VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN IN ASIA: AN EXPLORATION OF ITS INTRODUCTION AND EVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper conducts a comprehensive literature review examining the evolution of the term "visual communication design". It traces the terminology shift from "graphic design" to "visual communication design", initially coined by William Addison Dwiggins to describe printed communications—a term also found in educational contexts as early as 1917—to "visual communication design", which emerged in response to expanding design fields and digital media. This evolution in terminology reflects a more comprehensive approach beyond traditional print media. Key institutions and events, such as the Ulm School of Design and the International Council of Design (ICO-D), played crucial roles in reshaping the perception and application of visual communication in design. In Asia, the term gained prominence through international conferences, notably Japan's 1960 World Design Conference, and became part of the academic curricula at institutions like Musashino Art University and Seoul National University. In China, this shift moved design from "decorative" to a broader conceptual framework that includes multimedia and digital interaction, culminating in the Ministry of Education's 2012 reclassification of design programs. By examining these changes in terminology within the context of globalization and cross-cultural exchange, this study positions Asia as a focal point of design evolution during periods of societal transformation, portraying "visual communication design" as a distinct, interdisciplinary field shaped by technological and cultural influences.

Keywords: Visual Communication Design, Terminology Shift, Design History, Design Theory

1 AN EXAMINATION OF THE ORIGIN OF THE TERM VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN

If you search for "visual communication design" on a website, the search term "graphic design" is bound to come up. Historically, there has been a continuum between the two, and the broader field of visual communication design can be said to be a subset of "visual communication design". The shift from "graphic design" to "visual communication design" has been influenced by the harassment of commercialism and the expansion of digital media, which has not only changed the process of design production, but has also had an impact on the way designers work. Designers began to acquire new skills, such as digital image manipulation and web design, to adapt to the changing technological environment. In addition, with the popularity of the Internet, the dissemination of design work has shifted from traditional print to digital platforms, requiring designers to focus more on interactivity and user experience in their visual communication. "Contemporary culture is becoming a visual culture."[1]

Therefore, visual communication design not only covers traditional graphic design elements, but also extends to many fields such as multimedia, animation, interactive design, etc., and it form a more comprehensive and more diversified design field.

1.1 The origin of the term graphic design in international perspective

Philip Baxter Meggs mentions in the preface to the first edition that "It was not until 1922, when the outstanding book designer William Addison Dwiggins coined the term graphic design to describe his activities as an individual who brought structural order and more visual form to printed communications, that an emerging profession received an appropriate name." [2]

Dwiggins who is mentioned above published an article in the Boston Evening Post titled "New Kind of Printing Calls for New Design", at the end of which he mentions "graphic design".[2]However, Paul Shaw, a professor at Columbia University, challenges the widely accepted notion among scholars that Dwiggins was the first to coin the term "graphic design." On his personal website, he presents relevant textual and visual evidence to support his argument.

The Definitive Dwiggins, and in issue #81 Who Coined the Term "Graphic Design"? writes:

"In April of 2017 I received photocopies and scans of several catalogues of the California School of Arts & Crafts from Andrea V. Grimes, Special Collections Librarian of the Book Arts & Special Collections of the San Francisco Public Library, that not only supported my contention that the term "graphic design" had been employed before Dwiggins, but further solidified it by pushing the date of use back several more years. The material covered the years 1915 to 1921. In the 1917–1918 catalogue a course in Graphic Design and Lettering appears for the first time(Figure 1)(Figure 2), replacing one called Advanced Design and Lettering. Both were taught by Frederick H. Meyer (1872–1961). "[4]

Meyer was the director of the California School of Arts and Crafts and one of its instructors. In 1917, h e taught a class entitled "Graphic Design and Lettering". This is the description for it:

"Lettering, Freehand, Roman and Old English; Initial letters, Monograms and Ciphers; Illuminating an d Engrossing; Book-plates and Book-covers; Illustrated quotations; Title pages; Calendars; Posters; et c."[5]



Figure 1. Courses in California School of Arts and Crafts(Figure source:[4])

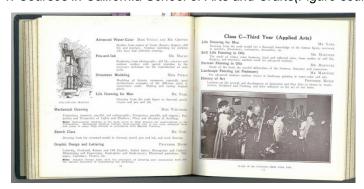


Figure 2. Courses in California School of Arts and Crafts(Figure source:[4])

From the above description and evidence, Prof. Paul argues that Prof. Meyer was the one who first proposed "Graphic Design", five years before Dwiggins.

