A Dissertation

Art in Cinematic Narration: The Interplay of Pictorial Texts in Films

by Bijun Huang

Submitted to the Graduate Division of the University of Hawaii

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

August 2011

Dissertation Committee:

Ruth Hsu
Glenn Man
Cynthia Ward
John Zuern
Lew Andrews
Abstract

This paper explores how filmmakers use painting and calligraphy/writing as prop and image, blending various styles of painting and calligraphy/writing to portray characters, create settings, depict sequences, frame narrative structures and convey meaning. This study will examine ideas about the artistic value of Chinese and English calligraphy, and their integration into cinematic images.

Besides written texts, I also examine the ways that both Chinese and Western paintings are used creatively to advance the visual rhetoric and narrative strategies in cinema. I will focus on the compositional designs of cinematic images, their cultural implications and narrative elements such as setting, characterization, metaphor, hyperbole and irony.

Susan Felleman in *Art in Cinematic Imagination* points out that a small but significant body of scholarly work in the past decade has discussed the use of non-cinematic visual arts, such as painting, in films (2). However, little work has been done on written words in cinematic images. This paper aims to expand the discussion about painting in cinema, as well as to the examination of written texts integrated into cinematic images.
Acknowledgements

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

I am most grateful to the English Department, University of Hawaii for granting me a scholarship/graduate assistantship and lectureship so that I can have the wonderful opportunity to learn and explore the beauty and art of cinema. Special thanks to Professor Christina Bacchilega, Professor Susan Schultz, Professor Judith Kellogg, Professor Mark Heberle, Professor Laura Lyons, and Professor Jeffrey Carroll for their various supports in the program. During the research for this dissertation, I have enjoyed numerous encouragement, excellent expertise and academic assistance; in particular, Professor Ruth Hsu, Professor Glenn Man, Professor Cynthia Ward, Professor John Zuern, and Professor Lew Andrews from the Art Department. I wish to thank as well my dearest parents and my family.

Sincerely,

Bijun Huang

May 18, 2011
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 1
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................... 2
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................... 3
Cover Page ..................................................................................................................... 5
Introduction: Cinema—The Pictorial Intertexts ............................................................... 6

## Chapter One:

**Chinese Painting and Calligraphy in Cinematic Imagination** ........... 16

I.1. The Picturesque Quality of Chinese Calligraphy .............................. 23
I.2. Aesthetics of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy in Cinematic Images ... 54
I.3. Optical Routes in Chinese Painting and Calligraphy Influence Camera Techniques ................................................................. 81

## Chapter Two:

**English Calligraphy and Writing as Cinematic Representation** ........ 99

II.1. The Graphic Features and Rhetoric of English Alphabets ............. 104
II.2. The Symbolic and Pictorial Quality of Handscript/Writing in Credit Sequences and Cinematic Narration ...................................................... 120
Chapter Three:

Pictorial Texts in Cinematic Narration

III.1. Calligraphy and Painting in Setting and Narrative Framing

III.2. Calligraphy and Painting in Time Sequences

III.3. Calligraphy and Painting in Characterization

III.4. Calligraphy and Painting in Figurative Language

Conclusion

List of Illustrations/Figures

Works Cited
ART IN CINEMATIC NARRATION:
THE INTERPLAY OF PICTORIAL TEXTS IN FILMS

Bijun Huang


**Introduction: Cinema—The Pictorial Intertexts**

In cinema, filmmakers have employed technology and many art forms, especially painting, to narrate stories and stimulate our senses of sight and sound. Recently, filmmakers have been exploring alternative modes of cinematic narration, employing more written texts, calligraphy, drawing and painting to enrich their filmic discourses and pictorial representations. My goal in this study is to examine the ways in which Chinese and Western painting, and Chinese calligraphy and Western calligraphy/English writing are represented in recent cinema to enhance themes, create settings, frame narratives, portray characters, and convey meanings. I investigate the camera techniques and narrative methods of filmmakers who integrate painting and calligraphy into cinematic narration.

I find this project to be very challenging because existing scholarship focuses on how painting is employed in cinematic representation and adaptation rather than written texts or calligraphy. Scholarship that deals with the relationships between painting and cinema do so in terms of a painting’s artistic value and its cultural significance in the cinematic representation, for example, Susan Felleman in *Art in the Cinematic Imagination*, Angela Dalle Vacche in *Cinema and Painting: How Art Is Used in film*, and John Albert Walker in *Art and Artists on Screen*. Meanwhile, scholars of film adaptation and art history examine the historical accuracy of an artist’s work in a biopic, look into the pictorial elements in literary works, or explore the influence of painting styles on
filmmaking, such as Standish D. Lawder in *The Cubist Cinema*. Chinese calligraphy and Western calligraphy/English writing in cinematic representation are rarely discussed.

In order for me to explain how my dissertation contributes to this existing field, I will mention a few works that inspired me in this research project. Two very important books are *Visual Culture: The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn* by Margaret Dikovitskaya and the other is James Elkins’ *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction*.

Dikovitskaya first discusses the history, theoretical frameworks, and methods of Visual Culture. She gives an archaeological account for the terms of Visual Study and Visual Culture. She explores the emergence of the field from the older discipline of art history, and provides a detailed engagement with questions of curriculum design and pedagogy. In particular, Dikovitskaya observes the “graphic conventions” in some writing systems and advocates the study of them (56). She justifies the pictorial features of writing systems such as Egyptian hieroglyphics and Chinese characters. She states,

The emergence of visual culture is a challenge to traditional notions of reading and literacy. Because the literary text consists of visible signs, the alphabet and mode of inscription become issues: the researcher has to analyze writing as a system of images. The Chinese character system, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and Aztec writing have very elaborate graphic conventions. All these symbols have historical origins; they become the
proper domain of visual culture, which stimulates an interest in typography, graphology, and calligraphy. (56)

Accordingly, I want to expand on her observation and explore the pictorial features and visual narrativity of both English and Chinese calligraphy using specific films.

In *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction*, James Elkins describes the major concerns and principal theoretical sources of Visual Studies. Elkins defines Visual Studies as “the study of visual practices across all boundaries” (7). Elkins and Dikovitskaya look at Visual Studies in an interdisciplinary approach and encourage a study of all visual practices and objects, both in art and non-art categories. Elkins remarks, “One effect of developing visual culture out of visual communications is an emphasis on non-art images, including scientific and technological practices,” such as “the uncountable different kinds of charts and graphs…the visual elements in scripts”...“typography…and scientific illustrations of all sorts” (12, 83).

The field of Visual Studies broadens my optical routes to appreciating all visual elements, especially for my study of films and writing systems. I will explore the cinematic representations of painting and calligraphy and the visuality of Chinese and English writing systems/paintings in cinematic narration. I will focus on the visual routes, representational conventions and styles of calligraphy and painting being transformed into camera techniques and editing skills. I will examine calligraphy and painting used as a means of narration to
depict setting, sequence, characterization and figurative language such as metaphor, pun, irony and hyperbole. My methodology is analytical, thematic and intertextual.

This book is divided into three chapters besides the Introduction and Conclusion. Painting and calligraphy in cinematic representation and narration weaves the chapters together. In brief, I will analyze the filmmakers’ use of camera techniques and narrative strategies influenced by the art forms of Chinese painting and calligraphy. I will explore the pictorial features of Chinese/English calligraphy. I will examine the interplay of Chinese/English calligraphy with painting and illustration in cinematic representation and narration. I have found semiotic, narrative, feminist methods, film theory, cultural study, visual study and art history very useful in my analyses of the films that I have included in this study. In terms of pictorial texts, I refer to both written texts and images in cinema. I have a selection of mainstream, commercial, entertainment and art films of various genres available to me. Most of them were made in recent decades. In terms of the arts, I concentrate on the visual arts such as painting, drawing, and calligraphy rather than the art forms of music or architecture.

Malcolm Barnard, a Senior Lecturer, teaches the History and Theory of Art and Design at the University of Derby. He has his BA in Philosophy and Sociology, Ph.D. in Philosophy from Universities of York and Warwick. In Art, Design, and Visual Culture: An Introduction, Barnard suggests, “If different social and cultural groups have different ideas as to the definition of the visual,
then visual culture as a discipline must use those differences as part of the explanation of visual culture” (17). In China, calligraphy is even an earlier art form than painting. Chinese artists exercise their writing skills with brushes and express their inner thoughts and emotions along with graceful movements of their body. Calligraphy is a practice that combines body and mind, spirit and movement. Visual arts, especially painting and calligraphy incorporated into cinematic products, become powerful means of communication in cinematic imagination.

It appears that some scholars are unaware of the artistic value of Chinese calligraphy and regard Chinese calligraphy as a “non-art” image (Elkins 83-4). In Chapter One, I discuss the cinematic images synthesizing with styles of Chinese painting and calligraphy in Hero (Zhang Yimou, 2002), Shanghai Knights (David Dobkin, 2003), Mulan (Jingle Ma, 2009), The Three Smiles (Yueh Feng, 1969), Challenges of the Masters (Chia-Liang Liu, 1976), Dragons Forever (Sammo Hung Kam-Bo, 1988), and Fight Back to School (Jing Wong, 1993). I argue that Chinese calligraphy is an image art and a performance art. Similar to Chinese painting, calligraphy is a pictorial representation complementary to cinematic image. Word is image. In the cinematic images of Hero (Yimou Zhang, 2002), I examine the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy and painting. I argue that the filmmaker’s techniques in camera movements are a reflection of the Chinese visual tradition of painting and calligraphy. Cinematic images present the aesthetic value of Chinese painting and calligraphy.
Western alphabets using Roman and Greek style letters also contain a wealth of artistic value and convey ideas to audiences. Technology enables artists to design English letters to imitate virtually any image including objects, people, buildings and animals, and thus affect our perception of that image. For instance, the film title designs of *The Dark Crystal* directed by Jim Henson and Frank Oz in 1982, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (Hector Babeno, 1985), and *The Secret Life of Bees* (Gina Prince-Bythewood, 2008) illustrate the pictorial features of English alphabets. Texts, fonts, glyphs and words are inseparable from cultures and loaded with connotations besides their obvious denotations, forming a rich resource for filmmakers to draw upon to narrate stories.

In Chapter Two, I examine how the choice of fonts, colors, placement, and dynamics of English letters in film credits conveys rhetorical meaning and cultural significance. The text composition, lighting, contrast and camera techniques in the opening credits set time, mood and atmosphere, and foreshadow events and action sequences like those in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (Hector Babeno, 1985) and *Bulletproof Monk* (Paul Hunter, 2003). English alphabets, purposefully created, can produce conclusions, analogs, or transitions in *Epic Movie* (Jason Friedberg, 2007) and *The Ghost Writer* (Roman Polanski, 2010). In addition, I explore the pictorial art of English alphabets in *Inkheart* (Lain Softley, 2009), *Across the Hall* (Alex Merkin, 2009), and other films. I discuss how filmmakers perceive word vs. image; and how directors represent the interactivity among word, image and painting in cinematic narration and
representation such as Michèle Ohayon in the documentary *Steal a Pencil for Me* (2007), and Nathan Hope in the crime, suspense thriller *Elsewhere* (2009).

Furthermore, I analyze filmmakers who synthesize English letters with media, signs, props and drawings into cinematic narration such as *Daybreakers* (Michael Spierig and Peter Spierig, 2010) and Nathan Hope’s *Elsewhere* (2009). I argue that English alphabet letters can be pictorial, symbolic and rhetorical. The interplay of text with image captures audiences, advances narrative events and complements the narration artistically and literarily. For example, in *Daybreakers*, the banner on the car of Elvis’ (a cured vampire who returns to human form), “From the ashes spring new life” brightens and balances the compositions in the cinematic image, reinforces the theme, marks the turning point and foreshadows the climax of the narrative.

Unlike static graphic design, text in film is dynamic and able to move, morph, meld, and vanish along with any other actions on the screen. Alphabet letters and English texts bear rhetorical and cultural meanings. English letters in the cinematic images are not only pictorial but self-reflexive as well. In *The Ghost Writer* (Roman Polanski, 2010), the letters signify the revelation of the scandals of a politician, inviting audiences to deconstruct and reconstruct the filmic discourse and reassemble facts for the politician’s memoirs, based on the ghost writer’s manuscript. English letters have gone through enormous innovation in cinematic representation. With animation technology and the advent of CGI (computer-generated imagery), English letters can be an image art.
We will certainly have more opportunities and experiences in the cinema to see image through text and vice versa.

In Chapter Three, I explore cubism and African fractal art used in the filmic discourse of Short Cuts (Robert Altman, 1993). I analyze the director’s transforming cubist painting and African fractal art into his camera techniques and narrative structure. I discuss painting as a metaphor beyond its use as a prop.

In addition, I examine the director’s artistic preference in transforming the literary piece Short Cut written by Raymond Carver into cinematic images. It is a complicated process to transform a literary work into cinematic images. Adaptations of literary works, therefore, have played an important part in film history since its inception. Two approaches toward adaptation studies are commonly discussed. Some critics employ the concept of “fidelity” as a critical tool. Others posit the cinematic text as a rereading tending towards deconstruction of the literary text. Most critiques on literary adaptation in film are formalistic, preoccupied with issues of textual fidelity or with attempts to tell the differences between the two media.

Robert Stam, University Professor at New York University, has published widely on Film Theory, Film History, Film Study and Adaptation. In Literature and Film, Stam argues that there is “no such transferable core” of a literary piece that can be included in an adaptation since “a single novelistic text comprises a series of verbal signals that can trigger a plethora of possible readings.” In adaptation, a literary piece is “constantly reworked and reinterpreted by a
boundless context” (15). John Desmond and Peter Hawkes in *Adaptation: Studying Film and Literature* also argue that fidelity is impossible when audiences are capable of various interpretations of a text, when there is “no agreed-upon method to compare text and film and no standard measure as to how much of the text must be transferred in order for the film to be judged faithful” (2).

The second belief about fidelity, according to Stam in his article “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation,” is that “an adaptation should be faithful not so much to the source text, but rather to the essence of the medium of expression.” This ‘medium-specificity’ approach assumes that every medium is inherently ‘good at’ certain things and ‘bad at’ others” (58). Stam mentioned Kael’s argument that movies are “good at action; they are not good at reflective thought or conceptual thinking.” Citing surrealism and expressionism and Alfred Hitchcock’s films, Stam argues, “Each medium has its own specificity deriving from its respective material of expression.” The novel has the written word, a singular material of expression. But “the film has at least five tracks: moving photographic image, phonetic sound, music, noises, and written materials. In this sense, the cinema has not lesser, but rather greater resources for expression than the novel” (59).

Accordingly, I will explore how filmmakers integrate painting and calligraphy into films adapted from literary works. I discuss director Julie Taymor’s approaches in transforming Mexican artist Frida Kahlo’s paintings in
the biopic *Frida* (2002). I also examine director Sofia Coppola’s aesthetic preference of using paintings in her cinematic representation of *Marie Antoinette* (2006). In addition, I look at the Chinese film *Myth* (Stanley Tong, 2005), Korean film *Bichunmoo* (Kim Yeong-jun, 2000), and the Indian film *Jodhaa Akbar* (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2008) to examine how paintings or film stills are used as a medium for the narrative frame and the transition of time and space. I also discuss that the use of painting and calligraphy in the films *Marie Antoinette* (Sofia Coppola, 2006), *Butterfly and Sword* (Michael Mak, 1993), *Kung Fu Hustle* (Stephen Chow, 2004) contributes to the effect of characterization, hyperbole, euphemism and irony in the cinematic narratives.

Angela Dalle Vacche, a specialist in the intersection of aesthetic theory and film history who holds a Leverhulme Distinguished Professorship at the University of London, asserts the importance of film being a multimedia art form and a means of mass communication. In *Cinema and Painting: How Painting Is Used in Film*, Vacche argues that “[i]t takes more than a study of the sources of a film to reveal the beauty of the encounter between cinema and painting; one must imagine all the possible elements of visual culture that a film, just by virtue of its circulation, has the power to attract into the textual orbit” (1). Film weaves other art forms such as photography, painting, music, poetry, architecture and theatre onto one cinematic canvas, conveys to us vast amount of information, and provides us with spectacles of audiovisual entertainment. The incorporation of calligraphy and painting into cinematic narration is worthwhile to explore.
Chapter One: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy

in Cinematic Imagination

[A] concern with what is art is not just a matter of classification,

but a matter of cultural esteem.

—Gordon Graham

Richard Wollheim, former president of the British Society of Aesthetics, noted for his work on mind and emotion related to the visual arts, especially painting, defines the nature of art as a vehicle for the expression or communication of emotions and ideas. Wollheim states that art is a means of exploring and appreciating formal elements (compositional elements such as color, line, shape and texture) for their own sake, and as mimesis or representation (1). He evaluates the artist’s intent and the ways that various audiences interpret a piece of art. He implies that art can be an imitation or a representation of the object. The nature of art’s significance is assigned and interpretive.

John Berger, the English art critic, novelist, painter and author of *Ways of Seeing* questions the hidden ideologies of visual images and criticizes traditional Western cultural aesthetics. Berger asserts that “the art of any period tends to serve the ideological interests of the ruling class” (86). Gordon Graham, author of *Philosophy of Arts*, discusses the value of particular artforms and examines the subjectivity of aesthetic judgement, the importance of the artist’s intention
and the possibility of an aesthetic appreciation of nature. Graham claims that the concern of an art form is a serious issue that involves cultural esteem of the nation (15). Art can reflect the pride of a nation. He thinks that art is embedded in a cultural context.

Malcolm Barnard concurs that different social and cultural groups define art in different ways (17). Therefore, it is important that we perceive art in a cultural context. Many scholars have studied the art of Chinese painting and calligraphy, but few explore it in the cinematic representations; my goal in this dissertation is to use films to examine the artistic value and hieroglyphic quality of Chinese calligraphy. I use films because as John Desmond states, “Film has become a dominant art form” and “a cultural artifact that holds promise for social or ideological analysis” (1). Film is one of the most influential forms of modern media today. It reflects our social concerns and influences our thinking and perception.

Different cultures have different perspectives on the arts. The word calligraphy literally means “beautiful writing”. It derives from Greek (κάλλος kallos beauty + γραφή graphē writing) (Mediavilla 17). However, Chinese calligraphy cannot be viewed as merely “good writing” of Chinese characters; nor is it described as a way of making Chinese characters look “more beautiful.” Chinese calligraphy is a performance art. It carries the thoughts and feelings of the artist besides the skills. It involves the artist’s grace of movement in accordance with his/her breath flow (气, Chì) in the body. Chinese calligraphers
regard the practice of calligraphy as a highly disciplined exercise of body and soul. In the practice of calligraphy, artists pursue the best style to express the content as well as the best path to physical and spiritual well being.

In China, calligraphy is an even earlier art form than painting, which was highly praised by the imperial court and intellectuals. Jerome Silbergeld, the P.Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Professor of Chinese Art History at Princeton University and director of Princeton’s Tang Center for East Asian Art, states that Chinese calligraphy, or the art of brush writing, is “the visual art form prized above all others in traditional China” (2). Silbergeld further states, “We have used the Western term ‘calligraphy’ (literarily, ‘beautiful writing’) to describe Chinese writing when raised to the level of a fine art, but the Chinese used a term shu-fa” (书法) or “models for writing” to emphasize “a concern for something other than beauty—namely, tradition” (20). The styles and techniques of calligraphy pass from generation to generation. Traditionally, every literate person in China learned to write by copying the standard forms of Chinese characters when he/she was a child. The child/student emulated the great calligraphers' manuscripts, stroke by stroke, character by character. One of the most-copied pieces of Chinese calligraphy was *Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion*, a masterpiece of Wang Xizhi, the most celebrated calligrapher known as the Sage of Calligraphy in China (Figure 1).

Written in Semi-Cursive Script in 353 A.D., this piece of work describes a gathering of forty-two literati (writers, poets, painters and calligraphers) at the
Orchid Pavilion near the town Shaoxing, Zhejiang province during the Spring Purification Festival (Chinese: 上巳节, Pinyin: shāng sì jié), one of the most ancient traditions in China during which men of the literati would gather beside a river to bathe and to drive away the evil spirits. On the occasion, Wang Xizhi invited his guests to the Orchid Pavilion in Zhejiang Province to compose poetry and enjoy wine. They played a special drinking game that incorporated a poetry competition. Servants filled small cups with wine, set them on large leaves and placed them in a stream. The cups then floated down toward the scholars, who sat on the banks. The scholars were asked to compose an impromptu poem as fast as possible. They were required to finish a poem before the cups reached them. Those unable to provide suitable verse had to take a cup from the stream and drink the contents before resuming the game. Wang Xizhi composed an anthology of the collected poems of the literati guests for this occasion.
The preface is a piece of improvisation, consisting of 324 Chinese characters in 28 lines, depicting the beauty of the gathering. The character zhi (之) appears 20 times in the preface, but no two look the same. Wang demonstrates an expressive work of dynamic harmony. The structure of each character is fluid, balanced and pleasing to the eye. His brushstrokes have a quiet beauty. It is said that Emperor Taizong of Tang (618-907) liked Wang’s calligraphy so much that he ordered a search for the original copy of Lanting Xu.

Dispatched by the emperor, Xiao Yi disguised himself as a wandering scholar, gradually gained the confidence of the owner and persuaded him to bring out the Orchid Pavilion Preface (Lanting Xu). Xiao Yi seized the work, revealed his identity, and rode back to the palace. The overjoyed emperor had it traced, copied, and engraved into stone for posterity. It is said that Emperor Taizong treasured the work so much that he had the original buried in his tomb.

Chinese calligraphy emphasizes tradition but allows individual creativity. It is an expressive art, depicting the abstract beauty of lines and rhythms, drawing characters into expressive images. “For more than 2,000 years, China’s literati...have enjoyed being connoisseurs and practitioners of this abstract art” (Stokstad 370). For example, Chinese character 寿 (Pinyin: shou)
means longevity. Artist Tang San represents the character 寿 like a peach, a fruit that symbolizes longevity in China (Figures 2). Instead of using the common color of black ink in calligraphy, Tang San selects brown red to resemble the peach color. The brushstrokes emulate the Free-hand/Xieyi painting style of Qi Bai Shi/Ch'i Pai-shih (Chinese: 齊白石), the most famous contemporary painter for the whimsical and playful works that are influenced by the early Qing Dynasty painter Bada Shanren (Chinese: 八大山人 or Zhu Da) and the Ming Dynasty artist Xu Wei (Chinese: 徐渭).

In Figure 2, Tang San writes the calligraphy similar to the shape of the peach painted by Qi Bai Shi in a Free-hand style using red and yellow color ink (Figure 3). The brushstrokes of the calligraphy 寿 (longevity) are also playful like the style of Qi Bai Shi.

Tang San paints a green middle ground and writes graphic calligraphy in light hue, making a contrast to the red image of longevity. The red seals and smaller fonts of the calligraphy in black on the left balance the structure of this work. The blank space (void) on the paper and the red image on top of the green color give a sense of layers and variation. Tang San also draws the character 寿 into an expressive image resembling a turtle. In Chinese culture, a
turtle is associated with longevity. Many artists such as Qi Bai Shi enjoy painting turtles, a symbol of a long and prosperous life as shown in Figure 4. In addition, Tang San’s calligraphy of 寿 (longevity) looks like a profile of a man with long beard carrying a long walking stick, an imagery of Chinese God of Longevity (Figure 5). Calligrapher Tang San expresses the idea of longevity in a conceptual art style. The character 寿 resembles an object or animal that symbolizes longevity.

Figure 4 Painting: Turtle, Artist: Qi Bai Shi (1864-1957)
http://www.chinapage.com/paint1.html

Figure 5 The God of Longevity with Attendant
© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Artist/maker:
Ren Yi (1840 - 1896)
Wu Changshuo (1844 - 1927) (calligrapher)

Material and technique: ink and colour on paper
Dimensions: mount 325 x 113.5 cm (height x width), painting 198.3 x 93 cm (height x width), rolled 8 cm (diameter)
Material index paper
http://www.jameelcenter.ashmolean.org/collection
I.1 The Picturesque Quality of Chinese Calligraphy

Chinese calligraphy is considered a form of painting—the highest form. In Figure 6, the word 缘 (destiny) in black ink is painted like a lotus leaf and a part of the clothes of a Buddha. The artist blends the image and text so well that the calligraphy is actually the painting. The word-image relationship in Chinese visual culture allows artists to apply a rich imagination to their work. Word is image, and image is word. In Chinese painting, word and image interact to convey meaning. In Figure 7, the painting and calligraphy 佛 (Buddhism), is drawn in a peaceful manner with curvy strokes and a famous ancient poem concerning the peace of mind and happiness under the guidance of Buddhist theory. The style of the text reflects traditional Chinese calligraphy that emphasizes balance and harmony. The image helps convey the meaning of the
character (Buddhism). The figure of a Buddhist is an illustration and a foil to the character while the poem reflects the painter’s attitude towards life—happiness is the contentment of the heart, which enhances the philosophy of Buddhism. The poem reads, “There is no Bodhi tree, nor a standing mirror, no one here, where can the dust alight?”

Chinese calligraphy is not only a medium of communication, but also a way of expressing a person's inner world at ethical and aesthetic levels. It embeds Taoist philosophy and Chinese tradition. Chinese calligraphy and images of objects in Chinese paintings interact to represent the word and meaning. In Western visual culture, word can challenge image and complement the imagery. Image tends to be dominant in Western Art, relegating text to an inferior position as “other.” Therefore, words are usually treated as a foil to images in Western culture as Dikovitskaya summarized Mitchell’s views:

[Mitchell] describes the difference between word and images as being “linked to things like the difference between the (speaking) self and the (seen) other…between words (heard, quoted, inscribed) and objects or actions (seen, depicted, described); between sensory channels, traditions of representation, and modes of experience (Mitchell, 1994, p. 5)”…In Iconology he suggests that an image is not just a particular kind of sign, but a parent concept—image as such. He treats textuality as foil to imagery, a significant other or rival mode of representation. “The image is the sign that pretends not to be a sign…The word is its ‘other,’ the artificial, arbitrary
production of human….(1986, 43)”….According to Mitchell, the word-image difference can be likened to the relation between two languages that have been interacting for a long time: an ongoing dialogue between verbal and pictorial representation. (15, 16)

In contrast, in Chinese visual art, image can be a foil to the text and vice versa. The character 佛 (Buddhism) in Figure 7 takes half the space. Together with the poem, the text takes up more than two-thirds of the picture. The writer intends to make this art piece a calligraphy demonstration more than a portrait illustration of Buddhism. The Buddhist image here is a supplementary illustration to the character of 佛 as well as the theme of the poem. The four lines of the poem and the figure are used as a foil to calligraphy 佛. Whether the image or the word plays a more important role in the artistic illustration, word and image interact and interplay as “an ongoing dialogue between verbal and pictorial representation” which is identical with the Western theory as Mitchell points out in the above paragraph.

Word is image in Chinese visual representation. In Figure 8, the image of a horse resembles the Chinese character 马 (horse); while in Figure 9, the character is a picture of the heart 心. The word is an illustration of the image.
Calligraphy is painting. Such uniqueness of text in Chinese can be traced back to the creation of Chinese characters. The earliest writing of Chinese characters derived from pictures, simplified and stylized for easy writing. As shown in Figure 10, the word goat (羊) is a picture of a goat. From left to right are rooster (鸡), goat (羊), rat (鼠), tortoise (龟) and fish (鱼). Unlike Western writing with alphabets where a sequence of individual letters signifies the word in linear order, each symbol in Chinese stands for an entire word which can be written in either horizontal or vertical arrangement, making it flexible within the artistic composition of a painting or cinematic image.

Figure 9
Chinese calligraphy:
Heart (心)

Artist: Tang San
http://www/chinesepaintings.com

Figure 10 Chinese Characters of Rooster (鸡), Goat (羊), Rat (鼠), Tortoise (龟) and Fish (鱼)
<http://www.logoi.com/notes/symbols.html>
For instance, in the film *Dragons Forever* (飛龍猛將) (1988) directed by Sammo Hung Kam-Bo, and Corey Yuen (aka Yuen Kwai), the title is illustrated like a flying dragon with flaming pearls (Figure 11). This Hong Kong Kungfu film features Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung Kam-Bo, and Biao Yuen. The film is a story of three heroes involved in a court case of a fish farmer against the evil owners of a chemical factory. They locate a hidden door in the factory behind which drugs are produced. The heroes then attack the villains and destroy the factory. The movie title is from a Chinese idiom 龍飛鳳舞 (meaning: Flying Dragon and Dancing Phoenix) that describes the beauty, elegance and energy of calligraphy. The movie title is designed in a striking contrast of bright yellow and thick font on dark background, showing the quality of the flamboyant, bold Block Script calligraphy and the strength of the dragon, a divine and mighty creature, the symbol of emperors, and the image of luck and fortune in Chinese culture.

The yellow denotes royalty. The two characters 飛龍 (flying dragon) link together similar to the body of a dragon. The short strikes or dots in the title characters are transformed into circles like the flaming pearls in a playful manner, suggesting the comedic touch of the funny stunts of the heroes in the film. The yellow dragon and the pearl carried on its forehead are believed to possess supernatural properties and healing power as one hero played by Sammo Hung
Kam-Bo recovers from drug poison. Similarly, in the film *Fight Back to School III*—*Dragon over Rooster* (Jing Wong, 1993), a comedy, romance and action genre starring Stephen Chow and Min Chang, the Chinese characters of *dragon* (龍) and *rooster* (雞) are hieroglyphic and representational of the two animals (Figure 12).

Another example is *Armour of God II Operation Condor* (Jackie Chan, 1991). Featuring Jackie Chan as the writer and director, the film won the 1992 Hong Kong Film Awards. The character 鷹 (*hawk*) in the film title is actually the image of a flying hawk (Figure 13). Its bright orange color is striking against the blue sky. The title is slanted to the left and angled backwards. The character 鷹 is a parallel image of Jackie Chan flying in a device with a parachute in the sky as well as a metaphor for the hero who flies like a hawk and bravely recovers the gold in the desert, surviving all risks and escaping from the treasure-hunters and the last Nazi from the doomed regime.

