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Review

Transforming the ma-zu cultural field experience into design form

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This paper discusses how the field investigation into Taiwan's traditional Ma-Zu culture was transformed into a creative design project. The study begins with a review and analysis of Taiwan's Ma-Zu culture and the relevant field experience process next, it presents the development of a theoretical framework for transforming this experience into a creative design. Four phases of this transformation were delineated into a creative design: (a) the conceptualization abstract ideas, (b) the visualization and 2D portrayal of concepts, (c) 3D portrayal of 2D visual object, and (d) the application of 3D objects to daily life. Subsequently, these phases were employed in a design case. The abstract and religious spirit inherent in Ma-Zu culture was transformed into a physical, realistic, and experiential goddess icon incense burner by internalizing the ritual of the Ma-Zu pilgrimage and contemplating the relevant field experience. The field experience encompassed cultural characteristics that could be used as the basis for a creative design, thereby forming a distinct, emotive design as an expression of the field experience. In addition, cultural features used could enhance the creative meaning and value of the design and form a feasible reference model for contemporary cultural creative designs, and thereby expanding the aesthetics economy with significant cultural characteristics.

Keywords: Ma-Zu culture, field experience, transformation, cultural creativity, creative design

INTRODUCTION

Belief in the sea goddess Ma-Zu is centralized along the coast of Southeast China, and for hundreds of years emperors in the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties bestowed the goddess with numerous high honors because of their reverence for the deity. Belief in Ma-Zu has drastically influenced Chinese cultures in coastline areas for thousands of years. As great numbers of Chinese nationals emigrated to foreign countries, belief in Ma-Zu was transmitted over a broader range, dissemi-

nating the deity's influence, and forming what scholars refer to as a Ma-Zu culture. Furthermore, Ma-Zu's annual pilgrimage has been termed one of the three largest events in all world religions. This study investigates the feasibility of transforming experiential activities pertaining to Ma-Zu culture into creative design. The spiritual experiences of the religious rituals in the Ma-Zu field are transformed into external and physical, designed objects that impart spiritual comfort.

The field experience of ma-zu culture

This section presents a review of relevant literature on Ma-Zu culture and the cultural field experience.

Ma-Zu culture

Belief in Ma-Zu has become popular among local folk in Taiwan. Each year on Ma-Zu's birthday during the third month of the lunar calendar, Ma-Zu shrines and temples throughout Taiwan host major rituals and pilgrimages. Of these annual tours, the nine-day, eight-night pilgrimage held by the Zhen-Lan Temple in Da-Jia, Taichung County, is the most significant and magnificent. This event has eight phases: "praying for well-being," (for the public) "entering the sedan," "commencing the journey," "taking up residence," "praying for prosperity," (for the public) "praying for celebrating Ma-Zu's birthday," "returning," and "sitting peacefully." During the returning ceremony, which is held on the fourth night of the tour and termed "delivering incense," a priest takes incense from the Feng-Tian Temple incense burner, it to the small incense burner from the Zhen-Lan Temple, then returns the incense burner to a small wooden incense carrier, before sealing the carrier box and completing the ritual; the priest repeats this three times. "Offering incense" occurs when Ma-Zu returns to Da-Jia: a small incense burner is placed in the sedan of Ma-Zu, and worshipers offer their incense sticks, pay homage to Ma-Zu, and pray for good fortune in a predetermined order of four stages: the first offering, the second offering, the third offering and the glorifying offering. In the final "adding fire" ceremony, the head of the recitation choir uses a long ladle to take the burning incense from the incense carrier and add it into various incense burners throughout the temple, thus ending the ceremony.

Throughout the Ma-Zu pilgrimage, worshipers make offerings of incense to the goddess, and the physical medium of "incense" is presented to complete each phases of the ceremony, thus concluding this major cultural event. Through the ritual of burning incense, worshipers convey their wishes to the gods, and the ritual symbolizes communication with the gods in heaven. This study investigates the feasibility of transforming Ma-Zu cultural experiences into creative design, and these experiences are transformed into external designed objects that impart a spiritually comforting effect. This corresponds with the findings of Cheng (2002), who states that the use of traditional Chinese cultural images in product designs can be classified as "symbolic transformation of tangible forms," and "life experiences of real roles and people." Ma-Zu culture is a typical example and representation of Taiwanese beliefs, attitudes, and conventions, and forms a cultural layer of Taiwanese culture. Artifacts, physical and sensory

experiences, rituals, and past memories could assist contemporary Taiwanese people to forge connections and identify with their ancestors. Designers must consider how cultural codes can be used to establish deep emotional connections with consumers to evoke internal experiences and emotions. Using the demonstration of the imprint—the product of such a fusion of experiences and emotions—a basis can be developed for transforming the elements in the cultural field experience, including the cultural characteristics into a creative design, thereby forming an extended distinct, emotive design after the field experience.

