

Relating the Visual  
and the Headline  
in Chinese Print Advertisements

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**Abstract**

*The most important components in modern print advertisements are the visual and the headline. The interplay between these two components is poorly understood, and is typically judged by experience, feelings or common sense. Based on classical rhetoric, Gui Bonsiepe's visual/verbal figures and other literature sources including Chinese ones, this paper examines the relationship between the visual and the headline in 1,562 Chinese print advertisements collected from Longyin Review – the only Chinese creative advertising reference periodical. The study develops a typology for analyzing these relationships from two aspects: Physical and Conceptual. The physical aspect looks at the visual ordering of the visual and the headline, and the conceptual aspect concerns the ways in which these two components jointly form and present creative ideas.*

*The typology provides a new tool for Chinese advertising practitioners to review their own or other people's work and it supplements what Bonsiepe has done. The findings compare the data in different ways and draw preliminary conclusions on the linkages between the various physical and conceptual relationships.*

## INTRODUCTION

Visual and headline in print advertisements interact in different ways and are likely to result in different presentations of the creative message. Most practitioners emphasize the manipulation of these interactions but seldom produce concise definitions. ‘Work together’ and ‘complementary’ (Cotzias, 1999) are the most widely used definitions, but these can only give a very broad and general idea. Jim Aitchison, the former creative director of Singapore’s Batey Ads suggests that there are two modes in the relationships of visual and headline—“a bent headline with a straight picture” and “a straight headline with a bent picture” (Aitchison, 1999). ‘Bent’ means containing a twist or a shock and ‘straight’ means straightforward. But his conclusions are not totally clear.

Some scholars give us a better answer. They have broken fresh ground in analyzing modern print advertisements during the past two decades by using the discipline of classical rhetoric. However, most of their studies aim to explore the use of rhetoric either in the headline or in the visual; employing rhetorical figures to evaluate consumer comprehension and liking (e.g. Beltramini & Blasko, 1986; Hitchon, 1991; Howard & Barry, 1988; Mcquarrie & Mick, 1992 & 1993; Philips, 2000; Scott, 1994; Tom & Eves, 1999; Unnava & Burnkrant, 1991). Only a few of them have touched lightly on the relationships between visual and headline (Houston, Childers & Heckler, 1987; Ward & Gaidis, 1990).

In fact, the problem had been explored as early as in 1965 by Gui Bonsiepe. He was among the first to suggest “the need for a modern system of rhetoric, updated by semiotic theory, as a tool for describing and analyzing the phenomena of advertising” (Bonsiepe, 1999b, 167). He first presented his paper on visual

Table 1 Two Lists of Visual/Verbal Figures by Gui Bonsiepe

1965	1999
1. Analogy	1. Analogy
2. Associate Mediation	2. Associate Transfer(link /Mediation)
3. Chain	3. Comparison
4. Comparison	4. Exaggeration
5. Parallelism	5. Exemplification
6. Metronymy	6. Fusion
7. Negation	7. Metaphoric
8. Verbal Specification	8. Metronymy
9. Synecdoche	9. Negation
-	10. Parallelism
-	11. Specification
-	12. Synecdoche
-	13. Typogram
-	14. Understatement

and verbal rhetoric to Arbeitsgruppe für Grafik Wirtschaft (The Working Group for Graphic Design and Industry) in Stuttgart in March 1965. Bonsiepe selected useful figures from the daunting system of classical rhetoric and brought them up to date with semiotics which originally studies every language sign in two aspects: syntactic and semantic. This helped Bonsiepe to draft his first list of visual/verbal figures (*see table 1*), based on the analysis of a series of advertisements with the focus on defining “the possible interactions” (Bonsiepe, 1999b, 168) between the visuals and the headlines. He claimed, “the [visual and headline] signs no longer simply add up, but rather operate in cumulative reciprocal relations” and “in this first approach, the visual/verbal figures were simply noted. The work of classifying and systematizing them still remains to be done” (Bonsiepe, 1999b, 171). However, his call didn’t arouse much interest in mainstream advertising countries like present day America, until the 1990s, when Bonsiepe’s work was eventually rediscovered and expanded beyond advertising to cover graphic communication (de Cosio et al, 1998).

Being inspired by Bonsiepe’s work, I did a pilot study in 2001 (Yu, 2001). I examined 180 Chinese award-winning advertisements, collected from The Association of Accredited Advertising Agents of Hong Kong (HK4As) Creative Awards between 1991 and 1999. By using Bonsiepe’s list of figures and referring to other literature on rhetoric, I explored eight types of figure which best describe the relationships of visual and headline, plus two cases which occur when either visual or headline exists alone (*see table 2*). The result paved the way for a deeper investigation that I will describe as follows. The first and most important aim of this deeper study is to formulate a typology of visual-head-

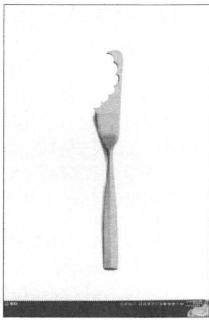
**Table 2** The Relationships of Visual and Headline of Award-winning Chinese Advertisements (2001)

CATEGORY	NO.OF ADS	PERCENTAGE
Analogy	10	6
Anchorage	35	19
Blend	28	16
Chain	24	8
Contradiction	8	4
Metonymy	8	4
Parallelism	31	17
Syllepsis	22	12
No Visual	15	8
No Word	9	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3** The Physical, Conceptual Relationships and Extreme Cases

