

Rediscovery of Autonomy
The History of Contemporary Chinese Graphic Design
in the Context of Globalisation

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This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yun Wang". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Yun Wang

Abstract

This thesis explores the experience and role of Chinese graphic designers in developing graphic design in China as a profession and discipline through design work, publishing and education. The focus is on practice in Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen as industry centres from the 1980s, after China began to implement the reform and opening up policy, to 2010. The thesis pays particular attention to the ways in which designers in China intersected with international networks, and to the specificity of each location. It analyses the impact of these intersections on practice and self-positioning, from graphic design resources from the West exclusively provided to in-house designers from state owned packaging companies in Guangzhou in the 1980s to academically-trained graphic designers' more active involvement in international design communities in the 2000s. Chapters discuss changes in graphic design practice and education, as well as the impact of international exchange and experimental exploration on Chinese graphic designers' practice, with a particular emphasis on book design, posters, packaging and print advertisements as the categories of graphic design most addressed in China in this period.

The thesis situates changing conditions, interests and concerns amongst graphic design practitioners, educators and students in China within broader cultural, economic and social trends and conditions. It maps how economic growth and urbanisation in China after the implementation of the reform and opening up policy in 1978 had a direct impact on graphic design practice and education in China, as did China's decision in 2001 to abandon economic isolation in favour of deep engagement with the world market through membership in the WTO. Similarly, it links shifting emphases in the graphic design community to the introduction of policies on cultural construction reflecting the government's desire to build institutional confidence through cultural self-confidence, throughout the period.

The research is based on extensive primary research collected through interviews and questionnaires with over 50 designers and other stakeholders, as well as through archival research into graphic work, design journals, exhibition catalogues and personal and institutional archives.

Key analytic methods include global design history (Adamson, Riello and Teasley), "practice orientation" (Kimbell) and artefact analysis; the thesis also aligns itself with other recent scholarship on post-1978 China in international networks. An emphasis on objects as constituting practices allows the thesis to articulate and analyse the complicated relationship between the graphic design object and its social environment, technology, local tradition and international networks.

Ultimately, the thesis aims to offer a self-reflective critical history of the impact of internal change and international networking on graphic design practice and communities in China since 1980. As such, it also offers a model of critical research within the context of Chinese design history.

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Note on Transliteration and Translation

The thesis follows the standard in *A History of Graphic Design* (Beijing: China Youth Publishing House, 2018) (《世界平面设计史》, 北京: 中国青年出版社, 2018) by professor Wang Shouzhi (王受之), Art Center College of Design, for all the translation of graphic design terminology such as “graphic design” (平面设计) and “decorative design” (装潢设计).

All translation from Chinese is my own.

List of Accompanying Material

- 1) Confirmation of ethical approval
- 2) Survey Information Sheet and Interview Consent Form

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I. Introduction: Journey to the West

In 1978, the Communist Party of China made major decisions resulting in what was known as “reform and opening up”, perhaps the most significant turning point in recent Chinese history. After 1978, rapid expansion in China’s relative economic size became the norm. From 1978 to 2010, China’s GDP increased from 149.5 billion USD to 6.101 trillion USD.¹ Compared to neighbouring countries, Chinese output in this period grew from 37.5 percent of Japan’s 1978 figure to 219.2 percent of Japan’s 2004 GDP.² Chinese per capita income doubled in size relative to that of Korea and achieved even faster growth relative to those of India and Japan.³ In 2001, China officially became a member of the WTO and the government abandoned a policy of economic isolation in favour of active engagement with world markets. The implementation of the reform and opening up policy also contributed greatly to increasing urbanisation in China, while at the same time significant changes also took place in the fields of literature and music with the introduction of Western culture.

In this context, graphic design practitioners in China experienced a tremendous transformation in their experience and environment, from operating in a comparatively isolated circle in which graphic design learning resources from the West were provided exclusively to in-house designers in state-owned packaging companies to active involvement in international design communities. The thesis explores the experience and role of Chinese graphic designers in developing graphic design in China as a profession and discipline during this period through design work, publishing and education. The focus is on practice in Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen as centres of industry from the 1980s onwards, after China began to implement the policy of reform and opening up, to 2010 when Wen Jiabao (温家宝), the then prime minister of China emphasised the further development of industrial design in his annual governmental report.⁴ Chapters discuss changes in graphic design practice and education, the impact of international exchange and experimental exploration on Chinese graphic designers through the analysis of the transformation of book, poster and packaging design, as well as print advertising, the areas that have experienced rapid development in China. The thesis is based on research combining various factors that contributed to this situation. These include, for example, the long-term evolve-

¹ ‘China GDP’, in *The World Bank Data* <<https://data.worldbank.org/country/china>> [accessed 21 August 2019]

² Loren Brandt and Thomas G. Rawski, “China’s Great Economic Transformation”, in *China’s Great Economic Transformation*, ed. by Loren Brandt and Thomas G. Rawski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 1-26 (p. 1).

³ *Ibid.* (p. 2).

⁴ Wen Jiabao, ‘Wen Jiabao’s Government Report (The Third Session of the Eleventh National People’s Congress)’, in *www.GOV.cn* <http://www.gov.cn/2010lh/content_1555767.htm> [accessed 22 August 2019] (温家宝, 《温家宝所作政府工作报告 (十一届人大三次会议)》, 刊载于中国政府网)

ment of government's economic and cultural policy, the changing social environment with the deepening of reform and opening up, the trajectory of key figures who played central roles in the events, as well as the transformation of the positioning of international design organisations.

For me, an individual born in China in the 1980s who went to university in Beijing in 1998, those changes brought by the reform and opening up are not just abstract increasing statistics but an exciting real-life experience involving huge transformations that I could feel and sense in my daily life. It covered nearly all aspects of life, including clothing, food, housing and transportation. I mention this here because personal experience is integral to how the research unfolded, and to the narrative, analysis and perspectives presented in this thesis. I will discuss positionality, personal experience and how I have sought to incorporate and interrogate this throughout the process of the PhD, critically in the section on methodology, below; here, I offer personal experience as a way to introduce the period, the transformations that occurred during the period and the importance of the lived experience of this transformation for the history I offer in this thesis. One night in August 1998, my parents and I boarded a train from my hometown, Hangzhou, to Beijing. I was overwhelmed by mixed feelings of excitement and curiosity. On the one hand, it was a journey of leaving home to go to university in the cultural centre of China; on the other hand, I was excited about the experience brought by the trip itself. We were on the newly introduced T32 train. Before this, there had been no direct train from Hangzhou to Beijing. Usually we would take the K46, the train from Fuzhou to Beijing, and the whole trip took twenty-six hours. In comparison, it only took sixteen hours to travel from Hangzhou to Beijing on the T32. The sixteen-hour travelling time meant we would board the train at night and arrive in Beijing the next morning when we woke up. Furthermore, it was a brand-new train, on which the train attendants in their new uniforms were full of enthusiasm. For me, the T32 seemed to signify a much faster and more modern life. The following summer, in 1999, when the semester was nearly over and I was preparing to go home for summer vacation, I received a phone call from my father. As a typical Chinese parent who always tries to provide their child with "the most up-to-date and best" possible things, and as a member of the urban middle class whose income and position afforded the possibility of accessing at least some of these new things, my father arranged a flight for me. It was hard to describe my feelings, experiencing the speeding-up of the journey in such a short space of time, which had a profound impact on my vision and understanding of distance. I was not the only one overwhelmed by the acceleration. This was the period during which cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen were undergoing dramatic transformation as a result of the Chinese government's addressing of

internal economic policy demands by means of vigorous infrastructure and urban development from 1997 onwards.⁵

Transformation was also taking place at the level of thinking. In 1998, I was accepted by the Art History Department of the Central Academy of Arts & Crafts (中央工艺美术学院), one of the leading art and design schools in China. The school later became The Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University (清华大学美术学院) in 1999, my second year of studies when it was merged into Tsinghua University with the revocation of the Ministry of Light Industry as the school's governing body. Meanwhile, the other seven schools under the former Ministry of Light Industry located in different regions were facing a similar situation of either becoming institutions under the management of local government or being subsumed into the wider university institution.⁶ This merging and the change in the schools' names became a hot topic in art schools in China at the time due to the fact that this actually marked the transformation of the trajectory of Chinese design due to changes in national demand. The reason for the establishment of these colleges in the 1950s was that the country needed to address the issue of the decoration and packaging of glassware, enamelware, ceramics and plastics to make these products more competitive in the international market to stimulate foreign trade, while at the same time meeting domestic demand.⁷ By the end of the 1990s, the national demand for design had

⁵ For the transformation brought to the Chinese cities by urbanisation, see Huang Du, 'The Implosion of Urbanization in China: Architecture, Art, Visual Culture', in *China Contemporary*, by Linda Vlassenrood, Jaap Guldemond, Huang Du, Christine de Baan (Rotterdam: NAI Uitgevers), pp. 70-75 (p. 70); for the transformation in Dashila area, Beijing, see **Harriet Evans**, 'Neglect of a Neighbourhood: Oral Accounts of Life in 'Old Beijing' since the Eve of the People's Republic', in *Cambridge University Press* <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/EA3C711EC08F3BA3A2D8AB7252EC6735/S096392681300076Xa.pdf/neglect_of_a_neighbourhood_oral_account-s_of_life_in_old_beijing_since_the_eve_of_the_peoples_republic.pdf> [accessed 19 August 2019]

⁶ Tian Jun and Zhou Zhi, 'Interview with Wang Mingzhi: Inheritance, Integration and Transcendence', *Zhuangshi*, 5 (2019), 26-29 (p. 28) (田君、周志, 《王明旨专访: 传承、融合与超越》, 刊载于《装饰》, 2019, 第28页); These seven schools are Wuxi Institute of Light Industry (无锡轻工业学院) (currently Jiangnan University (江南大学)), Northwest Institute of Light Industry (西北轻工业学院) (currently Shaanxi University of Science and Technology (陕西科技大学)), Hebei Institute of Light Industry (河北轻工业学院) (currently Tianjin University of Science & Technology (天津科技大学)), Beijing Institute of Light Industry (北京轻工业学院) (currently Beijing Technology and Business University (北京工商大学)), Dalian Institute of Light Industry (大连轻工业学院) (currently Dalian Polytechnic University (大连工业大学)), Zhengzhou Institute of Light Industry (郑州轻工业学院) (currently Zhongyuan University of Technology (中原工学院)), Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute (景德镇陶瓷学院) (currently Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute (景德镇陶瓷大学))

⁷ Zhang Ming, 'Interview with Guo Weimin: Design Education at Jiangnan University', *Zhuangshi*, 5 (2019), 45-49 (p. 45) (张明, 《过伟敏专访: 江南大学的设计教育》, 刊载于《装饰》, 2019, 第45页)

changed, shifting to the need for train and subway design.⁸

The institutional merging brought about by the economic transformation was followed by a reform in education. From late 1998, the credit system, as well as the course selection system, was applied in my school with aim of encouraging different departments and students to become more competitive.⁹ Instead of following the unified fixed curriculum, at this point many of my classmates were suddenly thrown into fierce competition, fighting for places on the popular courses, such as computer design. In the Art History Department, we spent much time learning and remembering the definition of crafts (工艺美术) and design (设计), trying to draw a clear line between these two concepts. Unlike most of the other universities in the Haidian district which were near the ancient royal gardens such as the Summer Palace (颐和园) and Yuanming Yuan (圆明园), our campus was inside Beijing's Central Business District and the Third Ring road.¹⁰ At that time, the first phase of The Chinese World Trade Centre (国贸) had already been completed and we were encouraged to visit the stores of international brands there and pay attention to shop window design, because, as a professor from the Art History Department explained, the application of new technology and material always came first in places with great material abundance.

In 2000s, the changes in the surrounding environment of Beijing had become obvious and difficult to ignore. After China joined the WTO and successfully won the bid to hold the 2008 Olympic Games, the Chinese construction industry entered a new period of development. From 1999 to 2000, China's GDP showed sustained growth.¹¹ International architects began to participate in projects in China.¹² Various media had brought public attention to these buildings and their international architects through focused introductions and reports. During this period, I combined my studies with work as a part-time journalist on *Trends Home* (《时尚家居》),

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Tian Jun and Zhou Zhi, 'Interview with Wang Mingzhi: Inheritance, Integration and Transcendence', *Zhuangshi*, 5 (2019), 26-29 (p. 28) (田君、周志, 《王明旨专访: 传承、融合与超越》, 刊载于《装饰》, 2019, 第40页)

¹⁰ As to the discussion about geographical location of art college in Beijing, see Lily Chumley, *Creativity class: Art school and culture work in postsocialist China* (Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 24, 26, 27.

¹¹ 'GDP Growth: World Bank National Accounts Data, and OECD National Accounts Data Files', in *The World Bank* <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=CN>> [accessed 8 August 2019]

¹² *Designed for China: An Interview with International Architects*, ed., by Yang Dongjiang, Fang Xiaofeng, Liang Wen and Li Dongmei (Beijing: China Architecture and Building Press, 2010), p. 318 (杨冬江、方晓风、梁雯著, 李冬梅编, 《为中国而设计: 建筑大师访谈录》, 中国建筑工业出版社, 2010, 第318页)

the commercial design magazine with the highest circulation figures in China. In this role, I had the opportunity to interview architects and product designers with an international reputation who came to China to conduct expensive projects usually connected with property development, such as Philippe Starck's interior design for Lan Club (兰会所), which was filled with classic product designs from the history of modern design in Beijing, Frank Gehry's cooperation with Swire Properties for Opus Hong Kong (傲璇), and Erdos 100, a project organised by Ai Weiwei, who invited a hundred international architects with the plan of building a hundred buildings in Erdos. The interviews turned out to be challenging, because I realised there was an urgent need to build up new mode of thinking, with a new vocabulary that was different from those I had learned in school. To fulfil the task, I would spend weeks sitting in front of my computer, carefully watching interviews with these designers conducted by international journalists, as well as reading relevant materials. Their architectural projects in China brought not only a new lifestyle associated with the buildings, and a striking new visual language, but also their design concepts. In addition to design projects for commercial purposes, at that point there were also a large number of architectural projects focusing on the national image. Sometimes, these designs would lead to discussions, and even cause fierce controversy. A typical example was the China National Centre for the Performing Arts (中国国家大剧院) designed by French architect Paul Andreu, whose work was criticised for "ignoring Chinese traditional culture, [being] inconsistent with the buildings around Tiananmen Square, and violating the basic laws of architecture".¹³ With the advancement of the project, the public became aware of these related discussions involving professional knowledge. The media coverage of these debates furthered general discussion on architecture and design, as well as cultural heritage, beyond professional circles, making it a hot topic in society and one which attracted public concern.¹⁴

Completed by international designers, these national or privately funded projects seem to have offered a kind of contemporary design textbook for ordinary Chinese people who suddenly gained the right to speak on the issue. During that period, every time I took public transport and passed these buildings, I would always feel thrilled to overhear ordinary Beijing citizens evaluating and discussing them. The nicknames they gave to these buildings, integrating the architecture's external features with their daily life experience were widely used in various media. For example, the National Stadium, designed by the Swiss architectural practice Herzog and de Meuron, was known as the Bird's Nest (鸟巢) due to the form of its steel frame structure. As a student majoring in history of art and design, as well as a fledgling design journalist, I was sensitive to this phenomenon and there were questions forming in my mind. How would my re-

¹³ Du Ping, 'National Grand Theatre and Traditional Baggage', in *China Report Weekly* <<https://www.china-week.com/html/370.htm>> [accessed 26 April 2019] (杜平, 《国家大剧院与传统的包袱》, 中国报道周刊)

¹⁴ Isabel Hilton, 'They're all domed', in *Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/nov/16/china.dome>> [accessed 21 August 2019]

search subject become a topic of interest to them? Did this present the localisation of international design? Did this represent attention to design field from the whole of society? Did this reflect the changes the design discipline was undergoing? Why were these changes taking place? Were we, the design historians going to play a more important role? These are some of the core questions that prompted this PhD research.

Additional questions were prompted by my work in the early 2000s, when significant changes were taking place in the graphic design field in China, represented by a number of large-scale international exchanges organised by Tsinghua and CAFA (Central Academy of Fine Arts).

In the 2000s, there were more and more international exchanges taking place in the graphic design field in China. At that point, China officially became a member of the WTO. Chinese companies and brands were engaged with the international market, which provided Chinese designers with an international platform.¹⁵ At the same time, Chinese designers also confronted competition from the international designers entering the Chinese market.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the concept of "advanced culture" (先进文化) and people-oriented "harmonious culture" (以人为本的“和谐文化”) was raised in the 2002 report of the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and in the "Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Several Major Issues Concerning the Construction of a Harmonious Socialist Society" adopted at the Sixth Plenary Session of the 16th CPC Central Committee in 2006.¹⁷

Under such circumstances, some leading art and design schools, especially those located in Beijing such as The Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University and the Central Academy of Fine Arts took the lead in organising large-scale international exchange activities. With frequent international exchanges throughout the design field, design students or graduates with language skills had many opportunities to work on the organisation or in the translation teams of various exhibitions or seminars. In 2003, as a MA student, I was invited to join in the AGI (Alliance Graphique Internationale) COC (China Organisation Committee) set up in the Art and Science Research Office at the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, to work for the 2004 AGI

¹⁵ Ma Yu, ed., *China WTO Report 2003* (Economic Daily Press), p. 333 (马宇主编, 《中国WTO报告·2003》, 经济日报出版社, 第333页)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁷ On "advanced culture", see Hu Jintao, *Marching Along the Path of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Striving for Establishing A well-off Society* (People's Publishing House, 2012), p. 27 (胡锦涛, 《坚定不移沿着中国特色社会主义道路前进, 为全面建成小康社会而奋斗》, 人民出版社, 2012, 第27页); On "harmonious culture", see *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Several Major Issues Concerning the Construction of a Harmonious Socialist Society* (People's Publishing House, 2006), p. 6 (《中共中央关于构建社会主义和谐社会若干重大问题的决定》, 人民出版社, 2006, 第6页)

Beijing Congress, the organisation's first congress in China. With no previous experience of working for AGI, every aspect of our work, such as how to draft a reminder for potential international participants was conducted under the guidance of Yu Bingnan (余秉楠), the chairman of the AGI COC, a professor from the Graphic Design Department at Tsinghua University and the first ethnic Chinese member of the AGI. During the week when the congress was taking place, 21-25 September 2004, I met around fifty internationally renowned graphic designers: for many of them, this was their first trip to China. Meanwhile, I also saw many Chinese graphic designers traveling to Beijing for the event from different parts of China, and I was impressed by their excitement about participating in the lectures delivered by the international AGI members, as well as their desire for communication. The farewell dinner took place at the Commune by the Great Wall (长城脚下的公社), an architecture project created by twelve well-known Asian architects located in the valley at the foot of the Great Wall, followed by a party when all the participants danced together to celebrate the success of the Congress. The atmosphere at the time was so harmonious and friendly that it made me feel as if this was a chance for communication between people who had been old friends for many years.¹⁸

Years later, I joined the team preparing for the 2009 ICOGRADA (International Council of Graphic Design Association) Beijing Congress as the project coordinator for AIGA China. I was also travelling between Chengdu, Beijing and Shenzhen to work for Social Energy, a series of events including exhibitions and seminars to introduce Dutch design and to discuss the design phenomenon in contemporary Chinese context, as well as other interview tasks connected with the local practice of international architects and industry designers for *Trends Home* and the Chinese edition of *Vogue*. Gradually the excitement about gaining information and updating my knowledge was replaced with an uneasiness and confusion. This was especially evident after a business trip to Guangzhou arranged by *Vogue* to interview Zaha Hadid in her newly designed Guangzhou Opera House (广州大剧院). Walking out of the opera house, standing in the middle of Huacheng Square (花城广场), I was surrounded by groups of buildings created by international architects, including Canton Tower (广州塔), by Dutch architects Barbara Kuit and Mark Hemel, as well as Guangzhou International Finance Centre (广州国际金融中心), by WilkinsonEyre. Each individual building was new and gigantic. When juxtaposed, however, they gave me the surreal feeling of being in a huge laboratory. This made me rethink the knowledge I had enthusiastically accumulated in design circles for years — they were delicate fragments floating in my brain, just like those buildings scattered around the Huacheng Square. Why had I been so keen to amass this knowledge? What was it leading to? What was behind all this excitement? Could I search for something deeper behind these phenomena? It was not easy to find answers to these questions because I was surrounded by “practical” people who were

¹⁸ On “Commune by the Great Wall”, see ‘Hotel Concept’, in *Commune by the Great Wall* <<https://commune.sohochina.com>> [accessed 21 August 2019]

enthusiastically busy “doing things”, planning or organising new international activities, setting up new building, creating new products, and producing new articles or publishing plans. The reason I chose the word “produce” is because most of the articles or publications about this period were an instant response to what had happened. Take, for example, the numerous catalogues published to accompany all kinds of exhibitions and seminars, with the main aim of promoting the new projects.

The idea of searching for the depth and inner logic of this scattered information and trying to make sense of it prompted by the uncomfortable experience at Huacheng Square turned out to be a critical moment for me to rethink my future plans in the design field. Drawing on the discovery that the amount of information I collected does not mean that my understanding about the subject is deeper, I realised the need to undertake systematic training in contemporary design research and develop a research methodology, through which I could organise the existing materials, and as a result, find the *raison d'être* of these materials for further analysis and reflection. In doing so, I could try to search for the reason or the “missing part” that was causing my uneasiness.

1. Research Questions

As this short, personal experience-based history of how changes in China impacted on the graphic design profession in the 1990s and 2000s shows, the opportunities for international exchange in China in graphic design in recent decades have been the result of the long-term effects of a multitude of factors. Take for example, the impact of China's economic development, the Chinese government's cultural policy, the intention of the initiators and the local institutions hosting the events, as well as the expectations and involvement of the international design organisations. Questions in my mind about their relationship to design practitioners' work and identity led to this thesis, and to the following research questions: How was international exchange carried out in different historical periods, and what was the influence of this exchange? Was the awareness of, and emphasis on, Chineseness equivalent to the embodiment of autonomy in contemporary Chinese graphic design? What was the role of external factors, such as government policy and social environment, in the development of Chinese graphic designers' professional skills and their understanding of graphic design? What was the main challenge the Chinese graphic design practitioners had to confront? How did they tackle these challenges with their own methods, and what was the impact of the specific approach they chose on their future development?

By pursuing these questions about both the wider historical context, such as the overall social environment and government policy, and those directly related to the graphic design profession, such as influential international exchanges, as well as the personal trajectory of key figures

within this environment and set of interactions, the thesis aims to demonstrate the various complicated reasons for the way in which graphic design developed in China.

2. Academic Context: Literature Review and Research Methods

While this thesis aims to offer the first critical, carefully-researched history of graphic design in contemporary China within the context of global networks, it is not the first representation of the history of graphic design in the country during this period. Some of the earlier representation and analysis of graphic design in contemporary China happened in the form of exhibitions. In 1992, the exhibition *Graphic Design in China* (平面设计在中国) organised by a group of graphic designers based in Shenzhen and Guangzhou represented by Wang Yuefei (王粤飞) and Wang Xu (王序), took the initiative in defining the concept of graphic design (平面设计) publicly to clarify the confusion between graphic design, crafts and art: there were many different terms for this field, such as “decorative art” (装璜美术), “practical art” (实用美术) and “commercial art” (商业美术), a challenging situation they had to tackle in their daily practice.

There are very few scholarly publications on contemporary Chinese graphic design: examples are, *Documentary of the 20th Century Chinese Graphic Design* (《20世纪中国平面设计文献集》) edited by Xu Ping (许平), a collection of essays discussing significant aspects of the history of graphic design in China in the 20th century in chronological order; *Research on Contemporary Chinese Graphic Design* (《中国当代平面设计研究》) by Shi Chenxu (石晨旭), Zhu Shuai (祝帅) and Xie Xin (谢欣) covers the period from 1992 to 2018 with a focus on the development of graphic design in Shenzhen, and there is *A Study on Graphic Design Industry in China* (《中国平面设计产业研究》) by Shi Chenxu and Zhu Shuai. Publications by contemporary Chinese graphic design practitioners, such as the *Tao of Book Design* (《书艺问道: 吕敬人书籍设计说》) by Lu Jingren (吕敬人), *An Inspiration from Tibet* (《来自西方的灵感》) and *An Important Moment* (《一个重要时刻》) by Wang Yuefei (王粤飞), *Meishuzi* (《美术字》) by Yu Bingnan recorded the design practices of these designers, and there are important sources for my research. Books and articles about policy and the political background, published mainly by the official Chinese press, include *The Sino-foreign Joint Venture Enterprise Law* and “The Development of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone from 1987 to 1994”. The political and economic factors that had a profound impact on the development of graphic design in China were revealed through an understanding of these key policies and regulations promulgated by the Chinese government from the time of reform and opening up. In addition, the text relating to contemporary Chinese graphic design can also be found two further publications on contemporary Chinese design: “Shenzhen: Frontier City” by Zhang Hongxing in

China Design Now (edited by Zhang Hongxing and Lauren Parker), an exploration of the impact of economic expansion on design in China, discussing the design phenomenon in Shenzhen in particular. There are brief introductions to products and packaging design in the 1960s and 1970s in *Made in Shanghai* (edited by Yu Shen and Shaonong Wei), in the context of the industrial manufacturing history of Shanghai from the 1920s to 2018. *China's Design Revolution* by Lorraine Justice describes the evolution of Chinese design in a post-Mao China.

These publications attempt to construct a framework for Chinese contemporary design history research. Among them, *Research on Contemporary Chinese Graphic Design* specifically mentions the importance of design research methodology and design criticism.¹⁹ These topics are also addressed in *A Study on Graphic Design Industry in China*, in which the author emphasises the speciality of the design industry research method, as well as the significant importance of paying attention to the area for academic circles in mainland China.²⁰ This was the approach to the situation of Chinese design research in mainland China based on the study of research methods applied in design colleges in Europe, and the United States, as well as in Hong Kong and Taiwan.²¹

Publications covering the period from 1992 to 2018, however, could not avoid some of the universal problems in design history writing and research in China. Take for example, *Research on Contemporary Chinese Graphic Design*. Although its title presents it as research on Chinese graphic design, the main emphasis of the book is on Shenzhen, even though the development of Chinese graphic design actually presented many diverse trends. This exemplifies the issue of needing to keep a distance from research objects and research materials. The reasons for this kind of problem are complicated. In addition to the limited time allowed for the authors to thoroughly process the research materials, it also reflected a widespread attitude of avoiding taking time to think deeply. In a fast-moving environment, most researchers within an academic institution face pressure to publish a certain number of papers, and more attention tends to be paid to indicators that can be directly quantified by the system, such as the quantity and length of publications, rather than relatively invisible factors, such as the quality of publications. Meanwhile, this also reflected the fragmented situation and utilitarian attitude in the field of design research in China. It is often a challenge for authors working in certain institutions to eliminate the influence of their institutions. It is also unusual, and not easy, to get proper research materials from “rival” institutions or cities. In addition to the above reasons, general social pressure within academia and the design industry to avoid critical thinking and writing also negatively

¹⁹ Shi Chenxu, Zhu Shuai, and Xie Xin, *Research on Contemporary Chinese Graphic Design* (Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2019), pp. 6-15 (石晨旭、祝帅、谢欣, 《中国当代平面设计研究》, 清华大学出版社, 2019, 第6-15页)

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 120.

²¹ *Ibid.*

impacts on scholars' ability to write questioning, critical histories of the graphic design discipline and community, and of its broader context. Academic criticism is often considered to be an attack on individuals instead of a method to improve the discipline. Therefore, design history writing that pays attention to selective phenomena, avoiding either comparison of its internal logical relationship, or questioning its essence, seems to appropriately reflect the problems inherent in China's graphic design development itself. A lasting and sustainable value seems to be absent. Within network of relationships, and influenced by an academic context which cannot provide systematic training in design history, and where access to publications written by international scholars is still very limited, sometimes researchers are conscious of this deficiency, and sometimes not.

For me, to conduct research on contemporary Chinese graphic design at the RCA in London was based on such concerns. Without the need to represent and present certain organisations within China, I had the freedom to include all the necessary elements in my research. For example, before coming to London, my research had mainly focused on the graphic designers based in Beijing, due to my previous study and work experience. The RCA, as a new academic platform outside China, was very convenient in terms of communicating with designers in other regions. While conducting research, the semi-structured interview approach was applied. Questions targeted at different designers, based on the research methods I had developed at the RCA, were sent to them by emails before I went to China to visit them in their specific working environment. The conversations with designers in their studios were followed up by WeChat and phone calls after I was back in London. The long-term relationship I developed with the interviewee provided a solid foundation for my in-depth understanding of their design practice, as well as the thinking behind it.

What is more, the opportunity to be exposed to publications by international researchers recommended in tutorial meetings and course studies, as well as participation in international seminars, helped to build up an awareness that transcends local ideology. The learning experience at the RCA helped me to develop a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary Chinese design phenomena. This meant that I started to establish new networks and expanded my research to a broader area, including Shenzhen and Shanghai, which is of vital importance to my research topic. The comprehensive reading required by the programme is not limited to the field of design history; instead it is an interdisciplinary learning experience with an emphasis on material cultural studies putting artefact analysis into the social context of interpersonal and transnational relationships.²² This helps to improve the understanding of design history writing and strengthen critical thinking, as well as to grasp effective methodology that could be applied to my own research. For example, the choice of designers in my research depended on their relevance to the research topic, not personal relationships. The analysis of certain design phenom-

²² Sarah Teasley, Material Histories of Asia course introduction, Royal College of Art, London, 2016.

ena would thus not only reply on a single individual designer's opinion, but also helped to integrate the information provided by designers and design historians from different regions in China, as well as the research from international scholars, together with the visual analysis of contemporary design products.

In this context, my own conceptual framing of the thesis drew heavily on several methods and directions within design history as practised in the UK. First, design history, including local and global aspects of design history. *Global Design History* by Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello and Sarah Teasley and *Designing Worlds: National Design Histories in an Age of Globalization* by Kjetil Fallan and Grace Lees-Maffei provided a new perspective and methodology that is of vital importance for research on the design history of the countries and geographical areas that are not at the centre of the development of modern design, such as China. A recognition of multiple and fragmented conditions, rather than addressing an overarching narrative, is inspiring and instrumental for tackling the complicated issues in the history of contemporary Chinese graphic design and representing them in a reflective way.

The process of reading is a process of gradually understanding and learning the writing and methodology of design history research while at the same time trying to build up the ability to think critically. The thesis also builds on design history methods articulated in scholarly work on other geographical areas and cultures, starting with *Graphic Design Reproduction and Representation since 1800*, a survey of the trends and key issues involved in graphic design over the last 200 years; the main aim in reading this book was to acquire a definition of "graphic design" for my own research, as well as to gain a critical perspective which is not emphasised in Chinese design history education, for example, the relationship of graphic design in the public domain to issues such as gender, class, race and hegemony. "The State of Design History" by Clive Dilnot, an article from the early years of design history's existence as an academic discipline in the UK, provided a description and analysis of the position of design history, that has developed substantially during the past few decades from the perspective of design education, professional awareness, and its more comprehensive functions. In terms of graphic design and national identity, *Nationalism and Internationalism: Design in the 20th Century* by Jeremy Aynsley attempted to inspire speculations about materiality, nationalism and internationalism. Through an in-depth review and analysis of national traditions, the relationship between nations, the identity of their industries and the forms of marketing and propaganda that project national identity is clarified for a better understanding of the position of national design in an international context.

Second, conducting the PhD within an art and design research environment also allowed me to incorporate design research methods into my methodology. "Rethinking Design Thinking" by Lucy Kimbell analyses the transformation in the design field by introducing the origin of "design thinking" as a concept, as well as its identification of three different stages of development,

including, first, design thinking as a cognitive approach in the 1980s, followed by the second stage when design thinking became a general theory of design in the early 1990s and finally when design thinking became an organisational resource in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, the article also discussed the contributions of practice orientation as an approach, clarifying that this approach sees design as a situated, local accomplishment instead of dualisms between subject and object, nature and culture, and body and mind. In addition, the contributions of practice orientation are also represented as an emphasis on objects as involved in constituting practices.²³ Instead of simply being the things created by designers or consumed by people, the objects and materials in this context become the elements that are crucial to the unfolding of practice, through which a richer and more nuanced understanding of what happens during design activity began. This is a very effective method that is applied in my thesis to disentangle the multiple factors behind the sophisticated design phenomenon in China through visual analysis of the graphic design works. Publications on social responsibility of design and the challenge of design research, such as Victor Margolin's "Design Studies: Tasks and Challenges" and "Healing the World: A Challenge for Designers" have helped to navigate my thinking about design on a much broader and more sophisticated level.

The third influence is the published work on Chinese history since 1980 more generally. Chinese and English publications on Chinese history provided me with different perspectives and materials for research in this area. Some English publications elaborated on topics that are rarely openly addressed in Chinese ones. For example, 'Income Inequality during China's Economic Transition' by Dwayne Benjamin, Loren Brandt, John Giles and Wang Sangui in *China's Great Economic Transformation*, ed. by Loren Brandt and Thomas G. Rawski, and "Can China Address Air Pollution and Climate Change?" by Michael B. McElroy in *The China Questions: Critical Insights into a Rising Power*, ed. by Jennifer Rudolph and Michael Szonyi. Chinese publications, such as "The Development of Export Commodity Packaging in the 1980s" (《80年代出口商品包装的发展》) by Xu Jianguo (许建国), general manager of the China Packaging Import and Export Corporation (中国包装进出口总公司) in 1990, provided the policy and historical background that influenced design practice at the time. Within the scholarship on contemporary China, *Unlikely Partners: Chinese Reformers, Western Economists, and the Making of Global China* by Julian Gewirtz provided a particularly useful perspective, using historical materials and a narrative approach to the history of China's reform and opening up.

The secondary literature review provided a solid foundation of broad knowledge necessary for my research. In particular, by comparing international and Chinese scholars' thinking on, and interpretation of, similar topics, I could obtain a more comprehensive historical view while at

²³ Lucy Kimbell, 'Rethinking Design Thinking: Part I', in CAA <caa.tandfonline.com> [accessed 13 October 2017]

the same time having a different perspective and narrative approach. In addition, the task of reading also provided training in writing, including the knowledge of various formats and approaches to writing for journals, conferences and symposia; the in-depth thinking on the function of essay, as well as footnotes and other forms of citation, glossary and discursive marginal commentary. The comprehensive reading experience is therefore also a training in methodology and ways of thinking, which has been of vital importance for me to become familiar with international academic standards, cultural environments and the evolving contemporary context.

The primary sources for the research came from oral interviews, artefact analysis, original period document archives, records of exhibitions, studios, projects and my own experience. Oral interviews were a key source for the thesis. Interviews also included follow-up interviews conducted through WeChat (微信). WeChat, a free application officially launched by Tencent (腾讯公司) in 2011, a popular contemporary communication method used by people in China was adopted as an effective tool for my research.²⁴ Meanwhile, WeChat moments (微信朋友圈) is used by many Chinese graphic designers as a platform to discuss historical and current design issues, as well as to share information and resources in the area. Therefore, for my research, WeChat was not only an effective and instant communication tool, but also a medium through which the research materials were collected and the concerns of the designers were revealed. Meanwhile, it is important to be aware of the limitation and disadvantage of WeChat, the instant communication tool, as an interview medium. To collect comprehensive and in-depth research materials, it is necessary to establish long-term communication with the interviewee, posing questions from different perspectives in order to be able to repeatedly confirm relevant information to ensure the accuracy of data.

Since September 2016, I have interviewed twenty-five influential graphic designers and design educators in China. Among these, I have established close connections with the key figures in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, for example, Yu Bingnan, Zhao Jian (赵健) and Lu Jingren from the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, Wang Min (王敏) from CAFA, Gu Shipeng (顾传熙) from Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts (上海视觉艺术学院), also the founder of the Shanghai Chuanxi Arts Design Studio (上海传熙艺术设计工作室), Zhao Zuoliang (赵佐良) from Shanghai Jiumu Chuansheng Advertising Co., Ltd. (上海九木传盛广告有限公司), as well as the designers who have made a significant contribution to

²⁴ On the name of the institution that launched WeChat, as well as the time period when WeChat was launched, see Song Ziran, ed., *Chinese New Words and New Language Dictionary (1912-2011)* (Shanghai: Shanghai Dictionary Press, 2014), p. 625 (宋子然主编, 《100年汉语新词新语大辞典(1912年—2011年)》, 上海辞书出版社, 2014, 第625页)

the development of graphic design in Shenzhen, including Chen Shaohua (陈绍华), from C&S BRAND (陈宋品牌设计顾问), Wang Yuefei from W+FITON (王粤飞+非同空间) and Wang Xu (王序) from wx-design (王序设计). These designers provided not only the relevant information from the interview questions, but also images or original examples of their design work for research.

In terms of the methods and skills required to conduct research, there are *Real World Research* by Colin Robson and “Speaking of Memory...” on oral history by Linda Sandino. *Real World Research* provided a comprehensive framework for approaches to conducting research, starting from the initial stage of developing ideas to the evaluation of the research and observation methods, as well as ways of dealing with data. Both of the books were instrumental for my research because technically they provided comprehensive knowledge and a scientific method for conducting research, especially because the first-hand material is of significant importance for my research. As mentioned before, there are very few serious publications taking a reflective thinking approach to record the rapid development of the graphic design in mainland China during this period. The research is mainly based on the first-hand material collected including interviews and questionnaire responses, the personal archives of key figures and the organisations hosting these events, as well as research in design journals and exhibition catalogues from the networks I built through my working experience in this area in the past fifteen years. Due to the importance of my existing professional networks for the thesis, I had to adopt a highly reflexive approach, based on the knowledge and methodology provided in *Real World Research* and “Speaking of Memory...”, such as “Tactics: The Methods of Data Collection” in *Real World Research* to account for and mitigate subjective interpretations arising from my own presence in this field.

As the list of interviewees above suggests, the key figures discussed in the thesis who have had a significant impact on graphic design in China during this period are all male. I did not set out to research male designers’ activities only, nor to interview only men; rather, the thesis reflects the situation as I found it when conducting my research.

Since entering into Chinese graphic design circles in the early 2000s first as a student then as a journalist, event organiser and translator, I realised that male designers had always played a dominant roles in the field of design practice and international exchange activities taking place in China. The lack of female designers’ voices seems to have been accepted. People seemed to acquiesce with the opinion that male designers were more creative and they had advantages in terms of physical fitness, which was suitable for work involving long and irregular working hours, while women’s qualities were defined as meticulousness and patience, suitable for handling client reception and administrative work. When conducting research for the thesis, I visited many design studios and design companies in different regions in China and confronted

the gender bias issue from my perspective as a researcher. The experience seemed to confirm that this kind of “social positioning” still applies. Most of those sitting in front of computers doing design tasks were male. The ones that were responsible for communicating with me to set up meeting dates and providing me with further research materials were female members of the studio. Most of the time, especially in the early stages of research, I felt my role was viewed as a somewhat passive one of collecting historical facts or to promote the design projects of those being interviewed, instead of that of a serious scholar engaging in critical thinking. For example, sometimes the designer would disregard my research questions or try to interfere in my research, asking me not to pay attention to design phenomena in other geographical areas.

The situation was the same in Shenzhen, the city that has been known for its spirit of experimental exploration since the reform and opening up. According to research conducted by Li Tingting (郦亭亭), a female graphic designer, educator and researcher with a special interest in feminism, who had about ten years’ working experience in Shenzhen from 1995 to 2005, there were about 2000-3000 design companies in Shenzhen: the operating model for 85% of these companies was that men were in charge of creative design tasks while women worked as assistants.²⁵ The phenomenon was particularly evident in the design companies run by husbands and wives.²⁶ Consciously or unconsciously, women would stand behind the men, and many talented woman designers would give up their creative jobs and independent thinking for family duties due to the fact that the widely accepted ideal marriage partners were still the binary of the active, successful and productive man, and the gentle, supportive and passive woman.²⁷ From the first Graphic Design in China exhibition in 1992 up to 2010, the Japanese designer Keiko Hirano was the only female jury member.²⁸ A similar situation was also reflected in the membership structure of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association. From its establishment in 1995 to 2010, the successive presidents and board members of the association

²⁵ The information about Li Tingting’s working time period in Shenzhen comes from Li Tingting interview with the author, through WeChat, 6 August 2019; The information about the gender issue in design companies in Shenzhen comes from Li Tingting, “Woman as Designer, as Artists, as Wife, as Mother, as Daughter, and as a Media Creator” (《女性是——设计师、艺术家，也是妻子、母亲和女儿，更可以是媒体创造者》), “Women’s Empowerment through Media” seminar in Shantou University, November 18-19, 2011. The digital file situated in Li Tingting’s personal archive.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ The reason why woman designers would give up their creative job in China comes from Li Tingting interview with the author, through WeChat, 6 August 2019; On the description about the widely accepted “ideal marriage partners”, see Harriet Evans, ‘Gender in modern Chinese culture’, in *Cambridge Companion to Modern Chinese Culture*, ed. by Kam Louie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 68-90 (p. 78).

²⁸ Li Tingting interview with the author, through email, 11 August 2019.

had been male, and among the 120 individual members, there were only five women.²⁹ In most of the cases, women were expected to play “invisible” roles in these kind of events, such as those of secretary, translator or liaison person. When women did not do this, they struggled professionally. For example, the voice of Li Tingting, a female designer and researcher with independent attitude and critical thinking on gender issues, was often ignored, and eventually she had to leave her teaching job at Shantou University and return to her hometown, Hangzhou, for a temporary teaching job. This phenomenon clearly reflects the gender issues in the field of graphic design in China. While doing my research, I became aware of this issue and tried to reflect it in my writing.

Artefact analysis is a second important research method applied in the thesis. For graphic design history, all print sources are clearly useful as records of both the histories they recount in words and image, and the histories they recount through their materiality. *A Breeze in China*, the catalogue for the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress exhibition catalogue, is a complete record of the fifty-three examples of fan designs created by sixteen AGI members. Meanwhile, an analysis of the particular system in the catalogue design (the red and grey square used in the contents) reveals the Chinese participants’ familiarity with international AGI members, the reason for barriers to communication and the expectation of the local organisers of the conference. In addition, the physical form of the research material contributes to in-depth research into printing technology and paper. It also helps to provide an intuitive understanding of the size of the publication and the texture of the printing material.

The multiple aspects that had an influence on graphic design, such as political and economic factors, technical factors and the peculiar trajectory of the individual designers, were revealed through the visual analysis of graphic works, for example posters, packaging and promotional materials, as well as through print publications. In doing so, the objects and materials in this context became the elements that were crucial to the unfolding of practice through which a richer and more nuanced understanding of what happens in design activity began. Artefact analysis is an effective research method for explaining and analysing the complex phenomenon of contemporary Chinese graphic design.

A third source of information came from interviews. Interviews published in publications of the period provided rich resources for the study of the practice and thinking of graphic designers. These journals include China's key academic journals, such as *Zhuangshi* (《装饰》) and *Art Observation* (《美术观察》), academic journals in the field of book design, such as *Book*

²⁹ Li Tingting, “Woman as Designer, as Artists, as Wife, as Mother, as Daughter, and as a Media Creator” (《女性是——设计师、艺术家，也是妻子、母亲和女儿，更可以是媒体创造者》), “Women’s Empowerment through Media” seminar in Shantou University, November 18-19, 2011. The digital file situated in Li Tingting’s personal archive.

Design (《书籍设计》), as well as popular magazines such as *Modern Advertising* (《现代广告》) and *Urban Flux* (《城市空间设计》). “The Combination of the East and West - Interview of professor Yu Bingnan” (《中西融汇——余秉楠教授访谈录》) by Ding Chen published in *Book Design* is a lengthy conversation discussing the professional journey of Yu Bingnan. “What Can the Icoграда Congress Bring to Us? A Conversation with Wang Min, the Dean of CAFA Design School” (《“世界设计大会”带给我们什么? ——王敏访谈》) by Zhu Shuai in *Art Observation* presented Wang Min’s reflection on the 2009 Icoграда Beijing Congress soon after this international exchange took place.

Records of exhibitions, studios and projects were important as historical resources and as materials for visual analysis in my research. For example, through the analysis of an unusual system in the catalogue of the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress exhibition that aimed to help both the Chinese designers and the audience, who were unfamiliar with the majority of the AGI members coming to China and their work, to become familiar with international AGI members while at the same time promoting these AGI members in Chinese design circles, the isolated situation of the Chinese graphic design field and the lack of information in this area was revealed.

Last but not least, my personal experience-based history of how changes in China impacted the graphic design profession in the 1990s and 2000s also plays an important part of the thesis. In the narratives related to personal experiences, as well as the part related to interviews of the designers, the theory and methodology in Linda Finlay’s “Negotiating the Swamp: The Opportunity and Challenge of Reflexivity in Research Practice” was applied. Based on the awareness that “the researcher is a central figure who influences”, the corresponding methods were adopted to transform the subjectivity from a problem to an opportunity.³⁰ Attention was paid to the mutual meaning emerging within the research relationship with a focus on situated and negotiated nature of research encounter,³¹ for example, my own overseas studying experience was used as an effective medium to understand the experience of those graphic designers travelling abroad. Thus, the conversation between the researcher and participants became more mutual. Furthermore, more voices, instead of “one voice” were presented through various ways to collect research materials, such as interviews with different groups of designers from different regions of China, publications by both international and Chinese scholars from the graphic design profession and other disciplines, as well as the collection of records of exhibitions, design studios and projects.

³⁰ Linda Finlay, 'Negotiating the Swamp: The Opportunity and Challenge of Reflexivity in Research Practice', in *SAGA journals* <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/146879410200200205>> [accessed 16 July 2019]

³¹ Ibid.

3. Social, Historical and Political Context

The narrative, based on extensive primary research with an emphasis on objects as constituting practices, allows the thesis to articulate and analyse the complicated relationship between the graphic design object and its social environment, technology, local tradition and international networks. In doing so, the thesis aims to reveal the uneven trajectory of the development of autonomy in contemporary Chinese graphic design in China since 1980 through reflective thinking, while at the same time explaining and analysing the complexity of various kinds of “autonomy”. John Christman, Professor of Philosophy, Pennsylvania State University defines “to be autonomous” as “to be one's own person, to be directed by considerations, desires, conditions, and characteristics that are not simply imposed externally upon one, but are part of what can somehow be considered one's authentic self”.³² By autonomy (自主性), I mean the designer's self-awareness about his or her identity as an individual and/or as part of a culture and nation during the process of the creation of this identity. The thesis discussed how designers' activities were impacted by their autonomy. For example, how the autonomy of the designers of different generations were reflected through their design creation and international design exchanges they organised, as well as how the individual designers' autonomy was evolving in the context of the significant transformation brought by the reform and opening up in China since 1978.

Before reform and opening up, China pursued a strategy of isolationism, and the state control of imagery under Communism after 1948 led to a form of mass propaganda in which posters (xuanchuanhua (宣传画)) played a significant role.³³ The political poster, usually with a “red flag, fist, gun, thick neck and exaggerated stout arm”³⁴ as the main elements, not only dominated public spaces, but also filled the private spaces of ordinary people.³⁵

Although it was difficult for the artists to express their ideas in political posters, the main function of which was propaganda, there was rich diversity of expressive methods in this type of

³² John Christman, ‘Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy’, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/autonomy-moral/>> [accessed 29 Jan 2020]

³³ Jeremy Aynsley, *Nationalism and Internationalism Design in the 20th Century* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1993), p. 159.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

³⁵ Huang Zhicheng, “Transformation from Propaganda Posters to Modern Posters - An Introduction to Chinese Cultural and Commercial Posters since the Reform and Opening Up”, in *Documentary of the 20th Century Chinese Graphic Design*, ed. by Xu Ping (Guilin: Guangxi Fine Art Publishing House, 2012), p. 405 (黄治成, 《从宣传画向现代海报的华丽转身——改革开放以来中国的文化与商业海报概论》, 刊载于《20世纪中国平面设计文献集》, 许平编, (桂林: 广西美术出版社), 第405页)

work, including “Chinese painting, oil painting, prints, murals, sculpture and photography”.³⁶ Meanwhile, a variety of typefaces were used in the creation of political posters, such as Songti (宋体), Heiti (黑体), Songheiti (宋黑体) and Yaoti (姚体).³⁷ The impact of training on the creation of political posters in this period can be seen in the future practices of a number of designers. Lu Jingren, one of the key figures in the thesis, was actively involved in the creation of political posters from 1966 to 1976, when he was sent to the Fine Breeding Production Team at Xuguang Farm within the Heilongjiang Jiu San Agricultural Reclamation Bureau (黑龙江九三农垦局旭光农场良种生产队) in the north-east of China as a “sent-down youth” creating promotional materials to become reeducated.³⁸ After the Cultural Revolution, when he began to work in the China Youth Press in Beijing as an art editor, the skill of combining pictures with typefaces that he had gained while producing a significant number of political posters in Heilongjiang was applied effectively to his new job of designing book covers.³⁹ For example, his ability to create new typefaces based on the content of the book was based on his experience of writing headline slogans.⁴⁰

The rise of contemporary Chinese graphic design began after the reform and opening up, when commercial design activities gained pace. The task of the in-house designers at the Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation (广东省包装进出口公司), such as Wang Yuefei and Wang Xu, was to change the situation in which China’s export commodities were characterised by “first-class quality, second-class price and third-class packaging”.⁴¹ They were trying to transform the unattractive products into something eye-catching on the supermarket shelves because China needed foreign currency exchange and to expand its export market.⁴² With the prosperity of the packaging and advertising industries, as well as the development of printing

³⁶ Zhou Bo, “The Schema and Language of Propaganda Poster in China”, in *Documentary of the 20th Century Chinese Graphic Design*, ed. by Xu, p. 205 (周博, 《中国宣传画的图式与话语》, 刊载于《20世纪中国平面设计文献集》, 许编, 第205页)

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

³⁸ Lu Jingren interview with the author, through email, 16 March 2018.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Lu Jingren interview with the author, through WeChat, 21 Jan 2020.

⁴¹ Yan Fugui, ‘Big Issue in the Little Package: Interview with Xu Weifeng, the Director of the China Packaging Research & Test Centre’, in *CPRTC (China Packaging Research & Test Centre)* <<http://www.packagetest.net/en/newsin1.aspx?cateid=2&cid=7&id=105>> [accessed 21 March 2018] (闫贵福, 《小包装里的大文章——访中国包装科研测试中心主任徐炜峰》, 中国包装科研测试中心网站, 2018)

⁴² Xu Jianguo, “The Development of Export Commodity Packaging in the 1980s”, in *China Packaging*, 3 April 1990, p. 28 (许建国, 《80年代出口商品包装的发展》, 刊载于《中国包装》, 1990, 第4期, 第28页)

technology, graphic design in Shenzhen began to engage with a wider commercial market, which was the prerequisite for Shenzhen to become the centre of graphic design in China in the 1990s.

In Chapter One and Chapter Two, the transformation of the attitude towards international design, as well as the local culture and tradition associated with Wang Xu and Wang Yuefei, the pioneers of contemporary Chinese graphic design, is demonstrated by describing the trajectory of their careers. Educated at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art in the late 1970s, where the training of graphic design skills was inadequate, both Wang Xu and Wang Yuefei were heavily influenced by the images in the international design magazines in the reference room, as well as design samples displayed in the exhibition hall of Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation that were accessible exclusively to the in-house designers. When describing the situation in the 1980s, Wang Xu remarked that “we were surrounded by graphic design but had no awareness about what exactly design was [...] my task was to design export packaging but there were no teaching materials at school. What should I do? Study or not study? Use (these materials) or not? How should I use (them)? These were pressing issues. My method was to learn by copying”.⁴³ Apart from the luxury of learning in the exhibition hall and reference room, there were another two important opportunities for the in-house designers at the packaging design corporation to learn: the presentation delivered by Walter Landor in Hangzhou and Guangzhou in 1979, as well as the United Nations Development Programme, organised and sponsored by the United Nations in 1980.⁴⁴ Openly advocating Westernisation, by which he meant the adoption of Western typographic and graphic design practices and aesthetics, Wang Xu ignored any existing local, national or regional graphic identity or practices because he was overwhelmed by the impact of Western graphics and would apply his understanding of typefaces and branding, as well as his commercial photographic skills, to real projects directly.⁴⁵

Therefore, in the early stage of the development of contemporary Chinese graphic design, in the context of the lack of information caused by the Cultural Revolution, many Chinese graphic designers consciously chose to distance themselves from local culture with the aim of creating packaging design for competition in the market by copying the similar products by international designers. This kind of situation, however, changed after they had further communication with international designers and after they tried to participate in international design competitions, when the skill of pure imitation was no longer an advantage.

It is important to point out that after the 1980s, many Chinese graphic design pioneers such as Wang Xu and Wang Yuefei tried to realise the rapid transformation of Chinese design through the introduction and transplantation of international systems. The influence of international

⁴³ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 28 October 2017.

⁴⁴ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 15 February 2018.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

modern design via Hong Kong began to drive the reform of the design profession in mainland China.⁴⁶ In fact, the influence of the Hong Kong design community on the Mainland can be traced back to 1978, when Hong Kong designers and design educators started to visit the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art for exchanges. Among them was, Wucius Wong (王无邪), the author of *Principles of Two-Dimensional Design* (《平面设计原理》) and *Principles of Three-Dimensional Design* (《立体设计原理》), publications based on the Bauhaus foundation course, which had a profound impact on design education in mainland China at the time.⁴⁷ Many local design students, including Wang Xu, Wang Yuefei and Chen Shaohua, the key figures in the contemporary Chinese graphic design field, were hugely inspired by Wong's publications.

The interaction and communication between the designers from Hong Kong and mainland China in graphic design was further strengthened in the 1980s, when the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong was approaching. In late 1982, with fifteen years to run on the lease for over 90 percent of Hong Kong's total land area, the British and Chinese governments began their talks to provide a blueprint for the future of Hong Kong.⁴⁸

The increasingly frequent interaction between Hong Kong and mainland China was reflected in the trade between the two areas. In 1979, the value of mainland China's re-exports only accounted for the sixth place in Hong Kong's re-export trade values. In 1980, its position suddenly jumped to first.⁴⁹ Preferential conditions for investment in special economic zones at the time attracted a large number of Hong Kong manufacturing companies to invest in Shenzhen.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Jiang Hua, "Independence and collaboration - 30 Years of Pioneer Contemporary Chinese Graphic Design", in *Documentary of the 20th Century Chinese Graphic Design*, ed. by Xu, pp. 421-422 (蒋华, 《独立与协作——当代中国先锋平面设计30年》, 刊载于《20世纪中国平面设计文献集》, 许编, 第421-422页)

⁴⁷ Huang Shaoyi, "The Role of Graphic Design in Hong Kong: 30 Years of Inheritance, Introduction and Interaction in the Development of Chinese Contemporary Design", in *Documentary of the 20th Century Chinese Graphic Design*, ed. by Xu, p. 456 (黄少仪, 《香港平面设计的角色——中国现代设计发展史里的传承、引进与互动30年》, 刊载于《20世纪中国平面设计文献集》, 许编, 第456页)

⁴⁸ Eric Peter Ho (何鸿銓), 'Hong Kong: A Political Transition to 1997', in *The Heritage Foundation* <<https://www.heritage.org/asia/report/hong-kong-political-transition-1997>> [accessed 23 December 2019]

⁴⁹ Fang Ningsheng, 'Economic Integration of Hong Kong and the Mainland in Transition Time', in *China Merchants Group Historical Research* <<http://1872.cmhk.com/ziliaoku/4544.html>> [accessed 16 Jan 2020] (方宁生, 《过渡时期的香港与内地的经济整合》, 刊载于招商局史研究网)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Under such circumstances, Wang Xu was sent to Hong Kong to work for a packaging company within the Yuehai Group (粤海集团包装公司), the local branch of the Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation in 1986. The following year, when GRAFICOM (深圳嘉美设计有限公司) was established in Shenzhen as a joint venture, Wang Yuefei was appointed as chief executive.⁵¹

This turned out to be a turning point in their life and in their design approach. In Hong Kong, Wang Xu had the opportunity to be exposed to international design and began to think reflectively with the help of international designers such as Henry Steiner, an Austrian graphic designer based in Hong Kong, as well as Kohei Sugiura, the Japanese book designer who had travelled there. *Design Exchange*, a magazine introducing international design that was founded by Wang Xu at the time for the purpose of acquiring the professional knowledge which was inadequate in mainland China and to build up international connections, had been an influential publication among Chinese graphic designers. Meanwhile, Wang Yuefei's GRAFICOM had been making a profit since its establishment in the burgeoning market environment in Shenzhen, stimulated by the beneficial policies for the special economic zone where many emerging local companies were starting to pay attention to their image due to the competition. The business opportunities brought by the market competition, as well as the challenges and problems in their design practice due to their insufficient understanding of the design industry, stimulated them to seriously think about establishing professional value for design profession in China, such as introducing the exhibition and competition system they were familiar with through their reading of international design magazines. Shenzhen Graphic Design Association, the first graphic design association in China, was established in 1996, with the New York Art Directors Club as an example, and was an institution which gave a voice to evaluate standards for graphic design, to avoid the existing situation in which design was combined with fine art and crafts at the time.

It was during this process of gradually opening up to the international design field that Wang Xu and Wang Yuefei realised the transformation from viewing design as a purely technical skill for market competition to gaining deeper understanding of its cultural value. They started to try to have their own voice in a creative way, based on an awareness of their cultural identity. This kind of awareness was strengthened when, as a result of the deepening of the reform and opening up, their advantages in obtaining overseas information and market operation diminished.

Compared to those based in mainland China, the graphic designers with overseas study experience confronted the issue of cultural identity while conducting their research in an international environment. Yu Bingnan, who was studying at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig, East Ger-

⁵¹ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 1 March 2018.

many, in 1962, consciously applied Chinese elements to his typeface design to differentiate his work from that of his European classmates. Wang Min, who was selected to digitise the Japanese typeface for Adobe in 1986 understood that the reason why he and his partner for this project were chosen was because of their Asian background, as well as their skill in calligraphy. For both of these designers who were sent abroad by the Ministry of Education, their autonomy was entangled with strong patriotism. They had been active in the international design field with a conscious effort to promote “Chinese design”.

