

RESEARCH ON THE APPLICATION OF CHINESE CHARACTER GRAPHIC DESIGN IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMERCIAL GRAPHIC ADVERTISING DESIGN



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Abstract

This research explores the application of Chinese character-based graphic design in cross-cultural commercial graphic advertisements, focusing on how to foster cultural understanding and emotional resonance through visual representation. As Chinese characters are unique cultural symbols with deep connotations, their integration into commercial advertising can enhance both visual appeal and cultural communication. The research examines how the form and meaning of Chinese characters can be harmoniously applied in advertising to achieve cross-cultural communication via using “hotpot” as a representative element of Chinese culinary culture. The study selects four regional varieties of hotpot from across China and designs four commercial graphic advertisements that incorporate graphical elements of Chinese characters. Through literature analysis, case studies, and design practice, the study identifies effective design strategies for applying Chinese character graphic design in a globalized advertising context and interviewed the audiences from different cultural backgrounds to assess their impact on visual effectiveness, emotional resonance, and cultural recognition. The findings show that Chinese character graphic design can significantly enhance advertisement impact while effectively conveying cultural symbols, promoting understanding across cultures. The research provides valuable insights for cross-cultural advertising, encouraging the innovative use of Chinese characters in the global advertising market and offering theoretical support for design practitioners aiming to merge cultural symbols with commercial goals.

Keywords: Chinese character graphics, Commercial advertising design, Cross-cultural communication

Introduction

Since ancient times, Chinese characters as one of the most representative visual symbols of Chinese civilization, have always conveyed the

spiritual essence of the nation. Along with the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt and the cuneiform script of Mesopotamia, Chinese characters are among the oldest writing systems in the world. However, it is unique in that it still retains the characteristics of pictographic writing and is widely used in modern society (Stavrianos, 2005). As a product of time and culture, Chinese characters are not only writing symbols but also a rich resource for graphic design (Bamford, 2009). The origins of Chinese characters can be traced back to pictographs and ideographs, meaning that their written form incorporates features of drawing, which lends them flexibility and creativity. Early applications of Chinese characters as graphics can be observed in Shang Dynasty bronze inscriptions and Taoist talismans. Over thousands of years, the form of Chinese characters has continuously evolved, yet they still demonstrate profound cultural and aesthetic value in today's technologically advanced society (Liu & Lu, 2019). From a theoretical perspective, the combination of semiotics and visual communication theories provides a foundation for understanding how Chinese characters function as culturally embedded symbols. According to Barthes (1977), visual signs can convey layered meanings beyond literal representations, while Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) highlight the importance of cultural codes in shaping viewers' interpretation of visual language. These theories support the notion that Chinese character graphics are not merely decorative but serve as meaningful signifiers within specific cultural contexts. By combining Chinese characters with graphic design, not only is the expressiveness of the characters expanded, but it also provides new possibilities for the application of Chinese cultural symbols. Due to their ease of memorability, intuitive communication, and rapid dissemination, graphics can effectively capture viewers' attention in design. The characteristics of Chinese character graphic presents such as readability, aesthetics, and evocativeness, not only provide designers with creative ease but also play an important role in enriching people's daily experiences (Arnheim,2008). This study focuses on the application of graphic design based on Chinese characters in cross-cultural commercial graphic advertisements. It aims to explore how graphical representations of

Chinese characters can enhance cultural expression in commercial advertising and promote understanding and emotional resonance with consumers from different cultural backgrounds. To be specific, the research will use “hotpot,” a quintessential symbol of Chinese food culture, as the entry point. It will select representative types of hotpot from the four major regions in China, Chaozhou beef hotpot of the east, Sichuan spicy hotpot of the south, Yunnan mushroom hotpot of the west, and northern copper pot mutton hotpot, to conduct advertising design experiments, and incorporate the Chinese characters of these hot pot names into the graphic design.

Research Objectives

1. This research analyzes the principles and methods of graphical representation of Chinese characters by integrating the relationship between the form and meaning of Chinese characters into graphic design. Also providing a basis for modern visual design. This approach breaks down language and cultural barriers, facilitating cross-cultural communication, especially by enhancing the global recognition and appeal of commercial graphic advertisements.

2. The research provides practical insights to help designers better apply Chinese character elements in cross-cultural advertising design through the innovative design of four commercial graphic advertisements with a focus on the graphical representation of Chinese characters.

3. This research aims to evaluate how audiences from different cultural backgrounds perceive, interpret, and emotionally resonate to Chinese character-based graphic advertisements, thus assessing their effectiveness in achieving cross-cultural communication and cultural resonance.

