

Spreading Positive Messages: The Beijing 2008 Olympics Logo

Every logo in the world symbolises a meaning. No matter the meaning is implicit or explicit, it draws our attention to a specific topic. It brings into our awareness. It arouses our criticisms. It generates our feedbacks. Our perception on a particular logo actually affects what we feel about a particular event, a particular function or a particular organisation. This is the reason why Beijing Government has put up much concerns about the design of the Olympics Logo in 2008. As the event will take place in Beijing, the capital of China in 2008, a good logo design should not only manifest Chinese culture, but also cross-cultural understandings, sportsmanship and active participation of the event.

In my opinion, the official logo of the Olympics 2008 is a 'good' design. What I mean by 'good' here is that the logo explicitly or directly reveals that China is the country that hosts the Olympics event. This is evident from the use of Chinese character '*jing*' (京) and graphics in the logo. The logo also tells the audience that China has a long history of civilisation.

The Rationale of Choosing the Chinese Character '*jing*' (京) as the Core Element of the

Design of the Logo

Every Olympics game is held in a city of a country. China is no exception. In every Olympics, a unique feature of that country or city will be incorporated into the design of the logo so that our future generation could trace back where the Olympics event was actually held by just simply referring to the logo. At least, they could come across where the game is held based on the ‘implicatures’¹ from the logo. The presence of Chinese character, *kanji* (漢字) in the logo design makes the audience aware of the fact that China is the country organising the Olympics event in 2008. Based on the *kanji* in the logo, the audience could at least be able to infer the Olympics event takes place in Asia. The word in the logo is actually the Chinese word ‘*jing*’ (京). By tracing more about the meaning or the origin of the *kanji* above, the audience will get to know that the label ‘京’ signifies Beijing in the context².

On the other hand, though you may say that the word ‘*jing*’ is ambiguous, because ‘*jing*’ (京) could also refer to Nanjing (南京), Beijing (北京) or even Tokyo (東京), the designer of this logo at least considers using one of the greatest assets of the Chinese, *kanji*, as the core element in the logo. National identity and national pride will be strengthened when Chinese character is used in the design of an international event.

¹ According to Thomas and Wareing, implicature allows the audience to make assumptions about the existence of information not made explicit in what is actually said. (Language, Society and Power, An Introduction, 1999)

² With reference to Thomas and Wareing, in this context, “京” is the ‘concept’, or the signified. And ‘Beijing’ will be the ‘label’, the signifier. (Language, Society and Power, An Introduction, 1999)

The Chinese will feel proud with their nations' greatest asset being incorporated in an international sporting event. Nationalistic sentiment could be aroused not only to the Chinese people living in China, but the Chinese people living overseas as well.

The designer is also wise enough to differentiate the word '*jing*' with that of other countries. Japanese also uses *kanji*. However, the typography (象形書法) used in the logo is actually practiced by the Chinese in the ancient times, perhaps 5000 years ago. Such typography could not be found in Japan. Therefore, we could eliminate the thought that the event takes place in Tokyo, Japan. Foreigners also become aware of the fact that *kanji* originates in China. Being able to arouse international attention tactfully leads to successful public relations.

The Chinese Calligraphy of the Character '*jing*'

Chinese calligraphy has a long history. In ancient time of China, Chinese calligraphy was practised by people of a high social class, such as scholars or government officials. It is a prestigious language. For example, in many famous and prestigious Chinese paintings in the past, artists liked to include Chinese calligraphy to show to the audience what the message he/she wanted to convey. He/she liked to put what was on the theme (題旨) using Chinese calligraphy. Therefore, the logo designer is wise enough to

choose the prestigious Chinese calligraphy to signify 'Beijing is the place where the Olympics will be held' in the logo.

Dancing Beijing

Another element I like about the design of the Olympics logo in 2008 is the "Dancing Beijing" element. When we examine the word '*jing*' closely, we could see that the word is written in curvy strokes. The curvy strokes of the Chinese character '*jing*' reflect to the theme "Dancing Beijing". But what is "Dancing Beijing"?

With reference to the Beijing 2008 official homepage, Dancing Beijing actually refers to the belief that the heart of an ancient culture embraces the modern world, and the spirit of a people moving toward a new destiny³. To be frank, such a message makes me feel that China is concerned about international affairs. As China becomes modernised, it should be more active in the international political and economical scene. This is the reason behind her participating in the Olympic game. I think the logo designer is rational to point out that China has a duty to shape the world's future and improve the livelihood of people, as it covers a vast terrain and population.

³ [Anonymous] (2003). Introduction to the Emblem.
http://www.beijing-2008.org/Olympics_logo/english/xinwen.html (Accessed on 25 October 2003)

My interpretation to 'dance' is that it refers to being active, sociable and outgoing. To put this into the context of the theme, it seems to be that the logo designer wants to show that China, while still clinging to its traditions, strives to modernise itself to meet the ever-changing world.

From the context, 'dance' means flexibility. And through flexibility, Chinese people strive to adjust and adapt to the worldwide trends and situations while they do not want to give up the Confucian virtues, such as respecting the nature, harmony and people.

"Flexibility" also means openness and being enlightened. Through "dance", the logo designer wants to show that China is a country that opens to all the people in the world.

