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by

Jou-chia Huang

2011

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Running Upside Down

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Running Upside Down

by

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Report

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Dedication

This report and film are dedicated to my parents, and also to my life partner Jeffrey Brent Zollner. All of who have never stopped believing in me, especially in times when I did not believe in myself. Without them, I would cease to be.

Abstract

Running Upside Down

Jou-chia Huang, M.F.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisor: Andrew Garrison

The following report describes the making of the short film *Running Upside Down* in its entirety from the genesis of the idea to pre-production, production, post-production, and finally reflections and musings of the whole process. *Running Upside Down* is a story about a father and son's journey to reconciliation though oceans apart and also of a young girl's dream to travel to America. Supplemental materials to the report include the original script, budget and shooting schedule. This short film was produced as my Graduate Thesis Film in the Department of Radio-Television-Film at the University of Texas at Austin in fulfillment of my MFA in Film Production.

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INTRODUCTION

List of Crew Members – by last name

Aitcheson, Georgia- Production Assistant (TW)
Brath, Charli- Makeup & Hair (US)
Charlton, Jennifer- Production Assistant (TW)
Chen, Stephanie- 2nd Assistant Camera (TW)
Cheng, Annabelle- Production Assistant (TW)
Chiang, Joy- Assistant Director (TW)
Croft, Forest- Key Grip
Duncan, Nathan- Boom Operator (US)
Faia, Tony- Producer & Co-writer
Garcia, Caleb- Assistant Camera
Hall, Brook- Actor: Thomas
Huang, Jou-chia- Writer, Director and Editor
Huang, Jou-man- Actor; Shu-shu
Huettner, Stephanie- Producer
Javens, Nathan- Actor: Kyle Weathers
Lavadera, Anthony- Production Designer (US)
Leal, Homer- Gaffer (US)
Liu, I-Yo- Gaffer (TW)
Liu, Pin-Chun- Production Assistant (TW)
McWatters, Josh- Graphic Designer
Peters, Garry- Actor: Jim Weathers
Peterson, Jeff- Vehicle Specialist
Riche, Josh- Sound Recordist (US)
Rusk, Patrick- Stills Photographer (US)
Shepard, Alicia- Editor
Silverstein, Annie- 2nd Assistant Director (US)
Staub, Carmen Hidalgo- Actor: Courtney
Tran, Therese- Assistant Director (US)

Wallain, Dale- Art Department

Xanthopoulos, Drew- Director of Cinematography

Yu, Yu-Shen- Sound Recordist (TW)

Zheng, Pinti- Actor: Thomas' girlfriend

Foreword

It's hard to convey that being here in Austin, Texas, the United States of America, studying film production for the past three and a half years is almost a surreal experience for me. It's a scenario you could have probably seen me play over and over in my head all throughout my childhood growing up in Taiwan. My beginnings are just different enough to be considered "unique", and there's no doubt that this "uniqueness" has affected my decisions, my perspectives, and ultimately my work. I feel it is necessary, then, to start at the very beginning in order to fully comprehend the culmination of the past three years and my thesis work. I hope this is one of those rare exceptions you'll bear to read through a blatant *exposition*.

Genesis

I was born in Taipei, Taiwan in 1983. When I was seven years old, my family relocated to Kansas City, Kansas for three years. My father, who had cultivated a love for American cinema and music growing up in the 50's in Taiwan, found it a perfect opportunity to finally get his fill. I don't remember exactly how I learned to speak English, but I remember the "people" who definitely helped me along the way: Gene Kelly, Dick Van Dyke, Judy Garland, Jimmy Stewart, Marlon Brando... my father made sure I understood those were the glory days of cinema. As an eight year old Taiwanese kid, I embraced this culture as the only one I've ever known, and somewhere deep inside I had the idea that I too wanted to either tap dance on a wrap-around porch like Shirley Temple, or yell "ROLL'EM!" at the top of my lungs like that director did in "Singing in the Rain". I had buried my young roots here, deep in American soil.

In 1993, we moved back to Taiwan. It was, ironically, a harder transition than when we moved to Kansas. By this time, my "native" language was English, I was disconnected with my Chinese heritage and I was still the odd kid at school who "didn't

speak the language”. I resented my parents for bringing me back to Taiwan. I hated being there and I vowed to return “home” one day. What I didn’t know was that I would continue to search for exactly where that “home” was throughout the years.

Birth of a Story

After graduating from college with a B.A in film production, jobs were so abundant that I had to work at a restaurant in between my freelance work to pay the bills. The restaurant I worked at catered to mostly foreigners and that is where I met Jeff my husband, along with his “crew” of expat friends. Most of the foreigners, like Jeff, came to Taiwan looking for adventure. What they found instead was an easy way of life that quickly became a party that never seemed to end. To the bewilderment and often disapproval of most of their families, foreigners who come to Taiwan almost always stay. This was a common phenomenon in Asia, where it becomes a “Never-never-land” of sorts for expatriates to escape to. As long as you stay, you’ll never have to grow up. Jeff was one of the few that chose to do the hard thing- give up the easy life and try living the “normal” life back home. But having led the vagabond lifestyle for the past six years, the idea of coming home was as foreign to him as my decision to move to Austin to pursue a graduate film degree.

I had been waiting for this opportunity for 15 years, coming back to America. So when I realized, when I finally arrived, that it did not feel anything like returning home, I was heartbroken. Nothing made sense. Sure I spoke the language and this time around people didn’t make fun of my speech or what I looked like, but I didn’t feel complete. It took me 15 years and leaving my birthplace to finally find where my heart has always lived – in Taiwan. Meanwhile, my future-husband Jeff was also struggling with transitioning back into life here in America.

Jeff is originally from Portland, Oregon. His parents were separated when he was quite young. As we began to build a life together in Austin, I started to get to know his family history, his values, reasons to why he began a life of constant travel after college, and the love-hate relationship he has with his father and mother separately. I realized even though we come from different backgrounds, and we are essentially completely different people when it comes to race, religion, culture...etc, we were both consumed

and running from a similar fear- being lost. That is when I found my calling to tell the story of two different people from opposite sides of the world, both essentially looking for the same thing- home.

