

設計學院 香港理工大學 對話

(譚智恆)



PolyU Design celebrates its Semicentennial Anniversary in 2014. Being the sole provider of design education at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Hong Kong, the School of Design has been an important hub of design education and research since 1964. Keith Tam is a Hong Kong-based information designer, typographer, teacher and researcher. He is currently an assistant professor at the School of Design of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, where he heads the Communication Design programme and the Information Design Lab.

今年是香港理工大學設計學院建校50週年，理工大設計學院作為全港唯一一個具備本科及研究生培養層次的設計學院，自建院之日起就一直是肩負香港設計教育重任，為社會源源不斷地輸送設計力量。譚智恆是理工大設計學院助理教授，傳意設計學科主任和資訊設計研究室主任。

An Interview with PolyU Design (Keith Tam)

儘管“作為圖像的字體”在傳統的面設計領域佔有重要的一席之地，但當下亟待關注的應是“作為信息的字體”。

“‘Type as image’ is certainly more closely related to traditional graphic design, but ‘type as information’ needs more urgent attention these days.”

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360° — 香港理工大學設計學院喬遷至新落成的馬會創新大樓，可喜可賀。整座建築的外觀氣勢非凡，我很想知道建築內部的導視系統是怎樣的。既然說到了您的專長，想聽聽您內行的角度。
T — 謝謝！入駐扎哈·哈迪德設計的標誌性建築的確讓人精神振奮。相信新大樓也會為學院注入新想法，打造新風貌。相比之前的學院樓，現在所有學科的師生都能安居在同一個屋簷下，無疑是件幸事。說到新大樓的導視系統，由我們信息設計研究室承接，目前仍在進行中。我們的團隊已經開展了原型設計和多項測試，確保系統達到我們的預期。我們預想了使用者的尋路路線，針對關鍵點設置相關信息，以防迷路。我們設計了一套清晰易懂的思維模型，便於使用者一目了然大樓內不同機構和活動。這個項目的關鍵詞是“系統”，因為我們設計的不是單個的設計品，而是一整套連貫統一的導視規則，儘可能地將其簡明化。既然大樓本身已經是一個標誌性存在了，我們決定收斂導視的鋒芒。我們不希望出來的效果

太過張揚，這容易和整體的建築語言相衝撞。新大樓標新立異，沒有哪兩層是一模一樣的，它迴避了建築樣式上的節奏重複，變得不可預知。對此我們的思考是導視標識應避免給人突兀或喧賓奪主的感覺，而應一目了然。字體方面，我們外包並參與研發了一款新字體——理大漆咸體（PolyU Chatham），由 Irene Vlachou 聯同本人設計，將會成為香港理工大學的企業形象字體。該款字體屬無襯線體，比例舒展，字懷開放，清晰可辨。眼下僅有三種粗細版本：普通、中等、粗體，再加上專門用於數字和編號的變體。以後我們將會完成全套有多種粗細和斜體的設計，用於印刷品和電子屏幕上。對應的中文字體則選用了信黑體。信黑體是香港字體設計前輩柯熾堅老師的作品，柯老師亦為理工大設計學院的客席講師。

2

360° — 您的文字設計指導原則是什麼？
T — 我認為文字設計位於語言、文化、科技和美學之交匯處。首先，語

言文字是文字設計的根本，也是最重要的。畢竟脫離了語言，文字設計無從談起。而且語言也是人類文明的基石。至於科技，它則推動了書面文字的轉化、複製與傳播。書寫工具、紙張、書籍、網路，直到無處不在的電子屏幕，所有這些媒介改變了字型的外貌，也影響了內容的呈現，互動，以及讀者消化的方式。在這樣的條件下，文化開始發揮作用。其實人的行為和生活方式是語言和傳播技術操縱的結果。人和人，人和信息、知識發生關係的方式便構成了文字設計的文化內涵，人們因為共同的視野和價值體系而獲得定義。最後再說美學，它之於文字設計當然重要，但它不是純粹形式上的藝術表達。文字設計的美學價值有時很難界定，它會隨時間和情景而轉變。美學與受眾的情感反應尤關，能驅使強大的聯想力。

近來，在亞洲乃至全球有很多人關注文字設計，但好像把文字設計等同於字體設計了，這在我看來並不應該。文字設計更多是關於內容的編排而非字母或字符本身的形態設計。我傾向於將文字設計看作信息設計的一個分

Entrance Lettering of the Innovation Tower

創新樓正門大樓名稱





1.
2. 3.

