

by Ellen Shapiro

OLYMPIC DESIGN TEAM

VISUALIZING THE
DREAM OF 1.3
BILLION PEOPLE



Beijing 2008
TM ©



This could be the biggest design program in history. More designers are involved, more energy, more years of work. And the largest audience. It's estimated that 4.5 billion television viewers will watch the 2008 Summer Games, which will open with the lighting of the Olympic flame in Beijing's dramatic new "Bird's Nest" National Stadium at 8:08 p.m. on August 8, 2008, eight being the luckiest number on the Chinese calendar. One million people are expected to visit China this August, including 25,000 journalists.

Beijing has spent seven years getting ready. Nonstop construction has created a new skyline and the 3000 -acre Olympic Green Park with 12 sports venues and an Olympic Village for the more than 10,000 participating athletes. All China has gone sports crazy. The "Beijing 2008" logo is on everything from Coke cans to UPS trucks. Every citizen is expected to contribute, to be part of the process of bringing the People's Republic into the modern world. And that includes being good hosts, using cell phones with Olympic logos and buying Olympic mascot dolls for their children.

The story of how Beijing won the games—beating out Istanbul, Osaka, Paris and Toronto—may have begun with a Chinese-born, Western-educated graphic designer who was working in his San Francisco firm, Square Two Design, at the time. In May, 2001, Min Wang, for ten years design manager at Adobe Systems, got a call from the Beijing municipal government: "We need your help." He was given less than two months to create seventeen PowerPoint proposals that would visually present Beijing's qualifications as host city to the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

"They wanted a big splash," Wang recalls. He assembled a team of designers who worked for two intense weeks in San Francisco and three in China. "I told the committee that one hard fact is worth 10,000 romantic pictures," he says. "We had to show how much the Chinese people wanted the Games." In addition to demonstrating Beijing's ability to build the necessary infrastructure and facilities, the presentations, titled "The Dream of 1.3 Billion People," were designed to demonstrate what Wang calls the energy and passion of a changing China. On July 13, 2001, the Chinese bid delegation—including China's minister of athletics and the mayor of Beijing—went to Moscow, where they were given 30 minutes to make their final pitch. "It was televised all over China," says Wang. "The IOC made up their minds in one hour: Beijing would host the 2008 Summer Olympic Games." After the announcement, he says, there was a national celebration with fireworks throughout China's 3.7 million square miles.

