

Narratives of Older Chinese Immigrants Living in New Zealand: The Meaning of Home

Wendy Wen Li

PhD Candidate

Department of Psychology, University of Waikato, New Zealand

Abstract

Inspired by symbolic interactionism, this paper explores the meaning of home for older Chinese immigrants. According to symbolic interactionism, homes may exist in physical form, but for the person or the group, they are pointed out, categorised, interpreted, and given meanings through social interaction. In that regard, homes are social objects which are constantly changing as they are defined and redefined, constructed and reconstructed in social interaction. This paper investigates the meaning of home amongst a group of older Chinese immigrants interviewed from April to October 2008. The methods of data collection and analysis were informed by a narrative approach. Initial and follow-up interviews were conducted with 22 households of older Chinese immigrants, with a total of 34 individual participants who were currently resident in New Zealand with permanent residency or New Zealand citizenship, who were born overseas and entered New Zealand under an immigration programme, and who self-identified as Chinese and were 65 and over years of age. For this group, home means a process of reconstructing the disruptive and discrepant self, and a process of negotiating domestic power. The findings suggest that the participant's narrative is a quest narrative, which reframes the biographical disruption as a challenge.¹

¹ This paper was presented at the 8th East-West Center International Graduate Student Conference, February 12-14, 2009 in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to utilise symbolic interactionism to analyse the meaning of home. Symbolic interactionism is usually traced back to the work of George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), who is now esteemed as one of the most creative philosophers in the pragmatic movement of the twentieth century (Desmonde, 1970). Mead wrote many articles, yet much of his influence on symbolic interactionism comes through the publishing of his lectures and notes by his students, as well as through interpretation of his work by various other sociologists, especially one of his students, Herbert Blumer (Charon, 1979).

When relying chiefly on the thoughts of Mead to discuss the nature of symbolic interactionism, Blumer (1969) maintained that symbolic interactionism rests in three simple premises. The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969).

Blumer (1969) asserted that these three premises are fundamental for symbolic interactionism. The first premise suggests that the meanings that things have for human beings are central in their own right and are essential in the formation of human behaviour. The second premise refers to the source of meaning. Meaning is viewed as arising in the process of interaction between people. The meaning of a thing for an individual grows out of the ways in which other individuals act towards the individual with regard to the thing. The individual's actions operate to define the thing for the individual. Therefore symbolic interactionism regards meanings as social products. Meanings are creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact. The third premise highlights that the use of meaning by a person in his or her action involves an interpretative process. Blumer contended that this process has two steps.

The first step is that the person indicates to himself or herself the things towards which he or she is acting. He or she has to point out to himself or herself the things that have particular meaning. The making of such indications is a selective process that the person communicates with himself or herself. The second step is that interpretation becomes a matter of handling meanings. The person selects, checks, suspends, regroupes and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action. Thus, interpretation is a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action. These two steps suggest that meaning plays its part in action through a process of self-interaction.

Inspired by the Mead's (1934) and Blumer's analysis of objects, in recent years there has been a proliferation of writing on the meaning of home, exploring the collective meanings of home for different groups. According to their theories, homes may exist in physical form, but for the person or the group, they are pointed out, categorised, interpreted, and giving meanings through social interaction. In that regard, homes are social objects which are constantly changing as they are defined and redefined, constructed and reconstructed in social interaction. Homes also have different meanings to different groups. Thus, it has been universally understood that home is a multidimensional concept varying among individuals and groups (Mallett, 2004; Marcus, 2006).

The association between home and the physical shelter is commonly acknowledged in the relevant interdisciplinary literature (Clapham, 2005; Mallett, 2004). It is a place where space and time are controlled (Mallett, 2004) and where safety, security and protection are provided (Clapham, 2005; McCracken, 1989). However, home is more than that. Many scholars argue that home is laden with emotional significance (Gurney, 1996; Scikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Gurney (1996) championed a primary focus on emotional elements of home, stating that the emotional discourses of family, intimacy and love are the most significant rationalisations drawn upon in making sense of home. Benjamin, Stea and Saile (1995) asserted that home is a cultural interpretation tool, a reflection of social contention and change, lessons from the past retrieved for the present. Hayward (1975), Marcus (2006), and Rubinstein and de Medeiros

(2005) conceptualised home as an expression of self and identity. People consciously and unconsciously use their home to express something about themselves. From the perspective of home being a symbol role, home expresses the social identity people wish to communicate. Thus, home is a very potent statement of who one is (Marcus, 2006). Giddens (1984) emphasises the home as the prime locale for the creation and sustenance of ontological security which is defined as “confidence or trust that the natural or social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and social identity” (Giddens, 1984, p. 375).

Specifically, a number of studies focus on the meaning of home for older people. Dupuis and Thorns (1996) depicted that the meaning of home among older home owners reflects concerns with security, family continuity and inheritance. They (1998) further employed Giddens’ concept of ontological security to explore the meaning of home for a group of older home owners in New Zealand. They found that home means constancy in the social and material environment, spatial context for the establishment of routine, a site where older people feel most in control of their lives, and a secure base around which older people can construct their identities (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). Swenson (1998) suggested that for older women home is the centre of self, the centre of caring for themselves, their families and their homes, and the centre of reach which encompasses movement outward from a central emotional and physical home base. Home provides the physical rootedness and attachment that enables movement and reach (Swenson, 1998).

Although there is little research touching on the meaning of home for older immigrants, Lewin (2001) presented a paper on the meaning of home among elderly immigrants. Lewin maintained that for elderly immigrants the meaning of home takes on a special character involving not only the fact that they have lost their homeland and former residence, but also their history and home. Lewin emphasised that elderly people who have immigrated to a new society encounter several obstacles to their development of a feelings of homeliness or being at home in their new living environment.

