: color, typography, and audio, visual, spatial and temporal elements. “Effective arrangement of all these elements helps to communicate the movie’s theme” (Zhang, 2014).

A successful movie title sequence can help determine the artistic level of a film. In a mature movie market and industry, the production usually has a corresponding artistic level and a visual standard that includes an appropriate movie title sequence, posters, that have visual continuity. An effective title sequence design not only engages an audience emotionally, it also partly represents the quality of the movie itself.
1.1 The Present Situation of Chinese Movie Title Design

1.1.1 The booming film market

Along with rapid economic development in China, the Chinese film industry has been booming for the past 10 years and developing rapidly. In January 2015, a Chinese film research organization, Entgroup which primarily did marketing research and analysis (data collection and analysis) for the Chinese film and media industry published the “2014 Chinese film market influence report” (Entgroup, 2015). Entgroup mainly analyzed the Chinese film market for 2014 and concluded that for that year, the Chinese film industry had a box office take of $4.7 billion, with audiences of up to 830 million.

1. Chinese movie box office, showing rapid growth


![Graph showing growth rates of Chinese and North American box offices](Data source from Entgroup: 2014 Chinese film market influence report)

In 2014, 388 films were released in China, grossing over $4.7 billion (29.6 billion yuan), with a growth rate of 36% over the previous years. At the same time, the North American box
office grosse $10.3 billion, and compared to 2013, showed a 6% decrease, while, according to the report, the global movie box office grew from 35.9 billion in 2013 to $37.5 billion in 2014, an increase of almost 4.5%. In fact, except in India, South Korea and France, this decline occurred widely being observed in Japan, England, Germany, Russia, Australia and other countries (Entgroup, 2015). In contrast to the stagnant growth and slowdown of the global movie industry, the Chinese movie industry was accelerating rapidly.

![2014 Main country box office on global box office](image)

Figure 2. 2014 Main country box office and ratio on global box office
(Entgroup, 2015)

Also, the statistics on the 2014 global box office distribution show that China has earned the second place in movie consumption.
2. Dominance of domestic movies in the Chinese movie market

With regard to the distribution of Chinese domestic movie consumption in the past 6 years, Chinese domestic movies have a slightly higher market share than imported movies. Of all 388 films, 308 domestic movies created $2.58 billion (16.155 billion yuan), 55% of the total box office. The remaining 80 movies, which were imported, created $2.16 billion (13.484 billion yuan) at the box office (Entgroup, 2015). Therefore, Chinese movies still obviously dominate the domestic movie market.
3. Young and white-collar people are the main audiences

The report noted that the audiences was 830 billion in 2014, a figure 34.52% higher than in the previous year. As figure 4 shows, over 80% of audiences members were in the age group 19–40, shows that over half in the age group 19–30. The distribution of educational background, shows that over 80% had a college degree. Thus it can be inferred that the core audiences are young, well-educated white-collar workers. Their consumption ability and perception on movie are dominant and represent main audience’s opinion.

“There are still huge room for development and growth in the Chinese movie industry” (Zhang, 2014). “On the development of the Chinese movie industry, to seek a new economic growth point requires them not only to make an effort on big production domestic movies, but also to develop the potential market in new media movies” (Zhang, 2014).

4. Box office market and piracy

The statistics above only shows box office figures. However, China has been troubled by a great deal of piracy. The potential movie market is likely to be much larger.
1.1.2 Development of New media technology

With the development of technology, movie title sequence design has stepped into a whole new digital era, “the visual design technology has greatly helped to liberate audience imagination; in this way, the audiences’ aesthetic psychology has been changed so that they would like to appreciate diverse and new works” (Zhang, 2014).

“In the new media era, audiences’ subjective consciousness has been improved. They no longer passively receive the information given by a movie. More and more audiences, mainly those who are well educated, have begun to have their own interpretation and understanding on images or information given by directors” (Zhang, 2014). “More and more audiences take visual expression in evaluating a quality movie” (Zhang, 2014). Therefore, audiences increasingly demand more in both visual and audio qualities, causing the movie industry practitioners and designers to seek ways to work together to achieve better design and visual effect to create works that meet audiences’ expectations.

The development and broad application of 3D technology in movie production have impressed audiences. “The new media technology caters to audiences’ pursuit of novelty in such a fast consumption age” (Zhang, 2014). The film editing and montage techniques were generated in the same background as new media technology was developed. Use of kinetic typography, animation, audio and other techniques compensate together helped to reveal the sophistication of movie production. This comprehensive method helped to compensate for the deficiencies of traditional graphic media in terms of visual expression. “New technology has changed audience’s habits and preferences, more and more audiences pursue the ‘immersion’ that technology brought with it” (Zhang, 2014).
In the past 10 years, demand for better Chinese domestic movie title sequence design has emerged. Because a movie is an emotional experience, effective movie title sequence design can help to improve resonance with the audience, improving the reputation of the movie and leading to more sales. In addition, domestic movies are trying to expand into the international movie market. Effective title sequence design is a very important aspect of this effort.

1.1.3 Movie title design in the Chinese domestic market

To measure a film's success beyond such factors as box office and awards, it is useful to turn to the movie itself to see its evaluate artistic quality and success. Although the annual number of Chinese domestic movies has risen sharply in recent years, and although these movies have received very good box office results, they have primarily benefitted such as the following: First, the marketing of movies accelerates increased theater and movie industry investments. Second, the fame of directors and actors or actresses and publicity strategies promote movie consumption. Third, population growth has improved consumer availability. Accordingly, the present success of movie marketing as a whole is mainly due to time and opportunity, rather than artistic value of the movies. Although some movies have good stories, production and quality vary. There is room for improvement in every aspect of main stream Chinese domestic movies, from screenplays, marketing, design and production.

The rapid growth of the movie industry in China may have caused unevenness in film production quality, and awareness of movies in the market is inadequate despite the high speed of production. Movie posters and title design systems are inconsistent; and impressive or effective movie title sequences are lacking. Producers mainly gain audiences through using a poster strategy during the middle or advanced stages of shooting. Some use 3D effects as selling points, with money mainly invested in developing the movie’s VFX (visual effects). Unfortunately, movie
titles are sometimes inadequate. The quality and meaning of a movie title sequence does not necessarily match the content of the movie; it may reflect neither an appropriate concept nor appropriate execution. Audiences then cannot emotionally engage in the movie emotionally, and the gap between reality and the story cannot be bridged.

Chinese increasingly watch a movie in a theater as national living standards improves, they have more money to spend on “emotional spending” and entertainment. Such audience members usually demand higher-quality audio and visual effects and consumer are willing to spend money to enjoy a better viewing experience. Those who have the consumer power to attend movies represent a new generation who grew up during the transition of Chinese society; many of them grew up watching both Chinese and Western films (especially American films) that have significant global impact, and many have experienced western-style movies and title sequence design. They naturally make comparisons between Chinese domestic films and American or western films, and they see a difference.

In researching this subject, this author has read posts on Chinese websites such as “Zhihu“ (a Chinese online forum on which questions and answers are created or edited by community users) that questioned why distinctive typeface design is lacking in Chinese domestic movie title sequences. The following answers came from “netizens” : “They don’t have awareness for designing a specific typeface for just movie title sequences,” (Zhihu, 2015) “They don’t have awareness on choosing colors and typography, not to speak of designing new typeface,” (Zhihu, 2015) “Their thoughts are too old,” (Zhihu, 2015) “Chinese characters are too much for design, too slow,” (Zhihu, 2015) “They underestimated the importance of movie title sequence, so they just play at it,” (Zhihu, 2015) “The education system separates the designers into two type, pure artist and ‘computerite,’ and they can’t cooperate well. Those who have good concept lack of technique
to express and those who have technique don’t have good idea” (Zhihu, 2015). Some of the answers came from individuals in the industry who already have work experience and who analyzed the situation from their own perspective; some came from audience members. These opinions and complaints seemed to reflect the audience’s opinions of present Chinese domestic movie title sequences, as well as audience expectations.

1.1.4 Design issues in the present Chinese domestic movie title sequence design

China has a long history in the movie industry. However, for historical reasons, the movie title sequence design field not has developed much. Even though many movies have so-called title sequences, they are still considered a necessary but unimportant part. It is not until recently, with the boom of the Chinese domestic movie market, as well as the development of digital technology, that designers and producers noticed opportunities in the movie title sequence and TV title sequence fields. From the author’s observation, some problems of Chinese domestic movie title design can be summarized as follows:

1. Movie title sequences do not function as bridges to bring audiences from reality to the story. Some movie titles does not conceptually fit with the movie. A common practice is to start the film immediately after these advertisements shown once the lights are turned off. The first part plays about 5-7 minutes and foreshadows a good deal about the movie; then comes the movie title sequence and title and casting information as a section between the previous 5-7 minutes part of the movie and the rest of the movie itself. It is difficult to determine when the movie itself begins. If audience miss the movie title sequence, they feel as though they missed a large part of the plot.

2. Lack of distinctive concept. A majority of domestic movies still use an old formula to make movie title sequences, which is to simply overlap moving text on montages. However, with
advances in movie technology, these titles often place more emphasis on visual effects, neglecting the value of the movie title sequence, which results in a mismatch between the title design and the movie itself. Some movies have an interesting story line, but the relatively ordinary movie title sequence does not suggest the theme.

3. Lack of visual continuity. Some movies do not use the same typeface for titles on posters and on the official movie (figure 5). This causes some confusion for audience members, who find it hard to associate the two. Very few movies develop specific typefaces, American movies do. Some designers do not have appropriate choices in selection of fonts, for both Chinese and English typefaces that correspond to each other in form or concept when attempting bilingual text design. Additionally, consideration of the composition, color palette, textures, or movement of text is insufficient.

4. Inappropriate elements. Some movies have inappropriate typeface combinations, textures that do not match the story background, either in form or meaning; movement, pace, composition, etc may be inappropriate.

