

SOMEWHERE IN-BETWEEN

Documenting Cultural In-Betweenness and Intergenerational Conflicts
Amongst Diasporic Chinese in New Zealand Through an
Autobiographical Framework

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Exegesis

An exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Communication Studies.

Abstract

This research project is an investigation of the conditions of in-betweenness faced by diasporic Chinese in New Zealand as well as techniques and strategies utilised by diasporic filmmakers to document their experiences. Through a practice-based research approach interviewing those born and raised in New Zealand as well as other diasporic Chinese, I derived techniques and strategies to support the creation of *Somewhere In-between* - an autobiographical documentary exploring intergenerational conflicts and how it shapes diasporic experiences.

Somewhere In-between aims to investigate cultural in-betweenness through reflexive analysis of my own diasporic experiences of intergenerational conflicts, and how cultural identities evolve and reshape through internal and external influences.

This research investigates my own experiences of in-betweenness in diasporic conflicts such as Chinese cultural traditions around marriage, lifestyle, and career decisions, assimilating to the new or obeying old cultural habits, to migrate or to return to my roots. By interpreting my personal diasporic experiences, my research documents the contemporary diasporic conditions of in-betweenness faced by Chinese families in New Zealand through an autobiographical lens.

The exegesis concludes with a reflective analysis of the creative process which produced *Somewhere In-between*.

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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 (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Exegesis Breakdown

This exegesis is comprised of five sections:

Introduction – an outline of the personal experiences and theoretical motivations foundational to the research and overview of the project’s core focus.

Contextual Framework and Research Methodology – a theoretical investigation of the concepts behind In-betweenness and Diasporic experiences, Diasporic Films as well as the modes of Documentary Filmmaking and Autobiographical Documentaries which forms the contextual framework for this practice as research project.

Autobiographical Documentary Case Studies – an examination of Diasporic autobiographical documentaries and techniques relevant to the practice-based research of the project.

Practical Research – a reflective analysis of the creative process behind the production of *Somewhere In-between* - an autobiographical documentary.

Conclusion – summary of the significant findings from results of this research project.

References – a comprehensive account of all texts, films, images, and other media referenced throughout the exegesis.

1.2 Research Question

How can cultural in-betweenness be documented through an autobiographical filmmaking framework to investigate identity, belonging and intergenerational conflicts faced by diasporic Chinese in New Zealand?

1.3 Research Overview

As New Zealand's population continues to become more culturally diverse, documenting diasporic stories plays an important role in communicating and understanding cross-culture experiences. Through a reflexive analysis of my own diasporic in-betweenness, this research project allows me to challenge hegemonic discourses and provide insight into minority ethnic consciousness and the contemporary Chinese diasporic condition in New Zealand. This research contributes to diasporic films within the Asian New Zealand Cinema through autobiographical documentary techniques and strategies informed by experiences of other diasporic Chinese people in New Zealand and the work of New Zealand diasporic filmmakers.

Through investigating the conditions of in-betweenness experienced by myself and other diasporic Chinese in New Zealand – my research helps both local and international audiences to better understand Chinese diaspora, cross-cultural identity and navigate the ever-changing diverse social-cultural landscape of New Zealand.

2. Contextual Framework and Research Methodology

The following topics formed the basis of a contextual framework which proved useful to understand my own position as a filmmaker who is part of the Chinese diaspora in New Zealand and experiencing a sense of being in-between cultures and the intergenerational conflict that has followed from this. The most suitable methodology to explore this was practice as research, with methods designed to contribute to the creation of an autobiographical documentary film.

2.1 In-betweenness and Diaspora

In *Diaspora and Migration*, Ghassan Hage (2017) specified the experience of ‘spatial displacement’, ‘comparative spatiality’ and ‘comparative temporality’ as features of the diasporic identity experiencing the condition of ‘in-betweenness’ (p. 201). Due to the experience of displacement, migration and globalisation, diasporic subjects are unable to experience “a social phenomenon, be it a landscape, an object, a social opportunity, or a social relation on its own terms without having an elsewhere shadowing it” (p. 201). Many who experience the diasporic condition find it hard to specify their sense of belonging, as “the boundaries and borders which define who belongs and who does not proliferate in the age of globalization, whether or not they coincide with national jurisdictions” (Franz & Silva, 2020).

I believe to fully document the modern condition of in-betweenness and (non)belonging it is prudent to discuss not the legal condition but rather emotional, representational, and cultural links between the self and land. It is useful to unpack and define “home” as a productive means to investigate diaspora as “home” is both “a physical presence— a geographical location” and “a metaphorical place— of comfort and belonging” (Franz & Silva, 2020, p. 16). For many migrants, expats and those who experience the diasporic condition, the internal longing to ‘return home’ is often juxtaposed with feelings such as the positivity evoked by the discovery of a ‘new home’ or the negativity evoked by external social pressure of being a non-native who should ‘go back home’. Hage (2017) defines this most distinguishing feature of the diasporic condition as a “vacillatory mode of existence” (p. 201). It is the consistent faltering state of oscillation between conflicting decisions – i.e., to stay or depart, to call country of origin or host country home. Ambivalence resulting from the state of in-betweenness is “foundational to the diasporic condition” (Hage, 2017, p. 201), as uncertainty and instability become a pronounced factor in every decision relating to the diasporic subject’s cultural identity and daily experience. As the modern world becomes increasingly globalised, Kenny (2013) proposes defining

‘diaspora’ in a more critical sense, in caution of proliferation leading to a lack of coherence. Rather than simply a synonym for “migration” or “ethnic group, ‘diaspora’ can be a more powerful tool to “reveal important variations, not just between migrant groups but also within [them]...as character of every group’s migration changes substantially over time” (p. 16).

As a Chinese international student in New Zealand, my in-betweenness and diasporic condition have both commonalities and differences to that of the Mainland Chinese migrant in New Zealand, or descendants of early Chinese settlers and gold-miner families. While I am just beginning to discover my place in New Zealand, another “Chinese New Zealander”, “New Zealand Chinese”, “Chiwi” might be struggling with re-discovering their Chinese cultural roots. Like the gold miners of old, in recent years, international students have become the new sojourners, expected by both their families and peers to be expats, temporary residents in a foreign land, destined to return ‘home’ once their studies are complete. Yet, it was not uncommon for those of my parent’s generation to travel across China, study and eventually settling down away from their hometown. Furthermore, I grew up in China but spent the most crucial formative years of maturity in New Zealand entering my adulthood. My in-betweenness lies at the heart of my evolving personal identity and intergenerational conflicts with my parents. Hage (2017) suggests the dilemma faced by many diasporic Chinese to be more independent as an adult or obeying traditions passed on by one’s parents is not so much a question of right or wrong but rather a cause for indecision, as both choices represent a meaningful investment and outcome.

I believe diasporic phenomena of in-betweenness are a vital component of communicating and investigating the intersection of the contemporary Chinese identity in New Zealand. To successfully document cultural in-betweenness I must investigate the Chinese customs, traditions, and ethnic consciousness impacting Chinese diaspora in New Zealand. As a filmmaker, this requires research of not only my own diasporic condition but also how other Chinese in New Zealand articulate their sense of vacillatory sense of belonging and ‘home’, as well the methods diasporic filmmakers have documented these experiences.

2.2 Diasporic Film Making

In *Migrant and Diasporic Film and Filmmaking in New Zealand*, Zalipour (2019a) identified diaspora as the core concept at the heart of diasporic films categorised by Hamid Naficy as “accented cinema” (p. 6). Diasporic filmmakers of migrant backgrounds or experiencing displacement created works to maintain “a long-term ethnic consciousness and distinctiveness

about their original cultures, customs and traditions” (Zalipour, 2019a, p. 6). Naficy (2001) believes such works are “in dialogue with the home and host societies”, the filmmaker and audiences (many of whom are similarly transnational), expressing shared “desires, aspirations, and fears” (2001, p. 6).

Zalipour proposes that diasporic films not only reflect the modern “realities of growing socio-cultural diversity in New Zealand”, the “practice of diasporic filmmaking” is also crucial for “imagining the future of New Zealand film and television” (2019a, p. 3). While I agree with the impact and contributions that diasporic films have made for New Zealand’s screen legacy, it is also vital to consider the diasporic filmmaker’s sense of belonging – that is if the subject of the work is one of cultural in-betweenness, what is the cultural/ national identity of the film produced? Naficy (2001) acutely defines accented diasporic cinema as a “transnational cultural phenomenon” featuring the interaction of multiple displaced but situated cultures.

I believe investigating how other New Zealand based diasporic filmmakers document conditions of in-betweenness will uncover techniques and strategies for my own research. However, as Naficy (2001) states, although diasporic films by nature are driven by “aesthetics of juxtaposition” between “there with here”, “then with now”, “home with exile”, they derive power “not from purity and refusal but from impurity and refusion” (p. 6). As such, I do not intend to present the broadest range of Chinese diaspora in New Zealand as a form of wider representation. For my own filmmaking practice, the truth I seek and present to the audience will be from my perspective alone. I acknowledge that this process of investigation will likely contain a high degree of subjectivity, but it is my aim to capture one slice of an authentic state found within the current Chinese diasporic condition.

2.3 Modes of Documentary Filmmaking

In his seminal text *Introduction to Documentary* (2017), Bill Nichols identifies six distinct modes of documentary filmmaking: “Expository, Poetic, Observational, Participatory, Performative and Reflexive”. He defines “...documentary as a form of cinema that speaks to us about actual situations and events. It adheres to known facts rather than creating a fictional allegory” (p. 104). Furthermore, Nichols identifies two main points of view: real people (social actors) “...who present themselves to us in stories that convey a plausible proposal about or perspective on the lives, situations, and events portrayed” and the distinct voice of the

filmmaker who “...shapes this story to show us what it feels like to inhabit or experience the world in a given way” (p. 104).

To create an effective autobiographical documentary, I acknowledge that it would be difficult for myself as the filmmaker to be separated from personal biases, as such, my perspective being the only voice leads to a clearly subjective narrative rather than objective truth. However, by acknowledging this subjectively in an honest manner both to other subjects featured in the film, as well as my audiences, I can present a ‘truthful voice’ that is authentically my own. In *Finding the Personal Voice in Filmmaking*, Knudsen (2018) states: “As I create, I feel a deep need to be confident that it is the genuine ‘I’ who is speaking and not some other voice. I want to be confident that the truth, my truth, is the truth that I am sharing” (p. 5).

Nichols (2017) defined expository modes of documentary filmmaking as emphasising verbal commentary and argumentative logic therefore allowing the filmmaker to assert a ‘right’ and ‘proper’ answer. However, I believe it is possible to combine this with Observational and Participatory mode approaches to acknowledge my inherent biases to the viewer. In these modes, elements of a narrative are often gathered by the filmmaker as “raw materials” first, before creating “a meditation, perspective or proposal” (p. 132). Considering this, I also acknowledge that by placing myself as one of the subjects, I can attempt to not interfere, but never truly achieve an objective depiction of reality as I am ultimately in control of the editing process as a filmmaker.

