Detachment and Unification: A Chinese Graphic Design History in Greater China Since 1979
Wendy Siuyi Wong

The illustrations are identified by the name of designer, the client or title of the work, the design category, and the year. The title of the work is the author's own title, if an official name is cannot found. All woks reprinted with permission of the designer.

1   Matthew Turner, "Early Modern Design in Hong Kong" in Dennis P. Doordan, ed., *Design History: An Anthology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 212. This article was first published in *Design Issues,* 6:1 (Fall 1989): 79–91; also Matthew Turner, "Development and Transformations in the Discourse of Design in Hong Kong" in Rajeshwari Ghose, ed., *Design and Development in South and Southeast Asia* (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1990), 123–36.

2   The translation of the Chinese names used in this paper is based on the Chinese system in which the family name is first and the given name last. English names are used if they have been established by individual designers. The system of translation of Chinese names to English used in this article is based on the Romanization of Cantonese for Hong Kong and Macau designers, or the Romanization of Mandarin for mainland China and Taiwanese designers, and the Romanized names already established by individuals.

3   Shou Zhi Wang, "Chinese Modern Design: A Retrospective" in Dennis P. Doordan, ed., *Design History: An Anthology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).
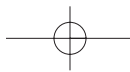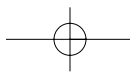
Introduction

The history of modern Chinese design is virtually unknown due to its relatively late development compared to design in the West. Not until recent decades, since the opening up of China in 1979, has a unifying Chinese graphic design history started to form. This was assisted by China's rapid economic development and interactions with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau; which, together with mainland China, make up the Greater China region. Traditionally, in academic practice, it was common to separate the investigation of these individual Chinese societies. Matthew Turner, one of the few Western historians to examine Chinese design, notes that the history of Hong Kong design prior to the 1960s "simply was believed not to exist." [1] Chinese-trained design scholar Shou Zhi Wong [2] emphasizes that there has been very little written about modern design in mainland China, because design activity under the communists before the start of the Open Door Policy in 1979 was mostly in the service of party propaganda. [3] Both Turner and Wang, as well as Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, published their works on Chinese design history before a number of key economic and political changes in China and Hong Kong took place.

With the return of Hong Kong and Macau to Chinese sovereignty in July 1997 and December 1999, respectively, it now is possible, and even preferable to consider a unified history of Greater China rather than simply the individual histories of these regions. In addition, during the past decade, important political solidification has taken place, and the various locales within Greater China have been engaged in increasing levels of cultural and economic exchange. Thus, it makes little sense at this time to consider each locale as a separate entity. Although Greater China cannot be considered a single entity for the purpose of writing a political history, a great deal of cultural similarity and creative cross-fertilization that has taken place throughout many decades in spite of political shifts of great magnitude. Arguably, then, the history of Chinese graphic design can be understood more meaningfully as encompassing the whole region rather than as a set of discrete local histories.

This article takes the potentially controversial position that Chinese design history should be studied as one unified whole rather than individual studies of several separate entities. It argues

that the development of graphic design in the Greater China region since 1979 involves shared common ground among the locales within the region such that their histories cannot easily be separated. This article will focus specifically on graphic design, examining artistic and commercial visual communication activities other than Communist Party propaganda. Its objective is to uncover the history of Chinese graphic design, and to begin to build the foundations of this history from a unified regional perspective.

Origins and Development Before 1979

Many of the influences that shaped modern design throughout Greater China had their origins in centuries-old Chinese arts and crafts traditions. These traditional elements later were combined with foreign influences to form dynamic modern design styles. The most prominent example of Chinese modern design may be found in the Shanghai style of the 1920s and 1930s. Design works produced in Shanghai during this period reflect various outside influences in large part due to the existence of numerous foreign concession zones in the city. As Minick and Jiao note, "[c]oming to a culture with such a strong decorative heritage, the geometric and patterned compositions of art deco only succeeded in fueling further the renewed interests in China's own past."[4] They refer to the "masterful synthesis"[5] characterizing Chinese design works at this time.

The Shanghai period represented both the beginning of Chinese modern design and the best of this emerging form before the Second World War. Creative design work of the quality produced in Shanghai could not be sustained during the war, and after the Communists gained power in 1949 commercial graphic design was seen as a symbol of "Western lifestyle" and said to be a "waste of national resources" because it encouraged the consumption of unnecessary products.[6] However, the Shanghai spirit of commercial graphic design continued under the capitalist economic system and British colonial rule in Hong Kong after the war.

The level of talent and quality of creative production in Hong Kong before 1950 was never equal to that of Shanghai, nor was the direction of development begun in Shanghai continued after this time. From the period after the war through the 1960s, commercial graphic design developed at a steady pace in Hong Kong. Turner argues that Hong Kong was able to maintain its modern Chinese design style until at least the 1960s, through the contributions of both mainland and Hong Kong designers.[7] He attributes a rapid fading of Hong Kong modern design style after 1960 to the influx of American companies and to government assistance for American design specialists, rather than local designers. Local Chinese designers previously trained in Guangzhou and Shanghai had to gradually alter their style to fit into the new commercial environment dominated by American companies, and

3   continued
    213-41. This article was first published in
    Design Issues, 6:1 (Fall 1989): 49–78;
    also Shou Zhi Wang, "The
    Internationalization of Design Education:
    A Chinese Experience" in Rajeshwari
    Ghose, ed.,*Design and Development in
    South and Southeast Asia,* (Hong Kong:
    Centre of Asian Studies, University of
    Hong Kong, 1990), 267–76.

4   Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese
    Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century*
    (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 38.

5   Minick and Jiao, *Chinese Graphic Design
    in the Twentieth Century,* 38.

6   Wang, "Chinese Modern Design: A
    Retrospective," 230.

7   Matthew Turner, *Ersatz Design:
    Interactions Between Chinese and
    Western Design in Hong Kong, 1950s-
    1960s* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation.
    Royal College of Art, London, 1993). His
    dissertation provides a detailed account
    of the interactions of modern Hong Kong
    design with Chinese, British, and United
   States traditions in the 1950s through
    1960s.
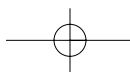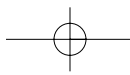
8   Turner, "Early Modern Design in Hong Kong," 209.

9   Henry Steiner graduated from the Art and Architecture School at Yale University with an MFA in Graphic Design in 1957. Before starting his career in Hong Kong, he worked in Paris and New York in various graphic design positions. He arrived in Hong Kong in 1961, and established his own company, Graphic Communication Limited, in 1964. He is the first designer based in Hong Kong to receive international attention and recognition. See Wang Xu, ed., *Henry Steiner: A Graphic Designer's Design Life* (Beijing: Chinese Youth Publishing, 1999). [In Chinese]

10 Henry Steiner and Ken Haas, *Cross-Cultural Design: Communicating in the Global Marketplace,* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 2.

