

Hybrid identities.

The making an unmaking of Chinese-Canadian identity.



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1. Introduction

“When my parents left Indonesia, they walked away from a familiar life, but foreign to all I know” (Khu 2001: page unknown). The lead-character in this book is a child of Chinese migrant-workers’ parents who crossed the world looking for opportunity. From China to Indonesia; where they worked and lived for years, to Vancouver; where they remained and had a daughter. At home her parents spoke a mix of Javanese, Hokkien, Cantonese and a bit of Mandarin, while outside the home English became a huge influence. She recounts: *“I actually used to speak Cantonese very well, but kind of drifted to speak English because I had to at school; I didn’t want to speak Cantonese anymore because nobody spoke Cantonese (11/3/15)*. Vancouver is most definitely her home, but she has to consolidate this with the fact that her parents are from Indonesia. Or China? Far from this being inherently problematic, it makes us wonder how she identifies with Indonesia, Canada or China.

“The past is our definition. We may strive, with good reason, to escape it, or to escape what is bad in it, but we will escape it only by adding something better to it” (Berry 2005:14)

In this thesis I analyze personal life-stories of second and third generation Canadians who are (partly) of Chinese descent, to find out more about the complex dynamics of self-identification and identity politics in Vancouver, Canada. The families of my informants have come to Vancouver from mainland China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and other places. It is their self-proclaimed identification with Chinese heritage that ties them together in this research project. Most, although not all, can trace their ancestry back to a Cantonese-speaking background. The stories of these people reveal the search for a sense of belonging, rootedness, as well as the forging of new and personal identifications in contemporary Vancouver society. In my research proposal, I intended to trace identity politics and affiliations from a perceived global perspective back to local manifestations. This premise brought forth questions about the actual ways in which people grow up and live in a country their parents or grandparents did not grow up in. It is these questions that are discussed in this thesis. Notions of Chinese heritage are important in this respect. But – as we shall see – Chinese heritage entails different cultural practices and principles every time it is expressed, rendering it undefinable.

Altogether, this thesis sheds light on the practice, as well as impossibility of ethnic categorization and identity politics in multicultural Vancouver. It illuminates the personal stories of second and third generation Canadians that are (partly) of Chinese descent. I also supplement these experiences with data gathered from more recent

Chinese migrants to offer an insight into the process of migration from China to Vancouver. Lastly, I will discuss the migration of a part of my own Dutch family that migrated to Vancouver in the 1950's for comparative purposes. Any direct connections between the discussed stories are speculative, but I have found interesting commonalities that I wish to demonstrate in this way. These stories are analyzed in the perspective of contemporary anthropological theory, thereby contributing to the ethnographic knowledge that form the basis of these theories. The limitations of this study can be illustrated by referring to a discussion on anthropology's field of inquiry as well as sphere of influence. Ingold points us to the importance of evaluating anthropological knowledge in its proper context: "Any particular phenomenon on which we may choose to focus our attention enfolds within its constitution the totality of relations of which, in their unfolding, it is the momentary outcome" (Ingold 2011:239). In this thesis I provide a discussion on the many relations that might influence people's identification with their Chinese heritage. By combining multiple stories in one thesis I do not attempt to prove there is a common essence of 'Chineseness', or a unified way in which people connect to their Chinese heritage. Rather, together with the experience of my Dutch-descendant heritage family it shows some of the commonalities of migrant-experiences, but also the importance of idiosyncratic histories and trajectories. Through the combination of theoretical knowledge and empirical observations, this thesis aspires to appeal to a scientific public, as well as prove its worth for society by providing a small glimpse into the lives of the people that have so generously shared their stories with me. Before continuing, I want to offer one of these glimpses here, which, when evaluated in its proper relational context, provides us with an understanding and introduction on the topics discussed in this thesis. In this 1973 radio show (15 minutes), students discuss their experience of growing up in Canada as 'Chinese-Canadians' and their affiliation with Chinese heritage. <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/chinese-immigration-debating-identity>

1.1 Methodology

Anthropology's unethical past regarding the relationship between anthropologist and subject; representation and represented, demands a careful consideration of these dynamics in present-day studies of the anthropological other. The discipline draws its early existence from a clear distinction between 'The West' and the 'non-West other', where the latter is studied and talked for by the former. Contemporary anthropological discourse, although it has progressed immensely from its colonial past, is still susceptible to these issues. Under the guise of culture there are implications of separation that in turn invoke a sense of hierarchy. Furthermore, vast generalizations can conceal complexity, and the boundary between self and other dismisses its political nature and is

often uncritically a matter-of-course. By moving into a social situation, the outsider anthropologist is literally not outside anymore and thus of influence on its research surroundings. Thus, ethnographic representations are not only partial truths but also positioned truths. (Abu-Lughod 1991). Because of these issues, it has often been suggested that anthropology is in a state of crisis. Students of anthropology are instructed in the craft through an outline of these consecutive fissures and consequently develop a keen eye for epistemological issues. This often results in unceremonial anthropological self-criticism in their writings as anthropologists. Of course this has triggered immense epistemological progress, making anthropology what it is (or isn't) today. At the same time, this proneness to self-criticism has the tendency to render anthropology limbless by stimulating the rejection of its own concepts, the retreating back into the local and entry into the empirical; which results in the description of specific, concrete events without considering its relevance for comparison and generalization (Comaroff 2010). All these things considered, one has to find a balance when designing a research project. It is exactly this premise that has made me acutely aware of the pitfalls while doing ethnological field research. Consequently, it had a profound influence on the research design of this project, because I strived for a project that was both relevant and sensitive to local (social) conditions.

Prior to entry into the field, I had arranged for interviews with two local social advocates concerning Chinese-Canadian issues and a journalist to find out about relevant topics and possibly an organization to work together with during my research. I did not find the collaboration I was hoping for, but they did provide me with the chance to use their extensive networks to reach potential informants throughout the research project. They brought me in contact with others that might be interested in giving an interview, or let me send an email to the subscribers of their mailing list. This resulted in several new informants. After that I have steadily found new informants through this initial group and by engaging several Chinese-Canadian associations. My initial interviews helped me identify several potential topics that seemed worth pursuing. The limited timeframe for this research project led me to pursue the subject that people talked about most frequently; identity politics in Vancouver, thereby giving me the chance to find out as much possible in the available three months.

As an anthropologist it is essential to be aware of the perceptions informants (might) have of you and how this affects interaction with each other during your field research. In *Fixing and Negotiating Identities in the Field*, Shaery-Eisenlohr aptly describes that she gained much information on her principle subject; Lebanese male politico-religious and national identity, through analyzing her interactions with informants: “[my research] involved taking account of how my interlocutors’ identities,

and their perceptions of what seemed to them my identities, interacted with my own definitions and presentations of these". She gives an example: "for this Shiite friend, [...] my categorical status as Iranian and Shiite trumps all other possible images of myself, including my gender and my roots in the West" (Shaery-Eisenlohr 2009:103/112). This shows the importance of analyzing anthropologist-informant interaction as well as any historical and social factors that might be of influence on their relationship. During my research in Vancouver, I became very aware of particular identity politics that might have influenced my interaction with informants. Rather than trying to work around these influences, I have analyzed them throughout the whole research process and incorporated them in this thesis. This approach adheres to the second article in the American Anthropological Association's (AAA) ethics statement. It states: 'Be open and honest regarding your work', which calls for honesty towards research participants regarding intentions and interests that have an impact on their work (American Anthropological Association 2012). Furthermore, the ethical code states it is important to be honest and open when presenting information gathered in the field. That is why my research and experiences in Vancouver are such an integral part of this thesis. Micro politics of identification influenced my interactions with informants, which can be seen as a reflection of wider societal dynamics. I have analyzed my interviews as such, because many of the subtle influences on identity politics were best gauged through my own experience in conversation with others. Consequently, I could not differentiate between anthropological and personal considerations, or anthropological and personal data. Thus I have not made the distinction between field notes and a field diary. I use different kinds of data haphazardly throughout this thesis; empirical, anecdotal, and anthropological data are all intermixed, which should be seen as a metaphor for the thorough intertwinement of influential factors in Vancouver's identity politics.

I have recorded and transcribed most of my interviews – about twenty-five in total – for a number of reasons. It allowed me to concentrate on making connections and formulate follow-up questions during the interviews, instead of having to write all of the time. Furthermore, while transcribing the interviews I was able to pay more attention to detail and nuance, making my analysis richer than had been possible without a recording. Finally, recording and transcribing interviews gave me the opportunity to use already gathered data to cross-check, support or contradict subjects that I decided to pursue later on. All of my interviews have started with the informant's confirmation of informed consent, which included recording of the conversation, as stated in the third article of the AAA's ethic statement (American Anthropological Association 2012). Apart from conducting interviews I have regularly attended assemblies, meetings, workshops and other gatherings that were organized around the subjects I was researching. This gave me an idea of the social advocacy and activism that people felt was needed, which

in turn informed my research.

The *thesis* of this thesis has taken shape over the course of my research. I have tried to include all the relevant phenomena that presented themselves in my considerations. Ultimately, this thesis took shape through the writing and re-writing of these considerations. The *thesis* is outlined in the company of several literal quotations; excerpts from interviews that I deemed relevant in that particular context. I took great care to listen to my informants and analyze the gathered data with sensitivity towards their perspective, which is in accordance with articles one and seven of the AAA's ethical statement². I have opened up my mind and eyes to other people's perspectives and in doing so, have been able to gain understanding on the acts and reasoning of other people in a certain time and place (Ingold 2011). It is this understanding; my understanding, that I present to you in this thesis³.

This thesis starts off with the first chapter: *Introduction*, which also includes the research project's *methodology*. Then the used theories are discussed in chapter two, the *theoretical debate*, after which the local research context is outlined in the third chapter: *Context*. Chapter four, the *empirical section* of this thesis, comprises of several sub-paragraphs in which the respective subjects are discussed. This chapter contains several vignettes that are supportive and exemplary for the associated text. After the empirical section, in the fifth chapter, theory and empiricism come together in the *Conclusion*. Although reflection is an integral part of this whole thesis, in chapter six; *reflection*, I return to this subject once more to discuss some underlying personal motivations and considerations. Finally, in chapter seven; *References*, and chapter eight; *Attachments*, one can find the resources used for this project, and scientific summary, respectively.

² 1. Do no harm; 7. Maintain respectful and ethical professional relationships (American Anthropological Association).

³ By presenting my results in this thesis and storing the rest of the data from this research project, I adhere to the fifth and sixth article of the AAA's ethical statement: 5. Make your results accessible; 6. Protect and preserve your records (American Anthropological Association 2012).

2. Theoretical debate

Reading theories of globalization usually leaves me - at the best of times - mildly puzzled. There is this force in the world which expands and compresses; homogenizes and differentiates; it connects people separated by borders and emphasizes local uniqueness, while simultaneously encouraging people to become either cosmopolitans or nationalists (Eriksen 2007). Globalization is a “buzz-word” with scientific significance; it hints at the possibility of looking into the future and convinces scholars to get on the theory-train, for one would not want to ignore this important and exciting power in the world. This logic is reminiscent of post-World War II, when social scientists were seduced to get involved in international “modernization” and “development” projects in an attempt to break with colonial histories and create a new, harmonized world. As postmodernist-literature has made abundantly clear later on, the focus on modernization as a universal force for the betterment of the world would actually obscure increased inequality and uneven power-relations⁴. Nevertheless, even critics of the modernization paradigm would implicitly acknowledge the existence of modernization as a unified, world-changing process (Tsing 2000). This unintended acknowledgement is a direct consequence of the inherent ambiguity that typifies terms like “globalization” and “modernization”.

