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Between Shores: Transnational Subjects and Visual & Material Culture

Selected Case Studies

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Philosophy in

Visual and Material Culture Studies

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Abstract

This thesis explores relationships between material culture and transnational individuals. It discusses how visual and material objects function in the lives of transnational students in helping them adapt to their adopted country and new environment. It highlights what objects can tell us about the impact of the physical process of migration, how they represent people who move across different cultures, and how they relate to the construction of identity and memory. Chapter One 'Transnationalism and Diaspora' explicates different transnational typologies, and the different aspects and challenges transnational individuals experience. The following chapter, 'Material Culture and Transnational Subjects', represents the study of material culture, how social meaning in objects change across cultures, and the acculturation experience. Finally, three case studies are presented to illustrate how transnational individuals use objects as symbols, memories, and channels to reflect their personal experiences. These case studies demonstrate how objects affect individual psychology. In the summary, I conclude that objects play a particularly important role in the shaping of transnational lives and that interactions between the transnational subject and everyday objects—efforts to sustain previous interactions by continuing to use, make and treasure objects from another place—shape experience across cultural places.

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Lastly, I offer my regards and blessings to all of those who supported me in any respect during the completion of this project.

Vivian Shao

Illustration List



Fig 1. Diasporic experience and creative arts
Description: photographic work “The Third Me”, Auckland, New Zealand, 2012
Photo taken by: Jack Xie,



Fig 2. Case Study One: Diasporic experience - Zoe Zhang “Belonging”
Description: photographic work “The Belonging” Auckland, New Zealand, 2012
Photo taken by: Zoe Zhang



Fig 3. Case Study One: Diasporic experience - Zoe Zhang "Belonging"
Description: photographic work " The Belonging" Auckland, New Zealand, 2012
Photo taken by: Zoe Zhang

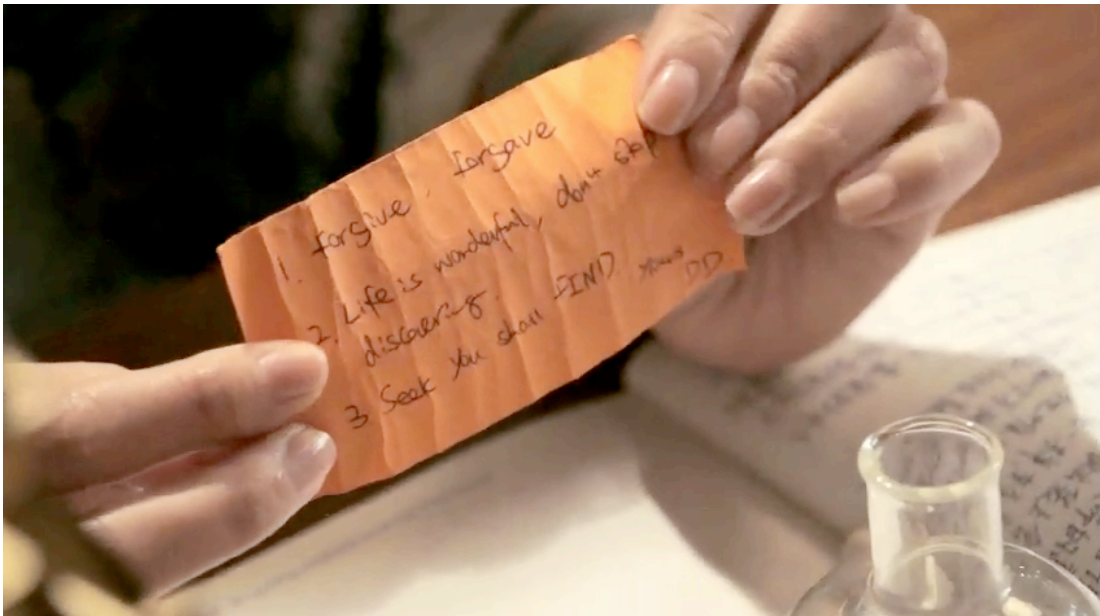


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Photo taken by: Screenshot from video. Video shot by Ctrl N Studio



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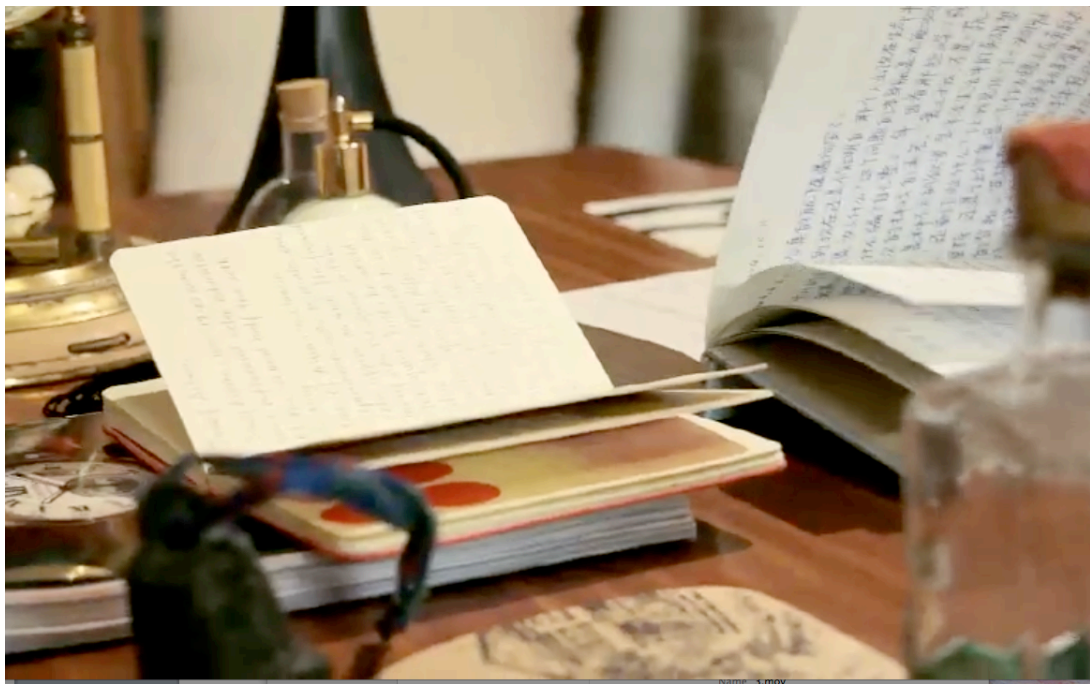


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Description: Annabel's mother wearing the vintage dress, Guang Zhou, China, 1989.
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Description: Annabel wearing the vintage dress, Auckland, New Zealand, 2012.
Photo taken by: Vivian Shao.

Preface

[Some people] are strangers in their birthplace, and the leafy lanes they have known from childhood or the populous streets in which they have played, remain but a place of passage. They may spend their whole lives aliens among their kindred and remain aloof among the only scenes they have ever known. Perhaps it is this sense of strangeness that sends men far and wide in the search for something permanent, to which they may attach themselves” (1942) William Somerset Maugham

On 2nd of February 2004 I boarded an Air China flight and travelled to New Zealand to commence study as an international student. Little did I know then that this departure would implicate me in future research projects including the writing of this thesis. Since that initial flight I have flown back and forth from New Zealand to six other countries on no less than 21 flights. I have traveled a total distance of 260,191 kilometers and have spent 329 hours in the skies. This is the equivalent of 15 days of my life on airplanes. These statistics entail an important distinction I make for this study: that I am no longer an “international” student but rather a “transnational” subject. The single transition of moving to a foreign country has changed to an oscillating process of moving back and forth, to and from different countries. There is no longer a single transition of separation from my home country to settling down in a foreign country, but instead I have encountered a constant process of dislocation and adaptation to a foreign environment. This has had a discernible effect on the manner I understand my memories of a home and *new* place to which I also call a home. This notion has prompted me to turn the investigation onto other transnational subjects.

Chapter One: Introduction

The research examines the experience of 'culture dislocation' (Samad, 2009) through the visual and material culture owned, consumed and used by transnational subjects. I will begin this chapter by considering the diasporic experience and how language and communication, culture learning, culture shock and the idea of authority vs. autonomy affect international students. To establish the theoretical framework for the thesis, begun here and further developed in Chapter One, I will discuss the importance of transnationalism, key transnational typologies and transnational identity. I will then ask how material objects possess social meaning and how objects' meanings change through place and time with implications affecting individual subjects who own, use, desire and consume objects. I propose that debates concerning how objects function as symbols and how they encapsulate diasporic experiences are memory forms that tell us about the relationship between object and individual biography. I will then seek to identify whether or not objects actually help transnationals adapt to a new culture. This can be understood through a series of case studies that I present in Chapter Three. Each case study highlights a different approach to the topic. I contribute my own photographic portraits of transnational subjects as a form of visual research in Chapter Three.

Background of the Problem: The Diaspora Experience

In Ancient Greece the term diaspora meant "scattering" and was used to refer to citizens of a dominant city state who immigrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonisation, to assimilate the territory into the empire. The idea of diaspora is generally thought of as "forced" settlement due to expulsion, slavery, racism, or nationalistic conflicts. However, nowadays diaspora has a positive connotation that partially explains globalisation and can usually be related to the push and pull forces theory¹. In all cases, the term diaspora carries a sense of

¹ Wan, Enoch. 2007. "Diaspora Missiology." *Occasional Bulletin*, Spring. Push factors might include war; political persecution; natural or human-made disasters; poverty; or health crises. Pull

displacement; that is, the population so described finds itself for whatever reason separated, either culturally or physically, from its national or original territory, and usually entails a connection with the “homeland” or a desire to return to it.

This brings us to an interesting question of whether this displacement necessarily means leaving behind one’s own country, culture and ethnic enclave, or does it involve other forms of traveling that mean more than the physical crossing of borders? One might argue that this is an important question considering how much things have changed and how fast things can change in a country. The movement of populations – from rural to urban, agrarian to industrialised, national to post-national and transnational, all of which are key to new articulations about the meaning of identity and culture. With economic, political, technological, and social changes come cultural changes, and surely this logically results to some extent in the disconnection between the displaced population and their homeland.

The counter argument to this is that diasporic cultural development often assumes a different course from that of the population in the original place of settlement. Thus, regardless of how developed or how much has changed in the homeland, the connection will remain. It is noted that diaspora may result in a loss of nostalgia for a single home as people “re-root” in a series of meaningful displacements. In this sense, individuals may have multiple homes throughout their diaspora, with different reasons for maintaining some form of attachment to each. In his article, William Safran sets out that the concept of diaspora can be applied when members of an ‘expatriate minority community’ share several of the following features:

1. They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from an original ‘center’ to two or more foreign regions;
2. They retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland including its location, history and achievements;

forces might result from opportunities for political freedom, apparent economic improvement, or educational advancement.

3. They believe they are not – and perhaps can never be – fully accepted in their host societies and so remain partly separate;
4. Their ancestral home is idealised and it is thought that, when conditions are favorable, either they, or their descendants should return;
5. They believe all members of the diaspora should commit to the maintenance or restoration of the original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and
6. They continue in various ways to relate to that homeland, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are in an important way defined by the existence of such a relationship².

What we gather from analysing these six features is that four of the six features mentioned were concerned with the relationship of the diasporic group to its homeland. So although the homeland's social and cultural development may not need to be consistent with the diasporic cultural development of the group, it nevertheless influences and affects the relationship of the diasporic group. For example, a political/military coup or a violent riot might have a severe impact on the peaceful collective vision the diasporic group might have of their homeland.

For the purposes of this thesis, I apply the diasporic influence and effects to further understand the relationship between the transnational students/individuals in New Zealand and their homeland. In the literature, international students are also called 'overseas students', 'intercultural sojourners', 'foreign students' and most things in between. 'International student' is probably the rarest of those, but is the most inclusive. Michael Paige (1990) offers a definition of 'international student' as follows:

[International students are] individuals who temporarily reside in a country other than their country of citizenship or permanent residence in order to participate in international educational exchange as students, teachers, and researchers. They

² Cohen, Robin (2008). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (2nd ed.). Abingdon: Routledge. ISBN 0-415-43550-1.

are distinguishable by virtue of being culturally different from their hosts. The definition has three key emphases: the temporary status of the sojourners, the educational purpose of the sojourn, and the cultural backgrounds that distinguish international from host country students (Paige, 1990).

Some students, such as the ones from Hong Kong (who are allowed to hold more than one passport), may hold permanent residence or citizenship in more than one country, such as New Zealand. Others hold on to their old citizenship but also have permanent residence in other countries that they might also call “home”. Therefore, in this research, such individuals will be classed as transnational students.

Most of the research on international students has come out of North America and from psychology (Redmond and Bunyi, 1993). Within psychology, research has drawn on each of the major theoretical perspectives on acculturation: functional model of friendships, stress and coping theories, and social identification theories (Ward, 2001). In general, literature on international students falls into four areas: the problems of international students, the psychological reaction of international students, the influence of social interaction and communication on adaptation, and the culture learning processes in cross-cultural adaptation (Hammer, 1992). However, there is very little literature on international students that have migrated to several countries.

Statement of Problem and Purpose of the Study

“The house is a place of memory and dreams that is the centre of the human universe – for our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word”³ (Bachelard, 1958)

Little investigation has been undertaken on linking cross-cultural adaptation with the material objects taken and transported by transnational students from their homeland to an 'other' country. The social definition of material culture is the association of material objects to social relations of a use in their daily life, human group or community. In straightforward terms, material culture can be defined as the study of objects that people interact with, and the significance of such material objects in their lives. Material culture is the study of why individuals from different cultures consume certain objects and the importance of displaying or using such objects in their daily lives. Individuals from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds are prone to use various objects that differ on many levels of technology and often consume the same objects for different uses. Therefore, studying a culture's affiliation to materiality is essential for social scientists, as well as historians to study the social and cultural attitudes of a certain group. Questions we often ask about objects are: Where does the object come from and who made it? What has the thing been designed for? Who is likely to buy it, and what uses would they put this thing to? What has been the career of this thing so far? Each question can be related to different stages in the life of an object. This biography of objects can even extend to the personalisation of fashion, much like how people wear clothes to distinguish themselves from others. Daniel Miller notes the contradiction that 'academic study of the specific nature of the material objects produced by society has been remarkably neglected. This lack of concern with the nature of the objects appears to have emerged simultaneously with the quantitative rise in the production and mass distribution of material goods' (Miller, 1987). The answer as to why objects matter is not because they are more plentiful but because they contain important meanings for social action. According to Miller (1987) objects represent or symbolise some aspect of culture and have cultural resonance because members of a society or social group recognise them.

There are a number of reasons to study objects in our domestic life. Firstly, it is a focal point of most people's lives, both emotionally and physically, where they interact with the most important people in their lives. It is also the most substantial monetary investment the majority of people will make and an important signifier of achievement and success, as well as personal values. Finally, it embodies

elements of being both highly personal and strongly social such that it encompasses private and public meanings.

An excellent case study of people and domestic material culture is Daniel Miller's 2008 book *The Comfort of Things*. This presents an analysis of thirty people from a single street in South London, where the contents of their houses have been removed and 'displayed' in the street. We recognise different ways that people use material culture as resources to continually find and define themselves, and their place, in the world. The object in their domestic realm thus affords people to perform self expression. What seems more important than the actual physical properties of objects are the means and resources they have for expressing preferences, and the relation of these methods to the process of narrative construction – a biography if you will (Daniel Miller, 2008). The physical taste and preferences are thus merely the material elements of more interesting cultural and social discourses. Thus, the practice of producing narratives around objects contributes to the personal work of autobiography (or social lives in objects) and renders objects as meaningful participants in the social work of identity building.

Every individual forms a unique classification of objects. These classifications form the basis of daily life, and constitute fundamental cultural practices, for example the assessment of something as good or bad, beautiful or ugly, rich or poor, treasure or otherwise. The transnational student shows particular ways in which they cope with culture dislocation by holding on to certain objects - some hold on to them more than others. All these objects inevitably relate back to their culture, past experiences, family or friends from their home (Woodward, 2005). By conducting a case study and interviews with participants I will be able to further understand the cultural expression of 'dislocation' which might or might not infer a disconnect from the original culture. I will also apply relevant interpretations/theories of material culture from Bourdieu (1990), Batchen (2004), Cort (1989), Hoskin (2006), Woodward (2005), etc. to grapple with the nuances of the transnational individuals' everyday life and their material culture.