Regardless of how I combine different aspects of Nichol’s proposed modes of documentary filmmaking, I lean on agreeing with Stella Bruzzi’s (2006) argument that “...a documentary will never be reality nor will it erase or invalidate that reality by being representational” (p. 5). As an autobiographical documentary, *Somewhere In-between* explicitly establishes the context of my authorial control to both my subjects and audience. As such, I do not believe any single mode proposed by Nichols presents a suitable methodology for my work. In my pursuit of an authentic autobiographical documentary, I also need to accept and embrace Poetic and Reflexive modes of interpretation and methods of artistic expression such as poetical manipulation or exposing the nature of the documentary filmmaking process. I will guide my audiences not to ‘the’ truth but rather to ‘a’ truth or an ‘inner truth’.

As Knudsen (2018) contends, “what is personal then becomes universal. Paradoxically, perhaps, the more personal we get in our expressions, the more universal the consequences and impact of what we reveal” (p. 4).

I aim to use Nichols’ six modes of documentary as a foundation to explore hybrid subjective and objective approaches, to respect the authenticity of both my own truth and the ‘reality’ of cultural diasporic experiences. My process of autobiographical documentary filmmaking shall be an experimental one. I believe by casting away the limitations of working under any one specific mode, the filmmaking process can help present a better investigation of cultural in-betweenness. As Knudsen suggests, experimentation can help to discover, understand, and shape a story, not only on an individual level but also at the meta-cultural level, whereby “cultural codes and narrative forms themselves, are refreshed.” (p. 97)

2.4 Autobiographical Documentaries

Through “perpetual negotiation between the real event and its representation” (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 13), documentary filmmaking is at its core - a contributor of meaning to real world events.

In *Introduction to Documentary* (2017), Nichols defined “Autobiographical Documentary” as a nonfiction model which gives a “personal account of someone’s experience, maturation or outlook on life” (p. 107). Autobiographical documentaries allow the filmmaker to follow the pathways of their personal desire, coming to terms with “...what it means to take up an identity, to establish intimate relationships, and to achieve a sense of social belonging” (p. 84).

de Jong , Knudsen, & Rothwell (2011) propose that autobiographical documentary is a form which requires “intimacy” requiring balance “between the ‘inner’ experiences and the ‘external’ events in the life of the storyteller” (p.111). As a filmmaker, the camera is my tool for self-expression. By connecting my practice to my research and investigation of cultural in-betweenness, it supports building a link into my creative and cultural heritage (Knudsen, 2018). Knudsen (2018) defines this as a form of “narrative resonance” that the autobiographical documentary filmmaker has ownership of. This ownership is reflected in the use of the language of film to reflect the diasporic filmmaker’s personal identity, experiences and sense of belonging.

Not limited to one mode of documentary filmmaking, autobiographical storytelling can also be blended with other formats such as observational or essay forms of participatory/ performative modes. de Jong , Knudsen, & Rothwell (2011) believe combining different formats allows the filmmaker to integrate different ideas, feelings and experiences in the film. Interactions with, or being addressed directly by, the filmmaker creates a deeper engagement and sense of intimacy.

Somewhere In-between undertook a practice-based process to derive experiential knowledge from the production of a short autobiographical documentary exploring my own diasporic in-betweenness. As both the director guiding the viewer's path of observation as well as a subject inside the documentary, it was prudent for me to communicate with transparency to both audiences and my subjects about the autobiographical perspective and context of the film. As Winston, Vanstone, & Chi (2017) state: "We have been too sophisticated for too long to think that documentary can be 'life caught unawares' in any meaningfully unmediated way" (p. 85). Awareness of the camera and my editorial control over the work directly blurred the distinction between "Presentational acting" and "Representational being", with on screen behaviour and responses complicated by the issue of "Performativity" (p. 89).

In *The Cinema of Me: The Self and Subjectivity in First Person Documentary* (2012), Lebow and Renov provide a thoughtful argument against 'autobiographical documentary' as an umbrella term, preferring the use of "First Person Film" instead (p. 2). Lebow proposes that first person films are often not just about an individual but those "close, dear, beloved or intriguing, who nonetheless informs the filmmaker's sense of him or herself. [The film] may not be about a person, self or other, at all, but about a neighbourhood, a community, a phenomenon or event" (p. 1). Indeed, by researching and investigating the wide context of Chinese Diaspora in New Zealand, I am engaging first person filmmaking in a singular plural form. In this form, the individual 'I' inherently encompasses the social context in relation to the wider 'we'. I am persuaded by Lebow's belief that first person films express "our commonality, our plurality, our interrelatedness with a group, a mass, a sociality, if not a society" (p. 3). By accepting the duality of my role as both subject and object of the documentary, I could further my research in pursuit of a personalised truth that offered a perspective but did not 'represent' the voice of other diasporic Chinese New Zealanders. On a technical level, I developed my research based on many of the established genre tropes and techniques established by Nichols and autobiographical documentary filmmakers before me. However, the emergent practice of first-person filmmaking as proposed by Lebow and Renov helped me to balance and address the

integral embodied subjectivity in *Somewhere In-between* and acknowledge the wider relationship my narrative perspective had with the diasporic community and diasporic films.

As a diasporic filmmaker, I had to accept that neither myself nor my subjects could truly represent their ‘everyday selves’, but collectively we could represent an investigative contextual representation of the diasporic experience. My experience as the filmmaker became the film itself, my in-betweenness and diaspora was a vehicle to navigate intergenerational relationships and conflicts between diasporic Chinese in New Zealand and their parents.

2.5 Relationship between Diasporic Filmmakers and Diasporic Autobiographical Documentaries

In the autobiographical documentary *Banana in a Nutshell* (2005), Liang as both director and subject combined voice-over, staged flashbacks, interviews and reality TV-type coverage to explore cross-cultural romance and intergenerational conflicts. Zalipour (2019b) proposed that “Liang’s films have offered examples of Asian New Zealand identities and the related challenges and issues of living as a second-generation Kiwi-Chinese” (p. 188). The resulting documentary strikes a narrative tone that is “personal and honest”, deserving of its praise as “an artefact of our multicultural society” (p. 187).

In *Creative Documentary: Theory and Practice* (2011), de Jong , Knudsen, & Rothwell propose that the form of a narrative structure is best developed “in conjunction with the content” during the research, shoot and editing process. While openly acknowledging the “Chineseness” of her films, Liang personally believed she did not know what she was trying to convey when she was making *Banana in Nutshell* (2005) as she “didn’t necessarily need to know what [she] wanted to convey – the documentary was very much an instinctive, emotional process” (Zalipour, 2019b, p. 191).

By avoiding the “ideological approach” of working from a conflict model where binary opposition restrains the documentary filmmakers’ ability to tell stories with nuance and subtlety, Liang’s approach results in a deeply personal narrative that reflects an authentic personal reality.

This introspection mirrors my own process as a filmmaker. Winston, Vanstone, & Chi (2017) suggest “Narratives in the auto/biographical, including the visual, are discursive in nature, simultaneously questioning both identity and representation”. Liang’s autobiographical story shed light on her diasporic experiences such as navigating between diverse cultures, intergenerational conflicts, and a multicultural relationship, all the while hiding behind the camera as an emotional catharsis (Zalipour, n.d).

Whilst I intended to take a more participatory and less performative approach, I also intended to build experiential knowledge through reflexive analysis and iterative learning while creating my own autobiographical documentary. By adopting a self-reflexive position, I could leverage the strength of my personal perspective – investigating the holistic condition of cultural in-betweenness by looking inside-out, using my own diasporic identity as a reference for the subject but also for the direction of the documentary.

3. Autobiographical Documentary Case Studies

In *The Act of Documenting: Documentary Film in the 21st Century* (2017), Winston, Vanstone, & Chi state that “More usually, for documentaries, the confusions of performativity’s tolerance of inauthenticity are compounded. In scholarship on the cinema it can become a virtual synonym for “performance,” just as “performance” is a synonym for “acting” (p. 98). As established earlier, as both subject and investigator of my research, I w ‘performed’ dual roles – a clear case of conflict of interest where I did not intend to shy away from the viewer. However, successful works in this genre have used the personal perspective of the filmmaker to the work’s advantage in presenting unique personal experiences to audiences.

In this section, I conduct a critical analysis of the techniques, structure and cinematography of several autobiographical and diasporic documentaries that provided this project with processes of communicating an authentic voice and representation for my own diasporic autobiographical documentary.

3.1 Banana in a Nutshell (2005)

Autobiographical documentary is a very personal journey, and the point of view belongs to the filmmaker. *Banana in a Nutshell* (2005) presents a touching and powerful story to the audience through a Chinese cultural lens. Zalipour (2019) suggests that “Liang’s films have offered examples of Asian New Zealand identities and the related challenges and issues of living as a second-generation Kiwi-Chinese.” However, as filmmaker Roseanne Liang explained in an interview with Zalipour (2019), that she did not know what she was trying to convey when she was making *Banana in a Nutshell*. Liang believes she “didn’t necessarily need to know what [she] wanted to convey—the documentary was very much an instinctive, emotional process”.

As the documentary is told from a New Zealand born Chinese filmmaker’s personal point of view, the “Chineseness” of the film may lead to cultural misunderstanding for audiences of different cultural backgrounds. For example, when Liang’s boyfriend Stephen requests a meeting with her father (to request his blessing for their marriage, bearing in mind the father and boyfriend have barely met, and Liang’s mother has not yet met Stephen), her father replies by saying that he needs to discuss with her mother. Liang’s nervous hesitation (she seems to be unsure what to make of the situation) shows that it was not quite what she expected. Yet, in the context of Chinese cultural norms, it is very natural for decisions to be made only after discussion.

Later when Stephen calls back and is told that Liang must talk to her parents. It might seem to unfamiliar audiences as a very roundabout way to organise a supposedly very simple meeting. However, the real issue presented is one regarding a hierarchy of respect and connection. The fact that Liang cannot go directly to her parents to discuss this issue is the product of this cultural gap.

The depiction of Chinese traditional family values and decision making is an example of a cultural context which many Western audiences may not understand upon initial viewing.

Liang believes that due to sharing a common childhood environment as her partner, she is “...very much a product of New Zealand” yet also acknowledges “...how un-New Zealand [she is]...like an outsider looking in”. Zalipour recognises this as a result of New Zealand’s “...official policy that privileges the bicultural relationship between White New Zealanders of

European Pakeha descent (the mainstream majority) and the indigenous Maori” (2019). However, despite being the minority ethnic group with the longest history in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2014), the Chinese community “... is by no means monolithic” with “...complexities and diversities” (Zalipour, 2019, [P19](#)). Zalipour proposes that first versus second or third-generation Chinese migrants display a difference in “...depth and modes of connection” with China as their “cultural homeland”. Despite this, other value based cultural connections such as family connection, education, festivities, and food remain integral to the Chinese cultural identity.