Running Upside Down is a story of a father and son's journey to reconciliation, and a young girl's ambition to discover the world on her own terms. Their journeys seem unrelated, but in the end interweave and ultimately affect each other's destination. The young girl, Shu-shu, would be from Taiwan traveling to America. The son Kyle, a disenchanted American living in Taiwan, and the father, Jim, an old bitter Texan living in Austin. I would not only have the opportunity to tell a story close to my heart, but also film the two locations I now equally consider my home- Taiwan and Austin, Texas.

As I started to compile all my ideas together and drafts of screenplay began to pour out, I became aware the scope of the story to be bigger than I had originally imagined. The story was so dear and near to my heart I had a hard time separating from it and letting the characters, which were all based on real people, speak for themselves. It was then I decided to do something I've never done before- collaborate with a screenwriter. Tony Faia was a recent MFA screenwriting graduate. I've always enjoyed his particular sense of humor, and I knew he had traveled to Southeast Asia before so hopefully he would not be completely unfamiliar with the world I was trying to write. We met up to discuss the possibilities of collaborating and Tony immediately expressed interest.

Working with a screenwriter was a challenging experience, especially with a story that intimately mirrored my life and the people around me. On one hand, I knew that I did not have as much writing experience, especially in screenplay format, as Tony did, and I also knew of my weakness when it comes to story structure. So having Tony on board to make sure the story flowed was incredibly helpful. However, the story itself had many intimate and often sensitive areas where I was almost afraid of Tony's input. Sometimes I would find myself fighting his rewrites and suggestions because it didn't match with what I had experienced or remembered in real life. In the end, I had to remind myself I wasn't making a documentary or writing a memoir, I was making a fiction short film no longer than 30 minutes. The characters and their journey were the main focus, and that's what we needed to concentrate the story on. Once this was established, it was clear to

both of us that the original idea for the story had to change dramatically. I had to compromise with taking out a good portion of supporting characters that were not contributing to moving the story forward. Also, we realized I was trying to squeeze too much into a 30-minute piece. There was so much commotion and distraction going on that it took focus away from our main theme. I struggled very hard and for quite some time to keep those “distractions” in the screenplay. For myself, it almost felt like if I agreed to get rid of a certain scene it would be the equivalent of erasing a bit of my past, but the integrity of the story was priority. Even though compromises were made, the end result was certainly a story of what we set out to tell- the search for home.

PRE-PRODUCTION, AUSTIN

Casting

From the moment I decided to shoot this film, I knew I wanted it to be as genuine as possible. As someone who comprehends both Mandarin and English fluently, I've always found it agonizing when movies cast non-native speakers to play a role that requires them to speak fluent Mandarin. I knew that whoever played "Shu-shu" had to be native Taiwanese who spoke "broken English"(Mainland China and Taiwan have different accents, so mainland Chinese candidates were not considered). This proved to be a more difficult task than I had expected.

Austin is abundant with talent. It is also close to two of the nation's biggest cities- Houston and Dallas, both with large Asian/ Chinese populations, which I sent my casting calls to. I received many responses, all of whom were Asian Americans, meaning Mandarin is not their first-language. I know at this point you're probably thinking no one would really know the difference, but with my plans of showing this film in Taiwan, I could imagine the audience there completely taken out of the story because the actor sounded "funny". As time was running out, I had to move on to my next option- Non-actors.

I've never worked with non-actors before, but being in a film program I've heard my share of stories, good and bad, about working with these elusive creatures. From the very beginning, in the back of my mind, I always knew of my very own elusive creature to consider- my younger sister, who was living in New York at the time. Erica went through all the same transitions as I did growing up. She, however, having lived in Kansas from the age of two to five, never developed her English speaking skills to the full extent, so she still speaks with a minor accent. With this in mind, and my options growing fewer and fewer as the days went by, I decided that Erica would indeed be the answer. The challenge with casting Erica, however, would be a culmination of all my fears- working with a non-actor, who also happened to be my closest family, who I also know for a fact is terrified of even speaking in front of more than five people. After plenty of coaxing, Erica decided to face her fears and make her acting debut in my thesis film. She had saved the day.

When it came down to casting for the character of Jim, it was not hard. I had a clear image in my mind what Jim would act and sound like. So when Drew Xanthopoulos, my DP, suggested Garry Peters from Catherine Licata's pre-thesis, I knew that I had found my Jim. Garry was perfect in the sense that he looked like a man who fought a great battle with time and came out battered yet victorious. His snow-white hair and deep grey eyes showed menace, regret and sympathy all at the same time. In addition, he was incredibly patient and encouraging towards Erica's first-time acting attempt. Garry not only guided her, but was also a patient teacher who understood the delicate nature of working with non-actors. He was key in making production days smooth and enjoyable. I had my characters cast, and I felt a huge rock roll off my shoulders. As you'd expect, there was still a huge mountain yet to climb ahead.

Locations

I had specific ideas for my locations, as they were crucial to the story. I also wanted to make sure the color palette and settings of everything in Austin would be distinct from those in Taipei. You may think this is superfluous, as the two locations seem inherently contrasting to each other since they are on two different continents, but one would be surprised how much streets and cities actually all look alike in a way, and that was not what I was looking for.

With the limited budget we had, my producers and I were lucky enough to have all but one location donated to us in Austin. As a student film, we were able to get away without a lot of the bureaucracy of filming at the Austin-Bergstrom Airport, which was one of the locations we were concerned about. The supervisor there was incredibly kind and understanding. All it took was filling out some paper work and choosing the right low-traffic time slot and we were in business. For Jim's house, which was where the bulk of the story happened, we had to use three different houses for both the interior and exterior shots. At first I was worried about cheating the three locations as one, but my talented Production Designer, Anthony Lavadera, did a great job making sure little details such as window drapes matched between locations.

