

## **Changes in Visual Rhetorical Features of *New Weekly* Magazine Covers Published from 1996 to 2001**

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### **Abstract**

This article is part of the study “*New Weekly* Magazine Covers: A Study on Visual Rhetoric in Magazine Cover Design from 1996 to 2001.” The article is aimed at describing the changes in visual rhetorical elements across 111 *New Weekly* magazine covers from the launch of the publication in 1996 until 2001. Variations in the relationship between cover images and cover topics were also explored. The study is based on semiotic and visual rhetoric theory and used media content analysis to discuss the merging of three variables: media technology, visual form of the image, and type of image function. Changes in the relationship between the cover images and cover topics were characterized, and these changes were discussed in terms of their connection with *New Weekly's* short- and long-term marketing goals and brand image construction. According to the study’s literature and interview findings, *New Weekly* used a total of eight visual rhetoric modes to create its cover

images. It adopted and tested these different modes not only to gain short-term market advantages, but also to identify a visual voice that could convey *New Weekly's* basic concept of "something new." In other words, innovation related to the magazine's visual rhetoric mode helped *New Weekly* to establish its long-term brand image.

**Keywords:** *New Weekly*, Magazine Cover, Visual Rhetoric, Content Analysis

## 1 Introduction

On August 18, 1996, the first issue of *New Weekly Magazine* was released. Under the control of the Guangdong Press and Publication Bureau, the magazine has had to adhere to standards aimed at shaping and disseminating national socialist cultural values, according to Chinese Press and Publication Regulations. At the same time, as a news publishing organization it has had to generate revenue independently in order to survive. Guangzhou, where *New Weekly* is published, was a place where the economy and culture flourished after China's reform and opening-up policy was introduced in the 1990s. Publication, meanwhile, was a groundbreaking field at the vanguard of Western popular culture's influence. Due to the proximity of *New Weekly's* editorial publishing house to Hong Kong, Hong Kong and Western magazines heavily impacted its editing, publishing technology, and marketing concepts. Today, *New Weekly* is primarily sold in bookshops and newsstands for nationwide distribution. The nature of these transactions has required that the magazine compete for "attention" with other magazines, especially through cover images with adequate visual appeal and familiarity. Editors of *New Weekly* discovered early on that high-quality visual expression could successfully improve magazine sales and increase the magazine's competitiveness among other magazine brands at the newsstand.

As a current affairs news magazine, *New Weekly* was initially expected to take a serious line according to tradition and the overall environmental atmosphere of the press at the time. Shuo Qin, former Editor in Chief of *Nan Feng Chuang* Magazine, maintained that through the 1990s in China the objective of running a magazine was to meet standards under the constitution and to serve the spiritual and material construction of socialist civilizations. (Shuo Qin, 2001) However, Mian Sun, founder of *New Weekly*, believed that the magazine should make current affairs news easier to access and even entertaining. After some controversy, Mian Sun claimed that all of *New Weekly's* efforts would be directed toward creating "something new." This tagline, though considered somewhat utopian, became the main premise of *New Weekly*. (*New Weekly*, 2016: 17) Defining and expressing the concept of "something new" through visual symbols was a nebulous problem that *New Weekly* would need to investigate and solve, partly through marketing practices, as well as through the visual rhetoric displayed in their cover design. Then, after a series of investigations into the role of visual rhetoric in cover design, the cover of *New Weekly's* 98th issue, released on January 1, 2001 ("The Big Inventory of 2000"), won the Ozzie Award (for best cover design with a readership of over 250,000). This was the first time a Chinese magazine business had won an award of such significance. Thanks to a succession of marketing activities, *New Weekly* quickly became an influential magazine brand, widely recognized by official press and publication management agencies, readers, advertisers, and magazine circles.

The cover of *New Weekly* went through numerous major alterations from its launch through 2001. Xincheng Feng (then Executive Editor in Chief of *New Weekly*) stated in the early days of the magazine's existence that it represented the arrival of the "picture reading era." He also stated that they were pioneering the concept of "good-looking" thanks to *New Weekly's* visual performance and its focus entirely on aesthetic impact. (*New Weekly*, 2006: 28) The early days of the publication coincided with the significant event of Hong Kong's

return to China, allowing the magazine to leverage this hot event and create magazine covers with images of political people relevant to the theme. After the initial luck brought by this historic event subsided, and due to the reality that high-quality news gathering resources were scarce, the magazine recognized the need to develop a new content and cover creation editing strategy. As a result, Xincheng Feng admitted, *New Weekly* followed the rhetoric pattern of many cover designs at the time, employing color frames to increase the visual effect and using attractive women in the cover image in order to please the market of that era. (*New Weekly*, 2006: 28) Xincheng Feng added that, while using attractive photographs on the cover was a bit vulgar, it was an effective method to efficiently increase sales in the short-term for *New Weekly*, which was still in the early stages of brand development. (*New Weekly*, 2006: 28)