In another 1992 movie starring Stephen Chow, the Chinese title 鹿鼎記 (*The Deer and the Cauldron*, Stephen Chow) in Oracle Bone style, also illustrates the pictorial feature of Chinese writing systems (Figure 14). The title is written in vertical order. The character 鹿 (*deer*) is composed of two decorated antlers on the head, the deer’s body and legs. The second character 鼎 (*cauldron*) resembles the unique bronze tripod of China, a curved vessel supported by three legs. Ding (鼎) was made of fired clay five or six thousand years ago for cooking. Later, the ding was made of bronze instead of clay. In
typical Shang (1766-1015 B.C.) style, “a large deer’s head adorns the center of each side, and images of deer are repeated on all four legs” of the bronze vessel (Stokstad 363). It is noteworthy that filmmakers used different styles of
calligraphy to demonstrate the art and image of written Chinese.

Verbal text has played a very important role in Chinese visual culture, especially Chinese calligraphy in paintings and cinematic representations. A Chinese character not only denotes meaning, but its form reveals itself to be a moral exemplar, a manifestation of the energy of the human body, and the vitality of nature itself. In calligraphy, each character is written with a sense of balance and proportion, with an uninterrupted flow and rhythm. “The brush becomes an extension of the writer’s arm, indeed, his entire body. But the physical gestures produced by the wielding of the brush reveal much more than physical motion; they reveal much of the writer himself—his impulsiveness, restraint, elegance, rebelliousness” (Silbergeld 18).

In Hero (2002), Zhang Yimou interprets Chinese calligraphy by means of martial arts and draws beautiful paintings with his camera. He demonstrates to the audience that Chinese Kungfu resembles calligraphy. Word is image. Calligraphy is a performance art, every movement displays the artist’s spirit and strength. When the hero Nameless (Jet Li) goes to a small calligraphy school, he meets the martial artist, Broken Sword (Tony Leung) who creates a set of undefeatable swordplay moves represented by the Chinese character 剑 (sword). Another scene depicts Flying Snow (Maggie Cheung) whirling through the air with her long red sleeves swaying to ward off thousands of arrows shot by the army of Qin State. Her fight is graceful and balletic like the word 剑 (sword) that Broken Sword paints feverishly as shown in Figure 15.
When Nameless joins Flying Snow with his swift swordplay Kungfu, the camera then cuts to Broken Sword’s swaying black hair in the air when he is writing the calligraphy—eight foot image of (sword) as shown in Figure 15. The camera shot compares the graphic similarity of Nameless’ and Flying Snow’s whirling and fighting through the air to Broken Sword’s calligraphy and swaying hair. Zhang presents several reverse shots between the graceful fighting outside the school and the calligraphy written inside as if the camera is interpreting and representing the word (sword) into images of a martial arts fight. The camera directs the audience to the interplay of the text and image—when the protagonist’s writing of (sword) is completed, the arrow fight is also finished.

The dialogue between Nameless and Broken Sword after the arrow fight further shows Zhang Yimou’s purpose regarding the idea that Chinese calligraphy is swordplay—word is image. “Beautiful calligraphy,” Nameless compliments Broken Sword on the creation of the sword scroll. “Beautiful swordplay,” Broken Sword returns the favor: “Without your sword, the scroll would not exist.” In the story, Broken Sword is famous for his swordplay inspired and created out of calligraphy. Zhang indicates that Chinese calligraphy is not only philosophical but a performance art in the film’s mise-en-scene as
well. While Broken Sword is writing the calligraphy, his body sways with strength, grace and rhythm resembling the strokes of the character \(剑\) (sword).

To the artist, calligraphy is a mental exercise that coordinates the mind and the body to choose the best styling in expressing the content. Chinese calligraphy and painting are a simulation of life in the strokes and dynamics of the design performed by the artist. Every movement of the artist’s writing inscribes meanings, feelings and thoughts besides its grace and beauty. Meanings and pictures are embedded in the brushstrokes of Chinese calligraphy. For example, when Emperor Qin encounters the assassin Nameless in his palace and examines Broken Sword’s scroll hanging behind the throne, Zhang Yimou employs the four strokes of the Chinese character \(剑\) (sword) in red ink on a white sheet to brighten the hue onscreen dominated by blue and grey, resembling a flow of water or a lotus petal, and bringing focus to the actor in the center (Figure 16).

In the scene, the word \(sword\) (剑) is written elegantly in mellow and smooth strokes like the stream flowing down peacefully. The four strokes also resemble the petal textures of the sacred lotus flower in a Chinese painting. In Chinese culture, lotus signifies purity, virtue and peace. Emperor Qin realizes that the scroll of \(剑\) (sword) explains the ideal warrior, who paradoxically should have no desire to
kill. So Nameless decodes the wisdom in the word and leaves the King alive. The filmmaker benefits from the pictogram of Chinese calligraphy to embellish the cinematic image and the filmic discourse. Zhang uses the classic character \剑 rather than the simplified Chinese \剑 probably because he wants to present the traditional beauty of the character, and probably because the classic character represents the writing style in that historical period.

Another illustration of the artistic features in written Chinese is found in Zhang’s close-up shots of Flying Snow (Maggie Cheung), decorated by light red wood logs with Chinese characters in brown red on the foreground and background (Figures 17, 18). Those elegant, curving strokes of Chinese characters in vertical order look like geometrical structures and graphic patterns. They are part of the compositional design of the cinematic images. Zhang employs Chinese calligraphy to contrast the different layers of hue and to balance the monotonous color tone of red, which highlights the beauty of the actress Flying Snow in plain crimson costume. Zhang displays his artistic pursuit of calligraphy in cinema. He emphasizes the graphic nature of Chinese calligraphy in cinematic representation.
Filmmakers probe the artistic tradition of calligraphy and painting in cinematic imagination. They use calligraphy as a graphic backdrop to show film credits. In 2003, director David Dobkin presented to the world audience a comic Kungfu feast played by the most prominent Chinese martial artist, Jackie Chan, and Owen Wilson. *Shanghai Knights* opens in the Forbidden City in 1887 where the imperial seal is stolen, and the keeper of the seal is killed. His son Chon Wang (Jackie Chan), daughter Chon Lin (Fann Wong) and Roy (Owen Wilson) track down the murderer and thief in London. In addition to Chan’s fascinating Kungfu skills and Wilson’s amusing acting, the movie is visually pleasant because of the director’s staging, and the artistic and skillful cinematography by Adrian Biddle.

An impressive feature of this film is the design of the opening credit sequences that demonstrate Chinese calligraphy as an image art. On the dark screen, appears the Chinese bold character (uprightness, Figure 19) in bright red color, mounting like the sunrise with a bright golden lighting on the lower part (me). The character is written in a semi-cursive style of thick brushes, displaying strength and grandeur against a dark backdrop. The character foretells the story of Chon Wang and Roy undertaking a difficult journey to recover the imperial seal with a strong sense of uprightness and justice.
Figure 20 *Shanghai Knights* film stills
The camera then pans down revealing the Chinese words of 和 (peace) and 拳 (fist) in small red letters that fill the whole screen on the dark background (Figure 20). Then there is a wipe out from the left to the right on the screen until about seven characters of 拳 (fist) appear in red and gold shining on the upper left corner of the screen like hanging red lanterns. The white letters of TOUCH STONE PICTURES AND SPYGLASS ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS are written on the foreground of these bold, architectural patterns of Chinese characters. Then the camera gives an extreme close up of the shiny red-gold Chinese characters in vague strokes until we only see the glittering of red and gold as abstract patterns and ornaments for the background onscreen.

The Chinese red-gold letters dissolve and overlap alternately as within a kaleidoscope while the credits of English words appear on top. The art designer of the opening credits employs extreme close up, dissolve, overlap and jump cut to alternate the images of Chinese characters and strokes. The written characters create an interplay of striking, colorful images, patterns and graphs. At last, we see the English title “SHANGHAI KNIGHTS” in gold and red capital letters set on top of an extreme close up of a round red seal of Chinese characters in calligraphy style, completing this creative cinematic collaboration of Chinese writing and English alphabets (Figure 21).
Such a design of credits, using multiple styles of calligraphy, displays the hieroglyphic beauty and versatility of Chinese writing systems. In a less graphic way, similar ideas are explored in *Shanghai Noon* starring the comic duo Jackie Chan and Owen Wilson along with Lucy Liu (Tom Dey, 2000). The film narrates the story of an imperial guard who rescues the Chinese Princess Pei Pei abducted to the United States in the 19th century. In the opening credit sequences, calligraphy is firstly presented in white superimposed with yellow credits in English, then changed to red, orange, yellow and white. Credits are laid out from the left side or the right side onscreen. The English title *SHANGHAI NOON* in black is placed over Chinese calligraphy in white. Though Chinese characters are shot with extreme close-up, they appear less graphic and less ornate than those in *Shanghai Knights*.

Credits superimposed on Chinese calligraphy are not often seen in cinema. Such a cinematic representation can be traced to the credit sequences in *Fist of Fury* (精武門, 1972) featuring Bruce Lee, directed by Lo Wei. In the opening sequences, the setting is written in vertical order. Three large characters “精, 武, 功” in light ink brush are put forward one by one against a white or blue backdrop. Extreme close-up shots enhance the strength of the Chinese calligraphy in thick brushstrokes (Figure 22). The characters mount up or move out from both sides on the screen in a fast pace, foretelling the genre of a Kungfu movie. The yellow credits superimposed on white characters of the title in repetition against a red background, shows an overwhelming pattern.
Figure 22 *Fist of Fury* film stills

Our story begins with the death of No Tsen-chiu, a legendary Chinese warrior, when he was poisoned by Russia's champion wrestler and Japan's loudest expert.

He was poisoned, by whom? For what? It was not known for certain.

But these have been speculation, and we still offer the most popular verses.
Another credit sequence designed with calligraphy is found in Peter Pau’s adventure and action film *The Touch* (2002). Pau is one of the top cinematographers in Hong Kong. In the title sequences, various heights of camera angles and sizes of characters in gold are used to show the beauty of Chinese calligraphy. The title sequences display a stylish introduction of a terminology “Sharira” with calligraphy. This film won best cinematography in the Asia-Pacific Film Festival of 2002. Starring and produced by Michelle Yeoh, the film tells the story of a sister and brother, the last heir of a family of acrobats and martial artists. They safeguard a holy treasure “Sharira” that is believed to have mystic powers to control the world. With extreme and medium close-up shots of fast camera movements, and the alternation of camera heights and lightings, the title designer displays gracefully the graphic features of Chinese calligraphy (Figure 23).

The credit and title designer introduces to audiences the concept of “Sharira” with close-up shots out of focus. One scene reads, “In the Buddhist religion, a Sharira is a Relic purported to contain the pure essence of a Holy Man. Shariras are said to [possess] mystical powers that can transform mankind for the better…Or in the wrong hands for the worst.” The Chinese calligraphy in golden hue behind the English words in white, serves as a pattern for the cinematic image. The credit/title sequences explain the terminology and foreshadow the theme of good over evil in the narrative. With extreme close-up shots of elegant and swiftly moving strokes of Chinese calligraphy in gold, the camera changes height and distance to display different sizes of sacred texts in the Buddhist Sutra.
In the Buddhist religion, a Shairta is a Relic purported to contain the pure essence of a Holy Man. Shairtas are said to be possessed of mystical powers that can transform mankind for the better ... or in the wrong hands for the worse.
The art design employs a rich color to showcase the beauty and art of Chinese calligraphy. The golden font of the Sutra indicates the cultural significance of Buddhism in China. Gold is precious. In Chinese proverb, any valuable teaching, advice or perspective is called 金玉良言 and 金石良言, meaning words as precious as gold and gems. Generally, people in China have a great deal of respect and a sacred sentiment for Buddhism whether they are religious or not. It is believed that Buddhism nurtures and inspires people to be truthful, kind, virtuous and successful. The calligraphy in gold color in Pau’s film highlights Chinese writing and Buddhist aesthetics. As Jeffrey Geiger and R.L. Rutsky assert, “Images always carry connotations, and their connotations inevitably evoke emotional and cultural associations” (20). The color of calligraphy/Chinese writing conveys a cultural meaning.

The opening credits designer combines the art of calligraphy with swift camera movements to indicate the adventure genre of the film, and engage the audience in an atmosphere of fast action with Chinese Kungfu. In the credits, low lighting and shadow are used on the strokes of Chinese characters to create a striking contrast to the white English words. The low lighting creates a mysterious feel in the adventure narrative. The alternation of high and low lighting is used against a yellow-orange background for a variety of calligraphy displays. The fast camera movement, the pan and tilted angle create an effect of dynamics and tension, and give an engaging and exciting presentation of a pictorial text of Chinese calligraphy.
The hieroglyphic feature of Chinese writing enables filmmakers more picturesque options in cinematic imagination and representation. Marilyn Stokstad and David Cateforis state, “Each word in Chinese is represented by its own unique picture, called a character or calligraphy. Some characters originated as pictographs, images that resemble what they depict. Writing reforms over the centuries have often disguised the resemblance, but if we place modern characters next to their oracle-bone ancestors, the picture comes back into focus” (363). For instance, the first Chinese character  

\[ \text{日} \]

(sun) of the film title  

\[ \text{日出日落} \]

(Sunrise, Sunset, Wenji Teng, 2005) is written in a rectilinear manner unlike the second one in a circle with a dot in the center (Figure 24).

The dot in the center of character  

\( \text{日} \) has a story. In ancient China, people believed that the sun had a nucleus. In Chinese mythology, the world was created by an egg in which grew the giant Pangu. As Pangu became bigger and bigger, he stretched his limbs and broke the egg into two halves. The lighter part of the egg floated upward to form the heavens and the denser part sank to be the earth. When Pangu died, his body made all the elements of the world. His arms and legs became the four directions, his trunk became mountains, and his blood became
rivers. His flesh turned into soil and the trees grew on it. His breath formed the wind and clouds. His voice was thunder and lightning. His eyes made the sun and the moon. That’s why the character sun has the dot in the center, Pangu’s eye pupil. Written Chinese is pictographic, and ideographic—“pictures that represent abstract concept or ideas” (Stokstad 363).

Chinese writing system is the illustration of the physical object. Chinese characters are composed of images, ideas and sounds. Therefore, Chinese calligraphy is an image art. In the Chinese lexicon, each character is represented by one symbol. A character is either comprised of a picture of the object termed as “pictograph”, or picture of an abstract concept, categorized as “ideograph”, or a combination of a radical, given a field of meaning with a phonetic for pronunciation. The Chinese film title 花木蘭 (Mulan, Jingle Ma, 2009) is a vivid lexical example of these three paradigms (Figure 25). Character 花 (flower) consists of “花卉” (also meaning the field of plant) and “花” resembling two flowers on the top supported by trunks and leaves. The element “花” is also the phonetic “hua”.

Similarly, the traditional character 蘭 (orchid) displays the delicate textures and curvy petals, and the elegant shape of orchid branches while
suggesting the phonetic “lan.” The character 麦 sounding “mu” (wood) resembles a tree trunk. Two characters of “木” side by side, form an ideograph 林 meaning trees or a forest. The lavender and reddish purple hues complement the pictographic title while representing the grace and beauty of orchids. The title in oracle bone style looks like an orchid plant hanging and decorating with flowers on its branches—a reflection of grace and romance. The English title Mulan above the Chinese character 蘭 resembles the buds of orchids. The title designer illustrates that Chinese calligraphy can be a painting and an image.

British director Peter Greenaway also explores graphic representation of writings with Chinese characters in his cinematic images. His avant-garde attempt to display the beauty of calligraphy is recorded in The Pillow Book (1995). In the film, text and image are designed in frames within frames like postcards. Overlapped shots use calligraphy written on a piece of translucent paper through which figures and images are seen. The director explores delicately the visual effects of calligraphy superimposed on images. Various styles of Japanese hieroglyph with Chinese characters/Kanji are drawn neatly on the silky skin of nude models. Such displays of calligraphy on bodies also demonstrate that calligraphy is an image art. Calligraphy in moving bodies bears the feature of a performance art.

Though he presents many scenes of calligraphy written on nude models, Greenaway portrays an artistic vision of sexuality. David Bordwell says, “Part of the reality is sexual” (776). Sexuality can be the director’s art for art’s sake in
cinematic representation. In fact, body without clothes does not necessarily signify sex or eroticism. Greenaway uses the human body as a canvas for calligraphy, thus making a comparison between the grace and beauty of this written art form and the human body. John Berger claims,

To be naked is to be oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude. Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display. To be naked is to be without disguise. To be on display is to have the surface of one’s own skin, the hairs of one’s own body, turned into a disguise which, in that situation, can never discarded. The nude is condemned to never being naked. Nudity is a form of dress. (54)

The skin is a medium for the display of calligraphy. The curving grace and fluidity of calligraphy can be achieved on human bodies in a way that cannot be duplicated on the flat plane of a piece of paper (Figure 26). Yves Jacques, a film critic of The Daily of the University of Washington, comments on Greenaway’s artistic representation of calligraphy on the human body. Jacques says, ‘Greenaway's use of the body as a canvas makes the surface as unique as the marks placed upon it. Not only does this incorporate the performance aspects of theater into the calligraphic process, it also creates a product that is irreproducible. The same text written elsewhere would have a profoundly
different effect.” Greenaway displays the human body as a medium and a page to convey his aesthetic pursuit of calligraphy as a text and image. The small and large characters, the thick and thin strokes, the dense and the space, the black ink and red seal, the red characters and golden ones, are well organized in accordance with the body shape. Greenaway demonstrates calligraphy as a performance art by highlighting the curvaceous beauty of the human body.

The relationship between text and image is central to the cinematic representation of The Pillow Book. Greenaway emphasizes seeing calligraphy like an image. The film begins with the birthday ritual of Nagiko, the daughter of a Japanese calligrapher. Her father paints on her face and lips and signs his name on her neck while saying, “When God made the first clay model of a human being, he painted in the eyes, the lips and the sex.” Nagiko’s father moves the brush slowly and elegantly, displaying the beauty of calligraphy and the skills of brushwork. When she grows up and later becomes a writer, Nagiko is obsessed with calligraphy written on flesh rather than paper.

Greenaway’s cinematic language illustrates the dialectic relationships between images, texts and bodies. Jacques remarks, “Greenaway has fashioned a film that uses the body as canvas and the calligraphic text as image to blur the distinction between artist and product, subject and object, message and medium.” Greenaway blurs the distinction between text and image, too. In The Pillow Book, an old publisher, a calligrapher, articulated after he wrote on Nagiko’s body, “The word for rain should fall like rain. The word smoke should drift like
smoke.” Then the camera cuts to a medium shot of Nagiko’s naked body with calligraphy. The black ink drips along Nagiko’s body in the rain, forming tiny streams of black as if the words come to life like the rains. The blurring words of calligraphy drift away resembling smoke in the sky. Nagiko’s nipples are painted gold to understate sexuality and emphasize the artistic value of calligraphy (Figure 27).

Though the words are written in columns from top to bottom like Chinese calligraphy, the Japanese pattern is more symmetrically-spaced and flowing. Marilyn Stokstad and David Cateforis describe, “With its simple, flowing symbols interspersed with more complex Chinese characters, the new writing system [Kana script of native language in Japan developed from simplified Chinese] allowed Japanese poets to create an asymmetrical calligraphy quite unlike that of China” (396) (See Figures 28 and 29 for a demonstration). Greenaway directs the audience’s eyes to word as image. He filters his cinematic images through a lens of realism to display a unique style of calligraphy from an artistic point of view. He transmits the beauty of writing on human bodies, enlivens it on a three dimensional surface. When the body moves, the stroke of calligraphy stretches, shortens, curves and turns. Greenaway shows that calligraphy is a performance art on human bodies. He draws our attention to the study of word as image in the medium of film.
**Figure 28:** Japanese film title さくら (Sakuran, dir. Mika Ninagawa, 2006) is written stroke by stroke onscreen, exposing audiences to the simple and flowing beauty of Japanese calligraphy. The film fills the screen with lavish color and stylish image throughout the tale about classical Japan’s top prostitutes in Yoshiwara district. The moving fish in the blue water reflects the flowing Japanese calligraphy onscreen. The fluid and dynamic strokes of calligraphy resemble the swimming motions of the fish. Gold fish are domesticated and kept in decorated ponds or containers for appreciation. The gold fish represents the prostitutes in extravagant dress in Yoshiwara district, being observed, dancing and singing to please men.

**Figure 28 Sakuran (さくら) (Mika Ninagawa, 2006)**

![Figure 28 Sakuran (さくら) (Mika Ninagawa, 2006)](image)
Figure 29: Mao’s Last Dancer (Bruce Beresford, 2009)

Figure 29: Director Bruce Beresford presented to the world an interesting biopic Mao’s Last Dancer in 2009 based on Chinese ballet dancer Li Cunxin’s best selling book (played by real-life ballet dancer Chi Cao). The film begins with Chinese calligraphy 舞 (dance) brushed in black ink on a dark red screen, illustrating visually to the audience the graceful but complicated strokes of this Chinese character. Because the strokes reach different directions, both vertical and horizontal, the writing of the character 舞 is less flowing than Japanese Kana script, a style that developed from simplified Chinese.
Recently, writer and director M. Night Shyamalan released his adventure and fantasy *The Last Airbender* (2010). The title designer presents the opening sequences with a figure practicing Chinese Kungfu, mimicking the strokes of Chinese calligraphy written on the screen. Such sequences also demonstrate that Chinese calligraphy and Japanese calligraphy are an-image art. Produced by “Paramount Pictures” and “Nickelodeon Movies,” the film features spectacular visual effect—four elements of air, water, fire and earth are “bended” together, creating an exciting and unprecedented cinematic effect. The film was adapted from the popular animated television series that aired for three seasons on Nickelodeon (TV channel) from 2005 to 2008. In the fiction, the world is divided into four nations. Each is represented by an element, water, air, earth and fire. Special individuals in each nation have the talent and power to bend and manipulate that particular element.

Aang (Noah Ringer) known as “Avatar,” a link to the spirit world, is the only being capable of using the four elements and keeping them in harmony. Aang teams up with a waterbender and her brother to restore balance to the world in a war launched brutally by Fire against the other elements. In the opening sequences, words are presented like Chinese calligraphy and Japanese characters along with a human figure practicing Kungfu. The characters of the four lands are represented as 水 (Water Peaceful), 土 (Earth Strong), 火 (Fire Fierce), and 气 (Air Harmony) (Figure 30). The title designer presents the writings in a hieroglyphic manner like Chinese or Japanese characters, exhibiting
the pictorial feature of Chinese and Japanese writings. In addition, the title sequences illustrate the calligraphy writing with a martial artist practicing Tai Ji and Kungfu to interpret the strokes and images of the four elements—水, 土, 火, and 气. Every movement of the martial artist demonstrates the adaptability of Water (水), the harmony of Air (气), the passion of Fire (火) and the strength of Earth (土) as shown in Figure 30.

Such cinematic images of calligraphy interpreted by Chinese martial artists are seen in earlier Hong Kong Kungfu films. For example, in Challenge of the Masters (Chinese: 陸阿采與黃飛鴻, Lau Kar Leung, 1976), the credits designer demonstrates the resemblance between calligraphy and Kungfu in the title sequences (Figure 31). Two martial artists (Wong Fei-Hong and his father’s teacher) appear in between the columns of calligraphy and hold fists to greet each other, a typical ritual in Chinese Wuxia/Kungfu practice. A voiceover reads the two lines of calligraphy and pronounces each of the characters like an instruction for Wong Fei-Hong as he follows his master’s move. The demonstrated Chinese characters read, “刚, 柔, 逼, 直, 提, 留, 运, 制.” They refer to the Kungfu move/skill with strength, softness, forcefulness, straightness, lifting, holding, transforming, and controlling.

As the actors interpret the meaning and strokes of each character with fist and stick Kungfu, credits are added to the pictures. Each cinematic image is a well constructed composition with calligraphy, martial artist and credit in proper space and balance. The characters of the credits come either from the right, left or
Figure 30 *The Last Airbender* film stills (1-4):

1. 水 (Water: Benevolence & Adaptability)

2. 土 (Earth: Strength & Stability)

3. 火 (Fire: Intensity & Passion)

4. 气 (Air: Peace & Harmony)
Figure 31 Challenge of the Masters film stills
In calligraphy, artists control the vitality of individual brush stroke to express the dynamic relationship of each stroke and character. The graphic form and inner vitality of Chinese calligraphy complements the art of Kungfu and the design of the opening credits. This credit sequence displays calligraphy as an image art and a performance art. It reflects the aesthetics of Chinese painting and calligraphy—the force and vitality in portraying a character or an image.

I.2 Aesthetics of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy in Cinematic Images

Chinese aesthetics of visual arts embraces Chinese culture and the philosophical ideas of Taoism and Confucianism—the focus on nature and the harmonious relationship between humanity and the cosmos. By observing the nature and the heavens, Chinese people see life as the play of opposing forces and cycles. The balance of man between the heavens and the earth is important. Chinese people see the totality of life and put things into perspectives. Chinese artists do not duplicate nature with shade and light according to time and space. They represent the world with their ideas and vision. In the practice of painting and calligraphy, Chinese artists emphasize the balance in composition and structure. The harmony of dark and light, void and solid, yin and yang is often represented. This section will discuss how filmmakers apply the aesthetics of
Chinese calligraphy and painting to explore alternative modes of filmic narration and representation.

The styles of Chinese painting have evolved throughout the history of China. In the prosperous Tang Dynasty, art was highly valued. The criteria of good painting were established. Artists favor the capture of \( \text{qi} \), the life force of the subjects in painting. Each brushstroke is expected to depict the vitality and essence of a subject rather than to copy its form. One of the most important notions of classical Chinese painting is the “Concealment of Brilliance”. Overt expressions of technical skill are considered low art. Creativity and individuality are highly valued within the framework of tradition. The goal of an artist is to draw the viewer into the painting in a way to create a kind of reality like the palpable world by using multiple perspectives. Much of Chinese painting styles was influenced by Taoist ideology, and so emphasized the harmony of man and nature.

Chinese painting can be divided into two major stylistic forms, Gongbi painting, and Xieyi/Free-hand painting. Gongbi painting (Chinese: \( \text{工笔画} \)) emphasizes delicate brushstrokes. An artist uses extremely fine brushstrokes to render details very precisely and without independent or expressive variation. This meticulous style of Chinese painting is similar to Western oil painting in layers. The artist draws the scene in complete detail by overlaying thin color washes in various combinations. The artist applies color washes with a fine brush when ink is dry to achieve subtle graduation of shade. Then the artist applies
clear water along the edge of a wet wash with another brush. This process is repeated until the desired tones are achieved.

In contrast to Gongbi painting, Xieyi painting (Chinese: 写意画) is a free, expressive style that seeks to capture the "inner spirit" of the subjects rather than simply render the outward form. This style of painting gives artists the freedom to express their subjective feelings in depicting the world. Xieyi style uses many techniques of calligraphy that privilege spontaneity of the line. Xieyi paintings are quickly carried out. Thus, artists need years of practice and longer experience to paint in Xieyi style. A Ming Chinese painter Xu Wei (Chinese: 徐渭, 1521-1593) developed an expressive style of Xieyi painting that influenced and inspired many subsequent painters, such as Zhu Da (Chinese: 朱耷, 1626-1705), Wu Changshuo (Chinese: 吴昌硕, 1844-1927) and Qi Bai Shi (Chinese: 齐白石, 1864-1957). Xu Wei’s paintings feature novelty and fluidity with simple but accurate brushstrokes.

The harmony of man and nature, the symmetry of composition, the artistic conception of Xieyi style, and the color shading of Gongbi technique have profoundly influenced Chinese cinema. In addition, the optical routes of Chinese handscroll painting and calligraphy are often reflected in cinematic movements and representations. I will focus on the cinematic representations in Hero (Chinese: 英雄, Zhang Yimou, 2000), Raise the Red Lantern (Chinese: 大红灯笼高高挂, Zhang Yimou, 1991), Farewell My Concubine (Chinese: 霸王别姬, Chen Kaige, 1992), and Three Smiles (Chinese: 三笑, Yueh Feng, 1969). These
films also use other art forms that are conventional parts of Chinese painting, such as poetry and seal engraving.

Before I analyze the ways that contemporary Chinese filmmakers use the Gongbi and Xieyi styles of Chinese paintings, a brief and limited comparison between Chinese secular art and the more traditional forms of premodern Western art may be helpful in highlighting the aesthetics of Chinese painting. The essential differences appear to be that human figures are not emphasized in Chinese landscape painting. Chinese artists present symbols of landforms rather than realistic representations. In *The Art through the Ages* edited by Horst De La Croix, Richard G. Tansey, and Diane Kirkpatrick, the role of the traditional methods of stylistic analysis and periodicity of art is emphasized. According to Croix and the others,

Many of the fundamental differences between Chinese secular art and the traditional, premodern art of the West are based on differences between the philosophies of nature and of human nature held by the two cultures. For the Chinese, human beings are not dominant in nature; they are a part of it, responding, like all living creatures, to its rhythms. To be happy is to live in accord with nature; to be a painter is to be the instrument through which nature reveals itself. The painter’s work is an expression of personal immersion in the flow of life and of attunement to all that changes and grows; in so being, the work is also the expression of a personal character refined by the contemplation of nature. Because nature is not measured and
classified according to space and time, Chinese painters do not frame it off in perspective boxes with colors scale in light and shade. They do not attempt to duplicate and fix natural appearances by such means. The asymmetry of growing things, the infinity of cosmic events—these forbid all enframements, rigid regularities, beginnings and ends. (450)

Chinese painting is expressive of the ideology, evocative of the mood and illustrative of the artist’s personality. In the Song dynasty, landscape painting reached its highest peak. Guo Xi (Chinese: 郭熙, c. 1020–c. 1090), a court professional and literati, completed *Early Spring* in 1072, one of the most famous works of Chinese art in the Song Dynasty (Figure 32). The work demonstrates his innovative techniques called "the angle of totality" for producing multiple perspectives. Rather than from a single angle of vision, the painting contains various themes and objects depicted from different perspectives: high angle of the mountain ridge, eye-match of the middle ground of trees and space, and low angle of the foreground of rocks.

