

An Autoethnographic Exploration of Chinese Baijiu and Toasting Rituals

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Abstract

Through an autoethnographically focussed gastronomic lens, and within a constructionist perspective, my dissertation explores baijiu and its toasting rituals. Key to that inquiry has been the ways in which my baijiu and toasting narratives ‘fit’ within wider realisations of Chinese socio-culture. Adding to those perspectives have been my lived experiences in China, and in Aotearoa New Zealand. Those locales have provided my work with a reflective space inasmuch as living in Aotearoa New Zealand has literally and figuratively provided distance. That distance has empowered my research, enabling me to question myself and my topic in more objective ways, rather than from a taken-for-granted mindset. My research reveals not only the cultural dynamics of baijiu and its toasting, but also its spiritual realm. For me, baijiu and toasting signify a potent aide de memoir, transporting me back home, as it did particularly in times of homesickness when I lived in Aotearoa New Zealand. In those ways, my dissertation explores how material items like baijiu and its toasting rituals help people to make sense of their world and, in doing so, embody cultural practices. Within my research I distil my autoethnographic narratives into three central domains, namely: Interaction and the Socio-politics of Engagement; Self-identity and Comfort; and Adaptive Practice.

Within that amalgam, my dissertation contributes to a wider understanding and appreciation of how an individuals’ lived experiences not only contribute to wider cultural narratives, but also themes of identity, being and becoming. Please enjoy your reading journey!

Acknowledgements

In writing my acknowledgements I am aware that within Chinese culture it is best to use simple words to express strong emotions. Therefore:

Thank you, my parents, for your unconditional support at all times.

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr Lindsay Neill, for all your help and encouragement in my dissertation journey,

Thanks to the moon each night.

感父母，谢恩师

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Glossary of Important Chinese Words

Baijiu (白酒)	A distilled alcoholic beverage produced mainly in China and made from grain.
Chou (酬)	The host toasting a guest.
Du Kang (杜康)	According to legend, the inventors of alcohol in the Xia Dynasty (2070BC–1600BC).
Fenjiu (汾酒)	One of the most famous Chinese baijiu of the last century.
Gong Xi Fa Cai (恭喜发财)	A toast wishing of happiness and prosperity.
Ji Shi (吉时)	An auspicious time. Usually, Chinese people choose an auspicious time for important occasions, such as the time for a wedding or the opening of a business.
Jiaobeijiu (交杯酒)	The bride and groom face each other to drink baijiu through their interlinked arms.
Jiusheng (酒圣)	The Sage of Alcohol in the Tang Dynasty (618–907).
Jue (角)	Alcoholic beverage vessels used by the commoners in the Shang Dynasty (1600BC–1046BC).
Li Bai (李白)	A poet of the Tang Dynasty (618–907).
Luzhou Laojiao (泸州老窖)	One of the most famous Chinese baijiu of the last century.
Man Han Quan Xi (满汉全席)	The Manchu–Han banquet was a banquet for the 66th birthday of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty. It offered more than 300 delicacies.
Mianzi (面子)	Face, reflecting one’s tangible and intangible notions of superiority, self-esteem, and interaction.
Maotai (茅台)	One of the most famous Chinese baijiu of the last century.
“Quan Jun Geng Jin Yi Bei Jiu, Xi Chu Yang Guan Wu Gu Ren” (S. Chen, 2005, p. 61) (劝君更尽一杯酒，西出阳关无故人)	Wang Wei, a poet of the Tang Dynasty (618–907), wrote, “Please drink a toast one more time, for there would be no friend after you go westward through the Yang Guan.”
Sheng Huo An Kang (生活安康)	A toast wishing for a healthy life.
Shijiazhuang (石家庄)	A city located in north of China.
Tuan (团)	A group gathering.
Tuan Yuan (团圆)	Refers to the reunion of a family.
Wuji (无极)	A rural area in Shijiazhuang.
Wu Jiu Bu Cheng Xi (无酒不成席)	A Chinese idiom, meaning that there is no banquet without alcoholic beverages.
Xi Jiu (喜酒)	A joyful wedding alcohol beverage.
Xifeng (西凤酒)	One of the most famous Chinese baijiu of the last century.
Xin Nian Ji Xiang (新年吉祥)	Hopes for an auspicious new year.
Yan Nian Yi Shou (延年益寿)	A toast for longevity.
Yi Di (仪狄)	According to legend, the inventors of alcohol during the Xia Dynasty (2070BC–1600BC).
Yuan (圆)	A complete circle, denoting integrity.
Zheng Hun Ren (证婚人)	High-status wedding witnesses. They are formal witnesses to a wedding.
Zhi (觥)	Alcoholic beverage vessels used by the nobility during the Shang Dynasty (1600BC–1046BC).
Zuo (酢)	The guest toasting the host in return.

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.

Signed:

Date:

Chapter 1. Background and Introduction

Foods, including liquids, are essential for human survival. As Kittler et al. (2016) explained, food, and within the scope of my research, baijiu, and its toasting rituals provide socio-cultural and symbolic meaning. In those ways, food and beverage consumption helps people to understand the world in which they live. The potency of food and beverage is realised in the study of gastronomy. Brillat-Savarin's (1825/2009) seminal text, *The Physiology of Taste*, defines gastronomy as "the rational understanding of everything related to human nutrition" (p. 52). Brillat-Savarin's (1825/2009) passion for gastronomy links to the enjoyment of beverages, particularly the consumption of alcoholic beverages. That link is realised within his notation that "a meal without wine is like a day without sunshine" (p. 203). Considering Brillat Savarin's (1825/2009) suggestions, and the notion that food and beverage consumption are linked to identity (Qu, 2011), Chinese toasting rituals, as Wen (1990) suggested, reveal the character of Chinese people, and for me, much about identity. Within considerations of my autoethnographic methodology, Brillat Savarin's (1825/2009) aphorism, "tell me what you eat: I will tell you what you are" (p. 22), becomes particularly relevant albeit that my research concentrates upon a beverage, baijiu, and its toasting rituals.

Chinese baijiu is a distilled beverage made from grains and cereals. Those items are steamed, sweetened, fermented, and then distilled (Sun, 2021). Baijiu is an important part of the Chinese diet. Indeed, baijiu's consumption is linked with many different rituals, festivals, and celebrations throughout the year. In those ways, baijiu has much in common with alcoholic beverages from Aotearoa New Zealand or France because items like French champagne also signify celebration.

Using an autoethnographic methodology (Ellis, 2009), my research dissertation explores baijiu and its toasting rituals by refining my topics through three distinct lenses. My first lens reflects my choice of gastronomic study as a way to understand and appreciate my topic. My second refracting lens is my choice of an autoethnographic methodology (Ellis, 2009). Within that methodology I explore my own lived experiences of baijiu and its toasting rituals, before reflecting upon those experiences within wider considerations of Chinese social culture. My third lens is realised within my dissertation's constructionist positioning (Berger & Luckmann 1966) and my use of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934). The uniqueness of my research is evidenced not only within that theoretical amalgam, but also within my ethnographic comparisons to wider Chinese socio-culture.

In those ways, my research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on baijiu and its toasting rituals.

To maximise my inquiry, I developed the following research questions. My primary research question asks:

- **What have the symbolic meanings of baijiu toasting been over time in China?**

Underpinning my primary research question are two secondary research questions:

- **In what ways has traditional Chinese baijiu toasting culture changed over time?**
- **How are considerations of Chinese baijiu toasting culture applicable to my own journey?**

Research Rationale

My love of food and alcohol inspired me to choose baijiu and its toasting rituals as my research topic. Key to my topic choice is the word ‘inspired.’ My supervisor encouraged me to choose a topic that both inspired and excited me. That advice was sound. During my dissertation journey there have been times of elation and times of disappointment. Mediating those polarities was my passion for my topic. Throughout my research and writing journey I have been consistently inspired by my topic and the act of learning and finding out more about it. As my written journey nears its end, I am more knowledgeable about my topic and more inspired to enhance what I have come to know about it within what seems to be a never-ending process of refinement and polishing. My increased knowledge is not only about my topic. In completing my research and its write-up, I have come to learn more about myself. That realisation has been my ‘added’ research bonus.

When I was considering my research topic, I was mindful of my home in China and my family. My mindfulness reflected the important roles that food and beverage played in our everyday lives. That was highlighted when my family celebrated the Mid-Autumn Festival. The Mid-Autumn gathering is one of the few opportunities for our family to get together with relatives for a banquet. At our Mid-Autumn banquet, we celebrated our long-awaited family get-together with multiple toasts of baijiu. I observed how, at that event, the children followed the adults’ example of toasting each other with drinks. At that moment I had a sudden realisation: ‘this is my topic’! My family’s gathering and

toasting revealed my heritage and culture, something I had previously taken for granted. In choosing my topic I also celebrate the completion of my Master’s degree in Gastronomy at Auckland University of Technology (AUT).

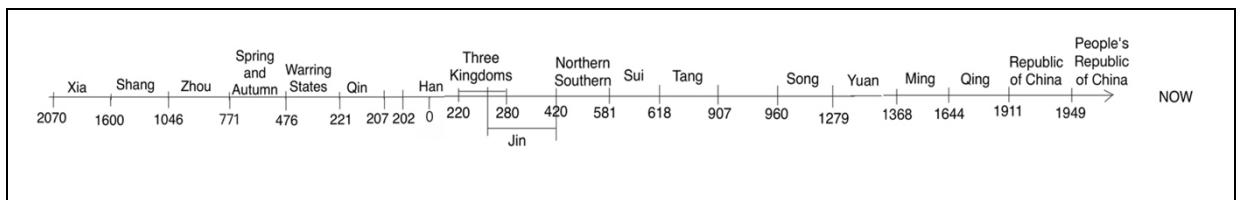
Dissertation Overview

Chapter 1 introduces my dissertation by discussing the links between Chinese baijiu, its toasting rituals, and the principles of gastronomy study. Adding to that, Chapter 2 explores my theoretical and conceptual frameworks, including my ontological and epistemological positioning. My literature review of relevant topic-related knowledge constitutes Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, I present a theoretical and applied overview of my research methodology and method: autoethnography (Ellis, 2009). Chapter 5 presents four autoethnographic narratives reflecting my experiences of baijiu and its toasting rituals. Finally, in Chapter 6, I present discussions of those narratives, my contribution to research and its limitations, my recommendations for future research, considerations of my research bias, and answers to my research questions. I conclude my dissertation with a final reflection on my academic journey.

Background Information

To understand the development of baijiu and its toasting rituals in China, this chapter introduces considerations of Chinese dynasties. Chinese dynasties can be viewed in much the same ways as the English and European royal families. This chapter concentrates on dynasties that hold direct connection to baijiu and its toasting rituals. Table 1 presents an overview of Chinese dynasties from 2070BC to 1949.

Table 1: Chinese Dynasties



Source: P. Fan (2014).

However, before discussing baijiu's link to dynastic China, it would be prudent to provide some base information on baijiu itself (refer Chapter 1 for information on toasting). Baijiu is the unique national 'alcoholic beverage' of China (Sun, 2021). It is a clear alcoholic beverage usually made from fermented grains (Sun, 2021), and usually consumed quite rapidly or sipped (Sandhaus, 2014). The Chinese word baijiu (白酒) literally means white alcoholic beverage (Sun, 2021). In Chinese culture, the 'colour' white holds connotations of light and purity (He, 2009). Thus, colourless baijiu is commonly called a white beverage with alcohol by many Chinese. Baijiu lacked an official English name until 2022, when the name 'baijiu', with its traditional Chinese cultural background, was officially launched (Hu, 2022). Because of the confusion in classifying baijiu, I contacted Aotearoa New Zealand's only Master Sommelier, Cameron Douglas. Master Sommelier Douglas informed me that "baijiu is classified as a spirit. It's very strong, and not for the faint hearted" (C. Douglas, personal communication, June 8, 2023). Prior to this, the terms 'Chinese spirits', 'Chinese distilled spirits', or 'Chinese liquor' were all used to describe baijiu (Hu, 2022). Because baijiu has many identifiers, to ease confusion, my dissertation uses the term 'baijiu' to describe this beverage.

Dynastic China and Baijiu

The Xia Dynasty (2070BC–1600BC) is China's oldest (Yong & Peng, 2008). Alcohol production and the popularity of its consumption began during that time (Yun, 2002). Then, two ethnic groups, the Yi Di (仪狄) and Du Kang (杜康) became renowned for alcohol production (W. Fan, 2020). As W. Fan (2020) noted, the Yi Di created rice wine while Du Kang produced sorghum wine. While baijiu was produced during this dynasty, it was not a common beverage (Yun, 2002). However, during the Shang dynasty (1600BC–1046BC) a strong drinking culture emerged, particularly among the nobility ("The Origin of Chinese Liquor," 2014). Then, King Zhou was famed for his baijiu obsession, establishing its popularity and link to gender (Lisi, 2020). While alcoholic beverages were very popular during the Shang dynasty, alcohol had a conservative status throughout the Zhou dynasty (1046BC–771BC). Then, alcohol was restricted to sacrificial rituals (Lisi, 2020). Consequently, that period began the development of toasting rituals (Lisi, 2020). During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period (772BC–221BC), drinking alcohol and its rituals continued. These rituals began to reflect differences between social classes (Lisi, 2020). According to the classic Confucian work, *Liji*, commoners were

asked to hold their mouths with their hands, or sleeves, when toasting nobles in a display of hierarchical difference.

However, it was not until the Qin dynasty (221BC–207BC) that baijiu, then known as shochu, began to appear and become popular (W. Fan, 2020). By the Han dynasty (202BC–220) drinking alcohol became associated with various festivals, for example, the Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival (W. Fan, 2020). People organised festive banquets in celebration (Lisi, 2020).

War and discontent within the ruling classes dominated the Three Kingdoms, the Jin dynasty (266–420), and the Northern and Southern dynasties (220–581). Discontent fostered alcohol consumption as a way for people to ‘escape’ and to dispel their sorrows. Poets used alcohol to write poetry that expressed their societal indignations. Consequently, this period links liquor and literature (“The Origin of Chinese Liquor,” 2014). Contrasting previous social unrest, the Sui dynasty (581–618) and the Tang dynasty (618–907) were periods of national stability, and rapid economic development (“The Origin of Chinese Liquor,” 2014). Again, this period nurtured the link between literature and alcohol (“The Origin of Chinese Liquor,” 2014). As Wang (2017) proposed, the Sui and Tang dynasties were periods when Chinese poetry flourished, with baijiu consumption playing a key role. By the Song dynasty (960–1279), traditional craft brewing had reached its peak (Lisi, 2020). The introduction of Western distillation technology during the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) combined with traditional brewing techniques created what is now known as Chinese baijiu (B. Wang, 2017). It was during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911) that baijiu became popular with lower and middle classes. By contrast, the nobility consumed yellow alcohol (Lisi, 2020). During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the idea that storing alcohol enhanced its quality became popular. That trend added another criterion for judging the quality of baijiu (Lisi, 2020). During the Republic of China (1911–1949), particularly during World War II, grain and food were in short supply. Consequently, baijiu became scarce. That shortage promoted the home brewing of alcohol with any spare grain (Lisi, 2020). Consequently, baijiu lacked flavour and alcohol consistency (Lisi, 2020). Later, in a move to stimulate agricultural production, in Chairman Mao’s ‘Great Leap Forward’, the Chinese Government ordered professional workers in urban areas to the countryside as a farming labour force (Youran, 2021). There, communal farming was preferred, but it was unsuccessful. Mao’s ‘Great Leap Forward’ resulted in famine (Y. Liu, 2010). However,

as time passed and agricultural practices improved, the alcoholic beverage industry gradually increased production and the consistency of its product (Lisi, 2020).

