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The Talking of Objects: Migratory Experiences and Subjectivities of British Chinese Women in Contemporary Britain

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Migratory Experiences and Subjectivities of British Chinese Women in Contemporary Britain

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Abstract

The British Chinese have been one of the longest standing ethnic minorities in Britain, however, they have largely been "invisible" in the public and academic discourse. In light of this, the voices of British Chinese women have been lesser heard and while there is some research conducted on the experiences of the British Chinese, the intersection between ethnicity and gender has been less considered. The identities of British Chinese women swing between stereotypes of being "submissive", "sexualised" or "exotic", each one in turn distorts the lived experiences of British Chinese women. To productively address the lack of representation of British Chinese women, this study adopted visual ethnography and material culture as a strategy to bring forward their personal, intimate and creative voices. Through the approaches found in visual ethnography and material culture, the women were given a context where they are at the forefront of expressing their subjectivities to articulate the cultural experience of British Chineseness from their perspective.

Drawing on the emergent "material turn" in migration studies, this study situated the subjectivities of British Chinese women as migrants and settlers through their personal objects. Through this approach, women from different backgrounds and generations were invited to articulate their feelings and experiences through the context of their personal, material objects. The stories of these objects became the inspiration for their art making and their artwork was curated into an online exhibition[1], which was one output of the thesis. This creative form of data collection views visibility and material culture as acts of social resistance to make visible the lesser heard voices of British Chinese women.

Centred on facilitating the visibility of the women and representation, Materially Embodied Visions was developed as a conceptual framework to distill the interdependent relationship between people, objects, and art making in this study. The experimental and participatory nature of this approach enabled the women a greater range of self expression to situate their identities within a wider public

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[1] The online exhibition was supported with funding by Language Acts and Worldmaking, Open World Research Initiative (OWRI) funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

context. The objects and artworks from the two generations uncovered a generational difference in how the women used objects and art making to articulate their agency and selfhood. For the first generation, these migrant women were more concerned with creating a stable and secure future and therefore acquiring new material objects (and therefore to achieve migratory stability) was more significant than to publicly preserve old objects from their past. The vantage point of the first generation Chinese women was orientated towards the future and their migratory aspiration was imagined through the acquisition of new material objects, rather than preserving the old. In this sense, art making was extremely important for these women as it allowed them the freedom to articulate their dreams and aspirations about the future and their desire to acquire migratory stability through new material goods.

In contrast, physical objects from the past were highly significant for the second generation women. As women with Chinese ancestry born into British society, the women shared a commonality; they all experienced a sense of isolation from one another and did not easily see their experiences represented in society. To address this lack of social representation, material objects became a way for these women to articulate the many questions, complexities and nuanced experiences of being British Chinese women. In the art workshops, the women shared stories with each other as they used objects to articulate questions of belonging within the present, past and future. The art workshop functioned as a social space which brought together second generation women to share experiences and this space became a point of community building. The approaches found in visual ethnography and material culture captured a portrait of British Chinese women across two generations as they contested histories, articulated present day inequalities, and projected their aspirations into hopeful futures.

The research seeks to address the following questions: Can a gendered perspective give visibility to British Chinese women and interrogate the wider study of the British Chinese? Can a material culture perspective shed new light on the understanding of Chinese migration in Britain? Can artistic practices such as visual ethnographic methods and curating, which are sited outside traditional migration studies, offer an innovative way of research and form an integral part of academic exploration? How can this experimental approach contribute to the existing understanding of

Chinese migration in Britain at large? In particular, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the study of British Chinese and towards the study of transnational migration in general. It gives voice and empowers the underrepresentation of British Chinese women by unpacking the complex relationship between materiality, gendered identities and representation in migrant worlds. In addition, an important finding of this study is the development of visual ethnographic methods as an innovative approach that has the potential to enrich the existing research of migration studies.

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Statement of Authorship

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I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Introduction

1.1. An Opening Event of British Chinese Women

An electric buzz permeated the atmosphere; excitable reunions, bodies shuffled with anticipation, while new faces met each other for the first time. A rhythmic chatter of Cantonese, English and Mandarin saturated the air in small groups and transformed the former character of the corporate room into a space of cultural hybridity. At the centre of this energy were the beaming faces of British Chinese women of different generations, ages, and linguistic backgrounds. Gathered together, commonalities aligned and differences emerged but nevertheless, as women of British Chinese heritage, they came together in the same room, at the same time to celebrate and be seen on their terms.

Figure 1: Launch Event for the "Object-Stories of British Chinese women" Online Exhibition, University of Westminster, July 2018. Photo credit: Bethan Morgan.

Upon the exhibition screen, the online exhibition flicked through a plethora of the womens' personal objects and art works. Familiar and surprising objects slid into view; a rice cooker, a majestic soybean grinder, embroidered silk clothing, ballpoint pens, and jewellery. The intrigue about the stories of these objects sparked conversations of common recognition, nostalgia and new understandings emerged between the women, lecturers, and professors. Momentarily, the two generations of British Chinese women and the academic community collided and the feeling of being seen and being visible grew across the women like an infectious confidence. For women of the second generation, it was an opportunity to nurture new bonds and to sow wider friendships with women from similar backgrounds. Like seedlings that require care and water, a deeper understanding of oneself grew amongst the conversations between the women. Between the bubbling chatter and new introductions, the air of initial excitement matured into a quiet pride; standing taller and with faces more open, the women shared their stories with each other and calmly took their place upon the throne of their lives.

This was the launch event for the object stories of British Chinese women online exhibition that I curated as part of this doctoral project. The event was hosted at the University of Westminster and it was attended by the first and second generation of British Chinese women, who had taken part in the research. British Chinese women were invited to participate in the doctoral project to share their stories through personal objects and to visualise these stories through art making. The object stories online exhibition was the final result of 8 months of fieldwork with two generations of British Chinese women. Material objects and art making became ways to articulate and visualise their journeys and experiences.

During these months, the women took part in interviews and participated in art workshops. The women made art and through their making, they shared the stories of their objects with each other and articulated their experiences. The project offered an opportunity for women to speak about their lives and subjectivities and furthermore, the collective dimension of the project was significant as it gave the women a reason to come together. The collective and social aspect of the project was an integral aspect, however, the origin of the object-stories project arose from a very different setting as

the project started in the domestic setting of solitude and material reflection.

1.2 A Story of Pyjamas: The Beginning Of An Academic Journey

This doctoral study began at the bottom of my wardrobe amongst the mundanity of everyday objects; this was the beginning and it was ordinary. Clearing out my wardrobe, it was the familiar that caught my attention; I unravelled an outfit that I had carried around for years, but had given seldom attention. The coolness emanated on the back of my hand and as the sensation grew on my skin, an image of my mother wearing the outfit in the dense heat of Chinese summers slid into view. As a two piece, the top had buttons and a rounded collar with a soft piping while the trousers were crafted from a soft elastic. The pattern glowed with a dewy romance as small flowers were scattered in front of a hazy yellow background. Elegantly feminine, the cotton was silky cool to the touch. The outfit was not structured and strict and as pyjamas, they were spacious and intimate.

Figure 2: "Mother's Pyjamas" 2016. Photo credit: Denise Kwan.

They had a home spun quality that was distinctive to any British high street clothing, the design and fabric belonged to another era. Unsure how this pyjama set arrived in my possessions, I asked my mother about its origins. My mother's response was pragmatic and un-laboured. Showing little sentimental attachment, my mother explained that the pyjama set was purchased in Hong Kong in anticipation of her new life in Britain. The pyjamas were brought along with other things such as a watch, a handbag and a Chinese wedding dress. After all, the start of a new life needs to be properly furnished by new things, as she pointed out.

In my possession, this pyjama set took on a heightened significance. Unexpressed by my mother, it was a material memento of her ambition and courage as a migrant Chinese woman; to leave her home country for another that was culturally unfamiliar, with little command of English and having only met my father for two weeks before agreeing to marriage and life in Wales. Folded before me, it belonged to a time that physically I could never occupy or fully comprehend. It epitomised the apprehension and courage involved to migrate somewhere else and start again. The mixture of tenacity and blind faith was indeterminable and though the pyjamas showed a prettiness, they also embodied a determination for a better life against the odds.

As an artist, my mother's pyjamas was a source of inspiration and after months of making art work related to these pyjamas, I grew curious about all the various and possible objects of other British Chinese women. My mother's pyjamas was the beginning of the start. Rooted at the core of this study is the notion that people and objects exist in an interdependent relationship. To speak about the journey of a material object is to speak intimately about the self and through the physicality of the material; the object reveals and embodies the trials and tribulations of self and journey. Material objects are not just passive entities that simply mirror or reflect the active self, rather materiality is central to *making* the self. Through the speaking of material objects, identities and stories are forged. Identities are seldom held in abstraction, they are created and articulated through the material and visual dimensions of our lives.

This study takes seriously the mundanity of lived experience and everyday objects. The definition of

value in this study does not refer to objects housed in the glass vitrine of museums and institutions, neither do the objects belong to well known public figures or reflect the capitalist structure of the art market. In this study, the definition of a valuable object resides in the ability of a material object to facilitate questions, challenges and agency of everyday British Chinese women. By looking into the forgotten nooks of drawers and wardrobes, women retrieve objects and stories as ordinary things to give voice to the extraordinary and seldom heard voices of British Chinese women.

In the British landscape, the British Chinese as an ethnic minority have been described as a "model minority" (Yeh, 2014) and described as the "least noticed of all communities" (Parker, 1998:4). These stereotypical preconceptions are particularly damaging when we consider this in relation to women; these stereotypes do not reflect the diversity of womens' experiences and the agency in which they assert in their lives. As British ethnic women, their identities have received little attention. In British society, there are few examples of visible British Chinese women in media, television, and sport. Invisibility of any culture or group is not a natural condition and must be actively resisted, challenged, and revised.

Academic research on the British Chinese is in a process of development and the topic of gender in a British Chinese context has been overlooked. While there is some evidence of research on British Chinese women, this research has predominately derived from a sociological perspective (Song, 1995; Lee et al, 2002; Yuen, 2008) with the exception of Hsiao (2008) who examines the creative literature of British Chinese women writers. In this sense, it is important to consider how a greater variety of disciplinary perspectives and methodologies can generate new insights to enrich our understanding of gendered British Chinese identities. The use of material culture and visual ethnography aims to present an innovative approach to cultivate a deeper understanding of British Chinese women. It is from this point that this study of objects stories situates itself and intends to give visibility to the subjectivities of British Chinese women.

1.3 Research Design, Questions and Approach

Two generations of British Chinese women participated in this project. In total, 28 women contributed to the project, 11 first generation and 17 second generation women from the London boroughs participated in the study. It is necessary to acknowledge that the British Chinese women in this study form only a segment of the British Chinese. In this study, the majority of the women came from Hong Kong and their family language was Cantonese. 9 out of 11 of the first generation women spoke Cantonese, while 9 out of 17 second generation women came from Cantonese speaking backgrounds, while others came from Hakka, Hokkien, Mandarin and French Creole linguistic backgrounds.

In Britain, the Cantonese Chinese are the oldest and largest settlement. Despite this, there is little research about women from Cantonese backgrounds and it is this lack that informs the selection of participants in this study. It is important to note that the newly arrived Mandarin speaking migrants from mainland China and those from Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore backgrounds are not the sole focus of this study, however, some women from these linguistic backgrounds have been included. The intention of this study does not intend to make generalised claims about British Chinese women as a monolithic group, however, the findings of this study does suggest that comparable insights and relationships of selfhood and materiality can also be applied to different linguistic Chinese groups.

To recruit first generation women, I worked with a Chinese Women's Group for 8 months at a Chinese Community Centre in Haringey, London. The women took part in object stories interviews, art workshops, and an opening event to celebrate the online exhibition of the research project. The project was not just concerned with understanding the experiences of British Chinese women as individuals, but also recognised the productive exchange that occurs when women come together in a collective space through creative expression. In comparison, the recruitment of the second generation women differed as the women did not gather in a single space in London. Various social media platforms were used to advertise the project. However, only a handful of women responded to these call outs and the main route of recruitment was through a snowballing via personal contacts and networks. All of the women took part in interviews and those that were available participated in the art workshop and the opening event of the project. The study of British Chinese women

presented here is driven by the following research questions:

(1) Can a gendered perspective give visibility to British Chinese women and interrogate the wider study of the British Chinese?

(2) Can a material culture perspective shed new light on the understanding and representation of Chinese migration in Britain?

(3) Can artistic practices such as visual ethnographic methods and curating, which sit outside traditional migration studies, offer an innovative way of research and form an integral part of academic exploration?

(4) How can this experimental approach contribute to the existing understanding of Chinese migration in Britain at large?

In this thesis, I propose that visual ethnography has a significant role to play in the articulation of the subjectivities of British Chinese women. Ethnography refers to the study and interpretation of everyday people in groups, communities and organisations. It has a specific focus on their social interactions to understand their behaviours and their perceptions of the world. A hallmark of ethnography is the use of participant observation to produce a "thick description" of the social world and from this the researcher can produce a deeper and holistic understanding of social context and action (Reeves et al, 2008). Visual ethnography generally refers to the use of images, photography, film and electronic media. Participants adopt these methods to express their view of their world to produce a "thick description" of their social experience. The enriched interdisciplinary crossover between the visual and ethnography has been advocated by a number of researchers ((Pink, 2001; Gauntlett, 2007; Schneider & Wright, 2010; Banks, 2018). The production of visual expressions by participants are viewed as "sites of cultural production, social interaction and individual experience that themselves form ethnographic fieldwork locales" (Pink, 2001:1).

In the context of the British Chinese, visual ethnography enacts a powerful and productive social role. On the whole, the settlement of British Chinese are dispersed and they are highly internally differentiated group with few opportunities for different generations to gather within one space. From this social context, visual ethnography intervened in the dispersed social character and the participatory emphasis created a context for people come together. Visual ethnography has the potential to nurture a broader and deeper social articulation of the multiple positions of British Chineseness and womanhood within a collective context. Acts of creative participation through the methodology became acts of resistance against internalised racisms, social isolation and prejudice.

As a methodology, it was not just concerned with facilitating individual expressions but rather as the methodology was rooted in social interactions, it has the propensity to raise a wider social awareness through the participatory nature of visual ethnography. Visual ethnography as a methodology will be outlined in more detail in Chapter 4 to further explain its relevance to British Chinese women. I assert that a gendered perspective in the analysis of the British Chinese was fundamental in understanding how gender dynamics create both opportunities and restrictions for British Chinese migrants. It is not enough to simply consider ethnicity but rather an intersectional consideration of how gender impacts ethnicity is crucial to better understand the experiences of the British Chinese at large. In order to highlight the interplay of gender and ethnicity dynamics, this thesis will specifically examine the experiences of women to draw an understanding of their experiences.

Centred on enabling the voices and visibility of British Chinese women, this study theoretically employs the term Materially Embodied Visions. Materially Embodied Visions is an interdisciplinary term that is informed by the fields of material culture (Miller, 1987, 2005), visual culture (Haraway, 1991), and cultural theory (Williams, 1977). Constructed for the purpose of this study, it aims to capture the interconnected relationship between people and things; through material objects, people make themselves and their identity. Material objects cannot be viewed as passive, rather objects are integral in enacting the construction of self and culture at large. This conceptual term further magnifies this interconnected dynamic between materiality and people through visual ethnography as the women visualise the stories of their objects through art making.

Materially Embodied Visions aims to situate a bodily vantage point of the subjectivities of women through their object stories. As a conceptual notion, it privileges the embodied individual (as epitomised by the material object) and it is also concerned with situating the individual voices within a wider perspective. This wider perspective manifests through the context of the online exhibition and the opening event for the exhibition. The online exhibition can be viewed as theory in action and epitomises the conceptual stance of Materially Embodied Visions as it presents a visibility of British Chinese women and connects it with an academic and wider public.

1.4 Research Contributions

This study proposes 4 key findings which revolve around the themes of (1) visibility, (2) representation and furthermore, it highlights a (3) methodological innovation in using visual ethnography, and (4) a conceptual contribution through the framework of Materially Embodied Visions.

As a methodology, visual ethnography created a context where British Chinese women could express themselves on their own terms. In many ways, the two generations can appear to be distinct from one another in terms of class, language, education, and generational outlook. However, visual ethnography revealed that despite these differences, the two generations shared a similar experience of isolation, albeit experienced in different ways. In this study, visual ethnography highlighted the desire of British Chinese women to be seen on an *internal* and *external* level. While the first generation experienced an isolation from the wider British society, the second generation spoke of growing up in isolation from other British Chinese peers and remarked on their lack of a wider cultural network. Across the two generations, the women expressed a need for visibility, albeit on different levels.

In response, the participatory nature of visual ethnography produced an alternative orientation and articulation of the women's identities as it presented an *external* visibility of their identities to a broader British public, and also created an *internal* visibility of womens' identities to each other. Facilitated by the online exhibition, the women could see their identities in *amongst* other identities

as the women saw themselves as a part of a broader expression of British Chinese women. The methodology revealed two dimensions of the womens' lives as caught in a process of *internal* and *external* articulation. In this sense, the personal and collective dimension of the methodology created a productive context where experiences could be creatively shared to offer an understanding of British Chinese women as an evolution of multiple positions and experiences.

Visual ethnography provides a fuller picture of the Chinese in Britain, which has previously been seen predominately from a gender neutral perspective. In the context of the British Chinese, British Chinese women have been a minority within a minority and historically, the voices of women have been seldom heard. This absence of a gendered perspective in British Chinese research overlooks the challenges and determination of migrant and settled British Chinese women. From this view, visual ethnography creates an environment where British Chinese women can come together to articulate their experiences and through art, their experiences are made visible to each other and to the broader public.

In Britain, where British Chinese women do not see themselves represented, the objects and artworks of British Chinese women functioned as a point of personal and cultural representation. However, the womens' expression of selfhood differed according to their generational outlook and this difference was manifested in material *presence* and *absence*. For the first generation, it was not as important to maintain objects from the past and publicly talk about the self through old things. Many women did not openly keep migratory objects from the past; these objects were lost, discarded or pawned away. As first generation migrant women, they did not desire to revisit the past but instead they were focused on the future and attaining a stable settlement as migrant women. This generational outlook presented a material absence of migratory objects. The process of art making was far more meaningful for this cohort of women as it allowed them to articulate their agency with greater freedom and capture their attitude about securing betterment in the future.

In contrast, material objects were highly significant for second generation as women presented a diversity of personal objects from different eras of their lives. As women of a Chinese heritage and born in Britain, many of the women observed that they did not see their stories and histories represented in society. In this sense, the objects of the women became a method of representation.

The second generation women used objects as a way of negotiating belonging, otherness and celebrating heritage as material objects became a strategy to articulate questions, ambiguities and tensions about the present, past, and future. Objects of cultural institutions and museums tend to represent either a "British" or "Chinese" perspective, rarely do objects represent a culturally hybrid perspective of "British Chinese". In this cultural absence, the objects of the second generation can be viewed as a context where British Chinese women can attain representation.

Furthermore, this study presented a methodological and conceptual contribution to the understanding of British Chinese identities and wider communities. As a methodology, visual ethnography is a non-traditional social science method, however, it proved to be a crucial strategy that produced invaluable insights about British Chinese female identities. The British Chinese are a dispersed settlement and the participatory nature of visual ethnography created a point of community building where women were able to come together to share experiences. From a conceptual stance, Materially Embodied Visions presented a theoretically innovative approach as it enabled everyday women the opportunity to personally and culturally articulate their subjectivities through material objects and art making. Materially Embodied Visions captured the poignant social role of materiality and immateriality for ethnic minority women and in this way, everyday objects embodied agency and social action.

Material objects reminds us of the agency of their owners and the lives of everyday women to overcome challenges and embody determination. By situating their lived experience through the material environments and objects of British Chinese women as migrants and settlers, it endeavours to locate the subjectivities of Chinese women in Britain through creativity. This study, therefore, contributes towards the emerging "material turn" (Wang, 2016) in migration studies by theoretically bridging the gap between material culture and migration studies. From a methodological perspective, it demonstrates the potential of visual methods to enrich the conventional discipline of migration studies to offer an embodied perspective of migration from the perspective of female migrants.

1.5 Outline of Chapters

This project gives equal emphasis to the conceptual and practical. The thesis consists of 9 chapters and an online exhibition curated and compiled from the object stories of the British Chinese women, which is equivalent to one empirical chapter. Chapter 1 provides the introduction and Chapter 2 offers a contextual understanding of the British Chinese from a socio-historical viewpoint to understand the migratory settlement, employment, linguistic characteristics, social and generational challenges of the British Chinese at large. By sketching the socio-economic situation of the Chinese in contemporary Britain, we can begin to better understand the challenges experienced by British Chinese women living in London.

Chapter 3 presents an interdisciplinary review of key conceptual perspectives and texts which have shaped the research question of this thesis and informed the conceptual framework. As a literature review, this chapter conducts a review of influential perspectives grounded in the fields of material culture, migration studies and visual culture to articulate the need for greater representation of British Chinese women. By outlining the issues and challenges that surround British Chinese female experiences, the chapter will present a new conceptual framework, Materially Embodied Visions. As a conceptual framework, Materially Embodied Visions is informed by the fields of material culture, visual culture and cultural theory, this framework will be used in the analysis of material objects and artworks of British Chinese women.

Chapter 4 explores the interdisciplinary developments and key debates between art and ethnography to outline how these two fields have merged together to form the research term of visual ethnography. This chapter offers an understanding of the methodological process that underpins the object story interviews and art workshops to justify the use of visual ethnography in the study of British Chinese women. This issue of reflexivity and my positionally as an artist-ethnographer will be raised in this section. This chapter will discuss the recruitment of the female participants to offer a detailed explorations of the research journey to understand the insights and challenges of using visual ethnography across two generations of British Chinese women.

The analysis is structured over 4 chapters. Chapter 5 begins with the experiences of the first generation of British Chinese women and centres on the significance of material absence. For these women, it was not as important to publicly hold onto their initial migratory objects and being migrant women, their orientation was directed towards the future, instead of remembering the past through old objects. With the lack of past material objects, the women practiced a level of wilful forgetting. It was *new* things that were significant, rather than the old. The womens' desire for migratory stability was epitomised by new things which was highly apparent though their art making. In this sense, the womens' sense of agency manifested through collective art making rather than through the context of personal, past possessions.

Chapter 6 explores the subjectivities of second generation British Chinese women and for them material objects were integral to the way they negotiated the present inequalities in their lives. For these women, everyday objects can be understood as enacting and embodying symbolic resistance on an everyday basis. Specifically, practices of dress and bodily presentation were used in multiple ways to counter situations of sexual, gender and race inequality. In this way, the material object orientated an embodied view of the women as they navigate the social challenges that they find themselves in the present society.

Chapter 7 continues the emphasis on material objects for second generation women. In contrast to the previous chapter, this chapters focuses on the way objects are orientated towards the past and through the site of the family. This chapter examines how material objects celebrate and contest personal histories and received meanings. These second generation women employ objects as a way of situating themselves within a broader social history. In Britain where they do not see themselves represented in wider culture, the object acts as an anchor which gives visibility to their diasporic journeys, questions and subtleties. The object enables the women to articulate difficult questions of belonging and as such the orientation of identity is positioned in complex and nuanced ways.

Chapter 8 offers a space of reflection from the participants of this study. This chapter draws on the feedback and reflections from the women to understand how visual ethnography has impacted the perception of themselves and British Chinese women at large. While the previous chapters were focused on attaining an in-depth and an embodied view of the individual, this chapter situates a

wider view of the women as a collective group and examines their reflection from the overall project. This chapter explores the relevance and significance of visual ethnographic art methods in facilitating a wider collective consciousness of British Chinese women. Furthermore, this chapter will draw on the feedback and thoughts from the wider public about the object stories online exhibition.

Finally, Chapter 9 presents the conclusion to highlight the key findings that have arisen from this study. In this study, the issues of visibility and representation proved to be pertinent and re-occuring themes across the two generations. Visual ethnography and a material culture view of womens' identities highlighted that issues of visibility and representation had a different meaning depending on the generational position of the women. This chapter discusses the methodological and conceptual contribution of this study. It will highlight the integral methodological contribution of visual ethnography and the usefulness of Materially Embodied Visions as a conceptual framework. To conclude, this chapter will underline areas of future research.

The object stories online exhibition was curated though this doctoral project and it is presented as an integral output of this research, which is equivalent to one empirical chapter in word count. While this research is a study rooted in academia, the use of visual methods is concerned with actualising and facilitating a meaningful exchange between women on an individual, public and experiential level. To extend the public visibility of the British Chinese women of this study, the object and stories of the women are collated into an online exhibition via the website www.objectstories.co.uk and is also available as a disc in this thesis. Informed by the issues pertaining to the lack of representation of British Chinese women, the online exhibition thus becomes the public interface of this academic study where stories of women can be easily shared.

Chapter 2
Context

This chapter will outline the historical context of the Chinese in Britain to offer an overall picture of their settlement. This chapter will explore the various trajectories of the Chinese in Britain; the early settlers, the first generation via the post-war immigration wave, the second generation, and the present day. By identifying the different generations of Chinese settlement, this chapter will bring specific attention to the case of British Chinese women as an integral yet overlooked group. To provide an overview of the British Chinese, this chapter will consider how social factors such as immigration policies, settlement patterns, employment, public representation and political consciousness frame the challenges and opportunities for the Chinese in Britain to understand how these circumstances impact the experiences of British Chinese women.

2.1. Early Chinese Immigrants: From Seafarers to Settlers

The first Chinese individual to arrive in Britain was Shen Fuzong in 1683 who was a Catholic missionary.[2] Shen Fuzong, along with a small number of diplomats made up the first trickles of Chinese presence in Britain. The more substantial Chinese migration began in 1851 as Chinese male seafarers worked onboard the East India Company and arrived into British docklands in London Limehouse, Liverpool, and Cardiff (Benton and Gomez 2008). The presence of Chinese labourers working on board British ships was symptomatic of Britain's appetite for maritime expansion with Asia.

The East India Company vessels were a part of an influential strategy to coerce China into trading with the British. This tactic resulted in the Opium Wars (1839-1860) and the handing over of sovereignty of Hong Kong to Britain for 150 years to repay the debts incurred by the Chinese destruction of British opium (Parker, 1998). These events caused instability and impacted the infrastructure of China. This instability led many Chinese men living along the southern region of

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[2] Benton and Gomez cite that early Chinese visitors to Britain were mostly Catholic missionaries. Small in number but highly educated, men such as Shen Fuzong imparted an idealised view of China as the "land of oriental despotism" (2008:23).

Guangzhou who considered seafaring as a means to make a living and support their family from afar (Christiansen, 2003:51).

The narrative of the Chinese in Britain began as exclusively male-centric, however, the situation of the men was far from the traditional depiction of patriarchal heroism. The wages of seafarers was often undercut and their lack of language was exploited putting them in emasculating conditions. Characterised as "docile" (Benton and Gomez, 2008:68), they were exploited by their bosses and experienced racial hostility from the white sailors. Comprised of Hakka, Siyinese and Hubeinese sub-ethnic groups, they also spoke different languages and had differing migration motives. Gregor Benton and Edmund Gomez (2008) provide a detailed account of British Chinese history through employment and questioned the ethnic solidarity of the Chinese seafarers as they assert, "They imported prior divisions that inhibited unity abroad" (2008:18).

Benton and Gomez observe that it was difficult to describe the Chinese as being a unified community, rather it was a community "divided by class, language, place of origins, period of arrival, and reason for coming, as well as by physical segregation within Britain" (2008:4). To exacerbate the existing divisions within the seafarers, the bosses recruited Chinese crew from different regions of China to ensure that the seafarers could not form allegiances and challenge the exploitative treatment. Onboard the ship, the Chinese seafarers mainly looked after the lowly jobs such as fire stoking, cooking, and laundering. The early Chinese sojourners lived solitary existences characterised by hard toil and labour exploitation.

In 1851, the Chinese born population in England and Wales was counted as 78 and by 1921, the population had increased to 2,419 (Parker, 1998b: 69). Considering the small settlement of the Chinese seafarers, the inter-war period heralded numerous political sanctions upon the movements of Chinese people to Britain. Deportations and refusals of entry were sanctioned under the 1919 Aliens Act, the 1920 Dangerous Drugs Act, and the 1925 Special Restrictions Coloured Alien Seamen Order (Parker, 1998b:73). The control of Chinese immigration also coincided with the rise of racist ideology perpetuated through the myth of the "Yellow Peril" through the popular short stories created by Sax Rohmer (Clegg, 1994)

During the First World War, 95,000 Chinese male labourers were recruited to support the French and British war efforts. They performed dangerous and vital work and sources estimated that 20,000 men died (Kennedy, Guardian online: 2014). Despite their sacrifice, these Chinese labourers have been described as the "forgotten of the forgotten" (ibid:2014) and were considered as "expendable" (Parker, 1998b:71). While other nationalities have been commemorated on British war memorials, the contribution of the Chinese went unacknowledged.[3] It is necessary to observe that Chinese male labourers made a vital contribution to the war effort, however very few of these labourers remained in Britain. Unlike the Chinese migrants who arrived after the Second World War, these Chinese male labourers were better understood as sojourners.

Using the skills that the seafarers acquired onboard, those who remained gradually transferred from sea to land as hand laundry businesses were set up around British docklands during the 1900s. Despite the small numbers of Chinese settlers, racial hostility was inflamed by racist popular imagery depicting the Chinese as opium smokers, morally corrupt, and sexually dangerous. The visibility of Chinese people working on land sparked race riots and this racial hostility accumulated in the destruction of 30 Chinese laundries during the seafaring strike of 1911 (Benton and Gomez, 2008:92). This type of business was difficult and unsociable in hours, however, there were advantages; little capital was required to set up these businesses and free labour from the family unit could be utilised. Laundry shops combined working and living quarters as they served as flexible spaces to accommodate newly arrived migrants and kin. The strategies employed in the laundry shop can be understood as similar tactics for the post-war catering generation.

2.2 Chinese Immigration in Post-War Britain

The large scale arrival of the Chinese to Britain did not take place until after the Second World War. The first wave of Chinese migration consisted of diverse geographical locations including Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Taiwan, and China. Though the Chinese population derived

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[3] In 2014, an alliance of British Chinese organisations gathered together to fundraise and raise awareness of the efforts of the Chinese during the First World War to create the first memorial to commemorate the war efforts of the Chinese in Britain.

from diverse countries, the largest settlement of Chinese was from the New Territories of Hong Kong and spoke the Cantonese dialect. The Chinese in Britain were a complex and highly differentiated ethnic minority and spoke languages of Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien and Mandarin. As a body of people who settled in Britain and hail from Chinese ancestry, the British Chinese shared more diversity than fixed commonalities.

In the case of the New Territories in Hong Kong, a number of political factors created the circumstances that led to Hong Kong families and individuals immigrating to Britain. The influx of mainland Chinese refugees fleeing to Hong Kong to escape communist persecution accelerated the decline of agricultural life in the New Territories as it brought intense crop competition on the land. Unable to maintain a livelihood in these increasingly difficult circumstances, the prospect of British immigration was viewed as a hopeful prospect. As a commonwealth country, Hong Kong welcomed the outflow of Hong Kong agricultural labourers to Britain as a strategy to lessen the domestic employment strain and alleviate poverty (Christiansen, 2003:51).

From a policy perspective, a distinctive feature of the first wave of Chinese migration was the 1948 British Nationality Act and this piece of legislation gave Commonwealth citizens the automatic right to settle in Britain. The Hong Kong Chinese were a part of the Commonwealth recruitment to rebuild Britain after the Second World War. The British government viewed the arrival of Chinese working class labourers as cheap labour for British society. This migratory phase coincided with a taste for international cuisine including Greek, Italian and Chinese developed during the post-war period. In meeting the demand for world cuisine, the Chinese catered for an anglified Chinese taste (Parker, 1998b:75). A culinary gap in the British market opened and struggling Hong Kong labourers viewed immigration as a viable option.

To control immigration, the 1948 British Nationality Act was replaced with the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act and this law removed the right of Commonwealth citizens to automatic British citizenship. This law required prospective entrants to enter Britain only with an employment voucher issued by an existing British employer. In a Chinese context, this law channeled Chinese migrants into catering work through an employment-voucher system and this

legislation was responsible for the rise of family owned takeaways in Britain (Parker, 1998b:76). The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act was an influential piece of legislation which has shaped the settlement of the Chinese in Britain to this current day.

According to the Home Affairs Report of 1986, it was estimated that 90% of Chinese people worked in the catering sector (Dummet and Lo, 1986). This statistic demands some reflection to understand its manifestation. This recruitment of working class Hong Kong Chinese people with low levels of education meant that the only employment viable in Britain was the catering of Chinese food to British people. In effect, the Chinese population became occupationally subservient to British demands and consequently maintained within an ethnic niche.

The early Chinese immigrants in the post-war era called upon the voucher-system to recruit kin to support the establishment of the family takeaway business. The takeaway functioned as a flexible living and working space for newly arrived immigrants and families could exercise a level of financial independence, enterprise, and security. However, the family take-away cannot be solely perceived as an emancipatory step as Benton and Gomez argue that such businesses also functioned as a retreat from racism and competition with local white residents for jobs. They state, "The racism Chinese have persistently experienced in Britain has been the main factor in the rise of Chinese-type institutions, embodied in the creation of Chinatowns, ethnic-type enterprises, and clan associations" (2008:320).

The growth of takeaways in Britain increased the level of internal competition among Chinese businesses as they saw each other as potential competitors; it was more viable to compete amongst one another than enter the broader British work market. Internal competition has resulted in takeaways being positioned in distance from one another. Furthermore, the majority of the post-war era lacked the education and language skills to attain jobs in the wider British society. The historically high number of takeaways in Britain can be read as a method of self-preservation from racism in the open market. Benton and Gomez observe a comparison between the Chinese in Britain and America and highlight the restrictive nature of employment for the British Chinese. The Chinese in America were able to access a wider range of occupations in rural and urban settings. They were found in construction, fruit picking, crop work, and factory work. The Chinese Americans occupied

both ethnic and non-ethnic modes of employment. In being a larger population, a Chinese presence was more holistically a part of American everyday life, rather than contained with an ethnic enclave of catering work.

2.2.1 The First Generation Chinese

In this research, the "first generation Chinese" refer to those individuals and families who immigrated to Britain shortly after the second world war. The Chinese lack the usual community boundary markers such as a singular religious space or one distinctive language, rather the Chinese community can be better described as diverse and increasingly hybrid. In addition to this internal diversity, the Chinese in Britain are a relatively small population. The 1981 Labour Force Survey estimated the Chinese population to be about 91,000 however, this figure was revised as the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys estimated 100,000 as its "best figure" when people of mixed origin were counted as part of the wider Chinese population (Dummett & Lo: 1986:5).

As a result of the high numbers of Chinese people found in catering work and family takeaways. The Labour Force Survey of 1986-1988 reported the Chinese in Britain as a highly dispersed population. Examining the ethnic settlements of Chinese people in Britain, Wai-K Luk (2009) describe the Chinese settlement as informed by economy as he asserts, "The Chinese experience of diffused concentrations seems to be more attributable to economic need rather than to ethnicity: they are integrated economically but physically divided, at least at the micro-geographical scale" (2009:576). The dominance of catering scatters an already small Chinese population putting geographical distance between families and businesses.

Yiu Man Chan and Christine Chan (1997) assert that the scattered settlement impacts the social needs and quality of Chinese community centres as their "language provision, cultural activities and community care- may be overlooked by local authorities and by central government" (1997:125). These centres function as spaces to provide social and educational activities to enable cultural transmission and integration. They provide a necessary support network to the family unit. Chan et al (2007) explain that in being a smaller ethnic minority, Chinese centres have struggled to attain the

appropriate funds for skilled services such as counselling and legal advice. The lack of financial resources has meant that many Chinese organisations can often only provide leisure based activities which hampers their ability to address the wider issues of racism, family problems and mental health issues. In doing so, the services of the Chinese Community Centres have "weakened" (Chan et al, 2007) which impacts those most vulnerable.

During the post-war era, the Chinese in Britain were predominately perceived as an unskilled working class cohort from Hong Kong. Published 20 years after the initial Chinese post-war boom, the Home Affairs report of 1986 was the first formal attempt to identify the social needs and challenges of the Chinese in Britain. This report has been influential in shaping the perceptions of the first generation Chinese (Song, 1995; Christiansen, 2003). According to the report, it identified the Chinese as experiencing housing discrimination, a lack of knowledge of their rights in claiming social support and a limited English ability. One of the main governmental aims was to prevent the "disadvantages of the first generation being perpetuated among the young Chinese" (Dummet and Lo, 1986:13). It was estimated that 65%-75% of first generation immigrants were unable to speak English adequately (Dummett & Lo, 1986:6). The limited acquisition of the English language was identified as a significant factor that prevented Chinese people from claiming their rights, social security benefits, negotiating housing, and employment contracts. A "preference" for self-help and a cultural mistrust of social intervention were also identified as barriers for integration. The Home Affairs report stated,

> The tendency for Chinese to prefer self-reliance and mutual aid within the family and community, linked with a reluctance to complain and a mistrust of the authorities has also contributed to their use of service falling far below their full entitlement. The concentration of the Chinese community in the catering industry with its long and unsocial hours, has further increased their isolation and hampers their access to services (1986:6-7).

The social problems encountered by the Chinese were viewed as "cultural" and emphasised the individual as possessing the "problem". Little reflexivity was given to consider how these inequalities were a product of immigration policies. The report projected a strong onus on the issue of language and their occupational lifestyles as a significant obstacle that restricted Chinese people

from a greater participation of British life. The report possessed little reflectivity on the affects of immigration policies on linguistic acquisition and therefore, wider structural inequalities of the Chinese went unacknowledged. This view is echoed by Pang and Lau (1998) who assert that too much attention has been placed upon the cultural character of the Chinese in Britain and inadequate attention has been given to understand how structural forces have shaped the cultural character of the Chinese.

This continued emphasis on language projected an assimilatory stance onto the first generation; the Chinese were welcomed as long as they comply with the needs of the British demands, yet when problems arise within the community, the blame was placed upon the individual. This emphasis on assimilation is at odds with British multicultural aims which highlights the institutional racism surrounding the British Chinese. Thus, the issue of language and stereotyped notions of cultural "self-help" are indicative of wider racist blind spots of British institutions. In response to the Home Affairs report, the Chinese Information and Advice Centre critiqued this perception of the Chinese in Britain by stating,

> You can have access to services, as long as you assimilate and learn the language: This view places the onus not on the Chinese to agree to be assimilated into the dominant white culture as a precondition…This Chinese have been forced to rely on their own resources, because of their experiences of an indifferent government and institutional racism (1986:17-18).

The high percentage of first generation Chinese people found in catering work can be understood as a result of restrictive British immigration policies that desired a certain type of Chinese individual to fulfil a specific domestic role to the economic benefit of Britain. The characteristics of hard-work and diligence has been projected onto the community, as well as being claimed by people within the community as a source of pride. In this way, these cultural characteristics can be viewed as "having enabled the Chinese migrant to attain their level of success *in spite* of structural conditions which define the areas in which the Chinese make these achievements" (Pang and Lau, 1998:871).

The Chinese in Britain are a dispersed community and this presents an additional challenge in calling for political and collective action against structural inequalities. This is coupled with the "multicultural" drive of the 1980s which assigned a racialisation of ethnicity as a primary definition

of multiculturalism with little regard for the internal diversities of class and language. This was a specific concern for the Chinese in Britain as they are characterised by internal linguistic and regional diversity more than unity. The political treatment of the Chinese in Britain can be described as "highly ambiguous" (Christainsen, 2003: 25). Christiansen observes,

> In no European country were the Chinese an important immigrant group. British race relation policy, accordingly, was mainly directed towards 'Afro-Carribbeans' and 'Asians' (i.e. Indian and Pakistanis) […] Policy changes were accompanied by 'racialisation' of the ethnic minorities, meaning that cultural and racial essence became a dominant criterion for constructing the groups at the receiving end of the policies (2003:25).

On the one hand, while certain social needs were addressed during the 1980s, this was only a partial recognition of the Chinese as not enough consideration was given to the internal differences and the needs of the Chinese as an internally multicultural group. The needs of other Chinese sub-ethnicities fell into the background and little political recognition was formed between the sub-groups. As a result, Chinese families and individuals from South East Asia including Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam were sidelined from the imagined notion of the Chinese in Britain during the post-war era. It is clear that a significant challenge of this period was the matter of gaining an accurate picture of the Chinese in Britain and presenting a reflexive account of the social challenges faced by the Chinese in Britain.

2.2.2 The Second Generation Chinese

In this research, the "second generation" are defined as those who are British-born Chinese or individuals who migrated at a young age and Britain is the country where they spent their formative years. According to the 1991 Census, the Chinese population in the UK was counted as 157,000 people which comprised of 0.30% of the overall British population. Those who have migrated from Hong Kong make up over one third (34%) of the overall Chinese population while those who are British born Chinese make up just under a third at 28%. In the context of the second generation, the 1991 Census showed that the Chinese in Britain was dominated by those aged between 20-40 (Chan and Chan, 1997). The Labour Force Survey showed an increased population from 8.9% to 17.3%

between 1995 to 2002 due to the birth rates of the British born Chinese cohort. The second generation of the British born Chinese cohort are on the rise and they "represent a considerable potential in terms of playing an active role in the economy and society of Britain" (Chan and Chan, 1997:127). Being born and raised in Britain, the social challenges experienced by the second generation are distinct from the first generation.

Over the course of a generation, the burgeoning second generation have made "rapid socio-economic advancement" (Pang and Lau, 1998: 862). According to the 1988-1990 Labour Force Survey, the British Chinese attained the "highest percentage for any ethnic group in Britain" (Parker, 1998a:97) as the survey reported that 44% of all Chinese aged 16 to 24 had at least one A-Level or equivalent qualification. By 2000, a quarter of young Chinese held university degrees (Benton and Gomez, 2008:353). As the second generation British born cohort, they do not contend with the same English language barriers. Opting for education suggests that the young British Chinese have a greater propensity to choose their occupational preference. Given that the first generation were cordoned into unskilled domestic work, this was a remarkable development achieved over a relatively short space of time.

The perception of these achievements for an ethnic minority group has led the Chinese in Britain to become labelled as a "model minority". Model minority was a concept initially used in the context of the Asian-Americans to describe the successful and high-achieving ethnic individual or group (Kawai, 2005). From a British Chinese perspective, the term model minority may appear fitting; a dispersed collection of sojourners who have become self-employed and produce off-spring who succeed in society. However, the notion of model minority is racially restrictive as it projects stereotypical assumptions onto the Chinese. A study conducted by Archer and Francis (2005) asserts that the construction of racism for the young British Chinese often revolved around stereotypes of Chinese people as "boffins" or "geeks" projected by pupils and teachers alike.

Pang and Lau highlighted that there are a proportion of young Chinese who are qualified to do non-manual work in the wider labour market and yet some choose the "social and economic security" of ethnically marked employment (1998:863). It appears that while the emerging generation are evidently better equipped to navigate the wider British labour force, discriminatory practices and

structural inequalities are still active a generation later. In a survey of 194 respondents conducted by Parker (1998), it was found that one-third of respondents were working in full-time catering employment. The 1997 Census revealed that 53.8% of Chinese men and 36.8% of women were found in the catering trade, albeit as managers in services and personal service occupations. It appears that, as the second generation are breaking out of the ethnic niche and occupationally diversifying, the "structural barriers of their integration are being revealed" (Pang and Lau, 1998:870). The progress attained by the first generation cannot be expected to reproduce itself by virtue of hard work and perseverance of the second generation.

The structural barriers that have been instrumental in occupationally segregating the post-war Chinese migrants have left their mark upon the second generation through their sense of cultural belonging. Unlike their parents, who are more likely to identify as culturally Chinese (by virtue of being born outside of Britain and largely participating in ethnically inclined employment and social structures), the second generation are more likely to experience a sense of cultural ambivalence. Born ethnically Chinese and raised in a British society, it is an identity experienced in duality. This sense of duality is underscored by a sense of isolation as exemplified by the dispersed settlement pattern of the Chinese in Britain as Parker highlights the consequences of these social factors for the second generation,

> Young Chinese people, lacking the backing of a concentrated community settlement, have a uniquely difficult position, finding it hard to engage with both British and Chinese culture on their own terms and thus unable to partake in the effervescence of cultural hybridity (Parker, 1998a: 97).

Miri Song (1995) highlights the impact of employment on racial identity. Song observes that the site of the takeaway has devised the notion of a "private" and "public" identity, as these identities are constructed to navigate these two opposing spaces. The socio-economic dispersal of the catering trade has "isolated" the young British Chinese impacting their ability to resist discrimination and racism. For the British Chinese, racism and prejudice is "often absorbed and internalized, accepted as part and parcel of growing up in England" (Parker, 1995: 233). The second generation may be educationally and financially better equipped but nonetheless, these attributes do not equate to a sense of belonging in British society (Song, 2003).

As the second generation begin to seek employment in the wider British society, this presents a greater ratio of scattering through employment. The second generation may not require the practical services of a traditional Chinese Community Centre, but the spaces which are needed are those which focus on social issues of exclusion and inclusion. Given the geographical distance between the second generation, online spaces have become significant in enabling the second generation to openly discuss issues of belonging, mixed race relationships, language maintenance, and political inclusion.

It is clear that past governmental institutions have overlooked internal class and linguistic differences and in doing so, this has subsequently distorted their social needs. The picture is further complicated by a highly dispersed settlement pattern of the Chinese in Britain which makes it difficult to galvanise collectivity and unity along ethnic lines. The dispersed settlement of the first generation cannot be solely seen as a "free choice", but rather as a decision made to counter the inequalities experienced and perceived in the wider British job market. This dispersed pattern is a residual hangover of structural inequality and it stands as a significant obstacle in the mobilisation of a British Chinese political consciousness. Moreover, the residue of this structural inequality can be seen in the context of the second generation as they have formed their identities in isolation from one another.

On first impression, it could be easy to understand that the social circumstances of the first and second generation are separate from one another. However, it is more accurate to consider that while their educational and occupational circumstances differ, the two generations do share common social challenges. The issue of language has been cited as a frequent issue as both generations refer to the challenge of establishing a common language (Dummett and Lo, 1986; Pang, 1999). The first generation refer to their challenge with the English language, while the second generation express their difficulty in maintaining proficiency with their family language (Pang, 1999:161).

The matter of social exclusion operates differently between the generations. The second generation have grown up without cultural counterparts, it is likely that they have experienced cultural isolation

from each other (Parker, 1998) while the first generation may have experienced less opportunity to participate in the wider society. Furthermore, a significant issue that unites both generations is the absence of their voice in British society. Both generations have lacked a platform to articulate their experiences on their terms and have experienced negative stereotyping. Despite generational differences, there are areas of underlying commonality between the two generations.

Furthermore, it is important to consider that the character of the Chinese in Britain is rapidly changing. Between 2000-2005, 9,785 mainland Chinese people were granted permanent residency compared to 3,125 Chinese people from Hong Kong (Knowles, 2016) which signals a steady rise of migrants from mainland China which is estimated at 12% (Chan and Chan, 1997: 126). The arrival of mainland Chinese migrants in Britain presents another dimension of linguist and economic diversity to the existing Chinese population.[4] As a group, the recent mainland Chinese settlers in Britain are characterised by elite qualifications, a greater propensity to earn good salaries and more likely to have comfortable lifestyles. There is a tremendous difference from the first generation and the new migrants; the first generation were granted citizenship, but were left with little option other than unskilled employment. This contrasts with the new Chinese migrants who are highly skilled and educated but do not have the security of automatic citizenship. As the third wave of Chinese migration in Britain has began to already illustrate, it is clear that the future of the Chinese in Britain will remain increasingly diverse.