Chinese paintings are viewed from multiple focal points. In Chinese painting, artists pursue multiple perspectives to display the reality. They believe that in life people view their surroundings from a mobile focal point. When they walk along a river or in a garden, they see everything on the way. Artists do not
intend to duplicate the object in its actual form, size and color, but to capture a sense of inner reality of the wholeness as if a picture flows from their mind through the brushes onto the paper. Marilyn Stokstad and David Cateforis state, “The sense of shifting perspective is clearest in the handscroll, where our vantage point changes constantly as we move through the painting.” Stokstad and Cateforis remark that “we can imagine the ideal for Chinese artists as a film camera aloft in a balloon: distant, all-seeing, and mobile” (379).

Cinematic images reflect the convention and aesthetics of calligraphy and painting. In the fighting scenes of Zhang Yimou’s Hero (2002), the alternation of extreme close-ups to long shots, the shift of objective to subjective point of view, the change of camera angles arrest the audience in the constant dynamic of optical experience, enchanted in a flow of visual spectacles. The shift of perspective expresses realism and engages audiences in the narrative as if they are moving like heroes onscreen. The cinematic images resemble the tradition of Chinese landscape painting in the Song Dynasty—the human figure—is not emphasized but minimized among the vast landscape. Usually, Chinese landscape paintings include small human figures that blend harmoniously into the vast world around them. As shown in Figure 33, man and nature interact and complement each other like the symbol of Tai-Chi, the balance of yin and yang. The small human figures are portrayed inside a temple among the vast mountain. Their dresses in red, blue and green echo the color schemes of the trees, rocks and temples.
Figure 33

Figure and Landscape

Artist: Ren Bonian (1840-1896)

Creation Year: 1866

Size: 150.7 × 69.1 cm

Ink and Colors

National Art Museum
http://www.namoc.org
In a fight scene in *Hero* located at Jiu Cai Gou, Zhang presents the aesthetics of Chinese landscape paintings (Figure 34). The compositional structure, lighting, hue, and tone in the cinematography are very much influenced by Chinese painting. “Chinese landscape aesthetics stress man-nature unity and order, and the absence of the self” (Chu). Zhang Yimou represents a distant shot of the beautiful lake. Nameless (Jet Li) stands to the right onscreen, integrating into the landscape next to the trees. Chinese characters and writing often emphasize the right side. The audience can barely see Nameless within the vast scene of nature. Such a long shot indicates the absence of the self and the unknown heroes like Nameless who devote their lives to an ideal cause.

The identical blue tone fills the whole image of the landscape, in search of a great harmony of nature and creates a serene and graceful mood to honor the death of Snow. In Figure 35, Zhang Yimou gives a panoramic and long take of the fight between Nameless and Broken Sword in the scenic landscape of Jiu Cai Gou. Though the two figures are very small, Zhang uses a deep focus as the actors fight on the water in elegant, floating positions. Meanwhile, Zhang emphasizes the gorgeous red maple leaves in the foreground, but the
Figure 35 *Hero* film still

Figure 36 *Hero* film still

Figure 37 *Hero* film still
environment is quiet and placid. The actors display their swordplay and dodge on the water gracefully as if they are dancing, doing some kind of ritual to honor the deceased Flying Snow.

Zhang Yimou employs the multiple perspectives of Chinese landscape painting in the cinematic narrative to elaborate on nature and the visual dynamics of Chinese Kungfu. To achieve his style of realism, Zhang Yimou alternates full shot, close shot, extreme close up, low angle, high angle, subjective point of view and objective point of view to maximize the visual effects as Broken Sword contests or battles on the water with Nameless. We see both heroes fight fact-to-face, make vertical drops to the surface of the water from the air, rotating or spinning, swords touching the blue water creating ripples. Then the heroes push their palms against the water to shore up their bodies deftly (Figure 36).

Shot from underneath the lake, the two heroes step and stride on the horizontal surface of the crystallized water (Figure 37). Again, from an aerial point of view, we see them chase each other like eagles and hover like dragonflies or eagles flying in the blue sky. Zhang Yimou assimilates multiple perspectives of Chinese painting into cinematic representation to enhance the sense of realism. He presents to audiences shifting focal points by alternating extreme close up, full, medium close up, crane shot, low and high angle, subjective and objective perspective, reverse shot and jump cut to create his vision. Audiences are drawn into the scenes while enjoying the art of Kungfu. The flow of bright color and intense hue in these shots coincides with the
aesthetics in Chinese folk art and Chinese Gongbi painting as shown in Ren Bonian’s work (Figure 33).

Soon after the opening scene of Nameless’ (Jet Li) seeing the Emperor, the flashback of an exciting combat between Nameless and Sky is narrated along with an old man playing Qin, an ancient oriental instrument with four strings. The others who were playing chess fled before the fight. During this “Fight at the Chess Club” (棋馆大战), Zhang presents to the audience traditional Chinese culture—Qin, Chess, Calligraphy and Painting (琴棋书画). Along with the chess and skillful duel between Nameless (Jet Li) and Sky (Donnie Yen), the setting is decorated with many ornamental elements—a blind old man playing the ancient Chinese violin in the center of the background, rain dripping off the roof, a male vocalist from Beijing Opera, and the antique Chinese architecture. All highlight the variation in the martial arts, and the chivalrous spirits of the Kungfu masters (Figure 38).

The compositional structure onscreen is neat and symmetrical, resembling the traditional Chinese paintings that emphasize space, depth and balance. Huilin Huang and Yiwen Wong in “A study on ‘Seventeen-Year’ Cinematic Aesthetics in New China” state, the art director ensures that the setting is structured in “a symmetrical pattern,” emphasizing “a multi-level
plane,” “two-dimensional and three-dimensional relationships” of the compositions, representing Chinese culture and styles (580-82). The symmetrical design of the architecture in Figure 38 reduces the tension of the fight, drawing the audience’s eyes to the beauty of the scene and appreciation of the heroic spirit rather than violence as Zhang Yimou wishes the fight between heroes to be elegant and fluid, bearing the style of Chinese painting (Momo 190).

In *Hero*, characters fight elegantly in ancient Chinese buildings, on snow white mountains and among the swirling of yellow leaves. Peter Brooks in *Body Work: Object of Desire in Modern Narrative* claims that body is the first important element in modern narrative. The narrative is often resolved with the success or failure to gain control over another’s body (5). The martial artists in *Hero* fight each other in order to get close to the emperor and kill him. Zhang Yimou conforms to the modern narrative mode with a convoluted plot to keep the audience’s interest in this postmodern era. However, he emphasizes traditional Chinese aesthetics of painting. Zhang employs different colors in his visual narration of the plot. He situates human bodies in the beautiful landscapes
with different color schemes—black, red, blue, green and white to denote the various versions of the plot as shown in Figures 39 and 40.

“Jenny Kwok argues, ‘Hero is a martial arts poem painted in color’” (Khoo). Indeed, Zhang creates his cinematic image by using colors expressively, and evolves from unreliable narration by Nameless in red and blue colors to reliable narration in white, green and black colors. The different colors red, blue, white, green and black help the audience to recognize the narrative structure and compare the different versions to find out the truth. Such a technique resembles the traditional practice of painting in China. An artist sketches in black ink with a thin brush the outline of a figure or an object and lays the opaque rice paper on the top. He/She then experiments with different color schemes to enrich or improve the painting until achieving the desired effect.

Zhang demonstrates the artistic forms of Chinese writing and calligraphy with beautiful cinematic images of different colors. He situates the major setting of Hero in a calligraphy school of Zhao, one of the countries in China’s Warring Period. The major character Nameless, played by Jet Li, travels from Country Qin to Country Zhou to visit a great martial artist, Broken Sword, to learn the secret of unbeatable swordplay created from the myth of Chinese calligraphy. The narrative revolves around Nameless’ mission either to assassinate or to spare the King of Qin based on his understanding of the myth associated with the calligraphy 矢 (sword). It is common for a filmmaker to present elaborate scenes of Chinese calligraphy and writing in the martial arts.
genre. But there has never been a Chinese film before in which a director uses Chinese calligraphy as a narrative source like Zhang Yimou in Hero.

The plot of Hero centers on Broken Sword’s use of his calligraphy experience to learn swordsmanship in order to kill Emperor Qi. He tells Nameless nineteen ways to write 剑 (sword) and is asked to explore the twentieth way to write 剑 for the inspiration of the utmost swordsmanship (Figure 41). Zhang especially conveys his message regarding the importance of Chinese writing and calligraphy in one scene: In the setting of a calligraphy school, with enormous courage, an old scholar continues teaching calligraphy despite a hailstorm of arrows shot by the Qin soldiers. The old scholar ensures his students that their writing system, the spirit of a nation, can not be eliminated even if everyone is killed. Zhang conveys a message that calligraphy is an emblem of the national tradition that cannot be replaced or destroyed.

Zhang Yimou includes images of Chinese calligraphy in many settings and scenes. When Broken Sword and Flying Snow are practicing writing in the sand box with bamboo sticks, Zhang gives close-up shots of the Chinese words they are writing. He locates the two protagonists to the right, close to the light green bamboo curtain through which Chinese calligraphy can be seen on the wall. In particular, Zhang creates a close-up shot, and fills the screen with Chinese calligraphy when Broken Sword sits in front of the art pieces meditating about the essence of Chinese calligraphy—the realm of artistic conception or the unity of spirit and the form, the artist’s pursuit of aesthetics and
philosophy. Such a close-up shot, reveals the artistic potential of Chinese writing systems (Figure 42).

In his earlier film *Raise the Red Lantern* (Chinese: 大紅燈籠高高掛, 1991), Zhang Yimou also employs Chinese calligraphy and painting in the cinematic representation. The film tells the story of a young woman Songlian (Chinese: 頌蓮, played by Gong Li) in the 1920s, who becomes one of the concubines of a wealthy man. The story reflects the extreme inequality of women in feudal China. Women were victimized as servants and slaves to men. A woman’s social status depended on her husband’s attention resulting from her obedience to please him and her productive ability for descendants. Songlian feigns pregnancy in an attempt to gain the majority of her husband’s time. Unfortunately, her fraud is discovered by other concubines. She is punished by her husband’s indifference and resentment. Songlian suffers severe trauma and becomes insane when her husband marries the fifth concubine.

*Raise the Red Lantern* received the Silver Lion for Best Director at the 1991 Venice International Film Festival. Zhang has been praised for his artistic presentation in this film. When Songlian sits on the bed waiting for her man, several red lanterns are placed above her and on both sides of the scene, creating a strong and striking color scheme. The handscrolls of painting and calligraphy hang along the wall near the bed, extending the depth of vision and enhancing the feeling of tension in Songlian, symbolizing Songlian’s further retreat into solitude and despair (Figures 43). In a scene of four concubines playing mahjong,
Figure 41 *Hero* film stills

![Hero film stills](image)

Figure 42 *Hero* film still

![Hero film still](image)

Figure 43 *Raise the Red Lantern* film still

![Raise the Red Lantern film still](image)

Figure 44 *Raise the Red Lantern* film still

![Raise the Red Lantern film still](image)
the portrait paintings on the wall decorate the cinematic image and suggest the
tension by emphasizing family legacy and authority (Figure 44). Zhang
deliberately uses Chinese painting and calligraphy as a cinematic composition,
symbol and image.

I will analyze some distinctive film titles that use Block, Seal, Clerical, and
Semi-Cursive Scripts of calligraphy and Gongbi/Xieyi paintings in their designs.
In Chen Kaige’s *Farewell My Concubine* (1992), the film title in red is strikingly
overlaid on a Chinese handscroll painting of Gongbi style under the same name
霸王别姬 (Figure 45). The Gongbi painting style expresses the tradition of
Chinese aesthetics that emphasizes symmetry and harmony. The cinematic
image centers the historic figures Xiang Yu, the King of Western Chu and his
concubine Yuji in costumes of Beijing opera, along with Block Script
calligraphy and seals on both sides. The earthy color of the rice paper and the
frame of the handscroll express an antique feel and contribute to the harmonious
pattern between all the compositional elements in the cinematic image.

This cinematic representation adapts the Chinese painting style in the
Yuan Dynasty when seals, calligraphy and image are combined in a Chinese
painting by Zhao Mengfu, the famous scholar, painter and calligrapher. In his
*Arhat in Red Robe*, the figure of Arhat, a spiritual practitioner of Buddhism, is
portrayed in a brilliant red robe, sitting on a rock in the middle ground of the
painting (Figure 46). The tree and rocks behind Arhat and the rock he sits on
resemble a stage set and suppress the illusion of three-dimensionality. The
Figure 45 *Farewell My Concubine* film still

Figure 46 *Arhat in Red Robe* (紅衣羅漢圖), by artist Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322)
Ink and colors on paper, 26 x 52 cm, Liaoning Provincial Museum

Figure 47 *Autumn Colors on the Ch’iao and Hua Mountains*, by Zhao Mengfu
Part of the handscroll, ink and color on paper, 28.4 x 90.2 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei
poem/calligraphy and seals by Emperor Qian Lung in the shaded background create a sense of depth. Zhao prefers a cruder style in his brushwork of landscape painting, focusing more on a literal laying of ground rather than organizing them in a foreground, middle ground and background. He layers middle grounds at various heights to create a sense of depth. Similarly, the Chinese title 霸王別姬 in red is centered, with subtle color change in the figures of the middle ground, and calligraphy and seals in the background to produce additional layers.

Chinese calligraphy is considered an art form of the elite in history. During the Song dynasty, “painters finally achieved a status equal to that of court officials. For the literati, painting came to be grouped with calligraphy and poetry as the trio of accomplishments suited to members of the cultural elite” (Stokstad 803). In the Song Dynasty, Chinese painters split into two groups. Some artists worked on painting three-dimensional objects by creating the illusion of perspective and space. Others started combining calligraphy with artwork to create ink paintings that emphasized the inner spirit of the individuals in the painting. The paintings of Song Dynasty (960-1279) favored abstract, implied meanings rather than direct expressions, painting skills matured considerably, and the realistic style was in full blossom.

In the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368), artists started including poems in their paintings. Zhao Mengfu, (Chinese: 趙孟頫, 1254 - 1322), one of the four master painters in the Yuan Dynasty, advocated the mixture of old tradition into
calligraphy and painting to create the Yuan style. These poems, usually short, were done in calligraphy, harmonizing the three different types of artwork in artistic combination as illustrated in Figure 47, a masterpiece by Zhao Mengfu. In the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), many painters preferred expressionist style and indulged in painting solely for personal pleasure. It was said that a painting would not be regarded as a painting without poetry and calligraphy. In his *Autumn Colors on the Ch’iao and Hua Mountains*, Zhao Mengfu drew the autumn landscape of the mountains decorated with seals, poetry and calligraphy (Figure 47). Calligraphy, poems and seals take up nearly half space of the composition in this painting.

Shen Zhou, a Ming artist, also combines poetry, calligraphy and seals in the landscape painting. “The mountains and slopes were first modeled with hemp-fiber texture strokes and tinted with light ink, to which layers of dark ink were added to build up the slopes. The mists and the coloring of the mountains are particularly luminous and well done. A waterfall plunges hundreds of feet, the torrent's waters becoming light and gentle below” (*National Palace Museum, Taipei*). The texture strokes are calligraphic, reflecting Zhou's own innovation. The work brims with clarity, ease, and calm complementing the inscriptions and seals. Calligraphy is part of a painting and an
image in Chinese visual culture. Many contemporary artists such as Qi Bai Shi include calligraphy, seals and poetry in their paintings as graphic compositions.

Figure 49: *Eagle Standing on Pine Tree with Four-character Couplet in Seal Script* by Qi Bai Shi (Chinese: 齊白石, 1864-1957)

The work of *Eagle Standing on Pine Tree with Four-character Couplet in Seal Script*, consists of a painting measuring 266 cm by 100 cm and a pair of calligraphy scrolls each measuring 264.5 cm by 65.8 cm. It is said to be Qi's largest work.

The painting was sold by Beijing-based China Guardian on May 23, 2011 for 425.5 million yuan (65 million U.S. dollars), a record high for contemporary and modern Chinese paintings and calligraphy.

The high auction price was, in the history of the Chinese mainland art market, second only to ancient calligrapher Huang Tingjian's hand scroll "*Pillar Ming,*" which was sold for 436.8 million yuan in 2009 (*English.xinhuanet.com*).
Seals have always been a part of the composition of Chinese painting and calligraphy since it became popular “in the late Chou [1046-256 B.C.] and the Ch’ in [221-206 B.C.] periods” (Silbergeld 11). Usually carved in stone, jade, or wood, a seal serves the purpose to “certify authorship or ownership” and bring “honor to the work” of the artist. Art historians also use seals as an important tool to authenticate works of art” (Silbergeld 11). Frequently, filmmakers employ one or two of the art forms of calligraphy, engraved seals or poetry in cinematic representation. Hong Kong director Woo-ping Yuen presents his film entitled *The Miracle Fighters* (1982) in the frame of a seal (Figure 50). Similarly, *Little Shaolin Monks* (Bai Haibin, 2007) is engraved in a seal with graceful strokes of the Chinese characters in Oracle Bone style decorated with character 禅 (Zen) in black seal with red ink stroke in contrast to the color scheme of the film title. Next to the seal is the title written in the modern square style (Figure 51).

Artists usually carve their literary names and press the seals with red sealing paste on the finished artwork. The round, oval and square shapes of seals made of good quality stones and inscribed with various fonts of characters become collections of the literati. The English title *Chivalrous Legend* is written above a brush stroke like a highlight of calligraphy 侠盗正传 (Yeung Ming Choi, 1999). Inside the stroke is the English title. The film takes place during a Japanese occupation of Taiwan in the late 19th century. 廖添丁 (Jimmy Lin), the name of the hero is presented in the cinematic image as an impression of a
red seal that indicates a story about him, a twelve-year-old boy, who takes
refuge in a Peking opera company and learns Kungfu to rob the rich and help
the poor (Figure 52).

In *The Three Smiles* (Yueh Feng, 1969), the Chinese title is written from
the right to the left. The character 笑 (*smile*) looks hieroglyphic as if it is the
smiling face of a girl. The cinematic image is composed of calligraphy in Clerical
Script and Chinese figure painting of Free-hand/Xieyi style. The colors are light
and brushstrokes simple (Figure 53). *The Story of Lotus* (Qi Jian, 2003) is
actually a piece of calligraphy by China’s famous artist Meilin Han (Chinese: 韩
美林) with his name and seal (Figure 54). The film title is drawn with thick
brushstrokes of Block Script. The title in red and his name in white harmonize
with the seal print in the lower right of the frame.

The film title of *White Dragon* (Wilson Yip, 2004) is composed of
calligraphy 小白龙 (little white dragon) in Semi-Cursive Script superimposed
over a painting of a dragon (Figure 55). The design brings attention to the film’s
theme of a white dragon who teaches a princess Kungfu. It is a Hong Kong
Kungfu and comedy film about a princess in love with a nobleman. The princess
acquires martial arts from The White Dragon by accident and kills the assassin.
The Chinese characters 战鼓 in the title of *The Drummer* (Kenneth Bi, 2007)
resemble round drums (Figure 56). The film narrates a story about Sid, a troubled
boy raised in a Hong Kong triad family who flees to Taiwan and joins a group of
Zen drummers. The mesmerizing art of drum practice and austere way of life
transforms him into an extraordinary young man. These film title designs emphasize and connect to the narrative themes and characters.

As inscribed in Chinese painting, the picturesque quality of calligraphy is often used as an ornate composition in a cinematic image. In The Last Song: Stories of the Han Dynasty (Lin Chao Xiang and Wei-Han Tao, 2004), the phrase in bright red calligraphy “大风起兮” (a gust of wind arrived) overlapping Chinese calligraphy in grey against a black backdrop, draws the attention of audiences. Characters in columns and vertical lines in white on the dark screen present an ancient feel and a tragic atmosphere (Figure 57). The story depicts Liu’s investigation into the truth of Xiang Ru’s death. In 202 B.C., a protracted war broke out between Liu Bang, King of Han and Xiang Ru, King of Chu. The war ended with the suicide of King of Chu by the Wu Jiang River. Liu Bang then became the first emperor of the Han Dynasty.

Director Ping He presents Wheat (2009), a Chinese historical drama about the women left behind after their husbands are sent to war during the Warring States period (475 -221 B.C.). Two men escape from the army and hide in the wheat. Shot in Mongolia, the director paints a panoramic landscape of lush wheat meadows and narrates a simple drama about simple people. One of the striking images about the film is its title sequence. With extreme close-ups of the wheat waving under the breeze out of focus onscreen, the two characters 

麦 (wheat) and 田 (field) are represented in calligraphy like the swaying wheat in the wind and the square field full of grains (Figure 58). The director and title
Figure 50 *The Miracle Fighters* film still

![Image of The Miracle Fighters film still]

Figure 51 *Little Shao Lin Monks* film still

![Image of Little Shao Lin Monks film still]

Figure 52 *Chivalrous Legend* film still

![Image of Chivalrous Legend film still]
Figure 53 *The Three Smiles* film still

![The Three Smiles film still](image)

Figure 54 *The Story of Lotus* film still

![The Story of Lotus film still](image)

Figure 55 *The White Dragon* film still

![The White Dragon film still](image)
Figure 56 *The Drummer* film still

![The Drummer film still](image)

Figure 57 *The Last Song: Stories of the Han Dynasty* film still

![The Last Song film still](image)

Figure 58 *Wheat* film still

![Wheat film still](image)
designer here again illustrate the hieroglyphic features of Chinese character and the art of calligraphy.

1.3 Optical Routes in Chinese Painting and Calligraphy

Influence Camera Techniques

Chinese calligraphy and painting have had a great influence on cinematic representation. Inspired by the aesthetics of painting and calligraphy, Chinese filmmakers apply artistic modes of painting and calligraphy in title, credit, setting and even camera movement to enrich the cinematic narration. The right-to-left viewing of a handscroll painting or calligraphy, especially ancient written Chinese right-to-left on bamboo pieces vertically as shown in Little Big Soldier (Sheng Ding, 2010), influences filmmakers in their camera movements (Figure 59). I will discuss Zhang Yimou’s synthesizing optical routes of Chinese painting and calligraphy into his camera techniques in Hero (2002). I will also mention cinematic images in other films influenced by the right-to-left or left-to-right ways of Chinese calligraphy/writing.
Each Chinese character takes up a square block in space. Traditionally, Chinese is written vertically in columns going from top to bottom and ordered from right to left, with each new column starting to the left of the preceding one. Naturally, a handscroll of calligraphy, the oldest known portable format used by Chinese artists, is written from right to left and should be viewed in this order of direction. When audiences unroll the handscroll, they look at it as if they are reading a book. Seen this way, handscroll painting has a cinematic effect like the unfolding of a narrative. It is said that viewing a Chinese handscroll painting is similar to traveling down a river, with new landscapes opening up gradually.

Handscrolls may be very long, but they are not meant to be viewed or unrolled completely at one time. The left hand unrolls the scroll to a length of approximately 20 inches. After the unrolled section is viewed, the right hand rolls up the scroll as the left hand unrolls another section for viewing. Jerome Silbergeld describes, “The painting was viewed from right to left, as one reads in Chinese, unrolling a bit at a time from the roller and transferring the excess to a loose roll temporarily maintained around the stretcher on the right. About one arm’s length was exposed at a time for viewing” (13). As the handscroll unrolls, the narrative or the journey progresses. Zhang Yimou in Hero makes a great effort to exhibit this feature of visual route in Chinese painting and calligraphy. He frames his camera with pans from the right to the left in many scenes.

Zhang paints his cinematic images in the tradition of Chinese visual arts. He employs the camera techniques, especially pans, to reflect the right-to-left
horizontal writing in Chinese calligraphy. In Figures 60 and 61, Nameless (Jet Li) and the female character Flying Snow are staged to direct the audience’s eyes to look from the right to the left. In Figure 62, Flying Snow charges towards Nameless from the right to the left, directing the audience’s gaze in the right-to-left route resembling traditional Chinese calligraphy and handscroll painting. We can also examine the details in the painting both from the left to the right or vice versa. Calligraphy in modern times is written from left to right horizontally like English. The double optical routes (left-to-right and right-to-left) in Chinese calligraphy provide filmmakers with a flexible mode of cinematic representation.

In *Hero*, in the fight between Nameless and Flying Snow, the camera pans from right to left first as Flying Snow charges towards Nameless, then left to right on Nameless rushing towards Flying Snow. Likewise, in the fighting scene in Jiu Cai Gou as shown earlier in Figures 35 to 37, the camera pans from right to left and then left to right when Nameless fights Broken Sword on the beautiful lake. Instead of zooms or other movements, the camera panning from left to right when Nameless charges at Long Sky in the Chess House, and then right to left as Long Sky fights back at Nameless during “Fight at the Chess Club” (棋馆大战), resembling a handscroll of figure painting and a landscape painting. The camera
pans of right-to-left and left-to-right are also shown in the dazzling fight among the yellow leaves when Moon battles Flying Snow to avenge the death of her master Broken Sword.

In Figure 63, Moon is sucked into the gust produced by Flying Snow’s force of swordplay, spinning from right to left in the air along with the yellow leaves. As shown in Figure 64, Moon dashes towards Flying Snow from right to left. The two woman warriors fight gracefully, jumping and floating in the air like ballet dancers. In Figure 65, Flying Snow’s gaze guides the audience to look from right to left. She is staged a little right of center, her eyes looking towards Moon on the left, calm and static among the mobile yellow leaves. The reverse optical route of right-to-left and left-to-right technique enhances the dynamic motion in the martial arts fights, and captures the beauty and grace of the action between the two actresses in red flowing costumes among yellow trees and under the blue sky. Zhang Yimou has made a great effort to display the optical routes in Chinese writing and handscroll painting/calligraphy in his film. He adapts Chinese visual culture into filmic narrative.

The right-to-left visual route of hand-scroll painting and left-to-right horizontal writing of modern calligraphy are applied by other filmmakers as well. In the credit sequences, the Chinese characters of the film title 倚天屠龙记 (Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre 2, Chu Yuan, 1978) written in bold red brush strokes are in the order of right to left (Figure 66). The use of Semi-Cursive
Script complements the simplicity of the painting. The Chinese title is also displayed vertically in black ink calligraphy in a top-to-bottom manner with the credits. After the title, the camera pans from right to left along a long hand-scroll painting about the story’s historical setting and plot. A voiceover introduces the narrative background and interprets the painting.

The figures and objects in the credit sequences are painted with crude strokes against a white backdrop. Such graphic art of Free-hand brushwork is associated with Chinese traditional folk art, representing a tale of historical Wuxia legend. The images drawn are simple like the illustrations in picture books for children. Written Chinese both in horizontal order and vertical manner gives artists flexibility and variety in cinematic images like 倚天屠龙记. Another example is the title sequence of Fists and Guts or 一胆二力三功夫 (Lau Kar-Wing, 1979). The title designer gives a long shot of the hero walking on the mountain. The Chinese title 一胆二力三功夫, meaning "One Courage, Two Strength, Three Kungfu," is shown in horizontal order from right to left with an extreme close-up, then zoomed out, overlapped by the title in vertical order with extreme close-up shots (Figure 67). The title in horizontal order disappears along with the English title while the title in vertical order zooms out, creating a dual effect of vision. The calligraphy in red is written in thick brushstrokes filled with strength.

The drama 老鼠爱上猫 (Cat and Mouse, 2003) by Hong Kong director Gordon Chan, starring Andy Lau, begins exactly with a long Gongbi handscroll
Figure 66 *Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre 2* film stills (Right-to-Left View in Row)
Figure 67 *Fists and Guts* film stills
painting with calligraphy introducing the credits and synopsis along with a voiceover (Figure 68). Set in the Song Dynasty, the court officer and martial artist Zhan Zhou (Andy Lau) spots a conspiracy about assassinating the upright Judge Bao. In an effort to protect Bao, Zhan teams up with a young girl disguised as a man whom he falls in love with. The Gongbi style of the handscroll painting in the title sequences resembles traditional paintings, with refined brushwork and delicate color. Such images impart the feeling of nostalgia to the film as well as indicate that the narrative is set in ancient times.

In Chan’s film, the audience’s eyes are directed from right to left as the camera pans steadily, showing the delicacy of the figures and landscapes. Different from Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre 2 (Yuen Chor, 1978), this film title 老鼠爱上猫 locates unconventionally at the last part of the scroll, implying that the synopsis ends as the painting is completely unrolled while suggesting the starting point of the actual cinematic narration. “On a handscroll, a painting was generally preceded by a panel giving the work’s title and often followed by a long panel bearing colophons—inscriptions related to the work, such as poems in its praise or comments by its owners over the centuries” (Stokstad 806). Filmmakers transform the traditional style of Chinese handscroll painting to structure the narrative in an interesting way.

The right-to-left visual tradition in a handscroll of Chinese painting and calligraphy is often represented through camera techniques during the opening sequences. Beginning with a serial of right-to-left shots in Voyage of Emperor
Figure 68 *Cat and Mouse* film stills (right-to-left view)
Chien Lung or 乾隆下扬州 (Li Han-Hsiang, 1978), the camera tracks the watchman who strikes the gong, to tell time and to warn against fire during his patrol. The camera pans from the right to the left displaying the horse cart running from right to left on the street. Court officials are summoned into the palace, the emperor and his concubines, servants and guides walking on the courtyard, the royal cart and troops are all heading somewhere, from the right to the left. After the film title 乾隆下扬州, the camera shows the royal troops marching from left to right to indicate a change of direction, from the royal palace towards Yangzhou, a beautiful city known for its merchants, poets, painters and scholars in history (Figure 69). Afterwards, the camera follows the right-to-left view again. The direction of the camera movement denotes a significance of change of space.

