**“I’m a foreigner there”: landscape, wellbeing and the geographies of home**

**Abstract**

The experience of migration brings particular challenges for wellbeing, especially as an individual’s sense of disconnection from previous homes can persist over many years. This paper reports on how visitors to a Chinese community centre in NW England reflected upon their experiences of being uprooted from their homelands, even in cases where they had lived for more than half of their lives in the UK. Memories of their previous homelands were persistently called upon in understanding their sense of belonging and cultural identities in the present. We use their accounts in dialogue with recent theories of landscape, especially those that argue for an understanding of place as embodied, ambivalent and in a continual process of making and re-making, in order to trace memories of home in contemporary cultures of wellbeing.

**Keywords**

Migration, Home, Homeland, Landscape, Dislocation, Wellbeing.

**Research Highlights**

* Memories of homelands persist for migrants, long after settling in new countries.
* Migrants use embodied practices from childhood to shape current cultural identities.
* Spaces that allow memories of past landscapes can build well-being in the present.

*Introduction*

This article explores the intersections between individual expressions of wellbeing and wider understandings of landscape that are especially pronounced and strained in the case of migrant communities for whom connections with previous homelands are felt deeply, yet in ambivalent ways. As Dyck and Dossa have shown (2007), the experience of wellbeing for migrant groups is a layered process, composed through interlocking questions of cultural identity and belonging, embodied practices and memories of home. Migrant groups’ sense of identity, and understanding of the local, is inflected by traces of previous homelands and transnational spatial contexts of their ongoing connections and imaginaries, as contingent as these may be (Massey 1991). Writing about the experiences of Chinese migrants in Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong and Canada, Chan (2005) proposes a conceptualisation of (migrant) identity that focusses on plurality and multiplicity rather than on the assimilation/segregation of migrants within a host country. Chan argues that identity is articulated in different ways in different places; that it is never static, but is rather multiple, changeable and fluid. Such notions of identity and questions of home as active and continual processes of making and re-making underwrite our understanding in this paper. Whereas other research around the experience of migration is often focussed on health outcomes for migrant groups (e.g. Lawton et al. 2007) or the structural inequalities built into healthcare systems for marginalised groups (e.g., Elliott and Gillie 1998; Karlsen & Nazroo 2002), migration in this study is approached in terms of identity and wellbeing, in the context of migrants’ different imaginaries of home. Specifically, we explore the importance of particular landscapes and homelands to one particular migrant group’s articulation of cultural identity and their sense of wellbeing.

The participants in the study are migrants from Hong Kong, China and Vietnam, now living in the UK, and who are all members of a Chinese community centre in North West England. They have all experienced being uprooted from a known and familiar place and have had to rebuild their lives in a new social and cultural context. Their experiences of living in two (or more) different places raise important issues about identity and belonging; issues that are also shown to be important in terms of their sense of wellbeing. Although most of the participants have lived the larger part of their lives in the UK, and their experiences of migration are not recent ones, those other times and places in their lives continue to play a part in shaping their identity in the present - as Chinese migrants living in the UK. Their sense of belonging and experience of migration is also explored within their participation in the community centre; specifically, in the day-to-day activities and social practices facilitated there. These, as we will show, are shaped by the embodied knowledge of those previous homes, and memories of the landscapes they left behind.

This paper draws on contemporary debates in cultural geography that understand landscape as an active process linked with practices of identity formation (Wylie 2009). We make connections with arguments about how cultural scripts of home are often conflated in ambivalent ways with homeland narratives (Wylie 2016). We do so in order to explore how questions of cultural memory and spatial practices are implicated in the relations between landscape and wellbeing, and to tease out the ambiguities of how these relations are articulated and experienced. We move from briefly reviewing health geography discussions of therapeutic landscapes to wider debates about the associations between landscape and cultural identities. These debates inform our exploration of how deeply held memories of other times and homes play a part in shaping the ongoing negotiation of identity, for the participants in this study. Specifically, in this paper we are interested in how memories of homelands, at a spatial and temporal distance from other longstanding sites of home, open up experiences of dislocation as much as immersion for our study participants. Home becomes, in this understanding, something that is made and re-made continually through everyday activities and practices that are collectively achieved as much as they are individually felt, and that are uncertain in their affects. So, in this paper, we articulate the tensions between cultural scripts of homelands and the lived experience of home, given the distance of biographical time and geographical landscapes for participants in this study.