2.3 Representation of the British Chinese

David Parker noted the considerable lack of research on Chinese communities and described the Chinese as the "least noticed of all communities in Britain" (1998:4). Compared to other ethnic groups in Britain, the Chinese have been perceived as "quiet" or "reserved". Whilst cultural theorists from African Caribbean and Indian ethnicities have written extensively about identity

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[4] The type of migration from mainland China to Britain is a product of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms and British immigration policies. This development coincides with changes in British border controls that aim to recruit professional migrants to enhance the skills and economy of the British workforce. Caroline Knowles (2016) highlights that settlement for these new migrants does not involve drawing upon social and kin-based networks. Migrants tend to be lone-travellers arriving in Britain for specific work or educational purposes.

politics in Britain (Wilson,1978; Gilroy,1993; Hall,1990, 1995), the same cannot be said for the Chinese in Britain. Speaking about the British Chinese, Parker observed "They have been kept on the margins of both social science research and politics because they fall outside of the prevailing black-white binary" (1998:67).

The lack of social and political recognition has not insulated the British Chinese from racial stereotyping and mis-representation. The stereotypes swing from the criminal figure of the dangerous opium smoking Fu Manchu, to the subservient caterers to the well-adjusted model minority; each one in turn capture a partial and distorted picture of the Chinese in Britain. Perceptions of Chineseness have been contradictory and highly ambivalent; some have been evidently racist while other instances illustrate a strong admiration of Chinese culture and therefore representation of the Chinese in Britain were "never simply negative" and instead were "shot through with ambivalence and recognized the potential power of China, often in tones of great foreboding" (Parker, 1998b:72).

The early visual representation of the Chinese in Britain during the 1920s reflected an overt racist sentiment. The combination of animosity and intrigue at a new ethnicity in Britain became the creative material for the writer Sax Rohmer.[5] Rohmer created the character, Dr. Fu Manchu who was a product of Western racist ideology and represented an evil and exotic force capable to overthrowing Wester civilisation through intelligently devised schemes. The imagery connected with Fu Manchu was symbolic of the power struggle between Britain and China as Jenny Clegg explains,

> The depiction of Asian vice provided a backdrop for British virtue. The Fu Manchu films abound with blatant colonial imagery. The notion of danger from the Orient is used to heighten identification with the white upper-class hero and to convince the audience of the necessity of Empire as the sole guarantee of security (1994:x).

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[5] Having never visited Asia or China, he created a franchise through the fictional character of Dr. Fu Manchu after passing through the small settlement of Chinese people in London's Limehouse.

Such imagery represented the Chinese race as connected to illegal opium dealings and alludes to the politics of the time to highlight a contradiction; it was the British who trafficked illegal opium into China as a tactic to coerce China into opening trading deal. Rohmer's character was reflective of the colonial struggle between Britain and China which was expressed upon gendered and racial terms through Fu Manchu. Colonial power was imagined as a gendered male force and for the superiority of the British to manifest, the Chinese male was portrayed as sexually defective and dangerous as epitomised by fictional character of Fu Manchu. This gendering of power transpired as fear over the "yellow man" which asserted a necessity to patrol the racial boundaries between the Chinese and the British to prevent any merging of blood between Chinese men and white British women.

This racist depiction of the Chinese contrasted to the living conditions of the Chinese seafarers at the time who were a mobile collection of Chinese men who saw themselves as sojourners rather than settlers. The hypocrisy symbolised by the figure of Fu Manchu was indicative of the treatment experienced by early Chinese seafarers. The pursuit of British colonial expansion was a significant reason why Chinese seafaring men arrived in Britain and in doing so, they were greeted with a disproportionate prejudice and racially inflammatory behaviour fuelled by press and media (Clegg, 1994). Stringent immigration policies have sanctioned the British Chinese and these controls are indicative of the colonial relationship between Hong Kong and Britain. These relations of power are not just expressed through policies but they also play out in visual culture. While racial contempt of the Chinese was expressed through Rohmer's Fu Manchu, this hostility was contradicted with an admiration for Chinese material culture by British upper-class women (Cheang, 2006).

The contradiction of these positions illustrates China as occupying a position of "semi-colonialism" as exemplified by Hong Kong as a former British colony (Cheang, ibid). Though China evaded complete colonialisation, the exoticisation of Chinese culture was not exempt from the European imagination. Chinoiserie was a term used to describe the European centred pursuit of the "orient" (Haddad, 2007). Matthew Winterbottom (2008) highlights that chinoiserie was the European's imagination of a mythical and exotic China, however this imagination was not informed by facts or experience, rather it was based on an *impression* of China. The British institutional tendency to construct Chineseness through material culture adheres to binary ideas of cultural fetishism and ethnicity. Craig Clunas (1998) argues that the institutional framing of "Chinese art" in Britain

reveals little about the history of China. Clunas describes Chinese objects in British museums as functioning as a "souvenir" of the British "vanished empire" and specifically refers to the lack of history surrounding objects such as a the Chinese emperor's throne at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Britain can no longer exert its power as a fledging empire, but it can replay the glory of past power through museum objects as Clunas expands,

> As the British Empire became more and more remote, souvenirs of the emperor such as the 'throne of China' played a greater and greater role in the national imaginary, as nostalgia for one empire slide across into nostalgia for all, and souvenirs of empire became fetishes of consolation (1998:48).

The representation of "China" in Britain has consequences for the perception of the British Chinese at large. The racialising imagery of Fu Manchu and the fetishistic gaze represented by the "Chinese" objects in British museums do not reflect the everyday lives of British Chinese people. Moreover, it is crucial to observe that these stereotypical representations are not the expressions of Chinese people in Britain, instead they are British viewpoints about a notion of "China". Such a gaze projects nation-state notions of identity, it constructs a Chinese identity as orientating from a geographically bound "China" and overlooks the nuanced experiences of diasporic Chinese in Britain. It is from this socio-political context in which we can begin to understand the continual challenge of developing a British Chinese hybrid culture. Diana Yeh (2003) reminds us that the Western constructions of "Chineseness" in Britain exert an influential role from which British Chinese identities are negotiated and perceived. The lack of adequate representation of a hybrid British Chinese identity is echoed by Parker as he observes a lack of "publicly recognised and socially validated forms of Chinese youth culture" (1995:171) through music, film and media representation in the context of the British Chinese.

Despite the stereotypes that circulate about the British Chinese, the British Chinese have eked out their own spaces of representation. Following the rise of Black and Asian-British filmmakers, the 1970s and 1980s presented the first film centred on British Chinese experiences which included British Chinese actors entitled 'Ping Pong' (1986) followed by "Soursweet"(1988).[6] Both films were

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[6] Starring British Chinese actor Lucy Sheen, 'Ping Pong' explored the balance of Eastern and Western pressures on the British-born second generation while "Soursweet" was a dark comedy following the lives of a newly wed Hong Kong couple and their life in Britain.

critically well-received but neither found popular success. In 1986, Manchester launched The Centre of Chinese Contemporary Art which became the first space to exhibit artwork by British Chinese artists. Since its initial inception, the centre has since positioned it focus on the art practices of Chinese artists from mainland China. While there are instances of British Chinese exhibitions and visual culture, this has been equally accompanied with a sense of ambivalence with an identification and meaning of the term "British Chinese art".

The Hong Kong 1997 handover shed light on British Chinese artists and in this year, two exhibitions showcased the work of British Chinese artists. The artists who took part in the exhibition were critical to resist ghettoisation and used the platform to problematise the category of "British Chinese" (Yeh, 2003). Artist, Anthony Key opened up the contradiction by stating, "We all work under roughly the same agenda, and yet each artist won't admit to that; it's a strange thing about being suspicious of being ghettoised" (Key cited in Yeh, 2003:83).[7] A contradiction manifests; there was a desire to engage with the experience of British-Chineseness and yet in doing so, it risked an ethnic categorisation of their work. From this perspective, British Chineseness was marked by a sense of ambivalence as Yeh puts it,

> In this light, the notion 'British-Chinese' can be seen as both a burden and a blessing, enabling the artists in the embryonic formation of a 'British-Chinese' consciousness to erect a temporary platform within the current climate of cultural diversity, whilst exploring the limits of investigations into cultural identity (2003:84).

In recent years, there appears to be an emerging consciousness related to British Chinese identity. For instance, in 2014, a campaign was launched to commemorate the 95,000 Chinese labour corps who contributed on behalf of the British war effort.[8] In 2017, a contemporary London theatre company titled the Print Room casted British white actors as Chinese characters and practised "yellow face" in the theatre production. In response, the British Chinese theatre community

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7 There have been instances of British Chinese artists making visual work about their identity position as British Chinese subjects. An example of this is Anthony Key and the artwork that he makes that explores the contradiction between being a Chinese and British subject specifically through the context of sculpture. Through the visual metaphor of food and ingestion his works explores the connection between assimilation and invitation through food.

8 The Chinese Labour Corps refers to the recruitment of nearly 100,000 Chinese men from the Shandong province to support the British war effort during WW1. While their efforts have been commemorated in northern France, their war efforts in Britain has only recently been recognised in Britain.

launched a public protest against the company (Saunders: 2017).[9] In the effort to seek forums of representation, the second generation have taken to online spaces to carve out their own forums of expressions as it has been briefly highlighted earlier in this chapter. Given the dispersed nature of the British Chinese, new technological platforms and social media forums offer a much needed space to share social concerns and discuss issues of belonging. Parker and Song studied the use of British Chinese websites such as British Chinese online and Dimsum, they found that while the second generation may appear to be doing well from a socio-economic standpoint, an examination of online discussion threads revealed that "concerns about social marginalisation and invisibility remain common" (2007:1057).

These online platforms provide an outlet for conversations and ideas that are not immediately apparent in mainstream culture. The popularity of these online platforms have a significant impact on the lives of the second generation and they have "become part of a networked infrastructure for friendships, relationships, social activities, charitable donations and political interventions" (ibid: 1059). Parker and Song are optimistic that with the rise of online platforms will cultivate a sense of collective consciousness as they are "enabling the emergence of British Chinese people to define its place in British society in its own terms for the first time" (ibid:1060). While the British Chinese have shown development over the course of a generation, there still remains the challenge of their political mobilisation to be more directly involved in public debate and policy making. This type of political mobilisation will be hindered without these online and offline spaces.

It is clear that matters of representation for the British Chinese are evolving; Parker's initial observation about the "invisibility" of the British Chinese in 1998 appears to be gradually dissipating. 21 years later, social media and creative organisations are making a political and productive stand against stereotyping. This current and emergent visibility of the British Chinese is distinctive to the previous situation of the British Chinese where their identities have been described as being "held in the private domain with a certain enforced innerness" (Parker, 1995:233). In contrast to previous "enforced innerness", there are more opportunities of British Chinese visibility in British society.

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[9] "Yellow face" refers to the practice of white actors applying "yellow" make up and caricaturing the identities of East Asian people.

These are encouraging developments that advance the discourse of the British Chinese. However, these developments do not suggest that issues of representation have been resolved and while change is emergent, continued change requires persistence from multiple voices and across a variety of industries and social platforms.

2.4 British Chinese Women

This thesis takes British Chinese women as the focus of study. The significance of studying British Chinese women will underline 3 areas: (1) the arrival of Chinese women has changed the British Chinese society from a previous bachelor society to a settled society, and labour of women has been the corner stone of the livelihood of the Chinese, especially in relation to the catering industry. (2) The British Chinese are underrepresented as an ethnic group and this has a considerable impact on the lives of British Chinese women, (3) the gender neutral view on the Chinese in Britain in the existing literature requires urgent attention to provide a better understanding of gender and ethnicity in a British Chinese context.

The 1948 British Nationality Act and 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act were two pieces of legislation that changed the character of the Chinese in Britain. The majority of early Chinese migrants were unmarried young men or young husbands who sent remittances to their wives and families. These men mostly viewed themselves as sojourners and those who settled in Britain would have likely formed families with British white women (Benton & Gomez, 2008:304). The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act meant that Chinese individuals were able to apply for family and kin to join them and most importantly, this piece of legislation heralded the presence of Chinese women.

Migrant Chinese women occupy a powerful position in their community as women "biologically, culturally and symbolically" reproduce culture and nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997), yet British Chinese women have remained largely invisible in mainstream culture and academic research. The appearance of Chinese women was a distinctive feature of the post-war chain migration and this significant gendered implication has been taken for granted and overlooked in the research of the

British Chinese. The migration of the post-war era profoundly changed the character of the British Chinese community as women became an integral part of British Chinese settlement. Flemming Christiansen (2003) raises the point that the appearance of Chinese women before 1965 was rare. The presence of women transformed a previous bachelor society into a settled society which gave rise to the second generation of the British born Chinese.

While Chinese women have contributed a fundamental role in the settlement of the British Chinese, there are only few instances of research that are fully dedicated to the lives of British Chinese women (Song, 1995; Lee et al, 2002; Yuen, 2008; Hsiao, 2008). As a group, little is known about British Chinese women (Yuen, 2008) and this perspective is similarly shared by other researchers as Song states the work and family experiences of British Chinese women "have barely begun to be represented in writings on Black or ethnic migrant women" (1995:285). Song states "depictions of Chinese women in Britain seemed content to rest upon stereotypes of them as wholly subordinated" (1995:286). The stereotyped notion of "subordinate" and "submissive" Chinese women was reenacted in the description of challenges facing women in the Home Affairs Report of 1984 as it highlighted,

> Several aspects of Chinese life in Britain render many Chinese women extremely isolated. Lacking command of English, they cannot play any part in or understand their children's education [...] they are likely to have little time with their husbands [...] they are dependent on their husbands for finances, which can often lead to squabbles or even more serious martial breaches [...] in the worst cases the consequences can include mental breakdown and child battering (Dummett and Lo, 1984: 16).

Given the vital cultural and biological role of British Chinese women, the image of British Chinese women portrayed in the report was one-dimensional and painted a homogenous picture of British Chinese women as a singular entity. Lee et al observes an urgency to recognise the difference classes of British Chinese women as it is highlighted, "To date we know little about the migration trajectories of different categories of Chinese women, their aspirations, and their experiences in Britain" (Lee et al, 2002:608). The report gave little recognition to the multiple forms of domestic and employment labour taken up by British Chinese women and instead the image portrayed through the report was one of dependency and victimhood. There was little room to recognise the

agency enacted in the women's lives. Furthermore, the report did not recognise the different social classes of British Chinese and thus their varying challenges, needs, and agency.

The contribution of women's labour in the family business has been fundamental to the settlement of the British Chinese population that we recognise today. The appearance of Chinese women during the post-war era meant that family businesses were able to prosper as the business entreprise drew on the determination of husband and wife as a unit to economically establish the business. Despite their integral role, Chinese women are more likely to carry the "double burden of domestic and catering labour" (Parker, 1998b:84). Given this significance, there has been little recognition of gendered differences experienced by Chinese women and men through the migration process. Parker describes the double bind of first generation women as both mothers and catering workers, "Female labour is the foundation-stone of the British Chinese family economy. Chinese women bear the brunt of racial stereotyping by non-Chinese customers" (1998b:79). His observation encapsulates the dichotomy of the role played by Chinese women and furthermore does not recognise the added sexual harassment that women experience through employment (Song, 1995).

Miri Song (1995) observes that the agency of British Chinese women in self employment is often made "invisible" as it is consumed into the labour of the husband. Self employment combines the realms of domestic and business into close proximity making it difficult to distinguish the boundaries, whereas the agency of women can be more easily quantified in external waged work. From this perspective, the agency of British Chinese women is more challenging to capture as they are more likely to be a part of family businesses. Despite this flexible dimension of self employment, it does not negate the effort and determination asserted by women as Song stress the need to recognise their agency "Chinese women (wives) have not only contributed their labours in supporting the business ventures of their husbands, but that some of them have actively taken the initiative in establishing take-away businesses themselves" (1995:289).

Song suggests that the lack of accurate representation of British Chinese women is related to the way that identity politics are framed in Britain. The situating of Chinese women may not always be compatible with Afrocenteric feminist thought that circulate in British race discourse. While some

Black feminist ideas are relevant in the analysis of British Chinese women, there are also elements that are less comparable as there are "historical and cultural specificity of Afrocenteric viewpoints which make writing about Black women's lives so rich and properly contextualised" (1995:286-287). The lack of representation and understanding of British Chinese women can be understood as two-fold; governmental reports such as the Home Affairs Report relay a stereotyped view of British Chinese women, and there is a lack of race discourse that is a culturally and historically specific to British Chinese women.

It is useful to provide a comparative understanding between British Chinese women and their Chinese American female counterparts to understand how employment has shaped British Chinese female experiences and political mobilisation. Predominantly recruited from the former British colony of Hong Kong has meant that policies greatly regulated the settlement of Chinese people in Britain. This regulation led to a high percentage of British Chinese migrants taking up domestic work such as catering as there was little other option for these unskilled people from the New Territories to be employed in other work. The private nature self employment for British Chinese women is considerably different to Chinese American female counterparts who could be found in a wider range of occupations such as factory work, construction work, crop work, as well as catering businesses. This is partly attributed to the fact that they are a larger minority population.

In the UK, the 1991 Census estimated the Chinese ethnic population as 156,938, this amounts to 0.30% of the overall British population (Cheng, 1996:161). In 1990, the Chinese American ethnic population was estimated as 1,648,696 and they formed 0.65% of the overall population (US Census, 1990). By 2010, the Chinese community in Britain grew to 0.70% of the population while the Chinese Americans increased to 1.23%. In contrast to the dispersed settlement of the British Chinese, the nucleated nature of American cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles provide a sense of "oneness in cultural identification" and therefore has cultivated a sense of a Chinese American identity (Parker, 1995: 213). In turn, this offers more opportunities for Chinese Americans to form a political and collective awareness.

In the context of Chinese American women, their ability to assume a greater range of occupations outside the family ethnic niche enabled a collective voice to articulate their social rights and political

identity. It was Chinese women who organised the longest strike against the largest garment factory in San Francisco's Chinatown.[10] Similarly, historian Xiaolan Bao (2001) detailed the transformative 1982 strike of 20,000 Chinese American garment women workers in New York. These organised strikes "proved that Chinese women could stand up for themselves and work across generational, racial, gender, and political lines" (Yang, 1993:210). Greater social awareness has resulted in direct political action, specifically these inequalities have been fought by Chinese American women (Yang, 1993).

By contextualising the experience of diasporic Chinese women in these two Western contexts highlights the impact of occupational forces upon ethnic Chinese women. Unlike their Chinese American counterparts, the majority of British Chinese women have experienced fewer employment opportunities outside catering and in turn this has impacted their collective sense of political and social assertion. The private nature of family owned business in Britain is less conducive to inciting collective political action and therefore the lack of an overt political identity could be attributed to the socio-economic limitations experienced by the British Chinese. Despite this, British Chinese women have achieved settlement in the face of challenges from a British government which has not always recognised their social needs and structural inequalities. Their settlement is a testimony to their own personal determination against the odds. This exposes the institutional racial prejudice that underscores the lives of British Chinese women. As such, "problems" cannot be viewed as "cultural" but rather policies and structural forces play an intrinsic role in the engineering of challenges encountered by British Chinese women.

By assessing the historical and cultural account of the British Chinese, it becomes apparent that the matter of the gender and specifically the experiences of women have been greatly overlooked. The fundamental contribution of British Chinese women through employment and the family deserve specific recognition. As such, it is necessary to assign specific attention to British Chinese women in order to situate their agency in navigating their challenges and opportunities. In 1998, Parker called for a deeper intersectional consideration on British Chinese identity politics to consider "linkages and dissonances between Chinese identities and gender and sexuality, and how these are negotiated

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[10] Supported by a white labour union and left-ist organisations, the women workers in the factory demanded for fair wages and better working conditions. This strike and the withdrawal of their labour lasted for 105 days.

and lived" which would enable "Chinese people to carry their Chinese identities with them in a broader anti-racist and feminist politics rather than confining them to an inner sanctuary" (1998a:112). Parker's intersectional assertion to align the experience of gender with ethnicity remains as relevant as ever, and the subject matter of British Chinese women is an urgent area that deserves academic investment and public attention.

2.5 Summary

The British Chinese are a unique and distinctive ethnic minority group in Britain. As a group, the majority of the British Chinese historically arrived from the New Territories of Hong Kong as part of the kin-based chain migration of the post-war era. People from a Hong Kong Chinese background therefore make up the largest majority group of the British Chinese, however, the British Chinese are also comprised of families and individuals from Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and China. Each of these geographical regions present a linguistic diversity and distinctive migratory history and therefore the British Chinese are characterised as being internally multicultural. The high number of families and individuals found in the catering trade disperses the settlement of the British Chinese. In these ways, it is difficult to speak of a coherent and unified British Chinese community.

These structural migratory factors have impacted the second generation. Born and raised in Britain, the second generation may not experience the same linguistic, educational and economic challenges as their first generation counterparts. However, the second generation face their own structural challenges as the second generation are more likely to experience a lack of cultural belonging to a wider British Chinese community as a result of the historical dispersed settlement of the British Chinese. In this sense, the second generation lack "the backing of a concentrated community settlement" (Parker, 1998a:97) which has impacted the sense of a hybrid British Chinese culture and identity. Despite these challenges, there is encouraging evidence that cultural practitioners in art and theatre are pushing for greater British Chinese and Southeast Asian public expression.

The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act was an influential piece of legalisation, this piece of legalisation enabled the arrival of Chinese women. The arrival of women transformed the British

Chinese from sojourners to settlers. Migrant Chinese women supported the economic development of the family business and as women, they enabled the future of the second generation cohort. The economic, biological and cultural contribution of women became the foundation of a British Chinese future. Despite their integral contribution, the needs of migrant women were often overlooked as illustrated by the limited recognition of women's needs in the Home Affairs Report of 1986. Furthermore, the identities of women was stereotyped and their tenacity and resilience was socially unrecognised.

A cross-cultural comparative insights of British Chinese and Chinese American women reveals that many of the social challenges experienced by British Chinese women were a result of restrictive immigration policies, limited employment opportunities and a smaller population. From this perspective, it is important to consider how structural circumstances impact not only the experience of ethnicity and race, but also a stronger consideration is needed to consider how these factors impact the experience of gender. The understanding of the British Chinese has largely been concerned with the experience of racial otherness and difference, this emphasis has overlooked the intersectional dynamic between ethnicity and gender.

To date, a comprehensive account of British Chinese women remains to be written. The research on the British Chinese has largely assumed a gender blindness in accounting migratory experiences for migrant women. A gendered perspective in a British Chinese context would provide an overdue recognition of women's labour and their vital economic and community contribution. Without post-war migrant Chinese women, the future of the British Chinese would be culturally and literally unfathomable. A gendered perspective offers a fuller recognition of women's experiences to understand that the experience of ethnicity and otherness are influenced by gendered inequalities and expectations. A perspective of women interrupts the gender neutral socio-economic viewpoint of the British Chinese, and instead a gendered view acknowledges their agency and labour of women in the continued settlement of the British Chinese.

Chapter 3

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this chapter is to conduct an interdisciplinary review of key literature that has informed the research questions and conceptual framework of this thesis. The literature discussed in the following chapter is situated in the fields of migration studies, visual culture and material culture. One of the aims of this literature review is to extrapolate specific debates within these fields to contextualise the use of a material culture perspective in the analysis of British Chinese women. Firstly, this chapter will evaluate the existing research about British Chinese women to outline how and why British Chinese women have been under-researched and overlooked as a minority group. Secondly, this chapter will highlight the interdisciplinary research conducted on the relationship between materiality and migration to outline the ways in which everyday material objects can reverse power relations for migrant people. Building on from this, the third section will theoretically unpack a material culture perspective of embodiment and cultural expression. The final part of the chapter will explain the conceptual framework of Materially Embodied Visions which has been specifically devised for this study and further highlight its relevance in examining the subjectivities of British Chinese women.

3.1 Gender and Ethnicity in the Context of British Chinese Women

Traditional migration studies has not sufficiently considered the gendered implication of migratory experiences. Mainstream theories found within migration studies have tended to portray Chinese migration from an economic perspective and as a discipline, it has assumed a gender neutral perspective (Wang, 1991; Christiansen, 2008; Benton & Gomez, 2008). This "neutrality" masks the notion of the migrant who is imagined as an individual male and unburdened by domestic work. This view of migration marginalises female migratory narratives and marks them as secondary to the migrant male who has been largely viewed as the economic trailblazer. Yuval-Davis (1997) reminds us that women not only assume a powerful biological and cultural position, but they reproduce collective identities to redefine racial, ethnic and national consciousness.

Anithas and Yuval-Davis (1992) assert that the categories of race, gender and class have to be considered as forming an "intersection of subordination" to understand how exclusions and

privileges are created for individuals. Both gender and race have a powerful pre-determining effect as they are deterministic categories that are viewed as a "biological" inheritance and denote a "natural" fixity in the social imagination. While class is an influential category, it is a category that is governed by the conditions of gender and race. Cultural theorist, David Parker reminds us that gender and cultural identities are "intimately connected" as "they are not formed separately and then articulated together; instead racism is experienced in gendered terms and gendered identities can take on racialized elements" (1995: 136).

The limited research conducted on Chinese women in Britain illustrates how migration studies have traditionally assumed a gender neutral focus while scholars from Chinese Studies have developed a stronger gendered perspective (Teng, 1996; Evans, 1997 2008; Rofel, 1999). Debating the migratory character of the Chinese diaspora, Adam McKeown (1999) observes that the history of Chinese migration has been dominated by two competing nation-based narratives; the China-centred perspective which has emphasised the preservation of a "Chinese soul", while the Western-centred perspective has emphasised the flexible adaptation of Chinese people. The emphasis on competing nation based narratives and ethnicity has taken precedence and the intersectional consideration of gender and ethnicity was rendered a secondary matter.

The experiences of British Chinese women sit between disciplinary boundaries of gender and ethnicity and this has contributed towards a lack of attention to the experiences of British Chinese women. A dominant focus on ethnicity has meant that the experiences of British Chinese women have historically been the "minority of the minority" (Hsiao, 2014). A lack of a gendered consideration ignores how ethnic identifications are entangled amongst gendered dynamics as "gendered identities can take on racialized elements" (Parker, 1995: 136). A socio-economic vantage of the British Chinese makes it difficult to view the everyday, lived experience, rather the individual can be reduced to a compilation of categories pertaining to "race", "gender", "age", "language" and so on.

Traditionally, there has been a strong focus on the socio-economic survival and adaption of the British Chinese which has largely been accounted on gender neutral terms. In 2008, Benton and Gomez contributed a much needed account of the British Chinese through a largely historical and employment perspective. However, their emphasis of labour and family business enterprise overlooks the unpaid reproductive labour, which is generally undertaken in the domestic space by women. Furthermore, the Chinese family business relied on female labour to enable men to transit between employment to autonomous business owners. Despite this crucial point, there is little mention of women's integral contribution. Instead women are mentioned in terms of family reunification and their contribution of free labour in establishing the takeaway with little regard for gendered implications for women. As such, it is difficult to fully understand the industriousness and resourcefulness of migrant Chinese women in Britain.

There are instances of gendered considerations in the study of the British Chinese (Parker, 1995; Pang, 1998; Lin, 2014), however the topic of gender has rarely been the sustained focus of the enquiry. The research conducted on the younger British born Chinese priorities a focus on how they negotiate their identities and otherness in Britain (Parker, 1995, 1998). The work of Kim Kiang Pang (1999) explored the contradictions of identity for second generation British-Chinese people living in London through work and community. More recently, Xia Lin (2014) examined the performance of a "Chinese" identity and the ways in which people from different generations perform their "Chineseness" to one another.[11] In these accounts, gendered considerations are a part of the analysis however the topic of gender and women's experiences are rarely the primary focus. In contrast, instances of academic research that has fully concentrated on British Chinese women predominately derived from a sociological or social policy perspective (Song, 1995; Lee at al, 2002; Yuen, 2008) with the exemption of the work of Yun-Hun Hsiao (2008) who explored the creative literature of British Chinese women. Drawing on this literature, I will critically evaluate the existing research relating to British Chinese women.

Existing accounts of British Chinese women largely come from a sociological and social policy

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[11] As a woman born in China speaking the dominant dialects of Cantonese and Manadarin, Lin was interested in the notion of a unified Chinese identity in London and described her interview work with her participants as a metaphorical dance of moving "towards" or "away" from her.

perspective which centres on the site of family and employment. Miri Song (1995) observes the phenomena of the Chinese takeaway and notes that the British Chinese experience contrasts to the experiences of British black women who may not have engaged with family labour and self employment to the same extent as British Chinese women. As a result of the difference of employment patterns and migration histories, Song argues that the British Chinese experience is felt differently. Song's study specifically examined the lives of mothers and daughters in the context of the takeaway business and argues that feelings of subordination and empowerment differ greatly between the generations.

For mothers, the site of the family takeaway offered a level of protection from wider workplace exploitation and offered a way of making a living outside of English language restrictions. The takeaway provided a flexible place to tend to childcare and business hence the ownership of a takeaway shop was a goal for both husband and wife. This level of self-autonomy offered protection from wider racial discrimination. For these first generation mothers, the family business withheld a potential of emancipation. For daughters who were "helping-out", the site of the takeaway produced a gendered and racial visibility, and while sons experienced racism, daughters negotiated sexual harassment. Daughters navigated a "private" and "public" identity; a question that was not as prevalent for their mothers. As such the site of the family business is an evolving site of women's subordination and empowerment (Song, 1995). The takeaway presents a double edged sword. On the one hand, it is clear that the takeaway offered a flexible family and workspace and a level of entrepreneurialism. On the other, the familial and private nature of takeaway ownership meant that inequalities within the private space were easily assigned as "personal" rather than "social" issues. Problems within the family business can be readily absorbed on a personal level rather than understood as wider social inequalities.

Like Song, Maggie Lee et al (2002) asserts the need to recognise the resourcefulness and determination enacted by first generation British Chinese women to refute their one-dimensional depiction as "passive" or "submissive". Lee et al identified three groups of Chinese women
(1) overseas brides, (2) women who migrated with their families or "college wives", and (3) independent migrants. Those with the appropriate resources were able to negotiate familial and employment structures to their advantage and viewed migration as a liberating adventure while those who possessed fewer resources carried the burden of labour inside and outside of the home.

This perspective evidently brings more nuanced understanding to British Chinese women as "Women are not usually just passive recipients and non-participants in the determination of gender relations, and clearly not all women are subjugated in the same way or to the same extent, even within the same society at any point in time" (Lee et al, 2002:616-617).

Being the "most vulnerable" of the three groups, Lee et al observe that for overseas brides the quality and support of their marriage was crucial in determining their settlement process. Structural forces are stacked against this group of women, their migratory inequalities manifest in their limited educational attainment and they were more likely to occupy a lower tier of employment in their home country. In spite of these familial pressures, Lee et al highlights that often the women demonstrated a strong level of self-determination and resourcefulness which compensated for the wider inequalities the women faced. On the whole, the "college wives" were younger than "overseas brides", they generally possessed higher educational qualifications and more likely to be found in professional occupations. These women were overall more qualified, however as their migratory strategy was focused upon the family, the reality was that these women were more likely to assume the traditional role of supporting the children and family (Lee et al, 2002).

This sense of familial collective strategy demonstrated by these two cohorts contrasts with the third group of women categorised as "independent migrants". Being the least researched group; they exhibited a high level of choice in their economic strategy and desired financial independence from their natal family. For them, migration to Britain was viewed as a point of self fulfilment. They are more likely to be integrated into public life and able to find employment outside of kinship ties. With a greater number of employment choices at their disposal and a stronger disposition for an equal partnership, this group differs greatly to the previous two groups (Lee et al, 2002).

Adopting a life story and auto-ethnographic approach, Jenny Yuen (2008) explored the adjustment needs of Chinese mothers who have migrated from Hong Kong since the 1997 handover. Like Lee et al (2002) and Song (1995), Yuen (2008) focuses on the challenges structured by the family unit and specifically on the challenge of being the primary carer for the family while adjusting to a new life. Caught between Confucian patriarchy and structural British oppression, Yuen argues that migrant Chinese women experience a "double subjugation". Being the primary carer of the family means

that women are more prone to experiencing isolation which is exacerbated by the dispersed settlement of the Chinese in Britain. As a result, Yuen calls for more governmental funding and supportive spaces for Chinese women to meet one another to ease the challenging cultural transition for migrant Chinese women.

As the majority of the research on British Chinese women derive come from a sociological perspective, they adopt similar methodologies to examine the agency of women within the context of employment and family (Song, 1995; Lee et al, 2002; Yuen, 2008). In using life-history interviews (Song,1995; Lee et al, 2002) and narrative inquiry (Yuen, 2008), these traditional social science methods produce similar results, which to some extent are predictable and confine the parameters of the women through their social circumstance. To build upon the existing research of British Chinese women and to further capture their untold agency, it is crucial to consider how British Chinese women can be understood in and outside of the family and employment. From a methodological perspective, the research on British Chinese women would benefit from a greater diversity of innovative methods to generate new insights to offer a greater opportunity for women to express their agency on their terms.

With few academic accounts of the British Chinese women, these sociological studies centred on British Chinese women are a recognition of their invaluable contribution to the British Chinese community. However all three researchers (Song, 1995; Lee et al, 2002; Yuen, 2008) have focused on British Chinese women within the context of the family and employment. Employment and family are certainly significant sites in the negotiation and articulation of selfhood, however, the reiteration of these contexts offers little room to consider their identities outside of the family and employment structure. The contribution of Lee et al brings to light the multiple characteristics and differences within the first generation cohort, however written from a sociological perspective, it is difficult to decipher their everyday, personal experience as women and moreover how their identities are experienced outside of the context of the family and employment. Therefore, a sociological approach does little to offer an alternative way to re-imagine and articulate the women's identities and agency outside these structures.

3.2 Materiality and Migration

To give voice to British Chinese women, material objects are viewed as a strategy to give visibility to their experiences and subjectivities. The use of a material culture approach in the research of British Chinese women is informed by the "material turn" in migration studies (Wang, 2016). Material objects provide a context for migrants and settlers to claim their voice in articulating their experiences to challenge wider preconceptions surrounding their lives. In other words, self expression facilitated through material objects become a reversal of power relations. To outline how material objects can be viewed as a strategy of reversing power relations, the following section will outline the relationship between power, objects, and representation.

Historically, the practice of collecting objects has been the result of Western imperial expansion. The act of material collecting is indicative of Britain's maritime mobility and expressive of imperial practices (Longhair & McAleer, 2012). The collecting of objects is epitomised by the phenomena termed "cabinets of curiosities". During the 19th century, collections of exotic objects operated as a view of the world for those unable to travel. From a Western imperial gaze, these presentations were viewed as an organised form of knowledge. These cabinets became points of learning about different cultures to elicit fascination while simultaneously projecting an otherness onto these cultures. The Pitts Rivers Museum in Oxford and the Great Exhibition of 1815 are powerful examples of such knowledge practices enacted through material culture.

While objects have been subjected to the narratives of imperialism, academics have also observed the potential to challenge these imperialistic power structures. Rather than focus on the meanings constructed by the museum collector, the emphasis has shifted to the owner of the object. The histories and journeys of Chinese material objects in Britain have predominately been represented by their colonial "possessor/owner" rather than its "maker" or initial owner (Cheang, 2006:372). To readdress these dynamics of representation, such relations of power can be creatively challenged and reversed through the site of migrant's material object and this epistemological material culture shift has become pertinent in the field of migration studies. Thus, objects of migrants are increasing seen as a strategy to locate the stories and voices the migrant traveller/owner to understand how identities are anchored through materiality and experienced through the migratory process (Basu and

Coleman, 2008).

The integration of a material culture approach to understand migration and people has been influential across a number of disciplines ranging from anthropology (Hoskins, 1998; Parkin, 1999; Basu and Coleman, 2008), psychology (Turan, 2010), cultural geography (Toila-Kelly, 2004; Ho and Hatfield, 2010), and sociology (Csikzentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The merging of materiality and migration related research illustrate the burgeoning potential of material objects to counter the "highly abstract and generalised ideal of mobility to a more nuanced and grounded conceptualisation of movements" (Wang, 2016:1). Identifying the migrant traveller through the site of their material object offers a nuanced and embodied account of their experiences and selfhood to recognise that the process of migration and settlement is first and foremost a materially felt condition. Wang (2016) reminds us that materiality offers an experiential account for the migrant's transitional journey and thus, a materially embodied account of the migrant offers a way to conceptualise belonging beyond nation-state categories.

Objects are seldom secondary companions of migration, rather they sustain projections into far away geographies and cultural collectives to present the notion of home as an evocative site. The migrant home can be described as a place of creative agency. The home functions as a personal museum as Svetlana Boym expands, "Each home, even the most modest one, becomes a personal memory museum…each immigrant becomes an amateur artist in everyday life" (2001: 328). Csikzentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) observe an interconnected understanding between homes and people and as people shape objects, objects shape people.

The domestic space becomes a lived and symbolic environment which constructs one's identity through furnishings and objects. In addition, French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard (2014) describes the home as first and foremost a "material paradise". It is clear that material culture and objects *make* the home and the self. Though the country of arrival can appear hostile and unfamiliar, the space of the home offers a place of refuge as it has been suggested by Boym (2001), Csikzentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), and Bachelard (2014). This relationship between objects and home is particularly amplified for migrant people for whom homes might be flexible, multiple and unpredictable.

From this vantage point, it becomes crucial to observe the interconnected dynamic between material objects and people as anthropologists Basu and Coleman (2008) call for an integrated approach to consider "migrant worlds" rather than migration *and* materiality and therefore a view of materiality is a lens on the complexities and ambiguities of migration. As the status of the migrant is characterised by change of home and material security, Basu and Coleman assert that traditional disciplines centred on people and their movements such as anthropology, history and sociology have tended to sideline the material dimensions of migratory lives. Additionally, materiality reflects the shifting status of the migrant by illustrating the security or wealth of one's world as Basu and Coleman state,

> Migration is grounded in objects, practices and relationships that mediate but also create contexts of movement and (often temporary) settlement. At the same time as constituting the migrant experience, however, certain forms of materiality can also provide powerful ways of indexing the status and/or agency of the migrant (2008: 323).

From the context of anthropology, David Parkin (1999) examines the relationship between

materiality and migration. Parkin draws on the displacement of refugees and suggests that during the moment of fleeing, the items taken by the person assume a different status because these "items taken under pressure and in crisis set up contexts less of use and more of selective remembering, forgetting and envisioning" (304). Though they have little commodity value, they are invaluable for the individual as they act as mementoes of their identity prior to leaving one's home and land. In this sense, objects become analogous to life and death as the loss of physical material resembles a social loss of the self. The object functions as a point of cultural transition in a Winnicottian tradition.[12] Parkin explains,

> When people flee from the threat of death and total dispossession, the thing and stories they carry with them may be all that remains of their distinctive personhood to provide for future continuity. Take those away, that little which they have, and social death looms closer, making more possible biological death itself (1999: 314).

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[12] Child psychologist, Donald Winnicott proposed for children that objects function as "transitional objects" for example, comfort items such as blankets and soft toys can stand in for the absent parent and therefore these items are used to facilitate the development of the child and their psychological independence.

Parkin argues that migratory objects have a dual function. In times when the individual experiences self-alienation, the self becomes objectified through possessions; however, during settlement the individual reverses the level of depersonalisation. The individual can start to invest their selfhood in the social world as personal possessions taken in flight can "re-articulate socio-cultural identity if and when suitable conditions of resettlement allow for the retelling of the stories that they contain" (1999:314). Similarly environmental psychologist, Zeynap Turan (2010) adopts Winnicott's "transitional object" to explore the role that objects enact in sustaining a collective identity for diasporic Palestinian people. Objects epitomise the situation of the Palestinian strife; as a nation without land, this loss of land is compensated through the inheritance of things, which becomes an active resistance against cultural forgetting. Adopting the idea of the transitional object, objects assist the shift between cultural environments by providing security and comfort. While Parkin stressed the object's potential to maintain selfhood during the initial stages of migration, Turan argues that the function of the objects still exists even during the matured stages of settlement, and for the second generation it offers a physical connection to a historical collective identity (2010:45).

Cultural geographer, Divya Toila-Kelly (2004) explores how religious shrines in the home can act as a form of resistance against non-identity for British South Asian women. Toila-Kelly asserts, "These materials represent the physical buffer between their experience of displacement and the difficulty in dealing with marginalization from new points of settlement" (2004: 327). Furthermore to understand the formations of a British identity, Toila-Kelly asserts that one must consider the space of the domesticity and how identity is constructed in these spaces and therefore a "true understanding of post-national, post-colonial experience is enabled through an interrogation of 'home' landscapes, and their material culture" (2004:327).

The work of Parkin, Turan and Toila-Kelly demonstrate the value of using materiality as a strategy to understand the migratory experience. Their analysis prioritises the agency of people as they stress the ways in which people employ material objects to act out social relationships and sustain cultural knowledge. While they seemingly adopt a post-Cartesian perspective in viewing objects as intimately connected to people, their research underscores the tendency to maintain a Cartesian

position in that it is the "person-subject" who creates and projects meaning into the otherwise "passive" object. The integration of Winnicott's "transitional object" from Parkin and Turan underlines the emphasis of people over things and, in contrast, Turan is the only researcher who acknowledges the propensity of materiality to act upon people. The work of Parkin and Turan mostly maintain a traditional perspective in portraying an emphasis of the subject-person over materiality. Wang (2016) critiques the "blind spot" of migration and materiality and asserts that the "continuous prioritisation" of people over things gives little way to conceptualise materiality and embodiment and therefore it is important to consider,

> How people make place and construct identities through situated multidimensional sensuous and corporeal engagement (through sight, sound, touch, smell, taste) with the material world, and how things become the very medium through which migrants' emotion and desires are objectified, articulated and extended (2016:5).

As highlighted by the work of Parkin, Turan and Toila-Kelly, an overall focus on materiality is a promising perspective to bring forward the lesser heard voices of migrants. A material culture perspective enables a view of everyday experiences and in the context of migrant people, materiality presents an opportunity to reverse the relations of power as they are afforded a space to articulate their experiences on their terms. In this sense, a material culture perspective in the analysis of the British Chinese can contribute towards a greater diversity of research and offer an embodied perspective of British Chinese experiences. In this sense, the understanding of British Chinese experiences are not simply framed by socio-economic perspectives which can generally portray a "top-down" and anonymous position and instead the context of materiality can enable a voice from below.

3.3 A Theory of Objectification in Material Culture

The prioritisation of people over things assigns a broad semiotic understanding to material significance. However, a key theorist of material culture Daniel Miller (1987, 1994, 1998, 2005) problematises the semiotic/linguistic tradition in viewing objects as "signifiers". Miller highlights the limitations of a traditional anthropology approach in approaching objects as material vehicles to

illustrate theoretical concepts. From this position, material objects are reduced to social and theoretical signifiers and this perspective fails to capture the richness of the sensual and embodied dynamic between people and things. While social relations are projected through objects, Miller argues that more can be accomplished by understanding that objects offer more than just illustrating social relations and suggests that materiality does not function like grammar and struggles to be contained by linguistic logic.

> Language consists of relatively few specific domains. These might include the written word, speech and grammar. Each divides up the large sense of linguistics into domains with their own specificity. These remain relatively restrained and encompass able differences. By comparison, material culture virtually explodes the moment one gives any consideration to the vast corpus of different object worlds that we constantly experience (1998:6).

Miller highlights the multiple interpretation and meaning of material objects and argues that the multiplicity of the material object and interpretation should be actively embraced and viewed as a productive resource. Therefore, to apply a singular linguistic explanation to objects excavates the multiple affective dimension of materiality and its relationship to people. This overlooks the possibility of bringing together surprising theoretical perspectives. This can be described as a "freedom from reductionism" (Miller, 1998:4) which presents material culture as a multidisciplinary site that does not claim a disciplinary status. Rather, material culture is, "best understood in relation to the issues that they address. In effect they make up relatively discrete bodies of texts formed around particular problematics" (Miller, 1998:4). Material culture cannot be described as a clearly defined discipline but instead the theoretical perspectives that are employed are driven by a sensitivity to materiality and the specificity of each context.

The multidisciplinary site of material culture enables a deeper analysis about the interaction between people, object and culture that allows a move beyond a formalistic understanding. A material culture approach does not intend to reduce people to mere boxed categories of race, gender, and class. A materially driven approach acknowledges the significance of these categories while equally understanding that such categories still can only offer a partial reality. In contrast, a material culture account aims to offer a productively speculative approach that is grounded in the experience of people while embracing a diversity of other theoretical perspectives to illuminate nuanced insights.

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Miller explains, "Through dwelling upon the more mundane sensual and material qualities of the object, we are able to unpick the more subtle connections with cultural lives and values that are objectified through these forms" (1998:9).

To understand how material culture resists a semiotic reductionism while still maintaining an analytical view of the social world, it is useful to consider how Miller adopts a philosophy of culture through Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977). To begin, it is useful to consider the conception of self and culture in Hegelian terms. Hegel's concept of self is described as being "entirely unconscious and undifferentiated" (Miller, 1987:22). The struggle towards a sense of identity can only be achieved by locating what the individual is not. As the self interacts with the world, the individual undergoes a process of othering because "awareness of the self is predicted on awareness of the 'other', and it is the process of creation and acknowledgement of the other which is the key to the achievement of self-awareness" (1987:22).

In other words, the development of the self is constantly informed by what the individual is not, and thus the articulation of the self occurs in the collision between the subject and the seemingly objective world. The idea of an external culture may appear to be innate and pre-given as people inherit its pre-existing social relations and this gives an impression of an autonomous objective reality. However, Hegel argues that the notion of subject and object cannot be viewed as two separate parts as "subject/self" and "object/culture" rather he asserts that these terms are mutually interchangeable and influence each other. In a circular motion, Hegel arrives to the proposition that humanity and materiality cannot be distinguished from one another, thus "subject" and "object" are much entangled together. From this view, Hegel's conception of the self and the social share a commonality with Bourdieu's (1990) concept of "habitus". Bourdieu's concept of the habitus argues that seemingly objective social conditions are reproduced by its social actors and in doing so, Bourdieu asserts, they can be equally dismantled by its social actors. Power is not conceptualised as a vertical structure, rather power is distributed and maintained through people and everyday actions. From a Hegelian perspective, people and things are both emergent products of historical processes who are capable of reinforcing or dismantling such histories and social power.

In this way, Hegel does not conceptualise the self as *prior* to action, rather self and culture are

realised through the *process* of action and this simultaneous dynamic alters the nature of self and the social world; this is a key idea conceptualised by Hegel that underpins Miller's view of material culture. Miller adopts Hegel's view of culture and self and applies this in the context of material culture. Acknowledging this interrelated dynamic between the social and the material, Miller (1987) devises the concept of objectification to justify how culture does not create material expression, but instead, a culture is articulated and simultaneously transformed *through* material expression as he states, "Everything that we are and do arises out of the reflection upon ourselves given by the mirror image of the process by which we create form and are created by the same process" (Miller, 2005:8). Similarly acknowledging a people-object entanglement, material culture theorist Christopher Tilley (2006) asserts that objects are not just the by-product of human action but that the production of objects simultaneously creates the identity of people,

> Through making, using, exchanging, consuming, interacting and living with things, people make themselves in the process. The object world is thus absolutely central to an understanding of the identities of individual persons and societies. Or, put it another way, without the things- material culture- we could neither be ourselves, nor know ourselves […] Personal, social and cultural identity is embodied in our persons and objectified in our things (2006:61).

