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# THE USE OF VISUAL NARRATIVES IN RESEARCH WITH OLDER CHINESE IMMIGRANTS

Wendy Wen Li, Darrin Hodgetts, Otilie Stolte  
School of Psychology  
University of Waikato



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
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# Acknowledgements



# Overview

- Introduction
- Methods:
  - Visual narrative
- Results:
  - Visualising self (re)construction
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- Discussion

# Introduction

- ◉ Words are only one form of communication. In contemporary social sciences, photography has emerged as an influential communication method (Hodgetts, Chamberlain, & Radley, 2007; Radley, Chamberlain, Hodgetts, Stolte, & Groot, 2010).
- ◉ A photograph “might function as a narrative if we recognize its visual codes as belonging to ... a form dominated by narrative such as cinema, theatre or history painting” (Soutter, 2000, p. 3).
- ◉ A photo narrative as “a set of photographs arranged to create a storyline within the constraints of a particular format” (Baetens and Ribiere, 1995, p. 314).

# Introduction

- Riessman (2008) argues that visual representations of experiences in photographs enable researchers and/or audiences to see as participants see, and to feel.
- This argument is supported by Radley (2002) who proposes that pictures not only restore feeling, but also the capacity to feel. Photography provides a means of documenting processes through which participants make sense of what they see and experience.
- In the process, links between personal identities, local contexts, society, history and culture are invoked (Harper, 2005).

# Introduction

- Photography was used as part of our methodology because it is ideally suited to the study of people's everyday life, providing a pictorial dimension of culturally meaningful objects and settings (*cf.*, Radley et al., 2010).
- Visual analysis precedes conventional verbal interviews by visual materials that encourage researchers and readers to understand the world as defined by participants (Harper, 2005).
- Visual narrative is not a copy, substitute, or complement to text narrative. It is instead an alternate form of representation that focuses on the parts of culture which cannot be accessed by just the use of words (Trafletti, 2009).
- Seeing often comes before words to establish people's place in the surrounding world (Berger, 1977).

# Introduction

- Using visual analysis, we challenge the dominant narrative which emphasises, sometimes even overemphasises, on older migrants' negative experiences and to build a new story which enhances alternative knowledge (*cf.*, Murray, 1997b).
- This paper will
  - generate alternative stories that integrate vital and previously neglected aspects of older immigrants' lived experiences, such as their capacities to a positive growth and openness to change and adaptation.
  - provide alternatives to the dominant trends in immigration and social psychological research towards the increased reliance on simplified measures to represent complexities of human movement, transnational practices and the processes of cultural transformation.

# Methods

- Research participants are 14 males and 18 females ranging in age from 62 to 77 years.
- All participants were new migrants from the People's Republic of China.
- At the time of the initial interview, 22 participants lived with their spouse or lived alone, and 10 lived with their adult children.
- The participants' primary source of income was social benefits of no more than NZ\$10,000 per annum.
- Prior to moving to New Zealand, the majority were employed as professionals including engineers, medical doctors, nurses, teachers, physiotherapists, and managers.



# Methods

- Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants.
- All participants took part in the initial two interviews which were conducted between April and October 2008.
- Ten of thirty two participated in the third interviews which were carried out during May to September 2009.
- The interviews lasted approximately two hours each and were conducted by the first author in either Mandarin or Cantonese.

# Methods

- ◎ “Go-Along” interview (Carpiano, 2009):
  - A house tour
  - Researchers can explore participants’ places with them and prompt the participants to reveal the history and personal relevance of particular domestic spaces in their everyday lives that would likely be missed by casual observers (Li, Hodgetts, & Ho, 2010)

# Methods

## ○ Visual analysis

- First, we recorded information of the production of photography, which set the scene of the photograph.
- Second, we interrogated the photograph, searching and re-searching the story it suggested.
- Third, we focused on how the photograph was read by the participant by discussing the photograph with the participant. we collectively interpreted the meaning attached to the photograph with the participant.
- Fourth, we interpreted the photographs alongside the oral texts.
- Such an analysis method enables us to show readers the world through the participants' eyes, for readers to see what the participants see. The participants' experiences therefore become "seeable" in ways that transcend the "sayable" (Riessman, 2008).

