



0221

## The Reorganization of Graphic Design History

W. H. CHOU

Asia University, Taichung, Taiwan

### Westernised Design history

William Addison Dwiggins first used the term 'graphic design' in 1922, devising it to address issues surrounding the seeming lack of professionalism of commercial art. (Meggs, 1998: xii) In particular, the title was meant to signify that his work had gone beyond mere graphic printing and employed professional rules of design and principles of visual styling. However, the applications and circumstance of graphic design have undergone much evolution and change since Dwiggins distinguished graphic design's need for professional recognition. From its beginnings in printing and commercial promotion, graphic design has morphed into a range of specialties, creating new terminology as it changed as diverse as brand mark, communication, identity, interface, and information design.

The objective of this research, however, is not to argue terminology but to open discussion and offer a critique with regard to the classification methods and focus of mainstream design history, especially as it reflects on the past, present and future circumstances of Taiwanese graphic design. Yet the comparative newness of the term 'graphic design' has had some important ramifications for the construction of graphic design history. Before design was considered a distinct professional field, it was conventionally classified under the category 'art', a classification that influenced many of the research methodologies and historiographic perspectives of design history.

John Walker A. established this in his groundbreaking work *Design History and the History of Design*. (Walker, 1989:16-18) Over the last two decades other writers have called for those perspectives and approaches absorbed into design history from art history to be reviewed. These include Tony Fry, whose work *Design History Australia*, clearly identified the dilemma of historical exclusion for all national design cultures considered peripheral to the economic, technical, cultural and geographic axis of Euro-America. In this influential piece Fry argues that due to Australia's removed geographic position from the 'centre of the world', relatively small population, low market output, and limited internationalization, it was seen as a nation almost without design.



Fry urged design historians and students to take into account unique perspective on the material world in which it is embedded and that it transforms.

Fry's point did not fall on deaf ears, with considerable reflection taking place in regards to the integrity of Australian design and the development of Australian design history as a postcolonial project. Fry himself, in his paper: 'A Geography of Power: Design History and Marginality', (Fry, 1989) specifically debates the marginalisation if not outright neglect of Australian design past and present, arguing for a systematic and regionally specific design history to be conducted in response to the territorial biases of general histories of design. In response to the canonical account of design presented in such a histories, an Australian design history would explore the nature and nurture factors that enabled the re-writing of design history specific to Australia, simultaneously uncovering the reasons why its history been ignored. Bradford R. Collins argues that after postmodernism, issues of bias against women and minorities in art historical research had been sufficiently challenged to invalidate the tendency to establish categorically exclusive canons of design and designers. (Collins, 1995) Collins concludes that the preference for aesthetics, in the case of connoisseurship, or authorial intent and art historical forces, in the case of canonization, had been so extensively questioned as to require much greater inclusiveness and reflection in the narration of design history, especially given its definitive impact on contemporary design thinking and activity.

Design history and criticism, however, continues to be influenced by three main hypotheses of cultural change; art history (art archaeology, monograph and autobiography, and style), modernism (capitalism, industrialization, functionalism, technology, progress), and social science (material culture). Histories of design are still mainly accounts of the *oeuvres* of single designers, or design or manufacturing companies, or connoisseurship. For Ellen Mazur Thomson the focus in design history on particular designer's stories severely skews the knowledge of broad cultural forces that design history should provide. (Thomson, 2001) The cultural imperialism of the majority of the corpus of design history is with no doubt, as it is also written by those who constituted the discipline. But it doesn't mean that artifacts and an associated system of values did not develop in other cultures. Quite the contrary, each and every culture has its unique perspective on the material world in which it is embedded and that it transforms.

### **Graphic design history in globalization**

From end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the circumstance of globalization requests us to emphasize on beware of the domination of capitalism and modernism that has gradually influenced research in different fields, leading to a clearer direction and adding support to areas of research often neglected. Many recent seminars held by the Design History Society Annual Conference indicate a will to expand the geographic horizons of graphic design history, as did the 2002 International Conference on Design History and Design Studies entitled 'Mind the Map: Design History beyond Borders' while journals such as *Design Issues* and *Journal of Design History* have pointed out the urgency and importance of redrawing the map of world design and reconceiving design history. Jonathan M. Woodham paved the way for future design history research by arguing it should be aimed at what was "missing" or "never been seen" in mainstream surveys of design. (Chou, 2005; Woodham, 2005)



This has initiated much reflection and reorganization on design history research at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The history of design, however, as Francois Furet has emphasized, is different, values in the present framing knowledge about the past and especially understandings about the facts. (Furet, 1985) However researches on the “present” has also to include historical research at differing levels based on the past, whilst a correct understanding of graphic design history is a basic and necessary knowledge for such a job. Current researches have indicated the tendency of developing the unique contribution other visions would bring, and which set of values they would foster. Especially for those regions which have been marginalized for long.