Furthermore, in recognising the interdependence between people and material worlds, Tilley asserts that it is not a free-floating and abstracted notion of "culture" which creates material expression, but rather culture *is* created and transformed through materiality. Without a material outlet, a culture could not be known. Material worlds are not a reflection of culture, instead the material and the cultural are constitutive of each other as "culture and material culture are the two sides of the same coin" (Tilley, 2006:61). This concept acknowledges the mutual and interdependent relation between object and subject and in doing so, this dynamic negates the view that objects are passive vehicles of meaning as Miller puts it,

> This relationship is never static, but always a process of becoming which cannot be reduced to either of its two component parts: subject and object. The action of externalization and sublation is always constitutive, never merely reflective, and is therefore not a process of signification. This means that a theory of culture can have no independent subject, as neither individuals nor societies can be considered as its originators, since both are inseparable from

culture itself and are as much constituted by culture constituting it. This process is inherently dynamic; the relation between subject and object is never static. Objectification is therefore an assertion of the non-reductionist nature of culture as process (1987:33).

A by-product of this interrelated relationship between the individual and society suggests there is not a prior subject within a Hegelian perspective; it is neither the individual or culture that comes first. The only entity that appears prior is the process of on-going objectification which gives an impression of an "autonomous subjects and autonomous objects, which leads us to think in terms of a person using an object or an institution" (Miller, 2005:10). A theory of objectification is a recognition that the self and the material world are entangled in a processual and constantly emergent relationship because the "act of creating forms creates consciousness" (Miller, 2005:9). This dynamic enables an individual to articulate emotions and feelings that would be otherwise unknown and without a "material mirror" the self cannot be known, as Miller expands.

> We cannot comprehend anything, including ourselves, except as a form, a body, a category, even a dream. As such forms develop in their sophistication we are able to see more complex possibilities for ourselves in them…We cannot know who we are, or become what we are, except by looking in a material mirror, which is the historical world created by those who lived before us and confronts us as material culture, and that continues to evolve through us (2005:8).

From this position, we can begin to understand how and why Miller's theory of objectification is different to theories of representation; a position of representation foregrounds the self as being prior to the object or action. In contrast, a view of objectification focuses on the emerging subjective consciousness and cultural assertion that arises from material and external action. In this way, making and being become intimately tied to each other and through making, a sense of self and a wider cultural consciousness emerges from material action. Thus, selfhood and materiality are bound with one another and as materiality emerges, so does the sense of identity of the individual.

3.4 Conceptual Framework "Materially Embodied Visions"

The material of this literature review informs and orientates the conceptual framework used in this

thesis. The literature review has highlighted the advantages of adopting a material culture perspective in the study of the experiences and identities of British Chinese women. In order to bring forth an articulation of women's experiences, I have constructed the conceptual framework Materially Embodied Visions to capture the dynamic between materiality, subjectivity, and culture. Materially Embodied Visions acts as a concept to give visibility to the actions of women to represent themselves and transform the parameters of their cultural representation. The term combines concepts borrowed from cultural studies, material culture and visual culture to orientate a view of British Chinese women. In borrowing from across these disciplines, this concept attempts to illuminate the conceptual dynamic between the subjectivities of British Chinese women and the emerging articulation of themselves through their material worlds and art making.

British museums and cultural institutions have historically overlooked the identities of the British Chinese and sidelined their diasporic inbetween-ness. In response, Materially Embodied Visions recognises the dynamic between vision, power and embodiment for British Chinese women. Therefore the conceptual framework of Materially Embodied Visions is an opportunity for British Chinese women to reverse relations of representation and to put forward their experiences. For British Chinese women, this articulation of an embodied selfhood through materiality offers a counter narrative to the homogenising visual culture of the "Chinese" in Britain as highlighted in Chapter 2. Drawing on concepts from material culture, cultural theory, and visual culture, this interdisciplinary perspective is purposefully eclectic and by drawing on these concepts from across disciplines will support the tiered methodology in this study.

To better understand the term Materially Embodied Visions, I will unpack the concept of Materially Embodied Visions which consists of three strands. Firstly, informed by the cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1977), Materially Embodied Visions encompasses his concept of "structures of feelings". Secondly, the material worlds and creative making of British Chinese women is viewed within a theory of "objectification" as proposed by Daniel Miller (1987, 2005) as discussed above. Thirdly, to recognise the tension between power and representation, Materially Embodied Visions is a form of "situated knowledge" as borrowed from Donna Haraway (1991). By unpacking the concept in these ways will offer more clarity and to better understanding to its relevance in capturing the

subjectivities of British Chinese women.

3.4.1 Materially Embodied Visions as "Structures of Feeling"

"Structures of feeling" is a flexible concept that is concerned with the question of how to capture the cultural expressions of people and groups who have traditionally remained on the margins of society. As a marginalised group, their cultural expressions exist outside the legitimised and dominant forms of culture that often appear to be long-standing and enduring. Raymond Williams (1977) critiques the way these dominant cultural expressions are discussed within a "habitual past tense". This tendency to view culture as being a fixed and stable entity of the past commands authority and renders other emerging cultural expressions as lesser expressions. This conceptualisation of culture is problematic; it ignores the essence of culture as an inherently dynamic and creative force which thrives on the reinvention in the present moment. This cultural "habitual past tense" denies the dynamics of culture and instead creates a secure shorthand as Williams states,

> Social forms are evidently more recognisable when they are articulate and explicit. We have seen this in the range from institutions to formations and traditions. We can see it again in the range from dominant systems of belief and education to influential systems of explanation and argument (1977:130).

In the desire to be externally communicable, complexities are lessened with the intention to be understood. It erases and reduces the inherent intricacies of cultural inbetween-ness. Therefore "structures of feeling" can be understood to be a textured and anti-prescriptive concept which is focused on the emerging identities of cultural expressions of a new social group and subjectivities (Rutherford, 1990). Their identities are emerging amongst a dominant culture whose discourse has not allowed them to fully articulate their experiences to themselves or others. "Structures of feeling" transgresses the dichotomy of thought and emotion to view these two entities as being entwined with each other. As a concept, it is by no means prescriptive, rather it attempts to capture the emergence of cultural subjectivities as "thought as felt and feeling as thought". In this way, it marries together affective emotions and intellect to view these entities as equal with each other, as Williams explains,

It is that we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt […] We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity (1977:192).

"Thought as felt and feeling as thought" acts as a responsive "structure" in which the experiences of individuals can be understood within a wider social significance as Williams puts it,

We are then defining these elements as a 'structure': as a set, within specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet we are also defining a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating (1977:132).

With this view, "structures of feeling" finds its conceptual form through empirical material and in this sense, the concept does not operate as an overarching superstructure concept. Unlike didactic superstructure concepts that are prescriptive in its theoretical application, "structures of feelings" is a nuanced concept. This aspect of the theory has found itself criticised for being too tentative and abstracted as raised by sociologist Paul Filmer (2003). However, it is important to remember that it is a concept designed to address the difficulty of articulating what is yet to be verbalised and furthermore it is a concept designed to sit between disciplines. It does not impose a theory of culture but it sketches a theoretical outline to capture expressions that are in emergence. The flexibility of the concept allows an ability to locate the textured nuances and subjectivities of emergent expressions and identities without the imposition of a highly theorised concept. In this ethos, comparisons can be drawn between Williams and Bourdieu in their desire to bring lucidity to the experience of social experiences. While Bourdieu was concerned with providing rationale for the function of society, Williams was concerned with the lived experience of culturally emergent expressions.

As a relatively small and dispersed community, the British Chinese have only recently begun to assert their sense of self and hybridity into the broader cultural arena. Song (1995) observes the construction of a "private" and "public" self, while Parker describes the identities of the second generation as being "more privately held and guarded" (1995:238). Being British Chinese, their references and points of identification do not abide to the "habitual past tense" of fixed and stable

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forms of a singularly bound geographical location such as Britain or China. From a British institutional perspective, there are few public accounts of a hybridised British Chinese representation. Most constructions of "Chineseness" refer to a mythical China in a "habitual past tense" and this impacts the way in which British Chinese identities are imagined. An integration of this viewpoint in Materially Embodied Visions acknowledges the emergent cultural articulation of British Chinese women in contemporary manifestation.

3.4.2 Materially Embodied Visions as "Objectification"

Building upon the culturally emergent view as advocated by "structures of feelings", I will integrate a theory of objectification to illuminate the interdependent relationship between people, materiality and culture as proposed by material culture theorist Daniel Miller (1987, 2005). Objectification argues that material expression and culture are entangled in a process whereby "neither society nor cultural form is privileged as prior, but rather seen as mutually constitutive" (Miller, 1987:18). This acknowledgement of an emergent cultural dynamic similarly resonates with the ideas of Williams as he also stresses the need to acknowledge the changing nuance of culture as these shifts arise. Objects can be understood to be "bridging roles" across a multiplicity of functions and meanings while maintaining a "particularly close relation to emotions, feelings and basic orientations to the world" (Miller, 1987:107).

As a perspective, it challenges the empiricist Cartesian notion between object and subject. Following the collapse of this division, it acknowledges an inherent people-object entanglement, it is not an abstracted notion of "culture" that creates material expressions, but rather culture *is* created through materiality (Miller, 1987; Tilley, 2006). Without a material outlet, a culture could not be known. The material and cultural are constitutive of each other as "culture and material culture are the two sides of the same coin" (Tilley, 2006:61). Objects are far from being passive entities that receive and carry semantic meaning from the individual, but instead objects play an active role in the articulation of selfhood and culture. The dissolution between object and subject suggests that the biography of the object both mirrors and embodies the lived experiences of people,

> Material forms remain as one of the key media through which people conduct their constant struggles over identity and confront the contradictions and ambiguities that face them in their daily lives. To go beyond a dualistic approach means recognising that the continual process by which meaning is given to things is the same process by which meaning is given to lives (Miller, 1994a: 417).

From a cultural perspective, objects and material environments are intrinsic to the process of socialisation and constitute the micro-routine of everyday life. They act as a point of orientation where everyday habits and values are developed in harnessing selfhood and cultural identity. The individual is physically embodied in that cultural environment, while aspects of this lived embodiment become representational symbols of that culture. A focus on material objects offers an embodied view of people whereby the affective dimensions of materiality offer ways to understand "thought as felt and feeling as thought". The physicality of material culture provides a practical outlet to understand how Williams' "structures of feelings" are enacted by people and things.

A theory of objectification privileges an ethnographic vantage point on objects and people. As a theory, it recognises the limits of imposing social theories or strict disciplinary parameters upon objects; for example, a study of homes and people does not necessarily have to be analysed in the context of architecture or interior design studies. Miller observes that the multi-disciplinary and eclectic nature of material culture is an advantage and it can generate surprising insights that would be otherwise unobserved within a singular disciplinary lens. From this perspective, material culture is ethnographically dedicated to "emphasize careful observations of what people actually do and in particular do with things" (1998:12). Objectification privileges the production of "thick description" generated by ethnographic engagement. Insights are initiated by material objects centred on a "structure of feelings" raised by the individual. The observations raised through an objectification position will privilege the ethnographic observations of people, rather than following an analytical deduction of pre-existing social theories.

3.4.3. Materially Embodied Visions as "Situated Knowledge"

As previously discussed in Chapter 1, the experiences of British Chinese women have been overlooked by wider British cultural institutions in favour of a "habitual past tense" of a mythically

constructed China. As a result, the emergent articulation of selfhood through the objects of British Chinese women can be seen as a strategy to disrupt and revise relations of power and representation. To capture these relations of power through visuality, I employ "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1991) as an idea that conceptualises the dynamics between vision, power and positionality to foreground a feminist embodiment perspective.

Using the metaphor of the technological gaze, Haraway critiques the problematic notion of "objective" knowledge and describes this form of knowing as a disembodied gaze which encapsulates the position of the unmarked Western masculine authority that casts judgement, without being judged and sees without being seen. This technological gaze "mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation" (1991:188). Condemned as the "god-trick", this omnipresence gaze is symptomatic of the way that the gaze has operated in the representation of the British Chinese through visual culture. The discourse of Chineseness in Britain has been dominated by representations that epitomise the racial othering as epitomised by Dr. Fu Manchu (Clegg, 1994), the fetishistic Western gaze of the museum (Clunas, 1998) or the unassuming gaze of the white, middle class British woman Cheang (2006).

This conquering Western gaze produces an aesthetic of the |Orient while simultaneously denying those "Oriental" a voice. Haraway highlights, "The Western eye has fundamentally been a wandering eye, a travelling lens. These peregrinations have often been violent and insistent on mirrors for a conquering self" (1991:192). To overthrow this "conquering gaze from nowhere" permeates the way that the British Chinese have been viewed through visual culture, Haraway calls for another form of feminist objectivity through her concept of situated knowledges. Rather than positioning the acquisition of knowledge as a disembodied, scientific and top-down gaze, Haraway asserts the necessary position to reclaim an embodied vision from below as she asserts,

> I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives; the view of a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere,

from simplicity. Only the god-trick is forbidden (1991:195).

This embodied vision calls for a strategy of "partial perspective". This partiality is not a limitation but rather with a situated focus, it highlights that seeing and knowing are never neutral and always marked. This situated perspective dispels the myth of an objective knowledge. A partial perspective advocates that there is never one singular "truth" rather there are multiple truths, positions and visions which present a multiplicity of knowledges. This partial and situated perspective drives a view of the body as a fundamental site which has the propensity to challenge, refute and internalise the inequalities of the social world as "we need to learn in our bodies" (1991:190). Political theorist and feminist, Iris Marion Young affirms the centrality of the body as a site of a situated location as,

> The subject who constitutes a world is always an embodied subject…There is no situation, however, without embodied location and interaction. Conversely, the body as lived is always layered with social and historical meaning and is not some primitive matter prior to or underlying economic and political relations or cultural meanings (2005:7).

Binary viewpoints reveal their fallibility. The only way to attain a complex and robust objectivity is to be situated *somewhere* therefore, "Objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision" (1991:190). A situated perspective is a flexible mode of vision that connects the individual to the wider perspective to view women's experiences in the variants of "tensions, resonances, transformations, resistances and complicities" (1991:195). This embodied knowledge advocated by Haraway is a strategy to conceptualise the voices, bodies and visions of British Chinese women to acknowledge the points of divergences and commonalities in the articulation of their subjectivity through creative and verbal means.

Furthermore, the vantage shift from the dis-embodied "god-trick" to a situated perspective presents a dissolution of distances to signal a revision between the boundary of "object" and "subject". Haraway's dissolution of the subject-object dichotomy resonates with the theory of objectification in material culture as previously raised by Miller. For Haraway, the category of an active "subject" can refer to human and non-human entities. While they both Haraway and Miller largely draw on an

embodied perspective, it is useful to note that their emphasis differs; embodiment from Haraway's view takes in the "view of the body" as informed by feminist thought, while Miller's concept of objectification emphasises the relationship between material embodment and cultural assertion. Despite their difference of emphasis, conceptual parallels between material culture and visual culture can be drawn together as both Haraway and Miller refer to post-Cartesian perspectives of embodiment over representation.

3.5 Viewing British Chinese Women Through Materially Embodied Visions

The research on embodiment from a feminist, material culture and cultural theory perspective informs the term of Materially Embodied Visions. As a concept, it epitomises a feminist "view from below" as a strategy to disrupt the bodies of knowledge that have been constructed about British Chinese identities through visual culture. Using a material culture focus to understand the subjectivities of British Chinese women offers a critical contrast to the collection and fetishisation of Chinese material objects. Materially Embodied Visions highlights the intersections between objectification and embodiment as a strategy to overthrow the "god-trick" of the homogenising visual culture that surrounds British Chinese identities. Such a culturally felt and materially embodied position acts as a creative and subversive strategy to disrupt the homogenising representations of Chineseness by British institutional practices. This view of womens' material lives would otherwise be unseen in the public museum context as their identities do not conform the usual nation-state notions of identity. This material culture strategy posits as a counter narrative to nation-states discourses of China to present a diasporic account of the lives of Chinese women in Britain which have been overlooked and under-represented.

This conceptual framework takes inspiration from my own practice as an artist which informs the core of the methodology to provide a space where women are able to take ownership over the articulation of their identities, this visual methodology will be discussed in Chapter 4. By inviting British Chinese women to speak through their material worlds and art making, Materially Embodied Visions offers "a view from below" which would bring greater clarity to the subjectivities of women as informed by race, class, sexuality, and gendered dynamics. As there is a lack of public discourse

surrounding British Chinese identities, the articulation by these women is viewed as culturally felt and emergent. In viewing materiality as constitutive of culture, we can understand the womens' material worlds and the art making as cultural acts where British Chinese women articulate their place in the world and thereby express their subjectivities. With and through the material object, we become attuned to viewing the multiplicity of vision; it affords an opportunity to enter into the lesser seen domestic space of British Chinese women, a space that the public museum gaze has less propensity to enter.

The dissolution of the binary notion of object and subject presents the women's objects as extensions of their lives as "thoughts as felt and feeling as thought". In the lives of their female owners, these objects are active subjects that enable the women to articulate known and surprising knowledge about themselves. The visual and participatory aspect of the methodology makes an active gesture towards cultivating a dynamic of embodiment and material articulation. The dissolving between the object and the subject occurs at every stage of the methodology, thus the concept of embodiment is central to the methodology. The significance of the object and art making lies in its ability to enable the individual to situate their felt selfhood which resonates on a personal and cultural level for British Chinese women. From this material culture and feminist vantage point, the objects of the women are not viewed through the lens of psychology that could individualise the experiences of the women. Rather, their subjectivities are viewed through a wider collective expression of British Chineseness and womahood.

The representation of the Chinese in Britain has traditionally adopted a position of nation-based narratives; invariably a diasporic voice of cultural inbetween-ness has been overlooked. Unlike the emperor's throne that proclaims to be about a geographically bound China, the analysis of these objects does not intend to do the same. Moreover, the women's objects and art making are not presented as final and definitive categories of "British Chinese" female identities. Instead, what constitutes their British-Chinese relation is that these objects have been used in a multiple of ways to negotiate their sense of selfhood, questions and belonging within a British landscape as British Chinese women. Their material worlds and art making are viewed as strategies to initiate, ask and

share questions within a social and supported environment to problematise or unpack their gendered experiences as British Chinese women. Their negotiation and questions are indicative of larger challenges of the British Chinese as a whole.

3.6 Summary

The experiences and social contribution of British Chinese women have been overlooked in a public and academic context. This chapter has illustrated that while gendered considerations have been adopted by some researchers (Parker, 1995; Pang, 1998; Lin, 2014), the experiences of women have seldom been a dedicated focus. Instead, the matter of ethnic boundaries and cultural identifications have been the dominant focus in British Chinese research. The research that has solely focused on the identities of British Chinese women generally derive from a social policy and sociological perspective which largely account the lives of women from a top-down perspective. While this provides an overarching view of women's lives, their lived subjectivities are less tangible through a sociological lens.

To bring forward a textured and embodied view of women's lives, this chapter highlights the potential of adopting a material culture perspective. The work of Parkin (1999), Turan (2010) and Toila-Kelly (2004) emphasise how a material culture perspective can shed light on the lesser seen experiences of migrant lives. Through their research accounts, it becomes apparent that material culture view can present a greater propensity for individuals to speak for themselves. From this perspective, a view of material culture presents a theory of objectification. As Miller (1987) outlines, a theory of objectification differs from representational theories which prioritises the individual as the "active" subject over the "passive" object. A view of objectification recognises an inherent people-object entanglement, it is not an abstracted notion of "culture" that creates material expressions, but rather culture *is* created through materiality (Miller, 1987; Tilley, 2006) and thus, the identity of the individual and culture emerges through material expression.

Ideas about materiality, self and culture inform the conceptual framework of Materially Embodied Visions. This concept was specifically devised to capture the insights of the bespoke visual

methodology which consists of object centred interviews, art workshops and a curated online exhibition. As a conceptual framework, it is inspired by Haraway's feminist viewpoint of "situated knowledges", this view is combined with Williams' cultural theory view of "structures of feeling" and a recognition of emergent, periphery cultural expressions, and finally, the framework is further informed by Miller's theory of "objectification" which views cultural expression as an inherent manifestation of materiality.

In borrowing from across these disciplines, the conceptual term attempts to illuminate the insights between the subjectivities of British Chinese women and the emerging articulation of themselves through their material worlds and art making. In this sense, material culture enables an expression of individual embodiment and a wider cultural articulation. A perspective of material culture presents an opportunity for women to reverse the relations of power and through objects and storytelling, women are afforded a context to speak about their lives and journeys. From this perspective, the lives of British Chinese women are not only framed by socio- economic structures rather material objects enable women a context to speak for themselves and articulate their desires and aspirations.

The analysis and interpretation offered in the forthcoming chapters encompass the concept of Materially Embodied Visions. As a conceptual framework, Materially Embodied Visions recognises the limits of claiming a position where knowledge is secure and fixed. Rather, the womens' objects and artworks capture a moment in time where the women externally situate their material selves in the world. These narratives are open to revision and do not offer themselves as definitive and finite accounts. In this spirit, the interpretation of material worlds are multiple and cannot be generalised, and such an intention would defeat the purpose of a feminist intention which privileges the situated multiple subjectivities and positions of British Chinese women.

Chapter 4

Methodology

With the aim of deepening the understanding of British Chinese women beyond the binary stereotypes of "submissive" and "model minority", this study adopted visual ethnography to study the subjectivities of British Chinese women. Visual ethnography was selected as a methodology to accommodate the multiple conceptual insights of this study. The use of visual ethnography in the study of British Chinese identities contrasts to traditional research methods, which have predominately focused on the parameters of employment and economy (Song, 1995; Benton, 1998; Pang and Lau, 1998). To date, the experiences about British Chinese people have generally privileged oral interviewing as a major method of data collection (Parker, 1993, 1998 ; Pang, 1999; Yuen, 2008; Lin, 2014). The use of visual ethnography and creative methods intends to challenge the wider understanding of the Chinese in Britain as framed by occupational terms rather than cultural or creative pursuits as Diana Yeh (2014) highlights the problematic nature of this perspective,

> By assigning to particular bodies a machine-like capacity for work but an inherent lack of creativity constructs them [the Chinese] as essentially 'Other', denies their status as fully human, and questions their very ability to participate in the social and cultural realm (2014: 1207).

The following section will (1) provide a theoretical overview about the relationship between art and ethnography to contextualise the use of visual ethnographic methods, (2) explain the process of recruitment and gaining access to the participants in the study, and (3) detail the research journey of using art methods undertaken by the two generations to highlight the journey of using ethnographic art methods. By discussing the process of using visual ethnographic methods, I will detail the ways that these methods have been used and adapted accordingly to engage the two cohorts of women and highlight the challenges and insights encountered through the methodology.

4.1 The Relationship Between Art and Ethnography

To better contextualise visual ethnography as a methodology, it is useful to consider the critical and theoretical developments of art practices during the 1970s and 1980s which signalled an ethnographic shift. The movements of feminism, civil rights and gay rights inspired a generation of artists to leave the traditional art institutions to question and dismantle traditional power structures. As artists departed from the gallery and brought their practices into the social sphere, this move also re- defined the definitions of "art", "artists" and "audiences". At the core of these practices was a desire to break down the traditional hierarchy between what was deemed to be "art" and "non-art". Abandoning the studio, artists moved into society which led to a growth of practices ranging from performance art, site-specific art and community engaged practices (Sasni, 2015).

No longer interested in the singular, revered art object and the capitalist structure of the art world, socially engaged practices epitomised the mantra of German artist Joseph Beuys who announced that "everyone is an artist".[13] The site of everyday life was seen to possess a radical and untapped creative potential. With this in mind, artists viewed creativity as a strategy to initiate social impact. Formal and aesthetic considerations of an autonomous artwork were no longer the only criterion for judgment. The "form" of artists' practices was no longer a literal and physical conception, rather the "form" of artworks could be understood in relation to social issues, marginalised communities, political problems and institutional power. A result of these developments meant that these new art practices and artists found themselves in a wider cultural debate alongside anthropologists and sociologists. Artists interested in creating social change operated in a similar manner to ethnographers as Dipti Desai (2002) states,

> The artistic process in this broader understanding of site-specific work privileges the collaborative process over art product, placing experience as a cornerstone. The collaborative process obligated artists to become participant-observers in order to better understand the communities they chose to engage with. In other words, artists spent time in communities informally talking to various people, reading about the community and often

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[13] Joseph Beuys (1979) was a German artist who believed that every human being has creative potential. By exercising the creative potential of the individual, it is possible to transform and emancipate society from capitalist society. He devised the concept of social sculpture which challenged the use of "high" and "low" materials and therefore in his work everyday materials such as felt, fur and fat are incorporated into his work.

conducting interviews […] It is no surprise then, that excavation of stories, objects, and material evidence from the lives of people in various communities required artists to become in a sense ethnographers and/or oral historians (2002:309).

An example of an artist whose practice has ethnographic parallels is the American artist, Suzanne Lacy. Lacy's practice encompassed the parameters of a socially engaged art practice that is "not built on a typology of materials, space, or artistic media, but rather on concepts of audience, relationship, communication, and political intention" (Lacy 1995:28). Interested in the marginalised experiences of older women exemplified by the work "Crystal Quilt" (1987), Lacy brought together 430 women over the age of 60 in Minneapolis to share their experiences of ageing. Exhibited at Tate Modern, the documentation of the event spoke as a visual metaphor of women's lives through the visual metaphor of tapestry. Also embracing the need for political change through aesthetics and enactment is British artist Jeremy Deller. His work "The Battle of Orgreave" (2001) was a performance that brought together 200 former miner strikers who were part of the original strike of 1984. 800 police officers (recruited as actors) and the former miners came together to re- enact the the mining labour confrontation. This work presented a public opportunity for the former miners to re-enact the past and speak from their perspective.

The work of Lacy and Deller captured the sentiment of socially engaged art practices. The desire was no longer to simply illustrate social relations through an object for the gallery, but to creatively intervene in those social relations. In these social contexts, the artist can be viewed as an instigator of activities to ignite social consciousness, cultural debate and to move toward effecting change. The site of the artwork was not an autonomous artwork of aesthetic concern, rather the "work of art" exists in a social and relational context. In the 1990s, curator Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) coined the term "relational art" to describe artworks that embraced "the whole of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space" (2002:14). Relational art can be understood as a situation of social encounter. The artwork exists in relationship to its participants and the ways in which the encounter facilitates social debate as art historian Claire Bishop states,

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Relational art works seek to establish intersubjective encounters (be these literal or potential) in which meaning is elaborated collectively rather than in the privatized space of individual consumption…relational art is entirely beholden to the contingencies of its environment and audience. Moreover, this audience is envisaged as a community: rather than a one-to-one relationship between work of art and viewer, relational art sets up situations in which viewers are not just addressed as a collective, social entity, but are actually given the wherewithal to create a community, however temporary or utopian this may be (2004:54).

Roger Sasni (2015) observes the productive interdisciplinary relationship between anthropology and art. Sasni explains that ethnography can offer artists the theoretical and practical tools to facilitate and assist creative participation which informs the methodological term "visual ethnography". Ethnographic principles of participant-observation and a "thick description" of social observations are hallmarks of the methodology. For the relational artist, ethnographic tools can help to "establish relations of participation". As these socially engaged art projects evolve, they can initiate change in the social world as they can create "unprecedented relations between different actors, generating new alliances and communities- in other words, help re-imagine and rebuild the social at a local level" (2015:13). Reflecting on the ethnographic integration into artists' practices, Sasni explains,

Fieldwork techniques such a participant observation, field notes, interview and life histories have become common method through which artists produce their work. Anthropological questions about exchange, personhood, and identity formation figure prominently in many of these projects (2015:37).

In this spirit, Sasni states that artists and anthropologists can "teach" each other the advantages of their practices. The direct engagement of artists with communities means the gap between theory and practice are bridged as they take on a responsibility as cultural theorists (Sullivan, 2010). The tools of ethnography can assist the artist to better situate self reflexivity as a researcher. While the artist can promote ways for the anthropologist to embrace a greater sense of experimentation where anthropological concepts of collaboration, gift and relation are literally "put into play" (Sasni, 2015:14). Visual ethnography becomes a way to view theory in action as people are seen as active participants in producing knowledge about their own experiences.

The use of visual methods have been advocated by a variety of academics from sociologists (Chaplin, 1994; Leavy, 2009), anthropologists (Schneider and Wright, 2010, Sasni, 2015; Banks,

2018) and media based disciplines (Gauntlett, 2007). Visual anthropologist, Marcus Banks (2018) highlights the benefits of using visual methods for work that is specifically centred on issues and power relations of representation. Visual methods are particularly suitable for identity-based work as they are "adept at accessing subjugated perspectives, challenging stereotypes and dominant ideology, raising critical consciousness, fostering empathetic understandings, and building coalitions" (Leavy, 2009:ix). Thus, visual methods are especially relevant when wanting to situate and give voice to individuals and groups who have been previously overlooked or socially stereotyped, such as British Chinese women.

While Sasni calls for more anthropologists to take up experimental methods, Schneider and Wright (2010) highlight the contentions between the two fields. They argue that there has been a traditional mistrust of the potentially fetishistic nature of the visual, they coined this as "iconophobia" which describes an "anthropological fear" of the visual acting as a form of cultural fetishism. This iconophobia of the visual has meant that anthropologists have either been dismissive of the visual or have viewed it as solely a vehicle to illustrate "real" knowledge. From this perspective, "visuality itself becomes merely ancillary, illustrative rather than constitutive of anthropological knowledge" (2010:2).

Schneider and Wright observe that some anthropologists are "dismissive" of artistic methods because of their "experimental" nature as it implies a laboratory environment controlled by the researcher, rather than viewing people in their "natural" setting. However, it is impossible for any anthropologist to remain outside of society without intervention. Moreover, knowledge does not exist as a fully formed product that is identified and extracted. Instead "knowledge is produced through experience rather than simply replicated" (Schneider and Wright 2010:11). The field of ethnography is a site of knowledge that is not singular but multiple. Furthermore, ethnographers Crang and Cook (2007) assert that it is not possible to conceptualise knowledge as an "objective" entity as people-centred research requires an immersion of the participant's cultural environment. Visual ethnography offers an opportunity for anthropologists to engage with wider forms of social engagement and creativity, while ethnographic tools offer artists a socially grounded approach to deliver such intentions.

Sarah Pink (2001) defines ethnography as an on-going methodology based on a process of questions, interactions and observations with people, rather than being a singular action marked as "ethnography". Ethnography is a processual methodology which is a holistic approach to "experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society" (2001:18). In other words, ethnography is a self-reflexive filter where one admits one's subjective situation and acknowledges how that impacts the way one sees the world and therefore produces research knowledge. As Pink states,

> Ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals) that is based on ethnographers' own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or 'truthful' account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context,
> negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced (2001:18).

The use of visual methods allows the researcher to see the participant's personal expressions and thereby Pink suggests that the visual becomes a "site of cultural production". To understand the verbal and visual as being equal forms of knowledge production, Pink calls for an "end of hierarchies" between the two entities. The collaborative spirit of researcher and the participant also extends to the way that the visual and the textual are integrated. Pink's assertion for an end of hierarchies is an invitation to view the visual as containing specific knowledge that is particular to its own form, rather than to view the visual as "evidence" that illustrates verbal knowledge. This consideration is specifically important for the researcher during the analysis of the material as Pink observes,

> The purpose of analysis is not to translate 'visual evidence' into verbal knowledge, but to explore the relationship between visual and other (including verbal) knowledge. In practice, this implies an analytical process of making meaningful links between different research experiences and materials such as photography, video, field diaries, more formal ethnographic writing, local written and visual texts, visual and other objects (2001:96).

While visual ethnography can offer participants an active way to engage with power structures, the use of visual ethnography has been criticised by art critic Hal Foster (1999) in his article "The Artist as Ethnographer?". He critiques the use of ethnography by artists and labels it as a form of "pseudo-

ethnography" where the artist's engagement with the community is insufficient to be considered as ethnography. Drawing on Foster's critique, we can begin to better situate the work of Lacy's "Crystal Quilt". The visual documentation of "Crystal Quilt" was an arresting metaphor, however, the more intricate questions such as inter-group dynamics of the women were not always clear in the work. For example, it was difficult to get a sense of the women as individuals to understand how cultural views impacted their ideologies on ageing and selfhood.

Foster's point is a valid concern, however, a more productive position is to consider how the two disciplines can come together to fulfil the aim of the each individual study. There are disciplinary tensions between ethnography and visual art and there are certainly overlaps and departures between the disciplines. However, their divergences do not mean there is not common ground to be gained. The disciplinary fork in the road needs to be carefully considered for the research aims of each visual ethnographic study. In this sense, it requires the visual ethnographer to balance the use of visual methods and the ethnographic research aims of the specific study. In this sense, the challenge of interdisciplinary work is to consider how visual methods can enable us to see with more ethnographic clarity, and how ethnography can offer a practical theoretical structure for people-centred research. In this sense, it is important to remember the richness that can be generated when the disciplines of art and ethnography come together.

4.1.1 Theory in Action

In this study, the use of visual ethnography was informed by the concept of Materially Embodied Visions. The conceptual foundations of this study have a direct methodological impact which expands the qualitative paradigm. The discussion of theory and epistemological positions cannot be divorced from methods (Leavy, 2009; Sasni, 2015). Materially Embodied Visions took in a view of objectification and embodiment as a strategy to situate the subjectivities of British Chinese women. The use of visual ethnography created situations where the concept of Materially Embodied Visions could be embodied and enacted in the research methodology. I will outline the ways in which visual art ethnography offered a physical outlet for this conceptual framework.

In viewing materiality as constitutive of culture, we can understand the women's objects and the art making as cultural acts where they articulate their place in the world. From a practical viewpoint, I invited two generations of British Chinese women to attend one-to-one "object-stories" interviews. The women were asked to bring an object to the interview; their choice could be as culturally specific or neutral as they desired. The women were invited to speak about their life stories through their choice of object. After the interview, the women were invited to attend a group art workshop. In the workshop, the women took part in an array of art activities such as printing, collaging and experimental art writing to visual the stories of their objects.

By engaging with women through material objects and art making, this enabled the women to engage in the process of cultural objectification in a creatively productive way. The process of art making was a strategy that brought Miller's theory of objectification to an observable reality. The stories of the women's objects were not just verbal interpretations but though the art making, they assumed a visual form. Through making, the women's sense of self emerged as a culturally felt action and posited them as producers of their own representations.

Furthermore, their object-stories did not just exist as academic "data", rather, their stories and art making were curated into an online exhibition which became the public interface of this study. The online exhibition was formally launched in July 2018 with an opening event where two generations of female participants celebrated the project launch. The online exhibition inserted the voices of British Chinese women into the public discourse and consciousness and these ideas are further discussed in Chapter 8. Overall, the visuality of the methodology enhanced the accessibility and relatability of the research project.

The dissolution of the traditional domains of "object" and "subject" presented the material objects as extensions of the women's lives as "thoughts as felt and feeling as thought" (Williams, 1977). In the lives of their female owners, these objects were active subjects that enabled the women to articulate known and surprising knowledges about themselves in the interview. The activities of the art workshop were centred on art making which made an active gesture towards an embodiment

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position. Between the artwork and the material object, we are offered a phenomenological account of the women's lives as the object and artwork acted as "structures of feeling". The object often related to a direct lived experience, while their artwork captured the affective sentiment of that experience. Therefore, the two entities can be viewed as material outlets to articulate the various political, social, classed and raced reflections of British Chinese women as their feelings and thoughts are extended into materiality.

The significance of the object and art making resided in their ability to enable the individual to situate their selfhood which resonated across a personal and cultural level. Material objects and art making became strategies to initiate and share questions within a social and supported environment to problematise and unpack their gendered experiences as British Chinese women within a group setting. Given the lack of public discourse surrounding British Chinese identities, the communal element initiated through the workshop context was an essential element of the methodology. In order to facilitate a broader cultural expression of the British Chinese, it was essential that this discussion emerged amongst British Chinese women first and foremost.

Visual ethnographic methods created a context where participants physically engaged with creative processes. These creative activities connected the participant with the emotional aspects of social life and this empathetic sharing on a public level brought forth a public consciousness that was previously lacking. Working with marginalised groups provided a platform to articulate their experiences on a broader level to begin to dismantle previously unseen power structures. Thereby, visual practices can help to "build coalition across groups and challenge dominant dominant ideologies" (Leavy, 2009:13). The creative engagement from these groups can be seen as a strategy to confront and challenge wider stereotypes as their work strives to communicate their differences and diversity as individuals within a broader social group. Furthermore, as a visual medium, it has a greater propensity to cross over from academic scholarship to communicate and engage with a wider public audience as it directly inserts their voices into a public forum to challenge dominant modes of ideologies.

Using visual methods offered a holistic view of identities and the possibility of communicating through visual metaphors to access different levels of consciousness. Identity is a social construction which is constantly influenced by images from popular culture, media and advertising. In noting this

symbiotic relationship, David Gauntlett suggests that visual methods can be an alternative way of gathering knowledge about the construction and experience of identity from people. The physical nature of making reflects the metaphorical nature of identity as "this process of writing, drawing, cutting and pasting […] in some way mirrored the procedures involved in piecing together one's own representation of the self" (Gauntlett, 2007: 117). As visual methods are process based, these methods encouraged participants to engage with creating knowledge that is embodied through their experiences. This echoes the feminist concept of embodiment as they help participants to "keep their own bodies" (Weber, 2008) because not all knowledge can be reduced to language. Sandra Weber expands on this point, "People are not ideas, but flesh and blood beings learning through their senses and responding to images through their embodied experiences" (2008:46).

It is important to note that while visual methods can have therapeutic attributes, they differ from art therapy. Founder of Inclusive Arts, Alice Fox (2015) notes that all creative pursuits offer a therapeutic quality which is an intrinsic element of any meaningful creative journey. In this research, visual methods were not viewed as a "tool" to address an underlying personal problem (as in occupational therapy) but rather to focus on broadening self expression and facilitate creative exchanges of British Chinese women. The intention was not to resolve personal matters, rather visual methods can bring forth an individual and a wider social consciousness. Mitchell and de Lange (2011) found their community-based participatory video project in South Africa created a space for community members to "externalize[d] its stories" and in doing so it "externalize its problems" which presents an opportunity to envisage collective solutions. The use of visual and participatory methods has been influential in facilitating an experiential account of lives, which is especially pertinent for groups who have few public instances to articulate their subjectivities.

Their articulation and expression were viewed as indicative of larger challenges of the British Chinese as whole, rather than as idiosyncratic and isolated anecdotes. These objects and artworks captured a moment in time where the women situated their material selves into the world where there are seldom public accounts of their lives. The visual and verbal accounts offered an in-depth account of women's lives. The interpretations of their material and visual worlds are multiple and cannot be generalised, such an intention would defeat the purpose of a feminist intention which

privileges the situated and multiple subjectivities of British Chinese women.

4.1.2 Artist-As-Ethnographer

As an artist of British Chinese heritage, I was inspired by my mother's pyjamas that she brought to Britain as part of her migratory wardrobe. To explore the affective dimensions of the unseen migratory stories of women's objects and journeys, I began to ask my mother about the story of these pyjamas. Drawing on this material as inspiration, I adopted various techniques of collaging and experimental writing. The material object and art making encapsulated questions of cultural belonging and selfhood. On exhibiting this artwork, I realised that this personal and creative process of collaging and experimental writing could be shared as a wider "method" with other British Chinese women to explore their experiences of gender, race and migration and to provide a space for women to speak about and for themselves.

Art methods are informed by wider ethnographic principles and therefore this methodology can be seen as a wider extension of my practice as a socially engaged artist. This mirrors the broader transition of artists moving from the "studio into the community" that shifts "viewers from passive to an active participant in artistic encounters" (Sullivan, 2010:166). In this study, I viewed myself as an artist-ethnographic researcher. The method of employing material objects, collage and experimental writing came directly from my own creative process as an artist. In working with a wider community, I drew upon the conceptual and practical tools of ethnography to offer a greater capacity for self-reflexivity as an artist and researcher.

With the artist in greater proximity to groups and individuals, there is a greater theoretical and ethical responsibility as Sullivan reminds us of the "increased responsibilities" for the "space between theory and practice becomes a site for making art and doing research and takes inquiry beyond disciplinary boundaries, cultural borders and technological divides" (Sullivan 2010:166). In this sense, equal emphasis was given to the visual and verbal dimension of the final research product. This study gave equal emphasis to the more traditional "thick" written ethnographic

account and the visual product of the object-stories online exhibition. The social impact of the online exhibition and research project will form the analysis in Chapter 8. The visual online interface presented an opportunity to visually and culturally articulate the experience of British Chinese women and therefore, visuality cannot be seen as a "secondary" vehicle to textual expressions.

The integration of ethnography with visual methods presented a greater self reflexivity for myself as the researcher. A reflexive approach recognises that the identity of the researcher (in terms of gender, class, race, sexuality) impacts the production of the research. Subjectivity is not a threat to ethnographic work; instead it can be reflexively and critically embraced to understand the way in which bias influences and brings specific focus to the research. As Pink puts it, "Subjectivity should be engaged with as a central aspect of ethnographic knowledge, interpretation and representation" (2001:19). In this sense, it is not just a case of how ethnographers observe reality, rather observation itself presents a distortion of "reality". Reflexivity is not just the attempt to record and capture an "objective" reality but acknowledges that the subjectivity of the researcher can bring forth a greater view of objectivity.

4.1.3 Self-Reflexivity

Being a British-born Chinese woman from a Hong Kong Chinese background was an advantage as it cultivated a cultural connection with the two generations. My Hong Kong Chinese background was an asset because the Hong Kong Chinese in Britain are the majority sub-group and are the longest settled Chinese cohort in Britain. Through the eyes of the first generation, I was viewed as a "daughter" or "teacher" as they recognised commonalities between us in terms of language, family background and gender. They were very open with their migratory stories as I was welcomed into their group and invited to their social Chinese New Year celebrations. However, our shared commonalities could also be viewed as a disadvantage and being a younger woman, I met some initial resistance before being accepted as a figure of "authority" as their art teacher because traditionally in Chinese culture, the individual in authority would be an elder. In these ways, being an 'insider' also meant that I was subject to being constrained by traditional hierarchical values found in

Chinese culture. Some of the women were slow to open up to me while others were very quick to embrace me as their new teacher. Developing a relationship with the Women's Group was a gradual and uneven process. Some women were very quick in accepting me; one woman gave me her English homework and diary entries for correction on a weekly basis, while other women kept their distance in the first months. Some were forthcoming with their personal stories, while others deferred their stories as being "same as everyone else" and were less forthcoming about their lives.

In comparison, the relationship between myself and the second generation developed quickly. In sharing a similar educational background, language and gender attitudes meant that trust could be formed easily. Mostly, the second generation viewed me as a peer and as a workshop facilitator. They understood the aim of the research, specifically the relationship between people and objects, whereas communicating this relationship was more challenging to the first generation as my Cantonese was not as nuanced. As a group, they were very interested in my background and moreover they were very intrigued by the other second generation women whom I had interviewed. Many of them commented on the lack of interaction between themselves and other second generation women like them. This curiosity to meet other women like themselves is likely to have motivated some participants to attend the group art workshops and their participation in the research project.

In addition, I also conducted several interviews with British Chinese second generation men, but found that the dynamic differed greatly. Given the scope of the research, I felt that to include men would over extend the reach of this project. Also, it proved difficult to recruit enough men to hold a workshop and hence, after a couple of interviews with some British Chinese men, I decided not to continue with this avenue. As a woman, I encountered gender based differences that made engaging men more challenging. In this sense, my gender disposition played to my advantage in recruiting and working with women.

4.2 Recruitment and Access

The British Chinese are comprised of Chinese ethnicities from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Taiwan and China. Due to the colonial status of Hong Kong, the predominate group of Chinese in Britain are from Hong Kong and hence they are the oldest and most substantial group of Chinese in Britain amongst all the ethnic groups. Many of the first generation arrived during the post-war boom of immigration and they were a part of kin-based chain migration as Chinese families were reunited. More contextual and historical information about the settlement and cultural composition of the British Chinese can be found in Chapter 2.

Highlighted in the 1986 Runnymede Home Affairs Report, most Chinese are Cantonese speakers and there is a substantial Hakka-speaking minority amongst other diverse dialects who are second time migrants from South East Asia, including Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore. This has informed the recruitment of British Chinese women, specifically the decision to predominately focus on Cantonese speakers and also to identify women of other dialects from South East Asia to form the group of the first generation participants. Hence the sample of first generation women in this study are predominately women from Hong Kong as well as Malaysia and Vietnam.

The decline of agriculture in Hong Kong meant that many unskilled labourers viewed emigration as a way of making a living. Many of the Hong Kong Chinese women in this sample were from a working class background and noted an inability to complete a full education and hence this may have impacted their fluency with English.[14] In contrast, women from the second generation are defined as British-born Chinese or women who have moved to Britain as young children and claim a dual belonging as "British Chinese". In this study, British-born Chinese women are more racially diverse than the first generation. They are fluent in English but may struggle with their family language. They are a mix of ethically Chinese and mixed race women, as some first generation women started families with the indigenous British population. Unlike the first generation, it was

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[14] Working class Hong Kong Chinese women are less likely to have attained a full education due to the working class status of their families. The status of boys and men in Chinese culture meant that sons were more likely to be educated, rather than their daughters. This limited level of education presented difficulties for Chinese migrant women to easily integrate into British society on arrival.

more likely that British-born Chinese women have been able to attain a full education and take up professional jobs. Between the two generations of British Chinese women, distinct differences emerged and this will offer a deeper insight into the challenges, inequalities and advantages that frame their experiences.

4.2.1 First Generation

To recruit a group of first generation Cantonese speaking women, I approached various Chinese Community Centres in London. Keen to develop a genuine relationship with a group of women, my supervisor introduced me to the centre manager at Haringey Chinese Community Centre. Established since 1987, the Haringey Chinese centre has played an important role in the local Chinese community. Located in North London, it is a well-respected centre amongst British Chinese families and individuals in the area. As a centre, it caters to a range of generational needs as it provides a range of activities including Chinese Language School, luncheon club, housing support and advice service, computing training, leisure outings, and health classes. Furthermore, it was one of the few Chinese centres in London that ran a women-centred space and scheduled English classes for women.

Haringey Centre ran a weekly Women's Group where Chinese women attended English classes. This Women's Group has ran for nearly ten years; they were predominantly Cantonese speaking and their age ranged from 60-82 years old (at the time of the research was conducted). They described themselves as a group of "overseas brides". Broadly, they shared similar backgrounds; all the women were married and had adult children. Some of the women married prior to migrating to Britain, while others met their husbands in Britain. Many of the women shared similar employment experiences as they recalled working in the catering profession or taking on sewing work as flexible work to juggle alongside early motherhood. All the women were fluent in Cantonese and had varying abilities in English, Mandarin and Vietnamese.

Between November 2016 until July 2017, I developed access with the Women's Group. With the first generation, I was introduced to the women through the community centre manager who acted as the

gatekeeper. My initial contact was informal and a relationship gradually developed over a period of 8 months. I assisted with the women's English classes and attended various Chinese New Year events across London which allowed me to better understand the women. The Women's Group ran on a drop-in basis and between 8-15 women attended the group every week on an informal basis. Aware that they have missed out on a formal education, they attended the group in their retirement years to improve their English. These lessons were taught by a Vietnamese Chinese woman who volunteered her time as an English teacher. As a group, they practiced Chinese and European dance routines, ate together and attended events around London and overall they can be understood as an informal sisterhood.