Cultural field experience

Lin and Lin (2010) referenced the experience-related theories proposed by Pine II and Gilmore (1999), and redefined the model of experiential design in creative life industries using customers and fields as subjects. In contrast to the referenced experiential strategies, they proposed that field perceptions, experiential activities, cultural meanings, and sensory experiences could become driving factors in creating an elevated aesthetic sense, could establish the distinctiveness of such experience, and thus could be used to analyze emotive fields and experiential products qualities in the creative life industries. That is, the relationship between the customer (horizontal axis) and field (vertical axis) is redefined through the proposition that field perceptions, experiential activities, cultural meanings, and sensory experiences are factors that create experience. The current study combines these concepts with Cheng (2012), restructuring the framework for a "cultural field experience" as outlined in Figure 1 by using the sensory and emotional experiences of a cultural field to satisfy the aesthetic desires of participants minds, bodies, and spirits, thereby achieving an entertaining, aesthetic, and even transcendent experiential state. In addition, with design, evoked memories of a spiritually comforting emotion can become a continuous part of daily life, and maintain the vitality of festival culture. Only through a continued dialogue and exchange between humans and culture, can the quality and vitality of cultural industries be enhanced. A detailed description of the factors follows:

- (1) Field perceptions: A beautiful and pleasing space allows participants to enjoy a free ambience and induces unrestricted participation so they may fully enjoy themselves in the activity. Participants can experience the field functions of created mental, physical, and spiritual states, and achieve the objective of being touched emotionally.
- (2) Experiential activities: When participants arrive at the cultural field, the activities draw them into the event and create an experience connected to the body and

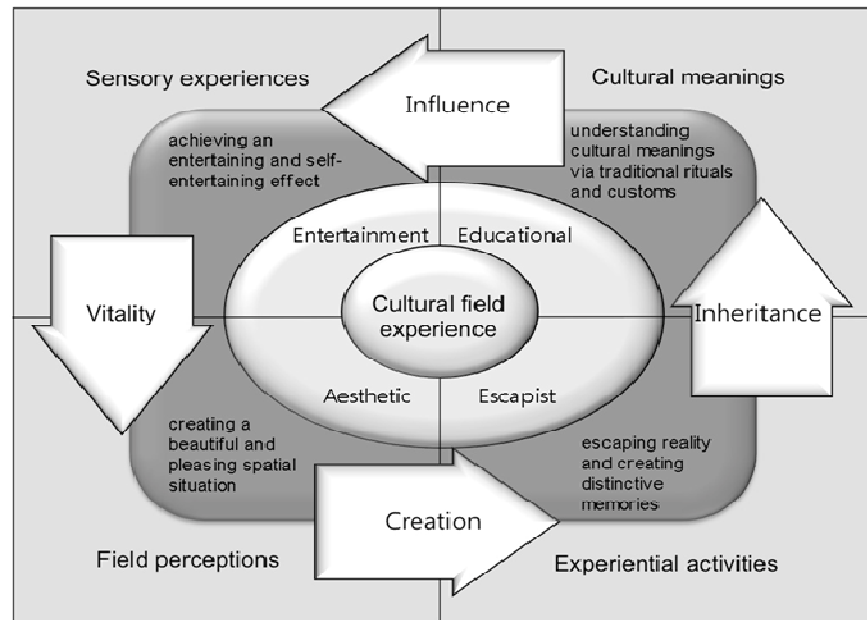


Figure 1: Cultural field experience (organized by this study).

patterns of life, encouraging participants to “just do it.” Participants can thus temporarily escape reality and create distinctive memories from the cultural experience.

(3) Cultural meanings: Field experience models possesses educational significance, and participants discover cultural meanings and participate in an exploration of knowledge and skills through the experience of various traditional rituals and customs.

(4) Sensory experiences: Stimulation provided by sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch can enhance the impression of an experience, achieving an entertaining and self-entertaining effect while also strengthening memories and recollections (Schmitt, 2000). Participation in a cultural field experience is a process, just as the use of a product is a process. Norman (2002) states that when people use a product, the series of procedures involved enables them to recall the original feelings and ideas conveyed through that product. In other words, participating in an experience process creates a connection between a product (at an external level) and personal values (at an internal level).

