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Wet Market

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WET MARKET

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B.A., Southern Illinois University, 2014

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Science.

Department of Mass Communications and Media Arts
In the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

Wet Market

By

Haitao Zeng

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science

in the field of Professional Media & Media Management

Approved by:

Professor H.D. Motyl, Chair

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
June 28th, 2016

AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

HAITAO ZENG, for the Master of Science Degree in PROFESSIONAL MEDIA & MEDIA MANAGEMENT, Presented on JUNE 28th, 2016, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: WET MARKET

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Professor H.D. Motyl

This research project paper explores the documentary installation show: *Wet Market*. The installation is to show the Chinese culture of both shoppers and vendors buying and selling food on a daily basis in the Chinese wet market. With the use of audio, photos, and videos, the author created a space to construct an environment similar to that of a Chinese food wet market. In the show, *Wet Market*, audiences can walk around to look at the photos, listen to the natural sounds of each section of the wet market recorder on audio, and watch the large screen projected of people walking back and forth through the narrow aisles in the Chinese wet market. This show connects with the wet market in China and brings the atmosphere; the natural sounds of the market, vendors, the hustle and bustle of business, it gives a unique insight of Chinese local culture to the audience.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND

Growing up in a small city of Southern China, I was lucky to witness the incredibly huge change from a small town to a small city. I remember when I was in the elementary school, my mom always took me to a simple and crude wet market, which was just have a huge frame tent. Most of the food vendors were lined on the street, hawking their produce, and it was really lousy. I hated this place: dead fish and putrid vegetables were on the floor everywhere, and it was full of rotten fish smell, especially in the steamy summer time. My mom knew most of the vendors, and they always would chat for a long time and sometimes my mom got a special discount for buying their foods.

In the old days, supermarkets were not common in many places, especially in the small cities. Shopping in the wet market has been a feature of typical Chinese life for generations. Most markets start operating before sunrise, and it is a common thing for people to wake up early to make their trip to the wet market, so they are sure to find many fresh foods.

In the early 2000s, wet markets began to face new challenges from public health issues and urban renewal construction projects. After an outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) disease began in Guangdong province of China in 2002, and poultry disease caused by H5N1, which is a highly pathogenic bird flu virus, occurred in Fujian province, more than a thousand people were infected. The public felt it had to improve the hygiene of wet markets and the government decided to renovate all the places that contain the SARS and H5N1, which including wet markets. Many of the small wet markets were removed, others needed to be reconstructed. Now, all the food vendors have to register with the local government and get a

license, and they rent the stalls for selling their products. In addition, western-type supermarkets expanding into the Chinese market has been developed at an amazing speed. These stores have become a huge competitor to the traditional wet markets. The supermarkets are clean and tidy and attract the crowds of the young generation.

After high school in 2010, I left China and traveled to the United States for my undergraduate and graduate study. The reason I made such a big decision was because I had been attracted to Western culture and wanted to explore it as an adventure. However, just a couple months after I arrived, I started to experience culture shock, which was interesting and powerful, and gave me an alternative perspective on many things, including my own culture.

I have been subtly and easily influenced by western culture. The first thing I had to learn in America was grocery shopping. It is very convenient to shop in a major supermarket such as Walmart, Kroger, or some of local retail markets. But, if I want to buy some live fish, seafood, and chickens, there is not a place in southern Illinois where I can find them.

During my years in the US, I went back to China four times and I was amazed by the remarkable changes, especially in the wet market, each time when I went. Unfortunately, the wet market I went to with my mom had been removed, due to the urban renewal construction. This means I lost the place that contains my childhood's memories. I could not even have time to use my camera to record it. Luckily, there are still a few wet markets exist in my hometown, I decided to use this opportunity to record one, focusing on this local culture in memory of my childhood.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS A “WET MARKET”?

The wet market is a simple, open-air construction marketplace where food retail vendors have traditionally been sold their consumables at individual stalls filled with fresh vegetables, live animals, including poultry, fish, and pigs. Most of the animals are usually kept in the wooden round basket crates and ready to be killed for preparation. The markets are all over China and of varying sizes, depending on the region and area. Each market is divided into different sections where in each the food vendors selling the same type of food are grouped together. The floor is always damp since they use water to keep the vegetables fresh and keep the live seafood in the tanks. The air is full of the stench of rotten fish and blood. Even though the market has all of these horrible conditions, people still come and shop at the wet market every day and they remain an indispensable part for Chinese people life. One of the reasons for this is that because the wet market is the cheapest place to buy foods, as well as the place to get fresh ingredients.

CHAPTER 3

JOURNAL OF MY MS PROGRAM

I thought that making a short documentary film about Chinese immigrates in the US, and I learned that it was not able to make it since I don't have any people connections and budget for Traveling from Carbondale to san Francisco and New York City. I realized that there have been many documentaries about the same topic in the same location, it is boring and not an original idea, and I should explore new ideas and new ways to show my talents.