In addition to the first generation women at the Women's Group, I also recruited an additional five other first generation women for interviews. These women were recruited through word of mouth or they were recommended to the project by their daughters who had taken part in interviews. The women outside the Women's Group were of a different social class and had more opportunity to pursue an education as younger women. Within this group of five women, two of the women were of Chinese Malaysian heritage, while the other three were from a Hong Kong Chinese background.

4.2.2. Second Generation

For the second generation, I interviewed seventeen British-born/British Chinese women, these women were either born in London or currently resided in London. The majority of the women are British-born Chinese, while two of the women were born in Hong Kong and Taiwan and moved to the UK at a young age and were raised predominately in Britain. The second generation possessed a different socio-economic background as all the women had completed a formal education and all of the women (with the exception of one woman) had a degree education, while one was educated to a doctoral level. All of the women had employment in professional occupations. These women were raised and educated in Britain, they did not struggle with English but rather their challenge was with their family language. In this sense, the socio-economic background of these women was vastly different to the first generation in regards to education, language and employment.

In comparison, it was more difficult to recruit second generation women as there was not a common space where they gathered. Given the difference of their socio-economic circumstance, it was important to target a broader range of organisations to recruit the second generation as many did not attend community centres. Understanding this generational difference, I contacted a variety of organisations to initiate a process of snowballing. I contacted British Chinese theatre companies, London universities, attended cultural events, and advertised the research project through BBC Radio and the British Chinese online magazine, Nee Hao. Despite these efforts, I was only able to recruit a handful of women through these pathways. On meeting these women, I was introduced to other family and friends through a snowballing method. For the second generation, given their difference of lifestyle and time restraints, my contact with them was through email to arrange dates for interviews and workshops. To suit their lifestyles, my contact with them was less frequent, however our time together through the workshop and interview was intensive.

4.3 The Research Process

To build a fuller and more intricate picture about the experiences of British Chinese women, ethnographic visual methods comprised of three interrelated stages: (1) "object-story" interviews where I collected information about the women's life stories in relation to their chosen objects, (2) art workshops offered a context where participants visualised the stories of their objects and their activities were observed and recorded, (3) a curated online exhibition of the participant's objects and artworks and an opening event which celebrated the contribution of the two generations of women in the project. These stages are not separate from each other; they functioned as a holistic and cyclical process that inspired and informed one another. The final methods of the online exhibition and opening event functioned as ethnographic sites to gain the participants' feedback of the overall project to evaluate the use of ethnographic art methods. One by one, I will now discuss each of the three stages.

4.3.1 Object Story Interviews

For the object stories interview, each participant was asked to bring an object of significance; the

object could be as everyday or as culturally specific as they liked. The significance of objects mirrored the journey of their lives, this process of talking about experiences through objects acknowledged the entangled relation between people and things. The following questions acted as a flexible interview guide:

1. Can you tell me about yourself? (Age, education, brief family history, occupation, migratory journey)
2. Can you tell me about your object?
3. Can you explain the significance of the object?
4. How would you describe your relationship with things?
5. How would you describe your parent's relationship with things?

The interview endeavoured to understand the participants' life story through their chosen object. The life-story interview intended to fulfil two intentions: (1) to create a mind-map of the participants' life story and to understand the significance of their object, and (2) to establish a rapport of trust and dispel any unease about art making as many of them were new to art making. After establishing a rapport and an understanding of the object/life-story, the participant was invited to attend an art workshop.

Using this object stories interview guideline, I adopted a semi-structured life-story interview approach (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). It allowed the participants to freely talk about issues that have been significant to their lives, but it also followed a purposeful direction which is distinctive to a usual conversation. Kvale and Brinkmann describe the semi-structured approach as, "close to an everyday conversation, but as a professional interview it has a purpose and involves a specific approach and technique; it is semi-structured- it is neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire" (2009:27). They describe the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee as a "co-construction of knowledge" (2009:18).

Similarly, this notion of co-construction applies to the way I viewed my role as a workshop facilitator. In many instances the delivery of the workshop relied on the active participation and input from the participants. With little experience of interviews, I ran a trial interview with a friend

to build my own confidence in developing interview technique and intuition. This experience was invaluable as it reaffirmed the importance of creating a supportive and non-judgemental space for a person to freely speak while ensuring confidentiality.

Interviews with the first generation Women's Group were mostly conducted at the community centre as this was a familiar place for them, with the exception of one participant whose interview was done at her home. Interviews with first generation women outside of the Women's Group were conducted at their homes. Within the Women's Group, there was a quiet reluctance to take part in a formal interview. Many of them expressed doubts about the significance of their story or their status as a legitimate interviewee or felt that their story was similar to others and therefore it was not necessary to be interviewed.

As a result, I conducted five formal interviews with the Women's Group which lasted between 1.5 hrs to 3.5 hrs. These interviews were conducted in Cantonese. In this sense, most of the material that I gathered from the Women's Group derived from observations, informal interactions and themed group discussions stimulated from the art workshops over the 8 months. Interviews with the second generation British-born Chinese/British Chinese were a different process. Overall, I interviewed 17 second generation women but only one woman was recruited from external recruitment methods; nearly all the women were introduced via a friend or by word of mouth. All of these interviews were conducted in English and mostly our conversations happened at their homes or at the university and they lasted between 1.5 hrs to 3.5 hrs.

4.3.2 Art Workshop

Pink (2001) stresses the importance of observing a level of cultural sensitivity in the selection and delivery of visual methods. These considerations were highly significant for this study. There were many socio-economic differences between the two generations. Given this discrepancy, the activities of the focus were modified to engage the women on a personal level and pursue the intention of the study. As a result of these adjustments, the activities of the workshops differed between the generations.

Due to the differences between the two generations, I adjusted the workshop activities to better engage the two generational groups (see appendices). The initial idea was to ask the first generation Women's Group to bring an object to the workshop (which travelled from their home country to the UK) to creatively inspire their art making. However, it transpired that most of the participants in the Women's Group had not kept the initial things that travelled with them or those things that were precious like dowry jewellery had been pawned. It appeared that a lot of things had been lost, while others recounted the initial lack of material things they brought with them. This was a challenging stage as the art workshop was focused on stories belonging to these initial objects. Equally others were baffled about the significance of personal possessions as one woman remarked, "It's really weird that someone wants to interview random Chinese women about their belongings". In this sense, trying to convey the significance of the objects to the first generation was a challenge and furthermore, this highlighted my assumption of the sentimental value attached to these objects.

4.3.2 (1) Women's Group Art Workshop

Observing that the women of the Women's Group did not externally express a direct attachment to past material objects, I changed the focus of the workshop to "self-portrait" and "sisterhood". My interaction with the first generation took on a more longitudinal ethnographic approach over the course of 8 months. In total, I delivered 10 workshops between November 2016 and July 2017 which lasted between 1.5 to 2.5 hrs at the community centre. The workshops at the Women's Group took on an art school format as each session was themed accordingly to engage and develop their learning. Using techniques of collage and mono-printing, the women created two main pieces of artworks that responded to the themes of "Self Portrait" and "Sisterhood". The first visually expressed their pre-migratory aspirations before arriving in the UK; and the second piece responded to their current reality and their sense of sisterhood within the group. I adopted ethnographic techniques of participant observation to observe the interactions and conversations in the workshops.

In understanding that many of the participants in the Women's Group did not have the opportunity to complete their formal secondary school education, I was keen to use the art workshops as a learning environment to build their English vocabulary and art knowledge in order to empower the women to speak about their lives through art. In this sense, learning was viewed as tool to access self

expression and therefore empowerment in one's life. Developing self expression through learning cultivates a sense of empowerment as Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Friere states,

> Education as the practice of freedom- as opposed to education as the practice of domination- denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it (2005:82).

The workshops followed an art school carousel which developed their learning in a structured and supportive environment. Aware that the idea of art needed to be gradually introduced to build their confidence and familiarity, the activities of the workshops were divided into three sections: (1) understanding basic principles of visual making; (2) forming interpretations about art work; and (3) making their own self portraits. There was a strong bilingual element as these workshops were delivered in a mix of Cantonese and English.

To engage the first generation Women's Group in art workshops and interviews, it was essential to use Cantonese as the main language of communication. The process of researching multilingually and using more than one language in a research project is a complex task (Holmes et al, 2013). If possible, it can generate enriched material and embrace a wider demographic of participants. Being a second generation British-born Chinese, I had a reasonable command of Cantonese but took on private tuition to increase my confidence. The ambition of delivering the art workshops entirely in Cantonese was an ambitious leap; a challenging leap that I did not feel I could reach. To echo Kvale and Brinkmann's notion of co-construction of knowledge, the president of the Women's Group identified my difficulty with Cantonese and suggested that the art workshops could be bilingually delivered in English; words that were not understood became a learning opportunity to widen the group's vocabulary. Their regular Vietnamese teacher was fluent in Cantonese and English and acted as a translator within the sessions. These collaborative efforts made the visual workshop a possibility.

This exchange of language lessened the sense of hierarchy between myself as a researcher/teacher and them as the participant/student. This relationship echoes the learning dynamic highlighted by Friere as he states, "The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teachers, but one who is himself

taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (2005:80). A revision of hierarchy presented fruitful results; I was able to develop my Cantonese confidence while the women developed their English vocabulary and art making skills. In this sense, the researcher is no longer a silent observer of knowledge. Instead, the suggestion from the women transformed the power dynamics of "researcher" and "participant" to create a more intimate and transparent learning context. The flexible and interactive nature of visual ethnography enabled a fluid exchange of Cantonese and English.

The first sessions were based on instilling a practical understanding of making art as I introduced ideas and techniques in mono-printing and collaging. Through these means, I taught the importance of using colour, composition, texture and embracing experimentation. I set them tasks and asked them to interpret a still life arrangement of objects through collage. There was some initial hesitation but as the women began to build confidence in their making skills, they felt proud of their outcomes. Over time, they became more confident in creating visual responses. While their creative confidence grew, they were less familiar with the idea of forming interpretations about the "meaning" of an artwork. Understanding interpretation in this way is useful as it enables them to understand the significance of a self portrait. The second part of the carousel was based on facilitating their interpretations about art works and familiarising them with key concepts such as symbolism, metaphor and self-representation. To better understand these ideas, I asked them to make interpretations about paintings made by women artists such as Frida Kahlo and Sonia Boyce. I chose specific artists who used symbolism to represent ideas of cultural identity and gender. The blackboard was a crucial tool to visibly mapping their ideas and collective thinking.

The final part of the carousel combined their learning from the previous sessions to inspire confidence to make their own self portraits. To structure their thinking for the self portraits, I invited them to make a collage that visually represented their aspirations for life in the UK. In preparation for the collage making, I asked them to make a mind map of ideas that described their thoughts about Britain. On completing this collage, they were asked to make an additional collage which focused on their current aspirations for the future and their sense of sisterhood in the group. At the end of each session, each women spoke about their artwork and this became an opportunity to understand how they expressed themselves through visual making.

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4.3.2 (2) Second Generation Art Workshop

The second generation art workshop contrasted with the Women's Group art workshop. As the second generation presented objects at their interviews, they were asked to draw inspiration from their objects to inform their artwork. The second generation all brought objects to the workshop, and these objects ranged from sewing tools, kitchen utensils, clothing and jewellery. Each participant brought a significant object with them to the workshop as their creative stimulus.

The aim of the workshop was to produce artwork that creatively embodied their relationship with the object. To ensure the women felt prepared and inspired to create their artwork, I set the women a series of experimental object writing exercises, creative meditation and demonstrated basic techniques in mono-printing and collaging. For further details about the themes of the workshops of the two generation, please see the appendix. With the second generation, I ran two intensive one-day art workshops at the Regent Street campus on the 27th May and 10th June 2017. In total, 11 women attended and they were divided into two groups.

Eleven second generation women were split into two groups and each group attended a one-day art workshop at the Regent Street Campus which lasted the whole day. With the Women's Group, I entered their community but with the second generation, the context of the workshop formed a temporary community. To bond the women, the first part of the day was focused on sharing the story of their respective object and background with each other. Beyond drawing on the representational qualities of their objects, I wanted the women to creatively draw on the embodied and affective relations between themselves and their things. To do this, I initiated a series of meditative exercises followed by experimental writing exercises.

The meditative exercise lasted for an hour and during this time, I guided them through breathing exercises followed by a creative meditation upon their object. Sat on their chairs, the women closed their eyes and began to relax through the breathing. After this, I asked the women to bring their object to the mind's eye. I posed a series of scenarios that drew on creating a synesthestic response. For example, I asked them to visualise the emotional relation of the object as a colour; specifically to consider the changing hues, density, edges, lines and saturation of their particular colour. Then, if

this colour was to be become a texture, how might this colour translate into a textual form; whether it is chalky, firm or crisp to one's touch to bring an emotional resonance with their object. The aim of this meditative hour was to form an affective and visual relationship with their object.

After this hour, the women embarked on an exercise of "free writing" to continuously write without stopping for fifteen minutes. This is a technique designed to free the unconscious and to let go of achieving "results". Homi K. Bhabha (2016) acknowledges the possibility to reclaim untold narratives through writing and the body as he states, "The body is a writing instrument, an agent of inscription as intervention, caught in the restless agency between violence, security, surveillance and protection". To draw on this relationship, the writing exercise take inspiration from the experimental art writer, Maria Fusco (2010) emphasises the creative possibilities of writing *through* objects.

The women were set some short 15 minute writing exercises: (1) to write from the experiential position of the object in the present tense but without using the first-person address of "I"; and (2) to write through the object as witness to oneself within a significant memory. To inform these exercises, the women were free to draw on any relevant ideas from the creative meditation. After completing, I invited the women to read out their pieces as a point of collective sharing. Using this written material as creative inspiration, the women were able to draw on any aspect of the writing to inspire their collage. They were free to draw on any phrase, sentence or textual feeling within their text to visually explore the idea through collaging and mono-printing. I was on hand to help with support them with any practical or conceptual ideas. On completion, each woman presented their finished art work to the group and spoke about their thoughts that led to the making. This became point of mutual sharing and reflection to close the workshop day.

4.3.3 Online Exhibition and Opening Event as Ethnography

Like the workshops, the online exhibition and opening event were viewed as ethnographic sites that produced its own knowledge through social exchanges and interactions. Gryor (2017) asserts that digital technologies have become geographies of the social, emotional, and moral and in this way, digital technologies are influential in "creating and maintaining personal relationships" (2017:136). With this in mind, the online exhibition of the object stories can be understood as a facilitating

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platform for the stories of British Chinese women to afford the wider British public a deeper insight into their lives. The online exhibition can be understood as an opportunity for British Chinese women to express their subjectivities in virtual space, while the opening event was a context for women to take up physical space.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the online exhibition and the opening event were sites of "theory-in-action". Theoretically, the online exhibition was a curated platform that embodied the concept of Materially Embodied Visions. This framework acknowledged the need to bring more visibility to address the under-representation of British Chinese women in both an academic and public context. By inserting the experiences of British Chinese women through their creativity, the online exhibition refutes the Western "wandering eye and travelling lens" (Haraway, 1991:192) which has historically stereotyped non-white cultures as the online exhibition afforded women a forum to speak for themselves.

With the understanding that materiality creates cultures (Miller, 1997; Tilley, 2006), the online exhibition was viewed as a visual vehicle for cultural expression. Given this significance, the online exhibition has been carefully designed with a professional website designer. As aesthetics create and represent cultures, the images, motifs, colour schemes and aesthetics of the online exhibition were subjected to extensive conversations between myself as the artist-ethnographer/curator and the designer to ensure that visuality of the online exhibition was appropriately crafted. While still maintaining a vibrancy of Chineseness and cultural hybridity, careful considerations were taken to avoid the recycling of orientalising motifs. The online exhibition became a platform where the expression of British Chinese women could be creatively and culturally asserted.

The public nature of the online exhibition was a method to stimulate feedback from the broader British society. As such, the online exhibition and opening event acted as a strategy for a two-way feedback where the wider public and participants could give feedback on the overall project. Individuals who expressed an interest in the online exhibition were asked to complete a feedback form. In addition to the opening event, I conducted several individual interviews with second generation women and held a group interview with the first generation Women's Group to

understand their reflection on the project as an overall experience. The online exhibition can be accessed on www.objectstories.co.uk and the social impact of the online exhibition will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

To increase the representation of British Chinese women, the online exhibition can be accessed from anywhere. The online platform acted as the public interface of the academic thesis. To extend the reach of the online exhibition, I worked with a Chinese translator and presented the online exhibition as a bilingual platform that can be read in English and traditional Chinese. It is not only important to assert a British Chinese cultural presence into the British sphere, but also it is equally crucial that the website engages with Chinese speakers interested in the Chinese diaspora.

In a British landscape where it is difficult to locate the experiences of British Chinese women, the opening event provided a visible celebration of the women who took part in the project. By inviting two generations of women to attend the opening event, the opening event was a context where I gained an insight into the participants' thoughts and feelings about the completed project. Intergenerational insights could be seen as this was the first event where they came together. As facilitated by the online exhibition and opening event, these two ethnographic sites created a dual context where the women participants could view the finished project and moreover, the women could appreciate their personal contribution in the wider representation of British Chinese women.

4.4 Methodological Challenges

The use visual ethnography with British Chinese women was not always straight-forward. At the initial stage, several community members expressed doubt about whether the older first generation of British Chinese women would be interested to take part in art activities as they viewed these activities to be outside their usual interests. Some first generation women also expressed their own reservations about taking part in art activities and doubted their own ability to be creative. Using a visual methodology with a group of people with little prior confidence and experience required myself as the artist-ethnographer to be creatively persistent to gradually engage the women over a period of 8 months. Once the women grew more confident with art, the women readily engaged with art workshops. Contrary to the initial ideas about the creative capabilities of first

generation women, a visual methodology proved to be a highly significant mode of self expression.

Relationships and interpersonal dynamics were paramount in visual ethnography. The dual identity of being a researcher and "one of the group" has to be carefully considered throughout the process to maintain a level of professionalism yet approachability. As an artist-ethnographer, I was keen to identify opportunities within the project to facilitate mutual exchange. This notion of giving back is highlighted by Pink she notes that this sense of exchange offers a sharing of agency and thereby "both researcher and informant invest in, and are rewarded by, the project" (2001:44). To continue this sense of mutual exchange, I made prints from the participants' collages and sent these back to them so they could display these as artworks in their homes and an invitation to the opening event of the project. I used these ways to maintain contact and it offered me a way to give back as a researcher to offer continuity to the research project.

The challenges of the online exhibition and opening event revolved around the time consuming nature of arranging logistics, administration, and production. Despite these limitations, they are essential in the realisation of the events in order to give a public visibility to British Chinese women. However, it was evident from the participants' feedback (see Chapter 8 for more detail) that creating a creative platform was a crucial way to heighten British Chinese visibility in culture. The online exhibition and opening event are far from being supplementary, rather they were points of knowledge making and moreover they created a physical space to assert the visibility of British Chinese women to fulfil the conceptual intention of this study.

Using visual methods with participants who have little experience of creative making can be challenging, a general level of understanding cannot be taken for granted. It requires the workshop facilitator to be prepared and highly responsive to interpersonal situations. It was crucial to accurately interpret the situation and make decisions that both advanced the project and engaged the participants. Before meeting the Women's Group, I planned a detailed themed workshop plan over a series of weeks; my intention was to enter into the group and "deliver" the workshop. On meeting the group, I realised that it would be unrealistic to set activities that were too abstracted and a gradual relationship needed to be developed over a longer period of time. Very quickly, I realised that

my initial plan would not work: it was too rigid and would be unnatural and irrelevant to the women's lives.

Being prepared yet remaining flexible was essential in engaging the women, however this required weekly reflections and continual adjustments. Careful consideration was put into developing art activities that would be relevant for them and advance the intention of the project. Much time was invested into researching artists' examples, developing art techniques, selecting art materials and finding strategies to support their learning. Of course, in using visual methods, there is the matter of expenses to consider.[15] After each session, it was important to evaluate their engagement and to assess whether to change direction or continue. However, this flexibility worked both ways; it was the president of the Women's Group who suggested the bilingual delivery of the workshop. Without this suggestion, the workshops would have been greatly hindered as I would have struggled to facilitate their art learning through Cantonese only.

In retrospect, an additional Cantonese assistant would have been useful in assisting some of the first generation women. As the workshops continued beyond the practical making, it became more apparent that certain women needed more one-to-one support with understanding the specific ideas or with English assistance. While I did have an assistant on one occasion; it was difficult to predict how many women would turn up as some would regularly drop in and out of the session. Being an informal English class, they operated on a casual basis which made it difficult to support inconsistent attendees. The leisurely environment meant that at times, it would be very noisy and difficult to hear one another. I chose not to video record the sessions as it would break the developed trust. I adopted several roles; I was both leading the session and observing their responses but doing these two things with high noise levels was challenging. In these instances, my reflections and observations of these workshops might be less detailed than I would have ideally liked.

In contrast, the delivery of the second generation workshop was the opposite. I devised a workshop plan and followed it closely without much adjustment. These workshops were more manageable and I did not have to contend with noise levels and they were also video recorded. However, I did not

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foresee that the women would enjoy speaking to one another as much as they did. This was specifically apparent during the discussion segments of the workshops; they would often overrun leaving less time for making. In retrospect, I would have run a two-day workshop to give more time to discussion and making, as some participants commented on the intense nature of the day. However the decision to run an intensive full one-day workshop was informed by the understanding that the participants led busy lives and retention would have proved difficult.

In running workshops, it was important to consider group dynamics. It was important to identify scenarios where bigger characters might be dominating the conversation. I was very conscious of this and the inherent danger of producing uneven observations from the workshops. In instances where this happened, I tried to steer the conversation back to the original intention. These days were quite intense but relatively short. I had enlisted an assistant but unfortunately on the second workshop, my assistant had fallen ill and was unable to attend. These were unforeseen circumstances, but it meant that as a researcher, I was less able to simply observe their reactions as practical issues needed my attention. In comparison to the workshops, interviewing was logistically more straightforward though it was time consuming and emotionally intensive. Beyond the practical logistics of arranging times with interviewees, it was fairly easy to interview the second generation, although it proved more difficult in interviewing their first generations mothers and counterparts.

Visual ethnography as a method had its challenges. It requires the artist-ethnographer to be organised yet responsive to the situation and willing to modify activities relevant for the participants. Interpersonal skills were paramount in these methods because of the durational nature to ensure that participants were engaged to participate in the multi-layered methodology. Also visual ethnography requires the researcher to balance a friendly engagement and healthy distance. In this instance, the artist-ethnographer is both the observer and instigator and the dualistic nature of these roles have to be carefully negotiated. Despite these challenges, it is a method that is highly rewarding. One of the most distinctive aspects of the methodology was the space it provides for the participants to express themselves. Initially, this sense of freedom can appear to be daunting for both the participant and researcher in the uncertainty of what might happen. Despite this, it was necessary to fully embrace this uncertainty to support the participants in their sense of spontaneity and creative

making.

4.5 Summary

This chapter offered a theoretical and disciplinary understanding of the research term visual ethnography. As a term, visual ethnography is the product of artists embracing a wider definition of art making to enter into the social realm and make creative interventions. Audiences are no longer viewed as being passive observers of museum and art objects and instead, audiences are viewed as being active collaborators of the artwork. Furthermore, anthropologists and sociologists interested in a broader method of engaging with research viewed art as a strategy to initiate research observations. In this way, artists interested in creating social change aligned with the practices of anthropologists and sociologists which puts the practices of these artists closer to the disciplines of anthropology and sociology than traditional definitions of art. These interdisciplinary crossovers are not without their tensions, however, enriched insights can be cultivated when these disciplines are carefully employed.

In this methodology, I viewed my position as an artist-ethnographer and I saw the use of visual methods as a strategy to embody and understand the world view of women's lives. Hence, the women's art making became a creative embodiment of their lives and social viewpoint. The visual expression of women become a "site of cultural production" (Pink, 2001). Visual ethnography recognises an equal emphasis of self expression as Pink asserts an "end of hierarchies" between verbal and visual expression. By understanding the lives of women through objects and art making enabled a view of the body to situate their voices and a view from below. In articulating their experiences through objects, the women participated in group art workshops and created artworks where they visualised the stories of their objects and themselves. The experimental nature of visual making presented a host of possibilities to challenge reductive notions of identity categories. Visual ethnography sought to challenge the stereotype that the British Chinese are only driven by economic betterment and as a methodology, it offered an alternative context where ethnic and gendered identities can be productively explored through creativity and self expression.

From a practical perspective, visual ethnography was delivered in different ways depending on the generational cohort. The use of visual ethnography for the second generation was fairly straight forward as the women were mostly creatively confident. However, this journey was different for the

first generation as prior knowledge of art could not be taken for granted. Despite the first generation women expressing their reservations about their creative ability, the people-centred commitment of the methodology supported their creative actualisation. As such, visual ethnography presented a spacious and supported methodological engagement as many aspects of the method were adjusted to better engage the women.

Furthermore, the methodology offered wider conceptual tools to engage with participants on an ethnographic level which supported my role as an artist-ethnographer. To realise the full ambition of visual ethnography, I sustained contact with the women to establish a trusting and creative relationship. Visual ethnography proved to be a highly rewarding methodology and the creative and people-centred parameters of methodology created the opportunity to form a reciprocal and meaningful two-way relationship where both researcher and participants were able to locate a meaningful connection to the study. This aspect of the methodology was one of the most valuable assets to emerge from visual ethnography as it afforded the participants to take a personal and creative ownership over the visual project.

Chapter 5

An Orientation To The Future Through Art

The tendency to project into the future can be seen as a migratory coping strategy for the first generation female participants in this study. This orientation into wilfully working and moving towards a brighter future acts as the motivation to endure the difficulty of the present moment. This future projection culturally contrasts with the Western fixation with memory and recall as the process of remembering is often socially privileged through numerous memorials, museums and statues (Young, 2008). The fixation on recall is often socially privileged in a Western context. This emphasis on recall is most acutely epitomised by Freudian discourses of self management which directs an individual into their past childhood to resolve difficulties in adulthood. In contrast, forgetting is often viewed as the threatening counterpart of remembering (Brockmeier, 2002). Forty and Kuchler (1999) emphasise the interdependent process as "remembering is only possible on the basis of forgetting" (1999:12). Remembering and forgetting are an interrelated processes; in order to remember, one must forget.[16]

This Western cultural emphasis on remembering contrasts with Chinese conceptions of selfhood. Rather than revisiting the past through a Freudian introspection of the self, the individual in a Chinese context is encouraged to look towards the future despite current or past difficulties. In looking towards the future, the individual views the resolution of their problems as being externally located within a social context. For example, to seek help or advice from social relationships e.g. family, friends and co-workers which informs the Confucian idea of *guanxi*. In a contemporary political context, the Chinese government's pursuit of the "Chinese Dream" directs its people to focus on the future, rather than lament the past as Gerda Wielander (2018) observes,

> Little remembering and reflection on the recent past is encouraged in the Chinese population, which is forever exhorted to look towards the future. Active remembrance of the recent past is also often actively discourage, banned, or prosecuted, with the party holding a tight grip and control over what is remembered, and how (2018).

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[16] Remembering is less about perfect recall but rather it is an imaginative process which is renewed in every single moment this "always creates gaps, distortions, contradictions and other incoherences, it also is reconfiguring: by closing or ignoring gaps or omissions, it arranges new orders and creates new coherences" (Brockmeier, 2002:22).

This view is reinforced by Louisa Lim (2014) as she describes the governmental procedures in controlling the memory of Tiananmen as a form of "cultural amnesia". Selective forgetting and remembering can be understood as a part of a wider cultural strategy to maintain a viable equilibrium in everyday life. Mieke Matthyssen (2018) observes the psychology of Chinese culture through the influence of daoist philosophical ideals. These ideals promote endurance, tolerance, contentment and an acceptance of one's fate rather than the pursuit of extreme desires and emotions. Given the historical periods of natural and political disasters, Matthyseen highlights that the cultivation of contentment needs to be considered as a product of the political history of China as she argues that the Chinese have "developed a strong disposition to be content with what they have and make the best of it" (2018:19). In order to make the best of difficult situations, one needs to adopt an attitude of tolerance and endurance to achieve the stable plateau of contentment.

In the context of migration, the ideals of acceptance and tolerance are seen as productive characteristics to enable an individual to overcome difficulties and achieve settlement. Many of the first generation women of the Women's Group experienced difficulty in sustaining a livelihood in Hong Kong due to ariguclutural competition on the land and intense employment competition. Many of the women in the Women's Group experienced a gendered disadvantage as many did not have the opportunity to complete their secondary education or sacrificed their education for their brothers or younger siblings. Due to the difficulty of sustaining a living, many of the women viewed migration as a way of escaping their restrictive socio-economic situations.

The notion of an active forgetting in a migratory context was highlighted by Janet Carsten (1995) who observed that Malaysian migrants on the island of Langkawi placed little value in the remembrance of their family past. From this position, the construction of identity is "intrinsically fluid, moulded and acquired through life, and shared by the activities in which individuals engage" (1995:317). Carsten observed that kinship for Malays in Langkawi was focused upon the future and this is most evident in their concern for the reproduction of children and grandchildren. In this sense, forgetting can be seen as a productive sensibility. Paul Connerton identified forgetting as a wider strategy of identity production, "forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new

identity" (2008:62). Forgetting can be seen as a gain, rather than a loss.

> Discard memories that serve no practicable purpose in the management of one's current identity and ongoing purposes. Forgetting then becomes part of the process by which newly shared memories are constructed because a new set of memories are frequently accompanied by a set of tacitly shared silences (2008:63).

Drawing on the concept of Materially Embodied Visions, if objects and art making offers a way to articulate "structures of feeling", it appears that the women in this group expressed a preference to situate their identities through art making to articulate their view of the future, rather than the maintenance of past possessions. Art making offered them a greater propensity to situate their migratory aspirational in the future tense, whereas the maintenance of personal migratory objects appeared to anchor them into the trials of their past. This orientation towards aspiration and the future can be understood as indicative of wider cultural attitudes informed by their experience of political uncertainty in Hong Kong and the women have little option but to cultivate strategies of endurance to survive.

Through the process of art making, their sense of aspiration emerged in a way that could not be replicated in speech. By comparison, there were few women who wanted to actively remember the challenge of migratory settlement through materiality, rather their art making expressed an orientation towards the future with a robust positivity in spite of their past difficulties. The concept of Materially Embodied Visions captured a tendency to preserve the positive aspects of one's life while eluding the difficulties of migratory settlement and life. In this sense, the women exhibited a level of "active forgetting" and "selective remembering" (Connerton, 2008) and this was epitomised though the absence of migratory objects.

5.1 Discarding Dissonance

Migratory related objects were not publicly kept by most women in the group; it appeared that the women did not necessarily want to openly talk about the difficulties of their past. For one woman, the project functioned as an opportunity to donate her personal possessions as a way to seemingly forget her hardship. Collected from her home, one of the participants Jenny (63) arrived with an

armful of objects.[17] All the objects inhabited a similar persona; a kitsch-like aesthetic and mass produced items portraying a decorative and colourful emblem of a "China". Amongst the paraphernalia, a figurine stood out, it was a bulbous plastic cartoon figurine of a girl and boy dressed in traditional Chinese clothing beaming with large smiles (fig. 3). Connected at the hip, they appeared to be a newly married couple soaring in unison towards a bright and hopeful future.

Figure 3: "Cartoon marriage figurine" 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan

Curious to the story of this object, I inquired about the origin of the object which Jenny remarked, "I don't want it, you have it for you study. If you don't want it, then put it into the bin. It reminds me of my marriage and it wasn't very happy so I don't want it".

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[17] All participants names in the study have been given pseudonyms.

Objects have an ability to summon past residues and Jenny was adamant that she does not want to revisit the troubled past of her marriage. Jenny's insistence to give away her object suggested a desire to productively discard the item and manage the memory of an unhappy marriage. In fact, these recollections are an interference to her everyday life, a view supported by Connerton. On another occasion, the topic of her object and her marriage began to arise but in this instance, Jenny revised her story and claimed that the object belonged to a friend and it was she who had adopted the item; this narrative was entirely different to the original version. It was clear that talking directly about the past was difficult. However, through an informal group exchange, which crucially was always inflected with humour, the nature of her marriage emerged as her experience as a young overseas bride became more vivid.

For Jenny, her arrival in Britain was the first time that she had met ever met husband as her family was keen to marry her out in the promise of a better life aboard. Arriving in Britain, she quickly realised her husband's embellished achievements, but as a daughter with little education and no financial means to leave her husband and return to Hong Kong, she was left with no option but to stay in her unhappy marriage. Jenny was given gold jewellery as a wedding dowry in case of emergencies, she explained that it was sold to aid everyday living as she recalled her initial arrival,

> My mother at the time said, 'You can choose from millions and thousands of men, you better not choose a broken light bulb!' But then I got here, he had nothing. I went through the wrong door, I gambled and lost. My mum wouldn't allow me to go back, she said I was a married girl, I couldn't go back. You go through your in-laws' door and the pressure starts. My parents had lots of daughters, why did they need me as well? They would say, they're busy, go quickly so I don't bother them.

Margery Wolf (1972) describes the status of daughters in Chinese society as akin to "split water and like water, she may never return" (1972:34). For Jenny and other young overseas brides in similar situations, this pressure intensified. Unable to visit her natal family, she stressed the struggle to meet the expectations of her husband's family while simultaneously acclimatising into a new culture and language. The learning curve was steep, "I had to learn everything. Had to learn the money, roads, cook dinner, look after kids, washing clothes, it sent me into a tailspin". Jenny's list of domestic work signalled a new phase of womanhood and her new status as a mother. The demands of motherhood

meant that Jenny and other first generation British Chinese women like herself were ushered into a domestic space. Like many of the women in the group, Jenny juggled the responsibilities of raising the family and juggling lowly paid work such as ad-hoc sewing jobs which required little language skill. Inevitably these inequalities affect their ability to make themselves heard in a public domain.

The expectation of the migrant bride was not only to marry but more importantly to reproduce the next generation of her husband's family. Motherhood was never a choice, but a requirement. Marriage is ladened with reproductive expectations as Wolf reminds us that one of the most fundamental roles expected of a daughter-in-law is to reproduce the family line, ideally through the conception of a son. Only when she begins her own "uterine family"'can she situate her belonging in her husband's family which highlights the daughter-in-law's ambivalent position in the patriarchal family structure as Wolf states,

> She is an outsider (…) Her husband and her father-in-law do not see her as a member of their family. But they do see her as essential to it; they have gone to great expense to bring her into their household for the purpose of bearing a new generation for their family (1972:34).

The figurine, though cheerful and child-like, harboured another reality; the unexpected revision of Jenny's story surrounding the figurine suggested a reluctance to directly engage with the past. The object was a witness of the past and the figurine presented her past in a light that was too frank and resisted a light hearted account of her history. It presented a narrative which refused to be diluted with humour and like assertive speech, it spoke too directly to a still raw and fragile memory of past struggles. For Jenny, the practice of active forgetting manifested in the desire to discard specific objects to control the dissonance of one's life. Her strategy echoes Connerton's notion of active forgetting and in doing so, forgetting becomes productive as it enabled her to reinvent herself and this afforded her a merciful freedom in her retirement years.

5.2 Preserving the Positive

The desire to retain the positive and elude the negative aspects of one's life was also materially embodied in the possessions of other women, specifically Anna (65), the president of the Women's Group who presented an ink landscape drawing and a twin studio portrait of herself and her husband during their courtship. Though these items appeared to be oppositional in their appearance, their function was much similar as both these items were objects of self construction. They constructed the self in an empowering light to retrieve narratives and associations which are not immediately associated with working class British Chinese women.

Raised in rural Hong Kong and being the first born and a female presented her with a double disadvantage. From her early childhood, she described a difficult upbringing where she took on much of the housework and recalled having to raise herself as she declared, "We are born of the sky and raised by the sky". Overburdened with caring for her siblings from a young age, Anna was unable to complete her studies as she gave up her education at the age of 13 so that her younger brother and sister may continue their schooling.

In spite of these difficulties, her ink drawing clearly illustrated her artistic intellect and potential. Painted when she was 14 years old, her painting showed a sensitive and intelligent use of tones and shadows which crafts a serene landscape. While she was unable to complete her education, her art evidenced her natural talent and visually it was a reminder of her potential. The painting was not just a landscape scene but rather it was physical proof of her natural ability. In this way, her self worth assumed a visual form. Rather than lamenting her lack of education and gendered inequality, through her material object, she chose to remind us of her innate ability as a young girl to defy the stereotype that Chinese woman are ornamental fixtures rather than makers.

Figure 4, "Ink Drawing", 2019. Photo Credit, Denise Kwan

Anna's twin portrait of early courtship striked a similar point (fig 5). Taken almost forty years ago, it shows a young Anna with a bright and gentle smile alongside a head shot of her husband. At first glance, it appears to be a pleasant portrait of a young couple, however the very existence of the portrait was a homage to Anna's ability to choose her own husband, an opportunity afforded to her through migration. Unable to complete her studies, her mother was keen to marry her off at a young age. In refusing to marry, she was determined to join her father in Britain and to work alongside him in catering as she deliberated her options, "I wondered if girls were allowed to go. I was already putting in a lot of effort to learn English. I said, 'One day I will go to the UK but I don't know if my Dad will allow me but I wanted to'. He said, 'You are a girl and if you are courted and married when

you arrive in Britain then likewise, useless'.

Figure 5, "Courtship Photograph", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan

Anna's own uncertainty about going to Britain highlighted gendered preconceptions; it is men who travel to foreign lands while women remain in the domestic space. To interfere with this gendered conception of space brings attention to a woman's body. In moving the female body into the male space of travel and trade highlights a woman's sexuality and the concern that she would be married into another family and unable to financially assist her natal family. Her determination to join her father as an economic migrant challenged the gendered binary of male/female, public/domestic and work/ family. Anna's determination to migrate reversed these gendered conceptions of migration and agency. In this scenario, it was the daughter who assumed the traditional role of a son who supports the family through economic migration. For Anna, migration offered her the opportunity express her agency outside of the confines of the gendered and familial expectations as she expressed her relief,

"My mum kept telling me to meet boys and get married, meet boys, get married. Constantly. The day I came to the UK, I was so happy, the skies cleared! I could leave my mum's cage. I felt free. I could be in charge and I didn't have to listen to my mum's instruction".

From this context, it was evident that Anna challenged gendered conventions and in doing so, she was able to make her own marital choices on her terms and this step towards independence was captured by her two portraits. On first impression, there was little unusual about a photograph of courtship (fig. 5), however Anna was keen to point out certain reasons for the separate portraits of their initial courtship.

> The photography man said, 'Why don't you photograph together?' I though, no I don't want to take it together, because one day we might have an argument, you don't know me and I don't know you and saves me the bother of getting some scissors and it cutting it half! (laughs) I said, 'No let's not take a photograph together but if we don't split up, this will be our wedding photo'. We did manage to get married and I framed it and behind I wrote, love for a thousand years.

The choice to have individual portraits may appear to be insignificant; one of convenience should the couple part ways. Unwilling to be portrayed as an idealised couple, Anna insisted on having separate photographs and in doing so, her ability to control her representation reinforced her power to present herself on her own terms. In choosing her own representation through a portrait, her attitude contrasted to the notion that a woman's status is dependent on men, whether that is the father, husband or son. In penning her affection for their union at the back of the photograph announced their marriage as based on a romantic union and free choice, rather than of economic necessary.

Photography is a powerful medium one that is essential in the construction of one's selfhood. By insisting that they should have separate portraits suggests that these photographs were not just the product of a photographer's imposed gaze, rather they are self portraits which reveals direction from the sitter. As photography theorist Susan Sontag observes, "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world what feels like knowledge- and, therefore, like power" (1977:4). Framed as their wedding portrait, these photographs was evidence of her determination to resist a premature marriage and captures a young

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migrant woman forging a path on her terms.

In her interview, Anna stressed her inequalities as a teenage girl and specifically related them to her being born a woman, however, her material possessions withheld a different portrayal of her selfhood. Her objects embodied a narrative where she was the protagonist in charge of her destiny. Like Jenny, Anna also desired to actively forget the dissonant periods of her life and this attitude resonated through things. The desire to retain the positivity of one's life, while keeping the negative at bay, was not just an attitude taken up by Jenny and Anna as individuals but rather this attitude can be understood to be culturally informed.

Highlighted by Matthyssen, attitudes of tolerance and endurance were readily practiced by the women in the group as survival strategies. Jenny spoke of having to "tolerate" her martial fate, while Anna spoke of "enduring" a hard life in Britain and Hong Kong. Jenny chose to discard an emotionally negative object in order to maintain a daily emotional equilibrium. In contrast, Anna consciously reinforced her agency as a migrant Chinese woman through the preservation of emotionally positive objects that underlined her determination in overcoming the gendered inequality. Now during retirement, they have endured the trials of migratory settlement and have entered a phase of relative ease. The cultural attitude to preserve the buoyant contentment of their lives in the face of challenges become materially embodied in the absence of migratory possessions. Therefore, to hold onto a material item as a reminder of a difficult past would be culturally dissonant as it would direct them closer to fringes of extreme, past emotions and it would leave them less able to cultivate contentment in their present lives.

5.3 Embracing Recall

The desire to preserve positive emotions contrasts to the perspective of the English teacher of the Women's Group, Lanan (78). As a Chinese Vietnamese woman, her demotion from a middle class citizen to a refugee was narrated through her possessions. To recount her story as a mother of three children fleeing Vietnam, Lanan recalled the various things that accompanied the month long boat

trip from Vietnam to Hong Kong, and eventually to arrive in Britain. On board the ship, Lanan was only allowed to take one bag and inside it contained a whole host of items that affirmed the family's sense of selfhood. These things included a Vietnamese household register, (should the family be refused entry to Hong Kong and need to return to Vietnam), birth certificates, permission letters but the most precious was a copy of family photographs (fig. 6). Wrapped in several layers of plastic, gifted by her mother who said, "If you survive the journey, wherever you go, look at the photos and you can see us".

Figure 6. "Family Photographs From Vietnam", 2019. Photo Credit, Denise Kwan.

Lanan's family photographs depicted another world. Aged brown photographs show the family relaxing in their large garden or dressed in their best clothes for a proud studio portrait. Through their clothing, Lanan emphasised that her family presented themselves as a modern Asian family. Her father was dressed in a modern Western suit, her mother wore a traditional Chinese two- piece while the children's hair was permed and dressed in fashionable western skirts. Taken in front of a studio

back drop, this world depicted through the photographs was one of ease and dignity striking an extreme disparity of their refugee status.

Amongst the shifting political uncertainty that casted Lanan and her family as refugees, her photographs and documents evidenced their life before their status as refugees. However, the documents and photographs illustrated their own permeability which highlights the ephemeral status of family. Yellowed in colour and frayed at the edges, they possessed a wafer thin texture. Feathery, light and stained in parts, it seems ambitious that it should be these fragile items that carry the responsibility and demonstrate the family's personhood. Amongst the indiscriminate forces of the world, the frayed documents evidenced the legitimacy of the family. It is upon things on which their future lives were dependent as Parkin reminds us, "When people flee from the threat of death and total dispossession, the things and stories they carry with them may be all that remains of their distinctive personhood to provide for future continuity" (1999:314).

Moreover, the most contested and integral possession of all was a series of black and white photographs taken of the family having arrived in Hong Kong after a month on board a boat (fig. 7). Taken for the practical purpose of cataloguing the arrival of refugees, the composition of the photograph reduces them as a number to be logged, an administration procedure. Unlike the previous studio portrait, Lanan stood behind a blank wall. Like a specimen for analysis, her eyes are fixed and stoic as she stared straight ahead. Given their nature of the photograph, Lanan and her refugee counterparts dubbed these as their "prisoner's photographs". This sense of dehumanisation was captured as the photograph led Lanan to reflect on the loss of her former identity.

> In my whole life, I was born to a wealthy family and had a good education until the age of twenty-one and then straight to work and had a good job. I've never been treated poorly. At that time, I think wow, they treat me like a prisoner because in Vietnam only a prisoner would hold a board like that. With your inmate number on. Wow, they treat me like a prisoner…really sad (laughs). I can guarantee you, if you ask one hundred Vietnamese families, I suppose one hundred per cent would say, 'No sorry we didn't keep those pictures'. They didn't see it as valuable and some even say, 'Why keep this, that's a very bloody memory, we don't want to keep it!' I say, 'That's history, that's world wide history!' Some say they don't want to remember those years because it was a very sad memory.

As she recognised, Lanan's intention to retain this difficult memory marked her as distinctive to the cultural attitudes of her Vietnamese counterparts. The photograph captured the powerlessness of her situation at its most pronounced. Unlike Anna, she was not able to instruct or direct the photographic gaze but instead she was entirely dependent upon the anonymous and mechanical gaze of the camera to reinstate her legitimacy as an individual. Through the medium of photography, the power dynamics are played out as Lanan's identity was refused through the lens as her portrait underlined the dehumanisation of the selfhood and precarity of her situation.

Figure 7 "Refugee photograph", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan

Furthermore in the settlement of her life in the UK, these photograph enabled Lanan to reclaim and reconstruct a difficult part of her personal history. Without these photographs, that transition would remind vacant and hollow. Objects became material hooks to hang lived narratives and enable resettlement because as Parkin highlights, "The personal mementoes taken by persons in flight may indeed re-articulate socio-cultural identity if and when suitable conditions of resettlement allow for

that retelling of the stories that they contain" (1999:314). While these photographs are discarded by her counterparts, these photographs were carefully preserved amongst paper and plastic sheets as Lanan claimed her place in history. In retelling her story through these photographs, she reconstructed her selfhood not a victim, but as a surviver.

5.4 Truthful Fictions

Unlike the significance that Lanan gave her migratory photographs, the other women in the group expressed less sentimental value about possessions associated with migration. Material attitudes express a wider social dynamic and while they are a unified group in largely identifying themselves as "overseas brides", Lanan's education and upbringing as a Chinese Vietnamese marks her as distinctive. The contrast within the cohort was not just of geography, education and class. These differences are materially embodied and they permeate the ways that hardships and traumas are remembered or forgotten. This symbiotic relationship grew more prominent during an art workshop where the women were asked to visualise their feelings and life before migration. Unsure how to proceed with the task, one of the participants asked Anna (as the president of the group) how best to illustrate her hard village life. Confident in her pragmatism, Anna strongly asserted that as women they need not concern themselves with past hardships because the past should reside in the past.