Shooting Logistics

Coming into this film, I knew from the beginning that there would be tremendous logistical difficulties that we would have to overcome. For everything we plan to shoot in Austin, we had to keep in mind the other half of the film that would be shot two and a half months later in Taiwan. Even though I wanted to establish a differentiation between the two locations, I didn't want viewers to feel like they were watching two completely different stories that were stitched together by force. Drew and I sat down before the shoot and clearly mapped out some of the shots that we anticipate to be mirrored when we went to Taiwan. Anthony and I also talked a lot about the colors and tones we wanted for the sets in Austin so that I would be able to match or contrast them, come the Taiwan shoot.

One of the most critical decisions I had to make regarding the Austin shoot was actually in the sound department. We were 30 days before production and I had yet to lock down a sound recordist. No one was available within the department, and I just couldn't afford to pay a professional mixer. Out of desperation, I decided to go with someone who had no experience in recording sound on a film shoot. Josh Riche was a college friend of our producer, Tony Faia. Josh expressed great interest as he was an aspiring studio recordist. He had been looking for opportunities to expand his experiences outside of the studio. Before I go on about this decision of choosing Josh as our soundman, and to be able to really appreciate the outcome of this decision, allow me to elaborate a bit more. I've always tried to adhere to a personal motto while in school- "We're all here to learn", and that is why we're *in school* and not already working. So when a person comes to me and expresses their eagerness to work on set (without payment) and gain experience, who am I to say- "No, you're not good enough"? I knew Josh was familiar with studio recording, so I thought at least here's a guy that would know good sound from bad, but when I realized he didn't even know what or how a sound recorder worked, I tried to block out all the red flags, printed up a manual for Sound Device 744T and told him to memorize it. I'm happy that I gave him the opportunity and he learned a lot from my shoot, but in the end, the sound for the Austin part of my thesis suffered greatly for it.

PRODUCTION- AUSTIN

Any student film shoot's nightmare is when a shoot goes ten hours overtime, or when all you have to eat for every meal is either burgers or pizza, or sometimes just waiting around because the director doesn't know what he/she wants. I am pretty blessed and proud to say that I rarely let anything like that happen on my set. Shooting *Running Upside Down*- Austin, has been one of my most pleasurable shoots, and I'm blessed to say that my cast and crew feel the same way. In the five days of shooting, never did we once go over twelve hours. Two out of the five days, we wrapped so early that even Garry "complained" he had nothing to do because he had blocked out the day for the shoot. None of this happened out of luck, nor was it taken for granted. Having produced and assistant directed a couple other projects in the program, I knew all the things I did and did not want happen on my set. I've seen shot lists and overheads made meticulously in pre-production, only to be ignored or thrown out when the camera started rolling. That is why I chose Therese Tran as my assistant director. She and I have similar on-set values. Her ability to keep with the schedule and problem-solve when change happens is incredible. She also understands my preference to keeping to the plan and when I falter, Therese has no problem cracking the whip behind me. Her brutal honesty keeps me in check and is one of the many reasons why the shoot ran so well and on time. As the director, I was blessed to have acquired a small but dedicated crew who understood the importance of each of their roles, and allowed me to take the time and focus on directing, which as I mentioned was a new experience this time around.

With Erica arriving less than a week before production, she had very limited time to rehearse with Garry. While filming, I found myself continuously balancing my relationship with her as a sister and a director. It was hard to see my own sibling subjecting herself to an act she is obviously uncomfortable and very self-conscious of, and at the same time I had to constantly push her limits on purpose to get the reaction I wanted. In the end, it was Erica's faith in me and my direction that made the collaboration possible. In addition, Garry along with everyone else in the crew was very

much supportive of Erica. Never once was she treated like an outsider, and it was a pleasure to see Erica's personal transformation in the process.

As this film was going to be an interweaving of two different stories, we decided to approach the production as if we were shooting two individual movies. I gave the cast and crew a self-contained Austin portion of the film. I made it clear to Garry and Erica to concentrate on what's happening to their characters in Austin, and that the Taiwan part of the story should never have to be considered. With the rest of the production team, aside from what was established in pre-production, we operated under the mentality and structure of the Austin script. While this was helpful in getting us to concentrate on the task at hand, I was a bit apprehensive of the possibility of this plan backfiring- essentially ending up with two separate movies that had nothing to do with each other. With a cast and crew of twenty or so supporting me and trusting me to make a good film, I had to believe that the six months of work Tony and I put in to the script was worth it. I figured there has got to be moments like this in filmmaking where you just cross your fingers and pray that you're making the right decisions.

PRE-PRODUCTION, TAIWAN

Casting

I arrived almost two months before production in Taipei, Taiwan. One of the reasons for arriving so early, besides the opportunity to be home with my family for the first time in three years, was casting. For the main character Kyle, I already had a specific person in mind- Nathan Javens, who was a childhood friend of Jeff, my husband. Nate was actually the reason why Jeff traveled and ended up living in Taiwan. I had based the story of the film loosely on Jeff and his group of expatriate friends in Taipei, so who would be a better candidate to play the role of Kyle than Nate? Having had some theater experience himself back in high school, Nate agreed without hesitation. After a brief audition process and script read-through it was obvious my decision was correct. Nate showed great anticipation in playing this role and expressed his empathy with Kyle's character. I was very relieved to hear this, as it was always a minor concern of mine that this story may be touching some delicate issues regarding the expat culture in Taiwan. Knowing that Nate not only appreciated the story but could relate to the character's struggle was very encouraging not only for the sake of his acting, but also as his friend and director.

While I was gone, the expat community started up an amateur theater troupe. I contacted them immediately once I got back and started sending out casting calls for the two remaining characters- Thomas and Courtney. This proved to be a bit of a challenge. Theater and acting is already quite a niche group in Taiwan, and within this small group of mixed nationalities of westerners, I had to find two candidates who had enough acting experience to be believable. The two actors I decided to cast were Brook Hall and Carmen Hidalgo-Staub. Brook came to Taiwan ten years ago from the Broadway shows of New York. He found new inspiration and opportunities in Taiwan that enabled him to establish a pretty good career in local commercials and musicals. Carmen was a German-Spaniard who loved acting, and coincidentally like her character Courtney, was preparing to move to the states with her American husband. Her slight European accent worried me, as her character Courtney was suppose to persuade Kyle to go back "home" to the States with her, but with the production date inching closer and my options growing smaller, I chose to ignore the red flag and convinced myself it wouldn't matter that much. It

became one of many hard decisions I would end up making in Taiwan that were close to damaging the integrity of my film.

