BALING HOU

BALING HOU

A Photographic Exploration of the Chinese Post-80s Generation in the urban cities of China.

Diya Isabella Liu

This exegesis is submitted to AUT University in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the degree of
Master of Art & Design

June 2015

PgDip, BA. Art & Design AUT University, New Zealand (2015)

Table of contents

Table of images

_____

Figure 1. *Chinese family planning propaganda poster.* Retrieved from https://globalvoicesonline.org/2012/06/15/china-late-term-abortion-forced-by-corrupt-officials/

Figure 2. *Chinese family planning propaganda poster.* Retrieved from http://smashalloldthings.blogspot.co.nz/2012/06/turning-caverns-into-thoroughfares.html

Figure 3. *Members of a traditional Chinese family.* Private Family Photograph Collection, 1970s.

 Figure 4. *Dressed with the similar hairstyle*. Private Family Photograph Collection, 1960s.

Figure 5. *Posing with the 'Little Red Book'.* Private Family Photograph Collection, 1960s.

Figure 6. *Posing against Mao Zedong's background.* Private Family Photograph Collection.

Figure 7. Liu, D. (2015). *Initial experiment – photographing a post–80s family portrait.* China. 2015

Figure 8. Liu, D. (2015). *Initial experiment – photographing a post–80s couple in their bedroom.* China. 2015

Figure 9. Liu, D. (2015). *Initial experiment – photographing elder parents in their bedroom.* China. 2015

Figure 10. Liu, D. (2015). *Initial experiment – photographing elder parents in their bedroom.* China. 2015

Figure 11. Liu, D. (2015). *Individual portrait with the blank background 1.* China. 2015

Figure 12. Liu, D. (2015). *Individual portrait with the blank background 2.* China. 2015

Figure 13. Liu, D. (2015). *Individual portrait with the blank background 3.* China. 2015

Figure 29. Liu, D. (2015). *Li Xiangquan checking his roster for the week.* Guangzhou, China. 2015.

Figure 30. Liu, D. (2015). *Li Xiangquan's shared flat with his colleagues.* Guangzhou, China. 2015

Figure 31. Liu, D. (2015). *Li Xiangquan's dining area.* Guangzhou China. 2015

Figure 32. Liu, D. (2015). *Li Xiangquan is playing games on phone, which is his only entertainment after work.* Guangzhou China. October 2015

Figure 33. Liu, D. (2015). *Eva Lu at home with her son and parents.* Guangzhou China. October 2015

Figure 34. Liu, D. (2015). *Eva Lu with her son Danny and her dog Louis.* Guangzhou China. October 2015

Figure 35. Liu, D. (2015). *Eva Lu is a tattoo enthusiast.* Guangzhou China. October 2015

Figure 36. Liu, D. (2015). *Grandpa with grandson Danny.* Guangzhou China. October 2015

Figure 37. Liu, D. (2015). *When Eva has time she takes her son to McDonald's for treats.* Guangzhou China. October 2015.

Figure 38. Liu, D. (2015). *The Book covers design.* Publication book.

Figure 39. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (insert page of senior generation).*

Figure 40. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (insert page of questionnaire).*

Figure 41. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (storyline design layout of each individual) 1.*

Figure 42. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (storyline design layout of each individual) 2.*

Figure 43. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (Storyline design layout of each individual) 3.*

Figure 44. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (Storyline design layout of each individual) 4.*

Attestation of Authorship

'I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgements is made in the acknowledgements'.

25th June 2015

....
Signed   Date

Acknowledgments

Intellectual Property Rights

25th June 2015

Signed ....   Date ....

ABSTRACT

—————————————————

The aim of this practice-led research is to create a body of photographic work that explores the characteristics of the Baling Hou [八零后] and their life in urban China. Baling Hou refers to the generation born in the 1980s and is commonly known as the post-80s generation.

The research seeks to highlight, by way of photography, how China's economic reform as well as the implementation of the one-child policy have changed the composition of the traditional Chinese family structure and the consequent impact on the diversity of social lifestyle, values, attitudes and expectations for Baling Hou who reside in the urban cities of Beijing, Yichang and Guangzhou.

Utilizing the author's personal experience as a member of the post-80s generation as well as specific strategies drawn from ethnographic study, the research offers a personal reflection on how this generation has been shaped by a macro-environment of social transformation in contemporary China. This research is constituted as practice based work 80%, accompanied by an exegesis 20%.

Introduction

The genesis of this project can be found in the confrontational but supportive relationship between my parents and myself, in which I have at times been criticized as a typically spoiled and selfish member of the one-child generation. As an only child who grew up in China but was educated in New Zealand, I have experienced the expectation of duty and unyielding pressure as well as a resolute and concomitant love and attention that is so constituent of Chinese parentage.

The objective of the project began with a desire to seek clarification on the character, nature and identity of the post-80s generation via personalities for whom individuality assumes a greater prominence compared that of their parents generation. The validity and pursuit of personal expression is still contested by elements of modern Chinese society and while my research indicates that post-80s maintain a respect for the necessity of tradition and collectivism, my interaction with post-80s suggests a desire to assert their autonomy. As a member of the post-80s generation, born in Wuhan and raised in Guangzhou,

I've sought the opportunity to examine my own identity in parallel to that of young urban Chinese caught between doctrinaire collectivism and an expressive individuality more commonly associated with Western culture, one that has seeded throughout the metropolises and cityscapes of 21st Century China.

The strategy of this project is to develop working relationships with a select group of persons who belong to the post-80s as well as the urban environment they inhabit, using strategies including interviews to inform photography that is emblematic of the subject's current social mobility and state. As such, the project breaches topics, many of which will be beyond the scope of the proposal, that offer a window into the interrogative relationship the post-80s generation has with family, with their environment, their sense of filial duty and yearning for expressive opportunities beyond the purview of ordained, traditional Chinese order and stability.

One

Positioning perspective

1.1 Identifying as Post 80s

The resources of 'self' and 'identity' encompass life experiences, elements of local culture, language, biographical particulars, and other aspects that can be consolidated into a personal story (Sabet, 2011). In the process of self-identification, it is common for people to invoke narrative resources that relate to age and a life course. This life course can be thought of as "a sequence of culturally defined stages or roles in life that individuals enact during their lifetime" (Giele & Elder, 1998). That is to say, to reflect on and explore one's life course, through the different stages of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

I was born as the one-child in my family in China during the 1980s, surrounded by love and attention from my parents and grandparents. My family created a very easy and comfortable environment for me so that I did not need to worry about anything. Subsequent to adolescence, I came to New Zealand with my parents, which proved to be a turning point in my life. I started to adapt to the impact and challenge of language, culture, and most importantly, independence. I came from a one-child family, whereas my New Zealand friends all had siblings. Under the influence of a new environment and culture, my parents adapted their way of parenting as I moved away from my family and learned to be independent at the age of eighteen.

Today, when I review my identity, I consider myself to have a cross-cultural background as a "kiwiasian" or a "chiwi" girl, who came of age in New Zealand with a Chinese heritage. I am not a typical Chinese post-80s; my new immigrant life has brought me a different experience with a new identity. This helps me to make judgments and share my personal opinions from a slightly distanced perspective. I feel that this perspective positively informs my role as a photographer and researcher in this project.

Personally it is crucial for me to also explore my own identity in the formation of this research project. This helps me to understand who I am and to appreciate my heritage. In this project, I would like to put forward my perspective on Chinese post-80s culture through photographic work that reflects my identity as well as that of my subjects.

Two

DEFINING THE BALING HOU GENERATION

2.1 The Background of the 'One-child' Policy

Chinese post-80s generation refers to those who were born between 1980 and 1989. This generation were born amidst a period of intense economic transformation and were the first under the one-child policy period that formally began in 1980. Today, they are aged between 26 -35 and are often considered as the current 'backbone' of China.

It is very common to encounter popular topics about the post-80s generation in newspapers, magazines, and television. The media uses the term Baling Hou when describing the social conditions experienced by the post-80s (Davis, 1984). Baling Hou is the Mandarin Hanyu pinyin of [八零后],[1] referring to the children of the post-80s as the 'collapsed generation'.

The one-child policy in China is a significant family planning policy formulated by the Chinese government in the late 1970s. By the 1980s, this version of family planning was put into practice in both the urban and rural areas of China in 1980 with the passing of the Second Marriage Law, a revised version of the New Marriage Law [新婚姻法] first passed in 1950. The revised law significantly changed the structure of Chinese families and thus Chinese society. According to Tang, Zhang, Wang and Feng (2010) the average size of a traditional Chinese family prior to the one-child policy was between four to six members (p. 28). This was rearranged into what became known as a "4-2-1" family structure.[2] Under this system, in most cities four grandparents and two parents would focus on bringing up one child. The one-child policy synchronised with China's "reform and opening" policies, which were initiated by the statesman, Deng Xiaoping.