*New Weekly's* editorial department recognized that this strategy was not a long-term brand development strategy. In fact, the magazine deliberated on a number of questions: how they could create a unique visual voice to convey the magazine's "something new" spirit; what kind of visual expression a cover image could achieve in order to attract the attention of potential readers; how the cover could explain or expand the meaning of the magazine issue's major topic; and how the cover could help to increase sales. *New Weekly* felt the need to address these issues immediately, and consequently, proceeded to experiment with various visual rhetorical modes on their covers until finally winning Ozzie's worldwide "best cover award" in 2001 with the cover of their issue "The Big Inventory of 2000." The cover showcased an expressive and symbolic, technology-created collage. Simultaneously, the concept of "Visual Developer" was evolving at *New Weekly*. Xincheng Feng stated clearly that the magazine had developed, over the course of its long-term marketing and design practice, a management process that identified a "passionate, sharp, and clear" visual style to embody its "something new" core spirit. (*New Weekly*, 2006: 25) In this regard, *New Weekly's*

exploration and attempts to achieve their distinct goals perfectly exemplify how a magazine might have remained competitive in the Chinese magazine market in the 1990s, gaining the necessary economic and social resources to survive and develop. As a result, research on the magazine's development during that time is extremely vital.

## **2 Objectives of the study**

This research aimed to:

1. Study changes in the visual rhetorical features of *New Weekly* magazine covers issued from 1996 to 2001,
2. Identify the visual rhetoric modes used by *New Weekly* in their cover design.

## **3 Methodology**

Richard Weaver expressed his belief that "rhetoric is an art of emphasis on the whole." (Richard M. Weaver, 1971) In fact, people typically use visual description that deviates from the norm in order to arouse people's vigilance and attention to the changes and to inspire them to think further about the meaning behind them. Visual rhetoric has advanced away from the use of signs and toward the use of symbols. C.S. Peirce defined the symbol as any kind of thing "determined by an object on the one hand, and an idea in people's mind on the other hand; and the object indirectly determines the latter's way of decision." (C.S. Peirce, as cited in James Litzka, 2014, p. 31) Peirce named this "way of decision" as the interpretant of the symbol and believed that the interpretation of symbolic meaning did not belong solely to individuals, but rather, always involved interpersonal social relations. Foss (Sonja K. Foss, 2005) suggested a perspective to investigate visual phenomena wherein visual rhetoric

researchers can start from the nature of the image and examine three aspects: 1) The physical characteristics of elements presented in the image and the conceptual meaning of suggested elements; 2) The function of the image, or in other words, how the image stimulates the production of a certain feeling or emotion in the viewer; and 3) Image evaluation, an assessment of whether the image has achieved its own suggestive function. These three aspects are often used to study products which use visual rhetoric.

In accordance with Foss's theoretical suggestions, this research employs both quantitative and qualitative methodology to analyze media content on the covers of 111 issues of *New Weekly* released between 1996 and 2001. Data relating to visual rhetoric were collected, investigated, and evaluated. The physical characteristics and functions of cover images were analyzed using quantitative methods, identifying visual rhetoric features along three primary variables: media technology, visual form, and image function type. Qualitative methodology was used in order to evaluate the images in terms of the unquantifiable relationships between the form and content of the cover image and its role in extending the cover topic. Therefore, descriptive analysis was used to describe, for example, visual content and effects, the degree of matching between visual extension and connotations of the cover topic, and relevant social and cultural background of topics and images. This study also examined data gathered from *Oral History of New Weekly*, as well as other relevant literature and interviews.

There is a great deal of information on the various kinds of variables used to analyze elements of visual rhetoric. Visual variables likely to reflect major changes and to have relevance on a macro level will be examined in this article. These variables are: 1) *Media technology*, including 1.1) Photography—In this study, photojournalism and fashion photography will be merged under the same category of photographic media, with further subdividing only according to image function type when necessary for the sake of detailed

analysis; 1.2) Collage—Originating from pop art, this category covers pieces which combine objects, paintings, photographic elements, or other media to express specific conceptual themes; and 1.3) Painting—This powerful tool is especially useful in the creation of covers with visual rhetoric communicating abstract concepts; 2) *Visual form*, including 2.1) The realistic form—In this study, if the whole image is a faithful simulation of physical objective phenomena, or concrete physical reality, it will be considered a representation of reproducible images, leading readers to focus on the object to be reproduced, and the explanation of the cover topic will likely point to specific individuals, times, and objects; and 2.2) The expressive form—In this way of expression, images no longer simulate a concrete physical reality. The general meaning of the image is liberated and becomes more universal; and 3) *Types of image function*, mainly analyzed in this research from the perspective of semiotics, the three symbolic forms of which are icons, indexes, and symbols. (C.S. Peirce, 1974) While index forms are outside the scope of this study, there is a "decorative" role that tends to transpire in the relationship between the cover image and the cover topic. As a result, the three functional categories used to classify the various types of image functions in this study include 3.1) Iconic function—If images of characters, events, or items mentioned in the cover theme are presented in a direct manner, their function is considered iconic; 3.2) Symbolic function—If the image's denotation or connotation seems to expand or enlarge the cover topic's meaning, its function is considered symbolic; and 3.3) Decorative function—A cover image in this category does not show actual facts connected to the cover topic, nor does it contain any deeper symbolism, but is simply visually appealing.

