Wh-
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I?

Thesis Process Book

Hung Tsai

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Do you know who you are?

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“He who knows other men is discerning; he who knows himself is intelligent.”

— **Lao Tzu,** ancient Chinese philosopher and writer.

Intro-duc-tion

1

What about Thesis?

Thesis project is a milestone in the student journey of the BFA Graphic Design Program at San Jose State University. Throughout the thesis project, students are encouraged to reflect on themselves and demonstrate their interest and passion in the field of graphic design through a variety of mediums such as video, print, UX/UI, illustrations, exhibitions, etc. This thesis project provides an extraordinary experience for students to understand their personalities in the field of graphic design.

"I want to learn the ambiguity about our life."

"I want to know the potential of humans."

"I want everyone to know about themselves"

What I pursue

For this thesis project, I want to use this opportunity for me to **discover the ambiguous and mysterious power of human beings**, so I decide to study deep into the Four Pillars of Astrology and use it to create a guide for everyone to understand the potential of their lives and who they are in the universe.

Four pillars of astrology

Four Pillars of Astrology, as known as "BaZi", literally means Eight Characters from birth time. It is based on the sexagenary cycle calendar, a traditional Chinese calendar that accurately records a year, month, day, and hour by using celestial stems and terrestrial branches. The sexagenary cycle calendar consists of eight characters, year stem, year branch, month stem, month branch, day stem, day branch, hour stem, and hour branch. A pair of stems and branches is known as a pillar and Eight Characters consist of the year pillar, month pillar, day pillar, and hour pillar accordingly, thus Bazi is also called Four Pillars or Eight Characters.

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Abstract

Discovering who we are has been a constant pursuit of mankind since time immemorial. Philosophers also question their own nature and wonder about the individual's place in the universe, the future, and even the afterlife. Throughout thousands of years of discovery, Chinese ancestors discovered that at every moment in the world, there are various invisible forces on the earth that affect a person's character and destiny. They believe that strength has the greatest impact on the moment a person is born, so the year, month, date, and hour of a person's birth can be used to define a person's main character. Over time, a system was developed known as the Four Pillars of Destiny, the "Ba-Zi". However, due to the complexity and invisibility, it is often difficult for people to identify how different forces affect their characters, and many times it is difficult for even trainees to analyze it. A major reason is that a lot of information is compressed into 8 Chinese characters. Therefore, **unpacking the 8 Chinese characters** by clearly visualizing the power will help people to better understand the concept of power movement that occurs on their birthdays and times. **Ultimately, people can perceive who they might be from a different perspective.**

Thesis statement

To make the Four Pillars of Astrology easier and accessible for the average person to understand, it is important to break down the themes for each element, so people can more easily sense the forces behind their birth dates without having the prior knowledge of the Four Pillars of Astrology. Ultimately, they can understand themselves from different perspectives.

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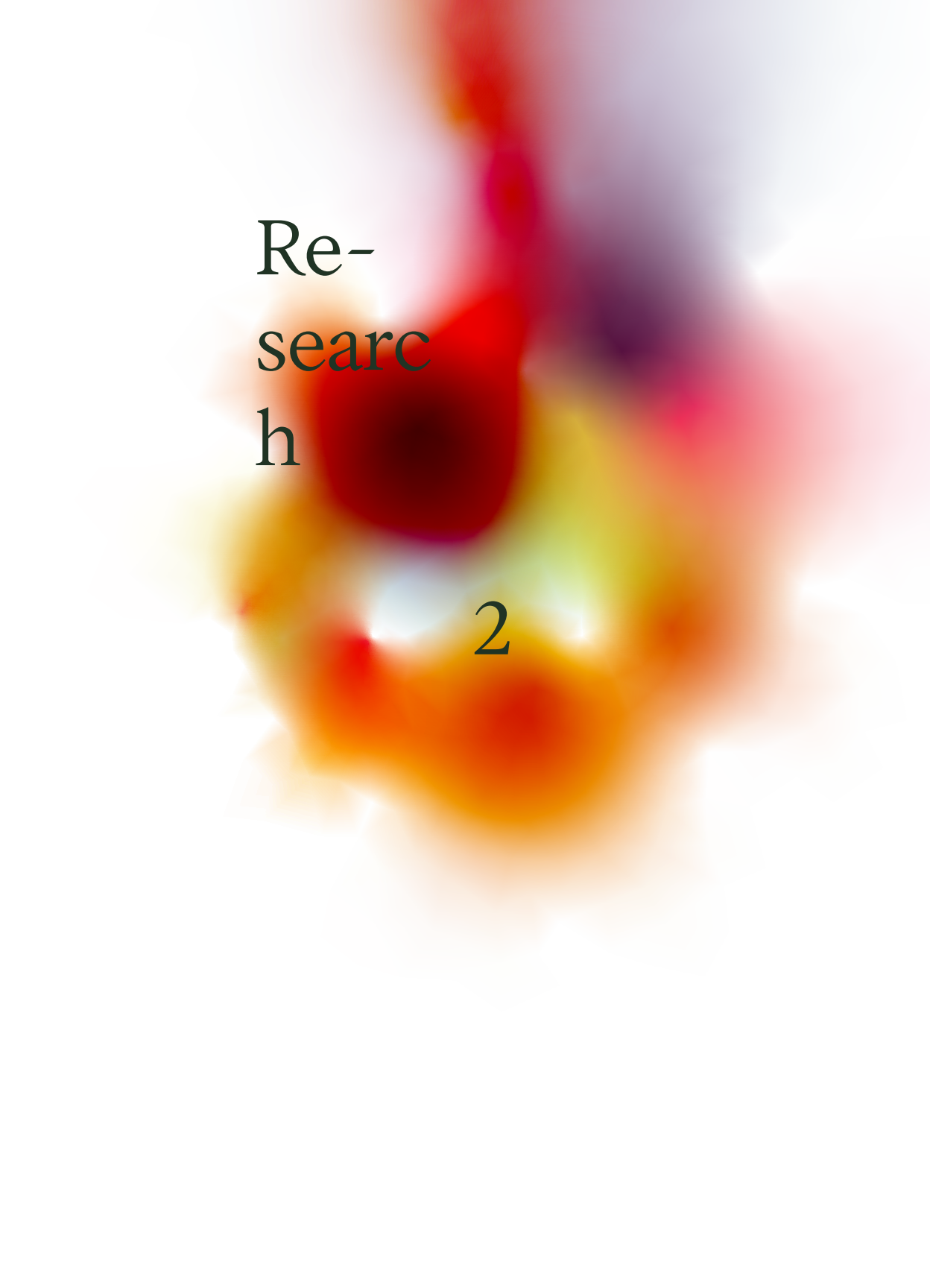

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Initially

Once I choose this topic as my thesis, I already have a picture in my mind of what the outcome may potentially look like. I want it to be a combination of a VR world or 3D environment of the world of their own Four Pillars of Astrology plus a user guide to help the audience understand why certain things look that way. All of the initial reactions that I had led me to the research questions to think of along the project.

Research questions

1 How to find the midpoint where the topics can be understood by everyone, yet still, maintain the essence of the Four Pillars of Astrology?

2 How to optimize the audience experience with Four Pillars Astrology?

3 How can the information be conveyed to the audience most efficiently and clearly?

Answering by self-recognition

I try to recognize myself and analyze who I am as a designer in order to answer the first question. I look into my toolboxes, and soon enough I decide to introduce the topic with my i**mage making and visual communication skills** to create appealing visuals to deliver the insights of four pillars of astrology toward the audience. However, the essence of the Four Pillars of Astrology is complicated. It can be large or small. It can be abstract or realistic. It can be close or far. It can be anything. So, I look up myself and wonder who am I as a designer. I realize that **I appreciate the ambiguity of the world, and I embrace the vague feelings that I have all the time.** Therefore, to answer the first question, I decide to create visuals that communicate and embrace the ambiguity essences of the four pillars of astrology, which are the forces within it. Meanwhile, I would like it to maintain how it was communicated over the past thousands of years, so I include the Chinese Character as the medium. Eventually, the visuals would be able to communicate the feeling and techinical part of the Four Pillars of Astrology simultaneously.

