

Translocation

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Attestation of Authorship

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment is made in the acknowledgments."

Linda Sun

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Table of Contents

Attestation of Authorship	
Acknowledgements	
Abstract	1
Design Brief	2
Story Line of the Myth 'Nata Caused Havoc in the East Sea'	3
Research Methodology	5
Theoretical Background	11
Design Style	18
Creative Synthesis	26
The Storytelling Event	35
Conclusion	38
Bibliographic /References	40

Abstract

In recent years China has become increasingly more exposed to the influences of western culture, this has motivated me to explore the place of traditional Chinese cultural beliefs and virtue amongst contemporary Chinese children. The meaning of virtue refers to the concept of moral value. In the Chinese cultural context, “virtue” comprises moral values such as ritual, honour and cultural custom. The aim of this project is to raise awareness of traditional cultural virtue amongst contemporary Chinese children through the re-presentation of a traditional and illustrated Chinese myth ‘Nata Caused Havoc in the East Sea’. This re-presentation will involve a re-thinking and re-styling of the traditional illustrations and related design elements for application in a contemporary context.

In this research I will produce a portfolio of illustrations and related designs that embody the virtue of traditional Chinese culture to support the launch of a storytelling event that will operate in a contemporary library. This thesis in graphic design includes a practical project, which is a notional 80% of the final submission, accompanied by a 7806, word exegesis.

The project will be activated from a design brief and realized through a process of analysis, application and creative synthesis. The research project will explore how graphic representations can be employed to support a storytelling event in a library. The story is based upon the traditional Chinese myth "Nata Caused Havoc in the East Sea". The project seeks to contemporize and at the same time retain the traditional cultural virtue of both the myth and the storytelling event to target a demographic of six to twelve year old Chinese children.

Design Brief

The design/illustration work will interpret and express the characters and related backgrounds from the myth “Nata Caused Havoc in the East Sea”. This narrative will act as a resource for the production of a series of graphic designs to support a storytelling event, which includes: ID¹ production documents and set design. The ID production is to promote the storytelling event that is presented in a library to the targeted demographic group of children to related organizations, libraries and audience (children and their parents). However the main purpose is to promote the education of the younger generation through the incorporation of Chinese virtue in the myth of the storytelling event.

The main practical part of this project is to design a set of eight, full colour panels that represent the main plots of “Nata Caused Havoc in the East Sea”. This part will act as a conceptualising agent for other design elements in the storytelling event. The ID production will contain the design of a postcard, a letterhead; a fax header, an invitation card and a poster.

Alongside the illustrated panels and the ID production, I have also designed a booklet that interfaces with, and develops the key elements of the narrative. This document will be limited to twenty pages of which ten pages will be full colour productions. The booklet is designed to support the storytelling event and also sets out to encourage six to twelve year old children to investigate the wealth of an indigenous narrative. An outline drawing of the characters (designs) of the myth was also included, which served as a teaching aid during the storytelling event.

¹ The term ID is an acronym for identity development. It incorporates and applies branding design to print forms letterheads, fax headers, business cards and stationary.

As the thesis develops, I decided to perform a storytelling event to explore the response from the children. It is not intended to test the effectiveness of the designs, but rather it serves as a reflective practice for my design career.

Story Line of the Myth “Nata Caused Havoc in the East Sea”

The myth “Nata Caused Havoc in the East Sea” is used in the storytelling event. This myth is familiar to the majority Chinese that represents Chinese traditional virtue in a vivid way in historic form for educating children. The myth originated from the Chinese classic novel “Feng Shen Bang” “封神榜”, dating back to 1600-1100B.C. This multiple purpose storytelling approach is considered to be a productive and effective teaching method and has been widely used throughout history. Through the relaxing and humorous presentation, traditional virtue is unconsciously conveyed to the participants.

Story line

Li Jing, who is the general of the Chen Tang strategic pass in Zhejiang Province, has two sons and is expecting a third child. The baby is born after Mrs Li has been pregnant for three and half years, however the baby is born a monster, a big sarcoma. Li Jing is so upset and angry that he cleaves the sarcoma in two. All of a sudden, rays of light radiate in all directions and a boy jumps out of from the sarcoma. He looks lovely and is very witty but Li Jing believes that he is evil and detests him, however his wife and two older sons like the witty and innocent newborn boy very much.

One day, the venerable master Tai Yi came to Li Jing's house to congratulate him. Master Tai Yi tells Li Jing that his son is a prodigy. Tai Yi takes him as his disciple, gives him the name Nata and bestows upon

him two weapons: These are Fu Yao suo (a rope) and Qian Kun Quan (a fire ring). From that point, Nata studies magic power with Tai Yi for a total of seven years.

When Nata is seven years old, the region is struck by a long drought and the atrocious Dragon King of the East Sea, who controls the supply of rain water, shows little mercy to the people. Instead, he demands children to be sacrificed as an offering to him. In order to save the people, Nata kills the Dragon King's third and favourite son, AoBin. The Dragon King goes to the Heaven Palace to complain about Nata to the Jada Emperor. (The Supreme Deity of Taoism) but on his way Nata beats him soundly.

The next day, the Dragon King orders it to rain continuously for another three days and nights. The Dragon King persecutes General Li by claiming that the rain will not stop until he hands over to him his son Nata. General Li is scared and decides to forsake Nata to save the people living in the town and Nata willingly sacrifices himself.

After Nata's death, his spirit goes to Tai Yi to lament his fate. With the help of Tai Yi, Nata is reborn from a lotus. The re-born Nata has gained more magical power and weapons than before. Amongst the weapons, the fire ring and fire wheels are the two main weapons that he uses to cause havoc in the East Sea to defeat the evil Dragon King.

Research Methodology

In this chapter, I will discuss the method and process that I have deployed in this practical project. Initially I engaged in a programme of both primary and secondary research into the historical, cultural and aesthetical background of the myth. From this data, I analyzed and developed my own theoretical notions about the myth. From this I managed to underpin the design of this project. Subsequently, I have set out to develop a unique approach to the styling of the visual work based upon the research. The final process involved the synthesis of theory into the practice, which enabled me to embody the essence of cultural virtue into the whole body of work. I have also performed a storytelling event to test the effectiveness of the contemporary application of this project.

Research

The myth “Nata” Caused Havoc in the East Sea” is the object of this research. To obtain a full understanding of the ethos and cultural values of the myth, I researched published materials produced over a period of twenty-five years.

