12-15-2021

Using Characters to Narrow Culture Gaps

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RIT

USING CHARACTERS TO NARROW

CULTURE GAPS

by

Xiangyu Han

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Visual Communication Design

School of Design
College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, NY
December 15, 2021

RIT | College of **Art and Design**

Thesis Approval

Using characters to narrow culture gaps

Thesis Title

Xiangyu Han

Thesis Author

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of Master of Fine Arts

The School of Design | Visual Communication Design

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Abstract

There are a lot of different cultures around the world. It is hard for people with various cultural backgrounds to understand each other. Language is the most direct expression of cultural barriers. With the different structures of languages, communication becomes unsmooth. People can get to know each other better if we narrow down the gaps. The research here discusses the possibility of building a connection between language characters through the graphic. This work will use Chinese and English as an experimental. Images and pictures are the most visual information for people to read. And languages are the most direct information for people to communicate. So I did some research between letters and characters in those two languages. Try to incorporate the style of Chinese fonts into the English letters, and I used calligraphy to write English letters. I used that typeface to make some words.

Keywords

Culture differences, bilingual communication, motion graphic, typography.

Problem Statement

There are many different cultures in the world. Cultural differences will inevitably affect the communication between people with varying backgrounds of culture. Sometimes it is hard for people with diverse cultural experiences to understand each other because of the cultural distinction. How to reduce the gap of understanding caused by this is essential for improving communications. Language is one of the representations that most reflects culture. The typefaces in different periods usually reflect the art and advertisement style and technological development. Some people think that fonts can use as a tool to seak the culture. (Marisa Sloan, 2018.12) How can we create a system about various languages to help people know more about different cultures.

Design Concept/Solutions

To solve the problem, I think out is building a bridge between the two cultures. I want to make a motion graphic piece to help people understand the gap between the two cultures. English and Chinese are used as a key to reflect the cultural background. To make a motion piece composed of characters from the two languages to help people know the differences between the two cultures and understand each other's culture. I compared different Chinese and English typefaces and wanted to find their similarities and differences.


According to my research, some works about language and culture existed before digital media became popular. The work "Billingual Lettering." did an experiment focus on Kanji/Chinese/Latino. The designer explored the possibility of these two languages in graphics. Since these two writing systems are very different, she showed the similarity in personality between these two scripts. (Tienmin Liao, 2016) The earliest work about the foreign languages I found is "Square World Calligraphy." made by Xu Bing. He developed a system for writing English called "square word calligraphy," which organizes the letters of each English word into structures that resemble Chinese characters. It is a very creative way to combine two languages. Although some English personality is losing a little bit, it is still an excellent reference for my project. (Xu Bing, 1994-1996)

