

Inexpressible Love

An Exploration of Chinese Intergenerational Family Relationships
via Nostalgic 2D Animation



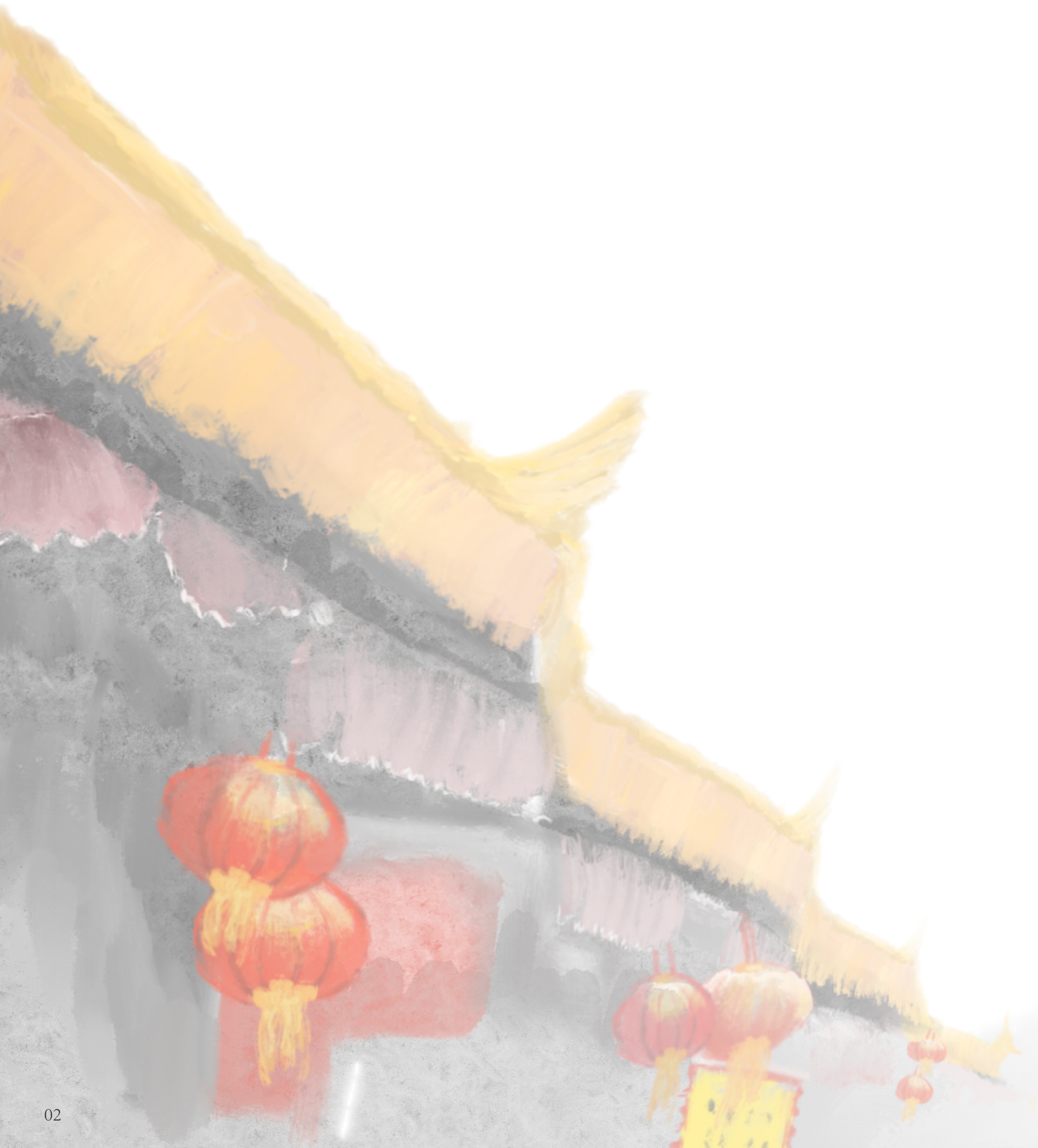
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Abstract

The research looks at how hand-drawn animation can express longing for loved ones and hint at sentiments of “nostalgia.” I used a practice-based research methodology, combined with multiple methodologies, including autoethnography, contextualization, and pre-visualization, and used methods including mind mapping, field exploration, casual conversation, feedback, and storyboards to explore how to embody nostalgia through visual language and animation production processes.

In terms of animation production, as a graphic designer, I try to use traditional hand-drawn animation techniques to explore the effect of a nostalgic emotional atmosphere. Based on my experience in graphic production and illustration/painting, I transformed static illustrative stories into animation to vividly convey nostalgia and longing for loved ones. Through these means, I redefine nostalgia and explore its expression in visual language and animation.

This study particularly highlights the dynamic and complex nature of nostalgia. As a researcher, I understand nostalgia in the Chinese context as longing and yearning for relatives and childhood, accompanied by emotional experiences of warmth and regret. Nostalgia is not a static, single state but a process closely connected with the memories and emotional ties of loved ones, and is constantly evolving. Alongside this, the impact of traditional Chinese concepts on family models is discussed in depth.

Through the lens of autoethnography, this project highlights my childhood memories. A hand-drawn animation featuring a little girl born in China's Qianxi era, it tells the story of her memories of her deceased grandfather. In general, I hoped that the little girl's regrets and longing for her grandfather would help people who live outside of their hometowns regain their emphasis on, and enhance their deep understanding of the emotional sustenance of, the family.

Furthermore, this animated short film adds many elements related to traditional Chinese culture, such as sugar paintings with period characteristics and scene creation with Chinese characteristics and architectural styles, including gestural elements of ink painting. It is hoped that the nostalgic atmosphere created by the animation will particularly touch the nostalgic emotions of young (especially millennial) audiences with Asian cultural backgrounds.



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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 (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Date: 03 / 05 / 2024

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Introduction

Aim and Significance

This project aims to use two-dimensional animation to convey the concept of “nostalgia” in a Chinese cultural context and explore how to effectively evoke the nostalgia of Asian cultural backgrounds, especially among young Chinese audiences. The research aims to find the difference between nostalgia in the Chinese context and its Western equivalent, and applies a unique take on Chinese nostalgia in the field of animation.

Zhao (2005) describes in “Sociological Analysis of Nostalgic Cultural Events” how negative emotions can be alleviated by appropriate nostalgic behaviour, to a certain extent. As Sedikides et al. (2008) propose, positive nostalgia can help promote social connections, strengthen cultural identity, and improve cultural acceptance. Hopefully, my practice can convey a comfortable nostalgic experience, allowing the audience to reconnect with their childhood memories, nostalgia for the good times, and reflections on their families, thereby arousing emotional resonance deep in their hearts. As an animation practice, the emotional expression between grandparents and grandchildren, such as the conflict between the grandfather and the little girl, the little girl’s ignorance, the way the grandfather expresses his love, and the nostalgia caused by visual elements, explain these plots. It can provide a unique perspective for understanding the emotions of grandparents and grandchildren under the influence of traditional Chinese concepts.

Significant Terms Used in the Study

Nostalgia in a Chinese Context

In the West, nostalgia is considered a form of longing or excessive sentimentality, often involving a longing for a past time or unrecoverable state, particularly those moments or places associated with personally pleasurable associations. Unlike the West, in Chinese culture, nostalgia is more often closely linked to traditional values and family, involving the connection between tradition, culture, and family. Nostalgia in Chinese culture emphasizes positive feelings: a beautiful and warm experience. Jinhua and Jingyuan (1990) point out that nostalgia literally translates into Chinese as homesick or miss.

However, if nostalgia is viewed in a Chinese cultural context, it will carry more connotations. Yang (2003) quotes the idiom, "The peach blossoms remain the same as before, but beyond recognition"¹ projecting a nostalgic Chinese interpretation of the physical level—although the external environment such as scenery and architecture have not changed, the relatives who once shared this space are no longer there. Zengbao (2017) proposed that nostalgia is not only emotional; it lingers in ordinary objects which endow emotions with commemorations of the past for loved ones. Combining these theories provides an essential concept for my research; that is, nostalgia serves as a physical sustenance of emotion. Familiar scenes and objects in memories become a new sustenance that carries the longing for loved ones.

¹ 桃花依旧·面目全非: "The peach blossoms remain the same as before" means that the peach blossoms are still blooming as usual and are still beautiful. The peach blossoms here may refer to flowers that bloom in spring, symbolizing the blooming of life and the coming of spring. "...but beyond recognition" means that although the peach blossom remains the same, the surrounding environment or people have undergone tremendous changes and are entirely different from before. This contrast strongly expresses a sigh of helplessness brought

The Nature of the Project

This research stems from my own experience. Studying abroad, I have been away from home for a long time, and the COVID-19 epidemic forced me to stay in Aotearoa New Zealand for three years. My attachment to my homeland and the memories and nostalgia evoked by familiar objects prompted me to embark on a journey of exploration of the concept of nostalgia. According to research by Wildschut and Sedikides (2021), nostalgia can not only be explained as attachment to a hometown but may also be related to other psychological or behavioural tendencies. It depends on a deeper understanding and distinction between personal experience and nostalgia.

Therefore, I take nostalgia as the core of my research, combined with my personal cultural identity (Chinese), to explore the definition of nostalgia in a Chinese humanistic environment and understand nostalgia through my personal experience and cultural background: a longing for loved ones. The practical focus of this study is on artistic expressions that memorialize loved ones. Under the influence of traditional Chinese concepts, elders often express their emotions to younger generations in euphemistic and implicit ways. This springs from my personal experience; my grandfather would keep a little book to remember my favourite food or take me to buy my favourite toys when I was unhappy. However, he never expressed his love for me physically with hugs, or verbally, because, in our culture, expressing love directly makes people feel shy and awkward.

The Structure of the Exegesis

This exegesis is divided into four parts, starting with an overview of the research and its connections to the researcher. The second part conducts an in-depth contextual review, exploring the original definition of nostalgia, contemporary attributes, nostalgia in a Chinese context, Chinese concepts of family affection, and the application and analysis of nostalgia in animation. The third part explains the research design, including a section on methodology and methods. This part explains that the project is based on autoethnography and practice-based research and specifically discusses the methods used. The final part discusses the application of reflective experiments and creative decision making to the problem.

Positioning Statement

As I grew older, my distance from my family grew. Studying abroad meant the geographical distance and time cost increased, so the number of times I went home to visit relatives gradually decreased. Being unable to go home for long periods makes me miss my hometown and relatives even more. Since my grandfather was not proficient in using mobile phones, I often could not contact him - - familiar items would give me a sense of security and increase my sense of missing him. Every time I leave home, I take the lantern my grandfather gave me when I was a child to accompany me. After my grandfather passed away, the lantern seemed to symbolise my thoughts about him. Looking at it, I seem to momentarily return to my childhood, and I spontaneously miss my grandfather. The trigger of longing for my grandfather prompted me to explore the rich concept of nostalgia, with my personal experience as a starting point and Chinese culture as a background.

According to Ray and McCain (2012), nostalgia is both emotional and connects with hometowns and familiar objects. We can carry the memory and sustenance of our loved ones' experiences through space and objects. This attachment to one's hometown through familiar items is an emotional bond that carries a deep longing for relatives. In other words, the emotional experience of nostalgia not only exists in the interior world of an individual but is also projected through specific physical spaces and objects. Familiar environmental scenes and daily routines were once closely related to the lives of our relatives, but now they have become memories and commemorations of past good times.

When I returned home, I discovered through family stories that my once-strict grandfather always tacitly expressed his love for me, but I never noticed it when I was a child. Because I was young and unable then to comprehend, it was difficult for me to understand the deep love expressed by my grandfather in his unspoken way. Maybe there was a gap in communication; neither of us were good with words, and I couldn't understand clearly what he meant. This also triggered my exploration of the emotional expression among family members under the influence of traditional Chinese concepts: a kind of family affection is carried out in daily actions. As a designer, I try to interpret my feelings of "missing" my grandfather through the art form of animation, and to reproduce the warm memories of childhood and the unique phenomenon of "elders euphemistically expressing love" in a Chinese cultural background.

Figure 1

My Grandfather and Me at the Lantern Festival, Chengdu (2004)



Review of Related Knowledge

Introduction

This chapter focuses on reviewing a series of concepts that are germane to this project. Firstly, the primary connotation of the word nostalgia and its contemporary attributes are explained. Then the review focuses on the unique connotation of nostalgia in traditional Chinese culture, especially its close connection with the concept of family affection. Secondly, a series of animation case studies related to the theme of nostalgia will be presented.

This section explores how creators use animation to interpret the longing for relatives and present unique emotions connected with ancestors, grandchildren, and family affection from the perspective of traditional Chinese culture. These fundamental concepts provide theoretical support for this study and provide valuable reference and guidance for the practical use of animation art to interpret nostalgic emotions.

The Concept of Nostalgia: Original Definition

The word can be traced back to 1688, as defined by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer, and is a combination of the ancient Greek words for ‘homecoming,’ nostos, and ‘pain,’ algos. It was used to describe those who cannot return; those from the past whose painful emotions are related to memories of their hometown or homeland (Landwehr, 2018). However, in those early days, the concept of nostalgia was seen as an undesirable psychological dysfunction associated with negative emotions, such as depression. Associated symptoms were considered harmful, such as anxiety and sadness (McCann, 1941).

Contemporary Attributes

Contemporary nostalgia is not just a longing for childhood memories or the past; it is a rich emotional experience closely connected to an individual's family and relationships, with positive emotional qualities and potential personal benefits (Sedikides et al., 2008). According to research by Wildschut et al. (2006), nostalgic emotions can enhance an individual's self-awareness, including self-esteem, and contribute to a more positive perception of self-worth while effectively alleviating negative emotions, such as stress and anxiety. In addition, nostalgia, as a cultural phenomenon, is closely related to an individual's memory and is also a joint construct of society and culture (Xue, 2017). According to Sedikides et al. (2008), positive nostalgia helps promote social connections while enhancing cultural identity and acceptance. The emotional resonance generated by nostalgia can lead to stronger relationships with those with similar experiences (Wildschut et al., 2006).

Cui (2015) pointed out in “A Review of Nostalgic Marketing” that introducing nostalgic factors into advertising design, such as exploring typical characteristics of a specific era, can evoke traditional habits and resonance in consumers' dusty collective memories and attract the attention of specific target consumers. This investigation provides clues about the practical feasibility of tapping into the emotional experience of nostalgia. Through emotionally triggered visual elements and cleverly designed nostalgic memory cues (including scenes and objects), marketing can resonate with an audience of thoughtful consumers. According to Davis (1979), nostalgia tends to be associated with the warmth of childhood memories, rather than simply with memories of a hometown or past events. Emotional connections to people are key. Simple recollection is not enough to evoke nostalgia's emotional experience because its core quality is focused on reliving the sensation—a kind of psychological time travel (Hepper et al., 2012).