To promote the policy, the Chinese central government launched propaganda materials promoting favourable attitudes towards fertility throughout China primarily in the form of slogans such as "do a good job in family planning to improve the economic development" and "fewer births, more quality births" (Fig. 1 & 2).

---

1   Hanyu Pinyin is the system of pronunciation for Chinese characters.

2   Under the one-child policy, the optimal family structure is one child, two parents, and four grandparents. It is commonly called "4-2-1" (Yi, 2013). Wang Peian, Vice Minister of the National Health and Family Planning Commission refers to the sixth national census conducted in 2010, noting an "average family size of 3.1 persons… 0.34 fewer than the number reported by the fifth national census. Comparing to 4.43 persons per family on average in the early 1980s, it represents a reduction of 1.33 persons". For a more detailed summary of China's shifting population, including family size and structure, see Population Bulletin (2004) Vol. 59, No. 2.

Figure 1. *Chinese family planning propaganda poster.*
Retrieved April 21, 2015. From: https://globalvoicesonline.org/2012/06/15/china-late-term-abortion-forced-by-corrupt-officials/

Figure 2. *Chinese family planning propaganda poster.*
Retrieved April 21, 2015. From http://smashalloldthings.blogspot.co.nz/2012/06/turning-caverns-into-thoroughfares.html

The implementation of the one-child policy has changed the structure of the traditional family unit in both urban and rural areas across the breadth of the country. In terms of economic structures and level of civic development in rural and urban locales, and taking into account the contemporary attitude towards fertility, and as such family planning has gained more acceptability and has thoroughly succeeded in the city districts of urban China (Hou, 2009).

In the decades after economic reform opened China up to greater international influence, many of the major cities have undergone a process of accelerated urbanization. Today, more than half of China's population reside in large, populous cities compared with a mere eighteen percent in the 1970s (Xing & Zhang, 2013). Larger, more populous cities bring greater benefits and prosperity. An improved standard of living is a fundamental incentive that advances progress in technology, social development and infrastructure. Greater human

capital, efficient investment, cooperation between state politics and local jurisdiction, freedom in managing local development and better systems of healthcare are all advantages that well-managed cities provide (Xing & Zhang, 2013). Millions of people have abandoned their rural station to seek an improved life premised on these perceived advantages.

The one-child policy has brought both advantages and disadvantages to the family structure of the post-80s generation. There are vast differences in the implementation of this policy throughout rural and urban areas[3]. These differences are a consequence of approaches to economic development and the density of populations in these areas.

---

3 According to Xueyuan Hou (2009), this disparity is due to different economic conditions. Urban couples are only allowed to have one child, but there are exceptions based on population density and labour necessity for rural couples, ethnic minorities and parents without any siblings.

2.2 Characterising the Post-80s

The one-child policy has restructured the traditional family unit and thus has significantly influenced the experience of childhood in the 1980s. Stanat (2006) suggests that "the one-child policy makes the term 'little emperor' appropriate in that these single children live under a '4-2-1' model" (p. 90). He also observes that the post-80s generation has received much attention from social media. Compared to older generations, post-80s are considered "spoiled," "irresponsible," "selfish," "materialistic," and "the most rebellious" generation (Farrar, 2013). The childhood experience of people from this generation is often characterised as lonely. Sabet (2011) interviewed Leah, one of the post-80s children, who expressed this feeling of loneliness:

"Parents only have one kid. We grow up very lonely. It is hard to do team work in company. I always do something alone. Go to school alone, study alone. Summer holiday have to stay at home alone and watch TV. Parents lock you up in the house. I used to watch the American TV show - Growing in [sic] Pains. There are four kids in the family, but we are alone". (p. 23)

Loneliness and selfishness have often featured as characteristics of the post-80s generation in urban China. When the economic reforms began in the 1980s, most of these children were poor and lonely and had no access to material leisure goods; these children became the beneficiaries of economic reforms. The post-80s were, for example, the first generation to experience education reforms, which entailed engaging with a full nine-year compulsory education programme (Zhang, 2010, p.22). Compared to that of their parents, the reformed system provided many more opportunities to the post-80s as well as unexpected social pressures and challenges. Despite these pressures, the reforms opened a door to a generation who are arguably more open-minded than their parents' generation having been exposed to, and increasingly influenced by Western consumer culture. As Stanat suggests, "this economic transformation is indicative of China's transition from a planned economy to a consumer economy in which teenagers, instead of their government and parents, enthusiastically make their own individual decisions. This change should not be looked at lightly, considering its clash with traditional Chinese culture" (p. 49).

The perception that the post-80s identity was self-centered and materialistic was challenged by two major events occurring in 2008. These were the magnitude 8.0 earthquakes in Sichuan Province and the Beijing Olympics. Lin Li, writing for Xinhua Net in 2008, reported that thousands of youngsters rushed to the quake scene to support the local people. They developed online charities to collect donations for those victims who had lost their homes and schools, as well as those who suffered serious injury. Most of these rescuers were born after 1980. There were also many post-80s students overseas who stood up to protest against Tibetan independence to "free the Olympics from politics" in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics. The protests occurred in many countries, and these young groups of protesters were passionate and strongly patriotic towards China (Li, 2008). As outcomes of national pride, the performances of the post-80s in these events were full of strength and furthered a positive reputation of China. However, as Chinese post-80s author Ximu suggests, this group was not a politically aware generation compared with the older generations of the 60s and 70s. Ximu (2012) says, "the post-80s generation, although independent and self-centred, does not have a natural interest for freedom, democracy or the right to vote." The unique characteristics of the Chinese post-80s generation provide many diverse perspectives to draw from.

Michael Stanat expresses an optimistic perspective of the post-80s. He says "Chinese post-80s are the future leaders of the world's next superpower" and characterises China's Baling Hou as "optimistic about the future, having a newfound affinity for consumerism and fully accepting their historic role helping to turn the world's fastest growing major economy into the next superpower" (p. 1-4).

2.3 Generation 'Parent'

A sense of identity always helps us to better understand who we are, especially when it comes to a sense of collective identity within a generation. Consequently, a comparison is often made between the post-80s generation and their parents. The generation born between 1950 and 1965 experienced a wholly different social environment in China. They grew up around several major historical events such as the Cultural Revolution. The universities were closed down by the Chinese government during this time because of a dysfunctional social system that led to a period of starvation in 1963. Educated youth were sent to farm camps in the countryside (Sabet, 2011). My parents were amongst these people.

People of the older generations have many siblings, as the traditional Chinese family comprised four to eight members (Fig. 3). During the ten years of the Cultural Revolution[4], young people were living in a collective and authoritarian social environment. They wore the same clothes, had the same hairstyle, and strangely enough even adopted the same poses in photographs (Fig. 4). Most of the time, they were required to have a copy of the "Little Red Book"[5] in their possession.

The Little Red Book was a collection of Chairman Mao Zedong's quotations and commonly appeared in group photos (Fig. 5). As admirers and followers, people liked to pose in front of the camera reading or simply clasping Chairman Mao's literature with his image in the background, a common expression of being 'politically correct' (Fig. 6). This generation grew up in the high-pressure "scars" era[6]. For many, their passions and dreams, character and values were destroyed. They had learnt not to speak their opinion in public, or even at home, for fear of punishment.

---

4 The Cultural Revolution lasted from 1966 to 1976. It was a "complex social upheaval that began as a struggle between Mao Zedong and other top party leaders for dominance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and went on to affect all of China with its call for "continuing revolution." (Spence, 2001)

5 The book is an infamous symbol of Mao Zedong's political thought. Admirers of Mao Zedong can frequently be seen holding the book, gripped tightly in their hand and waving it over their heads in a (sometimes orchestrated) display of joy.

6 According to a statement by Ye Jiangying on December 13, 1978, the Cultural Revolution affected 100 million people, killed 20 million, and caused 80 billion yuan of losses. Wilson Center, n.d.)

Figure 3. *Members of a traditional Chinese family.*
Private Family Photograph Collection, 1970s.

Figure 4. *Dressed with the similar hairstyle.* Private Family
Photograph Collection, 1960s.

Figure 5. *Posing with the 'Little Red Book'.*
Private Family Photograph Collection, 1960s.

Figure 6. *Posing against Mao Zedong's background.*
Private Family Photograph Collection.

Tan Ni (2012) has discussed the period of the "parents" generation; how their life values were easily distorted, and the importance of being accepted and affirmed by a collective society. However, this acceptance and certainty was vulnerable. Therefore, the most reliable way to survive and feel safe was to have money and power in order to obtain social status.