PHYSICAL	CONCEPTUAL	EXTREME
<b>Blend</b>	<b>Analogy</b>	<b>No Visual</b>
Typographic Design	Simile	Ellipsis
Headline-in-Visual	Metaphor	Rhyme
Visual-in-Headline	Substitution	Syllepsis
<b>Headline-led</b>	<b>Blend</b>	<b>Pure Visual</b>
<b>Visual-led</b>	<b>Chain</b>	-
-	<b>Contrast</b>	-
-	<b>Exaggeration</b>	-
-	<b>Exemplification</b>	-
-	<b>Metonymy</b>	-
-	By Feature	-
-	By Characteristic	-
-	By Association	-
-	<b>Parallelism</b>	-
-	<b>Specification</b>	-
-	<b>Syllepsis</b>	-
-	Enhancing	-
-	<b>Misinterpretation</b>	-
-	Releasing Tension	-

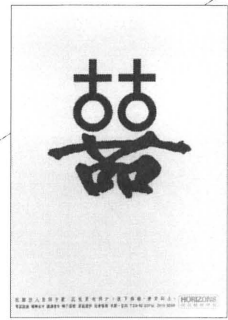
Remarks : Blend is classified as both a physical and conceptual relationship.



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line relationships of Chinese advertisements by examining their two aspects—Physical and Conceptual. The physical aspect of the relationship is the visual order between visual and headline which stems from an old question: “which is read first—headline or visual?” (Cotzias, 1999, 369). The conceptual aspect of the relationship is the way that a visual and a headline together form a creative message. The second aim of this study is to demonstrate the validity of the typology by applying it in the analysis of a large sample of Chinese advertisements. In view of how little Chinese advertising is empirically studied, it is hoped that this typology will become a prototype for the study of Chinese advertising art and provide a useful reference for students and practitioners. Table 3 summarizes the complete typology.

### THE PHYSICAL RELATIONSHIPS

The physical relationships of visual and headline are about the visual order of these two components. Either the visual or the headline captures the advertising audience so that they will begin reading the advertisement. Thus, the different degrees of prominence of the visual and the headline form different

**Figure1** Snow Brand Margarine. Agency: DY&R, Hong Kong.

**Figure2** Lim Automobile Air-Con Service. Agency: Saatchi & Saatchi, Singapore.

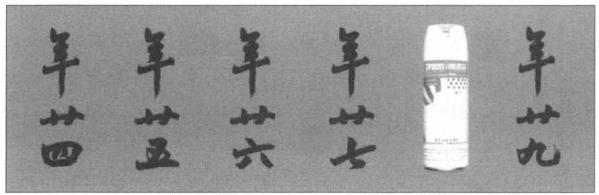
**Figure3** Horizons Gay Hotline. Agency: DMB&B, Hong Kong. A congratulatory Chinese character meaning ‘Double Happiness,’ that can be seen in almost every Chinese wedding, is used here as the main visual. The top part of the character has been replaced by two male symbols to bring out the message of supporting homosexuality.

**Figure4** Sing Kwong Jewellery & Gold. Agency: TBWA Lee Davis, Hong Kong. Several handwritten words added to the subway station sign to form the headline: “Who says there is no diamond on Diamond Hill!”

**Figure5** Preen Stain Remover. Agency: Bozell Worldwide, Hong Kong. The product shot replaced the date of the 28th (3 days before the Chinese New Year) in the headline: “24th, 25th, 26th, 27th & 29th of January.” A visual wit connects the product to the Chinese traditional “Clean Out Day” on the 28th. (Figures Courtesy of longyinsearch.com.)

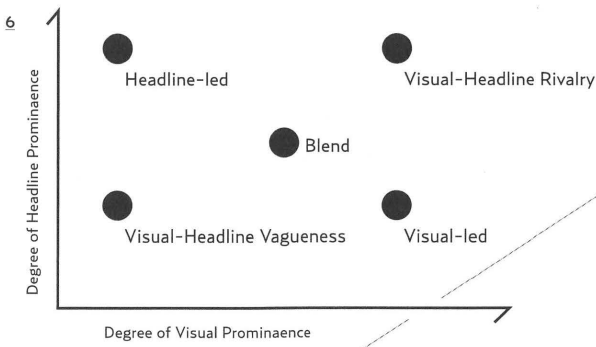


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orders. These orders are: Visual-led (Aitchison, 1999, 167-208), Headline-led and Blend. Visual-led means the visual is the most prominent component in an advertisement (see figure 1). The visual first draws the attention of the advertising audience while the headline comes next. The more prominent the visual is, in comparison with the headline, the more visual-led the advertisement is. On the other hand, the more prominent the headline is, the more headline-led the advertisement (see figure 2). In some cases, the visual is blended into the headline to form an entity. That means the visual and the headline are permanently linked so that the advertising audience sees them at once. The blend relationship presents a physical combination of visual and headline but this combination also creates a new layer of meaning. Thus, the blend relationship is also a conceptual relationship, discussed later. The physical side of the blend relationship has three different forms: Typographic Design, Headline-in-Visual and Visual-in-Headline. Typographic design means adding visual elements to a word or some of the words in a headline to create a new visual entity thus having an extra layer of meaning (see figure 3). Headline-in-Visual normally happens in visual-led advertisements. It means the visual has captured a part of or an entire headline (see figure 4). If a visual is incorporated into the headline in a headline-led advertisement, that becomes Visual-in-Headline (see figure 5). Manipulating an appropriate order of visual and headline aims to avoid undesirable outcomes: Visual-Headline Rivalry and Visual-Headline Vagueness. When a visual and a headline each have a high degree of prominence at the same time, they will compete with each other. This leads to a rapid, back and forth movement of the eyes of the audience, because both the visual and

