

# Widening the Spaces for Imagination

Rebecca Chee, publisher of Christian Communications Limited and chair of the Association of Christian Publishers in Hong Kong, uncovers the secrets behind an award-winning Chinese cover design.

China's 5,000-year history gives designers with a treasure-house of ideas to enrich their compositions. Book cover designs must communicate the theme effectively; and for Chinese readers, it is extremely important that a book cover design honor the readers' cultural background.

Johnny Wong, an elite Hong Kong designer, described for me how Chinese elements contribute to the cover for *A Stream by the Path of the Cross*, by Rev. Wei-fan Wang. This title is a devotional intended for Christians in mainland China. The author was born in China; acquired theological training in the mainland, and has taught in seminaries and delivered training in China for almost 40 years. He is an author, a speaker, and a pastor.

Wong's book cover design won the 2005 Gold Medallion award granted by the Association of Christian Publishers in Hong Kong. Because the book is targeted to Chinese Christians, Wong felt the book design should be composed of Chinese elements. Folk art, Chinese architecture and festive motifs all provide rich resources for design.

Chinese art also makes ample use of white space. For example, in the Tai Ji graph (the yin-yang black and white symbol of Taoist origin), both black and white elements are of equal size. The ratio between the depicted object and the space around it is the same. This, says Wong, widens the space for imagination, and enhances interactions between the design and the readers.

In *A Stream by the Path of the Cross*, Wang provides 64 devotional passages for meditation. He combines poetry and prose, so Wong felt the design should be composed of abstract and realistic elements, as to express the poetic atmosphere of the contents. The composition of Chinese book covers tends to be abstract so as to widen the space for imagination, and this is quite different from the Western representational way.

Abstract expressions are especially common in landscape paintings. In this cover, the realism is provided through the photograph of a river. The abstract element is the red stroke, representing the path to the cross wrought by Jesus' precious blood. The color of the path has even more significance in view of the conventional interpretation of colors in Chinese culture. Red and orange represent blessing, conveying a festive spirit; gold and silver communicate wealth; black and blue represent death or misfortune.

Chinese characters are pictographs that can easily be merged with other graphic patterns to compose a book

title. Besides, characters can go both from left to right and from top to bottom, certainly an advantage for designers to have choices. The title of *A Stream by the Path of the Cross* is hand written by the author in traditional Chinese calligraphy, marked with his stamp.



*A Stream by the Path of the Cross*, by Rev. Wei-fan Wang, is part of a series that includes CDs as well as books.

