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Nancy Hui-yun Chen

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# Abstract

Research into portrayals in photographs under the family influences, and the ambivalence between actual family memories and sentimental memories. A study taking the form of real photographs represent the succession of influences in the portraying of the family; on the other hand, modified images represent the likely fabrications of sweet memories, which are potentially recreated by our imagination. The conjunction of the real photographs and the modified images, therefore, is the means by which I represent family influences in our portrayals and falsified memories in our imagination. My project was exhibited during 28<sup>th</sup> June to 30<sup>th</sup> June in Photospace at Canberra School of Art.

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Special thanks to my dear family!

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Shin-zhen Sheu

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*Special thanks to my dear family!*

## Introduction

This report is to summarize the process of my major project in Suzhou Institute of Graduate Diploma of Art (Visual Arts). The project has taken a year of time to complete with the help of my supervisors. BELOVED FAMILY

*“Memory declares the death of yesterday. In such a dead situation, through a forgivable living, I am then to discover that life form has adapted to another pattern for continuing its floating, to sense the bliss of revival; the revival relieves the burden of memory, in thus, I am on my new journey.”*

Many researchers prove that family environment and family education play an important role in the life of a person in past, present, and future. Family values generally affect every family member's personality, and even on his or her poses and gestures when being photographed. Living together under the same roof, many influences can be succeeded from generation to generation. The family influences are often assimilated into our behaviours. The most obvious example is the portraying in the photographs.

While we try to cultivate the influences of family values in the photographs, we also recall our memories of the past. It is unavoidable that we have selective remembrance of happiness and selective forgetting of bitterness as we revisit our memories.

Through the revisiting of the memories, we are not only able to observe the depth of family influences in how we portray each other in the photographs,

## Introduction

This report is to summarise the process of my major project in Studio Practice in Graduate Diploma of Art (Visual Arts). The project has taken a year of time to produce with the help of my supervisors. BELOVED FAMILY is the title of my project which aims to study the representations of family value in the photographs, and the possible falsehood of heart-warming memories in the experience of past memories via the photographs.

Many researchers prove that family environment and family education play an important role in the life of a person in past, present, and future. Family values generally affect every family member's personality, and even on his or her poses and gestures when being photographed. Living together under the same roof, many influences can be succeeded from generation to generation. The family influences are often assimilated into our behaviours. The most obvious example is the portraying in the photographs.

While we try to observe the influences of family values in the photographs, we also recall our memories of the past. It is unavoidable that we have selective remembrance of happiness and selective forgetting of bitterness as we revisit our memories.

Through the revisiting of the memories, we are not only able to observe the depth of family influences in how we portray each other in the photographs,

but we are also given opportunities to remove the unhappy memories in our past.

Memories are fragmented, non-sequential, and independent just like still photographs. The memories can be selected in our recall, so as the photographs are able to be read in single pieces. Thus, both the memories and the photographs somehow share similar characteristics.

In order to recreate the modified images, the old family scanned photographs were sorted by dates, and I applied different techniques in PhotoShop 5. The final presentation of my project is in a form of digital layouts. During the period of my study, I have learned about Zone System, Black and White printing, lighting, and colour printing. With the sum of experiences and knowledge that I have gained, I produced a set of digital layouts combining the research of the themes of my project, family value and memories.

## Concept

The past is unable to be fully rendered in human memories. Therefore, family photo albums and our imagination play an important role filling in those missing gaps in the past memories. It is undoubted that photographs can recall our memories of the past; however, the photographs are unlikely to reinforce our memories about the full stories behind those photographs. The reason is that we tend to only recall the happy memories in the photographs, and to omit the unwanted memories of our past. As remarked above, the imagination becomes a method to reproduce the forgetting in the memories.

According to Claude Levi-Strauss, memory is a most enjoyable thing to people; its enjoyment is not originated by the vivid rendering in people's minds. Very few people like to re-experience the weariness and the pain that they have encountered. Memory is a life form. But the memory and the life form are different in their characteristics. (Chong, 2001, cited from Levi-Strauss, 1961). By this means, the so-called past memories that we unconsciously or intentionally recreate are usually more in harmony than our own experience at the time it took place. Hence, the juxtaposition of the selective remembrance of memories and the imagination contribute to the whole memories of the past.