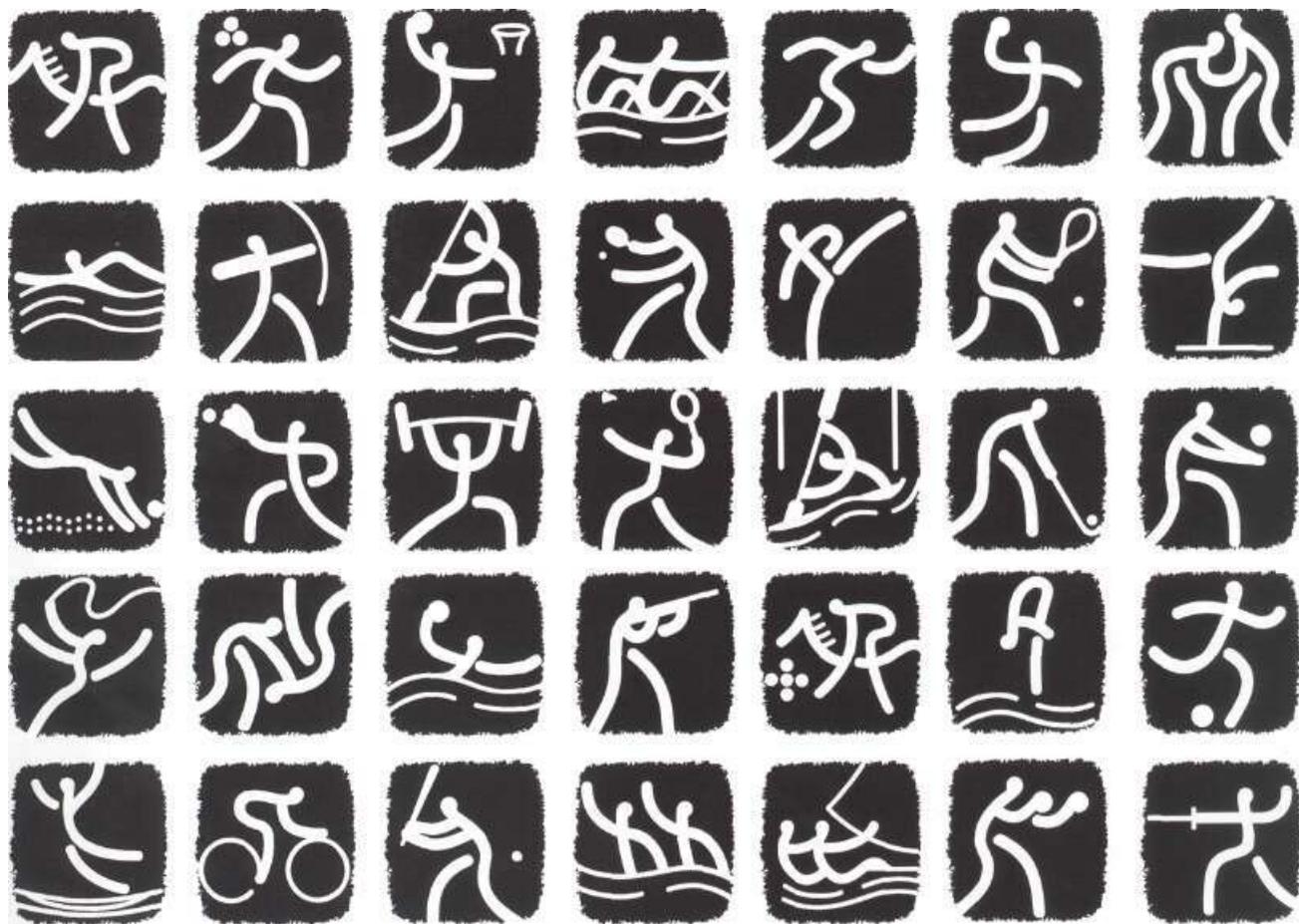
The "Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the xxix Olympiad" (BOCOG) now needed an official emblem, always a controversial undertaking. With the stated goal of getting a design that would "integrate traditional Chinese culture with the Olympic spirit," they organized an international competition and sent invitations to 1,500 designers, including the large branding firms that designed the identities for the Atlanta, Nagano and Torino Games. A local won. Guo Chunming, vice president of Beijing Armstrong International Corporate Identity Co., Ltd.,

Caption information provided by Ellen Shapiro and Min Wang.

This page: "**Dancing Beijing**," the official emblem of the 2008 Beijing XXIX Olympiad." Guo Chunming, vice president, AICI, art director; Guo Chunming/Han Meilin/Wang Yong, AICI, designers; Zhang Wu, president, Beijing Armstrong International Corporate Identity Co., Ltd. (AICI), creative director.

Right: **Sport pictograms**. "After researching iconic photographs of athletes to represent the ideal of each sport, designers traced the forms in strokes styled after ancient inscriptions." Wang Jie/Hang Hai, lead designers; Min Wang, design director; Art Research Centre for Olympic Games at CAFA (Central Academy of Fine Arts), Beijing, design.

"The core graphic palette connects all Beijing 2008 identity elements and images, forming a consistent yet flexible '**Look of the Games**.' The wave pattern called 'Lucky Cloud,' symbolizes the granting of blessings." Chen Weiping/Lin Cunzhen/Hu Xiaomei, designers; Hang Hai, lead designer; Min Wang, design director; Art Research Centre for Olympic Games, CAFA, design.



submitted a design based on an athlete in motion carved from a red chop, or seal used to stamp documents. The figure resembles the Chinese character *jing* (capital, sparkling) in *Beijing*. Chunning, whose firm's clients include some of China's largest banks and industrial corporations, describes it as "a symbol of the city's dedication to the Games as a grand festival of the people. I call him 'Dancing Beijing,' and he is faster, stronger, in a forward run, cheerful and friendly, yet full of dynamism and sports passion." Of the judges' choice, Chunning comments, "Many foreign designers perhaps were unable to tap into China's traditional culture." After the selection was made, the art was fine-tuned by making the figure more active and lettering the words "Beijing 2008" in typography reminiscent of Han Dynasty calligraphy. Chunning and Beijing Armstrong then expanded the system to include secondary emblems for the Torch Relay, the Paralympics and the volunteers.



their forms based on iconic photographs of athletes in motion; the graphic style based on writings found on ancient stone carvings and bronzes. "We are bringing the quintessence of traditional Chinese aesthetics into international communication graphics," explains Wang.