11 The elements of cross-cultural design that Steiner generated in the book are "iconography," "typography," "symbolism," "split imagery," and "ideography." The book provided directions for designers to achieve a harmonious juxtaposition and interaction with their own culture and new surroundings. See Henry Steiner and Ken Haas, *Cross-Cultural Design.*

12 A Beijing-based magazine, *Art and Design*, published a special feature for Chinese readers entitled "100 Years Retrospective on Graphic Design in China." Contributors, including professors from major art institutes in China, give a brief account of graphic design on the mainland in the past hundred years. A study of articles in this special feature indicates that the major graphic design categories are publication design, old Shanghai advertising calendar posters, propaganda posters, and logo type design since the Open Door Policy in 1979. See *Art and Design* (Beijing: Art and Design Publishing House, 2000-2, issue 94) 3–20. [In Chinese].

13 Wang, "Chinese Modern Design: A Retrospective."

to meet the standard set by American-trained designers.[8] This transition was significant to the history of Hong Kong design, because it brought Western design theory and principles directly into contact with Chinese culture.

Among the newly arrived American designers during the early 1960s, Henry Steiner has been the most influential.[9] A graduate of Yale who arrived in Hong Kong in 1961, Steiner demonstrated new possibilities in incorporating Chinese cultural symbols and written characters into his otherwise Western-style designs. A student of Paul Rand, he practiced what he had learned about two important design principles, "the primacy of concept" and the use of contrast to "give life" to a design.[10] In Hong Kong, he established the principle of cross-cultural design,[11] successfully adapting the generally understood concepts of Western design into the Hong Kong/Chinese context. For example, in his poster for the Hong Kong International Music Festival in 1969 (figure 1), Steiner places the graphic presentation of the body of a butterfly between two ears, which function visually as the wings. The addition of pearl earrings adds the final symbolic reference, representing Hong Kong as the "Pearl of the Orient" to most local viewers. Steiner introduced the basic design principle of "concept" to Hong Kong design. His work brought local design closer to the international design style of the times, something that had not yet been accomplished by locally trained designers. It is difficult to know the extent to which the works of Henry Steiner provoked local Chinese designers to turn their thinking in the direction of Chinese cultural symbols and meanings. It certainly is the case that elements of response to the unique local environment in Hong Kong can be found in his work in the late 1960s. For example, in a 1972 logotype Steiner designed for Jade Creations (figure 2), the Chinese character for jade is used to form the final "E" in the company name. Thus, the name can be read in both English and Chinese by the Chinese reader. This innovative combined use of written languages can be seen in Steiner's work from the early 1970s forward, including in much work produced throughout the 1990s.

While Hong Kong was developing towards a new direction in graphic design through the inclusion of Chinese elements, communications between Taiwan and Hong Kong were not well established. Taiwan design was less developed than Hong Kong's due to political suppression and restricted personal freedom. Commercial graphic design also was less on the mainland under the tight ideological control of the communist regime. Propaganda materials such as posters and publications designed for the service of the party were the main graphic design activities.[12] The cultural revolution period from 1966 to 1976 brought about the virtual elimination of commercial graphic design work in mainland China.[13]

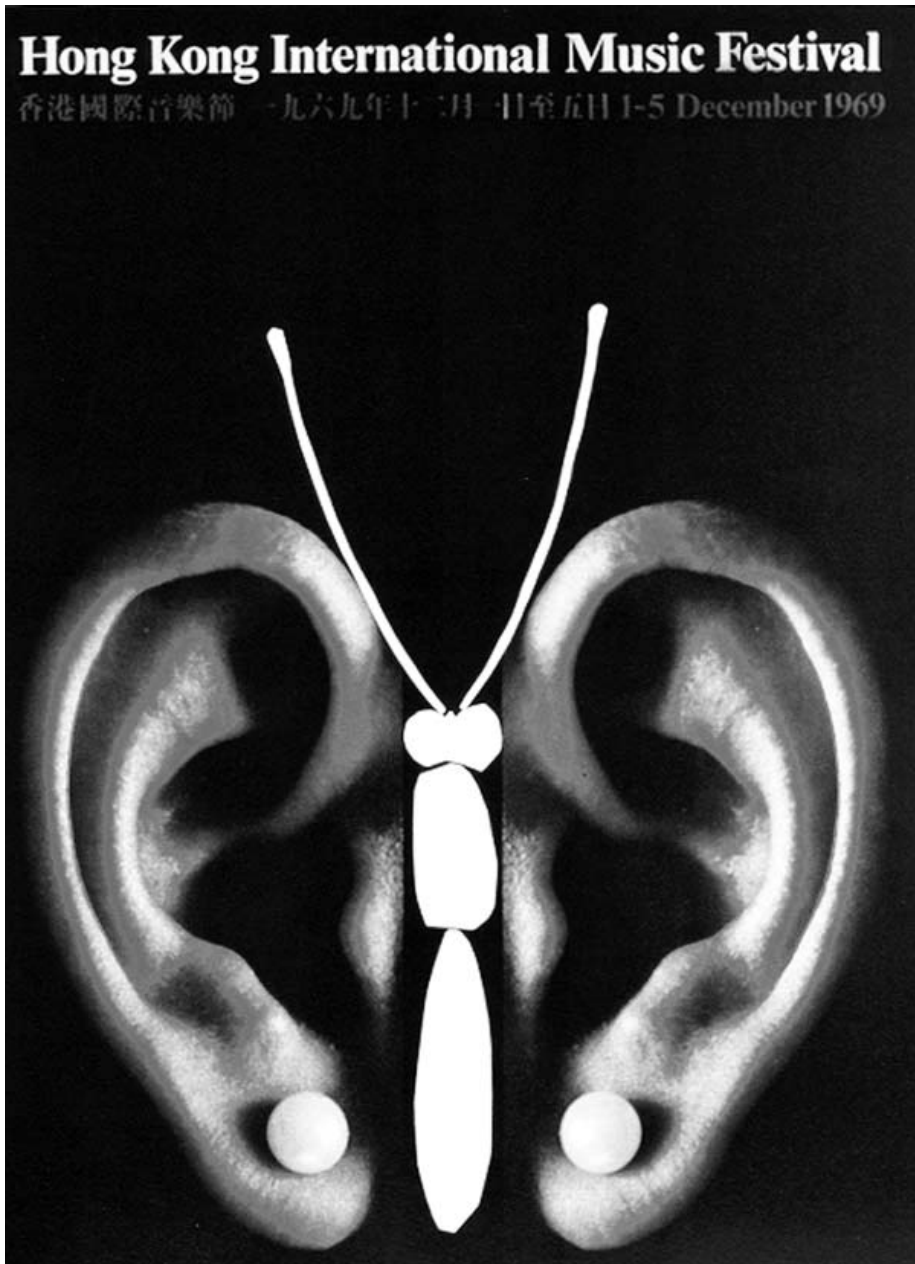The era of local design education began in the 1970s. Fundamental Bauhaus design principles were introduced and
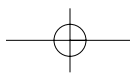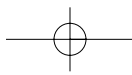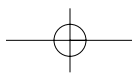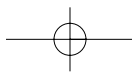
Figure 1, above
Henry Steiner, Hong Kong International Music
Festival, Cultural Poster, 1969.

