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Branding the International Street Food Association -

Street Foods in Taipei/New York City

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"We find in the fields of nature no place that is barren, every spot on land and sea is covered with harvests always ripe and ready to be gathered."* 

—John Muir

Growing from the soil and soaking up the sunshine, food is the essence of nature. An ancient poem in my hometown points out that harvesting grain needs intense labor, so the best way for people to express their appreciation to workers is not to waste any food. Similarly, in the West, Jean-Francois Millet captured the female peasants bathed in golden light in his painting, *The Gleaners*, because he tried to praise peasants’ plight and dignity.

In ancient societies, humans gathered edible fruits and hunted animals; then, people planned to plant vegetables and to raise livestock.** During the development of civilization, they chose what foods to eat and how to cook them and devised utensils, such as chopsticks and forks to eat easily.

Etiquette was developed to regulate behavior while eating. For example, in Asia, inserting chopsticks into the rice bowl is rude since it is a salute to our passed family or a deity. In Chinese religions, people burn Joss-sticks as an offering to heaven and hope to be blessed with health and wealth. In America, when people want to make an announcement during dining, they will use a spoon to tap a wineglass rather than yelling.

Also, food has culinary symbolism, which is related to religious beliefs and ethnic life styles. In certain dishes, we can recognize cultural identities. Rice is
usually associated with Asia. Cheese is reminiscent of the West. When we share food with people, we also create a mutual memory with them. For example, oysters always remind me of the first time that my grandfather brought my cousin and me on his raft to catch oysters. After that, all our family gathered for a seafood dinner at night. By evoking such thoughts, food plays an important role in daily human communication that crosses nations, mingles cuisines and is filled with stories.

Asian people have studied food culture for hundreds of years. In 1578, Li Shih-Chen wrote the *Compendium of Materia Medica*, which addresses the nutrition of grains. Traditionally, we are guided to adjust our diet according to seasonal change and to select foods for our health. During the winter, people in Asia consume foods like lamb, because Chinese medical science believes that it can promote circulation and metabolism and keep the body warm. Due to differences in geography, religion and weather, each Asian country has developed its distinct food culture and unique food language. For instance, Japan is well known for its sushi and India is proud of its spicy curry.

Taiwan, where I come from, has street food, such as bubble milk tea and steamed pork dumplings, which are also served in expensive restaurants nowadays. Friendliness and hospitality are Taiwanese traits, and a return from a coin is not only a full stomach but also a grin, sometimes with a freebee, such as an extra skewer or a homemade off-menu pastry. One of the reasons that Taiwanese enjoy street food so much is that it reminds us of who we are. In the 1960s, hawkers boosted part of the local economy in Taiwan.
At that time, this kind of cheap food provided a main diet resource that most families could afford. After several years of economic development, we have a better life than before but we will never abandon street food. We have a common memory and flavors that fill our hearts, with the kitchen on sidewalks.

For me, food is the best language to understand a new place. When I came here in 2010, I realized that America is truly a culinary melting pot. British bars, Japanese buffets and Chinese cafeterias are found along the same street. Diverse groups live together with a physical and spiritual blending of cultures. Immigrant populations have changed much of the American diet, which is based on potatoes and meat. An “American diet” has become hard to define because most Americans not only enjoy fries and burgers but also exotic traditional cuisine. Moreover, newly incoming groups directly influence food habits, combinations and preparations in America to create more possibilities, such as tofu hamburgers and guacamole subways. New York, the dream destination of many immigrants from other countries, is made up of the nationalities of the world. Fall 2011 was the first time I visited New York City. I was impressed by the variety of foods, such as hotdogs, and intrigued by the vending carts, logos and packages, which were different from those in my hometown.

This initiated my thesis project: “International Street Food Association - Street Foods in Taipei/ New York City”. A formal organization of street food vendors, previously a small-informal industry, boosted the development of the economies of both America and Taiwan. People can spend less money for
food on the street than in restaurants, and may arguably have more appealing options.

In my project, I introduce food diversity through a food cultural exchange exhibition. People have a chance to understand different foods from different countries around the world. Local people will have more possibilities to try food combinations and increased multiple daily nutrition resources. Some people protest street food because of concerns about quality control and sanitation. By creating a standard corporate identity system, I am utilizing the advantage of design to change the stereotype of street food. Specifically, in this project, package designs are created to be economical for street food vendors and practical for consumers’ use. I also try to utilize the characteristics of paper, such as its being scentless and flat, to stretch people’s imagination to space, shadow and even smell by the paper art series. A street food e-recipe introduces cooking preparations and cooking detail. Here, people can check out ingredients and cooking processes without being confused by Chinese names. For example, stinky tofu is fermented just as cheese is. People name food in Asia usually by a funny nickname or banter; however, it sounds like a weird food if we directly translate the name into English.