The huge differences informing the social backgrounds and life experiences of the post-80s generation and their parents have increased the generation gap in many ways. Many of my photographic subjects have mentioned how difficult (if not impossible) it is to communicate their values and ideas to their parents and elders. There is a very active forum named "Anti-parents" on one of China's more popular websites, which serves as a platform for young people to air complaints about problems they have with their parents. For example, members of the

more individualistic post-80s cohort are likely to start a small business or short contract job from home, but from their parents' perspectives these jobs are not "real" careers. The parent's generation were used to stable jobs in state-owned enterprises, a situation known as an "iron rice bowl"[7]. However, nowadays in China, most of the post-80s have to find jobs by themselves in a ruthlessly competitive job market. Palmer (2013) interviewed two post-80s, who commented that:

"It's not just a generation gap, it is a values gap, a wealth gap, an education gap, a relationship gap, an information gap, and we have nothing in common with our parents. They don't understand how we choose to live our life, we never talk about anything".

---

7 "Iron rice bowl" is a Chinese term which refers to an occupation with guaranteed job security, steady income and benefits. It is typically used in reference to positions in state-owned companies.

2.4 The Predicament of the Post-80s'

The post-80s not only have to achieve their dreams and aspirations in life, but also have to navigate the expectations and desires of their parents. This transfer of intergenerational expectation not only happens in the modern incarnation of Chinese society, but is also visible in traditional Confucian culture.

Hwang (1999) explains that in Confucian ontology, the lives of the individual "are the continuation of their parents' physical lives" (p. 169). The core concept of Confucian filial piety not only shapes traditional culture and history, but is also the principle and standard of Chinese contemporary family values of morality and virtue (Tang et al., 2010). Fengshu Liu (2008) explains the notion of filial piety further, that "all children should respect, obey, and serve their parents" (p. 412). Compared with older generations, the post-80s "4-2-1" family structure faces enormous pressures from traditional family values of filial piety and the reality of life in every aspect. In earlier times, these parental obligations were shared with other siblings in the extended family (Palmer, 2013). The post-80s generation still needs to maintain these obligations towards family support and are expected to abide by the code of filial piety and assume responsibility for their parents in later life, as a quid pro quo for the often enormous quantities of financial and emotional support they receive. The law asserts this obligation for filial duty to the extent that "failing to support your elderly parents can get you a jail term" though as the author notes, such prosecutions are "rarely enforced" (Palmer, 2013). There is however evidence to suggest that this obligation has acquired a certain flexibility amongst families, as exemplified by one of my subjects, Eva.

Apart from the duty to support family and look after parents according to traditional values, the post-80s also need to challenge these values that posed by the consequences of a rapidly developing economy. This includes attending to such issues as the job market, marriage, purchasing property, and acquiring a respectable education. A comment cited by Farar from the popular microblog Sina Weibo reads, "we have four elderly people to take care of and one child to raise. Our children have no access to safe milk or fair education. High real estate prices make us homeless" (Farrar, 2013).

Under the huge pressure of practical living and social issues, many people have begun to realise that the post-80s generation cannot live independently and must rely on their parents. Jiangyun Feng has summarised that a quarter of adult-age Chinese will remain, in some way, financially dependent on their parents. This dependency has also been studied in Tribe Eats the Elderly Group [啃老族], a social phenomenon that analyses the young adults' dependant life (Mei, 2008).

Failing to communicate is another trait of post-80s; many of them live an indoorsy lifestyle [宅], a phenomenon originating in Japan in the 1980s. The word indoorsy became very popular and widespread over the Internet, describing the addictive behaviour of young people obsessed with the Internet and computer games. A consequence of locking themselves in their world was that they lacked communication skills (Sun & Ni, 2012). Many of these young people would rather hide at home to ignore the pressures of life and release tension through online distractions (Sun & Ni, 2012).

The post-80s also have to experience the extreme competition of the market economy and the challenge of purchasing an apartment if they wanted to get married. There are some specific terms that reveal this social phenomenon, such as monthly empty tribe [月光族] which describes those who do not have any savings and spend their entire monthly income. Another is dwelling narrowness [蜗居] or ant tribe [蚁族] meaning people living a humble abode, carrying the economic burden of purchasing a house throughout many years (Gao, 2012).

As the most rebellious generation, the post-80s desire to be independent of the family. They are also under the influence of Western popular culture which assumed an unprecedented prominence in China during the 1980s, and inspired many to emigrate overseas to study at Western universities and experience a different lifestyle (Yi, 2013).

Three

Methodology and Practice

3.1 Conceptual Development

The inspiration for this photography comes from images of post 80s family life. The concept of family is an essential element in Chinese culture; the importance of which cannot be overstated. A frequently encountered scenario in the post-80s member is a tendency to live under the same roof as the respective family, sometimes well into adulthood. This is commonly due to the high cost of owning real estate, as well as the willingness of older, sometimes senior, parents to care for the new-born as well as juvenile offspring of the post-80s couple. In other words, convenience and tradition service an attitude of pragmatism that results in a combined living arrangement, an arrangement of seemingly mutual benefit.

In the early stages of this practical work, I made contact in China with a few individuals who live with both their child(ren) and biological parents within the same house or apartment. The resulting photographic series documents a moment in time of the post-80s couple, a moment of sharing in the same living space as their parents. I photographed a family of five members - a young couple, their child and grandparent (Figure 7). I used the concept of a family living under one roof to illustrate a representative account of a post-80s living state, to define the family of the kinship as the central role in contemporary Chinese society.

The location selected was a private residence. I have photographed each family member separately in their respective bedrooms, to catch an angle of privacy that reflects their character, living conditions and interaction with family members (Figure 8 – 10). I also photographed individually each person against a blank background as a portrait so as to draw a contrast with the group shots and to further illustrate the paradoxical state of being caught in-between individualism and collectivism (Figure 11 -15).

This initial practical work lacked effective communication with the participants. Consequently, I reviewed the current practice and developed a research process to photograph these participants within full detail background in the method of action research.

Figure 7. Liu, D. (2015). *Initial experiment - photographing a post-80s family portrait.* China. 2015

Figure 8. Liu, D. (2015). *Initial experiment – photographing a post–80s couple in their bedroom.* China. 2015.

Figure 9. Liu, D. (2015). *Initial experiment – photographing elder parents in the living room.* China. 2015

Figure 10. Liu, D. (2015). *Initial experiment – photographing elder parents in their bedroom.* China. 2015

Figure 11. Liu, D. (2015). *Individual portrait with the blank background 1* . China. 2015

Figure 12. Liu, D. (2015). *Individual portrait with the blank background 2* . China. 2015

Figure 13. Liu, D. (2015). *Individual portrait with the blank background 3* . China. 2015

Figure 14. Liu, D. (2015). *Individual portrait with the blank background 4* . China. 2015

Figure 15. Liu, D. (2015). *Individual portrait with the blank background 5* . China. 2015

3.2 Ethnographic Strategies

The aim of this research is to create a body of photographic work, grounded in an ethnographic approach that illustrates fundamental traits of the Chinese post-80s generation. Therefore the methodology appropriate to this objective pertains to choice of location, questionnaire responses and visual practice research of post-80s as understood by way of ethnography. Ethnographic approaches incorporate a diverse range of methods that I will discuss with the following the development of practice. I have limited the scope of this research to include only urban cities and not rural designations. Of the many cities in China I initially started with two "super cities" - Guangzhou and Beijing, two of the largest metropolitan areas in China, as well as a third-tier city[8], Yichang. When progressing towards the photographic practice, I primarily worked in Guangzhou.

The one-child policy has been well accepted by urban parents. The policy has been liberally adapted by the social economy and the demographic structure of the city. These cities are not merely resource rich, due to the extensive overseeing of the Chinese government, they also garner international attention (Fig. 16 & 17). Yichang (Fig. 18 & 19) is smaller than Guangzhou and Beijing but shares similarity in local cuisine, dialect, history, geography, culture and climate though lacks the modernized architecture that defines the former (Mayer, 2011).

Secondly, population and social mobility has increased the diversity of character found in the post-80s generation. In addressing the one-child policy and its social ramifications in these urban environments, consideration of a socio-cultural context is a necessary aspect of this examination, to contextualise in detail the post-80s generation. Furthermore, Guangzhou is the city in which I came of age. In my interacting with the economic and demographic characteristics of the city, I found myself recalling past experiences, memories of which revived a familiarity and awareness of what it means to be Chinese.

---

8 According to Adam Mayer (2011), the real trajectory of urbanity is shifting to China's so-called 'second-tier' and 'third-tier' cities. The hierarchy of Chinese cities is a relatively nascent development; the cities of Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai ('super cities'), Shenzhen and Chongqing are considered to be elite. So-called 'second-tier' cities (for example Suzhou, Nanjing, Dalian, Dongguan) are expanding with momentum. According to Bolger, (2012) annual GDP growth in second-tier cities continues to rise and exports, notably to the United States, have gathered momentum. Tier two and three cities are not distinguished so precisely, but generally lag behind second tier examples in GDP, population and infrastructure.