Nostalgia in a Chinese Context

Nostalgia is a cross-cultural phenomenon, and each nation has its different definition, originating from different cultures and memories (Fang et al., 2019). Traditional Chinese civilisation has endowed the emotional experience of nostalgia with its own kind of uniqueness. According to Fang et al. (2021), agricultural civilisation established the basic relationship between people and the land. Compared with nomadic people, agricultural people are bound by and to the land, thus the rural concept originated from agricultural production, bringing Chinese-style nostalgia to solid, unshakable nature. In ancient Chinese literature, artistic creators (poets, painters), often depicted scenes of rural life. For example, the poet Lu You of the Song Dynasty wrote in “Visiting Shanxi Village,” describing the landscape and customs and conveying his nostalgia for his hometown: “Don't laugh at the fact that the wine brewed by farmers in the twelfth lunar month is turbid and not mellow. Farmers entertain guests with rich dishes in harvest years” (Lu You, n.d./ca. 1200).

When people experience homesickness, they subjectively place themselves outside their hometown. But it is worth noting that the hometown described by many poets differs from the countryside where they lived. It is mixed with beautification and ideal elements. For example, the Chinese Qing Dynasty poet Gao Ding wrote, “Children come back early from school and are busy flying kites in the east wind” (Gao Ding, n.d.). This sentence describes a vivid scene of lively children flying kites in the beautiful spring weather. Nostalgic for childhood is an emotional look back at childhood memories, somewhere between the ideal and the real. This memory is a true reproduction of past life and also a poetic memory (Xiang, 2015). Guangzhong (1972) argues that nostalgia has a sense of home and gives people a familiar, friendly feeling.

As Yu Guangzhong wrote in the poem “Nostalgia,” “When I was a child, nostalgia was like a small stamp. On my side, my mother is on the other side. Later, homesickness was like a short grave, with me outside and my mother inside” (Yu, n.d./1972). Nostalgia is not only a longing for one's hometown but also carries the emotional sustenance of family connection. It emphasizes the memory of home and relatives and the fluidity of emotions (changing with the current mood). In my opinion, nostalgia is a kind of attachment to the family ties and lifestyle we once had. In my case, it not only comes from a longing for the geography of my hometown but also embodies my nostalgia for my family, my yearning for childhood, and my attachment to familiar people and things, carrying emotions of warmth, happiness, and regret.

Using animation to convey these emotions, and combining personal experience and divergent thinking to restore childhood memories, I tell the nostalgic journey of the protagonist and her grandfather, which reproduces childhood memories of my grandfather and me and triggers discussions about helplessness and sadness. In the animation scenes, I tried to restore the traditional style of my hometown (Chengdu). For example, in terms of architecture, I referenced the traditional buildings of the 1980s and 1990s, Kuanzhai Alley² and Wenshu Monastery. In terms of natural style, I referenced Chengdu's most beautiful representative park, Du Fu Thatched Cottage. I try to convey to the audience an immersive feeling and cultural atmosphere through these pictures.

² Kuanzhai Alley (宽窄巷子) is a historical and cultural district located in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China. It has three parallel streets: Kuan Alley, Narrow Alley and Jing Alley. This neighbourhood has preserved many traditional buildings and cultural heritage from the Ming and Qing Dynasties and is one of the more complete historical neighbourhoods in Chengdu.

Figure 2.1.

Collection of Architectural Styles of Kuanzhai Alley (December 2023; January 2024)



Figure 2.2.

Du Fu Thatched Cottage Environmental Reference (December 2023; January 2024)



Family Affection in a Chinese Context

The concept of family in China is related to its cultural tradition of generating harmony. The harmonious extended family is familiar to most Chinese people (Xiang, 2015). According to Shek (2001), it was not uncommon for the past four generations to live under one roof (四世同堂). Based on this tradition, some families leave their children to be raised with grandparents, due to their busy work schedule. As a result, the emotional connection between grandparents and grandchildren will be more profound than ever. Generally speaking, the nuclear family model is more common in Western cultures, with parents and children living together and a higher proportion of independent lives (Siqueira et al., 2016). However, as the grandchildren who were raised with their grandparents grow older, they often forget to give back to their grandparents and ignore their grandparents' emotional needs. According to Somesan and Haragus (2016), the emotional gap experienced by the elderly stems partly from the lack of companionship and their emotional needs, forgotten by the young.

The plot of my animation depicts a typical traditional Chinese family scene - - the emotional entanglement between a grandfather who is introverted and not good at expressing love, and a young granddaughter who often misunderstands his love. As the girl grows up, she begins to reflect on her ignorance and misunderstanding of her grandfather by looking back and examining every moment of her childhood. Her grandfather's outward sternness concealed his deep, heart-felt love for her, and her innocence and limited understanding as a child prevented her from being aware of his hidden expressions of love. It isn't until she is grown up and reexamines the past that the girl finally realizes her grandfather's gentle and affectionate side.

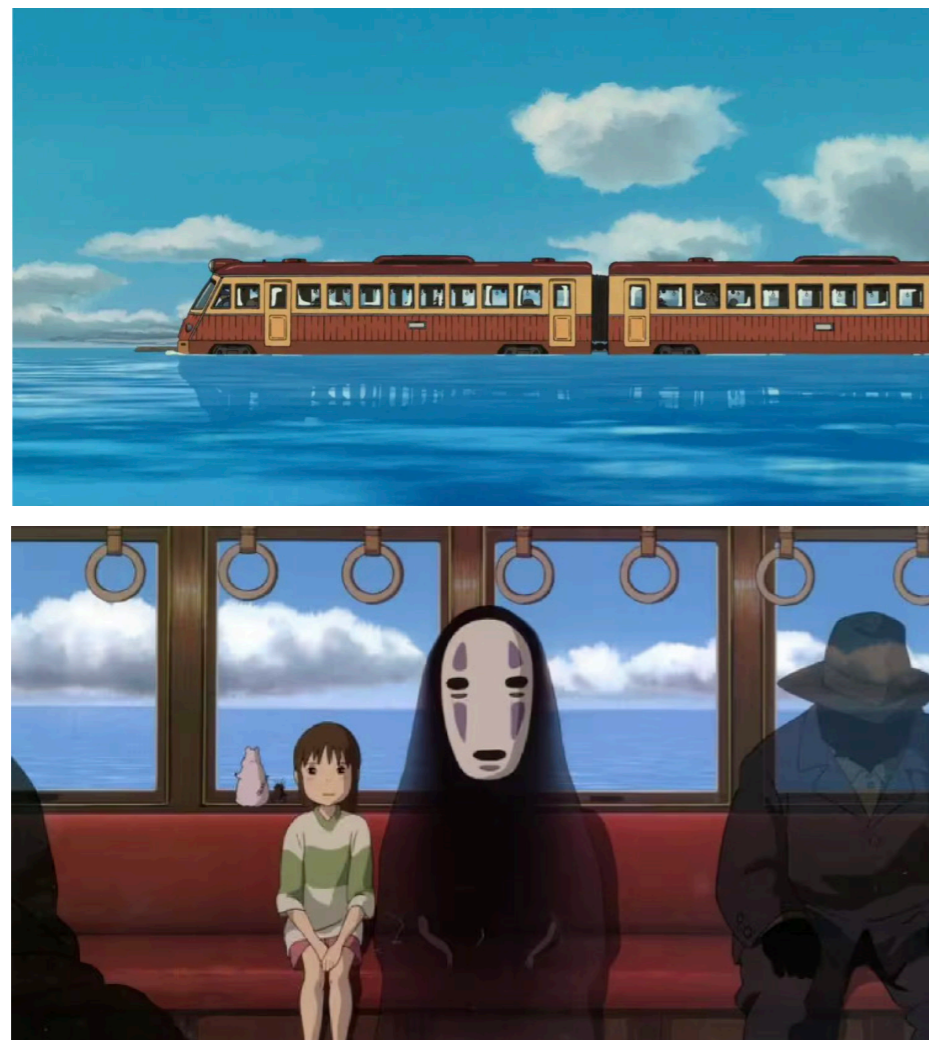


The Expression of Nostalgia in Eastern Animation

The overarching goal of this research project is to use 2D animation as a visual means to convey nostalgia within a Chinese context. According to research by Macdonald (2015), Eastern animated films usually use unique picture styles and designs to create artistic conceptions. These designs may draw from traditional Eastern painting styles, such as Chinese ink paintings or Japanese ukiyo-e. In order to have a more specific understanding of the aesthetic methods in Eastern animated films, during the research phase I chose two successful animated films, *Spirited Away* and *Chinese Strange Tales*, as design heroes to understand how the visualization of nostalgia and emotion could be expressed in an Eastern context.

Figure 3.1.

The Train Scene in Spirited Away



Note. Animation screenshots retrieved from Miyazaki (2011).

Spirited Away

According to Zongmei (2016), there is a complete psychological mechanism behind the exquisite audio-visual language of Hayao Miyazaki's animation films: civilian consciousness and praise of ordinary people, as well as the humanistic feelings displayed in this creative psychological mechanism, which is the fundamental reason for the success of Miyazaki's animation. The expression of nostalgia and memory, using Japanese culture as the background of the overall story, provided specific ideas for my practice. According to Collingwood (1960), the film proposed the concept of 'magic' and used elements such as colour and form to create a unique atmosphere and emotional experience, creating in the audience a sense of immersion. Integrating Japanese mythology and traditional culture, it tells the story of the main character, Chihiro, and follows her adventure and growth in the mysterious world (Swale, 2015). Spirited Away is Miyazaki's simple homage to Japanese culture, retaining a focus on the past and a unique Japanese identity.

There are apparent nostalgic metaphors in the animation's scene design, such as the conductor using a mechanical ticket punch device on his belt and wearing white gloves, paying tribute to the early design model of the train. The two-car train departs from the platform, surrounded by a vast and calm sea, and although it has no specific form, it is reminiscent of rural travel. The depiction of the train and the unique architecture of the country house are intended to generate a sense of magic - - ritual participation (a collective emotional experience).

Figure 3.2.
The Bath House, Animation and Actual Scenes



Note. Images retrieved from
<https://travel.rakuten.com/contents/usa/en-us/guide/spirited-away-bathhouse/>

In addition to the structure of the screen, the film also incorporates traditional architecture, costumes, and objects with Japanese cultural characteristics. The most outstanding thing is undoubtedly the creation of the Bath House in the animation. The prototype of the Bath House is a hot-springs house, popular during the Muromachi and Edo periods in Japan (C. Wu, 2016). This kind of architecture with traditional oriental characteristics is used throughout the animation. The film also incorporates many Japanese elements, such as gorgeous printed yukata, wooden slippers and paper window panes; profoundly traditional items which are deeply imprinted in the memory of Japanese people. These old-fashioned objects quietly return the audience to Japan's Edo period hot-springs town style, evoking the intimacy this familiar environment brings and arousing audience nostalgia for their hometown.

Switching perspectives between reality and imagination is reminiscent of the unique experience of the world in childhood. The memories of that stage are often the wonderful feeling of reality and fantasy intertwined. This provided me with a structure; the description of the scene can become a medium for a touching experience, capturing the details of the contemporary cultural background to form an atmosphere through depicting more information and generating an immersive nostalgic experience. Using the environment to create a dreamy, immersive atmosphere complements the animated narrative, allowing the audience to better integrate with the storyline.

Therefore, in the early stages of animation production, I collected elements related to my cultural background (Chengdu, China), such as scenes with regional characteristics (Chinese markets, Sichuan opera masks). I referred to Chengdu-specific architectural groups, such as Kuanzhai Alley, and added elements with architectural characteristics (tiled houses, cornices) to the scene design. At the same time, I created a home scene with period characteristics. This fictional home restored the atmosphere at the turn of the millennium; old-fashioned bookshelves, wooden cabinets and printed wallpaper. I was trying to bring the audience into the animation - - the perspective of a Chinese girl living in the 2000s.

Figure 4.
Scenes from "The Country Bus Takes Away Wang Haier and the Gods"



Note. Animation screenshots retrieved from https://youtu.be/tFgIF_KluNU?si=kVrEKLDG8uLJNqlx

Chinese Strange Tales

"The Country Bus Takes Away Wang Haier and the Gods"

Chinese Strange Tales is a collection of animated short films from Shanghai Art Studio. It is divided into eight chapters with different stories and animation production styles. The fourth story, "The Country Bus Takes Away Wang Haier and the Gods," brought inspirational guidance to my animation practice. It tells a story about memories of growing up and changing times. Childhood confusion provides space for imagination, rooted in the environment in which one grew up. The animation begins with the protagonist recalling that one day, as a child, he saw three shadows under his feet on the way home. He thought it was magical at the time because he believed a person only had one shadow and did not understand why he had three. So began the fantasy.

The animation adopts the illustration style of Chinese students' textbooks, imparting a nostalgic atmosphere to the audience. In addition, the author also arranged many details with the characteristics of the times in the scene design: tape recorders, sewing machines, televisions, and other items representing the 1990s. At the same time, it also depicts children catching grasshoppers and playing in the fields and scenes of villagers sitting at the intersection eating meals together. These details, which represent daily life during that period, make the animation background settings more realistic and credible, creating an immersive experience for the audience. The background story of the animation is set in the author's hometown: Gangliu Village, Hongchang Town, Yuzhou City, Henan Province. In the animation, the story is told in dialect, which increases the audience's sense of resonance through familiar language and intonation.

The story told in "The Country Bus Takes Away Wang Haier and the Gods" is a simulated reconstruction of childhood memories. The country bus in the animation is a modern means of transportation that connects the countryside with the outside world. It is also the connection between childhood and reality. It runs through the film like a metaphor and hints at the overlap between childhood and reality that cannot be returned to.

Drawing on the creative experience of “The Country Bus Takes Away Wang Haier and the Gods” gave me inspiration for subsequent animation production. In terms of narrative, I used the child’s perspective as the entry point for the plot design. In the story, a little girl is the protagonist. Everything is observed from her perspective: her understanding of the environment, her curiosity about things (vendors at the morning market), and her mentality (for example, her childishness – she loses her temper when she doesn’t get the lantern that she wants).