These (and other similarly used terms) can be typified as concept-metaphors. Referring to these terms merely as metaphors does not suffice, because they have no specified referent. They represent theoretical abstractions *as well as* concrete processes, experiences and connections in the world. “Global”, “local” and “modern” are heuristic devices; encompassing terms that indicate fields of inquiry and bridge understanding between social scientists and the wider world. The latent danger of using these concept-metaphors is that their exact meaning is neither specified in everyday speech, nor in scientific discussion. Such a premise, absent of any concrete conceptualization, can create false shared understandings or misunderstandings. The concept-metaphor globalization offers social scientists a practical envision of an interconnected and changing world (Moore 2004). Just as has happened with the modernization-paradigm, globalization is conceptually established as a trans-cultural world-changing power, reinforced by widespread scientific, political, corporate and societal usage of the term (Tsing 2000:328). As with the terms local and global, globalization has for the most part escaped precise conceptualization (Appadurai 2001:4; Moore 2004:369). This does not mean we should try to “pull the plug” on discourse involving globalization. On the

⁴For examples, see Wolf’s (1982) or Foucault’s critiques on the modernization paradigm (Burrell 1988)

contrary, globalization as a framework is useful: it highlights the myriad connections that form local situations. Tsing notes: “places are made through their connections with each other, not their isolation” (2000:330). These considerations do, however, signal the importance to carefully consider what the concept-metaphor ‘globalization’ actually represents when it is used in different locales. How imaginations of globalism come to be, is referred to as the *politics of scale-making*. This includes “cultural claims about locality, regionality, and globality; about stasis and circulation; and about networks and strategies of proliferation” (Tsing 2000:344-347). Discourse on globalization raises questions about who gets to set the terms for these debates. “We”, social scientists, should not get caught up in abstract talk of a unified and all-encompassing globalization. Instead, we should direct our focus to the assumptions and principles that underlie the usage of the term and situate the conceptions of globalization in a cultural or political context (Tsing 2000).

This inquiry naturally presupposes an analysis of the concept-metaphors “local” and “global”. Local could be conceptualized as a process that is empirically and ethnographically observable, whereas the global is seen to transcend locality in favor of a complex and abstract whole. It contrasts the embedded concreteness of everyday life against a more abstract and elusive unilateral power. The relevance of the term ‘concept-metaphor’ becomes clear here: it shows that such terms can imply two things at the same time. Using the terms local and global, people refer to certain abstractions *and* a set of localized processes, experiences, and connections at the same time. Globalization as a concept-metaphor refers to a set of projects that are locally imagined to be truly global. The before-mentioned assertions, then, lack a proper understanding of the *relation* between the local and the global: how is ‘global’ constructed from the local? Therefore, global processes should – to the anthropologist – only make sense in their local emergence (Moore 2004; Tsing 2000).

This evidently addresses the need to critically analyze the concrete practices of globalization, in similar fashion to the previous reconceptualization of the term ‘modernization’. I argue here, like Tsing, for a conception of the local and global wherein both manifest themselves in localities, and both receive and assert influence (2000). Such conceptualization renders the distinction between the local and the global of a different order in our analysis. The concept-metaphors ‘local’ and ‘global’ are used to conceptualize the speech of people imagining local and global processes. The task of social science is subsequently to analyze these understandings and the practices they entail through what Tsing calls *globalization projects*. That is; concrete practices and ideas that exist and mobilize people to imagine globalization. Even though globalization

can be found in local practices, we should not overlook the fact that people do think in terms of local and global (2000).

From this premise we can move on to look at some important globalization projects that define the way in which we perceive the world; notably the movement of *people* around the world. Diasporas are the exact link between the local and global we are looking for; linking diverse localities into an imagined global network. It is important to note, however, that the connection between globalization and diaspora is one of coherence; one certainly does not originate from the other. Cohen notes: "Globalization and diasporization are separate phenomena with no necessary causal connections, but they 'go together' extraordinarily well" (2008:154). Of course, the notion of diaspora pre-dates globalization by some two thousand years. Only later, when globalization projects started intertwining with the concept-metaphors nation, ethnicity, race, migration and post-colonialism, the term diaspora was appropriated for scientific use (Tölöyan 2007). Tracing and encountering diasporas around the world – from homelands to settlement-countries – can help us understand perceptions of locality and globalization and the manifestation of particular globalization-projects (Appadurai 2001:8-9; Tsing 2000). Especially because – following leading theoreticians in diaspora and globalization studies, I will argue that diasporas are embedded in stable localities between which there is movement of people and imagined relationships (Tölöyan 2007; Tsagarousianou 2004; Tsing 2000).

Following the theorizing force of globalization studies, diaspora studies have adopted the logic of spatialization and mobility as a conceptual framework. Such concept-metaphors conceal the distinction between diaspora and the dispersion of people, which complicates theorizing the former. We should be on guard not to define diaspora too rigidly. They are certainly not objectively definable communities and it would obstruct the inclusion of worldwide manifestations of diaspora (Tsagarousianou 2004; Comaroff 2010). Defined too loosely, however, and we will lose our theoretical understanding of the term. Diaspora's are often defined as a migrated community with cultural or social practices and a collective identity which all derive from a perceived "homeland". This homeland provides a key symbol that unifies people in the diaspora. Diasporans are partial towards their homeland, while also making ties with the place they settle. These connections toward the homeland are expressed in travel, remittances, cultural exchange, political lobbying and other activities (Tölöyan 2007). This, on an analytic level, separates diaspora from the often included concept-metaphors 'ethnicity', 'mobility' and 'global'. When merely using 'ethnicity', theorists are unable to encompass the transnational aspects of diaspora, while the term 'mobility' emphasizes movement over the localized network-aspect of diaspora (Tsagarousianou 2004). This

specific analytical tendency in diaspora studies does not come without its drawbacks, however.

Gupta and Ferguson have observed an increase in “ideas of culturally and ethnically distinct places”, while at the same time “actual places and localities become more blurred and indeterminate” (1992:525). So instead of following the trend of statically linking group and place, we should consider the constructivist nature of claims about a perceived ‘homeland’ and look for the underlying mechanisms that shape these ideas. Following Benedict Anderson (1991), I conceptualize a diaspora and its connection to a homeland as an *imagined community*. Originally setting out to reveal the social mechanisms of nationalism, Anderson shows the constructivist nature of national communities. A nation “is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign”. People who define themselves as members of a nation “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 1991:6). Thus, a “nation” has to be invented and that requires the mobilization of its people. Within this imagined community, symbols, history and values are created, which serves to reinforce its existence (Zimelis 2010). The forming of a diaspora works very much the same way; imagining a shared identity that is derived from “the homeland” is its central defining feature. As Sökefeld notes: “[diaspora] is not an issue of naturally felt roots but of specific political circumstances that suggest the mobilization of a transnational imagined community”. Rather than acknowledging an essentialist bond with a place of origin, the constructivist character of common notions of identity and community are important for consideration. Indeed, the question is how diasporans are mobilized *and* relegated to a specific identity (Sökefeld 2006:280; Tsagarousianou 2004).

Frequent use in daily conversation, popular culture and political discourse reveals the many attempts to appropriate the concepts of ‘Chinese’, ‘Chineseness’, and even ‘China’ for diverse purposes. Perhaps more so than with other countries, China is a contested area that is constantly subjected to political and imaginative stake-claiming. There are already subtle and not-so-subtle differences in what is meant by China and Chinese from a Taiwanese perspective, a Hong Kongese perspective, and a Chinese mainland perspective. Of course within these categories people do not necessarily agree. Also in social science there are many attempts to try and materialize abstract notions of China; so much so that it inspired the Taiwanese anthropologist and sociologist Allen Chun to write a paper with the salty title ‘Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity’ (1996). Singular terms, like Chineseness, cannot accommodate the complexity and multi-faceted character of Chinese identity (Wu 1991),

and should therefore only be adopted when accompanied by clarification and when scrutinized with a healthy dose of suspicion. To view these terms as concept-metaphors can be of considerable help here, as it shows the multifacetedness of what is talked about. Words like 'China' and 'Chinese' are both used as abstractions (e.g. when somebody refers to 'Chinese culture' or 'Chinese politics') *as well as* localized processes (e.g. someone that has the Chinese nationality or visiting a Chinese restaurant). This multifacetedness points to the need, from an anthropological standpoint, to deconstruct its multiple layers and look at some of the concrete practices through which the diverse appropriations of these concept-metaphors are constructed. As shown before with the concept-metaphor globalization, abstract notions of a phenomenon are created in the embedded concreteness of everyday life. In fieldwork, then, it is the anthropologists' task to discover how concrete processes relate to their abstractions. Thus, in this case it is important to see how abstract notions of 'China' and other terms that are associated with it, are constructed in everyday practice. By undertaking this task throughout this thesis, I do not attempt to give abstract notions of Chineseness an empirical background so that they can be used unambiguously. To interpret before-mentioned concepts as concept-metaphors shows us that even though phenomena are grounded in concrete practice, they are still subjected to abstraction, even contestation. Thus, by emphasizing the many ways concept-metaphors are constructed and appropriated, I intend to show the inherent ambiguousness and subjectivity of the uncritical usage of terms like China and Chineseness.

Logically, a discussion on Chinese diaspora leads us to the politics of identity. There is much debate on how to approach the issue of identity and identification. From as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, anthropology has moved away from essentializing and stagnant formulations of identity. In his 1920 critique on the anthropological methods *evolutionism* and *diffusionism*, Franz Boas notes: "As soon as [my] methods are applied, primitive society loses the appearance of absolute stability which is conveyed to the student who sees a certain people only at a certain given time. [Rather,] all cultural forms appear in a constant flux and [are] subject to fundamental modifications" (Boas 1920:65). Needless to say that anthropology has been able to progress its understanding of fluent identifications even further in the present day. However, today there is still debate on how to do justice to all of identity's diverse facets. In the context of this research, I prefer to think of any assertion surrounding 'identity' as the politics of identification, because this emphasizes the fact that identity is always contested, multilayered, and fluent (Augé 1995; Moore 2004). It shows both the deliberateness of some assertions and how people can be subjected and influenced by

identity politics. 'Identification with' is context dependent and becomes more relevant to personal experience when one is subjected to othering; by which I mean others 'othering' you, as well as you 'othering' others. In the words of Zygmunt Bauman: "One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go on in each other's presence. 'Identity' is a name given to the escape sought from that uncertainty. Hence 'identity', though ostensibly a noun, behaves like a verb' (Bauman 1996:19).

As a result of increased movement and exchange across the world in recent decades, people have increasingly felt compelled to express their own ideas about 'who they are' in everyday life. But one does not construct an identity individually and independently. There are also many external influences that exert influence on someone's identification processes, even if we try to resist it. In society and the media, identities are often presented as mutually exclusive, singular and uncomplicated. By categorizing, people create difference. Identities are shaped on the intersections of many different influences, however. These influences are not neatly divided and therefore not easily identifiable. On the contrary, categorizing occurs on many different levels and the different categorizing principles also influence each other. For example: ethnicity, gender, and social status all co-construct each other and from this and many more factors a person positions itself through politics of identification. With the intersectional approach it is possible to recognize the different influences that have a major impact on our self-image (Nagel 2003). Even if we have developed solid ideas about who we are or want to be, there are always other people's conceptions to contend with. In politics of identification, positioning yourself is a constant negotiation between your own conceptions of self, and the categories other people project onto you (1998 Wekker).