1.2 Ulm School of Design

The Department of Visual Communication at the Ulm School of Design in Germany was initially called "visual design", but was renamed "visual communication department" in 1956 in order to make it clear that the goal was to solve design problems in the field of mass media. During the period of HfG's

operation from 1953 to 1968, the departments of product design, visual communication, industrialized architecture, information, and film production adopted a progressive design process. From the 1958-1959 academic year, the subject of film was included in "Visual Communication", and film was later expanded into a separate department.[6]

The purpose of establishing the Department of Visual Communication is to cultivate complex talents in the field of advertising design, who not only need to obtain profound training in a single field such as typography, graphics, photography, etc., but also need to comprehensively master and flexibly integrate the knowledge and skills of these fields. With the continuous advancement of imaging technology and the widespread adoption of television, the scope of visual communication design has expanded significantly, highlighting its immense development potential and broad application prospects.

1.3 Establishment of ICO-D

Icograda, the International Council of Graphic Design Associations, was founded on 27 April 1963 in London by two graphic designers, Peter Kneebone and Willy de Majo. The original membership consisted of 28 associations from 17 European countries. Later, during the 1970s, Asian and American countries gradually joined in. The Icographic Journal (*Figure 3*), first published in 1971, was the first iteration of the council's journal. According to Teal Triggs, it seeks to establish a benchmark for the study of visual communication design, and is known for the articles published by practitioners and academics, as well as for the richness of the graphic imagery of designers from around the world. [7]



Figure 3. icographic (Figure source:[8])

2 INTRODUCTION OF THE TERM VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN TO ASIA

2.1 Japan World Design Conference: Visual Communication Design Nurtured in the Context of Industrialization

From May 7 to 16, 1960, more than 200 designers and architects from 27 countries gathered at Tokyo Sankei Biru to participate in the exhibition. (Table 1) The theme of the conference was "Our Century: the Total Image-What Designers Can Contribute to the Human Environment of the Coming Age. "(*Figure 4*) The conference focused on the future image of the modern world, reflecting on the involvement of designers in mass production and consumption, and the alienation of solid design from commercially viable design. the opening ceremony was held on May 11th, the symposiums were held from the 12th to the 14th, and the closing ceremony was held on the 16th. At the closing ceremony on the 16th, there were 84 participants from 26 countries and 143 participants from Japan. The participants were divided into five sections: "Graphic", "Craft", "Business Design", "Architecture", "Design Education and Research", Design Criticism and Editorial". [9]From this categorization alone, it is clear that people gather in a wide range of design-related fields.

Table 1. Participants in the World Design Conference(Data source:[9])

Area	Foreigner	Japanese
Graphic	11	29
Craft	4	15
Business design	24	26

Architecture	43	49
Criticism and	2	24
respect education		
Total	83	143



Figure 4. World design conference 1960(Figure source:[11])

Takashi Asada, Director General and Board Member of the World Design Congress, recognizes that times have changed in all areas and that we have entered a whole new world. People have taken a step forward, and those involved in design must work together to make fundamental adjustments to this situation. In the field of graphic design, for example, he argued that it was necessary to expand the area of activity from the previous narrow stance of advertising and promotion (commercial art) to the new field of communication design more broadly. [10]The conference generally discussed the role that design should play in the modernization brought about by various technological developments, and raised the issue of the need for designers to share a new consciousness and understanding, noting that we are facing an era in which we must construct ways of thinking that are in keeping with the new age.

Herbert Bayer, a prominent designer from the Bauhaus, and Tomas Maldonado, co-founder of the Ulm School of Design, participated in the conference and provided insights and contributions to the communication of 'visual communication'. Tomas Maldonado presented the gap between theory and practice in visual communication and emphasized the need for designers to use a scientific approach to communication in order to overcome this gap. [11]Most graphic designers have been influenced by Professor Tomas's theories of visual communication, and he believes that stylistic expression must go hand in hand with these sciences in order to create a convincing design. In this case, the designer needs to have a critical judgement of what is being communicated, in addition to the techniques of presentation. During the panel discussion, Takeji Imaizumi emphasize the principles of visual communication.[12]

Throughout the conference, architects, environmental designers and industrial designers emphasized the importance of visual communication in the environment and the growing importance of the term 'visual communication'.

