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AMBER

GM40036 FRANK'S PLAYGROUND - PROCESS BOOK

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PROCESS BOOK

CHARLOTTE CHAN

COVER

CRAYS

BRIEF ANALYSIS

Initial Response

Open briefs weren't something new to me as I did one for my final year project during my diploma, but narrowing down a topic was something I always struggled with. I always felt too much pressure in choosing something with the most 'potential' to produce the best work I could possibly, and that pressure is something that hindered me from being more free with my process. My previous open brief project was more corporately-framed, so I was glad this module is very much more encouraging of experimental outcomes.

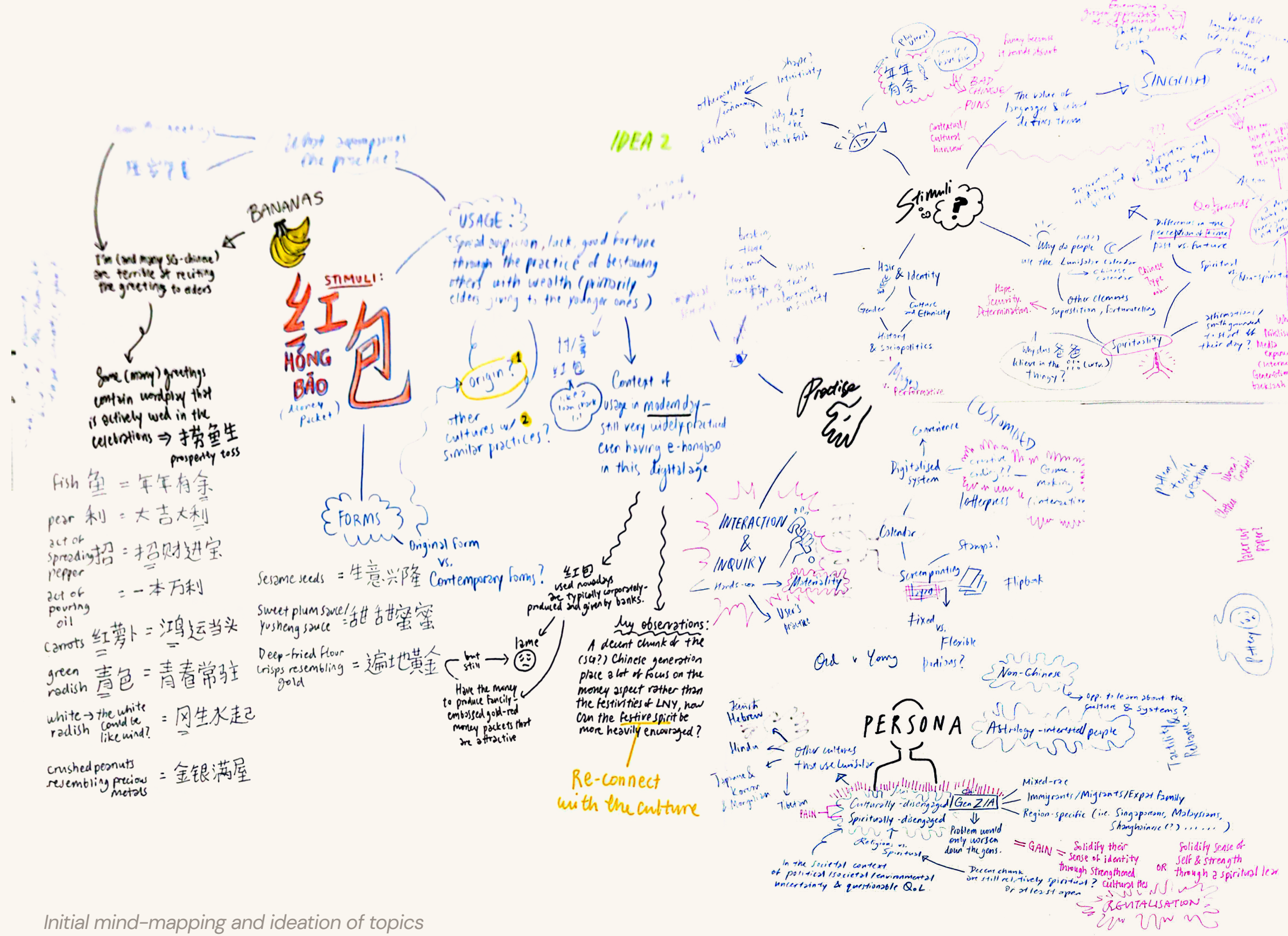
Brainstorming topics, I was drawn to exploring something related to Chinese culture, influenced by the fact that Lunar New Year was coming up, plus I wanted to learn something about my culture that I wasn't familiar with.

WORKSHOPS

The Foundations of Formulation

I ended up going through a few rounds of selecting a topic, doing research into it, and abandoning the topic because I wasn't feeling it/the idea didn't feel feasible for the project timeline.

However, practicing defining the PPP through these rounds was helpful in keeping my thinking concise.



Initial mind-mapping and ideation of topics

WASTE LESS publication



Left – components of the publication (all from an A1 sheet of paper) Right – Assembled publication

This workshop was held during enrichment week, where some alumni introduced their process and outcome to create a almost-zero-waste publication.

They shared that they started out just being interested in paper and materiality, and their process of learning about sustainable materials and practices led them to this outcome, where everything they had learned was designed in an informational and digestible manner for the reader.

I found it fascinating that in a way, their process was the outcome. As I attended their session in the middlepoint of this project (after I had conducted my workshops, see later pages), it helped guide me to an outcome that was more process-driven.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

Initial research centred around traditional Chinese name seals

My direction shifted to exploring Chinese name seals after my friend Matilda and I discussed it randomly – she spoke about how she had one from way back when and it felt like a physical manifestation of cultural pride in relation to her personal identity. I was intrigued by this idea, and chatted with my dad to understand more about its cultural and historical significance.

From my standing as a Singaporean, the MZ generation have a degree of disconnect from their ethnic culture. While those in the group like immigrants/half-Chinese experience a disconnect mainly because of geographical displacement, Singaporean-Chinese have a unique position of being raised in their ethnic cultural environment, yet being highly-exposed to western media and values and becoming an in-betweeners.

This background was what made me curious to explore the idea of one's ethnicity and their feeling of identity in a contemporary context, where cultures keep changing.



Calling with friend (left) and dad (right) to clarify the focus of my project

篆书 (zuan shu)
older style, proportions can be seen in 3:1/5:1, 2/5, 3/5, establishes direction with weight

小篆 (xiao zuan)
more commonly used style for seals, mix of recognisability w/ the older heritage feel

隶书 (li shu)
More developed Chinese characters closer to modern day Chinese, horizontal feel

行书 (xing shu)
Modern day calligraphy style, larger variation in thins & thick, tapered & fluid, clearly defined

草书 (cao shu)
Most playful script style meant to be expressionistic than legible, words can be connected, more often just used in script, not seals

缪篆 (miao zuan)
Sinuous seal script. The most common script style found in Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) seals. The name comes from the way strokes can be twisted or altered to fit the design.

柳叶篆 (liu ye zuan)
tapered ends, square

虫鸟书 (chong niu shu)
Extremely decorative, Bird and insect script (calligraphy)

兽面印璽 (shou mian yin xi)
照见五蕴皆空, 'shed light on the five aggregates, and find them empty.' by contemporary Taiwan artist Lin Mengrong 林孟蓉

圆文 (yuan wen)
Round script. Thin rounded characters. In use since the Song and Yuan dynasties (960-1368).

急就章 (ji jiu zhang)
Haste seal; literally: urgently improvised seal. Often made by the military in ancient China where an officer might need to be quickly promoted

朱白文相间印 (zhu bai wen xiang jian yin)
A seal with both red and white characters.

Wu Chang Shuo
More humanistic/natural feeling

八叠篆 (ba die, zhuān)
Very systematic & systematic in proportions, varying heights, vertical lines are folded back and forth to fill the available space, Mongolian-influence

Ding Jing
geometric & square, but can vary

Research and analysis of Chinese engraving styles

Qi Bai Shi
scratchy & rough, playful

I saw Cao Shu in a physical exhibition in Hong Kong – I love the sense of pacing conveyed through the embellished strokes.

With Chinese calligraphy being quite a 'proper' art, seeing Qi Bai Shi's purposeful chicken-scratchy style is refreshing and feels more expressive.

1. Origin
There are various mythic origins as well

HAN DYNASTY
压胜钱 (Spirit-suppressing money), a type of coin, was created to ward off evil spirits. It was inscribed with auspicious phrases, believed to protect people from sickness and death.

唐 (TANG DYNASTY)
Began to see the beginning of Spring as LNY. Money in general was given by elders to children to ward off evil spirits.

宋 + 元 (SONG & YUAN DYNASTY AFTER)
Custom of giving children lucky money was evolved from the LNY practice. Coins were threaded w/ red string.

明 + 清 (MING + QING DYNASTY)
2 kinds emerged – red string/wear AND colourful pouch of coins. 压岁钱 also emerged at this time.

2. Cultures that also practice giving money envelopes

Cambodia – ang pav / toe ea
Vietnam – li xi
Korea – 복주머니 bokjumeoni (bags) are used instead

Japan – お年玉 otoshidama
Are white or decorated money envelopes w/ receivers name written on them. Ancestor of the Malaysian-derived!

Muslim in some SE. A
Malay Muslims in Brunei, Indonesia, Malysia & Singapore adopted the Chinese custom as part of Hari Raya Aidilfitri using green packets.

SG Hindu – purple envelopes more recently adopted for Deepavali

≥ 1912 (Republic of China)
100 coins wrapped in red paper. New coins lacked holes, so they were not faired with red envelopes.

Note: Trad. you are not considered adult until you are married

Historical research notes

PRELIMINARY EXPERIMENTATION

Exploring forms and crafting seals

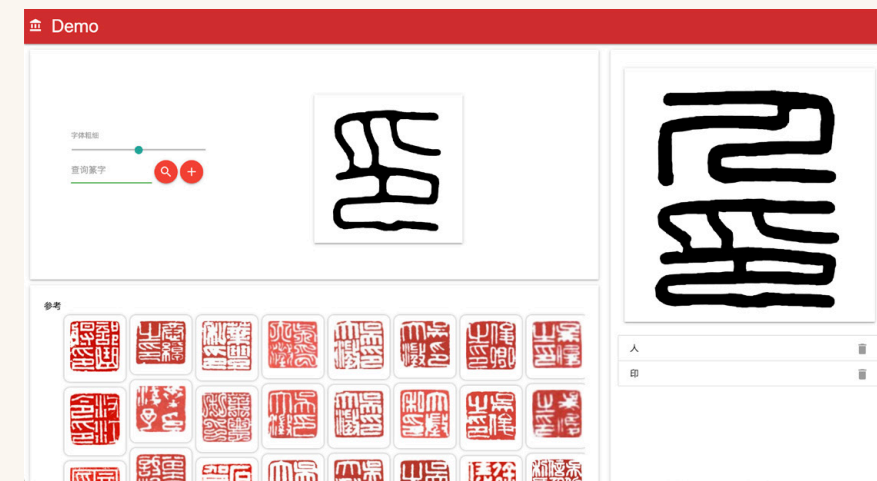
I set out to try my hand at crafting a seal, experimenting with wood first as it was the most readily-available material. I inducted myself into the wood workshop and got myself a set of carving tools.

