

The Graphic Language of Min Wang

by Richard B. Doubleday and Stephen Goldstein

In the summer of 2008, the eyes of the world will turn to Beijing, China, as the city becomes host to the spectacle that will be the Games of the XXIX Olympiad. Hosting the Summer Games will be one of many firsts for the fastest-growing nation in the world. One of the leading programmes in China's debut at centre stage of global tourism and sports is the development of the Beijing Games pictographic symbols, identity programme and applications. Designer Min Wang is the creative force behind this extraordinary undertaking which began three years ago in a country that just 30 years ago had no word for graphic design.

Min Wang is the Design Director for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, a position to which he was appointed in 2006. Since 2003, he has also been Dean of the School of Design, at China Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing. At that time, he created a unique working group in the Art Research Centre for the Olympic Games (ARCOG) at the China Central Academy of Fine Arts. Under his leadership, the centre's design teams, including CAFA students, have developed an elegant and comprehensive design system for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. Their work includes the athletic pictographic symbols, the Beijing Games emblem and their applications. All of these efforts address design planning through the development of extensive design standards manuals for the Beijing 2008 Olympics, and reaffirm the Olympic spirit and significance of this international multi-sporting event.

Wang's efforts, and those of his design teams at the Art Research Centre, follow in the tradition of Olympic pictogram designs developed by art director Masaru Katsumie, who invented the first system of pictograms for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Katsumie, working with his graphic design team, was concerned with the social importance of graphic design and focused his research efforts on an internationally standardized signage system.¹ Their unique system of icon-based signage became the model that influenced Lance Wyman for the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, and Otl Aicher for the 1972 Munich Olympics. A noteworthy event occurred in 1966 when Aicher met with Katsumie and collaborated on underlying design standards and a more streamlined pictogram design based on the 1964 Tokyo Olympic pictograms. The Olympic wayfinding efforts since Katsumie have also become landmarks in the advancement of design systems for major international events and universal public visual design systems.³

The Beijing Olympics and the spirit the Chinese government hopes to create are not without controversy. Few Olympic Games, certainly none since 1936 when Jesse Owens won four track and field gold medals in front of an irate audience of Third Reich leaders, has been free of socio-political issues. In the United States at least, the atmosphere has already been heated by articles on China's human rights record, and its investments in Africa, to name a few issues. At stake for the Chinese in 2008 is nothing less than the opportunity to be perceived as a full-fledged member of the world community. To that end, China has invested heavily in the Games and its identity - from architecture to graphic design - and surrounded it all with sophisticated public relations.

The Olympics design programme has been developed in a relatively new design education and business environment, as China rapidly expands and begins to blend Western design with its 5,000-year-old artistic traditions. The designs of the Olympic emblem and its applications, athletic pictograms and Olympic colour scheme standards are elegantly presented in three large-format, white, perfect bound design standard manuals: *Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Emblem Usage Manual*, *Pictograms of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games* and *Dancing Colours: Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, The Colours*. The design and writing, created by ARCOG teams, is equivalent to any multinational corporate branding effort in the West. Each manual elaborately presents a facet of the standards management process. In the *Emblem Usage Manual* under a positioning statement entitled 'Core Design Concept of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Emblem', the Olympic emblem is named 'Dancing Beijing' and is declared to be 'the seal of the nation', 'the signature of Beijing' and 'the spirit of the individual'. In conclusion, it is stated that 'Dancing Beijing is an invitation - a hand extended to welcome the world to China for a celebration destined to unite humanity as never before'.

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1 Min Wang

2 Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Visual Identity Manuals: Emblem, Colour, Pictogram

3 The Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Emblem is also the official emblem for the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad (BOCOG). The emblem consists of three parts: the symbol, the logotype and the Olympic symbol.



Min Wang arrived at Yale University in 1986 after studying at the Yale Summer Programme in Brissago, Switzerland, in 1985 under graphic designer Armin Hoffman and industrial designer Richard Sapper, and after completing his art education at Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (now the China Academy of Fine Arts).

While a student at Yale University, Wang attained a pivotal design position at Adobe Systems in late 1986, just as the digital revolution came to the desktop with the introduction of the first-generation Macintosh computer. Wang, along with fellow graduate student Brian Wu, had the task of digitizing Kanji typefaces (Japanese fonts) using a beta version of Adobe Illustrator on the first-generation Macintosh computer.

Shortly after graduating, Wang joined the faculty of the Yale University graduate graphic design programme where he taught a typographic workshop. He joined a graphic design studio in New Haven, Connecticut, and continued in his many roles as Graphic Designer, Senior Art Director and Design Manager in the Creative Services division at Adobe Systems. In 1998, Wang left Adobe to form Square Two Design with design partner Eddie Lee, establishing offices in San Francisco and Beijing. Square Two Design clients include Adobe, IBM, Intel, Netscape and Stanford University.

Wang's work at Adobe and Square Two Design illustrates the influences of his Eastern and Western design education and his fusion of elements of contemporary Western design and traditional Chinese arts. For example, his typeface Mythos, based on legendary mythological beasts from Eastern and Western cultures, includes both the unicorn, which has predominately Western roots, and the dragon, which stems from East Asia, united within the Roman letterforms. Other examples include his logo design for the US & Korea Trade Association - where he merged the stars and stripes of the American flag with the Taegeuk symbol of the South Korean flag - as well as the Adobe Stone calendars, where he integrated Roman letterforms into the design reminiscent of a **textural** Chinese brush painting. Some of Wang's work, such as his Bird House logo, a bird symbol merged into the counter of a Roman letterform, are reminiscent of his Western education, while other designs, such as the freehand calligraphy on his Forbidden City T-shirts, appear entirely Eastern.