The younger generation of Chinese graphic designers, such as Jiang Hua and He Jun, who were born in the 1970s, are more enthusiastic about actively engaging in the key topics in the international design field. They are not shy about putting forward their opinions. Instead of applying the traditional cultural elements directly, as the older generation of designers had done, the Chinese elements in their work were usually presented in a more abstract way, situated in the contemporary context. This is what they defined as “equal interaction” (平等的交流)⁵² with international designers, as an individual, based on personal daily experience.

In Chapter Three, account of the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress, the 2009 Icoграда Beijing Congress and Social Energy were juxtaposed. These three influential graphic design international exchanges were organised by three generations of Chinese graphic designers, showing their different ways of presenting and positioning themselves at these events. In doing so, the thesis seeks to reframe the scholarly assessments of the autonomy of contemporary Chinese graphic design in previous studies in which the autonomy of Chinese graphic design was simplistically equated with the emphasis on Chineseness in isolated design phenomena, by introducing its complexity presented from systematic research on design practice from various regions in the sophisticated social environment of the period from the 1980s to 2010.

4. Thesis Structure

The thesis starts from the graphic design practice conducted by early practitioners in Guangzhou and Shenzhen, the frontier for China’s reform and opening up in the 1980s. “Early Dawn - International Exchange in the 1980s”, Chapter One discusses the international exchanges taking place in China through the introduction of international design magazines such as *Idea* and *Graphis*, and through training courses and lectures delivered by international graphic designers from Europe, the United States and Japan travelling to China, as well as the way Chinese graphic designers integrated the knowledge they gained into their practice. Meanwhile, it is also about the exchange taking place outside China where overseas Chinese graphic designers received systematic training in Europe, the United States and Japan. The chapter is based on research questions such as “what was the main challenge the early graphic

⁵² Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 12 March, 2019.

designers had to confront in an era when the academic environment could not provide sufficient design education, and when design education was seriously out of step with the needs of the profession?” “What was the role of external factors, such as government policy and the social environment, in the development of their professional skills and the understanding of graphic design?” “What is the relationship between the specific policies, printing technology and the development of Shenzhen, which later became the centre of Chinese graphic design?” “What was the influence of European, US and Japanese graphic designers who travelled to China in the early stages on the development of Chinese graphic design?”

Chapter Two: “‘Graphic Design in China’ - Graphic Design Practice in the 1990s” is about the personal trajectory of three key graphic designers, Chen Shaohua, Wang Yuefei and Wang Xu, with an in-depth analysis of the connection between their practice, personal choices and the wider context of the deepening of the reform and opening up, as well as the establishment of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association in the 1990s. In addition, the chapter analyses the graphic design phenomenon in Shanghai. The main argument of Chapter Two is based on the following research questions: “How and why did these key figures in the Shenzhen graphic design field start their practice as independent graphic designers with the deepening of the reform and opening up?” “What was the role of external factors, such as government policy and social environment in the development of their professional skills and career?” “What was the pattern of graphic design development in Shanghai?” “What was the difference between the graphic design phenomenon in Shenzhen and Shanghai, and what was the reason for this?”

Chapter Three: “‘Social Energy’? - Graphic Design Exploration in the 2000s” discusses the international graphic design exchanges that had a profound influence on the development of contemporary Chinese graphic design, such as the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress, the 2009 Icofrada Beijing Congress and Social Energy, a series of exhibitions and seminars about Dutch graphic design touring in Chengdu, Beijing, Shenzhen and Shanghai from 2008 to 2009. The discussion in the chapter is based on research questions such as “why many large scale international events, such as the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress and the 2009 Icofrada Beijing Congress took place in the 2000s?” “How did these international organisations “land” and function in China?” “Did Social Energy really become a substantial energy that brought change to Chinese society or Chinese graphic design circles?”

The chapters attempt to provide not only a record of important case studies and events taking place in the design field in China but also an exploration of the thinking behind these, trying to identify the real problems and challenges the graphic designers confronted in a fast-changing society, how these designers tackled these problems, and how the external factors, such as government policy and the social environment have shaped and affected the phenomenon of graphic design in China. When discussing and analysing the phenomenon of global interaction, as well as globalism and material culture, that has had a profound influence on Chinese graphic

design, the global design history research approach together with other methods of transnational analysis, are applied, addressing the impact of geographically distant forces on the local and correcting what the editors of *Global Design History* (2011) describe within this context, as “the dominant lopsided representation of the history of design occurring primarily in Western Europe and the United States, particularly in the modern period, by expanding the field of vision to include design as it is practised and consumed around the world”.⁵³ Besides, an emphasis on objects as constituting practices allows the thesis to articulate and analyse the complicated relationship between the graphic design objects and their social environment, technology, local tradition and international networks. With the methods mentioned above and a recognition of multiple and fragmented conditions, rather than an overarching narrative, the thesis tries to tackle the complicated issues in the history of contemporary Chinese graphic design and represent them in a reflective way.

⁵³ Sarah Teasley, Giorgio Riello and Glenn Adamson, ‘Introduction, Towards Global Design History’, in *Global Design History*, ed. by Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello and Sarah Teasley (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 2.

II. Chapter One: Early Dawn—International Exchange in the 1980s

1. Introduction

In the Spring of 1983, a delegation consisting of four representatives from the Chinese cultural field together with their translator were taking a group photo on a pleasure boat in Berlin 'Figure [1]'. All the representatives, including Yu Bingnan, then a faculty member in the Decorative Art Department (装潢美术系) at the Central Academy of Arts & Crafts, as well as the dean of the Academy of Aesthetics (美学研究院) and an official in charge of museum, both from the Ministry of Culture were formally dressed in suits and ties.⁵⁴ Most of them looked serious in front of the camera. They were here for a friendly ten-day trip to visit Belgium and West Germany.⁵⁵ The trip was organised by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China as one of a series of cultural exchanges after the reform and opening up of China.⁵⁶ Their aim was a fact-finding one, visiting universities and other institutions to discuss culture, art, aesthetics and publishing while at the same time demonstrating an open attitude to their interlocutors and others in the outside world.⁵⁷



Figure [1] Group photo of the members of the Chinese delegation on a pleasure boat in Berlin, 1983 (© Yu Bingnan)

For Yu Bingnan, this trip had a special significance because it was his first trip abroad since he had completed his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig, East Germany, in 1962 and after he had experienced long-term cultural isolation due to the Cultural Revolution when he was sent

⁵⁴ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 2 May 2019.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

to Li Village in Xingtai, Hebei province, for reeducation in 1969.⁵⁸ For more than ten years, Yu Bingnan lost the opportunity to conduct research and he was eager to be reconnected with international design circle.

At the same time, in the south of China, the in-house designers from the Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation (广东省包装进出口公司), such as Wang Yuefei and Wang Xu had already started in their practice to change the situation in which China's export commodities had "first-class quality, second-class price and third-class packaging".⁵⁹ They were trying to transform the unattractive products into something eye-catching on the supermarket shelves because China needed foreign currency exchange and to expand its export market.⁶⁰

What Yu Bingnan and those designers in Guangzhou had and were going to experience was a groundbreaking transformation taking place in the Chinese graphic design field. It was evolving from an isolated circle to being fully open to the international design community with the continuous advancement of reform and opening up, a turning point in the contemporary Chinese history.

The chapter examines the experience and practice of the key figures in the graphic design field in China in the 1980s, with special attention paid to the way in which they were influenced by international design, as well as how this kind of influence had an impact on them, including their way of thinking and future career choices. As explained in the introduction, the key figures are the group of graphic designers who played central role in the events of significant meaning in the field of graphic design in China. The designers discussed in the chapter can generally be divided into two groups. The first group includes early practitioners such as Wang Yuefei and Wang Xu who completed their graphic design education through reading international design magazines and participating in the training courses provided exclusively to the in-house designers of the state-owned companies, as well as Chen Shaohua who learned design skills from international design magazines at the library of the Central Academy of Arts & Crafts. The second group are the designers sent abroad for design research by Chinese government, including Yu

⁵⁸ The information about Yu Bingnan's experience of cultural isolation during the Cultural Revolution comes from Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 15 February 2017; The information about the place where Yu Bingnan was sent for reeducation comes from Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 21 February 2018.

⁵⁹ Yan Fugui, 'Big Issue in the Little Package: Interview with Xu Weifeng, the Director of the China Packaging Research & Test Centre', in *CPRTC (China Packaging Research & Test Centre)* <<http://www.packagetest.net/en/newsin1.aspx?cateid=2&cid=7&id=105>> [accessed 21 March 2018] (闫贵福, 《小包装里的大文章——访中国包装科研测试中心主任徐炜峰》, 中国包装科研测试中心网站, 2018)

⁶⁰ Xu Jianguo, "The Development of Export Commodity Packaging in the 1980s", in *China Packaging*, 3 April 1990, p. 28 (许建国, 《80年代出口商品包装的发展》, 刊载于《中国包装》, 1990, 第4期, 第28页)

Bingnan, Wang Min and Lu Jingren. The research on these designers helps to understand how the graphic design field was influenced and shaped by the long-term evolvement of the Chinese government's economic and cultural policy, the changing social environment with the deepening of reform and opening up, and the transformation of international design organisations' positioning.

Drawing on materials that have not received sufficient attention before, for example, packaging design work by Wang Yuefei and Wang Xu in the early and mid-1980s, the chapter describes the impact of international packaging design displayed in the exhibition hall of their company, that was exclusively open to the in-house designers. Meanwhile, the visual analysis of these works shows the advantages in terms of the facilities at Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation in China at that time, for example the equipment for high-quality photography and printing. The further exploration reveals the impact of international designers travelling to China at the time, for example, "United Nations Development Programme"(UNDP) organised and sponsored by United Nations by invitation from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Trade in 1980, as well as the presentation of Walter Landor, a renowned packaging designer and pioneer in the field of branding, in Hangzhou and Guangzhou in 1979.⁶¹ The chapter describes the transformation Yu Bingnan, Wang Min and Lu Jingren underwent while studying abroad with a visual analysis of the design work they created during the period, as well as an in-depth analysis of the combined impact of various factors, for example, their disciplines, the specific environment in which they were conducting research, and the social network around them. The chapter thus offers detailed case studies illustrating a period of pivotal importance to the active phenomenon and the full opening up of the graphic design field in the 1990s and 2000s.

The narrative is significant because it exemplifies the broader political context of the period, introducing the policies that had an impact on the trajectories of these design practitioners and design researchers. Even more important, and specific to this case, the description and analysis of the trajectories of these designers practising or carrying out research in different regions highlights the difference between their knowledge and concept through comparison, providing a foundation for understanding their future development and network building. In doing so, the chapter reveals the elements important for an understanding of the reasons for the development of contemporary Chinese graphic design formation.

This chapter makes several new claims about graphic design in China in the 1980s. First, the early practice of the key figures who made a huge contribution to the development of graphic

⁶¹ The information about the "United Nations Development Programme" comes from Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 15 February 2018; On "Walter Landor", see 'Walter Landor', in *AIGA (The Professional Association for Design)* <<https://www.aiga.org/medalist-walterlandor>> [accessed 13 September 2019]; The information about Walter Landor's presentations in China comes from Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 16 January 2020.

design in Shenzhen in the 1990s, such as Wang Yuefei, Chen Shaohua and Wang Xu, to which inadequate attention has been paid in previous research (Shi Chenxu, Zhu Shuai, Xie Xin, *A Study of Chinese Contemporary Graphic Design* (Tsinghua University Press, 2019) (石晨旭、祝帅、谢欣, 《中国当代平面设计研究》, 清华大学出版社, 2019) is thoroughly analysed. In doing so, both the phenomenon of design in Shenzhen in the 1990s, as well as these designers' practice at that time, are described not from partial and fragmented information, but from systematic analysis in a specific context. Previous research on graphic design in Shenzhen has mainly focused on the first Graphic Design in China exhibition in 1992 ("Interpretation of the 'Southern Phenomenon' of Chinese Design" by Ji Qian 《解读中国设计的“南方现象”》) with barely any research based on the visual analysis of the design works created by the key figures in the 1980s. This chapter uses new sources provided by these designers based on interviews conducted in their studio in Shenzhen and Guangzhou, followed by continuous long-term communication through email and WeChat. Thus, it is not a fragmented description or record of important historical events but a systematic narrative that reveals various potential factors informing the phenomenon of graphic design in Shenzhen.

Second, the chapter seeks to re-examine the historical facts about Chinese graphic design from a different perspective based on previously unstudied materials: for example, the detailed documentation of the creation of the Friendship typeface (友谊体) published in *Movable Type Research Reference* (《印刷活字研究参考资料》) in 1962 as internal information by the Shanghai Printing Institute of Technology (上海印刷技术研究所) situated in Yu Bingnan's personal archive. The chapter describes Yu Bingnan's interaction with Albert Kapr during the process of creating the typeface and demonstrates how this kind of communication had an impact on the final effect of the work, as well as a potential influence on Yu Bingnan's future design attitude. Previous studies of the Friendship typeface (Ding Chen, "The Combination of East and West - Interview with professor Yu Bingnan", *Book Design* (丁辰, 《中西融汇——余秉楠教授访谈录》, 刊载于《书籍设计》)) mainly describes the influence of education, such as the courses Yu Bingnan had taken at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig, as well as the design tools used to create the typeface. The interaction between Yu Bingnan, his supervisor Albert Kapr, and printer Otto Erler from VEB Typoart Dresden who helped him to complete the design task, as well as the impact of the interaction, are not explained in these earlier studies, but are addressed in this chapter.⁶²

⁶² Yu Bingnan, 'How I Designed the "Friendship" Typeface', *Movable Type Research Reference*, 6 (1962), 13-27 (p. 13) (余秉楠, 《我怎样设计“友谊”拼音活字》, 刊载于《印刷活字研究参考资料》, 第6期, 上海印刷技术研究所, 第13页)

There are very few serious scholarly publications that focus on the early careers of this group of designers in the 1980s. The research is mainly based on first-hand material that was collected, including extensive interviews, questionnaires and promotional materials published by these designers at the time, as well as their personal archives. I extensively interviewed the key figures in Shenzhen and Beijing over a period of three years, which is the focus of the discussion in Chapter One. These key figures include the founding members of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association, such as Wang Yuefei at W+FITON (王粤飞+非同空间) and Chen Shaohua at C&S BRAND (陈宋品牌顾问), as well as Wang Xu at wx-design (王序设计), one of the main organisers of the first Graphic Design in China (平面设计在中国) exhibition in 1992. In Beijing, the graphic design educators who had overseas study and/or work experience, and later played a pivotal role in international exchange in the 2000s, including Yu Bingnan, professor at the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, the initiator and main organiser of the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress; Wang Min, former dean of the Design School, Central Academy of Fine Arts (2003-2016), the main organiser of the 2009 Icofrada Beijing Congress; Lu Jingren, professor at the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, art director of Jingren Book Design (敬人设计工作室) are the focus of the research.⁶³ With the deepening of the research, the interviews were followed by frequent long-term communication through email and WeChat when I was back to London after the research trip to China.

Designers' personal archives were an important source for the research. Take for example, 'How Did I Design the "Friendship" Typeface' (《我怎样设计“友谊”拼音活字》) published in *Movable Type Research Reference* by Shanghai Printing Institute of Technology in 1963, mentioned above, from Yu Bingnan's personal archive reveals important details about the creation of this typeface which had been undiscovered in previous scholarly research.

The chapter also refers to many interviews with these designers, as well as articles on designers' and design historians' personal blogs. During a period when there was a very limited understanding of design in Chinese society and when there was very limited formal publication on this area, the online articles and interviews, usually established by those with a strong interest in design, are an important record of the early thinking of the key figures in the Chinese graphic design field. These materials help to construct the context for an understanding of graphic design in China in the 1980s from different perspectives.

Understanding the early stages of the development of Chinese graphic design - for example, the trajectory of the key figures in the 1980s - can offer significant insight into contemporary Chinese graphic design history: for example, Wang Yuefei and Wang Xu's experience as in-

⁶³ The information about Wang Min's tenure at Central Academy of Fine Arts comes from 'Wang Min Resume, before 2012', the document was provided to the author by Wang Min through email on 10 February 2017. The original document is situated in Wang Min's personal archive.

house designers at the Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation, Chen Shaohua's award-winning poster design for the Sixth National Art Exhibition in 1984, as well as his unsuccessful drawing teaching reform at the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, contribute to an understanding of the political background at the time and how the related policies had an impact on graphic design and individual designers. This would help to explain their later practice in Shenzhen in the 1990s that had a fundamental influence on the contemporary Chinese graphic design field. Similarly, the overseas study and work experience of Wang Min and Lu Jingren in the 1980s not only helped them grasp relevant knowledge and skills in design, but also shaped their concepts and vision, which had an important impact on their local practice in the 2000s. The chapter describes the experience of the key figures in the Chinese graphic design field in the 1980s, the various influences of different factors, including Chinese government policy, the international designers or design educators they encountered, and their specific working and educational environment. In doing so, the chapter demonstrates this important stage that had a profound influence on the development of the graphic design industry and international exchange in the 1990s and 2000s.

2. Starting from “Zero” - The Emergence of Graphic Designers in Guangzhou and Shenzhen

Between mid-1970s and the late 1980s, design education in China consisted largely of painting courses and there was confusion between crafts and design. Most of the designers who are around fifty to sixty years old now describe the situation for design students at art school in the 1980s as marginalised.⁶⁴ At that time, Western design magazines started to be available in art school libraries. Chen Shaohua, founding member of Shenzhen Graphic Design Association and designer of the 2008 Beijing Olympics logo mentioned that unable to get enough training in the class, he spent most of his time in school library doing intensive reading on a daily basis.⁶⁵ With no language skills, he was learning through reading and copying images from Western design magazines. Designers had to learn from practice and this process of learning was often a journey of self-exploration that was full of challenges.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 October 2017.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

2.1 “Falling into the ‘Wrong’ Path” to be A Designer

The winner of the Gold Award in the propaganda painting (宣传画) section of the highly anticipated Sixth National Art Exhibition (第六届全国美展) was finally unveiled in 1984.⁶⁷ It turned out to be a surprise in art circles. First of all, the work was not submitted from an



Figure [2] Chen Shaohua, “Green from Your Hand”, poster, 1400 x 700 mm, 1984 (© Chen Shaohua)

area known for its creation of propaganda painting, such as Jiangsu province or Guangdong province, where there were the well-known artists called the “Four Big Tigers” and the “Four Little Tigers”.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it was not even created by an “artist” but by Chen Shaohua, a young faculty member from the Crafts department with a design training background. Last but not least, the subject of the work was not the popular Communist propaganda image represented by highly formalised images of workers, peasants and soldiers, those active in the struggle for social and economic transformation, instead, the main element in this work is a hand, a beautiful gentle female hand, from which tender green leaves are growing from the fingertip, floating in the spring breeze.⁶⁹ In the background, there are miles of green hills and flying tiny delicate butterflies in pinky-blue and pinky-purple. Entitled “Green from Your Hand” [Figure [2]], the poster encourages people to plant trees. At the bottom of the poster, there is the slogan

⁶⁷ On “propaganda painting” (宣传画), see *Chinese Art Encyclopaedia*, ed. by Shao Dazhen (Beijing: People’s Fine Arts Publishing House, 2009), pp. 1768-1769 (《中国美术百科全书》, 邵大箴主编, 北京: 人民美术出版社, 2009, 第1768-1769页); On “The 6th National Art Exhibition” (第六届全国美术作品展览), see “The 6th National Art Exhibition”, in *Artron* <https://12qgmz.artron.net/index/show_news.html?Selected=9&id=628> [accessed 19 March 2019] (《第六届全国美术作品展览》, 刊载于雅昌艺术网)

⁶⁸ Chen Shaohua, ‘Conspiracy’ (Series 1), in *Chen Shaohua blog* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a4473a8010006ee.html> [accessed 15 Feb 2018] (陈绍华, 《阴谋》(连载一), 刊载于陈绍华博客)

⁶⁹ On the popular Communist propaganda image, see Jim Aulich and Marta Sylvestrova, *Political posters in Central and Eastern Europe, 1945-1995: Signs of the times* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 159; also see Chen, ‘Conspiracy’ (Series 1) (陈, 《阴谋》(连载一))

“Green from Your Hand” in bright yellow, as well as smaller white text on the right side of the slogan that reads: “To transform the loess plateau to oasis, and to change the barren mountain to treasury”. Together, the soft colours and forms created by airbrush show a fresh, natural and relaxed atmosphere of spring.

How, then, did such a gentle hand defeat works by other experienced participants with strength in this area, impress the judges and win the Gold Award? Why would it be such a surprise for a person with a design background to win? What motivated Chen Shaohua to come up with this creative idea that differentiated his work from those following tradition and stereotype? Would this “unexpected” award-winning experience have any impact on him and the practice of poster design? To answer these questions, it is both important and necessary to explore his motivation to participate in the competition and to examine his situation as a design student and later as a design educator in the 1980s. And answering them would allow us to understand the impact of cultural policy on design and artistic creation, as well as the state of design education at the time.

Chen Shaohua received graphic design training at the Xi’an Academy of Fine Arts (1972-75) and The Central Academy of Arts & Crafts (1978-1982) in Beijing respectively. At that time, it was known as the Decoration Programme under the Crafts Department of the Xi’an Academy of Fine Arts. With a dream of being a scientist since childhood, Chen Shaohua misunderstood that the Crafts Department was connected with engineering, since in Chinese, the first character of “crafts” (工艺) is the same as that of “engineer” (工程师).⁷⁰ In 1972, he applied to the Crafts Department of the Xi’an Academy of Fine Arts to pursue his childhood dream.⁷¹ It was still during the Cultural Revolution, the period that had abandoned commodity culture since 1949 and disengaged from the tradition developed in Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s when commercial talent and excellent graphic designers gathered together in foreign concessions, creating advertisements and building up local commercial culture.⁷² Under such circumstances, the school’s understanding of design was to paint simple decorations such as flower patterns on the surface of light industrial products to beautify them.⁷³ The foundation course Chen took at the Xi’an Academy of Fine Arts was similar to the programme in the Painting Department.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 October 2017.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² On “commercial package design during the time period of the Republic of China”, see Zuo Xuchu, ‘Abstract’, in *The History of Commodity Packaging Design in Republic of China* (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong University Press, 2017) (左旭初, 《内容摘要》, 刊载于《民国商品包装艺术设计史》, 上海: 上海交通大学出版社, 2017)

⁷³ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 October 2019.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Three years later, when studying in the Decorative Design Department of The Central Academy of Arts & Crafts, Chen Shaohua realised that it was an environment still dominated by decorative painting, as well as research into decorative painting and traditional Chinese patterns, such as Dunhuang.⁷⁵ Most of the people in the department were creating fine art, and graphic designers were marginalised.⁷⁶ This situation can be explained by many factors: first of all, there were only a few faculty members interested in practising design in the department, for example, Yu Bingnan, with his experience of studying graphic design in Germany, was concentrating on typeface design, book design and typography and Chen Hanmin (陈汉民) focused on logo design.⁷⁷ The star teacher in the department at that time was Wu Guanzhong (吴冠中), a well-known painter, and most of the students were interested in painting.⁷⁸

Within this environment, Chen Shaohua had to turn to the school library in his search for research material, especially the newly arrived international design magazines, as well as publications from China National Publications Import & Export Corporation (中国图书进出口公司).⁷⁹ In addition, he was also a frequent visitor to the international art and design exhibitions organised in Beijing at that time.⁸⁰

Chen Shaohua would always carry his marker and pigment to take notes when there was anything that inspired him, through which he built up his graphic design archive.⁸¹ With no language skills, his judgement was made according to sensory impressions, especially the visual effect of the work.⁸² The result was his graduate work - he created a Visual Identity (VI) system, a transformation of the school's logo, without knowing the concept of CI (Cooperate Identity) and VI.

⁷⁵ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 October 2017.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

The impossibility of gaining professional academic training in graphic design was a universal phenomenon at that time.⁸³ This, however, stimulated the further strengthening of Chen Shaohua's own learning method, developed from his early childhood. Born into a poor family, his father was a worker and his mother was illiterate.⁸⁴ Chen Shaohua recalls that there was no cultural atmosphere at home and the only thing with any cultural significance was his and his siblings' school bags and textbooks.⁸⁵ His innately rebellious character pushed him to question what he was taught in the class - he was always critical and trying to find alternative solutions.⁸⁶ He did not have an idol and felt no pressure to follow tradition due to his personality as well as the influence of the slogan, "suspicion of everything" (怀疑一切).⁸⁷ The slogan was popular during the Cultural Revolution that took place during his adolescent years. Therefore, he developed a mental approach that involved searching for things in their true nature. In 2010, at The First Sino-French Art Education Forum organised by the Xi'an Eurasia Institute, Chen Shaohua delivered a speech based on his own learning and practice entitled "Return to Zero, Find Yourself", explaining it was of vital importance to first of all to "think about the basic principles while at the same time keep the questioning and critical spirit".⁸⁸ This self-taught journey was at a time when "graphic design" was not clearly defined and the boundary between design, crafts and art was unclear: Chen Shaohua was open, sensitive to and curious about everything new, including anything mysterious such as astrophysics, UFO and aliens.⁸⁹ His thinking on the creation of brand-new ideas and visual forms had always been combined with his interest in new science and engineering he had sustained since childhood.

In 1982, he went back to the Crafts Department of the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts to start his teaching job after graduating from the Central Academy of Arts & Crafts.⁹⁰ Again, he had to confront the situation in which art dominated, where the "craftsmen", faculty members from the

⁸³ Hou Liping, 'Cultural Transformation and the Transformation of Undergraduate Education Curriculum Design in China's Modern Design Studies' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Central Academy of Fine Arts, 2013), p. 74 (侯立平, 《文化转型与中国当今设计学学科本科教育课程设计的变革》(未经发表的博士论文, 中央美术学院, 2013, 第74页))

⁸⁴ Chen Shaohua, 'Return to Zero, Find Yourself', in *Chen Shaohua blog* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a4473a80100i41b.html> [accessed 27 Feb 2018] (陈绍华, 《归零思考, 找回自我》, 刊载于陈绍华博客)

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 October 2017.

⁸⁷ Chen, 'Return to Zero, Find Yourself' (陈, 《归零思考, 找回自我》)

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 October 2017.

⁹⁰ 'Art Director Chen Shaohua', in *C&S DESIGN OFFICE* <<http://www.csbrand.cn/about-68.html>> [accessed 15 March 2018]

design programme did not have their own voice but tried to be artists while they would not even receive important exhibition and competition information, such as that for The Sixth National Art Exhibition.⁹¹ Dissatisfied with the current situation, and with the idea of changing things, Chen Shaohua decided to submit his work to the propaganda painting section that was dominated by the painters.⁹²

To compete with the artists from the Painting Department, Chen Shaohua had to find his own strengths to break through. At that time, China had experienced decades of political struggle, including ten years of the Cultural Revolution, when the heroic utterance and hypocritical hollow praise represented by the posters of workers, peasants and soldiers' portraits with political slogans predominated.⁹³ People had long been exhausted spiritually and had become tired of the robust, idealised figures.⁹⁴ For him, to present something beautiful in a warm and relaxed context with human appeal, as in his poster, was an attractive idea. Meanwhile, the state government had established Arbor Day few years earlier, in 1979.⁹⁵ Combining all these elements, Chen Shaohua's creative idea took form — he wanted to create a spring scene to welcome the “Spring of Literature and Art” (文艺的春天), the new literary trend advocated after the Cultural Revolution during the The Fourth National Literary Congress in 1979.⁹⁶

Chen Shaohua's creativity was not only demonstrated in the subject of the work, but also reflected in his artistic presentation. Instead of choosing gouache, the art form frequently adapted by those artists who had exquisite skill in presenting backlit effect of women in scenes of labour with delicate strokes, he turned to the airbrush, the common tool used by graphic designers at that time, to create the flawless, white hand with decorative effect.⁹⁷ Considering all these factors, including the new subject and new performance techniques for this award in the context of

⁹¹ Chen, 'Conspiracy' (Series 1) (陈, 《阴谋》 (连载一))

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ On “establishment of the Arbor Day in China”, see *Encyclopaedia of China*, ed. by Editorial Board of Encyclopaedia of China, 28 vols (Beijing: Encyclopaedia of China Publishing House, 2009), p. 371 (《中国大百科全书(第二版)》, 《中国大百科全书》总编委会编, 北京: 中国大百科全书出版社, 2009, 第28册, 第371页)

⁹⁶ On “Spring of Literature and Art” (文艺的春天), see Deng Xiaoping, 'Deng Xiaoping's Speech at the Fourth China National Literary and Artistic Workers Congress', in People.cn <<http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64165/70486/70539/4842815.html>> [accessed 20 March 2018] (邓小平, 《1979年10月30日邓小平在第四次文代会上讲话》, 刊载于人民网)

⁹⁷ On the artists' exquisite skill in presenting backlit effect of women, see Chen, 'Conspiracy' (Series 1) (陈, 《阴谋》 (连载一)); The information about the decorative effect created by Chen Shaohua's airbrush comes from Chen Shaohua interview with the author, through telephone call, 10 February 2017.

the transformation that Chinese literature and art field underwent under the new requirement to “genuinely reflect rich social life through vivid artistic imagery”, for example, the emergence and popularisation of the “stream of consciousness” writing style at the time, it seems less of a surprise for the judges to be impressed by this “unexpectedly” award-winning work.⁹⁸ What, then, would this award-winning experience bring to Chen Shaohua?

Chen Shaohua was soon invited by the editors to contribute to *Trends in Art Ideas* (《美术思潮》), an emerging magazine in the art field to talk about the ideas behind his work.⁹⁹ Despising the rigid approach of scholars and their clichés, Chen Shaohua emphasised the importance of abandoning standardisation as a way to gain complete liberation in creation based on the fact that there was no fixed method of thinking and each individual was different from the others.¹⁰⁰ For Chen Shaohua, who always made random conjectures as thinking training, divergent thinking was a prerequisite for creation. The article, entitled “Riding A Donkey Looking for A Donkey” was written in the “stream of consciousness” style — newly adopted in Chinese literary circles at that time, which seemed to suit the topic under discussion perfectly.¹⁰¹

With a critical spirit, and based on his own learning experience as a graphic design student, Chen Shaohua had already put his thinking on creativity into practice — he started reforming the teaching of drawing in the Xi’an Academy of Fine Arts around the same time. He realised the critical problem of graphic design foundation courses was that they were confused with the professional training of painting, characterised as pure training of skill but seriously out of step with the nature of graphic design profession.¹⁰² What was more, he also realised that what he perceived to be a monotonous way of thinking, monotonous observation method and monoton-

⁹⁸ On the new requirement that led to the transformation in the Chinese literature and art field, see Deng Xiaoping, ‘The Fourth National Literary Congress: Welcoming the Spring of Literature and Art in the New Era’, *China Art Newspaper* <http://www.cflac.org.cn/zgysb/dz/ysb/page_9/201907/P020190714745863875258.pdf> [accessed 17 July 2019] (《第四次全国文代会：迎接新时期文艺的春天》，刊载于《中国艺术报》)

⁹⁹ Chen Shaohua, ‘Cherish the Memory of that Spring’, in *Chen Shaohua blog* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a4473a8010006ee.html> [accessed 15 Feb 2018] (陈绍华, 《怀念那个春天》，刊载于陈绍华博客)

¹⁰⁰ Chen Shaohua, ‘Riding A Donkey Looking for A Donkey - The Sixth National Art Exhibition Gold Medalist on Creation’, in *Chen Shaohua blog* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a4473a8010007yz.html> [accessed 22 Feb 2018] (陈绍华, 《骑驴找驴——第六届全国美展金牌获得者谈创作》，刊载于陈绍华博客)

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Chen Shaohua, ‘On “Design Sketch” Teaching Experiment 24 Years Ago’, in *Chen Shaohua blog* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a4473a80100gbq5.html> [accessed 15 Feb 2018] (陈绍华, 《记24年前的一次“设计素描”教学实验》，刊载于陈绍华博客)

ous end result was a result of the monotony of teaching content and teaching methods.¹⁰³ With this understanding, Chen Shaohua arranged unusual tasks for his students. He asked students to paint a wrapped or broken plaster statue, which required them to actively involve themselves in the procedure, arranging the fragments themselves. In doing so, they would learn to deal with the construction of a painting.¹⁰⁴ In this course, self-expression, imagination and subjective initiative were highlighted as an effective way to cultivate creativity.



Figure [3] Wang Yuefei, Jiasheng stereo-headphones, package design, 1985 (© Wang Yuefei)

Through out the seven-week course, all the students were in high spirits and at the end of the course they felt strongly about the need to organise an exhibition, which attracted people from different departments of the school, leading to unprecedented academic debate in the history of the Xi'an Academy of Fine Art.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, the reform triggered what Chen Shaohua's colleagues called an "earthquake" at school — some students from the other departments stopped participating in their course, demanding to change their teachers.¹⁰⁶ It seems that Chen Shaohua's idea to transform the focus of foundation courses of the design programme from training in skills to evolving a way of thinking, from an experience-based teaching method to the cultivation of students' abilities, developing students' design concepts turned out to be too advanced in this situation, and eventually it encountered intense criticism from the older generation of staff members.¹⁰⁷ At that point, with the implementation of the reform and opening up policy, the state relaxed its restrictions on individual economic activity in terms of policies to ease the pressure of employment, leading to the phenomenon that some people from government agencies

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 October 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ 'Chen Shaohua: Chinese Banner in the Design Field', in *China Design Online* <<http://www.cdol.com/hangye/designer/1189.html>> [accessed 17 July 2019] (《陈绍华：设计界的中国招牌》 刊载于中国设计在线)

gave up their secure employment and started more risky business practices.¹⁰⁸ In the early 1980s, a large number of private enterprises had already emerged in coastal areas.¹⁰⁹ In 1988, Chen Shaohua left his teaching job at the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, and headed for Shenzhen because he believed that “Shenzhen had a commodity economy and graphic design would be useful there”.¹¹⁰

2.2 The Dream to be A Design Hero

Similarly, Wang Yuefei, the main founding member of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association also felt that the training of graphic design skills at his school, Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art, was inadequate.¹¹¹ After graduation, when he had arranged to work for the Guangdong Export Commodities Packaging Institute within the Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation, he had to gain relevant knowledge from design practice to create packaging design that would complete in the international market.¹¹²



Figure [4] Wang Yuefei, Lotus Flower Stainless Steel Cutlery, package design, 1985 (© Wang Yuefei)

There are only a few images of examples from Wang Yuefei's early practice that have survived; these include his package design for export products such as Jiasheng stereo headphones (广州嘉声牌立体声耳机系列) 'Figure [3]' and Lotus Flower Stainless Steel Cutlery (荷花牌陶瓷柄餐具) 'Figure [4]' by local companies in Guangzhou. Unlike the packaging design with a hand-drawn image as the motif which was

¹⁰⁸ On “development of a private economy”, see Wang Kezhong, *On Non-public Ownership Economy* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2003), p. 8 (王克忠, 《非公有制经济论》, 上海: 上海人民出版社, 2003), 第8页. Alternatively, see international source Yang Xueye, 'China's Rising Private Economy', in *MCS (Modern China Studies)* < <http://www.modernchinastudies.org/us/issues/past-issues/63-mcs-1998-issue-4/465-2011-12-29-18-13-29.html> >, [accessed in 18 March 2018] (杨雪野, 《崛起的中国私营经济》, 当代中国研究, 2018)

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 October 2017.

¹¹¹ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 15 February 2018.

¹¹² Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 24 October 2017.

popular in the local market at that time, the packaging for Lotus Flower Stainless Steel Cutlery applied a high-resolution picture of the product, a set of stainless steel cutlery with porcelain handles including a knife, a fork and a spoon grouped together, the shadow under which created a realistic three-dimensional effect. The plain blue colour of the packaging is similar to the colour of the pattern on the porcelain handles of the cutlery, as well as the colour of blue and white porcelain (青花瓷), one of the main traditional varieties of Chinese porcelain.¹¹³ An abstract form of a lotus flower inside a gold circle, the logo was put on top of the image on the front of the box and the brand's English name in the same colour was highlighted in handwritten font on the bottom, beside the Arabic number 5 indicating the number of sets of cutlery inside the box. Three parallel gold lines were used on three sides of the image in the front. Between the English name of the brand and the number 5, there is a red seal with English text reading "Porcelain Handle" and the Chinese character 瓷, meaning porcelain in the centre.

This is a package with clear information and an emphasis on Chinese characteristics — Chinese porcelain is world famous with a history of thousands of years — to make it stand out as the selling point of this product.¹¹⁴ The packaging for Jiasheng stereo headphones, however, highlighted the high-tech feeling, which can be seen in the selection of its main colours, grey and black, as well as the choice of typeface. This feeling of high tech was emphasised by the audio level graph. There are no pictures of the product on the box. Instead, part of the packaging material is transparent plastic, through which the customer could have a clear view of the headphones inside.

On the surface, these are two package designs that are both functional and aesthetic created in the 1980s; however, once put into the context of where they were created, many questions emerge, for example, why they are different from most of the packaging design that was hand-drawn in a realistic style at the time? Where did the methodological design training and sophistication of the design come from, for example, the systematic application of colour to present a high-tech feeling? After all, many of the packaging designs in the 1980s were direct visual presentations of the title of the brand, such as the use of the image of landmark buildings for a brand named after a city.¹¹⁵ What about the safety issue? Both of the products were fragile and could not withstand high pressure. Are the cardboard boxes carrying them strong enough for the international journey? What is more, where did the strategy in the design come from, for example, the way of handling "Chinese identity" in different products? To search for the answers

¹¹³ On "blue and white porcelain" (青花瓷), see *Encyclopaedia of China*, ed. by Editorial Board of Encyclopaedia of China, 18 vols (Beijing: Encyclopaedia of China Publishing House, 2009), p. 112 (《中国大百科全书(第二版)》, 《中国大百科全书》总编委会编, 北京: 中国大百科全书出版社, 2009, 第18册, 第112页)

¹¹⁴ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 1 March 2018.

¹¹⁵ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 10 April 2018.

to these questions, there are many elements to disentangle from the designer's exciting journey in the early 1980s, as a staff member of the Guangdong Export Commodities Packaging Institute and the different activities he participated in there.

It is important to point out that Guangdong was one of the leading provinces in terms of exports, with GDP among the highest in China.¹¹⁶ It was also at the forefront of the implementation of the reform and opening up policy.¹¹⁷ The Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation was in charge of the coordination and the overall planning of imports and exports in Guangdong province, including all the design work in this area; also, the designers in its Design Section were responsible for certain categories of export commodities according to a division of labour, for example, Wang Yuefei's task was to design the packaging for light industry and indigenous livestock products, as well as the brochures for these items.¹¹⁸ This at first glance might look like a product of a planned economy, but at that time it was an advanced organisation with a very professional and comprehensive configuration — there was a large scale exhibition hall to display imported commodities by well-known brands in the form of supermarket shelves corresponding to all the export categories, including electrical appliances, clothing, children's toys, hardware, textiles and food.¹¹⁹ There was also a reference room of international design magazines such as *Idea* (Japan), *Graphis* (Switzerland), *Communication* (United States) and *Package* (Japan), as well as annuals, such as *Art Directors' Annuals* (Art Director's Club of New York).¹²⁰ In addition, the company would regularly provide publications on international design information and trends.¹²¹ Both of these — the design magazines and design objects — became very helpful research materials for Wang Yuefei, who spent most of his time copying the design of brands with an international reputation, together with their typefaces, as a learning process.¹²² This experience and working environment — almost non-existent in mainland China — had such a profound influence on Wang Yuefei that many years later, in 1987, when he star-

¹¹⁶ *History of Reform and Opening Up in Guangdong*, ed. by History of Reform and Opening in Guangdong Research group (Beijing: Social Science Literature Publishing House, 2018), p. 24 (《广东改革开放史》，《广东改革开放史》课题组编，北京：社会科学文献出版社，2018，第24页)

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ 'Wang Yuefei: Graphic Designer Dancing in Design Capital' in *CPPCC Shenzhen Committee* <http://www1.szzx.gov.cn/content/2015-10/28/content_12407961.htm> [accessed 18 December 2018] (《王粤飞：平面设计人与设计之都共舞》，刊载于政协深圳市委网站)

¹¹⁹ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 24 October 2017.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

ted his own business, the requirement for recruitment was to paint fifty international brand designs, instead of viewing applicants' CVs.¹²³

It was also the period when Wang Yuefei had his first encounter with the AGI (Alliance Graphique Internationale) international design association through the Western European, American and Japanese design magazines.¹²⁴ Because of his lack of language skills, he started to get to know the content and organisational mode of AGI's activities with an in-house translator's help.¹²⁵ At that time, Wang Yuefei only knew a few AGI members, such as Saul Bass and Henry Steiner through reading.¹²⁶ Each of these was his idol.¹²⁷ What was more, the things that attracted Wang Yuefei and other Chinese designers then were not only the design work created by these AGI members and international masters of graphic design, but also the images showing their life-style, for example, the AGI annual gathering and how they enjoyed life and sunshine together.¹²⁸ At that time, joining AGI and becoming a member was more like a fantasy for Wang Yuefei and his colleagues who had access to Western design resources. The yearning to join AGI in the 1980s, however, somehow reflected the characteristics of that specific era: in recent years, a free spiritual territory for creation has become more important for the younger generation as studio owners with their customer group, and to be accepted by others or certain organisations is no longer their primary concern.

Except the luxury of learning in the exhibition hall and reference room, there were two important events then which turned out to be excellent learning experiences for Wang Yuefei: the first was to be part of "The United Nations Development Programme" organised and sponsored by United Nations in 1980.¹²⁹ By invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Trade of China, international designers and design experts were asked to come to China to provide training for designers, including training courses on graphic design and structural packaging.¹³⁰ These international designers and design experts did not have to have had distinguished careers and they vo-

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ 'Wang Yuefei - The Pioneer of Chinese Graphic Design', in *Zcool* <<https://www.zcool.com.cn/article/ZNDg1MjQ0.html>> [accessed 14 June 2018] (《中国平面设计拓荒人——王粤飞》, 刊载于站酷)

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ 'Members', in *Alliance Graphique Internationale website* <<http://a-g-i.org/members>> [accessed 4 June 2019]

¹²⁷ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 24 October 2017.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 15 February 2018.

¹³⁰ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 17 February 2018.

lunteered to join the programme.¹³¹ The graphic design training course was about packaging design, similar to brand design and product promotion nowadays while the structural packaging training course was about packaging material and packaging protection for transportation.¹³² There were only about ten students in the packaging design course while the structural packaging course, which was mainly aimed at engineers, was even smaller, with around four to seven students.¹³³ All the participating trainees were delegated, usually one designer from each province's state packaging company.¹³⁴ The influence of this event was wide-spread and what is more, it set a precedent of inviting international designers to China to give presentations and training for local designers. The course notes was created by speakers themselves and so their circulation benefited many more designers who could not participate in the course such as Wang Yuefei.¹³⁵ For him and his fellow designers, this way of understanding design with a combination of knowledge from the engineering and science field was something completely new, for example, the consideration of the most cost effective paper to use, and how to maximise the protection of the product.¹³⁶ According to Wang Yuefei's memory, many of the in-house designers including himself were busy folding cardboard boxes after the training course to get a better understanding about its structure as packaging material and to apply this knowledge in practice.¹³⁷ For example, the application of the fastening structure in his package design for Jiasheng headphones is the result of adopting the method introduced in the UN training course, a safe and economical approach appropriate for headphones.¹³⁸

What's more, for those who could not participate in the training, to send their work through students for teachers' comments was also an effective way to learn, for example, one of the homework tasks from the training course was a design for breakfast cereal packaging.¹³⁹ Most of the Chinese designers had no clue about this task until they saw a sample from the teacher — a picture showing cereal on the table and a cockerel standing outside the window, expressing such feelings as reliability, high nutrition, high calories and a morning full of vitality.¹⁴⁰ Similar training included strategy comments on package design for tea, such as how to compete with English

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 12 March 2018.

¹³⁸ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 17 February 2018.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

red tea with a package of clear Chinese information, as well as the emphasis on Chinese identity to distinguish Chinese green tea from those from other areas of Asia, such as India and Sri Lanka for competition in the international market.¹⁴¹ It was through the analysis in these courses that Wang Yuefei began to have an awareness of the identity of China and the role it could play in his design as a strategy. After about thirty years, Wang Yuefei could still remember all the details of the training he received as an “auditor” who did not get the chance to attend the class, which helped him to realise the transformation of his understanding about design from creating beautiful images to reviewing the systematic thinking behind it.

The second learning experience that had a significant influence on Wang Yuefei’s design practice was the presentation by Walter Landor in Hangzhou in 1979.¹⁴² The slides in this presentation were shown in Guangzhou afterwards and the participating designers were very impressed by the classic logo designs for companies with an international reputation such as British Airways, Singapore Airlines, All Nippon Airways, Alitalia, First Bank of the United States etc. “I was just like an innocent kid watching a movie, totally overwhelmed”.¹⁴³ This was Wang Yuefei’s description of the experience. His first encounter with graphic design was thus neither from a textbook, nor in college.

Both of the events had a fundamental influence on Wang Yuefei, who began to experiment with the new knowledge and skills in his practice based on his design skills gained through thorough research and learning experience in the reference room and exhibition hall of the Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation, an unique situation in China at the time.¹⁴⁴ It is worth mentioning here that the Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation was one of few companies with high-quality photography and printing equipment at that time. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the company and Hong Kong’s Carnival Group established GOODYEAR (深圳市嘉年印务有限公司), the first Sino-foreign joint venture printing factory in Futian, Shenzhen, which was set up as the printing company to specifically serve export packaging by the Ministry of Foreign Trade.¹⁴⁵ These provided a material foundation for the presentation

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Mo Ping, ‘Record of Shenzhen-Hong Kong Graphic Design Development’ in *Mo Ping blog* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_402903810101h23x.html> [accessed 17 July 2019] (莫萍, 《深港平面设计发展纪》, 刊载于莫萍微博)

¹⁴³ ‘China’s Graphic Design Pioneer - Wang Yuefei’ (《中国平面设计拓荒人——王粤飞》)

¹⁴⁴ ‘Wang Yuefei: Graphic Designer Dancing in Design Capital’ (《王粤飞: 平面设计人与设计之都共舞》)

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

of Wang Yuefei's packaging design work, such as the one for Lotus Flower Stainless Steel Cutlery with its high quality image of the product as a design motif.¹⁴⁶

The sophisticated equipment, however, could not make up for the problems in the system. The participation in events mentioned above, as well as the communication with international designers made a sharp contrast with Wang Yuefei's own experience as an art worker (美工) in his company during the transition period when the design task there was mainly simply to "beautify" the commodity but with no concern for branding and marketing.¹⁴⁷ There was still neither a complete and clear target, or a work schedule — usually it took quite a long time to finish a design. Therefore, after the first encounter with Landor's design, a strategic "commercial weapon" based on the combination of brand design and visual identity, Wang Yuefei could hear a voice in his head saying, "That's what I need, that's what Chinese companies need."¹⁴⁸

In 1987, when GRAFICOM (深圳嘉美设计有限公司) was established in Shenzhen as a joint venture between Guangdong Import & Export Corporation, GOODYEAR Printing Co., Ltd, as well as Kengseng Trading & Co. Ltd from Hong Kong, Wang Yuefei was appointed as chief executive.¹⁴⁹ With the idea of creating a design company on larger scale to undertake a wider range of design projects and to change the backward situation of Chinese packaging design, Wang Yuefei started his new role ambitiously.¹⁵⁰

2.3 One Eye Looks forward, One Eye Looks back

As well as Wang Yuefei, there was another designer exploring and experimenting with the new knowledge and skills in graphic design gained through practice to tackle the challenge of improving the packaging of export products — Wang Xu—Wang Yuefei's schoolmate at Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art and colleague in the Guangdong Export Commodities Packaging Institute within the Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 7 February 2018.

¹⁴⁷ On "Art worker" (美工), see 'Wang Yuefei: Graphic Designer Dancing in Design Capital' (《王粤飞: 平面设计人与设计之都共舞》); The information about Wang Yuefei's design task to beautify the commodity comes from Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 15 February 2018.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 1 March 2018.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Wang Xu interview with the author, in Guangzhou, 23 October 2017; also see 'Wang Yuefei: Graphic Designer Dancing in Design Capital' (《王粤飞: 平面设计人与设计之都共舞》)

Wang Xu has always been very proud of his design for Heaven Temple brand (天坛牌) 'Figure [5]', an attractive package using a photo of the whole pineapple together with freshly cut slices.¹⁵² A high-quality image created a sharp contrast between the pattern of the rough outer skin of the pineapple and its juicy slices to emphasise the freshness of the product. The background colour is mainly green with the top part in blue to highlight that this is something from nature. The



Figure [5] Wang Xu, Heaven Temple, package design, 1982-1983 (© Wang Xu)

brand name — Heaven Temple, is big and bold in white on the green and blue background. Underneath, there is introductory text of the same colour as the juicy pineapple slices. If it is not specifically pointed out, it is hard to differentiate this from similar product packaging designed by international designers in the market from the perspective of typeface, as well as the quality of photography and printing. It looks as if everything has been done strictly according to an international standard. In a situation in which China's export commodities had "first-class quality, second-class price and third-class packaging", Wang Xu's redesign successfully transformed an unattractive product into something eye-catching on the supermarket shelves.¹⁵³

Around five years later, in 1988, Wang Xu won one of the most important awards in his career — his catalogue design for Meiguang Printing 'Figure [6]', a Sino-Japanese joint venture that received a HKDA golden award; he was the first designer from mainland China to win this award. While the interesting thing is that the tone of this award-winning design is very different from the earlier one. Here the Chinese element dominates: on the white cover, two black Chinese characters 欢迎, meaning "welcome", set vertically, occupy the right half of the page while on the upper left part of the page is a black-and-white photo of a small object, a magnifying glass used in the printing industry. The exciting part of this design is the play on words between the Chinese character 迎 (meaning welcome) on the transparent title page and the 印 (meaning printing) on the solid title page. When the transparent title page is opened, the character 印 is revealed to indicated that this is a catalogue for a printing company, otherwise the

¹⁵² Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 19 March 2018.

¹⁵³ On the situation of China's export commodities in the 1980s, see Yan, 'Big Issue in the Little Package: Interview with Xu Weifeng, the Director of the China Packaging Research & Test Centre' (闫贵福, 《小包装里的大文章——访中国包装科研测试中心主任徐炜峰》)

character 迎 on the transparent title page ‘Figure [7]’ and the character 印 on the solid title page overlap with each other, conveying the friendly message of welcoming people to open the catalogue and to know more about the company.

The juxtaposition of these two important design projects by Wang Xu in the 1980s, both of which, in his view, are of great significance in his career, raised many questions, such as, what is the reason for the huge differences between these two designs? Was it only because they were for different clients or was it a simple issue of a change of personal style? Or is there anything specific that happened in his professional trajectory during this period? All of these issues must be viewed within the prevailing environment at the time, and should be examined in the light of Wang Xu’s individual trajectory of development.

When describing the situation in the 1980s, Wang Xu remarked that, “we were surrounded by graphic design but had no awareness about what exactly design was... my task was to design export package but there were no teaching materials at school. What should I do? Study or not to study? Use (these materials) or not? How to use (them)? These were pressing issues. My method was to learn by copying”.¹⁵⁴ To enter into this profession as soon as possible, he paid special attention to the structure of Western lettering, and the colour, form and use of imagery in Western

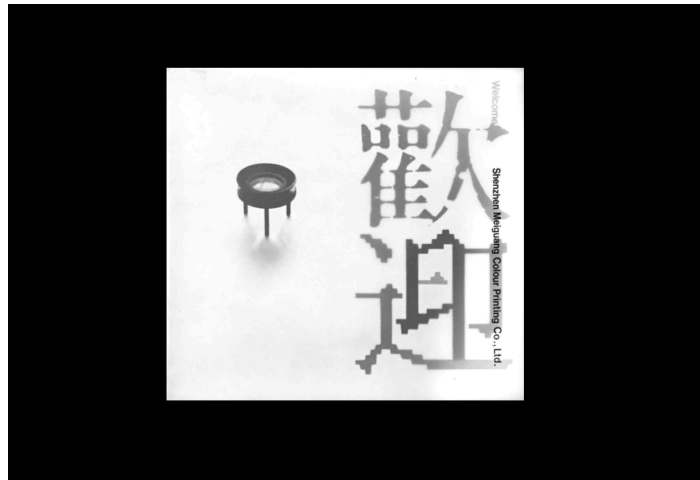


Figure [6] Wang Xu, transparent title page, catalogue design for Meiguang Printing, 1988 (© Wang Xu)



Figure [7] Wang Xu, solid title page, catalogue design for Meiguang Printing, 1988 (© Wang Xu)

¹⁵⁴ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 28 October 2017.

design, and their influence on his own design, while at the same time thinking about and analysing the reason for the excellence of Western design.¹⁵⁵

Like his schoolmate and colleague Wang Yuefei, to actively participate in the design presentation and training conducted by the international designers was an effective way for Wang Xu to learn.¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile he continued to concentrate on copying as an effective way to learn, due to the fact that although at that time there were already a number of designers of international reputation coming to visit China to give lectures, usually they would not go into that much detail, for example, analysing the reason behind the choice of a certain typeface in a particular design.¹⁵⁷ Openly advocating Westernisation, by which he meant the adoption of western typographic and graphic design practices and aesthetics, Wang Xu ignored any existing local, national or regional graphic identity or practices because he was overwhelmed by the impact of Western graphics and would apply his understanding of typefaces and brand, as well as commercial photographic skills to real projects directly.¹⁵⁸ His redesign for Heaven Temple is a case in point. The emphasis on the brand represented by an eye-catching bold typeface in a large size, as well as a stable position for the brand name on each item is the visual representation of the “visual impact on the shelf”, the professional vocabulary Wang Xu used as the key concept behind this design from the presentation of Walter Landor,¹⁵⁹ a renowned packaging designer who is best remembered as a pioneer in the field of branding and use of consumer research.¹⁶⁰ Westernisation, however, was not only his personal experience. The trend of learning from the West was dominant at that time, especially among the designers working for the import and export companies where to meet an international standard was a prerequisite for competition.¹⁶¹ For example, Landor’s presentation during his trip in Hangzhou and Guangzhou in 1979 had a huge influence on Wang Xu and his colleague Wang Yuefei. Both of them, like the other participants in the presentation, had not been exposed to the relevant information before.

In the autumn of 1986, Wang Xu was sent to Hong Kong to work for the Packaging Company under the Yuehai Group (粤海集团包装公司), the local branch of Guangdong Packaging Im-

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Wang Xu interview with the author, in Guangzhou, 23 October 2017.

¹⁵⁷ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 28 October 2017.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 19 March 2018.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Walter Landor’, in *AIGA (The Professional Association for Design)* <<https://www.aiga.org/medalist-walterlandor>> [accessed 13 Jan 2020]

¹⁶¹ Wang Xu interview with the author, in Guangzhou, 23 October 2017.

port and Export Corporation. This turned out to be the turning point of his life.¹⁶² In October 1986, the year when the Hong Kong office of Landor Associates opened,¹⁶³ Landor visited the Hong Kong branch of Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation with the requirement to see some “graphic designer from mainland China”.¹⁶⁴ For Wang Xu, this was a meeting full of excitement because Landor’s previous presentation was so inspiring that he had been experimenting and applying what he had gained into practice, for example, the redesign of packaging for Heaven Temple brand. Therefore, it turned out to be the opportunity for him to communicate with Landor about his design practice, through which he formally got connected with Landor.¹⁶⁵

Meanwhile, soon after his arrival, Wang Xu began to try to approach Henry Steiner, an Austrian graphic designer based in Hong Kong, through the Hong Kong branch of the Japanese paper company Tai Tak Takeo Fine Paper Co.,Ltd.¹⁶⁶ Educated at Yale under the guidance of Paul Rand, Henry Steiner had a special interest in the application of Latin typefaces, as well as the combination of Western and Eastern culture in design.¹⁶⁷ From 1964, when he established Steiner & Co. in Hong Kong, he created designs for many well-known brands with an international reputation, including IBM and HSBC.¹⁶⁸ Meanwhile, he started research on bilingual design and published *Cross-Cultural Design: Communicating in the Global Marketplace*.¹⁶⁹ In December, 1986, at the Hong Kong Design Biennial, Wang Xu eventually had his first encounter with Henry Steiner together with Japanese book designer Kohei Sugiura.¹⁷⁰ After viewing Wang Xu’s work, Kohei Sugiura suggested: “You should look forward with one eye and look backwards with the other eye”, a reminder for Wang Xu not to forget his roots, the extensive and deep thousands-of-year old Chinese culture.¹⁷¹ Kohei Sugiura’s suggestion was brief; however, for Wang Xu, this was the sentence that woke him up from his keen worship of Western design and

¹⁶² Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 24 October 2017.

