

Concept of Shadow

The Exploration of Metaphors of Shadow in Contemporary Visual Communication

This exegesis is submitted to the Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Arts (Art and Design) in the year 2005

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 acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.”

Yan Xiao, 2005

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Abstract

This thesis explores shadow and its metaphorical representation in a Chinese-Western, cross-cultural context. It focuses on both the similarities and differences of the concept of shadow from two cultures to introduce a contemporary visual representation in art and design practice. It is a practice-based project and is presented in a book format.

My childhood memories are the key content to explore the metaphorical representation of shadow. The intangible memory is transcended through the Western visible and Chinese invisible shadow in the work. I, as an art and design practitioner, visualize and transcend the emotional experiences of my childhood into my photo-graphic¹ work. This explorative work of shadow is associated with presence and past. It is also a reflection of my personal identity, which profoundly influences the style of my practical work and the format of display.

These different emotional thoughts and experiences of my childhood have culminated into a visual gestalt representation. The book is regarded as an attempt to piece all the fragments of memory together – a physical document that represents the self-disclosure of my memories, emotions and a medium to communicate the visible

¹ In this thesis, the term 'photo-graphic' is used instead of photographic. This addresses my position as a graphic designer using both photography and graphics as the major media to infuse my concept into my practice.

& invisible shadows. Through exploring the underpinning metaphorical meanings of shadow, I transcend discourse into viscourse² – transforming theory into practice.

² Viscourse is a contemporary term for visual dialogue.

Aims

This practice-based research project focuses on the exploration of metaphors of shadow in visual communication in a Chinese and Western cross-cultural context. The main aim is to unfold a cross-cultural concept that would extend design discourse, viscourse and creative practice through a series of artworks.

The concept of shadow is chosen as the content because it embraces the unique aesthetic qualities of both cultures. The metaphor of shadow is a container to transfer the perception of my experience to visual art expression.

Locating myself between Chinese and Western cultures, the metaphorical essence of shadow is applied to contemporary visual representation in art and design practice. The key challenge of this thesis is to communicate the aesthetic thoughts of Chinese cultural representations that are unfamiliar to the dominating Western culture.

The artwork is intended to blend the concept from both Chinese and Western cultures to develop a confluent representation, rather than to provide solutions for resolving the gaps and differences among cultures. This thesis will potentially contribute to the cross-cultural dialectic discourses in the academic and professional practices of art and design disciplines. The project also attempts to explore alternative methodological approaches that merge the philosophical and visual concepts of two cultures to arrive at a confluent position in contemporary art and design practice. A series of photo-graphic works is created to represent this new position.

Introduction

Metaphor is a word or phrase that is applied to an object or action that it does not literally denote in order to imply a resemblance (Collins, 1987, p. 625).

Landay (2001) also defines metaphor as a figure of speech in which the comparison is implicit or phrased as an “imaginary identity”.

Ricoeur (2003) reveals that linguistic imagination creates and recreates meaning through metaphor. “Metaphor has a unique structure but two functions: a rhetorical function and a poetic function” (p. 12). My own focus on metaphor is that it is a device of the poetic imagination, which correlates with my field of vision to express self-emotion and self-experience. However, the imagination of personal perception for this research is based on the daily experience, which is personal and subjective.

Metaphor is a Greek word meaning “transfer”. The Greek etymology is from *meta*, implying “a change” and *pherein* meaning “to bear or carry”. In contemporary Greek the word *metaphor* also means *transport* or *transfer* (Metaphor, 2005). As Lakoff & Johnson (1980) suggest, “We understand experience metaphorically when we use a gestalt from one domain of experience to structure experience in another domain.” In this research, using memory of my own intellectual domain, I intend to explore the implicit and explicit attributes of shadow that

potentially unfold multiple layers of metaphorical representations. Shadow and metaphor have associated qualities of evoking and reflecting sensitivity of emotion, imagination, perception, conception and expression. These parallel qualities of shadow and metaphor provide the possibility for me to transform the intangible experience to be represented in visual form. Therefore, the metaphorical meanings of the shadow are the central focus of this research.

When discussing the relationship between metaphors and the visual field, Lakoff & Johnson (ibid.) say that:

We conceptualise our visual field as a container and conceptualise what we see as being inside it. The metaphor is a natural one that emerges from the fact that, when you look at some territory (land, floor space, etc), your field of vision defines a boundary of the territory, namely, the part you can see. Given that a bounded physical space is a container and that our field of vision correlates with that bounded physical space, the metaphorical concept 'visual fields are containers' emerges naturally (p. 30).

In this research, memory of my subjective emotion is conceptualised as shadow, which is defined in the visual field as container. In this sense, shadow is the container of my emotions and nostalgic feelings are the constituent elements of the metaphorical meaning. Thus, my emotions and nostalgic feelings will emerge naturally through the concept of shadow.

The exegesis is structured into five main parts:

Chapter One establishes my concept of shadow through analysing its metaphorical interpretations of both the West and Chinese. The central discussion is the unique aesthetic and philosophical essences of ‘visible and invisible’.

In **Chapter Two**, based on my established concept, I develop the conceptual background of the practical work with a focus on my childhood memory with my Grandma.

Chapter Three discusses the context of the research that acknowledges my position to develop a cross-cultural confluent research output.

Chapter Four illustrates the research approaches that I have employed and discusses the cyclic intellectual processes of perception, conception and expression.

In **Chapter Five**, I contextualise my practical work with a core focus on my emotions that underpin my practice.

Chapter One: The Concept of Shadow

Shadow is ephemeral, silent and subtle. We cannot touch or clutch it. It hovers somewhere between the physicality of 'real' and the non-physicality of 'unreal'. It is intangible. However, "the world of shadows tells us things about seeing that are invisible by the light of the sun" (Kentridge, 2001, p. 159). It always brings endless echoes of emotion and imagination. When I was a child, I loved shadow and explored shadows enthusiastically. This experience of playing with shadow is universal. "They [children] ask nothing, they do everything on their own, with a kind of abacus for their ideas, which is unknown for us" (Malaguzzi, 1990, p. 25). Children always make poetic expositions with shadow, such as "everything has a shadow, except ants", "it's me that makes the shadow born", "I think it comes from your shoes", "they are made of wind", "shadows are magic, you can not catch it and you can not feel it in your hand, and if you touch it you don't feel anything" (ibid., p. 31).



Figure 1. Stefano Sturloni, (1999).
Everything has a shadow, except ants. p. 32



Figure 2. ibid., p. 23

These primordial expositions seem naïve. However, it is these intrinsic enthusiastic responses to shadow that intrigue me and inspire me to further explore the memory of my experience as a child. This experience that has imprinted in my memory is profound and elusive. It evokes my nostalgic reminiscence.

This thesis reveals the emotional feelings of my childhood memories via the underpinning metaphorical representations of shadow. Shadow is fugitive and mutable. It could be considered to have indispensable essence to convey ambiguous meanings. Metaphor could be applied as agent to convey those ambiguous concepts. It could be used to transform the subtlety of shadows into the more tangible visual domain of a photo-graphic medium – to communicate my childhood memory. Western artists have investigated the metaphorical meanings of shadow in a wide range of art disciplines. Poets, writers and painters have often revealed emotional sentiments through metaphorical representations, plenty of which are associated with shadow.

Dolci (1990) suggests that:

It seems that shadows always come to mind when we want to express sensations of restlessness, deceitfulness, inseparableness or nothingness, because the shadow is often seen as the opposite of light and therefore a synonym for darkness (p. 17).

On the contrary, I believe shadow can evoke something subtle and warmhearted. Psalms 17:8, 91:1 and Isaiah 51:16 in the Holy Bible use various ways of saying that the Lord is the shadow that covers you. Different from

that, shadow in this thesis is about a poetic³ feeling of sentiment, a cherished memory of an individual and a root of one's belongings. As discussed earlier, shadow has the quality to evoke emotion, imagination, perception, conception and expression. This is a significant aspect that I embrace about the concept of shadow. It allows me to create poetic and nostalgic metaphors in visual art and design narration.

In this thesis, memory is my shadow. It serves as a conceptual site of performance, whereas my practice is a physical site of performance. When commenting on a classical Chinese literature YingYing Zhuan, Yu (2000) suggests that: "... the text is laden with layers of other texts; the poems and letter initiate... Not only are the text's texts performative, moreover, but also they are performed... Such acts of performance cannot but call attention to the fact that their medium itself is a site of performance" (p. 184). Through conceptual (memory) and physical (practice) performance, I unfold an open-ended consideration of the multiple layers of metaphorical interpretation and representation of shadow.

³ Poetic is a complex idea. In the exegesis, I do not intend to engage in the detailed discussions of the concept of poetic. However, I acknowledge that there are diverse metaphorical meanings of poetic between different cultures that require further in-depth exploration. "Poetic means that allusion to human feeling, thoughts and minds for Chinese painting" (Hung, 1996, p. 21). I would consider that in this thesis, poetic is the emotional feeling of an individual that is influenced by one's own philosophical and aesthetic thoughts.

Western Concept of Shadow

In a Western context, Pliny (23 A.D. – 79 A.D.) is arguably one of the first who described the meaning of shadows by using myth (Stoichita, 1997). According to Pliny, when painting first emerged, shadow was part of the absence/presence theme (absence of the body; presence of its projection). Stoichita discusses Pliny's assertions that "it would therefore seem likely that artistic representation in general can be traced back to the primitive shadow stage" (ibid., p. 12). Shadow offers a rich scenario that is able to provoke a chain reaction in the mind of the readers or viewers, ending up with openness to conjecture. Pliny's concept of shadow acts as transcendent and enlightening meaning from the very beginnings of human history.

Stoichita (ibid) summarised that:

The primary purpose of basing a representation on the shadow was possibly a turning point of it into a mnemonic aid – of making the absent become present. Another possible function stems from the fact that the image/shadow is somebody's image; it both resembles and belongs to the person whose image it is.
(p. 15)

Through shadow, the absent becomes present.

Stoichita also discussed the relationship between shadow and identity by using another story – *Peter Schlemihl*.⁴

The shadow is priceless only as a substitute for the soul. For the one as much as for the other, it is through the shadow that a being is determined, where his identity is defined. To sell your shadow therefore, is the same as losing your identity: one moment you are 'somebody', the next you are 'nobody' (ibid., p. 171).

Our shadow roots our solid body by our feet and they are “the contact with the ground” (ibid., p. 175). In this aspect, ‘shadow’ is the link between our bodies and the ground, which is ‘the identity’. The reflection of my personal identity – ‘the ground’ is my cultural background that I grew up with and shadow acts as an agent of bonding.

In Western paintings, shadow is used as the metaphor, such as “the Surrealists that exploited the effect of shadows to enhance the mood of mystery they sought” (Gombrich, 1995, p. 26). In the painting *Melancholy and Mystery of a Street* (Figure 3) by Giorgio de Chirico, the shadow in the street scene was explored as the hyper-realised revelation of utter human emptiness.

⁴ In the story, a poor young man Schlemihl exchanges his shadow with the devil for a magic purse. After the exchange, though he is incredibly rich, he is rejected by others, because he does not have his root and identity without shadow. According to the old tradition, someone without shadow is just like a vampire.



Figure 3. Giorgio de Chirico. (1914).
Melancholy and Mystery of a Street

Until today, physical shadow is still widely applied and expressed in the Western art field. Campbell (2003, p. 107) discusses Texas painter Hallmark's paintings (Figures 4 & 5) that "shadow is an open-ended visual language". By integrating shadow with the paintings, Hallmark can explore "the beauty of life's surface" and imply "the endless narrative" in his paintings.



