

## Logo Design Methods Based on Compound Indicatives

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### Abstract

Under the influence of economic globalization and intense market competition, individual design style and national cultural tradition have become the essential elements of design. It is a demanding task for Chinese designers to set up new Chinese design styles. In my opinion, the *Six Principles of Chinese Writing*, which are the principles of Chinese characters' formation and application, is a set of design methods that can be applied to modern design. In this paper, I present my research on the new design methods based on compound Indicatives, one of *The Six Principles*, with logo design as examples. I analyse compound Indicatives as design idea, and relate them with modern design methods. Finally, I draw my conclusion that logo design based on compound indicatives comprises a set of effective design methods and is one of the characteristic design methods in China which will carry forward the Chinese design.

**Key words:** Design method, logo design; *The Six Principles of Chinese Writing*; Compound Indicatives

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### INTRODUCTION

Under the influence of economic globalization and intense market competition, individual design style and national cultural tradition have become the essential elements of design. At this point, the most elite countries in the

domain of design—such as America, Japan and some developed European nations—have already formed design theories of their own and have different design styles. But in China, a clear national design style has not yet been founded.

Writing is among the greatest inventions in human history—perhaps the greatest invention, since it has made history possible. The structure of the written word reflects the philosophy and culture of a country (Wang, 2003). China is one of the countries whose civilization started earliest in the world, and the Chinese character perhaps is the oldest surviving writing system. It is used in writing not only Chinese, but also Japanese, Korean, and formerly Vietnamese. It is the most representative cultural symbol of China and East Asia (Pan, 2004).

As new Chinese characters being developed constantly, the total number of Chinese characters from past to present reaches a tremendous sum. The *Zhonghua Zihai* published by the People's Republic of China in 1994 covered 85,568 characters. Traditionally, Chinese characters have been divided into six different categories according to the principles of their composition: Pictograph, simple indicatives, compound indicatives, phono-semantic compound, associate transformation and borrowing. *The Six Principles of Chinese Writing* had been summarized till the inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells took shape and were widely applied (Liang, 1984). It is really amazing that such huge and complicated character-formation can be generalized by only six principles.

In my opinion, *The Six Principles* comprise a set of logical methods based on using graphics to indicate meanings and *The Six Principles* can be regarded as an effective design method that can be applied to modern design, especially in the field of visual communication design. In this paper, I present my research on the new logo design methods based on the compound indicatives and testified their feasibility with logos designed by myself and other designers.

## 1. THE PRINCIPLES OF CHINESE FORMATION

*The Six Principles of Chinese Writing* had been summarized till the inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells took shape and were widely applied. This classification system is often attributed to Xu Shen's (許慎) dictionary, the *Shuowen Jiezi* (說文解字, analytical dictionary of characters) in 100 AD, which is the first Chinese dictionary in China (Li, 2011).

a) Pictograms (象形). Characters in this class express meaning through shapes and contours. For instance, 牛 (cow) imitates the front of an ox head; and 车 (cart) takes the shape of a cart. Roughly 600 Chinese characters are Pictograph. These are generally among the oldest characters in Chinese. Over time they have been standardized, simplified, and stylized to make them easier to write, and their derivation is therefore not always obvious, especially during the transition from the Seal Script to clerical script and then to regular script.

b) Simple indicatives (指事). Also be named as Simple Ideograph or Ideograms. This small category contains characters that either illustrate abstract concepts directly or add indicators to pictograms to make new meanings. Examples include 上 (up) and 下 (down), originally a dot above and below a line; and 刃 is composed of 刀 (knife) and a point, meaning the sharpest part of a knife.

c) Compound Indicatives (會意). These are also variously termed Associative Compounds, Logical Aggregates. An associative compound has been interpreted as expressing a new meaning with the combined meaning of two or more than two symbols. For instance, 木 is a pictogram of a tree, and putting two 木 together makes 林, meaning grove.

d) Phono-semantic compounds (形聲). Also called semantic-phonetic compounds or pictophonetic compounds. These characters were created by linking together a character with a related meaning (the "semantic" element, often graphically simplified) and another character (the "phonetic" element) to indicate its pronunciation. For example, the verb 沐 (to wash one's hair) is composed of the character 木 which indicate the pronunciation, and the character for 氵 (water) which expresses the meaning. By far the bulk of Chinese characters – over 90%, belong to this category.

