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# **GRAPHIC DESIGN AND CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION: APPLICATION OF POLYMORPHIC FUSION IN THE REPRODUCTION OF VISUAL TEACHING AIDS FOR THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES**

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## **Abstract**

*Globalization has led to the necessity of teaching and learning of foreign languages in institutions as world economies have become increasingly interdependent. Learning of foreign languages, as that done in the Confucius Institutes, is therefore paramount. Scholars have argued that for Effective Foreign Language Learning (FLL) to take place, a concept known as 'nativization' can be applied to the teaching aids to enable learners be instructed in and comprehend the language being learnt better. One type of nativization is called 'cultural nativization.' This takes place when elements from the culture of the language being learnt are fused with those from the learners' culture in the teaching aids being used in classroom instruction. Further, other studies have identified 'polymorphism' as a technique of fusion that can be used in cultural nativization. This paper reports a study that demonstrated the application of*

***polymorphic fusion of different cultural artefacts from two communities in redesigning and reproducing teaching aids used in Confucius Institutes in Kenya. The study derived features of elements selected Chinese Han and Kenyan Maasai cultural artefacts and then applied six different methods of polymorphic fusion when reproducing the teaching aids. The study hypothesized that polymorphic designs using fused elements from Chinese Han and Kenyan Maasai cultural artefacts when applied on teaching aids used in the Confucius Institutes can ensure effective learning of Chinese language. This paper presents the visual design process that was applied. The paper also presents the subsequent redesigned and reproduced teaching aids. It is expected that the use of the reproduced aids would lead to enhanced learning of the Chinese language learning at the Confucius Institutes.***

**Key words:** *cultural nativization, polymorphism, fusion, visual design process*

## **Introduction**

**Globalization is requisite in the world today as communities have become interdependent. Globalization is affected by social cultural factors, one of which is the transnational circulation of ideas and languages. The impact of globalization on language can also be easily perceived in the language learning process. Irina (2011:81) argues that “without languages, there would be no globalization and vice versa, without globalization, there would be no world languages.” Languages help people communicate across cultures, pushing them to think globally over new horizons as the world today**

is multicultural and the language landscapes are multilingual. As is stated in an article written by Oana-Roxana Ivan (2012), there is a great demand for foreign languages in globalization. Foreign languages are a tool needed for effective interaction between people and help to better understand one's own language and culture (Aleidine & Theresa, 2015). Foreign language learning and teaching are progressively connected to diaspora relations, cross-cultural identities and global cosmopolitanism. (Christina & Bal, 2017).

According to Ivan (2012), culture is a crucial determinant in foreign language acquisition. This is due to the fact that improving cross-cultural awareness and enabling learners to deal with stereotypes are important goals of language courses. Ismail Cakir (2006) claims that although pure information is helpful, it does not necessarily guide learners' perceptions; while cultural awareness can make people think more critically. The close contact between the foreign language learner and the culture of the language being learnt leads to more effective language learning. Thomas & Chiharu (2014) on their part, state that in Foreign Language Learning (FLL), socio-culturally adapted learners tend to be much more connected, more open-minded, gaining a deeper understanding of their place in the world and the significance of knowing both their own and other people's cultures. The existence of local culture serves as the reference point for the effective utilization of foreign culture in language classes. Schulz (2007) proposes that a good way of doing this is to use culture-learning materials or portfolios.

It is paramount therefore that the target language and the learners' own language are in cooperated in the teaching aids during

**classroom instruction of new languages. An experimental study carried out by Seyedeh & Mustafa (2014) had one group of learners provided with materials of the target language only while the other homogeneous group was given materials containing both native and target languages. After a period of use of the materials, it was evident that the use of culturally adaptive materials by the latter group had significantly boosted the acquisition of language.**

**Scholars have argued that for Effective Foreign Language Learning (FLL) to take place, a concept known as 'nativization' can be applied to the teaching aids to enable learners be instructed in and comprehend the language being learnt better. As a kind of readjustment that a language undergoes at lexical, phonological or syntactic levels, nativization is caused by the impact from native language or other cultural or social factors. In the nativization process, the information and knowledge of target language are transformed to learners' native language equivalents so as to evoke the learners' thinking. There are many types of nativization with one type being referred to as 'cultural nativization.' Cultural nativization would help the learners to comprehend the target culture easily and therefore ensure effective learning of the foreign language. Cakir (2006) states that cultural nativization is very crucial in the acquisition of foreign language learning (FLL) as it helps learners to comprehend the language and behaviour patterns of both foreign and local cultures at a more conscious level.**

**The medium of applying the cultural nativization is in the teaching aids being used for classroom instruction. Masoumeh (2012) emphasizes that fine art is a valuable instrument for all language**