Approaches and outcomes

According to my research, languages are a reflection of culture. Ye Tianyu's work about Chinese characters. There is an interview record about Ye's thoughts of Chinese typeface. The designer flexibly uses Chinese as a hieroglyph and combines Chinese culture to make typefaces. (Hu Yuwei, 2018.4.12) The article "A designer's guide to more fulfilling typography." talked about both typography and iconography. The characters' personalities are shown through several heading fonts. The author tried to call for people to dig into cultural diversity to enrich typography and icons. (Batsirai Madzonga, 2020.5.22)
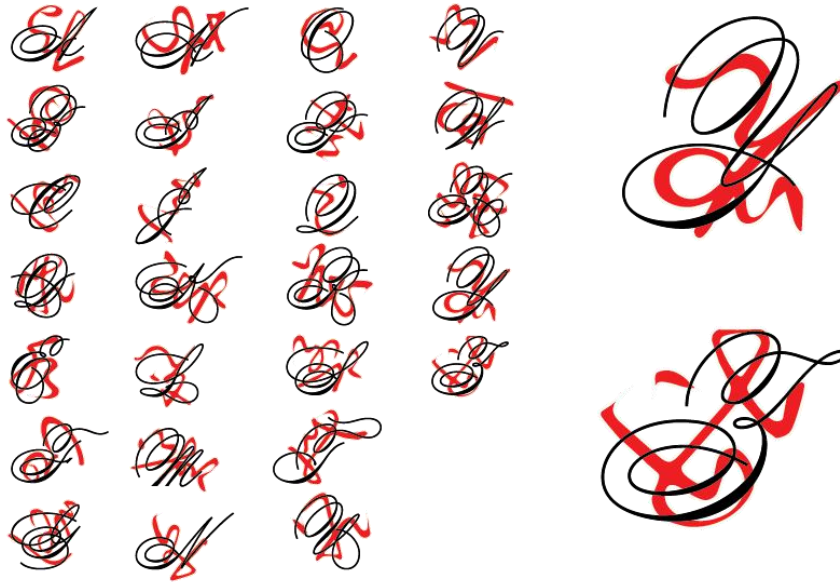
I found two sets of unique fonts in Chinese and English, respectively, and found glyphs similar to the 26 letters in Chinese. Try to incorporate the style of Chinese fonts into the English letters. I chose Compendium (English) and Tensentype BoDang Caoshu (Chinese) for comparison. To my surprise, I found highly overlapping text on the graphics in these two poorly recognizable fonts. I used calligraphy to write English letters. According to those sketches, I designed a font that looks handwriting and has Chinese characters' personalities.