An individual might offer different feelings and thoughts after he or she views the family photo albums. Also, the new perceptions and the new forgetting



about family memories will be generated from time to time. Furthermore, family memories can be remembered in several ways. While we revisit family memories through the photographs, revisiting memories is affected by our emotion on viewing the photographs. In this means, we possibly either recreate a new dimension of memories in the photographs, or bury the bitterness of memories in the photographs, or in both.

In general, we can easily have a superficial understanding of a family memory through photo albums, letters, and conversations with the family members. Looking at the photographs, we can be reminded of the activities of the family members involved, and the friends and relatives with whom they socialised. Regardless of the passage of time, the mutation of generations, the changes of family values, and the intention of fabricated memories, the true appearance of the family unquestionably existed, and never disappeared.

# Process

## *Start-of-year*

In the beginning of the process, time was main focus of my project. Time lost always appears as an interesting prospect to me. I try to search for the trail of time lost and capture it with photography. For example, three photographs below (Series of "Season": Fig 1, Fig 2, Fig 3) were taken with the same scenery in different seasons to express the travelling of time. As for my project, I decided to employ a family story to present meanings of time space and significance of time lost (as shown in Fig 4).



Fig 1



Fig 2



Fig 3



Fig 4

In the very beginning of my project, I tended to use old family photographs and some belongings such as cigarette and ring as representatives of the ownership of the selected family. In my early consultation with my supervisor (Martyn Jolly), his suggestion was to emphasise either time or family as the main theme of my project. At last, I decided to choose family as the main theme of my project.

Normally, people start to treasure things only when they realise that the precious things have gone. When we are with our family, we are more likely to put up many excuses of not being caring and concerned for our family members. We tend to think that there are always many opportunities to show our caring to them. Before I first came to Australia, I had never thought that I would ever leave home for such a long period of time. I was missing my family terribly, and I started realising how important my family members were to me. Since I had encountered the terrible homesickness, I intended to find out about other overseas students' feeling towards their family. I interviewed some of my friends and heard many of their family's stories. I took some time to observe their daily habits and personality. And I discovered that it is not only their family that have long term influences on my friends' daily habits and personality, but also the relationships between their family members are seen to impact on my friends.

To implement my ideas of family, I planned to present some selected families in a form of portraiture. Therefore, I sat in some workshops to learn

the theories and the skills of photography such as Zone System, Darkroom, Colour Printing, Camera and Lighting.

In the classes of Camera and Lighting, I was given the opportunity to learn and imitate the lighting of Olive Cotton's art works. I selected "My Grandfather Frank Cotton" (Olive Cotton, 1938, Fig 5) to be my learning example.

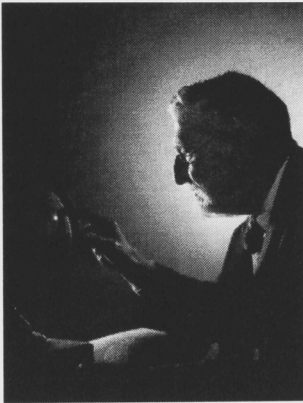


Fig 5

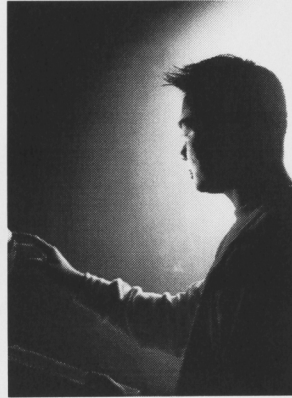


Fig 6

In the photo of "My Grandfather Frank Cotton", Frank Cotton was pointing at a world map globe with his finger as if he was reading the map. In my opinion, Olive Cotton tried to portray her grandfather as a knowledgeable gentleman in a way of showing her feeling and thought about her grandfather. In this exercise, I tended to create a duplicated lighting effect in my photograph. The photograph portrayed a hard-working student (Fig 6).