Process
Analyzing several New York City and Taipei City tourist venues, I included the hotdog (Fig 1), pretzel (Fig 2), popcorn (Fig 3), chestnut (Fig 4), pizza (Fig 5), ice cream (Fig 6) and taco (Fig 7) to represent New York City.
As well, the representative foods of Taipei City will incorporate Zongzi (Fig 8), steamed stuffed dumpling (Fig 9), stinky tofu (Fig 10), bubble milk tea (Fig 11), Taiwanese chicken nuggets (Fig 12), oyster omelets (Fig 13) and Luroufan (Fig 14). I simplified the silhouettes of these foods and inspired by the
simplicity of “less is more”, I focused on removing redundancies through a thoughtful, simplified process.

The memories of foods

I believe that Food plays an important role in binding our past memories together since it can be nostalgic of our living experiences. For instance, as an international student, I always look for home dishes in foreign countries. A reminiscent flavor always evokes a memory, an object or a person whose appearance is significant in my life. Food is not only a diet for our stomach but also becomes a thread of memory. The hotdog is one of the most popular foods in the world, while the name of the food is horrible. My first hotdog was ten years ago at Costco when I studied abroad in the US. The long shaped bread embraced a sausage topped with onions, mustard, ketchup and relish. It was not only tasty but was mingled with my experience of this new land. My favorite food is ice cream. My mom used to bring my sister and me to Snow King after our class. They have more than one hundred novel and amazing flavors including basil, tomato and dried meat flakes. I still remember the smile on my sister’s face and the taste of the sweet and frozen cold in that time. I had my first salty pretzel last year in a baseball field stall. When I bit the warm twisted bread, it felt so delicate and chewy. Meanwhile, our home team earned a score by a home run, which made the pretzel even more perfect. Popcorn is another widespread snack. Watching a movie with half salty half sweet popcorn is our lovely family time on the weekend. The smell of popcorn always makes me feel as comfortable as I did before. When it comes to chestnuts, I have to mention how I am obsessed with them. I bought
three bags of chestnuts every day when my family and I toured Italy. It reminds me of autumn, in which I was born. Pizza is one of my favorite dishes; I enjoy the flavor on my tongue when the cheese melts into pepperoni, tomato sauce and basil. The best pizza I ever have had so far is the one under the Brooklyn Bridge. In addition to the pizza, the worker from Mexico in that restaurant was so friendly that I cannot forget what I was served there. I tried a taco last year on campus with my friends. The taste was fresh along with lettuce, tomatoes and salsa. Although it comes from Mexico, it reminds me of Spring rolls in my hometown but the Taco has stronger seasoning. I am surprised that the foods from different regions share some common characteristics, but represent their subtle differences to people.

Rice is our main food in Asia. Luroufan, braised pork rice, is an ordinary dish throughout Taiwan. Pork is stewed with soy sauce and some spices for hours then mixed with a stewed egg and rice. My grandmother used to keep a pot of stewed pork in case someone was hungry. I was always hungry whenever I smelled it. Zongzi is one of our traditional rice dishes during the Dragon Boat Festival. Sweet rice was fried with meat flakes and stuffed into a dried bamboo leaf, which is folded into a triangular shape. My grandmother used to make Zongzi for the whole family. It was fun for the whole family to help her tie them. Stinky Tofu is fermented like cheese but deep-fried. It is crispy outside and has a sponge-like texture inside. It was my favorite food when I dated my boyfriend in the night market. We shared our crispy and juicy stinky tofu. At that time, we created our own memories. Taiwanese consume plenty of tea-based drinks including green tea and black tea. Bubble milk tea is
almost as pervasive in our life as Coca-Cola in America. I had the best bubble
milk tea with my boyfriend in Taiwan. Its sweetness becomes our spiritual
support to help us overcome everything bitter in our lives. Steamed stuffed
dumpling is made of a small dough wrapping with ground pork and chicken
soup inside. The soup flows out when the chopsticks cut into the surface. I
always wonder how chefs can wrap so much soup into the tiny piece of dough.
Another commonplace food in Taiwan is the oyster omelet, which mixes
oysters with egg and fried vegetables. My mother made it once at home.
Although it was not successful, we had a great time when we cooked together.
One of the most famous snacks is Taiwanese chicken nuggets, which is fried
chicken nuggets seasoned with allspice. Some friends and I tried to make it
once in the US. It was surprisingly easy to cook and the taste was good.
Since food occupied an important position in my past life and brought me so
much pleasure time, I wanted to use this most familiar and powerful language
as a media to induce every viewer's imagination and provoke their resonance.