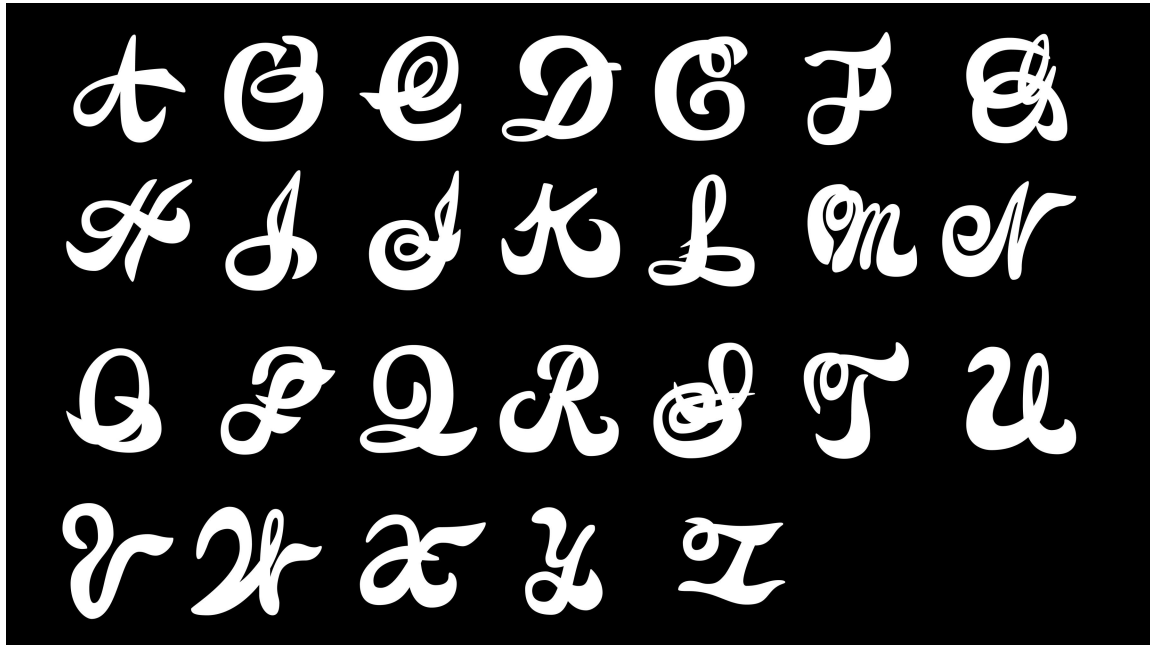
With the popularity of digital media, videos and pictures are the most direct and fast ways to get information. It causes motion graphics to become more and more popular in our daily life. The animations can give direct input to people. There are a lot of artists and designers making experimental with languages. Motion graphic works "HaKU" and "Kanji City" made by Kota Iguchi are impressive pieces. He put the Japanese characters into concrete figures while keeping the words' shape. (Kota Iguchi, 2013.5)(Kota Iguchi, 2012.10) Another motion graphic about characters is "Motion Type Project." Tingan combines the meaning of a specific character in Chinese to make a single animation for that character. (Tingan Ho, 2016.11)I used that font to make words like "water" "sand," which are specific things around our daily lives because these things have no barriers to understanding people from different cultural backgrounds. Finally, to show the connection between the patterns spelled out by the fonts and items, I designed a set of motion graphic pieces to transition from English patterns to Chinese patterns.
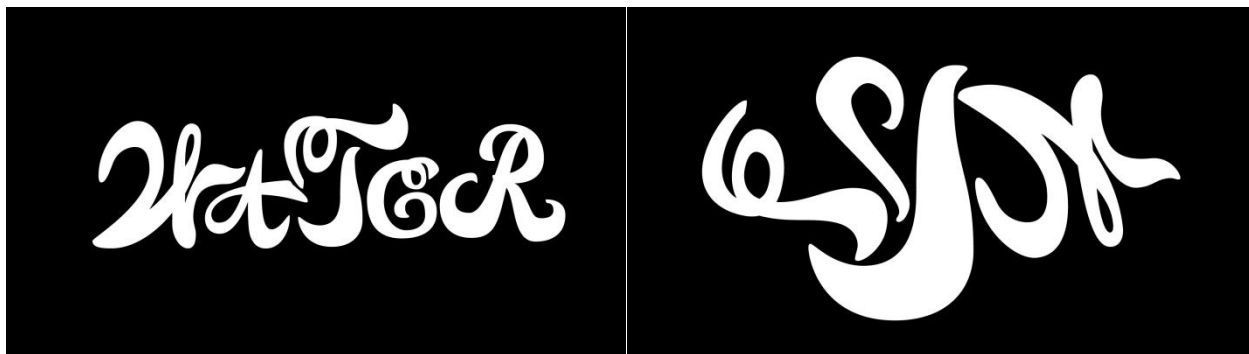
Conclusion