My first encounter with the myth dated back to a simple black and white line drawing storybook in my childhood in 1986. This book used traditional freehand drawing to illustrate the Nata story. Another Chinese cartoon animation of “Nata” designed and produced by Zhang Din (Zhang, 1979.) was a unique representation of that period. The cartoon not only portrayed a unique form of design work in relation to the characters, it also combined the aesthetics of traditional Chinese art with contemporary elements in a successful cohesive manner. Most importantly, it integrated the traditional cultural virtues into a contemporary context and has moved and educated Chinese people in a metaphorical way. (Fig. 1, 2)



(Fig. 1, 2) Zhang Ting, *Nata caused Havoc in The East Sea*. Animation design.1979.

My initial involvement with the design of Nata as a character began in August 2002. Through the design of Nata, (Fig. 3) I realized that the Nata story had multiple complex historical meanings and cultural virtues embedded into it. I returned to China to conduct primary research to enrich the philosophical context of this project. In the winter of 2003 during my visit to China, I interviewed Mr Qiu ting² in BeiJing. This interview enabled me to acquire a large amount of key concepts and background history of this myth.



Fig.3 Linda Sun. Nata. Digital Image.2002.

As part of this research visit, I also interviewed Zhang Yi Min, my mentor and teacher in decorative painting at Shan Dong Arts and Crafts Academy.

² Qiu Ting was then studying for his PHD with Mr. Zhang Ding in Bei Jing.

The interview enriched my theoretical and cultural knowledge in the creative application of this project. In this interview, Zhang Yi Min stated that:

“Decorative painting is a style of romanticism which stresses on expressional art and free sketching. However decorative painting is also based upon representational art because romanticism originates from real life. Representationalism is the foundation of the art style.” Zhang Yi Min, (January 13, 2003).

This research trip also included a visit to JiNan³ where I collected decorative paintings, paper cut and leather silhouette designs from different time periods. These images were the key references for the development of the contemporary Nata character in this project.

Data analysing

At this part, I analysed the research data that spanned a period of twenty-five years and referenced both the design and the cultural, history and aesthetical influence of the material. The myth “Nata Caused Havoc in the East Sea” appeared in China more than a thousand years ago, however the story has been limited to the context of folklore. Fig. 4 is an image of Nata from a temple and is believed to have preserved the traditional elements of the myth. It also appears commonly in paper cut form. Yet the visual references are complex and abstruse and employ the line work and approach to colour related to a traditional Chinese aesthetics. These signifiers do not reflect the gritty, witty and youthful character of Nata and do not connect with a contemporary concept of ‘cool’ that holds currency within contemporary Chinese youth culture.

³ JiNan is the capital city of ShanDong province and is one of the oldest cities with abundant historical heritage and folk art.



Fig. 4 Artist unknown. *Chinese Traditional painting of Nata*. 2003.

I also had referenced an image from a Japanese cartoon, which allowed me to explore some new approaches to contemporary design for the younger generation. The Japanese Nata (Fig. 5) is depicted as having strong muscles, a 'cool' expression, fashionable clothes and hairstyles, which is common to the other courageous Japanese cartoons with similar identities. This inspired me to bring some contemporary elements and ideas into my new Nata design so that it might be more appealing to a contemporary, youth market.



Fig. 5 Ryufujisaki, *Nataku*. Digital Image.345x565 pixels.2002

My collections of Nata images are from 1970's, 1980's and 2000. The 1970's⁴ were a difficult period for the Chinese. The artists from this period had adapted this traditional myth into a new design with the aim of encouraging Chinese people to survive the hardship by using Nata as a brave personality, in the form of a role model of resistance. (Fig. 1, 2)

The opening up of the regime and the reform of policy in the 1980's not only changed the economic structure of China but also had a vast influence on the cultural beliefs of the people. The Chinese experienced the cultural difference that was introduced through economic transformation, which influenced the ways of seeing the world and impacted on their understanding of the traditional cultural virtue. The uncertainty of the beliefs had been partly caused by the buoyant economical growth. The country had never been in such a prosperous and stable situation after the struggles in the seventies. People were satisfied with the existing state of affairs and the influence from western culture was still minimal. The artworks of the time purveyed peaceful and traditional elements as demonstrated in an example of the Nata design in 1984 (Fig. 6) This design has been deeply influenced by traditional painting, this is also demonstrated through aesthetic signifiers such as the approach to line drawing and the illustration of the character and other elements including waves and clouds.



1 这一天，哪吒把七尺混天绫围在脚上，截断风浪，又到东海里去喊闹得冰

Fig. 6 Liu Yi Tong. *Nata caused havoc in the East Sea*. Printing image. 8cm/10cm. 1980.

⁴ Chinese people suffered from three years nature calamity followed by ten chaotic years of the Cultural Revolution 1966-1976.

From the late 1990's, the influence of western mass culture began to emerge in China, this provoked a reaction from designers. They began to incorporate design ideas and elements from western culture and scaled down the use of traditional elements. In addition, they had adapted the instant computer-styled design elements from digital technology. An example of this can be seen in Nata designs of 2001. For example the outlines of the characters are very rough and the main feature of Chinese painting, which originally contains a soft sense of aesthetics is replaced by computer-styled design elements. The overall design gives a glossy and mechanical appeal and lacks of the subtlety of artistic emotional sense. (Fig. 7,8)



Fig. 7,8 artist unknown. *Nata Caused Havoc in the East Sea*. 18cm/19cm. 2001.

During my research I found that most of the Nata designs in China were derived from a decorative style and I decided to apply and integrate it into the contemporary design to develop my personal style. I shall discuss this further in the chapter of 'Design Style'.

Theoretical Background

Chinese culture

(1) Adaptation and Change

“Adaptation” and “change” are important features in Chinese culture. These features are also important aspects of Chinese philosophy. This philosophical idea is from “YiJing⁵”. This idea is stated in a traditional well-known Chinese saying:

变则通 通则久 Liu & Jiang, 1997, P. 371

This saying means change is development, and development, is the only possible solution in the mind of the Chinese. Thus it can be understood that harmony of the Chinese culture is gained through, “Adaptation”, “Development” and “Change”. The religion of Buddhism is a good example; it was propagated into China during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), creating many themes that emerged from Buddhist cave murals during that period. These Buddhist themes and concepts clashed with traditional Chinese philosophies. However Chinese culture was still opened and embraced through Buddhism. This contributed to the development of Chinese cave art.