One of the key personnel in our Taiwan production was Joy Chiang. Joy graduated from UT's undergraduate RTF program in 2010 and decided to go back to her native country of Taiwan and try to make a name for herself in the film industry there. When I contacted her to assistant direct the Taiwan part of the film, she had already started producing TV commercials and web series locally but was excited to once again work on a UT student film. As Joy had already established quite the connection in the industry there, she was key in helping me cast most of my extras and securing a lot of the equipment and gear. She went above and beyond her assistant directing role, and took on most of the producing duties. It was comforting to have a fellow Taiwanese RTF alumni on set. She definitely helped bridge the multi-cultural and multi-national cast and crew of the Taiwan production together.

Locations

Securing locations in Taiwan may just be one of the hardest tasks that we've accomplished during this part of production. I had come back to Taiwan with the confidence that I would be home and therefore finally know my way around and be able to work much quicker than in Austin. Again, I had underestimated the time I've been away from home, and how cities and people change. It was almost like being ten years old again, coming back "home" to a completely foreign country. The streets that I once knew like the back of my hand, taking short cuts through alleys and backstreets on my scooter, I now could hardly remember. I felt like a tourist, and for a while I struggled with the notion that maybe I was mistaken in telling this story. If I don't even know what my streets and my country looked like, how was I supposed to demonstrate its beauties and culture to my American viewers? I was at a complete loss. Luckily, people like Joy and my long time friend and assistant producer Annabelle Cheng were relentless in seeing me complete this film. They helped me remember how generous Taiwan can be, and within a month I had locked all my locations and rekindled the connection with my hometown. Location scouting for the film has definitely brought me closer to my roots and reminded me how much I really do love Taiwan.

Getting the Crew Across

Five crew members from the Austin shoot chose to pay their own way out to crew on the Taiwan production- my cinematographer, his first assistant camera, two producers and my key grip. You may think be thinking why such an odd choice of crew positions. I gave the options to whoever wanted to come to Taiwan, and these were the ones that chose to do so out of their own pocket. From the very beginning, I knew this was going to be quite the journey and also quite the endeavor. First of all, none of the accompanying crew had ever been to Asia. I made it clear to them that Asia is a completely different experience. It is not the same as if you've traveled to Europe or South America. It is not a Latin- based culture and everything from language, to culture, to food is almost completely and utterly different than what most westerners are used to. I knew my production would benefit from having a semi-consistent crew throughout the shoot, but knowing that I would also be in charge of seven foreigners (two of the crew members brought their significant others, on the condition that they'd help out) who have never set foot in Asia before would not be as breezy as I thought. Secondly, let's assume that everyone has a good healthy stomach (which thankfully, they did) and had no problems adjusting to the physical aspect of being in Taiwan, they would have to quickly adapt to how filming works here, which for the most part is quite different than in the States. Lastly, having paid their own way to finish shooting my thesis film in Taiwan, the least I could do would be to repay them is to make time after filming to show them around town. However, with everything that was going on, going out to town and having fun was the last thing on my mind.

Having said all that, four days before production Jeff and I welcomed the crew to Taiwan after a dreadful thirteen-hour flight. Everyone was in good spirits. I ordered everyone to take whatever allergy medication or ultra-boosting vitamins they brought with them, and we walked into the thick humid air that is Taiwan to begin our adventures in "overseas filmmaking".

Shooting Logistics

You may have guessed that this part would be the bulk of my thesis report. There has been no greater logistical chaos that I've encountered on film shoots, than the one I've put myself in Taiwan. I'll be the first to admit that I had a very naïve perception of my "plans" of shooting in Taiwan with seven Austin crew members. To be concise, here is a list of things that, in retrospect, I had neglected to consider or underestimated-

- Transportation and lodging- I was very lucky to have one of my father's church friends volunteer to have the crew stay at her four-bedroom house about 15 minutes from my family's place. This was crucial as I thought it best that 1) The crew should always stay together, so we won't waste time rounding people up, 2) If they stay close, I would have easy access to the crew in case anything happened, or if plans changed. What I didn't take into serious account was the fact that this house was in the mountains, accessible only by scooter, shuttle bus or taxi. Even though I had hired a personal driver to transport the crew on set each day, after the first couple days, it was clear that without their own transportation the crew either all showed up on time, or all late. The latter happened more than the former.
- Language and communication- Taipei is a pretty modern international city for the most part. People are used to seeing foreigners and English is taught as a second language. When you are working together as a group, however, the dynamics change. It is not just conversational English when one is one set. If I needed something, I couldn't afford to translate my needs between two languages. I need it, and I need it now. If a corner needs to be lit, or if something is in the shot and needs to be moved, it has to be done quickly and efficiently. There's no time to be wondering if what you said was being understood. Which brings me to my next point.
- Crew efficiency- I've always kept a relatively small set. What I lack in quantity, I hope to make up in quality. If a person cannot be used efficiently, then that person is a wasted resource and should not be on set. On my Taiwan shoot, I realized in most circumstances my crew efficiency was low and I had people on set that didn't need to be there. Due to the language barrier, and because they were not

familiar with any of the locations, it greatly reduced my American producers' ability to perform their tasks. I had to rely greatly on Joy, my AD, which in turn further burdened her. My Taiwanese crew was very professional, but had never worked with foreigners before. It took them a good first half of the production before they finally developed a comfortable working relationship with the American crew. Before that, the morale was always a bit awkward, and communication was slow. I would be lying if I said I didn't make compromises due to delicate working conditions.