One problematic aspect of this dynamic is the persistence of an 'unconceptualized category'; which in many cases is the white, Western ethnicity. Western interest in identity as a binary and mutually exclusive phenomenon often leads to an appreciation of multiculturalism as ethnicized 'others' versus a naturalized 'us'. Dominant thought about identity has the tendency to suppress other ways of thinking, which makes a hegemonic discourse about multiculturalism not very multicultural at all. The matter-of-factness of the dominant discourse makes it powerful, as it sets the standards for debate and leaves certain other aspects undiscussed. "Cultural discourse [...] includes not only symbols of national identity, icons of patriotic fervor and other things; more importantly, it involves the authority of statements about shared values embodied in language,

ethnicity, and custom, as well as shared myths encoded as genres of knowledge, such as history, ideology, and beliefs. [...] The self-effacing character of cultural discourse, in spite of its obvious authorial nature, is precisely what makes identity appear to be a value-free construct, when in actuality it is quite the opposite" (Chun 1996:115). Implicit privilege of certain cultural expressions and conduct over others is called *performativity*. Usually, these performative aspects of society are only implied through referral to 'cultural others', which makes them a tacit standard (Nagel 2003). A healthy discussion on multiculturalism and identity should therefore also revolve around what determines the standards for debate and comparison, thereby exposing the underlying performative dynamics in society.

The politics of identification do not only entail the discussed external influences. People are not passive recipients of stigmatizing forces, but manage, incorporate and contest them in different ways. This is aptly shown by Hall: "[...] identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who are we' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation. [...] Not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms with our 'routes'" (Hall 1996:4). The conception of identities as a process of becoming is a deliberate move away from the idea of identities as fixed products of an inescapable past. It emphasizes the political and strategic aspects of creating and imposing identities, while revealing that they are constantly being influenced by history, culture and power. However, the crux of the matter is that even though postmodern and feminist literature has taught social science the significance of the constructivist nature of identity, "at the level of experience and common, sense identities are generally expressed, and mobilized politically, precisely because they feel natural and essential" (Ang 2001:151). Thus while insisting in theory on the fact that identities are profoundly human constructs which are continually being contested, we still have to take in account their significance as "real, social and symbolic forces in history and politics" (Ang 2001:151), *and* in everyday life, I might add. This two-faced character so typical in the politics of identity renders the scrutiny of identities in theory both necessary and impossible (Hall 1996).

Despite the undeniable logic of the fluidity of identity, people often still find themselves relegated to certain characteristics based on nationality, perceived ethnicity or even 'culture'. Gupta and Ferguson argue that 'culture', 'space', and 'place' are often all too readily clustered together. "Space itself becomes a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization are inscribed

(1992:375). Although this reasoning downplays the importance of space in theorization, it is actually a central defining principle. Often the name of a nation-state is equated with ideas about 'culture', 'society', and whether people do and do not belong. As anthropologists we all too often regard difference between spaces as an outcome of disconnectedness, and cultural and social change a product of intercultural contact. Difference, in this reasoning, is the premise on which anthropological research is conducted. Research is done on the presumption of other people's fundamental difference. However, if we acknowledge that connection is always part and parcel of developments of difference, we enable ourselves to think about the construction of space differently. Difference does have a history and spaces have always been hierarchically connected. Consequently, the important question becomes how spatial meanings come to be. To assign meaning to a place is a well-known practice within anthropology, but what is needed is a full-fledged politicization of space through which we can trace the constructivist nature of place-making. This is especially relevant in the context of global migration. Gupta and Ferguson note: "If we accept a world of originally separate and culturally distinct places, then the question of immigration policy is just a question of how hard we should try to maintain this original order. [...] If, on the other hand, it is acknowledged that cultural difference is produced and maintained in a field of power relations in a world always already spatially interconnected, then the restriction of immigration becomes visible as one of the main means through which the disempowered are kept that way" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:381).

One way of looking beyond the discussed discrepancies in identity politics is to differentiate between real culture; the way people actually live, and ideal culture; the way people are *(th)ought* to live – which obviously is not always that relevant in everyday life. Migrants are often essentialized because a caricature of their perceived *ideal culture* is projected on them (Djao 2003; Chun 1996). In the same way it should be noted that identification with a certain (ideal) cultural tradition and the resulting *real culture* can mean entirely different things for each person, as identity labels never fully coincide with personal experience (Ang 2001). In Vancouver, I encountered an ethnically mixed person that grew to affiliate with Chinese tradition throughout its teen years, as well as ethnically Chinese Canadians that "*want to integrate [themselves] in Canadian culture*" (5/3/15). On the one hand, this shows that the momentary outcomes of identification processes are thoroughly idiosyncratic, and on the other, it shows the need to analyze how statements about ideal culture are produced (Chun 1996). One particularly useful way to perceive and discuss the embedded reality of personal experience and identification is to use the concept-metaphor *hybridity*. Hybridity emphasizes complex entanglement rather than clear-cut distinction. As much as some might want to; in today's world it is impossible to maintain a clear distinction between

specific groups or places. Hybridity naturally questions mutually exclusive and contrasting formulations of identity and forces us to think about the myriad interconnections that pervade everyday life. It offsets dominant, hegemonic positions by infusing it with difference and uncertainty. Ultimately, hybridity entails neither flawless fusion nor integration. Hybridity speaks to the togetherness in difference that has become so relevant in cities all across the world. By emphasizing the porousness of cultural boundaries, hybridity shows that cultural expressions mix and mingle, as well as exist alongside each other. In short, hybridity is able to deal with cultural mixing *and* distinct development simultaneously (Ang 2001; Bhabha 1994). Feng provides a clear-cut example of the relevance of hybridity in identity politics: "As people go through a social process of interaction and mutual learning, they come to have a particular affinity with groups with whom they feel the most comfortable because they share similar experiences and aspirations. The salience of a person's group identity may shift according to the social environments or changes in his or her life, which renders the adherence of a set of fixed attributes or identities inflexible or even suffocating" (Feng 2015:205). It is exactly this fickle and unsettling nature of identity politics and personal identification that makes hybridization such an apt tool for the analysis of these processes. I want to stress the omnipresence of hybrid forms of loyalty, culture and identity to unsettle the implication of exactly these hybrid forms as a threat for social order. Identity and identification is a prime example in this regard: often seen as an important factor in setting people apart, while it is actually the very act of demarcating between different identities that deserves the most attention in scrutinizing this process (Ang 2003).

"Identity is both relational and situational and always hybrid. This means that firstly, one axis of identity (like gender) must be understood as in relation to other axes [...]. Secondly, identity shifts fluidly from setting to setting, so that not all axes are equally foregrounded in every situation" (Yow 2010:8).

3. Context

In Vancouver, Chinese migrants have always dealt with changing and trying circumstances by employing different strategies. Chinese immigration (of males) into South-West Canada already started in the late 19th century as a consequence of several gold rushes, available wage labor, overseas trade, and coal-mining opportunities. Canadian communities at the time were primarily formed according to conceptions of race. 'Whites' deemed themselves superior and responded to Chinese immigration with severe Sinophobia, which resulted in the first laws that prohibited Chinese from voting or taking certain professions in 1875. This, and the fact that the Chinese did not speak any English, resulted in the formation of enclaves by Chinese immigrants (Zucchi 2007; Tan and Roy 1985). 'White' resistance against Chinese discrimination surfaced only sporadically and was predominantly focused on ensuring the availability of cheap Chinese labor. Control of Chinese immigration, as well as *institutional* and *social* racism continued for the next decades (Anderson 1988). This led Tan and Roy (1985) to conclude that the Chinese were "the *most harshly treated [minority]*" in Canada. Head-taxes were raised exclusively on Chinese immigrants, starting at \$50 per person, rising to \$500 per person later on. This discouraged many Chinese males to bring their families to Canada and form kinship-ties there⁵. From 1923 onwards, Chinese immigration was banned altogether for 25 years. As these restrictions did not make integration into Canadian society possible, nor the formation of family-ties, the Chinese sought to create other forms of social organization. In Vancouver, this led to clan formation and the establishment of mutual aid organizations. These institutions had key functions in social, economic, political and cultural life during this period (Li 2008; Mitchell 1998).

The Second World War profoundly changed attitudes towards race and discrimination, and in its wake, most of the discriminating laws in Canada were abolished (Li 2008). Ideas about race moved away from biological determinism and found firm ground in the ethnic and cultural distinctions that supposedly set people apart. In a relatively short time, perceptions about Chinese people in Canada went from 'threatening "hordes of [people who]... carry with them the elements of disease, pestilence and degradation over the face of the fair land"' (Anderson 1988:133) to exoticized 'ethnic others'. Discriminating ideas from former decades had stipulated the formation of Vancouver's Chinatown in the swampland around Dupont Street. With a

⁵ This also resulted in an extreme imbalanced sex-ratio among Chinese immigrants. In 1911, with 27,831 Chinese in Canada at the time, the ratio was twenty-eight men to every woman. In 1931, with 46,519 Chinese living in Canada, there were twelve men to every woman.

renewed interest in 'the Orient', this formerly ghettoized Chinatown became the romanticized representation of an exotic Orient. Consequently, tourist and restaurant industries flourished. These developments were not passively taken in by the Chinese community. Instead, Chinatown residents increasingly accepted this hegemonic view on ethnic distinctions, be it for economic, status or nostalgic reasons. This acceptance too, however, reaffirmed the divide between 'whites' and 'ethnic (and therefore spatial) others' on the terms of the European elite (Anderson 1988).

Fast-forward to 2015. An eager student-anthropologist tries to make sense of ethnic dynamics in contemporary Vancouver society. Displayed on a video screen, different images appear in a slideshow: a huge parking lot in front of a superstore; fenced property, deserted and overgrown with brambles; a highway full of cars. A narrator sorely laments for the places they used to be, but are not anymore. The other meanings of these places are the ones he holds on to; despite the asphalt, brambles and fencing. To the First Nations in the Vancouver area, these are sacred places; burial grounds and the former livelihood of their ancestors.