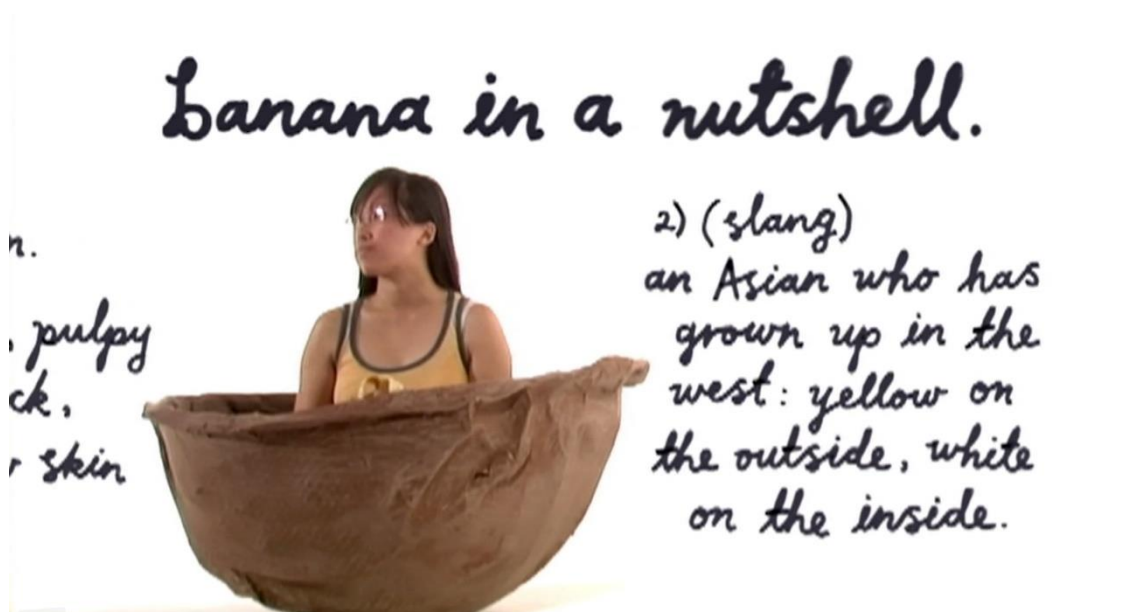


Figure 1 *Banana in a Nutshell* (2005) uses the title screen to communicate the context of the term 'Banana' for the film

Banana in a Nutshell is a significant point of reference for my research as an important piece of autobiographical documentary from a prolific Chinese New Zealand filmmaker. It is just as important for me to investigate Liang’s success in crafting an authentic depiction of her personal diasporic experiences as it is to also challenge and deconstruct her methodology. Just as Zalipour describes, there is an intergenerational cultural gap between Liang and me as second versus first generation migrants. I aimed to develop a system of autobiographical documentary filmmaking which not only tells my personal story, but also can effectively create understanding and an empathetic response from non-migrant audiences.

3.2 I Cannot Write A Poem About China (2019)

Originally a piece of poetry inspired by Tusiata Avia's *I cannot write a poem about Gaza* (VUP, 2016), author Sherry Zhang then adapted the piece to a short autobiographical documentary featuring spoken word poetry read by herself and set against the spaces and subject matters surrounding her cultural in-betweenness and diaspora.

Her core motivations for the piece stem from the “discomfort...[of navigating] disagreement” due to being stuck between “cultures with polarising politics views” (Kerr, 2019, para. 1).

Zhang acknowledges that the poem and filmmaking are both an attempt to “articulate [her] in-articulation” as she hopes to encourage discussions and understanding through self-education.

Despite the poetic and expository nature of the original poem, by taking a performative mode approach, Zhang invites the viewer into both her personal spaces (a New Zealand home full of Chinese cultural artifacts) as well as the familiar (Chinese supermarket) and catalysts for conflict (Chinese Consulate in Auckland). Juxtaposing herself reading her story set against these environments completely reframes the context of each sentence, giving further subtext and inviting further interpretation. Zhang begins by recounting her family’s migrant history from their humble roots in rural China framed against imagery of western luxury – a large open living room full of solid timber furnishing, large rugs, flat screen television, piano, glass cabinet full of curios, vases and pots of modern indoor plants as well as traditional Penjing. It is a deliberate choice to frame Zhang in this setting, who is framed symmetrically facing the viewer, in a familiar Youtuber ‘storytime’ or ‘Vlogger’ presentation style. The establishing shots are a deliberate juxtaposition as soon Zhang recounts the catalysts for intergenerational conflict, from language and accents, to much darker topics across geopolitical ideological differences both modern and historical, in China and in New Zealand. Through the cinematography, Zhang challenges viewers to question the relationship between a comfortable lifestyle and improved living standards with biased geopolitical perspectives.



Figure 2 Environmental storytelling in *I Cannot Write a Poem About China* (2019)

Zhang then takes this further by performing the second act of *I Cannot Write A Poem About China* (2019) in front of the entrance to a popular local Chinese supermarket. Surrounded by a constant stream of mostly Asian shoppers entering and exiting the grocery, she recounts her relationship with her mother and pakeha boyfriend, patriarchal and racial tensions forming her diasporic identity. Around her, each shopper passing by becomes a subject of the documentary through their response to the public performance, whether the act of choosing to ignore Zhang or staring. Environmental storytelling and visual motif play an even bigger role here as Zhang directly challenges the traditional patriarchal norms found in Chinese culture by not only performing in public, but also discussing sensitive subjects such as politics, personal relationships, and sex.



Figure 3 Narration in front of a Chinese Supermarket in *I Cannot Write a Poem about China* (2019)

Finally, the third act accumulates in Zhang escalating the discussion in front of the Chinese Consulate, this time dressed in a more traditional Chinese dress. However, the conversation turns more reflective and inward, as Zhang acknowledges her personal feelings of in-betweenness and conflict around what it means to “write about China” and to be or not to be “Kiwi”.



Figure 4 In the final act of *I Cannot Write a Poem about China* (2019), wardrobe choice and background setting are directly juxtaposed against the content of the narration.

Despite only featuring three locations and a handful of close-up cuts of certain objects of interest, the cinematography and editing of *I Cannot Write A Poem About China* (2019) is incredibly effective in not only visually communicating the subject’s autobiographical account of her diasporic experiences, it accentuates each line with additional context and subtext which are especially familiar to audiences in New Zealand, both Chinese and non-Chinese. This process invites the viewer to not just accept what Zhang presents as fact, but rather as a dialogue, befitting of her intention to spur discussion and acknowledgement of the work’s theme of discomfort around navigating disagreement. I aimed to adapt these techniques for my own practical research process to provide additional context to both my own autobiographical experiences as well as those of other featured subjects.

3.3 Diary (1973-83)

Filmed over a period of 10 years by documentarian David Perlov, *Diary* (1973-1983) captures his everyday experiences as a migrant from Brazil adjusting to political and social shifts in

Israel. Described frankly by Perlov (1996) as an autobiographical film created through “subjective eyes”, he set out to only capture the beauty and optimism in his life and subjects. Perlov believes that as a filmmaker, he is the intermediary between reality and his viewer. What Perlov captures spanning a decade is not pre-planned, but the resulting narrative is “tendentiously” ordered by him as the filmmaker. For Perlov, directing and editing his epic autobiographical work is akin to the literary writing process, his presence itself helping to “introduce order... [and creating] continuity for the viewer” (p. 2). Initially intending to record narration while shooting, Perlov eventually decided to edit and “clean” the narration in post-production, a process he describes as similar to correcting grammar. In this way, the work finds balance between spontaneous documentation and authored narrative.

The filmmaking of *Diary* is a poetic documentary process. Perlov (1996) is fascinated by the discovery of new things existing in “people...their gaze, in the way they walk, in their movements”. He fully embraces the stream of consciousness nature of an actual diary entry in his documentary process, insisting that “the film structure shouldn’t be exposed” (p. 4). In his own words, Perlov’s documentary filmmaking involves “[taking] a shot – to ask a question with it, to let it linger, and then to look for and film another shot that would be the visual answer to the first”.

I believe this form of filmmaking embodies the most authentic form of First-Person Cinema. Rather than conforming to one mode of documentary filmmaking as traditionally outlined by Nichols, the filmmaker fully embraces their ever-shifting role to both capture reality and also interpret a personalised view of the truth from the resulting footage. For Perlov, this means to “show beautiful things in films, things [he loves] ...to show the glass half full” (1996, p. 1). Dittmar (2012) however interprets Perlov’s use of shots filmed from high-rise apartments above street level as presenting the perspective of a surveying “camera eye”, and his static focus on banal and contingent subject matters as indicative of suppressed tension found within the great backdrop of social change. Neither view is factual or correct, *Diary* continues to evolve with

time as a subjective but authentic slice of history that successfully embeds “the personal within the political and the political with the personal”.



Figure 5 In Diary (1973-83), scenes captured by Perlov in a spontaneous manner over the course of a decade can be interpreted differently both by the filmmaker and viewer, dependant on the context of when and where the film is viewed.

Diary gives viewers a personalised view into the social and political landscape of Israel during a specific time and place from Perlov’s eyes, however, I believe the state of Chinese diaspora and cultural in-betweenness will undoubtedly continue to evolve with time. It is my role as researcher and filmmaker to capture reality in an unfiltered manner and discover meanings from the process and resulting footage. As Lebow describes the nature of First-Person cinema, *Somewhere In-between* is an autobiographical of ‘me’ in a singular plural sense, encompassing social contexts in relation to a wider diasporic ‘we’.

4. Practical Research

4.1 Practice as Research

This research project involves analysis of diasporic filmmakers and autobiographical documentaries to develop techniques and strategies for documenting in-betweenness and

diasporic experiences relating to intergenerational conflicts. Using practice as research, I interviewed both subjects native to New Zealand as well as diasporic Chinese in New Zealand relating to their in-betweenness and the concept of 'home'.

In *A Correspondence Between Practices*, autobiographical filmmaker Stephen Goddard (2014) argues that philosophical theory is equivalent to practice. By adopting an autobiographical video memoir as a framework for his PhD research, the production process and research writing became exegetical through their "capacity to be used in analysis and interpretation of each other" (Barrett & Bolt, 2014, p. 12). By understanding both practice as enquiry and evaluation of its outcomes, the resulting process provides a philosophical context which "moves between established theory and the situated knowledge that emerges through practice" (Barrett & Bolt, 2014, p. 12). Furthermore, Batty & Kerrigan (2018) elaborate this for the filmmaking context as 'Practice-led' or 'Research-led' depending on the researcher's chosen methodology (p. 23). For my research, documentary filmmaking was fundamental to my investigation into cultural in-betweenness, as such the 'method' of documentary lies embedded in my research question from the outset. Batty & Kerrigan (2018) argue that the interdisciplinary nature of screen production inquiry could be used as a form of creative practice methodology, where ontology and epistemology are woven in to the research design (p. 25). My research also resonates with Robin Nelson's (2013) belief that Practice as Research "typically involves a multi-mode inquiry" whereby practice-led approaches can co-exist alongside "consciously disorderly or chance approach" research methods (p. 99).