Literature Review

1. Characteristics of graphical representation of Chinese characters

The graphical representation of Chinese characters refers to a design

approach that uses the meaning of the characters as the foundation, adopting a pictographic style while maintaining the original meaning of the characters. This method provides a strong visual impact, evoking emotional resonance in human (Xu & Batra, 2021). It enhances both the expressiveness of the characters and the visual effect of the design. In short, the graphical representation involves altering the form of the Chinese characters while preserving their original meaning, employing techniques such as substitution or embellishment. For example, in the design of the 2008 Beijing Olympic emblem, the character “京” was stylized to resemble a running figure, seamlessly blending graphical character design into commercial graphic advertising, yielding positive results. Therefore, graphical representation can offer audiences more information while improving design effectiveness. According to Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) theory of visual grammar, the semiotic potential of visual elements lies in their ability to convey meaning through form, composition, and modality, which supports the value of using Chinese characters as graphic symbols in cross-cultural communication.



Figure 1 2008 Beijing Olympic Games Commercial Advertising Design

Source:<https://olympics.com/zh/olympic-games/beijing-2008/logo-design>

2. The advantages of using graphical representation of Chinese characters in cross-cultural commercial graphic advertising

There are several advantages while using graphical representation of Chinese characters in cross-cultural commercial graphic advertising: First, as a pictographic writing system, Chinese characters naturally possess a strong visual impact compare with alphabetic writing (Mitchell, 1994). By adopting graphical design, the uniqueness and recognizability of the graphic advertisement can be enhanced. Secondly, graphical design of Chinese characters can creatively integrate cultural connotations into advertisements, and it will be endowing brands with a rich cultural background and thereby attracting consumers from different cultural contexts. Additionally, the diversity and flexibility of graphical representation can assist designers in conveying more information within the limited space of a graphic ad, enriching the visual layers. Lastly, the graphical representation of Chinese characters can effectively break down language barriers, promoting the global dissemination of advertisement messages and giving brands a more competitive edge in international markets.

3. The methods of applying graphical representation of Chinese characters in cross-cultural commercial graphic advertising

3.1 Deconstruction method

The concept of deconstruction originated in France and was proposed by Jacques Derrida. Dissatisfied with Western philosophical thought, Derrida challenged traditional ideas, introducing the philosophy of “deconstructionism.” In Western countries, advertising often uses letters as primary elements and adopts graphical representation for letters. The characteristics of letter strokes, such as size, direction, and assembly, are designed to create corresponding graphics, which enhances the visual artistic effect of commercial graphic advertisements (Yu & Kim, 2020). According to Davis and Hunt, the deconstructive approach in design promotes non-linear, interpretative aesthetics that disrupt conventional communication, allowing for greater engagement through ambiguity and visual surprise (Davis & Hunt, 2017).

3.2 Overlapping method

The method involves overlapping strokes of Chinese characters or

combining characters with other characters or images. The result creates a three-dimensional sense of space, significantly improving the design's visual effect. By overlapping Chinese characters with images, the design becomes more dynamic and enriched. This technique can be associated with the Gestalt principle of figure-ground perception, where the interaction of overlapping forms can stimulate viewers' perceptual interest and maintain attention (Arnheim, 2008).

3.3 Variations in font solidity and transparency

Designers can alter the contrast between solid and transparent images or outlines to achieve specific design goals. By manipulating these contrasts, designers can evoke visual effects such as blur, illusion, and motion, creating an emotional resonance with the audience (Craig & Scala, 2012). Additionally, other elements like color and positioning can be adjusted to enhance the visual impact of commercial graphic advertisements. For instance, in Figure 2, the advertisement “Chongqing Impressions,” a cross-cultural city promotional ad, uses traditional Chinese ink gradients and variations in transparency to convey the characters “Chongqing.” The graphical representation allows the audience to quickly grasp the design's intent and message.



Figure 2 “Chongqing Impression” city commercial advertising design

Source: <http://xhslink.com/a/MGjdlto0ZmQW>

3.4 Pictographic representation of Chinese characters

Chinese characters are traditionally created through pictographs,

ideograms, associative compounds, and phonetic compounds etc (Wang, 2015). Among these, associative compounds and phonetic compounds combine two or more characters to form a new character. In graphical design, the “form + form” approach is often used to create associative characters, such as “口+耳” (mouth + ear) to form “听” (listen). Designers may replace part of a Chinese character with a representative image or stroke, enhancing the artistic value while ensuring readability. An example can be seen in Figure 3, where the characters for “粤” (representing Guangzhou cuisine) and “京” (representing Beijing cuisine) are transformed using graphical food elements, allowing viewers to quickly understand the design’s content and purpose. As Liu and Lu (2019) argue, integrating cultural visuals into brand identity not only strengthens cultural communication but also increases cross-cultural recognition and appeal in global markets.