This video exhibit – found in the University of British Columbia (UBC) Museum of Anthropology – is one of the many reminders that the area now known as Vancouver has a long and rich history of habitation before European colonizers came and made it their own. Although I can never do justice to this eventful and colonial history due to the limitations of this text and my knowledge on the subject, I do believe that this particular history is of profound influence on how Vancouverites think about ethnicity and migration issues today. Multi-lingual signage; area names like Coquitlam and Squamish that hint at the original regions and people that lived there; and benefits and tax-cuts for contemporary First Nations peoples are all subtle but ubiquitous reminders of a terrible history and the need to deal with it in the present situation. *First Peoples: A Guide for Newcomers*, a booklet for new citizens of Vancouver published by the City of Vancouver, shows that policymakers are keenly aware of the importance of the intersectional influences in migration: history, ethnicity, colonialism, policy and a thousand more factors exert influence on the creation and maintenance of a city is that livable and enjoyable. In an effort to stimulate mutual understanding and cultural exchange, there have been projects where aboriginals, non-aboriginals, and newer migrants have come together:

We brought together Urban Aboriginals..., local First Nations, and the immigrant communities. They came together, told their stories, and they talked about them; and it was an opportunity for First Nations to give these histories, the histories that aren't told in the newspapers, the histories that aren't told on the television sets, the histories that

aren't told in the books in the library. It's the personal histories, what these people have experienced. Not only what they've experienced, but their ancestors as well. These are the histories they wanted to share, and, vice-versa: We wanted to hear from the immigrant communities about why they came to Canada, what brought them here, why they want to learn more about Aboriginal people. We want to learn about their cultures... (Henderson and Wilson 2014:65)

It is a far cry to say that these examples mirror city-wide sentiments. To the contrary; many people are unaware of specific details regarding Vancouver's history; for instance, that 95% of British Columbia is unceded First Nations land. Additionally, it is frequently voiced that the present-day schooling system still fails to give this issue the attention it deserves (Henderson and Wilson 2014). Nonetheless, there is a widespread awareness of Canada's history of migration along general lines, which manifests itself in frequent referencing to almost anybody's migrant history in Vancouver. I have found people to be proud of this fact. What this means for relations between First Nations communities and non-aboriginals, I do not know, but it is certainly of great impact on the way contemporary migrants are viewed by broader society. This prominence of migrant histories (mind you: not colonial histories) in people's awareness makes Vancouver a place where issues surrounding migration and ethnicity are easily and widely discussed. A group of artists that is exploring their parents' Chinese heritage also recognizes this: *"This is one of the best places for us to be in now. The racial dialogue is so far advanced in Vancouver. People really care here, and they notice. There is place for us to explore and discuss our own identity"* (11/03/15). Despite this widespread dialogue, several people have expressed their concern about Vancouver only being inclusive on the surface. It professes to be multi-cultural, but is actually *'clingy'* and *'segregated'*, according to many observers. Feng notes: *"on the one hand, governments in Canada have greatly welcomed Chinese and other Asian migrants as human assets for labor and economic capital; on the other, there is a subtle sense of suspicion about the social and political impacts of the new arrivals"* (2015: 207). Ask any local in Vancouver, and they can point you to several city-regions associated with certain ethnicities: Indians live in Surrey; Chinese in Richmond and Burnaby; and Caucasians in Yaletown, Pitt meadows and Maple Ridge. Upon closer inspection, I found out that the rifts run even deeper. A second generation Canadian of Taiwanese descent told me: *"How I view the breakdown of identities and cultural groups in Vancouver? It is very fragmented. I will be very honest with that. It's just extremely fragmented because you have the people that came, you know, that formed the early Chinatown, for example. People that worked on the railway, that have been here for 5 or 6 generations and their families. Then you have slow migrations [...] from then until now, [plus] the big one in 1970; Hong Kong. And then you have families, like mine, that came from other diasporic communities. [Finally,*

there's been] a lot of Mainland Chinese within the past five years. All of these communities are quote, unquote 'Chinese', but they don't really mix in one way or another. Language-barriers, geo-political differences; yeah its actually very fragmented. People just say, 'oh, they are all Chinese'; but actually, we don't talk to each other that much" (4/2/15). Vancouver is a much sought after resettlement destination from the Greater China Region, but it is impossible to speak of an undivided 'Chinese community' due to these rifts.

The long and eventful history of Chinese migration notwithstanding, narratives of the involvement of Chinese migrants and their descendants in the development and overall realization of the city of Vancouver as it is today, have only relatively recently gained prominence. Only in 2006 – 121 years after the first head tax, the Canadian government offered a full apology for exclusionary and discriminatory legislation directed against Chinese. Leading up to the apology and subsequent financial compensation for the affected people that were still alive, was a twenty-five year struggle for recognition and justice that finally found its leverage through the 2006 Canadian elections (Li 2008). An official apology is of course a great step in the right direction, but it is a far cry from Chinese influence being recognized as an integral part of Vancouver's history. A former book-publisher notes: "*Until recently there was no space for Asian-American writers' [...] work to get recognized; they struggle to get recognized for their work even though [it] is very prolific*" (01/04/15). Narratives of Chinese migrants and their descendants have gained relatively little prominence, although visibility has increased recently with the publication of several books specific to Chinese-Canadian stories in Vancouver. On a broader scale, overall Chinese migrants' influence and legacy in British Columbia is still struggling to find recognition beyond the perimeters of Vancouver's and Victoria's Chinatowns. Several educational programs and organizations are committed to carve out a space in British Columbian history for these narratives to gain prominence. Simon Fraser University and UBC both teach Asian-studies programs; the Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia provides publications, events and research scholarships on the subject; several websites are dedicated to Chinese genealogies or serve as a platform to publish the stories of Chinese migrants and their descendants. Recently, Canada's most read newspaper published the article *A Forgotten History: tracing the ties between British Columbia's First Nations and Chinese workers*⁶. Chinese history in British Columbia is finally gaining ground.

⁶http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/chinese-heritage/article24335611/?fb_action_ids=10152772641567617&fb_action_types=og.shares Accessed on June 2nd, 2015

4. Empirical chapter

4.1 In between the lines - The student-anthropologist

To situate myself and my perspective through the course of this research is important. Should I ignore this, then the risk of confirming one of the issues that I have discussed in the theoretical debate is far too great. To a certain extent I have already threaded murky waters during my fieldwork and discovered how well-ingrained and instinctive some of the pitfalls of othering and discrimination are, also to me. This shows the necessity of including several aspects of my research project in the empirical chapters of this thesis. My own actions, choices and hesitance in pursuing certain subjects have had a profound effect on the results of this research; not just with regard to the data I have or have not gathered, but also in the way I processed it. Despite careful consideration of postmodern literature and my attempt to avoid essentialization, I still set out to somehow define people of Chinese descent in Vancouver. While living with family that has migrated to Vancouver from The Netherlands, I was looking left and right to find people that identify as Chinese, or were of Chinese descent. My own actions and perceptions allowed me to gain insight into some of the ways people are set apart from a perceived 'mainstream'. In my preparations, I had settled on affiliation with Chinese food as an identifier for how people connected to 'China', but over the course of my fieldwork I found out that in some ways my presence and inquiries also appeared to be of influence on somebody's identification processes, including the external influences that 'connect' someone to China.

"It takes a political mind to think someone is connected to something" (20/3/15).

In preparation for this project, I have written extensively on the constructivist nature of identity and community, theorizing manifestations of identity as *imagined communities* (Anderson 1991). Notwithstanding this preparation, the reality of the field made me doubt profoundly what I was actually doing in Vancouver. I found out that my actual inquiries; whether to find out if someone felt 'connected' to China or to Canada, were performative too. As will become clear, my fieldwork reflected larger societal dynamics that question someone's origin from a hegemonic view on belonging. There are multiple reasons I came to Vancouver to inquire into people of Chinese descent without giving a thought to inquiring into my own family's Dutch heritage. Those reasons are partly idiosyncratic, but also historically situated and shaped by the politics of identification. As an outsider, I was trying to pinpoint certain practices that indicated a connection or affiliation to Chinese heritage or culture. Through subtle encouragements, I wanted people to speak about their affiliations on their own terms, thereby establishing an empirical connection between a person and a place. If only it had been that simple... I

learned that identification is more dynamic, and more political than I had assumed beforehand. The more I learned about the politics of identification in Vancouver, the less I felt it was in anyone's interest that I should say anything about the affiliations of people of Chinese descent in this thesis. As discussed in the context; contemporary Vancouver is quite supportive of openly discussing identity politics, but that doesn't mean there is no tension. In fact, most people have independently told me that Vancouver society is very segregated when it comes to spatial settlement and interaction between different perceived ethnic groups. In such a supporting environment, people can still be othered and stereotyped through subtle and seemingly positive-discriminatory practices. An obvious way to counter this tendency is inter-ethnic exposure to personal narratives, which is perhaps more helpful than writing a thesis about it as a European outsider.

Through interactions and assumptions in society, Chinese-Canadian identity becomes a category; it is important to recognize how this category exactly takes shape. I took it upon myself to analyze this process, and found out that the discovery of one's identity is a profoundly personal endeavor that is nevertheless influenced by many external factors. My inquiries into people's affiliation with Chinese heritage must have triggered some interesting thoughts. I am a China-enthusiast. I have lived there, traveled there, studied Chinese history and philosophy, and I'm currently studying Mandarin; one of the Chinese languages. My informants often spent a lot of thought on the personal importance they bestow on their Chinese heritage. This made them talkative about the subjects I was looking for, but at the same time made talking about it a precarious undertaking. In the process of translating thoughts and feelings into words, much of the complexity is lost. People *want* to talk about it, because the subject hits close to home, but as I discovered later on: identity politics are basically an open-ended process. When solidifying it in conversation, you run the risk of essentializing yourself as different from the Canadian mainstream, but you are not. Well, you are. But everyone is different!

About halfway through my research fieldwork, two important realizations dawned on me. First, identity politics in Vancouver are very subtle; when people of Chinese descent feel othered, it is most often through an inherent bias about notions of belonging in society that does not culminate in outright discrimination. Thinking about this, I arrived at my second realization. The best thing that can happen in favor of improving this bias is making Chinese-Canadian stories heard. Actual Chinese-Canadians telling their story; establishing Chinese-Canadian as a legitimate identity; carving out a space in Vancouver's historical narrative. If identities are so malleable, shouldn't people themselves be the one's shaping it?

And there I was – truly in the thick of things, asking people if they ate ‘Chinese food’ at home.

These realizations took me aback. Throughout my project, I struggled to find a place for myself in this process. I still struggle with it while writing this thesis. I had wonderful conversations with people that told me about these issues in great detail. It has crossed my mind more than once to copy-paste parts of the interview-transcripts in my thesis and be done with it. Not out of laziness, mind you. No, because... Well, I’ll let my data speak for itself: *“we don’t want the script for this generation to be written for us. We want to write it ourselves”* (Goto 2014: 33).

4.2 Opportunity – Migration to Vancouver.

Migration from Greater China to Vancouver – from its humble beginnings into its fast contemporary pace – has had one consistent motivation: opportunity. Through work, education, environment and opportunity, there are better lives to be forged, although not always directly for ourselves: *“I thought: if I have the ability to go outside of China, I want to try. [...] My grandparents and my mom worked so hard to raise me, so I felt like it was my mission to change the whole family’s life”* (17/4/15). Family – whether its children or parents or grandparents – is often invoked as an important reason for migration to Vancouver. With migration, one tries to maximize opportunity; better opportunity evolves into a better future for the family. Of course, the notion of opportunity is a very abstract one. One informant found the reality of migration from China vastly different from what she expected, after giving birth to her daughter : *“Before I gave birth to my daughter I felt like: ‘I’m going to do this; I’m going to be a single mom; I’ll be fine’. But afterwards I just felt so lonely, so helpless, and so pathetic”* (17/4/15). So motivations and opinions might change during the process of migration. One has to keep in mind how remarkably turbulent life can be for the people that migrate to a fundamentally different society. For many Chinese, opportunity to go abroad is scarce and one has to display both great dedication and motivation, or cough up a rather large sum of money for it to work. Regardless of the level of motivation (or money), migrating can still be a profoundly distressing endeavor. Perhaps that is why I have encountered such widespread silence within families about this subject. Canadian-born informants often cannot recount stories of how their family migrated to Vancouver, save for a few generic aspects like opportunity or better education. *“I guess they did it because they wanted a better life. [...] We don’t talk about these things at home much; it’s complicated”* (17/2/15).

Apparently, first-generation Chinese migrants do not divulge in the stories of their journey very often. It is fitting to refer to some passages of important Chinese

philosophy here, Djao notes: "The key to conducting one's life is assiduous effort – keep on doing, whatever it is. If one has truly put in the effort, even when the outcome is failure, it is neither permanent nor weakness, because *'Reversing is the moment of Dao, weakness is the means of Dao'*. Failure, adversity, or calamity will not last forever; things will be better" (2003:208). Without proposing an essentialist bond between Chinese philosophies and how Chinese migrants might behave, this passage shows the virtue of perseverance and effort that is a very prominent topic in Chinese philosophies. An informant gave a playful description of her perspective on the mindset of her Hong-Kong-born mother, who mirrors some of these virtues: *"It's not about you, it's not about your experience, and it's not about your suffering. You play a role in society that is integral to its equilibrium. Don't shake the equilibrium!"* (11/3/15). This disposition obviously does not facilitate recounting stories of hardship in China, the process of leaving China, and settlement in Vancouver. Rather, it seems like parents feel like there is nothing to gain from recapping stories of migration. Perhaps dwelling on the past does not befit the entrepreneurial mindset that made people migrate in the first place. In any case, many Canadian-born informants speak of this silence surrounding hardship and migration as a common aspect of their family life, which is sometimes contrasted with their own disposition to be more vocal about their lives with others.

