

# An Analysis of the Latest Five Emblems of Olympic Games from the Perspective of Three Meanings of Visual Grammar

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## Abstract

In a multimedia society, single-mode gradually becomes insufficient to meet the public multifaceted needs. In this case, multimodality, such as moving images, sound, text, etc., is increasingly prominent and becomes more salient in people's lives. Accordingly, research related to multimodality discourse analysis attracts more and more scholars' attention, yet few analyze different emblems of Olympic Games from visual grammar. Under this background, this paper will analyze the latest five emblems of Olympic Games from representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. By so doing, it aims to unfold how each emblem mirrors the three meanings mentioned above, how they are coordinated to present multimodality, what rich information is embedded in each emblem, and what visual designs reveal different cultures in different countries. Through an analysis, this paper summarizes four major findings: representational, interactive, and compositional meanings of visual grammar are reflected in emblems of Olympic Games; the three meanings coordinate to effectively convey multimodal connotations of emblems; in a multimodal discourse like an emblem, different modes, such as images, words, colors, and typography, etc., are interconnected and interacted, making contributions to representing the original information in a comprehensive manner; and finally, visual designs of different emblems of Olympic Games are deeply influenced by different countries' unique elements, including culture, history, ideology, geography, etc. Taking all these into account, this paper tries to shed light on dissecting Olympic emblems and their designs while enriching multimodal discourse analysis.

**Keywords:** multimodality, Olympic emblems, visual grammar

## 1. Introduction

With the advancement of information technology, society gradually features technology-driven and multimedia, with single-mode being insufficient to meet the public multifaceted needs. Under this background, multi-modality, such as images, sound, text, etc., plays an increasingly important role in people's lives, ranging from recognizing the world, expressing oneself to communicating with others. Kress and van Leeuwen define multimodality as "the use of several semiotic modes and their combination within a socio-cultural domain which results in a semiotic product or event" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 20). Halliday reckons semiotics as the study of sign systems, that is, as the study of meaning in its most broad sense. "There are many other modes of meaning, in any culture, which are outside the realm of language" (Halliday, 1985, pp. 3–4). That indicates language is only one kind of semiotics. Beyond language, there are many other ways of meaning. In this case, when it comes to discourse analysis, there is a transition from only language-focused to multimodality. Inspired by Halliday's three metafunctions (Halliday, 2014, pp. 84–85), Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 1996) explore visual grammar and present a framework to analyze visual images from representational, interactive and compositional meanings and hence bring the analysis of multimodality.

As previously stated, there are myriads of signs and symbols to present multimodality, ranging from text, images to music, sound, color, etc. Among them, the emblem of Olympic Games, which combines images and colors with words, is an essential one. It makes full use of images, words, or a combination of images and words to form a visual symbol, which conveys information and ideas while exacting an impact on viewers' opinions and attitudes. As a visual language, the emblem has its unique features: simple, clear, precise, and vivid. With its profound connotations, beautiful form and meticulous composition, it usually leaves a unique impression on viewers and brings aesthetic beauty to people's life. On top of that, emblems in different eras bear different design styles, influenced by social, historical, economic, cultural and customary background factors, etc. Since the emblem of Olympic games belongs to a visual design and bears the multimodality nature, it is suitable to analyze it from the grammar of visual design. Hence, this paper will analyze the latest five emblems of Olympic Games from representational, interactive and compositional meanings. It attempts to explore whether visual grammar is appropriate to be employed in dissecting and interpreting Olympic Games emblems, what representational, interactive, and compositional meanings are contained in emblems, and what cultural connotations are embedded in visual images. Beyond that, how different modes are interconnected and interacted with each other to successfully convey meanings and become an indispensable part in delivering meanings and what are the differences among the five emblems from different countries. Through the analysis, it tries to shed some light on Olympic emblems design so as to make contributions to the actual design practice of visual images.

The framework of this paper includes five chapters. It will start from making an overall introduction about this paper. Then it will conduct a literature review in terms of multimodal research, followed by the interpretation of theoretical background about visual grammar and the analysis methodology. Then the focus is on a detailed analysis of five emblems of

Olympic Games from representational, interpersonal and compositional meanings. Finally, it will come to conclusions, with major findings taking into account.

## 2. Literature Review

Following Kress and van Leeuwen' theoretical framework of visual grammar, crowds of scholars have analyzed semiotic discourses from various aspects. Similar to other multimodal discourses, the emblem of Olympic Games also features multimodality which stands out as providing more comprehensive perspectives and has been a growing research interest, yet most of studies tend to narrow down the discuss scope. The relatively comprehensive analysis of different emblems by taking representational, interpersonal and compositional meanings into account remains under-researched.

Most of studies adopt the grammar of visual design to analyze narrative texts, advertisement texts, or subtitling.