Another example is the movement named “let a hundred flowers bloom”⁶ forwarded by Chairman Mao in 1971. The movement promoted the idea of openness, letting all art forms and styles flourish. Though the movement was driven by a political incentive, it carried the similar philosophic idea of change, development and adaptation. The willingness to adapt to the

⁵ Yi Jing (易经) is the oldest augural book in China created over 3000 years ago. It is regarded as the foundation of Chinese philosophy.

⁶ A policy set forth by Mao ZeDong for promoting the progress of the arts and the sciences and the development of a flourishing socialist culture.

change and the subsequent development has allowed Chinese culture to survive despite the long history of uncertainty.

(2) Coexistence

The ideology: “君子和而不同” advanced by the Chinese philosopher Kong Zi (Confucius)⁷ has also influenced Chinese thinking. Kong Zi stated that educated individuals have individual thoughts but incorporate similar beliefs into the community as a whole. The existence of different art forms and aesthetics has been partly due to the acceptance of difference amongst individuals. This has contributed to the unique harmonic coexistence in our society and “和而不同” is the true essence of culture development. These embedded philosophical and cultural ideas have inspired Chinese artists to adapt to change and develop, while maintaining individual thoughts and styles. Looking at contemporary design, Chinese artists have been and are still embracing the adaptation to new ideas from different cultures in a global context.

(3) Chinese Culture and Chinese Art

Chinese culture and art interweave with each other. Han Yu in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) advanced the idea that a relationship exists between culture and art. He stated the idea “文以载道” which means art is the carrier of culture. His student Li Han re-stated this idea in his book *Postscript of Li Chang*:

“Scholar and art are the media of Dao” (Li, 618-907).

⁷ Confucius (551-479 B.C.) -- Wade-Giles K'ung-fu-tzu or pinyin Kongfuzi, or Master K'un is a famous Chinese philosopher whose idea has influenced Chinese culture for thousands of years.

The term “Dao” represents the meaning of virtue in this book. Another scholar Liu Zong Yuan in later Tang Dynasty had a similar idea to Han Yu. Liu Zong Yuan further developed Han Yu’s concept in his book *Seasonal Method* “四季论”.

“Art is the media which services for society and culture.” (Li, 2002, p.107).

Liu Zong Yuan’s idea was more advanced than Han Yu as his idea was extended to include a broader scope embracing both culture and society. Both scholars had similar opinions and advocated the close relationship between art and culture.

Western cultural theorist Cartwright also stated the tight relationship between society and art.

“Art has often functioned to reflect society and nature back to its spectators.” (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p.111).

As a contemporary Chinese designer, I share the opinions outlined above that art is a carrier of traditional cultural virtues while adapting to the change and development in a global context.

(4) Chinese Virtue and Myth

In a broader perspective virtue is considered as the practice of moral duties, carried out by individuals in a given society. It is often referred to as the guardian of a culture. From my perspective, I believe virtue to be the moral thoughts that are specifically designed and structured for creating a harmonic social environment. The historical influence of virtue to Chinese is related to Chinese philosophies such as Taoism, Buddhism and Confucius dating back two thousand years. These philosophies have provided the basis of the virtue system for traditional Chinese society. Amongst them,

Confucius is the most influential in constructing the social and moral systems.

An important aspect of virtue derived from “ritual”(Li) in the Confucius era. Ritual (Li) has a tight relationship with virtue in Chinese culture. Ritual is the basic code, which Chinese ancient society used to deal with the relationship between people and society. Hall and Ames suggest that ‘The notion of formal *li* [ritual] action overlaps with *t’i*, body, in that *li* actions are embodiments or formalizations of meaning and value that accumulate to constitute a cultural tradition. (1987: p.88) The significances of ritual contain broad and various meanings in Chinese society such as, how to build an order of a society; the bylaw of individual behavior; the bases of self-cultivating and the rules of building a state. In other words, ritual plays the role of adjusting the relationship between individual Chinese people and the society to develop a harmonic consensus. I believe that the ‘virtue’ system of a society constitutes to the formation of Chinese social regime, ethos in the here and now through individual self-cultivation that makes key reference to ritual. In this sense, virtue contributes to the self-cultivation of individual to build a respectable personality. In my project, I explore the key essences of virtue such as respect, love, honour, sympathy, responsibility and bravery in a contemporary context. These essences of virtue have been adapted and applied into different art forms through myth.

Chinese myth in a broader perspective is considered as a traditional story that focused on early history, explaining some nature or social phenomena, such as calamity and war.

There are two unique features that allow Chinese myth to effectively disseminate and educate virtue to the individuals of a Chinese society. Firstly, the majorities of the content of Chinese myth focus on human’s wistfulness of happiness, ideals (of living and relationship) and sense of beliefs, which are the basic essences for the formation of a harmonic environment. Secondly, the main medium of the communication of myth is

through storytelling. Throughout Chinese history, many famous myths have survived and are handed down through the relaxing and entertaining presentations of storytelling. Such presentations allow the subtle dissemination of the essences of virtue through individual's unconscious self-interpretations and self-evaluations of the myth. Yang considers this as 'empathy education' through myth. Yang suggests that:

'Empathy education is the sharing of others' emotional experience. Empathy occurs in various situations, for example, when a baby witnesses another baby crying, he/she would be influenced by the sadness and in due course would cry too, which is an intrinsic emotional response. For some older children, they may not cry but seek comfort from other sources. If delivered properly, empathy education is comparatively effective when applying to young children.' (2002, p.84)

In addition, the episodes of myth are usually simple but rich in emotional contents to allow individuals to respond upon. This is intriguing as the emotional contents imbue participants not only during the storytelling, but extend to influence individuals' considerations of the cultural, moral and philosophical conception after the event. At the least, myth may ease individuals' emotional feelings when they encounter despondent happenings in their daily life. I would suggest that the dissemination of virtue through the storytelling of myth is effective and as such that myth is one of the main carriers of traditional virtue.

In my project, I have attempted to incorporate the concept of virtue through the myth 'Nata Cause Havoc in the East Sea' as the carrier. An example of myth being the carrier of virtue in art is the famous "Chang E"⁸. The myth talks about a Chinese goddess of the moon and has been adapted into many art forms such as paper cut and drama and has been developed to become a symbol of the Chinese Mooncake Festival.⁹

⁸ The Archer King Hou Yi was given the Herb of Immortality for shooting down nine renegade suns. His beautiful wife Chang-O stole the Herb of Immortality for herself. Pursued by Hou Yi she floated to the moon where she coughed up the herb casing.