To summarize, this study will tabulate the three factors mentioned above—media technology, visual form, and type of image function (Table 1)—in order to compare and analyze data related to the visual rhetoric of 111 *New Weekly* covers published between 1996 and 2001.

Table 1 Variables used to analyze elements of visual rhetoric that appear on *New Weekly* covers

<b>Media technology</b>	Photography
	Collage
	Painting
<b>Visual form</b>	Realistic
	Expressive
<b>Type of Image Function</b>	Iconic
	Decorative
	Symbolic

#### 4 Research results

This study examined 111 *New Weekly* magazine covers published between 1996 and 2001, using the variables listed in Table 1 to study the covers' visual rhetoric. The following data connections emerged:

##### 1) *New Weekly's* use of media technologies

In terms of media technology, collage was applied 48 times, accounting for 43% of the 111 *New Weekly* issues; painting was used 31 times, accounting for 31% of the total; and photography was included 32 times, accounting for 29% of the total. From 1996 to 1998, most of the covers utilized photography, with the usage of collage technology starting to take



hold in 1998. From 1998 through 2001, cover images were created using either collage or painting techniques with photographic covers occasionally utilized as well, depending on the needs of the cover topic.

#### 2) *New Weekly's* use of visual form

From 1996 to 1997, all 30 images were realistic, accounting for 27 percent of all cover pictures; meanwhile, from 1998 to 2001, all 81 images were expressive, accounting for 73 percent of all cover images.

#### 3) Image functions of *New Weekly* covers

Based on the use of three different types of image function variables, data collection and analysis of 111 *New Weekly* cover images showed that the relationship between cover images and cover topics published between 1996-2001 had the following salient features: The total number of images that fell into the iconic category was 10, accounting for 9% of the total, and these images were scattered across covers published between 1996-1998. Images with decorative functions were found on 24 of the covers, accounting for 22% of the total, and they appeared on covers published from mid-1997 to 1998. From 1996 to 1998 and thereafter, 77 cover graphics were shown to have symbolic functional qualities, accounting for 69 percent of the total. Symbolic images became the primary visual strategy for *New Weekly* covers printed after 1999.

#### 4) The eight visual rhetorical modes

From this study's investigation into *New Weekly* cover images along three key elements—media technology, form, and type of image function—it was found that the combination of sub-variables resulted in eight visual rhetorical patterns (Table 2) (In this article, “M” indicates a visual rhetorical mode).



#### Table 2 Rhetorical modes of *New Weekly* covers

<b>Rhetorical Mode</b>	<b>Media Technology</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Type of Image Function</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Photography	Realistic	Iconic	6	5%
2	Collage	Expressive	Iconic	4	3%
3	Photography	Realistic	Decorative	9	8%
4	Collage	Expressive	Decorative	15	14%
5	Photography	Realistic	Symbolic	15	14%
6	Photography	Expressive	Symbolic	2	2%
7	Collage	Expressive	Symbolic	29	26%
8	Painting	Expressive	Symbolic	31	28%

Table 3 presents typical instances of these eight visual rhetorical modes, with information on each cover's type of visual rhetorical mode, serial number, release date, and cover topic.

Table 3 Typical covers representative of the 8 visual rhetorical modes

<p>M1</p> <p>Issue: 1</p> <p>Sept 1, 1996</p> <p>Topic: Huajian</p> <p>Zhou Coming to Guangzhou</p>		<p>M5</p> <p>Issue: 0</p> <p>18 Aug, 1996</p> <p>Topic: "China Can Say No," Shakes the Western World</p>	
<p>M2</p> <p>Issue: 57</p> <p>15 Jan, 1999</p> <p>Topic: The 16-Year Itch</p>		<p>M6</p> <p>Issue: 71</p> <p>15 Nov, 1999</p> <p>Topic: The Never Winning History of Chinese Football</p>	
<p>M3</p> <p>Issue: 2</p> <p>15 Sept, 1996</p> <p>Topic: Witness the Operation of Foshan 110</p>		<p>M7</p> <p>Issue: 58</p> <p>1 May, 1999</p> <p>Topic: Find a Place to Hide</p>	

M4		M8	
Issue: 40		Issue: 63	
1 May, 1998		15 Jul, 1999	
Topic: The 14		Topic: Smashing	
Most Promising		TV	
Occupations			

The span of these modes' unique uses, the number of occurrences, and the distribution of rhetorical patterns over time indicate how the magazine's visual rhetorical strategy has been altered over time (Table 4). Media technology has evolved from single photographs to mix painting and collage; visual form of images has moved from realistic to expressive; and the functional relationship between image and topic has transitioned from iconic to decorative. Finally, on the magazine cover, symbolic images have taken the lead in terms of visual rhetoric.