Transforming concepts into design

The transformation process for the Ma-Zu cultural field experience is based on the aesthetic foundation presented in Chinese paintings and references the transformational framework developed in “Applying Poetic Techniques of Shape-Spirit Transformation in Cultural Creative Design” (Yeh et al., 2011). Ma-Zu

culture has essential functions for conveying imagination and emotions, and the process of applying this to actual designs can be compared to the mental transition described by Zheng (1982) when drawing bamboo. This explains the process artists encounter in transitioning from conceptualization to objectification, which we found to be closely related to the process seen in the transformation of the Ma-Zu cultural experience into creative design (although different methods are applied).

In the first process in Figure 2, Tong (2006) clearly delineates the progress from “bamboo in the eye,” to “bamboo in the mind,” to “bamboo in the hand”. Artists use their subjective mind to discover the essence in objective objects, and find inspiration (related to the contemplation of ideas) in the connection and interaction between the mind and the object. This conceptualization during the process of artistic creation refers to a relationship that progresses from “seeing the object” and “using the mind” to the expressive form of “using pen and ink,” that is, drawing a connection between the personal qualities, character, and cultivation of the artist and the final form of the work. This corresponds to the subjective participation of the artist and the expression of aesthetic forms and images, maintains the creative expression that adopts an “eye—mind—hand” process for creation, and develops the perfect fusions of form and spirit, as well as form and mind.

Furthermore, Tsai (2010) stated that creating artistic works is a type of transmutation, in which thoughts, ideas, and observations are transmuted into feelings, emotions or perceptions, and mental states. The process

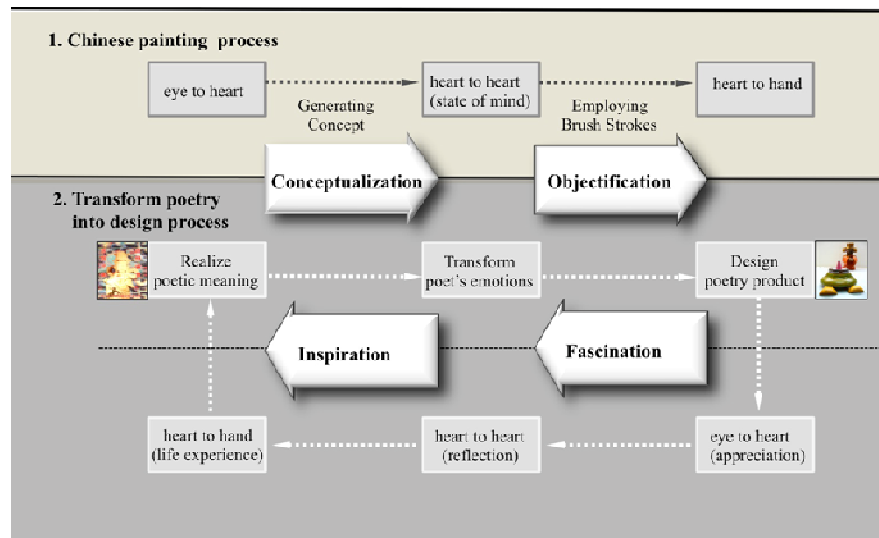


Figure 2: Reference process for transforming cultural field experiences into designs (organized by this study).

of transforming materials into artistic works requires designers to use their mind and spirit, and the subtleties of such use remains part of the mystery of the creative process. Therefore, the process of transforming field experiences into actual design output and applications should follow aesthetic principles, guidelines for the transmutation of qualities and attributes, and other relevant theoretical foundations for two purposes—to complete the design implementation and to achieve the goal of establishing a model, with solid theoretical foundation, that transforms cultural field experience into designs and applications.

In addition to presenting the aesthetic concepts of Chinese painting for designers to follow in the first process, the second process in Figure 2 further demonstrates a corresponding process in transforming the field experience into design. Here a designer begins by first seeing the field experience (the Ma-Zu pilgrimage field), and channeling the sensory impressions into a basic creative idea (the experience of spiritual prayer). This internal image is then transmuted into an artistic and creative concept, transforming the Ma-Zu cultural field experience into an emotive design (the Ma-Zu icon design). Starting from the left of Figure 2, this process also explains how the participant employs the visual communication effects gained through viewing the designed product (the Ma-Zu icon) and experiences the aesthetic state of basking in the Ma-Zu cultural field experience, which inspires deep reflection, resonance between the mind and object, and interaction with the goddess when the participant is deeply moved. Consequently, the design and creation based on the cultural field can be applied in daily life, comprehensively

transforming experience into design and achieving the cultural creative design goal of beginning from culture, forming in creativity, and being applied in life (Lin, 2007).