Design guidelines were codified to keep the messages, colors and themes consistent across media and across the

country. Beijing is not the only host city; for example, sailing and windsurfing events will be held in the beach city of Qingdao, 350 miles southeast, and equestrians will compete in Hong Kong, a 3-hour flight away; guidelines were written for local groups that are handling production and installation. A typical page in the *Dancing Colours* book shows how to design a poster by superimposing a sport pictogram on a wave background. Another book of guidelines for advertisers and sponsors outlines requirements for how the "Beijing 2008" logo is to be linked with corporate and brand identities.

With the "Beijing 2008" logos in place, there were six more years of monumental tasks to be completed. Min Wang, back in San Francisco, had promised the bid committee, "If Beijing wins, I will come back." He did, and was appointed design director of BOCOG. In January 2004, his group, "Art Research Centre for Olympic Games," was installed in a new design building at Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA). An all-star "Olympic Design Team" was chosen from CAFA's faculty and its 700 undergraduate and graduate design students.

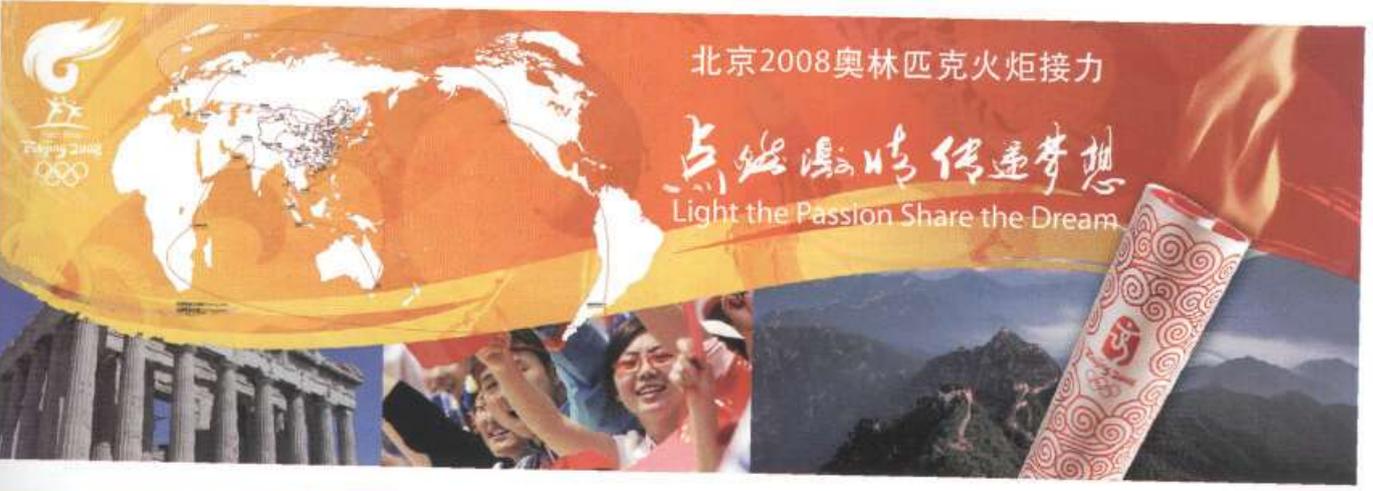
The work they are doing is not only one of the largest design programs ever, it is among the most complex, technologically advanced, well-researched and culturally iconographic. Its distinctively Chinese aspects are expressed in the "Look of the Games" palette of six primary and ten subsidiary colors intended "to bring to mind glimpses of Beijing." The colors are the reds and yellows of the walls and roof tiles of The Forbidden City, the blue-and-white of Ming Dynasty porcelain, the grey of the stone of The Great Wall, and the green of the leaves of the Chinese scholar-tree. Another key element is the "core graphic," a series of patterns inspired by silk fabrics, zodiac signs and jade dragon sculptures. The wave or cloud elements signify "get your wish" and are used as a background for environmental graphics. Pictograms were designed for each of the 35 Summer Olympic Games sports,

The day of my visit to CAFA, August 8, 2007—the one-year kickoff to the Games—was a momentous day in China, Ioc president Jacques Rogge marked the start of the 365-day countdown with a lavish ceremony in Tiananmen Square. Hundreds of banners with the "One World One Dream" slogan were waving in Wangfujing Dajie, Beijing's central pedestrian mall. Around town, Olympic logos were omnipresent on Nike billboards, Panasonic and Audi ads, and promotions for Lenovo computers. Just about every block was a construction zone: new hotels, shopping centers and office and apartment towers going up. Civic initiatives were underway to reduce the number of cars, cut down pollution and smog and beautify the roadways. The government was dealing with significant issues reported in the international press, including human rights violations, deaths at construction sites, unsafe products, tainted drugs and steroid-filled meat that could render athletes ineligible. Local headlines screamed, "Will Beijing be ready?"