At the end of the stage of start-of-year, I started to develop some concrete ideas of family. I spent time to research on the concepts of family value and its structure. My family became the learning target of the task. I simply built a house-shape model to represent the family structure. In this model (Fig 7), the house was divided into five spaces. Every family member enjoys his or her own living space, but still keeps a closed relationship between each other. Also, I put some belongings to represent our distinguished characteristics. For instance, my father likes to play tennis, so I placed a picture of a tennis player in his space.



Fig 7

I had tried several methods to implement the idea of family house. Instead of using the house shape, I tried to use window frame to represent the family house. The meaning of hanging the window frame in front of the images was to implicate that outsiders are allowed to see the family through the window frame, and walk into the family (Fig 8). As well, I also scattered the elements of the picture of house (Fig 9). After arranging the picture in this way, I explained the ownerships of each room with conversation bubbles.



Fig 8

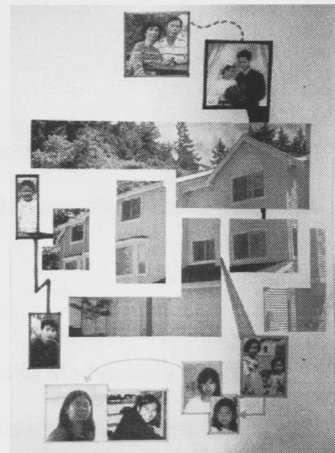


Fig 9

Up to this stage of the process, I still lacked of many materials for my project. The focus of the concepts in my project was still uncertain.

## *Mid-year*

Since I had focused on family as the main theme of my project, I was enthusiastic about choosing five families to be the targets of study. My intention was to emphasise the characteristics of each family.

First of all, I collected as many photographs as I could get among those targets. I decided to run a trial case of study to further develop my concepts of family memories. Serina's family and my family participated in this trial study.

In this mid-year process, there are two sessions of work. The first session was conducted prior to the time I was back to Taiwan. The second session was carried out while I was at Taiwan.

At the end of November, 2000, I had a review with Martyn Jolly and Nigel Lendon. At this time, I gave up the ideas of house-shaped model and other methods (window frame, and random picture of house) which were developed at the stage of start-of-year. The initial ideas of having the models were to shape an intimacy among my family members. Nonetheless, those ideas were seemed to be limited by the models' separated spaces. All those previous ideas of having the house-shaped model, the window frame, and puzzled picture of house were seemed to show up the effect of coldness and loneliness, in which divided all my family members.

Not having the protection of walls and ceilings of the house model, my family was exposed in front of everybody. Even the protection of window frame, I can easily detect my fearing of exposure. In tradition, it was unusual to reveal our personal feelings and thoughts in the eyes of public. But now we had no shade to protect either our appearance our feelings and thoughts. Perhaps this was a new breakthrough of my concepts in showing the family memories.

Collecting family photographs is a risky task. Old photographs easily turn yellowish if good care is not taken of them. The negatives of the photographs were not well kept by people. Hence, it became an impossible task to reprint the old photographs with their negatives.





Fig 14



Fig 17



Fig 15



Fig 16

I conducted some exercises to recreate a family photograph (Fig 17). I cropped out the figure of my mother from Fig 14, and the figure of my father from Fig 15. I placed these two figures into two separated layers. After that I took the figures of siblings from another old photograph (Fig 16), and placed all the figures on a cropped out background from Fig 15. It took quite some time for me to master the techniques of PhotoShop 5 in order to create the new look of family photograph.

As for Serina's family, I presented a plan view of her house to demonstrate the ideas of division of rooms and the real distance of the regions (Fig 18).

As for Serina's family, I presented a plan view of her house to demonstrate the ideas of division of rooms and the real distance of the regions (Fig 18). In her family, there are four family members. The plan view of her house was referred to the ideas of all the family members being divided into different rooms. Moreover, the real distance between them was that all of them were working and studying in the different regions. And they could only get together on weekends.