Figure 2, right
Henry Steiner, Jade Creations, Logotype,
1972.

widely read among young designers in Hong Kong through the
books of Wucius Wong, an active design educator from the mid-
1960s to the early 1980s in Hong Kong. Wong was an American-
trained Chinese, whose two books, *Principles of Two-Dimensional
Design* and *Principles of Three-Dimensional Design*,[14] brought a strong
Western influence to design theory education in the region. In turn,
the new generation of emerging Hong Kong designers was heavily
imbued with Western sensibilities and design values.

Among the pioneer local designers in interpreting and
exploring the use of traditional Chinese folk art and high art ele-
ments in their design work is Kan Tai-keung. The retrospective of
his work published in 1998[15] reveals that Kan's early 1970s works
were devoid of Chinese elements, and simply followed the Western
style. Starting in the mid-1970s, he began to employ Chinese
symbols and images in his designs.[16] In a 1977 poster design pro-
duced for a graphic design course," a private design school, (figure
3) Kan explored the integration of traditional Chinese calligraphy
together with the constructive lines borrowed from Western typo-
graphic design. Choi Kai-yan was a pioneer who attempted to
apply Western typographic theory to Chinese writing. In his work
for the Baptist Press in 1977, (figure 4) Choi employed Chinese char-
acters but used icons to replace parts of them. For example, the
logotype design for the company places an icon of a book at the top
right of the character. In spite of the replacement, the character's
original meaning still can be read. This technique of adding icons
and meaning to Chinese characters became Choi's design signature.

The late 1970s marked the beginning of cultural exchange
activities between Hong Kong designers and institutions in main-
land China. After the cultural revolution ended in 1976 and prior to
the official announcement of China's Open Door Policy in late 1978,
some art and design institutions began to interact with overseas
organizations. Activities such as Kan Tai-keung's lecture on pack-
aging and graphic design at the Guangzhou Institute of Arts in
1978,[17] and the visit of the First Institute of Art & Design Association
of Hong Kong to the Central Arts and Crafts Academy in Beijing in
1979,[18] stimulated new developments in graphic design in mainland
China. These two visits were followed by exhibitions. The first, the
Hong Kong Designers Show, was held in 1979 at the Guangzhou
Institute of Arts. The second, Design '80, was held both in Hong
Kong and Beijing in 1980. These two events were some of the activi-
ties that introduced outside influence into the development of
contemporary graphic design directions in mainland China.

China had been cut off from the outside world, and there
were hardly any commercial art activities there for almost three
decades. Under such circumstances, the modern Chinese design
movement started in the 1930s by Shanghai designers was not able
to keep pace with the international design trends throughout this
period. With the introduction of the latest design trends through an

14   Wucius Wong, *Principles of Two
     Dimensional Design* (New York: Van
     Nostrand Rhinehold, 1974) and *Principles
     of Three-Dimensional Design* (New York:
     Van Nostrand Rhinehold, 1974).

15   Kan Tai-keung, *Selected Posters by Kan
     Tai-keung: Sentiments and Harmony*
     (Hong Kong: Kan and Lau Design
     Consultants, 1998).

16   See Wang Xu, ed., *Kan Ta-keung, Graphic
     Designer's Design Life.*

17   Ibid.

18   See First Institute of Art & Design
     Association, *Design '80* (Hong Kong: First
     Institute of Art & Design Association,
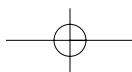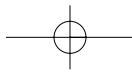   1980).

Figure 3
Kan Tai-keung, Studio II, Commercial Poster,
1977.

Figure 4
Choi Kai-yan, Baptist Press, Calendar, 1977.

increasing number of international exchanges, very little influence of the older generation of mainland designers was passed on to the younger generation in the 1980s and 1990s. The main direction of the design education system in mainland China, in today's context, is still based on a skill-training curriculum from the 1960s Russian model.[19] Creative and conceptual thinking have not been emphasized in design education. Thus, the influx of overseas design concepts, in which Hong Kong initially was significant, played an influential and inspirational role for young people and students such as Wang Xu and Wang Yue-fei, who later became a pioneer in graphic design in mainland China.

Spreading the Seeds of Communication in the 1980s
The 1980s was the era during which Hong Kong played a major role in fostering and building connections with design practitioners and institutes in mainland China and Taiwan. Hong Kong designers responded to the invitation of a Taiwanese graphic design group to participate in the Exhibition of Asia Designing Masters held in Taiwan in 1982.[20] Compared to work from Hong Kong, Taiwan graphic design was less exposed to Western design, due to the political constraints, censorship, and martial law on the island until 1987. The early 1980s also saw the rise of the awareness of Hong Kong Chinese of their identity due to the coming handover to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, which led to the development of two divergent design trends in Hong Kong. The incorporation and exploration of traditional Chinese elements, begun in the mid-1970s, was expanded and refined while, at the same time, other local design work developed in another direction toward the expression of pure Western themes.

Among the prominent Hong Kong designers to continue with the inclusion of Chinese elements in graphic design was Kan Tai-keung. As a practitioner of modern Chinese shuimo painting, Kan Tai-keung often used Chinese high art objects and brush strokes in his designs. For example, his transitional work between his Chinese style works in the mid-1970s and late-1980s is illustrated by a poster design for *Shui Mo: The New Spirit of Chinese Tradition* exhibition in 1985 (figure 5). Its black brush strokes, Chinese painting pallet, and red paint formed the basis for his future stylistic signature. The simplicity of the use of only red, white, and black is evidence of the continuity of his style from the late 1970s.

Another Hong Kong local trained designer to gain prominence in the 1980s was Alan Chan. As a collector of Chinese antiques, Chan benefited from his knowledge of artifacts from the past, which he often used in his designs. For example, in corporate identity work for the Canton Disco Club in Hong Kong in 1983 (figure 6), Chan borrowed images of swimmers from the illustrations of 1930s Shanghai publications, and set them against brightly

19   Lin Jiayang, "On Design Education" in *Art and Design* (Beijing: Art and Design Publishing House, June 2000) 29–34. [In Chinese].