5. Copy phenomena. The copy phenomenon exists in all title sequence designs, not only for movie production, but also for TV drama and TV shows. This phenomenon reflects two facts: (1) what is being copied must be a good example; otherwise, it should not be used as the reference. Additionally, the one who is copying must have good reason to do so. Some designers claim they use good examples as references because it is a fast way to learn. However, it is debatable as to how much they use an original as reference when they design a new one. (2) What is copied must be applicable or appropriate to the context of the movie.
Figure 5. *So Young* poster and movie titles using different typography design (doubanmovie, 2013)
At the end of 2012, Jian Nan Chun (JNC), a giant in the Chinese alcohol market, released a commercial on CCTV (Chinese Central TV station). Broadcasting its commercial on CCTV cost 608 million yuan. The huge investment JNC made for the “gorgeous ad” was intended to spread and build their company image in the audience’s mind. Unfortunately, they did it in a negative way by copying the idea from “The Game of Thrones” — the most popular American drama at the time in China. The advertisement was soon recognized as an idea copied from “The Game of Thrones” by Chinese netizens, who made a video that paralleled highly similar footage and uploaded it to a video website. It received considerable criticism and many netizens vented about the “shamefulness” of the endeavor, saying they would never support the behavior of JNC. The netizens believed it would be hard to predict whether JNC would be responsible for its products if they would allow this “copy idea” behavior in their ads. Sun Yue Bing, the “dubber” for the JNC ad, responded through his personal blog that the producer group indeed used some original materials from the drama during editing, and that it started from the perspective of respect and study. They hoped that those who had not seen the drama would think it was a great work, and that those who had already watched the drama would associate the drama with JNC’s product.
Figure 6. Comparison of a frame of “Jiannanchun” advertisement animation and the “Game of Thrones” title sequence (Chen, 2015)
In March 2015, another copy incident occurred on a popular Chinese entertainment TV
tvshow, “I’m a Singer.” Almost 30 seconds of the 40-second TV title sequences were copied from
the movie title sequence of the Spanish movie *Eva*, made by the famous Spanish animation studio
Dvein. The animation was copied almost exactly frame by frame, including the composition,
texture, and special effects. The person who discovered this said, “It’s common for designers to
mimic a master’s work, but it’s rare to copy to this high degree.” The film title sequence of “Eva”
is a highly technical process, since it is about glass and shining glitters — even copying it requires
time and advanced techniques. The incident was widely condemned and addressed by the original
producer in Spain.

Although not every title is copied in China, to some extent copying reflects the present
status of Chinese movie title sequence design, in that designers try to learn techniques used by
others by mimicking, at least initially, although the techniques may not always apply to the
Chinese movie. The copies have the appearance of the originals, but lack their essence.
Figure 7. Comparison of frames of “I’m a singer” TV title and the *Eva* movie title sequence (Chen, 2015)
1.2 Chinese movie industry history and movie title design in China

1.2.1 Several periods of the Chinese movie industry

China’s movie development started in 1896, when most of the movie industry was centered in Shanghai for its first few decades. “The first Chinese film, ‘The Battle of Dingjunshan’ was made in 1905” (Cinema of China, 2015). The Chinese domestic film industry began with a commercial release. Prior to the 1920s, the movie industry gradually became privatized. The industry matured and prepared for the development of commerce, and many capitalist investors began targeting the emerging film industry. However, the film industry in Shanghai ended its prosperous stage during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). Iconic film studios such as “Mingxin” and “Lianhua” went out of business, and “Tianyi,” another studio, moved to the south. This marked the gradual demise of the old film industry in China, as the first flourishing golden age of the Chinese movie industry abruptly ended in gunfire and war.

1.2.2 First period, 1930s

The 1930s were considered the first bright period for Chinese domestic movies. “Leftist cinematic movement and the dispute between Nationalists and Communists were reflected in the films that were produced” (Cinema of China, 2015). Movies created at that time were used as political tools to promote and advertise the communist party. They were mainly spy movies about the struggle between the communist party and the nationalist party. In 1937, during the Second Sino-Japanese war, which was fought throughout China and lasted for more than 7 years, the Japanese took charge of the film industry until the war’s end in 1945. The Chinese film industry declined during that time.
1.2.3 Second stage—wartime

The second stage occurred after the New China was founded in 1950. After the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese domestic war, a new film studio was founded as a state-owned business. Because of war damage, China went through a long-term recovery period in every aspect. During this time, movies were created for the purpose of cultivating patriotism and spreading political party propaganda, as well as encouraging people to rebuild the country and consolidate the nation.

During the years 1950-1980, international politics changed dramatically. China had split with its original strategic partner, the Soviet Union bloc, over disagreements on ideology and the socialists’ political development road. From 1967 to 1976, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution took place in the People's Republic of China, a social-political movement that brought disaster to China in every aspect.

“The film industry was severely restricted. Almost all previous films were banned, and only a few new ones were produced, the so-called ‘revolutionary model operas.’ The most notable of these was a ballet version of the revolutionary opera, ’The Red Detachment of Women.’ Feature film production came almost to a standstill in the early years from 1967 to 1972. Movie production revived after 1972 under the strict jurisdiction of the Gang of Four until 1976, when they were overthrown. The few films that were produced during this period, such as 1975’s 'Breaking with old ideas', were highly regulated in terms of plot and characterization” (Cinema of China, 2015).
Movies were completely controlled by the leftist government and used for political and ideological propaganda. Movie title sequence designs of this period were very simple; they were limited to a single theme in the form of titles that used traditional calligraphy, with strongly traditional Chinese colors: mostly brush calligraphy font words combined with common print italicized words, with centered layout rules and no extra information. There were very few applications for motion typography; its use was temporarily discontinued because of the political situation in China. Film was technically still in the early stages of design; its next breakthrough did not occur until the late 1970s, when the Cultural Revolution ended.

Figure 8. Typical film title appearance during the Cultural Revolution (sinablog, 2014)

1.2.4 The Cultural Revolution period

Movies during the Cultural Revolution were limited in prescribed themes; therefore, no diverse movie title sequences exist today. Sequences simply presented the movie title and cast list. Usually, the titles were done in Chinese calligraphic type and the text was done in *Imitation Song* typeface.
(Imitation Song typeface is a printing font that mimic the traditional Calligraphy Song typeface. The character is similar to serif in Latin letters). The designer usually used center alignment to emphasize the title, and the movement involved simply fading in from the middle and fading out. The type size overwhelmingly covered the screen. The background footage did not change from the beginning to the end of the movie title sequence and was accompanied by revolutionary, strong, emotional symphonic music. The techniques and methods used which did not vary significantly, were used in most movies from 1950 until late in 1980.

![The Chinese title for “Breaking with old ideas”](image1.png) ![The casting list frame](image2.png)

“Breaking with Old Ideas”, 1975, by Beijing Film studio

Figure 9. Screenshot of a movie made during the Cultural Revolution (Youtube, 2013)

In 1980, China and the United States established diplomatic relations, and the government of China began to gradually open up the country. The movie industry began to revitalize, and 5th and 6th generation Chinese directors and filmmakers became active internationally.

“The ‘Fifth Generation’ refers to a group of directors whose movies represent a particularly creative moment in the history of Chinese cinema, roughly spanning the 1980s and early 1990s” (EdwART, 2011). “The Sixth Generation of directors denotes the group of mostly
independent filmmakers who began directing after 1989. They are sometimes also called the ‘urban generation’ because of their focus on city culture” (EdwART, 2011). They broke previous traditions on quality and movie type and eventually gained more international recognition as representatives of Chinese domestic movies.

During the 21st century, after a long process of exploration, movie marketization came into its own in the Chinese movie industry. During the 1990’s and through 2000, China experienced high-speed development, with more international connections and communications between China and the rest of the world. When China joined the WTO and engaged in international cooperation, the Chinese film industry adopted international standards and cooperated with countries already operating in a mature film market and film chains such as those in the United States. The reforms and restructuring of the film market provided new opportunities for the industry.

1.3 Challenge of movie title design in China

1.3.1 Elements: Complexity of Chinese characters

Typography, one of the most important and necessary elements in film title design, and it adds atmosphere to a movie. Unlike romance languages, the Chinese language is composed of characters, each character representing a word rather than a letter. Each character is made up of several strokes.

The complexity of Chinese characters is a challenge for title designers in China. About 2,500 common characters are used daily in printing, making it difficult to design large numbers of characters for just one movie.

The main strokes in Chinese characters are shown in figure 10.
It is difficult to apply some effects directly or use ordinary design methods for English movie title sequences because of the complexity of Chinese characters. English words consist of letters, which can be seen as independent units that are still meaningful as individual entities. This gives designers more latitude to play with ideas. But, the same method might not be applicable to Chinese characters because it is laborious to break down a character into many strokes, and after being broken down they no longer are meaningful or represent a concept.

Therefore, Chinese designers rarely design a specific typeface for just one movie. To do so would be a heavy workload in a fast-placed industry, and would take much longer than designing English letters. Designers usually design the title according to the movie’s basic concept and select from existing typefaces to make the title.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Stroke</th>
<th>Writing Rule</th>
<th>Chinese Name</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>点</td>
<td>主</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horizontal stroke left to right</td>
<td>王</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vertical stroke top to bottom</td>
<td>十</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Downward stroke to the left top-right to bottom-left</td>
<td>人</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Horizontal stroke with a hook</td>
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<td>国</td>
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<td>Vertical stroke with a horizontal turn to the right from the top downward, then horizontally to the right</td>
<td>它</td>
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1.3.2 Chinese typesetting and reading sequence

One way to do Chinese typesetting is horizontal typesetting, moving from left to right and from top to bottom. This method is widely used internationally and was highly promoted after 1949 in China. “After 1949, traditional vertical typesetting was changed into the horizontal typesetting, which was broadly used internationally. Only a small portion of the printing presses still use vertical” (Sugiura, 2005). After the Cultural Revolution (1967), most presses adopted horizontal typesetting; traditional vertical typesetting almost disappeared.

“The change from vertical to horizontal typesetting can be traced back to the New Culture movement. It was to overthrow the Qing dynasties, reflect China's traditional culture, introduced modern thought of Western democracy and science. The horizontal mode of Western books and publishing was also introduced as the pursuit of new trends. Therefore, from the beginning of the revolutionary movement, elementary school textbooks began to have horizontal typography” (Sugiura, 2005).

Another way to do typesetting is traditional vertical typography, which is read from right to left and from top to bottom and which uses traditional Chinese characters. The square structure of Chinese characters makes vertical typography highly suitable for them. Today, traditional vertical typography is still used, mainly in Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, vertical typography is used in movie title sequences, it basically means the story happened within a certain time period, usually before 1949. Therefore, typeface is chosen based not only on how it looks, but also according to the time period it represents.

For example, in the movie The Grandmaster (figure 11), the designer used traditional vertical typography with traditional Chinese characters. Because the story took place during the 1930’s in China, the typeface for the text was Song, the title was written in Chinese calligraphy,
and the reading sequence progressed from right to left. In one specific frame there is an English name in the cast list. The designer expressed the English name in vertical typography to keep it consistent with the Chinese characters. Like any mature designer, he was knowledgeable about both languages’ written symbols and how to use them.

1.3.3 Tendency to use bilingual designs in movie title sequences

Designers must incorporate both Chinese and English translations into movie title sequences, because Chinese movies are open to the international market. The challenge is that it is not easy to show a large amounts of information in motion text and still make it look good. Designers have to consider the hierarchy of information and language, and then balance the two through compromise, as well as having a good command of both English and Chinese typography. Many Chinese designers do not have that knowledge; they can choose English typeface only according to their professional work experience or based on the form of letters.
Figure 11. *The Grandmaster* film title in vertical typesetting (Wong, 2013)
1.4 Market and systemic challenges in movie title design in China

1.4.1 Infancy of marketing with growing demand

Because the marketization and commercialization of the Chinese movie industry has occurred relatively recently, marketing of its product is still in its infancy. Practitioners in China have not found an effective way, or a suitable set of norms to manage movies. Currently the industry lacks the concept of integrating movie title design and poster design into making and marketing of movies. They fail to recognize this opportunity, so they do not invest money or time on it. As a result, they may create a product that is low in quality and usually appears to be an afterthought. If it is an afterthought, designers can work for only a limited time, with limited materials. This probably explains why a movie can have visual inconsistency between posters and the film title sequence, or why a spectacular visual effects movie sometimes has a substandard movie title sequence.