Figure 4. Hallmark, G. *Shadows*



Figure 5. Hallmark, G. *Hecho En La Sombra*

I have applied a similar idea to my work (Figures 6 & 7). The shadow in my work acts as a witness of the time, it adds pleasure into my mundane life. Since shadow itself is transparent, it is an open-ended visual language to explore my memory. The artwork will be discussed in Chapter Five.



Figure 6. Xiao, Y. (2005)



Figure 7. *ibid.*

Demos (2003, p. 149) studied people in his book “Shadows of Silence”. He captured black or translucent figures, even silhouettes as the shadow.

Marangopoulos (2003) suggests:

These dark shapes survive as shadowy memories of some unbearable, ancient pain – a pain that is as old as original sin. With his dark images, he records the struggle between the angelic and the demonic elements present in man. This struggle leaves scant visible traces in the material world of light, traces of dreams, struggles, pain, desire; shadows of a hidden life within our existing one.

Demo's photographs (Figures 8 & 9) guide the viewer through the relentless shadows and the appalling silence to introspectively consider the secret of life and death. His intensive and contrasting application of shadow is unique and provoking.



Figure 8. Demo, J. (2002).
Shadows of Silence



Figure 9. *ibid.*

Lewis (2005) describes Caffery's work as "shades of mystery and shadow". Her evocative photographs are poetic stories that capture the mystery and spirit of the people and places that she encounters. Caffery is conceptually prepared, and patient enough to wait for the right moment to capture the emotions of her subjects and their environment. This enables her to more honestly convey the obscurity of people's lives and their spiritual world.



Figure 10. Caffery, D. F. (2002). *The Shadows*



Figure 11. *ibid.*

Both artists have used monochromatic photography. John Demos' shadows are living shadows carrying intensive traces of dreams, struggles, pain and desires. Caffery's work conveys mysteries and sufferings, with a sense of sparkling lights in everyday tribulation. She said she has to face the challenge "that is always to balance the emotions of struggle, tenderness and hope so that it shines through in a body of work" (*ibid.*, 2005). The shadows in these two artists' work are not a physical entity; they transcend layers of emotional metaphors, embraced with powerful open-ended narratives and emotions. Although the philosophical and aesthetic concepts in their work are different, they have parallel concepts about shadow, which does not refer to the physicality of the shadow. In their work, the invisible shadow acts as a conceptual tool. Their ideas of shadow have parallel reference to the

Chinese notion that shadow does not physically exist. Shadow is used as an aesthetic concept to convey visual and philosophical meanings. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chinese Conceptual Shadow

Shadow used in Chinese painting is ambiguous and ineffable. Traditional Chinese painting does not usually present shadow with the same forceful impact and immediacy as what Western painting usually does. Traditional Chinese painters are inclined to 'do away' with shadow in their work. This is much influenced by the stroke system in Chinese calligraphy. However, it does not imply that they never apply shadows to their work.

Zhang Qing [张晴] (2004) discusses the development of Chinese ink brush, suggesting that, "...the painter of Shu [蜀], in the Five Dynasties Period, observed the shadow that was projected on wall under the moonlight and was inspired by the natural transcended forms of the 'project shadow' of bamboo."⁵ (Figure 12) The transcended forms – 'ink and wash'⁶ are ambiguous and do not represent the realistic physical visual form. Such philosophical approaches had influenced the development of aesthetics of Chinese painting. In a way, the application of ink by brush tends to represent an individual painter's emotional experiences and not the physical visual form of a subject or an object. In addition, the simplistic approach in colour also allows the painter to focus on the

⁵ The original Chinese text is as follows:

到了后蜀，有人观察月夜中竹影投射在纸窗上，恰似自然造化之水墨，从中得意而成墨竹画之传统，舍形而求逸笔草草之。

宗白华 (1999: p. 98) 认为：中国人画兰竹，舍弃一切背景，甚至于捐弃色相，参考月下映窗的影子，融会于心，胸有成竹，然后拿点线的纵横，写字的笔法，描出它的生命神韵。

⁶ 'Ink and wash' is a unique method of applying ink with brush in Chinese painting. Complemented with watery subtle colour (instead of bright colour), it gives a bland aesthetics for the manifestation of painting (Zhuang & Nie, 2000, p. 61).

communication of mind through rhythmic calligraphic strokes (usually called the dance of brush). For centuries, these established philosophical approaches have influenced the concept of shadow in Chinese art practice.



Figure 12. Zheng, B. Q. [郑板桥], (Qing Dynasty). *Bamboo*

Xu Jiang [许江]⁷ (2004) suggests that, “‘Shadow’ in Chinese culture is a poetic concept and it is transferable and transcendent. It is commonly applied in literature, poetry, odes and painting. Shadow is used to reflect the poetic

⁷ Xu Jiang [许江] is the professor from China Academy of Art. He discussed shadow in ‘Shanghai Biennale’ (2004) and the original Chinese text is as follows:

中国的古人们正是深明“影”互为转换的意义，才将如此众多的意向赋名为“影”，并在文学、诗词、歌赋、的界域中以影来影射—自然与心神的关系、笔墨与气韵的关系、可见与可不见的关系、情与景的关系。

world that is composed of the relationships of the ink and brush with vigour [笔墨与气韵的关系], visible with invisible [可见与不可见的关系], blending of Qing with Jing [情与景的关系]”.

The idea of ‘ink and brush with vigour’ has parallel implication to that of Zhang Qing’s idea about the transcended forms –‘ink and wash’. It focuses on the communication of mind through rhythmic calligraphic brush strokes. However, this idea is not my central focus in this research.

The concept of Qing [情] and Jing [景] is also a unique essence of Chinese thoughts on aesthetics. Qing [情] in Chinese refers to the aspect of the affections of inner emotion and could be literally interpreted in English as ‘passions’. In this thesis, I consider Qing as the ‘emotions’ of an individual. The compound meanings of Qing Xu [情绪] refer to ‘feelings’ stirred by some particular objects or experiences. Jing [景] has a literal meaning of ‘scene’ in English. In Chinese thought, Jing represents complex layering of representations, not only a particular scene of the physical world. Jing often refers to a scene perceived from a particular place at a particular time, thus implying the ‘point of view’ of a subject. “While Jing implicitly locates the perceiver, the term Jing refers specifically to that aspect of the external world, which is independent of a subjective attitude toward it” (Owen, 1992, p. 585). Jiao Juyin⁸ [焦菊隐] (Su & Zuo, 2003) summarised the Chinese aesthetic concept of Qing Jing

⁸ Jiao Juyin (1905-1975) was one of the two most influential directors of Chinese spoken drama; he integrated Western realistic drama with the techniques and aesthetic principles of traditional Chinese opera.

[情景] as the “fusion of emotion and scene” and as a method to create “poetic feeling of the world” to attempt to integrate realism and the poetic world. The concept of Qing Jing is a key aesthetic thought that I am referring to in this thesis. It enables me to explore and express my personal memory to evoke a nostalgic and poetic state of mind through the metaphorical representation of shadow.

Furthermore, the Chinese philosophical concept of shadow is a subjective interpretation of the organic nature of a scene or an object, rather than the representation of objective likeness. This is usually referred to as ‘in favour of shadow and renounce the shape’ [舍形而悦影] in Chinese. This aesthetic concept of invisible shadow is a distinctive core of Chinese painting tradition. In other words, the painters focus on how to express their own inner feelings through their work, rather than attaining the likeness of the object.

Taylor (2003) summarises Lentridge that “may be the shadow of an apple can tell us something about ‘apple-ness’, which the apple itself can no longer reveal. So this is a meditation on representation, on art, on the image and image-maker” (p. 53). In a way, Taylor believes that the internal quality of an object cannot be fully revealed in its physical form representation. He uses shadow to represent the internal quality, which requires our deeper thoughts to explore. Lentridge’s idea of the representation of the object is beyond physical entity. This has parallel meaning and common consensus between Chinese and the West.

As an example of the Chinese concept of shadow, Figure 13 (a partial view) is a typical ‘poetic landscape’ of misty hills and lakes by one of Southern Song scholar painters,⁹ Xia Gui [夏圭]. He only used ink and wash and applied sketched lines to construct the landscape painting. The bland visual form conveys a sense of tranquility and elegance. This work is an obscure representation of the artist’s apprehension. The artist leaves a dominant proportion of ‘empty space’ to suggest hills, mist and water, rather than to paint the visual elements explicitly. It blends emotion with scene. “The expression of emotions is through the depiction of the scene” (Wu, 1982) [吴冠中]. Through the twilight scene, the painter conveys a melancholic sentiment of the returning fishermen. This painting is a typical example of embedding the layers of implicit meaning of invisible shadow that underpins the Chinese aesthetics of shadow.

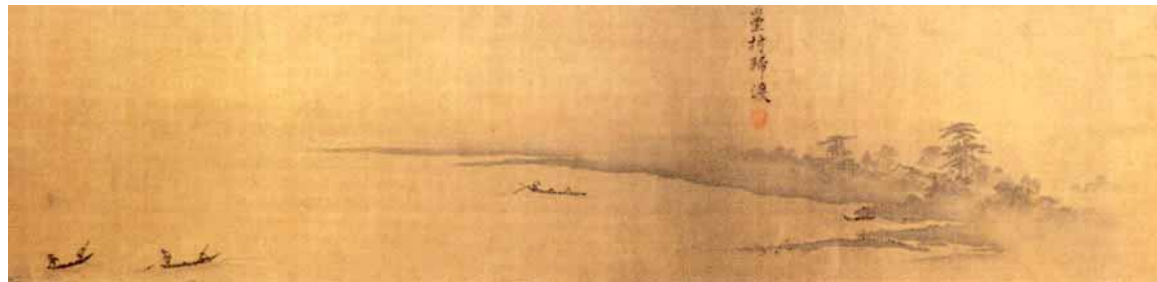


Figure 13. Xia, G. (13th Century). *Thatched Hut*

⁹ Scholar painters did not seek to draw the minute details of objects. Rather, their attention was focused on how to express their own feelings through what and how they drew. (Zhuang & Nie, 2000, p. 61)

In this sense, the metaphors of shadow in this research are transferable and shuttle between visible and invisible, presence and absence, present and past, and linger with cultural imprint. The shadow is an agent that triggers a state of nostalgia and poetic sentiment. It is the link between scene and emotion, evoking the imagination between memory and everyday life.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Background of the Work

Shadow is my memory. It holds the root of my childhood with my Grandma. The shadow has profound meanings to me. My father served in the army for approximately twenty years in a remote city. My mother was occupied with her work and study. She rarely had the time to look after my elder brother and myself. In my preschool time, I lived with my grandparents, away from my own family. With my grandparents, I hardly had the chance to go out and play with other children as it was unsafe. My Grandma has bound feet and could only walk for a short distance very slowly. Most of the time, I stayed inside the house clinging to Grandma. Shadow was my playmate for most of the time. In my memory, shadow is fascinating and intriguing. It keeps moving and changing in shape. It changes after a breeze passes by. It creeps from one wall and seeps through another. I played with shadows, scrutinised them brushing the wall or the ground. I treaded on the twisting and tangling shadow, and created another shadow. Shadow is my intimate friend, the same as my Grandma. It is the root of my connection with the past and it evokes a visceral sense of nostalgia.

Brought up and educated in China, now I am studying in a Western country. The cultural in-between-ness has broadened my vision. However, as a foreigner and spoilt adult in a Western country, my memory haunts me all the time. Educated by Chinese tradition as a self-effacing person, I do feel it is difficult to get involved with the new environment. I feel alone and homesick. I am always triggered by the tiny details of shadow, even a fleeting one. I resonate with shadow deeply and emotionally, as those timeless scenes of shadow evoke latent memories of

my loved ones, my intimate friends and the happy time with them. Even now, shadow always evokes a transient feeling of my memory.