China accepts people of different values. China is not stubborn, but friendly. With "dance", cross-cultural understanding could be fostered, the East could learn from the West, and the West could learn from the East. This is the notion I appreciate most. The Olympics event is not an event participated by one country only, but countries all over the world regardless of size and power. Through "dance", people become better understand about each others' background and norms. As a result, the world can achieve unity. We learn how to respect others of different values, or others from a different community. Unity and showing respects are important elements to make the Olympics game successful.

The Human Figure in the Olympics Logo

When we examine the logo carefully, we could find that Chinese character '*jing*' is written is drawn as a human figure. According to the Beijing 2008 homepage, the “Dancing Beijing Man” in the logo represents the spirit of the individual, yet it is also the symbol for every Olympian, every performer, every volunteer and every spectator⁴. It seems to me that the logo is designed with much consideration because it considers every participant in the Olympics game. It makes me feel that the game actually belongs to the world, but not being dominated by the bigger nations, or the nations that win the most awards.

As the Olympics is everyone's game, it belongs to 'human' (人). And when 'human' is incorporated into the design of the Olympics logo, it adds colours to the Chinese civilisation. Chinese society is a collectivistic society. In a collectivistic society, the presence of social groups and 'human' is important. The ideology of 'human' in the Chinese philosophy teaches us to learn how to respect people, how to be harmonious and friendly, how to become a gentleman (君子), and how to establish a good inter-personal relationship with the other people. The use of the symbol of 'human' in

⁴ [Anonymous] (2003). Introduction to the Emblem.
http://www.beijing-2008.org/Olympics_logo/english/xinwen.html (Accessed on 25 October 2003)

the logo design gives the message to everyone that the Olympics game is just a game rather than a 'competition' involving losers and winners (友誼第一，比賽第二). We should not be too serious about which country wins, but the goal we want to achieve is a more win-win relationship. Then, different social groups could co-operate with themselves to achieve a common goal. Therefore, the design to a certain extent, the logo design reflects how relationship-oriented the Chinese society is. Being relationship-oriented does solve many international conflicts and disputes. It should be remembered that when the Olympics event takes place, all international disputes should be put aside.

Notice the human figure in the logo is 'moving'. The motion portrays a human figure running desperately towards a destination or a goal. This motion reflects to the fact that the Olympics Game demands spirits and aspirations. Athletes need to get prepared, practice and keep up with their body weight in order to perform best in this athletic game. The use of a man running represents motivations involved in the game. This spirit of motivation is important when we come across 'performance' and 'world record'. And the man running symbolises that athletes should strive for reaching a goal in order to perform best in the Olympics Game.

The Choice of Colour

In choosing the colour of the logo, the designer uses the colour red as the background colour of the logo. Red is associated with luck and joy to the Chinese people. When we have important ceremonies, such as weddings, Chinese people will only pick the red colour for decorations, because Chinese people believe 'red' brings luck, wealth and prosperity. The word red (紅) in Chinese is pronounced as 'hung', and many of the Chinese thankful sayings have pronunciation beginning with 'hung' too, such as *hung wen dong tou* (鴻運當頭), *hung fu xi tin* (鴻福齊天). Therefore, to bless for luck for the Olympics event in 2008, the red colour is widely used to associate with luck, joy and cheers. In addition, red also means 'energetic', 'getting motivated' and 'improvement'. This is the connotative meaning of colour which many people are agreed on. Being energetic and motivated, and striving to improve are key elements bringing to the success of an athlete in the Olympics game. Therefore, the logo design is 'good' because it could show the aspiration of the Chinese in hope of luck and joy, while it can also shows what the athlete wants- energy, motivation and improvement.

The Stamp Design of the Logo

The Olympics logo is shaped like a Chinese stamp. In the Chinese society, documents that are stamped are associated with great importance. When we have reached an

agreement towards a statement, we confirm or approve the statement by “chopping” the stamp on the piece of paper to make the statement immediately become into effect (印鑑). The same situation is applied here. The stamped design represents an agreement has been reached. The agreement, of course, is that the Olympics Game in 2008 will be held in Beijing, China.

From above, it is obvious that the logo for the Beijing 2008 Olympics creates a good impression on people. It arouses our awareness and generates our positive responses. However, there are defects in the logo design. It is obvious that there are too many elements related to the Chinese culture in the logo design, while the main theme, the Olympics event, is not remarkably signified in the logo. For example, the colours of the Olympics rings (red, yellow, blue, green and black) are not used in the logo. It is not doubtful that such a logo could also be adopted in other occasions besides the Olympics game as well. For example, a Chinese Restaurant in Hong Kong may also have a similar logo with a red background colour and the word ‘*jing*’ meaning it serves Beijing food.

Somehow, elements related to sports and aspirations are being neglected in the logo. Though patriotism could be hastened through the logo, the Olympics logo should not contain too many colours on politics. It should not have the message of telling one ‘to

love the country' and 'to admire the country'. Perhaps the use of a more variety of colours could reduce such a defect in the logo design.

The Beijing 2008 Olympics Logo has touched the theme of aspiration, motivation and dedication. These elements are important in paving to the success of an athlete. On the other hand, many features have been found in the logo related to the Chinese culture and philosophy. With all the design elements being interwoven, East meets West and West meets East will be achieved because all these design elements conceptualise cultural understandings and intercultural communication.