Designing the Multilingual:
Summer Olympic Sports Pictograms and Universal Design in Cross-cultural Context

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Abstract

This Major Research Paper explores Summer Olympic sports pictograms design in historical and cross-cultural context. The distinctive characteristic and significance of Olympic sports pictogram design lies in its capacity to negotiate specific cultural expression alongside universal legibility, ideally communicating without supplementary text. On the other hand, they are also sutured to the mission of expressing the national identity of the host city/country and charged with conveying the specific cultural legacy unique to the host. Through an in-depth case study of the design process for the pictograms of the 2008 Beijing Olympiad, it further attempts to counter the Western-centered perspective of Olympic design scholarship. Drawing on the role and meaning of Chinese script (direct inspiration for the 2008 pictograms), as well as interventions by domestic and international stakeholders, this paper demonstrates how these images negotiate a synthesis between specific cultural interests and universal communication.

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Table of Contents

Forward *1*
Introduction *3*
ISOTYPE, Olympiad Sports Pictograms, and "Universal" Design *8*
Part 1: Tokyo 1964 Pictograms and the Hidden East Asian Particularity 9
Part 2: Olympiad Sports Pictograms and ISOTYPE 11
Part 3: Munich 1972 Pictograms and German Nationalism 12
Part 4: Rethinking "Universal" Pictogram Designs 14
Part 5: Modern or Postmodern? Mexico 1968 and the Post-1990s' Pictograms 18
China, ISOTYPE, and The Design of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Pictograms *22*
Part 1: Confusing Terminologies 24
Part 2: Beijing: First Steps 25
Part 3: Obstacles and Reception of the Design 27
Enacting Four China(s) *31*
Part 1: The First China: Calligraphy Meets Typography 32
Part 2: The Second China: Hanzi as the Extreme Other 38
Part 3: The Third China: Hanzi as Self-Otherness 42
Part 4: The Fourth China: Retracing Cultural Flows 44
Conclusion *48*
Bibliography *50*
Appendix A: Figures *57*

List of Figures

Figure 1: Paris 1924 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Sample *57*
Figure 2: Berlin 1936 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Samples..... *57*
Figure 3: London 1948 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Samples *57*
Figure 4: Tokyo 1964 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Samples *57*
Figure 5: Munich 1972 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Samples *58*
Figure 6: Mexico 1968 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Samples..... *58*
Figure 7: Beijing 2008 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Samples..... *59*

Forward

The modern Summer Olympic Games are among the most anticipated global mega-events, drawing interest from athletes, spectators, and media worldwide. From the first edition of the modern Summer Games (held in 1896 in Athens, Greece), art and design have played essential roles. The modern Games — following the desire of their visionary originator, Baron Pierre de Coubertin —initially included official Olympic Cultural Programmes, which aimed to "develop an internationally recognised marriage between art and sport."[1]

The official Olympic Cultural Programmes were practiced in various formats. In the early stages from 1912 to 1948, while athletes were still amateurs, art competitions featuring professional artists were held alongside sports competitions; winners of each art category (sculpture, painting, architecture, music and literature) were also awarded medals. Beginning with the 1956 Melbourne Games, the art competitions evolved into cultural festivals, which have become increasingly prominent features of the Games from the 1970s onwards. These cultural festivals were held separately from the competitions, in the form of concerts, plays, exhibitions.

The elevated status of architecture and design in contemporary global culture has led to a great deal of attention being focused on the design aspect of the Games: before any Games begins, media coverage often focuses on the progress of the Olympic infrastructure, such as the design and construction progress of stadiums. The dramatic appeal of the opening and closing ceremonies, broadcast globally, has likewise become part of the success of each Games. Coinciding with the rapid growth of mass media, the Games and their expanded Cultural

[1] Beatriz Garcia, (2008) "One hundred years of cultural programming within the Olympic Games (1912–2012): origins, evolution and projections," *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, (14:4): 367, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10286630802445849.

Programmes has become a media event — "a great cultural phenomenon"[2] — in which images of the culture and identity of the host city/country are displayed for both a domestic and global audience.

While architectural design and the opening and closing ceremonies can act as part of the accumulation and display of national culture and pride, the role and influence of graphic design have not come under equal scrutiny. Olympic sports pictograms, as a branch of the overall "look" of the Games, also enact the national identity of the host nation.

[2] Miquel de Moragas Spà, (1992): "Communication, cultural identities and the Olympic Games: the Barcelona'92 Experience," *Barcelona: Centre d'Estudis Olímpics UAB*, (1992):4, http://olympicstudies.uab.es/pdf/wp006_eng.pdf.

Introduction

Attention to Olympic design reached a new peak during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. A global audience (the largest ever) cast an interested eye on the images of modernization, art, design, and cultural representations of China disseminated through mass media. During the period leading to the 2008 Olympics, Chinese mainstream coverage of the Games among newspapers, TV programs, and radio broadcasts was extensive but unified, tending to praise the country's strong presence on the global stage. Design historians worldwide have devoted much attention to the 2008 Games' opening ceremony and the design of Olympic infrastructure, mainly the Bird's Nest and the Beijing National Aquatics Center, but very few details have emerged concerning the design process for the 2008 pictograms, or the designers involved. Individual voices from on-line forums (both in English and in Chinese) discussing the Games likewise tend to ignore the pictograms — when they discuss design at all.

Pictograms are schematic graphics/icons that aim at expressing a particular message. Ideally, they communicate accurate information with efficiency, and transcend language barriers among their audience. Post-war Olympiad sports pictograms have embodied this cross-cultural goal. Designed specifically for each Games, a set of sports pictograms usually appear as silhouettes of human figure with particular actions, each representing a certain sport. The pictograms are also printed on competition programs, venue maps, and enlarged in size and painted on building walls, as part of the wayfinding system to direct participants and spectators to the correct venue.

The distinctive characteristic and significance of Olympic sports pictogram design lies in its capacity to negotiate specific cultural expression alongside universal legibility (ideally

communicating without supplementary text). On the one hand, the ultimate goal of these pictograms is to trigger an immediate recognition of each sport represented and speak a neutral language that could bridge the international audience at the Games. On the other hand, they are also sutured to the mission of expressing the national identity of the host city/country and charged with conveying the specific cultural legacy unique to the host.

Coubertin's ideal vision of joining art and sport through modern Games, is also a reflection of the ancient Greek ideal of man, with both the body and the mind being educated. It is rarely acknowledged that Coubertin's athlete pedagogy is largely influenced by Confucianism, an ancient Chinese school of thought. Chinese sports and Olympic Games scholar Susan Brownell states that Coubertin was educated by Jesuits, the first Westerners to live in China, who introduced Chinese culture to the West during the 16th century.[3] Brownell reminds us that the Western-centric approach in Olympic studies has largely ignored this Chinese influence. Similarly, although China as a host nation joined the Games relatively late, its cultural influence on Olympic pictogram design has also been significant.

Canonical accounts of graphic design history claim both the 1964 Tokyo Olympiad pictograms designed by Masaru Katsumi, and the 1972 Munich pictograms designed by Otl Aicher, as the peak of the spirit of Modernism, achieving an ideal design neutrality. The re-use of the 1972 Munich design in the 1976 Montreal Summer Games (albeit with a different color scheme and some reversed images), and again in the 1988 Calgary Winter Games, reasserts this notion of the "perfection" of the earlier design. At the same time, international transportation and institutional signage systems also adapted the 1972 design, bringing forth a network of icons that

[3] Susan Brownell, "Western centrism in Olympic studies and its consequence in the 2008 Beijing Olympics," *Proceedings: International Symposium for Olympic Research*, 2008, p. 20+. *Gale Academic OneFile*, 26, https://link-gale-com.ocadu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A197599055/AONE?u=toro37158&sid=AONE&xid=c4f241d6.

share the same "universal" visual cues. These canonical accounts of Olympic pictogram design, I argue, are rooted in the Euro-centric habits of writing design history that locate design in static results and arranges the results into a chronological evolution of design trends. Design historians such as Jilly Traganou, Kay Schiller and Christopher Young have identified the cultural perspectives hidden behind the 1964 and 1972 sets; they argue that both sets are deeply rooted in their historical and cultural specificity.

This paper explores Summer Olympic pictograms in historical and cross-cultural context, arguing for these images as negotiating a synthesis between cultural specificity and universal communication. It further attempts to counter the Western-centered perspective of Olympic design scholarship, through an in-depth case study of the sports pictograms design process for the 2008 Beijing Olympiad. It draws on the role and meaning of Chinese script, as well as interventions by domestic and international stakeholders in the Games, to illuminate the significance of design decisions taken by the creative team tasked with constructing the pictograms.

My research process for this paper, particularly the sections on the 2008 Beijing Olympic pictogram design, was no easy task. Aside from the lack of available scholarship on this topic, the difficulty of writing about the 2008 Olympic pictogram design was also partly due to the Chinese custom of emphasizing teamwork over individuality. In the official IOC (International Olympic Committee) document on sports pictogram design, the designer of the 2008 Beijing pictograms is indicated as "China Central Academy of Fine Arts/Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University,"[4] without any specific names of designers being mentioned. During the

[4] The Olympic Studies Center, "The Sports Pictograms of the Olympic Summer Games from Tokyo 1964 to Rio 2016, Reference document, 09.02.2017," 28. https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Factsheets-Reference-

summer of 2019, I contacted the art director of the 2008 Games, Wang Min, who responded by sending me a book on the 2008 Beijing pictograms that he co-edited with his design team member Hang Hai: *Xin & Yi, Pictograms Design & Wayfinding System Design of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*, which contains detailed descriptions of the design process. This book provided me with a chance to see in-depth how the design team dealt with both domestic and international interventions during the design process.

My research on Olympic pictogram design in general, on the other hand, allowed me to discover the cultural flows among host nations, and dialogues among designers with various cultural backgrounds. These interactions, along with socio-political environments that shaped each design, are intrinsic to the final results, but have been marginalized in Eurocentric and modernist narratives. The interactions between Masaru Katsumi and Otl Aicher, suggest the constant evolving stages of design with existing models. According to Jilly Traganou, "A host nation, while under the spotlight of the international, the supernational, and the global, is called upon to represent and articulate both its particularity and the universal ideals of Olympism, which requires that nation to redefine itself in relation to "others."[5]

Canonical claims also ignore the role of designers, the active interactions among Olympic designers and art directors from different countries in-between each Games, as well as global cultural flow and interactions in general in the design process. As the design historian John Heskett states,

Documents/Games/Pictograms/Reference-document-The-Sports-Pictograms-of-the-OG-from-Tokyo-1964-to-Rio-2016.pdf.