Because of my background in production and studies of documentary filmmaking and photography, I was interested in exploring the stories behind each image I made. During my first year in the graduate MS program, I took a photojournalism class with professor Mark Dolan. He inspired me and guided me to understand what is photography. Initially, I don't like this class at all, because the professor always had different opinions with me; he disagreed with my ideas and did not like my photos. After that semester, I realized that photography was not only focusing on and takingd some beautiful images, it more required me to become a better communicator who utilizing images to tell stories.

However, only exhibiting a photograph is not enough to tell the story. In the last years of graduate school, I took a documentary production course, I became more interested in the documentary film, I recognized that the sound is the most important elements; sound provides the time element, which can encourage the audience to stay a longer time and to instill curiosity of the space.

These interests make me want to establish the relationships with photographs, videos, and audio all together that able to describe my idea. I encouraged myself to think about a new way to present my works.

CHAPTER 4

INSTALLATION

The reason for doing this media project is to show the Chinese local culture of both shoppers and vendors buying and selling food daily in the Chinese wet market. Because of the power of technology, my idea of documentary has been infused with a new method. In regard to the exhibition, the whole project presented as an audio soundtrack, still images, and videos multimedia documentary installation that presents my works, it allowed me to connect the past and the present for constructed an environment similar to that of a traditional wet market in China.

Installation art is a new genre of contemporary art, which involves the subject creating a work in a space such as an indoor room or public area, allowing audiences to walk around to interact with the elements or material in the space.

My documentary installation “Wet Market” is constructed in a gallery where audiences could walk around to view the photos while listening to the natural sounds of each section of the wet market. Each photo focuses on a different individual stall accompanied with the respective audio sounds. The use of the audio soundtrack gives the audience a chance to focus and maybe create the stories behind each of the images. All of the audio is played at the same time, and includes chopping meat, voices as the shoppers and vendors bargain. It creates a noisy, realistic market atmosphere. For video, a large screen projection of shoppers and customers walking back and forth through the narrow aisles in the wet market. I believe that this installation brings to the audiences the images—both visually and aurally—of the wet market, as well as the feeling of a community through the use of multiple media sources. This community keeps the event

memorable in the minds of the audiences because of the shared connection between the gallery room and the wet market in China.

CHAPTER 5

CULTURE

Chinese culture, one of the oldest cultures in the world, dominates a huge region diverse traditions cross between provinces, cities, even towns. No matter where are you from, wet market is an Asian phenomenon scattered throughout whole China. Wet markets have been valuable assets for most Chinese, and it is a huge part of their lifestyle and local culture. It is the only place where one could find flocks of Chinese people going about on their daily business of grocery shopping. Most of the food vendors make a living of selling food products that could feed their families, shoppers and vendors create a special connection, chatting with each other regardless of region or cultural background. Wet markets have long been established as a place for people gather as a social community.

This multimedia installation explores the traditional Chinese local culture and the nostalgia in my mind, all of which can present and enhance a fascinating impression of Chinese imagery in the minds of audiences. I am trying to combine the aesthetic elements of Chinese tradition into modern technology; thus, the audiences can experience the Chinese culture in a different way.

Most of the people of southern Illinois, they have not had direct experiences of Asian culture. One of the ideas behind bringing this multimedia installation to southern Illinois was to allow the audience to experience the wet markets in China-through the photographs, video and the atmosphere created natural sounds of the market. Through the video and the audio recording, the audiences could see and hear the hustle and bustle of the business as if they were really there. This installation illustrates a Chinese culture and lifestyle that people have not seen in television

or any kinds of tourism promotion video. In the end, I believe this installation allows people to immerse themselves in a virtual culture and to learn how to respect this new culture while appreciating their own culture.

CHAPTER 6

WET MARKET SHOW

In my show, *Wet Market*, I used fabric to create a hallway that divided the gallery into two areas. When the audiences walked into the hallway, they are attracted by the two posters on the fabric. The first poster (figure 1) is the market floor plan; it lists 8 vendor sections and 1 shop in the map. The second poster (Figure 2) is the market staff member, they are the people who helped and guided me to set up this show. This part of my installation gives the audience a first idea to understand the market and how this market was organized.



Figure 1. The first poster: Market Floor Plan



Figure 2: The Poster two: Market Staff Member

As the audience walked down the hallway, they are welcomed by two Chinese women behind the counter, inviting people to enjoy some of the Chinese snacks, noodles, and chicken legs they had prepared. I remember that every day after class, I always liked to use the money that I had in my packets to buy my favorite snacks before I went home. When the audiences taste some snacks I grew up eating, they also experience a slice of my childhood.

In the main gallery area, I display 8 different photographs that represent 8 different food vendor sections, with 4 photographs on each of the two sides. Each photo shows the unique characteristic and personality of the vendor booths.