**instructors to improve their teaching as it is significant in the preparation of the teaching aids that help develop intellectual skills and boost language learning through providing non-verbal inputs to the learners to enhance their understanding. These aids include the visual graphic materials that helps foreign language learners create mental images. Graphic design, as a technique of fine art, is used to effectively convey information to the target groups. Johanna D. (1999:42) relates graphic design to "ideological values and cultural attitudes". Culture is therefore perceived as a key element in graphic design. Newark (2002) affirms that, 'in graphic design, no matter what information is conveyed, it is supposed to culturally reflect its obligation to the society.**

**Many studies have demonstrated the link between graphic design and culture. Brenda & Reed (2016) point out that in design, the ideas of artists are often limited by their native culture, nationality and ethnicity. However, the world today is a mingling of both new and old ideas as well as a fusion of multiple cultures. Mar & Ire (2015) argue that it is the diversity of cultures, as well as the contrast and the union of them that make fusion art unique as different cultures can be interpreted in the fused artwork. In design, designers endeavour to determine the potential that exists in bringing together two or more cultures in a creative form while still keeping their individual identities (Gerrit, 2011). Nowadays the certainty of conventional monoculture has already been substituted by the uncertainty of the designed fusion culture (David, 2011).**

**Fused art tends to have more attention and be more recognizable in today's globalized world. 'Polymorphism' is the latest trend in graphic design that is used for fusion. It is noteworthy to note the**

**emergence and use of polymorphic logos or posters in the recent past. It can be argued that this new direction in design not only breaks the original limitations, but also moves towards a better direction (Minhua, 2019). Polymorphic technique therefore allow designers to implement a function in different ways. The technique is both object-oriented design as well as functional design and is applied to combine cultural elements in various contexts. This can be done in six different methods: (1) elements standing side by side, (2) elements fused, (3) background side by side, (4) background fused, (5) both elements and background side by side, and (6) both elements and background fused.**

**This paper reports a study that demonstrated the application of polymorphic fusion of different cultural artefacts from two communities in redesigning and reproducing teaching aids used in Confucius Institutes in Kenya. The study derived features of elements selected Chinese Han and Kenyan Maasai cultural artefacts and then applied six different methods of polymorphic fusion when reproducing the teaching aids. The study hypothesized that polymorphic designs using fused elements from Chinese Han and Kenyan Maasai cultural artefacts when applied on teaching aids used in the Confucius Institutes can ensure effective learning of Chinese language. This paper presents the visual design process that was applied. The paper also presents the subsequent redesigned and reproduced teaching aids. It is expected that the use of the reproduced aids would lead to enhanced learning of the Chinese language learning at the Confucius Institutes.**

## **Methodology**

**This study applied the exploratory research design. This research design “tends to tackle new problems on which little or no previous research has been done.” Brown R.B. (2006:43). The research design assisted better understanding the existing problem of acquisition of new languages that had been minimally investigated and acquire new insights. Exploratory research was also relevant during the fusing into polymorphic forms of the identified elements from Chinese Han and Kenyan Maasai cultural artefacts and the application of the fused forms in redesigning and reproducing the existing visual teaching aids at the Confucius Institutes in Kenya.**

**Out of the existent Chinese and Kenyan cultural artefacts, the study sampled only Chinese Han and Kenyan Maasai cultural elements were selected. This is because Han culture is overwhelming, numerical and has cultural dominance in China. On the other hand, “the Maasai have been viewed by many as the iconic, traditional representation of Africa”(Allison, 2013) and “their identity has stood timelessly through maintenance of their rich culture reflected through traditional dress and other customary practices” (Elizabeth,2018). The study also only involved Confucius Institute at Kenyatta University and Confucius Institute at University of Nairobi as they are the two largest and oldest Chinese Institutes in Kenya and would have challenges reminiscent to any other Chinese Institutes in the region.**

**The target population was the Directors and administrators of the two Chinese Institutes. They guided on the visual materials used at the Institutes for the teaching of Chinese Language. Purposive**

sampling was used to select the 32 visual teaching aids which were further that included: posters, logos and fliers were categorized into five: brand publicity, enrolment brochures and fliers, teaching environment and decoration, cultural activities publicity, teaching materials and office stationery. Cluster sampling was then applied to achieve the study sample calculated using a 5% margin of error and 95% degree of confidence.

### **Developing compositions derived from cultural elements from Chinese Han and Kenyan Maasai Artefacts**

The study first sought to identify and select typical Han and Maasai Cultural Elements to be used. Identified Han cultural elements and Maasai cultural elements were classified and coded according to their sources. They were classified based on the following 6 culture types: architecture, paintings, ornamentation, nature, clothing and jewellery and accessories.

Fusing experimentation was then done on the identified Chinese Han and Kenyan Maasai cultural elements using the six types of polymorphic fusing methods as follows: (1) elements standing side by side, (2) elements fused, (3) background side by side, (4) background fused, (5) both elements and background side by side, and (6) both elements and background fused.

