ON THE DESIGN COMMUNICATION OF CULTURAL IMAGE

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Abstract. In this era, people are no longer satisfied with standardized products. Designers need to implement unique product semantics to attract customers to buy the products. According to this reason, designers are developing a new design approach that puts cultural elements into their products so that they can make people reappreciate their own culture and history. The Olympics is a global event which involves various sport competitions. Before the Beijing Olympic Games, many host nations used to promote their culture through selling a variety of merchandise. It is the first time for the Olympic Games to take place in China which means that it is obviously the right timing to see cultural symbols of China in the merchandises created by the Chinese design team. These designs had introduced Chinese imageries to the whole world. As generally known, traditional culture of Taiwan actually took root from China. Taiwan owns the same ancient history and materials like China. This study explores the cultural identity and analyses the cultural design elements of China. The 2008 Beijing Olympic Games is taken as case study in this research, because it helps people think how to create new value from their own culture. Furthermore, this paper proposes some suggestions on how to create design which represents the image of Taiwan.

1. Culture as Identity

The Taiwanese designers have been following the Western design thinking for decades, so it was easy to discover the Western design language in their designs. In other words, they have neglected and seldom appreciate their own traditional culture. This situation changed after the post-modernism was introduced into

Taiwan in the eighties. The Taiwanese started to recollect and re-learn the meaning and values of their culture. They also try to apply culture as an innovative tool to re-structure the new aesthetics and values of Taiwanese design which will build Taiwan's good image and unique identity.

The image design of the Beijing Olympic Games is commended as a successful combination between the modern design and the traditional culture of China which communicates the Eastern culture. As Taiwanese culture mainly roots from China, understanding the innovative imagery design of the Beijing Olympic Games will be helpful for Taiwanese designers to build unique Taiwan's identity.

2. Research Aim and Method

This paper aims to explore the relationship between cultural image and identity design, analyze Chinese cultural symbols and their meanings, comprehend the context of Chinese culture from the perspective of modern design thinking by taking the image design of the Beijing Olympic Game as an example, recommend Taiwanese designers to develop the image design of Taiwan. The paper adopts literature and style analyses as basic research methodologies.

3. Culture as Mental Image

As we know, culture is the synthesis of science, art, religion, morality, law, and customs of the human race. The connotation and superficial representation of a nationality also emerged from the culture which develops characteristic values and logical thinking in a nation. Those characters gradually become as national identity. The design form is constructed from various elements, such as model, colour, material, function and culture. However, only culture could tell so many
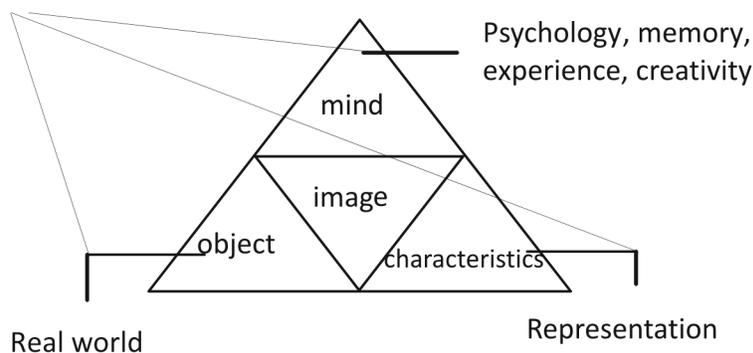

Figure 1. Structure of image

stories of a nation. The form of a culture can develop multidimensional thinking and more contents can be found in it (figure 1).

That is why the designers pay more attention to embed the cultural elements in their creative design works which is noticeable in many commercial products sold in the market. Therefore, the Taiwan design image is gradually being shaped by this trend.

The imagery is the mental image of people, which can be called as the stream of consciousness. It is shifted and floated by the social values, personal experiences, and customs. The image in people's mind is disordered and blurred (Li, 1995; Lin, 1991). After the systematical generalization, people perceive a more concrete and specific idea of an image in their mind. Besides, how to construct a clear image in of the product, graphic or architecture designs has become an important subject in the design researches and practices during the latest decade. In the fields of product design, visual communication, and architecture, there are more designers adopting the local image as a strategy for communicating the values of a culture. The same situation happens in all host countries. The main purpose of host nations of the Olympic Games is to promote their strengths and communicate the cultural information and connotation to the world, particularly when they start to use the local symbols to distinguish themselves from other countries. For example (as shown in table 1), Seoul of Korea used images of Tai-Chi and the Eight Diagrams from its national flag as the official emblem of the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games.