The literature offers valuable insights into the meaning of home. However, it by and large focuses on the meaning of home as a static product of personal, material and social environments. In the light of symbolic interactionism, I would argue that home is not just simply a linear representation of a person's socio-economic status. Rather, it is an on-going process that takes time to complete and that binds the individual's history to his or her present and future (Lewin, 2001), which focuses on interaction instead of on social structure.

This paper thus uses empirical data from New Zealand to demonstrate that home is a process for older Chinese immigrants. For them, home is a process of reconstructing the disruptive and discrepant self, and a process of negotiating domestic power.

Methods

Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique. Potential informants were approached through Chinese communities, church groups and personal contacts who provided referrals. The following criteria were used to recruit research participants: People who were currently resident in New Zealand with permanent residency or New Zealand citizenship, who were born overseas and entered New Zealand under an immigration programme, who self-identified as Chinese and were 65 and over years of age, and who lived in New Zealand for less than 15 years.

Participants

There were 14 male and 18 female participants aged between 62 and 77 years of age from 22 households in Auckland and Hamilton. Three participants were under 65 years of age. Their husbands were participants who were over 65 years old of this research. They were interested in participating in the research along with their husbands. They therefore were included in the research. All participants were originally from the People's Republic of China and were retirees. The duration of residence in New Zealand ranged from four months to 12 years and six months. With respect to participants' work positions before they moved to New Zealand, 11 participants

had been senior professionals (senior engineer, senior doctor and Associate Professor), 11 professionals (nurse, teacher, physiotherapist, engineer and artist), nine managers and one factory worker. Regarding highest qualification, one participant held a masters degree; 15 participants were bachelor degree holders; 13 held diploma and certificate and three held high school qualifications. With respect to income, 31 were supported by an Emergency Benefit by the Government and retirement income from China, ranging from NZ\$200 to NZ\$300 per week. One participant who lived in New Zealand less than two years was not eligible for the Emergency Benefit. She financially depended on her retirement income from China which was about NZ\$100 per week. In relation to living arrangements, 22 participants were living with spouse only or living alone, while 10 participants were living with their adult children.

Procedure

The initial interview was conducted from April to May 2008. At the beginning of the interview, confidentiality was affirmed, and permission to record the interview was sought by asking the participants to sign a consent form. Only 21 participants agreed to be tape recorded. The reasons of declining to be recorded given by the participants included that their voices were not beautiful, their talks would not be logically arranged and they simply did not want to be recorded. To ensure anonymity participants agreed to the use of pseudonyms.

The semi-structured interview schedule included the following themes: the participant's life in China, immigration history, history of the house, perceptions of home and everyday life at home and in the community. A follow-up interview was conducted from September to October 2008. The follow-up interview started with a home tour during which the participant introduced his or her home to me. It was followed by some standard questions such as home maintenance and modification, support and intention to move, which were put to each participant, and some questions developed specifically for each individual participant in the wake of a preliminary analysis of the initial interviews. Each interview lasted approximately two hours and was conducted in either Mandarin or Cantonese at the participant's preference.

Analysis

Interview note taking and transcribing were the fundamental first steps towards data analysis. For those participants who did not agree to be recorded, I took notes in Chinese during the interviews and added as many details as possible immediately after the interviews. For tape-recorded interviews, they were transcribed in Chinese. Data analysis was processed in Chinese and translated into English for reporting.

The method of analysis used in this research was narrative analysis. Both thematic and structural analysis were employed. In thematic analysis, I interpreted the narrative as a whole (Riessman, 2008). I worked with a single interview at a time, isolating and ordering relevant episodes into a chronological biographical account. After the process had been completed for all interviews, I zoomed in, identified the underlying assumptions in each account and coded them. Particular cases were then selected to illustrate general patterns – range and variations – and the underlying assumption of each case was compared with others.

To look at how housing stories are organised and sequenced to understand the range of meanings, I used Reissman's analytic model (2008) of structural elements. As an initial foray into any narrative segment, I asked, how was this story put together? How are structural elements arranged by this storyteller? Such an examination of strategic placement was of enormous aid in interpreting the relation between meaning and action. I then moved to coding which displayed my reading of the function of a particular clause in the overall structure of the narrative: did it carry the action forward, comment on the meaning of an event for the narrator, and provide information about setting and characters, or resolve the narrative? The structural analysis provided me a tool with which I could read the plot – what was meant to the storyteller – by contextualising events, recognising orientation clauses that gave background information about the particular event, identifying when and where the event happened, and most vividly, classifying evaluative statements that described rationalisations and emotions.

The focus on the meaning of home in this research is meant to be illustrative only. It is intended neither as a comprehensive description of the meaning of home in the particular community nor as a claim that the meaning of home is similarly constituted elsewhere.

Results

Home is a process of reconstructing the disruptive self

Nora: Over the first three months [after my arrival in New Zealand], I stayed home myself. I felt very bored and lonely. The house was dead quiet except the sound of the ticking of the clock. I had nobody to talk to. I didn't understand those English programmes on TV. I was sitting in the living room alone, counting the ticking of the clock. I was thinking that New Zealand was very beautiful but I was too lonely and too isolated.

What Nora presents here is not only a lonely self but also a disruptive self who is facing a lonely and disruptive life in a new culture. Nora's immigration to an English-speaking country disrupts her language skills and abilities. She also experiences the disruption of her social networks. Recently, much of literature on immigration has been focused on such disruptive effects of the immigration experience (Meares, 2007). In her research on South African immigrants' experiences in New Zealand, Meares (2007) concluded that biographical disruption is an important characteristic in all of her case studies. The idea of biographical disruption is introduced by Michael Bury (1982) who studies problems associated with the beginning stages of rheumatoid arthritis, and has become a pivotal concept in research of health and illness (Meares, 2007). Bury maintained that illness, in particular chronic illness, is the experience where the structure of everyday life and the forms of knowledge which underpin them are disrupted. For Nora, the disruption of everyday life is not caused by illness but immigration. More specifically, Vivian used a metaphor of "immigration jail" indicating her biographical disruption. The metaphors of "blindness, mute and deafness" further describe the biographical disruption given rise to language.