[5] Jilly Traganou, *Designing the Olympics: Representation, Participation, Contestation* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 9.

> The history of design...can be described more appropriately as a process of layering, in which new developments are added over time to what already exists. This layering, moreover, is not just a process of accumulation or aggregation, but a dynamic interaction in which each new innovative stage changes the role, significance, and function of what survives.[6]

An acknowledgment of this layering in design practice shatters the one-way global cultural flow from the Western capitalist world to the subjugate Other. In the history of Olympic pictogram design, inspirations drawn from ancient and pre-modern cultures are adapted and translated into new design languages. Designers as active agents are able to absorb and transform multiple design languages, while embedded local aesthetics always exert an influence on design practice.

[6] John Heskett, *Design, A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2002), 6.

ISOTYPE, Olympiad Sports Pictograms, and "Universal" Design

Most early modern Olympic pictograms were not archived on a large scale. According to *Olympic World Library*[7] and the *Olympic Games Museum*[8], the earliest sets of Olympic pictograms[9] created for the Games in 1924 (Paris), 1936 (Berlin) and 1948 (London), were executed in a traditional manner of figurative illustrations, representing objects and human figures in extensive detail. **[Figures 1, 2, and 3]** The 1924 and 1936 sets contained the title of each sport in French and German texts, whereas the 1948 set eliminated texts; however, the pictograms still depicted detailed information of sports equipment.

The 1940 and 1944 Summer Olympic Games were canceled due to World War II. The visuals of post-war pictograms from the 1952 Helsinki Games, the 1956 Melbourne Games, and the 1960 Rome Games are difficult to access. According to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) [*Olympic Studies Center*][10], these three sets of pictograms can be found only in official reserved documents. Similar to the pre-war illustrations, however, it seems that these pictograms were "more figurative then schematic, and there are sometimes several types for the same edition of the Games."[11] Although the first edition of the modern Summer Olympic Games was held in

[7] The Olympic Studies Center, "VIIIe Olympiade Paris 1924 / Comité olympique français." https://library.olympic.org/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/78022/viiie-olympiade-paris-1924-comite-olympique-francais-publ-par-le-comite-executif.
[8] Olympic Games Museum, "Olympic Games London 1948, picto used during the London 1948 games," http://olympic-museum.de/pictograms/symbols1948.php.
[9] Practically speaking, although the term "pictogram" was not yet in use.
[10] The Olympic Studies Center, https://www.olympic.org/olympic-studies-centre.
[11] The Olympic Studies Center, "The Sports Pictograms of the Olympic Summer Games from Tokyo 1964 to Tokyo 2020," https://library.olympic.org/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/161824/the-sports-pictograms-of-the-olympic-summer-games-from-tokyo-1964-to-tokyo-2020-the-olympic-studies-ce.

1896 (in Athens), the design of sports pictograms did not become a standard feature of the Games until after World War II, beginning with the 1964 Tokyo Olympiad.

Part 1: Tokyo 1964 Pictograms and the Hidden East Asian Particularity

The visual template for modern Olympic pictograms emerged with the 1964 Tokyo Games. Different from previous versions, the design of the 1964 Tokyo pictograms represent each sport with closely related icons, drawn in a simplified and abstract manner. **[Figure 4]** The use of abstract silhouettes has been continued, with various modifications, by subsequent Olympic pictogram designers ever since.

The 1960s witnessed a steady rise of world travelers and diversification of Olympic participants' nationalities. As the nationality of participants multiplied, the problem of how to communicate specific information accurately, became an urgent matter. The first nation that took this into consideration was Japan. Considering that few visitors outside of Japan could read Japanese, the Organizing Committee of the Games in Tokyo sought to figure out a signage system that could effectively communicate to an audience comprising multiple cultural backgrounds. Jilly Traganou writes: "Like a visual Esperanto, [the programs] were meant to overcome the linguistic limitations that emerge in national context when it opened itself to global encounters."[12] The lead designer of the Games, Masaru Katsumi (勝見勝), also created a network of secondary signage symbols as the wayfinding system. These symbols indicated the

[12] Jilly Traganou, *Designing the Olympics: Representation, Participation, Contestation* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 49.

Olympic competition venues, facilities, and services such as first aid, café, bank, etc., for directing all spectators and participants during the Games.

While Western perceptions of Japanese graphic style are frequently linked with ukiyo-e prints, which often appear as colorful and excessively decorated, there is another side to Japanese visual culture, that of austerity and simplicity: the interior design of Japanese residences utilize sliding doors and screens to create geometric and rational space without excessive decorations; Japanese pattern designs on kimonos often depict natural elements such as flowers and birds, and many are simplified into exquisite lines, curves, and geometric shapes. These visual approaches have been used extensively on Japanese family crests, used to clarify lineage for generations.

Ostensibly, the Tokyo Olympic pictograms show no conspicuous Japanese idiosyncrasies, much as one would expect from a visual language aimed at universal and neutral communication. As Jilly Traganou states, however, while "the pictograms intentionally bore no resemblance to Japanese letter or word characters or traditional visual representations, their conception was inspired by both Japanese ideograms and the crest design (mon)."[13] The bond between the 1964 pictograms design and this Japanese iconic tradition (Mon) is so strong that Katsumi himself considered the pictograms as "successor to the perfection of the Japanese family crest."[14]

[13] Jilly Traganou, *Designing the Olympics: Representation, Participation, Contestation* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 73.
[14] Ibid., 73.

Part 2: Olympiad Sports Pictograms and ISOTYPE

The 1964 Tokyo pictograms adopt the ideal universal vision of ISOTYPE[15], a graphic system initiated by Viennese philosopher and sociologist Otto Neurath during the 1920s, and facilitated by collaborators such as his wife Marie Neurath, Gerd Arntz and Rudolf Modley. ISOTYPE sought to transform social statistics into immediately legible diagrams: Neurath described ISOTYPE as "turning the statements of science into pictures."[16] The graphics enhance communication efficiency by arranging multiple silhouettes of human figures and selected objects in various ways, to represent a certain number of people (or things) of a particular category.

ISOTYPE is the first attempt to achieve a universal visual language composed of pictographic signs. Neurath's vision was to ensure a universally understood visual language that would communicate information "free from limits of language."[17] This vision was disrupted by Neurath's forced emigration (to the Netherlands and then to England) during WWII, and his untimely death in 1945 at the age of 63; but the graphic language he had initiated was later continued in the United States by Marie Neurath, Rudolf Modley and other graphic designers inspired by the system. ISOTYPE design is also closely connected with the Chinese writing system, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.

ISOTYPE designs, which were expanded to respond to any occasion that required accurate communication among people with different cultural backgrounds, became especially influential

[15] Jilly Traganou, *Designing the Olympics: Representation, Participation, Contestation* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 80.
[16] Otto Neurath, *International Picture Language, the first rules of ISOTYPE* (London: Kagan Paul. Trench. Trubner & Co., Ltd. 1936), 8.
[17] Ibid., 18.

during the 1970s in the expanding realm of information design.[18] In this context, ISOTYPE formed the conceptual and formal basis for sign-systems in wayfinding, airports, subways, and International Traffic Signs, in the era of modern travel. With the increase of international events such as World's Fairs and the modern Olympic Games, which similarly sought means to communicate with people of varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds, pictographs sought to provide a solution.[19] The 1972 Munich pictograms also uniquely drew on ISOTYPE, in the maintenance of a strict consistency[20] in the depiction of human bodies across the varied pictograms.

Part 3: Munich 1972 Pictograms and German Nationalism

Inspired by the 1964 Tokyo pictograms, for the 1972 Munich Games the modernist designer Otl Aicher and his team decided to further "simplify the pictograms developed for Tokyo in 1964"[21] by dismissing any redundant visual elements, and eventually creating a stunning uniformity **[Figure 5]**. The use of silhouettes in the Munich 1972 pictograms set is not only abstract, but the shape, length, and angles of human figural elements — heads, legs, and arms — are highly standardized with the aid of a grid system (squares composed along with visible orthogonal and diagonal lines). The grids ensured the sharpness and precision of drawn lines. The standardized elements can therefore be configured and combined according to the typical posture of each sport, creating a visual coherence among the entire collection.

[18] Christopher Burke, Eric Kindel, and Sue Walker, *Isotype: Design and Contexts 1925-1971* (London: Hyphen Press, 2013), 63.
[19] Martin Krampen, Michael Gotte and MichaeKneidl. *The World of Signs Communication by Pictographs* (Ludwigsburg: avedition GmbH, 2007), 25.
[20] Ellen Lupton, "Reading Isotype." *Design Issues*, Vol.3, No.2 (Autumn, 1986):56.
[21] Markus Rathgeb, *Otl Aicher* (New York: Phaiden Press Limited, 2008), 81.

Aicher's pictograms were considered so groundbreaking that they were simply repeated in subsequent Olympic Games: the Montreal 1976 Olympic pictograms continued the design with a different color scheme, while the Calgary 1988 Winter Olympics utilized a nearly identical version of Aicher's set. In addition to its Olympic Game usage, Aicher's highly standardized and ordered method was later continued in internationally comprehensible symbols at airports or public buildings.[22]

The Munich 1972 pictograms have been praised in graphic design history texts as the perfect universal design, and one that additionally conveys the positive transformation of post-war West Germany. However, similar to the 1964 Tokyo ones, these pictograms bear both personal taste and German idiosyncrasies. Aicher's design approach in the 1972 Munich pictograms continues his general design technique. Before designing the pictograms, Aicher has been a prominent graphic designer producing modernist designs since the 1950s, ranging from typefaces to posters, and corporate identities. One of his most famous commissioned works, the corporate identity design of Deutsche Lufthansa airlines, exemplifies the same systematic approach that was at work in the design of the Olympic pictograms. In his redesign of Deutsche Lufthansa's logo, the geometry of the crane was altered from the original, so that it could fit into a certain scope on the grid system Aicher created.[23] Although benefiting from the 1964 Tokyo pictograms, the systematic design approach used in the 1972 Munich pictograms echoes Aicher's early design experiences. The systematic set of pictograms for the '72 Games can thus be seen as a reflection of Aicher's understanding of design language, a "disciplined manner of applying a defined set of graphic elements with a system of rules."[24] The human figure silhouettes in the

[22] Markus Rathgeb, *Otl Aicher* (New York: Phaiden Press Limited, 2008), 106.
[23] Ibid., 61.
[24] Ibid., 60.

pictograms were treated the same way as the crane and the typeface strokes weights in the Lufthansa company name.