Coupled with a rapid development of technologies that allows an individual to stay more readily in contact with a country of origin when away from it, we may see the term of transnational students take hold. It will become increasingly important to understand how transnational students have successfully or unsuccessfully adapted to their environments.

In the field of material culture studies, objects act as markers of aesthetic value and of self-identity (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu submitted the idea that judgements of taste are based upon objective and absolute criteria by showing that particular social and class factions tended to have distinctive taste preferences, which amounts to professing a liking for certain objects over others. Through the collection of objects from interviewees, I will be able to analyse the importance of the objects and how they are used in the sojourning process. I also use photography to record the relationship of the objects to my interview participants.

Batchen (2004) in his book, *Forget Me Not*, advocated that photography aids memory. Through informing the reader of historical photographic practices, such as fotoesculture, which are photographs sandwiched between two glass sheets with an elaborate frame, Batchen cleverly shows that photographic objects are not really about remembering the past, but a revelation of the fear of forgetting or of being forgotten. Personalising photographs; putting images of loved ones in a locket; painting parts of a photograph to make it 3D; all act to enhance photography as a tool of memory. And this, of course, suggests that photography in its raw form is anything but an aid to recollect the past. By using this tool of analysis, not only will it allow me to document their most important memories in their travels but also aid them to recollect those memories.

Marcel Mauss noted that objects often encode the names, biographies, memories, and histories of past owners, deepening their significance. Annette B. Weiner applied this idea to cloth in a case study in Western Samoa. There, women soaked, dried, and plaited the narrow fibres of the pandanus to make fine mats. Accumulating significance through association with ancestors and mythical events over periods as long as 200 years, these linen-like constructions reinforce claims

to the past and were desired, and kept, as treasure. In Japan when a new emperor is installed, textiles crafted by rural methods of laboriously soaking, rotting, boiling and beating coarse fibers convey simultaneously a material and spiritual blessing derived from the 'ancient core of Japanese culture' (Cort 1989). Turning the page to a new century, we see that society and technology has diluted these constructs, making some of the deep cultural clothing "impractical" in our modern day society. On the other hand, each morning we establish an image in which we identify for ourselves through the simple act of getting dressed. Gell (1998) describes this as "distributed personhood", wherein selfhood is externalised and distributed in space through different material objects. Sophie Woodward (2007) describes this as personal aesthetic in her book *Why Women Wear What They Wear*. In her book, Woodward uses real women's lives and clothing decisions - observed and discussed at the moment of getting dressed - to illustrate theories of clothing, the body and identity. Woodward pieces together what women actually think about clothing, dress and the body in a world where popular media and culture presents an increasingly extreme and distorted view of femininity and the ideal body? Nevertheless, our clothes today still speak of our culture. However, it is not culture as the historical or mythical associations that we might imagine, but simple symbols and coordination of our daily clothes that tell the stories of our culture. Terrence Turner labeled clothing as our 'social skin', a covering that, by virtue of its physical proximity to the body, speaks about us. We use it to say what is 'us' and to differentiate us from 'others'. Therefore, because culture in essence is within every individual, it will ultimately be reflected in our clothing. By using this tool I will analyse the capacity of cloth or clothing of transnational interviewees to enhance who they are, their culture and both their shifting and compliant social relationships which are evident wherever they go as well as what is inside every individual.

Hoskin (2006), in *The Handbook of Material Culture*, explains that just as persons have biographies and life cycles, the same notion can be applied to objects. The things people make, exchange, use and consume are intertwined with their identities. These things then provide a medium for objectifying the self, whilst containing and preserving memories and embodying personal and social

experiences (Hoskin, 2006). As material culture, clothing is not seen as simply reflecting given aspects of the self, but through its particular material use, contains facets such as identity, sexuality, ethnicity, and social roles. A further analysis on the suggestion that objects contain and preserve memories and embody personal and social experiences (Batchen, 2004) would lead us to believe that certain objects have sponge-like attributes that absorb the memories of personal and social experiences of its owner.

Not only do objects such as shoes, sweaters and jewelry play an important role to distinguish the presence of class, they also carry out changes or evolutions of self-identities which can be linked to the acculturation the transnational subject moves through. This thesis will provide a deeper and richer analysis of the transnational phenomenon by examining a variety of objects owned by the transnationals and how each object has a different (or similar) purpose, function and meaning. The findings will show how wider cultural factors impact on the reasons for transnationality since the turn of the 21st Century.

Research questions and Methodology

Primary Research Question

In a selective manner, my research seeks to find answers to the following question: How do visual and material culture function in the lives of transnationals in helping them adapt to their diasporic environment?

This yields the following set of sub-questions: What do objects tell us about the physical process of migration and the journey across the seas? How do objects represent people who move across different cultures? How do objects relate to the construction of identity and memory as transnationals pass through different countries? How do objects affect attitudes and relations towards transnational individuals?

Methods

Answers to these questions have been sought through textual explication of literature on material culture in Chapters One and Two and through face-to-face in-depth interview. In terms of sampling, this research will undertake a hybrid of theoretical sampling approach (Glaser, 1978) and snowball sampling. This means that my selection of participants is directed by the emerging analysis undertaken (i.e. from being a transnational individual to being a transnational individual who owns an object from a past culture). The first participant is interviewed and asked if he or she knows of another similar transnational individual who would like to participate.

The instruments used in this research design are a set of pre-determined questions that every participant was provided with and then asked to respond to in interviews. The instruments also contain open-ended questions which are aimed at allowing the participants to elaborate more on the topic.

In discussions in Chapter Three I apply established material culture theories to analyse findings from transnational individuals and present evidence as to how they adapt to their environments.

Interviews were conducted with eight individuals (Refer to Table 1). An interview method was selected because it allows the interviewees to be involved in a discussion whereby discovery of an individual's experiences or events may be of significance to the research. However, the disadvantages of this method are that responses are easily affected by external factors. For instance, memories of interviewees become filtered through subsequent experiences; and media contamination, overlaid by nostalgia, or distorted by emotion, which may lead to inaccurate information that I will have to evaluate and judge. Nevertheless, because these interviews explore the narrative experience of the participants in their lives, it is important that answers are captured in a more fluid manner as opposed to the rigidity of surveys.

Object and Image analysis

Every interviewee was asked to bring an object that they had brought from their own country and kept with them throughout their travels. Each of these items will also be photographed after each interview. These objects and pictures will be analysed to understand the practical, mediatory role of the objects and pictures in their adaptive processes. A video was also taken of Beverly in her flat with the items that she had collected. As mentioned in my literature review, I will be applying various theories when analysing the objects and images collected in the research. All these items are collected as visual contributions to the thesis which impart a narrative of the participant's experience. Not only that, readers will also be able to deliver their own interpretation of the object and what they see in the object.

Self-analysis

As earlier mentioned I am a subject who is also involved in this research. Self-analysis might be described as an independent methodical attempt to study and comprehend one's own personality, emotions, and behavior. In this case, I will be recording my own experience, thoughts and interpretations as an individual who has a particular background as a transnational student. This will extend to applying and asking myself the same interview questions.

Interviewee biography

The following table displays the list of participants who were interviewed in this thesis. However, only three are used in the case study; Beverly, Annabel and Zoe.

NAME	ORIGINAL COUNTRY	GENDER	CURRENT CITY	INTERVIEW LOCATION	DURATION OF STAY IN NEW ZEALAND
Lori	Japan	Female	Auckland	Cafe	6 years

Jack	China	Male	Auckland	Unitec	7 years
Beverly	China	Female	Wellington	Home	10 years
Carla	India	Female	Wellington	Cafe	4 years
Annabel	China	Female	Auckland	Home	12 years
Nadia	Norway	Female	Auckland	Cafe	2 years
Zoe	China	Female	Auckland	Home	13 years
Ivo	Bulgaria	Male	Wellington	Home	8 years

Table 1: List of interview participants

Chapter One reviewed select literature that relates to material culture and transnational subjects. It also described the structure of this thesis and approaches to my research. The following chapters establishes a theoretical framework with regard to the key themes of ‘transnationalism and diasporic’ in relation to culture. These include culture shock and the acculturation process, objects as symbols, and object and individual biography of the transnational subject.

Chapter Two: Transnationalism and Material Culture

“Over the sea”: International students

The rapid growth of the Chinese economy over the last two decades has seen many Chinese students going overseas to study in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (Tarling, 2009). New Zealand shared in this growth of international students, enjoying a reputation as a provider of education, offering good study opportunities and support services, and delivered in a relatively safe environment. Since the early 1990s, New Zealand's tertiary institutions experienced rapid growth in the number of international students with Chinese students making up the bulk of this growth. By 2009, there were 20,780 Chinese students from a total of 93,505 international enrolments in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2009).

As mentioned previously, the main reasons that students desired to live or study in New Zealand were for the country's lifestyle, safety, security as well further educational opportunities. However, job opportunities were not cited as a reason for wanting to stay in New Zealand; this was because there are more opportunities in their home countries, particularly in China where it is more common for students, who have an international qualification, to obtain a better position. With the high economic growth in China, there are better work opportunities for successful students who have studied overseas, a reversal of the previously held perception of Asian students. Furthermore, there is a general consensus that there is already a strong social and professional network established by family members that can be used to their advantage when they go back. Having to build that network in a foreign country has proven to be a challenge; this will be discussed below.

Studying in a different country presents international students not only with cultural challenges but also different academic demands (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). The ability of international students to successfully adjust to these demands includes their proficiency in English, their ability to cope with different approaches to

teaching, moving from teacher-dependent to autonomous learner status, and dealing with psycho-social cultural pressures.

Language-- communication

The English language skills of international students has received considerable attention in the literature. Even when they have acquired the IELTS score of 6.0 to enable them to enrol in a New Zealand tertiary institution, many students still experience difficulties, suggesting that the IELTS requirement does not prepare them well enough for their studies (Jepson, Turner & Calway, 2002). Furthermore, it can be argued that IELTS by itself cannot be a true representation of a student or individual's English proficiency to comfortably acculturate into New Zealand society. For Chinese students, difficulties with the English medium can be traced to the teaching of English in China where 'the Chinese EFL teacher ... adheres to the prescribed textbook, analysing texts ... sentence by sentence.' (Wang 2009, p. 247). The heavy emphasis in China on written English often results in Chinese students' spoken English not being well developed (Zhang & Brunton, 1999). Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002) found that the better the students' English language skills, particularly their spoken English, the more effective the adjustment will be. Proof of this statement is evident in the analysis of Malaysian-born Chinese, who have a strong foundation in English communication, both written and speaking, versus mainland Chinese students who have studied English. Malaysian born Chinese students are seen to have an advantage over their mainland counterparts because they are able to communicate more clearly. Campbell and Li's (2008) study of international students who had studied in New Zealand for at least a year found that Chinese students spent more time with the English dictionary in the library than they did studying the content of the course.

Lack of proficiency in both written and spoken English among international students is well documented in the literature (Campbell & Li, 2008; Li, Baker & Marshall, 2002; Read & Hayes, 2003; Ward & Masgoret, 2004). For many of the international students in the research it was the major barrier to them fully engaging in many aspects of life. For example a comment frequently heard "...I

feel like they [New Zealanders] don't understand what I say...and sometimes I am too tired to have to explain my statement to them again and again..." For those who succeeded or felt comfortable communicating in English, being accepting and accepted into the host culture was less difficult. In one of the case studies, we see the example of language barriers whereby Beverly maintains two personal diaries; one written in Mandarin and the other in English.

Culture learning

Chinese students are likely to have experienced a narrow range of approaches to teaching, primarily formal teacher-centred and teacher-directed lectures (Carter, 2006). They come from learning situations where they are expected to 'uncritically accept the instructor's lecture or the fact in a textbook instead of presenting their own thoughts' (Zhao & McDougall, 2008, p. 64). As a result, they expect teachers to be the providers of knowledge where their role is to passively 'obey, and not challenge; to listen, absorb and then regurgitate when asked' (Littlewood, 1996). Although they are expected to actively engage with the academic content of their studies they are offered few opportunities to engage actively in the learning processes (Ma, 2007).

China's traditional Confucian values, such as harmony, cooperation and 'face' also influence learning leading to students who 'prefer not to speak out in open response to questions' (Guo & Zhang, 2004, p. 20). In such a context, challenging the teacher is considered inappropriate and likely to lead to 'loss of face' (Ministry of Education, 2001). Jin and Cortazzi (2006) found that spontaneous oral activities were rare in the Chinese classroom with the result that Chinese students often appeared passive. Cheng (2004) argues, however, that when 'Asian students have fewer problems with language ... they are likely to take active roles in class' (p. 44).

In contrast, the education that international students encounter in the West draws on a wide range of approaches which are 'student-centred, meaning focused, competence-oriented and ... include tutorials, workshops and/or seminars' (Zhou,

2008, p. 1). In these situations the role of the teachers is to 'facilitate the student-student communication process through effective learning tasks' (Hu, 2010, p. 78).

Institutional supports are available to international students through a teaching and learning unit, but unless directed by tutors, Chinese students were often reluctant to admit their shortcomings and seek help. To do this meant admitting that they were not able to meet the performance standards of the paper. When they did seek help it was often too late. Hu (2010) identifies this in one of his research subjects, Chen, who was reluctant to proactively seek help resulted in her failing her courses. This in return reinforced her decision to stay in her comfort zone of Chinese community and friends thus impeding her progress (Hu, 2010).

Authority vs. Autonomy

'Authority' has always been a key theme not only in Chinese education but also Chinese culture in China. Thus, the concept of autonomy has always been taboo or given less emphasis. Many Chinese authoritarians believe that freedom of autonomy loosely leads to the idea of unrestricted freedom - a concept that has been frowned upon by traditional Chinese maxims. Chinese students learn to respect their teachers as authority figures where, as previously mentioned, asking questions might be interpreted as a challenge to the teacher, resulting in a loss of face (Wen & Clement, 2003). The result is that students learn to depend on direction from the teacher (Flowerdew, 1998; Gao, 2006). Western education places value on learner autonomy and the acquisition of critical thinking skills which Holec (1981) defines as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (p. 3). Claxton (2002) maintains that autonomous learners are less likely to accept uncritically what they are told. Harmer (2007) maintains that New Zealand students are encouraged to 'take responsibility for their own learning' (p. 396), while Yang, Li and Sligo (2008), and Camborne (1988), maintain that tertiary students are encouraged to be independent, critical thinkers and to value working collaboratively. When confronted with learning situations that value these attributes, Chinese students often struggle.

Autonomy and authority are also key concepts in everyday life. Chinese students coming to New Zealand for the very first time often feel what can be termed 'excessive freedom'. Excessive freedom often correlates with students who come from extreme authoritarian upbringing, usually enforced by parents, and are exposed to western autonomy - which is often the case for the majority of Chinese students (Shu-Ping Lin, 2006). According to Lin (2006), this sudden ability to make choices and absorb an overflow of information that is not filtered by authoritarian subjects or entities leaves them in a predicament in which they often make the wrong decisions. Beverly, one of the interviewees in this thesis, commented that her late ex-husband was in a similar situation. She held that "...his parents were from a military background so were strict on him...so when he came [to New Zealand] he was not used to the freedom...there were strip clubs, casinos and small gambling bars which we don't have in China...so he gambled a lot and was [deported] back to China.". Such stories are common in China with students who are sent overseas and much of it is related to the level of autonomy.

Culture shock

International students frequently encounter 'culture shock' both in the society they join and in their studies, where they find it difficult to settle and focus (McLaren, 1998). Culture shock is the personal disorientation an individual may feel when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life or culture due to immigration or a visit to a new country (Macionis and Gerber, 2010). Holmes (2004) maintains that the international students in her study, including Chinese students, 'had little knowledge of New Zealand society, culture, or education before beginning their studies. Upon arrival they all experienced various degrees of reality shock'. Their behaviour in their studies, for example, passivity, often reflects their desire to avoid failure and not lose 'face'. A sense of academic helplessness and disengagement occurs when students believe there is nothing they can do to avoid failing (Martin, 2010).