In this instance, Anna launched into a mini manifesto as she rose out of her chair to tell the group of the way she surpassed her own trials by remaining focused on the future. The message was: one need not revisit old memories of negativity, it is more productive to focus on creating a positive future. Hearing the conversation, the teacher of the group, Lanan joined in the conversation. She suggested that old hardships and negativities have a place in our lives and therefore, they should be included in the art collages. This ideological stance was reflected in the type of object Anna retained and furthermore, this attitude resonated through art making as her collage captured this sense of positive dynamism. In the very corner of Anna's fairytale collage (fig. 8) was an intimate manifesto that she had wrote to herself. On the edge of the paper, it appeared that pebbles are emerging into jewels and diamonds and alongside she penned, "Tomorrow will be better".
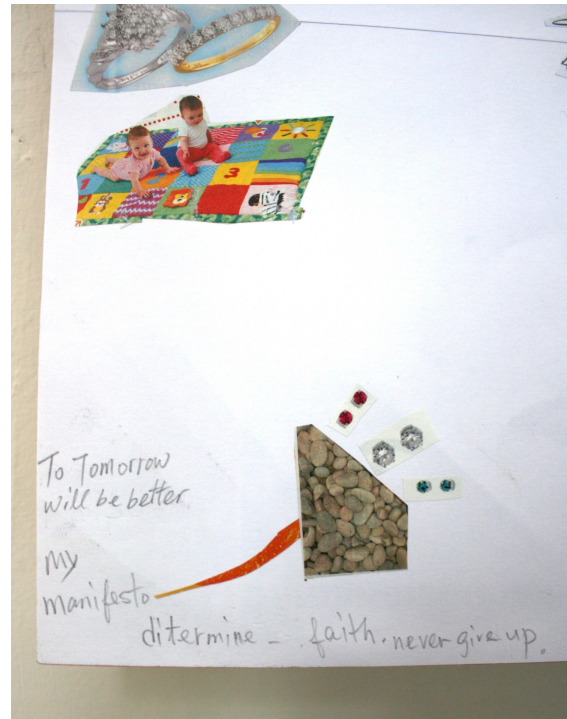
Figure 8, "Tomorrow will be better", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

In presenting her collage, Anna announced to the group that her life motto was to "turn stones into diamonds" and through the collage she brought this manifesto into life. Selecting the textures from mono-printing and magazine imagery, Anna's second collage grew vertical and tall into the sky as her ambition gathers strength and voracity (fig. 9). Dark and scratchy forms inhabit the ground representing the rocks, stones and pebbles and as the collage grows, the colours become brighter and more vivid in their conviction. The textures and surfaces are more dazzling and more spectacular as shards of light splinter off the dulled hues. Gathering energy, they appear like particles generating momentum as they cascade upwards resembling the dazzle of fireworks. They eventually explode and transform into multicoloured jewels in shades of jade and crimson amongst the glitter of diamonds. They cascade and swirl with a hypnotic focus as these diamonds find themselves poised

on an elegant hand, a comfortable cradle, the resting place of hard toil. Rising up to speak about her collage, she declares,

> **Anna**: This is the point of my story and the conclusion is here. My conclusion is, this is rock, my life before was like a stone, sturdy and barren. My hope is…I've struggled so much…I hope in the future that I can turn a rock into diamonds! From the inside the rock is an explosion and from the explosion, there are bright diamonds! The light is beaming out. I can go around the world on this light. That is my manifesto, tomorrow will be better, my stones will become diamonds!
>
> **Group**: Your dreams have come true!
>
> **Anna**: Not everything has come true but good things have come to me. I thank the gods. I have a roof over my head, so I am sheltered from the rain. My rick bucket has rice so I can cook dinner. My purse has 20 pounds so I can buy plenty of groceries. So I am very content. Thank you god.
>
> **Group**: So now you have lots of diamonds?!
>
> **Anna**: I have some, it's just not a lot! (laughs) But there are lots of diamonds in rocks, in my garden there is a lot of rock! Now everyone in the UK is ok now, everyone can more or less support themselves. The kids are big and now you look after the grandchildren. We only play with them, we don't have to mind them!

The material of stone was a metaphor of her previous life, restrained by gendered expectations to marry and abide by its conventions, however the destruction of this stone brought forth a new existence, a transformed self forged through migration. Her determination to succeed explodes and transforms the unforgiving stone into a glittering spectacle. Her sense of agency to change the conditions of her life was imagined as the metaphorical process of turning a material of poverty into grandeur. While Anna referred to the significance of her courtship photos, the symbolic context of the collage more fully accommodates the extent of her selfhood. Through art making, she fully captured her personal agency as she narrated her selfhood with a fantastical tenacity. In the same way she created a new life in Britain, the collage functioned in a similar fashion because in both scenarios, Anna was starting from a blank page from which she inscribed her ambitions.

Figure 9 "My Stones Will Become Diamonds", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Like Anna's collage, many of the collages of the Women's Group (fig 10-11) resembled an account of their migratory aspirations as fantastical visual narratives and this became a collective aesthetic of many collages. Leafing through newspapers and magazines, they easily projected their desires and selected imagery that fitted their aspirations. In some examples, there was a singular Asian female figure looking assertive or ponderous of their potential life as the objects around the figure show the fresh glean of new cars, country houses amongst the solitude of gardens and the leisure of conservatories. Some of the collages depict a village-related imagery directly next to a stately home. The pursuit of a new future was embroiled with striving for a modernity that resided in hyperreal, material goods and a kaleidoscope of seductive textures glistening with promise.

Figure 10 "Self Portrait Collage 1" 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Figure 11, "Self Portrait Collage 2", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

For this group of women, there was a palpable tendency to project into the future. The freedom of making accommodated the women's tenacity to pursue a positive future outlook. Through the context of art making, the women expressed their "thought as felt and feeling as thought" and therefore the distinction between migratory desire, emotion and intellect cannot be untangled. This positive tenacity would struggle to be articulated through personal migratory possessions as it would place them into the difficult past. To continue their settlement, it was important to lessen their attachment to their own initial migratory hardships. As a coping strategy, the women practiced a level of wilful forgetting to forge a new life in the UK. They cannot afford to yearn for their past life or hold onto old grievances which would only cement them in the past. Moreover, art making enabled the women to articulate and visualise their ambition and desire unencumbered by social circumstance.

As embodied by their collages, their intention was to look towards the future and strive towards a material stability that is focused on acquiring the new rather than maintaining the old. Furthermore, the achievement of settlement was intimately related to economic stability and material possessions as one participant Chen remarked, "The kids got older and we brought a takeaway and turned into a business. When we brought the takeaway, I was 40 years old. I brought the first house when I was 30 years old. We worked for 10 years and retired when I was 50 years old". Settlement and stability was not just an internal adjustment of mind over matter, but rather stability manifested on a material level for the migrant woman. Echoing Connerton, forgetting is a productive process because it creates a space for a new identity to be formed and this attitude was practised by the women and this was exemplified by Jenny and her art making.

Though Jenny unwillingly became an overseas bride and had an unhappy marriage, this was not the story which she visualised in her a group collage (fig. 12). Her collage imagined a glamorous and elaborate wedding for all the women. At the centre of the page are rows of women dressed in white bridal wear while the men are dressed in red tail coats. Close up images show a vast selection of Western and Eastern meals and expensive wines are dotted along border. Images of new cars and beauty creams dart around the collage while a mother with a child smiles out from the corner of the

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page. An overall air of dynamism and anticipation accumulates from the collection of images.

Figure 12, "Group Collage 1", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Two of the group members, Jenny and Ying (67) describe their visual collage,

> **Ying**: We are getting married, after the marriage we have a huge party and we've invited so many sisters. Even Jenny brought along her new boyfriend! (laughs) These women are all us and we are all sisters, and these all the brothers and they are driving the car. This is a Rolls Royce! But they drove the wrong car and ended up driving a broken down car! (laughs) We wanted to go in the Rolls Royce but ended up in the broken down car!
>
> **Rest of the group**: You better not get in! The bride better not get in if the car's like that!
>
> **Ying**: And there is food, there's everything to eat. There's champagne and wine and after food, we start the music. Sister Jenny comes out and performs for us and performs ballet.
>
> **Jenny**: Who are these two? (pointing to two figures)
>
> **Group**: They are the audience!

Jenny: Maybe they are watching me perform?

GROUP: They are thinking Sister Jenny is so beautiful!

Ying: This is my son he's grown up now and graduated. This person is giving my son an award, my dream is that my son grows up and that is my dream.

DK: What is this?

Jenny: That's my face cream! (laughs)

Ying: I brought her some Olay, she can use it and she'll smell nice! (laughs) It's a gift!

Their collective visual narratives dynamically diverged from the personal stories which they spoke about of themselves in the interview. Their interviews often referred to periods of self sacrifice, long hours of toil, an inability to achieve their potential and the gendered challenges which were exacerbated by the loneliness and challenges of migration. Linguistic expression tended to solidify their stories with a heaviness of their adversity. Speech often anchored their tales within boundaries of linearity and justification and dulled the glimmering flints of agency and desire. The need to adhere to speaking logically about one's self can subdue stories and restrain the ability to speak in metaphorical and fantastical ways.

Though the women were asked to make individual art collages, they automatically formed small groups to complete the collages. Their art making became live constructions of meaning making where the women naturally formed groups; one woman would be responsible for cutting images, selecting, sticking images and discuss the meaning of the art work amongst themselves. On completing their art collages, each group offered an interpretation of their collective art work. Through the visual and the symbolic, their stories were released from the mundanity of common sense reality. Instead through their collective visual making and feedback, they weaved together a narrative of spontaneity which was responsive to change and adaptation; the threads were loose and pliable.

In this alternative realm illustrated by the collage, Jenny did not tolerate her unhappy marital fate. Instead she was single and embarked on a new courtship while she pursued her passion of dancing,

however, this idealisation was never far from reality's reach as the pot of Olay cream was a light hearted reminder of her age. While the women set their sights on a Rolls Royce, it was the "broken down car" which they settled for instead. In many ways, these short, humorous anecdotes encapsulated their migratory aspirations and their attempt in striving for best but having to make do with a lot less, this echoes Matthyssen's point about Chinese attitudes with contentment and making the best of hardships. In contrast to Connerton's suggestion of forgetting as a necessity to create one's identity, the women's collage refutes clear cut definitions and suggests that the construction of their identity resided upon the threshold of remembering and forgetting. Through the narratives of the collage, there was an active sense of the women's selective remembering, they were neither truths nor fictions but rather they reside in the creative potential of ambiguity, their visual narratives were truthful fictions. Having overcome their migratory trials, they recalled their futures from the perspective of their younger selves. Outside of the usual time-space and social constraints, their desires were unencumbered and within their imagination resided a truth more vivid than the socio-economics that framed their lived experiences.

5.5 A Floating Sisterhood

At the top, dark shadowy figures wander aimlessly in a barren landscape (fig. 13). Facing away from us, we only see their backs as they walk away from us towards a destination that is not in view; where have they come from and where are they going? In dramatic contrast, the image below depicts a more hopeful scene. The sun dawns on a lonely canoe inhabited by two people, again they face away, as though searching and looking for a destination far away in the distance. Further on, a soft silhouette of houses begin to dawn into view and rising into a sharper focus are the faces of people as they are look ahead. Land that was once barren become less hostile, more inhabitable and welcoming. We turn a page and on the other side shows a distinct contrast as drama, glamour and people populate the surface. The glitter and drama of the stage presents a stage of dancers performing dances from different cultures. The lack of their previous life is replaced by the abundance of fruit that is carried by the armful. Their exuberance does not go unnoticed as a row of teenage fans look on, deciphering their performance in awe and disbelief of their resurrection. In relation to her group collage (fig. 12), Jenny explained the narrative,

This is about the future and not knowing what to do, we are floating and don't know where the destination is, we are looking forward and then eventually, thankfully, we saw some houses but, thankfully, besides us there are some friends helping us along. Look, there are friendships everywhere! Look, we've arrived now and see how happy we are in every step. We even have face powder on, look! We are learning to dance, we are so happy, we are dancing different cultural dances. We are learning to grow vegetables and we even have fans! Our friendship networks are becoming stronger and bigger!

Figure 13, "Group Collage 2", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan

Their sense of sisterhood created community and knowledge sharing and this was reflected in their collective art making. Voluntarily, they formed smaller groups to complete the artwork and through the process of collecting images, the narrative grew from the image selection as the women compiled

the narrate and collage as a live process. The womens' desire to make together and speak from the same voice underlined their sense of shared culture. Anna says, "We share secrets…we come here to talk and we talk about our husbands, isn't that a secret?! We talk about our daughters". The informal space of the group enabled a shared common culture where they could openly speak about the domestic and social aspects of their life. Their social time with each other cannot be labelled as trivial "gossip" rather the sharing of informal information was essential in creating a supportive network. From this position, they inhabited and shared a flexible structure of power as a participant, Yuet Lan (68) puts it,

> Everyone knows different things and have different skills, and so our friendship is good, it makes us more powerful. We create more power because when we are together, we are more powerful. More skills and more ideas and because I might know something that maybe she doesn't know. More power. By coming together, it builds the strength of the group and makes the group more powerful and stronger.

In this sense, power was not a vertical notion awarded from above and received by those powerless, instead power was a horizontal form of information and ideas sharing. Information sharing referred to everyday matters such as advice on navigating transport, medicinal advice, sharing a recipe or simply a space to share domestic frustration. As a group of women that felt socially encumbered by their English ability, the group functioned as an opportunity where the women could share knowledge to overcome such barriers. A network of support and sharing was formed by each of the women in creating an infrastructure of power in the continual settlement of their lives. The structure of the group relied on their bond as women and cultural commonality. In this way, the Women's Group resembled Wolf's concept of the uterine family. Wolf describes the uterine family as a female response to the lack of women centred spaces in traditional Chinese patriarchal society. Amongst informal conversations with other women, they could retrieve advice and temporarily inhabit a roving female space as Wolf puts it,

> With a female focus, however, we see the Chinese family not as a continuous line stretching between the vague horizons of past and future, but as a contemporary groups that comes into existence out of one woman's need and is held together insofar as she has the strength to do so, or, for that matter, the need to do so. The uterine family has no ideology, no formal

structure, and no public existence. It is built out of sentiment and loyalties that die with its members, but it is no less real for all that (1972:37).

Like the uterine family, there was little public knowledge about the Women's Group, the women may mention activities of the group with their family but often in informal passing. The existence of the group relied on the recommendations from the women; an interesting dance activity, a cookery class, or a weekend trip out of London. The English lessons certainly gave a focus to the group but the broader more essential function of the group was the bringing together of women and in this way, they offered support and power to each other.

Despite the integrity of the group, it existed as an amorphous form where women would come and go freely without obligation, some women attended weekly while some were intermittent. Their acceptance of me as a researcher is a testimony to this. In viewing me as a surrogate "daughter" whom they wanted to help, their amorphous form shifted to accommodate our mutual needs. Their agility was an asset as it continually responded to the thoughts and needs of the group but equally its lack of definition lessened the external visibility and recognition of the group. Akin to Wolf's uterine family, the Women's Group was a female space which had "no ideology, no formal structure, and no public existence" (1972:37). It was a space that was held by the women for the women. This space did not exist external of themselves but rather it was space maintained by each of the women. Unlike Wolf's uterine family, the function of this space was not to only seek independence from their husband's family, however, in a migratory context, the Women's Group provided a space for support and enrichment to their lives as British Chinese women.

5.6 Summary

For the participants of the Women's Group, the concept of Materially Embodied Visions manifested through the context of collective art making. Through art making, the women were more able to articulate their agency and desires to create from a place of imaginative optimism; the women physically *made* their thoughts and feelings. In giving visibility to their own stories, the cultural character of the women was objectified through their artwork. They reinvented themselves to visualise their agency and subjectivities in ways that a singular object or an interview would be unable to accommodate. The women placed greater emphasis on their artworks as it presented a

symbolic freedom that gave them the flexibility to move across the past and future to construct their identities with an imaginative optimism.

Far from the fixity of linguistic expression, through art making the women constructed another version of their stories; one that was more agile to their desires, a version which would otherwise remain buried under the logic of language. Through the visual and the symbolic, the womens' stories were released from the mundanity of common sense reality. Instead through their collective making, they weaved together a narrative of spontaneity and determination. The women presented an alternative version of their stories to give equal focus to desire, humour, and reality. In the context of making, the women revised and modified the past while visualising their future agency as brighter and more vibrant.

Though Anna spoke about her courtship photograph, it was uncommon for women to speak directly about themselves through personal possessions. The cultural tendency to foreground optimism was reflected by the keeping of emotionally positive objects while discarding objects that would conjure emotional dissonance, such as the wedding figurine. Moreover, the notion of whether one should remember the difficulty of one's life was highly contested. For the participants of the Women's Group, migratory objects appeared too anchored by their personal narrative and this narrative of settlement was seldom breezy and positive. To maintain and publicly speak about these migratory objects would be to openly recount and remember their past hardship, this was not the spirit of these migrant Chinese women. For the women, it appeared that the improved cultivation of the self was a state that belonged in the future, whether this was concerned with their personal stability or the future of their children. It appeared that the women practised a level of active forgetting of past migratory difficulties in the pursuit of cultivating and emanating a sense of positivity in their present and future lives. As such their situated vision appeared to be located on the possibilities offered by the future or the "past-future" as embodied by their artworks, as they are retired women reflecting their younger selves. This orientation towards creating a positive future can be understood as a reason why certain objects were not publicly offered up.

There was little formal recognition of the group's collective identity and they existed without formal funding. The group relied on the labour of the volunteer work of the Chinese Vietnamese teacher. This highlighted the precarious yet crucial nature of these structures. With this in mind, the artworks provided a temporary form to this indefinable group of women, it was visual evidence of their collective existence. The womens' artwork carved out a symbolic space. Through the act of making, they spoke to each other about their lives as lived and imagined. From this vantage point the visual narratives assumed a status of truthful fictions as the artworks captured their aspirations outside the confines of social and time-space constraints. The visual narratives were not simply individual accounts but they were records of a cohort of British Chinese women as a female community where they marked their points of symmetry and angles of divergence. The process of art making mirrored the migratory journey because in both scenarios, the women began with a blank page. With her mark, she not only inscribed her own life but also of her sisterhood. Though the sisterhood is an ephemeral structure, we captured a glimpse of their fleeting form and vibrancy. The women may choose to elude the difficulties of initial settlement but through the process of art making, their tenacity to achieve their migratory goals are foregrounded and remembered.

Chapter 6

Materially Embodied Resistant In The Present

This chapter will explore the ways that second generation women enact resistance against present day challenges through material objects. Born and raised in Britain, the inequalities faced by these women are more covert compared to their first generation counterparts. The challenges of the second generation are not as obvious as the first generation who faced the obstacles of employment, language and education. On the outset, it might appear that the situation for the second generation has improved, however a materially embodied vantage point revealed that structural challenges still persist into the second generation. In being British ethnic women, the women found themselves in positions of vulnerability.

The women of the study employed materiality as a strategy to armour the body to prevent and deflect prejudices that they experienced. The way in which the women employed material objects illustrated the ways that power relations are negotiated and resisted on an individual and everyday level. Thus materiality embodied resistance and the notion of resistance articulated by the women in this chapter was two-fold; resistance is interpreted as a form of literal action (of preventing or deflecting a problematic everyday situation) or as a symbolic assertion against the power relations they observe in British society.

6.1 Armoured Dress In The Workplace

Born in London, Rachel's (29) parents migrated from Hong Kong to London in the 1960s. Showing academic potential, Rachel decided at the age of fourteen that she wanted to become a technical coder at Google. After studying Computer Science at Cambridge, at the age of twenty-one she secured her dream job at Google. Her academic and professional achievements were a far cry from her parents' initial work as waiters. Evidently naturally gifted, bolstered by self determination and family support, these characteristics appear to be symptomatic of British social mobility and worthy

of the label of "model minority". Having arrived at Google, Rachel quickly observed difficulties arising in her workplace as she explained,

> Even though I saw myself as an engineer first, the tech industry being very white and male dominated and they did not see me as a part of that…I was either left out of the decision-making or people would…er…you know, sometimes people were a lot more open about saying things like, 'You don't look like an engineer or are you from sales?' I would say, 'No, I'm an engineer' but it was difficult for people to see that.

The tech environment grew increasingly obstructive as she observed, "I have definitely seen an unfriendliness, a distrust of women who are engineers". On a regular basis, Rachel recounted a daily need to prove her worth. In this homogenous environment, the accumulation of "distrust" over her identity as a woman led to intense feelings of dismemberment. At the adult age of twenty-two, Rachel recalled the very moment that she witnessed her own racial otherness. Influenced by her workplace exchanges, Rachel started to see herself through the gaze of others and as a racialised, female body.

> I remember being about 22 or 23…and staring at myself in the mirror and being *absolutely astonished* that people would see me first as Chinese, and in fact that as I looked at myself in the mirror I saw a Chinese person first! People would not see 'Rachel', they would not see me as British first, which is obviously how I saw myself. I grew up in London which is very diverse and I went to an all-girls' school until I was 16, I never really developed this realisation that people would see me in *that* way first.

Rachel described gender discrimination in the tech industry as a "touchy subject" and that plenty of men would try to explain away the problem with, "It's not a problem, it's just not a problem! Or say things like, maybe women just aren't as good at programming and maybe their brains aren't as set up for it!' [laughs] This is suppose to be Google! This is suppose to be a really smart and liberal group of people". Rachel's encounter with her own otherness was experienced on a bodily level and simultaneously this sense of otherness was enacted through dress as she recounted the experience of her difference as a material entity,

> I go to conferences and it is a *sea* of white, grey and blue. These are great colours to wear if you are white with blue eyes, pale skin and mousy brown hair but it looks god

awful on most minorities, which sounds like a small thing. But I noticed that 95% of the time, I can't take these t-shirts they give out at conferences. I can't take them because of the colour, they are men's t-shirts so they are too big on me and even if they are women's t-shirts, a lot of the time they have blog slogans across the chest and that's not *comfortable* as a woman- you don't want people staring at your chest! So I don't take most of these t-shirts because they exclude me in three different ways.

Traditionally the t-shaped garment began as an emancipatory dress for working men as it freed the top half of the body and over time, the garment has been integrated into mainstream dressing (Brunell, 2002), however this emancipatory ethos of t-shirts was contradicted upon Rachel's body. Rather than striking a unity amongst her and her colleagues, these t-shirts underlined her otherness in emphasising her gender and constructed a sexualised reading of her body. Writing about power dressing, Molloy (1980) notes that the area of the female chest is most problematic for the workplace and the inability to contain the potential eroticism of the female body undermines the "professionalism" and "productivity" of women in the workplace.

After five years, Rachel resigned from her job. On her final day, she recalled a specific comment from a colleague-friend who said, "Thanks for making the team a nicer place to look at!" Having left Google, Rachel found another job at a new tech start-up. This transitional time between jobs signalled a phase of self reflection where Rachel turned to the site of the body to reconsider how to regain control over her otherness. This period coincided with her discovery of K-Pop, Korean Pop Music, a phenomena that has propelled itself into a global consciousness. Though highly manufactured, this explosion of K-Pop presents a construction of Asian womanhood that defies Asian female stereotypes.

Through the extravagant lens of K-Pop, the Asian female body becomes an experimental space that is subversive and bold. The synthetic sound and styling of the music videos challenges the construction of an innate Asian femininity which usually falls within the stereotypical qualities of gentleness, submission and restraint. Writing about Korean Pop Culture, Michael Fuhr (2017) comments that the visual pleasure of K-Pop has "opened a discursive space in which traditional rules of masculinity and femininity can be critically reflected, reoriented, and transformed" (2017:1152). The sweeping wave of Korean Pop Music did not escape Rachel which prompted her to reflect on the lack of media

representation of Chinese and Asian women in a British and Western context. For Rachel, it was a pivotal moment to see Asian women as "aspirational" which started the unpicking of the stereotypical Western prejudice she had internalised about Asian women,

> When you grow up in a Western environment, you watch Western media and you assimilate their stereotypes. On the BBC for instance, Chinese women were generally portrayed in one way. When I started watching K-Pop, there would be a group of nine girls. One would be really sporty, one would be the leader of the group, one would be really smart, and whatever! It really helped me push through my own stereotypes of Asian-looking women and I could start to see...to see...these as individuals. It's easier for me to visualise myself in multiple ways rather than thinking Asian American in Hollywood and you've got Lucy Lui and that's it! It sounds ridiculous but it was a really big moment to see these people held up as aspirational who I could relate to visually. Like K-Pop, I want my image to be something I construct with no real regard to my inner personality.

In recognising the potential of creatively reconstructing appearance, Rachel felt inspired to address her racial and gendered otherness in the workplace. After much contemplation and in preparation for her next job, Rachel decided to invent a new work wardrobe. She declared, "I'm going to do the Steve Job's thing and buy multiples of one outfit and it's going to be my perfect outfit". This new wardrobe accumulated in the purchasing of twenty identical t-shirts (fig. 14). Purchased from the high street, these round necked t-shirts were strikingly unremarkable; identical in every way, each cotton garment was bottle green.

Figure 14, "Green Work T-Shirts", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Along with a pencil skirt, this became a self-imposed work uniform. In discovering her ideal work uniform, her exhilaration was evident as her experimental writing (as written from the perspective of the object) captured the moment,

> I remember being purchased by a Chinese woman in her mid-twenties.
> She seemed agitated but when she found me, she was delighted.
> She took me and a few of my siblings into the changing room where I was tried on over and over again in different permutations and with photos taken.
> It was quite exhausting!
> After she decided that we would the be the t-shirt, I was taken back to the rack and every inch of us inspected.
> In particular the seams and hems were checked for straightness and evenness.
> Five of us were chosen from dozens as the neatest and most perfect looking, and we were all taken together on hangers to be paid for.

Rachel's writing captured a sense of her relief in finding the ideal t-shirt that would both enable her to visually integrate into the work environment while complimenting her racial colouring and body

shape. However, finding the garment was not enough and the way she wore the t-shirt was just as important: she explained that each t-shirt was worn back to front. This decision was deliberate as the neck line would sit closer to the collarbone to further deter any attention to the neck and chest. The choice for a singular style and colour was not a creative oversight. This was a conscious consideration to minimise her affiliations with the traditional female identity and its associations with colourful and fashionable clothing.

She explains, "If you dress up, keep changing your clothes, you are not technical, you are not an engineer, you are not one of us. In the tech industry, there is this feeling that clothing is functional and it's frivolous for you to care and that's distinctly female". In being a woman in this male dominated environment was a disadvantaged position and therefore to further behave as a "woman" through dress would underline her otherness. Instead, she sought to unmark herself from the associations of her gendered body as she says, "I want to project this *blandness*, this professionalism, I just want my work to be visible…I *absolutely* don't want to be seen as the *woman* in the office, even though I am".

Her t-shirts functioned as an armour for the workplace; a concept that was reflected in her artwork (fig. 15). Presented in the shape of a shield, rows of undressed males are lined side by side but we are not privy to their faces or the rest of their bodies, they exist in complete anonymity. Like a strip club peep hole, the men are thoroughly dismembered from the rest of their bodies; all that is available is a framed portrait of their genitalia while their hands dangle in awkwardness. The male body is shown with vulnerability in its un-erect state as it is portrayed in a full frontal state of undress as their hands dangle with a stammer of self-consciousness. A closer inspection highlights the multiplicity of the male body; different sexual orientations and creeds. The numerous rows of penis confronts the viewer with a blunt starkness which is markedly different from the sexualised media images of women's bodies.

Figure 15, "Dressing as Armour", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Laura Mulvey (1989) asserted that the site of the female body has historically been the site of visual male pleasure. To see the male body objectified switches gender relations; no longer is it the man surveying the objectified woman. The male gaze is turned inside out and reversed. Through the artwork, it was the woman doing the making, and hence the looking. The shield-like form was suggestive of the function of her t-shirts; Rachel's t-shirts offered a literal protection from the male

gaze at work and by adopting the "Steve Jobs" dress, she afforded her body a level of camouflage. A startlingly aspect of this artwork was the fact that the male figure was captured in a soft, un-erect state which challenges the ideology of phallic patriarchal power. Rachel's artwork explicitly captured her personal defiance of patriarchal authority and its assertion in the workplace. Rachel's portrayal of masculinity contradicts the concept of an ideal authoritarian, white male identity. Male bodies in the workplace are often rendered invisible in contrast to the attention given to women (Entwistle, 2001) but through this artwork, it is no longer her body that is visible and self-conscious, rather it is the white, male body.

Through this artwork, she articulated a scenario that would be unspeakable in her workplace. Rachel's conscious choice to present the imagery as upside down withholds a double significance; in one sense, it softens the confrontation with the male body but equally it can be read as a symbolic desire to overturn the existing status quo in gender work place relations. On the one hand, in pasting male genitalia in this overt way reverses the gaze, while the shape of the shield is symbolic of the function of her t-shirts in protecting her from the same gaze is exposing. Rachel stressed the importance of the t-shirts in navigating her identity as an ethnic minority woman,

> I have to, I have to, protect myself in a way, you know. I have to project- I have to, as much as I can, control what people will think when they see me...because I don't have the luxury of wearing anything I want, despite what the tech industry saying- wear whatever you want, it's not true!

This concept of dress as armour was mirrored by Rachel's language as she described the t-shirts as a form of protective wear. This notion of clothing as armour and imprisonment is echoed by Umberto Eco (1973) when he reflects on wearing a tight pair of new jeans. He refers to the "epidermic awareness" that he experienced when wearing jeans that clung too tightly and stated, "Well, with my new jeans my life was entirely exterior: I thought about the relationship between me and my pants, and the relationship between my pants and me and the society we lived in. I had achieve heterconsciousness, that is to say, an epidermic self-awareness" (1973:194). In feeling the "edges"

and limitations of his body, the sensation of wearing jeans acted as a physical reminder of his objectivity. Despite the egalitarian and unisex appeal of denim, Eco states that jeans for women serves as another form of imprisonment which, "don't free the body, but subject it to another label and imprison it in other armours" (ibid). It is precisely this "epidermic awareness" that she wants to avoid in wearing the inconspicuous t-shirt uniform.

At first glance, Rachel's green t-shirts appeared to be everyday clothing but when these garments are considered in relation to her artwork, the function of her t-shirts as armour becomes more lucid. These cotton t-shirts may assume an easy-going persona but they also possessed a literal function as they enabled her to camouflage with the habitus of her workplace. The t-shaped cotton garments drew a visible commonality between herself and other colleagues. To contain any sexually eroticised interpretation of her body, Rachel developed her own way of wearing these t-shirts as they were worn them back to front. Despite the seemingly simple and relaxed persona of the t-shirts, careful consideration has been channeled into choosing the precise style and developing a particular way of wearing them. Though these t-shirts appear to be commonplace, this self imposed uniform was her workplace armour; the t-shirts enabled her to camouflage into the workplace while simultaneously managing the male gaze.

6.2 An Object of Deterrent

The theme of armour and protection was similarly echoed in the object chosen by Rachel's older sister, Jessica (32). Jessica recalled the difficulty of growing up as a young girl and negotiating instances of gender harassment on a daily basis. During the workshop discussion, the women shared the significance of their object with each other. In the group, Jessica recalled instances when she was an eleven year old girl and returning home from school in her school uniform where she was met verbal sexually harassment as she says, "People would you know, comment on things like I was a 'Chinese school girl' or an 'Asian school girl'. I was eleven years old and wearing my school uniform". This form of sexual harassment continued into her teenage years.

I would get constantly called 'leng neui' which means 'pretty girl' in Cantonese from Westerners, it was a term they had learnt. I had that in a swimming pool once and he put his arms on either side of me. He came up behind me and I just turned around and he was said 'pretty girl'. This is a white guy, I was a teen and he was an older teen. It was the most uncomfortable thing ever.

These reoccurring instances of sexual harassment continued into her mid twenties and she noticed that once she passed a certain age, the daily sexual harassment subsided. These instances of sexual harassment and gender inequalities impacted the way that Jessica viewed her identity and sexuality. Her experience of harassment has taught her that it was her gender as a woman that first and foremost formed her vulnerability in a public space. For Jessica, she was clear that it was her gendered status as a woman and sexuality as a bisexual polygamous woman was a problematic and heightened aspect of her identity.

The fact that I am female has more of an impact on my day to day life rather than the fact I am Chinese. I think being Chinese has not felt like the most important part of my identity because it hasn't been as threatened in the current society. I feel more in danger that I am female and the fact that I am bisexual and I am polygamous, all of these things in many ways feel like they are more threatened.

In a similar way to Rachel's tactic of assigning herself a workplace uniform, Jessica adopted a material strategy to manage the sexualising male gaze that she encountered in public. Jessica presented a pair of bright, purple headphones (fig. 16) as she explained that these headphones accompanied her everywhere as she travelled within London, even during times when she was performing house chores when she had to go outside her home. She was vigilant to note that the headphones were especially brought for its bright aesthetic and being a bold colour, Jessica hoped that the headphones would send out a social signal to deter people from speaking to her or commenting on her appearance. It was a constant companion to her daily life as the visibility of the headphones acted as a deterrent to potential "cat callers".

I picked this because I wear these headphones everywhere I go. The main way that I get through commuting in London is the fact I have these headphones. I can shut out the rest of

the world and I can't hear it if there are people who are referencing the fact that I am female. I do not hear any of that cat calling because I have my headphones on. They are so brightly coloured because that they are an indication to other people, 'Do not try to talk to me, I will ignore you'. Sometimes, they are not even playing music, the headphones signal, 'I am not listening to you, I cannot hear you, this is my bubble'. I don't always have music on, this is an indication, 'Don't talk to me'. I literally just put them on. They are not noise cancelling because I wouldn't feel safe if I cannot hear anything. They are deliberately not noise cancelling so I can still hear everywhere.

Figure 16, "Purple Headphones", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

The headphones were more than their physical function as Jessica used them as a material strategy to deter sexual harassment. As an object of deterrent, the headphones were paramount to her sense of personal safety in public spaces as she viewed the headphones as forming a protective "bubble" around her. Like Rachel, her strategy of managing the male gaze and harassment took on an individual level. By no means was it their fault that they have received discriminations, however, both women have adopted personal material tactics to manage gendered discriminations. Through material expression, both women used objects and dressing as methods of acting out resistance in a society where gendered and raced inequalities are much active. Like Rachel's t-shirts, Jessica's

headphones can be viewed as a form of armouring.

Jessica stressed that it was her gender and sexuality that were most threatened in contemporary society, whereas her identity as a British Chinese woman has experienced less hostility as she says, "It's not like we are in a post-racial world. I am aware that we are not the majority race in this country but being Chinese has less of an impact in my life. I had that awakening moment with gender and sexuality but I haven't had that epiphany with race in the same way". Jessica stressed the role of gender and sexuality in her life, however, the sexual harassment Jessica experienced incorporated a strong racial element. As a young girl, her body was not solely sexualised as a un-raced female body. Instead the comment of the "Asian school girl" and the derogatory term of "leng neui" are raced insults. In other words, the sexualisation of her body was not limited to gendered and racially neutral terms, instead the sexualisation of her body carried a highly racialised connotation.

These terms resurrects and purports the stereotype of the overly sexualised Asian female identity. Furthermore the illusionary notion of the sexualised "girl" rather than "woman" suggests an infantilisation and projects a sexual dominance and a "double gendering" of Asian women. This dynamic aligns with notions of cultural power and asserts an orientalist binary notion of power and desire. It reinforces the illusionary yet persistent notion of the "West/male" and "East/female" dichotomy. Jessica did not explicitly refer to her Chinese ethnicity as being a problematic notion however, she recognised that her disposition as a middle class, well educated and employed woman offered her a range of "privileges" that filter the way she has experienced her racial identity.

> Usually race doesn't impinge on my every day life but when people talk about their racial experiences of not being white in a Western dominate society, I realise I have a lot of privileges that buffers me slightly, they protects me from feeling the worse effects of it. I have a job, I work in a very, very ethnically diverse job, people speak multiple languages, race is not a big deal. I'm middle class and I live in East London. People may see me as Chinese but I open my mouth and I'm middle class, that's how it is with British people. Your accent is how you are labelled. I am lucky to be in a position where I get the chance to open my mouth. Usually I am in a position where those other privileges come into play without me even realising.

Jessica's artwork refers to the history of her family's immigration from Hong Kong to Britain. The edges of the paper are purposefully irregular and the overall colour of green gives an impression that it is a portion of land. In this way, the artwork reflects the appearance of a map as small cut outs of mountain-scapes are positioned. At the centre of the map is the imagery of an ornate elephant denoting foreign lands while below an individual map appears suspended by an animated balloon. It is neither clear whether the individual is about to ascend or descend into the choppy seas below. Towards the bottom of the artwork is a small tree lined tunnel that fades away in a linear perspective.

Speaking about the collage artwork (fig. 17), Jessica explained that the artwork represented the relationship between Britain and its colonies as represented by the elephant to suggest its colonial relationship with India, as was the case with Hong Kong. While it does not speak about Chinese migration explicitly, the iconography of the map is a powerful statement. As a self made map, it suggests an exploratory approach to cultural identity and belonging. Maps function to guide travellers and explorers within a foreign or unknown landscape and provide direction and security amongst uncertainty.

Figure 17, "Self Made Map", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Armed with a map, the individual is not entirely lost, an individual with a map holds the possibility to forge their own path. The fact that Jessica created her own map to echo the relationship between Britain and its colonial countries speaks to her own nuanced history as a second generation British born Chinese woman. While she notes that ethnicity has not been as a significant as sexuality and gender, she nevertheless observes the difficulty of situating a sense of wider belonging to the Chinese community.

> I went to Chinese school for a couple of years, a shame that nothing has embedded itself and I don't remember that much from it. Peers I met from the centre, there has been no reason for us to get together so it became a case that our social groups and circles were not based around the Chinese community. It never developed into a social circle. The only reason I know any Chinese people at all is because my parents are heavily involved in the Chinese Community. Like the Dragon Boat Festival, I think if my parents weren't heavily involved, I

would have practically no connection with the Chinese community. There's a real disconnect between the 20-something people and middle aged to elderly people in their use of Chinese community centres.

Jessica's reflections on her sense of belonging as a British Chinese woman resonates with her creation of a personalised map. In the middle of the artwork is an individual suspended by a balloon, it appears ambiguous whether the figure is about to arrive or depart which metaphorically reflects her sense of recognition and disconnect as a British Chinese second generation woman. Equally she notes that the awakening of her sexuality and gender has been the result of the governmental legalisation of same sex marriage and gender inequalities that has led her into activism as a bisexual and polygamous woman. As the Chinese in Britain are a smaller ethnic percentage and given the dispersed population, it has proved more difficult to forge the same sense of political awareness surrounding the British Chinese identity. Her handmade map begins to articulate the tentative position of situating herself as a British Chinese woman. With few peers, there are obvious challenges in recognising oneself as a part of a larger cultural entity.

6.3 Symbolic Resistance Through The Phoenix

Born in Hong Kong to a Chinese mother and a Welsh father, Robin (59) recalled a happy childhood until the age of eight when she and her family relocated to Cardiff in 1966. Growing up bilingual in Hong Kong with little sense of her difference, Robin had never experienced any racism. She recalled the vicious racism she experienced at school and explained this came from children and was antagonised by her teachers, "It was a very hard time for me, I was very unhappy for many years and you know, the racism wasn't just from kids in school, teachers would take the piss and whip the kids into a frenzy [CLICKS HER FINGERS]...Race had been such a...painful issue...I suppose I wanted to fit in, I wanted to be like everyone else. That was very, very difficult".

In experiencing such direct racial abuse, Robin explains, "In my little girl's head, it was all my mother's fault that I was getting all this shit. I wasn't very close to my mum when I was little because actually it was safer with my dad". As a result, Robin aligned herself with her white, Welsh father and this alignment had a profound effect on her bilingual ability. At the age of thirteen, she no longer had any command of Cantonese. Robin recalls a dinner with her Chinese relatives, "I

remember sitting there and...people were chatting away and I couldn't understand them...I was thirteen. I thought, shit, I couldn't...I can't, I can't understand this anymore...because I use to say to my Mum, speak in English, speak in English!" To seek protection from the daily racism, the loss of her Cantonese was driven by a burning desire to assimilate into the dominant white British society.

As a young woman in Britain, her identity was informed through the prism of sexuality and politics as she identified herself as socialist, lesbian woman. A significant event in healing her relationship with her racial identity manifested in her joining a Chinese Lesbian group in 1984 in South London. By accessing a wider network of like-minded women from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds gave her an opportunity to break the sense of isolation and shame that shrouded her early racial identity as she says,

> I hadn't really been around Chinese people that much or those that were around seemed really different to me in that they were, I suppose, more serious and weren't into partying and drinking (laughs)...It was a small group of 6, all of us were born outside of this country and suddenly that sort of...expanded my...my *comfort* with myself.

The Chinese Lesbian group travelled to the first international Asian and Lesbian conference in San Francisco. This event firmly situated Robin's racial and sexual identity as a visible and legitimate position in the world. She recalled her exhilaration at the encounter, "There must have been five-hundred people at this conference. Well I've never seen so many like-minded women and women that looked the same as me, ever, in the same place!" After years of internalising shame over her racial and sexual identity, Robin was able to see her identity and others like her as proudly visible and existing in the world.

Robin's sexuality could be viewed as problematic as it contradicts the traditional Confucian, familial expectations of a daughter which associates filial duty with heterosexual marriage and childbearing. Over time, her once difficult maternal relationship has healed and her mother not only accepted her sexuality but has joined her community in making good friendships with the mothers of her friends. In recent years, her mother has developed dementia and as her condition has worsened, Robin has become the sole carer to carry out one of the most filial of duties. She states that her mother was integral to her personal reclaim, "For many years when I first came to this country, my race was

such a nightmare, it caused me so much pain. But yes, I reclaimed all of that and in a positive way and my mother represented that. It's been a total reversal".

Her sense of Chineseness was deeply connected with her mother but equally she acknowledged the fragility of this hard won position, "Race becomes more or less of an issue at different times, I think now race is an issue, my mother has got Alzheimer and she's dying. What will it mean for me when she goes? Do I feel less Chinese? I don't know". Yuval-Davis (1997) emphasise the central role of women in biologically and culturally reproducing a nation and raises the ultimatum that 'If the Woman does not want to be Mother, Nation is on its way to die' (1993:1). As a lesbian woman, Robin was acutely aware of the link between reproduction, race and sexuality, specifically the decision of deciding the racial genetics of her child, a question she considered in her thirties.

> In terms of race and my sexuality, I wouldn't want to have a child with a white man, I don't want a child that- that might look like a *white* child. That really struck me. If you're heterosexual with a white man, that wouldn't have entered my consciousness. This is such a significant part of me...I didn't want that *diluted*, which is quite interesting because my race has been such a source of *pain* for many years. But I guess, that pain I associated with that period in my life, that must have gone.

Robin's desire to reproduce a "genuine" Chinese baby reinforced her journey of self acceptance and racial ownership. As a woman, there was a feeling of responsibility to continue the racial lineage and to preserve it as "authentically" as possible, but without children of her own and the mother in ill health, her connections to her Chinese identity begins and ends with herself. Nearing her 60s, Robin has not had children but her sense of cultural and racial identity was reproduced and visualised through upon her body; it was inscribed through tattoos and embodied through the numerous Chinese furnishings in her house.

After moving her mother into a care home, she inherited many of her household items (fig. 17). These household objects are both ordinary and ornate: a 1960's formica handmade table and chairs, a rice cooker, chopsticks holder, paintings and wall hanging, a carved wooden drinks' cabinet, her baby bath tub, an enormous jade plant which dominates her living room and even a P&O napkin kept from ship journey to the UK.

Figure 18, "Household Objects", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Stepping into Robin's home was a materially distinctive experience as many of these objects were a part of her Hong Kong childhood as she says, "Fundamentally they represent the best time of my life. My childhood in Hong Kong was a very happy one so yeah, it represents a time of safety and security which were taken away when I came here". Though she lives in London, her furniture from her Hong Kong childhood embodied a fleeting time of warmth and security. Robin expressed a desire to return to Hong Kong, but knows that this is impossible; the Hong Kong of her childhood has ebbed away. The remnants of her Hong Kong childhood exist in the distinctive wear and tear of her material objects.

Equally, her identity as a lesbian woman was physically marked on the body as a tattoo of two women in embrace and over the years, she has accumulated tattoos including an anarchy symbol and various peace characters in Chinese, Thai and Tibetan. For Robin, tattooing was a physical and external reminder to the ever-changing body of personal eternal truths as she says, "It's to remind myself that inner peace is a very important thing and not to let things get in the way of that". One of the most significant and impressive tattoos on Robin's body was her multi-coloured phoenix that rises from the base of the spine and explodes into the expansiveness of her back (fig. 19). Having survived a difficult phase of her life, the tattoo celebrated her survival of a difficult life event.

Victoria Pitts (2003) describes body modification and tattooing as an act of "reclaiming" the female body, the permanent inscription is a symbolic action of ownership as she asserts, "Modifying the body promotes symbolic rebellion, resistance, and self transformation- that making the transformation of the body can symbolically 'reclaim' the body from its victimisation and objectification in patriarchal culture" (2003:49). She describes tattooing as a form of "body- biography" as the individual consciously chooses to mark significant points of one's life upon their flesh. Alfred Gell (1993) highlights the psychological effects of tattooing. Far from being a singular process of inserting ink into the skin to attain a surface decoration, Gell emphasises that tattooing creates a "double skin, folded over on itself" where the internal self is not only externalised through adornment but the body's renewed surface internalises its external persona as he puts it,

What tattooing reveals...is an inside which comes from the outside, which has been applied externally prior to being absorbed into the interior. The basis schema of tattooing is thus definable as the exterioization of the interior which is simultaneously the interiorisation of the exterior (1993:38-39).

Figure 19, "Phoenix Tattoo", 2019. Photo credit, participant's own photo.

For Robin, the phoenix was form of body art that physically embodied her survival of a challenging situation. Akin to the ideology associated of the phoenix, it announced her rebirth; a renewed strength and empowerment. A crucial point about the phoenix was its cultural affiliation with Asian culture. This visible and undeniable assertion of a racial identity was in complete contrast to her early attempts to conceal her otherness. The tattoo not only celebrated her survival but also permanently inscribed her identity as a Chinese woman in the most lasting and direct way possible.

Following Gell's schema about the externalisation of an interior identity; the phoenix unleashed a much suppressed racial identity through the active construction of a "double skin" which visibly asserted her sense of racial belonging. Her tattooed skin became a permanent form of racial dress, a dress that will change and crease with the body's rhythm. Striking a distinction with Rachel's desire to minimise the reading of her raced body, Robin's tattooed skin was a garment that she does not want to take off. Ruth Holliday (2001) reminds us that queer identities are reliant on visual practice to build communities because unlike gender and race, sexuality is not biologically marked onto the body. This principle is keenly practised by Robin as she wore her Chinese identity as a "double skin".

While the other women made artworks in relation to their objects; Robin's tattoo was her artwork. She transformed the raw materials of pain and oppression into a sensual and creative sight upon her body. Robin desired to not only preserve but also visually assert her racial identity into the world. As a lesbian woman, Robin was no longer willing to suppress neither her sexual or racial identity. In having to negotiate her sexuality made her more determined to assert all aspects of herself, including her race.The intersections between her race and sexuality cannot be overlooked; in outwardly claiming her sexuality as a lesbian woman gave her the impetus to resolve past, racial trauma. Like the rising phoenix, she was no longer willing to repress any part of herself. The intersections of sexuality and race collide and they empower each other to defy suppression as the phoenix gathers its strength from the ashes because neither identity shall be repressed.

6.4 Material Anchors And Maternal Relations

Figure 20, "Always Hanging On", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

A series of arms and wrists wind and grow together, in unison they appear to be pushing, reaching outwards and upwards. It is an eerie image of arms disconnected from their bodies but entwined, they are an organism formed of disparate parts. Noticeably, these arms are different shades of skin tones from porcelain white, warm ochres and sandy browns. As though searching for a lost pin in the dark, the arms rise with an apparent intention and vigour but as they rise, it is difficult to see their destination as it appears blocked by bricks and concrete. Made in the time of an hour during the art workshop, the spontaneity of the collage captures the motion, uncertainty yet determination

that has characterised much of Charlotte's life (fig. 20).