The human silhouettes in the 1972 pictograms are the first to force body parts into perfect proportions. While this has been regarded by most historians as exemplifying Aicher's modernist approach to visual communication, it can also be seen as evoking, unconsciously, aspects of the Nazi past. In a press conference around the Games, Otl Aicher stated: "The 1936 Berlin Olympiad was emotive, militaristically disciplined, neoclassicist, and was accompanied by a spirit of fatalism; until the Munich Games this image converged with a wide-spread interpretation of what was seen as typically German. In creating a new interpretation of the Olympic Games, it seemed desirable to correct this one-sided view."[25] While seeking to consciously avoid — and indeed counter — any historical reference to the memory of the 1936 Games, the meticulous adjustments in the Munich 1972 pictograms and the nearly coercive approach in the design, have led some[26] to draw connections between these designs and pre-war Germany.

Part 4: Rethinking "Universal" Pictogram Designs

Although Baron Pierre de Coubertin's ideal suggested that the modern Olympic Games should be venues of peace and friendship, the modern Olympic Games have never been politics-

[25] Markus Rathgeb, *Otl Aicher* (New York: Phaiden Press Limited, 2008), 94.
[26] For instance, Kay Schiller and Christopher Young, The 1972 Munich Olympics and the Making of Modern Germany. The connection between the rhetoric of purity in modernist graphics and Nazi ideology had earlier been asserted by the typographic reformer Jan Tschichold, who repudiated his prewar dogmatism in a series of postwar articles. Looking back, he argued that Modernist typography in the 1920s and '30s "reflect[ed] those fearful components of the German character which set loose Hitler's power." Tschichold, Jan. "Belief and Reality," *Typography Papers* 4, 2000, p. 73. First published in *Schweizer Graphische Mitteilungen*, June 1946, pp. 233-42.

free. The 1936 Berlin Games are synonymous with the Nazi regime, and the subsequent two Games were cancelled due to the Second World War. Slowly recovering from the mourning of war, the modern Olympic Games were relaunched with the 1952 Games in Helsinki. The post-WWII era also saw an increase in participating nations with each successive Games, notwithstanding the 1980s and 1984 Games and 1984 Games in Moscow and Los Angeles, which saw nations withdraw due to Cold War boycotts. Having initially despised the idea of Olympic Games as a sport events for the bourgeoisie, the Soviet Union participated in the Helsinki Games and almost beat the United States, showing the world its genius in sports competition and setting the stage for the Cold War antagonisms of future Games. The tension between two postwar superpowers utilized the Olympic Games as a venue for their power dispute. The recently-proclaimed People's Republic of China joined the Olympic competition for the first time, and Germany, rejected by the previous Games due to its controversial role in World War II, also returned[27].

Designs for each Games, even as they sought to be "universal," cannot escape from their political environment. This is exemplified in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the so-called "Nazi Games," which cast a dark shadow over designs for this Games, as well as future German design. Intriguingly, Kay Schiller and Christopher Young have explored the connections between the 1972 Games and this earlier moment. On the one hand, they suggest that the graphic minimalism in the 1972 Munich pictograms pays "a homage to the democratic styles of the Bauhaus and Ulm,"[28] looking back to pre- and post-war German design as equated with

[27] 刘晓非,《*从雅典到北京*》(清华大学出版社, 2004), 184. (Liu Xiaofei, *From Athens to Beijing* (Tsinghua University Press, 2004), 184.

[28] Schiller, Kay and Young, Christopher. "Motion and landscape: Otl Aicher, Günther Grzimek and the graphic and garden designs of the 1972 Munich Olympics," *Urban History*, 37, 2 (2010): 279. doi:10.1017/S0963926810000350. https://www-cambridge-org.ocadu.idm.oclc.org/core/journals/urban-history/article/motion-and-landscape-otl-aicher-gunther-grzimek-and-the-graphic-and-garden-designs-of-the-1972-

democracy and progressive politics. At the same time, from their perspective, Aicher's exquisite manipulation of visual elements for the Games also reincarnates the "Gesamtkunstwerk" effect of the 1936 Games. According to Schiller and Young, the aim of Aicher's design was to "match the positive aspects of Berlin [i.e., the 1936 Games] while at the same time making the negative ones irrelevant."[29] These "positive aspects" refer to the 1936 Games' capacity to envelop visitors' senses and trigger admiration even in those whose politics did not align with the Nazi programme.

While the silhouettes in ISOTYPE suggest standardization and order, aiming for a "ordered, universally readable language of vision,"[30] they do not "ensue from the kind of geometrical elementarism at the root of much Bauhaus design,"[31] which are in glaring contrast to Aicher's approach. ISOTYPE pictograms show a conventional and humanist touch that counters the coldness and rigidity that some modernist design provoked. The "universal" ambition of the 1972 pictograms can, therefore, be seen as rooted particularly in German history, and German design history, in its synthesis of military rigidity, Bauhaus minimalism, and the total environment of the "Nazi Olympics."

Similarly, during the 1964 Tokyo Olympiad, Japanese nationalism and its recent history was never absent. Yoshinori Sakai, one of the 1964 Tokyo torchbearers, was born on the day of the Hiroshima atomic bombing, and was explicitly chosen to represent the national determination of post-war reform. On January 24, 2020, I attended a screening of the film "Tokyo Olympiad" in Toronto, hosted by the Japan Foundation. The 1965 documentary, directed by Kon Ichikawa,

munich-olympics/2A10335C9A02C601268D1B19FD9EEF3E. See also Schiller and Young, *The 1972 Munich Olympics and the Making of Modern Germany*.

[29] Ibid., 280.

[30] Ellen Lupton, "Reading Isotype," *Design Issues*, Vol.3, No.2 (Autumn, 1986):47.

[31] Christopher Burke, Eric Kindel, and Sue Walker, *Isotype: Design and Contexts 1925-1971* (London: Hyphen Press, 2013),78.

not only captures the passion for sports but the hue of pan-Asian longing at this time in Japan. Recordings of the commentator's passionate welcome of "Asian friends" when Mongolia athletes entered during the Parade of Nations, only intensify the persistent Japanese affinity with Asian counterparts in the postwar era, while animations in the film to explain sports regulations utilized ink brush drawings, emphasizing the East Asian roots of the host nation.

The seemingly geometric regularity and visual neutrality of the 1964 pictograms, viewed through the eyes of Western observers, saw the set enter the modernist canon as reflecting Japan's effort to establish equivalence with the West, as well as the Westernization of its graphic designs. In these histories, the pictograms are also aligned with modernist trends of corporate identity design and an intentional breaking with history. These interpretations, however, neglect the inter-Asian relationships, particularly the long and complex cultural interaction between China and Japan, and the place of Japanese cultural specificity in the designs. Takeuchi Yoshimi, one of the most prominent post-war Japanese Sinologists, has analyzed the complicated relationship among Japan, China, and Europe, putting forth the struggle of Japan in dealing with European modernity and homogeneity while maintaining its Asian culture.[32] Although Yoshimi's focus is on translation theory, he makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the complex identity construction of Japan as derived from a longstanding battle between Chinese influence and European imperialism.

These tensions and interactions, hidden behind the 1964 pictograms, allow us to see these as more than a simple adoption of Western and modern design principles; instead, they are complex artifacts displaying both cultural particularity and Japan's own postwar history. The

32 Richard F Calichman, *What Is Modernity?: Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/yosh13326.

1964 set is essentially a patriotic statement, asserting Japanese tradition within the nation's entry into the post-war global community, first celebrated globally in the 1964 Games. Thus, it is not surprising that the planned pictograms for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics are identical to those used in the 1964 Games, which have themselves become a watershed moment in Japan's modern history, a point of national pride.

Part 5: Modern or Postmodern? Mexico 1968 and the Post-1990s' Pictograms

While designs from the "first-world" countries were misinterpreted as the embodiment of universal truth, designs from the global "periphery" have typically been seen in supporting roles, underestimated and marginalized by the mainstream Eurocentric chronology. In-between the1964 and 1972 Olympiads, the celebration of local cultural elements was also exemplified in the 1968 Mexico pictograms **[Figure 6]**. The Mexico '68 pictograms design utilized bright colors and unconventional styles, offered an edgy and subversive design approach that counters the Modernist design ethos of that very moment.

The U.S.- born designer Lance Wyman designed the famous Op-art logo that served as the center of the graphic system of the Games,[33] and inspired other graphic projects of the Games. The pictograms, designed by Eduardo Terrazas, can be traced back to pre-Hispanic glyphs.[34] One of the unique features of the design is Terrazas' rejection of full-body human silhouettes, instead using partial images of bodies or sports equipment. Each sport is assigned a

[33] Luis M Castañeda, *Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), OCADU Library e-book, Introduction XV.
[34] The Olympic Studies Center, "The Sports Pictograms of the Olympic Summer Games from Tokyo 1964 to Tokyo 2020," https://library.olympic.org/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/161824/the-sports-pictograms-of-the-olympic-summer-games-from-tokyo-1964-to-tokyo-2020-the-olympic-studies-ce.

particular color. The vast range of colors, 20 in total, created a vibrant visual cue, mirroring the local fascination with textiles produced by the indigenous Huicholes group. The design of water waves in certain sports was also inspired by Huicholes' art,[35] echoing the radiating effect in the Games' logo.

The celebration of individual expression and cultural elements in these pictograms also reflects contemporary trends; during the 1960s, when the International Style was dominating Europe, many young designers in the United States chose a progressive direction that countered the mainstream's restrained geometric exploration. Posters and album cover created for the rock music scene utilized vibrant colors and psychedelic effects, overprinting or new serif typefaces, even unreadable fonts were pervasive. The conscious reaction to the International Style through unconventional font and color revealed a synthesis of historical styles that can also be seen in the Mexico '68 pictograms, whose design also played a similar role by using bright colors and unconventional styles —while maintaining an association with Mexican history and cultural specificity.