*Experiences of landscape, questions of home*

The association between landscape and wellbeing is not new; recently, the concept of therapeutic landscapes (Gesler 1992; Williams 2008) has been used to understand experiences of wellbeing in a wide range of locations, in critical and productive ways. In developing this term, Gesler argues that the physical, social and symbolic elements of landscapes combine to create an experience of particular places as health-giving (1996: 96). The concept has been used to analyse processes of wellbeing in a wide range of environments, including; hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare settings (e.g. Gesler et al. 2004; Gesler & Kearns 2002); towns and cities (e.g. Wakefield & McMullan 2005); neighbourhoods (e.g. Liamputtong & Suwankhong 2015); communities (e.g. English et al. 2008); parks and communal gardens (e.g. e.g. Plane & Klodawsky 2013; Milligan et al. 2004), and domestic spaces (Williams 2002). In addition, it has been drawn upon to explore ideas of wellbeing outside of biomedical contexts (e.g. Andrews 2004; Bignante 2015; Wilson 2003). Conradson (2005) uses the term ‘therapeutic landscape experience’ to describe ‘something that emerges through a complex set of transactions between a person and their broader socio-environmental setting’ (p.338). This relational understanding is extended within understandings of community in relation to wellbeing. Plane & Klodawsky (2013) define community in terms of participation in activities that in turn promotes a sense of belonging within, or attachment to, a particular locale. Similarly, Milligan et al. (2004) propose that community practices - understood as engaging in communal activity in a particular setting - can contribute to wellbeing. Other conceptualisations of therapeutic landscapes stress the feeling of wellbeing as something that is ‘lived’ (Andrews et al. 2014) and that ‘comes into being’ through the processes of engagement of people with(in) specific places (Gesler 1991: 166).

In this respect, Andrews et al. (2014) characterise therapeutic landscapes in terms of cultural association as ‘places that are acted, felt, felt about’ (p.210). The intimate entanglements of cultural memory and social practices in specific spatial settings have shaped the work of geographers and informed how we conceptualise the relationship between people and landscape – especially cherished sites and places of home (Jones and Garde-Hansen 2012). The contribution of Tim Ingold’s work has been crucial to the development of these debates and, indeed, Ingold explicitly argues that to understand a landscape is ‘to carry out an act of remembrance’, by ‘engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past’ (1993: 152-3). Ingold offers an account of landscape as immersed in its social histories and, furthermore, where landscape acts in a documentary way to keep alive the embodied practices associated with that environment. The landscapes we know, inhabit and belong to can only be perceived through the activities we perform within them. Augmenting our reading of a place with a deeper understanding of its local cultures reframes picturesque understandings of landscape (Wylie 2007). As Ingold explains, ‘landscape, in short, is not a totality that you or anyone else can look *at*, it is rather the world *in* which we stand in taking up a point of view on our surroundings’ (1993: 171).

Such an argument has been influential in stressing the active, embodied and dynamic ‘acts of landscaping’ (Lorimer 2005: 85) that cultural geographers have extended in subsequent contributions, wherein they explore the ways in which individuals engage with landscapes in affective and everyday ways. An embodied understanding of landscape moves beyond understandings that separate the human observing subject from the objective environmental landscape. Rather than considering the human participant as a repository of local knowledge and customs, in his understanding of landscape Ingold argues that embodiment is understood ‘as a movement of *incorporation* rather than *inscription*’ (1993: 157). So, our sense of the environment is internalised and reproduced in our movement through the spaces in which we dwell. Casey (2001: 688) complements this understanding where he proposes the idea that the body ‘bears traces of the places it has known’ and that through being in and experiencing a place ‘we are forever marked by that place, which lingers in us indefinitely and in a thousand ways’. He suggests that this marking of place on the body is about the ‘presence of place’, about ‘how it felt to be in this presence’ (p.688). What these arguments suggest is that the embodied memory of particular times and places can inflect our experience of other times and places. More generally, they suggest that landscape is central to how we experience being-in-the-world and how we compose our sense of self through our everyday practices, rather than a background to that experience.

Rose has argued for a fuller and more nuanced appreciation of the role of cultural identity within our awareness of landscape: in contrast to earlier strands of research that treated landscape as a symbolic marker of the wider ‘cultural system it reflects’ (2006: 538), he argues instead for a characterisation of ‘the cultural landscape’ as ‘something that happens as we actively mark the world to orient our unfolding selves’ (539). This is not an understanding of landscape as definitive in its shaping of human experience, but rather as orientating individuals in their social actions. Landscape becomes, in this sense, bound up in the making, crafting and materialities of their everyday practices (Ingold 2013). This is a dynamic and imaginative understanding of landscapes and those who dwell within them, with Rose arguing that we should:

reorient the study of landscapes from analysing landscapes of presence to exploring them as dreams of presence; that is, as intimate collections of material sensations where other dreams of presence (dreams of who we are, of where we belong, and of how we get on with life) are consigned’. (2006: 539)

Rose’s phrase ‘dreams of presence’ draws on the landscape traditions that connect processes of self-construction with world- and home-making (Wylie 2007), but also opens up a further appreciation of the geographic imaginaries that accompany our everyday practices. These speak to the intersections of identity formation with the landscapes we know ourselves in – especially those landscapes we may call home. For Rose, dreams of presence ‘constitute the affective cabling that connects self and world… [and] constitute *the work* that marks our being’ in the world (2006: 545).