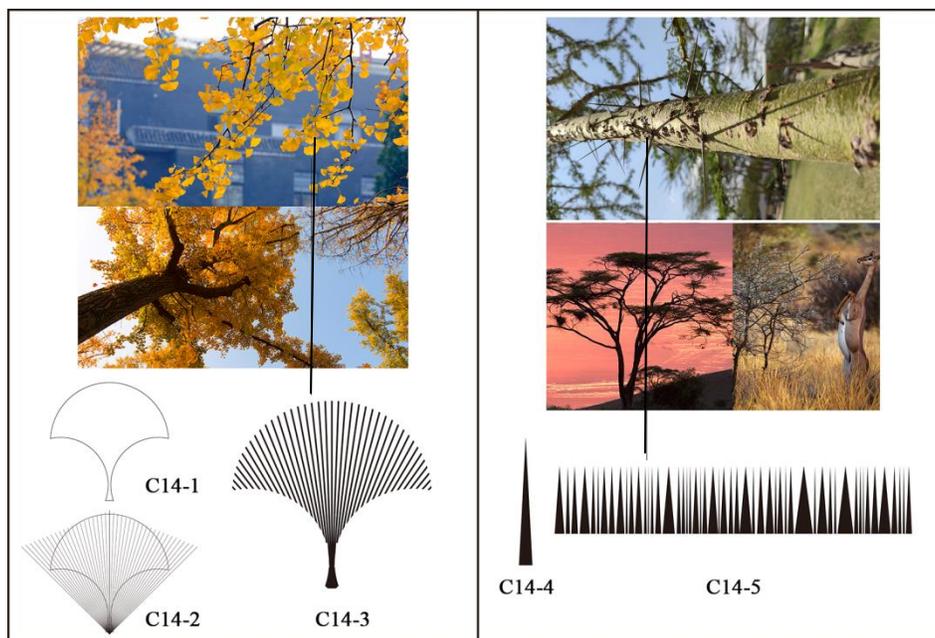
The resultant compositions were then used to redesign the existing visual teaching aids used at the Confucius Institutes in Kenya.

The following section of the paper explains the visual design process that was applied to each of the six polymorphic fusing techniques.

The paper also presents an example of the subsequent redesigned and reproduced teaching aids.

**(1) 'Elements presented side by side' polymorphic technique**

The designer sought to use the natural elements from the two cultures that had their own distinct characteristics. The designer illustrates the use of leaves of *ginkgo* trees (found in Han region, China) and leaves of Acacia thorn trees (found in Maasai land, Kenya). Figure 1 indicates the designs extracted from the unique outline of leaves of the two trees respectively.

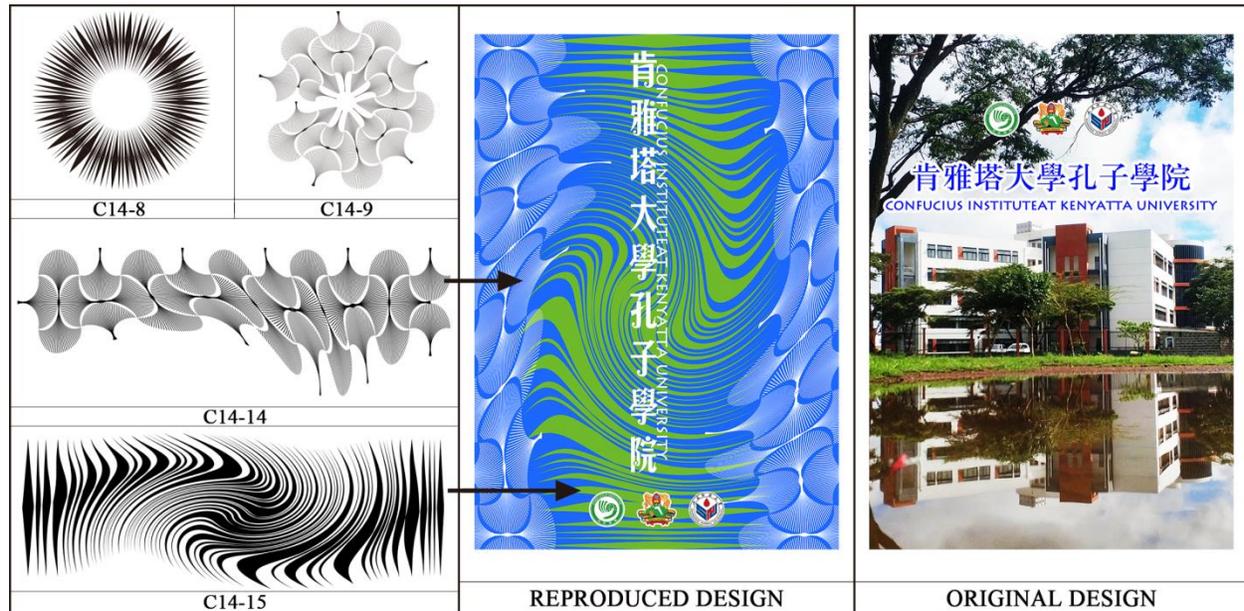


**Figure 1 Sample elements from cultural artefacts of nature sampled from China (l) and Kenya(r)**

*Source: The researcher's own design*

The researcher then used *Illustrator and Photoshop Software* on the sketch of leaves of *ginkgo* trees (C14-3 in Figure 1) and thorn trees (C14-5 in Figure 1) to fuse the 'Elements side by side' using the polymorphic technique. Numerous compositions were achieved after creative design application of processes such as distortion,

duplication and symmetry. The aim was to keep both the original features of the teaching aid and visual expressiveness of the new design in harmony. C14-14 and C14-15 in Figure 2 (below) are such examples.