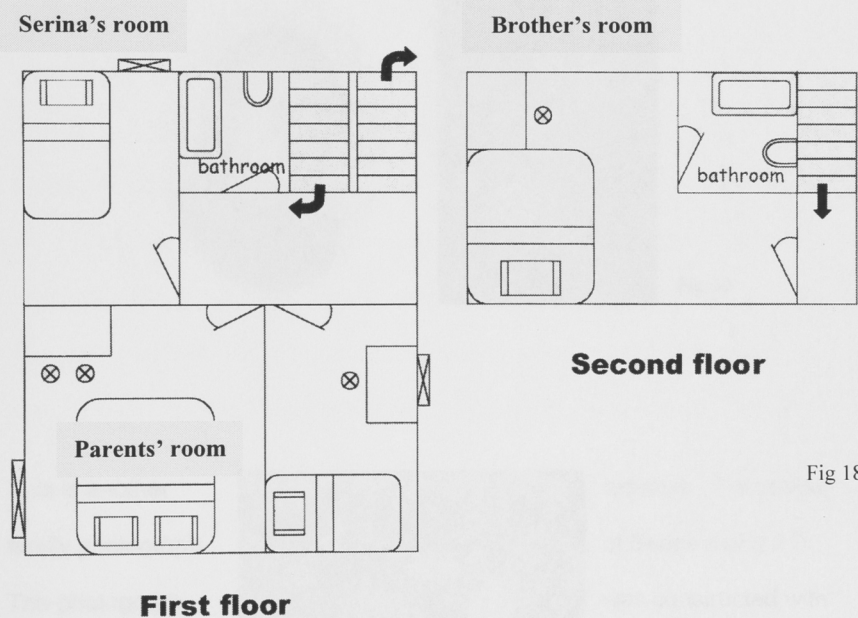


Fig 18

Serina sometimes has disagreements with her mother, but she is much like her mother, even their outlook and expressions on their faces are very much in common. In the case of Serina, her portrayals in the photographs are mirrored to her mother's. Two obvious examples of photographs are shown as follows (Fig 19, Fig 20):



Fig 19



Fig 20

This is another family photograph. The photograph was constructed with three photographs and one image of background.



example of recreated of Serina's (Fig 21). was constructed with and one image of

Fig 21

The greatest distance in life is not measurement of real distance, but the distances in soul and heart. One of my subjects is a stereotype of the effects

of distancing relationship among his family members. Even they live under the same roof, the family members do not attempt to have conversations between each other. Ever since my friend has his own memories, his family members never sat down together to enjoy the dinners. There is always dissonance in the atmosphere of his family. I had tried to persuade him to take photographs with all his family members but my suggestion was not granted.

In the stage of mid-year, I made a misjudgment in my process. I planned to present my concepts of family memories among five selected families. However, my time ran short while I was at Taiwan. I was only able to collect the old photographs of my family and Serina's family. I had visited Serina's family only twice which was not enough to understand even partially family memories of hers. Another reason for giving up Serina's family was that the two remaining families (Serina's and mine) still complicated the focuses of my concepts. It was difficult to analyse two sets of different family memories in the mean time. I was very reluctant to terminate my ongoing research of Serina's family. Thus, the final decision was to only concentrate on my family memories.

## *End-of-year*

After I came back from Taiwan for the new semester of 2001, my supervisor has changed to Denise Ferris because Martyn Jolly went abroad to London for his further education.

At that time, I decided to focus only my own family in my project. As I thought that it would be nicer to have the most recent photographs in the construction of my project, I picked up some photographs of Chinese New Year (Fig 22) which was just celebrated during the period of my staying at home.



Fig 22

According to the lunar calendar of Chinese, 2001, the Chinese New Year was scheduled in January. In Chinese tradition, red and black are a set of lucky colour in the celebration of the Chinese New Year. Therefore, Chinese spring sonnets are normally calligraphic in black ink on red papers. Also, activities like cleaning up, ancient worship, and reunion dinner are always carried out a few days before the Chinese New Year and on the eve of Chinese New Year. I tried to design a new look of images based on those

selected photographs of Chinese New Year. However, the progress of the set of images of Chinese New Year was abandoned soon after I realised that the topic of Chinese New Year is too broad to be analysed and did not well fit into the focus of my project.