Wang has been a visiting fellow in Germany at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Munich, and the Hochschule der Künste, Berlin, and was appointed Honorary Professor by Shanghai University Fine Art College. Wang's work has been exhibited internationally in showcases such as the Biennial of Graphic Design, Brno; the Graphic Design Show in Beijing; the Type Directors Club Exhibition in New York; the International Poster Biennial, Lahti; the collection of Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg and the Museum für Gestaltung Zurich.

4 Cover and sample spreads from *Pictograms of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Visual Identity Manual*.

5 Cover and sample spreads from *Dancing Colours Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, The Colours, Visual Identity Manual*.

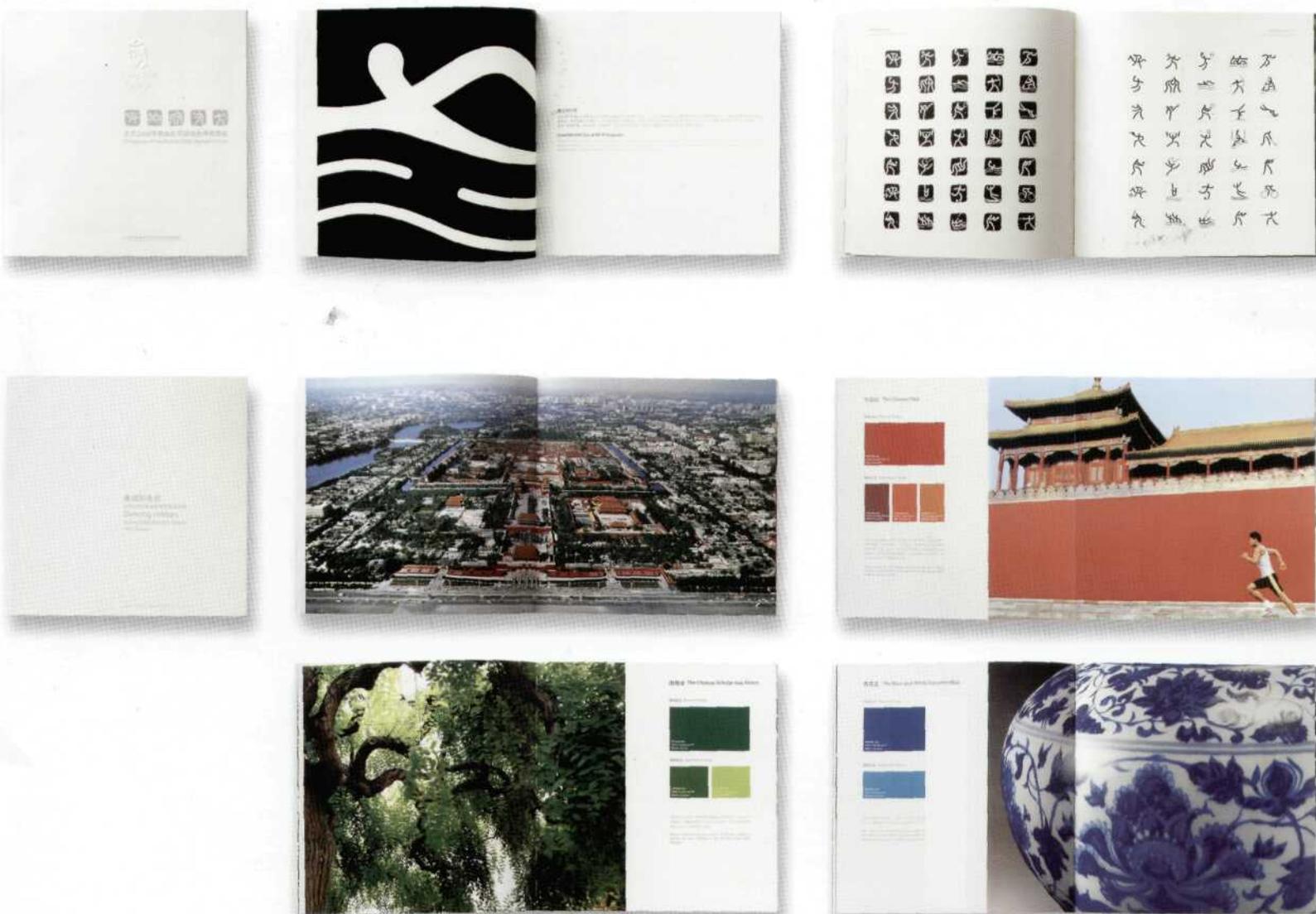
6 The pictographs in the top row are bone-and-shell script, or *jia gu wen*, attributed to the legendary Tsang Chieh. The bottom row, from left: sun, moon, water, rain, wood and dog, reveals the same words from Li Ssu's unified *hsiao chuan*, or small-seal style script, 1800-1200 B.C.E.

