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# Shifting Selves: Home beyond the House

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# Background

- ▶ International population ageing
- ▶ National population ageing
- ▶ The population aged 65 and over is projected to increase for all four broad ethnic groups in New Zealand.



# Background

- ▶ Chinese people ageing in New Zealand
- ▶ Policy responses to ageing and ethnic issues in New Zealand
  - Positive ageing

“where people can age positively, where older people are highly valued and where they are recognised as an integral part of families and communities” (Ministry of Social Policy, 2001, p. 13).
  - Ageing in place

In New Zealand, ageing in place refers to “people’s ability to make choices in later life about where to live, and receive the support to do so” (Ministry of Social Policy, 2001, p. 10). The emphasis on ageing in place implies that older people would remain in the community, either in their family homes or in supported accommodation of some types, rather than moving into residential care.



# Background

- ▶ *The Positive Ageing in New Zealand: Diversity, Participation and Change* (Ministry of Social Development, 2001, p. 78–79)

The traditional ethnic family is characterised as being based on extended family systems with a strong emphasis on familial duty, cohesion, continuity between the generations, and interdependence of family members. A common perspective termed ‘ethnic compensation’ suggests that traditional ‘age-honouring’ cultures provide older people with a position of prestige within the family, thereby helping the ageing process. This is contrast to most Anglo-Saxon or modernised cultures in which the status of older people is reduced because of influences such as urbanisation, technology and education. ... [E]thnic families often prefer to care for older family members in their home, ... and are more likely to live in extended families because of both convenience and cultural values.

# Theoretical orientation: symbolic interactionism and the self

- ▶ The self is multiple as well as unified.
- ▶ The self is stable as well as transformative.
- ▶ The self is framed and shaped by relationships.
- ▶ Contemporary notions of the self challenge cultural dichotomies.



# Methods

- ▶ Three semi-structured interviews were conducted between April 2008 and September 2009.
- ▶ All participants took part in the first two interviews which employed the Western episodic interview technique.
- ▶ Ten participants participated in the third interview which employed an indigenous Chinese interview technique—*fangtan* (Li, 2010).
- ▶ *Fangtan*, a Chinese phrase, is comprised of two Chinese words: *fang* and *tan*. *Fang* means interviewing and asking questions, while *Tan* means dialogues and dialogical discussions.

# Methods

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



# Positive ageing in a new place

- ▶ Affordable and stable public housing
- ▶ Building safe neighbourhoods
- ▶ Engaging in local communities
- ▶ Hybridised transnational communities



# Affordable and stable public housing

- ▶ The majority of my participants wanted to live in public housing where they sought place attachments that gave them a sense of autonomy, stability, and community bonds.
- ▶ *Living in a state house is affordable for us. We can stay in this public house as long as we want. We have spent several years on making our home and knowing our neighbours. For example, I can even walk around my place in dark without running into my furniture because I know where my lounge suite, tables and chairs are. We don't want to move. The best thing of public housing is that it gives me a sense of stability.*  
(Ling, 73 yr-old female, living in NZ for 10 yrs & 5 mths)

# Affordable and stable public housing

- ▶ Public housing also offers the participants cultural connections to their home country.
- ▶ *I now live in a state house specifically designed for older people (see Figure 17). I like such a living arrangement. I had been living in state houses for years in China. I never thought I would live in a state house again in New Zealand. Living in a state house gives me a sense of belonging. I feel that I am a member of New Zealand society. (Hong, 75 yr-old female, living in NZ for 10 yrs & 8 mths)*





# Building safe neighbourhoods

- ▶ My participants often identified neighbourhood as a territorial area surrounding their houses.
- ▶ *I learnt English when I was young. I therefore can speak English. My husband studied in Russia for five years. He can speak Russian. One day, our Russian neighbour, whose children lived outside New Zealand, lost her wallet in a supermarket. She came to us for help. We went to the supermarket with her. She communicated with my husband in Russian. My husband translated what she said into Chinese to me. I explained to the staff member in the supermarket in English. The lady got her wallet back. (smiles) (Hong, 75 yr-old female, living in NZ for 10 yrs & 8 mths)*

