Visual communication in cross-cultural design

Fan Jiang

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Visual Communication in Cross-Cultural Design

by Fan Jiang

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences in candidacy for the degree of Master of Fine Arts MFA Graphic Design Rochester Institute of Technology

April, 2012
## Approvals

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Abstract
Abstract

Visual Communication in Cross–Cultural Design

Fan Jiang
June.2011

The Chinese Zodiac, a 12–year cycle that ancient Chinese people use to count years, is considered as a very important and seminal part of traditional culture in China and. Now, more and more foreigners are being introduced to this traditional culture of China. Consequently, there are many books about Chinese Zodiac have been published because of its increasing exposure. Currently, though people have access to a large variety of information about Chinese Zodiac, most of the information is ineffective. Through research and conceptual experimentation, effective visual design solutions that convey the essence of the Chinese Zodiac were developed in this thesis. The purpose is to help Western people better understand and develop interest in traditional Chinese culture through design, to enhance the communications and exchanges between Eastern and Western culture and to show how design can improve them. The project integrates illustration, book and series poster design.

Keywords:
Chinese Traditional Culture, Poster Design, Illustration, Typography Design, System Design, Effective Communication
Introduction

Situation Analysis
Problem Statement
Design Definition
Background Information
Introduction

Situation Analysis

Now, more and more foreigners are being introduced to traditional culture of China, such as the Chinese Zodiac. Some of them may get to know it in Chinese restaurants; others may come across it on the Internet. As a result, many books about Chinese Zodiac have been published because of its increased exposure.

Western people's interest in the Chinese Zodiac system is also attributed to its similarities with the Western Zodiac system. Every zodiac sign is named after animals. What's more, both of systems are divided into circular 12 time periods. And it is widely accepted that each zodiac influences people's personalities and fortune in life. But there is a major difference that the Chinese Zodiac's 12-part cycle is divided into years rather than months. (Wikipedia, “Chinese Zodiac”)

Chinese Zodiac is an important part of Chinese traditional culture, history and astronomy. Ancient Chinese people picked 12 animals and used them as signs to help counting years based on lunar calendar. They represent a cyclical concept of time, rather than the Western linear concept of time. In Chinese calendar, the beginning of the year is between late January and early February based on the cycles of the moon. Chinese Zodiac is considered as a very important part of traditional culture in China. Although China has adopted the Western calendar since 1911, the dates of traditional Chinese festivals, such as that of the Chinese New Year, are still based on the lunar calendar.
Introduction

Problem Statement

As time passed by, the Chinese Zodiac system became part of Chinese culture rooted in and related to Chinese people’s daily life. There are many interesting tales and beautiful artworks about these animal signs. For instance, many Chinese believe that the year when a person was born is the primary factor determining one’s personality.

People, especially foreigners, might have these questions when they get to know these 12 animal signs. Why are there 12 animals? What are these 12 animals, and are there any stories about them? Does the Chinese Zodiac have any connection with the Western Zodiac? If they want to further comprehend it, they need more information.

Though people have access to a large variety of information about the Chinese Zodiac; most of the information is ineffective. For instance, some of the published books are simple collections of existing information, no matter whether the information is correct or not. Some are focusing on the astrology and fortune-telling part and written by foreigners who have a different cultural background with Chinese people. Some other books are badly designed with rough images. People even do not want to open them. Some information is accurate but foreigners may not understand because of the cultural differences. In most of the readers’ review of these books, people want more professional, interesting, and easy to understand information. What’s more, they are calling for well-designed books for this topic.

To solve this problem, the thesis project consists of a series of posters and books. Through research and conceptual experimentation, effective visual design solutions were developed that convey the essence of the Chinese Zodiac. The purpose is to help western people better understand and increase interest in traditional Chinese culture. The project integrates illustration and graphic design.
Design Definition

There are three main parts in this project: Illustration, Poster Design and Book Design.

Illustration: This is one of the main sections of the project. There are 12 character illustrations, one for each animal. These were created using watercolor and line drawing, then digitally optimized. The illustration style was inspired by different Chinese folk arts, such as Chinese paper cut style and pattern on ceramics. Both computer-based and hand drawing image were used and designed through Adobe Photoshop, Painter or Illustrator.

Poster Design: The series posters are aimed to be attractive and informative. The 12 character illustration of each zodiac will be used to form the poster. Typography and graphic symbol design were stressed to achieve design effectiveness. Also, the consistent layout of literal information and illustrations helps to explore the meaning of the Chinese Zodiac out of its original complexity.

Book Design: The book is mainly providing supplementary information about the Chinese Zodiac system since the information on the posters is limited. The information on the book will be detailed and divided into different layers. Correlative folk tales and traditions will be introduced in the book and image example included, too.
Introduction

Background Information

The Chinese Zodiac is a 12-year cycle system that consists of 12 animals which are respectively related with a certain year. The purpose is to count years. Each zodiac is named after an animal, so there are 12 animals in total: rat, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig.

There are many stories and fables explaining the origins of the zodiac. Historians believe that the Chinese Zodiac system is originated from the zoolatry since the Protohistory Age. The earliest detailed record about the zodiac that we can find traced back to The Spring and Autumn Period (770–476BC). By the time of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589AD), the Chinese Zodiac system had been widely used in China.

<table>
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Introduction

Background Information

The Chinese Zodiac system begins with the year of Rat and ends with the year of Pig. The reasons of this sequence and why these 12 animals are selected, there are many folk tales and historic records explained the detail. One truth is that, all the animals in the zodiac system is strongly related to ancient Chinese's life, including the Dragon.