Rose notes that ‘culture, as a dream of presence, is only present from a distance’ (2006: 545), and this insight is valuable when considering the role of landscape in shaping feelings of belonging and processes of home-making for migrant communities. How might memories of previous homelands influence the experience of life in newer countries, where notions of self-identity are tied up within logics of *displacement*? John Wylie has recently formulated an interpretation of landscape that transcends the essentialism and ‘homeland thinking’ of previous landscape writing (2016), and instead has sought to figure landscapes in terms of rupture, not fusion, between self and place (2009). Moreover, Wylie has sought to express ethical questions of belonging in terms of distance rather than notions of proximity (2017), and has sought to think through the implications of a provisional sense of landscape where the cabling between people and place is ‘*untied* rather than *united*’ (2012: 376). Landscape, Wylie pithily argues, often includes an absence ‘at the heart of the point of view’ (2009: 278). Overall, Wylie’s work aims at ‘a perceptual unsettling and questioning of the senses of belonging, identification, connection and communion we might associate with the term ‘homeland’’ (2016: 409); an argument that resonates with the words of the participants in this study. In the next section, we present information on the study’s research design and methodology.

*Methods*

The data presented in this paper come from an ethnographic study at a Chinese community centre in the North West of England. The centre provides support to Chinese people living in the local area through various activity groups and a daily lunch throughout the week, as well as translation, advocacy and other social and health-related services. Membership is open to anyone over the age of 55. Data were primarily collected through participant observation and detailed fieldnotes over a period of ten months between August 2013 and May 2014. [First Author] regularly attended the community centre to participate in the Tai Chi class and other activities, to eat lunch with the centre members, and to attend various meetings and events. Twenty one in-depth interviews were also conducted with centre members.

As an ethnographic study undertaken in a specific place, participation in the study effectively encompassed everyone who was part of the community centre. Permission for the study to take place was given by the management committee of the community centre, and the presence - and purpose - of the researcher was made explicit to all the members of the centre. Ethical approval for the study was also granted by the University XXXX Ethics Committee. The participants who took part in in-depth interviews represent a proportion of the centre members who were physically active and who were engaged in the regular activities at the centre. Others, who were older and less physically able, and whose participation in the centre was mainly through the communal lunch, are included in the study data through informal conversations and observations recorded in fieldnotes.

In-depth interviews were conducted in order to explore in more detail the themes underlying the study. These were conducted after [First Author] had spent several months attending the community centre, in order that a relationship had already been established with most of the research participants before the interviews were conducted. This allowed for some prior contextual understanding of the participants’ lives and of the day-to-day nature of the community centre. It also meant that although the interviews were loosely structured around the key areas of the study, the interviews were a continuation of conversations that had already begun with the research participants in the process of taking part in activities at the community centre. Interviews were audio recorded, with the exception of one, in which the participant was happy for notes to be written but not for the interview to be recorded. Seven of the interviews were conducted in Cantonese with an interpreter; these participants relied on the interpreter to varying degrees, with most using a mixture of Cantonese and English throughout the interview.

Detailed fieldnotes were kept throughout the fieldwork period; these provide a record of activities, events, and conversations that took place at the centre. These all form data for the study. They also document the process of engagement with, and analytical development of, the data throughout the fieldwork period, through the ongoing process of writing. In this sense, analysis of the data was not a separate activity that took place following completion of data collection, but was an integral part of the research process (as Fetterman (2010: 93) describes in relation to ethnographic research). This is what O’Reilly (2009) calls a ‘spiral’ approach to analysis, in which data collection informs the analytical and theoretical development of the data, which in turn generates the need for further data collection, and so on. Structured coding of the fieldnotes and interview transcripts was undertaken, and then subsequent visits were made to the community centre after this initial coding. As noted above, an iterative approach to the research was undertaken, in which analysis and writing were an integral part of the data collection in accordance with an understanding of ethnography as a methodology rather than as a tool for data collection.