⁹ "In ancient times, people regarded the full moon as a symbol of reunion. The common folk and emperors worshipped and enjoyed viewing the moon. The tradition of worshipping the moon was

On the other hand, Chinese culture is a kind of “introspective psychology”.
Wu JunShan explains:

“Introspective psychology” refers to a Chinese mindset which is about not changing the world actively and it is a kind of self-remolding and self-consolation in order to adjust to daily unhappiness. Chinese can find a way to comfort self and be happy easily and myth is a good carrier for “introspective psychology”.’ (Wu, 2003, <http://www.booker.com.cn>).

This can be exemplified through the idea that when there is a cause of suffering, Chinese seem to focus on a peaceful inner-world rather than facing the existing problem (also known as “Confucianism”). Yee .C also states:

“The early Chinese were a people of easy disposition, detached, indifferent, rather self-centred and not adventurous.” (Yee, 2003, p.4)

Heroes play an important role in Chinese myth. Heroes, whom emerge from myth, are usually brave and strong; they dare to struggle and strive for the goodness of people. This is shown through the famous Chinese myth “大禹治水”¹⁰. The famous hero Da Yu did not once enter his home over a period of three years, due to the fact that he was helping to save the people of the town from an enormous flood. He eventually had to sacrifice himself and inhumanely turned into a big powerful bear to stop this raging flood.

I have applied the idea of hero into my own design work to present Nata in a contemporary way. In my artwork, I illustrate Nata as being a representative

observed on a broader scale during the Soong, Ming and Qing dynasties. It was customary to set up a table laden with moon cake, pomegranates and dates in open air. After prostrating themselves before the moon, the people would sit with their families to enjoy viewing the moon, eating and chatting. `The Moon cake Festival signifies the celebration of family union and happiness. The atmosphere is one of harmony." (<http://allmalaysia.info.com>)

¹⁰ A famous Chinese myth story that talks about DaYu regulate rivers and watercourse. Da Yu was one of the earliest emperors in China.

figure of bravery, whom dares to sacrifice himself in his opposition to evil. Furthermore Nata is portrayed to represent our faith to respect and cherish the elderly and our love for family and friends. These are the virtues of Chinese culture that I have set out to make reference to in my designs. I have simplified the design of the Nata character to a little child of modest proportions to allow for a sense of wittiness and naivety. The character of Nata is a suitable representation of the hero.

Design style

(1) Main style

My designs are based upon folk art, which are derived from traditional Chinese decorative painting. A central concern of this exegesis is to research and analyze how significance is generated and developed from decorative art in the contemporary context.

The graphic styling of the designs of the myth are based upon my research into a traditional use of geometry in Chinese folk art, which has subsequently been redesigned for application in contemporary context.

The key reference of my design style has been drawn from a Chinese decorative art style. The definition of decorative Painting is:

“Different from representational; stress strong decorative style. There are two sorts of decorative art: made from materials and techniques; painting works.” (Zhang, 1999, p. 13)

Decorative art is a broad area, which is known to include only two-dimensional forms. In this project I only focus on two-dimensional decorative painting as my key reference. More specifically, I am inspired by folk art in designing the characters of the story and decorative painting when composing the images for articulating my conceptual ideas.

The key creative essence of folk art is that the artists adapt ideas from their daily experience. The majority of folk artists are usually poorly educated and from a working class background. Their creations are unconscious, direct responses to their feelings and conceptions without any intention to achieve a certain goal. For example, there is a kind of folk song, which is very popular in the Chinese countryside. This kind of song called “Xin Tian You”¹¹ which comes from ShanXi¹² in China incorporates senses of rhythm

¹¹ “Xin Tian You” refers to ‘Hover in the sky’, which is a kind of folk song of Northern ShanXi.

in the songs, which are very simple and allow the singer to enact and improvise.

As most folk artists are not trained professionally, they usually express their emotions intuitively through simple forms. Folk artists seldom derive their work from life drawing; rather, they work from their emotional experience and interpretation. For example, Fig.9 is a Chinese folk art that presents the Chinese country daily life in a way that creates a very strong visual effect of happiness through the use of strong colours and the intense mood created by a use of compressed perspective. On the other hand, although the elements in the artwork are busy (with lots of trees, houses and people) the design is harmonically composed because of the use of repetition and simple outlines.



Fig. 9 Artist unknown. Folk Painting. 2003.

Another unique feature of folk art is the use of repeated geometrical shapes to form the whole or part of a figure or element. (Fig. 10, 11, 12) are artworks from paper cut, leather-silhouette showing (shadow play) and woodcut. These artworks are constructed through simple out lines, colours and repeating geometrical shapes.

¹² Shan Xi a province in NW China, which is famous for its folk art.



Fig. 10 Artist unknown. Paper Cut. 2003.



Fig. 11,12 Artist unknown. Chinese paper cut; Chinese traditional leather-silhouette. 2003.

The key features of folk art are represented through a figurative approach employing simple outlines, repeating forms or shapes. Chinese usually describe these features in folk art as a 'naïve' style.

In my project, I have applied these unique features and techniques from Chinese folk art to articulate my emotional inner feeling in narrating the myth and to signify a reference to the text of tradition Chinese folk art.

Zuo Han Zhong states the relationship between emotion and folk art in his book *The Chinese Folk Arts Modelling Catalogue*.

"Emotion and beauty are the souls of folk art. Beauty comes from emotion; emotion draws support from beauty." (Zhang, 1992. p.86).

The embodiment of strong and sincere emotion towards family and country in the work is central to the creative concept of folk art. From a continuing perspective, Chinese folk art usually demonstrates as mature thinking, which is underpinned by cultural background. Li Yanzu says in his book *An Introduction to Industrial Art*:

“During the feudal society, structure of Chinese economy was self-sufficient, organic and primitive. Chinese folk art is a way that expresses people to strive for the survivorship. Therefore the folk art was not only for entertainment, it was the wish for the better life. There are always optimistic spirit and intelligence behind every folk art.” (Li, 2002, p.95)

In my work, I have placed a strong emphasis on the emotional feeling of the love between mother, child and family and friends in the myth “Nata Cause Havoc in the East Sea”. Through these designs, I have sought to re-introduce the traditional virtues to children. I also incorporate naïve and a mature style of folk art in the characters for the easy interpretation by children. The simple visual form of naïve figures of the story is a key element in the design of this project for communicating both the emotion and visual narration to my target group in a contemporary context.