Design historian Luis M. Castañeda has thoroughly articulated the complexity of the Mexico '68 Olympiad designs, and the interrelations of the "design miracle" within the nation's economic and political environment. The author also addresses the influence of modern trends from "first-world" countries such as East Germany and Japan[36] on the Mexico Games' design approach, with "the Mexican state's avowed embrace of 'cosmopolitan' and 'indigenous' cultures."[37] Meanwhile, the Mexico '68 pictograms enacted the contradiction of being

[35] The Olympic Studies Center, "The Sports Pictograms of the Olympic Summer Games from Tokyo 1964 to Tokyo 2020," https://library.olympic.org/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/161824/the-sports-pictograms-of-the-olympic-summer-games-from-tokyo-1964-to-tokyo-2020-the-olympic-studies-ce.
[36] Luis M Castañeda, *Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), OCADU Library e-book, Introduction XVIII.
[37] Ibid., Introduction XV.

simultaneously Mexican *and* "global modern". Terrazas' extensive experience as an architect before the Games was dip-dyed with modernism, including an education from Cornell University, as well as activities in London and Paris.[38] His design approach, Castañeda writes, thus reflects "the challenge to embody Mexican cultural specificity while remaining in tune with universalizing and internationally palatable modernist trends."[39]

The Mexico '68 pictograms disavowed order and universal truth, and instead celebrated diversity, deconstruction, and pluralism. This aspect of these earlier Games is ignored in the official Olympic document on pictograms, which situates the origin of these tendencies in the 1990s, when "the pictograms for the Games of Albertville as well as Barcelona started a new trend with the style of silhouettes becoming more artistic and more abstract."[40] This statement, which identifies a new phase of pictogram history moving from modern to postmodern, essentially ignores the precedent of the Mexico Olympiad as an instance of explicit cultural identity and radical expression in Olympic design.

This distorting narrative is repeated by the designers of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic pictograms themselves, who set out to intentionally challenge the "universal" pictogram models of the 1964 and the 1972 sets. Josep M. Trias, the designer of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic pictograms, states: "One of the basic premises of the competing process was the need to get away from the characteristic images of the previous Olympic Games or the candidatures. This consideration did not arise so much from demands for originality in design as from seeing that the symbol could not be made with a technical, geometric or technological vocabulary…… [this]

[38] Luis M Castañeda, *Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), OCADU Library e-book, 162.
[39] Ibid., Introduction XIV.
[40] The Olympic Studies Center, "The Sports Pictograms of the Olympic Summer Games from Tokyo 1964 to Tokyo 2020," https://library.olympic.org/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/161824/the-sports-pictograms-of-the-olympic-summer-games-from-tokyo-1964-to-tokyo-2020-the-olympic-studies-ce.

led to the need to define a language more human, more artistic, more creative, more personal, in short, more in keeping with the communicative values it was necessary to transmit."[41] While the 1992 Games can be seen as ushering in a new era of postmodern graphic design concerns in Olympic pictogram design, including fun, color, and identity politics,[42] the Mexico '68 pictogram design should be considered an important precedent for post-1990s designs. As we have seen, cultural and national histories were not absent from the 'modernist' designs of 1964 and 1972 either; perhaps we can say that in 1968, as in the 1990s and after, these concerns move from the background to the forefront of Olympic pictogram design.

[41] Josep Maria Trias, "Symbol and logo of Barcelona'92 Olympic Games," Barcelona: Centre d'Estudis Olímpics UAB:4. http://olympicstudies.uab.es/pdf/wp082_engpdf.
[42] Johanna Drucker & Emily McVarish. *Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide* (Pearson Education Inc, 2013), 289.

China, ISOTYPE, and The Design of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Pictograms

The Chinese writing system has implicitly contributed to ISOTYPE and post-war Olympic pictogram designs, yet it is silenced in mainstream accounts. In 1936, Otto Neurath remarked in his book *International Picture Language, the first rules of ISOTYPE*: "In the Far East we see one language for writing, but a great number of languages for talking... The present writing in China and Japan is a writing in signs, and every sign is representative of a thing or an idea…for example, signs for tree put together given the sign for wood."[43] Some 70 years later, when the Chinese writing system made its recurrence in the 2008 Beijing Olympiad pictogram design, the role and significance of Chinese scripts had changed against an ever-complicating and globalizing design scene. Entitled "Beauty of Seal Characters"[44] (篆书之美), the 2008 Beijing pictograms utilized the logographic nature of ancient Chinese characters **[Figure 7]**. The evaluation of written script as the highest form of art is exclusive to East Asian culture. It is particularly important for China, as the earliest country in East Asia to develop its own writing system.

The concept of the 2008 pictograms began with the ancient Chinese character "human" (人). The designer noticed that the shape of the character is very similar to the pose of a horseman in equestrian sports.[45] Each pictogram combined multiple forms of ancient Chinese

[43] Otto Neurath, *International Picture Language, the first rules of ISOTYPE* (London: Kagan Paul. Trench. Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1936), 17 & 105. Note that Japan adopted the Chinese writing system around the 3rd century. Its later developed script around the 8th century, kana, still in use today, is also based on Hanzi.
[44] The English translation is according to: https://www.olympic.org/news/beijing-2008-pictograms-released.
[45] 王敏&杭海,*《形与意：北京 2008 年奥林匹克运动会体育图标/指示系统设计》*,中国建筑工业出版社，2012. [Wang Min & Hang Hai. *XING & YI, Pictograms Design & Wayfinding System Design of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*. (Beijing: China Architecture Publishing & Media Co., Ltd., 2012）],69.

characters, specifically Oracle Bone Script and Chinese Bronze Inscription. As the name suggests, oracle bone scripts are inscriptions on tortoiseshell, utilized as a form of oracular fortune-telling. They are the earliest known form of ancient Chinese characters, dating back to the late 2nd millennium BC. Many oracle bone scripts are emulations of the shapes of natural objects. The engraved lines vary in degree of thickness, but the overall look appears to be quite similar to contemporary icons. When Oracle Bone Script evolved into Chinese Bronze Inscription, especially during the late Western Zhou (1100BC-771BC), the variety of thickness gradually unified, and the structure of each character tended to be more orderly and upright, which formed the base of the contemporary square-shaped Chinese character.[46]

Derived loosely from these characters, the appearance of each character in the 2008 pictograms references specific characteristics of each sport through silhouette imagery. To achieve desired color contrast, the design team set the silhouette figures in white, against a dark background resembling the ancient Chinese art form of "stone rubbing," a technique used by Chinese scholars to transfer ancient calligraphy from stones onto paper. The rubbings from ancient inscriptions are "highly prized by calligraphers and collectors as tangible traces of high antiquity."[47] For the aim of universal legibility, the length for human limbs, heads, water waves, as well as the angle of strokes were all standardized in order to keep consistency throughout all pictograms.

[46] 王敏&杭海,*《形与意：北京 2008 年奥林匹克运动会体育图标/指示系统设计》*,中国建筑工业出版社，2012. [Wang Min & Hang Hai. *XING & YI, Pictograms Design & Wayfinding System Design of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*. (Beijing: China Architecture Publishing & Media Co., Ltd., 2012）],31.
[47] Stephen Little, "Chinese Calligraphy," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, Vol. 74, No. 9 (Nov, 1987):374.

Part 1: Confusing Terminologies

As the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic pictogram designs rely heavily on Chinese characters, some terminologies require clarification before further discussion: specifically, Chinese characters, Hanzi, Seal script, Chinese-ness, and Han-ness. In most reports regarding the 2008 Beijing Olympic pictograms, either among Chinese media or in other countries, the success of the design is largely attributed to their being seen simultaneously as sports illustrations and as "Chinese characters" loaded with specific cultural meaning.

"Chinese character" is the English translation of "Hanzi." In Chinese, "Han" in the term "Hanzi" refers specifically to the Chinese Han ethnicity and Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.), one of the most glorious dynasties in Chinese history. China is a vast country that nurtures 56 distinct ethnic groups, some of whom have very different writing system and written characters. However, Hanzi has been the dominant writing system throughout Chinese history. "Han" as an ethnicity, defines the majority Chinese population (about 93%).[48] In the East Asian context, "Chinese character" and "Hanzi" are interchangeable, but in the Western context, the term "Chinese character" lacks the connection with Han specificity. It is worth noting that "Chinese character" in most Western writings in fact refers to Hanzi.

Hanzi encompasses a broad variety of scripts, including seal script (the direct inspiration for the 2008 Beijing Olympic pictograms), many of which still require deciphering. Clerical script, cursive script, and standard script are used to describe different forms of Hanzi in calligraphy pieces. Hanzi, as "the only surviving writing system out of those far ancient

[48] Throughout Chinese history, there were several dynasties that were ruled by the non-Han (Yuan Dynasty, 1271–1368, which was ruled by Mongol, and Qing Dynasty, 1636–1912, which was ruled by Manchu.) The long history of China witnesses a co-existence and assimilation of cultures; however, most traditional Chinese culture symbols known in the West are Han-centered, and the Beijing Olympics mega-event also promoted a Han-centered representation of China.

civilizations of the world,"[49] also includes contemporary Chinese written characters: traditional Chinese characters (used in Hong Kong and Taiwan) and simplified Chinese characters (officially used in mainland China).

Seal script, in contrast, generally refers to all logographic scripts/inscriptions of ancient China up until the end of Qin dynasty (221-206 BC), including Large (or Great) seal script and small seal script. Large seal script in a broader sense includes oracle bone script (the earliest known pictorial form of Hanzi, dated roughly 1200 BC), Chinese bronze inscription, and stone drum inscriptions.[50] Seal script was used on a daily basis until replaced by clerical script in the Han dynasty.[51] Ancient forms of Hanzi are vast and perplexing to scholars. Each form also contains different stages of development. Some forms still do not have English equivalences. Similar to the case of "Chinese character" and "Hanzi", the terms "Chinese-ness" and "Han-ness" also have a similar connotation in the East Asian context. Later discussions of the 2008 Beijing Olympiad will use the term "Han-ness" for the sake of clarity.

Part 2: Beijing: First Steps

On July 13, 2001, Beijing won its bid and was awarded the 2008 Summer Games. In December of the same year, China welcomed the new millennium by joining the WTO, marking a new era for the country to display its economic achievement on the world stage. In July 2002,

[49] Zhang Jie, Tang Wenyue, Shi Chunyun, Liu Zehua & Wang Xia, "Chinese Calligraphy and Tourism: From Cultural Heritage to Landscape Symbol and Media of the Tourism Industry," *Current Issues in Tourism*, 11:6, (2008): 530. DOI: 10.1080/13683500802475836.
[50] 王敏&杭海,*《形与意：北京 2008 年奥林匹克运动会体育图标/指示系统设计》*,中国建筑工业出版社，2012. [Wang Min & Hang Hai. *XING & YI, Pictograms Design & Wayfinding System Design of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*. (Beijing: China Architecture Publishing & Media Co., Ltd., 2012）], 31.
[51] Qianshen Bai, *Fu Shan's World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 186-187.

the Beijing Organizing Committee of the 2008 Olympic Games (BOCOG) held a two-day Olympic Design Conference, declaring that designs for the Beijing 2008 Olympic would be cultivated under the motto of "New Beijing, Great Olympics." Against this background, aside from showcasing the universal Olympic spirit, the word "new" in the motto might signify the nation's anticipation of the new millennium, with an accompanying desire to circumvent stereotypes of China's so-called "backwardness," conservativism and self-enclosed attitudes.