e) Associate transformation (轉注). Refers to mutually explanatory characters adopt the same radical and can explain the meaning of each other. The characters 老 (old, pronounced lǎo) and 考 (test, pronounced kǎo) are the most commonly cited examples, as they come from a common etymological root but differ in that one part is altered to indicate a different pronunciation and meaning.

f) Borrowing (假借). This category refers to the case in which a character is borrowed to write another word due to a fortuitous homophony between the words. Sometimes the old meaning is then lost completely, for

example, the character 来 (pronounced lái) depicts the wheat plant and meant "wheat" in ancient times, it was then borrowed to write the verb "to come" and has lost its original meaning of "wheat" completely (Shirakawa, 2000; Tang, 2005).

## 2. COMPOUND INDICATIVE AS LOGO DESIGN IDEA

The essence of compound indicatives is combination. What is more, it is a kind of "logical aggregate." This means taking advantage of exiting elements to create new meanings that differ from the meanings of the elements that form it. This is significant for logo design. From the analysis of the formative methods of compound indicative, I obtain numerous methods for combining several components to create new meanings (Zhou, 2014).

Like a Chinese character, a logo must represent several meanings or sometimes a single, complicated meaning with a concentrated graphic. The method of combining two or more graphics makes it possible to present complicated and abstract concepts. Additionally, the combination of two or more unexpected elements will make a strong impression on viewers.

Actually, to combine the existing components is not unique. However, the characteristic of the combination methods based on compound indicatives, that the combination methods themselves also convey meaning, is novel. This means the position, orientation, and relationship of the components also becomes important means to convey information. This is seen in the components of Chinese characters occurring in multiform layouts, such as up and down, left and right, connected or intersected. The multiformity and freedom of layout also allow for rich combination methods for expressing meanings. In contrast, this kind of combination is not possible in the Latin writing system. Using this information, we can also gain a better understanding of the graphic characteristic of the Chinese character and the intuitional thinking pattern of Chinese people.

## 3. COMPOUND INDICATIVE AS LOGO DESIGN METHOD

There are a large number of Compound indicative characters, and the formation methods for these characters are also complex. Hereafter, I will divide Compound indicative characters into four categories from the perspective of logo design, and will give some examples of each.

### 3.1 Graphical Compound Indicatives

#### 3.1.1 Example Chinese Characters

Characters in this category also adopt the method of depicting the idiographic shapes of objects. However, by

combining two or more components to express a new meaning that is different from that of any of its original components, this kind of character is largely different from Pictographs such as “sun” or “moon”.

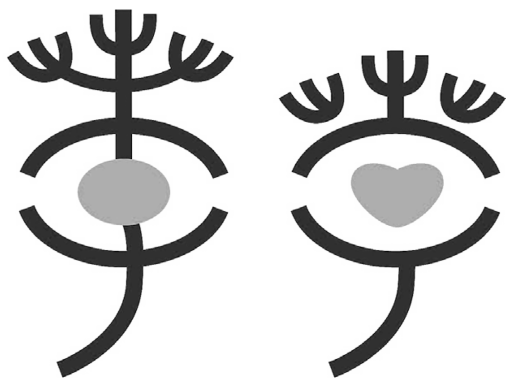
Such is the situation with the character 宿 (lodge for the night), which was combined from graphics for a room, a mat, and a man. It means a man sleeping on the mat in the room. Here, three objects are represented, but the meaning of the character is new and different from that of all of the components.

### 3.1.2 Explanation of the Design Method

Combining several semantic compounds together makes it possible to present complicated meaning. This is the basic combination method which makes use of old elements to create new meaning that differs from the individual units. And it is also the most often used method in mark design.

### 3.1.3 Example Logo Design

Figure 1 is a logo combining two Chinese characters 李 and 宁. It is for a lovely girl who wanted her personal logo to be a combination of her name 李宁 and some kind of tree or plant. The character 李 happened to be a phone-semantic compound formed by the 木 (tree) and the 子 (child), so I turned the characters into a concise graphic. The character 宁 was transformed in the same style to combine with the graphic of 李.