Figure 16. Liu, D. (2015). *Pearl River.*
Guangzhou, China, 2015.

Figure 17. Liu, D. (2015). *Shopping Departments and Finance district.*
Guangzhou, China, 2015.

Figure 18. Liu, D. (2015). *Local cuisine – Street food outlet*. Yichang, China. 2015

Figure 19. Liu, D. (2015). *Local culture – Gathering to play cards for leisure*. Yichang, China. 2015.

Ethnographic study is a discourse ably suited to this study of the construction of identity. According to Tony Whitehead (2005) primary data collection, secondary data analysis and fieldwork are the key criteria in successful ethnographic study. Wolcott (1995) defines fieldwork as "a form of inquiry that requires researchers to be immersed personally in the on-going social activities of some individual or group carrying out the research". Field research, in other words, is an essential attribute of ethnography.

My practical work is based on field research facilitated through a process of observation, interviews and photography. I have engaged in ethnographic research to achieve this, conducting personal interviews in order to understand the group culture of post-80s.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz described culture as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (1973). The aim of ethnography is to study "a focused group in their socio-cultural contexts, processes and meanings within a particular cultural system" (Whitehead, 2005). The fundamental constructs of society, such as family, social networking, institutions, and community, have an immense influence on social behaviour. Socio-cultural discourse defines the value of the outcome from the relationship of an individual with their social system (Whitehead, 2005). This process of discursive analysis invites the question: how can one

understand and interpret the interactions of an individual within their environment? This line of inquiry offers a great opportunity to explore the post-80s from my own personal experience, including memory, social activity and travel experience.

In my photographic work, I draw from these principles of ethnographic study to analyse the post-80s in specified Chinese urban cities with the aim of forming a narrative ethnography (Goodall, 2004) which specifies study in data collection and analysis of interviews based on a certain number of focus questions.

The final publication contains three parts. The first chapter describes the cultural and social background of the project. The second chapter considers the individuals who represent and participate in the post-80s generation. The final chapter is comprised of photographs relating to the participants in relation to specific cultural contexts, such as aforementioned social background and the presence of identity.

In the chapter on individual post-80s, a selection of photographs of each person are presented to facilitate a narrative across a range of divergent contexts and backgrounds. Genzuk (2003) suggests that the purpose of participatory observation in ethnographic research is to "develop an insider's view of what is happening... the researcher not only sees what is happening but 'feels' what it is like to be part of the group" (p. 2).

FOUR

Influential Photographers

4.1 Conceptualising "Family"

Chinese photographer Huang Qingjun conceived of an interesting project he titled Chinese Families with All Their Stuff (Fig. 20). His conception of family connects deeply with family belongings, which are part of the Chinese tradition where the family is the root, and their belongings are the branches. His photography asserts the relationship between family possessions and historical position within developing societies, especially the contrast between different regions and social classes of China, highlighted after China's "opening up" and economic transformation.

Qingjun's photographic series inspired early ideas for a line of questioning exploring the association of family relations with a country's institutional and cultural background, for instance, how may a particular environment influence family?

Figure 20. *"Chinese Families with All Their Stuff. One of the inner-Mongolian families" by Huang Qijun.* Retrieved April 26, 2015. From: http://huangqingjun.com/cg/family-stuff/

I also considered the photography of Taryn Simon, specifically her series A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I-XVIII (Fig. 21). Each chapter of the work was constructed with three subchapters - photography, writing, and additional images (Fig. 22). On the left-hand side were the family members' portraits, shot against a cream background. In the centre is a section with footnotes concerning the family tree and its social and historical background. On the right-hand side are additional images about the relationship between each family member and selected objects, such as general family belongings, animals, a scene, and a person. ArtinAsia (2013) commented, "As an artist photographer travelled around the world researching the bloodlines and their related stories, and you can see the external forces from power, territory and religion with the internal forces of psychological and physical inheritance".

Her entire project raises questions about the relationship of family members towards one another. Whether it is through lineage, fortune or circumstance – how can family determine our path in life? Drawing from Taryn Simon's project, I have considered family relations inclusive of moral principle, religious affiliation, gender, birth, and death (Fig. 23).
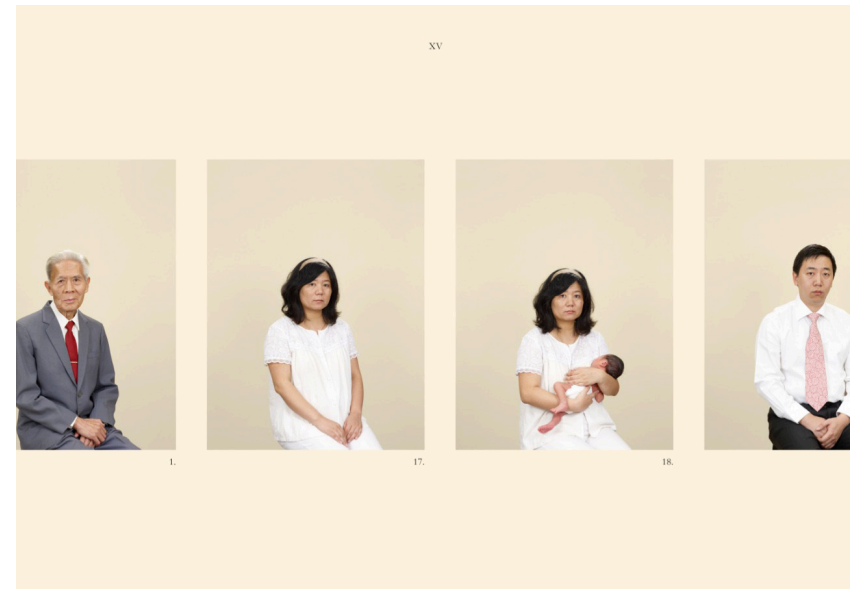
Figure 21. *"A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII" by Taryn Simon. One of the Chinese families.*
Retrieved April 26, 2015. From: http://www.artinasia.com/img/event/21037-3fe7a952297d3da700099fd36334bb68.jpg

Figure 22. *"A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII," by Taryn Simon. Three subchapters – photographs, writing and additional images* Retrieved April 26, 2015. From: http://tarynsimon.com/works_livingmanindex.php

This diagram is a simplification of relations within families that I used to create a body of photography that explores the differences and similarities of family structure regarding relationships between environment and the family. The polarities consist of China and New Zealand, followed by an exploration of family relationships within specified cultural and social backgrounds. This strategy was conceived at the very beginning of my proposal for this project and has been developed and reinforced with ideas from my travelling experiences, practical work and theoretical research.

FAMILY

BLOOD & BREED

China

New Zealand

Ethic moral — Institution — Birth & Death — Religion

Questions of Relationship   Environment with family (country institution and Culture background)

Environment with Environment (China , New Zealand; Social class; Economy development)

Gender with family structure (Gay family)

Figure 23. *The researcher's diagram of the relationship between family and other psychological as well as physical matters*

FIVE

Analysis and Approach

5.1 ETHNOGRAPHY APPROACH

This project involves many Chinese participants. The involvement of these subjects has been approved via an ethics application (AUTEC #14-341) and contains a participant information sheet and consent release form in both English and Chinese to be signed by the participants. This ensures my photography and interviews respect the rights and dignity of the participants.

Genzuk states that ethnographic research employs three kinds of data collection "interviews, observation, and documents" (2003). In recent months, I flew back to China on two separate occasions, photographing and interviewing twenty-eight people, some of whom were couples, in the aforementioned cities, using primary data collection in accordance with ethnographic research as my primary means of int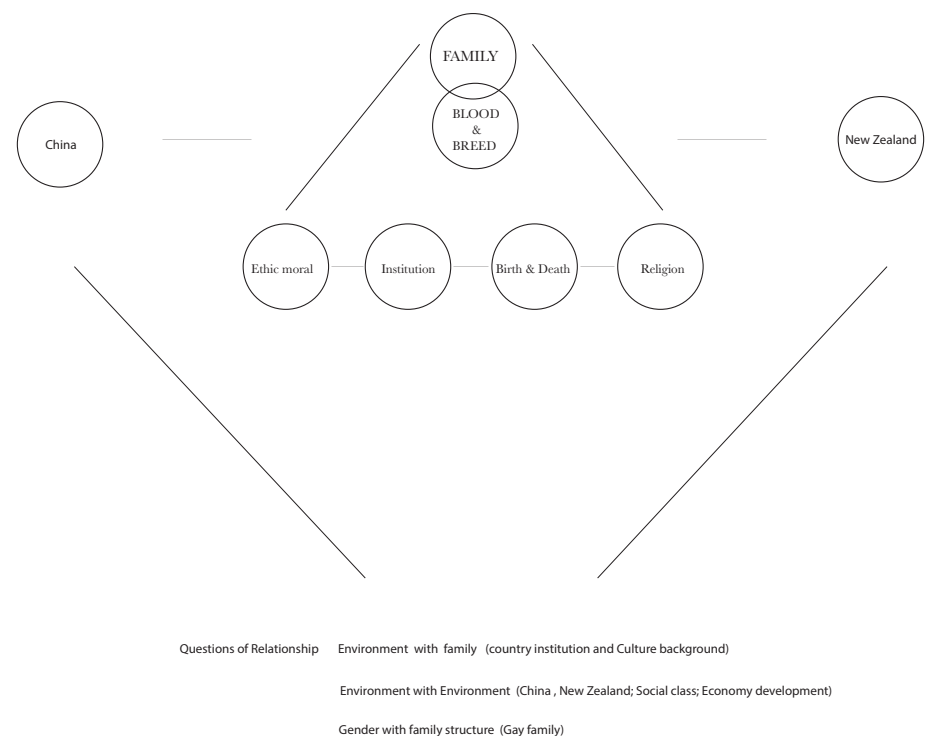eraction. The subjects were procured through my relatives and friends in China and were all born between 1980 and 1989. From these meetings I selected participants based on gender, occupation, marriage status, living conditions, social class and career status to with the aim of emphasizing the versatility, variety and significance of the post-80s generation.