Along with establishing its significant position in the global economy, China also aimed with these Olympics to communicate a new cultural image, one that showed the country to be modernized, open, and a qualified member of the global community. For fulfilling this vision, both Chinese and international designers were invited to contribute to the 2008 Olympic spectacle. The Bird's Nest stadium, perhaps the most high-profile icon of the Beijing games, was a collaboration between Chinese artist Ai Weiwei and internationally-known Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron. The BOCOG also approached Wang Min (王敏), a Chinese-born graphic designer educated at Yale during the 1990s, and who had extensive graphic design experience in the United States and Germany, to supervise the "look" of the Games.[52]

In 2003, Wang Min returned to Beijing and took the position of the Dean of the School of Design at China Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA). Meanwhile, he was appointed as the Design Director of the 2008 Beijing Olympiad. With the support of BOCOG and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Wang Min founded the Art Research Centre for the Olympic Games (ARCOG) at CAFA; this was the first research center in history dedicated to the

[52] Richard B Doubleday and Stephen Goldstein, "The graphic language of Min Wang," *The International Council of Design*, 01 May, 2008, https://www.ico d.org/connect/features/post/300.php.

overall “look” and graphic program of Olympics Games.[53] Members of this center formed the backbone of most graphic design projects of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games, such as the wayfinding system pictograms, the Olympic medals, and the design of the sports pictograms.

The design of the 2008 pictograms began in March 2005 and was publicly unveiled in August 2006. The BOCOG had designated five institutions to contribute submissions for the Games’ pictogram design and the wayfinding system: the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, China Academy of Art (CAA), and Beijing Armstrong International Corporate Identity (AICI) Co Ltd. Echoing the motto “New Beijing, Great Olympics,” Wang Min decided right away that the final designs should not be a mere exhibition of Chinese civilization, but to tell the story of China through a global design language. The pictograms were initially designed by CAFA student (now a professor)Wang Jie (王捷), and later adjusted with aids of professor Hang Hai(杭海) and Wang Ziyuan(王子源).

Part 3: Obstacles and Reception of the Design

The ever-present challenge in the history of Olympic pictogram design, is to design a set of icons that will uniquely reflect the cultural particularity of the host nation, while remaining universally legible. Within this context, the Beijing team was forced to redesign Hanzi and Han-ness to fit different expectations; this is exemplified in the use of Hanzi to continue and elevate traditional Chinese culture, as well as conforming to a clichéd ‘Chinese-ness’ for non-Chinese audiences.

[53] 王敏&杭海,*《形与意：北京 2008 年奥林匹克运动会体育图标/指示系统设计》*,中国建筑工业出版社，2012. [Wang Min & Hang Hai. *XING & YI, Pictograms Design & Wayfinding System Design of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*. (Beijing: China Architecture Publishing & Media Co., Ltd., 2012）], 14.

There were two critical moments in the design process that showcase different expectations towards the 2008 Beijing pictograms design. The first moment nearly led to the abandonment of the design. A review meeting was held by the BOCOG on July 20th, 2005 with a jury composed of scholars and officials from both CAFA and Tsinghua University. Jury members of CAFA were mainly painters and art critics, while members of Tsinghua University were design experts from the graphic design department.[54] During the meeting, a different concept of pictogram design, entitled "String"[55] (中国线）,was proposed by Tsinghua University. Members from CAFA insisted that as a representation of Chinese culture, the seal script pictograms did not adequately convey the artistic excellence of ancient Chinese writing embodied in Chinese bronze inscriptions,[56] preferring "String" as more closely based in Chinese calligraphy culture.

This design depicted the human figure silhouette of each sport using varying thicknesses and types of ink wash strokes. The curvy linework of the bodies provided a sense of smoothness and elegance, while the pointed finishes on figures' feet and hands suggested direction and dynamism. The uneven distribution of white marks within depicted body parts was made to resemble those left on paper by incidental ink flow and artists' natural brush movements. However, jury members from Tsinghua University felt that functionality and legibility should be the primary considerations of pictogram design; a mere hint of calligraphy and antique flavor

[54] 王敏&杭海,*《形与意：北京 2008 年奥林匹克运动会体育图标/指示系统设计》*,中国建筑工业出版社，2012. [Wang Min & Hang Hai. *XING & YI, Pictograms Design & Wayfinding System Design of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*. (Beijing: China Architecture Publishing & Media Co., Ltd., 2012）], 31.
[55] The English translation "String" is according to: https://www.olympic.org/news/beijing-2008-pictograms-released.
[56] 王敏&杭海,*《形与意：北京 2008 年奥林匹克运动会体育图标/指示系统设计》*,中国建筑工业出版社，2012. [Wang Min & Hang Hai. *XING & YI, Pictograms Design & Wayfinding System Design of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*. (Beijing: China Architecture Publishing & Media Co., Ltd., 2012）], 31.

would be sufficient.[57] Due to this difference of opinion, both “String” and “Seal Script” concepts were proposed to the Executive Board for a final decision.

Since the visual quality of Chinese calligraphy became the standard to determine which concept should be chosen, some members of the Executive Board even suggested merging the two in order to generate a new solution. At this moment, Wang Min had to refer to comments from Brad Copeland, IOC Look of the Games Advisor, to support the “Seal Script” design and ensure its survival: “the seal script pictogram design is the best design so far, as it expresses the idea and beauty of ancient Chinese characters, and also accords with the international requirements of legibility.”[58] This comment, from a Western member of the IOC team, eventually convinced the Executive Board and helped to save the concept.

While the “Seal Script” concept finally gained approval, Theodora Mantzaris, the art director of the 2004 Athens Summer Olympic Games, added a different perspective, which required the pictograms to undergo new adjustments. Mantzaris came to Beijing in 2005 to visit the design team. She liked the idea behind the design but suggested that the pictograms should be redesigned to “emphasize more on the sense of Hanzi.”[59] She also made some changes in person. Based on Mantzaris’ suggestion, the designer Wang Jie created some new symbols that catered to a more script-like design. These designs appeared to have more strokes; some were overlapped, which created a relatively complex and chaotic feeling. These designs might echo the mysterium of Hanzi and East Asian culture in general, in the eyes of the international

[57] 王敏&杭海,*《形与意：北京 2008 年奥林匹克运动会体育图标/指示系统设计》*,中国建筑工业出版社，2012. [Wang Min & Hang Hai. *XING & YI, Pictograms Design & Wayfinding System Design of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*. (Beijing: China Architecture Publishing & Media Co., Ltd., 2012）], 31.
[58] Ibid., 35.
[59] Ibid., 73.

audience. However, they countered the Olympic demand of translingual communication, in that they sacrificed a certain degree of legibility.

Enacting Four China(s)

As the 2008 Beijing design team juggled multiple expectations, the cultural particularity of the host nation no longer carried single interpretation but generates a set of fragmented cultural identities. As Jilly Traganou observes: "National identities and processes of identification…, are thus not static or monosemantic, holding a singular, fixed meaning. Rather they are constantly constructed and reconstructed, adjusting to the eyes of the 'other'."[60] On the one hand, the conservative nature of the Beijing jury blocked design work that it perceived as innovative. On the other hand, the persistent Western imagination of China also intervened in the design process.

However, it is important to see these challenges outside of an East-meets-West binary, since each encompass a complex historical interrelation. The Beijing jury's perspective is tied to pre-modern inter-East-Asian relationships, in which China used to be the "Central Kingdom" or cultural hegemony of East Asia, having lost its power during the 19th century due to domestic turmoil and Western invasions. The Western (mis)perception of China is formed not only by direct Western misrepresentations of the East, but is also partly due to the lack of mutual cultural understandings between China and the Western powers, which has led to China's conscious or unconscious reinforcement of its own stereotyped image through tourism and the culture industry since the 1980s.

[60] Jilly Traganou, *Designing the Olympics: Representation, Participation, Contestation* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 10.

Reconstructing the image of China in the “Beauty of Seal Characters” pictograms required negotiating among no fewer than four fragmented Chinese identities (specifically Han identities in this context), against the backdrop of cultural globalization, as follows:

(1) a Han-ness immediately recognizable by the Chinese audience (including both domestic and Chinese migration overseas). It was also expected to act as a nationalist stabilizer for patriots, who could see in it a non-disrupted thousand-year history of tradition and cultural power. (2) a Han-ness associated with Chinese stereotypes and Otherness produced by Western powers. (3) this same Han-ness, albeit reinforced by China’s own tourism and culture industry, and (4) a China possessing its own design power, which is in conversation with a synthesized contemporary global design scene.

Part 1: The First China: Calligraphy Meets Typography

The 2008 Beijing Olympic pictograms carried the burden of the thousand-year history of Chinese calligraphy culture. In the pictograms, traditional Chinese bronze inscriptions were morphed into a graphic form that was vaguely unrecognizable to CAFA jury members, whose eyes were steeped in traditional Confucian teaching and ideology. Their comments, used the same aesthetic preference and criteria for traditional calligraphy work, showed an intense fear of breaking with tradition, and disclosed an unconscious understanding of design engaging with ancient scripts, namely that these should just emulate the shape, form, and spirit of Chinese bronze inscriptions, in order to maintain the quintessence of the art form. The jury’s critique of the 2008 pictogram design indicated a contradiction between ancient Chinese calligraphy culture

and its relationship with contemporary graphic design sensibility. Thus, it is important to explore some crucial historical moments of Chinese calligraphy in order to better understand the issue.

Calligraphy, the art of writing Hanzi, has been considered as the supreme form among all artistic expressions in China. Calligraphy can be divided roughly into two trends: the model-book school and the stele school (or epigraphic school). The model-book school plays a dominant and mainstream role. It ties the art form with artists' characteristics and sees the significance of each art piece goes beyond the literal meaning of scripts. This school also believes that calligraphy should emulate classic masters of ancient China without much distortion of the character forms,[61] whereas the epigraphic school, practiced by artists of the late Ming (1368 to 1644) and early Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, which existed on the periphery, focused more on exploring the form of Hanzi.