What's out there?

I look into various existing designs and mediums and analyze what's the possible best way to communicate the messages toward the audience, so audience can get the information that they need and experience the world of Four Pillars of Astrology.

Design by 4W studio

Animal representation

This is the most common way to visually represent the terrestrial branches, which are part of the system inside Ba-Zi. People often refer to terrestrial branches as various sorts of animals and used those animals to represent the specific Year.

The advantage of using this method is the ease for people to remember.

The disadvantage is that if I apply this method to my thesis, then I would miss the chance to connect terrestrial branches to energy forces.

www.echineselearning.com/blog/12-heavenly-stems-10-earthly-branches

Traditional arrangement

The traditional method arrange elements in a very practical format. It is mainly in circular format is that it also served as a compass, so it is easier for people to search the direction of goodness.

The advantage of this format is that if the person carries the knowledge of all the abstract symbols, then the person would be able to accurately point out the solutions to the problems.

The disadvantage that comes with this is obvious. It is too complicated for general folks to try to use it in real life.

theperihelioneffect.com/astrology-the-zodiac-and-the-eccentric-orbit-of-the-planet/

Zodiac sign

Astrology Zodiac has been developed for a very long period of time, and it is by far the most popular and accessible method for common folks to understand themselves through astrology. However, it still falls into the same issues that Four Pillars of Destiny faces, which is that it is either too generalized or too specialized. There is not many midpoints in-between.

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App

The advantage of Four Pillar of Astrology app brings ease for professional practice tellers to easily generate the resources that they need for prediction, and the spontaneous responsiveness definitely helps speed up the workflows.

The disadvantage of this sort of app is that its target audience is only people with a certain amount of knowledge of Four Pillar Astrology, so it limits users without the knowledge to understand themselves.

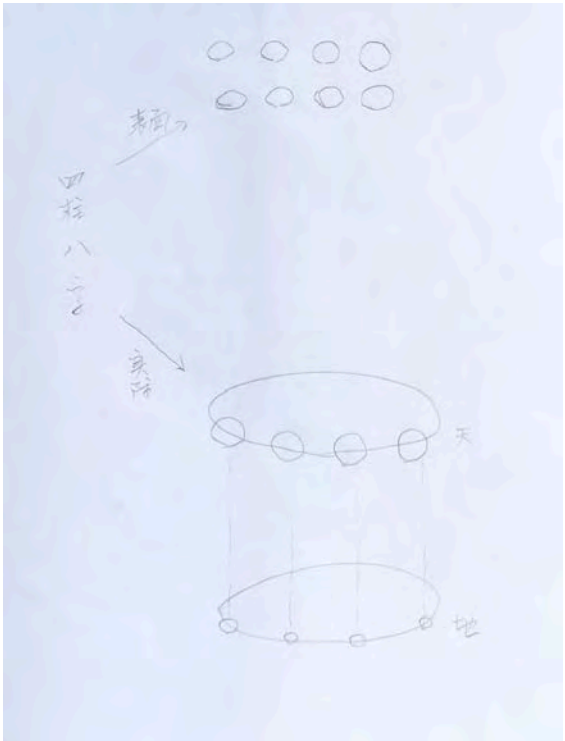
Design by Wu Liang

Solar terms visualization

The artist uses Chinese Characters as the medium to draw the solar terms on top of it, so each Character no longer just carries the name of the solar terms, at the same time, they actually have visuals beyond it, which provide the atmosphere for the audience to feel it. This series of artworks provide a strong sense for the audience who doesn't have the relative knowledge and cultural background, and they can still feel the meaning behind the visuals.

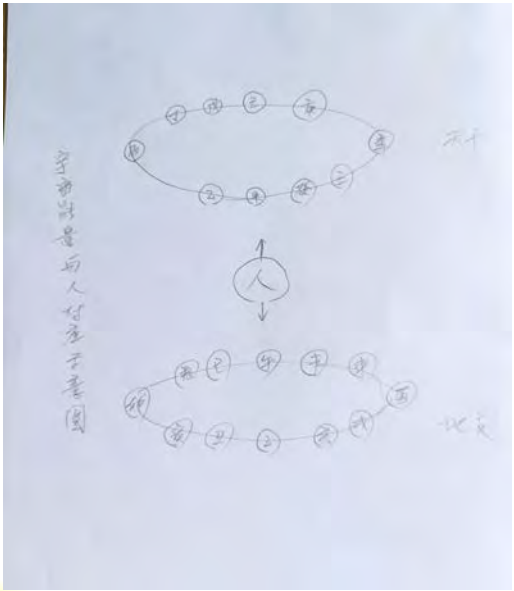
Input from advisor

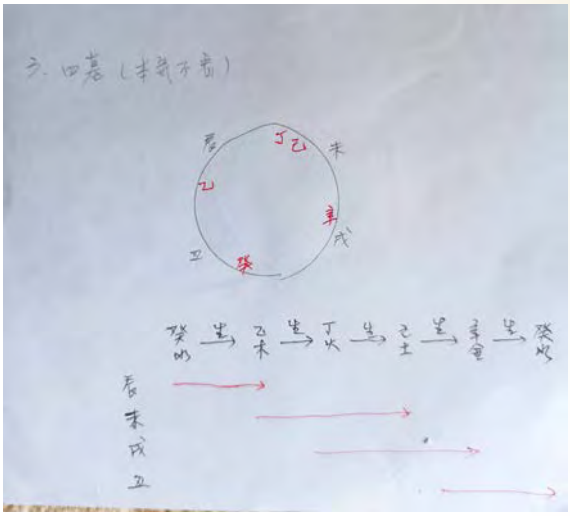
During the initial research phase, I talked with my advisor, who is a professional fortune teller and have been studied in this area for more than 30 years. He provided me some hand sketch that he made and related to information for me to consider to add into the book, so the audience would have a better understanding.



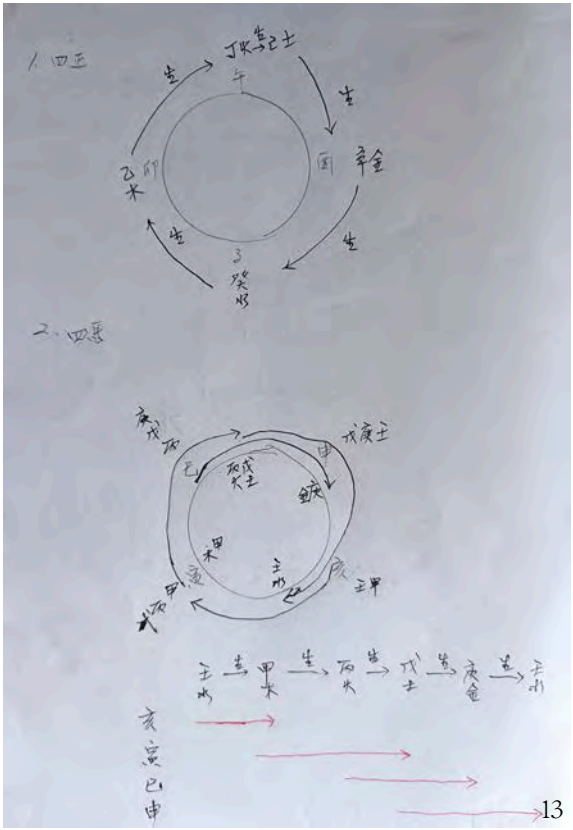
He reminded me to imagine astrology as if they are in the real world, and he asked me to tight this up with my designs.