# Building safe neighbourhoods

- ▶ Apart from the emotional bond and belonging, neighbourhoods may also encompass negative experiences.
- ▶ *Kids threw chips and eggs at my daughter's car. It's frightening. I will remind myself to be careful in the future. For example, lock my doors and windows when I go out, and not to walk closely to a stranger. (Tian, 69 yr-old male, living in NZ for 8 yrs)*





# Building safe neighbourhoods

- ▶ Such experiences were also evident in other participants' accounts.
- ▶ *In 2003, several older Chinese people were attacked by some kids in our neighbourhood. Some girls threw eggs at older Chinese people. A group of young men threw stones at an older Chinese couple while they were waiting by the bus stop near their home. A friend of mine has been afraid to leave his home since a kid hit him with a road cone. We didn't feel safe when we walked on the street even at as early as seven o'clock in the evening. (Hong, 75 yr-old female, living in NZ for 10 yrs & 8 mths)*



# Building safe neighbourhoods

- ▶ *We organised an informal meeting in our local community centre to talk about our worries for our personal safety. The victims spoke of kids throwing bottles at them, punching them and trying to take their purses. But only one person had gone to the police. A few were scared, but for most inability to speak English and the belief that the police would do nothing, stopped them from reporting the attacks. So we decided to act collectively. We approached Chinese newspapers and mainstream newspapers. The reporters disclosed the attacks. Our collective action pushed the police to set up a call centre for Asians in our community. A Chinese–Kiwi Friendship Programme was also established to help Kiwi people and older Chinese people to better know each other, to keep our neighbourhood safer together (Ming, 76 yr–old male, living in NZ for 5 yrs & 8 mths)*



# Building safe neighbourhoods



# Engaging in local communities

- ▶ While the participants defined neighbourhood as a territorial area, they defined community as a relational environment in which people share common interests, mainly referring to the Chinese community.
- ▶ *There is no Chinatown in New Zealand. But the Chinese is a big group in this city. We have a shopping centre like a Chinatown. There are many Chinese shops and food outlets over there (see Figure 20). I go to the shopping centre every day, collecting Chinese newspapers, meeting people and talking to my peers. (Tian, 69 yr-old male, living in NZ for 8 yrs)*





# Engaging in local communities

- ▶ Compared to the informal communal places such as Chinese shops and restaurants, the activities coordinated by Chinese organisations provide the participants with formal communal places in which they perceive their own belonging and attachment.
- ▶ *The Chinese association organises weekly meetings and parties. Every Friday morning we meet in a community centre for seminars and information sharing. Every Sunday we organise the ballroom dance party. Many of our members regard these two days as the most important days in the week. I participate in these two events every week. (Ping, 73 yr-old female, living in NZ for 7 yrs)*



# Engaging in local communities

- ▶ Tian's account shows the communal place provides him with a sense of identity via practical assistance in concrete tasks, such as a free haircut.
- ▶ *The gentleman offers us free haircuts. I really appreciate that. In China, we had such free haircuts in parks specifically catering for retired people. Now when I sit in the chair and have the haircut, I feel like I am in China. (Tian, 69 yr-old male, living in NZ for 8 yrs)*



# Engaging in local communities

- ▶ The library is a public space where many participants visited regularly.
- ▶ *My husband is a quiet and shy man. He doesn't like socialising. He therefore is not interested in joining any of the Chinese organisations. He goes to the library every day. There are Chinese books and magazines in the library. He can sit there for four or five hours reading those Chinese books and magazines. He once told me that he really enjoyed reading a book about Chinese migrants. He said he knew more about himself from other's stories. He also enjoys the friendly atmosphere in the library. The librarians are very nice to him. (Xue, 73 yr-old female, living in NZ for 9 yrs & 7 mths)*





# Engaging in local communities

- ▶ Throughout my thesis, I have emphasised how older Chinese migrants are not passive victims of circumstances or recipients of care. They care for others and are active community members making contributions to the community, for instance, through volunteering.
- ▶ *We receive benefits from the Government. We should in turn make a contribution to New Zealand. In a Chinese saying, “Without the big home, there are no little homes.” ... (Qian, 68 yr-old male, living in NZ for 7 yrs)*