# Visualising self (re)construction: Movements and self-discrepancy

- The concept of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987):
  - There are three basic domains of the self: the actual self, ideal self and ought self.
  - The actual self is one's representation of the attributes that he/she or others believe he/she actually possesses.
  - The ideal self represents one's attributes that he/she or others would like him/her, ideally, to possess.
  - The ought self is one's traits that he/she or others believe he/she should or ought to possess.

# Visualising self (re)construction: Movements and self-discrepancy

- *A majority [of older Chinese immigrants] were high-level intellectuals. **They are hidden dragons and crouching tigers** in New Zealand. **I was a chief surgeon** in China but now **I am a beneficiary** in New Zealand. She (Sheng's wife) was a senior teacher. But in New Zealand we are the poor. We are nobody here. (Sheng, 69 years old male, lived in New Zealand for six years)*

# Visualising self (re)construction: Movements and self-discrepancy



Sheng and Hua cooking lunch

# Visualising self (re)construction: Movements and self-discrepancy

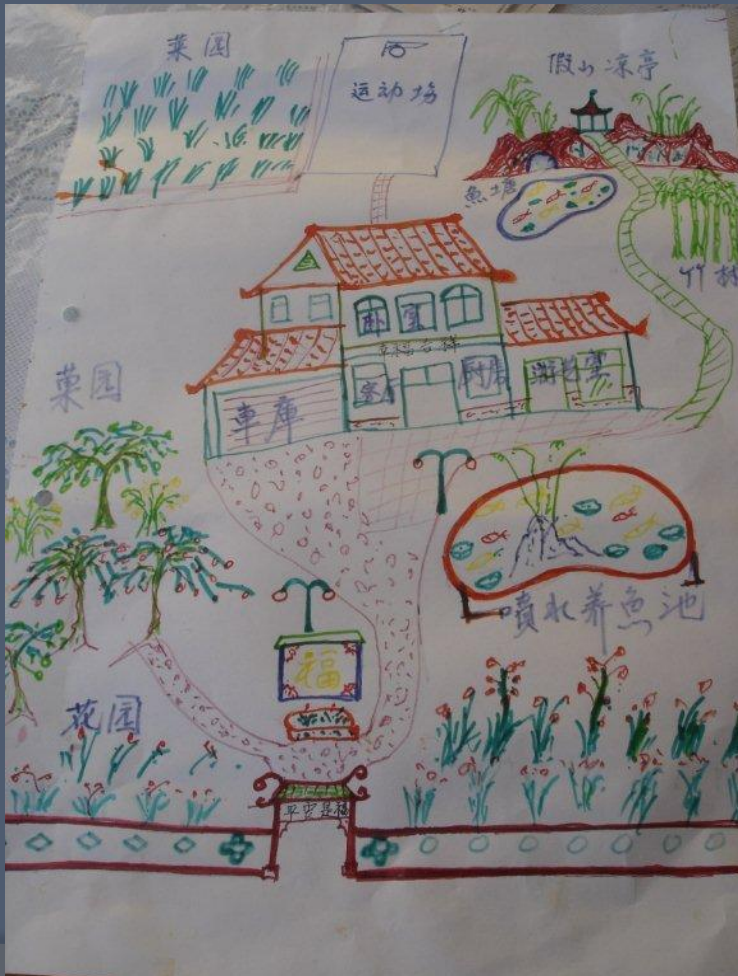
- *This was not what happens in our everyday life. I would not say that if he was here. He never helped me in cooking except last time (the first interview) when you were here. I look after everything in and outside our household, such as cooking and shopping. He didn't like me participating in community activities and sometimes was upset when I talked to my friends on the phone. He spends most of time in painting. He seldom goes out. He isolates himself. (Hua, 70 years old, lived in New Zealand for six years)*

# Visualising self (re)construction: Movements and self-discrepancy

- *I didn't think about it. This is not my house. I don't have financial ability to change it. I won't change it. (Jian, 69 years old male, lived in New Zealand for nine years)*