In order to investigate the extent to which visual and verbal components work together to create meaning, Jesus Moya Guijarro and Maria Jesus Pinar Sanz (2008) tap into a picture book by taking compositional, interpersonal and representational meanings into account. They choose 18 images and adopt the multimodal perspective as a way to carry out the visual analysis. By so doing, they conclude that the verbal and the visual modes coordinate to avoid dullness, promoting the tale easy to understand and attractive for the young child. Likewise, O'Halloran and Fei (2004) explore the meaning arising through the use of language and visual imagery in printed texts. They tap into both linguistic and visual forms of semiosis, as well as cross-functional systems such as colour in printed texts. Based on the SF metafunctional principle and intersemiotic mechanisms and systems, their research attempts to capture the expansion of meaning which occurs when linguistic and visual forms combine in advertisement texts. By leveraging the SF-MDA approach, coupled with digital technology of image-editing software, they present more detailed semantic and ideological interpretation and reveal metaphorical meanings embedded in linguistic and visual elements.

To move beyond language realm and uncover the text-image relationship, Zhang Man (2018), Ye Yanping (2021), and Zhu Qian (2021) investigate semantic relations between texts and images in subtitling. Centering on the text-image relationship, they carry out multi-modal discourse analyses and reveal how texts and images cooperate each other to render meanings through elaboration, extension, and enhancement in subtitling as a way to improve subtitle translation quality. These researches provide new perspective to multi-modal discourse analysis.

Some studies do explore emblems of Olympic Games from the visual grammar theory, yet single out one aspect or just take one emblem as an example.

Centering on solely dissecting interactive meaning, Xiang Lingyu (2011) takes 10 emblems from the 25th to 29th Summer and Winter Olympic Games as examples to conduct analysis. The 10 emblems come from nine countries and contain different cultures and ideas. That makes the diverse data more convincing and representative. Through the analysis, it is found that the interactive meaning of Olympic emblems is realized through the interaction of

different constituent elements of visual grammar and other attitudinal resources. Although the multimodal discourse analysis of the nine emblems contains more holistic data, it only focuses on interactive meanings, solely setting sights on contact, social distance, attitude and modality.

Moving beyond singling out one aspect, Qian Xueping (2010) applies visual grammar to analyze the emblem of Beijing 2008 Olympic Games from the perspective of representational meaning, interactional meaning and compositional meaning. The focus is on narrative representation (especially the reaction process), modality (centering on colors) and compositional meaning (focusing on information value). This study sheds some light on analyzing images and helps readers better realize the contained information behind the emblem, yet the discuss is far from being holistic, without taking other elements into account.

Some studies combine visual grammar with other coordinating resources in analyzing emblems of Olympic Games. Sun Yi and Zhang Junlong (2015) unfolds how multimodal resources are coordinated in the emblem of Rio 2016 Olympic Games by taking prototype, color, format design and heuristic combination into consideration. Their study focuses upon the interactive meaning in this visual symbol and explores different communicative modes. Prototype uncovers the original inspiration of the emblem, color discloses the host country's culture, format design presents the overall composition, and heuristic combination concludes how these different modes are coordinated to better present a visual design. Similarly, Shang Ximei (2012) discloses the emblem of 2012 London Olympic Games by taking words, images, colors and typographies into account. By analyzing reaction process, colors, composition, and typography style, the multi-modal text tries to unfold the inter-semiotic relationship between different modes and how they are coordinated to render meanings. Zeng Fangben (2017) also takes the emblem of 2016 Rio Olympic Games as an example to adopt an analysis from multi-perspectives, including systemic-functional semiotics (centering on visual grammar), cognitive poetics, and cross-cultural communication. It widens the perspective on multi-modal text analysis, yet fails to render detailed discuss.

The previous research mentioned-above allows us to have a general picture of the analysis of multimodal discourses with visual grammar which crowds of scholars have touched from various aspects, yet most of researches center on advertisement texts or narrative texts. Even if some studies do explore the emblem of Olympic Games, most of them tend to single out one aspect of visual grammar or just take one emblem as an example. The relatively comprehensive analysis of different emblems by taking representational, interactive, and compositional meanings remains largely under-researched. That leaves a gap for this paper to bridge. In this case, this paper will attempt to tap into how each emblem mirrors the three meanings mentioned above, how they are coordinated to present multimodality, what are rich information embedded in the emblem, and what are the different visual designs revealed in different countries.

### **3. Theoretical Background and Methodology**

According to systematic functional language, there are three basic metafunctions, namely, ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function (Halliday, 2014, pp. 84–85).

Following Halliday's metafunctional semiotic theory, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 1996) present a framework to analyze visual images from representational, interpersonal, and compositional meanings, which respectively correspond to the above-mentioned three metafunctions. Drawing on the present framework, this paper will analyze five emblems of Olympic Games from representational, interactive and compositional meanings.

### *3.1 Theoretical Background*

#### 3.1.1 Representational Meaning

Among the three meanings, representational meaning includes narrative representation and conceptual representation. Similar to ideational function which is concerned with what happens in the world, representational meaning also involves the following components: a process unfolding through time, the participants involved in the process, such as persons, things or abstract entities, the attributes ascribed to them and finally, the circumstances associated with the process, like place, time, manner, etc.

As for narrative representation, it represents doings or happenings and stresses what participants do. "The participant who emanates the vector refers to the Actor and the participant who points at the vector is called the Goal. Here we can regard their relation as a Transaction, as something done by an Actor to a Goal" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 50).