Vivian: I am now sentenced in two-year immigration jail. That we use immigration jail to describe immigration indicates that it's not enjoyable. I am very lonely. Life is very boring. [I] become blind, mute and deaf. I lose myself. I have been here for four months. I have no social life except going to English classes for two months. I did not understand when people talked to me. I did not understand when I watched TV.

In New Zealand, the first Returning Resident's Visa is issued to the person at the time he or she is issued a residence visa or permit. It is valid for two years from the date the first residence permit is granted. An immigrant is not eligible for an indefinite Returning Resident's Visa until he or she has held a residence visa or permit at a time which was a minimum of two years before he or she applies for the indefinite returning visa. Moreover, the immigrant must spend 184 days or more in every year in New Zealand for the past two years (Immigration New Zealand, 2005). The period of two-year residency is where Vivian's metaphor of immigration jail derives from.

Living in a new country where the dominant language is not one's first language impinges on an immigrant's life. The speaker has to fashion the language into a pedagogical tool and have to do with it in a displaced context (Gunew, 2003). The situation is complicated further by inability to speak the language. The symbolic order of Chinese language which is Vivian's mother tongue is completely lost in English, which results in the metaphors Vivian used, describing herself as being blind, mute and deaf. Language leaves Vivian with an empty space and a vacated self; she claimed that she had lost herself. Hoffman (2000) eloquently expressed this loss of the self:

For a while, like so many immigrants, I was in effect without language, and from the bleakness of that condition, I understood how much of our inner existence, our sense of self, depends on having a living speech within us. To lose an internal language is to subside into an inarticulate darkness in which we become alien to ourselves. (P. 48)

Before Vivian lamented about the “immigration jail” and her lonely life in New Zealand, she outlined her life in China. Her description assists me to understand the extent to which her life was disrupted by immigration and the importance of repairing the biographical disruption (Corbin & Strauss, 1987).

Vivian: We lived in a compound of my working unit. We had good neighbours and many activities for retired people. In our retired people activity centre, I played Taichi and table tennis. I learnt and practiced international ballroom dancing. I was a member of our choir. We invited a famous conductor from Shanghai to coach us. We took part in many competitions. We once won the prize of runner up in a choir competition in our city.

Corbin and Strauss (1987) proposed the notion that a biography can be repaired after the biographical disruption. Frank, in his seminal work of *The Wounded Storyteller* (1995), suggested a similar trend. Frank claimed that stories have to repair the damage that illness has done to the ill person’s sense of where he or she is in life, and where he or she may be going. To repair the disruption, the construction of continuity of a biography is required (Corbin & Strauss, 1987).

In their study of constructions of continuity after stroke, Hinojosa and colleagues (2008) proposed that constructing continuity following illness is possible because the self is a multifaceted object defined by the various symbolic meanings that individuals, and others, attach to it. Giddens (1991) also noted that many selves are possible because self-constructions draw on different resources at different times and in different contexts. McAdams (1993) suggested that the process of continuity construction is tied to the access people have to various symbolic and material resources because “in life and myth, we cannot transcend our resources” (McAdams, 1993, p.100). One potent resource useful in the construction of continuity found in the participants’ narratives is to connect the present to the past – to have things in present that have

been used or have been done before (Marcus, 2006). Charon (1979) argued that although action always takes place in the present, the past is part of human beings' action. The past plays an important role in what a person does. Charon claimed that the symbolic interactionist means not that "what a person does now is caused by the past" but that "the past experiences of the individual are used to help determine the kind of action to take in a situation" (Charon, 1979, p. 123). The past is the remembered experience an individual uses to make sense out of the present and the future. In his research on chronic illness, Williams (1984) too posited that individuals reconstruct and repair ruptures between body, self and world by linking up and interpreting different aspects of biography to realign present and past, and self and world. In this research, the most-frequently-mentioned action taken by the participants that connects the present to the past is growing Chinese vegetables, as declared by Edward:

Edward: I lived in a countryside village in my young age. Our family was very poor. We had little land. I developed a vegetable garden in a raw land. I removed rocks. I seeded. I weeded. I watered. I fertilized. I harvested. I cherished land very much. I now have my own garden here in New Zealand. I can grow Chinese vegetables. I am so happy when watching vegetables growing up.

Gardening and growing Chinese vegetables permit Edward to reproduce the place and activity that gave him profound experience of nurturance in his childhood. He is seeking that numinous connection with earth and nature, first experienced in childhood, as the age-old tasks of sowing, tending, and harvesting are repeated in their appropriate seasons. Marcus (2006) asserted that this phenomenon – creating a garden that repeats some aspects of an earlier, fondly remembered place – may be more common than people think. Re-creating some aspects of a childhood garden is more possible for most of people than re-creating the home itself. This is evident in earlier research conducted by Worthen (1975) who noted that people plant gardens which make them feel at home.

Chinese vegetable gardens are of great importance to the participants. During the interviews almost every participant mentioned growing Chinese vegetables. For those who lived in flats without gardens, in pots they planted spring onion which is one of the most popular ingredients in Chinese cuisine. While the narratives have featured the utilitarian purposes of the garden, I also have to believe that gardening has definite psychological benefits for those recent arrivals from the East to the West. Benjamin stated:

Benjamin: When first arrived in New Zealand, we were rather hard put then financially. Growing Chinese vegetables helped relieve our financial stress. Now we have financial support from the Government. Our financial situation is better off. Growing Chinese vegetables is more about joy and fun. Watering and weeding make me feel happy when I am upset. It's my first thing in the morning to look at my vegetables. I am very happy when I see my Bok Cai, winter melons and bitter melons growing day by day. I even talk to them.

A garden offers more to Benjamin than the growing of food. A garden serves as a refuge from the stress of the changes in his life. A garden also is a place where Benjamin can talk to his vegetables in his own language. No English verbal skills are needed in the garden. There are no pressures to understand, to translate, and/or to feel judged. Having a garden offers a psychological outlet, as well as a way to keep idle hands which symbolise a vacated self in a new culture occupied.