The resulting production of *Somewhere In-between*, my short autobiographical documentary, derives its research methodology from ontological questioning and contextualisation of cultural in-betweenness as well as an epistemological investigation into the techniques and strategies of diasporic filmmakers and their films and autobiographical documentaries. This approach is described by Batty & Kerrigan (2018) as an "insider's perspective", where the research is conducted through filmmaking whilst the filmmaker is also observing their own actions through the process (p. 11).

Furthermore, a parallel can be drawn between research design methods and film production processes and planning. For the production of an autobiographical documentary, the planning and sourcing of my interview subjects, questions and interview process, location, cinematography, sound design, and every facet of the filmmaking process are "designed around the pragmatics of executing the research" (Batty & Kerrigan, 2018, p. 12). Due to the personal nature of my research, I gravitate towards declaring my myself as a constructionist, described by Kerrigan (after Crotty, 1998) as reflective of how human practices are constructed through

human interaction, allowing screen media to advocate for specific positions (2018, p. 20). Constructivism is more useful for my research rather than a Subjectivism approach (where meaning is consciously imposed rather than derived out of an interplay between parties). As I am investigating from a personal (and inherently biased point of view), meaningful research results for me means accepting that there are no objective truths for me to conclude nor established positions for me to argue. My process of practice as research relies on discovery from interaction with my documentary subjects (and personal reflection as a subject myself) to arrive at understanding of my diasporic experiences and cultural in-betweenness.

4.2 Aims, Methods and Outcomes

Somewhere In-between was conceived as a practical research based on my theoretical understanding of the techniques of autobiographical documentary and diasporic filmmaking. The core purpose lies in the investigation of context and catalysts leading to cultural in-betweenness and intergenerational conflicts shaping diasporic Chinese experiences in New Zealand. As I began my practical research with more questions than answers, I believed it was beneficial to include perspectives of other diasporic subjects to explore their in-betweenness and juxtapose against my own.

As previously discussed, my intention was to fully embrace both roles as filmmaker and subject of the documentary. One technique I could adopt from the 'Performative' mode was acknowledgement of the camera. I chose to present myself as narrator, interviewer and subject, conducting a series of interviews with my own personal story as a throughline. Winston, Vanstone, & Chi (2017) propose that "Awareness, whether in overt or covert enactment, is not necessarily fatal to authenticity. And, so, by extension, neither is the interview, its commonest overt form" (p. 93). I chose this common form because both my subjects and audience are aware of its "de facto presentational" (p. 94) nature. There would be no pretension of an *established narrative* as I chose to make it clear to all that I was exploring my own in-betweenness but using my subject's stories as juxtaposition. I support Bruzzi's (2006) critique of the inflexibility of Nichol's proposed 'expository mode' framework. She believes that unadulterated observation does not automatically make a documentary more faithful to reality, likewise, "the truth...does not only become apparent when the overt intervention of the filmmaker is minimised" (p. 56). Documentaries, even of the autobiographical kind, can possess many voices. If I was transparent to audiences from the start, my voice would not be the 'one' truth, but simply 'my truth'.

My initial production plan of the documentary is as follows:

1. Formulate a series of interview questions to explore the social dynamics of being born and raised in New Zealand versus China and how it shapes traditions and expectations around parent-child dynamics, career and marriage decisions and adjusting to moving to live in a different country.
2. Confirm three key interviewees:
 - a. New Zealander born and raised in Aotearoa, ideally third generation at least, who identifies with Kiwi culture, with no diasporic experience.
 - b. Chinese New Zealander, 1.5 generation or second generation, with migrant experiences.
 - c. Chinese New Zealander – limited time living in New Zealand (maximum two years), with diasporic experiences.
3. Conduct interviews with each group to explore the same set of questions and document their lifestyle, cultural identity, diasporic experiences, and intergenerational relationships.
4. Edit each interview into segments to reflect on my own diasporic experiences and formulate additional interview questions for my own parents to discuss and analyse the cause of my cultural in-betweenness.
5. Interview my own parents with the original set of questions, then screen for them responses from the other interviewees and then conduct a follow up interview for their responses.

It is very likely that audiences and I will draw different conclusions to my subjects' answers, I will intentionally present my feelings as the filmmaker in response to self-reflexive analysis. I will take these crucial takeaways into my interview conversation with my parents, to build a more nuanced interview. My intended outcome would be to produce a short autobiographical documentary exploring my personal diasporic experiences through contrast and juxtaposition as well as direct confrontation and reflection with my parents.

This production phase of the short autobiographical documentary would take place in both New Zealand in person and via video call to China. I had intended to return to Inner Mongolia to screen interviews conducted to my parents and record their reactions live and conduct our discussion immediately following this. Unfortunately, I was not able to travel due to Covid-19 lock down restrictions in 2020-2021. However, during this research period I naturally had many video call conversations with my parents. My concern for their wellbeing due to the evolving

pandemic added further mixed feelings about what ‘home’ meant for me. As such, I decided that the interview with my parents would be presented in the same way as usual video calls. As such, the expository nature of discussing my research themes became Observational and Participatory. I would be frank with my parents who are aware of the topic of my research and themselves being subjects. I hoped this method of presentation would provide context of my in-betweenness through deconstructing the ‘interview’ format and help derive cultural understanding of my ethical consciousness and source of intergenerational conflict by ‘joining in’ on a family call.

Reflexive analysis of my pre-production research, strategies, techniques, production journal, practical research data from interviewing documentary subjects and locations and the resulting autobiographical documentary all served as the theoretical and practical framework to answer my research question.

4.3 Interview Questions

My research covers a series of questions to explore childhood, maturity, cultural identity, cultural in-betweenness and diasporic experiences. I proposed these questions for both myself to answer as well as my interview subjects to both learn and contrast our respective experiences. Bruzzi (2006) suggests that the use of a voiceover narrator in documentaries often “...achieve a certain authority through being both an arbitrator and arbitrary; capable of being both reasonable and logical as well as irrationally selective” (p. 57). By introducing myself as an interview subject before narrator/ author of *Somewhere In-between*, I hoped to break down such barriers as the purpose of an autobiographical documentary is to be intimate and far from anonymous.

During the interview process, it was important for my research subjects to speak for themselves to retain an unbiased point of view. I provided the following questions as framework for inquiry and conversation but avoided enforcing any sense of a pre-authored narrative:

1. Where were you born and raised?
2. What does “home” mean for you?
3. How would you describe your cultural identity?

- a. Would you introduce yourself as a New Zealander or Chinese (or country of origin) or a mix of both, and why?
4. How would you describe your relationship with your parents growing up?
 - a. How did this evolve as you entered adulthood?
5. What were the traditions and expectations around career, marriage, and other life decisions for you whilst growing up?
 - a. Would you say this was normal for the environment/ culture you were raised in?
 - b. What were your own dreams/ goals/ expectations and did this change? If so, what caused the changes?
 - c. Did your parents support your decisions growing up and moving into adulthood?
 - d. Do they support your life decisions now?
6. Have you ever experienced any cultural or intergenerational conflict?
7. Have you ever experienced any feelings of cultural in-betweenness? (Whether as a tourist, migrant, expatriate or during daily life in New Zealand)
8. Do you have any diasporic experiences?
 - a. (Follow up) If yes, what would you say would be the cause of these experiences?
9. Would you say your cultural identity is similar or different to that of your parents and why?
10. How do you envision your relationship with your own child to be like based on your own experiences?

4.4 Interviewees

The process of finding suitable interview subjects for *Somewhere In-between* was an extensive affair:

4.4.1 Ken (1.5 Generation Chinese Immigrant)

Ken was the first interview subject I confirmed for my practical research. The term ‘1.5 generation’ describes “children of migrants who arrive in their new country aged between 5 and 17” (Kim, 2013). While Ken has spent his teens in New Zealand, well exposed to the local culture, he was still very connected with his Chinese identity – forever split between two nations and cultures. As someone who has moved beyond the ‘international student’ moniker that I have personally yet to shake off completely, I was interested in how similar or different his perspectives on cultural in-betweenness differed to mine. Furthermore, as Ken and his family are originally from Guangzhou (Canton), he was connected to a much longer history of Chinese in New Zealand. The first Chinese in New Zealand can be traced back to the early 19th Century with gold miners from Guangzhou (Ip, 2015). Culturally speaking, differences do also exist between us as our families come from the two polar north and south ends of China. I was curious to find out what Ken’s perspectives were on intergenerational relationships and Confucian traditions such as family ties and following the wisdom and life choices our elders have laid for us.

4.4.2 Thomas (Kiwi/ European New Zealander)

I approached Thomas as an interview subject for my research as he was a good representation of the quintessential ‘Kiwi’. Born and raised in Tauranga, Thomas shared many of the characteristics associated with the ‘traditional’ New Zealand national identity of gumboots and number 8 wire (Barker, 2012). Despite not directly relating to diasporic experiences, I believed it was important to feature an authentically New Zealand native perspective to juxtapose against myself and the other interview subjects. In particular, I was very interested in what childhood and upbringing in New Zealand was like for Thomas and how he viewed his relationship with his parents. I believe most Chinese migrants, certainly myself and my parents, have a very stereotypical view of what growing up in New Zealand would be like. Certainly, there are aspects that may be rose-tinted in nature, which potentially contribute to my own feelings of cultural-in-betweenness and diaspora i.e. “I’ll never fit in because we were raised different”.

A crucial component of my practical research was to finally have a direct conversation on these subject matters to explore the nature of the “New Zealand national identity” and whether we currently exist on a mono-cultural, bi-cultural, or multi-cultural worldview.

4.4.3 Perry (New Chinese Immigrant)

Next, I confirmed Perry as my third interview subject. As the eldest interviewee in age, he had also lived the longest in China – having spent “[his] childhood, youth, and adulthood” (Liu, 2021) in Fuzhou city, Fujian province, China. As such, Perry had more experience than me both being “Chinese” as well as being an ‘immigrant’. He described himself as a “new immigrant”, but it was apparent to me he had more knowledge and experience living as a “Chinese in New Zealand”. Based on his background and during discussion about my research, I sensed that we were in different stages of cultural in-betweenness. Perry was more concerned with the issues of integrating into New Zealand and Western society. Furthermore, he also had a very traditional Chinese upbringing, which made for a perfect interview candidate for us to explore his perspectives on intergenerational conflicts.