1.4.2 Educational system and other factors in development of design

Chinese graphic design, as it is understood today, began around 1900, at which time it was true that "Chinese graphic design always adheres to the traditional art form. The original graphic design originates from those found in traditional ink paintings, batiks, rock carvings, and murals. These developed as the advertising poster. Most posters use ink-based techniques on painting which has a certain aesthetic sense of meaning with a certain commercial purpose. These posters were usually used for advertising for books, plays, and traditional bulletin." (Yang, 2011) During the almost 10-year Cultural Revolution, thousands of valuable traditional art works and historical relics were destroyed. The same revolution destroyed the educational system, bringing China's education system “to a virtual halt” (Wikipedia, 2015). “In the early months of the Cultural Revolution, schools and universities were closed. Primary and middle schools later gradually
reopened, but all colleges and universities were closed until 1970, and most universities did not reopen until 1972” (Wikipedia, 2015). “University entrance exams were cancelled” starting in 1966 and “replaced later by a system in which students were recommended by factories, villages and military units” (Wikipedia, 2015) “Entrance exams were not restored until 1977 under Deng Xiaoping” (Wikipedia, 2015). According to documents presented in the “prosecution of the Gang of Four, 142,000 cadres and teachers in educational circles were persecuted and noted academics, scientists, and educators died.” (Wikipedia, 2015) “Many intellectuals were sent to rural labor camps, and many of those who survived left China shortly after the revolution ended” (Wikipedia, 2015). The cultural and educational gap that was formed has widened since. Because of this gap, Chinese graphic design education turned to Western Graphic Design models and theories. However, in recent years, the public has begun to return to and to recognize the value of traditional culture and arts. Designers are exploring ways of combing western design methods and theory with traditional Chinese aesthetics and culture.

Movie title sequence design is a comparably new field within graphic design, however it has developed quickly in technique and concept in recent years, especially with regard to incorporating technology. A traditional school education does not provide the equivalent of western courses in use of updated software and techniques; therefore, China cannot produce mature designers directly from secondary schools alone. One feature of the Chinese education system is that it separates liberal arts majors from science majors, and places heavy emphasis on science and technology for the latter. So that students are better trained in technique than in creativity, or are stronger in aesthetics but lack technique. There is little blending of art with technology.
A movie titles sequence is an indispensable part of a movie. Just like Pablo Ferro once stated, “It’s a part of the movie.” (Ferro, 2010) As part of the movie, it is an art form. “The origin of film titles can be traced back to the silent film era, where credit sequences were presented on title cards containing text. They were inserted throughout the film to maintain the flow of the story.” (Krasner, 2004). Early in the history of silent movies, “Hand-drawn white lettering superimposed over a black background provided information such as the title, the names of the individuals involved, the dialogue, and action for the scenes” (Krasner, 2004).

"Sometimes the letters were embellished with decorative outlines, and usually the genre of the film dictated the style” (Krasner, 2004). With the development of newer techniques, designers began to use kinetic typography and graphics in movie titles sequences. To some extent, this made movie titles a hybrid motion graphic art that shared the methods and principles of animation.

Apparently, “the primary purpose of title sequences is to accurately credit the cast and crew, or even more simply, to give the film’s title” (Byrne & Braha, 2011). In some way, its function is similar to that of a book cover. Fascinating book covers can attract people and encourage them to look at the content. The same principle follows for movie title sequences; A fascinating movie title sequences can make people emotionally excited. “Conveying a certain feeling is the essence of communication in any art form. The response of the viewer is an emotional one, because art speaks to the heart” (Thomas & Johnston, 1981). “As the audience’s sophistication grows, there is an increasing burden on the young animator or filmmaker. Finding an idea worth putting on film, presenting it with enough imagination to capture fleeting interests, and involving the audience
emotionally is a big assignment. It is also the very soul of entertainment” (Thomas & Johnston, 1981).

2.1 Saul Bass

Saul Bass, a renowned American graphic designer, developed movie title sequences into an art form, and was best known for designs of film posters and title sequences. During his 40-year career he worked as a graphic designer as well as a filmmaker. Early in his career, he learned from extraordinary filmmakers such as Billy Wilder, Alfred Hitchcock and Otto Preminger. His thoughts on the use of motion graphics and various type styles for movie title sequence began at that time. “He became well known in the film industry after creating the title sequence for Otto Preminger’s The Man with the Golden Arm in 1955” (artofthetitle, 2015). Bass invented a new type of kinetic typography and designed memorable title sequences for North by Northwest, Vertigo (with John Whitney), and Psycho.

“One marked characteristic of the Bass title is that its image undergo a journey whereby they are transformed into the unexpected” (Haskin & Bass, 1996). According to Saul Bass, one of the primary functions of a title sequence is “to support the film” (Haskin & Bass, 1996). It can almost serve as a reinvention of the film title. It has to “set the mood and to prime the underlying core of the film's story” (Haskin & Bass, 1996).
Another function of the title sequence is “to express the story in some metaphorical way” (Haskin & Bass, 1996). In the film, *North by Northwest*, he used vertical and angled typography traveling along a gridline. Later the line became transformed into the outline of skyscraper windows. Bass states, “I had a strong feeling that the film really began on the first frame. This was, of course, back when titles were strictly typography — mostly bad typography — and took place during the period when people were settling in, going to restrooms, or involved in chitchat. I just felt that this was a period that could work for the film” (Haskin & Bass, 1996). He thought a title
sequence from this period could be used to serve the movie and build a connection with the audience’s emotions, “so that when the film actually began, viewers would already have an emotional resonance with it” (Haskin & Bass, 1996). Bass firmly believed that the success of *The Man with the Golden Arm* was related to the design, which conveyed the notion that “a single visual element, good, bad or indifferent, could become a statement for a film. The graphic made a very important difference” (Haskin & Bass, 1996). The day the film was released in New York, the symbol of the arm appeared on the marquee alone, without the movie’s name. Subsequently, the film performed well at the box office. “This was a very powerful thing and really set the industry to thinking (Haskin & Bass, 1996). “The film did very well — for reasons that may or may not have had to do with the symbol. But understanding that in the parlance of the film industry, if a film does well, naturally it’s a great film. If it does badly, it’s the fault of advertising campaign—everybody knows that” “I truly believed that the graphic made a very important difference” (Haskin & Bass, 1996).
Figure 13. *The Man with the Golden Arm* opening movie title sequence by Saul Bass, directed by Otto Preminger (Preminger, 1955)
2.2 Kyle Cooper

Kyle Cooper, an American movie title sequencer and motion picture designer, is credited as the one who single-handedly revitalized main title sequencing as an art form. “His 1995 title sequence for “Se7en” was heralded by New York Times magazine as one of the most important design innovations of the 1990’s” (Submarine channel, 2009). His main works included over a hundred movie title sequences, among the most memorable of which are *Dawn of the Dead*, *The Spider Man*, and *Superman Returns*.

![Se7en movie title sequence, by Kyle Cooper (Fincher, 1995)](image)

Cooper stated, “A great title sequence sets an expectation” (Submarine channel, 2009). He believes that once an audience gets into a theater, the title sequence should bring it from reality into the movie, functioning as a “bridge.” “You’re in the theater and you see the sequence and you forget about everything else, you don’t want be anywhere else but right here at this moment and you get excited” (Submarine channel, 2009).

When the creation of a title sequence begins, typography should be an integral part. “Typography is integrated rather than being an afterthought” (Submarine channel, 2009). “If you
can help use type to add to the overall tone and the overall impression that you are trying to set. It’s just another tool that, you know, shouldn’t be an afterthought but should be integrated. I try to make the typography in service of the story we are trying to tell. Trying to come up with the clever pun and make the type do what it says” (Submarine channel, 2009). This principle was well applied in the process of creating the title “Se7en.” To show the dark and depressed side of the serial killer, Cooper tried to show that the killer was keeping his journals, “The idea that it is a hand written fonts in “Se7en” is because, you know, the guy is a series killer when he’s keeping his journals, scratching the motion and developing his own, we wanted to be like he is developing his optical and bath tub when his writing on the film, you know jumpy” (Submarine channel, 2009).

One of Cooper’s favorite title sequences is *To Kill a Mockingbird* directed by Robert Mulligan, which highlights Scout’s obsession with her treasure box. Cooper thinks the typography in this title sequence perfectly matched each individual frame. “I think it is beautifully photographed. The way that the marbles distort, the background, the way you wreck focus through this very macro objects.” “The form of the horizontal lines are the type, and the sort of circular marbles, round objects behind and makes for a good contrast. So I believe that the title is integrated. Typography is integrated rather than been an after thoughts” (Submarine channel, 2009).

Cooper also believes that it is very important for a movie title sequence to show the backstory of a movie. “By story I mean, you know, specific back story but also a metaphor, a clear metaphor, post like upon that has to do specifically what the, you know, what the film is about. I always think those terms, then starts with an idea, and I kind of back into execution.” (Submarine channel, 2009). He has a strong and optimistic belief about the future of title design. “People
realize they can help the movie, they can tell this back story and they can put you where you need to be at the head of the film” (Submarine channel, 2009).

2.3 Pablo Ferro

Pablo Ferro, a Cuban-born filmmaker, graphic designer, and master title designer, has been compared to Kyle Cooper and Saul Bass in terms of impact on title design. (Krasner, 2004) His master works include *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968), and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). “He introduced several techniques to the commercial film industry, including rapid-cut editing, hand drawn animation, extreme close-ups, split-screen montage, overlays, and hand-drawn type. His quick-cut technique, in particular, influenced what later became known in television as the “MTV style” (Krasner, 2004, p. 42).

Ferro is perhaps best known for his hand-lettered movie titles. In *Dr. Strangelove*, the distinctive handwriting style became one of his distinctive styles. He adopted the idea of filling the film frame with different sizes and weights of letters. The impact of this style can be seen in some more contemporary movie titles sequences such as those for *Stop Making Sense* (1984), *Beetlejuice* (1988), and *For Love of the Game* (1999). The elongated hand-drawn type was one of his characteristic styles.

Ferro believes movie title sequences have to foreshadow information about the characters. “It’s the sequence that opens the film and gives you some information about the characters” (Ferro, 2010). It is also important that movie title sequences match the concept of the movie; as he stated, “You have to make it fit to the movie. It can’t be something just clever and nice to look at” (Ferro, 2010). When asked about the relationship between music and titles, he stated, “They’re always together. One doesn’t live without the other” (Ferro, 2010).
Ferro cares about speed and movement. “I created the ‘quick cut technique’ of editing because animation taught me every frame means something; you draw the movement, how fast or slow you make things” (Ferro, 2010).