In the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, America Sanchez is the one who designed the emblem. The design is dominated by hand-drawn, colourful, rough and free lines that represent the passion of the Mediterranean people. While in the 2000 Olympic Games, Sydney adopted the Boomerang and Sydney Opera House, which are the cultural impressions of Australia the people usually have. Other examples include: Atlanta, which used the flag of the United States of America and the torch of Statue of Liberty in 1996; Athens, which chose the symbol of the nation, the laurel wreath, as the 2004 Olympic Games emblem; and The Beijing design team adopted the ancient Chinese characters which are commonly used as written sytem and seals in the ancient China.

TABLE 1. 1988–2008 emblem design of the Olympic Games

1988/ Korea/ Seoul	1992/Spain/ Barcelona	1996/USA/ Atlanta	2000/Australia / Sydney	2004/Greece/ Athens	2008/China/ Beijing

In the table 1, each emblem is separated into two categories: image and presentation. In the design process, the image is regarded as the language and style which represent designer's concept and affect how users will identify the product. User's ability to identify a product is always influenced by personal backgrounds, the times, standard of aesthetics, customs, etc. Therefore, the image is an abstract concept, a mental state and an attitude. Adding cultural factors to design an image will bring users closer to the culture which then will result in identification and cognition.
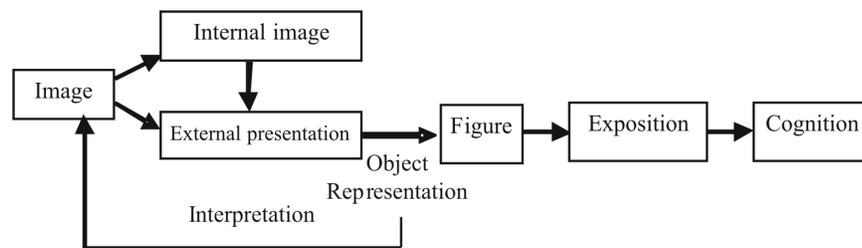

Figure 2. Concept flow of the image

The history of Chinese traditional arts is quite long and abundant. Ancient Chinese always respected the nature, learned from it and believed it as an internal image. As to external presentation, they imitated nature and used their own way to make nature visible in their imagination (figure 2). They developed seven categories of imagery patterns and apply them in their daily life, such as: auspicious beasts (e.g.: dragon, unicorn, Chinese mystical bird); animals (e.g.: lion, turtle, fish); plants (pine, bamboo, plum blossom, orchid); human figures (e.g.: the Eight Immortals crossing the sea, door-god of temple, and Bodhisattva of Buddhism); character signs or patterns (e.g.: Yin-Yang sign, Eight Trigrams, Tai Chi, swastika, "囍", and "壽"); auspicious patterns (e.g.: lotus flower, Aquarius); shape of fire and water(Ho, 2006). These varieties of patterns communicate cultural images to users and therefore connect their mind to decode the products with the cultural images embedded.