# Visualising self (re)construction: Movements and self-discrepancy



Huang's drawing of his future home (male, 69 yrs old, living in NZ for 6 yrs and 9 mths)

# Visualising self (re)construction: Movements and self-discrepancy



Sheng's painting room

# Visualising self (re)construction: Movements and self-discrepancy

- ◎ *I am somewhat unsociable. I have difficulties to get on with people I don't appreciate. I have been a doctor in my whole life. People asked for my help all the time... I seldom mingled with people spontaneously. I am sort of indulged in self-admiration ... Now I have a painting room. I can paint again. Many people came to me asking for my paintings. I gave them my paintings as gifts (Sheng).*

# Visualising self (re)construction: Movements and self-discrepancy



Sheng's uncompleted painting for his friend

# Visualising self (re)construction: Movements and self-discrepancy



Fen's work: *Heaven*  
(Female, 68 yrs old,  
living in NZ for 8 yrs and  
5 mths)

# Visualising self (re)construction: Movements and self-discrepancy

- ◉ *Heaven is my work I donated to my church. I call it as **a cultural graft**. I combined **the Chinese image of Dunhuang Flying** to the Western image of angel in the Bible. (Fen)*

# Visualising a sense of community



A shopping centre in Auckland

# Visualising a sense of community

- *There is no China town in New Zealand. But the Chinese is a big group in this city. We have a shopping centre like a China town. There are many Chinese shops and food outlets over there. I go to the shopping centre every day, collecting Chinese newspapers, meeting people and talking to my peers. (Tian, male, 69 yrs old, living in NZ for 8 yrs)*



# Visualising a sense of community



Weekly Ballroom Dance Party

# Visualising a sense of community

- *The Chinese association* organises weekly meetings and parties. Every Friday morning we meet in a community centre for seminars and information sharing. Every Sunday we organise the ballroom dance party. *Many of our members regard these two days as the most important days in the week.* I participate in these two events every week. (Ping, female, 73 yrs old, living in NZ for 7 yrs)

# Visualising a sense of community



Free Haircut

# Visualising a sense of community

- *The gentleman offers us free haircuts. I really appreciate that. In China, we had such free haircuts in parks specifically catering retired people. Now **when I sit in the chair and have the haircut, I feel like I am in China.** (Tian)*

# Visualising a sense of community



Chinese Books in a Library

# Visualising a sense of community

- *My husband is a quiet and shy man. He doesn't like socialising. He therefore is not interested in joining any of the Chinese organisations. He goes to the library every day. There are Chinese books and magazines in the library. He can sit there for four or five hours reading those Chinese books and magazines. He once told me that he really enjoyed reading a book about Chinese migrants. He said he knew more about himself from other's stories. He also enjoys the friendly atmosphere in the library. The librarians are very nice to him.*

# Discussion

- People telling stories about photographs are also telling stories about themselves, as moral beings with histories and beliefs, who are both socialised and individualised (Hurdley, 2006).
- Our analysis, of interactions between the persons, their homes and material cultures such as photographs, suggests that there is an active meaning-making process in which all three play a role.

# Discussion

- The self is not the act of the person whose action can shape the self alone.
- Instead, the materiality of the world is integral to the self-construction process and interacts with the person.
- The objectivity of the social world is socially constructed.
- It is an objectivity that arises out of the human practices and interactions (Jovchelovitch, 2007).



# Discussion

- Our analysis goes beyond simply providing insights into the hardship the participants experienced and how the participants survive in the face of adversity.
- Rather, we suggest that the participants not only cope with challenges, but also consider that their everyday situations foster their growth and positive changes (Hodgetts et al., 2010).
- The positive changes the participants experience include new possibilities of their lives and a greater sense of personal strength.
- In this sense, living with adversity can wound the participants both emotionally and physically, but can also encourage them to rethink their lives, grow and enable growth in others.

# Discussion

- This paper exemplifies that cultural diversity requires much greater consideration in the formulation of policies and social services that address diversity of experiences and of approaches to ageing in multicultural societies (Li, Hodgetts, Ho, & Stolte, 2010).
- Situating culture in larger society and attention on interpreting social issues through the cultural lenses of those concerned will expand responsiveness of policymaking and aged care.