Marcus (1995) suggests that, “our senses have a way of reconnecting us, without warning, to memories of times and places long ago, and in particular too memories of childhood (p. 17)”.

She explains it further that:

We hold on to childhood memories of certain places as a kind of psychic anchor, reminding us of where we came from, of what we once were, or of how the physical environment perhaps nurtured us when family dynamics were stained or the context of our lives fraught with uncertainty (ibid., p. 18).

I have been living a drifting life style. I am fortunate that my childhood memory was tranquil and light-hearted. In this way, I rummage through my past memory experiencing consciously or unconsciously, and depositing it as my spiritual treasure to tell a story. Exploring the past relationship between Grandma and me is critical to this project. I was her shadow, and she had profound influences on me. Until today she soothes me with her whisper and her watchful eyes in this volatile world.

This body of research intends to imbue the multiple layers of metaphorical meanings of shadow that are rooted from my memory and identity. It invites reflections on the absence/presence of my granny, who has passed away.

She overshadows me. The essential aspects of my life experience with my Grandma form the main narration – the closeness, the affection and the bonding between us.

The memory is misty. I miss my Grandma but I am not so grieved about her death. On the contrary, I heartily believe that death was a relief to her. In my memory, she was always sick. Her sickness was brought about by the tribulation of everyday life, the bound feet, the loss of her beloved children and the poverty. Her inner world is mysterious to me. She never talked about her earlier life, especially the time before I was born. My understanding about her is shadowy. However, I am sure that she loved me. My memories of Grandma always imbue me and stimulate my emotions. These are imprinted in the mundane scenes of my everyday life. Grandma is always present, in who she was, in the shadow of the old house, in the vivid memories that brought her close to me, and the objects I grew up with as a child, in the trace of the past time. All these memories have been transcended and rooted deep inside of me.

The most resounding place of my childhood is the house that we lived in together. I still feel strongly and emotionally adhered to it and its surroundings. The house was sitting there solidly. During the summer, the flourishing and rustling leaves covered the entire wall; the warm and sparkling rays of sunlight constantly whirled about and dwindled away, thus projecting tangled shadow on the house mixed with the intensified scent of plants and earthy soil. I am so bonded with this now demolished home.

Not unlike what Priscilla (1995), one of Marcus' interviewees has described:

Just thinking about the house is putting some sort of vibration in my body... It had very strong roots for me. And in that house too... there was a rootness about the furniture... as a child, I suppose that I felt tremendous security from all of these things which had been around for a while (ibid., p. 34).

Those things that I used, saw, smelt and touched in my childhood are still alive inside me. I still keep some of my child-mate objects and enjoy a strong sense of 'continuity' and 'safety' from them. Bol (2000, p. 201) believes "emotions are responses to things that impinge upon the self; they are of the self but are orchestrated by the thing. When 'things' gain the ability to stir us, they rouse passions." My exploration of concept of shadow is rooted from the Chinese concept of Qing and Jing, which is transferable and invisible, and interweaves with the Western ideas of visible shadow.

In my photo-graphic work, all the environmental experiences of childhood (for instance, spaces, objects, architecture and furniture) are my personal 'library'¹⁰. This is a library that evokes and nudges me to explore the profound state of nostalgia. It is an enjoyable & pleasant bittersweet experience of personal remembrances; it is a

¹⁰ Our memories and dreams are our personal "library"; they can be powerful motivations and inspirations, rich resources for later creative thinking. (Marcus, 1995, p. 39)

continuity of my past into my present. It is this nostalgic lingering remembrance of my childhood experiences that I intend to create and transcend visually and tangibly through the practical photo-graphic work.

Owen (1985, p. 40) discusses the poetic of Chinese poetry suggesting that:

The poem embodies an experience of the world in historical time is a charming illusion, but an illusion nevertheless... He [the poet] has been changed by it [experience]; he is different from what he was while he was 'in' the experience... The poem is — unfortunately, by necessity — an artficed construct. The poems we have read are distinguished by being artifacts, which aspire to cast the illusion of immediate experience of the world.

In this thesis, the conceptual metaphors of my memory linger between the West and Chinese. It could be argued that my ideas are arbitrary. However, it is the arbitrariness that is challenging for both the creator (I) and the viewer. I would consider that the act of my practice is a spontaneous reflection of my memory. It is not a charming illusion. I might have been changed by my experience. My perception about my experience with Grandma might shift from time to time, however, deep inside myself, the bonding and intimacy I had with Grandma remain as they were. This is what is intriguing about the metaphors of shadow in this thesis. The multiple layers of open-ended meanings will change from time to time and from person to person. The metaphorical representations are always temporal and never anchor at any fixed meanings. This is what I believe is the unique poetic essence of Chinese aesthetics that I intend to explore in my work.

Chapter Three: Context of Research

Cross-cultural Communication

The main theme of this thesis focuses on the aesthetic thoughts of the Chinese cultural representations that might be enigmatic to the Western culture. The physicality of the content of my practice such as the landscape, architecture, and the people are twined together with a personal passion for my cultural identity. The Chinese symbolic representations are inevitably elusive. However, the experiences I want to share with viewers are not those traditional symbolic meanings, but a state of nostalgia, metaphor and belief that stir our consideration of culturally diversified representation.

Those ambiguous Chinese aesthetic principles, which are based on unique Chinese philosophy, are not easily accessible for the Western culture. In fact it is a universal challenge for all cultures. How do we transmit the message from culture to culture? How do we appreciate the arts and aesthetics of other cultures? In a globalised environment that facilitates easy access to information and resource, the study of art and design aesthetics has encouraged interdisciplinary and cross-cultural dialectic discourses, thus addressing the need of a balanced harmonic communication across cultures. I do not intend to explore and provide solutions to the gaps for resolving the differences amongst cultures. I agree with Maquet's idea that human has "analogous feelings, emotions, and processes occurring in other's minds" (1986, p. 29). Considering this, emotion is universal and

could be applied as the constituent element to the shadow as 'container', as suggested in this project, for communicating across cultures.

I agree that Chinese traditional art concepts have their unique aesthetics that not only are unfamiliar to the dominating Western culture but also to the majority of contemporary Chinese people. The visual symbols stand for a range of 'messages' that are influenced by the philosophical background and the subjectivity of artists, therefore it creates ambiguous interpretations between the artists and the viewers. The Chinese concept of invisible shadow and its aesthetics in this thesis aims to use 'scene' to evoke the emotional resonance of viewers, and to share my own experiences. [借景写情]

Maquet (1986, p. 159) suggests:

What does the artist intend to say is not the right question. The right question is, what experience does the artist want to express and share. He also comments that: Beholders invest the visual object with meanings related, in part, to their past experience. Because of this rooting in individual experience, symbolic meanings attributed to the same object by different beholders are bound to be different... However, symbolic variety is limited. The commonalities in our experiences are many (ibid., p. 157).

I refer to an accumulation of experiences that are kept in my memory. This serves as a repository for my project. Although individual's emotional experiences are influenced by his/her culture, human emotion also has universal

qualities that will bridge across culture. Therefore, though my research is based on Chinese philosophic concepts, it applies also to a globalised Western context. I believe that through the metaphorical representation of my emotion and my memory, which in a sense is universal, the work is able to bridge the cultural barriers.

Because of the ambiguity and obscurity of metaphorical representation, the research ends up with openness. The practical work intends to provide my own experience with open-ended multiple layers of meaning to trigger the viewers to respond and integrate with their own. This will potentially allow for the development of confluent representations and interpretations.

Harmony but Not Assimilation

Today, we all see the influences and passage of so many other cultures and diversity. Following that, “the conflict between the need to explore other cultures and the need to anchor oneself, between innovation and tradition, is important for each culture and individual” (Lijn, 2002). The global stereotyping of lifestyle has a gradual effect on cultural assimilation, such as in fashion and architecture. Ikko Tanaka, a contemporary Japanese designer, suggests that through free and open communications, unique and distinctive cultures can be nurtured (Kan, 1998, p. 7). This thesis is situated in a cross-cultural context. The ultimate goal of my photo-graphic artwork is to achieve a harmonious outcome. The Chinese philosophic belief of ‘harmony but no assimilation’ [和而不同] “emphasises co-existence of different cultures occupy a dominant position” (Fang, 2003). The

philosophic belief suggests that cultures coexist, keeping their unique stems. Chinese culture as exemplified in the arts and applied art is not a pure tradition. Professor Jin¹¹ used Chinese culture as an example, “Chinese culture is open-minded; it is wide-ranging, developing and absorbing. The flourishing of Buddhism in the Sixth Century probably is the earliest example. Until today, both the indigenous religion – Taoism and Buddhism coexist in harmony”. This is a significant aspect in my research. I need to nurture my own intellectual repository through studying and working in a Western culture. Thus I am able to establish a harmonious and confluent cultural belief of my own.

Cheng (1989) compared both the ancient Greek notion of harmony¹² in music and food with that of the ancient Chinese. He suggests that both cultures share the same belief that harmony results from different elements being related in an appropriate way to give rise to a totality of wholeness, which leads to the experience of agreement and unity. (p. 228)

Kan Tai Keung, renowned contemporary designer in Hong Kong, advocates this principle. His work

¹¹ Professor Jin is one of my interviewees. He is the director of Humanities College, Shanghai Teachers University.

¹² Chen (ibid., p. 230) suggests that: Conflict may be resolved into harmony when the conflicting elements evolve into different things or different states of their existence through a natural force, which integrates or unifies them into a totalistic system. In this case there is still harmony, as there is still a whole difference, which completes the whole and complements each other.

(Figures 14 & 15) is internationally recognised, yet it is bounded deeply with Chinese cultural philosophy and aesthetics. His work preserves his own identity through the contemporised Chinese cultural thoughts and aesthetics.



Figure 14. Kan, T. K. (1998).
Selected Posters by Kan Tai Keung : sentiments and harmony. p. 87



Figure 15. *ibid.*, p.21

As a Chinese, I value the wealth of both Western and Chinese cultural essences. Although there are gaps between cultures, I am suggesting to nurture a confluent position through art and design practice. I explore and interfuse the conceptual essences of shadow of both cultures into my work. These are interwoven, transformed and

communicated through a series of photo-graphic visual practical work. The outcome will potentially develop and achieve a harmonic, balanced and globalising representation.

Chapter Four: Research Approaches

The nature of my research is an experimental exploration that is rooted in practice. It could be considered as a creative-production research. Heuristic approach is applied for the exploration of self-adjustable methods.

Mousatakas (1990) states that:

Heuristic comes from the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning to discover or to find. It refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of further investigation and analysis. ...Heuristic processes incorporate creative self-processes and self-discoveries.

Heuristic can combine a range of various methods applied for art and design research. There is no exact formula or solution, thus it is suitable for the open-ended nature of art and design research. This duality of mind-mapping maintains an openness that constitutes the expressive and communicative functions of artistic creation. Since each process of the research content is inter-related, I have designed a cyclic framework that resembles the Chinese Taiji symbol.