1. Section View of the Innovation Tower

創新樓建築剖面圖

2. Floor Directory of the Innovation Tower

創新樓樓層指南

3. Floor Plan of the Innovation Tower

創新樓建築平面圖



“Before a user engages in the content, they need to first be able to recognise it as something interesting and relevant.”

支，而不只是書法藝術的延伸。儘管“作為圖像的字體”在傳統的平面設計和廣告領域中佔有重要的一席之地，但在我看來，當下亟待關注的應是“作為信息的字體”。

3

360° — 您帶領的信息設計研究室是設計學院的研究及顧問機構。你們的口號是“我們研究是什麼促成了信息的獲取，理解和使用，並使其具有吸引力。”我尚能理解信息設計至少要做到清晰易懂，但“吸引力”，真的有必要嗎？如果設計過於顯性，不會擔心信息僅僅成了符號而損害了對意義的傳達嗎？

T — 那句話與其說是“口號”不如說是對我們工作性質和設計方法的綱領性闡述。的確，有時好的設計不需要太吸引眼球，特別是站在傳統平面設計的立場上，將“吸引力”歸為製造驚喜或視覺震撼的元素。但其實，具有吸引力，也就是說具有高度的顯性，也是信息要發揮的功能之一，因為使用者在進入內容閱讀之前首先要對信息產生興趣並認定它跟自己有關。所以，信息給人的第一印象的確如你所說，類似這種符號性的表達，不論是表格，說明書，還是文件，使用者都會用主觀來判斷所看到的信息是什麼，是否要閱讀它，如何使用它，對它的感覺如何。

4

360° — 如今您在閱讀新聞時，什麼最先抓住你的視線，圖片還是大標題？（請說明閱讀媒介）

T — 當今，新聞的傳播採取了多種形式，用得最多的要數移動終端上的app。這些app更青睞標題，例如RSS，它們把圖片縮到還不及郵票大。屏幕越小，選擇的空間越小。小屏幕在設計上真正要實行“多重作業模式”看來並不現實。這和大開張的報紙不同。報紙的設計里有機緣巧合的成份在，目光可以很輕易的落在無關的信息上，因為報紙可以同時開放多個閱讀窗口，標題和圖片都可以當幌子。但在移動終端上，隨機要讓位於選擇。這其中有有利有弊。數字媒體在推出私人訂製的同時也加多了大口徑的新聞渠道，應該說，相比傳統大眾媒體，後者更民主了，也確實實改變了閱讀的模式。

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360° — 信息設計研究室有一個項目，是研究香港雙語文字設計，我覺得很有趣。因為在香港，西方文化和嶺南文化交融共生。雙語文字設計作為解讀香港的城市密碼之一是如何強化香港的獨特性的？

T — 香港獨樹一幟地採用了中英對照的文字形式無疑是由香港的殖民歷史所催發的。這一文化在香港大街小巷的店鋪招牌上體現得淋漓盡致，也常見於香港人的口頭和媒體。兩種語言一旦聯姻就會激發一系列的語言問題和視覺傳達問題，其中最重要的就是主次問題。說來難以置信，但中文的確是在經歷了上世紀七十年代的殖民反抗以及“中文運動”之後才成為官方語言。若想一窺兩種語言主次的演變，商鋪招牌和政府的門牌是最

顯而易見的。中文里的楷書搭配上西文里的羅馬大寫字體是最具香港范兒的。這種處理並不是要追求絕對的協調融洽，而是秉著對兩種文化傳統的尊重，將各自的精華融合在一起。在我看來，這真的是非常的香港，也非常嶺南：既堅忍包容，又精幹務實。當下流行的做法則更現代一些，比如將無襯線體和黑體結合，將宋體和襯線體結合，向所謂的“普世”的視覺語言轉變。這少了些趣味，但是大勢所趨。