Beginning with a verbal explanation of the project, I then scheduled time with the participants for an introductory interview and photography session. These sessions were conducted at different times and locations, for example, private homes, offices, coffee shops, backpacker hostels, local markets and other public places. The selection of these locations offered an opportunity to foreground the interviewees against a backdrop that illustrated their respective lifestyles and personalities.

To ensure effective collection of observable data I conducted a light focus group in order to create a questionnaire. The intention of this set of questions is to provoke a revealing response and localized insight into the post-80s generation. The questionnaire abides by the protocols of secondary data analysis, that is to say the provision of qualitative methods from a focus group that is concerned with opinion, views, attitudes, values and behaviours (Roddy, 2006). The questionnaire accommodates a formative structure beginning with standard personal information such as name, age, occupation, marriage, child status et cetera, followed by a total of fourteen core questions.

For example:

(1) What is the most important/meaningful thing in your life presently?

(2) What is the most important character or personality trait to you?

(3) What do you think about success, and what does it mean to you?

(4) What are the most five most important things in your life at present?

(5) What are the challenges in your life at present?

(6) Could you accept a rental house to get married?

(7) Do you have a good relationship with your parents? And do you have any family pressures or expectation from your parents?

The focus questions are aligned with the post-80s social life style, values, attitudes and expectations. The wording courts opinion, indirectly, on the consequences of economic reform and the one-child policy in urban cities. The responses collected from the questionnaire allowed me to develop a dossier of sorts on the personal views of each participant as well as their collective ideology. This approach underpins my approach to the subsequent photography session and post-processing. The data also facilitated my analysis on the final resolutions and findings of the research.

5.2 Practical Reflection: Action Research

To develop the ideas discussed above in greater detail, I have appealed to the methods espoused by the action research model. Action research preferences observation and reflection on the primary attributes of a given subject and asserts the importance of action towards new ideas, reviews and evaluated outcomes. This method not only involves my personal thoughts and reflections on the practical work but also is a self-reflective practice on value.

Action research is not only helpful in identifying problematic areas, but also to find the possible solution and change the practice from the evaluation (Mcniff, 2002). The initial photographic works lacked diversity and only presented evidence of one or two character traits of the post-80s. The shots were also too restrictive location-wise in only being located at home. There is of course much more to reveal in terms of post-80s character elements.

I have investigated this issue based on theoretical developments and summarising the participants interviews. As previously mentioned, the data collection of the participants was very precise about each individual's personal life states. Attention was paid to select post-80s characteristics, centring on several key categories including gender, occupation, marital status, living conditions, social class and employment status. Out of this emerged identities, idiosyncrasies and character traits of the post-80s individual in contemporary China as evidence I took an influence from.

Two of my subjects, Tiffany and Ren Qiang, both live in Guangzhou and have very different backgrounds. Tiffany is a full-time employee at Starbucks coffee house (Fig. 24) whilst Ren Qiang is a salesman in an engineering company (Fig. 25). Before the photo shoot, I conducted some interviews and enjoyed some casual conversation with them about their lives. I started to form some initial ideas about options for location shoots. I wanted to prominently highlight their personality and character as the post-80s outside of their domestic environment.

Figure 24. Liu, D. (2015). *Tiffany works at Starbucks.* China. 2015

Figure 25. Liu, D. (2015). *Ren Qiang is catching a train.* China. 2015

In Figure 24, Tiffany is pictured at work as an employee of American company, Starbucks. She is a great admirer of Western culture and lifestyle. I photographed her in a working apron, holding a washtub and positioned in front of a mural depicting Western culture. In Figure 25, Ren Qiang told me that the subway is the crucial means for rapid travel between his home and his employer; he spends approximately an hour on the subway every day. During peak travel times, Ren waits for the next train which can add substantially to his daily routine, and subsequently, the rhythm of his lifestyle. I photographed him at a subway station during peak time. Here, Ren Qiang is foregrounded against a relatively flat, densely packed crowd descending upon the open doors of a train. His arms are folded across his chest in a relaxed fashion in accordance with his optimistic and aspiring personality, an attitude I found particularly drawn to in our casual conversation and interview.

The project integrates photography and interview in order to exhibit the varied perspectives of the subjects; their stories, personalities, life state, hopes, personal values, thoughts, struggles and attitudes. This is the goal for this photography based documentary project. The photography attempts to interpret and accentuate the character and background of each individual in a naturalistic way as opposed to the plain foregrounding and restrictive domesticity of the initial practical work.

In keeping with this vérité approach, I've sought to photograph the instance of emotion and personality, in order to emphasize the attributes of the post-80s discussed thus far (Figure 26 & 27). Specialized and complicated lighting setups were eschewed in favour of a candid, natural, environmentally sourced luminance to ensure minimal interruption of the authenticity of the scene.

Figure 26. Liu, D. (2015). *Tiffany holding a New Zealand travel guide.* China. 2015

Figure 27. Liu, D. (2015). *Tiffany's bedroom.* China. 2015

5.3 Questionaire Responses

By using this action research to inform my practical work, I would like to put forward two candidates for comparison so as to facilitate the consideration and construction of photographs and questionnaire in this photographic project and also to evaluate their lives within the post-80s group.

The first is Li xiangquan, a very reserved, quiet twenty-eight year old man who works as a security guard in a residential building (Figure 28-32). He is one of many migrants who come from remote villages to one of the large cities, Guangzhou in this case, to pursue a better life for both themselves and their families. I interviewed and photographed him in his residence which he shares with eight others and at his workplace where he tends to the entrance of a large building and adjoining parking garage. His responses to the questionnaire suggest that he is not happy with his present life and feels a degree of helplessness. The reality of his life in the city, as is no doubt the case for tens of thousands of young migrants, doesn't quite fit his imagined life. Coupled with the long hours he works, Li xiangquan is subject to exhausting pressure and expectation from his family, who remain in the countryside of a distant province. Here are some excerpted responses of his that resonate with the photographs taken. In my estimation they broadly portray the governing concerns of the post-80s working class: the tough life and frustration they endure and the desire to lead a better life as a just reward for the hard effort they put forward.

What is your dream to be successful?

Persistence is the key to hold on my dream, and I wish that I could have a happy family.

What are the most important five things in your life at the present?

Career, family, marriage, parents, and have my own house.

What are the challenges in your life at present?

Marriage and housing

How do you describe yourself as a member of the Post-80s generation?

I am a county-side boy from a small village. I am a very conservative person, genuine, rational and also self-centered, but most of the time I am frustrated about city life.

Can you accept to rent a house if you want to get married?

I can't accept that, to get married without my own house, and it is a Chinese tradition that if people want to get married, we must own the first marriage house. This is most of men's responsibility.

Do you have a good relationship with your parents? What are the expectations from them?

I have a good relationship with my parents. I respect and listen to them. It is called filial piety, as is Chinese traditional culture. They always give me pressure to get married soon. I do not want my parents to worry anymore. But I am unlucky, I do not have a girlfriend.

What are your favorite social activities?

I do not have many friends in Guangzhou. If I get day off from work, I would like to play games on my phone and I am addicted to surfing internet.

Figure 28. Liu, D. (2015). *Security guard Li Xiangquan working in the car park area of a residential building.* Guangzhou China. 2015

Figure 29. Liu, D. (2015). *Li Xiangquan checking his roster for the week.* Guangzhou, China. 2015.