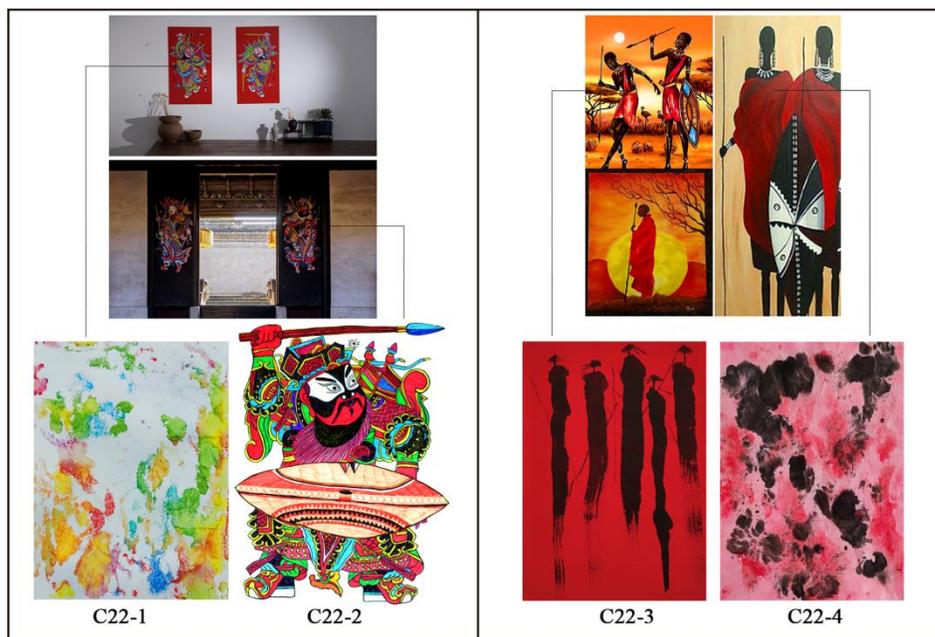
**Figure 2. Original and Final redesigned compositions of poster using 'elements presented side by side' polymorphic technique**  
*Source: The researcher's own design*

The two compositions (C14-14 and C14-15 in Figure 2) were then fused 'side by side' in the final redesigned compositions shown in Figure 2. The design took advantage of the softness of ginkgo tree leaves and the sharpness of thorn tree leaves so as to develop a design that had a new balance that offers both simplicity and high performance. The comparison of the old and new redesigned posters using polymorphic fusing technique of elements 'standing side by side' are also shown in Figure 2.

## (2). 'Elements fused' polymorphic technique

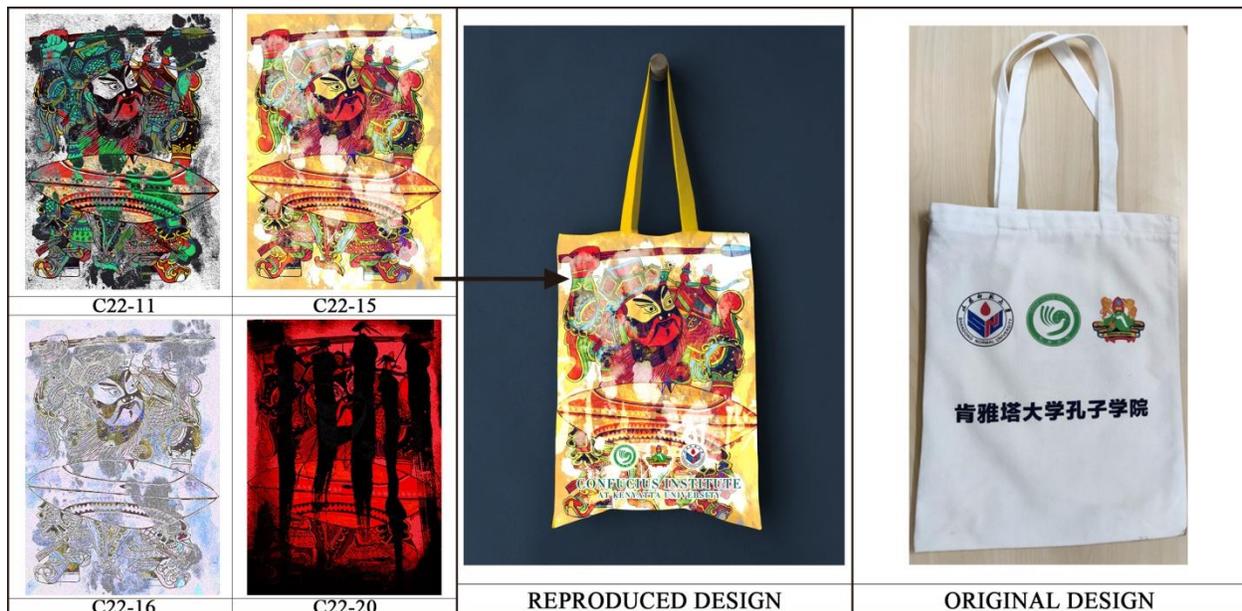
In the study, the designer applied the concept that cultural fusion is often reflected in philosophical values, customs and beliefs. For example, in Chinese Han folk religion, two separate martial images of door gods were posted by people on respective halves of gate to keep away the evil spirits. Amongst the traditional Kenyan Maasai culture, people carried shields and spears to protect themselves in war and also when hunting. Shields also were used in rites of passage ceremonies as symbols of identification and prestige.

