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Tokyo Olympic Bid Teamwork Inspires Kanji of the Year

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By **MARI IWATA**



Agence France-Presse/Getty Images
Seihan Mori, the chief priest of Kiyomizu temple in Kyoto, displays his calligraphy of a kanji "wa" meaning "ring", which was selected as the single best kanji to symbolize the year 2013.

The teamwork that went into [Tokyo's successful bid for the 2020 Summer Olympic Games](#) inspired the choice of Kanji Character of the Year — "wa," which means circle, wheel, or ring, and which is pronounced the same as the character for "harmony" between people.

The annual year-end vote for the year's most resonant kanji — pictographic ideograms used in writing Chinese and Japanese — is organized by the Japan

Kanji Proficiency Tests Association. This year, "wa" edged out the competition with 5.6% of 170,290 votes, the association said Thursday. Many Japanese were cheered by the teamwork displayed by Tokyo's delegation to the September meeting of the International Olympic Committee in Buenos Aires to pick the host of the 2020 games, the association said.

Among the contenders were "bai" (double), one of the characters in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's name, and "raku" (enjoyment), a character in the name of the Rakuten Golden Eagles, the baseball team that won the professional Japan Series championship.

The harmony conveyed by "wa" is a core value of Japanese society, enshrined in the country's first constitution in 604 AD. The circle that the character represents also suggests the five overlapping rings of the Olympic symbol, which themselves signify peace between the peoples of five continents.

A news release accompanying the announcement of kanji of the year quoted one male voter as expressing thanks for the "cooperation" between members of Tokyo's Olympic delegation.

Having seen natural disasters in Japan, the Philippines and elsewhere — and rescuers and volunteers coming from around the world to help — the man said he realized "the country must keep harmony."

Tokyo's Olympic presentation featured news anchor Christel Takigawa giving a memorable speech on Japanese hospitality. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also weighed in by offering assurances there would be no radiation threat from the stricken Fukushima nuclear reactors.

The [Kanji Character of the Year contest](#) has been held since 1995. In 2001, the character for "war" (ikusa) won following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. In 2011, "kizuna," or "bond," won because people thought bonds between people were never more important to survive and rebuild from the devastating



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earthquake and tsunami of that year.

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