7 Chinese oracle bone writing, *jia gu wen*, is the earliest Chinese script dating from the Shang Dynasty. The 128 characters on this scapula are marked with bone-and-shell script, or *jia gu wen*, c. 1300 B.C.E.

8 Bronze tripod of Maogong cauldron rubbing, ninth century B.C.E.

9 Four-handed vessel with bronze script, or *Jin wen*, inscription, eleventh century B.C.E. Most of the inscriptions made inside the vessels were meant as dedications to ancestors and gods.

9.1 Rubbing from the vessel.



Characteristics of the Beijing Olympics Pictograms

The basic forms of the athletic pictograms are derived from a fusion of the Chinese seal script (zhuan wen), the oracle bone writing (jia gu wen) and the bronze ware script (Jin wen), combined with elements of Olympic pictograms of the past.

Seal script (zhuan wen)

An archaic style of Chinese calligraphy that evolved organically out of the Zhou Dynasty script. Seal script became standardized and adopted as the formal script for all of China in the Qin dynasty (ca. 221-207 B.C.E.),¹ and was widely used for decorative engraving and seals (name chops, or signets) of officials. In the graceful flowing style of seal script, the lines are drawn in thicker, more even strokes.² The seals, cut in relief, allowed multiple reproduction printed from matrices.³

Oracle bone inscriptions (jia gu wen)

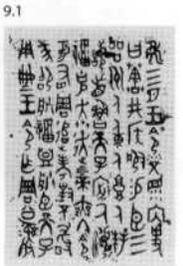
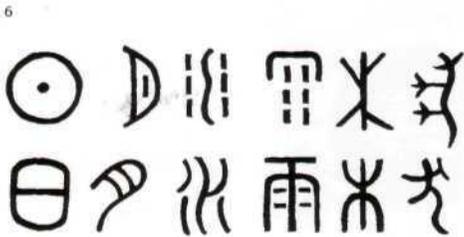
The earliest mature Chinese writing scripts were ancient Chinese characters carved on tortoise shells and animal bone. The 'oracle bone inscriptions' were largely records of divination and events at the royal court of the Shang Dynasty (1200 - 950 B.C.E.).⁴

Bronze script (jin wen)

A family of scripts found on cast bronze objects such as ceremonial vessels, bells (zhong) and tripod cooking pots (ding) in the late Shang dynastic period. Ceremonial vessels were cast with incised inscriptions, conveying dedications, inside the vessels. Messages were inscribed on other bronze objects in castings. The messages were believed to be from gods. Bronze script characters were well-formed and more regular in shape than oracle bone inscriptions.⁵

Traditional Rubbing Form

A rubbing is the impression of graphics, inscriptions or patterns of ancient bronze ware or stone tablets on a sheet of rice paper, which enables reproduction of the original pictorial and text content. The extraordinary forms of expression of the rubbings have made them a distinct form of traditional Chinese art.⁶



The Interview

What is the nature of your leadership role as Director of Image, Identity and Design for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games and the iconic identities that you designed or art directed for the 2008 Olympics?

In October 2006, I became the Design Director of Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. My responsibility covers overseeing the image and identity programme and the look of the event from the present all the way through the Olympic Games in the summer of 2008.

I became involved with the Beijing Olympics as early as 2001, when I was invited by the Beijing Olympic Bid Committee to design the Bid Presentation at the IOC meeting at Moscow. Beijing won the bid. Then in 2003, I was invited by BOCOG (Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad) to be their expert on image and identity. Meanwhile, I took up an offer to become the Dean of the School of Design at the China Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) and moved back to China after spending over 20 years in Germany and the United States. The first thing I did at CAFA was to start the Art Research Centre for Olympic Games (ARCOG), which has served as the core team for coming up with many major Olympic designs.

Here is a partial list: Identity Guidelines, Colour System, Pictograms, Medal, Emblem of Paralympics, Wayfinding System, The Core Graphic, The Look for the Torch Relay, The Looks of the Game Guide.

The centre now has 20 full-time designers plus faculty and students who are actively involved with different design teams and projects. There are many design studios and ad agencies working on Olympic-related projects. The design work I mentioned above is based on teamwork, and I feel very fortunate to have been able to lead such a strong team for the last 3 years.

How did you design the Olympic symbols and identity while straddling the line between West and East? What were the Olympic Committee's impressions of your designs?

Yes, all through the design process, we are walking along and across the lines between East and West. It is a great challenge for Chinese artists and graphic designers to use the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games successfully to make a statement to the world, by understanding the 'global' needs and spirit, promoting that spirit in an artistic language, which will inspire both the local and the international community, and creating a new look for the city that will bring the world into China and bring China into the world. Therefore, in the design process, we have constantly to ask and solve these questions:

- How can we create a look that combines the Olympic spirit and Chinese values?
- How can we create a look that blends the traditional with the contemporary?
- How can we create a look that is uniquely Chinese in colour and form?
- How can we create a look that touches the hearts and minds of people from all over the world?

Let me give two examples of design solutions we found:

First, the pictograms of the 2008 Olympic Games we knew from the very beginning that our challenge was to create the pictograms in a visual

language that was known to all world athletes and spectators, yet at the same time was uniquely Chinese. We came up with quite a few good design concepts and went through many internal reviews and selections as well as external competitions with other design institutions. Finally, we decided on the current, best solution.