Figure 3 Commercial advertising design for Chinese New Year purchases in Guangzhou and Beijing

Source: https://fashion.sohu.com/a/540234413_120076109

3.5 Digital Technology in Design

The designers not only be proficient in various image-processing software but also ensure that the style and form of the characters align with the theme of the commercial graphic advertisement when employing digital

technology to graphically represent Chinese characters. The design must prioritize the effectiveness of advertising while ensuring harmony between form, style, and the design's theme. Furthermore, the legibility of the Chinese characters should be maintained during the graphical representation process to avoid compromising the advertisement's effectiveness. This aligns with Bamford's (2009) discussion on the importance of visual hierarchy and clarity in digital design, emphasizing that successful visual communication depends on the balance between creative aesthetics and functional readability.



Figure 4 Hong Kong city commercial advertising design

Source: https://fashion.sohu.com/a/540234413_120076109

Methodology

This research employs a blend of qualitative and descriptive analysis. The specific procedures are as follows:

1. Literature review method: The research analyzes the existing studies and design practices by reviewing relevant literature and case studies in the fields of graphical design of Chinese characters, cross-cultural advertising, and commercial graphic design. The objective is to investigate the visual representation and application of graphical Chinese characters in cross-cultural contexts. The literature review will establish the theoretical framework for this research and provide foundational background information.

2. Case study method: Representative cross-cultural commercial graphic advertisements will be selected for in-depth analysis which focusing on

the use of graphical Chinese characters, the effectiveness of cultural symbols, and the reception of these designs across different cultures.

3. Design experiment method: The practical design experiments will be conducted based on the findings from the literature review and case analysis. The graphical representation of Chinese characters will be applied in specific cross-cultural commercial graphic advertisements. The experiments will focus on “hotpot” as the thematic element and selecting representative hotpot types from four regions in China: Chaoshan beef hotpot (East), Sichuan spicy hotpot (South), Yunnan mushroom hotpot (West), and traditional mutton hotpot (North). The Chinese character graphic designs of the four hot pot names were incorporated into four commercial graphic advertisements.

4. Audience interview feedback methodology: To assess the effectiveness and cross-cultural reception of the hotpot-themed Chinese character graphic design in advertising, an interview study was conducted with audiences from different countries. Participants were selected based on diverse cultural backgrounds, including but not limited to the United States, France and countries in Asia and Europe, ensuring a representative sample for cross-cultural analysis. The interview focused on key aspects such as visual appeal, cultural comprehension, symbolic interpretation, and emotional resonance. Interviews were used to collect more nuanced insights into individual perceptions and cultural associations triggered by the design.

Research Results

Through literature research, case study, design experiment method and random audience interview feedback. The research had focuses on three research objectives closely and output the results as below:

1. Analysis of the Principles and Results of Chinese Character Graphic Expression

Chinese characters and advertisement have the most significant similarity is all of them are pictographic representation of meaning. There are at least three ways to visualize Chinese characters and author has explain as below.

1.1 Pictographic Reconstruction: The core logic lies in extracting the original pictographic features of Chinese characters (such as the concrete forms found in oracle bone script and bronze inscriptions), and reinterpreting them through modern design language. This approach retains the “form-meaning connection” while enhancing visual impact. It can be illustrated by the picture below. It shows clearly that how Chinese character “Mountain” and “Water” come from and how to use it in the visual design.

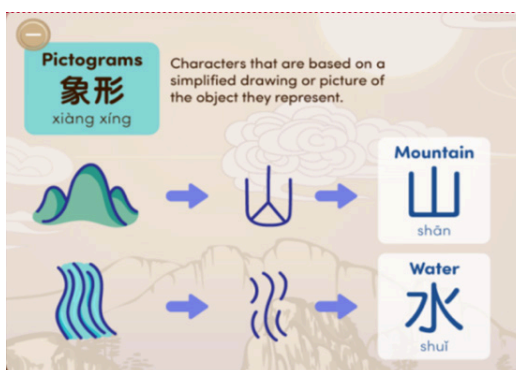


Figure 5 Chinese characters pictographic reconstruction sample

Source: Author design

1.2 Decorative and filling design of Chinese characters: It is a sophisticated technique in graphic design. The decorative and filling design of Chinese characters refers to the creative integration of character strokes, structural forms, and graphic elements, enhancing the visual expressiveness and cultural connotation of the text. When applied to Chinese character design, it strengthens cultural symbolism and enriches visual appeal. It can be illustrated by the picture below. The original meaning of this character is means “lucky” in Chinese. The design is applying the right part as the concrete image of a snake cause year 2025 is Chinese snake year. The left part displays thriving crops and ancient copper coins, symbolizing prosperity and a bountiful year.