**Figure 1**  
Li Ning Personal Logo

In the middle of the character, the shape of heart was added, because the original complex form of 宁 is 宀—which means that people feel peace and welfare when they have a house to live in and food to eat.

## 3.2 Taking Advantage of the Relative Position of Components

### 3.2.1 Example Chinese Characters

Most of the characters in this category are also created by depicting the shapes and relative positions of components, thus playing an important role in representing the meanings at play. At the same time, the method of symbolization is often used with this kind of character, so that the graphical characteristic becomes weaker. For

example, the character 間 (間) shows a vision with two doors, where moonlight can be seen through the gap between the doors.

### 3.2.2 Explanation of the Design Method

This is the most characteristic combination method of *The Six Principles*, because the combination methods themselves also convey meaning. Below are three typical types of Chinese characters that present meaning using the combination methods.

#### 3.2.2.1 Taking Advantage of the Combination Mode

In the Latin writing system, morphemes (a meaningful linguistic unit consisting of a word) are disconnected. For example, in the word “overtake”, the morphemes “over” and “take” are just arranged in a horizontal line. In Chinese characters, there are three types of connection between morphemes: detached, connected and intersected. These combination methods are always meaningful. Take

the character 伐 (伐), which means to cut down the head of a people with a dagger-axe (an ancient weapon). Two components 人 (people) and 斤 (dagger-axe) intersect each other, and the purpose of this combination is to convey the meaning more clearly (Wang, 2000).

#### 3.2.2.2 Taking Advantage of Orientation and Size

Because of the different methods of combination, characters that make use of the same components may have different meanings. Let us take a look at three characters comprised of the same character, 人 (people).

The Chinese character 从 (从) depicts two men in the same direction; its meaning is “one man follows another”. The Chinese character 背 (北 the original character of 背) depicts two men facing opposite directions, and its meaning is “with the back towards”. The Chinese character 夾 (夾) depicts two small figures on either side of a big man, and it means “to assist a ruler in governing a country”. (In ancient China, people always use a larger figure to represent a person with higher status.) In these three characters, the combination method of the components becomes important in showing the meaning of the character.


There are only two ways to arrange the position of two components when do not consider of its orientation. That is, above and below, or, left and right. When consideration of the factor of the orientation, we can get a variety of layout with the same two elements. And more importantly, each layout conveys different meaning visually. Therefore, this is an effective method to convey multiple meanings with limited components.

In the logo of the father and son interior design company designed by Wang Hongming (Figure 2), a large hand, which represents the father, and a small hand representing the son was depicted. It used the same method as the character 夾.



**Figure 2**  
**Logo of Father and Son Interior Design Company, Wang Hongmin**

### 3.2.2.3 Taking Advantage of the Relative Position

This is the most characteristic combination method for Chinese characters. For example,  莫 (the original character of 暮) shows that the sun is in the midst of the jungle or wilderness. It means ‘dusk; sunset’. In the character 間, as mentioned above, the same method was adopted. In this kind of combination, we can feel the space and distance clearly, and it indeed helps us to better understand the meaning of the character.

Many logos are composed with two or three elements. However, the elements are always arranged with aesthetic pleasure as the goal. Logos which take advantage of the relative position of its components are seldom seen. Therefore, this method provides new idea for logo design. Without adding other visual elements or developing additional spaces, the meaning of the logo is enriched. It is no doubt an effective way for the logos to convey multiple meanings within a limited space. Moreover, as it is a visual presentation, the meaning of the logo becomes more understandable.

### 3.2.3 Example Logo Design


When design the logo for the New Space Gallery, I tried several design taking advantage of the relative position of the same components to represent the meaning of the “space” of the gallery. Firstly, I chose three squares which symbolize the frames as components. A perspective space was represented taking advantage of the relative position and different sizes of the three frames. As the square looks a little humdrum, I tried a square without the bottom line. This shape not only symbolizes the frame, but also recalls people of architecture element of the gallery such as entrance or separation. I attempted different layouts of these three components to get different visual effects. At last, the design as shown in Figure 3 was chosen as it makes an interesting 3D space on the 2D surface and quite matches the title “new space gallery”.