The procedures for transforming concepts into design and a case study

Procedures for transforming concepts into design

In transforming the concept of the Ma-Zu cultural field experience into a practical design, we referenced related studies and developed practical implementation procedures according to field experience characteristics. You et al. (1997) examined the transformation of the image of a product into a representational design, and proposed a three-stage representational image design process comprising “association,” “transformation,” and “implementation.” Association refers to establishing a direct connection with personal experiences, concepts, memories, or feelings and perceptions to further describe and portray concepts that are considered ideal and significant (image characteristics). Furthermore, keywords related to the image are used as a basis for transforming 2D symbols. Transformation describes a key step in the transformation design process, in which image association is visualized and associations are transformed into primary form vocabularies (transforming the abstract into the physical), and symbols are transformed into 3D designs (models). Implementation refers to the final form of the project and the completion of the association transformation process. During this phase, in addition to creating the, selected finalized

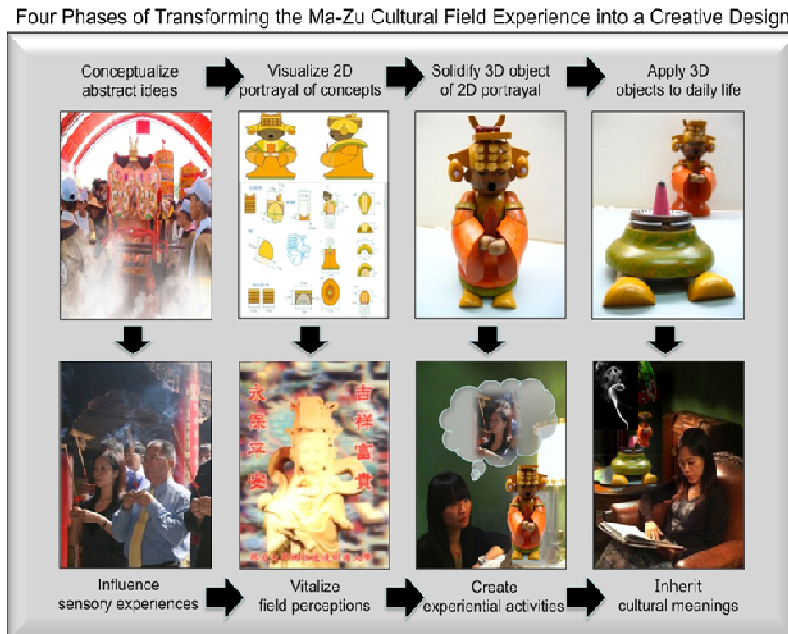


Figure 3: Processes of transforming cultural field experiences into designs (organized by this study).

product after transformation and modification, initial evaluation procedures related to the further examination and modification of visual rationality, detail and proportion processing, and color configurations related to the final product are completed. This study was primarily based on the above reference and the model proposed by Yeh and Lin (2011), and we consequently determined the following four phases in the transformational design process based on the characteristics of the Ma-Zu cultural field experience.

The first phase is the conceptualization of abstract ideas, which is a process that follows the perceptive imagination and creative imagination processes proposed by Teng (1997). Perceptive imagination refers to contact with an object of perception under the influence of an individual emotional model and framework, which triggers a natural emergence of images based on specific memories; these memories are then processed by the mind and spirit. Consequently, in the process of creative imagination, a new image is created that is similar to the characteristics of the object of perception. The created image atmosphere and ambience is also connected with the original object. We extracted and analyzed the relevant perception-based elements in the field experience process to serve as a basis for transformational design and to stimulate perceptive imagination regarding the field experience.

The second phase is the visualization and 2D portrayal of concepts. In *Experiences in Visual Thinking*, when discussing the visualization of concepts and the development of concrete objects based on visualization,

McKim (1980) indicated that visual images can be divided into three types: (a) the perceived or seen image is the experience of the senses regarding the physical world, that is, the experiences seen by the eye and recorded in the mind; (b) the mental and spiritual or imagined image is the image assembled using internal creativity, which requires the recorded information from perceived image; and (c) the figure-like or drawn image is images recorded through the use of sketching, drawing, or written forms for communication. These three visual image-creation processes are required in the design and contemplation processes, which create new images through constant feedback. Therefore, viewing, imagining, and drawing are three essential elements of visual thinking. These elements do not demonstrate automatic generation of simply received, displayed, or recorded images, but indicate that a gestation and contemplation process is indispensable whenever a new image is created; this is a requisite phase in the transformational process. Thus, this process can be adopted to, with contemplation and imagination, transform the conceptual elements observed in field experience into 2D visual elements.