In addition, to better create the environment of the era when the story takes place, I used colours with Chinese symbolism (dark blue, bamboo green, apricot yellow) to match the traditional Chinese ink-painting style, hoping to create a unique aesthetic by drawing on the background creation techniques in “The Country Bus Takes the King and the Fairy Away.” In some scenes, such as the morning market, I added street cries, characteristic of the Qianxi era, vendors (no longer common) and restored the clothes of children in the 2000s era, trying to recreate the atmosphere.





Research Design

Methodology

Practice-Based research

As a designer, I hope to present my research and thinking visually, through art. Candy et al. (2021) point out that practice-based research is a research methodology that combines theory and practice. This methodology allows researchers to acquire knowledge through practical personal activities, forming a positive interaction between theoretical exploration and practical exploration; that is, theory guides the direction of practice (Biggs, 2004). Practice-based research emphasizes the combination of theory and practice, which guided me to unlock the theoretical knowledge of the concept of nostalgia at the beginning of the project. By concentrating on relevant literature, I reflected on my personal experience and cultural understanding of nostalgia. I learnt about the traditional culture and connection to family that nostalgia implies in the Chinese context. Going through these studies helped me establish the goal of my research: to create an emotional connection with the audience through feelings of nostalgia illuminated by hand-drawn animation. This methodology also emphasized direct participation and experience.

Next, I employed activities such as field visits and interviews to launch a practical exploration phase. Through a large number of painting exercises and on-site collections, I perfected and crystallized the abstract concept of nostalgia. Through practice-based research, combined with personal experience when I returned to my hometown for fieldwork, I found that many familiar scenes from my childhood no longer existed, extending my feeling of nostalgia to include regret. This experience cannot be obtained through theoretical research alone; real emotions profoundly impacted my animation design. I fictionalized my grandfather's home in the animation, modified the original scene, and reproduced elements such as old-fashioned induction cookers and radios that no longer appear as times change, adding a contemporary flavour to the work.

Figure 5.1.
Brainstorming During the Research Topic Selection Phase



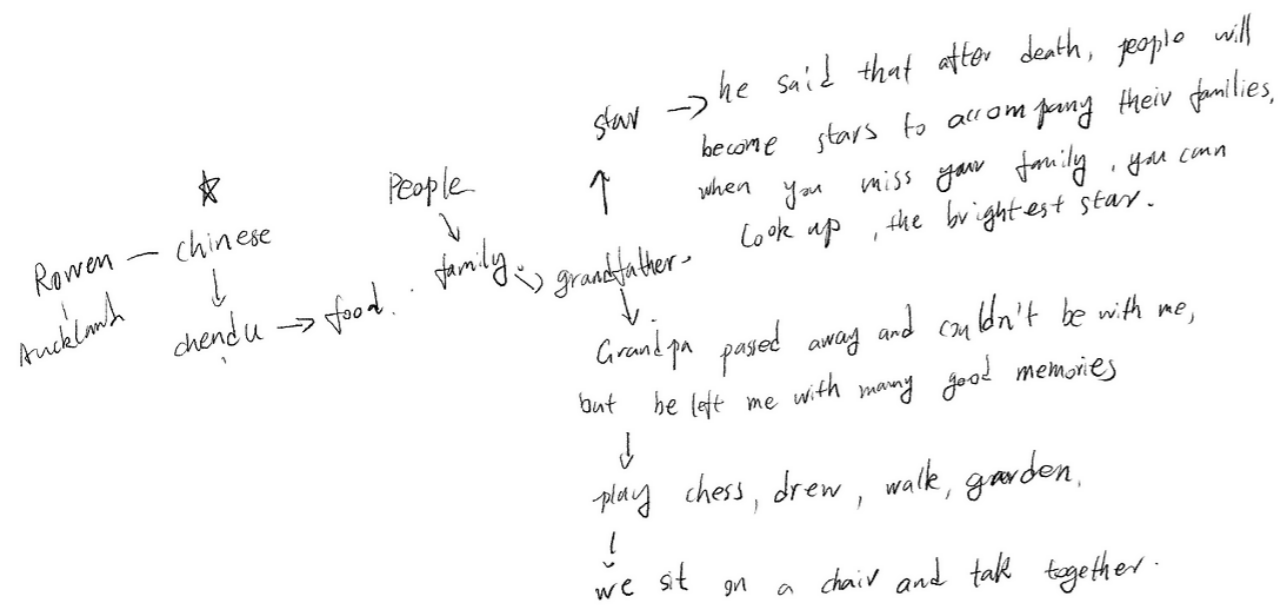
Note. Brainstorming during the research topic selection phase was expanded with inspiration from memories and nostalgic feelings (August 2023) .

Autoethnography

In this project, I used an autoethnographic research methodology to support practical exploration. Autoethnography is an analytical writing methodology that describes and systematically analyzes subjective experiences to better understand cultural experiences (Bochner & Ellis, 2006). Guided by autoethnography, I began to self-reflect on the content and feelings I was interested in, such as my growth, hometown, family, and how I felt when I was far away from home. I used brainstorming to record this content. Autoethnography not only represents the voice of the person being studied - - inspired by personal experience and my cultural background, I realized that whenever I was far away from home, I would always miss my loved ones, prompting me to develop a strong interest in the theme of nostalgia.

As Bochner and Ellis (2006) explain, autoethnographic research records personal experiences and contains deep political and cultural connotations. Through self-reflection, researchers can resonate with readers and clarify the connection between individual identity and the social environment in which they live (Adams et al., 2017). For these reasons I decided to return to my hometown to conduct an in-depth investigation and gain a systematic understanding of the region, culture, and feelings evoked. In addition to exploring the theoretical context around the meaning of nostalgia in Chinese culture, I conducted on-the-spot investigations.

Figure 5.2.
Brainstorming Based on Personal Experience (August 2023)



Upon returning to my hometown of Chengdu, I reviewed my upbringing with my parents. I hoped that their descriptions of my childhood would help me better understand my family and family ties. Based on the childhood photos I found, I decided to revisit my hometown to examine the collision between the scenes in my memory and reality. I returned to places, such as the parks I had always been to, and found that over the years they had become dilapidated or no longer existed. I hoped to experience my feelings this way and incorporate this nostalgia and regret for the past into the animation, making the story's emotions more lifelike and immersive. At the same time, I went to historic sites in Chengdu that had a solid cultural and historical presence, such as Kuanzhai Alley and the morning market. Through immersive exploration of their regional atmosphere, I gained a more systematic understanding of the city where I had grown up, its customs, and their impact on me. In addition to these investigations through autoethnography, I used other research methods alongside it, to help me further understand nostalgia and practice.

Contextualisation (Contextual Review)

Contextual review as a methodology emphasizes a comprehensive and in-depth review and analysis of the literature on the research topic. So, in the first important part of my writing, the contextual review stage, I conducted a theoretical study of the key theme of this project from two perspectives: the definition of nostalgia and the connotations of nostalgia in Chinese culture. These combined concepts provided essential information for the project and improved my understanding of what nostalgia signifies. From my initial, simple recognition of the word, I gradually understood it as a feeling for loved ones influenced by culture and personal experience.

In addition, this exploration of concepts provided me with a basic prototype for the following practice. I began to think about creative perspectives, nostalgic aesthetics, and animation technology (such as nostalgia-related animated movies and painting styles). In the final stages of the project, I moved more deeply into aesthetic and technical considerations. I drew on influential animation works such as *Spirited Away* to help me analyze how nostalgia is expressed in visual arts of a specifically Asian cultural background, through an aesthetic perspective: traditional painting style (ink), colour, composition (white space, artistic conception). From a technical standpoint, I borrowed from *Inside Out* to help me understand the technical means of character creation and emotional transmission, such as music, body movements, facial expressions, and emotional atmosphere.

By comprehensively considering these theoretical perspectives, I was able to grasp the theme of nostalgia more comprehensively and provide strong guidance and support for subsequent creation and research.

Pre-Visualization

Trying out different strategies early in production helped me as a designer to pre-visualize specific outcomes and make and reflect on them as the cycle progressed. These strategies included tools such as storyboarding and mind mapping, which helped me build ideas and conduct early simulations and tests of potential outcomes. For example, I briefly sketched drawings for the stories I wrote to present my design concepts and ideas, helping me discover the feasibility of these ideas while visually recording the iterations of scenes, characters, etc. Additionally, mind mapping helped me organize various ideas and concepts and connect them to design goals and requirements. Through these pre-visualization tools I was able to understand my design direction more clearly and to make adjustments and reflections during the production process, in order to achieve the final design goals.

Methods

For the research, I developed my project using an approach that allowed me to reflect and constantly refine the creative process. These methods included the following:

- Mind mapping
- Field exploration
- Casual conversation
- Feedback
- Storyboard

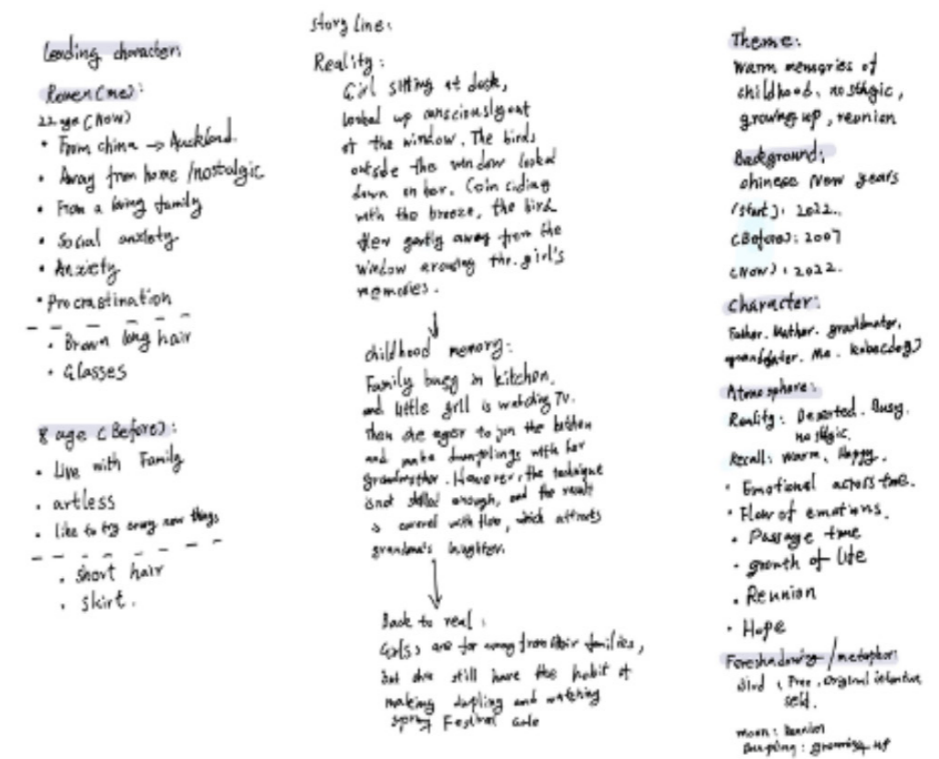
Mind Mapping

As a practice-oriented creative researcher, it is essential to clarify ideas in the early stage of the project, combine personal experience with practice, organise the unique insights brought to me by nostalgia, and establish the narrative direction in an animated short film context. As a method, mind mapping is a visual tool for deconstructing ideas (Crowe & Sheppard, 2012). It helped me sort through my memories and nostalgia early on in this project, connecting fragments of personal memory and nostalgia into visual structures.

As part of this process, being a Chinese student who has lived in Aotearoa New Zealand for three years, I listed my personal experiences, including the environment in which I grew up, my cultural background, how I felt nostalgic during my study abroad, and how I came to understand the origins of nostalgia. They helped me sort out my interpretation of nostalgia and the concepts dominated by my unique cultural background. To break down the keyword 'nostalgia,' I articulated my own explanations in Chinese. At first, I used different software to translate the English word nostalgia, and found that it was interpreted as either homesick (乡愁) or nostalgia (思念). However, these are two relatively different concepts.

For example, homesickness is more about nostalgia for the hometown, while nostalgia is more about nostalgia for the family. To better understand the idea and differentiate it from the Western concept of nostalgia, I conducted in-depth research within a Chinese context, during the contextual review stage. I learned that nostalgia closely relates to traditional Chinese culture. It is not just a longing for a place (home) or memories of the past, but also carries strong emotions, warmth, and an emotional connection with family. This research helped me develop a narrative direction—connecting the concept to the emotions (longing) for my family (kinship). With this understanding, I drew a mind map (see Figure 6). From the memories of my childhood to the process of studying abroad, I found that the most significant memories (or nostalgia) I had while studying abroad, the ones I described the most, were about my grandpa - the helplessness and sadness over the death of a loved one, as well as the sensation of past time with my grandfather when recalling childhood memories. So, I decided to tell a heartwarming story about a girl and her grandfather based on my experiences.

Figure 6.
The Structure of the Mind Map for the Story



Note. The structure of the mind map for the story includes character setting, storyline advancement, and the overall goal of the animation (January 2024).

Figure 7.1.
Photos Taken in the Park When I Was a Child; The Same Venue in 2023 (2006; December 2023)



Field Exploration

Based on my ongoing investigations into the theory of nostalgia and the exploration of its visual expression, I decided to conduct a field trip to combine existing theoretical knowledge with personal practical experience. Through field trips and photographic records, I collected information about my hometown's unique architectural style, cultural attractions such as the morning market, and my grandfather's lifetime possessions. I used these materials in the creation of animations. I designed a fictional morning market including the architectural style of the morning market based on the old-fashioned tiled houses in Chengdu, vendors (hard to find nowadays), sugar paintings, and candied haws.

During my fieldwork, I looked back on my childhood memories. When I returned to places I used to visit, many had ceased to exist. For example, the house I lived in as a child has been turned into a shopping mall. In addition to collecting material for animation creation, this field trip also made me experience a deeper nostalgia; missing my grandfather, accompanied by regret and yearning for my childhood that no longer exists.

Figure 7.2.
Chengdu Ancient Town



Note. Photographs by author, taken during on-site work (December 2023).

Casual Conversation

Conversation as a research method is a specific means of obtaining information, usually to collect data through direct communication with specific groups of people (Remenyi, 2012). Since my grandfather died, I have often heard my family mention him. From what they said, I realised that my understanding of my grandfather was only one-sided. I never seemed to understand his life or his past. My childhood memory of my grandfather became blurry as I grew up. I can only recall fragments of my time with him and mostly from my own perspective. I needed to learn more about him in other ways. Therefore, I interviewed my grandma in the early stages of animation production.

