



Positions through Dialogue

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I have always been interested in how to make narratives tangible. By integrating sensory experience and materiality, I aim to propose new possibilities in graphic communication. In my previous practice, Kenya Hara's book *Designing Design* has been an important source of inspiration. Hara discusses paper as more than just a material for writing and printing—it is a sensory medium, a timeless vessel of intelligence that engages and inspires the human senses. As a neutral and unconscious medium, paper has always been readily available to us, yet its materialistic aspect has rarely received attention. Perhaps today, when paper has been freed from its primary role as a medium and from its practical duties, it can once again exert its charm as a material in its essence. So I decided to take a closer look at paper by tracing its origins—paper-making. I visited three paper mills in Yunnan, China, where the traditional handmade paper-making process is still preserved. There, I engaged with the craftsmen, seeking new insights and discoveries within the paper-making process.



The craftsmen say that paper produced in different regions has its own characteristics, which are mainly shaped by local ethnic cultures and social changes. When I visited these paper mills, I found that each used different materials based on the local culture, resulting in variations in color, texture, thickness, durability, and application. For example, the Bai people in Dali use the bark of the local paper mulberry tree, a material native to the region, to produce a soft, cotton-white paper known as “white cotton paper.” This paper, which takes over a month and 17 steps to make, was traditionally used for calligraphy and painting but has since found a new use in tea packaging as the local agricultural industry has developed.

In addition, in my experience of making Dongba paper, I discovered something surprising—the senses stimulated by this paper are not only visual and tactile. The Naxi people of Yunnan primarily produce Dongba paper, which they have historically used to record their unique religious scriptures. The paper is made from the bark of rare medicinal plants that grow in the mountainous regions inhabited by the Naxi. When the tree roots are cut, a pungent odor fills the air, requiring masks with at least eight layers of protection. Interestingly, in the past, the local people even consumed the paper. Because the raw materials are medicinal, it was believed to repel parasites and reduce swelling. This experience reinforced for me that paper, as a sensory medium, has the potential to engage all five senses.

The French writer Octave Uzanne believed that “the death of paper” would free people from the overuse of the eyes, and that new media would lead us to a more efficient, relaxed and enjoyable future with a whole new sensory experience. However, after my hands-on experience with papermaking, I began to realize that paper as a material has never lacked the ability to mobilize and catalyze senses beyond the visual. This realization could serve as a key point in demonstrating that even in a post-digital age, paper remains a highly potent material and interface.