That day, the CAFA design team (150 students and faculty members) was hard at work to make sure that Beijing will be ready—at least from a design standpoint. One group was completing wayfinding and signage systems in Chinese, English and French. Planning had begun on the large-scale graphics that would decorate the sports venues. Art for official

This page: **Min Wang.**

Right: **Torch Relay logo and branding:** "The Torch Relay logo, designed by Guo Chunning, AICI, is based on the concept of 'fire phoenix,' symbolizing good fortune, nobility and happiness; two runners hold the Olympic flame high. The applications, including vehicles, venues and 'city look' banners were designed at the Art Research Centre for Olympic Games, CAFA. Hu Xiaomei/Hang Hai/Chen Weiping/Lin Cunzhen, designers; Min Wang, design director.







Olympic posters and schematics of medals, uniforms and tickets were being finalized.

"Our job is to get people excited, stimulated, engaged and give them a good experience in Beijing and when they engage in the Olympic moment all over the world," Wang emphasizes. "No visual pollution."

For Wang, and most Chinese adults, such an Olympic moment would have been unthinkable until now. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), his parents, like other intellectuals, were forced to become workers and embrace Communist Party ideals that did not include welcoming the outside world. Western music and art were forbidden. Food was rationed. "Each person got one-half kilo of meat and a few kilos of rice a month," Wang recalls. "A bicycle cost three months salary." By 1978, educational prospects had opened up and Wang entered the China National Academy of Fine Arts. He received a BA in 1982, enrolled in graduate school at Yale, and became a protege of Paul Rand. After studying with Armin Hoffman in Switzerland and receiving his MFA, he took a design position at Adobe, where he became design manager in charge of all marketing collateral.



When Wang returned to China to direct the design program for the 2008 Games, the president of CAFA appointed him dean of the School of Design, "I came back to serve design education in China," he says modestly. "This is a *weiji*, a moment in China's history," Wang explains. "*Wei* means crisis. *Ji* means opportunity. From crisis, opportunity arrives. China has a thousand new design programs that enroll hundreds of thousands of students at the college and univer-



Left: **Official poster of the XXIX Olympiad.** "More than two millennia ago the Chinese began carving inscriptions into stone. In the seventh century they discovered how to make multiple copies of the records by covering the stones with paper and tamping the paper with an inked pad. the process produces white characters on a black background. That was the paradigm followed by Min Wang when designing this poster using all 35 sports pictograms and the 'Dancing Beijing' emblem."

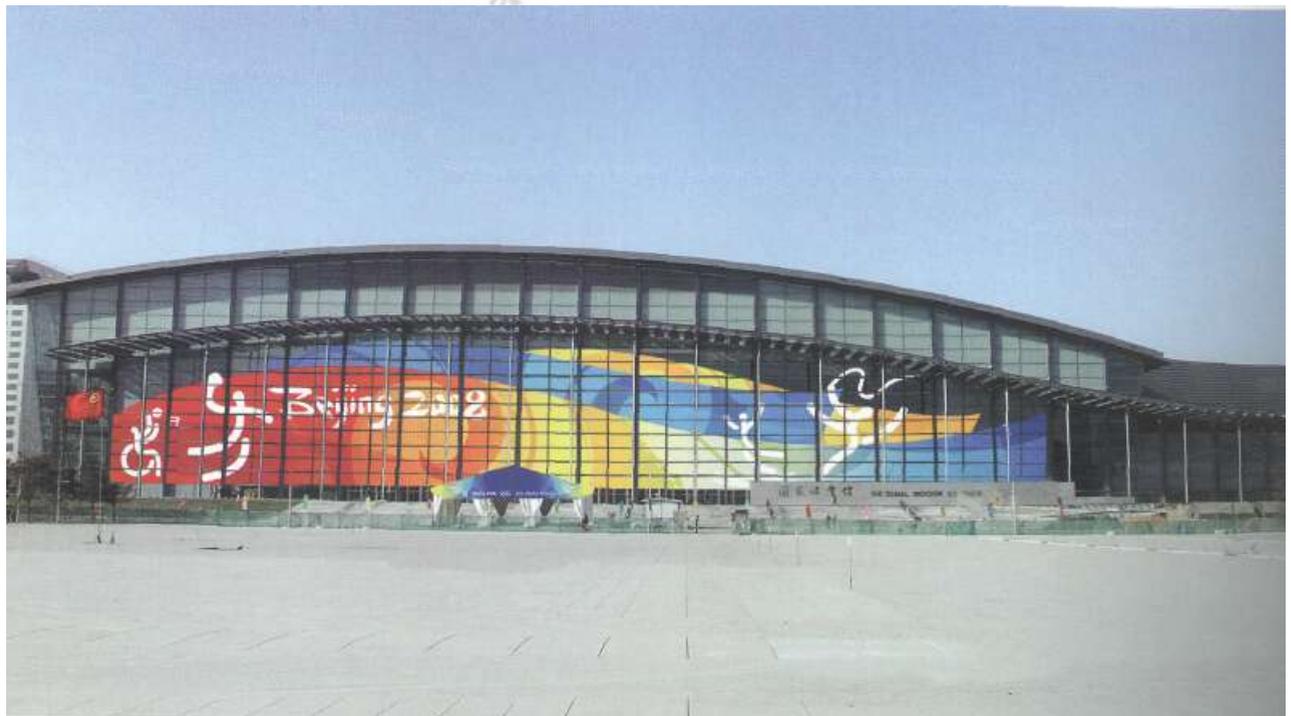
Three concept sport posters. "In an early presentation, the designers at CAFA used a simplified, contemporary take on the 2,000 year old art of paper-cutting; the design concept realized here in posters for table tennis, sailing and judo. Art Research Centre for Olympic Games, design."