Studying in a strange country, with different cultural norms and language barriers, often leads international students to experience loneliness. Ward and Rana-

Deuba (2000) found that students who interact well with host nationals often reported decreased feelings of loneliness. A New Zealand survey found that Chinese international students had the lowest levels of life satisfaction amongst country of origin groups and were least satisfied with aspects of their academic progress (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Transnationalism

The term 'transnationalism' has numerous definitions, in part because its overall form changes as its influence shifts and incorporates additional spheres of daily life at global and semi-global levels. Despite a lack of consensus on the boundaries and definition of transnationalism, there is increasing interest in the phenomenon. With the advancement of globalisation, the twenty-first century will be characterised by more transnational activities and identities, and scholars have highlighted several relevant issues. Two are discussed here.

First, as the social historian Michael Peter Smith (2001) argues, transnationalism draws attention to what it negates - that is, the continued significance of the national. As Smith notes, "trans-nationalist discourse insists on the continuing significance of borders, state policies, and national identities even as there are often transgressed by transnational communication circuits and social practices." (2001: 3) Smith argues that, on the one hand, countries that experience substantial out-migration are actively promoting the transnational reincorporation of migrants into their country. They essentially need to make their country more attractive to outsiders. Countries have done this via capitalising and channelling remittances sent home by "trans-migrants" and conferring honorary status on trans-migrant entrepreneurs who invest heavily in the host country. For example, in Malaysia, entrepreneurs are granted a title-ship of 'Datuk' for contributing to the Malaysian economy or country (technologically, financially, or reputationally). In return this title-ship provides transnationals with in-country benefits such as accessibility to a different tax rate, and other financial and legal benefits. On the other hand, countries at the receiving end have responded to transgression of

their national borders by more stringent control and policing of material boundaries of the country.

Second, it is important to see transnational subjects as embodied beings, as bearers of gender, ethnicity, class, race, nationality, and at the same time agents constantly negotiating these self-identities in relation to others in transnational spaces. Transnational identities, while fluid and flexible, are at the same time grounded in particular places at particular times (Yeoh, Charney & Tong, 2003). As transnationality becomes a way of life for many, the maxim - 'no one can have two countries' - is no longer true (Murphy, 1998: 369). Although identities, whether ethnic, racial, social or national, are traditionally said to be 'localised' (Rouse, 1995) and derived in relation to specific contexts of a particular environment, transnational subjects obviously play by a different set of rules, since they live in, or connect with, several communities simultaneously. Their identities, behaviour and values are not limited by location; instead they construct and utilize flexible personal and national identities.

Transnational typologies

Transnationalism is experienced and comprehended in popular consciousness by the "growing number of persons who live dual lives: speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders" (Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999: 217). In their book *Nations Unbound* (1994), Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc pioneer the theoretical application of the concept of transnationalism. In one of their earliest formulations, they write:

We define 'transnationalism' as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasise that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders ... An essential element... is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies. (Basch, Glick Schiller, and

Blanc-Szanton 1994: 6)

It is important to distinguish between various kinds of cross-border structures and activities that are often mentioned in literature. Portes (2001) for example argues that concepts need to be delimited with reference to differentiated sources and scales of activity: 'international' pertains to activities and programmes of different countries; 'multinational' to large-scale institutions such as corporations or religions whose activities take place in multiple countries; and 'transnational' to activities initiated by non-institutional actors. Faist (1999) takes it further by distinguishing diaspora as a distinct form of transnational community. Faist argues that in diaspora, there is a vision and remembrance of a lost and imagined homeland still to be established, often accompanied by a refusal of the receiving society to fully recognise the cultural distinctiveness of community members who are spread out to many diverse regions of the world.

Transnational identity (citizenship)

Identities are social constructions, as defined by Hall:

Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we represent ourselves. (Hall, 1996)

Diasporic identities on the other hand are defined by the recognition of necessary diversity. They are constantly producing and reproducing themselves as they move, but also re-creating the endless desire to return to 'lost origins'. For these displaced subjects, the fiction of cultures as separate, object-like phenomena occupying discrete places becomes implausible, but the disjuncture between place and culture becomes increasingly clear. For example, a transnational may attempt or desire to fit into the surrounding host society but this attempt or desire is realised only because he or she clearly identifies the existing dislocation. Paradoxically, as cultures are uprooted from places, ideas of culturally and ethnically distinct places become even more noticeable.

Material Culture and Transnational Subjects

The study of material culture

In simple terms, material culture can be defined as the significance of such material objects in people's lives. Individuals from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds are prone to use various objects that differ on many levels (technology, politics, and culture). Often the same objects are consumed but for different uses. Therefore, studying a culture's affiliation to materiality is essential for social scientists, as well as historians, to study the social and cultural attitudes of a certain group. Studying a culture's correlation to materiality can be considered a lens analysis on which social and cultural attitudes can be conferred (Donald, 1991). Therefore it is assumed that an individual's association with, and awareness of, objects is socially and culturally dependent. Investigating material culture also helps us understand past societies and explore the material culture of such communities through the material objects found.

Woodward (2007) submits that the first characteristic that defines the contemporary field of material culture studies is its interdisciplinary approach and cross-disciplinary focus that includes sociology, history, anthropology, psychology and so on. In this model, there is no given authority explaining material culture as each is seen to enhance the insights of the other. No object has a single interpretation because objects have multiple meanings and are capable of transformations of meaning across time and space. Furthermore, there is an inherent diversity of analytic methodologies used within material culture studies. Woodward points out that by restricting analysis for a discipline with an interdisciplinary approach will only result in a narrower understanding of that idea. For example, the interdisciplinary-founded focus of much psychological research into material culture has been generally overlooked by sociologists and anthropologists save a few exceptions such as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-

Halton (1981). Thus, only by using these different lenses of analysis can we better understand the phenomenon.

The second fundamental characteristic is that objects do matter for culture and society, and that social analysis should take account of objects in theorising culture and how it works. Daniel Miller (1987) notes the contradiction that 'academic study of the specific nature of the material artefact produced by society has been remarkably neglected. This lack of concern with the nature of the objects appears to have emerged simultaneously with the quantitative rise in the production and mass distribution of material goods'. The answer as to why objects matter is not because they are more plentiful but because they contain important meanings for social action. Objects represent or symbolise some aspect of culture and have a cultural resonance because they are recognised by members of a society or social group (Woodward, 2007). Dant (1996), in his article, 'Fetishism and the social value of objects', said that objects in terms of their general structure of social behaviour are the scaffolding for global structure of the environment. By understanding their ingredients, we are able to better understand our global structure. Another interpretation of objects is that they belong to material and expressive orders. The material order of objects relates to their practical utility while expressive order of objects is a component in helping to create social hierarchies of honour and status (Harre, 2002). Harre reminds us that social life can be seen to be a series of symbolic exchanges, which construct and manage meanings, and that such exchanges cannot be accomplished without the help of material things. Woodward also emphasises the distinction of classical studies of society and current material culture studies. He contends that current studies of society have a direct interest in people-object relations as the prime motive and aim of their analytical work. For example, Marx spoke of objects within his larger theory of capitalist development, Durkheim of objects as representations of fundamental classes of things as either sacred or profane, and Veblen of the ability of objects to show off luxury and beauty. Thus, there is a greater potential for material culture to be theorised and conceptualised in more sophisticated ways and become more integrated in the expression of social actions and outcomes.

Another basic premise of material culture is that objects have social lives (Appadurai, 1986). This means that where meanings and interpretations attached to images are relatively flexible and fluid, objects have trajectories whereby their meaning for consumers change over time and space. Woodward uses Kopytoff's (1986) example of analysis on objects shifting in and out of commodity status. According to Kopytoff's study, at some stage of their lives, objects are primarily defined by their relation to a monetary value which defines them as 'commodities', while at other times, they become 'de-commodified' as they are incorporated by people according to personal meanings, relationships or rituals. Using a pet to illustrate this example, Corrigan (1997) establishes that when a pet is engaged in a pet store it is primarily a commodity, yet when it's future owner exchanges cash for it and brings it home, its commodity status dissipates and the pet is primarily defined by its relations to its new owners and family. Kopytoff extends his argument to suggest that such transformations are akin to a type of biography. Things, not just people, have social lives. Questions we often ask about objects are: Where does this come from and who made it? What has the thing been designed for? Who is likely to buy it, and what uses would they put this thing to? What has been the career of this thing so far? Each question can be related to different stages in the life of this object. This biography of objects can even extend to the personalisation of fashion, much like how people wear clothes to distinguish themselves from others. The general point of this basic premise is that objects are never culturally fixed, but always in the process of being and becoming.

Changing the social meaning of objects

One of the most interesting questions in material culture study is whether people impose meaning on things, or they discover it in them. Many scholars believe that an object only becomes part of culture after a meaning has been given to it. For example, a rock in a field has no meaning until it is used as a tool or to build a fence. How we make and use things in a manner that is appropriate both to the materials from which things are made and to their social purposes is fundamental to our lives as skilled social beings. How to walk, how to eat, what to give and when to receive, are all things we need to know; such knowledge encompasses

the skills of making things, but also those of taste and discrimination which provide a sense both of the conventional and of impressive novelty. We are taught to make and use things by people through verbal instruction or emulation, but the crucial teachers are the things themselves.

It is now widely accepted not only that people live in society but that they also produce society in order to live. To create a society, people use objects in different ways and for different purposes; in every society at every time, there must be certain objects that are given, others that are sold or bartered, and still others that are kept for good. In our societies, buying and selling have become the main activities, while in others the giving of things or even intangible entities such as services, names or ideas predominate. Yet why are there some things one sells, others one gives, and yet others that can neither be sold nor given, but which must be kept and transmitted?

The reasons may reside in the things themselves, as the same object may successively be bought as a commodity or circulated in a gift exchange. Each of these actions inevitably changes the meaning of the object. For example, gifting an object to someone changes the meaning, value, and purpose of the object as opposed to selling the object to someone. Woodward's (2007) case study of Vivianne, whereby a sweater given to her by her first boyfriend, is a prime example of this theory. Vivianne would put the sweater on whenever she was home and it became her "second skin". This particular object was contrasted with the second hand clothing that she purchased and threw out over the years. It is evident that the action of gifting and purchasing the item has given the sweater a different meaning.

Individuals, specifically transnational subjects, can also affect the meaning of objects through 'ownership'. There are many different types of ownership, and this research paper will focus on four: physical ownership, intellectual ownership, affective ownership and creative ownership. Physical ownership is the typical ownership most people would think of when they own an object. It is legal ownership; it involves various rights to the tangible presence of an object, from the

right to display it in one's study to the right to destroy it. Physical ownership must also be validated by one's peers. If one's physical ownership is not validated one is at the very least in possession of stolen goods. *On Beauty*, a novel by British author Zadie Smith, contains a good example of the workings of physical ownership in the drama surrounding the Maîtresse Erzulie painting. The painting at first belongs to Carlene Kipps; it hangs in the library in her home. She wishes it to be given to Kiki Belsey on her death, but her family refuses. Kiki's son Levi later steals the painting, claiming that it belongs to the Haitian people and that Carlene never should have had it in the first place. At the end of the novel, Monty Kipps is embroiled in a court battle with Kiki over who will obtain legal validation for their ownership of the painting. All of these adventures are encompassed in physical ownership of this painting and it defines its value and meaning because of the various ownerships. This story is analogous to that of a transnational student who has been given a watch as a farewell gift. He/she has been told that this watch has been passed down by his/her grandparents. The physical ownership of the watch and knowledge of previous ownerships will inevitably increase the watch's meaning, whether it is translated into emotional or monetary value.

Intellectual ownership, on the surface, has more to do with meaning than physical ownership. When a person claims to know the significance of an object, describes its aesthetics or mechanics, or makes a judgment on its value or quality, that person is taking intellectual ownership. Intellectual ownership is most commonly associated with academia, but in fact anyone can take it. In *On Beauty*, Howard Belsey's father, Harold, calls the Mona Lisa a "lovely" painting (Smith, 299). Simple as it is, this statement is as much intellectual ownership as a dissertation on the painting. Of course, intellectual ownership must be validated by one's peers, similar to physical ownership. The difference is that the peer group for intellectual ownership may vary, in much the same way the society that defines whether or not a particular item is an object in the first place may vary. The act of definition involved in intellectual ownership is relatively common in everyday discourse, but the need for validation is less commonly addressed. Both, however, are common in literature. A good example is Howard Belsey's ownership of Rembrandt's works in *On Beauty*. In a lecture on Dr. Nicolaes Tulp Demonstrating

the Anatomy of the Arm, he claims that Rembrandt “was neither a rule breaker nor an original but rather a conformist” (Smith, 155). This is, first of all, an analytic evaluation of the work, which establishes his attempt at intellectual ownership. The passage also makes clear the importance of the peer group or society’s validation of ownership. Howard is obviously disputing the conventional view of Rembrandt’s paintings, the view that is already validated. It is unclear as to what extent Howard’s ownership has been validated by a large part of the art history community. Despite the fact that he has a teaching position at a small university, which suggests that some people think his views are at least passable, he spends much of the novel seeming to struggle to gain wider approval for his views. Regardless, he demonstrates the two components important to the outer workings of intellectual ownership: the act of definition (or re-definition) and the need for validation by one’s peers. We see many such examples in objects that have significant cultural aura, for example a traditional Hindu tea cup used for ceremonial purposes. In one interview conducted with Carla Sharma, a student from India, she gave an example of how the Hindu tea cup reflected this aura. She stated:

“Me and my brother have a Hindu tea cup set that we never paid attention to because it looked really old and traditional. We were forced to bring it to New Zealand by my mother. While in New Zealand, I found it weird that my brother and I would always fight over who could use the tea cups. We never really understood why but eventually we found out that whenever we used it, it would remind us of home. At times it would even taste like the tea mother always made.”

Take this object and place it in a foreign environment and we are left having to define and explain the value, significance and ecstatic. We then gain validation either by having this meaning challenged or accepted by foreign subjects. This process of defining and validation in return affects the meaning of the object, depending on how receptive we are to the outcome of other people’s views.

Frequently, intellectual ownership goes hand in hand with affective ownership. Affective ownership essentially consists of an emotional attachment to a cultural

object, making it, by itself, a somewhat simpler form of ownership than the first two. However, affective ownership rarely occurs by itself; it is usually connected to intellectual ownership. There are a few suggestions that point to this connection. The first is simply that it is difficult to say that one likes a piece of art without saying why, which is slipping into intellectual ownership because it will more than likely involve value judgments. Conversely, when one makes a value judgment in taking intellectual ownership, the value judgment is likely to have some emotional weight that will affect the owner. Not only that, but if one commits the time and energy (however much or little) to take intellectual ownership, one will probably become invested in the ownership and thus in the object itself. Because of these, it is often difficult to separate intellectual and affective ownership, and many examples given below of one or the other will include a bit of both. The main point distinguishing the two is that affective ownership requires no validation from others, though it may be shared. However, even this line can become blurred when affective ownership combines with intellectual ownership, especially when the affect is shared by many. Pure affective ownership remains elusive.

The other important point to note about affective ownership is that it can be negative as well as positive. A persistent hatred of an object is just as much affective ownership as a passionate love of one. This may seem odd at first, but the attachment is there regardless of its valence. While people with negative affective ownership may wish to distance themselves from the objects of their dislike, they cannot prevent the objects from getting under their skin and thus cannot truly detach themselves from them. Again we take the example of Vivianne's ex-lover's sweater. Although it is not obvious whether this ownership was manifested out of love or the need to remember, it is obvious that Vivianne has affective ownership of the sweater and because of this affective ownership she has kept the sweater for seven years. On the other hand, some individuals may wish to respond differently. Raman "Mainduck" Fielding of *The Moor's Last Sigh* shows this well. He attacks a painting of a kiss between a famous cricket player and a fan as "a pornographic representation of a sexual assault by a Muslim 'sportsman' on an innocent Hindu maiden" and intends to lead a march in protest against the gallery displaying it (Rushdie, 232). Mainduck exhibits negative

affective ownership here; he despises the painting. He also takes intellectual ownership of it by making value judgments, as well as connecting it to a larger cultural phenomenon – the conservative nativist movement against Muslims. It is difficult to say which type of ownership is the more important here, but it is a powerful example of affective ownership in any case.