Table 4 The distribution of rhetorical patterns over time

Rhetorical Mode	Year / Issue						Total
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	
1	2	3	1				6
2			3	1			4
3	1	8					9
4			14	1			15
5	3	5		2	4	1	15

Rhetorical Mode	Year / Issue						Total
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	
1	2	3	1				6
2			3	1			4
3	1	8					9
6				2			2
7		3	2	6	5	13	29
8			1	6	15	9	31

As shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3, realistic news photography images were mixed with a number of visual forms and image function types to make a wide range of rhetorical pattern combinations. In total, 6 covers used M1 (combining news photography, realistic image, and iconic function), accounting for 5% of all covers; 4 used M2 (combining news photography, expressive image, and iconic function), accounting for 3%; and 9 used M3 (combining news photography, realistic image, and decorative function), accounting for 8% of the total. The use of fashion photographs and brilliant color block collage, falling under M4 (expressive visual form with a decorative link to the cover topic) occurred just 14% of the time, **in 1997 and 1999**. Both M5 and M6 use photography and have a symbolic image function, but the visual forms are distinct. M5 (15 in total, accounting for 14%) uses realistic news photography, whereas M6 (2 in total, accounting for 2%) uses expressive theme photography. Among the 111 covers, 77 used symbolic images, accounting for 70% of the total. In terms of media technology types, the cover images of the magazine in its earlier days

mostly used realistic news photography (15 in total, accounting for 14%). However, it did not take long for the magazine to transition toward using M7 (combining collage technology, expressive visual form, and symbolic image function) and M8 (an expressive painting and symbolic image function hybrid), with 29 covers using the former, accounting for 26% of all covers, and 31 using the latter, accounting for 28%. These modes gradually replaced realistic news photography and came to be the dominant mode in terms of visual rhetoric, with the highest total covers and highest proportion of covers adopting these modes.

## 5 Discussion

This study's findings revealed that *New Weekly* has always been actively investigating the feasibility of various visual rhetoric modes for their covers in order to meet their short-term interests and to carry out long-term development of the market and brand. The magazine intentionally modified visual rhetoric on their covers, applying eight different rhetorical modes at different periods.

### 1) Transformation of visual rhetoric on *New Weekly* covers

The primary role of any magazine's cover is to attract the attention of readers and promote magazine sales.

In the 1990s, the high number of street newsstands in China became a virtual battleground for numerous magazines. In fact, if you look at magazine covers from that time, it's easy to find celebrities and dignitaries, as well as unknown handsome young men, beautiful women, cute pets, and delectable foods, all vying for the attention of readers. Every magazine publisher's mission was to get pedestrians passing by to notice their magazine and become potential readers. In fact, cover images are undeniably effective at increasing subscription and retail sales. Consequently, magazine editors lay a high value on cover

design. A cover's visual depiction should not only allow devoted readers to instantly distinguish the magazine from dozens of its competitors, but it should also be appealing enough to attract prospective new readers. As Cath Caldwell and Yolanda Zappaterra pointed out: "It must be eye-catching and stand out from the crowd, attracting readers to it rather than its competitors." (Cath Caldwell & Yolanda Zappaterra, 2014: 44) Newspapers and magazines fight for the attention of the audience, according to Guoming Yu, a journalism and communications scholar, and advertisers are also buying the audience's attention. Attracting readers' attention "at a distance of three steps from the newsstand and within five seconds" (Zhen Yang, 2014) has become the challenge that every magazine strives to meet.

The role of a cover's visual rhetoric is clear. Regardless of the period in which a *New Weekly* cover was issued or what style of visual rhetoric it implemented, it was aimed at drawing the attention of potential readers and increasing the magazine's sales. Linda Ruth's research identified three key elements affecting readers' decision to buy (or to not buy) magazines from newsstands and determined the following influence ratios: 10%, magazine content; 15%, magazine name and reputation; and 75%, cover design. (Linda Ruth, 2005) The magazine cover, according to Xiaofeng Yan (Chief Writer of *New Weekly*), stimulates readers to buy magazines. He explained, "The cover is like the front face of a store, not because it is magnificent, but because it conforms to the positioning. You must discover your own way of speaking on the cover of the magazine if you want to stand out among a sea of newspapers and publications. The objective of the cover is to draw attention to the magazine and sell it... The cover is the same as the magazine's poster on the newsstand." (Xiaofeng Yan, 2008)

Janet Froelich, Creative Director of *Real Simple*, agrees: "Design is at the forefront of establishing a relationship with the reader. It telegraphs the content, spirit and forward-thinking qualities of the publication and gives the reader an instant relationship with

the spirit of the magazine.” (Cath Caldwell., Yolanda Zappaterra., 2014: 34) Moreover, as Ping Deng, JieLi Publishing House's Deputy Editor-in-Chief and Art Director, pointed out, "The cover is not only the magazine's first visual stimulus, but also an important reflection of the magazine's soul." (Ping Deng, 2021: Interview) In short, a magazine cover's visual rhetoric must not only attract readers and promote magazine sales; it must also reflect the magazine's editorial concept in order to generate a distinct and easily recognizable visual image among competitors. Whether it is to enhance short-term sales growth or long-term brand influence, the magazine cover has a significant impact on sales.