Logo
A logo (Fig. 15) for the International Street Foods Association is designed as
an earth shape, which is symbolic of the universe encompassing all foods in
the world. As one of the best chefs in Europe, Davide Scabin says, "The
concept I serve is incomplete when it leaves the kitchen: when it is eaten, the
cycle of assimilation is complete. But the flavor people taste can 'last' and can
be remembered." Food is a circular process and only the circle can be used
to enclose smell, flavor and the memories that are created by people. Next, I
tried to simplify the shapes of the foods and still keep them recognizable. For
example, the configuration of bubble milk tea is made up of circle outlines and round shapes, which refers to the foam on the top and the circular pearl tapiocas. The idea came from Enzo Mari, an Italian modernist. He states that design should provide a response to the people’s needs and development rather than a function for decorations as today. vi I interwove the silhouettes of foods into negative space to emphasize different flavors of foods. I used a red orange scheme to dominate the image because the loud orange exactly matches the concept of street food, which is bustling, appetite stimulating and fun. vii With all components, the logo tells the story about tasty, sociability and hospitality.

![International Street Food Association logo](image)

Fig. 15 International Street Food Association logo

**Application**

A unified branding system can enhance customers’ impression of our products and embed a unique image on people’s mind. The logo of the street food association is further applied to the business card (fig 16) and letterhead (Fig 17) for brand usage. Through this application, we can communicate with consumers directly and promote the brand in a convenient way. I also designed the appearance of a street food cart (Fig 18) for vendors’ identity. Both the cart and letterhead have high motility in the public places so that the exposure rate of the brand will be quickly spread and eventually the marketing can be highly broadened.
Package design

Once Ettore Sottsass, an Italy designer, commented on the concept of package design, "First sensory contact completely changes the approach of
Package design is the key for consumers to determine whether they are interested in the product or not. The mission of package design is to immediately grab the consumer’s attention, sell the product and, in the meantime, protect the contents. Therefore, I customized fourteen package designs for the street foods in order to meet different needs for consumers. For instance, I designed a tin-ties bag to pack chestnuts for long preservation. I also utilized one of the design elements, structure, to capture the consumer’s attention. With the pizza package design, customers can hold the triangular box shaped like a pizza slice. It is a more interesting visual display for pizza.

Considering the price of street food, I used paper as the main material for the designs, which is more affordable for street food vendors and is recyclable. I also believe that a practical and economic package design can enhance a pleasant experience in dining for consumers. Davide Scabin states, “In some cases, package design helps to eat food in a better or easier way, in others, it can create added interest in the product, surprise or disorientation.”

**Paper art**

Paper was created in the ancient Orient and spread throughout the world. Originally, paper was used to record the history of human life, or as a medium to communicate with, so far more techniques and creativity involve paper. I remember that my first fun class in kindergarten was cutting paper. Shape, color and space on paper create a new combination to bring viewers into a paper art piece. For example, I connect a cut-out corn image and three-dimensional popcorn in a special relationship. The negative space is not empty anymore, but presents the popcorn in an emotional explosion. The
advantages of paper are silent, scentless and two dimensional, hence I try to make it speak by itself through composition, color and the imagination of the viewer. Interestingly, a relationship of street foods to specific animals is created by their shape or other characteristics. For example, a hotdog relates to a dachshund and pizza connects to a ladybug because of the design like pepperoni on the body.

E-recipe

Recipes help people understand food step by step. I separated the sections, such as directions, from each other to make sure people can reference without confusion. By employing the digital media, people can store more recipes on their computer and sort the recipes for different needs. I created a format that looks as if it is a real book. For example, when the page is flipped, we can hear the sound of the flip. It not only helps people find the information they need but it is also enhanced by interactive effects.

Conclusion

Food is not just the thing that people think of when they are hungry, but an indispensable life element interwoven with history, people and their stories. Unlike formal cuisine, street food is even closer to most people's life no matter their social position, gender or age. Creating this project made me understand street foods more in both America and Taiwan. In the process, I started to examine the history and relationship between street foods and local people and also tried to use the advantages of design to create an intimate milieu, which can accommodate people from different cultures as my imagined. On
the other hand, I also perceive that design can truly make peoples’ lives more comfortable and easier. I designed some food packages that are more convenient for the holder but also keep the economical feature and pleasing appearances for the vendors. The color I used and the shapes I created trigger the viewers’ subliminal imagination. The ultimate goal of this project is to wake people’s awareness of food memories and help them to create their own stories.

Endnote

III Kittler and Scuchter, 17.
IV Kittler and Scuchter, 17.
V Paris and Lucibello, 522.
IX Marianne Rosner Klimchuk and Sandra A. Krasovec, Packaging design: successful product branding from concept to shelf (New Jersey, 2006), 82.
X Tonino Paris and Sabrina Lucibello, Designer’s exhibit: product, graphic, fashion and food (Italy: Roma, 2009), 523.

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