¹⁶³ ‘History Walter’s Story - Landor Associates’, in *Yumpu* <<https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/6255690/history-walters-story-landor-associates>> [accessed 13 Jan 2020]

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Henry Steiner’, in *Steiner & Co.* <<http://www.steiner.hk/about/hs.htm>> [accessed 16 July 2019]

¹⁶⁸ ‘Our Clients’, in *Steiner & Co.* <<http://www.steiner.hk/clients/banking.htm>> [accessed 16 July 2019]

¹⁶⁹ ‘Henry Steiner’, in *Steiner & Co.* <<http://www.steiner.hk/about/hs.htm>> [accessed 16 July 2019]

¹⁷⁰ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 24 October 2017.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

encouraged him to reflect on his journey and then prepare to make the transformation of starting to pay attention to local culture and draw inspiration from it for his design creations while learning from international designers.¹⁷²

Wang Xu's communication with Henry Steiner, Walter Landor and Kohei Sugiura was conducted through translator.¹⁷³ However, he was determined to try his best to understand international graphic design despite the barrier of language. In the 1980s, there were three graphic design book stores, including Keng

Seng (競成), Swindon (辰衝) and the Apollo Book Co Ltd (JBC) (智源書局) in Hong Kong.¹⁷⁴ Visiting these bookstores had become a part of his daily life. Soon, Wang Xu made the decision that to quickly learn and understand international graphic design, he should start with editorial work.¹⁷⁵

In 1987, one year after his arrival in Hong Kong, he began to publish *Design Exchange* (《设计交流》), a magazine introducing international graphic designers and their practice with the support from his company.¹⁷⁶ As a beginner, he had to build up everything from zero through the new connections he had established, with designers such as Henry Steiner and Walter Landor.¹⁷⁷ At the beginning, the content of the magazine was decided by availability of information, and the design style was direct, for example, photos showing packaging design of two products together



Figure [8-11] Wang Xu, *Design Exchange*, cover design, 1 vol, 1987; Wang Xu, *Design Exchange*, cover design, 2 vol, 1987; Wang Xu, *Design Exchange*, cover design, 4 vol, 1988; Wang Xu, *Design Exchange*, cover design, 3 vol, 1988. From left to right, top to bottom (© Wang Xu)

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 28 October 2017.

¹⁷⁵ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 24 October 2017.

¹⁷⁶ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 28 October 2017.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

with the shape of a capital D representing Design in light green and capital I representing Identity in light blue as background respectively on the cover of the first issue 'Figure [8]' clarified its two main themes.

The influence and support of Walter Landor was also evident. A portrait of Rodney McKnew, the then design director of the Asia Pacific headquarters of Landor Associates, as well as his letter to Wang Xu together with its Chinese translation was directly used for the cover design of the second issue 'Figure [9]'. For the fourth issue 'Figure [10]', Walter Landor's name was the first to be shown on the cover, together with that of Saul Bass and other two American designers, in an issue entitled "Four California Designers". The cover of the third issue 'Figure [11]' was a collection of Henry Steiner's logo designs, and from the fourth issue, Henry Steiner started to give Wang Xu full support, including introducing designers, design institutions and contributing articles.¹⁷⁸ Sometimes, he would even participate in design work, providing creative ideas. For example, to present "Three British Design Groups" as one of the topics in the sixth issue 'Figure [12]', Henry Steiner put half of a pencil underneath the photo showing the top of Big Ben to create the surrealist effect that the pencil was the main body of the building.¹⁷⁹ With two simple elements, the collage implies that this is an issue about British design.

Through observing Henry Steiner carrying out design for the magazine, Wang Xu quickly adapted a new methodology, instead of simply throwing the names and photos of the designers of international reputation on the cover. His excitement was transformed into a more sophisticated expression. When creating the eighth issue on Australian graphic designers in 1991 'Figure [13]', Wang Xu partly adopted this method. With the packaging of a famous local beer Foster's, he replaced the letter F representing Foster's on the package with the letter A representing Australian in the centre of the package.¹⁸⁰ To make the information clear, he put the text "Australian Graphic Designers" around the character A. This kind of descriptive text, however, disappeared on the cover design for the tenth issue 'Figure [14]' when Wang Xu began to be responsible for



Figure [12] Wang Xu, *Design Exchange*, cover design, 6 vol, 1990 (©Wang Xu)

¹⁷⁸ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 19 March 2018.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

the magazine independently. With an apple and a design of incorporating a portrait of a woman in Art Deco style in New York, Wang Xu tried to present the theme of the issue with purely visual language. Before *Design Exchange* was taken over by the China Youth Press as a standardised magazine, Wang Xu's cover design enjoyed a brief but exciting free experimental period.¹⁸¹



Figure [13-14] Wang Xu, *Design Exchange*, cover design, 8 vol, 1991; Wang Xu, *Design Exchange*, cover design, 10 vol, 1993. From left to right (© Wang Xu)

These cover designs conveyed Wang Xu's enthusiasm for discovering internationally renowned graphic designers from different countries and his enthusiasm for spreading this information. It was a process of exploration that included various attempts and adjustments, for example, the magazine's English title was initially improperly translated as *Design Intercourse* for the first four issues by his colleague, the in-house translator from the Yuehai Group Packaging Company until it was replaced by *Design Exchange* after a suggestion from Henry Steiner and other local people in Hong Kong with a better and more sophisticated understanding of English.¹⁸² For Wang Xu, this was a significant learning opportunity through which he gradually built up his own network in international design circles. Meanwhile, this was also a difficult process — it took Wang Xu about a year to prepare the first issue and the publication frequency of this magazine was low, with no more than two issues in a year.¹⁸³ Wang Xu described the situation at that time as a backward field that had been trying hard to catch up in the graphic design field.¹⁸⁴ He and his colleagues must learn because they were out of the mainstream circle dominated by the Western Europe and American designers.¹⁸⁵ The cultural environment in Hong Kong, especially his friendship with Henry Steiner and Kohei Sugiura, who confronted the cultural differences and conflicts in their daily life and careers while at the same time having in-depth thinking and continuous explora-

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 19 March 2018.

¹⁸³ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 1 November 2017.

¹⁸⁴ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 24 October 2017.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

tion in their design practice to improve their understanding of crossing cultural exchange was reflected in this publication.

Therefore, the differences between Wang Xu's design for the Heaven Temple brand and the catalogue design for Meiguang Printing can not simply be accounted for by change of style or the results of different design briefs; instead it marked two very different stages in his design journey, from advocating Westernisation to returning to his own culture and tradition based on a solid foundation of the concepts and techniques of modern design he gained from practice, as well as an understanding of the work of his Western counterparts through frequent exchange brought by his editing work for *Design Exchange*.

3. Western Training, Chinese Soul - Reflections on Chinese Culture in Crossing-Cultural Communication

After the end of the Cultural Revolution and under the circumstances of the reform and opening up, Chinese universities gradually resumed exchange and cooperation with international institutions. In 1978, the Chinese government sent the first group of publicly-funded students to the United States.¹⁸⁶ Since then, more and more students and faculty members were sent abroad for further study and training.

3.1 Reconnecting: The Friendship Typeface and the Chinese Typeface

In 1986, Albert Kapr from the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig (HfGuB: Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig), German Democratic Republic was invited to give presentations at The Central Academy of Arts & Crafts; he was among the first

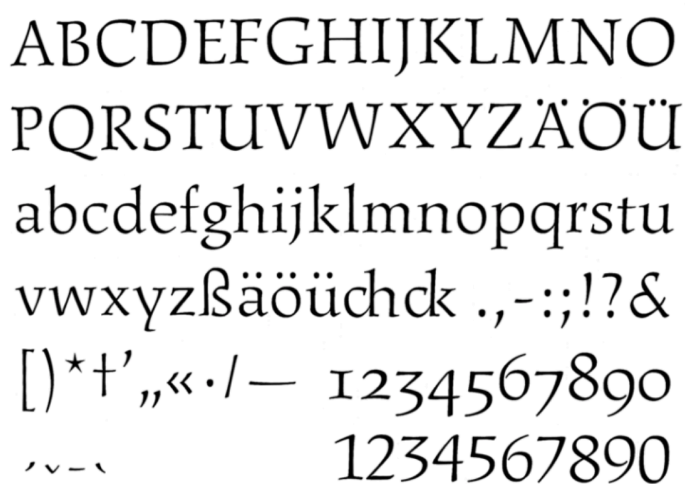


Figure [15] Yu Bingnan, Friendship typeface, typeface design, 1962 (© Yu Bingnan)

¹⁸⁶ Zhang Xinsheng, 'Deputy Minister of Education, on Hot Issues of Overseas Study for "Policy Makers Speech" Programme' (《章新胜副部长做客〈决策者说〉谈留学热点》), in *Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China Website* <<http://old.moe.gov.cn//public-files/business/htmlfiles/moe/s3574/201004/83085.html>> [accessed 16 Feb 2018]

group of international experts coming to this academy after the Cultural Revolution.¹⁸⁷ During the trip, Albert Kapr was reunited with Yu Bingnan, his student in Leipzig in the late 1950s and currently a staff member of The Central Academy of Arts & Crafts.¹⁸⁸ What he was going to do in his tour of China was not only to share his knowledge in the area of typography and typeface design, but also to bring a gift for the school — the Friendship typeface (“友谊体”) designed by Yu Bingnan ‘Figure [15]’ during his stay in Leipzig.¹⁸⁹ This set of typefaces includes the upper case and lower case characters suitable for the English, German and Chinese phonetic alphabet in Roman and italic, together with Arabic numerals and punctuation. Then why was this set of typefaces so important that Albert Kapr would bring it with him and formally present it to school as a gift during his first trip to China? Is there anything special about it? Which kind of training was required for a Chinese practitioner to gain the ability to create Latin typefaces? Why was it named Friendship? What was its practical meaning in the Chinese context at that time? For a better understanding about these issues, it is necessary to trace the history and creative process of the Friendship typeface.

After 1949, when the People's Republic of China announced its establishment, new China was in urgent need of all kinds of personnel. From the very beginning of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the government had considered sending students to study in the Soviet Union and socialist countries in Eastern Europe.¹⁹⁰ It was under this trend, Yu Bingnan, a student from the Printing Art Department, Luxun Academy of Fine Art was sent to the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig in East Germany to study book design under professor Albert Kapr in 1956.¹⁹¹

Yu Bingnan was soon absorbed in intense training for typeface design.¹⁹² At the beginning of his study there, he did not understand the meaning of the training and felt it was tedious.¹⁹³ It was

¹⁸⁷ Yu Bingnan, ‘The Missing Friendship Typeface’, *Zhuangshi*, 10 (2009), 68-69 (p. 69) (余秉楠, 《消失的“友谊体”》, 刊载于《装饰》, 2009, 第10期, 第69页)

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Shen Xun, ‘Unforgettable: Experienced of being Sent to the West by Premier Zhou’, in *Zhishifenzi* <<http://zhishifenzi.com/depth/humanity/5069.html>> [accessed 18 July 2019] (沈恂, 《难忘: 亲历1973年周总理派到西方留学》, 刊载于《知识分子》)

¹⁹¹ Li Yun, Wang Xiaomo, ‘Based on Writing, Combining the East and West Style - Interview with Yu Bingnan’, *Zhuangshi*, 6 (2013), 19-22 (p. 19) (李云, 王小茉, 《基于书写, 融通中西——余秉楠先生访谈》, 刊载于《装饰》, 2013, 第6期, 第19页)

¹⁹² Yu, ‘How I Designed the “Friendship” Typeface’, p. 13 (余, 《我怎样设计“友谊”拼音活字》, 第13页)

¹⁹³ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 2 April 2018.

only after persistent practising for a month or two that, he gradually got used to it.¹⁹⁴ In the initial stages, Albert Kapr would not provide him with a copybook for calligraphy.¹⁹⁵ Instead, he asked Yu Bingnan to write twenty-six characters freely with round head and flat head pens, aiming to help him to understand the structure of each character.¹⁹⁶ After fully and correctly understanding the structure of the characters, the procedure of copying began, starting from a Roman capital typeface originating from the inscription on Trajan's Column, followed chronologically by other typefaces, including those from the Middle-Ages, the Renaissance and the Neo-Classical period, and so on.¹⁹⁷ This process lasted for a few months.¹⁹⁸ For Yu Bingnan, it was an important experience not only because the typeface is the foundation for type design and typography, but also because it was a way of strengthening his appreciation and ability, improving his ability to judge the quality of a typeface according to its proportion, contrast and combination. At the same time this effectively helped him to understand how to match the typeface with other visual graphic design elements.

At the same time, in 1958, China started to promote the use of Pinyin, the official Chinese phoneticisation of Latin programme, which was used mainly for indicating Chinese Mandarin pronunciation, with Mandarin phonetic symbols for Chinese characters.¹⁹⁹ Within this context, professor Kapr asked Yu Bingnan to design a Latin typeface with multiple functions.²⁰⁰ With a passion for contributing to the Pinyin project, Yu Bingnan accepted this challenge.²⁰¹ After a whole year's concentration, based on the solid foundation gained from his earlier specific training in writing, he created the design that would become the Friendship typeface, that attracted his German classmates' attention — they were very curious about the strokes in this typeface and assumed it had been influenced by Chinese calligraphy.²⁰²

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Li, Wang, p. 19 (李, 王, 第19页)

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ On 'Chinese character phonetic Latinization program', see 'Chinese Character Phonetic Latinization Program', in *Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China* <http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A18/A18_ztzt/jnhypyfa/201805/t20180517_336339.html> [accessed 9 April 2018] (《汉语拼音方案》, 刊载于中华人民共和国教育部网站)

²⁰⁰ Ding Chen, 'The Combination of East and West - Interview with professor Yu Bingnan', *Book Design*, (2012), 64-91 (p. 75) (丁辰, 《中西融汇——余秉楠教授访谈录》, 刊载于《书籍设计》, 2012, 第75页)

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 2 April 2018.

The reasons for the Chinese aspect of this typeface, however, are much more sophisticated. It started from the search for a suitable pen — for a writing instrument with elasticity, as well as a quality that was much softer than the pen; Yu Bingnan created the tool by cutting an old brush into a bamboo pen using the skills he had learned at college in Leipzig.²⁰³ While writing, he would press the pen when he



Figure [16] Yu Bingnan, Friendship typeface and its application, *Chairman Mao's Poems*, book cover, text and title page, 1962. From left to right, top to bottom (© Yu Bingnan)

needed strength and relax when he needed a light touch.²⁰⁴ The “stroke effect” in the typeface is closely connected with this self-made writing tool. There were more creative ideas in the work. Usually when writing Latin characters, the angle between the hand and the desk should be around 15 degrees, and this angle should be changed to horizontal when writing serifs.²⁰⁵ There was, however, no “turning of the pen” when Yu Bingnan wrote the serifs for this typeface. Influenced by the training in creating a “repeated symmetrical pattern” (二方连续), the traditional Chinese pattern design he had learned at Luxu Fine Art Academy, Yu Bingnan wanted to achieve a similar kind of coherent visual effects.²⁰⁶ Therefore, what he did instead was to keep the original angle with a bit of a curve and so when the characters are viewed in a line, it seemed like a wave [Figure [16]], through which people could enjoy the rhythm and dynamics of the text.²⁰⁷ That is to say, the most significant differences in this typeface from the Western typefaces are the stroke and the wave, a natural expression based on Yu Bingnan’s academic experiences at both Luxu Fine Art Academy and the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig. For his German classmates,

²⁰³ Li, Wang, p. 19 (李, 王, 第19页)

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 2 April 2018.

²⁰⁶ Ding, p. 75 (丁, 第75页); On “repeated symmetrical pattern” (二方连续 / Erfanglianxu), see Wu Shan et al., eds, *Dictionary of Chinese Arts and Crafts* (Jiangsu: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 2011), p. 887 (吴山主编, 《中国工艺美术大辞典》, 江苏: 江苏美术出版社, 2011, 第887页)

²⁰⁷ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 2 April 2018.

these were significant Chinese characteristics, and they called it the “Chinese typeface” when they used it.²⁰⁸

When he was at the stage of finalising the typeface design, Yu Bingnan was informed that actually the then Chinese Prime Minister hoped there would be a Chinese student with the ability to design Latin characters while the Pinyin scheme was announced.²⁰⁹ This idea was supported by German colleagues with permission from the German Ministry of Culture to produce the typeface; meanwhile, professional and technical support was also provided, including specific training by Albert Kapr and the guidance of the experienced professional Otto Erler at VEB Typoart Dresden during the process of creation.²¹⁰ This was the reason why Yu Bingnan called this typeface Friendship, indicating all the help and support from German colleagues.²¹¹ Three years later in 1963, one year after Yu Bingnan was back teaching at The Central Academy of Arts & Crafts, the Friendship typeface — the first Latin typeface designed by a Chinese designer — was given to the Chinese ambassador as a gift for the Ministry of Culture of China in a ceremony at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig.²¹²

The influence of the Friendship typeface, as well as Yu Bingnan’s knowledge and skills in Western typeface design, did not stop here. In the early 1960s, Yu Bingnan was sent to the Shanghai Institute of Printing Technology (上海印刷技术研究所) for a year to participate in the team creating typeface for *Cihai* (《辞海》).²¹³ This was also an opportunity for him to become familiar with Chinese typeface design and to gain a better understanding of the printing industry context in China. The experience provided him a chance for in-depth thinking and for making a comparison between Western typefaces and Chinese typefaces, through which he tried to find connections between the two. During this period, he wrote an article entitled “How I Designed the ‘Friendship’ Pinyin Typeface” with a detailed description of the creation of this typeface. The article was published in the *Print Type Study Reference* in the archive of the Shanghai Institute

²⁰⁸ Yu, ‘The Missing Friendship Typeface’, p. 69 (余, 《消失的“友谊体”》, 第10期, 第69页)

²⁰⁹ Ding, p. 76 (丁, 第76页)

²¹⁰ Yu, ‘How I Designed the “Friendship” Typeface’, p. 13 (余, 《我怎样设计“友谊”拼音活字》, 第13页)

²¹¹ Ibid. p. 14.

²¹² Wang Yun, ‘He Opened the Door to the World for Chinese Design’, *National Art Museum of China*, 7 (2006), 58-63, (p. 58) (汪芸, 《他为中国设计打开了通向世界的大门》, 刊载于《中国美术馆》, 2006, 第58页)

²¹³ Ding, p. 79 (丁, 第79页); On “Cihai” (《辞海》), see ‘Preface’, in *dacihai* <http://www.dacihai.com.cn/publish_explain.html> [accessed 16 April 2018] (《前言》, 刊载于大辞海网站)

of Printing Technology. Based on the experience of working in the team to design a Chinese typeface applied to *Cihai*, Yu Bingnan completed the task of designing corresponding Latin typeface called “Cihaixiti” (辞海细体).²¹⁴

The thinking and practice in typeface design continued in Yu Bingnan’s teaching practice. In 1963, when he was back at the Central Academy of Arts & Crafts, he took the lead in starting courses such as typography design, Chinese and Western typeface design and printing typeface design.²¹⁵ After the Cultural Revolution, since the school had reopened in 1977, Yu Bingnan had to prepare teaching ma-

terials for each lesson so he had the idea of writing a textbook on typeface design which would combine the knowledge he had learned in both Ger-

many and China.²¹⁶ Eventually his re- search on Chinese and Western typeface design developed into a publication entitled *Meishuzi* (《美术字》), published in 1980 [Figure 17].²¹⁷



Figure [17] Yu Bingnan, *Meishuzi*, cover and inside page design, 1980 (© Yu Bingnan)

The publication is a good demonstration of Yu Bingnan’s research into typeface design, especially his thinking on, and analysis of, the relationship between Western and Chinese characters at the time. This was first of all reflected in the choice of the book’s title. In the 1980s, many concepts in modern design such as typefaces, had not been introduced to China.²¹⁸ In these circumstances, Yu Bingnan chose to use *Meishuzi*, a local concept indicating characters that had

²¹⁴ Ibid. p. 80.

²¹⁵ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 6 May 2018.

²¹⁶ Li, Wang, p. 22 (李, 王, 第22页)

²¹⁷ Yu Bingnan, *Meishuzi* (Beijing: People’s Fine Arts Publishing House, 1980) (余秉楠, 《美术字》, 北京: 人民美术出版社, 1980)

²¹⁸ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 26 February 2018.

been processed, embellished and decorated to adapt to a local context.²¹⁹ His research on Western and Chinese typefaces was directly reflected in the book cover design. There are two groups of characters on the cover, including the title in both Chinese and Pinyin. Some upper case English letters and Chinese characters were shown in the space underneath. Here on the cover, two kinds of Chinese typefaces of very different styles were applied with English typefaces in corresponding styles, showing the common rules in typeface design. The radicals on the left side of these Chinese characters under the book title were highlighted, showing that they — like the combination of individual English letters forming a word — are components to construct a character. In addition, the other similarities between the English letters and Chinese characters were also displayed, for example, the way of presenting strokes in the structure of a character, as well as the situation in which horizontal strokes usually looked thinner than the vertical ones in the application of both typefaces.

As a practical book, *Meishuzi* was very popular in China in an era with limited information and resources on design. It was reprinted for thirteen times with about 1,300,000 copies printed from its first edition in April 1980 to 1998.²²⁰ The publication was a continuation of Yu Bingnan's training in and research on typeface originating at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig. During the process of creating the Friendship typeface, Albert Kapr found an “oriental decorative beauty” in the typeface conveyed by the “lively lines” and he insisted that this “Chinese impression” should be retained.²²¹ Such guidance would have an profound impact on Yu Bingnan's understanding of design and encouraged him to pay attention to the cultural meaning behind the visual images and the Latin characters he had been learning and practising. This awareness was further developed in the local Chinese context with continuous search for the inner connections between Western and Chinese typeface design. In 1983, the trip to Belgium and Germany with the delegation organised by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China provided him with the opportunity to link his knowledge of typeface and book design he had gained from Albert Kapr in the 1960s with the new information in this area through conversation with Jürgen Spon, professor at Berlin University of the Arts.²²² In the ten-page article entitled “Introduction to the Modern Book Art in the East and West” (《东西方现代书籍艺术掠影》) published in the fourth issue of *Literature and Art Studies* (《文艺研究》), a key journal in China in

²¹⁹ On “Meishuzi”, see *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, 7th edn (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2016), p. 889 (《现代汉语词典》, 北京: 商务印刷馆, 2016, 第7版, 第889页)

²²⁰ Yu, *Meishuzi* (余, 《美术字》), also see Zhao Jian, *Professor Yu Bingnan 50 Years Teaching Career Design Work Exhibition* (Beijing: Beijing Graphic World Printing Co., Ltd., 2012) (赵健, 《余秉楠教授执教五十周年设计作品展》, 北京: 北京图文天地印刷有限公司, 2012)

²²¹ Yu, ‘How I Designed the “Friendship” Typeface’, p. 14 (余, 《我怎样设计“友谊”拼音活字》, 第14页)

²²² Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 2 May 2019.

1984, there is a section specifically making comparisons between international and local Chinese book design.²²³

Therefore, Albert Kapr's gift for the Central Academy of Arts & Crafts during his first trip to China in the 1986 was not simply a historical record of the first Latin typeface designed by his Chinese student — it was also a starting point for Yu Bingnan's cross-cultural research on design.

3.2 From Polish Poster to Adobe Typeface

On the comparative research journey on Chinese and Western typeface designs, Yu Bingnan was not alone. In the afternoon of November 8 1987, a talk on type design in the digital era was delivered at Yale University School of Art by Sumner Stone, then director of typography at Adobe.²²⁴ This was part of the educational campaign on digital type targeted at the design community, that aimed to encourage the acceptance of PostScript.²²⁵ At that time, it was a brand-new topic, and the poster for the talk was equally innovative 'Figure [18]'. The main elements of the poster are the four characters of the letter TYPE, and the title of the talk in white on top of the red background. Instead of putting them in their normal order, the characters were rearranged — the first character, T, was laid horizontally, followed by the second and the fourth characters P and E. The second character Y was put underneath, between T and P. Among the four main characters, T and P are sans-serif while Y and E are serif. Inside the letter T, is



Figure [18] Wang Min, poster to promote Stone font family, 594 x 841 mm, 1987 (© Wang Min)

²²³ Yu Bingnan, 'A Review of Book Design in the East and West', *Literature & Art Studies*, 4 (1984), 224-233 (pp. 227-228) (《东西方现代书籍艺术掠影》，刊载于《文艺研究》，1984，第4期，第227-228页)

²²⁴ Pamela Pfiffner, *Inside the Publishing Revolution: The Adobe Story* (Berkeley, CA: Peachpit Press, 2003), p. 12.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

the presenter's name, together with the talk's title in italics of even smaller size. The text showing the location and time of the talk in white was under the letter E in italics, the same size as the talk's title. At the bottom right of the poster there is a description of the typefaces used, all of which are members of the Stone typeface family by Adobe Systems. In this poster composed of letters, the message is clarified through the juxtaposition of different layers of information. Also, a sense of richness and rhythm was created by kerning, line spacing, and the thickness and size of the fonts. Obviously, it was designed by someone with a profound understanding of the Stone family typefaces, as well as a thorough grounding in typeface design skills. The creator of the poster was Wang Min, a designer from mainland China. This might raise many questions, for example, why and how was Wang Min chosen for this task? How could he have such an in-depth understanding of the Stone family typefaces, as well as the skill to present them in such an elegant way? To address these questions, it is necessary to trace and to examine Wang Min's development, and to explore the reasons why he could gain such exquisite skill in typeface design.

Compared to the students with study experiences outside China in the 1950s, those who were sent abroad for further research in the 1980s had more choices — the areas they visited were no longer confined to the Soviet Union and Socialist Eastern European countries.²²⁶ After six years of studying and teaching experience at the Zhejiang Academy of Art (currently the China Academy of Art), Wang Min, later the founding director of the CAFA School of Design and design director of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, left China in 1984 to become a visiting fellow at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich (Akademie der Bildenden Künste, München) and then Berlin University of the Arts (Hochschule der Künste, Berlin).²²⁷ As a student of Waldemar Swierzy, Wang Min was initially strongly attracted by Polish poster design.²²⁸ However, he felt lost in such an environment with “too much freedom” where there was no strict restriction on the length of schooling and the courses the students took.²²⁹ Coming from China, Wang Min had very limited resources on design when he was at school due to the country's isolation for

²²⁶ Zhang Hui, ‘Total Number of Overseas Students from China Has Reached 5.19 Million, The 50-year History of Chinese Overseas Students’, in *Tencent* <<https://new.qq.com/omn/20180508/20180508A1EO8H.html>> [accessed 16 February 2018] (张慧, 《我国留学人员累计已达519万, 盘点出国留学50年大数据》, 刊载于腾讯网)

²²⁷ ‘Wang Min Resume, before 2012’, the document was provided to the author by Wang Min through email on 10 February 2017. The original document is situated in Wang Min's personal archive.

²²⁸ Wei Lai, ‘Preface’, in *Min Wang Twenty Years of Graphic Design*, ed. by Wei Lai (Harbin: Heilongjiang Science and Technology Press, 2003) (魏来, 《前言》, 刊载于《王敏平面设计二十年》, 魏来编, 哈尔滨: 黑龙江科学技术出版社, 2003, 第一版)

²²⁹ Zheng Juxin, Chen Yongyi and Yu Jiadi, “Professor Wang Min, Dean of CAFA Design School Talks about the Comparison of the Design from the East and West”. The text was provided to the author by Wang Min, through email, 7 February 2017. The text is situated in Wang Min's personal archive (郑巨欣、陈永怡、俞佳迪, 《中央美术学院设计学院院长王敏教授谈东西方设计比较》, 王敏个人文档)

decades. In 1978, when he was an undergraduate student, the only international design magazine in the school library was *Idea*.²³⁰ Wang Min and his classmates had to manage to borrow the magazine from the library, selecting the posters and decorative paintings to copy.²³¹ A collection of each copy was stored in the dormitory as their best source of information.²³² He was eager to get systematic training.

During his stay in Europe, Wang Min had been looking for something solid and something that could be connected with the Chinese education system at that time until he encountered and communicated with the Swiss designer Armin-Hoffman, head of the Graphic Design Department at the Basel School of Design in 1984.²³³ In contrast to the free, artistic environment of Berlin under the influence of Eastern Europe, Swiss design was particularly rational and rigorous. For Wang Min, Swiss education was a typical product of modernism.²³⁴ He found that there was something similar to the Chinese education system, with its strict drawing training.²³⁵ Attracted by the Swiss international graphic design style, Wang Min began his training in Switzerland, starting from a sketch and then the transformation of sketch from a natural pattern to something abstract.²³⁶ This was a process for training the eyes, hands and logical thinking ability. After this, came a course in typography, something of great importance, where he learned to repeatedly scrutinise the position and size of each character.²³⁷ Usually it would take about three or four months to continuously modify a design for a letterhead before finding the best solution.²³⁸ This experience laid a solid foundation for his future exploration in the area of typeface and typography design.

Soon, the third turning point in his life came. In 1985, Wang Min participated in the summer school organised by the Graphic Design Department of Yale University at Brissago in Switzer-

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ 'CAFA Lecture | Good Teacher - Listening to Wang Min talking about "My Design Journey"', in *CAFA art information website* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_777b520d0101cwt5.html> [accessed 17 June 2018] (《CAFA讲座 | 《良师》——听王敏讲述“我的设计之路”》，刊载于中央美术学院艺讯网)

²³⁷ Wang Min interview with the author, through email, 26 January 2017.

²³⁸ Ibid.

land.²³⁹ In Wang Min's opinion, Yale, as a major university, had a stronger academic atmosphere than Basel School of Design.²⁴⁰ Under the influence of his teachers in the summer school, Wang Min started to plan his study in the United States.²⁴¹

In 1986, he began his graduate research under Paul Rand at Yale University, where he would soon apply what he had learned into practice. Through the recommendation of Alvin Eisenman, then the dean of the Graphic Design department at Yale, and also a member of the Type Advisory Board at Adobe, Wang Min had the opportunity to work at Adobe in Christmas vacation at this crucial point when designers were just starting to use personal computers for typeface and typography design.²⁴² Together with his classmate Brian Wu, Wang Min was invited to join in the team to tackle the challenge of digitalising Japanese characters, because of his Chinese background and the solid basic skills in typeface design he had gained in Switzerland.²⁴³ Wang Min and Brian Wu were among the first users of Illustrator 1.0, and successfully tackled the challenge.²⁴⁴

They did a beautiful job, and were even put on the Japanese firm. Morisawa's staff were convinced that if these two graduate students could do so many characters so well, they certainly could be successful in their production process. And, as it turned out they were right. This project launched Adobe's introduction of scalable typefaces and the PostScript language in the Japanese market, a venture that turned out to be extremely successful."²⁴⁵

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Philip Charles Burton, 'The Journey of Min Wang', in *Min Wang Twenty Years of Graphic Design*, ed. by Wei Lai (Harbin: Heilongjiang Science and Technology Press, 2003), pp. 160-163 (p. 160) (菲利普·查尔斯·伯顿, 《王敏的历程》, 刊载于《王敏平面设计二十年》, 魏来编, 哈尔滨: 黑龙江科学技术出版社, 2003, 第160页)

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Wang Min, 'Morning Light: Adobe Typeface Design in the Desktop Publishing Era', *Zhuangshi*, 6 (2013), 22-26 (p. 22) (王敏, 《晨光初现: 桌面出版时期的奥多比字体设计》, 2013, 第6期, 第22页); On "designer's early adoption of computers and the requirement for typeface", see Nicole Miñoza, 'Celebrating Twenty-Five Years of Original Type at Adobe', in *Adobe Typekit Blog* <<https://blog.typekit.com/2014/05/20/celebrating-twenty-five-years-of-original-type-at-adobe/>> [accessed 5 April 2018]

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Summer Stone, 'Min Wang: Simply & Complex', in *Min Wang Twenty Years of Graphic Design*, ed. by Wei Lai (Harbin: Heilongjiang Science and Technology Press, 2003), pp. 24-27 (p. 24) (萨姆纳·斯通, 《繁简合一》, 刊载于《王敏平面设计二十年》, 魏来编, 哈尔滨黑龙江科学技术出版社, 2003, 第24页)

This experience turned out to be the starting point of Adobe's connection with Wang Min who came back in the summer of 1987 as an intern with the task of making a specimen book for the Stone typeface family, again together with his partner Brian Wu.²⁴⁶ As the first original designs produced for the desktop publishing environment, Stone typefaces include serif, san serif and informal versions. To create promotional materials for this typeface family, Wang Min had to conduct a series of experimental explorations based on his familiarity with each character.²⁴⁷ He was at that point entering into what he felt a utopia of typeface design. According to Wang Min, there was a utopian atmosphere in Adobe, where people had a great passion for typeface design, and this was reflected in every aspect of their life, including topics of conversation, which usually focused on the possibilities offered by new technology and future trends.²⁴⁸ Besides, this was also the period during which Wang Min began to get the opportunities for close cooperation and communication with leading typeface designers. He frequently visited Jack Stauffacher's studio in San Francisco and spent lot of time sitting in front of the computer to work out the delicate spacing for the Stone typeface brochure.²⁴⁹ A conversation about spacing could last the whole night.²⁵⁰ All his communication with Robert Slimbach, the designer of the Utopia typeface, whose work space was "a permanent landscape of computer screens with huge typefaces shining in his dark room" was purely about typeface design.²⁵¹ This turned out to be not only an ideal opportunity to learn and to communicate about professional issues in a particular design area, but also an environment that shaped his professional spirit and values. His concentration and passion, and his skills in presenting the richness, as well as various possibilities of typeface design was specifically reflected in his poster for Sumner Stone's talk at Yale in 1987.

At that time, "behind-the-scenes technologies developed by Adobe Systems set the foundation for professional desktop publishing applications".²⁵² Adobe tried to set the industry standard for typeface software, not only from the technical aspect, but also from aspects of design and quali-

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Wang, p. 22 (王, 第22页)

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Wang, p. 23 (王, 第23页)

²⁵² On "early systems of Adobe", see 'Desktop publishing (DTP), History of Desktop publishing?' in Opticentre <[https://www.opticentre.net/FAQ/Desktop-publishing-\(DTP\)/History-of-Desktop-publishing/](https://www.opticentre.net/FAQ/Desktop-publishing-(DTP)/History-of-Desktop-publishing/)> [accessed 10 January 2018]

ty.²⁵³ In doing so, they used history and tradition as a resource, Adobe Garamond is a case in point: it revived tradition to pursue quality. For Wang Min, after Robert Granjon's redesign, Adobe Garamond restored the classical beauty of this typeface while at the same time gaining the qualities of a digital typeface, such as accuracy and practicality, eventually reaching a balance of traditional aesthetics and modern technology.²⁵⁴ In 1989, Wang Min received a commission to create promotional material for Adobe Garamond, which for him was a journey to explore classical Western typeface design — a valuable opportunity to learn.²⁵⁵ Since then, he has been deeply connected with Western typeface design.

Wang Min's understanding of the rules, aesthetics and legacy of Western typography originated in his experience at Adobe, and this influence continued — about 20 years later, in 2006, when he was formally invited back to China to work as the design director of the local Beijing Olympic Games design team, he chose Garamond as the standard Western typeface for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, based on his understanding of the typeface gained during his research on it in 1989 when he was asked to create promotional material for Adobe Garamond.²⁵⁶ The relationship between design and technology, as well as typefaces and their application has become an important issue for Wang Min, and one that occupied his thoughts very much since then.²⁵⁷ In 2003, at around the same time that he was back to China working for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, he also received an invitation to become the dean of the CAFA design school, where he established the Text Design Research Centre to further his desire to participate in and promote the development of Chinese typeface design.²⁵⁸

In 1990, Wang Min joined the Creative Services department of Adobe after working part time for a year while teaching at Yale on the faculty of the graduate Graphic Design programme.²⁵⁹ His academic and work experience at the Zhejiang Academy of Art in China to a experimental

²⁵³ Wang, p. 22 (王, 第22页); also see Tamyé Riggs, 'The Adobe Originals Silver Anniversary Story: Stone, Slimbach, and Twombly launch the first Originals', in *Adobe Typekit Blog* <<https://blog.typekit.com/2014/06/12/the-adobe-originals-silver-anniversary-story-stone-slimbach-and-twombly-launch-the-first-originals/>> [accessed 12 April 2018]

²⁵⁴ Wang, p. 26 (王, 第26页)

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid

²⁵⁷ On "attitude on fonts at Adobe in the 1980s", see Pamela Pfiffner, *Inside the Publishing Revolution: The Adobe Story*, 1st edn (Berkeley: Peachpit Press, 2003), p. 56, also see Riggs, 'The Adobe Originals Silver Anniversary Story: Stone, Slimbach, and Twombly launch the first Originals'.

²⁵⁸ 'Wang Min Resume, before 2012', the document was provided to the author by Wang Min through email on 10 February 2017. The original document is situated in Wang Min's personal archive.

²⁵⁹ Stone, p. 26 (斯通, 第26页)

artistic environment at the Berlin University of the Arts, to the rational and rigorous Basel School of Design, and then to Yale and Adobe during the period of the “publishing revolution” helped him to see and understand the design phenomenon from a multi-dimensional perspective. Instead of following one single dominant style, he has always looked for design creativity from crossing-cultural activity and an interdisciplinary environment where differences bring dynamism.²⁶⁰

3.3 From Cover Painting to the Construction of Five Senses of Book

While Wang Min was exploring typeface design for in-depth research, trying to create vivid dramatic visual effects with fonts at Yale and Adobe, in his home country one designer had been experimenting with new modern elements to transform the book cover into a dramatic stage.

In 1986, the Silver Award winner of the National Bookbinding Art Competition’s cover design section ‘Figure [19]’ was different from the normal style of book design at that time: instead of showing exquisite realistic painting techniques, the designer used geometric forms.²⁶¹ The design features simply red, black and brown blocks of colour on a white background. The topic of the book, and its title, *Life and Death*, was expressed in a symbolic way with red representing life and black representing death. The brown colour in between,

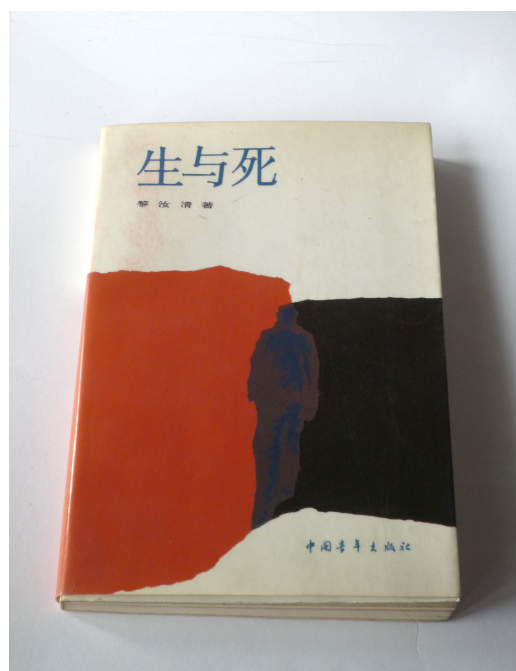


Figure [19] Lu Jingren, *Life and Death*, cover design, 1985 (© Lu Jingren)



Figure [20] Lu Jingren, *The Days in Kuocang Mountain*, cover design and illustration, 1980 (© Lu Jingren)

²⁶⁰ Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, ‘Min Wang and Yale’, in *Min Wang Twenty Years of Graphic Design*, ed. by Wei Lai (Harbin: Heilongjiang Science and Technology Press, 2003), pp. 14-15 (p. 14) (希拉·布拉特维勒, 《我所认识的王敏》, 摘自魏来, 《王敏平面设计二十年》, 哈尔滨: 黑龙江科学技术出版社, 2003, 第14页)

²⁶¹ Lu Jingren interview with the author, in Beijing, 20 October 2017.

with the shape of a human figure, implied the journey from life to death.²⁶² This might look ordinary today but it meant something special at a time when a realistic style was highly popular. Just a few years ago, Lu Jingren, the designer of *Life and Death*, was very proud of his cover design for *The Days in Kuocang Mountain* (《括苍山恩仇记》) ‘Figure [20]’ which features skilful line drawing in the traditional ink and brush style. What, then, are the reasons for this change? How did Lu Jingren gain the ability to realise the transformation from presenting a topic in a realistic style to using abstract visual language? Would this bring something new to Chinese book cover design in an era when the concept of “book design” did not yet exist and when this competition section was known as “bookbinding art”? What would this change lead to, and what would be the next stage in Lu Jingren’s exploration? To unpack the puzzle, it is important to start from Lu Jingren’s working environment, the China Youth Press where he had started his career as an art editor.

For Lu Jingren, the end of the Cultural Revolution was the turning point in his life when he, a young man with good painting skills originally from Shanghai, could finally leave the Fine Breeding Production Team in Xuguang Farm within the Heilongjiang Jiu San Agricultural Reclamation Bureau (黑龙江九三农垦局旭光农场良种生产队) in the north-east of China where he spent ten years as a “sent-down youth” creating promotional materials to become reeducated.²⁶³ With a strong wish to continue painting, and based on his good reputation in publishing circles established through a series of outstanding book cover designs and illustrations, he chose to work at the China Youth Press in Beijing as an art editor after the Cultural Revolution.²⁶⁴

Excited about the transformation in the book design area, he began to search for a new visual language in a much more open environment when international publications began to be available in China. Every Saturday night when he finished work, Lu Jingren would go to the China National Publications Import & Export Corporation.²⁶⁵ He would bring a watercolour paint box and copy the cover of international publications while at the same time cutting out artworks, advertisements and illustrations from the Russian magazine *Orohek* subscribed to by his brother and made a reference book for himself.²⁶⁶ Gradually, he began to put the new ideas into practice, for example the cover design for the Chinese translation of Seiichi Morimura’s novel *Watershed* (《分水岭》) ‘Figure [21]’, as well as *Wang Anyi’s Collected Short Stories* (《王安忆中短篇小说集》) ‘Figure [22]’ in 1983. On both covers, there are no descriptive images to rep-

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Lu Jingren interview with the author, through email, 16 March 2018.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Lu Jingren interview with the author, through email, 20 October 2017.

²⁶⁶ Lu Jingren interview with the author, through email, 30 March 2018.

resent the content of the book, only metaphorical elements. For example, the abstract blue shape on the cover of *Watershed* implies the confusing consciousness of the novel's hero while on the cover of *Wang Anyi's Collected Short Stories*, the windows, balconies and the various colour blocks representing the cloth hanging on the balcony implies it is a book that discusses ordinary people's daily lives.²⁶⁷



Figure [21-22] Lu Jingren, *Watershed*, cover design, 1983; Lu Jingren, *Wang Anyi's Collected Short Stories*, 1983, cover design, 1983 (©Lu Jingren)

It was also during this learning and working process, however, that Lu Jingren realised the differences between the books published in China and those from abroad. He found out there was no special emphasis on cover design and painting skill in some of the international publications; instead, the designers attention was put on the structure of the book, as well as the way it conveyed the content and information.²⁶⁸ What was more, he further observed that the scope of book design was not limited to painting the cover and creating illustration according to a division of work roles, that was the situation in his office; some international designers played a far more active role in creating a book, putting forward their own unique perspectives on design.²⁶⁹ In doing so, the reading experience would turn out to be a process of understanding something through inference to intrigue the reader's imagination.

After continuous thinking, analysis and comparison based on his practice in the publishing house and research on international publications, Lu Jingren gradually realised the significant difference between simply providing readers with a precise text and offering them a special reading experience enhanced by the editorial concept. This was an understanding of vital importance, which helped Lu Jingren to view his own experimentation on book cover design in a critical way, realising that the adoption of modern elements from international publications

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Lu Jingren, "Beauty Book, Continue to Read - The Situation of Contemporary Chinese Book Design". The text was provided to the author by Lu Jingren, through email, 1 March 2017. The text is situated in Lu Jingren's personal archive (吕敬人, 《美书, 留住阅读——中国当代书籍设计现状》, 吕敬人个人文档)

²⁶⁹ Lu Jingren interview with the author, through email, 9 May 2017.

with no background knowledge was similar to the way “a blind man feels an elephant”.²⁷⁰ What he gained was a fragmentary surface understanding, which could not support the sustainable development of his practice. This dilemma reflected in some of his works in the mid-1980s, such as the cover design for *The World of Animals in Stamps* and *Master Pieces of the World in Stamps* (《邮票中的动物世界》) ‘Figure [23]’. He himself could not explain the meaning of the trace left by the stroke at the centre of the cover, a visual symbol incorporated after he had seen it in the design of international publications.²⁷¹



Figure [23] Lu Jingren, *Master Pieces of the World in Stamps*, cover design, 1986 (© Lu Jingren)

Unsatisfied with the situation in which many publications were designed for sell, while the content of the book was ignored, as well as the stereotypes of combining an image and a line of text (the book title) as a book cover, Lu Jingren started to look for a new breakthrough.²⁷² At that time, state-owned organisations had already begun to send their staff abroad for further training. In 1989, an opportunity came when Lu Jingren was selected by the joint programme of the Publishers Association of China and Kodansha Company Limited (講談社) for further research on book design in Japan.²⁷³ Before the trip, Lu Jingren had already heard about Kohei Sugiura, the well-known Japanese book designer and appreciated very few images of Kohei Sugiura’s works he could found in the Japanese design magazines available in China.²⁷⁴ For him, Kohei Sugiura’s “chaotic manifestation” (混沌表现) was unique, especially compared to the modernist style that was popular

²⁷⁰ Lu Jingren interview with the author, in Beijing, 20 October 2017.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Lu Jingren, ‘Learning and Seeking for Method 1989-1998’, in *Imitation and Innovation: Book Design by Lu Jingren and His 10 Proteges* (Gyoha-eup: Pajubookcity Corporate Cooperative, 2016), pp. 143-145 (p. 145) (吕敬人, 《求学问道 1989-1998》, 刊载于《传承创造: 吕敬人的书籍设计与他的10位弟子展》, 坡州: 坡州书城, 2016, 第145页)

²⁷³ Han Zhanning, ‘Interview of Book Designer by Han Zhanning 1: Lu Jingren, Design Master who Respects and Loves Book’, in *Design China* <http://www.333cn.com/graphic/llwz/115687_9.html> [accessed 17 July 2018] (韩湛宁, 《韩湛宁书籍设计家访谈录 1: 吕敬人, 敬书爱书的设计大家》, 刊载于中国设计之窗)

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

in Japan at that time.²⁷⁵ Attracted by Kohei Sugiura's design, and eager to see his original work, he specifically searched for Kohei Sugiura's books soon after his arrival in Japan.²⁷⁶ Overwhelmed by the richness of Sugiura's visual expression, as well as the strong attraction that "grasped" him, Lu Jingren sent a request to the organiser of the trip, the Comprehensive Editorial Department of the Kodansha Company to arrange a meeting with Sugiura.²⁷⁷ Fortunately, he not only realised his dream of meeting Kohei Sugiura, but was also accepted to study in his studio during his one-year stay in Japan.²⁷⁸ This meeting changed Lu Jingren's original research plan in Japan, and he spent as much time as possible in Kohei Sugiura's studio.²⁷⁹

As a versatile designer, Kohei Sugiura's research was broad and experimental. For example, his exhibition "Luminous Mandala: Book Designs of Kohei Sugiura" was the result of his own image research based on cosmology.²⁸⁰ Educated at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Design, with architecture as his major subject, Kohei Sugiura was later invited as a visiting professor to Ulm School of Design, Germany, in 1964 and from 1966 to 1967.²⁸¹ Based on his cross-cultural experience and long time standing exploration in areas such as information theory, sign theory and perceptual psychology, Kohei Sugiura developed specific methods that he felt allowed him to apply an Asian aesthetics to the techniques of Western design, which precisely represented in his book design with emphasis on craftsmanship.²⁸²

The learning experience in Kohei Sugiura's studio was overwhelming and challenged Lu Jingren's understanding of book design. One of the most important things he learned from Kohei Sugiura was that book design was not simple decoration: instead, it was teamwork effort, based

²⁷⁵ Lu Jingren interview with the author, through WeChat, 11 April 2018; On "chaotic manifestation", see Usuda Shouji, "Preface", in *Kohei Sugiura on Design*, trans. by Lu Liren, Lu Jingren, 2nd edn (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2014), p. 213 (白田捷治, 《前言》, 刊载于《旋: 杉浦康平的设计世界》, 翻译: 吕立人、吕敬人, 香港: 三联书店有限公司, 2014, 第一版, 第213页), also see Kohei Sugiura, 'Wind and Lightning: A Half-Century of Magazine Design by Sugiura Kohei', in *ggg (ginza graphic gallery)* <<http://www.dnp.co.jp/CGI/gallery/schedule/detail.cgi?l=2&t=1&seq=0000075>> [accessed 18 April 2018]

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ 'Luminous Mandala: Book Designs of Kohei Sugiura', in *ggg (ginza graphic gallery)* <<http://www.dnp.co.jp/CGI/gallery/schedule/detail.cgi?l=2&t=1&seq=00000565>> [accessed 22 Feb 2018]

²⁸¹ Kirti Trivedi, *Kohei Sugiura Graphic Design, Methodology and Philosophy* (Mumbai: Asian Art & Design Research Group, 2015)

²⁸² On Kohei Sugiura (杉浦康平), see Shouji, *Kohei Sugiura on Design* (白田捷治, 《旋: 杉浦康平的设计世界》)

on the overall plan made through continuous discussion, communication and modification between the designer and the writer, publisher, editor, illustrator, and typeface expert, as well as the printer.²⁸³ Kohei Sugiura had his own unique insights on text and he would communicate with the author, providing ideas from his own perspective; furthermore, Kohei Sugiura would construct the structure of the book based on communication with author, trying to apply the particular qualities of visual communication to make up for what was missing in the text; meanwhile, detail in processes was always highly emphasised in his design.²⁸⁴ In Lu Jingren's opinion, a book created by Kohei Sugiura was a combination of rational logical thinking and sensual artistic creativity: the book designer acted like a film director.²⁸⁵ A new concept of book design started to take shape in his mind.

Kohei Sugiura also helped Lu Jingren to understand the importance of broad knowledge in addition to the improvement in design skills, especially during Lu Jingren's second trip to Japan in the early 1990s supported by a scholarship from Kohei Sugiura studio, when Kohei Sugiura gave him a lecture on a weekly basis.²⁸⁶ Actively involved in studio design practice, Lu Jingren tried to find every opportunity to observe and to learn, including the time when they were having meal or afternoon tea together.²⁸⁷ What he tried to learn was not limited to the book design area: he was also interested in music, drama, film, various kinds of exhibitions and folk culture customs. With these interests, Lu Jingren achieved a comprehensive education in art, which was reflected in his "five senses of book", an approach to book design highly valued by Kohei Sugiura.²⁸⁸

It is important to point out that this training model, as well as the international working atmosphere integrating Eastern and Western culture in Kohei Sugiura's studio, was not a completely new experience for Lu Jingren. Instead, there are potential internal connections with his childhood experience. Born into a family operating in the silk industry in Shanghai in 1947, Lu Jingren was surrounded by large numbers of imported European silk sample books and design drafts, as well as pattern designs created by the European designers employed by his father,

²⁸³ Han, 'Interview with Book Designers by Han Zhanning 1: Lu Jingren, Design Master who Respects and Loves the Book' (韩, 《韩湛宁书籍设计家访谈录 1: 吕敬人, 敬书爱书的设计大家》)

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Lu Jingren interview with the author, through WeChat, 11 April 2018.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ On "five senses of book", see Lu Jingren, *Tao of Book Design* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2017), p. 6 (吕敬人, 《书艺问道: 吕敬人书籍设计说》, 上海: 上海人民美术出版社出版, 2017, 第6页)

whose target consumer groups was mainly European.²⁸⁹ Besides running the business, Lu Jingren's father had a wide range of interests and a life-style which was a combination of Chinese and Western. As an art lover, Lu Jingren's father bought many publications on Western art and subscribed to international photography magazines.²⁹⁰ Meanwhile, his father never forgot to educate and cultivate his five sons in traditional Chinese culture. He provided the brothers with a small library with many old books.²⁹¹ To manage and maintain the library, Lu Jingren learnt to repair and bind the books at an early age.²⁹² Lu Jingren was profoundly nurtured by the strong cultural atmosphere of his family, which could be the reason for his natural ability to share the ideas and values of Kohei Sugiura, who was erudite and versatile, adhering to traditional values while at the same time maintaining an openness to Western culture.

After careful observation and training on a daily basis, Lu Jingren transformed his understanding of book design. This can be seen in his new practice. Compared to previous works, the book design for *The Family* (《家》) created at the Kohei Sugiura studio in 1990 'Figure [24]' looks much more exciting like a stage. The Chinese character "Family" (家) was put at the centre of the cover highlighted in red colour inside the geometric form of a lantern. Under this character, there is a rear view of the



Figure [24] Lu Jingren, *Family*, cover design, 1990 (©Lu Jingren)

novel's hero. On his far left, near the edge of the book, is a rear view of the novel's heroine, in a much smaller size. On the four corners of the cover, there are copper door knockers, typical of a Chinese feudal family house. The heavy and repressive atmosphere, as well as the tragic fate of the hero and heroine struggling with inter-generational conflict during the process of transformation from feudal to modern society in China in the 1920s that is described in this modern Chinese literary masterpiece by the well-known Chinese novelist Ba Jin (巴金) is presented by the visual elements with direct and symbolic meaning. Instead of "planting" foreign elements from international publications in his design, the application of the symbolic forms on the cover

²⁸⁹ Lu Jingren interview with the author, through email, 12 March 2018.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

of *The Family* was supported by an internal understanding, for example, of the form of lantern representing the important family in the former times, as well as the brass door knocker with its traditional decorative pattern showing the family's power and authority. These elements are therefore part of the story, not merely forms for decorative use. Meanwhile, the choice of material, a special type of Japanese paper (手揉纸) with a rough texture, similar to those used to make lanterns, conveyed a feeling of history and melancholy.

The influence of Kohei Sugiura was not limited to the professional area of book design. When Lu Jingren finished his studies, he struggled with his choice of future plans and deciding whether to stay in Japan or to go back to China, where there was still an arbitrary division of work in publishing houses and editorial design was the "inviolable territory" of the author and executive editor.²⁹³ Kohei Sugiura encouraged Lu Jingren to concentrate on local culture and to start a movement to promote the transformation of the practice from book binding and book decoration to book design when he was back to China.²⁹⁴ Kohei Sugiura's suggestion had significant impact on Lu Jingren's decision. Meanwhile, Lu Jingren's design concept went through a transformation under the influence of Kohei Sugiura's cultural attitude. When talking about Kohei Sugiura's influence at that time, Lu Jingren wrote the following:

He was not against Western scientific methodology... however, he expected the younger generation not to ignore the excellent and profound design philosophy of Eastern culture... to respectfully learn from local culture, local texts and traditional customs and habits... Kohei Sugiura was not trying to make a judgement about East and West, merely saying that each nation should understand the importance of returning to its own culture in order to present the diversity of the world. Kohei Sugiura's education inspired me who was always advocating learning from the West to think reflectively.²⁹⁵

Therefore, after Lu Jingren returned to China from Japan, when he had to confront domestic clichés about book decoration theory, as well as the way the publisher operated, he had a strong feeling that it was his responsibility to do something to make a change.²⁹⁶ Meanwhile, he started a journey of visiting ancient Chinese collections from museums in different regions of China to

²⁹³ Han Zhanning, 'Han Zhanning Interview with Book Design Master Lu Jingren', in *ZCOOL* <<http://www.zcool.com.cn/article/ZNTgyMTgw.html>>, [accessed 18 March 2018] (韩湛宁, 《韩湛宁访谈书籍设计大师吕敬人》, 刊载于站酷)

²⁹⁴ Lu Jingren interview with the author, through email, 12 March 2018.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

accumulate a knowledge of local culture, history and tradition.²⁹⁷ In the process, the relationship between Kohei Sugiura and Lu Jingren shifted from one between teacher and student to an alliance that articulated Asian culture in design.

4. Conclusion

1980s was a period of transformation, when the establishment of the market economic system was advocated while a planned economy was still implemented in China. The commodity market had not yet formed and so the requirement for design was unclear.²⁹⁸ In the art and design academies, training in painting was still dominant, and it was a common phenomenon that many of the students enrolled in the decorative design department did not have a clear awareness of the subject they were going to learn. Even though there were courses in modern design, there was no explanation of the presupposed market or, consumer interest groups, or the appeals and goals of the brand.²⁹⁹ The design training at that time was not aimed at bringing solutions for the real problems in the market.

Under these circumstances, the experience of viewing the design work by international designers, as well as the opportunity to travel abroad for research and work, were highly influential for Chinese graphic designers. The chance to learn the knowledge and skills of modern graphic design in China was limited at that point. At that time, international design magazines such as *Idea* and *Graphis* would be available only in the reference rooms of the state-owned packaging design corporations and in the libraries of a few art and design academies. The exhibition halls displaying imported commodities by well-known brands corresponding to all export categories, as well as the training courses delivered by international designers organised by the Ministry of Commerce were available exclusively to the in-house designers. Therefore, a number of in-house graphic designers, including Wang Yuefei and Wang Xu, the key figures discussed in this chapter, were the ones with the opportunity to receive training in modern design, and had access to advanced facilities for printing and photography, as well as the translation services provided by the company. For those outside this system, such as Chen Shaohua, the language barrier which was common among the early graphic design practitioners led to a situation which the learning process was mainly undertaken through copying images from international design magazines.

For the designers who went abroad for further study, such as Wang Min and Lu Jingren, the trip was an opportunity for them to gain design training on a conceptual level and receive systematic

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 15 February 2018.

²⁹⁹ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 19 March 2018.

training in basic skills. For example, Wang Min's experience of copying, writing and research on Latin characters laid an important foundation for his future exploration. The rigorous training in typeface and typography design at the Basel School of Design established a solid foundation for his future practice at Adobe, where he successfully tackled the challenge of digitalising Japanese characters. It is important to point out that the international environment provided the opportunity for the Chinese graphic designers to reflect on their own culture and tradition. These all stimulated them to rethink profoundly about their cultural identity, as well as ways to present something so delicate and abstract in a universal way to an international audience.

This chapter describes the phenomenon of graphic design in China in the 1980s through the description of the early trajectory of these key figures who played a significant role in the development of the graphic design industry in Shenzhen in the 1990s, as well as those who had a huge influence in terms of international graphic design exchange in the 2000s. It explains how they gained their design education and how they built up their networks with an analysis of the potential problems brought by specific learning methods. Take for example, the high-intensity learning experience of those early practitioners in the local environment, especially the in-house designers, helped them to grasp specific design knowledge and skills in a short period of time while at the same time it ensured that they were likely to fully accept international design without a critical attitude. The case studies of the individual designers and their work in this chapter is an effective way to reveal the transformation they went through under the influence of various factors, such as the beneficial policy of the Chinese government and the impact of communication with international graphic designers. While providing an account of how designers experienced this period with the increased access to foreign practices and norms, the narrative is contextualised with some references to period economic patterns of the period, beneficial policies, global networks, a transitional society and the attitude to Chinese culture and tradition, to demonstrate the sophistication of these early practitioners' journey, which had a profound impact on their future practice.