In China, the most popular story about the Chinese Zodiac is as below;

“Once upon a time, the Jade Emperor thought it'd be better to assign an animal to each year so people could much more easily remember the Zodiac system. So he decided to hold a meeting with all the animals and he would choose 12 of them to be the Zodiac animals. On the registration day, the Rat thought the Ox is the fastest, strongest animal. So he jumps onto the Ox's back and stand on his head. Soon without knowing, the Ox first reached the final destination. Then the little Rat jumped off and claimed first place of the Zodiac system. The Ox gets the second place. Then comes other animals.” (Wikipedia, “Chinese Zodiac”)

Another widely accepted story focusing on the story between the Rat and the Cat;

“God called the animals to a banquet that night. The Rat loved to play tricks on the Cat so he told the cat that the banquet was on the day after tomorrow. When the Cat was sleeping and dreaming about the banquet, the rest of the animals all arrived to the banquet. The order of the animals was decided by the order that they arrived. Feeling betrayed, the Cat vowed that henceforth the Rat would be his enemy. That is probably one reason that why Cats are always chasing after Rats.” (Wikipedia, “Chinese Zodiac”)
Review of literature

Graphic Design
Illustration
Cultural Information
Review of Literature

The research is focusing on Chinese traditional culture, zodiac, typography design, book design, illustration and cultural communication. Both traditional books and digital websites were researched in order to get enough information and inspiration.

**Graphic Design**

Thinking with Type
*Ellen Lupton*
*Princeton Architectural Press; Revised edition (November 17, 2010)*

This is a well-organized book about typography design all through print-based or web-based page. Also this book is considered to be one of the best books for designers or artists who are focusing on everything about typography. In this book, the author detailed expressed the fundamental elements about typography, such as, aligning of the texts, higher and lower-cases, usage of different typefaces and so on. Many meaningful practical examples were provided to help increasing understanding of typography design. This is a perfect guide book.

Digital Diagrams: How to Design and Present Statistical Information Effectively
*Trevor Bounford*
*Watson-Guptill (September 1, 2000)*

In this book the author explores several possible ways of creating digital diagrams by using different symbols, colors and stylistic techniques. It focus on how to communicating the information with a chosen format, as mentioned in the book, effective design of presentation of statistical information. It is a useful book for me to get inspiration about diagram design.
Review of literature

New Masters of Poster Design: Poster Design for the Next Century
John Foster
This book is mainly showcasing some of the world’s best designers’ poster designs. Besides those high quality works, there are also useful descriptions about the process information of each work. It is very informative and useful. I got inspiration not only from the fresh ideas but also from the way how they creating something impressive, to be specific, how they make typography solutions or color combination.

Cross-Cultural Design: Communicating in the Global Marketplace
Ken Haas, Henry Steiner
Thames & Hudson (June, 1995)
The author focused on what is the international visual communication business and how the communication between different culture working. Many examples were provided to showing the effect of cross-culture to commercial solutions. This book provides several useful viewpoints when we are researching on cross-culture projects and explained the challenges of this topic through experiences.

The New Chinese Astrology
Suzanne White
Thomas Dunne Books; Revised edition (November 24, 2009)
This book provides a basis for understanding astrology in terms of the Chinese Zodiac based on character descriptions, with some experiences based on the author’s own life. The information on this book is mainly focusing on fortune telling, which is not considered as an useful book for cultural research. But it is useful for seeing different understanding of the zodiac system between Chinese and western people.
Review of literature

**Cultural Information**

**12 Zodiac Signs** (Chinese)
Weisheng Liu
*China Social Science Press (September, 2006)*
This book explained many interesting folk stories and cultural meanings of each animal sign in the Chinese Zodiac system. For example, it tells how ancient Chinese considered each animal in the zodiac system and how these animal related to their life. Interesting and attractive information can be gained from this book.

**A Comparative Study of the 12 Symbolic Animals** (Chinese)
Xueliang Gu, Fagong Liu
*China Industry Press (August, 2008)*
This book compared the difference of each animal in the Chinese Zodiac between Chinese and English culture. It focuses on the difference of science, literature, and art field. Even this book is not well organized, but some information in this book is helpful for the cross-cultural communication.

**Chinese Folk Arts**
Jin Zhilin
*China Intercontinental Press; 1st edition (June 16, 2004)*
This book tells plenty of information about Chinese folk arts, including some detailed technical steps and images. It's mainly entry introduction for people who's interested in Chinese art and culture. The colored images gave me some inspiration and the content is interesting and easy-understanding.
Review of literature

**Cultural Information**

*Chinese Traditional Pattern* (Chinese)

*Yue Gu*

*Oriental Press* (*January, 2010*)

This book provides high quality images of Chinese traditional pattern and information about their meaning and origin. Pattern is an important part of Chinese traditional culture and art. Varies patterns that created in different time periods were showed in this book. Some of them were found on the ceramics while others may on the cloth. It provides me many materials for creating the illustration of each zodiac.

**Illustration**

*Exploring Illustration*

*Michael Fleishman*

*Delmar Cengage Learning; 1st edition* (*November 3, 2003*)

In this book, the author presents various elementary illustration techniques and styles with detailed step diagrams. Also, many examples are presented to help understanding of different techniques. This book is especially for people who is not illustration major but get interest in illustration. To experiment different illustration styles for each zodiac sign with the guide of this book gives me many inspiration.

*Flower Line-drawing Collection*

*Yiran Jiang*

*Tianjing People’s Fine Arts Publishing House; 1st edition* (*January 1, 2007*)

This book is a tutorial guide book about a special Chinese illustration style, the line-drawing. In this book, the author shows detailed illustration examples of flower pattern with this style. It also shows how to control lines and composition with this traditional drawing skill. It inspires me a lot while I was creating the illustration style for each zodiac.
Process

Design Ideation
Style Inspiration
Research
Character Analyse
Sketch
Illustration Style Definition
Final Illustration
Color Experimentation
Poster Ideation
Background Elements
Final Poster
Book Ideation
Final Book Layout
Process: Ideation

Design Ideation

During the project process, there are three main parts in this project: Illustration, Poster Design and Book Design. Under is the flow chart during the process.
Style Inspiration

The illustrations are inspired by several Chinese traditional arts style. I researched several photo copies and images of those arts and noticed that they are sharing several similarities, such like rich in color and decoration.