The last major type of ownership is creative ownership. This is the ownership of an object that the subject or creator maintains. The creator conceived and fashioned the object; it is a product of their mind. Some might say that cultural objects like artworks or antiques are a piece of the creator given physical form. The Moor's Last Sigh, for instance, suggests repeatedly that an artwork can capture the true nature or self of the artist, for instance (e.g., Rushdie, 174). Therefore, the product will in some fashion always belong to the creator. This is why we refer to "Michelangelo's David" or "Beethoven's Fifth Symphony." Creative ownership, however, varies by culture – it is not universally recognised. In *My Name is Red*, in fact, it is systematically prevented, or at least discouraged. The miniaturists of sixteenth century Turkey were trained to give no evidence of their own style, but to paint in exactly the same way as everyone else. Not only that, but they frequently collaborated on paintings, each one contributing a single tree or horse, with the result that none of them can claim the final painting. Still, this situation was the exception rather than the norm, and elsewhere creative ownership appeared regularly.

The mechanics of ownership are impressive enough; to be able to alter the meanings of a cultural object the way intellectual ownership allows one to, for instance, seems remarkable. However, ownership regularly goes even further. Owning an object can change the creator, other individuals, society as a whole, or even past and present events. Sometimes, accepting a particular meaning for a cultural object requires that the meanings of something else are also changed. Turn to the example of the ancient Greek statue of Athena where the meaning of "ignorance" to the statue inescapably necessitates that one attach a similar meaning to the people who created or worshipped at the statue in the first place. Thus, owning a cultural object changes the meanings of a society, albeit one long

gone. Of course, only intellectual or creative ownership can accomplish this alteration. Modifying the meanings of anything aside from the owner or the cultural object itself must be done through changing the meanings of the cultural object, and only intellectual or creative ownership can accomplish that.

Changing the meanings of cultural objects can change the meanings of any number of other things, frequently in multiple, complex ways, as elaborated above. Not only that, but the objects that have been discussed here whose meanings are susceptible to alteration may be only the beginning, in the same way as there are more types of ownership than those I have principally focused on. Ghosh, for instance, repeatedly asserts that ownership of the past allows ownership of the future. With all its myriad forms and consequences, including those yet unexplored, ownership represents a powerful force for meaning-making. Granted, it sometimes seems as if the modern incarnations of the sorts of objects we are used to thinking of as cultural objects – great paintings, great literature, etc. – do not have as great an impact on as many people as earlier works did. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that when one takes ownership of an object, one changes meaning – of oneself, of the object, and potential myriad of other objects. We can conclude that the answer to ‘Do people impose meaning on things, or do they discover it in them?’ is that it is an interdependence of both because objects are created out of meaning, for a purpose, and as the object grows to engulf further meaning it sheds light on how people understand themselves.

Diasporic experience and creative arts

Having talked to several Chinese subjects we have identified a curious trend. It seems that remaining a Chinese citizen has always been a point of honour, or of some importance for all transnational Chinese subjects. Many weren't sure that they wanted to renounce their Chinese citizenship (the Chinese government does not allow dual nationality), and partly because they believed that their peers or family would mock them. We began to realise that these subject's desire to hold onto their Chinese passport revealed a deep, strong and defining identification with China and a sense of Chinese-ness, in spite of the fact that it sometimes created difficulties for them when traveling around the world. We encountered this

time and time again in our conversations and interviews with Chinese transnational subjects. It begs the question: why do these subjects retain such a strong connection to China?

One obvious explanation is the idea of diaspora, which elucidates a sense of longing for one's homeland. Reference can be given to Melissa Chiu (2006) and her case study of Zhang Huan, a Chinese born artist living in the United States. Chiu explains that for Zhang Huan, historical and cultural references to China are more overt today in his work than when he lived in Beijing, China. To examine the work of this community of artists residing outside China is important because for much of the nineties, these artists played a decisive role in defining Chinese art to audiences outside China. One remarkable difference between artists who remained in China and those who settled overseas is the recurring reference to China found in their art at a time when their peers in mainland China were more concerned with exploring local issues.

In one of the few accounts of Chinese diaspora, John Clark (1998) provided a careful analysis of Chinese artistic diaspora that takes into account sites where artists settled. He observed that: "What artists do with and in the other culture depends as much on the type of culture into which they are received as on any particular properties of the 'Chinese' culture they may bring with them" (1998, 23). Clark argues that there are three main factors influencing the reception of the Chinese artist into a new community, which he calls the "China-receiving community": firstly the size of the immigrant community in the place of settlement; secondly, the relationship with the immigrant community and the "China-receiving community": and lastly, the politics of living in each place for Chinese people. In the case of the later, he cites the Australian government's decision to grant nearly 20,000 students and professors residency after the June Fourth Movement as an example of the influence of government policy on an immigrant community.

In Chiu's case study, Chinese artist Chen Zhen argues that transexperience "summarises vividly and profoundly the complex life experiences of leaving one's native place and going from one place to another in one's life" (1998). In addition

to the physical dimension of migration, Chen extends the idea of transexperience into his art practice. For Chen, transexperience is:

‘...a mode of thinking and method of artistic creation that is capable of connecting creation that is capable of connecting the preceding with the following, adapting itself to changing circumstances, accumulating year-in-year-out experiences, and being triggered at any instant. Furthermore, this type of experiential concept relates to an extremely important matter, that is, to immerse oneself in life, to blend and identify oneself with others.’ (1998)

One of the most important principles of Chen’s notion of transexperience is the idea of evolutionary change. Chen articulates a condition wherein his residence in a foreign environment has created an on-going process of adapting to changing circumstances. Transexperience allows past experiences to infect the present, a process of “connecting the preceding with the following.” Transexperience also brings a type of ‘cultural homelessness’; namely, you do not belong to anybody, yet you are in possession of everything” (Chen, 1998). The sense of an overlapping un-belonging described by Chen provided him with a framework with which to explore a multiplicity of experiences. His approach towards transexperience suggests a model of cultural interaction apart from an oppositional relationship between China and the West, encouraging him to incorporate into his contemporary work, which was really about living in France. This in, our opinion, is what makes it so relevant to the work of the Chinese diasporic artist: it does not rely upon the simple cultural division of here and there, or an interpretation of the dual relationship between the past (China as the homeland) and the present (New Zealand, United States, etc.). Instead, transexperience describes the transformation of Chinese-ness in different cultural contexts via art or objects.

Chiu (2006) argues that to apply transexperience or transnational experience to the artwork of Chinese artists living abroad we must focus on the process of change. Edward’s Said’s mapping of the way that ideas and theories are altered by travel is particularly salient here. He writes:

First, there is a point of origin, or what seems like one, a set of initial circumstances in which the idea came to birth or entered traversed, a passage through the pressure of various contexts as the idea moves from an earlier point to another time and place where it will come into new prominence. Thirds, there is a set of conditions - call them conditions of acceptance or, as an inevitable part of acceptance, resistance - which then confronts the transplanted theory or idea, making possible its introduction or toleration, however alien it might appear to be. Fourth, the now accommodated idea is to some extent transformed by its new uses, its new position in a new time and place (Said, 1982).

Said's four-stage process bears similarities to Chen's concept of transexperience, adding detail to the process of irrevocable change brought about by travel. Although it describes the introduction of a new idea and its general acceptance, we might in another way apply it to the assessment of changes in works, objects or works of art by Chinese overseas artist. If we take Said's point of origin as China, and furthermore being Chinese, then it adds another dimension to transnational experience: the process of strategic adoption and rejection of references to China (Said, 1982). For Salman Rushdie (1991), the condition of diaspora relates to the past memories. He writes:

'It may be argued that the past is a country, from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true; but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being "elsewhere".'

Rushdie's comments on the creative effects of diaspora hold true for the Chinese artist. Yet the adoption of here and there as the sole reference point for diaspora limits the discussion to a bi-lateral relationship between the past and the present, at the expense of considerations of the future. On a similar note, Len Ang warns of such a trap, stating that "...when the question of 'where you're from' threatens to overwhelm the reality of 'where you're at', the idea of diaspora becomes a

disempowering one, a hindrance to 'identity' rather than an enabling principle" (Ang, 1992-93). If the homeland is fixed in the past rather than an evolving entity, one's cultural identity is subjected to similar constraints. Any approach to diaspora should involve not just the past (homeland) and present (host country) but also the future. In the interview conducted with Jack Xie, a former photojournalist in China and fellow Photowhisper co-founder, he said he hoped his audience would gain a deeper understanding of the Chiwi⁴ way of life. "I want to explain to the public how we look at the way of life in both Chinese and Kiwi cultures. To me the culture is something genetic: it's how you look at the world; how you exist", he said in his interview. In an exhibition entitled "Chiwi: A Way of Life" held at the Pah Homestead, TSB Bank Wallace Arts Centre, Xie displayed his photos, which he titled "The Third Me", featuring a man and a woman standing in the open with a bush and a lowering sky in the background. It could be a portrait, except that their faces are covered by red cloth. This, Xie said, represented the inner Chiwi state of mind, after the "first me" (the person you present to the world) and the "second me" (the person the world perceives you to be).

"When other people look at you, they just think you are Chinese instead of looking at the sum or quality of you as a person -- people try to characterize you," explains Xie.

⁴ Chiwi – Chinese & Kiwi way of life.



Fig 1. Diasporic experience and creative arts
Description: photographic work “The Third Me”, Auckland, New Zealand, 2012
Photo taken by: Jack Xie,

Nevertheless, the most persistent problem with discussion of diaspora is an emphasis on the homeland over the new place of settlement. It is the focus on their (homeland) rather than here (residence), on the past rather than the present, that characterises much diaspora theory. A good illustration of this is James Clifford’s discussion of the Moe family. They are Hawaiian musicians specialising in Hawaiian slide guitar and singing who traveled the world because of the popular success of their music. Clifford asked, “How, for fifty-six years in transient, hybrid environments, did they preserve and invent a sense of Hawaiian ‘home’?”(1997). This highlights one of the greatest drawbacks of diaspora - it does not allow for the transmutation of identity within a new context and location. The concept of transnational experience thus lends itself to such an exploration of cultural transformation more readily than diaspora because it is inherently flexible. Transnational experience provides conceptual framework for addressing questions such as: to what extent has migration affected the work of artists and their sense of their Chinese nationality? We will explore this framework in more

detail in Chapter Three in our case study of two Chinese artists living in New Zealand.

Symbolising objects

In a recent article in BKI, Penny van Esterik (1984) argued that "objects that are used as symbols have proper or literal meanings of their own, and these literal meanings are the material out of which symbolic significance arises". To substantiate her more specific suggestion that "technological operations must be extensively thought about, and these thoughts may provide analogies for other things which people must think about", she focussed on the Buddhist contexts of pottery vessels in South East Asia, especially Thailand. Her analysis also relied very much on the realisation that an important property of symbolic systems is their openness, and that the meanings of symbols are frequently vague, ambiguous and discordant. In this connection some attention must be paid to motifs on jars in Borneo, especially Chinese and other imported ware, which are highly prized by the locals.

Another example of how individuals infer symbolic meaning into objects is Rakoczy's (2005) article on 'How children turn objects into symbols'. In his paper, Rakoczy explains that from around their second birthday, young children engage in activities in which one physical object or situation is used to "stand for" another. For example, 2- and 3-year-olds pretend that an object is something different; they create and interpret simple drawings of objects and situations, and they use simple maps, pictures, videos, and scale models to locate things in real space. These activities in which one thing or situation is used to point beyond itself to another are all uniquely human activities and may be said to involve the capacity to symbolise. Rakoczy points further that a human being making a horse-shaped cloud, drawing a horse on a placard, or asserting "there is going to be a horse show", with the appropriate intentions in the appropriate context, means that there is going to be a horse show. We may even use commonly known causal expressions in symbolic acts if we have the right intentions; for example, when

asked what the weather is going to be like I can simply point to the dark clouds with a concerned facial expression. Non-natural meanings are thus not out there in the world, but rather are socially constituted through the way people use and interpret them. A transnational student holding onto a cultural object, like a Hindu motif tea cup, may hold symbolic interpretation that he has strong attachments to his religious belief. It could also mean that he has a particular interest in antique items deriving from his cultural roots. Importantly, the symbolising process always assumes a collective background of shared rules and practices for symbol making and interpreting.

Many analytical processes have been developed to study and understand the symbolising of objects. Object biography is one such analytical process that has emerged within material culture studies as a way to reveal and understand object agency and symbolism. As Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall (1999) have described it, an object biography examines an artefact's life history to 'address the way social interactions involving people and objects create meaning' and to understand how these meanings 'change and are renegotiated through the life of an object'. Such a biography might include information about an object's genealogy, its manufacture, use, possession, exchange, alteration, movement and destruction or preservation, obtained from a wide variety of sources. Considering an object's life in a dynamic, active relationship with human lives raises questions about how people and things articulate in culturally and historically specific ways. One set of questions revolves around how object relationships form, form part of, perform or represent a sense of self. A second set arises from arguments for the agency of objects in these processes.

Object biography makes notions of self and agency more dynamic, more complex and more culturally specific. It also suggests the merits of an approach to the biography of people that engages with material culture and an individual's personal, social and cultural relationship with objects. '[E]mphasising the manner in which things create people,' Gosden argues, 'is part of a rhetorical strategy to rebalance the relationship between people and things, so that artefacts are not always seen as passive and people as active.' This is the way in which much

biography, even in museums, is written. When objects feature in personal biography, they are often positioned as relics or illustrations. This diminishes or obscures objects' agency in shaping a life by restricting them to memorial or representational roles, and limiting the range of their effects to impressions on a somewhat disembodied mind, rather than a sensing and perceptual body.

Understanding lives and events experienced across the boundaries of nations can be enriched particularly by a conversation with material culture studies, which are increasingly moving towards explorations across the boundaries of materiality and subjectivity. Gosden and Marshall, reflecting on Marilyn Strathern's study of ideas of a distributed self in Melanesia, argue that attending to the complex relationships between people and things 'have radical implications for the notion of biography. Material things are not external supports or measures of an internal life, but rather people and things have mutual biographies which unfold in culturally specific ways.' Gosden's articulation of an 'object-centred approach to agency' draws our attention to 'the effects things have on people', particularly the way 'our senses and emotions [are] educated by the object world'. By exploring how subjectivity is created by the material world, Gosden has shifted the debate from focusing, at least initially, on the 'meanings of objects' towards a closer reading of their effects.

An understanding of how embodied experience is created by the material world opens significant possibilities for researchers exploring the lives of people and how things have moved between places that each represent substantially different material and cultural conditions. Indeed, much of the recent attention given to object agency and object biography can trace its origins to 'a broadening of research paradigms to include transnational movement and connection'. In their influential articles on the social life of things, Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff proposed biography as a means to understand the agency of objects that move through space and time. Gosden's further articulation of the approach has emerged from analysis of the flows of people and goods associated with colonialism and imperialism in Papua New Guinea and newly Romanised Britain. Gosden applied his ideas about the effects of objects to a reading of change and continuity in the material culture of the period surrounding Britain's incorporation

into the Roman Empire (150 BC – 200 AD). What emerged was an ‘overwhelming impression...of variety, fluidity and regional difference’. This, he admits, leads naturally to an emphasis on transformation: how ‘one set of forms becomes another’. This suggests that there is merit in careful readings of the ‘logic’ behind the creation of hybrid objects and perhaps, by extension, a hybrid self. Gosden writes:

“Overall, cultural forms always have two conflicting elements: they are often made up of bits and pieces taken from many places on the one hand, but these are quickly formed into a coherent whole on the other. We should not spend time trying to identify the original elements of a bipartite Romano-British culture, but rather look at the logics by which the pieces were combined.”