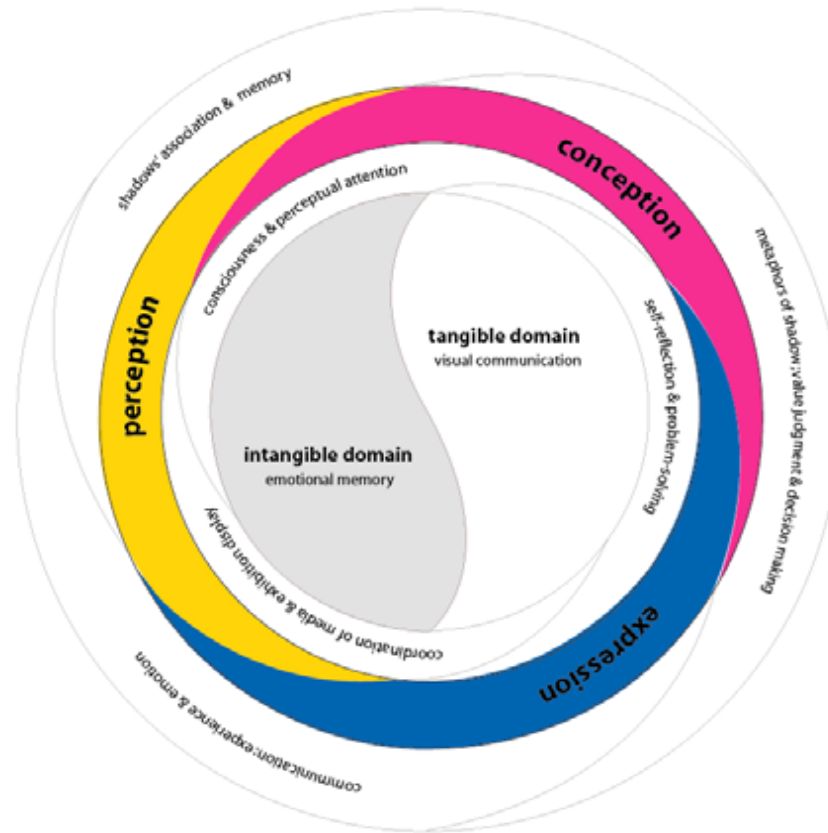


Figure 16, Xiao, Y. (2005). *Analytical and Conceptual Method Wheel*

I have designed an analytical and conceptual method wheel (Figure 16) to illustrate how the intangible domain (emotional memory) is transferred to the tangible domain (visual communication). This framework forms the development of my research approach in this thesis.

It is inspired by Ho. He is a current practicing artist and tertiary educator from Hong Kong. He studied and explained the relationships between perception, conception and expression with his own design project '*The Perceptual Body*'¹³ (Figure 17).

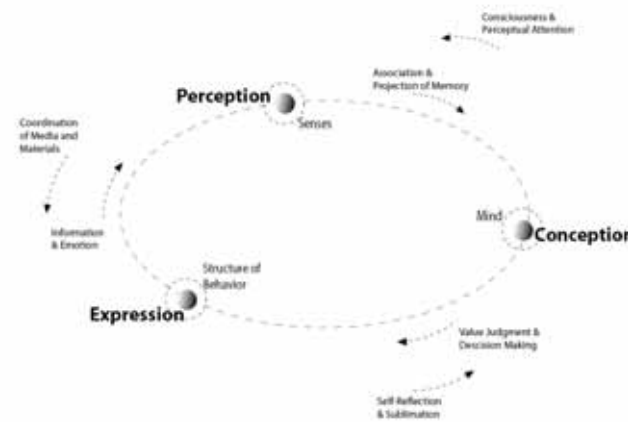


Figure 17. Ho, S. K. (2003). *The Perceptual Body*.

¹³ Through exploring his own senses and bodily perception, Ho's artwork provides a starting point for him to rethink the essence of artistic expression.

Ho argues that:

Perception becomes consciousness and all kinds of meaning are formed which embody the function of the human Mind. The mind includes rational 'Thinking', 'Intuition' and 'Belief' [which] together form our conception. In artistic creation, this is the process of incubation and emergence of ideas (2003).

In this project, 'Thinking', 'Intuition' and 'Belief' are from the experience and reflection of my childhood memory. Association and memory through various phenomena form perception of the shadow. At perception stage, 'Intuition' acts more like the library, where we search for information and where my ideas come from. It requires accumulation of knowledge from everyday experience. However, it is also subjective. It is based on personal judgment, life experience and personal emotion. The phenomena of shadows and their association with memory constitute the main part of perception, which incubate emerging ideas and insights for art creation.

The stage of conception is the process I encode my memory into. I explore the shadow through metaphor. The perceived physical shadow image is transferred to become my memory by metaphor as an agent. In order to stay on the focused conception, I use "Value Judgement" suggested by Ho, "meaning an assessment that reveals more about the values of the person making the assessment than about the reality of what is assessed" (Value Judgement, 2005), and "Decision making" to build up the order from the chaotic raw information. According to Stephen Scrivener(2005): "issues, concerns and interests change throughout, it is difficult to ignore the

decision-making process”. Likewise, this research involves a decision-making process. I have to judge particular issues, concerns and interests. Value judgement and decision making are rational processes to inform and establish conception of ideas. During the journey of the research, with the extending vision and knowledge, the focus of the concept is being continuously shifted and refined. This trial-and-error process enables me to solve problems and rationalise my concepts. When the conception expands, shifts, or renews, quite often it affects perception accordingly. Therefore, “Perceptual Attention” guides me to select the information consciously and carefully.

Schön (1991) suggests that “tacit knowledge” can rationalise decisions and direct the course of the research. It refers to the accumulated knowledge of both from daily experience and constant art practice. My position of “tacit knowledge” is similar to the Chinese notion of “intuitive mastery” (Pohl, p. 138), which requires the artists’ constant practice of the craft to gain new knowledge. Furthermore, classical Chinese art practice suggests that ongoing practice of the craft and imitating notable artist’s work will enlighten the artist to attain “intuitive mastery”. Due to the nature of this particular project, which is a visual representation of memory, it depends on my life experiences and comprehension of practice. Therefore, my experience and practice have provided both the conceptual and practical platform for this research. Self-reflection and problem-solving are typical self-adjustable methods of heuristic approach: the experimental practice has to be re-examined repeatedly to resolve the problems. Thus doing, these processes rationalise my conception. Another form of artistic

self-reflection mentioned by Ho is the deliberate detachment from consciousness to allow the emergence of sub-consciousness, for the possible capturing of mental glimpses. The mental glimpses may appear randomly or irrationally. This also provides potentials for developing new insights.

During the 'expression' process, my concerns are... how do I communicate and transcend my own conception, which yields to personal experience and emotion? How is it possible to achieve an effective articulation of my conceptual ideas? When viewers encounter my work, it is an *interaction between* viewers' perception and my expression (as creator). Furthermore, the viewer also starts his/her cyclic processes of perception, conception and expression in response to my work.

According to Rodriguez (2003):

The making of art includes the activity of looking at the work and discovering forms in it: the artist becomes a spectator of her own work. As the role of the creator comes more and more to resemble that of the perceiver, the difference between the artist and her audience becomes more permeable, more flexible (p. 268).

These cyclic processes are ongoing and interactive. Thus, the multiple layers of open-ended meanings will change from time to time and from person to person. In this sense, the metaphorical representations are always temporal and never anchor at any fixed meanings.

Research Processes

Conceptual Research

The research of concepts composes four major areas; namely, the concept of shadow, metaphor, memory and narration. The research is started with exploring concepts of shadows from both Western & Eastern perspectives. By studying metaphors, associating shadow and metaphors with my own memory, I establish the shadow to represent my childhood memory. Most of my conceptual research was carried out in Auckland. In addition, whilst I was photographing for my practical research in China, I also had interviewed two Chinese professors and an advertising practitioner to gather a wide range of opinions and information about the cultural concepts of shadow. This form of dialectic discussion is interactive and gives a more proactive research outcome, significantly influencing my own creative thinking of both my concept and practice.

Practical Research

There are four major areas of my practical research; namely photography, graphics, book design and exhibition display. I went for a research trip to China to reconstruct my memory through photography. These photographs serve as the raw data for my practice. It is worth noting that the photography trip was thought provoking, inspiring and challenging. In a way, it was intellectually demanding. The cyclic processes of perception, conception and expression had constantly challenged me to refine both my concept and practice. The research into graphics, book design and exhibition display is carried out in Auckland after the photography trip. The

creation of the final work has gone through extensive development. I also note that the tutorial sessions with my supervisors were contributing as both supervisors positioned themselves as my viewers to interact with me. Their dialectic critiques had provided temporal solutions for the further refinement of my practice. The tutorial critique sessions were another intellectual interaction of the designed cyclic method.

The following diagram (Figure 18) is a graphic illustration of the research content.

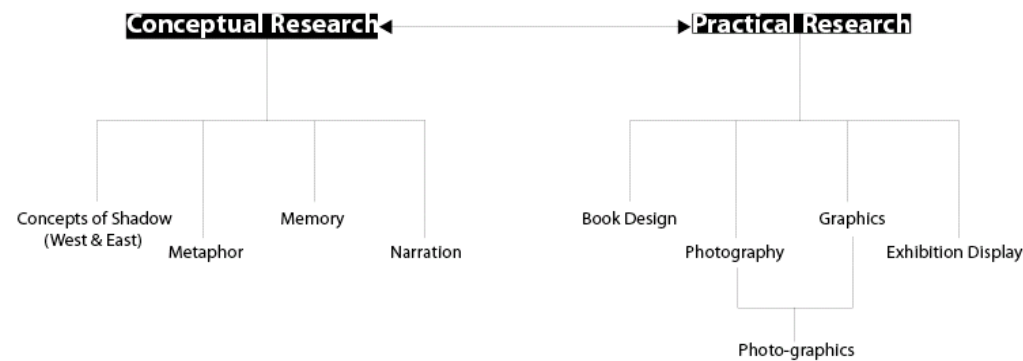


Figure 18. Xiao, Y. (2005)

In this creative-production research project, the aspect that is most demanding and exciting is the ongoing pursuit of broadening and extending my vision and the concurrent refining of my practice and its underpinned concept. The interactive cyclic processes of perception, conception and expression are designed and applied strategically to

provoke my critical engagement. I have tested this approach through the tutorial dialectic critiques with my supervisors. The tutorial sessions open up to an intellectual interactive discourse with my supervisors. This is crucial to the research nature of exploring metaphor and representations, which is subjective, elusive and open-ended.

Chapter Five: Practical Work

The practical work represents a collection of fragments of my memory. It is a genuine disclosure of my own thoughts. Through my unfettered self-revelation and self-expression, it provides an impetus of creative intensification to manifest the openness of multiple layers of metaphorical representation of my memory. The cyclic methodological approach of my intellectual processes of perception, conception and expression has effectively enforced me to question, challenge, contemplate, and respond to both my concept and practice. These processes encourage me to creatively shuttle freely between tangible and intangible, visible and invisible, past and present, present and absent, in the manifestation of my practice. The metaphorical representations seem obscure and convoluted. I would argue that it is the otherness of meaning that inspires and questions individuals to respond through their own interpreting processes. As discussed in the chapter of research approaches, through viewing my work, viewers encounter my expression (as creator) and start their own intellectual cyclic processes of perception, conception and expression. Through such intellectual encounter, there is no closure in the metaphorical representation, rather an open-ended experience. I also believe that if my work is able to trigger a sparkling glow that stirs my viewers to summon up their own individual memory or experience, then my work has surpassed cultural boundaries.

In the following, I discuss the execution of my practical work and the media that I have applied.

The Photography

I am not trained to be a photographer. This is also a challenge for me as a researcher. However, the nature of my research project relies on my spontaneous response to recapture my memories, not technical consummation. I even believe that I am free from the burden of attaining photographic perfection. But it does not mean that the quality of my practice has been compromised. I am always aware of the professional standard expected, both as a practitioner and a researcher at Masters level.

Digital photography is my medium to recapture the fragments of my memory with Grandma in the research trip. It is a major constituent of my practice and it is a means of collecting still images as raw data. The photo-graphic representations of my work transform the intangible memory to tangible visual representations. My photo-graphic approach combines the processes of documentary photography and image editing¹⁴.