(2) Geometrical Form in Folk Art

Contemporizing the use of traditional geometrical form for graphic design application is an important part of this research project. In this chapter I discuss my approach to the use of the geometrical shapes in the representation of the myth.

Chinese artists started to use geometrical forms to express their feelings long before the context of writing existed. One of the earliest examples was Totemistic (or Totem adoration) in China 3000 years ago. Archaic Chinese were powerless when they suffered from calamity. The Totem appeared as

a simple and repeating geometrical form, which played a role that was believed to ease and protect people from suffering. It also symbolized the good wishes of the people. (Fig.13)

Geometrical shapes are also used to represent personality. A folk story in the Tang Dynasty has used geometrical form to represent personality, for example, the shapes of both squares and circles represent integrity and intelligence respectively.



Fig. 13 Artist unknown. *Chinese traditional totem*. 2004

The following folk art demonstrates the reference to geometrical forms in relation to emotion. Fig. 14 is a Chinese paper cut, entitled “Bringing in Wealth and Treasures”, which in essence is made of a circle and polygon with traditional Chinese money shapes inside a coin, which refers to wealth and treasure. (Fig. 14)



Fig. 14 Artist unknown. *Bringing in Wealth and Treasures*. Chinese paper cut. 2004.

Another example is “longevity”, which means long life. The circular shape and the endless strokes form the Chinese character of ‘longevity’. (Fig. 15)



Fig. 15 Artist unknown. *Longevity*. Print image. 5cm/4cm. 2003. Auspicious Design of China.

I have applied many geometrical shapes to create the emotional feeling of the myth “Nata Caused Havoc in the East Sea”. In Chinese culture, the lotus flower represents the new born. It also refers to the concept of holiness as used in Buddhist scriptures.

In the book *Auspicious Design of China* (2002), Yee Shui Qin presents the symbol of lotus and the relationship with Chinese culture.

"The character 荷 of 荷花 (lotus flower) is homophonic of Chinese characters 和 and 合. The flower symbolizes harmony, love and newborn life." (Ye. &Ye, 2002, p.92).

Traditionally, artists applied repeating lotus petals, which were very complex and implied the wish of giving birth to many new lives¹³. (Fig. 16)



Fig. 16 Artist unknown. *A boy's birth in the louts flower*. Traditional paper cut of lotus flower. 2004.

In my work, I have used many lotus petals to present the key episodes of the myth, such as birth and the re-born symbolises. As well I have applied the lotus motif to the design of the character and applied it on the costume and the weapons. I have kept the main features of the lotus flower, however I have simplified the form to suit the contemporary context. (Fig. 17,18)

¹³ In the agriculture society, manpower is the source of production and Chinese prefer to have many children in their family.

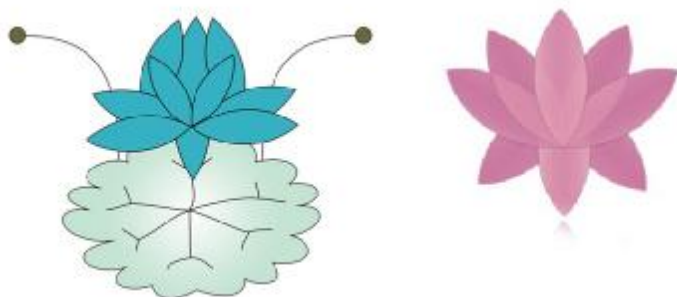


Fig. 17,18 Linda Sun. *My new simplified lotus design*. Digital image.10cm/10cm. 2003.

Creative Synthesis

In this chapter, I discuss the creative process related to the synthesis of conceptual idea and practice. I also discuss the colour, the geometrical forms and composition in relation to the design concept. The key goal was to integrate the traditional essence of decorative painting into the design and to develop a contemporised style for a storytelling event, with the embodiment of cultural virtue. The conceptual approach related to colour, form and composition, as outlined below. This has also been used as a conceptual and philosophical framework for application to the design of the ID document and the eight-panel display.

The practical work is produced in the digital workflow. I designed and hand sketched the elements and digitized them. I used the software CorelDraw and Adobe Photoshop on the computer to produce the final work. I printed all the work using ink jet technology. This allowed me to acquire a contemporary look with outstanding print quality.

The main part of this project is focused on a series of eight panels of artwork that is displayed in the format of a Ping Feng (Chinese screen). Ping Feng is a kind of Chinese traditional furniture that serves as a partition; it is also a medium for artwork presentation. Ping Feng is usually made up of a few long panels; when joined together, they form a freestanding movable partition. The content of the artwork is usually related to a series of images for story narration (Fig. 19), which suits the presentation of this myth as a storytelling event. The actual size of each panel in my project is 900 millimeters wide by 1700 millimeters long.



Fig. 19 Artist unknown. *Chinese screen*.2004.

During my research trip to China, I obtained a special traditional Chinese painting paper called Gao Li paper. The uniqueness of Gao Li paper is that it allows the artist to tint or draw on both sides of the paper. It had inspired me to explore ways of applying colour to both sides, resulting in a mixture of solid and semi-transparent colour effects. I drew all the backgrounds on Gao Li paper and digitized them by scanning. The combination of the free hand drawing style (background) together with the mechanical aesthetics and faultless precision of the computer-generated geometrical forms (foreground) is one of the unique features of the design aesthetics of my work. Working with these two approaches, the handmade and the digital meant that I had to shift between two ways of working; one (the digital) required a more rational approach and the other (the handmade) required a more intuitive approach.