4.3 A Different Understanding - Vignette

"Back in China I taught foreign teachers Mandarin. They told me a lot about Canadian-American education. I was fascinated by it; there is so much freedom! My mother was very against me going abroad though; I already had a job at a really good high school in the capital city of the province. You know, in our culture, when parents raise you it is your duty to support them in all different ways. But I thought that if I go to Canada, I will make more money with which I can change my whole family's life. So after I migrated, I felt like it was my responsibility to invite her over, so I can give her support; give her shelter; pay for everything so she doesn't need to worry about anything. My mom came to live with me in Vancouver.

Last month, she thought about renting out her own bedroom, but there were already two strangers staying in the living room of my two-bedroom apartment. I protested. She said: 'If I get sick one day, you don't even have the money to pay for my medical expenses. I cannot count on you so I have to do it on my own.' When she said that, I caved. I feel really bad about myself, because what she said is so true; I really don't have money to take her to the hospital in Vancouver.

At her age, it is very hard to learn other concepts and ways; values of different cultures. How people interact here is very different from the Chinese way. 'Mom, I just

want to make my own decisions'. She doesn't understand. She was so sad when I said it. It's one of the worst things that can happen to a Chinese parent.

I said 'Mom, I don't want you to rent out the room and you can just go back to China''

4.4 Momentum - Distancing of Chinese heritage

A third generation informant with family that migrated from Hong Kong tells me that: *"[...] [my family members] that have immigrated here, who immigrated their kids here, are getting old [...] the people that might have been the most vocal about it are passing away. We will see what happens"* (11/3/15). From his comment speaks a concern for the effect the loss of migration stories has on his generation. Without a narrative of the transition between China and Vancouver, subsequent generations lose part of their family's history. The silence of first generation migrants from China will prevent later generations – regardless if they would want to or not – from making a direct connection to their Chinese heritage and family. It burdens subsequent generations with the difficult task of reinventing themselves; carving out a space with which one feels comfortable identifying with. After migrating, the span over which a family lives in Canada is usually made explicit by referring to first, second or third generation migrants or Canadians. This very clearly marks a break between the North-American branch and Chinese branch of the family. But it is not just conceptually, but also in many other ways, the start of a new chain of generations.

The daily life situation of Chinese-Canadian families in Vancouver prevents the passing down of Chinese heritage in multiple ways. These influences can be external – by being subjected to othering and discrimination, or internal – by deliberately distancing oneself from Chinese heritage and language. First generation migrants are frequently confronted with cultural and lingual markers of difference. This seems to encourage the choice to distance oneself from Chinese heritage. The second generation – which is the first generation to be born in Vancouver, however, seems to be a key generation that rejects Chinese heritage for internally motivated reasons.

"[...] my grandparents don't speak English. They came here when they were relatively old; probably like forty of fifty years old. So for whatever reason they didn't pick up English at that time, I would imagine it was very difficult. At the time, Vancouver was also a very different place, so I'm not sure they were able to move into Anglicized communities in the same way that we do now. They were very isolated. My dad, uncle and mom did learn English; they went to public school over here. There was still a lot of discrimination going on at that time. They held on to their heritage... [...] there is a distancing in fact. My grandparents are very close to it; my parents semi-close, and

when I was growing up, as a teenager, as a kid, I actually wanted to distance myself quite a bit" (11/3/15).

Thus, distancing from heritage manifests itself as both a logical consequence of living in a foreign country, as well as a deliberate move away from anything Chinese, especially for people of Chinese descent that are born in Vancouver. Regardless of parents' intention to teach their children Chinese or Canadian values – traditions and habits, children tend to reject a lot of the Chinese aspects of their upbringing. From the child's perspective, Chinese values and traditions are deemed superfluous as they are going to Vancouver schools where none of those traditions apply and they associate with many non-Chinese Canadians. Silence surrounding migration by earlier generations is therefore not the only way one can be removed from the family's Chinese heritage, discrimination and supposed applicability of Chinese values and customs are also of consequence here. Consequently, Canadian born people of Chinese descent often deliberately distance themselves of Chinese heritage during childhood and teen years. *"It's not abandoning, but putting aside the more obvious sign of Chineseness, or the things that you can put aside, like language and participation in cultural activities. [...] [my friends] pretty much got rid of it all as best as they could" (2/3/15).* According to many of my Canadian-born informants, there is a widespread tendency discernable in their generation to disregard the Chinese parts of their cultural heritage like history, language, and cultural activities. I have spoken to some who lament this development, some who are at peace with it, and others that are indifferent to it. To make your own choice in this matter and to be respected in your decision is what matters to most.

In the example above, the informant's friends deliberately distance themselves from Chinese heritage. An involuntary influence that stimulates a distancing of Chinese heritage is found in the experience of an international student from mainland China who studies in Vancouver. Paradoxically, it seems like life abroad only makes her affiliate more with 'Chinese stuff': *"I found that living abroad makes me more appreciative of your own culture, instead of forgetting it. I live abroad not because I don't like China, or because I want to disregard all the Chinese stuff. On the contrary! You put more attention on Chinese tradition and when you meet people from other countries, you want to share something of your own culture. Last year I had a lot of foreign friends over for Moon Cake Festival. I started telling the legendary story of the Moon Cake. In China we wouldn't pay so much attention to the stories, and you can get Moon Cake all year round! This is the difference between being in China or abroad. What I mean is; in China you might forget some aspects of being Chinese, or you take it for granted" (19/2/15).* This is an interesting comment from somebody that is relatively new to Vancouver. This example is of course very idiosyncratic, and on the surface it seems like life abroad

would actually stimulate, rather than decimate affiliation with Chinese cultural heritage. But I want to draw attention to the importance of the difference between tangible and intangible heritage. When I inquire into the affiliation people have with Chinese tradition, it becomes clear that in the transition from China to Vancouver, something changes in the experience people have. Chinese heritage moves from a way of being, inherent to everyday life in China, to traditions that require effort and planning to maintain in Vancouver. It moves from implicit aspects of everyday life, to explicit manifestations of tradition, developing and changing alongside its Chinese counterparts. To keep Chinese ways in the family, all of the sudden one has to work for it and provide explicit manifestations of culture that were thoroughly implicit before migration. When all of these traditions are removed from the Chinese sphere, subsequent generations tend to lose sight of the reasons why they perform certain rituals and traditions. The quoted student above expresses an experience with life abroad that might very well resonate throughout her life, or even over subsequent generations; especially when she decides to stay in Vancouver like she intends to do. In China, one is able to take some aspects of 'being Chinese' for granted, just because... well, the cultural context *is* Chinese. In Vancouver, however, children grow up in very different situations. This causes the nature of the connection people have with Chinese heritage to change quite dramatically.

"My entire family always goes to the cemetery every single year to pay respect to our ancestors, but none of my cousins understands why. My aunts and uncles don't necessarily know either; they just know they have to. I am the only one that actually asks my grandmother 'why do we do this?' I am distributing this knowledge to the people in the rest of the family, because they just don't have the knowledge or any way to access it. My friends, that are my age, even when they speak the language, often have not cared enough to get that knowledge from their parents and aren't going to be able to pass it on to their children, if they have them" (2/3/15).

The above quote illustrates that language is another important factor in one's emotional proximity to Chinese heritage. Especially first generation migrants often feel the need to work on their language-skills in order to assimilate into 'Canadian mainstream life'; not only English proficiency is important to them, but also getting rid of any non-English accents can be part of that. To strive for language assimilation is often induced by the experience of othering and significant isolation from the mainstream, as well as practical purposes like the need for English proficiency. Consequently, from the second Canadian generation onwards, English is almost always the first, if not only language spoken by informants. The degree in which parents actively stimulate Chinese language and tradition varies widely among my informants. Even when Cantonese or Mandarin is the only spoken language before school-age; the need to use English in a

school environment changes that to English fast. This lack of applicability of the Chinese language soon moves children to associate it with grandparents, distant family in a land far away, and Chinese school on sunny Saturdays when all the other kids get to play outside. In other words; there are hardly any situations in which Chinese proficiency is useful and it is generally associated with not-fun. Not speaking Chinese is the perfect way to rebel against parents and the Chinese heritage with which one might not feel a connection. Consequently, virtually all of the stimulants for second or third generation Canadian children to (continue to) learn Chinese are non-existent. Further down the line, however, the ability or inability to converse in the native tongue of Chinese parents or grandparents is frequently voiced as the single most important way in which someone is able to access some kind of 'Chineseness' and Chinese heritage. Having lost or never mastered a Chinese language thus makes one feel distanced from Chinese heritage. But, as we shall see, most Canadians of Chinese descent are far from done with it.

Vignet

February nineteen, 2015 marks the start of the Chinese New Year. A mother with a young kid in a stroller has positioned herself at the front of a small crowd that is watching a traditional Chinese lion dance. The colorful and intimidating figures dance vigorously while engaging the audience with rapid approaches and meaningful stares. The youngster in the stroller cannot be roused and stares muddily into the distance. A large, orange lion picks up on his indifference and takes a few cracks at catching the young boy's attention. The lion gets up in his face and withdraws again, then showcases some martial arts before briskly moving its face within a few centimeters of the boy while eagerly awaiting a response. *Nothing*. The mother is trying to hand the young boy some lucky charms to hand to the lion, but he's not having any of it. The lion looks up at the mother, slightly tilts its head and moves on. When the impressive beast walks away, the boy snaps out of his daydream and watches with fascination how the lion disappears into the distance.

4.5 Negotiation - Identity politics

As suggested before, identity is shaped and contested by personal as well as external influences. Informants have regularly explained their own disposition on a perceived Chinese-Canadian scale via the metaphor of being 'white-washed'. To them, every place on this continuum explains an affiliation with either Chinese or Canadian (pop) culture, tradition, values or the proficiency in English or any of the Chinese languages. Conceptually, the term 'white-washed' suggests a rigid connection between white people and Western or Canadian dispositions. Logically, the term can only be applied to people who are non-white and it reflects the underlying logic that these people are not quite as 'Canadian' as whites. Although the term is often used apologetically by

my informants, 'white-washed' does represent something measurable for many. "*I'm very whitewashed*" (22/2/15) or, "*I'm not as whitewashed, although I was born here*" (17/2/15); these and similar remarks were frequently voiced by my informants. The term 'white-washed' embodies the complex relationships and assumptions that underlie Vancouver society regarding history, ethnicity and belonging. Although everybody – save for aboriginal peoples – can trace its recent ancestry back to myriad of places across the world, there is still a tendency to regard whites as more native to the city than other ethnicities. One could argue that European settlers come from societies that are more compatible with what Vancouver has become; Western. Such reasoning, however, fails to recognize (among other things) the fact that Vancouver's historic Chinese migrant community is predominantly made up of Hong Kong residents that left due to political struggles with mainland China and later during the Hong Kong handover; when the British government ceded the region to the Chinese government. In other words: many left the area because they did not want to live under a Chinese regime for whatever reasons, and they saw potential in migrating to Vancouver. Furthermore, as I have discussed in the context, Chinese-Canadians played a pivotal role in the establishment of basic human rights in Canada after the Second World War by demanding equal citizenship. These are just a few striking, but arguably unnecessary examples of the role the Chinese migrant community has played in Vancouver's development. Another poignant detail that underscores subtle white erasure is found in the scientific Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal. In its 25 years of existence, it has not published one article about Caucasians or whiteness in Canada. I found exactly one article that compares the experience of Chinese migrants' kids to Caucasian kids' experiences in schools. The denial of people from Anglo or European descent as being an ethnicity and the subtle implication that they are the 'standard Canadian' seems not justified looking at Vancouver's history of colonialism and migration.