III. Chapter Two: “Graphic Design in China” - Graphic Design Practice in the 1990s

1. Introduction

In May 1987, Wang Yuefei arrived in Shenzhen to start his new job in charge of GRAFICOM, a joint venture in the Special Economic Zone, by appointment from the Guangdong Import and Export Corporation.³⁰⁰ From then on, he began to travel between Guangzhou and Shenzhen.³⁰¹ He would take the train to Shenzhen every Monday and return home to Guangzhou by train on Friday night.³⁰² The situation continued for ten years until 1997 when he settled in Shenzhen.³⁰³ Two decades later, when describing this experience, he said, “I can't remember how many times I travelled between Guangzhou and Shenzhen, usually by train. Roughly calculating, the distance between Guangzhou and Shenzhen that I travelled for more than twenty years accounts to the distance of three and a half circles around the earth.”³⁰⁴ At that time, he did not realise that in China, design could actually become a profession to support a family.³⁰⁵ By then, he was deeply attracted by design, “just like a three year old child (eager for the apple on the table) but could not reach it”.³⁰⁶ At that time, Wang Yuefei's understanding of contemporary design was mainly gained through reading and copying the international design magazines in his company's reference room, as well as visiting the company's exhibition hall where the imported commodities of well-known brands were displayed. It was during this time that, he started to pay attention to the “Call for Entries” in *Graphis* magazine and began to participate in the competition.³⁰⁷ He received numerous rejection letters from the competition organiser but still kept on trying with the hope to “meet the international standard”.³⁰⁸ What was probably unexpected for him was that with the blooming of graphic design industry in Shenzhen, he would give up his

³⁰⁰ Wang Yuefei, *A Momentous Moment: Poster Design* (Wang Yuefei Design & Associates, 2001) (王粤飞, 《一个重要的时刻: 海报》, 王粤飞设计公司, 2001)

³⁰¹ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 4 July 2019.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ ‘Wang Yuefei: Graphic Designer Dancing in Design Capital’, in *CPPCC Shenzhen Committee* <http://www1.szzx.gov.cn/content/2015-10/28/content_12407961.htm> [accessed 18 December 2018] (《王粤飞: 平面设计人与设计之都共舞》, 刊载于政协深圳市委网站)

³⁰⁵ ‘Shenzhen Designer Wang Yuefei: Being Playful, Knowing How to Play and Enjoying Play Is also A Kind of Appeal’, in *Design China* <<http://www.linux4life.com/graphic/sjr/82634.html>> [accessed 29 June 2019] (《深圳设计师王粤飞: 好玩、会玩、喜欢玩也是一种号召力》, 刊载于中国设计之窗网站)

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 15 December 2017.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

"iron rice bowl", the stable job at Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation, to start his own design company, Wang Yuefei Design & Associates in Shenzhen in 1997.

The remarkable transformation of Wang Yuefei's trajectory was not simply an accidental choice of an individual designer, but reflected the profound changes in Shenzhen, as well as those the graphic design industry in this city had been undergoing with the deepening of reform and opening up.

This chapter examines the practice and exploration of the key figures in the field of graphic design in Shenzhen and Guangzhou, such as Wang Yuefei, Chen Shaohua and Wang Xu. It discusses the various reasons that brought them to Shenzhen. Take for example, Wang Yuefei was sent to Shenzhen by his company, the Guangdong Import and Export Corporation, to set up GRAFICOM as joint venture between the Guangdong Import & Export Corporation, GOODYEAR Printing Co., Ltd, and Kengseng Trading & Co. Ltd from Hong Kong. Chen Shaohua chose to work in Shenzhen with the belief that "Shenzhen had a commodity economy and graphic design would be useful there."³⁰⁹ These two choices, whether active or passive were directly related to the policy of reform and opening up. The structure of GRAFICOM, the joint venture itself, was an exploration of the new economic model brought by the policies of preferential treatment for the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone. So this was the environment, with many foreign-funded companies and new types of enterprise, with a high percentage of young people that Chen Shaohua referred to.³¹⁰ This chapter uses the biography to open up a wider discussion of the reasons for the successful printing industry in Shenzhen and why the city would become the centre of Chinese graphic design. Meanwhile, it discusses the difficulties and dilemmas brought about by the immature development of the industry the graphic designers had to confront, as well as how they tried to tackle these problems: for example, introducing systems of exhibitions and competitions, as well as professional design associations, in parallel to the international design competitions and associations they saw in the international design magazines such as *Graphis* and *Communication Arts*.

In addition, the chapter introduces the designers behind the supermarket shelves in Shanghai, the former centre of graphic design in China in the 1930s. The city had been going through a transformation from being a defender of China's reform and opening up to entering into the stage of development resulting from Deng Xiaoping's proposal to accelerate the opening of Pudong, from the end of 1990. The local brands created by Shanghai designers discussed, including White Cat (白猫), Bee & Flower (蜂花) and Seagull (海鸥) all had a lasting and profound impact on the lives of generations of people in the Yangtze River Delta.

³⁰⁹ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 28 October 2017.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

The narrative is significant not only on its own terms, but also because it exemplifies the broader political and economic context during this period. It shows the crucial role preferential policies played for the development of the graphic design industry in Shenzhen and Shanghai. Meanwhile, the discussion in this chapter is set in a transnational context with an analysis of influence from international design circles and designers. These influences were presented in different ways in local practice due to specific environmental and historical factors.

The chapter makes several new claims about the graphic design phenomenon in China in the 1990s. First of all, the political environment and corresponding economic policies that have usually been used as brief background information in previous research on Chinese graphic design history (*A Study on Graphic Design Industry in China* by Shi Chenxu, Zhu Shuai, 2017 (《中国平面设计产业研究》, 石晨旭、祝帅)) were carefully examined. In doing so, their impact on the formation of the pattern of Chinese graphic design industry has been explicitly clarified. Previous research on graphic design in Shanghai has mainly focused on the period of the Republic of China from 1912 to 1949, with a focus on the 1920s and 1930s (“Power of Advertisement — The Role and Significance of Calendar Advertising in the Process of Urbanisation of Old Shanghai” by Jiang Ying, 2015 (《广告的力量——老上海都市化进程中月份牌广告的作用和意义》, 蒋英)). There are barely any publications on graphic design in Shanghai after the 1980s. This chapter, however, uses new printed sources to reveal the important role economic policy played in the development of graphic design through the comparison of the graphic design phenomenon in Shenzhen and Shanghai. Thus, the narrative does not consist of fragmented stories from different cities but rather interrelated content demonstrating the context and reasons for the development of graphic design in China.

Second, the chapter seeks to reexamine the historical facts about Chinese graphic design from a different perspective. Therefore, the description about important events, such as the establishment of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association (深圳平面设计协会), the first graphic design association in China, in previous studies (“Interpretation of the ‘Southern Phenomenon’ of Chinese Design” by Ji Qian, 2015 (《解读中国设计的“南方现象”》, 季倩)) is transformed into critical in-depth thinking and discussion about these events, as well as the reasons for the initiatives. The artefact analysis of representative works during this period is not limited to the visual level but connected with rich and complex historical factors. In doing so, the analysis of the design works and historical events was conducted from a critical perspective, revealing the problems that had not been discussed in earlier research.

There are very few serious scholarly publications to record the rapid development of graphic design in Shenzhen and Shanghai during this period, not to mention any focus on this group of designers. The research is mainly based on first-hand material, including exclusive interviews, questionnaires and promotional materials published by these designers during this period. I

established close connection with the key figures in Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Shanghai, which are the focus of the discussion in this chapter. These key figures include the founding members of Shenzhen Graphic Design Association, such as Wang Yuefei (王粤飞) from W+FITON (王粤飞+非同空间) and Chen Shaohua from C&S BRAND (陈宋品牌顾问). In Shanghai, the late designer Gu Shipeng (顾世朋) from the Shanghai Daily Chemicals Co.,Ltd. (上海日化公司) and Zhao Zuoliang (赵佐良) from the Shanghai Jiumu Chuansheng Advertising Co., Ltd. (上海九木传盛广告有限公司), the graphic designers behind many well-known local brands are the focus of research. The information about Gu Shipeng was mainly provided by his son Gu Chuanxi (顾传熙) from the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts (上海视觉艺术学院). With the deepening of the research, the interviews were followed by frequent long-term communication through email and WeChat when I was back in London after the research trip to China.

Meanwhile, the research draws on many interviews with these designers, as well as articles on designers and design historians' personal blogs. Take for example, Chen Shaohua published a series of articles on his Sina blog in the early 2000s, in which he discussed some of his iconic commercial graphic design projects and thoughts on design and design education in detail.³¹¹ During the period when there was not enough attention paid to design in mainstream printed media in China, the articles and interviews on these online media channels, usually established by those who had strong interest in design, recorded the thinking of Chinese graphic design pioneers at that time. They were important resources for the research in this field, especially under the circumstances that there were very few formal publications available. Since there are barely any records and books about the early stage of the local enterprises in Shenzhen, some of which had close business relationships with graphic designers in the 1990s, I also referred to unpublished theses on related topics.³¹²

Understanding how and why the Chinese graphic design industry evolved at high speed in Shenzhen in the 1990s in the context of globalisation, as well as the specific local political and social environment, can offer significant insight into the understanding of the trajectory of the development of contemporary Chinese graphic design. Intrinsically linked to the reform and opening up policy of the 1980s, the blooming of the graphic design industry in Shenzhen in the 1990s happened within the circumstances of a national macro plan to develop the import and export trade. As a consequence this provided corresponding technical and material conditions, as well as a reserve of knowledge and skills for these graphic design pioneers in the area. Meanwhile,

³¹¹ *Chen Shaohua blog* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a4473a80100i41b.html> [accessed 27 Feb 2018]

³¹² Zhao Xiaolan, 'Sanjiu Group's Journey to Create Knowledge-based Enterprises' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Peking University, 2000) (赵晓兰, 《三九集团创建知识型企业之路》, (未经发表的博士论文, 北京大学, 2000))

the geographical proximity to Hong Kong increased their chances of interacting with international designers. The understanding of this kind of rapid development in a short period within a specific environment also sheds light on the dilemma the graphic design pioneers confronted in the 2000s when Shenzhen's advantage was no longer significant, for example, the advantages of international information acquisition and international communication, as well as the way the younger generation tried to explore new methods to tackle these challenges in the 2000s. The chapter demonstrates how the early pioneers in the Chinese graphic design field applied the design knowledge and skill gained from international design magazines to local practice, as well as how they introduced international design competitions and design associations to Shenzhen with the aim of establishing industry norms and standards from scratch.

2. “Vigorous Spirit” - Graphic Design Practice in Shenzhen

2.1 Growing up with the Local Companies

Shennan Avenue (深南大道) is known as the calling card and shop window for Shenzhen, with its high skyscrapers representing well-known companies standing on both sides 'Figure [25]'. However, in 1980, when the first section of Shennan Avenue was built, it was just 2.1 kilometres long and 7 metres wide, only enough for two vehicles in parallel.³¹³ Still, this was already the longest road in Shenzhen at that time.³¹⁴ Here is how Wang Yuefei describes Shenzhen in the early 1980s when he visited the city, “Shennan Avenue was still a muddy road. During the summer, there was red clay about 10cm thick covering the road. When the car passed by, the dust would be blown up by the wind. There were many small buses that were no longer used in Hong Kong and almost no houses on both sides of the road”.³¹⁵ 'Figure [26]' It is only after undergoing numerous expansions in the 1980s and 1990s, initially with the aim to “prevent the flying dust from stopping the footsteps of the Hong Kong businessmen” from investing in Shenzhen that Shennan Avenue has become



Figure [25-26] Shennan Avenue, in 2018 and 1985. From top to bottom (©Wang Yuefei)

³¹³ Zhang Liming, *Her Old Street: 1979-1983* (Shenzhen: Shenzhen Press Group Press), p. 17 (张黎明, 《她的老街: 1979-1983》, 深圳: 深圳报业集团出版社, 2018, 第17页)

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 4 July 2019.

an east-west main road with a total length of 25.6 kilometres.³¹⁶

The change in Shennan Avenue conveys the high-speed development of the city itself. At the early stages of the construction in the 1980s, Shenzhen was a small border town adjacent to Hong Kong. The government had almost no investment there and there were barely any state-owned enterprises.³¹⁷ With the comprehensive construction of the Special Economic Zone in the 1980s, as well as the continuous deepening of various reforms, a group of government industry management departments were turned into administrative companies.³¹⁸ These companies underwent rapid development due to the favourable policies and market mechanisms for the Special Economic Zone, forming a group of specialist professionals engaged in industry, commerce, tourism, materials and food production, etc.³¹⁹ Meanwhile, the government invested in the formation of a number of state-owned enterprises according to the needs of the construction of the Special Economic Zone.³²⁰

In the decade from 1990 to 1999, Shenzhen underwent rapid development. The annual per capita wage in Shenzhen increased 4.7 times, from 4,340 CNY in 1990 to 20,714 CNY in 1999.³²¹ The figures were much higher than those in the other economically developed cities in China. Take for example, in Guangzhou, a nearby city, the annual per capita wage was 3,504 CNY in 1990, increasing to 16,202 CNY in 1999.³²² In the area of the Yangtze River Delta, the annual per capita wage in Shanghai and Suzhou from 1990 to 1999 increased from 2,183 CNY to 10,932

³¹⁶ On the reason for the expansion of Shennan Avenue, see 'Shennan Avenue: The Transformation of the First Road in Shenzhen to Shi Li Chang Jie', in *Shenzhen News* <http://dc.sznews.com/content/2018-02/11/content_18460334.htm> [accessed 24 June 2019] (《深南大道：深圳第一路从土路到“十里长街”的蜕变》，刊载于《深圳新闻网》)；On the direction and length of Shennan Avenue, see Tang Yi and Zhang Dongfang, *The Hometown of Dancing Paper Dragon* (Guangzhou: Nanfang Daily Press, 2016), p. 16 (唐毅、张东方，《纸龙舞动的故乡》，2016，广州：南方日报出版社，第16页)

³¹⁷ Zhang Siping, *Shenzhen Miracle: Forty Years of Reform and Opening up in Shenzhen and China* (Beijing: CITIC Press Group, 2019), p. 66 (张思平，《深圳奇迹：深圳与中国改革开放四十年》，2019，北京：中信出版社，第66页)

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid., p. 377.

³²² Guangzhou Statistics Bureau, *Guangzhou Statistical Yearbook - 2011* (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2011), p. 86 (广州市统计局，《广州统计年鉴——2011》，北京：中国统计出版社，2011，第86页)

CNY, and 2,512 CNY to 11,258 CNY respectively.³²³ Compared to the other regions in China, the higher salaries in Shenzhen attracted a large number of people to work there. In 1990, the population in Shenzhen was 1,674,400; the number increased 27.78 times to 6,325,600 in 1999.³²⁴

The local media such as the *Shenzhen Special Zone Daily* (《深圳特区报》), commonly described the key experience and characteristics of the Special Economic Zones as a can-do attitude (敢闯敢试).³²⁵ “Non-reformers have no future” (不改革者不入此门) is the well-known statement made by Yuan Geng, the then head of the Shekou Industrial Zone when the training courses for the enterprise management cadre started.³²⁶ All of these factors contribute to the special ecology of the city, the shop window for technology, management, knowledge and the policy of reform and opening up.

What, then, was the role the graphic designers played in this laboratory with an active economy, flexible and beneficial policies (优惠政策) and an experimental spirit? As mentioned in the Chapter One, the understanding of graphic design both as an academic concept and as a profession was still at an initial stage, in which graphic design education was mixed with art training while those doing design works were regarded as art workers. The fact is that these early pioneers chose to explore and establish this field together with the local entrepreneurs, based on the knowledge gained from international design magazines and strengthened through the communication with graphic designers traveling from Europe, America and Japan. With a spirit of exploration and experimentation, they also had the ambition to introduce Chinese graphic design to international design circles.

³²³ On Annual wage growth in Shanghai and Suzhou from 1990 to 1999, see Shanghai Statistics Bureau, *Shanghai Statistical Yearbook-2011* (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2011), p.158 (上海市统计局, 《上海统计年鉴》, 北京: 中国统计出版社, 2011, 第158页) and Suzhou Statistics Bureau, *Suzhou Statistical Yearbook* (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2015), p.81 (苏州市统计局, 《苏州统计年鉴》, 北京: 中国统计出版社, 2015, 第81页)

³²⁴ Shenzhen Statistics Bureau, *Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook-2011* (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2011), p.49 (深圳市统计局, 《深圳统计年鉴——2011》, 北京: 中国统计出版社, 2011, 第49页)

³²⁵ Han Wenjia and Yao Zhuowen, ‘The Can-do Attitude in Shenzhen’, in *Phoenix New Media* <http://inews.ifeng.com/yidian/49247312/news.shtml?ch=ref_zbs_ydxx_news> [accessed 10 July 2019] (韩文嘉、姚卓文, 《深圳敢闯敢试, 敢为人先》, 刊载于凤凰网)

³²⁶ ‘From Chasing the Trend to Guiding the Times - Review of the 40 Years of China's Reform and Opening Up through the Miracle of Shenzhen's Development’, in *Xinhua Network* <http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-05/20/c_1122860284.htm> [accessed 5 July 2019] (《从追赶时代到引领时代——从深圳发展奇迹看中国改革开放40年》, 刊载于新华网)

2.1.1 The Brains behind the Vanke VI System and Taitai's Market Expansion

In the autumn of 1988, there was a “unique” van running on the Shenzhen streets. Different from other vehicles, this was a special one: one with Chinese and English company names and logo on the body of the van. The large-scale word Vanke — the company name — written in blue lines and light blue stripes looks striking. According to its designer, Chen Shaohua, this van was transformed into something special because the visual symbols on its body were an interesting event on the street ‘Figure [27]’. Actually, the uniqueness of the Vanke van was not just limited to the visual level, it reflected the transformation happening in the city, as well as in the graphic design profession there.



Figure [27] Chen Shaohua, logo design for Vanke, Corporate Identity, 1988 (© Chen Shaohua)

Nowadays, Vanke Co., Ltd. is among the Fortune Global 500 rankings.³²⁷ At the end of 1988, this was still a small company just entering into the property industry, four years after its establishment in 1984.³²⁸ The change in the company’s name in 1987 brought the opportunity to redesign its logo.³²⁹ This task fell on the shoulders of Chen Shaohua, who came down to Shenzhen, looking for a healthy employment environment from his hometown Xi’an with the strong belief that “Shenzhen had a commodity economy and graphic design would be useful there”.³³⁰

In 1988, before formally entering into the property field, the main business of Vanke was high-end household appliances, which became the basis for Chen Shaohua’s logo design.³³¹ The multiple stripes between the English letters V and A had layers of meaning: first of all, they

³²⁷ ‘China Vanke Co., Ltd.’ in *Vanke.com* <<https://www.vanke.com/about.aspx>> [accessed 25 June 2019] (万科企业股份有限公司, 刊载于万科集团网站)

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, through WeChat, 27 February 2018.

³³⁰ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 28 October 2017.

³³¹ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, through WeChat, 27 February 2018.

expressed the delicacy of the quality of Vanke products; secondly, they displayed the diversity of the company's business; thirdly, the designer tried to make the logo distinctive through this detail.³³² This was an extension of his ambition to make a series of designs to create a corporate identity (CI) for Vanke, as a result of successfully encouraging an awareness of branding by Wang Shi (王石), the founder and then director of the company.³³³ It is important to point out that, as mentioned in Chapter One, for the generation of graphic designers like Chen Shaohua, there was no professional design education at college, where fine art training dominated. Reading international design journals at school library became an important part of his graphic design education although he had problems in understanding the text due to his lack of language skills. This is the reason he had created a new visual identity (VI) system for his college, the Central Academy of Arts & Crafts (currently The Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University) as graduate work with no clear understanding of the concept of VI. After moving to Shenzhen, the translation of the series of books on CI by Japanese CI designer Motoo Nakanishi was available in bookshops, which helped Chen Shaohua to gain a better understanding of the knowledge and logic behind visual imagery.³³⁴

The logo for Vanke was Chen Shaohua's second logo design since his arrival in Shenzhen between May and June, 1988. The first logo he created when he came to Shenzhen was the one for Vanke's secondary enterprise, the Shenzhen International Management Service company 'Figure [28]'. The green logo consists of four English letters, SiMS, the abbreviation for the Shenzhen International Management Service. The English letters were divided into twenty-five blocks of colour, based on Vanke's management philosophy of "reasonable combination".³³⁵ It also reflected the formation of Vanke: there were twenty-four employees and one employer (in



Figure [28] Chen Shaohua, business card design for Vanke, Corporate Identity, 1988 (© Chen Shaohua)

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 June 2018.

³³⁴ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, through WeChat, 27 February 2018.

³³⁵ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, through WeChat, 27 February 2018.

April 1988).³³⁶ Soon, in early 1989, Chen Shaohua had the opportunity to design Vanke's first stock certificate (specimen) after Shenzhen Vanke's stock was listed in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone securities company in 1988.³³⁷

It is important to point out that at that time there was no awareness of branding in the entire business community in Shenzhen, and Chen Shaohua himself did not receive systematic training in VI and CI.³³⁸ For him, the lack of this systematic training about VI and CI as not an obstacle to his practice, since "as long as you understand the reason and principles (of the field), and if you do it seriously, you can do well".³³⁹ Based on the related knowledge gained from reading international design magazines, and later on from reading the Chinese translations of the books in this field, he applied his skill in the local environment while at the same time taking on the role of educating the team leader of the company. For Chen Shaohua, this was also the reason why Shenzhen attracted him — as the experimental location for the reform and opening up policy, there were many foreign-funded companies and new types of enterprises there, which meant the existence of high quality and standardised customers.³⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the percentage of young people was high. Therefore, it was easier for him to try something new in his design or experiment with something innovative in Shenzhen than in his hometown of Xi'an.³⁴¹

Based on his working experience as executive creative director of Shenzhen International Management Service under Vanke, Chen Shaohua started his own practice, the Chen Shaohua Design Co., Ltd (陈绍华设计有限公司) in 1992.³⁴² The registration at the local industrial and commercial bureau was not easy, and his initial proposal to register as the Chen Shaohua Design Office (陈绍华设计事务所) was turned down because, according to the explanation provided to him, in Chinese, the term "Office" (所) sounded too important for his business.³⁴³

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 June 2018.

³³⁹ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, through WeChat, 27 February 2018.

³⁴⁰ The information about the enterprise structure of Shenzhen at the end of the 1980s comes from Chen Shaohua interview with the author, through WeChat, 27 February 2018; The information about the customer quality in Shenzhen at the end of the 1980s comes from Chen Shaohua interview with the author, through WeChat, 9 July 2019.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² 'Twenty-Years Journey Anvils Brilliance', in *C&S Brand* <<http://www.cshdesign.com.cn/about>> [accessed 26 June 2019] (《二十征程，辉煌铸就》，刊载于陈宋品牌顾问)

³⁴³ Chen Shaohua interview with the author in Shenzhen, 25 June 2018.

Chen Shaohua's design company, which, in the eyes of the local industrial and commercial bureau staff could only do small things, did create something "big" with wide-spread influence soon after it was formally registered. In 1995, there were three sets of advertisements for Taitai Oral Liquid — a Chinese herbal medicines for women — in newspapers all over China.³⁴⁴ On the first advertisement 'Figure [29]', there is rear view of a man holding an umbrella walking in the rain. The bold Chinese characters in Heiti in white inside the red frame on the right-hand side of the image read "Year-end Awards for a Wife". The text on the left-hand side of the image, in Songti, explains the important role the wife played at home and the reason she deserved a gift. On the left-hand side of the advertisement, there were the photos of the product, Taitai Oral Liquid, together with its packaging. Underneath, is the text introducing the product. The concept of the second set of advertisements is "A Good Idea for a Marriage Proposal" with an image of a surprised young woman holding a package of Taitai Oral Liquid, given to her from the hand of a man standing behind her 'Figure [30]'. The third one is about gratitude for the love and care of a mother with a portrait of a young mother holding a toddler 'Figure [31]'. The style and format of these three sets of advertisements are consistent with the rectangular red frame. The themes of the advertisements were put inside the right-hand side of the red frame. An image, together with a text explaining the theme, are in the centre. On the left-hand side, there are photos of the product with the text introducing it and lottery information underneath. The impact of the combination of the short text and image is not easy to ignore. The second day that the "Year-end Awards for a Wife" advertisement was published in the newspaper, the company was informed by the Shanghai office that all the products were sold out and the company needed to arrange air transport for more to be delivered.³⁴⁵



Figure [29-31] Chen Shaohua, newspaper advertisement for Taitai Oral Liquid, 1995 (©Chen Shaohua)

³⁴⁴ Chen Shaohua, 'One Prescription, Three Doses of Strong Medicine', in *Chen Shaohua blog* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a4473a80100054g.html> [accessed 26 June 2019] (《一副方子三帖猛药》, 刊载于陈绍华博客)

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

At that time, the product was mainly sold in department stores in first and second-tier cities, targeting consumer groups with average and above-average income.³⁴⁶ Chen Shaohua's advertisement design is aimed at three groups of female consumers, the elderly, middle-aged and young women. On the right-hand side of the advertisement, the Chinese characters, such as those for wife (太太) and mother (妈妈) are represented in a bold typeface to highlight the concepts. The advertisement was published at the end of the year, when the lunar Chinese New Year was approaching.³⁴⁷ The colour red, that represents joy and auspiciousness, very much accords with Chinese people's choice of colour for gifts, especially during the Spring Festival.

Why did Chen Shaohua's design have such a huge impact on the market? What kind of critical strategy did he follow to make this happen? To find an explanation for this phenomenon, it is necessarily to trace the reason why the Shenzhen Taitai Health Food Co., Ltd (深圳太太保健食品有限公司) (currently Joincare Pharmaceutical (康元药业集团)) a company already well known for their leading product, Taitai Oral Liquid, approached Chen Shaohua, as well as being interested in his design process.³⁴⁸

In 1994, two years after its establishment, the Shenzhen Taitai Health Food Co., Ltd., the company mainly engaged in the production and sales of Taitai Oral Liquid, was searching for new ideas to transform the advertising of its products.³⁴⁹ The strategy that had been used previously for the past two years seemed outdated, especially when confronting competition from newly emerging products that were similar, such as Meiyuanchun (美媛春) and Sanyuan (三源), while the new one — the television advertisement that was seemed like a beautiful art movie — did not function well.³⁵⁰ With the idea of confronting the challenge of fierce competition from other similar products while the Taitai Oral Liquid market developed into maturity, in 1994 the company sent Gao Feng (高峰), a staff member from the Marketing Planning Department, to Chen Shaohua's studio, seeking a design solution to expand the sales of their products.³⁵¹

³⁴⁶ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, through WeChat, 8 August 2019.

³⁴⁷ Chen Shaohua, 'Cause of Disease for "Taitai"', in *Chen Shaohua blog* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a4473a80100051m.html> [accessed 26 June 2019] (陈绍华, 《“太太”的病因》, 刊载于陈绍华博客)

³⁴⁸ On Shenzhen Taitai Health Food Co., Ltd (深圳太太保健食品有限公司)'s current name, see 'Joincare Pharmaceutical' (健康元药业集团), in *joincare.com* <<http://www.joincare.com>> [accessed 8 November 2018] (健康元药业集团, 刊载于健康元药业集团官网)

³⁴⁹ Chen Shaohua, 'Cause of Disease for "Taitai"' (陈绍华, 《“太太”的病因》)

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

Chen Shaohua's design started from the analysis of the sales problem with this product, which included the age group of the customer that was targeted.³⁵² In Chinese, Taitai (太太) means well-to-do lady while this product was suitable for women of all ages, not just for a specific group of women around the age of 30. Besides, there was a regional problem for sales. Take for example, the sales of this product in the East China market were not high, especially in Shanghai.³⁵³ During the research on the product, some of the details caught Chen Shaohua's attention: the majority of the people who bought the product were the users themselves, and some of them would unpack the product and abandon the packaging straight away; in his view it was well designed for the shop counter on the spot.³⁵⁴ Chen Shaohua's design solution started from this detail.³⁵⁵ According to his analysis, the fact that the majority of the customers of Taitai Oral Liquid was the users themselves means the act of purchasing was mainly a private one, to benefit their own health, which somehow reflected the limitation of the targeted clients; meanwhile the psychological barrier for customers of being regarded as someone who had a disease was reflected in the way they abandoned the product packaging on the spot, showing people's misunderstanding about the product.³⁵⁶ Obviously, the product was not on people's gift selection list.³⁵⁷

Based on this understanding, Chen Shaohua's design for Taitai concentrated on the following key concepts: the "care" of women as a cultural orientation of the company and this product; the transformation of the product's attributes from something used to benefit one's own health to those of a "gift" between family members and friends of different age groups, which would inevitably help to eliminate misunderstanding about the product.³⁵⁸ Therefore, he particularly emphasised the concept of the product as a "gift" for women from three different ages groups in the advertisement, for example, Taitai as a gift from a husband to a wife for taking care of the family, and from children to their mother to express gratitude for the love and care she has given.

³⁵² Chen Shaohua, 'One Prescription, Three Doses of Strong Medicine' (陈绍华, 《一副方子三帖猛药》)

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 28 October 2017.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Chen Shaohua, 'One Prescription, Three Doses of Strong Medicine' (陈绍华, 《一副方子三帖猛药》)

³⁵⁸ Chen Shaohua interview with the author in Shenzhen, 28 October 2017.

As a result, the sales of Taitai Oral Liquid increased from 15 million CNY in 1994 to 200 million in 1996, growing tenfold.³⁵⁹ In the same year, the headquarters of the Shenzhen Taitai Health Food Co., Ltd moved into the Diwang Building (地王大厦) in Shenzhen, then the most expensive office building in China.³⁶⁰ Chen Shaohua's advertisement design that received such a good market response, as well as his engagement with setting up the market strategy, was an important driving force behind the Taitai Health Food Co., Ltd.'s successful market expansion.³⁶¹

Unfortunately, his cooperation with the Shenzhen Taitai Health Food Co., Ltd. did not develop in a positive direction after one of his creative ideas was used without crediting him in 1995.³⁶² This forced him to become aware of copyright issues. In addition, this experience, together with the obstacles to registering his company at the local industrial and commercial bureau somehow consciously and unintentionally urged him to take action to improve the social awareness of graphic design.

In 1995, Chen Shaohua designed a new business card for his company 'Figure [32]'. The image, with auspicious symbol at the centre, was inspired by the pattern on the dragon robe, the formal dress for emperors in ancient China.³⁶³ For Chen Shaohua, the choice of this pattern reflected his design attitude: the customer is emperor and he (Chen



Figure [32] Chen Shaohua, business card design for Chen Shaohua Design Co., Ltd., 1995 (© Chen Shaohua)

³⁵⁹ 'Review on History of Chinese Health Products, Analyse of Current Status of Health Products Market', in *Sina* <<http://finance.sina.com.cn/jygl/20030903/1733432162.shtml>> [accessed 18 July 2017] (《回顾中国保健品历史, 分析保健品市场现状》, 刊载于新浪网财经纵横)

³⁶⁰ 'Chronology of Events of Joicare', in *Joicare Sales Sina blog* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_48fb211801000ak8.html> [accessed 16 July 2017] (《健康源大事年表》, 刊载于新浪健康源直销)

³⁶¹ Chen Shaohua, 'One Prescription, Three Doses of Strong Medicine' (陈绍华, 《一副方子三帖猛药》)

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 June 2018.

Shaohua) should be the one to embroider the robes.³⁶⁴ This was also his practice after choosing a new design tool, the computer. Both the Chinese and English typefaces were from a digital system. Kaishu (楷书), the standard script for Chinese handwriting, was chosen to create a solemn feeling to match the royal robes.³⁶⁵ Goudy, the English typeface used in the circle, as well as Century, in the middle of the card were provided in CorelDRAW.³⁶⁶ For someone who did not understand English and who had not received bilingual layout design training, the main consideration for Chen Shaohua in choosing the English typefaces was for them to “look harmonious” when juxtaposed with the Chinese typeface and to avoid copyright issues that might be caused by the use of fonts.³⁶⁷ Similarly, he broke through the language barrier in a visual way during the process of mastering American version of CorelDRAW 2.0 on his 386 PC.³⁶⁸ “Every morning, I would open CorelDRAW 2.0 and click each window to test. It took about two to three months for me to thoroughly master the use of this software”³⁶⁹.

The graphics design software began to appear in China in the mid-1980s, when it was used in 286PC to make simple subtitles for TV program.³⁷⁰ In 1993, with the frequent appearance of 3D computer animation applied on television advertisement and at the beginning of television programs, many graphic design studios in China began to be equipped with 386 or 486 computer.³⁷¹ The application of the computer greatly simplified design process. For example, for this kind of design, with rich colours and precise details, Chen Shaohua did not need to create black and white drawings, marking different areas with different colours before sending the drawing to a printing studio where typesetters would need to spend a few days completing the design.³⁷²

The computer also helped Chen Shaohua to provide his client with a modern user experience. When presenting his design, he would take along the bulky metal box, keyboard and mouse,

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, through telephone call, 9 July 2019.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 October 2017.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Zhang Siyao, ‘30 Years History of Graphic Design in China - Reviewing the Development of Graphic Design in China after the Reform and Opening up’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Central Academy of Fine Arts, 2009), pp. 41-42 (张思遥, 《中国平面设计30年——回顾改革开放后中国平面设计发展的历程》(未经发表的硕士论文, 江南大学, 2009, 第41-42页))

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Chen Shaohua interview with the author, through telephone call, 9 July 2019.

which impressed his high-end customers at the time such as the Shenzhen Media Group.³⁷³ Respecting the spirit of excellence, his business positioning was to create designs for the leading companies in various industries. Unlike the situation in which many urban workers in mainland China would passively wait for the assignment of tasks, being sensitive to new technologies and new trends and taking the initiative to explore these was the approach an individual working in Shenzhen required. Chen Shaohua was not alone. At that time, there was a group of graphic designers in Shenzhen who had the vision and ambition to enhance the competitiveness of local companies through design, or even work together with emerging local entrepreneurs to create brands targeted at the international market.

From the end of the 1980s to mid-1994, Shenzhen's development went through several stages. In 1987, an export-oriented economy was initially established and more than 50 per cent of industrial products in Shenzhen were exported.³⁷⁴ At that time, investment in Shenzhen was dominated by Hong Kong businessmen who were attracted by the preferential policies, such as the first three years' business duty free, and investment projects were mainly labour-intensive ones.³⁷⁵ In 1988, Deng Xiaoping's inclination to favour price reform without simultaneously implementing large-scale enterprise reforms led to soaring prices and pent-up inflation that exploded throughout the economy.³⁷⁶ Fear drove an extraordinary spate of bank runs and panic buying, which posed serious systemic risks to the Chinese economy.³⁷⁷ Under such circumstances, the decision to reduce the scale of infrastructure construction and consumer funding was made in the third plenum of the Thirteenth Party Congress convened in 1988.³⁷⁸ In 1989, the construction of 280 projects were suspended and a total investment of 3.1 billion was reduced in Shenzhen.³⁷⁹ Due to the impact of the Tiananmen Square protests (六四事件), there were several large-scale processions and assemblies, but the social situation remained stable in the city at the time, which was known as "Shenzhen phenomenon" (深圳现象).³⁸⁰ In that year,

³⁷³ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 October 2017.

³⁷⁴ Wang Shuo, 'The History of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone from 1987-1994', in *CPC* <<http://cpc.people.com.cn/BIG5/218984/218994/219014/220612/14740357.html>> [accessed 16 November 2018] (王硕, 《1987-1994年深圳特区的发展历程》, 刊载于中国共产党历史网)

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Julian Gewirtz, *Unlikely Partners: Chinese Reformers, Western Economists, and the Making of Global China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), p. 206.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 207, 215.

³⁷⁸ Wang, 'The History of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone from 1987-1994' (王, 《1987-1994年深圳特区的发展历程》)

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

the actual investment in Sino-foreign cooperative projects in Shenzhen fell by 28.7%.³⁸¹ However, with geographical advantage as a convenient way of establishing communication with Hong Kong and overseas regions, Shenzhen still grasped the opportunity for development during the period from 1989 to 1992.³⁸² In 1990, Shenzhen's economic growth recovered, and the actual use of foreign capital reached the level of 1989 in October.³⁸³ From 1992 to 1993, Shenzhen's GDP and industrial output value continued to increase at a rate of more than 30 per cent.³⁸⁴

From 1987 to the mid-1990s, China's GDP experienced many fluctuations, with plunges during the periods 1987-1988, 1989-1990, and 1992-1993.³⁸⁵ During this period, Shenzhen maintained relatively stable development.³⁸⁶ In 1995, the second Party Congress of Shenzhen put forward a proposal of "starting a new undertaking" (第二次创业), with a plan to adjust the industrial structure to develop high-end service and financial industries, and to develop high-tech industry.³⁸⁷ Under the circumstances, the graphic designers in Shenzhen had new customer groups and design projects generated under a new industrial structure.

2.1.2 999 Group Corporation at Time Square

In 1995, a huge new billboard was set up at the junction of 7th Avenue and 48th Street in New York 'Figure [33]'.³⁸⁸ In the upper part of the billboard, on a sea-blue background, there were three striking Arabic number "9s" in white arranged together. Underneath, on a white background, there is the English word "Pharmaceutical" in upper case letter on top of a line of

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Carsten A. Holz, 'The Quality of China's GDP Statistics', in *China Economic Review* <<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/dba3/623860049941756dbc6de7658e4a7c15d839.pdf>> [accessed 20 July 2019]; also see 'GDP growth', in *The World Bank* <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=CN>> [accessed 20 July 2019]

³⁸⁶ Wang, 'The History of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone from 1987-1994' (王, 《1987-1994年深圳特区的发展历程》)

³⁸⁷ Shenzhen Innovation and Development Institute, *Reformer: Hundreds of Shenzhen Reformers* (Beijing: CITIC Press Group, 2019), p. 41 (深圳创新发展研究院, 《改革者: 百位深圳改革人物》, 北京: 中信出版社, 2019, 第41页)

³⁸⁸ Wang Yuefei, 'What I've Seen about the Chinese Graphic Design during These Years', in *Zcool* <<https://www.zcool.com.cn/article/ZMTQwOTY0.html>> [accessed 9 November 2018] (王粤飞, 《王粤飞: 我看到的中国平面设计这些年》, 刊载于站酷)

Chinese characters. This was the billboard for a Chinese pharmaceutical factory that had a special historical significance.

To understand this message, we can look at a text written six years later by Wang Yuefei, the designer of the billboard, and the logo for the 999 Group Corporation, who wrote the following text in his publication with pride,

This billboard in Times Square in New York is the only flag in the United States for Chinese medicines. It records the journey, full of hardships, for the 999 Group to develop from a small to large enterprise. In 1988, in the early stages of the establishment of the Southern Pharmaceutical Factory, we designed a package for “Sanjiu Weitai” capsules, as well as other products. So far, these are strong brands of pure Chinese medicinal products, positioned at the top of the market and creating the myth of building a large-scale conglomerate from a single brand of products. Its symbolic image is the “999” logo we see everywhere today in China.³⁸⁹



Figure [33] Wang Yuefei, advertisement for 999 Group Corporation, New York, 1995 (© Wang Yuefei)

Why, then, did a design for billboard carry so complicated and profound a meaning? Why is it connected to the national honour and national image? What was the role of the designer and how did they work with local companies when the area of CI and branding was barely developed and the relevant knowledge and training were not systemically provided at college? To search for the answers to these questions, it is of vital importance to put the research into the local context at that time to scrutinise the cooperation and relationship between the designers and their clients.

According to Wang Yuefei, in the 1980s and 1990s, since the market economy was run in Shenzhen, there was a phenomenon of well-known designers having the luxury to choose to cooperate with the major, well-established state-owned and privately-owned companies.³⁹⁰ During the

³⁸⁹ Wang Yuefei, *A Momentous Moment: Package Design* (Wang Yuefei Design & Associates, 2001) (王粤飞, 《一个重要的时刻: 包装设计》, 王粤飞设计公司, 2001)

³⁹⁰ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 2 July 2018.

period when graphic design in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone had not yet emerged, Wang Yuefei created the well-known “Sanjiu Weitai” packaging and the identity for the “999” Group for Shenzhen Nanfang Pharmaceutical. Good business opportunities and a favourable market environment finally stimulated Wang Yuefei to take a crucial step in his career in 1997 when he left the state-owned GRAFICOM (深圳嘉美设计有限公司) within the Guangdong Import & Export Corporation, and founded Wang Yuefei Design & Associates.³⁹¹ Within about ten years, his team had completed design projects for large enterprises such as the Shenzhen International Trust and Investment Corporation (深圳国际信托投资公司), the Shenzhen Development Bank (深圳发展银行) and the Shenzhen Neptunus Group Co.,Ltd. (深圳海王集团), the Haier Group (海尔集团), and the Shenzhen Overseas Chinese Town Group (深圳华侨城集团) etc.³⁹² Meanwhile, he was also the brains behind the brand planning, product packaging, and CI design of strong domestic brands, including Taitai Pharmaceutical (太太药业), Flaming Sun (哈尔滨红太阳集团), Shenzhen Yishengtang (深圳益生堂), Guangzhou Ding Jiayi (广州丁家宜), and Shenzhen Pharmaceutical (深圳制药厂).³⁹³

At that time, many of the large enterprises had no idea about where to find the designers, and some of them would come to painters with the idea that fine arts was comprehensive and could solve all their design problem.³⁹⁴

As mentioned in Chapter One, the working experience at the Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation was one where Wang Yuefei had access to a large scale exhibition hall displaying imported commodities from well-known brands in the form of supermarket shelves corresponding to all the export categories, including electrical appliances, clothing, children’s toys, hardware, textiles and food.³⁹⁵ There was a reference room of international design magazines such as *Idea* (Japan), *Graphis* (Switzerland), *Communication* (United States) and *Package* (Japan), as well as annals, such as *Art Director’s Club Annals* (Art Directors’ Club of New York).³⁹⁶ In addition, the company would regularly provide publications on international design information and trends.³⁹⁷ Also, he benefited from directly or indirectly participating in the packaging

³⁹¹ Wang, *A Momentous Moment: Poster Design* (王粤飞, 《一个重要的时刻: 海报》)

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ ‘Wang Yuefei: My Experience about the Development of Chinese Graphic Design during These Years’ (《王粤飞: 我看到的中国平面设计这些年》)

³⁹⁵ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 24 October 2017.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

and graphic design training courses provided exclusively for the state-owned in-house designers.³⁹⁸ Therefore, Wang Yuefei had the advantage in the commercial competition at that time, and his design concepts were ahead of his time in Shenzhen.

In many of his commercial brand designs, Wang Yuefei had implemented the market design positioning theory he had learned. He had a clear awareness that design should not be the designer's personal preference and he realised that this worked effectively when trying to convince his customers of this idea. "Regardless of technology updates and market development, the customer would regard this as a designer's responsible approach to the product and to the design task".³⁹⁹ Meanwhile, he still continued to actively pay attention to the design ideas of European and American designers and applied some thoughts about this to his own practice. Wang Yuefei always emphasised a case study in which Dutch designer Gert Dumbar persuaded Dutch National Railways to change the colour of their trains to bright yellow. When the first proposal was turned down by the official after describing the aesthetic effect of a yellow train entering into the station, which would look like the "sun rising in the darkness", Dumbar explained that colour yellow could effectively improve the visibility of the train and so ensure safety and the smooth operation of the railway.⁴⁰⁰ The client accepted this further explanation.⁴⁰¹

The sharing of his international colleagues' experience helped to shape Wang Yuefei's own design philosophy. He stated clearly in an interview with VisualUnion that "Most people usually discuss the issue of beauty or ugliness... for me, I'd rather talk about 'effective' solutions to problems."⁴⁰² The advocacy of effectiveness was reflected on Wang Yuefei's design and his belief

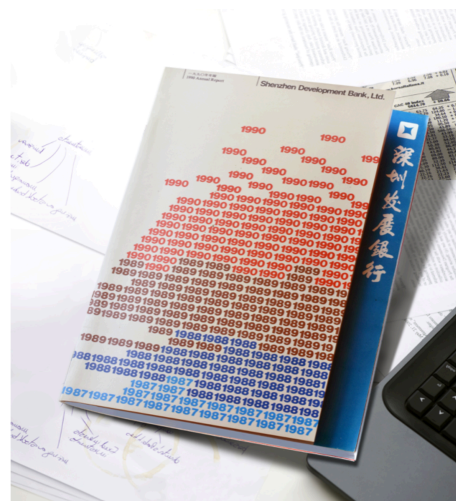


Figure [34] Wang Yuefei, annual report design for Shenzhen Development Bank, 1990 (© Wang Yuefei)

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Wang Yuefei, *An Important Moment* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House, 2002), p. 2 (王粤飞, 《一个重要时刻》, 石家庄: 河北美术出版社, 2002), 第2页

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 3

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Liao Xiang, 'Interview with Leading Chinese Design Organisations: Wang Yuefei Design', in *Visionunion* <<http://www.visionunion.com/article.jsp?code=200601120019>> [accessed 13 November 2018] (廖翔, 《中国顶尖设计机构专访——王粤飞设计》, 视觉同盟)

that “form follows function”.⁴⁰³ The design of the annual report of the Shenzhen Development Bank, Ltd. (1990) ‘Figure [34]’, and the Shenzhen International Trust & Investment Corp.(1993) ‘Figure [35]’ are cases in point. The main elements for both annuals are purely numbers or English letters respectively. For the cover design of the Shenzhen Development Bank’s annual report in 1990, there are layers of numbers showing different years from 1987 to 1990 from the bottom to the top. Each year has a different colour and the later years have more layers than the previous ones. Therefore, blocks of light blue, blue, brown and red are formed, with some of the red 1990s floating on the top to represent the rapid development of the bank’s performance.



Figure [35] Wang Yuefei, annual report design for Shenzhen International Trust & Investment Corp, 1993 (© Wang Yuefei)

Shenzhen International Trust & Investment Corp.’s annual report in 1993 has a similar style. The majority of the cover was left empty. On the right-hand side at the top, is the company name in English and Chinese. On the left-hand side, there are lines of English letters which are the abbreviation of the company name. From the bottom to the top, there are delicate transformations happening with the letter “T”, the abbreviation of “Trust”, which is highlighted in red. The horizontal line on the top of the T gradually changed to an arrow pointing upwards. There are only three colours used in the cover design, grey-green as the background colour, red for the character T and arrow, and dark grey-green for the rest of the characters. Wang Yuefei explained the reason that he still pursued “form follows function” even after this policy was outdated was because he wanted to avoid “falling into the trap of personal style”.⁴⁰⁴

It is important to point out that since the 1990s, the high-tech industry had gradually developed into the main industry of Shenzhen. At that time, the adjustment and realisation of the transformation of the industrial structure in Shenzhen was put on the agenda of the Shenzhen Municipal Party Committee and Municipal Government.⁴⁰⁵ The task and goal of the new phase was to

⁴⁰³ Wang, *An Important Moment*, p. 4 (王, 《一个重要时刻》, 第4页)

⁴⁰⁴ Lei Lan, ‘Wang Yuefei’s Design Policy’, in *China Art Weekly* <http://msb.zjol.com.cn/html/2010-03/13/content_293618.htm?div=-1> [accessed 13 November 2018] (雷兰, 《王粤飞的设计原则》, 刊载于《美术报》)

⁴⁰⁵ *Selected Works of Important Documents from Previous congresses and plenary sessions of the Communist Party of China Shenzhen*, ed. by Office of City Chronicle of Shenzhen (Shenzhen: Office of City Chronicle of Shenzhen, 2005), p. 48 (《中国共产党深圳市历次代表大会及全会重要文献选编》, 深圳: 深圳市史志办编, 2005, 第48页)

“establish the city as a comprehensive economic zone, as well as a multi-functional international city based on advanced industries with tertiary industry”.⁴⁰⁶ Within these circumstances, Shenzhen had been going through a transformation to become an innovative city and one of the most important bases for China's high-tech industrialisation.⁴⁰⁷

The three major areas of Shenzhen's high-tech industry include electronic information, biomedical and new energy supplies, as well as new materials industries.⁴⁰⁸ Starting in the early 1990s, the high-tech industry developed rapidly. From 1991 to 1998, the city's high-tech products' output value increased from 2.29 billion CNY to 65.518 billion CNY.⁴⁰⁹ The proportion of high-tech technology in the total industrial output increased from 8.1% to 35.44%.⁴¹⁰ The development of the electronic information industry was particularly fast. In 1998, the output value of electronic information industry products was 60.395 billion CNY, accounting for 92.18% of the output value of high-tech industrial products in Shenzhen, 32.67% of the city's total industrial output value.⁴¹¹ At the end of 1998, there were 125 high-tech enterprises in Shenzhen.⁴¹²

Among them, many of the high-tech enterprises became Wang Yuefei's design company's clients.⁴¹³ A style reflected Wang Yuefei's passion for, and interest in, working with this emerging area. The design for Liming Network Systems (黎明网络), established in 1990, consists of the symbolic elements of the internet age and a metallic colour representing computer technology. This kind of futuristic style can also be seen in his design for China Motion Telecom (润迅通信集团有限公司) 'Figure [36]', where the image of a UFO was adapted directly. Wang Yuefei directly expressed his and his team's excitement when conducting the design for IT companies,

⁴⁰⁶ Wang, 'The History of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone from 1987-1994' (王, 《1987-1994年深圳特区的发展历程》)

⁴⁰⁷ Fu Ying, *A Brief History of Shenzhen's Major Reform and Innovation* (Beijing: Social Science Literature Publishing House, 2017), p. 51 (付莹, 《深圳重大改革创新史略》, 北京: 社会科学文献出版社, 2017, 第51页)

⁴⁰⁸ *Reformer: Hundreds of Shenzhen Reform Figures*, ed. by Shenzhen Innovation and Development Research Institute (Beijing: CITIC Press Group, 2019), p. 144 (深圳创新发展研究院编著, 《改革者: 百位深圳改革人物》, 2019, 北京: 中信出版社, 第144页)

⁴⁰⁹ 'Overview of Shenzhen's High-tech Industry Development', in *State Council Information Office* <<http://www.scio.gov.cn/xwfbh/xwfbh/wqfbh/1999/0128/Document/328082/328082.htm>> [accessed 18 August 2019] (《深圳高新技术产业发展概况》, 刊载于国务院新闻办公室网站)

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Wang, *An Important Moment*, p. 8 (王, 《一个重要时刻》, 第8页)

saying, “The most distinctive aspect of working for the IT industry is that it enables our designers to remain excited, and the discussion between the two sides are full of excitement... because we have been doing the same thing and that is to stand at the forefront of the times to create the cultural work that will inspire the future.”⁴¹⁴ This shows the passion of designers involved in high-tech development in Shenzhen at the time. What is more, it also reveals how Wang Yuefei positioned his design creativity.

During the 1990s, Wang Yuefei and his team had been working closely with many local companies to create brands.⁴¹⁵ The companies relied on their professional design skills, especially in brand management and long-term operation, while

Wang Yuefei’s team would adjust their research direction according to the development of the companies. Wang Yuefei has always been very proud of helping local brands to complete their transformation to well-known brands. During this process, he had an ethical approach based on his reading and practice. For him, “the corresponding elements of the market and the consumer should be considered in design while it should not deteriorate into simply selling; design should advocate humanity and individualisation, trying to search for the connection between function and targeted consumers... while outstanding characteristics are an effective way for visual communication”.⁴¹⁶ This statement might sound ordinary or even outdated nowadays but in the 1990s, at an early stage of the development of graphic design in China, when the definition of design was still ambiguous, this was valuable thinking about design.

Meanwhile, booming business opportunities did not stop Wang Yuefei from having an critical attitude to the local market and clients. In the publications based on his practices in the 1990s, Wang Yuefei pointed out that the mainstream functional design advocated in China should not

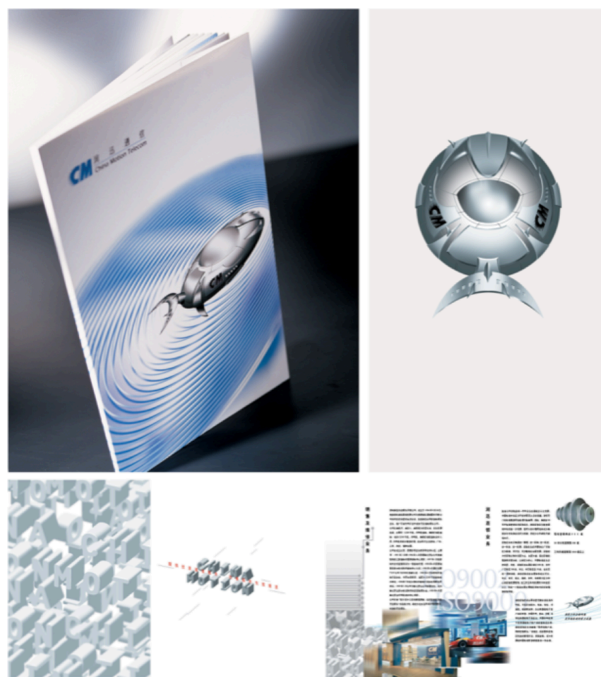


Figure [36] Wang Yuefei, publication design for China Motion Telecom, 1999 (© Wang Yuefei)

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴¹⁵ Wang, *A Momentous Moment: Poster Design* (王, 《一个重要的时刻: 海报》)

⁴¹⁶ Wang, *An Important Moment*, p. 22 (王, 《一个重要时刻》, 第22页)

be understood as a solution to tackle all the problems on the level of function.⁴¹⁷ It was also necessary to put designers' imagination and aesthetic feelings in the design.⁴¹⁸ Unfortunately, however, the majority of the Chinese customers at that time did not have such an awareness.⁴¹⁹ At that time, it was not easy for Wang Yuefei to transform his research into commercial profit, due to the fact that most of the designers would see design as just a skill — when the skill was cheaply purchased by the market, a large number of this kind of designer quickly appeared in the city.⁴²⁰ Wang Yuefei once mentioned in an interview that the reason behind this phenomenon was the lack of a design curriculum in general education in China.⁴²¹

Besides, in the context of an insufficient understanding of design and design professionals, there were many unclear blind spots for the definition of the designer's work. “you (designers) are working together with them (local entrepreneurs), sometimes (the relationship is) like colleagues, sometimes (we were) like their boss”.⁴²² That could be used to describe Wang Yuefei's experience of working with Shenzhen Nanfang Pharmaceutical (currently 999 Group). At the time of the initial stage of its construction, this was only a small factory, with China's first automated Chinese medicine production line located in a barren mountain in Shenzhen.⁴²³ However, it quickly expanded and prepared to form a group due to the huge success of “Sanjiu Weitai”, a stomach medicine.⁴²⁴ Desperate to find an appropriate name for the group, the head of the company asked Wang Yuefei for help.⁴²⁵ Wang Yuefei provided the suggestion that the group could be named after their leading product, “Sanjiu Weitai” capsules (999 Weitai) and the 999 on the product package could be adapted directly to incorporate the CI.⁴²⁶ According to his analysis the

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Wang, *An Important Moment*, p. 4 (王, 《一个重要时刻》, 第4页)

⁴²⁰ ‘Shenzhen Designer Wang Yuefei: Being Playful, Knowing How to Play and Enjoying Play Is also A Kind of Appeal’ (《深圳设计师王粤飞: 好玩、会玩、喜欢玩也是一种号召力》)

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Wang, *An Important Moment*, p. 2 (王, 《一个重要时刻》, 第2页)

⁴²³ Zhao Xiaolan, *Sanjiu Group's Journey to Create Knowledge-based Enterprises* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Peking University, 2000), p. 1 (赵晓兰, 《三九集团创建知识型企业之路》, (未经发表的博士论文, 北京大学, 2000, 第1页))

⁴²⁴ ‘Wang Yuefei: My Experience about the Development of Chinese Graphic Design during These Years’ (《王粤飞: 我看到的中国平面设计这些年》)

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

product was far more popular than the company itself and this could be an efficient way to use the influence of the product, as well as its huge market resources.⁴²⁷

It was this suggestion that determined the group's image. By December 1999, the 999 Group had developed into a large-scale enterprise group with total assets of 15 billion CNY.⁴²⁸ Unfortunately, in the opinion of the head of the company the suggestion provided by Wang Yuefei was simply the result of a casual but inspiring conversation with the designer.⁴²⁹ Wang Yuefei did not get paid for this important design.⁴³⁰ The experience — similar to the one Chen Shaohua had with Taitai — became a lesson he learned, stimulating him to think about creating a professional platform and healthy environment for design and design communication in China.

2.1.3 From Designer for Shenzhen Development Bank to A Member of Global Alliance

On December 1987, in the process of Shenzhen experiencing a transformation into an innovative city and one of the most important bases for China's high-tech industrialisation, when the financial services industry covering banks, insurance and securities started to occupy an important position in Shenzhen, the Shenzhen Development Bank Co., Ltd. was established.⁴³¹ This turned out to be something of a historical watershed, since the Shenzhen Development Bank was the first commercial bank in China to openly issue shares to the public.⁴³² At that time, it was a signal of the flexibility of the financial policy of reform and opening up.