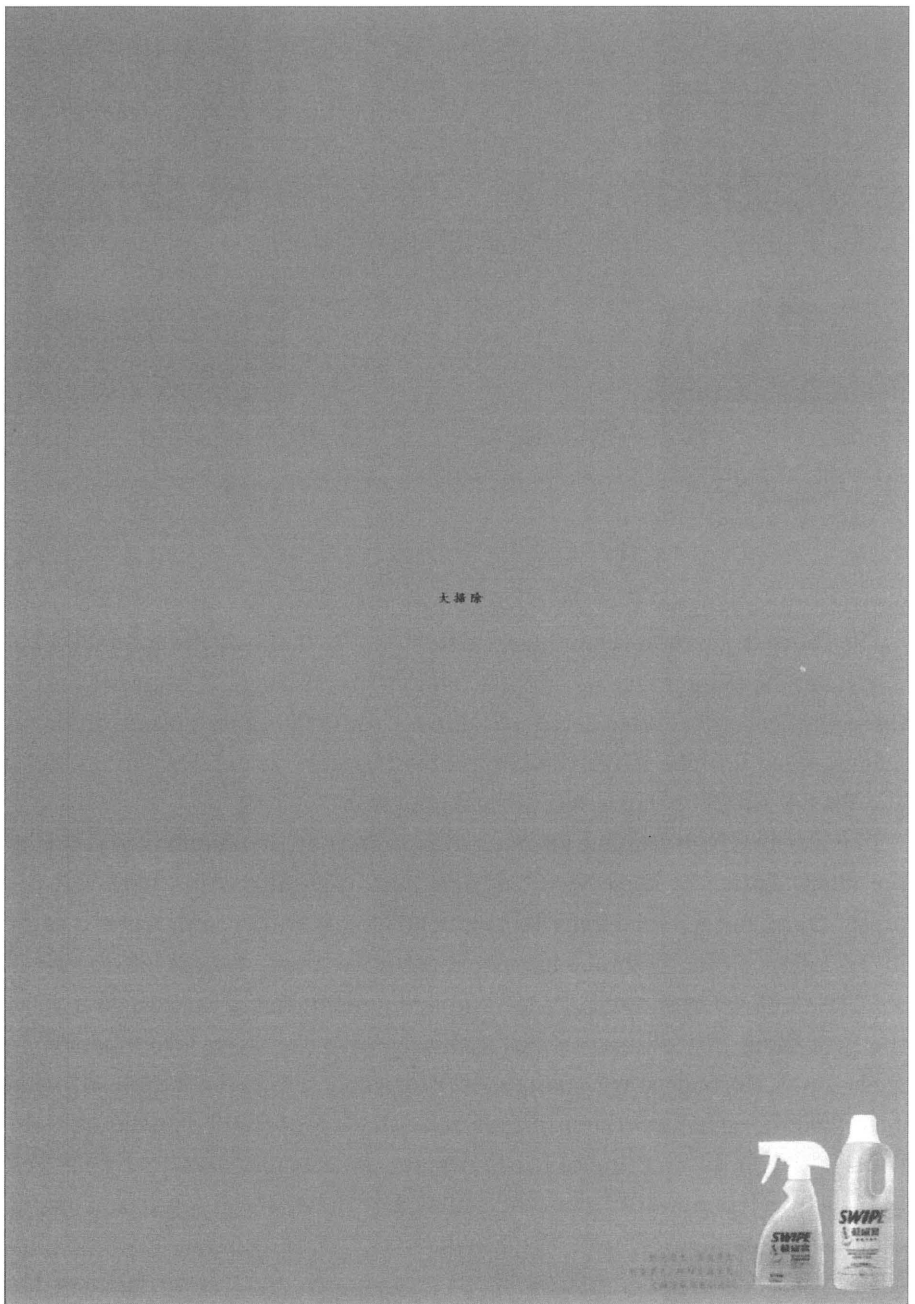


the headline are strong visual fixation points. Confusion may eventually result. Vagueness of visual and headline does not necessarily mean that they are too small but rather, that they are competing because of too many other visual elements spread all over the advertisements to undermine the visibility of either component.

David Ogilvy (1985, 87) strongly believes that the right order of the elementary components—visual, headline and body copy—has brought him perfect layouts that communicate best with the audience. He used his ‘perfect layouts’ in all his magazine advertisements. These layouts follow one simple, clear order: visual (illustration) first, then headline; and finally the body copy from top to the bottom. He thinks that these layouts work perfectly with people’s “normal order of scanning” (Ogilvy, 1985, 89). Undoubtedly, Ogilvy introduced the classic print advertising layouts that are still influential today.

In fact, simplicity is a recurrent theme propagated by those advertising masters who want to stop advertising from suffering ‘art-directoritis’ (Ogilvy, 1982, 121)—craft for craft’s sake. Ogilvy (1985, 88) always reminded his art directors who tended toward over-craftsmanship: “KISS – an acronym for Keep It Simple, Stupid.” Advertising is ultimately a tool for selling brands, services or products. It is all about effective and efficient communication with the target audience. Thus, simplicity is a must. The first and foremost task is to create a simple look, otherwise, people will just skip the advertisement. This is because, in general, nobody will spend time to figure out how to read an advertisement with scattered bits and pieces (today’s advertising for the youth market is another story). A clear and easy-to-follow order of elementary com-





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Figure6 Interaction between the Orders of Visual and Headline.

Figure7 Environmental Protection. Agency: Gong Kai, Shanghai. Courtesy of longyinsearch.com.



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ponents must be used.

The above discussion is summarized in Figure 6. It shows the interaction of visual and headline in terms of their relative prominence. It is clear that the three physical orders: Visual-led, Headline-led and Blend are a useful guide for making good layouts, while the two problem styles: Visual-Headline Rivalry and Visual-Headline Vagueness are less effective.