20   Amoeba Group, *Leaflet of Asian Designers' Invitational Exhibition & Amoeba Annual Show* (Taiwan: Amoeba Group, 1982). [In Chinese].
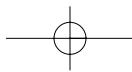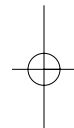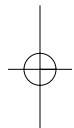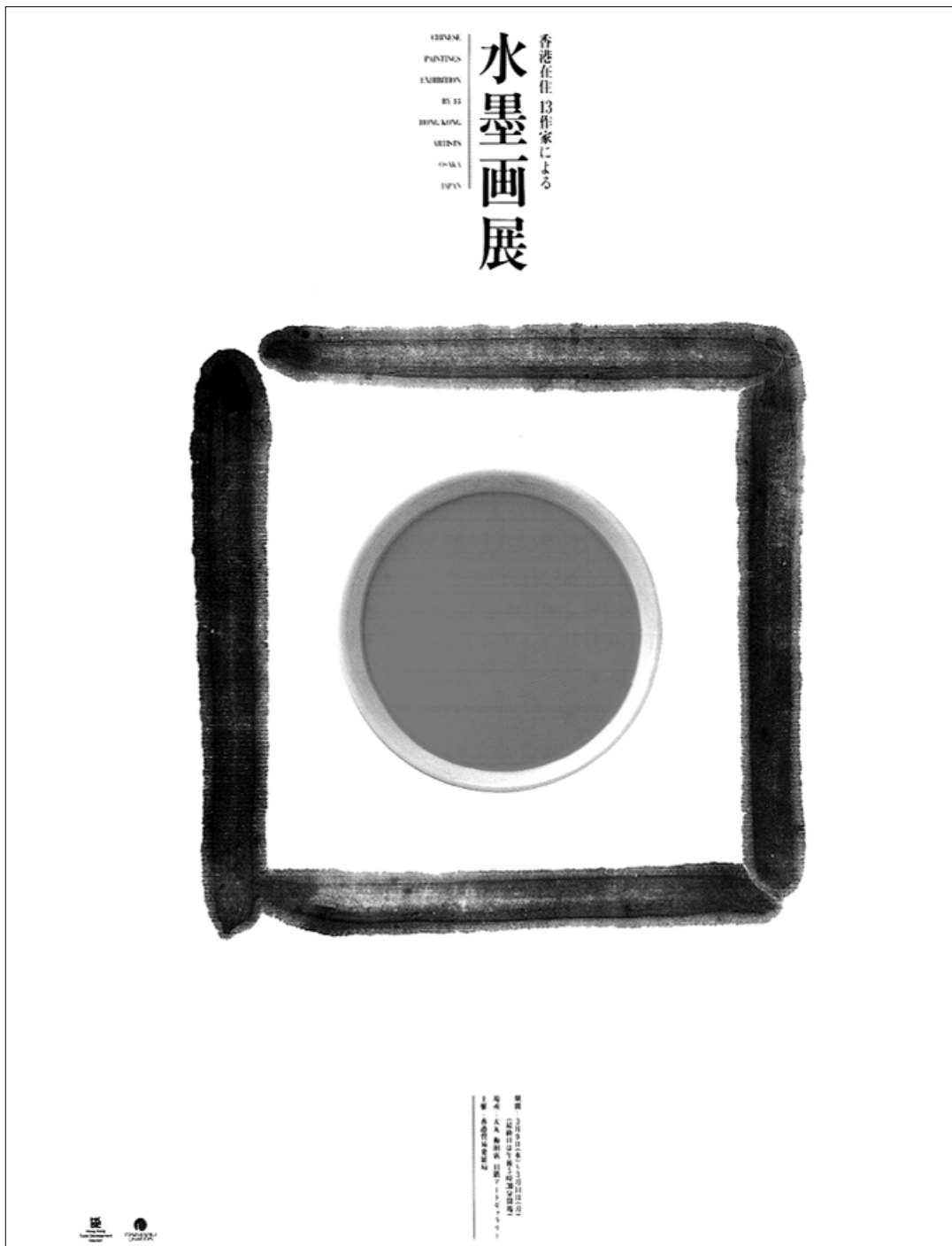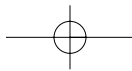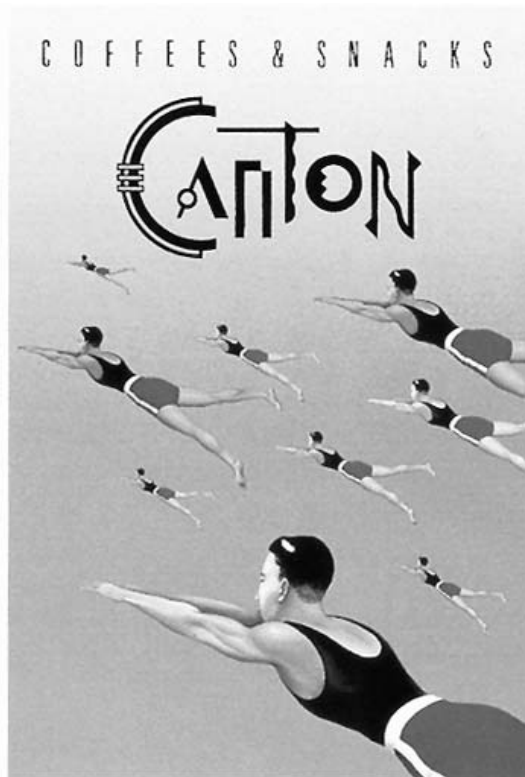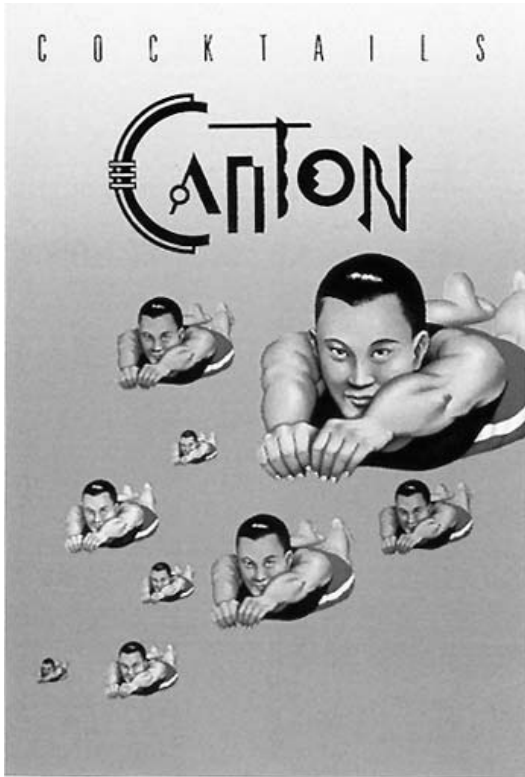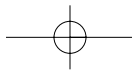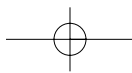
Figure 5, above
Kan Tai-keung, *Shui Mo: The New Spirit of Chinese Tradition*, Exhibition Poster, 1985.

