The Path To Another World

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I am a very ordinary girl and grew up in a very traditional Taiwanese family. We worship and pray to gods and our ancestors since our religion is Taoism. Also, we made traditional food by ourselves for some worship festivals. These are the memories of my childhood but I still can tell many details. I was standing at the side and watched when my grandparents were cooking for worship and I could try the food when they got some extra portions. The taste of the food is still on my tongue and still clear. My time with my family as a child is so sweet that I decided to create my project with those memories. Therefore, the food offerings and the worship culture in Taiwan are my original ideas for my thesis.

My animations are about the worship culture in Taiwan. As a member of a Taoist family, I believe that we can be blessed by gods and our ancestors if we worship and pray to them. This is the point that I developed in the story. The main character, a little boy, was playing in a pond in the month that ghosts are able to visit the living world. However, the little boy was saved by his deceased father when he was almost caught by a water ghost. The dead father heard the prayer from his son, so he showed up when the boy was in danger. At the end of my animation is the scene when this boy prayed to his father.

My animation presented the way of worship in Taoism, so I designed my characters in a Chinese performance style called shadow play\(^1\). The movements of the characters are like shadow play puppets. By tradition, the bodies of my characters are created using a side view. (fig.1) However, I wanted to make my design different from
traditional shadow play, so I changed the angle of the face. The face design of my characters is not a traditional side view, but an angle between a side view and a front view (fig.2) instead. This change of perspective and the contour of the hand-drawn style made my characters more special and interesting. The body shapes of the characters are created in the same style. (fig.3) Furthermore, the dresses on the characters are different from the shadow play. Their dressing is inspired by Taiwanese drama\(^2\). In Taiwanese drama, long sleeves (fig.4) and special headwear (fig.5) are the most obvious features. This dress can be traced back to the Ming-Dynasty\(^3\), but many details were simplified, as this drama was popular during an impoverished era. The dress style in Taiwanese drama is a composition of historical background and contemporary life. The people of that time were making this performance with strong visual effects, so the actor and actress not only wore exaggerated make-up but also dress differently. For example, the long sleeves are waved vigorously to emphasize their body language when they are talking. This is one of the features of traditional Taiwanese drama, so the scene when the ghost shows up and waves her sleeves demonstrates this. This is a stage direction that made it more like a Taiwanese work.
The Taiwanese drama style is strengthened in my background design as well. The backgrounds of an actual Taiwanese drama are usually rendered with some realistic paintings to set the scene. (fig.6) The background is humorous and interesting because the audiences can tell the space of the background is unreal. People also wave or turn those paintings to make the scene lively. A scene with this style is hard to find in other drama performances. Therefore, I chose this unique style as the basis for designing the backgrounds. The backgrounds in my animations are created with many flat images and moved in the scenes. The scene which exemplifies this style of background the best is the scene with waves in the pond. The pond looks like a scene in a Taiwanese drama. Also, I made the background fuller with some textured images. Those images are made with imprints from everyday things, such as concrete walls and the surface of the computer tower face. They look totally different from the original picture and present the textures of the scenes. The heat of Hades and the tides of the water show the texture images. These digital images changed the imagery of pure tradition in the original backgrounds.
Modern digital techniques make traditional Taiwanese drama backgrounds different while still expressing the style of old drama performances. My animation begins with an introduction to the folklore which is an old Asian tale about a water ghost. People who drown will stay in the water as a ghost, waiting for other people to come by, in order to drown them. These water ghosts can get a chance at rebirth if they drown another person in the water. This is the climax of the story I made. However, dead souls are only allowed to enter the living world during the seventh month of the lunar calendar, which roughly corresponds to August or September of the solar calendar. There is a festival during the middle of this month in Taiwan called the Ghost Festival\(^{11}\). Taoists worship and offer many foods to all kind of ghosts including ancestral ghosts. This worship and food satisfies the ghosts, so that they won’t hurt any people. That is, our ancestors will protect us and ghosts will not hurt us if they feel satisfied with the worship and the feast.