Through the design of housing for U.S. military depending house and its accompanying furniture allowed Japanese designers to gain a proper understanding of American lifestyles and accumulate valuable experience, laying a strong foundation for their future work. This ultimately led to the World Design Conference, which attracted and invited leading experts from various countries for discussions. The conference promoted international exchange in the field of design and facilitated long-term collaboration between the Japanese design community and international design organizations.

2.2 Musashino Art University in Japan

According to available information, Musashino Art University was the first Asian university to introduce "visual communication design". Browsing the official website of the current Musashino Art University, we can get the curriculum is following:

"Within this context and the developments in technology today, visual communication design, which has its roots in graphic design, continues to grow as a realm of expression spanning several media domains, from print media employing type, symbols and signs to convey information, to the command

of new media including audio, animation and three-dimensional data."[13]It suggests that visual communication design is rooted in and extends from graphic design.

Let's go back in history, with Professor Mukai Shutaro of Musashino Art University mentions that the history of Musashino Art University. The Imperial Art Academy, founded in 1929, which established a Department of Industrial Design in October of the same year. In November 1948, the Imperial College of Art changed its name to Musashino Art School, replacing the Practical Arts with the Pattern Crafts Section. In 1951, the Pattern Crafts Section was changed to the Modeling Section; in 1952, the Faculty of Commercial Arts and the Faculty of Theater and Film Arts appeared in the admission brochure for an unexplained reason; in 1959, the Musashino Art Junior College (two-year program) was established, including the Departments of Commercial Design, Entertainment Design, and Art Design, was not only to cultivate skilled craftsmen and designers in the broad sense of the word, but also to further explore and mold designers who possessed a high degree of adaptability and were able to flexibly respond to the ever-changing field of production and advertising. In 1963, the junior college established a Department of Life Design, aimed not at training industrial or graphic designers but at cultivating professionals involved in general design affairs, with a focus on advanced consumer education. In 1967, the Faculty of Art and Design at Musashino Art University introduced a Department of Basic Design. In 1974, the original Department of Commercial Design was renamed the Department of Visual Communication Design. [14]

The reason is the following:

"視覚によって環境から情報を受容ずることは、われわれの生活にとって重要な意味をもってきた。... 本学科は、ク"ラフィック・デザインを中心として 境 界の 領域に わ た る 広汎な 視覚伝達(ヴィジュアル・コミュニケーション)デザインにっいての理論を学び...(出典 7 武蔵 野美術大学案内 1975)<商業デザインという限定された用語が時代状況 にもはや適応なくなったことを意味する>"[15]

Receiving visual information from our surroundings has always played a crucial role in our lives. This department emphasizes a broad spectrum of visual communication design theories across various disciplines, with a primary focus on graphic design. As commercial design could no longer keep pace with the evolving social environment and demands of the era, the name was updated to Visual Communication Design.

2.3 Korea: Visual communication design learnt from Japan and the US

The development of Korean design was hampered by the Japanese invasion of Korea, but today's Korean visual communication design was largely initiated by Koreans who studied in Japan in the 1930s. Formal university design education began after the country's independence in 1946, when Seoul National University opened a design programme. Ewha Womans University started art education as the first art institution in October 1945 with the establishment of the Department of Art at Ewhaewon, but it was not until the establishment of the Department of Living Arts in 1960 that a full-fledged design programme began to be offered. Hongik University established the Department of Fine Arts and Crafts at the Faculty of Arts in 1958, and it was not until 1964 that a design department was established within the Department of Fine Arts and Crafts. Until the 1960s, there was no design department at the university, and it can be said that Seoul National University laid the foundation for design education in modern Korea. Just after the end of the Korean War, there was a new change in the design curriculum at Seoul National University, and John L. Frank, an American lecturer who worked at the Information and Culture Centre of the U.S. Army in Korea, introduced some of the basic design education in the U.S. Though the teaching time was very short, it had an impact on design education in Korea, and a lot of information about the trends in Western art could be known.[16]

The beginnings of visual communication design in Korea were largely influenced by two things. One originated from early Japanese abstraction based on realism, and the other pursued the more condensed and concise forms of abstraction introduced after the late 1950s.[17]

Korean Ahn sang-soo is the vice president of ICO-D and is currently a professor at the College of Fine Arts at Hongik University in Seoul. Hongik University was the first to establish a Department of Visual Communication Design. During the 1980s, while teaching there, he introduced modern typography and layout design, which contributed to modern Korean design.[18]

2.4 China: from decorative design and graphic design to visual communication design

Most scholars believe that Dwiggins was the first person to propose "graphic design", and the source of the literature is clear, while the literature on the introduction of the term visual communication is more ambiguous, and there is no specific person who invented the term visual communication design, but it is more like a slow spread of the term under the transnational exchanges, which is mostly discussed at international exhibitions organized by national associations. It is more like the term spread slowly through transnational exchanges and was mostly discussed at international exhibitions organized by national associations.