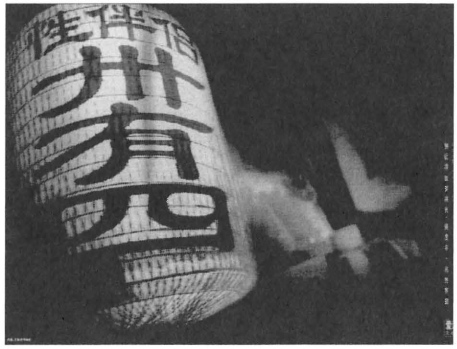
To make an advertisement visual-led, headline-led or a blend is to consider the manipulation of basic visual design rules. The discussion here will not repeat them, but will highlight some crucial factors which contribute to helping us follow either method and make it effective. These factors are described as: The Center, Layer, Open Space and Excitement. Being big in size may be the first thing that one associates instantly with the word ‘prominence.’ In many cases, the biggest is also the most prominent. However, Rudolf Arnheim described the center as “the principal locus of attraction and repulsion, established through the crossing of the four main structural lines. Other points on the lines are less powerful than the center, but the effect of attraction can be established for them as well” (Arnheim, 1974, 13). In general, a component, either visual or headline, placed in the central area of an advertisement has stronger visual power than elsewhere (see figure 7). This also challenges the top-

**Figure 8** Youth Outreach. Agency: Euro RSCG Partnership, Hong Kong. Although the red headline somehow competes with the duotone photograph, the layering helps to enhance its prominence thus it is read first.

**Figure 9** Swipe Miracle Cleaner. Agency: Euro RSCG Partnership, Hong Kong.

The tiny Chinese words at the centre are hardly missed.

**Figure 10** Action for Aids. Agency: Lowe & Partners/Monsoon, Singapore. The provocative words: “Thirty-Four Sex Partners” immediately grabs people’s attention. Placing them on the surface of a white lantern (meaning someone died) creates a visual impact. (Figures Courtesy of longyinsearch.com.)



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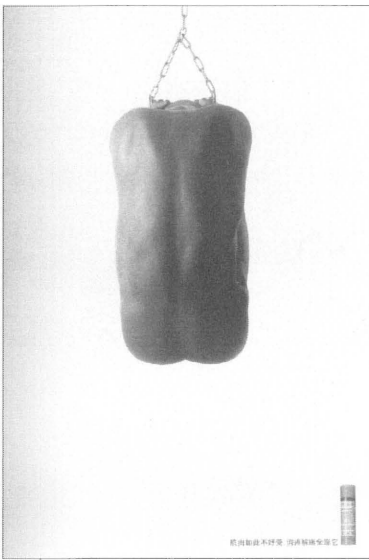
down order which Ogilvy supports. Layers, the second factor, creates visual depth in a two-dimensional space. It can establish priorities. The component on the top layer will be read first (*see figure 8*). Our eyes tend to spot the contrast. Thus a little red flower in a large green field is as prominent as a speck of dirt on a white shirt. Placing a visual or a headline, even though it is small, in a plain, 'open space' is hard to miss (*see figure 9*). The fourth factor is excitement. 'Oddvertising' is short for 'Odd Advertising' which Warren Berger defined as always presenting "extreme scenarios, offbeat characters and at time baffling messages" (Berger, 2001, 185). Most creative people use either well-known or strange scenarios, people or things in their advertisements in order to stand out from today's visual crowd and draw people's attention (*see figure 10*).

Although the above factors have been singled out for individual discussion, they are often mixed in different ways to establish the prominence of visuals or headlines in most of the advertisements we see every day.

### THE CONCEPTUAL RELATIONSHIPS

The discussion of the conceptual relationships of visual and headline mainly concerns the ways they form and present the creative messages. By examining a large sample of Chinese advertisements one by one, ten types of relationships were found and described by rhetorical terms. Their key definitions follow.

**Analogy** / Martin Gray defined an analogy as "a word, thing, idea or story, chosen for the purpose of comparison, which can help to explain whatever it is similar to" (Gray, 1992, 22). Analogy as a conceptual relationship simply means that an



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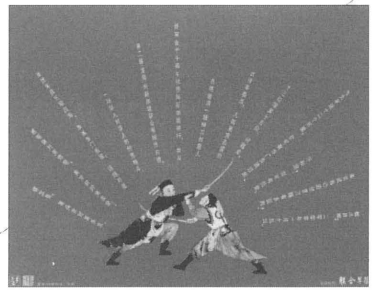
**Figure11** Deep Heat Sport Pain Relief Spray. Agency: Saatchi & Saatchi, Singapore. A human body punching bag connects very well to the headline: "If your muscles are painful like that, use this."

**Figure12** Bronx Fitness Centre. Agency: Grey, Shanghai. A muscular lady is holding a pair of weights that imply she has big and firm breasts. The headline says, "This is a one hundred percent natural push-up bra."

**Figure13** Long Xi Creative Award Call for Entry. Agency: Singapore Press Holdings – Chinese Creative Unit, Singapore. A combat between the two Chinese warriors substitutes for the competition between Chinese admen.

**Figure14** Action for Aids. Agency: Saatchi & Saatchi, Singapore. A combination of the Chinese character meaning 'life' and the graphical illustration of a penis that wears a condom.