There is a big problem with cultural differences and the communication among people with various languages. Problems caused by different cultures are often more complicated. There would be a lot of methods to help people narrow down the culture gap in the future. Motion graphics will play an essential role in the development of modern media, while languages are always the fundamental part of cultural differences. People are used to getting information quickly and directly.

It is an experimental idea to use the combination of motion graphics and typography to help with the problem. The two poorly recognizable typefaces weaken the function of letters/characters as a language. Therefore, I try to narrow down the meaning of language and visually look at these two fonts. In this way, I look for the visual similarities and differences between language and culture. After discovering some surprisingly similar graphics, I think culture's personality can be conveyed through abstract text symbols. According to the typography trends, motion graphics combine with typography become a way of communication. And it has appeared in the design of posters, websites, etc. So, I tried to use this set of fonts to spell English and Chinese separately and make them into a motion graphic piece. In English, the placement of letters has been adjusted to make them look more like an image, while in Chinese, the letters are disassembled and combined with the shapes of Chinese characters（some of them refer to Oracle) into an image. Try to use the transition between the two to narrow down the cultural gap.

Appendix A: References and Bibliography

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The Problem

Cultural differences will inevitably affect the communication between people with varying backgrounds of culture. Language is one of the representations that most reflects culture. The typefaces in different periods usually reflecting the art and advertisement style and technological development. How can we create a system about various languages to help people know more about different cultures.
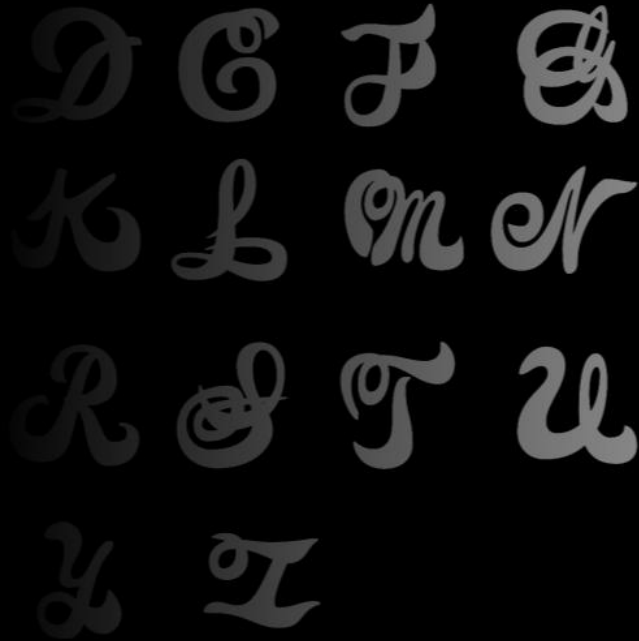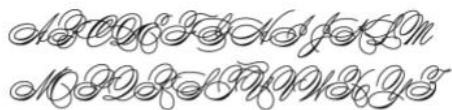
Researches

I compared different Chinese and English typefaces and want to find the similarity and differences among them.


Similar Typeface Compare

Bodoni vs Song	Typeface 宋体	. Triangular serif at the end of strokes . Dramatic contrast between thick and thin strokes
Helvetica vs Hei	Helvetica 黑体	. Even thickness on both horizontal and vertical strokes . Sans-serif
Gotham Rounded vs Rounded Sans	Gotham 幼圆	. Rounded end on a stroke . Rounded corner . Even thickness of strokes
Cooper Black vs Li	Cooper Black 中文隸書	. Swelling ends on both horizontal and vertical strokes . Similar contrast between thick and thin . Rounded counters
Androgyne vs Wei	Typeface 魏体行书	. Similar ends on vertical stroke . Brush shaped terminal ends

Process & Outcomes
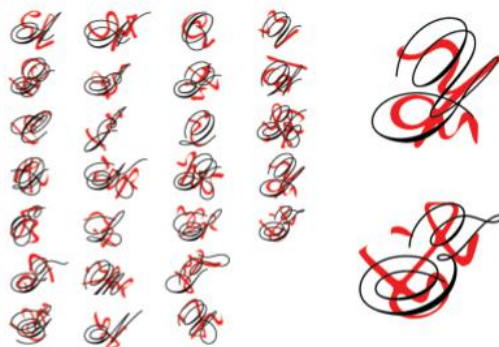
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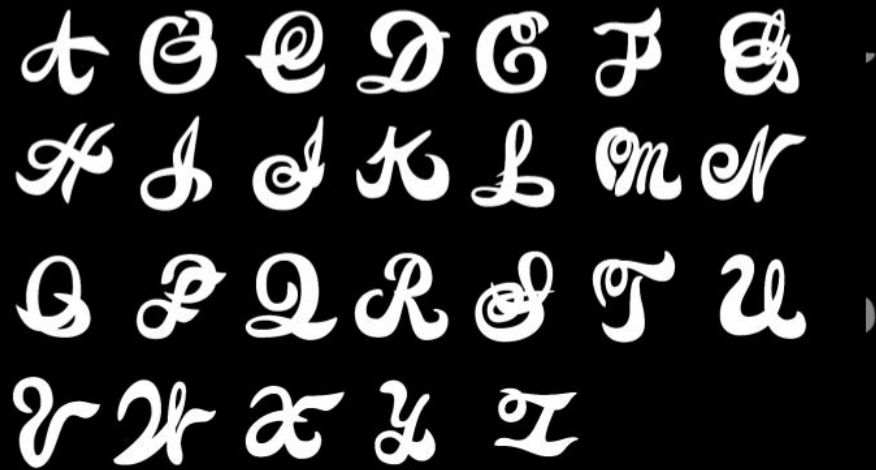
Process & Outcomes

Try to incorporate the style of Chinese fonts into the English letters. I used calligraphy to write English letters.