Finally, during our discussions in relation to integration, Perry also suggested that I interview Junior, a Samoan New Zealander to offer a diasporic perspective I had not previously considered. Pasifika immigrants have a much closer relationship with indigenous Māori culture in New Zealand, and it would be valuable for my research to not only compare and contrast Kiwi Pakeha and Chinese perspectives but also New Zealand’s neighbouring immigrants.

4.4.4 Junior (Samoan Immigrant)

After Perry’s prompt for me to expand my interview subjects, I decided to include an additional interview subject from my original plan of three subject groups. The process of confirming interview candidates had offered me new insights and understanding of the New Zealand identity. I became cognisant of the fact that as society became more diverse, so did perspectives and the ‘Kiwi’ identity was very much evolving to reflect a multicultural landscape. Pasifika immigrants, drawing on deeper connections with Māori indigenous culture, “congregated and evolved a distinctive New Zealand Pacific culture which was more than the sum of their different cultures” (Phillips, 2015).

In China, the Hukou permanent residence registration system dictates each person’s access to local education, social welfare, and job opportunities. As such, China has one of the most extensive “internal migration” systems in the world (International Labour Organization, 2013). I began to realise that there are a lot of similarities between Pasifika migrants and internal migration in China. Previously, I had considered Pasifika New Zealanders to be naturally more ‘local’ than a Chinese migrant, however, it became apparent that cultural in-betweenness and

diaspora exists just the same. Interviewing Junior would allow me to gain a uniquely different perspective that lies ‘in-between’ Pakeha and Chinese New Zealand identities.

4.5 Language and Identity

As the documentary is autobiographical in nature, naturally I was also one of the interviewees. I decided to film my own answers first, to establish a baseline of my diasporic experiences prior to comparing to those of my interview subjects. Once all the interviews are complete, I revisited my answers to re-evaluate both questions and answers from a new perspective. Due to English not being my native language it was important for me to clearly communicate myself as filmmaker and interviewer. I am more confident in writing than speaking so I wrote my answers in Chinese then translated to English before recording myself answering the questions.

This act is Performative in nature, especially so as I had to practise recording my answers in English due to my lack of fluency. However, as Winston, Vanstone, & Chi (2017) state: “presentation of self is [not] automatically rendered invalid if it is self-conscious” (p. 102). By showing to the viewer my lack of English fluency, I present another personal truth: the act of simply communicating diaspora and in-betweenness is difficult in itself for non-native speakers.

Upon reviewing the footage, I realised that it would be very inauthentic to conduct the in-person interviews, especially with Ken and Perry in English. To complete *Somewhere In-between* as an auto-biographical documentary, it was important for me as the filmmaker to be an intimate participant in the interview process. As such, I naturally felt more comfortable and confident conducting the interviews with Ken and Perry in Mandarin Chinese, our native tongue. However, this also made me question whether this would place the interview in a biased perspective right away, as the subjects would possibly be subconsciously engaging their ‘Chinese identity’. Native tongue, Mother Tongue or what is also referred to as “Home Language”, “...carries within it the history, the culture, the traditions, the very life of a people”. (Rovira, 2008). However, after extensive discussion with my interview subjects we came to the decision to allow them to speak in the language they best feel comfortable in to express their diasporic experiences – whether it is English, Chinese, or a mix of both. In *The Relationship Between Language and Identity* (2008), Rovira proposes that it is the right of immigrants to maintain their native tongue, even after they become fully fluent in the language of a new country. Navigating intersections of Chinese and New Zealand cultures lies at the heart of *Somewhere In-between*. Thus, the juxtaposition of different languages and how my interview

subjects choose to express themselves will inherently contribute to the discussion and research purpose at hand.

“Language is intrinsic to the expression of culture...and a fundamental aspect of cultural identity” (Rovira, 2008). After going through the process of translating and recording my own diasporic experiences in English, I realised that an important aspect of my cultural in-betweenness stems from pre-established notions of assimilation. Is it truly possible to authentically examine diaspora if it is communicated through a loss of one’s mother tongue? By choosing to express myself in this manner, I had lost many of the “sights and sounds” that were integral to my native language and in turn, cultural identity (Baez, 2002).

I had considered re-recording my answers again in Chinese Mandarin, however, revisiting my research on autobiographical documentary techniques, I recognised that Poetic and Reflexive modes of filmmaking, as proposed by Nichols, are inherently personal. My responses should be treated just the same as any of the other interviewees, un-edited and without reshoots. The purpose of *Somewhere In-between* was to convey a truth about the nature of my cultural in-betweenness and diasporic experience. It was vital to prioritise the needs of Jinyang the documentary subject to reflect a personal reality over Jinyang the filmmaker’s desire for objective perfection. Thus, the mistake of choosing to avoid using my home language to detail my diasporic experiences served to highlight and juxtapose against the language choice of my other interview subjects.

In the end, it was decided that Ken and Perry would respond in their preferred language of choice – Chinese Mandarin, while Thomas and Junior would use English.

4.6 Cinematography

4.6.1 Equipment

Nichols’ (2017) approach to the documentary process is similar to that of a fictional filmmaking pipeline: doing pre-production, fieldwork, developing a treatment, and choosing the correct tools to serve the overall structure and flow of the film (p. 219). However, Bruzzi (2006) remains sceptical of such formalised processes to strive for objectivity: “if one is always going to regret the need for cameras and crews and bemoan the inauthenticity of what they bring back from a situation, then why write about or make documentaries?” As such a paradox is created

where documentaries seem more spontaneous and authentic because they show the documentary process and the moment of encounter with their subjects, [flaunting] their lack of concern with conforming to the style of objectivity” (p. 10). As *Somewhere In-between* seeks to explore many unanswered questions both personal and meaningful to wider diasporic Chinese, I do not intend to present interviews or stage shots to fulfil a concluding point or agenda. To pursue the most naturalistic storytelling experience for an autobiographical documentary, I prepared a set of camera and lens combinations that best suited the two setups most necessary for *Somewhere In-between*’s production. Common to both setups are the need for light run-and-gun style filmmaking, as I needed to respond to the preferences of my subjects as well as keep the cinematography in a state of motion and ‘exploration’.

A Canon C100 Mark II was used for static camera interview scenes combined with 85mm f/1.2 lens for best subject isolation for medium closeup shots. A Canon EOS R5/ R was used for moving *B-Roll* (secondary supplemental footage) in conjunction with prime lenses such as 50mm f/1.2 and 35mm f/1.2 as well as 28-70mm f/1.2 zoom, dependent on camera movement requirements. As the purpose of these scenes was to convey a ‘slice-of-life’ investigation of my daily life in New Zealand, they needed to be spontaneous shoots where portability outweighed the need for perfection.

4.6.2 Time and Space

Time and space are important aspects of cinematography for a documentary filmmaker. Certainly, for many, it is all about control, the pursuit of consistent sound and light, removing hazards and unpredictability for the sake of “beautiful footage” (Irving, 2017). However, I was less concerned with technical excellence than I was with capturing authenticity. From the outset of *Somewhere In-between* I had already established that the documentary is set in New Zealand. For my interview subjects, I simply wished for them to share their stories in the same manner as myself as the narrator. This meant that the physical space and location where the interview took place was of less concern to me. Traditional documentary interview techniques suggest taking advantage of environments and “use it to help tell the story” (Ruttkay, 2020). However, in the case of *Somewhere In-between*, I wanted each interviewer’s expressions and words to remain at the forefront. As such the location of each interview was determined based on environments most comfortable for the subject. Regardless of their socio-economic condition in New Zealand the focus of the interview should be on their childhood upbringing, intergenerational relationships, and their perspectives on cultural in-betweenness and diaspora.

I was aware that some preconceived stereotypes might exist for *Somewhere In-between's* intended audience, as such it was even more important to avoid first impressions such as “they seem like a typical Banana (yellow skin on the outside, white on the inside, referring to Asians who have assimilated into Western society)” or “they seem financially well off so they must be dealing with first-world problems”.

It was vital for my director's eye to be purely documentary, to present my subjects as they are. To achieve this, I intentionally designed the cinematography to be as neutral as possible. Firstly, all the interviews were conducted outdoors. I also worked to achieve naturalism for lighting, to closely match the weather conditions. I chose daylight settings to avoid dramatic colour or lighting having an emotional influence over the shot.



Figure 6 Each frame was intended to remain as visually naturalistic as possible

In autobiographical documentaries, when the filmmaker is part of the shoot, they are both the “seer and seen”, “observer and observed”. They are continually raising key questions about the (power) relationship between film-maker and subject in an always overt and often reflexive fashion...in the way that film-makers make use of their cameras (Dowmunt, 2013).

For the interviews, I chose to frame the subject side on, with a sliver of myself deliberately just barely in frame. The intended context was to respect both roles – myself as the director/ interviewer but also as a participant in the conversation. I deliberately left a lot of ‘space’ open outside of the *Mise-en-scène*, to allow room for the viewer to become a third party in the conversation. I deliberately intended to avoid standard practices of documentary filmmaking

such as cutaways, simultaneous shots or subtle camera movements for expositional benefits (The Slanted Lens, 2013).



Figure 7 The interviews are presented as if the audience is part of the conversation.

Drawing inspiration from my previous case studies, I designed a setup similar to an interview scene from *Banana in a Nutshell* (2005) where Liang's boyfriend reads a prepared speech. The character is aware of and acknowledges the viewer and interviewer but is also focused on telling the story as a narrator. This medium closeup shot (Figure 8) is intimate and inviting, yet by having the subject turning and almost speaking off camera it feels like they are addressing the audience as part of the same conversation.

I avoided the front-on shot found in *I Cannot Write a Poem about China* (2019), which was more performative in nature, for my own answers. I recorded my own storytelling narration intercut between B-roll footage in a similar fashion to the other subjects, speaking to an off-camera party whose presence isn't seen, but is felt. I believe this helps *Somewhere In-between* to remain an exploration of my diasporic experiences rather than one where I am simply presenting my findings as factual conclusions.



Figure 8 (Above) Banana in a Nutshell (2005), (Below) I Cannot Write a Poem about China (2019) demonstrates how a subtle difference in the subject addressing off camera changes the nature of the dialogue and how their stories are communicated to the viewer.

4.6.3 B-Roll (Secondary Supplemental Footage)

For *B-Roll* shots in *Somewhere In-between*, I chose to document on-the-spot videography techniques based on observation of people's daily life habits. This is also the most frequently used and standard shooting angle and shooting method for television documentation of news events.

In this way, the visual provides a window for the audience to observe the daily activities of myself and those living around me in Auckland New Zealand.

When shooting the streets of Auckland, I directed the camera in an organic manner. When the camera was not moving, I used the movable chassis on the tripod or the videographer's own human body to create subtle movements.

The choice of panning transitions allows the audience to adjust their visual attention based on movement of myself as a subject or change of scenery.