Being separated from one's familiar language, cultural and social environment is referred to as a process of uprooting (Li, 2008). Nann (1982) argued that immigrants experience both psychological as well as physical uprooting. For many, uprooting means the breaking of deep and meaningful ties in their home countries (Nann, 1982), and a remembering of a home left behind (Sheller, 2003). Being uprooted and relocated in unfamiliar surroundings is, for most, an unsettling experience (Snowden, Martinez, & Morris, 2005). Immigrants who are uprooted from

their home countries therefore need to re-ground themselves in the host country. Warren's narrative suggests that, for example, sowing Chinese vegetables is a symbol of re-grounding in New Zealand:

Warren: My vegetables are Chinese vegetables, not Kiwi vegetables. I brought seeds from China. I sowed the seeds. Chinese vegetables put their roots in New Zealand's soil. I watered, weeded, fertilised and harvested. I was very excited when I successfully grew Chinese vegetables in New Zealand's land.

The accounts of Benjamin and Warren suggest that gardening serves to facilitate their reconstruction of the self, and to ease their transition from a familiar setting in China to new and often difficult conditions in New Zealand. The gardens also provide a link to their cultural heritage that makes them feel they are still Chinese people. Resettled in a new country in their later life, the participants have found that they miss their home country. They feel homesick for their own country. Edward said:

Edward: When doing gardening, I recalled growing vegetables with my mother when I was a little boy. Watering and weeding were my gardening duties. At that moment, I who lived in a foreign country in later life desperately missed my birthplace.

The mother metaphor is played out at two levels in Edward's account. At one level, the nurturing and loving mother of childhood may represent the deeply rooted world, a world where Edward felt protected and happy. At the other level, mother is symbolic of Edward's motherland – China. From Edward's excerpt, I began to understand the complexity of how he feels in his garden. On one hand, gardening is an enjoyable part of his new life in New Zealand. On the other hand, it can also be an emotional reminder of the life he has left behind in China. The garden Edward makes provides a connection to his past and culture.

Home is a process of reconstructing the discrepant self

James: 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. She (James's wife) was a senior teacher. But in New Zealand we are the poor. I am a beneficiary. We are nobody here.

James here touches on an issue of how people feel about themselves. According to self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), there are three basic domains of the self: *the actual self* which is one's representation of the attributes that he or she or others believe he or she actually possesses; *the ideal self* which is one's representation of the attributes that he or she or others would like him or her, ideally, to possess; and *the ought self* which is one's representation of the attributes that he or she or others believe he or she should or ought to possess. In James' narrative, "beneficiary" is bound up with the concept of actual self which represents a self that he thinks he actually is, whereas "chief surgeon" is a symbol of the ought self which describes the kind of person that James thinks he ought to be. James believes that he has lost or will never obtain the same social status he possessed in China. He feels sad and disappointed as he claimed that "we are nothing here".

In accordance to self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), James's self-discrepancy is the type of actual/own versus ought/own discrepancy. James possesses a discrepancy that the current state of his attributes, from his own standpoint, does not match the state that he believes he ought to attain. This discrepancy, then, represents him with a psychological situation of the presence of negative outcomes, and thus self-discrepancy theory predicts that he is vulnerable to agitation-related emotions, such as fear, feeling threatened and edginess (Higgins, 1987). This is evident in the account of Grace, James' wife, when she talked about where she wanted to live when she grew old. This story was told in the second interview when James did not take part in the interview:

Grace: We now live on our own. I look after everything in our household. I am also in charge of shopping. I participate in community activities in order to get information that is useful and helpful for us. If I don't take part in the activities, we won't know what's going on outside our house. But he doesn't like me to participate in the activities. He sometimes was very unhappy when I talked to my friends on phone. He seldom goes out. He isolates himself.

Findings from previous studies (Horenczyk, 1996; Roccas, Horenczyk, & Schwartz, 2000) present a related argument. Horenczyk's study (1996) showed that Israeli immigrants from the former Soviet Union tend to perceive the host culture's expectations of them in regard to assimilation as much stronger than their own willingness to assimilate. Following self-discrepancy theory, Horenczyk suggested that these discrepancies are the ones between the immigrant's "actual/own" acculturation attitudes and his or her "ought/other" acculturation orientations. Higgins (1987) conceptualized that if a person possesses this discrepancy, the current state of his or her actual attributes, from the person's own standpoint, does not match the state that the person believes some significant other person considers to be his or her duty or obligation to attain. Both Higgins (1987) and Horenczyk (1996) reported that such a self-discrepancy may lead to vulnerability to anxiety-related disturbances.

It is essential to stress at this point that, in the light of symbolic interactionism, the self-discrepancy is not a product of the change of James' socio-economic status. Instead, it is derived from the social interaction that James has with other persons. Blumer (1969) pointed out that many psychologists and social scientists treat human behaviour as the product of various factors that play upon human beings. In such typical psychological and sociological explanations the meaning of things for the human beings who are acting are either bypassed or swallowed up in the factors used to account for their behaviour. For example, self-discrepancy is viewed as the product of the differences between James' socio-economic status in China and in New Zealand.

Yet, symbolic interactionism sees meaning as arising in the process of interaction between people (Blumer, 1969). The meanings of “chief surgeon” and “beneficiary” to James grow out of the ways in which other persons act towards him with regard to “chief surgeon” and “beneficiary”. Others’ actions operate to define “chief surgeon” and “beneficiary” for James. Thus, self-discrepancy is a social product, a creation that is formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact.

Apart from actual and ought selves, self-discrepancy theory claims that there is another domain of the self – ideal self. In this research, notably absent from the narratives for some participants is ideal self. Such absence is reflected when I asked the question of “what would you like to change about your home if you could”. By and large, the participants claimed that they did not think about change. For example, Paul who lived with his wife in their children’s investment house, managing five tenants who rented rooms in the house, stated his views:

Paul: 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.