Process & Outcomes

According to those sketches, I designed a font that looks handwriting and has Chinese characters' personalities.

Process & Outcomes

I used that font to make words like "water" "sand," which are specific things around our daily lives because these things have no barriers to understanding people from different cultural backgrounds.

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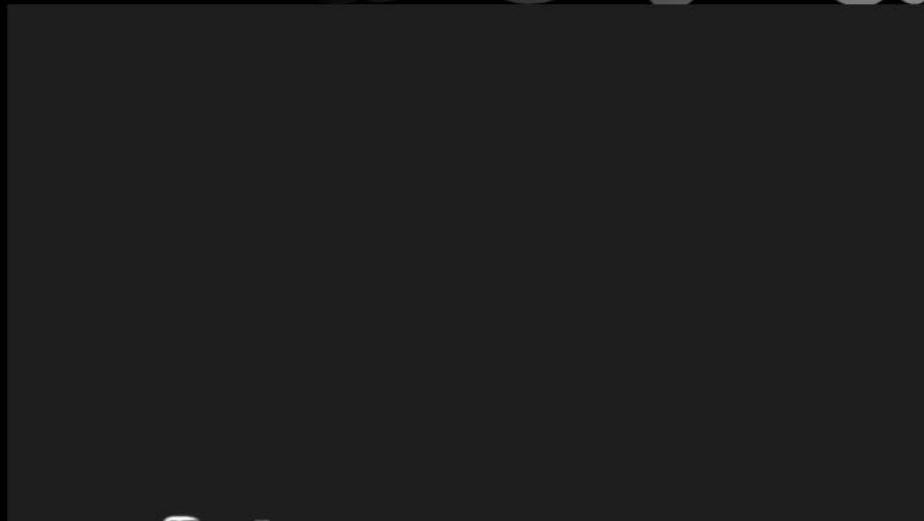
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Finally, to show the connection between the patterns spelled out by the fonts and items, I chose"water" and "sand" to make motion graphic pieces to transition from English patterns to Chinese patterns.

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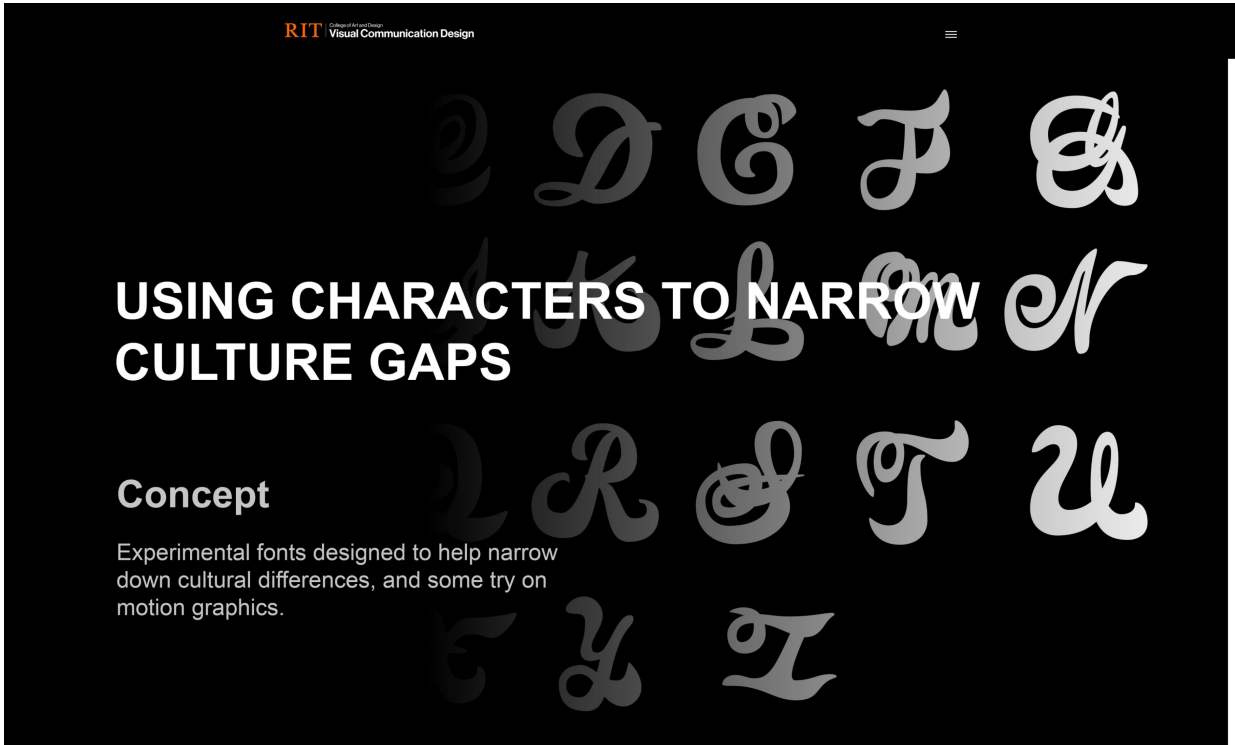
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Appendix C: A full-page screen capture of the Thesis website