I decided to carve the chinese characters '人印'. It literally translates to 'person's mark', or in other words, identity. I found an interesting website that takes the characters you type in and shows them in various olden Chinese script styles, and I used it as a visual reference to draw my carving base. I found it interesting how the characters physically look like person crouching and a person ontop of a flat object, similar to a position you would be in when pressing/printing something.

Woodcarving was incredibly difficult!! I watched people's techniques and tutorials online repeatedly, but working with the grain and precision was tricky, and I was trying to grasp what purpose each tool had.



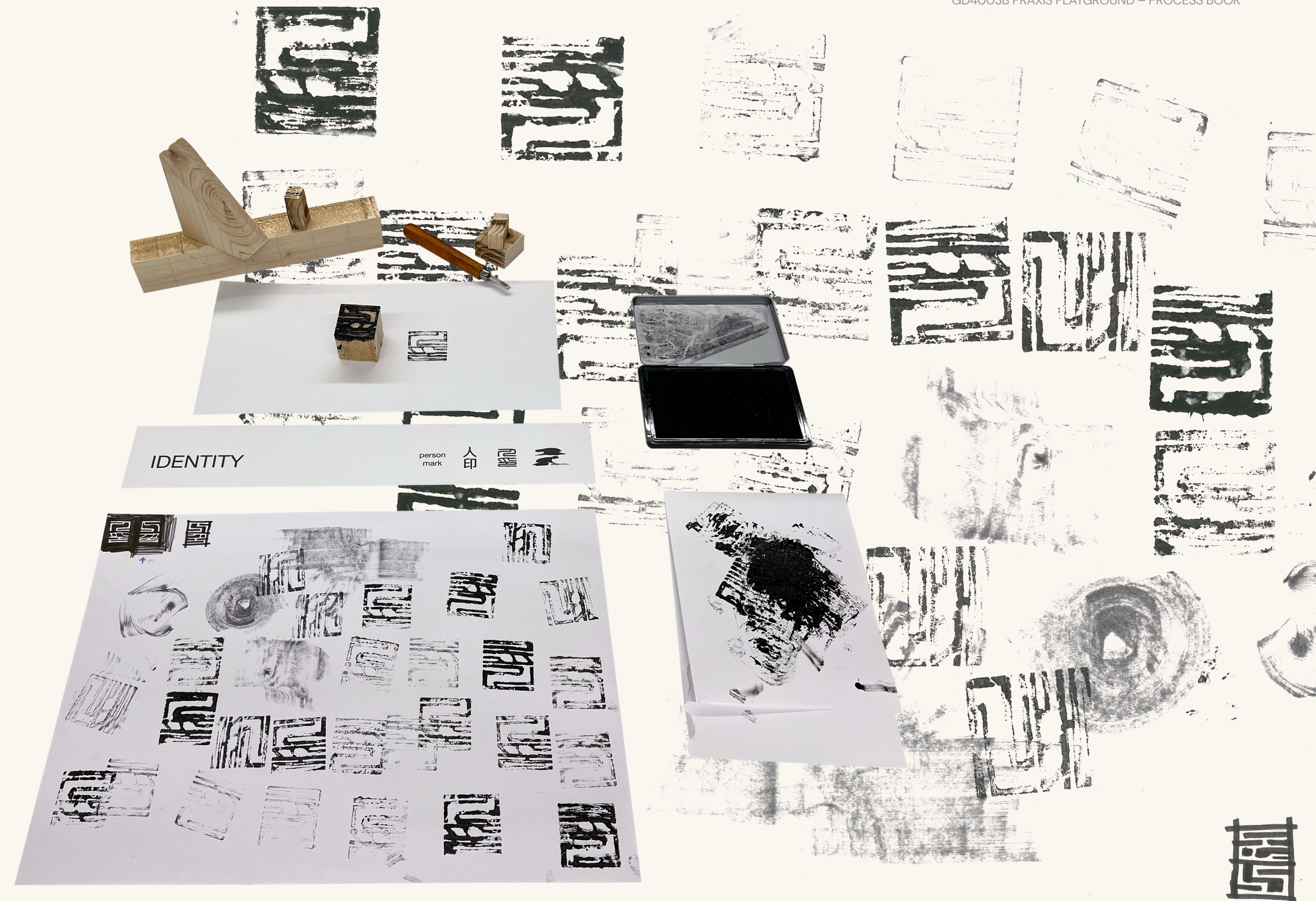
Top – breaking wood down into appropriate sizes at the wood workshop. Bottom – Figuring out the techniques to wood carving



Online resource that converts modern-day Chinese characters into olden styles (http://www.next.zju.edu.cn/seal/search_app/)



Me crouched to resemble the forms of 人印/person's mark



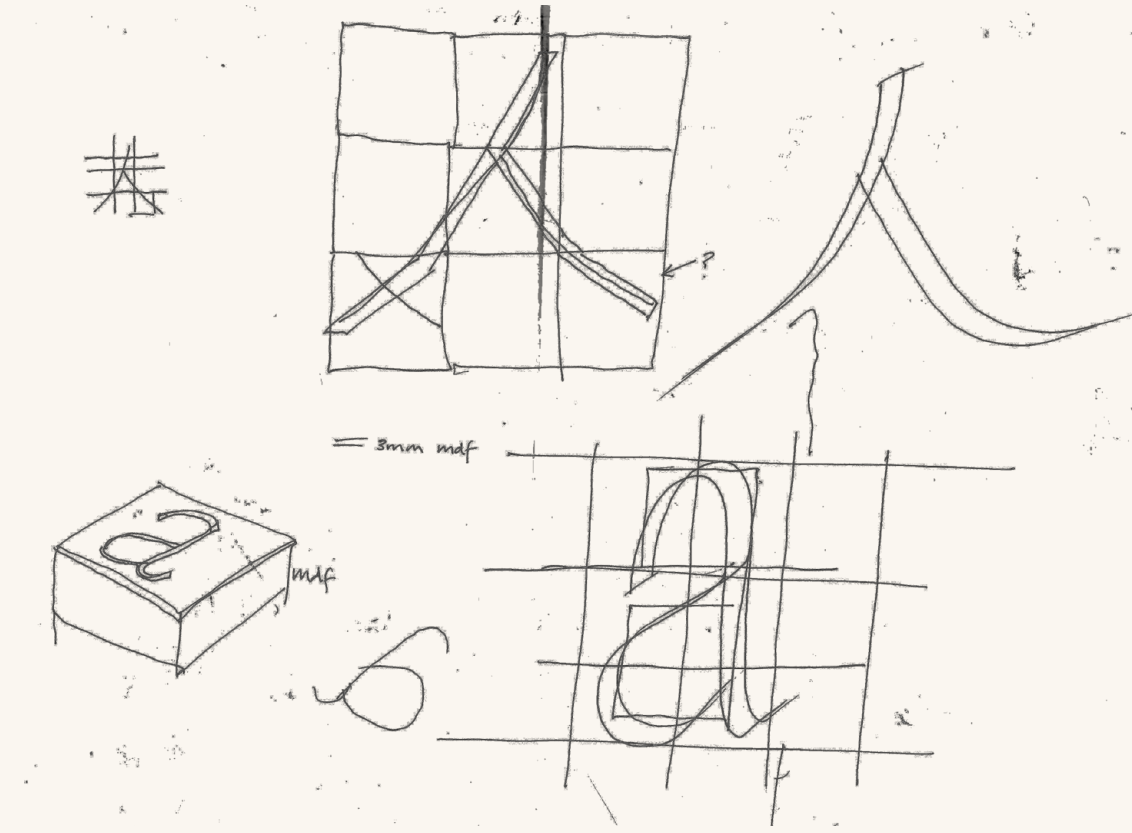
5-hour design challenge outcome, set-up with a visual explanation of the character carved, the stamp, and a stamping 'playground' for my classmates

For the 5-hour design challenge the next day, I managed to get used to the skills a little more and carved out a seal, letting people try stamping it themselves with various ink consistencies. **There's an interesting feeling of pride that comes about from creating and using something so tangible, and the positive reactions from classmates said likewise as well.**

FOCUSED RESEARCH & DEFINITION

Switching topics again...kind of?