The discussed notions of belonging in Vancouver have subtle, but sometimes far-reaching consequences. Regardless of the degree of affiliation one has with Chinese heritage, ethnic identity is still regularly confused with a person's cultural identity or even national identity by broader society. When my informants are asked where they are from, people are not always satisfied when they answer 'here'. One second generation informant of Hong-Kongese parents tells me that he often has to explain that his father came to Vancouver from China when he was twenty, and that his mother was born here as a second generation Chinese-Canadian, before people are satisfied with his answer. Apparently, the question 'where are you from?' refers to more than where he is actually from. These people ask about his family's history to which he is supposed to identify himself when this question is asked. The same informant makes the following observation: "*Asking these questions works two ways: by asking, people reinforce their*

own ideas about ethnicity and the category which they place you in, and at the same time it puts me on the spot" (22/2/15). This type of stereotyping hints to a perception of non-white people as non-standard Canadian. An affiliated issue is that people of Chinese descent are regularly grouped together regardless of heritage, time of migration, or any other factor that might emotionally or practically set someone apart of others. 'Orientals' is a term that occasionally pops up, and in popular discourse, discussion of Chinese immigration often invokes comments on bad driving and skyrocketing housing prices⁷. When the compatibility of national and cultural Canadian identity with being (partly) ethnic Chinese is constantly being questioned, it compels someone to question where he or she *does* belong.

Several of my informants have experienced feelings of shame and guilt when directly confronted with their inability to speak a Chinese language. For instance: when people speak Chinese to them on a bus, or they were excluded from a social group in school because they didn't speak Cantonese. In some cases, this has motivated them to learn a Chinese language. In the following quote, an informant of Singaporean-Chinese descent expresses a viewpoint she finds is regularly directed at Chinese-Canadians: *"You should know this! You look like you should know it, why don't you know it?" [...] they think you should be able to speak that language. When you don't, it's disappointing for both parties"* (15/3/15).

The discussed identity politics all influence one's attitude towards Chinese heritage, but I do not propose the discussed identity formations contain an essence specific to Asian or Chinese descendants. On the contrary: my inquiries into the 'Chinese community' of Vancouver revealed the existence of diverse groups that don't necessarily interweave. Identifying with an Asian or Chinese-Canadian identity is shaped by people's personal experiences and in interactions with others. Sometimes an interest in Chinese things starts from scratch; sometimes it is passed on by family. The Chinese heritage one affiliates with encompasses something different for every individual that talks about it. This constructivist nature reveals the ambiguousness inherent in identity politics. I was a part of the outside influence that made them think about their Chinese heritage too. Some welcomed it; some had no affiliation with it. In the end, I don't think it should be seen as tainting with someone's authenticity – although that is something I struggled with quite a bit during my research. These people are not fragile, and being questioned about these things has become part of what shaped them. However, the fact that

⁷Many wealthy Chinese, as well as other people, have bought property in Vancouver during recent years. At the time of writing, exact figures on the influence of foreign investment on housing-prices in Vancouver were not available, however.

identification with abstract concepts like China or Canada is dynamic, suggests the limits of identity politics. Only speech and action along racial lines make them salient, just as mutually exclusive and complete identities are only forged in either thought or text – here we can see that the complexity of reality has a way of proving them all wrong.

"The sense of being rooted in one's ethnicity is not based on biological heredity. It arises out of life experiences, such as childhood socialization by a grandparent, reinforced by the treatment by a dominant group in the immigrant society. {...} [Discussion on] Chinese overseas identity in terms of ethnic, political, and cultural dimensions is merely an attempt to capture in words a process that is constantly evolving. It is an observer's way of analyzing a multifaceted and multilayered process."
(Djao: 2003: page unknown)

4.6 Being Both - Vignette

"I'm mixed. Or at least, that's how I identify in Canada. My father's family's background is from England. My mother's family's background is from Canton, China. My elementary school was predominantly Cantonese speaking, Canadian born Chinese. I didn't get to be part of that group, because I was the white kid that didn't speak Chinese. In high school it was the same idea but I had figured out how the game works, so I was able to shape it more. I would mention my Chineseness, so that people are aware. *'You don't look like I would expect you to look, but you are saying all of these things that sound like you have a claim to Chineseness, so you might be Chinese'*. To my own white family, I was *their* access point to Chineseness. I always had to ask the waiter or waitress in Chinese restaurants for stuff. When I went to Shanghai, China for a year to attend school, people saw me as being full white or foreign; so not-Chinese again. By that time I was much better in Mandarin, so I was constantly shocking people. *'This person is not Chinese, so why are they able to speak Chinese?'* Where ever I am, I'm always asked on foreigners' opinions; by default I'm always 'foreign'. You're from *Canada*, therefore not Chinese. You *don't look* Chinese, therefore you are not Chinese. But they could never say: *'you don't speak Chinese, so you're not Chinese'*. That's the only thing that I have control over. I can't change myself to look more Chinese and I can't not be from Canada. Language and knowledge about cultural things are the only ways I could get them to accept me being Chinese.

Slowly this constant othering started to feel weird; strange, because I am both Canadian and Chinese. Regardless of where I am I should just be able to be both"

4.7 Discontinuity – In between cultures

Many informants acknowledged that they feel as though they are in between two cultures. One culture at home and another outside of the home, or one culture represented by a mother and another by a father. Being suspended between two cultures is one of the main connecting factors among almost all of my informants, but at the same time there are many ways in which this in-betweenness is experienced. For some people it means speaking one language at home, and another outside of the home. For others, living between two cultures means the constant negotiation of identity, depending on the social context. For others yet it means having a great affiliation for things Chinese, but hardly knowing any Chinese language. Quite often, it is explained as a generational gap; children that do not hold the same values as their elders and consequently have to negotiate between different cultures at home and elsewhere. Talking to the artist group Hong Kong Exiles, they explained their view on being in between: *"We feel exile from both the West and the East. We exist in these two separate spaces and they don't necessarily fit into the same category. It's sort of a removal of both cultures that we are exploring as a diaspora; the Chinese diaspora"* (11/03/15). Some informants told me that they were treated as experts on China in Canada, for instance when going out to a Chinese restaurant or in the classroom, only to be treated as experts on Canadian affairs when they visited China. Feeling as though you live in between two cultural traditions creates tension, but this tension manifests itself not as a disharmony between "Eastern" and "Western" culture per se. Rather, it is a tension that occurs within families and between generations that adhere to different values and customs. *"Feeling like you live two cultures separately? Yes, but not because of the culture thing. I act different at home, because they are family. It's more a relationship thing, than a culture thing"* (17-2-15).

Negotiating and moving between two cultures has a big impact on informants' lives. Issues that arise from incompatible values range from not being able to connect to your grandparents to irreconcilable differences that all but alienate one from one's parents. Some Chinese-Canadians felt compelled to adopt Western names on their resumes but simultaneously run a risk of reproach from Chinese friends for being white-washed. It is fascination or annoyance with this *in-betweenness* that often incites the beginning of an exploration of Chinese heritage, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.8 Challenging Music - Vignette

"As a teenager of course I did want to distance myself of Chinese heritage, but now I want to try and reengage myself with it. I study Western acoustic composition so I

wrote a lot of music for chamber ensembles and orchestra. When I started asking myself these questions, I started with 'why am I writing so much music for Western instruments?' Of course the solution for me is not to write music for traditional Chinese instruments either. That is the difficulty, I'm not from China; I'm not actually born in China. I have as much... if anything I have more in relation with the Western instruments than with the traditional Chinese instruments. But at the same time; that whole paradigm and apparatus of making is still very Western. How do I challenge that, how do I challenge this? That leaves me with no instruments! So I don't know what... I'm still figuring that out. But that is my personal experience; I was distancing from it, but now I'm trying to be engaged with it"

4.9 Reconsideration - Reengaging Chinese heritage and broadening self-identification

"Most second or third generation are part of this transitional generation, you are trapped between two worlds, eh? [...] You already know where you are now, because you grew up in that environment. What is that other world? What is the alternative for when your parents hadn't left? You would've grown up in this environment; this is what I would be doing. Exploring your heritage" (22/2/15).

For many informants, Chinese background and heritage starts to become more important again when they are between twenty and thirty years old.. Many – though not all I have spoken to, want to reclaim, reengage, or rediscover Chinese heritage, since they feel like they got distanced from it at an earlier age. Although most have tried at least few times, information about Chinese heritage can rarely be gained from immediate family. In the following quote, an informant tells me she scolds her mother once in a while, because she tends to monopolize 'Chinese wisdom': *"My parents migrated 30 years ago, but she's always like: 'when we were in China, blablabla'. It changed a lot since you were in China! I tend to [argue with her] then, because I don't like that"* (17/2/15). So we see that even when parents are vocal about Chinese heritage, it might still not be the information someone is looking for. As discussed, a habit of not talking about the early days and reasons for migrating is very widespread. Lots of information about this period is lost after the first generation, as this informants found out after asking his parents about their Chinese heritage: *"go ask your auntie in Singapore. She knows everything, we don't know anything anymore"* (11/3/15). People that are actively searching for this information in their own families run into different barriers. Their parents might not have asked these things themselves and communication with grandparents is often challenging because of language barriers. In the words of a second generation Canadian of Singaporean-Chinese descent: *"[In] two different ways I have observed with my friends that there is this silence: they don't want to talk about it"*

because there is nothing to talk about or there is this tension. But in my case [...] there is no tension; it's just that nobody knows anything, so there is very little to talk about" (2/3/15).

This disconnectedness is important in the way people engage with Chinese heritage. My interviews have shown that people who are passionate about reconnecting with their Chinese heritage often appear to miss an essential link with it: a direct connection. While growing up, these Canadian born and raised children are exposed to tangible aspects of Chinese culture and essentially foreign Chinese practices, which does not help them much in identifying with their Chinese heritage. Some even feel so much distance from Chinese ways of being, that affiliating with it feels inauthentic. A second generation Canadian of Hong-Kongese parents told me: *"It is a part of my culture and it is what we did when I grew up. I feel tension around that [not knowing Chinese heritage], because it is heritage. It is hard to motivate me to look into it very much more, because the meaning I assign to it feels kind of inauthentic. No one in my family talked about it, or even demonstrated that it was meaningful to them. At the same time I didn't want that, but I guess it feels empty for me to say that my culture just consists of food and language. There is more to it"* (1/4/15).

Without disregarding the obstacles and difficulties that could arise from the discussed in-betweenness, there are myriad other ways that people explore Chinese heritage and explore their identity. The very same informant that described the forthcoming feelings of inauthenticity told me that a job for a Asian-American literary magazine, as well as the network of people that work resulted in, really helped her coming to terms with her identity. Many informants demonstrated eagerness in pointing out all the ways one can explore identity and engage Chinese heritage beyond inquiring within their own family, and welcomed the breathing space these approaches offered. One informant with Singaporean-Chinese parents artistically joined forces with two like-minded souls that happened to have Hong Kong-Chinese parents in their exploration of in-betweenness. Others started learning Mandarin while their families have always spoken Cantonese.