Transnational Objects

There are a number of reasons why objects are important in the lives of transnational subjects. Firstly, it is a focal point of most people’s lives - transnational or not, both emotionally and physically, where they interact with the most important people in their lives. Objects can represent the most substantial monetary investment the majority of people make, and an important signifier of achievement and success, as well as personal values. Finally, it embodies elements of being both highly personal and strongly social such that it encompasses private and public meanings. Researchers from the discipline of social psychology have recognised the environmental and psychic importance of objects inside the home, given their centrality to modern life and everyday existence. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) present findings from a significant empirical study of material culture in North American homes. The key areas that they address are the relations between people, their psychic development and well-being, and the material objects in their homes. The research demonstrates that people use objects to signify information about themselves, their relationships with others, significant past experiences and personal aspirations. This can aid research and study of transnationals because the objects of attachments are affected and re-identified by the past home

(homeland) and the present home (overseas).

The safety pin is an example of transformation provided by Dick Hebdige (1979). In Hebdige's example, he shows how safety pins were appropriated by punks in the 1970s and used in shocking ways, such as for nose piercing or as a type of perverse decorative brooch. Along similar lines, they wore plastic bags as if they were clothing. Applying this theory to transnationals, we identify the classic case of international students who have identified themselves with a particular culture that they have been studying in. We can also identify other examples within the domain of fashion. Take for example the students and youth in Osaka, Japan. In a documentary released by CNN, it was submitted that many of the resident youth in Osaka differentiated themselves through the application of fashion of a particular era of a country. Students that lived and studied in the United States identified themselves via impersonations of Elvis Presley while others feted British punk symbols of the 70s.

Woodward's (2007) book provides a case study which examines the relevance of material culture in a domestic context. In the case study, Helen, her husband, and two young girls live in a large house in one of the most prestigious suburbs in the city. She is articulate, informative and speaks with a tone of clear-headed precision about her home, how she has come to decorate it, and the objects she has filled it with. It is the latter that we are interested in. In Woodward's interview with Helen, he identifies that she chooses 'clean and tidy', 'uncluttered' and 'comfortable' to describe her ideal home. However, it is evident from the objects in her home that her choices are surprisingly 'unaesthetic'. Nonetheless, these are choices of her preferred mode of presentation of an 'understated' style. One object that Helen points out as one of her personal favourites is her Bang & Olufsen stereo. The Bang & Olufsen BeoSound 8 is a conical shaped set of speakers that can be linked to an iPad, iPhone or iPod. It provides two functions. Design-wise, the shapes 'disappear' to create an unobtrusive impression from most viewing angles and make placement easier, and in terms of audio quality, they eliminate standing waves by avoiding parallel surfaces. This first function is translated into practical utility in the material order. The second function is the expressive order in

which the stereo helps create a social hierarchy of honor and status for her (Harre, 2002). In my opinion, the stereo encapsulates the principles of technologised, abstract, and modernist design. Apart from the suggestion of a silver disc shape, it presents as a dark, rectangular object in a design style that could be considered avant-garde, given contemporary design style for stereo systems. For Helen, it is considered a piece of art (much like her impressive range of original art hanging on the walls of her home). Furthermore, the price of the stereo indicates that this is no average household stereo. This is also evidence of Woodward's third premise that objects have social lives. Woodward points out that the stereo attests to Helen's appreciation of good design, but also her ability to afford the good design. Having the stereo also demonstrates her competence across a range of aesthetic fields including art and technology, which is reminiscent of the pattern of the omnivorous consumer (Peterson, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996).

Other case studies show that some objects have a more emotional component attached to their social biography. One example is Rachel Hurdley's interview with Sylvia, a mother who lives in a modern house with her husband, and has two adult daughters who both have children. The object of analysis was a large bronze with male and female figures embracing each other, displayed on a shelf in the front bay window area. Sylvia tells the story of how she acquired the object. She concentrates on the moral values constructed around the object which was a gift from her daughters to her and her husband. It cost her daughter's money, time and effort. It was specially selected and has a leaflet about the maker. An ordinary-looking domestic ornament is made abnormal by the story she reads into it. It is also the amount of time and effort invested into it by the givers that makes this object extremely emotional. The element of Sylvia's story is emphasised in this particular production of it, as she details her children bringing it home in a pushchair in a failed attempt to surprise their mother. This little detailed memory of the object adds the most value to the object. The second element that makes this object no ordinary "object" is the revelation it gives her of her daughters' perception of her and her husband. In the case study, Hurdley identifies that rather than telling Hurdley what that perception is, Sylvia points at the statue of the lovers: 'You know, like that'. This emphasises the dramatic nature of storytelling

that sometimes cannot be quantified into words; the objects are demonstrative of the themes of the stories and memories. Once again, it is the direct correlation Sylvia draws between the object's appearance and what it conveys about her identity, together with her daughters' perception of that identity. She perceives it as a representative of her character and how that is seen by those closest to her.

Through these examples and analysis we see the different ways that people use material culture as resources to continually find and define themselves and their place in the world. The object in their domestic realm thus affords people to perform self analysis. What seems more important than the actual physical properties these examples show are the means and resources they have for expressing these preferences, and the relation of these methods to the process of narrative construction – a biography if you will. The physical taste and preferences are thus merely the material elements of more interesting cultural and social discourses, which can be imagined as embedded beneath the talk of principles of material culture. Thus, the practice of producing narratives around objects contributes to the personal work of autobiography (or social lives in objects) and renders objects as meaningful participants in the social work of identity building.

David Parkin's (1999) work "mementoes as transitional objects in Human Displacement" argues that the movements of people are associated with the objects that people attached themselves to. Parkin's work is concerned with whether physical objects associated with particular persons or their personhood go beyond their individuals' biological body. In his paper, he found that people who left their home country during or because of crisis, often bring objects with them resembling their selective remembering, forgetting and envisioning of home. However, there were several points that can be argued against Parkin's submission: (1) his example of refugees coming to a new place bringing with them an object that made them remember their homeland was too simple; and (2) departing under such conditions is to be exposed to a vulnerability which is opposed to the rationalisation of picking an object of choice. For the first point, the role of these transitional objects is not just for activating memory, but also it helps to shape the new life experience as well. For instance, when an immigrant comes

to a new country, he brings with him an object for remembering his homeland. However, we should argue that it does not stop here. The object acts like a mirror reflecting his culture in a new place; it is not his personal item. Rather, it is a piece of cultural possession. People would look at it and interpret what his culture is. At times an object can have a positive as well as a negative meaning attached to it. For example, a Chinese immigrant attending a job interview wearing a traditional 'chi-pao'. This can shape her personal experience as (1) she might get the job because of the impression her dress-sense helps her make or (2) she might face discrimination because she is seen as a foreigner who is incapable of doing work. For the second point, Parkin's condition for picking an object does not allow the subject to rationally decide what is valuable. The assessment of value is misplaced with the importance of the object. Making an assessment of how valuable an object is and why it is valuable requires an absence of Parkin's condition. However, Parkin does make the point that such conditions are existential as they are material, for it is through the skills and objects one may take that one's future may be given shape. Nevertheless, such conditions described by Parkin have a significant deterrent on people's capacity to think and even prepare, making the 'choice' less of a significant factor.

Adapting new culture

Objects exert agency in diverse and often interconnected ways: as repositories of memories, mechanisms for the transfer of skills, as sites for negotiating cultural frameworks, as arenas for imaginative escape, modes of connecting with lost family, or even modes of connecting with lost homeland. In every case, objects work as conduits for simultaneous experience, removing geographical and temporal difference. As people engage with them, the objects enable them to simultaneously experience and mediate multiple times, places and modes of being. Changes in a person's location necessarily generate new interactions between a person and a different material world - and also define the relationship with the old. These interactions - and efforts to sustain previous interactions by continuing to use, make and treasure objects from another place - shape how a person experiences their life across multiple places. Paying close attention to how

a person absorbs, rejects, accommodates and reinvents these forms reveals valuable information about the nature and meaning of those experiences. Below is an example of one such experience and how the object became my tool of adapting to a foreign culture.

Upon my arrival and during my first few years in New Zealand, I brought over 10 pairs of shoes from my hometown. I brought them with me because I felt that they provided me with a sense of home. Furthermore, wearing them provided me with a clear cultural identity. The idea of doing this case study on shoes came as I wondered what part shoes played in our lives as clothing between our bodies and the ground beneath our feet. So taking shoes off and putting them on, or choosing one pair rather than another, patterns our time, probably marking the difference between day and night – but also between being at home and being at work, or out shopping, or at a wedding or funeral, or climbing or dancing. Getting into the details of people's shoe lives commits a point of view into how they live out their identities. It makes us aware that they are likely to move between different roles or aspects of themselves – so we are treating identity as something dynamic that accommodates to different things we choose to do, or different people's expectations of us.

I have over twenty pairs of shoes, ten of which I brought with me from China. The latter shoes are traditional handmade flora printed shoes, all in similar styles but of different colors. What surprised me most was that I had seldom worn any of them. I recalled in the few days before leaving China that I wished to travel with things that represented my ethnic origin. However, what I discovered was this idea slowly shifted when I arrived in New Zealand.

Natacha Morro, a shoemaker, claims that "Shoes turn you into someone else" (Newman, 2006). This notion that shoes move or change us is evident in how they alter the shape of our feet but also affect our intention to be like someone else. High heels are the obvious example. Sophie Woodward explains that the 'surface' of the body is the site for the construction and presentation of self. Strathern (1979), writing on self-decoration in Mount Hagen in Melanesia, demonstrates that

for the people of that region appearance is regarded as anything but superficial. Focusing explicitly upon body decorations employed by men on formal ritual occasions, Strathern points out that such elaborate make-up is not a form of disguise, but rather this is seen to be where the self is displayed. During my first year in New Zealand I would wear my traditional shoes day and night regardless of occasion or where I went. Arguably, those ten pairs of shoes objectified my past and my ethnicity. However, through the process of culture adaptation, through socialising and making new friends and adapting to Western culture, a new window opened. I began to observe the presence of high heels, their contextual purpose in Western culture, how they changed the way women moved their style, their posture, their symbolic power and even their sexuality. Although high heels were present in China, it was associated with formality and often only worn to weddings or formal events. All these present themes overpowered the relevance – and sometimes the value – in wearing what had originally been used to identify my culture and myself; instead it provided me with the constant promise of transformation deemed “current” by others through popular media. Gell’s theory (1998) of objectification points to the ways in which a person’s intentionality may be distributed through objects, thus highlighting the immense potential to influence the minds of others through a particular medium. In my case, that medium was specifically shoes. Featherstone (1991) quoted that one of the supposed characteristics of post-modernity is that ‘everyone can be anybody’, which translates sartorially into the wealth of often contradictory styles and identities to experiment with. This experiment in my life is evidence of my cultural dislocation and the acceptance of New Zealand culture. Throughout the years I slowly lost them; sometimes I made a conscious decision to throw them out because I could no longer wear them, other times I would lose them in a bag of old clothes that I decided to give away. Till this day, I have kept only one out of the ten pairs of shoes that I brought from China. Sometimes I experience regret for not keeping them or taking better care of them. Looking back on the phases that I went through, keeping those traditional shoes was essential in maintaining my individual and cultural identity. Now, the reverse has occurred and that one pair of ethnic shoes has become an isolated module in my wardrobe only worn for certain formal Chinese functions.

Shaping transnational identity

As material culture, clothing is not seen as simply reflecting given aspects of the self, but through its particular material use, containing facets such as identity, sexuality, ethnicity, and social role. However, within these subjects lie a psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud) where there are three constructs; the id, the ego and the super-ego. The id comprises the unorganised part of the personality structure in a person. It acts according to the “pleasure principle”, seeking to avoid pain or displeasure. The ego acts according to the reality principle whereby it seeks to please the id’s drive in realistic ways that will benefit in the long term rather than bring grief. The super-ego can be described as a successful instance of identification with the parental agency. It also takes on the influence of those who have stepped into the place of parents such as teachers and people chosen as role models, and it tries to achieve perfection. For example, in a cold climate the id construct would instigate us to wear anything that would keep ourselves warm. Whereas the super-ego construct would aim to instigate us to wear the most expensive, efficient, multi-functional, or perfect clothing. The ego construct would prompt a more logical or practical option of clothing that is within our means and would also provide warmth.

Daniel Miller explains that dissecting clothing into pattern, fibre, fabric, form and production uncovers that the basic notion of what cloth feels and looks like is the source of its capacity to objectify myth, cosmology and also morality, power and values. Therefore, ego will affect our aesthetic taste. Miller provides six examples of how the ego construct affects our aesthetic taste:

1. Demographics – There are 3 elements of demographics that affect the aesthetic of choice; gender, age, and profession. Our aesthetic of choice is strongly governed by what we are allowed to wear or should more actively wear (e.g. skirts for females) depending on our gender, age and profession.
2. Representation – Ego affects aesthetic choice of representation, whereby clothes represent our personality and our identity. For example, actresses and actors wear

clothes that represent their lifestyle and their hierarchical position in society as celebrities.

3. Adaptation – Ego affects the aesthetic choice to allow us to adapt to our surroundings. For example, when traveling we might choose to wear certain locally inspired clothing, such as floral printed shirts/skirts when traveling in Hawaii. This allows us to blend in with the local culture.
4. Fantasy – Ego affects the aesthetic of choice by allowing individuals to meet certain fantasies. For example, when children go into stores, they are drawn to costumes of their heroes because they fantasise of being those heroes with superpowers.
5. Cover-up – Ego affects the aesthetic of choice because it allows individuals to cover up themselves. This can happen in two scenarios. One is where an individual is not satisfied with his social status, power, wealth or even education. Therefore, by wearing exclusive brands of clothing, they feel like they have a higher social status. The second is where an individual is trying to cover up imperfections on themselves, for example a scar.
6. Camouflage – When individuals socialise with one another, they use clothes to camouflage their true personality, which might be stereotyped against them. This allows for better communication. For example, an individual who has a shy and passive personality may wear bright coloured clothing to reflect a more confident and positive character. Another example would be how two best friends might coordinate to wear identical clothing. One individual might not actually like that particular clothing but will wear it because it allows him/her to bond with that close friend.

These six examples show the internal development of subjectivities in relation to clothes and how we want to use them in society. These are closely related to decisions we make each day in choosing what to wear.

Each morning we establish an image in which we identify for ourselves through the simple act of getting dressed. Gell (1998) describes this as “distributed personhood”, wherein selfhood is externalised and distributed in space through different material objects. Sophie Woodward (2007) describes this as personal

aesthetic in her book *Why Women Wear What They Wear*. In her book, Woodward uses real women's lives and clothing decisions - observed and discussed at the moment of getting dressed - to illustrate theories of clothing, the body and identity. Woodward pieces together what women actually think about clothing, dress and the body in a world where popular media and culture presents an increasingly extreme and distorted view of femininity and the ideal body.

Woodward uses her example of Mumtaz to shed positive light on aesthetic fit and how clothing selected by Mumtaz created joyous moments when the outfit spoke of herself. Mumtaz is a married mother of two in her mid-forties; she has lived extensively in Paris, Kenya, Uganda and India. Mumtaz is picking an outfit for her husband's colleague's wedding. Her outfit was a success because it combined aspects of herself (her biography, race, global travels) within one outfit. The different facets of Mumtaz's self – her past, ethnicity, her travels – are objectified in the clothing hanging in her wardrobe. In the act of dressing, she hangs herself onto the surface of her outfit. Her choice of clothing was a true reflection of her identity; an antique Indian printed stole, white blouse and simple black leggings. In Chapter Three, we will use a case study to explore further the transnational subjects and their wardrobes to show how they use clothing, and, moreover, the act of changing what they choose to wear to shape their transnational identity.