And, he used terrestrial branches and celestial stems to explain why people's characters are influenced by them.





The movement of the forces also something that I need to consider. Especially, when it comes to the terrestrial branches because there are more forces hidden inside of them.



Take away

Throughout my research, I realized the breadth and potential of this topic. Most current deliverables are either too complex or too simple. Therefore, in order to solve this problem, the design needs to **maintain a connection with the theme**; at the same time, the visual needs to **introduce and talk about the topic in a way that everyone can easily understand**, and it needs to **be a system** that includes the terrestrial branches and celestial stems, so that it can be further developed.

Idea

Based on the research, I plan to create a simple informational book with visuals that encoding the five forces and Chinese character. This allows me to deliever the message in a way that everyone can understood yet it is still connect with its traditional formate, so people can carry the knowledge that they gain from the book to other form of visual representation.

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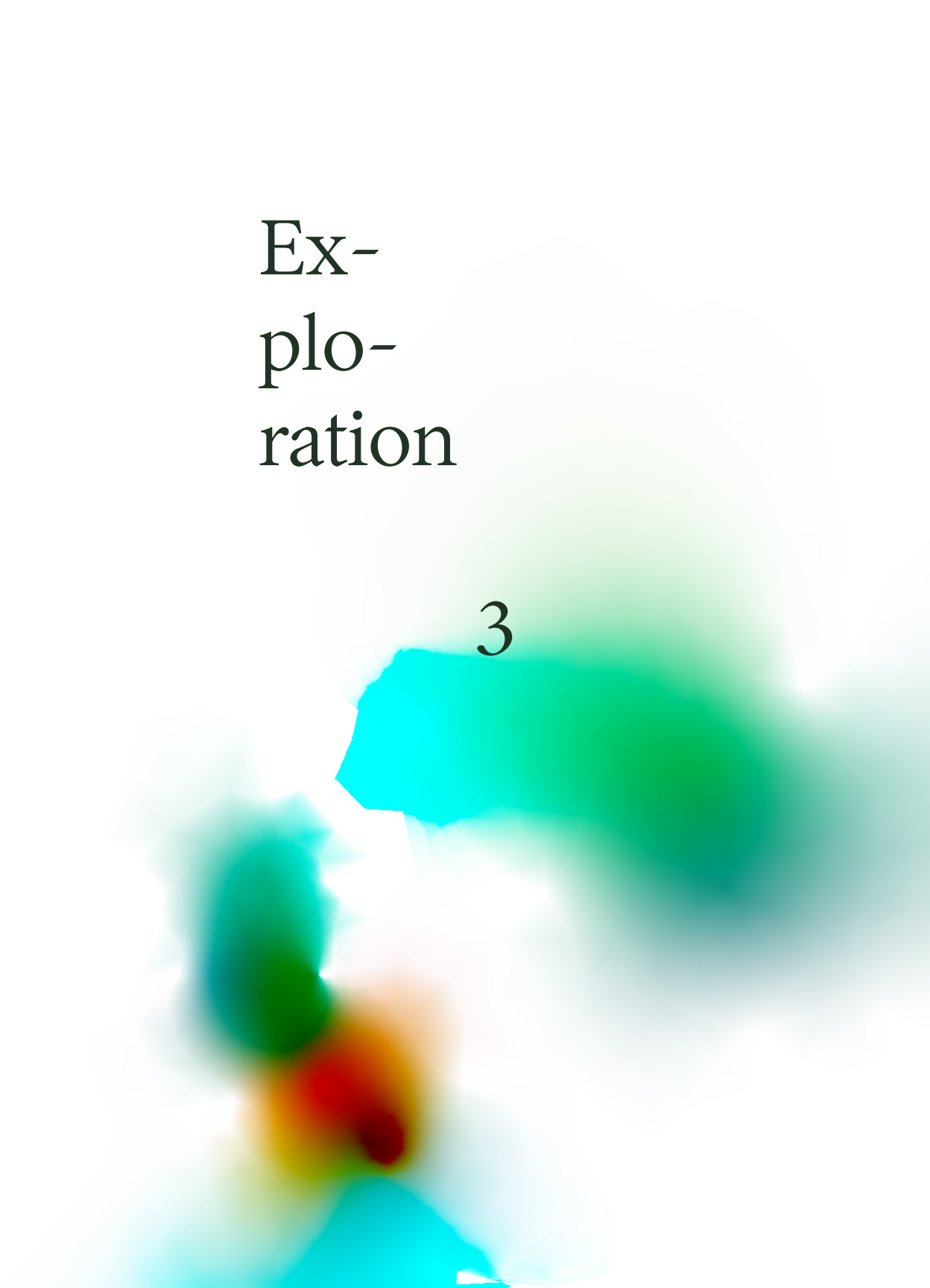
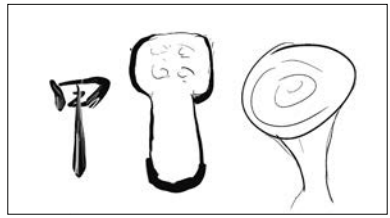
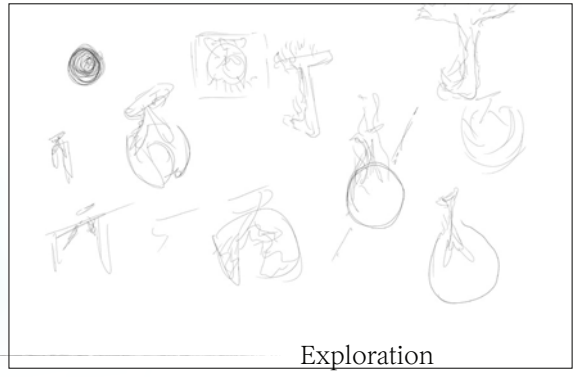
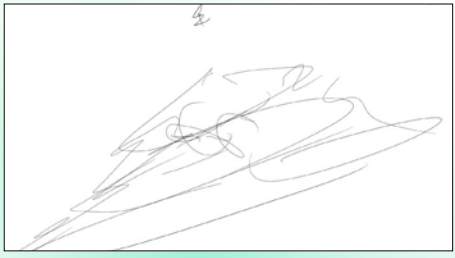