Examples of the Chinese Traditional Arts

- Rural Painting
- Line Drawing
- Kite
- Shadow Puppet
- Bronze
- Blue-White Porcelain
- Paper Cutting
- Beijing Opera Mask
- Embroidery
Research

The research will focus on the meaning and format of the Chinese traditional patterns. Through different periods, there were many typical patterns. They were not only created in art works such as ceramics or embroidery, but also on architectures. Pattern is considered to be one of the most important parts of Chinese traditional culture.

There are mainly five kinds of patterns through the Chinese history: geometry pattern, flower and bird pattern, animal pattern, figure pattern and auspicious pattern. They share several similarities but each of them has its own specialties in meaning and usage.

**Geometry Pattern:** This kind of pattern has been existed since the Stone Age. Ancient Chinese draw those kinds of pattern on the wall of cave or on the pottery. They are simple abstract geometries such as fret pattern, rope pattern and swirl pattern. They do not contain too many meanings but simply powerful feeling.

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Examples of the Geometry Pattern
**Flower and Bird Pattern:** The flower and bird pattern was traditionally created for the decoration of porcelains. People got inspirations from the biosphere around them and created many beautiful patterns with various meanings such as happiness and luck. For example, the peony pattern is widely welcomed because its meaning of wealth and prosperity. In brief, the flower and bird pattern is one of the most beautiful and widely used patterns in Chinese traditional culture.

**Animal Pattern:** People believed this kind of pattern has been existed since the Stone Age because of the zoolatry. There are mainly two kinds of animals that were used to create the pattern. One is the animals that strongly related to people's life, like horse, fish or monkey. The other is some powerful animals that people created in tales, like dragon, phoenix or kylin. All the patterns contain ancient Chinese's expectation of luck, wealth and happiness. The dragon pattern is particularly significant for it is only used as the symbol of the emperor.
Figure Pattern: The figure pattern came out from Chinese traditional figure painting. It is widely used on porcelains, frescoes or Chinese New Year pictures. There are two kinds of figure. One is the figure of real people, such as children; the other is the figure of the god or fairies that appeared in the folk tales. People used those patterns in hope of being blessed and protected.

Examples of the Figure Pattern

Auspicious Pattern: The auspicious pattern has been existed since the Shang Dynasty. People chose some graphics with positive meanings and constructed them into auspicious pattern. They mainly contain 4 metaphors, wealth, power, longevity and happiness. People used this kind of pattern especially for the festival celebration, such as the cloud pattern, the Ruyi pattern and the Eight Diagrams pattern.

Examples of the Auspicious Pattern
Character Analysis

There are twelve animals in the Chinese Zodiac system. Each of the animal represents a zodiac sign. During the long history of China, the character of each animal sign has formed and changed a lot. But now they have formed a certain character for each of them based many Chinese folk tales and traditions, which noticeably affect all the art works related to the Chinese Zodiac topic. Before illustrating the portrait of each zodiac sign, detailed character research and analysis should be done.

The style of pattern, figure and color theme of each animal sign should be defined based on the character research result. Then the next step is to figure out a consistent illustration style for the whole zodiac system after all the research of the style, pattern and character.
Chinese Zodiac: Rat

**Introduction:** The rat is the first of the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac. Ancient Chinese considered the rat as the elf that controlled the storage. Also, they considered the rat as an omen of plenty of descendants.

**Symbolic Significance:** In most of the folk tales, the rat has been given such characteristics, like smartness and vitality, even though it is tiny in size. It is also connected with crops and wealth. Also, because of the strong reproductive performance of rat, people consider it as a good sign of many children. The most interesting and famous folk tales about the rat is “The Rat Daughter’s Wedding”. So the suitable pattern for the Rat is: the flower and bird pattern.
Chinese Zodiac: Ox

Introduction: The ox is the second of the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac. Ox has been the most important domestic animal for ancient Chinese since 7000 years ago. That is why they keep being grateful and respectful to the ox. What’s more, they believe that it is the ox that created the earth.

Symbolic Significance: The ox is always being considered as strong creature with iron will and unswerving spirit. Also, ancient Chinese admire and value ox because of the important role it has played in the agricultural civilization. In most of the traditional arts and folk arts, ox is presented as strong animal with simple line and shape. So the suitable pattern for the Ox is: the geometry pattern(on pottery).

Examples of the Ox in Chinese Traditional Arts

- Ware Art: Bronze Ox
- Traditional Art: Chinese Painting
- Folk Art: Paper-cutting
- Folk Art: Rural Painting
Chinese Zodiac: Tiger

**Introduction:** The tiger is the third sign of the zodiac system. Chinese considered the tiger as the king of the animals not only because of its power but also the pattern on its forehead which looks like the character 'king' (王) in Chinese.

**Symbolic Significance:** At the top of the food chain, the tiger is highly revered as a powerful and authoritative creature. In many Chinese folks, the tiger is considered as a strong animal that can defeat the god of disaster and disease. So there is a tradition in China – making small cloth tiger dolls or shoes for children, in order to keep disease away from them. So the suitable pattern for the Tiger is: the geometry pattern (on bronze ware).

### Examples of the Tiger in Chinese Traditional Arts

- **Ware Art: Eaves Tile**
- **Ware Art: Bronze Tiger**
- **Ware Art: Jade Tiger**
- **Folk Art: Cloth Tiger**
Chinese Zodiac: Hare

Introduction: The Hare is the fourth of the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac system. Hares are popular, compassionate and sincere. There were many famous fine horses that were named as hare because of the quick speed. What’s more, the hare is known as a sign of spring and plant.

Symbolic Significance: In many folk tales, the hare is considered as a spirit who lives with the goddess of the moon. So, people often call it the Moon Hare. Most of the artistic works about this zodiac sign are colorful, playful and adorable because of the lively nature of the hare. So the suitable pattern for the Hare is: the flower and bird pattern (Fragrans).