The effect of constructing the backgrounds in a freehand, handmade approach and the foregrounds in a mechanical approach generated by the computer is to create what Chinese call 'Chi' (气), this can be described as the 'air' in the composition. Integrating the traditional art practices and aesthetics together with contemporary technologies and design approaches has underpinned my process and thinking throughout this project. (Fig. 20)



Fig. 20 Linda Sun. *Hand drawing of cloud on Gao Li paper*.30cm/45cm.2003

In designing my work, I have adapted the conceptual idea of Gu Kai Zhi (345-406) on Chinese painting, specifically on portrait painting. His theory has a dominant influence in the history of Chinese art. Gu Kai Zhi suggested that equal attention should be paid to both the faithful depiction of the external form of the figures as well as to the in-depth carving of their facial expression. He stated that the articulations of an aestheticism, whose theory is underpinned, are deeply rooted in the thinking. He referred the underpinned theory as the 'living spirit' behind the artwork. In my work, I refer to the cultural virtue as the living spirit of the myth. (Chen,1998, p.147)

Geometrical Composition

In my design I have used geometrical forms and shapes as the design elements and have also applied geometrical composition in the construction of atmosphere, mood and emotional feeling. In the following paragraphs I will analyze the visual construction of my eight panels. They do not follow the sequence of the story, as I prefer to fit them into the flow of theoretical discussion.

In the first panel "The Birth of Nata", I placed Nata's mother on the bottom right of the panel and a maidservant standing on the left top with the 'Nata sarcoma' in the centre. The aim of using this oblique-line composition was to express the nervous and confused feeling of everyone in Nata's family as he was born as a sarcoma: the disquieted servant in contrast with the uneasy but caring mother. (Fig. 21) I also incorporated the "S" composition/form with circle in this panel to link the family together to enhance the feeling of harmony. This was developed from the Taoist idea of Ying and Yang.¹⁴ Chinese also believe that when Ying and Yang exist in a

¹⁴ The Taoist thinking of Ying and Yang is associated with balance, harmony and perfection. The symbol of Taoism is composed through a curve inside a circle. The glyph composed of mutually balanced black and white areas refers to the physical world being composed of inseparable differences; every thing exists with every thing else. There can exist no Yang without Yin in it, nor Yin without Yang.

circle together, they have a strong vitality because Yin represents female and Yang represents male.



Fig. 21.1 Linda Sun. *The Birth of nata*. Digital image. 70cm/130cm. 2003.

Fig. 21.2 The Symbol of Ying and Yang

I applied the same idea in the seventh panel “Nata Reborn” (Fig. 22). Lotus flower and clouds to create the warm and intimate environment of the vitality of new life encircled the re-born Nata. A similar compositional approach is employed in “Birth of Nata’, although Nata was born as a big sarcoma, there is a harmonic relationship between Nata and his mother. These examples demonstrate the application of classical Chinese philosophy and aesthetics into the contemporary art and design context.



Fig. 22 Linda Sun. *Nata Reborn*. Digital image. 70cm/130cm. 2003.

In the second and eighth panels (Fig.23 and 27), I applied the oblique-line composition to achieve different effects. In the second panel 'Master Giving Presents', Nata, with a witty smile, stands in the hand of his kind and benevolent master. I intended to impose a relaxed and warm feeling between them through the oblique-line composition. The atmosphere is strengthened by the graphic elements of "S" shape ribbon and the Ying & Yang symbol. To further illustrate the intellectual character of the master and the wittiness of Nata, the scale between them has been deliberately emphasized. (Fig. 23)



Fig. 23 Linda Sun. *Master Giving Presents*. Digital image. 70cm/ 130cm. 2003.

I used a 'triangle' composition in the third and fourth panels, namely "People Praying for Rain" and "Nata Fighting with a Frog" (Fig. 24,25), to create the intense atmosphere of the episodes. In Fig 25, I placed the two dragons on the top to overpower the prayer and animals. This triangular composition establishes the tension between the powerless and resentful people of the town Chen Tang Guan and the brutal Dragons, thus creating a strong suppressed feeling against power.



Fig. 24 Linda Sun. Digital image, 70cm/ 130cm.2003.

In the fourth panel, the episode describes Nata fighting with the 'frog' soldier. It is intended to illustrate the fury of Nata about the long drought brought by the atrocious Dragon King. In this scene, I embed the courageous character of Nata through the scale, position and pose: the proportionally small Nata fighting against the large frog; the placement of Nata on top of the frog and the sun behind Nata; and the agile but elegant pose as compared to the clumsy frog. These elements are also composed in an acute triangular form. This composition gives a dynamic atmosphere against the evil. (Fig. 25)



Fig. 25 Linda Sun. *Nata fights with frog soldier*. Digital image, 70cm/130cm. 2003.

In the eighth panel entitled “Nata Caused Havoc in the East Sea” (Fig. 26), describes Nata fighting with four dragon kings¹⁵, I only designed two intertwined evil dragons displayed in an oblique-line to express a tense pressure behind the wrathful Nata who is fighting for justice. This simplified approach is just one of the means to co-temporize the presentation of the myth (Fig. 26). Same as the fifth panel, “Nata Fights with the Son of Dragon King”, I also used oblique-line composition to express the anger of Nata during fighting. (Fig.27)



Fig. 26 Linda Sun. *Nata Caused Havoc in The East Sea*. Digital image. 70cm/130cm. 2003.

¹⁵ The Dragon King: the God of Rain in Chinese mythology that governs the supply of water/rain



Fig. 27 Linda Sun. *Nata Fights with the Son of Dragon King*. Digital image. 70cm/130cm.2003.

Colour

Within individual race and culture, there are different interpretations of meanings in colour. Long Tan states his opinion between colour and politics and cultures in his article Colour Emotion.

"The formation of colours mental state of human is with the politics, culture, history, and ages, every kind of factor inseparable." (Long, 1996, p.34)

I believe that there are common consensus within the same culture and thinking about colour and its meaning. Therefore the consideration of colour is imperative in the process of re-introducing cultural virtue in this project.

The main colour in my designs was cyanine. One of the reasons was to represent the key locations/backgrounds in the myth, namely the sea and sky. Secondly, the dragon is believed to be one of the 'Four Guardian Spirits'¹⁶ and is in charge of the 'East' side. In colour, cyanine represents the East and Chinese usually described the dragon as the 'cyanic dragon' (青龙).

¹⁶The Guardian Spirit of the Direction in Taoism: the Cyanic Dragon , the White Tiger, the Scarlet Bird and the Black Warrior. (Zhao, 1989, p.134)

“Red” is also an important colour element in my work. Chinese people have a passion for red. Red has been used enormously not only in folk art, but in all kinds of Chinese arts. Red represents lucky, warmth and happiness and is usually used for celebrations. Red also symbolizes revolution and conflict. In the representation of personality, red refers to bravery and righteousness. When red is used with cyanine, the colour contrast expressed strong emotion.