Chapter Three: Case Studies

Case Study One: Diasporic experience - Zoe Zhang “Belonging”

In this case study I will attempt to describe the multiple rather than dual experiences of diaspora, the notion of transnational-experience will be employed as an explanatory model for the way Chinese artists such as Zoe articulate their diasporic experiences via their art. The concept of transnational-experience or transexperience was developed by the late Chinese artist Chen Zhen for her own practice, but it is one that can be applied to varying degrees to the artistic expression of artists like Zoe. According to Chen, transexperience “summarises vividly and profoundly the complex life experiences of leaving one’s native place and going from one place to another in one’s life”.

Zoe Zhang is an artist who grew up in China and migrated to New Zealand in the early 1990s. She recently held her exhibition titled ‘Contradiction and the Co-existence of Two cultures’⁵. Zoe explains in her interview that the project’s aim was to explore the experiences of cultural difference. As a young Chinese immigrant living in New Zealand for over ten years, she draws from the idea of home and loneliness, and interrogated the notion of ‘confusion in belonging’. Her photographic work, which consists of bright-contrast portraits of herself holding an invisible object and others of the objects that she is presumably holding, focuses on the emotional contradiction and struggles that emerge in the space between two cultures.

⁵ Chiwi – A way of life exhibition, TSB Bank Wallace Arts Centre, 29 May – 22 July 2012.



Fig 2. Case Study One: Diasporic experience - Zoe Zhang "Belonging"
Description: photographic work "The Belonging" Auckland, New Zealand, 2012
Photo taken by: Zoe Zhang



Fig 3. Case Study One: Diasporic experience - Zoe Zhang "Belonging"
Description: photographic work "The Belonging" Auckland, New Zealand, 2012
Photo taken by: Zoe Zhang

The portraits of Zoe holding an invisible object represent the feeling of longing for comfort, while the stand-alone objects represent the distance and absence that has created the feeling of loneliness. In her interview, Zoe states that the bright-contrasting colours can also be interpreted as representing confusion: “Why is my background bright green when the background of my book, that I am supposedly holding, bright orange? Why are my eyes closed? Is it because I don’t see but feel the loneliness that you are probably interpreting from the picture? Each of these questions represents the dislocation of multiple experiences from one another.” Together with the lamentation of the loss of identity, Zoe’s photography allegorically represents the internal motivation behind the civic social ideology of Chinese immigrants. One of the most important principles of Chen’s notion of transnational experience is the idea of evolutionary change. Chen articulates a condition wherein his residence in a foreign environment has created an ongoing process of adapting to changing circumstances. It is evident from Zoe’s interviews that her transnational experience has allowed past experiences to affect the present, a process of “connecting the preceding with the following”. Zoe also confirms Chen’s theory that transnational experience brings a type of ‘cultural homelessness’; as Zoe explains “You do not belong to anybody yet you feel the need to belong to something, a culture. But which culture?”

Zoe explains how her project, in its core, incorporates Western and Eastern techniques and one of her Western inspirations is the New Zealand expatriate, Boyd Webb. In Zoe’s background research, she explains that she perceives Boyd Webb as a sculptor who defines a photograph as a secondary object of choice. In her opinion, photography is the process of reproduction and photographic images do not exist in their own rights, but exist only relative to the objects in the image. According to Zoe, what she derives from Webb’s practice is that Webb takes an almost defiant pleasure in stressing the deception and theatricality of every tableau he assembles.

Webb worked with his limited range of props to construct artificial worlds, in which his isolated characters struggle to make sense of things, to overcome the obstacles he frustratingly places in their way. This, Zoe felt, is contradictory to the Chinese culture of using artificial sources to create art. “I was very much inspired by Webb’s use of strips of ready-made tablecloth to create natural elements like the heaving sea or the cloudy sky. The strips are slung across the studio, or hung down in expanses with folds and creases.” Zoe admits that this opened her mind to the various juxtaposing methods of using materials in dynamic ways.

With Webb’s influence, Zoe has also used many methods expressed by Chinese artists. For example, Weng Fen, who explored his experience living in his hometown and dealt with the social issue of migration and displacement. Zoe explains:

“His work ties into the core of theme of my life experience as a Chinese immigrant in New Zealand. While artist like Wang Qingsong, also based his work on the rapid economic growth in China and references to Western classical art. He draws his audience’s attention to the commercial world in China, in comparison to Webb whose images are more ambiguous. I believe Webb’s approach promotes a fantasy-of-reality but deliberately fall short of the commercial ideal of glamour”.

However, both ideas and aesthetics lead us to explore the world of commodity, and the idea of ‘fake and reality’.

It is evident that Zoe’s travels and experiences in different countries has influenced her work. Edward Said’s mapping of the way that ideas and theories are altered by travel is particularly salient here. He said:

‘First, there is a point of origin, or what seems line one, a set of initial circumstances in which the idea came to birth or entered discourse. Second, there is a distance traversed, a passage through the pressure of various contexts as the idea moves from an earlier point to another time and place where it will come into a new prominence. Third, there is a set of conditions – call them conditions of acceptance or, as an inevitable part of acceptance, resistance – which then

confronts the transplanted theory or idea, making possible its introduction or toleration, however alien it might appear to be. Fourth, the now full (or partly) accommodated idea is to some extent transformed by its new uses, its new position in a new time and place. (Said, 1982, p. 196)'.

Said's four-stage process bears similarities to Zoe's transnational experience, adding detail to the process of irrevocable change brought about by travel. If we take Said's point of origin as China, and furthermore being Chinese, then it adds another dimension to transnational experience: the process of strategic adoption and rejection of references to China. We see how this is expressed in Zoe's art and how it constantly accepts her Chinese heritage whilst rejecting specific ideologies or perceptions of China. At least three main distinctive strategies are used by overseas Chinese artists like Zoe to explore the past and the present, which are employed both simultaneously and alternately in her work. The three strategies are: firstly, the recovery of Chinese iconography as a way of remembering the past at a geographical and psychological distance from China; secondly, the juxtaposition of memories of China with its current reality; and lastly, the modification of Chinese signifiers, such as Chinese characters, to make them accessible to non-Chinese audiences.

The first strategy Zoe utilises to refer to past experiences in China is the recovery of Chinese iconography. In one of her works she captures Chinese imagery including Chinese sayings for titles of her work and uses recognisable Chinese icons such as the braid. This strategy is also used by well-known artist like Fan Dong Wang who repainted traditional Chinese imagery including dragons, fruits and plants with Chinese symbolism. In addition, there is Cai Guo-Qiang's re-staging at the 1999 Venice Biennale of Rent Collection Courtyard, a tableau of a feudal scene containing life-sized clay figures depicting landowners extracting rent from peasants, and one of the most famous art works of Cultural Revolution. Made in 1965, the original Rent Collection toured throughout China during the Cultural revolution as a statement against feudalism. The integration of signifiers from the Cultural Revolution is an increasing trend in the work of overseas Chinese artists, and more recently can even be found in the work of mainland Chinese artists.

The second strategy is one of comparative juxtaposition. By way of example, a number of Zoe's works sought to contact her childhood experiences during her time in China in the late 80s and early 90s with the turn towards a market economy and growing consumerism in the 90s, observed during her travels back to China after migrating to New Zealand. While Chen's approach is based upon his own memories and responses to change in his homeland, Huang Yong Ping's installations demonstrate a wider, historical view of the Chinese diaspora by exploring Chinese immigration as a central theme. Kearny Street (1994) offers an historical allegory of nineteenth century Chinese migration and anti-Chinese movements, while Human Snail Plan (1993) explores the story of more recent illegal Chinese immigrants. These works acknowledge past and present-day Chinese migration to the United States, which allows a comparison between the Chinese diaspora of late nineteenth century and that of the late twentieth century. Ah Xian's porcelain busts might also be included in this category, given that they overlay traditional Chinese porcelain designs over porcelain busts of contemporary Chinese individuals. In this way he juxtaposes the old and the new.

The final strategy that will be discussed here, and there are surely others used by artists living outside China, is the modification of Chinese signifiers. This includes Zoe's portrait of herself in a Western setting – an old English laced glove holding a white flower against an eye-popping background colour. One might say that this modification of Western-Chinese portrait acknowledges her residence outside China. Other artists have also used this strategy. This includes the adaptation of Chinese writing, evident in Xu Bing and Wenda Gu's invention of hybrid forms of Chinese characters. Xu's "New English Calligraphy", for example, constructs a new script from English that resembles a form of Chinese calligraphy, while Gu's "United Nations" series of installations combines an entirely fictitious and unreadable language all together. Both artists reform their first language, Chinese, by combining it with English and sometimes other languages.

These three strategies chronicle the ways that overseas artists like Zoe figure China as a site of both past and present relevance. Moreover, by bestowing equal

priority to the past and present, equal weight and acknowledgement is given to Chinese and non-Chinese references. By positioning China as a current influence rather than frozen at the moment of migration, the works of Zoe and other overseas artists illustrate an evolving “Chinese-ness”. This is a significant departure from some accounts of diaspora that position the homeland solely in terms of the past. The idea of identity in flux, elucidated in the concept of transnational experience, also allows a discussion of the factors that might influence changes in “Chinese-ness”.

However, there is a distinction between Zoe and the Chinese artists identified in this study; and that is the notion of exile. Similar to the idea of diaspora, the idea of exile was also applied to Chinese artists when they first migrated to the West because some could not return for fear of political reprisals. Edward Said identifies the condition of exile as an unending sense of loss and process of comparison between the past in the homeland and the present residence in the foreign environment. He states: “Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and bond with, one’s native place; what is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the existence of both... For an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitable occur against the memory of these things in another environment” (1990, p. 366). Exile differs in several ways from considerations of diaspora. The most obvious difference is based on the conditions, for various reasons, including greater political freedom, and economic opportunity. Zoe is an example of the larger Chinese diaspora as based on a desire to pursue opportunities outside of China rather than those that exist in an attachment to homeland culture.

Nevertheless, Zoe and her counterpart Chinese artists have something in common, which is their roots. Wang Ling-chi (1998), for example, provides one of the most evocative models, linking Chinese migration to the roots of a plant. He describes Chinese reactions to migration as having two different responses: “growing roots where they land” (*luodi shengen*) or “return to their roots” (*guigen*). Inherent in these two responses is a double meaning for “roots,” since Wang’s term *luodi shen gen* refers to plant roots while *guigen* refers to roots as cultural

origins. This establishes a double-metaphor that operates on a figurative and symbolic level, given a further dimension by its correspondence to the tradition of Chinese sojourners (haiwai huaren/huaqiao). The tradition of Chinese migrations suggested by terms such as haiwai huaren and huanqiao also allows us to consider some of the subtleties of Chinese migration. For example, the difference between overseas Chinese settling in a foreign environment while sojourners only stayed for a limited period of time. Inherent in arguments for the specificity of a Chinese diaspora is the notion that it constitutes a new cultural form. This is particularly apparent in Ong and Nonini's discussion of Chinese transnationalism as a "third culture", which is no doubt influenced by Homi K. Bhabha's writings. Bhabha's concept of a "third space" is defined as: "the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity and fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicised, and read anew" (1993, p. 37). Bhabha's "third space" articulates the cultural transition between cultures that occurs in a diaspora and has been particularly important to the development of transnational studies.

Zoe has expressed that as an artist living abroad, she feels that there is a need to employ the idea of Chinese-ness as an alternative to mainstream cultural values. In fact, curators such as the United States-based Gao Minglu and Hou Hanru have argued that Chinese artists have the ability to critique Euro-American modes of thought because they trained and grew up in a different cultural environment. Gao Minglu's discussion of overseas Chinese artists in the exhibition catalogue *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* acknowledges a debt to Bhabha's concept of a "third space". He argues: "What is crucial for overseas Chinese artist is not the preservation of Chinese characteristics but rather to act effectively in the third space... The artists' task is to make their own Chinese cultural experiences into efficient languages to intervene the new social reality" (1998, p. 183). This notion of intervention also characterises Hou Hanru's discussion of overseas Chinese. Hou's writings on overseas Chinese artists have, in effect, called for a new interpretation of art from a Chinese perspective. He states that Chinese artists are "critiquing and deconstructing the 'mainstream' discourses and practices of Western art by incorporating their Chinese background at the centre of their work"

(1998, p 185). Hou's arguments prove an explanation for the way that Chinese symbolism has been adopted and employed in the work of Chinese artists as an alternative to American, European or Australian cultural values.

Zoe in her interviews often expressed her opinion that the interpretation of Chinese traditions from the perspective of living outside China is one manifestation of the sense of a multiple consciousness embodied in the term transnational experience. It is also worth noting that distinctly identifiable Chinese signifiers frequently become more apparent in the artwork of Chinese artists the longer they stay overseas. Chen Zhen explains this as drawing upon his "bank of genes", meaning an inescapable Chinese heritage. Memory and, more specifically, memories of China, are based on the artist's memories of China. Yet memory itself should be thought of as flawed and somewhat distinctive. This observation about identity sheds light on some of the issues relating to the incorporation of Chinese symbols in the work of overseas artists. Zoe's statement draws our attention to the fact that when Chinese artists incorporate Chinese references into their work it is frequently a transmigration or reinterpretation of Chinese culture from a distance. In other words, Chinese identity outside China is distinctly different from within mainland China. Significantly, the idea of transnational experience reflects this difference by acknowledging that Chinese art is altered irrevocably by migration and the adoption of other sources of inspiration.

Case Study Two: Beverly in the house

Beverly Ng was born in Jiangsu province, China. Her father was an architect turned investment manager; her mother a freelance architect. Beverly was born two years after China adopted its current constitution and grew up during a time of significant economic reforms under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. As Beverly was growing up, many Chinese were reaping the benefits of China's great economic growth and many, for the very first time, had access to wealth in the form of money, gems like jade, and even education. Education in China during this period evolved significantly and people were learning about things around them

and the outside world. This led many families to send their children overseas for foreign education and also to experience different cultures.

Beverly arrived in New Zealand on 14 February 2002 and attended the Victoria University of Wellington foundation course, a mandatory one to two year course that certain international students take to be entitled to study in Victoria University. During her one year of study, Beverly stayed in a 'home-stay', a form of intercultural-integration-accommodation-system where international students stay with a New Zealand family as if they were a guest of a close family friend. This accommodation system not only allows international students to immerse themselves in the daily lives of a New Zealand family but also allows New Zealanders to communicate and get to know people from different cultures in a comfortable and productive environment. For instance, Beverly spent Christmas with her home-stay family when she exchanged gifts for the first time and understood the symbolic rituals of various holidays and events in a more intimate way. She would also experience home cooked New Zealand meals for dinner (also known as "tea"). During her first year, Beverly flooded her taste buds with New Zealand cuisine. Dishes like fish and chips, meat pies, custard squares, pavlovas and hangis were just a few examples.

In her 10 years living in New Zealand, Beverly collected various items. Some she both bought and collected herself, others were given to her by friends and family. One object in her collection is a drift bottle. A friend Dan found the bottle in a gift shop in Sydney, Australia. Beverly's friendship with Dan was not built overnight but sustained over a period of eight years. They now live on different continents but they are able to keep in touch and support each other even though Dan now lives in London. Beverly feels that this gift has become a strong attachment because of Dan's perception of Beverly and how it has been treasured over the years of their friendship.