*Research participants*

At the time of the study the centre members were predominantly Chinese migrants from Hong Kong, China and Vietnam. Most were retired, although a few still worked part-time, and they ranged in age from early 50s through to 80 plus. Most had children and grandchildren in the UK (or somewhere outside their country of origin) and most had a few relatives (parents, siblings) in their country of origin. Among those formally interviewed, the most common reason for migration to the UK was marriage; either to get married in the UK, coming to the UK with their spouse having got married in their home country, or following their spouse who had come over to the UK before them (see Figure 1 for a summary of these details). Most had arrived in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s, meaning that all those who took part in an in-depth interview (except one) had been resident in the UK for 30 years or more. Many of them had come to the UK to join other family members (mainly on the husband’s side) and had owned and worked in family-run restaurants and takeaways reflecting this association with Chinese migration into the UK (Yu 2000). Three of the participants who were formally interviewed had come to the UK as refugees from Vietnam. Although the circumstances of their migration were different to those who had come to the UK through marriage, these women had also been uprooted from their home countries and had gone through the experience of re-building their lives in the UK away from family and friends and in a significantly changed social and cultural environment.

*Research setting*

The community centre is a one storey building, consisting of a large open hall, an open office area that also functions as a reception, a kitchen with a hatch that opens onto the main hall, and two small offices, used as meeting rooms, for various health services, and for playing games of mahjong. There is a garden area on two sides of the building and a basketball court at the back, separated off by a tall wire fence. The regular organised activities - Tai Chi, line dancing, calligraphy and table tennis - always took place to the accompaniment of the buzz of day-to-day life at the centre: the smell of cooking and the clacking of utensils against pans and chopping boards wafting from the kitchen in the morning; the chatter of conversation (mostly in Chinese but sometimes in English too); people sitting in the corner on the comfy chairs chatting or reading; the pouring and drinking of tea; the tumbling of mahjong blocks as people played with quiet concentration; the staff milling around in and out of the office chatting to people; the Tai Chi music from the transistor radio; the sound of the TV; and the line dancing music blaring out from the stereo in the afternoon. This created an in-motion backdrop to life at the centre with people coming and going, taking part in the activities, and undertaking their various roles. Some days it was quieter than others, but on most days there was a buzz of noise and activity that filled the centre with continual movement and interaction.

*Findings*

The focus of the study was to explore the community centre members’ experiences of migrating to the UK, their understandings of health and wellbeing, and the role of the community centre in their lives in this context. Part of the in-depth interviews addressed the participants’ health; they were asked how they felt about their current state of health, what - if any - health problems they had (such as diabetes, arthritis, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart trouble, depression and anxiety), and the ways in which they managed those problems in their day-to-day lives, including their use of both Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Western Biomedicine (see First Author 2016). Within those conversations the participants expressed ideas of wellbeing in terms of landscapes and homelands; that the experience of living in other countries with very different social and cultural contexts to the UK played a part in shaping both their understandings of their specific health problems, and how they chose to manage those. Their understanding was a holistic sense of wellbeing, expressed in terms of how the participants chose to live their lives, within and outside of the community centre, in a way that honoured both their Chinese heritage and the lives and families they had built in the UK. Their understating of wellbeing was enacted in the ways in which they engaged in the community centre, with each other and through particular activities that were culturally and socially meaningful, and which were also shaped in large part by the contexts of their early lives in other countries. In this paper, we explore how their understanding of wellbeing - of living ‘in harmony with other people and the world around’ (Jovchelovitch & Gervais, 1999: 251) - is shaped by notions of landscape and memories of homelands.

 *The mutability of home*

One of the aims of the study was to collect participants’ migration stories. In the process of doing so, talk of ‘home’ emerged; of where the participants feel is ‘home’ for them and their attendant sense of connection with those particular places. Most participants who were formally interviewed had lived the larger part of their lives in the UK, where they spoke about feeling settled. For example, Mr I, who came to the UK in 1963, said that because he has been in the UK for so long, it feels like home:

*[First author]: So you’ve been here for more than 50 years, does England feel like home?*

*Mr I: Yeah. Now it feels like home, definitely, yeah feel like home, you know. I get used to everything now. I like the English way, you know…like working and holidays and that […] I do feel English. Because you live in the same place 50 years, so everything…you know, just like one of yours, yeah… just get used to the life, you know.*

[Mr I, 80, China]

However, for many this sense of being settled in the UK was expressed in terms of a dislocation from their countries of origin, and the lives that they had had there. Within this is a sense of the distance that Wylie incorporates into his understanding of landscape, and of the ‘untying’ of the ‘cabling between people and place’ (2012: 376). For these participants, the process of becoming settled in one place is intimately linked with the untying of the connection with another place; and this unfolds in different ways at the same time.