My story shows how one can be protected by an ancestral ghost. The deceased father saved his son from being caught by a water ghost. However, for the father to have a chance at rebirth, he also needs to hunt a living person since he also drowned in the pond where the boy played. He did not jump at the chance for rebirth but saved his son instead. I not only show the scary part of the folklore but also added a sweet episode in this story. I trust that parents always think their children are more important than themselves. By giving up his chance at rebirth, the dead father can still hear his son as his son prays to him everyday.
I have loved scary folklore since I was in kindergarten. It is always related to the underworld, and the myth of the underworld makes it charming. The scary part of my animation is from a movie that I watched when I was seven years old. The plot is that a water ghost came out of the sea where she had drowned and hunted kids who were playing in the water. This episode is still creepy for me when I am home by myself. The scenes and the sounds are showed vividly in front of me and terrify me. The impressions of this movie in my memory are still clear, so I brought them into my animation. The plot of kids playing in the water and the shots of a ghost chasing the kids are the most exciting parts in this story.

My unique sense of humor is also in my animation, and this was developed from my childhood experiences. One time when I played hide and seek with my friends and my father, my father was running slowly as I chased him. I thought I might catch him, but he sped up as my hands were almost reaching his waist, so I could never grab him. I was so angry but laughing at the same time because his posture of running was hilarious. This scene was represented with the naughty boy playing in the water and escaping the ghost by accidentally moving forward. This action in my animation made my friends laugh.

I developed this story with my memories, my personality, and my cultural background. These three factors always affect me when I am creating anything. I worked on several two-dimensional images and videos in my graduate work and was anxious to try something different. Therefore, I included some three-dimensional works
also. I decided to make some designs with paper and related them to traditional Taiwanese worship vessels, such as the packages for food offerings. This idea is originally from paper sacrificial offerings. We burn these paper offerings, and we believe that god and our ancestors receive them in their world. My family made most of the food offerings by ourselves, and we ate them after worship. Although this is part of my sweet memories, I was thinking whether god or our ancestors can actually receive these foods or not since we ate them. The idea of burning offerings came to my mind again, so I decided to make those food offerings with paper. Therefore, I picked two food offerings as the products of my package design.

The first one is a steamed cupcake. (fig.7) This cupcake is not only something edible but a tool for predicting our luck. Its appearance changes after it is cooked. The top of the cupcake separates into three or four blocks after steaming it, and it looks like a flower is blooming on it. This means you will have good luck in the following year. However, the steamed cupcake does not always come out in a beautiful shape. The worst result I saw once was when the top of the cupcake was like a tongue thrusting from inside of the cake. Sometimes, Taiwanese housewives will try many times until the flower-shape is showing on the cake in order to get good luck.

(fig.7) (fig.8)
The cupcake in the exhibition is not edible because I decided to make all the food offerings with paper. The structure of the steamed cupcake is three or four blocks, so making the cupcake model is not easy. However, old memories are not only sweet but also helpful. I suddenly remembered an origami design that I learned in kindergarten. (fig.8) The shape of the origami design is exactly what I wanted for the cupcake.

My central idea for designing the cake box is from the traditional offering plate with a foot underneath. (fig.9) I made two extrusions inside the box (fig.10) to hold the cake higher than the bottom. The food is as it would be displayed in a person’s hands. People believe that giving food to god or their ancestors in this way shows respect. The design of the cake box structure is similar to many small to-go boxes in Taiwan. (fig.11) A to-go box is easy to carry and arrange cupcakes in worship.

(fig.9) (fig.10)

(fig.11) A to go box from a store and a box I designed
The other food for the package is a turtle rice cake. (fig.12) The turtle rice cake is either stuffed with dried radishes or red beans in the chewy crust. The crust is made with rice, so it is soft and sticky, and people serve each turtle rice cake with a green leaf underneath. There is a color contrast as turtle rice cakes are usually dyed a vivid red lucky color. People also transfer a lucky octagon pattern (fig.13) onto it. The octagon pattern represents the shape of the turtle. The turtle means long life in Taiwanese culture, so it is applied to many food offerings.

The main ideas behind designing the package for turtle rice cakes are the shape of the actual turtle, the octagon pattern, and avoiding ruining the rounded shape of rice cake itself since it is so soft. Therefore, the idea of a basket came to my mind. I made a it with a handle so people can carry this soft and sticky food gracefully and arrange it easily. Also, the turtle pattern is still visible as the octagon is continually applied on the plate, the main piece in this package. (fig.14)

I made the turtle rice cake with a wooden model (fig.15) from my grandmother. The turtle rice cake that I made for my project is paper. I soaked kitchen towels in glue and spread them on my wooden model. This is really time consuming because it takes half a day to dry. Furthermore, I could only make one at a time since I only had one model.