2.4 Michael Riley

Michael Riley, an American designer and creative director with a graphic design background, has over 20 years’ experience in “designing film and television main title sequences, theatrical trailers, TV commercials, and corporate identity packages” (watchthetitles, 2010). He has received many awards and honors for his movie title work, “including a Gold Medal from D&AD and five Primetime Emmy nominations” (artofthetitle, 2015). His works include *Kung Fu Panda, Band of Brothers*, and *Temple Grandin*. 
He views himself as a storyteller when working on a movie title sequence. “I like to think of myself as a graphic designer, but maybe a little bit of a storyteller too” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010). “If you are working on a commercial or if you are working on an animated title sequence, sometimes you are telling a little bit of a story. You kind of get your feet wet as a storyteller. I think that more and more designers are gonna go the route of allowing designers to be storytellers and I would love to do more of that” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).

Riley thinks that graphic design can be involved in part of film creation. Storyteller and designer can collaborate to develop titles. “I think there are tons of other places that graphic designers can get involved. To be more involved in storytelling. That’s one of the things I think is so great about this media at this time is that the graphic designers, designers that work in films and television can kind of break over into the area of storytelling. And storytellers kind of wanna get the field in the area of design” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).

Figure 16. Kung Fu Panda movie title sequence by Michael Riley (Osborne & Stevenson, 2008)
Consistency is another characteristic of title sequences that Riley thinks is important. He advocated working on the main title, the whole graphic scheme, and marketing in an integrated manner, and has worked with directors and filmmakers to ensure visual continuity.

“*Gattaca* is an example where we not only have the opportunity to work on the main title but also on the marketing. And Andrew Nicole, who is the director, really had the vision for this movie and also had a vision for the marketing. It was really important for him that the main title looked like the marketing. And the marketing looked like the main title. So many times you will watch a trailer for a movie and it will look like one thing and you get in to the movie and you watching the title sequence and it is something completely different. From his point of view, he really wants to make it consistent” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).

![Figure 17. Temple Grandin title sequence by Michael Riley](Mick, 2010)
When developing an idea, it is important for designers to derive their inspiration from the story itself, and to work through details to build the concept. For example, when Riley was working on the film, *Temple Grandin*, he mentioned that the designer used handwriting and drawings from *Temple Grandin* and tried to reveal her “compassionate” personality thorough the detail of the drawing of the smiling cow. “She is autistic. She is very well known for advocating for animal rights. And one of the things that she was very famous for is designing a cattle system for slaughterhouses. She thought that every animal deserves dignity, so it was her goal to, even though cattle did end up in a slaughterhouse, she believed that they should be treated as humanely as possible. These are all croppings from her actual drawings, these are lines that she drew. We used all the drafting drawings to illustrate what she did” (Felix & Wolting, 2011).

“We used little bits and pieces of her scrap book. She had a scrap book where she took down visual notes. She is a very visual thinker. She thinks in pictures. She remembers lots of things, so she’s always writing down images of things that she sees in the film. That struck us. And one of the things that we want to insert into this particular idea was her drawing of cows. Her draft drawing was always analytical but whenever she drew animals, they always had smiles on their faces. It showed that Temple Grandin was obviously a brilliant thinker, a very creative and analytical thinker, but also a very compassionate person. We felt that these drawing of these cows and the way that they smile to us looked very human. They looked very compassionate and we wanted to show that contrast” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).

2.5 Darius Ghanai

Darius Ghanai, the designer of *Perfume*, *Palermo Shooting*, and *Good Bye, Lenin*, designed over 50 movie title sequences and posters. What sets him apart from other title designers is his
“integrated design” philosophy (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010). He creates design concepts for all marketing materials, including title sequences, trailers, and posters.

“When a poster is hanging outside on the wall, in the city, you know that you have the blink of a second to catch the attention of someone driving by. Whereas, in the film, when you finally see the film, or when someone in the audience sees the film, he has already paid for the ticket. He is inside. You have all the time at the movie to really unfold your ideas and do whatever is important for you to do that” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).

Ghanai states, “Film is about rhythm, the way you edit things, the way things come and go. In many cases there is no dialogue. There is no voice over when you see the titles. So you can really feature music” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).

Ghanai also believes that a movie title sequence should create an emotional resonance in an audience. “When you are dealing with an opening sequence, you try to relax the audience to really dive into it emotionally. You have to imagine people still dealing with getting off their jackets, sorting out their popcorn, other things, and then something starts, then the audience gets quieter and quieter. That’s what I’m trying to tell directors, directors that immediately want to start their film without anything in the front. I said, you have to be aware of that in the beginning, there’s lots of distraction” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010). The sequence can serve to give the audience the necessary time to relax before the movie starts.
In his work on the title sequence for *Palermo Shooting*, based on a true story, Ghanai used contact sheets to show the progress of the film and to create unusual effects. The transition between titles was simply a sliding movement from right to left accompanied by the sound of a shutter.

Ghanai shares Saul Bass’s opinion that it is important to arouse audience interest without giving away the story: “And in an opening sequence you want to foreshadow the tonality without going too far into it” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010). “The film is about rhythm, the way you edit things, the way things come and go. In many cases there is no dialogue. There is no voice-over when you see the titles. So you can really feature music” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).

2.6 Richard Morrison

Richard Morrison is now a creative partner at a vibrant London-based animation media production studio, “Th1NG,” which has produced numerous famous works: *Quadraphenia*, *Batman (first version)*, and *Sweeney Todd*. 
Morrison thinks the concept should be well established before work on the title sequence begins, even if the idea is simple. “I always remember the story that Ridley Scott, when he did his first Alien film, assigned that film only three words, and they were ‘JEWS IN SPACE,’ and that got him money to make that film, that tells you that simple is good. I advise anybody, when you first meet a director, or producer or having you work with someone, you don’t have to own the complicated idea to start with” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).

Morrison fully appreciated the advantages of technology: “Technology has moved on so much now…it almost creates the impossible. But it is also depends on how you adopt it. I think the technology is fantastic, as long as you use it in a right way. It won’t give you an idea. But it sure will make things happen a lot quicker” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).
Morrison also noted that it is better to create a physical model before shooting. A combination of technology and other techniques can result in a better outcome: “I’m a great believer that once you compose your storyboard, the great thing to do is actually make a little model. It just tells you so much. Because it’s a physical object, and the more physical you are with texture, smell, you are using all of your senses, it’s feeding subconscious information in to you” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010). “Each time the sequence is unique” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).

_Sweeney Todd_ was one of Morrison’s works with Tim Burton. While discussing the idea, “Tim spotted a kind of naive pencil drawing which I like doing. But he could see I came up with a narrative idea. And to be honest I was kind of new, that’s what he would be looking for. He wasn’t looking for a technique, he wasn’t looking for a type style, he was looking for a narrative to have some reason for the film” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).

While creating _Sweeney Todd_, Morrison used metaphor to show the atmosphere and Todd’s inner world and feelings. He describes his original thinking about that decision: “Because we thought he was coming back to London after he’d been cast away forever many years ago. As he comes back, he’s always subliminally thinking what he’s gonna do before he actually gets back to London. So I thought why could that not be any surrealistic idea in his head, like a drain sequence. So that was how the idea of starting with blood instead of rain coming from clouds began. And then you basically just follow that blood pattern, all the way through his location, all the way down to the sewer, where disposables, the bodies and all. So it’s a journey of blood. But it's a metaphor for the whole film” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).
2.7 Karin Fong

Karin Fong is a director and title designer, some of whose representative works are *Terminator Salvation, Boardwalk Empire*, and *Rubicon*, as well as a founding member and partner at Imaginary Forces. She has created numerous title sequences for movies and television, and has earned five nominations and an Emmy for main title design.

She views title work as a storytelling element: “The thing I love about my job is the sheer variety of it, the kind of storytelling problems that we have to solve” (Designindaba, 2014). She also views the title sequence as a way to communicate emotion: “I love working film as a media. I’m drawn to surrealism and with film you just get that perceived reality of live reaction and combine it with all the…mixed media….You can make a very immersive, emotional piece with film” (Designindaba, 2014). Fong also states that concept is the base for title creation: “The biggest inspiration comes from the story itself and that’s one of my favorite parts of the whole process, it’s just dive deep down into whatever the subject matter is” (Designindaba, 2014). “The fun thing about working on the title sequence for a movie is you will immerse yourself into the world of film” (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).

While working on the Terminator Salvation main title, Fang faced a challenge: The previous terminator movie was already well known for its methodology, and audiences were familiar with the story. She wanted to do something new and inventive. “Mitty always knew that he wanted to kind of reference the huge monolithic letters that were in the title of the first Terminator movie. That’s a very classical sort of main title sequence with huge letters that cross over” (Submarine channel, 2009). In order to retain visual consistency, Fong used a similar concept but changed the details when doing titles: “We kind of took that idea and we were able to
develop textures and we referenced both something that’s very concrete, greedy, like kind of metallic textures but something virtual as well” (Submarine channel, 2009).

2.8 Garson Yu

Garson Yu, a Hong Kong designer who graduated from Yale graphic design in 1987, is the founder and creative director of yU+co, a motion graphic design company in Los Angeles focuses on feature film title design and motion graphics for network branding, shows, and promos. His representative works are “the innovative animated end credit sequence for 300 and the cleverly embedded opening credits for the much-discussed 6-minute opening sequence of Watchmen” (watchthetitles, 2009).

Figure 20. 300 opening title sequence by Garson Yu

(Snyder, 2006)

Yu has expanded his work to China, where he owns an office and lab in Hong Kong. From his point of view, the big challenge in doing a movie title sequence for a foreign audience is that designers need to consider different cultural aesthetics and design sensibilities: “The biggest challenge has been finding design talent that understands our design culture and mentality. You see,
there’s a different cultural aesthetic and design sensibility when you’re trained in an Asian country, versus being trained with a Western design sensibility. We wanted to find a group of people that have a strong passion for creating good design and could incorporate both worlds” (Goh, 2009). He adds, “I think technology is changing the whole landscape of the whole title sequence design” (Submarine channel, 2009). He confirms the benefits that technology brings, while acknowledging the drawbacks of using technology alone: “Most of what a motion graphic designer has relies on the technology and creates these kinds of effects. Technology is a good thing…but…don’t completely rely on it” (Submarine channel, 2009).

Yu highly praised Se7en, stating it has one of his favorite title sequences. He thought it was distinctive when it came out and stated that he thought the style subverted any other method used for movie titles: “Everybody is trying to replicates this Se7en look. I think that has a global impact. It’s really changed the possibilities of how motion graphics can be done” (Submarine channel, 2009). He appreciated the way it combined handmade things with those made by use of technology: “I think that handmade is a kind of intuitive way of creating accidents that we would be able to react to, and then take that look and feel and digitize them, that we apply to whatever we need to, to achieve the effects. This kind of a hybrid, I think. It needs to be a hybrid, not totally rely on computer generated images” (Submarine channel, 2009).