As an example, Mrs H begins by saying that Hong Kong is too busy and crowded, but goes on - almost in the same breath - to talk about the disconnection from her old life in Hong Kong:

*Hong Kong…I don’t…it’s not…I don’t really like Hong Kong because it’s too crowded with people. The space are so small. And don’t have much friend in Hong Kong because I left Hong Kong so many year…40 years….more than 40 year. Only got one or two friend, that’s it. And they working, they are bit busy. It’s different lifestyle…I think… I’ve been here quite long, so I quite like… I’m settled with [life] here.*

*[Mrs H, 57, Hong Kong]*

Here, she describes becoming disentangled from the relationships associated with her previous home. For Mrs H, this reflection - in the context of talking about her present life in the UK - expresses a sense of absence or loss from that other place. Wylie’s argument that landscape often includes an absence ‘at the heart of the point of view’ (2009: 278) is reflected here; in this excerpt, belonging to one place is described inversely in terms of absence from another.

Similarly, Mrs L and Mrs N also spoke about their present lives in the UK in terms of the distancing of the ties that connect them to their previous places of home.

*[First author]: So you’ve been in England for over 30 years. Is England your home now?*

*Mrs L: Yes.*

*[First author]: Why is that?*

*Mrs L: Because you...you...your friend anything all in England. When you younger in Hong Kong the friend is all finished, they not...when I come back to Hong Kong I can't find them.*

[Mrs L, 54, Hong Kong]

*Now I prefer England. Because er, more than life in England, so, 40 years more than, 40 years now, yeah, so...I go back Hong Kong I don't know everyone, because the friend, school friend, schoolmate, all grown up now, they got family. No it's...so I like England.*

[Mrs N, 61, Hong Kong]

The shift in belonging takes place here through the untying of the vital connections that link the women to the other places - and times - in their lives. It is defined by absence from one place, at the same time as (and perhaps, more strongly than) presence within another.

Mrs E and Mrs F express this in terms of feeling like visitors when they go to Hong Kong. They do not speak about going ‘home’, but rather of visiting a place which they are no longer intimately part of, but rather that they pass through.

*Mrs E: Here home now. Never mind Hong Kong.*

*Mrs F: I go to Hong Kong just for holiday.*

*Mrs E: Because they are children all in born here [the UK].*

*Mrs F: All born here, yeah. I go to Hong Kong just for holiday about few weeks, just holiday, then come back.*

*[First author]: What does it feel like when you go to Hong Kong for a holiday?*

*Mrs F: Just for holiday, yeah.*

*Mrs E: Not like home, just like holiday.*

*Mrs F: Just holiday.*

*Mrs E: Enjoy yourself, eat all the…*

*Mrs F: And I go to other, other…go to the America, er…just…*

*[First author]: So the same as going to any other place?*

*Mrs F: The same…just for the holiday, not home, not home feel now.*

[Mrs E, 72, Hong Kong and Mrs F, 60, Hong Kong]

Also talking about going back to Hong Kong, which she does regularly to visit family, Mrs P said:

*‘I am a foreigner there…because, there…the world is changing. The whole world…it wouldn’t be the same as what I have left behind…no, is not the same.’*

*[Mrs P, 66, China]*

Mrs P clearly acknowledges that the place she had left behind had changed and that her life as she had known it did not exist in Hong Kong anymore. In this she suggests a gradual erosion - an untying - of the connection with the home she had previously known and been part of. This shift is temporal as well as geographical; it is both time and distance that create this rupture, and she feels it as she travels between the two places in her life, with an awareness that she is becoming gradually less a part of one place, and more a part of another.

Although this gradual untying of the connections the participants feel to the places in which they began their lives is occurring, there is at the same time a lingering of those places, in the way that Casey describes; a holding of place, within the body and in memory, through which ‘place and self actively collude’ (2001: 687). The times and places of the beginnings of the participants’ lives, however distant (both temporally and geographically), remain important because the experience of being in those landscapes – what Rose would term a ‘dream of presence’ (2006) - is still felt. The memory of belonging in those other places is deeply held and continues to play a part in shaping the participants’ current lives - as Chinese migrants, living in the UK.

The following fieldnote, which details a conversation with Mrs NL about the two different locations in her life, shows this notion of the holding of place within the body. This is a different sense of belonging; not about what it feels like to return to a previous home, but rather, the deeply internalised knowledge of that other place, and of how to live in it.