Figure 3. Lamb and Beef photograph



Figure 4. Meatballs photograph



Figure 5. BBQ photograph

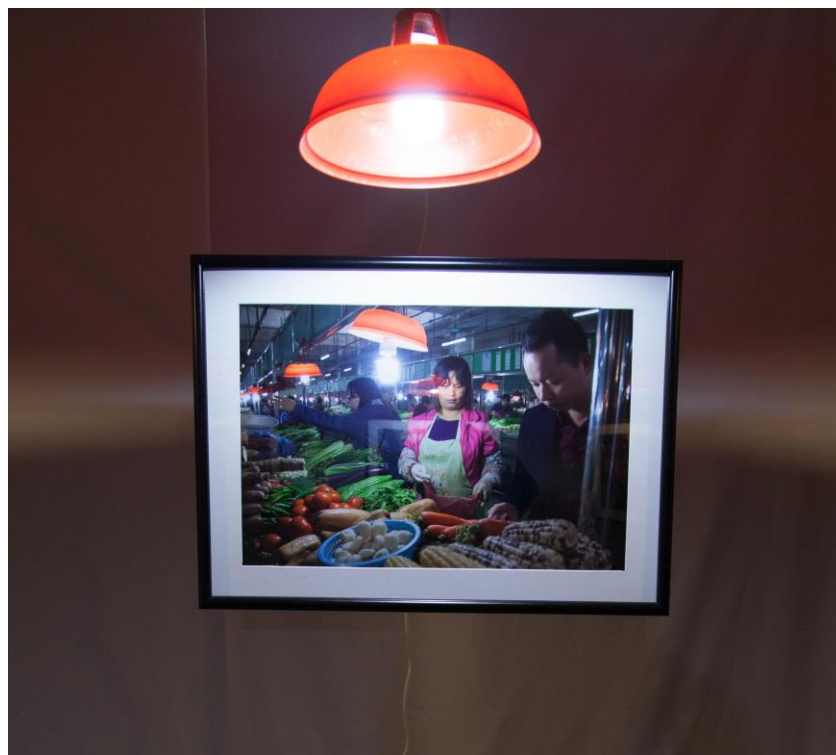


Figure 6. Vegetable photograph



Figure 7. Chicken photograph

I wanted to have a contrast between busy and empty, noisy and quiet elements through these images. Also, the audio plays an important role in my installation as each individual sound, coupled with an image, is telling a story to the audience. The fact that these stories are obscured makes the audience want to stay with the photo longer. For showing these stories, I divided the photographs into two parts. The first part of the story, lamb and beef, meatball, BBQ, vegetable and chicken, these photos all have an interaction between the vendors and customers. The lamb and beef photo (Figure 3) chronicles two sisters promoting a piece of lamb meat and bustling about selling their food to an old lady. The “Meatballs” photo (Figure 4) shows a vendor in the back making meatballs and the other vendor in the front serving the meatballs to a woman. In the BBQ photo (Figure 5), a woman looks through the windows, watching the vendor cutting meat

and preparing it for customers. The Vegetable photo (Figure 6) shows the vendor holding a plastic bag for a man selecting foods. The Chicken photo (Figure 7) depicts the chicken vendor in a conversation with a lady who has bought some chicken. The audio for these photos are noisy and filled with all the conversations, bargaining, and the sounds of food preparation.



Figure 8. Egg photograph



Figure 9. Pork photograph



Figure 10. Fish photograph

The second part of the story shows the other side of business, the quieter side. In the egg and pork photo (Figure 8, Figure 9), both female vendors are waiting for customers; their facial expression show us that they may be depressed. The fish photo (Figure 10) shows the vendor is organizing his table, laying out the fish. For this part, the audio captures a few conversations, but mostly, they are only ambient environment sounds.

Another part of this installation was meant to construct the real olfactory environments of a wet market. A fresh raw fish lay in a basket; putrid veggies were strewn on the floor, and a sign with prices was placed in a basket with some fresh eggs. So, the gallery room also was full of raw fish-smell. The audiences can truly experience the wet market as if they traveled thousands of miles to China.



Figure 11. A looped video projected

At the end of the rows of photographs was a large screen on which is projected a looped video clip of my hometown's Wet Market. In the clip (Figure 11), my hometown local people

walk back and forth through the narrow aisles. I believed this was important as part of this installation because it established a bridge to connect the actual Chinese wet markets and the facsimile I created for my show.

The lighting became another important element in my show, especially the red lamp. This red lamp is the most iconic item of a wet market. I believe that I would not find these red lamps in other countries' cities. They instantly remind me of the market whenever I see them. While I was documenting the market on video, I discovered a business strategy that surprised me: the vendors use two different color temperature of light bulbs to illuminate their foods. Each color created a different vision effect to attract customers. For instance, they used a daylight bulb to light up the vegetables because it makes the veggies more colorful and the saturation of their color is higher. Conversely, those selling meats used soft white bulbs to display their meats because the meat appears more scarlet and looks fresh.

In conclusion, by creating this installation, I invite all audiences to become a part of the people in the wet market. When there, I want them to have social conversations with each other, and like in the actual wet market, there was consistent social contact throughout the whole day of the exhibition.

In this sense, my work strongly represents a personal nostalgia, and it is a way for me to mourn the place that holds my childhood memories. When audiences walk through the gallery, they look at the images and listen to the sounds of a busy market and voices from people buying in selling, and when they experience this, they are experiencing a part of my life, too.

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