Likewise, in The Lord of Hangzhou (杭州王爷, Yong-Qiang Qian, 1997), the camera frames the cinematic images from right to left in the opening sequences. The camera pans to the right steadily and smoothly, giving audiences a pleasant journey of the famous scenic spot of West Lake in China. Audiences are presented the picturesque landscape of West Lake, the famous “Three Ponds Mirroring the Moon,” and the royal highness with his sister, enjoying the beautiful scenery and the poetic sentiment of a landscape. The cinematic images are consistent and harmonious. The camera pans from the right to the left, showing West Lake section by section as if we are viewing a landscape handscroll (Figure 70). Such a camera technique of right-to-left panning is also
illustrated in the credit sequences of a Taiwan Kungfu film 一夫當關 (The Invisible Sword, Hsu Tseng Hung, 1971). The camera begins with right-to-left pans of a panoramic painting in classic style with white credits, displaying a wide, all-encompassing view of a historical event (Figure 71).

**Figure 69 Voyage of Emperor Chien Lung film stills**

(Right-to-Left View in Row)
Figure 70 *The Lord of Hangzhou* film stills (Right-to-Left View in Row)

Figure 71 *The Invincible Sword* film stills (Right-to-Left View in Row)
In 2005, the prestigious Hong Kong director Stanley Tong released his action-fantasy adventure *Myth* (神话) starring the world-renowned actor Jackie Chan. The narrative combines fairy tale, legend, adventure, action, romance, comedy, and sci-fi elements. The archeologist Jack (Jackie Chan) is obsessed with mysterious dreams in his past life as a warrior in ancient China who was sent to escort the emperor’s concubine (played by Hee-Seon Kim from Korea) to the palace. Tong uses a left-to-right track and pan as the story begins with Jack’s troops in the golden desert going to meet the emperor’s concubine. The

**Figure 72 Myth film stills (Left-to-Right View in Row)**
left-to-right camera techniques display images of vast landscapes and colors with the graceful calligraphy of larger credits in violet, smaller characters and English version in black (Figure 72).

Some Chinese filmmakers place paintings and calligraphy in a left-to-right direction at certain points in their films, while at other locations, they use the optical route of right-to-left. At the beginning of a Chinese musical *Ganglamedo* (Chinese: 岡拉梅朵, Dai Wei, 2008), audiences see beautiful paintings of Buddha and an extreme close-up of a thin ink brush, drawing from top to bottom, left to right with fine lines of patterns on a light reddish-violet canvas. The camera dissolves into Buddha’s portrait and reverses to the drawing. The brush outlines a female’s delicate fingers holding something and her pretty ear. The brush continues to paint the lipstick on her little smiling mouth. Then comes a long shot of an old man drawing on the canvas, facing to the left, directing audience’s gaze from the right to the left. After some shots of the girl in the painting on the vast Tibetan plateau, the camera directs audience’s eyes from the right to the left again by a medium shot of a finished painting—a lovely Tibetan girl standing elegantly towards the left between vases of flowers.

With the melodious music of *Ganglamedo*, the film title in Tibetan language is superimposed on the blue sky, and then dissolves onto an elegant dark-red screen with title of Chinese Han characters and English title in smaller fonts written from left to right (Figure 73). “Ganglamedo” means snow lotus in Tibet; an impeccably white flower blooming on the plateau despite the cold. It is
considered a sacred flower in Tibet that brings peace and love. The film includes powerful audio-visual effect in presenting the beauty of the Tibetan landscape and musical culture along with a touching love story. In the pre-title sequences, the consistent brush on the painting is immersed with Anzha’s profound affection and life-long reminiscence for his missing bride.

The title designer imparts a holy feeling to the girl in the painting as well as the traditional style and delicate brush work of Chinese painting. Many Chinese paintings rely on fine lines like those used in sketches or drawings. “In Chinese painting we are usually confronted with described lines, painted by a brush of visible width and thus having its own two-dimensional shape, an inner surface area and outer edges. Moreover, lines were usually painted with black ink, and color was commonly limited to interior areas” (Silbergeld 16). This painting, serving as a prologue, leads the audience to a tale of mysterious romance.

The graphic title in Tibetan language introduces the narrative. It depicts a Han Chinese singer who becomes popular for singing “Ganglamedo” but loses her voice. She is enchanted by the story of a Tibetan girl of the same name as the song, who could sing this traditional folk song magically and elegantly. The Han singer then embarked on a wonderful journey to Tibet, to the magical lake Namucua. On the way, she met Anzha, a Tibetan musician. They teamed up and travelled, eventually, finding Ganglamedo, the girl in the painting. Ganglamedo is Tibet's flower, a painting, a song, a bar, a woman's name. Dai Wei paints a poignant and moving love story on the cinematic screen. The title design is
impressive. In the English title, the first letter $G$ in small size and the second letter $A$ in large size resemble the first character of the Tibetan title. The calligraphy in Block Script complements the graphic Tibetan words with angular strokes.

Figure 73 Ganglamado film stills

The right-to-left pan also displayed in a blast scene in the American crime-thriller Swordfish (Dominic Sena, 2001), starring John Travolta, Hugh Jackman, Halle Berry, Don Cheadle and Sam Shepard, is very impressive. In the narrative, Gabriel Shear (John Travolta) works for Black Cell, an organization headed by a senator to undertake retaliation against terrorists who attack America. Shear threatens to kill the hostages if the government does not comply with his demands. He ordered his men to tie bombs onto a woman hostage. After the
terrible explosion of bombs tied on the woman hostage, the camera pans from right to left consistently for about 30 seconds, tracking the realistic continuum of the blast destruction on the street; very descriptive and powerful (Figure 74).

**Figure 74 Swordfish film stills (Right-to-left view in row)**
Chapter Two: English Calligraphy and Writing as Cinematic Representation

Fonts convey an emotion without having to say the words.

—Neville Brody

Andy Ellison, in the Graphic and Design Department at Staffordshire University, offers a brief history and discusses font classification, software, and the revolutionized typography brought about by advances in computer technology in The Complete Guide to Digital Type. Ellison points out, “The digital age has brought with it a newfound freedom in typography, allowing typographic design to push the boundaries of legibility and visual esthetics” (22).

In recent years, with the advancement of technology, many Western filmmakers have made great efforts to synthesize the textual into the representational in their productions. English writing can be representational, pictorial, artistic, symbolic and rhetorical as well. Like Chinese calligraphy, English alphabets and words convey graphic and rhetoric properties of a narrative by various illustration techniques.

In this chapter, I will explore the graphic, symbolic, and artistic features of English lettering in cinematic representation. I will examine the ways filmmakers use English letters to compose cinematic images to convey meaning. I will focus on the fonts, shapes and colors of English letters in Bulletproof Monk (Paul Hunter, 2003), Kiss of the Spider Woman (Hector Babenco, 1985), Catch Me If You Can (Stephen Spielberg, 2002), Smokin’ Aces 2 Assassins’ Ball (P.J. Pesce,
2010), *Dark Crystal* (Jim Henson and Frank Oz, 1982), *The Secret Life of Bees* (Gina Prince-Bythewood, 2008), *Across the Hall* (Alex Merkin, 2009), *Inkheart* (Iain Softly, 2008), *Steal a Pencil for Me* (Michèle Ohayon, 2007), *Epic Movie* (Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer, 2007), *The Ghost Writer* (Roman Polanski, 2010), *Daybreakers* (Michael Spierig and Peter Spierig, 2009), and *Elsewhere* (Nathan Hope, 2009). I will discuss filmmakers’ camera techniques and ways of integrating English text/calligraphy into cinematic images. English letters can hint at a theme or provide pictorial and artistic clues and symbols for the structure of a filmic narrative.

Western Calligraphy, the art of writing Roman letters has been a vital part of the design for movie titles and credit sequences. The choice of letter font and color is intended to express or evoke a particular idea or emotion to the audience. For example, the smooth curves and elegant strokes of handwriting style can portray a classic beauty. The font of a handwriting script may reflect the sentiment of the protagonist. Each font stands out for its unique shape and personality. The meaning of the words therefore can be partially affected by the font besides its color. Paul C. Gutjahr, editor of *Illuminating Letters: Typography and Literary Interpretation*, describes that typography is “the means to the message of a text,” “a means whose own semiotics must be deciphered if one is to understand the message fully” (45).

English letters have gone through a remarkable innovation in the cinematic art of title presentation and credit composition. Usually, art designers begin with
the title, production company, cast and director in the title sequence. Others put the title or cast at the end credit. Many drama and action films tend to overlap a title sequence with an opening sequence. Some films display the titles, directors and main actors/actresses both in the opening and end credit sequences. Film critics recognize Saul Bass’ innovative contribution to the art of title sequence. Pre-Saul Bass title cards are used in the opening title credits—static texts superimposed on a plain background. Fonts are simple or classic like the typography in the early silent film *Intolerance* (D.W. Griffith, 1916). Though the title cards are decorative, texts are static and unanimated (Figure 75). Title cards are also used to convey dialogue in silent films.

Melis Inceer, a former student in the Department of Visual Arts, University of Pennsylvania published in *Penn Visual Studies* “An Analysis of the Opening Credit Sequence in Film.” Inceer puts the timeline and characteristic of title sequence into five categories: 1. Pre-credit Era; 2. 1920s; 3. 1930s-mid 1950s; 4. 1955-1970s; 5. 1980-Present based on historical and technological factors that transform the design of title sequence significantly. In the late 19th century, there was no opening credit sequence. Then in the 1920s, title cards were used as still images in the film. Title cards were not elaborate but lines of plain text or simple text with hand-drawn border and a still image. Usually, a single image title card with simple printed text or pattern of graph were photographed and integrated into the film. This technique was also used throughout the film to narrate the story or make a commentary by the director in
Figure 75 *Intolerance* (D.W. Griffith, 1916, silent film) film stills

Figure 76 *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Robert Mulligan, 1962) film stills

http://americannight.wordpress.com/2011/03/02/film-design-steve-frankfurt
silent cinema, such as *Intolerance* (D.W. Griffith, 1916, Figure 75). During the 1930s-mid 1950s, graphic languages were used to associate special typefaces with specific genres such as romance drawn with a pink ribbon. Title sequence design was less boring due to the advance of cell animation by Max Fleischer and Walt Disney in this period. For example, Large upper case of letters S and W in lining and white displayed interesting fonts on top of a film still of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (David Hand, 1937).

In the 1955-1970s Post-Saul Bass Period, the style of static graphic design in poster format was prevalent. Animated texts and images were incorporated into the title sequence. With larger budget and Technicolor, Hollywood designed more sophisticated opening credits to lure and engage the audience. More movies had their title credits at the end instead. “Bass not only reinvented the film title sequence but he also turned it into an art form…Each credit sequence that Bass designed was a short film in and of itself that set the tone and prepared the viewer for what was to come in the subsequent film” (Inceer). For example, in Alfred Hitchcock’s films *North by Northwest* (1959) and *Psycho* (1960), the opening title sequences created by Saul Bass, contained animated text, featuring credits that flew in from off-screen, and finally faded out into the film itself.

During the 1980s, different styles, techniques and methods emerged with improvement of technology, digitalization and special effects. Texts in the credit design appeared more graphic and faster-paced. Credits were not merely
superimposed on a plain background but combined with graphs and images. One outstanding example is *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Robert Mulligan, 1962) designed by Stephen Frankfurt. The title sequences display a little girl’s hands opening a cigar box in which holds her toy and art supply. The title appears as her hand is drawing it with a crayon. As she hums a lullaby, the camera pans from left to right of her toys with credits in white block letters. Her lifting of the crayons trigger a marble rolling towards the right to show a drawing of a bird that leads her to the wonder of life. Stephen Frankfurt displays a lyric and dynamic credit sequence (Figure 76). Other examples are *Walk on the Wild Side* (Edward Dmytryk, 1962) by Saul Bass, *The Dead Zone* (David Cronenberg, 1983) by Wayne Fitzgerald, and *SE7EN* (David Fincher, 1995) by Kyle Cooper. Despite the increased sophistication in recent years in title design, the texts in the above title sequences are simple writing or still typography integrated into props and images on the background.

II.1 The Graphic Features and Rhetoric of English Alphabets

With the rapid progress of technology, English letters are more representational and rhetorical in recent cinema. In the opening credit sequences of *Bulletproof Monk* directed by Paul Hunter in 2003, the letter *M* is in the shape of a pupa and new-born butterfly; very graphic and expressive (Figure 77). The red letter *M* in *Monk*, resembling the transparent pupa, indicates that the Nameless Monk is enlivened to be the new scroll keeper. In the opening
sequences, with a rhythmic shake, the beautifully shining orange butterfly frees itself from the pupa on the rope of a bridge and flutters a circular route towards the two Tibetan monks who are contesting their martial arts skills on the bridge.

The Nameless Monk (Yun-Fat Chow) passes the Kungfu test and is appointed to be the new guardian to protect an ancient scroll. This ancient scroll is believed to have unlimited power. The red letter $M$ in the shape of the pupa indicates that Nameless Monk is reborn and invigorated like the new-born butterfly roaming freely in the sky.

English letters are artistic and decorative in cinematic image as well. In *Bulletproof Monk*, the extreme close-up of the rope emphasizes thickness and strength. The rope forms a cross in the center with its solid brown color and roughly-woven texture in contrast to the pupa in $M$ shaped with a light hue, transparent and fine lines. The red English title in the center balances horizontally with the cross of the rope. The letter $M$ mimics the pupa and the butterfly forming a harmonious ninety-degree triangle. The stability of a triangle contrasts to the movement of the rope, easing the tension and shaking of the hanging pupa, drawing audiences’ attention to the shiny butterfly, the symbol of the protagonist, a capable Monk who defeats the Nazi hunting for the sacred
scroll. The out-of-focus background gives an unrealistic touch and fits well in the genre of fantasy and legendary narrative. The three letters O in the title are perfect round circles, ornate and symbolic. They suggest the success and fulfillment of the three scroll keepers in guarding the ancient scroll (the old Monk, the Nameless Monk played by Chow Yun-Fat and the young boy Kar).

In another example, the title letters are compared to the characters’ mental and emotional transition at a rhetorical level in addition to the synecdoche of spider’s claws at a representational level. In the credit sequences of *Kiss of The Spider Woman* (1985), director Hector Babenco uses extreme close-up shots of the title letters in white and grey on the black screen. The straight and curvy strokes of letters associate with spider’s claws (Figure 78). The letters in three different shades of grey and white overlap, making ornate patterns with a three-dimensional look, moving from left to right with credits and film title in white on the top. While showing the representational feature of the Roman letters, the filmmaker follows the Western convention of left-to-right optical route.

The film depicts the conflict between personal emotions and desire in the relationship of two mates in a South American prison. Molina, a homosexual,
recalls his favorite movie to pass the time while Valentin, a Marxist revolutionary, criticizes his use of fantasy to escape reality. But later, Valentin is intrigued by Molina’s tale and falls in love with him, while Molina agrees to assist in Valentin’s political activity. The multilayer title letters in grey indicate the transformation of both of the characters as well as the woman changed into a panther in the tale told by Molina. As the camera pans from left to right slowly and steadily, the letters in different grey colors combine, coalesce, jumble and mingle as if we are witnessing the transformation of the protagonists in the filmic narrative. The title letters are symbolic and graphic.

English letters can be pictographic. New technology and new media rewrite spectators’ experiences in cinema. Digital images on the screen can be animated or dynamic. Cinematic images can be three-dimensional. Filmmakers use the latest HD video cameras and CGI technology to blend live-action sequences and digitally captured performances in a three-dimensional world as shown in The Last Airbender (James Cameron, 2009). Filmmakers have greater control of special effects in producing spectacular images. Alphabet letters and words are no longer static texts onscreen, but animated and graphic artwork. The line, line direction, shape, size and color of English texts can be extended and transformed into images, pictures and graphs.

For example, in the credit sequences of Catch Me If You Can (Stephen Spielberg, 2002), English letters are not only part of the compositional design of the cinematic image, but also the part of the picture drawing (Figure 79). From
the strokes of letter $L$ and $d$ hangs the yellow arrow sign hooked by letter $n$, directed at the human figure of Frank Abagnale Sr, a check forger played by Leonardo DiCaprio who leans on a stroke of his name in $p$. The image is simple but well-designed with a smart play of the letters. The curvy strokes of $m$ and $n$ form the chairs where Carl Hanratty (Tom Hanks), an FBI bank fraud agent is seated. The stretching $H$ and $k$ in the center balance the structure of the whole image, and highlight the actor’s name Tom Hanks.

In the whole credit sequences, English letters are the main elements in the sketch of pictures such as pool ladder, lane line, bookshelf, elevator wire, light hook, door frame and rope. The art designers use letters to structure and compose the cinematic images. This style of sequence design is seen in early James Bond film credits. The innovative animation of letters demonstrates that English texts can be part of a drawing and part of a picture, which is graphic and artistic. The art designer applies the dynamic and ever-changing quality of curved lines in $m$, $n$, and the more static quality of the straight lines in English letters $L$, $P$, $K$ to construct the cinematic images.

Influenced by Piet Mondrian, the creative designers for *Catch Me If You Can*, Kuntzel+Deygas, draw animated images with alphabet letters in pink, orange and green in addition to the primary colors of red, blue and yellow. Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), the Dutch painter, was an important contributor to the non-representational art movement “Neo-Plasticism.” This artistic style consisted of white background, upon which was painted a grid of vertical and
horizontal black lines and the three primary colors—red, blue and yellow. Mondrian’s works appear abstract but compact and pictorially harmonious. Inspired by Mondrian’s style, Kunyzel+Deygas benefit from the ever-extendable straight line to form the traffic lanes, elevator wires and light hooks. Similar to Piet Mondrian’s preference for using vertical and horizontal black lines and three primary colors of red, blue and yellow in his abstract painting, audiences see lines in the credit sequences of Catch Me If You Can extending all the way to the edge of the screen, turn and shape forms, and create spatial and temporal changes in different bright hues of blue, yellow, orange, red, pink and green. Each image features aesthetic balance and smooth rhythm with lines, geometric shapes and proper relationship of graphics and space. Such cinematic images of color simplicity and funny animation impress audiences emotionally and aesthetically.
In the recent production *Smokin’ Aces 2 Assassins’ Ball* (2010) directed by P.J. Pesce, the end credits are written with painted brushes in garish colors of diamond blue, black, yellow and light brown surrounded by ornate texts of the same hue. In the two images as shown in Figure 80, English words are arranged neatly with proper space either on the top or at the bottom. The two blue drips in the first frame break the monotonous layout, visually consistent with the circular font of Courier New in the upper and lower plane.

The bigger size font in blue bears a graphic function to contrast the smaller credit in black Copperplate Gothic Bold. The light blue painterly stroke spread to the frame edge, contrasted with the dark blue, creates a strong focal point in this title credit. In the second image, the letters are heavily ornate in light brown as if they are stamped or painted on the canvas. Text and color are the only compositional elements of these cinematic images. The artistic strokes of letters appeal to the audience’s eyes aesthetically. The similar structures with a casual horizontal stroke in the middle resemble the patterns symmetrically as if they are a set of abstract paintings of the landscape—blue clouds on a dark night and the
withered maple leaves on the soil in a deep forest at dawn, mysterious and risky. If we frame the two images and hang them on the wall, viewed from a distance, they will be artistic pieces of abstract paintings. Therefore, English letters can be images.

Another example is the title image of *The Dark Crystal* (1982) directed by Jim Henson and Frank Oz. This animation illustrates a fantastic tale located in Thra, a planet that had three suns. Along with the brilliant artwork of puppetry, the graphic design is lavish and exquisite with an emphasis on details and shades. The English letters in the title resemble a piece of purple crystal. The three words *THE DARK CRYSTAL* are arranged tactfully in top-to-bottom sequence, forming a replica of the purple crystal on its left (Figure 81). Each purple letter is framed in yellow to outline the text, and fabricate the component and structure of the crystal as well. The yellow-purple complementary hue and the lighting on the outline of each letter create a focal point and suggest the shiny nature of a rock crystal.

In the narrative, the crystal cracked and two races formed, but a shard of the dark crystal is missing. The evil race Skesis will not end their power to rule the planet until the prophecy of the crystal is restored at the moment when the
three suns join. The chief of the wise race Mystics asks Jen, his adopted son to find the missing piece of the crystal and save their world. The words of the title designed like the dark crystal can be interpreted as the missing shard. The letters $D$ and $C$ display larger size and their dynamic weight on the left. The strokes of $D$ and $C$ are curvy like a butterfly with colorful wings, comprising the rest of the letters in the title. Seemingly, the title or the shard, like the butterfly, dances towards the left to join the crystal. The English letters not only resemble the appearance of the crystal but also represent the essence of the shard and Mystics’ spirit to defeat the evil and keep peace. Metaphorically, the alphabets in the title indicate the shard, a symbol of the true power of the dark crystal to restore peace and world order, to save the wise nation and eliminate the evil race.

Likewise, in the film title *The Secret Life of Bees* (Gina Prince-Bythewood, 2008), English alphabet letters make images—line drawings of lovely bees (Figure 82). The slim, fluid yellow lines depict the buzzing bees that fly back and forth making “S” turns, circles, fluttering and dancing in their secret paradise. The queen bee depositing her larvae, represented by the bigger letter $B$, runs across the hive and climbs over worker bees illustrated by the script style of the letters *ees*. Line art illustrates the simple shape and structure of the image by distinctive straight and curved lines on a (usually) plain background without graduation of shade (darkness) or hue (color) to represent a two-dimensional or three-dimensional object. Sometimes artists use lines of colors to enhance an image.
Line art emphasizes form and outline over color, shading and texture. Therefore, we can perceive the letter B as the simple sketch or an abstract mode of a bee since representation is not merely a copy of the object, but illustration of its personality and spirit. The simple sketch of the title against a black backdrop enhances the mystery of bees. English letters in simple lines, however, indicate that things are not as simple as they seem; which resonates with the theme of the narrative. Set in South Carolina in 1964, the story tells how a fourteen-year old girl escapes from her abusive father and takes a journey to search for her late mother’s past. She finally understands that life is more complicated than it appears.

The credit sequence designers of Across the Hall (Alex Merkin, 2009), the art director Nathan Lay, and cinematographer Andrew Carranza play with image and text to create a dramatic visual effect for director Alex Merkin’s feature-length noir thriller based on a short film of his in 2005. In addition to English letters being images, the title sequences display an interesting pictorial phenomenon—English letters emerge from inside images and images are seen in letters. The camera takes the audience to a slanted of the title on the dark screen with the long H like a ladder, then zooms into an extreme close-up of H turning in
Figure 83: *Across the Hall* film stills

![Across the Hall film stills](image-url)
horizontal direction with lighting on dark-red patterns of wallpapers. The camera cuts to the letter $H$ standing vertically in dark red evocative of a hall with lanterns. The lining structures like beams on the top and bottom of the image, however, stretch horizontally, suggesting a symmetrical image of $H$ and a ladder, like a reflection in the water (Figure 83).

Blood-red leaves and plant trunks climb eerily on the wallpaper of line patterns. Red letters of credits appear similar to the shape and manner of the plants. The director’s name “Alex Merkin” emerges in small size inside the white letter $N$ of “Andrew Carranza,” director of photography. The extreme close-up of $E$ of the director’s name in black font embodies the image of a brown key and the credit “music by Bobby Tahouri.” With camera techniques such as oblique angle, zoom in and jump cut, the designers of the credit sequences deliberately combine image into text and text into image. Moreover, like the $B$ in bee, of the title design “The Secret Life of Bees,” and the letter $H$ in Hall of the film title Across the Hall demonstrates a touch of pictograph. Interestingly, such words in English resemble the hieroglyphic composition of Chinese characters. The letter $B$ represents the image of a bee, and $ee$ in bee is the phonetic. The letter $H$ represents the image of a hall while all in Hall is the phonetic.

Filmmakers continuously explore innovative modes to narrate stories and represent cinematic images with texts. English letters are used as a discursive sign to show how interestingly a narrative frame is constructed in the opening and ending of Epic Movie (Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer, 2007) and The
Ghost Writer (Roman Polanski, 2010). Besides their pictographic nature, letters are encoded with secrets and are therefore, semantic, interactive and self-reflexive, inviting audiences to decode, interpret and re-construct the filmic narrative. Epic Movie begins with background texts about the story on which golden letters pop out, zoom in and assemble the title. Then audiences are presented a masculine and sexy body (played by David Carradine) lying on the ground with a sign on his chest. He dances and shapes his body with vigor and elegance into alphabets of D, A, V, I, and C like “The Da Vinci code” to give hints to his adopted daughter Lucy (Figure 84). As Lucy looks at the painting “Mona Lisa” on the wall with a written clue of “SO LAME THE HAIR OF TOM”, she moves to Tom’s portrait, and locates a “Golden Ticket” in a candy bar to lead her to a perilous but humorous adventure. The English alphabets are represented as a password to a secret and a key to unfold a narrative of fantasy. English alphabets are pictorially mimicked by a human body to communicate like a language.

Likewise, in the film title The Ghost Writer (Roman Polanski, 2010), the English alphabets in black bold font suggest pictorial and rhetoric purpose. This dramatic and suspenseful mystery narrates the story of a ghost writer (Ewan McGregor) who is hired to complete the memoirs of a former British prime minister, Adam Lang (Pierce Brosnan). When he decides to revise the memoirs from his perspective and does some research for the writing, he unexpectedly discovers some dark secrets about Adam Lang’s involvement in a war crime
Figure 84 *Epic Movie* film stills

```
THIS IS THE STORY OF FOUR ORPHANS BROUGHT TO GET HER
BY FAE.

THEY DIDN'T KNOW IT YET BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING
GREATER IN STORE FOR THE V

THERE WAS SOMETHING EPIC.
```

但他们命中有些不平凡的事情…

```
求求你！求求你！
```

这是“V”

```
哦！是“G”
```

“汤姆的头发太乱了”
authorizing illegal seizure of suspected terrorists. Moreover, Ewan McGregor is told that his predecessor is murdered when he uncovers Lang’s secret. The secret information is hidden between the lines of the predecessor’s manuscript before his death.

Finally, when the ghost writer (McGregor) realizes how the information is hidden between lines and paragraphs of the manuscript, a car dashes towards him on the street. We hear a loud collision and see papers of the manuscript flying in the sky. Then comes the cinematic image of pages laid one over another. Each page is highlighted with a capital block letter that combines to spell the film title (Figure 85). Apart from its captivating tension, suspense and twist of the narrative, such a title design after the denouement of the story followed by end credits is unusual. While it brings the narrative to an end, the title image and the alphabet letters T, H, E, G, O, S, T, W, R, I, T, E and R indicate the actual page order of the manuscript by the ghost predecessor. Such an order of the manuscript reveals the secret of the former prime minister. The English letters in the title image are not only pictorial but self-reflexive and interactive as well.
When the cinematic narrative ends and the ghost writer is murdered like his predecessor, the manuscript flies into the sky, floats, swirls, descends and scatters on the ground. Then appears the title image—pages are assembled according to the letter order of “The Ghost Writer.” The letters here signify the revelation of the dark secret and call for the audience to reconstruct the memoirs based on what they have seen in the film. Audiences as witnesses of the filmic discourse perform the role of a ghost writer, evaluate the information seen onscreen and rearrange the facts and truth of the memoirs based on the manuscript. An audience therefore, becomes a spectator, consumer, writer and producer. Not only do the cinematic text and image interact to narrate the story, but audiences and implied authors (director/screenwriter/art designer/cinematographer) interact to create the narrative as well.

The page upon page and the order of letters in the film title *The Ghost Writer* functions as a pretext for calling attention to both the actual process of writing the memoirs and producing the cinematic narrative. Audiences watch how the ghost writer is frustrated at the beginning, then decides to reorganize and rewrite parts of the memoirs, interviews the former British prime minister, visits related people, digs up some secrets and reveals scandals of murder and war crime. The pictorial representation of the title is like a mediation for audiences to construct and reconstruct the cinematic narration, and the process of writing and completing the memoirs. The film title put at the end of the narrative, seemingly draws a conclusion, but opens for a retelling and re-presentation.
According to Robert Stam in *Film Theory: An Introduction*, reflexivity derives from philosophy and psychology. Reflexivity becomes “institutionalized as high modernism” in non-representational art featuring “abstraction, fragmentation and the foregrounding of the materials and processes of art.” As used in film, it refers to “the process by which films foreground their own production…their authorship…their textual procedures…their intertextual influences…or their reception” (151). English letters in the film title *Ghost Writer* bear the symbolic meaning of order and truth. Unlike *Epic Movie* where alphabet letters combine in the film title in the opening sequence and start a narrative, the director in *The Ghost Writer* assembles the film title with letters and draws a conclusion to the story, but leaves a clue for audiences’ interpretation and rewriting the narrative.

**II.2 The Symbolic and Pictorial Quality of Handscript/Writing in Credit Sequences and Cinematic Narration**

Calligrapher and designer Julian Waters delivered a lecture at Washington's Sidwell Friends School, where he was the 1997 Rubenstein Memorial Guest Artist. According to Waters, modern Western calligraphy was rooted in the development of written symbols and letterforms from the earliest scratching in dirt, cave painting and pictograms to the great classical inscriptions, and Mediaeval, Renaissance and Baroque manuscripts. For thousands of years, the development of letterforms continued through the use of engraving and other
technologies, and in the forms of typefaces used in printing, from the mid-fifteenth century up to the present. At the end of the nineteenth century broad-edged pen techniques were rediscovered by pioneers including Edward Johnston in England and Rudolf Koch in Germany. Johnson and Koch and their students/followers helped spread renewed interest in the art of Western calligraphy.