*Mrs NL was playing some music on her mobile phone and putting it up to her neighbour’s ear for her to listen to. I caught her eye and she came over to let me listen to it too. She said it was a song that her younger brother had sent her about how to live after the age of 50. It was a series of pictures with Chinese characters to go with each one that corresponded with the words of the song, with the song playing in the background. Some of it was about money - not saving it all or keeping it all in the bank because you can’t take it with you when you die. There were some pictures of food and she explained that if you like something (to eat) you should have it (i.e. to spend your money on things you like) but that balance was important - not too much of one thing - and then there were several pictures of different kinds of food to show balance. After that she showed me some photos on her phone - one of the canal opposite where she lives. There were several trees in blossom on the other side, beautiful pink and white blossom. She said this is the view she has from her flat and she looks out on it every morning when she opens the curtains. She said there are ducks on the canal and she sometimes feeds them from the window. She said she had sent the photo to her grandchildren. She then showed me some photos of her family.*

 *[Fieldnotes 26th March 2014]*

In talking about the song and the photos her brother had sent, Mrs NL is reminiscing about another part of her life and another sense of belonging that continues to tie her to her homeland; this is about what she did in that place and how she lived in it. However, she switches smoothly into talking about her present life in the UK. She talks about this in a different kind of way, but the point here is that for her it is all connected. These are blurred together; the talk of how to live in another place, flows into how she lives in *this* place, and then into talking of her family. This reflects Ingold’s notion of ‘incorporation’ rather than ‘inscription’ (1993: 157); that our sense of place is internalised and reproduced through the body in everyday actions and movements within the places in which we live. This is also evident in the activities that took place at the community centre and the ways in which the members participated in those together.

*Calligraphy: the imagining of home through embodied practice*

A calligraphy group took place once a week at the centre. A large table was set up for everyone to sit around together, with pots of ink, a box of paintbrushes, a teapot and cups in the middle of the table. Each week the group had a theme (such as fate and destiny) which they discussed and practised writing about in traditional Chinese characters, using the ink and brushes. The conversations that took place during these classes were often very reminiscent about the past; about the way of life in the places where the participants had lived their early lives, and about the values and structures that are different now. These conversations took place while the group members were holding the brushes, dipping them into the ink pots, and making deliberate and specific markings on the paper. Practising calligraphy became one way in which the participants actively engaged in ‘doing Chinese-ness’. That is, calligraphy became for the group an act of remembering their cultural heritage – in as much as they have a shared sense of this – through the doing of something that reimagines their homelands, and that mediates what this memory of home means in the context of their current lives.

Mrs NL talked about learning calligraphy in school and how the relationship between children and teachers is not the same now:

*Mrs NL wrote out a list of words for me to try that she said were the words that you learn to write first as a child in primary school. She said she remembers her parents teaching her to write them when she was little. And she said that in school when you were learning calligraphy the teachers (in China) would be very strict and they would rap you over the knuckles or clip you round the ears if you didn’t get it right, and make you change them so that they were right. She went on to say that in the past the discipline between teachers and children, and parents and children, was very strict; that you had to do what you were told whether it was right or wrong, but that now it’s not the same and children can complain about teachers and not do what they are told. (Fieldnotes 9th April 2014)*

The memory of the rapping of the knuckles and the clipping round the ear are particularly poignant here, as embodied memories of the process of learning, of the physicality of this particular activity, and of the character of the relationships that she is talking about, between teachers and children. Mrs NL talks about all of this - and remembers these sensations - whilst she is holding the brush and making the same markings that she learnt as a child. These actions - holding the brush and making the markings on the paper - and the memories that they provoke, re-locate her imaginatively in her homeland.

In a similar way, Mr K spoke about the traditional family structure in Chinese families. He had written a poem about the relationship between a teacher and student:

*There was a character [in the poem] that signified the relationship between mother/father (old people) and son/daughter (young people). This was made up of two characters but together they represented the relationship between the two. He talked about the hierarchy in Chinese families, that the father comes first, then the mother, then the son, and then the daughter. He said that in English families, everyone was equal. He said that in Chinese families, the father would always be called ‘father’, not by his name, even by sons/daughters-in law. He said this is what he prefers and that his daughters-in-law call him ‘father’ and that he calls his wife’s parents ‘mother’ and ‘father’.*