**Figure 3**  
**Logo of New Space Gallery**

## 3.3 The Combination of Main Body and Apparatus

### 3.3.1 Example Chinese Characters

Characters in this category combine the character or shape sign that represents human or animal forms with the character or shape sign that represents an apparatus, in order to present a certain action or situation related to this apparatus. For instance,  (見, seeing) is the function of the eyes. So adding the character 目, a big eye (the visual apparatus) to the character 人 (human) yields the character for seeing.

### 3.3.2 Explanation of the Design Method

This is an interesting combination method which can create amazing design, just as shown in the Chinese of character 見 (seeing). The function of this method is similar to adding geometric forms on pictograms—they both emphasize a part of a whole. In logo design, this method can be used not only to human and animal. It is a creative method to show the function of an object such as tool and machine.

### 3.3.3 Example Logo Design

In the logo of the fam.s art gallery (Figure 4), two big eyes and a leg were emphasized to form a simple but amazing figure of people. The way of making this logo is same with the method used in the character 見.

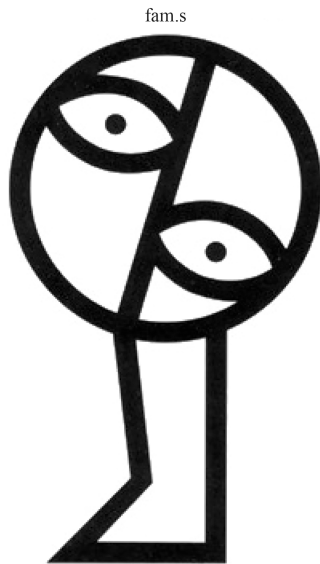
## 3.4 Repeating the Same Radicals

### 3.4.1 Example Chinese Characters

This kind of compound indicative character involves the combination of two or more of the same Pictographs. For example, 林 (hurst) is composed of two 木 (trees). 轟 is composed of three vehicles, and its meaning is “the rumble made by a group of vehicles”.

### 3.4.2 Explanation of the Design Method

This method makes use of the same component repeatedly to create new meaning. It is of course an effective way in logo design. With same forms, the same components appear harmonious aesthetic feeling. But sometimes, we



**Figure 4**  
**Logo of Fam.s Art Gallery**

should make them a little different to avoid the humdrum style.

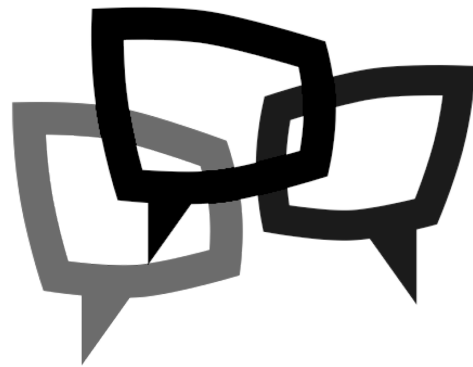
### 3.4.3 Example Logo Design

In the logo for the fifth TV Program Comment Competition of CCTV (Figure 5), three TV-shaped talk boxes were used as the main elements. The repeated use of the same talk boxes here symbolized there were many participants in the competition. To emphasize the multiplicity of the competition, vivid shades of red, green and blue were applied to the coloring of the three talk boxes. These colors also indicated the primitive colors of color television.

## CONCLUSION

Through this research, I analyzed Compound Indicatives as applied for design thoughts. Based on results of the analysis, I related them with methods of logo design and testified their feasibility with my own logo design work and logo design of other designers. Finally, I reached the conclusion that the methods of logo design based on compound indicatives constitute a set of effective design methods and it is a characteristic method of design in China.

It is of great significance to modern design in China to research the design ideas that lie in the Six Principles. First, from the creation of Chinese characters, we can understand the cognitive style of Chinese people. This is important not only in evaluating design ideas in the west



**Figure 5**  
**Logo of The 5th Program Comment Competition of CCTV**

and in China, but also in advancing our techniques in design. On the other hand, given that design style is highly valued these days, showing the national character becomes an important task for Chinese designers. The design ideas outlined in the six principles can be a powerful tool to carry forward Chinese design.

In this paper, I researched the potential of compound Indicatives using logo design as an example. On this basis, I can extend these theories to other fields of modern design from signs and graphics to product and environmental designs. The huge potential of *The Six Principles* is awaiting further development.

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