A Hierarchy of Baijiu

Baijiu's hierarchy links its price to constructs of class. Consequently, this chapter explores baijiu's hierarchy and how that hierarchy has been influenced by history.

In modern China, baijiu is the nation's most popular alcoholic beverage (Sandhaus, 2014). Baijiu's contemporary popularity reflects the combination of Western distilling techniques and traditional Chinese brewing processes (B. Wang, 2017). That combination, as B. Wang (2017) asserted, created beverages with high alcohol content. Baijiu became popular for the lower and middle classes during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911) (Lisi, 2020). There were two main reasons for this: the first was that the nobility consumed yellow wine, which positioned baijiu as a relatively inexpensive alternative; secondly, because baijiu is high in alcohol content, small amounts achieved intoxication (Lisi, 2020). Consequently, while yellow wine held aristocrat connotations, baijiu denoted the proletariat. While that distinction, in Western considerations, may be understood negatively, the Chinese Communist Party, as the leader of the Chinese proletariat, played a decisive role in making baijiu the most popular alcoholic beverage in China (Lisi, 2020). The Republican period (1911–1949) was a time of constant warfare (W. Wang, 2018). Then, baijiu played a key role. During times of medical supply shortages, baijiu, because of its high alcohol content, was used as both an antiseptic and anaesthetic (Toh, 2021). The use of the baijiu in those ways bestowed mana¹ on Chinese soldiers by reflecting their bravery and strength (W. Wang, 2018).

While the association with the Chinese Communist Party aided baijiu's vernacular 'profile', branding also played a key role in creating baijiu's hierarchy. The first National Alcohol Evaluation Conference was held in 1952 in Beijing (Yang, 2006). The conference proposed the revitalisation of alcoholic beverage production in the early years of the People's Republic of China (Jin, 2022). However, the first conference did not have a standardised product testing and evaluation programme (Jin, 2022). Nonetheless the conference selected the top four Chinese baijius: Maotai (茅台), Fenjiu (汾酒), Luzhoulaojiao (泸州老窖) and Xifeng (西凤酒). That process and naming set the framework

¹ Mana is associated with power, status and charisma. The higher a person's prestige, the more mana they have. Mana can be inherited at birth (Moorfield & Te aka Māori dictionary, n.d.a).

for baijiu's hierarchy (Jin, 2022) and that hierarchy had a lasting impact on the consumption of baijiu in China. According to Li (2014), Maotai's status as one of China's premium baijiu brands is based on its taste and packaging.

Consequently, in terms of prestige, Maotai can be considered to be the equal to the French La Romanée Conti wines (Resnick, 2008). That parallel reflects the consideration that both beverages share notions of sophisticated taste, class, high price, scarcity, and prestige. Those constructs reflect Bourdieu's (1984) notions of taste. Bourdieu (1984) proposed that individuals in the middle and lower classes held aspirations to glean the tastes of the upper class. As that aspiration became realised, the upper class move their notions of taste. Within that movement, the upper class create a perpetual cycle of aspirant consumerism.

Figure 1: The Top Four Chinese Baijiu: Fenjiu (汾酒), Maotai (茅台), Luzhoulaojiao (泸州老窖) and Xifeng (西凤酒) (from left to right)



Source: Meishirijian (2022).

Reflecting that, Maotai, was Mao Zedong's favourite alcoholic beverage (W. Wang, 2018). Additionally, Zhou Enlai, the first premier of the People's Republic of China, insisted on serving Maotai at every state banquet (Toh, 2021). Considering that, and Bourdieu's (1984) position, Fing (2021) noted that the Maotai brand signified a person's following of and admiration for the nation's leader. Additionally, Fing (2021) proposed that in purchasing Maotai from certain years of production, a consumer revealed their patriotism. Reflecting baijiu's patriotic connotations, bottles of Maotai, produced in specific years, including 1949, the year of the founding of the People's Republic of China, and 1978, the year of reform and opening up, sell for premium prices (around US\$44,000) (Yu, 2020). In those ways, the consumption of Maotai not only reflects its quality and

rarity but also the social status of its consumer, their wealth and symbolic patriotism (Fing, 2021).

Alcoholic Beverage Vessels in Chinese History

Key to baijiu's consumption and toasting rituals are the drinking vessels that Chinese people have used, and continue to use, in the beverage's consumption and toasting. While China's drinking culture began in the Shang Dynasty (1600BC–1046BC) and was dominated by the nobility ("The Origin of Chinese Liquor," 2014), that period also produced foundries that fashioned bronze drinking vessels (Luo, 2021). Given the hierarchal structure of China at that time, and reflecting Bourdieu's (1984) theory, nobles and upper-class people demanded the use of drinking vessels differentiating them from the lower and middle classes. As Confucian writings illuminate, different drinking vessels were used in Chinese banquets by different social classes. Figures 2 and 3 (below), show the upper class Zhi (觥) and the lower class Jue (角) (Confucius, 2006).

Figure 2: Zhi (觥)



Figure 3: Jue (角)



Source: Encyclopedia of China (2009).

As Confucius (2006) noted, a toast was made by raising the cup in the direction of the other person and then drinking the alcohol after a verbal toast was made. Because of China's strict hierarchal class system, people of different classes did not eat at the same table or make toasts together (Luo, 2021). Additionally, the nobility used elaborate bronze drinking cups, some with distinctive engravings, that emphasised the drinker's status (Deng, 2013). Then, within the Northern and Southern Dynasties, porcelain drinking vessels became popular (Lisi, 2020). Contrasting the earlier images is the simplicity of the drinking cup shown in Figure 4. That cup would be used by prince (R. Wang, 2022). Figure 5 shows a porcelain drinking vessel used by the Guangxu Emperor during the Qing

Dynasty (1644–1911). The vessel’s dragon motif, along with the gold rim, signifies that it could only be used by the emperor (C. A. S. Williams, 2012).

Figure 4: Ancient Chinese Porcelain Cup



Source: Drouot (2023b).

Figure 4: Porcelain Alcohol Cup of Qing Emperor



Source: Drouot (2023a).

Porcelain drinking vessels remained popular until the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949 (Luo, 2021). From that time, and with Western influence, other choices, including ceramic, glass, and metal became popular (Baolai, 2019). Also impacting vessel use was the type of alcohol consumed. For many contemporary Chinese people, drinking a French Bordeaux from a ceramic cup was deemed to be unacceptable etiquette. Instead, the preference was to use a glass, and glasses that best suited the type of alcoholic beverage that was consumed. In contemporary China, baijiu is consumed in a variety of vessels, including glass (Baolai, 2019). If porcelain is used, as Figures 6 and 7 show, designs vary from complex graphics to simple and plain design.

Figure 6: Porcelain Artwork, Starry Night



Source: Ning (2009).

Figure 5: Contemporary Porcelain Baijiu Vessel



Source: DishCoSF (2023).

Despite the fact that the origin of glassware and its use in China are contested, Chun (2021) proposed that drinking glasses, particularly alcoholic beverage glasses, were introduced to China by Western diplomats during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Baolai (2019) suggested that glassware was introduced during the Song Dynasty (960–1279), but that its use and widespread distribution was curtailed by China’s strict class system. Additionally, Baolai (2019) also suggested that glassware and the clinking of glasses for toasting emerged through Western influence during the Republican period (1911–1949). Although the clinking of glasses is not a traditional Chinese toast, the act is widely accepted and used in contemporary toasts (X. Tian, 2021). However, it has been modified within Chinese culture. Exemplifying that, and particularly at large tables, where the clinking of glasses together is difficult, people use their cup or glass to tap on the table. That gesture signifies a person’s participation in the toast (X. Tian, 2021). However, many Chinese people avoid the ‘table tap’ toast, especially when toasts are made to older people (X. Tian, 2021).

Toasting rituals: A Historical Insight

Toasting with alcoholic beverages has a long and interesting history. The ancient Greeks made beverage toasts to their gods in ritual sacrifice. Additionally, the ancient Greeks toasted each other’s good health (Broxson, 2017; H. Liu, 2013). Such toasts are found in Homer’s *Odyssey*. There, Ulysses toasted Achilles’ good health (Broxson, 2017). Toasts were also common for ancient Germanic peoples who would dip bread in a wooden wine bowl, believing that those who ate the bread, while drinking, would receive good luck (“Toast,” 2005). Toasting’s association with bread also has an English connection (Broxson, 2017; “Toast,” 2005; H. Liu, 2013). In the 16th century, the British liked to dip slices of bread into their wine to add flavour to it (Broxson, 2017; “Toast,” 2005). H. Liu (2013) suggested that putting old/stale bread into wine allowed the bread to absorb the wine’s acidity, thus enhancing its consumption profile. Then, it was also common at feasts and banquets that guests toasted honoured individuals, and that the stale and hard bread figuratively constituted a toast (“Toast,” 2005; H. Liu, 2013). However, sharing a toast also has a negative connotation.

According to H. Liu (2013), a toasting beverage and its ritual were tests that the wine (or another toasting beverage) was not poisoned. In the act of toasting, and the clinking of drinking vessels together, it was easy for wine to be spilt into another glass. That made the risk of poisoning oneself real. Consequently, toasting and its rituals were metaphorical

insurance policies. While toasting as a measure of personal security may sound fanciful, poisoning one's enemies in ancient cultures, was common (H. Liu, 2013). The origin of the toast, on the other hand, is a matter of varying opinion.

In China, as Beamer (1993) noted, toasting rituals were grounded in the belief that toasting provided a vector for living Chinese people to spiritually communicate with their deceased ancestors. During these rituals, a cup containing the beverage would be raised to the sky, while at the same time, blessings and good wishes would be verbalised in the hope that they would come true. Traditional Chinese toasting meant that the person offering the toast knelt in honour of the person toasted. Later, as S. Wang (1994) reported, people began to raise their cups directly to each other and then recite the toast. However, as glass became a popular drinking vessel, and reflecting Western influences, the clinking of glasses became common in China (Baolai, 2019). Yet, hierarchy still pervades contemporary Chinese toasting rituals. As Lamm (2016) noted, in modern China an elder's cup is raised higher than a younger person's cup, in a symbolic reflection of kneeling or bowing.

Considering the Banquet: A Brief History

Baijiu is linked to the Chinese banquet (Lisi, 2020). Consequently, this section explores considerations of the banquet from Western and Chinese perspectives. While I present notions of the banquet from these two perspectives, my aim is illumination, not comparison. In my understanding, it is often easier to relate one topic to another, thus enhancing the understanding of both. I begin with an overview of Western banquets, before exploring Chinese banquets.

Western Banquets

Etymologically, 'banquet' means a snack eaten on a bench rather than at the table; the word emerged in the late 15th century and originally meant a small meal between meals (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2022). In Western culture, a banquet holds rich connotations for English history and the upper class, particularly royalty. Those associations are understandable because the history of the upper classes was, as Thompson (2002) noted, better recorded than that of the lower classes. Reflecting that, the wealthy classes of Medieval England hosted and attended grand banquets (Bhote, 2003). Then, 'banquet' and 'feast' were interchangeable terms used to describe rich meals (Boermans, 2022). Their point of difference, as Normore (2015) explained, was that

medieval banquets were considered more formal and therefore more important than feasts. Notwithstanding that, around 1509 the banquet also referenced an in-between snack-meal or running banquet, like a contemporary buffet. Reflecting how banquets denotative and connotative meanings have changed over time, the English banquet was given new meaning around 1523. Then the banquet represented the final sweet course within a feast. Since then, and until the 1700s, as Boermans (2022) noted, the medieval banquet became more closely associated with sweetmeats.² In those ways, the dynamic nature of the banquet reflected not only the development of food, but also the dynamic nature of language and, surprisingly the English predilection for gardening (Boermans, 2022). In the garden it was possible to enjoy the landscape. Then, for wealthy English people, the opportunity to enjoy the landscape and food represented a unique multi-sensual experience (Boermans, 2022) showcasing their wealth and taste. For the wealthy British, a banquet was more of an entertainment rather than a way to satiate hunger (Boermans, 2022). Consequently, the wealthy sought the variety and rarity of ingredients, as well as multi-sensory pleasurable experiences, to highlight their wealth. Therefore, the food and the venue of the banquet became a means of displaying wealth, and a site of “conspicuous consumption” (Veblen, 1899/2005, p. 52).

Luxurious 16th century commodities, like sugar, influenced the English banquet. Then, because sugar was very expensive, its inclusion in buffets signified the hosts generosity within the creation of a lavish banquet (Boermans, 2022). Later, in the Stuart era (1603–1714), the high price of sugar began to decline as the scale of sugar production increased (Schmidt, 2019). As prices fell, consumption rose. Crucially, the middle class (Schmidt, 2019) began to consume sugar. Reflecting Bourdieu’s (1984) notions of taste, the upper class simply moved away from their previous sugar obsession (Boermans, 2022).

In Europe, the mediaeval banquet was more egalitarian. Reflecting that was Bakhtin’s (1981) consideration of the medieval carnival, celebrated before Lent. Bakhtin’s (1981) observation of the carnival as a means of using art to explore the development of capitalism defines the carnival as a parody of folklore; a symbolic event in which participants were both actors and spectators. For Bakhtin (1981), the carnival provided outdoor eating for the duration of the celebration. Within a reversal of class-based roles, the feast was dynamic, corner-stoned by the grotesque. However, Bakhtin’s (1981) notions of the banquet changed around the time of the European Renaissance. As Elias

² Sweetmeat is an old-fashioned sweet food, usually made or preserved with sugar (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.c).

(1998) related, the medieval banquet moved indoors. That meant that grotesque behaviours like farting and vomiting were no longer acceptable. Thus, as Elias (1998) posited, those changes signalled the emergence of contemporary table manners.

Chinese Banquets

Ideas about the Chinese banquet are contested. Reflecting that, G. Chen and Wang (1987) proposed that banquets originated from the rituals associated with the changing seasons and their impact upon agrarian life. Often, those ritualised celebrations were accompanied by a potluck dinner (G. Chen & Wang, 1987). Those activities became associated with the development of the Chinese banquet. Contrasting that, Ren (1999) suggested the Chinese banquet originated from clan gatherings. Through feasting, a clan maintained its stability and enhanced its interpersonal relationships and identity (Ren, 1999). Mediating those positions, Y. Ding (2011) noted that the evolution of the Chinese banquet reflected the celebration of food production surplus. Considering all those positions, the banquet reflects a celebration incorporating rituals and recognising abundance. In those ways, as Y. Ding (2011) observed, the banquet recognised and enhanced wider social functions intrinsic to the spiritual and cultural needs of many Chinese people. A Chinese banquet combines food and alcoholic beverages. A popular Chinese folk saying is that there is no banquet without alcohol (无酒不成席).