Let's take a closer look at the original inspirations behind the creation of the pictograms. The pictograms use the structure of the Chinese seal script as the basic form, while incorporating the charm of the oracle bone writing and the bronze ware script from over 2000 years ago. We also used the rubbing form for the pictograms. The extraordinary form and force of expression of rubbings have made them a distinct form of traditional Chinese art.

Nevertheless, the overall look of each pictogram is also very modern and international. This effect is achieved by a fine touch of lines, shapes, curves, black and white contrast, and flowing motion of the sports - all elements of modern and Western design. Thus, in this case, we successfully created an image that is not only uniquely Chinese, but simple, clear, and aesthetically appealing to a world audience.

Jade disc, bi

Jade was considered the 'imperial gem' beginning from the earliest Chinese dynasties along the Yangtze River Delta (Liangzhu culture, 3400-2250 B.C.E.).

The jade discs, bi, - round discs with a hole penetrating through the middle - were ritual objects from the Neolithic period in the Liangzhu culture and later found in the Shang, Zhou and Han dynasties. Early examples were plain, while later examples were ornately decorated. They were thought to symbolize the sky or the heavens and were found in tombs and burial sites.

¹ 'Modern Chinese Writing', Victor H. Mair, *The World's Writing Systems*, edited by Peter T. Daniels and William Bright, Oxford, 1996.

² *Meggs' History of Graphic Design* by Philip B. Meggs, Alston W. Purvis, Wiley, 2006.

³ *A History of Writing*, Albertine Gaur, The British Library, 1984.

⁴ 'Early Chinese Writing' by William O. Boltz, *The World's Writing Systems*, edited by Peter T. Daniels and William Bright, Oxford, 1996.

⁵ Meggs', op cit.

⁶ *Pictograms of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*, Beijing Organizing Olympic Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad.



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Another good example is the Olympic medal design. The inspiration of the design comes from China's ancient jade, known as 'bi'. In ancient China, people wore jade as a decoration to symbolize nobility and honour. This cultural tradition continues today; people wear jade to wish for good health and luck, and to symbolize virtue and aesthetic value. The inspiration of the medal hook also derives from jade 'huang', a ceremonial jade piece with a double dragon pattern, often used as a hook to tie strings on.

On the medal's front side, we have to follow the standard design patterns and inscriptions required by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), while on the back we add the Chinese element, an inlaid piece of jade in a ring shape, with the emblem of Beijing 2008 engraved in the centre. Jade and gold symbolize honour and achievement and are the perfect embodiment of traditional Chinese values and virtues. When I presented the idea of adding jade to the medal design, the IOC responded very positively:

Noble and elegant, the Beijing Olympic Games medal is a blending of traditional Chinese culture and the Olympic Games. It gives the winners of the Games great honour and acclamation as recognition of their achievement, (quote from BOCOG website)

The American ex-patriot Henry Steiner, also educated at Yale University, seems to have had a wide influence on the graphic arts in China. What are your impressions of his work and influence?

He can be credited as the most influential figure in the early days of Hong Kong's graphic design that took off in the 1960s. In the 1980s, the Hong Kong designers brought that influence to mainland China. Being an ex-patriot designer in Hong Kong, Steiner's design work has to deal constantly with cross-cultural or inter-cultural themes. As a result, he published an excellent book, titled *Cross-Cultural Design* in the mid-1980s. I really admire Henry's design work, as well as his contribution in researching and writing on cross-cultural design that has influenced a younger generation of Chinese designers.

What are your thoughts about identity and iconic design across cultures and how has that informed your work?

Cross-cultural design requires an extremely sensitive understanding of different cultures at a deeper level. Just adding a few Chinese characters to a work cannot necessarily elicit resonance in the Chinese people. Similarly, to add some English words on the package won't guarantee the sales of a product in the American market.

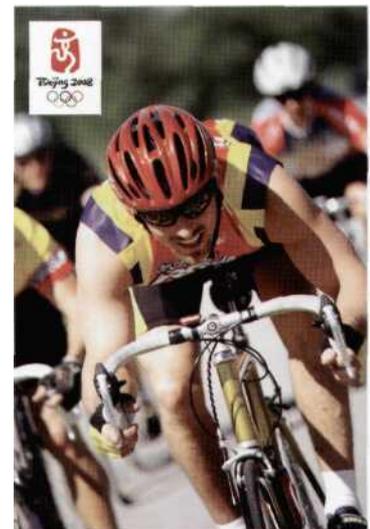
It is a precondition of cross-cultural design that designers have a profound knowledge of cultures on both sides. It was my years-long experience in identity and branding design in the West and keen understanding of the Western culture and audience that led the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Bid Committee to ask me to lead the design effort for Beijing's Olympic Bid Presentation in 2001



10 10.1



and now to work on the image and identity for the Games in 2008. To facilitate the understanding and acceptance of our design by a Western audience, we resorted to Western-style visual language and techniques. Our design is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and reveals strong Chinese messages.



10 Inscriptions on the Gui bronze vessels.

10.1 Pictograms of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.

11 Jade disk with pattern of curls. Fourth century B.C.E. to third century B.C.E.

12 The medals of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.

13 Usage guidelines for application of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games emblem in media materials. Example of application for magazine page.