The designer wished to present the above philosophies as derived from traditional Chinese and Kenyan painting works. The designer first drew and painted the Chinese door gods using Maasai painting skills and tools, (C22-1 and C22-2 in Figure 3) then painted Maasai people using Chinese ink brush pen and painting skills. (C22-3 and C22-4 in Figure 3.)



**Figure 3 Cultural painting artefacts from China (l) and Kenya(r)**  
**Source: The researcher's own design**

As opposed to Kenyan painting that uses acrylics or oils, Chinese traditional ink painting is a water-based techniques. This difference in technique together with the use of additional texture derived from different materials from the two communities were used to fuse the elements using *Illustrator and Photoshop Software* (see C22-11, C22-15, C22-16 and C22-20 in Figure 4.) Figure 4 also shows the fused polymorphic elements of Chinese Han door gods and shields and spears used in Kenyan Maasai combined into one new composition and compared with the original design used at the Confucius Institutes.



**Figure 4 Final redesigned compositions of publicity bag using 'elements fused' polymorphic technique**

**Source: The researcher's own design**

### (3). 'Background presented side by side' polymorphic technique

Backgrounds of artworks need not be made up of abstract designs only. Multiple images fusing side by side in the backgrounds can also be used. In the study, two types of masks, one from Kenya and another from China and which possessed different art effects though they both used warm colours, were studied. The below figure shows

part of the Kenyan wood carved face mask (C19-1 in Figure 5) and part of Chinese opera mask (C19-2 in Figure 5) being stylized before fusing.



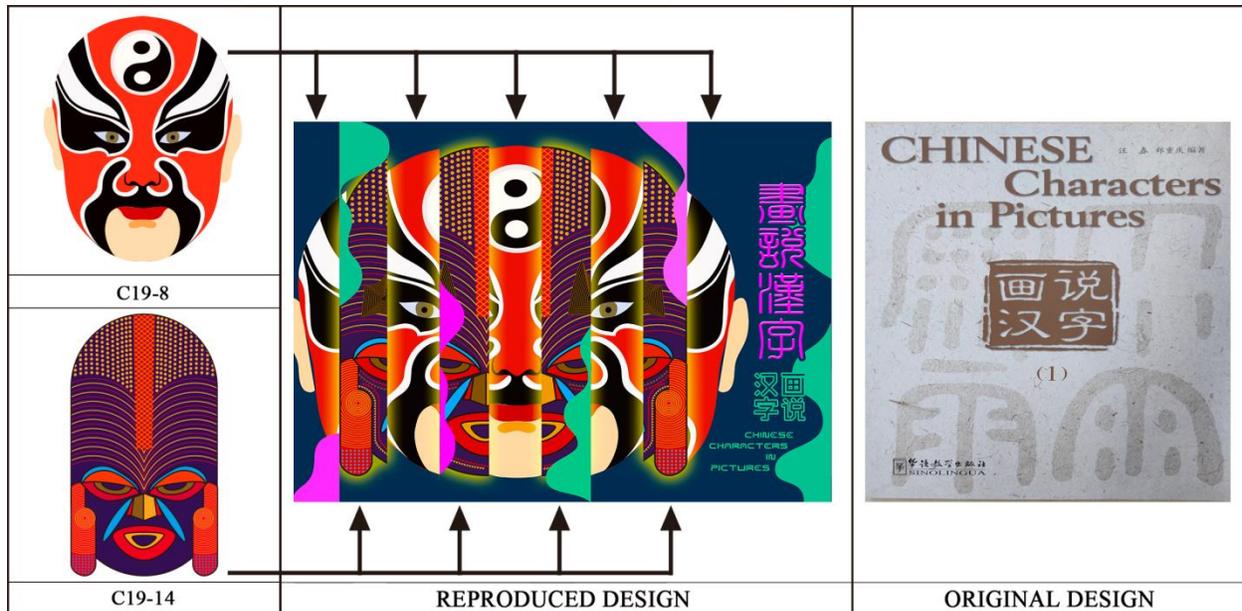
**Figure 5 Sample elements for cultural artefacts of ornaments sampled from China (l) and Kenya(r)**