To Yu, concept and emotion are the essences of title art. They outweigh techniques: “Every time a motion graphics company or a motion graphic designer creates a unique technique, everybody follows, and it becomes trendy. So, the question is: Is the technique important in motion graphics? But, I think it is not as important as it should be. If it’s all about humanity and humanity deals with emotion” (Submarine channel, 2009).
Yu feels the future trend of title art is a “fusion”, stating: “Design wise as always in any form of art, I think that’s gonna be all integrated together. The ‘fusion’ idea. In a way, when you go to a restaurant, there is fusion food, there’s all integrations, multiculturalism. That’s our future” (Submarine channel, 2009).
CHAPTER 3
DEVELOPING CRITERIA FOR EFFECTIVE MOVIE TITLE SEQUENCE DESIGN AND EVALUATION 10 TOP BOX OFFICE CHINESE MOVIES

3.1 Criteria for effective movie title sequence design

Based on the opinions of title designers discussed previously, effective movie title sequences need to meet the following requirements.

3.1.1 Have a concept

An effective title sequence has a concept that fits the movie it is to serve. This is something that must go first, according to Richard Morrison (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010). He did not suggest a very complete or complicated idea to start with, but rather a simple one, with probably several key words. Michael Riley and Karin Fong have similar opinions. They state that they always go back to the story to seek inspiration.

Darius Ghanai gives an example in which an audience at a test screening failed to associate the title with the movie’s theme because of a mismatched concept: “They discovered that the audience had problems identifying the movie as a mystery. The director called me and said, ‘We have this problem.’”

3.1.2 Set mood and anticipation

Effective title sequences intrigue audiences’ interest by hinting at some of the topics, themes, or challenges characters will face. They also build anticipation, help inform some of the main character’s traits, and possibly invite questions that will be answered later in the movie. In addition, effective title sequences can “create an emotional reaction from the audience, leaving them glued to their seats, waiting for more” (Byrne & Braha, 2011, p. 2). As Saul Bass states, “I
saw the title as a way of conditioning the audience” (Haskin & Bass, 1996). Kyle Cooper (Submarine channel, 2009) agrees: “Don’t start the movie immediately, give the audience a little bit more time!”

### 3.1.3 Express the story in some metaphorical way

The use of metaphor in title design is very important. Designers have a profound conviction that it is necessary to show the back-story of a movie without giving away too much of the plot. When Richard Morrison did the title for *Sweeney Todd*, he successfully conceptualized the scene by using metaphor to show the characters’ traits and inner worlds. Therefore, effective title sequences can foreshadow themes without revealing too much about the movie itself. They prophesize things that will come later in the film, but do not reveal key elements. Moreover, they “shouldn’t summarize the plot of the movie or give away a perpetrator’s identity that is supposed to be revealed only at the ending” (Byrne & Braha, 2011, p. 2).

### 3.1.4 Make the title sequence a narrative

An effective title sequence needs to be a narrative that can be seen as an independent story. Many title designers, such as Michael Riley, Richard Morrison, and Karin Fong, consider themselves storytellers when creating titles. “I think there are tons of other places that graphic designers can get involved. To be more involved in the storytelling,” Riley said (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010).

### 3.1.5 Have visual consistency and integration

Effective title sequences must have visual consistency to make the work of marketing and communication easier. Michael Riley contends that the main title, all of the graphics, and marketing need to be integrated (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010). Another designer who adheres
to this philosophy is Darius Ghanai, who usually creates design concepts for titles, trailers, and posters as a whole package. Karin Fong (Submarine channel, 2009) also advocates this idea. When she created the Terminator Salvation title, she stuck with the original Terminator movie design theme and used similar concepts to retain visual consistency, knowing that audiences would already be familiar with the theme of the original movie.

3.1.6 Use appropriate typography

Effective title sequences need to have appropriate typography, which must be considered early in creation of the titles; each typeface must have a prescribed form and deliver appropriate emotion and atmosphere. Some typefaces were created or used during a given time period which must be consistent with the time in which the movie is set. Kyle Cooper once said, “Typography is integrated rather than an afterthought” (Submarine channel, 2009). In a good title, appropriate type can help add to the desired impression and speak to the movie’s theme. A good example is Se7en.

3.1.7 Have appropriate rhythm, pace, and movement

A title’s movement on the screen can greatly affect the feel of a movie. The manner in which a title moves, and its speed, must fit the mood of the film. Ferro thinks that each frame should have a separate meaning (Ferro, 2010). Ghanai shares this opinion; he thinks that a film title is about rhythm—things coming and going (Morrison, Riley, & Ghanai, 2010). Therefore, the movement of the title is something that cannot be ignored.

3.2 Analysis of Top 10 Chinese domestic movies of 2013 and 2014

As indicated in the official records for 2013 and 2014 yearly box offices in China, domestic and imported movies had almost equal shares. I chose the top five Chinese domestic movies in
2013 and 2014 to do the analyze. The reason for selecting these movies is that they indicate audience taste and perhaps expectations for the future.

The top five Chinese domestic movies in 2013, in terms of box office are: *Journey to the West, Conquering the Demons, Personal Tailor, So Young, Young Detective Dee,* and *American Dreams in China.* In 2013, the top five Chinese domestic movies in terms of box office were: *Breakup Buddies, The Monkey King, The Taking of Tiger Mountain, Breakup Guru,* and *The Continent.*
# China Yearly Box Office


**Rows: #1–100, #101–164**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Movie Title</th>
<th>Distributor</th>
<th>Gross</th>
<th>Release</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$196,740,000</td>
<td>2/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Iron Man 3</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$121,200,000</td>
<td>5/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Personal Tailor</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$115,520,000</td>
<td>12/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Zhi wo men zhong jiang shi qu de qing chun (So Young)</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$114,710,000</td>
<td>4/25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pacific Rim</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$111,940,000</td>
<td>7/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Di Renjie zhi shendu longwang (Young Detective Dee)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$96,400,000</td>
<td>9/28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Zhong Guo He Huo Ren (American Dreams in China)</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$86,450,000</td>
<td>5/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Police Story 2013</td>
<td>Wanda</td>
<td>$86,340,000</td>
<td>12/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Finding Mr. Right</td>
<td>EDKO</td>
<td>$82,680,000</td>
<td>3/21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tiny Times</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$77,600,000</td>
<td>6/27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Gravity</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$70,680,000</td>
<td>11/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Fast &amp; Furious 6</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$66,490,000</td>
<td>7/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Man of Steel</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$63,440,000</td>
<td>6/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The Croods</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$63,310,000</td>
<td>4/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Skyfall</td>
<td>Sony</td>
<td>$59,234,352</td>
<td>1/21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Star Trek Into Darkness</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$56,910,000</td>
<td>5/28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Jurassic Park (3D)</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$55,890,000</td>
<td>8/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Thor: The Dark World</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$55,340,000</td>
<td>11/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>G.I. Joe: Retaliation</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$53,840,000</td>
<td>4/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Firestorm (2013)</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$50,770,000</td>
<td>12/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$49,730,000</td>
<td>2/22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Tiny Times 2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$47,220,000</td>
<td>8/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Switch (2013)</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$46,820,000</td>
<td>6/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Bu Er Shen Tan (Badges of Fury)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$45,300,000</td>
<td>6/21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Yi dai zong shi (The Grandmaster)</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$45,270,000</td>
<td>1/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Chu zi Xi zi Pi zi (The Chef, The Actor, The Scoundrel)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$42,970,000</td>
<td>3/29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>No Man's Land (2013)</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$41,800,000</td>
<td>12/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 21. 2013 China box office
(boxofficemojo, 2013)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Movie Title</th>
<th>Distributor</th>
<th>Gross</th>
<th>Release</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Transformers: Age of Extinction</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$301,000,000</td>
<td>6/27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Breakup Buddies</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$187,970,000</td>
<td>9/30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Monkey King</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$167,840,000</td>
<td>1/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Taking of Tiger Mountain</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$141,020,000</td>
<td>12/23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Interstellar</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$121,990,000</td>
<td>11/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>X-Men: Days of Future Past</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$116,490,000</td>
<td>5/23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$115,620,000</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dad, Where Are We Going?</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$111,870,000</td>
<td>1/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dawn of the Planet of the Apes</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$107,355,317</td>
<td>8/29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The Breakup Guru</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$106,590,000</td>
<td>6/27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The Continent</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$100,110,000</td>
<td>7/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Guardians of the Galaxy</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$96,470,000</td>
<td>10/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The Amazing Spider-Man 2</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$94,430,000</td>
<td>5/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Back in Time (Congcong Nanian)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$93,470,000</td>
<td>12/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The Man from Macau</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$84,570,000</td>
<td>1/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Tiny Times 3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$82,320,000</td>
<td>7/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Gone with the Bullets</td>
<td>Wanda</td>
<td>$81,300,000</td>
<td>12/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Godzilla (2014)</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$77,630,000</td>
<td>6/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$74,730,000</td>
<td>2/21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Old Classmate</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$73,050,000</td>
<td>4/25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>The Expendables 3</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$72,870,000</td>
<td>9/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Need for Speed</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$66,240,000</td>
<td>3/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Edge of Tomorrow</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$65,660,000</td>
<td>6/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Beijing Love Story</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$65,290,000</td>
<td>2/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>The House That Never Dies</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$65,220,000</td>
<td>7/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>How to Train Your Dragon 2</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$65,100,000</td>
<td>8/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (2014)</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$62,130,000</td>
<td>10/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>The White Haired Witch of Lunar Kingdom</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$61,850,000</td>
<td>7/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Qin Ai De Xiao Hai (Dearest)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$54,630,000</td>
<td>9/25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Despicable Me 2</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$52,980,000</td>
<td>1/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Robocop (2014)</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$50,820,000</td>
<td>2/28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Overheard 3</td>
<td>HuaXia</td>
<td>$49,650,000</td>
<td>5/29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Frozen (2013)</td>
<td>China Film</td>
<td>$48,240,000</td>
<td>2/5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 22. 2014 China box office (boxofficemojo, 2014)
3.2.1 Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons

Figure 23. *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* opening movie title sequence (Chow, 2013)

The movie *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons*, a horror and fantasy movie, was created and directed by Chow Sing Chi, one of the master comedy actors, screenwriters and directors in Hong Kong. The story was adapted from the traditional Chinese saga, “The Monkey King,” about a monk and his life before he met the Monkey King. The entire movie title sequence,
which lasted less than 30 seconds, included information about the movie company, the director’s name, and the title of the movie. The background music was epic in nature, and used completely musical instruments, thus sounding relatively heavy, slow and somewhat sad. Likewise, the movement of the movie title was also relatively slow. Two frames showed the film company’s name and the director’s name, using the same Chinese calligraphy fonts, Kai Shu, for both. The frame showing the director’s name included the title and a confining circle, a symbol for the Monkey King. It rotated slowly until the camera zoomed in for a close-up. As the rotation continued, the confining circle rotated out and the title of the movie rotated in as the camera continuously zoomed in. As the landscape-look type rotated to a straight facade facing the audience, the camera zoomed in to the center and suddenly transited to the movie scene. The landscape movie title fonts were designed separately, partially in the Chinese calligraphy style of Li Shu, and were then refined by computer. The texture was highly technical in appearance. Within 30 seconds, the fonts varied in size and shape, appearing inconsistent from one individual frame to another. The movement of the title sequence consisted of a simple fade-in and fade-out. Creating a cinematic atmosphere in such a short time is difficult.
3.2.2 Personal Tailor

Figure 24. *Personal Tailor* opening movie title sequence  
(Feng, 2013)
*Personal Tailor* is a fictional, inspirational comedy about a company that offers customers creative customized services to help them realize their dreams. Customers can assume the role of movie star, heroine, political leader, millionaire or any other role they want.