According to the present research, the role of visual rhetoric on the cover of *New Weekly* underwent three major alterations from 1996 to 2001. Initially, to generate maximum visual impact, *New Weekly* selected realistic news photographs, and these dominated the entire cover. The iconic style news photographs faithfully reflected the personalities and events referenced in the cover topic. However, the magazine did not take long to alter its approach, shifting its focus to cover photos that used more emotive visual rhetoric tactics. In this second alteration, *New Weekly* decorated and beautified its covers in an effort to please the market, a practice which has continued until the present. The style dominating the magazine issues from 1997 to 1998 involved large areas of vibrant color blocks and photographs of actresses. Finally, the third alteration, which occurred starting in 1999, involved more expressive and abstract collages and paintings. This symbolic cover rhetoric not only became *New Weekly's* distinct visual voice, but also better conveyed the significance of the cover topics and ultimately, became a recognizable visual feature reflecting the brand's "something new" concept.

## 2) Further interpretation of the 8 visual rhetorical patterns

As part of their objective to boost magazine sales, *New Weekly* needed to create visual rhetoric on their covers that would not only help to promote sales but also develop the



brand's image. Meanwhile, the cover's visual appearance would not only need to transmit and enrich the meaning of the magazine's theme, but also adhere to market value norms and the magazine's own spiritual beliefs.

The visual rhetorical strategy behind *New Weekly* covers issued in various periods reflects these basic concepts. *New Weekly* has always placed a high value on the magazine's visual quality, recognizing that the key to effective visual art is to have a particular formal style and a distinct visual voice. As J.B. Bury believed, if a speculative new concept failed to display a certain external concrete image, or was not supported by significant tangible evidence, it would be difficult to impress and penetrate the general consciousness of a community. (J.B. Bury, 2008) *New Weekly* reflected an understanding of this, as in order to efficiently achieve target short-term sales and growth while also creating long-term brand influence, the magazine created a number of visual rhetorical modes of cover expression over time by combining various variable attributes. From 1996 to 2001, the publication experimented with eight different visual rhetorical components in order to respond to market shifts and marketing demands.

The cover of the magazine "Huajian Zhou Coming to Guangzhou to Hold a Concert in October" (Table 3) is an example of a cover that was reflective of the market at the time. It displays a realistic portrait of the celebrity Huajian Zhou himself. The mode M1 is used on this cover. The portrait of the famous singer echoes iconic-style replicable documentary photographs and accurately conveys the magazine's topic. The image is made up of dark tones and diagonal lines. Huajian Zhou is dressed in a dark suit and has a smile on his face in the photo. His clasped hands give him an uneasy appearance. Taiwanese pop music grew popular in mainland China in the 1990s, and concerts by Taiwanese pop stars brought big profits. This issue's cover is also *New Weekly's* first attempt at organizing and marketing

cross-media commercial activities. The content under the cover topic is directly reflected in the cover photo.

In following issues, *New Weekly* created expressive photography collages, mixing documentary and fashion photos on their covers. The mode M2 was used exclusively for the following issues: Issue 36, "The Era of Consumption has Arrived!" Issues 37 & 38, "Chinese People Playing Mahjong," Issue 46, "The Precious Special Issue of the Second Anniversary of *New Weekly*," and issue 57 "The 16-Year Itch of the Spring Festival Gala." The cover of the latter, Issue 57 (Table 3), shows traditional symbols of Chinese people celebrating the Spring Festival through expressive collage and iconic style images. A red lantern with golden laces, golden tassels, and black lettering that spells "春节联欢晚会" (Spring Festival Gala) tilts to the right along the cover's vertical axis, occupying nearly a third of the space. Spectacular fireworks blossom in the dark blue and purple night sky in the background. The tassel at the bottom of the cover is overlaid with large yellow characters that read "十六年之痒" (Sixteen-Year Itch). For 16 years, the Chinese had observed the Spring Festival Gala. It had received both praise and criticism. Regardless, the collage on the cover indicated that the party could be likened to red lanterns and fireworks in frigid winter. Since then, the Spring Festival Gala has evolved into a cultural icon that brings the entire country together to welcome the new year.