*(Fieldnotes 14th May 2014)*

As with Mrs NL, it is the handling of these objects - brush and paper - and the physical act of writing that prompts Mr K’s reminiscence about old times and ways of being. These memories are mediated by the actions that bring the other times and places to mind, through the ‘doing’, and through the embodied memory of using particular objects in specific ways. This builds on the way in which Rose intends the idea of ‘dreams of presence’ - as ‘material sensations’ in which we dream of (or re-imagine) ‘who we are [...] where we belong [...] and how we get on with life (2006: 539). Through these everyday actions and the memories that they provoke, the participants bring something - that deeply internalised embodied knowledge - of those other times and locations, to this particular place. This is a (re)imagining of landscape that is enacted through reminiscence and through the ‘making’, crafting and materiality of everyday practices (Ingold 2013) that help to relocate - even briefly - the participants in homelands they once knew. This is not a ‘dream’ of presence, in a wistful or longing sense, but rather in the sense that those other landscapes - the internalised memory of being part of them - are still part of who the participants are now. The connections to past times continue to inform the negotiation of their identity and sense of belonging in their lives today; those places are also part of defining who they are now in this particular place. Massey has argued that our sense of place inevitably involves ‘negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and a geography of then and theres)’ (2005: 140); in their imaginative recall of childhood geographies and routines, enacted through the practice of their calligraphy, we can observe such a process of negotiation, as the study participants brought places of the past into their experience of the present. Their invocation of childhood homes could be argued to extend Rose’s characterisation of engagements with landscape as a gathering of ‘dreams of presence’ (2006) in order to configure imaginative geographies through *acts* of presence.

*Concluding discussion*

In this paper, we have presented findings from research into the experience of migrants who have often lived the larger part of their lives in the UK, but whose sense of cultural identity remains informed by, and negotiated through, their memories of previous homes. For the people in this study, the familiarity of place - whether current sites of home or previously known homes - is a key referent within their sense of self and, relatedly, their experience of wellbeing in the present. For participants in this research, evoking memories of their homeland was an ‘act of landscaping’ that was engaged and embodied (Lorimer 2005: 85), arising from social and communal practices as much as individual acts of reverie. The men and women in this study were active in their making of home and in their memories of their homeland, with their routine and shared activities, such as calligraphy, acting as a form of ‘landscape-remembering’ (Wylie 2009: 279). Their understanding of particular landscapes was intimately connected to the activities and experiences they carried over from those places and their collectively crafted histories (Ingold 1993). However, their sense of belonging to these landscapes often was ambivalent. Whilst reference to their homelands in the past was a pronounced feature of how they spoke about their experience of wellbeing in the present, these homeland imaginaries were as often framed in terms of a sense of dislocation rather than any easy immersion of self *in* place (Wylie 2016).

This finding relates to Chan’s conceptualisation of migrant identity based on ideas of plurality and positionality rather than simply assimilation or segregation of migrants within a host country (2005). Chan’s notions of identity, and Wylie’s ideas of landscape (2009; 2016), are resonant with the sense of home articulated by the participants in this study, as these were defined for many by dislocation from their homelands. This is not an either/or - here or there - sense of identification with a particular place of home, but rather a shifting between landscapes, accompanied by an ambivalent sense of belonging. Identity here, as Chan suggests (2005), can be seen to be multiple, partial and fluid, and negotiated in the movement between different landscapes. For the participants in this study, home is something that is mutable and continually negotiated, made and re-made through the everyday activities and practices in which they participate collectively, and through which their sense of wellbeing is mediated through landscapes they care *for*, and care *about*. Indeed, questions of landscape, memory and identity are, for Rose, prompts towards re-imagining cultural practice in terms of a ‘call to care’ (2006: 542); what the observation of participants in this study reveals is the deeply embodied and everyday ways in which such expressions of care are articulated.

In highlighting the importance of landscape in the narratives of home for participants in this research, and the ambivalence this raised, we have sought to add to the literature on migration by bringing out the tension between cultural scripts of homelands and the lived experience of home. The community centre the participants visited could be thought of as a therapeutic landscape, but only if we consider it less in terms of its physical features or spatial design, and rather in terms of the social practices it facilitated (cf. Milligan et al. 2004). The men and women who used the community centre were dynamically engaged in cultural practices and communal activities that tied them to memories of their previous homes, even if that feeling of home was plural, contingent and uncertain. Their practices of home-making can be understood as set of local experiences informed by transnational contexts (Massey 1991), and this has implications for how we consider questions of wellbeing and implicit practices of care in, and through, such deeply felt experiences of landscape.

We conclude by acknowledging the limitations of this research. The participants in this study were all aged over 50, and almost all had been living in the UK for over 30 years: whilst this offered an opportunity to identify homeland imaginaries in migrants who were relatively well-settled in the UK, it would have been valuable to explore questions of belonging in more multi-generational spaces, with varied age-groups of visitors, in order to understand the different ways in which experiences of home, landscape and wellbeing are negotiated. Similarly, although the connections to China, Hong Kong and Vietnam offered a relatively common ground amongst participants in terms of cultural experience, investigating such issues in more multi-cultural spaces, where there might not be a such a clear shared identity, would have been valuable. A detailed analysis of the centre as a gendered space could form the basis for future research. Future research could also extend our understanding of the complex intersections between landscape and wellbeing through an explicit focus on how the imaginaries of homes for migrant groups are facilitated through different types of buildings - clinical *and* community. Although the community centre is not outwardly a therapeutic setting – in the sense that a TCM clinic or a healing centre might be seen to be - it is what takes place within it that makes it a place of, and for, wellbeing (Andrews et al. 2014).