Project analysis and reference: Xu Bing's Square Word Calligraphy

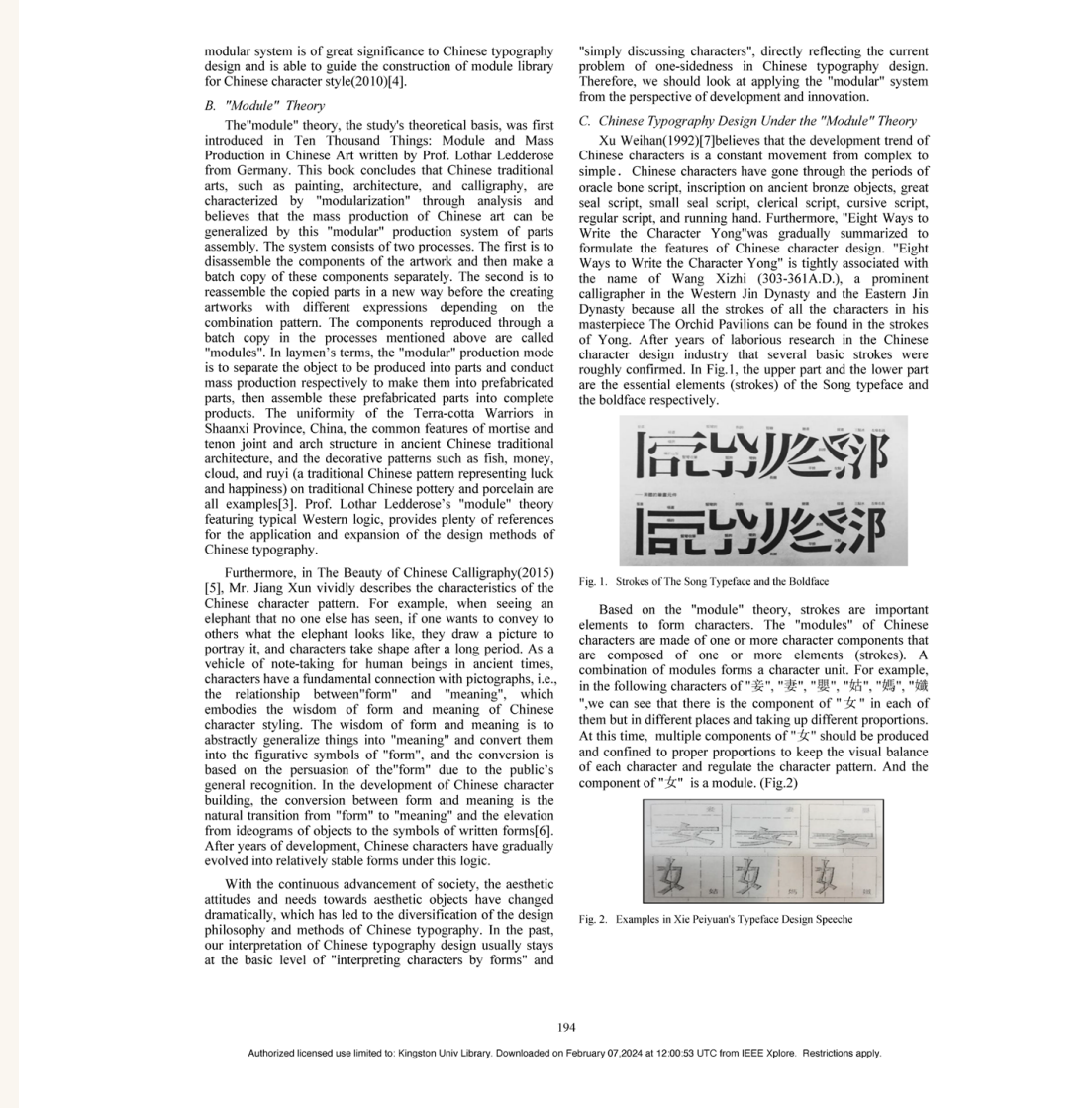


Andrew's sketches when explaining to me his ideas and feedback

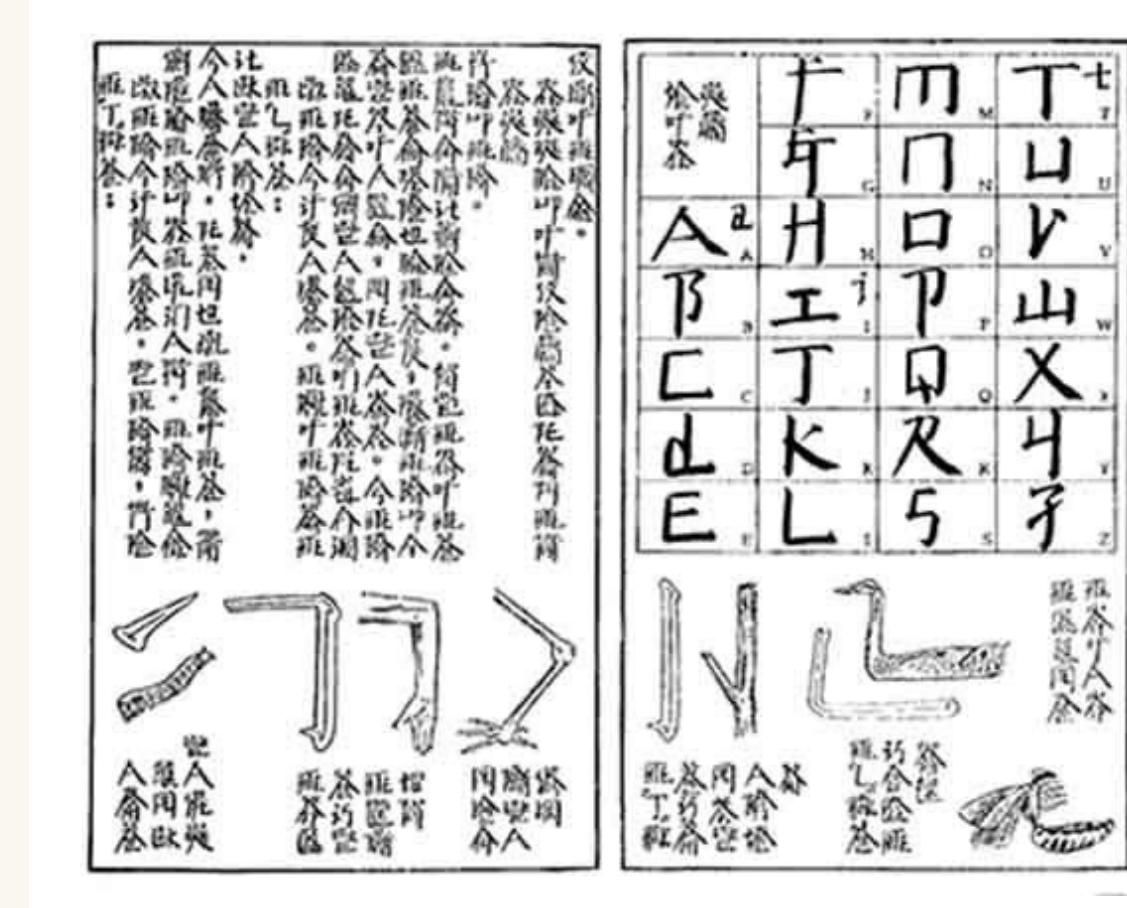
I was quite certain I wanted to explore the realm of culture and identity, but didn't have a clear outcome in mind yet.

I chatted with various tutors and peers about what I had done and related thoughts; Andrew brought up the idea of language modules after viewing my 5-hour design challenge outcome, about discovering the possibility of designing module-based typography for Chinese script. While that's possible with latin scripts (e.g. Dotted, the 'font' used in digital clocks), Chinese is much more complex and it isn't possible to create such a simplified typography. It did however, spur me to research more on language modules.

I read an academic paper titled 'Study on the Application of Modularization Theory to Chinese Typography Design' to understand how Chinese characters can be broken down visually. It was very insightful in discussing the how we read the view the script, and how those foundational blocks can be played with to create interesting typography. It's certainly a very useful paper for someone looking to design Chinese type, but what stood out to me was their example of Xu Bing's Square Word Calligraphy.



Page from the 'Study on the Application of Modularization Theory to Chinese Typography Design' paper about the stroke modules.



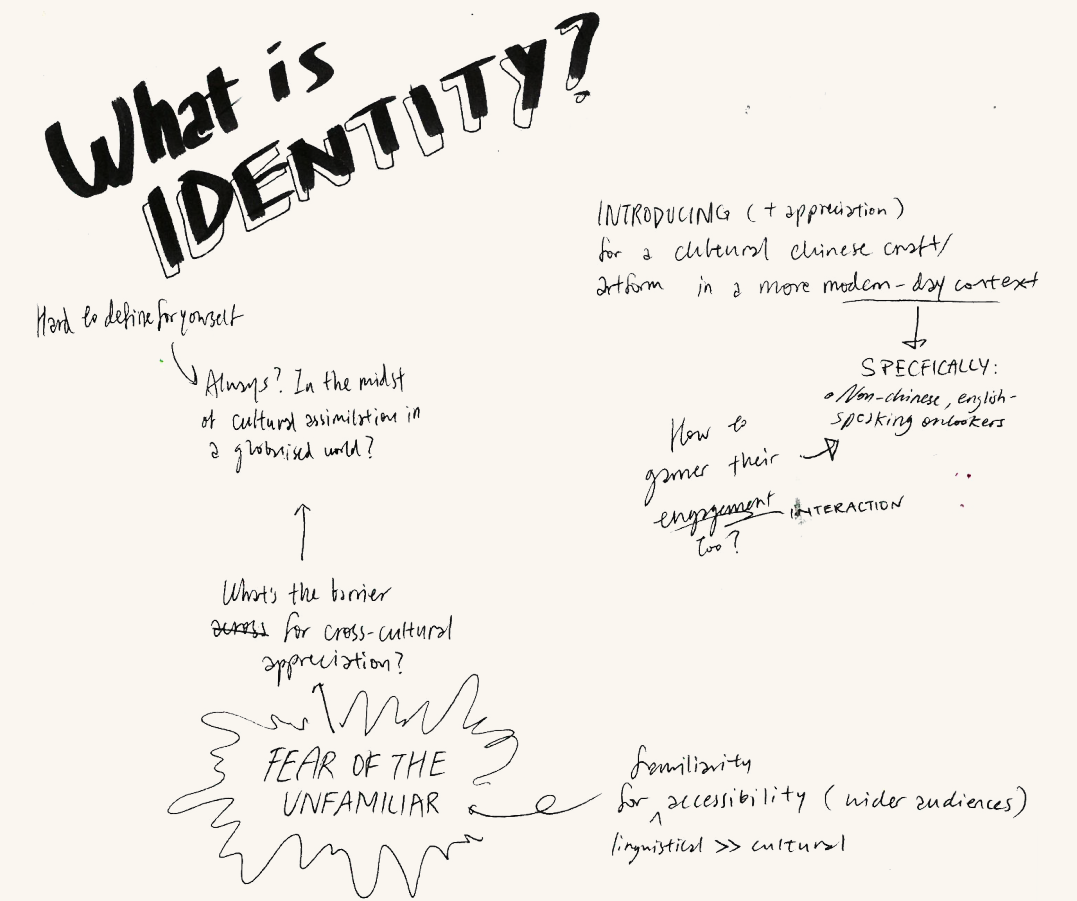
Left – The special Latin-Chinese 'font' and system Xu Bing developed, morphing the latin alphabet to resemble Chinese characters. Try to read it! Top right – 'Art for the people', 'Xu Bing'. Bottom right – 'Little Bo Peep' being written in Square Word Calligraphy



I looked into Xu Bing, a China-born, Beijing & New York-based artist, most known for his work with Square Word Calligraphy (his website: <https://www.xubing.com/>). His practice carries tones of satire, deconstruction of ideas, and melding traditional elements with the modern.

As a bilingual person, I found this series immensely fun and interesting, where he's trying to familiarize non-Chinese speakers (mainly monolingual English-speakers) with the language and in turn the culture.

It made me think of identity and 'othering' (the act of categorising those different to yourself as separate, oftentimes in a reductive way), and how culture, while valuable in providing the world diversity and substance, also acts as an inherent barrier in the context of people inherently being afraid of the unfamiliar (other cultures).



The feedback got from this initial research and project direction prompted me to think broader, on cultures and language I myself am not familiar with. It also helped affirm my that the general direction was something that monolingual individuals would be interested in.

Are you going to deal with all languages from different countries? (ex. Japanese, french, german, ...)

I think this is an impactful topic so focusing on how it brings ppl together would be a great stance to take

Very interesting concept. Why do you want to reform language system break down this barrier & perception? Is it a personal reason? How are you going to show this 'why'?

