

Analysis of the element “He” (harmony) and Beijing Olympic games

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Abstract: Culture has been the center of attention in the design field because culture and design infiltrate mutually. This thesis analyzed the historical and connotation meanings from the evolvement of the shape of the character on the basis of analyzing the element “和” (harmony) and the opening ceremony of 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Then the focus was shifted onto “和” element's performance in the traditional art with different modes, such as its geometrical shape, homophony culture and sagas. Finally this thesis was developed through analyzing the “和” element's generation, innovation and application in modern design with the Olympic opening ceremony as an example. During the development, this thesis probed into “和”'s most representative visual expressiveness and the outlook and possibilities for He culture to be applied in modern design. Relative theories of semiology and linguistics were helpful in melting “和” culture into modern design to expect that Chinese style design can be recognized and identified.

Key words: *History, Culture, Semantics, Aesthetics and Experience in Design, Design Project Cases*

1. Introduction

As the most typical Chinese traditional culture, dominating the Chinese traditional culture and modern Chinese culture elements as a conjunction point to the world culture, “和” is an important element in the opening ceremony of Beijing Olympic Games, while the Olympic Games' opening ceremony is to express the Olympic spirit with the hosting country's unique ethos and cultural characteristics. This thesis is to analyze and study on the vision representation from the aspects of geometrical shape, colors with the Olympic opening ceremony as an example of Chinese “和” culture by Semiology and linguistic theories and the outlook and possibilities for “和” culture to be applied in modern design.

2. Geometrical shape and meaning evolvement of “和”

2.1 Geometrical shape and meaning evolvement of “和” (龠→盞→和)

	Font structure and literal meaning	meaning
龠	Left: “龠”, “龠” in oracle bone characters , indicating a musical instrument made by bamboo pipe in a similar shape with flute.	“龠” means to adjust the sounds from different finger holes in order to form a harmony chorus.
	Right: “禾” indicating the pronunciation	
味	Left: “口”, “甘” in oracle bone characters, in the similar shape of human being’s mouth.	In order to be delicious food, “禾” must be flavored by cooks with different spices (five spices). The flavoring represented from mouth is “和”.
	Right: “禾”, “禾” in oracle bone characters in the whole shape of a grain plant.	
盃	Upper: “禾”, indicating the flavored food	“味” means to flavor the tastes.
	Lower: “皿”, indicating the container for flavoring.	

2.2 和’ s extended meaning and its connotation

“和” flavoring the tastes and sounds’ adjusting can be extended to harmonizing, harmony, moderateness, pacification, etc.

1 · Blending tastes, sound to make them harmonious in ratios.

2. If one physical and psychological harmony as well as the harmony between others and selves from heart. Then he/she will be pleased in face, placid in mood, and gentle in behavior in interpersonal relationships. Harmonization can be achieved between people. Consequently, the universe will be peaceful with all the disputes and fights amicably settled down.

3. The verb “harmonize” means to coordinating contradictions, and to ensure conformance. By virtue of that, “和” has been interpreted as unification as another extended meaning. New terms can be created on the basis of “和”, such as “和味(flavored taste)”、 “和声(harmony sounds)”、 和谐人际关系(harmonious interpersonal relationships), etc.

Therefore, Chinese people summarize the interpretation of “和” as the followings

1. The harmony between the nature and human beings. That is, human beings and the nature achieve mutual existence and mutual development.

2. The harmony in interpersonal relationships. From the positive side, it is appreciated that mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, mutual help and win-win can be achieved between different individuals, individual and community, communities and communities, in order to realize the peaceful coexistence and mutual development of the human society.

3. The harmony in physical and psychological condition. Speaking positively, attention must be paid to coordinate the relations between the body and mind to harmonize the physical and psychological condition. Thus physical and psychological health can ensure a person in a happy condition for long. Speaking passively, while one is building his/her body and mind, some unhealthy problems will crop up due to disharmony between the body and the mind. Thus some dishonorable behaviors may happen.