I also developed an idea of a larger package to hold all the worship vessels. (fig.16) This one is designed for my grandmother. She needs to wake up early if there is a worship festival. Cooking the food and buying all the ingredients from many different
places is necessary, but she does not have enough energy. I thought that a package with everything inside would reduce her burden, so I invented a house-shaped box for packing all the worship vessels.

![Figures 14, 15, 16](image)

The house shape is adapted from the basket that was used in the past. (fig.17) It was also like a house. However, I made a new longer one to keep the joss sticks protected. Also, there are two layers (fig.18) in the box. The joss sticks will be in the roof part. The other offerings are in the body of the house. Every object can be found easily.

![Figures 17, 18, 19](image)

Those three packages are organized with the same patterns and the group of colors that I picked. (fig.19) In Taiwan, the food offerings are usually named with puns that sound like some blessings or lucky meanings, and the packages have lucky or blessed patterns on them, like the patterns of an Chinese ancient coin (fig.20) and the
shoe-shape gold, (fig.21) called yuanbao. The colors of these patterns tend to be a warm orange tone, so the color arrangement of the whole package needs to be suitable with orange. I tried vivid red, but it is unsuitable to use red on the offering packages. In Chinese culture, it is rude to wear red when attending a funeral since a funeral is sad, and wearing red is like celebrating something happy. The offering packages could also be used in a funeral, so the decent style is what I wanted to use on my packages.

Finally, light yellow and light green are the main colors that I applied to the packages. Those two colors are the colors of mild sunshine and newborn grass. This composition is not only respectful but lively. The feelings of respect, warmth, and peace are created as the patterns work with those colors. I still used the lucky vivid red on the tiny decoration elements, so the Chinese style is not lost at all.

The paper food offerings and their packages are not the only three-dimensional works that I presented in my project. I also extended the idea of burning paper offerings to gods and our ancestors with paper sculptures. These paper sculptures were representative of Taiwanese culture. I began my sculptures with a paper-person. A sacrificed paper-person is usually burned in traditional Taiwanese funerals, so this is the first thing I considered for the paper sculptures. However, I wanted to bring more cultural aspects to my work. The paper-person’s face is not showing but is covered by a paper turtle rice cake mask. (fig.22) Furthermore, his dress is a very traditional style of baby dress from ancient times. (fig.23) The one on my paper person sculpture is made with real fabric.
The other paper sculptures are not offerings but show the Taiwanese cultures in an educational way. I made a Taiwanese grave and two scrolls. The grave tells the worship culture in Taiwan. Taiwanese people usually prepare many food offering and light some joss sticks at the grave. Also, they burn a lot of paper money after the joss sticks are burnt out. I arranged all the worship vessels in the grave sculpture with another paper-person who worships there. (fig.24) This is also the last scene of my animation when the boy prays to his father. The paper-person was made according to the appearance of the little boy. Furthermore, the design of the Taiwanese grave is another thing that I wanted to show. The shape of the Taiwanese grave is different from the Western grave. The Taiwanese grave design is not underneath the ground but a semi round-shape behind the tombstone. (fig.25)

The other educational sculptures are much smaller than the others. They are actually the rods of the scroll-style posters. I have two scrolls that tell the stories of the Ghost Festival in Taoism and Buddhism. I designed the characters after I researched the
stories. The characters are created with the face between a front view and a side view like the characters in my animation. This is the way that I made my works consistent in style with each other. These stories of the Ghost Festival are also related to the story of my animation. The reason that people worship during the Ghost Festival is related to many ancient folk tales. Therefore, the colors I applied on these two posters are like the colors of ancient paintings, (fig.26) but the design of the posters is not old. They are drawn with a comic style, which was inspired by the comics I read when I was seven. These two posters explain the stories in a charming way for all ages.

(fig.26)  (fig.27)  (fig.28)

Presenting a worship culture is a challenge, so I used a lot of text explanations and images when I displayed them to the public. Not only the comic posters but also the package poster has a layout with many illustrations. I created the images of the food offerings (fig.27) to show the appearances of the actual products. The steamed cupcake and the turtle rice cake are vastly different from any Western dessert. Their appearances are related to the pattern design on the packages. I also mentioned some Asian worship cultures because it is about the structure of my package design. The structures of the packages are not shown with two-dimension images but with dummy-sized package. (fig.28) There are three small packages, which are glued on the poster as images for the package structures.
Once I finished so many different kinds of works for my project, including two-dimensional images, animations, and three-dimensional pieces, I needed an environment to display them. I needed a bright place to display the scrolls and the package poster and a dark place for my animations. I planned the display so audiences could read and understand the history and the background of the Taiwanese worship culture before they watched the animations. Therefore, I arranged the posters on the walls, which are in front of the media room. The media room was to be the dark space for the animations.