In this question, “changing home if they could” is used as a symbol which mirrors the ideal self that the participants would like to be. Kumashiro and colleagues (2006) pointed out that people cannot achieve their ideals in the absence of adequate ability and sustained motivation. Previous analysis indicated that inadequate language ability is one of the difficulties the participants encountered. Other than language inability, Paul’s account names his financial constraints. Paul’s household income was \$550 or so per week, including an emergency grant and accommodation supplement provided by the Government, and retirement income from China. That left them NZ\$250 to live on after rent. Paul believes such income would not be adequate to support him to pursue the change which would symbolise his pursuit of the ideal self.

Apart from inadequacy ability, lacking desire also contributes to the absence of pursuing the ideal self. Building upon the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan (1978), Frank (1995) found that desire is lacking in illness narratives. Desire is placed in a triad with need and demand. Frank argued that the need is fully corporeal and can be satisfied at that level. The expression of the need is the demand, but the demand differs from the need itself. The demand asks for *more* than the need it seeks to express. Desire is this quality of *more*. Desire cannot be filled – there is always more. Yet, Frank maintained that some bodies, particularly ill bodies, do cease desiring. I would argue that the plot of desire lost informs not only the illness self, but also the disruptive and discrepant body. In the current research, for those who cease to pursue the ideal self, their narratives lack desire. They claimed that there was no need to change their homes. They asserted that they would not expect *more* in their later life.

The narrative tension therefore lies in whether desire will be regained. Frank (1995) proposed that just as illness almost invariably plunges the body into lacking desire, illness can instigate new reflections on how to be a body producing desire. The narratives of the participants of the current research introduce a similar trend. The loss of desire is initially expressed in indifference to changing home if they could. Nevertheless, when I studied the narratives intensively, I found the plot of desire regained informs the participants at various points. Take James as example. Even if James stated that he was not interested in changing his home, he did modify his garage into a painting room. The painting room is not merely a place where he paints, but a place he could communicate with others.

James: I am somewhat unsociable. I have difficulties to get on with people I don't appreciate. It is because of my personality. I have been a doctor for my whole life. People asked for my help all the time. I seldom reached out people spontaneously. I am sort of indulged in self-admiration. It is not good... Now I have a painting room. Many people came to me asking for my paintings. I gave them paintings as gift.

James symbolises people's asking for his canvases as asking for help from a senior doctor when he was in China. Painting, besides being something that James loves to do, is part of his self-conscious attempt to develop a style to meet the discrepant self and to produce desire. Broyard, a storyteller in Frank's book of *The Wounded Storyteller* (1995), stated that he thought that only by insisting on one's style could one keep from falling out of love with oneself as the illness attempted to diminish or disfigure one. Broyard's "falling out of love with oneself" gives life to Frank's generic notion of "lacking desire" (Frank, 1995). Frank asserted that what diminishes the self is no longer desiring for oneself. Falling out of love with oneself means ceasing to consider oneself desirable to oneself: James fears he is no longer worth being asked for help from others and being respected by others. As desire is always for more than the immediate object, James' sending his canvases to friends as gift are self-consciously metonymic of a desire that will always exceed its tokens - James communicates and evaluates who he is and assesses other people's impression of himself. James thus develops a tool, for reconstruction of the discrepant self, that transforms how he functions inter- and intra-personally. The tool is the means for developing a style to address the discrepant self and for producing desire.

Home is a process of negotiating domestic power

Edward: There was only one towel rail in our bathroom. Towels were stacked together and wet. I installed a hanging line. My daughter felt the line did not match the decoration of the bathroom. She was very unhappy that I did not tell her before I installed it. I argued that I did it for the sake of the family and no need to consult with her for such a small thing. (Sigh and pause) Alas, my daughter said, "This is MY house."

Edward's account is not simply about an argument between his daughter and himself in the physical world – a towel line. Instead, it is about an interaction negotiating domestic power. Living in a new culture in his later life and with his daughter, Edward no longer possesses the power derived from knowledge and loses control over resources. The expression given to Edward by his daughter communicates a message that he is no longer the head of the household and not in a position to make domestic decisions. According to Luckenbill (1979) who conceptualised power consistent with the perspective of symbolic interactionism, power is

defined as the process in which one party exacts compliance from another party, despite a conflict of interests, through the actual or proposed manipulation of resources in the control of resources which the other party values. One party – the source of control – announces one or more rules of conduct, commands compliance to those rules, and supports those commands with the actual or proposed manipulation of valued source. A second party – the target of control – interprets the source’s commands and constructs a line of action oriented toward compliance. Edward’s daughter, the source of control, raises the issue that, as she stated, “this is MY house” and demands Edward to be compliant with what she believes is right or wrong. Edward, the target of control, decides to surrender power to escape conflicts and arguments, as Edward discussed with Yvonne, his wife:

Edward: Housework is always our duty. We do all housework and gardening. When doing gardening, I decided to keep that tree and removed this one. My daughter wasn’t happy because I didn’t ask her opinions before I did. She looked angry.

Yvonne: Our daughter felt she lost power if you did not discuss with her before you made changes in the house because this is her house. We better ask her if we want to make any changes in the house so that we could avoid conflict.

Edward: Removing a tree is not a big deal. That’s why I did not discuss with her. I was doing the good for the family.

Yvonne: But your “good” is different from her “good”. You think you are the father and you have the right [to make decisions]. Our daughter thinks that this is her house, but you didn’t ask for her instructions...