Culture in late capitalism is tied to broad global forces, though, as Arjun Appadurai argues, the traffic is not all one way, with the central tension in the contemporary world being that between ‘cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization.’ (Appadurai, 1996: 32) Appadurai confirms that a great weight of empirical evidence can be marshalled for the influence of Euro-American, and especially American culture as the hegemonic force the 21<sup>st</sup> century through the influence of their economies, media and consumer culture. But external forces are rapidly localized in one or more dimensions and as Appadurai argues, Americanization is not always the most pressing hegemonic force.

In the case of Taiwan one only has to consider the power and influence of China, though its sense of marginalization from the world at large (and consequent interest in Euro-American cultures) is increased by its political exclusion from the WTO and other global organizations as a result of China problems. For the health and development of Taiwanese design it is critical that we rebuild our design characteristics and capabilities from scratch on the basis of solid historical research into what Taiwanese design has been. Taiwanese culture can no longer be seen through centre-periphery structures, Terry Eagleton proposing that ‘global perspective’ or ‘global thinking’ shouldn’t necessarily mean the centralization of global power but rather the integration of domestic and indigenous criteria into global networks against a tide of irreversible loss. (Eagleton, 2005)

In thinking about the situatedness of Australian design, Simon Jackson argues that Denmark, Italy, Japan and Sweden have been much more successful in developing economically sustainable and culturally specific design cultures than Australia. (Jackson, 2002) He attributes this to the design cultures of those nations starting earlier than Australia, and their strong desire to present their cultural individuality to the world. For Jackson, however, Australia has a certain natural and geographic uniqueness, which led to the early pioneers adapting tools, for example, to environmental conditions with a certain degree of uniqueness. The second, for requiring the mainly focus onto design expertise; he suggested “Australian industrial design” should be called “design activity in Australia”. This stresses to concentrate on the design needs and related field within Australia, instead of mimicking the flavour of the mainstream. These observations on the formation of uniqueness in Australian design are also very applicable to Taiwanese design and design education

### **The Past and present graphic design history in Taiwan**

According to Wendy Siuyi Wong, (Wong, 2001, 2005) the design history of China is hardly heard or seen (9), and it was not until 1979 that it began to take shape. Matthew Turner, one of the few historians who paid



attention to the design history of China, said that the design history of Hong Kong prior to 1960 “simply was believed not to exist”. (Turner, 1995) Wong thought that the reason the modern design history of China had not been noticed by the Western world prior to this was because before the “open gate” policy of China enforced in 1979, most design was in the form of propaganda of communism, whilst the design activity in Taiwan was considered as being inspired and influenced by Hong Kong, and the development was between Hong Kong and Mainland China. (Wong, 1995) If we trace back the design theory, design knowledge and design activity of Taiwan in the last thirty years, most are examples of “modernism design” which were eager to follow in the lifestyle of the capitalistic metropolis and European civilization. In addition, the design history of China and other Asian countries other than Japan is considered to imitate the consuming and cultural value systems from western industrialized and commercialized countries. This imitation consequentially caused western nations to neglect the development and value of design in these areas. (Chou, 2005; Wong, 2001) What is perhaps far worse is that these superior industrialized countries considered the output of the developing and Asian nations as their own manufacture, duplicating and producing design for/from them.

Beside this, graphic design history research in Taiwan has another problem. Though the first design association organized in 1962, and there are a few relevant design associations such as Packaging Design Association, Graphic Design Association, and Designers Association, Poster Design Association, and Chinese Institute of Design, the foundation of graphic design history research in Taiwan has lacked sufficient peer cooperation and resources. On the one hand, current graphic design history research in Taiwan has been vaguely intertwined with that of architectural history and fine art history. It was roughly seen and talked of as one minor section in architectural or art history, or migrated into the cultural and social research approaches. Much research into architectural/industrial design /art/craft history has in the past vaguely made statements on behalf of graphic design history. Graphic design history in Taiwan actually hasn't build up its own specialized profession as graphic design in practice does. On the other hand, in existing Taiwanese graphic design history related research, first of all, it is short of communities to share and discuss the information. Very few researchers and educators who have dug out rare sources of information and completed study projects, haven't made their resources and contributions available to the public; secondly, the research itself has directed graphic design history towards capitalism or that of the fine art style research due to a lack of accurate knowledge of graphic design history research. In fact, the current research goes against some of the main principles of modern graphic design history that researchers desperately wanted to establish; also, the efforts to establish a professional and precise field on graphic design history research in Taiwan have so far not been profitable.