There are three kinds of narrative process: Action processes are sub-classified as non-transactional process in which images or diagrams have only one participant (usually an Actor) and has no "Goal" while transactional process which has two participants (one the Actor, the other the Goal). Reactional processes refer to the Reactors who emanate the vector by an eyeline direct the glance at Phenomena. Differing from the other two processes, speech process and mental process has something to do with saying or thinking through the thought balloons and dialogue balloons, with speakers or thinkers presenting their speech or thought.

In terms of conceptual representation, it represents a situation or condition or something featuring generalized, stable, and timeless nature, different from the action-related narrative representation. It is further sub-classified as three processes. Classification processes have something to do with taxonomy and explores the relationship between different participants. Analytical processes present participants in a part-whole structure: one Carrier (the whole) and Possessive Attributes (the parts). Symbolic processes are about the meaning or identity of participants (the Carrier and the Symbolic Attribute).

#### 3.1.2 Interactive Meaning

Interactive meaning sets sights on interaction between the producer and the viewer of the image. There are four parts: contact refers to visual communication between the presented participants and the viewer. It is sub-categorized as demand in which the presented participants gaze at the viewer directly and explicitly as if require something from the viewers and offer which is devoid of direct address to the viewer and just offers information impersonally; Social distance has something to do with the close-up, medium and distant shot and is realized through "frame size" of the image. Different shots indicate different degree of

closeness between the viewer and the image. “Attitude refers to the relationship between the viewer and the represented participants by choosing different angles. The oblique and the frontal angle indicate detachment and involvement respectively. Besides, a high angle reveals the viewer has power towards represented participants, low angle means represented participant has power over the interactive participant, and eye level indicates equal relationship” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 116–129).

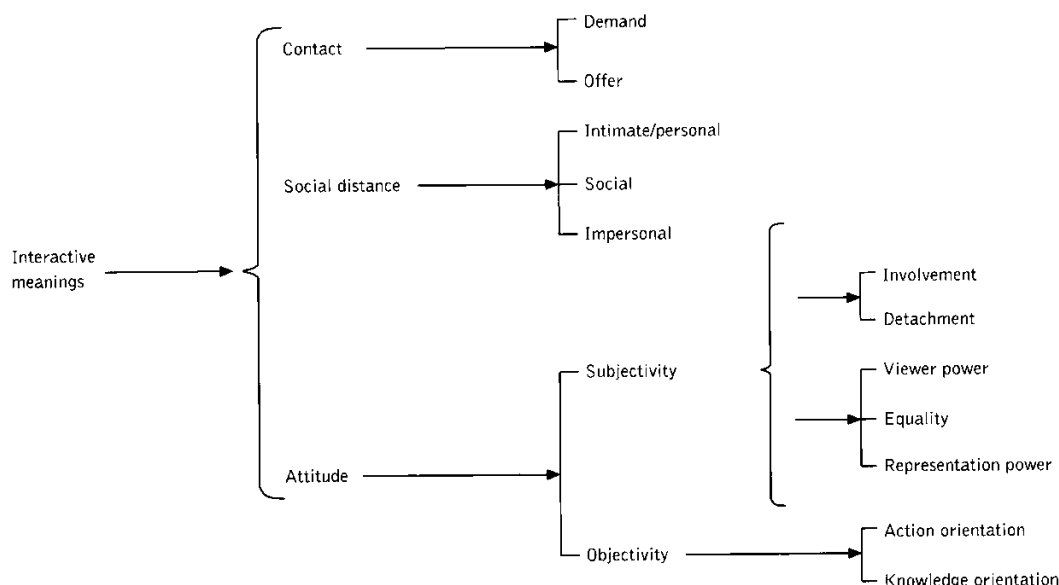


Figure 1. Interactive meanings in images

Source: Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 149.

Modality, similar to linguistics evaluation about the world, has something to do with the truth value or credibility. When it comes to visual design, the focus is on color: the more colour is abstracted and reduced, the lower the modality. There are a lot of modality markers: colour saturation; colour modulation; illumination; brightness, etc. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 160–162).

### 3.1.3 Compositional Meaning

Compositional meaning relates to the layout of the image and sets sights on how the visual and verbal elements are coordinated to present a whole unit. “It links to the representational and interactive meanings of the image to each other through three interrelated systems.” Information value refers to what is the placement of different elements, whether it is left or right, top or bottom, and centre or margin; Saliency relates to how the image attract the viewer’s attention through different factors, like positions of the foreground or background, relative size, tonal value, image sharpness, etc.; Framing refers to whether there is dividing lines to disconnect or connects elements of the image or not (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 177).