14 The pictograms with frame of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.

15 15.1 15.2 Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Emblem Usage Manual.

16 Rhythmic gymnastics pictogram.

17 The sports postage stamps of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.

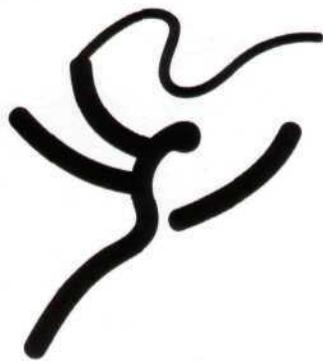


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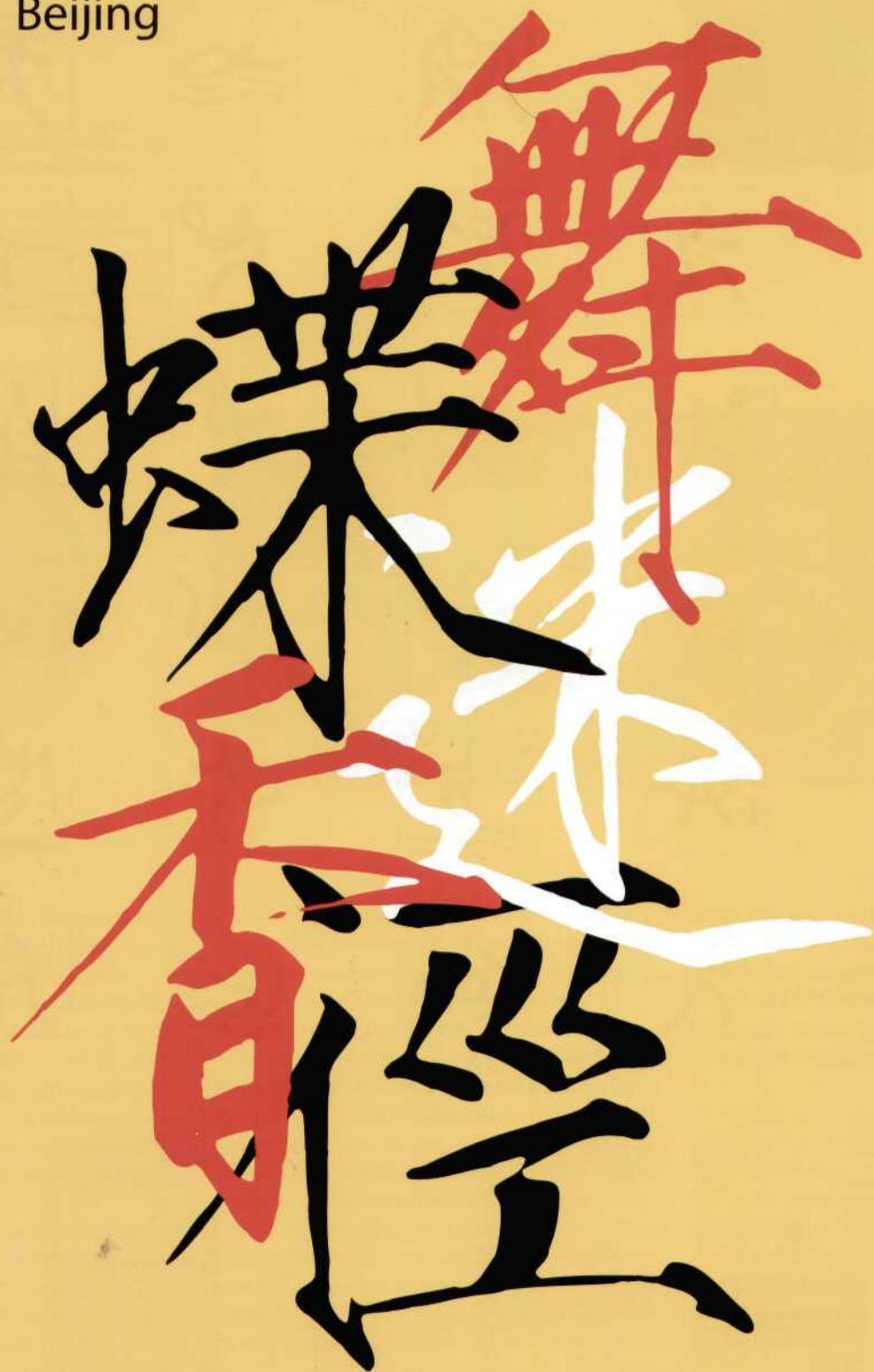


艺术体操
Rhythmic Gymnastics

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Beijing



故宫



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18 Forbidden City poster.

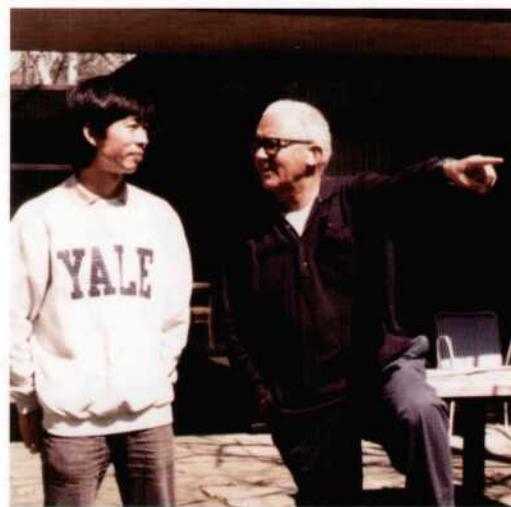
19 Forbidden City logo. The Forbidden City was the royal palace during the last two dynastic periods of China's imperial reign, the Ming and the Qing.