Purple is another important colour in this myth. The colour purple symbolizes nobleness and power in Chinese culture. When equal proportions of the colour red and blue (which is close to cyanine) are mixed together, they create the colour purple. However if the proportion is unequal, the colour will be shifting between blue and red depending on the proportion. Therefore purple is a conflicting colour. Thus the colour purple is a mystic colour and the purple colour is the main hue of the eighth panel “Nata’s Suicide” (Fig.28) and expresses the grief and indignant emotion of Nata in confronting the evil Dragon King.



Fig. 28 Linda Sun. *Nata Suicide*. Digital image. 70cm/130cm.2003.

The Storytelling Event

I arranged a storytelling event to test the visual design of this project. The event occurred in the Auckland City Library on December 12, 2003. My initial intention was to establish it as a suitable location that is friendly, comfortable and relaxed for my target audience. After some sourcing and location research, I decided to use the children's area of the Auckland City Library. Through the library and friends I invited a group of about twelve Chinese children aged between six to twelve years to attend the storytelling. I decided to personally present the storytelling event to the children. This was an exciting and fulfilling experience. In the storytelling event, I presented the story and interacted with the children by casual discussion. Subsequently, I had asked the children some questions relating to the content of the myth. (Fig. 29,30)

I also arranged to professionally document the event on video format. There are two reasons for this video production. Firstly, the video would gather direct visual responses from the children. Secondly, I intended to distribute the video to appropriate organizations to promote the concept of the storytelling event in a contemporary context. This video was also included as part of the ID production.

I have noted some responses from my storytelling event:

- Children were interested in the idea of colour emotion, that there are unique emotional meaning represented by each colour
- The oversized design of the colour panels of the myth has provided a strong focus for myself as a storyteller to communicate. It is crucial in creating an enthusiastic atmosphere amongst the children.

- Whilst the storytelling continued, an intimate emotional connection started to build up between the characters of the myth and the children. This is encouraging for myself as a project designer and storyteller.
- The colouring of line drawing by children was the highlight of the event. Through the 'learning by doing' process of self-colouring, the teaching of virtue is advanced.
- There are a few points about the storytelling event, which need further consideration. It would be interesting to seek response from western children regarding the understanding and interpretation of Chinese virtue as they were brought up in a different cultural environment. I would like to extend the target group to a wider community such as churches, schools or community centres to involve a larger group of audience from different backgrounds. I would encourage the parents to attend the storytelling. This will stimulate and extend the education of virtue to a broader environment. I also believe that the hand out of the line drawing is effective and I should include additional designs of the line drawing for the audience to take away. This will foster the ongoing self-learning of virtue.



Fig. 29 KT Ho. Digital Photograph, 2003.



Fig. 30 KT Ho. Digital Photograph, 2003.

Conclusion

This exegesis forms a discourse around my position as a Chinese contemporary graphic designer who explores and investigates the possibility of new technological and conceptual approaches by incorporating the essence of traditional decorative art into contemporary design context.

In the project, I have investigated Chinese philosophy and mythology in relation to traditional virtue from different perspectives and the influence of aspects of Chinese art. Through a re-thinking process, I am able to construct my personal notions of the conceptual implications to re-introduce traditional virtue to contemporary Chinese children through contemporary design in a storytelling event.

I have analyzed the traditional decorative art and investigated folk art in terms of both conceptual and aesthetic concerns. I have developed my own notions in applying traditional ideas and aesthetics and integrated them into the contemporary design. The re-styling process has allowed me to contemporise traditional decorative art whilst preserving the cultural virtue in a contemporary design practice.

I believe that there are potentials in some areas to further the research. Some key areas are: the application of traditional materials in a contemporary design context; the integration of traditional ideas into contemporary design concept such as colour, geometrical shapes etc; the combination of traditional hand drawing art with computer-styled design and the exploration of using a contemporary story in storytelling events and the extension of the event to a wider community.

In conclusion, this project uses a unique method and design approach to develop an alternative style in contemporary art and design aesthetics with the inclusion of traditional cultural values, which metaphorically enriches the content of contemporary art and design practice. In addition, this project provides new creative ideas for the re-thinking of the proliferate use of mechanical computer style in contemporary design applications. I believe that the potential of decorative art, and Chinese art as a whole, has not been fully explored and developed by contemporary Chinese designers. My intention is that this thesis will serve as a case study for both academics and practitioners that can be used to revitalize and stimulate interest in traditional Chinese art and at the same time re-introduce cultural virtue into contemporary design practice.

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The ID Production: Panels Design