Something of equal importance also took place in design for the Chinese bank industry: this was the emergence of an innovative logo design with rich meaning for the Shenzhen Development Bank 'Figure [37]'. Presented in a concise way, the logo created by Wang Xu is a blue square with rounded corners. Inside the square is a star shape with white centre. The Chinese name of the bank is placed underneath. The shape of star in the middle has layers of meaning. On the one hand, it symbolises the Phecda, a star in the constellation of Ursa Major, the symbol of for-

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Zhao, p. 5 (赵, 第5页)

⁴²⁹ 'Wang Yuefei - The Pioneer of Chinese Graphic Design', in *Zcool* <<https://www.zcool.com.cn/article/ZNDg1MjQ0.html>> [accessed 14 June 2018] (《中国平面设计拓荒人——王粤飞》, 刊载于站酷)

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ 'Shenzhen Development Bank 1987-2012', in *Sina.news* <<http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2012-01-20/081523830028.shtml>> [accessed 14 November 2018] (《深圳发展银行 1987—2012》, 刊载于新浪新闻中心网)

⁴³² Ibid.

tune in Chinese culture; on the other hand, it draws on the characteristics of the Circular Coin with a Square Hole (圆形方孔钱), one of the Chinese coins used in the Ming and Qing Dynasties.⁴³³ Both are metaphors for the bank's business. Furthermore, the *four* curves that form the shape of the star represent gathering money, with the implication that the supply chain and financial chain of the Shenzhen Development Bank covers the *four* seas (meaning all of China), within which the bank and its customers could work together to develop and share a better future.⁴³⁴ The choice of blue implies the colour of the sea, reflecting the regional characteristic of Shenzhen, a coastal city.⁴³⁵



Figure [37] Wang Xu, logo design for Shenzhen Development Bank, 1990 (© Wang Xu)

It is important to point out that this was the period when the State Council promulgated the "Provisional Regulations of the Private Enterprises of the People's Republic of China" and the private enterprises in China had legal status.⁴³⁶ Shenzhen Development Bank was the first joint-stock commercial bank in China.⁴³⁷ Meanwhile, it was also the period when the bank had started to use computers.⁴³⁸ Bearing this in mind, Wang Xu took a close look at the computer keyboard and buttons and found that the buttons were in a pointed shape that became a square.⁴³⁹ He presented this idea through design. Therefore, this logo design was not simply a smart modern translation of traditional Chinese visual elements related to fortune, which was adopted in many banks' logo designs in China, such as the Bank of China

⁴³³ 'Appreciation of Shenzhen Development Bank Logo Design before the Merger', in *Faith-brand* <<http://www.bjfhry.com/fhweb/post/560.html>> [accessed 14 November 2018] (《合并前的深圳发展银行标志设计欣赏》, "风火锐意"网站); On the "Circular Coin with a Square Hole" (圆形方孔钱), see *Encyclopaedia of China*, ed. by Editorial Board of Encyclopaedia of China, 28 vols (Beijing: Encyclopaedia of China Publishing House, 2009), p. 417 (《中国大百科全书(第二版)》, 《中国大百科全书》总编委会编, 北京: 中国大百科全书出版社, 2009, 第28册, 第417页)

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Gao Debu, *China's Private Economic History* (Shanxi: Shanxi Economic Publishing House), p. 85 (高德步, 《中国民营经济史》, 山西: 山西经济出版社, 2014, 第85页)

⁴³⁷ 'Chinese Entrepreneur Magazine: The Final Destination of Shenzhen Development Bank', in *Finance.Sina* <<http://finance.sina.com.cn/leadership/20110919/143810502910.shtml>> [accessed 20 July 2018] (《〈中国企业家〉: 深圳发展银行的最后归宿》, 刊载于新浪财经)

⁴³⁸ Wang Xu interview with the author, in Guangzhou, 28 June 2018.

⁴³⁹ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 10 July 2019.

and Industrial, as well as the Commercial Bank of China; it was also a visual symbol of the new era. Perhaps because of this uniqueness, the manager from the marketing department of the Shenzhen Development Bank, who had been dissatisfied with the logo design provided by the previously commissioned designer immediately adopted this solution.⁴⁴⁰

This logo raises a series of questions. What was required for the rich reserve of knowledge and skills to create this design? Was there any challenge in presenting the client with something new? Was there any connection between designer's creative spirit and the experimental nature of the client — the first joint-stock commercial bank in China, or the wider environment at that time? Does this design project have any continuation? To search for the answers to these questions, it is necessary to follow the designer's trajectory in that era, that was full of turning points and opportunities.

As mentioned in Chapter One, unable to get proper design education at college at the end of the 1970s, Wang Xu, together with Wang Yuefei, his schoolmate at GAFA and colleague at Guangdong Export Commodities Packaging Institute within the Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation, took advantage of the international design resources available for the in-house designers. These resources included the international design magazines mentioned above. Meanwhile, he was actively searching for anyone who could help him to strengthen his knowledge and understanding of the design profession.⁴⁴¹ The opportunity to work for the packaging company within the Yuehai Group, the local branch of Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation, in 1986 effectively expanded his horizons when he tried to arrange a meeting with Henry Steiner, an Austrian graphic designer based in Hong Kong, with whom he developed a life long friendship.⁴⁴² Also in 1986, Wang Xu encountered the Japanese book designer Kohei Sug-iura at the Hong Kong Design Biennial.⁴⁴³

In addition to professional guidance, these international graphic designers' exploration of and attention to the integration of Chinese and Western cultures also inspired him to start to thinking reflectively on this aspect. Wang Xu stated, in relation to his difficult working environment at that time,

History sometimes can be quite strange. As someone who didn't understand

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² 'View on Design: Conversation with Graphic Designer Wang Xu' in *AD518.com* <<http://www.ad518.com/article/id-2553>> [accessed 20 November 2017] (《设计之上看设计：对话平面设计师王序》，刊载于AD518网站)

⁴⁴³ Wang Xu interview with the author, in Guangzhou, 23 October 2017.

Western fonts at all, I ran into it one day and wanted to know more about it. I was not sure if there was any reason to do so but I must do it because it was part of the job requirement. In a situation with no teacher, you must rely on the most basic common sense to learn. At the end of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s, I studied these subjects on my own while at the same time applying self-taught knowledge to practice. It was a journey of fearless persistence.

As for teachers, you need to search for them yourself. The teacher you find determines your future development. In the context of the 1980s and 1990s, my teachers included professional international design magazines, annals and all kinds of catalogues etc. To meet a real teacher, you need good luck to encounter them on various occasions.

Since I don't understand English, progress was very slow. Later I tried to improve myself through editing and designing publications, through making a comparison between the translated text and the picture. I would revisit the works I was interested in repeatedly and paid more attention to the designers I preferred. I was always trying to think about the intent of the works, as well as various ways of presenting them. This was a way for me to accumulate more knowledge. Day after day, year after year, I tried to grasp all kinds of visual languages in my creations. My path to development is a slow and long journey.⁴⁴⁴

The description discussed Wang Xu's difficult experience of gaining knowledge about graphic design in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Wang Xu did benefit from this long, solid learning and process of practice, as well as frequent communication with international design circles, which provided him an international vision. When describing the influence of Henry Steiner, his long-standing friend, Wang Xu mentioned that Steiner introduced him to the Western art director system.⁴⁴⁵ "The art director must be familiar with fonts, images, patterns, colours, and various papers, printing techniques, etc. Therefore, the art director can guide the work of the designer, photographer and illustrator etc." In 1999, when he again received a commission from the Shenzhen Development Bank to upgrade and standardise its VI system to make it look more modern, his comprehensive capacity as design director had been practised 'Figure [38]'.⁴⁴⁶

The process of completing this project was particularly exciting for Wang Xu, because this was the point at which he switched to the new design tool, the computer. In 1989, the logo design for

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 20 May 2019.

⁴⁴⁶ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 10 July 2019.

Shenzhen Development Bank was created with tools such as compasses.⁴⁴⁷ When discussing the changes brought about by the transformation of design tools, Wang Xu mentioned that,

The advent of the computer era is really great, because it (the computer) is precise. There, however, would always be error in human manual operation. Take for example, if we draw a circle by hand, it is never possible to get a perfect shape, while a circle created by a computer should be perfect.⁴⁴⁸

The logo of the Shenzhen Development Bank had been in use for about twenty-three years since it had been created, until 2012, when the bank and Ping An Bank (平安银行), formally merged.⁴⁴⁹ In 1999, during the process of design, in addition to reading many books on VI that existed on the market, and referring to internationally renowned VI design for banks, including HSBC and Deutsche Bank, Wang Xu also received reference materials from his client, the Shenzhen Development Bank.⁴⁵⁰

At this time, Wang Xu had already started WX-Design, his own practice in Guangzhou, four years earlier in 1995, after he finished his job in Hong Kong.⁴⁵¹ A change of work and working environment did not stop his work on the publication *Design Exchange*, an effective way for Wang Xu to learn



Figure [38] Wang Xu, VI design for Shenzhen Development Bank, 1999 (© Wang Xu)

⁴⁴⁷ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 10 July 2019.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ 'Shenzhen Development Bank and Ping An Bank merged', in *Pingan Bank* <<http://bank.pingan.com/jianti/touzizheguanxijixinwen/1343612676610.shtml>> [accessed 15 November 2018] (《深圳发展银行与平安银行合并完成》, 刊载于平安银行网站)

⁴⁵⁰ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 10 July 2019.

⁴⁵¹ Wang Xu interview with the author, in Guangzhou, 23 October 2017.

and to communicate with international design circles. In Wang Xu's opinion, international communication was of vital importance, since this was the way he had made progress. "Without communication, everything would remain stagnant and so it would be difficult for an individual to find things that are inspiring, as well as things that catch your attention. Then it is difficult to make changes."⁴⁵²

The delicate changes did appear in his work for the *Design Exchange* magazines. Compared to the early versions created in the 1980s, which usually directly adapted images of products by well-known designers, or simply used these designers names, cover design in the 1990s experienced a transformation to a more sophisticated style using a variety of form of visual expression. Take for example, the collage technique applied in Volume 6 'Figure [39]' and Volume 9 'Figure [40]': there is a much freer style, combining Chinese ink painting and printed imagery, in Volume 10 'Figure [41]'. Meanwhile, descriptive text about the magazine's content was gradually replaced by metaphorical visual language, for example, in Volume 11 'Figure [42]', a wineglass in the shape of the inverted Louvre Pyramid by I. M. Pei, held by the hand in A.M. Cassandre's "Étoile du Nord and Dubo Dubon Dubonnet" implies that this is an issue about French design. Henry Steiner once mentioned this in an interview, saying,

I am very sure that Wang Xu did something important and that was to publish a magazine in China (*Design Exchange*). That's the first time... he visited the designers all over the world and there were large-scale images (in his magazines). If you can go (to visit these designers) in person and collect the works from them,



Figure [39-42] Wang Xu, *Design Exchange*, cover design, 6 vol, 1990; Wang Xu, *Design Exchange*, cover design, 9 vol, 1992; Wang Xu, *Design Exchange*, cover design, 10 vol, 1993; Wang Xu, *Design Exchange*, cover design, 11 vol, 1995. From left to right, top to bottom (© Wang Xu)

⁴⁵² Ibid.

the effect will be very different. Yes, he presented Chinese graphic design to the outside world in a great way.⁴⁵³

This passage pointed out the double meaning of Wang Xu's efforts in terms of international exchange. In 1999, Wang Xu's persistent exploration and practice in the professional field, as well as his continuous efforts in international communication, bore new fruit. He received an invitation from Gert Dumbar, whom he visited frequently in his studio in The Hague during the 1990s to establish a global alliance with Studio Dumbar from the Netherlands and Emery Studio from Australia.⁴⁵⁴ This was an organisation that allowed all three companies to retain their own corporate identities and clients while sharing resources and working cooperatively.⁴⁵⁵ The international partners of Wang Xu saw the potential of the Chinese market, as well as what was lacking in the Chinese market at the time: "China can do practically everything the same as Japan but they do it cheaper and they don't know how to sell it... if you want to sell something you must have a label or a trademark".⁴⁵⁶

This seemed to be an "ideal" concept for international cooperation. Wang Xu's studio would have strong professional support due to cross-cultural collaboration and receive professional guidance, especially in the area of signage design, which was little known in China then.⁴⁵⁷ As to Studio Dumbar and Emery Studio, the cooperation with a high-quality local graphic design company would help them to get access to high-end customers in an unfamiliar area, while at the same time greatly reducing the difficulty of applying and using Chinese text.⁴⁵⁸ This kind of cooperation, however, had problems in practice. The Chinese clients felt it was difficult to accept the quoted price. There were not many businesses, although Garry Emery provided designs for some important Chinese property developers.⁴⁵⁹ By the early 2000s, when Dumbar retired, such cooperation was basically over.

The dilemma Global Alliance experienced when planning to "expand into the fast-awakening Chinese market" actually reflected the real situation of the Chinese graphic design industry at

⁴⁵³ DCM, ed, 'AGI China - Textbook Level Exhibition on Graphic Design Development in China', in *Loft*, 27 vols (Shenzhen: +IPRESS, 2018) (《AGI China——中国平面设计发展的教科书级别展览》, 深圳市和谐印刷有限公司)

⁴⁵⁴ Wang Xu interview with the author, in Guangzhou, 23 October 2017.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Judith Heywood, 'Emery to Ride Pact into China', *Business*, 16 September 1999. The material was provided to me by Wang Xu through WeChat on 20 May 2019. The original copy is situated in Wang Xu's archive.

⁴⁵⁷ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 10 July 2019.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

the time.⁴⁶⁰ Most of the managers from local companies were not fully aware of the value of design and were unable to make cultural and aesthetic judgments about it. Meanwhile, a large number of designers appeared in the city and their design works were purchased cheaply by the market.⁴⁶¹ The reason for the “fast food” phenomenon in the graphic design area in Shenzhen at that time was comprehensive, including the lack of relevant knowledge in the public education system or a systematic training in professional skills and concepts, as well as the lack of industry specialisation in the Special Economic Zone with high-speed development. That is to say, the environment that brought these early practitioners opportunities also contained a variety of factors that were not conducive to the development of the graphic design industry. This encouraged them to use their own resources and knowledge to explore ways to improve the situation.

2. 2. The Graphic Design in China Exhibition and the establishment of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association

In the 1990s, many companies achieved rapid development, due to the beneficial policies and market mechanisms for the Special Economic Zone, especially the joint ventures and high-tech companies.⁴⁶² In the Special Economic Zone, joint ventures had to pay income tax at a rate of 15 per cent, while in the other regions of China the rate was 30 per cent.⁴⁶³ In 1996, “Measures for the Implementation of Fiscal Preferential Policies for Key New Products in Shenzhen” (《深圳市重点新产品享受财政优惠政策实施办法》) was issued to encourage local companies to develop new products.⁴⁶⁴ Meanwhile, a profound transformation was taking place in the strategy for the development of Shenzhen. At the early stages of the reform and opening up, Shenzhen's processing and manufacturing industry was dominated by the “Three-plus-one” trading-mix (三来

⁴⁶⁰ On Global Alliance's business plan in China, see Heywood, “Emery to Ride Pact into China”.

⁴⁶¹ ‘Shenzhen Designer Wang Yuefei: Being Playful, Knowing How to Play and Enjoying Play Is also A Kind of Appeal’ (《深圳设计师王粤飞：好玩、会玩、喜欢玩也是一种号召力》)

⁴⁶² Wang, ‘The History of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone from 1987-1994’ (王, 《1987-1994年深圳特区的发展历程》)

⁴⁶³ Yin A'nuo, *Research on Strategy, Method and Countermeasures of China's Open Economy Transformation and Upgrading* (Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House), p. 64 (殷阿娜, 《中国开放型经济转型升级的战略、路径和对策研究》, 北京: 新华出版社, 第64页)

⁴⁶⁴ Deng Jintang, *Regional Modern Industry Development: An Innovation Driven Strategic Theory* (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2015), p. 140 (邓金堂, 《区域现代产业发展: 一个创新驱动战略理论视角》, 北京: 中国社会科学出版社, 2015, 第140页)

一补) , which means to customise manufacturing with imported materials.⁴⁶⁵ In this kind of industrial structure, focused on labour-intensive manufacturing, not too much attention was paid to the original product design. According to Wang Yuefei, there was an industrial design company that started at around the same time as his GRAFICOM in Shenzhen, which unfortunately did not last long due to the lack of demand for car design in China at that time.⁴⁶⁶ However, the graphic design company, as a service industry, was a new force that suddenly rose to prominence.⁴⁶⁷ Wang Yuefei said it was the only design category that was of similar importance to manufacturing industry at that time, because overseas companies needed to open the Chinese market through localised design, and Chinese local enterprises also needed to use designers' talent to drive sales and to achieve profitability.⁴⁶⁸

With the in-depth development of reform and opening up, Shenzhen Municipal Committee had to confront the new challenge of creating "Shenzhen achievements" on the basis of "Shenzhen speed".⁴⁶⁹ Since the early 1990s, the high-tech industry gradually developed into the main industry of Shenzhen and it had been going through the transformation of becoming an innovative city and one of the most important bases for China's high-tech industrialisation.⁴⁷⁰ While bringing new markets to the graphic design industry, the situation also set new requirements and challenges for the development of this industry.

Graphic design as a discipline or professional field was still in its early stages. The awareness of design was also very superficial and vague. As mentioned before, many managers of large enterprises had no idea about where to find designers. As a result, graphic designers were confronting an exciting but chaotic situation. On the one hand, there was the phenomenon that the well-known designers would have the luxury of choosing to cooperate with the major established state-owned, as well as privately-owned companies, since a market economy was operating in Shenzhen; on the other hand, some of their work that brought huge profit for the company did

⁴⁶⁵ "Three-plus-one' Trading-mix" - The Initial Form of Using Foreign Investment', in *People's Republic of China Ministry of Commerce* <<http://history.mofcom.gov.cn/?newchina=三来一补-利用外商投资的初始形式>> [accessed 22 November 2018] (《“三来一补”——利用外商投资的初始形式》)

⁴⁶⁶ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 30 October 2018.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 6 March 2018.

⁴⁶⁹ Wang, 'The History of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone from 1987-1994' (王, 《1987-1994年深圳特区的发展历程》)

⁴⁷⁰ Zhang Siping, 'Review on 40 Years History | Institutional Innovation Password for the Rise of Shenzhen's High-tech Industry', in *Sina.com* <<https://finance.sina.com.cn/roll/2018-10-26/doc-ihmxrkzx3143426.shtml>> [accessed 10 October 2018] (张思平, 《40年说 | 深圳高科技产业崛起的制度创新密码》, 刊载于新浪财经)

not get paid since the definition and boundary of their work was not clear, for example, the conflict between Chen Shaohua and the Taitai Group. Meanwhile, the communication between the key graphic designers in China and international design circles, as well as their ambition to learn and to construct China's graphic design profession, was growing with their blossoming design practices, as well as the thinking emerging from practice. They had been actively searching for solutions to change the status quo, for example, to make changes in the way graphic design was understood by local companies.

2.2.1 Graphic Design in China Exhibition

In 1993, a poster design entitled “Vigorous Spirit” (龙马精神) received the Best Work award from the 7th International Poster Salon in France in 1993 (7th Salon International De L’Affiche, Des Arts Graphiques et des Arts de la Rue) organised by the Paris City Hall.⁴⁷¹ It was designed by Wang Yuefei and, according to him, as one of the very few poster works created by a Chinese graphic designer in the early 1990s to receive an international poster design award.⁴⁷² The Chinese style of the poster is obvious. The main element of this poster is a photograph of a paddle painted with red lacquer, on top of which the pattern of a golden dragon is depicted. Both the colours and patterns have an auspicious meaning, which has been frequently used in traditional Chinese festivals. The background of the poster is a large area of black with a painted ink effect. The contrast between the shape and quality of the photograph and the abstract free-hand brushwork creates a dramatic effect.

What, then, was the idea behind this poster? Was the winning of this award, as one of the very few Chinese poster designs to receive an international award, accidental? What was the designer’s appeal and desire? What did poster design mean to the designer during a period when there was no proper graphic design education in China and when there was little social awareness of this profession? And what did poster design mean to the designer during a time when graphic



Figure [43] Wang Yuefei, “Vigorous Spirit”, poster design, 1992 (© Wang Yuefei)

⁴⁷¹ Wang, *A Momentous Moment: Poster Design* (王粤飞, 《一个重要的时刻: 海报》)

⁴⁷² Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 24 October 2017.

design had just started to blossom? To answer these questions, it is both important and necessary to analyse the work in its historical context and to trace the designer's journey and thoughts, as well as his ambition.

“Vigorous Spirit” ‘Figure [43]’ was created as promotional material for Shunde Rongli Colour Printing Co., Ltd. (顺德容里印刷有限公司), a private enterprise in the city of Shunde, located in the Pearl River Delta. The title of the poster design, “龙马精神”, an old Chinese idiom, when directly translated into English, means “energetic as dragon and horse”. Each year during the Dragon Boat Festival (端午节), there is a dragon boat race in Shunde, a tradition that has lasted for hundreds of years, in which qualities such as solidarity, hard-work and vigorous diligence is encouraged. In Shunde, typically each household has a paddle, and the paddle shown in the poster was the one Wang Yuefei bought from a Shunde family in a rural area of the city as an element of his design.⁴⁷³ When explaining the meaning of “vigorous spirit” in the title of this design, Wang Yuefei put the following text on the right side of the poster: “Shunde Rongli Colour Printing Co., Ltd. uses this spirit as the motto of the company to ensure the best quality, to create stimulating new ideas, and to make customers completely satisfied”⁴⁷⁴.

The diagonally displayed paddle, the shining golden dragon, and the sharp contrast between the bright red paddle and the dark background presented a kind of dynamic state, which is not only a reflection of the thriving atmosphere in the early days of reform and opening up, but also the spirit of the designer himself. In an era when there was huge gap between graphic design education and industry standards, the international design magazines, as well as the products of well-known international brands on display in his company's reference room and exhibition hall were effective tools to help Wang Yuefei and his colleagues to produce almost identical packaging for the goods that would compete with similar products in the international market. The process of copying had a profound impact on them, for example, the use of photography in “Vigorous Spirit”, as well as some of Wang Yuefei's other poster designs, was directly influenced by the packaging designs of international products.⁴⁷⁵ Meanwhile, this accelerated learning method also had an impact on their conceptual awareness, which was reflected in their longing for the lifestyle of international designers and their desire to participate in international competitions, inspired by the photos and advertisements published in these international design magazines. This group of designers believed that “the standard of design was determined by the West”.⁴⁷⁶ What stimulated Wang Yuefei to think deeply about the Western system of evaluation

⁴⁷³ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 28 June, 2018.

⁴⁷⁴ Wang, *A Momentous Moment: Poster Design* (王粤飞, 《一个重要的时刻: 海报》)

⁴⁷⁵ Wang Xu interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 8 June, 2018.

⁴⁷⁶ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 15 December, 2017.

was years of experience of trying to get his work accepted by the international competitions, such as the one organised by *Graphis*. He once made this interpretation of "international standards": "the content should have the remarkable quality of Chinese culture, it should be creative... reflecting a personalised spirit of exploration".⁴⁷⁷ This reveals a profound transformation of Wang Yuefei's journey of learning from making copy to building up cultural awareness and self-awareness in design creation. Based on personal experience, Wang Yuefei believed that participating in international competitions was an effective way for young designers to learn.⁴⁷⁸ Meanwhile, for him, this "fair and just" way to select excellent design works combining academic exchange and discussion was also a healthy method of building the graphic design profession in China.⁴⁷⁹

Wang Yuefei was not the only one to have this idea. Wang Xu, his schoolmate at GAFA and also his colleague at the Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation, shared his thoughts. They were the very few Chinese graphic designers who had access to international design magazines due to their job as in-house designers at this corporation. In the early 1990s, Wang Xu was a designer in the packaging company of the Yuehai Group, the Hong Kong branch of the Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation. The experience of working in Hong Kong, as well as encounters with designers of international reputation who thought reflectively about Western and Eastern culture, such as Henry Steiner and Kohei Sugiura helped him develop an international vision and further realise the importance of international exchange. For Wang Xu, without communication everything would be stagnant and there was no way to discover things or to stimulate thinking.⁴⁸⁰ In his view, it was Chinese designers' responsibility to tackle what he perceived as Sino-Western cultural conflict: "Chinese designers should take the initiative to communicate with the outside world and bring Chinese philosophy to other places in a simple and clear design language."⁴⁸¹ At that time, one of the most effective ways for them to get involved in international design circles was to participate in international graphic design competitions.⁴⁸² Wang Xu received his first gold medal at Hong Kong Design Biennial organised

⁴⁷⁷ Liao Xiang, 'Interview with Leading Chinese Design Organisations: Wang Yuefei Design', in *Visionunion* <<http://www.visionunion.com/article.jsp?code=200601120019>> [accessed 21 August 2019] (廖翔, 《中国顶尖设计机构专访——王粤飞设计》, 刊载于视觉同盟)

⁴⁷⁸ Wang Yuefei, Han Zhanning, 'Shenzhen Urgently Needs Authoritative Design Competition', *Shenzhen Business Daily*, 29 May 2004, p. 8 (王粤飞, 韩湛宁, 《深圳急需权威设计比赛》, 刊载于《深圳商报》, 2004)

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Wang Xu interview with the author, in Guangzhou, 28 June, 2018.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 2 July, 2018.

by the Hong Kong Designers Association (HKDA).⁴⁸³ From that point, he started to pay attention to international design competitions. In 1993, when receiving the “Award of Excellence” from a competition sponsored by *Communication Art*, the magazine Wang Xu had to read since the early 1980s, he described his feeling as “realising a wishful dream”.⁴⁸⁴

Both Wang Yuefei and Wang Xu’s ambition to become connected with international design circles, and to promote Chinese graphic design was not limited to participation in international design competitions. They decided to introduce the system of these awards to China with their own personal investment. In 1991, Wang Yuefei planned to take part of the annual profit from his company GRAFICOM, as preparation to organise an such event.⁴⁸⁵ In the following year, together with designer He Maohua (贺懋华), they curated the Graphic Design in China exhibition in Shenzhen.⁴⁸⁶

In 1992, it was still necessary to apply for approval for a national design exhibition to be organised by GRAFICOM, as a Sino-foreign joint venture design company.⁴⁸⁷ Wang Yuefei still remembers how he asked his friends to go to Beijing to communicate with National Federation of Industry and Commerce, as well as the trade journal *China Packaging* (《中国包装报》) about the possibility of applying for approval for the exhibition from the Shenzhen municipal government.⁴⁸⁸ They were pleased when they were informed that the whole process went on very smoothly, which meant they would have no problem to getting customs reports to receive works from abroad and the works from Taiwan, to safeguard the exhibition space, and to be authorised to charge an entry fee for the exhibition.⁴⁸⁹

Meanwhile, they had been actively planning the composition of the jury members for the exhibition. As mentioned before, both Wang Yuefei and Wang Xu had a strong wish to introduce the international evaluation system — the one they believed would be fair and helpful for the devel-

⁴⁸³ Wang Xu interview with the author, in Guangzhou, 28 June, 2018.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Zhu Shuai, Xie Xin, Shi Chenxu, ‘Twenties Years of the Development of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association’ (祝帅、谢欣、石晨旭《深圳市平面设计协会二十年(1995-2015)》, 王粤飞个人文档). The text was provided to the author by Wang Yuefei, through email, 2 August 2018. The text situated in Wang Yuefei’s personal archive.

⁴⁸⁶ ‘Memorabilia’, in *Shenzhen Graphic Design Association* <<http://www.sgda.cc/about.aspx?id=3>> [accessed 17 October 2018] (《大事记》, 刊载于深圳平面设计师协会官网)

⁴⁸⁷ Wang Yuefei interview, through WeChat, 4 August, 2018.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

opment of the profession — to China.⁴⁹⁰ Probably based on his own self-taught experience of his journey in the design field, Wang Yuefei held the opinion that young developing designers should learn to invent themselves. For him, access to self-invention would not be achieved through design education reform and a deep relationship with a teacher but through participating in important competitions. “Heroes come out of competition”.⁴⁹¹ His idea was reflected in the composition of the international jury members. The international jury members for the first Graphic Design in China exhibition gathered together a group of highly active graphic designers, including Henry Steiner from Hong Kong, Yu Bingnan from Beijing, Kan Tai-keung (靳埭强) and Alan Chan (陈幼坚) from Hong Kong, Wang Jianzhu (王建柱) and You Huili (尤惠励) from Canada.⁴⁹² Although there was actually only one foreign member, the Austrian Henry Steiner, and the rest were all Chinese due to the fact that this was the first iteration of the Graphic Design in China exhibition and the event had not yet developed international influence, the jury members all had an international vision. Among them, Henry Steiner, Yu Bingnan and Kan Tai-keung had a profound influence on contemporary Chinese graphic design, which was a helpful way to promote the exhibition, while at the same time establishing its authority.

It is important to point out that this exhibition was the first time “graphic design” (平面设计) as a concept was publicly proposed not only to the professionals but also the public in China.⁴⁹³ Wang Yuefei and Wang Xu had frequently seen this English term in the international design magazines in the library of the Guangdong Packaging Import and Export Corporation. For them, the exhibition could be an opportunity to openly define their practice and to clarify the confusion with crafts and fine arts.⁴⁹⁴

This idea received a positive response from Chen Shaohua and other designers. As mentioned in Chapter One, Chen Shaohua was one of the key figures in contemporary Chinese graphic design circles, who experienced the transformation from arts and crafts training to modern graphic design education. Like Wang Yuefei and Wang Xu, he gained his knowledge of modern design through reading international design magazines in the library of The Central Academy of Arts & Crafts (currently The Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University), as well as publications by the China National Publications Import & Export Corporation. His experience of being unable to

⁴⁹⁰ Wang Yuefei interview, in Shenzhen, 24 October, 2017.

⁴⁹¹ Liao, ‘Interview with Leading Chinese Design Organisations: Wang Yuefei Design’ (廖, 《中国顶尖设计机构专访—王粤飞设计》)

⁴⁹² Zhu, Xie, and Shi, ‘Twenties Years of the Development of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association’ (祝、谢、石 《深圳市平面设计协会二十年 (1995-2015) 》)

⁴⁹³ Wang Yuefei interview, in Shenzhen, 24 October, 2017.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

gain professional training on graphic design at college encouraged him to start reforming the foundation course for design students when he was teaching in the Crafts Department of the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts after graduation, before he came to Shenzhen to start a career as graphic designer. The training he received as a craftsman and painter at school also provided him with a



Figure [44-45] Chen Shaohua, “Graphic Design in China”, poster design, 1992; “Larger Chanting Ceremony” (part), Chen Shaohua personal collection (©Chen Shaohua)

solid foundation for thinking when confronting the challenge of localising contemporary design in China. His thinking on this issue was reflected in the poster design he created for the Graphic Design in China exhibition ‘Figure [44]’ in which two human legs, one wearing black Western-style trousers and leather shoes, the other with the colourful costumes of Beijing opera, are entangled in a visually balanced way, moving forward. According to Chen Shaohua, the inspiration for this poster design came from “Larger Chanting Ceremony” (《水陆道场图》) ‘Figure [45]’, an ancient Chinese painting Chen Shaohua spent months copying when he was an undergraduate student.⁴⁹⁵ The connection with local Chinese culture provides the poster with depth while at the same time presents Chen Shaohua’s cultural attitude.

With great excitement about helping to prepare the first design exhibition and competition organised by a non-governmental organisation in China, at an early stage of reform and opening up, when everything was blossoming, Chen Shaohua proposed the slogan “design helps the construction of a country” (设计立国).⁴⁹⁶ For him, design should not only be a method to support import and export, but also a powerful way to influence people’s lives in all aspects. In this excit-

⁴⁹⁵ Chen Shaohua interview, in Shenzhen, 25 October, 2017.

⁴⁹⁶ Wang Yuefei interview, in Shenzhen, 24 October, 2017.

ing atmosphere, the designers in Shenzhen encouraged each other with this slogan.⁴⁹⁷ At that time, the majority of the graphic designers gathered together in Shenzhen came from various different cities.⁴⁹⁸ Most of them had the experience of making great efforts to improve themselves since there was a huge gap between the knowledge they gained at college and the requirements of the industry. In this context, the designers' groups in Shenzhen were actively learning from each other and the communication among different design areas was frequently.⁴⁹⁹

On 28 April, 1992, the Graphic Design in China exhibition took place at Shenzhen International Exhibition Center.⁵⁰⁰ The organiser of the competition received about 5,000 pieces of work from all over China, as well as work from Taiwan.⁵⁰¹ Among them, 3,750 were judged to be pieces fit for the competition requirements.⁵⁰² With a selection rate of 3 per cent, the number of the award-winning works was 174 pieces in twelve categories, including posters, newspaper advertisements, commercial publications, book design, editorial design, commercial photography, self-promotion, CI, commercial illustration, stationery, packaging design and others.⁵⁰³ At that time, most of the domestic participants were from institutions inside the state system, such as provincial packaging companies, publishing houses and art colleges, etc.⁵⁰⁴ It was very rare to find participants from private design companies.

Many Shenzhen designers, including Wang Yuefei, Wang Xu, Chen Shaohua, Long Zhaoshu (龙兆曙), Han Jiaying (韩家英) and Bi Xuefeng (毕学锋) were on the winners list of the 92 Graphic Design in China competition.⁵⁰⁵ There were also award-winning designers from other regions, especially for categories such as book design and package design, where art editors from the publishing houses and the designers from the state-owned packaging companies act-

⁴⁹⁷ Han Fangfang, 'Chen Shaohua: Designer's Ideal to Construct Country', in *VisionUnion* <<http://www.visionunion.com/article.jsp?code=200804200005>> [accessed 20 October 2018] (韩方方, 《陈绍华: 设计师的立国理想》, 刊载于视觉同盟网站)

⁴⁹⁸ Wang Yuefei interview, through WeChat, 13 December, 2018.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ SGDA, 'Review: Graphic Design in China Exhibition, 1992', in *VisionUnion* <<http://www.visionunion.com/article.jsp?code=201010090023>> [accessed 4 December 2018] (深圳市平面设计协会, 《回顾: 平面设计在中国92展》, 视觉同盟)

⁵⁰⁴ Wang Yuefei interview, through WeChat, 20 December, 2018.

⁵⁰⁵ Zhu, Xie, and Shi, 'Twenties Years of the Development of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association' (祝、谢、石, 《深圳市平面设计协会二十年(1995-2015)》)

ively contributed their works.⁵⁰⁶ In the early 1990s, the design market was not well developed and most of the designers worked in state-owned institutions that had a need for design. Among the award-winning designers from Shenzhen, many of them were new comers, trying to search for opportunities for development in an environment with more Sino-foreign and Sino-Hong Kong joint ventures, with “high quality and standardised customers”, as well as the companies with high quality printing and output facilities.⁵⁰⁷ The deputy mayor of Shenzhen in charge of industry came for the opening.⁵⁰⁸ Although there was still no beneficial policy towards design at that time and the reasons why the mayor attended the opening were because the exhibition was organised under the name of the China Industrial Design Association, as well as the existence of “China” in the exhibition title, the curators were very impressed by the mayor’s comment at the time, “It turns out that this is graphic design. Isn't that something that we are used to seeing in our daily lives?”⁵⁰⁹ This actually was one of the most important aims for Wang Yuefei and Wang Xu in organising the exhibition: to define and to introduce graphic design as a concept, as well as to raise social awareness of the profession.

The exhibition continued. Four years later in 1996, the second Graphic Design in China exhibition was organised in the Shenzhen Science Museum.⁵¹⁰ This time, the composition of the jury changed significantly from the previous competition. Instead of a team consisting mainly of the Chinese designers, there were more graphic designers with an international reputation, including Ken Cato from Australia, Michael Boucher from France, Keizo Matsui from Japan and Ahn Sang Soo from Korea.⁵¹¹ Meanwhile, the curatorial team also expanded, with three new members, Shenzhen graphic designers Long Zhaoshu, Chen Shaohua and Han Jiaying, as well as Wang Xu and Wang Yuefei, the curators of the previous Graphic Design in China exhibition.⁵¹² The cohesion between graphic designers in Shenzhen was growing and the establishment of an association gathering Shenzhen graphic designers together was now under development.

⁵⁰⁶ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 28 June, 2017.

⁵⁰⁷ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, through WeChat, 9 July, 2019.

⁵⁰⁸ Wang Yuefei interview, through WeChat, 13 December, 2018.

⁵⁰⁹ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 24 October, 2017.

⁵¹⁰ Zhu, Xie, and Shi, ‘Twenties Years of the Development of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association’ (祝、谢、石, 《深圳市平面设计协会二十年(1995-2015)》)

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Ibid.

2.3 Shenzhen Graphic Design Association

2.3.1 The Growth of Independent Designers in Shenzhen

As mentioned, there was no private enterprise in China before the reform and opening up in 1978 because at that time the planned economy dominated and private capital was not allowed. It was only after the reform and opening up, private enterprises and the micro enterprises gradually emerged.⁵¹³ The private economy had experienced a tortuous development before its fast development from 1992 after Deng Xiaoping's speech during his Southern Tour in China. During the period when the first Graphic Design in China exhibition was organised in 1992, private design companies started to appear in Shenzhen.⁵¹⁴ From 1993 to 1995, the growth rate of urban and rural individual industrial and commercial households was higher than 15 per cent every year and the growth rate of the number of employees was between 19 per cent and 29 per cent.⁵¹⁵

There were two kinds of advertising company in China before 1992, state owned and Sino-foreign due to the traditional planned economic system.⁵¹⁶ At that time, international advertising companies and design companies had to establish joint ventures with Chinese companies if they wanted to enter China, for example, Saatchi & Saatchi, J. Walter Thompson and Ogilvy.⁵¹⁷ The percentage of foreign investment was not allowed to exceed 49 per cent of the shares.⁵¹⁸ It was in this context that private design companies began to appear in Shenzhen. Chen Shaohua was one

⁵¹³ 'Chinese Entrepreneurs in the 30 Years of the Reform and Open Up', in *Sohu* <http://www.sohu.com/a/195885482_770237> [accessed 7 December 2018] (《改革开放30年的中国企业家》, 刊载于搜狐)

⁵¹⁴ Zhang Siping, 'Review on 40 Years History | Institutional Innovation Password for the Rise of Shenzhen's High-tech Industry', in *Sina.com* <<https://finance.sina.com.cn/roll/2018-10-26/doc-ihmxrkzx3143426.shtml>> [accessed 10 October 2018] (张思平, 《40年说 | 深圳高科技产业崛起的制度创新密码》, 刊载于新浪财经)

⁵¹⁵ 'The Rise of China's Private Economy', in *Modern China Studies* <<http://www.modernchinastudies.org/us/issues/past-issues/63-mcs-1998-issue-4/465-2011-12-29-18-13-29.html>> [accessed 7 December 2018] (杨雪野, 《崛起的中国私营经济》, 刊载于当代中国研究)

⁵¹⁶ Zuo Jing, Chu Hongwei, 'Twenty-five Years History of the Chinese Outdoor Advertising', in *People.com* <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/14677/21963/22065/2757253.html>> [accessed 10 December 2018] (左晶、楚宏伟, 《中国户外广告的二十五年》, 人民网)

⁵¹⁷ 'Introduction to the American Association of Advertising Agencies (4A)', in *MBA Lib* <<https://wiki.mbalib.com/wiki/4A>> [accessed 10 December 2018] (《美国广告代理商协会(4A)简介》, 刊载于智库百科)

⁵¹⁸ *The Sino-foreign Joint Venture Enterprise Law* (Beijing: Law Press China, 2001), p. 3 (《中外合资经营企业法》, 北京: 法律出版社, 2001, 第3页)

of the first group of graphic designers to open his own design studio in the early 1990s.⁵¹⁹ At that time, graphic design was still a new concept. When he went to the local industrial and commercial bureau to register his company, the staff there had no awareness about what Chen Shaohua was doing. Besides, his requirement to register as Chen Shaohua Design Office was turned down because in the viewpoint of the staff from the industrial and commercial bureau, “Office” sounded too important for his business.

Around 1992-1995, many graphic designers left their positions at state-owned companies to start their own practices, including Long Zhaoshu and Liang Xiaowu.⁵²⁰ The transformation from stable job to fully entering into the competition of the market economy required an open and active attitude, as well as additional clients, to make a living. Under such circumstances that there was little understanding about graphic design as a newly emerging profession in China, as well as the gap between the inadequate knowledge provided by school and the requirements of industry, so designers felt the urge to gather together to communicate with each other and to speak in a strong voice to the outside world.

The idea of gather together local graphic designers in Shenzhen to establish an association was thus formed, while to give this association — the first graphic design association in China — a legal identity was challenging. As the most senior member among the Shenzhen designers at that time, Long Zhaoshu, the Gold Medal winner of the packaging design category of the Graphic Design in China exhibition in 1992, a designer with many years experience of working in the state system, who was familiar with the national conditions of China, was selected as the candidate to represent the design group to tackle the challenge.⁵²¹ His job included a significant amount of work communicating and interpreting between various government departments.⁵²² Take for example, the local Civil Affairs Bureau knew decorative art (装璜美术) but had no ideas about what graphic design (平面设计) was.⁵²³ Therefore, Long Zhaoshu was asked to provide them the concept of “graphic design” (平面设计释义) and the task of writing the concept was handed to Chen Shaohua.⁵²⁴

Graphic design refers to a form of work that is creatively planned, conceived, and

⁵¹⁹ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 June 2018.

⁵²⁰ Zhu, Xie, and Shi, ‘Twenties Years of the Development of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association’ (祝、谢、石, 《深圳市平面设计协会二十年(1995-2015)》)

⁵²¹ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 June 2018.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

expressed in the context of two-dimensional space, for the purpose of specific topics.

Graphic design is among categories such as architectural design, fashion design and other design professions. Most of graphic design works are displayed in a flat form. Graphic design includes: product packaging, book binding, trademark design, advertising posters (posters), text design, graphic illustrations, photography, etc. Its basic function is to meet the visual aesthetic needs of people while conveying information. It is also an expression of human thought, doctrine, and proposition, so it is also called "visual communication design".

In the past, we generally referred to graphic design as "decorative art" (装璜美术) or "practical art" (实用美术). As the field involved in the profession has expanded, its name also differs: it is called "commercial art" (商业美术) in terms of its main scope of use; it is called "printing art" (印刷美术) in terms of technical method; it is called "pattern design" (图形设计) in terms of expression, and it is called "visual communication design" (视觉传达设计) in terms of function.

In the field of design, it is called "graphic design" compared to the other design categories, but the term "graphic" is not completely accurate when it comes to certain content, such as packaging container design, display environment design, film and television design, etc. but all these are within the range of graphic design.

At present, in areas dominated by Chinese, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, it is generally called "graphic design".⁵²⁵

In this document, Chen Shaohua provided a clear explanation about the concept of graphic design. For him and his colleagues in the design field, they had been doing something of vital importance, which was to define graphic design as a profession. When talking about the establishment of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association, Wang Yuefei, one of its founding members very proudly mentioned in many publications that this actually marked the end of the era of the "art worker" during a time when the notion of the "designer" was absolutely a new thing.⁵²⁶ Be-

⁵²⁵ Chen Shaohua, 'Explanation about the Meaning of Graphic Design' (陈绍华, 《平面设计释义》). A photo copy of the text was provided to the author by Chen Shaohua, in his Shenzhen studio, 25 June 2018. The original document is situated in Chen Shaohua's personal archive.

⁵²⁶ 'Wang Yuefei: Graphic Designer Dancing in Design Capital' (《王粤飞: 平面设计人与设计之都共舞》)

cause of this, Chen Shaohua used very popular language when defining and explaining the concept of graphic design. He cited the relevant design fields that the public was already familiar with, such as architecture and fashion design. He explained the various categories in graphic design with a description of how people described this area at that time. All these efforts reflected his clear awareness about the lack of understanding of this profession when trying to introduce this new concept to the local Civil Affairs Bureau. From his definition and style of description, it could be seen that this was a text written for design practice. For the same consideration, Chen Shaohua mentioned the usage of this term in Hong Kong and Taiwan where there were frequent business and academic exchanges with Shenzhen. In his view, “the unification of the term would avoid confusion about the concept”.⁵²⁷ Therefore, although the event was taking place in Shenzhen, to define graphic design and to popularise the concept was a nationwide plan.

2.3.2 An Exploration from Zero

On 26 August, 1995, when Shenzhen Graphic Design Association (GDA) was established at the Shenzhen Grand Theatre, there were 25 members.⁵²⁸ Long Zhaoshu was elected as the first chairman of the association.⁵²⁹ Wang Yuefei and Chen Shaohua were elected as the vice chairmen.⁵³⁰ As a non-government organisation at that time, there was no access to government funding.⁵³¹ This means both the daily work expenses and the funds for activities needed to be self-generated. Both the 30,000 CNY registration fee to the government and the 6,000 CNY daily expenses of the association came from the membership fees from the nine board

⁵²⁷ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, through telephone call, 12 July 2019.

⁵²⁸ Zhou Sixin, *20th Anniversary Events of Shenzhen Graphic Design Association* (Shenzhen International Color Printing, 2015) p. 8 (周思欣, 《光辉岁月: 深圳市平面设计协会20周年大事记》, 深圳市国际彩印有限公司); also see 'About SGDA', in *SGDA* <<http://www.sgda.cc/about.aspx?id=1>> [accessed 18 December 2018] (《协会介绍》, 刊载于深圳平面设计协会网站); also Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 2 July, 2018.

⁵²⁹ Liu Xiaofu, 'On Chinese Graphic Design at the End of the 20th Century', in *People.com* <<http://media.people.com.cn/n/2014/1009/c389664-25798754.html>> [accessed 20 August 2017] (刘晓夫, 《浅谈二十世纪末的中国平面设计》, 刊载于人民网)

⁵³⁰ Zhou, p. 8 (周, 第8页)

⁵³¹ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 2 July, 2018.

members.⁵³² During a period when the per capita salary was between 300 - 500 CNY per month, the 4,000 CNY membership fee was no small amount.⁵³³

Starting from scratch is always full of hardships. At the beginning of its establishment, Shenzhen Graphic Design Association had no organisational experience and so they decided to learn from international design associations: its original name, which was the Shenzhen Art Directors Club, was directly inspired by the ADC (Art Directors Club) in New York.⁵³⁴ Their learning experience can be divided into direct experience and indirect experience. At that time, the majority of the early design practitioners in Shenzhen participated in the design competition in Hong Kong and were familiar with the Hong Kong design community.⁵³⁵ Among the curators of the first and second Graphic Design in China exhibition in 1992 and 1996, Wang Xu had experience of working in Hong Kong for about ten years. In 1988, he won the gold medal in the competition organised by the Hong Kong Designers Association. Later, he also served as executive member of the Hong Kong Designers Association.⁵³⁶ As far as he was concerned, the organisational experience of the Hong Kong Designers Association was part of his work.

Meanwhile, they also tried to learn from other approaches about how to operate in a scientific way by reading relevant information about international design competitions such as those organised by the Art Directors Club of New York, D&AD: Global Association for Creative Advertising & Design Awards, the International Poster Biennale in Warsaw / Poland, as well as International Biennial of Graphic Design Brno etc. from international design magazines.⁵³⁷ This is the way they learned some of the basic rules and regulations about the system of evaluation: the selection of a competition should have a first round and a second round and it should be notarised at the notary office.⁵³⁸ In addition, a registration fee should be charged. As one of the founding members of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association, Wang Yuefei mentioned that the way to select award-winning works by putting Go chess pieces inside an inverted cup in

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ On per capita salary in China in 1995, see 'History of Wage Change in China', in *NetEase* <<http://money.163.com/11/1011/09/7G2VA46J00253G87.html>> [accessed 11 December 2018] (《中国人工资变化史：1986年全国年平均工资1271元》, 刊载于网易财经); On membership fee of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association, see Zhu, Xie, and Shi, 'Twenties Years of the Development of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association' (祝、谢、石, 《深圳市平面设计协会二十年(1995-2015)》)

⁵³⁴ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 24 October, 2017.

⁵³⁵ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 13 December, 2018.

⁵³⁶ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 28 October, 2017.

⁵³⁷ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 24 October, 2017.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

front of each work for selection was directly influenced by a photo from a competition scene.⁵³⁹ For him, this was a reasonable way to avoid the possibility that the judges would be influenced by the choices of the others and so would effectively improve the fairness of the evaluation process.⁵⁴⁰

To establish the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association crystallised many personal ideals of its founding member Wang Yuefei. Majoring in design in the 1980s, Wang Yuefei always had the feeling that he was born at the wrong time until the beginning of reform and opening up, when China entered into the market economy and when companies, brands and products finally started to appear in China and managers began to realise the necessity of the designers to promote their products.⁵⁴¹ Under these circumstances, he had the idea of establishing an association to gather together the graphic designers and to organise a design competition with international standards, as well as impartial evaluation competition rules. Wang Yuefei's vision had fundamental influence on the direction of the Graphic Design in China exhibition, one of the core elements of the association's work. At an early stage, the focus of the Graphic Design in China exhibition was academic and it encouraged young designers to pursue their dreams.⁵⁴² Meanwhile, his in-depth thinking on local culture, as well as his exploration of local culture and tradition in the contemporary context, which was reflected in his poster and book design, was influential in Shenzhen and Guangzhou.⁵⁴³ Many local young designers affectionately called him "Brother Fei".⁵⁴⁴

At that time, all the board members of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association were part-time: that is to say, they came to participate in the work for the association during the break between running their own companies and their commercial design practice.⁵⁴⁵ All of them were going through a transformation from being a graphic designer to being a versatile organiser and communicator between the public, government, educational institute, industry and professional designers. Each board member had their own strength and they contributed to the association

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 30 October 2018.

⁵⁴² Zhou, p. 8 (周, 第8页)

⁵⁴³ 'Graphic Design Master, Military Fan, What is Wang Yuefei Really Like?', in *Souhu* <http://www.sohu.com/a/132236058_698512> [accessed 14 December 2018] (《平面设计大师、军事迷, 他到底是怎样的王粤飞?》, 刊载于搜狐)

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Zhu, Xie, and Shi, 'Twenties Years of the Development of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association' (祝、谢、石, 《深圳市平面设计协会二十年(1995-2015)》)

in their own way. Long Zhaoshu had years of experience of working in the state system.⁵⁴⁶ Educated in the Oil Painting Department of Hunan Normal University in 1987 and later receiving training from the international expert design course organised by The United Nations Development Programme's Aid China Project in 1983 and 1987 respectively, he was among the first group of people, after the Cultural Revolution, who were awarded the title of Senior Craft Artist (高级工艺美术师) in 1987.⁵⁴⁷ In 1988, he continuously received important titles such as "Young and Middle-aged Experts with Outstanding Contribution" (国家有突出贡献中青年专家) by the Ministry of Personnel, "National Excellent Packaging Workers" (全国优秀包装工作者) by the National Economic Commission, as well as "Model Worker in the National Foreign Trade Industry" (全国外贸行业劳动模范) by the Ministry of Foreign Trade.⁵⁴⁸ He started to enjoy the special government allowance from the State Council from 1992, one year before moving to Shenzhen to serve as the head of the preparatory team of the Design Department at Shenzhen University.⁵⁴⁹ All these experiences helped him to become familiar with the national conditions of China, while at the same time it made him an ideal candidate to communicate at government level. Therefore, he was elected as the representative of the designers to take responsibility for tackling the challenge of gaining a legal position for the association.⁵⁵⁰ Later, he served as the first chairman of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association.

As one of the key members of the association, Chen Shaohua had major concerns about the social responsibility of design. He was the one who raised the slogan of "design helps the construction of a country" during the Graphic Design in China exhibition in 1992.⁵⁵¹ This slogan actually reflected his understanding and thinking about the creativity of design as a vehicle for making the change in society. As introduced in Chapter One, the devising of the slogan was a continuation of his thinking behind his reform of drawing teaching targeted at the monotonous way of thinking, monotonous observation method and monotonous manifestation as a result of the monotony of teaching content and teaching methods in the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts in

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.; also see 'Members - Long Zhaoshu', in Shenzhen Graphic Design Association <<http://www.sgda.cc/memberDetails.aspx?id=95>> [accessed 18 December 2018] (《会员——龙兆曙》, 刊载于深圳市平面设计协会网站)

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 June 2018.

⁵⁵¹ Han, 'Chen Shaohua: Designer's Ideal to Construct Country' (韩, 《陈绍华: 设计师的立国理想》)

1985.⁵⁵² For him, intellectuals and elites from different areas need to have social responsibility, paying attention to social events and expressing their opinions.⁵⁵³ His awareness of issues and critical spirit inspired many young designers who actively interacted with him by participating in his lectures and communicating with him through his blog.⁵⁵⁴

Such a composition and working method allowed the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association to adopt an independent position that was different from the other public design organisations in China at that time, and to have the affinity to gather designers who came to Shenzhen from all over the country. This also made it possible for an organisation that, for a long period of time with no fixed office space and source of funds, continued to develop through mutual support among its members.⁵⁵⁵ When the association was established in 1995, Wang Yuefei specifically created a poster with this event as theme ‘Figure [46]’. There are two main elements on the poster. One is a copper hammer used by Chinese traditional goldsmiths while the other is a pair of cigar scissors from the UK.⁵⁵⁶ These two objects were put together to form the English capital letter A, which was the initials of the English word “Art” since, as mentioned before, at first the English name of the association’s name was a direct adaptation from the name of the ADC in New York.



Figure [46] Wang Yuefei, “The Establishment of Shenzhen Art Directors Club”, poster design, 1995 (© Wang Yuefei)

⁵⁵² Chen Shaohua, ‘Yellow Notebook III’, in *Chen Shaohua blog* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a4473a801000754.html> [accessed 20 December 2018] (陈绍华, 《黄色笔记(下)》, 刊载于陈绍华新浪博客)

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ ‘Zhu Shuai X Chen Shaohua | A Casual Dialogue’, in C&S <<http://www.cshdesign.com.cn/news-74.html>> [accessed 18 November 2018] (《祝帅 X 陈绍华 | “无话可说”之对话》, 刊载于陈宋品牌顾问网站); also see Mu Zi, ‘Rologo Interview | Chen Shaohua: From Designer's Viewpoint, He Said Something that Many People Don't Dare to Say!’, in *Rologo* <<http://www.rologo.com/rologo-interview.html>> [accessed 18 November 2018] (木子, 《Rologo 访谈 | 老贫头陈绍华: 从设计师的角度说一些很多人不敢说的话!》, 刊载于Rologo 网站)

⁵⁵⁵ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 13 December 2018.

⁵⁵⁶ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 3 August 2018.

Meanwhile, this image also looks like a brave man forging ahead.

Just as shown in this poster, the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association adhered to its original intention with the spirit of exploration, an open attitude to supporting design education, and the desire to popularise design to professional designers and society while expanding international exchanges. However, what would be the consequences of fully adopting the Western model without critical thinking? Would this kind of simulation mean that Chinese graphic design was truly connected with the international design circles? Or was it a shortcut to pursue short-term effects? In a high-speed development environment such as Shenzhen, the graphic design industry, which was rapidly expanding over a short period with the market demand from emerging local enterprises, had difficulties and problems in establishing codes of practice. With international design organisations such as Art Directors Club of New York as examples, the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association was established with the target of helping to tackle the challenges its founders confronted in daily practice and to create a favourable environment with fresh thinking.⁵⁵⁷ After its establishment, the exchange between Shenzhen designers and their counterparts in Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan became more frequent. Together with the 1996 Graphic Design in China exhibition, a group of designers from the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association were travelled to Japan in 1997 to visit many well-known Japanese graphic designers such as Ikko Tanaka, and officially started exchanges with the Japanese graphic design community.⁵⁵⁸ However, an in-depth thinking about “international standards” occurred much later. When describing his *An Inspiration from Tibet* (《来自西方的灵感》), an experimental book design based on research on Tibetan characters, the gold award-winning work of the 2003 Graphic Design in China exhibition, Wang Yuefei emphasised the quality of Chinese culture and his personalised spirit of exploration.⁵⁵⁹ This reflected the transformation of Shenzhen Graphic Design Association founding members’ understanding of “international standards”, a process gradually shaped by the deepening international engagement.

3. The “Anonymous” Designers behind the Department Store Shelves in the 1990s

3.1 Historical Opportunities Brought about by Reform and Opening Up

While Shenzhen was undergoing in-depth reform, another coastal city of great significance was also experiencing transformation. From the end of 1990 to the beginning of 1991, Deng Xiaoping pointed out in many talks delivered in Beijing and Shanghai that the opening of Pudong in Shanghai should be accelerated just like the construction of the Shenzhen Special Economic

⁵⁵⁷ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 15 December 2017.

⁵⁵⁸ Zhu, Xie, and Shi, ‘Twenties Years of the Development of the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association’ (祝、谢、石, 《深圳市平面设计协会二十年(1995-2015)》)

⁵⁵⁹ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 15 December 2017.

Zone.⁵⁶⁰ In the first half of 1990, Shanghai announced ten policies for the development of Pudong.⁵⁶¹ Some of them made significant breakthroughs compared with the Special Economic Zone policy, which had put pressure on its southern rival, Shenzhen.⁵⁶² In 1992, during a visit to Shanghai, Deng Xiaoping emphasised that "By the end of this century, Pudong in Shanghai and Shenzhen... should both be pacesetters".⁵⁶³ Thus, Shanghai, which had for a long time been lagging behind other provinces in the implementation of the new policy of China's reform and opening up, and which at that time was responsible for one sixth of the national revenue, was finally designated its pivot, the head of a dragon symbolising the Yangtze basin.⁵⁶⁴

Unlike Shenzhen, the development of which started from zero, Shanghai was one of the important international financial centres in East Asia from the 1920s to the 1930s.⁵⁶⁵ During the period of Socialist construction, under the guidance of the national policy of giving priority to the development of heavy industry and transforming consumer cities into productive cities, Shanghai had completed the transformation from consumer city to productive city.⁵⁶⁶ From 1949 onwards, the introduction of a centrally planned economy made many services redundant and the city lost its position as a financial and commercial centre.⁵⁶⁷ Shanghai became an important source of commodities, equipment, technology and capital in China from the 1950s to the 1970s.⁵⁶⁸ Its total industrial output accounted for one-fifth to one-eighth of the country's total

⁵⁶⁰ Zhu Xiaoming, 'Deng Xiaoping's Strategic Thinking on the Development and Opening of Shanghai Pudong', in *people.com* <<http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0102/c69113-29740415.html>> [accessed 15 November 2018] (朱晓明, 《邓小平关于开发开放上海浦东的战略思考》, 刊载于人民网)

⁵⁶¹ 'Ten Preferential Policies for the Development of Shanghai Pudong and Other Preferential Policies', *Southern Economy*, 20 March 1993, p. 73 (《上海浦东开发的十项优惠政策》, 刊载于《南方经济》, 1993, 第3期, 第73页)

⁵⁶² Marie-Claire Bergère, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 414.