6

360° — 有哪款字體符合您本人的性格嗎？

T — 如果你問的是我個人的喜好，我確實有中意的字體，不過用什麼字體就要看具體的項目了。我不會說哪款字體符合我個人的性格，但我可以談談我個人的設計哲學和方法。論字體性格，我喜歡簡單實用又低調的字體。平日里打字，我會選用Georgia（Matthew Carter設計），因為它比較中性，很適合屏幕。我還比較喜歡簡單低調的，比如Thesis Sans（Luc(as) de Groot設計）和Charter（Matthew Carter設計）。中文字體里，我比較喜歡蒙納出品的宋體和信黑體，兩款字均由柯熾堅老師設計。

7

360° — 盲文也會有文字設計的需要嗎？

T — 據我所知，其實是有的。比如尺寸和間距。但在這個領域我沒什麼經驗。

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1

360° — School of Design has just moved into the Jockey Club Innovation Tower, the latest landmark of Hong Kong. Congratulations. The building looks spectacular from outside, and I am more curious to know its way-finding system in the inside. Since it's your expertise. Any insight?

T — Thank you! It has been exciting to move to such an iconic building designed by Zaha Hadid. I believe that the new building will bring new inspirations to the School and gradually transform its culture – it is a space that is of much higher quality than our previous premises, and all programmes of the School are now housed under one roof, which is a good thing.

In terms of the building's wayfinding system, the Information Design Lab (IDL) has taken on the responsibility, and the project is still ongoing. Our team has been prototyping and testing various design ideas to ensure that the system works for our users as intended. The most important aspect of the project is to consider a typical user's journey in finding destinations within the tower, and to provide relevant information for them at strategic locations to ensure that they do not get lost. We provide

a clear mental model for our users to understand the various activities and organisation within our School. The keyword for such a project being 'system': we are not designing disparate artefacts but a coherent and consistent set of principles that help people navigate around with as much ease as possible. Since the building is already an iconic architectural statement in and of itself, our design approach for the signage is therefore a rather subtle one. We did not want to create a sweeping aesthetic statement that might be at odds with the architectural language. The building is unusual in that no two floors are the same. Unlike more conventional buildings, it does not have a predictable and repeatable architectural pattern. Our thinking was that the signs should not be obtrusive nor unnecessarily draw attention to themselves, but yet should be immediately apparent when needed.

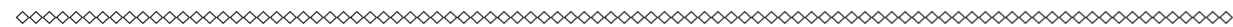
We have also commissioned and co-developed a new typeface called PolyU Chatham, designed by Irene Vlachou, which will be the new corporate typeface for the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. This is a sanserif typeface of generous proportions, with open counters and distinctive, legible shapes. At the

moment there are three weights for signage use: regular, medium and bold, plus a variant specially made for numerals. We will expand it to a full range of weights, for print as well as screen. The Chinese typeface is Xin Gothic designed by a distinguished local type design veteran Sammy Or, who is also a part-time lecturer at the PolyU School of Design.

2

360° — What are your guiding principles for typography?