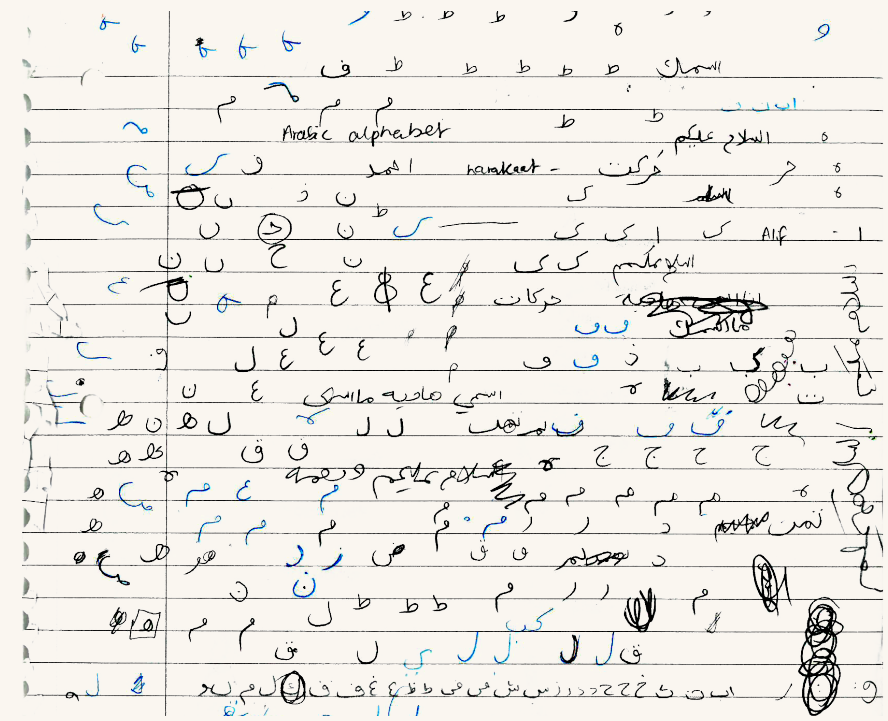
I like the idea of capturing identity through this form. Maybe explore wax seals too?

Some of my classmate's feedback towards the research and initial ideas

Understanding various language systems

I wanted to put myself in the position as a blank slate (like my potential audience). Certain languages like Japanese and Korean, which I've tried to teach myself before were easier since they had similarities to Chinese, so I wanted to experience the process of introducing myself to a language and system that was completely foreign.

I had a 2-hour sitdown session with my Pakistani flatmate to try to learn about Arabic's writing system. I'm still a complete novice, but chatting with her and writing out the characters taught me a lot about the nuances of a writing system, like how important certain angles and sizes are (e.g. I would try to imitate a character, but she would immediately point out how certain bits of it make it un-Arabic-like even though it looked identical to me).



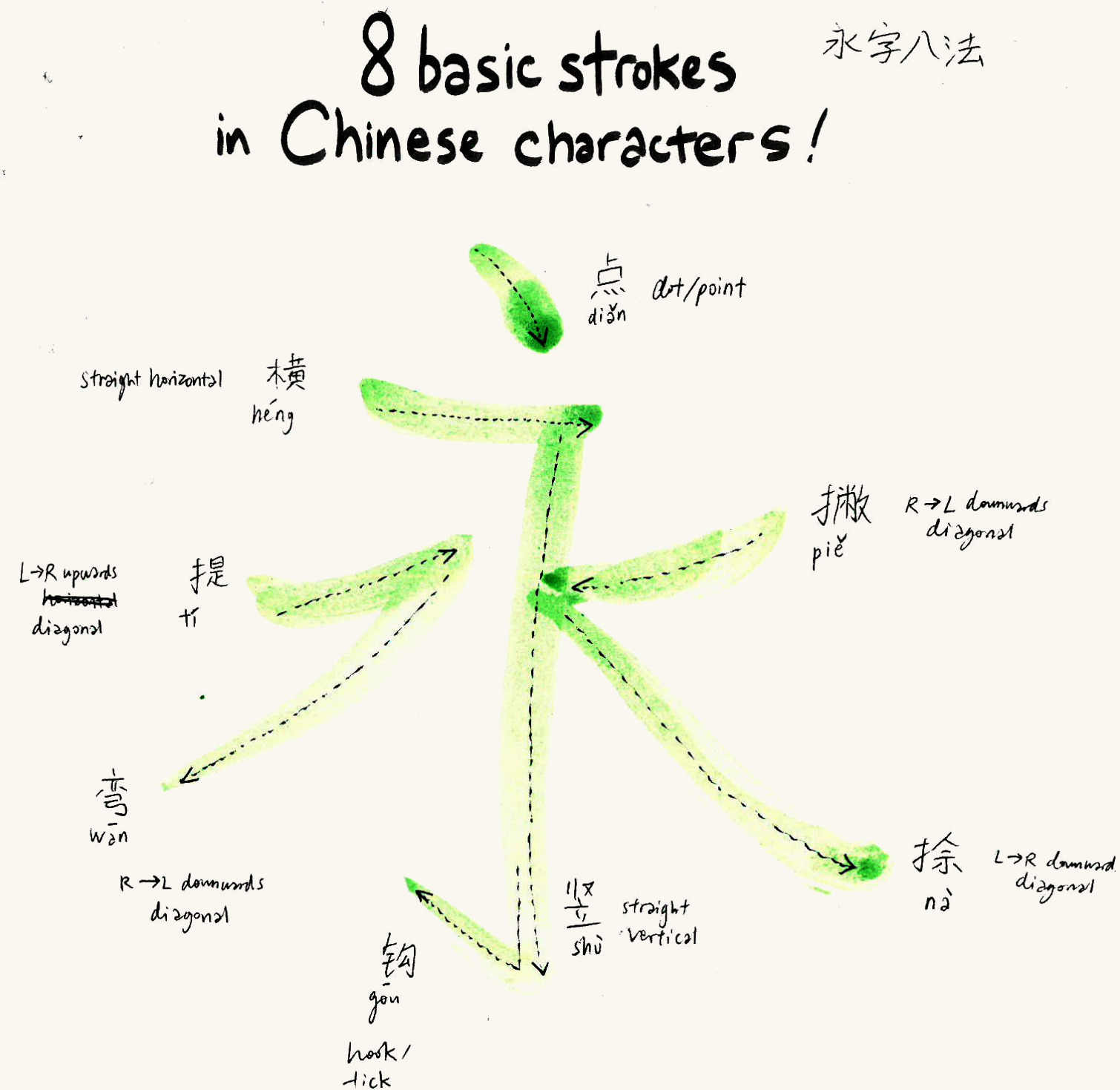
A page full of my terrible attempts at writing Arabic alongside my flatmate's guiding writings

The session gave me insight into defining my project; 'othering' is a lack of effort in viewing something (in this case, culture) past its surface and stereotype. This lack of engagement then doesn't allow for a person to understand something's nuances and value of its depth.

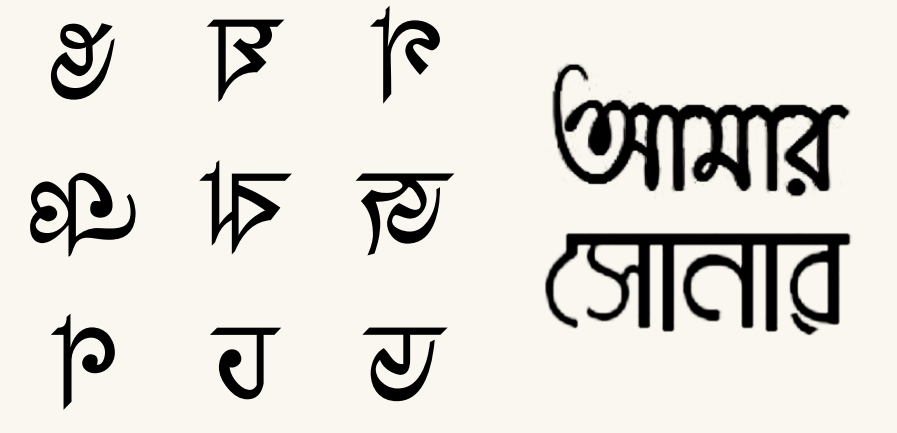
Why would one want to stay in this state of close-mindedness? Most people aren't racist or anything like that, its just the inertia of unfamiliarity. I felt the medium of language served as a great way to tackle this idea, because people are quick to dismiss something when they don't immediately understand another's language.

I started breaking down Chinese (language I'm familiar with) to see how its nuances can be communicated (came in handy during the workshop later in), and looked up as many other written languages I could to check out their forms and systems.

Right – A commonly-used way to deconstruct the modules/strokes of Chinese characters using the character '永'



Fun to observe the base structures of languages, e.g. Bengali's baseline is above rather than below (like in Latin), and how that can affect typography.



Some of the Bengali alphabet

Two Bengali fonts with differing baseline styles



Some of the alphabets/writing systems I downloaded for reference

EXPERIMENTATION & WORKSHOP

Exploring 'language-breeding'

After looking into various types of languages, I **simplified their systems into two kinds – Linear and Block** (there are many 'proper' ways to categorize them, but this was the simplest way I could think of for novice curious-minds like myself).

Some examples of linear scripts are latin, arabic, where multiple modules (i.e. letters, 'a' is one module while 'am' has two modules) run along a line to form a word. Block scripts like Chinese and Korean's Hangeul have modules in being contained together more like a puzzle.

I started with trying out Xu Bing's Square Word Calligraphy, before applying the principal to others like Katakana, Hangeul, and even reversing the system of linear > block to block > linear.

Since this process is about imitation of a foreign glyph's forms to the user's native language rather than actual translation, I **did think about whether this was cultural appropriation/bastardisation** in a way. I concluded that this was up to how it was presented, and the **objective** needed to be defined as being a **introductory point in encouraging appreciation of other cultures**.

LINEAR → BLOCK

charlotte CHARLOTTE

CHAN

Eng → Chinese

Eng → Chi

Eng → Korean

Eng → Japanese Hiragana

BLOCK → LINEAR

陳 陈 莊 庄

진문장

Eng → Eng

Eng → Eng

Eng → ???

Eng → ???

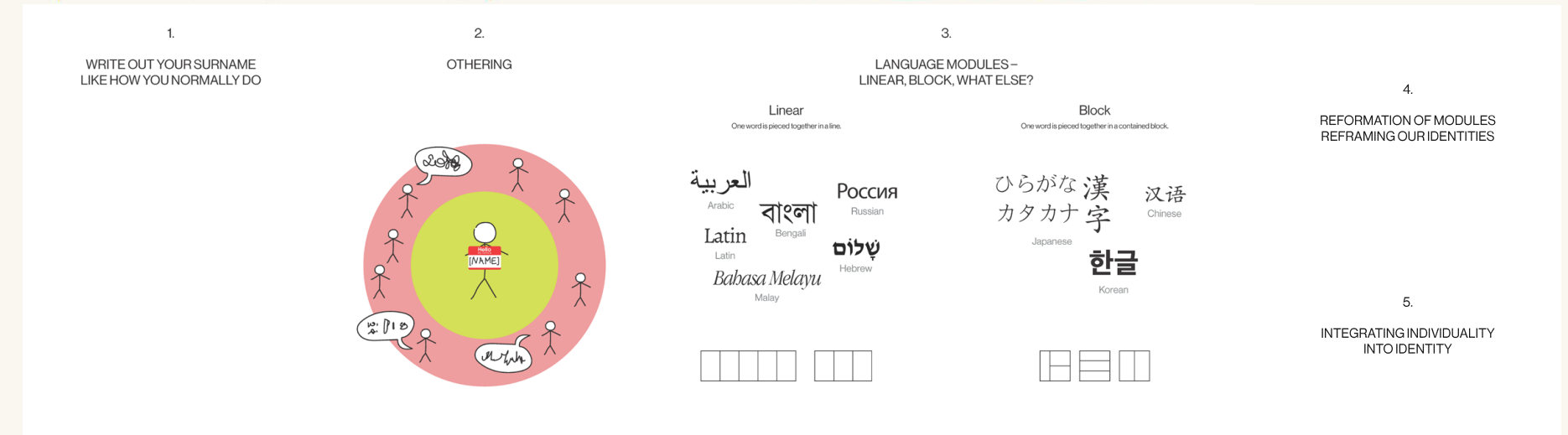
Eng → ???