Something tacit and important here is that we do not only need to switch the focus of design study/graphic design history research in marginalization, we also need to conceive the true value of design, not the fragrance of art pieces, nor the splendor of new technology, but bring the quality of design principles into full view. Although graphic design history research have believed that the bias and focus adjustment on the past were necessary, under the premise of graphic design history research, we must recognize that design activity and behaviour are inevitable products of commercialized and industrialized society. Therefore their development was hard to detach from that of the commercialized and industrialized cultures and political colonization, as we have all appealed that design activity is integrated with its social context. Furthermore, after such long



debates, fighting the conventional research of graphic design history, we also have to admit that it is impossible to investigate the development of existing graphic design history by completely excluding or making a denial of the great impact of modernization, industrialization and capitalism and their consequences. Yet, after being blinded by the aforementioned for such a long period, we finally have the chance and capability to reveal this conscious/unconscious hegemony which has immersed our legitimacy. Also, for marginalized areas such as Taiwan, facing the force of colonial/postcolonial influence, whilst also investigating the acculturation in modern time and seeking the multiple approaches of history interpretation, in order to get the base to construct in future. Going back to the Taiwanese native literature debate in the seventies, the argument of this controversial movement has caused extensive impact in many areas, such as literature, fine art, music, and contemporary dance. It helped loosen the autocratic authority of the imported regime, enriched and hastened the hybrid culture in Taiwan. This is clear evidence of Pieterse's interpretation of 'postcoloniality', (Pieterse, 1995) in which we endeavor to recognize the inevitable hegemony and absolute essentiality of primordial ties, both endogenous and exogenous, whilst rebuilding the energy and character of current culture, and set up an environment of design discourse. (Conces, 2005)

#### **The further perspectives in the ground of graphic design history in Taiwan and East Asian**

To study the graphic design history and design education here in Taiwan, we of course must understand the history of the early migrants from the south mainland, the living conditions and utensils used by aborigines, the fine art design and industrial revolution during the Japanese ruling period, the influences from the coastal cities and the design of Hong Kong, to take race, colonialism, manufacturing and production practices, as well as multiple levels of political environment into consideration. At the same time, we must further coordinate with the current industrial structure, economical development and the present cultural status of Taiwan. Only when this has been completed can the graphic design history research of Taiwan possibly get away from the currently mistaken view of 'mass production' and 'style analysis' as well as the 'canon admiration' of modernism, and therefore get into the deep rooted graphic design history and find out the special meaning from a globalised viewpoint for Taiwan's design. This is vital, especially as it is now profitable to produce work on design history from within the marginalized areas, that this history not be produced based on a historical viewpoint of the past and that it should encapsulate a new and conclusive viewpoint and research method.

As the above discussion illustrates, design is originally the product of modernism and industrialized society, and when undergoing objective graphic design history research, it is undeniable that the repeat indications of this thesis regarding European hegemony, capitalism, industrialization, commercialized or aesthetic graphic design history perspectives and methodologies have long been planted in the self-realization of the Europeans and the thought that they are more advanced and superior (Kaelble, 2005) and whilst such attitude appears too proud, biased and foolish it has been unavoidable in previous research. On the other hand, for a long time, the emerging and weaker nations have been involved in an endeavour to pursue and imitate the advanced western countries, hoping to get a chance for presentation, expression and recognition. Therefore, the Western powers must be alarmed at the world that they have seen is a world formed within their own image. They have been at the epicentre of power, yet could not see the design from the non-industrialized, non-capitalist world.



For a country like Taiwan that has long been neglected, when faced with its own graphic design history writing and understanding, it should be able to reshape a history of its own. Take Turkey, Mexico, India, Brazil and Cuba for example, these countries have been actively re-interpreting their local design culture and history, (Margolin, 2005) and emphasizing that after understanding the research approach of Western hegemony, the association between design development itself and those viewpoints, you must then return to the native cultural specialty significant to that nation in order to write its design history. (Uriarte, 2005) Such as the graphic design history in Mexico, researchers took graphic design is a tool for progress, but it is employed in the contradictory condition of underdevelopment. They look at their own history, struggle to reach modernity, subordinated at different times to the power of Spain, France, and the U.S., and finally now they are looking into their culture and history to find their your identity. (Casas, 1997) Another example like India, which is the place thousands of Indians developing the high level software language. Poonam Bir Kasturi, an Indian educator experienced in consultation to craft practices, disputes some of the myths associated with “contemporizing” craft, and addresses the future through example: collaborations that include broad creativity training (reflection, critical thinking, and experimentation); bringing student groups to talk and work with craftspeople (another form of the fieldwork mentioned by Balaram); careful choices of new markets to maintain makers’ identity and to avoid the social destabilization of craft communities. (Scotford, 2005) They are looking forward to provide historical and cultural context for the efforts of design schools and individuals. Design itself will then make more practical and local sense, and design history will achieve a breakthrough in viewpoint. This will enable graphic design history research to be undertaken with complete self-determination according to the character of the design activity and the actual socio-cultural factors; not to be influenced by the value system of historical research that allowed graphic design history to jump out the subordinate status in cultural research to struggle between colonialism and marginalized power, or even being at the present hot topic- panic and anxiety caused by globalization.