**Figure15** 33rd Anniversary of Singapore, Agency: Leo Burnett, Singapore. The story starts at the visual of "33" formed by two McDonald's logos and ends with the headline that sends congratulation from McDonald's to the Republic of Singapore. (Figures Courtesy of longyinsearch.com)

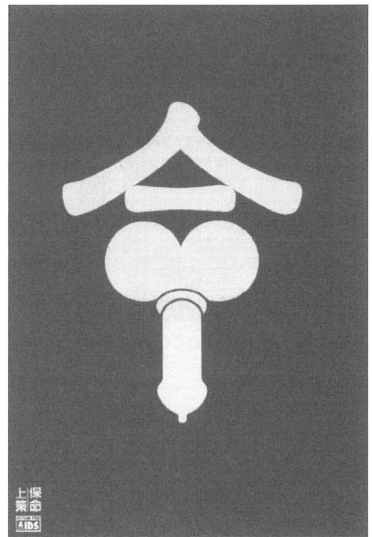


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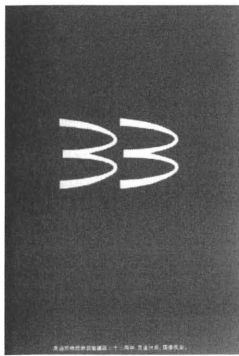
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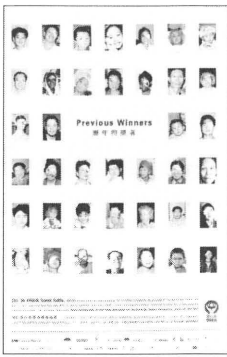


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element of the visual links with an element of the headline. It always gives a very good excuse for creating visual wit. Through careful examination, three basic forms of analogy in modern Chinese rhetoric can be found from Chinese print advertisements. 1) Simile—the visual and the headline are compared to suggest a similarity, usually with words ‘like’ or ‘as’ (see figure 11) 2) Metaphor—the visual and the headline are compared to suggest that they refer to the same meaning (see figure 12) 3) Substitution—this is the most subtle form of analogy. Either the visual or the headline is totally omitted for the basis of the comparison (see figure 13).

**Blend** / A combination or unity of visual and headline. The physical blend relationship always brings about a more concise visual idea to convey a new message, by combining a visual and a headline in a simple and clever way (see figure 14).

**Chain** / Roland Barthes (1977, 38-41) described the written or verbal text as having a ‘relay-function’ for the visual in advertising. This means the story starts from the visual and continues in the headline. Meanwhile Bonsiepe (1999b, 171) said that “a topic begun in words and continued and completed visually” is a chain relationship. Apparently, they are talking about the same relationship of visual and headline but in the opposite order (see figure 15).



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**Figure16** Project Orbis Eye Hospital. Agency: DMB&B, Hong Kong. The headline: “Previous Winners” contradicts the reader’s perception that all those people who have eye problems are unlucky. The reader will then find out that these winners have regained their sight because of the donations to the hospital.

**Figure17** Caltex Superon Unleaded Gas. Agency: Bates, Hong Kong. A motorcycle driver is lying on the road in an amusing gesture. The humor is revealed by the headline: “Watch out for the ignition power of Caltex Superon unleaded gas”.

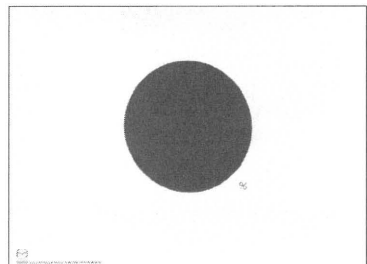
**Figure18** Hong Kong Breastfeeding Mothers’ Association. Agency: FCB, Hong Kong. The female news reporter is breast-feeding her baby during the news program. This supports the headline, “No matter how busy you are, you can do it! The more you breast-feed your baby, the more the both of you are healthy.”

**Figure19** Mazda 626 Capella. Agency: J. Walter Thompson, Taiwan. The ad looks like the national flag of Japan and the red circle replaces the “zero” of the percentage. It echoes the headline: “Mazda 626 Capella is 100% imported from Japan. Now you can enjoy a 0% installment rate.”

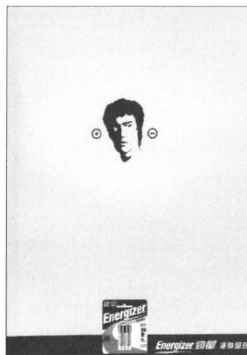
**Figure20** Energizer Batteries. Agency: Bates, China. The unbeaten character of the dead martial art movie superstar—Bruce Lee is used to symbolize the long lasting power of batteries. It perfectly matches the tagline: “Full of Energy.” (Figures Courtesy of longyinsearch.com)



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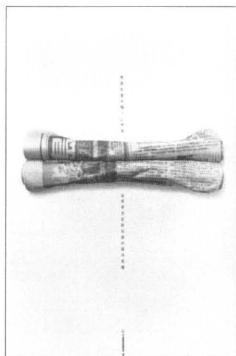
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**Contrast** / Bonsiepe (1999a, 74) defined Visual-Verbal Negation as “the meaning of a sequence of words is illustrated by a visual opposite.” I propose the phrase Contrast to describe the incompatibility of visual and headline in which visual-verbal negation is the most extreme condition (see figure 16).

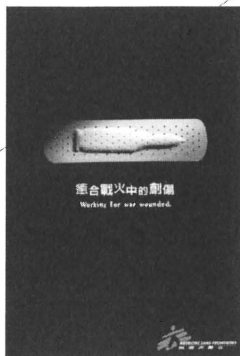
**Exaggeration** / The visual amplifies something in the headline or vice versa. This something can be the key attribute of a brand or product or the end benefit for the consumers (see figure 17).

**Exemplification** / In most cases, the visuals serve as illustration of examples that support the meaning of headlines (see figure 18).