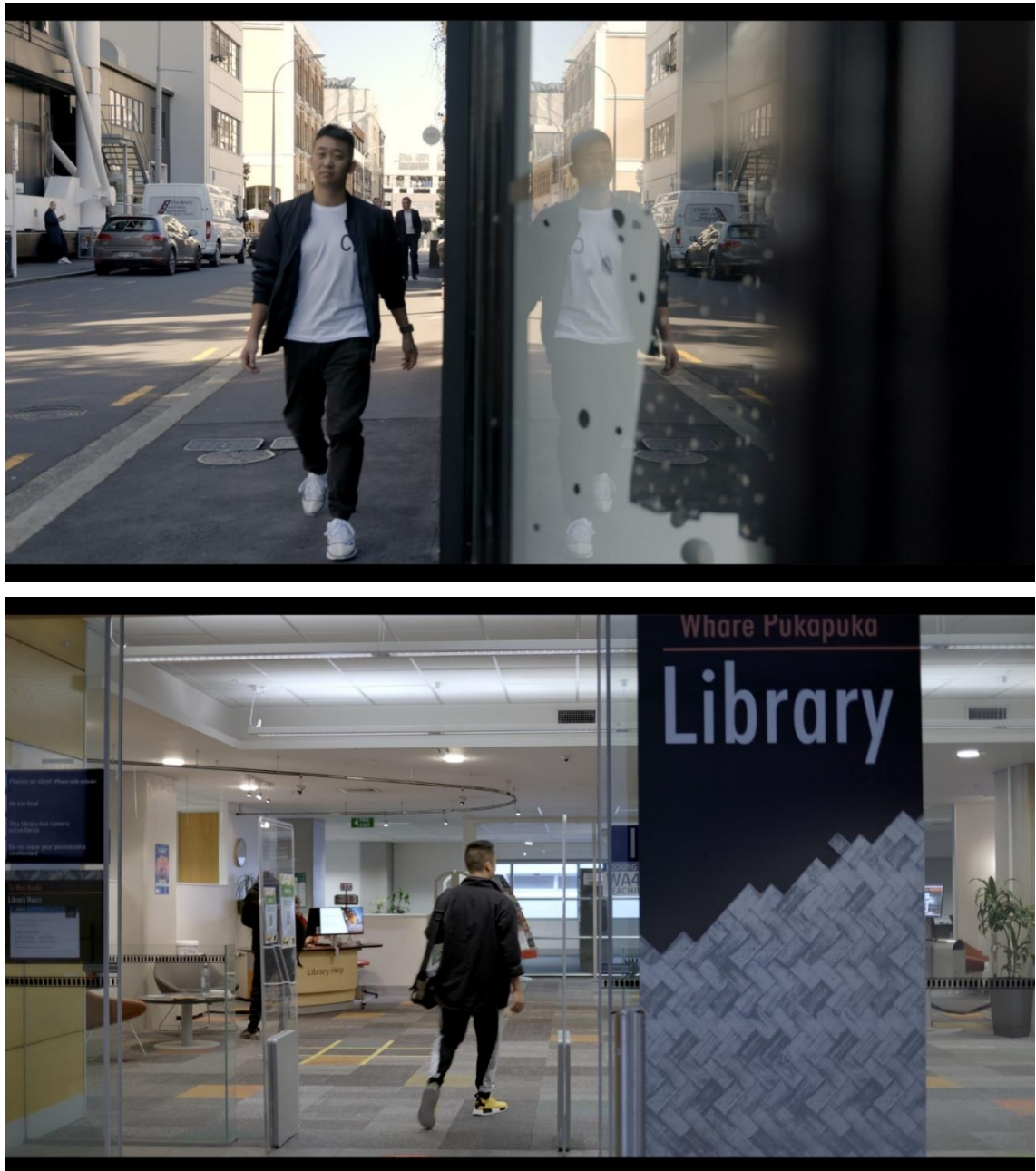


Figure 9 (Above) Streets of Auckland (Below) Auckland University Library transitioning between daily life and study.

As an opposing effect to the interview scenes, when subjects are not in the shot speaking, then environmental storytelling techniques are used instead to complement the voice-over narration.

Upon reviewing my own recorded narration – it was apparent to me that B-Roll footage and environmental storytelling was crucial for *Somewhere In-Between*. As my spoken English skills are not as proficient as those of my other interview subjects, I needed to use the cinematography of time and space, to express my emotions and provide context for the themes of the documentary. It serves the functions of providing exposition, symbolism, and visual metaphors.

By interspersing interview close-up scenes where the subject is the main focal point with B-Roll where Auckland, New Zealand becomes the visual subject, I can use creative edits to provide spatial conversion of the scenes and adjust the documentary's sense of rhythm.

4.6.4 Camera Movement

Even though *Somewhere In-between* is an autobiographical documentary, the purpose of the film was for the audience to be an active participant in exploring my diasporic experience. Differing from *I Cannot Write a Poem About China* (2019) the intention was to avoid presenting the documentary as a performance. Camera movement was especially important to remove the feeling of a theatre/ stage-like experience.

During production I learnt that when I make use of camera panning, it should always serve a clear purpose. The amount of movement and speed will cause subtle changes in the audience's visual perception and interpretation of a scene.

For shots of Auckland scenery, I made use of panning to keep the visuals always in motion. Objects in the frame would thereby show a state of constant movement regardless of whether they are in a moving state or a static state.

At the same time, the movement of the camera suggests to the viewer a first-person visual experience of movement in the audience's own daily life walking around a city. It was my aim to evoke the visual experience of travelling whether on foot or in a vehicle, creating more

immersion. The restless camera also serves as a visual metaphor for my ever-shifting cultural identity – in flux and not yet settled.



Figure 10 (Above and below) Travelling is a very large part of life as an immigrant.

4.6.4 Composition

During the production of *Somewhere In-between*, I also tried to achieve a balance in capturing naturalistic footage but also utilising interesting camera angles different from our usual everyday perspective. By altering the position and visual importance of the subject on screen, I

was able to make use of environmental storytelling to create visual metaphors that complement my narration.

By shooting most of the B-Roll from standard eye line, the subject does not undergo perspective distortion, and a strong sense objectivity and realism is presented.

When I am travelling through Auckland city, the audience is invited to join me on the same eyeline to experience my surroundings.

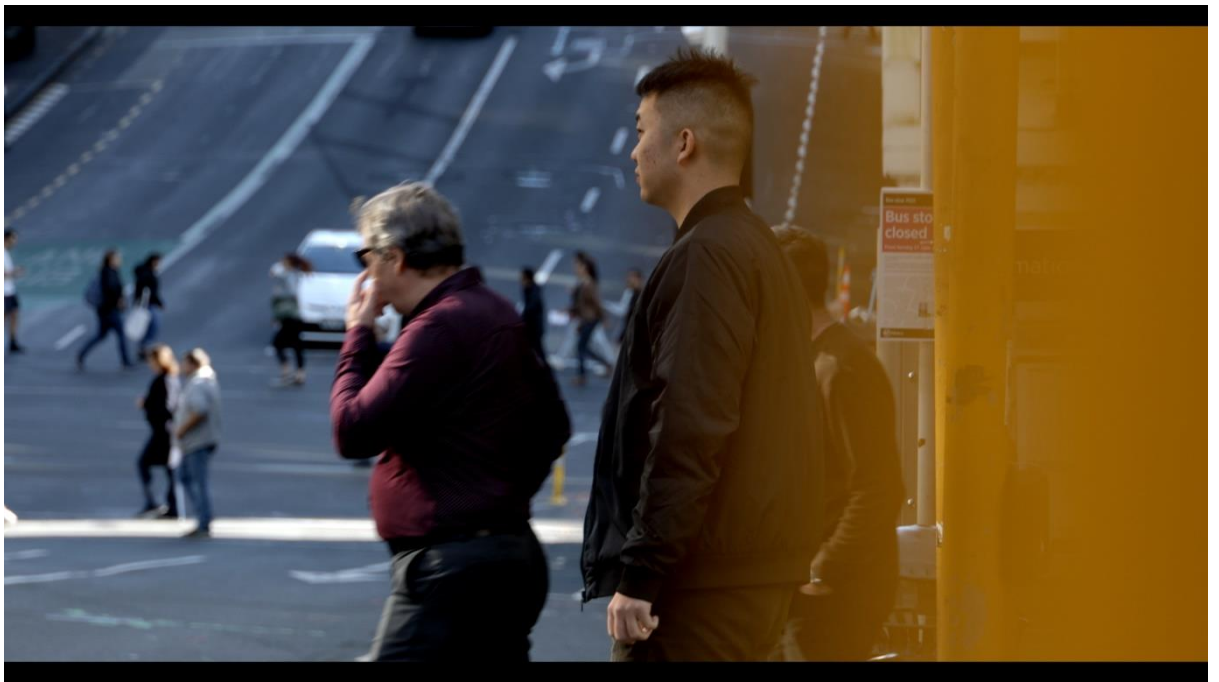


Figure 11 (Above and Below) Exploring the city at a normal eye level.

When I did eventually adjust the camera angle dramatically, it was to provide context for an emotional response. I used low-angle upshots to give a better view of the urban environment and present the relationship between me and the sense of feeling lost within a foreign city.

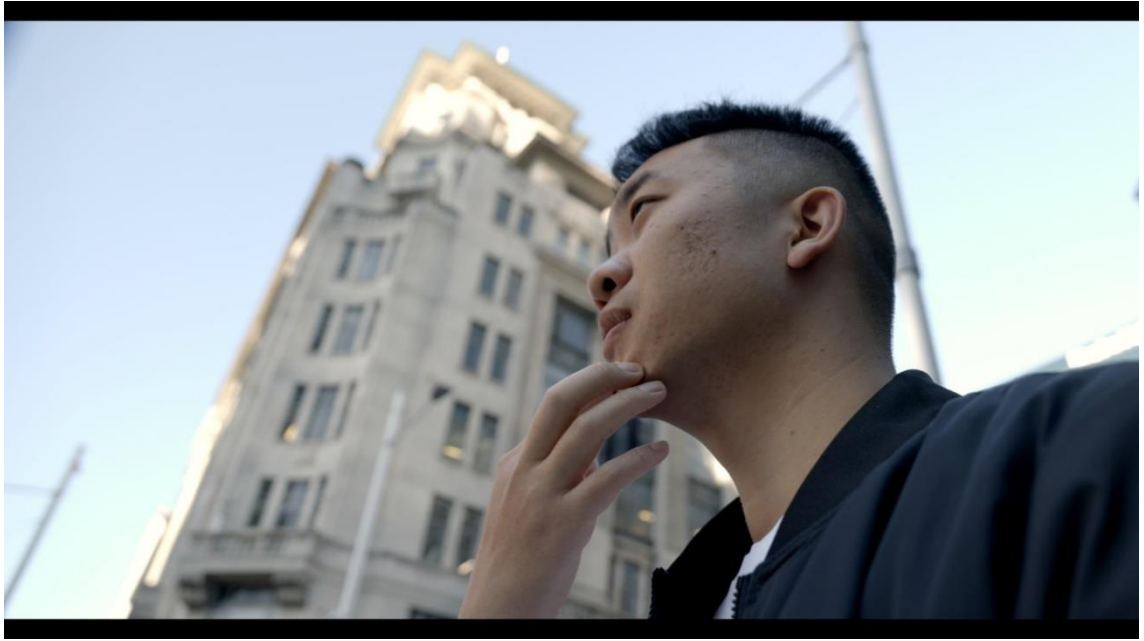


Figure 12 The camera angle simulates the physical action of looking up at an unfamiliar sky.