Documentary processes freeze places, events, people and specific moments. Image editing allows me to reconstruct the visual representation, thus refine the underpinned concept of my practice. Before I went to China, I had arranged a child and an elderly to act as models. They represent the physicality of my memory of Grandma

¹⁴ Image editing refers to the decision making of selection of images, alteration of visual structure of images and the interweaving of photographs and graphics

and me. They are close friends of mine and identifiable in the work. It might at first glance conflicts with the concept of metaphor, however, they are in fact part of the key elements that constitute the emotions, feelings and self-contemplation of the memory to be blended in the scenes. My intimate relationship with the two substitutes is important for my nostalgic re-enactment. Their participation is a significant visual agent in my work.

Jiang Nan [江南] is the location chosen to relive the memories. It is a southern area of Yang-zi River [扬子江] in China. Because of its historical, geographic, environmental resources, Jiang Nan has always been an important political and financial area where eminent scholars and artists reside. It is also famous for its poetic atmosphere. Though it was not my birthplace, I had spent four years studying and traveling in Jiang Nan. In order to create a bland, still and tranquil setting for my memory, it is crucial to include an old house in my work. I am fortunate to find this well-preserved historical building. It is a rare find. The surroundings of the house resemble the one in which I used to live: high rustic walls crawling with ivies, a tiny courtyard with wriggly path, and the old furniture inside. All these evoke my memories about the people, the place and my life. To me, the house has life, and it has witnessed the ups and downs of memories.

The Graphics

The graphics are designed to give a sense of blandness [淡] to this project. Blandness¹⁵ is a major essence of Chinese aesthetics in art. The literal concept of blandness is: simple, plain, tasteless or boring. However, it is the underpinned sophistication, subtlety, ambiguity and unfathomable representations that have intrigued the Chinese for decades. I believe that our everyday life is bland. Most of the time, we are living a mundane life, yet there are the transient moments of ups and downs that sparkle. These moments stir our emotions, for good or for bad. For me, the real happiness in life is to live a simple life. This graphic blandness is designed to resonate to the sophisticated, subtle, ambiguous emotions of my void childhood memory.

·Francois Jullien (2004), a French philosopher, in his book '*In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics*' has in-depth and thorough discussions about the Chinese philosophical aesthetics of blandness. In his prologue, he said that:

On this common ground of the bland, all currents of Chinese thought – Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism – converge in harmonious accord. None of these systems conceives of it as an abstraction (for the purposes of establishing a theory) or, at the opposite extreme, as ineffable (in the service of some mystical calling). But it is precisely the bland that the arts of China reveal to us through their uncluttered spareness and allusive depths.

By taking us to the limits of the perceptible, that place where perceptions assimilate and nullify each other, the bland brings us to experience a world beyond. But this movement does not open up onto another, metaphysical world, cut off from the senses. It simply unfurls and expands this world (the only one): drained of its opacity, returned to its original, virtual state, and open up – forever – to joy (p. 25).

The text is void¹⁶ (Laotzu, Chapter 5) to cohere with the openness of concept of shadow. The text is absent and yet present. The physical absence of text is responsive to the ineffable, ambiguous and transferable quality of metaphors. This is challenging and demands careful consideration.

The Photo-graphic Book

The book is designed, as an attempt to piece all the fragments of memory together. It is a physical, visual document to represent emotion and a medium to communicate the concept of visible and invisible shadows with a sense of intimacy and self-belonging. “The familiarity of its component parts, the weight, scent and feel of it in our hands, together with memories of childhood reading, give the book a sense of belonging in our personal environment” (Ward, 1998, p. 48). The context of my work is about a memory story of my childhood, which is not familiar to the viewers. I utilise the book as the medium to suggest a sense of familiarity. Thus it creates a sense of intimacy between the viewers and myself and brings them closer to share and respond to my experience. The design also interfuses ideas, approaches and materials both traditional and contemporary from both Chinese and Western cultures to achieve a confluent visual aesthetics for my conceptual communication. There is a restraint to apply bookwork to present the concept of metaphor of shadow in this thesis because the bookwork has given a linear sequence to the collated fragments of memory. However, I would argue that each individual

¹⁶ Laotzu, a Chinese philosopher (around 400-550 B.C.), in Chapter 5 of his 81-chapter Tao Te Ching[道德经] suggested: “Much speech leads inevitably to silence. Better to hold fast to the void.” [多言数穷，不如守中] (Lau, translated, 2001, pp. 8-9)

work stands on its own to form its own metaphorical representation. When these works are complied together as a unity, they do not form a sequential whole; rather they are representations of a void memory.

“Books offer the artist the possibility of transcending the perceived boundaries of art practice. The artist sets the context and the book exists within its contextual space” (ibid, p. 50). Each component of the book is preciously considered (such as paper, material, print, size and binding). This opens up many possibilities in achieving a unique parallel reference to my memory. The plasticity of book format provides me the potential to transcend my expression as a unity whole. Textured and creamy radiant white ink jet paper is used to suggest nostalgia and gives a sense of intimate touch. The size of the book is 320 mm wide and 230 mm tall. A case with a traditional Chinese lock signifies the door to enter my memory.

There is a specific design element in my book. Translucent Chinese paper is used as overlay onto the images. The shadow seen through the translucent Chinese paper intermingles with the Western water colour ink jet images to portray a cross-cultural confluence. The shadow on each translucent paper acts as an agent of the visible trace of invisible memory of the photo-graphics. The use of translucent paper is a popular western approach to give a modern and clinical look in contemporary art and design practice. However, in this thesis, I have applied the Chinese paper to make reference to the classical nostalgic protective paper of traditional photo albums, rather than to give a modern clinical look. This layering also enables me to represent the Western metaphorical

representations of shadow. This translucent paper is further used as an interactive agent that serves several other purposes. First, it serves as an interaction and interconnection between the viewer(s) (interpreter) and myself (creator). The act of flipping through the translucent paper creates visual experiences in time and space and thus triggers individuals' intellectual activities of perception, conception and expression. Secondly, it serves to interweave the Western and Chinese concepts of shadow – the visible and invisible. Thirdly, the blurring (view through the translucent paper) and clarity (view without the translucent paper) represents the interaction of elusive and misty memory that is distanced from everyday life. The application of translucent paper, though ordinary, is an important design concept of this practical work to create and embed multiple layers of metaphorical representation.

The Exhibition Display

The exhibition display is a significant physical and conceptual site of performance (Figure 27). It is a spatial construction of one of my works. This typical traditional Chinese lounge setting suggests the 'present and absence', 'presence and past' and a sense of continuity as a whole. The display creates a resonant response to the concepts of shadow (Figure 25 & 26). I was my Grandma's shadow (Figure 25). The nostalgic objects/toys are my shadow (Figure 26). The empty chairs in the exhibition display are our shadows that underpin the metaphorical components of my shadow concept. The theatrical lighting distances the viewers from their everyday lives whilst encountering my work (memory) that is encaged within a box. The work, in a long scroll

format, on the wall ties all elements together, and completes the unity of my concept and practice. I invite the viewers to sit down and enjoy my work; I am absent and yet present. This display is a cherishing, nostalgic reminiscence of my childhood with Grandma.



Figure 25. ibid.



Figure 26. ibid.



Figure 27. ibid.

The displayed work (Figure 28) serves two purposes: First, it is an exemplification of applying 'empty space' to suggest the transferable, invisible shadow (which I have discussed in the earlier chapter on 'Concept of Shadow') that blends emotion with scene. The dominant empty space is visually interpreted as the over-exposed light rays. This approach is also not uncommon in Western art practice to suggest past memory and experience. Both Chinese and Western have parallels that suggest visible and invisible, presence and absence, present and past. This work is a shadow of the cross-cultural context of this research project. Secondly, the work, which is a fragment of my misty bonding with Grandma, intermingles the display with the photo-graphic book. It also serves to invite my viewer to interact with my work.



Figure 28. *ibid.*

Commentary on the Practice

Everyone has a story, a 'void' one. It is meaningful to the creator and maybe meaningless to viewers until they themselves are emotionally triggered and resonated. There are about twenty pieces of work. Together, they represent a unity of my memory. In the following, I discuss my own metaphorical ideas that underpin the body of work. However, I do not intend to discuss each individual work, rather I describe the emotions of my memory by making reference to some of the work. These discussions of my thought are intended to give an open-ended experience and not a closure to my memory.

As a unity, the work represents the nostalgic lingering remembrance of my childhood experiences. Transcended visually and tangibly through the photo-graphics practical work, I explore the essential aspects of my life experience with Grandma – the closeness, the affection and the bonding with her. In my memory, I was very dependant on her. In a way, I am her shadow. (Figure 29 – 31)



Figure 29. *ibid.*

I always enjoyed the moments when she was telling stories to me. In her life, she never had the chance to study, but she was an amazing storyteller, those stories are real and unreal, certain and uncertain. Storytelling is a way I inherit from Grandma. Now, through my thesis, I am telling a story about us through metaphors. The physical shadow on the ground is our bonding (Figure 30). The complexity of the form and shape reflects the simplicity of our closeness. The simplicity of the blank wall leads to the ambiguous and trailing shadow that recalls the complexity of our feelings.



Figure 30. *ibid.*

Every now and then, I am in the moment of trance (Figure 31), it is just like watching myself as a stander-by, it is blurring, shadowy, even mysterious. Grandma is near and yet so far away. Her shadow is void to me, a void of silence. Until now, I am still curious and wanting to know more about her and her memory.



Figure 31. *ibid.*

The most resounding environmental experience of my childhood is the old house I lived in with my grandparents. I felt safe and free in the restricted space. Within this confined space, there was something intriguing and unforgettable: the roof, the wall and the window are my connection to the outer world. The low-angle composition of most of my images is a self-revelation of my physical smallness in the past (as a child) and present. It also represents my clinging to the memory for security until now; the wanton-greenly wall, sheltered roof and the high and far-reaching sky. I love to be under the shadow of the house. (Figure 6, 32 & 33).



Figure 6. *ibid.*



Figure 32. *ibid.*

The Chinese say: when we are born, we are as blank as white paper. For me, it is as blank as a white wall. Through experience, individuals trace their own shadows on the blank wall. For me, Figure 34 is the trace of my identity: the shadow of Chinese window, the bland and tranquil mood. The chair in the corner gives a sense of environmental ambiance. In-between memory and reality; in-between interiority and exteriority; in-between emptiness and fullness; these are the roots that I always cling to.



Figure 33. *ibid.*

I may be fetishistic about some child-mate toys or objects and until now I am still keeping a few toys with me. These toys mean a lot to me, I enjoy the sense of continuity, security and intimacy (Figure 34 – 36).

Like most kids, I often wish that I could be a kite up in the sky, wander wherever I chanced to be, as free as the wind. As I am older, I realise that it has a string attached. Ironically, without the attachment, it will flutter onto the ground and become a 'dead' kite. The bounding keeps me 'alive' (Figure 34).



Figure 34. *ibid.*

The 'Long-life lock' of the container is a Chinese traditional amulet for a new baby: It is a blessing for a long-life. It seems that I was living in a confined space as a child; quite the opposite, I was emotionally free. I photographed this container with a reflection of the sky. (Figure 35) I was bound but free. This is another resonance to the 'kite' image (Figure 34). The bounding keeps me alive and free.