The Chinese banquet reached its peak during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911) (Z. Liu, 2012). Then, there was a strict social hierarchy and a well-established traditional culture (X. Li et al., 2020). Additionally, the scale of the banquets enjoyed by the upper class differed from those of the lower classes (Z. Liu, 2012). One differentiating factor was the use of alcohol during upper class banquets. a type of distilled alcoholic beverage's place at a banquet provided its host with status, which served to strengthen the social connections between banquet participants. It was the upper-class banquets of the Ming and Qing dynasties that came to influence contemporary Chinese banquets (Z. Liu, 2012). Like Western banquets, it was the rarity, quantity, and variety of banquet foods and ingredients that constituted its grandeur (Zhao et al., 2015). Reflecting that, the Manchu–Han Banquet (满汉全席) of the Qing Dynasty is considered to be the most extravagant historical Chinese banquet. The Manchu–Han banquet for the 66th birthday of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty offered more than 300 delicacies (King, 2020). The banquet included many rare ingredients like abalone, bear paw, and camel hump (Yue, 2018). Because of its grandeur, the Manchu–Han Banquet is used to describe the richness of a

contemporary banquet's food and beverage offering (King, 2020). Today, if a banquet guest refers to a host's banquet offering as Manchu–Han, then the host is given the highest compliment, one reflecting their wealth and taste. In Chinese culture, that implies an enhanced sense of 'face.' Face is not literal, rather face (面子) reflects one's tangible and intangible notions of superiority, self-esteem (Yen, 2017) and interaction (Zhang & Si, 2010). In that way, face is a metaphoric mask revealing those characteristics (Zhang & Si, 2010) albeit that they are bestowed by others (Zhang & Si, 2010). For example, praising a host for their banquet offering enhances the host's face. In those ways, face is similar to the Māori constructs of mana. Mana defines a person's status ("Māori Values and Practices," 2012). While mana can be inherited and passed within a family, individuals can also gain, increase, or lose mana through their actions. Mana influences the behaviour of people and groups, and is sought through achievement and success ("Māori Values and Practices," 2012). Chinese people, like Aotearoa New Zealand's Māori people, actively defend their face and mana in their daily lives and endeavour to enhance it as much as possible.

Contemporary Chinese banquets are a continuation of traditional Chinese banquets. In that way a whakapapa³ of banquets helps many Chinese people to understand their history, and contemporary identities. Today, Chinese people still value the rarity, quantity, and variety of ingredients provided at a banquet. However, they are not the only quality criteria used to evaluate a contemporary Chinese banquet. Many contemporary Chinese people now focus on nutrition, dining environment, uniqueness, and the quality of service when they attend a banquet (R. G. Tian et al., 2018). Thus, Chinese banquets not only reflect Chinese food habits, history, and class, but also provide opportunities to extend ritualised behaviours into beverage consumption. Within that blend, contemporary Chinese people glean an applied understanding of their world and its history.

³ Whakapapa is a genealogy, genealogy chart, pedigree, lineage. It is an important skill that reflects the importance of genealogy in Māori society in terms of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship, and status. It is at the heart of all Māori institutions (Moorfield & Te aka Māori dictionary, n.d.b).

Chapter 2. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

This chapter presents the philosophical theories underpinning my dissertation. Differentiating my theoretical framework from my conceptual framework is the notion that my conceptual framework is the application of my theoretical framework within my research. Considering that, this chapter explores ontology, epistemology (Madill et al., 2000; Smith, 2012), symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), and the social construction of reality thesis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Those theories are important to my research because individually and collectively they reflect the ways in which people construct their world views within their individual subjective experience. Additionally, those theories appeal to me because they encompass the ways in which I see the world and negotiate my realities. To begin, I present my theoretical framework, then I describe its conceptualisation and application within the presentation of my conceptual framework.

Ontology: As Theoretical Framework

Ontology is a branch of philosophy (Smith, 2012) reflecting “the study of being” (Levers, 2013, p. 2). Ontology is concerned with the conditions of existence in relation to material, social, cultural, and political contexts (Ejnavarzala, 2019). In that way, ontology focuses on what exists in the world and how humans can acquire knowledge. Consequently, ontology is the belief reflecting an individual’s interpretation of what constitutes reality (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). Thus, the main question raised by ontology in research is ‘What is the nature of truth?’ Ontology is reflected within two key classifications, realism, and relativism (Killam, 2013). A realist ontology proposes that reality is objective (Killam, 2013), something independent from people’s perceptions (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). Contrasting that, a relativist ontology proposes that reality is subjectively experienced (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In that way, a relativist perspective maximises the subjective experiences and realities of people (Lincoln & Guba, 2016).

Ontology: As Conceptual Framework

Considering the two classifications of ontology, realism, and relativism (Killam, 2013), a relativist ontology provides the theoretical basis for my dissertation and indeed my own understanding of the world. As I have come to know myself, and my view of the world, I realise the importance of the subjective experience and how it has promoted my own ways of being, becoming, reality and how I come to know that reality. Consequently, in

completing my dissertation, I realise how my world view simultaneously differs from yet is similar to that of others. Indeed, the realities of baijiu and its toasting rituals not only promote my own understanding of those domains, but also how those domains generate and promote my ‘functioning’ as a young Chinese woman both here in Aotearoa New Zealand and in China. In that way, completing this research has made me explore my taken-for-granted reality and its place within wider Chinese socio-culture, particularly notions of world view and truth.

Epistemology: As Theoretical Framework

Epistemology is a philosophical theory exploring the nature of knowledge (Levers, 2013) and the ways and means of acquiring knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Epistemology is concerned with the relationship between knowledge and how we know what we know (Al-Ababneh, 2020). In the research process, epistemology asks the central question, as Levers (2013) put it, of ‘How do you know?’ An epistemological inquiry focuses on the relationship between the knower and knowledge within a topic of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). How we come to know what we know realises, as Levers (2013) explained, the link between knowledge and the social construction of reality thesis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934). Considering epistemology helps us to make sense of our world.

Epistemology: As Conceptual Framework

The aim of my research was the exploration and extension of knowledge within my research on and analysis of baijiu and its toasting rituals. To achieve that, my epistemology reflects the notion that I perceive our existence, knowledge, and experience of the world as a construction. That thinking aligns with Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) social construction of reality thesis. That construction reflects the idea that baijiu and its toasting rituals are culturally charged items reflecting historical and contemporary social meaning. Applying Levers’ (2013) suggestion that epistemology reflects how we ‘know,’ my application of autoethnography as a way of presenting my narratives and knowledge within wider socio-cultural considerations realises knowledge within an individual and group context. In that way, my knowledge of baijiu and its toasting rituals is integrated within and beyond traditional Chinese knowledge and emphasises the subjective nature of reality and knowledge. In my research, that subjectivity is presented within etic and emic (Jary & Jary, 2005) perspectives.

Conflating Ontology and Epistemology

While the scope of ontology and epistemology appear to be different, as I have come to know and understand these constructs, I have also recognised their symbiosis. In that way, despite their differences, ontology and epistemology are closely related. While both domains aid my responses to my research questions, their ‘use value’ becomes obvious when I consider ontology and epistemology within my wider notions of my theoretical and conceptual framework. ‘Knowing reality’ and ‘having knowledge’ are in a close relationship and that relationship is best exemplified within my other theoretical and conceptual perspectives, symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) and the social construction of reality thesis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) and social construction of reality thesis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) illuminate how, in creating and interacting within our world, people come to realise knowledge, and within that realisation construct dynamic realities and ways of being and becoming. In that regard, I realise the symbiotic nature of ontology and epistemology. While that nexus aids my research and wider understandings of the world, considerations of ‘Which came first, ontology or epistemology?’ sit well outside the scope of my research.

Symbolic Interactionism: Theoretical Framework

Symbolic interactionism is an important sociological theory (Stryker, 1990). Symbolic interactionism emerged in the 1930s when it was proposed by American sociologist George Herbert Mead (1934). Mead believed that the ideational behaviour in human social life was realised through social interaction, and that symbols were a key part of interactive (social) life. Later, Blumer (1969) completed and generalised symbolic interactionist theory. Blumer argued that meaning was created for people through their social interaction and its ongoing interpretation. That position challenged the determinism of positivist sociology that, by comparison, demeaned the subjective agency of people (Rock, 2016). Symbolic interactionism explores the relationship between individual thought and action and places the understanding of individual behaviour and experience within its social context (Blumer, 1969). Consequently, symbolic interactionism emphasises human interaction. For example, meaningful interactions include language, as well as gestures, facial expressions, and body language. Symbols are one of the main concepts of symbolic interactionist theory. Arguably, language is one of humankind’s

most often used, yet taken-for-granted, symbols. In using symbols like language, people interact with each other (Stryker & Vryan, 2006), considering that within wider social applications, socio-cultures can be created and sustained by people repeating meaningful behavioural interactions (Fuller & Carter, 2016). In that way, symbolic interactionism reinforces the ways of being and becoming for individuals and groups, helping them to make subjective sense of their worlds. Thus, in the process of interaction, people learn from each other, create, and share ideas. In turn those ideas influence ongoing behaviours and ways of being and becoming.

Applying Symbolic Interactionism: Conceptual Framework

Drinking and toasting with baijiu denotes interaction between people, reflecting that baijiu toasting is an essential ritual whenever baijiu is present at a banquet. Consequently, consuming the baijiu via toasting evokes, in subtle ways, not only contemporary behaviours but also historic and symbolic meanings. In that way, via toasting interactions, the past, present, and future combine within interactive acts. However, those acts are often taken for granted: it is just what Chinese people ‘do’ at banquets when baijiu is present. Baijiu toasting and sharing rituals help people develop an understanding of the world they live in. In turn, that knowledge aids an individual’s realisation of ‘who they are’ and their ‘place’ within their wider socio-culture. While baijiu use at banquets, weddings, births, and funerals literally lubricates those occasions, that lubrication reflects, evokes, and marks the rituals and connotations of Chinese life that have developed over time. The act of toasting, completed by the bride and groom at their wedding (交杯酒), marks not only the beginning of their marriage, but also their changed identities as husband and wife. Thus, via interaction and ritual, people make sense of their world, reinforcing past ways of being and becoming and opening new possibilities as rituals and ways of being and becoming change over time.

The Social Construction of Reality Thesis: Theoretical Framework

The social construction of reality thesis was proposed by sociologists Berger and Luckmann (1966). Their work suggested that all meanings and understandings arose from the process of people’s communication and that those interactive communications were echoed between people, thus forming a common understanding of a shared reality (Gergen, 2009). According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), reality is socially constructed because it is formed with reference to social concepts of knowledge and their

development. Those concepts are shared interactively. Thus, people's actions reflect common concepts that determine knowledge (Calhoun et al., 2002). People form their reality by referencing common sense, customs, and habits. Customs and habits shape the reality influencing human activities that, over time, become habitual⁴ (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Those realisations identify the similarities between the social construction of reality thesis and Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionism. In that way, the social construction of reality thesis recognises, like symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), the importance of human interaction promoting a shared yet subjectively experienced understanding of dynamic realities.

Applying the Social Construction of Reality Thesis: Conceptual Framework

Because baijiu and its toasting rituals have extensive histories, their meanings vary between Chinese people. Baijiu toasting, as a medium and means of communication, has formed a common perception of reality for many Chinese people, thus building and reinforcing a commonly shared perception of the world. Key to those perceptive understandings is the interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) inherent to baijiu's consumption and its associated toasting rituals. In constructing reality and enhancing our understanding of the world around us, baijiu and its toasting rituals connect peoples' understandings of ancestor worship by creating an interactive link between the living and their ancestors. The toasting ritual for the deceased and other ancestors is customary and habitual in Chinese socio-culture. Through repetition, and considering Berger and Luckmann (1966), many Chinese people make sense of their world, and ancestor worship, through the repetition of an affirming ritual. Consequently, baijiu and its toasting rituals are social constructions formed through and reinforced by the interaction of people. Those interactions reinforce notions of the symbolic meanings of blessings, respect, gratitude, and expectations as people interact. In those ways, baijiu and its toasting rituals reinforce the social construction of reality for many Chinese people.

⁴ Habituation is defined as any behaviour that is repeated frequently in a pattern. It can then be performed again in the future in the same way (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Chapter 3. Literature Review

The purpose of a literature review is to present existing knowledge relevant to a particular topic in the form of a written report (Hart, 2018). Additionally, within research, a literature review allows for the development of theoretical frameworks and methodologies (Booth et al., 2021). Considering that, academics writing literature reviews use two basic formats to convey academic knowledge, theme and chronology (Nayak et al., 2021). A chronological approach organises the relevant literature in order of publication date (Nayak et al., 2021). Contrasting that, a thematic literature review is organised around a theme or issue rather than its chronological progression (Nayak et al., 2021). Considering those approaches, my literature review takes a blended approach of theme and chronology. That approach serves to best illuminate literature relevant to my topic because, within the Western academy, there is not an abundance of literature on baijiu or its toasting rituals.

Baijiu is common in China (Sun, 2021; see also Chapter 1, “Dynastic China and Baijiu”). Indeed, as X. W. Zheng and Han (2016) noted, baijiu is the national alcoholic beverage of China. Despite that, and baijiu’s long history, relatively limited academic attention has been paid to baijiu or its unique toasting rituals. What literature there is on baijiu tends to explain its role in Chinese society from a Chinese perspective (Guo, 2021; Hong & Jue, 2006; Meng, 1994). Consequently, more research is needed to complement and illuminate existing knowledge and to extend the reach of that knowledge into the Western academy. Bearing that in mind, my literature review provides a summary of the current relevant academic research on baijiu and its toasting rituals. Consequently, reflecting my research questions, my review of literature is divided into two sections: first, a review of baijiu; and then a second section discussing its toasting rituals. In presenting my first section, I discuss considerations of baijiu within constructs of the literati, gender, and social politics. Then, in the second section of my literature review, I present other literature informing my readers about the historic and contemporary toasting rituals associated with baijiu.

Baijiu and the Chinese Literati

Baijiu plays a vital role in Chinese society (Li et al., 2018). That role reflects its long history as well as its brewing process (F. Liu & Murphy, 2017). Throughout its history, baijiu has been inextricably linked to art. Li Bai (李白), a poet of the Tang Dynasty (618–907), used alcohol narratives in his poems to toast the moon and as an expression of his

loneliness (Liscomb, 2010). Because of his beautiful descriptions of drinking, and his love of it, he became known as the Sage of Alcohol (酒圣) (Shen & Wang, 1998). Because of Li Bai's poetic enthusiasm for it, the beverage began to impact China's creative community (Jiang & Liu 2010). The mental freedom associated with getting drunk enabled many Chinese literati to free themselves from their societal constraints thus empowering their artistic creativity (Cochrane et al., 2003; Jiang & Liu, 2010). Historically, for many members of the Chinese artistic community, baijiu was simultaneously a consumption pastime and a prop or muse for the empowerment and expression of their thoughts and imaginations (Zheng, 2005).