Examples of the Hare in Chinese Traditional Arts

Folk Art: Hare Lantern
Ware Art: Eaves Tile Rubbing
Folk Art: Paper-cutting
Folk Art: Clay Sculpture Hare
Chinese Zodiac: Dragon

**Introduction:** The Chinese dragons are legendary creatures in Chinese mythology and folklore. In Chinese art, dragons are typically portrayed as long, scaled, serpentine creatures with four legs that particularly control over water, rainfall, hurricane, and floods.

**Symbolic Significance:** Chinese dragons traditionally symbolize potent and auspicious powers, particularly in control of water, rainfall, hurricane, and floods. The dragon is also a symbol of imperial authority. Ancient emperors always named themselves the son of the god, which means the dragon. So the suitable pattern for the Dragon is: the auspicious pattern (Cloud/water pattern).

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<td>Ware Art: Eaves Tile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Historical Art: King Gown</td>
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Chinese Zodiac: Snake

Introduction: The Snake is the sixth of the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac. Some ancient Chinese named the snake “the little dragon” because they thought the snake is the entity of the dragon on the ground. In many tales, the two gods who created the Chinese nation had human body and snake tails.

Symbolic Significance: Some ancient Chinese named snake “the little dragon” and they thought the goddess who created the Chinese nation had a female body and snake tails. What’s more, one of the most famous folk tales in Chinese history is the White Snake. So the suitable pattern for the Snake is: the flower and bird pattern (Blue-and-white on porcelain).

Examples of the Snake in Chinese Traditional Arts

- Folk Art: Embroidery
- Folk Art: Paper-cutting
- Ware Art: Jade Snake
Chinese Zodiac: Horse

**Introduction:** The Horse is the 7th of the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac. These fast, clever and loyal creatures were highly considered in Chinese history. Ancient Chinese evaluated one country's national power by counting the amount of the horses they had.

**Symbolic Significance:** There were many traditional paintings and tales that praise horses because of their talent and being noble-minded. Also, Chinese highly admired them by comparing talented people to horses. The most famous art about horse is the traditional painting from Master Xu Beihong. The suitable pattern for the Horse is: the auspicious pattern.
Introduction: In traditional Chinese culture, the Goat is the eighth of the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac. The Goat is one of the oldest domesticated species and it has been one of the six most important domestic animals since 8000 years ago. They are very important for China's agriculture, stock raising and textile industry.

Symbolic Significance: Ancient Chinese considered the goat as sign of luck because of their similar pronunciation and the shapes of the characters of goat (羊) and luck (祥). So there is the word goat (羊) in many goat shape wares and idioms. What's more, people believed the goat symbolized judicial justice because of their horn. So the suitable pattern for the Goat is: the auspicious pattern.

Examples of the Goat in Chinese Traditional Arts

- Ware Art: Galloping horse
- Ware Art: tri-coloured glazed pottery
- Folk Art: Colored Pottery
- Folk Art: Paper-cutting
Chinese Zodiac: Monkey

**Introduction:** The monkey is the ninth of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac system. Chinese people like this creature because of its playful, clever and brave character, which they think is similar to human being.

**Symbolic Significance:** The Monkey is always related to luck and intelligence in traditional Chinese culture. There are thousands of tales and stories about monkey. The most famous monkey in China is the Monkey King who governs the Flower and Fruit Mountain. So, the monkey often appears with lucky peaches in many folk arts. In conclusion, the suitable pattern for the Monkey is: the flower and bird pattern.

**Examples of the Monkey in Chinese Traditional Arts**

- **Folk Art: Colored Pottery**
- **Folk Art: Plasticene “Monkey King”**
- **Folk Art: Paper-cutting**
- **Traditional Art: Beijing Opera Makeup**
Chinese Zodiac: Rooster

Introduction: The Rooster is the tenth of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac system. Ancient Chinese believed the Rooster as the entity on the ground of the phoenix.

Symbolic Significance: The Rooster is considered as a great sign of the five traditional moralities, they are brave, faithful, merciful, intelligent and honest. Ancient Chinese also considered the Rooster as sign of lucky because of their similar pronunciation “ji”. So, the suitable pattern for the Rooster is: the flower and bird pattern (water lily is a flower with high moralities in Chinese traditional culture).

Examples of the Rooster in Chinese Traditional Arts

Folk Art: Colored Pottery

Folk Art: Rural Painting

Folk Art: Paper-cutting

Ware Art: Tri-coloured Glazed Pottery
Chinese Zodiac: Dog

**Introduction:** The Dog is the eleventh animal in the Chinese zodiac system. Dog was the first animal that had been domesticated, and has been the most widely kept working, hunting, and companion animal in human history. During the long history, the Dog has been the symbol of loyalty, compatibility and kindness.

**Symbolic Significance:** Ancient Chinese thought the Dog is the god who controls wind. Also, they like and adore dog because it is a loyal, faithful and playful animal. That's why the character ‘dog’ is widely used in informal names and appellations. The most famous dog in the history is the guard Xiao Tian Dog of the Erlang God. So, the suitable pattern for the Dog is: the auspicious pattern.

**Examples of the Dog in Chinese Traditional Arts**

- Folk Art: Colored Pottery
- Folk Art: Shadow Puppet
- Folk Art: Colored Pottery
Chinese Zodiac: Pig

**Introduction:** As the last one of the Chinese Zodiac system, the Pig represents such characters as diligence, compassion, and generosity. Pigs are omnivores and are highly social and intelligent animals that have been widely domesticated and used in sacrifice activities by ancient Chinese since 10000 years ago.

**Symbolic Significance:** The Pig is so important in traditional Chinese traditional culture that it can be found in many folk art works. They are considered as the sign of honesty, richness and luck. People made a lot of pottery pigs, bronze pigs and golden pigs and wish they can bring fortune to them. So, the suitable pattern for the Pig is: the auspicious pattern.

**Examples of the Pig in Chinese Traditional Arts**

- **Ware Art:** Bronze Pig
- **Folk Art:** Rural Painting
- **Folk Art:** Paper-cutting
Process: Illustration

Sketch

Based on the research of Chinese traditional pattern and each Zodiac’s character, I began to draw several sketches for illustration style ideation.