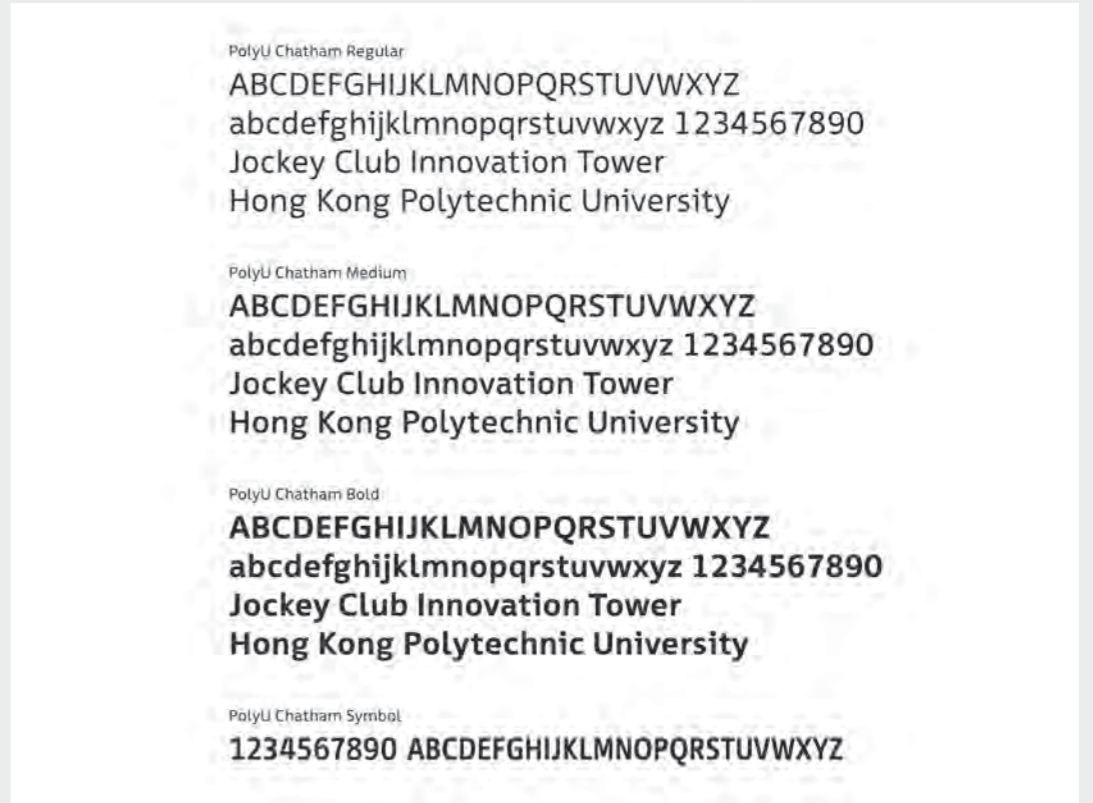
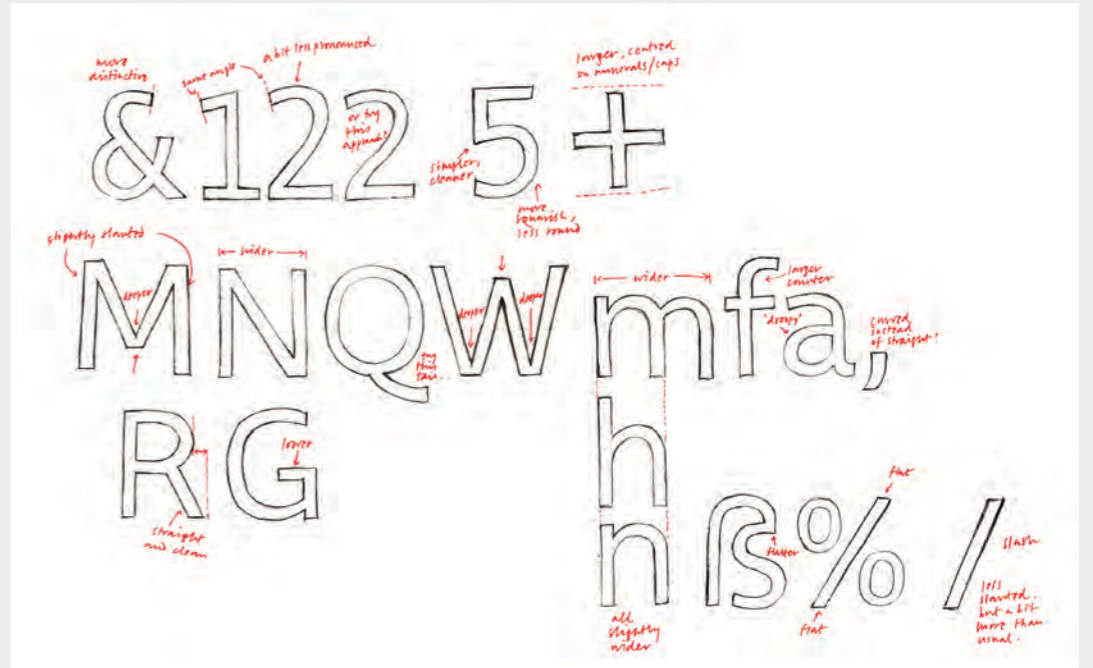
T — I believe that typography is situated at the intersection of language, culture, technology and aesthetics. First and foremost, typography rests on the foundation of language, this is the most important. After all, typography cannot exist without language, and language is a cornerstone of civilization. Technology on the other hand, has to do with how we render, reproduce and disseminate written language. Writing implements, paper, typesetting technologies, the book format, the Internet, all the way to the now ubiquitous digital screen – they influence what letterforms or characters look like and how content is arranged, interacted and comprehended by readers. Under this context, culture comes into play.