⁵⁶³ Wang Shuo, "Wind and Thunder: The Establishment of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone", in *Deng Xiaoping and the Beginning of Reform and Opening Up*, Third Research Department of the Party History Research Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, ed. (Beijing: CPC Publishing House, 2005), p. 504 (王硕, 《风雷激荡: 深圳经济特区的建立》, 刊载于由中共中央党史研究室第三研究部编著的《邓小平与改革开放的起步》, 北京: 中共党史出版社, 2005, 第504页)

⁵⁶⁴ Bergère, pp. 409, 412.

⁵⁶⁵ Yu Keming, *Shanghai's Urban Development and Transformation* (Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 2009), p. 1 (俞克明, 《上海城市的发展与转型》, 上海: 上海书店出版社, 2009, 第1页)

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 2.

⁵⁶⁷ Bergère, p. 372.

⁵⁶⁸ Yu, p. 9 (俞, 第9页)

value, and its total profits and taxes accounted for a quarter to one sixth of the country's total value.⁵⁶⁹ In 1979, distant southern provinces such as Guangdong were chosen as fields of experimentation while Shanghai was ruled out as a pilot area for reform due to its proximity to the centre and role as pillar of the centrally planned economy.⁵⁷⁰ However, Shanghai's importance was gradually acknowledged as a result of the evolution of a relationship of strength within the party from 1979 when Deng Xiaoping began to encourage decentralisation to combat the opposition to the transition to market economy.⁵⁷¹ After 1989, both Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji, the then secretary of the Shanghai Party Committee and the mayor who managed to calm down the local community during the Tiananmen Square protests, were promoted within the party.⁵⁷² The rise of the "Shanghai clique" held possibilities of patronage that would play an essential role in the recovery of the Shanghai economy.⁵⁷³

These changes had a direct impact on the lives of people in Shanghai. One of the most significant characteristics of the Shanghai population was that even if they lacked material conditions, they would still try to live a life of "ceremonial feeling".⁵⁷⁴ In 1980, after the implementation of the reform and opening up policy, the newly packed Phoenix Pearl Cream, by Shanghai's local cosmetics company, was launched.⁵⁷⁵ Prior to this, cosmetics were considered to be symbol of the bourgeoisie.⁵⁷⁶ Therefore, after ten years of suppression, when a new product came out, the desire of Shanghai women for beauty products was suddenly released. According to packaging designer Zhao Zuoliang at that time there was a situation such that in the rush to grab bottles of Pearl Cream, the counters of department stores were damaged.⁵⁷⁷ The speed at which the factory produced this product could not keep up with the needs of consumers, which led to a shortage in supplies.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Bergère, p. 409.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., p. 413.

⁵⁷² Ibid., pp. 413-414.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., p. 414.

⁵⁷⁴ Gu Zheng, 'In Order to Get a Bottle of Pearl Cream, the Department Store Counters Were Smashed', in *Morning News*, 26 August 2018, A6 (顾箏, 《为抢一瓶珍珠霜, 百货公司柜台都挤破了》, 刊载于《新闻晨报》, 2018年8月26日, A6版)

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., A7.

What kind of impact, then, would the development and implementation of a commodity economy have on Shanghai's design? In other words, in the face of such historic opportunities, what were the differences and similarities between Shanghai, the graphic design centre of China in the 1920s and 1930s, and Shenzhen, the new centre of graphic design which had started from nothing, on the issues such as the direction and strategy of design development? What challenges would Shanghai graphic designers face? How would they face the problem of historical inheritance? To understand these issues, it is necessary to trace the origin of the design context of Shanghai.

3.2 Shanghai Style Designer - A Glorious History and Its Heritage

In the early 1990s, a series of Phoenix Pearl Nourishing Cosmetics (凤凰系列化妆品) appeared on the shelf of the Friendship store in Shanghai.⁵⁷⁹ A few years later in 1995, the packaging design for this product created by Zhao Zuoliang 'Figure [47]' received the World Star for Packaging Excellence award, as well as the China Star for Packaging Excellence award.⁵⁸⁰ Created for the well-known local brand, this award-winning work looks very elegant and poetic. On the white paper box, there is a portrait of the Goddess of clam. Wearing a full ancient Chinese robe, with a sophisticated head-dress, the goddess is holding a plate on top of which sits a shining pearl. The portrait uses the technique of line drawing (白描), a traditional Chinese painting techniques. On top of the portrait, are the names of the product in Chinese and English. The Chinese character “珍珠”, means Pearl, as part of the product name, which, as well as its main element, was written in a freehand brush-work style in traditional Chinese calligraphy. The artistic flavour of these two Chinese characters



Figure [47] Zhao Zuoliang, Phoenix Pearl Nourishing Cosmetics, package design, 1990s (©Zhao Zuoliang)

⁵⁷⁹ Zhao Zuoliang, *Design Strategy* (Shanghai: Longtu Zuoliang Original Design Master Studio, 2010), pp. 223-224 (赵佐良, 《设计策略》, 上海: 隆图·佐良原创设计大师工作室, 2010, 第223-224页)

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

echoes the mythological theme of the portrait. For each package in the Pearl series, the English title is put underneath the Chinese one, presented in a light colour, such as yellow and light green. The traditional Chinese element was naturally transformed and represented in a modern context.

Why was a goddess from an ancient Chinese story chosen for the packaging design of a modern product? What was the inspiration for the design? What were the thinking and values behind this design? How did Zhao Zuoliang develop this style? What did it mean for Zhao Zuoliang to gain these two important design awards at that time? To address these issues, it is important to explore Zhao Zuoliang's journey towards becoming a designer.

Zhao Zuoliang was enrolled in the Shanghai Light Industry School (上海轻工业学校) in the 1960s, where he studied packaging design.⁵⁸¹ The school was founded in 1959 by the Shanghai Light Industry Bureau with the aim of training talent for the packaging industry.⁵⁸² At that time, Shanghai's light industry was of great significance. More than half of the country's daily necessities were provided by Shanghai.⁵⁸³ The huge increase in production took the Shanghai design of light industrial products to the whole country and overseas and in order to meet the aesthetic standards of the overseas market, the products were not simply decorated with traditional Chinese painting, but also incorporated decorative geometric patterns.⁵⁸⁴ Initially, the school invited many senior professionals with great achievement in the local design field as teachers.⁵⁸⁵ Most of them had experienced the Republic of China and the early days of the People's Republic of China. They were influenced by Western culture while at the same time maintaining their own design culture. At that time, there were no formal textbooks at school, except *Chinese Pattern History* (《中国图案史》), as well as the classical Dunhuang (敦煌) patterns.⁵⁸⁶ Most of the teaching materials written by the staff were based on their practical experience.⁵⁸⁷ The majority of these teachers used to carry out packaging design for local companies, and so they had

⁵⁸¹ Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, in Shanghai, 1 November 2017.

⁵⁸² Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, in Shanghai, 7 August 2018.

⁵⁸³ Xie Zhongqiang, *Feedback and Responsibility: Study on Shanghai's Support to the Whole Country since Liberation* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2017), p. 36 (谢忠强, 《反哺与责任: 解放以来上海支援全国研究》, 北京: 中国社会科学出版社, 2017, 第36页)

⁵⁸⁴ Shen Yu, and Wei Shaonong, ed., *Made in Shanghai* (Suffolk: ACC Art Books, 2018), p. 15.

⁵⁸⁵ '2018 Shanghai University of Applied Sciences Art Application Guide', in *China Art College Entrance Examination Network* <<http://www.ms315.com/html/20180311/201803111125351.htm>> [accessed 2 July 2018] (《2018年上海应用技术大学美术类报考指南》, 刊载于中国美术高考网)

⁵⁸⁶ Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, in Shanghai, 7 August 2018.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

practical experience, for example, Chen Fangqian (陈方千), one of the faculty members and previously a staff member of a toothpaste factory within the China Chemical Industry Association, based his teaching on real design projects.⁵⁸⁸ He would bring students to factory to participate in the process of manufacture and printing. Also, he would invite students to work on commission from the factory.⁵⁸⁹ Some excellent students would be chosen by him to visit well-known designers in Shanghai; Zhao Zuoliang was one of them.⁵⁹⁰



Figure [48-52] Gu Shipeng, Swan wax for hair, package design, 1964-1965; MAXAM toothpaste, package design, 1957; Yuhwa, bath soap, package design, 1964-1965; Budlet cream, package design, 1965; Butterfly cream, package design, 1964. From left to right, top to bottom (© Gu Chuanxi)

The design attitude and method that emphasised the integration of Chinese and Western elements, as well as the apprenticeship learning model, continued in his working environment. In 1963, Zhao Zuoliang entered the Pechoin Packaging Company (百雀羚包装公司) within the Shanghai Rihua (上海日化).⁵⁹¹ Pechoin was a brand created in 1931. The design of the product had limitations in terms of colour and pattern, including the three main colours of blue, white and yellow, and the image of little birds.⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁸ Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, through email, 5 September 2019.

⁵⁸⁹ Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, in Shanghai, 7 August 2018.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² 'Introduction to the Pechoin Group', in *Pechoin* <<http://www.pechoin.com/集团-简介/>> [accessed 20 Jan 2019] (《集团简介》，刊载于百雀羚网站)

The second year after Zhao Zuoliang joined the company, an exhibition of cosmetics export products led by Gu Shipeng was held.⁵⁹³ Gu Shipeng was a designer of significant importance, behind many well-known brands of local light industrial products, including Swan (天鹅) ‘Figure [48]’, MAXAM (美加净) ‘Figure [49]’, Yuhua (裕华) ‘Figure [50]’, Fangfang (芳芳) ‘Figure [51]’ and Butterfly (蝴蝶) ‘Figure [52]’ etc.⁵⁹⁴ Born in Shanghai in 1924, during the period when the development of national capitalism meant that a large number of national industrial and commercial enterprises emerged in Shanghai, Gu Shipeng learned design skills and knowledge from practice.⁵⁹⁵ He became a designer for Shanghai New Asia Pharmaceutical (上海新亚药厂) in 1944 after studying art with Ding Song (丁悚), a well known painter in Shanghai, and receiving professional training in the class for advertisement design organised by Shanghai New Asia Pharmaceutical.⁵⁹⁶ Later, Gu Shipeng learned design strategy and how to write English fonts from his superior, Hu Zhongbiao (胡忠彪), once a senior executive at Carl Crow Inc., an American advertising company based in Shanghai.⁵⁹⁷ What he had also gained from this working experience was a knowledge of Hu Zhongbiao’s life-style. According to

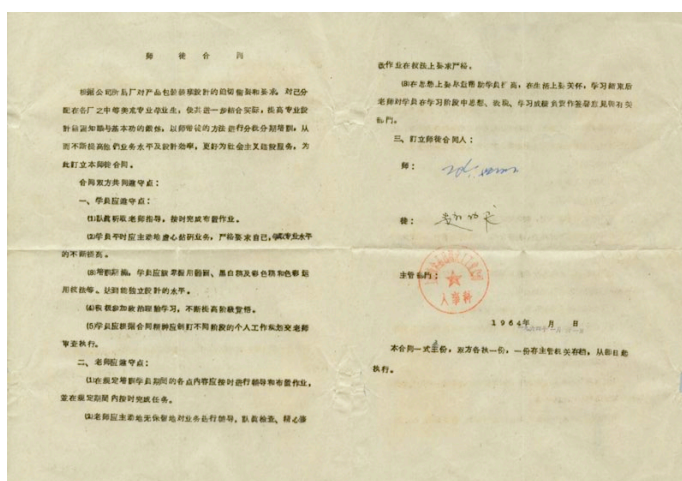


Figure [53] “Master and Apprentice Contract” (师徒合同) between Gu Shipeng and Zhao Zuoliang, from Zhao Zuoliang’s personal archive (© Gu Chuanxi)

⁵⁹³ Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, in Shanghai, 1 November 2017.

⁵⁹⁴ The document was provided to me by Gu Shipeng in his studio in Shanghai on 13 August 2018. The original materials is situated in Gu Shipeng’s personal archive.

⁵⁹⁵ The information about Gu Shipeng’s birth year comes from the document was provided to me by Gu Shipeng in his studio in Shanghai on 13 August 2018. The original materials is situated in Gu Shipeng’s personal archive; on the development of national capitalism in Shanghai in the 1920s, see Li Feng and Yang Jiansheng, ‘Research on Commodity Packaging Design in China in the 1920s and 1930s’, in *CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure)* <<http://www.cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFDTOTAL-SJYS200403034.htm>> [accessed 28 December 2018] (李锋、杨建生, 《我国二十世纪二三十年代商品包装设计研究》, 刊载于中国知网)

⁵⁹⁶ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, in Shanghai, 13 August 2018.

⁵⁹⁷ The information about Gu Shipeng’s learning experience with Hu Zhongbiao comes from Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, in Shanghai, 13 August 2018; On Hu Zhongbiao’s working experience in Shanghai, see ‘Retrospective of the Old Generation of Designers: the King of the MAXAM - Gu Shipeng’, in *AD518* <<https://www.weibo.com/ttarticle/p/show?id=2309404197959318250904&infeed=1>> [accessed 1 Jan 2018] (《老一辈设计师回顾：美加净之王——顾世朋》, 刊载于最设计微博)

the recollection of Gu Chuanxi, Gu Shipeng's son, his father always combed his hair neatly, always wore perfume and visited cafés frequently.⁵⁹⁸ In Gu Chuanxi's eyes, his father was style-conscious and fashionable, which was a manifestation of his love for life and connected with his working experience with Hu Zhongbiao, a typical entrepreneur in traditional Shanghai style in the 1920s.⁵⁹⁹

In 1964, Zhao Zuoliang formally acknowledged Gu Shipeng as his master under the company's arrangement 'Figure [53]'.⁶⁰⁰ From then, Gu Shipeng would assign design tasks and give specific guidance to Zhao Zuoliang while he was working on these tasks.⁶⁰¹ For Zhao Zuoliang, the traditional Chinese apprenticeship with Gu Shipeng — a one-to-one teaching method based on mutual trust — was highly beneficial as an addition to the specific knowledge he gained at school.⁶⁰² The result of this kind of learning style and learning environment was that Zhao Zuoliang did not choose to break from the local culture when all kinds of design information arrived in China through exhibitions, publications, and presentations delivered by designers or design historians of international reputation after reform and opening up.⁶⁰³ Among various forms of design thinking introduced into China, he chose “people-oriented” (以人为本) and “the object of design is people” (设计的对象是人) to guide his practice.⁶⁰⁴



Figure [54-55] “Chao Yuan Tu” (part), Zhao Zuoliang personal collection; Zhao Zuoliang, main figure on the package design of the Phoenix Pearl Nourishing Cosmetics, 1990s. From left to right (© Zhao Zuoliang)

Zhao Zuoliang's values and thinking on the integration of Chinese and Western styles is reflected in

⁵⁹⁸ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, in Shanghai, 13 August 2018.

⁵⁹⁹ The information about the connection between Gu Shipeng's style and the influence from Hu Zhongbiao comes from Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, in Shanghai, 13 August 2018; On “Shanghai Style”, see Shanghai Style (海派), in ‘Haipai and the Ideal of Modernity’, in Bergère, p. 242.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, in Shanghai, 7 August 2018.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, through email, 9 January 2019.

his package design for Phoenix Pearl Nourishing Cosmetics in the 1990s.⁶⁰⁵ Like Pechoin, Phoenix, created at the end of the 1970s, was also a local brand. It was named after the phoenix, a traditional Chinese mascot popular among Chinese working people, and there was a long history in China of using pearls as a beauty material.⁶⁰⁶ In order to highlight the mythical and traditional atmosphere, Zhao Zuoliang went to the ancient mural painting “Chao Yuan Tu” (《朝元图》) to search for inspiration.⁶⁰⁷ “Chao Yuan Tu” is a mural from the Yuan dynasty in the Sanqing Hall (三清殿) at Yongle Palace (永乐宫) in Shanxi province.⁶⁰⁸ As one of the most complete ancient murals in China, the composition of “Chao Yuan Tu” is vast, and includes solemn emperors, mighty generals, and elegant and beautiful fairies ‘Figure [54]’. All these figures are beaming and buoyant. Basing his design on the image of the goddess in “Chao Yuan Tu”, Zhao Zuoliang added a phoenix headdress. The articles of tribute in the plate holder by the goddess in the original mural were replaced by a shining pearl to communicate the brand and to build a connection with the product. Meanwhile, he simplified the treatment of the goddess’ pleats and departed from the rich colour in the original painting. Instead, line drawing skill was applied ‘Figure [55]’. This abstract, concise method ensured that the character fitted perfectly with modern packaging design. Using modern materials, the goddess was presented on the package in silver.⁶⁰⁹

As the winner of the China Star for Packaging Excellence award in 1995, Zhao Zuoliang’s package design for Phoenix Pearl Nourishing Cosmetics was recommended to the World Star for Packaging Excellence award committee through Design Committee of China Packaging Association.⁶¹⁰ On December 1995, the package design received World Star for



Figure [56] Zhao Zuoliang, Phoenix Super Placenta Cream, package design, 1992 (© Zhao Zuoliang)

⁶⁰⁵ Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, in Shanghai, 27 July 2017.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ On “Chao Yuan Tu” (《朝元图》), see *Taoist Cultural Archive* <<http://zh.daoinfo.org/w/index.php?title=朝元圖&variant=zh-hans>> [accessed 21 Jan 2019] (刊载于道教文化资料库)

⁶⁰⁹ Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, through WeChat, 22 January 2019.

⁶¹⁰ Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, through email, 9 January 2019.

Packaging Excellence award. The winning of these two important awards at the same time greatly enhanced Zhao Zuoliang's self-confidence, while at the same time strengthening his understanding of the innovative value of Chinese culture in his design practice.⁶¹¹ In his speech at the conference of the World Star for Packaging Excellence awards, he emphasised his methodology and thinking in terms of combining international style with local culture:

While learning (from the international designs introduced to China), they (Chinese designers) realised that to be innovative is more important. Chinese cosmetics must have Chinese style... A strong national culture will definitely affect modern Chinese design. Chinese cosmetics will definitely set their sights at a world level, we have already seen the dawn.⁶¹²

Zhao Zuoliang and his colleagues had always been proud to be known as designers of Shanghai style. When his team tried to promote the Pearl series of beauty products to South-east Asia, the slogan of the product was “your grandmother's beauty method”.⁶¹³

At around the same time, Zhao Zuoliang was also responsible for the packaging design for Phoenix Super Placenta Cream ‘Figure [56]’, another new product from the Phoenix Cosmetics range, launched in 1992. Unlike the design for Phoenix Pearl Nourishing Cosmetics, there is no realistic image on the packaging of this product. In the middle of the package, there is a small square with an embossed gold frame. In the centre of the square, there is a highly abstract pattern of a phoenix, simplified from the image on the trademark. Underneath the square, “Super Placenta Cream”, the English name of the product, is arranged in three lines. “Placenta”, in purple, is enlarged and presented in bold while words “super” and “cream” are presented in thin gold text. The container for the product has the same style, with the product name arranged in three lines horizontally. On top of this, there is the English word phoenix, the name of the cosmetics range. On the other side of the package is the Chinese name of the product in Xiheiti.⁶¹⁴ The whole container is in pink, except for the thin metal edge of silver on the plastic cap. Why would a wrinkle-removing product targeted at an ordinary female consumer have exquisite details, for example the embossed gold frame? Why was the realistic image of a phoenix on the traditional trademark simplified for this package?

⁶¹¹ Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, through email, 9 January 2019.

⁶¹² Zhao, p. 163 (赵, 第163页)

⁶¹³ The information about the impact of winning China Star for Packaging Excellence award and World Star for Packaging Excellence award on Zhao Zuoliang's self-confidence comes from Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, in Shanghai, 27 July 2017.

⁶¹⁴ The designer could only provide an image of this side of the packaging design. According to his explanation through WeChat on 31 July 2019 that he does not have the image showing the other side of the packaging design with Chinese characters.

These elements were designed to highlight the product's characteristics. The simplified phoenix pattern was specifically applied to reflect that this was a modern, fashionable product with a newly developed formula for skin care.⁶¹⁵ The gold phoenix and embossed gold frame were used to create a sense of exquisite quality.⁶¹⁶ When introduced to department stores all over China, the sales of this product from 1992 to the end of the 1990s reached about 500 million bottles.⁶¹⁷ These statistics reflected the proportion of the Shanghai cosmetics industry in the national market at the time and its influence on consumer before international cosmetics brands entered the Chinese market on a large scale. Through the design of these products, the characteristics of Shanghai-style design could be reflected, such as the preservation and application of traditional elements, special attention paid to details, as well as the emphasis on an English typeface. Instead of using an existing font, Zhao Zuoliang created new typefaces based on the existing ones but with significant modification, the method of dealing with English typeface frequently used by his master Gu Shipeng.

3.3 The “Sunday Designer” behind the Popular Brands

The brands attracted by Shanghai design were not limited to local enterprises. In 1998, newly packaged shampoo and shower cream designed by Shanghai designer Gu Chuanxi were launched at the CIGO (高姿)

counter in department stores all over China. Instead of putting a label with product information on the bottle, a common approach to packaging design for this kind of product at that time, Gu Chuanxi's design looked more sophisticated.⁶¹⁸ The CIGO shampoo 'Figure [57]' was put in a white bottle with a light blue cap. There are various blue and black vertical curved lines on the bottle. On the right-hand side, there is a rectangle with the product name in



Figure [57-58] Gu Chuanxi, CIGO shampoo, package design, 1998; Gu Chuanxi, CIGO shower cream, package design, 1998 (© Gu Chuanxi)

⁶¹⁵ Zhao Zuoliang interview with the author, in Shanghai, 27 July 2017.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Gu, A7 (顾, A7版)

⁶¹⁸ The information about the common approach to packaging design for shower cream in China in 1998 comes from Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through WeChat, 2 August 2019.

Chinese, as well as the slogan in Chinese and English. The English name of the product is put underneath. The colour chosen for the packaging of the bath foam is light orange. Unlike the shampoo, there are only two vertical curved lines on the bottle of the shower cream ‘Figure [58]’. In addition, the English name of the product is on top of the rectangular form, where the Chinese name of the product and slogan are presented. Different typefaces with very thin strokes were chosen for these two products. What is the meaning of these vertical curves on the bottle? Are they pure decoration? Why was the design chosen? What was its strength? To get a better understanding of these issues, it is necessary to learn more about the company’s background and the designer who was responsible for the task.

CIGO was a well-known joint Sino-Hong Kong cosmetic venture.⁶¹⁹ In order to make the brand more competitive, the company chose to set up its headquarters in Shanghai, where many well-known brands of China's daily chemicals industry were located⁶²⁰ and their cooperation with Gu Chuanxi began in 1984, soon after the company was established.⁶²¹ As the youngest child of Gu Shipeng, the well-known Shanghai designer behind many famous brands of local light industrial products, including the first generation of mousse in China, Gu Chuanxi was brought up in an environment full of talented artists and designers, for example, his father’s friend Guo Dajing (郭大敬), a well-known painter in Shanghai, as well as his father’s apprentice and colleague Zhao Zuoliang.⁶²² Since childhood, Gu Chuanxi had had the opportunity to read information about international design from his father’s bookshelves, where Gu Shipeng displayed samples and catalogues from international design exhibitions and trade fairs, such as the catalogue for the Japanese brand Shiseido.⁶²³ Meanwhile, he learnt painting skills through participating in the training course provided at the Youth Palace (青年宫) in Shanghai.⁶²⁴ In 1979, Gu Chuanxi was accepted by the Decorative Design Department of the Central Academy of Arts & Crafts.⁶²⁵ The school could not provide systematic design training then, and as Chen Shaohua, also a student from the Decoration Design Department, one year senior to Gu Chuanxi, described, “most of the

⁶¹⁹ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through WeChat, 26 July 2019.

⁶²⁰ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through WeChat, 31 July 2019.

⁶²¹ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through telephone call, 1 August 2019.

⁶²² The information about Gu Shipeng comes from Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through WeChat, 26 July 2019; The information about Guo Dajing comes from Gu Chuanxi, “Reminisce about the Past to Get Inspiration” (顾传熙, 《追昔励今》, 顾传熙个人文档), the text was provided to the author, through email, 6 February 2019, the text is situated in Gu Chuanxi’s personal archive; The information about Zhao Zuoliang comes from Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, in Shanghai, 6 August 2018.

⁶²³ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through telephone call, 1 August 2019.

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

⁶²⁵ Gu Chuanxi resume provided to the author, through WeChat, 13 August 2018

people in the department were doing art creation while graphic designers were marginalised”.⁶²⁶ Gu Chuanxi’s understanding of design mainly came from the influence of his father.

In 1983, soon after graduation, Gu Shipeng went back to Shanghai and became a teacher at the Advertising Teaching and Research Section (广告教研室) of the Shanghai Institute of Business and Accounting (上海商业会计学院).⁶²⁷ Meanwhile, he joined his father and started his commercial design practice.⁶²⁸ At that time, with the implementation of reform and opening up, private enterprises began to appear in the suburbs of Shanghai, as well as surrounding area such as Jiangsu and Zhejiang.⁶²⁹ Due to the impact of the planned economy, these private enterprises were lacking in equipment and market-oriented methods.⁶³⁰ They urgently needed technical and production management talent. Under these circumstances, they started working with in-house designers from the state-owned enterprises to enhance the competitiveness of their products.⁶³¹ For in-house designers with limited income under the planned economic system, this was a good opportunity to obtain supplementary payment.⁶³² Thus, many in-house designers would work for private enterprises during the weekend, and they got the nickname “Sunday designers” (星期天设计师).⁶³³ Many of Gu Chuanxi’s clients then were private companies, such as the Dongfangzhibao Cosmetics Limited Company (东方之宝), the Sino-Hong Kong joint venture CIGO (高姿) and township enterprise the Huaerzi (华尔资).⁶³⁴

In the 1990s, he had established long-term relationships with these brands. With the deepening of reform and opening up, especially after Deng Xiaoping’s several lectures about accelerating the opening of Pudong delivered from the end of 1990 to the beginning of 1991, the in-house designers in Shanghai could cooperate more openly with private companies and display the design they created during their spare time, instead of secretly working on these projects at home as they have done in the 1980s.⁶³⁵ Compared with state-owned enterprises, the

⁶²⁶ Chen Shaohua interview with the author, in Shenzhen, 25 October 2017.

⁶²⁷ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through telephone call, 1 August 2019.

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Gu Chuanxi resume provided to the author, through WeChat, 3 August 2018

⁶³⁰ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through WeChat, 2 August 2019.

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through telephone call, 1 August 2019.

⁶³⁴ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through WeChat, 26 July 2019.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

management of private enterprises was more flexible. This was reflected not only in the payment for designers, but also in the process of reviewing and adopting design concepts, which encouraged designers to apply new technology in their design work.⁶³⁶

When working on the packaging for CIGO's new products in 1998, Gu Chuanxi emphasised their function through design instead of relying on the introductory text on the information label. Cold colours and warm colours were chosen for the bottle of shampoo and shower cream respectively, to enable the user to easily distinguish them from each other. Meanwhile, to make the products stand out on the shelf, he

applied a number of creative ideas, using the various vertical curves on the bottle of shampoo to represent hair and the double vertical curves on the bottle of shower liquid to represent the body.⁶³⁷ Thus, vibrancy and depth were added to the design. Screen printing was used for printing on plastic blow-moulded bottles.⁶³⁸ It is important to point out that in the late 1990s, the overlap of colours in this design was very difficult to realise according to the printing technology available in China at the time.⁶³⁹ Gu Chuanxi had to work together with printing technicians to tackle the challenge with the aim to first of all maximising the printed surface on the bottle; second, to present the colour blocks and lines precisely; third, to display the delicate effect of both English letters and Chinese characters with fine strokes.⁶⁴⁰



Figure [59-61] Gu Shipeng, MAXAM perfume, package design, 1995; MAXAM cream, package design, 1983; Yuhua hair tonic, package design, 1965. From left to right, top to bottom (© Gu Chuanxi)

⁶³⁶ The information about the flexibility of the management in private enterprises compared to the stated-owned enterprises in Shanghai and the neighbouring areas in the early 1990s comes from Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through telephone call, 1 August 2019.

⁶³⁷ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through telephone call, 1 August 2019.

⁶³⁸ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through WeChat, 28 July 2019.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

In 1999, the second year after the CIGO shampoo and shower cream had been launched, Gu Chuanxi received a new task at a higher marketing level from the company.⁶⁴¹ During this period, CIGO put into production JR, a high-end product.⁶⁴² The company invested a major amount of product development funding to purchase the patent formula developed by a Japanese technology company.⁶⁴³ The targeted consumer group were people with higher education qualifications, including teachers, doctors and college students.⁶⁴⁴ Where would he go to search for inspiration? How would he present the high-end quality of this new product?

Gu Chuanxi went to study his father Gu Shipeng's design. After much reviewing and comparison, he decided to choose brown - Gu Shipeng's favourite, which was also the colour Gu Shipeng had applied to many classic designs in a different period 'Figure [59-61]', as the colour of his new design.⁶⁴⁵

In my mind, my father likes brown and enjoys eating chocolate and drinking coffee. He always regards brown as a colour that represents high quality. The last design he created is also in brown.⁶⁴⁶

From Gu Shipeng's designs, what Gu Chuanxi was looking for was not only a suitable brown, but more importantly to explore the subtlety and richness of this colour, and to create sophisticated layering by contrast between different textures. Eventually he chose two browns, one dark and shiny, one light and rough-



Figure [62] Gu Chuanxi, CIGO JR skin care and makeup series, package design, 1999 (©Gu Chuanxi)

⁶⁴¹ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through WeChat, 24 January 2019.

⁶⁴² Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through WeChat, 31 July 2019.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through WeChat, 26 July 2019.

⁶⁴⁵ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through WeChat, 28 July 2019.

⁶⁴⁶ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through WeChat, 31 July 2019.

looking, both of which according to his description were “a bit grey, not too glamorous while at the same time fashionable”.⁶⁴⁷ In doing so, he tried to establish an interesting conversation between the browns in his packaging design for JR ‘Figure [62]’. The same concept was also applied to the design of the product container where the browns of different textures and materials — plastic and glass — were combined. To present the high quality of the brand, Gu Chuanxi chose Times New Roman as reference for the typeface because in his view, this typeface looked “serious and elegant”.⁶⁴⁸ Based on Times New Roman, he created the typeface for CIGO JR. During the process of printing, Gu Chuanxi went to the printing plant several times to check the printing samples.⁶⁴⁹ It was during the process of viewing the paper for the packaging that he had the idea of putting the brand name and a brief product description between the two sides of the paper cube.⁶⁵⁰ When released on the market, the CIGO JR soon became popular.⁶⁵¹

The journey Gu Chuanxi experienced in the 1990s was closely connected with the rise of private and township enterprises in Shanghai and surrounding regions after the reform and opening up policies from the early 1980s. At that time, these companies were in need of design talent, as well as a strategy for entering the market. Their flexibility in capital and operational processes was a great opportunity for designers to experiment with new ideas and materials. Gu Chuanxi, who inherited his father's career, was proud to present the inclusive spirit of the Shanghai style and to embody his father's design spirit, including the meticulous attention to elegant detail and ways of using colour.⁶⁵² For these companies, Shanghai design meant good quality and a nationwide consumer base.

4. Conclusion

In the 1990s, the graphic design practice presented an active picture in Shenzhen and Shanghai, especially after the "Southern Tour Speeches" delivered by Deng Xiaoping who emphasised that the policy of reform and opening up should be continuously implemented and that opportunities for development, such as the development of the economy, should be seized.⁶⁵³ As result, the

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through telephone call, 2 August 2019.

⁶⁴⁹ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through telephone call, 1 August 2019.

⁶⁵⁰ Gu Chuanxi interview with the author, through WeChat, 26 July 2019.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² Gu Chuanxi, ‘Reminisce about the Past to Get Inspiration’ (《追昔励今》) was provided to the author, through email, 6 February 2019. The text situated in Gu Chuanxi's personal archive.

⁶⁵³ Deng Xiaoping, *The Third Volume of Selection of Deng Xiaoping's Works* (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1993), pp. 370, 371 (邓小平, 《邓小平文选第三卷》, 北京: 人民出版社, 1993, 第370、371页)

Chinese government issued a formal decision in early March 1992 to continue reform and opening up.⁶⁵⁴ This was a turning point with significant meaning since by the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, China's economic reform, as well as the implementation of the opening-up policy, faced serious difficulties due to the conflicts between the interests of the old and new systems, as well as the increasingly disordered economic operations. Meanwhile, the tremendous changes in the international situation following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of Eastern Europe prompted deep thought about the direction of China's future development.

It is worth mentioning that even between 1989 and 1992, during the period after the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, as well as the rapid decline in economic growth rate in China since 1988, the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, as “the window of technology, management, knowledge and the Reform and Opening Up policy” still maintained a consistent pace of development because of its unique geographical advantages.⁶⁵⁵ After the government toughened its approach following the student protest, the important position of Shenzhen was maintained due to the fact that it was through the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone that China was able to establish a convenient channel of communication with Hong Kong and abroad, making efforts towards trade diversification under the circumstances in which Western countries' economic sanctions against China were increasing its domestic economic difficulties.

The chapter discusses the practice and development of graphic design in southern China, especially in Guangzhou and Shenzhen, the test bed for reform and opening up, as well as Shanghai, the region that had a dominant role in China's light industry in the 1990s. This was the period when the key figures in the south, including Chen Shaohua, Wang Yuefei and Wang Xu left stable jobs to start their own practices. Meanwhile, the in-house designers in Shanghai such as Gu Chuanxi and Zhao Zuoliang could cooperate more openly with private enterprises. The chapter describes the opportunities and the challenges the graphic design pioneers experienced in Shenzhen, a newly developing city where they had to start from zero. The narrative also addresses the issue of how the Shanghai designers dealt with the tradition and legacy of their city, which was known as “Oriental Paris” in the 1920s and 1930s, when Shanghai style, a combination of Western aesthetics and traditional Chinese culture, was prosperous.

Through comparison between the different attitudes and choices made by the designers from these two different regions when encountering international design, as well as various international design thinkings that flowed into China after the reform and opening up, an interesting

⁶⁵⁴ Robert Weatherley, *Politics in China since 1949: Legitimising Authoritarian Rule*, 1st edn (Routledge, 2006), p 137

⁶⁵⁵ Gao Shangquan, *To Change China in 40 Years*, 1st edn (Beijing: Beijing United Publishing Company, 2018), pp. 600, 603, 606 (高尚全等著, 《四十年改变中国》, 北京: 北京联合出版公司, 2018, 第一版, 第600、603、606页)

context was created in which the rich and sophisticated relationship between the political, economic and geographical factors behind the formation of the pattern of the Chinese graphic design phenomenon are revealed, as well as how these led to a different understanding of creativity and a different attitude towards history, tradition and the influence of the international design.

IV. Chapter Three: “Social Energy”? - Graphic Design Exploration in the 2000s

1. Introduction

In June 2009, Wang Min, the dean of CAFA (Central Academy of Fine Arts) Design School and Academic Director of the 2009 ICOGRADA (The International Council of Graphic Design Associations) Beijing Congress, realised that he was confronting a major challenge in his career. Two months earlier, he had been informed that Beijing-Hyundai Auto were cancelling 5 million CNY (447,675 GBP) of sponsorship for the congress due to the lack of approval from the Korean headquarters.⁶⁵⁶ As the congress to be held in about three months' time, many issues needed to be resolved. According to Wang Min, on the worst day, he received three telephone calls urging him to make payments, including one from China CYTS (China Youth Travel Service) Tours Holding Co., Ltd (中青旅) and Gehua New Century (歌华开元大酒店), asking for 450,000 CNY (40,290 GBP), half of the cost of the flights for the speakers and the board members, as well as further hundreds for thousands for hotel reservation deposits respectively.⁶⁵⁷ Although this event was supported by the government, those payments were usually for a fixed purpose. Also, it took time to go through all the processes to receive the funds. Take for example, the one million CNY sponsorship CAFA had been promised from the Ministry of Education could only be used to buy equipment, such as projectors and hardware.⁶⁵⁸ Meanwhile, the funds that the Gehua Group (歌华集团), the co-organisers of the congress, had gained from the Beijing Municipal Government were not in place yet.⁶⁵⁹ In this urgent situation, Wang Min thought of asking for help from the other institutions. So he, together with his colleagues Tan Ping (谭平) and Xiao Yong (肖勇) began to contact other art and design institutions around China, communicating with them about the possibility of participating in the congress as cooperative institutions.⁶⁶⁰ After a week, they had received 2.5 million CNY from about 45 schools to resolve the “crisis”.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁶ Wang Min interview with the author, through WeChat, 27 July 2019; On Chinese Yuan and Sterling exchange rate, see ‘Daily Spot Exchange Rates against Sterling - June 2009’, in *Bank of England / Database* <<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/boeapps/database/Rates.asp?TD=15&TM=Jun&TY=2009&into=GBP&rateview=D>> [accessed 2 August 2019]

⁶⁵⁷ Wang Min interview with the author, through WeChat, 12 July 2019; On Chinese Yuan and Sterling exchange rate, see ‘Daily Spot Exchange Rates against Sterling - June 2009’, in *Bank of England / Database* <<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/boeapps/database/Rates.asp?TD=15&TM=Jun&TY=2009&into=GBP&rateview=D>> [accessed 2 August 2019]

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Wang Min interview with the author, through WeChat, 6 July 2019.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

Wang Min's dramatic experience in the process of preparing for the 2009 Icoграда Beijing Congress reflected the situation in which at that time neither the government nor the business community were fully aware of the value of design. This encouraged him and his colleagues to rethink the positioning and meaning of design in the local environment. As a result, the content of some of the events were adjusted to appeal to the public, as well as the decision-makers, the government.⁶⁶² They were trying to make changes.

This chapter examines the international graphic design exchanges that had a significant influence in China in the early 2000s, for example, the 2004 AGI (Alliance Graphique Internationale) Beijing Congress, the 2009 Icoграда Beijing Congress and Social Energy, an event trying to address the problems in Chinese graphic design circles through the introduction of Dutch design ideas in 2009. Drawing on previously unstudied materials in Yu Bingnan and Wang Min's personal archive, including the report written by Jelle van der Toorn Vrijthoff and Annett Lenz, the then AGI IEC member who came to Beijing to review the venues and the theme proposed, the information about the exhibitions organised as part of the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress and the 2009 Icoграда Beijing Congress, as well as reports about the events from local media, based on interviews with some of the AGI members and Icoграда members who came to participate in the congress, the chapter describes the interaction between these two international design organisations and Chinese graphic design circles from 1994, the first time that Yu Bingnan proposed the annual congress in China. It demonstrates how Yu Bingnan and his Chinese colleagues, including members from AGI COC (China Organisation Committee), the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, as well as the CAFA team responsible for the organisation of the Icoграда Beijing Congress, interpreted and presented the theme of the congress locally. Meanwhile, the appearance of Social Energy, organised by Jiang Hua and Li Degeng, two young design researchers, highlights the new generation of Chinese graphic designers' thinking about design and how they tried to explore their autonomy through this event.

The chapter is important because it offers a detailed case study of international graphic design exchanges in China in the 2000s under the influence of multiple factors. It reveals the impact of China's economic development, the government's cultural policy, the intention of the initiators and the local institutions hosting the events, and the expectations and involvement of the international design organisations. The chapter highlights a critical episode in contemporary Chinese graphic design history through a description of these three significant international exchanges, as well as a comparison and in-depth analysis of the inner connections between them, situated in a global context.

⁶⁶² Wang Min interview with the author, through WeChat, 27 July 2019.

The chapter makes several new claims about graphic design in China in the 2000s. First of all, more than has been previously understood, engagement with international design organisation was far more than merely communication within the professional field. It was the result of the joint action of multiple forces, including the achievements in economic development brought about by reform and opening up, the long-term evolution of the Chinese government's cultural policy, and the international design community's attention to Chinese design and the Chinese market due to these changes, as well as the persistent efforts made by key figures from the Chinese graphic design field. These complex factors have not been clarified in earlier research, such as "Summary of 2018 Beijing Design Week" in *2018 Beijing Design Week Theme Exhibition Guide Book: Design in China after 1978* (ed. by Wang Min, Lin Cunzhen and Wang Yudong) (《2018北京国际设计周综述》, 刊载于《2018北京国际设计周主题展导览手册: 改革开放以来中国设计40年回顾展 1978-2018》, 主编: 王敏、林存真、王昱东) and were carefully examined. The critical and reflective thinking that was absent in the previous research was applied. Based on research on the impact of reform and opening up on the Chinese economy and the evolvement of cultural policy, as well as interviews with the international and local participants of these events, the narrative provides in-depth analysis, rather than isolated facts, relating to this graphic design phenomenon in the 2000s.

Secondly, the chapter tries to reexamine these historical facts from a different perspective by juxtaposing them. These three international exchanges have previously been reviewed as independent events. The chapter, however, tries to explore the inner connections between them by comparing, for example, the promotional materials, the choice of venue, the organisations involved in them and the attitudes and roles played by the international delegates, as well as the initiative and concept behind the event. In doing so, the complex agencies that contributed to the realisation of these events, as well as the unique and accelerated development of Chinese graphic design in this specific period, were revealed.

There were very few scholarly publications that recorded the phenomenon of Chinese graphic design in the 2000s. The research is mainly based on first-hand material, including interviews, questionnaires and promotional materials for these events. I participated in the organisation work all three events, as a member of the AGI COC, project coordinator for AIGA China, and the translator for Social Energy in Chengdu, Beijing and Shenzhen, through which I established close connections with the organisers of the events. Take for example, Yu Bingnan, professor at the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, initiator and organiser of the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress; Wang Min, organiser of the 2009 Icofrada Beijing Congress; and Jiang Hua (蒋华) and Li Degeng (李德庚), curators of Social Energy. They have been very generous in sharing with me their personal archives. The chapter also includes research based on interviews with relevant people from government departments, such as Zhang Xiuju (张秀菊), Deputy General Manager of Beijing International Design Week Co., Ltd. and Wang Yudong (王

昱东), director of Beijing Gehua Cultural and Creative Industry Centre. Meanwhile, the research received strong support from many international designers who were involved in the process of China's application to join AGI and Icograda, including Laurence Madrelle, international president of AGI, Robert L. Peters, president of Icograda (2001-2003) at the time, who wrote reports on Chinese design published in Icograda's 'Board Message', and David Berman, vice president of Icograda at the time, among others. With the development of the research, the interviews were followed up with frequent long-term communication through email, WeChat and by telephone.

Meanwhile, the research draws on many interviews and articles about these designers. Take for example, the interviews conducted by the journalists from VisionUnion (视觉同盟) and ChinaVisual (视觉中国), influential online media focusing on art and design that were very active at the time.⁶⁶³ Also, attention is paid to the personal blogs of designers who published their opinions on emerging young designers and important events taking place in design circles. The remarks and evaluations that reflect individuals' own opinion complement the official reports. These are important supplementary sources for my research, especially because of the lack of serious scholarly publications on graphic design in China at this time.

Understanding how these three influential international exchanges in the field of graphic design in China in the early 2000s was conceptualised and actualised, as well as the integration of historical and current factors relating to these events, is of great significance for the understanding of the development of contemporary Chinese graphic design in a global context. From the first large-scale international exchange in the contemporary Chinese graphic design field (the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress) to the international design events that attempted to educate the government and the public about the value of design (such as the 2009 Icograda Beijing Congress) and to search for local solutions to existing problems in the Chinese graphic design field with reflective thinking (such as Social Energy), this not only reflects the different approach by different generations of Chinese designers, but also highlights the major issues confronted by Chinese graphic design field, including the fast-changing domestic environment, and the transformation of the international design community. The chapter reveals these comprehensive issues through an in-depth analysis of these international exchanges, and assesses their implications.

⁶⁶³ The information about the interviews conducted by the journalists from VisionUnion (视觉同盟) comes from Yu Bingnan interview with the author, by email, 1 March, 2017; also see Yimei, 'The Beacon Who Promoted International Exchange of Chinese Design - Exclusive Interview with Professor Yu Bingnan 50 Years Teaching Career Design Work Exhibition', in *Vision-Union* <<http://www.visionunion.com/article.jsp?code=201210230039>> [accessed 3 June 2019] (羿梅, 《推动中国设计国际交流的引路人——执教50年设计作品展余秉楠教授专访》, 刊载于视觉同盟); the interviews conducted by the journalists from ChinaVisual (视觉中国)

2. “Breeze in China” - 2004 AGI Beijing Congress

2.1 A Long Journey to Blow up the “Breeze in China”

There was great excitement inside and outside the auditorium at Tsinghua University in Beijing on 22 September, 2004. Thousands of design students, design educators and designers, as well as people working in the publishing industry from all over China, were gathering here for the Student Seminar during the first day of the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress. A similar sort of excitement was vividly expressed in the poster design for the congress ‘Figure [63]’. On top of the white background, there is a huge bright red fan covering the most of the space on the poster. A few brushes of the contrast colour green, in the blurry shadow of the fan expresses rapid movement and the blowing wind. The wind not only wrinkles the fan, but also blows over the letters in the left-hand top corner of the poster. Instead of

being arranged in orderly rows, some of the letters deviate from their position, looking as if they have been scattered by the wind. Underneath these English letters is the text announcing “Breeze in China” (中国风) as the theme of the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress.

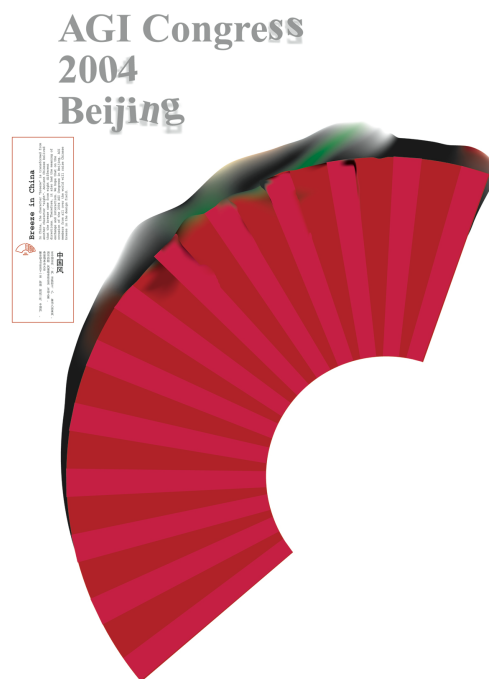


Figure [63] Zhao Jian, poster design for the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress, 2004 (©Zhao Jian)

Breeze in China

In China, the character for “breeze” (风) is made by transforming another character “eight” (八). The ancient Chinese believed that the breeze came from eight different directions. Therefore, it also represented the notion of exchange and interaction.

We hope that on the occasion of the 2004 AGI Congress in Beijing, AGI

members from all over the world will raise the Chinese breeze in the design field.

The Chinese part is arranged vertically according to the typographic style of traditional Chinese books. The Chinese typeface Fangzhengzhonghei (方正中黑) and Xihei (细黑) were chosen due to the fact that “they are striking and have a strong modern feeling”.⁶⁶⁴ It is important to point out that Zhao Jian chose Courier New as the typeface for the English text in consideration of the fact that, like Chinese characters, this typeface emphasised the character’s horizontal strokes, which makes “it harmonious to put it together with Chinese”.⁶⁶⁵ The effort to create harmony aptly reflected the values the designer, who was deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture, was trying to present. It also reflected the willingness of the local team responsible for the organisation of the congress, including the Art and Science Research Centre and the Visual Communication Design Department at Tsinghua University. For a department that had only been established three years earlier, the Art and Science Research Centre regarded the project of preparing an international congress of hundreds with international graphic designers from different countries as a glorious challenge.⁶⁶⁶ Working in the team as an graduate student, I remember always hearing Xu Jianguo, the director of the Centre, emphasised that we should work hard to make it a successful congress that demonstrated unity. The poster for the congress seemed to appropriately demonstrate this friendly attitude and the pursuit of harmony.

Underneath the English words “Breeze in China”, in between the English and Chinese text, is the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress’ logo. Also in the shape of a fan, the right side of the logo consists of the three English letter AGI. “2004 BEIJING” is presented as the fan handle. All the text in black is inside a red frame. The poster seems like a traditional Chinese painting, while the text inside the red frame functions as the seal on the painting. Together with the bright red fan and

⁶⁶⁴ Zhao Jian interview with the author, Beijing, 17 Feb, 2019.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ On Art and Science Research Centre, Tsinghua University, see ‘Art and Science Research Centre, Tsinghua University’, in *Tsinghua University* <http://www.ad.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/ad/2862/2010/20101214084607384627832/20101214084607384627832_.html> [accessed 21 June 2019]; On numbers of international participants of the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress, see Edo Smitshuijzen, ‘AGI 2004 Beijing Congress’, *AGI New Voice* (Berlin: Hedsign, 2005), p 18.

the floating characters on the top left, Zhao Jian, the designer of the poster and professor from the Visual Communication Design department of the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, seemed to be trying to convey a dynamic and cheerful feeling.

Why would an international graphic design congress cause so much excitement among Chinese graphic design circles, attracting design students, design educators and practical designers from all over China? What and how would the Chinese organisers do to explore the congress theme of “Breeze in China”?⁶⁶⁷ How would the AGI Congress being received in China? Would this congress have an enduring influence on the Chinese graphic design field? To explore the answers to these questions, it is necessary to put them into the context of the congress site, and to trace the historical background of the congress.

The excitement Zhao Jian tried to convey in his poster design exactly echoed the heated atmosphere of the Student Seminar, when the Auditorium at Tsinghua University was packed with design students, design educators and design practitioners from all over China. ‘Figure [64]’. The participants showed great enthusiasm and respect for the events



Figure [64] Student Seminar, the first day of the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress, Tsinghua University Auditorium, 22 September, 2004 (© Yu Bingnan)

and the international speakers. Kari Piippo, the AGI member from Finland, described the situation as follow: “we the guests were made to feel like rock stars. It was both flattering – and

⁶⁶⁷ Yu Bingnan, ‘Preface’, in *A Breeze in China* (Beijing: Beijing Hualian Printing Co., Ltd, 2004), p5 (余秉楠, 《序言》, 刊载于《中国风》, 北京: 北京华联印刷公司, 2004, 第5页)

amusing at the same time.”⁶⁶⁸ Before the opening, there were long queues for signatures from the international guests of the congress. Interestingly, most of the students were only queuing for two, the Japanese graphic designer Shigeo Fukuda and Hong Kong designer Tai-Keung Kan (靳埭强). The majority of the students knew only a few international designers through publications in Chinese. This reflected the isolated situation of the Chinese graphic design field and the lack of information in this area. This was the reason Yu Bingnan, the chairman of AGI COC (China Organisation Committee) felt it was urgent to bring the AGI congress to China.

This turned out to be a challenging task. Yu Bingnan and his colleagues had been going through a long process of preparing for the 2004 AGI congress to happen. In 1990, Yu Bingnan met Henry Steiner, graphic designer and AGI member based in Hong Kong, at the International Typeface Design Competition, The Morisawa Awards, in 1990 in Japan. Both Yu Bingnan and Henry Steiner had been jury members of the competition.⁶⁶⁹ Henry Steiner was impressed by the typeface designed by Yu Bingnan’s students participating in the competition and was eager to communicate with Yu Bingnan. In 1992, Yu Bingnan became the first ethnic Chinese AGI member, through the introduction of Henry Steiner.⁶⁷⁰

Two years later, at the 1994 AGI Congress in Cambridge, Yu Bingnan had proposed to the committee that an AGI congress should be organised in China. This first initiative was declined since the feedback from the AGI committee was that China was “not ready”.⁶⁷¹ Yu Bingnan remained the only ethnic Chinese AGI member at that time and he was advised to start by organising

⁶⁶⁸ Kari Piippo interview with the author, through email, 10 June, 2019.

⁶⁶⁹ Yun Wang, “He Opens the Doors to Connect Chinese Design with International World”, in *National Art Museum of China* (Beijing: China Publishing Group, 2006), p. 58 (汪芸, 《他为中国设计打开了通向世界的大门》, 刊载于《中国美术馆》, 北京: 中国出版集团, 2006, 第58页)

⁶⁷⁰ Henry Steiner, (article with no title), in *World Design Master Series: Yu Bingnan*, ed. by Yu Lu (Zhengzhou: Henan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2004), p 18 (石汉瑞文, 刊载于《世界设计大师丛书——余秉楠》, 郑州: 河南美术出版社, 2004, 第18页); also see Ben Bos, ‘The AGI Steps into the 21st Century’, in *AGI Graphic Design since 1950*, ed. by Ben Bos and Elly Bos (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 2007), p. 499.

⁶⁷¹ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 26 Feb, 2018.

some small-scale events to gain experience.⁶⁷² In the following year, an event entitled “95 Beijing International (AGI) Corporate Identity Exhibition” was organised by Yu Bingnan, five AGI members were invited, including Fritz Gottschalk from Switzerland, Pierre Mendel from Germany, David Hillman from England, Henry Steiner from Hong Kong, as well as Steff Geissbuhler from the United States.⁶⁷³ When describing his experience of Beijing during his second trip to the city, Steff Geissbuhler said:

China seems to have advanced about 25 years since my first visit and especially graphic design has progressed and become very sophisticated, strong, more visible and colourful, sensitive and bold, and often displaying an interesting mixture of traditional Chinese craft, painting and calligraphy with contemporary ideas and modern technology.⁶⁷⁴

This seems to offer a brief overview of the development of contemporary Chinese graphic design. At that time, however, positive feedback from AGI international member based on his real experience in China was significant and Yu Bingnan was expecting that positive opinions would be shared by Steff Geissbuhler’s AGI colleagues,⁶⁷⁵ especially considering that even around ten years later, in 2004, for many of the AGI members and their guests, the 2004 Beijing congress was their first trip to China. Before that, they had limited knowledge of China. Kit Hinrichs, a partner in Pentagram and a delegate to the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress, reported that the experience “gave me and my non-Chinese colleague, a fresh look at a culture that we

⁶⁷² Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 1 March, 2017; also see Yimei, ‘The Beacon Who Promoted International Exchange of Chinese Design - Exclusive Interview with Professor Yu Bingnan 50 Years Teaching Career Design Work Exhibition’ (羿梅, 《推动中国设计国际交流的引路人——执教50年设计作品展余秉楠教授专访》)

⁶⁷³ ‘95 Beijing International (AGI) Corporate Identity: Five-Person Exhibition (Beijing: Beijing Red Apple Advertising Art Company, 1995) (《’95北京国际 (AGI) 企业形象设计五人展》, 北京: 北京红苹果广告艺术公司, 1995)

⁶⁷⁴ Steff Geissbuhler, (article with no title), in World Design Master Series: Yu Bingnan, ed. by Yu Lu (Zhengzhou: Henan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2004), p 17 (斯蒂夫·盖斯布勒, 刊载于《世界设计大师丛书——余秉楠》, 郑州: 河南美术出版社, 2004, 第17页)

⁶⁷⁵ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 28 July, 2018.

only see in the media”.⁶⁷⁶

In 2003, Laurence Madrelle, newly elected AGI international president, received a letter with Yu Bingnan’s proposal to organise an AGI congress in Beijing. That night she went for dinner with her friend Frédéric Edelmann, a French journalist and architecture critic at *Le Monde*, and a specialist in contemporary Chinese architecture.⁶⁷⁷ At Frédéric Edelmann’s home she met Yu Bingnan’s student, contemporary Chinese artist Gao Bo (高波).⁶⁷⁸ Through these two people, Laurence started to decipher and understand China. For her, it was

A good time for our little association to go and discover this huge country. No way to disregard such a culture. Also showing the designers from Europe and USA... I was in good hands to start thinking seriously about this proposition and very enthusiastic. I proposed it to the board, who joined me in that decision. Our association has a rule to rotate the cities and continents where we go to our yearly meetings. It was about time to go to Asia. So it was. Indeed we had gone to Tokyo. Also China was in the process of a phenomenal change. An appropriate timing. We could not ignore it.⁶⁷⁹

As can be seen from the above description, there were still many coincidental factors in the decision to hold the 2004 AGI Beijing Conference. At that time, the international design community had a very limited understanding of China and contemporary Chinese design. That year, Yu Bingnan’s proposal to organise the AGI congress in Beijing was approved, nice years after the initiative had been suggested in 1994.⁶⁸⁰ The concerns arising from unfamiliarity, however, still

⁶⁷⁶ Kit Hinrichs interview with the author, through email, 22 June, 2019.

⁶⁷⁷ ‘Frédéric Edelmann’, in *France Culture* <<https://www.franceculture.fr/personne/frederic-edelmann>> [accessed 6 June 2019]

⁶⁷⁸ Laurence Madrelle interview with the author, through email, 3 June, 2019; On Gao Bo (高波) see ‘Biography’, in *BoArt* <http://www.gaoboarts.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2.Gao-Bo-CV-EN-2018_march.pdf> [accessed 7 June 2019]

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁰ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 1 March, 2017.

existed among the AGI board members and AGI members, due to the fact that there were not enough Chinese members who had attended past congresses to have an understanding of what was required.⁶⁸¹ Therefore, a delegation consisting of AGI International Executive Committee (IEC) members, including Laurence Madrelle, Anette Lenz, Jelle van der Toorn and Niklaus Troxler, came to Beijing twice to work with the AGI China Organisation Committee (COC), visiting the different venues, meeting rooms and hotels recommended by AGI COC.⁶⁸²

In the report on the AGI IEC's trip to China, written by Jelle van der Toorn, great emphasis was put on the Imperial Ancestral Temple (太庙 / Taimiao) near Forbidden City, the venue originally chosen for the General Assembly, including a detailed description of the materials used to build up ancient architecture, such as wood, weathered lacquer, faded paintings and hand-carved marble, as well as its location.⁶⁸³ As to the student seminar, the number of participants was highlighted, since "due to the enormous numbers of eager Chinese students we expect a turnout that will run into the thousands rather than in the usual hundreds"⁶⁸⁴. There was also a description of the changes in Beijing, as well as whether the recommended hotels met international standards.⁶⁸⁵ The report concluded with an affirmative tone: "To those who had any doubts about having our conference in China we can only express our enthusiasm and joy that it will finally happen".⁶⁸⁶

In order to cherish this hard-won opportunity, and considering the special situation of China, two innovative initiatives from Yu Bingnan were put to action to help more Chinese designers and students to benefit from the event, especially those who could not travel to Beijing.⁶⁸⁷ First,

⁶⁸¹ Laurence Madrelle interview with the author, through email, 5 June, 2019.