**Sketches for Character Structure and Pattern Experimentation**
Process: Illustration

Illustration Style Definition

After many experimentation and brainstorming, I made the entire 12 zodiac Sign as a consistent system and illustrate them in similar style. It is a combination of Chinese Traditional pattern, my personal line-drawing style and the shape outline of each Zodiac Sign.

Examples of the Three Illustration Style

- Chinese Traditional Pattern
- Personal Line-Drawing Style
- Animal Shape Outline
Process: Illustration
Process: Illustration
Color Experimentation

After the character line sketch, I experimented with some color themes for each sign. I was inspired by colors in traditional Chinese drawing, which resulted in the use of red, blue, green and yellow. Watercolor is perfect for the style.
Process: Design

Poster Ideation

After finishing all the character illustrations, I turned to the design project and begin with poster design. The design process began with experimentation of different elements for the poster, like font, background, content and the layout. Below are some sketches for the overall layout of the posters.
Poster Ideation

At last, I decided to use the portrait of each Zodiac sign as the main body of the series of posters and align the elements in the middle of the poster. Also, I used nonobjective color background instead of the watercolor drawing of each animal I did before. The main purpose is to make the whole series of posters harmonious.

Rough Layout of the Poster

| The Sign Character Illustration |
| A Circle Indicates the Zodiac System |
| Nonobjective Watercolor Background |
| Chinese Hand making Paper Texture |
| Traditional Chinese Handwriting |
Font

I chose three fonts to create both traditional and modern feeling for the poster design. They are Bodoni (Bold), Frutiger (Bold Condensed and Light) for English texts and Kangxi Dictionary Font for Chinese character.

Bodoni is a very elegant font that is both modern and traditional, which is perfect for the big title of each poster and Frutiger’s organic cleanliness is great for the text and subtitle. The Chinese typeface is inspired from the type in the Kangxi Dictionary, a famous dictionary in Chinese history that Emperor Kangxi authorized to compile around the year of 1710.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of the Typefaces</th>
<th>Bodoni Bold</th>
<th>Frutiger Bold Condensed</th>
<th>Frutiger Light</th>
<th>康熙字典体</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ</td>
<td>ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ</td>
<td>ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ</td>
<td>鼠牛虎兔龍蛇馬羊猴雞狗猪</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>abcdedefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz</td>
<td>abcdedefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz</td>
<td>abcdedefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz</td>
<td>子丑寅卯辰巳午未申酉戌亥</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>01234567890</td>
<td>01234567890</td>
<td>01234567890</td>
<td>一二三四五六七八九十</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Background Elements

In order to make this whole series of posters more unitary, I created a background system based on Chinese traditional philosophy about natural world. The four color scheme illustrations represent four natural elements in this philosophy. They are earth, wind, fire and water that formed everything in the world, which can be associated with the characteristics of the 12 Zodiac Signs.
Then I designed a circular symbol system that represents the position of each animal sign in the 12 year’s cycle of the Chinese Zodiac system, which is inspired from the Twelve Earthly Branches in China. The Chinese character in each circle means the position of this Zodiac sign. It begins with the top middle Zodiac, the rat, and move clockwise to the last Zodiac Sign (the pig). It repeats every 12 years.
Finished Poster: Dog

Dog

Chinese Zodiac [gǒu]
Dog is the 11th zodiac in the system. 
Dog people are honest, faithful and sincere. They respect tradition and value honor, and enjoy helping people. 
Horse

Chinese Zodiac [má]

Finished Poster: Snake

Chinese Zodiac [shé]
Finished Poster: Dragon

DRAGON
Chinese Zodiac [lóng]

Finished Postercard
After I finished the series poster and postcard design, I began to work on the book design. The purpose of the book is to provide more detailed information about the Chinese Zodiac. If the aim of the poster is to attract public interest and show them this amazing world, then the aim of this book is to present to everyone what this world looks like. There will be 12 chapters in this book and each chapter will show some detailed introduction of one Zodiac sign. The structure of the content will be layered and clear.
Finished Book Layout

**CONTENTS**

**What is the Chinese Zodiac**
- Chinese Zodiac
- History of the Chinese Zodiac
- Chinese & Western Zodiac
- Stories of the Chinese Zodiac

**12 Zodiac Signs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rat</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ox</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiger</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snake</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WHAT IS THE CHINESE ZODIAC**

The Chinese Zodiac, a system that traces each year in an animal and its attributes, according to a 12-year cycle, has Chinese people picking 12 animals and their signs to mark the year based on their zodiac. They are Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, and Pig.

The Chinese Zodiac is considered an important part of Chinese traditional culture. Not only is it still influencing the Chinese society in many fields.

**History of the Chinese Zodiac**

There are many stories and beliefs to explain the beginning of the zodiac. Historically, the Chinese zodiac system is thought to originate from the creation of the Chinese calendar.

The Chinese zodiac system dates back to an ancient astrological system. It is believed to have originated from the Chinese calendar system, and its origins can be traced back to the ancient Chinese civilization.

The Chinese & Western Zodiac

Identifying the Chinese zodiac system using the term "zodiac" offers several benefits to the Western world. Both of them have 12 signs divided into 3 sections, each indicating a time period (the Earth, the Sun, and the Moon). However, the Chinese zodiac system also incorporates a person’s relationship to the cyclical journey. While there is a major difference, the Chinese 12-year cycle is divided into years rather than months.
STORIES ABOUT THE CHINESE ZODIAC

Generation
The zodiac, typically begins with the sign of the Rat, and there are many stories about the origins of the Chinese Zodiac, which explains why it is so.

The 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac have been developed over the years in various cultures for hundreds of years. A few are: the current zodiac which is based on the Chinese calendar. This is not the one used in other cultures, and it is hard to pinpoint which is the right one. The Chinese一年代表十二生肖, and if it is the case, it iscommonly called Chinese Zodiac, or simply the Chinese zodiac.