The third phase is the 3D portrayal of 2D visual objects. This uses the strategies for creating new images proposed by Stoops and Samuelson (1983) to extract 2D visual elements from field experience and make them 3D objects by employing image details, or techniques such as the change, alternation or simplification of form characteristics.

The fourth phase is the application of 3D objects to daily life. During the 3D portrayal process, the

functionality and usability of objects are taken into consideration, enabling these objects to be used in daily life. Through design, all objects used, seen, and experienced in life can enjoy and demonstrate increased convenience and pleasure, thereby comprehensively enhancing overall life quality. In addition, cultural traditions conveyed through design take root and are continued in daily life, demonstrating the realization of design applications in the physical world.

Case study of transforming concepts into design

Figure 3 shows the transformation of the Ma-Zu cultural field experience concept into a design. In addition to following the four phases of transformational design, we also considered the design elements in cultural product design, as listed in Lin (2007), including the exterior or external layers (i.e., color, texture, form, and the composition of individual elements), the middle or active layer (function and usability), and the internal or mental layer (the cultural or emotive qualities of a product). A detailed description follows:

In the first phase, the conceptualization of abstract ideas, the relevant cultural expression elements from the abstract festival activities of Ma-Zu culture were extracted and analyzed, using field experience to develop diverse and concrete concepts. According to Lin (2007), the elements to be transformed, such as “Ma-Zu”, “entering the sedan” and “offering incense”, are considered based on external form and color, middle and active layers, internal spirit, and relevant elements, thus facilitating the conceptualization of the abstract Ma-Zu cultural field experience as transforming the concepts into a design. In the second phase, the visualization and 2D portrayal of concepts, Ma-Zu, incense burning, and other conceptual elements comprising the field experience are transformed into visual design elements according to the principles of design. The physical seated icon of Ma-Zu was deconstructed as a 2D figurine or icon schematic, and the functional form of the incense-offering was transformed into a visual element of an incense burner. In the third phase, the 3D portrayal of 2D visual objects, concrete visual elements were again contemplated according to external form, function, and other elements, to redesign them into 3D figures. By integrating design concepts and contemplation, the 2D Ma-Zu schematic was transfigured into a 3D Ma-Zu figurine (i.e., the 2D visual elements of Ma-Zu were portrayed in a 3D form). Finally, in the fourth phase, the application of 3D objects to daily life, the function of an incense burner, transformed from the concept of incense-offering, was integrated into the 3D Ma-Zu figurine, enabling the design to achieve applications in everyday life and thus completing the goal of applying 3D objects to the physical world. For the design of the Ma-Zu icon or figurine, yellow and red clothing, similar to the colors most often used on Daoist

gods, were adopted. The figurine materials were formed using refined woodworking, and the production method involved wood-based machining. Finally, regarding the form of the design, the complex external appearances of the clothes typically displayed on gods were simplified. The design was then configured to provide functionality and integrated a smoking-burning wooden-icon mechanism. In sum, the figurine allows consumers to experience elements of traditional Ma-Zu culture such as fragrant incense, protection and healing, and prayers for well-being.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we considered the Ma-Zu cultural field experience in Taiwan, analyzing past literature to determine transformational foundations and processes as well as organizing implementation procedures for transforming abstract concepts into concrete designs. We delineated four transformational phases: the conceptualization of abstract ideas, the visualization and 2D portrayal of concepts, the 3D portrayal of 2D visual objects, and the application of 3D objects to daily life. In the first phase, the conceptualization of abstract ideas, field experience is expanded, interpreted, and extended to create diverse and concrete ideas. In the second phase, the visualization and 2D portrayal of concepts, various formed concepts are transformed into design elements through the use of design principles and indicators as a reference for transformation, then the design elements are integrated to form the visual elements of a product design. In the third phase, the 3D portrayal of 2D visual objects, concrete elements are reconsidered according to form, function, and other elements, and subjected to 3D design. Finally, in the fourth phase, the application of 3D objects to daily life, the product is created for use in various aspects of daily life. The abstract spirit of Ma-Zu culture was transformed into a physical, realistic, and experiential product, the Ma-Zu figurine incense burner, through the internalization and interpretation of the incense offering ritual and in the field experience. Consequently, a soothing effect, as well as a distinctive emotive memory, was achieved and the product could become an essential part of daily life. Such design facilitates the effective continuation of cultural vitality, and provides a reference for designs in the cultural creative industry.

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