

## 30 Years of Showmanship Part II

In 1990, after setting up his first office in a spare bedroom of his parent's house in Anaheim Hills, California, Mirage founder, Charlie Kao, wondered what to do next. Inspiration struck as he watched a news story on TV about the new "Turbo Tour" Motion Theater Experience from Iwerks (the company that invented the advanced projection screen systems at Walt Disney Theme Parks). The Motion Theater Experience was a kind of simulator ride that incorporated moving theater seats with a huge, wrap-around projection screen. Willing to help out, Charlie's unofficial partner, Brad Billington, took the lead in contacting Iwerks and acquiring all the necessary promotional material for their "Turbo Tour" system.

Charlie's father, Lucas Kao, had longstanding connections with the state-owned Taiwan Film Culture Studios, which operated a theme park known as Taiwan Film Culture Park. Armed with the Iwerks material from Brad, Charlie traveled to Taiwan and leveraged his father's connections in an attempt to sell the movie theme park on the "Turbo Tour" attraction, for which he would then acquire licensing rights. But there was a hitch. The Iwerks system and property sold for 2.5 million dollars, which was far too high for the Taiwanese theme park. Luckily, he was able to find a specialized 60-seat system from Ridewerks (a subsidiary of Iwerks), which had been ordered and then rejected by a Swiss exhibitor – and was thus available at the discount price of 1.6 million. Thus, with Brad temporarily joining Charlie in Taiwan for back-up, the sales negotiations continued from July, onward. It was a hot and humid experience in a rented room with no AC.

But as negotiations dragged on, there was another hitch looming. According to Iwerks, a "Turbo Tour" Motion Theater takes 6 months to build...and the parks opening date for the attraction was in February, 1991! As October turned to November, time was already running out! Charlie began to lose hope as he spent most days staring at the phone and waiting for good news. Desperate for answers, he visited a Taoist temple and consulted a Kau Chim oracle (known in the west as Chinese fortune sticks). In a process similar to drawing straws, the querent (or questioner) picks a Kau Chim stick from a chim bucket of many such sticks. The stick will be inscribed with a number that corresponds to a lottery poem, which (when read by an interpreter) is supposed to tell your fortune. In this case, Charlie's fortune poem said that he would close his deal on November 20. He signed the contract with Taiwan Film Culture Park on November 19. The first Mirage Entertainment project was on! Stay tuned to find out how it turned out.