I also utilised camera angles as well the scale of subjects in frame to present different scenes via a mix of balanced and unbalanced compositions, representing my experiences navigating through Auckland city, my new home. Each shot represents a visual metaphor of the familiar versus unknown.





Figure 13 (Above) Balanced composition, subject feels at piece with environment (Below) Unbalanced, navigating unfamiliar streets.

4.6.5 Sound Design

There is an “academic debate of (documentary) film sound circles around a cluster of themes: realism, authenticity, aesthetic impact of technological change, narrative” (de Jong , Knudsen, & Rothwell, 2011, p. 289). For *Somewhere In-between*, I felt strongly that naturalistic realism was more important to build the authenticity that I desired, over musical aesthetics or creating soundscapes for mood building and tension. This ‘fly on the wall’ approach allowed me to remove an additional ‘Performative’ aspect to the intimate nature of an autobiographical documentary. As the audience is keenly aware of the presence of the camera during my interviews, the absence of backing music respects the naturalism of the cinematography and context of the conversation. Everyone featured in the documentary discussed deeply personal topics and stories. My sound design process simply involved capturing the conversations that took place and presenting them as authentically as possible.

de Jong , Knudsen, & Rothwell (2011) however, also suggest that recording and presenting non-native speech can be “problematic” and that even with subtitling will result in limited regional reach to audiences (p. 301). I followed this advice for the beginning of the production of *Somewhere In-between* but realised in the final section that only by respecting my native mother-tongue and expressing myself in Mandarin Chinese can I truly present my authentic ‘voice’ to audiences. This conflicting method of communication matches perfectly with the in-between nature of the identity and cultures I seek to juxtapose, as such I feel it only serves to embolden the themes of my project.

4.7 Reflections on Practical Research

The production of *Somewhere In-between* took place over roughly 4 months, impacted significantly by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as lockdowns and restrictions on international travel. During the process, I had more time to reflect on the nature of my Chinese identity under escalating geo-political tensions between the two countries I had come to call home: China and New Zealand. As I embarked on the process of completing an autobiographical documentary about cultural in-betweenness, my perspectives continued to be reshaped and re-written. To conclude my research, I endeavoured to reflectively analyse the production process of *Somewhere In-between* through each stage of the work. The following is intended to serve as a companion piece to be read after viewing the documentary.

4.7.1 Introduction

Somewhere In-between begins with a self-narrated autobiographical introduction of my own upbringing, set against contrasting footage of my two homes: China and New Zealand, as well as two roles: the filmmaker and interviewee.

I also begin to explore the concept of ‘diaspora’, a complex word describing the ever-changing personal identity struggles of people scattered across the globe, living and settling in new homes away from their homeland. As Kenny (2013) observes, “almost every diaspora involves the idea of return” both literal and physical (para. 9). Yet, where do diasporic people yearn to ‘return’ to if they are not sure where ‘home’ lies?

As the introduction was intended to provide context for this entire research project, I was not embarrassed to admit from the outset that I am new to the reflective process of understanding what diaspora means both to myself and others. Initially I wanted to simply present the story of my upbringing and answer the age-old cliché question “where are you from?”. However, the documentary needed to serve as a catalyst for exploration and not just to communicate a conclusion. Therefore, I eventually decided to settle on a question that encompassed both past and present “*what does Home mean for you?*”

Cinematographically, the documentary begins in motion – via drone footage I had previously recorded of my hometown in China before quickly cutting to New Zealand signifying the

drastic change the move felt to me emotionally. My own narration scenes and B-Roll both feature an objective naturalistic slice of life view of me in my usual New Zealand environment. As I am an international student, it was natural for me to be alternating between my usual studio work desk setting, and wandering the city, always trying to absorb and perhaps, assimilate into my new home.

4.7.2 Home, Cultural Identity and Childhood

The first section of the documentary features interviews with my four interview subjects: two immigrants from China (one as a teen, and one new migrant), a local Kiwi born in Tauranga, and one immigrant from Samoa. Each describes where they were born and raised, as well as what does “Home” mean for them.

It was interesting to hear the different interpretations by the different subjects on what the word ‘home’ meant. The immigrants depending on how long they had spent here emphasised their origin country or New Zealand differently. For the migrants it is very much forward future facing in terms of aspirational ideals such as “better future”, “safe haven”, “pillar to support”. However, there is also a consistent desire for feeling grounded such as “feeling complete”, “[being oneself]” and feeling contentment, which seems external to nation or borders. I also found it interesting that Thomas the Kiwi especially mentioned family in relation to home, which made me ponder whether he would consider another country home if separated from friends and family.

Following this, the topic of cultural identity was then explored. I prefaced this topic by explaining the complexities of both “Chinese identities” as well as the identity of being an Asian or Chinese in New Zealand such as:

“...an international student, as a Mainland Chinese, as an Inner Mongolian, as an Asian, as a minority.” (Liu, 2021)

This identity confusion is also rooted in the fact that in modern China, citizens often remain in the city they were born in. There are “provincial cultural norms” but there is a very ancient

collective cultural identity of being “Chinese”. The need to investigate my own cultural identity was one as foreign as having to do so in English rather than my own mother tongue.

For my interview subjects, I found it fascinating that Junior was very confident to express his understanding of the Pasifika culture, and how it relates to New Zealand society. For Ken and Perry however, like me they felt the effects of being in-between cultures, or “half and half” as Ken describes himself when pondering if he’s ready to call himself a New Zealander. I too shared with them a common desire to learn and exchange more with other ethnic groups in New Zealand to expand my understanding of what the Kiwi identity really means. In contrast to us, Thomas was more interested to explore his Scottish heritage, but he already considers whatever his father passed down to be part of his Kiwi cultural identity. Certainly, New Zealand is such a young country that everyone has a curiosity when we trace our roots.

After interweaving personal stories of my subjects, the documentary moves into the second section, a deeper look at childhood and family dynamics. Again, I provide the context through examining my own past growing up in Inner Mongolia. As with many Chinese, family and traditions were the most important part of our lives. I had prepared my narration here to be a crucial autobiographical core of my documentary. I tried to share the most raw experiences behind my cultural in-betweenness and intergenerational conflicts with my parents.

My childhood experiences and tensions with my parents were echoed by Perry and Ken, both of whom had similarly strict upbringing in China. This led me to believe that many of our conflicts and cultural discomfort as Chinese in New Zealand stemmed from what we saw as things to be desired – freedom as youth to explore the world, and a closer/ more understanding relationship with our parents. It was clear that we shared many common childhood expectations from our family which would shape a significant part of our cultural identity in adulthood. It was something that many teens in China end up resisting, hoping to carve out their own path in life. This too, was a common motivation for those of us who travelled and migrated across the world to New Zealand.

Our responses were in stark contrast to those of Thomas and Junior who both described very supportive families and childhoods. This further supports why Junior might feel less diasporic and cultural in-betweenness immigrating to New Zealand. Fundamentally, it was easier for him to transition into a new ‘home’ where the nature of support and freedom was of similar nature on a societal level.

This part of the documentary ended with my reflexive analysis of the lifestyle, cultural identity, diasporic experiences, and intergenerational relationships of my interview subjects, using them to discuss my own diasporic experiences and analyse the cause of my cultural in-betweenness. This process allowed me to better understand both the roots of my diaspora experience as well as my growing intergenerational tension with my parents. As they had sent me to New Zealand for study, I would remain a child, from their traditional perspective, until I graduate. My New Zealand identity represented adulthood, while my relation to China, and with my parents, was still rooted in one of co-dependence.

4.7.3 Conversation with My Parents

The next chapter of the documentary was originally intended to begin with a video of the previous chapters being played. It would be me as both the director and subject playing the documentary up to this point to my parents via Zoom video call. I would then document an interview conversation between us inspired by the autobiographical elements in *Banana in a Nutshell* (2005). I had believed by screening my own story and responses from the other interviewees to my parents it would help provide them with an understanding of my experiences to lead to a more fruitful conversation.

Unfortunately, this was not the case. I had underestimated how little they were aware of what I was experiencing. They had supported me to travel to New Zealand as they wished me to be more independent, however, as their profession has always been non-commercial, their thinking is very conservative and so ‘change’ and ‘identity conflicts’ that were happening both internally and externally on a constant basis were not concepts they wished to accept or understand.

Furthermore, I realised I had lost the objectivity I expected from my parents as subjects for *Somewhere In-between* as there was a direct conflict of interest. As they had invested significantly in my education, they were happy to respond with barebones answers providing only broad stroke statements or repeating traditional cultural expectations and virtues. Being very conservative and traditional, they were also very tied to Confucian mantras of saving face. As the old Chinese idiom states, we must not wash our dirty linen in public. What I desired to understand and resolve, they desired for it to remain in the family, below the surface. True to

Chinese culture, we were “defined by relationship to the larger group” (Internations, 2019), thus, what we do reflected the collective – in this case our family.

In the end, I realised our conversation proved unfruitful, it was not what was said that was important to *Somewhere In-between* as a documentary, but rather what was *unsaid*. For my parents, it was more important for them to uphold themselves as ideal model parents. However, my parent’s responses, despite not necessarily providing direct answers to my questions, offer the context of my Chinese identity through their perspectives and help explain a cultural understanding of my ethical consciousness.

At this stage, the very fact that I felt no closer to understanding what diaspora meant for me after coming this far in my research process, began to make me question whether my in-betweenness was diasporic at all, or was I simply a Chinese New Zealand international student living a life lost in translation? I decided to complete the edit of the documentary up to this point, but staying true to practical research methodology, reinvestigate my personal diasporic experiences through contrast and juxtaposition with my beliefs and experiences prior to conducting this research project.

Having re-evaluated my autobiographical storytelling in *Somewhere In-between*, I realised that I found it very difficult to express my answers and newfound questions in both English and my own voiceover narration.

4.7.4 Sherman’s March (1985)

Ross McElwee’s 1985 documentary provided a crucial point of reference to rethink my process at this critical juncture. Famous for his use of first-person filmmaking utilising “diary form as essayistic reflection” (Chanan, 2012), he constructs and communicates his identity and experiences via “[anguish] over his epistemological uncertainty” (Hughes, 2012).