20 Bird House logo.

21 US & Korea Trade Association logo.

22 Eaton Food logo.

23 Min Wang and Paul Rand at Rand's home, 1988.



18 Forbidden City poster.

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20 Bird House logo.

21 US & Korea Trade Association logo.

22 Eaton Food logo.

23 Min Wang and Paul Rand at Rand's home, 1988.

Do you agree that the font Mythos that you designed in 1993, while at Adobe, composed of legendary beasts from different cultures, draws similarities to the graphic identity for the Forbidden City?

The two are not exactly the same. The graphic identity that I did for the Forbidden City was based on an earlier Han-style dragon from tile stone rubbings. The beasts in Mythos were based on classic European figures, but I may unconsciously have added an Asian touch to it that I was not aware of at the time.

It's very natural for me to choose the image of a dragon. In Imperial times, the dragon was the emblem of the Emperor. Even today, the dragon is also regarded as the symbol of the Chinese nation, and people will always find spiritual sustenance in it. Dragons are depicted in various patterns in the Forbidden City. However, the overly elaborate dragons in Ming and Qing dynasty style suggest a hint of vulgarity. I therefore chose the Han-styled dragons instead.

The graphic identity you developed for the Forbidden City integrates traditional Chinese arts and crafts forms into a contemporary visual language. Can you talk in depth about the development of this identity and the problems you faced during the execution phase?

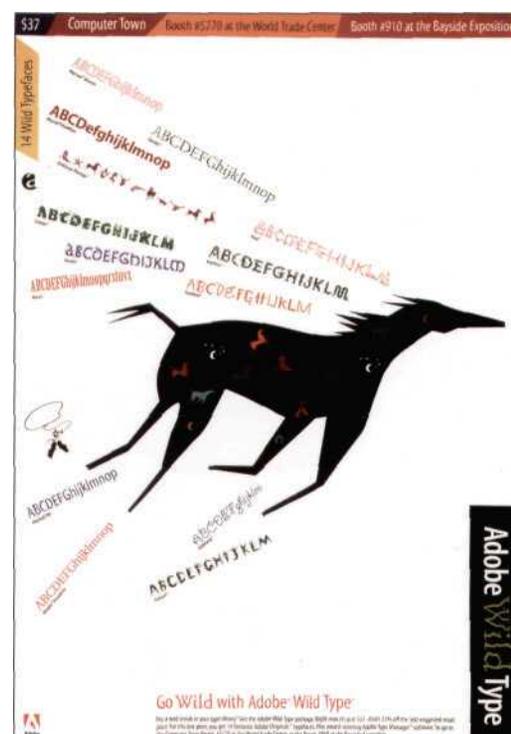
Yes, the identity design for the Forbidden City clearly reflects my conscious effort to bring the elegant Han dragon alive to the modern world. Considering the audience can be both Chinese and international, I wanted to add a contemporary touch to it. I was doing the Mythos type design for Adobe type library not long ago and it was quite possible that I could have unconsciously added that European flair to the Chinese dragon.

What were your student days like at Yale University? What were your impressions of Paul Rand, Armin Hofmann and Bradbury Thompson?

I was a graduate student at Yale University in the late 1980s and feel very fortunate to have studied graphic design under these three great masters, who had very different teaching styles and approaches. Paul Rand was quick and sharp; Brad Thompson was genteel and patient; and Armin Hofmann was always witty and wise. I learned a lot from them, not just how to do good design, but also how to think about design and be a good design educator.

How has your educational training in Europe and the United States shaped your design language?

Who we are and what we do is very much determined by our learning experience. In my case, after growing up during China's Cultural Revolution period and learning how to use colour and form first by painting the portrait of Chairman Mao onto a rural village wall, moving on to study design in a Chinese art school, and then going to Europe and the United States, each learning experience added to another to shape my design language today. I had a solid training in Western design disciplines and extensive work experience both at Adobe and Square Two Design, but my Chinese cultural sense and sensibility stays with me as who I am and definitely influences my design today.



What do you see as the mentoring role Alvin Eisenman, director of the Yale University graduate graphic design programme played, both there and during his typographic advisory role at Adobe?

For over 40 years, Alvin had given all his time, passion, and energetic devotion to the Yale University graduate graphic design programme and made it into a world-class educational institution. To me, Alvin is not just a mentor, but also a role model and, as an educator, a fatherly figure. I think that my decision to come back to China and teach at CAFA had a lot to do with Alvin's influence on me. When I visited Alvin in May of this year (2007), it became clear to me that it was his big heart, broad vision, love for typography, passion for teaching and care for students that made the Yale graphic graduate design programme the home for me and for many faculty and students in all those years.

What was your teaching role in the Yale University graduate graphic design programme. Did it include using beta versions of Adobe Illustrator and Adobe Photoshop?