This lengthy excerpt illustrates a sequence of adjustment between Edward and Yvonne and their daughter. Luckenbill (1979) maintained that power consists of social interaction characterised by a high degree of adjustment between the source of control and the target of control. The source and the target mutually orient their actions to one another. They interpret one another's gestures, using them as cues, signifying themselves in light of their interpretations. The negotiation of domestic power between Edward and Yvonne and their daughter is the culmination of a series of adjustments. The daughter, the source of control, required the parents, the target of control, to ask for her instructions when they removed a tree in garden. Edward sought information from the daughter as to how seriously upset she was by arguing that he was doing the good for the family. The daughter adjusted by informing the parents that this was her house and that they should comply in order to avoid conflicts. The parents interpreted the daughter's verbal and body gestures which indicated that the daughter was seriously upset and angry. Upon a strong commitment to maintaining family harmony, Yvonne persuaded Edward to withdraw opposition and orient himself towards compliance. Consequently, compliance is constructed in a succession of adjustments between the daughter and the parents. Here, power is distinguished by the fact, as Luckenbill (1979) emphasised, that it involves asymmetrical interaction – the daughter exercises greater control over the behaviour of the parents than the reverse. Yvonne's account below offers weight to this notion.

Yvonne: Take dinner as an example. I prepared for dinner and asked them (daughter and son-in-law) to come to dining room. If they were in the middle of doing something, they would be upset. I now just put what I cook on the table. They eat whenever they like. We eat first ourselves. Another example is buying a house. I wouldn't give my opinions. I am afraid if I told them that I dislike the house they would say that I should not complain a lot because I didn't contribute money to buying the house.

The interaction is asymmetrical because the outcome value and outcome scarcity favours the source of control (Emerson, 1962). Yvonne's account implies that the household's source of income is mainly from her daughter and son-in-law. Goldscheider and Jones (1989) have pointed

out the larger ratio of one's income to total household income, the greater power one possesses. Income and household headship thus purchase power because income and headship have greater value for the parents than the value of housework that the parents manage, as perceived by the parents. Further, the daughter's control over resources of income and home ownership, which the parents value, is greater than the parents' control over resources of management of housework, which the daughter values, as perceived by the parents. Thus, power is defined by the reality that the daughter's capacity to reward or to punish the parents is greater than the parents' capacity to reward or punish the daughter, as this is perceived by Yvonne. In order to avoid conflict, Yvonne employed a strategy that prevented her from confronting her daughter and son-in-law.

In spite of the fact that Yvonne endeavours to keep away from conflict, conflict occurs inevitably because one of distinctive properties of power is conflict between the source and the target (Luckenbill, 1979). Similarly, Clegg (1989) claimed that reification of power rarely occurs without resistance. The features of Edward's resistance shown in the previous two excerpts signify the conflict. The rules of conduct to which the source demands compliance are in the conflict with the rules of conduct which the target would prefer to employ in the situation. Opposition, then, signals a conflict of interests, a conflict over what is considered best for both parties in the matter at hand. Hence, while his daughter claims that it is in her best interest to give instructions to Edward, Edward claims that it is in his best interest to maintain the autonomy in the family. Nonetheless, Edward's and Yvonne's actions finally satisfy their daughter's commands because their daughter has greater access to resources which may buy power and status within the household (Goldscheider & Jones, 1989). Here, power is characterised by the daughter's capacity to overcome part or all resistance and to introduce changes in the face of opposition (Etzioni, 1968).

Yvonne's statement that Edward thinks that he is the father who has the rights to make decisions of family affairs indicates how Edward defines domestic power. Edward defines his power in acts of linking to the past when he was in China. In traditional Chinese culture, children's bodies originate from their parents'. Consequently, the parent is in a superior position as a head of the

family (Hwang, 1999). Edward conceptualises his power through the past accomplishments in China where he and Yvonne made every single decision of the family within his household. He recognises, when living with his daughter in New Zealand, that he needs to surrender his power to his daughter who is the owner of the house. However, he strives to negotiate domestic power with his daughter through making a decision as small as installing a hanging line or removing a tree. Some participants conceptualise such a process of negotiating domestic power as “from the central to the periphery”. Amanda’s embodied interaction gives life to this conceptualisation.

Amanda: I was the head of the household in China. My son is the head of the household now. I am no longer the centre, but the periphery. The house is others’. Surely, you could make suggestions, but you need to think through what you want to suggest and whether you should suggest. If you suggest what you shouldn’t suggest, conflicts will occur. I say what I should say. I don’t say what I shouldn’t say. I don’t ask questions that I shouldn’t ask. Asking too many questions will make them unhappy. ...My husband sometimes said, “You swallow everything without expressing yourself. Your high blood pressure is a result of this.” My answer was “what else could I do? Do you want quarrels everyday?”

What Amanda revealed was a disciplined body-self when she negotiated domestic power with her children. The concept of disciplined body-self is introduced by Arthur Frank (1995). Frank argued that the disciplined body-self defines itself primarily in actions of self-regimentation. The disciplined body experiences its gravest crisis in loss of control. Amanda’s response of such a body-self is compliance, or using Sokolovsky’s (1997) term, “suffers in silence”. Such compliance transforms the body into “it” to be treated instead of “itself”. The self becomes dissociated from this “it”. The disciplined body ceases to love itself and lacks of desire. As a result, the disciplined body-self is not likely to tell stories about itself; rather, its stories are told through the pursuit of the compliance. Amanda stated that, for example, “I say what I should say. I don’t say what I shouldn’t say. I don’t ask questions that I shouldn’t ask.” Insofar as the compliance is the story, a disciplined body can make “good parent” in terms of its self-regimentation. Such a good parent has given up the hope of successful power negotiation, but

continues to act out the prescribed norms of conduct within the household in which she is no longer the centre, but the periphery. Amanda's demands are only in the cause of getting the compliance just right. Her disciplined body suffers in silence. By bowing to the interests of her children – either deliberately or unconsciously – Amanda maintains the peace and avoids costly conflicts that she would be apt to lose. This subtle power process secures compliance without the eruption of conflict (Pyke, 1999).