Figure 6, right
Alan Chan, Canton Disco Club, Corporate Identity, 1983.
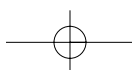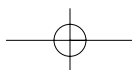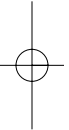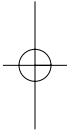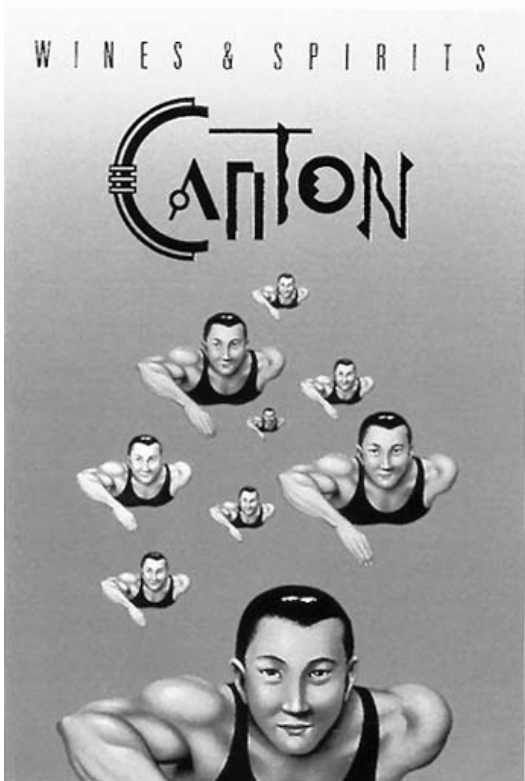
colored backgrounds to give the illusion of flying through space. Although Chan was best known for this modernized nostalgic style, his other works also demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the blending of Chinese images with modern graphics. In the poster design for *Hello Hong Kong* in 1987, (figure 7) he created a central image of a black dragon on a red background. The traditional image of the dragon is modified in two ways, with the top half pixilated to evoke a computer image and the bottom half in a stylized brush stroke to evoke traditional calligraphy. Kan and Chan are the best known pioneers of the modern Chinese graphic design style. Other local designers, trained both in Hong Kong and overseas, who did not identify their style with Kan and Chan also found their own way without featuring a blend of Chinese and Western elements in their design work. Designers such as William Ho, Alan Zie Yongdar, Lillian Tang, Michael Miller Yu, John Au, Jennings Ku, Tony Tam, and Winnie Kwan continued their Western design approach without the incorporation of Chinese concepts and icons as part of their own characteristic styles.

By the mid-1980s, when Hong Kong designers were developing into two divergent design trends, their works began to be exhibited in mainland China on a regular basis. For example, the winning pieces from the HKDA shows of 1986 and 1988 traveled to Guangzhou.[21] Through such shows, as well as visits from Hong Kong designers, Hong Kong was able to export some influence to mainland China. Although Hong Kong played a leading role through the 1980s because of its relatively free and liberal environment for creative ideas, starting in the 1990s, the quality of graphic design work in mainland China and Taiwan improved rapidly to reach an international standard. By the late 1980s, the more liberal political situation in Taiwan, together with continued economic development, supported international exchanges. From this period on, rapid improvements in the quality of Taiwanese design can be seen, and Taiwanese design organizations began to initiate joint ventures within Greater China.

A New Era of Interaction in the 1990s

In the early 1990s, the outstanding representative designers in mainland China and Taiwan noticeably followed the style of Kan Tai-keung and Alan Chan. By that time, Kan and Chan were well established as the masters of Chinese graphic design within Greater China design circles. Kan, in particular, played an active role in promoting his work in both Taiwan and China, and frequently was invited to give lectures, donate his works to institutions, judge competitions, and participate in shows and solo exhibitions on the mainland. There is no doubt that Hong Kong graphic design, especially as represented by Kan Tai-keung, has played an important role in Chinese graphic design history. However, with more active designers in recent times, a great diversification of style has devel-

21 Hong Kong Designers Association, *HKDA Members Profile* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Designers Association, 1998).
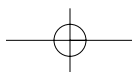
Figure 7
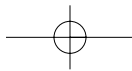Alan Chan, *Hello Hong Kong*, Commercial
Poster, 1987.

Figure 8
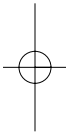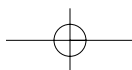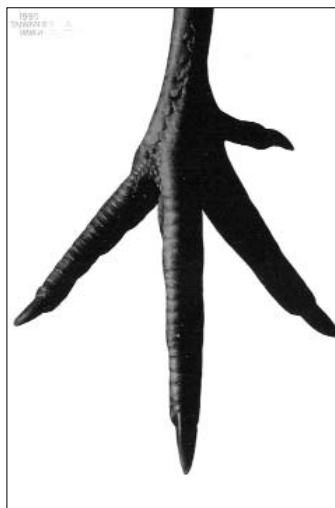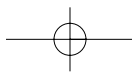Freeman Lau, *Written Chinese Characters: The Love of Nature*, Thematic Poster, 1996.

Figure 9
Wang Xu, *Written Chinese Characters: Claw*, Thematic Poster, 1996..

oped. The 1990s can be seen as the era of the rapid establishment of graphic design associations, expanding activities including many events centering on poster design and graphic design publications within Greater China, and the active participation of Chinese designers in major international poster design competitions. The various locales of Greater China had never been so connected and interactive, with a fully merged history of modern Chinese graphic design.

*The Proliferation of Professional Associations*
Professional design organizations in Greater China always have played an important role in stimulating and promoting the local design industry, as well as establishing overseas connections, following the original example of the Hong Kong Designers Association (HKDA) in Hong Kong. Established in 1973, HKDA was one of the earliest professional design organizations in the region. Since then, HKDA has played a key role in organizing local design awards competitions and maintaining contacts with the outside world. In Taiwan as well, professional design organizations have played a central role in the development of graphic design, although not until much later.

The Amoeba group was formed in Taiwan by professional graphic designers in the early 1980s, but never generated much local or regional attention. Not until 1991, with the establishment of the Association of Taiwan Image Poster Designers (renamed the Chinese Poster Association in 1997) was a stable and influential professional association formed.[22] The primary objective of this association was promoting the quality of Taiwanese graphic design through creative poster design. Taiwanese graphic design was still searching for its own developmental direction at this stage. With the awareness of the needs of internationalization, new professional graphic designer groups such as the Taiwan Graphic Design Association, formed in 1994, and the Kaoshiong Graphic Design Association were established in Taiwan.

The development of graphic design associations in mainland China first began in Shenzhen. Due to the geographic proximity of Shenzhen to Hong Kong, Shenzhen design work for many years was the most advanced in mainland China. Before the establishment of the first graphic design association on the mainland, the Shenzhen Graphic Design Association in 1996, many future members of the Association already were active in organizing shows such as the Graphic Design in China Show in Shenzhen in 1992.[23] The event was a design competition accepting entries from Taiwan and mainland China, co-organized with the Taiwanese magazine *Taiwan Graphics Communications Monthly.* Soon after 1994, the quantity and quality of activities in inland cities in mainland China also increased rapidly. By the late 1990s, Shenzhen was no longer the dominant city in graphic design in mainland China.