Between the Ming and Qing dynasties (12th–18th centuries), the role of baijiu for the literati subtly changed. During the Ming and Qing dynasties (12th–18th centuries), baijiu consumption was not only a way for the literati to gain artistic inspiration, but also a way to supplement their incomes. Many members of China's artistic community operated baijiu breweries (Guo, 2021). That link is an important consideration because, as Clunas (2004) argued, the historical Chinese literary elite were the arbiters of taste. Consequently, they influenced the opinions of others about baijiu and, in doing so, left a legacy of written work that not only reflected their socio-temporal space, but also that of baijiu. That, as R. Zheng (2005) observed, helped to cohere Chinese socio-culture within shared cognitive processes and common behaviours, habits, and rituals.

Baijiu and Gender

Baijiu is distinctly gendered, reflecting the way in which baijiu does not fit within the traditional Chinese sense of femininity, but rather sits within constructs of masculinity (Jayne et al., 2022). Denoting that is its consumption, as drinking baijiu in one big gulp signifies masculinity (Guo, 2021; Hong & Jue, 2006). In traditional Chinese culture, it was not acceptable for women to drink baijiu (Hong & Jue, 2006). Baijiu's patriarchal link also reflected the religious use of the alcoholic beverages within rituals usually conducted by men (Meng, 1994). Compounding that, within traditional Chinese culture, women were expected to be dominated by their fathers when they were not married, and by their husbands when they were married (Hong & Jue, 2006). Additionally, it was considered virtuous for women to stay at home and raise children (Hong & Jue, 2006). Intensifying those norms, during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), China's economic and social development flourished, and the number of commercial drinking establishments increased exponentially (Meng, 1994). With that increase and the emphasis on male

consumption of alcohol, bar owners began to hire female performers and prostitutes to ‘accompany’ drinking and to attract more male customers (Guo, 2021). However, at this time, some women, usually prostitutes, began to consume baijiu (Hong & Jue, 2006). Guo (2021) suggested that as time passed during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1912), that women attended drinking parties in secondary roles to men. At such events, women accompanied their husbands or fathers. They never attended drinking events alone. This, and the fact that women who attended these events did not drink baijiu alone, reflected their, and baijiu’s, socio-temporality (Hong & Jue, 2006). These behaviours defined and cemented a Chinese male-centric, patriarchal social system that realised men as baijiu’s primary consumers. Today, as modern Chinese women enter the professional labour market, they are expected to drink heavily and attend business-related parties alongside men (Mason, 2013). Notwithstanding that, Zuo et al. (2021) suggested that baijiu still holds and promotes a male-centric bias in contemporary China. For example, it is common for Chinese men to compare themselves by the amount of liquor they drink (Zuo et al., 2021). Similarly, praising a Chinese male for their baijiu drinking capacity simultaneously recognises their masculinity (Zuo et al., 2021).

Baijiu and the Socio-politics of Engagement

Mannarini and Salvatore (2019) defined the socio-politics of engagement as a cognitive process whereby people develop and express their views about the world, its governance, and their role within that, through a wide range of social activities. In those ways, the socio-politics of engagement realise the importance of my application of the social construction of reality thesis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) to my dissertation. Considering that, baijiu’s association with socio-politics reflects its historical and contemporary meanings for many Chinese people within their interactions and social activities. Yu, the ruler of the Xia dynasty (2030BC–1600BC) said, after tasting the alcohol, that now “future generations will have alcohol to destroy their kingdoms” (as cited in X. Liu, 1985, p. 173). Contrasting that, baijiu was also associated with the politics of abundance because drinking it celebrated a plentiful harvest (Meng, 1994). Like contemporary Chinese society, during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1912) social stability and rapid social and economic development created socio-economic disparities between the rich and the poor, noble merchants, and commoners. Then, it was popular for the nobility to hold extravagant alcohol feasts (Meng, 1994). Those occasions were literally used to lubricate business and maintain the social status of attendees and, by implication, their future generations (Meng, 1994). In that way, baijiu connoted

expressions of socio-political community engagement. Then, as now, drinking baijiu was a crucial commensal business activity (Sandhaus, 2019). That situation has continued. Since the Chinese reforms of 1978,⁵ eating and drinking together have been prominent ways in which people build relationships and trust in the Chinese business community and wider socio-culture (Sandhaus, 2019; Steidlmeier, 1999). As Sandhaus (2019, p. 182) noted: “Few high-level decisions in China are made without the aid of a strong drink. So closely is professional advancement tied to one’s drinking that the more successful one becomes, the more they must drink.”

Toasting rituals and the Socio-politics of Engagement

Key to that socio-political commensality are ritualised acts of toasting. In China, toasting is signified by the raising of a filled glass, the shared recitation of a wish, the clinking together of glasses, then the consumption of the beverage (S. Chen, 1994). However, toasting rituals in China have changed over time. Beamer (1993) proposed that, historically, toasting was used as a ritual blessing. Rituals are an important activity in contemporary and ancient societies because they signify self-regulation that in turn provides material and spiritual comfort within a sense of belonging (Meng, 1994). In the Xia dynasty (2030BC–1600BC), an alcoholic beverage was a rare commodity. Consequently, its ritual consumption offered and recognised sacrifices to the heavens, the earth, the mountains, the sun, the moon, and the stars, and ancestral spirits (Meng, 1994; Puett, 2005).

Figure 7: A Ritual of the Living Toasting Their Ancestral Spirits



Source: Ziqiangbuxi (2020).

⁵ Reform and the opening-up of China was a turning point in the nation’s history. Reform promoted rapid economic development and combined with low labour costs, this allowed the Chinese economy to become the world’s second largest.

In rituals, an alcoholic beverage, as a treasured item, was first offered to the ancestral spirits. That act, it was believed, would provide blessings and spiritual support for the living. In that way, the toasting rituals associated with baijiu were closely linked to concepts of life and reproduction (Meng, 1994). For example, weddings, births, and funerals.

A Chinese wedding heralds the heteronormative union of a male and female, thus signifying the beginning of the couple's reproductive life. At a wedding, the bride and groom drink cross-cupped baijiu from each other's glass. That action signifies that they are married and further indicates a promise that they will stay together forever (Ochiai, 2015). Birth and death identify the beginning and the end of life. On these occasions, ritual toasts are common (Meng, 1994). Baijiu consumption celebrating a birth is designed to bless the child with longevity and health. Usually, the father or grandfather of the child gives a short speech conveying those sentiments while the newborn is brought forward by its mother or grandmother to receive his blessing. Contrasting that, at funerals baijiu is a comfort for the soul of the deceased, and a way that their family can avoid excessive grieving (Y. Wang, 2013). At a funeral, the son or son-in-law usually performs the ritual of soothing the soul of the deceased with baijiu. This is achieved by toasting a picture of the deceased, and then the baijiu is spilt on the floor after the toast (R. Li, 2018).

Over time, baijiu consumption and its toasting rituals became associated with Chinese festivals (E. Zhang, 1939). Exemplifying that are traditional Chinese festivals including the Spring Festival, the Dragon Boat Festival, and the Mid-Autumn Festival. At these events, banquet celebrations are common (Hong & Jue, 2006; Meng, 1994). In raising a glass of baijiu at these events, Chinese people often pray for blessings (Meng, 1994). On these occasions, people from the same clan often hold a toasting ritual, as a way to gather and strengthen clan connections (Meng, 1994). Consequently, baijiu and its toasting rituals have become symbolic expressions of emotion, belonging, desire, and spirituality.

Compounding that, in China, Confucianism underpins many vernacular practices and beliefs. Confucianism is a system of thought, belief, and behaviour that originated in ancient China. Confucianism emphasises benevolent respect and ethical behaviours (Yao, 2000). Confucianism is centred around the notion of respect for others (Beamer, 1993; Chan, 2006; Meng, 1994; Sandhaus, 2019) and the maintenance of a harmonious social order (L. Ding et al., 2021). As Jary and Jary (2005) noted, "social order refers to the stable patterns of social expectations and social structure that exist in any society" (p.

575). Exemplifying that are the laws enacted by governmental authority that are accepted and upheld by its people. Similarly, China's toasting culture simultaneously reflects social order and its links to Confucianism because both Confucianism and toasting rituals regulate people's behaviour. In that way, the blend of Confucianism and toasting mirrors concepts of morality that, in turn, according to Meng (1994), denote an individual's social and cultural capitals.⁶ Those capitals are displayed in everyday life. However, a Chinese banquet provides a valuable insight into their operationalisation and Confucian overlay.

At a Chinese banquet, all food is shared. It is usually served on a round table (R. G. Tian et al., 2018), A round table not only makes food sharing easier, but also signifies reunion (Du, 2018). Confucianism requires that a banquet's toast is an important consideration.

Figure 8: Toasting Etiquette According to Confucianism



Source: Yuerong (2020).

Reflecting that is Figure 9. In Figure 9, the host's act of toasting his two guests has a special name, 'Chou' (酬). The act of the two guests toasting the host is known as 'Zuo' (酌). Toasting in this situation expresses friendly respect (M. Ding & Xu, 2014). Only when the 'Chou' (酬) and 'Zuo' (酌) are finished is traditional toasting considered complete (S. Wang, 1994). That toasting ritual holds Confucian links (Wan, 1992). The classic Confucian work, *Liji* (来而无往非礼也), states that it is impolite not to return in kind what is received. Also, Confucianism requires that people drink baijiu within kneeling rituals, and when a young person toasts an older person, they must kneel down when making

⁶ Bourdieu (2018) presented three types of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Economic capital refers to economic resources, such as cash and property (Musoba & Baez, 2009). Cultural capital comprises the social assets of a person (Throsby, 1999), for example, their education, intellect, style of speech, and style of dress. Social capital is the effective functioning of social groups through interpersonal relationships, shared identity, common understanding, shared norms, shared values, and trust (Halpern, 2005).

their toast (S. Wang, 1994). In Chinese society, kneeling denotes respect within social hierarchy (Gao, 1999), and reverence for one's elders (Gao, 1999; Mi, 2003).

Over time, Confucianism has become a universally accepted set of social rules permeating Chinese culture (Dong, 2012). Confucianism has deeply influenced Chinese toasting rituals. Considering that, Chinese toasting rituals signify interaction between people that in turn helps them make sense of their world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Through constant human action and interaction, including toasting rituals, social norms and values are created, recreated, and reaffirmed (Del Casino & Thien, 2009). Human behaviour is created, reinforced, and influenced by the ways in which material items like baijiu are given meaning within toasting rituals. As previously noted, those actions underpin the importance of interaction within symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934). It is within that nexus that people co-construct their knowledge and realities of the world around them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Mead, 1934). Consequently, over time, baijiu toasting rituals reinforce ways of being and becoming, identity and social order.

Nevertheless, modern Chinese toasting etiquette takes a form that is different from that advocated by Confucianism. Exemplifying that, at a modern Chinese banquet, after the first course is served, the host would lead with the first toast. That toast marks the beginning of the banquet (Szto, 2013). Then, as the banquet progresses, guests are usually toasted one-on-one. However, that ritual is not obligatory (Nishizawa, 2003). At large contemporary banquets, the host toast can also toast groups of people. While that saves time, it still confers respect (Szto, 2013). The kneeling ritual during the toast has also been replaced in modern times (S. Wang, 1994). In modern society, it is common to clink glasses during the banquet. However, reflecting Chinese social and familial hierarchies, the elders' cups will be held higher than those of the younger people (Lamm, 2016), metaphorically signifying the bowing of younger people to their elders ("Bowling – Clinking Glasses – Shaking Hands," 1991).

Clearly, baijiu and its toasting rituals are commonplace for many Chinese people. Although the contemporary toasting rituals have changed, their essence is grounded in notions of respect (Jiang & Liu, 2010). Respect is a key Confucian construct (Beamer, 1993; Chan, 2006; Meng, 1994; Sandhaus, 2019). Confucian connotations impact both contemporary and traditional toasting rituals. Nevertheless, the expression of Confucianism can vary from one era to another. For example, it is not necessary to walk up to the other person during a modern baijiu toast. It is enough to hold the glass in your

hand, face the other person and make the toast. Those changes reflect the dynamics of social interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and the dynamic nature of contemporary toasting rituals within equally dynamic socio-cultures like China.

Rounding Out Literature Review

In concluding my literature review I present Table 2, in which I present the key themes that I distilled from my literature review. In that way, Table 2 provides a synopsis of the information that I carry forward, alongside my autoethnographic narratives (refer Chapter 5), in order to facilitate my discussion and conclusion chapter (refer Chapter 6).

Table 2: Important Themes in Existing Literature on Baijiu and its Toasting Rituals

Baijiu and the Literati
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baijiu influenced and promoted by China's literati (Jiang & Liu, 2010).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the literati, baijiu provided artistic escape. Baijiu was a prop/muse of expression (Zheng, 2005).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China's literati were arbiters of taste, influencing perceptions of taste and behaviour (Zheng, 2005).
Baijiu and Gender
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baijiu and toasting are associated with masculinity in China (Jayne et al., 2022).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relationship between baijiu and gender defines traditional social and cultural norms and practices (Hong & Jue, 2006).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baijiu's gender bias is still evident in contemporary China (Zuo et al., 2021).
Baijiu Toasting and the Socio-politics of Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baijiu is used in business to build relationships and trust. That association is also realised within families and communities (Sandhaus, 2019).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ritualised act of toasting with baijiu reflects feelings of empathy, respect, self-regulation by providing material and spiritual comfort (Meng, 1994).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baijiu toasting reflects social order and connections to Confucianism. Baijiu toasting also connotes an individual's social and cultural capital (Sandhaus, 2019).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baijiu toasting rituals promote interaction. In that way, people come to understand their world, and promote and reinforce existing and new social hierarchies. In turn, those domains support social order (Zhai, 2020).

Chapter 4. Methodology and Method

Introducing Methodology and Method

This chapter presents my research methodology and method. Methodology explains how a researcher intends to conduct their research cognisant of methodological theory (Kazdin, 2016). In that way, according to Dawson (2019), methodology is the main principle guiding research. Contrasting that, method denotes the application of methodological theory enabling a researcher to undertake their research (Disman et al., 2017). While they are interrelated, the essential difference between methodology and method is that methodology is theoretical while method is the application of methodology.

Situating my research within a relativist ontology (refer Chapter 2; see also Killam, 2013), and constructivist epistemology (refer Chapter 2; see also Lee, 2012), I theoretically consider and then apply the concepts of symbolic interactionism (Fuller & Carter, 2016; Mead, 1934), and autoethnography (Ellis, 2009) as my theoretical methodology and applied method. Consequently, in the following sections, I present those domains by first exploring theory (methodology) then my application of that theory (method) for each of my methodological considerations. Complementing that, the Appendix provides an overview of the methodologies I considered but rejected.