In 1962, Austrian-American designer Henry Steiner came to Hong Kong and served as the design director for Asia Magazine. An increasing number of Hong Kong products were designed in the United States or by American designers based in Hong Kong. In 1979, Hong Kong designers taught graphic design courses at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, and the term "graphic design" was introduced to mainland China.[19] Entering the 2000s, Hong Kong's design industry entered the multimedia and digital era. Designers not only focused on graphic design, but also started to venture into user interface design, interactive design and new media art. Visual communication design became more diverse in Hong Kong and cross-fertilized with areas such as film, animation and digital media.

Chai Changpei translated the book A History of Graphic Design by Meggs(1st edition in 1983)[20], he translated "graphic design" as "visual communication design". The explanation he gave in September 1987 was that "the original meaning of the word graphics refers to layout and printing, or images, that can be disseminated in large quantities by means of reproduction, such as printing, and are different from ordinary paintings, drawings, etc., which are single pieces of original work. There is no proper translation of this word in Chinese, so far often translated as 'graphics', 'drawings', sometimes translated as 'printing', such as Graphic Arts translated as Printing Art. The original term is now interpreted in the broader sense of visual communication or information communication, which more appropriately summarizes the many uses, and this book adopts the contemporary translation of 'visual communication'."[21] Chai Changpei's translation was forward-thinking, as with the widespread use of smart devices, printed materials have gradually faded from people's daily lives.

Lin Pang-Soong, a lifetime friend of ICO-D, mentioned the transition of design education in Taiwan from "graphic design" to "visual communication design" in Taiwan Art Classics: "In 1990, Dayeh University established a Department of Visual Communication". It's the first Taiwan university to change the name of the course. [22]Tracing the progression from terms such as "patterns," "graphic arts," "applied arts," "art design," "commercial design," and "graphic design" to the current "visual communication design," which is widely used in various departments and institutions in Taiwan, we can interpret that each term reflects distinct core concepts and artistic values. Therefore, when "visual design" emerges as a new specialized term, it symbolizes the transcendence of boundaries—between "pure and applied", "commercial and cultural", "2D and 3D"—and represents a new level of independent consciousness. [23]

In an interview with Visual Alliance in 2005, Professor Zhao Yan from the China Academy of Art discussed the historical development of the Department of Visual Communication Design at the academy.

He said, "Graphic design has always been one of our main programs. Initially, it was called the Department of Patterns, then the Department of Commercial Art, and later the Department of Craft Art with a focus on decoration. Around 1996, we independently established it as the Department of Visual Communication Design at the China Academy of Art. Currently, the department has two majors: one is graphic design, and the other is multimedia and web design. The characteristic of the graphic design

major is that all designs are related to traditional printed materials, but the projects involved are still quite diverse, such as packaging, advertising, bookbinding, logo design, and so on. The multimedia and web design major, on the other hand, is different from graphic design as it focuses on electronic media forms, such as the internet, video, and includes interactive elements."[24]

In modern Chinese design literature, the term 'graphic design' appeared in the early days, mainly referring to the plan of architecture, engineering and planning. Compared with 'decorative design', 'graphic design' is indeed more up-to-date and international, with avant-garde and experimental colours in the minds of the younger generation of designers.[25]

The first Graphic Design in China Exhibition was held in Shenzhen from 28th to 30th April 1992, and Henry Steiner was one of the members of the jury. (*Figure 6*) The exhibition stirred up the design circles at home and abroad, and aroused the attention and praise of people from the mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan and even the international culture and art circles, as well as the industrial and commercial circles. And this graphic design exhibition is the first time by the mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong jointly organized the most complete design categories of graphic design exhibition and evaluation activities, set up a bridge of communication between the design community across the Taiwan Strait.