At the beginning of the interview, I did not formulate too many outline questions but allowed her to talk freely about her memories of my grandfather and the details of my childhood. According to Molenaar and Smit (1996), regular questioning may restrict the interviewer's thinking process. So, during this process, I tried my best not to interfere or guide, hoping that Grandma could recall and narrate at her own pace so that I could learn some details that might be difficult to talk about in daily life. In the process, I knew that my grandfather, taciturn in my impression, would always silently give me his love and secretly buy me the toys I liked. He would copy pictures in newspapers when he was bored and cook my favourite dishes to cheer me up when I was unhappy.

These details and memories about my grandfather gave me a deeper understanding of him and provided an authentic reference for the subsequent character creation in the animation. In addition to oral interviews, I asked my grandmother to give me some precious old objects and photos as auxiliary materials; these provided me with an intuitive visual reference and helped to restore the atmosphere and details of the time in the film. This interview not only enriched my understanding of my grandfather but also gave me a better understanding of my family's attachment to their loved ones. I remember that after my grandfather passed away, my grandma rarely mentioned him. I thought that my grandma had adapted to life without him, but here, after the first interview, I observed that Grandma would put the things that Grandpa used frequently in boxes and carefully preserve them. This was just like my grandpa's love for me, always expressed clumsily and hidden. This emotional experience would be injected into every detail of the animation, such as the dishes my grandfather cooked for me and the Spring Festival couplets he wrote, with the aim of making the work warmer and more humane.

Figure 8.1.
Grandpa's Paintings and the Places he Once Lived (January 2024)



Figure 8.2.
Records of Chats with Grandma (January 2024)

采访:

希望了解的内容:

爷爷的生平

照片中的故事

爷爷是否留下什么遗物

我小时候与爷爷的故事

问题:

① 奶奶你觉得爷爷喜欢小时候的我吗?

回答:你小时候太调皮了,爷爷有哮喘,每次你跑得太快

爷爷都追不上你,爷爷老偷偷给你买零食,还帮你瞒着

不让别人知道,他肯定很想你,都没有见到你最后一面。

② 这个灯笼买的时候发生了什么?

你上次喜欢一个东西玩两天就不要了,肯定是不愿意给你

买的,但是你一直闹,爷爷也不想看你不高兴给你买了。

③ 爷爷有什么喜欢的东西吗?

他喜欢画画,没事就对着报纸上的插画临摹。

④ 你觉得爷爷和我是怎么相处的?

他其实很有耐心,他虽然记忆力没有之前好了,但是

你喜欢吃的东西他都记得,什么红烧狮子头啊,韭菜鸡蛋。

知道你喜欢吃就老给你做,做多了白饭你还不爱吃,吃了

就腻了,然后他就得想新事,

⑤ 爷爷和我小时候经常去的地方?

公园啊,浣花溪公园,你总想去喂鸭子,每周幼儿园

一放学就得去一次。

Note. Partial list of question:

1. Do you think grandpa liked me when I was a child?
2. How about the lantern? Why did my grandpa and I quarrel? What happened at that time?
3. Does grandpa have any hobbies?
4. How do my grandfather and I get along?
5. Where is the place that my grandpa and I went often?

Evaluation

Evaluation feedback is opinion given by others on outputs, which can promote the advancement and improvement of the project in a timely and effective manner (Hepplestone et al., 2006). I used regular meetings and discussions with my supervisors during the research process to advance the project and obtain effective feedback at each stage. Through these meetings and discussions, my supervisors understood the progress of my research and gave targeted evaluations and suggestions on my current work. My supervisors' affirmation helped to enhance my confidence and maintain motivation; on the other hand, questions and shortcomings raised by my mentor prompted me to reflect on, explore, and solve problems. The evaluation from the supervisor's professional perspective made the feedback more targeted and forward-looking, guiding my research to not deviate from the established goals and directions. In addition to regular meetings, my tutors and I also used online communication channels such as email and Teams. In this way, I promptly got answers and guidance from instructors when encountering problems and avoided many blind and inefficient attempts.



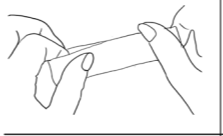
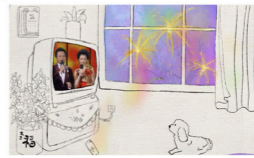

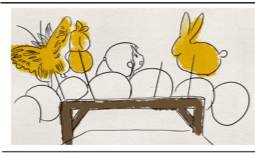






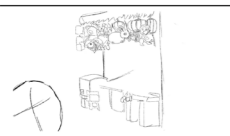


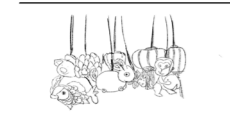
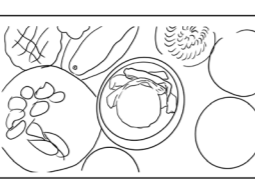



As it is a story about the relationship between a little girl born in the millennium and her grandfather, I envisioned the audience for this short film to be young people of similar age to me, with an Asian background. I hope that, through the animation, the little girl and her grandfather can interact with each other, and that Grandpa's emotional bond arouses these viewers' reflection and nostalgia for their family. To verify this aim, in addition to the tutor's comments, I also gave the draft of the animation to friends with the same cultural background, hoping to get some feedback. In one friend's feedback, she mentioned considering adding some specific Qianxi era cultural elements or details into the story to enhance the audience understanding and emotional resonance of Asian culture. From this feedback, I realized that apart from the style and objects of the scene, there was not much evidence of traditional culture in the animation, so I added symbols of the Qianxi era, such as sugar paintings and candied haws, hoping they would awaken in people a shared memory this era.

Storyboard

To make the narrative and visual effects of the story more precise, I created storyboards in the early stages of my animation practice. I used drawing to transform the proposed text of the plot into different draft storyboards, based on their content. The early drafts gave me a rough idea of the scenes and shots needed for the animation. I found that some proposed plot points might weaken the overall rhythm of the story, so I made new choices. For example, I deleted the original plot of the grandfather teaching the little girl calligraphy. This segment was too disconnected from the main plot, so I only displayed this as a photo and simply hinted at this through the layout of the grandfather's home and the pictures on the wall. At the same time, I added the plot of the little girl getting angry and the grandfather cooking to coax her, to make the overall pace of the story more dramatic and add conflict.

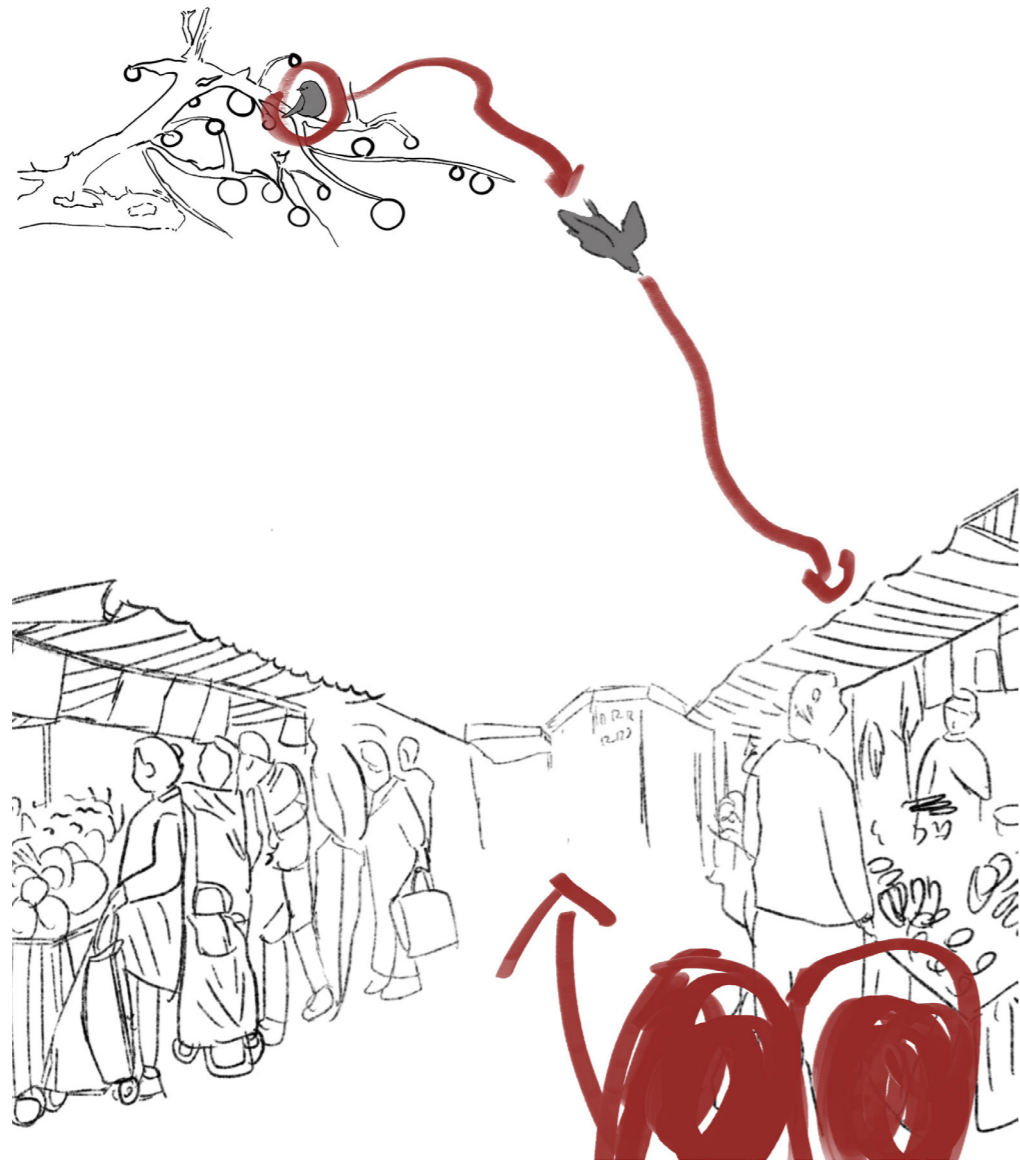
In addition to allowing me to control the plot more clearly, the storyboard also helped me greatly in my subsequent animation production to predict angles, shot language, and design of a painting, frame-by-frame. In addition, this process also inspired me to think about lens language, which can create an immersive atmosphere through angles and perspectives, making the animation picture richer. For example, I added Grandpa's first-person perspective to the new storyboard, using camera shake and reduced frame rate to simulate his faltering steps.

Figure 9.1.
Initial Storyboard Draft

	Scenes 1. the grandfather hold the girl's hand/ Enter morning.	Overview the story begins with memories. my grandfather always holding my hand and taking me to the fair.		Scenes 2. Market / tanghulu.	Overview the little girl pulled away from her grandfather's hand and looked around.		scenes 5 Paper lantern .	Overview Grandpa took out a few pieces of paper and folded them up.		Scenes 6 Home	Overview spring Festival party began, the window also set off fireworks.
	Scenes 2. Morning market	Overview grandpa brought the little girl to the market, and the little girl looked at surrounding things with curiosity.		Scenes 2 Market / sugar blossom	Overview The things in the market are varied, and the girl is excited to visit		Scenes 5 Paper lantern	Overview Grandpa's hand was like magic, the few pieces of white paper gradually turned into a lantern.		Scenes 6 Home	Overview grandpa said, let me teach you to write the "福". The New year has come to greet the "福", the coming year can be smooth and healthy.
	Scenes 2. Morning market	Overview the girl didn't like her grand father always holding her hand. she wanted to break away and look around.		Scenes 2 Market.	Overview suddenly several little girls run past the girl, and the girls eyes were caught by the lanterns in their hands.		Scenes 5 Paper lantern.	Overview little girl was very happy when she saw the lantern and thought it was even prettier than the ones sold outside.		Scenes 6 Home .	
	Scenes 3 Market .	Overview she found the lantern shop.		Scenes 4. Home	Overview the little girl went home and made rice, while her grandfather began to cook in the kitchen.		Scenes Return to reality	Overview zoom into the "福"			
	Scenes 3 Market.	Overview All kinds of lanterns make the girl more excited		Scenes 4 Home .	Overview Grandpa made a lot of dishes that girls likes and called the girl to come over for dinner.		Scenes Return to reality	Overview Grandpa sat alone, and she was on his head on the table, but someone had no way to go home this New year.			
	Scenes 3 market	Overview she pulled her grandfather, wants to buy the lantern. but grandpa did not agree.		Scenes 4 Home.	Overview The girl ate her meal sorrowly. Then grandpa came back to comfort her and said, "Grandpa to do a magic tal for you."						

Note. The initial storyboard draft included storyboard scenes, content, and shot setup (October, 2023).

Figure 9.2.
Shot Preset at the Beginning of the Animation (First 10 Seconds) (December 2023)



Documentation of Practice

In this chapter, I will reflect on the decisions and procedures during this practical project. It first explores the expression of nostalgia (the motivation and process of reliving memories), then focuses on specific considerations of character creation, plot development, music decisions, and in-depth commentary on all aspects of animation production.

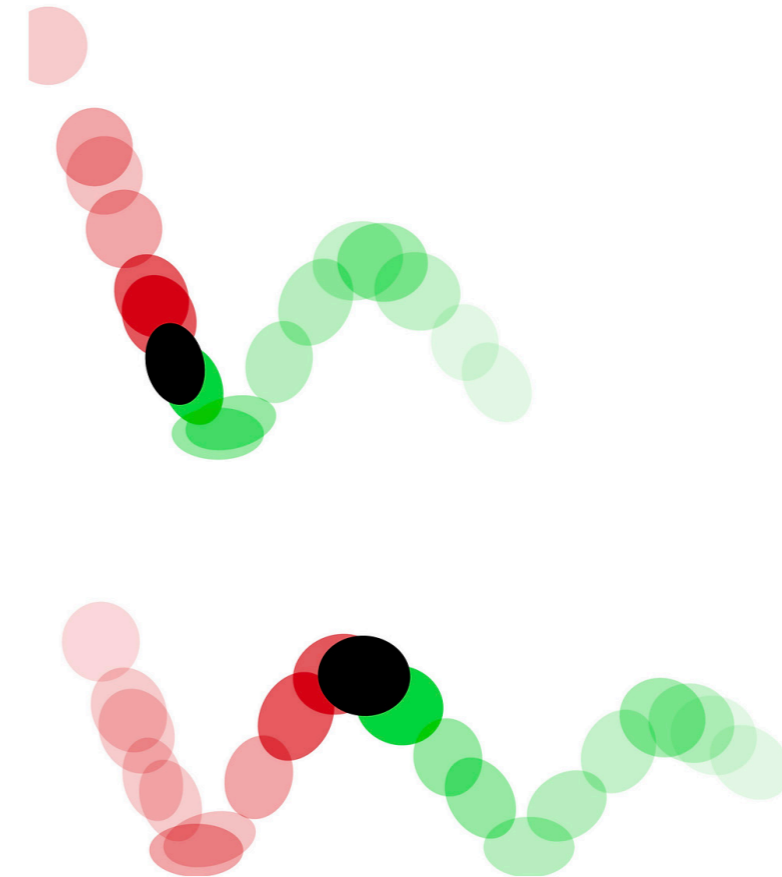
Looking Through the Lens of a Communication Designer

In my past research practice as a communication designer, I have tried a variety of graphic forms, such as books, posters, and picture books. However, when creating picture books, I often think about how to make the storyline no longer limited to static images but more vivid and exciting through dynamic photos. At first, I tried to create GIF animations to present graphic works in dynamic form on my mobile phone. Still, this simple animation method could not fully satisfy my desire for visual storytelling. Later, through continuous exploration, I learned about the media form of 2D animation.