This page; **Tennis poster** at the Art Research Centre studio, CAFA. "In this concept, developed by students and faculty, sport pictograms are superimposed on iconic black-and-white photographs of athletes."



"On August 8, 2006, China National Philatelic Corporation issued a four-piece set of **commemorative stamps** titled. The Games of the XXIX Olympiad-Olympic Sports." Xin Jing, lead designer; Min Wang, design director; Art Research Centre for Olympic Games, CAFA, design."

"The **Olympic medal design**, inspired by ancient jade pieces, was the result of a competition within China that garnered 265 submissions. The winner was CAFA." Art Research Centre for Olympic Games, CAFA/Hang Hai/Xiao Yong/Wang Yipeng, designers; Xue Mei, lead designer; Min Wang, design director.





shy level. But how to teach design in China, how to learn from the West but not to copy, and how to find design expression in Eastern aesthetics and sensibility, those are big questions."

Wang has chosen highly qualified colleagues to help answer those questions. They include Wang Ziyuan, head of CAFAS' graphic design department, who has his own branding design practice and calls the Olympics a life-changing opportunity for students. "They are learning how to work in groups and how to produce big ideas for big projects," says Ziyuan.

Right now, athletes are completing their training, visitors are completing their travel plans and designers are completing production on projects such as the murals for exteriors of venues and fences around playing fields, a "look" that will not be revealed until opening day. After the last gold medal has been draped over an athlete's track suit, the Art Research Centre will not disband. CAFA faculty and students plan to work together on projects such as bid proposals for design of the graphics for the 2011 "Universiade" collegiate games in Shenzhen City. If their bid wins, there will be another round of demanding projects.

"The Games are the opportunity for the Chinese designer to be recognized, to show people we are part of the developing world, to cross the barriers of politics and religion," Wang sums up. "See for yourself! Come to Beijing in August!" CA



Left: "Wayfinding pillars with icons and signage in Chinese and English in the Olympic Green Park plaza. At left in the rendering is the 'Bubble Building' or 'Water Cube,' the new National Aquatics Center, by Australian architecture firm PTW. At right is the Beijing National Stadium, or 'Bird's Nest,' designed by Swiss architectural firm Herzog & de Meuron. Wayfinding design by Art Research Centre for Olympic Games, CAFA. Wang Xuejiao, lead designer; Min Wang, design director.

"In this rendering, the 18,000-seat National Indoor Stadium's glass curtain wall facade is decorated with a **frieze of pictograms.**" Art Research Centre for Olympic Games, CAFA, design; Min Wang, design director.

This page; "On the day of the one-year countdown to the Games, the 'Dancing Beijing' emblem was omnipresent on **street banners** on Wangfujing Dajie, a major pedestrian shopping mall near the Forbidden City."

"Sponsored by official timekeeper Omega, a two-story **countdown clock** that displays the time remaining before the opening of the Games, stands in front of the National Museum of China, a Mao-era edifice." Fonte: Communication Arts, p. 86-93, May/June. 2008.