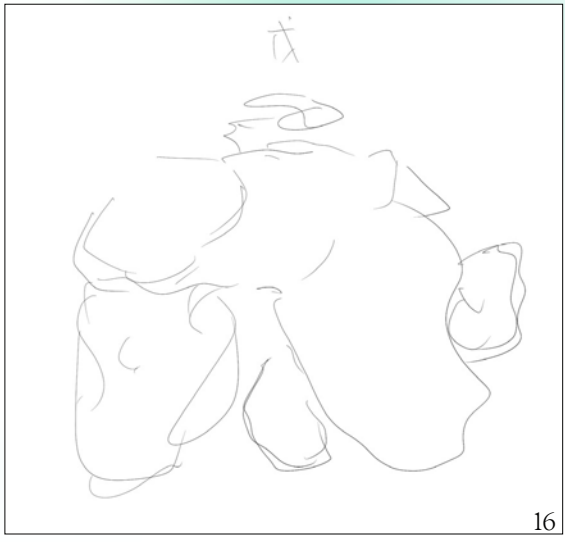
Initial
sketch

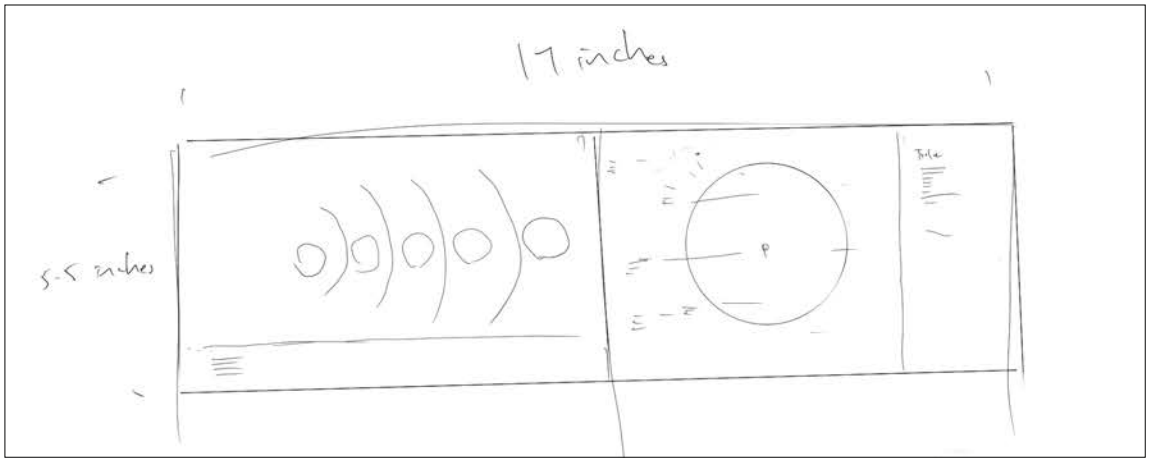




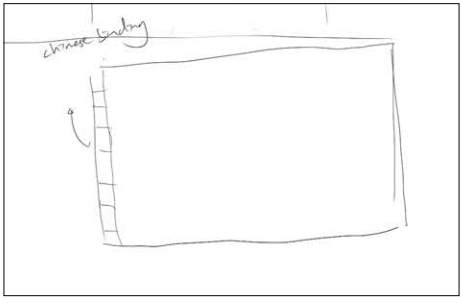
I start with quick pencil sketches and explore and think about what might be the best representational form for the Chinese characters interacting with the forces behind them.







Then I consider what sort of format the content can be best presented, and I landed on the long rectangular format at the very beginning stage.



Developing

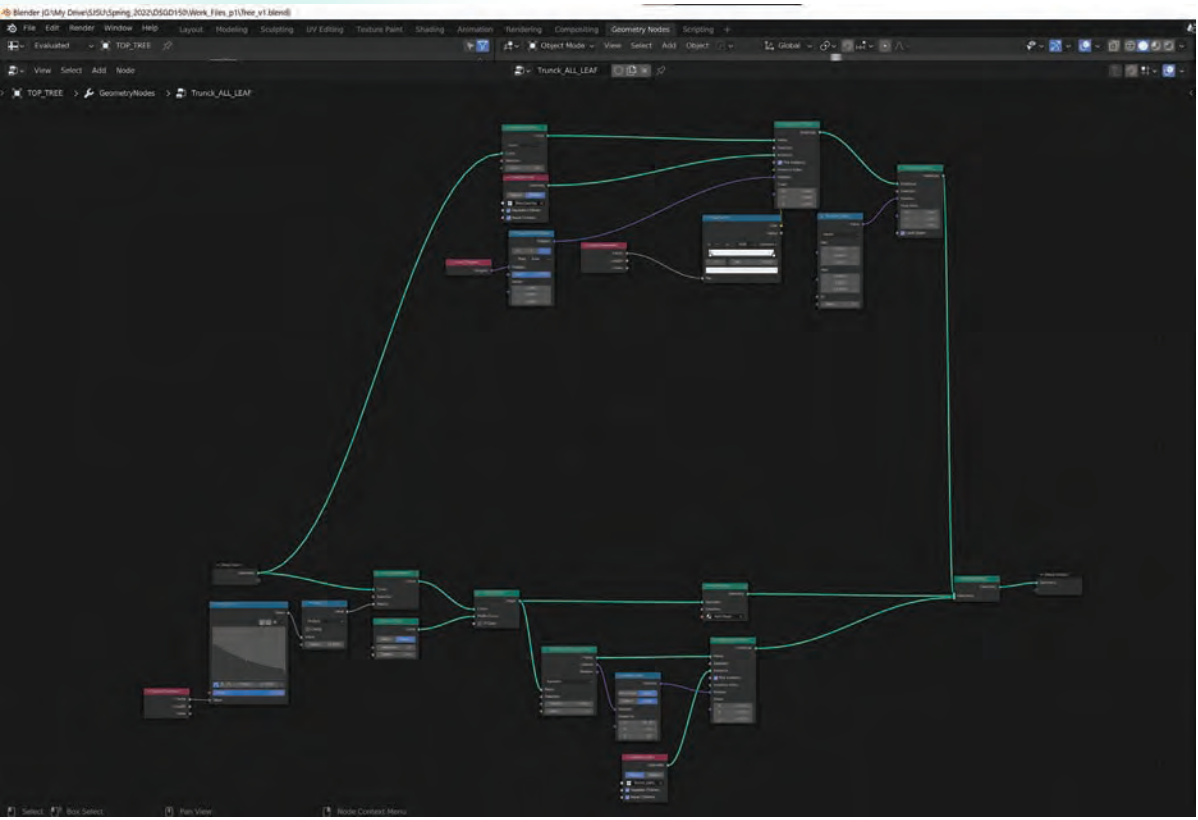
The main method I use for image making is to use **Blender** to create the base of the image. Then I would go into **Illustrator** and **Photoshop** to adjust the details and layout. Finally, I printed the content on rice paper and bound it into a book with fiber.

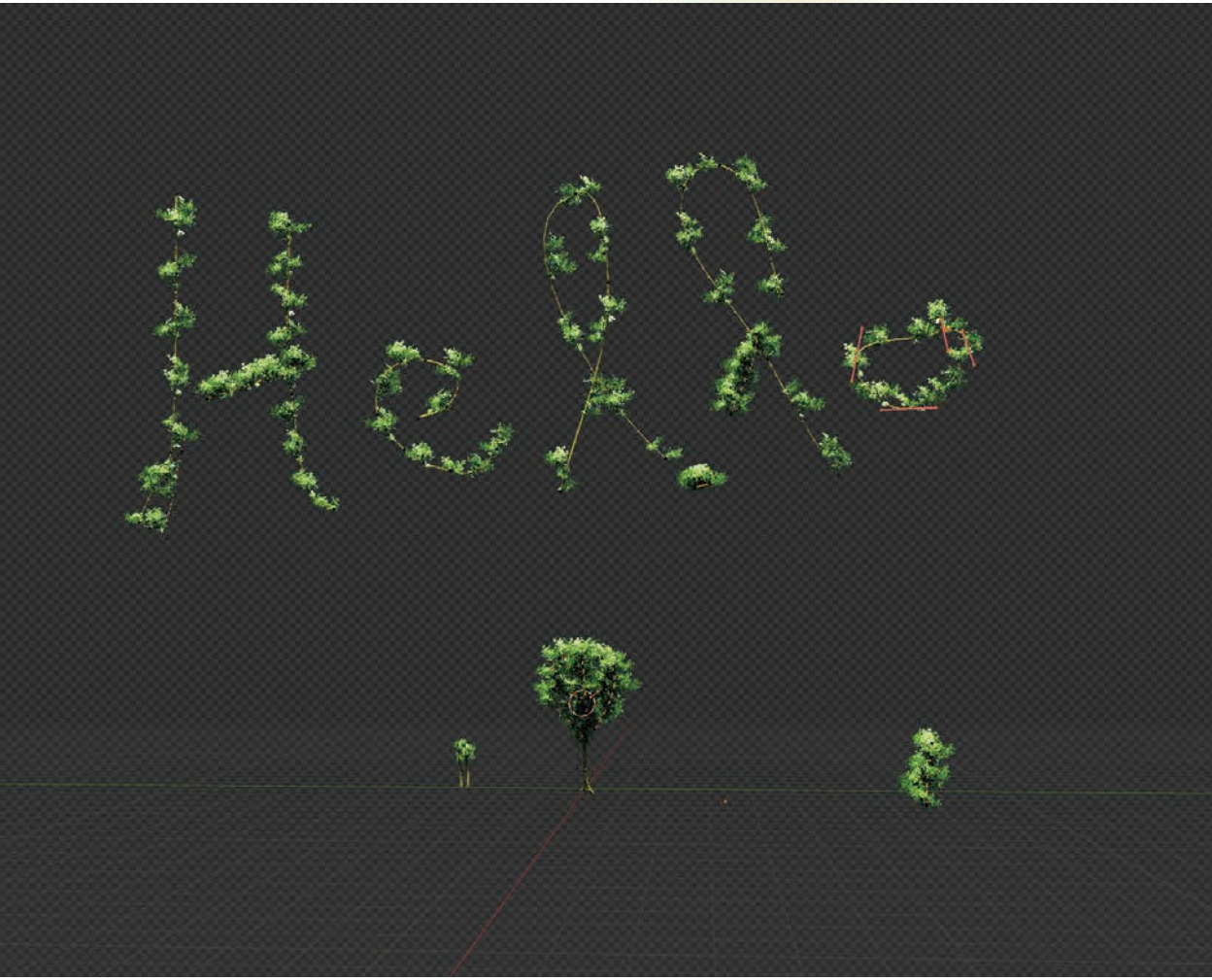
During the developing process, there is various kind of try out. Although the tool that I used is always the same, the approach constantly switches during the process.