Since the Tang dynasty (618-907), the model-book canon has ubiquitously praised the Two Wangs' (Wang Xizhi 303–361, and his son Wang Xianzhi 344–386) writings as perfect models, due to the graceful appearance of the scripts. The Two Wangs' calligraphy was also tied to Confucianism, used by the ruling class as a mechanism to stabilize society. In his article, "Chinese Calligraphy: Its Aesthetic Dimension and Social Function," Lothar Ledderose states that the Two Wangs' model writings are disciplined, serving as an example of the ideal Confucian literati (the educated scholar-officials under Confucian system) who aimed to achieve a well-balanced, peaceful and graceful status and become a cultivated, ideal gentleman. The practice of calligraphy "foster the social cohesiveness of their (the literati) class, which in turn was a prerequisite for political cohesiveness and stability."[62]

[61] Soyang Park, East Asian Art: pre-1800 (lecture), OCAD University, September 27th, 2019.
[62] Lothar Ledderose, "Chinese Calligraphy: Its Aesthetic Dimension and Social Function". *Orientations* 17: 10 (October 1986): 35.

The canon signifies the importance of respect for and worship of the calligraphy masters, which generated a star system that encourages emulation. By doing these, the followers can slowly gain cultural refinement and take steps toward becoming the ideal gentleman, just like the two Wangs. The learners are discouraged from having much personal expression since any rule-breaking activities would be considered as an obstacle to the coherent stream of the art tradition. Calligraphy practice from the Tang dynasty onwards has thus been an instrument used by the government to emphasize the importance of continuity and stability of the Confucian tradition.

This Confucian doctrine, despite its extreme conservatism, still influences contemporary mainstream social and political conduct in China. The Two Wang's copybooks are still being produced and practiced in China today. According to the model-book tradition, the aggressive act of deviating from the originals is close to a violation of the law; the manipulation of Hanzi in the pictograms was seen as a betrayal of the guardianship of tradition. The Confucian doctrine promoted by mainstream Chinese calligraphy theories, though it inspired Coubertin's athlete pedagogy of modern Olympic Games, ironically posed a huge threat to China in identifying its contemporary cultural identity through pictogram design.

Most writings on Chinese graphic design history in the West either neglect the role of certain Chinese calligraphers' contribution to early Chinese typography or treat Chinese graphic design history as it began after the modern era without the calligraphic factors leading to it. Conventional historical writings in China, on the other hand, pay attention to the invention of movable type or the use of contemporary Hanzi in graphic design, but neglect the graphic structure of ancient Hanzi, including seal script.

The pictographic nature, and the infinite possibility of design excellence through the manipulation of ancient Hanzi's structure, is precisely its value in the 2008 Olympic pictogram

design. However, most attention to seal script in China still remains in the field of archaeology, and is marginalized in Chinese graphic design history. On the one hand, ancient Hanzi almost became a lost "past", even for the Chinese audience. Some ancient Hanzi, like oracle bone script, has a distinctive form and structure that are impossible to decipher via modern Hanzi. As American linguistic and sinologist John DeFrancis declared, "If Confucius could undergo a resurrection, he would be quite unable to carry on a conversation with one of his descendants today. Nor would the two be able to communicate in writing… intensive training is needed to master both."[63] Seal script did not regain attention until the Song dynasty (960–1279 A.D.); calligrapher and art critic Huang Bosi (黄伯思) was the first to address the transformation of ancient calligraphy in his book *Dongguan yulun* (《*东观余论*》). On the other hand, the calligraphic tradition and its historical burdens kept intervening in the role of Hanzi, even in print culture. Chinese movable type was also invented during the Song dynasty, but "(Chinese) scholars often found the aesthetic quality of the movable type inferior to the unique and distinctive potential of calligraphy on the carved block."[64]

The late Ming and Qing literati took a different approach. In his book, *Fu Shan's World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century*, Art historian Qianshen Bai provided a substantial analysis of a distinctive contribution made by the late Ming and early Qing calligraphers, as well as the socio-political and cultural factors underpinning the new style. Some scholars began to investigate Chinese characters on ancient tombs and funerary objects. They also turned back to the art of seal carving and exploration of ancient scripts. These scholars

[63] John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*. 1984. 39. https://books.google.ca/books/about/The_Chinese_Language.html?id=gQF8kvWmFJkC&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false.
[64] Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2010,) 16.

believed that "…calligraphy should be grounded in seal and clerical script" and they sought "roots earlier than Wang Xizhi, who was himself the origin of the elegant, fluent, refined calligraphy of the model-book tradition."[65] Calligraphy as an art form turned into a craft hobby inspired by ancient characters and archaeological exploration of these characters.

With the aid of abundant printed materials, literati from this period were able to study and even invent new characters.[66] Qianshen Bai also observed: "…calligraphers sought to imbue their works with *qi* (the marvelous and strange), producing calligraphy that was expressive and dramatic yet often playful, ingenious, puzzling, and entertaining."[67] This new trend in calligraphy — known as epigraphic calligraphy — coexisted with the model-book tradition. Literati dedicated to their inner expression and turned much of their attention to the form and aesthetic of Hanzi, especially seal script and clerical script.[68]

To expand on Qianshen Bai's discussion, I argue that shift of the focus on the form of ancient Hanzi is crucial to early Chinese experimental typography. During the late Ming, the metal typography technique was blooming,[69] and the obsession with unusual characters among literati and publishers reached its peak.[70] Dictionaries printed with bizarre characters, such as *Inscriptions on Guwen Script and Strange Characters (Guwen qizi)* became trendy. Many scholars view the late Ming as a humiliating historical moment due to the political fall of the ethnic reign and the takeover by the Manchu regime (Qing). Despite ever-present corruption and

[65] Qianshen Bai, *Fu Shan's World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003),185.
[66] Ibid., 140.
[67] Ibid., 4.
[68] Ibid., 4.
[69] Bussotti, Michela & Qi, Han. "Typography for a modern world? The ways of Chinese movable types," *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine*. Issue 40 (Sept. 22, 2014): 19. https://www.jstor.org/stable/eastasiascietech.40.9?seq=1.
[70] Qianshen Bai, *Fu Shan's World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 60.

conservatism within the court, late Ming represented a relatively open environment for art creation. The Wanli reign (1573-1620 A.D.) saw prosperities in economic growth, travel, seafaring, private sea trade, and more international interactions and urban culture.

Unfortunately, the epigraphic approach did not last long. On the one hand, although the new emphasis on the importance of seal script and clerical script was prevalent, and many calligraphers responded positively, archaeological seal script samples and seal script rubbings were both rare during the period. Until the Qing dynasty, most calligraphers had to concentrate more on clerical script samples due to its greater availability.[71] On the other hand, the epigraphic approach went against the star system of the model-book tradition. Ancient inscriptions on oracle bones and bronze were created by anonymous artists, so there are no specific idols to adore. When the fame of the idols dissolved, the epigraphic school was the one to blame.

It was not until the late eighteenth century that there was a systematization of seal script sources for study,[72] which generated new waves of investigation and appreciation among contemporary scholars in China. However, most of these are still limited to archaeology. The design of the 2008 Beijing Olympic pictograms is a reminder of the essential role of ancient Hanzi, while also signaling a new potential for all Hanzi forms in future of Chinese graphic design.

[71] Qianshen Bai, *Fu Shan's World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 186.
[72] Ibid., 140 &188.

Part 2: The Second China: Hanzi as the Extreme Other

The interpretation of Hanzi outside of China, particularly that formed by Western powers, plays a decisive role in perceiving the aesthetics and meaning of the 2008 pictograms. The perception of Hanzi as shaped by Western powers is twofold. On the one hand, the lack of studies on the early Chinese writing system made the concept of "Hanzi" incomplete. On the other hand, Hanzi in general, as the inspiration of the Beijing 2008 pictograms and representation of China, is also a synecdoche of China, which echoes constructed stereotypes, exoticism and images of Otherness.

When Western scholars first began to study Hanzi, seal script was not used on a daily basis. Hanzi had evolved into more standard forms, less pictorial than seal script. The Italian missionary Matteo Ricci, who traveled to China during the 16th century Ming dynasty, was exposed to Chinese seals — some engraved with ancient seal scripts, as the late Ming literati were fascinated by the form of ancient Hanzi. However, Ricci immersed himself only in studying Hanzi in daily use, in order to better communicate with Chinese people. With the aid of Chinese officials, he translated some Confucian classics into Latin for the first time and compiled the very first European-Chinese dictionary.[73] When these works were disseminated to the Western audience as authoritative material, this underpinned the impression among Western audiences of what Chinese characters should look like among Western audiences, which ruled out seal script in the first place.

During the 19th century, there was an increased interest in Chinese studies in Europe and America. *Early Chinese Writing*, by the American missionary Frank H. Chalfont (1862-1914),

[73] James, Gregory. "The first European dictionary of Chinese: A missionary learning tool." Historical dictionaries. (J. Coleman & A. McDermott, Eds), (2004). 121.

which focuses specifically on oracle-bone inscriptions, is among the few Western academic contributions on ancient Hanzi. Although the Chinese language has been the main focus of Chinese studies in Europe and America since the 19th century,[74] writings on early forms of Hanzi were (and are) still rare and unlikely to reach the broader public. If we revisit Neurath's 1936 remarks on Hanzi, it also reveals that the Hanzi to which Neurath referred were those of a contemporary form. Seal script bears a representational relationship to the natural world. Considering this logographical nature, if they had been available to Neurath, he might have sensed an even closer resemblance between seal script and ISOTYPE.

In addition, Hanzi was used by Western companies to promote their products in China during the 19th century, forming a hybrid myth of "East (Asia) meets West." After the Opium Wars and treaties with the Great Britain, the Qing court was forced to open certain port cities and trade with the West. Shanghai was the first city to open its trade in 1843, and later became the ideal arena for foreign merchants to promote Western products. One of the most popular advertising forms, calendar poster ads (Yuefenpai), reached their heyday during the 1930s Shanghai. According to the Western design-history timeline, "the Shanghai Style" initiates the first signs of modern Chinese graphic design.