I was trying to build both the feeling of walking into a theater and the atmosphere of a creepy place in the dark space. The hanging projector and the big wall were the perfect facilities for creating a theater. My animations were played as they would on a real movie screen since they were shown on the entire wall in the room. I also has a movie poster, (fig.29) movie ticket design, (fig.30) and a movie trailer. This is one of the animations I included in this project. It is the same story as the animation,
however the style of the movie trailer is totally different than the animation. Not only the plots are simpler but also the style of the images is not the same. The images of the movie trailer are made with pigments and ink. I applied pigments and reserved some spaces for ink at the first layer of painting and covered oil ink at the second layer. When the ink is dried, I washed the painting with water and a woodcut style was revealed. Those hand-painting images created a dull tone like old-fashioned movie trailer. The other work that I made for the movie theater atmosphere was the paper-person. I designed some classical movie tickets in his hands, and made him like a ticket inspector. (fig.31) He was located along the wall past the poster and the ticket design and under the first spotlight in the media room. The room was all black except for two spotlights on the paper sculptures and above the Taiwanese grave. (fig.32) It was behind the bench at the center of the media room. People could stop by there and look at the stuff in the grave but not distract those watching the animations.
References

1. Shadow play, also known as shadow puppetry, is an ancient form of storytelling and entertainment which uses flat articulated figures (shadow puppets) to create the impression of moving humans and other three-dimensional objects.


2. Taiwanese drama is also translated as Taiwanese opera or Gua-a-hi.

3. The dress in Taiwanese drama is similar with the fashion style of the Ming-Dynasty. No matter which dynasty the story belongs to, the dresses are not altered.

http://content.edu.tw/competition/96year/web/works/B060002/op4.htm

4. The seventh month of the lunar calendar is called Ghost Month. On the first day of the seventh month the gates of the Hell are opened and the spirits are allowed a month of freedom in the living world.

http://cherrybear.pixnet.net/blog/post/1334861~英文~中元節的由來

5. Paper offerings are for Asian traditional worship. People burn many paper-made life accessories to their ancestors, such as a house, a car and maids. The paper offerings are also changed with contemporary trending. Now, there are paper-made cell phones, paper-made laptops and paper-made ipods etc.

http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/紙紮
Fig 1.


Fig 2.
Fig 5.

http://www.panoramio.com/photo/63555715

Fig 6.
Fig7.

http://w.mtwebcenters.com.tw/HOSHING/eCommerce/---30.html

Fig8.

http://library.taiwanschoolnet.org/cyberfair2004/phantom/02_file/0236/023602.htm
Fig 11.

↑ A to go box from a store and a box I designed

http://blog.yam.com/yukibaby/article/24931599

Fig 12., Fig 13.

Fig 14.

Fig 15.

↑ My grandma’s model and me, Rio.
Fig21.


Fig22.
Fig25.

Fig26.

http://www.nipic.com/show/2/27/562913a9e70a18.html
Fig 27.

Fig 28.

HOUSE-SHAPED BOX: This house-shaped box is designed to hold all offerings and snacks for worship, including joss sticks, paper offerings, cupcakes, butter rice cakes and other snacks. People can be ready for worship in a short time instead of preparing for half a day.

The house shape is inspired from the basket that was used in the past, it was also a house. However, I made a new house box to keep the joss sticks, protected well as the box is long enough. Also, there are two boxes inside the box. The joss sticks will be in the roof part. The paper offerings are placed in the body of the house. Everyone object can be found easily in this box.

STEAMED CUPCAKE BOX: The steamed cupcake is a traditional Taiwanese food that can be used in worship. The box has two steamer pots and a plate for worship. The plate has a hole for carrying and arranging the cupcakes. Also, there are two extensions inside the box. This is the easy worship place with a fast turnaround. The food is easy to be displayed in hands. People believe that giving food to gods or their ancestors in this way is showing their respect.

TURTLE RICE CAKE BOX: Turtle rice cake is a traditional Taiwanese food for worship. It is soft, sticky and has a leaf underneath. There is always an octagon shape on it. The octagon shape is actually a turtle pattern. The octagon plate is the main place in this package. Also, I made a handle with it so people can carry this soft and sticky food gracefully and arrange it easily.
Fig 29.

Fig 30.