From the late 80s to the late 90s, I taught courses at Yale University graduate graphic design programme. My teaching focused on two fields: 1. cross-cultural design and Eastern typography and 2. digital image making. In 1989, with colleague Charles Altschul, I taught the image workshop, using Adobe Photoshop, which was still a Beta version at the time. Students used Photoshop to make collages and manipulate photos, and came up with many experimental images that were not possible to compose using traditional tools. In my cross-cultural design and typography course,

I taught students to experiment how to incorporate Asian letterforms into their design by using Adobe Illustrator and an early version of the Kanji fonts. For most Yale students, this was their first exposure to Asian typography.

What are the differences in design between China and the United States of America?

This is too big a question to talk about in just a few words. There are not big differences in terms of design disciplines such as colour, form and use of computer technology today, but there are definitely differences in cultural context, content and comprehension.

How much were you able to use the language of design, through use of type and image, during the Cultural Revolution in China? Was the computer an integral tool for the cross-pollination of messages? There was publicly little to no commercial design being generated during that period.

The computer was not available at all in China during the Cultural Revolution period. Commercial design was non-existent. Design then was mostly used as a medium for political posters, books and pamphlets. In fact, the word 'graphic design' (ping mian shi ji) was not introduced to China until the early 1980s, together with China's economic reform and open-door policy to Western influences.

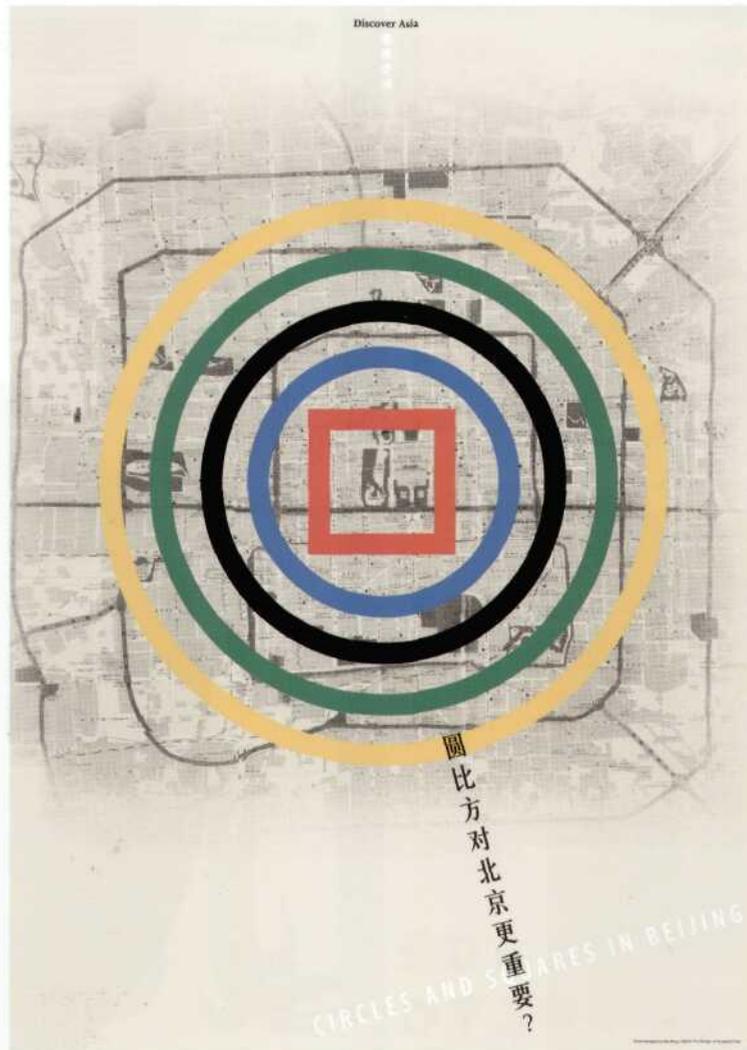
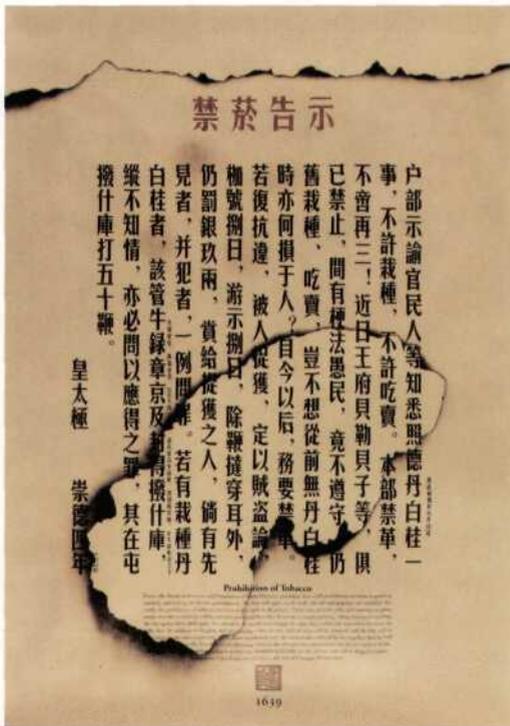
What was your experience and what were the challenges, particularly the method of digitizing fonts at Adobe Systems in 1986, given the technological spread of the personal computer?