Figure 5. Graphic Design in China 1992(Figure source:[26])

评审团 Jury Panel

Figure 6. Graphic Design in China 1992 Jury Panel(Figure source:[26])

Table 2. Number of articles searched for related terms in the journal Decoration(Data source:[27][28][29])

Name	Amount	Earliest Period
The title of "Visual Communicati	196	Xueqing Wang, Teaching Visual Com
on Design"		munication Design in Contemporary F
		rance,1989
The title of "Graphic design"	173	Zhu gekai, Repetition and Gradation-
		An Initial Exploration of the Formal L
		aws of Graphic Design,1980
The title of "Decorative Design"	25	Zhang Ding, 'Improving the Art of C
		ommodity Packaging and Decoration
		Design,1980

In June 1980, the central academy of arts and crafts journal "Decoration" after the resumption of publication, the first issue was published in 1980. According to the table, visual communication design was noticed in 1989. (Table 2)

In September 2012, the Ministry of Education issued the Catalogue of Undergraduate Specialties in Colleges and Universities, in which "Visual Communication Design" replaced "Decorative Art Design", and has been used ever since.[30]

Li Yanzu believes that printing technology is the driving force behind graphic design; without printing technology, modern graphic design would not exist. The term "visual communication design" emerged

precisely because printing technology has gradually been supplanted by digital media. In today's technologically advanced world, people can create designs using computers and share their works with audiences through social media, with the ability to spread globally via the internet. Therefore, a new term was needed to reflect the current era.[31]

3 CONCLUSION

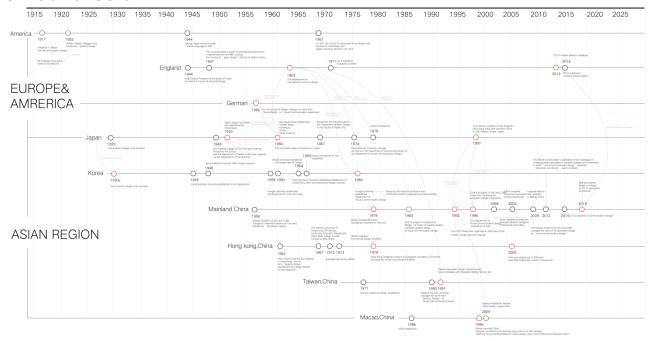


Figure 7. Timeline for the flow of visual communication design(Figure source: Author's own production)

This paper examines the shift from "graphic design" to "visual communication design" as it emerged in post-World War II industrial design through international collaboration. Following efforts to revive global economies, design committees convened to address evolving societal needs, propelling a terminological transition that aligned with technological and interdisciplinary advancements. (Figure 7) Key events, such as the 1960 World Design Conference in Japan and the Ulm School of Design's establishment of the Department of Visual Communication in 1956, marked a significant redefinition of design practices, expanding from print-based "graphic design" to include digital media and interdisciplinary approaches.

"Graphic design" rooted in printed communication, laid the groundwork for the profession. In contrast, "visual communication design" can be traced back to 1956, when the Ulm School of Design established a Department of Visual Communication. During a panel discussion at the 1960 World Design Conference in Japan, the "visual communication theory" proposed by professors from the Ulm School, along with Japanese participants Amazu and Takeshi Imaizumi, began to gain attention and was gradually disseminated. In 1974, Musashino Art University officially established a Department of Visual Communication Design. South Korea, drawing on design fundamentals from Japan and the United States, made efforts to integrate these influences with local cultural characteristics while aligning with international standards. This culminated in the establishment of its own Department of Visual Communication Design in the 1980s. From a domestic perspective, visual communication design was introduced by a small number of scholars who studied abroad, and then introduced by mutual exchanges in the design education sector, such as Taiwan's Dae Yeh University, the China Academy of Art, and the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts, which keenly kept up with the pace of the times to keep up with the international standards. In China, the 2012 Ministry of Education reclassification reinforced the field's scope, emphasizing multimedia and digital interactions. Universities in Asia are trying to explore localized visual communication design. This adaptive approach reflects a broader trend of regional reinvention within a global context.

As the design field evolves, "visual communication design" is positioned to meet the demands of a media-rich, digitally interconnected world, so its use will help readers to develop a forward-looking and holistic understanding of the subject. At the same time, the graphic design development has experienced the baptism of the technological revolution of the information age, which triggered the change from design tools to design concepts. In an era shaped by technological advancements, visual communication design remains an essential, forward-looking field with a profound impact on future visual experiences and interactions in an increasingly dynamic global society.

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