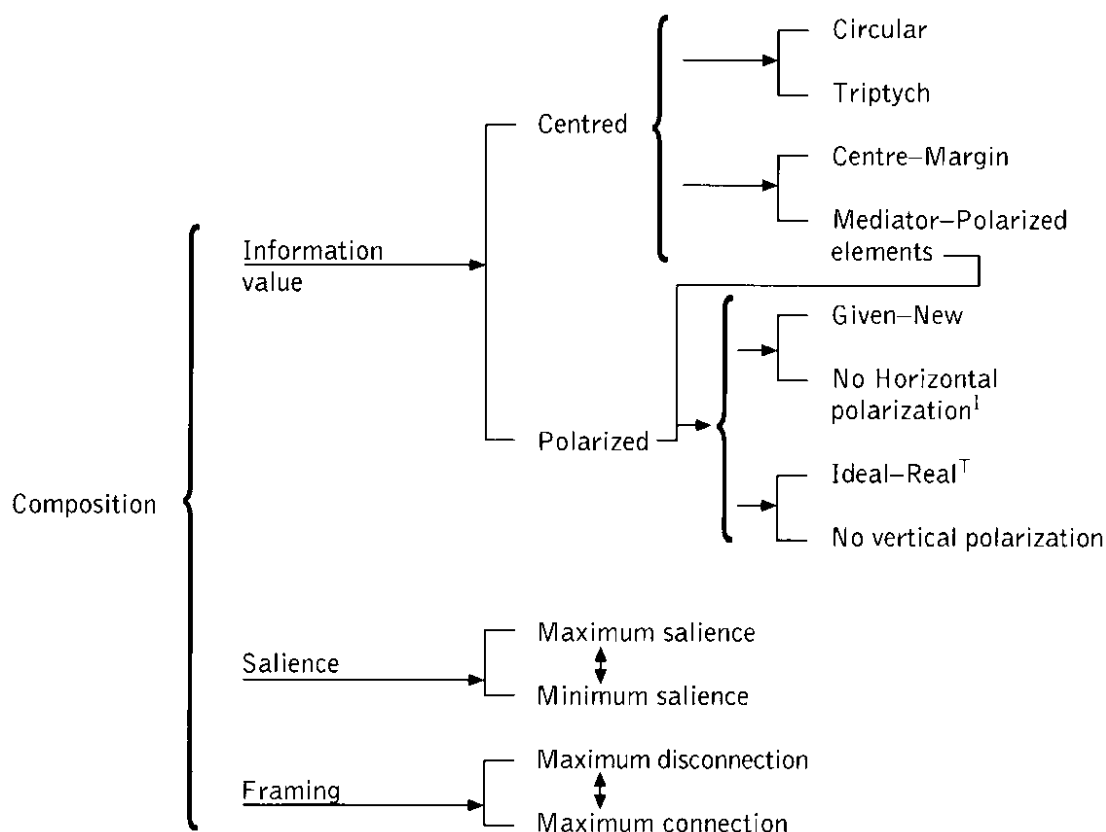


Figure 2. The meaning of composition

Source: Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 210.

### 3.2 Method of Analysis

This paper will employ the method of qualitative analysis and choose the latest five Olympic emblems as examples. These Olympic emblems are from different countries and unfold different design features, which can reveal what cultural elements are embedded in them respectively. On top of that, they are relatively new emblems which uncover the tendency of design styles in recent Olympic games so as to shed some light on the visual design of Olympic emblems and even other emblems in the future.

Coupled with these data, the analysis will be conducted from representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning respectively. Since the three meanings are further sub-categorized as a myriad of elements and each emblem has its unique feature with the possibility of not including every element, this paper will place more weight on exploring those major elements reflected in each emblem. On top of that, given the emblem bears rich connotations and message, such as culture, ideology, geography, etc., the paper will also set sights on disclosing the embedded culture elements so as to further uncover the five emblems of Olympic Games.



#### 4. The Analysis of Five Emblems of Olympic Games from Representational, Interactive, and Compositional Meanings

##### 4.1 Representational Meaning

As stated previously, representational meanings are divided into narrative representation and conceptual representation. The difference between them mainly centers on whether there is a vector or not. Narrative representation always has a vector and it aims to unfold actions and events while conceptual representation has not vector and it pays more attention to generalized and stable essence of the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 59).

##### 4.1.1 Representational Meaning of the Emblem of 29th Beijing Olympic Summer Games



Figure 3. The emblem of 29th Beijing Olympic Summer Games

In the emblem (Figure 3) of Beijing Olympic Games, the Chinese character “京” is constructed by Chinese calligraphy. Shaping like a dancing human figure, it forms an action process (the angled vector) and looks like running to the right side to greet guests. On top of that, the running figure with the graceful curve also presents viewers the beauty of life vitality. The reactional process can be reflected by the gaze (the eye vector) of the figure who seems to look at the right side. Coupled with the open arms, the emblem symbolizes China’s welcoming people from all countries and regions of the world to join the Beijing Olympic Games. By so doing, it aims to promote viewers feeling the greetings and passion of the friendly and hospitable Chinese people. It echoes a famous Chinese saying, “It’s a pleasure to have friends from afar”. Beyond that, the “Chinese seal”, which combines Chinese ancient civilization with the modern Olympic spirit, indicates seriousness and symbolizes the past of Chinese civilization, enriching the connotation of the Olympic feast. All of these elements are coordinated to express the sincere wishes of a populous country for making the Beijing Olympic Games an impressive and friendly feast for all people around the world.