When Western companies realized that it was difficult for Chinese consumers to make a connection with the unfamiliar visual aesthetic, they decided to hire Chinese artists to create Chinese versions of the ads.[75] The new hybrid designs normalized unfamiliar foreign elements by juxtaposing them with Chinese symbols to avoid visual conflicts and rupture. With the aid of Hanzi to explain product features, Western products were finally able to fuse the global and the

[74] Shu Chao Hu, *The Development of The Chinese Collection in The Library of Congress*. New York: Routledge, 2019. Google E-book.
[75] Zhao and Belk, "Advertising Consumer Culture in 1930s Shanghai: Globalization and Localization in Yuefenpai", Journal of Advertising, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Summer, 2008): 45-56. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20460842?seq=1.

local. In addition to being readable by Chinese artists, the role of Hanzi in these designs also reinforced Western preconceptions; the shape and form of these characters not only expressed a "mysterious" nature but also stimulated an Otherness that made possible a continuous misconception and appropriation of Hanzi outside of China.

The exoticism and Otherness of Hanzi, as an image supported by the Western entertainment industry, can be exemplified by the prototype of Hanzi in the 2016 American science fiction film *Arrival*, which treats communication between humans and aliens. The film was created based on a 1998 short story "Story of Your Life" written by Ted Chiang, a Chinese-American writer who immigrated to Taiwan with his parents during the Cultural Revolution, and later moved to the United States. In this film, the main task of the protagonist, a linguist, is to figure out how to communicate with an alien race who arrives unexpectedly on earth. The aliens deliver their message to the linguist by writing their script in logograms, manifested in the form of circular shapes painted with dark ink. The linguist then has to decipher the script into English words by scanning and computer analyzing, so that she could be able to write back to the aliens and keep their conversation going.

The aliens' written script, its strokes, splashes, and blobs, generates a striking and eerie similarity with Chinese calligraphy, both in its aesthetics and the way it is delivered. Patrice Vermette, the production designer of the film, developed 100 logograms in total with various stroke weights carrying different meanings: "We wanted to create a language that is aesthetically interesting. But it needed to be alien to our civilization, alien to our technology, alien to everything our mind knows."[76] This "alien to," not only refers to the look of scripts that do not follow the alphabetic standard, but also suggests a position of fear towards the language's

[76] Margaret Rhodes,"How *Arrival's* Designers Crafted a Mesmerizing Alien Alphabet," *WIRED*, November 16, 2016, https://www.wired.com/2016/11/arrivals-designers-crafted-mesmerizing-alien-alphabet/.

creators. In the film, the performance of aliens writing the script is slow and poetic, arousing a feeling of elegance that echoes the traditional Chinese calligraphy performance. However, the aliens' performance is also mysterious and unsettling, the depiction of this in the film indicates an attitude towards others whose behavior falls outside of the boundaries of Western knowledge.

The Beijing 2008 Olympiad caught the attention of an unprecedented global press and on-line coverage, becoming "the most-watched Olympic Games ever, and probably the most-watched event in human history."[77] Before and after the 2008 Beijing Olympiad, criticism of China's involvement in the Olympic Games is was based in "a deep-seated mistrust and fear of China in the West, a fear of an unknown 'Other'," [78] which also contains Western doubts as to the accountability and actions of the Chinese government. Susan Brownell has suggested that the sheer attention to the Games "provoked an international debate about the political system of the host country that had not been seen on such a scale since, perhaps, the Berlin 1936 Olympics."[79]

Brownell's parallel is supported by the fixation on issues of China in global reports over the last four decades, such as Chinese human rights issues, the Chinese government's tight control over its citizens, median censorship, and so on. It could enable a ripple effect on all aspects of Beijing/China, including the role of cultural relevance relating to the 2008 Olympiad, and Hanzi. Brownell notes that "China existed on the margins of Orientalism; it was assumed that since it was the most extreme geographically, it must also be the most extremely

[77] Susan Brownell, "Brand China" in the Olympic Context," *Javnost – The Public: Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture*, Vol.20 (2013):67, https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2013.11009128.
[78] Susan Brownell, "Western centrism in Olympic studies and its consequence in the 2008 Beijing Olympics," *Proceedings: International Symposium for Olympic Research*, (2008): 20, *Gale Academic OneFile*, https://link-gale-com.ocadu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A197599055/AONE?u=toro37158&sid=AONE&xid=c4f241d6.
[79] Susan Brownell, "Brand China" in the Olympic Context," *Javnost – The Public: Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture*, Vol.20 (2013):67, https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2013.11009128.

‘oriental’.”[80] In the contemporary era, the Otherness of Hanzi might no longer due to China’s geographical distance from the Western powers, but a globalized psychological distance.

By gauging the scale of “Chinese-ness” in the Beijing 2008 pictogram design, Western comments pushed Hanzi further into an ‘Othered’ frame. When Theodora Mantzaris suggested that the 2008 Beijing Olympic pictograms should more closely resemble written Chinese characters, she was likely referring to the contemporary form of Hanzi, less logographic than ancient Seal Script. This reaction reflected the ‘exoticism’ and ‘uniqueness’ of Hanzi, globally recognized by the Western audience as a sign of ‘Chinese-ness.’ Hanzi here is not merely a novelty, but critically holds the position of expressing difference from the West.

Part 3: The Third China: Hanzi as Self-Otherness

Chinese cultural politics always tend to emphasize its cultural particularity and glories, to “show off” and remind people of its three-thousand-year history. The third Han-ness is the one produced by China itself, through naturally displaying its own culture to the global community in cultural industries since the 1980s. Chinese calligraphy has become a cultural symbol, used as part of the cultural exportation and national branding of China. In this section, I am proposing the term “Self-Otherness” (as distinct from “Self-Orientalism) to illustrate this process of China’s own reaffirmation of the stereotype of Hanzi. Before the seal script concept was chosen, Wang Min’s team from CAFA came up with several other concepts for the pictographic system of the Games, including seals, weaving, “Han & Tang glory,”[81] papercutting, and ink painting.

[80] Susan Brownell, “Western centrism in Olympic studies and its consequence in the 2008 Beijing Olympics,” *Proceedings: International Symposium for Olympic Research*, (2008): 22, *Gale Academic OneFile*, https://link-gale-com.ocadu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A197599055/AONE?u=toro37158&sid=AONE&xid=c4f241d6.
[81] Utilizes a well-known decoration on the eaves of ancient Chinese buildings.

All these entries unexceptionally revisited Chinese traditions. Here, as in other aspects of China's cultural industries, ancient traditions function as a vehicle for the continuity of historical pride, uniqueness, cultural hegemony in Asia, and distinctness from the Western powers.

There is a lack of mutual understanding towards calligraphy as a cultural element, among Chinese and Western audiences. In ancient China, calligraphy belongs to a grand system of arts[82] that includes poetry and painting. Many ancient Chinese paintings, for example, "Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion", depict literati gatherings in gardens, drink wine and write poetry while enjoying nature. The garden in ancient Chinese culture, viewed as a microcosm of the universe, is a place that encourages balance and harmony. In this sense, Hanzi and calligraphy cannot be seen as separate from the microcosm but an essential part of it. For certain Western audience who are not aware of the traditional connection between calligraphy and sites, calligraphy can be perceived as cultural symbols detached from their environment, and as exotic objects.

This disjunction was unexpectedly reaffirmed by the Chinese tourism industry since the 1980s, in its use of traditional forms such as calligraphy. Following the 1978 economic reforms, China reopened to the global community and began to roll out plans supporting cultural industries. In the year 2000, the first proposal of China's "Tenth Five Year Plan," which later became official national strategy, established the essential role of cultural industries.[83] As key resources for this effort, Hanzi and calligraphy pieces are scattered among tourist sites, mostly in the forms of stele, souvenirs, art and design pieces. From the domestic Chinese perspective, the display of calligraphy is a friendly promotion of Chinese culture. The curiosity towards these cultural elements from some Western tourists on the other hand, is already clouded with "alien"

[82] Soyang Park, East Asian Art: pre-1800 (lecture), OCAD University, September 27th, 2019.
[83] Qingben Li, "Cultural Industries in China and their Importance in Asian Communities," CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture20.2 (2018):3, https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3231.

connotations of difference, while lacking a deeper understanding of these traditions: they become, for the Western observer, mere signs of 'Chineseness.'

In China during the 1980s, postcolonial theories of racism, cultural appropriation, and the "Other," long discussed in Western countries, were unfamiliar. Chinese people tend to welcome anyone who respects or make efforts to learn Chinese culture, especially the language, even if the learner can say only one word in Mandarin or write one Hanzi. Conversely, China's cultural display since the 1980s has been one of reinforced stereotypes of exoticism, largely predicated on an unconscious Self-Othering and play on the lack of mutual understanding between China and global audiences through cultural symbols — including a decontextualized Hanzi. Aside from the tourism industry, ongoing "Chinese character" art exhibitions aimed at attracting the attention of global visitors, scholars, international art collectors and designers, also use Hanzi as a prop to promote the history and civilization of China.

Part 4: The Fourth China: Retracing Cultural Flows

The 2008 Beijing pictograms reveal a China in conversation with a synthesized contemporary global design scene. The involvement of the Chinese writing system in ISOTYPE, the adaptation of ISOTYPE for post-war Olympic sports pictograms, and the revisiting of the Chinese writing system in the 2008 Beijing pictograms indicate that Olympic pictogram design is a constantly evolving system. The redesign of cultural specificity in the contemporary era no longer hold on to a certain locality, but absorbs multiple national languages along the way of

production. Anthropologist and theorist Arjun Appadurai unfolded global cultural processes as a world of disjunctive global flows, in which cultural forms are both "fractal" and "overlapping."[84]

This is true likewise of the history of graphic design in China, which has its own path long before the 1930s Shanghai Style, and can be traced back to Tang dynasty's woodblock prints, Song dynasty ads and Ming and Qing book design.[85] The design scene was ruptured by Sino-Japanese wars in the 1940s; later, during the Cultural Revolution, the design scene in China was completely insular. Graphic practices such as propaganda poster design became merely ideological instruments to praise Mao and the Communist Party. Mao's death in 1976 and the subsequent economic reforms and open-door policy initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 created a relatively liberty for Chinese artists; art schools were re-opened in 1979 and subscriptions to Western art magazines was finally allowed.[86]

China joined the WTO in 2001, and foreign companies were allowed to expand their business and open offices in China. This step of internationalization created a possibility of coexistence and interactions among state-own, private, and international companies and designers. Graphic designs generated in such a matrix thus oscillate among various design languages. Designers, as active agents move across national boundaries, keep recycling and circulating design ideas among nations. As the design director of the look of the 2008 Beijing Olympiad, Wang Min's task was to ensure the pictogram had global intelligibility and reflected national tradition. Wang Min has extensive study and work experience in China, United States

[84] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," From *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory*, (1994): 337.
[85] Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2010,).
[86] Many scholars suggest that China opened to the global community during the 1980s because of the open-door policy, without considering the pre-Modern linkages between China and the West. It is worth noting that these linkages have been prevalent and persistent over a much longer timeline.

and Germany; these experiences made him the ideal candidate to overlook the graphic system of the 2008 Olympiad.