The movie starts with the first frame. About nine minutes later the movie title appears, followed by the cast list. After nine minutes, background music began to play a bossa nova and samba style music, to suggest a tropical feel. The footage depicts a natural tropical island. The camera was fixed and captured subtle details, such as clouds changing and wind blowing. The text suddenly pops out and then fades with the frame change. The designers used Imitation Song typeface for Chinese words and a decorative font for the English translation, along with a decorative line pattern. They tried to use lines to indicate hierarchy. Some frames have more than one name, so that the information was doubled. Also, the designer decreased the size of the English typeface. The type and size chosen made it difficult to read the frame in a short time, especially when the music was fast and text shifts in fast pace. Additionally, there was no hierarchy in the English text between the positions and names, and it appeared that a grid to place the text on the frame was not used; the text simply flew around.
3.2.3 So Young

Figure 25. *So Young* movie title sequence
(Zhao, 2013)
So Young, a Chinese drama directed by Zhao Wei, is based on the best-selling novel “To Our Youth That is Fading Away,” by Xin Yiwu. In 2013, the movie became a “major success at the Chinese box office, grossing over US $118 million, with a US $5 million budget” (Wikipedia, 2014).

This movie won many domestic film awards in 2013, such as the award for best new director, best new actress and best adaptation. The story involved several young people and their love and hate relationships during college. The name of the title in Chinese means, “To memorialize the passing of time youth,” which to some hinted that the film's tone had slightly tragic overtones. The time and setting were in the 2000’s in a Chinese college. Like other conventional movies, the story line started immediately. The main title appeared three minutes into
the story. The casting list was shown above a boulevard of green trees. The scene was reminiscent of an imaginary college life scene, or a cliché describing college life. The music was purely instrumental and somewhat sad in tone. The text layers above the footage decomposed into light dots and bubbles, then faded away. Designers gave the footage some Gaussian blur, with lighter tones to suggest that the story was a nostalgic memory. However, the pop-out and disappearance speed was fairly rapid, making it difficult to read when a great deal of information was presented. The typeface color, which was light yellow, contrasted poorly with the greenish leafy background. The typeface used by the designer for Chinese was one of the most commonly used sans-serif typefaces in China. However, the corresponding English title was done in a tall, thick stroked typeface, which, when it shrunk in size, was difficult to read because of the spaces between letters. Furthermore, audience members could not participate in the emotion of the movie visually because the design of the title sequence was too plain and ordinary; the methods and techniques were not original. Basically, the movie title sequence was carried by the music.
3.2.4 Young Detective Dee: Rise of the Sea Dragon

Figure 27. *Young Detective Dee* opening movie title sequence
(Tsui, 2013)
Detective Dee is a crime action movie directed by Hong Kong director Tsui Hark. The protagonist was a real historical figure about whose life books have been written. He is also the protagonist in a famous detective novel series in China. Detective Dee, a famous Chinese living during the Tang Dynasty, cracked a strange criminal case in the imperial court. The movie was shot in 3D with an abundance of special effects. As with other recent Chinese domestic movies, the story starts immediately after the advertisements that precede the movie itself.

During the first part, the scene was magnificent, showing the Imperial Army fleet being attacked by an unidentified sea monster. Ships sank resulting in many deaths. The incident caused people to panic and rumors to circulate through the city. To stop the rumors, the royal court sent an officer to solve the case. The first part depicted the battle at sea, with the general falling into the water during the sinking of the ship. This section lasted for five and a half minutes. The title then emerged, with ambitious, majestic, rhythmic music and set against underwater footage. The movie title first appeared underwater, and in some frames the characters were embedded in the movie scene. When it transited to the next footage, the characters appeared above the scene, as if floating. This made frames look disjointed, with no consistency. The typeface used for the movie title was a sans-serif Chinese typeface East Asia Gothic typeface, which is “commonly used in headlines, signs, and video applications” (East Asian gothic type, 2014). The type style is characterized by “strokes of even thickness, reduced curves, and lack of decorations, akin to sans serif-styles in Western typography” (East Asian gothic type, 2014). In the movie, the typeface had a very modern look, with a texture reminiscent of rough metal coupled with an outer glowing effect. Overall, it gave audiences a futuristic and high-tech feel that did not match the story’s setting during the ancient Tang Dynasty; it therefore felt inappropriate. In addition, the typeface scale on the screen was too large, occupying much of the screen. Moreover, the composition of the frame was not
appropriate and competed with the text and footage. Instead of playing a supporting role, the text distracted audience members from appreciating the film itself. Some effect elements were overused and made objects look artificial.

Text movement was another problem. In the first several scenes, the characters were embedded the footage and moved from far off to near; there was depth, and the characters looked three-dimensional. In later scenes, the typeface looked graphic and flat. The movement style changed to rotate vertically and rotate horizontally. Because the scale, font size, movement style, and texture varied in different frames, there was little consistency from frame to frame.

Also worth mentioning is that the publicity poster for the film used a title design that was not related to the one that appeared in the movie. The texture and typeface were changed slightly. The poster incorporated the figure of a dragon in the subtitle, while in the movie this figure did not appear.

Figure 28. Detective Dee, use of different typefaces in opening movie title and poster (Chen, 2015)
3.2.5 American Dreams in China

Figure 29. American Dreams in China opening title sequence
(Chan, 2013)
American Dreams in China was an inspirational movie about three young men who met in college and went on to live different lives after graduation. They experienced various failures and then, coincidentally reunited. They had learned from their failures, and, building on their collective experiences, found an English training school called “New Dream.” The school helped a large numbers of Chinese students to pass the English language exam before going to study in the United States. Because of many students’ excellent performances, the school had become the tutoring model for language education. These three seeming “losers” became successful educators and entrepreneurs.

Like most movies, the plot starts immediately after the advertisements. With voiceover, the scene flashes back to a time when one of the protagonists was rejected by a visa officer. The narrator tells the background story through the first character in about seven and a half minutes.

The movie title appears around seven and a half minutes into the movie, along with rhythmic and passionate music played by a popular rock band of the time. In this part of the film, the designer used some montage footage to depict the protagonist’s college life in 1980’s China.

The designer chose a bold typeface typically used for titles and printing in 1980’s China. Behind the title was a yellowish Kraft paper meant to give a vintage feel; Kraft paper was used to package school stationery and paper during that time in China. The music and main Chinese typeface were both visually and acoustically powerful, and suggested the concept of “dream”.

I found several problems with the bilingual design: the designers used Chinese for the main title and English as the alternative. Basically, the Chinese characters were set over English letters. By changing typeface, the designers tended to separate hierarchies between the two languages. They used bold line typeface for the main Chinese text and capital and a thin stroke serif font for the corresponding English title. The designers emphasized the hierarchy between the title and
name by differing the size. However, varying the sizes between the two for both typefaces made
the relationship between characters and letters complicated, especially when more than one name
was necessary. In addition, they used a different composition for each individual set of characters
presented on Kraft paper. Sometimes the English title went below the Chinese, and sometimes it
went above. There was no grid. Texts moved in cadence with the rhythm and were rushed; an
audience member would not be able to anticipate where the text would go next. The alignment
changed constantly, making it hard to capture an audience member’s attention and rendering it
hard to read.

The frame with the main title in figure 28 is an example. The corresponding English title
was just one word, “partner.” The Chinese font was too large, whereas the English title was too
small, rendering it almost invisible. The alignment was disconcerting as well; images were aligned
neither to the left, to the right or middle, or they were aligned with individual characters. Perhaps
the designer meant to create the feeling of a montage. These details needed to be more carefully
executed so that words and images would not appear to be placed arbitrarily.
Text movement is worth consideration as well. Sometimes the type interacted with footage or a character and created the illusion of fun. For example, in some footage, the text disappeared in the direction of a character running through the scene. Another example is seen when the text followed the protagonist’s movements. However, the designer did not apply this method to all footage, which indicates a lack of consistency.
3.2.6 Breakup Buddies

Figure 31. *Breakup Buddies* opening title sequence
(Ning, 2014)
*Breakup Buddies* earned the top ticket gross for Chinese domestic movies in 2014. The storyline was about the protagonist, Hao, a second-hand audio system provider who was formerly a singer and who had divorced his wife after she chose to be with another man. Hao was so angry that he sawed his possessions in half as a way to vent his emotions, because he hated losing his wife and imagined those possessions as rivals in love. His friend Yi, a drama producer, recognized Hao’s despair and became deeply worried about him. Yi decided to take Hao on a “journey of healing.” They drove south, met many girls, and had many experiences. After experiencing a variety of misfortunes, Hao began to understand the meaning of life, love, and forgiveness. Five years earlier and during the same time period, his ex-wife was on a “journey of healing” of her own. The director adopted reverse narration to show the wife’s life—back to the time they two meet. Hao finally walked out of his life’s shadow and achieved reconciliation with himself and his ex-wife.

The concept of movie title sequence, which was about two and a half minutes long was to show Hao’s anger early in the film. Slow-motion cinema photography captured the sparks of the electric saw Hao used to destroy his possessions and symbolized Hao’s rage. Accompanied by slow paced electronic music, the close-ups showed Hao cutting up domestic items such as a TV set, a microphone, a guitar, an iPad, marriage dolls, and Chinese characters “囍” which symbolize marriage. The footage reflected Hao’s emotional state and anger before transitioning to the story itself. Utilizing this concept, the designer chose relatively bold, square Chinese characters. and a similar straight-lined English typeface. Type movement complemented the concept: the text shattered and then pieced back together as the footage changed. The designer separated the hierarchy between English and Chinese by changing the size of the symbols, adjusting horizontal distance to show the hierarchy between title and name, thus rendering the text readable and clear.
Interestingly, the title of the movie was displayed differently in its advertising poster and its movie title sequence. For the poster, the designer incorporated a woman’s figure in the movie title to indicate that a woman was integral to the story, and that the movie was both a comedy and a romance. The type was bold and tilted, and the texture gradient and bright. However, in the movie title sequence, the designer used the same typeface but without the woman’s figure. The music and the movie title sequence delivered a completely different feel; the tone of the music was calm and depressing. Hence, even an audience member could detect lack of conceptual continuity of the typeface. From a marketing perspective, advertising consistency is not present.