Overall, the developing process can be separated into 3 part.

1 Base image creation with Blender
2 Layout and image refinement with Illustrator and Photoshop
3 Book Binding & Print

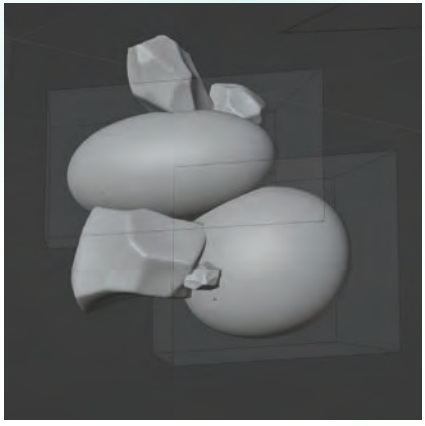
1-1 The original reason I chose to use **Blender** was not only because it was a great tool for creating images, but also because I wanted to create props for my underlying 3D environment at the same time. Therefore, I utilized the **geometry node** in Blender to help me generate a variety of results quickly.



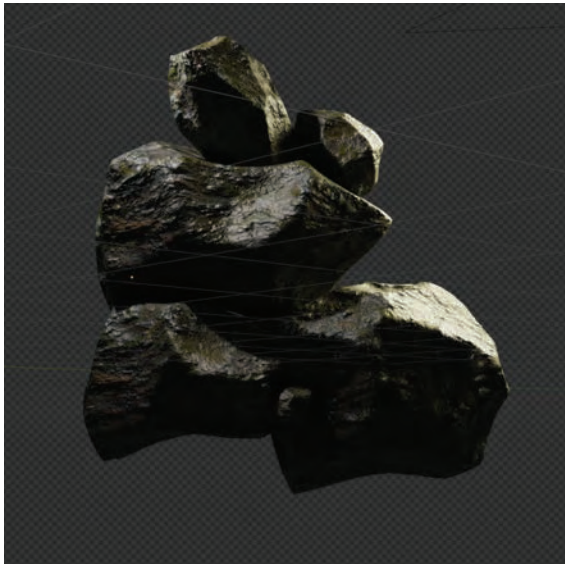


However, after I complete the generate all the nodes for Jia (甲), I realize that this is not a sustainable method for me to do for the rest of the project.

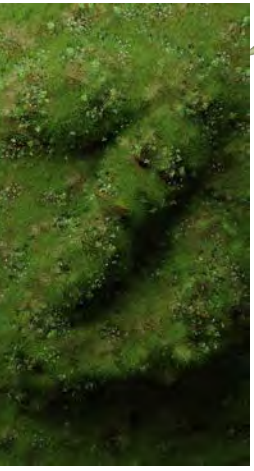
1-2 Hence, I **changed the image making process** in Blender. I started by building the models in a transitional manner, so I would start from a base geometric shape and try to use the modifier to create models instead of using geometric node to create the model. While this way, I may be limited by the existing base, but it certainly speeds up the pace of image production.

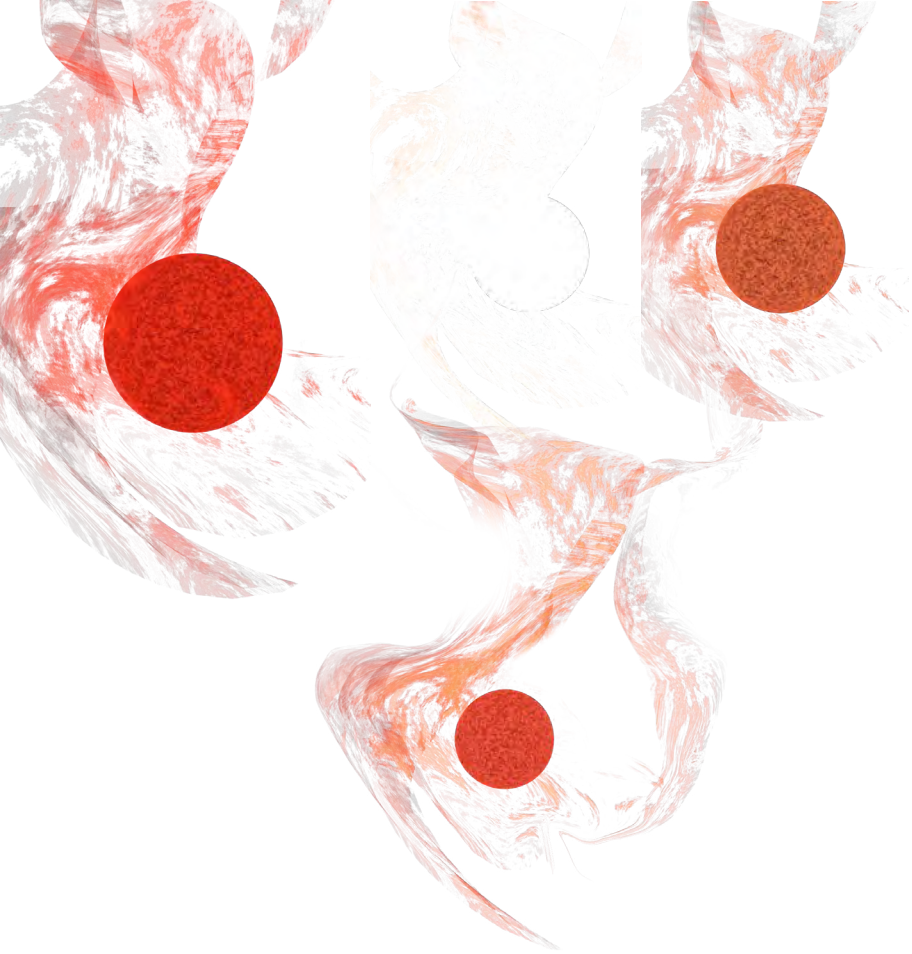


As the images show on the top, the base shape is a rectangular oval shape, and I was able to use the modifier to generate the shape for different rocks. Eventually, I would have a variety of different shapes on the right-hand side.