⁶⁸² Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 1 March, 2017.

⁶⁸³ Jelle van der Toorn, 'First China Visit by IEC', in email correspondence between Yu Bingnan and Jelle van der Toorn, December, 2003. The text was provided to the author by Yu Bingnan, through email, 1 March 2017. The text is situated in Yu Bingnan's personal archive.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁷ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 1 March, 2017.

about fifty Chinese designers who were not AGI members, which accounted for 50 per cent of AGI members and their entourages participating in the Beijing congress, were allowed to attend the conference that had formerly been exclusive to AGI members.⁶⁸⁸ Secondly, some AGI members arranged to travel to design schools in different parts of China, such as Shanghai and Nanjing, to give lectures.⁶⁸⁹

These short-term exchanges were eye-opening experiences for the students. However, there still seemed to be a lack of deep understanding of what the international teachers tried to communicate, due to language problems or a lack of understanding about the relationship between design and its cultural background. Therefore, the excitement brought about by this kind of communication and learning often stayed at the visual level, unconnected with deep thinking or an awareness of the underlying reasons for the visual images. Kari Piippo, the Finnish graphic designer who travelled to China to give lectures at that time realised that the Chinese graphic design students were exceptionally active and open to new ideas but did not have the understanding that “designs must function in the cultural environment”.⁶⁹⁰ This description and comment reflected the situation in the field of graphic design education in China then. In the early 2000s, there were few publications on international design in Chinese, and the understanding of tradition was mostly at the level of traditional patterns, although there had already been debate in design circles and at art and design schools on how to present Chinese tradition in a contemporary context.

2.2 Various “Fans” - Bridge for Communication

The opening of the AGI members’ exhibition at the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University in the afternoon of 23 September 2004, turned out to be another highlight of the congress. There were 54 fan designs created by 53 members from 15 different countries on display. Why was the fan chosen as a medium to convey the theme of the congress? Was this simply an

⁶⁸⁸ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 26 Feb, 2018.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁰ Kari Piippo interview with the author, through email, 10 June, 2019.

opportunity for AGI members to show their design talent in a fan? What were they trying to express through the fan design? Would this exhibition truly function as a medium to promote communication and mutual understanding between the Chinese and international AGI members, as its organisers hoped? For a better understanding of how this exhibition functioned, it is important to take a close look and scrutinise these fan designs.

The choice to use the fan as a medium to express “Breeze in China”, the theme of the 2004 AGI Congress was a “natural” one because of the discussion of the relationship between the breeze and the fan during the preparation meeting of the Chinese members, including Yu Bingnan, Zhao Jian, Song Xiewei and Wang Yuefei in Beijing in 2003.⁶⁹¹ Interestingly, due to the connection between the fan, fan painting and traditional Chinese literati, many Chinese delegates at the congress, as well as the media, had the idea that the choice of a fan as medium for creation was an opportunity for international AGI members to “demonstrate their understanding and interpretation of Chinese culture”, in doing so, “Chinese culture and Western culture would merge into one through the fan”.⁶⁹² This kind of description can be found in articles published in two authoritative Chinese design magazines, including *Modern Advertising*, published by the China State Administration for Industry and Commerce (国家工商行政总局), and *Design Artist* by the Hunan Federation of Literary and Art Circles (湖南省文学艺术界联合会).

The tendency to present Chinese culture or the modern Chinese state can be found in the fan designs of many of the Chinese members. Some applied traditional elements directly, such as that designed by Yu Bingnan ‘Figure [65]’. The painting of face on his fan was taken from Chinese shadow play. Some did this in a more subtle way. Take for example, Wang Yuefei played with the strokes of 王, the Chinese character for his surname ‘Figure [68]’. Deconstructing the

⁶⁹¹ Wang Yuefei interview with the author, through WeChat, 23 Feb, 2019.

⁶⁹² On interpretation about the choice of fan as medium for creation from Chinese media, see Yu Lu, ‘AGI in the Fan - AGI Beijing Congress Exhibition’, in *Modern Advertising*, 1 February 2005, p. 62 (余璐, 《扇中的AGI——AGI北京大会主题作品展》, 刊载于《现代广告》, 2005年, 第2期, 第62页); also see Sun Xiangming, ‘Breeze in China of AGI Congress’, in *Design Artist* <http://www.chda.net/cms/news_view.asp?ID=255&NewsPage=1> [accessed 4 June 2018] (孙湘明, 《AGI的“中国风”》, 刊载于设计艺术家网)

character, he transformed the strokes of Kaiti (楷體) into the form of bamboo joints in the traditional Chinese ink painting and presented them in an abstract way. Henry Steiner's design also played with characters but in its pronunciation in both languages 'Figure [67]'. Completely covering his fan, there is a huge Ciao. The pronunciation of "Ciao fan" sounds the same as "fried rice" (炒饭) in Mandarin. Hong Kong AGI member Tai-Keung Kan displayed contemporary Chinese ink painting with a twist. He combined the ink painting, seal and wrinkled rice paper with a photo of a stone paperweight 'Figure [69]'. Also from Hong Kong, Freeman Lao Siu Hong's fan presented a colourful scene. Piles and piles of chairs — an iconic element in his work — in the form of a dense forest of skyscrapers vividly present the characteristics of his city 'Figure [71]'. Among the designs by international AGI members, some endeavoured to have a conversation with China. Take for example, American AGI member Arnold Schwartzman's fan design applied a photo of China's Great Wall to the space shuttle Endeavour, 10 April, 1994 'Figure [72]'. Some, such as German AGI member Dieter Feseke, tried to present their own cultures directly — Feseke's fan included a Bauhaus building 'Figure [66]' — or offered with a twist, such as Shigeo Fukuda's fan with a complete portrait of himself together with the other six showing half of his



Figure [65-74] Fan design by Yu Bingnan, Shigeo Fukuda, Henry Steiner, Wang Yuefei, Tai-Keung Kan, Dieter Feseke, Freeman Lao Siu Hong, Arnold Schwartzman, Leonardo Sonnoli and Kit Hinrichs. From left to right, top to bottom, 2004 AGI Beijing Congress Exhibition (© Yu Bingnan)

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face with a traditional Japanese hair style ‘Figure [70]’.

Some of the designs addressed the fan itself. American AGI member Kit Hinrichs’ design consisted of curved colour blocks in red, yellow, green, blue and purple ‘Figure [74]’. Over this, was the text in Trade Gothic Pro Condensed, “Alliance Graphique Internationale Congress Beijing China 2004”. It seemed like a contemporary artwork. Italian AGI member Leonardo Sonnoli’s fan design was a photo showing a hand with open fingers ‘Figure [73]’. In the middle of the index finger, the one usually used to open the fan, there was a rectangular black block, on top of which was the English word “open” in white. When talking about the fan design for the 2004 Beijing Congress, both of them thought it was an interesting experience.⁶⁹³ Kit Hinrichs said that his design was a way to present the fan as “an iconic historical and contemporary object”.⁶⁹⁴ For Leonardo Sonnoli, he was displaying “the gesture that someone does when it’s hot, “making wind” with their open hand”.⁶⁹⁵

The opening of the fan exhibition turned out to be an event with fun, active communication and curiosity about each other’s culture. It is important to point out that small notes were put at the edge of some fans by the designers to clarify their creative intent. Take for example, Wang Yuefei put 王, the Chinese character of his surname at the bottom of his fan design and Henry Steiner added CIAO FAN and 炒饭, the Chinese characters for fried rice of his fan. Similarly, there is an explanation of the pattern on Arnold Schwartzman’s fan. This demonstrated their wish to be understood. In an article entitled “AGI in Fan - AGI Beijing Congress Exhibition”, there were specific explanations of the meaning of some of the fan designs.⁶⁹⁶

Each delegate to the congress received a copy of the exhibition catalogue ‘Figure [75]’ and each AGI member who provided a fan design had one of his or her fans as a gift. I can still clearly re-

⁶⁹³ Kit Hinrichs interview with the author, through email, 22 June, 2019; Leonardo Sonnoli interview with the author, through email, 14 June, 2019.

⁶⁹⁴ Kit Hinrichs interview with the author, through email, 22 June, 2019.

⁶⁹⁵ Leonardo Sonnoli interview with the author, through email, 14 June, 2019.

⁶⁹⁶ Yu, p. 62 (余璐, 第62页)

member the situation in the display hall in which not only the participants of the exhibition but also the visitors to the show were holding the catalogues looking for the designers to sign the page showing his or her fan. It is important to point out that there is an unusual system in the exhibition catalogue. The contents of the catalogue consists of three parts with each page number in white inside a red rectangle



Figure [75] Zhao Jian, contents and inside page design for *Breeze in China*, 2004 AGI Beijing Congress exhibition catalogue, 2004 (© Zhao Jian)

arranged vertically in the middle. The designers' English names are on the left of the page numbers and the corresponding Chinese translations are on the right. Usually each participant of the exhibition would have two pages. The image of the fan is on the right-hand side. On the left one, instead of just providing the name of the individual designer whose work is displayed on the opposite page, there is the list of names on the contents page with all the other designers' names and page numbers highlighted in light grey, which appears similar to the effect people would get when clicking for specific information on a web page. Are all the other designers' names on the left-hand page pure decoration or an artistic experiment by the catalogue designer? Or does it have another specific meaning and function? Actually this design was based on the fact that although at the time many Chinese graphic designers admired AGI as an international professional graphic designers association, they were unfamiliar with the majority of the AGI members coming to China and their work, not knowing their names or having difficulty knowing their names

because of the language problem. The repetition of all the AGI members names on every other page was an effective way to help the Chinese designers and audience to become familiar with them while at the same time promoting these AGI members in Chinese design circles.⁶⁹⁷

For the international AGI members, the exhibition was not only an opportunity to understand Chinese culture, but also a way to find out about the current situation of the industry in Beijing. Dutch AGI member Edo Smitshuijzen mentioned in his report on the AGI Fan Exhibition, “Printing in China seems as common and delivered as fast as a multi coursed Chinese meal”.⁶⁹⁸

2.3 Spreading the “Breeze in China”

The excitement caused by the fan exhibition was also reflected in media report. In an article entitled “Breeze in China of the AGI Congress”, the author stated, “Chinese and Western culture, as well as Chinese and Western civilisation, were integrated into one through the ‘fan’”.⁶⁹⁹ Actually the schedule of the whole congress was designed with a focus on Chinese history and culture, because for the main organisers of the congress represented by Yu Bingnan, this was an opportunity not only for Chinese graphic designers to know what had been happening in the Western design field, but also a chance for international graphic designers, especially those who had never visited China before, to experience Chinese, which would help them to get a better understanding of the country, Chinese design education and its design market.⁷⁰⁰

The excitement caused by the fan exhibition was also reflected in media report. In an article entitled “Breeze in China of the AGI Congress”, the author stated, “Chinese and Western culture, as well as Chinese and Western civilisation, were integrated into one through the ‘fan’ ”⁷⁰¹. Actu-

⁶⁹⁷ Zhao Jian interview with the author, through WeChat, 21 February 2019.

⁶⁹⁸ Smitshuijzen, P. 18.

⁶⁹⁹ Sun, ‘Breeze in China of AGI Congress’ (孙湘明, 《AGI的“中国风”》)

⁷⁰⁰ The information about the congress schedule comes from ‘2004 AGI Beijing Congress Schedule’ was provided to the author by Yu Bingnan, through email, 21 February 2019. The original copy is situated in Yu Bingnan personal archive.

⁷⁰¹ Sun, ‘Breeze in China of AGI Congress’ (孙湘明, 《AGI的“中国风”》)

ally the schedule of the whole congress was designed with a focus on Chinese history and culture,⁷⁰² because for the main organisers of the congress represented by Yu Bingnan, this was an opportunity not only for Chinese graphic designers to know what had been happening in the Western design field, but also a chance for international graphic designers, especially those who had never visited China before, to experience Chinese, which would help them to get a better understanding of the country, Chinese design education and its design market.

During Chinese Day, the second day of the AGI Beijing Congress, two scholars from China's major academic institutions were invited to give speeches on Chinese philosophy and architecture. Liang Mei (梁梅) from the Aesthetic Research Laboratory, Institute of Philosophy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences gave the talk entitled "Chinese Philosophy and Culture", which was about the aesthetics of traditional Chinese philosophy from the perspective of Taoism. A lecture about ancient Chinese architecture was delivered by Liu Chang (刘畅) from the Institute of Architecture and Historical Relics, Tsinghua University. In addition, three Chinese AGI members, including Wang Yuefei from Shenzhen, Song Xiewei from Beijing and Tai-Keung Kan from Hong Kong were invited to give an introduction to the graphic design situation in the south and the north of China, as well as the graphic design phenomenon in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan respectively.⁷⁰³

With a philosophical approach of heaven and earth co-existing in harmony, Taoism is one of the important schools of thought in China. Chinese traditional landscape, as well as the new Chinese-style landscape, inheriting and drawing from this philosophical idea, embodies the values of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.⁷⁰⁴ Taoist theory, in modern times,

⁷⁰² '2004 AGI Beijing Congress Schedule' was provided to the author by Yu Bingnan, through email, 21 February 2019. The original copy is situated in Yu Bingnan personal archive.

⁷⁰³ Some of the emerging designers mentioned in Wang Yuefei and Song Xiewei's talks, such as Han Jiaying, Bi Xuefeng and Wu Yong (吴勇) joined the AGI and became its members in 2006, 2007 and 2012 respectively.

⁷⁰⁴ You Chaoyi, 'Elaboration on Chinese Style Landscape Design Based on Taoist Thought and Culture — A Case of Some Residential Area', in *ResearchGate* <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332416218_Elaboration_on_Chinese_Style_Landscape_Design_-_Based_on_Taoist_Thought_and_Culture> [accessed 27 Jan 2020]

has also had an impact on Western design practices. For example, Bauhaus teacher Johannes Itten introduced Taoist philosophy into his course.⁷⁰⁵ Richard Sheppard, Professor of German at Oxford University, with historical avant-gardes as his main research interest highlights the link between the new atmosphere of modernisation and Eastern thought, especially Taoism, during the Modernist period.⁷⁰⁶ The aim of Yu Bingnan and his team in juxtaposing lectures on Taoist theory and ancient Chinese architecture was to demonstrate to international designers the significance of ancient Chinese philosophy and its evolving application in design. Meanwhile, these two lectures also provided a context for the audience to understand contemporary Chinese graphic design, based on a concept that was connected to design practice in both East and West.

The Chinese experience specifically arranged by the local Chinese organiser was not limited to the topics of lectures delivered in the Chinese Culture and Design Morning on 23 September, 2004.⁷⁰⁷ It was also reflected in the spaces chosen to organise all these events in. The press reception for the congress was organised in Luying-



Figure [76] Main entrance of Dongyuan Theatre, the venue of The International AGI Morning, 24 September, 2004 (© Yu Bingnan)

fangting (绿荫芳庭), an old Beijing Siheyuan (Courtyard Houses). The Student Day took place in the Auditorium at Tsinghua University, one of the early buildings of Tsinghua University constructed in 1917. The main venue was arranged in Dongyuan Theatre (东苑戏楼) 'Figure [76]',

⁷⁰⁵ Melvin L. Alexenberg, *Educating Artists for the Future: Learning at the Intersections of Art, Science, Technology, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 166.

⁷⁰⁶ Erin M. Lochmann, 'The art of nothingness: Dada, Taoism and Zen', in *Journal of European Studies* <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0047244117745434>> [accessed 27 Jan 2020]

⁷⁰⁷ '2004 AGI Beijing Congress Schedule' was provided to the author by Yu Bingnan, through email, 21 February 2019. The original copy is situated in Yu Bingnan personal archive.

an building in typical Chinese royal garden style. In addition, there were tours to the Forbidden City and Great Wall, the welcome dinner at Tingliguan (听鹧馆) inside the Summer Palace, dinner at Quanjude (全聚德), a Chinese restaurant known for its Peking roast duck and its longstanding culinary heritage from the time of its establishment in 1864 in Beijing, as well as a farewell dinner at the Commune by the Great Wall. All these were arranged to provide the overseas participants with an immersive experience of Chinese culture. The interaction between the international AGI members and the local Chinese art and design schools continued after the congress, when the Chinese participants from fourteen different areas including Guangzhou, Hubei, Sichuan, Shanghai, Nanjing and Shenzhen brought fifteen international AGI members who wanted to continue their trip and to selected schools to give lectures.⁷⁰⁸

For many international designers, this kind of introduction was helpful. There was, however, no fixed model for a Chinese experience and not every member followed the schedule and arrangement of the congress. Some preferred to do something more authentic and to explore the city according to their own interests. For the American AGI member Kit Hinrichs, the Summer Palace and the Forbidden City were so well publicised around the world that he felt he had already been there.⁷⁰⁹ He was more interested in finding places to see contemporary Chinese art.⁷¹⁰ The French AGI member Laurence Madrelle enjoyed walking around the Hutong and admiring the traditional square houses.⁷¹¹ The Dutch AGI member Jacques Koeweiden, who had specifically arrived in Beijing three days before the congress, started walked through the city to experience the iconographic world of signs, colours and sounds.⁷¹² The “conflicts” between the “image of China” presented by the AGI COC and the specific choices taken by the individual AGI members sparked my curiosity and that of my colleagues, as local organisers. It took years for

⁷⁰⁸ “The AGI Members Who Will Give Lectures in the Local Universities after the Congress’ was provided to the author by Yu Bingnan, through email, 21 February 2019; the digital file is situated in Yu Bingnan’s personal archive.

⁷⁰⁹ Kit Hinrichs interview with the author, through email, 22 June, 2019.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹¹ Laurence Madrelle interview with the author, through email, 3 June, 2019.

⁷¹² Jacques Koeweiden interview with the author, through email, 7 June, 2019.

me to understand the complicated reasons behind them, including ideology, values, and the positioning of individual autonomy, which was interwoven in design but was not usually emphasised in the design education I had received at that time.

One of the important results of the 2004 AGI congress was that four graphic designers from mainland China were selected as AGI members: Wang Min from the Design School, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Zhao Jian from the Visual Communication Design Department, the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, Cao Fang (曹方) from the Graphic Design Department, Nanjing Art Institute and

Yu Lu (余璐) from the School of Journalism and Communication Peking University.⁷¹³ They were all graphic design educators, and some of them played a pivotal role in Chinese graphic design education and international exchange, leading educational reform and exploring a pedagogy fit for a fast-developing society with rapidly changing requirements from the market. The preparation needed to apply for and organise another international graphic design festival — Icofrada Beijing Congress — was in progress.

3. Xin - 2009 Icofrada Beijing Congress

3.1 Xin with Multiple Meanings

In the afternoon of 26 October, 2009, China National Centre for the Performing Arts looked quiet in the late autumn sunshine of Beijing. Newly completed and in use for just two years, the

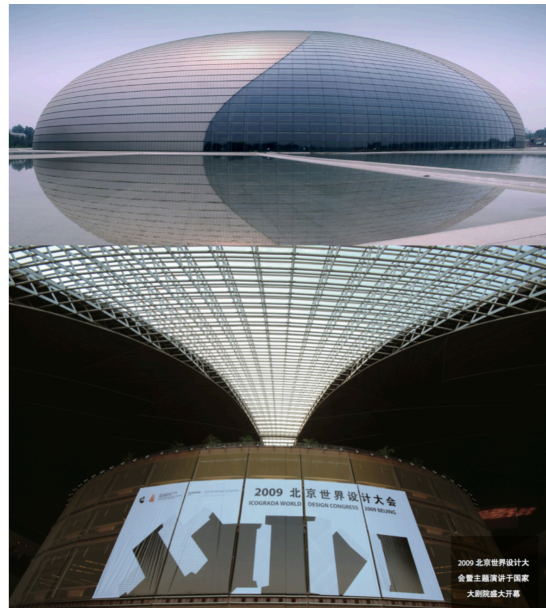


Figure [77] China National Centre for the Performing Arts; The banner of 2009 Icofrada Beijing Congress inside the China National Centre for the Performing Arts, 26 October, 2009 (© Wang Min)

⁷¹³ 'Members', in *Alliance Graphique Internationale website* <<http://a-g-i.org/members>> [accessed 4 June 2019]

once controversial gigantic building designed by French architect Paul Andreu, with a hemispherical shape made up of metal and glass, was floating peacefully on the water. Once entering the building, this quietness was transformed into something dynamic with the huge banner of the 2009 Icograda Beijing Congress. The main elements of this were large regular and irregular geometric blocks in black and white ‘Figure [77]’. On the right top corner of the banner was the name of the congress in both Chinese and English. “Icograda World Design Congress 2009 Beijing”, the English title, was presented in bold capital characters. Above this, the Chinese characters were presented in Heiti, a type style characterised by strokes of even thickness corresponding to sans



Figure [78] He Jun, 2009 Icograda Beijing Congress poster, 2009 (© He Jun)

serif styles in Western typography. In the left top corner, there was the Chinese character 信, consisting of similar structures, that formed the main part of the banner. Its appearance conveyed a modern, powerful message through its size, visual elements and typeface. There were similar geometric forms in the poster design for the congress, also designed by He Jun, a faculty member from CAFA Design School ‘Figure [78]’.

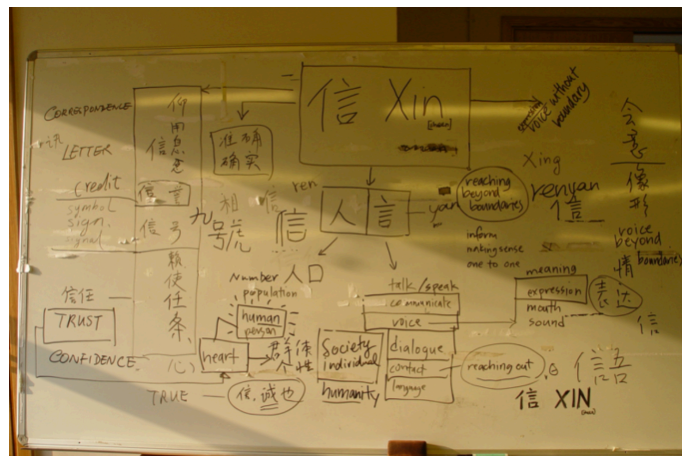
But where is Xin — the theme of the 2009 Icograda Beijing Congress? Is it missing from the poster? If not, how was it presented? To find out, it would be helpful to first of all to understand the meaning of Xin and to trace the reason why it was selected as the theme of Beijing congress.

Literally meaning “message” or “letter,” 「Xin-信」 represents a primitive means of communication. Today, however, it encompasses many more dimensions than ever

before, as illustrated by words such as Xin-xi (information); Xin-nian (vision); Xin-ren (trust); Xin-yong (credibility) and Xin-xin (faith).⁷¹⁴

The Chinese character 信 consists of two parts, 亻 and 言. 亻 has the meaning of people and 言 has the meaning of talking and speaking. Based on this, the meaning of 信 was expanded to an individual, human and society context, as well as communication, dialogue, contact, expression, and a voice beyond boundaries, and

so on. From a chart with the analysis of the word Xin, together with the multiple meanings derived from it, the thinking process of the Ico-grada CAFA curatorial team including Wang Min, Xu Ping (许平), Xiao Yong (肖勇) and Zheng



Tao (郑涛), as well as Ron Newman, the Ico-grada representative, can be seen clearly ‘Figure [79]’.⁷¹⁵

Figure [79] Brainstorm for the meaning of XIN, the theme of the 2009 Ico-grada Beijing Congress at CAFA Design School, 2007 (©Zheng Tao)

On the chart, the classification of the literal and extended meaning of Xin, for example, Xin as correspondence, the most basic meaning of the character to its abstract meaning as credit (symbol, sign, signal) and trust (confidence) is paralleled by an analysis of the structure of this character.

The analysis of the theme of the congress helps to decode its promotional materials. The basic element in the banner and poster designed by He Jun who tried to create a strong and dynamic atmosphere is an envelope, an image prompted by the literal meaning of Xin. Based on this element, He Jun created a series of colourful forms, as shown in the poster, or in black and white,

⁷¹⁴ 2009 Ico-grada Beijing Congress, ‘Theme’, in *Ico-grada Beijing 2009 Congress* <<http://www.beijing2009.org/xin.htm>> [accessed 28 February 2019]

⁷¹⁵ Zheng Tao interview with the author, through email, 24 April 2017.

in the huge banner on top of the glass facade discussed above, as well as the other places where related events took place. It was also applied to various promotional materials, such as the bag for each delegate and on the official congress website. Sometimes, they were presented as abstract forms and at others they make up the letters. Unlike the poster for 2004 AGI Beijing Congress, created by Zhao Jian, any obvious Chinese elements were invisible in this design. Take for example, the geometric structure forming the main part of the banner was the character XIN. It was not easy to identify and the inner meaning seemed only speak to the professional designers.⁷¹⁶ The abstract shapes made of envelopes displayed at different venues through different media became the visual identity of the 2009 Icoграда Beijing Congress as a recurring pattern related to the congress.

At the age of thirty-two, having already received many important design awards, including the Excellence award for book design from the 2003 Tokyo Type Directors Club, He Jun seemed to be confident in developing his own style without having to worry about positioning himself as a Chinese designer.⁷¹⁷ Consisting of bright red, bright blue and white geometric blocks, as well as the grid of red blocks at a 45 degree angle, his poster design tries to convey a vibrant atmosphere. Layers of information are differentiated through the size and colour of the typeface. The four topics in the parallel sessions of the congress, including Access, Balance, Communicate and Define, together with their explanation, are in ochre yellow. Placed in the centre at bottom of the poster, the contact information for the Chinese office of the congress is of the same colour but in a much smaller typeface. The same size of typeface but in red is the information about organisers, official media and corporate partners, separated by red horizontal lines underneath the access explanation. Details of the Chinese office of the congress are presented here again. On the left top and at the bottom of the poster is the website addresses of the congress, in red and ochre yellow respectively.

⁷¹⁶ 'Exclusive Interview with He Jun, GDC17 International July: Creation of Content and Form', in *DesignLive* <http://www.sohu.com/a/208228824_556783> [accessed 14 June 2019]

(《GDC17 国际评委设计师何君专访：创造内容和形式》，刊载于设计现场)

⁷¹⁷ On design awards He Jun received, see Zi Mo, 'Design Conversation: He Jun', in *CCII 798 International Design Museum* <http://www.cci.com.cn/cci/new/member/talk_1.html> [accessed 13 June 2019] (子陌, 《设计对话：何君》，CCII-798国际设计馆)

In addition to showing the designer's confidence, the poster also reflected He Jun's attitude. For him, design was a lifestyle, a way to enjoy life.⁷¹⁸ Preferring the works created by Jet Experimental to the major project by Studio Dumbar, he was often inspired by everyday details and tried to deliver a "simple and undemanding" atmosphere in his work.⁷¹⁹ Therefore, it was not difficult to understand the playfulness of the "jigsaw puzzle" incorporating envelopes, as well as the childlike handwriting in the poster design. He Jun's understanding of design, as well as his approach to expressing his personal attitude, somehow reflected the more diversified status of contemporary Chinese graphic design in the early 2000s. By this time, information about international design circles was much easier to access, due to the internet. Meanwhile, with the achievement brought about by the deepening of reform and opening up, establishing cultural self-confidence had become a matter of concern to the government, and this tendency was strengthened by the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.⁷²⁰ Under these circumstances, many designers of the younger generation began to think about their own position. In interview, He Jun tried to express his understanding about the value and position of the designer:

(designers) should not be satisfied with being an added value. Designers should have the right to speak... (designers) should not simply be an employer; instead, we should participate in the production process. Therefore, designers should take the initiative instead of remaining in a passive state."⁷²¹

⁷¹⁸ 'Designer He Jun: The Youngest Chinese AGI Member', in *Tu Zhichu Blog* (Tu Zhichu (Associate Professor, Department of Design, Hubei Academy of Fine Arts)) <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a63a4800100phz1.html> [accessed 13 June 2019] (《设计师何君中国最年轻的AGI会员》, 刊载于涂志初的博客)

⁷¹⁹ The information about He Jun's preference for international design comes from He Jun interview with the author in Beijing, 17 October, 2017; On the connection between He Jun's design practice and details in daily life, see ChinaVisual, 'He Jun: Inspiration Comes from Details, Design Is Not So Heavy', in *Hanming Blog* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4b837cb7010005vd.html> [accessed 14 June 2019] (视觉中国, 《何君: 灵感从细节出发, 设计没有那么沉重》, 翰明的博客)

⁷²⁰ Chang-Tai Huang, 'The Politics of National Celebrations in China', in *The People's Republic of China at 60: An International Assessment*, ed. by William C. Kirby, Barry R. Bloom, Timothy Cheek, Sheena Chestnut, Sheena Cohen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 357-372 (p. 360).

⁷²¹ Tu, 'Designer He Jun: The Youngest Chinese AGI Member' (涂, 《设计师何君中国最年轻的AGI会员》)

He Jun's enthusiasm and attitude towards design was reflected in his design for 2009 Icograda Beijing Congress, and this kind of dynamisms was in parallel with the excitable atmosphere inside the fully packed venue inside the China National Centre for the Performing Arts. Meanwhile, outside the venue, there were anxious students waiting from morning to afternoon for the opportunity to get access to the venue.

They were specifically attracted here by Sol Sender, the American graphic designers known for his Obama "O" logo, the first keynote speaker in the afternoon during day one of the Congress. I clearly remember how excited one student was when he finally obtained permission to enter the seminar room after hours of waiting, trying hard to persuade the teachers from CAFA to allow him in. I also heard these teachers complaining about all the student volunteers who were meant to be working at National Centre for the Performing Arts helping the participants with way-finding or answering their questions disappearing soon after the beginning of the seminar. Their "complaining", however, was mixed with pride.

The situation at the China National Centre for the Performing Arts reflected the attraction of the Opening Ceremony & Keynote Presentations of the 2009 Icograda Beijing Congress, featuring well-known international and local speakers such as Sol Sender and Jan van Toorn, the strong media publicity, close cooperation with design schools all over China and the choice of venue.⁷²² The congress had 45 cooperating media channels of different kinds. In addition to artron.com (雅昌艺术网), ChinaVisual (视觉中国), *Art and Design* (《艺术与设计》) and *Design 360°* (《设计360°》), the influential professional local design media that were often invited by art and design events in China, there were also many popular mass media channels such as Sina (新浪), *Morning Post* (《北京晨报》), *Beijing Youth Weekly* (《北青周

⁷²² The information about the 2009 Icograda Beijing Congress and its close connection with design schools in China comes from David Berman interview with the author, through telephone call and email, 9 June, 2019; On the information about venue during the congress, see 'Home', in *Icograda Beijing* <<http://www.beijing2009.org/index-eng.htm>> [accessed 11 June 2019]

刊》)。⁷²³ This clearly demonstrated the organiser's intention to position the congress as an event for the whole of society, instead of something limited to design circles. Besides, the congress also had a wide range of international media partners, including *Baseline* and *Creative Review* from the United Kingdom, *Communication Arts* from the United States, *novum* from Germany, *d[x]i Magazine* from Spain, *abcdesign* from Brazil, *DESIGN>In Formation* from South Africa and others.⁷²⁴

All these conveyed a strong message from the CAFA team about introducing the event to local audiences and international participants in a contemporary context in which Chinese design had achieved great improvements, whether at the technical or conceptual level, instead of focusing on the legacy of ancient China. The choice of He Jun for the visual identity of the congress seemed to further confirm this idea. He is young but a frequently award-winning designer at international design competitions. When talking about his design, He Jun did not mention the influence of Chinese history or over-emphasise the impact of “the West”. In many interviews, he specifically mentioned that his inspiration came from everyday details.⁷²⁵ This seemed to symbolise the signs that Chinese designers and international designers were competing on the same stage, a situation his predecessors such as Wang Min, the then dean of CAFA Design School and academic director of Icograda Beijing Congress would not have thought about at He Jun's age. Wang Min once spoke of the ambition in an interview, clarifying the main aim in organising the congress was “the urge to help China to gain the right of speech in the international design community”.⁷²⁶ He Jun's floating black and white and colourful geometric forms, the elements that made up Xin, seemed to be a confident design vocabulary that created an “ideal” facade for

⁷²³ ‘Media Partners’, in *Icograda Beijing* <<http://www.beijing2009.org/mediapartner.htm>> [accessed 12 June 2019]

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

⁷²⁵ Zi, ‘Design Conversation: He Jun’ (子陌, 《设计对话: 何君》); Zhong Heyan, ‘He Jun+Guang Yu+Liu Zhizhi=MeWe’, in *AD110* <<http://www.ad110.com/hi/blogview.asp?logID=174>> [accessed 17 June 2019] (钟和晏, 《何君+广煜+刘治治=MeWe》, 刊载于 *AD110*); ‘Record - MeWe Design - Guang Yu, Liu Zhizhi, He Jun’, in *Sina blog* <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_603e38d90100tkw2.html> [accessed 17 June 2019] (《记录——米未设计——广煜 刘治治 何君》, 刊载于新浪微博)

⁷²⁶ Ibid.

presenting contemporary Chinese graphic design in these circumstances.

3.2 Xin as Strategy

On 27 October, 2009, the second day of the congress, the venue moved to the campus of CAFA, where the four topics in the parallel sessions of the international conference on the theme “Xin” began: accessibility within design (Access), the wisdom of design and consumption in the global financial crisis (Balance), Design in business, an added value from service (Communicate), and biomimicry and cross-disciplinary collaborations in design (Define).⁷²⁷

A view of these would raise questions, such as: was the theme of the 2009 Icofrada Beijing Congress simply derived from the Chinese character 信? What about its connection with a contemporary international context? What was the value and thinking behind the theme? How was this kind of value and thinking presented and how did it function in a week’s congress in 2009? To discuss these questions, it is important first of all to investigate how Chinese design circles reached Icofrada and to get a better understanding of China’s historical and social background at that time.

Chinese design circles’ first formal encounter with Icofrada can be traced back to 1993. A year after introducing Yu Bingnan to AGI, Henry Steiner put Yu Bingnan in touch with Philippe Gentil, Icofrada’s then president to whom Yu Bingnan wrote a letter, asking for China to become a member. The reply was negative, however, since only national design associations could be considered as members of this organisation.⁷²⁸ At that time, the Chinese graphic design profession had just started and there was no design organisation on this scale. Therefore, Yu Bingnan was

⁷²⁷ ‘Theme’, in *Icofrada Beijing* <<http://www.beijing2009.org/index-eng.htm>> [accessed 17 June 2019]

⁷²⁸ Jin Minhua, ‘They Brought Icofrada to China’, *Shenzhen Business Daily*, 4 November 2009, p. C3 (金敏华, 《他们将 Icofrada 带到中国》, 刊载于《深圳商报》, 2009年11月4日)

accepted as a communication member of Icoграда to keep in touch with the organisation.⁷²⁹

Six years later, in 1999, Yu Bingnan received an invitation to participate in the Icoграда Sydney Congress from Leimei Julia Chiu, the vice-president of Icoграда who was born in Taiwan and raised and educated in the United States and later in Japan.⁷³⁰ According to Leimei Julia Chiu's analysis, China was a big country and it was difficult to set up a national association in a short period of time, so it would be more practical for Icoграда to accept an emerging design association from a Chinese city or province. This suggestion was accepted by the committee later that year Shanghai Graphic Design Association was accepted as the first Chinese Icoграда member.⁷³¹ In the following year, The Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, as well as Beijing CCII (Capital Corporation Image Institution (首都企业形象研究会)) joined the organisation at the 2000 Icoграда Seoul Congress.⁷³² According to Yu Bingnan, many delegates gathered together, calling for "Oullim", ("great harmony") during the opening ceremony at the Seoul International Convention and Exhibition Centre. Deeply impressed by this experience, Yu Bingnan and his colleagues were determined to integrate China into this international community.⁷³³

In 2001, with a recommendation from the national design association of Japan and Korea, as well as the Beijing CCII, Yu Bingnan was elected to be the vice-president of Icoграда, a position he held for three years until 2003.⁷³⁴ After that, Yu served as Icoграда ambassador in China.

⁷²⁹ 'Professor Yu Bingnan's Speech at Preparatory meeting of the 2009 Icoграда Beijing Congress Preparatory Committee' (《余秉楠教授在2009北京ICOGRADA大会筹委会预备会议的发言》)

⁷³⁰ 'Leimei Julia Chiu Appointed Executive Director of JIDPO', in *ico-D news* <<https://www.ico-d.org/connect/index/post/1311.php>> [accessed 4 March 2019]

⁷³¹ 'Professor Yu Bingnan's Speech at Preparatory meeting of the 2009 Icoграда Beijing Congress Preparatory Committee' (《余秉楠教授在2009北京ICOGRADA大会筹委会预备会议的发言》)

⁷³² Ibid.

⁷³³ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, in Beijing, 17 May 2017.

⁷³⁴ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through WeChat, 2 June 2019.

During this time, he participated in eight Icograda congresses.⁷³⁵ While actively participating in the international events organised by Icograda, Yu Bingnan and his colleagues were also trying to bring Icograda to China to strengthen mutual understanding.

One year later in 2002, Robert L. Peters, the then Icograda president, was invited to visit China for the first time when he was impressed with the individual designers he met while at the same time being quite surprised by the fact that China had no national design association.⁷³⁶



Figure [80-81] Lu Jingren, *Japanese Contemporary Illustrations*, book design, 1994; Lu Jingren, *The Birth of the Plastic Arts*, book design, 1999 (© Lu Jingren)

Was Robert L. Peters' trip to Beijing and Shanghai a direct result of Yu Bingnan and his colleagues' persistent efforts to bring Icograda to China? Was it simply a diplomatic protocol? Or did this action represent a profound transformation on Icograda's part? To answer these questions, it is important to view the issue in a global context.

Since the 1990s, Icograda had been going through a transformation from being Eurocentric to embracing a more global approach, that included developing countries.⁷³⁷ Globalisation and changes in communication technology, for example, the use of personal computers, the Internet, email and digital data transfer, played a significant role in helping Icograda fulfil its broader vision and mandate as an international non-governmental organisation for professional graphic

⁷³⁵ 'Professor Yu Bingnan's Speech at Preparatory meeting of the 2009 Icograda Beijing Congress Preparatory Committee' (《余秉楠教授在2009北京ICOGRADA大会筹委会预备会议的发言》)

⁷³⁶ Robert L. Peters, 'Crumbling Walls, New Dawn', in *Icograda Board Message* <http://www.robetlpeters.com/news/images/Icograda_BM12-02.pdf> [accessed 10 June 2019]

⁷³⁷ 'Board History', in *ico-D* <<https://www.ico-d.org/about/history>> [accessed 17 June 2019]

design.⁷³⁸ Asian names started to appear on the list of Icofrada board members, which brought a change in its structure.⁷³⁹ This brought a huge effect, especially when many design schools in Asia, particularly in China, Japan and Korean, joined in and their votes became powerful.⁷⁴⁰

During this period, communication between Chinese, Japanese and Korean graphic designers became frequent. Lu Jingren, the influential Chinese book designer who went to Japan in 1989 to study with Kohei Sugiura started to pay attention to design, art and folk culture in China, Japan and Korea under the influence of his mentor.⁷⁴¹ He translated, edited and introduced a series of books on Japanese design after returning to China. Take for example, *Nobuyoshi Kikuchi's Collected Works* (《菊地信义作品集》) 'Figure [80]', *Japanese Contemporary Illustrations* (《日本当代插图集》), as well as *The Birth of the Plastic Arts* (《造型的诞生》) 'Figure [81]' in 1992, 1994 and 1999 respectively. Meanwhile, he was connected with Ahn Sang-Soo through the recommendation of Kohei Sugiura.⁷⁴² From the early 2000s, these three had participated in and promoted a series of design exchange activities in China, Japan and Korea, with the idea of discussing and promulgating East



Figure [82-85] Lu Jingren, *The Chinese Memory - Treasures of 5000-year Civilization* (《中国记忆——五千年文明瑰宝》), book design, 2008; Lu Jingren, *Zhu Xi Bangshu Thousand-Character essay* (《朱熹榜书千字文》), 1999. Counterclockwise (© Lu Jingren)

⁷³⁸ Robert L. Peters interview with the author, through email, 12 June 2019.

⁷³⁹ Jin, p. C3 (金, p. C3)

⁷⁴⁰ David Berman interview with the author, through email, 11 June 2019.

⁷⁴¹ Lu Jingren interview with the author, through WeChat, 28 July 2019.

⁷⁴² Ibid.

Asian aesthetics through international activities and design practices ‘Figure [82-85]’.⁷⁴³ Ahn Sang-Soo chaired Icoграда's Millennium Congress, “Oullim 2000”.⁷⁴⁴ Together with Leimei Julia Chiu, he was one of the two earliest Asian members to join in Icoграда board in 1997.⁷⁴⁵ Like Ahn Sang-Soo, Leimei Julia Chiu was also influenced by Kohei Sugiura.⁷⁴⁶ The communication between the two provided Leimei Julia Chiu with a different sense of her role in Icoграда: “to reach the emerging underdeveloped regions”.⁷⁴⁷ Meanwhile, she was deeply influenced by Austrian designer and design educator Victor Papanek’s *Design for the Real World*.⁷⁴⁸ When describing her experience as the vice-president of Icoграда from 1997 to 2001, Leimei Julia Chiu mentioned that during that time she visited many underdeveloped countries and areas such Africa, Cuba and South America where she encountered very different opinions on design. With an awareness of design for those in need and design for developing countries, she felt it was both her responsibility and her wish to bring China to the Icoграда.⁷⁴⁹ About twelve years later, Victor Papanek’s *Design for the Real World* was translated into Chinese. At that time, “design ethics” had not been widely recognised in the field of design in China, where the focus of designers’ work was still the construction of a prosperous consumer society, while in the design education area the most attention was paid to material and technological innovation.⁷⁵⁰ The introduction of *Design for the Real World* at the time had the intention of stimulating Chinese designers and design researchers to think deeply about the development of Chinese design, at a time when some Chinese design researchers, including Zhou Bo (周博), the translator of the book, started

⁷⁴³ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁴ ‘Ahn Sang-Soo to receive Icoграда Education Award’, in *ico-D* <<https://www.ico-d.org/connect/index/post/1346.php>> [accessed 7 July 2019]

⁷⁴⁵ ‘Board History’, in *ico-D* <https://www.ico-d.org/about/history/sb_expander_articles/19.php> [accessed 7 July 2019]

⁷⁴⁶ Leimei Julia Chiu interview with the author, through WeChat, 7 July 2019.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁸ Jin, p. C3 (金, p. C3)

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁰ Teng Xiaobo, ‘Victor Papanek: Pioneer in Design Ethics’, in *Zhuangshi* <<http://www.izhsh.com.cn/doc/11/2415.html>> [accessed 12 Jan 2020] (滕晓铂, 《维克多·帕帕奈克: 设计伦理的先驱》, 刊载于《装饰》网站)

to become aware about the importance of design ethics and the critical attitude in design research.

Robert L. Peters, who served on the Icoграда board from 1999 to 2005 (as President from 2001 to 2003), and played a pivotal role in enhancing the understanding between Icoграда and design associations in China.⁷⁵¹ He was part of a younger group of leaders within Icoграда who pushed for a better global distribution for Icoграда. He did this

for a broadening of the benefits for all of Icoграда’s members and members’ members. This led us to actively develop contacts, programming, and events beyond the relatively narrow scope of Europe (and sometimes North America) — to include Asia (including India), Africa, Oceania, and South America.⁷⁵²

With a similar approach, Robert L. Peters wrote an article entitled “No Sleeping Dragon — The Dawn of Graphic Design in China” after his trip to China on September 2002 when he participated in the Icoграда council meeting that took place in Beijing, followed by a series of events including “The First Poster Exhibition of China Red Cross Society” and symposium and “A Trip to Shanghai: International Visual Art Master Seminar” and so on.⁷⁵³ The article was an introduction on China, including its history, culture, politics, economy, social transformation and philosophy, the connection with Chinese art and design, as well as a comparison between Western and Chinese design. His understanding of Chinese design and close communication with Yu Bingnan, however, started one year before his first trip to China, when he and Karen Blincoe, the then vice-president of Icoграда, helped Yu Bingnan with his communication with the other

⁷⁵¹ On Robert L. Peters’s tenure as president of Icoграда, see ‘Robert L. Peters, FGDC’, in *GDC (Graphic Design Canada)* <<https://gdc.design/fellows/robert-l-peters-fgdc>> [accessed 15 Jan 2020]; On Robert L. Peters’s role in enhancing the understanding between Icoграда and design associations in China, see Jin Minhua, ‘They Brought Icoграда to China’, *Shenzhen Business Daily*, 4 November 2009, p. C3 (金敏华, 《他们将 Icoграда带到中国》, 刊载于《深圳商报》, 2009年11月4日, 第3版)

⁷⁵² Robert L. Peters interview with the author, through email, 12 June 2019.

⁷⁵³ Robert L. Peters, ‘No Sleeping Dragon: The Dawn of Graphic Design in China’, *Communication Art*, March/April, 2004, pp. 86-99.

board members in English.⁷⁵⁴ Take for example, Robert L. Peters translated Yu Bingnan's talk "Review of Chinese Graphic Design" at Icoграда Melbourne and the Oceania Regional Conference in Australia in 2001.⁷⁵⁵ This kind of help was frequent during Yu Bingnan's tenure on the Icoграда board from 2001 to 2003.⁷⁵⁶

In 2005, a Chinese delegation headed to Denmark to participate in the Icoграда Copenhagen Congress.⁷⁵⁷ At this point, Yu Bingnan had retired and handed the task of applying for the right to host the 2009 Icoграда congress in Beijing to the CAFA team, including Wang Min, dean of CAFA Design School, as well as Xiao Yong (肖勇) and Wang Ziyuan (王子源), staff members from the CAFA Design School.⁷⁵⁸ The application was eventually approved after fierce competition on 30 September, 2005, when Beijing defeated four other cities, Singapore, Montreal, Warsaw and Brussels.⁷⁵⁹

Recalling this experience, Robert L. Peters, the past president of Icoграда in 2005, mentioned that "there was no doubt in my mind that Beijing was the best choice for 2009", due to the reasons that

China was making significant strides on the global stage to become more

⁷⁵⁴ Yu Bingnan interview with the author, through email, 11 March 2018.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁷ 'China Wins the Right to Host the World Design Congress', in *Sina.news* <<http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2005-10-13/11317159524s.shtml>> [accessed 17 June 2019] (《中国获世界设计大会举办权》，刊载于新浪新闻)

⁷⁵⁸ 'Icoграда General Assembly 21: Minutes, Copenhagen, Denmark, 29-30 September 2005', the document was provided to the author by Jacques Lange (Icoграда President 2005-2007), through email, 23 June 2019. The document is situated in Jacques Lange's personal archive. Also see Xiao Yong Design Studio, '2009 World Design Conference Will be Held in Beijing', in *VisionUnion* <<http://www.visionunion.com/article.jsp?code=200510090039>> [accessed 17 June 2019] (肖勇设计工作室，《2009世界设计大会在北京举办》，刊载于视觉同盟)

⁷⁵⁹ Jacques Lange interview with the author, through email, 23 June 2019. Also see Lang Li and Wang Min, 'A New Discussion about Seventh Anniversary of Beijing Design Week and Design Drives Innovation Based on the View of User Experience', *Zhuangshi*, 9 (2016), 36-41 (p. 36) (郎丽、王敏，《基于用户体验视角下设计驱动创新的探讨——暨北京设计周创办七周年》，刊载于《装饰》，2016，第36页)

connected (and less withdrawn) than it had been for many decades, and the Icograda board was very conscious of the considerable potential that could flow from finally having a more open flow of ideas, work, and conversations with Chinese colleagues. We had a clear sense that Beijing would be a spectacular venue. In no small part, the world's focus on Beijing's 2008 Olympics would offer natural momentum to build on, and the experience this brought to China's expertise are: hosting international visitors, etc. was welcomed and evident.⁷⁶⁰

If Robert L. Peters' recognition for CAFA as the organiser of the 2009 Icograda Congress was based on years of communication with Yu Bingnan while both of them worked as Icograda board members, and his trips to China, through which he saw the potential for Icograda to connect with design circles in China, then the support from Ron Newman, who travelled to the 2007 Cuba Icograda Congress as a voting member to ensure there was good support for Beijing was also connected with his long personal history of engagement with China.⁷⁶¹ Ron Newman's first trip to China was in 1980 as a practising industrial designer travelling by train from Hong Kong to Guangzhou to work with tool-makers who were producing production moulds for his company in Australia.⁷⁶² At that time, he still needed to apply for all permissions and was supervised during the whole visit.⁷⁶³ From 2006 to 2008, he was a member of the Raffles Institute which at that time had campuses all over China.⁷⁶⁴

Nearly 20 years of experience of working in China, as well as the working experience related to China based on substantial design projects, provided Newman with a more specific perspective on the design industry in China. Therefore, he was able to help the Icograda CAFA team with specific advice. He advised the team on what western colleagues would understand or otherwise

⁷⁶⁰ Robert L. Peters interview with the author, through email, 12 June 2019.

⁷⁶¹ The information about Ron Newman's contribution to the 2009 Icograda Beijing Congress comes from Ron Newman interview with the author, through email, 17 June 2019.

⁷⁶² Ibid.

⁷⁶³ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁴ 'Professor Ron Newman', in *Virtu Institute* <<http://www.virtuinstitute.edu.au/professor-ron-newman/>> [accessed 19 June 2019]

in the material, as well as the balance of speakers and topics, for example, he encouraged the use of Chinese characters in design with explanations because in his view, these characters represented a real cultural experience for the congress guests.⁷⁶⁵ Ron Newman joined the CAFA team to brainstorm about Xin, the theme of the congress with an awareness of the importance of introducing the Icograda members to the “true” culture of China, including its modernity, the professional drive, and the desire for outside contact and collaboration.⁷⁶⁶ This kind of close international collaboration in an everyday work context seemed to provide the opportunity for mutual penetration for both sides at the conceptual and operational levels. As a result, Xin became the quality that spoke to multiple agents, including the Icograda team, who was concerned about access to the level and nature of design practice in an open and communicative context, as well as the CAFA team, who was eager to present qualities such as vision, trust, credibility and faith in contemporary Chinese design from an interpretation of this Chinese character.

3.3 Xin as An Influence

The Icograda Beijing Congress was held alongside the first Beijing Design Week from October 24-30, 2009.⁷⁶⁷ During this period, various black and white or coloured geometric forms transformed from the shape of an envelope representing the theme of



Figure [86] The main entrance of The National Museum of China where Design As Productive Force, the sub-theme exhibition of the 2009 Icograda Beijing Congress was organised, 27 October, 2009 (© Wang Min)

⁷⁶⁵ Ron Newman interview with the author, through email, 17 June 2019.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁷ ‘Gehua 20 Years | 2009 Beijing World Design Congress and the First Beijing Design Week’, in *Beijing Gehua Cultural Development Group* <http://www.gehua.com/html/2017/bi-gevent_0828/411.html> [accessed 20 June] (《歌华20年 | 2009北京世界设计大会暨首届北京国际设计周》，刊载于歌华集团官网)

the congress appeared in different locations, including the glass facade inside the China National Centre for the Performing Arts, the main entrance of The National Museum of China (中国美术馆) 'Figure [86]', the outer wall of The China Millennium Monument (中华世纪坛), and on the facade of various buildings inside the CAFA campus. More than hundred scholars and designers of international reputation from six continents delivered nearly a hundred speeches, including seventy-eight keynote speeches under four main topics and in eighteen design education seminars.⁷⁶⁸ Twenty-five exhibitions showing Chinese and international design works, as well as thirteen events related to design, were organised.⁷⁶⁹ When recalling the experience during the congress, David Berman described it as "mysterious, and everything is dramatic" and he was "humbled" when witnessing "the design process in China, decision-making process, the powerful way to bring people together".⁷⁷⁰ The dramatic and powerful feeling seems to have been reflected in many aspects of the congress, including the glamorous opening ceremony at the China National Centre for the Performing Arts, the presentation delivered by former politicians such as Long Yongtu (龙永图), former deputy minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation.⁷⁷¹ In addition, the Beijing Municipal People's Government, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture were all on the list as Congress' hosts. This was, even for local Chinese designers, something unique. Usually a design conference would and could not have such "drama".

So what were the reasons that made this congress special? How did this happen, and who contributed to this situation? Further, what were the expectations of these sponsors and supporters? How did the CAFA team communicate with and speak to these agencies? Was this kind of support sustainable? To search for answers to these questions, it is important to trace

⁷⁶⁸ 'Programme' and 'Exhibitions', in *Icograda World Design Congress* <<http://www.beijing2009.org/programme.htm>> [accessed 28 February 2019]

⁷⁶⁹ 2009 Icograda Beijing Congress, 'Programme', in *Icograda World Design Congress* <<http://www.beijing2009.org/programme.htm>> [accessed 28 February 2019]

⁷⁷⁰ David Berman interview with the author, through email, 11 June 2019.

⁷⁷¹ On Long Yongtu (龙永图) see 'Long Yongtu', in *ICC (International Capital Conference)* <<http://www.internationalcapitalconference.com/cn/speakers/long-yongtu>> [accessed 20 June 2019]

the trajectory of Icoagrada CAFA team's cooperation with the sponsors and supporters of the congress.

The preparation for the 2009 Icoagrada Beijing Congress started in the second half of 2006, soon after CAFA won the bid to host the congress in Copenhagen.⁷⁷² Very quickly, however, Wang Min and his colleagues realised that it was very difficult for CAFA to independently take the responsibility of organising an international congress on such a scale.⁷⁷³ In their opinion, the conversations about design education and the design industry might not bring substantial results without governmental involvement and concern. Therefore, the original idea of establishing a platform for designers to discuss design issues was transformed into a much more urgent task, that of helping the government to understand the meaning and importance of design.

In these circumstances, the 2009 Icoagrada Beijing Congress CAFA team was trying to cooperate with local government to get support for the realisation of their visions. Soon after, the theme of the congress "Xin", was finalised on February 2006, the CAFA team submitted their proposal in the application for the Congress to the Beijing municipal government.⁷⁷⁴ The Beijing Gehua Culture Development Group (北京歌华文化发展集团), a large state-owned cultural business in Beijing committed to cultural services provision and the promotion of the cultural and creative industries, contacted the CAFA team for further communication after learning of the application.⁷⁷⁵ The involvement of Gehua provided support specifically for the fostering of an awareness

⁷⁷² Zheng Tao interview with the author, through WeChat, 6 March 2019.

⁷⁷³ Zheng Juxin, Chen Yongyi and Yu Jiadi, 'Professor Wang Min, Dean of CAFA Design School Talks about the Comparison of the Design from the East and West' (郑巨欣、陈永怡、俞佳迪, 《中央美术学院设计学院院长王敏教授谈东西方设计比较》). The text was provided to the author by Wang Min, through email, 7 February 2017. The text is situated in Wang Min's personal archive.

⁷⁷⁴ Zheng Tao interview with the author, through WeChat, 6 March 2019.

⁷⁷⁵ On Gehua (歌华), see 'Beijing Gehua Cultural Development Group', in *Beijing Gehua Cultural Development Group* <http://www.gehua.com/html/2017/bigevent_0828/411.html> [accessed 20 June] (《歌华集团》, 刊载于歌华集团官网)

of design through media campaigns.⁷⁷⁶

Meanwhile, in the letter inviting the Beijing Municipal Government and the Ministry of Education to jointly sponsor the 2009 Icofrada Beijing Congress, the CAFA team emphasised the significance of organising this event, including the opportunity to effectively promote Chinese design in the international arena, as well as to promote industrial transformation and the further development of cultural and creative industries in Beijing.⁷⁷⁷ Also it would help to enhance Beijing's competitiveness as a candidate to compete for the title of World Design Capital. All this was consistent with the strategic decision of the Beijing municipal government to develop cultural and creative in-

dustries at that time.⁷⁷⁸ After continuous communication, the CAFA team received approval from the Ministry of Education and Beijing municipal government to confirm them as joint organisers of the 2009 Icofrada Beijing Congress in April and December 2008 respectively.⁷⁷⁹ This also



Figure [87-88] The opening of the Design As Productive Force exhibition at The National Museum of China, 26 October, 2009; The introductory text about creative design and its function in economic development in the United States and Japan of the Design As Productive Force exhibition, 2009. From left to right (© Wang Min)

⁷⁷⁶ 'Organisers', in *Icofrada World Design Congress* <<http://www.beijing2009.org/organizers.htm>> [accessed 20 June 2019]

⁷⁷⁷ Zheng Tao interview with the author, through WeChat, 6 March 2019.

⁷⁷⁸ 'Beijing Cultural and Creative Industry Development Plan during the Eleventh Five-Year Plan Period', in *The People's Government of Beijing Municipality* <http://www.beijing.gov.cn/zfxxgk/110021/ndgzjh32/2015-05/29/content_6d05937dd17841ac9d8226159116212e.shtml> [accessed 21 June 2019] (《北京市“十一五”时期文化创意产业发展规划》，刊载于北京市人民政府官网)

⁷⁷⁹ Zheng Tao interview with the author, through WeChat, 6 March 2019.

meant that the congress would go beyond the scope of graphic design in terms of the topics and issues of concern, and extended it to an area more closely related to government strategy.