The disciplined body provides interpretive understanding of how a body exists at some moments of its being when negotiating domestic power. Declines in domestic power among the participants arise because of financial and spatial dependence on their adult children. Treib (1990) argued that control implies power. The process of domestic power negotiation is therefore a process of regaining control. In this research, participants extend power negotiation to the garden. Philbrick (1990) maintained that the garden in fact has power. The person evokes it and flees to it as refuge, as the source of life, and as his or her domain, outside which he or she is disarmed and undone.

Warren: A friend of mine believes that we should not combat for space, money and power against his children. The garden is a place where we can control our vegetables. My daughter and my grandson sometimes made me angry. But my vegetables never did. My vegetables did whatever I required. It is my kingdom.

For Warren and his friend, the garden is not only a source of delight and comfort, but also a symbol of control. The garden allows them to maintain control over a piece of land, to shape it, foster it, nurture it and even punish it, according to their feelings, ideas, and whims (Treib, 1990). The vegetables have no choice, no opportunity to talk back or exert their wills as Warren's daughter and grandson did. The vegetables' existence is structured on dependence, for water and for all life's other necessities from weeding to fertilising. The dependence of the vegetable upon the human creates the feelings of being needed if not outright wanted and respected. For those

who are marginalised from mainstream society and their adult children's home the garden provides a reason for living: "it needs me." At the same time, Warren can be reasonably sure that, given the proper care, the vegetables will be faithful, responding to his calls or his wishes, and will perform as he likes. He can watch a garden grow, care for it and more importantly dominate it. The garden becomes a kingdom to Warren, increasing a sense of power exponentially through vegetable growth (Treib, 1990).

Thus, the garden remains a statement of power. In their gardens, the participants feel comfort and security. Such safety and wellbeing are derived from being empowered, and feeling secure and in control (Treib, 1990). The garden is regarded as benign and positive place, where fantasy and horticultural skills merge in joy, pride and accomplishment. The participants need the garden as the garden needs them. The act of gardening provides a structure of their lives. Without this piece of home ground, they float, disenfranchise and detach from the world. Without at least this small something of the earth, they find it far more difficult to become someone (Treib, 1990).

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper explores older Chinese immigrants' narratives of the meaning of home. The older Chinese immigrants in this research experience biographical disruption, self discrepancy and loss of domestic power. They repair the biographical disruption through establishing biographical continuity across time and space. They cope with self discrepancy by developing a style to meet the discrepant self and regaining desire. They exercise domestic power through gardening. In short, they meet suffering head on; they accept interruption they face and seek to use it. Their narratives are quest narratives. What is quested for may never be wholly clear, but the quest is defined by the participants' belief that something is to be gained through the experience (Frank, 1995).

Frank (1995) maintained that the quest narrative affords the narrator a voice as teller of his or her own story; because only in the quest stories does the teller have a story to tell. The quest narrative speaks from the narrator's perspective and holds chaos given rise to suffering at bay. In

this research, the quest narrative tells of searching for alternative ways of being biographically disrupted, being self discrepant and losing domestic power. As the narrators gradually realize a sense of purpose, the idea that reconstruction of the disruptive and discrepant self and negotiation of domestic power have been a journey emerges. The narrative structure of this journey represents a form of self-help and self-reflection.

In his classic work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell (1972) described that the hero's journey can be reduced to three stages: departure, initiation and return. The first is departure, beginning with a call to adventure which is the point in a person's life when he or she is first given notice that everything is going to change. In older Chinese immigrants' stories, the call is moving to a new country where they unable to speak the dominant language, English. The second stage is initiation. Campbell called initiation "the road of trials" (Cited in Frank, 1995, p. 118). The road of trials is a series of tests, tasks, or ordeals that the person must undergo to begin transformation to a hero. It can be identified in this research as the biographical disruption, self-discrepancy and loss of domestic power. Tellers in this research initiate to develop biographical continuity, to meet discrepant self and to negotiate domestic power to achieve the goal of the quest. Through the conquering, the quest narrative tells self-consciously of being transformed; undergoing transformation is a significant dimension of the storyteller's responsibility. The final stage is return. The storyteller returns as one who no longer is disruptive and discrepant, and loses domestic power but remains marked by the experience. This marked person lives a world he or she has travelled beyond, a status that masters the two worlds – a world they leave behind and a world they move to. This conquering heroism discovers alternative ways to experience interruption (Frank, 1995).

In conclusion, for older Chinese immigrants, home means a process of reconstructing a disruptive and discrepant self, and a process of negotiating domestic power. It is suggested that the narratives of those older Chinese people are quest narratives, in which the interruption is reframed as a challenge. The quest narratives imply that the narrators have been given something by the experience, usually some insights that must pass on to others.

The meaning of home this paper explores focuses on individual and micro levels. However, the meaning of home does not stop at the front door of a home. Feelings about the home will be influenced by the perceived physical and social environment outside the front door (Clapham, 2005). There is a need for more research into the meaning of home for older Chinese immigrants at both meso and macro levels.

References

- Benjamin, D. N., Stea, D., & Saile, D. (1995). *The home: Words, interpretations, meanings and environments*. Ashgate: Avebury Press.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Bury, M. (1982). Chronic illness as biographical disruption. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 4, 167-182.
- Campbell, J. (1972). *The hero with a thousand faces* (2nd ed.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Charon, J. M. (1979). *Symbolic interactionism: An introduction, an interpretation, an integration*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Clapham, D. (2005). *The meaning of housing: A pathways approach*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Clegg, S. (1989). *Frameworks of power*. London: Sage Publications.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. L. (1987). Accompaniment of chronic illness: Changes in body, self, biography, and biographical time. *Research in the Sociology of Health Care*, 6, 249-281.
- Desmonde, W. H. (1970). The position of George Herbert Mead. In G. P. Stone & H. A. Farberman (Eds.), *Social psychology through symbolic interaction* (pp. 55-62). Waltham: Xerox College Publishing.
- Dupuis, A., & Thornes, D. (1998). Home, home ownership and the search of ontological security. *The Editorial Board of The Sociological Review*, 24-47.
- Dupuis, A., & Thorns, D. (1996). Meanings of home for older home owners. *Housing Studies*, 11(4), 485-501.
- Emerson, R. M. (1962). Power - dependent relations. *American Sociological Review*, 27, 31-41.