Unlike three-dimensional animation, two-dimensional animation using traditional frame-by-frame method has a powerful attraction for me - - during my childhood I was mostly exposed to 2D animation, and it remains one of my most iconic memories. As well as being a continuation of the illustration style I use in my newsletter design, I love the unique texture and warmth of hand-drawn work. I was eager to use the visual art medium of 2D animation to transcend the limitations of graphic works, achieve more profound visual narration, and truly bring the audience into a dynamic world, entirely of the imagination.

Consequently, I have developed a strong interest and love for two-dimensional animation. I am determined to devote myself to this new creative field and explore the unique charm of visual art in telling stories in the language of animated images. Considering that I need to animate characters frame-by-frame and do not have much animation experience, I did character explorations and animation exercises. I started with a simple ball movement and tried to recreate the dynamics of the ball falling. I made a reference video by recording a video of a falling ball and recreated it in frame-by-frame animation.

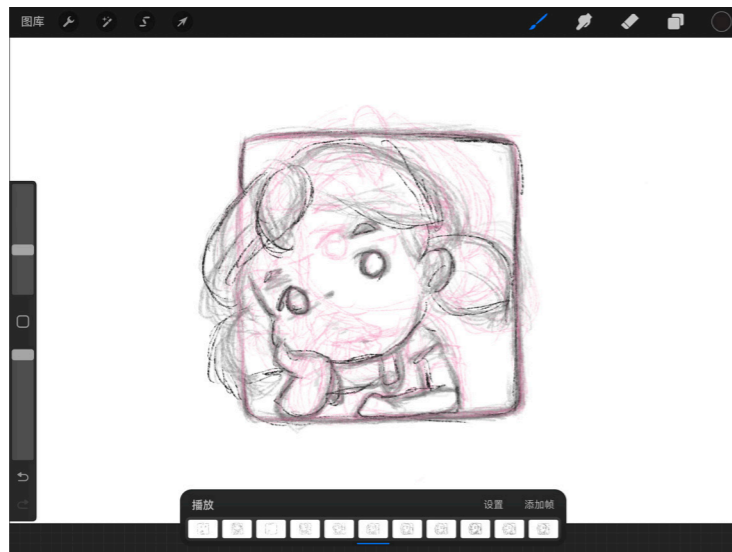
Figure 10.1.
Bouncing Ball Movement



Note. Bouncing ball movement, exercises in the early stages of learning to make 2D animations (April 2023).

During this process, I found that the shape and speed of the falling sphere changed, which was of great help in understanding and paying attention to an object's momentum and movement to make the animation feel more realistic. As the protagonist of my animation is a little girl, after getting familiar with simple bouncing ball movements, I created an image of a little girl to perform basic dynamic exercises, including a running girl and a little girl's expression exercises.

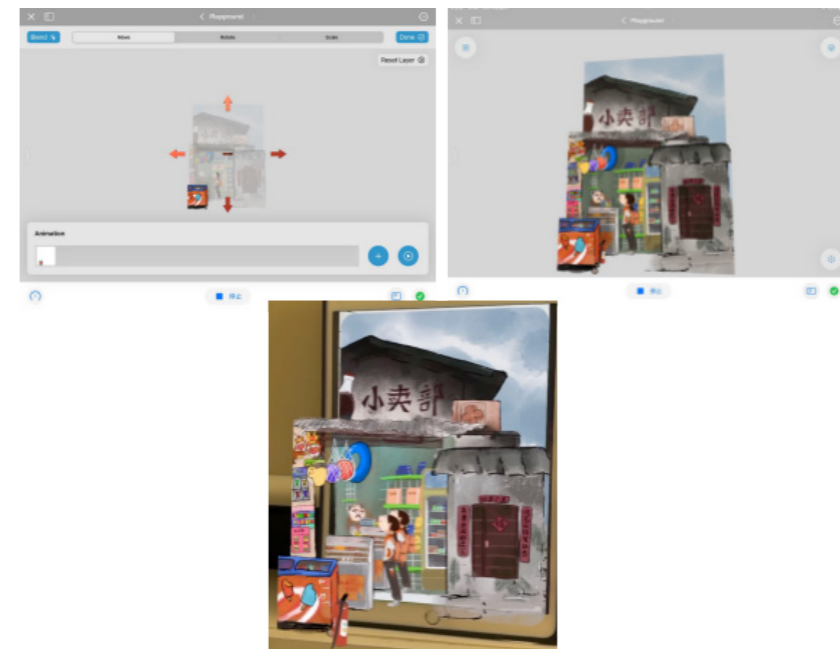
Figure 10.2.
Little Girl Expression Practice (May 2023)



In doing so, I echoed what I had learned in previous contextual studies of emotional expression in animation: capturing a character's facial expressions and body movements is crucial. Some everyday actions, when copied directly from the video reference source, are diluted when reproduced in animation, so I exaggerate the movements appropriately when drawing, based on animation principles. Compared to a bouncing ball, the animated object will be affected by its mass and material.

For example, balloons are soft in texture, so there will be more squeezes when a balloon falls. This deformation will make the ball's momentum more realistic; when it flattens as it hits the ground there will be a bounce momentum. The same situation can also be applied to characters. When putting video references into animation, these movements will not be noticeable; what I have to do is exaggerate them. For example, where the little girl quietly leaves her grandfather, I need to make her body movements feel like squeezing. She squats down, tends to lean forward, and then stands up again. As she follows, her hair and hands will also change in size. These exercises provided the foundation and inspiration for my later practice; in the subsequent animation production I became more proficient in using the momentum principle to add details of body language to the characters and demonstrate through movement.

Figure 10.3.
Animated Model Produced in Past Research (June 2022)



Animating Frame by Frame Using a Hybrid Framerate and Editing Techniques

Although new to animation, with limited experience as a communication designer, I was prepared to experiment with motion graphics. In the early stages of this project, I originally planned to use the 24 frames per second (24fps) frame rate common in feature-length animation. However, considering that I am an independent producer, and the animation is expected to be longer than one minute, using a higher frame rate of 24fps would cause greater work intensity for me.

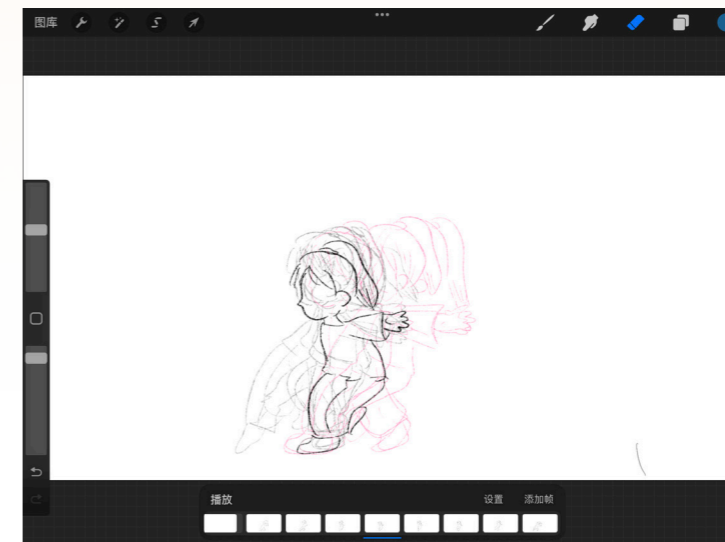
Therefore, during the actual execution phase, I adjusted the frame rate to 12 frames per second (12fps). As my understanding of animation production deepens, I gradually realize that animated objects will change in shape, lengthening or flattening due to speed, quality, material, etc. For example, when a ball bounces and falls, it will change form upon landing due to its material and mass. The balloon has a softer texture, so it will become very flat when it hits the ground, while the bowling ball has a hard texture, so even if it hits the ground, there will not be any exaggerated deformation. In addition, the frame rate directly affects the visual effect of moving objects.

For instance, when I set the little girl to walk from point A to point B and draw at 12 fps, because of time between adjacent frames, if the interval is long, the girl's movements will be stuck and the movement will appear intermittent, lacking coherence and realism. Therefore, in relation to character behaviour, I increased the frame rate appropriately and followed the original movement trajectory of the little girl. Frame padding was performed on the animation to align it to the movement trajectory that would exist in the real world.

I used a meager frame rate of 3fps in some scenes, in addition to the necessary 12fps. In my mind, the grandfather walks very slowly because he is old, so I tried to restore this feeling by an opening shot of the grandfather walking towards the cabinet. I used a first-person perspective and utilised the slow advancement of the picture and the shaking of the camera to depict an old man's staggering footsteps. I also used the editing technology of animation software to individually create dynamic effects for trees and other elements in some longer scenes, such as branches swaying in the wind and the sky moving with the characters.

These editing operations help me save time painting frame-by-frame, allowing me to focus more on the dynamic painting of characters. At the same time, combined with details such as swaying trees and environmental changes, the scene looks more natural and engaging. Through frame rate adjustment and editing techniques, I can create high-quality animation effects as much as possible, to present a lifelike visual experience to the audience.

Figure 10.4.
Little Girl's Walking Posture Practice (June 2023)



Collection of Memories

According to Mosher (1979), a good story needs a clear theme so the audience can understand the core message or emotion, which can be conveyed by including appropriate transitions and unexpected plot developments in the narrative. In the preliminary research, I discussed the word nostalgia in a Chinese context and gave it the connotation of missing loved ones. I decided to use animation as a practical form of emotional expression. I started creating a warm and friendly narrative thread – the deep familial bond between a girl and her grandfather.

Combined with my personal experience, when thinking about what kind of story to tell about this nostalgia for my grandfather in animation, I decided to start with the material closest to my heart, from the little moments of getting along with my grandfather during my childhood. To regain as many precious memories as possible I collected familiar childhood objects, photos, and other physical and video material that could evoke memories. I hoped these materials intertwined with my grandfather's memories would help me recall some of my own childhood memories. I also added some dramatic parts to the storyline, such as the origin of the conflict between the grandfather and granddaughter, and the unexpected way that the grandfather eased their conflict by cooking food.

Figure 11.1.
Photos of my Childhood with my Grandfather (2003)



However, this alone did not seem to be enough. When I looked at the photos again, I found that many of my childhood memories had become blurry because of the length of time elapsed. I could not recall what had happened when these photos were taken, nor the location. They just stayed in this photo and were difficult to distinguish. Many of the memories I recalled seemed inaccurate; as Moran mentioned in a 2002 study, our childhood memories are not entirely objective but are often affected by personal emotions, biases, and experiences.

Therefore, when we recall the past, we often reconstruct the memory and may add, delete, or change some details, making the memory deviate from what really happened. To reconstruct the past more completely, I turned to my family for help, hoping that their accounts could fill in the gaps in my memory and help me piece together a more complete puzzle. In my grandmother's narration, I found that my grandpa differed from what I remembered. Grandpa, who was not good with words, in my memory always tacitly expressed his love for me. For example, whenever I felt depressed, he would cook my favourite dishes to comfort me. In his quiet way, Grandpa remembered which dishes I liked to eat and always finished, even if I never explicitly told him. Maybe my grandfather would not directly express his love for me verbally, but he showed it in detailed actions and meticulous care. Through my grandma's stories and memories, I had time to acknowledge and re-recognize her quiet love for my grandfather, the man we both love deeply. This experience of bringing out these bits and pieces of him undoubtedly deepened my longing for him.

Figure 11.2.
Part of the Plot in the Animation (March 2024)



Character Development

As I explored nostalgic memories and got to know my grandfather better, I gradually developed the story's characters. I decided to extract character traits based on my childhood image and the real-life image of my grandfather. I created two key characters: the naughty little girl and the inarticulate grandfather. Thinking about making the characters closer to reality, I used details from my childhood photos I collected for the characters, such as the little girl's ponytail and sweatshirt, as well as the grandfather's Chinese tunic suit and rickety body. After completing preliminary character and appearance designs, I realized that the flat character images were purely on the surface. I asked myself, how do I visually highlight their inner personality traits and make these fictional characters more vivid and three-dimensional?

In this respect, I studied colour decisions in the animated film *Inside Out*. I learned that the director used his daughter as inspiration, referencing the emotional changes and behavioural characteristics of an 11-year-old girl in real life, and applied it to the character design. For example, she doesn't like broccoli. The director noticed that children at this stage would not have overly complex emotions; they will only feel simple happiness or sadness, so the glass ball representing memory at the beginning of the movie always appears in one colour: happiness is yellow, sadness is blue.

Figure 12.
Scenes from *Inside Out*



Note. Animation screenshots retrieved from <https://youtu.be/AcfmHoUiNnw?si=fCNmBuTiZzFt3OrS>.

These vivid and detailed descriptions make the characters more lifelike and make the audience feel more involved. Colours are used to represent emotions, making them distinct and recognizable (for example, anger is red). According to Morton (1997), brighter colours engender positive sensory feelings, darker colours, sad feelings: recognizable colours which allow the audience to identify the character at first glance. Secondly, in the movie, body movements are used to convey personality, making each character more vivid. For example, Joy will always open her arms exaggeratedly to express excitement; when she is sad, she will lower her head and frown, reflecting her melancholy and depressed state. Such gestures which mimic life give each character a distinct personality, making it easier for the audience to resonate with and deepen their understanding of the character. The shaping of the successful colour decisions of *Inside Out* guided my animation. Similar to the method of using the brightness of colour to represent mood in *Inside Out*, I also used different light and dark colours to distinguish the little girl's emotions in the animation. In order to make the overall atmosphere of the animation match the emotions of the protagonist while also having a Chinese atmosphere, I chose light ink colours that are more in line with the colours of traditional Chinese paintings, such as the traditional Chinese colours, indigo (blue)³ and Gladiolus fabric (pink)⁴.