PRODUCTION- TAIWAN

All throughout the production, I knew there would be no possibility for “pick-ups” or re-dos. Time and management was of the essence. Most of the people involved with the production were taking time off work to help out, so to ask them for any extra time to do re-shoots would be plain bad karma. With this in mind, it would be an understatement to say my nerves were stressed during the shoot. I was on the brink of insanity. On top of that and the before-mentioned logistical problems, did I mention that I was also planning my wedding four days after production wrap? My then-fiancé’s family of four was arriving five hours after our scheduled wrap time. God knows where I found the sanity to block all these other “minor” life decisions out of my mind, and on June 18th, 2011, I managed to get my entire mix-matched crew of fifteen on set, on time for the first day of *Running Upside Down’s* Taiwan production.

As the filming locations changed from interior to exterior, downtown Taipei to rural coastal town (sometimes within the same day), the first mentioned logistical problem- transportation- became one of our biggest set-backs. By the second day, I decided to send Drew and his A.C Caleb to stay downtown with Annabelle. I at least had to have my camera department on set on time, and Anna made sure that happened for the rest of the shoot. The first day of shooting also brought about the realization that I had no boom operator. Joy had managed to get me an incredibly discounted rate for a professional sound person on set. He was under the impression, however, that I would provide a boom operator. It took quite a few apologies, a lot of pleading and the ultimate realization that Tony, our producer, was not a capable boom-op replacement, that Yu-shen, the sound recordist, reluctantly took up the job on his own.

I would go into detail of all the ridiculous things that happened just in the five days of production, but I think for my own mind’s sake, I blocked most of it out. Let’s just say five days later, I felt like the Devil himself gave me hell’s version of a purple heart for not only surviving the battle, but managing to safely pull seven of my fellow soldiers out with me. To this day, I still cannot figure out how I thought I could successfully and sanely survive this entire ordeal, but here I am.

POST-PRODUCTION

Editing

I had always planned to finish my post-production within the coming 2011 Fall semester. I anticipated *Running Upside Down* to be a thirty minutes or less short, and I couldn't justify taking more than six months to complete it. I have always edited my own work in the past, and while they didn't turn out too bad I really wanted to try and go through a "real" post-production process. I wanted an editor.

Having an editor is like having a wardrobe consultant. She (in my case, it's a "she") picks out all the clothing she knows would work or go well together, mixes and matches them up, then lays it all out to show you. This relationship doesn't work if you don't trust the wardrobe consultant's taste in fashion, and I knew this would be the key in finding my editor.

Alicia Shepard was my data wrangler on the Austin shoot. She often worked with Therese Tran, and knowing that Therese trusted her, I felt that I would feel the same way. When I found out Alicia was actually working towards becoming an editor, it seemed like a good match. She was also unaware and disconnected from the story enough that I felt she could attack the edits from a fresh angle. That was what I needed- someone to take my film apart and reconstruct it with fresh eyes. With the suggestion of my committee member Prof. Don Howard, we decided to start the editing process by working on the edits simultaneously. Alicia would begin assembling the Taiwan story and I the Austin story. Our plan was to save time in the assembly process and give Alicia the two parts to edit together. This again, was a risky decision. The two stories had existed separately for so long that I was afraid we were indeed going to end up with two short films that had nothing to do with each other. When it came time to stitch the two stories together, my fear became a reality. In the initial edits, the entire movie was heavily leaning towards the Taiwan side. The Austin part of the story involving Shu-shu and Jim just didn't translate on screen as well as Kyle did in Taiwan. At this point, I was also starting to see performance issues that were only apparent when the story came together and the characters were on screen one after the other. Shu-shu was quickly fading into the background as Kyle and Jim's character demanded more presence. I was

starting to realize that the film we shot might not reflect entirely the film we had written. This sent me into a nervous breakdown. Had I ruined my thesis film? Did I make choices that I knew would not pan out? Did I let down all the people who had supported and trusted me in this project? Fortunately, this was a necessary process I guess one needed to go through in all post-production stages. Alicia and I, along with the guidance of Prof. Don Howard, set out to take apart the story completely. I had to come to terms, yet again, with taking out scenes or shots that though were personally important but did not work for the sake of the story. One good example was a scene of Kyle hiding from the police, which took place in a little boys' bathroom in Taiwan. It was a very well played scene with interesting shots and definitely a comedic relief to the story. However, in the last few editing sessions it was decided that the scene proved to be unhelpful to the overall story, and therefore cut out completely. Decisions like these were hard, but ultimately it did make the film more complete, and that was what we were trying to accomplish.

Working with an editor was definitely a new experience I would want to explore more in the future, and what I took away from it was that it takes a lot of trust and communication, both of which are hard to find and to carry out.

Color Correction and Sound Mix

I knew from the start that due to the two locations, there would be color correction involved. Dan Stuyck graduated a year before and having seen his work on Nicolas Siegenthaler's thesis film, I invited Dan to be part of post-production color correction. As luck would have it during both locations of production, the weather did not cooperate with us. We were constantly in and out of sun and shade. It was also cloudy and drizzling most of the time in Taiwan. This gave Dan quite a bit of work to do in color correction. Communication was always clear between Dan and I, and he was quick to pick up on what I had in mind for the look of the film. It was nonetheless a bit tricky, as this film is so rooted in the basic premise that there were two different stories going on at the same time, but in different countries. We had to be careful about creating separate tones and color palettes for the two locations, but stay consistent and similar enough that they would not look like two different films. The color correcting process was very successful. Dan was able to inject nuances of difference into each part of the film that gave both the

Austin and Taiwan part their distinct color tone, and yet stayed congruent enough to flow throughout the entire movie.