Figure 32. Breakup Buddies opening title and poster  
(Ning, 2014)
3.2.7 The Monkey King

Figure 33. *The Monkey King* opening movie title sequence (Cheang, 2014)
The Monkey King, a 3D fantasy action film adapted from one chapter of the famous Chinese classical novel, “Journey to the West,” is about how the Monkey King rebels against the Jade Emperor of Heaven.

The Monkey King is the pivotal figure of the novel. His iconic weapon, the amazing extensional gold metal bar, is well known all over China. This probably explains the movie’s title sequence and why the designer picked the bar as the first element. The camera moved around the flaming metal bar for about one minute, accompanied by impassioned music and drumbeats. Many visual effects were added, but the entire title sequence was free of narrative.

The designers chose handwritten calligraphy for the Chinese text body. The irregular script made some characters looks larger than others—an aesthetic of Chinese calligraphy. When the designers attached the corresponding English title, they used all capital letters and scaled up the first letter of each word. The alignment method was special; the letters sloped. Some scene sets incorporate too much text. The designer set the line spacing too even, and the kerning too small, but the font size was so large that it was difficult for viewers to read it during the fast moving footage. All of these factors created a visual burden for audience members.

One frame, which showed the name of the director, was set vertically. It was the only vertical arrangement among the text sets; all others were set horizontally. I think this somewhat undermined the feeling of consistency.
3.2.8 The Taking of Tiger Mountain

Figure 34. *The Taking of Tiger Mountain* opening title sequence, the first section (Tsui, 2014)

Figure 35. *The Taking of Tiger Mountain* opening title sequence, section 2 (Tsui, 2014)

*The Taking of Tiger Mountain*, directed by Hong Kong film director Tsui Hark, was based on the novel *Lin Hai Xue Yuan* by Qu Bo, which in turn was based on the real story of “an incident in 1946 during the Chinese Civil War, involving a Communist reconnaissance team soldier, Yang Zirong, who disguised himself as a bandit to infiltrate a local gang of bandits, eventually helping
the main Communist force destroy the bandits.” (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, 2015) The main protagonist’s and bandits’ names were real in both the novel and the movie. The story was also adapted for other art forms, such as the Peking opera, a drama, a TV play, movies, and picture storybooks was “one of the eight model plays allowed during the Chinese Cultural Revolution” (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, 2015). Therefore, the story has been well known in China for several generations.

In this movie, Tsui Hark adopted 3D techniques and created a completely new look. He used the flashbacks for the beginning. Jimmy, a Chinese student in the U.S, went to a graduation party with his friends before he flew back to China. He saw the Peking opera, “The Taking of Tiger Mountain,” as a music video and began to recall a story told by his grandfather, who was a child in the 1940’s and was saved by Communist soldiers during a fight with bandits.

After three and a half minutes, the movie itself began. Interestingly, the designer broke the movie title sequence into three parts. The first part informed the audience about the main film company. Above the black backdrop the companies’ name titles were highlighted, using Chinese script fonts. There were obviously two hierarchies of Chinese typeface; English constituted another hierarchy.

The movie itself was set in New York City. The footage shifted among lively holiday scenes with a holiday feel and the background music was an upbeat Christmas song. The designer chose Italic type for both Chinese and English and inclined all type at an angle, which, in my opinion, was inconsistent with the horizontal footage. Some frames contained more than one name, making the frames looks crowded and chaotic. Since individual frames were so different, the designer tended to use a variety of grids.
The scene shifted to a young boy in a traffic jam watching a video, “The Taking of Tiger Mountain,” on a smartphone. The footage then transitioned to the main story. The title of the movie appeared from the center and spread, employing a Chinese calligraphy design. I think the designer meant to arouse audience members’ memories of their childhood, when they read the storybook.

The designer used corresponding English fonts that appeared only once in the title. Within the next three frames containing text, the designer used four different Chinese typefaces of varied sizes and directions. He also used an unusual alignment of text, making the visual effect inconsistent and odd.
Figure 37. *The Taking of Tiger Mountain* opening title sequence, section 3
(Tsui, 2014)
3.2.9 Breakup Guru

Figure 38. Breakup Guru opening title sequence
(Yu & Deng, 2014)

Breakup Guru, an absurd romantic comedy, is about Gui, a man with abundant romantic experience who developed a business to help people break up. He is successful until he encounters a beautiful, strong, independent girl, Chun, whose boyfriend, a customer of Gui’s, broke up with her. From the time they met, Gui’s finds this girl captivating and unique. In the end, Gui found that he fell in love with her.
The movie's storyline starts immediately, with the movie title sequence placed within the plot. In the first section, the director meant to show an example of a successful breakup. The scene shifts to Africa, where a girl named Zhuang was spending a holiday by the sea. Gui rescues Zhuang when she has leg cramps during diving, and lies to her, saying he was the king of the country. They spent time together and Zhuang finally falls in love with the fake king, with plans to break up with her famous writer boyfriend, Han. Actually this was Han’s intention, because he did not want a negative image in the media and had solicited Gui to help him.

The movie title sequence used both Chinese characters and English words. The designers used two main typefaces, bold serif typeface and sans-serif, to separate the title and names. They used four different font sizes to establish a hierarchy—a white flat textured typeface lying above a fast shifting footage under fade-in and fade-out conditions. Because the pace was aligned to the music, the font size small, and the texture difficult to detect, the title sequence was not fully functional. The English title was so small that the texture made some strokes and elements hard to recognize. The footage was about their happy times in Africa and was accompanied by rhythmic African music. After this part, the footage shifted to another for about one minute. Then the scene quickly shifted to a billboard covered with advertising posters, with the title of the movie *Breakup Guru* as one of them.
Figure 39. *Breakup Guru* opening title and poster used different typeface (Yu & Deng, 2014)
The title appears after about ten minutes into the movie. Following the part to showcase archives, designers created a comic book style to quickly introduce their business success and to produce a comedy atmosphere. The designers then again changed style and used other typeface.

The movie title foreshadowing took so long that it was hard to determine where the movie started. The impression was that different fonts were used relatively freely.

Figure 40. Breakup Guru
(Yu & Deng, 2014)

3.2.10 The Continent
Figure 41. *The Continent* opening title sequence  
(Han, 2014)
The story of the continent takes place on a fictional Chinese island, Dongji Island. After a house removal decision was made, most residents had moved from the island. Three young men who grew up there decided to take a road trip together to seek a new life. During the trip, the three men relied on each other, had arguments, experienced risks and fraud, and sometimes met lovers. Eventually, they learned something about the meaning of life.

At the beginning of the movie, one of the young men began to have flashbacks. The music appeared over the narration, and the footage shifted to show scenes of a ruined island after the residents moved away. The island looked poor and old, but the background music was an anthem praising the island’s beautiful appearance and life. The melody and vocals, which were solemn and played at an intermediate speed, suggested a contradiction between what was presented visually and what was sung in the island anthem. The ruins, such as discarded furniture, abandoned houses, and walls overgrown with ivy, showed a deserted community—a purposeful irony. The footage slowly zoomed-in, zoomed-out or panned horizontally. The designer used two Chinese fonts, one a script font and the other an ordinary font, and varied the size to highlight the name. The corresponding English subtitles were presented in only one size. The subtitles faded in and faded out with footage. From the screenshot, it is obviously that the designer used a square grid to assure that the information appeared in the designated place.
CHAPTER 4
SYNTHESEIS

4.1 Introduction

From what had been discussed in Chapter 3, some common situations in Chinese domestic movie title sequences are as followed:

1. Some movie title sequences do not work conceptually. As a result, they do not resonate emotionally with the audience. In some movies, it is hard to determine when the movie really begins. Either the movie title sequence foreshadows a great deal of the movie, or it is a relatively short movie title sequence that does not function as a bridge to smooth audience emotion.

2. There are few distinctive styles in movie title sequences. Most followed old ways of doing sequences which make them lack a distinctive style.

3. Visual continuity is lacking. Many movies have inconsistent visual design and do not use the same concept on posters and in the movie title sequence. Some use different typography or colors which can confuse audiences.

4. Using inappropriate elements, such as inappropriate typography, movement, pace, sequences and visual hierarchy, can make it hard for the audience to grasp the information on the screen in a short time.

5. Copy ideas
4.2 Suggestions

An effective movie title design can set the tone, establish the context for a movie, and arouse the audience’s anticipation while conveying information. Usually, the movie title delivers information through the following factors:

Kinetic typography

Color

Color contrast

Textures/Lighting

Composition

Camera movement style

Iconic language

Imagery

Styles/techniques

By cautiously choosing the elements listed above, a designer can make a statement about the look and feel of the title sequence, “and directs the audience’s emotional response toward the desired result” (what-when-how, 2015).

4.2.1 Typography

“Typography allows designers and communicators to convey their ideas through the form of each letter. Each font has its own personality that manifests itself through weight, proportion, and detail. Furthermore, the way each font is articulated onscreen creates an additional “voice” and
character. There is no set rule about what is the “right” font; using the appropriate font for a project is an acquired skill that comes with time and practice” (Byrne & Braha, 2011)

The typography must match the genre and time period to be considered “appropriate.” Some typefaces have their own history and have appeared at a specific time. Before they were used for movies, they might have appeared in familiar environments and become a convention. Form determines the emotional qualities of typeface.

Emotion can also be affected by changing such elements as type stroke, weight, type size, kerning, tracking, and leadings. Also, type can be transformed, exaggerated, and altered, depending on the concept.

4.2.2 Color

Color, one of the most vital visual elements, can convey a great deal of meaning. “Certain colors can acquire a particular significance, depending on the cultural background and codex.” (Byrne, 2010)

Color can affect an audience’s mood. A study titled, “Spatial color—live experiment,” conducted by Shashi Caan Collective (Byrne & Braha, 2011, p. 117) showed that the color of a room can affect people’s behavior. They used three rooms colored red, yellow and blue, but otherwise identical. In the red and yellow rooms, people were “dynamically interacting, gesturing and moving around” (Byrne & Braha, 2011) while people in the blue room were prone to be still, calm, and less socially interactive.

Color also has cultural and sociological connotations. For instance, white is associated with mourning in Japan, China and Korea, while it is used for weddings in America and many other
Western countries. Red signifies “luck” and good fortune in China, while representing evil in some Western countries. Therefore, it is important to contextualize color within the theme and story.

Color also has political connotations. For example, it is easy for people to associate red with socialism, communism, left wing groups, and labor. White suggests pacifism or surrender. Black is always used in association with anarchism.

Certain color palettes “can evoke places, memories and personal associations” (Byrne & Braha, 2011, p. 117). Memory can affect the perception of color, and, conversely, color can arouse people’s memories of personal experiences and associations.

Color preference is also affected by culture and geographical location. For example, Chinese people prefer red for the Spring Festival; red is used for many things, from home decoration to clothes, and even food packaging. In the book “Eidetic Imagery” (Jaensch, 1930), the author explains that “human beings living in hot climates have to adapt to the long waves of light because of the increased amount of sunlight.” They are affected accordingly and have a preference for warm colors (Byrne & Braha, 2011).