2.3 The importance of the character “和”

1. It is a production of regional culture. China has a complicated landform. Diversity in geographic environment itself represents a unification of varieties. The complexity in territory has confined Chinese people to develop on the basis of agriculture with an agricultural economic mode of production. It also confined ancient Chinese production mode as family units. Integrated consciousness of a series of interpersonal relations became the powerful impetus to advance the birth and development of the ancient “harmony” concept. At the same time, the regional character also gave birth to Chinese people's early culture as “getting in tune with the time and environment”. Moreover, ethnic and religious variety led to Chinese people's extensive communication, compromising and tolerance. To sum up, “和” is a traditional culture that has been melted into every Chinese people's daily life. “和” has been the most representative Chinese culture.

2. It is a production of the long history. China has a long history with frequent dynasty subrogation, migrations. Additionally, ethnic and religious variety made the cultural elements diversified. For example, Cheong-sam is a Chinese element while it is the clothes for Manchu in China. Thus the succession of culture elements has a certain confine. However, culture element of “和” has been run through the whole Chinese history, dominating the Chinese traditional culture elements and modern Chinese culture elements.

3. It is a production of Chinese politics. China has such a long history that there have been a lot of natural disasters and civil wars. Disasters caused by the God and human beings activated the Chinese nation's adversity consciousness so that they have attached great significance to the coexistence between human beings and the nature.

4. Chinese “和” culture is also a conjunction point to the world culture.

3. extraction of “和” symbols from the traditional art

 <input type="radio"/> +smiling face	 Harmony Painting/ Ming Dynasty/Zhu jianshen, an emperor of Ming Dynasty The smiling maitreya Buddha is a Taoist, a shaman and a Confucians./It is a harmony existence of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, indicating a fine expectation of union and harmony.
 <input type="radio"/> +fusion	 Taiji chart/ 《Zhouyi》 Black and white circle means white in black, boundary line “s”, and black in white./All the things and circumstances are opposing to each other as well as mutually interdependence.
 <input type="radio"/> +smiling faces	All in Harmony/ Qing Dynasty/boy image Little boy and the characters“一团和气(all in harmony)” It means the harmony and felicity can be obtained by smiling to people all the time.
water lily	 Obtaining doubled happiness due to harmony / “荷(water lily)”is pronounced the same as“和” in Chinese. (water lily →kindness) / A good spouse or wealth is obtained due to kindness.
boxes	 The combination of five happiness / “盒(box)”is pronounced the same as“和” in Chinese.(Box→harmony) / With the five happiness, the family life will be blessed with felicity.
crane	 Six cranes getting together in spring / “鹤(crane)” is pronounced the same as“和” in Chinese. (Crane indicates peace) / millenarianism
The god “和”	 The two gods “和” and “合” / The god “和” is holding a water lily while the god “合”is holding a round box./The two gods represent the harmonious family life and couple relations.

4. Extraction of “和” symbols from the modern art(taking the opening ceremony of 2008 Beijing Olympic Games as an example)

“和”culture run through the whole Olympic Game as a center, thus the whole opening ceremony has taken it as the theme.