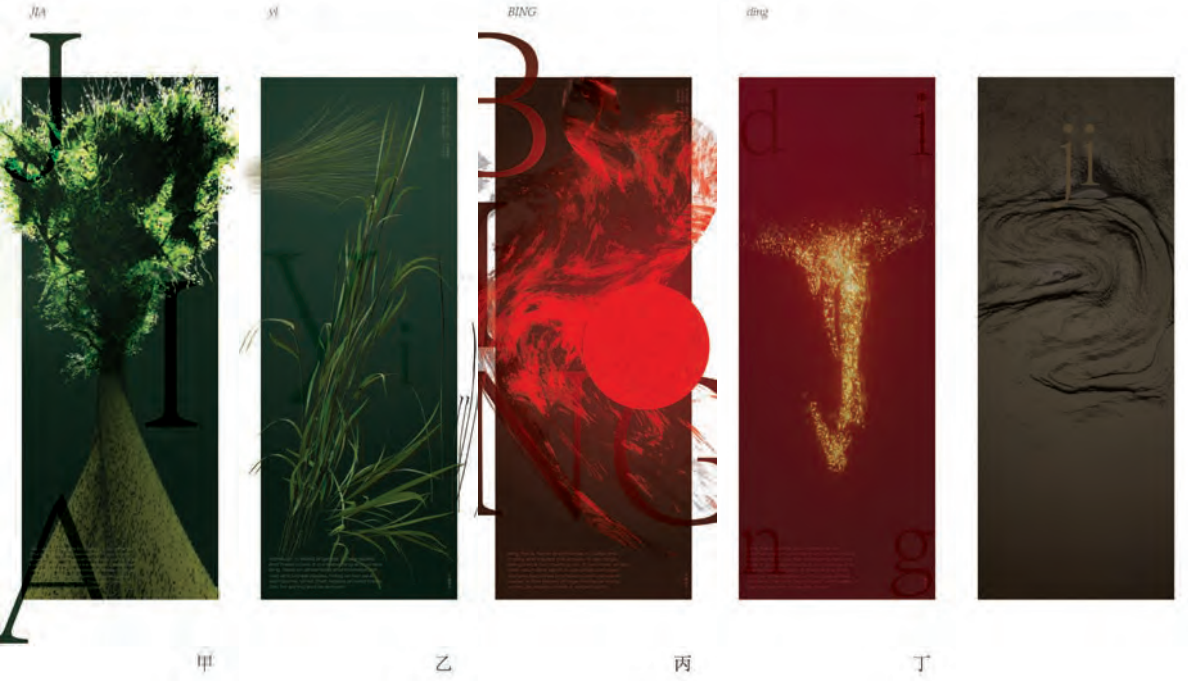


By using this method, I was able to generate the base image for the rest of the project.



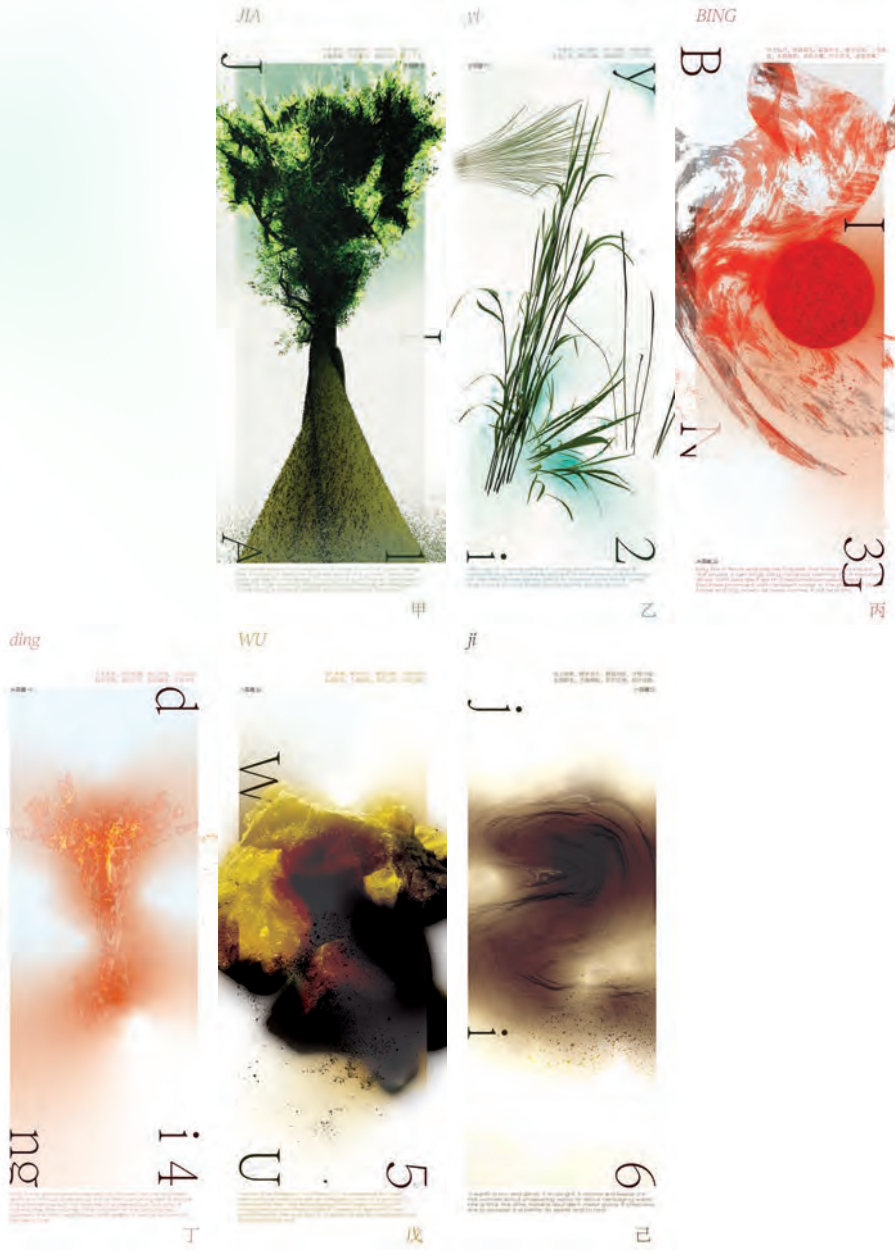


2 After, I finished some part of my images on Blender. I move on from it and carry the images into the **illustrator to create the layout and refine the image.**



In the beginning of the layout and image making in illustrator, I want to experiment and see what would happen if the big typeface can interact with the elements, and at this point, I still hesitate of the overall look and feel.

Then I add a bit more elements into the layout, and it was from this moment I decide to push the overall looks and feel into a bit more clean and I want to give it a bit more space to breath; meanwhile still maintain the playfulness.



After several round of playing with layout, I decide to move the Chinese description into the image, and provide the images and increase the brightness of the images a little bit.