Story of the Chinese Zodiac
In China, the most popular story about the Chinese Zodiac is as follows,

Once upon a time, the Jade Emperor thought it would be great to give animals a chance to show off their talents and skills. He invited all the animals to a race to the finish line. The first animal to arrive would become the Chinese Zodiac for that year. The animals were excited and eager to participate. The race began, and each animal tried their best to win.

However, the last animal to arrive was the Rat. It had been running all day, and it was tired and exhausted. Just as it was about to give up, it saw a small gap in the track. It squeezed through and won the race. The Jade Emperor was impressed by the Rat’s determination and awarded it the first place. From that day on, the Rat became the first animal of the Chinese Zodiac.

Another widely accepted story focuses on the story between the Rat and the Cat. It is:

The Rat was the first to arrive in heaven. When the Rat arrived, the Cat was not there, and the Rat was the first to welcome him. The Cat was tired and wanted to rest. The Rat offered him a place to sleep. The next morning, the Rat woke up and found the Cat gone. It then realized that the Cat had taken advantage of the Rat.

RAT
Rat is the first animal in the Chinese Zodiac: Masculine, clear, charming and living. They have excellent talents and outstanding educational background.

WHAT IS RAT IN THE CHINESE ZODIAC

What is Rat
Rat is one of the twelve animal signs in the Chinese zodiac. It is the first sign in the Chinese zodiac, and it represents the year of the Rat. The Rat is associated with the Element of Wood and is ruled by the Earth.

Recent Chinese horoscope charts use the Rat to forecast the future. Also, they consider the year of the Rat as a year of growth and prosperity. In some Chinese tales, it is the birth of the Chinese New Year.

Characteristics of the Rat
Rat people are often described as intelligent, creative, and artistic. They have a strong work ethic and are always looking for opportunities to succeed. Rat people are also known for their ability to think outside the box and come up with unique solutions to problems. They are often leaders and are known for their ability to inspire others.

Year of Birth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
What is Dragon

In Chinese culture, the dragon is an important symbol that represents strength, power, and good fortune. It is a mythical creature with features from various animals, such as a lion, crocodile, and snake.

Characteristics of the Dragon

- Power
- Strength
- Good fortune
- Symbol of royalty and imperial authority
- Associated with water and wind

Year of the Dragon


History of the Chinese Zodiac

The Chinese zodiac is based on the Chinese calendar and consists of twelve animal signs, each representing a year. The dragon is the fifth sign in the Chinese zodiac.

Chinese & Western Zodiac

- Chinese zodiac: Dragon
- Western zodiac: Gemini

The dragon is associated with the month of February and March in Chinese astrology.
Conclusion

Thesis Exhibition

Conclusion
Conclusion

Thesis Exhibition

I had two thesis exhibitions one in the Bevier Gallery on April, 22nd and the other in the Vignelli Design Center on May, 20th. The first exhibition mainly showed my design process. Four big panels of finished posters, twelve pieces of small postcard boards, and one introduction panel were displayed to show my design thinking process. I received feedback and compliments from the audience, which were mainly students, professors and people outside the campus who are interested in art. They all showed a great interest in this project and this wonderful traditional culture. The second exhibition was a conclusion of all my works.
Conclusion

The original target of this thesis project is to help western people better understand and increase interest in traditional Chinese culture through my design works. This thesis project is constructed by illustrations, graphic designs and cultural information.

Through this thesis project, I learned a lot. The most important gains are: First, I learned how to better communicate my illustration works with graphic design. Second, I have a better understanding on how to make the image style and design style consistent based on the content. The third gain is how to use design as a media to better communicate between eastern and western culture.

I would like to give thanks to all of my advisors. They have taught me a lot not only for design elements and illustration skills but also how to work as a professional designer. Great thanks also go to my classmates and friends. They have all given me many inspirations and positive advises.

But finishing this thesis project is not the end of my design concern. During the two thesis exhibitions, many audiences showed amazing interest and understanding in this traditional Chinese culture. They asked for more and deeper information. So I want to continue my pursuit of using my design skill to better communicate between different cultures and societies.
Bibliography

Book

Website
Bibliography

**Graphic Design**

*Thinking with Type* / Ellen Lupton  
Princeton Architectural Press; Revised edition (November 17, 2010)

*Digital Diagrams: How to Design and Present Statistical Information Effectively* / Trevor Bounford  
Watson-Guptill (September 1, 2000)

*New Masters of Poster Design: Poster Design for the Next Century* / John Foster  

**Illustration**

*Exploring Illustration* / Michael Fleishman  

*Flower Line-drawing Collection* / Yiran Jiang  
Tianjing People's Fine Arts Publishing House; 1st edition (January 1, 2007)

**Cultural Information**

*Cross-Cultural Design: Communicating in the Global Marketplace* /  
Ken Haas, Henry Steiner  
Thames & Hudson (June, 1995)

*The New Chinese Astrology* / Suzanne White  
Thomas Dunne Books; Revised edition (November 24, 2009)

*12 Zodiac Signs* / Weisheng Liu  
China Social Science Press (September, 2006)

*A Comparative Study of the 12 Symbolic Animals* / Xueliang Gu, Fagong Liu  
China Industry Press (August, 2008)

*Chinese Folk Arts* / Jin Zhillin  
China Intercontinental Press; 1st edition (June 16, 2004)

*Chinese Traditional Pattern* / Yue Gu  
Oriental Press (January, 2010)
Bibliography

Website

Chinese Zodiac Definition

Chinese Zodiac Introduction (Chinese)
http://baike.baidu.com/view/11006.htm

Chinese Traditional Pattern Introduction (Chinese)
http://baike.baidu.com/view/2967974.htm

Chinese Traditional Art Example

Astrological Sign Introduction
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrological_sign
Visual Communication in Cross–Cultural Design

Fan Jiang

Graduate Graphic Design
School of Design
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology
Thesis Proposal for the Master of Fine Arts Degree