Clearly, there are many ways in which people explore their heritage, and just as language plays a pivotal role in the distancing of Chinese heritage, it is even more important in reengaging with it. The ability to converse in the native tongue of Chinese parents or grandparents is frequently voiced as the single most important way to access Chineseness/Chinese heritage. Also in communicating with Chinese parts of the family, proficiency in one of the Chinese languages naturally becomes very relevant. Although this might not always be enough: *"It is impossible to get closer to my heritage without*

learning Chinese [...] [But,] both sides of the family [in China] have heavy dialects. They don't speak any Mandarin, so it was hard to communicate" (22/2/15). The resolve this particular informant of Hong-Kong descent shows in learning Mandarin despite of this language-barrier, shows that learning a Chinese language is not just about the ability to communicate with extended family. It is also a way to connect to a more general form of Chinese heritage culture. What this actually encompasses differs for everyone. Some used their proficiency in a Chinese language to go to China and experience some things first-hand; others aspired to use it for connecting with more recent Chinese immigrants in volunteer work. Mastering a Chinese language is seen as supportive of one's engagement with Chinese heritage, but at the same time it is definitely not a prerequisite, considering the many other ways people involve themselves with Chinese heritage. These days, many resources are available to people that are interested in Chinese heritage culture. Chinese *global* heritage is an umbrella term that encompasses material and non-material aspects of Chinese culture that are embraced in many places outside of China. Chinese cuisine, philosophy, art, calligraphy, and *Fengshui* are but a few examples (Djao 2003). This kind of Chinese heritage is readily available: informants find the name and origin of a particular Chinese dish on Google or look up Chinese characters they encounter in the street on the vocabularies in their smart phone.

Through these resources people can find out about tangible practices of Chinese culture and heritage and decide for themselves, if they affiliate with them. A search for one's Chinese heritage is part of a process in which somebody comes to terms with one's identity as a Chinese-Canadian by shaping it themselves. During this process it can be helpful to read about other people's experiences. *"It's interesting to see other people articulate what I am feeling, that was mind-blowing for me, because I struggled with articulation and being silent. So when I read someone else's text about it, it opened a world up to me about what that experience was like"* (15/3/15). Finding and relating to one's roots is often also very important, which is something the internet can facilitate: *"I have family in Honolulu, Los Angeles, Vancouver, Toronto and Hong Kong; even more places if you count other generations. Because of the sheer number of us in my generation it is really hard to stay close; thank God Facebook can facilitate that a little better"* (1/4/15). But it is also helpful to find people with similar experiences in the media, regardless if they represent your direct roots: *"I think for some younger people it gives them a broader perspective of what people that look like them could be doing and the ideas they can hold"* (1/4/15). Here the internet also makes a difference: I encountered multiple Chinese-Canadian online networks that connect people to each other. Through these networks people are made aware of news and activities relating to Chinese-Canadians, making it easier to seek out people that have similar experiences with growing up in Canada.

There is no straightforward recipe for connecting to Chinese heritage in the Canadian context. Some aspects have been handed down over the generations, others are shreds of knowledge or practices that someone associates with Chinese culture. *"There are no common values or practices, nor common knowledge of Chinese history, that can be seen as the basis [of identification with Chinese heritage]"* (Djao 2003:188). It is about realization and acceptance of a part of your own history; your family's history. But it is not something you are born with; it is acquired through socialization and (self-)discovery.

"Probably in their mid to late twenties, people are trying to get back in touch with their roots. It isn't necessarily ever that conscious, but you start to wonder where you came from, because you are thinking of where you are going to" (1/4/15).

4.10 Another Canadian story – Dutch heritage

And there I was in Canada – taking a break from writing about the importance of intangible heritage and the frequent focus on tangible heritage concerning people of Chinese descent in Canada. In between my laptop and my mug of tea there are two *speculaasjes*; traditional Dutch spice-cookies. Just on the other side of the window I see tulips blooming against a wooden fence. On the wall are pictures of my home-town, which also happens to be the hometown of my Canadian uncle Norman – who I am talking to in Dutch about his affiliations with The Netherlands. *"You know, I always feel proud to be a Dutchman and a Canadian. There is no greater pleasure for me than strolling around the market in Groningen. Whenever I see the Martinitoren, I feel like I am coming home"*⁸ (17/4/15). Norman – which is an anglicized version of the Dutch name Nanno, left The Netherlands with his parents mere weeks before his second birthday. After the Second World War, work was scarce in The Netherlands. They migrated to Vancouver for opportunity: Canada was actively recruiting Dutch people to come over. The Canadian government paid for their fare and the family received a \$50 settlement grant. Within a few years after migrating, Norman's parents gave birth to his two younger brothers in Vancouver. They never spoke much about their reasons for migrating; they came for better opportunity but were soon disenchanted because in Canada work wasn't for the taking, too. The three brothers' father regularly reminisced about the good quality of Dutch potatoes; mother seemed less focused on 'back home'. Their social contacts were primarily Dutch, although they both worked in Canada. At home, the family spoke Dutch, with English becoming more and more interspersed over the years. Work and school made English indispensable, but the Dutch language never

⁸Translation by author

left this household. Norman's now adult children still reminisce about *oma*⁹'s Dutch songs and games. This generation does not, however, speak or understand a lot of Dutch themselves anymore. Norman and his brothers decided against teaching their own children the language, so after opa and oma's passing, hardly any Dutch was spoken anymore within the family in Canada. *"The choice to not teach my children Dutch was a big mistake on my part. I thought it would be too hard, because my wife didn't speak Dutch either. It just didn't seem fair to her, even though she has always told me I should just do it. I'm always still a bit sad about it; I regret that my kids don't speak any Dutch. They understand it a tiny bit, but... oh well, there is nothing to be done about it now!"* (17/4/15). When asked about it, Norman's younger brother Jack (an anglicized version of the Dutch name Jacobus) and his wife Bianca, both second generation Canadians, put emphasis on other practices and they didn't seem to regret not teaching their children Dutch. *"we eat Dutch stuff like Gouda cheese, stroopwafels, kano's, and speculaas. Jack's mother taught me how to make 'stamppot'. [...] The kids know some Dutch food because we maintained the tradition of making Dutch food periodically, for sure"* (12/5/15). However, most of the three brothers' children lament the choice of their parents not to teach them Dutch; some because they feel connected to The Netherlands, others just because they would like to master a second language. This generation loosely affiliates with The Netherlands, or with another country's heritage that was passed down through their mother. I might focus on the Dutch stuff here, but at the breakfast table I saw English scones and German Rye bread just as often as Dutch Gouda.

"For many immigrants, there is some sort of crisis that causes them to move, therefore they often have this sad part. The memories that they hold dearest are of their country, of the good parts. I would say a majority did it because of economic reasons, and that is tough, because you are leaving behind your family. You are leaving the place that you feel is home, an indeed it is home in your heart. It is a very brave step and not an easy step. They try through these little traditions, to hang on to that good part" (12/5/15)

In my family in Canada – all of Dutch and Anglo, German or otherwise European descent – we see a generational decline of affiliation with Dutch heritage. Dutch clubs and associations, like the ones frequented by the brothers' parents, are also a thing of the past. Moreover, one is only – if ever – a Dutch-Canadian by choice.

⁹Which means 'grandmother' in Dutch

Jack: "I remember kids were always asking me: say something in Dutch, so that was a novelty. I remember the rest of our street all being Canadian"

Bianca: "Canadian or British? "

Jack: "Yeah, well..."

Oh yeah, there was a Norwegian family too, but predominantly Canadian, I would say"

(12/5/15)

5. Conclusion

Chinese-Canadian identity is not something general and attainable, nor is it even clear for individuals what it actually constitutes. It is a continuity, rather than an end point. We have seen the momentary fragments of this continuity throughout this thesis. Part and parcel of the Chinese-Canadian identification process might very well be ambiguity: the ambiguity of living in between two cultures; the ambiguity of being defined from the outside, but not even being able to define oneself from the inside. For example: imagine the uncertainty someone might feel when explaining their affiliation with Chinese culture – having never been there themselves - to a student-anthropologist who has lived in China. My research has made clear that there is no blueprint for subscribing to the Chinese-Canadian identity. At the very best it is vaguely describable and partly practicable set of practices that one affiliates with, but just as often it is invoked by the way one looks or talks. Sometimes it is supposed to be you, simply because your family came from elsewhere relatively recently, at other times it is more intrinsically motivated to inquire into this identity. Friends, colleagues or student-anthropologists might (and will) ask the unsolicited question 'Where are you from?'; a relatively simple question that can spark a torrent of consequence and thought for the one who it is asked. For many people of Chinese descent, it is a constant reminder of the connection with their Chinese heritage which they might have lost. These inquiries usually do not follow from the knowledge of family-dynamics or personal history, but are an explicit referral to the migrant-history of someone or their family. Therefore it forces one to think about identity on other people's terms. Rather than something fixed, historic and stagnant, Chinese-Canadian identity is an open-ended, individual inquiry into one's own heritage.

'Ultimately, I believe that the quest for an ideal 'authentic space' that an individual can call one's own, is a question of priorities, of loyalties, and of privileging certain elements over others. My early teenage self found that the overwhelming desire to integrate into Canadian life led to the humiliation and rejection of my Chinese roots; actions I now sorely lament' (Yow 2010:34)

I think this is a new era when it comes to identifying with culture. When I want to restrengthen my affiliation with Dutch culture – which I want; I will get some clogs somewhere – which I will; visit friends all over the country – because I lived in various parts of The Netherlands; and finally eat a raw herring at least once a year – dipped in raw onion, while skillfully dangling it above my head from its still-attached tail. These traditions are not implicit and omnipresent anymore. We become more selective and mindful of these cultural expressions; especially in the worlds' Western metropolitan areas where so many cultural expressions are readily available and competing.

Inauthentic? No. Hybrid? Yes. Hybrid theory is capable of explaining the many influences that together constitute someone's affiliations and loyalties. My research project and stay in Vancouver is a big influence on how I connect to being Dutch. This is much harder to understand when an analysis of my identification process starts and ends with referring to static places; me being Dutch means much more to me than the affiliations I have with my hometown, for instance. Ultimately, when inquiring into our own thoughts and experiences, we realize that identity is much more complex and dynamic in personal experience than generally is assumed. From the outside identity is often essentialized; but we have seen that people can even utilize this discrepancy by using identity strategically. Chinese-Canadian identity is a deeply personal and idiosyncratic thing. Nowadays it is up for individuals to decide how much they affiliate with it, or something else. At the same time there are stigmatizing forces that pressure someone to adhere to certain aspects or versions of identity. In these encounters, it is a Chinese *ideal culture* that is projected over someone's *real culture*. These exchanged are highly performative, as Chinese culture – with which someone is perceived to affiliate – is offset against a tacit understanding of Canadian culture. My informants show that rather than hopelessly divide a person, these influences are all internalized and leave their mark, regardless of mutual compatibility. The discussion on my family's experiences depicts the commonalities of migrant experience, as well as ideas on *belonging* in Vancouver society and the subtle influence this has on identity politics. I hope to have shown the politics of identity can be a game of pick-and-choose; although players do not always get to pick the rules. The biggest threat to someone navigating identity politics on their own terms are dominant expressions of culture and notions of belonging that are implicit standards in society.