Figure 6 Chinese characters decorative and filling sample
Source: Author design

1.3 Replacing Character Strokes: It is one of the core methods in the graphic design of Chinese characters. By substituting specific strokes with relevant images or symbols, this approach preserves the legibility of the character while enhancing its visual metaphor. It can be illustrated by the picture below. The original meaning of this character is means “tea” in Chinese. The design uses a teapot to replace the lower half of the character which imply tea needs a teapot to brew. And it vividly conveys the original meaning of the character “tea”.

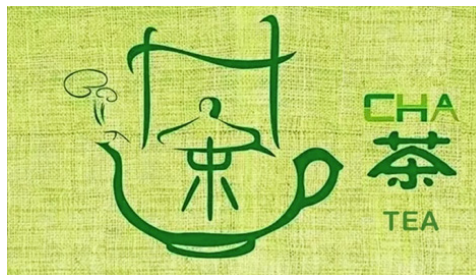



Figure 7 Chinese characters strokes replacement sample
Source: Author design






2. Practical Application of Hotpot-Themed Chinese Character Graphic Design in Cross-Cultural Advertising

The research takes “hotpot,” a representative symbol of Chinese culinary culture, as the experiment result. Advertising design experiments incorporating graphical design of Chinese characters are conducted, with the final design effects analyzed as follows. The specific graphical design of Chinese characters and the commercial graphic advertisement content analysis are detailed below.

2.1 Chaoshan Beef Hotpot (Eastern Guangdong Region): This is a traditional hotpot with nearly a century of history. The main characteristic is the emphasis on the freshness of the ingredients, particularly showcasing the different flavors from various parts of the cow. In the graphic ad design for this hotpot, the character “牛” (beef) is prominently highlighted. The Chinese characters “潮” (Chaozhou), “牛” (beef), and “锅” (pot) are graphically reinforced by incorporating imagery of cows into their forms. Additionally, the characters for “meat” and “hotpot” are expressed through visual elements to further convey the essence of Chaoshan beef hotpot. The design allows the viewer to intuitively grasp the unique features and deliciousness of the dish. The commercial poster integrates vector illustrations, showcasing realistic elements of the Chaoshan beef hotpot, including fresh beef, beef balls, braised tofu, and other ingredients. This visual presentation quickly informs consumers about the ingredients and enhances their appetite, making them eager to enjoy the dishes.

Table 1 Analysis of the specific contents of Chinese character graphic design

Original Chinese characters	Graphical Chinese characters	Explanation and Implication
<p>潮 chao</p>		<p>The three dots on the far left of this character represent the sound of “Umm” which from a cow. The rest of the part uses exaggerated graphics to show the key parts of the cow, such as horns, head, nose, body, front legs, and hind legs.</p>

Original Chinese characters	Graphical Chinese characters	Explanation and Implication
汕 shan		This character highlights the regional characteristics of the Chaoshan area, namely the three drops of water on the left and the character “山” on the right, which has the prominent feature of being close to the mountains and the sea.
牛 niu		The whole image of a bull's head expresses the meaning of the character “cow”. It shows clearly about Bull's head, horns, ears, and nose etc.
肉 Rou		This character "肉" is graphically processed to show the effect of stacking pieces of meat, which echoes the picture in the graphic design of the font.
火 huo		This character is the most typical example of the graphical representation of Chinese characters. The viewer can tell immediately that it represents fire.
锅 guo		This character once again shows the image of a cow on both sides of the graphic. In addition, the right half of the graphic vividly shows an image of a pot on fire, making it easy for everyone to understand at immediately.




Commercial graphic design works are as follows Figure 8




Figure 8 Chaoshan Beef Hotpot Commercial Graphic Advertising Design

2.2 Sichuan Spicy Hotpot (Southern Region): Sichuan hotpot perhaps is the most well-known representation of Chinese hotpot worldwide, with a history that spans over 400 years. Its key characteristics are its numbing spiciness and rich aroma, making it globally famous. The term “MALA” (meaning numbing and spicy) has even become synonymous with Chinese hotpot abroad. Different with other types of hotpot, Sichuan hotpot’s distinctiveness largely lies in its broth, which derives its unique flavor from an abundance of ingredients such as chili peppers, Sichuan peppercorns, star anise, ginger, and cinnamon. This design focuses on these elements, visually highlighting various spices used in Sichuan hotpot preparation. In this graphic ads, the graphical representation of the characters “四川” (Sichuan) features cultural symbols such as Sichuan opera’s “face-changing” and chili peppers. The commercial poster design uses vector illustrations to showcase a Sichuan hotpot full of ingredients like chili peppers, peppercorns, and other spices, effectively conveying the essence of this spicy and flavorful dishes.