Introducing Autoethnography as Methodology

Autoethnography is but one form of qualitative research (Ellis, 2009). Autoethnography denotes a genre of autobiographical writing that displays multiple levels of consciousness, linking the individual to their wider culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In that way, using an autoethnographic methodology helps researchers to blend and contrast the lives of individuals (Stahlke Wall, 2016) within, as Ellis et al. (2011) earlier highlighted, wider social phenomena. That, as Ellis et al. (2011) explained, uses the personal experience of the researcher to critically reflect upon their wider cultural experience Autoethnography differs from ethnography. Ethnography involves the researcher writing about a group of people, whereas an autoethnography is centered on the self (Hamilton et al., 2008). In this way, autoethnography acknowledges the subjectivity, emotions, and influence of the researcher within their research, rather than avoiding these issues (Ellis et al., 2011; see also Chapter 6, “Researcher Bias”). In choosing autoethnography as my methodology, I am cognisant that with in its application as method, I situate my knowledge and

experience within wider Chinese socio-culture (Butz & Besio, 2009; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In that way, my research narrative offers a contextual understanding of baijiu and its toasting rituals with a multilayered, nuanced, subjective perspective.

Introducing Symbolic Interactionism as Methodology

Symbolic interactionism is an approach to sociology based on the behaviourist philosophy of mind and action developed by George Herbert Mead (Fink, 2015). Symbolic interactionism is based on the view that society is a product of people’s everyday interactions (Macionis & Plummer, 2005). People interact to produce symbolic, literal, and figurative meanings that assist them to construct and understand the world in which they live. In those ways, symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) is linked to considerations of ontology and epistemology (refer Chapter 2). Those links, and the dynamic nature of socio-culture, show that symbolic interactionism, ontology, epistemology, method, and methodology are dynamically interrelated constructs. Best reflecting that dynamism and interaction are considerations of language, its expression and dynamic meaning. Language, in all its forms, provides⁷ the common base that Berger and Luckmann (1966) suggested facilitated humankind’s most common tool for creating and understanding (refer Chapter 2). In that way, symbolic interactionism is somewhat oxymoronic because it recognises the subjective nature of human experience albeit within the commonality of a shared and wider cultural experience (Prus, 1996). Key to that dichotomy and an understanding of how symbolic interactionism can be used as a research methodology and method are its four key tenets (refer Table 3, below).

Table 3: Symbolic Interactionism

First tenet	Individuals act based on the meanings objects have for them.
Second tenet	Interaction occurs within a particular social and cultural context in which physical and social objects (persons), as well as situation, must be defined or categorized based on individual meanings.
Third tenet	Meanings emerge from interactions with other individuals and with society.
Fourth tenet	Meanings are continuously created and recreated through interpreting processes during interaction with others.

Source: Fuller and Carter (2016, p. 932).

⁷ Language has many forms for conveying information. For example, writing, spoken words, body language, images conveying meaning, and sign language.

As I have come to understand and appreciate the four tenets of symbolic interactionism, I realised their use value within their application as my research method. However, before I present my method, the next section presents my application of autoethnographic theory as my base research method.

Method: Applying Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a method of research and writing (McIlveen, 2008). As such, autoethnography is both a process and a product (Ellis et al., 2011). My research tells the story of baijiu and its toasting rituals from my lived experience as a young Chinese woman. In that way, I place my own narrative within the broader socio-cultural context of baijiu, and toasting, in Chinese socio-culture. It is through my combination of literature review (accepted knowledge) and my own experience that my autoethnographic narratives (refer Chapter 5) and Discussion (refer Chapter 6) emerge. For readers familiar with Chinese culture, baijiu, and its toasting rituals, explored via autoethnography, can confirm, or challenge their existing knowledge within their own socio-temporal experiences of baijiu and its rituals. For non-Chinese readers, an autoethnographic approach provides a personal narrative within a broader socio-cultural consideration. In those ways, my personal narrative and authentic experiences illuminate and personalise my own lived experience of baijiu and its toasting rituals, mediated by existing knowledge (refer Chapter 3).

Method: Applying Symbolic Interactionism

In this section, I expand upon the individual tenets of symbolic interactionism (refer Table 3), and their application to my research.

Applying Tenet One

- “Individuals act based on the meanings objects have for them” (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932).

People interact with objects based on the meaning that people, as individuals and groups, attribute to those objects (Fuller & Carter, 2016). In that way, a relationship is established between people and ‘things.’ Considering that and applying it to baijiu and its toasting rituals indicates that baijiu is a material item that has been attributed meaning, status and

actancy⁸(Woodward, 2007) for Chinese people. Those attributes have positioned baijiu as a traditionally important Chinese beverage (X. W. Zheng & Han, 2016). Consequently, the meanings imbued in baijiu help its consumers make sense of their world and, in doing so, create and affirm social order and cultural protocols at events including births, weddings, funerals, and business occasions. This is manifest through Confucian considerations of respect and reciprocity (Mullis, 2008). In that way, individuals come to make sense of their world. That process is shared between individuals as they engage in baijiu drinking and toasting. Collective responses to baijiu and its toasting rituals promote communities of thought and practice within which Chinese culture is realised.

Applying Tenet Two

- “Interaction occurs within a particular social and cultural context in which physical and social objects (persons), as well as situation, must be defined or categorized based on individual meanings” (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932).

The socio-cultural context of baijiu and its toasting rituals are realised with the principles of symbolic interactionism’s second tenet. Although baijiu and toasting are common themes in my cultural background, I need to explore my own experiences and evaluate them within wider considerations of Chinese culture and my own sense of identity. I need to draw from this nexus to discuss the specific socio-cultural contexts in which meanings related to baijiu and its toasting are manifest. Those considerations provide a unique perspective on the role of baijiu and its toasting rituals as an item of symbolic meaning for individuals and groups. Considering that alongside the social construction of reality thesis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), baijiu and its toasting rituals signify a communicative interaction between people. Over time, those interactions have established common understandings that people use to negotiate and understand their world. Consequently, this tenet provides an opportunity for me to present an “emic” and “etic” (Jary & Jary, 2005, p. 182) perspective to my topic which is congruent with the principles of autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011).

⁸ Actancy means the ability of entities (both human and non-human) to 'act' in society, and it emphasises the inextricable link between human beings and material things (Woodward, 2007).

Applying Tenet Three

- “Meanings emerge from interactions with other individuals and with society” (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932).

Human behaviour is reflected in the meaning attributed to objects and reinforced by group behaviours, particularly interaction. Applied to my topic, this principle rationalises how the meaning of baijiu, and its toasting rituals are created, reinforced, and changed over time. This is evidenced by the interactions between individuals, groups, and societies that, over time, create the symbolically shared meanings of the contemporary baijiu consumption and its toasting rituals. Exemplifying that, baijiu toasting rituals signify gratitude, respect and blessings that are created and reinforced in the ongoing interactions between individuals and within their wider communities. It is through these interactions that a common understanding of baijiu and its toasting rituals are formed. I posit that, in that way, baijiu and its toasting rituals create a common community of thought and practice, within dynamic potentials and history. Consequently, metaphors and rituals, as well as customs and habits, are formed, reinforced, and changed by the conscious and unconscious interactions of people in their daily lives (Macionis & Plummer, 2005).

Applying Tenet Four

- “Meanings are continuously created and recreated through interpreting processes during interaction with others” (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932).

The meaning of objects and the language and interactive techniques people use to describe and interact with them are constantly evolving and changing. In that way, the symbolic nature of being and becoming is dynamic. Meanings are generated, maintained, and amended through the interaction of individuals and groups. Thus, the process of interacting and giving meaning to objects is a metaphoric loop of constant interaction and change. This interaction and change provides a plausible way to explore and understand baijiu and its toasting rituals. This tenet also reflects the subjective and dynamic nature of knowledge and reality (refer to the sections on ontology and epistemology in Chapter 2) and rationalises why my literature review (accepted knowledge) may not accurately reflect my own experience. In those ways, this tenet foreshadows change because the meaning of things does not remain static. Consequently, the meaning of the baijiu and its

toasting rituals are not singular but plural expressions that are enriched by human interaction.

Rounding Out My Method

The four tenets of symbolic interactionism (Fuller & Carter, 2016) not only inform my research but also foster its methodological exploration. That consideration, alongside my autoethnographic input, will, as Carter and Montes Alvarado (2019) proposed, add value to my research by maximising my unique subjective experience, thus situating my experiences within a wider frame of reference: Chinese culture. In those ways, and considering my theoretical and contextual frameworks (refer Chapter 2), my research weaves a fabric merging known knowledge (literature review), my supervisor's knowledge, my own unique knowledge of baijiu and its toasting rituals, and their synthesis. That combination fosters not only an interactive amalgam but also a unique insight into my research topic and a reliable way to respond to my research questions. I achieve that by using symbolic interactionism's four tenets within the discussion of my autoethnographic narratives (refer Chapter 6).

Impacts of COVID-19

My study and my dissertation have been impacted by COVID-19. For me, COVID-19 created a unique learning experience. When I began my master's degree in 2021, all my papers were delivered online. Online learning impacted my emotional and physical wellbeing. I was unable to interact face to face with my classmates or lecturers. I felt lost when I saw their communications on my computer screen. Adding to that were the time differences between China and Aotearoa New Zealand. Often, my online classes in Aotearoa New Zealand started in the early morning hours in China. Consequently, I felt tired. Studying that way was not ideal for me. While I returned to Aotearoa New Zealand to complete my dissertation, that return left me feeling discombobulated. My discombobulation reflected my lack of comfort in my return to Aotearoa New Zealand. On my return, I had forgotten many of the cultural rituals, mores, and nuances of being and becoming Kiwi. It took me some time to readjust. Notwithstanding those feelings and their impact upon me, as I reflect upon that time and those experiences, I now feel that I have shown resilience and determination in completing my studies and research dissertation. As I see it now, even though my academic voyage hit the storm of COVID-

19, my adaptations to that storm have realised my strengths as a person and student of gastronomy.

Chapter 5. Autoethnographic Narratives

In this chapter I present my autoethnographic narratives within four accounts of my lived experience of baijiu and its toasting rituals. My autoethnographic narratives include the presentation of baijiu toasting rituals at family banquets, baijiu at weddings, and finally my experiences of baijiu at farewell parties, as well as during COVID-19. These occasions were selected for my dissertation because they resonated for me as occasions of importance that included baijiu and its toasting rituals (refer Chapter 6, “Research Bias”). Additionally, my autoethnographic accounts highlighted the ways in which baijiu and its toasting rituals reflected and embodied the four tenets of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934). That interaction was demonstrated by wedding guests who were aware that baijiu was consumed at the beginning of the wedding and not during the wedding ritual itself. That awareness revealed the symbolic and cultural meanings of baijiu that, over time, many Chinese people have taken for granted. Additionally, it revealed how items like baijiu promoted interaction and in doing so helped people in understanding the world around them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Mead, 1934).

Also impacting the selection of my four narratives was my realisation that I negotiate a “dual realm of existence” (Bakhtin, 1981 p. 150). Unlike Bakhtin’s duality, my duality does not reflect my place within a reversal of social order, but within my lived experiences in China, and Aotearoa New Zealand. For me, that duality generated a heightened awareness of my life in China simply because of its contrast to my lived experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand. Consequently, my dual realm of existence has afforded me the luxury of thought, time, insight, and distance within my considerations of how I have come to take my Chinese lived experiences for granted. In that way, my duality provided space for thought, contemplation, and the consideration of who I am, particularly how my knowledge of my topic has been realised within my dissertation and, equally importantly, how that knowledge and those realities have shaped the person I am and will become.

Additionally, being and becoming Nora Ma has been impacted by global events. The most recent global event that has impacted my life, my study and research, and my physical and mental wellbeing, has been the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, I include the pandemic as a factor impacting my research and narrative writing. However, before presenting my narratives it is important that I tell my readers something about myself.

Getting to Know the Author: Nora Ma

I was born in 1998, the Chinese year of the Tiger. I was raised in the northern Chinese city of Shijiazhuang (石家庄). My birthdate makes me part of Generation Z (people born between 1995 and 2009: Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.b). As was China's policy at that time, I am an only child. My mother is an intermediate schoolteacher, my father an electrical engineer. Although I was born in Shijiazhuang, because of my parent's busy work schedules, the first five years of my life were spent living with my maternal grandparents in their countryside home in Wuji (无极). During that time my parents visited me and my grandparents every month. When I was five years old, I started school. At the same time, I began living with my parents in Shijiazhuang. For convenience, I attended the school where my mother worked from the age of 5 until I graduated from high school, aged 17.

Then, I came to Aotearoa New Zealand to attend AUT. Our family chose a New Zealand university because we had visited Aotearoa New Zealand when I was 15 years old. During our two-week trip to the country, we fell in love with Aotearoa New Zealand. Two years later, with the support of my parents, I came to Aotearoa New Zealand to begin my tertiary study. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced my return to China from 2020 to 2022. During that time, I studied at AUT by distance. Now, in 2023, I have returned to Aotearoa New Zealand to complete my research dissertation.

Coming to New Zealand was, for me, a completely new beginning. Being here meant that I said goodbye to my hometown, my parents, grandparents, and friends. As I write about myself living in Aotearoa New Zealand, I am acutely aware that while I have now adjusted to life here, that has not always been the case. In my early days in this country, I felt alone and homesick. Despite my own and my family's choice that I came here, I wondered 'why.' Part of that why was realised in my living alone. I missed the kitchen sounds of home. Those noises evoked food, company, love, and fun. To counteract that, I conjured images in my mind. A seminal image was drinking baijiu with my family and friends. Even my smelling baijiu evoked my mind's 'picture-show.' As time passed, things changed in positive ways. Part of that positivity was my dissertation. Not only did it consume my time, but it also gave me time and space to think about myself and my topic. Additionally, it showed me how theory permeated my life. Bakhtin's (1981) "dual realm of existence" (p. 150) identified something I felt. Oddly, that was comforting. My duality, a mind in China but a body in Aotearoa New Zealand, seems odd but that oddness

benefitted me in so many ways. Many of these experiences are encapsulated in my dissertation.

In those ways, baijiu and its toasting rituals are my aide-mémoire, distilling in my mind and imagination visualisations of my home country, family banquets, weddings, and farewell parties. As I now realise, baijiu and its toasting configure part of my unique identity. Those memories and emotions have made me more aware and, as a consequence of writing, given me a deeper understanding and appreciation of ‘who I am’.

Four Autoethnographic Narratives

Baijiu Toasting Rituals at Family Banquets

Family is defined as a group of people who are related to each other, such as a mother, father, and their children. Family also denotes a group of people who care about each other because they have a close relationship or common interest (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.a). Consequently, notions of family are dynamic, ranging from kinship ties to families of choice. Because my family unit was small, and much of my youth was spent with my grandparents, my considerations of family extend in meaningful ways to include not only my parents, but also my grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Considering that, my memories of my family’s banquets reflect my interactions with those people. My grandparents owned a farm (refer Figure 10). Like other farm owners, in our region, they grew wheat and corn. I have clear memories of the wonderful fruit and vegetables they cultivated, and the many animals, including goats and chickens, that also enjoyed farm life.