After giving up the progress of the Chinese New Year, I was struggling with my concepts. In a way of trying to reflect my family memories, I was also attempting to mirror and evaluate as much as possible within my capability about intimacy among my family members. Nevertheless, I had difficulties presenting both concepts in an equivalent way, in which would throughout express the focus of my project. At last, with a cool head, I was able to unravel the confusions of my concepts, and found a clearer way to demonstrate my ideas of family memories and the illusively memories created by imagination.

For the first session of the process, I employed the same method of my previous attempt in the mid-year process. I recreated the new images from the real photographs. In two photographs of “Wonderland” (Fig 23, Fig 24), my brother and I took turns to photograph the family. Therefore, both photographs were not documented with the whole family members participated. I cropped out the component of my grandmother and I from the first photograph (Fig 23), and reassigned the component into the second photograph (Fig 24) with the techniques of PhotoShop 5. As shown below, a new image (Fig 25) displayed a “reunion” look of my family.



Fig 23



Fig 24



Fig 25

As for my artistic direction, the real photographs without frame and decoration are more likely to simulate a heart-felt feeling towards people. Hence, my final works are purposely presenting the nature and the origin of the real photographs.

I always believe that family influences have some certain impacts in the way of posing and gesturing of the family members when their photographs are being taken. To demonstrate this, I produced two series of photographs, "Father and Son" (Fig 26) and "Mother and Daughter" (Fig 27). After I

completed the first serial of “Father and Son”, I did a small test in order to find out the possibly response from some audiences. Ironically, those audiences were unaware of the main focus of the series – the pose and the gesture in the photographs. After getting feedback, I added the body shapes of the figures into the series, hoping that the add-on would confirm the attention of the focus. As for the second serial “Mother and Daughter”, I easily solved the problem.

### Family Time (Fig 26) and (Fig 27)

The poses and gestures in these two series became an interesting aspect to observe. In “Father and Son”, my father and my brother showed the similar poses and gestures in the photographs. Although those photographs were taken in very different moment, their poses and gestures remained unchanged. It was also the same story for “Mother and Daughter”. My grandmother, my mother and I were portrayed the same pose without the consideration of time changed.

### The Influence of Family: The Similarity of Behaviour

Aside from “Father and Son” and “Mother and Daughter”, “Siblings” (Fig 28) was another series carrying the same theme – portraying. In this serial, my sister, my brother and I were photographed with our own friends in different moments. However, those three photographs were coincidentally pictured with the similar cartoonish actions in the same age. As for me, I was intentionally to imitate my sister when the photograph was taken. My sister has more and less influences on my behaviour since my childhood. Even though there was no evidence to show that my brother’s behaviour was also influenced by my eldest sister, I still believe that there are always some implications between the family influences and personal behaviour.



The third section of the project was to emphasise the meanings of family through a basic family celebration, Birthday party. "Birthday Cake" (Fig 29) was a serial of five modified images based on the real photographs. This series was particular to show the intimacy among all the family members. We celebrate every family member's birthday annually. Although we all work or study in different area, we still treasure the chances of being together.

"Family Photo" (Fig 30) is regarded to the idea of reunion. The family photographs are regularly taken in a commercial photography studio. This must-do activity signifies the closed relationship between each family member. Among these three photographs, the first photograph was actually created with PhotoShop 5. All the family members were not originally pictured in the same photograph. I took some components from different photographs to create a false reunion of family photograph. The reason for creating the unreal reunion impression of the first photograph was to fulfil the impression of loss in the family memories. The rest of another two photographs were then taken in the studio.

"Memory Box" (Fig 31) contained two wooden boxes for displaying my old family photographs. There were six Birthday photographs to be displayed in one of the wooden boxes; another six siblings photographs were placed in the other box. I used the timber, the Chinese newspaper and the cotton to create a special effect of house-warming. The timber symbolised the origin of a structure of the family. On the other hand, the Chinese newspaper was to represent the identity and the culture where I come from. The soft cotton indicated a protection of fragile old photographs.