Figure 35. *ibid.*

It is not uncommon that in Chinese art practice and literature that the under-layered representation might connote something quite opposite to what is perceived. This is why I consider that the metaphorical meanings of shadow are transferable. In Figure 36, the empty and stacked chairs imply that the space is crowded with people, however, in actual fact of my childhood memory, I never met up with so many people at home. The physical shadow of the chairs represents a sense of reality: such as the everyday mundane, the hardship of my thesis study and the challenge in pursuing my career.



Figure 36. *ibid.*

This series of work provides a liminal space of poetic evocations of my nostalgic passion. Each work has its own unique layers of underpinned metaphorical representations. Each also compliments others to form a united whole of my memory, and through this work I explore the concept of shadow. This memory is a source of bittersweet that stays with me until my dying day.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Metaphor transfers the perception of my experience to visual art expression. It is a poetic device, for transforming my emotion into photo-graphic expression. I have taken a journey to relive my childhood memory. The process of reliving and transcending childhood memory into photo-graphic practice involves the transition of an emotional domain to a physical domain – from theory to practice.

In this study, I have expressed my memory in the shadow through metaphor. I have explored the multiple layers of meaning of both metaphor and shadow and transforming them into a series of visual representations. This series of work enables me to implicitly and explicitly articulate my memory and emotion for the viewers to experience.

Through the process of reliving my childhood memory, I have recaptured and transcended my roots and belongings into a series of photo-graphic works. This series of work represents my poetic feeling, cherishing memory and anchoring roots. Multiple layers of conceptual thought are embedded in the practice through metaphorical infusion. People, architecture and objects are explored for their physicality and materiality to communicate my childhood memory. Telling my childhood story is an enjoyable and pleasant bittersweet experience of personal remembrance.

The cyclic processes of the method used in this project has been effective because it has enabled me to generate, analyse and apply valuable insights – ranging from metaphor, shadow and Chinese-Western culture to inform the creative practices. The research methods that I have designed have facilitated me to bridge and connect my past and present, and to position the practice at the confluence of Chinese and Western cultures. The research design has also contributed significantly in transcending art and design discourse into contemporary viscourse.

The practical work is designed to evoke a strong sense of nostalgic and emotional experiences. The practical research approaches for data collecting with documentary photography and the subsequent image editing have informed the creative process. A sense of blandness [淡] is portrayed in the work to respond and convey the ineffable, ambiguous and transferable quality of metaphors. The overlaying of Chinese paper onto Western water colour ink jet paper of the photo-graphic work has effectively interwoven my shadow concept in the practice. The exhibition display has also fulfilled the performance of my concept and practice. I believe, through the research and the subsequent practical work, I have suggested a confluent metaphorical representation for consideration in contemporary art and design context.

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Appendix:

Documentation of the Practice

- The wooden box that houses the bookwork (Plate 1 - 3)
- The content of the bookwork (Plate 4 - 27)
- The exhibition display (Plate 28 - 31)