#### 4.1.2 Representational Meaning of the Emblem of 30th London Olympic Summer Games

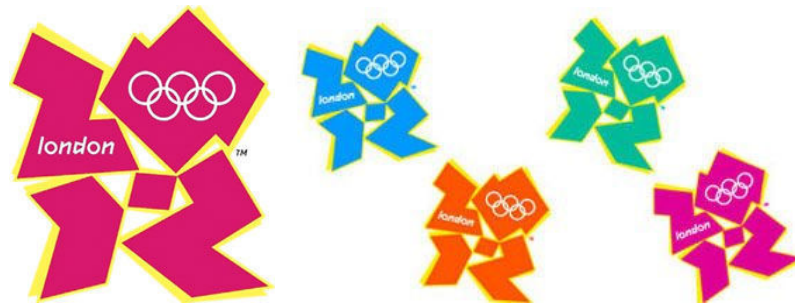


Figure 4. The emblem of 30th London Olympic Summer Games

The emblem of 30th London Olympic Summer Games is mainly constructed by irregular figures. Such uniquely scrambled figures are actually delicate and mirrors the abstract modern structure. The images of the two figures “2”, in particular, are like two athletes running on a track, both acting as actors in the narrative representation of the action process. The running body postures of the two actors form vectors, mirroring athletes’ vitality and strength. At the same time, their gazes also constitute vectors, with the left “2” is directing to the outside and the right “2” gazing at the Olympic rings. They together indicate London’s invitation to the world to participate in the 2012 Olympic Games. The square in the middle of the four images symbolizes that people around the world can cross the boundaries of geography to join in the Olympic feast. The four numbers (four irregular figures) represent Eurasian continent, North America, Africa and South America, and the small square in the middle represents the continent of Oceania. The whole image is similar to the world map (Li & Wang 2012). It implies the theme of the London Olympics, that is, the Olympics belongs to everyone in the world and people from the five continents are welcomed to attend this event. To sum up, the whole image presents a dynamic and unique visual effect.

#### 4.1.3 Representational Meaning of the Emblem of 31th Rio Olympic Summer Games



Figure 5. The emblem of 31th Rio Olympic Summer Games

In Figure 5, the action process is evidenced by three human bodies dancing in a graceful manner. They stand as actors and are placed in the upper part as the prominent components. The narrative representation is created by actions among the three dancers, whose hands and feet form vectors. They are showing the elegant dance, reflecting the enthusiasm of the Brazilian people to celebrate the Rio Olympic Games.

As for the reactional process, it can be reflected by the mutual gaze of the dancers. The three dancers look at each other attentively, showing unity and love, which further mirrors the Olympic spirit of love and harmony among the Brazilians and people around the world. Finally, concerning the speech and mental process, there is no thought balloons or dialogue balloons and hence we can't know the psychological reaction of the dancers. Nevertheless, faced with such a joyful dance, viewers are easily attracted to the passion of Brazilian people and share the joy with the locals.

When it comes to conceptual representation, we can look closely at the symbolic process. In Figure 5, the dancers are placed at the top of the emblem, which symbolizes that Brazil highly values athletes and people. Meanwhile, the dancing human figures who form a shape that mirrors the Brazil's Sugarloaf Mountain and express the greetings for the whole world. Beyond that, the blue, green and yellow colors represent Brazil's national flag colors. The blue color reveals that the venue is near to the sea. At the bottom is the iconic five Olympic rings, signifying that this is an Olympic event for all people to participate in.

#### 4.1.4 Representational Meaning of the Emblem of 32th Tokyo Olympic Summer Games



Figure 6. The emblem of 32th Tokyo Olympic Summer Games



Figure 7. The emblem of 18th Tokyo Olympic Summer Games

The emblem of Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games is based on “Japanese Indigo” which features aesthetic calmness and elegance. Specifically, the emblem is composed of squares and two kinds of rectangles with different widths. They together create a circle, which is a symbol of the harmonious coexistence, that is, although the cultures of different countries are varied, each country can seek common ground while preserving cultural diversity. A whole circle is one of the most important characteristics of Japanese graphic design. That can be evidenced by the emblem of 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games which is also a red circle (see Figure 7). The design concept also corresponds to and symbolizes Japanese nation’s characteristic of the “Land of the Rising Sun”. A whole circle also reflects the Zen spirit which Japan highly values. Zen spirit is related to the connotations of completeness, softness, and refinement. Beyond that, it is in line with the spirit of Buddhism which upholds the “Great Circle Realm”, in which mind and matter are integrated, and bears the highest and ultimate aesthetic realm (Mao, 2020). Japanese believes that circle is beautiful, all-inclusive, and infinitely eternal. The emblem as a whole symbolizes the unity and comprehensiveness of the world and the collectivism of Eastern societies.

#### 4.1.5 Representational Meaning of the Emblem of 33th Paris Olympic Summer Games



Figure 8. The emblem of 33th Paris Olympic Summer Games

The emblem of Paris 2024 Olympic Games presents a still image and has not action process. On the top of the image, the emblem consists of a circle, a torch, and a female face. The circle

symbolizes an Olympic gold medal, reflecting the openness as well as inclusiveness of Paris and triggers viewers' imagination of the Olympic Games. The torch symbolizes the Olympic spirit passed on from generation to generation. At the same time, the curve of the torch connects several landmarks in Paris, such as the Pont Alexandre III, the Plaza de la République, and Montparnasse Building (Gu & Wang, 2019), forming the image of the Olympic flame and highlighting the visual imagery. The prominent female face represents the goddess Marianne, reflecting the desire of Paris to bring the Olympic Games closer to the people. Marianne is the national symbol of the French Republic, and her image has been sculpted into a bronze statue which is placed in the Place de la Nation in Paris as a symbol of the "triumph of the Republic". Incorporating the female face into the Paris Olympic emblem reflects the value of inclusiveness and humanity by paying more attention to people.