- 1.
- 2.

1-2. Sketches and notes showing the development of PolyU Chatham

理大漆咸體修正過程草稿



How we connect with others, how we connect with information and knowledge, our behaviour and ways of life as a result of the communication as mediated by written language and communication technology, form the cultural aspects of typography. It defines who we are as groups of people who share common visions and sets of values. And last but not least, aesthetics is of course an important part of all this, but not as a pure form of artistic expression. The aesthetic value of typography is sometimes very difficult to define, and evolves over time and place. Typographic aesthetics concern readers' emotional responses and have associative qualities that can be very powerful.

Globally as well as in Asia, there seems to be a lot of interest in typography recently. But it seems that people tend to equate typography with fonts (the more appropriate term is 'typefaces'), which I do not believe is necessarily the case. Typography, to me, is perhaps more about the arrangement of content for reading/viewing rather than the forms of the letters or characters themselves. I tend to be of the opinion that typography is a subset of information design, rather than an extension of, say, calligraphy. Though of course, 'type as image' is also an important area that's more closely related to traditional graphic design and advertising. But from my perspective 'type as information' needs more urgent attention these days.

3

360° — You head the Information Design Lab (IDL), a research and consultancy unit at the School of Design. The slogan goes, "We

investigate what makes information accessible, understandable, usable and attractive." It's easy to understand information design need to be legible at least, but does it really matter to be "attractive?" If design is too visible, will information pass merely as signs or symbols other than conveying meaning?

T — That's not so much a 'slogan' than something that guides the nature of our work and our approach to design. You are right in that sometimes good design doesn't have to be 'attractive' in the more traditional 'graphic design' sense, referring to an element of surprise or graphic impact. But being attractive – hence highly visible – is also a function that a piece of communication needs to serve. Before a user engages in the content, they need to first be able to recognise it as something that is of interest and relevance to them. So the general impression of a piece of communication does work as a symbol or sign as you've put it, no matter whether it is a form or an instructional leaflet or a document, and users will form subjective judgments as to what is it, whether it should be read, how to use it and how they feel about it.

4

360° — For today's news reading, which you focused on first, picture or headline? (specify the medium)
T — News tends to come in many different forms nowadays, most of which stream through apps on our mobile devices. These mobile apps tend to favour headlines rather than pictures, such as RSS feeds, with images reduced to sizes smaller than