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 8

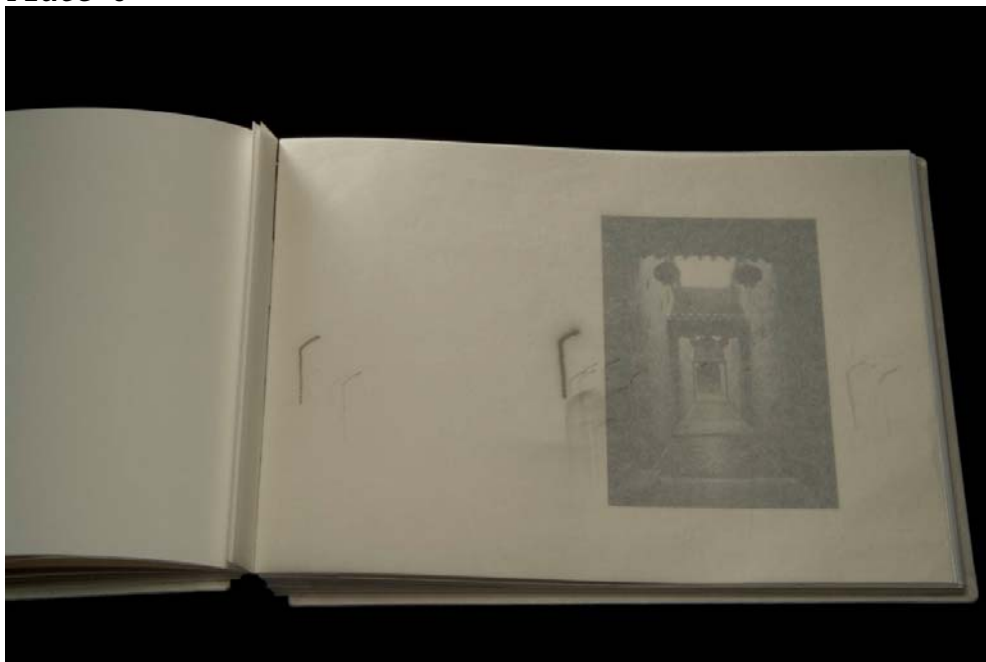


Plate 9

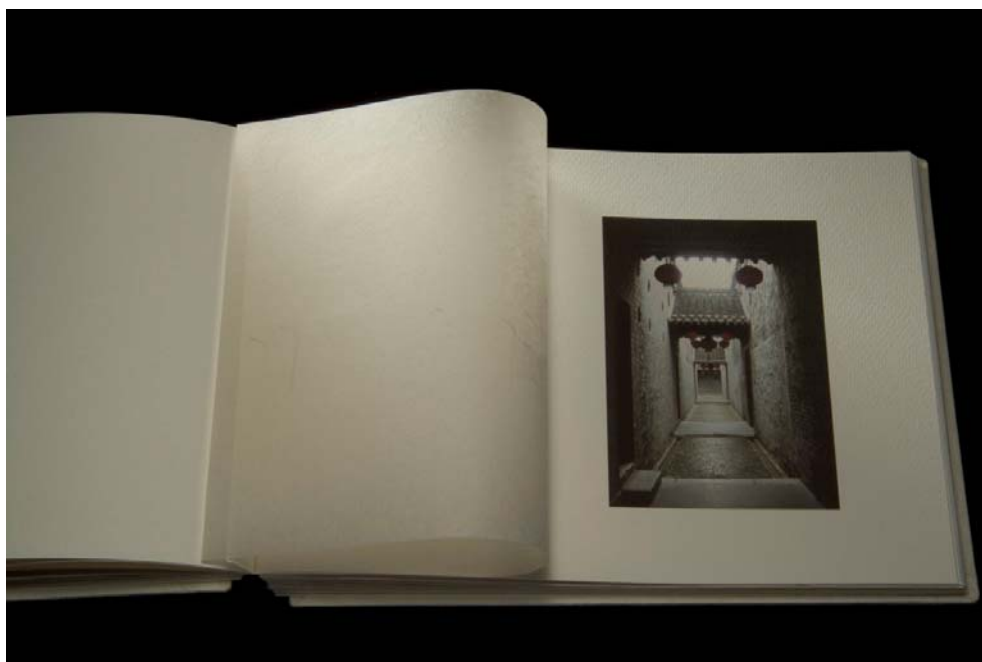


Plate 10

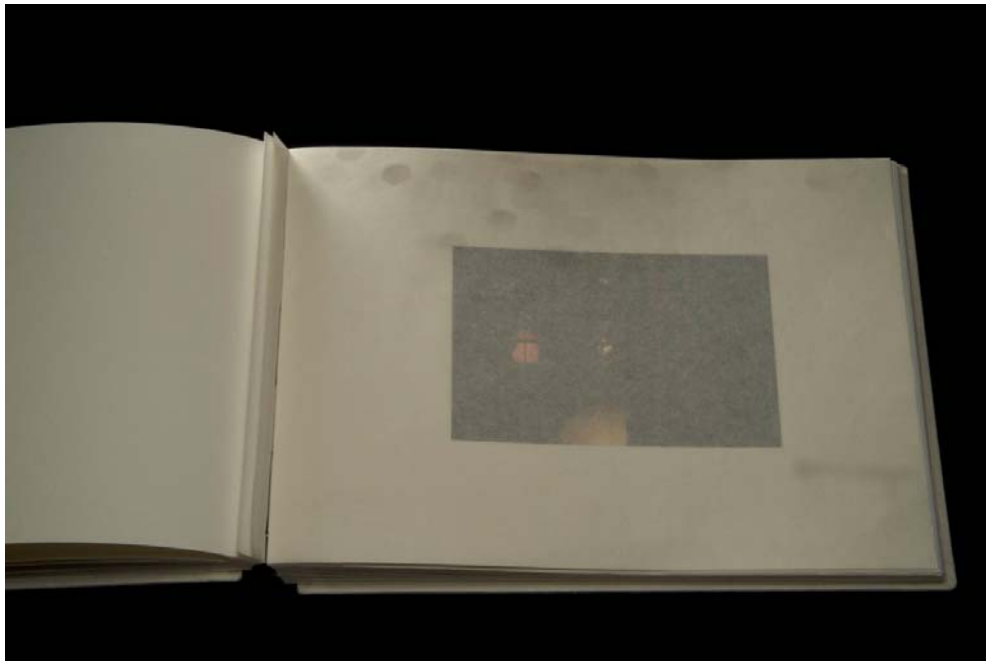


Plate 11

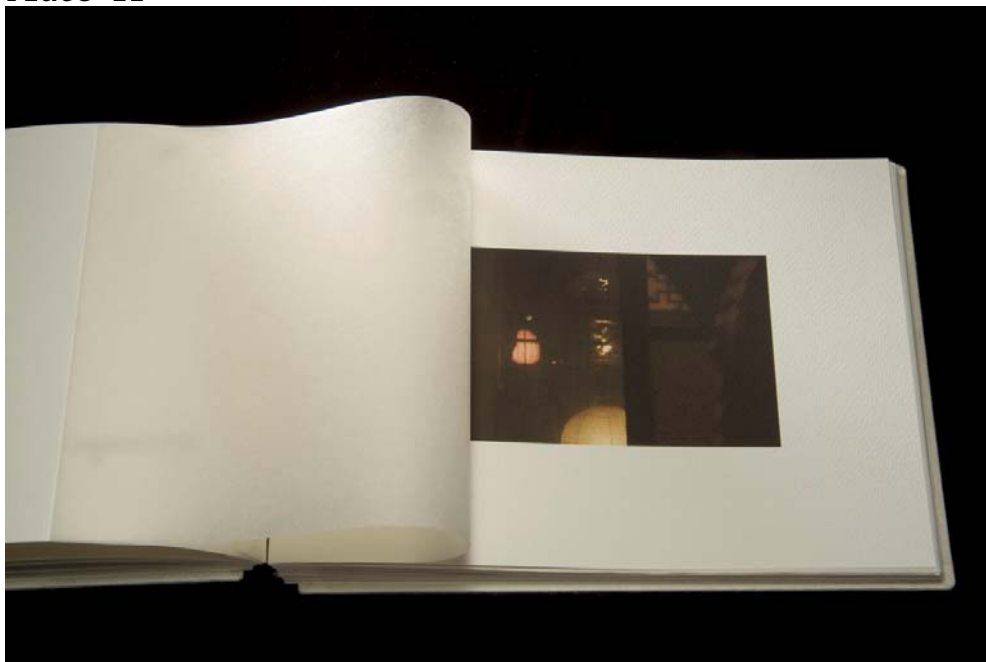


Plate 12



Plate 13

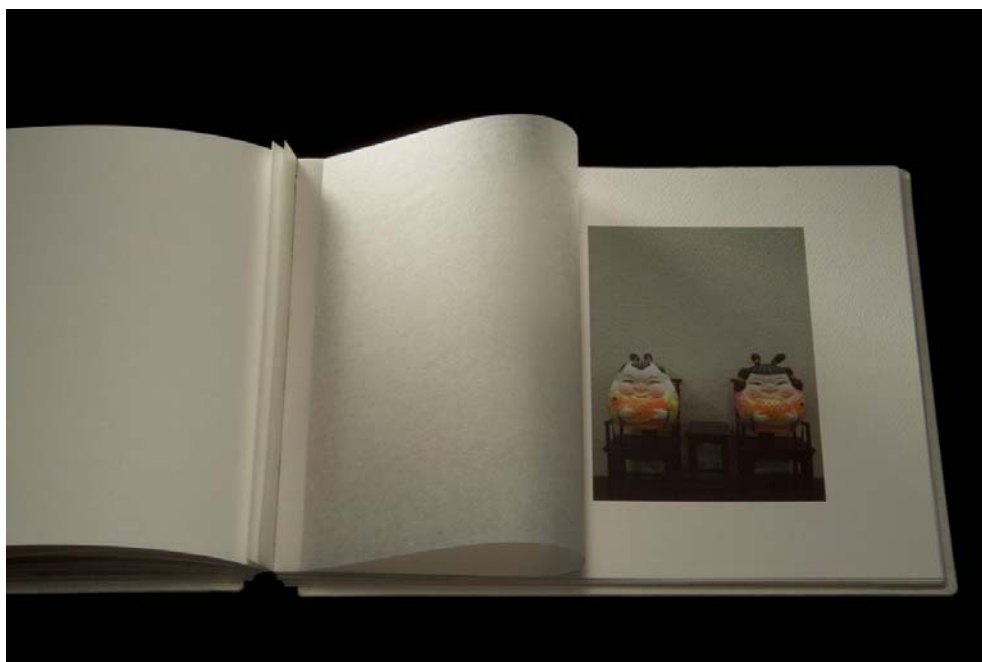


Plate 14



Plate 15

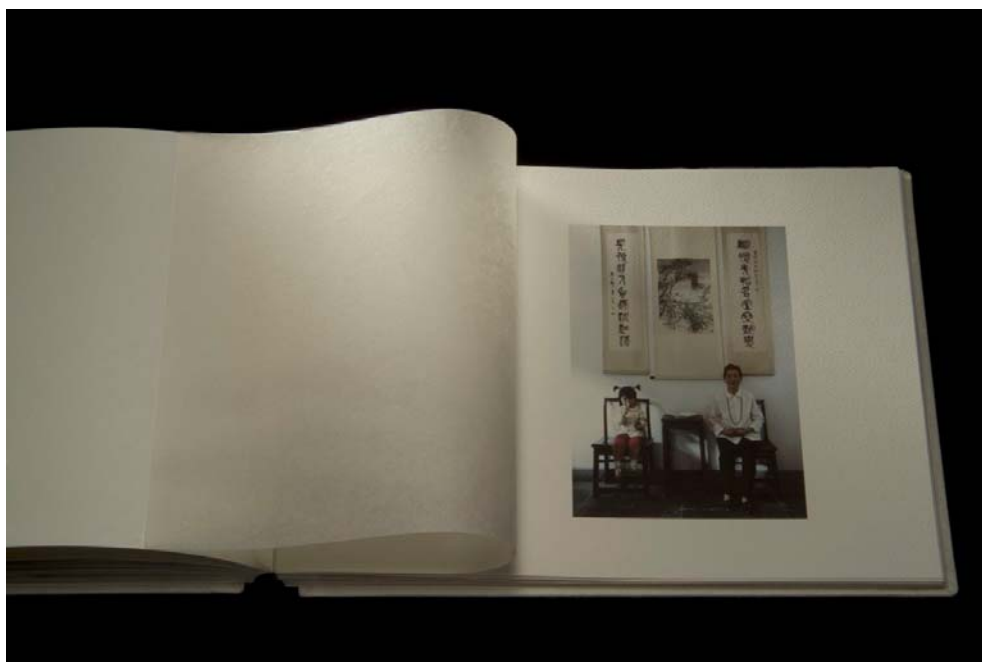


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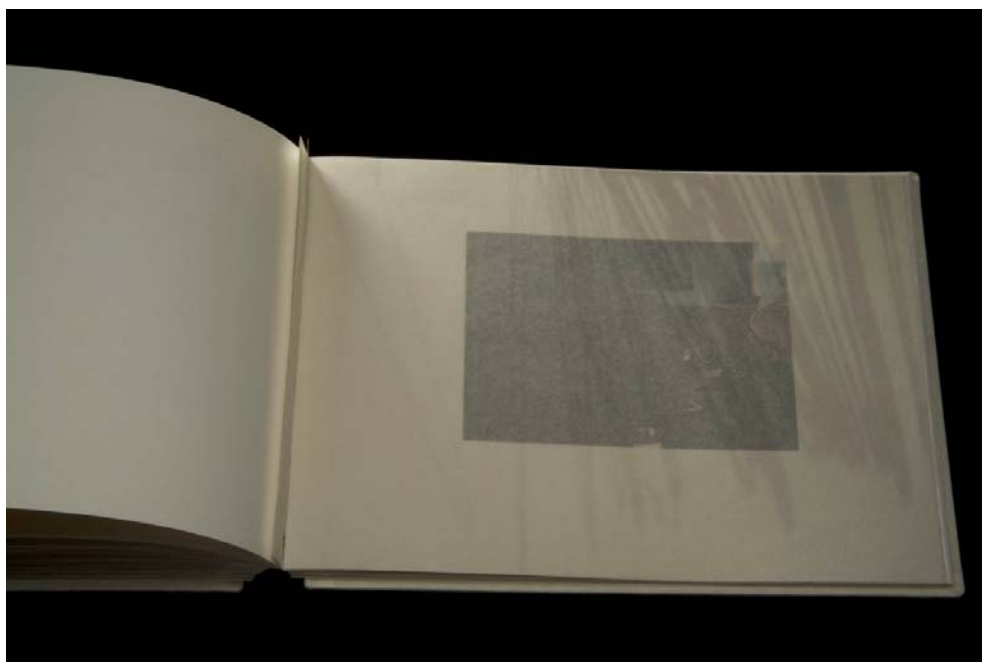


Plate 17



Plate 18

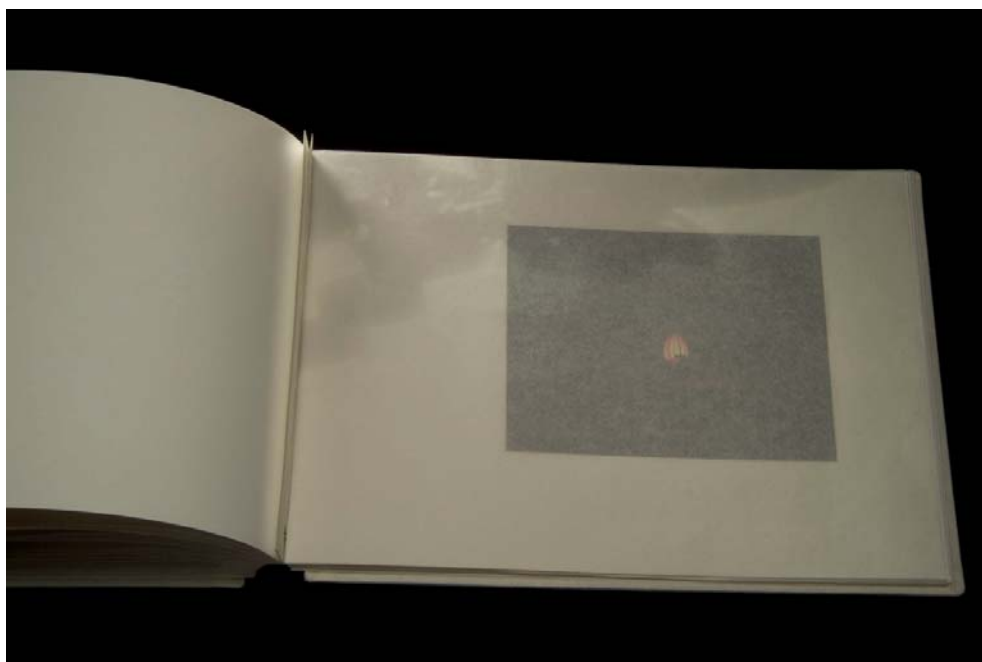


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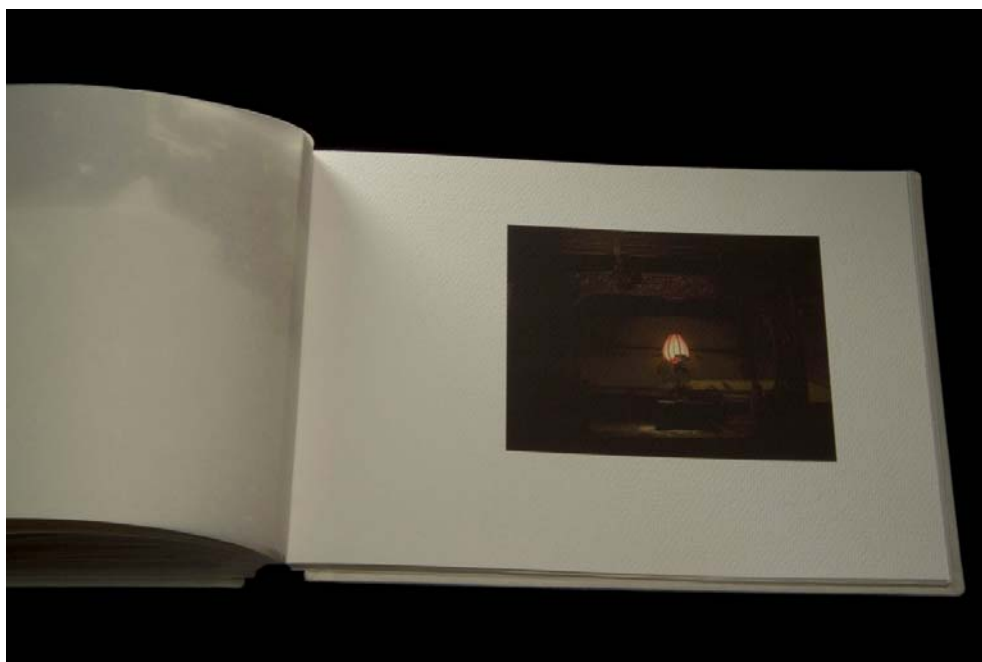