**Source: The researcher's own design**

As a dramatic art form, Chinese opera mask represented by different colours and patterns embodies the personalities and intense moods of characters in a Chinese Opera. In contrast, Kenyan Maasai wooden carved mask served both as a means to scare opponents and an identification within the tribe. Many Kenyan handcrafted masks were about Kenyan warriors. To achieve this emotion the designer utilized stronger lines in Kenyan masks than those in Chinese opera masks (Figure 5).

In order to better display this feature and combine them in design, the designer developed a new technique. He first sketched the images on a tablet, then fuse them by utilizing 'side by side'

technique to bring out a mysterious feeling. The final composition of the original and redesigned composition is shown in Figure 6 below.



**Figure 6 Final redesigned compositions of booklet cover using 'background presented side by side' polymorphic technique**  
**Source: The researcher's own design**

#### (4). 'Background fused' polymorphic technique

In this project, the study sought to use different techniques in designing compositions using fused cultural elements in the backgrounds of the composition. One way to do this was to let the elements fused and function as background image, which made it easier to coordinate the text and graphic elements. The designer was careful not to have a very busy or cluttered background design as this would result in the images looking dazzling, disorganized and even have the potential to overwhelm the main subject. In order to avoid this, the backgrounds were created with the intention to be used for social media messaging in a globalized context.

Figure 7 shows elements from Chinese Han wedding dress (C26-1) and Maasai wedding attire (C26-2) selected as they were used for

similar function and had similar colours. Indeed there were more similarities than differences between them, making it possible for the designer to fuse into an abstract background.



**Figure 7 Sample elements for cultural artefacts of clothing sampled from China (l) and Kenya(r)**

**Source: The researcher's own design**

The resultant fused compositions (Figure 8) tended to not only be very colourful and artistic, but also clean and versatile. Even more successful results were achieved when the designer folded and rubbed brown paper to imitate the texture of Maasai goat skin cape then used crayon and oil to display colours.

In some of the compositions, the image of Maasai people remained and could be easily identified at a glance (see C-26-8 in Figure 8). In other compositions, the image of auspicious clouds, sea and mountains from Chinese Han culture was highlighted because they symbolized eternity and union which was in consistent with the good wishes to the newly wedded couple. (See C-26-8 in Figure 8). Figure

8 also shows an example of the original and re-designed compositions. This re-designed composition focused more on the core elements with the theme “we rise as one” and which was applied to the final leaflet design.



**Figure 8 Final redesigned compositions of leaflet with 'background fused' polymorphic technique**

*Source: The researcher's own design*

**(5). 'Both elements and background presented side by side' polymorphic technique**

A fifth method of fusing cultural elements, 'both background and background presented side by side' polymorphic technique was also experimented upon technique. The study found that jewellery and accessories were a rich part in both Chinese Han and Kenyan Maasai culture. Both had an incredible history and profound symbolic meaning to the shapes, materials and vibrant colours reminiscent of jewellery.

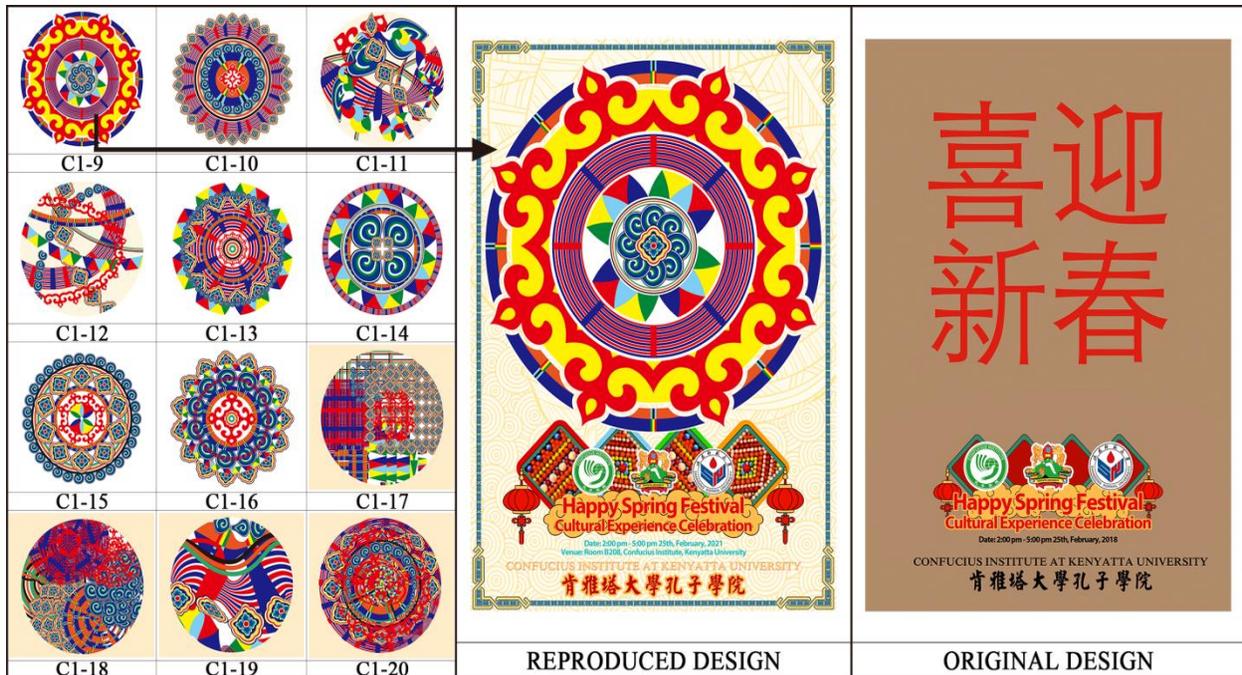
The exquisite hair ornaments in ancient Chinese Han culture (left in Figure 9) implied marriage, sincere love, elegance and social status.