Right – Playing with reforming language modules

Workshop format

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

1. The present; Status quo. Barriers are up. Write your surname. (original form and context)
2. Discuss the concept, the barriers in which we confine ourselves and others within. Othering. Reductive, and thus, lacking in understanding.
3. Introducing the method; language modules. Present the concept of modules/units within a language w/ examples. Explain the two simplified systems of piecing modules – linear-flowing or block.
4. Re-forming modules. Reframing our identities actively by rearranging its components (modules). Show and demonstrate examples of re-moduling, from linear to block and vice versa. Include various languages to display the freedom of the playground's space. Guide but not restrict, encourage free possibilities.
5. Integrating individuality; Explore different forms of expression with personal flairs. Show examples of varying typographic styles and use of tools to produce diverse variations of re-moduled identities.



Top – Penning down and clarifying how the process should be for the participant/user
Bottom – Formalizing the structure of the workshop, the slides used for the workshops

Since the topic tackled culture, the project definitely called for some form of collaboration and engagement with the target audience, and I thought a workshop would be pretty appropriate (and it could help me define my outcome as well). **It's structure is essentially a condensation of my thought process during the research and ideation processes.**

I wanted to keep the actual 'slides' used for the workshop as simple as possible, being less theory and potentially boring and more just about **exploring and having fun**.

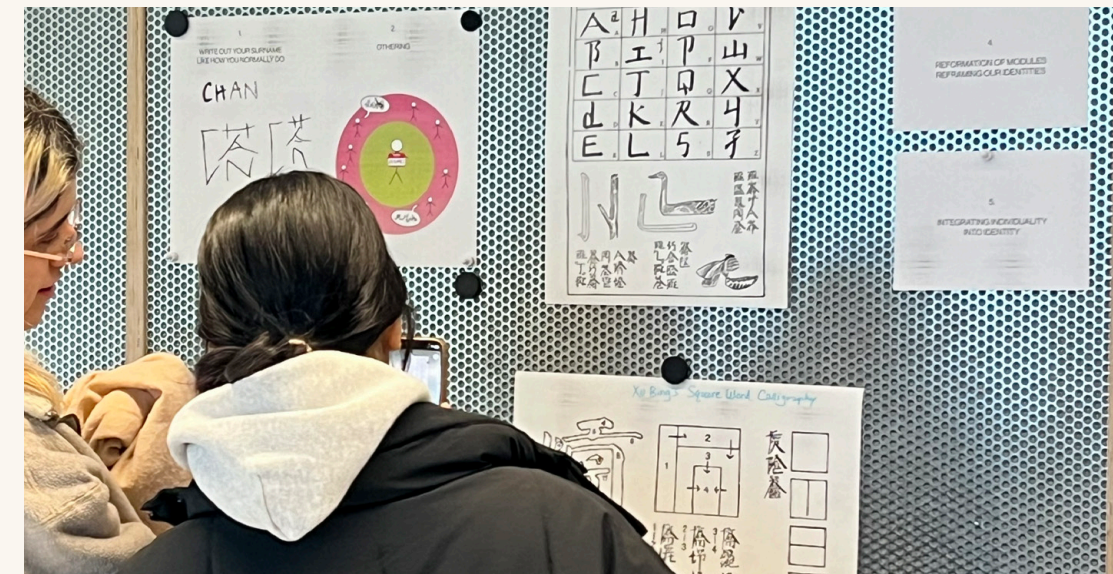
Conducting the workshops

I had never conducted workshops before, and was pretty nervous about doing so (especially since it ended up being with more classmates than I expected, not necessarily those I was close with).

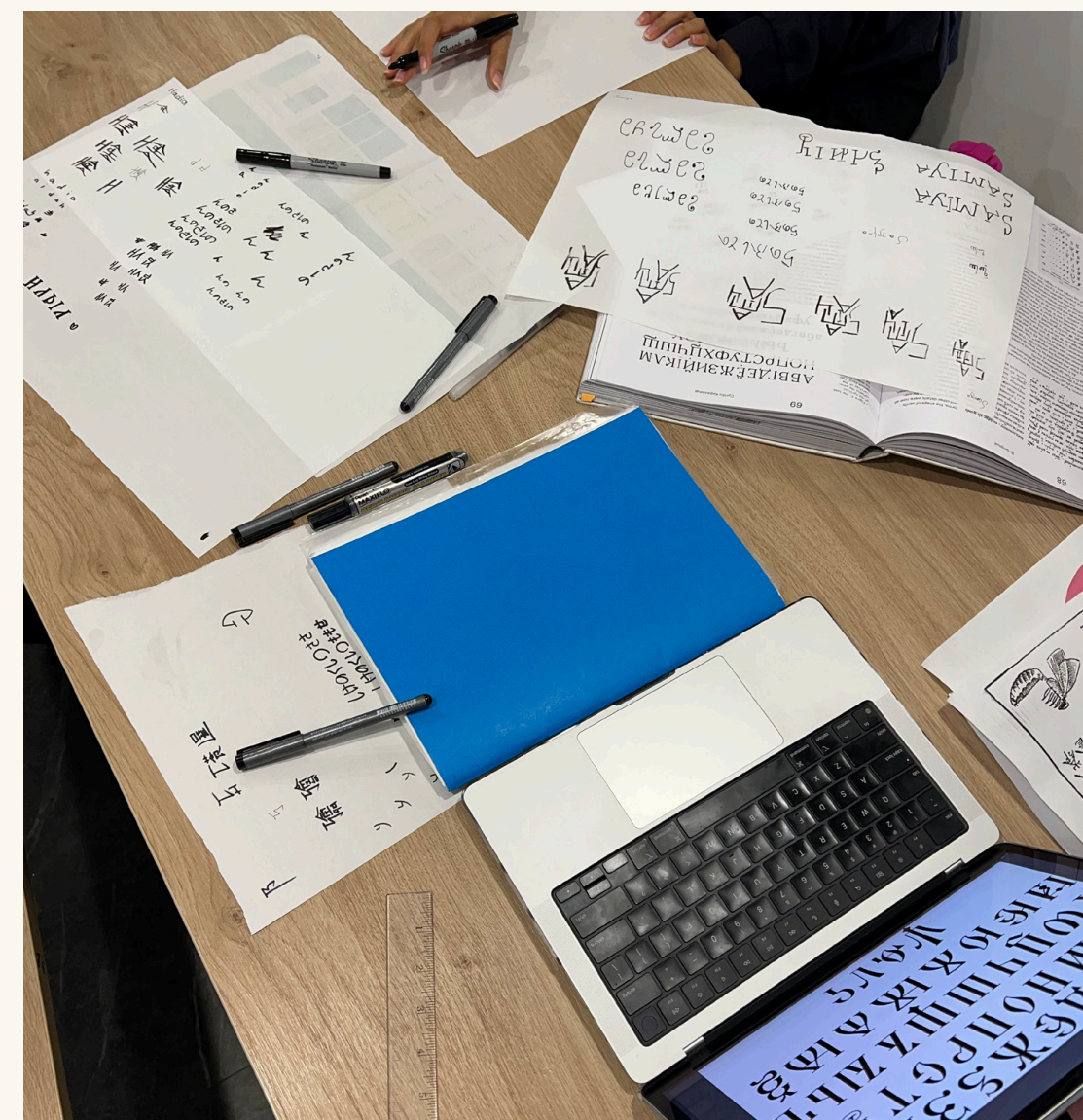
It actually turned out really interesting, because I wasn't the 'sole designer' of the project, getting to observe other's way of thinking and processes. **The best part of the workshop was seeing those fluent in other languages guide and teach the monolingual participants nuances and details** I wouldn't know too. This initial workshop didn't have many bilingual participants, but **this spirit of unity and cultural exchange is exactly what I was looking for.**



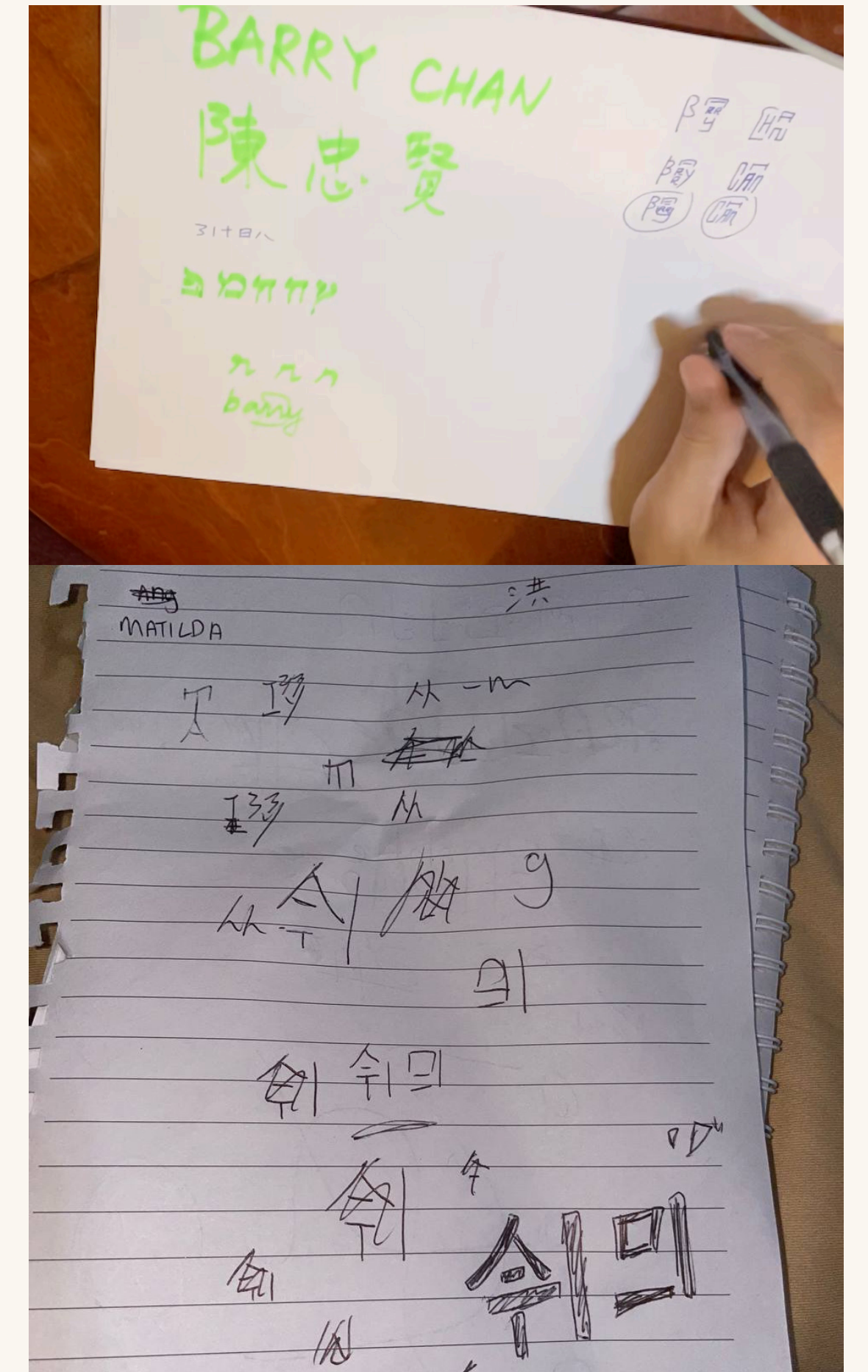
The first workshop with classmates. I put out a variety of tools (ball-point, chisel-tip, brushes) to encourage more exploration of glyph forms



Slides used to conduct the workshop



A few more small-group workshops were conducted afterwards



Some were with my family and friends online as well

DEVELOPMENT

Branding – CRXSS

The key objective of the project is encouraging worldly appreciation through cultural exchange, and the themes surrounding the term 'exchange' gave me **imagery of 'X'**. The process of the workshops were also like merging and multiplying (x) languages, so I explored this motif.