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**Figure 1. Participant Data**

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| **Participant data (participants formally interviewed)** |
| **Pseudonym** | **Age** | **Gender** | **Country of origin** | **Year came to UK** | **Reasons for migration** |
| Mrs A | 53 | F | Hong Kong | 1978 | To earn money so that she could buy a house in Hong Kong; and to join family. |
| Mrs B | 70 | F | Hong Kong | 1977 | Marriage; to join her husband's family who were all in the UK. |
| Mrs C | 72 | F | Hong Kong | 1971 | To find a job.  |
| Mrs D | 64 | F | Hong Kong | 1972 | Marriage; her husband already lived in the UK, but went back to Hong Kong to get married, after which they both returned to the UK together. |
| Mrs E | 72 | F | Hong Kong | 1965 | Marriage; her husband had already been living in the UK for a year. |
| Mrs F | 60s (exact age not given) | F | Hong Kong | 1970s (did not give exact year, but said that she has been here around 40 years) | Marriage; her husband was already living in the UK and after getting married in Hong Kong they came back to the UK together. |
| Mrs G | 76 | F | Vietnam (her father was Chinese but moved to Vietnam before she was born) | 1980 (left Vietnam in 1979, spent 1 year in Hong Kong) | Refugee. |
| Mrs H | 57 | F | Hong Kong | 1971 | To join family: her father was living and working in the UK and she and her brothers, sisters and mother came to join him.  |
| Mr I | 80 | M | China | 1963 | Marriage; his wife is Chinese but born and bred in the UK and they met while she was on holiday visiting relatives in Hong Kong.  |
| Mr J | 70 | M | Hong Kong | 1976 | Marriage; he had been corresponding with his wife who lived in the UK for a while, after being introduced by his uncle and aunt, and then decided to come to England to get married to her. |
| Mrs K | 75 | F | Vietnam (but her family are Chinese) | 1978 | Refugee. |
| Mrs S | 58 | F | Hong Kong | 1975 | Marriage; her husband was already living in the UK and he sponsored her application to come to the UK too.  |
| Mrs L | 54 | F | Hong Kong | 1982 | Marriage; her husband had come to the UK several months earlier and she followed him with her son. |
| Mrs M | 64 | F | Hong Kong | 1979 | Marriage: her husband was already working here in a fish and chip shop and she came over to join him after they got married.  |
| Mrs N | 61 | F | Hong Kong | 1972 | To join family; her father had been living in the UK since 1960, where he owned and worked in a take away shop. She and her mother came to join him in 1972. Her 2 brothers came 2 years later in 1974. She returned to Hong Kong for 2 years to get married, then came back to the UK. |
| Mrs O | 61 | F | Vietnam  | 1978 | Refugee. |
| Mrs P | 66 | F | China (but her family moved to Hong Kong) | 1986 | Marriage. |
| Mrs Q | 66 | F | China (but her family moved to Hong Kong when she was very young) | 1973 | Marriage; her husband's family were already living in the UK and she came over to visit them. While she was here her husband's work permit came through so he came over too and they stayed in the UK. |
| Mrs R | 65? | F | Hong Kong | 1973 | Marriage; her husband is originally from the UK but had been living in Hong Kong. After getting married in Hong Kong they came to live in the UK. Her husband didn’t want to go back to Hong Kong at that time, but Mrs was homesick and didn't get on very well with her mother-in-law, so they went back to live in Hong Kong for a few years, before coming back to the UK again to live permanently. |
| Mrs T | 56 | F | Hong Kong | 1972 | With family; she came to the UK with her family at the age of 13. |
| Mrs Z | \* | F | Hong Kong | \* | \* (member of staff at the centre) |
| Tai Chi Master | \* | F | China | \* | \* |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *\*These interviews were structured differently to the other interviews, which is why some details are missing. The interview with the Tai Chi Master specifically addressed the practice of Tai Chi at the centre, and the interview with Mrs Z focused on the developing analysis of the data.**\*\*Mrs NL and Mr K are not listed here as they were not formally interviewed. However, informal conversations with them both were recorded in detailed fieldnotes, which are used in this paper.*  |