**Metonymy** / It was originally a figure of speech referring to “the substitution of the name of a thing by the name of an attribute of it, or something closely associated with it” (Gray, 1992, 176). This type of conceptual relationship is reflected in several ways. 1) By Feature—forms, shapes, colors, properties or qualities of things can always be used to substitute for the whole so as to leave room for imagination (see figure 19). 2) By Characteristics—specific appearance, gesture, behavior and personality can be used as a substitute for people or animals (see figure 20). 3) By Association—customs, traditions and idioms are major elements for creating



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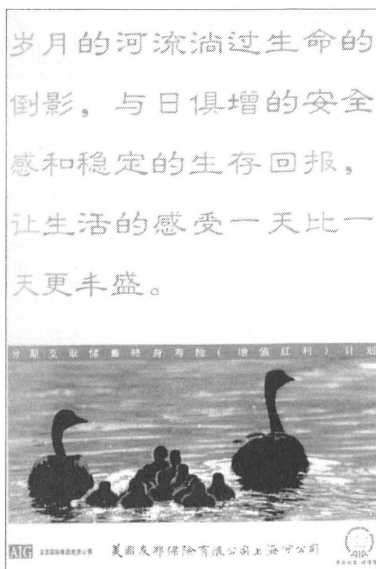
**Figure21** Sing Tao Daily News. Agency: A Partnership, New York. The visual of a “twisted cruller” (Chinese deep fried pastry, a typical food for breakfast) shaped newspaper echoes the headline: “Thanks to Sing Tao Daily for providing fresh and genuine nourishment for minds in every morning for the past 12 years.”

**Figure22** Medecins sans Frontieres. Agency Unknown, Hong Kong. The bullet-shaped Band-Aid reinforces the headline: “Working for war wounded.”

**Figure23** AIA Life Insurance. Agency: DDB Needham, Shanghai. With the anchorage-function of the headline—which tenderly talks about how insurance rewards the insured person with an abundant life—the visual implies a warm family life.

**Figure24** Shanghai Advertising Association. Agency: Bridge/J. Walter Thompson, Shanghai. The visual superficially illustrates the headline: “I want to be full of ink.” However, “full of ink” means someone is knowledgeable and intelligent in an old Chinese saying. Thus, the visual is actually ironic for those who seek shortcuts for acquiring knowledge.

**Figure25** Barry Forth – The Porsche Expert. Agency: BBDO, Hong Kong. The headline says, “This foreign guy is having an affair with your wife but you still laugh.” The visual shows a guy fixing a Porsche to reveal the other meaning of “wife” for “dream car” in a colloquial saying. (Figures Courtesy of longyinsearch.com)



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a metonymy relationship, especially in advertising that is derived from local cultures (see figure 21).

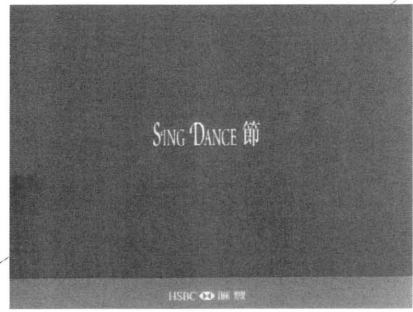
**Parallelism** / The visual and the headline reinforce a key point through repetition. As Bonsiepe (1999a, 74) said, parallelism provides “visual and verbal signs related to the same meaning” (see figure 22).

**Specification** / Bonsiepe (1999a, 74) defined specification as: “a visual sign is accompanied by a minimum of text in order to make it clear and narrow it down semantically.” This is quite close to what Barthes (1977, 38-41) called the Anchorage-Function of Text, helping the advertising audience choose from a confusing number of possible meanings of the visual (see figure 23).

**Syllepsis** / Originally a type of pun (Leigh, 1994, 19), it uses a word understood differently in relation to two or more words it modifies, an extra layer of meaning can be created. Syllepsis is making comparisons between visual and headline in dynamic forms: 1) Enhancing Misinterpretation—in order to create paradoxical effects, some advertisements provide wrong cues intentionally (see figure 24). 2) Releasing Tension—if the word-pun in the headline is strong enough to capture the advertising audience in the first place, the job of the visual is mainly to release this tension (see figure 25).



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**Figure26** Red Cross of China/Blood Donation. Agency: D’Arcy, Beijing. The Chinese word “Blood” is omitted to make the incomplete headline: “Integrity, Bravery & Hot (Blood),” which praises people who have the heart to give and implies that there is an urge for blood donation.

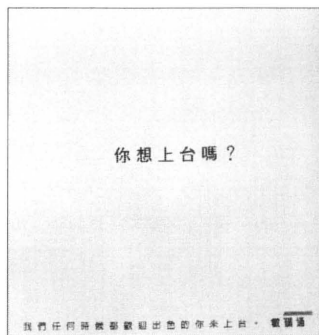
**Figure27** HSBC Bank. Agency: Bates, Hong Kong. The bilingual headline: “Sing & Dance Festival” phonetically sounds like Christmas in Cantonese.

**Figure28** SmarTone Mobile Phone Service. Agency: Leo Burnett, Hong Kong. The headline literally means: “Do you want to come up on stage?” but “come up on stage” also colloquially means “subscribe to a mobile phone service.”

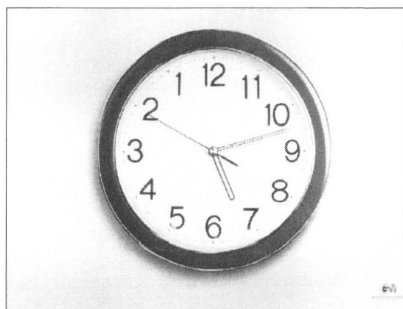
**Figure29** Guilin Guiyi Cosmetics Specialized Store. Agency: Huadun Advertising Guilin, China. The backward going clock closely links to the psyche of rejuvenation for cosmetics consumers. (Figures Courtesy of longyinsearch.com)

## NO VISUAL AND PURE VISUAL

Not all print advertisements have a visual-headline interaction. Sometimes, either the headline or the visual can do the job on its own. These represent the two extreme cases. A ‘no visual’ advertisement does not necessarily have a long copy. It can also be an advertisement that has a precise and witty headline with the support of a bit more copy or a brand name. A ‘pure visual’ advertisement is usually a visual riddle which has no hint in words. The headlines in no visual advertisements are self-sufficient and convey the whole creative message. However, this does not say that there should be no visual element at all. Rather, most of the time visual elements like colors, graphics, typeface, page layout are necessary for giving a so-called ‘visual voice’ to an advertisement. A visual voice represents a specific tone and manner which is similar to the mood of a movie. Thus, the headlines in no visual advertisements always carry figures of speech. Here are some of the figures which were used frequently in the sample of Chinese advertisements: 1) Ellipsis—Leigh (1994, 21) defined ellipsis as a “deliberate omission of a word or words that are readily implied by the context” (see figure 26). 2) Rhyme—the play with the sounds of the words (see figure 27).