The branding was kept pretty simple as I knew I had to keep it culturally-neutral. I ended up with a **flexible identity system** where the X can stretch, bringing in the idea of **cultural flexibility and diversity**.



Some explorations for the CRXSS branding

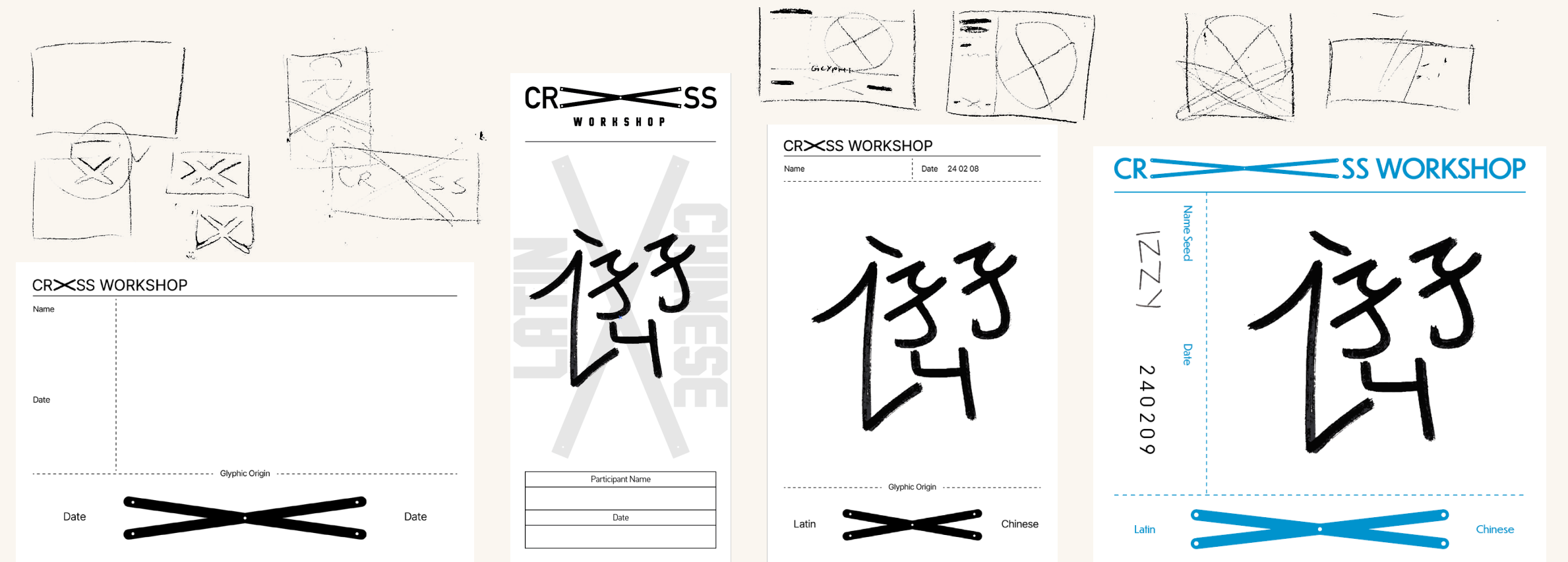
Workshop explorations – Showcase leaflets

I had asked the participants what their own favourite explorations were during the workshops, planning to showcase them in the outcome.

During tutorials, one of the ideas discussed is that the concept of 'crossing the cultural barrier' could translate to a **fleeting sense of physicality in the outcome**, since culture is inherently ever-changing and that's what the workshops encourage. This influenced my decision in picking the more fragile, disposable but precious paper stock of coloured tissue paper to print on. The colours (for the branding as well) were chosen afterwards; I opted for a colourful look for that idea of diversity (careful not to straight up have a rainbow scheme for symbolic purposes).



I was partially-inspired by old-school transport tickets too. Other than being a physical remnant of a journey, it also ties into themes of crossing barriers (geographical)



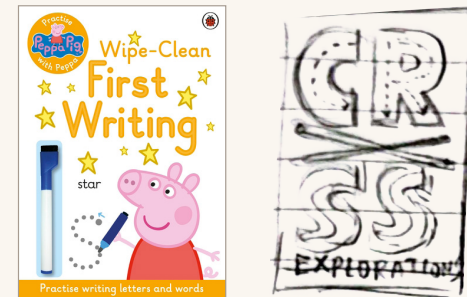
Ideation and digital explorations of the leaflet structure, final format (far right)



Use of coloured tissue paper for printing the leaflets

Workshop explorations – Compilation book

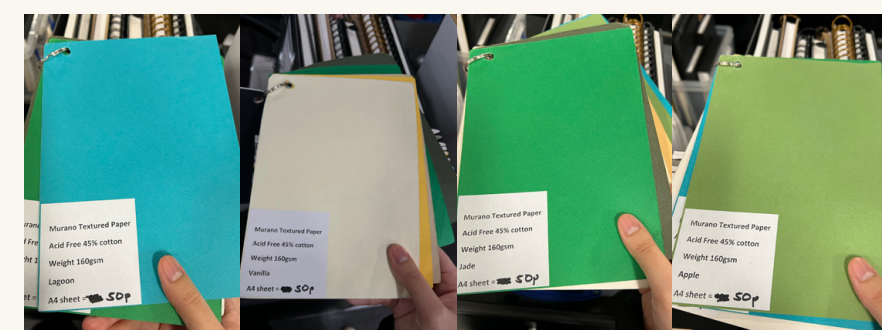
Including the engagement aspect of the workshop would be one of the most important things for the outcome. The workshop process and everyone’s work was so fun that I had to include them. Showing their processes ‘humanizes’ foreign languages and showcases them not simply as glyphs, but as something more relatable and something anyone can try.



Some design choices were influenced by children’s learning books in terms of style and colour



Figuring out the layout, with a paper pocket (to contain leaflets) lined in magenta

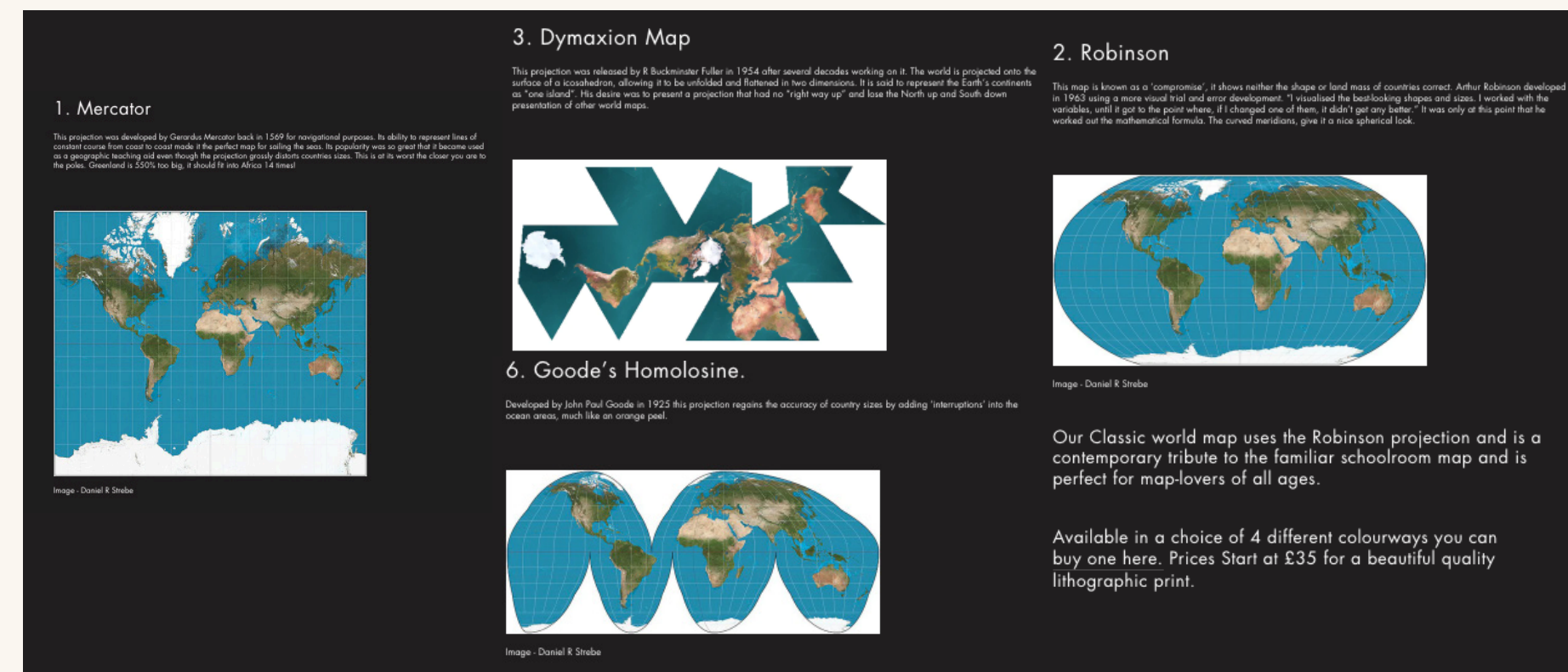


Looking for the right paper stock for the cover

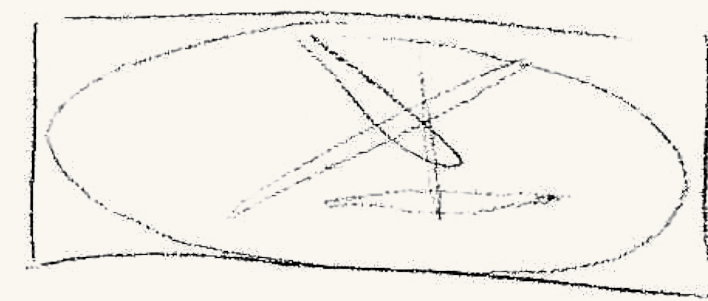
Map ACRXSS the world

To further show the ‘crossing barriers’ element, I wanted to map out the participant’s origin cultures to the language/culture they explored during the workshop.