For my sound mix, I specifically asked for Eric Friend. He had worked on my pre-thesis and the experience was such a pleasure that I knew I could trust him with the sound nightmare that I had for my thesis. As I mentioned before in both the production parts of Austin and Taiwan, I had the most problems when it came to sound recording. The quality of my sound was just disastrous. I tried to the best of my abilities to squeeze every bit of quality sound out of my production, but it wasn't until it landed in Eric's hands that the situation started to feel hopeful. I am not particularly familiar with the logistics and how-to's of post-production sound mixing, therefore I can only say that whatever Eric did, it was beyond magic. It was unbelievable to me that the sound I had could be salvageable. I was preparing myself for when Eric would shrug his shoulders and tell me that I should have done a better job at recording production sound, but he did nothing of the sort. In the first day of sound mix, Eric cleaned up the entire dialogue track. By the second day we were well into perfecting the quality and inserting sound effects. By the third and last day, after we came back from lunch, we took a last pass at the sound mix and decided there was really nothing left to do. Everything sounded like how it should be. We wrapped up hours earlier than expected. It was when Eric turned around and said, "I think that's it", did I first felt the relief and satisfaction of completion. I had finished my thesis film.

REFLECTIONS

It has been a long and emotional journey for both the film and myself. Truth be told, I didn't think I could have made it this far. Watching the film, I can honestly say that I am proud of this work, something I am rarely able to say about most things I do. I believe the drive and the reason I am able to come this far in completing this film has definitely been where I have been. The past 20 years I've been looking for an ending to a movie that I forgot I was the main character. I think it's naïve to say I've found out what the ending is, but I definitely understand where my character is coming from, and where I might take it hereafter. Making this film has been a surreal experience for me. For the first time, I felt like every step I took, I took it for a definitive reason. The people I chose or invited to be a part of this journey seemed to have traveled it together with me (metaphorically and literally), and that was what this film was about- people and their journeys.

I would have to say the things I've learned and experiences I've gained in the past three years that I consider important have little to do with actual film production. This program, or to speak in broader terms, this field of work, is all about people. I can think of few other fields of study that require so much human involvement and cooperation in order to complete a job. Yet at the same time, it seems to also be the most selfish and even narcissistic form of collaboration, where people of different trades come together to complete a project that ultimately a few individuals will or could publicly take credit for. I have not yet left the "student film" arena completely and already I've tasted the bitter taste of egotism, greed and self-absorption that comes easily with this profession. Though I am not disheartened, I learned that I treasure the experience more often than I do the outcome, and I love the people sometimes more than I love the work. I look forward to taking the skills I've learned in my graduate degree courses and applying them to a future career, but I think what I will ultimately take away from RTF grad school is the fellowship with some incredible people with whom I hope I will have the privilege of working with in the future, and above everything else- a sense of belonging.

APPENDIX

Budget

	REQUEST+	IN KIND=	TOTAL COST
<u>A. PRE-PRODUCTION/ ADMINISTRATIVE</u>			
Director (entire production @ \$500)		\$1,000	\$1,000
Producer (entire production @ \$500)		1,000	1,000
Writer/ Script		500	0
Photocopies	\$100		100
Copyright registration (WGA registration)	20		20
Total Pre-Production/ Administrative Costs	\$120	\$2,500	\$3,120
<u>B. PRODUCTION</u>			
Cast (3main@\$50/day for 10 days)		\$1,500	\$3,000
Director of Photography (1@\$50/day for 10days)		500	1,000
Production Designer (1@\$50/day for 10days)		500	1,000
Sound Recordist (1@\$50/day for 10days)		500	1,000
Assistant Director (1@\$50/day for 10days)		500	1,000
Production Assistant (2@\$50/day for 10 days)		1,000	1,000
Gaffer (1@\$50/day for 10days)		500	1,000
Grip (2@\$50/day for 10days)		500	2,000
Assistant Camera (1@\$50/day for 10days)		500	1,000
Camera Package (1@\$100/day for 10 days)	500	500	1,000
Lighting (1@\$150/day for 10 days)	500	1,000	1,500
Grip Package (1@\$200/day for 10 days)	1,000	1,000	2000
Art Dept/ Props	500	300	800
Wardrobe/ Makeup	150	150	300
Still Photography (1@\$100/day for 10 days)		1,000	1,000
Expendables	200	300	500
Catering/ Craft service (20ppl@\$15/day for 10 days)	1,500	1,500	3000

Airfare

(to Taiwan, 4ppl@\$1300)

	2,600	2,600	5200
B. PRODUCTION (cont'd)	REQUEST+	IN KIND=	TOTAL COST
Taiwan Visa (4ppl@\$100)	\$100		\$100
Lodging (in Taiwan, 4ppl@\$35/night for 5 nights)	500	200	700
Vehical Rental	500		500
Gas/ Parking/ Mileage	500		500
Location fees/ Permits (6@\$100/day for 1 day)	600		600
Production Insurance	1,000		1,000
TOTAL PRODUCTION COSTS	\$10,150	14,550\$	\$30,700

C. POST PRODUCTION**Editor**

(flat rate @ \$1,000)

	\$1,000		\$1,000
Edit System		4,200	4,200
Hard Drives (4 OWC 1Tb Hard Drives@ \$175/ Drive)	700		700
Music/ Score	500		500
Sound Mix (1@\$200/day for 5 days)	1,000		1,000
Titles/ Subtitling	200		200
Color Correction (1@\$200/day for 5 days)	1,000		1,000
TOTAL POST PRODUCTION COSTS	\$4,400	\$4,200	\$8,600

D. DISTRIBUTION

DVD Duplication	\$500
Digital Prints (HDcam, DigiBeta Cam)	400
Press Kit	300
Postcards/ Promotions	200
Posters	200
FESTIVAL ENTRY FEES	
SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL	50
TRIBECA INTL FILM FESTIVAL	65
AUSTIN FILM FESTIVAL	45
SXSW FILM FESTIVAL	40
SEATTLE FILM FESTIVAL	25
TORONTO REEL ASIAN INTL. FILM FESTIVAL	20
PORTLAND FILM FESTIVAL	45
SAN FRANCISCO INTL. FILM FESTIVAL	45
CHICAGO FILM FESTIVAL	50
SLAMDANCE FILM FESTIVAL	40