## Reference

- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Archer, L. B. (1981). A View of the Nature of the Design Research. in R. Jacques, J. A. Powell, eds., *Design: Science: Method*, Guilford, Surrey, IPC Business Press Ltd., pp. 30–47.
- Athavanker, U. A. (1997). Objects and Cultural Notions: Design Challenges in the Developing World. paper presented at 3rd International Design Education Forum of Southern Africa, 'Design for Developing Countries' conference, CSIR, Pretoria, 24–27 March 1997, Pretoria RSA, Pretoria Technikon: p.2.
- Athavanker, U. (2002). Design in Search of Roots: An Indian Experience'. *Design Issues*, 18(3), pp. 43-57.
- Baljon, C. J. (2002). History of history and canons of design. *Design Studies*, 23(3), pp. 333-343.
- Braun, I. and Bernwar, J. (1992). Techniques du quotidien et macrosystèmes techniques', in Alain G., Bernard J., and Victor S., eds., *Sociologie des techniques de la vie quotidienne*, Paris, L'Harmattan, pp. 69-86.
- Buchanan, R. (2004). Human-centered Design: Changing Perspectives on Design Education in the East and West. *Design Issues*, 20(1), pp. 30-39.
- Buckley, C. (1986). Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Critique of Design. *Design Issues*, 3(2), pp. 3-14, reprinted in V. Margolin(ed.) (1989) *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, pp. 251-262.
- Buntman, B. (1996) Selling with the San: Representations of Bushman People and Artefacts in South African Print Advertisements. in *Visual Anthropology* 8, Amsterdam, Overseas Publishers Association, p. 335.
- Casas, Amulfo Aquino. (1997). Graphic Design in Mexico: a critical history, *Print*, 51(1), pp. 98-104.
- Calvera, A. and Miquel M. (eds). (1999) *Design History Seen from Abroad: History and Histories of Design*, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona.
- Chant, C. (ed) (1989). *Science, Technology and Everyday Life 1870-1950*, London, The Open University.
- Cheney, S., and Martha C. (1936). *Art and the Machine. An Account of Industrial Design in 20-century America*, New York, Whittlesey House.
- Chou, W. H. (2005). *Diagramming Design History-an analytical, design-based approach*, Degree thesis of Professional Doctorate in Design, Faculty of Design Swinburne University of Technology.
- Chung, S. K. (2003). Redeveloping Design Education in Hong Kong? *Design Issues*, 19(3), pp. 83-93.
- Collins, B. R. (1995). Rethinking the Introductory Art History Survey. *Art Journal*, 54(3), p. 23.
- Conces, R. J., *Book Review: The Decolonization of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge and Power*, Retrieved Nov. 15 2005, from <http://www.unomaha.edu/philosophy/pieterse.htm>.
- Crowley, D. (1992). *National style and nation-state: Design in Poland from the vernacular revival to the international style*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- Eeden, J. V. (2004). The Colonial Gaze: Imperialism, Myths, and South African Popular Culture. *Design Issues*, 20(2), pp. 18-33.
- Dilnot, C. (1984). The State of Design History. Part I: Mapping the Field. *Design Issues*, 1(1), pp. 3-23.
- Dilnot, C. (1984). The State of Design History. Part I: Problems and Possibility. *Design Issues*, 1(2), pp. 3-20.
- Eagleton, T. (2005). *After Theory*, translated by Lee, San-Yi, San Chou Publishing Co., Taipei, Taiwan.
- Fry, T. (1988). *Design history Australia: a source text in methods and resources*, Sydney, Power Institute of Fine Arts.
- Fry, T. (1989). A Geography of Power: Design History and Marginality. *Design Issues*, 6(1), pp. 15-30.
- Gorman, C. R. (2001). Reshaping and Rethinking: Recent Feminist Scholarship on Design and Designers. *Design Issues*, 17(4), pp. 72-88.
- Gravier, M. G. (2002). Nineteenth-Century Mexican Graphic Design: The Case of Ignacio Cumplido. *Design Issues*, 18(4), pp. 54-63.
- Green, N., and Lascaris. R. (1990). *Communicating with the Third World: Seizing Advertising Opportunities in the 1990s*, Cape Town, Tafelberg Human & Rousseau.
- Heskett, J. (2001). Past, Present, and Future in Design for Industry. *Design Issues*, 17(1), pp. 18-26.
- Jackson, S. (2002). The "Stump-jumpers:" National Identity and the Mythology of Australian Industrial Design in the Period 1930-1975. *Design Issues*, 18(4), pp. 14-23.
- Kaelble, H. (2005). *歐洲人談歐洲：十九與二十世紀歐洲自我認識的形成* (柯燕珠譯), 左岸文化出版。
- Leong, B. D. in conversation with Clark H. (2003), Culture-Based Knowledge Towards New Design Thinking and Practice—A Dialogue. *Design Issues*, 19(3), pp. 48-58.
- Maldonado, T. (1998). Ancora la tecnica. Un "Tour d'horizon", in Michela Nacci, ed., *Oggetti d'uso quotidiano. Rivoluzioni tecnologiche nella vita d'oggi*, Venezia, Marsilio, pp. 197-227.
- Maldonado, T. (1999). Gli occhiali presi sul serio. Paper for the Conferences "Sapere e narrare. L'uomo e la macchina," Firenze, November 19, 1999.
- Margolin, V. (1995). The Product Milieu and Social Action'. in R. Buchanan and V.Margolin, *Discovering Design. Explorations in Design Studies*, Chicago, The University Chicago Press, pp. 121-145.