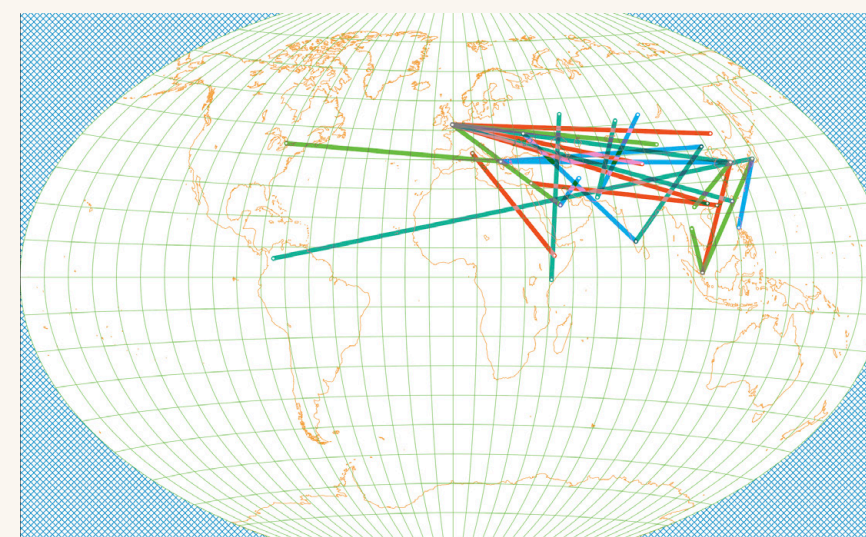
I unexpectedly encountered the question of “which map to use?” and learned a little about the biases (eurocentricity, exaggerating colonial powers) and inaccuracies (surface area and shape) of different kinds. I settled upon the Winkel Tripel projection as it balances accuracy of size and shape.



Looking at various types of maps – <https://futuremaps.com/blogs/news/top-10-world-map-projections>



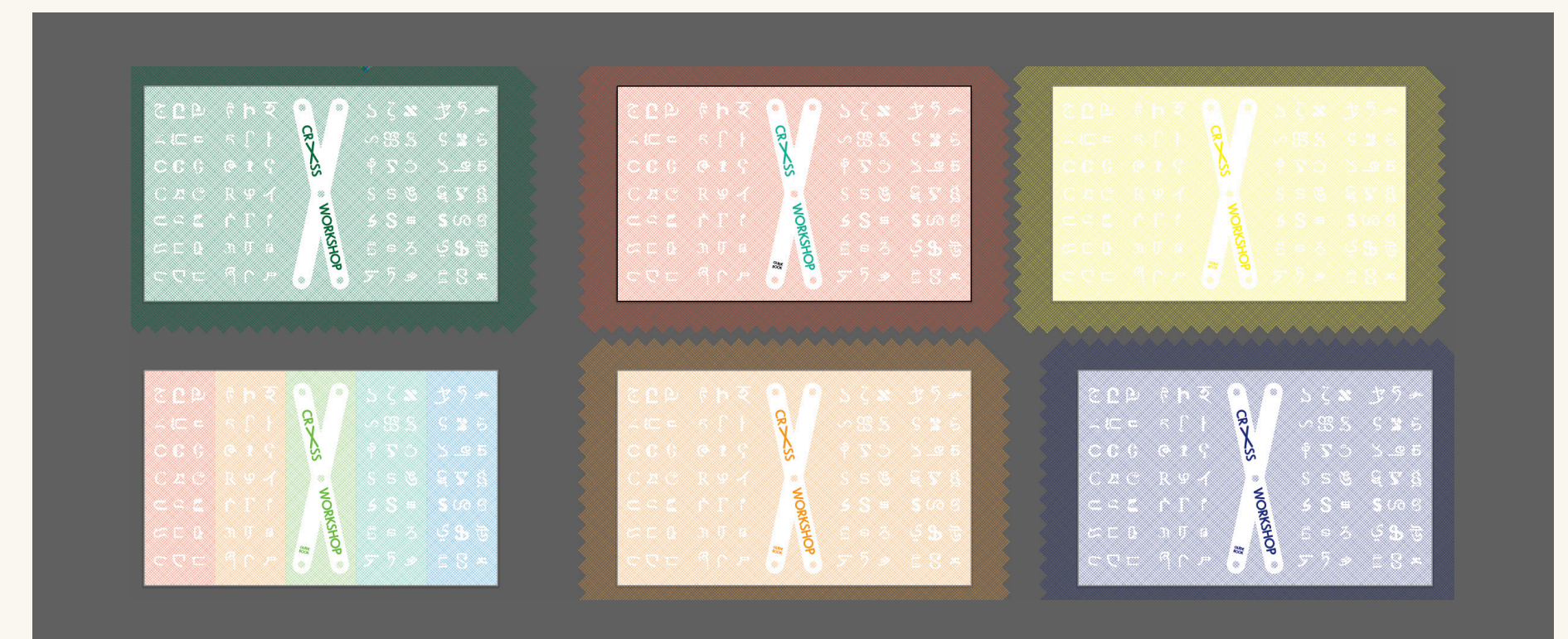
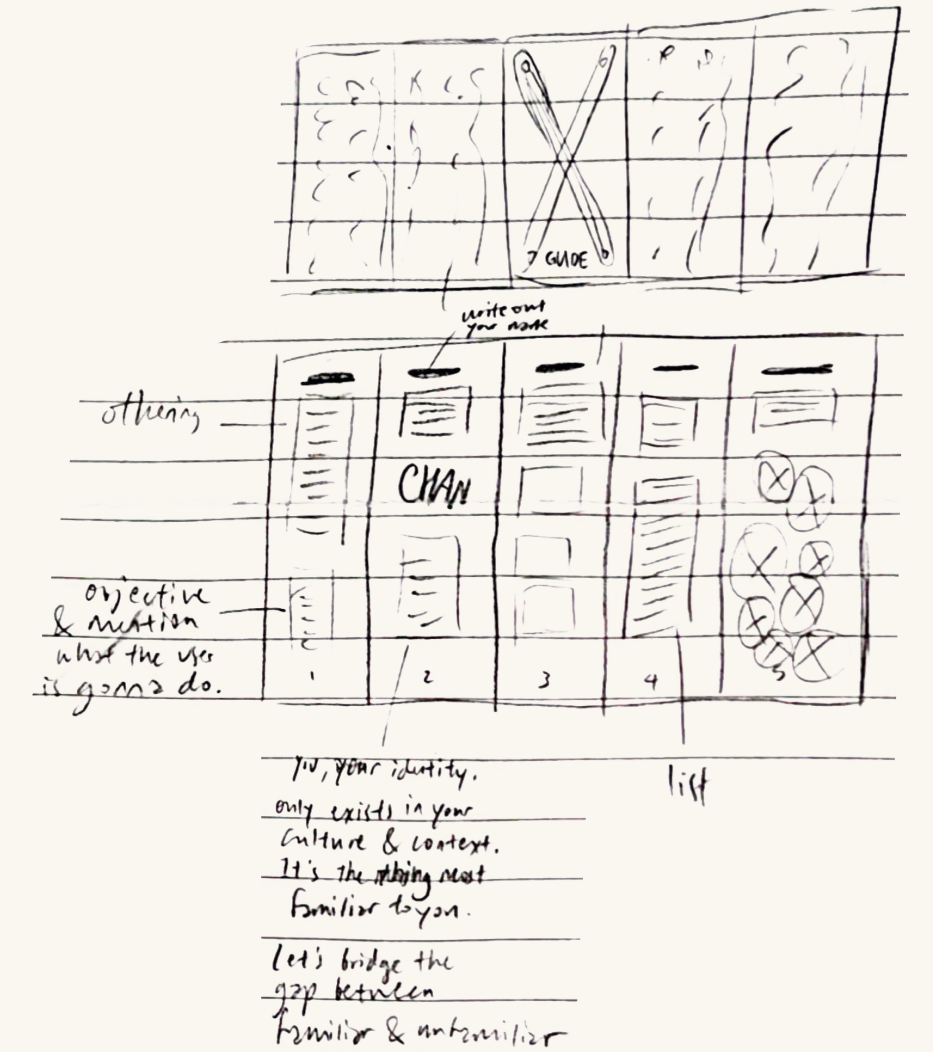
Looking at various types of maps – <https://futuremaps.com/blogs/news/top-10-world-map-projections>



Workshop guide

From the workshops I conducted, I was able to better define the structure in which to conduct them and put it into a paper guide.

Right – content planning and layout
Below – Pulling together glyphs from various scripts that look similar to ‘CRSS’ (CRXSS)



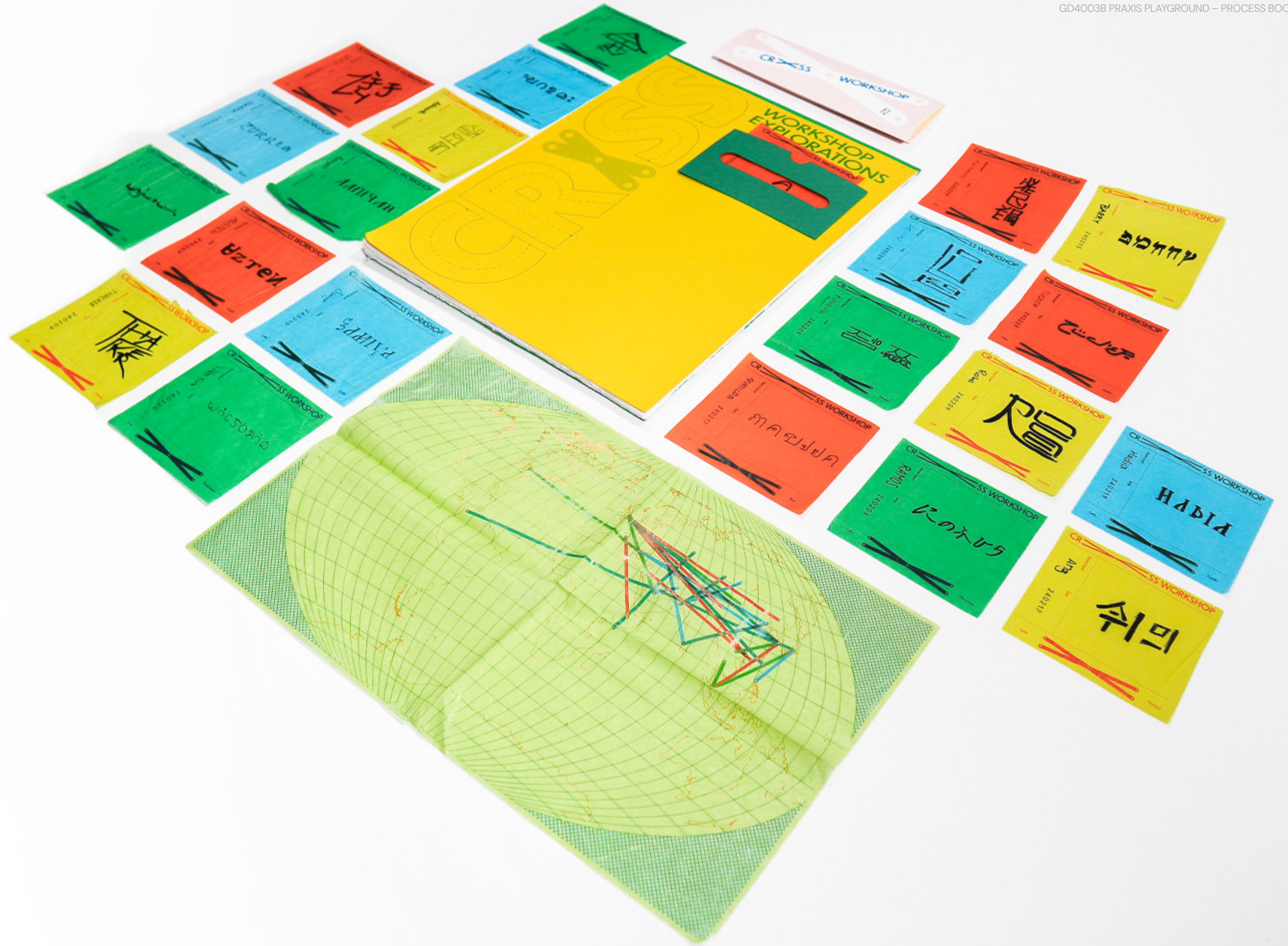
Trying various colour combinations for the cover