LONE STAR INTL. FILM FESTIVAL	30		
MARFA FILM FESTIVAL	45		
<u>D. DISTRIBUTION (cont'd)</u>			
	REQUEST+	IN KIND=	TOTAL COST
VANCOUVER ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL	20		
TAIPEI FILM FESTIVAL	0		
TAIPEI GOLDEN HORSE FILM FESTIVAL	0		
RAINDANCE FILM FESTIVAL (UK)	50		
PUSAN INTL. FILM FESTIVAL (KOREA)	0		
SHANGHAI INTL. FILM FESTIVAL (CHINA)	0		
HONG KONG INTL. FILM FESTIVAL	60		
Airfare			
(TBD)	0		
TOTAL DISTRIBUTION COSTS	\$2,180	\$0	\$2,180
	<u>REQUESTING TOTAL</u>		<u>\$13,650</u>
	<u>IN-KIND TOTAL</u>		<u>\$24,550</u>
	<u>TOTAL PROJECT COST</u>		<u>\$38,200</u>

Original Script

Final Draft 8 Demo

Running Upside Down
(Full Version)
By
Tony Faia & Jou-chia Huang

Final Draft 8 Demo

Final Draft 8 Demo

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1 EXT. TAIPEI STREETS- DUSK 1

We follow a MAN, late 20's, as he rides his scooter through the busy streets of TAIPEI.

2 INT. STAIRWELL- DUSK 2

The man walks up a dark narrow stair well.

3 INT. KYLE'S APARTMENT KITCHEN - EVENING 3

The man walks in to a kitchen littered with empty beer bottles, champagne bottles and cigarette butts. He grabs a couple of beers from the fridge. We see the man is KYLE.

Kyle pops the tops and takes a sip. He notices something on the table. Picks up a large MANILLA ENVELOPE with U.S. postage but no return address. He sets it back down.

THOMAS, American, early- mid 30s, comes stumbling in. He grabs a coffee can from the top shelf, opens it up and grabs a splif out of it. He lights it up.

THOMAS

C'mon Kyle, it's time to do this thing.

KYLE

Yeah.

4 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE(AUSTIN) - DAY 4

SHU-SHU, 20s, dressed maybe too warmly for Austin, folds up a slip of paper and tucks it back into her bag. She picks up two suitcases and walks quickly to the door with a smile. She KNOCKS.

No answer. Knocks again. She rings the bell, still smiling. And waits. Beat. She frowns. Takes out her phone. Calls.

PHONE CALL

I'm sorry, the number you have called has been disconnected...

Shu-Shu snaps the phone shut. She steps out and looks up to the second floor patio.

SHU-SHU

Song hang?

All is still. Shu-Shu is anxious as she looks around and sees no one.

5 EXT. ROOFTOP TERRACE(TAIWAN) - EVENING

5

The rooftop is dimly lit with lanterns and ornament lights. Mostly Westerners with occasional Taiwanese people dotted here and there. A few jam in the corner with guitars and banjos. People take turns manning a grill and eating food.

Kyle weaves his way through them. He sees COURTNEY, American woman in her 20s, who moves toward him. Kyle waves at her.

Kyle climbs on top of a table and WHISTLES.

KYLE

Okay, everyone. Get your drinks ready! Wait, shit...

Kyle scans the crowd. Picks out Courtney.

KYLE (CONT'D)

A Toast! To the woman who's helped us bring you Halloween four years running. (Cheers) She kick-started our Naked New Years beach bash!(Cat calls and cheers) And delicious Sunday barbeques such as this. (Massive cheers) But now she's headed back stateside.(boos) I know, I know. We're going to miss her. But she'll be back!

The crowd cheers loudly.

Kyle jumps down from the table. He gives Courtney a big hug.

Thomas drunkenly climbs on the table. He grins and raises his beer.

THOMAS

All you rest of the bastards! To beautiful Formosa! May she harbor us forever!

CHEERS.

Music SWELLS.

6 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - LATER

6

Shu-Shu sits on the porch between her bags. A dinosaur of an old truck rumbles up the driveway. Shu-Shu jumps up immediately.

JIM, 50s and big and battered as the truck, hefts his weight out onto the drive. He grabs a tool box the size of a coffin from the truck and glowers at Shu-Shu.

(CONTINUED)

6

CONTINUED:

3.

6

JIM

You have a lot of nerve showing up-

Shu-Shu starts.

JIM (CONT'D)

Just disappear without paying
rent...

Jim stops, a bit surprised now close enough to see Shu-Shu.

JIM (CONT'D)

Who the hell are you?

SHU-SHU

Jiao Shu-Shuang.

She steels herself.

SHU-SHU (CONT'D)

My friend Song-Hang. I look for
her.

JIM

Shit, another one of you people?
This ain't a goddamn hotel. That
boy shouldn't be sending you here!
Now get off my property.

Jim brushes past her into the house.

7

INT. JIM'S KITCHEN - DAY

7

Dim and lived in. The kitchen dusty, sink filled with dishes,
fast food bags on the table. Shu-Shu peers in the door.

Jim slides his tool box under the kitchen table, tosses his
KEYS on top. A small metal car KEYCHAIN attached to them.

He takes a WHISKEY bottle down from the top of the fridge.
Grabs one of the many PILL BOTTLES on the table. Reads the
label of one over a glass of whiskey, but looks up as the
floor CREAKS. Shu-Shu steps out into the kitchen light.

Jim is caught off guard.

JIM

What...the...hell.

Shu-Shu takes out something from her bag and sets the bag on
the floor.

Shu-shu approaches Jim, pointing to a picture of Sunny.

SHU-SHU

I look for Song-Hang.

(CONTINUED)

4.

7 CONTINUED: 7

Jim stomps toward her.

JIM
I give a shit! She's not here, and
you're god damned trespassing!

He lords over, Shu-shu shrinks back out the door-and leaves
her bag.

JIM (CONT'D)
Go on! Get the hell out of here!

8 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - DAY 8

Shu-Shu backs out the door lugging one bag with Jim not far
behind.

JIM
Nothing here for you, god damnit!

Shu-Shu stops running after the driveway. She looks back- Jim
didn't follow. He SLAMS the door shut.

SHU-SHU
(In Taiwanese)
Shit! My bag!

Shu-Shu knocks repeatedly on the door. No answer.