**Beadwork in Maasai culture (right in Figure 9) represented tradition, beauty and strength, age, marital or social status. Both were considered as valuable traditional components in the rights of passage of two communities and are still in use today. This were part reason for their selection by the researcher.**



**Figure 9 Sample elements from cultural artifacts of jewelry and accessories sampled from China(l) and Kenya(r)  
Source: The researcher's own design**

**In order to create a series of posters to be used for different occasions by the Confucius Institutes, various distortion, duplication and colour contrast experiments in *Illustrator and Photoshop Software* were done. Figure 10 summarizes these experiments. The successful compositions were applied to a series of polymorphic posters that were used during the Spring Festival Ceremony at the Confucius Institute at Kenyatta University (See redesigned poster in Figure 10). Maasai elements and Chinese elements can easily be distinguished in the re-designed poster.**

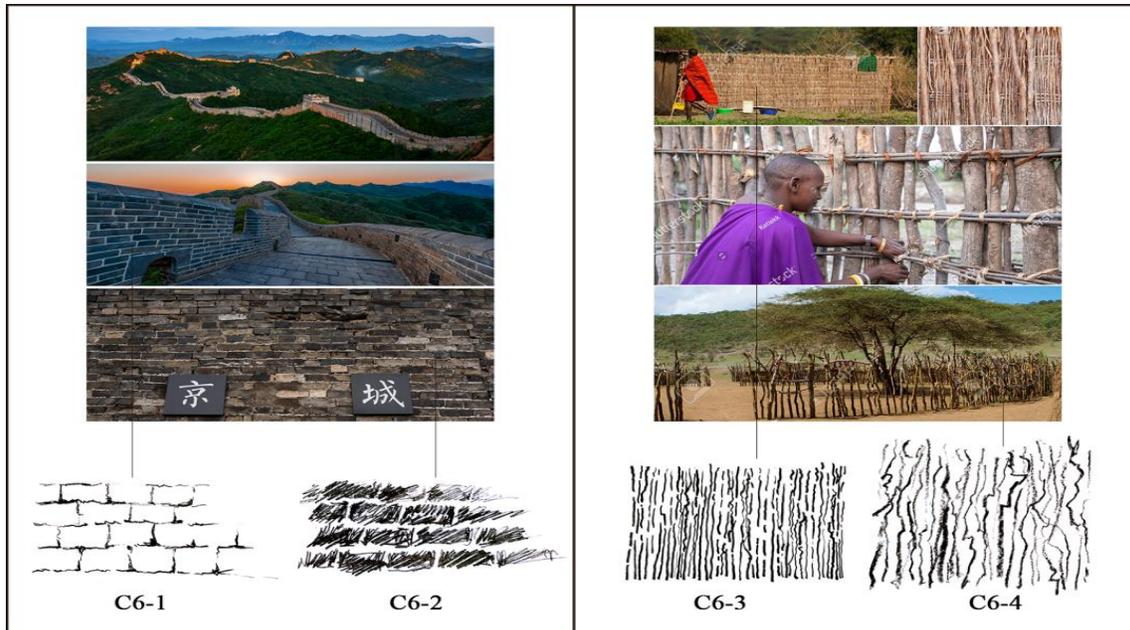


**Figure 10 Final redesigned compositions of poster with both elements and background presented side by side**  
**Source: The researcher's own design**

Figure 10 also shows the application on one of the redesigned compositions (C1-9) in redesigning and reproducing the original poster design of the Confucius Institute. It should be noted that any of the other redesigned compositions could be used as well.

