I set out to create a game where I could showcase Chinese, specifically Cantonese linguistic, culture as well as creating a game where people could also have fun while learning. The goal aesthetically was to give my game a traditional Chinese feel to it through the use of calligraphy, simple borders, and heavy usage of colors like red and gold. Mechanically, I wanted much of the game to play out similar to Pictionary, however, as there are a limited amount of cards that I could create for the game, I added a gambling aspect to the game in order to make the game more entertaining as well as attempt to balance player’s potential prior knowledge of Cantonese slang. I wanted the game to maintain a certain amount of replay-ability even after running through a majority of the cards. As an overarching goal, I wanted to find a good balance between creating a game where people could have fun and laugh, while at the same time maintaining respect towards Chinese culture. In essence, to create a game where people could laugh at the game and not Chinese culture.

An issue I ran into in the process of creating an aesthetically pleasing and matching box was my limited use of color. In order to stay true to the look of traditional Chinese calligraphy, I simplified the look of the cards and tokens to create a more authentic look. As a result initially, my initial box design was limited to white, black, and red. Although this gave consistency to my game it also began to feel recycled. To add more color to my game, I added a gold layer to the box and to further implement the color into my game I added the gold to the backside of the tokens to simulate a gold coin while maintaining the aesthetics of a simple octagon with a character in the center. Additionally, my initial design included a whiteboard and digital timer that would help allow players to better abide by the rules. Unfortunately, the products I ordered were lost in transit and I had to supplement this with a notebook and a kitchen timer. This, unfortunately, had the negative effect of not fitting in my box as comfortably as it initially would have. Another difficulty that I came upon was the creation of my “compatibility chart”. Initially, I had the information laid out like a spreadsheet but seeing as I could create a more aesthetically pleasing chart, I created a dodecagon with each zodiac animal listed on the outside while also showing which animals they were compatible with. The problems began to appear as I realized that fitting all the animals into the chart would be a challenge while maintaining visibility. This resulted in my having to create a chart large enough where people would still be able to decipher which animals matched with which, but at the same time would fit within the confines of the box. This ultimately resulted in my having to fold the chart which unfortunately affects its appearance. Another issue I ran into was the Chinese calligraphy font. Although it matches my overall aesthetic and works well in my game, the font was designed to process simplified characters and spit out traditional characters. This became a problem because as some of the characters in Cantonese are seldom ever written and as a result, certain phrases that were perfect for the game had to be replaced because they were not displayed properly with the font. Moreover, a problem that I was never able to solve completely was making the gambling phase more exciting, by making it mimic real gambling more. One idea was to make the game similar to getting a pot where all players would put in the score tokens they wanted to gamble, and the winner would take the pot. The issue was that it became very clear to me that certain zodiac cards had far too much dominance in combinations and thus it would cause problems. On the other hand, I wanted to stay true to the actual zodiac compatibilities, so I was unable to rebalance their combinations so that it would run more smoothly. The second idea I had was to create multipliers on the compatibilities which would help balance the cards and make cards like “Dog” more appealing to play thus creating a high-risk high reward situation. This proved extremely challenging due to the difficulty of balancing what would happen when they came across a negative compatibility. Since the math would become too complicated if I had players multiply by 1.25 on certain combinations it became too difficult to balance the gambling aspect, so I kept with the original idea even though it was not perfect. On the other hand, the research for the slang and drawing of the animals went very smoothly. As a majority, much of the aesthetics ended up coming out very nicely. I believe I succeeded in creating a simplistic yet aesthetically pleasing design and there was little problem in that sense.

What I learned from this process was that it was important to never get attached to one idea too much because circumstances can rapidly cause that to change and become unviable. For example, an issue I ran into was initially when I was printing out my cards the line border design I used was getting cut off. To fix this, I had to move the border design further into the card to prevent it from getting cut off in the bleed section. Another example of changes that I had to make that I felt were more ideal were the phrases used in the game. Because I did not want to use both simplified and traditional characters in my game, I had to cut certain phrases that I felt were ideal for the game that was not being processed correctly by the font. My design philosophy didn’t change too much throughout the process. My goal was to maintain a simple card design because I did not want clutter and complicated designs to overshadow the calligraphy font of the phrases. As a result, I kept with simple designs for the card as well as keeping an uncomplicated design for the zodiac characters as well. The biggest lesson that I learned while designing my game was that the design process is very fluid and constantly evolving. Even though I was satisfied with the look or mechanic of something there were always opportunities to improve on the game whether it be mechanics or aesthetics.

If I could do this again one of the biggest lessons, I learned was to have a more complete prototype earlier in the design phase. As I was missing certain physical components to my game, the playtests that I conducted involved improvising certain components and may have yielded flawed results. Another thing that I would do over again, was to keep experimenting with more designs even later past the initial design phase so it would create a greater pool of art that I could draw from for things besides the cards like the booklet or the box. I think one thing that I would still like to see improved on was the gambling phase of the game. Although making the gambling phase too core to the game would pull the players focus from the phrases that were implemented in the game, I would still wish that I was able to improve on the gambling phase and make it feel more dynamic and less linear with the simple add and subtract score tokens. Another aspect I wish that I had found a way to include was having an explanation of the origins of certain phrases like “driving a bus.” The origin of the phrase is amusing as it is supposed to represent how people will hold onto the sides of a toilet bowl as they are throwing up. These kinds of origin stories and tidbits make learning about these phrases more fun and possibly will create long-lasting impressions on the players which were one of my goals. The difficulty with this endeavor was trying to find a way to implement them. I had considered writing it on the cards themselves, but it created too much clutter on the card as well as creating an odd feeling with only some of the cards having origins and explanations while others were left blank. In retrospect, I think I could have had small origins written on the backs of certain cards while others had example sentences to supplement their lack of a need for an origin story. Ultimately, though my game was not perfect I had a positive experience in designing and ultimately creating a physical copy of the game, and I can say that I learned a lot throughout the entire process.