Panel 1
The Birth of Nata



Panel 2
Master Giving Presents



Panel 3
Nata Fighting with the
Frog Soldier



Panel 4
Nata Fighting with the son of
Dragon King

The ID Production: Panels Design



Panel 5
People Praying for Rain



Panel 6
The Death of Nata



Panel 7
The Reborn of Nata



Panel 6
Nata Caused Havoc in the
East Sea

The ID Production: Booklet

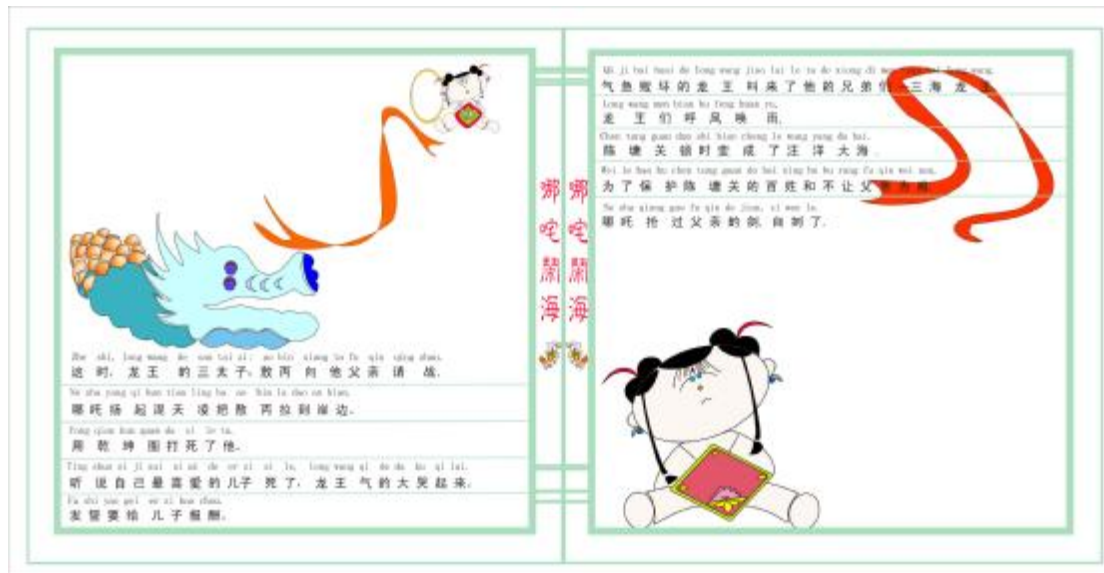


Page 1-2



Page3-4

The ID Production: Booklet



Page5-6



Page7-8

The ID Production: Book Cover & Envelop




Booklet Cover



Envelope

The ID Production: Fax Head



"Nata Caused Havoc in the East Sea" Story Telling Event

Yan Tai City Library

Fax : 0086-535 6904089

Fax

To:

From:

Fax:

Pages:

Phone:

Date:

Re:

CC:

Urgent

For Review

Pleases Comment

Please Reply

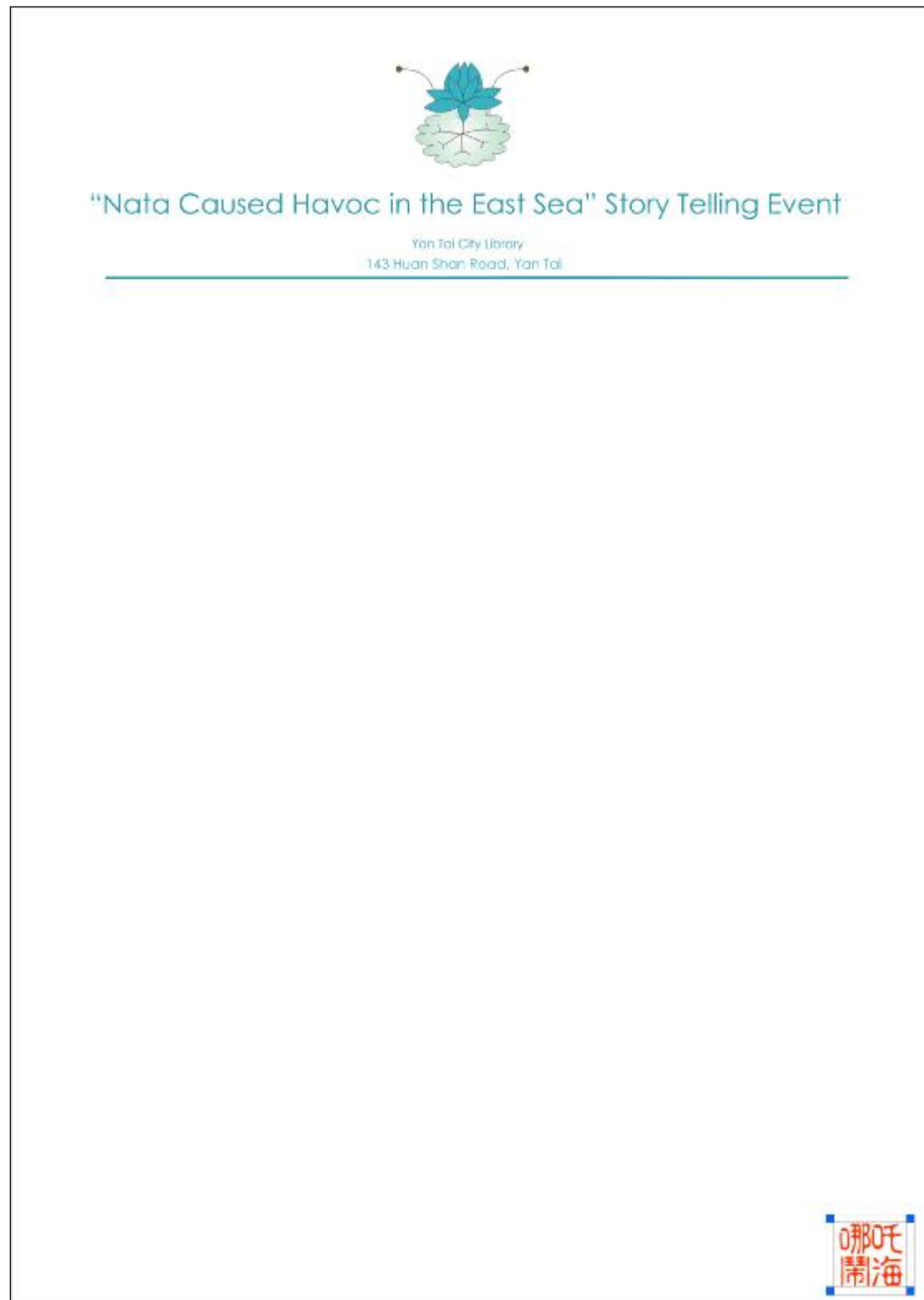
Please Recycle

Comments

哪吒闹海

Fax Head

The ID Production: Letterhead



Letterhead

The ID Production: Invitation Card



Invitation Card

The ID Production: Storyline Poster

Key Episodes of the Myth 'Nata caused Hovic in the East Sea'



The Birth of Nata

Nata is born a monster after his mother has been pregnant for three and a half years.



Master Giving Presents

Nata's master Tai Yi bestows upon him two weapons: Fu Yao Sua(a rope) and Qian Kun Quan(a fire ring)



People Praying for Rain

People pray for rain after a long drought that is maneuvered by the atrocious Dragon King.



Nata Fighting with the Frog Soldier

Nata fights with the frog soldier for saving his friends.



Nata Fighting with the Son of Dragon King

Nata fights with and kills Ao Bin, the son of the Dragon King.



The Death of Nata

Nata sacrifices himself to save the people living in the town.



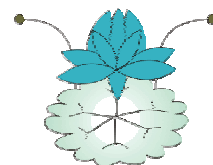
The Reborn of Nata

With the help of his master Tai Yi, Nata is reborn from a lotus flower.



Nata Caused Havoc in the East Sea

Nata causes havoc in the East Sea and defeats the evil Dragon King.



Storyline Poster

The ID Production: Storytelling Event



Storytelling Event

The ID Production: Storytelling Event



Storytelling Event

The ID Production: Exhibition