- Etzioni, A. (1968). *The active society*. New York: Free Press.
- Frank, A. W. (1995). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness and ethics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Goldscheider, C., & Jones, M. B. (1989). Living arrangement among the older population: Constraints, preferences, and power. In F. K. Goldscheider & C. Goldscheider (Eds.), *Ethnicity and the new family economy: Living arrangements and intergenerational financial flows* (pp. 75-92). Boulder: Westview Press.
- Gunew, S. (2003). The home of language: A pedagogy of the stammer. In S. Ahmed, C. Claudia, A.-M. Fortier & M. Sheller (Eds.), *Uprootings/regroundings: Questions of home and migration* (pp. 41-58). Oxford: Berg.
- Gurney, C. (1996). *Meanings of home and home ownership: Myths histories and experiences*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bristol.
- Hayward, G. (1975). Home as an environmental and psychological concept. *Landscape*, 20, 2-9.
- Higgins, E. T. (1987). Self-discrepancy: A theory relating self and affect. *Psychological Review*, 94(3), 319-340.
- Hinojosa, R., Boylstein, C., Rittman, M., Hinojosa, M. S., & Faircloth, C. A. (2008). Constructions of continuity after stroke. *Symbolic Interaction*, 31(2), 205-224.
- Hoffman, E. (2000). The new nomads. In A. Aciman (Ed.), *Letters of transit: Reflections on exile, identity, language and loss* (pp. 35-64). New York: New Press.
- Horenczyk, G. (1996). Migrating selves in conflict. In G. Breakwell & E. Lyons (Eds.), *Changing European identities* (pp. 241-250). London: Pergamon Press.
- Hwang, K. K. (1999). Filial piety and loyalty: Two types of social identification in Confucianism. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 2, 163-183.
- Immigration New Zealand. (2005). Residents. Retrieved November 7, 2008, from <http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/alreadyinnz/residents/>
- Kumashiro, M., Rusbult, C. E., Wolf, S. T., & Estrada, M.-J. (2006). The Michaelangelo phenomenon: Partner affirmation and self movement towards one's ideal. In K. D. Vohs

- & E. J. Finkel (Eds.), *Self and relationships: Connecting intrapersonal and interpersonal processes* (pp. 317-341). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Lacan, J. (1978). *The four fundamental concepts of psycho-analysis*. New York: Norton Company.
- Lewin, F. A. (2001). The meaning of home among elderly immigrants: Directions for future research and theoretical development. *Housing Studies*, 16(3), 353-370.
- Li, W. W. (2008). *Chinese international students' narratives: From gaming to gambling*. Saarbrücken, Germany: Verlag Dr. Müller.
- Luckenbill, D. F. (1979). Power: A conceptual framework. *Symbolic Interaction*, 2(2), 97-114.
- Mallett, S. (2004). Understanding home: A critical review of the literature. *The Sociological Review*, 52(1), 62-89.
- Marcus, C. C. (2006). *House as a mirror of self: Exploring the deeper meaning of home* (3rd ed.). Berwick: Nicolas-Hays.
- McAdams, D. (1993). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self*. New York: Guilford.
- McCracken, G. (1989). 'Homeyness': A cultural account of one constellation of consumer goods and meanings. In E. C. Hirschman (Ed.), *Interpretive Consumer Research* (pp. 168-183). Provo: Association for Consumer Research.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Meares, C. (2007). *From the rainbow nation to the land of the long white cloud: Migration, gender and biography*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Massey University, Auckland.
- Nann, B. (1982). Settlement programs for immigrant women and families. In R. C. Nann (Ed.), *Uprooting and surviving: Adaptation and resettlement of migrant families and children* (pp. 85-93). Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Philbrick, A. L. (1990). Radical growth: How the garden commandeers meaning in Colette's *The Cat*. In M. Francis & R. T. Hester (Eds.), *The meaning of gardens: Idea, place, and action* (pp. 76-79). Cambridge: The MIT press.
- Pyke, K. (1999). The micropolitics of care in relationships between aging parents and adult children: Individualism, collectivism, and power. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61, 661-672.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

- Roccas, S., Horenczyk, G., & Schwartz, S. H. (2000). Acculturation discrepancies and well-being: The moderating role of conformity. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 30*(3), 323-334.
- Rubinstein, R. L., & de Medeiros, K. (2005). Home, self and identity. In G. D. Rowles & H. Chaudhury (Eds.), *Home and identity in late life: International perspectives* (pp. 47-62). New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Scikszentmihalyi, M., & Rochberg-Halton, E. (1981). *The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sheller, M. (2003). Creolization in discourses of global culture. In S. Ahmed, C. Castaneda, A.-M. Fortier & M. Sheller (Eds.), *Uprooting/Regroundings: Questions of home and migration*. Oxford: Berg.
- Snowden, L. R., Martinez, M., & Morris, A. (2005). Community psychology and ethnic minority populations. In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (Eds.), *Handbook of Community Psychology* (pp. 833-856). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Sokolovsky, J. (1997). Bringing culture back home: Aging, ethnicity and family support. In J. Sokolovsky (Ed.), *The cultural context of aging: worldwide perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 263-275). Westport: Bergin & Garvey.
- Swenson, M. M. (1998). The meaning of home to five elderly women. *Health Care for Women International, 19*, 381-393.
- Treib, M. (1990). Power plays: The garden as pet. In M. Francis & R. T. Hester (Eds.), *The meaning of gardens: Idea, place, and action* (pp. 86-92). Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Williams, G. (1984). The genesis of chronic illness: Narrative re-construction. *Sociology of Health and Illness, 6*(2), 175-200.
- Worthen, H. (1975). How does your garden grow. *Landscape, 19*(3), 14-27.