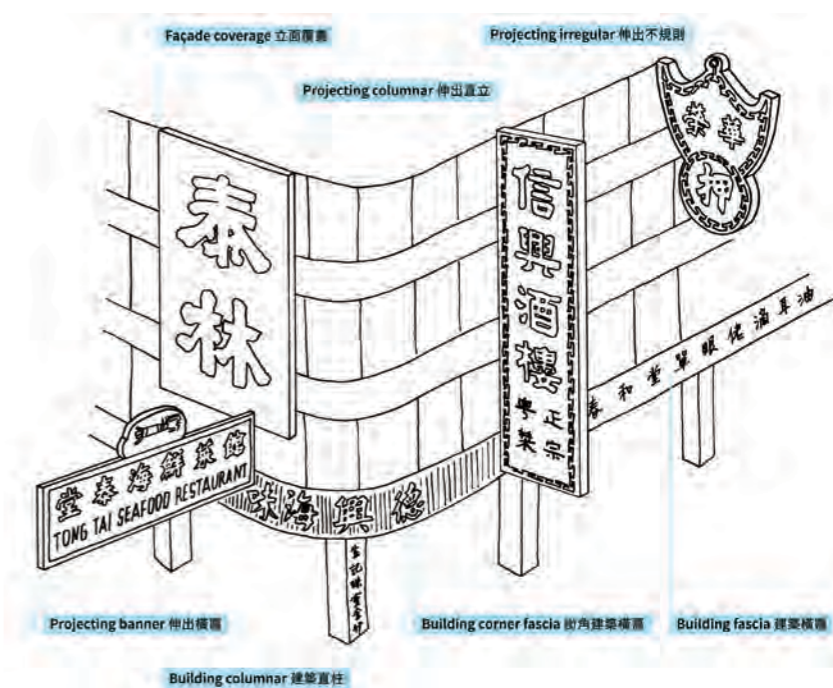
postage stamps. The smaller the screen, the fewer the choices available on one 'screenful' of information. True multitasking is not available on small screens really. This is very different from a traditional broadsheet newspaper, where serendipity is part of the design. It is much easier to stumble upon something that you didn't intend to read when you are browsing through a traditional printed newspaper because there are multiple entry points, and these could be large headlines or images. On mobile apps, choice is favoured over chance. There are pros and cons about this. Stories could be customised to the users' interests in digital media, and one has more access to larger varieties of new sources. More democratic than traditional mass media perhaps, and the mode of reading has indeed shifted.

5

360° — IDL launched a project to investigate the bilingual typography exclusively in Hong Kong. It's a very interesting topic. Hong Kong is known as an international metropolis where Western culture and Lingnan culture converge and interfuse. In what ways do you think bilingual typography as part of urban codes enhances the distinctiveness of Hong Kong?
T — Hong Kong's colonial history was obviously the main catalyst for its distinctive combination of the Chinese and English typographic traditions. This unique culture is manifested most vividly on the streets of Hong Kong in the signage, but also reflected in spoken language as well as print media. When two languages are

A sketch showing the relationship between signs and architecture in Hong Kong

香港商舖招牌與建築的關係



combined, a number of linguistic and visual issues arise, and one of the most important being status relationship. This might sound surprising, but Chinese did not become an official language in Hong Kong until the 1970s after the anti-colonial riots and what was known as the 'Chinese Language Movement'. This evolving status relationship between Chinese and English is most easily seen in signage and architectural lettering for governmental establishments especially. The combination of Chinese calligraphy (usually Kaishu) with Roman capitals for example is an eclectic yet distinctive approach that is uniquely Hong Kong. It does not aim for absolute harmonisation but designed with respect for each culture's own heritage and tradition, unashamedly mixing the best attributes of both together. This to me

is very Hong Kong and very Lingnan – it is the tolerance and openness for differences, as well as a pragmatism and ingenuity that is very honest. The prevailing approach these days tends to be one that is more in the Modernist spirit: to combine Heiti with a sanserif and Songti with a seriffed face. Aiming for a middle-ground and a so-called 'universal' visual language. This to me is less interesting, but nevertheless inevitable.

6

360° — Is there a font type matches your personality?
T — If you are asking about my personal preferences, I do have them, but when it comes to using typefaces in projects, it will depend on what the project is. I wouldn't go as far as saying there's something that matches my personality, but perhaps my design

philosophy or approach. I like simple 'workhorse' typefaces that are a little 'understated' in terms of character. For example when I write, I always use Georgia (designed by Matthew Carter) because it is quite neutral and works well on screen. I have a tendency to prefer plain simple typefaces like Thesis Sans (designed by Luc(as) de Groot) and Charter (designed by Matthew Carter). For Chinese typefaces I like using Monotype Sung and Xin Gothic (both designed by Sammy Or).

7

360° — Is it possible Braille needs typographic modifications, too?
T — To the best of my knowledge yes – considerations for size and spacing for example need to be made. But I haven't had much experience in this area.