Combining documentary and fashion photography, the mode M3 is defined by the usage of celebrities' photos but with a purely ornamental connection to the cover topic and a tenuous meaning relation. As seen on the cover of Issue 2, "Witness the Operation of Foshan 110" (Table 3), Princess Diana smiles and waves to the crowd. She has blonde hair and is dressed in a red outfit. The dark complexion of the young people against the chilly background reminds people that Diana is a world celebrity. She is well-known for her charitable activities in addition to her royal title. It is undeniably a lovely photograph, with a

very attractive cover character. This photo, however, has no relation to the subject "A Day of Foshan 110." The goal of this issue was to show readers how Foshan 110 worked on a daily basis by recording a person's day's work. At the time, it was vital to overcome urban security issues and adapt to the increasing speed and security needs of an urban population. Foshan was one of China's original 110 alarm service stations in 1996. (Xiaoli Xia, Yangqin Wen, 2016) The code 110 was a nationwide alert signal. Using Diana's photo to decorate the cover of this issue was clearly more effective than using police uniforms would have been, and it could better capture consumer attention even if it was not linked in any way to the theme.

Shortly after their use of M3, however, *New Weekly* promptly made a major shift, adopting a new visual rhetorical mode: M4. This mode was characterized by fashion shots of well-known Chinese female stars placed on vibrant color backgrounds, and the magazine maintained this rhetorical mode on their covers for over a year. For example, the cover of Issue 40 (Table 3) shows a very exaggerated fashion shot presented against a red background. Yuan Chang, an attractive woman, wears a wide and tall military-style hat with crimson cap insignia and red ornamental thread. Her open eyes are hidden in the shadow of the rim of the hat, projected over her forehead, and her green, military-style coat is embroidered with red epaulettes. The black-and-white figure of the model, paired with her military-style apparel, and the exaggerated forms and dark tones of the shot, give the cover an overall dismal and strange appearance. The photograph and the cover topic, "The 14 Most Promising Occupations," have little to connect them, but the design does give the cover a striking look.

M4 *New Weekly* covers also tended to combine the main photograph with a large, brilliant color block as the background. The background often accounted for approximately two thirds of the space on the cover, with the staged photograph of a beautiful woman in the center, accounting for the other third. This style would have helped to distinguish *New Weekly* from fashion magazines. In some ways, this rhetorical approach transformed the magazine's

border into something that resembled the yellow border of *National Geographic* or the red border of *Time Magazine*, creating a visual identity for the business. The photographs of women celebrities, on the other hand, seemed inappropriate for conveying *New Weekly's* "something new" concept due to the parallels with fashion magazines. The choice to use such models was clearly linked to market forces. Yumeng Liu pointed out that Mian Sun, the founder of *New Weekly*, had guided the magazine, saying that they should use the strategy "in order to increase the number of subscriptions." (Yumeng Liu, 2021: Interview) It could not be denied that the market responded to covers with appealing female celebrities. This style, on the other hand, did not accurately reflect *New Weekly's* concept. Li Rao (Designer and Lecturer at Southwest University) critiqued the use of women celebrities on *New Weekly's* covers: "It is easy to be misunderstood as a fashion magazine, and it will have an impact on brand perception in the long run." (Li Rao, 2021: Interview) Yumeng Liu added that after magazine subscriptions increased, Mian Sun guided the publication to abandon the approach. (Yumeng Liu, 2021: Interview) This indicated that *New Weekly* was aware of the issue.

The mode M5 was first used on the cover of *New Weekly's* debut issue (Table 3). The photograph used on the cover was called "Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping at Work" and was shot by Bo Hou in 1959. In the photograph, the two men seem to be discussing matters linked to national construction while studying a manuscript or document. The black-and-white documentary photograph emphasizes its historical weight. In the 1990s, as the economy had improved, nationalist sentiment in mainland China had increased. A book published the same year *New Weekly* debuted, "China Can Say No," by Qiang Song, Zangzang Zhang, and others, questioned and challenged Western hegemony (Baidu Baike, 2020). The beliefs put forward with rigor in the book led to debate and also created a stir in the United States and throughout the Western world. It can be assumed that *New Weekly* chose the portrait for their cover based on who they believed could represent the Chinese

saying "no" in the context of China's history and society. Mao and Deng were likely considered the most qualified candidates. Mao led the Chinese people in building an independent and sovereign People's Republic of China. Deng, meanwhile, resumed the college entrance examination, implemented domestic reform policy and opened China's economy up to foreign countries, led the Chinese people in building a prosperous, strong, and democratic socialist China, presided over the recovery of sovereignty over Hong Kong and Macao, and generally reintegrated China into the world. Mao and Deng were, therefore, chosen as the most powerful representatives of China's ability to "say no." The abstract topic of "China Can Say No" was expressed in a profound way by combining documentary photography, realistic expression as an extension of the cover topic's meaning, and symbolic image as connotative expression.

Their use of documentary photography highlighted the newly established magazine's internal recognition of the seriousness of news. The launch of *New Weekly* under favorable geographical and historical circumstances, with the magazine's decision to use the theme of Hong Kong's homecoming in 1997, and subsequently, current news documentary photographic images on their covers, got the publication off to a solid start. With their debut issue, the magazine adopted an M5 approach to symbolically interpret and represent the cover topic of "China Can Say No" using a realistic documentary photograph. Ultimately, however, the magazine would not become a news publication. It would be tough after Hong Kong to identify news hotspots worth reporting on every day, and it was clear that the magazine lacked the staff and official funding necessary to provide in-depth news reports. The M5 model, on the other hand, likely impacted *New Weekly's* appeal and sales, as well as its aim of becoming a lifestyle magazine.