My grandfather was a former soldier in the Chinese Army. When he received his army discharge, in 1970, he returned to his hometown to manage the family farm with his wife, my grandmother. Most of the food we ate came from their farm. This was supplemented by other foods purchased at monthly village markets. At these events, villagers would sell their surplus foods at bargain prices. My grandparents were no exception. Most of the villagers knew each other, and my grandfather’s great passion for purchasing homemade baijiu at the markets was well known. He believed that homemade baijiu had a unique style. That preference, he said, reflected China’s ancient literati who produced bespoke baijiu. After a visit to the monthly village market, my grandfather always enjoyed a glass of baijiu with his meals. In that way, I connected my grandfather with baijiu and enjoyment. Keen on baijiu, whenever the New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival or a birthday

celebration approached, my grandfather would always buy more baijiu in celebratory anticipation.

Figure 9: My Grandparents' Farm



Source: Author (2023).

My grandfather has three brothers and a sister. They all live in the same village as my maternal grandparents. My maternal grandparents have three adult children. However, their children left the village to work and live in Shijiazhuang. While the city of Shijiazhuang is only one hour's drive from Wuji, my maternal grandparents' children rarely visit their parents. One of the few times that we are all together is for a family banquet during the holiday season. That time is precious for all of us, because of its rarity. Our family banquets contrast the experience of other Chinese people who celebrate traditional Chinese festivals including the New Year, the Dragon Boat Festival, and the Mid-Autumn Festival. My family emphasises the importance of reunions (团圆). For us, this implies that when families are together (团), we are complete (圆). At our family banquets, in addition to a variety of wonderful food, usually prepared by my grandmother, it is essential to have baijiu. At our celebrations, the men in our family contribute their own baijiu that has either been purchased or home brewed.

At the beginning of our banquet, the family members who are allowed to drink select their choice of baijiu from the wide range that the men had brought. Later, the remaining baijiu is gifted to family elders, or set aside for them to collect later. Depending on the number of people present, we might all sit at one table. However, if our reunion is well attended, then baijiu drinkers are seated at one table, while non-drinking children are seated at another table. After the baijiu is selected, everyone toasts, either with the alcohol or, for children, with a non-alcoholic beverage. At this moment everyone's toast holds the same meaning: the joy of our reunion and a sign that we are part of this family.

However, the ritual of toasting changes on other occasions. Exemplifying that is the Spring Festival. Then, young people toast the occasion hoping for an auspicious new year (新年吉祥), wishing happiness and prosperity (恭喜发财). During the Dragon Boat Festival, toasting with baijiu proffers a healthy life (生活安康). On the birthday of the elders, the baijiu toast is for longevity (延年益寿). While any toast is not linguistically limited, a four-character toast is usually preferred by many older Chinese people. That preference reflects the notion that strong emotions can be best expressed in only a few words (refer to my “Acknowledgements”). Just as the ancient Chinese literati wrote poetry, often in the company of baijiu, they used poetry to express their emotions. The toasts we say at family banquets are also like poetry, using a few words neatly to express strong emotions.

Figure 10: Appetisers at my Family’s Banquet



Source: Author (2023).

Our family toasting has that format. After a toast has been verbalised, our family members take a sip of the baijiu. Embodying the baijiu, in that ritualised way, signifies agreement to the verbalised toast.

After we have celebrated the first baijiu toast as a shared experience, then one-on-one toasting continues until the end of the party. One-on-one toasting is a way in which we can strike up a conversation with other family members. Best exemplifying that in our family is when an elder family member wants to speak with a younger family member. Then, the elder will call the name of the younger. In response, the younger person will toast the elder thus allowing space for a conversation to begin. These toasts are always observed at our family banquets. These toasts continue the lineage of toasting etiquette that began in early Confucianism. As time passes, and conversation slows, we ask each

other if the other person would like to share a main dish of food. For our family, this is usually dumplings or noodles. When agreement is reached, toasting ends and we begin to enjoy my grandmother's excellent cooking. When everyone has finished eating the main dish, this marks the end of our banquet.

Until I was 20, I toasted using non-alcoholic beverages. My first baijiu toast was made at my first Chinese New Year family banquet after my 20th birthday. Then, I toasted my elders, including my grandfather and uncles, with baijiu. I wished them happiness and prosperity for New Year. After my toast, my grandfather told my uncles that I had now grown up. Then, he drank his baijiu in one solid gulp. Although I only consumed two glasses of baijiu, it signified to me that my family now recognised me as a grown-up, an adult. That experience gave me a new and deeper appreciation for baijiu and the importance of its toasting rituals. Yet, within that experience, as I felt the effects of the alcohol, baijiu's association with men was reinforced when I realised that many of my female family members tended to drink beer, or nonalcoholic beverages.

Weddings, Baijiu, and Toasting Rituals

In China, a Han Chinese⁹ wedding is conducted in two parts, the wedding ceremony, and the wedding banquet. Baijiu and toasting are essential elements in each part. At weddings, baijiu is often referred to as a 'joyful wedding alcohol beverage' (喜酒) (Y. Wang, 2011). In 2022, I was the maid of honour for my college roommate's wedding. The wedding ceremony and banquet celebration were held at the same venue, a large hotel in Beijing. There, in a special venue for weddings, with round tables for guests, the bride and groom were married at a podium set up at the front of the room. Before the wedding ceremony began, the invited guests enjoyed Chinese finger food snacks. At each table, in addition to the snacks, the bride and groom had placed baijiu for guests to drink during wedding banquet.

At an auspicious time (吉时), chosen by the bride and groom, the wedding officiant announced the start of the wedding ceremony. Then, the bride and groom were invited to the podium. There, they exchanged rings, and made tea for their parents. Although any kind of tea can be made in this part of the ceremony, its making signifies the couple's parental appreciation (Zhu et al., 2013). As the parents drink the tea, they convey their

⁹ Han Chinese are the main ethnic group in China, accounting for 92% of the country's population. 18% of the planet's population are Han Chinese (Minahan, 2014).

best wishes to the couple. Finally, the bride and groom make a toast using baijiu. Their toast is called a 'cross-cupped alcohol toast' (交杯酒). Usually, the couple do not speak in making their toast, rather their toast signifies their becoming husband and wife. In this toast, the bride and groom face each other and hold glasses, and through interlinked arms drink from their partner's glass. However, this toast holds differences. With large groups at large round tables it is inconvenient to clink glasses together in recognition of their toast. Consequently, we lightly touch the table with the bottom of our glass instead of clinking our glasses together. This unique way of signifying a toast is not only seen at weddings, but also at large banquets. Touching the table with the bottom of the glass is common when it is difficult to clink glasses together because of the distance between people. After the guests have made their toasts, a highly respected elder of status witnesses (证婚人) their wedding declaration. Their wedding proclamations are also uniquely Chinese, mostly consisting of a combination of poetic verses. Usually, the verses include best wishes for the wedding day, and for the couple's life together.

The end of the wedding ceremony marks the beginning of the wedding banquet. The banquet begins with food being served to guests seated at each round table. While the guests are enjoying their food, the bride and groom bring baijiu and glasses to each table for a toast. During the toast, they thank the guests for attending their wedding, and wish their guests enjoyment of the banquet and wedding. In reciprocation, the guests congratulate the couple on their wedding. In that way, a wedding is both a ceremony and a reason for family and friends to get together. At the same time, it is an opportunity to meet new friends. At my roommate's wedding, there were 16 round tables in total, with about seven people at each table. The guests at the wedding were all family members and friends of the bride and groom. The guests were placed by the bride and groom and, basically, friends who knew each other were sitting at the same round table. As maid of honour, I sat with the bride's parents and siblings. For me, the wedding was the first time I met the bride's siblings. Although it was the first time we met, we enjoyed the same table of food at the wedding banquet and gradually became familiar with each other and became friends through several toasts of baijiu. I raised my glass to them to wish their sister's marriage success, and to introduce myself. They would introduce themselves to me and we would then clink our glasses and drink baijiu. Each time we toasted we discussed more topics and after a few toasts we got to know each other much better. Obviously, baijiu's high alcohol content lubricated conversation! Later, I sat at another round table with the bride's friends. Although we were all close friends during our college

days, we all went to different countries after graduating from college. We hadn't seen each other for about two years and the wedding brought us together again. At the wedding banquet, we sat at different round tables, but I took my glass full of baijiu and went to their seats to toast them. As we toasted, we talked about our lives and reminisced about our past shared experiences at university. Although we hadn't seen each other for a long time, the baijiu toast brought us closer together again. At the wedding, I was able to witness my roommate's happiness and convey my best wishes to the bride and groom, while at the same time making new friends and catching up with 'old' friends that I had not seen in a long time. Finally, at the wedding's end, everyone had a final glass of baijiu. However, the wedding only concludes after the bride and groom have toasted everyone at each table.

Baijiu and Toasting Rituals at Farewells

Wang Wei, a poet of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), wrote, "Please drink a toast one more time, for there would be no friend after you go westward through the Yang Guan" (S. Chen, 2005, p. 61) (劝君更尽一杯酒, 西出阳关无故人). That quote metaphorically reflected my own association of farewells, baijiu, and toasting. When I lived in China, farewell parties were not common. For me, celebrating a farewell only became commonplace after I moved to Aotearoa New Zealand. Then, on periodic trips home for holidays, my family and friends would prepare a farewell party for me. Then, my dad would select a single bottle of baijiu for my farewell. At my farewell, toasting with alcoholic beverages occurred within our final meal. As the guest of honour at the farewell, I did not toast anyone else. Instead, everyone toasted me with the baijiu my father had selected. Their toasts included their wishes for me for hard work, a good life, and safe travels. I acknowledged their good wishes by taking a sip from my glass at each toast. In this way, as in Confucianism, I actively responded to the toast by sipping baijiu. Sipping displayed my respect and gratitude. For my younger cousins, toasting was made with non-alcoholic beverages. Nonetheless, and although baijiu was not used, the same blessings were expressed and shared.

After each person had made their one-on-one toast to me, we continued to enjoy our food and lively conversation. When everyone felt full of food, my parents would ask me if I had eaten and drunk enough. When I answered yes, a plate of dumplings was served. When it arrived, everyone helped me to eat the dumplings. The ritual of eating and sharing the dumplings, on an already full stomach, is an important ritual for many Chinese people

celebrating a farewell. In my family tradition, travel is deemed safe after the traveler has eaten and drunk well. As Chinese folklore has it, eating and drinking well before my departure were actions designed to ease any future homesickness I might experience. After consuming the dumplings, the farewell party ended.

Contrasting my family farewells were the farewells arranged by my friends in China. My friends' events were much more casual than my organised family events. As we are adults, these farewell parties were held in a bar. In that way, my farewell party was more like a 'regular' celebration. At the bar we only ordered one glass of baijiu each. After my friends had toasted me with baijiu, we ordered our other favorite types of alcohol. Although it was a farewell party, we seldom mentioned parting. Rather we emphasised the prospect of our next reunion. Consequently, it was hard to feel the sadness of parting, because despite that parting, our next reunion was emphasised. The farewell party that my friends held for me was in some ways like the one my family provided, but there were differences. My family's farewell party was attended by my elders. They focused on the process, including the one-on-one toasts that each guest offered to me. Those toasts expressed their positive wishes for me. After eating, my parents would ask if I had eaten enough. That question is an important one because it requires a clear response. A clear answer signifies good luck. In those ways, my family farewell was more formal and traditional than that of my friends.

I enjoyed my friends' farewell parties more than the one my family provided. My enjoyment reflected the fact that my family farewell was dominated by my elders whereas my friends' farewell only had people of my own age. The comparative informality of my friends' farewell event made me feel more comfortable.

Figure 11: My Farewell Party with Friends



Source: Author (2023).

Baijiu Toasting Rituals and COVID-19

In my life, baijiu toasts have always occurred when people gathered socially. However, COVID-19 has impacted baijiu toasting. As a regional epidemic,¹⁰ then global pandemic,¹¹ COVID-19 changed the ways in which humans interact (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). For me, and many others, COVID-19 impacted our lifestyles and social interactions in negative ways. When the epidemic began, I was in China enjoying my vacation. While news about COVID-19 cases appeared in various media, at first, I did not take them seriously. None of the cases were in my city, Shijiazhuang. However, within a week COVID-19 had reached Shijiazhuang. Now, my family, my friends and I became fearful. The COVID-19 virus was spreading fast. The lack of knowledge about it made us feel worried and scared. My parents and I isolated at home. Each day we learned daily from the news that the number of positive cases in our neighbourhood was rapidly increasing. We stayed in isolation for a month. At that time, we felt helpless and anxious. The emergence of COVID-19 coincided with the Chinese New Year. Social distancing required us to wear masks and prohibited the gathering of large groups of people. That impacted our interactions over New Year. As a result, family parties, weddings and other gatherings were cancelled or changed in order to meet the requirements for reduced numbers of people attending any gathering. Our Chinese New Year banquet, usually held at my grandparents' house, was cancelled. Although I was disappointed, my uncle initiated a video conference on his cell phone inviting all family members to attend on the day of our usual family banquet. There, we shared the food we had prepared, and engaged in conversation, toasting in the usual way, albeit mediated by my uncle's phone. Sadly, because of COVID-19 restrictions, some family members were unable to purchase baijiu for the celebration. And while the shortage of baijiu made me and my family feel lost, that provoked my realisation that baijiu and its toasting had become taken-for-granted aspect of my life. Nonetheless, I felt my family's love and care at this special time of year, even though it was not the same as face-to-face meetings, interactions and fun. Before COVID-19, we usually toasted with baijiu face to face, clinking our glasses together. In large gatherings, where it is not convenient to clink glasses because of the large table, as in a wedding toast, we clink the bottom of the glass against the table instead. That was also true for family banquets held via video conferencing, where we also loudly

¹⁰ An epidemic is a disease that affects a large number of people within a community, population or region (Rice, 2018).

¹¹ A pandemic is an epidemic that spreads to multiple countries or continents (Ministry of Health, 2022).

touched our glasses against the table at our toast. Although COVID-19 created distance between us, oxymoronically, our baijiu toasting gave us feelings of warmth within our isolation.

During COVID-19, weddings were defined as mass gatherings. Consequently, they were highly regulated events. My cousin’s wedding was held during the COVID-19 pandemic. In planning the wedding, my cousin was told that the number of people attending the wedding could not exceed 20 guests. Reflecting that restriction, 17 guests were invited. My cousin’s wedding, despite its small size, still followed the usual protocols. However, the bride and groom did not go to each round table with glasses of baijiu for toasting. Rather, after the wedding, they sent the baijiu originally provided to the guests by courier to those who could not attend the wedding. The bride and groom attached a photograph of themselves holding glasses of baijiu, posing in a toasting gesture to their guests. I was pleasantly surprised by such a creative way to share a baijiu toast and how that created a bond with people who were unable to attend the wedding. Although COVID-19’s social distancing prevented the baijiu toast from being performed in the traditional way, its adaptation made us feel the bride and groom’s sincerity. Consequently, while limited in scope, the continuation of baijiu consumption and toasting rituals continued throughout COVID-19, albeit in adaptive and innovative ways.

Rounding Out My Autoethnographic Narratives

Concluding my autoethnographic narratives chapter, Table 4 summarises the narratives’ key themes. Consequently, it is within the combination of Table 2 (refer Chapter 3) and Table 4 that my discussion and conclusion chapter is grounded.