USING CHARACTERS TO NARROW CULTURE GAPS

Concept

Experimental fonts designed to help narrow down cultural differences, and some try on motion graphics.

Designed by

Xiangyu Han

Advisor

Adam Smith, Mike Strobert

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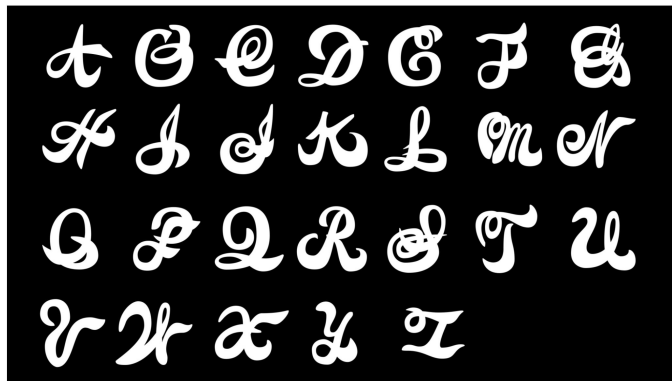
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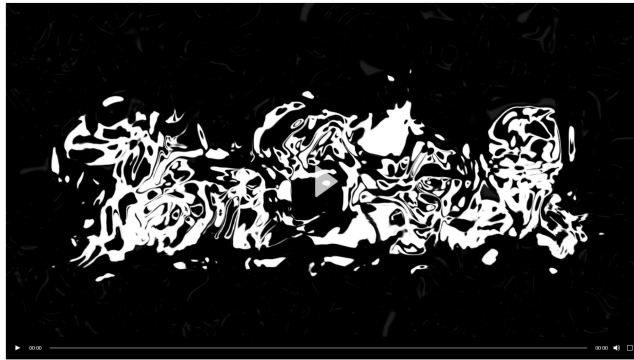
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The following is an attempt to try to spell Chinese and English words (like "water" "sand" "cloud" "thunderstorm") with this font, some of which refer to some ancient hieroglyphic graphics.

water

sand

cloud

thunderstorm

Similar Typeface Compare

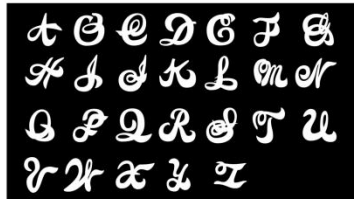| Bodoni Vs. Song | Typeface 宋体 | Triangular stuff at the end of strokes. Dramatic contrast between thick and thin strokes |
Helvetica Vs. Hei	Helvetica 黑体	Even thickness on both horizontal and vertical strokes. Sans serif
Gotham Rounded Vs. Rounded Sans	Gotham 幼圆	Rounded stuff as a stroke. Rounded corner. Even thickness of strokes
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THANKS FOR WATCHING!

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Communication
Design
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Communication
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Design Studies

About the Program