22 Chinese Poster Association, *2000 Exhibition of Chinese Poster Design Association* (Taiwan: Chinese Poster Association, 2000). [In Chinese]

23 Wei Yew, "Graphic Design in China Show" in *Communication Arts* (Communication Arts, September/October, 1992): 48–57.
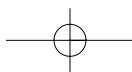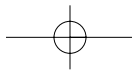
Figure 10
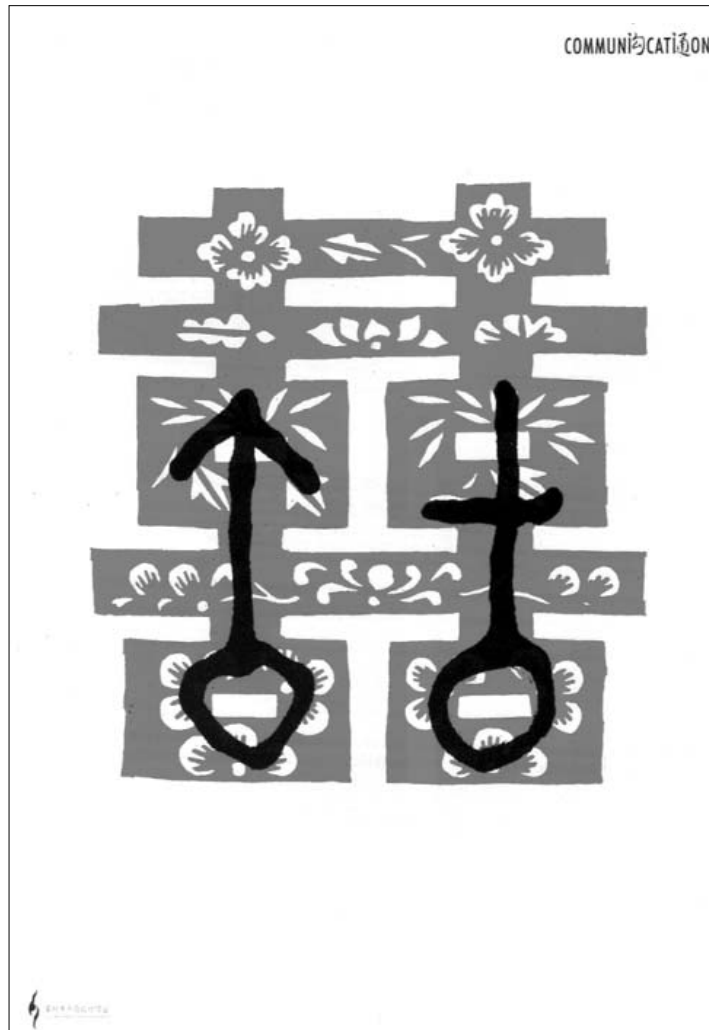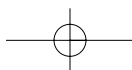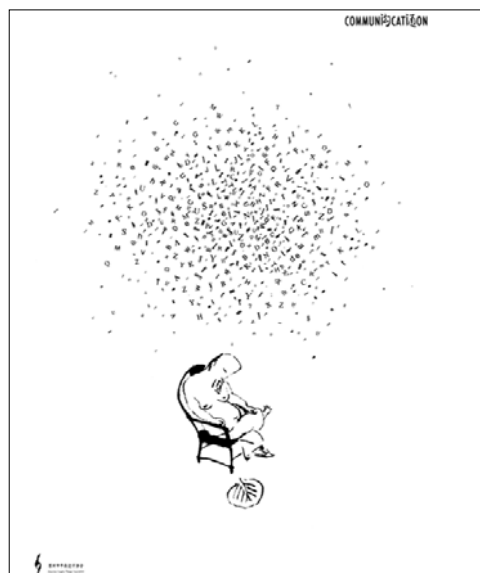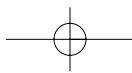Zhou Peng, *Communication: Double Happiness*, Thematic Poster, 1997.

Figure 11
Chen Shao-hua, *Communication: Dreaming West*, Thematic Poster, 1997

Some other inland cities have quickly gained ground, and have been organizing their own activities including corporate identity conferences, nationwide design competitions, and international design exhibitions. The Shanghai Graphic Designers Association, established in 1998, was the second professional group to be formed on mainland China.[24]

Within Greater China, Macau is a relatively small city compared to Hong Kong both in terms of area and population. It was under Portuguese colonial rule until 1999, when it returned to Chinese sovereignty. The Department of Design at Macau University was not established until 1994. Since that time, Macau designers have had the option of obtaining local training and education. The Association of Macau Designers also was established in 1994, and included members from various design disciplines. Although the membership is small compared to comparable associations in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China, the members remain active in intra-regional design competitions and other events.

*The Intra-regional Poster Design Frenzy*
The idea of thematic poster design invitational exhibitions is influenced by the Japanese and Europeans, but it is fair to say that the Chinese Poster Association of Taiwan started the thematic poster design frenzy, which later spread to Hong Kong and mainland China. Its main yearly event is a thematic poster design exhibition. The theme of the first invitational exhibition, held in 1991, was "The Beauty of Taiwan," and participation from 1991 to 1994 was restricted to its members.[25] Starting in 1995, the Chinese Poster Association Exhibition began to invite other Chinese participants from outside Taiwan to participate. In 1995, two designers from China and two from Hong Kong were invited.[26] The design theme for that year was "Written Chinese Characters." Designers could create freely within this theme, using written Chinese characters in the design.

The thematic poster exhibitions organized by associations within Greater China often centered on themes related to Chinese identity, and when the stated theme was not clearly related to Chinese-ness, participants often would include Chinese elements or interpretations in their works. The nature of this type of poster design exhibition primarily is to display the personal creative expression of the invited designers. However, the early exhibition on written Chinese characters also opened up new possibilities for Chinese typographic design. The theme of Chinese characters was used by many participants to explore explicitly Chinese subject matter, and to interrogate the cultural meanings of written characters. In Freeman Lau's work, the symbolic character for "good luck," normally used at the start of the Chinese New Year, is altered and thus reinterpreted to make a personal statement about the love

24 Shanghai Graphic Designers'
    Association, *Hi-Graphic* (Shanghai:
    Shanghai Graphic Designers'
    Association, Issue 1, 1998).
25 Chinese Poster Association, *2000
    Exhibition of Chinese Poster Design
    Association.*
26 Two designers from China were Yu Bing-
    nan and Wang Xu, and from Hong Kong,
   Kan Tai-keung and Freeman Lau.
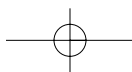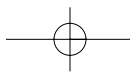
of nature (figure 8). Mainland Chinese designer Wang Xu reinterpreted the ideogram elements of Chinese characters, replacing them with pictures of the objects they represent, such as chicken feet for "claw" (figure 9) and vertical stones for "valley."

Compared to the development of Hong Kong graphic design, the mainland graphic designers have taken only a very short time to reach an international standard, especially in the area of poster design. The key figure in mainland China graphic design is Wang Xu, who had been working in Hong Kong since 1986 and returned to Guangzhou in 1995 to open his own design and publication business. Designers such as Wang Yue-fei, Zhang Da-li, Zhou Peng, Xia Yi-bo, Chen Shao-hua, and Han Jia-ying were key figures on the Shenzhen design scene in the mid-1990s. Chen Shao-hua was invited to the thematic poster invitational exhibition held by the Chinese Poster Association in 1996 under the theme of the "Colors of Taiwan." The following year, a thematic poster invitational exhibition was held for the first time on the mainland, in Shenzhen. The exhibition was co-organized by graphic design associations from Shenzhen, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau under the theme of "Communication."