Figure 30. Liu, D. (2015). *Li Xiangquan's shared flat with his colleagues.* Guangzhou, China. 2015

Figure 31. Liu, D. (2015). *Li Xiangquan's dining area.* Guangzhou China. 2015

Figure 32. Liu, D. (2015). *Li Xiangquan is playing games on phone, which is his only entertainment after work.* Guangzhou China. October 2015

Li Xiangquan is a shy young man who lives a very solitary lifestyle. Consider then Eva Lu, a thirty five year old single mother to a ten year old boy. She is a trendy, entrepreneurial local resident of Guangzhou who manages an online fashion business. She is also a tattooist (Figure 33-37). Recently divorced, Eva and her young son moved back into her parents' apartment. When I asked her whether she is happy or not, living with her parents, she answered

"Since I have a new boyfriend, I don't live at home anymore. My parents look after my son very well and I really trust them. I only worry that my parents spoil their grandson too much and that he is not doing well at school, but I am too busy with my own life so I don't have much spare time for my son".

I interviewed and photographed Eva at her parents' home and at a McDonald's restaurant where she often buys treats for her son. It's clearly evident that her current state of life is in extreme contrast with that of Li Xiangquan. Eva is a single mother who doesn't need to struggle to make a living. She enjoys a large degree of freedom, to travel about with her boyfriend for example. Eva's life offers a radically different insight into the lifestyle of urban city post-80s, one in which a comfortable and perhaps entitled life compares with that of the working migrants who struggle daily to improve their social status and ensure a brighter future.

What is your idea to be successful?

Great life-style and have more money; both are very important to me.

What are the most important five things in your life at the present?

My son's study, the health of my mum, relationship with my boyfriend, and my own business.

What are the challenges in your life at present?

I am very worried about my son's study.

How do you describe yourself as a member of Post-80s in China?

I am a genuine person and have an unbounded personality.

Can you accept to rent a house if you want to get married?

I can't accept this idea at all.

What conditions is necessary if you going to get married?

Have enough saving, a house and a car.

Do you have a good relationship with your parents? What are the expectations from them?

I have good relationship with my parents, especially with my mum. We definitely have generation gaps and sometimes it is very hard for us to communicate. Most of the time we have arguments and disagreements on how to educate my son. My mum is always very soft and relaxed on him and he does not listen to her. But on the other hand, I am tough and more critical of him. Sometimes I lose my patience with him and that causes arguements between my mum and me.

What are you favorite social activities?

I like to spend time with my friends and boyfriend, specially traveling.

Figure 33. Liu, D. (2015). *Eva Lu at home with her son and parents.* Guangzhou China. October 2015

Figure 34. Liu, D. (2015). *Eva Lu with her son Danny and her dog Louis.* Guangzhou China. October 2015

Figure 35. Liu, D. (2015). *Eva Lu is a tattoo enthusiast.* Guangzhou China. October 2015

Figure 36. Liu, D. (2015). *Grandpa with grandson Danny.*
Guangzhou China. October 2015

Figure 37. Liu, D. (2015). *When Eva has time she takes her son to McDonald's for treats.*
Guangzhou China. October 2015.

SIX

PUBLICATION AND EXHIBITION STRATEGY

This chapter proffers a reflective description of this practice-led project that acknowledges and responds to established theories and methods presented in the photographic publication as well as the final exhibited work. Both incorporate ethnographic study and action research strategies in the examination the post-80s generation.

The outcome of the publication focuses on photographs of the individual participants as well as their interview responses from a questionnaire. Together these methods seek to portray a narrative pictorial account of each individual as well as to reveal common or defining characteristics of the post-80s generation. The images illustrate the relationship between the post-80s participants and their living environment and strengthen the core thesis of binding character traits visible in the generation of interest.

The exhibition display is designed to allow appropriate space for these images. A selection of photographic prints (to be exhibited at the AUT gallery) will be enlarged for a panel display. The photography will be accompanied by a publication book and exhibition (80% of the final grade) and a written report (20%) which will provide further context to the exhibited series.

6.1 Consideration of Design Layout

A well designed book cover is the first impression the reader has for the style and intention of the contents. The cover design is crucial in that it has the power to enhance the emotional appeal of the content to the audience. The cover photo for this publication aims to present an intellectually inviting visual rendering of the one-child family unit.

I captured a family moment outside of a large stadium in Guangzhou - a young couple having a rest and immersed within a beautiful view of the city bathed in evening light (Figure 38). The couple is surrounded by modernized architecture and decorated with the neon lights emanating from countless electronic billboards and displays. The father is crouched down, hands gripped tightly to his chin as the mother steadies her little baby, perched on the carriage. Subtly backlit, they are positioned looking towards the direction of the light source which casts trace amounts of shadow in the foreground of the frame. What matters to me in this photograph is the idea of "privacy in public" - small moments of reflection on surroundings. By not concentrating on their facial expressions, the image serves as an avatar for the post-80s one-child family, hinting at the hopes, expectations, struggles, helplessness and spirit of young Chinese caught amidst two rapidly shifting generations.

BALING HOU

Post-80s Generation in
urban China

Figure 38. Liu, D. (2015). *The Book covers design. Publication book.*

6.2 Insert Page: Generation 'Parent'

The varying social backgrounds and life experiences between that of the post-80s generation and their parents form what is commonly referred to as a generation gap. Although the published book is conceived primarily as a focused account of specified subjects within their living environments, some supportive analysis of this generation gap will be instructive. With this in mind I have designed an insert page that attends to the senior generation (Fig. 39). This page features a selection of my family's private photographs, in black and white and arranged in two light grey sections, accompanied by a short paragraph that summarises the lives of the subjects. This design layout ensures that this supplementary material is easily discerned from the primary content.

The questionnaire is featured on separate insert page (Fig. 40). This selection of focus questions derives from research methods outlined earlier and is concerned with the participant's personal experience and opinions, views, attitudes, values and behaviours as post-80s constituents. I will print these questions on a light grey paper as an insert page forming roughly two thirds of the publication. The intention of this is to provide a clear overview of the interview component and also to pave the way for further summary of each interviewee.

Figure 39. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (insert page of senior generation).*

Senior generations:

The parent's generation were born between 1950 and 1965. They have experienced a different environment of society in China in their time, such as they grew up in the major historical event, the Cultural Revolution . They have many siblings as the Chinese traditional family was then comprised of between four to eight members. During the 10 years of Cultural Revolution the young people were living in an extremely collective and authoritarian social environment. They wore the same clothes, had the same hairstyle and adopted the same poses in photographs. Most of time, they had to have a copy of the "Little Red Book" - an infamous piece of communist literature - in their possession and also they liked to pose in front of the camera, reading Chairman Mao's literature with his photo in the background.

Figure 40. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (insert page of questionnaire).*

Position Question:

1.   What's your name?

2.   What's your date of birth?

3.   What's your occupation?

4.   Are you single or married?

Focus Questions:

1. What is the most important and meaningful thing in your life at present? Why?

2. How do you describe yourself as a member of the Post-80s generation?

3. What is your dream to be successful?

4. What are the most important five things in your life at present?

5. What are the challenges in your life at present?

6. How anxious are you in your life at present?

7. How is your living environment? Are you happy with it?

8. Under what conditions do you think that it is necessary if you going to get married?

9. Can you accept to rent a house if you are going to get married?

10. What is the generation gap between you and your parents if you think there is one?

11. Do you have a good relationship with your parents? What are the expectations from them?

12. Do your parents will arrange a blind date for you? Do you like the idea of blind date?

13. What are your expectations of marriage?

14. What are your favorite socials activates?

6.3 Narrative and the Individual

The subject narrative formed by both the questionnaire and photography is the primary content of the publication. The selection is comprised of eleven participants and forms a collection of approximately five to six representative photographs each. The idea for this structure is derived from the accumulated questionnaire responses (further discussion on this can be found in chapter two on the approach and analysis of the collection of data) in which to create and express the storyline of each individual.

This substance of narrative and character, values and personal experience advances the microcosm of the post-80s that the project attempts to codify imagistically. To simplify the questionnaire response I have summarized them into short statements and selected a medium grey font colour. The design is intended to accentuate the primary status of the photographs. In the layout of these photographs, I specifically chose four images (Fig. 41-44) and enlarged them to a large format with a slight amount of negative space to highlight the distinctive character, emotion and intimacy of the subjects.