In considering the construction of identity and language practices, it is necessary to—on one's own terms—name and re-name so as to un-name. Writing is located at the intersection between subject and history. It is only through self inscription, that the complex relations of a subject – caught between contradictory dilemmas of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class, for instance – could be woven into language. This paper is a kind of examination of myself here as written woman and writing woman; a task that involves trying to inscribe my self, my body, my identity, and all of its complexities, pluralities, and uncertainties into this text. My approach to this paper simply, is to draw on my multiple embodied subjectivities and memories, to turn myself into what Susan Sontag states, is a text, "to be deciphered," and a project, "something to be built" (Yow 2010:5).

In this quote we see Yow's defiance of society's performative influences. Stigmatizing forces notwithstanding, she chooses to re-write herself. Not outside the

sphere of in- and external influences, but in the thick of things; in the complexity of the dilemmas identity politics poses. Returning to Yow's thoughts on identity as always relational, situational, and hybrid; we see that my conversations with informants were undoubtedly informed by exactly those politics of identity that pervade in their lives. The interest they have in the subject Chinese heritage persuaded them to engage in this conversation, but during the interviews they ran into the same issues that are so prevalent in society, just like I did during my research. When trying to talk about the complexity of thoughts and identity politics, it is all too easy to end up vocalizing stereotypes: 'I *do* eat Chinese food sometimes!' Here we see the discrepancy that exists between hybrid realities and rigid ideas about identity and belonging, and the enormity – some might say impossibility, of the task to overcome these inconsistencies. *"Am I 'Chinese-Canadian'? 'Canadian-Chinese'? Or perhaps simply just 'Canadian'? But what if that term excludes my Chinese heritage? Or does Canada, known for its mosaic of cultures, automatically encompass it?"* (Yow 2010:4). The complex reality simply does not lend itself for mutually exclusive, distinct categorization. Yow legitimately asks if being Canadian automatically means that there is some other place one can relate to. I think this observation is not far off the mark, and the concept-metaphor *hybridization* can help us understand this by its ability to include different phenome, rather than set them apart. One identifies with Chinese heritage through being a Canadian, a student, an artist, a mother, and so many other things. We formulate identity through the myriad interconnections with other aspects of everyday life, which is best analyzed with hybridity. Aspects of people's identification do not always make a whole, but also contest each other or co-exist within one person. Cultural boundaries are inherently porous and only by using an intersectional approach we can start to appreciate the complexity of cultural identity. History, ethnicity, social pressure, sense of belonging, gender, place, and many more influences; I have shown all of these to be important in this process. Social research should start with these premises of interconnection, rather than assumed difference. What we have to realize, however, is that there is often a subtle discriminatory influence that privileges some cultural expressions over others. People can question these dominant expressions of culture and norms by opening up to other ways, but there is no straightforward recipe for this to happen. My own realization of being subtly discriminatory is important in this context, however, because it shows that it is near inevitable. It's the way people interact and categorize. Acknowledging that dynamic and being aware of this influence goes a long way. Our inquiries and way of dealing with someone is shaped by certain ideas about groups: where we stand; where someone else stands; and how we relate to each other.

"If I am inescapably Chinese by descent, I am only sometimes Chinese by consent. When and how is a matter of politics." (Ang 2001)

Social science is not exempt from this dynamic. In identity politics, cultural and ethnic expressions seem to become more distinct, but one should keep in mind that "actual places and localities become more blurred and indeterminate" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 525). It is somewhat surprising that in this hybrid world, imagined communities become ever more salient. The uninformed usage of umbrella terms like 'Chinese diaspora' and 'Chineseness' do not hold ground against the findings in this research. Specific social and political circumstances, as well as personal considerations amount to 'identification with'. Consequently, this process does not result in mutually exclusive and distinct diasporan identities; as we have seen, one cannot speak of a unified Chinese community in Vancouver. I do not digress from the standpoint that globalization projects need to be mapped and traced, but connecting it to imagined communities just got a lot more complicated. In this regard, I agree with Ingold that "Form is continually emergent rather than specified from the outset" (Ingold 2011:234). When scrutinizing a particular phenomenon, we also need to see the context of myriad relations of which it is the momentary outcome. By doing this, many sweeping generalization can be proved to be false. When we fail to place phenomena in its proper relational context, we disregard something that is crucial to understanding. "That something is life itself" (Ingold 2011:236).

6. Reflection

I believe much of what I have already written in this thesis can be seen as a reflection of my research process; not only at times when I have consciously reflected throughout the text, but also in between the lines, under the lines, *on* the lines and so on. Reflection is an integral part in realizing the current form of this thesis. Here I attempt to look back once more to provide insight into some of the inner workings of this project.

One idea that drove my enthusiasm from the outset of this project was 'to do something that mattered'. I was not going to be satisfied with merely describing a phenomenon, nor being an elusive outsider that threads eggshells, afraid to make a difference. In the words of Scheper-Hughes, I strived for an "active, politically committed, morally engaged anthropology. She encourages anthropologists to "enter the struggle" (Scheper-Hughes 1995:412-413) rather than stand at the sideline taking notes. I entered the field in good spirits with this presumption firmly in mind, ready to take on any problem that might need solving. Being keenly aware of my projects limitations with regard to its duration and my experience, I had lined up a few introductory interviews with local community organizers and a journalist in my first week after arriving. Although these conversations profoundly influenced my research focus at that point, they did not provide me with a feasible opportunity to directly work together with the organizations these people work for. In retrospect I realize it had everything to do with my search for practical issues to take on and the undetermined approach that followed from it. Especially in such a short research project, it might have been more helpful to represent a local organization, thus being able to use their approach and resources during fieldwork. However, by remaining independent in my research efforts, I felt like I'd 'joined the struggle' in a more real way than anticipated. Consequently, my realization of being somehow involved in Vancouver's identity politics caught me off-guard and has influenced my project ever since. I felt that incorporating this realization in my thesis was the only way I could proceed.

7. Attachments

7.1 Scientific summary

This bachelor thesis is the end product of a four month anthropological research project among second and third generation Canadians of (partly) Chinese descent in Vancouver, Canada. The discussed topics include a deconstruction of the concept of identity, identity politics in Vancouver, identity development, and internal and external influences on identity development. The thesis is structured along these lines: it starts off with the first chapter: *Introduction*, which also includes the research project's *methodology*. Then the used theories are discussed in chapter two, the *Theoretical Debate*, after which the local research context is outlined in the third chapter: *Context*. Chapter four, the *Empirical Chapter* of this thesis, comprises of several sub-paragraphs in which the respective subjects are discussed. This chapter contains several vignettes that are supportive of, and exemplary for the associated text. After the empirical section, in the fifth chapter, theory and empiricism come together in the *Conclusion*. Although reflection is an integral part of this whole thesis, in chapter six; *reflection*, I return to this subject once more to discuss some underlying personal motivations and considerations. Finally, in chapter seven; *References*, and chapter eight; *Attachments*, one can find the resources used for this project, and relevant attachments, respectively.

Now I will discuss each chapters' content in more detail. In *Introduction*, an introduction on the thesis' subject is provided, as well as supporting quotes and an audio clip that illustrate the debates in this thesis. In the first and only sub paragraph of chapter one; *Methodology*, a brief history of anthropological practices concerning the research of 'others' is provided, after which the actual methodology of this research project is discussed. This includes entry into the field, researcher-informant interaction, data collection, consideration of ethics, and thesis content, as well as thesis structure. The *Theoretical Debate* is structured to work from abstract concepts towards more concrete and empirical aspects of theory. It starts with a discussion on the theorization of globalization, how these phenomena are best conceptualized, and how global perspectives are necessarily related to local processes. This discussion is followed by the introduction of 'concept-metaphors'; a term used throughout the rest of the theoretical debate. Next, we go one step further from the abstract, towards real-world conceptions of globalization. I introduce the subject diaspora and discuss its use and abuse in current anthropological theory. I conceptualize the concept of diaspora as an *imagined community*, through which I emphasize its constructivist nature. In the ensuing part of this theoretical debate I discuss 'China', 'Chinese' and other associated concepts in the context of the earlier discussed theory. This logically leads us into a discussion on

identity politics and the subjects that are associated with it. This includes the media, societal influences, intersectionality, whiteness, performativity, constructivism, space, and migration. Next, I discuss the best ways to conceptualize identity politics, which includes an outlining of ideal and real culture, and finally, hybridity. It is the concept of hybridity that forms the basis of my analysis throughout the thesis.

The chapter *Context* starts with a discussion on Chinese migration to British Columbia, and the institutional as well as social racism against Chinese that was so commonplace in Canada before World War II. After the war, racism made way for Orientalism, which was yet another way of othering and discriminating against Chinese migrants. In this section, I also discuss the forming of Vancouver's historic Chinatown. After this introduction, I discuss the colonial history of Vancouver, and its consequential history of migration and settlement. I argue that this history is a big influence on identity politics and migration today. From these premises, I conclude that the relative obscurity of Chinese-Canadian narratives in literature, the media and (pop) culture is somewhat surprising.

The *Empirical Chapter* starts off with a discussion of my research project in paragraph 4.1 *In between the lines - The student-anthropologist*. In this paragraph I show that some of the interpersonal dynamics between me and my informants can be seen as micro politics of identity, which are exemplary for wider societal dynamics. I also introduce my own family as part of this thesis to further deepen some aspects of my argument. In paragraph 4.2 *Opportunity - Migration to Vancouver*, I delineate how my informants regard the migration of their family members from China to Vancouver. I supplement this information with stories of more recent migrants. Here the phenomenon of silence surrounding migration is introduced, which will be a recurring theme throughout the rest of the thesis. In paragraph 4.4 *Momentum - Distancing of Chinese heritage*, I discuss how people are emotionally distanced from their family's Chinese heritage. This effect is caused by internally motivated, as well as externally motivated reasons. Language is introduced as an important factor in this process, which is also a recurring theme throughout the rest of this thesis. In 4.5 *Negotiation - Identity politics*, I broaden the discussion by suggesting some other ways in which identification is influenced. This includes sense of belonging, stigmatization, ethnic identities, language proficiency, and socialization. In 4.7 *Discontinuity - In between cultures*, I discuss my informants' perceptions of being suspended in between two cultures. This manifests itself differently with every person, but is nevertheless a real sensation for many. In 4.9 *Reconsideration - Reengaging Chinese heritage and broadening self-identification*, I discuss the many ways in which my informants reengage Chinese heritage, should they want to. In 4.10 *Another Canadian story - Dutch heritage*, my own family's Dutch

heritage in Vancouver is discussed in a similar fashion, to emphasize some of the commonalities, as well as any distinctions that arise from this comparison.

In the *Conclusion*, theory and empiricism are combined to discuss the outcomes of this research projects in an anthropological manner. It is concluded that Chinese-Canadian identity is not a unified, coherent identity. All of the discussed factors lead me to question uncritical use of terms like 'Chinese diaspora', 'Chineseness' and 'Chinese-Canadian'. Identification is presented as a process, which is much preferable over the often used 'identity', which implies a stagnant and place-bound phenomenon. I return to a discussion on hybridity in combination with the presented field data. I suggest that hybridity provides us with the most feasible manner in which politics of identity are analyzed, because it is able to incorporate complex intertwinement. In the conclusion, I also return to my own research as an example of this thesis' argument. I conclude this part of the conclusion with the need for people to be able to navigate and appropriate identity politics on their own terms. I finish the conclusion with a discussion on the role of social scientists and social theory in relation to my research results. I conclude that it is tantamount to regard phenomena in their proper relational context, so as not to lose sight of the myriad influences of which our subject is a momentary manifestation.

In the last chapter containing actual content; *Reflection*, I discuss some more background processes of this research project to provide insight into the underlying mechanisms that shaped it. This includes the ideological basis on which I embarked on this research project and some practical issues I encountered.

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