As a mixed race woman growing up predominately in London, Charlotte (26) had little experience of racial prejudice (which is partly reflected by the integrated rope of arms comprised of different skin tones and cultures) however in being raised only by her Chinese-Malaysian mother with no extended family, Charlotte relationship to her ethnicity was ambivalent as she did not easily identify herself as second generation British Chinese. Firmly identifying as a Londoner, the matter of her racial appearance nevertheless marked her out as other as she recalled early presumptive questions about her identity as she says,

> When I was six, the corner shop man would ask me where I was from. I *knew* they were talking about my face and I would always say 'Malaysia' and my Mum would tell me off and say, 'You're not from Malaysia, you're from here' I used to not understand why Mum was upset with me. I came to understand more as I grew up, I understand now, I can't claim a culture, I know so little of.

In her adult years, Charlotte explained that the ambiguity of her racial appearance has led to people categorising her as "Russian". For Charlotte, in being mixed raced conjured difficult questions in whether she had a legitimate right to defend her Chinese/Malaysian identity if her ancestral blood is a product of the Western colonisation.

> If people make that (Chinese/Malaysian) association with me, there's some sort of social responsibility on you to speak for it...but what's my worth, my father is English...What's my worth if I'm raised by a culture that has been so terrible to that history that I can't separate from my blood, I don't have any claim to it, I've not lived there.

Amongst her accounts of racial ambivalence, Charlotte presented a silver small watch with a looped bracelet chain given to her by her grandmother (fig. 21). She observed her initial difficulty in choosing an object for the interview as she said, "I feel very passionately that all I am is an accumulation of relationships rather than objects". Equally Charlotte's attitude to material objects similarly mirrored her position as a mixed race women, her mixed raced identity was not viewed as a singular point of arrival but rather as an accumulation of influences and relations. Gifted to her by her maternal grandma when she was twelve, the watch is one of the few items to which she admits an

attachment. Though Charlotte felt uncomfortable in accumulating material goods, this was not the same for the watch; her grandma explained that to have a watch is to keep it for the rest of one's life. This sentiment was also echoed by her mother as the watch carved a place in her life as she says,

> As soon as she gave it to me, she said, 'Once you have a watch, you wear it for the rest of your life.' So it felt very natural for my Po Po to be giving me a watch. It felt like an organic process. Rather than the acquisition of objects- that was what I was fearful of. It didn't feel like a waste because that for me felt like a gap waiting to be filled.

Figure 21, "Grandmother's Watch", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Far from being a fashion commodity, Charlotte described the watch as symbolic of the continuation of her maternal line and the care and reproductive labour of her grandma in raising her, "I'm very aware of the three of us as a unit because me, my Po Po and my Mum use to hang around a lot because Po Po use to come and look after me". In this way, through the watch she was maternally aligned with the women in her family and this symbolic relationship was quite literally *felt* upon her body. Charlotte spoke about her increased awareness of her wrist because of the watch, "Now to me, this is a very intimate part of the body because of this watch specifically. They both feel like vulnerable areas, I keep it on the inside because I know that humans instinctively protect this as a sensitive area so I know that it will be cradled and protected". This sense of symbiotic protection between the watch and her inner wrist spoke metaphorically about the maternal allegiance amongst the women in her family. Equally her grandmother's advice informed how Charlotte wore the watch, it was worn on the inside of the wrist. Charlotte's relationship with her watch echoed the ideas of Hannah Arendt (1958) who argues that in a world of change and flux, the durability of things constructs a sense of objectivity and stability for the individual as she states,

> The things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life, and their objectivity lies in the fact that…men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table. In other words, against the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of the man-made world rather than the sublime indifference of an untouched nature… Without a world between men and nature, there is eternal movement, but no objectivity (1958: 137).

The watch encapsulated a certainty amongst the myriad of racial and cultural ambivalence and anchored her identity in relation to her maternal family. In this way, it was a contact zone of stability; a touchstone for the self. Similarly this notion of material anchoring was reflected in the way that Robin employed objects in preserving her childhood memory of Hong Kong. Through the watch, Charlotte was able to retrieve a sameness and allegiance with her maternal family through things. The all-encompassing flux described by Arendt is aptly encapsulated through Charlotte's collage.

Inspired by her grandmother's watch and its relationship with her wrist, Charlotte collected images of arms and hands from magazines. Her collage is a mesh of entwined arms and wrists which emerge into a chain-like unison of interlocked limbs. Forming a rope-like tool, their union gathers a strength despite the fragility of penetrable flesh. From the bottom of the page, the rising of the hands and arms of different skin colours reach upwards as though yearning or searching for something other than itself. The overlapping of the arms, like the ticking of a watch, embodies a sense of movement and as this stream of bodily matter swells, it meets an chequered board of bricks and concrete. Despite this barricade, a burning will swells underneath the force of the rising arms to move as a chain of strength. Charlotte's choice to select arms and hands is highly emotive as firstly it references her relationship with her watch but also hands are responsible for action and intention. This sense of determination mirrors Catherine's own will in navigating her challenges of a mixed race identity and belonging. This sense of will underpins her experimental writing. Her experimental writing captured an embodied perspective of the world. Writing from the perspective of her grandmother's watch, there was an underlying sense of determination to endure despite the continuous movement and challenge.

Dark. Heavier than the other objects here: one pair of earrings; delicate, an origami bird, a hanker-chief.
Stronger than everything here, which cushions the fall as the dark space moves.
Warm, falling, crashing but embracingly, not destructively.
Crashing in darkness outliving everything else where.
Just as precious but stronger.
Confident in the moving overturning dark, in the knowledge soon the light will come.
Always hanging on when flung about.
Most solid and loved.
Warm. Soft.
The light may come but the movement will not stop. And if the movement stops then fear sets in for the wait.
It's not a competition because everything has its own function.
Darkness cloaks purpose but not presence.

Charlotte penned an experiential portrait about the journey of her watch when she returned to Britain from New Zealand. In comparison to the other objects such as earrings, an origami bird and a hankerchief, Charlotte drew on the durability of the watch to not only endure but to embrace the "crashing in darkness" suggesting an acceptance, rather than resistance to the inevitable trials in

life. Cloaked in a sea-sick motion, Charlotte presented a disorienting environment where the usual points of clarity and security are absent but instead replaced by darkness and incessant flux.

Despite this, the watch demonstrated an uncanny strength as it is "always hanging on when flung about". As the scene draws to a close, it is apparent that although the day might dawn, the motion will never subside and while it may intermittently break, this is only a temporary state because "if the movement stops, then fear sets in for the wait". While her experience of an Asian heritage might be difficult to claim, her biological claim to her mother and grandmother cannot be denied. Through this portraiture of words, we become privy to her experience as Charlotte presented a textured and affective perspective of her embodiment as a mixed race woman of British Chinese heritage. Charlotte may receive comments and doubts regarding her ethnicity, however through the physicality of the watch gifted by her grandmother, she was able to situate and claim her sense of belonging through the maternal line of her family.

6.5 Summary

The women's objects and artworks offered an affective and embodied accounts of their lives as British Chinese women. Captured through the material context, the women articulated the challenges that surround their identities as second generation women. The challenges for these women are distinctive to the first generation. No longer are the challenges based on the basic survival skills of sustaining oneself, language skills or settling in a new country. As evidenced in this chapter, the challenges that surround the second generation are less overt and reside in complex and subtle forms of discriminations and inequalities.

Exemplified by the womens' material objects, the definition of resistance assumed a dual meaning of literal action and symbolic affirmation. To negotiate these power relations, the women viewed material objects as one strategy to enact resistance from an embodied and everyday level. A commonality amongst the women and their objects was their tendency to view objects as a form of protection and anchoring towards belonging. The interpretation of protection and anchoring differed; the use of the t-shirts and headphones were employed as a strategy for literal action as they were concerned on managing and deflecting a sexualising male gaze, while the tattoo and watch were

focused on creating a symbolic anchoring of cultural belonging through materiality.

As mixed race women, the racial and cultural identity of Robin and Charlotte existed in a state of duality but through symbolic adornment, they were able to locate personal and material points of belonging that spoke intimately to their biographical history. Their identities were reliant on people and things; for Robin her sense of Chineseness was tied to her Hong Kong mother and for Charlotte her sense of cultural affiliation was tied to the women in her maternal family. Amongst this change, the women drew a sense of Arendtian stability through the permanence of material things. While Robin was mixed race, she culturally presented her body as distinctively Chinese. Absorbed into the skin, the tattooed phoenix formed a racial "double skin" which asserted her unchanging racial affiliation. Charlotte's watch assumed a physical durability in claiming her maternal lineage and while mortal bodies may whither, the watch will outlast.

For Rachel and Jessica, it was clear that their gender and raced identity impacted the way in which they interacted with the world. Thus, Rachel steered away from wearing "cheongsam" as it would reinforce a sensual and exoticised Eastern depiction of her body. To eradicate this interpretation, she intervened in the presentation of her body and consciously adopted the workwear of plain green t-shirts as a protective armour against the workplace gaze. On the surface, it may appear that her dressing sought a conformity with the hegemonic habitus but her artworks offered a distinctively combative perspective which contradicted the seeming compliance of her work uniform. Her artworks both revealed the function of her t-shirts as a protective armour while simultaneously reversing the male gaze by presenting the male figure in a vulnerable state of undress.

In the case of Jessica, the gender based harassment took on a strong sexualised and racialised tone as comments of "Asian school girl" were projected onto her body from a young girl. To prevent and manage instances of sexual harassment, she used a pair of headphones to literally signal and deter harassment. The headphone provided a "protective bubble" for her daily commute. While the headphones and the t-shirts are different objects, the function of these objects enact similar roles; the function of these two objects was to armour and protect the women from prejudice and harassment as ethnic minority women.

The visual accounts from the women challenges the dominant impression of the British Chinese as a successful and untroubled "model minority". Their stories brought into sharp focus the real and present day challenges that persist in the daily lives of second generation British Chinese women. This was aptly epitomised by Rachel and despite possessing the hallmarks for success, she observed that her career progression was hampered because of her gender and ethnicity. However, the tenacity of the women to overcome and create a productive scenario of their challenges was evident and this was aptly epitomised by the phoenix that rises from the ashes. Through their choice of objects and creative making, they articulated their sense of strength and determination as they negotiated social challenges and prejudices in contemporary Britain.

Chapter 7

Celebrating and Contesting Histories Through Inherited Past Objects

This chapter examines the role of inherited, past objects for second generation women. In contrast to previous chapters where the object was orientated towards the future or the present day, an inherited object is orientated in a different direction. Inherited objects are not just a matter of physical accumulation, instead they carry cultural values, expectations and ideologies. As an inherited object, the receivers of these objects are central in negotiating their role and meaning into the future. The inheritance of objects requires a level of critical unpacking to determine which values and ideologies should be maintained into the next generation.

This chapter examines how second generation women use inherited objects to articulate questions of cultural transmission, interrogate contested meanings and celebrate the family histories. All of the objects of this chapter are objects related to family histories and through materiality, the women are at the centre of retrieving unheard stories and negotiating complex meanings. A materially embodied vantage point of inherited objects enable women to locate themselves in their family history and unpick the values and ideologies that accompany these objects. By reflecting and speaking about their past through material objects, the women orientate themselves into the future as second generation British Chinese women.

The women of this chapter share a similarity of cohort, these women are older second generation women who are in their fifties or have become mothers. The site of materiality offers a space of articulation where layered complexities can be unpacked with careful attention. A similarity also resonates in their choice of object; they share a Chinese aesthetic. This chapter presents a Chinoiserie box, a high-collared Chinese dress, a child's mien lap jacket and a jade pendent. The appearance of the objects may appear to adhere to an imagined "Chinese" identity as aesthetics of this nature are usually employed to evoke an atmosphere of festivity. However, in contrast to the received interpretations of Chinese visual culture, the women's relationship with Chinese material culture does

not abide within a binary notion of "celebration" or "fetishism" and instead, this chapter highlights the complex narratives that accompany these inherited Chinese objects.

7.1 Giving form to the unknowable

Born in 1960, Jean (57) was left on the doorstep of an orphanage in Hong Kong. At the age of 2, Jean and her fellow adoptees travelled by plane to Heathrow airport to be adopted by British parents. Jean arrived in Britain dressed in a traditional mien lap jacket (fig. 22) and wore a bracelet etched with the words "Lam Ling Chi", these became the migratory objects that accompanied her journey (fig. 23). Her adoptive parents were a mixed raced couple, her father was British born Chinese and her mother was British. Despite her positive adoption experience, a question mark loomed over the identity of her birth parents, a void that has been difficult to overlook. During her adult years, Jean has attempted to identify her birth parents through numerous venues.

Figure 22, "Baby Mien Lap Jacket" 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Figure 23, "Lam Ling Chi Bracelet" 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Jean carefully presented her migratory objects on the table in a South London cafe. With gentle hands, she unfolded a baby's embroidered mien lap jacket. Half a decade later, the garment that once contained her infant body has still retained its crimson colour. The collar and cuffs were lined with white fur, while small looped golden buttons were delicately spaced at the front of the jacket. The adoption mien lap jacket became a material reminder of her Chinese heritage and while she has grown up on British soil and holds British citizenship, the jacket was a physical memento of her Chinese born status. The mien lap jacket was not just a token of her Chinese descent, rather they functioned as a point of material commonality between her and the other fellow adoptees who also made the journey to Britain. They were all given an embroidered jacket and bracelet and through these objects, Jean described the other adoptees as "sisters" as she says,

When we go to our adoption reunions, we take the jackets and bracelets with us. Our common thread are these objects and the fact that we were all given these bracelets and jackets. Since we had these reunions, we do feel like we are sisters. Some adoptees lost their jackets and they're very upset with that or their parents didn't keep them. For all of us, those jacket are really, really precious. You can see why it is dear to me.

The embroidered jackets are more than their Chinese quaint and miniature aesthetic. In substitute of knowing her birth parents, the jackets offered a piece of concrete certainty amongst the unanswered questions surrounding her birth. While details and circumstances of her early life remain unknown, Jean was able to attain some form of knowledge of herself through the jacket that she wore as a baby. This relationship echoes Arendtian's concept that things of the world stabilise human life as people "retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table" (1958:137). Through the jacket, Jean was able to physically identify a point of origin for herself and wider identification with her adoptive sisters as epitomised by the same jacket, and same bracelet.

Jean's relationship with her childhood jacket dissolved the traditional boundary between "subject" and "object" and therefore to speak about her migratory jacket was intimately related to her own journey. The distinction between self and object cannot be clearly distinguished and this interchangeable dynamic permeated the way that she related to material objects at large. She recounted her early relationship with material things as she remembered tying her toys to the pram as a child. To this day, Jean explained that she still has the same habits as household items are physically attached to her as she explains,

I'm on of these people who's a real hoarder, I can't throw anything away. I'm terrible. Much to my husband's dismay because he thinks our house is full of rubbish because I can't throw anything away. According to my mother, I tied all my possessions to my pram. I use to rattle down the street. Everything was tied. It was extreme. I imagine it was my toys tied to the pram. Look at this, (gestures to her belt with tied household objects) it's still tied, it's all tied on, I tie things onto this band…yeah I still do it! (laughs). I find it really difficult to throw things out, anything. I feel much better to give things away rather than throwing them out. Things go to charity shops or go to neighbours. That makes me feel somehow they haven't permanently gone.

On one level, Jean associated her material attachment as a result of not having her own material possessions as an orphan. However, when we consider this seemingly idiosyncratic relationship with material things in terms of the dissolution of "object" and "subject", it becomes plausible that the act of discarding things can be understood as discarding a portion of the self. Objects are invested with selfhood and as they accompany the individual along the trials and tribulations of life, the boundary between "object" and "subject" become more enmeshed. In other words, the throwing away of everyday objects can be viewed as a loss of selfhood and identity.

Her baby's mien lap jacket was an object that physically connected her with a sense of origin and as an older woman, she has purchased an adult's mien lap jacket. The jacket was a proud projection of her Chinese roots and it enabled her to affectively embody her Chinese identity. She says, "I quite often wear a Chinese jacket to these reunions. I always wear it to the reunions, special occasions and occasions when I want to *feel* Chinese". While traditional Chinese dress allowed Jean to embody feelings of Chineseness, she also emphasised that Chineseness was fluctuating notion as she explained,

> At the reunion, I did a speech called 'Fifty Shades of Yellow'. I talked about how sometimes I feel very Chinese and sometimes I don't feel Chinese at all, depending on where and what context I'm in, what I am doing and why I am doing it. I always thought I was Chinese because my Dad's family was Chinese but when you actually go to the Far East, you actually realise how un-Chinese you are. I didn't know things like Chinese etiquette and it was very obvious that I didn't know any.

As an adopted child born in Hong Kong and raised in Britain, Jean's sense of Chineseness was an elusive state. By virtue of her biology, she is viewed as Chinese however, in an Asian context, she was perceived as an outsider. Through the mien lap jacket and bracelet, these objects connected her with a wider definition of biology and family as these objects became the material anchors that embodied and connected global kinship ties with other fellow adoptees. As these objects enacted a highly significant role in situating the past, Jean stressed that these objects would certainly be passed onto her own daughter into the future, "Yes, I would pass them onto my daughter, she knows how valuable they are to me". Amongst the ambivalence that surrounded her cultural identity and the uncertainty of her birth, Jean's objects from the past afforded her an opportunity to

anchor herself in what would otherwise be an indeterminable past. Therefore, in this case, the inherited object expanded a wider definition of family as her object asserted her unique history as an adopted child from Hong Kong.

7.2 Aspiration As Form

In the case of British born Chinese, Fei (56), the material object enabled her to travel into a past space that she would otherwise be unable to access. Through her inherited migratory object, Fei retrieved the story and agency of her migrant Chinese mother. Born in the midlands, Fei's parents migrated from the New Territories of Hong Kong. Unable to make a stable crop living, her parents was left with little option but to migrate to Britain as economic migrants to forge a living. To support the family's finances, her mother left behind three children at the age of 27 to support her husband (who was already in Britain) to establish their catering business. They settled in Chesterfield to set up a fish and chip shop which became their family business and home for 35 years. Fei's mother went onto have 6 children and Fei was the youngest of the siblings. Growing up in a busy household, she recalled the difficulty of her mother's life as she juggled the responsibilities of domestic work and the family business.

> As a child, I felt she struggled because she was always looking after the shop or us, she was trying to do too many things. I didn't think she was a happy lady when I was younger.
> I never wanted to bother her because she was always busy doing something, she was always cooking or cleaning. She had to look after six children and had a shop and was in a new country. Moving in your late twenties is a big thing and she didn't know the language, she couldn't read and write Chinese. She argued a lot with my Dad, I always thought they weren't in a happy marriage and that they would go their separate ways and get divorced.

Being a migrant woman and without language skills limited her employment options. This left her mother little option other than to embark upon the path of self employment with her husband. She undertook her share of labour in the business but as a woman she also shouldered the parenting responsibilities. In this sense, while economic migration gave her a greater opportunity to attain a steady livelihood, this came at an expense as she also carried the weight of being a mother and worker. However, Fei's perception of her mother's agency changed when she saw her mother bargain with her father for her stake in the business. Now retired, Fei's mother is in her 80's. Fei

reflected that despite her initial perception of her mother as struggling in life and seemingly subordinate in her marriage, she now recognised the agency and determination of her mother.

> Well, she was actually strong. At one point when we had the takeaway in Chesterfield, she got really stressed because she was doing a lot of work and she had 6 children, I think life was hard for her. It was quite traditional, my dad would look after the finances because he was literate up to a point and my mum wasn't. Without my dad's help, my mum couldn't do anything. At one point, she actually struck the deal with my dad, I saw the happen, I saw the change. She said, 'If I'm going to carry on, I'm going to get paid'. I saw that and I realised that she had a backbone, she had a strength behind it all.

To capture her mother's agency, Fei presented an object related to her story. She unwrapped the item from its bag and a distant yet familiar smell of mothballs emerged. As she unfolded the clothing, she revealed a handmade burgundy red two-piece dress suit (fig. 24-25). Styled as a traditional Chinese high collar dress with a modest slit on one side, the dress was accompanied by a fully lined tailored suit. Fei explained that suit was tailored in the New Territories in preparation for her mother's journey to Britain and the red fabric was chosen for its auspicious connotations. 50 years ago, this dress suit was the outfit that Fei's mother wore on the plane travelling to Britain.

Figure 24, "Dress Suit 1", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Figure 25, "Dress Suit 2", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Out of all the things, I chose this because it symbolises my Mum coming over, starting a new life. I'm sure that the plane journey was hard because plane journeys were not easy back then. It was just the thought that she had it made up knowing she was going to another country to join her husband, to start a new life and getting a dress- an outfit made just for that occasion to go over. You're making an impression on somebody at the airport, you need to get them to let you in and so she's formally dressed to arrive in England.

The outfit signalled a new chapter of her mother's aspiration to forge a better life in another country. The formality of the outfit carried a sense of excitement and anticipation at the challenge

ahead, an optimism to put one's best foot forward and continue with that mindset. As her parents had been separated for a number of years, the outfit was the item that presented the best version of herself to her husband. In this way, the start of a new life was accompanied by new things. The outfit was handmade by local tailors, it was her mother that directed the style of the outfit as Fei noted the shade of red and its modest yet feminine design. The outfit became a portrait of her mother on the cusp of migration and change.

> Looking at it, I wonder what she must had been thinking and feeling, getting ready, getting her dress ready, all the thoughts that go along with this dress and what it symbolises when she arrived in England; what was that like? Dad had probably met her at the airport. What was she thinking along that flight and how hard that flight must have been. If it is 14 hours now, it's got to have been longer in those times. What she was thinking all the time she was on the plane? She was on her own. Mmm. I can't imagine what it must have been like because she couldn't read or write English and she could only speak her local dialect. Back then, she didn't even speak Cantonese.

The courage of Fei's mother to voyage despite her linguistic and educational disadvantage was a testimony to her determination to succeed. As a material object, it offered Fei a small portal into her mother's cultural transition and as Fei was British born Chinese with fluent English, her mother's journey felt unimaginable. Through the dress, she imagined her mother's agency and aspiration as a younger woman as she projected into her mother's past, "Even though my mother is older, I can see my mother being a younger woman and wearing it, I can actually see her being, 'This is my new life and I'm getting on with it and putting on something new'. The physicality of the outfit enabled Fei a way to cast her imagination into her mother's past and to understand a crucial yet unimaginable transition of her mother's life.

Fei presented her artwork (fig. 26) which visually embodied the feeling that her mother may have experienced. Movement surrounds the image's surface. At the centre, a sphere is split into two coloured halves of blue and yellow. Suspended upon an invisible axis, it appears to be mid motion. Above the multicoloured sphere is a figure in a dress but without a head, its identity cannot be deciphered. This divided sphere hangs behind a backdrop of vibrant red as it grows with a textured intensity. From the top of the page are strobes of black that appears to be lifting up and away. From every angle, a sense of motion and change surrounds the anonymous figure. The abstracted motion

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is disorientating and like the whirling eye of any storm, it is difficult to see its edges to comprehend how it began and how it may end.

Figure 26, "A Story of Confidence", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Through Fei's artwork, we receive a daughter's interpretation of her mother's migratory journey. The split sphere represented the journey from one part of the world to the other, a journey made by her mother and embodied through her dress. A sense of movement occupied the image and this change comes from all directions. Fei could never physically or emotionally occupy the transition that her mother experienced but through the context of making, she visually articulated the sense of

burgeoning change and numerous questions that might have surrounded her mother at that time. In contrast to her own ponderings, Fei explained that her mother has a very different relationship to her dress.

> We were clearing out the house because my Dad passed away. We started to go through everything and I found the dress. I didn't want to throw it away and then she said, 'Yeah, that what I came over in and I had it made to come to England'. That was it. She's very matter of fact about it all. She's very practical. There's no sense of, 'Oh yeah I felt like this or I felt like that'. She's very much like, 'Yeah I got a dress and I got on the plane, that's what I wore!'

Fei was eager to know more about her mother's feelings about the object, however her mother presented a seemingly pragmatic account of the dress, "She only sees it (migrating) as a practical thing that she did. But there is an element of sentiment as well. Even if she doesn't talk about it, there obviously is because she kept it". Fei highlighted a generational difference in expressing emotions as she put it, "They're not of that generation where you talk about what you think and feel because for them, it's not about 'me', it's about 'we'". Her mother spoke with a cursory significance about the dress, however this contrasted to the fact that her mother has indeed kept the dress.

Aspiration assumed a form; the dress was tailored and invested in anticipation of a new life. The distinction between making and feeling and cannot be demarcated and in this way, migratory aspirations were made physical and materialised as a dress suit. Being the second owner, Fei gave both visual and verbal language to her mother's unknowable strength to succeed against the odds as a young, migrant Chinese woman. Her mother may not outwardly claim the tenacity of her own achievements, however it was her daughter who shared her story with a wider audience. As the inheritor of the dress, Fei retrieved and celebrated the story of her mother's unspoken agency and became the facilitator of her mother's personal history. Fei was immensely proud of her mother's achievements and ideally would like to pass the item onto the next generation in her family, however she expressed a level of doubt whether the younger generation would see the value as she had done.

> I can't really keep it, I have to pass it on. I'm sure they will have their own things, it will probably be immediately linked to their parents. We have objects linked to my great grandad, it's nice for me to have a connection because I can go back. In my head, I think it feels like a shame they will never know the past like I did, it's not the experience they've

had. It may not mean anything to my nieces and nephews. I could be wrong, I hope they would.

Fei expressed a sense of ambivalence about the future of her mother's dress. She emphasised that the relevance of the dress resided in the personal memories that she has of the clothing. Her reservation highlighted the interconnected relationship between materiality and memory and while the dress allowed Fei to revisit the memory of her mother as a migrant woman, these connotations may not be as apparent for the younger generation. Despite this, Fei remained hopeful that the memory and determination of her mother will be preserved by the future generations but she was also open-minded that other objects may prove to be more significant for the future generation, "I'm sure they will have their own things, it will probably be immediately linked to their parents […] I could be wrong, I hope they would keep it". By revisiting the past through the inherited dress, Fei articulated a portrait of her mother as a woman who was clear-sighted and determined and an orientation into the past through the inherited dress brought to light the agency of her mother.

7.3 Chinoiserie and a Critical Adoration

As a mixed race woman, Anita (60) experienced feelings of racial ambivalence and these matters were embodied through her inherited Chinoiserie box. Coming from a wealthy Chinese background, Anita noted that her Chinese father experienced a distinctively different immigration trajectory compared to most Chinese immigrants. Aged 23, her father arrived from South China in 1936 to study at Cambridge University. As a Chinese man with an excellent command of English, he worked as a diplomat in the Chinese consulate in Liverpool and in his latter years, he became one of the first writers of Chinese cooking in Britain. As an educated man, Anita's life begun in Hampstead but as her parent's relationship began to unravel, this signalled a move into the suburbs of Surrey. Growing up in Britain was a difficult experience as she recounted instances of racial confrontations and being a multiracial household living in a predominately white neighbourhood presented problems. She recalled a period where she and her brothers were subjected to a daily racism and derogatory insults and after enduring such hostility over a period of time, Anita recalled the time where she confronted the racism of local youths,

> One of them were shouting some horrible stuff, so I just walked across the road and started to lay into him. We would fight everyday but I particularly went for this gang leader. We had a really big fight and got beaten up. But I was so proud (laughs) of fighting back…so…that was a very defining moment for me because I thought I don't have to sit and take this.

Racism had a profound effect on the household, Anita and her siblings adopted specific strategies to deal with the hostility as her brothers changed their surname from "Lo" to "Lowe" while Anita herself ran away to London. Reflecting on her and her brothers, Anita observed that her gendered disposition as an Asian woman offered her a buffer. Unlike her brothers who felt the intense need to assimilate themselves as white, male British subjects, she felt that her identity as a woman assisted her in maintaining her cultural identity.

> This was post-hippy era and late 1960s and early 1970s, post the Vietnam war and there was a lot of drugs. There was an advantage in being Asian in the world I was living and people were interested in me. They were interested in Taoism, acupuncture, Chinese Medince and martial arts. With the help of my dad and uncle, I embraced that world. I was taking a lot of psychedelic drugs and in that environment and being Asian was somewhat a bonus in the sense you were 'exotic', you were part of the world which somehow valued whether real or imagined philosophies from Asia. It meant there was a lot of sexual interest in me.

As an Asian woman in Britain, she was viewed as an authentic point of cultural knowledge, a portal into Eastern philosophies and mysteries. Anita observed that the racial stereotyping of Asian women as "exotic" and "sensual" elevated her as an object of cultural intrigue. This gendered dichotomy raised by Anita was similarly echoed by Khoo (2007) as she highlights that transnational Chineseness is often consumed within gendered feminine terms. In direct contrast to this sense of authenticity projected by her British peers, her sense of legitimacy and belonging as a Chinese subject was directly challenged during a meeting with her father's family in China. "When I was thirty, I was in Shanghai to meet my relatives, I heard one of them saying, 'Is this really one of our relatives? She so DARK. It's ugly. She's so burnt like she looks like a peasant down the silk roads, you know, it's barbaric!'" It was clear that her identity incited much contradiction. On the one hand, she was viewed as a point of authenticity and on the other, she was dehumanised and viewed as a lowly person.

Growing up as a British born mixed raced Chinese woman, many of the contradictions that Anita experienced was materialised in the context of her Chinoiserie box (fig. 27). Set upon on her kitchen table, Anita presented a lacquered willow Chinoiserie box. Highly embellished, a willow pattern covered the surface of the octagon box and as the lid lifted away, the interior of the box presented two tiers of rectangular compartments. Each internal compartment had a lid which illustrated an idyllic scene of an idealised rural China. As an object, it was clearly well loved and showed an evident level of handling over the years. She reflected that the Chinoiserie box belonged to her British maternal grandmother and it represented her grandmother's love for Oriental things. As a young girl, she recalled her grandmother using the object as a card box as she explained,

> As a child, this box fascinated me and I used to play cards with my grandmother. Over card playing, I was being acculturated into a British environment and into bridge-playing. She was quite posh and there was a lot of Orientalism within her family which was passed down through my mother and I was growing up in that Orientalist environment.

Figure 27, "Chinoiserie Box", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

This consumption of Chinese material goods was a practice predominately exercised by middle-upper class women to exercise their taste and status as highlighted by Cheang (2007). While Anita was clearly fond of her grandmother's Oriental box, her fondness and love for the object was tethered with a palpable ambivalence as she reflected that the box embodied difficult memories of racial prejudice within her family regarding her parents' mixed race marriage. During the 1950s, their union caused both sides of the family to voice strong reservations as letters were found forewarning her mother against a mixed race marriage.

> Do not marry that Chinese man, don't do it. Think about the children. My English great-aunt said the same, 'Don't marry a Chinese person'. In the same breath, we found letters from my Chinese grandmother saying the same. Retrospectively, I remember my English grandmother would say, 'Your father spoke such good English, he's not really Chinese, he's an English gentleman'. She reconciled it for herself by denying his Chineseness therefore, he is a gentleman, he's not Chinese. My English grandmother brought into this [idea of Orientalism], she was into drinking tea and collecting Chinese things but she didn't want a Chinese bloke.

While it was acceptable to furnish the home with Chinese objects, it was another matter to invite a Chinese man into the family. This was viewed as a highly problematic as Anita reflected on the prejudice over her parent's mixed race relationship, "We are contentious, we really don't want our children to marry into it, especially not our girls". The governing of the marriage boundaries expressed racial animosity. As reasoned by her British maternal grandmother, though her father had the appearance of a Chinese man, he was acculturated into British norms and in being "thoroughly anglicised", this acted as a form of compensation for his racial otherness to ensure a level of suitability. Simultaneously another difficult memory was embodied by the Chinoiserie box.

> I have a memory that plays out about my father through this box. I remember watching my father on the TV in the Generation Game with Bruce Forsyth, horrible man. Basically, they got a game where you have to pick up marbles with chopsticks and dad is brought in as the 'China expert'. Now we have 'Brucey' treating my dad like a 'China man'. I'm 13 and watching this and thinking, 'That's horrible but I don't know why it is horrible and I'm freaking out'. Now I totally know why it is horrible for me. But also my father is colluding with it because he made his money and his life out of the British public by playing the 'China man' for them. He was civilised, intelligent, intellectual. But the contract with the

media was that he was always in an inferior position which came with contempt.

Anita struggled to disentangle the ambivalent feelings between the box and the treatment of her father. Through Anita's narration, parallels began to emerge between her grandmother's Oriental box and the treatment of her father. In both scenarios, her father's televised persona and the Chinoiserie box were orientated for a European audience as acceptable and manageable versions of Chinese otherness. The Chinoiserie box was not just a reflection of her family's prejudice over an interracial marriage but it also reflected the treatment of her father as a raced caricature. In both instances, they were stereotyped constructions of Chineseness centred upon an European audience

The box epitomised her bond with her grandmother and as a young girl, she was raised to appreciate and take pleasure in the Oriental pursuits with her British grandmother. The Chinoiserie box clearly embodied racial prejudice but despite this, Anita keenly emphasised that these difficult emotions were accompanied by a genuine love for the box, "I love it too. Do you know what I mean? I love this. I absolutely love it, it's really hard not to love it. But it comes with a lot of conflict and a lot of racist interactions". In the same breath, her delight and intrigue of the object was simultaneously matched by a disdain for her treatment of her father as a Chinese man as Anita stated, "The object represents that conflict over umm… a Britain that loves Oriental things but not Oriental people".

Inherited objects can embody multiple narratives that collide and contradict with each other and therefore the meaning of past objects cannot be managed within neat and linear narratives. In Anita's case, the meaning and inheritance of the Chinoiserie box was highly paradoxical; the box epitomised a deep aesthetic love and bond with her grandmother, but yet it also represented a racially hostile memory of her father. Anita's interpretation of the box was critical of any aesthetic fetishism but also, she recognised its beauty and therefore the object was knotted with racial ambivalence and embodied contradictory emotions and memories.

Through her inherited Chinoiserie box, Anita was at the centre of unpicking the difficult and contested history of her multicultural family. The box encapsulated the racial tension that was culturally present during her childhood. Thus, the process of speaking about the Chinoiserie box was simultaneously a process where Anita articulated the contradictions relating to her mixed race

background. Simultaneously, Anita highlighted that an orientation into the past through objects was a personal process of healing. As an older academic, she now retrieves old material objects from the deep past of China to find a form of solace as she says,

> I bring back Qing dynasty things from China, I collect beautiful things. I live in the past and in my past's past. I go deep into ancient history because somehow it resolves many traumas. The soul of my family was really traumatised, I love them all but they were very conflicted and displaced. I always must have sensed that and we certainly played it out as individuals but at the same time, there were glorious things happening. Dad had two extremely successful restaurants that were earning millions for a short time. My mum was happy and successful and then we lost it again and then he died.

Contrary to the European Chinoiserie box, the objects in which she now locates a sense of healing are through items and practices related to ancient China. As a way to initiate a sense of healing, she trained as a professional acupuncture, practised martial arts and tai chi. Her living room was a shrine to her family's history from her great grandfather, statues of Chinese goddesses and numerous sporting accomplishments of her father. These objects from the past brought together a visual representation of her life. At the centre of these items was a carved wooden Chinese mantlepiece which provided a literal support and aesthetic unity to the objects (fig. 28).

Figure 28, "Mantlepiece", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

As a traditional item, this mantlepiece illustrated Anita's desire to retrieve ancient Chinese items from her "past's past". The presentation of her diasporic journey through material culture mirrored an exhibition display. The home for the immigrant becomes a museum as "each home, even the most modest one, becomes a personal memory museum" (Boym, 2002:328). In this sense, Anita's sense of self in the future as a diasporic British Chinese woman was an identity that was forged by revisiting and retrieving objects from her "past's past". Thus, the physicality of objects provided a material outlet to critically interrogate and unpack racial ideologies of inherited histories and simultaneously reaffirm and anchor the self.

7.4 Embodying Multicultural Chineseness

Born in Northern Ireland and now living in London, Elaine (48), explained that her necklace was an family heirloom. It was an item that belonged to her great-grandmother (fig. 29), the necklace was an ornate yet discreet oval-shaped jade pendant. It was eventually passed onto her mother and at the age of 18, it was given to Elaine. Given its small size, it was an object that has crossed different geographies, survived displacements and political upheavals. Elaine explained that her great-great-great grandmother was a part of the Manchurian dynasty as her family owned parts of Canton. As an aristocratic family during the Sino-Japanese war, her mother was forced to flee by foot with all the possessions they were able to carry. One possession that they managed to salvaged was this jade pendant.

The pendant represented her family's identity as an aristocratic and modern Manchurian family. She noted that the pendent did not appear like a typical piece of Chinese jewellery as she highlighted that it was made from white gold, rather than the traditional yellow gold most associated with Chinese jewellery. The design of the pendent echoed an art nouveau aesthetic as Elaine described it as a "jade in an European design". The pendent reflected the aspirations of a family that identified as outwardly modern yet with Chinese centred values.

I think it looks very European for Chinese jewellery, it must be very modern for its time. A part from the jade, it looks very Victorian. If you're going to go all modern as a Chinese person, why put jade in? But possibly, it's about keeping their Chinese identity. They were slightly eccentric in their own ways and quite bourgeoise. My mother was very liberal, though she was very traditional, her values were very modern.

Instructed by her late mother that this necklace should be passed along the women in the family, Elaine now faced a dilemma as she did not have any daughters. In this scenario, she recalled a conversation with her mother where she was given specific instruction on how best to pass on the precious heirloom.

This necklace was my mother's, it was her mother's. She said, 'You've got to look after it and give it to your first daughter'. Now with two sons, fat chance of that happening with no daughter. This will probably have to go to my son's first daughter. I use to say to my mum, 'What if I don't have a daughter?' and she would say, 'Well you got two choices, if you trust her, your daughter-in-law or the first daughter of your son'.

Figure 29, "Jade Pendant", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

The necklace conjured a deeper question of cultural transmission and identity. The uncertainty of who might be the next female inheritor was encumbered with the question of how Chinese cultural identity can be maintained in a Western context. Being a British born Chinese woman in a mixed raced relationship, Elaine reflected on her desire to create a culturally Chinese domestic space, such was the one that she grew up amongst. For her two sons, she recalled the numerous attempts to replicate a culturally immersive Chinese environment in Britain by seeking out a Chinese nursery, finding a Cantonese speaking nanny, sending the children to Chinese Saturday school, as well as her continual attempts to speak Cantonese to her children. Despite her best efforts, it was difficult to maintain a consistent Chinese environment.

> I used to send my son to Chinese school but he hated it and hated me and the tantrums would happen every Saturday. I said to him, 'You will want to know this'. Now he blames me and says, 'You should have made me'. I wanted a connection. I wanted them to have a connection. Sometimes I think, maybe I should have stuck with a Chinese guy, does that make sense? We could just speak Cantonese, easy! This way, it is trickier.

In becoming a mother, she began to encounter questions of how to create and sustain a culturally unified environment of Britishness and Chineseness as she says, "It's a conflict and it's a battle because I don't know whether to go with the British part of the Chinese cultural part. It does really play on you, you feel that guilt that you can never get it right". Moreover in being a woman, she is biologically and culturally responsible for the transmission of her culture to her children. Elaine desired to create a Chinese domestic environment complete with language skills and values but as an individual woman, the struggle was inevitable.

> I was very aware that because we were an Eurasian household, it [Chineseness] was getting diluted and also I was working and I wasn't able to feed that cultural side of things whereas if you're a mother at home, you can speak to them all the time. Then I think if they get married and if it's not a Chinese girl, then obviously, it's going to be less so. So sooner or later, it's going to be quite diluted. I shouldn't use that word but that's the word I use, it's the best description of it. I do worry about it, yeah.

Motherhood initiated a deeper set of questions about cultural transmission and maintenance. In becoming a mother, she re-evaluated her own relationship with British Chinese identity, "I don't know if being British Chinese is unique anymore. A part of me feels like, 'Yeah that's great' but then there is a part of me that feels like I've lost something culturally". Motherhood posed the question of how she should instil cultural values but furthermore, motherhood made Elaine reflect more deeply on her cultural identity.

> I didn't care in my twenties, I didn't think about it [identity]. I didn't think of myself as either Chinese or European, I didn't think of myself as anything. I suppose when I had children, it became very apparent and especially during those early stages of their life. Very, very much I wanted that cultural side to be seen and I suppose there are bits they will always see like food. There's a part of me that goes back to being more Chinese as I've got older. I don't want them to know nothing about my side of culture, even though we live in the UK. It's quite hard because we don't have a big family network and I don't know any Chinese people so you are quite small. I can only do so much.

The jade stone set in a European style epitomised her mother's modern outlook as it encapsulated her mother's sense of curiosity for venturing into the world. Her mother valued a fluid notion of Chineseness, a Chineseness that was not necessarily bound by a geographic definition but instead pursued a multicultural notion of Chineseness. As her daughter, Elaine was a product of her mother's multicultural Chinese aspirations. She reflects on her mother's cultural aspirations, "I think it's a shame that they tried to do the whole 'modern- let's be English'. In a way, we were sold into it, my siblings and I are quite British even though we have a lot of core Chinese values, we are essentially British so it's a real conflict". On one hand, Elaine embraced the multicultural dimension of her Eurasian family and on the other, she viewed it is a form of dilution.

Presented as a vertical structure, geometrical forms and disparate components are stacked as a vertical form (fig. 30). As an energetic form, this sense of abstraction is unified by the use of colour as a coral red is interspersed upon the surfaces. In contrast to the coral red, an oval shaped lime green is suspended at the bottom. A luminous lime green glow emanates and as a form, it mirrors the shape of an avocado with its central stone removed. The form of the motif mirrors the shape of the jade pendant. As an avocado fruit that has been sliced in half and with its stone removed, we begin

to understand that this is one half of an object that was previously whole. The hollowed oval shape is reminiscent of a bulbous pregnant stomach that is ripened and full. A closer inspection shows that one of the components is a text discussing Chineseness and there is a vague outline of pandas while a darkened figure walks lonesome. As a coral red, it is outside of the bright red most associated with Chinese identity and presents itself as a contemporary counterpart to the traditional red shade. Her art work appears to express a similar sentiment to her jade pendent; a reinvention of Chineseness that is fresh and vibrant while making a nod at the traditional emblems of Chinese identity.

Figure 30, "Feeling Close To Water", 2019. Photo credit, Denise Kwan.

Elaine's artwork did not express a fixed and finite position to cultural identity, rather it alluded towards an evocative and open-ended position on identity. Her artwork offered a textured, abstracted

and idiosyncratic re-interpretation of Chineseness. In other words, the artwork and the jade pendant shared a commonality; they were both expressions of a revised and reimagined Chinese cultural identity that are untethered from a traditional definition of Chineseness. As a mother and without an immediate Chinese community surrounding her, Elaine wondered how she can maintain an immersive Chinese environment for her children. At the same time, she also remarked at her own excitement at the emerging multicultural family, "I much prefer a cultural difference in families, the children's father is half French, half English. My son's first girlfriend was a really pretty Indian girl and I thought, actually that's quite nice". In this sense, the metaphor of the halved avocado in her art work was no longer an object waiting to be "unified" and rather in being halved, the potential of a multicultural Chineseness becomes far greater.

While Elaine remarked that the multicultural character of her family was exciting, it was clear that the responsibility of cultural transmission fell upon her shoulders. As a woman without a wider Chinese network, this made her role as a Chinese cultural transmitter more challenging. It was evident that Elaine felt positive about her growing multicultural family, this positivity was met with equal measure about the uncertainty about how to maintain Chinese culture as a British Chinese woman in a mixed race relationship.

Despite the petite size of the jade pendent, the cultural expectation of the inherited necklace loomed large. The grand history of her Manchurian family history was embodied in a small jade necklace which carried specific instruction of who should be the next inheritor of the hierloom. The question of who should inherit the necklace was not just a matter of logistics. By reflecting on the past and the instruction that it should be passed amongst the women of the family, it posed a wider question of maternal cultural transmission. The inability to pass on the necklace as originally instructed expressed an anxiety about passing on and maintaining Chinese culture. In pondering the future of the heirloom ignited a series of deeper questions about the role and challenge of mothering across cultures.

7.5 Summary

In this chapter, the women presented a Chinoiserie box, a Chinese dress, a child's mien lap jacket and a jade pendent. As inherited objects, they were associated to the site of the family and a further commonality emerged, all the women's objects exerted a visible Chinese appearance. In contrast to the institutional anonymity of Chinese "costume drama" in British institutions, the stories of these inherited objects offered a multi-situational perspective of the object in relation to the experiences of second generation women. Usually Chinese aesthetics are employed to denote Chinese festivity, however, the womens' relationship with their objects were not always straight forward and were imbued with contested narratives and posed complex questions about how inherited meanings and instructions from the past should be negotiated.

A plethora of memories, contradictions and desires played out through material inheritance. The material object became a facilitator that allowed the women to ask questions about their heritage and retrieve aspects of their past that they would remain otherwise unarticulated. Through the inherited objects, the women articulated a multi-layered narrative consisting of ambivalence and desire to maintain Chineseness as second generation British Chinese women and as mothers. By examining the accounts of women through inherited objects highlighted how the women were at the centre of negotiating cultural meanings and retrieving unseen stories.

In the context of Fei's inherited dress, her mother did not publicly express her agency but as the inheritor of the dress, Fei shared the determination of her mother that would otherwise remain unvoiced. In this sense, the dress suit allowed Fei to creatively re-imagine a past that she would otherwise be unable to fathom as the material object offered a physicality into her mother's past. Fei's artwork presented a visual embodiment of her mother's migratory transition. Elaine's question of who might inherit the Manchurian family jade pendent ignited complex questions of how Chinese culture can be maintained through mothering. The inheritance of objects carried cultural expectations. The necklace highlighted the difficulty of cultural transmission for mothers of dual British Chinese heritage. Being a mother, Elaine encountered the contradiction in wanting to maintain a Chinese upbringing but also recognised the positive aspects of a multicultural family. As

such, the jade pendent highlighted the pressure of inheriting a rich Chinese family history and expectation but as a mother without a broader social Chinese network, the maintenance of cultural transmission was challenging.

The definition of traditional relations of inheritance and family differed in the case of Jean. For Jean, her mien lap jacket was the closest physical point to attaining a sense of origin and provided her the opportunity to affectively embody a feeling of Chineseness. Questions surrounded her birth and cultural identity but nevertheless, she was able to claim a piece of certainty through her adoptive objects. The jacket anchored her with a sense of continuity with her fellow adoptees and in sharing the same jacket and bracelet, the objects was their physical claim as sisters which physically announced their unique definition of family. The Chinoiserie box highlighted the contested nature of inherited objects and their received meanings. Anita's articulation unravelled the contradiction of desire and racism that was revealed in her family through materiality. Anita's admiration for the inherited Chinoiserie box was accompanied with a sense of contempt and to speak about the box was tethered to a racially hostile memory about her Chinese father. In this way, the line between the material object and human subject merged into an indivisible sum as ambivalent feelings and memories arose from the object. The inheritance of objects was not just a simple accumulation of beautiful things, rather the inheritance of objects brought complicated familial and cultural histories as the Chinoiserie box raised complex questions about the dynamics of race and belonging in mixed race British Chinese families.