Table 2 Analysis of the specific contents of Chinese character graphic design

Original Chinese characters	Graphical Chinese characters	Explanation and Implication
<p>四 si</p>		<p>The graph not only highlight key symbol of Sichuan Opera face-changing, but also tribute to the bronze statues at Sanxingdui. It allows viewers who familiar with Sichuan culture to quick understand the source of the food.</p>
<p>川 chuan</p>		<p>The graph uses chili to highlight the key feature of Sichuan hot pot. Also, the image of a chili is used to divide the word "chuan" into two parts, which also reflects the specific differences between eastern and western of Sichuan.</p>
<p>火 huo</p>		<p>This character uses a graphic method to show the flames in the flames, which vividly reflects the important elements of hot pot.</p>

Original Chinese characters	Graphical Chinese characters	Explanation and Implication
锅 guo		This character “pot” further highlights the difference between Sichuan spicy hot pot and others. Sichuan hot pot usually uses a flat pot or a double-flavored pot, rather than a Beijing copper pot (the kind of vertical pot). The upper right part of the word “pot” is replaced with a flat pot, and the large number of chili and seasonings in the pot are clearly visible.

Commercial graphic design works are as follows Figure 9









Figure 9 Sichuan Spicy Hot Pot Commercial Graphic Advertising Design

2.3 Yunnan Mushroom Hotpot (Western Region): Compared to the other hotpot. Yunnan mushroom hotpot is unique in its dependence on Yunnan’s specific geographical location. Yunnan’s tropical/subtropical climate and vast forested areas produce a wide variety of wild edible mushrooms, making this hotpot one-of-a-kind, not only in China but globally. Yunnan is home to about half of the world’s species of wild mushrooms. Rich in proteins and various vitamins, these mushrooms also contain polysaccharides that have health

benefits such as radiation protection, immune system regulation, and antioxidant properties. This aligns with the traditional Chinese medicine principle of “food as medicine” and contemporary health-conscious trends, making Yunnan mushroom hotpot a popular healthy choice. The graphical design for this hotpot innovatively depicts the characters “云南” (Yunnan) by incorporating cultural symbols like peacocks and Yunnan architecture, while “菌菇” (mushroom) is graphically represented using imagery of various wild mushrooms. The commercial poster features vector illustrations showcasing the mushrooms used in the hotpot as well as the diverse range of wild mushrooms from Yunnan. In this design, the artist captures the region’s cultural and natural resources through visuals, allowing viewers to quickly grasp the intended meaning.

Table 3 Analysis of the specific contents of Chinese character graphic design

Original Chinese characters	Graphical Chinese characters	Explanation and Implication
<p>云 yun</p>		<p>The upper part of the character vividly displays the shape of auspicious clouds in traditional Chinese culture to symbolize the theme word “cloud”. The overall text is an image of a peacock with its wings spread high, which further emphasizes the rich animal and plant resources of Yunnan Province.</p>
<p>南 nan</p>		<p>At the top of the character is the traditional stilt bamboo house of the Dai ethnic group in Yunnan, which further highlights the multi-ethnic characteristics of Yunnan.</p>
<p>菌 jun</p>		<p>The lower part of the graph uses a figurative mushroom graphic to show the basic meaning of the character. In addition, the top of the character also uses bamboo shoots, bean curd and other mushroom ingredients to emphasize it.</p>

Original Chinese characters	Graphical Chinese characters	Explanation and Implication
菇 gu		The composition of character is entirely derived from the graphic design of seven kinds of wild mushrooms, allowing the viewer to understand its meaning immediately.
火 huo		The lower left part of this character uses a wild vegetation commonly used for making fire in Yunnan to reflect the special nature of this hot pot.
锅 guo		This character first uses mushrooms again in the right half to emphasize the main ingredient, and at the same time uses a fish in the left half to emphasize the deliciousness of Yunnan mushroom hotpot, because the soup base of Yunnan mushroom hotpot is often made from fish soup.

Commercial graphic design works are as follows Figure 10









Figure 10 Yunnan Mushroom Hot Pot Commercial Graphic Advertising Design

2.4 Beijing Copper Pot Lamb Hotpot (Northern Region): It is said this hotpot became famous after being named by Kublai Khan, the founder of the Yuan Dynasty from Mongolia, and has a history of over a thousand years. If

the key feature of Chaoshan beef hotpot is the “beef,” then the essential element of this hotpot is the “lamb.” A notable distinction of Beijing copper pot lamb hotpot from other types of hotpot is the requirement to use a charcoal-heated copper pot for it to be truly authentic. Additionally, Beijing copper pot lamb hotpot is the only one among various hotpots that places particular emphasis on its dipping sauce, which must be the traditional old Beijing sesame sauce. In the design of the commercial poster, the copper pot, lamb, and old Beijing sesame sauce are illustrated through vector graphics. In this design work, the author has placed special emphasis on the graphic representation of Chinese characters, aiming to highlight features such as the lamb and copper pot.