In this section, I will examine the presentation of English handscript in recent cinema. English handscript style in cinematic representation is visually diverse in addition to being part of the narrative means. I will focus on the composition of credit sequences and a scene imposed with English writing or calligraphy. I will explore the artistic and pictorial features of handscripts in *Inkheart* (Iain Softley, 2008), and *Steal a Pencil for Me* (Michèle Ohayon, 2007). I will discuss the cultural significance that filmmakers place on such presentations of handscripts related to current social issues in *Elsewhere* (Nathan Hope, 2009) and *Daybreakers* (Michael Spierig and Peter Spierig, 2010).

In the fantasy adventure action film *Inkheart* (2008), director Iain Softley demonstrates that English handscript written on the human body is an image art. The film is based on the best-selling book by Cornelia Funke under the same title. The story describes Mo (Brendan Fraser) and his daughter Meggie (Eliza Bennett) known as “Silver Tongues” who has an innate gift for bringing things to reality whenever they read a story aloud. With delight, Mo finds the book of *Inkheart* in
Figure 86 *Inkheart* film stills
an antique bookstore. However, Capricorn, the villain of the book, imprisons them and destroys the book. With the help of Fenoglio, author of the book, Meggie manages to read aloud the revision of the manuscript, changes the ending of the story, and sends all the characters back to their own stories. Her actions eliminate the devil of the book like ashes blown in the wind (Figure 86).

When Meggie is dressed up and forced to read the devil, Shadow, out of the book, the camera directs audiences to the oral reading, written words and images. The audio-visual effects interact to achieve the tension and climax of the narrative. While Meggie reads the original part of *Inkheart*, the camera aims at the Shadow in the dark sky either with Meggie’s voiceover or a jump cut. Fenoglio, the writer of the book *Inkheart*, being caged, manages to use Toto, a dog from a story to give Meggie a page he rewrites for the story, so that Meggie can send the Shadow away. In the chaos, Meggie loses the page and the Shadow approaches Meggie’s mother and Fenoglio. To save their lives, Mo throws Meggie a pen. The girl then writes her own story ending on her arm and fingers.

The extreme close-up of Maggie’s arm and a pen writing on it, reverses to the close-up shot of Capricorn whose half face becomes yellow with prints of words echoing Meggie’s voiceover, “And as it did, Capricorn began to crackle and fade like the old page of a book...growing transparent and thin as paper." The camera reverses back to an extreme close-up of Meggie’s palm and fingers as she continues writing, "Capricorn's ink-black soul filled with terror...as he saw the end was near. And so, too, did the souls of all those within. The Shadow's
gaze...who'd committed villainy in Capricorn's name. And then they blew away, like ashes in the wind." The jump cut takes the audience to the crack-up and collapse of the villains and Capricorn.

Meggie’s writing is fluid and rapid. The handwriting is presented in a visually appealing light blue lighting even on her hand and fingers. Throughout the story, the director uses various camera techniques such as dissolve, reverse shot and jump cut to transform the text into image as “Silver Tongues” reads a story aloud. The director matches the unfixed verbal language to specific images. The character’s voiceover bridges the text to image and serves to replicate first-person narration of Meggie. The interplay of the vocal, visual, and written words engages audiences in the cinematic narrative. Currie Gregory, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Nottingham, perceives that written text onscreen presented by a close-up shot for the audience to read serves as a pictorial text. Therefore, we can conclude that those texts or sentences Meggie writes on her arm, palm and fingers are pictorial images in cinema. English writing or handwriting can be an image art in cinematic representation. Currie points out,

…that cinema is a visual medium; …it is a pictorial one, that it is a medium that trades essentially in pictorial representations….All pictorial representation is visual, but not all visual representation is pictorial. Subtitles and those helpfully orienting dates and place names that used to appear on the screen (and occasionally still do) are visual representations and not pictorial ones…On the other hand, if the hero is shown reading a
letter, and the camera closes in to show the letters and words on the page for us to read, there is a sense in which the visual image here functions pictorially. (7, 8)

Imagine the picturesque images of lines of beautiful handscripts floating lightly one after another in the blue sky or on the crystal river by a village. In the title sequence of *Steal a Pencil for Me* (Michèle Ohayon, 2007), the main title designer Alex Swart begins the cinematic image with peaceful and romantic scenes in blue. We see curly and slim handscripts in white drift forward, glide up or down and move away gently, arranged like poems and headings against a blue backdrop. The white handscripts float and linger on the foreground overlaid by a pen or a pencil held in the hand of a man or a woman, writing on a piece of paper along with the voiceover of a man and a woman expressing their deep affection to each other. The writing is misty or legible—clear or mysterious (Figure 87). The words drifting above the paper suggest the protagonists’ thoughts and feelings conveyed through the passage of space and medium of love letters when they are apart. The floating texts indicate the spirit of the intense love between the couple despite the horrible war conditions.

*Steal a Pencil for Me* is a feature documentary film. It depicts Jack and Ina, a loving couple who have been married over sixty years. They met under especially difficult circumstances at the same concentration camp when Holland was under total Nazi occupation and Jews were deported in 1943. They wrote
Figure 87 *Steal a Pencil for Me* film stills
secret love letters. When Jack was shipped to another camp, Ina was asked to steal a pencil for him, so that they could continue to write and keep in contact. It is a beautiful film directed by the award winners Michèle Ohayon and produced by Theo Van de Sande, ASC. The images are simple but elegant. Nevertheless, images are seen through texts. The drifting text in the foreground and the text written on the paper create a dual visual effect, which symbolizes the two characters writing letters to each other. The title design impresses the audience with the animated and pictorial texts. It is another illustration that English writing or handscript is an art and image.

The first two images are completely made of English writings on the blue backdrop. Words of English in white appear like musical notes and swans dancing on a lake. The most interesting feature in the credit sequences, however, is the name of the main title designer Alex Swart shown on the credit. To honor the title designer and mention his or her name in a film’s credit sequences is not a common practice. Steal a Pencil for Me announces the importance of film title design and the recognition of the pictorial feature of English writing in cinema. It draws our attention to the visual art of Western calligraphy and the artwork of title sequences. The ocean blue images with white texts in the opening sequences suggest a feeling of elegance and depth, emotionally touching and visually appealing.

A design of stylish and interesting credit sequences definitely attracts the audience, adds tone to the visual effect and gives information about the filmic
narration. It is creative and imaginative when cinematic images are composed of icon, photograph and handwriting. In 2009, director and screenwriter Nathan Hope made Elsewhere, a film of suspense, crime and thrills. He explores current social concerns about rebellious youth, internet dating and mysterious stalkers and murderers. The story takes place in a small farm town of Goshen, Indiana. One day, Jillian (Tania Raymonde), a young girl who created a provocative MySpace and flirted with any man online, suddenly vanishes. Her best friend Sahrah (Anna Kendrick), with the aid of a friend Jasper (Chuck Carter), tracks down with immense effort her missing gal pal and finds the killer with only a journal and a cryptic video message sent from Jillian’s cell-phone.

Nathan Hope was a cinematographer in his earlier years. In Elsewhere, Hope exhibits a great sense of visual effect in creating the cinematic images. In the opening title sequences, Hope uses the internet icon of “smile” with two
red strokes of upward eyebrows, extended tongue and red drips from the mouth to create an eerie atmosphere on a black screen. It signifies the murderer can be anyone with a smiling face but evil spirit. The handwriting “STAY” in green is trapped between the horns, suggesting ironically the impossibility to stay away from the desire of new technology (computer and online dating/chatting) and foreshadowing the tragic death of Jillian and other missing girls (Figure 88). The black color in the background contrasts to the bright yellow smile-face while indicating the somber tone in the narrative of a horror genre.

In another scene, surrounded by lipstick kisses, the tongue in pink sticking out with blood dripping down, gives a feeling of romance and violence, echoing the narrative theme, the seduction and risk of online dating. The lipstick prints next to each of the men’s names in the font of handwriting in blue, details the fact that Jillian provokes and flirts with the men on her MySpace (Figure 89). The handwriting of “STAY OUT” in light green with the monstrous face indicates the danger of online dating and implies that the murderer is one of the men contacting Jillian in her MySpace. The innovative handwriting is part of the graphic design of cinematic images. The text is not merely a writing script but part of the image and the visual narration. According to his commentary, Hope shot photos of the town before the film was made. He put together the town photos with the writings and pictures in a journal that Tania Raymonde wrote and drew while trying to get into character of the girl Jillian who disappeared.
Tania Raymonde did the entries and sketches as if she was that girl. The black-grey sketch of the girl on the left indicates the person who writes the scripts in green, contrasting the red large lipstick prints on the right. The message sending icon in dark black in the center foregrounds the green texts and links the girl to the message sending. Seemingly, the story is related to the romance by means of the communications technology in our society (Figure 90). Then the director composed images with the feature scenes of the town ornamented with the green handscripts on the right. Such a design highlights the credits in white in the center on a black screen with the message icon of “sending” (Figure 91). The handscripts from the actress’ journal in green look very graphic resembling spooky images of a green tint lit by camping lanterns in the film. The bare, dark, crooked and witch-like branches on the left correspond with the sloppy handwriting in the eerie green, which enhances the spooky feel of the image. Such a handscript style resembling the messy, bald, and eerie trunks and branches, further demonstrates that English writing is pictorial and emotional like a painting. English words can be images. English lettering is like a picture.

In another image of credit sequences, Hope displays the pictorial feature of English lettering again. The little bright dot in letter O looks like an angry bird eye, the evil, spying on the town (Figure 92). The round and circular letters of O and P match the top of the tower, the town’s landmark and the circle of lighting around the town. The bright circle of the town highlights the peace and joy of life in contrast to the dark and evil outside. Jillian’s message that “I need to get out
Figure 90 Elsewhere film still

Figure 91 Elsewhere film still

Figure 92 Elsewhere film still
of here. Help!” sent to Sahrah’s cellphone is ornate and pictorial. It becomes part of the graphic design of the cinematic imagery. The striking red outline of words OUT, and pink in Help on the left reinforces the warning and fear of being trapped and the desperation for an escape. The text creates more tension and anxiety, performing a function of commentary in the cinematic narration.

Nathan Hope strives to examine cyberculture in the film genre of suspense and mystery. In an interview, he explains, “Myspace was taking over the social stratosphere, and what I thought was interesting was how teenagers were exploring who they were through different persona’s. What happens now, people put on these persona’s, they put them on their profiles on these social networking sites, and play around with that” (Peters). Elsewhere reflects its timely subject matter: the increasing popularity of teenagers surfing on MySpace and Facebook who reveals personal information or expose rebellious misconduct in the ignorance of potential risks of identity theft or physical assault in real life. Teenage girls may think mistakenly that they are “invisible” on the websites and secure to post profiles of personal information accompanied by sexually provocative pictures.

By using cinematic images with texts, icons, drawings and photos in the credit sequences, Hope announces his concern over teenagers tempted and trapped by electronic media and computer technology. The bright and the dark onscreen is a good metaphor for the paradoxical dilemma—the positive and negative, the utopia and dystopia—of technology in human life (Figure 92).
Hope shows his mastery of visual organization and imagination in cinematic imagery. He delivers symbolic images with creative handscripts to command the audience’s attention.

Apart from the combination of writing script, icon, drawing and photo to represent cinematic imagination, directors use animation and different props along with handscript or English calligraphy to convey significance. For example, in the film *Daybreakers* (2010) directed by Michael Spierig and Peter Spierig, almost every shot and cinematic image in the opening sequences is embedded with beautiful texts on various media. The film is a stylish and inventive sci-fi vampire thriller. Set in 2019, an unexplained virus turns 95% of the humans into vampires. Remaining humans are farmed to supply the blood for the vampire. The perilous decrease of the world’s blood supply transforms the malnourished vampires into large bat monsters and makes Charles Bromley Marks, the corrupt president of a pharmaceutical company called Bromley Marks, to experiment with a blood substitute to sell for profits.

Edward Dalton (Ethan Hawke), a vampire hematologist in this company, fed on animal blood, tries to find a blood substitute that will keep vampires alive as the humans repopulate. He meets Vampire Lionel "Elvis" Cormac (Willem Dafoe), who reverses into human accidentally by burning in the sun and throwing himself in a river in a car crash. The two of them team up to develop a cure to turn vampires back into humans. But Edward is considered a traitor and tracked down by Bromley’s vampire military. This film is action-packed, inventive, and uses
high contrast and fluorescent imageries. The visual effect of text and image is creative and captivating. The Spierig brothers display to audiences that English writing and calligraphy can convey meaning and emotion.

In the pre-title sequences, the camera gives a rear and high angle shot of a girl writing on a piece of paper at the table (Figure 93, Illustration 1). Although the image appears in brown red color, warm and bright with lamps on both sides, the dramatic angle shot takes on a wacky look. The camera cuts to a close up of a girl’s hand with black nail polish writing, and pans to the girl’s younger photos on the wall, then pans to the calendar setting the story time of April 2019 (Illustrations 2, 3). Then the camera turns to the girl’s side view and her hand laying the paper of scripts on the table. Everything seems quiet and normal. Suddenly the scenes of the girl opening the door, sitting on the grass looking at the mountain filter with eerie green. Her yellow eyes and pointedly protruding teeth indicate her identity of a vampire.

Afterwards, the camera cuts to the paper on the table inside the house, takes extreme close-ups at the handwriting script “never change,” “never grow up,” and “can’t go on” then reverses to the mountain scene of the sunrise (Illustrations 4-6). Such a highlight of handscripts supports a mood of suspense and compassion for the girl. The shots of the handscripts in clear and round shape emphasize the visual impact of the suicide note on the audience as well as the cause-effect of the narrative. It explains the girl’s reluctance to grow old and
Figure 93 *Daybreakers* film stills (Part I):
die, yet her abhorrence and rejection of being a vampire. She struggles to negotiate her identity from human to vampire like the girl Alison in the film. Alison’s father Charles Bromley (Sam Neill) had cancer. He turns himself into a vampire and becomes an immortal. He commands his vampire soldier to attack his daughter and make her a vampire because he believes that is the last resolution for humans, the mortals.

The poor girl hates vampires and her father. She refuses to drink the human blood her father supplies. Her father imprisons her for her rebellion. The poor victim then cuts her own wrists, sheds her own blood and sucks it in order to protest against her father. Obviously, the Spierig brothers, explore the human concerns over life and death, mortality and immortality. The Lucida Handwriting on the suicide note conveys the dilemma of an innocent and desperate girl who wants to be human, who wishes to be always young and who cherishes life but hates to live as a vampire. Those extreme close-ups of handscripts reveal the inner feelings of the character, and perform a visual rhetoric like a monologue or the character’s voiceover.

The camera only frames the key words and phrases with extreme close-up shots to draw audiences’ eyes to the message and arouse their curiosity. Audiences interpret the meaning and examine her reasons when seeing scenes of the girl sitting on the grass and waiting for the sunrise, presented in rear view, filtered by an eerie green light. The directors give a reverse shot of the mountain with the first light of sunrise, cut to a close up of the girl in front view, showing
her green face, yellow eyes and sharp teeth. The pretty girl writing on the table at night turns to a horrible and ugly face at dawn. The striking and terrific contrast convinces the audience of the girl’s unwillingness to be a vampire; she prefers to end her life, committing suicide by the sun because she is never able to grow up.

The following extreme shots of the suicide note supplement the reason in the narrative. The last pre-title shot depicts the climax of the sequences—the girl appallingly burns up in flames, amid deadly and frightening screams (Illustration 7). The fade out and darkness indicate the resolution of a vampire—vanishing in the world. Such innovative shots of text and image in Daybreakers serve as a rhetorical question about the weakness of both man and vampire. It satirizes human fears about death and the effort to change the laws of nature.

Spierig brothers apply text, the written monologue, the suicide note to create a dramatic atmosphere, displaying the psychological problem of the character, and engaging the readers into being witnesses. The interplay of text and image offers viewers an opportunity to experience the complicated emotional tour of the protagonist’s despair, hope, and loneliness; pushing us to ponder—what is the significance of life and death? The directors convey to us a message that it is nice to be real, to be human, and true to nature. Such a message bears its current ethical value of education since people are nowadays more obsessed with disease, body aging and death.

In this postmodern era, “nothing is sure or certain, not even the self”. “A postmodern generation will not only be in search of meaning and community;
they will also be in search of some anchor, some solid point of reference from which they can answer the question ‘Who am I?’” (Kelly 121). Indeed, our lives are being shaped by the conflicting trends of globalization and identity. The more tradition loses its hold, the more daily life is influenced by the interplay of the local and the global, and the more people are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options. “Because of the potential loss of power and security, many of our actions attempt to prevent the infection, loss of obfuscation of identity, and maintaining an identity becomes a contest in the world” (Castell 11).

In modern society, more and more people place increasing emphasis on the health, shape and appearance of their own bodies as expressions of individual identity. The body initially appears to provide a firm foundation on which to construct a reliable sense of self in the modern world. Richard Gross writes that as part of the normal process of maturation and aging, we all experience growth spurts, changes in height, weight and the general “feel” of our body, and each time we have to make an adjustment to our body-image. People evaluate their self-image and pursue their ideal-self (220-22). The developments in biological reproduction, genetic engineering, plastic surgery and sports science enable people to control their own bodies.

However, human bodies age and people cannot escape the reality of death. Death is everywhere whether we fear it or not. The shortage of blood supply and the fighting and killing for human blood in the vampire world serve as a
metaphor of our society that fuel is in greater demand than production (Figure 93, Illustration 10). This credit image functions like an implied author giving a hint to the audience to decode the meaning of the narrative. It reminds us our natural resources are getting exhausted. In the scene, block letters in red on the signboard state that petrol and diesel fill-up are limited and only available in the daytime. What is worse, the electric car batteries are sold out as written on the board set in front of the garage. And plague lasts for ten years according to the special report printed in large block letters on the digital screen on the street (Illustration 11). In the free newspaper, the striking headline states, “German blood substitute fails” (Illustration 12).

All the texts in the credit sequences (Illustrations 10, 11) are inscribed in block letters on various media, emphasizing the desperate situation of the human world. The directors point to the idea that media “plays a crucial role in almost all aspects of daily life,” affects “how we learn about our world,” and spreads the bad omens that signal the doom of both the human society and vampire world (Croteau and Hoynes 15). Human species are becoming extinct. There is rarely any human blood to feed the vampire. Worst of all, no blood substitute experiment seems successful. In such a hopeless situation, even a vampire like the young and pretty girl in the credit sequence commits suicide and burns to ashes in the sun. The credits in delicate calligraphy are blown away like the vampire in flames and ashes (Illustrations 9, 13, 14). The texts and credits are animated as if they are replicas of forms and ashes, materialized.
Figure 93 *Daybreakers* film stills (Part II)
On the platform of the subway, an advertising board hung above the crowd reads, “Capture Humans—Join us now! Vampire army. Make a difference today.” The sign borrows the famous U.S. armed forces recruiting icon of “Uncle Sam” and re-assigns him to the vampire militia imbuing the image with satire and social commentary in the parallel vampire world (Illustration 15). However, the large block letters in red are very eye-catching and bold in contrasts to the grey color scheme in the scene. “Uncle Sam” is not identified as a vampire until the text in the ad is read. The English writing in the ad, therefore, sets the meaning of the image and orients audiences in their decoding. Its provocative wording in red creates a dramatic impact that promises hope and success if anyone joins the vampire army—more supply of blood and more chance of living.

Jack Solomon argues that advertising is not just show and tell. In effect, it’s “a form of behavior modification” that drives audiences to do what the ad says (141). He states, “But there’s no illusion like the illusion of reality” (170). The desire to capture more humans for blood supply attracts the hungry vampire. However, such an ad does not actually bring a solution to the problem but a fantasy of “commercial illusion” (Solomon 164). The more humans captured and bitten by vampires, the less humans and blood supply there will be. Such a film image satirizes the impact of advertisement in people’s life.

Besides the credit sequences, English writing and calligraphy are presented throughout the film, supporting different scenes, storyline and rhetoric in the cinematic narration. For example, when Edward Dalton (Ethan Hawke) walks into
the company building, he presses his finger on the computer screen next to the
elevator and the camera gives a close-up shot of the screen, showing English
words in white regarding the approval of his identification. Those words in print
introduce Edward Dalton, one of the major characters of the story (Illustration 17).
In another scene, where Edward drives his car to help a human to escape, there is
also a close-up of the car control panel with text and voice telling: “Daytime
driving mode active.” Such a shot with red English letters ACTIVE in large block
font add color to the screen and ensures that the vampire cannot be exposed to the
sun while they are driving in the daytime (Illustration 19).

When Audrey, one of the remaining humans (Claudia Karvan) asks Edward
to come and meet Elvis (William Dafoe), she hands him a map to instruct him
where to find other humans. The camera again gives a close-up of the map with
handscript in red that shows the marked route for Edward to follow (Illustration
18). Such a shot gives the audience an image of Edward’s trip and omits the action
of driving on the way, thus shortening the story time. The writing in the cinematic
image is brief, clear and concise as a constituent element of the image and an
integral part of the cinematic narrative. The close-up shot gives audiences a sense
of participation as if seeing the map from the perspective of the character.

After meeting Elvis, a man cured of vampirism by brief exposure to sunlight
while being thrown into a river during a car accident, Edward duplicates this cure
learned from Elvis and returns to human form. Edward and Elvis cooperate, make
further experiments and finally come up with a safe way to turn vampires back into
human beings. Then comes the climatic moment when Elvis unwraps his favorite car, a “Firebird,” ready to ride to save the human world. The directors deliberately give an extreme close-up of the quotation/banner on the car—“From the ashes springs new life.” The text is beautifully written in yellow orange handwriting on the powerful brown car above the forward wheel. It carries a feel of optimism and hope for the future. The letters are flowing and compact with thick strokes, indicating strength, power and order.

The lighting on the wheel highlights the flowing shape of the car and corresponds with the silver color and texture of the wheel ring, balanced by the two orange linings on the left. The quotation/banner on the car is not only decorative but thematic as well. Elvis, the first vampire to regain his humanity, transforms himself and rescues the human society, a classic ideology of individualism and heroism in Western culture. The quotation/banner, however, reinforces the process and imagery of Elvis’ rebirth in the sun, and echoes the pre-title sequence of a girl vampire burned to ashes. By contrast, Elvis revives in the sun and returns to human form, giving the film an optimistic resolution within the vampire genre. The directors use English calligraphy to beautify the image, highlight the theme, and reinforce the climax of the narrative.
Chapter Three: **Pictorial Texts in Cinematic Narration**

*Film can be used to record most of the other arts. It can also translate nearly all the codes and tropes common to narrative, environmental, pictorial, musical, and dramatic arts.*

--James Monaco

Standish D. Lawder, in *The Cubist Cinema*, examines the similarities of expression and common sources in film and art, and the dialectic between the arts of film and styles of modern painting. Yale University became the first place where film study developed out of History of Art (Lawder xiii). From then on, film study sprang up from many fields, from departments of drama, history, media and communication, general education, and foreign languages. Robert Stam in *Film Theory* argues that, “Film theory must be seen as part of a long-standing tradition of theoretical reflection on the arts in general” (10). In his perspective, we need to take a closer look at a filmmaker’s cinematic representation from an artistic standpoint. Therefore, I will examine filmmakers’ ways of integrating arts, such as painting and calligraphy, in films.

Goodnight (Renny Harlin, 1996), Frida (Julie Taymor, 2002), Butterfly and Sword (Michael Mak, 1993), and other films as examples, I will explore the influence of painting and calligraphy in cinematic presentation. I will examine the methods and artistic preferences filmmakers use to integrate painting and calligraphy into their filmic narration or adaptation.

Film is an audio-visual art. In the 1950s, the French director and film critic Francois Truffaut called the director an auteur or author. Truffaut emphasized “the director as the main creative force behind a film, who imprints the material with his or her own unique personal style, vision, and thematic preoccupations” (Desmond 45). Such auteur theory, John Desmond argues, “deemphasizes film as a collective enterprise” (45). Filmmaking is a collective practice that includes preproduction, filmmaking and postproduction. Film targets the average person and the majority of a population. It is an industry, entertainment and art. Filmmaking needs financing and technology. Computer provides audiences with spectacular scenes or special effects in the virtual world. Robert Stam in “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation” points out, “Film adaptations can be seen as a kind of multileveled negotiation of intertexts” (67). Film is open to interpretation. It involves our cognitive aptitude to the image and to construct the story.

In recent years, filmmakers explore alternative methods and synthesize other art forms into their cinematic representations. In this chapter, I will examine the integration of painting and calligraphy in cinematic representation
and film adaptation. I will explore filmmakers’ methods of using painting and calligraphy to present narrative elements such as setting, time sequence, characterization, and figurative languages of metaphor, pun, hyperbole and irony. I will discuss the intertext of painting and calligraphy, the interplay of image and text in their cinematic narration.

In literary narration, adverbs and conjunctions or phrases of time and space are ways to indicate transition. In cinematic narratives, filmmakers can use different camera techniques such as dissolve, jump cut and other media like painting to indicate the connection of events, represent the change of time and space, to depict a flashback, foreshadowing, or ellipsis of time, as shown in the films of *Myth* (Stanley Tong, 2005), *Bichunmoo* (Kim Yeong-jun, 2000), and *Marie Antoinette* (Sofia Coppola, 2006). Filmmakers have demonstrated many techniques to present time, setting and sequences, such as voiceover, text and image throughout the narrative, especially in the opening sequences, and end credits like those in *Fist of the Red Dragon* (Yuen Woo-ping, 1993), *Empire of the Sun* (Steven Spielberg, 1987), *House of the Flying Daggers* (Zhang Yimou, 2004), *Seven Swords* (Tsui Hark, 2005), and *Robin Hood* (Ridley Scott, 2010).

James Monaco states, “It’s a truism of film esthetics that metaphors are difficult in cinema” (166). Nevertheless, directors and filmmakers achieve the rhetoric of figurative language in cinema through various props and camera techniques. For instance, paintings can be used to express a metaphor like those in *Short Cuts* (Robert Altman, 1993). The two signatures in different fonts
symbolize the heroine’s duel identity in the film *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Renny Harlin, 1996). The Chinese calligraphy of a signboard in *Kung Fu Hustle* (Stephen Chow, 2004) serves as an ironical comment on a corrupt social system and the violence of gangs. The long letter written in Chinese calligraphy framed with a dramatic high angle shot in the film *Butterfly and Sword* (Michael Mak, 1993) functions as a hyperbole in cinematic narration. Painting and calligraphy denote meanings beyond a prop and set. They are part of the narrative as well as the composition of a cinematic image.

**III.1. Calligraphy and Painting in Setting and Narrative Framing**

It is a usual practice that film directors project texts onscreen at the beginning to introduce the setting of the narrative. It provides the audience with knowledge about where, when, why, or what and how events are going to happen in the film. This can include simple typeface of alphabets or characters either in white on a black screen, or in black against a white backdrop rising from the bottom to the top, line by line, or in a paragraph. In *Seven Samurai* (Akira Kurosawa, 1954), the credit designer uses striking and stunning large fonts of calligraphy in white against the backdrop in black to inform audiences about the suffering and fear of Japanese people during the Civil Wars (Figure 95). The setting text of *Fist of the Red Dragon* (Yuen Woo-ping, 1993) in vertical columns is about the Chinese scholar and official Lin Zexu in the Qing Dynasty who was sent to Gangzhou to halt the illegal importation of opium from the
British. His moral conduct and battle against the opium trade was welcomed by the Guangdong people. The Chinese characters in the setting appear orderly, neat, and simple (Figure 94). In *Shadowless Sword* (2005), the Korean director Young-jun Kim uses English in white on the black screen to briefly introduce the historic period when Korea was at war in 926 A.D. (Figure 96). The art designer chooses the rounder font in white to match with the moon in the next shot telling the specific story time “Autumn 926 A.D.” The text does not run by paragraph but in the form similar to a poem. The white lines centered on the black screen look neat and precise. Each letter resembles the shape of the moon. The text, however, depicts a war between two nations in ancient times. The shadow and low lighting on the text create a gloomy and mysterious atmosphere, coordinating with the content of the text.

Often, films start with the plain texts in silence or accompanied by a soundtrack. Audiences observe, read and interpret the image of the text. In this way, James Monaco remarked, “Film is very much like language” (152). Cinematic spectatorship suggests a literary experience in such cases. Other filmmakers prefer to combine image and text in their introduction of a setting. For example, Japanese director Ten Shimoyama presents beautifully animated title shots with the setting texts. The Japanese character 忍 appears from the right front in large scale, the sword slides from the left to the right bringing the English title *Shinobi* (2005) on the sword’s surface, then the camera zooms out. The colors of the character and background change and the word 忍 turns into
flame and explodes, in a thrilling and impressive sequence (Figure 97).

**Figure 94 Fist of the Red Dragon film stills (Right-to-Left View)**

**Figure 95 Seven Samurai film stills (Right-to-Left View)**

**Figure 96 Shadowless Sword film stills**
Figure 97 Shinobi film stills
The texts in white come line by line with one, two, three, and then one, and again one, two, three, lastly four sentences on each image of the setting in *Shinobi*. The rhythm of the texts is alternate, and explains that the story starts from the encounter of warriors, a man and a woman, in 1614. Born with superhuman skills, the ninjas and their fighting spirit become legendary. The introductory texts set the tone and genre for the narrative—an action drama and tragic romance. The blue mountain emits a somber and mysterious feel in the setting. The camera then zooms in and gives an aerial view to the villages where the two clans are hidden, and where the story begins (Figure 97).