Fan Jiang
Rochester Institute of Technology
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
School of Design
Graduate Graphic Design

Title
Visual Communication in Cross–Cultural Design

Submitted by
Fan Jiang
November 17, 2010

Thesis Committee Approval

Chief Advisor
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Graphic Design, School of Design

Associate Advisor
Professor Luvon Sheppard
Illustration, School of Art

Administrative Chairperson
Professor Patti Lachance
School of Design
The Chinese zodiac is a 12–year cycle used for dating the years. Ancient Chinese people picked 12 animals and used them as signs to help counting years based on lunar calendar. They represent a cyclical concept of time, rather than the Western linear concept of time. In Chinese calendar, the beginning of the year is between late January and early February based on the cycles of the moon. Chinese Zodiac is considered as a very important part of traditional culture in China. Even China has adopted the Western calendar since 1911, but the lunar calendar is still used for festive occasions such as the Chinese New Year.
Situation Analysis

Now, more and more foreigners are being exposed to this traditional culture of China. Some of them may get to know it in Chinese restaurant, others may came across it on the Internet. As a consequent, there are many books about Chinese Zodiac have been published because of its increased exposure. If we searched for these books online, we can find there are several kinds of books about this topic. Some of them are introductive books without illustration. Some are focus on the astrology and fortune–telling part. Some books are written by foreigner that sharing a different cultural background with Chinese people. In most of the reader’s review of these books, people want more professional, interesting, and easy-understanding information. What’s more, they are calling for some well-designed and write books for this topic.

My personal interest is on graphic design and illustration. My project is to design a effective, attractive and easy-understanding book of Chinese Zodiac, which is in purpose to popularize it as a cultural sign of China.

Popular books on the website of Amazon.
Problem Statement

The Chinese Zodiac has 12 animal signs consisting of a 12–year–cycle, each year of which is named after a different animal that imparts distinct characteristics to its year. There are many interesting tales and beautiful artworks about these animal signs. As time passed by, these animal signs became part of Chinese culture rooted in and related to Chinese people’s daily life. For instance, many Chinese believe that the year of a person’s birth is the primary factor determining one’s personality.

People, especially foreigners, might have these questions when they get to know these 12 animal signs. Why are there 12 animals? Why are these 12 animals, and are there any stories about them? Does the Chinese Zodiac have any connection with the Western Zodiac? If they want to further comprehend it, they need more information.

The current situation is though people have access to a large variety of information about Chinese Zodiac, most of the information is ineffective. For instance, some of the published books are simple collections of existing information, no matter whether the information is correct or not. Some other books are badly designed with rough images. People do not want to read them. Some information is accurate but foreigners may not understand because of the cultural differences.

To solve this problem, I am going to design a book about the Chinese Zodiac, because I think a book is the best medium for presenting traditional culture. Symbols and illustrations will be used to visualize both the function and meaning of the animal signs. Also I will compare Chinese culture with western culture by using diagrams to make people better understand each sign. My aim of designing this book is to provide effective and intelligible information for people who want to understand the Chinese Zodiac.
Survey of Literature

**Graphic Design**

**Thinking with Type**
Ellen Lupton
Princeton Architectural Press; Revised edition (November 17, 2010)
This book is the definitive guide to using typography in visual communication, from the printed page to the computer screen. This revised edition includes forty-eight pages of new content, including the latest information on style sheets for print and the web, the use of ornaments and captions, lining and non-lining numerals, and hand lettering. Throughout the book, visual examples show how to be inventive within systems of typographic form—what the rules are and how to break them.

**Digital Diagrams: How to Design and Present Statistical Information Effectively**
Trevor Bounford
Watson-Guptill (September 1, 2000)
In this book the author explains how to assess the information to be conveyed to determine what needs to be stressed within a chosen format. As the book says, effective design of presentation of statistical information. It is a useful book for people who want to get inspiration and function about diagram design.

**Book Design**
Andrew Haslam
Harry N. Abrams, Inc. (November 1, 2006)
This authoritative text guides readers through establishing formats, constructing grids, choosing typefaces, designing a jacket, and, finally, preparing materials for the printer, with more than 300 illustrations to demonstrate every aspect of the process. Interviews with professional book designers provide valuable insight, and an extensive glossary of editorial, design, and production terms make a handy reference for the burgeoning new designer.
Cultural

**Cross-Cultural Design: Communicating in the Global Marketplace**
Ken Haas, Henry Steiner
Thames & Hudson (June, 1995)
Henry Steiner articulates the international character of the visual communications business. Thriving on an interplay of ideas from culture to culture, country to country, some of the most dynamic work today is produced by companies for cultures outside their own. This book examines the challenges and rewards experienced by communications professionals in working beyond the constraints of their own culture.

**The New Chinese Astrology**
Suzanne White
Thomas Dunne Books; Revised edition (November 24, 2009)
This book provides a basis for understanding astrology in terms of Chinese animal signs based on character descriptions, with some signs based on the author’s own life. This is the best selling book in this topic on Amazon’s webstore.

**Chinese Astrology: Exploring The Eastern Zodiac**
Shelly Wu
New Page Books (June 2005)
Exploring the Eastern Zodiac explains our “natural endowment”. This 5,000–year–old art paints a remarkable picture of personality and potential using the archetypes of the 12 signs of the ancient Eastern zodiac. Anyone interested in exploring this fascinating branch of Eastern philosophy may read this book.

**A Comparative Study of the 12 Symbolic Animals in Chinese&English Culture(Chinese)**
Xueliang Gu, Fagong Liu
Industry Press (August 2008)
This book compared the difference of each animal in the Chinese Zodiac between Chinese and English culture. It focuses on the difference of science, literature, and art field. Even this book is not well organized, but some information in this book is helpful for the cross-cultural communication.
**Cultural**

**Chinese Folk Arts**  
Jin Zhilin  
China Intercontinental Press; 1ST edition (June 16, 2004)  
This book provides an in-depth look at folk arts, undertaking serious discussion of the core characteristics and social context of various forms, as well as an overview of folk artists themselves. The author offers a detailed study of the technical aspects that recur, from structure to color preference. With full color photographs and illustrations.