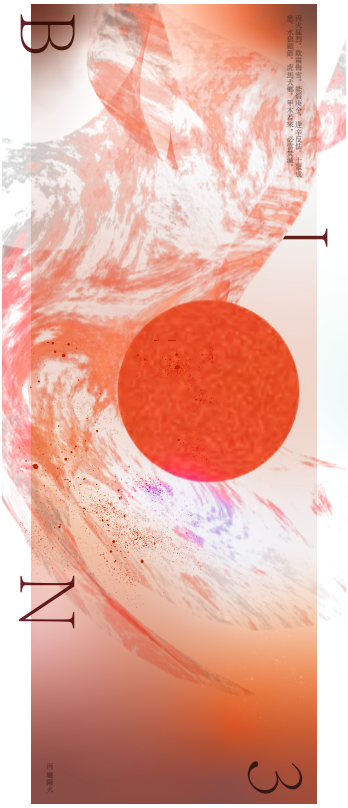
JIA

Jia wood attends to Heaven, to emerge from the womb needs fire in spring it does not tolerate metal, in autumn it does not tolerate earth. Fire ablaze, it rides on dragon, water dissipates, it rides on tiger. Earth is moistened (smoothened) and Heaven is in harmony, the plant stands for thousands of centuries.

yi

Although yi wood is gentle, it cuts goats and frees cows, it contains bing and wraps bing, rides on phoenixes and monkeys. On wet and unreal places, riding on Horse is worrisome. Vines that wraps around trees, can be spring and be autumn.

BING



Bing fire is fierce and intense, it bullies the frosts and insults the snows, it can forge geng metal but meeting xin, it becomes afraid. With abundant earth it becomes compassionate, becomes prominent; with rampant water, in the places of tiger, horse and dog, when Jia wood comes, it will be burnt.

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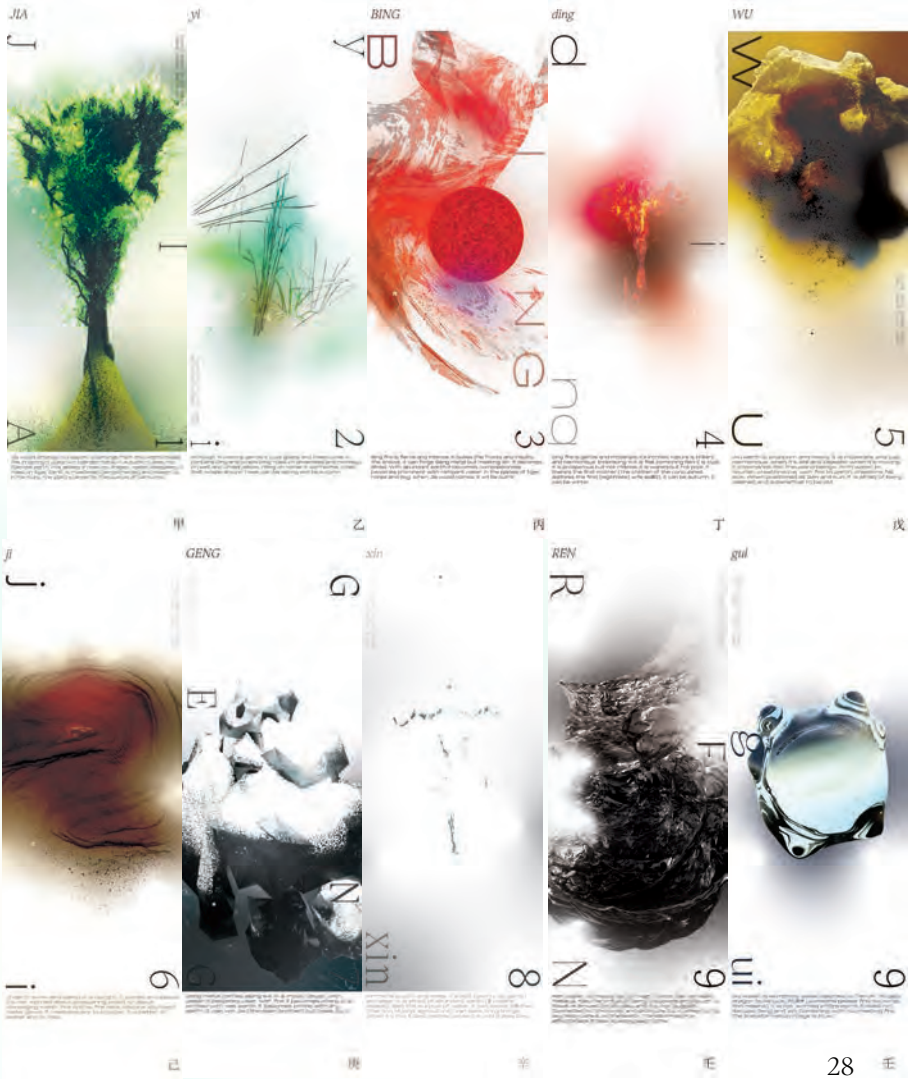
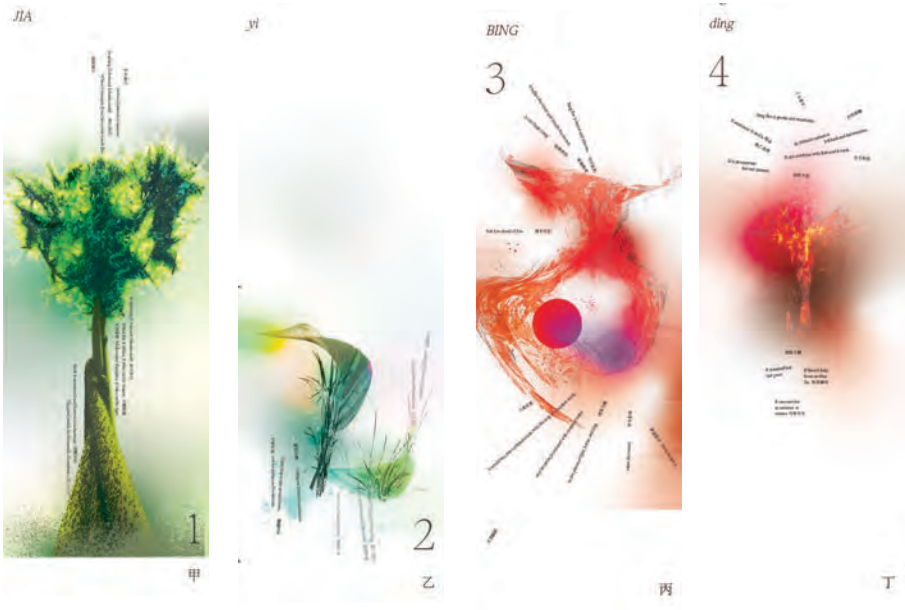
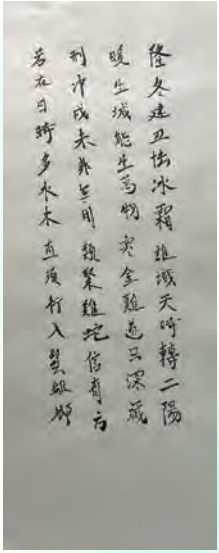
Then I play with the gradient at the background and play with the images in order to figure out which approach may apply to the other pages and cohesive with others.

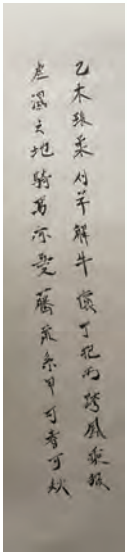


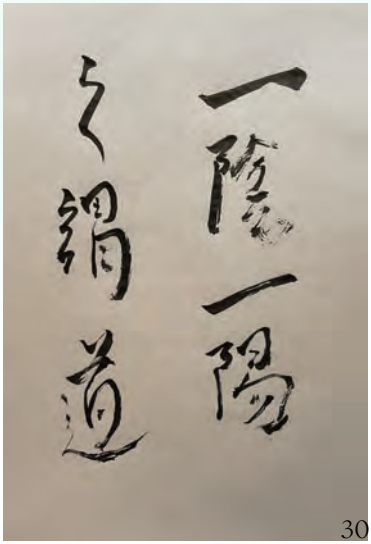
Later, I receive suggestions from advisor that texts maybe distracted from the image. Also, the advisor also wanted to see the shape of the image can looks like the Chinese Character a bit more.