Beverly recounts: "Since it is a gift given by one of my best friends, this object has been attached with a deep sentimental value. Not only did Dan get this present for me from a store on an ordinary day in Australia after jogging but he also instantly

thought of me when he had the feeling that he wanted move from New Zealand to the UK. The story of how he thought of me without the prior intention of buying a gift but ended up getting one is particularly flattering and poignant. The object has been personalised after hearing the story because the gift is unlike any other kind but one that can light up many memorable but subtle thoughts of Dan who is miles away in another country”

The gift, as a symbolic object, seemingly ignited some memories of Dan and Beverly’s friendship while Dan was living in New Zealand. According to Burman’s article, “Yearning” is a future-oriented and galvanising mode of desire that is later to be distinguished from nostalgic” (Burman, 2002). Beverly further emphasises “to be honest, there are days when I am homesick, and looking at this little bottle makes me remember Dan and the good-old-times.” To Beverly, the action of looking at this drift bottle enacts a connection to the past, and provides a sense of comfort. The bottle’s interior discloses further importance. Three rolled-up pieces of paper are found within, one of which contains a note with the following message:

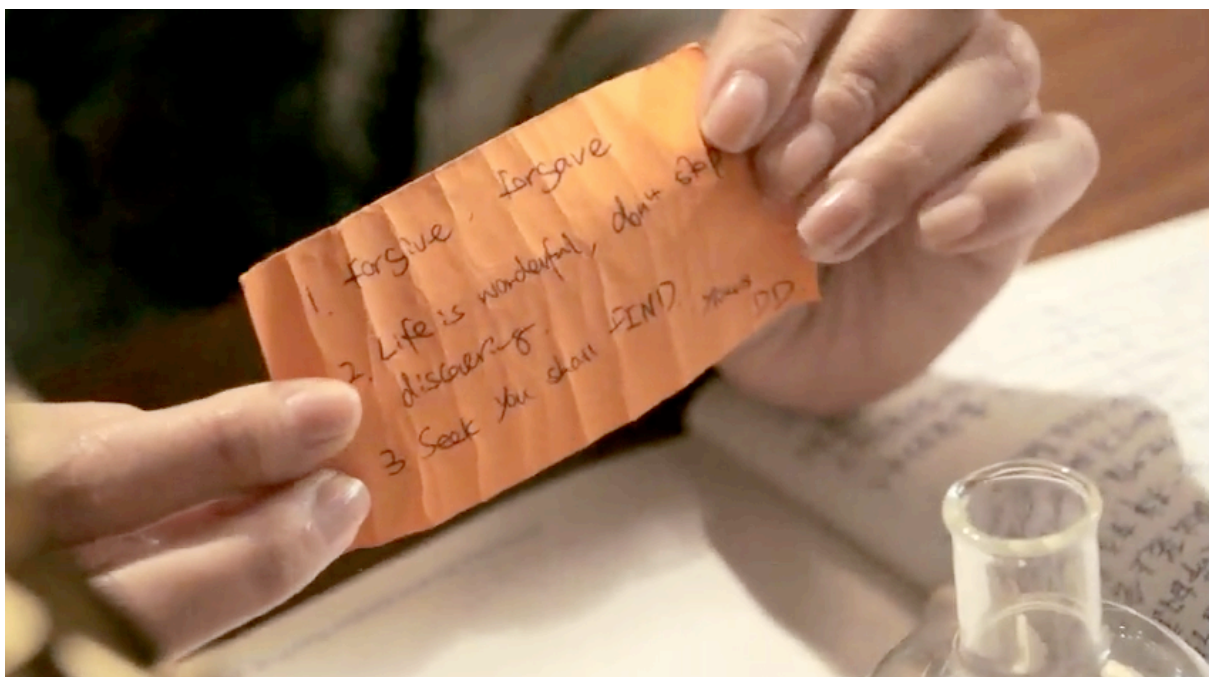


Fig 4. Case Study Two: Beverly in the house

Description: Beverly holding the notes from her drift bottle, Wellington, New Zealand, 2012.

Photo taken by: Screenshot from video. Video shot by Ctrl N Studio

The bottle and its message invoke Dan and Beverly's shared personality. There is a hint of motivation between the two, both of whom left China for New Zealand together, to explore or "drift" off to discover the world. The drift bottle also instils memories of everlasting friendship through three points of advice. Although outsiders may be indifferent to the message, to Dan and Beverly it represents the enduring points of their friendship.

Objects can simply be one of utility, and humans have material needs when objects can satisfy them (Carrier, 1995). Objects, particularly consumer goods, begin to enter into more private and feministic realms once they are produced. This understanding of objects appears as there is the growth in "consumption" in social sciences which explores the interest in people's relationships with objects. There are different ways to consider what value objects hold. It is true that it is impossible for people to think about objects if we don't attend to the ways that objects bestow distinction upon the owner (Carrier, 1995). According to Appandurai (1986), economic exchange creates value. Value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged, rather than simply on the forms or functions of exchange, which make it possible to argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is politics, construed broadly. There is value in economic exchange because it has become a widely regarded manner of understanding value. However, in the form of exchange in the context of Dan and Beverly, it is undeniable that there is a sentimental value that is embodied through this exchange too. Carrier notes that objects implicated in personal relationships are gifts. He further explains that commodities are not oriented to the physical production of objects, for such production is important in all societies, but they are supposed to be oriented to the social production of objects (Carrier, 19). In order to see gifts in a clearer framework, Carrier explains the gift exchange is oriented

by the system of social reproduction, thus explaining it with reference to the social conditions of the reproduction of people.

Carrier could also explain in academic terms how gifts can still create a sense of sentimentality in the mixture of bizarre commercialisation and sentimentality. The gift addresses the nature of the relationship that links those who transact the object and the nature of the relationship between person and objects; and in this context, it will be the friendship between Beverly and Dan.

Another item that has diasporic value to Beverly is her jade bracelet⁶ that she inherited from her grandmother. Since receiving it, never has she taken the bracelet off and has thus accepted the object as part of her.

In Chinese, "jade"(yu) refers to a fine, beautiful stone with a warm colour and rich luster that is skilfully carved. In Chinese culture, jade symbolises nobility, perfection, constancy, and immortality. For ages, jade has been an intimate part of the lives of all Chinese. It is considered the most valuable of all precious stones. Jade is found in mountains and riverbeds, and Chinese consider jade to be "the essence of heaven and earth." Jade needs to be thought of as an essence produced through the natural forces of rivers and mountains over eons. If it is not skilfully cut and polished, there is no way for the potential richness and luster that people prize to be expressed. The Chinese have a saying that goes: "If jade is not properly cut, it cannot be made into a useful utensil." Cutting is an important step in the process of producing jade articles.⁷

⁶ The jade bracelet is dark green and 56-58mm in diameter. The bangle is rounded on the outside and inside (it is believed that the jade bracelets with rounded insides fit closer to the wrist to stimulate acupressure points constantly to improve health).

⁷ The earliest jade object found in China was a piece of serpentine jade unearthed in the Immortal Cave in Haicheng of Liaoning Province and dating back to the New Stone Age, more than 12,000 years ago. The second piece was a small hanging jade article excavated at the site of Hemudu in Zhejiang Province and dating back more than 7,000 years. Jadeware in that period was mainly used for personal decoration. A large number of exquisite jade objects were produced 4,000 years ago. Jade objects at that time were mainly used for witchcraft and as an emblem of



Fig 5. Case Study Two: Beverly in the house
Description: Beverly wearing her jade bracelet, Wellington, New Zealand, 2012.
Photo taken by: Screenshot from video. Video shot by Ctrl N Studio

In this case study, Beverly presented two diaries; the first written in Mandarin and the other in English. When asked why she wrote her diary in two languages, she explained she lacked the confidence to write or communicate in English when she

privilege. The manufacture of Chinese jade articles was already highly developed by the Shang Dynasty (16th to 11th century B.C). The Chinese of this period had the technology to produce jade articles of every imaginable type, shape, and size. By the end of the Chou Dynasty (11th century to 256 B.C.) and the beginning of the Han Dynasty, Chinese jades reached a second peak in their development; craftsmen had more advanced tools as well as more efficient methods of polishing jade and creating unsurpassed masterpieces. From this point on, jade craftsmen could accommodate practically any and every customer demand. According to ancient Chinese legend, the phoenix and the dragon were animal deities that were the life-source of family clans. For this reason, jade was often used as a material for carving phoenixes and dragons which were worn as ornaments. These ornaments symbolized the noble bearings of a gentleman, and are the origin of the Chinese saying: "The gentleman's morals are like jade."

first arrived in New Zealand. After being able to engage fully in many aspects of life in New Zealand, she finally succeeded or felt comfortable communicating in English. In this particular situation, the diary is evidence of her cultural learning process because it documents periods of time in which Beverly was in a sojourner state of mind when she had fully shifted to a transnational identity.

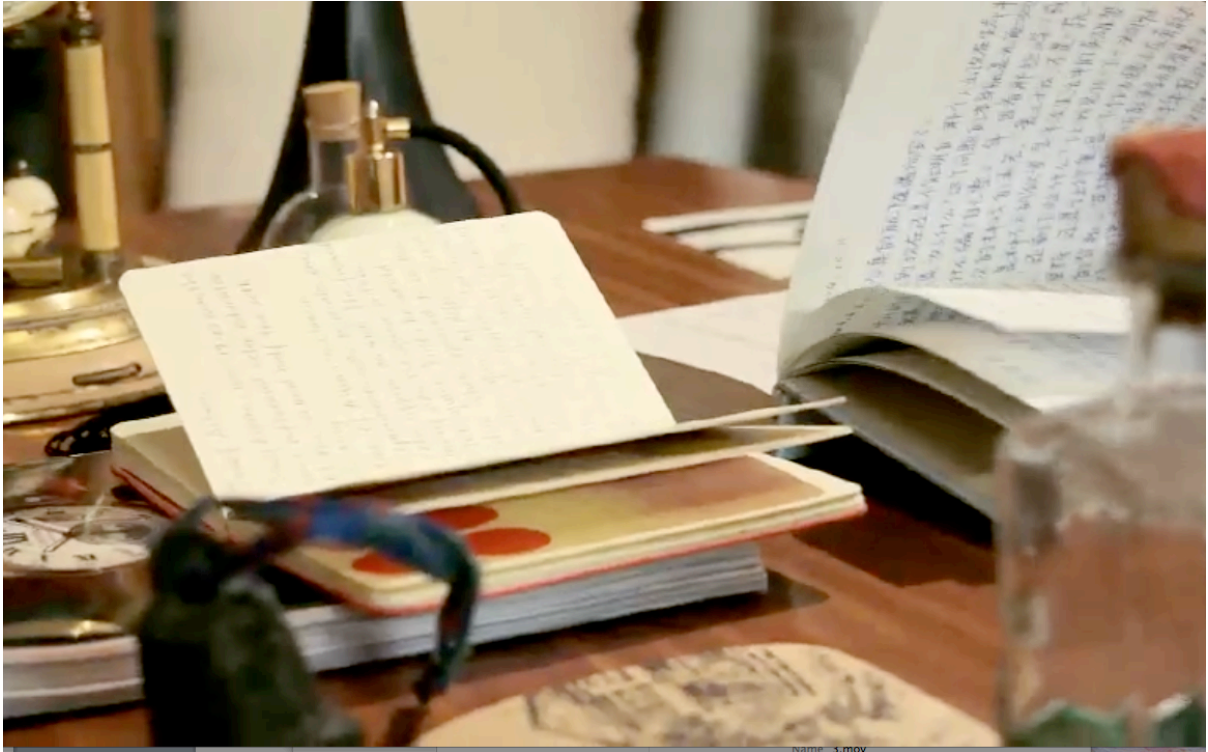


Fig 6. Case Study Two: Beverly in the house
Description: Beverly's diaries, Wellington, New Zealand, 2012.
Photo taken by: Screenshot from video. Video shot by Ctrl N Studio

Beverly has worn her grandmother's jade bracelet for as long as she can remember. It holds significance in regards to her father's explanation to her that the value of the bracelet through accounts told by Confucius (551 BC - 479 BC). The following is a passage from Beverly's English diary explaining the importance of Jade:

The wise have likened jade to virtue. For them, its polish and brilliancy represent the whole of purity; its perfect compactness and extreme hardness represent the sureness of intelligence; its angles, which do not cut, although they seem sharp, represent justice; the pure and prolonged sound, which it gives forth when one strikes it, represents music. Its colour represents loyalty; its interior flaws, always showing themselves through the transparency, call to mind sincerity; its iridescent

brightness represents heaven; its admirable substance, born of mountain and of water, represents the earth. Used alone without ornamentation it represents chastity. The price that the entire world attaches to it represents the truth. To support these comparisons, the Book of Verse says: "When I think of a wise man, his merits appear to be like jade."

In the interviews, I concluded with Beverly, that it is apparent that the superstitions and purpose of jade is instilled in her by her parents and the Chinese community around her. She reiterated comments from uncles and aunties who have told her that jade has spiritual healing properties, can draw wealth, promotes longevity, brings luck, etc. She also recalls her parents explaining how the jade 'qi' helps to balance the body, and the body 'qi' flows into the jade. If you are healthy and happy, your jade will become more beautiful and valuable as you wear it. Hence, wearing a jade bangle that fits close to your wrist and bumps the bones on your wrist stimulates acupuncture points that are located around the wrist bone and keeps the 'qi' flowing smoothly for health and youthfulness. Often enough Beverly repeats these accounts as if they have indeed brought her luck or good health. However, it should also be noted that Beverly does not seem to appreciate the value of the bracelet as much as she appreciates the meaning and value of the bracelet to her parents and family members. In every account of why the jade bracelet is so important, she often starts with a reference to a close relative and how they have explained the importance of the bracelet. Through this we can identify how the value of the bracelet brings back old stories told by relatives and how these stories bring sentimental attachment to Beverly. These stories bring with them a sense of belonging, which Beverly confirms, and brings her joy and a sense of nostalgia. It also reminds her of her culture and the spirituality of that culture in her upbringing and how it created her identity. Thus it is undeniable that this jade bracelet is representative of Beverly's cultural roots. Nevertheless, by inheriting jewellery from one's ancestor, Beverly is inclined to have a stronger association with that object. She also believes that she will pass the bracelet on to her daughter along with the stories told. The bracelet, while not inherently diasporic, is a reminder of Beverly's lineage and roots, and is very important in sustaining memories of her family members, both past and present. In a similar

way, the bracelet also plays a strong role in her personal identity, as it has become a visual reminder of my Chinese roots. Although this object originated in Burma it has come to be associated with China. This transformation has come about in part because it is one of the few objects that were passed down from her family. A lack of diasporic objects has created a wake that has resulted in this jade bracelet assuming a role, which it might not otherwise have. In its ability to sustain a connection to a homeland, this object has been framed as a diasporic object.

Since “Diaspora” is a term that is used to describe the transnational connections between people and homeland, it can cover a lot more space and the people that are around. It expands to the relationships between the object and the owner, and how the object can be related to so many other things in the world. In the following examples, these objects have connected people together in different forms while creating different sentiments altogether. The emotional sentiment that attaches on the object makes the object more than just a mere object. Sentiment is a by-product of the relationship that links the owner and the object. Often, these relationships are evident in the objects biographically.

Case Study Three: Annabel’s vintage dress

Clothing plays an important part in our lives. It often has the meaning that we substantiate our sense of self and our place in society. Clothing becomes an indicator of personal worth, values and beliefs as well as those of the culture we live in. The associations that we have with clothing reveal the connection between a person and their culture. In this regard, clothing has multiple meanings and it continually serves as a material culture reflecting the people living in that culture. This case study therefore focuses on the multiple meanings of clothing and its connection to the individual’s culture. In particular, this paper looks at a vintage dress that belonged to Annabel and its representation of her and the culture of China. Not only is this vintage dress the product of the culture, but also it is significant to Annabel because of its personal biography. Having that said, this case study argues that a vintage dress has multiple meanings in reflecting a

personal experience and being a cultural symbol as well as a biographical object. Therefore, in considering the vintage dress using theories present in material culture studies, we can begin to ask questions about the objects themselves and the migration process as a whole.