Many art designers superimpose the texts about the story setting upon the shots of scenes like those in *Cold Mountain* (Anthony Minghella, 2003, Figure 98). Some use colored texts on black screen to introduce the setting such as *First Knight* (Jerry Zucker, 1995, Figure 99), and *Rob Roy* (Michael Caton-Jones, 1995, Figure 104). Such a style of setting design engages the audience both with literary and pictorial images. To emphasize the physical settings of historic epics or ancient dramas like *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2004) and *Bichunmoo* (Young-jun Kim, 2000), film artists often put the texts on a map giving viewers a visual orientation of the historic sites and geographical locations (Figures 100, 101).

In *Troy*, the setting images are in earthy tones of brown and green (Figure 100). Texts are about four to five lines centered on each image. The texts in the same color synthesizing into the map give a harmonious tone for the cinematic
image. Another interesting setting design comes from Martin Campbell’s movie, *The Legend of Zorro* (2005). Here we see the flaming icon of the heroic Zorro “Z”, burned onto the screen, then in black on the grey screen. Usually, texts are added sentence by sentence; but in this case, six lines are laid out onscreen, then two and then reduced into one (Figure 102). The last sentence, however, focuses a promise that the governor in the timeframe of the movie made to the Californian people about the control of their own fate and freedom—the ideal of liberty and democracy.

In Martin Campbell’s 1998 production *The Mask of Zorro*, the slashes of Zorro’s iconic “Z” burns brighter and cuts deeper on the black screen. Afterwards, the title in white is put on the top, the camera then displays a shot of the texts about the setting in six lines, appearing slanted from within the letter strokes of Z. Each of the two lines in block letters in white stretches out respectively like the letter Z. The camera then zooms in and the texts turn to horizontal manner on top of a large Z in black and orange, mysterious and passionate. Other texts behind the iconic letter Z indicate the story revolves around the heroic defender of the oppressed, Zorro, a hero in a melodrama of honor, betrayal and revenge, with a touch of humor and romance (Figure 103).

Some art designers put English texts about the story setting on top of a title, displaying the beauty of Western calligraphy. In Steven Spielberg’s *Empire of the Sun* (1987), the introductory text in white appears on the black screen. As the text rises, the title is displayed vaguely on the background, then clearly
Figure 98 *Cold Mountain* film stills

![Cold Mountain film stills](image)

**Figure 99 *First Knight* film stills**

![First Knight film stills](image)

**Figure 100 *Troy* film stills**

![Troy film stills](image)

**Troy (1)**

**Troy (2)**

**Troy (3)**

**Figure 101 *Bichunmoo* film still**

![Bichunmoo film still](image)
Figure 102 The Legend of Zorro film stills

Figure 103 The Mask of Zorro film stills

Figure 104 Rob Roy film stills
highlighted by lighting up the underline and the word *Sun*. The red-orange lighting on the *Sun* bestows the word a pictorial feature like imagery of the sun. The title comes to the spotlight when the text is finished and then fades out (Figure 105). Such a design enables the audience to have an idea of the story setting and the view of story title at the same time. We see the title through the text since the introduction is part of the story, *Empire of the Sun*. The red-orange title gives hue and life to the black screen, breaks the monotony of the cinematic image and provides a smooth transition to the opening of the filmic narrative. It suggests an optimistic feel and cheerful ending like the sun rising in the sky—the reunion of the young English boy with his parents after his survival during World War II.

In Zhang Yimou’s *House of the Flying Daggers* (2004), the title in deep red calligraphy is first onscreen before the texts of the setting. The film begins with an extreme close-up of a red stroke like a dagger with credit of “Elite Group (2003) Enterprise Presents” and another character stroke and credits indicating the production by Zhang Yimou’s studio. Then comes the title design of a red drop on the plain screen. And the Chinese characters 十面埋伏 emerge with the red drop as the last stroke of the character 伏. The introductory texts of the setting appear line by line in dark grey and small font (Figure 106). The texts narrate the decline of the Tang Dynasty in 859 A. D. since the emperor is crippled by the corruption and can not control the land.
Figure 105 *Empire of the Sun* film stills

In 1941 China and Japan had been in a state of undeclared war for four years. A Japanese army of occupation was in control of much of the countryside and many towns and cities.

In Shanghai thousands of Westerners, protected by the diplomatic security of the International Settlement, continued to live as they had lived since the British came here in the 19th century and built banking houses, hotels, offices, churches and homes that might have been uprooted from Liverpool or Surrey.

Now their time was running out. Outside Shanghai the Japanese dug in and waited...
Figure 106: *House of the Flying Daggers* film stills:
Figure 107 *Seven Swords* film stills:
As a result, many martial arts groups are founded like “The House of Flying Daggers” that steal from the rich to give to the poor and earn admiration from the civilians. With more texts introducing the historical setting of the story from right to left, the hue of the title becomes lighter until all the introductory texts are shown and then fade, and vanish except the last dot of character 伏. This last dot of the character resembling a blood drop in the title foreshadows the tragic ending of the film and frames the cinematic narrative. It coheres with Mei’s death (Zhang Ziyi) and the brutal fight between Leo (Andy Lau) and Jin (Takeshi Kaneshiro) in the last scenes before colorful trees fade and dissolve into a white world of snow stained with blood like the film title.

The blood drop in the title is emphasized twice in the climax and ending scenes of the narrative when Leo becomes furious about Mei’s betrayal of his love and the martial arts group. Out of jealousy and fury, Leo wants to kill Mei and Jin. He throws the double daggers and hits Mei’s chest. Jin rides back to fight desperately for Mei. Both Leo and Jin are severely wounded. The camera gives a close-up shot of Leo’s hand with his dagger dripping blood. There is a jump cut to a blood drop on the snowy ground. This is the first emphasis of the blood drop. Then during the last deadly attack between Leo and Jin, Mei regains consciousness and threatens to pull the dagger from her chest at the expense of her life and kill Leo if Leo kills Jin. Leo pretends to throw his dagger towards Jin with a blood drop flying from his bleeding arm while Mei rips out the dagger from her chest to stop Leo’s attack. The blood drop on the snow looks exactly
like the dot of character 伏 in the opening sequences. The stroke/dot of calligraphy frames the beginning and end of the narrative.

The camera gives close-up shots of the blood and the dagger flying. The blood hits the dagger and drops on the snow-covered ground. Mei smiles, as she collapses, because she knows that Leo spares Jin’s life. However, her smile is fading and life is withering like the film title. As Leo walks off into the blizzard, she dies in Jin’s arms. Director Zhang Yimou uses character stroke and fading hue to foreshadow and frame the narrative. He employs the camera technique of dissolve as a metaphor in his cinematic language. He presents to the audience a romantic but tragic story set in natural locales. Characters dress in beautiful costumes with terrific martial arts. The ravishing color camerawork and a stirring score all contribute strongly to a poetic cinematic narration. The images in these fighting scenes are well-framed and nicely-composed like paintings.

Producer and director Tsui Hark from Hong Kong presented to the world another beautiful martial arts film Seven Swords (Chinese: 七剑, 2005) starring Donnie Yen and Michael Wong. It was the opening film of the 2005 Venice Film Festival. The film is adapted from a Wuxia novel Qijian Xia Tianshan (七剑下天山) by Liang Yusheng. Set in 1660s, the Qing government imposed a “Martial Arts Ban” (禁武令) to forbid the common people to practice martial arts in the belief that it would maintain law and order, and prevent any potential rebellion. Driven by greed, a former military officer enforces the law and kills
thousands of martial artists and innocent civilians with his army in order to get paid by the government.

The film begins with an extreme close-up of calligraphy 七 (seven) in flying strokes and 剑 (sword) in a stylish manner (Figure 107). Then the camera jumps to the title of the two words nicely arranged together. The character of 七 looks like a martial artist leaping up and kicking in the sky. The calligraphy of 剑 bears the shape of the sword and the idea of strength. The opening sequences present an arresting palette with red, black and grey. Tsui displays his preference for integrating Chinese culture into his cinematic images. Every scene in the opening sequences is decorated with red props such as bridal, silk flower, waist belt, banner and lantern among the blacks and greys. The use of a paper strip in red resembling a red couplet seems to be the most striking feature in presenting the setting.

In Chinese tradition, red couplets are usually written on two vertical strips of red paper in the best calligraphy style. Red signifies happiness, warmth, good fortune, luck, and longevity in China. To celebrate Chinese New Year, people customarily paste the red couplets on the frame of the house entrance and the courtyard. The red couplets are composed of two poetic sentences or proverbs that match and rhyme with each other. Along with the New Year paintings on the door, the red couplets serve as beautiful decorations as well as protective
shield against evil spirits (Figure 108). There also hangs a short piece of red paper above the top of the door, usually written with four characters to express best wishes and greetings.

Tsui puts up short red strips of paper in the opening sequences: “His Majesty has an edict. Implement Martial Arts Ban. Any common people who practice martial arts will be immediately executed.” Red couplet used in an ominous sense is uncommon in China though red indicates danger and violence in the universal sense. In early Hong Kong Wuxia film, white strips of paper with black calligraphy are used in the opening title sequence in ghost stories. Such red couplets in *Seven Swords* not only surprise audiences, and bring brightness and contrast to the cinematic images, but also briefly and visually inform the audience that a brutal slaughter happens in that historic setting. The couplets in red explain the cause of the story, the reason that the seven warriors fight against the law and help the people to survive.

Tsui adds red in his cinematic images to highlight the bloody scenes and reveal human savagery. Such a technique is similar to the Free-hand style in Chinese ink painting. The artist would add some color to an image in an ink painting to bring out the subject matter or beautify the picture. Tsui’s use of dramatic contrast of red and grey signifies the cruelty of the ruler versus the innocence and helplessness of the ordinary people. Tsui also satirizes the cruelty of the ruler and sympathizes with the innocence of the civilians. Red blood spews from the necks and arms of the civilians among the grey images. The
writing/calligraphy on the red couplets, therefore, evokes the audience’s emotions, and displays Tsui’s rhetorical means of ethos and pathos in cinema.

David Croteau and William Hoynes in *Media Society* state, “In the mid-1960s, Canadian cultural scholar Marshall McLuhan (1964) wrote that with the rise of electronic media, ‘we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace’ (p.19). McLuhan believed that the rise of electronic media marked a new phase in human history” (337). Inevitably, technology opens new ways of expression and representation in cinematic narration. More images related to computer technology are presented in opening title sequences. In *Smokin’ Aces 2, Assassins’ Ball* (2010), director P.J. Pesce begins the film with typography in white on the black screen reading: “rather than dashing, gun-toting g-men, most FBI employees are information analysts, sifting through millions of telephone, email, and data transmissions to uncover threats of violent crime, terrorism, and espionage against the United States…”

After a voiceover from a woman questioning if the information is present or real, the camera shows FBI agents walking in the building and some female FBI agents working on the computers. The reflections of the computer screen displaying an extreme close-up of the face of a woman agent along with pictures and data, is an interplay of text with image (Figure 109). Audiences see the FBI agent through the computer data or text on the screen. Such cinematic images illustrate the introductory text that many FBI agents analyze computer data. Audiences see images and patterns through text or text through images. The
reverse English writings in the same color tones look like patterns, showing a harmonious composition of the cinematic image.

The camera moves back and forth from the computer screen with data and the picture of a man to several female FBI agents working in front of a computer with a female voiceover, “Is it accurate, the name?” These images narrate that the FBI agents are searching for specific information, evaluating and comparing the data. “The WWW offered access to seemingly limitless information and data and unprecedented possibilities for interactivity” (Herman and McChesney 118). Not only does the cinematic image exhibit the interactivity between the FBI agents and the computer, the camera interacts and corresponds to the specific introductory text as well. The extreme close-up shots of text and image on the computer enable audiences to read, watch and analyze, interpret and question the text and image on the screen like the FBI agents.

The texts in white print read, “occasionally, bureau members themselves become the target of threats; these require extraordinary precautions, often including top-secret procedures outside the realm of normal protocol. The unintended consequences of such secret activities are known as ‘blowback.’” The English words are typed letter by letter on the computer screen, mechanical but striking, especially the last two sentences that understate the ruthless act of assassination and the chaotic administration of the government agency. The narrative revolves around an unassuming FBI agent named Walter Weed who
Figure 109 *Smokin’ Aces 2: Assassins’ Ball* Film Stills

Opening Title Sequences:

Rather than dashing, gun-toting green, most FBI employees are information analysts sitting through millions of telephones, email, and data transmissions to uncover threats of violent crime, terrorism, and espionage against the United States. Occasionally, bureau members themselves become the target of threats these require extraordinary precautions; often including top-secret procedures outside the realm of normal protocol.

End Credits:

On March 10th, 2000, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh alleged the existence of a covert US government assassination ring.

"It’s a web of a secret operators’ community that is set up independently," he explained.

"They do not report to anybody... Congress has no oversight of it."

Hersh did not mention whether any of the assassins used exploding darts.
becomes the target of several evil killers. As a result, a group of FBI agents have to protect him from all the skillful assassins.

Contrary to the peaceful opening title sequences, the film is filled with bloody scenes. Profanity laden gun battles move the narrative at a fast pace. It is an action driven narrative rather than a story of character development. The texts in the end credits echo the texts in the opening title sequences, “On March 10th, 2009, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Seymour Hersh alleged the existence of a covert US government assassination ring….‘They do not report to anybody…Congress has no oversight of it.’” The text in the end credits is written similar to Bookmark Old Style. Both white letters of angular font in the opening and round font in the closing frame the narrative.

The texts in the end credits explain further about the “top-secret procedures outside the realm of normal protocol” mentioned in the text of the opening title sequences. The printed quotation in the end credits from a Pulitzer Prize journalist sounds a convincing source for the fiction. The extreme chaotic and violent act of the filmic discourse suggests a parody of the introductory text. And the text in the end credits function as a conclusion and commentary of the filmic narrative. Nevertheless, both the beginning and ending texts invite the audience to speculate on the truth of the story. The audience may have the similar questions as those asked by a woman agent in the opening sequence: “This is past or present you are talking about? And this is real? This is a story or this is real?”
It is interesting that director Mike Newell chooses sequential shots of sunrise and sunset to frame the beginning and ending of *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (2010). He firstly shows audiences the sun rising from behind the mountain. As the sun rises and brightens at dawn, we see the introductory text in yellow: “It is said some lives are linked across time.” “Connected by an ancient calling that echoes through the ages.” “Destiny” (Figure 110). The camera dissolves into a map outlining the Persian territory along with the voiceover about how large and powerful the empire of Persia was a long time ago, and how wisely the king governed the country and how bravely the Persian army fought for more land. The director then gives a jump cut of the sun hanging high up in the sky with Persian troops at the top of the mountain, indicating the prosperity and power of the empire of Persia.

In this setting, the adopted Prince Dastan and the mysterious Princess Tamina safeguard an ancient dagger capable of releasing the Sands of Time, a gift from the Gods that can reverse time. Nizan, the uncle of Dastan and his two prince brothers, desire to possess the powerful dagger, change history and rule the world. Nizan kills the old king, Dastan’s father and the uncle intends to destroy the Holy City to take away the dagger. At last, Dastan uses the dagger to prove his innocence and Nizan’s evilness. Dastan proposes to the beautiful Prince Tamina and they hold hands. Followed by end credits come the concluding images of the sunset with the same texts as those in the title sequences except the word “Destiny”. The omission of the word *destiny* indicates
that the mysterious and powerful empire of Persia will no longer exist.

Universal Studios and Imagine Entertainment produce *Robin Hood* (Ridley Scott, 2010), an epic tale of a chivalrous knight in the 13th century England, starring Academy Award winners Russell Crowe and Cate Blanchett. At the setting, it reads, “In times of tyranny and injustice when law oppresses the people, the outlaw takes his place in history.” “England at the turn of the 12th century was such a time.” “King Richard the Lion Heart, bankrupt of wealth and glory, is plundering his way back to England after ten years on his Crusade.” “In his army is an archer named Robin Longstride. This is the story of his return home where, for defending the weak against the strong, he will be condemned to live outside the law” (Figure 111).

Written in Gothic font design, the setting texts are decorated with ornate upper case in red and sketches of leaves and plants on a classic screen in light brown hue. The lighting is dim, in keeping with the gloomy atmosphere of the narrative and the antique feel of the images. The upper case letters in Gothic style integrating into part of the graphic image on the page and the red letters highlight and decorate the writing. These setting texts resemble Roman calligraphy in the 13th century. The dark and classic images in the opening sequences have a great contrast to the end credits that look like pieces of abstract modern art of oil painting. The sequence designer displays the beauty of Roman letters/English calligraphy and Western painting in the opening sequences and end credits.
Figure 110 *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* film stills

Opening Title Sequences

End Credits
Figure 111 *Robin Hood* film stills

**Opening Title Sequences**

```
In a time of tyranny and injustice when the oppressors the people, the outlaw finds his place in history.

English at the turn of the 20th Century was such a time.

From Richard the Lion Heart, back out of summary and glory, wandering his way back to England after ten years on the Crusade.

His story is an alter quaid from Legezind.

This is the story of his return home where, for fighting the fight against the strong, he will be rewarded to live outside the law.
```

**End Credits**

```
As the legend begins.

DIRECTED BY Ridley Scott
```
Fonts have emotional impact and historical connotation. “A good design may be well served with a historically appropriate typeface choice when possible. For example, traditional or old-style typefaces imply timeworn wisdom, authenticity, integrity” (Saltz 16). The text in Robin Hood with ornate image before the end credit evokes an epic or romantic feeling. It reads, “And so the legend begins.” Such a cinematic image appears after Robin Hood moves to Sherwood Forest with Lady Marian and his friends, indicating another episode of Robin Hood—the Merry Men of Sherwood Forest, the group of outlaws who followed Robin Hood according to English folklore. The filmic narrative ends but the legend of Robin Hood and his followers continues. Such an end credit image with text and ornate patterns in a classic tone leaves the narrative open-ended as one characteristic of the art cinema discussed by David Bordwell (775).

In the ending, after the scene of writing “And so the legend begins”, the camera shows images of end credits like oil paintings with an animation effect. Like Western abstract art, heavy paints are poured on the canvas and spread out by brushes. Credit texts are introduced by the dynamic force of movement such as an animal running towards the forest or an arrow fired reaching the target. The block letters are round in white, clearly inscribed against the thick colors. Each image is like a painting and jumps from one to the other in a fast pace. The color schemes are strong and thick, composed of dramatic abstract figures and pictures.

In the Indian epic Jodhaa Akbar (2008), director Ashutosh Gowariker synthesizes multiple techniques to introduce the setting of the romance and war
story—text, image, painting, song and voiceover. Along with the soundtrack of a melodious male vocal, the white texts in English and Indian language are shown on the black screen, telling the legend of the two major characters in historic record, the Muslim Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great (played by Hrithik Roshan), and the Hindu Rajput Princess Jodhabai (played by Aishwarya Rai Bachchan) (Figure 112, Illustrations 1-4). The Indian scripts are signs linked to each other like graphic patterns. The camera displays the production company and the yellow film title in Indian language and English respectively on a lavish green backdrop (Illustrations 17, 18).

Then the camera dissolves into a map of India with a man’s voiceover telling “this is the land of India which was once under iron rule. Since A.D. 1011, many invaders crowded into this land and crushed it.” The camera shows shadows of camel riders appearing on the map and dissolves into the riders in the desert. The voiceover continues as audiences see the palaces, “Then the Mughal came and settled down, made India their home, with respect and love for this land.” The camera shifts to a jump cut of paintings and the image of Akbar’s home accompanied by the voiceover further describing the great Akbar, the first emperor born in India, who makes his empire into a great prosperous land (Illustrations 6, 7, 8, 9).

Audiences see many little pink flowers on a tree. The camera pans down displaying a beautiful painting of Princess Jodhaa (Illustration 10). The director then turns to the actual shots of Princess Jodhaa’s childhood in the palace. The
voiceover runs through the narrative until the King of Humayun dies and the King of Hemu, in an attempt to take over the land, leads his army to battle against the troops led by the loyal general of diseased King of Humayun’s thirteen-year-old heir. The director combines almost every means to narrate in turn the historical setting of this epic tale and introduce the major characters, physical settings, social conflicts and cause of wars in India at that time.

For example, both bold type of English and graphic Indian calligraphy in white are projected on the black screen to inform the audience of the historical source of this legend; a map to show the physical location of India, three paintings accompanied by a voiceover to briefly describe the establishment and prosperity of the empire, a painting to introduce the beautiful Princess Jodhaa; actual shots of the scenes such as the birthplace of King Akbar, Princess Jodhaa’s early life in the palace and the shots between Hemu’s army and Humayun’s troops. These multiple ways to narrate the setting enable the audience to receive a strong audio-visual impact and a clear idea about the ancient figures, complicated political situations and historical events of the narrative. The white Indian calligraphy contrasts effectively and artistically with the colorful paintings.

At the end of the film, the director uses six freeze frames with voiceover to summarize the narrative, saying that the film is not a tale or folklore, but a true story about how the unity of Jodhaa and Akbar made a history in India (Illustrations 11-16). In this way, the director frames the narrative beginning with
Figure 112: *Jodhaa Akbar* film stills (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2008)
paintings in classic style and *mis en scenes* along with a voiceover, but concludes the narrative with the film stills and voiceover. The paintings in the opening sequences indicate the historic record of the narrative, documentary and distant. But the freeze frames at the end of the story situate the past at the present, real and intimate. Gregory Currie argues that “cinematic images are real objects, reidentifiable across time and occupying different positions at different times during the viewing of the shot” (47).

The freeze frames, however, further modify the voiceover comments that this is a real story. The director incorporates other modes of representations with his camera—a postmodern style that texts are “typified by self-consciousness, bricolage and intertextuality” (Barker 22). The freeze frames like photographs, document the fiction and action; the paintings, however, are static images of representation. Gowariker deliberately uses static images, both paintings and film stills, to frame the narrative and to contrast the moving pictures of the filmic narration. He interplays the cinema with other forms of art. Currie points out, “Cinematic pictures are not like the static images of painting,…film is a pictorial medium; it gives us exactly moving pictures” (2). More impressively, the director connects the film title in lavish green with images of end credits of the same hue (Illustrations 17-20). In this way, the film title and end credit sequences are the outside frame of the narrative, that is, a frame within the frame.

In *NINJA* (2009), director Isaac Florentine narrates a story of Japanese mercenary agents in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century who were trained in the martial arts and
Figure 113: NINJA film stills (Isaac Florentine, 2009):
hired for covert operations such as assassination, espionage and sabotage. He strategically combines painting, text and voiceover to introduce the concept of Ninja in the opening credit sequences (Figure 113). The film starts with a close-up shot of calligraphy 二氧化, meaning "stealth", "secrecy", "endurance", "perseverance", and "patience." The crude and sturdy strokes on light brown paper impress audiences with historic and nostalgic feelings. Then there comes a swift pan to the calligraphy of 二氧化 (ninja) on the left with a figure of a ninja in black costume and mask holding knives on the right in the painting (Illustration 2).

Such a painting with word and image is further elaborated by the capital white letters rising from the bottom onscreen: “IN FEUDAL JAPAN, A NINJA WAS A MERCENARY, TRAINED IN THE MARTIAL ARTS, ESPIONAGE AND ASSASSINATION.” The camera zooms to the painting as if audiences lean over and have a closer look at the illustration of Ninja (Illustration 3). Then a swiftly-moving shot to the next illustration where a ninja with another martial arts pose with weapons, is further explained by white English subtitles in capital letters: “OUTLAWED IN THE 1600’S THE TRADITION WAS KEPT ALIVE IN SECRET. THE DEAD ART, HANDED DOWN FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.”
The calligraphy in Illustration 4 is written on both sides of the figure of a ninja. Visually, the words in the form of calligraphy and the images of weapons next to each other blend so well that images look like calligraphy. Literarily, words define the images and vice versa. The image and calligraphy in the painting are equal in meaning. They clarify each other while the subtitles interact and help explain the concept of Ninja. Another swift move of the camera and a jump cut to the next illustration of the ninja creates a dramatic effect of montage as if the figure in the painting is performing martial arts in a mobile action sequence (Illustration 4). Then the camera zooms to the weapons to bring added attention to the ninja’s tools (Illustration 9).

Such a close-up shot of weapons emphasizes the bloody cruelty of a ninja and foretells the plot of the story: a fight for the protection of the weapons and tradition of the last Koga ninja. Out of jealousy and intent to kill his love rival Casey, Masazuka (Tsuyoshi Ihara) is expelled from the ninjitsu school. Masazuka becomes an assassin-for-hire and threatens to steal the chest containing the weapons and armor of the last Koga ninja. An American ninja Casey (Scott Adkins) and Namiko (Mika Hijii), the daughter of the grandmaster at the Ninja school, escort the chest containing the weapons and armor of the last Koga ninja to New York for safekeeping. The next extreme close up of the red seal impression of 隠 conforms to the tradition of Japanese ink painting while indicating the bloody battles among ninjas, the tragic death of the ninja master and his students, and the hardship and risk Casey and Namiko have to endure to
protect the tradition and weapons of the last Koga ninja.

Again, the camera gives a jump cut of another illustration of a ninja and weapons, then quickly pans from the roof of a fortress down to the ninja climbing up the wall (Illustrations 5, 6, 7). The jump cut images in Illustrations 6, 7 and 8 give a further display of what a ninja is trained to be and to do. The calligraphy of 不動心 (No emotion, no distraction) renders the qualification for a real ninja. The narrative is followed by a beautiful scene of a Japanese dojo in which martial artists perform and practice their skills. The take is complemented with the grandmaster’s voiceover about a historic overview of ninjas in Japan (Illustration 10). In the shot, the grandmaster reminds the American student of being a ninja of no emotion and no distraction. The painting of Illustration 8 in the opening sequence serves as a repetition for emphasis and a continuity of the narrative. The fast camera movements of paintings create a visual effect similar to an animation. It displays the interplay of the dynamic camera with the static image of a painting.

In feudal Japan, men were trained to be agents and killers for different purposes like Ninja or Shinobi. In the future world, however, director Richard Clabaugh’s movie Eyeborgs (2009) proposes that men will be replaced by machines for espionage, sabotage, infiltration and assassination. The film is an overt political commentary in cinema, warning people that government can interfere with people’s privacy. Freedom is sacrificed in the name of security. The robots, the government surveillance cameras called “Eyeborgs,” are
intended to keep people safe but actually are killing innocent people. The film narrates this scenario of chaos some time in the future in the United States. As fear of terrorism escalates, the government passes the “Freedom of Observation Act,” and creates an intense surveillance program called ODIN system.

The film begins with an opening text along with images and a narrator speaking the text to provide audiences with some background. Although film critics may consider such text-image-narrator technique a redundancy, yet it gives audiences a visual and mental picture of ODIN (Figure 114). The camera shows the American flag superimposed with a metal icon of a camera surveillance system and the “Freedom of Observation Act.” Then it shows aerial shots to eye-match shots of model houses and cameras on both sides of streets. The voice of the narrator continues: All surveillance cameras both public and private have been linked together into a single anti-terrorist surveillance system under the Freedom of Observation Act, a follow-up to the Patriot Act. Such a network is called the “Optical Defense Intelligence Network”. The camera shows these four words respectively on top of a map of the United States, implying patriotic purpose. The system includes millions of mobile, robotic surveillance camera known as “Eyeborgs,” watching every digital device and person for suspicious behavior to stop possible crimes supposedly for American safety.

These Eyeborg surveillance bots come in a variety of sizes, shapes and functionalities. The cinematographer alternates camera angles and zooms to explain this ODIN system by creating a mechanized feel and collage of images
onscreen. Animated white blocks like steel or iron slide in, spin, assemble and form the film title Eyeborgs. The font is square and cute in white against a blue backdrop like the computer print. Impressively, the filmmaker plays on the word cyborg to suggest that such cameras of this surveillance system no longer function like a robot (machines with no biological components); instead, they act like cyborgs, human beings or animals that have weapons and motivation to take control and kill. They can change for their own purposes the recorded information and evidence to eliminate humans at will. The smaller cameras walk and run on two legs with a big eye, standing on top of buildings and looking around, and also creep up and peer in windows, plan, think, attack and kill. The bigger eyeborgs look like mechanical spiders that have power to crush and carry deadly weapons to kill anything. They invade people’s homes, close the door and trap the victims and murder them.

Such an “eyeborg,” both in name and in shape, resembles a “cyborg,” a cybernetic organism, part machine, part human and part animal. Donna Haraway, in “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Social Feminism in the 1980s,” defines cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (257). A cyborg is part of machine and part of human, a human being whose body has been taken over in whole or in part by electronic mechanical devices. A cyborg is a human being, or other organic creature, whose body is wholly or partially replaced with artificial parts.
Figure 114 *Eyeborgs* film stills (Richard Clabaugh, 2009):
Metaphorically, we are all cyborgs because we depend so much on machines. Everyday we drive to work, turn on our computer and write, shop and pay with a self-checkout system. We may feel we cannot live without machines. Machines are part of our lives, part of us. While some of the technology remains the domain of science fiction, some of it is appearing in our environments, in the form of exoskeletons, artificial limbs and prostheses, biological implants, and the electronic devices for restoring vision for the blind. The filmmaker and screenwriter of *Eyeborgs*, nevertheless, defined the robotic camera as a cybernetic organism like a Cyborg probably because of the violent nature of this mobile camera, which acts like a predator.

It is ironic in the film that humans are not killed by terrorists, but by the robotic cameras intended to keep people safe. Richard Clabaugh conveys a message that we will create greater danger if government interferes with people’s freedom or invades their privacy because of terrorist paranoia. As David Croteau and William Hoynes argue, “Media representations are intertwined with questions of power and ideology. Media images do not simply reflect the world, they re-present it; instead of reproducing the ‘reality’ of the world ‘out there,’ the media engages in practices that define reality” (168). Cinematic images can illuminate social concerns and make meaning. Clabaugh explores the topic of government’s continued expansion into people’s lives with the alibi of homeland security. The film entertains the audience with stunning CGI effect. Texts combining images through the eyes/cameras of *Eyeborgs* are pictorial.
III.2. Calligraphy and Painting in Time Sequences

Painting and calligraphy as art forms are often used to enhance the visual effect and to modify cinematic discourse. Directors utilize paintings and calligraphy in their narratives to recall a memory, or describe events that happened in the past or will occur in the future. Stanley Tong, the Hong Kong director, in his film *Myth* (神話, 2005) employs a portrait painting to narrate a flashback of the story. The major character Jack (Jackie Chan), an archeologist, is convinced by his friend William (Tony Leung Ka-Fai) to embark on an adventure to hunt a rare material that can create a field of zero gravity. They travel to the floating tomb of a Dassar king in India. When William removes a piece of the gem stone eye of an animal statue, the zero gravity field collapses, and the floating sword and tomb fall.