The second part of the emblem is the English font "PARiS" combined with the number "2024". Different font sizes and styles bring different psychological perceptions and express different semantic meanings. "PARiS 2024" adopts a handwriting-like font which features salient and beautiful, leaving an impression of freedom and smoothness. Meanwhile, the unique bold font suddenly brings a strong visual shock. The mental reaction is constructed by highlighting the letters "i" in lowercase. On top of that, the visual imagery "i" indicates the theme of the Olympic Games, that is, the Olympic event is for all and the focus is on the public.

#### *4.2 Interactive Meaning*

As previously stated, interactive meaning has something to do with the relationship between the producer of the image, the thing represented by the image (including people), and the viewer of the image. It includes four parts: contact, social distance, attitude, and modality.

##### *4.2.1 Interactive Meaning of the Emblem of 29th Beijing Olympic Summer Games*

As what has mentioned before, different colors will give the image viewer different psychological feelings. The traditional Chinese festive color red dominates the emblem with high saturation and high modality. Beyond that, red is the color of flame, representing life and new beginnings and also symbolizing enthusiasm, joy and good luck. That corresponds to the Chinese people's best wishes of life as well as hospitality to the world. The Chinese character "京" is in a full white color, which features clean, smooth, and simple, which relates to brightness and purity. The harmonious coordination of red and white reflects the concept of harmonious coexistence between different nations and peoples. It also echoes the Olympic theme slogan of "One World, One Dream". In this emblem, the figure's gaze is not clearly presented, yet it seems not directly addressing the outside viewers and is closer to a offering contact, intending to convey a message of passionate greetings. The emblem adopts a medium shot, which is a close social distance. It brings the participants and the viewers closer together and shortens the distance between them. The frontal angle allows the viewer to easily and quickly grasp the major information. Differing from the high angle and low angle, the eye level reflects equality without power difference involved.

#### 4.2.2 Interactive Meaning of the Emblem of 30th London Olympic Summer Games

As previously stated, contact refers to an imagined contact relationship between the participant in the image and the viewer through the pointing of the gaze. It is clear that this emblem image (Figure 4) belongs to the category of offering information without direct gaze. It conveys a modern and dynamic message with irregular shapes. Social distance is the relationship between the participant and the viewer in the image. The emblem image neither conveys an indifferent social relationship nor reveal the intimate relationship between the participants and the audience of the image. Instead, it applies a medium shot to wholly present the emblem itself. The frontal angle and the eye level view of the London 2012 Olympic emblem image shows that the London 2012 Olympic Games belongs to everyone. Apart from the role of perspectives, modality serves to the authenticity and credibility of the image. The four colors, pink, orange, blue, and green, show a pleasant atmosphere with a high modality. The contrast between the white color and the other colors are in harmony with each other and reflects the main theme of inclusiveness of the Olympic Games. Pink is liked to the harmony and balance of life, orange to health, vitality and friendliness, blue to peace, stability, professionalism and green to balance, harmony and nature, and is a symbol of peace. The combination of four colors is perfectly harmonious, vivid, and lively. They mirror the diverse and rich cultural connotations of the UK and the sincere, enthusiastic, and passionate British people who aim to hold an impressive Olympic event.

#### 4.2.3 Interactive Meaning of the Emblem of 31th Rio Olympic Summer Games

Interactive meaning has something to do with the interaction between the image producer and viewers. In Figure 5, the three dancers look at each other and their eyes do not directly address the outside viewers, which is a kind of offering contact. It intends to convey a message of harmony and coexistence without demanding force. This kind of contact has an appeal to encourage people around the world to work together for the Olympics and realize their dreams. In terms of social distance, the Rio Olympic emblem adopts a medium shot, which is a close social distance. It brings the participants and the viewers closer together and shortens the distance between them. The frontal angle allows the viewer to easily and quickly grasp the major information. Unlike the high angle and low angle, the eye level reflects equality. As have mentioned before, different colors will give the image viewer different psychological feelings. The Rio Olympic emblem adopts three colors and employs the high saturation color, which presents an attractive image and conveys naturalness with high modality. At the same time, the words and numbers of the image are dominated by blue, which forms a sharp contrast with other colors, highlighting the important information of the host city and time of the Olympic Games. The red, green, orange, black and blue of the five Olympic rings are blended together, further reflecting the good wishes of people from five continents to meet and gather for the Olympic Games.