Table 4 Analysis of the specific contents of Chinese character graphic design

Original Chinese characters	Graphical Chinese characters	Explanation and Implication
北京 Bei jing		The two characters "Beijing" are overlapped to vividly display the image of the Temple of Heaven, a famous landmark in Beijing, so that viewers can tell immediately where this delicacy comes from.
铜 tong		By visualizing the charcoal copper pot that is key for Beijing shabushabu mutton, the indispensable kitchenware for this delicacy is directly expressed. In addition, careful viewers also found that there is a "lamb" character on the surface of the pot, which increases the appeal of the copper pot.
锅 guo		The character "pot" is fully graphically represented, especially the right half which shows the meaning of fire in the pot and the pot on the fire.

Original Chinese characters	Graphical Chinese characters	Explanation and Implication
<p>涮 shuan</p>		<p>This character reflects another characteristic of Beijing mutton hot pot: Sauce. Traditional Bei-jing hot pot must be served with a dipping sauce mixed with sesame paste, chives, fer-mented tofu, chopped green onions and minced garlic to be considered authentic.</p>
<p>羊 yang</p>		<p>The character "羊" fully expresses the horns of sheep, and this graphic design fully illustrates the theme of Beijing shabushabu mutton hot pot, allowing viewers to quickly understand that mutton is the protagonist of this hot pot.</p>
<p>肉 rou</p>		<p>To further emphasize the theme of "mutton", the character "meat" is embedded with the im-age of a goat.</p>

Commercial graphic design works are as follows Figure 11



Figure 11 Beijing copper pot mutton hot pot Commercial Graphic Advertising Design

3. Audience Feedback on Chinese Character Graphic Design in Advertising Across Different Cultural Backgrounds

As is widely acknowledged, audience feedback serves as one of the most effective means to evaluate a design work. Since I teach at an international college, I randomly interviewed teachers from Italy, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and India. At the same time, I randomly interviewed teachers and parents from the United States, France, Germany, Australia, and Singapore at my daughter's international school. Based on this rationale, the author conducted interviews with cross-cultural participants from different countries. The aim was to assess how advertisements incorporating Chinese character visualization differ from traditional advertisements in terms of visual appeal, ease of understanding, and emotional resonance. Additionally, valuable suggestions for improvement were collected, providing useful insights and guidance for future design optimization.

3.1 Explanation of the Interview Design and Its Purpose

To assess the effectiveness of Chinese character graphic design in cross-cultural commercial advertising, this study conducted interviews with 30 participants from different cultural backgrounds. The interview outline was carefully designed to align with the research objectives, particularly in evaluating the audience's visual perception, cultural resonance, and interpretative responses to the graphic representations of Chinese characters used in the advertisements. The questions were structured to achieve three objectives:

- (1) To explore how audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds interpret graphic Chinese characters,
- (2) To assess the effectiveness of these designs in communicating cultural and commercial messages, and
- (3) To gather feedback for improving cross-cultural visual communication strategies.

Questions 1 and 2 aim to understand the participants' cultural backgrounds and their basic recognition of the Chinese characters used in the advertisements. This helps analyze how cultural familiarity influences interpretation.

Questions 3 and 4 focus on the clarity of message delivery and the extent to which Chinese cultural elements are perceived through the design. These address the effectiveness of visual communication in conveying meaning.

Questions 5 and 6 gather subjective impressions regarding the visual appeal and emotional resonance of the design, especially its ability to stimulate interest in Chinese culture or products.

Questions 7 and 8 assess the perceived suitability of such design approaches for cross-cultural advertising and invite constructive feedback for future design improvement.

By systematically asking these questions, the study aims to validate the hypothesis that Chinese character graphic design can function not only as a visual tool but also as a cultural bridge in global advertising. The collected responses provide critical insights into the ways in which audiences interpret, engage with, and respond to culturally embedded visual elements in commercial contexts. The following is a list of explanations of the content and purpose of the interview questions, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Interview Outline

No.	Interview Questions	Purpose and Description
1	Nationality / Cultural Background	Collect information about cultural background to assess how cultural differences affect understanding.
2	Are you able to recognize the meaning of the Chinese character in the image?	Assessing Non-Chinese audience initial recognition of pictographic Chinese characters
3	The message of the advertisement clear to you?	Effectiveness of Pictographic Chinese Characters in Advertising Communication
4	Are you able to identify the Chinese cultural aspects presented in the advertisement? Please elaborate.	Assess whether the design is capable of expressing cultural meaning