4. The Factors Influencing the Image Design Thinking

The choice and application of an image are based on designer's ability to realize them in the design. The factors of realization come from the environment which surrounds the designers, including social environment, social values, experience, tradition, etc. Designers can convert these factors into their own inner concept as their wisdom. These factors bring about the different interpretations on composition of designs, forms, colours, and shapes by the designer. Furthermore,
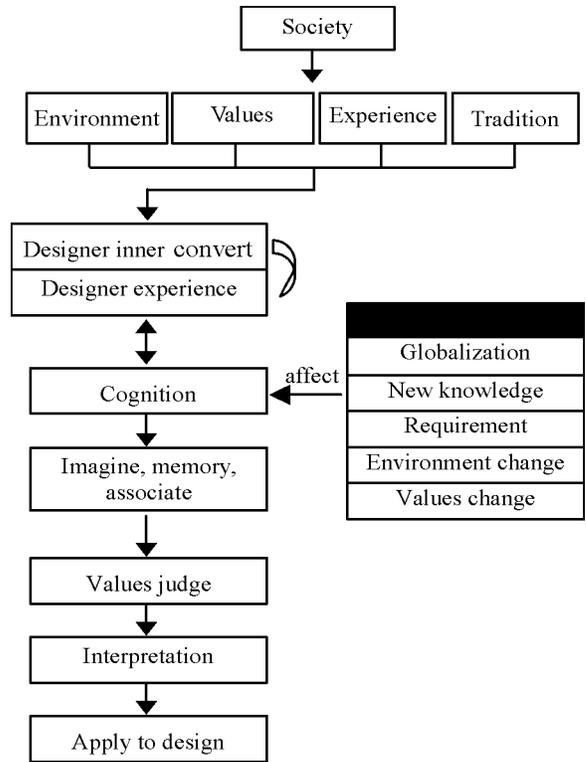
Figure 3. The process of designer

these factors also influence designers to choose the right elements for designing an image. However, the realization of a design concept keeps changing constantly in accordance with some changes of social environment, such as globalization, values, new knowledge, politics, economy, designer's understanding on physiology and psychology, , space and time, etc. Designers have their own peculiar ways to process creative thinking carefully. The thinking process of designers is like a black box which is not easy to penetrate and find out. In general, designer judges the relations and values among various elements through their own imaginations, memories, and associations while analyzing and choosing the design elements. Finally, it becomes a fundamental step to interpret an image design before applying it into the product. Therefore, the flow chart (as shown in fig. 3) is a process which designers proceed in their design thinking activities (Lee and Ho, 2008).

5. Analyzing the Image Design of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games

5.1. THE EMBLEM DESIGN

The Beijing Olympic Games attempted to build a unique Chinese style. This paragraph analyzes the imagery elements used in this Olympic Games which can help us to know the story behind the design.

   The Chinese design team made an attempt to construct Chinese style to distinguish China from all previous host nations by combining Chinese style with the modern design as a tool of communication with the whole world.

   As we know, Chinese letter is a symbolic system that can communicate meaning and form. The Beijing Olympic Games emblem has a main pattern designed based on a Chinese letter, "京", which looks like a dancer or a sportsman. Beside, the pattern of red Chinese figure seal is also adopted into the emblem. The torch relay emblem uses red and abstract Chinese mystical bird. This is the first time to use Chinese letters and legends in the history of Olympic Games.

5.2. THE MEDAL DESIGN

The Beijing Olympic Games medals are different from any of previous host countries. It is the first time to combine jade with other materials on medal design of Olympic Games. However, it was not the first time for the Chinese to craft such ornament. Two thousands years ago, jade had been made as accessories combined with metals (Tian and Yang, 1993; Zhang, 2003). The form of of the medal in the Beijing Olympic Games was adopted from a piece of flat doughnut-shaped jade of Han dynasty, two thousand years ago. According to the documentary, jade has been used and collected by the Chinese for more than three thousand years. The Chinese believes that jade is a sacred mineral which plays an important role for the childbirth, wedding, belief and death. Jade was even a symbol of dignity and the representative of someone's social status in the ancient China. In their mind, jade communicated the concept of noble thoughts and resoluteness. Until now, jade is still an important ornament in China which serves different purposes, such as forwarding evils off, bringing luck, commemorating, and investing.

5.3. THE TORCH DESIGN WITH CHINA ANCIENT PAPER SCROLL AND THE
      AUSPICIOUS CLOUD PATTERN

The torch relay is an important activity in every Olympic Games. The design of the Olympic torch always attracts people's gaze. The Beijing Olympic torch

design was inspired by the Chinese ancient paper scroll. It is generally acknowledged that paper was invented by the Chinese two thousand years ago. The purpose of paper is to continue culture, civilization, wisdom, and art. Through the image of paper, the Chinese design team attempts to remind the contribution of the ancient Chinese for the world.