"Feather Zhang is twenty-nine years old. She attended and graduated from universities in Sweden and Finland, attaining a master's degree. She has since returned to her hometown of Guangzhou, China. Feather describes herself as self-centered, rebellious, uncompromising and spontaneous. Her career, and her job opportunities and independent lifestyle are the most important things to her though such motivating factors cause her anxiety at present. She cares very much about her family, her wellbeing, her friends and personal freedom. She enjoys a good relationship with her parents. For the most part, they are open-minded and respect her decisions in life, even as they make no secret of their expectations for her as parents.
Having different views on lifestyle and future planning, they frequently pressure her with regard to careerism. This is a primary cause for argument between them".
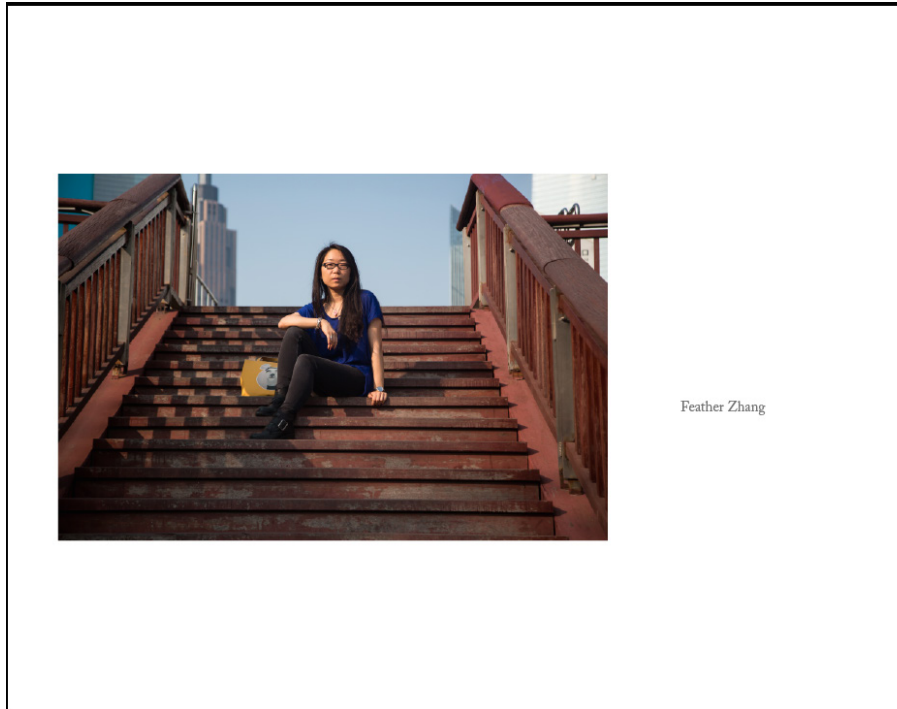
Feather Zhang

Figure 41. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (storyline design layout of each individual) 1.*
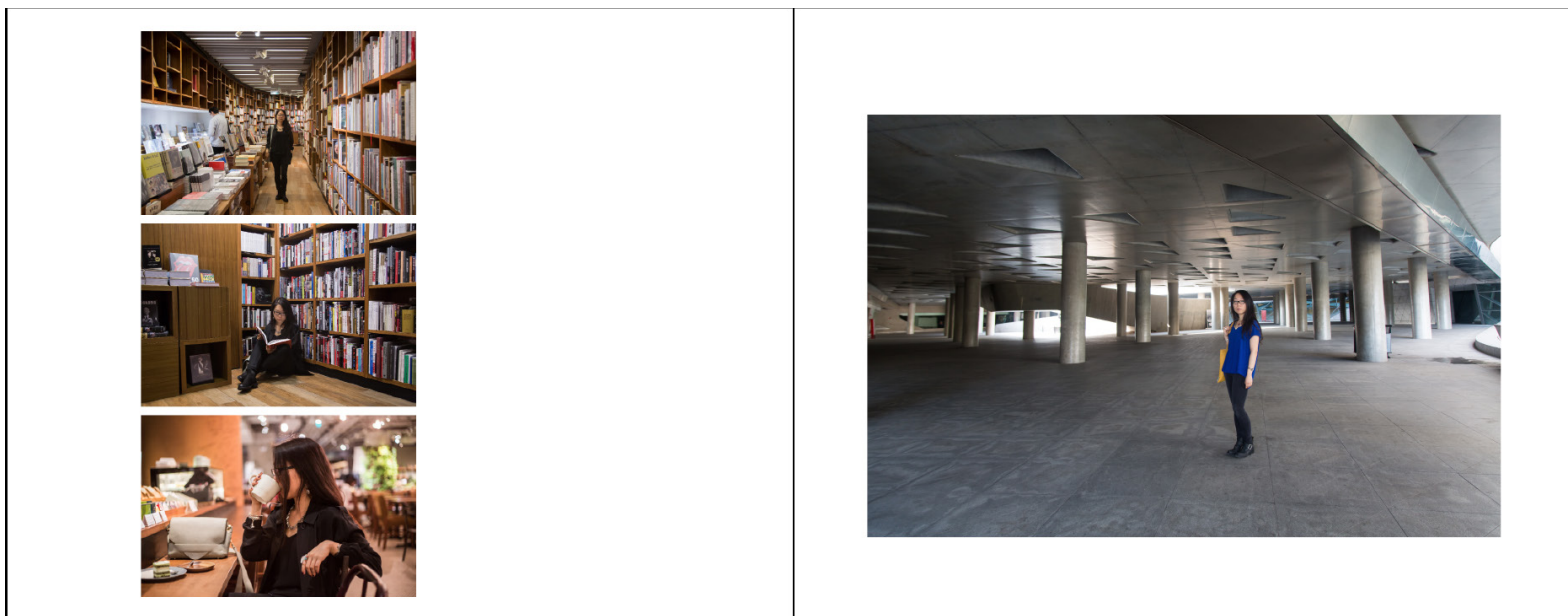

Figure 42. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (storyline design layout of each individual) 2.*

Tiffany Wong is twenty years old. She is a local Guangzhou girl who works in a Starbucks coffee house. She describes herself as rebellious, uncompromising, self-centered and occasionally feels helpless. Her ultimate dream is to be successful in attaining a New Zealand working holiday visa and to open a coffee shop. The biggest challenge in her life is looking for a boyfriend so as to get married. In her own words, she says:

"I am worried that I will be single forever if I cannot find the right person. I have had a few blind dates, introduced by my parents. I only hope that I can meet a normal man and he can take responsibility for the family. A stable income, house and car are very important. I am a realistic person, I need to guarantee my children's life. When I was seventeen, I thought that nothing is more important than love but when I got older, I started to realise that reality is much more practical than I thought, after all, this is the Chinese value of marriage. He should be taller than me to make me feel secure. I have to admit that I care about looks". When talking about her relationship with her parents, she sighed "I am living with my parents now. I am OK with it right now, though sometimes I worry about my mum because she has depression and often has a short temper. I have a very deep generational gap with my parents and we will never understand each other. I do not think that I have a good relationship with my parents. They give me too much pressure when it comes to marriage. They always force me to have blind dates or try to arrange a date for me. I am really sick of it, sick of the Chinese perspective on marriage. I will lie to them that I have a boyfriend next time, if they offer me a blind date again".

Figure 43. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (Storyline design layout of each individual) 3.*

Figure 44. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (Storyline design layout of each individual) 4.*

6.4 Photographs of Surrounding Environment

Photography that is inclusive of the surrounding environment is an important aspect of this project. Guangzhou is a remarkably urbanized international city; it provides a tremendous amount of opportunity for people to seek a better lifestyle. The selection of photographs covers many different landscapes in Guangzhou, featuring modernized architecture, city landscapes, rural migrants, political slogans, residential lifestyle and luxury shopping areas. The relationship between the post-80s participants and their living environment is inseparable. Examples of this urban city landscape include population density and a specified lifestyle in urbanized areas. The interaction of individuals within their particular environment can reveal personality as well as a disposition towards the external forces of economic growth, cultural inheritance, population mobility and politics and further shapes the post-80s generation. As an example of this section, here are some layouts considered for Guangzhou (Figure 45 – 48).

Figure 45. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (the layout of urban city, surrounding environment section) 1.*

Figure 46. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (the layout of urban city, surrounding environment section) 2.*
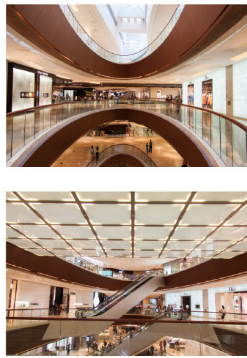

Figure 47. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (the layout of urban city, surrounding environment section) 3.*
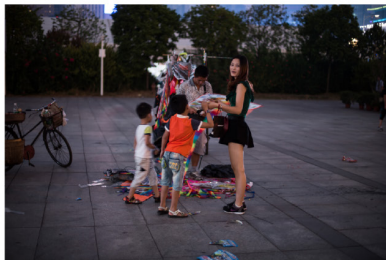

Figure 48. Liu, D. (2015). *Book design (the layout of urban city, surrounding environment section) 4.*

Exhibition and Conclusion

The exegesis has been designed to represent the photographic strategy of the research project in two ways. First is the choice of format - the selection will be printed on a landscape strip in an enlarged format to be exhibited in gallery three at the AUT University. The selection contains images featuring local people from the formative stages of the project and photographed in Beijing and Yichang (Fig. 49- 52) as well as finalised images of the research participants.