The mode M6 is typified by the covers of Issue 69, "Treat Wealth with Indifferent Attitude," and Issue 71, "The Never Winning History of Chinese Football." The cover images

of cold green broken dollar bills on the former and the deflated football on a black background on the latter expand the expression, power, and imagination of the text. These photographs bring abstract concepts to life by allowing them to be touched and seen, expanding the cover topic's interpretation and making it more visually appealing and impactful. Walter Lippmann believed that converting distant circumstances into images prevented them from becoming indistinct memories. Images, he claimed, helped people incorporate a topic into their sense of identity. Without images, a topic would interest only a small number of people for a short period of time. (Walter Lippmann, 2002)

In terms of the cover of *New Weekly's* Issue 71, "The Never Winning History of Chinese Football" (Table 3), a deflated football with a classic black and white pattern occupies the lower portion and is set against a black background. The white sans serif headline “中国足球不胜史” (The Never Winning History of Chinese Football) adds a helpless and silent anger to this picture. Not only were Chinese footballers discouraged at the time, Chinese fans' felt discouraged in their hearts as well. This issue evoked the memory of a previous cover, that of Issue 44, “A Great Criticism of Chinese Football,” released on July 15, 1998. The issue claimed that neither public nor private criticism or suggestions appeared to have any power to change China's football predicament. People could only witness it fail time after time. Whether it was the selection and training of football players or the development of professionalism, Chinese football fans had seemed to have lost all hope in the game. Youhong Zhu even said, a little bemused: "Since 1974, since Chinese football returned to the international sports world, every major international competition such as the World Cup and the Olympics has been attended with passion by the Chinese team, yet they have often returned empty-handed. Chinese football has made people sad and angry for more than 20 years..." (Youhong Zhu, 1999) In this context, the symbolic cover image of Issue 69

expands the connotation of the cover topic and incisively and precisely portrays feelings and emotions that are beyond words, extending the topic's significance.

Issues 19 ("The Specialness of Returning"), 58 ("Find a Place to Hide"), and 61 ("I am an Advertisement, Who Am I Afraid of?") have covers with visual rhetoric that exemplifies the use of the mode M7. The distinctive feature of M7 is its use of a picture collage to interpret the cover topic in an expressive and symbolic manner. It would be difficult to perceive and comprehend the abstract social subjects *New Weekly* was covering if the topics could not be visualized. *New Weekly* seemed to understand this and decided that if they wanted to interpret the magazine's topic clearly, attractively, and effectively, they would need to try a new visual rhetorical mode. The montage effect of physical collage photography not only strengthened the magazine's expression of various themes, but also made the cover more visually appealing. For example, on the cover of Issue 58, "Find a Place to Hide" (Table 3), A face covered in beautiful flowers of many varieties is centered on a blue background. On the flower in the lower right corner, a bee is busily collecting honey. The man behind the flowers, with his face hidden, wears suspenders, a white shirt, and a tie and appears to be a modern city white-collar worker. Three butterflies in the photo add another fun element. Due to the flap of its wings, the larger butterfly in the upper left corner creates a vague boundary. The butterfly behind the character's head has started to fly away, and the butterfly in the upper right corner, which is partly obscured by a bar code, has already flown off. The entire image, made up of clothes, a face hidden behind flowers, and the flying butterflies, effectively conveys the message to "find a place to hide."

China's rapid economic and social development, as well as the stressful rhythm of modern urban life, had led to immense pressure in Chinese people's social life. Social identities had become increasingly complex over the past 20 years of national reform and opening up and the resulting requirement that each individual assume new roles and

responsibilities. This necessitated people's ability to quickly change identities and fulfill their new roles while behaving appropriately. At the time, the challenge of how to properly deal with the pressure caused by this rapid identity shift emerged as a new issue for modern society. As a result, people generally wanted to temporarily escape the network created by new socioeconomic identities and relationships, find a place to hide, and acquire a temporary space for the "self." Determining where people could go and how they could become inconspicuous in order to liberate their souls and breathe freely became a problem that had to be addressed. Yuanming Tao's "Peach Blossom Land" and Henry David Thoreau's "Walden" offered solutions or options for escape, but nevertheless, people had to return to real life and cohabiting with multiple social identities. Clearly, the expressive collage and symbolic graphics of the M7 mode were the most appropriate techniques for conveying these abstract societal concerns through *New Weekly*.

In the 1990s, China's continuously changing and developing society generated a steady stream of new ideas. These new ideas were generally beyond the scope of people's prior experience with existing traditional concepts. Chinese people, in a new environment and affected by conflict, may have only had a hazy sense of what was going on. To assist people in grasping and recognizing complicated and abstract social notions, a method that made the relationship between image and topic simple and visible was needed.