There were various ways to achieve this goal, including the choice of speakers for the keynote speeches, and communication during the seminar and exhibition with specific topics. In doing so, the importance of design, as well as the problems that needed to be dealt with, were highlighted. Take for example, the speeches by Sol Sender and Patrick Whitney were arranged for the same day of opening ceremony, to enable the representatives from Beijing Municipal Government, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture have an opportunity to get a better understanding of how design could have an impact on politics, as well as how to build links between design and business strategy.⁷⁸⁰ Meanwhile, to promote the idea of design as innovative economy, the exhibition “Design As Productive Force” (设计·生产力), set up in the National Museum of China, aimed to educate officials about how design could be used to increase the value of enterprise benefits with successful samples from the Netherlands, the United States, Japan and other countries ‘Figure [87-88]’.⁷⁸¹ It also explained the relationship between branding and the knowledge economy. In doing so, the organisers of the congress tried to raise the awareness of government and industry of the importance of design. The topics highlighted in the congress, including those about strategic thinking about the future of Chinese design, were still discussed after the congress, for example, the value of design, how to make design the driving force of economic development, and the ownership of the design industry by government agencies.⁷⁸²

⁷⁸⁰ On the arrangement of Speeches in the 2009 Icograda Congress, see ‘Programme’ and ‘Exhibitions’, in *Icograda World Design Congress* <<http://www.beijing2009.org/programme.htm>> [accessed 28 February 2019]

⁷⁸¹ ‘2009 Beijing World Design Conference Special Exhibition: Design As Productive Force’, in *National Art Museum of China* <http://www.namoc.org/Videos/spzy/zlhd/2009/201304/t20130423_244286.htm> [accessed 10 May 2018] (《设计·生产力” 2009北京世界设计大会特展》, 刊载于中国美术馆官网)

⁷⁸² Chen Yuan, ‘Cultural Pulse: Design is Not Only Culture, But Also Productivity’ in *cpcnews* <<http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2012/0929/c83083-19151025.html>> [accessed 10 April 2019] (陈原, 《文化脉动: 设计是文化, 更是生产力》, 人民网); also see ‘Design Is Productivity - The Establishment of Design Research Institute, Beijing Ceramic Art Museum’, in *Artron* <<https://news.artron.net/20190121/n1043143.html>> [accessed 10 April 2019] (《设计就是生产力——北京陶瓷艺术馆设计研究院成立》, 雅昌艺术网)

Another important issue raised during the 2009 Icofrada Beijing Congress was the advantage of having a national design association.⁷⁸³ In the Chinese graphic design context, there was no national association. There were only a few local associations: among them, the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association was the most active. The benefit of having a national design association was that it could discharge the functions and powers that the government could not perform.

Without it, industry regulations and supervision could not be conducted. However, it was challenging to establish such an organisation and to find a relevant ministry to take care of it. There was only the Ministry of Industry and Information, which started to conduct an investigation into the development of the design industry in 2009. The result of this situation was that even though the importance of design was frequently mentioned in design circles, there is no specific data to support it. Take for example, there was no documentation of design as a percentage of GDP, the number of the practitioners in design industry in the country as a whole, or how product sales figures and value would be improved by design.⁷⁸⁴ Wang Min mentioned in an interview with *Art Observation* that at that time, among the issues in the design industry, the aspect he could address with government was design education, since he could explain that there were one million design students, which meant that there was a demand for designers in society.⁷⁸⁵

The Icofrada Beijing Congress turned out to be a reflection and practice on the meaning of design caused by the specific difficulties encountered by the CAFA team in the organisation and preparation of the congress. The idea of “design as productivity” was formally promoted with the exhibition at The National Museum of China. Meanwhile, Beijing Design Week, hosted by the Beijing Municipal Government and the Ministry of Culture, was retained and now happens annually, with the intention of promoting basic knowledge of design to the government, business enterprises, and citizens, and to popularise the concept of “design making life better” in a

⁷⁸³ Zhu Shuai, ‘What Can the Icofrada Congress Bring to Us? A Conversation with Wang Min, Dean of CAFA Design School’, *Art Observation*, 4 (2010), 26-27 (p. 27) (祝帅, 《“世界设计大会”带给我们什么? ——王敏访谈》, 刊载于《美术观察》)

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid.

situation when the understanding of design was still very vague in China.⁷⁸⁶ Wang Yudong (王昱东), deputy director for the Office of the Organising Committee of Beijing Design Week who originally thought design was a kind of artistic creation, mentioned in an interview that his own understanding about design went through a transformation through the organisational work for Beijing Design Week.⁷⁸⁷ Although the Congress did not directly lead to the introduction of design-related policies, the promotion and popularisation of design might eventually gradually shape government, industry and public's understanding about design. In the long run this would be beneficial to create a context that is conducive to the development of design in China.

4. Graphic Design Experimentation - “Social Energy”: A School to Learn

At the same time as the preparatory work for the 2009 Icofrada Beijing Congress was taking place, another international design event related to the CAFA Design School was taking place in Chengdu, a city in the southwest of China. In the summer of 2008, a huge billboard with Social Energy (社会能量) in both English letters and Chinese characters ‘Figure [89]’ started to appear on the roadside near the Xu LiaoYuan Museum of Modern Art (许燎源现代设计艺术博物馆), the first private art



Figure [89] Billboard with information about Social Energy, Chengdu, Sichuan, 2008 (©Jiang Hua)

⁷⁸⁶ Wang Yudong interview with the author, through email, 11 September, 2018; also see “Summary of 2018 Beijing Design Week”, in *2018 Beijing Design Week Theme Exhibition Guide Book: Design in China after 1978*, ed. by Wang Min, Lin Cunzhen and Wang Yudong (Beijing: Beijing Design Week, 2018) (《2018北京国际设计周综述》, 刊载于《2018北京国际设计周主题展导览手册: 改革开放以来中国设计40年回顾展 1978-2018》, 主编: 王敏、林存真、王昱东)

⁷⁸⁷ Wang Yudong interview with the author, through email, 11 September, 2018.

and design museum in China.⁷⁸⁸ The main information on the white banner was these outline characters in red displayed on three lines. On the first line were the Chinese characters for “social energy”. The English words “Social” and “Energy” were placed on the second and third lines respectively. All these characters were surrounded and connected by light blue and red outlines. The subtitle and the date of the exhibition, as well as the logos of the sponsors, were put on the right-hand side of the billboard. It is important to point out that these typefaces are not the usual choices for a formal event or exhibition, such as Xiheiti (细黑体) for Chinese and Bodoni for English, which in most Chinese designers’ view are elegant options. Instead, Beijing Yuanheiti (北京圆黑体) and Akkurat were used. Why were these unconventional fonts selected? What kind of information would an event entitled Social Energy try to convey? Was it an attempt to build up the connection between design and society? What gave the organisers this idea? Why would this event take place in Chengdu? How would the organisers try to transform the idea and the event into social energy? To search for answers to these questions, it is important to trace the trajectory of Jiang Hua, one of the initiators and organisers of the Social Energy, who was a PhD student at the CAFA Design School.

4.1 To Explore the Problem with Curiosity

In 2006, Jiang Hua was accepted as Wang Min’s PhD student at CAFA Design School. At that time, Wang Min had just come back to China from the United States to take up the position of art director of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and to lead the CAFA Design School. For Wang Min, it was a challenging task to train these design students to become a new force in establishing Chinese design culture, because as a consequence of exam-oriented education from kindergarten to high school, most of the Chinese students were often passive.⁷⁸⁹ They were busy remembering things, but not good at raising questions and finding problems. What was more,

⁷⁸⁸ XLY MoMA, ‘Introduction’, in *Xu LiaoYuan Museum of Modern Art* <<http://www.xlymo-ma.com>> [accessed 12 March 2019]

⁷⁸⁹ ‘Design Education for the Future — An Interview with Professor Wang Min, Dean of the School of Design, Central Academy of Fine Arts’, *Art Research*, 6 (2015), 14-17 (pp. 14-15) (《推进面向未来的设计教育——中央美术学院设计学院院长王敏教授访谈》, 刊载于《美术研究》, 第6期, 第14-17页 (第14-15页))

most of the students had a lack of curiosity and they were not curious about what was happening around them.⁷⁹⁰ Introducing questions such as how to make design education an effective link in the construction of design culture in the context of China's exam-oriented education, as well as how to inherit and develop



Figure [90] Jiang Hua, poster design for *Zhedong Culture* (《浙东文化》) magazine, Jiang Hua's early experimental work on Chinese character, 2003 (© Jiang Hua)

traditional culture through design, Wang Min began to think about a new educational model.⁷⁹¹ Take for example, to increase students'

teamwork and social cooperation skills by combining the curriculum with national projects such as the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, and to provide students with an international perspective through cross-cultural courses.⁷⁹² Besides, he was also thinking about a way to engage students in the forefront of technology and design concepts through collaboration with leading companies and organisations.⁷⁹³

⁷⁹⁰ Wang Min, 'One Hundred Questions: On the Construction of Chinese Design Culture', *Urban Flux*, 2 (2013), 37-40 (p. 37). (王敏, 《100问, 关于中国设计文化自主建构的一些思考》, 刊载于《城市空间设计》)

⁷⁹¹ Qu Xiaomeng, Peng Wenjiao, 'Interview with Wang Min, the Dean of CAFA Design School', in *VisionUnion* <<http://www.visionunion.com/article.jsp?code=201011230050>> [accessed 17 March 2018] (屈晓梦, 彭文娇, 《中央美术学院设计学院院长王敏专访》, 刊载于视觉同盟)

⁷⁹² Ibid.

⁷⁹³ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁴ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 12 March, 2019.

originated long time earlier in his childhood when Wang Yougeng (王友耕), his grandfather, a well known calligrapher, exerted a huge influence on him.⁷⁹⁵ His interest in international modern design and culture started in 1992 when he began to study at the Graphic Design Department, Wuxi Light Industry University School of Design (无锡轻工大学) (currently Jiangnan University (江南大学) School of Design).⁷⁹⁶ Deeply attracted by this new visual language, Jiang Hua spent much time in the school library, scrutinising international design publications and magazines such as *Creation*, a series of twenty publications focusing on international graphic design, art, and illustration edited by Yusaku Kamekura, *NOVUM*, *CA*, *Graphis*, *Print*, *Idea* and all kinds of design annals.⁷⁹⁷ He started to collect the works of modernist designers and his interests expanded into modernist literature, poetry, painting and product design.⁷⁹⁸

During the early 1990s, there were few Chinese scholars with overseas study experience doing research on design history in China, even fewer who had an in-depth understanding of this area. Fortunately, professor Gerhard Matthias from the Graphic Design Department, Kassel University of the Arts, was invited to give lectures on poster design. During the course, which lasted for about one month, Gerhard Mathias also showed students more than 3,000 slides covering early poster design in France, the Bauhaus and the work of creation of European designers in the 1990s, through which Jiang Hua learned about the design styles and concepts of Pentagram, Push Pin Studios, the Polish School, the Swiss School, the New York School, and others.⁷⁹⁹ These slides were left for the students' use, and they turned out to be their design history book.⁸⁰⁰ For Jiang Hua, this course was an important training because instead of simply re-

⁷⁹⁵ 'Beijing Kaiming Academy of Classical Learning | Assistant Academic Host: Jiang Hua', in *Souhu* <http://www.sohu.com/a/239830666_685640> [accessed 6 July 2018] (《北京开明文化书院 | 助理学术主持: 蒋华》, 刊载于搜狐)

⁷⁹⁶ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 14 March, 2019.

⁷⁹⁷ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 16 May, 2019.

⁷⁹⁸ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 2 February, 2019.

⁷⁹⁹ Han Zhanning, 'Han Zhanning: Dialogue with Jiang Hua and Pan Qin', in *Design On Line* <<http://www.dolcn.com/d/digest/20011101095236.html>> [accessed 14 March 2019] (韩湛宁, 《韩湛宁: 对话蒋华与潘沁》, 刊载于设计在线)

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

membering and knowing work by modernist designers, he got the chance to understand the context in which this work was created and the connections within it. Meanwhile, he also paid attention to various domestic design events and design magazines. It was through the catalogue for the Graphic Design in China exhibition in 1992 that he got to know Wang Xu's works.⁸⁰¹ From that point, Jiang Hua began to collect Xu Wang's publications, including *Design Exchange* and the brochure for Wang Xu's studio. For him, Wang Xu's existence was inspiring and his work broadened Jiang Hua's horizons, which according to Jiang Hua's own description demonstrated the possibility that there was also someone from mainland China who could design something as good as that created by designers from Europe, America and Japan.⁸⁰²

Jiang Hua's interest and research in modern graphic design continued after graduation. His life as a teacher at Ningbo University, however, became more exciting in 1998 when he participated in the event celebrating the establishment of the Shanghai Graphic Designer Professional Committee and he witnessed the achievements of his colleagues in Shanghai.⁸⁰³ This experience encouraged him to contact his colleague Pan Qin (潘沁), a graphic design teacher at Ningbo University, who was also finding he could not experience the passion of design through his job and had a similar urge for learning and international communication.⁸⁰⁴ At that time, in 1996, Jiang Hua had already tried to correspond with Wang Xu.⁸⁰⁵ The discussion started from questions about purchasing Wang Xu's publications and progressed to communicating about Jiang Hua's design works.⁸⁰⁶ By the time Jiang Hua and Pan Qin came to Guangzhou to visit Wang Xu to discuss their idea of organising an international design exhibition in 1998, he had established a strong connection with Wang Xu, who continuously encouraged him and reached out to him

⁸⁰¹ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 2 February, 2019.

⁸⁰² Jiang Hua interview with the author, Beijing, 15 March 2019.

⁸⁰³ Han, 'Han Zhanning: Dialogue with Jiang Hua and Pan Qin' (韩, 《韩湛宁: 对话蒋华与潘沁》)

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁵ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 2 February, 2019.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

providing further support, such as sharing his international resources with Jiang Hua.⁸⁰⁷ Together with Pan Qin, Jiang Hua organised the first Ningbo International Poster Biennale (宁波国际海报双年展) in 1999 with Wang Xu's help 'Figure [91]'. This was the project originating from Jiang Hua's ambition when he was an undergraduate student eagerly reading the information about the Chaumont Poster Festival, the Poster Biennale in Warsaw and the International Biennial of Graphic Design Brno from international design magazines in the school library.⁸⁰⁸ Positioning himself as an *observer* of the design phenomenon, to organise an international exhibition that would happen regularly was an effective way for Jiang Hua to pose the problem and limitations of current design methods, and in addition to create a school for continuous learning 'Figure [92]'.⁸⁰⁹



Figure [91-92] Preface of The First Ningbo International Poster Biennial catalogue, written by Wang Xu, 1999 (top); International jury members of The Third Ningbo International Poster Biennial, including Uwe Loesch from Germany, Kenya Hara from Japan, Edwin Vollebergh from Netherlands, David Tartakover from Israel, Wang Xu from China in the back row, Stanley Wong from Hong Kong and Niklaus Troxler from Switzerland in the front row (from left to right), 2004 (© Jiang Hua)

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁸ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 14 March, 2019.

⁸⁰⁹ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 13 January, 2019.

4.2 To Present the Problem with Social Energy

Parallel with the research on international modern design and the involvement in organising international design exhibitions to create the opportunity for communication and learning, Jiang Hua had been thinking deeper about the writing of Chinese characters, as well as their transformation in the contemporary era 'Figure

[93-94]'.⁸¹⁰ He focused on the study of Meishuzi, characters that have been processed, embellished and decorated, which originally appeared in China in the 1930s when modern printing technology was introduced into China.⁸¹¹

Curious about how these Chinese characters developed and eager to practise on a broader stage, he applied for a PhD programme at Studio 11 of the CAFA Design School where the supervisor, Wang Min, with an understanding of the rules, aesthetics and legacy of Western typography through working for Adobe at the time



Figure [93-94] Jiang Hua, “All Flowers Bloom Together, Hundred Schools of Thought Contending” (《百花齐放, 百家争鸣》), the work selected for No Paper, the experimental peripheral exhibition at The Fourth Ningbo International Poster Biannual; Visitors to the exhibition created their own works through working on the printing board on the wall with red ink paste used for seals in a way similar to the method of rubbing Chinese calligraphy from a stone tablet. 2006 (©Jiang Hua)

⁸¹⁰ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 2 February, 2019.

⁸¹¹ Jiang Hua, ‘Meishuzi: A Study on Modern Chinese Typography’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Central Academy of Fine Arts, 2009), p. 15 (蒋华, 《中国“美术字”研究——现代文字设计的中国路径》(未经发表的博士论文, 中央美术学院, 2009, 第15页))

when the company was trying to set an industry standard for typeface software, had just come back to China, eager to promote Chinese typeface design and design education.⁸¹²

In this new environment, Jiang Hua maintained his interest in design magazines and read widely. Soon, he was attracted by the writings of Li Degeng, who was then a PhD candidate in Visual Communication at the University of Wuppertal.⁸¹³ The meeting of the two took place in early 2007 when both of the young design practitioners and researchers who had the same passion for in-depth research on European design decided to work together on a project that would tackle the urgent existing problem that existed in Chinese design field.⁸¹⁴

As mentioned in earlier chapters, in the 1990s the graphic design field in China was in an active state. In the 2000s, when China's economic development accelerated, the older generation of graphic designers, however, who used to actively learn from the international design magazines in the late 1980s and 1990s seemed to have lost their aims. Some of them were beginning to think about how to deepen their practice in a new context, while this seemed to be a struggle, since there was very little that could attract attention throughout the country, like the logo design for 999 Group Corporation by Wang Yuefei in 1989 and the poster design for the Graphic Design in China exhibition created by Chen Shaohua in 1992.

Under such circumstances, and sensing the dilemma of their predecessors, Jiang Hua and Li Degeng started to question the current situation of graphic design and graphic design education in China.⁸¹⁵ Instead of simply fully accepting and absorbing knowledge about international design in textbooks and in international design magazines, they wanted to actively seek opportunities to express their own attitude and become involved in the field of international graphic de-

⁸¹² Wang Min, 'Morning Light: Adobe Typeface Design in the Desktop Publishing Era', in *Zhuangshi*, 6 (2013), 26, (pp. 22-26) (王敏, 《晨光初现: 桌面出版时期的奥多比字体设计》, 中国装饰杂志社, 2013, 第6期, 第26页)

⁸¹³ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 12 March, 2019.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

sign.⁸¹⁶ Thinking about the social and cultural spirit of graphic design, they started to raise questions of whether graphic design should simply function as socialised tools, as well as what the nature of graphic designer's social responsibility should be.

With the idea of tackling the challenge that puzzled their predecessors, and based on years of research and observation of the phenomenon of international design, Jiang Hua and Li Degeng decided to choose Dutch design as an agent to organise the narration of their thinking on design, entitled *Social Energy*.

This project originated from our reflection and observation of contemporary graphic design as designers. Taking the research on contemporary Dutch graphic design as a source and basing on our reflection on the quality and energy of design, we try to view design from a new perspective. The definition of the quality of design work is often limited by the various stakeholders, such as the designer, the client, and the public. "Energy", however, refers to the social role and critical attitude of design. It would stimulate us to think about which kind of contribution design will provide to society in the future. These two different kinds of design value judgments have shifted the definition of graphic design from the earlier definition to its key function of realising communication and social value. Based on the notion of "project" rather than "work", we hope to conduct research on design methodology and the value behind design to describe the development of design and the realistic social and ecological relationship... as a result, *Social Energy* raises questions about design.⁸¹⁷

It is important to point out that both of these designers were fascinated and hugely influenced by the American graphic designer Michael Rock's lecture "Mad Dutch Disease" delivered at the Premsela Institute, Amsterdam in 2003. Enthusiastic about the discovery of "a designer's

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ The text was provided to the author by Jiang Hua, through email, 15 January 2019. The text is situated in Jiang Hua's personal archive.

dream”, they were actively planning to create a series of events including seminars, exhibitions and workshops in major Chinese cities to introduce Dutch design to China.⁸¹⁸ To realise this ambitious plan, they approached Wang Min for academic and network support from the CAFA Design School, the Dutch embassy and consulate.⁸¹⁹ A team consisting of students from Studio 11 was organised for further and in-depth research on Dutch graphic design studios, including the search for their design philosophy and the motivation behind the works.⁸²⁰

When the exhibition was open to the public after a year of preparation, the works from eleven Dutch design studios and designers were presented, including Catalogtree, Dumbar, Karl Martens, LUST, Richard Niessen, and Mooren & van der Velden.⁸²¹ The approach to presentation, however, seems to display a style that was not typical

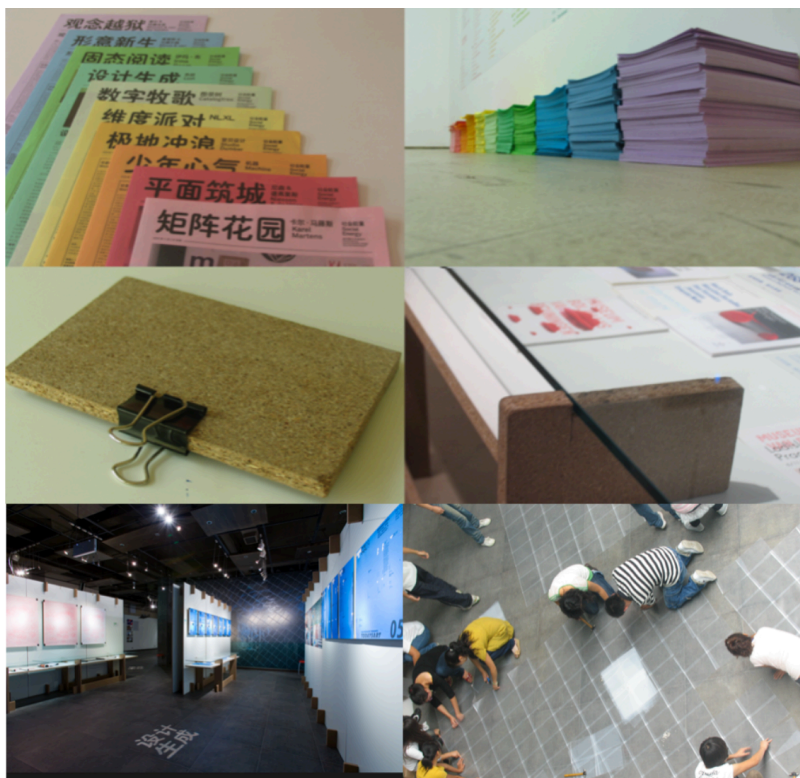


Figure [95-98] Social Energy exhibition catalogue printed on colourful paper and the catalogues displayed on the floor in the exhibition hall during the exhibition; brown cardboard and its application in setting up the show; grid-like transparent material made of plastic folders used to separate the exhibition space; local design students working together to set up the show, 2008-2009. From top to bottom (© Jiang Hua)

⁸¹⁸ On “a designer’s dream”, see Michael Rock, ‘Mad Dutch Disease’, in *2x4* <<https://2x4.org/ideas/2003/mad-dutch-disease/>> [accessed 21 March 2019]

⁸¹⁹ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 12 March, 2019.

⁸²⁰ Ibid.

⁸²¹ Li Degeng, and Jiang Hua, ‘Social Energy, Contemporary Communication Design from the Netherlands’, in *Art and Design*, 10 (2008), 29-53 (pp. 29-53) (李德庚, 蒋华, 《社会能量: 当代荷兰交流设计》, 刊载于《艺术与设计》, 2009, 第29-53页)

for an academic exhibition in China. In addition to the choices of typeface on the billboard mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the Beijing Yuanheiti and Akkurat typefaces were also applied to the exhibition brochure, which was printed on low-cost coloured paper 'Figure [95]'. The walls and tables set up to display the works inside the exhibition hall were assembled from brown cardboard 'Figure [96]'. In addition, a kind of grid-like transparent material was used in the exhibition space 'Figure [97]'. How would the work of Dutch designers', some of whom had very exciting approach, speak to the Chinese audience, especially those who were not from the design field? Why were the "unconventional" typefaces chosen? Where did the materials that were used to set up the exhibition come from? Did they have any special meaning in this specific context? Is there any connection between the choice of these materials and the design works on display? How could the organiser of the event create a space that would create a dialogue between Dutch design and the Chinese social context, through which to raise questions about Chinese graphic design? In order to discuss these questions, it is necessary to visit the space where the curatorial team prepared the exhibition, as well as the exhibition site.

The office space arranged for the Social Energy team to prepare the exhibition in the four cities that the exhibition toured to, Chengdu, Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen seemed to be temporarily transformed into a mini-market. The materials, including cardboard, paper and plastic folders, and paper of eleven different colours were used to print information about the eleven Dutch design studios and designers on show were piled up. Nearly all of them were ordered from a small market and Taobao (淘宝), familiar places where ordinary Chinese people usually go to get cheap items for daily use.⁸²² It was actually a strategy developed by the curators to minimise the gap between the ordinary people in the audience and an exhibition that concentrated on design from a European country, to encourage them to go inside the museum.⁸²³ This was also the reason for the choice of the Beijing Yuanheiti and Akkurat typefaces.⁸²⁴ According

⁸²² On "Taobao", see 'TaobaoWang (淘宝网)', in *China's "New Four Great Inventions"*, ed. by China's "New Four Great Inventions" Editorial Committee (Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House, 2017), p. 48 (《中国“新四大发明”》，《中国“新四大发明”》编写组编，新华出版社，2017年，第48页)

⁸²³ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 12 March, 2019.

⁸²⁴ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 2 February, 2019.

to the curators of the exhibition, the typefaces that could always be found on the packaging of food, such as milk and biscuits, in the local supermarket would look familiar and welcoming to the public.⁸²⁵ So was the set-up of the exhibition. Take for example, the tables and some of the walls used to display the design works were assembled with low-cost cardboard.

So did all these arrangements have any organic connection with the Dutch design works on display? What was the meaning of all these choices in this specific context?

Modernists believe that designers should create their own forms for each content. Mevis & van Deursen don't think so. In their opinion, the world is already full of forms, each with its own information and meaning. If this kind of manufacturing continues, one day, we will be lost in the ocean of forms... They collect, observe, analyse, and reorganise ready-made forms, and almost never “create” any new forms. They believe that through reasonable choice and editing, those forms that have been abandoned will be recombined into new forms, and the information and meaning they originally carried will be established in deconstruction and reconstruction.⁸²⁶

This was the introductory text about Mevis & van Deursen for the Social Energy exhibition. During the period when Jiang Hua and Li Degeng were carrying out research, searching for participants, they were deeply attracted by the concept advocated by this group because they identified the possibility of building an interesting connection between their idea and the local Chinese environment.⁸²⁷ There were huge amounts of ready-made products such as leaflets and magazines in China, where labour-intensive industry was very common. In the eyes of the curators, these local materials, that were cheap and easy to get access to, had the potential to be transformed into a kind of design that was appropriate in the local context through the local la-

⁸²⁵ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 12 March, 2019.

⁸²⁶ Li and Jiang, p. 51 (李和蒋, 第51页)

⁸²⁷ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 12 March, 2019.

bour force.⁸²⁸ In doing so, they could achieve the goal of activating local energy while offering a response to, or local interpretation of, Mevis & van Deursen's concept. They tried to practise in this way. At each point in the exhibition, they would organise local designers and design students to work together to set up the show 'Figure [98]'.

Actually the grid-like transparent material, made up of plastic folders used for the spatial separation in the exhibition hall, as well as the banners hanging on the facade of the museum made by groups of local design

students working as volunteers for the exhibition, were the result of this concept. In addition, the interactive communication and interdis-

ciplinary cooperation advocated and practised by experimental design groups including NLXL, LUST, Peter Bilak, Experimental Jetset and Catalogtree were also transformed into the local context. The Social Energy team created an online platform and started discussion about the exhibits on Douban (豆瓣).⁸²⁹ Close attention was paid to the personal blogs of the audience, from which they collected feedback and sometimes even adopted them as material for the next stage of the exhibition. Take for example, the comment on Social Energy's events in Chengdu from the designer Damen's blog was quoted as the introductory text for the Social Energy exhibition in Beijing 'Figure [99]'.

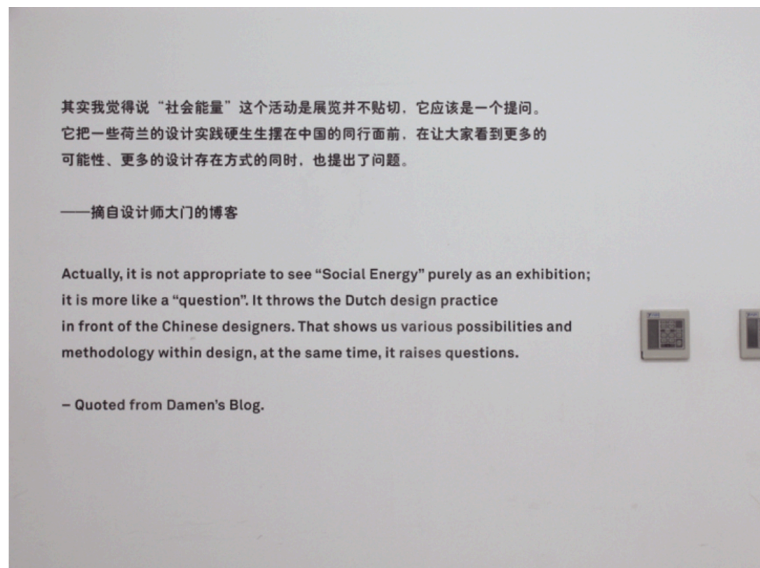


Figure [99] Comments on Social Energy's events in Chengdu (20 September - 10 October, 2008) from the blog of designer Damen were quoted as the introductory text of the Social Energy exhibition at the Today Art Museum, Beijing (1-21 November, 2008), Today Art Museum, 2008 (© Jiang Hua)

⁸²⁸ Jiang Hua interview with the author, through WeChat, 23 June, 2019.

⁸²⁹ On "douban", see 'douban (豆瓣)', in *China's "New Four Great Inventions"*, ed. by China's "New Four Great Inventions" Editorial Committee, p. 88 (《中国“新四大发明”》，《中国“新四大发明”》编写组编，第88页)

The exhibition also displayed work that was directly used by the curators to explain how design could intervene and have an impact on society such as the visual identity for the Dutch Police Department created by Studio Dumbar in 1993. Meanwhile, the curators of the exhibition realised that such an exhibition, full of work embodying experimental thinking about design, might be a challenge



Figure [100] Bookshelf with research materials about the exhibits on show, Xu Liaoyuan Museum of Modern Art, Chengdu, 2008 (© Jiang Hua)

for the audience, especially those who were not from the design field. As a result, rows of bookshelves filled with numbered books and materials labelled with numbers were moved into the exhibition hall as part of the show 'Figure [100]'. From these numbers, the audience could find relevant information about each individual work, which was the result of research conducted by the students from Studio 11 at the CAFA Design School.

In the early 2000s, this kind of exhibition was a whole new experience for the majority of the Chinese audience. According to Damen, it was inappropriate to view Social Energy purely as an exhibition. Instead, it showed the audience “various possibilities and methodologies within design; at the same time, it raises questions”.⁸³⁰ These few sentences actually pointed out the nature of Social Energy. Based on the observation of the problems existing in the graphic design industry and graphic design education, as well as the social environment in China at the time,

⁸³⁰ The comment on Social Energy's events in Chengdu (20 September - 10 October, 2008) from the blog of designer Damen, quoted as the introductory text of Social Energy exhibition at Today Art Museum, Beijing (1-21 November, 2008), Today Art Museum, 2008. The material was provided to author by Jiang Hua, through email, 15 January 2019. The original photo is situated in Jiang Hua's personal archive.

for example, designers' lack of ability to adapt to the media and a new way of communication, the superficial understanding of international design based on the imitation of forms, and the tension between the graphic designer and clients, the curators chose to pose questions leading to an open structure which required the interdisciplinary cooperation instead of providing specific solutions.

Although Social Energy did not become a sustainable force, directly giving rise to or bringing any substantial changes, this experimental exploration did provide a new dimension to promote thinking about the design phenomenon when Chinese graphic designers were beginning to confront the task of reconstructing their autonomy after the early stage of simulation and learning from international design practice.

5. Conclusion

In the early 2000s, international exchanges in the field of graphic design in China became active. After years of observation, communication and cooperation on the periphery, some international graphic design organisations, including AGI and Icoграда, started to work together with the leading Chinese art and design academies such as The Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University and CAFA. Frequent international exchanges in the graphic design field and the attraction to international design circles reflected to some extent the achievement of China's social and economic development. In the 2000s, China was entering into a development-oriented society, which meant that the situation and tasks of reform and development were very different from those at the initial stage of reform and opening up. The mission of the new stage was to stimulate the creativity of the whole of society, to gradually realise fairness and justice, and to promote the harmonious development of society.⁸³¹

The chapter describes three influential graphic design international exchanges, the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress, the 2009 Icoграда Beijing Congress and Social Energy. It demonstrates how

⁸³¹ Chi Fulin, *Starting Point - Thirty Years of China's reform* (Beijing: China Economic Publishing House, 2007), p. 92 (迟福林, 《起点——中国改革步入30年》, 北京: 中国经济出版社, 第92页)

the government's long-term evolution of economic and cultural policies had an impact on the graphic design field in a global context. The visual analysis of the promotional materials for these events exemplifies the rapid development in the field of graphic design in China during that period, from emphasising the tradition and glory of the Chinese literati spirit, to an experimental style represented in a visual system combining a Chinese character with its contemporary interpretation, and then to the exploration of Chineseness in the contemporary context with a focus on the application of local resources.

The juxtaposition of the three events shows the complexity of “autonomy” in the Chinese graphic design context interpreted in different ways by the main organisers of the events. The in-depth analysis of the difference reveals the impact of the personal trajectories of Yu Bingnan, Wang Min and Jiang Hua, designers from three different generations, especially the influence they received from international exchanges in a specific historical context. Meanwhile, it also shows the transformation of the political and economic factors that contributed to these events. However, the influence of the wider social background, as well as international design practice, on these events has not been systematically analysed. The chapter argues for the significance of understanding the process of the rediscovery of autonomy in the development of contemporary Chinese graphic design based on detailed case studies and reflective thinking.

V. Conclusion: Walking on Chopsticks

In this thesis, I have explored the experience and role of Chinese graphic designers in developing graphic design in China as a profession and discipline through design work, publishing and education. The focus is on practice in Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen as centres of industry from the 1980s, after China began to implement the reform and opening up policy, until 2010 when the further development of design for industry was emphasised in the annual governmental report of Wen Jiabao (温家宝), the prime minister of China at that time.⁸³² This thesis addresses the question of what the main challenges were that the key figures from the contemporary Chinese graphic design field had to confront and how they tackled these challenges.

Based on extensive primary research, the narrative, with an emphasis on objects as constituting practices allows the thesis to articulate and analyse the complicated relationship between the graphic design object and its social environment, technology, local tradition and international networks. In doing so, the thesis has aimed to reveal the uneven trajectory of the development of autonomy in contemporary Chinese graphic design in China since 1980 with reflective thinking. As such, it also offers a model of critical research within the context of Chinese design history.

1. Contributions to Knowledge

Through these discussions, the thesis has aimed to make a significant contribution to how we understand graphic design in China, as a community and field of practice, within a global context. Despite great changes in the Chinese graphic design field from the 1980s onwards, there is very little serious scholarly or reflective research conducted on this transformation. A core contribution of the thesis is thus to provide an evidence-based, thoroughly researched history of graphic design practice in this period.

Based on new information and research materials, the thesis analyses the sophisticated contemporary Chinese graphic design phenomenon from the point of view of the influence of the long-term evolvement of government's economic and cultural policy, the changing social environment, with the deepening of reform and opening up, the transformation of international design organisations' positioning, as well as the trajectory of key figures that played a significant role in this field. Take for example, the early experiences of the key figures in Shenzhen and Guangzhou, which had a profound influence on their future design practices, career choices and attitude towards international exchanges, which have not been explicitly addressed in earlier

⁸³² Wen Jiabao, 'Wen Jiabao's Government Report (The Third Session of the Eleventh National People's Congress)', in *China Central Government Portal* <http://www.gov.cn/2010lh/content_1555767.htm> [accessed 22 August 2019] (温家宝, 《温家宝所作政府工作报告(十一届人大三次会议)》, 刊载于中国政府网)

research, was revealed. There has been no scholarly research conducted specifically on the graphic design phenomenon in Shanghai in the 1990s, or on the three influential international exchanges in graphic design in the 2000s, the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress, the 2009 Icofrada Design Congress and Social Energy. In Chapter Two, an in-depth analysis was carried out to examine the design phenomenon in Shanghai in the 1990s in the city's political, economic, and historical context. Unlike the existing introductory texts, that deliberately focus on the contribution of the key figures in the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress, the 2009 Icofrada Design Congress and Social Energy, the narrative addresses the comprehensive and sophisticated factors that had an impact on these events. Meanwhile, the inner connections between these events were revealed. Therefore, they were not simply isolated international exchanges that coincidentally happened during the same period, as existing corresponding reports and texts imply, but a series of related events that reflected trends in the development of contemporary Chinese graphic design.

The thesis attempts to include all the necessary elements from different regions in China to avoid presenting a fragmented situation and utilitarian attitude in the design research field in China that was brought by the barrier between the different regions due to the fact that in China, the graphic design circles in different areas were relatively isolated. In contrast with most of the existing graphic design research focusing on a certain region in China, for example, the research on the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association (SGDA) organised by the SGDA, or the research on Shanghai design led by Shen Yu from School of Design, East China University (华东师范大学), the narrative examines the design practices in different cities, Shenzhen, Beijing and Shanghai. Through a comparison between the different attitudes and choices made by the designers from Shenzhen and Shanghai when encountering international design, as well as various international approaches to design thinking arriving in China after reform and opening up, an interesting context was created to reveal the rich and sophisticated relationship between the political, economic and geographical factors contributing to the formation of the pattern of the Chinese graphic design phenomenon, as well as how these led to a different understanding about creativity, a different attitude towards history, tradition and the influence from international design. Meanwhile, the description of the transformation of the focal point of the location of events in the Chinese graphic design field from Shenzhen to Beijing revealed the impact of political influence.

As the above paragraphs begin to articulate, a second key contribution comes through the analysis and interpretation of designers' work and experience in direct relation to broader historical conditions and change in China during this period. The thesis not only provides a narrative of the development of Chinese graphic design history since the 1980s, with a focus on the practice of the key figures in the Chinese graphic design field based on first-hand material; it also presents an exploration of the thinking behind the facts, trying to find out the real challenges that graphic designers confronted when applying the knowledge and experience

gained outside China to their local practice, as well as how they tackled with these problems. In doing so, the design history methods I learned in the Victoria and Albert Museum and Royal College of Art joint programme in History of Design were applied within the context of China. The in-depth analysis concerning the political and economic impact on design, as well as the research methodology used, is currently unusual in Chinese graphic design history research.

The thesis has situated graphic designers' practices and broader shifts within the context of the changing political, economic and social environment in China. The thesis also focuses on the role of external factors, such as government policy and social environment, in the development of Chinese graphic designers' professional skill and their evolving understanding about design. The phenomenon of design in Shenzhen and Shanghai, where designers grew together with local private enterprises after specific beneficial policies by the government was implemented in both of these important pilot cities for the reform and opening up, exemplified this. The thesis demonstrates how some of the designers were gradually realising the crucial importance of these external factors and took corresponding action. Take for example, Wang Yuefei, the initiator of the Graphic Design in China exhibition and the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association, pointed out in interview that the reason for the "fast food" culture in Shenzhen, where professional achievements could not be successfully applied to the commercial field and design could be purchased cheaply by the market was the lack of a design discipline in public education.⁸³³ Chen Shaohua's slogan "design helps the construction of a country" further illustrates that design was important because it was not only an subject in the field of culture and art, but also something connected to the quality of people and creativity, something of importance for the government to pay more attention to.⁸³⁴

A core aspect of this larger historical context, explored directly in this thesis, is the completely Westernised attitude held by some graphic designers in the south of China in the 1980s and 1990s that are examined in the thesis reflects the situation and influence of graphic design education, relevant favourable policies by the Chinese government, and international exchange at the time. Meanwhile, it can also broaden our understanding about the dilemma this group of designers had to confront in the 2000s when Shenzhen's advantage as an experimental field of reform and opening up was no longer significant, and when international design resources were more accessible due to the emergence of the internet.

⁸³³ 'Shenzhen Designer Wang Yuefei: Being Playful, Knowing How to Play and Enjoying Play Is also A Kind of Appeal', in *Design China* <<http://www.linux4life.com/graphic/sjr/82634.html>> [accessed 29 June 2019] (《深圳设计师王粤飞：好玩、会玩、喜欢玩也是一种号召力》，刊载于中国设计之窗网站)

⁸³⁴ Han Fangfang, 'Chen Shaohua: The Designer's Idea to Construct Country', in *VisonUnion* <<http://www.visionunion.com/article.jsp?code=200804200005>> [accessed 20 October 2018] (韩方方，《陈绍华：设计师的立国理想》，刊载于视觉同盟网站)

More specifically, the case studies of those designers who developed reflective thinking during the process of learning and practice in a crossing-cultural environment, such as Wang Xu, Wang Min and Lu Jingren, reveal the crucial role that international exchange, whether conducted directly or indirectly, played in the development of graphic design in China. Take for example, Wang Xu's encounter with Kohei Sugiura in 1986 which diverted him from his fervent worship of Western design and encouraged him to reflect on his journey and pay attention to local culture to draw inspiration for his design work while learning from international designers.⁸³⁵ This cultural attitude was passed on to Jiang Hua, one of the younger generation of designers and one of the initiators of Social Energy through frequent and close communication between the two. For Wang Min, who went abroad to search for a method to help improve Chinese design education, his experience at Adobe working on the promotional materials for the Garamond typeface shaped his understanding about the relationship between technology, history and culture.⁸³⁶ As a result, in 2006 when he went back to CAFA, he established the China Typography Research Centre (中国文字设计研究中心) where study on Chinese typeface design history was conducted.⁸³⁷

Although focused on graphic design, the findings in the thesis about practitioners' experiences within a changing environment are useful for understanding the social history of contemporary China more broadly. For example, they may be relevant for scholars interested in how the marketisation of the economy and engagement with global trade networks and economic systems has impacted on and been shaped by individual practitioners' work. Meanwhile, it provides new materials for the research on how creative practitioners have worked within this environment. Much research has been conducted on contemporary Chinese art and film, through publications and in the form of group or solo exhibitions in prestigious museums around the world, such as "Inside Out: New Chinese Art" at MOMA PS1 in New York from 1998 to 1999,⁸³⁸ and "Untitled", the group show that included Chinese artist Cui Xiuwen (崔岫闻) at

⁸³⁵ Wang Xu interview with the author, through WeChat, 24 October 2017.

⁸³⁶ On Wang Min's trip abroad and his aim to improve Chinese design education, see Zheng Juxin, Chen Yongyi and Yu Jiadi, 'Professor Wang Min, Dean of CAFA Design School Talks about the Comparison of the Design from the East and West' (郑巨欣、陈永怡、俞佳迪, 《中央美术学院设计学院院长王敏教授谈东西方设计比较》). The text was provided to the author by Wang Min, through email, 7 February 2017. The text situated in Wang Min's personal archive; On the impact of the working experience in Adobe on Wang Min, see Wang Min, 'Morning Light: Adobe Typeface Design in the Desktop Publishing Era', in *Zhuangshi*, 6 (2013)(China Zhuangshi Periodical Office, 2013), 26 (pp. 22-26) (王敏, 《晨光初现: 桌面出版时期的奥多比字体设计》, 中国装饰杂志社, 2013, 第6期, 第26页)

⁸³⁷ Ibid.

⁸³⁸ 'Inside Out: New Chinese Art', in *Museum of Modern Art New York* <<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/4638>> [accessed 23 August 2019]

Tate Modern, London, in 2004.⁸³⁹ My research on design added new content to this research that had not received much attention before.

A fourth contribution of the thesis is to raise autonomy as a core issue for past, current and future graphic design practice in China. The thesis explains and analyses the complexity of various kinds of “autonomy”. In Chapter Three, the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress, the 2009 Icofrada Beijing Congress and Social Energy were juxtaposed. These three influential graphic design international exchanges took place in the early 2000s alongside the evolvement of cultural policies by the Chinese government and the transformation of the relationship between international design organisations and Chinese design circles. The thesis seeks to reframe the scholarly assessments of the autonomy of contemporary Chinese graphic design in previous studies in which the autonomy of Chinese graphic design was simplistically equated with the emphasis on Chineseness in isolated design phenomena, through introducing its complexity presented from systematic research on design practice from various regions in the sophisticated social environment during the time period from the 1980s to 2010.

These debates about the significance and presentation of Chinese tradition and culture were actually debates about the autonomy of Chinese design. Many Chinese designers reconceptualised their vision of contemporary design as they reassessed their understanding of Chinese tradition and culture during the process of international exchanges. The thesis emphasises the ways in which designers in China intersected with international networks, and the specificity of each location. In doing so, it analyses the impact of these intersections on practice and self-positioning.

The thesis suggests that the debates about autonomy through design work, exhibitions, competitions and international exchange played a crucial role in the process of the development of contemporary Chinese graphic design. It is important to point out that the complexity of this “autonomy” was presented at different historical stages and situations. Some designers’ “autonomy”, usually reflected in their emphasis on the Chineseness of design was interwoven with patriotism, a product of ideology as national political propaganda, some with an abstract concept of China. This phenomenon, however, was not limited to a certain age group, but existed among designers of different generations. For example, for Yu Bingnan, the idea of connecting China with international design circles and introducing more Chinese designers to these organisations originated from his desire to contribute to the country as one of the first group of students sent abroad by Chinese government. Meanwhile, there is a belief among the younger generation of Chinese designers that the development of the Chinese economy will inevitably make Chinese design stronger. In the context of globalization, the concept of

⁸³⁹ ‘Untitled: Julia Loktev, Julia Rudelius, Cui Xiuwen’, in *Tate* <<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/untitled-julia-loktev-julika-rudelius-cui-xiuwen>> [accessed 23 August 2019]

“autonomy” in Chinese graphic design, whether presented in packaging design as a commercial method or in poster design accepted for international design competitions, has become a force to motivate Chinese graphic designers to pay attention to traditional local culture and to carry out in-depth thinking and research on it. The various visual interpretations of this concept created by the designers from different generations also represent the process of the modern transformation of traditional culture in China through the language of graphic design.

A fifth contribution is methodological. The thesis applies a method that has not previously been much used in the research on contemporary Chinese graphic design. When discussing and analysing the phenomenon of global interaction, as well as globalism and material culture, that have had a profound influence on Chinese graphic design, the research method of global design history proposed in *Global Design History*, together with other methods for transnational analysis, is applied. Therefore, in the process of research, special attention was paid to the impact the Western design concepts, styles and methods on Chinese graphic designers through publications and product packaging, as well as the specific process for the transformation of this knowledge through the thinking and practice of the Chinese graphic designers in the local environment. Take for example, the gradual change in Wang Yuefie’s understanding about “Western standards” after years of experience of participating in international design competitions; the gap between the arrangement by the local organisers of the 2004 AGI Beijing Congress and the expectation of the international delegates. The research methods of global design history provided an effective way to present the real state of the development of graphic design in China from the 1980s.

A final contribution to knowledge is both highly personal and perhaps instructive for other researchers who study their home country from abroad. The thesis tries to tackle the complicated issues in the history of contemporary Chinese graphic design and represents them in a reflective way with critical thinking. My research was an open and continuous process of exploration with questions I asked in my previous fifteen years of studying and working experience as a starting point. Like some of the designers in the thesis who experienced a difficult journey to rediscover autonomy, I also went through many transformations in my research. Coming to the RCA with the idea of acquiring systematic training in design history, I originally regarded “Western” design history writing as a style. It was not until I had spent years participating in the courses at the RCA, attending international design conferences and being exposed to the cultural environment in London, that I realised the sophistication behind this “style”, which was a combination of knowledge, research method and ideology in which critical and reflective thinking were encouraged. Under these circumstances, I was able to view my research subject and materials from different perspectives with new methods to reveal layers of meaning which had previously been hidden from me. This process helped me to gain a better understanding of the difficult journey that some of the designers referred to in my thesis experienced to rediscover autonomy, from a journey in one direction of learning from the West to the journey of “walking on chopsticks”

when they learned to combine the influence of both Chinese and international design in a more thoughtful and careful way.

Therefore, my research itself is an open and continuous process of exploration. In this process, full of challenges, I went through many transformations, after participating in courses at the RCA and in the V&A/RCA History of Design programme, attending international design conferences and being exposed to the cultural environment in London. The transformation I mention here refers not only to the acceptance of new knowledge, but also to the comprehension of certain concepts from a literal understanding to gaining the ability to apply them in research, such as my understanding of critical and reflective thinking, which was not emphasised and encouraged in my previous living and work environment.

2. Limitations and Areas for Further Research

A first limitation of the thesis lies in how I have been able to treat gender issues in the field of contemporary Chinese graphic design. The key figures discussed in the thesis as having had a significant impact on graphic design in China during this period are all male. This phenomenon clearly reflects the gender issues in this field. While carrying out my research, especially later in the process, I became aware of this issue. Further research on this phenomenon would lead to questions such as: why, with the proportion of female students in art and design schools increasing, does the balance of men and women who have gained socially recognised professional achievements among the long-time practitioners in the art and design industry, show the opposite trend?⁸⁴⁰ Why was the gender issue not confronted in the field of contemporary Chinese graphic design? The pursuit of these kinds of questions, as well as the discussion about the social, political and historical reasons behind it, would be a particularly meaningful perspective for this research.

Second, the thesis focused on designers rather than on design education. This decision was made in consideration of access to reliable research materials that could be used to analyse the phenomenon in the field of contemporary Chinese graphic design due to the complicated situation of design education in China. The complexity was reflected in the changing number of design schools, as well as their history and geographical locations. According to the statistics of design schools and schools with design curricula in the past decade, the figure was increasing at the rate of 6 per cent per year before 2012 when the number of schools peaked at around

⁸⁴⁰ Li Tingting, “Woman as Designer, as Artists, as Wife, as Mother, as Daughter, and as a Media Creator” (《女性是——设计师、艺术家，也是妻子、母亲和女儿，更可以是媒体创造者》)， “Women’s Empowerment through Media” seminar in Shantou University, November 18-19, 2011. (Unpublished; Digital file situated in Li Tingting’s personal archive).

2000.⁸⁴¹ In 2010, there were about one million design students in China.⁸⁴² However, there is a risk in using and making a comparison with the information provided by these schools, the method commonly used in quantitative research. Take for example, the same course title in the curriculum from different schools located in various cities did not indicate the same content, which was decided by the teaching staff, the domestic and international resources of the dean and the history and tradition of the school, as well as the location of the school where regional culture and local economic factors would have a certain impact. In addition, there were also immediate adjustments to the setting of disciplines arranged by schools in order to satisfy the teaching evaluation from the Ministry of Education. Under such circumstances, to conduct research with a targeted group of designers based on an in-depth analysis of their individual trajectories, which reflected personal experience and universal phenomena, was a practical and effective way to reveal the situation of China's graphic design education. Compared to research focused on design education, the limitation of this choice is that it could not provide a more systematic and comprehensive study in this area.

Third, the thesis was based on research on a group of successful designers. From the perspective of the authenticity of the data, as well as the feasibility of data collection, there were more approaches to obtain information about them from multiple channels, for example, interviews conducted by journalists at different times. This, together with their personal archives, the information on events they organised or participated in, the opinions of their peers and the other participants on these events, as well as the interviews I conducted, created a structure where the research materials from various perspectives could be examined. In addition, many of the events organised by this group of designers had a profound influence on the field of Chinese graphic design. The research focused on these designers helped an understanding of the formation of the pattern of contemporary Chinese graphic design, as well as the driving forces behind it. The focus, however, also means that insufficient attention has been paid to other design groups and phenomena. For further research in the future, the following aspects might be included: the employment status of design graduates, as well as the phenomenon of the emerging young designers with educational experience outside China working on inclusive design projects to help vulnerable groups in society since 2010.

The thesis works from extensive interviews and other primary material accessible only through close consistent contact with people, including the key figures from the field of contemporary Chinese graphic design, design educators, and those involved in the realisation of the relevant

⁸⁴¹ Xu Ping, 'Designers Must Stand at the Forefront of Advanced Productivity', in *designmag* <<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ZvyRLqMMzBtF2d4iye3hUQ>> [accessed 31 January 2019] (许平, 《设计师要站在先进生产力的最前端》, 刊载于《设计》杂志网站)

⁸⁴² Zhu Shuai, 'What Can Icoграда Congress Bring to Us? A Conversation with Wang Min, the Dean of CAFA Design School', *Art Observation*, 4 (2010), 26-27 (p. 27) (祝帅, 《“世界设计大会”带给我们什么? ——王敏访谈》, 刊载于《美术观察》, 第27页)

design events. This enabled me to conduct in-depth research to disentangle the multiple reasons, including political, economic, cultural and individual factors, for the sophisticated phenomenon of contemporary Chinese graphic design. At the same time this meant that I could not devote time to other research directions. These include contextualising the study within creative industries and practice in China more broadly. Take for example, research on how to compare my findings to research on filmmakers, artists and architects' responses to globalisation in China. Or to place my findings in relation to the impact of urban development, for example, the influence of changing workplace structures on people. All these would be fruitful next steps.

Despite these limitations, the thesis has aimed at nothing less than a major contribution to the history of graphic design in China since the arrival of reform and opening up in 1979. Methodologically and conceptually, the thesis demonstrates a new approach to writing Chinese design history to design history researchers and graphic designers in China, where, for ideological reasons, design is still regarded as a technical method. When carrying out research, design historians in China are still struggling to access the limited research materials available. Intentionally or unconsciously, they have avoided key elements such as the political and economic factors, and their writing tends to demonstrate the "achievements" in the design field. This thesis offers the first critical, carefully researched history of graphic design in contemporary China, within the context of global network, to international design history researchers.

Appendices

Royal College of Art Mail - Research Ethics Application

24/09/2019, 18:18



Royal College of Art

Yun Wang <yun.wang@network.rca.ac.uk>

Research Ethics Application

12 messages

RCA Ethics <ethics@rca.ac.uk>

10 June 2019 at 14:58

To: Yun Wang <yun.wang@network.rca.ac.uk>

Cc: Sarah Teasley <sarah.teasley@rca.ac.uk>

Dear Yun,

Many thanks for submitting your Research Ethics application. This has been reviewed and assessed as Risk Category: Yellow.

We are pleased to inform you that, based upon the information you supplied, we can approve your application and you can progress with your research.

Please note that should you make any changes to this research project, you may need to apply for further ethics approval.

Please contact us at ethics@rca.ac.uk if you have any questions about the ethics process.

Kind regards,

Research Ethics Team

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Research Ethics

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Royal College of Art



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RESEARCH & RESEARCH & INNOVATION INNOVATION

Project Information Sheet

History of Contemporary Chinese Graphic Design in the Context of Globalisation

For further information
Supervisors: Dr Sarah Teasley,
Head of Programme, History of Design
Dr Livia Rezende,
Tutor History of Design
Yun Wang / 0745 98609 56 /
yun.wang@network.rca.ac.uk insert date

Dear

I am..... a student in the History of Design program at the Royal College of Art. As part of my studies, *I am* conducting a research project entitled *History of Contemporary Chinese Graphic Design in the Context of Globalisation*. You are invited to take part in this research project which explores the development of Chinese graphic design from the 1980s, after China began to implement the Reform and Opening up policy in December 1978, to today.

If you consent to participate, this will involve:

- Accept an interview which will take approximately (hour)
- The interview will be recorded and its transcription will be used for the thesis and publication
- Provide photographs and/or images that represent my work and activities, as discussed in the interview for thesis and publication

Participation is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time and there will be no disadvantage if you decide not to complete the interview. All information collected will be confidential. All information gathered from the survey will be stored securely.

If you have any concerns or would like to know the outcome of this project, please contact my supervisor Dr Sarah Teasley at the below address.

Thank you for your interest,



Royal College of Art



Royal College of Art

RESEARCH & RESEARCH & INNOVATION INNOVATION

Complaints Clause:

This project follows the guidelines laid out by the Royal College of Art Research Ethics Policy.

If you have any questions, please speak with the researcher. If you have any concerns or a complaint about the manner in which this research is conducted, please address the RCA Research Ethics Committee by emailing ethics@rca.ac.uk or by sending a letter addressed to:
The Research Ethics Committee
Royal College of Art
Kensington Gore
London
SW7 2EU



Royal College of Art

**RESEARCH &
INNOVATION**

Interview Consent Form

History of Contemporary Chinese Graphic Design in the Context of Globalisation

For further information
Supervisors: Dr Sarah Teasley,
Head of Programme, History of Design
Dr Livia Rezende,
Tutor History of Design
*Yun Wang / 0745 98609 56 /
yun.wang@network.rca.ac.uk*

I.....have read the information on the research project ("*The History of Contemporary Chinese Graphic Design in the Context of Globalisation*" thesis) which is to be conducted by (*research student Yun Wang*) from the Royal College of Art, and all queries have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to voluntarily participate in this research and give my consent freely. I understand that the project will be conducted in accordance with the Information Sheet, a copy of which I have retained.

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time, without penalty, and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing. I understand that any stored data may be developed.

I consent to:

- Participate in an interview which will take approximately (*1 hour*)
- The interview will be recorded and its transcription will be used for the thesis and publication
- Provide photographs and/or images that represent my work and activities, as discussed in the interview for thesis and publication



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RESEARCH & INNOVATION

I understand that all information gathered from the interview will be stored securely, and that my opinions will be accurately represented. Any images in which I can be clearly identified will be used in the public domain only with my consent.

Print Name:

Signature:

Date:

This project will be conducted in compliance with the Research Ethics Code of the Royal College of Art.

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