Annabel Wong inherited her dress from her grandmother who passed it down from her mother. The dress is estimated to be 50-60 years old and was probably made in the early 1960s. All that is known is that the dress was bought in China by Annabel's grandmother and gifted to Annabel's mother when she was 23 years old. Annabel herself inherited the dress when she was 23. Annabel tells the story:

“When I was ten years old, my mother asked me to help her with folding some clothes. After folding all of her clothes, I put them into the drawers. Because there was not enough space, I had to look for another place to store my mother's clothes. I slowly searched for a place to put the clothes, but it seemed like all the empty spaces had been filled. I noticed that at the corner of the closet there was one drawer that had nothing inside but a dark red dress. I remembered my mother talking about her special dress before. My mother once told me that she had a very special dress being kept in a very special place. This was a very special dress to her because it was the only thing that she kept for herself since her childhood. To my mother, the dress is not just a dress; it is a part of her life story. At age of ten, that was all I knew about the dress. Until the time when I was 23 years old, I decided to go to New Zealand to study. The day before I left my home, my mother could not say a thing because deep down from her heart, she knew that she was going to miss me a lot, but because of my future, she had to let me go. It was a very emotional experience for my mother and me. That night, we could not sleep and she came to my room giving me a small package. She handed it to me. I opened the package and saw the red dress that I saw many years ago. My mother slowly said to me, “Well Anna, I guessed that it is a right time for you to have this dress especially when you are going to be away for a while. Just remember to carry the dress with you everywhere you go and wear it on your important days. It will bring you luck.” I waited for my mother to continue talking. She slowly told me, “Well you know that this dress once belonged to your grandmother then to me and now to you. Your grandmother had kept the dress as one of her most precious things. Your grandmother loved this dress very much. It

was a gift from her boyfriend many years ago. He gave it to her so that they could wear the dress on their wedding day. The day before he went to join the military, he told your grandmother to wait for him to return and get married. Well I guess your grandmother had waited for all her life and never had a chance to wear this dress” My mother hesitated for a moment then she started to talk, “Well it was because he never came back, perhaps he had died during the war. However, your grandmother believed that he still here alive and always be. She hoped and waited for his return until the day she passed away”. My mother said, “I know it was the sad story and I don't mean to say all of this to make you sad; nonetheless, it is because I want you to know how much the dress meant to your grandmother and to me. The story might be sad but you know that the dress live with your grandmother every step she goes. It is neither a gift nor a dress; it is her past and her future. I want you to have this dress because I want you to know that life is constantly changing and on your journey, you might find many difficulties; you must remember that everything will be fine in the end. May the dress bring you luck Anna.”



Fig 7. Case Study Three: Annabel's vintage dress
Description: Annabel's grandmother wearing the vintage dress, Hong Kong, China, 1956.
Photo taken by: Unknown.

The very fact that people like Annabel, her mother and grandmother had items they had owned for over twenty years hanging in their wardrobe alongside more recently acquired items raises the importance of considering the long-term relationship women have to their clothing. If an understanding of clothing and identity is reduced to the externally imposed temporality of the fashion system, then the relationships women form to their clothing may come to appear ephemeral. One consideration would be the way in which clothing is used to both remember former versions of the self (Banim and Guy, 2001) and visualise potential future selves to which a person might aspire. In this case, the vintage dress has become the metaphorical shoe that Annabel and her mother have stepped into in memory of Annabel's grandmother. In both cases, the wardrobe represents an external and material visualisation as opposed to the internal and intangible nature of memory. Memories through clothing acquire a particular poignancy as they are evoked through the physical sensuality and tactility of clothing. In this particular case, Annabel states that "the dress reminds me of mom and grandma. Mom always said that only a Wong lady would fit into that dress and that stuck in my head for as long as I can remember. She would show me pictures of grandma wearing the dress and compare them with pictures of herself wearing it.



Fig 8. Case Study Three: Annabel's vintage dress
Description: Annabel's mother wearing the vintage dress, Guang Zhou, China, 1989.
Photo taken by: Unknown.

When we consider how women choose what to wear, on many occasions these former identities through clothing, are not relegated to a terminated past. In wearing older items again, the past is reactivated, and the conventional biographical trajectory 'of development from the past to the anticipated future' (Giddens, 1991: 75) becomes problematic. This is supported by Annabel's acceptance that she anticipates that she will not fit the dress in the future self and this should signify that it is time to pass the dress on: "I think when the time comes when I can't fit the dress I will pass it on to my daughter". Patricia A. Cunningham and Susan Voso Lab (1991) suggested that regardless of the size of group or society in which membership is thought to be important, there is a need on the part of the individual to belong, to fit in, and to be accepted by peers. One way to show the acceptance of the group's philosophy and standards is to dress in a way

that reflects those same ideals.⁸ Society or groups have expectations or notions of what is acceptable attire for those who are socially mature. For instance, in the nineteenth century, specific clothing had connections with particular societal categories such as class, status, time, gender and occupation. This left the idea that appropriate clothing became more intertwined with rules of acceptable behaviours. We see this evident in Annabel's need to be accepted as a Wong descendant, by keeping the dress and being able to wear the dress. She suggests that the expectation of being able to fit into the dress as important, if not more important, than owning the dress, a significant pride of being a Wong.

In another article, "Living in a material world: object biography and transnational lives", Karen Schamberger introduced the term "object biography" as an analytical process that has emerged within material culture studies as a way to reveal and understand object agency. By saying, "object agency", she understood it as the idea of human agency for having a capacity to make choices and to act based on conscious choices. With reference to the work of Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, an object agency is an artefact's life history to "Address the way social interactions involving people and objects create meaning and to understand how these meanings change and are renegotiated through the life of an object. More importantly, Gosden emphasised that material things are not just external supports of internal life. Rather, he found that people and things have mutual biographies, which unfold in culturally specific ways. By exploring how subjectivity is created by the material world, Gosden's explanation of object biography focuses on the ideas of how things affect people who own them. In the case of object biography, Guna Kinne's Latvian national dress, Gunna Kinne had her way of preserving her nation through the way she preserved her national dress. In the article, she described her feeling when wearing her Latvian dress to an invitation by a Good Neighborhood Council to join other "new Australians" at which she said, "in a way, I was proud to show off the dress, because it was unusual, being red and all". Furthermore, by wearing the dress in Australia, she is also able to be politically active during the two Melbourne rallies for celebrating the fiftieth

anniversary of Latvia's declaration of independence and recognising the incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union. Hoskins (1998) also discusses how objects may be biographical in the example of the betel bag, amongst the Kodi of the Eastern Indonesian island of Sumba – a society which she notes lacks the tradition of telling life stories. As such, the past is accessed and understood through objects. The betel bag is carried around by adults all the time, and so the object is imbued with the owner's personality to the extent that, in some instances, a betel bag can be buried in lieu of a person. The notion of clothing forming an extension of the person is useful when considering these items women do not wish to throw away. Just as the betel bag and the Latvian dress are a constant comparison to the Kodi and Latvia, Annabel has kept the vintage dress over the years so that this clothing is inseparable from herself. When the self is extended through objects, the person is able to stand outside of, and reflect upon, themselves; and so, when Annabel cleans her wardrobe and sees that vintage red dress hanging there, she is considering her former self, her mother and her grandmother. In keeping the items, she is able to retain these memories rather than rely on the intangible, unreliability of memory in the mind.

The dress also helps Annabel construct and legitimate her current position in life. Whilst not wishing to return to the past, she does not want to relinquish the knowledge of this dress belonging to her grandmother and the emotional biography it has inherited. Banim and Guy (2001), in discussing why women keep clothing they no longer wear, point to the connectivities between former items and current identities. One of the means by which this is achieved is through establishing continuity between the former and the contemporary; yet for Annabel such continuity is present within the term 'vintage'. Even though she does not wear the dress everyday it does not mean that the dress is not relegated to her past entirely, as she also uses them in the construction and justification of a current identity; like all forms of memory, the dress is seen from the perspective of the present. Furthermore, the emotional biography is not restricted to that of her grandmother and mother. As Annabel talks about the dress, she strokes it fondly, telling how it brings back so many memories – when she made her first cheeky foray to the pub at the age of 23 and to a friend's party. She remembers the

excitement she felt and considered it her 'most dressy and exciting item', and even now she can recount how her hair spiked up when she wore it and how the soft fabric caressed her skin. The feel of the soft silk on her hands enables Annabel to reimagine herself through the sensuality of the item, as she remembers what it felt like to wear the dress. The importance of such sensual aspects of wearing becomes apparent when clothing is understood in more detail, from the perspective of the wearer, as an embodied experience (Entwistle, 2000). Clothing is imbued with meaning not only through how it appears, but also through how it feels, smells, and sounds (Barnes and Eicher, 1993). The touch of the clothing on the skin enables Annabel to be resituated as she is able to remember how it felt to wear the clothing. It is through this tactility that the wearer recaptures the potentialities of their former self as a particular experience of remembering is triggered (Kuechler, 1999: 54). Writing on wine collectors, Belk (1995) notes that on tasting each wine, people were able to remember exactly where they were when they first tasted it. With clothing this happens through touch and feel rather than through taste. Touching the silk dress evoked the other sensation associated with wearing the item.



Fig 9. Case Study Three: Annabel's vintage dress
Description: Annabel wearing the vintage dress, Auckland, New Zealand, 2012.
Photo taken by: Vivian Shao.

Annabel in her interviews expressed similar feelings. Although her dress lacks any cultural symbols on the surface other than the red colour, Annabel feels that the fact that the dress has a western cut or fit and was bought during a time when China was politically fragile has Chinese culture interwoven in the dress. The dress also represented China's openness to western culture, in the length of the dress, while conserving any beautifications or decorations to respect the Marxist ideology present then. Having a similar idea, David Parkin in his article "mementoes as transnational objects in human displacement", claimed that the movements of persons are associated with the objects that they find attached to them. In particular, Parkin argued that the "transnational objects" carried by people

in crisis “inscribe their person hood in flight but offer the possibility of their own de-objectification and re-personalisation afterwards”. Parkin began his paper by introducing Alfred Gell’s theory of the art nexus, which refers to the idea of “social trails may lead up to and follow the use of physical objects that insofar as they are sometimes associated with particular persons, extend that personhood beyond the individual’s biological body”. In arguing for personhood, Parkin suggested, “when a person cannot trust the people around, he is opening to inscribe his sense of a personal future and identity in whatever remains to the hand of impersonal physical, mental, and bodily object: to invest emotionally”.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the formation of transnational identity can mainly be constructed through the association of multiple cultural identities, the transference of cultures, and the re-function and association of cultural significations within different countries. The dynamic cultural significations come with the geographical border-crossing. The transnational immigrant route takes significations such as images and values to multiple cultural sites. In other words, the transnational subjects not only cross national borders themselves, but they also exercise signification in transit, and make those significations rework within different cultural places. For the immigrants, regardless of their geographical separation from an original culture, they in reality gain emotional attachment to their migrant countries through material culture. Transgression of national boundaries not only refers to the crossroads of national boundaries but also means the mutual influences of different cultures. The moving individuals enact the transit of cultural significations and promote a reshaping of heterogeneous cultures, and various facets of cultures can co-exist within a larger social context.

In this thesis I have included three case studies about three transnational individuals and the objects that they have brought with them to New Zealand. Individually and together, they have revealed some of the complexities of understanding the interrelated life journeys of people and objects they bring with

them. I can also conclude that each of these objects tells a story of strong affection that is further entwined with biographies and memories. In the example of Annabel's dress, in which donors chose to part with their treasured object as part of marking a change in their lives and to pass on a piece of memory down to a different generation, we had cause to consider the creation of collections as a form of autobiography. When asked what would have happened if the dress was not passed down from the generations, Annabel said:

“To lose that dress is similar to losing an important piece of evidence from the past. It is really not a statement of fashion because wearing it so often would eventually destroy the dress. It is a symbol of one's ancestry.”

Nevertheless the connection to China is imbued most significantly in Annabel's dress and the connection it represents to the 'homeland' and her ancestry and the need to continue seeking out connections to that homeland even in diasporic contexts.

Not all of the object biographies weave an individual's story so closely with that of an object. Objects exert agency in diverse and often interconnected ways: as repositories of memories, mechanisms for the transfer of skills, as sites for negotiating cultural frameworks, as arenas for imaginative escape, modes of connecting with lost family, or metonyms for other places or things. In every case, however, objects work as channels for simultaneous experience, collapsing geographical, temporal and perceptual differences. As people engage with them, the objects enable them to simultaneously experience and mediate multiple times, places and modes of being.

Transnational identity is not a choice between either homeland or adoptive country, or that between origin and destination. Neither does the transnational subject have to make a choice between worlds. All three transnational subjects observe that it is hard for an individual to make a clear-cut distinction between cultural impacts. The transnational identity, translated via objects, is an ongoing process and has an interactive force between each culture.

In this research I have also identified that, in most cases where transnational individuals are trying to adapt to their foreign environment, they are constantly challenged by the notion of identity and the shift of that identity from foreign to familiar. However, to achieve this, transnational individuals need to first appreciate the two reference points: the beginning or their roots and the end point of familiarity with their foreign environment. In this thesis we have identified that transnational individuals use objects to store memories as they move from one reference point to the other. This is relevant in the study of transnational subjects and visual and material culture because it allows us to identify the factors - such as language, education, politics, technology - that impact on the lives of transnationals as they transition between different cultures. This in turn could potentially provide future researchers with the necessary tools in identifying how we can “successfully” transition into another culture. Furthermore, future research may choose to explore different aspects of transnational adaptation such as how they choose objects to bring with them, how they ‘communicate’ with objects, if they ever dispose of the objects or if they pass them down to future generations.

Objects play a particularly important role in the shaping of transnational lives. We see the example of Beverly’s gift and how it proves the point that changes in a person’s location unavoidably generates new interactions between a person and a different material world. These interactions—and efforts to sustain previous interactions by continuing to use, make and treasure objects from another place or given by someone else—shape how a person experiences their life across multiple places. Paying close attention to how these transnational subjects absorb, reject, accommodate and reinvent material culture reveals valuable information about the nature and meaning of those experiences to them and how it functions in their individual lives away from their ‘home’ country. The contribution of this thesis also falls on the justification and the analysis of object-subject correlation that material culture can be used as a tool to further explore and understand the phenomenon of transnationalism.

Although this thesis has reached its aims, there were some unavoidable limitations. First, because of time constraints this research was conducted on a

small sample of transnational individuals. Second, the study is exposed to perceptual misrepresentations of each of the participants – or the groups as a whole. Furthermore, the element of bias is stronger in this thesis because of the snow-ball sampling approach undertaken. There is a potential that all participants share a collective opinion when one participant explains to the next what the interview is about. The scope of the thesis has been limited to 8 participants who all live in the Wellington and Auckland region. Case studies were limited to participants who have lived in New Zealand for more than 10 years. To achieve greater accuracy in the generalisation of transnational subjects, the study needed to involve more participants. Another limitation that was identified during the research was that there were difficulties in analysing or interpreting comments participants had that were in Mandarin or another language. Certain Mandarin words or characters have opposite meanings; such as the word 'jie' which could mean to borrow or to lend. One method of overcoming this would be to have the participants translate the meaning during the interview or to have an interpreter present at the interview. Lastly, the interpretation and analysis of the objects presented by the participants were strictly narrative (except for the diary transcripts). This means that any exaggeration or inaccuracy of accounts cannot be scoped out of the research results.

As a whole, this thesis has achieved its aim by answering the research question. It evidences that visual and material culture function as objects that capture significant events in the lives of transnational individuals and it reminds them of their roots and the 'home' they came from and also of the 'home' they have acculturated into. By constantly reminding them of these events, these objects provide the emotional and psychological support they require to overcome the various challenges they face while living in a foreign environment. As they move from one 'home' to another, these memories grow and the objects they collect become a cultural biography.

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Appendix 1: Beverly's Video Interview

Appendix 2: Summary of Interview Questions

1. Why did you first come to New Zealand?
2. What difficulties did you experience adjusting to a foreign environment?
3. What factors made your adjustment into the new environment easier?
4. What experiences made it easier to interact with the local community?
5. What were your expectations of the foreign environment?
6. How frequent was your communication/contact maintained between you and your home country friends and family?
7. How well did you understand or relate to how foreigners behaved?
8. How many countries have you visited prior to your stay here for a duration longer than one week?
9. How did you approach the challenge of communicating with people from different countries?
10. Did you visit the country prior to your stay?
11. Whom did you mainly socialize with in the foreign environment? (people from your own culture, other internationals, or host-country nationals)
12. How do you usually socialize with people back home?
13. How did you socialize with people in foreign countries?
14. Whom did you live with in the foreign environment? (people from your own culture, other internationals, or host-country nationals)
15. What was it like to go home to your home country? (for holidays or permanently)
16. What media or technology helps you maintain links back home? (Facebook/Twitter?)

Appendix 3: Visual Essay