Again, many of the participants interpreted the theme in specific relationship to Chinese identity and culture, or in relation to cross-cultural themes. For example, mainland designer Zhou Peng utilized a Chinese paper cut of the character for "double happiness" along with black, superimposed icons for "male" and "female" to convey the idea of male-female communication within marriage (figure 10). Chen Shao-hua's work depicts a sleeping Chinese man dreaming a garbled mass of Romanized alphabet letters (figure 11). A third example, Wang Xu's Coca-Cola bottle, is a porcelain version with a Chinese dragon in blue and green tones. These latter two examples represent cross-cultural communications with some humor and criticism. Together with mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan have become the three major players in most of the intra-regional events, but there are a few outstanding works from Macau. Ung Wai-meng, one of Macau's outstanding graphic designers, was born on the island and received his education in Portugal. His unique artistic drawing style shows a European influence, and his work has won many awards within Greater China.

Hong Kong has a tradition of concentrating on commercial works rather than on noncommercial creative poster design works. To respond to the intra-regional poster design frenzy, the HKDA adopted the thematic design idea for their biannual member shows. In 1997, their member show was organized under the theme of "Harmony." One of the major intra-regional poster design competitions held by Hong Kong organizations was the Asia-Pacific Poster Exhibition in 1997.[27] This exhibition called for entries from Asian countries including those of the Greater China region as well as Japan, Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore. The show reflected the qual-

27   The Asia-Pacific Poster Exhibition was organized by the Provisional Regional Council and the Hong Kong Designers Association from November 22, 1997 to December 12, 1997.
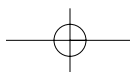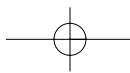
ity and standard of work in Greater China compared to other Asian countries. The quality of Japanese work always has been considered the highest in the Asia-Pacific region, so the competition provided an opportunity for the designers of Greater China to have their work judged against this standard.

Since the first event of the intra-regional poster design invitational exhibition in 1997, different groups have organized various thematic poster exhibitions such as *Celebration of Reunification of Hong Kong With China* in 1997, *Establishment of the Shanghai Graphic Design Association* in 1998, *Celebration of Reunification of Macau With China* and *Opening of Design Museum in Beijing* in 1999. These intra-regional design competitions and invitational shows enabled the region to produce a large number of posters within a short time. However, because some of the invitational events did not include a referee system, the quality of the work produced varied considerably.

Another important recent trend in invitational poster exhibitions is their expansion beyond Greater China into the international sphere. For example, one of the latest invitational exhibitions, *Shanghai International Poster Invitational Exhibition '99*, invited not only Greater China designers, but also solicited the participation of designers from Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Germany, England, the Czech Republic, France, Finland, Poland, Switzerland, and the United States.[28] The creative theme for the Greater China participants was "Interaction," while the overseas participants were invited to submit any of their poster works. Like the Asia-Pacific Poster Exhibition held in Hong Kong in 1997, events of this type provide an opportunity for Greater China designers to gain insight into how the standard of local works compared with the international standard. This trend of creating a theme and inviting overseas designers to also submit their works also has been adopted in Hong Kong. The biannual member show of the HKDA under the theme "Designers' Eyes on Hong Kong 2000" also invited prestigious overseas designers to submit their work without necessarily following the given theme. Subsequently, the same exhibition strategy also has been used by the Hong Kong Poster League, newly founded in 1998 by Kan Tai-keung, Alan Chan, Stanley Wong, Tommy Li, and Freeman Lau. The primary purpose of the group is to identify themes and to organize corresponding exhibitions on a regular basis. In their first show in 2000, under the theme of "People," they displayed their own thematic works and invited international designers[29] to submit works on any subject matter.

Publishing the Sources of Inspiration
An active intra-regional design scene and the flow of information have played a very important role in elevating the standard of work in mainland China. Together, these elements provide designers with creative opportunities as well as chances to display their work. Very

28   Shanghai Graphic Designers' Association, *Shanghai International Poster Invitational Exhibition '99* (Shanghai: Joint Publishing House, 1999).

29   The international designers invited included Michel Bouvet from France, Alan Fletcher from England, Helfried Hagenberg from Germany, Pekka Piippo from Finland, and Ralph Schraivogel from Switzerland. Freeman Lau's book of his own poster design works, *Looking Back: Freeman Lau's Poster Design,* was published by Kan and Lau Design Consultants in March 1999. The Kan and Lau books both were funded by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council. Tommy Li self-funded a book on his retrospective works, *Tommy Li: My Work My Words,* published in May 1999.
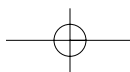
often, works from intra-regional poster design shows have generated media exposure and publication opportunities. Before the 1990s, the flow of information was so limited that mainland designers had to purchase magazines and other publications imported from Hong Kong in order keep up with recent developments in the field. Due to the loosening of the political environment in mainland China, leading to a more liberal attitude toward commerce and advertising, the publication business for international graphic design books and local graphic design magazines has experienced a boom since the mid-1990s. The mainland printing industry also has developed rapidly through Hong Kong investment and experience, particularly in Shenzhen and southern coastal areas.

With the expanding of the local market as well as the demand of local designers to have access to knowledge about international developments and trends, magazines such as the Beijing-based monthly *Art and Design,* and the Guangzhou-based *Design Exchange* and *Packaging Design*, often report major overseas design competitions and exhibitions. *Hi-Graphic* is a magazine published since January 1998 by the Shanghai Graphic Design Association, and is another trendy graphic design periodical. This publication plays a role in introducing outstanding work from overseas, as well as providing a venue for members to display their work and report on their activities. Magazines have become an important means for mainland designers to learn from established international designers. Major book series of collections of individual designer's works such as *Graphic Designer's Design Life,* edited by Wang Xu, invite international designers such as Niklaus Troxler (Switzerland), James Victore (USA), Kari Piippo (Finland), Art Chantry (USA), Koichi Sato (Japan), Tanaka Ikko (Japan), Louise Fili (USA), and Henry Steiner (Hong Kong), to allow their work to be published and circulated in Chinese for a mainland audience. Other Hong Kong designers also have published their own individual portfolio books. Examples include Kan Tai-keung's book of his poster works, and the Freeman Lau and Tommy Li retrospective collections.[30] This type of design portfolio collection book often simply displays the design work by category or theme, seldom adding any analytical perspective or much informational text.