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3) Syllepsis—using double meaning of some words, probably the most frequently used figure in Chinese advertisements (*see figure 28*). One may notice that the existence of a brand or product name in a no visual advertisement creates an anchorage-function (discussed above) that helps the audiences by narrowing down the interpretation of the headlines by recognizing who the advertisers are.

Pure visual advertisements are named by Lazar Dzamic (2001) as ‘No-copy ads.’ The cleanliness and boldness of pure visual advertisements help them to stand out from the ‘visual pollution’ in today’s media. They have a strong power to catch the eyeballs of people because they don’t always look like advertisements, but resemble the visual arts. If the cleverness of the visual is relevant to what is being sold and successfully aims at the psyche of the consumers, the pure visual advertisement is engaging and sophisticated (*see figure 29*). However, they are a real challenge for both the reader to decipher the visual puzzles and the creative people to design “the right amount of suspense” (Dzamic, 2001, 12). Readers must after all ‘click into’ the visual messages before they find their efforts are futile and give up trying. As Jack Fund, the creative director of Los Angeles’ Jack agency, warned, “If you leave it too open-ended, often a consumer won’t get it, or worse. They will fill in the blank with the wrong answer” (Dzamic, 2001, 13). Neil French also commented on some badly executed pure visual advertisements. He complained, “Too often the code is known only to admen” (Dzamic, 2001, 13).

## RESEARCH METHOD AND RESULTS

To test the reliability and prevalence of the methods discussed, I have carefully

examined a large sample of Chinese advertisements from different countries and regions.

### **Collection of Chinese Print Advertisements**

The sample of Chinese advertisements for this test was selected to fulfill the following criteria:

- 1) It should be large enough for reliable classification.
- 2) It should comprise Chinese advertisements of a high creative standard.
- 3) It should not be collected exclusively from creative award—winners in the big award shows, that are likely to have more visual-led and ‘pure visual’ advertisements than normal.
- 4) It should comprise Chinese advertisements from different regions.

*Longyin Review* was selected as the source for collecting the sample. It was first published in early 1995 by several advertising gurus in Hong Kong. It soon became the most important creative reference used in different Chinese communities and is still the only source of its kind in the world. Through this periodical, these luminaries aimed to display outstanding Chinese creative advertisements from different places and catapult Chinese creativity into the world arena. Every advertisement submitted to the *Longyin Review* is carefully screened and short-listed by a panel of well-experienced practitioners, with a professional focus on creativity in the setting of Chinese culture. Most of the published advertisements were from major advertising agencies in different

regions: Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, United States and Canada. 1,562 advertisements were collected from the issues number 10 to 28 (1997 to 2001).

### **Coding the Advertisements**

The coding process was in two parts. The first part coded the advertisements according to the two visual orders: visual-led and headline-led. The second part coded the advertisements according to the ten conceptual relationships of visual and headline and the two extreme cases. In this process, a second well-experienced coder was also employed. Disagreements between coders were resolved by discussion. The process of classifying the advertisements was consistent and reliable. To ensure the findings are not biased in the tabulation, only one of the advertisements in any specific campaign has been counted. The rest of the advertisements in the campaign have been put into another category called 'Campaign' (*see table 5*).

### **Findings and Implications**

The findings in Table 4 and Table 5 support the reliability of the methods discussed. Moreover, the data have been compared in different ways in order to make further inferences possible.

#### **1) Visual-led and Headline-led**

In Table 4, a total 892 advertisements were coded and counted because Blend (33 ads), No Visual (21 ads) and Pure

**Table 4** Visual-led and headline-led Advertisements in terms of Conceptual Relationships

	VISUAL -LED	HEADLINE -LED	RATIO	TOTAL
Analogy	135	3	45:1	138
Chain	189	50	4:1	239
Contrast	28	9	3:1	37
Exaggeration	15	3	5:1	18
Exemplification	55	3	19:1	58
Metonymy	68	1	68:1	69
Specification	86	17	5:1	103
Syllepsis	60	12	5:1	72
	140	18	8:1	158
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>776</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>7:1</b>	<b>892</b>

**Table 5** Distribution of the Conceptual Relationships and the Extreme Cases of the Studied Sample (1,562 Chinese Advertisements)

	CA	CH	HK	MA	SP	TW	US	US	St	Cam	TOTAL
<b>Conceptual Relationship</b>											
Analogy	0	35	76	1	10	14	2	2	138	84	222
Blend	0	5	21	1	5	1	0	0	33	7	40
Chain	1	35	130	3	19	50	1	1	239	189	428
Contrast	0	4	24	1	2	6	0	0	37	31	68
Exaggeration	0	5	8	0	2	3	0	0	18	17	35
Exemplification	0	9	40	1	3	5	0	0	58	41	99
Metonymy	0	22	36	0	7	3	1	1	69	39	108
Parallelism	1	30	53	0	8	10	1	1	103	59	162
Specification	1	19	31	1	10	10	0	0	72	49	121
Syllepsis	0	29	95	2	9	22	1	1	158	58	216
<b>Extreme Cases</b>											
No Visual	0	6	12	0	2	1	0	0	21	7	28
Pure Visual	0	6	12	0	3	1	0	0	25	10	35
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>971</b>	<b>591</b>	<b>1562</b>

CA=Canada, CH=China, HK=Hong Kong, MA=Malaysia, SP=Singapore, TW=Taiwan, US=USA, St=Sub-total, Cam = Campaign (only one of the advertisements in a campaign with the same type of the conceptual relationships and the extreme cases has been selected and counted. These are the numbers of the remaining advertisements).