Fig 26

Father and Son



Fig 27

Mother and Daughter



Fig 28

Siblings



Fig 29  
 Birthday cake



Fig 31  
 Memory box



Fig 30

Family photo

## Method

I did not use many kinds of materials to produce this project. I had tried to use colour, and black-and-white darkroom skill to print the photographs. But finally I chose digital layouts to be my final output because all of my works are modified based on the old photographs.

The hardware I used for the modified images of my project included Apple G4, Agfa print scanner, Nikon negative scanner and Epson digital printing. Also, some of the images were printed with the technology of LED (Laser Enlarged Digital) print. I scanned the real photographs and the negatives, then applied a number of techniques in PhotoShop 5.0.2. All of the modified images were printed on ink jet photo papers.

Both of the “Memory box” were crafted by using timber, and decorated with Chinese newspapers and cotton.

## Influences

I have been influenced by many artists on my work during research of this year. The concepts and presentation of my final work are partly illuminated by Chen, Shun-chu, Sharon Stelling and Jo Spence. I will introduce them in following pages.

### Chen, Shun-chu:

He is an artist who holds similar background like me. He is from the countryside of Taiwan and shows his family by photography and installation. I have visited exhibitions with his works twice in Australia, and feel close to his thoughts. So I continue doing research on his work, and trying to understand the progress of his artwork.

He intends to discover his identity through the old pictures and memory. The series of "Family Scene" (Fig 32, Fig 33, Fig 34) is a set of three same images coloured in red, blue, and green. The set of images was originated from more than six photographs to produce. Layered, unclear images and unbalanced framing glass indicate the blurred boundaries between experiences and imagination with uncertain relationships and layered memories.



Fig 32



Fig 33



Fig 34

Sharon Stelling:

She re-photographed the picture of her grandparents, which was taken by her father (Fig 35). Then she made her parents to be her models just as posing her grandparents' stance in the old photograph (Fig 36).

The same stance gave me inspiration to make the series of pose. My brother always keeps the same stance when he is taken photographs, and I accidentally found a picture of my father posing the same way as my brother did. Comparing two generation, it is easy to discover the influences between them.

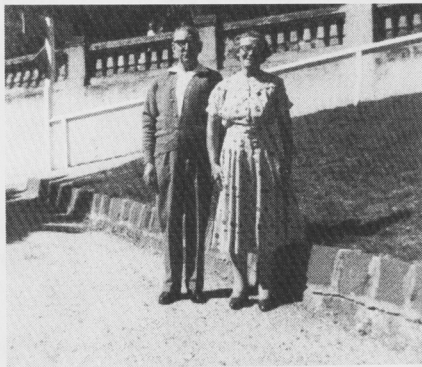


Fig 35



Fig 36



Jo Spence:

Jo Spence is an excellent photographer who deals with social problems, sexuality, myth and power in her artwork. Her artwork is not only to present merely the ideas of art, but strongly show her thoughts in any issue.

**Transformations**

*As a child*

*I did everything*

*possible,*

*not to be*

*like my mother.*

*Family Romance?*

*Cinderella,*

*Ugly Sister, Fairy-*

*I tried them all.*

*On the other hand*

*(now using my brains)*

*I still try to please*

*surrogate daddies.*

*Again, I fall.*

*Ageing, angry,*

*alone, ill,*

*I regard*

*the constellation*

*of imaginary selves.*

*Finally, with joy,*

*I picture*

*my dead parents.*

*In memory*

*I can be them,*

*Moving beyond*

*The past*

*I become*

*My own parent.*

Jo Spence. 1986:181



## Conclusion

The aims of the project are to present my perceptions on the topic of the representation of values in family photographs, and the ambivalent relationship between the original family memories and the illusive memories created by human imagination.

Our personality is deeply influenced by our family, so as the portraying in our photographs. The poses and the gestures in the photographs can alter the intimacy or distance between each family member.

Time travelling was my original interest in the project. Nothing is able to halt the tick-tock of the clock. Time is the reigning power of every event happening in our lives; time is the harsh critic of every lost moment; time is the liberal reminder of every future plan. As time flies away, memory is always its most sincere follower in the trail of time lost. Every life form has its time limit; but the memory does not own an expiry date.