Jack accidentally spots a beautiful painting of a princess (Korean actress, Hee-Seon Kim) under an ancient coffin in the tomb of a Dassar King. Such a painting brings back the memory of Jack’s obsessive dream that he is known as General Meng Yi assigned to escort a Korean princess to the old emperor of Qin Dynasty. The painting was portrayed when Princess Ok-Soo saw General Meng Yi after she became a concubine of Emperor Qin. The princess fell in love with General Meng. General Meng went to a battle while Princess Ok-Soo waited for him to come back at the mystical Heavenly Palace—a wondrous fortress said to be built by Emperor Qin Shi-huang to ensure his immortality. The emperor died soon after the princess tried the herbal pill for him. Princess Ok-Soo had waited
for Meng Yi ever since.

Jack’s dreams are supposed to be his past life. To indicate this and create a flashback, Tong alternates between shots of the portrait painting, and live action from the past, showing close-ups of the Princess’ and Jack’s delighted face, then an extreme close-up shot of the painting with the Princess facial features fading away (Figure 115). The camera zooms out to a medium close-up and then a full shot to show Princess Ok-Soo sitting by the beautiful pool of lotus and the painter waiting for her to smile for a finished portrait. The princess smiled when she saw General Meng. The camera zooms in from a medium close-up to an extreme close-up to her smiling. The camera then cuts to a close-up of General Meng’s face and then of Princess Ok-Soo’s smiling face. At last, the camera zooms in to an extreme close-up to princess’ smiling face and then to her portrait painting in the same size of her fading face to indicate the end of the flashback (Figure 115, Illustrations 2, 10).

*Myth* is a film that mingle dreams with reality. The narrative travels back and forth between Jack’s dreams of his past life and his real life. Tong also uses paintings in the picture book *Myth* written and drawn by Jack, and jump cuts to real figures to signal a flashback as shown in Figure 115, Illustrations 13, 14. In addition, a photo album and the real shot of a waterfall is also an indicator for a time frame, a story in the past (Illustrations 15, 16). The book opens with the painting of Princess Ok-Soo and echoes the flashback and origin of the mysterious story of Princess Ok-Soo and General Meng (Illustration 11). The
closing of the book with the cover page entitled *Myth* signals the resolution of the
dreamy tale (Illustration 12). Jack finally recollects all the fragments of his
dreams and finishes documenting the story about his past life.

First-time director Kim Yeong-jun from South Korea presents flashback
with a portrait painting in a different way. In *Bichunmoo* (2000), unlike the
flashback in *Myth* with jump cuts of a painting to the actress and back to the
painting, Kim presents the actress first, then he shows the image dissolving to a
painting and back to the actress. Nevertheless, both directors alternate close-up,
medium close-up and full shot to better depict the beauty of the protagonists and
the paintings. They both use zoom out of a painting to indicate the end of a
flashback. Kim’s martial arts film *Bichunmoo* (2000) narrates a story about
childhood lovers Jinha (Shin Hyun-june) and Sullie (Kim Hee-sun) in the
fourteenth century China under Mongol rule.

Jinha is an orphan, adopted by Sullie’s father, General Taruga. Taruga
arranges his daughter Sullie to marry a Mongol nobleman to form an alliance.
Sullie gives in after Jinha is apparently killed in a fight with the Mongol noble.
The flashback occurs ten years later. Without their knowledge, Jinha returns and
stands on the roof watching Sullie embracing her son in their house yard. The
camera aims at Jinha’s smiling face while Sullie’s and Jinha’s voiceover is heard
from their introduction in childhood. The camera reverses to extreme close-ups
of Sullie’s face with her son embracing her, then cuts to a girl dancing and
turning happily (Figure 116). These shots indicate a flashback and Jinha’s
Figure 115: *Myth* (Stanley Tong, 2005) film stills

(1)                                          (2)

(3)                                          (4)

(5)                                          (6)

(7)                                          (8)

(9)                                          (10)
Figure 116: Bichunmoo (Kim Yeong-jun, 2000) film stills
recollection of the happy time during his youth.

Kim employs dissolves to overlap the actress with a painting showing Sullie’s graceful dancing. The painting signifies the beautiful image of Sullie engraved in Jinha’s memory. The painting also indicates their happy time becomes a history. Their past happiness is documented in a painting and kept in Jinha’s mind. In reality, Sullie is someone else’s wife and a mother now. The flashback continues and narrates how Jinha saves Sullie from the attack of a wolf in the forest, and how they play, eat and practice stick fighting together. Kim uses painting to represent a flashback and narrate the transition of time and space. The brush work of the portrait painting is flowing in correspondence to the beautiful dancing of Sullie in her childhood.

Another time sequence that integrates painting styles in the cinematic narration begins with a medium close-up and jump cut to Sullie picking cotton in a field. Kim puts the background of the green field out of focus, contrasting the girl Sullie in the foreground in sharp focus, which creates a painterly effect and adds an impressionist touch to the scene (Figure 116). The cotton floating in space surrounds the innocence of the girl Sullie while zooming out and blurring the image like a water color wash. As the picture continues to zoom out, audiences see the boy Jinha play his flute, completing the sense of innocence of childhood, and the beginning of romance between the two protagonists.

Then the camera pans to an aerial shot when the cotton flies away to the right, moving to another season of autumn. Afterwards, the cotton transmutes
into snowflakes floating onscreen from the left. The grassland is now covered by a carpet of snow, indicating winter. The scene continues to unfold. The changing season reflects the growth and maturation of the young couple and their relationship. The snow-covered ground gives way to a rocky, purple shadowy landscape with gradations of blue sky mixed with white wispy cloud formations, creating the effect of a painting in oil and/or pastel. Kim employs special effects to infuse the cinematic images with a look of paintings in different styles.

Now, new life grows and spring returns, symbolizing the emergence of the new, mature relationship. Old yellow leaves gracefully swoop through the atmosphere, indicating their childhood passing as the now young adults move towards the horizon away from the audience and to their future. Kim instills his cinematic images with a romantic touch and lavish color in a series of paintings to denote the time sequences of the narrative—the change of seasons and the continuation of years. Such shots are demonstrations of cinematic scenes transforming to painterly images. They are innovative and powerful in presenting an artistic feel and symbolic meaning in the film. Kim uses camera techniques such as dissolves, pans, zooms, jump cuts, long shots and aerial shots along with lighting and props in the scenes to create painterly images and to represent the ellipsis of time in the narrative.

Filmmakers also make good use of paintings to foreshadow the cinematic narrative, for example, American screenwriter, film director, actress and producer, Sofia Coppola, displays her artistic talents in the biopic Marie
Antoinette (2006). She integrates paintings into cinematic narration of time change and the ellipsis of time sequence. Coppola is the daughter of set decorator/artist Eleanor Coppola and director Francis Ford Coppola. In 2003 Coppola became the third woman (and the first American woman) to be nominated for an Academy Award for Directing, for *Lost in Translation*. In 2010, with *Somewhere*, she became the first American woman (and fourth American filmmaker) to win the Golden Lion, the top prize at the Venice Film Festival.

In the film *Marie Antoinette*, the queen of France and her two eldest children are posed in front of a painter for the family portrait. The two children are standing on either side of Marie Antoinette, yet, in the scene, there is only one child, her daughter, in the painting. The incomplete painting foreshadows the tragic fates of the queen’s children. The painting reflects the historical fact that only Antoinette’s first child, the eldest daughter, survived (Figure 117). According to history, Marie-Therese Charlotte, the first child and daughter of King and Queen of France survived after the violence of the French Revolution. The other of the queen’s three children, two sons and a daughter, died young. The queen’s first child, Marie-Therese Charlotte was born in 1778 at Versailles and died in 1851.

In another scene, Coppola uses two paintings to denote the passage of time and understate the tragic event of the death of Marie Antoinette’s child. In the scene, two court servants carry a royal family portrait painting in which the queen sits in the center and her eldest daughter leans by her side, holding her arm.
On Marie Antoinette’s other side, a baby lies in the crib with the queen’s second child standing by the crib. The two court servants hang the painting on a wall in the palace and leave onscreen. Then the camera gives a jump cut to the two court servants again carrying a similar painting, and hanging it on the wall. The director deliberately produces a close-up shot of the painting. In this painting, the crib is empty, indicating that the Queen of France has lost her child (Figures 118 and 119).

The queen in the painting is in somber black and blue dress in contrast to her usual appearances in bright color and fancy hoop-skirt as shown in Figure 120. The low lighting and dark color hue of the painting and cinematic image both reflect the gloomy mood and tragic fate of the Queen of France. Sofia Coppola euphemistically and artistically depicts death with these paintings, and skips over the usual film depictions of tears and crying at a funeral. Such an interpretation avoids the cliché of chronological events of a traditional biopic. Coppola does not simply focus on the historical events, but synthesizes paintings into the cinematic narrative in an artistic manner. The film is like a series of
Figure 118 *Marie Antoinette* film still

Figure 119 *Marie Antoinette* film still

Figure 120 *Marie Antoinette* film still
paintings, sentimental and impressionistic. The setting and costumes are beautiful. Loosely based on a best-seller book by Lady Antonia Fraser, Coppola focuses on aesthetic imagery and creates a stylized, impressionistic portrait of the controversial French queen Marie Antoinette.

III.3. Calligraphy and Painting in Characterization

Skillful color or black and white cinematography is vital to create the atmosphere and motif for cinematic narration, and so is the font of texts. The meaning of the words is affected by the font they are displayed in. Text in different colors onscreen is arranged by the type face and size, the word spacing and depth of the margins. Text layout, the tone or color of the set and the interplay of the text with other props onscreen, combine to impart a “feel” or “resonance” to the narrative. English letters and calligraphy of signatures are embedded with the color of taupe throughout the credit sequences of *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996), a drama and thriller presented by New Line Cinema and directed by Renny Harlin. Close-up shots of handwriting scripts dominate the cinematic images in the title sequence.

The film begins with a close up shot of a woman’s delicate fingers holding a pen and writing her name *Samantha* in free style script on the paper (Figure 121, Illustration 1). Then the camera pans to the right or dissolves or jumps to the next cut, with extreme close-ups of the letters of her real name *Charlene Baltimore*,
a former CIA agent. Such sequences cohere with the narrative structure. The heroine named Samantha Caine (Geena Davis) is a perfect mom and a good teacher at a suburban Pittsburgh elementary school. She and her eight year old daughter, Caitlin (Yvonne Zima) live a happy and idyllic life with a nice man. Surprisingly, she finds herself talented with knife when chopping carrots in the kitchen, throwing the knife to the wall, killing a deer bare-handedly, and incredibly, dispatching an escaped convict.

She accidentally recovers from her "focal retrograde amnesia" in a car crash and discovers, with the assistance of a private investigator Mitch Henessey, (Samuel L. Jackson), her former identity—an assassin for the CIA named Charlene Baltimore. With feverish stunts, incredible gunfire and things blowing up, she and her daughter survive the persecution and murder conducted by her old enemies and her bosses, the villainous agents. The Free Style Script of her name Samantha on a white sheet of paper looks clean, tight, slim and neat, and seemingly reveals her personality as a professional, well-mannered teacher, a simple woman and good mother in accordance with the social norm. The camera cuts to a tone of purple taupe and medium taupe base. A pen is writing the name of Charlene Baltimore in the font of Lucida Handwriting on the paper.

Then the camera pans from left to right displaying the linear sequence of the English letters and writings, and orienting audience’s eyes to the signature of Charlene Baltimore overlapped on the top of Samantha, which suggests the heroine’s confusion about her double identity and her efforts to recapture the past
The strokes of Lucida Handwriting look spacious, smooth, refined, round and full in association with her identity as a special agent; a swift, well-trained, sophisticated and capable persona. It is impressive that the filmmaker employed different styles of handwriting to show characterization.

The color taupe exhibits a wide range of shades from gray, beige, yellow, brown and purple, reflecting the variants of her personalities from a modest and nice school teacher to a fierce and competent CIA agent. The color combination of taupe, mainly brown and purple, symbolizes her identity transformation. Brown implies her being down-to-earth, steadfast and tolerant when she hires the secret agent Mitch Hennessey to investigate her past and to fight for her life and her family. She is determined, even though she risks death. She endures threat and torture when caught by the villain, yet survives and never gives up protecting her family and saving her daughter and Mitch. The color purple reflects her mysterious, sexy, powerful and sophisticated feminine imagery.

When she resolves the mystery and recovers her true identity as a former CIA agent, the heroine practices writing the name of Charlene Elizabeth Baltimore to assert her true identity (Illustration 8). She decides to take control and fight her way out. She cuts her hair short, puts on a sexy look with heavy make-up, dark eyeliner and bright red lipstick. She wears tight pants and vest without bra underneath. She regains her confidence and fighting spirit. Her swift kicks and turns, heavy fists and punches, accurate shots and furious driving, all demonstrate her masculine side as well as feminine persona.
Figure 121: The Long Kiss Goodnight (Renny Harlin, 1996) film stills:
In traditional Western culture, hair style can be a sexual symbol. John Berger explains that in Western visual culture, the observer, the painter, is often thought to be man with a woman’s body arranged to appeal to the male observer; thus, her image is portrayed to appeal to his sexuality. Berger points out “in the European tradition generally, the convention of not painting the hair on a woman’s body supports the same end. Hair is associated with sexual power and passion. The woman’s sexual passion needs to be minimized so that the spectator may feel that he has the monopoly of such passion” (55). The Western tradition suggests that the male spectator, the male gaze possesses the sexual power. When Baltimore is independent, her hair is short and her sexual passion is minimized. She is ambitious and aggressive like a man. In one scene, she opens her robe and exposes her breasts to distract Mitch from pain in treating his wounds. She smokes and tells Mitch her plan for a fight and revenge. She has to be cold and dominating at the expense of her softness, to take control of her situation.

However, the character’s exaggerated red lips, blond wig, white stripe vest and braless figure also demonstrate her feminine charisma. She also shows her affection for her daughter even after she regains her real identity. In the credit sequences, the overlapping and floating of her name Samantha as a teacher and her real name Charlene Baltimore as a CIA agent symbolizes the confusion, inner struggle and awareness of the character’s passive femininity and regressive masculinity. The letter color and font of these signatures in the credit sequences show a woman of double roles, both feminine and masculine, both passive and
active in sexuality. English handscripts of two signatures in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* denote a dual character of the heroine.

In the biopic *Marie Antoinette* (2006), Sofia Coppola also employs painting and text to describe the queen’s character. As the angry mob attack the French palace, the director uses a painting and texts (three banners) to illustrate the French people’s fury and dissatisfaction towards the queen, and to expose her nature and character. Upon a gold-framed portrait of Marie Antoinette in blue dress with a pink rose in her hand, three commentaries are subsequently added, “Spending France into Ruin!” “Queen of debt!” “Beware of deficit!” In the painting, her dress lace, delicate cap, pink cheeks and rose, her dark rouge lipstick and her indirect gaze of a side view posture well record Marie Antoinette’s elegance and romanticism but also her arrogance and indifference to the common people as the queen of France (Figure 122).

Such a painting with texts adds an aesthetic touch to the filmic narrative while changing the tempo and shortening the story time. It brings audiences a visual surprise and makes a political, historical and artistic statement. Though the director does not show scenes of angry people attacking the queen, the brief text in the banners/captions written in casual handwritten script in block letter, the black color and exclamation mark all indicate the French people’s strong resentment towards her. The use of painting and texts here sheds a spotlight on the imagery and characterization of the queen, and highlights the strong emotion of the rioting mob against her.
Figure 122 Marie Antoinette film stills
Similarly, director Julie Taymor uses paintings to represent changes in the life and personality of a character. In the film *Frida* (2002), audiences are presented with a collage and convergence of both Frida Kahlo’s paintings and cinematic scenes. Though the film is not intended as an overview of Frida’s artworks, the director incorporates several of her paintings at the dramatic moments in this biopic. The cinematography is as vibrant and lush as Frida’s painting. The filmic narration is as dramatic and symbolic as her art. When Frida returns home only to find her husband muralist Diego Rivera having an affair with her sister, Frida explodes into anger and anguish; she throws things at her betayers, she cries and collapses. She confines herself to her room and refuses to talk to Diego and her sister.

Then the director uses Frida’s first self-portrait “Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair” to tactfully set an animated replica of the painting (Figure 123). This painting was made in 1940 after her divorce from her husband Diego. To express Frida’s disappointment in her husband and her desire to be independent of men, the director presents a freeze shot in which the actress Salma Hayek sits still on a chair with short hair in a man’s suit. The actress suddenly moves her head and takes a deep breath, which surprises the audience. The heroine has cut
off her long hair and martyred her femininity. Like Frida’s painting, vast amounts of uninhabited space surround the actress and strands of hair are scattered on the floor, which suggests the character’s deep despair and emptiness.

From then on, Frida’s personality changes drastically. She wears short hair, gives up her feminine dress that Diego likes. Her actions announce that she no longer loves Diego Rivera, her former husband and closest friend. She becomes addicted to alcohol, and becomes involved in relationships with women. The replica of Frida’s painting in cinematic image, however, achieves a vivid effect of characterization for the filmic narrative. It labels the transformation of the character and paves the way for the storyline of Frida’s later life. Frida eventually gets involved in some scandalous affairs with men and women. She has many lovers including an affair with the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky. The “Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair” indicates that Frida has changed and freed her mind, taking control in relationships as Diego does.

This painting symbolizes her challenge to gender roles and social norms. It serves as her expression of individuality and response to repressive romanticism. The self portrait documents her emotional pain and her alienation from the deep
affection, as she had for Diego. Another painting in the film that illustrates Frida’s pain is “The Broken Column” in 1944 (Figure, 124). At that time, Frida becomes a bit hysterical and agitated because her health is deteriorating rapidly. The animated nails in her body in the film not only serve as a metaphor for Frida’s physical suffering but also suggest a feeling of realism. Her tears in the painting drop to depict her excruciating pain and her helplessness in real life.

Such an animation in the cinematic representation based on Frida’s painting, gives a strong visual effect and emotional appeal to the audience. It helps the audience understand the character and her art work as well as the filmic narration. The director uses a series of zoom-ins and jump cuts to create a greater impact on the audience’s sense. Such long shots to medium close-up shots describe Frida’s increasing pain and create a feeling of intensity. The silence of the painting denotes an even stronger voice than the cries and moans of the actress, as in the proverb, “A picture is worth a thousand words.”

III.4. Calligraphy and Painting in Figurative Language

Film can be seen as a recycling and remaking of other art forms. Filmmakers have explored methods such as integrating paintings and calligraphy to narrate stories. Directed by Michael Mak, Starring Tony Leung, Michelle Yeoh, Donnie Yen and Joey Wong, the Hong Kong action/comedy/drama film Butterfly and Sword (1993) demonstrates a vivid use of calligraphy and painting in cinematic narrative and figurative language, such
as cinematic commentary and hyperbole. The film is loosely adapted from Gu Long’s Wuxia novel “Meteor, Butterfly, Sword.” It narrates the story of the protagonist Meng Sing Wan (Tony Leung) and Butterfly (Joey Wong) who fall deeply in love with each other and live happily in a small hut next to a river, fishing and writing poems. Sing is an assassin under the leadership of his sister Ko (Yeoh), however, without Butterfly’s knowledge.

Sing, Ko and Yip (Donnie Yen) carry out a mission assigned by the Grand Eunuch Tsao, to steal a letter from the hands of Master Suen (Tsui). The letter encloses names of martial artists. Sing has to leave his lover Butterfly and fake his own death. Sing takes on a new identity of a freelance swordsman and serves Master Suen. Finally, Sing and Ko steal the letter from Master Tsui and hand it over to Eunuch Tsao who turns out to be Eunuch Li in disguise. Actually, the evil Eunuch Li schemes to kill all the skillful martial artists. Knowing his cruelty, Sing, Ko and a prince (Jimmy Lin) defeat Eunuch Li and save the martial arts world.

The director presents a striking title of Chinese calligraphy in red on a black screen (Figure 125, Illustration 1), followed by smaller calligraphy from right to left in column commenting on the inevitable turbulence of the martial arts world and the romance of heroes (Illustrations 2, 3). Such calligraphy foretells ideas to the audience about the Wuxia genre with a touch of romance. Then the camera makes a jump cut to a physical setting displayed by a sign of calligraphy on the left upper corner of the screen “Eunuch Tsao’s Mansion”
Director Mak employs jump cuts to show the beautiful Chinese calligraphy written by the real Eunuch Tsao who is murdered by Eunuch Li. The extreme close-up shot displays the content of the Chinese calligraphy—moral disciplines and mottos, indicating Eunuch Tsao’s integrity and honesty, and introducing his character traits (Illustrations 5, 6).

The seal and his signature inform the audience of Eunuch Tsao’s identity. After Eunuch Tsao is mercilessly assassinated, the camera shows a jump cut of a full shot and then a close-up of the secret order over his calligraphy, informing audiences that anyone in his mansion is forbidden to go out (Illustrations 7, 8). Such shots pave the way for the following sequences where Eunuch Li disguises himself as Eunuch Tsao in order to carry out his evil scheme of slaughtering all the martial artists. The secret order from Eunuch Li with his seal covers Eunuch Tsao’s calligraphy handscroll, signifying Tsao is killed and his identity is stolen by Eunuch Li. The camera then gives a close-up shot of the secret order so that audiences can read it clearly.

When Sing (Tong Leung) rests in a field and opens a food box on his way to a mission, the Chinese calligraphy in white written on a leaf “Dessert for my dear husband. From Butterfly,” gives a humorous and touching moment to the narrative (Illustration 9). Similarly, in another scene, when Sing moans over his teammate’s death in front of her tomb, he throws a piece of grass and sends a message to Tsao’s guard who follows him. On the grass, small black font of Chinese calligraphy is delicately written. The extreme close-up shot of the grass
along with Sing’s voiceover explains the reason for his leaving Tsao’s mansion for a few days.

In Master Suen’s house, the director dramatically presents a high angle shot to achieve an effect of hyperbole. This shot emphasizes the length of a piece of rice paper. The long piece of paper hanging high from the roof to the ground is a list of names of martial artists in calligraphic style. The camera cuts to a medium close up with 180 degree pan and eye-match angle, to enhance the impression of the paper length and exaggerate the number of martial artists that Eunuch Li plans to kill. Such a shot highlights the violence and cruelty of a potential slaughter launched by the evil Eunuch Li to satisfy his desire for power and control (Illustrations 11, 13). While Master Suen and his guard are reading the long list, they also receive a letter from Eunuch Li to warn them to put the list in a safe place as someone is sent to steal it. The one-page letter and calligraphy is short in contrast to the long piece of paper, achieving an effect of humor for the cinematic narration (Illustrations 12, 14).

Likewise, in another scene about Sing’s caring letter to his sweetheart Butterfly before he leaves home on business, the director repetitively uses long pieces of paper with Chinese calligraphy to exaggerate and emphasize Sing’s deep passion and profound concern for Butterfly. Mak alternates from extreme close-up shots with text/calligraphy superimposed on image, along with voiceover, to medium close up and full shots in order to narrate the content of Sing’s letter in an interesting manner (Illustrations 17, 18, 19, 20). As Ko
(Michelle Yeoh) also loves Sing, she burns one of Sing’s letters after she reads it and does not let Butterfly see his letter (Illustrations 21, 22). The extreme close-up of the calligraphy and burning letter support the emotional content of the scene.

Before Sing leaves home for the mission to steal the secret list, he asks Butterfly what gifts she wants upon his return. Butterfly unrolls a Chinese painting and shows Sing that what she desires is drawn in the painting—bikini or sexy underwear like those worn by a beautiful Western woman. Such a prop of painting serves as a humorous and euphemistic reply from Butterfly. In the scene where Yip (Donnie Yen) reveals his secret love for Ko, Ko refuses his affections and advises him to take her as a man rather than a woman. Then the camera shows two handscrolls of Chinese calligraphy in the living room as a commentary when Ko leaves him (Illustration 15). The calligraphy says that romantic relationships are destined for whatever fate has in store for them. It tells Yip or the audience, “Man proposes, God disposes.”

As the narrative reaches its climax, Ko and Sing are badly wounded when they fight hard to defeat the fake Eunuch Tsao (actually disguised Eunuch Li). At a risky moment, Ko throws herself upon Sing to stop Eunuch Li (fake Eunuch Tsao) from hurting Sing. Ko is almost killed and Sing is touched and holds Ko. But as soon as Butterfly appears, Sing runs towards her and embraces her happily and passionately, leaving Ko alone in tears and despair. Then director Mak presents a jump cut of Sing driving a horse cart carrying Butterfly
holding Ko who is seriously wounded, moving further with beautiful calligraphy in purple on either side of the cinematic image. The calligraphy says, “It is helpless if people have the romantic connection but no fate to be together.” “It is tragic if people have the fate to be united but are separated.”

This is the last scene of the film. The calligraphy serves as a commentary, an exclamation mark and a period on the cinematic narrative. The director implies that true love is a blissful feeling for people who share the same affection. All our lives we may search for someone to love, but we can not be sure of being loved back in exactly the same way. Mak laments and sympathizes with people who suffer the pain and frustration of not having their love returned. However, the last shot foretells how the three characters will take care of one another in the future like a family. The director emphasizes the kindness and benevolence of human nature. This cinematic image is expressed in earthy tones, harmonious and natural. The calligraphy in purple highlights the theme and beautifies the cinematic imagery, very impressive and touching.

Hong Kong producer, director and actor Stephen Chow presents a brilliant action comedy Kung Fu Hustle (2004). The film attracts audiences because of its special effect and hilarious cartoon-style humor. The film has won numerous awards such as Best Picture, Best Visual Effect, Best Sound Effect, Best Action Design, Best Editing, and Best Supporting Actor at the Twenty-Fourth Hong Kong Film Awards 2005. Set in 40s Shanghai, China, a
Figure 125: *Butterfly and Sword* film stills
wandering thief Sing (Stephen Chow) desires to join the famous Axe Gang to
be cool. He accidentally acquires the mythic power of super Kungfu and defeats
his rivals when the gang attacks the slum, Pig Sty Valley where he resides. The
film features pop culture, violence and nudity. Chow uses a board carved with
calligraphy to indicate irony.

Chow blends both comedy and visceral action with artistic integrity and
traditional melodrama. He displays intense graphic violence with ridiculously
action-packed Kungfu using extravagant CGI effects. Another striking feature in
Chow’s cinematic language is using Chinese calligraphy to express irony and
satire. In the opening sequences, the camera shows an extreme close-up of a
name sign “陈探长” (Inspector Chan) in a police station, then pans up and
zooms out and pans to the right to give a full view of Inspector Chan, other
policemen and people looking up to the right and listening to the bangs and
cries from upstairs, but with no intent to stop them.

Surprisingly, we view a police man is smashed hard onto a board on the
wall engraved with Chinese calligraphy “罪恶克星” (Superstars of Crime
Fighters). The two Chinese characters “恶克” in the middle are crushed and
removed as the policeman falls on the ground right in front of Inspector Chan
(Figure 126). The remaining two words on the signboard read “罪星,” meaning
“Superstars of Crime”—very ironic. In traditional Chinese culture, Chinese
idioms of four characters in calligraphy style written on paper or engraved on
wood are meant for interior decorations, moral guidelines or as prizes of honor.
Figure 126 *Kung Fu Hustle* film stills
Such shots of the prop with Chinese calligraphy on the broken board indicate that the police are no longer heroes or a service force to keep social order and provide security for civilians. Instead, the gangs and evil groups take control and become heroes and superstars.

As the protagonist Sing admires the power of the Axe Gang and attempts to be a member, the director satirizes the corrupt social system and mocks pop culture and the ecstasy of violence. Then the camera cuts to the chief of Crocodile Gang played by Feng Xiao Gang, a famous Chinese director. He yells furiously, “Anyone else?” The camera cuts to three policemen standing at stiff attention, not daring to look at him. In the background hangs a framework of Chinese written in black and white “除暴安良,” meaning to eliminate evil and keep peace for the good citizens. In addition to the effect of irony, such a prop again implies a threat from the chief of Crocodile Gang that anyone will be crushed and damaged like the calligraphy board if he or she ever dares to keep good order or attempt to get rid of the Gangs. Chow employs props with Chinese calligraphy to vividly create a dramatic irony—“an effect felt when the audience learns something before the characters on the screen do” (Geiger 898).

Adapted from Raymond Carver’s short stories *Short Cuts*, director Robert Altman makes an American drama film using the same title *Short Cuts* in 1993. The film won the prestigious Golden Lion and the Volpi Cup for Best Ensemble Cast at the Venice Film Festival. The cast won a Special Golden Globe Award for their ensemble acting. Robert Altman was nominated for Best Director for the
Academy Award and shared with Frank Barhydt a nomination for Best Screenplay for the Golden Globe. The cinematic narration reflects the feature of African fractal art: self-similarity. This is a style of painting often found in African art—a rough or fragmented geometric shape splits into parts, each of which is approximately a reduced-size of the whole.

For instance, one of the striking features in *Short Cut* is that the characters in the story are seemingly detached from, yet inter-related to each other. Though some of them are strangers, they are involved in each other’s lives accidentally. For example, Marian Wyman, the wife of Doctor Ralph Wyman, invited Clair Kane, a children’s party clown and her husband Stuart Kane, an unemployed salesman, to a barbecue dinner since they met at a concert in which Zoe (a cellist) was giving a performance. The thread that links all the characters together is Casey, the 8-year-old son of Howard Finnigan, the TV anchorman, and his wife, Ann Finnigan. Casey’s connections to other characters get multiplied when he was hit by a car, driven by Doreen Piggot, a coffee shop waitress; Casey’s doctor was Ralph Wyman.