9 INT. KYLE'S ROOM(TAIWAN)- NIGHT 9

Posters of classic cars on the wall. A picture of a young
Kyle and his Mother is tacked out of the way.

Kyle kisses Courtney as she straddles him.

KYLE
Don't go back.

COURTNEY
Kyle...

Courtney backs off of Kyle and starts putting on her clothes.

COURTNEY (CONT'D)
We've been through this. I'm going
to see my family.

KYLE
You just saw them.

COURTNEY
That was a year ago, for like a
month. Come on. You don't ever miss
your dad?

Kyle gets up to pour himself a drink.

(CONTINUED)

KYLE

No. We haven't spoken to each other since... I don't even remember.

COURTNEY

And you still told Sunny she could stay with him?

KYLE

She needed a place to stay. The old bastard isn't exactly working anymore, so I told her he'd rent her my room. She's a big girl, she can take care of herself.

COURTNEY

That's horrible.

Kyle attempts to wrap his arm back around Courtney's waist. She dodges.

COURTNEY (CONT'D)

I don't know why you can't come back with me.

KYLE

How can you think about going back to the states when there's still so many places to see here?

COURTNEY

Because it's our home?

KYLE

Home is over-rated.

COURTNEY

My parents want to meet you.

KYLE

I want to meet them, too. Why don't they come here? Make a vacation out of it.

Courtney sighs and lays back down on the bed.

COURTNEY

Right. Sure.

She looks at the ceiling.

COURTNEY (CONT'D)

I'm not coming back this time.

KYLE

What?

(CONTINUED)

6.

9 CONTINUED: (2) 9

COURTNEY
I'm tired, Kyle.

Courtney turns her back to Kyle.

10 INT. KYLE'S BEDROOM - MORNING 10

Kyle wakes up, alone.

11 INT. KYLE'S APARTMENT KITCHEN - DAY 11

Kyle stumbles into the kitchen, hand gripping his head. He stops at the table, and glances at the Manila Envelope. Sneers, as though it offends him.

He turns around and grabs some tea from the shelf. Starts to make a cup.

A TAIWANESE GIRL comes up behind him.

TAIWANESE GIRL
Good morning.

KYLE
Hey.

TAIWANESE GIRL
So your girlfriend is going back to America. That's cool.

Kyle grunts.

TAIWANESE GIRL (CONT'D)
When are you going?

KYLE
I'm not.

Kyle brushes past her.

Thomas stumbles out of his room as Kyle walks by.

THOMAS
Kyle. Buenos Dias.

Thomas wraps his arms around the Taiwanese girl and kisses her head.

TAIWANESE GIRL
He's an asshole.

THOMAS
He's got his moments.

7.

12 EXT. SOUTH CONGRESS(AUSTIN) - DAY 12

Shu-Shu walks alone, hugging one bag. Pedestrians all around her. Past shops, past a boot store, a coffee shop, a GUY sitting in a taco cart alone...

13 EXT. TACO CART - DAY 13

Shu-Shu passes by the TACO VENDOR, he looks at her.

TACO VENDOR
Hey. You okay? You lost?

SHU-SHU
I'm...
(In Mandarin, no sub)
A crazy man took my bags. I don't
know what to do.

TACO VENDOR
I'm sorry...

Shu-Shu lets out a deep breath. Lets her bag fall to one side.

SHU-SHU
I know. Thank you.

She marches off.

14 EXT. SOUTH CONGRESS - DAY 14

She takes out the picture of SUNNY and friends. She looks at it for a while, turns it over to the address, and crumples it.

SHU-SHU
(In Mandarin)
What the hell am I doing?

Shu-shu walks down the sidewalk, her figure lost in the downtown Austin cityscape.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - Dusk

No truck in the driveway. Shu-Shu braces herself. Grits her teeth.

Walks right up to the door. She tries the doorknob. Nothing. Shu-Shu backs up to look at the second floor.

A window is open ajar. She cracks her knuckles.

She walks under the window, takes a deep breath and begins to climb. As she reaches up to grab something, her foot slips.

Shu-shu let's out a YELP.

8.

15 EXT. BACK YARD DRIVEWAY - DUSK 15

Jim's truck sits with its tailgate open and tools spread out in the bed.

Jim is working on a CAR, most of which is covered underneath a canvas. He looks up at a YELP.

16 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - DUSK 16

Jim walks from the back of the house, wipes his hands on a rag, squints up at her.

JIM
Jesus Christ.

Shu-Shu sees Jim out the corner of her eye.

JIM (CONT'D)
Get down from there!

SHU-SHU
No!

JIM
Come on. I got you.

Shu-Shu kicks at him. He backs off.

SHU-SHU
I need my bag!

Jim backs away.

JIM
Yeah. I got your bag. Get down,
and we'll get it. Okay?

She eyes him suspiciously. Lets go.

17 INT. ENGLISH CLASSROOM(TAIWAN) - DAY 17

Kyle points to a whiteboard with a map of the US drawn on it.

KYLE
Alright everyone, who can tell me
what this is?

Light laughter, this is an easy one.

CLASS
America!

KYLE
Very good. Now who can tell me what
the best thing about America is?

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED:

The students look at one another.

STUDENT
McDonald?

KYLE
Good guess. But no.

Kyle holds up a car magazine.

KYLE (CONT'D)
The 1968 Mercury Cougar. A miracle
of modern engineering. Now who can
tell me what a "miracle" is?

CHERRY, a Taiwanese English teacher pokes her head into the room looking worried. She motions for Kyle to come outside.

18 INT. ENGLISH CLASSROOM- HALLWAY - DAY 18

Kyle steps out of the classroom.

KYLE
Hey Cherry, what's up?

CHERRY
Just to tell you, the police are here.

KYLE
And?

CHERRY
Kyle, your visa expired?

KYLE
Um. Sort of?

He looks around the corner, sees POLICE.

CHERRY
What do you mean 'sort of'? You have it?

KYLE
Not with me right now, no.
Cherry grabs his arm.

CHERRY
You need to hide.

KYLE
"Hide"? Are you fucking kidding me?

(CONTINUED)

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