Plate 20



Plate 21

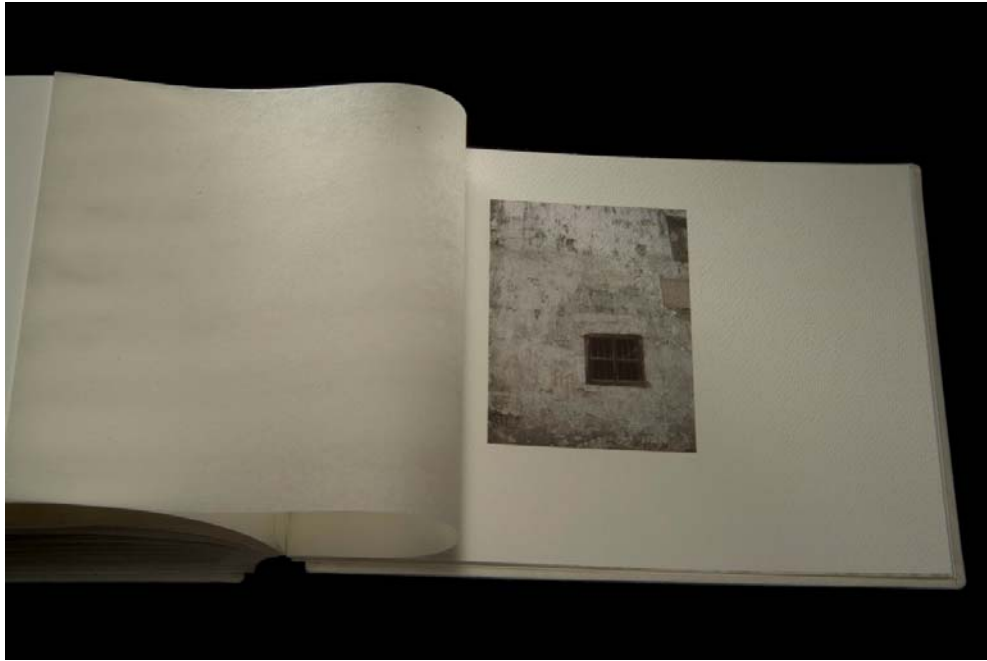


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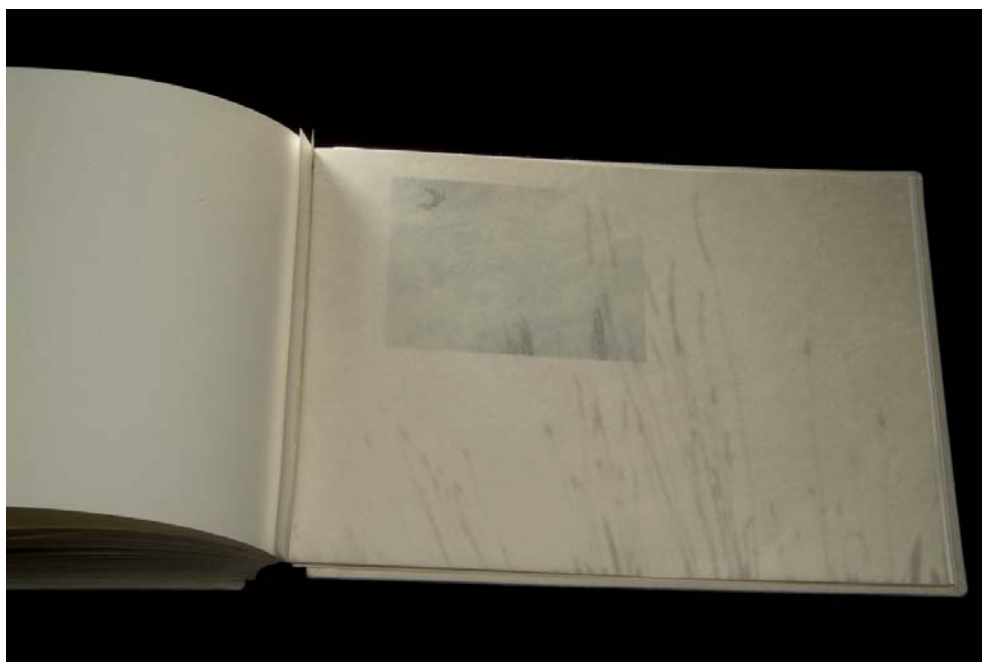


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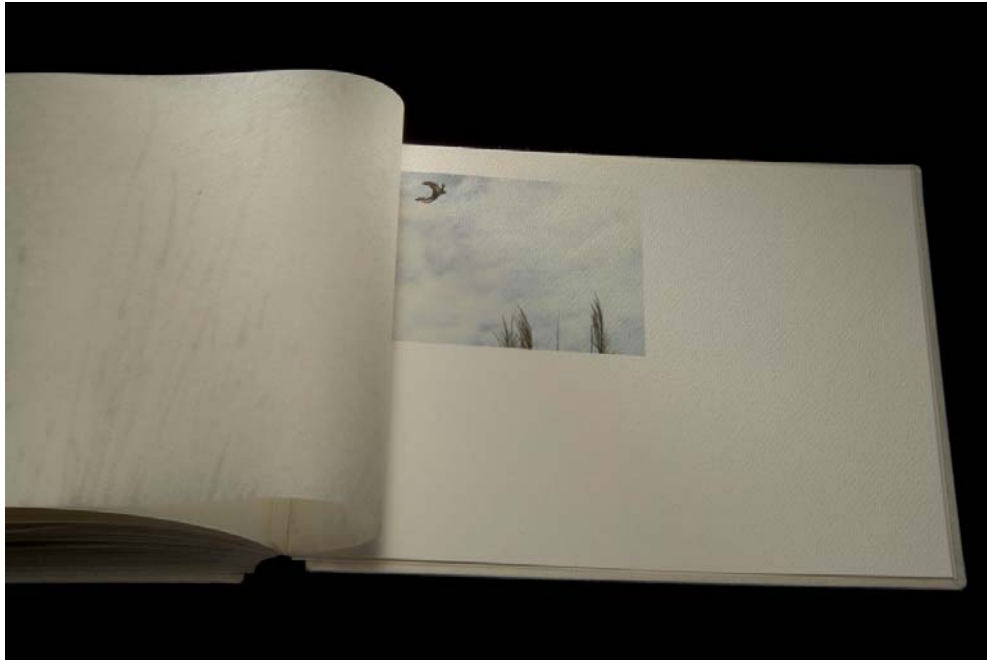


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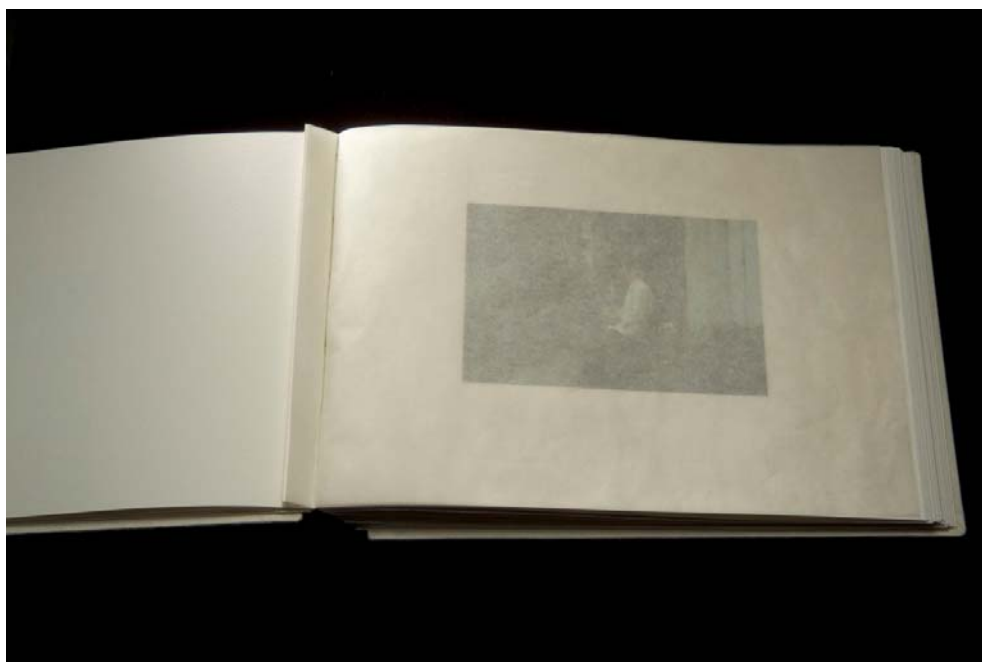


Plate 25



Plate 26

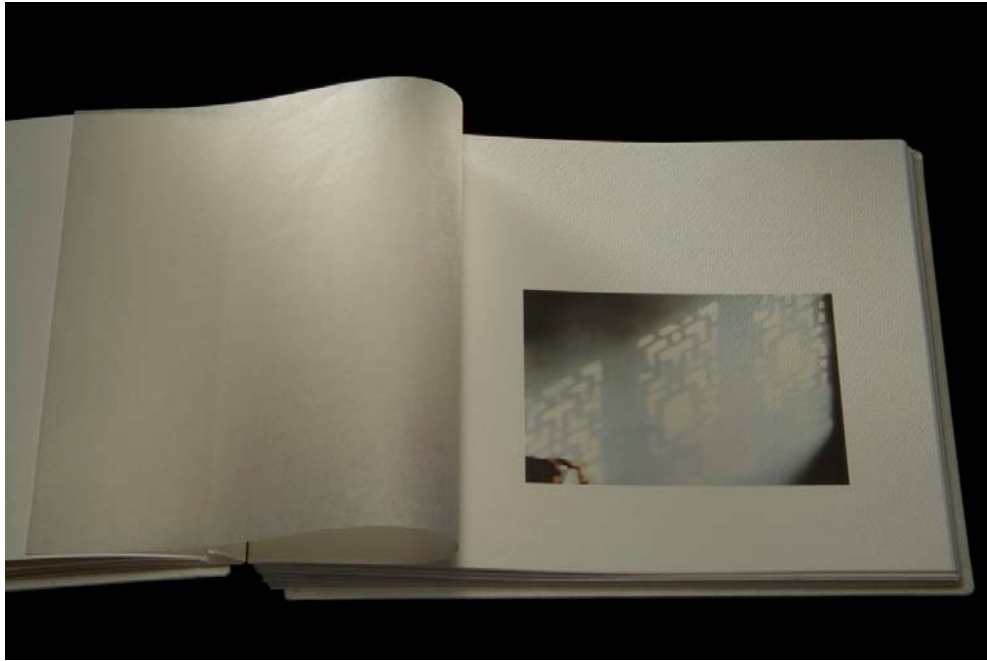


Plate 27



Plate 28



Plate 29



Plate 30



Plate 31

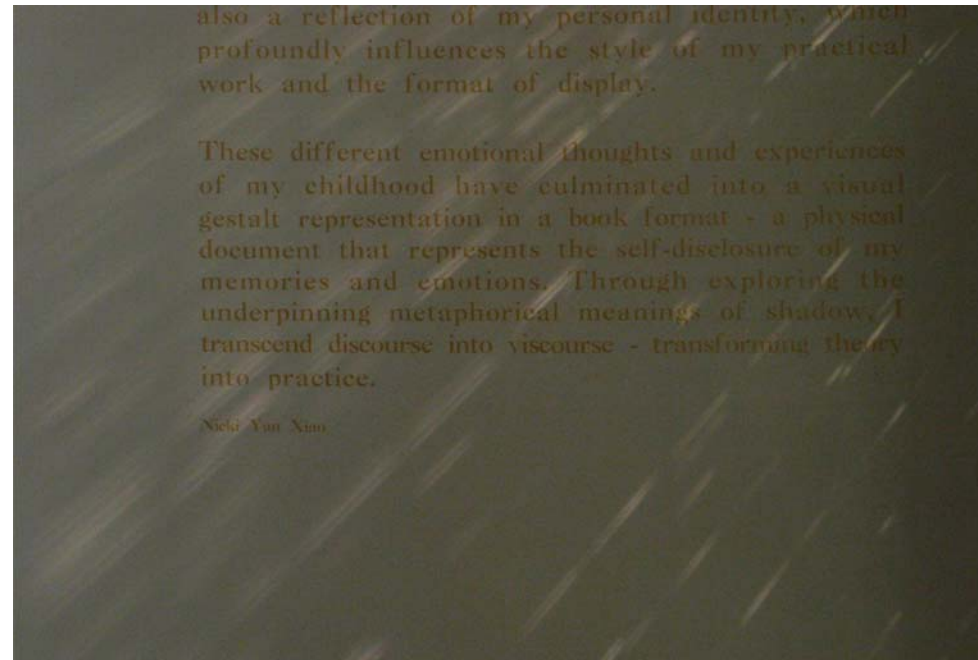


Plate 32