Figure 13.
The Use of Indigo (Blue) and Gladiolus Fabric (Pink) in Traditional Chinese Art



Note. Images retrieved from <https://m.jiemian.com/article/6232694.html>

³ 靛青 is one of the traditional Chinese colours, blue. It's a dark cyan colour. Cyan is one of China's "Five True Colors"—the colour of the East, the colour of spring. In the traditional Chinese colour system, cyan includes blue, black and green. It mainly refers to blue. Indigo is also known as indigo flower. Powders are made from processed stems and leaves of Malan, Indigo, Polygonum, Isatis, and other stems and leaves. It also refers to blue-black pigment. This pigment comes from indigo flowers. The Chinese painting pigment is called "cyanine," so indigo powder is called "cyanine powder," which contains the most indigo. The blue content is about ten times higher than ordinary indigo mud. Ancient women often used it to draw their eyebrows (China Fetching, n.d.).

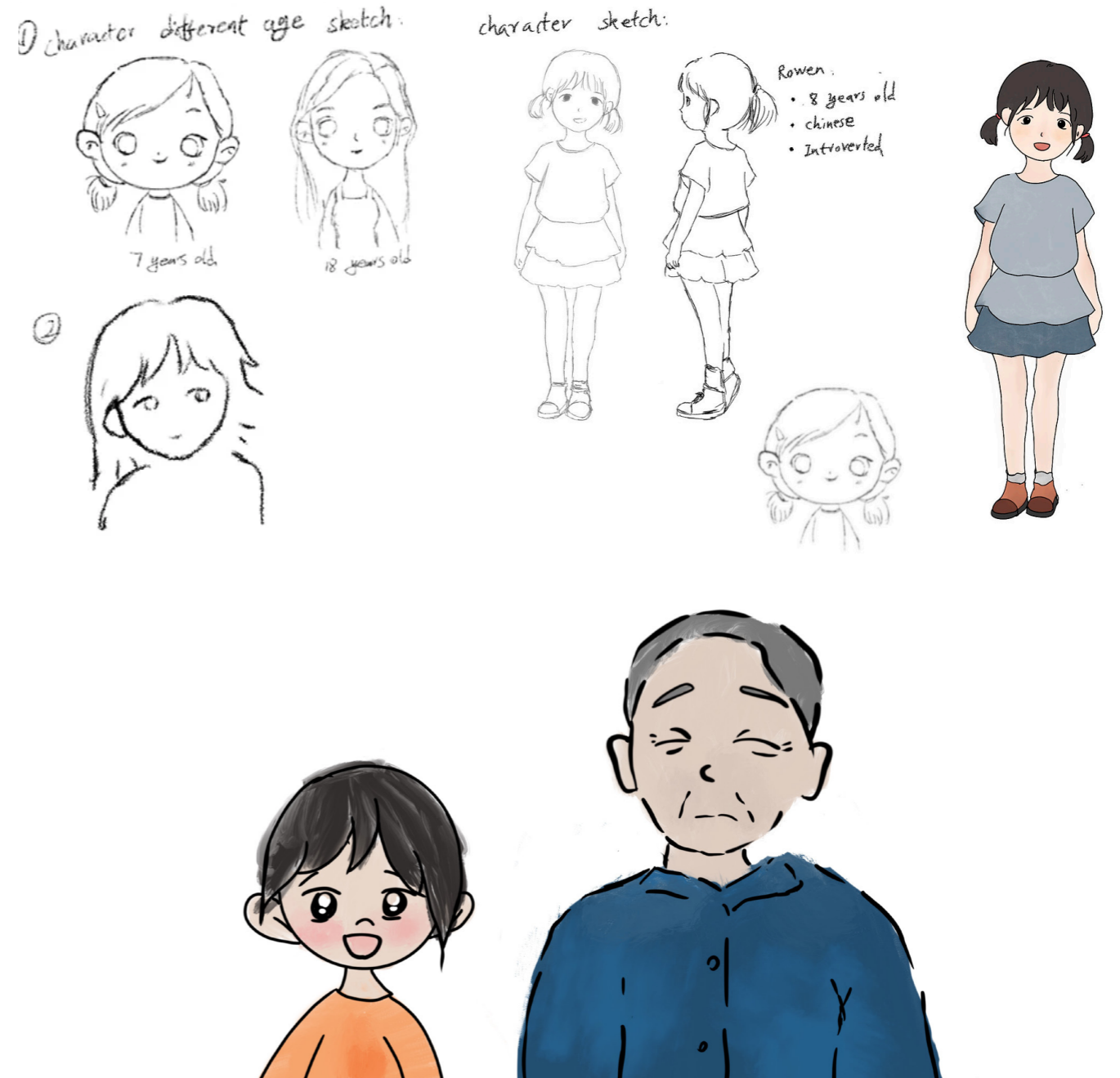
⁴ 十样锦 (Gladiolus fabric). A female poet of the Tang Dynasty dyed her letter paper light pink, the same color as the Gladiolus fabric, an exquisite embroidery style in history (China Fetching, n.d.).

Appropriately exaggerating a character's facial expressions and distinguishing personality through colour can visually make the character's personality traits more distinct. Based on this discovery, I decided to use a bright and lively yellow to interpret the little girl's outgoing personality and a low-key, restrained navy blue to show the delicacy of the grandfather's inner world. The depth of character development inspired me to think about animated scenes. I added personal items to the scene, such as the paintbrush and magnifying glass my grandpa used, to flesh out the characters. Including buildings with regional characteristics in the background conveys cultural identity and creates an immersive atmosphere for the audience.

Figure 14.1.
Character Inspiration (2008)



Figure 14.2.
Character Design Iteration (January 2024)

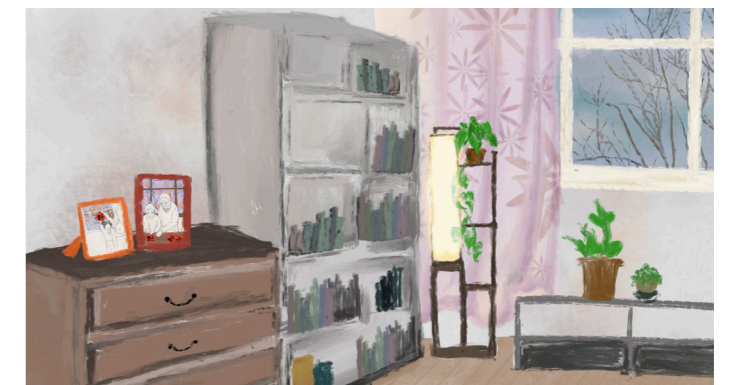


Developing Environment, Atmosphere

To restore as much as possible the scene of getting along with my grandfather as a child, I chose to return to my hometown of Chengdu for a month-long field trip. When I brought those precious childhood photos and revisited familiar places, I found that the passage of time had erased the appearance of the past; the park I often visited with my grandfather as a child had been renovated, a modern glass overpass had replaced the original wooden bridge, the old house where we once lived had been transformed into a brand-new shopping mall. The scenes from my memory no longer exist. These changes made me regretful and made the scene restoration challenging to recreate. I cannot completely reconstruct the original appearance of my childhood based on my memory. On the advice of my supervisors, I integrated these real-life scenes with photos that were taken in my childhood to create and translate my memories into the present animation. I chose to complete it by hand because painting can ignore the time difference, and I can freely depict the pictures in my imagination.

For the exterior architecture, I referred to the traditional Chengdu tile-roofed building style and the stone bridge. I tried my best to restore the original scene, such as the arrangement of rooves in the morning market and the arched bridge. In addition, I added some imaginary parts, such as fictionalizing the layout of my grandfather's house. I referenced the home where my grandfather once lived and restored the layout of cabinets and bookshelves, as well as the potted plants that he liked, but many details, such as the television and the photo of me with my grandfather, I chose to redraw from memory. In addition, I looked for anime visual reference material which also had a nostalgic theme.

Figure 15.
Scene Reference (February 2024)

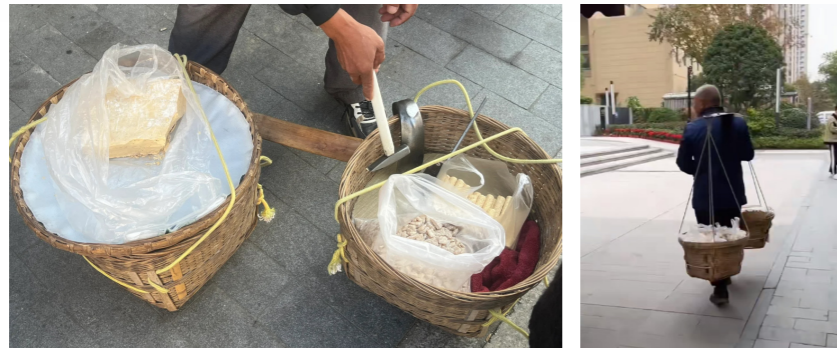


Diegetic Sound

In *Spirited Away* the sound of the train and the noisy vocal background made me realize that ambient noise could be added to animations to achieve immersive sound. Therefore, during the field trip to my hometown, in addition to collecting visual materials, I also captured environmental sounds on my mobile phone, such as the chirping of birds in the park and the hustle and bustle of the morning market. In the process, I hoped to collect some meaningful, culturally distinctive sounds; I recalled the shouts of vendors I used to hear in my childhood.

In my search, I found that the shouts in different places would have regional dialects. For example, the vendors in Chengdu would have a Sichuan accent. However, over time, vendor-style sales have become no longer mainstream and are rarely heard anymore. I started investigating, and luckily, I met an old man who sold dingding candy⁵. Many people may not know what dingding candy is, but it is part of my childhood memories, so I recorded it and incorporated it into the background sounds in post-production. Making these scenes in the animation more vivid and immersive, it provides the audience with an audio-visual experience.

Figure 16.
Chengdu Intangible Cultural Heritage: Dingding Candy (December 2023)



⁵ 叮叮糖: Dingding candy is an intangible cultural heritage of Chengdu, made from maltose. Vendors selling Dingding candy use a hammer to hit the iron plate to create a "ding ding" sound. Similar to the music of Western ice cream trucks, when children hear this sound, they know that Dingding candy is sold nearby, which is also where its name comes from.

Plot Development

I created a brief storyboard at the beginning of the research, but developing a complete storyline became a priority as the study progressed and fieldwork was conducted.

According to the original storyboard, I needed to make three short stories and connect them through a dream. The story told of a little girl who discovers her grandfather's box when she went home for a visit. This box contained three objects (Spring Festival couplets, lanterns, and photos).

They respectively represent three memories with grandpa, and the story is narrated from grandma's perspective. However, the story setting was still too fragmented, and I couldn't connect these stories at a later stage. When I made this animation, I wanted to express my longing for my grandfather and the emotions between grandparents and grandchildren.

I shortened the story to the "Keep the Lantern" chapter and used more space to show the bond between the little girl and her grandfather. From the beginning the girl is unhappy because he didn't buy the lantern but later comes to understand her grandfather's painstaking efforts.

After a rearrangement of the plot, the story focused on expressing the grandfather's hidden love for his granddaughter; her regret that she cannot make up for it after she has grown up and finally understood, after being ignorant of it at the beginning, her grandfather's love for her. In addition, to establish a connection between reality and memories of the past in the animation, I included a bird at the beginning, as a clue throughout the film. This idea originated from a childhood memory of mine - - my grandfather once raised a bird in the yard which he released when I had grown up and left home. The bird appears repeatedly in the animation. It is a transition between reality and memory, which carries the resonance of childhood, running through the entire story. I hope to immerse the audience in the flow between the character's past and reality through this detail.