#### 4.2.4 Interactive Meaning of the Emblem of 32th Tokyo Olympic Summer Games

The blue color in the emblem of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games is like the indigo on white cloth, offering people a sense of freshness, simplicity, and subtlety. It is minimalist in design, discarding superfluous colors and employing low-saturation. Japanese indigo in contrast

sharply with the colorful emblems of other Olympic Games, presenting a low modality. Indigo is the blue of nature and has the symbolic meaning of sacredness, peace, purity and justice, etc. The medium shot naturally presents the dominant blue color. Japan is the “Land of Thousand Islands”, surrounded by the sea on all sides. Hence the Japanese people have a deep affection for the sea and the islands and admire natural blue. There is no contact in the emblem, but the frontal angle showcases a clear image in which the exchange of blue and white backgrounds means the exchange of “yin” and “yang”, symbolizing the balance of all things on earth and reflecting the influence of Buddhist culture on the emblem. Beyond that, the eye level creates a sense of equality and peace. The whole emblem image unfolds the oriental culture aesthetics of simplicity and solitude.

#### 4.2.5 Interactive Meaning of the Emblem of 33th Paris Olympic Summer Games

In the emblem of 33th Paris Olympic Summer Games, the female face has not direct contact with viewers and is closer to offer information, reminding viewers of a golden medal. The medium shot leaves a peaceful and calm impression, bringing an impact on the interaction between an individual’s vision and the visual image. On top of that, different individuals see colors in different ways, and the feelings that the individual evokes are also varied. Color is also culturally diverse, with different meanings in different cultures. The 2024 Olympic Games emblem is composed of three main colors: sub-gold, white and black. The three main colors belongs to low modality and emphasize the concept of seriousness and environmental protection. In French culture, white symbolizes dignity and is an important color of the high class. On top of that, the French are mostly fond of white which signals peace and is one of the colors of their flag. Hence, it is no wonder that the Paris Olympic emblem is creatively designed in white background. The black color of “PARiS 2024” represents diversity and inclusion. The sub-golden color is close to gold, which leaves the impression of a light and hopeful color. The lively sub-golden and white color are combined with the solemn black to make the composition more harmonious. On top of that, frontal angle presents a clear image to viewers and help invoke their emotion. Besides, the eye level perspective not only creates a sense of equality, making the emblem more approachable, but also allows viewers to appreciate the complete image and ignites their imagination and responses.

#### 4.3 *Compositional Meaning*

As previously stated, in a multimodal discourse, the meaning of composition in visual images is expressed through the combination of multiple symbolic resources, including information value, framing, and salience.

##### 4.3.1 Compositional Meaning of the Emblem of 29th Beijing Olympic Summer Games

As mentioned above, the information value has something to do with the placement of elements in the composition. If some elements are placed above and others are placed below, then what is placed above is “ideal” and what is placed below is “real”. In the emblem 1, the dancing character “京” appears on the top of the Chinese seal (Dancing Beijing), implying that Beijing 2008 Olympic Games will be a showcase for the world. The ideal information of “Faster, Higher, Stronger” and “Peace, Friendship, Progress” will be played for all mankind.



In the middle of the image is “Beijing 2008” written in Chinese characters. Compared to the dancing Beijing character, it provides a more realistic message to the world, conveying the time and place of the Olympic Games which expresses the heartfelt message of all Chinese people: “Let’s meet in Beijing in 2008”. At the bottom of the image are the five Olympic rings, which is the most realistic message. On top of that, the image is also salient by the strong red color combining with the color of white. When it comes to the framing, the Chinese seal, “Beijing 2008”, and the five Olympic rings are divided by three obscure horizontal lines, which showcase the clean framing of the emblem.

#### 4.3.2 Compositional Meaning of the Emblem of 30th London Olympic Summer Games

In terms of layout, the whole London Olympic emblem is uniquely composed of several deformed and exaggerated figures, which can easily draw viewers’ attention. In the emblem, “2012” is divided into a combination of “20” and “12”, and designed as irregular images in which the framing is relatively obscure. The figures and images are integrated into one, reflecting each other. Differing from the usual norm of putting five rings on the bottom, the emblem of 30th London Olympic Summer Games places the five rings in the upper right position to leaves viewers an unusual, dynamic, open and free feeling. It also mirrors the harmonious integration and inclusiveness of the world’s diverse cultures, which is the “ideal” value information. The white English word “London” is placed in the lower position, on the left of the five Olympic rings logo. It gives people a realistic feeling and belongs to “real” value information, contextualizing the images and constraining the scope of interpretation. At the same time, it gives up a purely symbolic form of sports and returns to the modern Olympic spirit to let the public actively participate and share the joy of igniting the passion and dreams of the Olympics. Beyond that, in the emblem of London Olympics, the four figures of “2012” logo image are irregular and stand out. This makes the whole pattern has a very strong sense of sharpness. The salience can easily attract viewers’ attention. In addition, this structure makes the emblem look very energetic and modernized, matching the theme of the Olympic Games.

#### 4.3.3 Compositional Meaning of the Emblem of 31th Rio Olympic Summer Games

When it comes to the layout, the whole emblem is composed of three parts: the dancing human figures, the blue words and numbers, as well as the Olympic rings. As for information value, the three dancing figures in the emblem of Rio Olympic Games belong to the “ideal value” above, reflecting the ideal principle of “people-oriented and everyone participating and cooperating” in the Olympic Games. The artistic letters “Rio” and the number “2016” and the five Olympic rings in the lower part showcase more practical and authentic information. The former conveys the specific location and time of the Olympics in Brazil, which makes people easily understand at a glance and have a sense of belonging and authenticity; the latter uses the five Olympic rings to represent the five continents closely connected.