Table 4: Important Autoethnographic Themes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The experience of living in two countries made me realise that baijiu and its toasting rituals promoted my sense of nostalgia and considerations of identity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My contemporary ways of being and becoming reflect my early childhood experiences and interactions within my family.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baijiu is often associated with life’s rituals, which for me included traditional Chinese festivals, farewell parties, and weddings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baijiu and its toasting rituals are gender based, reflecting a bias toward being male.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rituals of toasting and consuming baijiu promote interactive relationships. For me, those interactions include conveying people’s feelings and blessings, and expressing their wishes.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baijiu and its toasting rituals are socio-temporally located and dynamic. Exemplifying that, baijiu toasts have had different manifestations and social significance at different times in Chinese history; Additionally, Chinese literati and Confucianism have had different influences on the toasting of baijiu at different times.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baijiu and its toasting provide ways in which Chinese people express their emotions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baijiu and its toasting promote interaction. That interaction reinforces Chinese ways of being and becoming. In that way, baijiu metaphorically represents a commonality within the diversity inherent in Chinese culture.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For me, baijiu and its toasting rituals are an actant aide-mémoire. Consuming and even thinking about baijiu and its rituals assuage feelings of homesickness, instilling happy memories.

Chapter 6. Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter presents my dissertation's discussion and conclusion. Within this chapter, I explore how my research 'worked' inasmuch as I reflect upon the effectiveness of my ontology and epistemology, my considerations of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social construction of reality thesis, and the impact of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) on my research. These considerations are important because they not only inform my dissertation, but in doing so represent part of my autoethnographic narratives, as I reflect upon their research effectiveness. Additionally, in this chapter, I consider the effectiveness of my methodology and method and in doing so add notions of rigour and validity to my research. Naturally, this chapter also discusses my autoethnographic narratives in a process whereby I discuss existing literature (refer Chapter 3) while considering my autoethnographic narratives. That process not only reflects the premise of an autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), but within that process I also identify my contribution to research.

Rounding out this chapter, I directly respond to my research questions, note my research limitations, and propose domains for future research. Concluding this chapter, I present a short reflective overview of the research dissertation journey.

Reflecting Upon Ontology and Epistemology

Remembering that ontology concerns what exists in the world and how we acquire knowledge within our interpretation of reality (Antwi & Hamza, 2015), while epistemology defines the ways in which a person understands their world (Levers, 2013), considering ontology and epistemology has caused me to stop and think. Until this research, and the write-up of my dissertation, ontology and epistemology were not part of my vernacular vocabulary. In fact, until I began my research dissertation, I rarely thought about reality or knowledge, their acquisition or philosophical underpinning. Somehow, I had taken these domains for granted. However, completing an autoethnographic account of baijiu and its toasting rituals has changed that perception. As a student, researcher, and author, I simultaneously became close to my narrative, yet I experienced distance from it. How else could I have evaluated my own narratives or considered their wider Chinese socio-cultural implications? Because of that duality, I came to understand and appreciate how ontology and epistemology work within my

everyday life. That ‘working’ is evidenced in my dissertation and in my own personal growth.

Additionally, I wondered which comes first, ontology or epistemology? However, I think that question needs my ongoing consideration. Nonetheless, given the constructionist nature of my work (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and my emphasis on symbolic interaction (Mead, 1934), considerations of reality are made real through their multiplicities: mine is but one baijiu toasting narrative. Similarly, constructs of knowledge were reinforced through knowledge’s embodiment and its verbal and symbolic repetitions within my interactions. Those occurrences, for me, simultaneously reinforced notions of knowledge and reality. Those themes were evidenced within my autoethnographic narratives that included baijiu toasting at family banquets, weddings, and farewell parties, and the dynamic nature of baijiu toasting consequent to COVID-19.

Compounding those considerations has been my “dual realm of existence” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 150). Living in China and Aotearoa New Zealand has created multiplicities of knowledge and reality. In those ways, completing this dissertation has not only increased my knowledge and sense of reality, but also provided me the space to think about my topic and the wider world in deeper philosophical ways.

Discussing Symbolic Interactionism and the Social Construction of Reality Thesis

My considerations of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) and the social construction of reality thesis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) have served my research in deep and meaningful ways. Both theories provided me with an opportunity to understand, conceptualise, and reconceptualise baijiu and its toasting rituals as simultaneously interactive and as social constructions that help people make sense of their world. In those ways, for me, symbolic interactionism and the social construction of reality thesis build upon in my considerations of ontology and epistemology in pragmatic ways. Over time, as I have come to understand it, our interactions become almost automatic reactions that we engage in with others who share the same interactional meanings and symbols. In those ways, and within my knowledge of baijiu and its toasting, baijiu and its rituals almost become taken-for-granted realities and knowledge. Reflecting that has been my own observation that men are expected to drink more baijiu than others, that a bride and groom automatically make their toast through interlinked arms, one drinking from the

others glass. As I have come to realise, those actions reflect the taken-for-granted nature of baijiu consumption and its rituals in contemporary settings.

Discussing Methodology and Method

While symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) and the social construction of reality thesis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) built upon my considerations of knowledge and reality, key to my methodological considerations has been my choice of autoethnography (Ellis, 2009). While autoethnography is individualised, as it is derived from personal experience (McIlveen, 2008), its research potency lies within its shared understanding of individual knowledge and reality. Sharing knowledge and reality allows us to understand the behaviour of others and, in doing so, reinforce our own behaviours, knowledge, and understandings. In this way, the value of autoethnography reflects how personal experiences are considered within their wider cultural sphere (Searle, 1995). Consequently, my conceptual and theoretical frameworks directly linked to my methodology and method. The tenets of symbolic interactionism provided theoretical support for my personal narratives. Similarly, symbolic interactionism also facilitated the wider understanding of my autoethnographic narratives as elaborated upon in later in this discussion chapter. Additionally, the four tenets of symbolic interactionism, within their repetition, within my narratives and within wider Chinese socio-culture revealed how I and other Chinese people come to ‘see’ and make sense of our world.

Evidencing that were my autoethnographic narratives. Symbolic interactionism’s tenet one states that “individuals act based on the meanings objects have for them” (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932). Demonstrating that tenet was my recognition that baijiu was an item of nostalgia for my hometown, my grandfather’s love of baijiu, and his connection of that love to the Chinese literati.

Tenet two proposes that “interaction occurs within a particular social and cultural context in which physical and social objects (persons), as well as situation, must be defined or categorized based on individual meanings” (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932). For me, that reflected the idea that baijiu and toasting hold default meanings for our family guided by the different cultural festivals we enjoy (New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival, and family reunions). Considering those events, it is in the repetition of toasting that we come to enhance our understanding of the world and our relationships to each other and wider Chinese socio-culture. Symbolic interactionism tenet three states that “meanings emerge

from interactions with other individuals and with society” (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932). That tenet was best reflected in our baijiu toasting rituals, New Year toasting, family banquets and the ‘cross-cupped wedding toast.’ Symbolic interactionism’s tenet four proposes that “meanings are continuously created and recreated through interpreting processes during interaction with others” (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 170). That tenet was best exemplified within our interactions and the changing dynamics within my comparison of my family farewells, and my friends’ farewells. Additionally, the necessities of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the revision of our toasting rituals and subsequent interactions. Consequently, meaning, action and interaction within baijiu and its toasting rituals are dynamic.

My “dual realm of existence” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 150) also impacted my methodology and method. Living in Aotearoa New Zealand prompted my research and provided me with literal and figurative distance from my topic and homeland. Consequently, that distance allowed me the academic space to review my own narratives as well as come to understand and appreciate many aspects of my own Chinese culture and identity.

Discussing My Research Autoethnographic Narratives

Here, I explore my autoethnographic narratives, and their fit with existing knowledge gleaned from my literature review (refer Chapter 3). To promote that nexus, I synthesise Table 2 and Table 4. That synthesis provides the base for my discussion and, within that, the identification of my contribution to research. However, before presenting that synthesis, I remind readers of my research questions.

My primary research question asked:

- **What have the symbolic meanings of baijiu toasting been over time in China?**

Underpinning that enquiry, my secondary research questions asked:

- **In what ways has traditional Chinese Baijiu toasting culture changed over time?**
- **How are considerations of Chinese Baijiu toasting culture applicable to my own journey?**

In order to answer my research questions, I compiled Tables 2 and 4. Table 2 presents the important themes from my literature review (refer Chapter 3). Table 4 presents important

themes from my autoethnographic narratives. Creating these tables facilitated my refinement of my autoethnographic narratives through theme distillation. Table 5, below, presents that distillation. It informs my subsequent writing. That process came as an unexpected point of consideration. As I explored my own narratives, I came to realise that, despite their topics, underpinning themes began to emerge transcending my initial thoughts and themes. The more I considered those emergent themes, the more I realised that they were woven throughout my separately presented themes and headings of my findings. Consequently, I considered it wise to present my discussion cognisant of those woven yet separately located themes.

Table 2: Important Themes from my Literature Review (refer Chapter 3)

Baijiu and the Literati
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baijiu influenced and promoted by China's literati (Jiang & Liu, 2010). For the literati, baijiu provided artistic escape. It was a prop/muse of expression (Zheng, 2005). China's literati were arbiters of taste, influencing perceptions of taste and behaviour (Zheng, 2005).
Baijiu and Gender
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baijiu and toasting are associated with masculinity in China (Jayne et al., 2022). The relationship between baijiu and gender defines traditional social and cultural norms and practices (Hong & Jue, 2006). Baijiu's gender bias is still evident in contemporary China (Zuo et al., 2021).
Baijiu Toasting and the Socio-politics of Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baijiu is used in business to build relationships and trust. That association is also realised within families and communities (Sandhaus, 2019). The ritualised act of toasting with baijiu reflects feelings of empathy, respect, self-regulation by providing material and spiritual comfort (Meng, 1994). Baijiu toasting reflects social order and connections to Confucianism. Baijiu toasting also denotes an individual's social and cultural capital (Sandhaus, 2019). Baijiu toasting rituals promotes interaction. In that way people come to understand their world, and promote reinforce existing and new social hierarchies. In turn, those domains support social order (Zhai, 2020).

Table 4: Important Autoethnographic Themes (refer Chapter 5)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The experience of living in two countries made me realise that baijiu and its toasting rituals promoted my sense of nostalgia and considerations of identity. My contemporary ways of being and becoming reflect my early childhood experiences and interactions within my family. Baijiu is often associated with life's rituals, which for me included traditional Chinese festivals, farewell parties, and weddings. Baijiu and its toasting rituals are gender based, reflecting a bias toward being male. The rituals of toasting and consuming baijiu promote interactive relationships. For me, those interactions include conveying people's feelings and blessings, and expressing their wishes. Baijiu and its toasting rituals are socio-temporally located and dynamic. Exemplifying that, baijiu toasts have had different manifestations and social significance at different times in Chinese history. Additionally, China's literati and Confucianism have influenced baijiu and its toasting rituals over time. Baijiu and its toasting provide ways in which Chinese people express their emotions. Baijiu and toasting promote interaction. That interaction reinforces Chinese ways of being and becoming. In that way, baijiu metaphorically represents a commonality within the diversity inherent in Chinese culture. For me, baijiu and its toasting rituals are an actant aide-mémoire. Consuming and even thinking about baijiu and its rituals assuage feelings of homesickness, instilling happy memories.
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Table 5: Refining My Autoethnographic Themes

Narrative Autoethnographic	Revised Themes Presented in Discussion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rituals of toasting and consuming baijiu promote interactive relationships. For me, those interactions include conveying people's feelings, blessings, and wishes. 	<p>Baijiu toasting rituals: Interaction and the socio-politics of engagement.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baijiu and toasting promote interaction. That interaction reinforces Chinese ways of being and becoming. In that way, baijiu metaphorically represents a commonality within the diversity inherent in Chinese culture. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baijiu is associated with life's rituals, which for me include traditional Chinese festivals, farewell parties, and weddings. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baijiu and its toasting provide ways in which Chinese people express their emotions. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The experience of living in two countries made me realise that baijiu and its toasting rituals promoted my sense of nostalgia and considerations of identity. 	<p>Baijiu toasting rituals: Present self-identity and comfort.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My contemporary ways of being and becoming reflect my early childhood experiences and family interactions. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For me, baijiu and its toasting rituals are an actant aide-mémoire. Consuming and even thinking about baijiu and its rituals assuage feelings of homesickness, instilling happy memories. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baijiu and its toasting rituals are gender based, reflecting a bias toward being male. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baijiu and its toasting rituals are socio-temporally located and dynamic. Exemplifying that, baijiu toasts have had different manifestations and social significance at different times in Chinese history. Additionally, China's literati and Confucianism have influenced baijiu and its toasting rituals over time. 	<p>Baijiu toasting rituals: Adaptation to the times.</p>

Despite its apparent simplicity, completing Table 5 was a time-consuming process. As I thought about the themes within my narratives, I realised that some of them had elements in common. To streamline my discussion, a synthesis of themes became necessary. Revision created three revised themes. Theme one, 'Interaction and the socio-politics of Engagement', refined the first four points in Table 5. Similarly points 5 to 8 in Table 5

distil themes of identity. Consequently, my second refined heading theme is ‘Present self-identity and comfort’. Finally, baijiu and its toasting rituals are dynamically socio-temporally located. Indicating that is point 9 in Table 5. Consequently, my final refined heading is ‘Adaptation to the times’.

Baijiu Toasting Rituals: Interaction and the Socio-politics of Engagement

In Refining My Autoethnographic Themes (Table 5), I came to understand that baijiu is a symbolic form of interactive communication. This communication facilitates a cognitive process of socio-political engagement often symbolised within a Chinese baijiu toast. Whether it was at my family banquets, a Chinese wedding, a farewell party, or the dynamic changes COVID-19 brought to toasting, baijiu toasting has always been about interaction. As Sandhaus (2019) mentioned, baijiu was a way in which relationships were founded and built upon in Chinese socio-culture. My narratives reflected that, and in doing so illuminated the tenets of symbolic interactionism. Specifically, tenet two proffered the idea that “interaction occurs within a particular social and cultural context in which physical and social objects (persons), as well as situation, must be defined or categorized based on individual meanings” (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932). My interactions with my friends and my family simultaneously reflected situation and context. Evidencing that was our celebration of the Mid-Autumn Festival and its connotations of joyful reunion, the Chinese New Year and its inherent wish for prosperity, and, at my farewell parties, the wish for my safety. Then, baijiu holds, like food, symbolic meanings that are conveyed and expressed in specific socio-cultural contexts (Stajcic, 2013). Consequently, those occasions also reflected tenet three as “meanings emerge from interactions with other individuals and with society” (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932). Supporting that, the rituals of baijiu toasting conveyed symbolic expressions of emotion, desire, identity and spirituality, manifest through toasting interactions. In that way, those occasions and interactions shaped, reinforced and helped me and other Chinese people to make sense of our world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

My connection with baijiu toasting began when I was a child. Then, I imitated the adults in my family with verbal toasts, gestures, and empathetic demeanor. Those occasions reflected my subtle acculturation within my family and wider Chinese socio-culture. I was not alone in that activity. My grandfather’s emulation of the Chinese literati evoked his cultural embrace. In those ways, my grandfather and I embodied symbolic interactionism tenets one and two. Those tenets stated that an “individuals act based on

the meanings objects have for them” and that “interaction occurs within a particular social and cultural context in which physical and social objects (persons), as well as situation, must be defined or categorized based on individual meanings” (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932). In those ways, my grandfather and I shared, in different ways, a wider understanding and appreciation of our worlds. Those understandings also reflected a whakapapa of knowledge and ritual. Consequently, baijiu and toasting have influenced my behaviours and view of the world.