After graduating from Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (now the China Academy of Fine Arts), Wang Min studied graphic design in 1985 at Yale under Armin Hofmann and Richard Sapper in 1985, obtained a design position at Adobe Systems and became a faculty of the Yale University graduate graphic design program, where his teaching included a course on cross-cultural design and Eastern typography.[87] This course, which introduced Asian letterforms to students, which most students' "first exposure to Asian typography."[88] Taking global references into account, his typeface design, Mythos, sought to combine East Asian and Western mythical animals, merging imagery of dragons and unicorns with Roman letterform. These experiences partly shaped the treatment and direction of the Hanzi forms in the 2008 pictograms, which similarly sought to combine East Asian origins with international legibility.

Olympic pictogram designers revisit other designs to reshape their contribution. The new contribution then has its further influence over the subsequent ones. The evolving design situations of Olympic pictograms before its unveiling, indicates the fluidity of design practice, injected with a dynamic exchange of ideas among designers. The Tokyo 1964 Olympiad pictograms are not only inspiration for Aicher, but the two designers have kept personal meetings before the 1972 Games discussing their design approach. Aicher also referenced the 1968 Mexico pictograms and Montreal Expo '67 pictograms.[89]

[87] Richard B Doubleday and Stephen Goldstein, "The graphic language of Min Wang," *The International Council of Design*, 01 May, 2008, https://www.ico d.org/connect/features/post/300.php.
He later co-founded design studio Square Two Design in 1998, where he designed typeface Mythos and various logos. He was also a visiting design fellow in Germany, and was the Vice President (2007-2009) of ICOGRADA (the International Council of Graphic Design Associations, the world body for professional communication design).
[88] Richard B Doubleday and Stephen Goldstein, "The graphic language of Min Wang," *The International Council of Design*, 01 May, 2008, https://www.ico d.org/connect/features/post/300.php.
[89] Mark Holt, *Munich '72. The Visual Output of Otl Aicher's Dept. XI* (self-pub., 2019), 145.

During the preparation of the 2008 Olympiad, Beijing and Athens kept in close interaction. The 2004 Athens Games' pictogram design also had an impact on the Beijing 2008 ones. Before Mantzaris's visit, Wang Min went to Athens to meet with her, and studied the look and management of the 2004 Athens Olympiad.[90] Inspired by the irregular shapes of the 2004 Athens pictograms, the shape of stone rubbing form in each of the 2008 pictograms was initially varied.[91] Although the design team eventually decided to maintain uniformity across all 35 pictograms, the Greek inspiration did play an undeniable part in reconstructing the design identity for the Beijing signs. This early stage of idea exchange echoes the interactions between Aicher and Katsumi, and opposes the idea that the Olympic design of each Games is an independent system; there is a layering and reshaping, in which each new design responds to what has come before.

Interactions among designers are not limited to adjacent Games, but a circulation of ideas among all. Wang Min also sees the 2008 Beijing pictograms design as a salute to Otl Aicher [92] He stated that the standardization of body parts was adopted from Aicher's design approach. As discussed in the first chapter, the 1972 pictogram design concealed a German design sensibility behind a modernist facade; however, as we have seen, this design cannot be seen as monolingual, but includes East Asian influences in its evolution.

[90] 王敏&杭海,*《形与意：北京 2008 年奥林匹克运动会体育图标/指示系统设计》*,中国建筑工业出版社，2012. [Wang Min & Hang Hai. *XING & YI, Pictograms Design & Wayfinding System Design of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*. (Beijing: China Architecture Publishing & Media Co., Ltd., 2012）],12.
[91] Ibid., 104.
[92] Ibid., 35.

Conclusion

In the contemporary Olympic Games, we see a move toward greater and greater flexibility and inclusivity within the formal frame and precedents of the event. To take one example, during the Beijing 2008 Olympiad Parade of Nations, the order of the entering nations was not in English alphabetic order but was instead arranged according to Hanzi stroke numbers. The name of each nation was first translated in Simplified Chinese characters (the results usually appear as more than two Hanzi), and then the stroke number of the first Hanzi is counted. Names including the fewest strokes would enter first. Using Hanzi stroke number order rather than alphabetic order emphasized once again the essential position Hanzi holds within China. It was also an act that countered familiar Olympic custom to that point, which echoes Coubertin's initial incorporation of Chinese culture and his ideal vision of the modern Games being peaceful and international reconciliation[93].

The designs of Olympic sports pictograms generated throughout Modern Games, especially post-war models, are often treated as an enclosed system that is separate from their socio-political environment. This, in part, has led to a misconception that there is a clear stylistic and conceptual division between Modern (immediate post-war) and Postmodern (especially post-1990s) Olympic pictograms. The history of Olympiad pictogram design examined in this paper has instead aimed to entrench a non-linear approach. The conventionally embedded "universal" idiom of Olympic pictograms has always relied on historically and regionally-specific iconography for its meaning. The recycling of design ideas among nations and from pre-modern

[93] Jilly Traganou, "Foreword: Design Histories of the Olympic Games." *Journal of Design History: Special Issue-Design Histories of The Olympic Games*, (Volume 25, Issue 3, August 2012): 245. https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40079310.

era and non-Western countries questions the definition of Self and Other within this context. These can be seen from the design process and reception of the Beijing 2008 Olympiad pictograms, the expurgated influence of East Asian culture and design language, as well as the complex interplays of individuals and precedents along the way.

There are many layers of Olympic pictogram design history that require further research and exploration, aspects of these histories that require accuracy, or hidden contributors whose names need recovering. Mark Holt's recently published book on the 1972 Munich pictograms, which adds the silenced contributions to this set by Gerhard Joksch, is just one example.[94] The multidimensionality of pictogram design indicates the ever-changing and complicated spectrum of interaction from their conception to their completion. The legacy of Olympic pictogram designs should not only be viewed as sets of two-dimensional icons, but the results of multilingual interactions, interlinked stories, complex histories, and their continuing effects on future pictogram designs.

[94] Mark Holt, *Munich '72. The Visual Output of Otl Aicher's Dept. XI* (self-pub., 2019).

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Appendix A: Figures

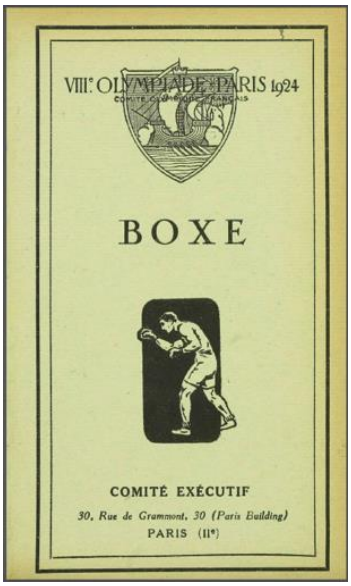

Figure 1

Paris 1924 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Sample. The pictogram contained the title of the sport in French text and was executed in a traditional manner of figurative illustrations, representing objects and human figures in extensive detail. Photo courtesy of IOC.

Figure 2

Berlin 1936 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Samples. The pictograms depicted detailed information of sports equipment. Photo courtesy of IOC.

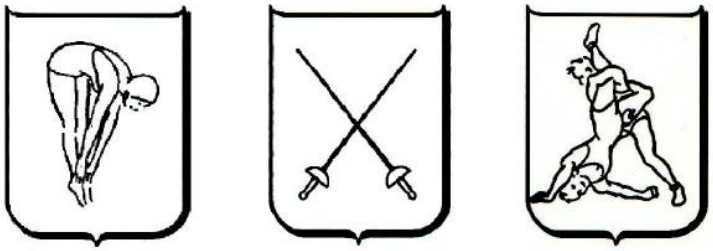

Figure 3

London 1948 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Samples. The pictograms eliminated texts and depicted detailed information of sports equipment. Photo courtesy of IOC.

Figure 4

Tokyo 1964 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Samples. The pictograms represented each sport with closely related icons, drawn in a simplified and abstract manner. Photo courtesy of IOC.

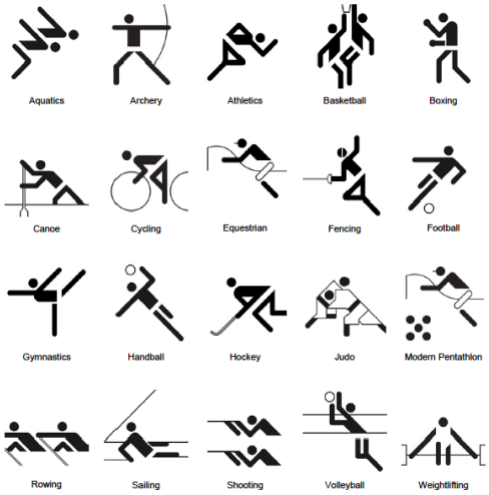

Figure 5

Munich 1972 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Samples. The use of silhouettes in the pictograms is not only abstract, but the shape, length, and angles of human figural elements — heads, legs, and arms — are highly standardized with the aid of a grid system (squares composed along with visible orthogonal and diagonal lines). Photo courtesy of IOC.

Figure 6

Mexico 1968 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Samples. The pictograms rejected full-body human silhouettes, instead using partial images of bodies or sports equipment. Each sport is assigned a particular color, mirroring the local fascination with textiles produced by the indigenous Huicholes group. The design utilized bright colors and unconventional styles, offered an edgy and subversive design approach that counters the Modernist design ethos of that very moment. Photo courtesy of IOC.

Figure 7

Beijing 2008 Olympiad Sports Pictogram Samples. Each pictogram combined ancient Chinese characters: Oracle Bone Script and Chinese Bronze Inscription. The color contrast is achieved by setting white silhouette figures against a dark background, which resembling the ancient Chinese art form of "stone rubbing," a technique used by Chinese scholars to transfer ancient calligraphy from stones onto paper. Photo courtesy of IOC.