# Engaging in local communities

- ▶ *I have been voluntarily teaching Tai Chi for years in New Zealand (see Figure 24) as I did in China. I had a Samoan student. She was my first non-Chinese student. She has [a problem with] obesity. After about one and a half years of Tai Chi practicing, her weight reduced from 84 kilograms to 60 kilograms. She was also recovered from her memory loss caused by a car accident. She got a job and removed herself from the beneficiary list. She now teaches her fellow Samoans Tai Chi. (Ming, 76 yr-old male, living in NZ for 5 yrs & 8 mths)*





# Hybridised transnational communities

- ▶ *After a large earthquake struck Sichuan, China on May 12, we learnt from the news that tens of thousands of people were killed. The Chinese association organised us to donate money to support the victims of the earthquake (see Figure 26). We watched TV news every day so that we knew the most updated situation in Sichuan. New Zealand people showed great compassion and donated money to the earthquake survivors. We really appreciate that. (Ming, 76 yr-old male, living in NZ for 5 yrs & 8 mths)*



# Hybridised transnational communities

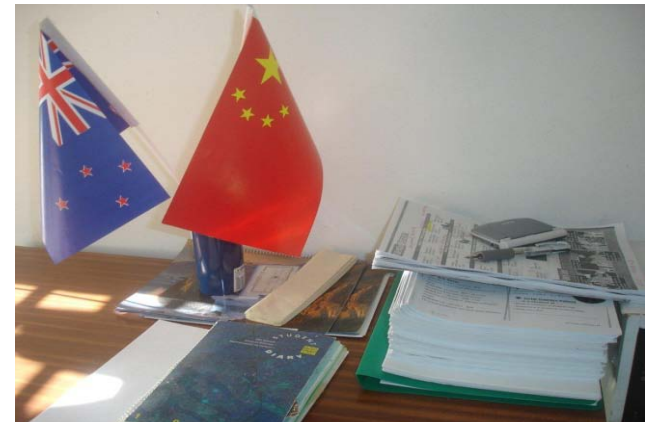
- ▶ *We installed a satellite dish which is used to subscribe to Chinese TV channels. We can receive more than 30 TV programmes from China. My wife loves to watch Chinese soap operas. I like news, talk shows and history programmes. We keep pace with China now... I phone my sisters and brothers at least once a month, sometimes once a week. I also talk to my former colleagues and friends via phone. Our phone conversations sometimes last more than one hour. I told them of my life here in New Zealand. They told me about their lives in China. We also have discussions on issues we were interested in. (Zhang, 65 yr-old male, living in NZ for 8 yrs & 8 mths)*



# Hybridised transnational communities

- ▶ *I returned to China for a 70-day holiday. It was fantastic. I visited the cities where I had worked. I visited my birthplace as well. I met 15 siblings and cousins. Well, it was a wonderful trip... Although my China trip was fantastic, I see New Zealand as my home. Look, there are two flags on my desk—the national flags of China and of New Zealand (see Figure 28). I truly, truly love the two flags. China is my first homeland, while New Zealand is my second homeland. I sometimes referred New Zealand to “our New Zealand” when I talked to my son. My son said, “Whoa, Mom, you are now a New Zealander.” (chuckles)*

(Tong, 70 yr-old female,  
living in NZ for 12 yrs & 6 mths)





# Discussions

- ▶ Older Chinese migrants desire ageing in places to which they are connected and belong.
- ▶ They are attached to places where they experience difficulties and, more importantly, where they cultivate, acculturate, re-cobweb and hybridise the self.
- ▶ Movement is central to understanding ageing and ageing in place, particularly in the lives of older Chinese immigrants who often move across borders, and thus live their lives between sites such as family homes, neighbourhood, community, New Zealand and China.
- ▶ In that sense, place is a process; ageing is a process; ageing in place is a process too.

# Discussions

- ▶ My findings present a progressive and positive storyline—the self is developed, transformed and grown by exposure and openness to spatial, cultural and social changes.
- ▶ As a result, their homes transcend time and space. For older Chinese immigrants, home is conflated with or related not only to the house, but also to family, self, identity and their migration journeys.

# Policy implications

- ▶ Policy making should start with how older Chinese migrants' settlement processes are conceptualised through to the implementation of policies that address the ongoing ageing and housing needs of older Chinese migrants living in New Zealand.
- ▶ Understanding older Chinese migrants' identity constructions and aged care practices from a transnationalist perspective suggests a need for policy makers to revisit policies related housing and aged care, to ensure that these policies reflect the everyday realities of older Chinese (and other ethnic) migrants.