**Illustration**

**Exploring Illustration (Design Exploration Series)**  
Michael Fleishman  
This book exploring Illustration presents a curriculum methodology to learning illustration Fundamental concepts, techniques, mechanics, and styles are highlighted in an approachable compare–and–contrast format, with functional, step–by–step visuals that enhance understanding.

**Naive: Modernism and Folklore in Contemporary Graphic Design**  
R.Klanten, H.Helliqe  
Die Gestalten Verlag; 1st edition (June 9, 2009)  
The authors creating new and striking imagery using palettes of earthy and pastel shades, patterns and shapes with a strong folkloristic element. They illustrates this new development in graphic design, assembling a multitude of vivid and inspiring examples ranging from illustrations, poster art, book covers. This book may give me some insprition of cultural illustration.

**Book Making**

**Bookcraft: Techniques for Binding, Folding, and Decorating to Create Books and More**  
Heather Weston  
Quarry Books (September 1, 2008)  
This guide provides the essential ingredients for designing and making books, from simple binding and finishing techniques to complex complete products. This book also explores more experimental binding and page treatment techniques, and has a comprehensive gallery of ideas outlining the skills and materials needed to apply techniques often reserved for professionals.
Methodological Design

There will be three main parts in this project: Graphic Design, Illustration and Book Design.

**Graphic Design**

Since this is a graphic design based thesis project, I will focus on typography design, information design and symbol design. In the information design part, I am going to use pictograms to compare and analyze the meaning of each animal in different cultures. In the symbol design part, the symbols will build up a system used for visualizing how the 12 animal signs become a 12–year–circular counting system. These symbols will be abstracted from the character of each animal or ancient Chinese character. I want to divide the book into 12 sections and each section will share a consistent system of typography design.

**Illustration**

This section will be an important part of content of the book. In this part, I will use both hand drawing and computer–based drawing to create my illustration. There will be 12 main visualized illustrations of each animal. I may use 12 different ways inspired by different Chinese folk arts, such as Chinese paper cut style or pattern on ceramics, to illustrate each animal. Also, relative information that can let readers know more about Chinese culture of these arts will be described in each section. Both computer-based and hand drawing image will be used and designed through Photoshop, Painter or InDesign.

**Book Design**

As regards the structure of this book, I will make it well-organized and cohesive. This book will be mainly divided into 12 parts for each animal sign. And there will be 2 additional parts for the overall background of the Chinese Zodiac and the application works of my design system. All the parts will be bind together in a book while each of them can be independently taken out.
Implementation Strategies
I want to make the book well-organized, rich in visual information and easy understanding. Because of this target, the information will be divided into several layers in each section of the book. The layered structure can help us get step-up information and better understanding the Chinese culture.
The illustrations will be inspired by several Chinese traditional arts, such as paper cutting or shadow puppet. Below are some examples of the Chinese traditional arts:
Target Audience

This application will appeal broadly to a wide demographic range. The target audience will include these individuals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both male and female</td>
<td>Primary target group will be age of 18 to 40</td>
<td>English-speaking people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example

**Rose**
Gender: Female  
Age: 26 year-old  
Educational Level: BA Degree  
Career: Painter

**Boliang**
Gender: Male  
Age: 35 year-old  
Educational Level: MBA Degree  
Career: Business Man

**Micheal**
Gender: Male  
Age: 18 year-old  
Educational Level: High School  
Career: Student
Dissemination

I will upload the project process on the thesis project processing blog. And post it on other public web-site that can gather more attention. Also, I will show my book to some publishing company and try to publish it.

I will also submit my project to some graphic design competitions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competition</th>
<th>TBA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Design Award</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Annual Design Contest</td>
<td>TBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Design Award</td>
<td>TBA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation Plan

I will upload an e-book on my web-site and invite some foreign friends to read it and give their feedback. I can get the feedback by a survey that people can finish it after they read the book.

Several questions will be given. Such as, if this book is well communicated the two different cultures? Is this book attractive and worth reading? What’s more information you would like to know?

Through the evaluation both online and in the real life, I can optimized my project in a certain way.
# Pragmatic Considerations

Total $550

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$50</td>
<td>Promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Includes printing cost for promotional poster &amp; business card)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50</td>
<td>Painting Material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50</td>
<td>Printing Cost for Documentation Book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50</td>
<td>Purchasing Domain</td>
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<tr>
<td>$250</td>
<td>Printing Cost for Books</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Includes printing cost and binding cost for 3 copies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100</td>
<td>Printing Cost for Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Such as poster or other design applications)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


# Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **October 2010** | Thesis Proposal Draft  
|             | Research of Literature  
|             | Project Design Ideation                                                |
| **November 2010** | Thesis Proposal Defense  
|             | Project Structure Construct                                            |
| **December 2011** | Book Content Ideation  
|             | Illustration Ideation                                                  |
| **January 2011** | **1st Committee Meeting**  
|             | Illustration Draft Completed                                           |
| **February 2011** | Book Design Ideation  
|             | Illustration Processing                                                |
| **March 2011** | Illustration Completed  
|             | Book Draft Processing                                                  |
|             | **2nd Committee Meeting**                                              |
| **April 2011** | Book Design Completed  
|             | **3rd Committee Meeting**                                              |
|             | Application Design                                                    |
| **May, 2011** | Thesis Defense                                                        |
|             | Thesis Show                                                            |
# Bibliography

| **Book** | Chinese Astrology: Exploring The Eastern Zodiac  
*Shelly Wu, New Page Books (June 2005)* |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Website** | http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_zodiac  
http://baike.baidu.com/view/11006.htm  
http://www.amazon.com/books  
http://www.amazon.cn/%E5%9B%BE%E4%B9%A6/b?ie=UTF8&node=658390051 |