Additionally, baijiu and toasting encourage the socio-politics of engagement. Baijiu and its toasting create interactions and rituals for people that reinforce social order as a cognitive process. The ritualised act of toasting was mentioned earlier as a ritual blessing (Beamer, 1993), and people used toasting to communicate and interact with spirits and their ancestors (Meng, 1994; Descola, 2013). In a similar vein, in my experience, my family and friends made a toast with baijiu at my farewell party. Doing that, we believed, conferred safety for my journey. Because we all shared that belief, our baijiu toasts symbolically conveyed our emotions and desires. Our conveying of emotions reflected symbolic interactionism’s tenet three inasmuch as “meanings emerge from interactions with other individuals and with society” (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932). Those considerations were based on our common perceptions and the meanings that people with similar cultural backgrounds have an almost unspoken understanding of. That understanding, reality, and knowledge reflects the maintenance of social order within vernacular action and interaction. In that way, baijiu reflects Del Casino and Thien’s (2009) observations that social order and values are repeatedly created and reinforced by people through consistent and dynamic behaviours and interactions. That, over time, leads people to co-construct their reality. Consequently, the socio-politics of engagement, as action and cognitive process, are part of each and every baijiu toasting occasion, within an overlay of emotion and spirituality.

Baijiu Toasting Rituals: Self-identity and Comfort

Baijiu toasting impacts individuals and groups that share baijiu’s symbolic meanings. As an individual, my identity is not only reflected in the view of others but also in notions of myself, my self-esteem and my interactions. Completing my dissertation has required that I engage in an examination of ‘self.’

Baijiu toasting reflects my identity. In my narratives, that has been reflected in multiple ways, including at my family banquets, farewell parties and within my account of other experiences. While I consider that my experiences of baijiu toasting are unique, essentially, and as I have learned, they are not. Many of my family's and my friends' baijiu rituals have been passed down through many generations of Chinese people. However, more than action has been passed down. Meaning and symbolism underpin many baijiu actions, and consequently they too have been passed down through many generations. Exemplifying that, at my family's banquets, we always enjoyed my grandmother's food alongside our baijiu toasting where, as in wider Chinese socio-culture, the men were always expected to drink more baijiu than the women. Stemming from our interactions, those considerations align with symbolic interactionism's tenet three. Tenet three states that "meanings emerge from interactions with other individuals and with society" (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932). Considering tenet three, I see that sharing baijiu toasting rituals helps people to understand their world, and within that understanding it promotes feelings of belonging that, in turn, reinforce shared ritualised activities. Considering that helped my realisations of "who I am." That dynamically reinforced my ways of being and becoming. However, my reflections on 'self' did not stop there.

I extended my reflections to my life in Aotearoa New Zealand. My life in New Zealand embodies Bakhtin's (1981) "dual realm of existence" (p. 150). Baijiu toasting is part of that realm and my bifurcated identity. As my autoethnographic narratives noted, I always return to China for my annual Christmas vacation. While I am there I meet with family and friends. Baijiu and toasting are always part of these gatherings. Without the disorder or the grotesque, those toasts are my equivalent of a 'carnival' reinforcing my dual realm of existence. In that way, baijiu toasting reveals my dynamic identity.

While reflecting my dynamic identity, baijiu works for me in much the same ways as comfort foods might. Baijiu, in Aotearoa New Zealand, is my emotional comfort food. My life in New Zealand made me realise how much baijiu toasting meant to me. When I lived in China, baijiu toasts were something that was simply so normal, that it was part of my taken-for-granted lived experience. In Aotearoa New Zealand, baijiu connected me to my home country, easing my feelings of loneliness. For me, that situation realised tenet one, inasmuch as "individuals act based on the meanings objects have for them" (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932). Baijiu assuaged my homesickness by serving as my comfort 'food.' In that way, baijiu provided me with emotional support which, at that time, was much needed.

Baijiu Toasting Rituals: An Adaptive Interactive Practice

Juxtaposed with baijiu's significant history is my own short life experience of baijiu and its toasting rituals. For example, during the Zhou Dynasty (1046BC–771BC), baijiu's antecedents were widely used in rituals but rarely consumed by commoners (Lisi, 2020). During the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911), liquor became proletarian (Lisi, 2020). In modern China, after the reforms and opening up (1978), liquor like baijiu became popular at business banquets where it served to gain the trust of other guests (Sandhaus, 2019). Within those differences, baijiu reflects the Confucian notion of extending one's arms towards the other (Confucius, 2006). Similarly, Chinese baijiu toasting has been impacted by Western etiquette. The clinking together of glasses is now common in China. These considerations of change are consistent with the dynamic process of change proposed by symbolic interactionism's tenet four. Tenet four states that "meanings are continuously created and recreated through interpreting processes during interaction with others" (Fuller & Carter, 2016, p. 932). Consequently, the process of interaction, and attribution of meaning, are metaphorical cycles of creative change. Such a process of change is evidenced in baijiu's history and my own experience. That observation supports the notion that an autoethnography should reflect the wider socio-culture within which it occurs (Butz & Besio, 2009; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

In my narrative, I mentioned that I lived in China for two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing created opportunities for people to innovate their toasting behaviours. For example, my family used the Internet and electronic devices to make online baijiu toasts, as well as video toasts at weddings. Technology filled the gap our family experienced because of COVID-19. This was also reflected in the different ways in which I interacted with my friends and family at my farewell parties. My family chose to make toasts in the style of the ancient Chinese literati. Our four-word toasts created a subtle link to history and art. Contrasting that, my younger friends began by drinking baijiu then moved onto other alcoholic beverages. In those ways my dissertation reveals the dynamic nature of baijiu and its toasting rituals.

Responding to my Research Questions

In this section I answer my research questions. My answers are based upon my autoethnographic narratives (refer Chapter 5) and my discussions in this present chapter. They are presented in Table 6, below.

Table 6: Research Question and Answers

Research Question	What have the symbolic meanings of baijiu toasting been over time in China?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Baijiu and toasting reflect constructs of ‘face’ for many Chinese people, particularly emphasising social and familial hierarchies, now and over time. ◆ Baijiu and toasting provide a contemporary and historical symbolic metaphor creating interaction between Chinese people and their ancestral spirits. ◆ Baijiu and toasting confer both blessing and expectation, symbolising the emotions and desires of many Chinese people. ◆ Baijiu and toasting signify a Chinese spiritual trust. That trust is embodied in the communicative interaction between people and their divine ancestors. ◆ Baijiu and toasting denote an individual’s social and cultural capital. Those capitals strengthen interpersonal relationships between family members and others. ◆ Baijiu toasts have symbolic meaning for individuals and for Chinese society and culture. ◆ Baijiu and its toasting reinforce Chinese identity and signify important occasions and festivals. Within that, people create and reinforce their identity through engagement and baijiu and its toasting.
Research Question	In what ways has traditional Chinese Baijiu toasting culture changed over time?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ According to my research, the connotations of the baijiu toast have changed. For example, while the baijiu toast was initially applied only in communication with ancestors, the contemporary toast can be used as a medium for people to maintain interpersonal relationships. ◆ The expressions of baijiu toasting have changed over time. Compounding my note above have been the toasting changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. ◆ The expression of baijiu toasting has also evolved from the traditional kneeling toast to the contemporary clinking of glasses toast, albeit that many of the toast wishes have remained the same. ◆ The application of baijiu toasts has changed from being restricted to traditional noble rituals to contemporary applications for family banquets, state banquets, traditional festivals, and special occasions.
Research Question	How are considerations of Chinese Baijiu toasting culture applicable to my own journey?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Baijiu and toasting signify my considerations of family parties, COVID-19, my spiritual comfort and my feelings of belonging and reunion with my family, friends, and homeland.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Baijiu and toasting generate points of nostalgia assuaged by my baijiu consumption and the memories that it evokes for me. Baijiu is my aide-mémoire. ◆ Baijiu and toasting reflect my identity, my coming of age, and my recognition within my family and peer groups. Baijiu lubricates my sense of belonging, self and growth. ◆ Baijiu and toasting signify my “dual realm of existence” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 150) and how within that realm I am metaphorically in two places at once: Aotearoa New Zealand and my home in China. ◆ Baijiu and toasting convey my family’s love and best wishes for me. ◆ Baijiu and toasting are points of nostalgia for me.
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My Contribution to Research

My autoethnographic research combined academic literature with my own narratives. While reflecting the premise that autoethnography should consider my own experiences within wider socio-culture, my dissertation also makes a significant contribution to the academic gastronomic canon (refer also to the “Recommendations for Further Research,” below). My dissertation contributes knowledge on:

- How traditional baijiu toasting is expressed in contemporary ways.
- How traditional and contemporary baijiu toasting and consumption are linked to gender.
- The essence of autoethnography within the relationship between personal narratives and wider social practices.
- How baijiu is a vector of emotion, nostalgia, and spirituality.
- How a “dual realm of existence” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 150) contributes to research depth.
- How Western constructs of toasting have impacted baijiu toasting rituals.

Research Limitations

As I consider my research dissertation, I have become mindful of its limitations. I present those limitations and their solutions in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Research Limitations

Limitation	Solution
<p>Time and Word Count: My dissertation requires that I complete it within six months and that my work not exceed 30,000 words.</p>	<p>With more time and a larger word count more depth and topic range of topic could be included in my dissertation (refer “Recommendations for Future Research”, below).</p>
<p>Using Chinese Literary Sources: While much Chinese literature on my topic exists, my use of it was limited by time constraints required to interpret, synthesise and consider those works.</p>	<p>More time would allow me to actively search out, translate and integrate Chinese literary sources.</p>
<p>Memory Reliability: Considerations of the past are often biased. Like most people I tend to recall a ‘rose tinted’ version of reality. Additionally, memory and recall can be highly subjective.</p>	<p>The validity of my research is reflected within considerations that an auto-ethnographic approach incorporates the wider socio-cultural milieu within which it occurs. Additionally, my narrative’s resonance with readers may also reinforce its reliability, despite my choice of narrative arguably being simultaneously both unreliable and biased (refer “Research Bias,” below).</p>
<p>Personal narratives may lack generalisability for wider understanding, reflection, and scrutiny.</p>	<p>While I chose autoethnography, other methodologies, including primary research options, might well open up this topic’s depth.</p>

Research Bias

Although I have tried to avoid my own bias in my research, I have not been able to eliminate it from this study. My bias as researcher is reflected in my choice of subject matter, my narrative style, and my methodology. Additionally, I most likely selected my favourite aspects of my topic first! The methodology for my dissertation, autoethnography, is not immune to the bias of personal preference. Nonetheless, my research bias is limited because autoethnography emphasises the way that personal narrative ‘sits’ alongside wider socio-cultural exploration. Finally, bias and reliability are essentialised by the views of my readers. The resonance of my dissertation with my readers reflects that position.

Recommendations for Further Research

In the context of my research dissertation and its limitations (refer Table 7, above), these bullet points list my recommendations for future domains of research related to my topic.

- The cultural and symbolic significance of toasting cultures in other settings, both within and outside of China.
- Research exploring the globalisation of Chinese alcoholic beverages that asks, why are Chinese beverages not as popular as those from France or Aotearoa New Zealand?
- Research exploring other Chinese beverages and their socio-cultural meanings.
- Contemporary exploration researching the impact of baijiu and toasting culture in maintaining social status.
- In what ways does baijiu help Chinese migrants cope in other countries?
- In what ways has toasting and baijiu consumption changed within the commercialisation of traditional Chinese festivals and events?
- An intensive study on the ways in which COVID-19 has impacted baijiu and toasting culture and rituals in China.
- What levels of knowledge and experience do New Zealanders have about Chinese drinking culture?
- The identification of nations outside of China that consume the largest quantities of baijiu and the rationales for that consumption.
- The impacts of commoditisation and globalisation on traditional baijiu drinking and toasting culture.
- In what ways do Chinese bar staff integrate Chinese alcoholic beverages and products into Western bar culture?

Concluding Considerations and Thoughts

Regrettably, this is my last entry in my dissertation before it goes to examination. My use of 'regrettably' is purposeful. I have enjoyed completing this work, its research and writing. My passion for my topic has seen me complete it in good time. When I began my research, I believed that I knew quite a lot about myself and my culture, including baijiu and its toasting culture. As I retrospectively reconsider that, I need to admit I was wrong! In the course of my research, I have explored literature, reflected upon and

evaluated my own lived experiences and in doing so challenged myself in meaningful ways. Those ways have led to my positive personal growth and a rapid increase in my knowledge about my topic. I might suggest that completing my dissertation and living in Aotearoa New Zealand by myself has allowed me to think about and realise myself in important ways. Before I began this academic journey, I was unfamiliar with the “dual realm of existence” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 150). Now, knowing of it, I embrace it as my strength. It is something that makes me, me – someone different to yet the same as many other Chinese people living in Aotearoa New Zealand. In that way, I need to acknowledge that my topic choice has renewed my sense of self in very positive and joyful ways. As this academic journey ends, I am not exhausted, but energised. I hope you have enjoyed reading my work as much as I did in completing it. Thank you.

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Appendix

Methodologies Considered and Rejected

The methodology for this dissertation is autoethnography. When I considered methodologies, there were several options for methodologies that I rejected.

Table 8: Methodologies Considered and Rejected

Methodology	Explanation	Suitability	Rationale
Case study	A case study is an in-depth study of a person, group or event to find patterns and causes of behaviour (C. Williams, 2007).	No	Due to time constraints and the limitations of the actual research group, case study is not applicable to my research.
Narrative inquiry	Narrative inquiry records the experiences of an individual or group, revealing that person's lived experience or particular point of view (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004).	No	As narrative inquiry requires a large narrative, and this study has word and time constraints, it cannot be the methodology for this topic.
Phenomenology	Phenomenology focuses on the study of the lived experience of individuals in the world (Laverty, 2003).	No	Phenomenological data collection requires more time and other resources and is not applicable to this study.
Ethnography	Ethnography immerses the author in a specific community or organisation in order to observe behaviour and interactions up close (Reeves et al., 2008).	No	As the dissertation was conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand, immersion in a local Chinese community or organisation to conduct the research was not possible.
Autoethnography	Autoethnography denotes a genre of autobiographical writing that displays multiple levels of consciousness, linking the individual to their wider culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).	Yes	Autoethnography was the most suitable methodology, as it allowed me to conduct research in a non-native area of China and also met the time and word count requirements for this dissertation.