Originally intended as a documentary on the American Civil War, the breakdown of McElwee’s personal love life caused the filmmaker to shift focus to an investigation of his relationship with women in his life, religion, romance, and extending to broader themes of Cold War and nuclear holocaust. This personalised and authentic approach to autobiographical filmmaking mirrors Perlov’s poetic documentary filmmaking process but condensed into a more restrictive time and

place. By embracing the role of the unreliable narrator, McElwee invites the viewer to judge him for what he is, or specifically his bachelor persona. When the subject becomes lost for answers, the filmmaker took over to continue to document and explore, leaving room for discovery from serendipitous conversations and whatever the footage might reveal after events have taken place.

This process of organic reaction to events “rather than following a mental argument” (Elsaesser, 2017, p. 126) breaks conventions of following a singular documentary mode as proposed by Nichols and the “linear, closed journey” (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 110). To truly explore my research questions, I could not, as the filmmaker, force myself as the subject to follow a predetermined path or narrative to reach a conclusion or result. McElwee’s adoption of the camera as a tool for personal testimony helps him reach personal realisations he would not have otherwise, and in turn provided his viewers a much more authentic and honest understanding of the filmmaker’s perspective as well as an inspired use of the historical context of *Sherman’s March* as an underpinning metaphor.

I had begun my research project with the belief I would be able to successfully interview my parents to discuss our complex relationship, my childhood and diasporic experiences. The unexpected challenges of communication during filmmaking did not directly give me the answers I was looking for but helped to expose the generational conflicts and catalysts that lay at the root of my cultural in-betweenness. In the end, these unspoken realisations and discoveries would be best presented to the viewer by once more pointing the lens at myself and reflecting, confessing, and talking to my audience directly as simply one of the subjects of the film, or alternatively an unreliable (in the sense that I do not have certain answers) narrator. Just as McElwee was more interested in his personal life and Sherman’s character than his march, I was more interested in capturing a sense of truth about my personal diaspora in New Zealand, whether or not I was able to reach any sense of factual conclusion normally expected of documentaries.

4.7.5 Final Reflection

After consideration, I changed the conclusion to the documentary to a different format. I began this research by focusing primarily on techniques and forms of autobiographical documentary filmmaking as proposed by Nichol’s Observational and Participatory modes. However, after researching the likes of more Poetic and Reflexive approaches such as *Diary* (1973-83) and *Sherman’s March* (1985), it was clear to me that inconclusiveness was not a detriment for my

research or my documentary – inauthenticity was. If I did not believe the words exchanged in my interview with my parents represented the truthful experiences of my childhood, family relationships and cultural in-betweenness in New Zealand, then it is this very response that I needed to capture and present to my audiences.

To achieve this, for the conclusion of *Somewhere In-between*, I would first turn the camera and microphone back towards myself to reflect on the research questions I was seeking answers for. During the process of production and editing I realised that a looser organic conversational format was necessary to conclude the documentary in an authentic manner. Furthermore, this time I would do so in my ‘Home Language’ of Mandarin Chinese. Throughout the documentary my narration and answers in English have been rather stiff as I still struggled to articulate myself clearly in English. This time, I asked another Chinese Mandarin speaker to interview me just as I have done with Perry, Ken, Junior and Thomas.

For this conclusion I prepared a series of new questions for myself:

- What is Home?
- Has my view on home changed due to moving to New Zealand or because I left my childhood ‘home’?
- How can I understand and grow through diasporic experiences and cultural in-betweenness?
- What is it about growing up in China that lay the roots for the commonalities in cultural in-betweenness for those of us that find a new home overseas?
- What is half and half? How many years would I have to live in New Zealand/ abroad from China to reshape my cultural identity?
- What is the difference between an expat and someone who is half/ half?
- Why do I struggle to have this conversation with my parents?
- Is it possible to resolve intergenerational conflicts if I struggle with my own identity?
- Is what I’m experiencing even ‘diaspora’?
- How does the Hai Gui (foreign-educated returnees) identity differ from that of a Chinese international student in New Zealand?
- Will I continue to have ‘diasporic’ experiences when I return to China?

The result was an encapsulation of everything I had learnt about myself and the topics of cultural in-betweenness and diaspora thus far. I was able to bring the documentary to a narrative

closure by recontextualising the introduction questions as well as expanding upon them to only focus on the past and present, but also my personal future.

5. Conclusion

This practical research project investigated how cultural in-betweenness could be documented through an autobiographical filmmaking framework. Through the creation of *Somewhere In-Between*, the personal stories of identity, belonging and intergenerational conflicts of a diverse range of interview subjects were juxtaposed with my personal diasporic experiences in New Zealand.

Overall, this research project has led to meaningful developments on a personal level for me as an individual and practical level as a documentary filmmaker. It contextualised many of the diasporic challenges I had been experiencing as a Chinese in New Zealand. The process suggests despite the existence of many shared experiences amongst migrants, expatriates and sojourners in New Zealand, the cause and catalyst for cultural in-betweenness is unique to the individual. My own personal journey of coming to terms with identity in diaspora is documented and analysed as a case study to understand the root causes for the sense of a lack of belonging experienced by Chinese in New Zealand.

In this chapter, key findings and the significance of my research will be discussed, concluding with a summary of limitations as well as implications for future research.

5.1 Key Findings

5.1.1 Diasporic Chinese in New Zealand

The production of *Somewhere In-between* has given me an entirely new understanding of what diaspora means for not just Chinese in New Zealand but people all around the world living in ‘home away from home’. At the beginning of my research, I had considered the state of cultural in-betweenness to be interchangeable with that of diaspora. Based on face-to-face interviews with a diverse range of subjects as part of my practical research, I now know it is but one facet of a complex state of being that only continues to evolve as New Zealand becomes more multi-cultural. As an international student who slowly nurtured a New Zealand cultural identity, I am not yet at the same level of bi-cultural maturity as most of my interview subjects. However, at this stage I too, would consider myself to be “half and half” if I were to consider adopting the

identity of 'Chinese New Zealander'. There is only one word difference between it and 'Chinese in New Zealand', but the connotations remain seemingly worlds apart.

5.1.2 Investigation of Intergenerational Conflict

Somewhere In-between demonstrates that diaspora and cultural in-betweenness can be a contributor to intergenerational conflict but not necessarily the root cause. Conflicts are a combination of internal and external tension, in my case, my own internal identity struggles differ from those of my parents. It may stem from elements of cultural traditions, norms and expectations; however, it also relates to a desynchronisation of perspectives and lived experiences. Investigation and reflection cannot be isolated to one party alone.

Despite allowing me to develop a better understanding of the root causes, the framework of creating an autobiographical documentary has not allowed my parents to gain any new insights. As I had conducted the interview and theoretical research independent of my parents, simply presenting my findings to them did not provide sufficient context for them to understand concepts around cultural in-betweenness or diaspora. Their rejection of discussing or reflecting with me on our growing cultural misunderstandings as causes for intergenerational conflict suggests it is not as simple as 'meeting in the middle' when it comes to communication between diasporic and non-diasporic people. Thus, it is evident that any effective investigation should be done by all parties involved in collaboration to ensure an empathetic foundation for discussion.

5.1.3 Documentary Filmmaking as Practical Research

The practical research process of producing an autobiographical documentary proved instrumental in my development as a filmmaker. Not only did I find documentary filmmaking to be an immensely useful tool for communicating diasporic stories, it has also proven to be an effective tool for research itself. As documentary filmmakers we are expected to know about subject matters before we begin filmmaking to find the correct format and perspectives of interpretation. However, it was hard to demand objectivity when juggling between the two roles of being the subject as well as the filmmaker, by navigating through the modes of documentary filmmaking in search of an appropriate style, the process itself organically yielded very meaningful results.

5.2 Research Significance

5.2.1 Documenting Cultural In-betweenness

I believe cultural in-betweenness will only continue to become more prevalent in the future as the world grows increasingly interconnected. *Somewhere In-between* has made me consider how much of what I feel correlates with those of a Kiwi expatriate in China. Is it really that different if one were sent over by an employer or by one's parents? Certainly, we all relate on some level to the feeling of losing confidence in our personal and cultural identity when experiencing life outside of our familiar comfort zone. My story is just one of many, this research has demonstrated the value of sharing and exchanging dialogue around the concept of belonging and connection to a place and people in the past, present, and future.

5.2.2 Autobiographical Filmmaking Framework

Somewhere In-between demonstrates the effectiveness of autobiographical filmmaking as a means of practical research to investigate causes and effects of cultural in-betweenness and international generational conflict amongst Chinese in New Zealand. The process of both interviewing others as well as oneself leads to unexpected yet fruitful results. It is clear that the advantage of such an approach is not to reach a 'truthful conclusion' that could represent the wider diasporic Chinese condition or prove a pre-established hypothesis. Rather, the process of creating an autobiographical documentary is a very effective tool in allowing Chinese New Zealand filmmakers to explore and analyse any confusion or challenges in their cultural identity. Such a framework allows for a clarification of the filmmaker's personal 'truth' which in turn can inspire resonance in both viewers and other diasporic Chinese alike to begin their own journey of self-reflection.

5.2.3 Chinese New Zealand Cultural Identity

This research contributes to the wider cultural zeitgeist of Chinese in New Zealand. In this context, my own personal bias and limited perspective prove advantageous as it presents an authentic truth from an insider investigating both internally and externally. As such the duality of such questioning and conclusions drawn from the processes adds further credibility and

authenticity. The resulting work may not necessarily represent all Chinese New Zealand experiences, but it certainly contributes further dialogue and understanding of the diversity and nuance of the current cultural landscape. Just as previous works of diasporic filmmaking have informed my research and practice, my own work will contribute to this ever-evolving genre and offer further insight into the nature of cultural in-betweenness, sense of belonging and intergenerational conflict amongst Chinese in New Zealand.

5.3 Final Thoughts

Somewhere In-between has provided me with a more nuanced perspective and effective frameworks of understanding diaspora of Chinese in New Zealand. I believe these methodologies will support better dialogue around this topic and prove especially meaningful for the expression in the medium of documentary filmmaking.

Due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, the practical research process faced many limitations, the most important being my inability to travel to China to interview my parents face-to-face, as well as document my original 'home'. This was a major catalyst culminating in the need for re-evaluation after the interview with my parents online. In the end, I believe this prompt for further introspective reflection proved beneficial – instead of directly offering myself or audiences of the documentary answers, it offered me more questions to answer. As the main subject of the documentary, I left the project with a better understanding of the overall social and psychological conditions which I was investigating than I had begun with as the director. This allowed me to be much more adaptable in utilising different modes of documentary filmmaking than simply conducting interviews and presenting answers and findings as facts.

As the nature of diaspora continues to evolve, *Somewhere In-between* serves as a reminder that authentic personal reflection lies at the heart of any diaspora storytelling – especially in the practice of autobiographical expression. By offering our diasporic experiences to be shared and experienced rather than taught or learnt, it can lead to more empathetic understanding not only for ourselves but as a society and wider global community.

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