Initially, my project was designed to bring out the themes of time travelling. After some considerations and rethinking of the themes, family memories became the main focus in the project. The family memories are the basic documentaries in the history of our personal lives. Living together as family members, it is unquestionable that every family member shares the memories.

Memories document every single moment of the past. However, the memories do not always entirely render a human's whole story. Very few people like to reveal their memories throughout. Since it is impossible for human beings to remember every segment of memories, people are given the opportunities to reassemble their own memories with selective remembrance and selective forgetting.

Hui-yun Chen

The juxtaposition of the real photographs and the modified images signifies the relationship between the original family memories and the falsehood of memories. However, I came to a conclusion that the loss of family memories is not always to be acquired in a recreated family photograph. It is unnecessary to rectify or falsify our memories to accomplish the comfort of family memories. The true meanings of family reunion are rooted in our heart.

Discovering the relationship of family and its memories, I was given the chances to self-evaluate and re-recognise myself in my family. I would like to take challenges to explore further research regarding a buried memory of a forbidden story in my next project. In order to broaden and advance my art direction, I deeply feel there is a need to learn more knowledge and techniques of computer technology.

# PROPOSAL FOR MASTER COURSE ON PHOTOMEIDA JULY 2000

Hui-yun Chen

## *INTRODUCTION*

There is nothing that lasts forever in the world. Everything elapses quickly, especially time. Time is abstract; we can neither see it nor touch it. Anything we can do is only remembered. It is cruel and merciless that the years glide by so quickly, but people cannot stop loving this and hating this. They love its variety and hate its elapsing. The most intensely interesting thing is everyone owns time, but no one can stop it or turn it back. People cannot change the past because it has already passed. Memories just have regret and envy.

Many people write a diary with a camera. Photographs are very important to keep memories. Without photographs, they cannot look back accurately. Photographs reflect time. Although people know it is impossible to catch time, they try their best to catch it by taking photographs.

## *SUBJECT*

I am interested in time flying. When I see an old picture or go to a place, I usually think, "How many interesting things or stories have happened here?" With the passing of time, memories become less and less clear, but they will never disappear. We can be reminded of what happened at that time by photographs. If we do not have a photograph to prove it, the memory of that period may be lost or changed easily.

In the following year, I want to represent the gliding time by pictures. How can we know time has gone? It must leave some tracks so that we can know it has left. Time leaves tracks on everything. As a log will rot and the paint will peel, we can see everything is changed by time. Thus I will make a comparison between the past and the present. I also want to catch the track of time and show the spirit of time. Its priceless is that it cannot return. I will not only talk about the helplessness of losing time but also remind people not to regret.

### *REPRESENTATION*

For my future study, I would like to represent my work by a series of pictures. This work is just like a comic book; lots of pictures become a story. I plan to make a romantic story that will and must be a tragedy so as to make people feel regret. Its background will be set in Taiwan between the 1970s and the 1990s. I choose this period because it is the time I am familiar with and it is a crucial period for Taiwan's society facing transformation of economic development and political democracy. We can see the rapid change of the environment. I would like to tell the story about the people with transition under such complex social context.

I will represent this story through synthesis photographs. In other words, I will use the photographs or pictures and combine computer technology. The subsidiary computer tools such as Photoshop and Photo Impact will be used to manage the image of photos in order to represent the mixture and the shift of time.

To sum up, my purpose of using separate photos to describe a story is to represent the fragment feature of people's memory. The combination of photography and multimedia can assist to present the transition of different time.

## Curriculum Vitae

**Nancy Hui-yun Chen**

Born 1976, I-lan, Taiwan

### Education

- 2000-2001      Candidate of Graduate Diploma of Visual Art  
                    Canberra School of Art, Australian National University
- 1998             Bachelor of Arts  
                    National Taiwan College of Art

### Professional experience

- 1999             I was working in Open Campus Organization that  
                    produces distant learning courses. My position was course  
                    designer and I was used to write proposal, design course  
                    and design classes materials.

My speciality is in video editing.

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