Figure 17.1.
Deleted Part of the Story; Sketch

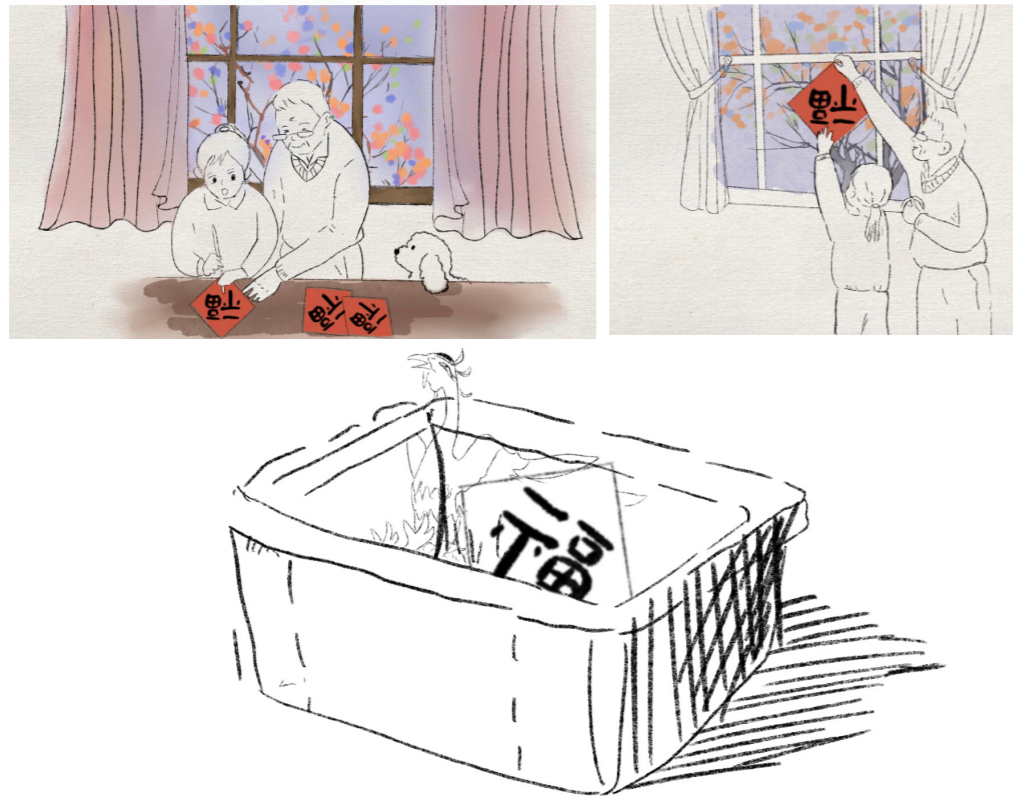
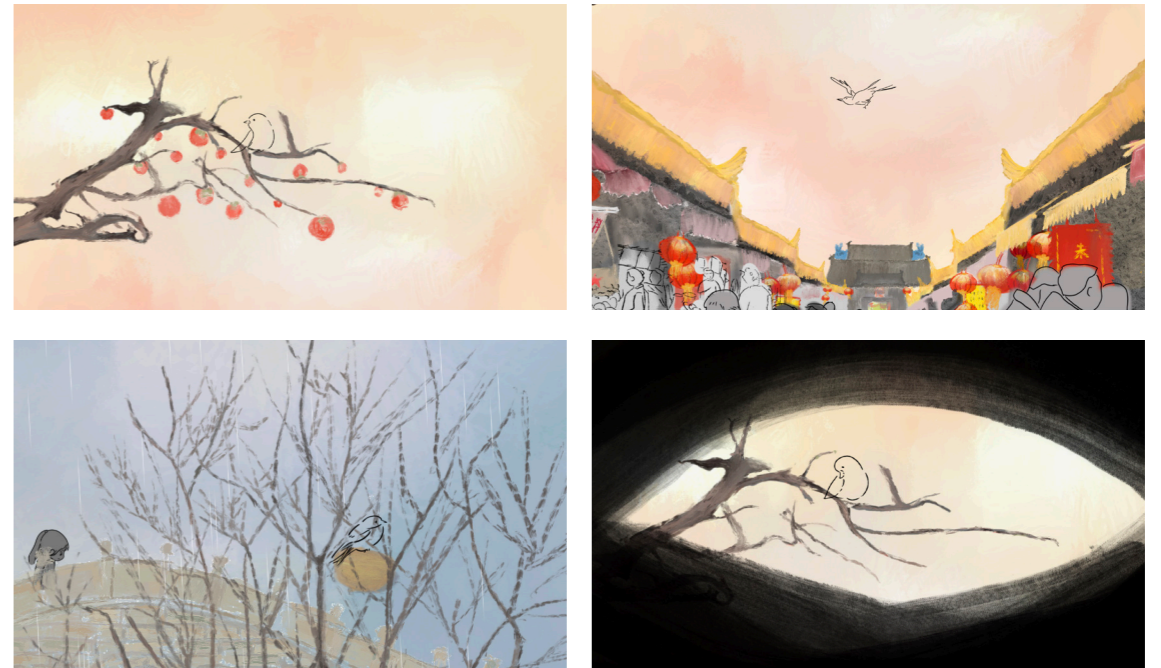


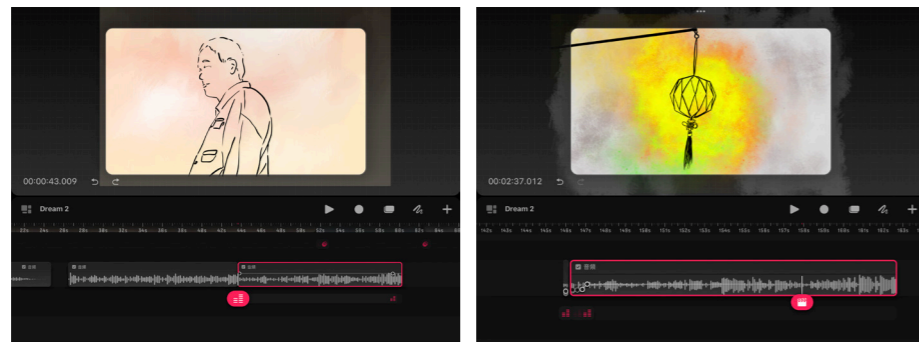
Figure 17.2.
Birds Appear Throughout the Story



Musical Score

I decided to use the character's expression, movement, and changes in the rhythm of the music to convey the character's emotional state. In choosing the background music, my goal was to match the slow narrative rhythm of the story. I also wanted to combine the charm of Chinese classical folk music with Chinese-style animation scenes. After careful consideration, I chose to complete the background music of the animation myself, and for this purpose I invited professional music producer Zheng Wentang to assist me in arranging the music. Instruments all serve specific stories, emotions, and ideas, and they are first and foremost tools (Wu et al., 2021). Accordingly, we discussed the overall mood of the animation at the beginning of the process and thought about which instruments would be used to play it. In order to be able to echo the cultural background of the animation in the musical atmosphere, we combined traditional Chinese instruments such as the guzheng, flute, and xiao⁶ with Western piano.

Figure 18.1.
Audio Tracks in Animation Clips (February 2024)



⁶ 古筝: Guzheng is a traditional Chinese plucked instrument with a long history and rich cultural connotations. It consists of multiple strings and a resonance box. The strings are usually plucked with two fingers to produce a musical tone. Guzheng was widely used in ancient China's court music, folk music, and various performances.

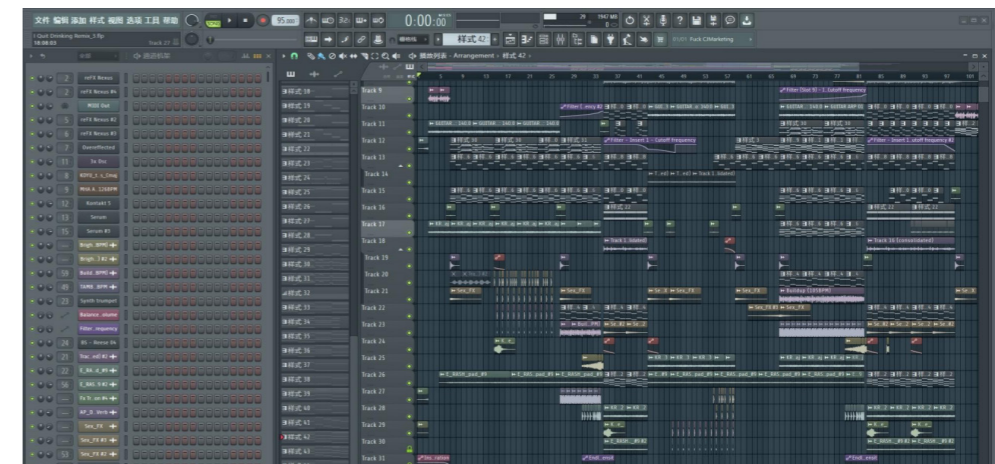
The flute is an ancient wind instrument that originated in China and was later introduced to Japan and other East Asian countries. It is usually made of bamboo or other materials and has a blow hole and several sound holes. The player blows air and controls the fingers to make the airflow through the mouthpiece to produce the tone. The sound of the flute is crisp and melodious, and it is often used to play classical music, ethnic music and modern music.

箫: Xiao is a bamboo wind instrument that originated in ancient China. It consists of several bamboo tubes of different lengths, controlled by blowing air and fingers to produce different tones. Xiao has a melodious and elegant tone and is often used to perform court, Buddhist, and traditional Chinese folk music.

This song, which I named “Dream Reborn,” begins with a gentle piano performance, which is very suitable for the opening of the animation. I hope that the audience can gradually feel embraced and integrated into the narrative; the music is mixed with the background sounds of the scene, such as the hustle and bustle of the morning market and the chirping of birds. According to Wu et al. (2021), the audience can perceive the transmission of emotions through instruments, rhythms, and musical styles.

The bamboo flute and piano play together, and the opening gradually fades out. The protagonist, the little girl, and her grandfather appear on the screen hand in hand. Here, I separated the piano solo from the music that started with the bamboo flute. It begins with a gradually increasing volume, combined with the added background sound, creating a sense of coming from afar, connecting with the present scene. Then the girl is attracted by the vendors in the morning market and breaks free from her grandfather's hand. I added a cheerful piano solo part to match her curiosity and innocence. As the plot progresses, the animation enters an indispensable part (the reconciliation between the grandfather and the little girl). In this clip, the music gradually rises. In this part, the flute and the piano together bring out the emotional climax of the animation. Then, I gradually lower the volume; as the music fades, it implies that the little girl is about to return to reality from the world of childhood memories. Zheng Wentang and I completed this song “Dream Reborn” to match the narrative rhythm of the animation. I hope that the overall atmosphere of the animation will be more complete, and in addition to the visual language, it will also bring emotional feelings to the audience.

Figure 18.2.
Screenshot of Music Production



Animation Production

Once the story framework was decided, I started animating it. Firstly, I made behavioural illustrations of the characters, drawing and organizing the facial expressions and imaginary movements of the grandfather and the little girl. I used Procreate animation mode to help draw more detailed content, frame-by-frame. In previous research, I learned that more exaggerated body movements and facial expressions would make the characters look alive and show off their personality. So, using the onion slice in the animation mode, I identified the changes in each frame and appropriately exaggerated the amplitude of the movements and expressions (such as a little girl walking quietly). Secondly, according to the framework of the storyboard, I used different camera angles to draw and organize the scenes and storyboards, hoping to convey the characters' emotions through the zooming of the lens or the change of perspective. For example, when the little girl reconciled with her grandfather, I gradually zoomed in and out and combined this movement with the crescendo of music to convey her subjective feeling of missing her grandfather.

Next, I created a second version of the storyboard. After showing it to my mentor, I received some feedback. The narrative was a bit bland and lacking dramatic conflict. I revised it and made a more detailed storyboard for the third version, using more space to tell the reconciliation process between the two. I added some details, such as the little girl discovering that the grandfather did not have enough money to buy a lantern, and his realization that she was unhappy. His reaction is one of helplessness. I hope to use this reconciliation plot to respond to the pattern of Chinese family relationships discovered in the research: indirect expressions of love.

Figure 19.1.
Plot Added into the New Storyboard (February 2024)

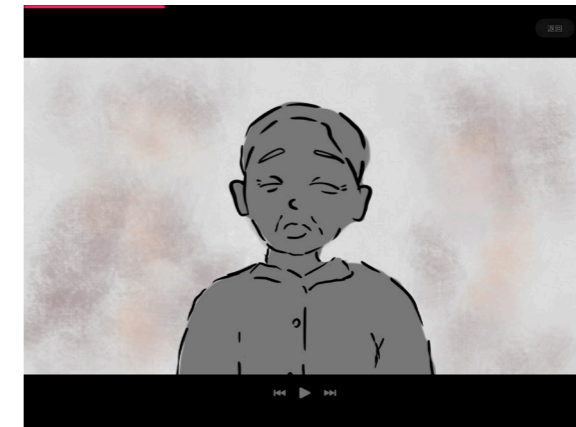
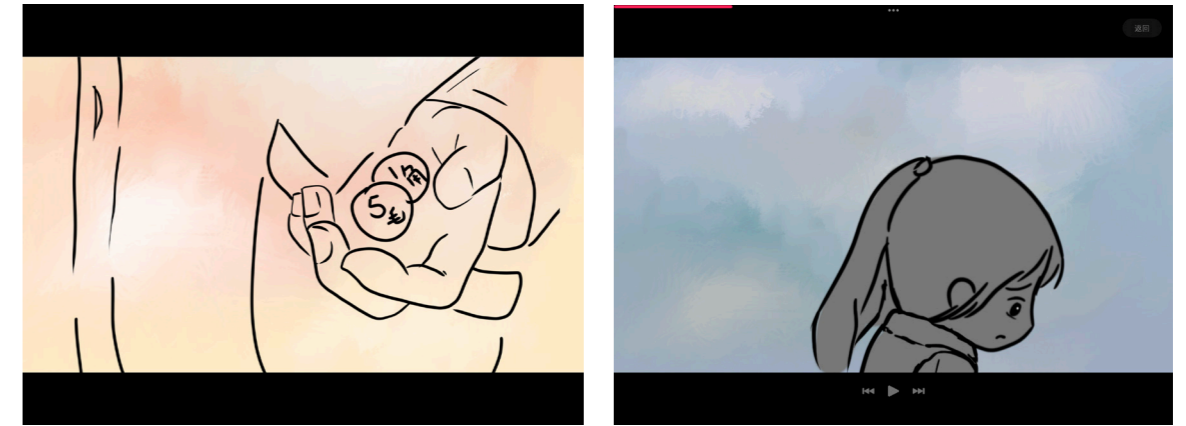


Figure 19.2.
Grandpa's Emotions Change After Discovering the Little Girl's Anger (February 2024)



Then, I began to try to depict some actions to express the little girl's feeling of missing her grandfather. I added a shot of them holding hands at the beginning of the animation, showing in detail the wrinkles on the grandfather's hands and his tight grip on her, while her hand gently holds his. She wants to look at the surrounding vendors more than being with her grandfather. She is curious about her surroundings. At the end, I added the image of a little girl hugging her grandfather, using the folds of the clothes around her hand holding her grandfather to show her longing and reluctance to leave him. In addition to movements, I also tried to capture some subtle changes in facial expressions, such as the slight frown on the girl's brow when she was unhappy and the slight sway of the shoulders when the grandfather sighed, thinking her ignorant. These tiny details better shape the character's inner world and emotional state. In this 'acting' approach, I gained many references for vivid and natural movements and expressions.

In the final exhibition, in addition to using the TV to play the animation, I also set up a scene for it. I made six wooden lanterns, printed out the scenes from the animation, and pasted them on the lanterns. Then I picked up some dry branches and hung them on the wall, and hung lanterns around the TV to create a simple environment. The environment formed by these lanterns and branches echoed the two scenes at the beginning and end of the animation. I hope that the viewers can feel immersive while watching the animation and experience the atmosphere of the Chinese New Year.