International Poster Graphic Design Events
In the year 2000, Hong Kong no longer enjoys a leadership role on the intra-regional design scene. Rather, new trends and developments now are being established in many of the cities within Greater China, and the common ground on which Greater China designers compare their work is the realm of overseas international competitions. Mainland designers have played a particularly active role in participating in these overseas competitions since the mid-1990s, and designers from other parts of Greater China have taken up the practice as well. For example, starting from the mid-1990s,

30 Kan Tai-keung's book of his poster works, *Selected Posters by Kan Tai-keung: Sentiments and Harmony,* was published by his own company, Kan and Lau Design Consultants in 1998.
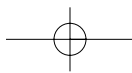
mainland designers were represented at the International Poster Biennale in Warsaw, Poland, the Lahti Poster Biennale at the Lahti Art Museum in Finland, the International Computer Art Biennale in Rzeszow, Poland, the Colorado International Invitational Poster Exhibition in the U.S., the International Biennale of Graphic Design in the Czech Republic, the International Poster Trienniale in Toyama, Japan, and the Seoul Triennale Exhibition of Asian Graphic Posters in Korea. Many of the mainland entries won awards in these international competitions. For example, a series of posters designed by Zhang Da-li and Tang Di on the theme of "Human and Nature" won major awards at the International Computer Art Biennale in Rzeszow, Poland in 1999. Chen Fang also was one of the three highest award winners at the Colorado International Invitational Poster Exhibition in the U.S. with his poster *Victory* depicting a hand gesturing the "peace sign," with the two peace-sign fingers intact and the other three apparently violently blown away (figure 12).

Compared to mainland designers, Hong Kong and Taiwan designers have not received many international awards. However, Hong Kong and Taiwanese work continues to receive international recognition on a regular basis. For example, in 1999, posters of four Hong Kong artists, as well as three from the mainland and seven from Taiwan, were selected for the 12th International Poster Salon in Paris. In 2000, John Au was awarded the Savignac Grand Prize at the 13th International Poster Salon in Paris (figure 13). This can be considered the most prestigious international award ever received by a Hong Kong designer. It represents a new stylistic direction in the territory, without the incorporation of Chinese elements in the design. The international recognition of a wide range of designers from the Greater China region also symbolizes a new era characterized by a lack of dominance any individual or group of designers or particular style. The scene at the beginning of the new millennium is full of potential for diversification. The next stage of Chinese graphic design history within the region will likely continue the search for international visual languages with the subtle expression of Chinese stylistic and aesthetic characteristics.

Conclusion

In this article, I have provided a brief survey of Chinese graphic design in Greater China. I have taken an historical view of the pioneering role of Hong Kong designers within the region, and have established the importance of treating the whole region as having one, unified history. The article has demonstrated the leadership role of early Hong Kong designers such as Henry Steiner, Kan Tai-keung, and Alan Chan, whose styles were influential throughout Greater China in the 1970s and 1980s. Their use of Chinese elements in design works is now thoroughly established as one means of expressing Chinese identity and culture in design works, although expressions of regional identity today certainly are
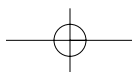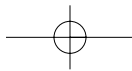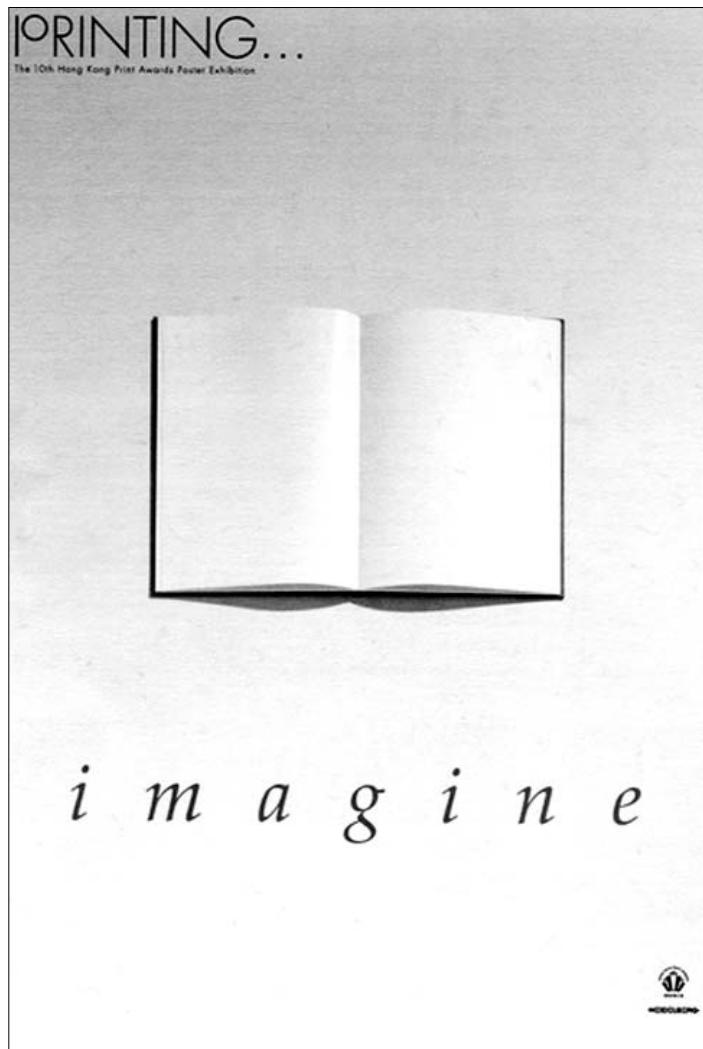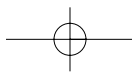
Figure 12
Chen Fong, *Victory,* Experimental Poster, 1998.

Figure 13
John Au, *Printing: Imagine,* Thematic Poster, 1999.

not limited to the use of Chinese elements in design. The current direction of stylistic expression is more towards a universal language that can be understood internationally in any culture.

The developments in the various locales of Greater China are so intertwined that a separate history of any one area necessarily would leave out key influences and developments involving the others, and thus would create a distorted and inaccurate view of Chinese graphic design history. In addition to the regional influence of the styles of early Hong Kong designers, regional history has been linked through the regular organization of intra-regional design competitions, exhibitions, and publications. Although many developments such as the establishment of professional design organizations have been at the local level, other important events have taken place among the various cities within Greater China. In order to maintain their competitiveness within the region and beyond, local designers have found it necessary to organize and participate in intra-regional events and international competitions.

Graphic design in Greater China definitely is entering into a stable environment, with the economy and politics of the region in a relatively secure state. Hong Kong once enjoyed a leading position but, with the developments of recent years, it seems unlikely that this former dominance will return. While Hong Kong and Taiwan are likely to continue their high-quality work, their sheer volume of output will never equal that of the mainland designers, who recently have been outstripping their Hong Kong and Taiwanese counterparts in sheer numbers of awards won. This is largely due to the fact that there are many more active designers in mainland China than elsewhere throughout the Greater China region. The future definitely will see an increasing visibility of mainland designers on the international scene. Thus, although mainland design had a slow start, its present and future importance and potential influence cannot be underestimated. Today, the high quality of mainland graphic design in poster works cannot be questioned. Quality design works in other commercial application areas of graphic design should improve rapidly in the near future.

Acknowledgment