Visual (25 ads) are irrelevant and thus excluded. The result shows a total 776 advertisements that are visual-led and 116 advertisements that are headline-led; they represent 87% and 13% respectively. Not surprisingly, these findings demonstrate that Chinese advertising professionals use visuals to lead the creative ideas in most cases. However, when we looked at the ratios between visual-led and headline-led advertisements according to the conceptual relationships, something else was found. The ratios of visual-led advertisements to headline-led advertisements in Parallelism (68:1), Analogy (45:1) and Exemplification (19:1) are very high. This suggests that these three conceptual relationships allow more room for creating visual ideas than the others.

## 2) The Extreme Cases

In Table 5, both the numbers of the no visual and pure visual advertisements are very small: only 21 and 25, which represent 2% and 3% of the total of 971 advertisements. The no visual advertisements are scarce because people are used to seeing more and reading less. The high proportion of the visual-led advertisements (*table 4*) gives evidence of this. Pure visual advertisements are also rare in Chinese advertising and this implies that Chinese admen are not 'lazy' or 'illiterate' as Neil French and Trevor Beattle, the creative

director of London's TBWA, say when they criticize the increasing number of pure visual advertisement (Dzamic, 2001, 11).

### 3) Comparison of Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan

The total number of the advertisements from Hong Kong, China and Taiwan is 872 which represent almost 90% of the 971 advertisements studied. It is worth making a comparison of these regions. Table 6 shows that the four most popular conceptual relationships are the same in all these regions. They are Analogy, Chain, Metonymy and Syllepsis. This suggests a common characteristic of Chinese admen. This is noteworthy, because people in today's Hong Kong and Taiwan, though their ancestors came from mainland China, have been influenced by very different cultures. As Tse, Belk and Zhou (1989) have noted, these regions have societal differences in the levels of economic development, political ideology, attitudes towards consumption and business training and philosophy.

## CONCLUSION

The typology developed in this study provides Chinese advertising practitioners with a better understanding of the range of relationships possible between the visual and the headline. The study confirms the utility of the typology in describing existing advertisements and providing a basis for composing effec-



**Table 6** Distribution of the Conceptual Relationships in HongKong, Mainland China and Taiwan

HONG KONG		CHINA		TAIWAN	
Chain	24%	Analogy	17%	Chain	40%
Syllepsis	18%	Chain	17%	Syllepsis	18%
Analogy	14%	Metonymy	15%	Analogy	11%
Metonymy	10%	Syllepsis	14%	Metonymy	8%
Exemplification	7%	Parallelism	11%	Specification	8%
Parallelism	7%	Specification	9%	Contrast	5%
Blend	6%	Blend	4%	Exemplification	4%
Contrast	4%	Contrast	2%	Exaggeration	2%
Specification	4%	Exemplification	2%	Parallelism	2%
Exaggeration	2%	Exaggeration	2%	Blend	1%

tive relationships between the visual and the headline.

The rhetorical approach to analysis has certain potential pitfalls, illustrated in the previous work of Bonsiepe, that this study has sought to address.

- 1) **The definitions of relationships** are not clear: perhaps due to translations; most of the definitions presented by Bonsiepe appear distorted and confused. This study has sought to revise and clarify the definitions.
- 2) **The definitions of relationships** are not distinct, when we talk about the interplay of the visual and the headline we cannot avoid making a comparison between the two. The Visual-Verbal Comparison relationship is always present. In addition, definitions of Metonymy and Synecdoche overlap. The blurred boundaries between definitions undermine the utility of the typology and makes classification more subjective. This study has sought to identify and address such overlaps.
- 3) **The definitions of relationships** are not effectively tested; confidence in the typology comes from its application to a large data set. Previous studies have been limited in this regard. This study has tested the typology against a large sample size.

However, further limitations remain. Critical in this regard is the need for multiple coders to determine equivalent results. This study has utilized two coders,

but there is still a question about the objectivity of the process. There is also a limitation to the typology because it has been grounded very much on a Western tradition of rhetoric and tested against advertisements that are likely to have been strongly influenced by Western advertising practice. Further studies of non-Western examples and basic studies of non-Western rhetoric may challenge the current typology.

The general utility of a rhetorical approach to the analytical study of visuals and headlines in advertising has been demonstrated. This rhetorical approach to the study of print advertising could be extended to the study of advertising in other fields, such as Public Service Advertising, Medical and Health Advertising and Political Advertising. The approach can also be applied to other types of media than print, such as radio, television and the Internet. Sound (voice, music and special effects) and image (static and moving) can all be evaluated using this approach. Opportunities certainly exist to extend this study and to further enrich our understanding of how visual and text components interact.

### Acknowledgments

*The author sincerely thanks Professor John Philip Jones of S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University who reviewed the final draft of this paper. The author would also like to thank Mr. Jimmy Lam, Publisher and Chief Editor of Longyin Review and Longyin Search (the largest online Chinese language ad database, featuring over 6,000 outstanding Chinese language ads online. [www.longyinsearch.com](http://www.longyinsearch.com)) for allowing the reproduction of the Chinese ad images in this paper.*

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The Interrelationships of Headlines and Visuals in Award-Winning Chinese Print Advertisements in Hong Kong. *Unpublished Paper.*

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