**(6). 'Both elements and background fused' polymorphic technique**

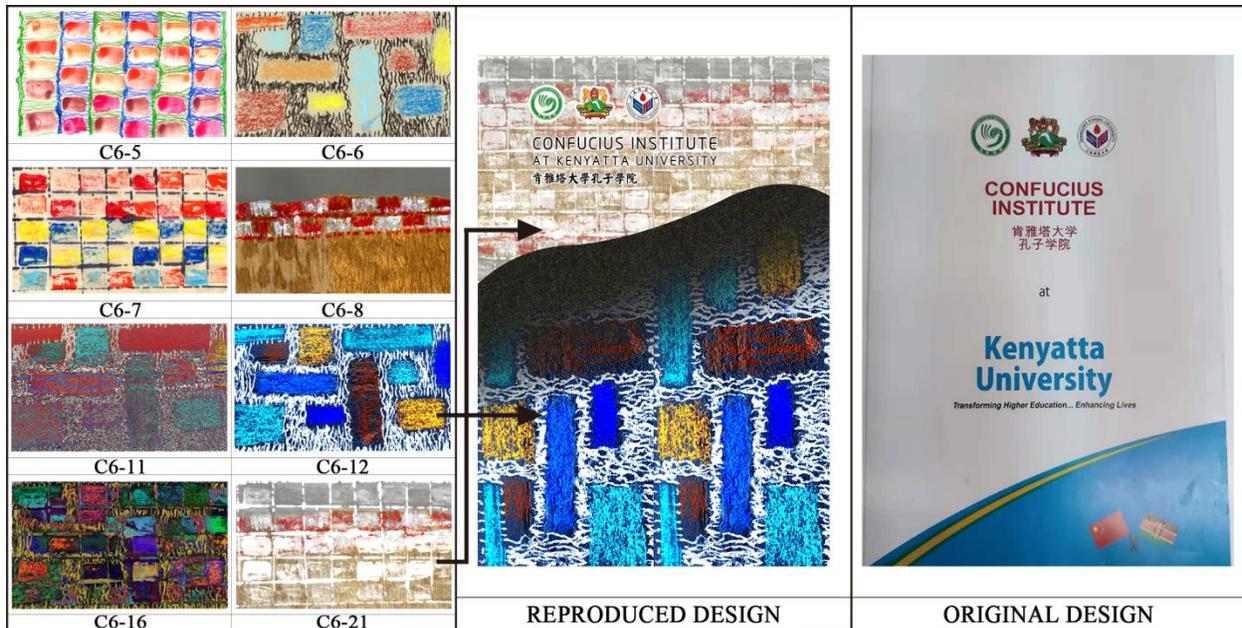
The procedure of using technique was similar with all the other experiments. The designer first drew the texture and outline of elements using pencil and charcoal pen on a piece of paper, as seen in C6-1, C6-2, C6-3 and C6-4 in Figure 11. Crepe paper was used to provide additional texture.



**Figure 11 Sample elements from cultural artefacts of architecture sampled from China (l) and Kenya(r)  
Source: The researcher's own design**

The second stage was to create design compositions using *Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop* software. What followed next was placing the scanned image created out of the pencils on the compositions and adjusting them to create different textured effects. This is shown as examples in visuals coded C6-5 to C6-12 in Figure 12.

Based on the adage that 'Architecture design is the fusion of *culture and function*', the designer sought, in Figure 12 to also achieve the combination that best highlighted the meaning of architectural design in the redesigned folder composition using Illustrations, colours, typography, layout and texture. It should be noted that Figure 12 shows the application on one of the redesigned compositions (C6-12 and C6-21) in redesigning the original folder. Any of the other redesigned compositions could have been used.



**Figure 12 Final redesigned compositions of folder with both 'elements and background fused' polymorphic technique**  
**Source: The researcher's own design**

## Conclusion

Graphic design is a universal language of expression. Different designers have different views based on their own cultural backgrounds and values. Fusion of different cultural elements in graphic design therefore could generate new perspectives and enhance expression and effective communication. This is also apt for materials that are for use in foreign language teaching and learning. This paper proved that the fusion of different cultural artifacts has the potential to bring a fresh breeze in graphic design. The fusion of different cultural elements to maintain cultural diversity has played vital roles in the cultural nativization for the language learners to achieve effective foreign language learning. Learners should now be able to better understand the language (and culture) being introduced to them with more insight and perspectives that make them better informed and involved.

**The paper further showcased a new and emerging novel technique, polymorphism, which was used in developing new designs in graphic design. This process can be replicated to other areas of Art and Design. Polymorphism enhances creativity and encompasses a wider range of applications of the design. This paper also affirmed the hypothesis that polymorphic designs using fused elements from cultural artifacts from different communities when applied on teaching aids can ensure effective learning of new languages. The reproduced designs of teaching aids should therefore be beneficial to learners of new languages in teaching institutes.**

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