Framing can be seen by the bright colors and clearly visible curve of the emblem with a clear dividing line, revealing the dancing human figures, the obvious symbolic mark of time and place, and the eye-catching Olympic rings. It can be seen that the emblem image is selected



from a close-up perspective, in which all the images are clearly shown to viewers' eyes. The word and numbers in the middle are like a horizontal dividing line, playing the role of connecting the transition: it is the Rio Olympics that connects the people of Brazil and the world together to cheer for the Olympic Games. The three different strong colors create a sense of sharpness and salience. In short, the overall composition of the Rio emblem is arranged harmoniously and conveys the multicultural characteristics of Rio and the local people.

#### 4.3.4 Compositional Meaning of the Emblem of 32th Tokyo Olympic Summer Games

In Figure 6, squares and rectangles form a whole salient circle. In the top of the emblem, the abstract "emptiness" in the middle of the circle is combined with the circle to convey the ideal information of encompassing differences and welcoming all countries to participate in the Olympic event. In Zen Buddhism, "emptiness" contains rich spiritual information, reaching the "Great Circle Realm" which is beyond words. On the lower part, the emblem provides real information, including the place and the time of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. On top of traditional Japanese elements, the design the emblem is also reflecting the abstract and logical nature of mathematics by adopting the grid composition method. The squares in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games emblem are formed by turning the concrete, complex and fragmented objects into a simple, concise, and elegant unity, presenting the simplicity aesthetics of traditional Japanese culture. This pattern focuses on using simple symbols to express profound information. To sum up, the whole emblem stresses the unity and comprehensiveness of the world by arranging the squares and gathering them into a circle.

#### 4.3.5 Compositional Meaning of the Emblem of 33th Paris Olympic Summer Games

On the top of the emblem showcases the symbol of the goddess Marie Anne and the ideal information stands out: this Olympic Games are people-oriented. The overall concept of the emblem is related to the goddess Marie Anne, the symbol of France, representing courage and inclusiveness. The central element of the Olympic Games is the human being, and the emblem features a human face as its main subject. On the lower part, the English font "PARiS" combines with the number "2024", providing real information, that is, the place and time of this event. Viewers see the words and numbers to identify the 2024 Olympic Games. That shortens distance between viewers and the emblem. In the word "PARiS", the letter "i" is lowercase, which is salient and becomes a focus point. The letter "i" reminds viewers of individual, which highly activates the contextual message that Paris wants to bring the Olympics closer to the people and to highlight that the Games are different and people-oriented, sustainable and inclusive. The framing is also clear, three unseen lines divide the emblem into three parts: the female figure, PARiS 2024 and the five rings.

The Paris Olympics in 1900 allowed women athletes to compete for the first time. The new emblem of the Paris Games perfectly reflects their vision of putting people at the center of the 2024 Paris Games. The combination of the gold medal, the Olympic flame and Marianne conveys the values, history and culture with the French, making the Games truly unique. This innovative design will soon be recognized around the world and will probably become an

iconic symbol at Paris 2024.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the social semiotics theory of multimodal discourse, this paper explores Olympic emblems from the representational meaning, interpersonal meaning and compositional meaning. There are mainly four findings. Firstly, emblems of Olympic Games do not create out of nothing. Instead, the visual design of each emblem is originated from a country's unique elements, such as culture, history, ideology, geography, etc. Whether it is “Chinese seal”, “Japanese indigo”, or “Brazil's Sugarloaf Mountain”, all of these embedded elements in the emblems have something to do with countries' representative objects. Secondly, the three meanings, that is, representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning, coordinate to effectively convey multimodal meanings of emblems. Whether it is action processes, colors, or layouts, etc., all of them work together to constitute meanings and enhance emblems' visual effect. Thirdly, in a multimodal discourse, different modes, such as images, words, colors, and typography, etc., are interconnected and interacted, making contributes to representing the original information in a comprehensive manner. The neglect of any of these symbolic resources can lead to a biased understanding or an incomplete interpretation of the multimodal discourse. Fourthly, visual grammar is appropriate and useful to be employed in studying emblems of Olympic Games.

To put it in a nutshell, in a multimodal language like the emblems of Olympic Games, symbolic resources such as images, colors, numbers, and layouts, etc., are used along with linguistic resources to render meanings. It is also worth noting that different symbolic resources are not simply chosen at will or randomly mixed up with each other. Each mode is carefully selected and they complement with each other to complete the overall discourse. From this perspective, the interpretation of a multimodal discourse calls for taking various factors into account. Meanwhile, since the designs of Olympic emblems are influenced by different culture, history, ideology, geography, etc., it is imperative to consider the specific context. Only by placing the various symbolic resources of a discourse in a socio-cultural context can we better interpret their connotations. At the same time, the analysis of multimodal discourse should not be limited to the semantic level but extend to non-verbal levels to further uncover other meanings and information hidden behind the discourse.

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