The mode M8 was essentially a visual rhetorical mode capable of achieving this objective. This final mode used by *New Weekly* was first used on the cover of Issue 53, "China Memo for 20 Years 1978-1998," and the magazine continued to use the mode in cover design until 1999. In M8, abstract conceptual linkages with the cover topic are conveyed in concrete visual forms recognizable to readers. Diverse painting styles are used in order to facilitate readers' perceptual cognition. Ping Deng (JieLi Publishing House's Deputy Editor-in-Chief and Art Director) stated: "Painting can be based on the content of news and



current events. It has the ability to not only recreate the scene of real events, but also to portray abstract social issues and encourage readers to use their imagination."

The cover of Issue 63, "Smashing TV" (Table 3), is a continuation of a topic previously brought up in Issue 39 ("The Mentally Retarded Chinese TV Industry"). In the later issue, the attitude against the television industry had become even more radical and resolute: the TV is being smashed. This issue's cover has a completely different visual rhetoric from that found in previous issues. It illustrates the emotion of destroying television in the form of dramatic expressionism. A muscular arm, a pair of big hands wielding a hammer, and a TV set crushed and distorted by the hammer are all displayed in the image. The smashed TV set is positioned in the lower center portion of the cover, and the hammer's handle, which is at the left end of the vertical axis, points to the upper right corner of the picture, connecting the hands and arms. A wide and vivid visual effect is produced by the red background, yellow arms and palms, gray hammer, black TV frame and broken pieces, and white screen. The context of the topic is thus effectively conveyed. The issue continues a debate on the negative effects of media content and consumption on children and public moral standards, proposing a compelling justification for smashing the television. The topic's intensity and tension are enhanced by the concise and powerful image conveyed through expressionist printmaking.

M8 mode, with its more adaptable and diverse painting style, not only enabled *New Weekly* to convey its "something new" concept and brand image, but it also allowed it to convey the broad connotations of the cover topic. Ping Deng has also noted that the covers of *New Weekly* in this period eschewed traditional forms of expression, polished the core topic or event of each issue in the form of visuals, caught people's eye with exaggerated imagery, and metaphorically highlighted the topic. (Ping Deng, 2021: Interview) The M8 mode,

therefore, helped the magazine achieve the status of being "something new," even cutting-edge and stylish, in appearance.

## **6 Conclusion**

A magazine cover's visual rhetoric should not only promote magazine sales and convey meaning according to the issue's main topic, but also conform to market value norms and the magazine's pursuit of its own spiritual ideas. Thus, the style of visual rhetoric found on *New Weekly's* covers may reflect the magazine's short- or long-term goals. Between 1996 and 2001, *New Weekly's* experimentation with a number of visual rhetorical modes on their covers reflected issues of pandering to the market or adhering to market-oriented concepts in an effort to survive, as well as standard brand-building processes start-up magazines tend to undergo.

The findings from this study reveal that *New Weekly's* endeavors to apply various visual rhetorical modes on its covers have helped to solve the magazine's problems during different stages of business development. These rhetorical methods were effective tools for boosting *New Weekly's* performance and enhancing its marketing efforts. The eight visual rhetorical styles found among the covers of *New Weekly* are the result of continuous testing and adjusting in response to a dynamic market. While news photography concentrates on documenting significant social and historical events, celebrity images embellish and enrich everyday life. In general, the visual discourse of *New Weekly's* covers has transitioned away from reproducible photos toward expressive collage and painted illustrations. It could be said that the covers created through collage or painting have enabled people to temporarily break the chains of gravity that control the weight of their physical body. The artwork frees them, allowing them to shift their thoughts to a wider complex reality or the future, welcoming

them to think freely, to create, and to envision. Indeed, helping readers to interpret the cover topic is only part of the objective of cover design; it's also about realizing the magazine's "something new" concept and purpose.

Findings from the present study also reveal that the visual rhetorical modes M7 and M8 effectively enhanced *New Weekly's* basic concept of "something new." These two modes of visual rhetoric helped *New Weekly* to not only win Ozzie's "best cover award" and recognition in the magazine industry, but also gain brand awareness and market interest. Modes M7 and M8 were also chosen as the key visual rhetorical modes for *New Weekly's* covers. These two modes are ideally equipped for expressing ideas around abstract societal issues that are the focus of *New Weekly*, as well as portraying the new concepts created by the magazine. Photography and celebrity photographs are not as hyperbolic or metaphorical as abstract or conceptual rhetoric. Covers that use conceptual graphics can help to expand and even surpass the text's imagination. The abstract and broad features of visual symbols can obscure the magazine's rationale surrounding social themes and concepts, erasing concreteness and specificity while bolstering generality and personal construction. This allows readers to integrate their own unique cognitive experience and emotional imagination. From 1999 on, in order to differentiate itself from kiosk competitors, *New Weekly* started manufacturing these high-concept cover images, utilizing expressive collage and painting, and adopting large-size master lines and poster-style covers. Ultimately, the purpose of the visual rhetoric on these covers was to draw potential audience's attention to the brand and to enhance sales.

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