No.	Interview Questions	Purpose and Description
5	How do you rate the overall visual quality of the Chinese character graphic design?	Obtain subjective evaluations from audience regarding the visual effects
6	Did the use of graphic Chinese characters make you more interested in Chinese culture or products?	Investigate the relationship between emotional resonance and cultural identity
7	Do you think this kind of Chinese character graphic design is suitable for cross-cultural advertising communication? Why?	Assess the communicative effectiveness of the design in a cross-cultural context
8	What suggestions do you have for improving this advertisement?	Gather suggestions for improvement and potential directions for optimization

Source: Author design

3.2 Summary of results and Recommendations Based on Participant Feedback

An analysis of feedback from 30 participants across 10 different countries reveals an overall positive response to the visual communication effectiveness of Chinese character graphic design in cross-cultural commercial advertising. The following is a tabular explanation of the results obtained from the interviews, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Summary of Participants Feedback

Facet	Index	Feedback content overview (30 Audience)	Percent %
Cultural Back-ground	Country origin	The United States (4), France (2), Germany (2), Italy (2), Australia (3), Singapore (4), Japan(4), South Korea(3), Thailand(3), In-dia(3)	NA

Facet	Index	Feedback content overview (30 Audience)	Percent %
Information recognition	Able to recognize Character's meaning	20 people almost recognize it, while 10 people find it difficult to understand but can roughly guess its meaning through the graphics.	68% Recognized
Information clarity	Is the advertising message clear?	21 people think the message is relatively clear, while 9 people find it somewhat vague.	70% think it is clear
Cultural identity	Feel Chinese culture?	27 people clearly stated that they can feel elements such as hot pot culture, character style, and traditional aesthetics.	90% feel the cultural elements
Visual appeal	Impression of the graphic design.	26 people rated it as interesting, innovative, and aesthetically pleasing, while 4 people found it somewhat complex or unfamiliar.	86% give positive feedback
Emotional resonance	Does it spark interest?	22 people expressed interest, particularly in food or culture, while 8 people gave a neutral response	70% feel a resonance
Cross-cultural applicability	Is it applicable for cross-cultural communication?"	25 people believe it can enhance cultural communication, while 5 people think it requires additional English explanations	83.3% recognize its applicability
Improvement Suggestions	Specific feedback	It is suggested to add more explanatory elements (e.g., pinyin/icons), improve the contrast between text and images, and enhance interactivity	NA

An analysis of feedback from 30 participants across 10 different countries reveals an overall positive response to the visual communication effectiveness of Chinese character graphic design in cross-cultural commercial advertising. Approximately 68% of respondents were able to partially recognize the basic meaning of the Chinese characters. Even without understanding the

language, most participants could guess the intended message through the graphic form, indicating that Chinese characters possess a certain level of visual universality due to their pictographic features. Additionally, 70% of participants considered the conveyed advertising message to be relatively clear, further validating the effectiveness of combining text and imagery in delivering intended meaning.

In terms of cultural recognition, 90% of participants explicitly stated that they could sense the presence of Chinese cultural elements in the advertisement—particularly the hotpot food culture and the traditional aesthetic features embedded in the Chinese characters. Regarding visual appeal, 86% of respondents gave positive feedback such as “interesting,” “innovative,” and “aesthetically pleasing,” suggesting that Chinese character graphic design demonstrates both strong cultural expression and visual attractiveness.

From the perspective of emotional resonance, 70% of participants said the design sparked their interest in Chinese culture or products. This indicates that beyond conveying information, Chinese character design can also evoke cultural identity and emotional engagement. In terms of cross-cultural applicability, 83.3% of participants believed this type of design is suitable for cross-cultural advertising, highlighting its potential in facilitating cultural communication and brand internationalization. However, some participants recommended the inclusion of English annotations or explanatory elements to assist with comprehension. Based on the collective feedback, the following recommendations are proposed to optimize future designs involving Chinese character graphics:

Incorporate multilingual elements (e.g., pinyin, English explanations, or visual annotations) to improve the clarity and accessibility of advertising content.

Integrate interactive features (e.g., QR code interpretation, animated formats) to increase audience engagement and depth of understanding. These suggestions not only help strengthen the communicative effectiveness of Chinese character graphics in cross-cultural contexts but also offer practical guidance for future design practices aimed at global audiences.

Discussion

This study investigates the application of Chinese character-based graphic design in cross-cultural commercial advertising, with a focus on both visual effectiveness and the ability to evoke cultural resonance. Drawing from literature review, case analysis, practical design experiments, and qualitative interviews with 30 participants from 10 countries, the research highlights key findings that contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical design strategies.