Then Howard’s father, Paul, who hadn’t seen his son for many years, appeared suddenly in the hospital to inquire about his grandson’s physical condition. The club singer Tess Trainer and her daughter Zoe, the cello player, lived next door to the Finnigan’s. Jerry Kaiser, a serviceman was cleaning Finnigan’s pool while Tess Trainer, their next-door neighbor asked him to clean her pool, too. Jerry’s wife, Josette Kaiser, mother with two children was also a
phone-sex worker. Jerry had a friend who works as a makeup artist, Bill Bush. Bill Bush’s mother was the coffee waitress Doreen, and her father was the limousine driver. The divorced mother, Betty Weather, dated a married policeman, Gene Shepard, whose wife was Sherry Shepard, the sister of the painter Marian, Doctor Ralph’s wife. Betty’s ex-husband was Stormy Weather, a pilot. Andy Bitkower, the baker kept calling Ann because she had ordered a birthday cake for Casey, but failed to pick it up because of her son’s death.

Every character is connected to each other and has the similar problem of human isolation. They are all uncertain of how to get along with people around them and some are disturbed by human problems of love and betrayal, trust and lies; indifference and lack of attention, life pressure and the threat of death. Such storylines and character situations reflect the pattern of African fractal art. If we take the contemporary human psyche, alienation and lack of communication, as a macro pattern, a representation of the human psyche in postmodern society as a whole, we can consider each individual character who bears the similar emotional pattern in the story as a micro pattern, a repetitive and smaller scale model of the whole, whose lives act upon each other’s as the plot is unfolded.

Another feature in this movie is the editing, similar to the technique of a cubist painting. Events are seemingly edited in a confusing and chaotic order. The camera cuts back and forth among different events. However, each fragment of the storyline is linked to the other and intertwined, mostly in chronological order, either by clues of diegetic sound, such as speech, helicopter engine noise,
TV siren, cello music and the club singer’s song or by props like fish, human body, smoke, painting, TV, helicopter and telephone. Many signifiers serve as a transition or link to the continuum of space and time and bear significance in narration. It is a way of displaying reality. All the storylines are represented in a simultaneous manner—“sequential cuts; within a temporal relation of simultaneity” (White 135). Like a cubist painting, cinematic images in Short Cuts are viewed from multiple perspectives simultaneously. The director breaks down images or visual perception into geometric and abstract components while audiences analyze and re-assemble them. The camera shows a lot of jump cuts of different characters and links the events at seemingly random angles, removing a coherent sense of depth.

Robert Altman uses different props to indicate time and space in Short Cuts. It shows how the cinematic narrator/implied author guides the audience in their understanding of the narrative. At the beginning of the movie, Altman gives an aerial shot of a limousine on the freeway, then a close-up inside the car. “Sometimes the cinematic narrator, through camera movements of angle or other means, seems to be communicating the story directly…in the establishing moments of a film before any character appears” (Chatman 157). In this way, the implied author or narrator mediates the perspective of a viewer. When in Short Cuts, the camera displays a woman’s leg in sexy black stockings and a TV on which the anchorman Howard is talking about pesticides and human emotion, and fear of death, the camera shifts to Howard and his wife Ann watching the
same TV news in bed.

After some shots of the concert, the camera shifts to Jerry’s house. Inside the house, the television is also reporting Howard’s program. TV here is a signifier of multiple events happening at the same time. When Casey is hit by a car and put to bed, Howard asks his wife Ann to call an ambulance while there is the noise of an ambulance on the TV screen. Ann tries to wake up Casey and asks him to drink a cup of milk. But he is still in a coma. The shot of the milk on the table turns to a shot of a cup of milk knocked down on the TV and a voiceover: “Accidents happen.”

There is siren and ambulance on the TV scene.

Afterwards, the camera presents a jump cut of Casey in the hospital. Here, TV is used as an agency to continue to tell the story and bridge the gap/ellipse of story time. TV as an agency here can not only create a feeling of tension and insecurity besides the linkage of time, but also convey a message that death is everywhere as shown by the woman’s dead body floating in the water when Paul and Stuart are camping and fishing. We are trapped. We are never certain about anything in this postmodern world as Trainer sings at the end of the movie: “No matter what happens, you need to carry on…That’s the unexpected and uncertainty that keeps us going…I’m a prisoner of my own self…”
Not only does Robert Altman intertextualize the techniques of cubist painting and fractal art into his cinematic discourse, but he also uses cubist paintings as props to decorate his cinematic images and narrate stories. In the scene where Doctor Ralph asks his wife Marian if she dated the painter, her male friend Mr. Anderson, that evening, the camera pans to a cubist painting on the wall in their house. The painting depicts a girl sitting in a chair with her fingers crossed from three angular perspectives exposed simultaneously, implying that Doctor Ralph hopes his wife did not have an affair with Mr. Anderson since Marian does not respond to his question initially. The director uses a crop shot of painting to visually reflect Doctor Ralph’s inner thoughts. The painting is also a metaphor of his wish for Marian’s fidelity.

To adapt Carver’s story “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” Altman deliberately adds several male portraits hanging on the wall, facing Marian and laughing as if they were looking at her with a male gaze as Laura Mulvey terms (Carver, 46-68). The portraits serve as a metaphor, a quotation and an intertext of Mulvey’s famous essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in which she argues that woman’s image in the cinema is displayed as a sexual object, an erotic spectacle; and man as the bearer of the voyeuristic look (837). Altman presents Marian ironing her skirt, naked below her waist as she talks to her husband, Ralph, who watches her walk here and there (Figure 127). Altman adds props of paintings to expand narrative elements and illustrate a feminist point of view.
**Conclusion:**

Film is pictorial and intertextual. Cinematic representation also transforms and encompasses other art forms, such as painting and calligraphy. In recent decades, more and more filmmakers integrate painting and calligraphy to narrate stories. However, there is little scholarship on calligraphy in cinematic representation. The discussion of Chinese painting in cinema is often ignored. This study attempts to contribute to the field of Chinese painting and calligraphy, and English calligraphy in cinema. Like Western cinema as illustrated in *Short Cuts* (Robert Altman, 1993), painting has a profound influence in Chinese films as well. For example, director Zhang Yimou employs Chinese conventions of landscape painting to present scenes of small human figures among vast landscapes in *Hero* (2002). He uses long shots and distant angles to situate the martial artists in the beautiful landscape of Jiu Cai Gou (Chinese: 九寨沟), a nature reserve in Sichuan Province, China (Figures 34-37). Zhang Yimou locates a small figure of Nameless (Jet Li) next to the trees by the lake, reflecting this tradition of Chinese
landscape painting as shown in Figure 34. Zhang also imitates artist Lin Fengmian’s (林風眠, 1900-1991) painting style to present a blue hue in this cinematic image (Figure 128).

In another scene of *Hero*, Zhang Yimou follows the style of artist Tang Yin (1470-1523), a talented poet and calligrapher in the Ming Dynasty, in his landscape paintings. Zhang’s camera captures the red maple leaves on both sides in the foreground and tiny figures of Nameless and Broken Sword fighting on the water in the middle ground as shown in Figure 35. Such a frame of long shot resembles the compositional structure of Tang Yin’s paintings *Drinking Tea* (Figure 129) and *Mountain Scene* (Figure 130). In the fighting scenes between Flying Snow (Maggie Cheung) and Moon (Zhang Ziyi) as shown in Figures 133 and 134, the images of two heroines among the swirling leaves are similar to two figure paintings by Fu Baoshi (1904-1965), a Chinese artist noted for an elegant style through his integration of poetic atmosphere and unique inking method (Figures 131, 132). Even the simplicity of costume design for the actresses in *Hero* resembles the figures’ dresses in Fu Baoshi’s paintings. Zhang Yimou employs Chinese calligraphy to embellish his cinematic representations as well. He displays the art of Chinese calligraphy in many scenes (Figure 135).

It is noteworthy that filmmakers include the arts as a means of extending film expression. Zhang Yimou integrates Chinese calligraphy in his cinematic representation. In *Hero* (2002), he revolves the narrative around an invincible swordplay derived from the writing of calligraphy and demonstrates the artistic
Figure 35 *Hero* film still

Figure 129 Painting: *Drinking Tea*, Artist: Tang Yin (1470-1523)

31.1 x 105.8cm Palace Museum, Beijing  (Chinese: 唐寅 事茗图 北京故宫博物院)

Figure 130 Painting: *Mountain Scene*

Figure 131 Painting (Left): *Nine Songs*, Artist: Fu Baoshi

Figure 132 Painting (Right): *Mrs. Xiang*, Artist: Fu Baoshi (1954)

Figure 133 *Hero* film still
Figure 134 *Hero* film still
Figure 135 *Hero* film stills
value of calligraphy as an image and a performance art. Recently, Western filmmakers have explored creative ways of using paintings and calligraphy to enhance their filmic narration. In the biopic *Marie Antoinette* (2006), director Sofia Coppola employs a portrait and three captions to describe the character of the French queen and convey the feelings of the French people of her time (Figure 122). Director Julie Taymor combines animated effects with paintings to present characterization and create the narrative mood in *Frida* (2002). After Salma Hayek portrays Frida Kahlo cutting her hair short because of her husband’s infidelity, the actress, in a replica painting of Frida, lowers her head and sighs. Tears added to Kahlo’s self portrait and the animated nails in her body indicate her great sadness and tremendous suffering. Such animation can convey a strong impact on the audience.

Filmmakers explore alternative and more graphic texts in recent cinema. The interplay of calligraphy/writing with painting/drawing beautifies and strengthens the cinematic representation and narration in *Elsewhere* (Nathan Hope, 2009) and *Daybreakers* (Michael Spierig and Peter Spierig, 2010). Text can become image in film. English calligraphy is pictorial, semantic and symbolic as illustrated in the title images of *Bulletproof Monk* (Paul Hunter, 2003), *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (Hector Babeno, 1985), *Catch Me If You Can* (Stephen Spielberg, 2002), and *The Secret Life of Bees* (Gina Prince-Bythewood, 2008). Image is seen in the text and text in the image as shown in the title sequences in *Across the Hall* (Alex Merkin, 2009) and *Steal a Pencil for Me*. 
In Chinese visual culture, painting and calligraphy have a close relationship. Calligraphy is a part of a painting. Text is image. The brushstrokes in a painting are similar to those in calligraphy especially in Chinese landscape paintings. The painting *Poet on a Mountain Top* by Chen Zhou is an illustration of this aesthetic feature. Chen Zhou (1427-1509), a great artist in the Ming Dynasty, painted the masterpiece in a calligraphic style. He portrays a serene landscape of tall mountains with white clouds and pine trees growing next to the temple on the mountain. The tiny human figure of a poet on top of the mountain, looking towards the left, becomes the focal point of the painting (Figure 136).
The figure is looking at the written poem in calligraphy that describes the beauty of the landscape. The light and dark ink brushstrokes of the calligraphy echo the technique seen in the painted image.

Ink painting is valued as high art in China. Tsui Hark, a Hong Kong filmmaker, reflects the aesthetics of Chinese ink painting and calligraphy in cinema. In addition to the film title 《七剑》 (Seven Swords) presented in stunning calligraphic strokes, Tsui imitates the simplicity and grace of Chinese ink painting to present the opening sequences in Seven Swords (Figure 107). The cinematic representations in the opening sequences are in grey and black hue with a touch of red. The images appear clear and elegant. Such a color scheme is associated with Chinese ink painting. Ink paintings have been valued by Chinese artists because they emphasize the technique of brushstrokes. For an artist, each brushstroke should be drawn in an exact manner at a fast pace. The control of ink density and rhythm of force are crucial in the representation.

To accomplish the basic skills of ink painting, an artist needs years of practice. Ink painting has been considered the supreme art among Chinese literati paintings owing to the art of calligraphy. Mario Bussagli comments, writing is a sort of “painting of thoughts” for the Chinese. Each character has a rhythm of its own, independent of its meaning. Characters are appreciated as abstract drawings. ‘The characters used to express ideas soon turn into ‘ink games.’’ Chinese paintings, therefore, is based on calligraphy, and it can be considered an emanation of that art. This explains why black ink was preferred to colour, and
the importance assumed by the brushstroke and the line” (Bussagli 13).

In the Yung Dynasty (1279-1368), Zhao Mengfu developed a new style of painting combining poetry/calligraphy and seals, especially in his landscape paintings. This aesthetic convention in Chinese painting is represented in Chinese cinema. Filmmakers apply handscroll painting, seal and calligraphy in a title scene, credit sequences, and a setting to enrich their cinematic images and enhance the narration in The Lord of Hangzhou (Yong-Qiang Qian, 1997), Cat and Mouse (Gordon Chan, 2003), and Farewell My Concubine (Chen Kaige, 1992). Seal engraving is an important art form in China. Seals indicate the authenticity of an artwork and honor for the artist. Filmmakers employ calligraphy and seals to assert their authorship in the same way as those used in calligraphy and painting, for instance, The Miracle Fighter (Yuen Woo-ping, 1982) and Little Shoalin Monks (Bai Haibin, 2007) in Figures 50 and 51.

These ideas of cultural references influence filmmakers in all aspects of their craft. The tradition of calligraphy and painting are the original communication arts of which filmmaking is a natural progression and evolution. When audiences view Chinese films with an understanding of the culture, there will be an expanded appreciation and greater enjoyment. In another example, the traditional Chinese handscroll painting and calligraphy from right to left vertically, and modern written Chinese from left to right horizontally, provide artists with alternative representations in film. The camera techniques of right-to-left and left-to-right pans in Hero (Zhang Yimou, 2002) enhance the
dynamics of the martial artists’ fight. In the title sequences of *Voyage of Emperor Chien Lung* (Li Han-Hsiang, 1978), the camera movement’s shift from right-to-left and left-to-right indicate the change of time and space.

Steve Blandford and others remark, “The cinema is a major aspect of popular culture, providing much of its iconography, stars, folklore, fashion, music and of course the movies themselves” (180). Part of this study aims to contribute to the cultural decoding of painting and calligraphy used in cinema. Audiences can better appreciate the filmic narrative if they understand the cultural references. For example, in the opening sequences of *Seven Swords* (*七剑*, 2005), director Tsui Hark uses couplets in black written on red paper to present the emperor’s order of prohibition against citizens practicing martial arts under penalty of death (Figure 107). The use of red couplets for stating a death penalty is an irony because red is a lucky and happy color in China. Usually, a death penalty is written on a white sheet of paper since white in Chinese culture indicates death. At a funeral, people wear white dress to mourn for the deceased. In *锦衣卫* (*14 Blades*, Daniel Lee, 2010), the emperor’s order of a death execution “斩立决” is in black ink on a white sheet of paper (Figure 137).

Chinese filmmakers present Chinese calligraphy as a pictorial and performance art in *Shanghai Knights* (David Dobkin, 2003) and *Challenge of the Masters* (Lau Kar Leung, 1976). It is impressive that American director M. Night Shyamalan and British director Peter Greenaway also display oriental calligraphy as a pictorial and performance art in *The Last Airbender* (2010) and
Figure 137 *14 Blades* film stills
The Pillow Book (1995). In recent years, more Western filmmakers have recognized the pictorial quality of Chinese calligraphy. For example, French director and screenwriter Karim Dridi presents a title sequence with Chinese calligraphy in Fureur (Fury, 2003). The story narrates a romance, a modern day Romeo and Juliet in the Chinatown community in France. The opening title sequences feature elaborate displays of Chinese calligraphy which form patterns and pictures in the cinematic representation (Figure 138).

When filmmakers and audiences become more aware of the multicultural, non-Western historical and present day influences on the arts and cinema, their horizons and appreciation are broadened. Film is a widely-circulated medium, therefore it is no small matter when members of divergent cultures gain greater understanding and appreciation of each others’ contributions to the social structures, languages, technologies, arts and entertainments that surround us. Such understandings may be the only lasting antidote to national conflicts.

Because many scholars have greatly contributed to the presentation of Western painting in cinema from the perspectives of art history and cultural study, I avoid a discussion in depth about Western paintings and art history in films. I deliberately examine Chinese painting and calligraphy and English writing in cinema since there is a lack of scholarship in this area. My study focuses on the pictorial quality of both English and Chinese calligraphy and writing, the compositional design of cinematic images with text, and the interplay of calligraphy and painting in cinematic narration. Camera techniques
Figure 138 *Fureur (Fury)* film stills
are also discussed regarding the use of painting and calligraphy in films.

In this highly technological and globalised age, the exploration of multiple languages in cinematic presentation, and the integration of calligraphy and painting along with the interplay of image with text, promises to be a worthwhile experience in our contemporary visual culture. Such examination will help audiences understand different cultures through the study of their languages and writing systems.

For example, the title image of *Shadowless Sword* (Kim Young-jun, 2005) is a picture of three languages. The film title in English and Korean is represented like swords on top of a background shaded with the title in Chinese calligraphy (Figure 139). *Shadowless Sword* is another Kungfu film presented by South Korean director Kim Young-jun after *Bichunmoo* (2000).

In the title image, the silver dragon on the left with letter S looks like the hilt of a sword. The film title in silver font of *Shadowless Sword* and the Korean characters 무영검 form the blades of the swords. In Korean history, swords were created for an individual user. The Korean cavalry was famous for using Twin Sword techniques on horseback. The two English words *Shadowless Sword* in silver color initialed by a bigger S resemble Korean Twin Swords. Meanwhile,
the double-sword image refers to the two royal swords passed from the king to the elder prince and the younger prince in the cinematic narrative. The two dragons extended from letter S display the extravagant pattern for the royal swords designated to the princes. The thick and angular brushstrokes of 無影劍 (Shadowless Sword) resemble swords. The Chinese calligraphy melts into the light brownish-grey background, breaks the plain hue, and paradoxically, adds a pattern like a shadow in the title Shadowless Sword. The Chinese calligraphy achieves an effect of oxymoron and creates a mood for the drama.

Filmmakers of other nations also use Roman alphabets creatively. For example, French director Philippe Muyl frames a story about Julien, an aging widower and passionate butterfly collector and Elsa, a nine-year-old girl who joins him on the trip to the Vercoes Plateau in search of a rare butterfly called Isabelle. The film Butterfly or Le Papillon (2002) in original French portrays white butterflies by using dynamic letters in the title sequences (Figure 140). On the grey and pink background, thin lines of letters in white jump and dance like a pattern of a butterfly wings. Tiny butterflies in white flutter vigorously onto the screen forming letters and credits around the little girl Elsa. Letters in the French credits become white butterflies dancing away. The letters indicate the title and become a symbol of butterflies. The dancing letters are like a painting. Martin Solomon in The Art of Typography states, “As an art, typography can be compared to painting, sculpture, music, and dance” (8).
Figure 140 *Le Papillon* (Butterfly) film stills
Figure 141 *Magadheera* (S.S. Rajamoulis, 2009) film stills
Writing systems record our civilizations and document our histories and collective human wisdom. Some writing systems are both graphic and pictorial. With the help of digital technology, filmmakers benefit from graphic writings and the artistic quality of calligraphy to present picturesque and descriptive images in films. For example, texts in the title sequences of an Indian love tale *Magadheera* (Rajamoulis, 2009) become part of the pictures displayed by the graphic Indian language. Water bubbles in the dark, fire waves, liquid reflection, and the yellow pattern of the hero’s costume match the circular writings. The blurred text in the Indian title appears in the background and comes to the foreground in fire, then turns to black like charcoal (Figure 141). Andy Ellison in *The Complete Guide to Digital Type* says that artists can make writing appear either in the background or foreground or fading into the screen by layering and using multiple blurs in the computer. “Blurring is a way of drawing attention to specific text and softening and adding depth to your typography” (Ellison 70).

*Magadheera* won two Silver Lotus in the 57th National Film Award in India—Choreography and Special Effects category. R. Ravindar, the art director, and K.K. Senthil Kumar, the cinematographer, produce a special effect of the title dissolving into brushstrokes of calligraphy against the fading charcoal. The writing strokes resemble the dancing movement of the couple. Other languages that possess pictorial and artistic qualities, are waiting for us to explore. With the advancement of technology, words and writings can have “texture effects” like the titles in *Magadheera* (S.S. Rajamoulis, 2009), and “metal effects” as in the
titles of *Eyeborgs* (Richard Clabaugh, 2009). English letters can wave, zizag, ripple, and liquify like those in the title sequences of *Daybreakers* (Michael Spierig and Peter Spierig, 2010).

Mitchell Stephens, in *The Rise of the Image the Fall of the Word*, points out that pictures, symbols and photos have been replacing words as our primary communication medium since the last third of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the increasing use of calligraphy and painting in films in recent decades indicates a potential rise of word along with image in our visual culture. Words can be images, therefore this book strives to examine filmmakers’ use of calligraphy/writing and painting/drawing in their recent productions. I examine the pictorial quality in Chinese and English calligraphy in an attempt to support Margaret Dikovitskaya’s proposal to study the pictorial quality of our writing systems.

Through this research, I discovered that cinematic images are an intertext of other art forms and a reflection of cultures. Cinema reflects and represents artistic trends as Angela Dalle Vacche argues in *Cinema and Painting*, saying that “the history of art is in film” (1). Chinese cinema includes the aesthetics of Chinese painting and calligraphy derived from Chinese tradition and philosophy such as Taoism and Confucianism. Chinese painting and calligraphy play an important role in cinematic representation. English calligraphy/writing also displays a graphic and pictorial feature in cinema. Recently, filmmakers have explored creative ways to combine more calligraphy/writing and
painting/drawing in cinematic narration. Painting and calligraphy provide filmmakers and audiences with greater artistic and narrative possibilities in the medium of film. Hopefully, this study will expand awareness of Chinese painting and calligraphy along with Western writing styles in cinema.
List of Illustrations/Figures

2. Calligraphy: Longevity by Tang San. p. 20
3. Painting: Butterfly by Qi Bai Shi. p. 21
4. Painting: Turtle by Qi Bai Shi. p. 22
5. Painting: The God of Longevity with Attendant by Ren Yi. p. 22
6. Painting: Destiny by Po Ching. p. 23
7. Painting: Not to Care So Much for the Gains and Loses by Po Ching. p. 23
8. Calligraphy: Horse by Ye Ying-Xing. p. 25
10. Chinese characters of Rooster, Goat, Rat, Tortoise and Fish. p. 26
11. Dragons Forever film still. p. 27
12. Fight Back to School film still. p. 29
14. The Deer and the Cauldron film still. p. 29
15. Hero film still. p. 31
16. Hero film still. p. 32
17. Hero film still. p. 33
18. Hero film still. p. 33
19. Shanghai Knights film still. p. 34
20. Shanghai Knights film stills. p. 35
21. *Shanghai Knights* film still. p. 36
22. *Fist of Fury* film stills. P. 38
23. *The Touch* film stills. p. 40
25. *Mulan* film still. p. 43
29. *Mao’s Last Dancer* film stills. p. 49
30. *The Last Airbender* film stills. P. 52
31. *Challenge of the Masters* film stills. p. 53
32. Painting: *Early Spring* by Guo Xi. p. 58
33. Painting: *Figure and Landscape* by Ren Bonian. p. 60
34. *Hero* film still. p. 61
35. *Hero* film still. p. 62
36. *Hero* film still. p. 62
37. *Hero* film still. p. 62
38. *Hero* film still. p. 64
40. *Hero* film still. p. 65
41. *Hero* film still. p. 69
42. *Hero* film still. p. 69
43. *Raise the Red Lantern* film still. p. 69
44. *Raise the Red Lantern* film still. p. 69
45. *Farewell My Concubine* film still. p. 71
46. Painting: *Arhat in Red Robe* by Zhao Menfu. p. 71
47. Painting: *Autumn Colors on the Ch’iao and Hua Mountains* by Zhao Menfu. p. 71
48. Painting: *Lofty Mount* by Shen Zhou. p. 73
49. Painting: *Eagle Standing on Pine Tree with Four-character Couplet in Seal Script* by Qi Bai Shi. p. 74
50. *The Miracle Fighters* film still. p. 78
51. *Little Shao Lin Monks* film still. p. 78
52. *Chivalrous Legend* film still. p. 78
53. *The Three Smiles* film still. p. 79
54. *The Story of Lotus* film still. p. 79
55. *The White Dragon* film still. p. 79
56. *The Drummer* film still. p. 80
57. *The Last Song: Stories of the Han Dynasty* film still. p. 80
59. *Little Big Soldier* film still. p. 81
60. *Hero* film still. p. 83
61. *Hero* film still. p. 84
62. *Hero* film still. p. 84
63. *Hero* film still. p. 84
64. *Hero* film still. p. 84
65. *Hero* film still. p. 84
66. *Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre 2* film stills. p. 87
67. *Fists and Guts* film stills. p. 88
68. *Cat and Mouse* film stills. p. 90
69. *Voyage of Emperor Chien Lung* film stills. p. 92
70. *The Lord of Hangzhou* film stills. p. 93
71. *The Invincible Sword* film stills. p. 93
73. *Ganglamedo* film stills. p. 97
74. *Swordfish* film stills. p. 98
75. *Intolerance* film stills. p. 102
76. *To Kill a Mockingbird* film stills. p. 102
77. *Bulletproof Monk* film stills. p. 105
78. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* film stills. p. 106
79. *Catch Me If You Can* film stills. p. 109
80. *Smokin’ Aces 2 Assassins’* film stills. p. 110
81. *The Dark Crystal* film still. p. 111
82. *The Secret Life of Bees* film still. p. 113
83. *Across the Hall* film stills. p. 114
84. *Epic Movie* film stills. p. 117
86. *Inkheart* film stills. p. 122
87. *Steal a Pencil for Me* film stills. p. 126
88. *Elsewhere* film still. p. 128
89. *Elsewhere* film still. p. 128
90. *Elsewhere* film still. p. 131
91. *Elsewhere* film still. p. 131
92. *Elsewhere* film still. p. 131
93. *Daybreakers* film stills. p. 135, 140
94. *Fist of the Red Dragon* film stills. p. 149
95. *Seven Samurai* film stills. p. 149
96. *Shadowless Sword* film stills. p. 149
97. *Shinobi* film stills. p. 150
98. *Cold Mountain* film stills. p. 153
99. *First Knight* film stills. p. 153
100. *Troy* film stills. p. 153
102. *The Legend of Zerro* film stills. p. 154
105. *Empire of the Sun* film stills. p. 156
107.  *Seven Swords* film stills. p. 158

108.  Picture: Chinese red couplets. p. 161

109.  *Smokin’ Aces 2 Assassins’ Ball* film stills. p. 165


111.  *Robin Hood* film stills. p. 170


113.  *Ninja* film stills. p. 177-78

114.  *Eyeborgs* film stills. p. 183

115.  *Myth* film stills. p. 188-89

116.  *Bichunmoo* film stills. p. 190

117.  *Marie Antoinette* film still. p. 194


120.  *Marie Antoinette* film still. p. 195

121.  *The Long Kiss Goodnight* film stills. p. 199


123.  Painting: *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* by Frida Kahlo. p. 203

124.  Painting: *The Broken Column* by Frida Kahlo. p. 204

125.  *Butterfly and Sword* film stills. p. 211-13

126.  *Kung Fu Hustle* film stills. p. 215

127.  *Short Cuts* film still. p. 220

128.  Paintings by Lin Fengmian. p. 222
129. Painting: *Drinking Tea* by Tang Yin. p. 224
130. Painting: *Mountain Scene* by Tang Yin. p. 224
131. Painting: *Nine Songs* by Fu Baoshi. p. 225
132. Painting: Mrs. Xiang by Fu Baoshi. p. 225
133. *Hero* film still. p. 225
134. *Hero* film still. p. 225
136. Painting: *Poet on a Mountain Top* by Chen Zhou. p. 228
138. *Fureur (Fury)* film stills. p. 233-37
139. *Shadowless Sword* film still. p. 238
140. *Le Papillon (Butterfly)* film stills. p. 240
141 *Magadheera* film stills. p. 241-42
**Works Cited**

*Across the Hall*. Dir. Alex Merkin. Insomnia Media Group, 2009. Film.


Butterfly and Sword. Dir. Michael Mak. Chang Hong Film & Video, 1993. Film.


Cat and Mouse. Dir. Gordon Chan. Media Asia Films and Changchun Film Studio, 2003. Film.


14 Blades. Dir. Daniel Lee. Shanghai Film Group, Mediacorp Raintree Pictures, and Visualizer Film, 2010. Film.


(Trans. of 黄会林， 王宜文。 “新 中国 ‘ 十 七 年 ’ 电 影 美 学 探 论” 《1897-2001 百 年 中 国 电 影 理 论 文 选》 (下 册 )。 丁 亚 平 主 编 ， 文 化 艺 术 出 版 社， 2002 年。 第 556-84 页。)


Khoo, Guan-Soon. “Hero—Zhang Yimou’s Controversial Epic.” *Offscreen.*


*The Last Song: Stories of the Han Dynasty.* Dir. Lin Chao Xiang. China Film Chanel Program Center and Shanghai Shanjiu Culture Development Ltd., 2004. Film.


(MTrans. of 《中国电影教父张艺谋传》。张末末编著。中国广播电视出版社，2008年。)


Saltz, Ina. Typography Essentials: 100 Design Principles for Working with Type.


   Film.


   Film.


Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Dir. David Hand. Walt Disney Pictures, 1937. Film.


Sunrise Sunset. Dir. Wenji Teng. China Film Group, 2005. Film.


Voyage of Emperor Chien Lung. Dir. Han Hsiang Li. Shaw Brothers, 2003. Film


(Trans. of: 徐葆耕。《电影讲稿》。北京大学出版社，2006年。)