A vantage point on material objects allowed us to see how cultural transmission and diasporic experiences are negotiated and embodied through materiality. Values, aspirations and expectations were imbedded in inherited objects and thus the women were central in celebrating and contesting the received meanings of these objects. As older women in the second generation cohort, the women reflected on the cultural meanings of the past and by reflecting on the past, the women began to consider their future as British Chinese women. As articulated by the women, their orientation to the future as British Chinese women and the next generation was met with an open- minded optimism for a multicultural identity however, this was also underscored with a desire to maintain a Chinese cultural identity as women and as mothers. By looking into the past, the women questioned how culture can be maintained into the future as a palpable sense of uncertainty emerged. In comparison,

this uncertain and speculative future contrasts with the first generation who illustrated a boundless range of determination and optimism. Indeed, the future of British Chinese culture remains to be written, however, the accounts of the women in this chapter begin to articulate the challenges of looking ahead as second generation British Chinese women.

Chapter 8

Visibility Matters, A Wider View

This chapter will draw on the feedback from the women participants of this study across the two generations. It will explore how the use of a visual ethnographic methodology has impacted the perception of themselves and British Chinese women at large. This emphasis signals a shift of perspective from the previous chapters; the vantage point is no longer upon the singular object (and therefore upon the individual). Rather, the emphasis shifts to consider the participants' experience of the overall visual ethnographic project from the interview, the art workshop, online exhibition and opening event. Williams reminds us that the concept of structure of feelings is concerned with bringing definition to emergent social experiences which are "not yet recognised as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating" (1977:132).

British Chinese identities have been described as "guarded" as they are "held in the private domain with a certain enforced innerness" (Parker, 1995:233). As such, this chapter will consider how the collective dimension of the workshop and public visibility of the online exhibition and opening event begins to counter the isolated experience of the British Chinese. This wider visibility is facilitated through a situated embodiment of the women which reminds us that "only partial perspective promises objective vision" (Haraway, 1991:190). A situated perspective mediated through the object-stories is a mode of vision that connects the individuals to the wider perspective to view women's experiences in the various modes of "tensions, resonances, transformations, resistances and complicities" (ibid:195).

Visibility is central and in this study, visibility is cultivated through visual ethnographic methods. Visibility is interwoven throughout the sites of participatory engagement from the interview, art workshop, online exhibition, and opening event. With each site, the layers of visibility are built upon one another. Firstly, the interview offers an opportunity for women to personally express their story, while the workshop situates the individual within a group context. The online exhibition provides a wider view which presents an understanding of British Chinese women across the generations, and

finally the opening event is the point where an external visibility is shared with a broader public. The various sites of collective engagement widen the radius of visibility and articulation. This notion of visibility is not just concerned with situating British Chinese women in relation to British society but rather it is also concerned with creating a space where women can speak *across* and *with* each other.

8.1 Situating Belonging in a Wider View

The process of speaking about oneself in a group context proved to be an invaluable experience in enabling women to situate their identity *amongst* other women and their identities. This point was readily observed by the second generation women. When these object-stories are shared in a workshop setting, a wider vantage point of distinct positions and voices emerged. The ways that the women situated themselves in proximity to their relationship to their Britishness and Chineseness differed according to their background. For Annie (27), who was born in Taiwan and immigrated to London at a young age, the context to make, speak and be heard by like-minded women created a sense of belonging that she did not experience in British society. She recalled instances where she would maintain a "distance" from other British Chinese young people while growing up in London, she explained that feelings of linguistic insecurity prevented her from forging friendships with British Chinese peers. However, through the context of the workshop, ambiguities, partial identifications and insecurities could be productively claimed as an empathetic and legitimate position.

For Annie, the workshop became a space of "meaning making". She reflected, "It's not just presenting the personal meaning of the object. It's also about you responding to others and having this collective conversation. At the interview, you don't get the wider picture but there is a sense of the wider picture from the workshop". She described this sense of belonging as a form of "protection" which countered the isolated experience of being a British Chinese woman. More importantly, her sense of belonging was no longer confined to the private site of the family and instead this notion of belonging could be extended into society at large.

> You almost felt like you had more protection like you are not alone anymore. It's that sense of...belonging. Yeah, it's a sense of belonging. It's just really nice. That sense of belonging was there but on a smaller scale, it would be myself and my siblings and my parents in our little house. It has extended to the wider community and a friendship group.

The notion of contextualising your identity outside the family and into broader society with people of similar backgrounds was highlighted by Fei who observed that the online exhibition offered her a view of the overarching questions and challenges experienced by different generations. Her view of British Chinese women was no longer confined to the women in her family. Through the online exhibition, Fei was able to better contextualise the challenges and experiences of the older and younger generations in her family. By situating her own experience, she gained a wider view of British Chinese women across the generations and through this overall view, she identified herself as the "bridge" between the two generations. Being an older woman in the second generation cohort, Fei explained that she was able to understand the position of the older generation like her mother, as well as the younger generation of women such as her niece, "I definitely identify myself as the 'bridge'. What the younger ladies (in the project) are experiencing is what my niece is experiencing because she is 27". Through her eyes, the online exhibition functioned as a "tool" to gain a wider view of British Chinese women beyond the family as thinking and feeling subjects.

> If I was looking for something to identify myself, the website is a nice tool to reflect on how I connect because it gives a way to see how other people think, that's how other people feel and that's what other people have gone through. I'm sure other people can identify and think, 'Oh yeah that's me'. That's why it's an interesting piece of work because I can say, 'That's my Mum, or that's a bit of me, or that's bit is me'.

Through the online exhibition, Fei noticed that some of the culturally neutral items tended to belong to the younger women such as the pair of headphones, t-shirts and pens, for example. She observed that objects that were recognisably "Oriental" tended to be items from older women in the project. This was in contrast to her expectations as she had initially assumed all the items brought to the workshop would visibly symbolise Chinese identities with Chinese aesthetics. Reflecting on her own selection, she observed that her sense of identity was related to the past, whereas women with more culturally neutral objects were referencing their experiences of negotiating the present day,

> My interpretation is linked to the past and their interpretation is linked to something that they use now in society. Maybe that's the difference. My identity is through my mum and through my mum's objects and her story. From my generation, I'm a bit older than the women who are in their twenties, I would be old enough to be their parent! I can still understand my mum's Chinese roots, I crossover between them and my mum, whereas my niece has a different experience. The ladies that brought their headphones, t-shirts and pens, I realised there was a difference in interpretation and in how they identify themselves.

While she was surprised at the cultural neutrally of some objects, this understanding raised the wider question of how the histories of Chinese families might be preserved without a visibly Chinese identification as she explained, "It feels like a shame. Maybe the younger generation won't have those identifiable Chinese objects that the older generation had. It's like if my niece doesn't take any of the objects that my mum has then that's it. Is that what happens to other cultures over time?" Fei's lament at the ebbing distinctiveness of a Chinese aesthetic (and hence identity) contrasts with the comments of another participant, Charlotte. Charlotte remarked at her own initial astonishment that the majority of the objects were of a Chinese aesthetic,

> I think I was shocked by the website and seeing all the objects together and the workshop and how much people identified in being originally from a Chinese heritage. If anything, I thought what would come out of it would be quite subtle or subtle patterns to show that people have joint heritage. The website again, I realised that people are quite aware of a Chinese identity and these roots.

Aesthetically, it may appear there was little commonality between a generic t-shirt and a traditional Chinese dress, however, Fei identitied a commonality amongst these culturally distinct objects and observed a theme of survival that align both objects, "The younger generation are trying to survive and the lady with the t-shirts, she's trying to survive in her own way". In contextualising her role as a "bridge" between the two generations and in viewing the objects as a spectrum of culture, Fei observed that this spectrum of cultural expression was far from being a "loss", rather she described these cultural shifts as an "evolution" of British Chinese women. By gaining a wider view of her identity amongst other British Chinese women, she concluded that she was also a part of a wider evolution of British Chinese women as she explained,

You do feel a little bit lost because I was born here. I didn't speak enough Chinese and when I go back to Hong Kong people will ask, 'What's wrong?' My head is where it is and I accept that more. Reading all the ladies' stories, it helps you to accept and you begin to think you are a part of this evolving society. Even the Chinese ladies that are born here, they will have a different experience to me because they will be mixed into this society and what is going on here.

In meeting other British Chinese women from a wide variety of backgrounds and linguistic heritages gave an opportunity for Fei to further accept her hybridity as a British Chinese woman. A sense of acceptance was nurtured through the workshops which countered the sense of cultural inauthenticity that she previously felt from not being "Chinese" enough.[18] This sense of lack was reframed into a positive re-evaluation where she saw herself as part of an "evolving society" of different British Chinese positions and female experiences. In participating in the study, Fei viewed her identity not as lack but as a unique position where she was able to relate between different generations and act as a "bridge". This notion of an "evolution" of British Chinese women and their positions echoes the thoughts of Hall (1990) as he posits the dynamism of culture as an orientation towards the future which is undergoing a "constant transformation" and therefore as a matter of "becoming" as Hall expands,

It [cultural identity] belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identifies come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fired in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power (1990:225).

The collective context of the project brings forward a positive stance of cultural hybridity. The act of physically bringing together British Chinese women countered isolation and productively addressed those feelings of cultural inadequacy. Furthermore, it enabled the women to view each other as individuals in their own right and with their own specific characters and personalities.

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[18] Fei was raised in a typically British Chinese household as her parents had run a takeaway business however her ability to speak Cantonese has grown distant. To counter this loss of language, she has taken Cantonese tuition to improve her communication. In taking Cantonese lessons, she has learnt that while she may improve her Cantonese, her expressions and mental landscape is anglophiled. Her desire to learn more Cantonese was a step to be and feel more "Chinese".

Just because we have the same backgrounds doesn't mean that we group under typical characteristics because we have our own characteristics. Everyone has different hobbies, different taste of music. different passions, different skills, some are more philosophical than others, some are very charismatic, some are more sociable than others; it's all about just being an individual person.

With this sentiment, it was equally important to highlight that not all women were able to easily view themselves as a part of an "evolution". This was a crucial point especially as the British Chinese comprise of an internally diverse linguistic and cultural background with several sub-groups. In the case of Charlotte, she was a mixed race woman and having been raised in London by her Malaysian Chinese mother and grandmother, she grew up in a predominately white British context. Now located in London, she identified herself as British. Surrounded by other British Chinese women in the workshop, she described herself as an "imposter" and found difficulty in staking her claim as a "British Chinese" female subject.

Her relationship to her Asian identity appeared to be more "subtle" and knitted through every day actions which she observed as being a cultural element passed from her mother through everyday actions and attitudes. For Charlotte, her relationship to the wider context of the British Chinese women in the workshop was one of partial identification. On the one hand, in being a mixed raced woman, she experienced the same questions, which centred on her otherness through appearance. With little lived experience of another Asian cultural context, it was less possible for her to identify herself with an easy and uncomplicated British Chinese identity. Despite this, the context of the workshop and online exhibition provided her with a space to understand the broader experiences of other women. While she not might describe herself as British Chinese, the situated experiences of the other women gave her an understanding how British Chinese women might feel and think. This was a valuable understanding that would otherwise be absent.

Do I now feel more of a certain group of women from a Chinese heritage; I don't know but I wouldn't have thought about it before! (laughs) It did make me think of myself a bit more in that context but sometimes I felt, gosh am I a bit of an imposter being here? I'm not sure whether my own experiences are relevant to the whole. The project does makes me reflect on my place in the British Chinese and also understand how British Chinese women feel. Even if I don't "fit" into that place, at least I now understand what that place is.

In contrast, for the first generation women of the Women's Group situating belonging was less about positioning themselves amongst other women of a similar background. Instead situating belonging for these women was centred on making physical steps into the multicultural context of London. As retired women with more leisure time, the women had more time away from domestic responsibilities and they were more able to educate themselves through formal and informal avenues. The significance of the art workshop appealed to the women as it fed their appetite to learn and exchange with the wider British community. The emphasis on attaining empowerment and independence through learning informed how Lanan viewed the significance of the art workshops.

As the teacher of the group wanting to empower herself and her group, Lanan viewed the art workshop as a crucial site of learning where she was able to develop and extend her knowledge of the wider world. In acquiring more practical skills and understanding of different ideas and concepts, it equipped her with a better propensity to participate in the world as an independent and retired woman. Through the workshop, she improved her knowledge and confidence and extended the radius of herself and the Women's Group. Lanan was instrumental in encouraging women to participate in the wider British society and was clear that education was integral to the women's independence.

> I always tell them to keep learning from others and go to any classes, workshops or keep learning from your surroundings. That's the way I live and I hope that everyone can take something for themselves. Whenever I feel depressed, I go to a workshop, I keep learning. If you don't learn and especially being here, you become dependent on your children and they're very busy. I must be independent so I must educate myself. That way, you're always being stimulated and you will be younger for it. If the elderly are cheerful, it will inspire the younger generations. I say to Women's Group, remember the older people are the wise ones. That's why we have to carry on learning to be more wise. Never let the young people say you are old and useless.

The Women's Group experienced eight months of art workshops which were aimed at developing a basic knowledge of art skills and concepts. They were introduced to a range of artists and encouraged to make independent interpretations of artworks. Moreover, their learning was not just abstracted through discussion rather the women were physically engaged in the making process. In learning about art, the women were at a greater disposition to participate in a wider variety of cultural and creative expressions. Identified by Lanan, she explained that the very act of learning

new skills and new concepts through art was an empowering pursuit.

> I learnt a lot. As well as learning the practical skill, we gained an understanding of art concepts. Now when I go to galleries, I know how to interpret the paintings. It helped a lot. Back then, I would have a quick look at paintings but now I know what angle I should look at a painting and I can spend thirty minutes on one painting. I see an improvement in my understanding of paintings. I went to a gallery talk about paintings and the presenter even asked if I knew about paintings, I said I learnt from my art class! I always say, whatever you learn, you never waste it. Sooner or later, you will use it.

In this sense, the first generation women of the Women's Group cannot be understood as being content with their achievement as settled migrant women. They are far from being static in their identities. From this position, they desired to be more independent and participate more greatly in British society and they did so with the support of an informal, female centred group. As a flexible structure of the "uterine family", they encouraged each other to participate in British society through exercise and creative activities to broader their participation in social life and to mix with different people and cultures. As such, the significant aspect of the art workshop for the Women's Group was an opportunity to learn in the broadest sense and to heighten their ability to participate in all cultural life as Lanan reflected on the emerging confidence of the Women's Group.

> Little bit by little bit, their lifestyles changed. Not just closed, not just going to the Chinese centre, they join in everywhere. You could see they've changed a lot. I didn't mention it to them but I could see it. Even their dress is different, perhaps when they see others, especially African people, they're always made up and very stylish in the gym (laughs) I can see small changes.

8.2 Being at the Centre

Annie remarked at the unusual opportunity to participate in an art workshop centred on issues and themes related to British Chinese women. Though she was schooled in London, she was quick to observe that despite London being a multicultural city, she did not have any British Chinese friends or peers.[19] Annie recalled growing up around British Chinese people at school but noted that she

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[19] In comparison, she noted that she had many ChineseAmerican and Chinese Canadian friends (whom she met in Taiwan on summer programmes for overseas Chinese youth).

actively maintained a "distance" from other British Chinese as she explained, "I only speak Mandarin in the house. Sometimes I felt a bit embarrassed speaking Mandarin outside of the house, which means I probably did distance myself from them. I didn't want to be associated with them, I'm quite happy to keep my ethnicity in the house". Annie cultivated friendships with other Chinese diasporic people, but it seemed that linguistic insecurity prevented her from expressing her Chinese identity in a public British space. Annie described her ability to move between an Asian and British cultural sensibility as "two buttons" as two contradictory modes of operating in the world. Her Chinese identity remained as an entity reserved for the domestic space and as a private identity. She reflected that it would be difficult to unite the both aspects as she explained that her public (British) and domestic (Chinese) persona are different as she noted,

> I don't think I can be both with at the same time. It would always be dependent on who I was interacting with and whether I am with family or friends. To me, if there was one button, I would just live with the British values or with the Asian values. For me, I don't think they can actually mix.

Many of the second generation participants were new to each other and the context of the workshop was the first opportunity that the women met each other. Annie emphasised that the art workshop was an "overdue opportunity" to reflect on her position in the world with women of a comparable background. In this sense, Annie's participation in the workshop was an opportunity to explore a private dimension of her identity within a public context as Charlotte put it, "It was a very public space of reflection and people were sharing things that were very intimate to them and intrinsic to their identity and putting that out in the open". Annie expands on this point to emphasise the need for spaces where marginalised people are able to claim ownership of their experiences,

> Talking about identity and culture felt like a revelation. Suddenly I got two hours of talking about myself! Based on my personal experience I don't have the opportunity to be heard. You never really have time to think about yourself, to internalise 'you' and to look at the world from your perspective. There is so much stimulus in the world but with this project, you are at the centre of the whole experience. It was a good thing to be a part the project. You are examining other people and they are at the centre of their own experience and identity.

Many second generation women in the study expressed varying levels of living and growing up in

isolation from other peers. Rachel remarked at her lack of British Chinese counterparts, "I don't feel like I have to go to make lots of Chinese friends but if I did, I don't know where I would go!" Having formed their identities in isolation from other counterparts, Fei remarked on the familiarity of isolation,

> It's familiar to feel isolated. We were the only Chinese in that vicinity and we were the only Chinese family in that school. On a Sunday suddenly you went to a Chinese school, you saw all these other Chinese families and where are all these Chinese family the rest of the time? Even though you talk to people, you went back to your little home and that was it. There wasn't any socialising in that context. Even now, in work there was a couple of Oriental women but they are Filipino not Chinese or British born Chinese. You are in isolation again. We still all live in isolation.

Furthermore, a second generation participant, Michelle (32), remarked at the discrimination that she experienced from other British Chinese peers from a more typical Hong Kong Chinese background. Her family were Malaysian Chinese and she recalled instances where she was made to feel as an outsider to the mainstream British Chinese identity. Her remark highlighted the way divisions are drawn within a British Chinese context through linguistic parameters and this existed for the first generation as well as the second generation.[20]

> We are the other-*other* within the British Chinese other. I have a different perspective, I'm not Hong Kong Chinese and my perspective is unique. Where I came from, there were British Chinese, they were mostly Cantonese speakers and nobody spoke the same dialect as my parents. The nearest community was in Wimbledon which was 60 kilometres away, it shows how dispersed we are. Linguistic differences exist and the fact I experienced discrimination from other Cantonese speakers is very interesting.

Annie viewed the use of creative and experimental activities as a distinctive element that challenged the usual conventions and stereotypes related to British Chinese identities. Annie identified the usual tropes of food, takeaways and restaurants and observed that the art workshops "added a bit more complexity". She expanded, "I think it makes people curious to other aspects to your identity, it's

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[20] Linguistic and language barriers has been repeatedly highlighted by the women participants in this study across first and second generation. For the first generation, the language barrier between their native dialect and English has been readily highlighted as the women express concern about the difficulty of passing on the Chinese language across the generations. As Anna puts it, "My kids when they all get together, they speak English. We can't force it onto them. They sit in the living room, we sit in the kitchen".

beneficial and it's not just people looking at things mindlessly". The activities of the workshop was ethnically unmarked and did not incorporate activities such as calligraphy or traditional dance. In this sense, Annie observed that it gave her a greater potential to express her identity on her terms rather than reverting to traditional symbols of food and iconography.

Art based activities presented a sense of spontaneity and cultural freedom for the participants. Reflecting on the sense of spontaneity in making, Charlotte explained, "It's a safe way to express way to express yourself. If you're talking about yourself directly, you have to be quite deliberate with your words. With the creative writing, it's still very much a written expression but you're not bound to reason, it's releasing". While linguistic expression was a feature of the workshop, it incorporated other modes of visual and instinctive expressions as being of equal value. Another first generation participant remarked that speaking about the self through objects was "unexpectedly healing". To embark upon a range of open-ended and experimental activities forged an alternative mode of cultural expression which presented therapeutic aspects. The notion of being at the centre of one's own story resonated for the Women's Group. Lanan was one of the few first generation women who consciously held onto her migratory objects and this enabled her to reside at the centre of her own story and to situate her place in her personal and cultural history. By taking a vantage point upon the everyday, she reflected that it enabled a wider and deeper understanding of migrant personal experiences.

> For some people, small objects are very ordinary things and people might say they are just old things and look unimportant, in fact they're very important. It might look invaluable but on a larger small, it becomes something very big. From small things, you can see the whole history. You can see the person, a family, a clan history and even a whole nation. You need countless details to build up a story. For me, the research starts from something very ordinary but you can see something very deep, very broad. That's what I learnt from the research.

Material objects were physical evidence of her survival as a Vietnamese Chinese refugee. What initially appeared as mundane objects in fact documented her survival and placed her at the centre of her own story as she says, "Especially for us Chinese from the old days to nowadays, you see that the Chinese go to everywhere and they survive, they adapt to their new environment and they survive. This research really applies to us". Lanan not only situated the story of her own survival

but she also connected herself to the wider diasporic Chinese sentiment of movement and adaptation.

The participation of the women in the workshop altered the way they related to their own personal stories and objects. Annie highlighted that the meaning of her object was heightened by the group discussions of the art workshops. She described her object as being a "living object" that mirrored the movements, thoughts and feelings of people. In this sense, Annie's relationship with her object dissolved the boundary between "subject" and "object". The meaning of the object did not just attain its value from the past but rather, its value as an object was on-going and accumulative.

> In exposing the object to the world, you add value to the object. It's (the workshop) definitely about internalising your object, it's that 'inside-outside/outside-in' dynamic. It's not an algorithm. People were literally bouncing ideas off each other. I think that's quite unusual but it matches us as people, the object then becomes a living object.

The opening event provided a physical space where first generation women could visibly be at the centre of their experiences. The attendance of the first generation Women's Group at the opening event cannot be underestimated. The majority of the women who attended the opening event comprised mostly of the women participants of the Women's Group. As a group, they predominately felt most comfortable in the context of their community centre and their attendance to the opening event at a university was outside their usual routine. In stepping into a place that was different of their usual parameters, the women extended their visibility in the world. Through the context of the project and by attending the opening event, the women situated themselves at the centre of their narrative and agency. During the opening event, there was a palpable sense of ownership, excitement and pride at the prospect at being able to see oneself represented through art. This palpable and emerging sense of pride was summarised through Lanan's reflection,

> Sometimes people see me as a chatter box but sometimes I will hide myself into one corner, sit quietly and study people around me. That day, I said hello and mixed with people but in the second part, I drew myself into a corner and I looked around and I *felt* the atmosphere. Everyone really enjoyed the opening.

While Lanan did not make an overt reference to notions of empowerment, however, what transpired was her emphasis on observing the emerging pride from the women at the event. For the first time, a

group of first generation Chinese women whose lives have revolved around the axis of family and work were placed at the centre of a public space. Supported by the sense of sisterhood they shared with each other, they shared the centre stage together. They were recognised for their creative work and the stories of their lives. At the opening event, they were not simply enclosed within the context of the community centre but with an audience comprised of people from a range of cultures and professions, they were celebrated as first generation British Chinese women.

> **DK:** How did you feel at the opening event?
> **Participant 1:** I was very happy to see our things there!
> **Participant 2:** Yeah, very happy to able to see our achievement and results.
> **Participant 3:** And there was a party! You can meet lots of new people and make friends, isn't that right?
> **Participant 1:** Right, yeah. You able to interact with other people and people knew we had made those things and they appreciated us (laughs).
> **Participant 3:** Feels like power.
> **Participant 1:** I've never been to this type of event. I've never seen anything like that so I felt really happy. I've never ever been to anything like that activity. Yeah, the presentation had the artwork that we made and you could see the things that we had made so that's why I was so happy.

The feedback of the first generation women highlighted that anonymity is not a natural condition. Being nameless and faceless is not a natural condition but rather it is a product of structural inequalities that render the individual seemingly voiceless. In the case of the Women's Group, they identified their lack of social participation as related to the English language. To pursue the view that the women must learn English has placed the blame on the individual when structural inequalities have been much apparent in the womens' marginalisation. In this sense, it was crucial to understand that the difficulty of attaining English was a result of inequalities experienced in both Chinese and British contexts.

Firstly, in a Chinese context, the majority of the Women's Group came from a working class background and as daughters, the onus of education was placed upon their brothers and hence many daughters were unable to complete their school education and resulted in a limited education foundation. Secondly as migrant women, their responsibilities were centred as mothers as well as in unskilled employment. As migrant women, they felt discouraged from taking up employment

outside the family or for reasons of gender vulnerability and racism. These circumstances significantly impacted their exposure to English and their ability to easily adopt an additional language. Hence to view language as being the problem misses the significance of structural inequality and its impact on migrant working class Chinese women.

While the women may have previously felt disempowered and unable to make their voices heard on a public scale. The space of the opening event was a celebration of the women's lives as expressed as individuals and as a collective sisterhood. It provided a space where the women could claim their agency and be seen for what they have achieved in their lives. In meeting other people at the event, they spoke for themselves on their own terms. Invisibility cannot be taken as a natural fact of any culture. In being recognised as individuals and as a group by the wider British society, this emergent and unfamiliar feeling was indeed as one first generation woman observed, "feels like power".

8.3 Visibility Matters

The online exhibition can be seen as a part of a wider effort to assert the visibility of British Chinese women in British society. The need to maintain and cultivate visibility in a British Chinese context was strongly underlined by many of the second generation participants. In particular, one participant, Biyu (25), highlighted that the stereotypical characteristics associated with the British Chinese are the same descriptors used to describe mental health,

> All this stuff about 'lack', 'invisible', 'hidden', 'buried', 'quiet', 'model minority', 'high achieving', 'high functioning'; it really plays into how we talk about depression as a silent invisible illness. Most especially high functioning depression, where you can go about life very normally and live very well but there's always just something not quite right, that you cannot solve, you cannot transcend it until you fully address it inside of yourself and also make it public.

A desire to cultivate public visibility was keenly raised by the second generation women as they observed the reluctance of their mothers to participate in the object stories project.[21] They observed this reluctance as cultural and therefore to speak about their lives outside of the home might put them at the centre of gossip, "There seems to be a generational gap of privacy and what we are use to sharing. My mum she's always been very private. We were always told to keep things in the family. To go away from that privacy is very difficult for her. It's more of a culture thing". Furthermore, Michelle observed that this sense of privacy can impact the propensity for British Chinese oral history, "All these oral histories are getting lost. That generation talk but then it stays in the family. You don't want someone to know your business because they will be negative about it".

The desire for cross generational sharing was readily highlighted by many of the second generation women and this point was echoed by Annie and Charlotte. During the opening event, it appeared that few people crossed between the generational groups apart from Fei who remarked, "I started speaking to them (the first generation women) and they are hilarious". However, several of the second generation women felt it was difficult to forge a meaningful conversation after initial introductions because of language barriers and cultural differences as Annie noted "There was a definitely a slight awkwardness. After I introduced myself and they've introduced themselves, there's not much to say". This distance was evident but also this was matched by a desire to lessen this generational gap as Charlotte highlighted the value of "talking and *all* talking together" and suggested that cross-generational art workshops could help to expand the "collective conversation" as she stated,

> If there were more first generation at the art workshops, I feel like that would have added an interesting dimension. It would have added a stabilising dimension because they are much more connected with that root. All my connection comes from my Mum, which is such a

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[21] During a feedback session, the second generation women noted their mothers' strong desire for privacy and associated this as a cultural product where the notion of speaking about oneself would create unpleasant "gossip" amongst other people. Equally other first generation women highlighted that many of the circumstances surrounding one's arrival was either difficult and in some cases illegal and hence speaking publicly about oneself would bring vulnerability to an already difficult scenario.

solid connection but it is a third-party connection. It would be interesting to see that first step into the culture and talking and *all* talking together.

Charlotte highlighted the need for a genuine understanding and internal articulation within and between the generations. In the sense, visibility does not just mean being visible in a British society. Visibility to each other is the crucial first step as some women remarked at their surprise of the internal ethnic diversity of the British Chinese.[22] For both generations, visual methods gave the women the opportunity to be at the centre of their experiences. A strength of this method was its ability to bring people together within one space and to enable women to speak to each other and to articulate their thoughts as felt and feeling as thought.

In this way, the women's objects were not just verbal articulations of their experiences but also as material objects, they asserted a much needed public visibility of their lives in a social context. Public users of the object stories online exhibition observed at how they felt more informed about the experiences of British Chinese women.[23] Everyday objects and art making opened up a space of cultural intimacy and connection. The stories of everyday objects narrated by the women lessened the gap of cultural differences to form a connection between British Chinese women and the wider public as one online user commented on the exhibition.

> Through the women talking about the objects, it shed light on cultural differences and experiences of migrating, but what was most insightful for me was it conveyed how that *felt* for people in a personal and intimate way, not just the logistics of how and why. I found this incredibly insightful as it was something I had never given so much thought to before, and it made me feel more connected to the experience of British Chinese women. I love how this project drew me in by its artistic, sensitive and insightful approach and made me feel connected to the experiences of these women.

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[22] In her feedback second generation, Zeta (46) reflected on her surprise in learning more about the British Chinese, "The diversity of heritage of the women was eye-opening to me. They were Chinese but not necessarily from Hong Kong. This made me realise that experiences of growing up would be completely different depending on the traditions, education and open-mindedness of the parents. If you were Vietnamese Chinese, Malaysian Chinese British, Hong Kong Chinese, China Chinese British or first or second generation, the culture and customs are different. This reinforces that we cannot just label British Chinese into a narrow compact category".

[23] I conducted several feedback forms with online users of the object stories exhibition where they emailed their thoughts about the object stories exhibition. In total, I recruited 8 people to take part in the online exhibition feedback.

Materiality and art making presented a space where British Chinese women could be recognised for their character and individuality to counter the faceless stereotypes that circulate amongst British Chinese women. The intimacy of the womens' everyday possessions opened up an emotional landscape where cross-cultural connections could be forged. The intimate nature of personal possessions and art making became portals into the lives of British Chinese women where the individuality of each women could be recognised and appreciated as one woman remarked, "This exhibition is an opportunity for the public to understand British Chinese women not as a group living in distance but like one of our neighbours or classmates with vivid personalities and colourful life stories. Everyone is different". Furthermore, the online exhibition offered an opportunity where the agency of migrant Chinese women could be made overt and visible, especially in light of recent political challenges in Britain as it was remarked by another online user,

> Migration is not a part of my family history. Many women in the project reinforce the idea that movement is complex, and amidst the stagnancy of Brexit, it's important to learn how they identify themselves, not how they have been identified by others - I'm grateful that their stories are an entry into a community where I may not have naturally found myself. I knew that Chinese culture can be quite 'traditional', but didn't know exactly how it might effect the individual. It also highlighted how hard working women are expected to be. I felt like I got to know these women in a very small way and it made respect them for their strength.

These observations highlighted how the online exhibition and the opening nurtured an *internal* visibility of British Chinese women to each other, as well as an *external* visibility of British Chinese identities in a wider social context. The use of everyday material objects was specifically powerful as the mundanity of objects possessed the potential to cultivate a deeper understanding and relatability of ethnic womens' experiences. As highlighted by the comments of online users, it appeared that the mundanity of personal objects enacted a significant role as it offered a way for the wider public to emotionally relate and recognise the character of British Chinese women as they saw themselves. Equally, this notion of connection also extended to the British Chinese women themselves as participants remarked at their desire to form inter-generational connections through creativity and material reflections.

8.4 Summary

The workshop, online exhibition and opening event became sites of materially embodied visions that produced an internal and external visibility of the women's experiences. If material objects enabled a view of the body, then we can understand the site of the workshop and online exhibition as presenting an overall view of the body *amongst* other bodies. The physical context of the art workshop, opening event and online exhibition asserted a visibility which gave voice to a group of women who would otherwise not have the opportunity to share their experiences. With this in mind, these spaces can be read as a sites of identity production and empowerment. In a British landscape where the voices of British Chinese women are seldom heard, these multiple platforms offered a visibility of British Chinese women through their creativity and personal articulation.

Situating belonging in a wider view through visual methods meant different things depending on the generational challenges and social circumstance of the women. Situating belonging for the first generation referred to the womens' ability to take part in society; to be confidently bilingual, travel and interact with people from different cultures. In the context of the first generation, visual methods were integrated into the eight month "art school" to empower the first generation through education and learning. Embodied learning through art enabled them to take ownership over their learning and the women utilised it to support their confidence in moving into the wider British society. Their learning was publicly displayed in the online exhibition and opening event where the women experienced a platform of visibility where they were at the centre of the experience.

The second generation cohort appeared to move freely in British society, however, it was important to note that isolation was been identified by many of the second generation women. The second generation was less concerned with physical need and survival, instead they were concerned with an ideological shift of representation and a desire to be heard for their experiences. They held the view that British society lacked a genuine understanding of their subjectivity and to confound this challenge, their identities and experiences have been developed in isolation from one another.

Visual methods intervened in this palpable sense of isolation, division and cultural invisibility

identified by the second generation women. Without an awareness of a wider society, it was less possible to situate and position oneself within a culture. Selfhood cannot be a lone and individual pursuit as it relies on a wider contextual understanding of other individuals from similar backgrounds. In the workshop, this situating of belonging was not necessarily concerned with securing a "definition" of the parameters of a British Chinese heritage or identity. Rather the art workshops opened a space where complexities and contradictions of British Chineseness could be maintained and productively explored and shared. Visual methods are not simply a move in a singular direction and to assert one's own subjectivity, rather it was an opportunity to be heard and hear others.

Drawing on the participants' feedback, it became apparent that visual methods were highly valuable as it brought together a group of women that would have otherwise remained dispersed. The online exhibition and opening event formed an external visibility of the subjectivities of British Chinese women at large. The women's experiences were less about declaring an authentic "Chineseness" or "Britishness" but rather the online exhibition portrayed an evolution of British Chinese women of different positions and backgrounds. In this sense, visual methods created an internal and external visibility of the subjectivities of British Chinese women.

It would be inaccurate to understand that the younger generation is paving its way in British society, while the first generation women lead settled and static lives. Retirement has unburdened the women from domestic responsibility and employment. In having more freedom and leisure time, their desire to learn suggested that this group of women were indeed continuing their self development. Through the support of informal structures such as the Women's Group, the first generation are paving their own way into British society. The conversations and reflections from the visual methodology suggested that the two generations of women were forging their way albeit from different points, privileges and dispositions. Observed from their feedback, it remained apparent that the British Chinese women of this study were amidst the process of defining the parameters of their identity and culture.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

This chapter will outline the main findings of the research study, they revolve around the issues of visibility and representation and it will also highlight the methodological innovation and conceptual contribution of the study. The issues of visibility and representation proved to be the most enduring and re-occuring themes that manifested in different ways across the two generations of British Chinese women. However, the matter of visibility and representation possessed a different meaning depending on their generational background and cultural outlook. Furthermore, this chapter will highlight the research contribution of visual ethnography as a methodology in the research of the British Chinese and its significance for wider communities. It will also outline the conceptual contribution of Materially Embodied Visions in a British Chinese context and its relevance for visual ethnographic research. To conclude, this chapter will highlight the areas for future research when concerning the experience and consideration for British Chinese research.

9.1 Revisiting Research Intentions

This doctoral research evolved around the following questions; (1) Can a gendered perspective give visibility to British Chinese women and interrogate the wider study of the British Chinese? (2) Can a material culture perspective shed new light on the understanding and representation of Chinese migration in Britain? (3) Can artistic practices such as visual ethnographic methods and curating, which sit outside traditional migration studies, offer an innovative way of research and form an integral part of academic exploration? (4) How can this experimental approach contribute to the existing understanding of Chinese migration in Britain at large?

To address these research questions, I took inspiration from my own creative methodology as an artist and informed by visual ethnography, I devised a bespoke visual methodology to engage two generations of British Chinese women. In a society where the voices of British Chinese women are seldom heard, visual ethnographic methods presented a methodological structure where the visibility of British Chinese women could be created and seen. Visual ethnography comprised of three tiers as

(1) object-stories interviews, (2) art workshops, (3) online exhibition and opening event. As a conceptual framework Materially Embodied Visions was created to capture and contextualise the visual ethnographic insights from the workshops and interviews. Facilitated by material objects and art making, the multi-layered stories and questions reflect and embody the multiple positions of women's experiences.

By adopting a gendered perspective in this study interrogated the perception of a gender neutral understanding of the British Chinese and the use of visual ethnography cultivated a cross-generational understanding of British Chinese women. The methodology nurtured an *internal* and *external* visibility of British Chinese women where their identities are publicly visible while also nurturing an internal understanding of the women's identities to one another. A view of material culture revealed that the social and generational circumstance of the women greatly influenced the way that they expressed themselves through material objects to bring forth the significance of material *absence* and *presence* across the two generations.

Visual ethnography and use of visual methods such as curating are lesser used in social science context, however, they proved to be a highly productive strategies that challenged the power relations and normalised isolation that surrounded the lives of British Chinese women. The participatory nature of visual ethnography intervened in the social context of the women's lives. The methodology created an environment where women could publicly articulate their experiences to each other and view their identities as part of a wider evolution of British Chinese female experiences. In this sense, visual ethnography proved to be an invaluable research method; it produced enriched conceptual insights into the women's lives while cultivating an emergent community and social awareness through the methodology.

9.2 Key Finding

9.2.1 A Gendered View

By adopting a gendered perspective in the study of British Chinese women, this study found that the experience of migration and settlement was far from being gender neutral. Certainly without the

presence of Chinese women, the settlement of the British Chinese would be not be possible as families could not be formed, the family takeaway would be less numerous and economically viable as these businesses relied on the labour of the family. A gendered perspective in the study of the British Chinese revealed that women enacted a crucial role in the familial and economic settlement of the British Chinese community at large. A gendered understanding of the British Chinese illustrated the gendered challenges faced by migrant Chinese women and highlighted the tenacity they exerted in the face of obstacles and the vital role of women in migrant settlement and community. In this sense, to speak about the British Chinese and any migrant community, it is important to consider the vital role of women in migrant settlement and community to recognise the multiple roles and agency they enact within the family and community.

In this study, many of the women came from working class backgrounds, predominately from the New Territories of Hong Kong. Coming from working class families and being women meant that many did not have the opportunity to complete their secondary school education. In arriving in Britain, first generation migrant women were more likely to shoulder the domestic and parenting responsibilities of the family as well as being workers. The circumstances for the first generation women were challenging as they were expected to simultaneously acclimatise into a new cultural environment, adopt a new language, become mothers, and economically support the family. The education constraints and gendered expectations experienced by first generation migrant women made the initial settlement a challenging process. Despite these structural challenges, the strength of the women enabled them to create a future in Britain. In many ways, the informal yet supportive nature of the Women's Group was reflective of the collective strength and resourcefulness of the women.

The gendered challenges of British Chinese women differed along generational lines. In this study, the second generation women experienced different challenges to their first generation counterparts. As women born in Britain, they did not face the same educational and linguistic challenges. Rather, as women born of Chinese ethnicity and raised in a British environment, they expressed their experience of racial stereotyping, which at times were compounded by the sexualisation of their Asian female identity. In this sense, the notion of situating and cultivating personal and cultural belonging was a theme that resonated amongst the women in overt and subtle ways. The question of

cultural transmission as women and mothers was a specific concern for these women. As women brought up in Britain, the question of how to pass on culture and identity was an issue raised by women in mixed race relationship and by lesbian and polyarmous women in the study. Being second generation women, they possessed more assurance to express a wider spectrum of identity positions as they were more diversified in terms of sexuality and partnering choices. In this sense, the question of how to interpret and preserve a Chinese cultural environment outside a binary racial and heteronormative structures was a point of careful negotiation for the women.

9.2.2 Internal and External Visibility

On first impressions, it can appear that the two generations of British Chinese women in this study were distinct from one another in regards to language, class, cultural views, and socio-economic status. Despite these differences, the three-tiered methodology highlighted their shared commonality. This commonality revolved around the notion of isolation experienced by the two cohorts of women in this study, albeit this isolation was experienced in different ways. The participatory nature of visual ethnography disrupted the isolation experienced by the women across the two generations. The multiple sites of the methodology produced an alternative orientation and articulation of the women's identities as it presented an *external* visibility of their identities to a broader British public, and importantly created an *internal* visibility of women's identities to each other.

For the first generation of the Women's Group, their experience of isolation was in relation to the broader British society. As migrant women from mostly working class backgrounds in Hong Kong, they possessed fewer opportunities to complete a formal education in their home countries and through migration, many of the women assumed responsibilities as mothers and workers. Many of the women remarked at their on-going difficulty with gaining confidence with English; this was a re-occuring theme in the study. In this sense, linguistic challenges can be viewed as a result of gender based as well as economic inequality for many of the first generation women in this study. Therefore, for these working class women the experience of isolation and language was intimately entwined. In comparison, for the second generation, as women of Chinese heritage raised in Britain, the women did not linguistically struggle with English, however, many women remarked of their desire and

difficulty in maintaining their family's language. A commonality amongst the second generation women resided in the sense of isolation they noted in growing up in a predominately British white neighbourhoods and experiencing isolation from other second generation female counterparts. This sense of isolation was described as a normalised component of their identity experience.

To counter the isolation identified by the two generations, the online exhibition and opening event brought an external visibility to the subjectivities of British Chinese women. For the first generation, the women were able to make their identities visible in a public context, while the second generation were able to situate their identities *amongst* other British Chinese female identities. For the first generation women in the Women's Group, the opening event was one of the first instances where they were firmly at the centre of their experiences. This public recognition of their selfhood in society was palpable. It was a new and exciting consciousness, this was remarked by the women and the once marginalised experiences of the women were reversed, at least during the event. By being publicly celebrated, the opening event presented an emergent feeling, a cultural character in motion.

For the second generation, the collective environment of the art workshops disrupted the isolation identified by the women. Unlike the Women's Group, the second generation women were unknown to each other. Being a dispersed group, the second generation women remarked on their lack of contact with other British Chinese female peers, while other women described their British Chinese upbringing as an isolating experience with few opportunities to sustain friendships with similar ethnicities. The coming together of a group of women (that would otherwise have little reason to do) was a crucial act of individual and cultural articulation. The second generation women described the online exhibition as a "tool" where they were able to further contextualise their identity in a broader view; their difference was not viewed as a lack, but rather as a wider portrait of womanhood. This wider perspective facilitated by the online exhibition presented a multiple view of British Chinese female identities to each other to present an evolving picture of British Chineseness and womanhood.

The collective sharing of the methodology gave the women an opportunity to situate their identity outside the family space and to productively problematise stereotypical notions of Chineseness in a public context; the process of identity work is no longer an individual and isolated process. The participation of the women can be viewed as an act of resistance against isolation and the sharing of

experiences challenged the internalisation of racial prejudice and structural inequality. The collective articulation of the women presented a visibility of their experiences, and by speaking about their experiences to one another raised a gradual cultural and identity consciousness.

By experiencing isolation in different ways, the two generations desired a greater visibility of their experiences on an external and internal level. This desire expressed by the two generations underlined a mutual ground between the two cohorts. Visual ethnographic methods were not only a way for British Chinese women to express their individual identities in isolation, rather the collective nature of the methodology presented a context for women to speak to each other and cultivate a wider social consciousness and a prospect of community building. The multi-layered methodology brought to view that the two generations of women were indeed paving their way in society, albeit from different positions and different privileges. Despite the initial differences, the two cohorts shared common ground as the women spoke of a desire to see themselves represented, to interact at a greater capacity, and to assert themselves into society that reflect the way that they saw themselves.

9.2.3 Representation: Material Presence and Absence

In this study, material *presence* and *absence* surrounded the lives of the two generations. The first generation women chose not to express themselves through personal objects and instead art making became a crucial act of self expression. By comparison, material objects played a greater role for the second generation women as objects were employed in multiple contexts to negotiate aspects of their identity and belonging. In this sense, the relationship with materiality across the two generations can be understood as a physical expression of their social circumstance; the ambition of the first generation was centred on creating a life abroad, while the second generation were born into a society where they did not feel visible. With this in mind, two dynamics came into view, firstly the multiple objects of the second generation can be viewed as a form of compensation for a lack of cultural representation of their identities. Secondly, the first generation had limited resources other than their determination to create a future aboard and this will to create was keenly expressed and embodied in the artwork of the first generation women.

For the first generation of the Women's Group, material absence was embedded with a significant

function. The majority of the women did not openly talk about their past or publicly speak about migratory objects. Only a few women participated in direct one-to-one interviews whereas many of the women participated in the art workshops. The difficulty of conducting personal interviews with British Chinese women has been remarked by several researchers.[24] It appeared that by preserving relics from the past would only confine them to replay their difficult settlement stories. As migrant women, their definition of agency and selfhood was expressed as a state that belonged in the future tense because for them the future represented prosperity, progress and betterment. Equally, it was important to recognise that this future orientation cannot be seen a "natural" component of the womens' innate character. Their orientation towards the future can be understood as a survival response towards the socio-economic challenges they faced. In this sense, an orientation towards the future can be viewed as migratory strategy enacted by the working class British Chinese women to will and orientate themselves towards stability and betterment.

For the first generation, the women valued creative expression over verbal articulation through past objects. Visual ethnography challenged the one-dimensional view of first generation women as "subordinate" and "victims". During interviews, the women often expressed their struggles as mothers and workers, however, in the process of art making the women represented their identities with humour and exuberance; a far cry from their verbal articulations. Art making enabled the women a greater propensity for positive reaffirmations and fantastical re-imaginations of their identities and desires. Through their art work, they simultaneously made their identities as we gained a deeper insight into the subjectivities which they framed with equal amounts of tenacity and desire.

For this cohort, the process of making enabled the women to assert their imagination and to visualise their agency without restriction. However, the popularity of creative expression cannot be viewed as a wholly unproblematic as their preference for art making could also be read as a strategy to "keep face" as the women were given an opportunity to sidestep re-living the dehumanising phase of settlement. Art making afforded the women a creative and supported context to assert a positive image of their migratory desires and ambitions with a greater vitality and imagination outside their socio-economic situation. The determined and distinctively positive narratives visualised and

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[24] At a workshop at King's College, London on the 8th May 2019, researcher Shuang Wu commented on the difficulty of accessing and interviewing British Chinese women and in 2017 at a China Exchange exhibition, a similar point was echoed by an oral history researcher who remarked at the initial difficulty of sourcing interviews from first generation British Chinese.

verbalised in their art making embodied their attitude as migrant women.

In contrast, objects were far more numerous for the second generation. If British Chinese material representation has not been apparent, then the objects of these women can be seen as an emerging step where British Chinese representation assumed a material form. In a Britain where the women did not see themselves represented, these objects became significant sites of negotiating belonging and affirming selfhood. By understanding the lives of British Chinese women through their personal objects diverged from the usual discourse of Chinese aesthetics and signifiers. Unlike the unheard stories of "Chinese" objects in British museums, the lives of the objects and the women were transparent and detailed. The objects of the women can be seen as a counter response to the British institutional and museum view of silent "Chinese" objects. The objects of these second generation women can be viewed as a reversal of power relations where the women represent themselves on their terms through the material object.

The appreciation of Chinese objects of this cohort of women were far from being muted, beautiful items, the histories of their objects were visible and apparent. At times, their stories presented a critical view of the orientalising and gendering forces of British society. The narratives and function of their objects emerged in multiple ways; women used objects as a way to retrieve the past, to ask difficult questions, negotiate inequalities, and celebrate their cultural heritage. By identifying objects of personal significance, the women took ownership of their cultural representation and articulation. Some objects visibly referred to their Chinese heritage while other objects appeared to be culturally "neutral" which contrasted with a traditional idea of a Chinese identity. While the appearance of these objects may not immediately appear to be connected with culture, the narratives of these objects were often a part of a wider and more subtle negotiation of their otherness as ethnic minority women. The variety of aesthetics and objects revealed how materiality enacted a meaningful role in articulating belonging and celebrating difference to highlight that materiality is a part of the everyday experience of otherness. The expression of a Chinese diasporic identity was released from an obvious cultural aesthetic and thus extended the traditional definition of what a "Chinese" object might entail.