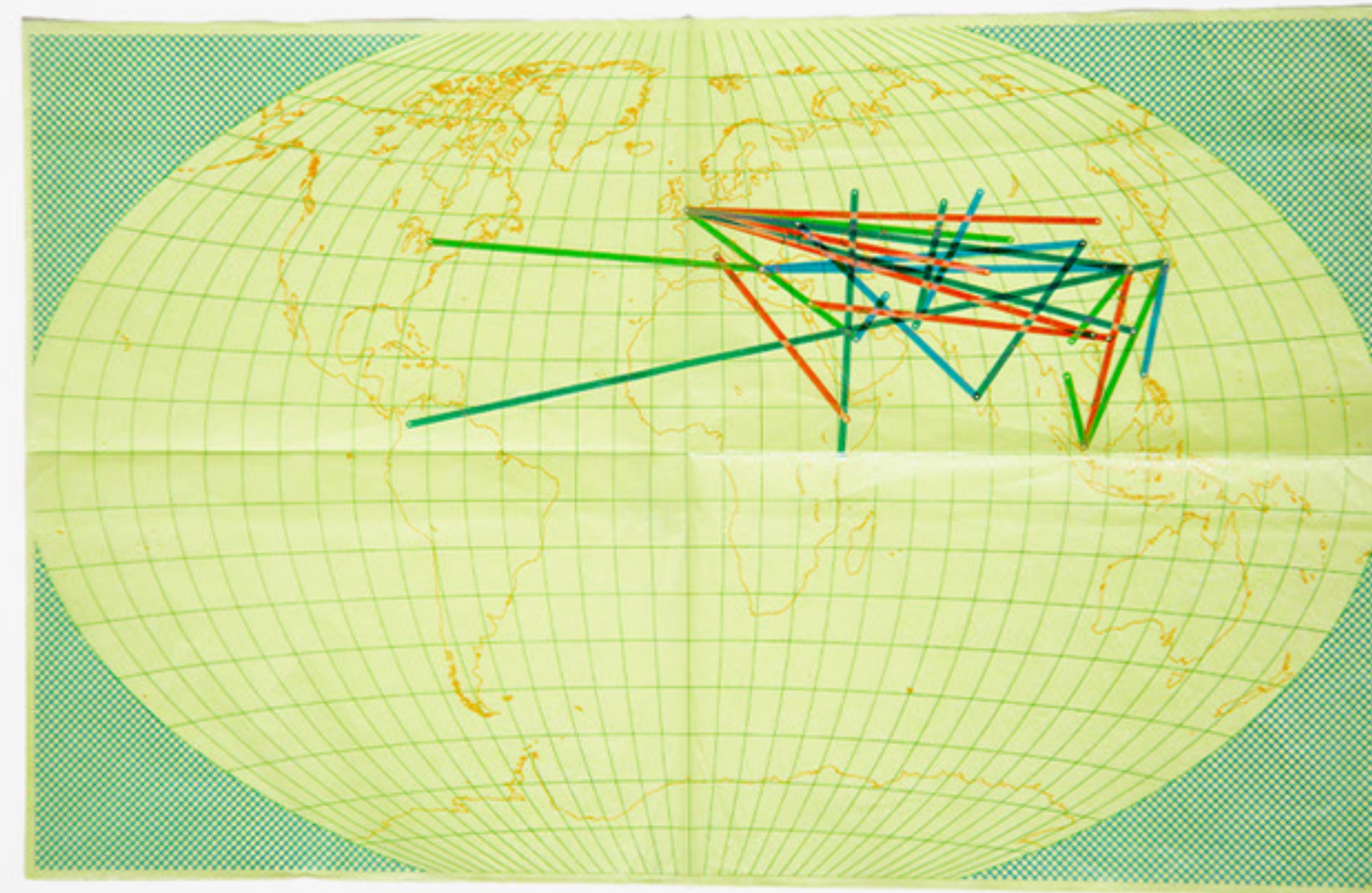
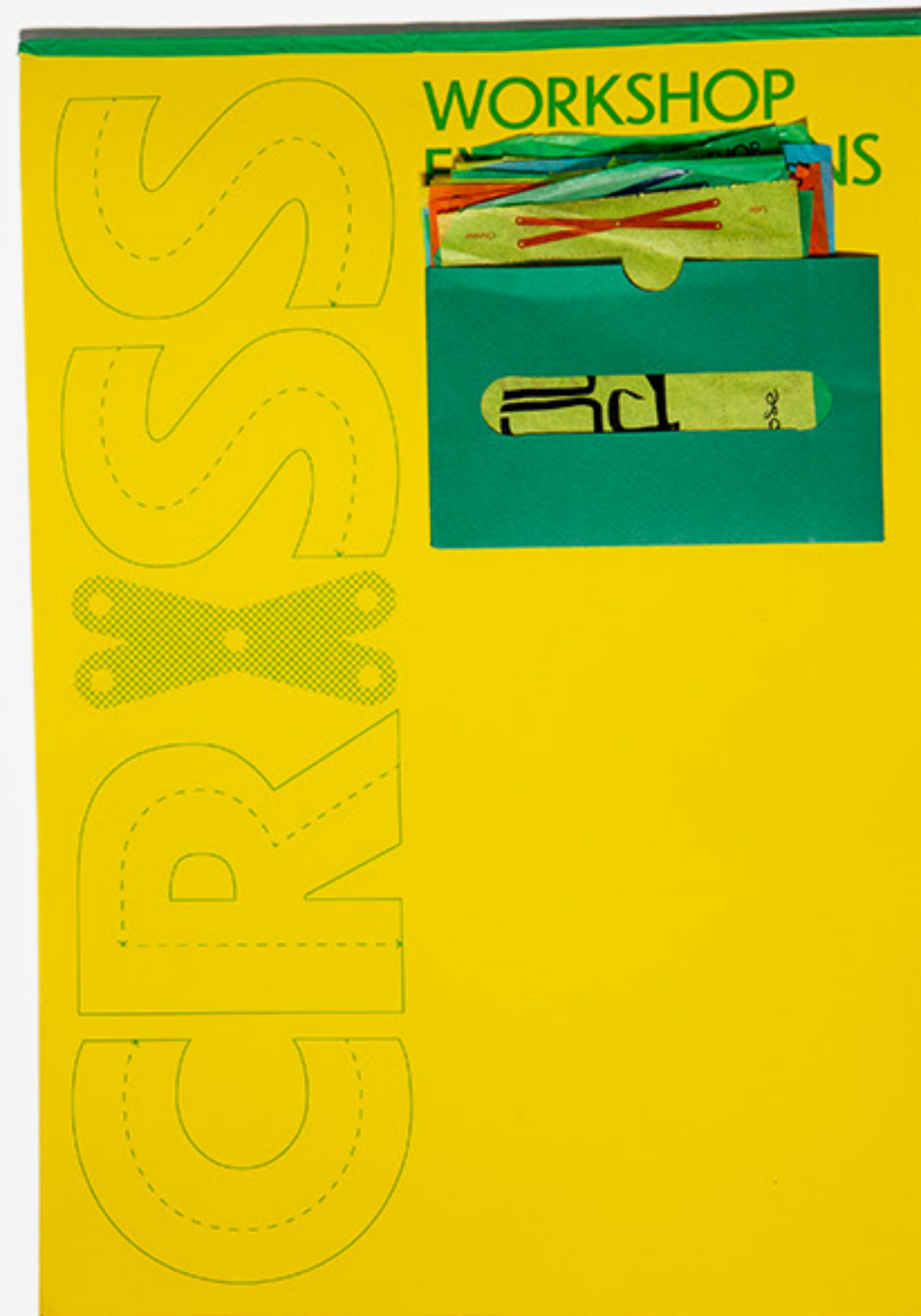
OUTCOME

Societies internationally have become increasingly diverse as they experience more cultural exchange. This has been helped through easier dissemination of information through the worldwide web and migration of communities, enabling people to share ideas and connect.

Multiculturalism should be embraced for personal and societal benefit, but an individual can often have the feeling of not knowing where to start when they engage with the unfamiliar, especially when it comes to the sensitivities associated with 'other' cultures.

CRXSS is a typography-based workshop that oversees participants in learning the systems of various scripts to devise their own blend with one they're familiar with, being them on a journey to cross the gap between familiar and unfamiliar and begin to embrace multiculturalism.





REFLECTION

This project was one turbulent journey. I was pretty lost on the topic and definitions of my work, not even having the idea for the outcome until the last week or so. Despite the anxieties of feeling a little behind-schedule at times, it made me realise I very much enjoy process-driven works. It makes me value my work more because there's more 'story' behind it, and I'm nicely-surprised by what I design rather than it all going exactly how I expect and being boring in a way.

The project has also thrown me on some tangents that I would like to explore further. Wood-carving didn't end up being integrated in the outcome, but I love the value the tactility brings, and it can be used in not only 3D forms like boxes but also as a 2D tool like printmaking. Type design for non-latin scripts has also become something I'm interested in; relative to latin, some other languages are so much more complex both systematically and visually, giving a lot of room to explore.

I plan to expand on this project further in a more practical implementation in the future, adapting its objective, and design aspects I've already worked on (like the workshop structure and branding) in contexts where my user can actually interact with the design, rather than the design simply being a physical manifestation of past workshops. Gearing towards a web platform!