4.2.3 Color contrast

It is universally acknowledged that black type on a light background is highly readable. However, in filmmaking, we often see the opposite: light type on a dark background. In title design, the type is seen as foreground, while other elements such as solid color, patterns, gradients, live action footage, animation or motion graphics are seen as background. Therefore, color contrast is very important. In a movie theater, the audience is most likely sitting still, and the screen type and other elements are animated. High-contrast color makes print easy to read quickly. In most movies, the colors are adjusted to create a certain atmosphere. When “the flexibility and possibility of
colors are highly exaggerated in movie production process” (Han, 2014), the audience can acquire certain strong feelings in a short time. To achieve a certain result, designers can adjust brightness, contrast or saturation to enhance the visual impact.

4.2.4 Textures/Lighting

“Movie is combination art of frame, audio, time and space” (Wang, 2009).

Because the film title sequence also contains sound, movement, space and a timeline, the visual elements need to coincide with acoustic factors and other elements. Texture and lighting need to be chosen according to the movie’s concept, such as flame, water spray, glow, and other textures, as well as sound effects. Visual effects need to conceptually or substantially coincide with the typeface texture.

4.2.5 Composition

The movie title sequence design is actually a redesign based on the original movie concept. We can view it as a kind of moving graphic art because in a movie, the footage can be decomposed into separate still images. Each image can be take as an independent unit of design. Therefore, we can apply graphic design principles in designing footages. Some movies already have very beautifully shot footage, so designers need to fully use negative space to present the necessary text information. Combining the typography and the footage effectively so as not to damage the harmony of the original footage is something that designers need to think about, as they learn from experience and improve this ability through practice.

A good way to do this is to use a grid. Because a video is constantly in movement, a grid can help keep the text in a given location and visible to the audience. It is easy to attract and guide audience visual if the grid is formed in a logical way and help audience to build a sense of visual.
4.2.6 Camera movement style

Designers can also create emotion by changing the camera’s movement style and speed. It is also important to match movement and acoustic styles so that they work together to communicate a strong emotion in a title sequence. For instance, fast movement and changing form combined with accelerated speed can create a feeling of excitement and dynamism.

4.2.7 Iconic language

The use of symbols or symbolic details in a title can increase an audience’s familiarity with, and memory of, specific characters. There are many examples of use of iconic language, such as “Transformer,” “Batman,” “Superman.” and “James Bond.”

4.2.8 Imagery

Adapting different forms of imagery such as video, footage, still image, 2D or 3D animation and etc in title sequence design can create interesting different layers and make the visual effect more rich and varied. Contrasts of still images and movement footage can create a dynamic feel.

4.2.9 Styles/techniques

Styles are usually ruled by the concept of movies. To develop a distinctive design, designers need to start from the movie and try to find appropriate color tone, typeface and movement styles that are compatible with the movie’s atmosphere. Different techniques such as cell animation, CG animation, stop motion can help to create different style.

Designers must visually capture the essence of a movie in a quality title sequence. The following are some suggestions and elements for a designer to keep in mind when beginning to work. First, always start with the concept, if only from a small number of key words. Second,
don’t always rely on technology; use a hybrid method to produce a draft, and use a computer later; if possible, build a small physical model before beginning work on the formal project. Third, remember to make the graphics visually consistent. Additionally, keep in mind that typography is of great importance; carefully choose the type, because the project will be less than fully successful if an inappropriate type is chosen. A title designer must stay abreast of new developments related to type and learn new ways to combine them, especially when creating a title with both Chinese and English. Last, but not least, title designers need to contextualize titles within the culture. Question whether the techniques or methods used complement the story and culture.

What ever method designers use, it is good for them to refer to the basic graphic design principles, design methods and animation principles. These principles and methods are the basics of design, and they can be applied to a very broad range of fields.
In order to show the criteria concluded from above, I designed a motion graphic to illustrate my findings about effective movie title design. Storyboards were sketched first to illustrate the background of Chinese movie history, then observations from designers’ interviews and general criteria for effective movie title sequence design from those interviews.
Figure 42. Initial ideas sketch
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sketch</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Introduce the present scene.</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Sketch" /></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Introduce the present scene.</td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Sketch" /></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More &amp; more film's potential market.</td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Sketch" /></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More &amp; more film's potential market.</td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Sketch" /></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mexican craftsmanship.</td>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Sketch" /></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A sign of a mature industry

Figure 43. Rough sketch
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sketch</th>
<th>Time</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Movie technology was introduced in China when it started.</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Sketch" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Film studio prosperous. During war time, Japanese took charge of film studios in Shanghai.</td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Sketch" /></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New China formed.</td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Sketch" /></td>
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Figure 44. Rough sketch
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<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sketch</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1950-1980, Chinese revolution, China's step towards communication with outside countries.</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Sketch" /></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Evergreen content, political correctness, banned import film.</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Sketch" /></td>
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<td>The film industry developed in slow.</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Sketch" /></td>
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<td></td>
<td>African music, industry developed. Diversity home.</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Sketch" /></td>
<td></td>
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Figure 46. Rough sketch
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<th>Sound</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sketch</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Concept is top</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Sketch 1" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Express mood and anticipation</td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Sketch 2" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Expressing in metaphorical way</td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Sketch 3" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Visual consistency</td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Sketch 4" /></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Reptition and pace</td>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Sketch 5" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Repetition and pace</td>
<td><img src="image6" alt="Sketch 6" /></td>
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Figure 47. Rough sketch
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<th>Music</th>
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Figure 48. Rough sketch
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<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sketch</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Improper can express itself</td>
<td>Romance in music, texture, size, tempo, color, rhythm, and pace. Lower music, follow contour.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Visual consistency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 49. Rough sketch
Figure 50. Draft video screenshots
Figure 51. Final video screenshots
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS

I have long been intrigued by attractive movie title sequences. As an average audience member, I wondered why American movies contain so many successful movie title sequences, how they deliver certain emotions visually, and how they carry out an idea through design. As a Chinese designer, I see a great difference between American movies and Chinese domestic movies. I am concerned about this aspect of the movie industry and wish to see more effective movie title sequences in domestic movies. This concern was my initial motivation for this research.

In this thesis, I summarized opinions of a number of movie title designers who have achieved outstanding reputations in the western movie industry. Among these designers are masters such as Saul Bass, Pablo Ferro, and Kyle Cooper, who have created unique styles and changed the history of movie title sequence design. Most of the opinions expressed in this thesis are from video interviews and journal articles.

As one of the most prominent representatives of the developed western movie industry system, the United States has earned a worldwide reputation for high productivity and quality. Many of its practitioners eventually established norms and standards for the field. American title sequence designers and filmmakers together created a successful model for cooperation of designers and filmmakers and what role designers should play in creation of sequences. Saul Bass, a great American graphic designer as well as filmmaker, is largely responsible for making the movie title sequence an art work that is integrated with the movie. Most of the title designers I have quoted and discussed in this thesis are working, or used to work in the American movie
industry or some other mature western movie industry, because I believe that it is very important to learn from successful examples and experiences.

I discussed the history of Chinese domestic movie industry as well as present issues in domestic movie title design, including possible reasons for these issues. I devised generalized criteria of effective movie title sequence design based on the opinions of the individuals I quoted and discussed and then used these criteria to analyze 10 Chinese domestic movies that had won the top box office in domestic movies. So I also created a video, using motion graphic and video examples, to illustrate my findings.

Although many movies have been successful in terms of box office, their success is often due to factors such as the fame of the actors or actresses, or the publicity strategy. Most of these movies represented a large investment and they were all directed by famous Chinese domestic directors. Although box office success is obviously desirable, the title sequence design is not necessarily appropriate and not equal in quality to the movie. In my opinion, this might potentially give audiences or new designers the impression that these movies are successful examples of movie title design. This impression may shape a standard or norm for the future movie market and if the design is inappropriate, the effect on designers, and on education of the audiences, could be negative.

The 10 movies I analyzed in this thesis are the most popular mainstream commercial movies of 2013 and 2014. Based on the criteria, the most common problems in the movie title sequences are that some do not have a distinctive style of the movie, some use inappropriate elements that do not match the concept of the movie, and some lack visual continuity. The most frequent problem is in the visual hierarchy. Part of this problem is because of the difficulties of designing Chinese characters; unlike English letters, Chinese characters are much more difficult
and time consuming to design. Also, the bilingual design added even more difficulties to arrange the visual hierarchy.

One of the most frequent problems is that some movie title sequences used inappropriate typography, effects, pace or movement. To deal with this problem, designers must have extensive experience in their work and have great command over use of design principles and methods. To have a unique style, designers need to use great creativity in their working process as well as understanding the essential concept of the movie.

China’s educational system is partly to blame for causing the situation. The educational system, which has been destroyed and rebuilt, separates art and science; those students who have a good aesthetic sense do not learn the techniques very well, while students learning technical computer skills do not receive systematic design training. Additionally, because the design field is evolving as well, some traditional courses do not offer designers the chance to learn enough technical skills. The school course therefore cannot provide the field with designers who are equipped with both skills. This is a matter for the design educators in China to consider. When I was doing the research, many of the designers referred to the importance of design methods and some basic design principles; even though movie title sequences can be diverse in styles and themes, when it comes to design, the same design principles are still applicable.

The movies produced during the cultural revolutionary period had a great impact on the modern Chinese domestic movie and on movie title sequence design. For years, the movie industry was a state-owned business and movies were used to spread political propaganda, so that the movies acquired a certain style in ideology and design as well. Since then, the domestic movie followed the same way of doing the title sequence, which is simply to present the title of the movie and the cast. At that time, lack of change was caused by limitations of technique or lack of
awareness. However, with the development of technology, problems related to technique are less severe, but awareness needs to be improved. Filmmakers and directors need to change their views and start incorporating the movie title sequence into the movie itself.

Another common problem is visual inconsistency between movie title sequences and posters. Some movies use a different title design from that on posters and use very different typography. This situation might be caused by a marketing problem; miscommunication occurs between different design groups in terms of implementing the concept.

The complexity of designing Chinese characters should not be a reason to hold designers back. Despite its complicated look, complexity also can offer Chinese designers a chance to explore the design of characters with specific Chinese cultural characteristics and unique beauty, or designers could try different methods, such as using only Chinese on their movie title sequences.

There are some good examples of effective movie title sequence design in Chinese domestic movies. The rapid development of the Chinese movie market has caused strong competition, and improvement in design can be seen every year. For example, the movie called *Go Away, Mr Tumor* (2015) is based on a real story about a young girl cartoonist with cancer who drew the cartoon to record the end of her life in the hospital in order to inspire and encourage others who are suffering from cancer. The movie title sequence used comic typeface and very exaggerated effects to visualize the mental world of the protagonist.

I believe that the movie title sequence field is developing globally, and improving in quality and quantity. I hope that the number of distinctive movie title sequences, no matter where they are made, is increasing and that they will be of good quality and inspiring. As Garson Yu once said, the future world is a “fusion” world (Byrne & Braha, 2011). I trust this fusion will happen technically, aesthetically, and culturally in the movie title sequence design field.
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