Firstly, the study confirms that Chinese characters—rooted in pictographic origins—possess unique visual symbolism capable of transcending linguistic barriers. Even among participants unfamiliar with the Chinese language, 68% were able to partially infer the meaning of the characters through their visual form. This supports the theories proposed by Arnheim, who emphasized that visual perception plays a central role in how humans interpret form and meaning, especially in symbolic communication (Arnheim, 2008). Furthermore, this aligns with Barthes' semiotic theory, which argues that visual signs can carry multiple layers of meaning, allowing audiences to interpret symbols even in unfamiliar linguistic contexts (Barthes, 1977).

Secondly, the four hotpot-themed advertisements—designed with typographic variations of Chinese characters—proved effective in evoking cultural identity and emotional resonance. According to participant feedback, 90% could identify distinct cultural elements such as Chinese culinary traditions, calligraphy, and aesthetic symbolism. This reinforces the assertion made by Cheng and Wong that Chinese characters can function as powerful visual storytellers when situated in culturally meaningful contexts (Cheng & Wong, 1999). It also parallels Mitchell's view that verbal and visual signs must work in tandem to generate effective cross-cultural communication (Mitchell, 1994). The emotional resonance of the designs further underscores their communicative power. Approximately 70% of interviewees reported a heightened interest in Chinese food culture or the brand itself after viewing the advertisements. This

supports previous work by Xu and Batra, who found that culturally embedded visuals in advertising can foster emotional identification and enhance brand engagement in cross-cultural contexts (Xu & Batra, 2021).

In terms of cross-cultural adaptability, 83.3% of participants considered the Chinese character designs suitable for international audiences. However, as Craig and Scala suggest in their guide to typographic clarity, cultural legibility must be balanced with visual innovation (Craig & Scala, 2012). Some interviewees indicated that without explanatory elements (e.g., pinyin, English captions, or illustrative icons), the graphics were occasionally difficult to comprehend (Wang, 2015). This echoes Wang Ning's observation that while Chinese character morphology offers rich visual potential, its complexity may present challenges in cross-cultural design unless supplemented with contextual aids (Wang, 2015).

Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of multimodal communication strategies. As Kress and van Leeuwen advocate, combining text, image, and cultural coding enhances viewer interpretation and facilitates meaningful global dialogue (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

In summary, the research demonstrates that Chinese character graphic design can serve as a culturally expressive and visually compelling tool in global advertising. By integrating culturally significant typography with visual storytelling, designers can bridge cultural divides, enhance communication, and generate emotional resonance. The findings not only affirm the aesthetic and semiotic power of Chinese characters but also provide a practical framework for cross-cultural visual communication in the commercial field.

Conclusions

The research investigated how Chinese character-based graphic design can be effectively applied in cross-cultural commercial advertising to promote cultural recognition and emotional resonance. Drawing on Qualitative Research methodology and audience feedback, the research concludes that Chinese

character graphics serve as powerful visual tools that can bridge linguistic and cultural gaps in global advertising contexts. This research applies graphic design of Chinese characters to commercial graphic advertisements using the element of “hotpot,” which is a highly representative part of Chinese culture. The research focuses on four different types of hotpot from the East, South, West, and North regions of China (Guangdong Chaoshan beef hotpot, Sichuan spicy hotpot, Yunnan mushroom hotpot, and Northern copper pot lamb hotpot), exploring the effects of Chinese character graphic design in cross-cultural advertisements. The experimental results indicate that such designs significantly enhance the cultural characteristics and visual appeal of the advertisement. Various forms of Chinese character graphic design can convey the regional features and cultural connotations of hotpot through a unique visual language. The experimental designs, centered on Chinese hotpot culture, proved successful in eliciting both aesthetic appreciation and cultural awareness among international viewers. The research highlights that while Chinese characters may appear unfamiliar to global audiences, their symbolic, pictorial nature enables intuitive recognition when properly contextualized. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that audiences are open to and even enthusiastic about advertisements that incorporate culturally distinct elements, provided they are visually engaging and supplemented with accessible cues. This reinforces the importance of cross-cultural sensitivity in visual communication, where designers must consider both cultural expression and audience comprehension.

In conclusion, Chinese character graphic design holds great potential for application in cross-cultural commercial graphic advertising. However, during the design process, it is crucial to fully consider the cultural backgrounds and aesthetic preferences of the target audience, ensuring that the effects of cultural communication and visual representation align to achieve more effective cross-cultural communication. Chinese character graphic design is not only a vessel of cultural identity but also a versatile medium for global branding and communication. Future studies may extend this research by examining authentic market advertising campaigns or exploring additional cultural symbols within Chinese visual culture.

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