It was a great time at Adobe in the mid to late 1980s when Alvin Eisenman was on the typographical advisory board and Sumner Stone was the Director of the Typography Department. They, along with

the best type designers, spearheaded the effort to bring fine typography into the desktop age. Their dedication to high standards of typography and their contribution to the revival of classic typefaces into digital forms stimulated the desktop publishing revolution of the '80s. As a young graduate student from Yale, I was having a free hand and great time in applying these new typefaces to create designs on the computer. Most of the work that I did stayed with me in my office as I changed work from place to place, but it recorded an exciting period in our lives, combining art and design with new technology and making an impact in the world we are living in now.

What did Adobe Systems think their mission was then and what do you think they are doing now, buying up most of their competitors and making the applications bloated with auto features?

Adobe started as a company that put its technological innovation and application in a very focused field that was the '80s and the early '90s. As the company expanded over the years, with the fierce market competition, the demands of growing as a public company and the introduction of new technologies, the company moved more towards the direction of new markets, and new industries. There is nothing wrong with the company, especially for its stockholders, but for typographers, for type designers and designers - people like Sumner Stone and me - the golden age of the 1980s has passed.



Do you think Adobe Systems are producing better quality fonts now?

I wouldn't use the word 'better', but I can say that Adobe always has produced high quality fonts to meet the market needs and remain in the forefront of combining high technology and design, or the other way around.

Why did you leave Adobe Systems in 1998 to start your own design firm. Square Two Design?

I started to work for Adobe as an intern in 1986 when the size of the company was around 30 people and worked all the way through as a senior designer, senior art director, and then design manager in charge of the company's design department and team. I learned a lot in these years, such as corporate marketing and communication, branding, interface and web design, etc. However as a designer, I never had an opportunity to run an independent design studio of my own. In 1998, the dot com boom was on in Silicon Valley. Eddie Lee, a former schoolmate of mine at Yale, offered me the chance to join Square Two Design as a partner. It was a time when I was looking for a change in my life and work, and it happened.

When did you decide to return to China and for what reasons?

After studying, teaching and working in Europe and the United States for twenty years, I made the decision to come back to China to focus my work on two things: design education and design for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

In less than ten years, China has quickly added more than a thousand design schools and programmes that enroll hundreds of thousands of students at the university and college level. How to teach design in China, how to learn from but not to copy the West, and how to find design expression in an Eastern aesthetic sense and sensibility, these have become big questions. I came back to China intending to face, ask and solve these questions.

As a Chinese designer educated both in China and the West, I feel very fortunate to be the current Dean of the School of Design at CAFA, a position that enables me to make an impact in the field of design education in China today. The students at CAFA will be the future leaders and educators in China's design field tomorrow. It is in them that we invest the hopes and directions of design in China and in the future.

If you were to identify the strengths and weaknesses in Chinese graphic design education, what would you include?

The strength of China's design education comes from its market demand and job opportunities for students. We also have a large pool of enthusiastic and talented younger-generation students who are eager to enter the field. However, our strength is also our weakness. We are in great lack of good design teachers and design education became very commercialized, short-term, utilitarian and technically driven. Everyone wants to get results or rewards fast, and a good and solid design education and design curriculum cannot be based on that. Except for a few top schools and design education departments, many schools - despite their lack of teaching staff and curriculum development-quickly expanded their student enrollment or added design

departments and majors. The result is the production line of graduates who do not understand good design from bad design, original creativity from copying, and even some basic principles and concepts of graphic design. Thus, I think that design education is a fresh, confused and chaotic field right now. The quality of design education varies greatly depending on schools, departments, faculty members and student recruitment.

What do you envision as the next development in Chinese graphic design, particularly with the ever-expanding economy in mainland China? Are you optimistic about the future of Chinese graphic design and the younger generation of graphic designers?

We consider ourselves as the 'older' generation of Chinese graphic designers, coming to the forefront as a result of China's open policy to a market economy and reform in the last 25 years. The top team of Chinese graphic designers, people like Wang Xu and some others in Shenzhen, as well as a group of very talented younger-generation designers - people like Chen Zhengda in Hangzhou, Miwi Studio and Jiang Hua in Beijing - are recognized by the international design community today and their work is just as excellent, sophisticated and individualistic as any other top graphic designer's in the world. However, compared to many Western countries, as well as some Asian countries like Japan, the overall design education and design standard still fall behind.



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Design for the 2008 Olympic Games is a great opportunity for us, through which we can combine design education with real world practices, blending East and West, and Chinese tradition with international modernity. The challenges we face and the solutions we are finding in design for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, to a large extent, reflect the challenges and solutions Chinese designers face today. I hope, through the high exposure and good quality of design, we not only bring Chinese designers to the world platform, but also bring the best international designers to China.

I applied to ICOGRADA (The International Council of Graphic Design Associations) to host the ICOGRADA World Design Congress 2009 in Beijing and the China Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) will be the main organizer. The conference should attract around 3,000 attendees. It will be a great event for designers from all over the world to meet with Chinese designers, to exchange their ideas and their works.

¹ *Graphic Design: A Concise History* by Richard Hollis, Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1994

² *Otl Aicher by Markus Rathgeb*, Phaidon Press Ltd., 2006

Photo credits

- 1 Wang, Min
- 2 Visual Identity Manuals
© Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad (BOCOG).
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