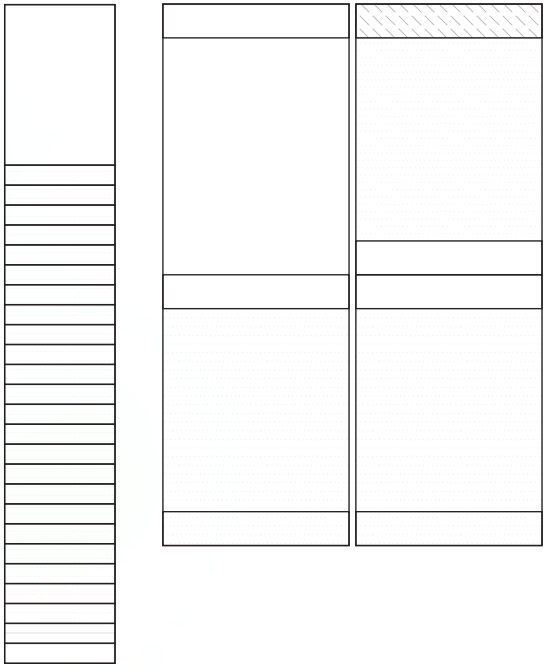
After losing the playful texts, I would like to bring them back. However, it seems not to work pretty well with some images, and the readability of the texts is questioned. Therefore, in order to address the lack of fun. I decide to add my hand write calligraphy.



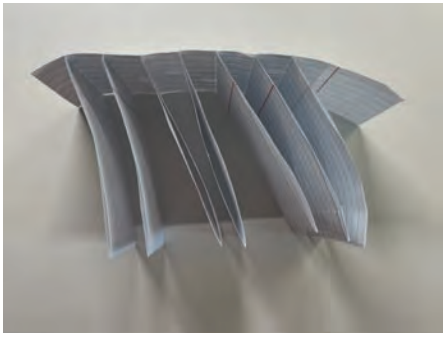




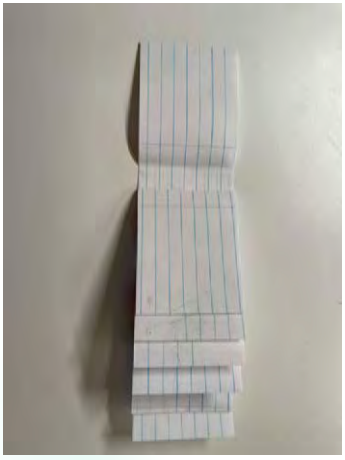
3 Also, in order to make the final outcomes appealing and understandable. I attempt several physical printing and try to figure the best way to deliver the message toward the audience.



I plan out the print template and define the print and bind area of the book to help me create the final outcomes.



Hence, I was able to build the first tiny mock-up from the template that I build.



And, then I print out the first test print base on the images that I have from the time.

With the further development, I create more images, and I bind them together with the size that I wanted at the time. Due to this time's test print, I am able to see how the potential printout may look the first time.

And, with the help from the previous experiment, I finally for the first time combine everything together, and spot things that I like and things that I would like to improve.

Out-come

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JIA

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Who am I?

"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom."

"He who knows other men is discerning; he who knows himself is intelligent."

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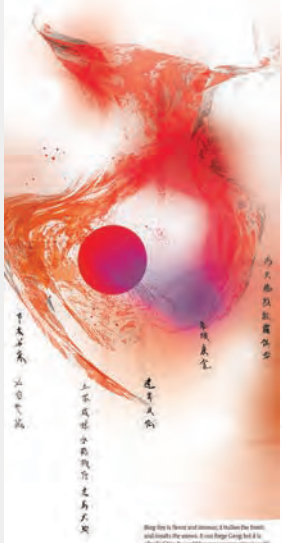

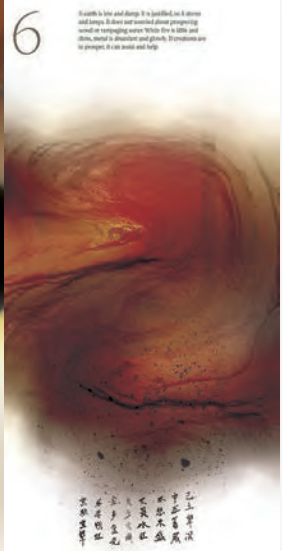

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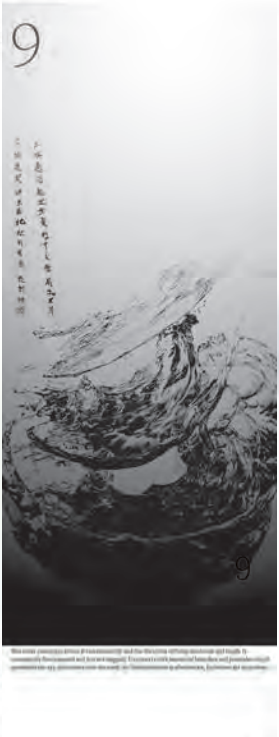

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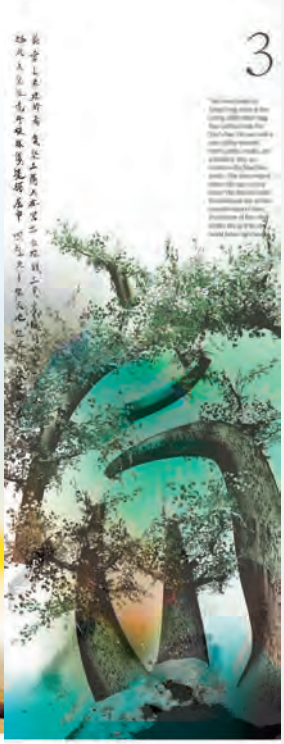

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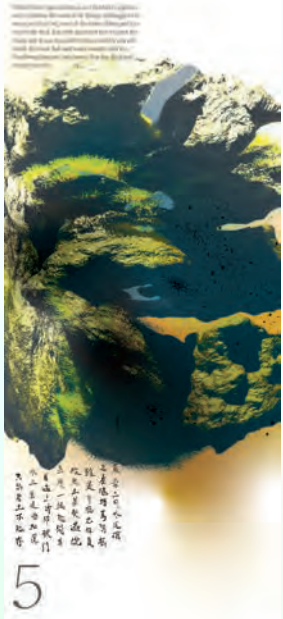

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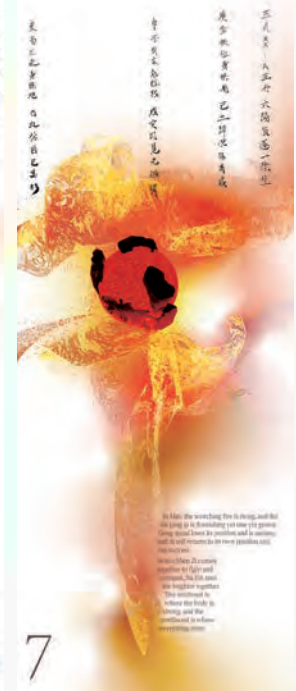

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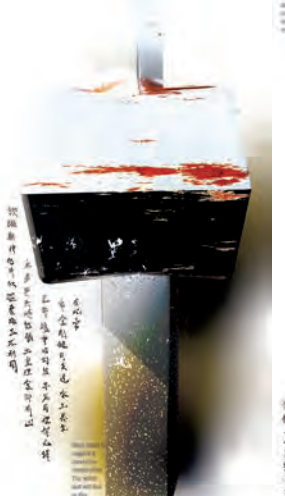

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Special Thanks
Chang Sik Kim
Julie Martinez
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Colophon

Inferi by Blaze Type

San José State University
BFA Graphic Design Program
Class of **2022**