- Margolin, V. (eds), al. (2002). A "Social Model" of Design: Issues of Practice and Research. *Design Issues*, 18(4), pp. 24-30.
- Margolin, V. (2005). A World History of Design and the History of the World. *Journal of Design History*, 18(3), 2005, pp. 235-243.
- Scotford, Martha. (2005). Introduction: Indian Design and Design Education. *Design Issues*, 21(4), pp. 1-3
- Meggs, P. B. (1998). *A history of graphic design*, New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Pasca, V. and F. Trabucco (eds.) (1995). *Design: storia e storiografia*, Bologna, Progetto Leonardo.
- Penati, A. (1999). *Mappe dell'innovazione. Il cambiamento tra tecnica, economia e società*, Milano, Etas.
- Pieterse, J. N. and Parekh, B. (eds.) (1995). *The Decolonization of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge and Power*, London, Zed Books.
- Rausing, S. (1998). Signs of the New Nation: gift exchange, consumption and aid on a former collective farm in north-west Estonia in Miller, D. ed., *In Material cultures: why some things matter*, UCL Press, London.
- Richards, C. (1991). About Face. *Third Text— 3rd World Perspectives on Contemporary Arts and Culture*, Autumn/Winter, London.
- Sauthoff, M. (2004). Walking the Tightrope: Comments on Graphic Design in South Africa. *Design Issues*, 20(2), pp. 34-50.
- Sutherland, I. (2004). Paradigm Shift: The Challenge to Graphic Design Education and Professional Practice in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *Design Issues*, 20(2), pp. 51-60.
- Thomson, E. M. (2001). Review of Martha Scotford, Cipe Pineles: A Life of Design. *Journal*, 7(1), p. 180.
- Turner, M. (1995). Early Modern Design in Hong Kong in Doordan, D. P. ed. *Design History: An Anthology*, Cambridge, MIT Press.
- Uriarte, L. F. (2005). Modernity and Postmodernity from Cuba. *Journal of Design History*, 18(3), pp. 245-255.
- Walker, J. A. (1989). *Design History and the History of Design*, London, Pluto Press.
- Wang, S. Z. (1995). Chinese Modern Design: A Retrospective in Doordan, D. P. ed. *Design History: An Anthology*, Cambridge, MIT Press.
- Wang, S. Z. (2001). Detachment and Unification: A Chinese Graphic Design History in Greater China Since 1979, *Design Issues*, 17(4), pp. 51-71.
- Wong, W. S. (2005). From On-site to On-line: Experience on Transforming Exhibition. Retrieved Nov. 15 2005, from <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2003/papers/wong/wong.html>
- Woodhouse, E., and J. W. Patton. (2004). Design by Society: Science and Technology Studies and the Social Shaping of Design. *Design Issues*, 20(3), pp. 1-13.
- Woodham, J. M. (2005). Local, National and Global: Redrawing the Design Historical Map. *Journal of Design History*, 18(3), pp. 257-267.