Theoretical research has been structured around several key headings and begins with with a brief discussion of relevant key concepts before moving on to an outline of methodological approach, thorough to the processes of data collection, data analysis, the conducting of interviews, and finalised photography.

In addition, this photographic series expresses my personal view in acknowledging and recognising my own identity within the post-80s generation, amongst those who grew up and experienced similar lifestyles within smaller and even more traditional cities. This explorative series has sought to present examples of post-80s identity in concert with a personal reflection on how the generation has been shaped by a macro-environment characterised by enormous social transformation in contemporary China. The core of this project has been to seek out defining and exemplary traits of the post-80s, reconciled with my own variation on Chinese identity, through the medium of photography, as both an 'insider' and 'outsider'. Baling Hou addresses the profound effect that economic transformation and the one-child policy has had on traditional Chinese family structure through the lensing of individuals subject to an array of issues including social mobility, values, and the obligation towards tradition. The outcome of the project asserts the identity of the subjects in relation to Chinese socioeconomic structures and the affective urban environment they live in.

The relationship between myself, as a researcher and photographer with my subjects, I learned, was not as straight forward as I had initially assumed. I felt reconciled, as an ethnic Chinese both 'insider' and 'outsider', with an internal dialogue that revealed itself through my interactions with the subjects, a dialogue framed by a discordant but faithful adherence to the social mores of contemporary and traditional Chinese society.

Figure 49. Liu, D. (2015).
The exhibition panel layout 1.

Figure 50. Liu, D. (2015).
The exhibition panel layout 2.

Figure 51. Liu, D. (2015).
The exhibition panel layout 3.

Figure 52. Liu, D. (2015).
The exhibition panel layout 4.

Reference

Chinese family planning poster [Online image]. Retrieved from http://
        smashalloldthings.blogspot.co.nz/2012/06/turning-caverns-
        into-thoroughfares.html

Bolger, M. (2012). China's Cities.
        Retrieved from http://www.ccmm.qc.ca
        /documents presentations/2011_2012/12_03
        _22_1_ChinaCities.pdf

Davis, F. (1984). Decade Labelling: The Play of Collective Memory
        and Narrative Plot. *Symbolic interaction*, 7(1), 15-24.

Farra, L. (2013). *China's Young Adults: Directionless, Unhappy
        but Unlikely to Rebel*. Retrieved from http://www.mcclatchydc.
        com/2013/07/01/195303/chinas-young-adults-directionless.
        html

Gao, J. (2012). *Post-1970s, Post-1980s, Post-1990s – The Enhanced
        Chinese Generation Gap*. Retrieved from http://www.
        ministryoftofu.com/2012/03/post-1970s-post-1980s-post-
        1990s-the-enhanced-chinese-generation-gap/

Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Culture*.
        New York: Basic Book, Inc.

Genzuk, M. (2003). *A Synthesis of Ethnographic Research*. Retrieved
        from http://www-bcf.usc.edu/~genzuk/Ethnographic_
        Research.pdf

Goodall, H. L. (2004). Narrative Ethnography as Applied
        Communication Research. *Journal of Applied Communication
        Research*, 32(3), 185-194.

Giele, J. Z. & Elder, G. H. (1998). *Methods of Life Course
        Research: Qualitative and Quantitative
        Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hou, X. (2009). *One-child Families in Urban Dalian: A Case Study
        of the Consequences of Current Family Planning Practices
        in China*. Retrieved from https://scholarsbank.uoregon.
        edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/9912/Hou_Xueyuan_
        ma2009sp.pdf?sequence=1

Hwang, Q. (1999). *Jiadang*. Retrieved from http://www.boredpanda.
        com/chinese-family-stuff-jiadang-huang-qingjun/

Lu, C. (n.d.). *Ye Jianying's Speech at the Closing Session of the CCP Central Work Conference, December 13, 1978.* Retrieved from http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121691

Li, L. (2008). *Chinese Post-80s volunteers on rise, Stereotyped Views Lose Ground.* Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-06/11/content_8349090.htm

Liu, F. (2008). Negotiating the Filial Self: Young Adult Only Children and Intergenerational Relationships in China. *Young*, 16, 409-430.

Mayer, A. (2011). F*rom a Rural to Urban Dispersion in the Middle Kingdom.* Retrieved from http://www.newgeography.com/content/002330-a-guide-china%E2%80%99s-rising-urban-areas

Mei, Z. (2008). *Zhong Guo Cheng Shi Qing Zhuang Nian "Ken Lao Zu" De She Hui Xue Fen Xi.* Retrieved from http://www.aisixiang.com/data/19776.html

McNiff, J. (2002). *Action Research for Professional Development: Concise Advice for New Action Researchers.* New Zealand: The University of Waikato.

Palmer, J. (2013). *The Balinghou: Chinese Parents Bemoan their Children's Laziness and Greed but this Generation of Young people has had Enough.* Retrieved from http://aeon.co/magazine/society/james-palmer-chinese-youth/

Peng, Y. & Cheng, J. (2014, Jan). Editor's Notes. *The Outlook Magazine.* 121.

Roddy, K. (2006). *Creating Effective Questionnaires and Surveys and Analyzing the Data.* Retrieved from http://www.lse.ac.uk/library/versions/Creating%20effective%20questionnaires%20and%20surveys.pdf

Sabet, D. (2011). *Confucian or Communist, Post-Mao or Postmodern? Exploring the Narrative Identity Resources of Shanghai's Post-80s Generation.* Canada: Royal Roads University.

Simon, T. (2008-11). *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I-XVIII.* Retrieved from http://www.artinasia.com/img/event/210373fe7a952297d3da700099fd36334bb68.jpg

Spence, J. (2001). *The Search for Modern China.* New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Stanat, M. (2006). *China's Generation Y: Understanding the Future Leaders of the World's Next Superpower.* Paramus, NJ: Homa & Sekey Books.

Sun, Q. & Ni, Q. (2012). *Zhong Guo "Zhai" Xian Xiang: Qing Nian Jing Shen Sheng Huo Zou Xiang Wu Zhi Zhu Yi*. Retrieved from http://zqb.cyol.com/html/2012-10/08/nw.D110000zgqnb_20121008_4-02.htm

Tan, N. (2012). *Scars After the Scars: From Collective Scars to Family Scars, A Look at the Post-Eighties and Post-Nineties Generation.* Retrieved from http://marcopoloproject.org/伤痕后的伤痕－－从集体伤痕到家庭伤痕看80后与90/

Tang, Jun., Zhang, Yi., Wang, Chunguang., & Feng, Ling. (2010). *China's Social Development.* Beijing, China: Five Continents Press.

Ullens Center for Contemporary Art. (2013). *ArtinAsian.* Retrieved From http://www.artinasia.com/galleryDetail.php?catID=0&galleryID=1150&view=7&eventID=21037

Whitehead, T. L. & MS. Hyg. (2005). *Basic Classical Ethnographic Research Methods*. USA: University of Maryland.

Wolcott, Harry F. (2005). *The Art of Fieldwork.* Toronto, Canada: AltaMira Press.

Xi, M. (2012). *Can We Blame the Post-Eighties Generation?*. Retrieved from http://www.danwei.com/can-you-blame-the-post-eighties-generation/

Xing, C. & Zhang, J. (2013). *The Preference for larger Cities in China: Evidence from Rural-Urban Migrants*. Retrieved from http://ftp.iza.org/dp7562.pdf

Yi, J. (2013). *Old Wave: Symbols for the Post-80s generation in China.* (Unpublished master's exegesis). Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand.

Zhenhua, Z. (1986). Chinese family planning poster. Retrieved from https://globalvoicesonline.org/2012/06/15/china-late-term-abortion-forced-by-corrupt-officials/

APPENDIX

'BALING HOU' - PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION & BOOK DESIGN

The appendix is the final photography exhibition and book design that represents the selected output of this research project.

The publication book presents a body of photographic work that features a group of post-80s participants situated within their surrounding urban environment and focuses on individual story telling. The exhibited work expresses visually the impact of identity and explores the living situations of the post-80s, to give the audience an impression of the formative role Chinese urban cities have in the lives of post-80s. The project adopts a documentary style to portray the diversity in the lives of this group in such areas as romantic life, employment, housing, family, choices, responsibilities and aspirations. In their stories you may find joy along with sadness, helplessness mingling with hope, resolution and perseverance.

I began this narrative photography based on my own experience as a member of the post-80s generation. I was born in an urban Chinese city as an only child, though I grew up in New Zealand. My personal interest is to observe this generation from an 'insider and outsider' perspective. In doing so, I seek to illustrate a personal reflection on who I am and what it means to be post-80s.

WE ARE
THE POST - 80S GENERATION

Final Photography exhibition