Figure 20.1.
Character Dynamic, *Onion Skin* (June 2023)



Figure 20.2.
Scenes from Animation

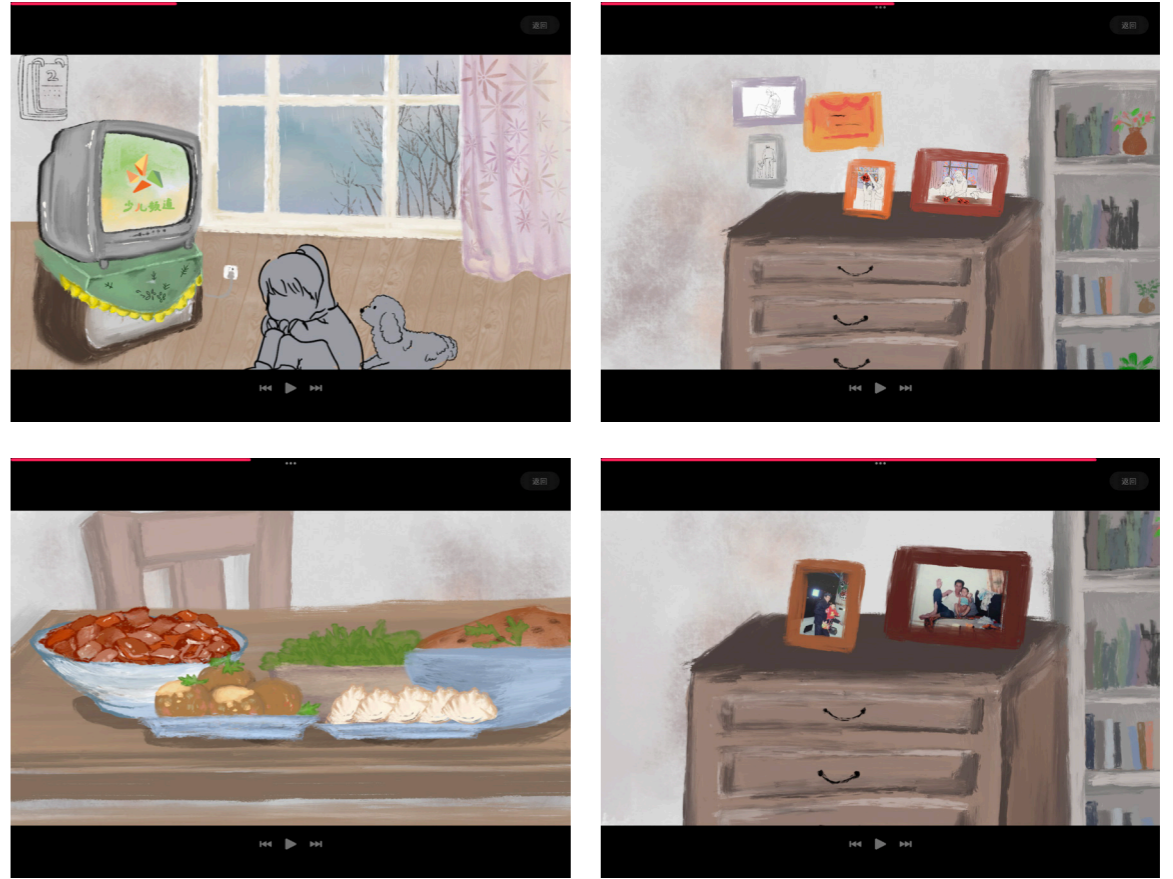


Figure 20.3.
Exhibition Layout



Conclusion

Missing my grandfather prompted me to look back at my childhood memories and explore the core of nostalgia. The research starts from the concept of nostalgia and gradually explores the cultural application of nostalgia elements in animation. Research into nostalgia is based on my personal experiences and identity, because whenever I am away from home, I feel homesick. Missing home and loved ones led me to explore this concept. I respond to this feeling in this project by situating nostalgia in a Chinese context and I have found the research highlights the positive effects of pleasurable nostalgia. In addition to effective stress relief, people can gain strength and comfort through memories and longing for loved ones (Scanlan, 2004).

I transformed from being a traditional graphic designer into an animator during this study. As I have been making graphic picture books for a long time, I began to think about whether I could use dynamic forms to narrate these stories instead of just through static pictures and words. Therefore, I stepped into a new creative field of animation, which I had never tried as a media designer. Through this transition, I did my best to understand and learn new narrative techniques, being more comfortable with frame-by-frame animation. I also learned that in addition to conveying information through images, I could also use a music score, sound effects, and camera angles to narrate and support the work's dimension. The newly acquired knowledge and skills have given me a more comprehensive understanding of the design industry and moving image creation.

Based on my research, I found that in addition to being away from loved ones at home for long periods, familiar objects and similar scenes can trigger feelings of nostalgia. I have also identified the concept of nostalgia, which is a complex emotion of longing for loved ones. I used a narrative story as animation content to tell the story of a nostalgic journey between the main character (a little girl) and her grandfather. It recreated warm memories of my grandfather, triggering feelings of helplessness and sadness. This study is my understanding and expression through visual means of my exploration of nostalgia.

In the future, I hope to continue to expand conversations related to nostalgia and understand how the concept of nostalgia differs in more cultural areas, such as nostalgia stories related to New Zealand regional cultures. Moreover, I hope to combine VR, a new artistic expression, with traditional 2D animation to form a new output form and achieve more immersive animation presentations. Looking back on this project, I realize it has given me a lot of inspiration. I believe that with the passage of time and the accumulation of experience, I will have new understandings. Based on my grandfather's memory, I used 2D animation to carry the memory, express Chinese nostalgia through visual art, and share this warm story of nostalgia and relief.

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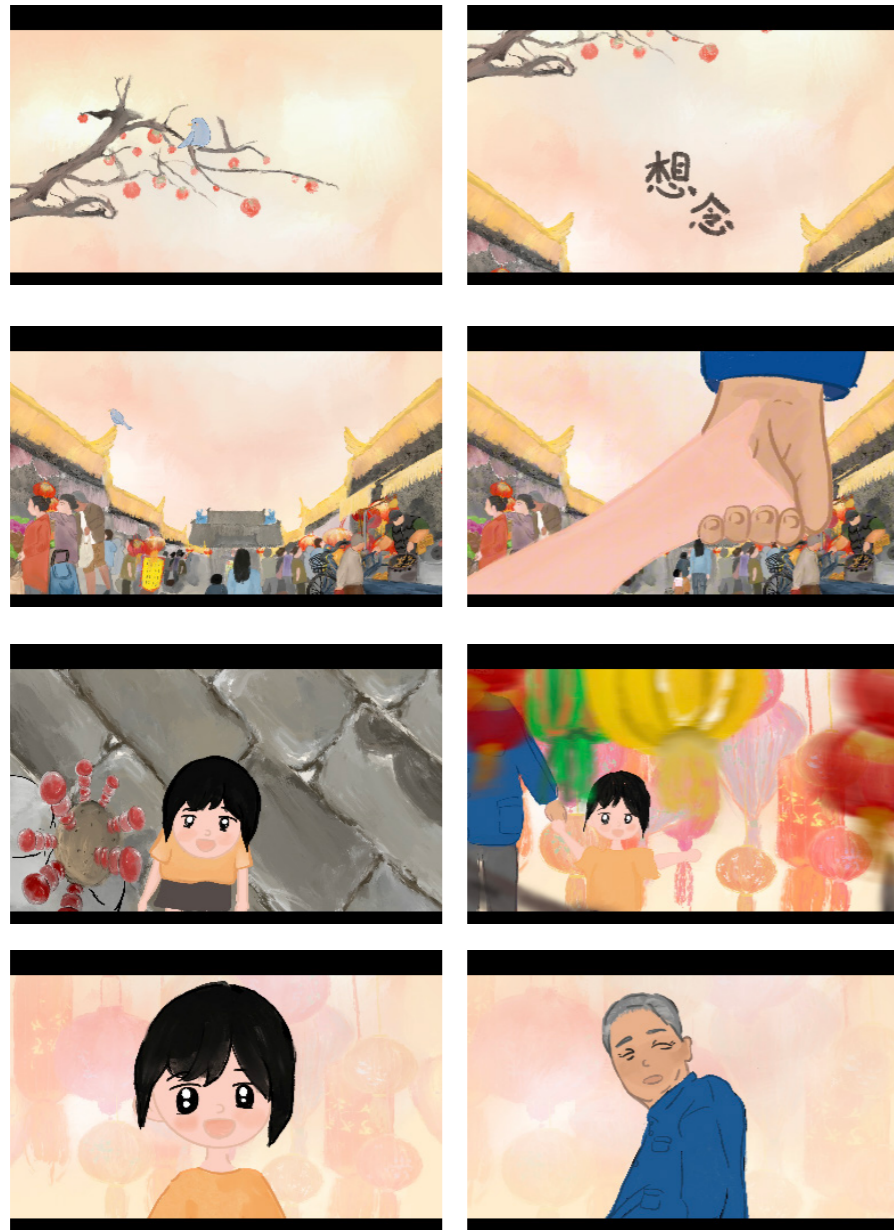
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Appendix

1. Inexpressible love (2D animation)—Storyboard version





2. Exhibition images

Animation Title: Inexpressible Love

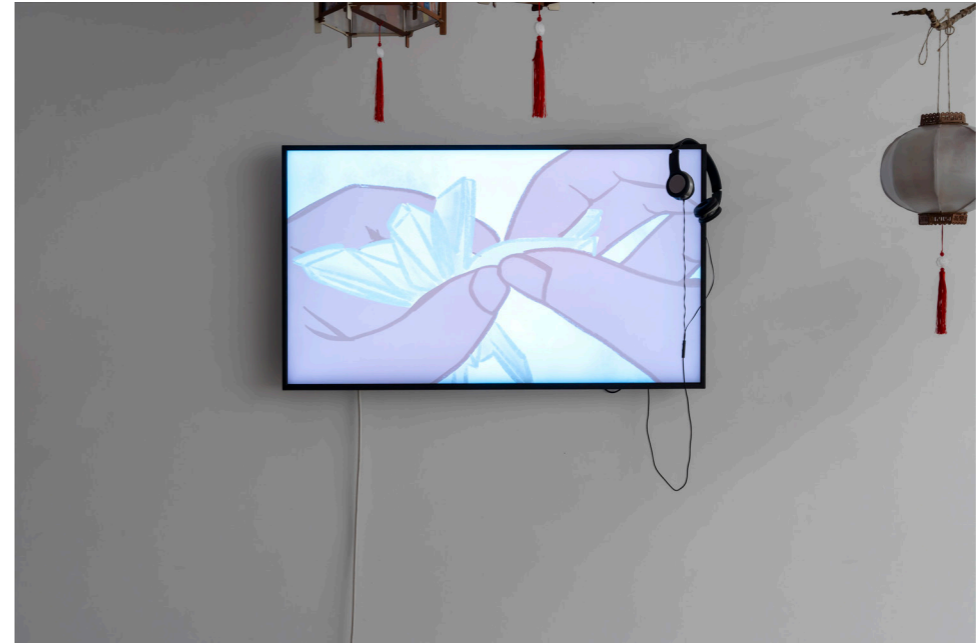
Media : Frame-by-frame Animation

Dimensions of Animation : 3840*2160px

Duration of Animation : Four minutes and thirteen seconds

Exhibition Dates : 19 June— 22 June 2024







3. Background Music "Dream Reborn" Authorization Letter

Music Link: https://c6.y.qq.com/base/fcgi-bin/u?__=L8xiohvW0zj7

Authorization Letter

Grantor: Duanmu Ruowen; **ID Number:** 620105200104130045
Grantee: Tencent Music Entertainment Technology (Shenzhen) Co., Ltd.

I. Authorized Works and Rights

1. The grantor grants the exclusive license of the authorized works and all the following rights to the grantee (see attached *List of Authorized Works and Rights*):
 (1) The adaptation right, reproduction right, performance right, broadcasting right, and information network transmission right of musical compositions.
 (2) The information network transmission right and broadcasting right of MV works.
 (3) The information network transmission right, broadcasting right, and remuneration right of adjacent rights of the copyright of sound recordings/videos, performers' rights, sound recording rights, video recording rights, etc.
 (4) The reproduction right of performers' rights and sound recording rights.

2. The information network transmission right in this authorization refers to providing or transmitting works, recordings, and performances to the public by wired or wireless means, including interactive and non-interactive methods. Specific usage forms include but are not limited to network on-demand, downloads, IPTV, digital TV, wireless or wired value-added services, and other usage forms that emerge during the authorization period, including specific user receiving terminals and display terminals such as but not limited to mobile phones, computers, tablets, set-top boxes, MPEG4 players, car TVs, aircraft TVs, and other receiving terminals or display terminals emerging during the authorization period.

3. The grantee has the right to take action to prevent and combat infringement and piracy, including but not limited to applying for evidence preservation, property preservation, administrative complaints, criminal prosecution, initiating civil litigation, appeals, applying for execution, settlement, obtaining compensation, etc. ("rights protection").

4. The term "piracy" in this authorization refers to any use of the authorized works without legitimate reproduction rights, performance rights, and information network transmission rights authorization, including but not limited to the use of unauthorized versions of music works (such as studio versions, live performance versions, derivative versions with altered compositions and remixes, etc.) through network transmission.

II. Nature of Authorization

1. This authorization is an exclusive authorization, meaning the grantee has the right to exclude the grantor and any third party from using the authorized works.
 2. The grantee has the right to sub-license all authorized works and rights to its affiliated companies and any third party.

III. Authorization Period: From July 24, 2024, to July 23, 2027. The expiration of the authorization period does not affect the grantee's enforcement of protection actions. Within thirty days before the expiration of the authorization period, under equal transaction conditions, the grantee has the right of first refusal for the renewal of the authorized works, meaning the grantor should first negotiate the renewal with the grantee, which does not affect the grantor's authorization cooperation with any third party after the expiration of the authorization period. After the expiration of the authorization period, based on the purposes of partial use agreed upon by both parties, the grantor will permanently and non-exclusively authorize the grantee to use the information network transmission right and broadcasting right of the copyright of the authorized works according to the authorization agreement.

IV. Authorized Territory: worldwide.

V. The grantor has the right to make the above authorization and bears all legal responsibilities.

Grantor: Duanmu Ruowen

Authorization Date: July 24, 2024

Signature: 端木若文



I, Pan Zhangjin, staff of Hangzhou Qihang Translation Co., Ltd., confirm this is a true and accurate translation of the original document.
 Translated by: Pan Zhangjin Contact Details: 13958359989
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 Signature: Pan Zhangjin Date of Translation: 2024.08.01

List of Authorized Works and Rights																	
ISRC	Album Name	Music Name	Song Type	Performer Name	Release Date	Lyricist	Composer	Lyric Share Ratio	Music Share Ratio	Adjacent Rights Ratio	Language	Authorization Start Date	Authorization End Date	Authorization Relationship	Authorization Form	Authorization Region	Convertible Authorization
	Dream Reborn	Dream Reborn	Song	Shi Buwen (Name: Duanmu Ruowen)	2024/07/24		Shi Buwen	100%	100%	100%	Instrumental music	2024/07/24	2027/07/23	Agent	Exclusive	Worldwide	Yes

Remarks:

1. Adjacent rights refer to the rights of the sound and video recording producers and performers.
2. Authorization relationship refers to whether it is an agency relationship.
3. Authorization form refers to whether it is exclusive.



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