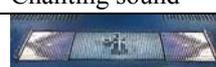
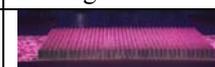
Chapters	striking pot and singing	Colors	M:  S: 
Figural symbols: Chinese characters,rectangles, loud voices			
Chapters	The fantastic five rings	Colors	M:  S: 
Figural symbols: Five rings, flying in the air, human sounds of gentle reciting			
Chapters	Singing for motherland	Colors	M: 
Figural symbols: Various ethnic groups, national flag, children’s voice, armyman			
Chapters	Painting scroll	Colors	M:  S: 
Figural symbols: Painting scroll, cloud veins, persons in dark, antiques, Chinese landscape paintings			
Chapters	characters	Colors	M:  S: 
Figural symbols: Human, bamboo slips, moveable type printing, reading voices, flute melody, three types of “和”, circles, rectangles, Great Wall, peachblossom, people waving to curtain call			
Chapters	Traditional Chinese opera	Colors	M:  S: 
Figural symbols: Figures in theatrical costume			
Chapters	The Silk Road	Colors	M:  S: 
Figural symbols: Flying in the air, Chinese landscape paintings sailboats, oars, waves, fan-shaping, tea, Compendium of Materia Medica, porcelains, compass			
Chapters	Rites-Music	Colors	M:  S: 
Figural symbols: Traditional Chinese opera, check dragon post, Pipa, dancers in ancient costumes			
Chapters	Star light	Colors	M:  S: 
Figural symbols: Piano, curves, the bird of peace, bird’s nest, swallows, kites, girls and concentric circles			
Chapters	nature	Colors	M:  S: 
Figural symbols: Water, waterfall, Taiji man in white costume, children’s voice, flowers, circles, bamboo flute, birds’ chirping, human voice, butterflies, phoenix and simple drawings			
Chapters	dream	Colors	M:  S: 
Figural symbols: Astronauts, the earth and Olympic sports			
Chapters	You and me	Colors	M:  S: 
Figural symbols: Sphericity, Children’s smiling faces			

(* M= Main colors; S=Supplementary color)

4.1 Direct demonstration of “和”

During *Culture* section of the second chapter of the opening ceremony, movable typographic group callisthenics made up of a huge“和” on the stage.

Steps:

				
	Chanting sound		waves, rectangle	The first “和”
				
circle	The second“和”	rectangle		The third“和”
				
Great Wall	diagonals	peach blossom	Chinese characters	curtain call

According to figural and abstract symbols, they can be classified as followings:

	Concrete emblems unique symbols for China. / Two font: seal font and Song font.Seal font is featured as consistency in thickness and evenness while Song font is full of force. / Traits: being square and upright.
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 Rectangle, circle	Rectangle: firmness, integrity, sincerity and sobriety Circle traits: curves and circles make people feel gentle and vibrant.
Movable type printing	One of ancient China's four famous inventions, and a trait symbol of Chinese culture. / Group Callisthenics indicate China's large population.
 Great Wall	It is the most influential Chinese symbol in the world. Traits: curves.
 peach blossom	It is a culture symbol of beauty, peace and harmony in traditional Chinese legends. / Traits: gentleness
Abstract emblems	
Blue	Representing placidity and peace. / Shape: the blue is in the shape of a circle.
Peachblow	Peachblow indicates new life with an implicative beauty, being gorgeous instead of elegant. / Shape: triangle or rectangle.
White	Simplicity, modesty, peace and the beauty of returning to nature
Human voice	Representing nature and vitality.

5. Conclusion

The opening ceremony of Beijing Olympic Games has demonstrated Chinese culture and its national image by using the characteristics of "He", and Olympic spirits. The abstract Chinese culture has been simplified, symbolized, and visualized through figural symbols, abstract geometrical symbols and large proportion of blue combined with white, black, yellow, red and green. In Chinese modern design, it can be formed a Chinese style index symbols by extracting the geometrical shapes and figural symbols representing Chinese "和" culture and by combining the extractions with the Chinese style colors or color groups. Therefore, even for people who do not have an understanding of oriental culture, they can imagine the Chinese culture. At the same time, Chinese characters can be in the role of a connotative image to surpass their physical shapes, to extract their abstract intentions and to explore the implied Chinese culture experience visualized in. In the application of modern media, attentions should be paid to the hearing experience besides visual experience. Chinese "和" culture acts like is a conjunction point to the world culture and a bridge between eastern and western culture. Therefore, "和" culture should be applied as much as possible in modern design. No matter in commercial field or cultural field, applications of "和" culture can obtain an excellent effect.

6. Examples Citations

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