In speaking about objects, the women spoke about themselves and the experience of belonging to multiple cultures. Their objects epitomised a cultural hybrid intersection and this insight is rarely represented in material form as cultural objects tend to represent either a "British" or "Chinese"

perspective. The stories of the objects were centred on articulating the ambiguities, subtle and overt racism, isolation, and pride about coming from a broadly British Chinese background. Through their objects, the women both desired a greater visibility and questioned and claimed their place within a "British Chinese" category. The objects of the women cannot be seen as being the finite point of arriving at a "British Chinese" identity, instead these objects offered an insight into the plethora of positions of being a woman of British Chinese descent.

A material culture and visual ethnographic perspective challenged the limiting stereotypes that have surrounded British Chinese women and have labelled them as "over-sexualised", "passive", "high-achievers" or "uncreative". The material expressions and art making of the women actively challenged and dispelled those specific stereotypes and prejudices. Through materiality, British Chinese women were at the forefront of representing their personal experiences and the wider British Chinese female experience. A perspective of material culture and a visual ethnographic methodology enabled the women a greater freedom to situate and represent their identities as they experienced the world and saw themselves. Through these ways, the women were able to articulate their identities in relation to the past, present and future with greater mobility. The articulation of their identities through material objects and art making pieced together a nuanced and ever evolving portrait to represent the experiences and multiple positions of British Chinese women.

9.2.4 Methodological Innovation

As a methodology, visual ethnography offered a creative mode of social engagement while maintaining an ethnographic viewpoint on the lives of ethnic minority women. From a practical perspective, the three-tiered methodology of the interview, art workshop, online exhibition and opening event acted as a supportive methodological structure to facilitate participants to express and view themselves. The methodology offered a concrete way to enable participants to consider how thinking and feeling are embodied in their everyday, material worlds. This unifying marriage of intellect and emotion becomes a holistic component embedded throughout the three tiers of the methodology.

Visual methodology defied inherent stereotypes about the capabilities and interests of British Chinese women and challenged ideas that the older generation are uninterested in creative pursuits or the

notion that the younger generation are an assimilated, problem-free "model minority". The enriched insights of this study were a result of merging the visual with ethnography; the ambition of the visual presented an engaging challenge while an ethnographic lens offered a grounding structure for that ambition. The merging of these two disciplines in a methodology presented an opportunity for British Chinese women to take ownership and assert a creative expression of themselves on their terms. Despite an initial uncertainty from the women to take part in a creative study, visual ethnography proved to be a methodology that presented a productive and surprising opportunity for British Chinese women to present a sensitive and bold portrait of themselves.

The primary intention of the methodology was to understand British Chinese women as individual subjects, however, in practice, visual methodology revealed far more than was initially anticipated. The enriched insights generated from the methodology is due to the experimental nature of visual ethnography. The artist-ethnographer has to take a step back in order for participants to come forward and take ownership of the project and this element of taking ownership had an empowering resonance. The artist-ethnographer can only endeavour to create a space for conversations and understandings to unfold; what happens in that space is at the onus of the participants. The following section will outline the significance of visual ethnography as a methodology in the context of British Chinese women and the wider community.

Firstly, visual ethnographic methods are a crucial yet overlooked research method in the study of the British Chinese. The British Chinese are dispersed within society and they are internally diverse through heritage and linguistic affiliation. The experience of isolation from other British Chinese counterparts and isolation from the broader British community was a common experience for participants in this study. The participatory nature of the workshops/opening event and the visible platform of the curated online exhibition disrupted the isolation experienced by the women. The creative and socially engaged dynamic of visual ethnography enabled a view of multiple identities which nurtured a wider view of other British Chinese women at large. From this position, the facilitation of an internal dialogue of British Chinese identities can help foster a deeper social and political consciousness.

The experimental and open-ended nature of the methodology presented a greater freedom for the

participants to express their subjectivities in unexpected and spontaneous ways. The participants in this project were not just vessels relaying ideas and opinions, but through making and talking about objects, the women presented a lived and embodied account of themselves which was a product of intellect and emotion. The participants were not expected to express themselves through the more traditional and predictable iconography and through food economies related to British Chinese culture. Instead, the creative experimental nature of Materially Embodied Visions presented a freedom for individuals to assert their re-definition of British Chinese culture and womanhood.

Secondly, the methodology signalled a shift of discourse for British Chinese research. Traditionally, much of the influential past research has generally adopted interview methods (Parker, 1994; 1995;1998) and historical archival sources (Benton, 2008). Broadly, these are the primary methods that have informed the research on the British Chinese. These are certainly important research methods; however, I propose that given the dispersed and isolated nature of the British Chinese settlement, there is a significant need to adopt visual and participatory research methods to extend and generate research insights about the British Chinese in a collective context.

As the British Chinese are part of a wider push for greater diversity and representation in the arts and politics, this study can be viewed as a part of that broader social effort which makes this research distinctive to previous research relating to the British Chinese. In this way, visual ethnography extends beyond previous methodologies on the British Chinese as it is concerned with facilitating individual expressions and inciting collective understanding and social awareness. Viewing the positive results from the participatory methodology has inspired future public and research plans centred on British Chinese women. In May 2019, fellow researchers and myself hosted a public research event at Kings College based on continuing the dialogue about British Chinese women.[25]

Thirdly, the methodology shed light on the gendered experiences of the British Chinese by specifically focusing on the experiences of women. The emphasis on gender in a British Chinese context highlights the continual need to integrate a gender perspective in the understanding of ethnicity. A gendered perspective in the study of the British Chinese disrupted the gender neutral

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[25] This workshop was held at King's College, London on the 8th May 2019 entitled "British Chinese Women, An Interdisciplinary Workshop" funded by the Social History Department at Kings College. It was organised by Sha Zhou, Chen Yang, and Denise Kwan.

viewpoint espoused by a socio-economic stance. A focus on British Chinese women recognised the agency exerted by both generations of women. Visual ethnography presented a view of women's subjectivities as they negotiated inequalities, celebrated triumph, asserted belonging, and navigated cultural transmission as mothers and women. In all these areas, the notion of gender is much apparent as issues of gender inequality, sexual harassment and negotiating sexuality were pertinent and on-going issues. This sense of otherness experienced upon the body became deflected into their material worlds and a viewpoint on materiality presents an opportunity to bring light to these gendered based issues.

Given the sample size of the research, this study does not claim to make overarching claims about British Chinese women as an overall population and neither is it focused on producing anonymous quantitative results. The experiences of women are certainly framed by social and political circumstances related to being British Chinese, however this study does not intend to reduce their subjectivities to formally defined categories. Their subjectivities and experiences of British Chineseness are simultaneously framed by and go beyond fixed categories of identity. Indeed, they are not the intentions of this study, however, this study does claim that visual ethnography and creative methods are powerful and empowering tools to enable marginalised and dispersed people a legitimate voice in society. Visual making becomes an act of taking up space as a margin becomes a centre.

9.2.5 Conceptual Insight

To accompany and capture the insights generated by visual ethnography, the conceptual term Materially Embodied Visions was devised. Materially Embodied Visions was designed to capture the interdependent dynamics between materiality, identity and culture. The strength of the framework was in the inherent recognition that power and self expression are entangled in the physicality and visuality of our material world. As a conceptual framework, it viewed the material objects of women as a way of situating the thoughts and feelings of British Chinese women as they are in cultural emergence.

As Materially Embodied Vision is concerned with objects and art making, it is a conceptual

framework that sought to reverse structures of power in order to situate the voices of people that are lesser heard. The objects and art making provides a view from below, a view of women's stories and bodies as they see and negotiate the world around them. This position takes seriously the matter of everyday objects and the art making of everyday British Chinese women. In this sense, objects were far from being secondary elements that are illustrative of social relations, instead objects were conceptualised as active and central in the negotiation of everyday power relations as they armour, celebrate, assure and challenge social relations.

By devising Materially Embodied Visions as an interdisciplinary concept, the parameters of understanding British Chinese identity through the usual tropes of food, rituals and ceremonies were abandoned. Material objects and art making offered an alternative and unusual way of representing British Chinese experiences where women were able to choose an object and make an artwork inspired by their everyday and embodied experiences to offer an unseen and intimate view of their lives. The process of speaking through personal objects and art making presented an opportunity for British Chinese women to speak emotionally and intellectually about their lives as materiality became emotional landscapes. An understanding of British Chinese women through their personal objects enabled the women a greater freedom to express their identities and subjectivities on their terms. Through their material worlds, the women were at the centre of an evolving inscription of British Chinese women through personal objects.

Furthermore, Materially Embodied Visions is a conceptual framework that can be adapted to suit the needs of marginalised community groups from wider cultures. The framework is suitable for groups which may lack a firm and identifiable cultural core. Given the emphasis on embodiment and people's stories, the conceptual framework is particularly suitable in raising the consciousness of dispersed groups to generate collective understandings. The concepts of Materially Embodied Visions offers a way for future researchers to recognise the significance of materiality and selfhood. It is a useful framework for cultural practitioners and socially engaged artists interested in working with community groups as it offers a structured way of viewing insights produced from ethnographic work.

9.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis makes a contribution to the study of the Chinese in Britain in particular and international migration in general from a methodological and conceptual perspective. Firstly, the use of visual ethnography is a unique methodological contribution in the research of migration and diaspora. This methodology deepens the research about migration and offers a creatively ethnographic approach of articulating migratory experiences. It extends the variety of methodology from traditional social science approaches and presents an enriched and grounded view of identities. It is both focused on drawing ethnographic insights as well as inciting social action. In a British Chinese context, visual ethnography is significant and powerful as it productively intervenes into the social dimension of British Chinese lives to create a context for community building and social articulation.

Secondly, visual methods such as curating are instrumental to the social impact of the academic research as the online exhibition provides an accessible and public platform of the academic study. As women migrants are an under-researched area, the online exhibition is a public platform dedicated to building and supporting the visibility of women migration and the work of future researchers. The online exhibition becomes a resource for future researchers, artists and academics interested in the experiences and research of British Chinese women. A focus on the collective and creative voices injects a valuable insight to rejuvenate the discourse of migrants as expressed by women. As well, the universal appeal of the online exhibition presented an intimate and personal insight into the subjectivities of British Chinese women for the wider British public.

Thirdly, this study makes a conceptual contribution to knowledge through the creation of a new conceptual framework of Materially Embodied Visions. Material Embodied Visions brings together ideas drawn from the fields of material culture, visual culture and cultural theory to capture the insights of materiality, subjectivity and cultural expression. As a framework, it is designed to reverse traditional relations of power to capture the voices of everyday women through their material worlds. The framework produces a unique set of data analysis to present an original and unseen understanding of not only British Chinese women, this framework can also be applied in other migratory contexts. By creating an innovative methodological context for women to speak and make artwork presented an alternative route for women to articulate themselves outside of stereotypical and orientalising symbolism.

As the women are expressing their experiences outside of the usual and expected cultural parameters assigned to British Chinese identities, the conceptual framework of Materially Embodied Visions views the artwork and objects of the women and acknowledges their making and articulation as a wider cultural expression. As raised earlier in this chapter, the methodology and conceptual framework have a connection to each other. Materially Embodied Visions took in a view of objectification and embodiment as a strategy to situate the subjectivities of British Chinese women. The use of visual ethnography created a creative context where the concept of Materially Embodied Visions could be physically embodied and enacted in the research methodology. Through visual ethnography, British Chinese women are at the forefront of making and inscribing their identities through the methodology and in doing so, their experiences are very much emergent and situated from the perspective of their lived bodily experiences.

In this way, Materially Embodied Visions acted as a new conceptual space to capture new relations and insights of British Chinese women articulating themselves through artwork and objects. The combination of visual ethnography and Materially Embodied Visions presented invaluable insights about British Chinese women. These approaches were dedicated in capturing the conceptual interaction of materiality and migration while also maintaining a strong emphasis on social impact and community building. In this sense, visual ethnography and Material Embodied Visions can also be adapted and used with wider migrant communities, especially community groups that are dispersed and require a structure yet flexible methodological and theoretical approach.

9.4 Future Research

From this study, I highlight the following areas as recommendations for future researchers. Firstly, it is evident that visual ethnographic methods are particularly powerful in the context of British Chinese women and the wider community as they offer the opportunity to speak within and across generations. The participatory nature of visual methods becomes especially meaningful in creating spaces and bringing people together that would otherwise not have this opportunity. Building on this point, it is important to consider how identities are constructed in specific contexts; for example, online spaces have become a pertinent area where British Chinese concerns and identifications are explored and shared. In this sense, this research study highlights the importance of exploring

identities through social contexts to understand how identities are made and experienced.

Secondly, the gendered experiences of British Chinese men and women require more emphasis in future research to dispel a gender neutral narrative of British Chinese migration and settlement. In a British Chinese context, there is not a single published account of British Chinese women; the experiences of British Chinese women are greatly under-researched. Therefore, an intersectional understanding of British Chinese identities is greatly needed to encompass the intersections of race, class, sexuality, disability, and gender. The issue of sexuality, race and culture requires more research in the future to understand how sexual orientations and cultural transmission intersect in a British Chinese context. Thirdly, there is the matter of the linguistic diversity of the British Chinese. So far, the British Chinese are mostly understood as originating from the Hong Kong/ Guangdong region and thus as Cantonese speakers. However, the dialects of Mandarin, Hakka and Hokkien of the British Chinese require more focused attention to understand how linguistic diversity can inform a wider definition of British Chinese to encompass a South East Asian perspective of migratory experiences.

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Appendix A: Participant List

(i) First Generation

	First Generation					
	Name	**Age**	**Background**	**Language**	**Education**	**Occupation**	**Object**
	Lanan	78	Vietnamese Chinese	English/ Cantonese/ Mandarin	Further Education	English tutor volunteer	Refugee documents and objects
	Yun	67	British Chinese	Cantonese/ English	Incomplete education	Retired	n/a
	Anna	65	British Chinese	Cantonese	Incomplete education	Retired	Ink drawing, photos
	Chun	71	British Chinese	Cantonese	Incomplete education	Retired	Photos of husband
	Jenny	63	British Chinese	Cantonese	Incomplete education	Retired	Wedding figurine
	Lanfen	75	British Chinese	Cantonese	Incomplete education	Retired	n/a
	Ying	67	British Chinese	English/ Cantonese	Bachelor Degree	Retired	Creative writing
	Chen	68	British Chinese	English/ Cantonese/ Mandarin	Incomplete education	Retired	n/a
	Cherie	60	Hong Kong born	Cantonese, English	Bachelor Degree	Accountant assistant	Sewing cushion
	Jude	65	Chinese Malaysian	English, Hakka, Hokkien	FE education	Retired	Typewriter
	Rose	64	British Chinese Bourneo	English/Hokkien	Further Education	Retired	Sewing Machine

(ii) Second Generation

	Second Generation						
	Name	**Age**		**Background**	**Language**	**Education**	**Occupation**	**Object**
	Silivia	33		British Chinese Cantonese	English/ Cantonese	Bachelor Degree	Dancer/ Creative Director	Mother's ping-on fuh (blessed paper)
	Jane	32		Mixed Race Chinese-Mauritius	English	Bachelor Degree	TV production	Grandfather's panda towel
	Rachel	29		British Chinese Cantonese	English	Bachelor Degree	Techical Programmer	Green t-shirts
	Jessica	32		British Chinese Cantonese	English	Bachelor Degree	Events Manager	Headphones
	Fei	56		British Chinese Cantonese	English/ Cantonese	Further Education	Nurse	Mother's tailored dress
	Weiyi	52		British Chinese Singaporean	English/ Mandarin	Masters Degree	Part time employment	Mother's soya bean grinder
	Elaine	49		British Chinese Cantonese	English	Bachelor Degree	Student	Mother's necklace
	Michelle	32		British Chinese Bourneo	English/ Mandarin	Masters Degree	Arts Professional	Uncle's gold necklace
	Charlotte	26		Mixed Race Chinese	English	Bachelor Degree	Newly graduated	Grandmother's watch
	Annie	27		Taiwanese	English/ Mandarin	Bachelor Degree	English language tutor	Pens
	Biyu	25		British Chinese Cantonese	English/ Cantonese	Bachelor Degree	Heritage Worker	Mulan notebook
	Zeta	46		British Chinese Cantonese	English/ Cantonese	Bachelor Degree	Television	Framed chinese kids' shoes
	Robin	59		Hong Kong born British Chinese	English	Masters Degree	Public sector worker	Tattoo and household objects
	Anita	60		Mixed race	English/ Mandarin	Doctorate	University Lecturer	Chinoiserie Victorian playing card box
	Jean	57		British Chinese/ Hong Kong adoptee	English/Mandarin	Bachelor Degree	Human Resources	Childhood adoption outfit
	Amy	30		Hong Kong born British Chinese	English	Bachelor Degree	Creative Fashion Director	Lucky charm
	May	33		British born Chinese	English/ Cantonese	Bachelor Degree	Television	Film camera

Appendix B: Art Workshop Activities

(i) Workshop Plan for First Generation

1. An introduction to Mono-Printing 18th January 2017, 1.5 hr

Keywords: colour, shape, form, texture, composition
Aim: To make mono-prints
Activity

These practical sessions are designed to engage the Women's Group specifically introduce them to the principles of art making and to understand the ideas of colour, shape, form, texture and composition. The next three sessions were based on these principles. I chose mono-printing because it is an effective, quick and relatively easy medium to use. It responds to touch and has an illustrative quality which might lend itself to the theme of self-portrait. By using monoprinting, I hope to dispel any unease about making art. I hope that the women will take confidence in their ability and most of all, enjoy the process of making.

2. Still Life in Collage, 15 February 2017, 1.5 hr

Keywords: colour, shape, form, texture, composition
Aim: To make a still life scene using collage
Activity:

In this second practical session, I wanted to challenge the women to think about the relationship of scale and form. In order to do this, I set up two collections of still life objects and asked the women to recreate the still life scene using a collaging technique. In doing this, I wanted to see how the women respond to creative tasks and to understand their level of creative learning. In preparation for this session, I prior made an example to show to the class so they have a visual that they can refer to.

3. Card Collage, 1 March 2017, 1.5 hr

Keywords: colour, shape, form, texture, composition
Aim: Use collage skills to make a birthday card
Activity:

Today was K's birthday and we had a celebration in class, I decided that it would be a good idea for each of the women to create birthday cards from the collage techniques that the women have developed so far. There have been so nice results and also this is an opportunity for the women to exert their own personalised designs on the card. While some of the women have commented that it is like 'child's play' it does seem that the women are enjoying themselves and enjoying the process.

4. Introduction to the project, 15 March 2017, 1.5 hr

Keywords: self-portrait, representation, symbolism, objects
Aim: To understand the relationship between people and things
Activity:

To explain the significance of objects and people, I decided to bring in my mother's pyjamas to the

Women's Group. I talked at length about its journey and the significance to myself and my mother as well as my own experience as a British-born Chinese woman, to this topic they responded with a lot of interest and input. Despite the women responding with interest to my object, when I came to asking them about what object they valued, it seemed that they have retained very little. To the point that I have changed the focus from object-related tasks to self-portrait activities.

5. Introduction into themes and concepts, 29 March 2017, 1.5 hr
Keywords: Perspective, colour, medium, visual interpretation **Aim:**
To form visual interpretations of artists' work

Activity: I felt it was necessary to develop the visual interpretation within the group and to do this, I used examples of Impressionistic landscape from painters such as Monet. By talking about visual interpretation, I wanted the women to consider the mood and effect of the paintings on themselves, essentially, their responses to the paintings. However I didn't feel that this session went particularly well, their responses were a bit stinted. Maybe the images were not big enough or maybe the content of the paintings are too formal. I need to change my approach for the next session.

6. Themes and Concepts, 12th April 2017, 2 hr
Keywords: cultural identity, self-portrait, symbolism, representation
Aim: To form visual interpretations of artists' work
Activity:
 In this session, I brought in large A3 photocopies of female Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo, British African female artist Sonia Boyce and British Chinese artist Anthony Key. I selected these artists for their autobiographical element, symbolic quality and their focus on cultural identity. Using the blackboard, this session went very well as we created a collective mind map where we debated the significance and meaning of the paintings. The themes of Kahlo were particularly appropriate as they spoke to notions of womanhood, environment and power. At the end of the session, I set them homework to create a mind map.

7. Mind map of the self, 26th April 2017, 1.5 hr
Keywords: self portrait, symbolism, representation, metaphor
Aim: To mind map ideas for a self-portrait
Activity:
To start the session, I made a self-portrait of myself and asked the group to visually interpret the meaning of the collage and to essentially apply their learning from the previous session to this current session. They did this very easily. Only two of the women completed their homework from the previous session and some of the women either did not understand the concept of making a mind-map of oneself or struggled with basic spelling. This session was incredibly noisy with people chatting and people walking in and out of the centre which was challenging for a learning environment. In helping some of the women, I understood that many of them finished school very young. However one of the women did complete her homework and more so, made her own collage at home! This was unexpected and inspired the group giving the group a much needed lift. We spent the rest of the session making interpretations about S's collage while she gave her own interpretation at the end.

8. Self-Portrait, 10th May 2017, 2.5 hr
Keywords: self portrait, symbolism, representation, metaphor
Aim: To make a self-portrait from collage
Activity:
This is the first of the three making sessions. To bring more focus to the session, I asked them to make a collage of what they imagined life in the UK and their aspirations for the UK pre-migration. I laid out mono-printing materials and magazines and card collage material but very few women used the mono-printing items. I stressed that there will only be three sessions left. This session was even nosier and there were more women there as well. Some women were interested and managed to make some things. Overall, this was a challenging session.

9. Self-portrait, 24th May 2017, 2.5 hr
Keywords: self portrait, symbolism, past aspirations, metaphor
Aim: To make a self-portrait of aspirations pre-migration
Activity:
 This session was far calmer and more focused. They continued with their collaging making and finishing what they made last time. They continued with the same theme of imagination for their lives in the UK. After they finished, we spent 30 mins talking about their intention for the collage. This was a productive session.

10. Sisterhood and Future Aspirations, 7th June 2017, 2.5 hr
Keywords: self portrait, symbolism, future aspirations, metaphor
Aim: To make a self-portrait of future aspirations
Activity:
As most of the women had finished their collage from the previous session, I set them a new task of making a collage of their future aspiration. Collectively we made a collage of their future aspirations, many of them commented on their age but they also talked about their friendship and sisterhood with each other. From the mind mapping activity, this became the central focus of the final collage. In the last part of the session, they spoke about their personal intention for the collage.

(ii) Workshop Plan for Second Generation

Workshop Goal: To explore through creative writing, collage and mono-printing the story and journey of an object.

Participants will be asked to bring their objects with them.

Keywords: object, experimentation, embodiment

Activity Description: Through guided activities, participants will consider the experience and journey of migration through personal objects; how might the journey of objects be metaphorical of the self and selfhood and cultural transitions? How might the journey of an object mirror the

journey that we take as migrants? Participants will be guided in these explorations through experimental writing tasks and creative making such as mono-printing and collage making.

Discussion Objectives: The aim of the session is to explore and reveal the journey of objects; specifically, to share with others in the group. How might the journey of an object mirror the journey of a person? How might objects be metaphorical of own journeys and movement. By talking through personal possession, it will provide participants an opportunity to talk about feelings of belonging, identity and gender. The making aspect of the workshop will offer participants a creative outlet for these stories.

Morning Session

Time	Focus	Activity
9.30am	Set up	P's names are at reception Materials set up Catering set up
10.30	P's arrive	Sign consent form for filming documentation Tea and coffee start
10.45	Welcome Workshop introduction Show them my object, inspiration for the project	Discuss what is to come in the workshop Where are toilets? Fire-exits etc.
11.00	Ice-breaker Introduce your partner	Introduce the other person, find out one interesting, unusual fact

Time	Focus	Activity
11.15	Group 'Show and Tell' your object	Tell the journey of the objects and it's significance to you
12.00	Creative Meditation/ Visualisation	Participants will be encouraged to creatively meditate and focus on their object
12.15	Free writing	P's will write for 10 min uninterrupted
12.25	Task 1 Give out '12 questions' sheet	Task 1: Write from the perspective of your object in the present tense and without using 'I'
12.40	Task 2	Task 2: Write from the position of the object witnessing you in a memory

12.55	Feedback	P's invited to read out their piece
1.30	Lunch	Set up lunch

Afternoon session: 2pm Start

2.00	Intro to mono-printing techniques	
2.15	P's to reflect on one text and create in collage/ printing form	Make sure materials are all out and accessible See how time is going, maybe time for some p's to make two.
3.00	Group 'Show and tell' collage Final discussion	Participants to feedback on one another on their collage and other to explain Let p's reflect on the day and any themes that arise
4.00	Close	Tidy room Finish

Appendix C : Object Stories Creative Writing; *Writing From The Position Of The Object*

Rachel

I was born in most likely a sweat shop in a third world country like Bangladesh, made from cotton and polyester from who knows where. I was shipped to the UK and found myself in a shop in London where I and multiples of my siblings were tried on and purchased.

Now I live, folded up, in a large wardrobe in a bedroom, next to differing clothes of different colours and shapes. There are many of us and I feel anonymous in my stack of siblings. The top is taken off at the beginning of each day and worn over a bra and jeans. I am soft and drapey and slide around and move around easily and comfortably. I travel from Camden to Holborn every day and back, walking both ways and sitting in an office. My role is to be unremarkable, generic, boring. I don't want to stand out in a sea of navy, grey and black t-shirts.

At the end of the day, I am dropped into a blue and white hamper where I wait to be washed. Even though I am cheap t-shirt and anonymous, I am treated carefully; always washed on delicate with delicate detergent. I don't want to fall apart afterall. After drying, I am folded again and stowed back into the dark wardrobe awaiting my time to be armour once again.

I remember being purchased by a Chinese woman in her mid-twenties. She seemed agitated and when she found me, she was delighted. She took me and a few of my siblings into the changing room where I was tried on over and over again in different permutations and with photos taken. It was quite exhausting!

After she decided that we would the be the t-shirt, I was taken back to the rack and every inch of us inspected. In particular the seams and hems were checked for straightness and evenness. Five of us were chosen from dozens as the neatest and most perfect looking, and we were all taken together on hangers to be paid for.

Jane

The hot sun peaks through the gaps in the slats giving stealth illuminations to the room. The cold white tiles are balm to my feet. The flat cushions with floral designs sit in the bamboo casing. You settle me down for a nap to rest my tired eye and go to fetch a suitable cover. The thin weave sits lightly on my warm skin and the loose threads. The panda looks up at me with caring eyes. In that moment we don't speak; we can't speak, but your gesture tells me things that language cannot describe. Where words will not do, it shows love and caring. Although distant, I remember this forever. A fleeting moment that probably didn't revisit you.

freshly laundered and pressed
folded neatly, tucked among countless others,
waiting to be chosen

light peaks through the wooden slats into the
cool darkness.
Suddenly, the space is illunminated and
a hand reaches into take the lucky one
The creases unwind as their fingertips

hold my frayed edges. Fine woven cream threads
My image is revealed.
The Easter bear lowered down onto the
'jolie chifille', who sleeps in the room
providing comfort and love in the close
heat
'She's not from round here' but he seems to
know her well somehow
Few words are uttered but she seems to enjoy my presence. Not as much as that other piece of
knitted cloth that has barely left the floor. No need to compete. For I am leaving my dark space,
folded and packed.

Fei

I was the outfit made and prepared for my journey to take its owner from one place to another.
Travelled across the world. I am of that time, that era. My style was of that time. No one uses me
now. Would I be worn if my owner could fit in me? Perhaps for special occassions. I smell as I did
when my old owner first had me made. I haven't been worn very much once I came to the UK. My
new owner now only keeps me in a bag in a cupboard, she doesn't celebrate me, for what I
represent e.g. my owner leaving to start a new life.

I feel rough, man made to last, that what my owner could afford at the time. Dependenable, long
lasting, easy to use/wear. Probably not washed since I was last worn.

-My job was to give a story of confidence, represent new life, fitting in with the style that I thought
the UK had at that time but still with Chinese/ Hong Kong twist. Made in my owners area where
they lived in Hong Kong.

- I was put away for years and only found whilst clearing out. Not celebrated by my old owner
either, but kept for a reason as my old owner isn't a hoarder, sentimental but the fact she kept me and
not other things is significant- in the back of her mind. And for my new owner too!

Elaine

Wrapped and stuffed into a bag. Smells of dim sum and noise. Sense of feeling close to water.
Opened and placed onto quite a shy child- she doesn't seem sure if she wants to take me and put me
on.

My arms are stroked and slowly the child comes around to the idea of wearing me. She becomes

comfortables inside of me hooped like a blanket It feels safe and warm. She knows she will value this where she is going to. It will be the last time I am in the house of my purchaser and to be taken far away. It will be the last time I am where I am from.

2.
Ignored and hung only to be seen through eyes of new comers to see whilst hung in hall way with other memories and of the past. Only seen as it shines so much and illuminating its goldish shine/
Hung next to another object of childhood memories only different generation. It almost shouts at you from the wall- but often not seen. Gifted from grandmother to travel to colder climates, it's a parting gift. Given at a last dim sum in Hong Kong. Out grown and packed in crispy sellepane wrapping with paper backing- accompanied by a sachet of moth repellent. Hand made with stitched in fabric pouch. Worn like a comfort blanket on plane journey back to the life previously had, but new experienced from perspective of new items gathered and collected in Hong Kong to be taken to London. It holds comfort through the silk it adds weight like a blanket through the filling. Cotton inside green turquiseded areas and trees through labels of Chinese stitches and the smell of dim sum dishes through all the bamboo steamers and banana leave covered rice. Old plain rice, spring onion in congee. (In complete)

Jessica

My gender is a much more significant part of my identity than my race, in many ways- I work in a very international place and so being non-white is not unusual. Equally I live in a place with a lot of non-white people, especially for a Chinese person, so I don't feel out of place there either. I feel that a big part of having the life I've chosen is that I made a pact with myself a number of years ago that I would always try to say yes to things first. This has meant I've had lots of of really great experiences and met lots of really interesting people. My being female hasn't really impacted on this negatively but I do sometimes look back and worry that things could have gone very badly for me. It hasn't stopped me continuing to say yes to things however, and I hope it never does.

As a paid of headphones, I go everywhere. Even when Just taking the rubbish down to the basement bins, or going grocery shopping. I am a constant companion. Always in use when outside the flat, and perched on the bedside table on top of the radio alarm clock when not in use. Occassionally plugged in, but not very often due to having a long battery life. It's a hard life sometimes, and I am getting rather battered with the passing of time. I've been sat on, dropped, squashed, folded, broken, repaired. As long as I'm still functional, however, I'll still be in daily use. I am an object of function and practicality, but also aesthetics- that colour was very deliberately chosen afterall. I was intentionally chosen. I have pretty much only ever been used by a single person- never lent out or borrowed in my years of service. I think this will not change and I will remain used by the one single person until no longer functional.

I remember being laid bare, opened by, stripped of everything I contained. Items pulled out of me, laid out one by one on the table in order. Each item explained and then scattered with careful hands. I was bought on a stall, the last of my pattern. She begged for me, for my laid-aisde pattern, for this one specific bag that would become something precious over time and with care and love. She filled

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one, over time, with the things that would come to dictate my usage- every individual item carefully chosen for practicality but also beauty and aesthetics.

Weiyi

Relaxation for five minutes can take you on a journey that would take weeks or days. My mind tracked back into the corner of a kitchen squatting on a stool with the weighty, solid, stable stone grinder infront of me. The sunlight stressing through the kitchen window. The sound of my mother clattering the pots and pan to prepare for our big mission; to quence the expectant thrist of the family for the sweet satisfying table dou jiong- or in Hakka tew jiong. First the squashed yellow soya beans piled up before me are daunting- how can the small hole of the enormous grinder possibily produce enough milk? With a jug of water by my side, I start to fill the hole with beans and add the water- I turn the wooden handle- the weight against me but soon it turns and grinds and it is easier- the milk flows out of the stone groove into a bucket- the task has begun.

For the past 20 years or more, I have been present in the mind of my owner only as an object of significance not to be thrown away but I am not used for the function that I was made. There are various dark spaces that I have been kept- under a bed- in the bedroom- now under an old shangbai kitchen cupboar in a garage. There is a sense of the temporary as I know that I am important but have not found my special resting place.

I remember being useful. I was the important object that would provide food- an object that would provide security to a woman moving to a new country with her family- Questions she asks herself- where will the dou jiang come from, where will the tofu come from, how can I make us feel at home. As a mother she was a provider of basis needs- food was important- I was important. But in the new country I was not placed in the kitchen immediately, more urgent tasks were required of this mother who had 5 children- a sixth came [something] up all the space in her mind, a restaurant to run. Perhaps she thought she would provide tofu for the restaurant?

When that 6th child was 9 or 10, I was brought back into the corner of the kitchen, she and her child made us of me again. My purpose, function and role came alive. Now these are memories, such is my journey, only discovered recently.

3.

Times I usually get taken out and when someone is not feeling well or need nurturing food. My interior is filled with lovingly chopped up pieces of beef- not mince- this is important. It has to be small piece of the best quality beef to produce the most nourishing drink, oh and the ginger to bring out flavour and add an additional kick and nurtrition of its own. Women I believe need this, this mother believes this and so do the daughters who receive her love and use through this thoughtful preposition.

Water poured into my outer body and then we are all completely pipped onto the stove to boil- cook and summer. I am not much used anymore, a cupboard shelf is where I have pride and place, but I am important, I am the object of memories of being nurtured.

Workshop 2

Charlotte

Dark. Heavier than the other objects here: 1 pair of earrings- delicate, an orgami bird, a hankerchief. Stronger than everything here which cushion the fall as the dark space moves. Warm, falling, crashing but embracingly, not destructively. Crashing in darkness outliving everything else where. Just as precious but stronger. Confident in the moving overturning dark, in the knowledge soon the light will come. Always hanging on when flung about. Most solid and loved. Warm. Soft. The light may come but the movement will not stop. And if the movement stops then fear sets in for the wait. It's not a competition because everything has its own function. Darkness cloaks purpose but not presence.

Rose

She treasures me, she trusts me, she knows failure and she knows success with me. We've been through it all together- we'd gone to heaven and to hell and then back again. Always together, always trusting, always belonging. We create, we mend, we tear, we join. Together we 'd experienced birth, we've experienced death. We are the objects of beauty, both of us.

Water sounds sunlight bird clear crystal sparkling green leaves ferns meandering free smiles warmth love calm beauty flower garden vest love life confusion truth pain clarity forgiveness honesty loyal hands hugs peave future love peaceful closure growth wisdom compassion death

Michelle

Bright yellow
Sunny warm lemon yellow
No hints of blue or green or red tones Just
the primary yellow. Pure and simple.

It explodes and move through my vision
Through colours of blue, pink, purple, red, orange, black, grey.
But never through white or other tones of yellow.
It merges with other colours but comes out through the foreground intermittently and when you least expect it

It is not forced
But it is thereforeIt gives
But does not expect anything in returnedA yellow that I've seen before but have not
fully explored

2.

This is a two-way movement. Left. Right.

But within the two way movement, it spins and expands. It contracts and changes forms. It can get hot and it can get cold. Liquid or solid.

The movement as maleable as you need it to be. And as hard and strong as you expect it to be. The movement is as versatile as you imagine it to be. And as limited as you wish it to be.

The world in itself is flat yet round, long but short, one way or the other way, up yet down.

- More than just a binary
- And encountering more than one change in its lifetime
- Yet always there: continuously stable in all its forms

Appendix D: Documentation of Art Workshops

(i) First Generation 'Women's Group' at Haringey Community Centre, Turnpike Lane

Workshop Theme: *Still Life Collage,* 15th February, 2017

To develop the participant's skill in making, the women were asked to recreate this still life scene using collaging and printing.
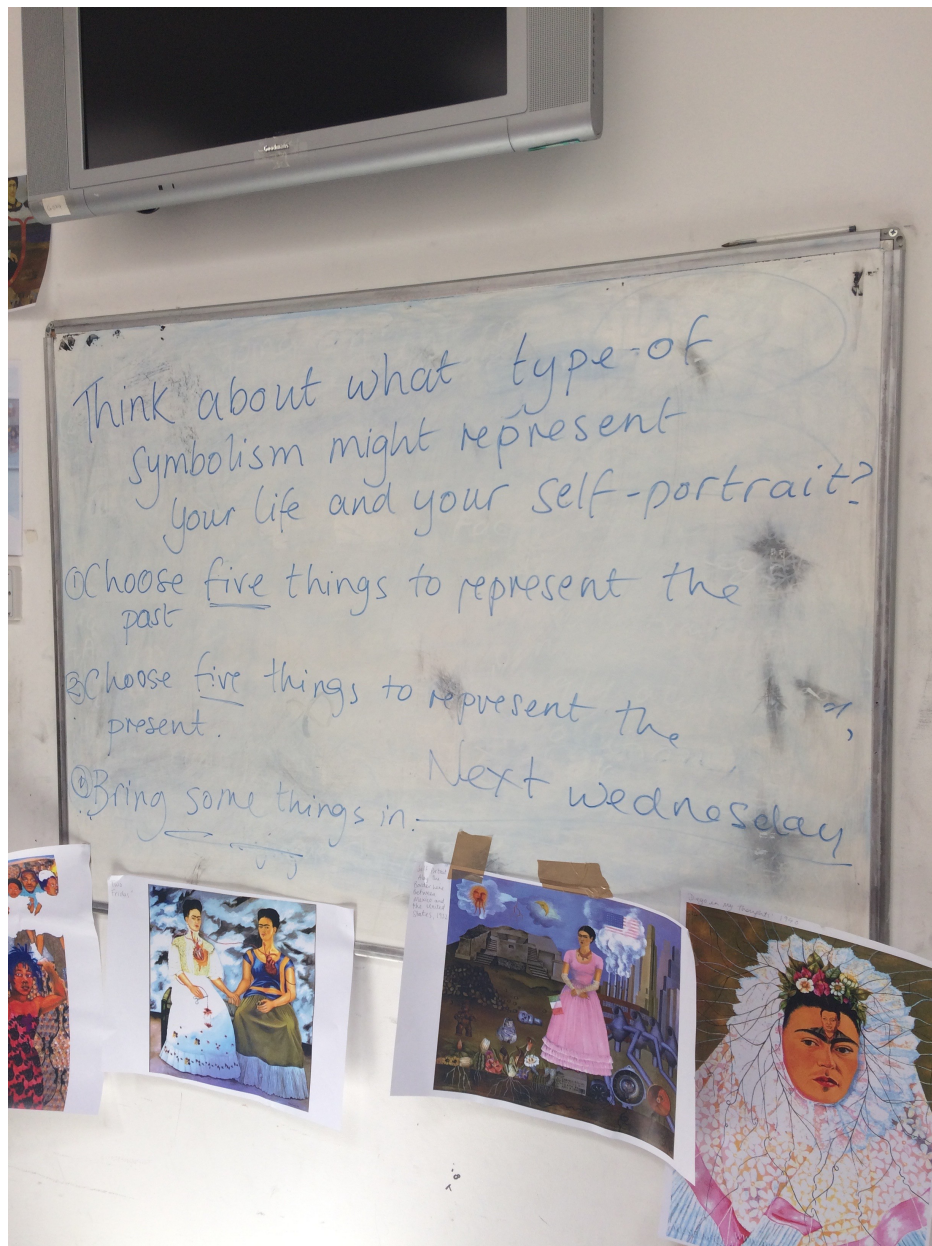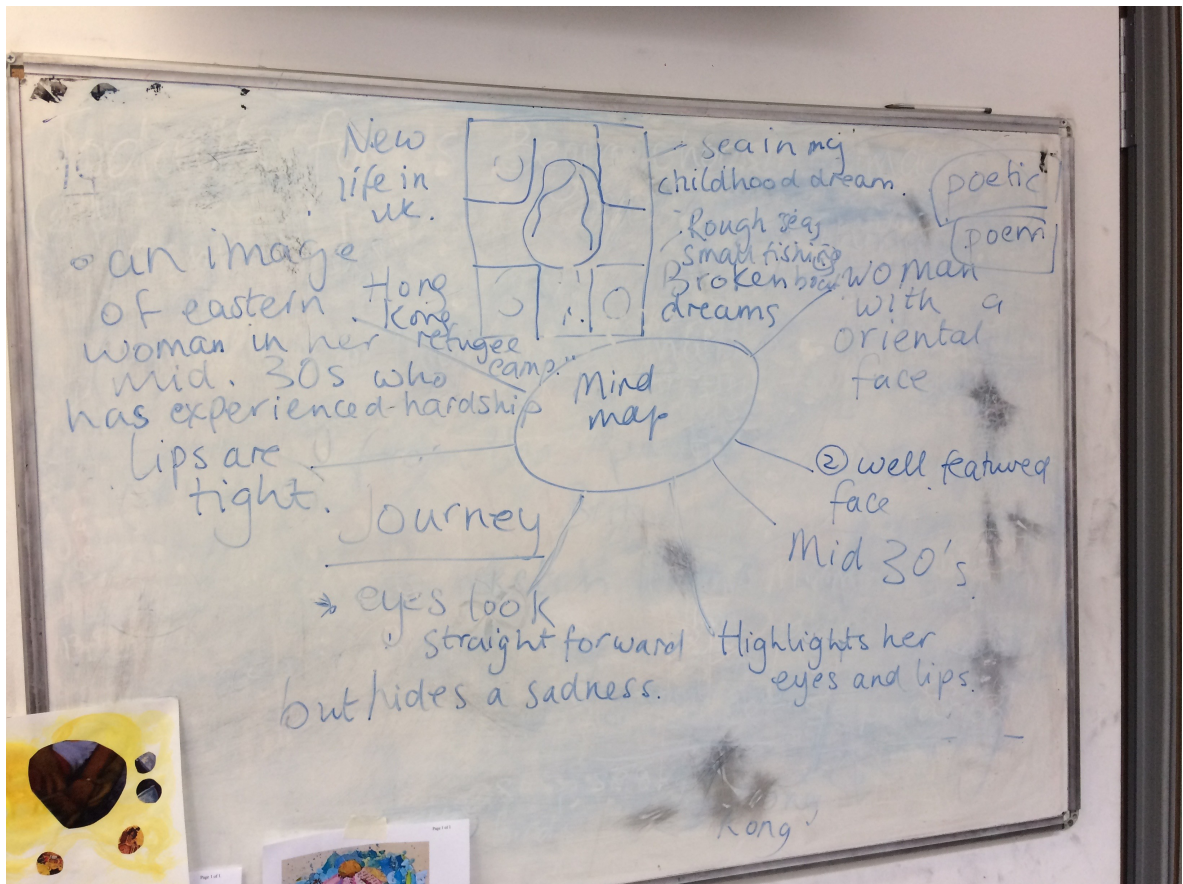
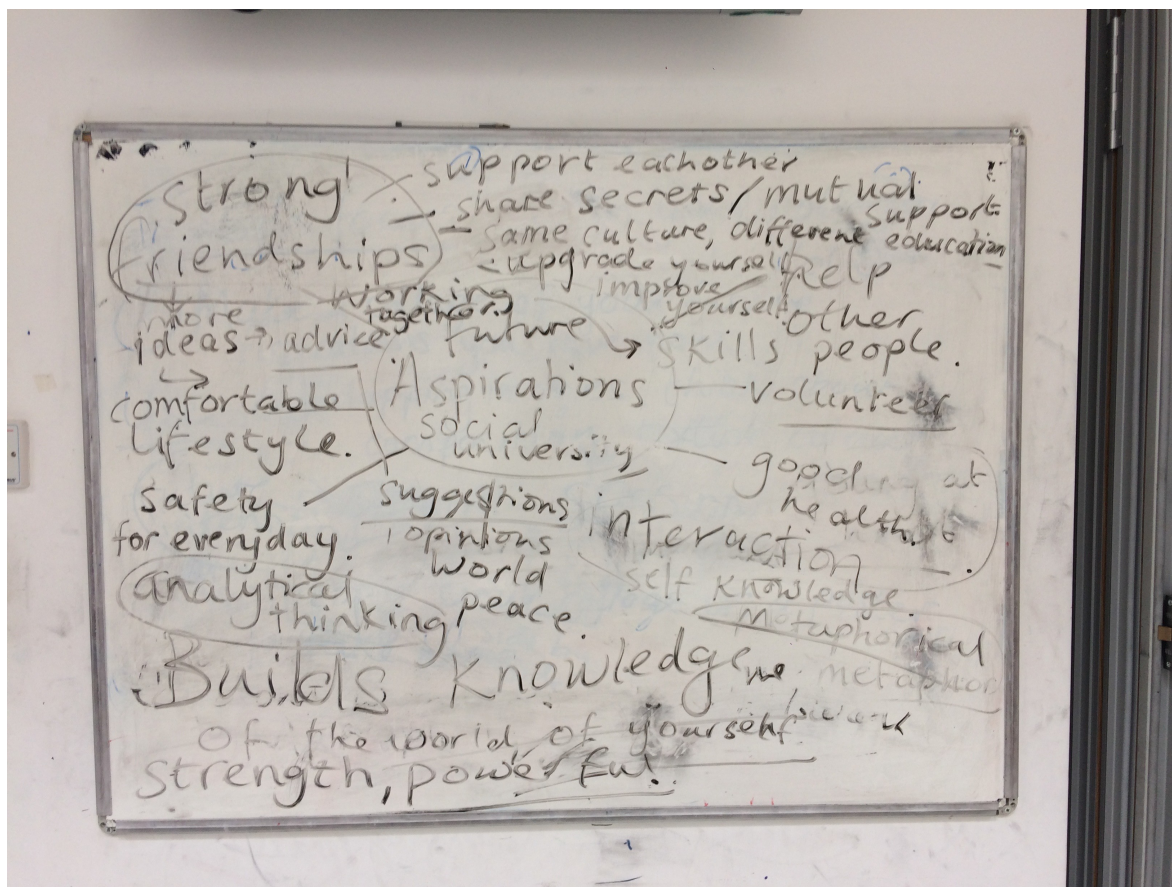Workshop theme: Mind map of the self, 26th April 2017

Women working in groups to finish their collective self portrait

Workshop Theme: 'Sisterhood' and 'Future Aspirations', 7th June 2017

A group mind map of ideas for their artwork themed on the ideas of 'sisterhood' and 'future aspirations'

The Women's Group in front of their finished artworks and celebrating their final workshop.

(ii) Second Generation Art Workshop at UoW on the 27th June, 2017

Group 'Show and Tell' where women explain the significant of their object to the group.

Group "Show and Tell" where women explain the significant of their object to the group.

Collection of women's objects including a Chinese bain maire, mien lap Chinese jacket, headphones, a 1970's Hong Kong tailored dress, green t-shirts, pyjamas and a lucky charm.

Experimental writing activity where women were asked to write from the position of the object in the present but without using the first person address of 'I'.

Mono-printing group demonstration into using inks and mark making techniques

(iii) Second Generation Art Workshop at UoW on the 10th June, 2017

The Object Stories Of British Chinese Women (Online Exhibition)

Please find the disc the online exhibition attached to the back and the online exhibition can only be accessed via www.objectstories.co.uk

Credits:

Design, Bethan Morgan
Translation, Sha Zhou