On the other hand, the auspicious cloud patterns become the main image in all image design. The torch design is also ornamented with cloud patterns. Chinese people think that the colourful clouds in the sky represent auspicious sign. This concept has spread from the ancient times to nowadays. We can find that the ancient Chinese has many poems from different fields, such as literature, philosophy, belief, historical relics, and costume. The Chinese transformed specific images into abstract aesthetics in people's inner mind.

In addition, it is not surprising that the main colour of the torch is red. There are a large number of words representing colours documented by the ancient Chinese. "Red" is the majority (Tzeng, 2003). For the Chinese, red is the cultural symbol and image of the nation which can be found in the wall of Beijing Palace, lanterns, weddings, monetary gift in the Chinese New year, the spring festival couplets, and eggs for the newborn children. Red fills Chinese people's life. From the ancient times to the present, red has always been an important colour and become the cultural image of the Chinese. Nevertheless, China Red does not have a standard colour, even though red colour is often used. The design team of the Beijing Olympic Games made a decision with digital technology that the standard China Red in the CMYK and RGB colour models should be as follows: C0, M100, K10; R230, G0, B0 (quote from web of International Olympic Committee). The decision will provide designers who engage culture in their designs with a definite standard of the China Red.

The Chinese design team attempts to search for the design elements in the Chinese historical relics. Their aim is to construct an entire Chinese style for the Olympic Games. For this reason and aside from adopting the image of science and technology, the design team imposes on taking root the image of "Cultural China" to a large audience. It is also seen as Chinese government's endeavor to make up for the mistake in 1970 and to be involved in the world. Besides, for building the new Eastern aesthetics, the design team did not invariably accept the Western design. They explore the historical relics, use the Chinese cultural vocabulary, and control the essential factors, such as the forms, colours, materials, functions, and spatial concept.

6. Conclusions

In the recent years, many Taiwanese designers develop Taiwan's cultural image through product designs. They start thinking and searching for the Taiwanese culture to be implemented as the main material in their design and an attempt to gain a position in the competitive international market. However, there are still some difficulties in the process. Firstly, the cross-Strait relationship between Taiwan and China causes an unusual political phenomenon. To eliminate cultural influences from China gradually becomes a public discussion. Choosing cultural image is sensitive for the Taiwanese designers. Therefore, some designers avoid adopting definite Chinese elements in the image design. Nevertheless, it is not easy to completely take off from China. The second problem is what will be left in the Taiwanese culture if they decide to entirely give up the Chinese culture.

From the Beijing Olympic Games, it can be found that the Chinese design team tried their best to enhance the value of self-culture. As to the Taiwan designers, it is not necessary to abandon colourful sources because of political issues with China. Taiwan is a multicultural environment consisting of several fusions of races. Besides, the Taiwanese designers learned the Western design concepts much earlier than the Chinese designers. They should be capable of integrating different cultures and separating their design contents from China.

The image design of the Beijing Olympic Games obtained commendation from the International Olympic Committee and the international world. The recognition signifies the Chinese design team has a successful image design. This paper proposes the following suggestions regarding to Taiwanese image design by probing into the image design in the Beijing Olympic Games:

1. The Taiwanese designers need to establish strategies on nurturing the creativity and the capability of re-thinking so that Taiwan can build their own aesthetic value and develop modern, unique Taiwan's image design which must fit in the Taiwanese local culture and be distinguishable from China.

2. The Taiwanese designers have to seriously catch the essence of the multi-culturism in Taiwan, comprehend the correlation between the traditional and the modern, and explore the balance. The task will help establishing the Taiwanese design image and advance on the power of Taiwanese culture. To advance contents of design image by culture is more important than merely adopting the form of some cultural elements. The designer shall re-interpret the multicultural elements of Taiwan.

3. We shall respect either the majority or the minority in Taiwan. The designers should try to integrate various cultures into multi-image of

Taiwan. In the Beijing Olympic Games, the design team only placed emphasis on the culture of Han people but ignored the other 55 races that exist in China. The Taiwanese designers should have a different perspective in interpreting and take this example as a crucial reference. Therefore, the Taiwanese modern design shall accept multiculturalism and increase the opportunity to create interactions among various cultures in Taiwan. Nonetheless, it is not necessary to purposely blend them together. It will be better to let it happen naturally.

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